



EQUIFAX

ONE YEAR LATER


AFTERMATH  
REPORT

2018



IDENTITY THEFT  
RESOURCE CENTER

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A little over one year ago, Equifax announced one of the largest data breaches in history in which approximately half of all Americans (over 148 million U.S. consumers) ultimately had personal information stolen. The Equifax data breach included names, birthdates, Social Security numbers, credit card numbers, documents about credit disputes and more. To better understand the impacts of the Equifax breach over the course of the last year, the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC) conducted a survey, *The Aftermath: Equifax One Year Later*, of consumers that identified themselves as victims of the breach.

The ITRC polled 880 Americans to gain more insights on how they were affected by and dealt with the aftermath of the Equifax data breach of 2017.


“Data breaches have unfortunately become a common occurrence for many Americans, and the impact of them often reaches far beyond monetary losses,” explains Eva Velasquez, President and CEO of the Identity Theft Resource Center. “A whopping 89.46 percent of Equifax data breach victims reported they experienced adverse feelings or emotions. The ITRC is proud to provide support to those victims and we strongly advocate that all consumers take proactive steps to prevent additional damage after a breach. Monitoring credit reports for new accounts, changing passwords and canceling credit cards are some of the steps anyone can take to avoid being the victim of additional crimes or fraud.”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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More than 148 million Americans had personal data compromised in the 2017 Equifax breach ([“Equifax Releases Updated Information on 2017 Cybersecurity Incident”](#), Equifax, 2018 ) and the impact of this data breach is far-reaching for many of those victims. Dealing with the aftermath of the Equifax breach brought new challenges, emotions and issues to the surface for many consumers. The ITRC supports victims of data breaches with its call center and over the last decade has been capturing and reporting trends on data breaches. Data breach incidents, which occur when personally identifiable information (PII) is compromised, continue to grow. According to the ITRC Data Breach Reports, breaches were up 44 percent last year over 2016 and already in 2018, there have been 864 breaches





reported with over 34 million records exposed (as of September 5, 2018). An unfortunate outcome of a data breach is often identity theft, when that compromised data is misused for identity crimes. There can be a multitude of negative impacts victims deal with in the wake of having personal information stolen beyond the financial component. This report will inform some of the many unique issues that consumers have faced in light of the Equifax breach.

After a data breach, there are a variety of ways that information may be leveraged or misused, including selling the information on the dark web to other criminals or using the data to hack into existing accounts, attempting to get or open new accounts. Criminals may also hold onto information for some time before using it, anticipating that just after a data breach people will be keeping a closer eye on things. Thus, the timeline for identity theft occurring after a data breach is not finite. This is why it's important for data breach victims to be vigilant continuously, not just immediately after a breach.

Negative impacts from the Equifax breach include adverse feelings or emotions that spill over into other areas of the victims' lives. The ITRC also set out to look at not only how the Equifax data breach affected consumers, but also to evaluate if consumer behaviors have changed since dealing with this major event.



## METHODOLOGY & FINDINGS:


The "Equifax Breach Aftermath" survey was distributed to Americans online. This sample provides a basis for evaluating trends in impact, behavior and habits.

### SURVEY POPULATION:

» 881 U.S. respondents online.

Responses were collected from August 19, 2018 – August 30, 2018.

As a part of the survey panel, ITRC asked participants to share if they were a victim in the Equifax data breach, if they were a victim of identity theft prior to the Equifax breach, how they found out they were involved in the



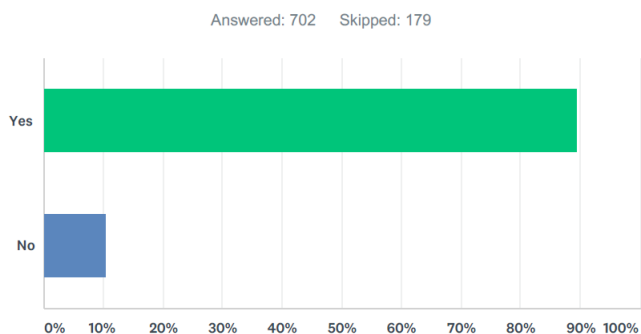
Equifax breach, how they were impacted by having their information stolen, if they took advantage of credit monitoring, and any emotional impact or subsequent downstream effects from the breach. Lastly, ITRC asked respondents to assess if their behavior has changed since becoming a victim of the Equifax breach.

