



**PAYNE CENTER**  
*for*  
**SOCIAL JUSTICE**  
THURGOOD MARSHALL  
COLLEGE FUND

# Black Thriving

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## IN AMERICA

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2023

*powered by*  
**GALLUP®**

“100 YEARS OF HELPING PEOPLE BE HEARD”

Payne Center for Social Justice (2023).  
Black Thriving in America: 2023.  
Washington: Gallup.

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# Table of Contents

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01	Letter From the Payne Center for Social Justice
03	Black American Social Justice Dashboard
05	Understanding the Life Evaluation Index
06	Thriving: The Best Life Imaginable
15	Dignity in Public
16	Respect at Work
18	Police and Me
20	Safety in Neighborhood
21	Quality of Education
23	Conclusion
24	Methodology

# Letter From the Payne Center for Social Justice

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Social justice is the existence of fairness in society. Because fairness is perceptual and emotional, it must either be observed or self-reported. This is why the Payne Center for Social Justice and Gallup launched a landmark study of Black Americans' self-reporting on social justice.

For over 80 years, Gallup has surveyed the American public to ask questions about their life experiences. The Payne Center has partnered with the Gallup Center on Black Voices to analyze Black Americans' responses to the question, "How is your life going?"

Social science regularly quantifies the educational achievement, employment status, gross domestic product, religious habits and political dispositions of Black Americans. However, no empirical measures exist on how Black Americans are experiencing life. Using items from the Gallup World Poll allows us to compare Black Americans' life experiences to other racial and ethnic groups in the nation, as well as other countries across the world.

This inaugural report, *Black Thriving in America: 2023*, focuses on what Gallup refers to as "net thriving" — whether an individual is experiencing their best life imaginable. The data reveal people around the world have life experiences that can be categorized into three primary and hierarchical domains — suffering, struggling or thriving.

This year, the Payne Center reports Black Americans and White Americans are thriving equally. However, this landmark and initial report should not be misinterpreted as Black Americans and White Americans being in the same boat. All Americans are in the same social, economic, political and racial storm, but some citizens are in yachts and others in canoes.

In *Black Thriving in America: 2023*, Black Americans detail their experiences shopping, dining out, in healthcare settings, at work, with schools, with police and more. The findings are condensed into a dashboard reporting Black Americans' responses on the measures of dignity in public, respect at work, police and me, safety in neighborhood, and overall thriving. The Payne Center's Black American Social Justice Dashboard is designed to be an annual Dow or NASDAQ on social justice.

While the Payne Center is intentionally not interpreting the data for the public, a review of the 15-year trendline on thriving invites clarion considerations of what was occurring nationally or globally and why Black Americans may have viewed their life as better or worse at the time of the interview. For the next 100 years, we are committed to reporting the above measures annually, along with trends and analytics.

*Black Thriving in America: 2023* is the single best empirical evidence of Black American progress toward social justice.



**M. C. Brown II, Ph.D.**

*Executive Director & Research Scientist  
Payne Center for Social Justice*

“

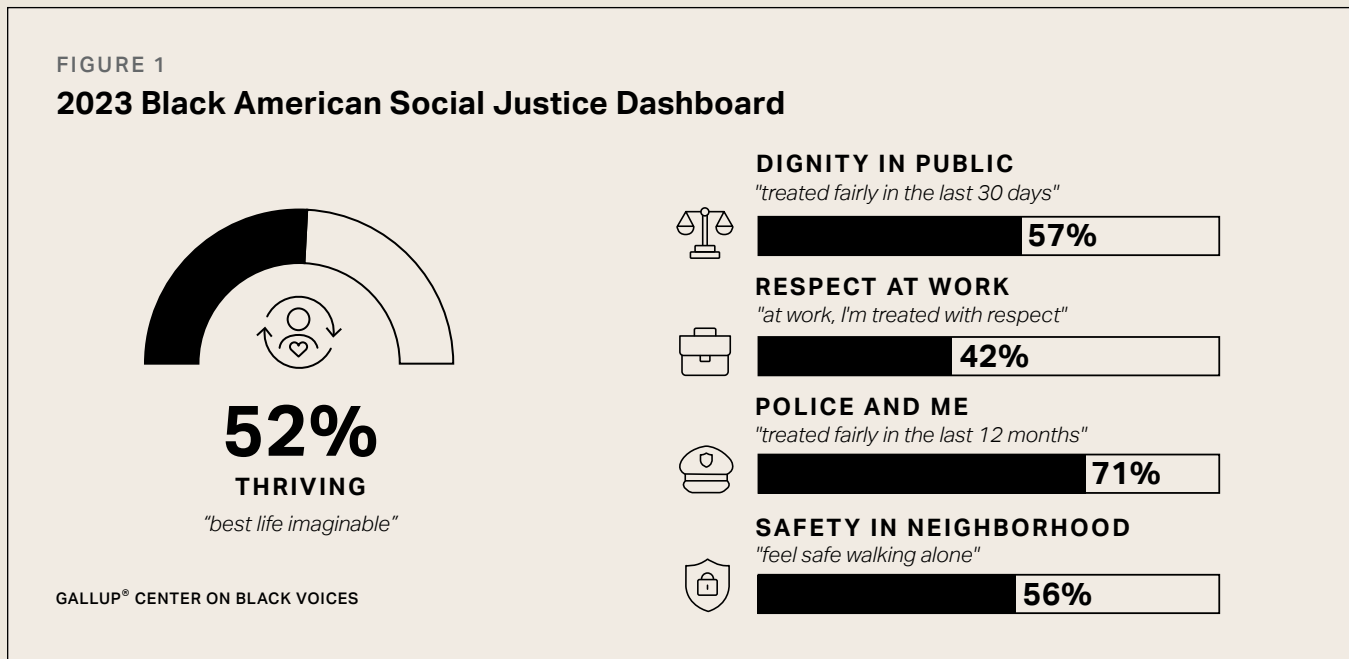
Meaningful progress in social justice remains an argument mostly because it lacks sophisticated measurement. Our greatest contribution is to ask 40 million Black Americans how they themselves experience justice and discrimination. Who is going to argue with them?

— **JIM CLIFTON**

*Chairman of Gallup*

# Black American Social Justice Dashboard

The 2023 Black American Social Justice Dashboard highlights the key measurements detailed in this report. The percentage of Black Americans thriving represents the percentage of Black Americans who have positive views about both their current and future lives.



**A slight majority of Black Americans (52%) are thriving in their wellbeing, matching the 52% thriving among White Americans.**

**But this rate masks disparities across key areas of Black life experiences:**

## DIGNITY IN PUBLIC

**57% of Black Americans say they did not experience discrimination because of their race or ethnicity in their daily life in the last 30 days.** However, 43% of Black adults report having been treated unfairly in at least one public place, including while shopping, dining out, in a healthcare setting or at work. The rate of unfair treatment reported among Black Americans is similar to the rate among Hispanic Americans (40%) but significantly higher than the 23% among White Americans.

