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In US, Water Pollution Worries Highest Since 2001

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Story Highlights

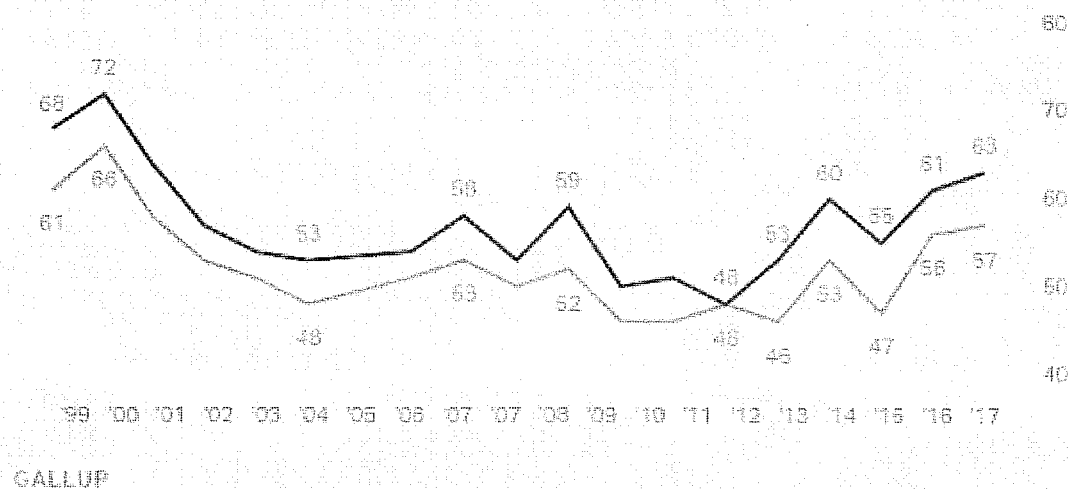
- 63% worry a great deal about pollution of drinking water
 - 57% worry a great deal about pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs
 - Low-income and nonwhite Americans more concerned about water pollution
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WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Americans are more concerned about water pollution than they have been since 2001. The latest percentages of Americans who are worried "a great deal" about the pollution of drinking water (63%) and of rivers, lakes and reservoirs (57%) have inched past the elevated levels of concern seen since 2014.

Americans' Concerns About Water Pollution, 1999-2017

% Worried "a great deal"

■ Pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs ■ Pollution of drinking water



The latest data are from Gallup's annual Environment poll, conducted March 1-5, 2017.

The continued elevated levels of concern about both types of water pollution come as President Donald Trump signed an executive order to roll back environmental regulations put in place by his predecessor to protect American waterways from pollution. Meanwhile, the Environmental Protection Agency under Trump has committed \$100 million in federal funding to address the ongoing drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan. The discovery of elevated lead levels in Flint's public drinking water in 2015, and subsequent news about a range of other contaminants in the Flint water system, has put a national spotlight on the issue of water pollution.

Gallup first polled on environmental worries in 1989 and began tracking these concerns regularly in 1999. Since then, between 48% and 72% of Americans have expressed a great deal of worry about the pollution of drinking water, and between 46% and 66% have expressed this level of worry about the pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs.

Concerns about these issues were highest around the turn of the millennium, and lowest between 2010 and 2012, perhaps reflecting the state of the economy during those times. Americans tend to give a higher priority to environmental matters when the economy is healthy than when it is not.

Democrats have fueled most of the increase in concern about water pollution since 2012. Less than half of Republicans have reported being concerned a great deal about drinking water since 2012, ranging from 36% to 49% during that time. Democrats' concern has risen to 74% from 57% over the same period.

Drinking-Water Pollution Remains Top U.S. Environmental Worry

Americans continue to rank worries about water pollution highest on a list of six environmental problems, as they have for over a quarter century. Less than half are greatly worried about air pollution or climate change, although concern about the latter is at a three-decade high.

As with water pollution, the percentages of Americans worried a great deal about other environmental problems Gallup measures such as air pollution, the loss of tropical rain forests or the extinction of plant and animal species are elevated in comparison with recent years, even if most of the country is not strongly concerned.

Americans Concerned "a Great Deal" About Environmental Problems

I'm going to read you a list of environmental problems. As I read each one, please tell me if you personally worry about this problem a great deal, a fair amount, only a little or not at all.

	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%
Pollution of drinking water	55	61	63
Pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs	47	56	57
Air pollution	38	43	47
Global warming or climate change	32	37	45
The loss of tropical rain forests	33	39	44
Extinction of plant and animal species	36	42	44

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Income, Race Disparities in Concern About Drinking-Water Pollution

A recent study by environmental researchers has found that poor and minority Americans are more likely to be victims of heavy environmental pollution. Some advocates have argued that Flint's heavily poor and black population increased its vulnerability to such pollution. Perhaps reflecting this pattern, low-income and nonwhite adults are more concerned about environmental problems than their higher-earning and white counterparts.

While four in five nonwhites (80%) are worried a great deal about pollution of drinking water, concern is far less prevalent among whites, at 56%.

Across income groups, 75% of those who earn less than \$30,000 annually are concerned a great deal about pollution of drinking water. This compares with smaller majorities among those in middle-income (64%) and upper-income (56%) households.

Nonwhites, Low-Income Americans More Worried About Drinking-Water Pollution

% Worried "a great deal"

	2015	2016	2017
	%	%	%
Whites	47	54	56
Nonwhites	73	78	80
Under \$30,000	66	75	75
\$30,000 to \$74,999	51	65	64
\$75,000+	46	49	56

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Bottom Line

With an ongoing high-profile case of contaminated drinking water in Flint, Americans' concern about the problem of drinking-water pollution has not diminished in recent years -- though it has still not risen to the level seen in the 1990s and early 2000s. While Gallup has documented heightened public concern about several environmental issues such as climate change, loss of tropical rainforests, and extinction of plant and animal species, water pollution remains Americans' greatest concern.

The Flint crisis exemplifies the higher concern lower-income and nonwhite Americans feel about water pollution issues. While the EPA under the Trump administration has issued federal funds to address the crisis, heightened worry about drinking-water pollution has persisted.

Historical data are available in [Gallup Analytics](#).

SURVEY METHODS

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted March 1-5, 2017, with a random sample of 1,018 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting.

Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods.

[View survey methodology, complete question responses and trends.](#)

Learn more about how the [Gallup Poll Social Series](#) works.

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