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The State of Kids and Families in America

common sense media

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COMMON SENSE MEDIA IS GRATEFUL FOR THE GENEROUS SUPPORT
AND UNDERWRITING THAT FUNDED THIS RESEARCH REPORT

Bezos Family Foundation

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Credits

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Letter from Our Founder

Parents are doing their best to raise their kids, but for many, it still feels like they can never do enough. They're juggling school, finances, politics, and rapid technological change, not to mention the day-to-day challenges of making sure their kids can grow up happy and healthy. In today's always-on world, raising a family can feel like putting out a wildfire with a garden hose.

Common Sense Media partnered with Echelon Insights and Lake Research Partners to conduct a comprehensive, nationwide survey of parents and kids. We asked them about their hopes and fears for young people in America, and what we heard was clear and consistent. Across the board, families see many of the same challenges ahead and believe in many of the same solutions. It was a remarkable display of unity during our divided times.

Around the country, concerns about the economy weigh heavily on parents. Many worry about whether their kids will be able to afford a home, pursue higher education, and have children of their own. Kids are more optimistic, but across generations, families want a future where hard work opens doors and opportunity is within reach of all kids.

Mental well-being remains a serious concern. Social media can lock kids into cycles of constant comparison, and unsafe AI chatbots risk making existing mental health struggles worse. So it's no surprise that most kids describe their peers' mental health as "just fair" or "poor." Kids also don't think their schools do enough to support them. That's why the majority of families say better schools and better health care would go a long way toward improving their lives.

At this pivotal moment for our kids' future, this new research reflects shared responsibility and shared resolve. Despite their differences, families are asking for thoughtful action, greater support, and a renewed commitment to ensuring every child can thrive.





Jim Steyer
Founder and CEO

Introduction

Parents have always balanced hope for their children's future and concerns about the challenges and struggles that will come their way. In the 2026 iteration of Common Sense Media's State of Kids and Families in America, the tension between hope and concern for parents, kids, and teens is evident.

On behalf of Common Sense Media, Lake Research Partners and Echelon Insights conducted two surveys: one among parents of children of any age, and another among kids and teens age 12 to 17. As in previous years, the surveys provide a detailed picture of what life looks like for American families today. The findings explore current attitudes, hopes and fears about the future, views of the Trump administration and government at all levels, and the solutions that families support.

Consistent with last year's findings, the mood of the country remains gloomy for many parents and youth. Parents feel economic strain more acutely than ever, and see these pressures only intensifying. Their economic worries extend to concerns about their children's future economic opportunities. Similar to last year, Democratic and Republican parents share many of the same concerns about economic stability, mental health, and AI, and they support the same goals to improve the lives of families and children: improving K–12 education and seeing the federal government prioritize health care coverage, food security, and affordable housing. Republican parents, however, are feeling more hopeful on a few fronts, including how things are going for families and the confidence they have that their kids will be able to afford a home.

Outlook also varies significantly based on the age of parents' children. Having watched their adult children grapple with economic instability, parents of adult children bring a more cautious perspective and pessimistic eye. Parents of younger children, by contrast, are more likely to believe that conditions will improve and that today's challenges may look different by the time their children reach adulthood.

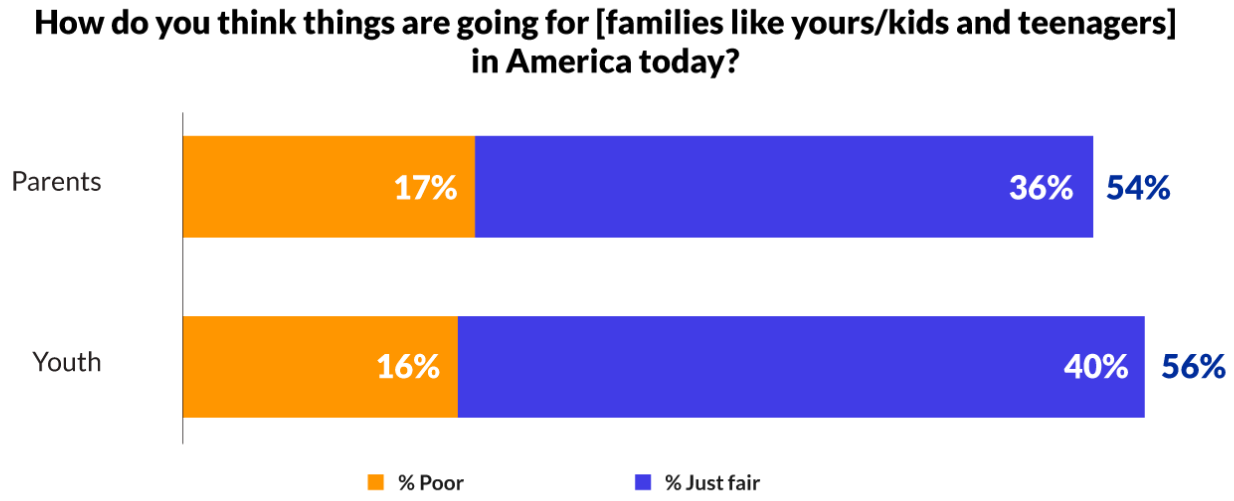
While parents can point to solutions to many of the problems that families face, neither parents nor kids and teens feel that the government is listening to them. Both parents and kids and teens want the government to prioritize policies that benefit young people in the country and invest in their future. Parents want the federal government to ensure health care coverage for children and families, address child hunger, and expand access to affordable housing.