## RESPECT AT WORK

**42% of Black Americans say they are treated with respect at work.** While similar to the 40% among Hispanic Americans, this is lower than the rate among White Americans (46%).

## POLICE AND ME

**71% of Black Americans who interacted with a police officer in the past 12 months say they were treated fairly** — below the 79% of Hispanic Americans and 90% of White Americans who say the same.

## SAFETY IN NEIGHBORHOOD

**56% of Black Americans report feeling safe walking alone at night in the area where they live** — falling short of the 66% among Hispanic Americans and 77% among White Americans.

“

Black Americans know firsthand what experiences create a life of struggling and suffering. However, little attention has been paid to what constitutes the best life imaginable. For the next 100 years, the Payne Center is committed to measuring and reporting on thriving in Black America. Everyone deserves a life filled with dignity, equality and hope for the future.

— **DR. N. JOYCE PAYNE**

*Founder of 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. There are three life evaluation classifications based on responses to the index.

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

STRUGGLING

THRIVING

### 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.

### 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.

### Wellbeing that is strong, consistent and progressing.

These respondents have positive views of their present life situation (7+) and positive views of the next five years (8+). 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

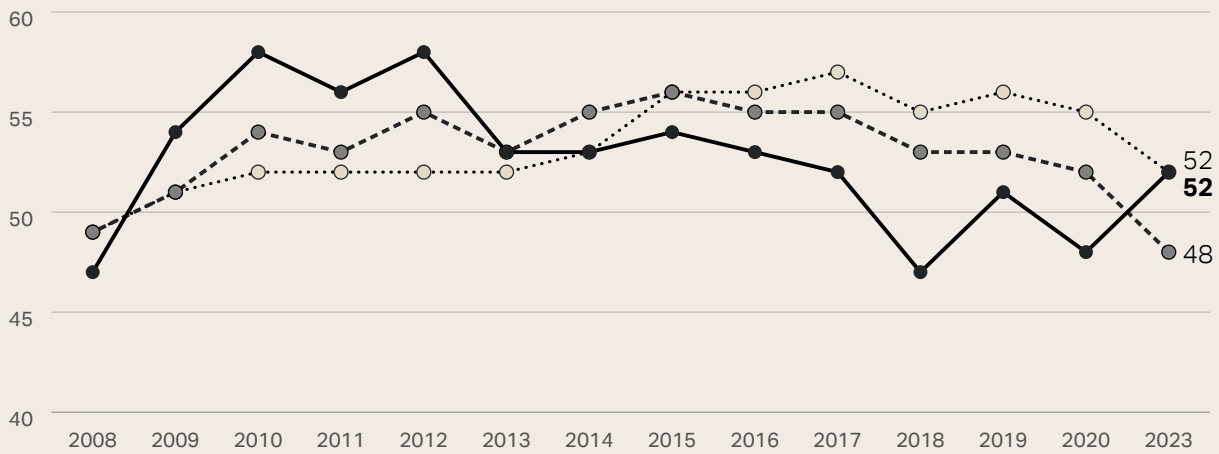
The measures in *Black Thriving in America: 2023* demonstrate that a slight majority of Black Americans (52%) are thriving on Gallup’s Life Evaluation Index. The percentage of White Americans thriving (52%) matches the figure among Black Americans — both of which are slightly higher than the rate among Hispanic Americans (48%).

FIGURE 3

## Thriving: The Best Life Imaginable

% Thriving

● Black Americans    ● Hispanic Americans    ● White Americans



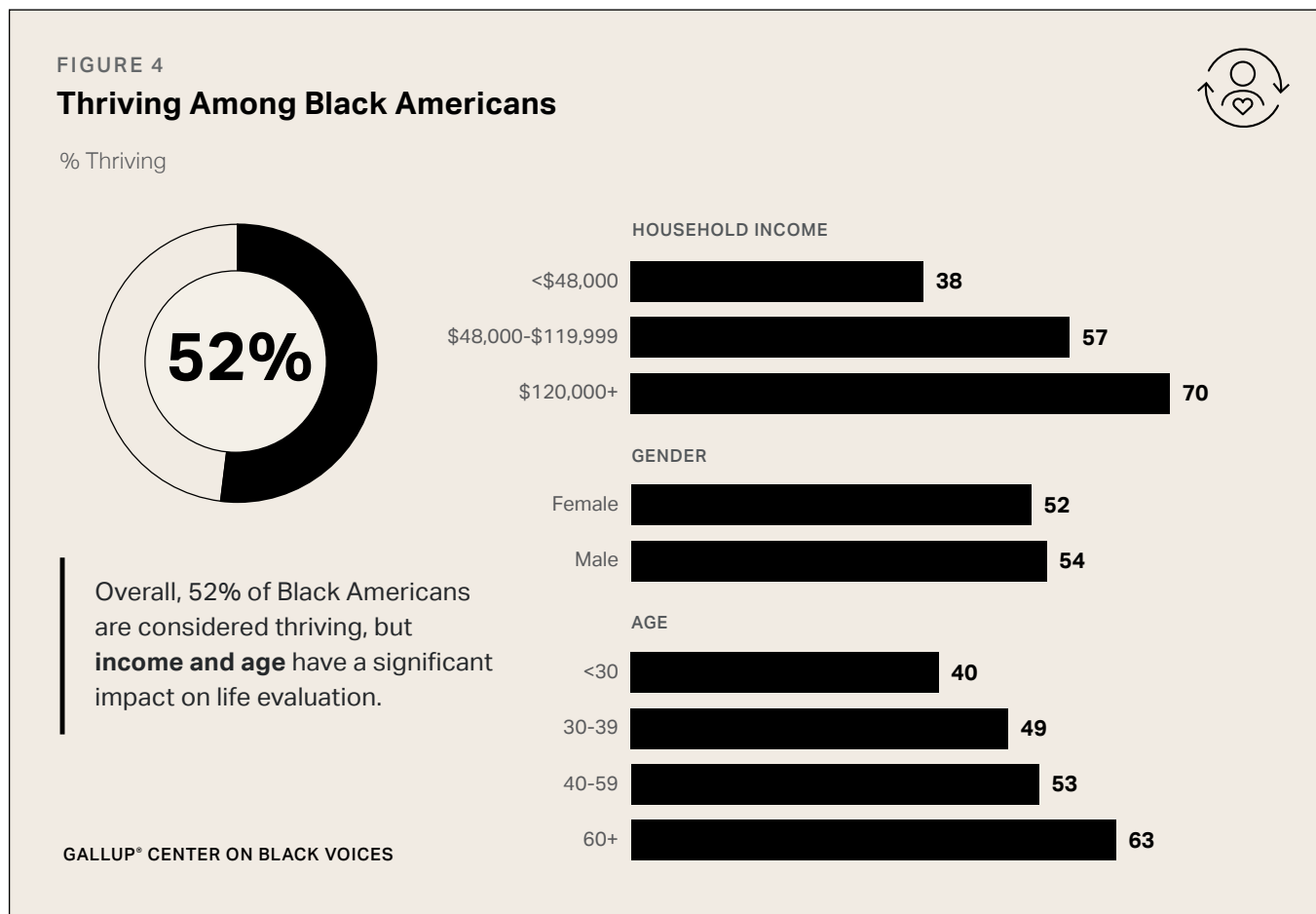
GALLUP® CENTER ON BLACK VOICES

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™. In 2023, data were collected in a Gallup Center on Black Voices mixed-methods survey.

