



— DR. N. JOYCE —
PAYNE
RESEARCH CENTER

Black Thriving

IN AMERICA

2026

powered by
GALLUP®

“100 YEARS OF HELPING PEOPLE BE HEARD”

Black Thriving

IN AMERICA

2026

Payne Research Center (2026).
Black Thriving in America: 2026.
Washington: Gallup.

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Letter From the Executive Director

FOR DECADES, GALLUP HAS ASKED AMERICANS — AND THE WORLD — A SIMPLE BUT PROFOUND QUESTION: How is your life today, and what do you expect for tomorrow? The answers have always mattered — not as abstractions, but as the raw material of national understanding. For the past four years, the Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center has made it our singular mission to ask these questions of Black Americans, systematically and without evasion, so that their answers might shape the policies, investments and priorities of a nation that aspires to offer the best life imaginable to all its people.

The findings of the *Black Thriving in America: 2026* report present a paradox that demands careful interpretation. At first glance, the data offer encouragement: Black thriving has rebounded to 49%, narrowing the gap with White and Hispanic Americans. A closer look, however, reveals a more complicated story — one that we call the 2026 Convergence Mirage.

The Convergence Mirage describes a condition in which a population's wellbeing metric converges with the national average, while disaggregated analysis reveals systemic deterioration across intersecting demographic cleavages. This mirage is sustained by intangible optimism, historically a source of Black resilience, which now functions as a statistical buffer that obscures the urgent need for targeted intervention. Black Americans are telling us they are hopeful about tomorrow, but today, their health, safety, dignity and financial security are fracturing along predictable structural fault lines. To construct policy based on the aggregate is to build based on a mirage.

Consider the evidence: While 68% of Black adults remain optimistic about their future — a figure that now rivals or exceeds that of other groups — only 56% rate their present lives positively, falling below the national average. Hope, it appears, is no longer translating into present-day thriving. Meanwhile, the aggregate parity in overall thriving masks a growing gender divide: Black men have rebounded to 53% thriving, while Black women have dipped to 46%, a seven-point gap that did not exist in 2023. Black seniors, who once led all groups in thriving, have seen their rate fall from 64% to 53%, while their White and Hispanic counterparts held steady or improved. These are not random fluctuations. They are fractures.

The workplace tells a similar story. While Black career wellbeing has remained steady at 53%, the national average has fallen seven points — a relative gain that obscures the reality that only 37% of Black employees strongly agree they are treated with respect, down from 46% in 2024. Black college graduates, who typically fare better than non-graduates across most measures, are less likely than their non-graduate counterparts to report being treated with respect at work, having their opinions count or having someone who encourages their development. Education, it appears, is not a panacea — a finding that challenges conventional wisdom and demands serious inquiry.

In public life, the data are unambiguous. Nearly one-third of Black Americans report being treated unfairly while shopping or in healthcare settings in the past 30 days — figures that have risen since last year and remain multiples higher than those reported by White Americans. Young Black adults report mistreatment at more than three times the rate of Black seniors. Dignity, it seems, is not distributed equally across age or setting.

There are, to be sure, areas of genuine progress. Neighborhood safety has improved seven points since 2024, with 69% of Black adults now feeling safe walking alone at night. For the first time, a majority of Black Americans (52%) say their city or area is the perfect place for them. Eighty percent believe children in their community have access to a good education, up from 74% in 2023. Physical wellbeing remains on par with the national average. These gains are real and meaningful, and they reflect the work of communities, families and institutions striving toward a better future.

But the Convergence Mirage warns us against mistaking aggregate improvement for systemic health. The improvements we see are real, but so too are the fractures beneath them. Both demand our attention.

As we mark the fourth year of this 100-year commitment, our charge is clear. We are not merely tracking data; we are building an empirical foundation for a future in which every American — regardless of race, gender, age, education or income — has the opportunity to live the best life imaginable. This work requires patience, rigor and an unflinching willingness to see what the data reveal, even when — perhaps especially when — it complicates our narratives.

The Payne Research Center remains steadfast in its mission: to measure, to report and to illuminate the path forward. We invite policymakers, philanthropists, community leaders and all Americans to join us in this work — not to look away from the fractures, but to see them clearly, and to build from that clarity a nation that delivers on its promise.

The data are not the destination. They are the map. And with this map, we can chart a course toward heights we have not yet imagined.



M. C. Brown II, Ph.D.

Executive Director & Research Scientist

Dr. N. Joyce Payne Research Center

Dr. Gallup had a simple mission:

“If democracy is supposed to be based
on the will of the people, someone should
find out what that will is.”

— **JIM CLIFTON**

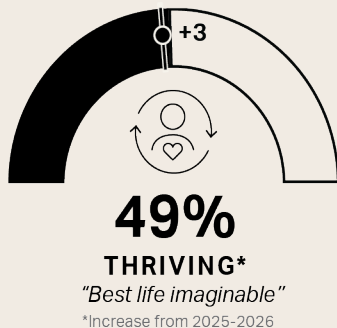
Chairman of Gallup & the Payne Research Center

Black American Racial Equity Dashboard

FIGURE 1

2026 Black American Racial Equity Dashboard

◆ Change from 2025



DIGNITY IN PUBLIC*

"Treated fairly in the last 30 days"

68%

-2



POLICE AND ME

"Treated fairly in the last 12 months"

78%

0



RESPECT AT WORK

"At work, I'm treated with respect"

37%

-1



SAFETY IN NEIGHBORHOOD

"Feel safe walking alone"

69%

+1

*Dignity in Public calculated using two measures (shopping and healthcare) versus four measures in 2024 due to item refinement.

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Black Thriving improved in 2026 but has yet to fully recover from the large drop in 2025. The percentage of Black Americans who are thriving in their lives stands at 49%, up from the 2025 low of 46%, but short of levels recorded in 2023 and 2024.

Thriving among Black adults is now statistically similar to thriving rates among White (52%) and Hispanic (50%) adults, but there are notable racial differences on the individual components that make up the Life Evaluation Index.

“

The data tell us what we must confront:
that hope and opportunity are not distributed
equally. The evidence is clear, and it demands
more than observation — it demands investment,
accountability, and a national commitment to
ensuring that every community has the resources
to thrive. When we measure what matters,
we have the power to change it.”

— DR. N. JOYCE PAYNE

Founder of the Thurgood Marshall College Fund

Understanding the Life Evaluation Index

The Life Evaluation Index measures how people rate their current and expected future lives. Gallup asks people to imagine a ladder, with the lowest rung representing the worst possible life and the highest rung representing the best possible life. Those rungs are numbered zero to 10. Based on how respondents place themselves on this scale — both in terms of where they stand today and where they expect to be in five years — their responses are categorized into three life evaluation classifications:

- Individuals classified as “thriving” report strong current life ratings (seven or higher) and optimistic future life ratings (eight or higher).
- Those categorized as “struggling” report moderate or mixed ratings, with uncertainty or concern about either present or future wellbeing.
- Respondents who fall into the “suffering” category report low ratings for both present and future life, reflecting heightened vulnerability across multiple wellbeing dimensions.

Gallup consistently applies this index as a foundational measure of subjective wellbeing across its global and national research efforts.

FIGURE 2

Life Evaluation Index

The Life Evaluation Index measures how people rate their current and expected future lives. There are three life evaluation classifications based on responses to the index: thriving, struggling and suffering.

WORST LIFE IMAGINABLE



BEST LIFE IMAGINABLE

SUFFERING

Wellbeing that is at high risk.

These respondents have poor ratings of their current life situation (4 and below) *and* negative views of the next five years (4 and below). They are more likely to report lacking the basics of food and shelter and more likely to experience physical pain, stress, worry, sadness and anger. They have less access to health insurance and care and more than double the disease burden in comparison to thriving respondents.

STRUGGLING

Wellbeing that is moderate

or inconsistent. These respondents have moderate views of their present life situation *or* moderate or negative views of their future. They are either struggling in the present or expect to struggle in the future. They report more daily stress and worry about money than thriving respondents and more than double the number of sick days. They are more likely to smoke and are less likely to eat healthily.

THRIVING

Wellbeing that is strong, consistent and progressing.

These respondents have positive views of their present life situation (7 and above) and positive views of the next five years (8 and above). They report significantly fewer health problems, fewer sick days, less worry, stress, sadness and anger, and more happiness, enjoyment, interest and respect.