Key Findings

1. **More than half of parents (54%) say things are going just fair or poor for families like theirs, and kids and teens (56%) say things are going just fair or poor for kids and teens in America.**

For the third year in a row, parents, as well as kids and teenagers, believe that things are not going well for families like theirs, with 54% of parents saying that things are going just fair or poor for families like theirs, and 56% of kids and teens saying that things are going just fair or poor for kids and teens in America today. With the transition from the Biden era to the Trump era, more than half of Republican parents are now positive: 55% think things are going excellent or good for families like theirs, compared to only 40% who thought things were going excellent or good for families like theirs in the last survey.

Figure 1: Percentage of parents and youth who think things are going poor or just fair.



2. **Families face acute economic struggles: Half (51%) of parents of children under 18 say their ability to afford the things they need to buy for their children is getting worse compared to last year.**

Most parents face significant economic struggles, and they do not see things improving. Half (51%) of parents of a child under 18 say their ability to afford the things they need to buy for their children is getting worse compared to last year. Seventy percent of parents agree that they are living paycheck to paycheck and have little opportunity to save, and 60% agree that they are one unexpected major crisis, illness, or injury away from financial disaster or major debt. Only 42% consider themselves to be financially secure.

Figure 2: Percentage of parents of children under 18 who say affording the things they need to buy for their kids is getting worse, better, or the same compared to last year.

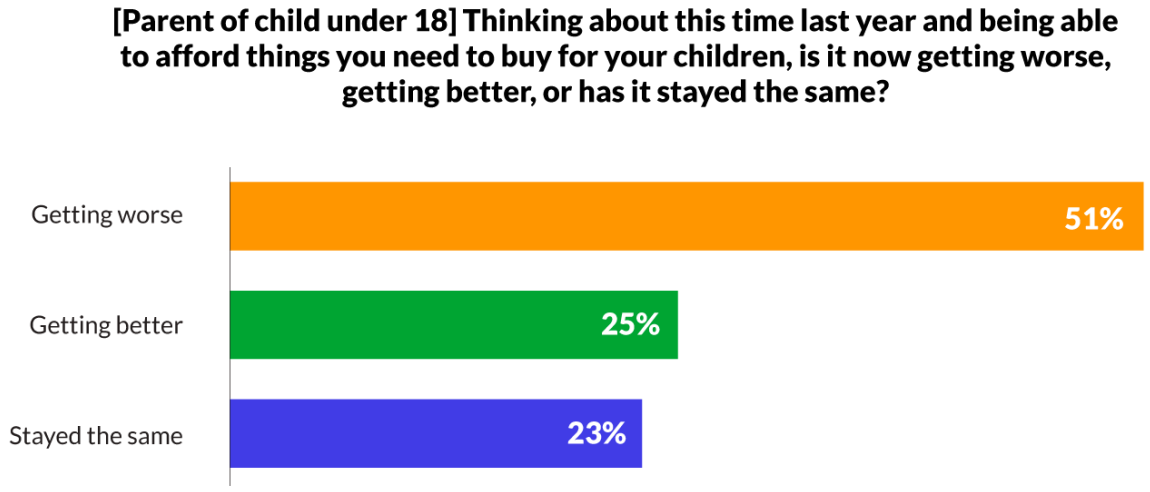
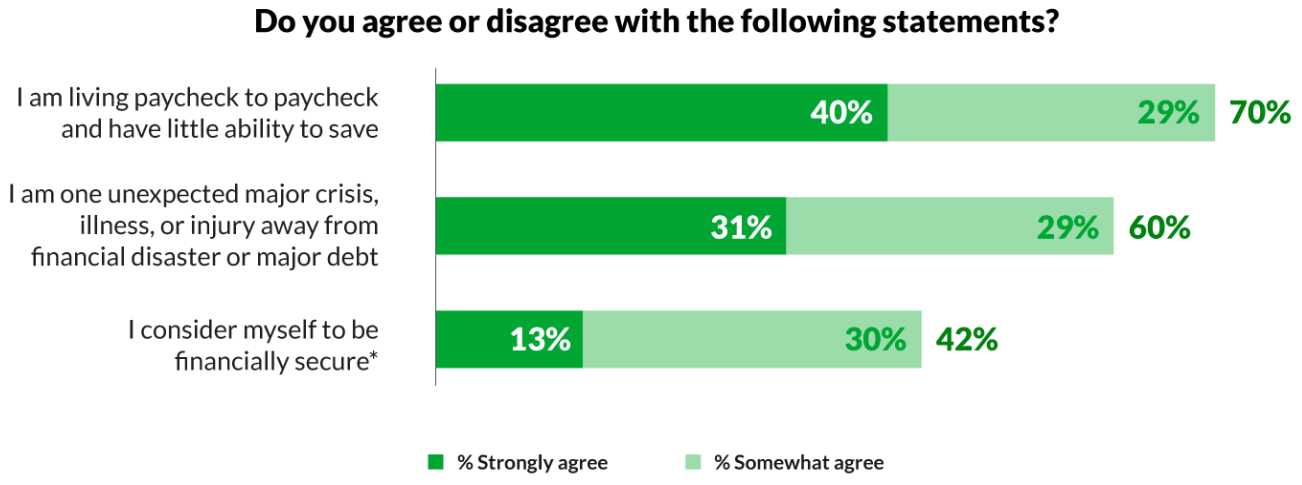