## The percentage of Black Americans thriving on the Life Evaluation Index varies greatly by income level.

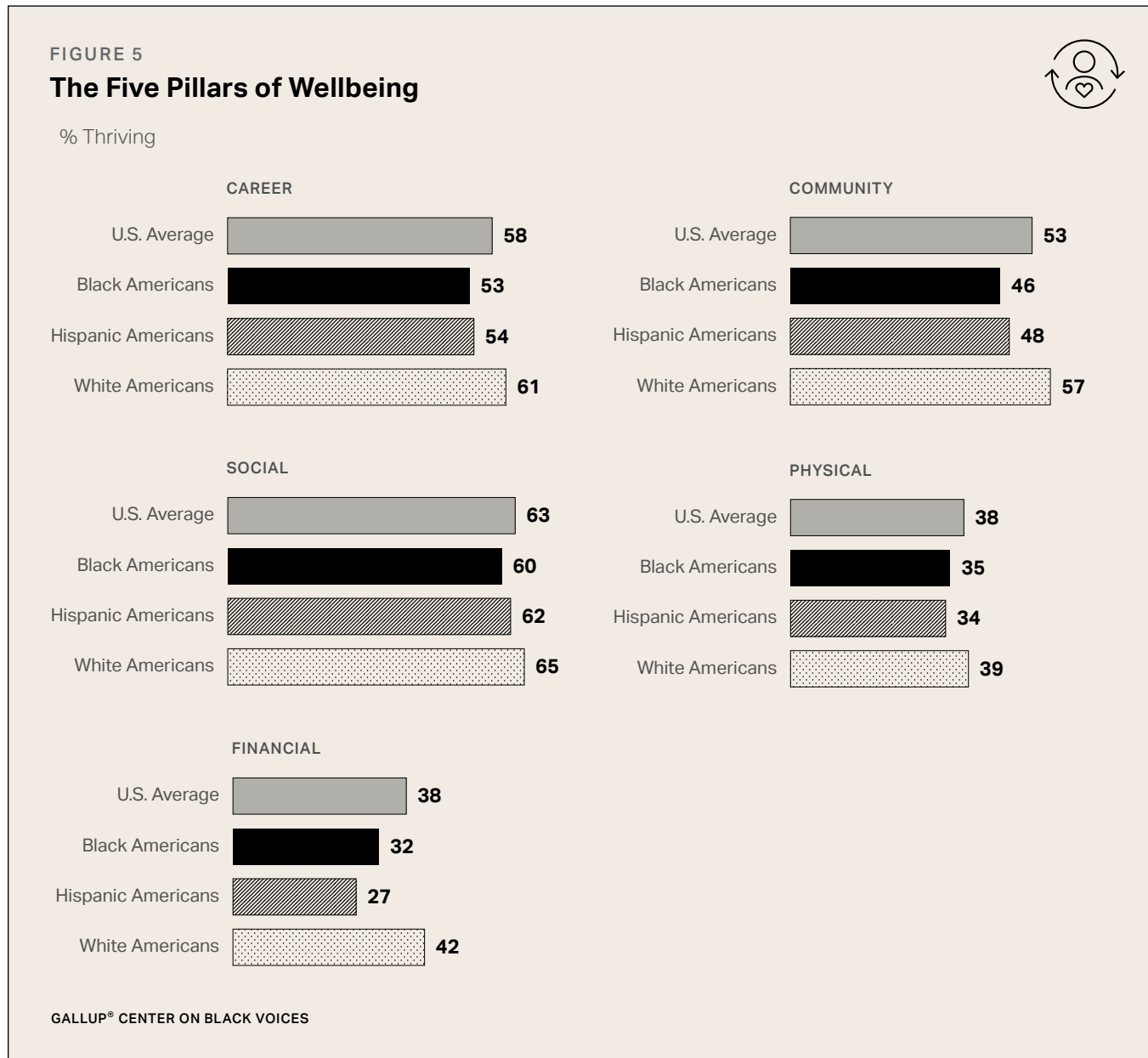
Seven in 10 higher-earning Black Americans (70%) — those living in households earning \$120,000 annually or more — are thriving. A slight majority of Black Americans living in households earning from \$48,000 to \$119,999 (57%) are thriving. However, fewer than four in 10 Black Americans living in households earning less than \$48,000 (38%) are thriving.

Their life evaluations also increase with each older age group. Black Americans under age 30 (40%) are the least likely to be thriving, while those aged 60 and older (63%) are the most likely to be thriving.



## Black Americans fall behind national averages across the five pillars of wellbeing: career, social, financial, community and physical.

While most Black Americans are thriving in their social (60%) and career (53%) wellbeing, just under half are thriving in their community wellbeing (46%). Roughly one in three Black Americans are thriving in their physical (35%) and financial (32%) wellbeing.



