

New Report From Gallup and The Rippel Foundation Tracks Two Decades of Shifting U.S. Wellbeing, With Young Adults Experiencing Steepest Decline

WASHINGTON, D.C., Oct. 5, 2026 — Gallup and The Rippel Foundation today released [*Thriving Together in America: Trends, Discoveries, Community Action and Advice for Leaders*](#), a new report finding that young adults have experienced the steepest drop in wellbeing of any age group since Gallup began tracking the measure in 2008, even as long-standing gender and race and ethnicity gaps have narrowed or reversed. Drawing on more than two decades of data and over 3.1 million interviews with U.S. adults, the report tracks how life evaluation has shifted across age, race and ethnicity, gender and geographic communities, and examines the factors most closely tied to thriving. The report goes on to highlight what leading communities are doing to measure and improve wellbeing for their residents and provides insights for leaders on how to optimize wellbeing efforts for their own constituents.

Young Adults Lead the Nation's Decline in Wellbeing

As of the third quarter of 2026, 48.1% of U.S. adults qualify as thriving on Gallup's Life Evaluation Index, a drop of more than 10 percentage points from the peak reached five years earlier. The decline in wellbeing has not landed evenly across age groups, and young adults have fallen furthest. Adults aged 18 to 29 went from the highest thriving rate of any age group in 2010 (64%) to the lowest of any age group today (44%), a 20-point drop that is the largest Gallup has recorded for any age group over the life of the index. The reversal has come alongside rising clinical depression and high rates of loneliness among young adults.

"Young adults went from the most optimistic generation we measured to the least in the span of 10 years, and while the pandemic was a major factor, the broader trend is not tied to one bad year," said Dan Witters, research director of the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index™. "It tells us the conditions shaping how young people see their present and their future have fundamentally shifted and reversing that will take more than waiting for the economy to improve."

Adults 30 to 44 show a similar but less severe pattern in thriving, falling from a peak of 62% in 2016 to 45% today. Middle-aged and older adults have fared better: Those 45 to 64 climbed from 46% in 2008 to a peak of 58% in 2021 before slipping to 46% today, while adults 65 and older have risen from 38% in 2008 to 53% today, showing the most resilience of any age group.

Racial and Ethnic Gaps Have Narrowed, but Only Because Every Group Has Fallen

Black, Hispanic, White and Asian American adults now report similar thriving rates of around 50%, a convergence that would ordinarily be encouraging but instead reflects a shared decline: All four groups rate lower today than they did in 2021. Asian Americans have seen the largest swings of any group, falling from the highest thriving rate on record at 64% in 2010 to 42% in 2020 amid the

pandemic, then rebounding to 59% in 2024 before joining the broader downturn. Black and Hispanic adults each reached record highs in 2021 (59% and 57%, respectively) before declining, while White adults recovered more modestly from their own 2020 low. Hispanic adults have shed 10 points since 2024, and their thriving rate of 45% is now the lowest of the four groups for just the second time in 19 years of trending. Geography still matters as well, with thriving rates nearing 70% in some U.S. counties and falling below 40% in others.

A Decades-Old Gender Gap in Wellbeing Has Flipped

For about the first decade of measurement, women consistently reported higher thriving than men. That pattern has reversed. In 2020, women's thriving fell 6 points to 49%, three times the 2-point drop seen among men, and while both groups rebounded in 2021, thriving has since declined for men and women alike. Women now match men at 49% and have trailed men in recent years, an inversion of the pattern seen throughout the index's first decade.

Optimism About the Future Hits a New Low

The report points to a corresponding decline in how Americans see their futures. The share expecting a highly satisfying life five years out fell to a record low in 2025. Americans have typically rated their expected future above their present life, but that gap is narrowing as future ratings fall faster than present-day ones.

"The steep declines are a clarion call, but in no way a verdict on our future," said Becky Payne, President and CEO of The Rippel Foundation. "We can reverse these trends, and across the country communities are already showing how: working together to understand the factors shaping their lives and choosing to prioritize and invest in the vital conditions that enable thriving."

The Factors Behind a Thriving Life

Drawing on nearly two decades of Gallup research, the report ties higher life ratings to a consistent set of factors: physical health, financial security, strong relationships, regular use of natural strengths and a clear sense of purpose. Income also tracks closely with thriving across people, communities, states and countries, though people at similar income levels still rate their lives very differently, pointing to forces beyond money. Community-level conditions matter too, as financial shocks, eroding trust, thin support systems and dimmer views of the future all track with lower wellbeing.

Research from The Rippel Foundation, in turn, has identified seven community-level assets that all people need to live well and reach their potential. Described as the "vital conditions for health and wellbeing," these include a thriving natural world, basic needs for health and safety, humane housing, meaningful work and wealth, lifelong learning, reliable transportation and belonging and civic muscle. The critical nature of collaboration across organizations is also examined in detail.

The report concludes that life evaluation works as a single summary judgment that draws on health, money, relationships, purpose, opportunity and outlook together, so raising it will take more than economic solutions alone. It also finds reason for optimism with several examples of communities organizing around wellbeing. In addition, insights from dynamic modeling suggest that places with a

better-balanced portfolio of investments across wellbeing drivers could generate double-digit gains for thriving within a decade, if implemented and sustained.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining 90 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

About The Rippel Foundation

The Rippel Foundation is pursuing an ambitious vision for health and wellbeing: a future where all people and places thrive together, with no exceptions. Rippel joins with partners who believe in the power of shared stewardship — people, organizations, networks and whole communities coming together to reimagine our systems and work toward a thriving future. www.rippel.org