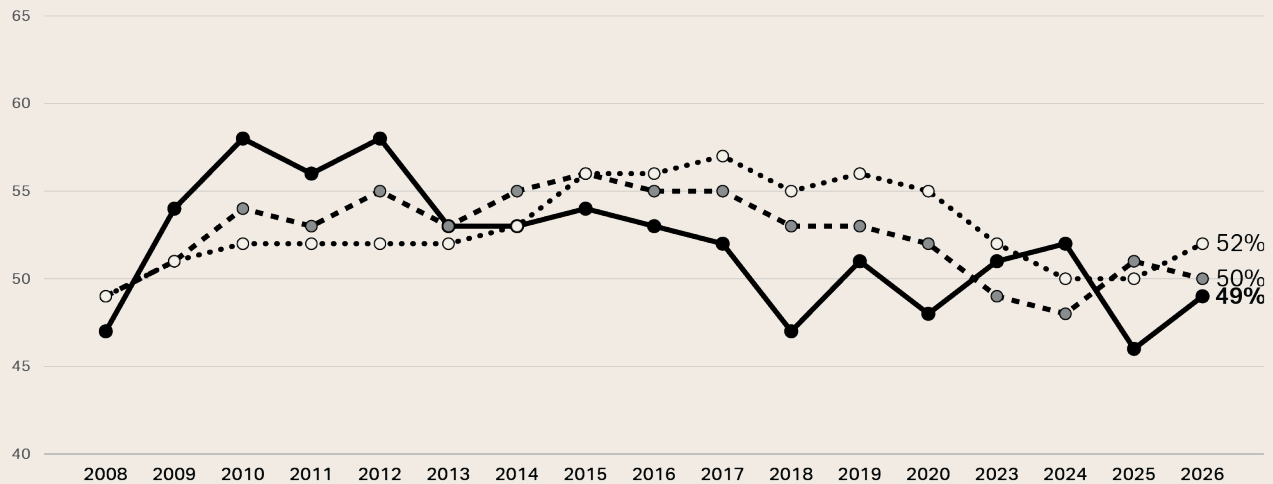
SECTION ONE

Thriving: The Best Life Imaginable

FIGURE 3

Thriving: The Best Life Imaginable

● Black Americans ● Hispanic Americans ○ White Americans



Data from January 2008-August 2019 and July-September 2020 are based on the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index™; data from September-October 2019 and March-July 2020 are from the Gallup Panel™. No measurement was conducted for 2021-2022. From 2023 to 2025, data were collected in a Gallup Center on Black Voices mixed-methods survey.

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While most Black adults (56%) rate their current lives positively, this falls below the national average (60%). Black and Hispanic (57%) adults are each less likely than White adults (65%) to rate their lives as a seven or higher on the zero to 10 scale.

In terms of their expectations for their future lives, however, Black adults (68%) remain more optimistic than White adults (62%) and are now statistically tied with Hispanic adults (70%), a group they used to clearly lead.

Meanwhile, a gender gap has emerged. In 2023, Black men and women thrived at the same rate, but today, a seven-point gap separates the two groups. While thriving among Black men (53%) rebounded in 2026, thriving among Black women (46%) dipped to a new low.

Black seniors have had a different trajectory than seniors in other racial groups. In 2023, Black seniors' thriving rate (64%) towered above every other Black age group — and above White and Hispanic seniors too. Today, it has fallen to 53%, while thriving among White seniors held steady and Hispanic seniors' thriving rose slightly. Black seniors no longer stand out from other Black adults on this measure, and they no longer lead seniors of other racial groups.

CAREER WELLBEING

Consistent with last year, just over half of Black Americans (53%) say they like what they do every day. Results on this measure among Black adults have been consistent despite a seven-point drop in the proportion of Americans overall reporting that they like what they do every day.

Income remains an important factor in Black Americans' career thriving. Among high-income earners, 62% like what they do every day, while 45% of low-income earners report the same. Similarly, Black men continue to report liking what they do every day at higher rates than Black women (55% vs. 50%).

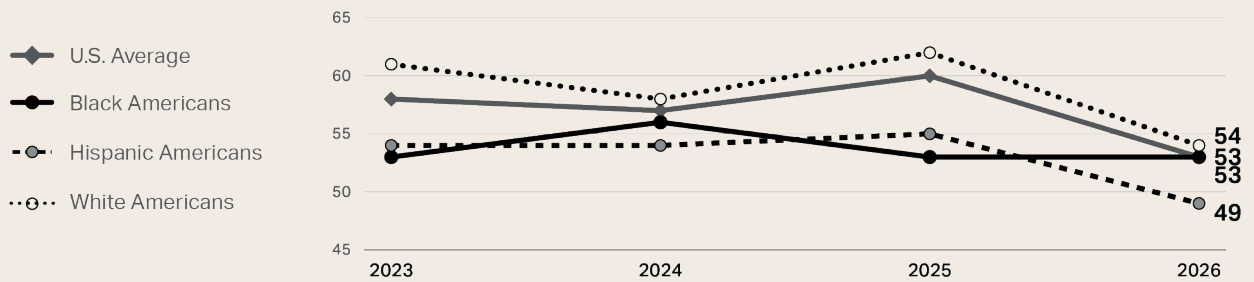
Black adults under 30 are more likely to report they like what they do every day today (58%), compared with last year (39%). However, agreement dropped from 56% to 41% among those aged 40 to 59. The improvements among early-career Black adults are notable, but later-career Black adults may not be getting the opportunities they are looking for.

FIGURE 4

Career Wellbeing

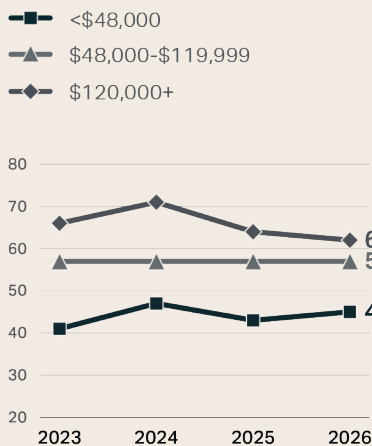
You like what you do everyday.

% Agree + Strongly agree

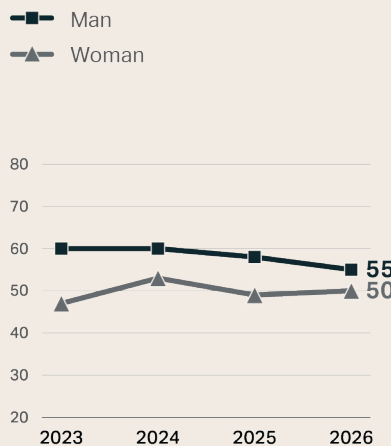


BLACK AMERICANS

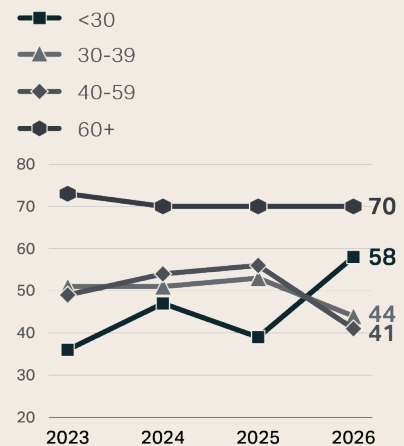
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



GENDER



AGE



Note: Career wellbeing item was sourced from Gallup's Q2 WBI Survey fielded May 28-June 5, 2026.

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SOCIAL WELLBEING

Nearly two in three Black adults (64%) agree that their family and friends give them positive energy every day, slightly below the national average (67%).

Black men (68%) report higher social wellbeing than Black women (61%), whereas there are no significant gender gaps among White and Hispanic men and women.

Black Americans' social wellbeing rises significantly at each higher income step, similar to White and Hispanic adults.

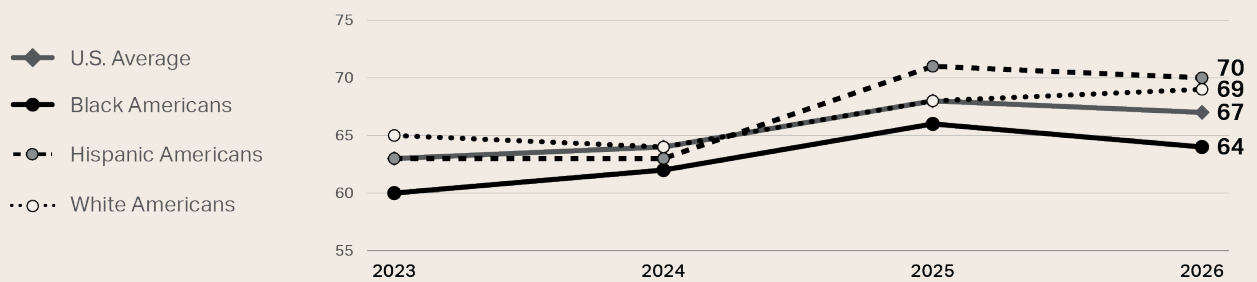
Black adults aged 60 and older (73%) far outpace 18- to 29-year-olds (54%) in their social wellbeing. Meanwhile, adults aged 30 to 39 had the largest social wellbeing improvement of any age or other Black subgroup, rising from 55% in 2023 to 64% this year.

FIGURE 5

Social Wellbeing

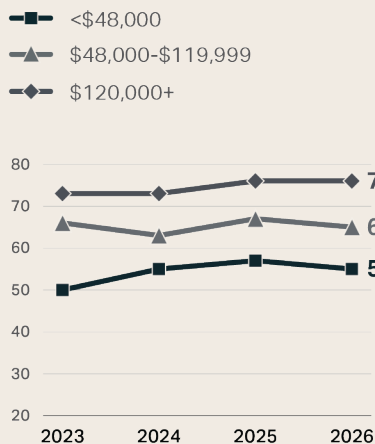
Your family and friends give you positive energy every day.