**Black (53%) and Hispanic (54%) employees are less likely than White employees (61%) to agree or strongly agree that they like what they do occupationally every day.**

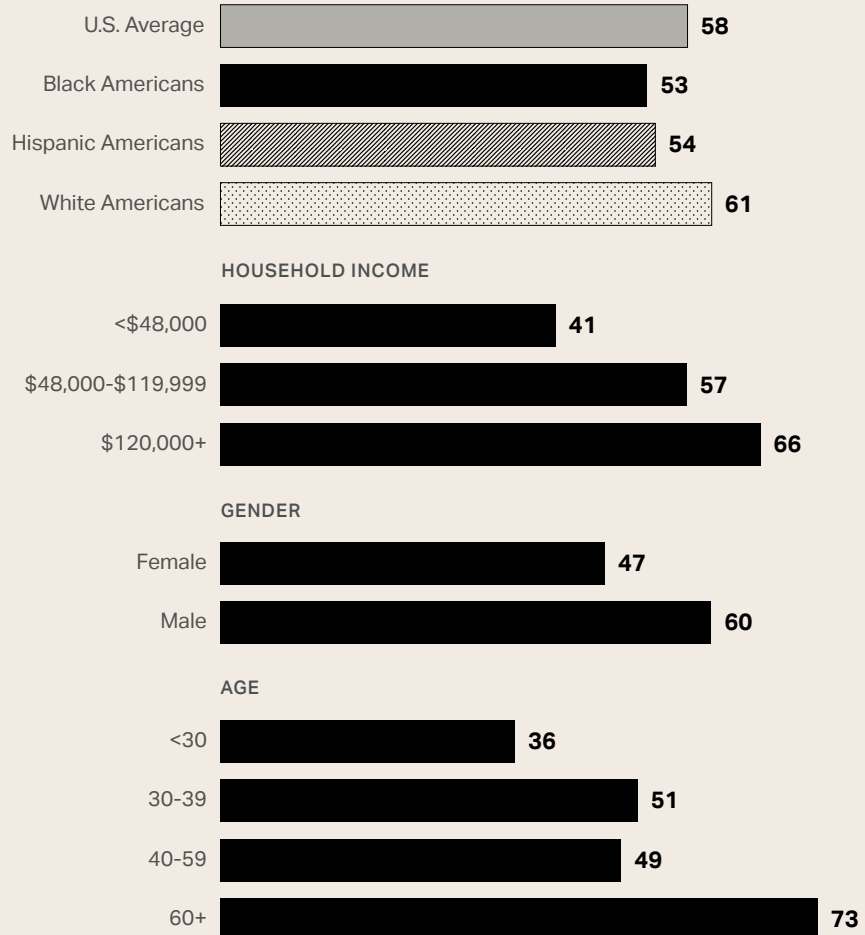
Black employees in higher-earning households are more likely than those in middle- or lower-earning households to report liking what they do. Meanwhile, Black men are more likely than Black women to say they like what they do. Black employees aged 60 and older are more positive on this measure than Black employees in younger age groups.

FIGURE 6

**Career Wellbeing**

*You like what you do every day.*

% Agree + Strongly agree



BLACK AMERICANS

## Six in 10 Black Americans (60%) agree or strongly agree that their family and friends give them positive energy every day.

This rate varies significantly by income, with Black adults in higher-earning households much more likely than those in middle- or lower-earning households to agree that their family and friends give them positive energy.

Age is a significant factor as well: While half of Black Americans under age 30 agree that their family and friends give them positive energy each day, this figure rises with each older age group.

FIGURE 7

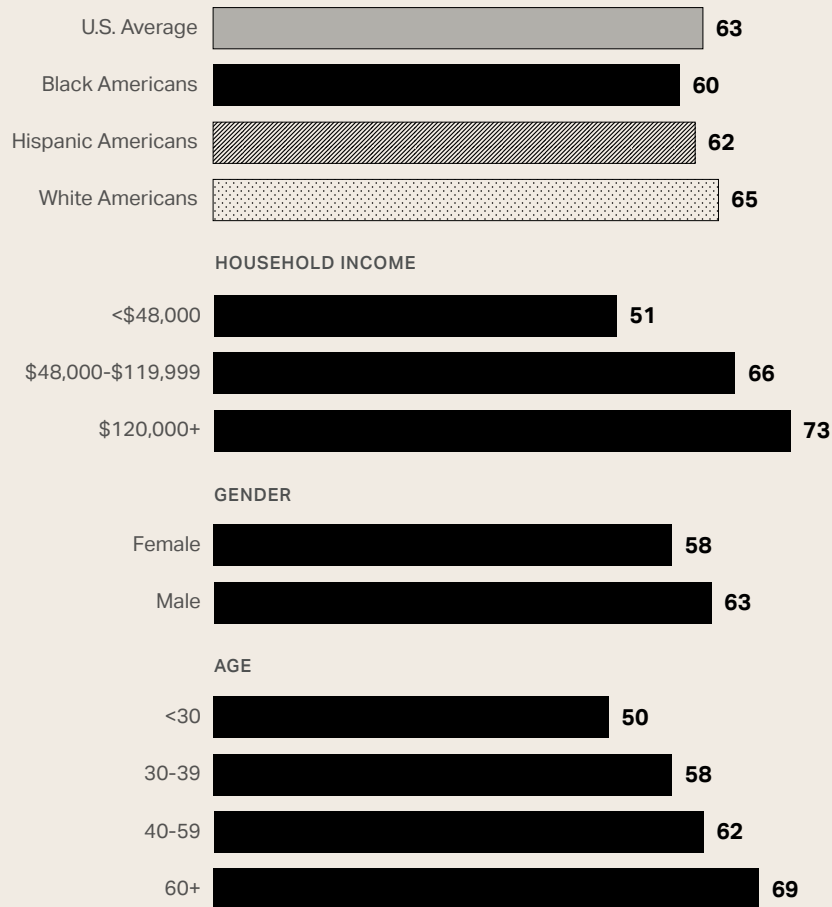
### Social Wellbeing

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

% Agree + Strongly agree



BLACK AMERICANS



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The percentages of Black (32%) and Hispanic (27%) Americans who say they are living comfortably on their present income are, by double digits, lower than the percentage among White Americans (42%).

While nearly two in three Black adults in higher-earning households (65%) report living comfortably on their income, just 13% of those in lower-earning households report the same.

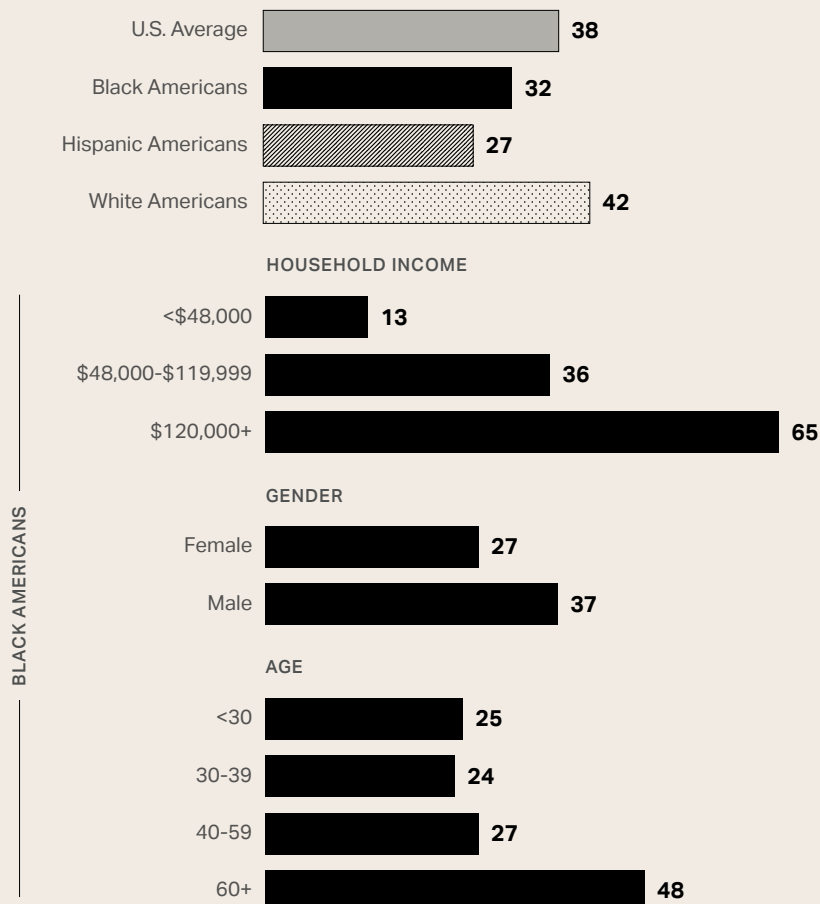
Meanwhile, Black men (37%) are more likely than Black women (27%) to report living comfortably on their income. Among age groups, almost half of Black Americans aged 60 and older (48%) report living comfortably, while roughly one in four in each of the younger age groups report the same.