Figure 3: Percentage of parents who strongly or somewhat agree with…

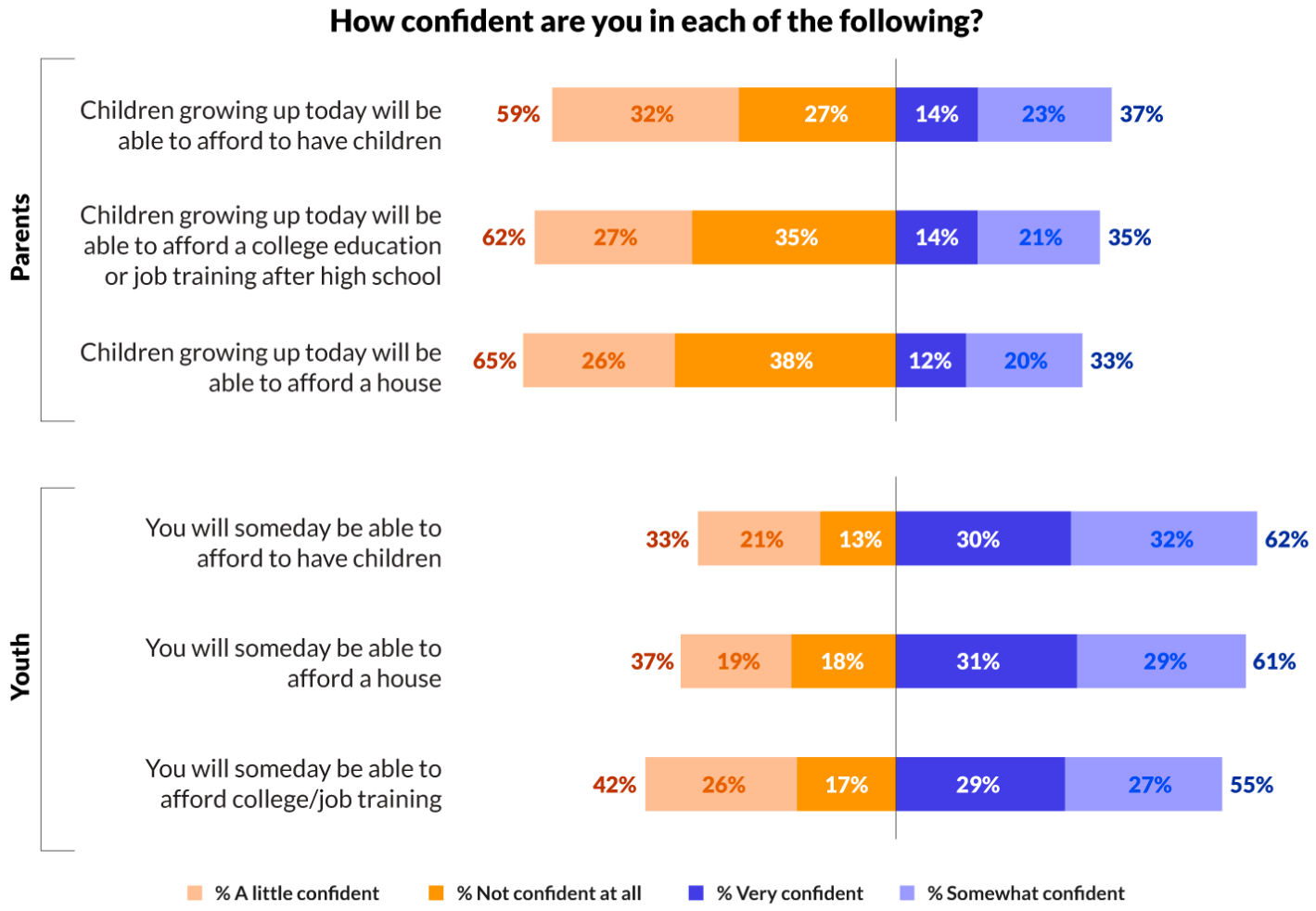
** Split sampled.*



3. Parents are worried about kids' economic futures, while kids feel more confident.

Parents' financial realities translate into significant concerns about children's future economic opportunities. Nearly 8 in 10 (79%) parents are concerned about children's future economic opportunities, and only about a third feel confident that children growing up today will be able to afford a house (33% confident), a college education or post-secondary job training (35% confident), or afford to have children (37% confident). In contrast, when asked about their own prospects, majorities of kids and teens are very or somewhat confident that they will someday be able to afford to have children (62%), a house (61%), and a college education or job training after high school (55%)—though just around 3 in 10 are very confident.

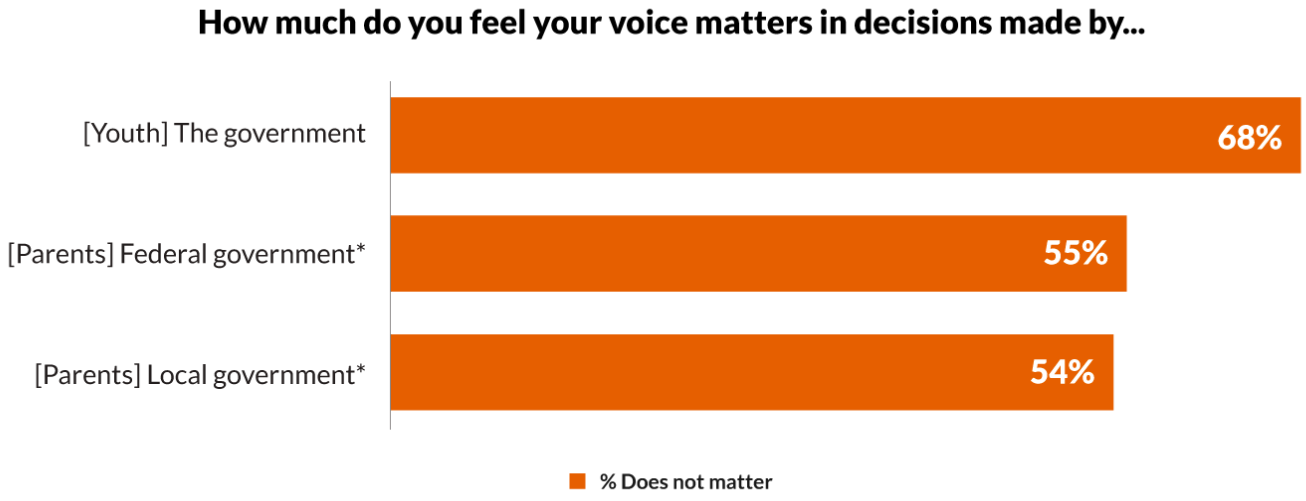
Figure 4: Percentage of parents and youth who are confident that…



4. **Parents and youth feel that government isn't listening: Over half of parents and 68% of youth feel their voice doesn't matter in government decisions.**

Neither parents nor kids and teens feel like the government listens to them. Over two-thirds (68%) of kids and teens feel their voice does not matter in decisions made by the government. Over half of parents feel their voice does not matter in decisions made by the federal government (55%) or their local government (54%). Republican parents, however, feel more heard by their local government (52% say their voice matters).