% Agree + Strongly agree

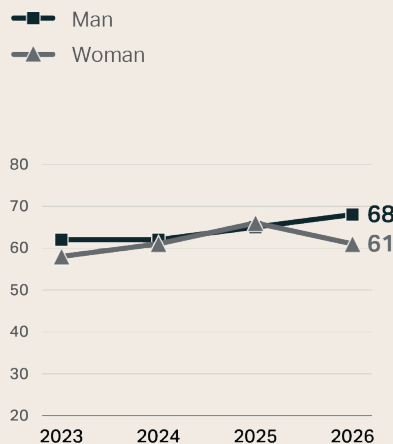


BLACK AMERICANS

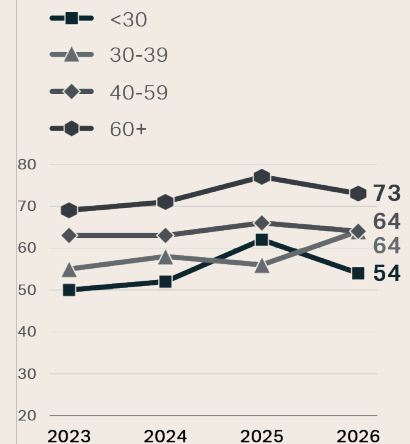
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



GENDER



AGE



GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Only 31% of Black adults say they are “living comfortably” on their present income in 2026, on par with recent years and below the national average (37%) and both other racial groups.

While Black and Hispanic adults alike have lower financial wellbeing than White adults, Hispanic adults (36%) have pulled significantly closer to the national average while Black financial wellbeing has not improved.

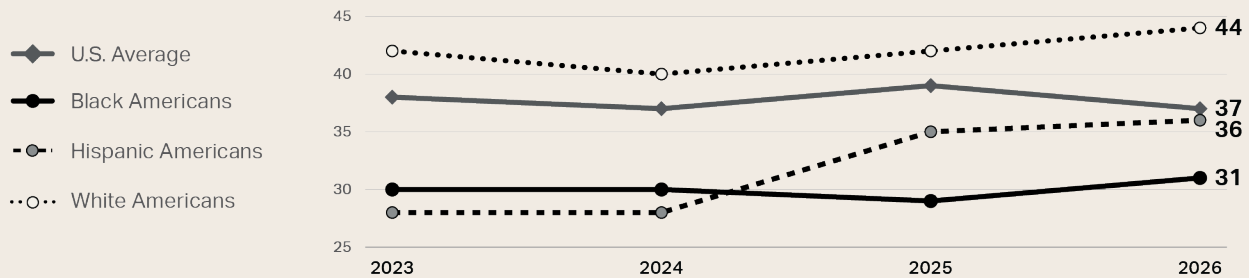
Financial wellbeing is about equally low across racial groups among adults whose households earn under \$48,000 annually. But among higher earners — those who make \$120,000 or more per year — Black adults (50%) are less likely to say they are living comfortably on their income than Hispanic (58%) and White (67%) adults in this income group.

FIGURE 6

Financial Wellbeing

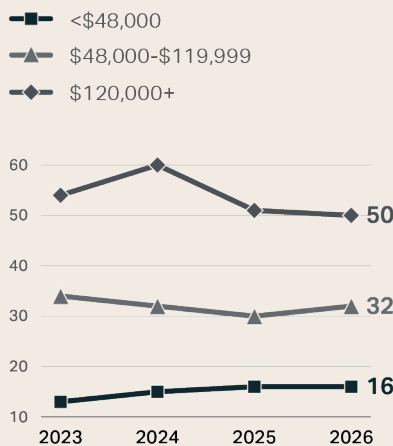
Which one of these phrases comes closest to your own feelings about your household's income these days?

% Living comfortably on present income

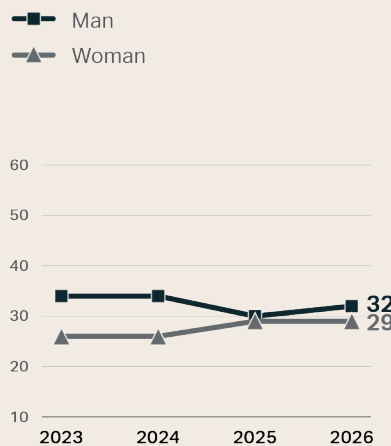


BLACK AMERICANS

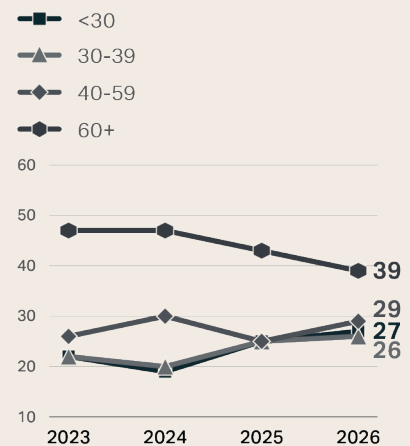
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



GENDER



AGE



GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

COMMUNITY WELLBEING

For the first time, a majority of Black Americans (52%) say the city or area where they live is the perfect place for them — an improvement of six percentage points since 2023.

The improvements on this measure were largest among Black adults aged 30 to 39 and 40 to 59 — with each age group increasing nine points over that time. But Black adults aged 60 and older remain the group most likely to say their area is perfect for them, as they have been in each prior update.

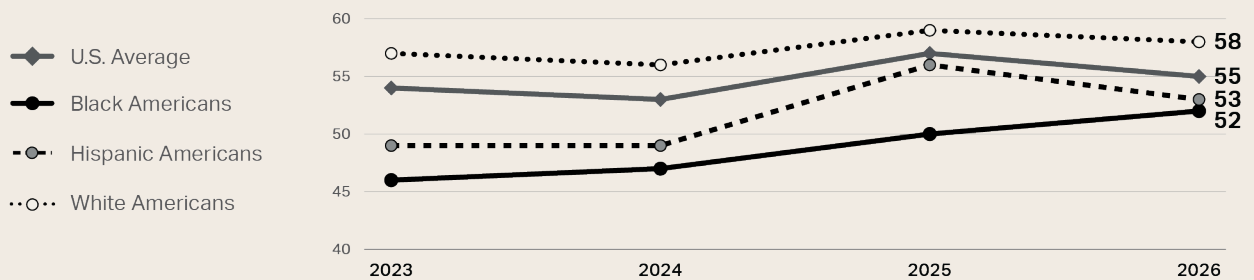
Consistent with patterns across other racial groups, Black adults living in lower-income households (45%) are less likely to view their area as perfect for them than those in higher-income households (64%), with those in middle-income households falling in between (53%).

FIGURE 7

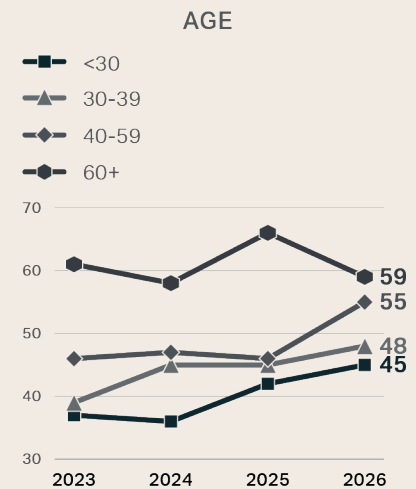
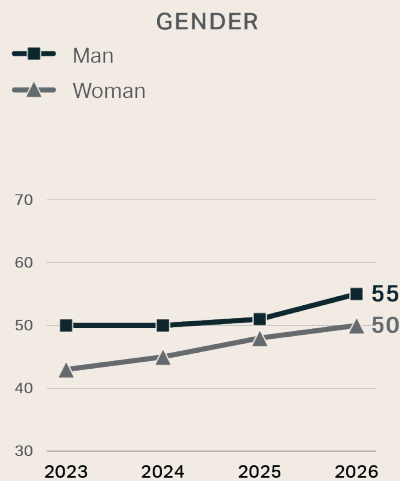
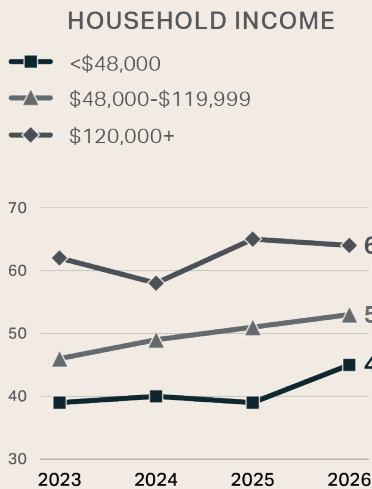
Community Wellbeing

The city or area where you live is the perfect place for you.

% Agree + Strongly agree



BLACK AMERICANS



GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Nearly half of Black adults (45%) say their physical health is near perfect, stable from last year and on par with the national average (44%).

While physical wellbeing differences are insignificant across age and gender subgroups, a 10-point gap exists between Black college graduates (53%) and non-graduates (43%).

