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The News Leader

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RISING COSTS

In 2020, 20.1% of households earning between \$60,000 and \$100,000 reported experiencing problems affording their energy. In 2024, 32.1% of those households did – a 12 percentage point increase. GETTY IMAGES

Data: 1 in 3 households struggles to pay energy bills

Diana Hernández
Columbia University
THE CONVERSATION

Americans' concerns about being able to afford electricity and home heating fuel have been elevated since the beginning of the Iran war. But recently released nationwide data shows that even before the war began, these concerns were widespread, long-standing and getting worse faster than the data can reflect.

The information is from preliminary reports based on the Residential Energy Consumption Survey, a representative survey of U.S. households conducted every four to five years by the U.S. Energy Information Administration. These early results show that energy insecurity, a hidden hardship defined as the inability to adequately meet household energy needs, affects millions of American households and is worsening quickly.

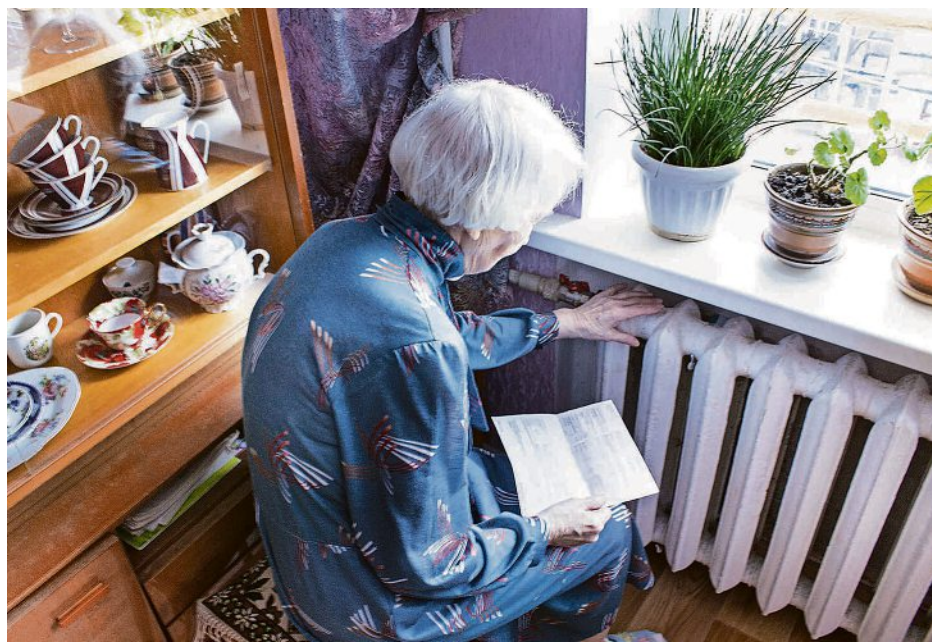
As a scholar who has spent years sitting in hundreds of homes around the country, hearing firsthand accounts about energy insecurity, I turn to this survey data to quantify the suffering I have witnessed up close.

The latest tranche of data was collected in 2024 and released in March 2026, but full results won't be available for some time. The preceding survey was taken in 2020, but results weren't finalized until August 2025.

Though that data is incomplete and slow to emerge, the picture is unambiguous: Even households once confident they could afford energy costs are at risk of falling behind on bills, making hard trade-offs to keep the lights on and living in homes they can't afford to properly heat and cool.

A pandemic success story

The survey asks respondents wheth-



Seniors have historically been among the most protected from high energy bills, partly by programs to assist with energy costs and partly because wealth usually peaks in later life. Even so, the share of older Americans experiencing energy insecurity climbed to 1 in 4 in 2024 from roughly 1 in 5 in 2020.

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

A closer look at the data over time reveals that more Americans live with energy insecurity now than in years past. In 2024, 43.6 million American households – 32.9% of all homes – reported experiencing some form of energy insecurity. In 2015, that figure was 31.3%, and in 2020 it was 27.2%.

er, in the prior 12 months, they received a disconnection notice threatening to terminate their home's electricity, gas or other fuel service because they hadn't paid the bills. It also asks whether any of those services were in fact disconnected; whether they bought less food or skipped taking medication to be able to afford their energy bills; or whether they

left their home at an unhealthy temperature because running or repairing the heating or cooling equipment would be too expensive.

The result is a portrait of a significant swath of the population that has a hard time affording housing

See ENERGY, Page 4A

Pursuit ends after man found hiding in creek

Brad Zinn
Staunton News Leader
USA TODAY NETWORK

Two people were arrested following a vehicle pursuit over the weekend, according to the Augusta County Sheriff's Office.

On Sunday, May 17 in the 700 block of Spotswood Road, multiple felony warrants were being served on 41-year-old Anthony C. Buchanan of Raphine. A press release said Augusta County and Rockbridge County deputies had been working on a joint investigation in an effort to apprehend him.

When deputies approached a 2013 Ford F-150, Buchanan reportedly fled the area in the truck at a high rate of speed. A pursuit entered Rockbridge County and later returned into Augusta County where deputies successfully deployed tire deflation devices, disabling the truck at the intersection of Old Greenville Road and Stover School Road, the release said.

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Officials cite 'hate rhetoric' in CA mosque shooting

Jeanine Santucci
USA TODAY

Authorities are searching for answers after two suspects opened fire at the largest mosque in San Diego County, killing three men and then themselves on May 18.

The shooting at the Islamic Center of San Diego, which also houses a school, unfolded shortly before noon local time, police said.

San Diego Police Chief Scott Wahl said at a news conference that the shooting would be investigated as a hate crime "until it's not."

He said "there was definitely hate rhetoric that was involved," but not a specific threat to the mosque.

Officers arrived on the scene minutes after the first call, and found three men dead outside the mosque, the San Diego Police Department said. About 50 to 100 officers searched the building, according to the chief.

A few minutes later, officers were called to a location nearby, where a vehicle was sitting in the middle of the street, police said. Two suspected

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