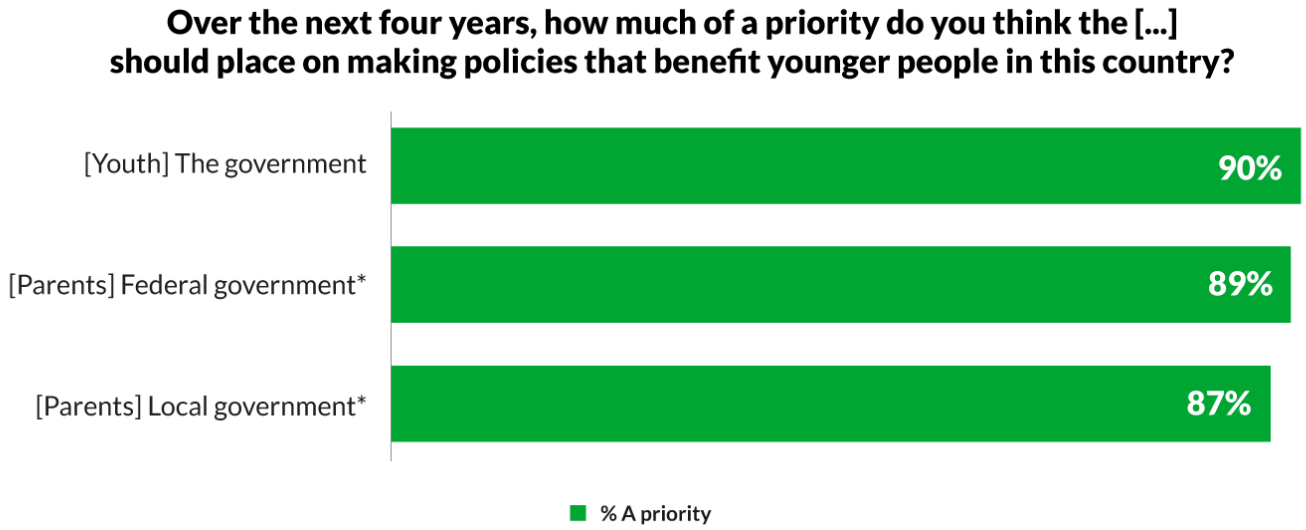
Figure 5: Percentage of parents and youth who feel their voice does not matter to government.
** Split sampled.*



5. **Parents and youth share desires for government investment and intervention: About 9 in 10 parents and youth want the government to prioritize policies that benefit young people.**

Parents and youth want the government to prioritize policies that benefit younger people in the country. Nearly universally, kids and teens think the government should place a priority on making policies that benefit younger people in this country (90% think it should be a priority). Nearly 9 in 10 parents think the federal government (89% say this should be a priority) and state and local governments (87%) should prioritize making these policies.

Figure 6: Percentage of youth and parents who think the government should prioritize making policies that benefit younger people.
** Split sampled.*



Policymaking isn't the only place where parents believe the government can contribute to the well-being of young people. Parents also see a role for government investment. As we have seen in the past, parents believe too little is spent by the federal government (68% say too little) and their state government (61% too little) on programs that benefit children and youth. This is a place of bipartisan agreement. Additionally, parents agree that families need more economic assistance from the government to get by in the early years of a child's life (78% agree) and when their children and teens are young adults (73%). Agreement crosses party lines.

Figure 7: Percentage of parents who think their state/the federal government spends too little on programs that benefit children and youth.
** Split sampled.*