FIGURE 8  
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

## Less than half of Black Americans (46%) agree or strongly agree that their city or area is the perfect place for them.

This rate is similar to the rate among Hispanic Americans (48%), while both are lower than the rate among White Americans (57%). Nearly two in three Black adults living in higher-earning households (65%) agree their city or area is the perfect place for them, while less than half of Black adults living in middle- (47%) and lower-earning (38%) households agree.

Half of Black men (50%) agree their city or area is the perfect place for them, while less than half of Black women (44%) agree. Most Black Americans aged 60 and older (62%) agree that their city or area is the perfect place for them, while roughly four in 10 among each younger age group agree.

FIGURE 9

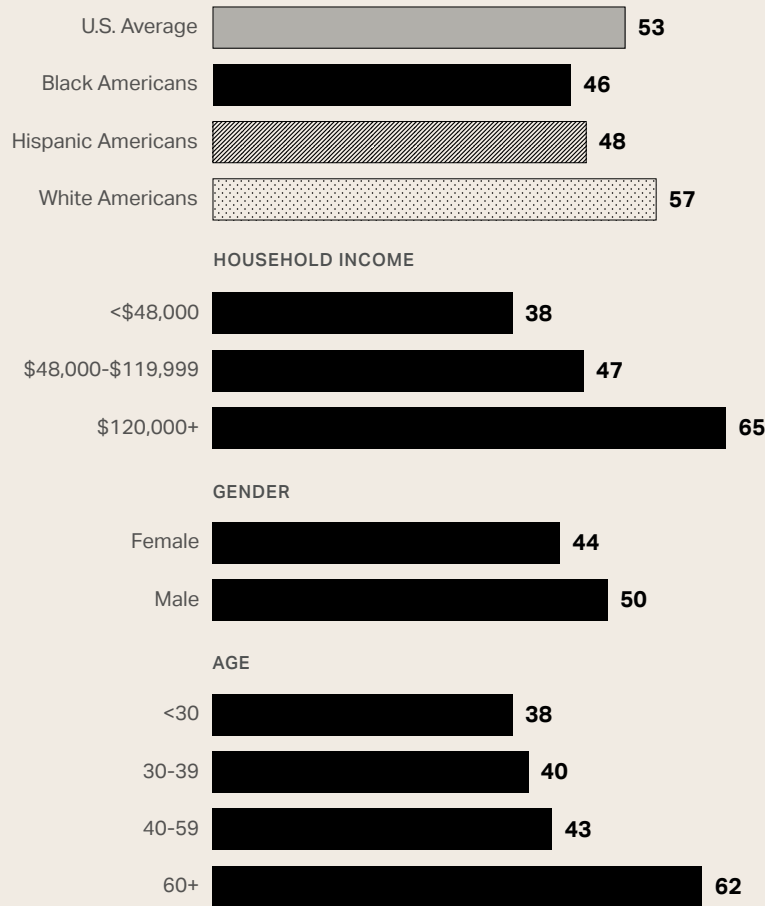
### Community Wellbeing

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

% Agree + Strongly agree



BLACK AMERICANS



GALLUP® CENTER ON BLACK VOICES

**About one in three Black Americans (35%) agree or strongly agree that their physical health is near perfect — similar to the rate among Hispanic Americans (34%) but lower than the rate among White Americans (39%).**

Agreement increases with each higher income group. Black men and women agree that their physical health is near perfect at similar rates.

Among most age groups, slightly more than a third of Black Americans agree that their physical health is near perfect, but the percentage is somewhat lower for Black Americans aged 40 to 59 (31%).

FIGURE 10

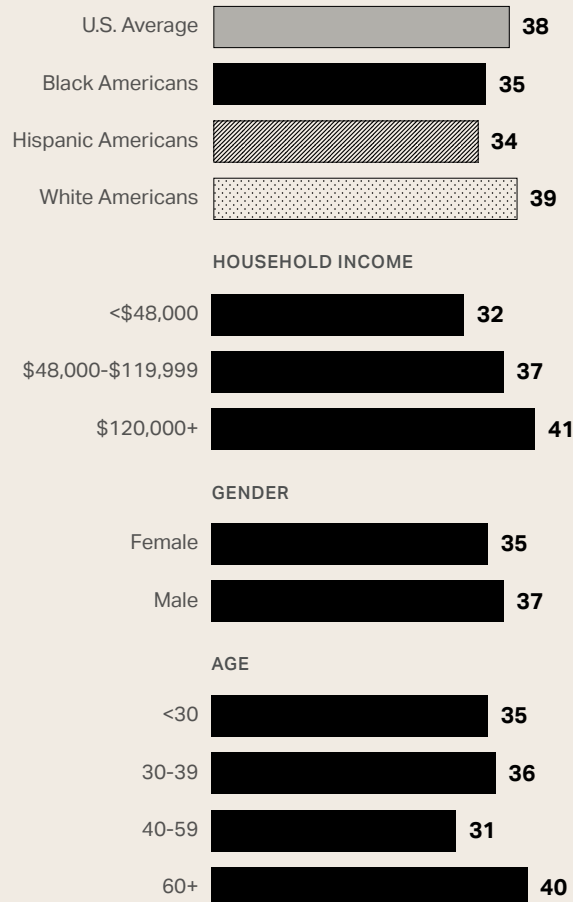
**Physical Wellbeing**

*Your physical health is near perfect.*

% Agree + Strongly agree



BLACK AMERICANS





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All Americans are in the same social, economic, political and racial storm, but some citizens are in yachts and others in canoes.