## KEY FINDING 1:

WHILE ONLY 21 PERCENT OF VICTIMS OF THE EQUIFAX BREACH HAVE SEEN UNUSUAL ACTIVITY ON THEIR CREDIT REPORTS OR NEW ACCOUNTS, 81 PERCENT EXPERIENCED WORRY OR ANXIETY BECAUSE OF IT.


The 2017 Equifax breach caused various issues such as monetary, time, emotional distress and physical impacts. Of those 21 percent of Equifax breach victims who have seen unusual activity, the most common unusual activity respondents noted so far relates to credit cards – 23.53 percent had a new credit card account opened in their name and 33.99 percent experienced changes to an existing card. Another 22.87 percent of respondents had other accounts opened including loans; checking or savings accounts; debit cards, or cable, internet or utilities accounts. Changes

Q10 Did being a victim of the Equifax Data Breach lead you to have any adverse feelings or emotions?



made to checking, savings and debit card issues can be harder to recover from and take more time to clean up because there aren't as many protections in place as with credit cards.

Some other items that people also reported include that their email was flagged as being on the dark web and getting alerts of people trying to open new accounts even after freezing their credit files. Another ongoing issue includes tax identity theft and fraud, where thieves



use a Social Security number to file a fraudulent tax return and collect a refund, with 3.53 percent of respondents having either state or federal taxes filed fraudulently in their name. Also, 9.59 percent of Equifax breach victims had some sort of medical identity issue including receiving a medical bill or collection notice for services they never received, learning that medical records were compromised or discovering another person's information on their medical records.

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“I LIVE IN FEAR FOR WHEN I’M GOING TO HAVE A MAJOR ISSUE RELATED TO THE BREACH.” - BREACH VICTIM

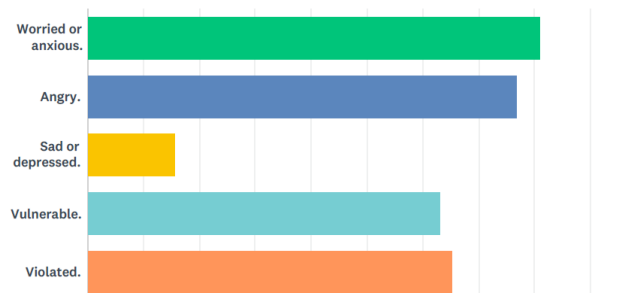
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The emotional and physical impact are often not tracked across the board like the money or even time spent to recover from identity theft. The [ITRC's annual Aftermath Report](#) lays out some of these general emotions identity theft victims experience, such as experiencing fear regarding their personal financial security or feeling a sense of helplessness. As previously mentioned, 89.46 percent of Equifax breach victims reported they experienced similar adverse feelings or emotions to those of identity theft victims. Of those, 81 percent of respondents said they felt worried or anxious, 76.85 percent felt angry, and 65.27 percent felt violated.

Annoyance, frustration, powerlessness and helplessness were also commonly listed. Taking control of one's own situation and personal information is one way that victims can improve their outlook. This includes taking immediate action when something seems off or you get a notice or letter with your name that doesn't match up with an account you have, checking your credit report regularly, not oversharing on social media and having a plan in place in case something does happen.

If yes, did you have any of these feelings: (check all that apply)

Answered: 622 Skipped: 259





## KEY FINDING 2:

NEARLY 89 PERCENT OF THOSE SURVEYED  
SELF-IDENTIFIED AS A VICTIM OF THE 2017  
EQUIFAX DATA BREACH

The ITRC first asked survey participants if they were a victim of the Equifax data breach in 2017. Most of them answered yes, proving the huge impact this breach had on Americans.

When asked about how they learned they were victims in the Equifax breach, most (58.78 percent) said they heard about it on the news and 26.2 percent saw something about it posted online. Only 37.77 percent of respondents learned about becoming a victim when receiving a letter from Equifax. Companies are required to notify of security and data breaches, but the requirements vary by state as there are no federal regulations in place.

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“[I HAD] TROUBLE WITH OBTAINING LOANS FOR MY  
DAUGHTER’S COLLEGE BECAUSE OF THIS.” - BREACH VICTIM

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According to the [National Conference of State Legislatures \(NCSL\) website](#), “Security breach laws typically have provisions regarding who must comply with the law; definitions of personal information; what constitutes a breach; requirements for notice; and exemptions.” There is a growing recognition that more must be done for victims of data breach incidents as the NCSL notes that at least 28 states enacted cybersecurity legislation in 2017, with even more states adopting and introducing legislation as well. Luckily, news outlets and social media has increased awareness of breaches and reduced the amount of time that passes before many people learn of them, but there’s still a gap depending on the breach’s size and what data was stolen.