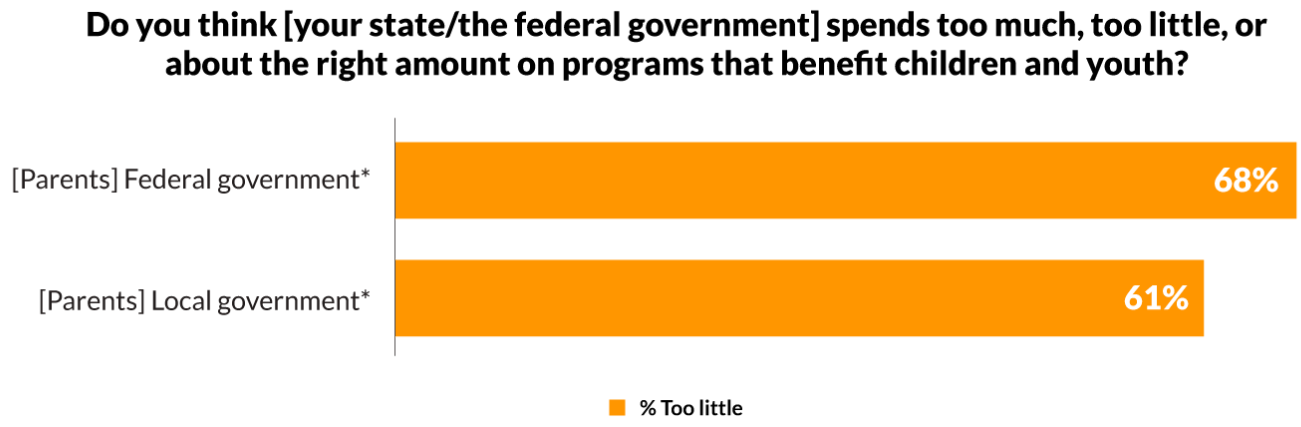
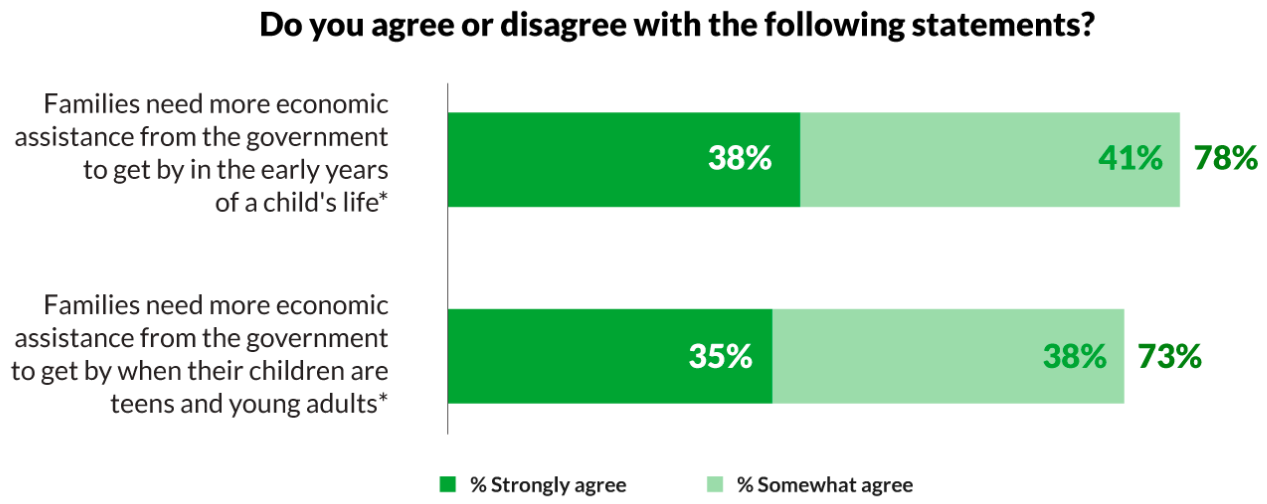


Figure 8: Percentage of parents who strongly or somewhat agree that…
** Split sampled.*



6. **Parents believe in improving children's lives through education, access to mental health care, housing, and addressing child hunger. Majorities of parents say better schools (58%), better access to mental health care (55%), and free preschool (53%) would make American children's lives much better.**

The changes that parents think would make the lives of American children better off are better K–12 public schools, better access to mental health care, and free preschool for young children. Over half of parents say better K–12 public schools (58%), better access to mental health care (55%), and free preschool for young children (53%) would make the lives of American children much better off.

Parents also want the federal government to address these needs and others by making sure that children and families have health care coverage (41% say the federal government should make this a top priority), that hungry children have enough to eat (40%), and that families with children have access to affordable housing (40%).

Figure 9: Percentage of parents who think the following changes would make the lives of American children much or somewhat better off.