— **M. C. BROWN II, PH.D.**

*Executive Director and Research Scientist  
Payne Center for Social Justice*

SECTION TWO

# Dignity in Public

When asked about their experiences in the past month, about one in five Black Americans report having been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity while shopping (22%), at work (22%), dining out (19%) or in a healthcare setting (18%). Additionally, reports of experiences with discrimination are slightly higher for Black Americans than Hispanic Americans. Across each measure, Black Americans are more than twice as likely as White Americans to report being treated unfairly.

FIGURE 11

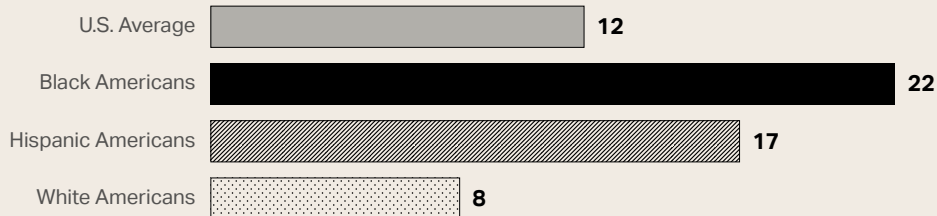
## Discrimination in Public Spaces



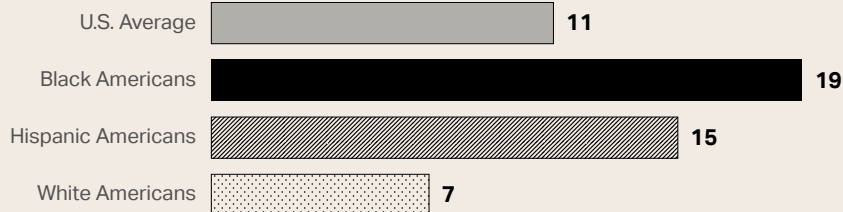
Can you think of any occasion in the last thirty days when you felt you were treated unfairly in the following places because of your race or ethnicity?

% Yes

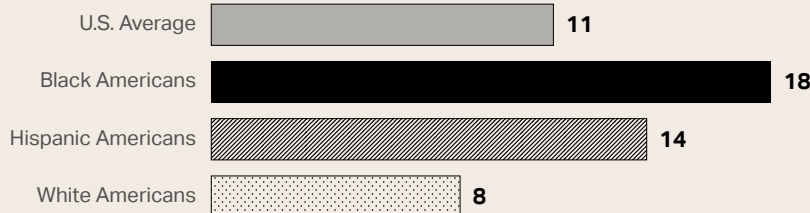
### SHOPPING



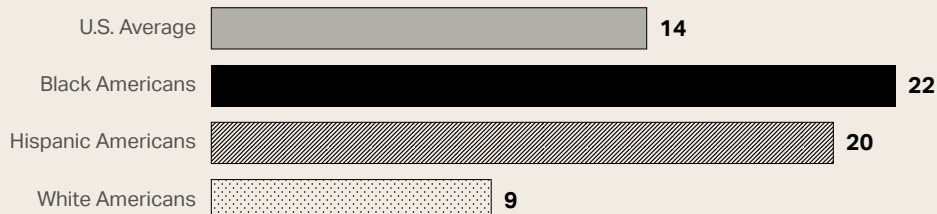
### DINING OUT



### HEALTHCARE



### WORK



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# Respect at Work

Forty-two percent of Black American employees strongly agree they are treated with respect at work, a rate statistically similar to the national average of 44%. One in three strongly agree that there is someone at work who encourages their development (34%) and that at work their opinions seem to count (34%) — nearly matching the national average of 35% on both measures.

FIGURE 12

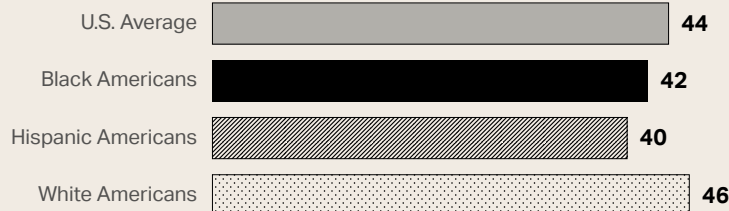
## Experiences at Work



### RESPECT

*At work, I am treated with respect.*

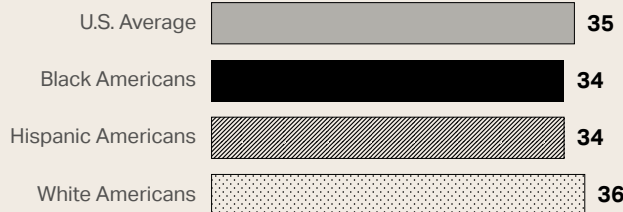
% Strongly agree



### DEVELOPMENT

*There is someone at work who encourages my development.*

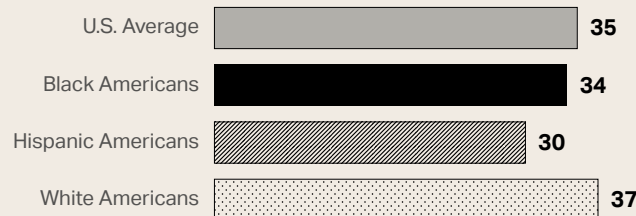
% Strongly agree



### OPINIONS

*At work, my opinions seem to count.*

% Strongly agree



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Across race-gender subgroups, Black women are the only subgroup to fall below 40% in their reports of being treated with respect at work.

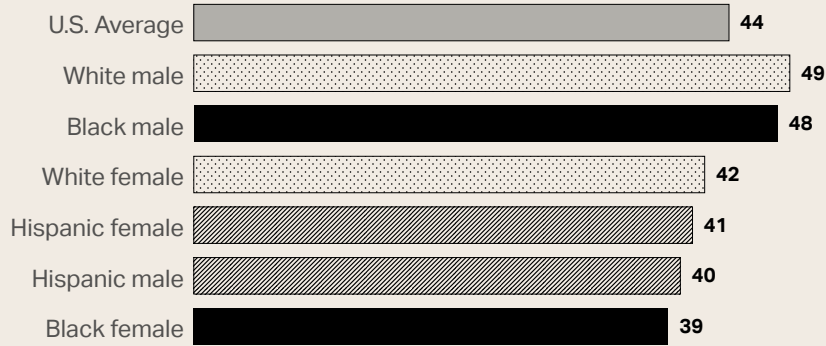
FIGURE 13

### Respect at Work



*At work, I am treated with respect.*

% Strongly agree



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# Police and Me

**About one in four Black Americans (26%) report personally having an interaction with police in the past 12 months.**

Interactions are reported at slightly higher rates among those in lower-earning households than among those in middle- or higher-earning households. Black men are also more likely than Black women to report having an interaction with law enforcement. Among those under age 30 and those aged 30 to 39, about one in three report having an interaction with police in the past 12 months. Interactions are reported at much lower rates among older age groups.