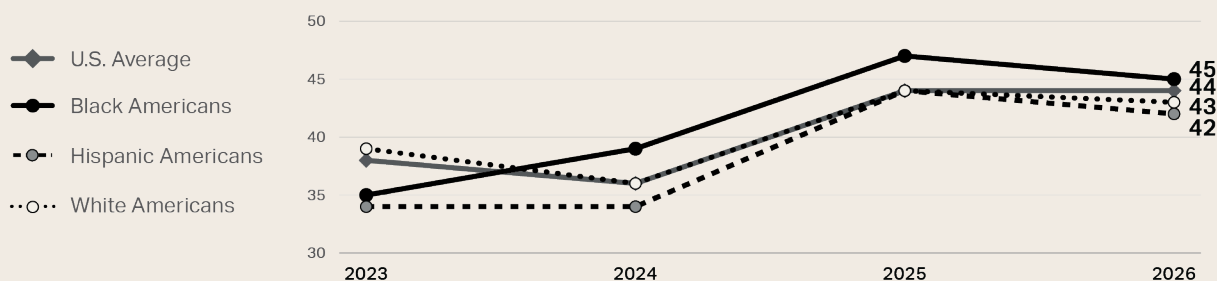
Physical wellbeing also varies significantly by income, from 41% among Black adults in lower-income households and 43% for those in middle-income households to 55% among those in higher-income households.

FIGURE 8

Physical Wellbeing

Your physical health is near perfect.

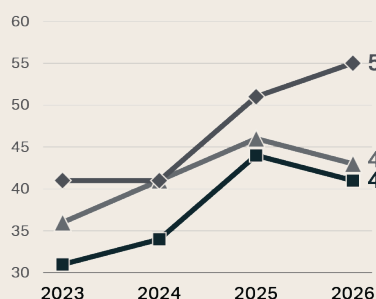
% Agree + Strongly agree



BLACK AMERICANS

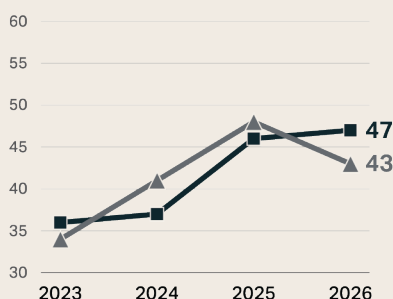
HOUSEHOLD INCOME

- <\$48,000
- ▲ \$48,000-\$119,999
- ◆ \$120,000+



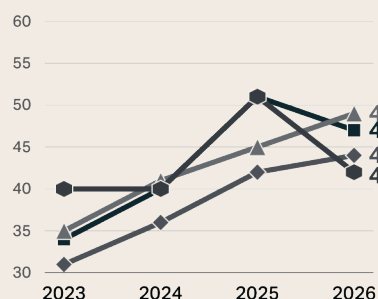
GENDER

- Man
- ▲ Woman



AGE

- <30
- ▲ 30-39
- ◆ 40-59
- 60+



GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

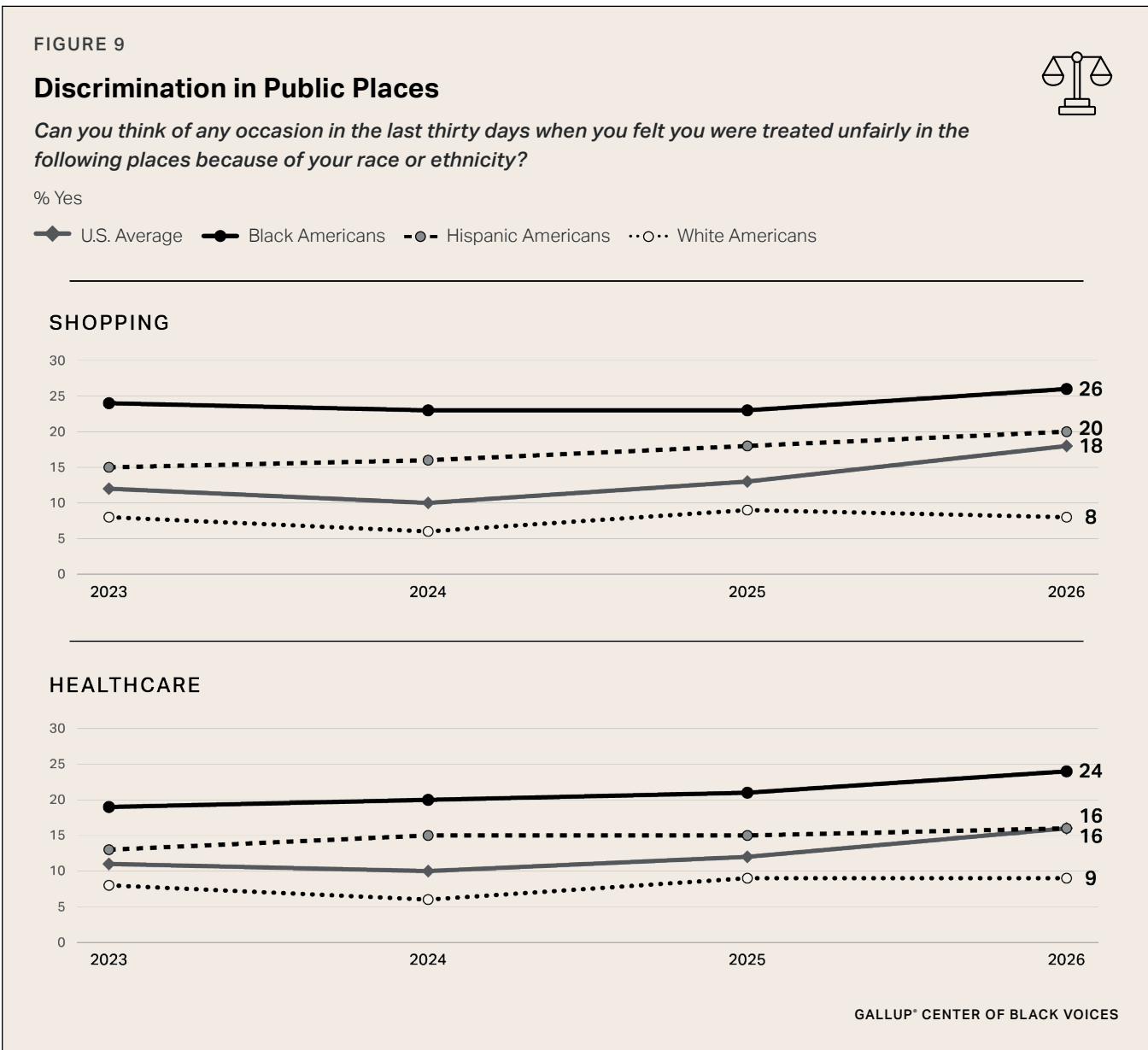
SECTION TWO

Dignity in Public

More than one in four Black Americans (26%) report having been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity while shopping in the past 30 days — higher than among Hispanic Americans (20%) and well above the figure for White Americans (8%). The latest percentage of Black adults reporting recent mistreatment while shopping is statistically higher than last year.

A similar proportion of Black adults (24%) reports having been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity in a healthcare setting — also higher than among Hispanic Americans (16%) and well above the figure for White Americans (9%). This also represents a statistically significant increase from last year.

Young Black adults aged 18 to 29 report mistreatment at more than three times the rate of Black seniors in both shopping and healthcare — representing one of the largest subgroup gaps in this report.



SECTION THREE

Respect at Work

In U.S. workplaces, Black employees' experiences have remained stable since 2025.

About one in three Black employees strongly agree there is someone who encourages their development (32%) and that they are treated with respect (37%). Meanwhile, just over one in four (27%) strongly agree that their opinions seem to count at work.

While the percentages of Black employees who report being respected and feel their opinions count at work are lower than what was found in 2024, these declines align with shifts in the national average.

FIGURE 10

Experiences at Work

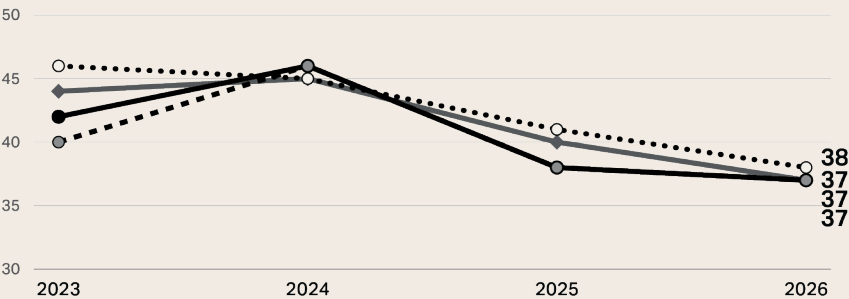


◆ U.S. Average ● Black Americans -●- Hispanic Americans ···○·· White Americans

RESPECT

At work, I am treated with respect.

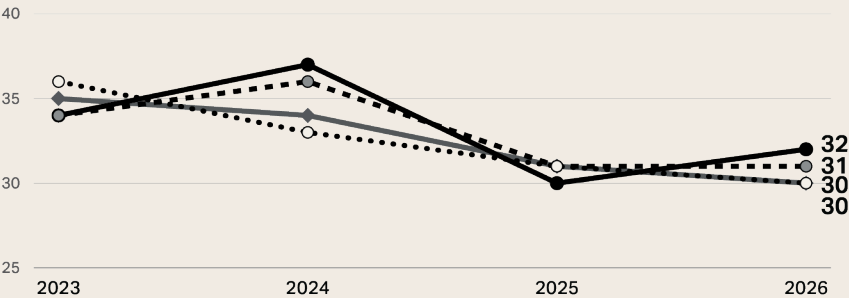
% Strongly agree



DEVELOPMENT

There is someone at work who encourages my development.