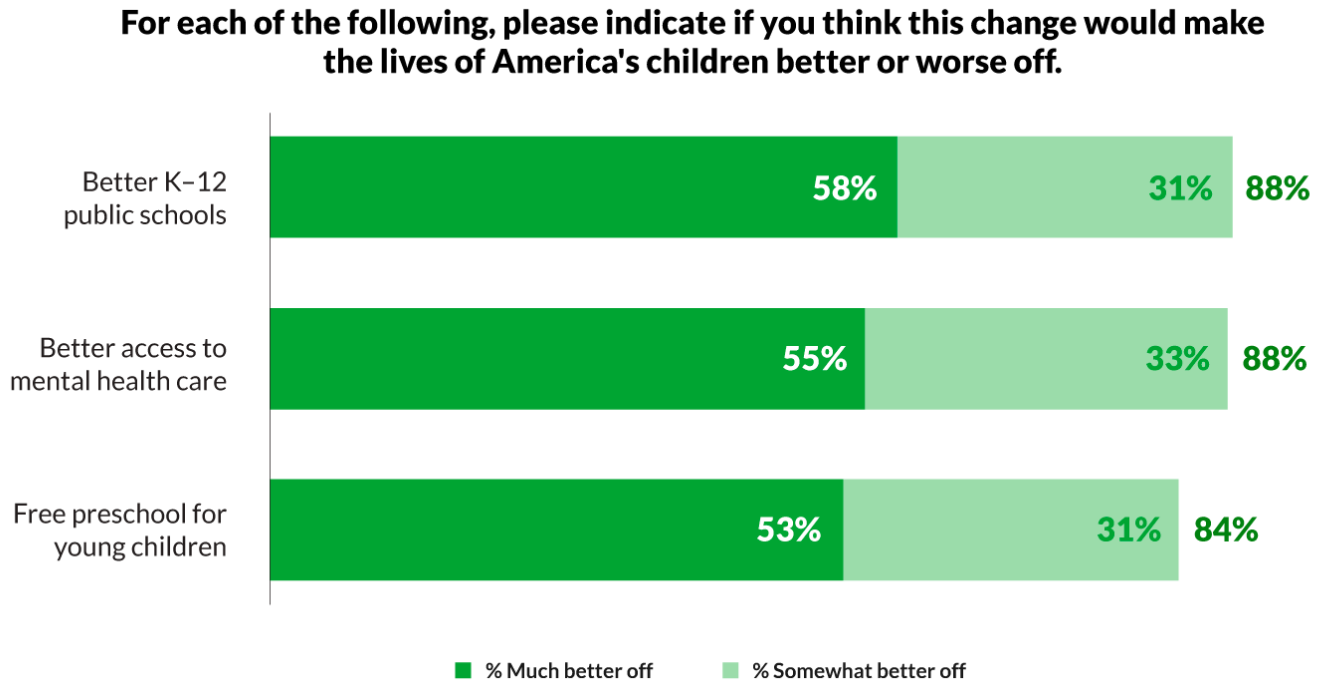
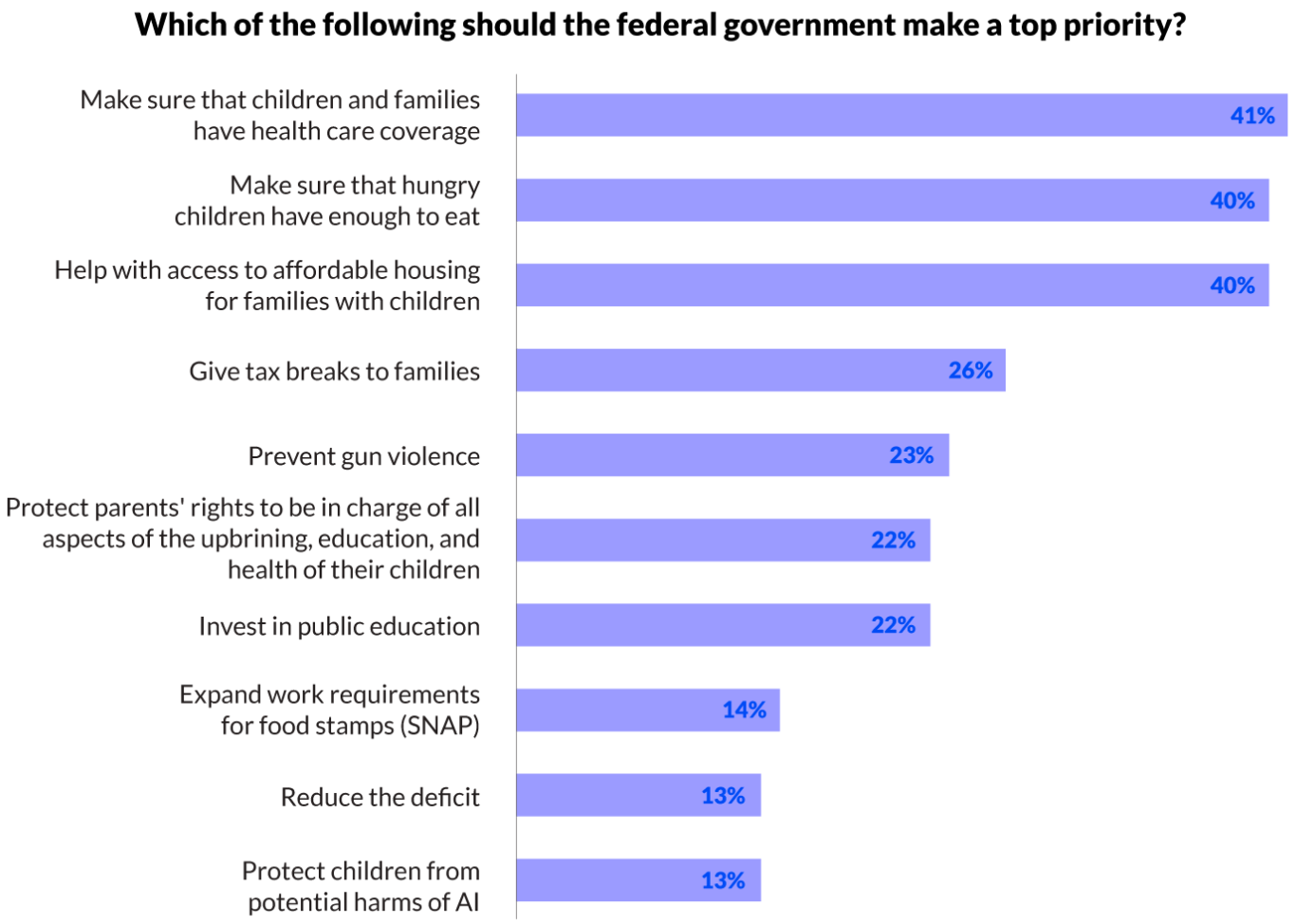


Figure 10: Percentage of parents who think the federal government should make the following a top priority.



7. **Mental health is still in crisis: 54% of kids and teens rate peers' mental health as fair or poor, and 58% say schools are not doing enough to support mental health.**

While 51% of parents say the mental health of children in their community is excellent or good, 43% say it is just fair or poor. Kids and teens feel even more negatively about the mental health of their peers: 54% say that the mental health of kids and teens in their community is just fair or poor. Parents and youth continue to point to social media, technology, and screen time as a main cause of today's mental health crisis (30% of parents and 32% of kids and teens think this is a main cause). Parents (48%) and kids and teens (58%) share the view that schools in their communities are doing too little to support students' mental health and well-being.

Figure 11: Percentage of parents and youth who rate the mental health of children in their community as excellent/good or just fair/poor.