FIGURE 14

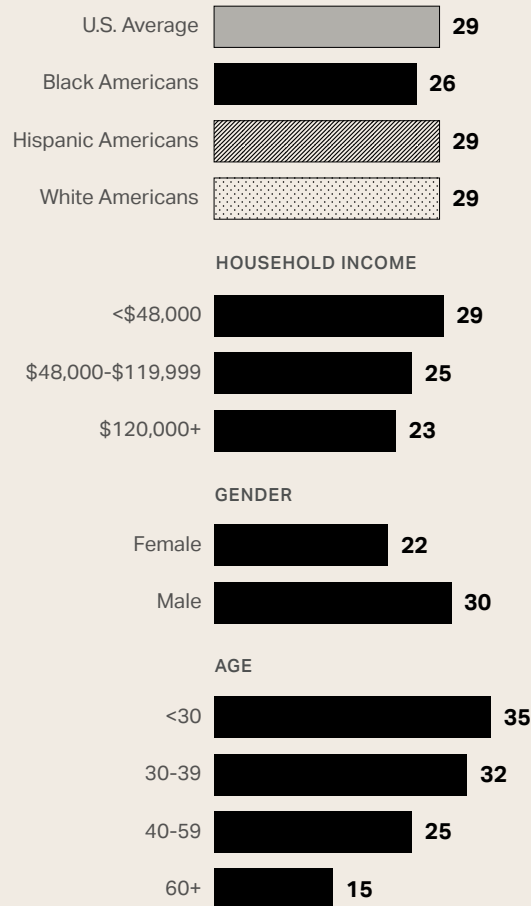
## Interaction With Police

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

% Yes



BLACK AMERICANS



Of those in each group who say they personally had an interaction with police in the past 12 months, **Black Americans (71%)** are less likely than their **Hispanic (79%)** and **White (90%)** counterparts to say they were treated fairly in the interaction.

Black and Hispanic Americans are both less likely than White Americans to say they were treated with respect and that the interaction was an overall positive experience.

FIGURE 15

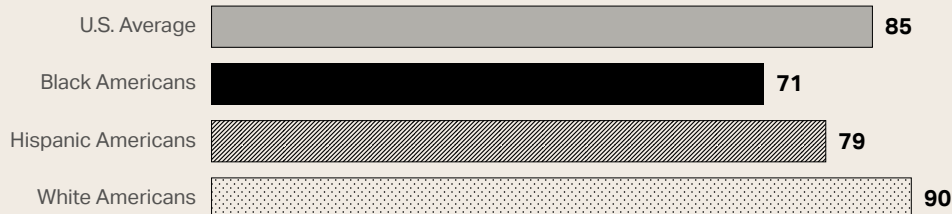
### Experiences With Police



#### FAIRLY

*You were treated fairly.*

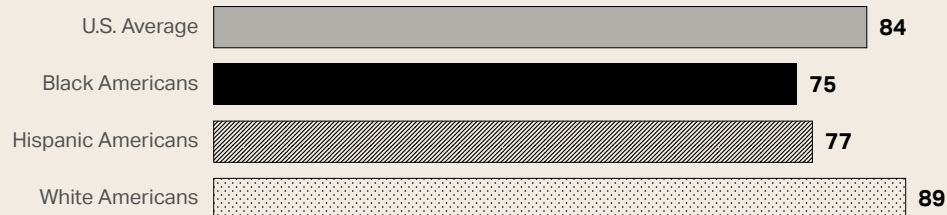
% Yes



#### RESPECT

*You were treated with respect.*

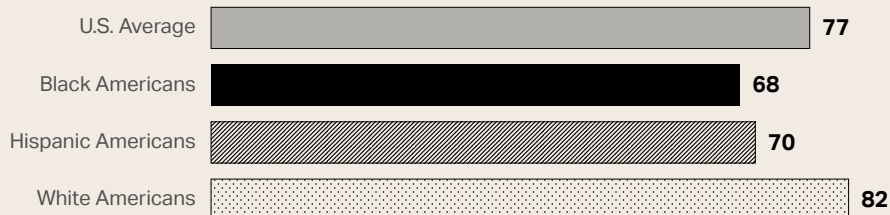
% Yes



#### POSITIVE

*It was an overall positive experience.*

% Yes



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# Safety in Neighborhood

**Black Americans (56%) are less likely to report feeling safe walking alone at night in the area where they live than Hispanic (66%) and White (77%) Americans.**

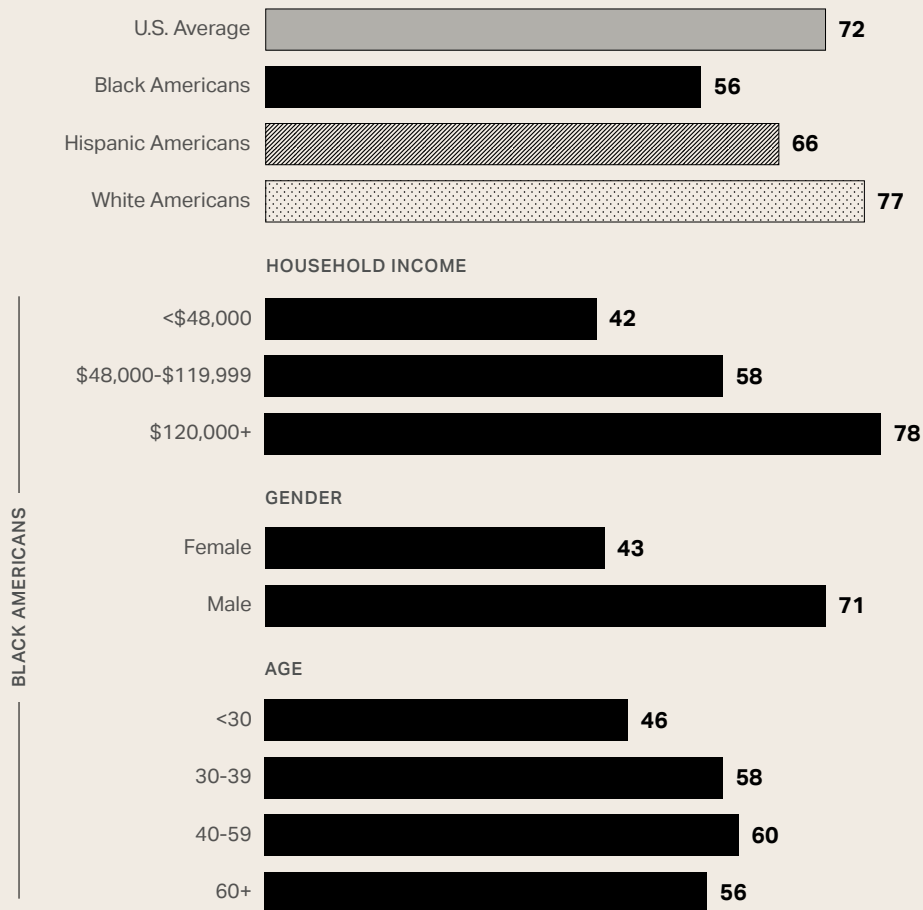
Perceptions of safety vary greatly by income among Black Americans. Black adults in higher-earning households (78%) are nearly twice as likely to report feeling safe as those in lower-earning households (42%). Gender is also a major factor in perceptions of safety. About seven in 10 Black men (71%) report feeling safe walking alone at night in their area, compared to roughly four in 10 Black women (43%).