### KEY FINDING 3:

CONSUMERS ARE NOW MAKING CONCRETE CHANGES TO HOW THEY ARE MANAGING THEIR OWN PERSONALLY IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION AS A RESULT OF THE EQUIFAX BREACH.

59 percent of Equifax data breach victims took advantage of free services offered to them and almost 44 percent are still currently using free credit monitoring from Equifax.

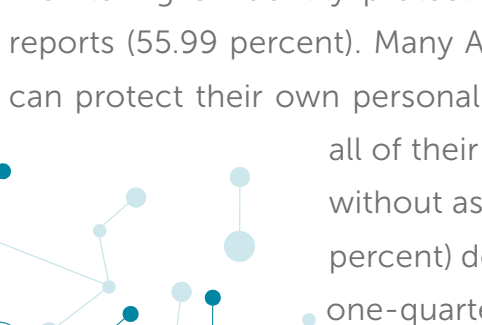
Respondents self-reported taking a variety of actions to protect themselves after the breach. Most victims of the Equifax breach took advantage of the services offered to them such as free credit monitoring and say they're currently taking actions to minimize the risk of identity theft.


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“I STILL FEEL VERY VULNERABLE AND PROBABLY WILL FEEL THIS WAY FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE BECAUSE OF THIS EXPERIENCE.” - BREACH VICTIM

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Over half of Equifax breach victims surveyed (59 percent) said they took advantage of free services offered to them such as credit monitoring after the Equifax breach, with another 13.43 percent saying they don't remember if they did or not. When asked what actions they are currently taking to minimize their risk of identity theft in light of their personal identifiable information being compromised as a result of the Equifax breach, almost half are still using the free monitoring provided by Equifax (43.86 percent). Other actions victims are taking include paying for credit monitoring or identity protection services (17.84 percent) and having freezes on their credit reports (55.99 percent). Many Americans are also aware of ways in their everyday life that they can protect their own personal information: more than half say they use strong passwords on all of their accounts (68 percent); half do not provide personal information without asking how it's used and stored (54.24 percent); almost half (48.98 percent) do not carry documents they don't need with them; and just under one-quarter (22.95 percent) use a safe or safety deposit box.





There are other protective actions that survey respondents mentioned, such as regularly reviewing accounts and credit reports for discrepancies, shredding documents with personal information and using two-factor authentication when possible.

#### KEY FINDING 4:

A GROWING NUMBER OF AMERICANS DON'T FEEL THEIR PERSONAL IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION IS BEING PROTECTED BY COMPANIES AND FEEL COMPANIES SHOULD BE HELD RESPONSIBLE WHEN THEY HAVE A BREACH.

The Equifax breach led to a growing mistrust amongst consumers for the company and credit reporting agency industry as a whole. Understanding how to best utilize your own credit and protect your personal information is critical. We are often at the mercy of other companies and organizations who hold our personal data and information. Based on the responses in this ITRC survey, the Equifax breach left many consumers feeling like they couldn't trust the credit reporting system and that Equifax didn't face repercussions that aligned with the magnitude of what happened at their company. Several respondents noted that they felt Equifax should have to provide much more than one free year of credit monitoring due to the extent of the breach.

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“LIKE, IT DIDN'T MATTER HOW CAREFUL I WAS WITH MY PERSONAL INFORMATION: THE WEAK LINK WAS PEOPLE I COULDN'T STOP FROM HAVING THAT PERSONAL INFORMATION.” - BREACH VICTIM

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The ITRC continues to advocate that every organization that houses data and personal information should continue to be held to high standards. Along with various U.S. legislation, the EU rolled out the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in 2018, which requires any companies with customers in the EU to adhere to specific guidelines for security and reporting and security incidents or breaches.





## SUMMARY

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**T**he 2017 Equifax data breach was a turning point for many Americans and it brought identity theft and protection to the forefront of their awareness. The impacts were far reaching and unfortunately because of the threat of the dark web and the value of personal information, we'll likely continue to see the impact of this breach. The ITRC and other consumer advocates will continue to educate, empower, support, and advocate for consumers and identity theft victims.

Over one year later, there are still plenty of actionable steps that every consumer can take to safeguard their own personal information. If you have further questions about what you can do to protect yourself, contact the Identity Theft Resource Center toll-free at 888-400-5530 or [idtheftcenter.org](https://idtheftcenter.org).



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