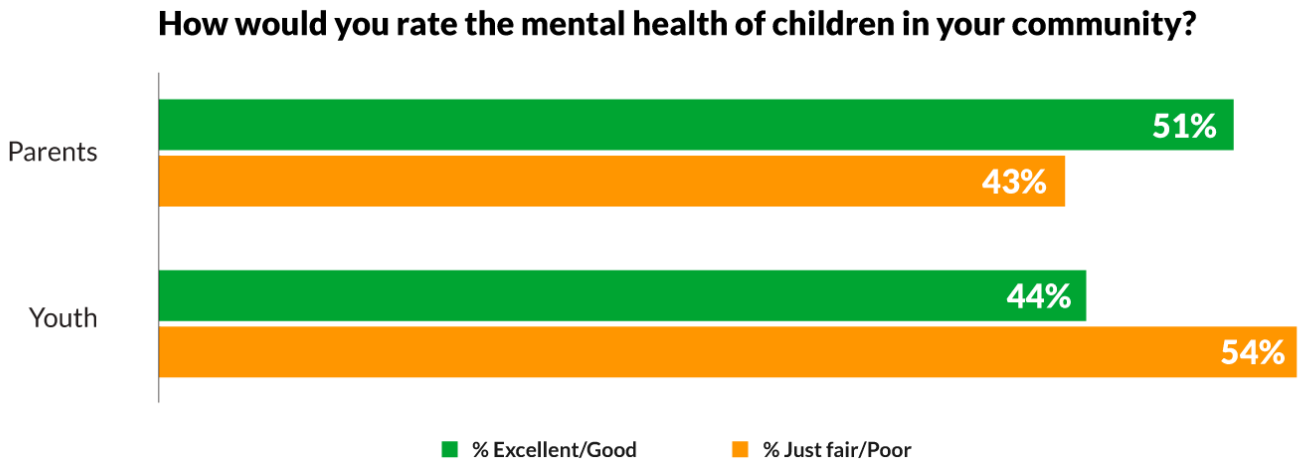
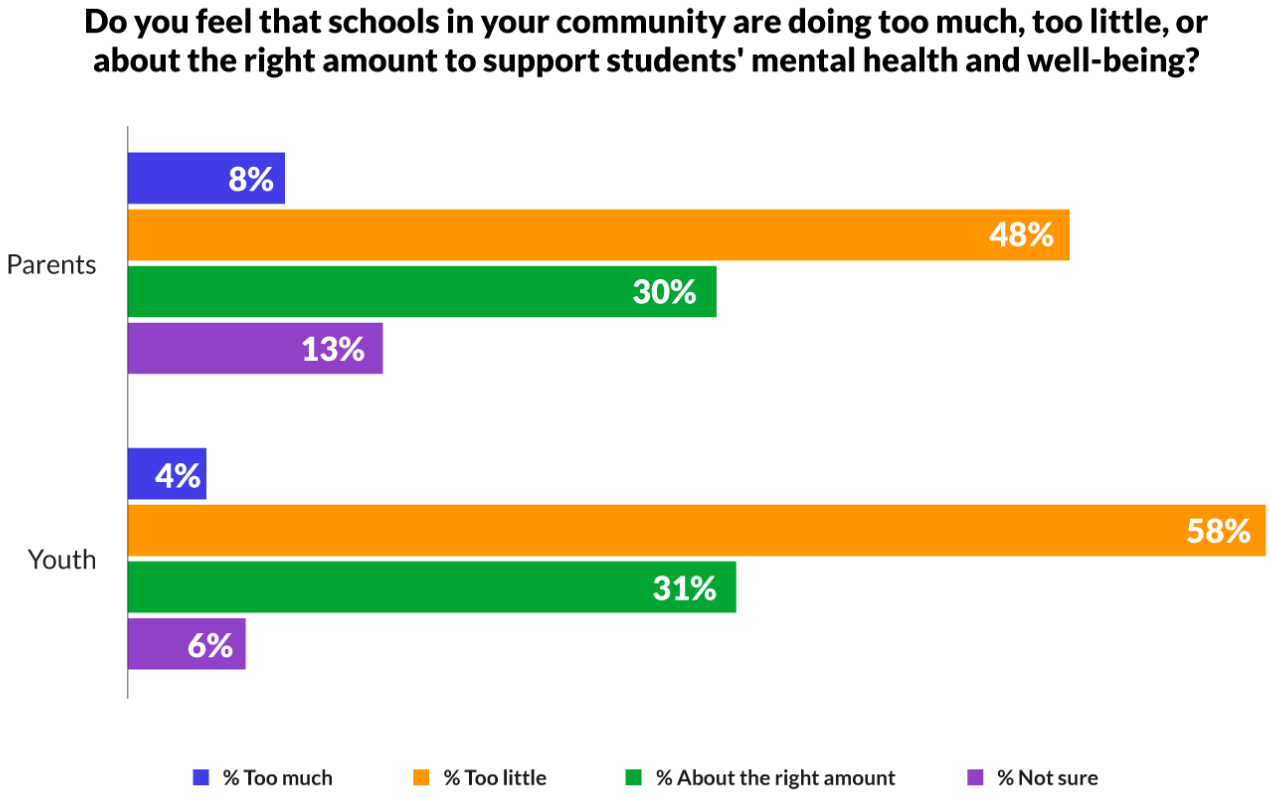


Figure 12: Percentage of parents and youth who think schools are doing [...] to support students' mental health and well-being.



8. Girls feel more pessimistic than boys about the present, the future, and mental health.

Girls feel more negatively than boys about how things are going today and how they imagine the future will be. Only 38% of girls think things are going excellent or good for kids and teens today, compared to 47% of boys. By wide margins, boys have a positive outlook about the future of the country (+24) and the future for children (+42). Girls feel positive by much narrower margins about the future of the country (+5) and the future for children (+25).

While girls and boys see similar root causes of the mental health crisis and agree with each other on schools needing to do more to support youth, girls rate the mental health of kids and teens in their community negatively (60% say it is just fair or poor, and 38% say excellent or good), and boys are split between excellent or good (50%) and just fair or poor (48%).