FIGURE 16

## Safety in Neighborhood

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

% Yes



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# Quality of Education

**About three in four Black Americans (74%) say they think children in their area have an opportunity to get a good education.**

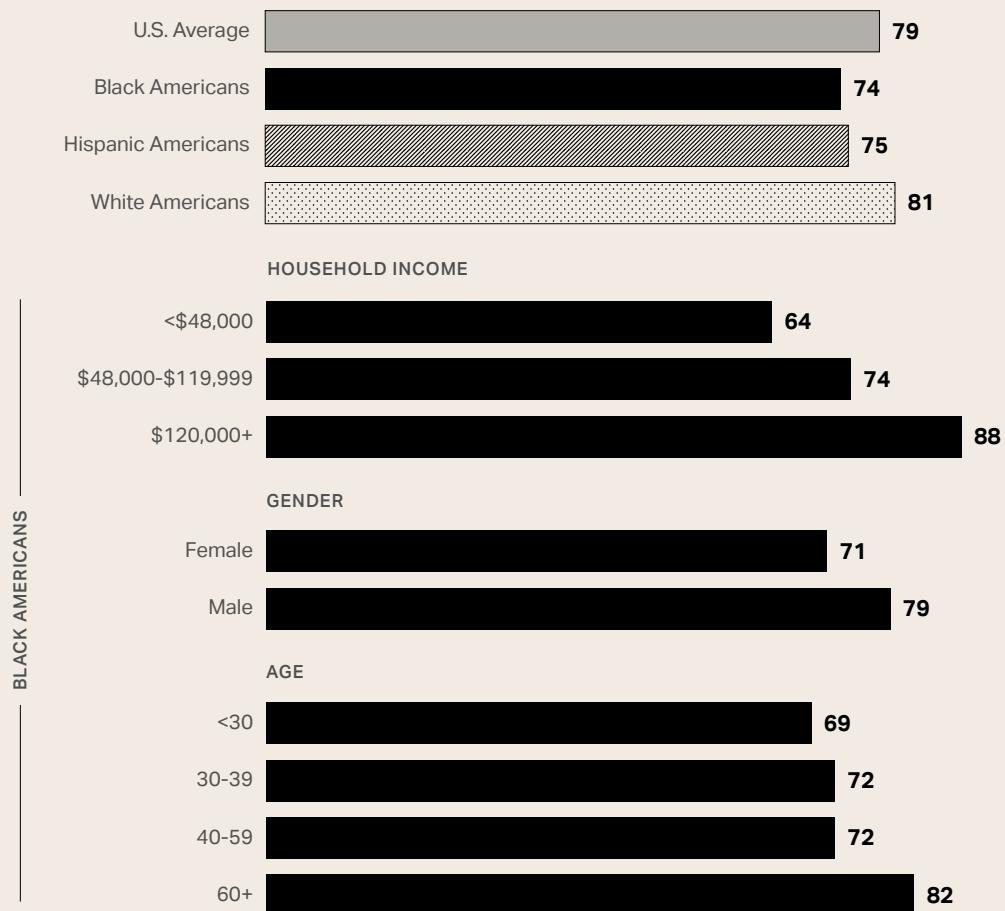
Perceptions of educational opportunities for children vary greatly by income, however. Among Black adults in higher-earning households, about nine in 10 (88%) say they believe children have an opportunity for a good education, while just 64% of Black adults in lower-earning households have this view. Black men are somewhat more optimistic than Black women in their views about educational opportunities for children. Meanwhile, older Black adults are more optimistic than younger Black adults.

FIGURE 17

## Quality of Education

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

% Yes



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Nothing is gained from prejudice.  
No one benefits from racism.

— **JUSTICE THURGOOD MARSHALL**

*United States Supreme Court*

# Conclusion

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*Black Thriving in America: 2023* reveals that a slight majority of Black Americans are thriving in America. The 52% thriving rate for Black Americans is the same as the thriving rate for White Americans, but differences exist in public discrimination, workplace experiences, interactions with police and feelings of neighborhood safety. Black Americans and White Americans are thriving equally; however, the data confirm their current life experiences are not equal.

There is a diversity of experiences in Black American life. For example, while 43% of Black Americans say they experience discrimination in their daily life, 42% of Black Americans say they are treated with respect at work. Many of these experiences are influenced by gender and economic wellbeing. Poorer Black Americans encounter the police more than wealthier Black Americans, and Black American males encounter the police more than their female counterparts.

Similarly, poorer Black Americans feel less safe in their neighborhoods than wealthier Black Americans, and Black American males feel safer than Black American females.

The life experiences of Black Americans vary greatly. You can have a high level of economic wellbeing and still experience a high level of discrimination in the workplace. You can live in a neighborhood that feels unsafe and still have highly rated positive encounters with police officers. *Black Thriving in America: 2023* confirms that while suffering and struggling persist, the good news is that more than half of Black Americans are thriving in their lives.

*Black Thriving in America: 2023* provides a voice to more than 40 million Black Americans. This report offers hope for Black Americans to attain the best life imaginable.

# Methodology

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## ***Black Thriving in America: 2023* is intended to help capture the perceptions and experiences of everyday life for Black Americans.**

These results are based on a Gallup web study completed by 10,026 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, February 8-28, 2023. The survey was conducted in English. Individuals without internet access were not covered by this study. The Gallup Panel recruited 4,298 respondents for the study and supplemented them with 5,728 respondents from a third-party sample provider.

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. Demographic targets were specified for the third-party sample provider to improve representativeness of the sample.

Gallup uses a multi-stage 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.

For results based on this sample, the maximum margin of sampling error, which takes into account the design effect from weighting, is  $\pm 1.9$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher. 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.

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