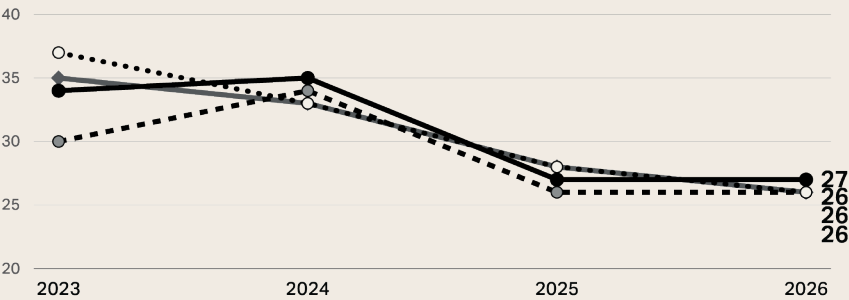
% Strongly agree



OPINIONS

At work, my opinions seem to count.

% Strongly agree



Note: Respect at work item was sourced from Gallup's Workforce Q1 Survey, fielded Feb. 2-19, 2026.

GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

The gender differences reported last year have narrowed. The proportion of Black women and Black men reporting strong agreement with each workplace item are statistically similar.

FIGURE 11

Experiences at Work

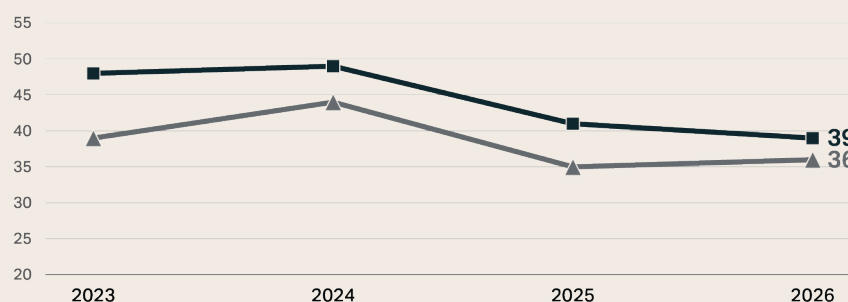
■ Black Man ▲ Black Woman



RESPECT

At work, I am treated with respect.

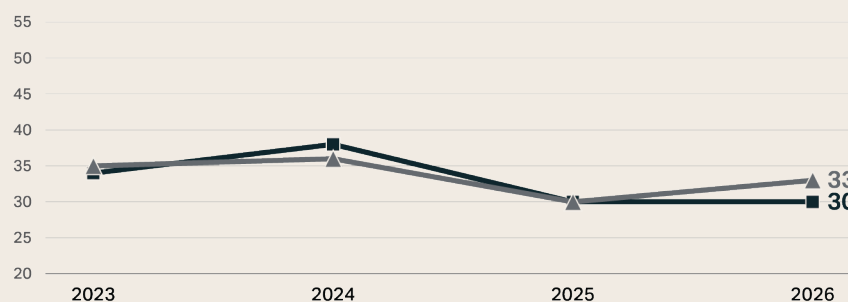
% Strongly agree



DEVELOPMENT

There is someone at work who encourages my development.

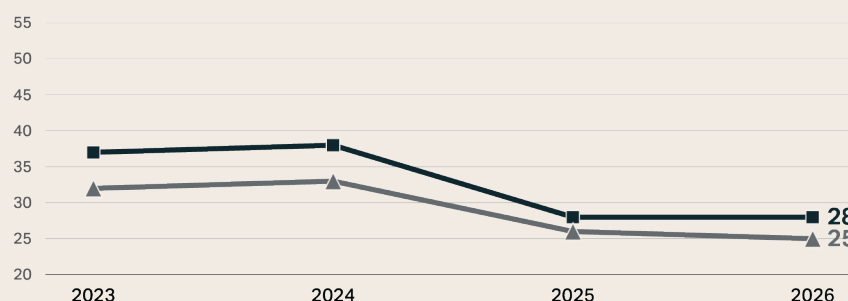
% Strongly agree



OPINIONS

At work, my opinions seem to count.

% Strongly agree



Note: Respect at work item was sourced from Gallup's Workforce Q1 Survey, fielded Feb. 2-19, 2026.

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Black employees with a four-year degree are less likely than their Black non-graduate counterparts to strongly agree that they are treated with respect (33% vs. 40%), that there is someone encouraging their development (29% vs. 34%) and that their opinions seem to count (23% vs. 29%).

While college education can be a path for opportunities — and generally better outcomes on most measures — Black employees' experiences reveal that it is not a panacea.

SECTION FOUR

Police and Me

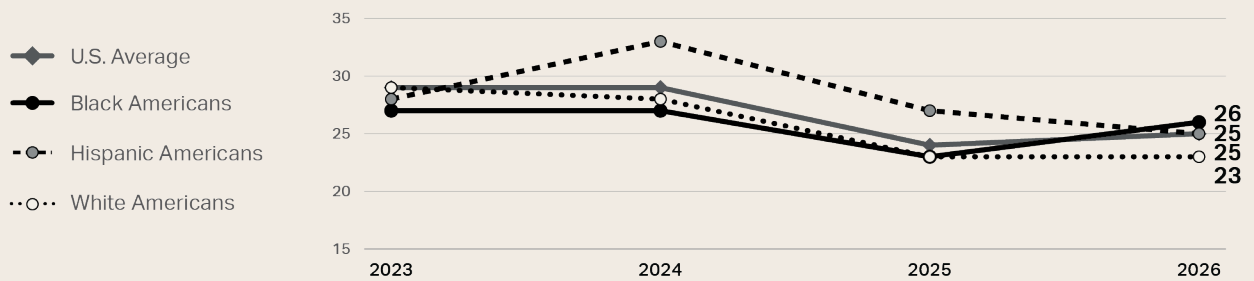
Across racial groups, about one in four say they have had an interaction with the police in the past 12 months. But Black adults who have had such interactions with police (78%) are less likely than their White (87%) and Hispanic counterparts (81%) to say they were treated fairly.

FIGURE 12

Interaction With Police

Have you personally had an interaction with police in the past 12 months?

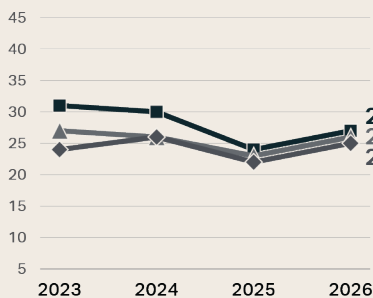
% Yes



BLACK AMERICANS

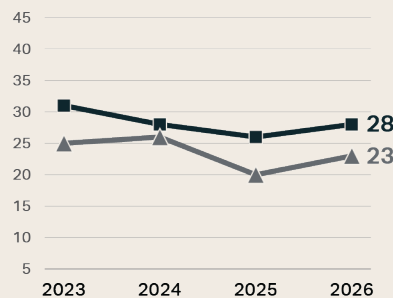
HOUSEHOLD INCOME

- <\$48,000
- ▲ \$48,000-\$119,999
- ◆ \$120,000+



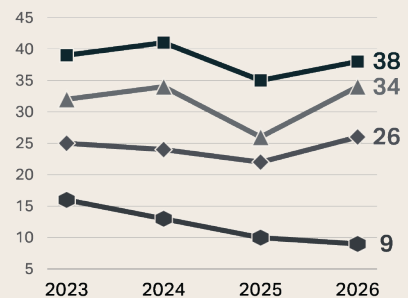
GENDER

- Man
- ▲ Woman



AGE

- <30
- ▲ 30-39
- ◆ 40-59
- 60+

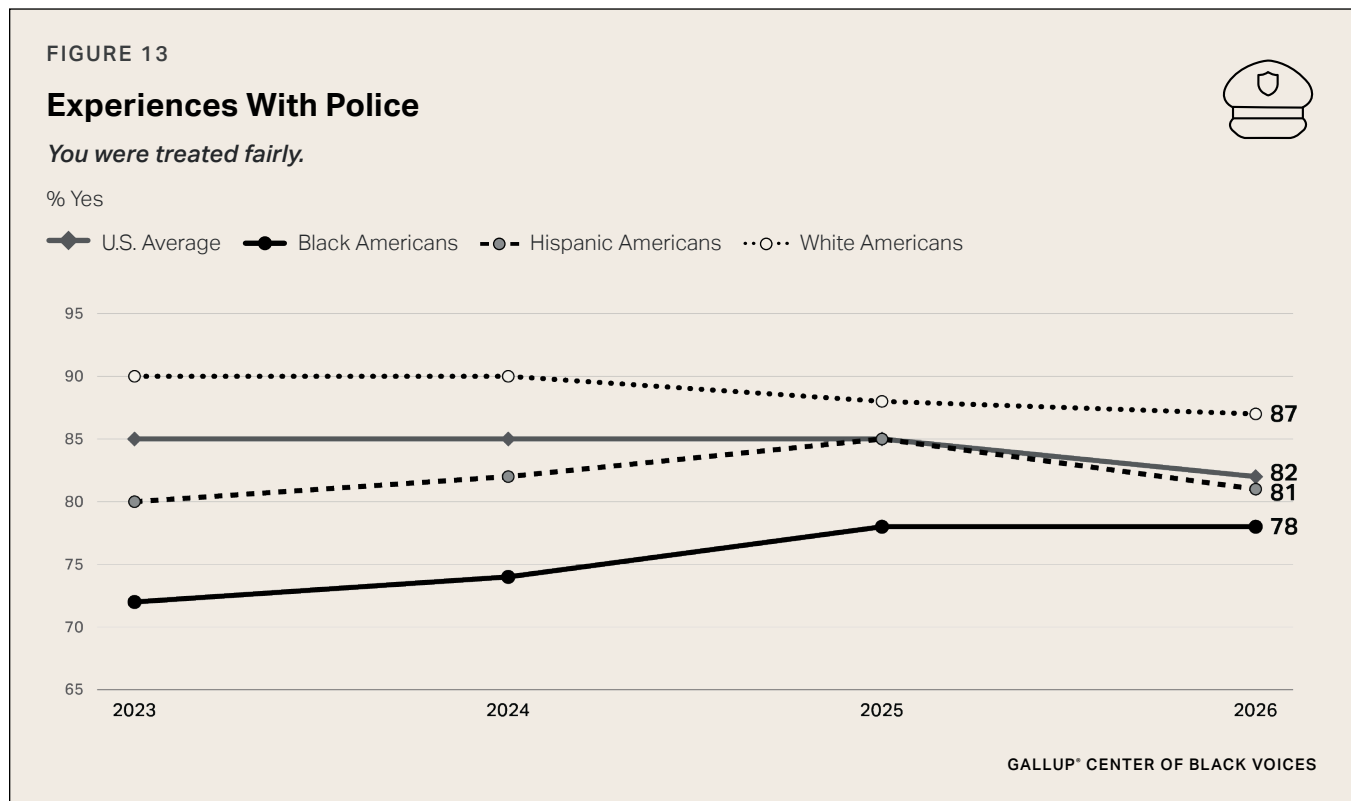


GALLUP* CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

The 78% recorded this year for Black adults who say their recent police interactions were fair is stable from last year but marks an improvement from 2023 (72%) and 2024 (74%).

This improvement is mostly driven by younger Black adults:

- Black 18- to 29-year-olds who have had recent interactions with the police are now 13 points more likely than in 2023 to say they were treated fairly (78% vs. 65%).
- Black 30- to 39-year-olds who have had recent interactions with the police are now 12 points more likely than in 2023 to say they were treated fairly (76% vs. 64%).



SECTION FIVE

Safety in Neighborhood

In 2026, 69% of Black adults say they feel safe walking alone at night in their neighborhood, up seven points from 2024 (62%). Still, Black adults remain less likely than White adults (81%) to feel this way and are about on par with Hispanic adults (73%).

Non-college graduates (58% to 67%) and Black seniors (60% to 69%) saw the largest 2024 to 2026 improvements in this measure, followed by lower-income Black adults (49% to 56%).

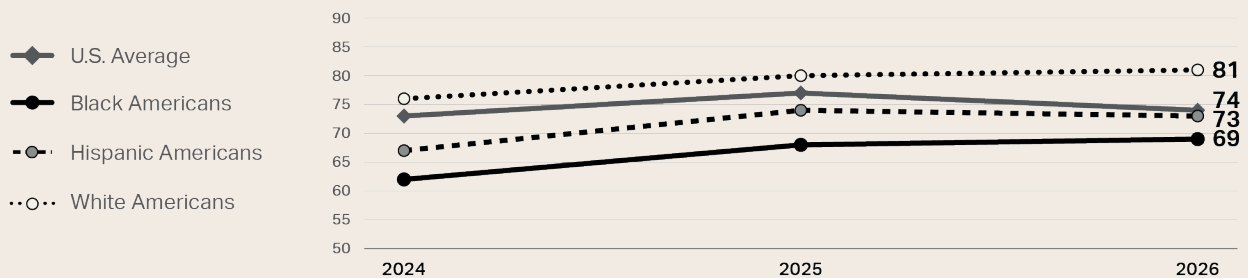
Black men (79%) remain far more likely than Black women (60%) to feel safe, the widest gender gap of any measure in this report. This gender gap is not unique to Black Americans: White and Hispanic adults have similarly large, or even larger, gender gaps on this measure.

FIGURE 14

Safety in Neighborhood

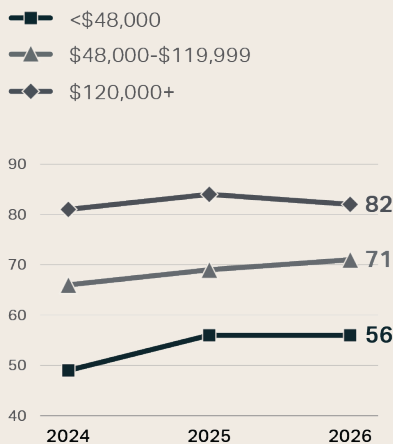
Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the area where you live?

% Yes

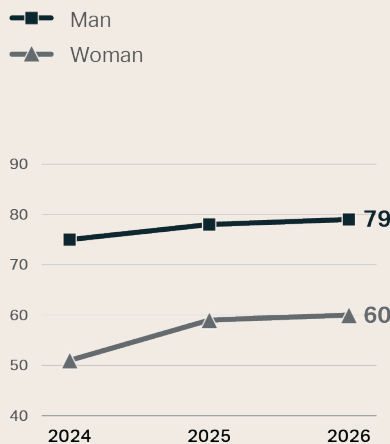


BLACK AMERICANS

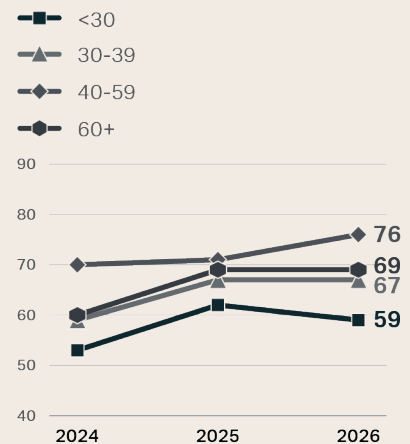
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



GENDER



AGE



GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

SECTION SIX

Quality of Education

In 2026, 80% of Black adults believe children in their community have the opportunity to get a good education, up from 74% in 2023. This is statistically similar to the share of Hispanic adults who feel this way (81%), though still below the figure for White Americans (85%).

This measure is closely tied to income: Just 75% of Black adults in lower-income households believe children have this opportunity, compared with 80% of those in middle-income households and 89% of those in higher-income households. A similar income gap exists among White Americans, though not among Hispanic Americans, whose gap by income isn't statistically significant.

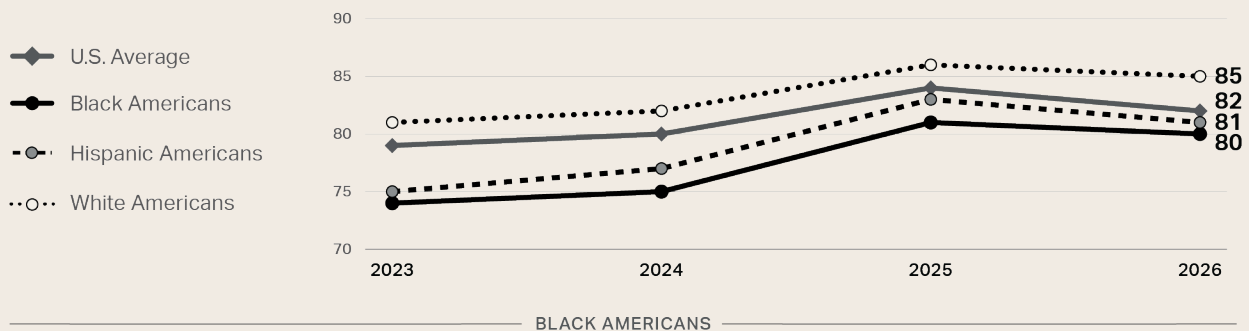
Black men (83%) are more likely than Black women (77%) to believe children in their community have the opportunity for a good education — a gap not found among White or Hispanic adults.

FIGURE 15

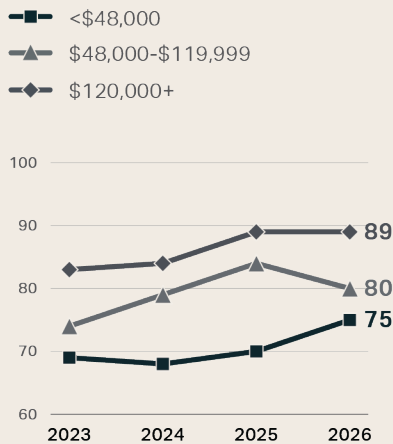
Quality of Education

Do you think children in your area have an opportunity to get a good education or not?

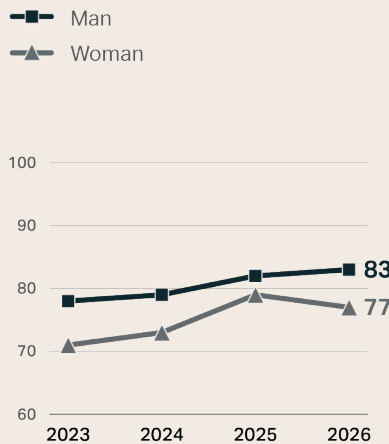
% Yes



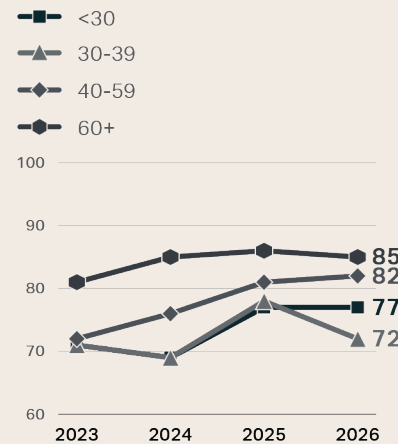
HOUSEHOLD INCOME



GENDER

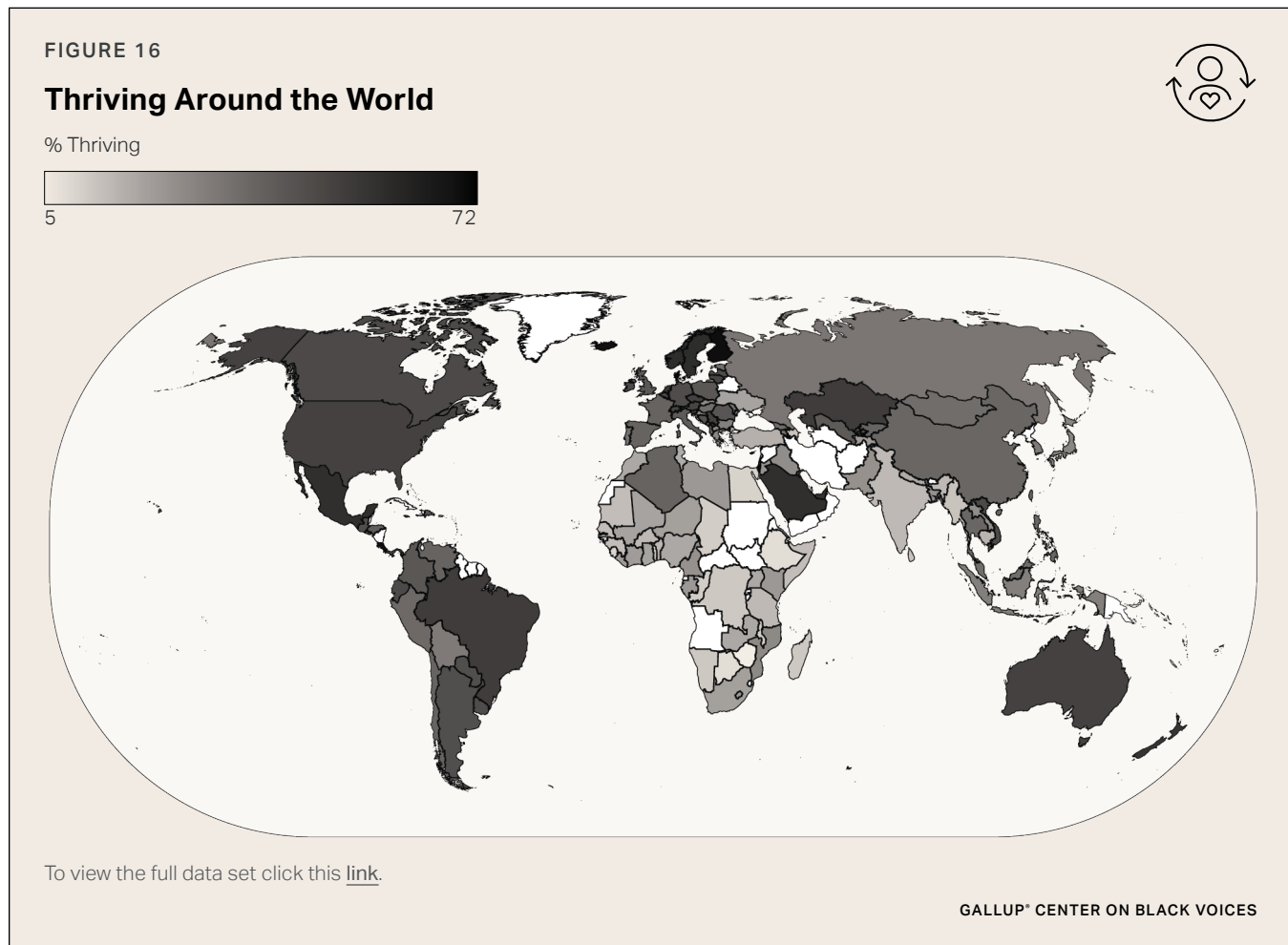


AGE



GALLUP® CENTER OF BLACK VOICES

Thriving Around the World



When viewed through a global lens, America’s wellbeing profile appears neither exceptional nor deficient — with room for improvement but also cause for measured optimism.

Worldwide, 31% of adults rate their lives positively enough to be considered thriving on Gallup’s Life Evaluation Index, per the latest findings from 2025, with 58% struggling and 12% suffering. This global average reflects vast regional variation, from the Nordic countries where thriving routinely exceeds 60%, to sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where rates fall below 20%.

The United States ranks alongside Australia (50%), the Netherlands (54%) and the United Arab Emirates (56%) — countries with developed economies and relatively high standards of living. Among other peer OECD nations, Costa Rica (68%) and Israel (69%) lead, while Japan (28%) and Greece (28%) lag considerably.

What distinguishes the American experience is not its aggregate thriving rate but the distribution of wellbeing across demographic groups. While the U.S. outperforms the global average by a substantial margin — 19 percentage points higher than the worldwide figure — the internal disparities documented in this report remain a defining feature of the American landscape. The United States, in other words, performs well by global standards and unevenly by its own.

Globally, perceptions of safety present a similar pattern. Worldwide, about seven in 10 adults report feeling safe walking alone at night in the area where they live. The United States (78%) exceeds the global average, though it is 36th in the world. Safety perceptions, like thriving, are shaped by local conditions, infrastructure and trust in institutions — factors that vary as much within countries as between them.

These global comparisons serve to contextualize, not diminish, the findings of this report. America's wellbeing is neither the highest in the world nor do its citizens feel the most safe. The United States remains a nation where the majority of citizens — across racial groups — report positive life evaluations. Yet the persistence of demographic gaps, and the emergence of new ones, suggests that the American promise of the best life imaginable is realized unevenly. In this sense, the U.S. experience mirrors the global condition: Wellbeing is distributed unequally, and the work of measurement is the first step toward understanding why.

“

In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings,
we pay ourselves the highest tribute.”

— **JUSTICE THURGOOD MARSHALL**

United States Supreme Court

This quote appears in Justice Marshall's concurring opinion in *Furman v. Georgia*, 408 U.S. 238 (1972).

Measuring Mirages, Charting Progress

Four years into our 100-year commitment, the data have become a lens through which we can observe not only the state of Black America but the very dynamics that shape wellbeing in a complex, diverse society. The 2026 report reveals a nation caught between competing forces — genuine progress in some domains, persistent deterioration in others, and an aggregate headline that tells a story of convergence while the details beneath it tell a story of fracture.

This is the Convergence Mirage: a statistical phenomenon in which a population's headline wellbeing indicator converges with broader national averages, even as granular analysis exposes systemic erosion across gender, age, education and income. The mirage is propped up by intangible optimism — a hallmark of Black resilience that has long sustained communities through adversity that in this instance functions as a statistical veil, concealing the urgency of targeted action.

A careful review of the data confirms that while Black Americans express hope for tomorrow, their health, safety, dignity and financial stability today are deteriorating along predictable structural fractures. To shape policy around the aggregate is to invest in illusion. But the mirage is not merely deception; it is a diagnostic signal, a call for deeper excavation, and a reminder that hope must be met with evidence if it is to become more than a placeholder for change.

What We Have Learned

The headline finding of the 2026 report offers encouragement: Black thriving has rebounded to 49%, narrowing the gap with White (52%) and Hispanic (50%) Americans. This aggregate convergence is real and measurable. But it masks a more complicated reality.

The optimism that drives this convergence is concentrated in expectations for the future — 68% of Black adults remain optimistic about their lives five years from now. Yet only 56% rate their present lives positively, falling below the national average.

Beneath the aggregate parity, fractures are evident across every major demographic divide:

GENDER: A seven-point gap now separates Black men (53%) from Black women (46%) in thriving — a divide that did not exist in 2023. Black women's thriving has dipped to a new low, while Black men's has rebounded. This divergence represents one of the most significant shifts in the report's four-year history.

AGE: Black seniors, who in 2023 led all groups in thriving at 64%, have fallen to 53% and no longer stand out. Meanwhile, White seniors held steady and Hispanic seniors improved. The trajectory of Black seniors suggests a cohort whose exceptional wellbeing has eroded, raising questions about the conditions that sustain or diminish life satisfaction in later years.

EDUCATION: The workplace presents a paradox: Black college graduates, who typically fare better than non-graduates across most measures, are less likely than their non-graduate counterparts to report being treated with respect at work, having their opinions count or having someone who encourages their development. Education, it appears, is not a panacea — a finding that challenges conventional wisdom and demands serious inquiry into the quality of the Black professional experience, even among those who have achieved the credentials traditionally associated with upward mobility.

INCOME: Financial wellbeing remains persistently lower for Black Americans (31%) than for White (44%) or Hispanic (36%) Americans. Among higher-earners — those making \$120,000 or more annually — Black adults are less likely to say they are living comfortably on their income than Hispanic or White adults in the same income bracket. Income, like education, appears to offer incomplete protection against the structural dynamics that shape Black experience.

PUBLIC DIGNITY: Nearly one-third of Black Americans report being treated unfairly while shopping or in healthcare settings — figures that have risen since last year and remain multiples higher than those reported by White Americans. Young Black adults report mistreatment at more than three times the rate of Black seniors. Dignity, it seems, is not distributed equally across age or setting.

What We Are Tracking

The Convergence Mirage is not a static condition; it is a dynamic process that we are now equipped to track across time. The 100-year commitment of the Payne Research Center is, at its core, an act of sustained measurement — a systematic effort to observe, document and understand the forces that shape Black wellbeing.

The tracking reveals several discernible trends:

- 1 First, the Convergence Mirage is likely to persist.** As aggregate measures continue to converge, the temptation to declare progress will grow. But the disaggregated data reveal that convergence is not the same as equity. The structural fault lines that produce disparities in experience — gender, age, education, income — remain deeply entrenched. Our task is to track these fault lines with precision, charting their evolution and resisting the seduction of aggregate complacency.
- 2 Second, the gender gap may be the most significant emerging trend.** Black women's declining thriving, combined with persistent disparities in workplace respect and financial wellbeing, suggests that the intersection of race and gender produces distinct vulnerabilities that require distinct responses.
- 3 Third, the education paradox bears watching.** If college graduates are experiencing less respect at work than non-graduates, something fundamental is amiss in the relationship between credentialing and professional experience. This finding, if it persists, would represent a significant challenge to the conventional wisdom that education is the primary pathway to equity.
- 4 Fourth, the optimism gap — the disconnect between present reality and future hope — warrants continued attention.** Black Americans remain remarkably optimistic about their futures, even as present-day thriving flags. This optimism is a source of resilience, but it also functions as a statistical buffer that masks present-day suffering. The question for the coming years is whether optimism can translate into improved present conditions, or whether it will continue to obscure the need for urgent intervention.

The Push Forward

The 100-year commitment is not merely a measure of patience; it is an act of hope. Hope that the systematic, sustained measurement of Black experience will illuminate the path toward the best life imaginable for all Americans. Hope that the data we collect today will inform the policies of tomorrow. Hope that the patterns we observe will provoke the interventions we need.

The data in this report are not the destination. They are the map. And with this map, we can chart a course toward heights we have not yet imagined.

The American promise — the promise that all people, regardless of race, gender, age, education or income, can live the best life imaginable — is not a matter of aspiration alone. It is a matter of measurement, tracking and persistent, evidence-based action.

The dream of fairness in American society is not necessarily denied, but as these data confirm, it is delayed. Our task is to measure the delay, track its contours, chart its causes and — armed with evidence — push to close it.

This is the work of the next 96 years. We are measuring mirages and charting progress. We are tracking hope and pushing for change. And we are doing it together, with the conviction that data, honestly collected and courageously interpreted, can point the way to a better future.

Methodology

The data featured in this Gallup report are sourced from web survey studies completed April 23-May 7, 2026, by 10,265 U.S. adults aged 18 and older (including 5,043 respondents from a third-party sample provider); Feb. 2-19, 2026, by 23,717 U.S. employees aged 18 and older; and May 28-June 5, 2026, by 5,065 Americans aged 18 and older. All surveys were administered in English. Individuals without internet access were not covered by these survey studies.

The Gallup Panel™ is a probability based panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using address-based sampling methods and random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. The sample from the third-party provider was opt-in, non-probability based. Demographic targets were specified for the third-party sample provider to improve representativeness of the non-probability sample.

Gallup uses a multistage weighting process to ensure samples are demographically representative of the U.S. adult population, using the most recent Current Population Survey figures; this process includes weighting Black, Hispanic and White respondents separately for each sample source before combining the sample.

Please see the table below for the maximum margin of sampling error for each population, which takes into account the design effect from weighting, at the 95% confidence level.

OVERALL		
Race	n Size	MOE
Black	3,701	±2.5
Hispanic	2,544	±3.6
White	3,608	±1.9

Race	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE				EDUCATION LEVEL	
	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+	College	Non-College
Black	±4.2	±3.9	±5.1	±3.8	±3.2	±5.9	±5.9	±4.0	±4.5	±3.5	±3.1
Hispanic	±6.6	±5.7	±6.5	±5.3	±4.8	±7.8	±7.2	±6.2	±7.3	±3.8	±4.4
White	±3.3	±3.0	±3.6	±2.9	±2.7	±4.3	±5.4	±3.5	±3.2	±3.1	±2.5

For the employee survey conducted from Feb. 2-19, 2026, the margin of sampling error is ± 1 percentage point. The margin of sampling error for Black Americans is ± 3 percentage points, for White Americans ± 1 point and for Hispanic Americans ± 3 points. For the Wellbeing survey conducted from May 28-June 5, 2026, the margin of sampling error is ± 1.4 percentage points. The margin of sampling error for Black Americans is ± 5.5 percentage points, for White Americans ± 2.0 points and for Hispanic Americans ± 5.6 points.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

Results from the World Poll are based on nationally representative, probability-based samples among the adult population aged 15 and older in approximately 140 countries and territories. The 2025 results are based on telephone or face-to-face surveys of approximately 1,000 respondents in each country or territory from March 27 to Dec. 5.

For results based on the total sample of national adults in 2025, the margin of sampling error ranges between ± 2.2 and ± 5.5 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error reflects the influence of data weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

APPENDIX

White and Hispanic Americans

Thriving (%)

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	34	48	69	52	49	39	45	55	64
White	29	49	68	54	50	46	47	53	55

Career Wellbeing | *You like what you do every day.*

% Agree + Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	33	54	48	46	51	39	49	48	62
White	41	54	61	52	56	46	47	52	63

Social Wellbeing | *Your family and friends give you positive energy every day.*

% Agree + Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	58	73	76	72	69	64	68	71	80
White	56	67	77	70	68	69	71	67	70

Financial Wellbeing | *Which one of these phrases comes closest to your own feelings about your household's income these days?*

% Living comfortably on present income

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	18	32	58	37	35	33	28	36	51
White	14	39	67	48	40	34	38	39	54

Community Wellbeing | *The city or area where you live is the perfect place for you.*

% Agree + Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	45	50	63	56	50	38	52	55	72
White	46	56	66	61	55	46	55	53	67

Physical Wellbeing | *Your physical health is near perfect.*

% Agree + Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	42	41	45	43	40	42	42	39	49
White	28	41	51	45	40	43	47	40	42

Dignity in Public

Can you think of any occasion in the last thirty days when you felt you were treated unfairly in the following places because of your race or ethnicity?

% Yes, shopping

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	27	16	19	19	19	28	23	19	5
White	12	7	7	10	6	14	15	10	2

% Yes, healthcare

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	25	10	16	16	15	21	17	17	5
White	12	8	7	9	7	13	15	10	3

Respect at Work

At work, I am treated with respect.

% Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	32	38	40	37	38	34	38	38	44
White	35	34	43	39	37	36	37	37	40

There is someone at work who encourages my development.

% Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	29	30	34	29	32	31	35	29	23
White	31	29	31	28	33	38	35	27	21

At work, my opinions seem to count.

% Strongly agree

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	22	25	30	26	25	23	28	25	29
White	24	24	30	27	25	25	26	26	27

Interaction With Police | *Have you personally had an interaction with police in the past 12 months?*

% Yes

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	31	24	24	28	22	33	30	22	14
White	27	21	24	25	20	35	34	26	12

Experiences With Police | *You were treated fairly.*

% Yes

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	81	80	82	80	82	78	82	81	94
White	76	87	95	89	86	81	84	90	95

Safety in Neighborhood | *Do you feel safe walking alone at night in the area where you live?*

% Yes

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	58	73	83	83	62	58	74	77	84
White	68	80	90	89	74	69	81	83	85

Quality of Education | *Do you think children in your area have an opportunity to get a good education or not?*

% Yes

	HOUSEHOLD INCOME			GENDER		AGE			
Race	<\$48,000	\$48,000-\$119,999	\$120,000+	Man	Woman	<30	30-39	40-59	60+
Hispanic	76	80	86	83	80	82	82	79	84
White	78	84	90	85	85	80	83	84	88

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