Figure 13: Percentage of boys and girls who think things are going [...] for kids and teens in America today.

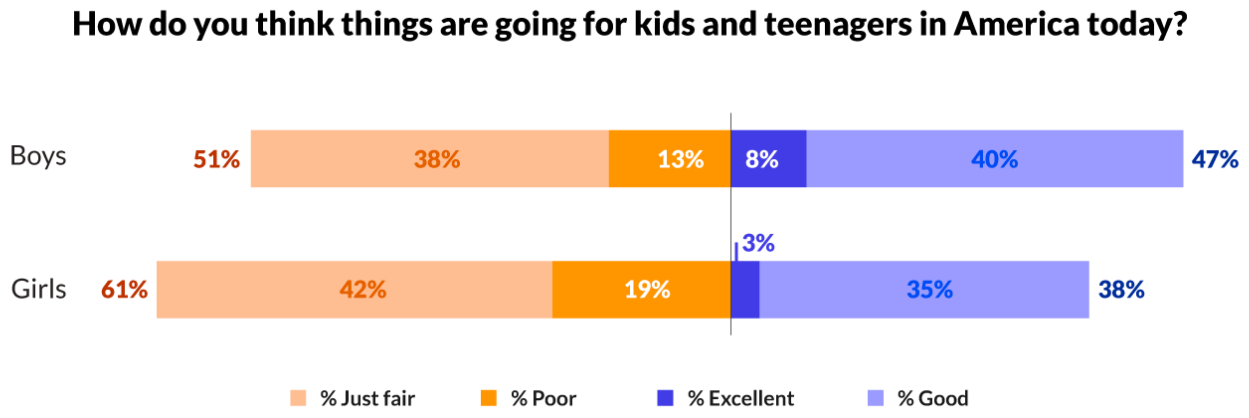
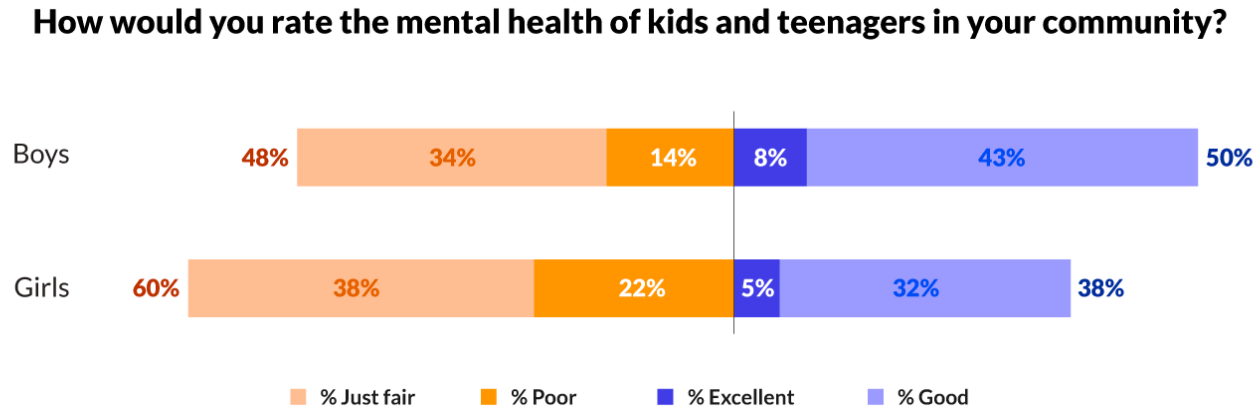


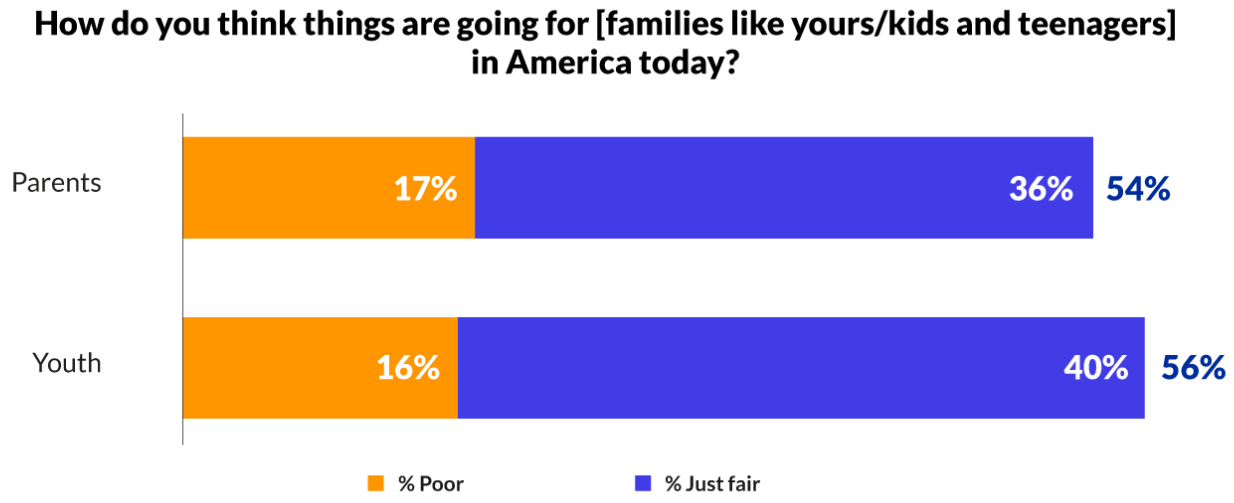
Figure 14: Percentage of boys and girls who would rate the mental health of kids and teens in their community as...



American Family Mood: Concerns for Families, Kids, and Young People

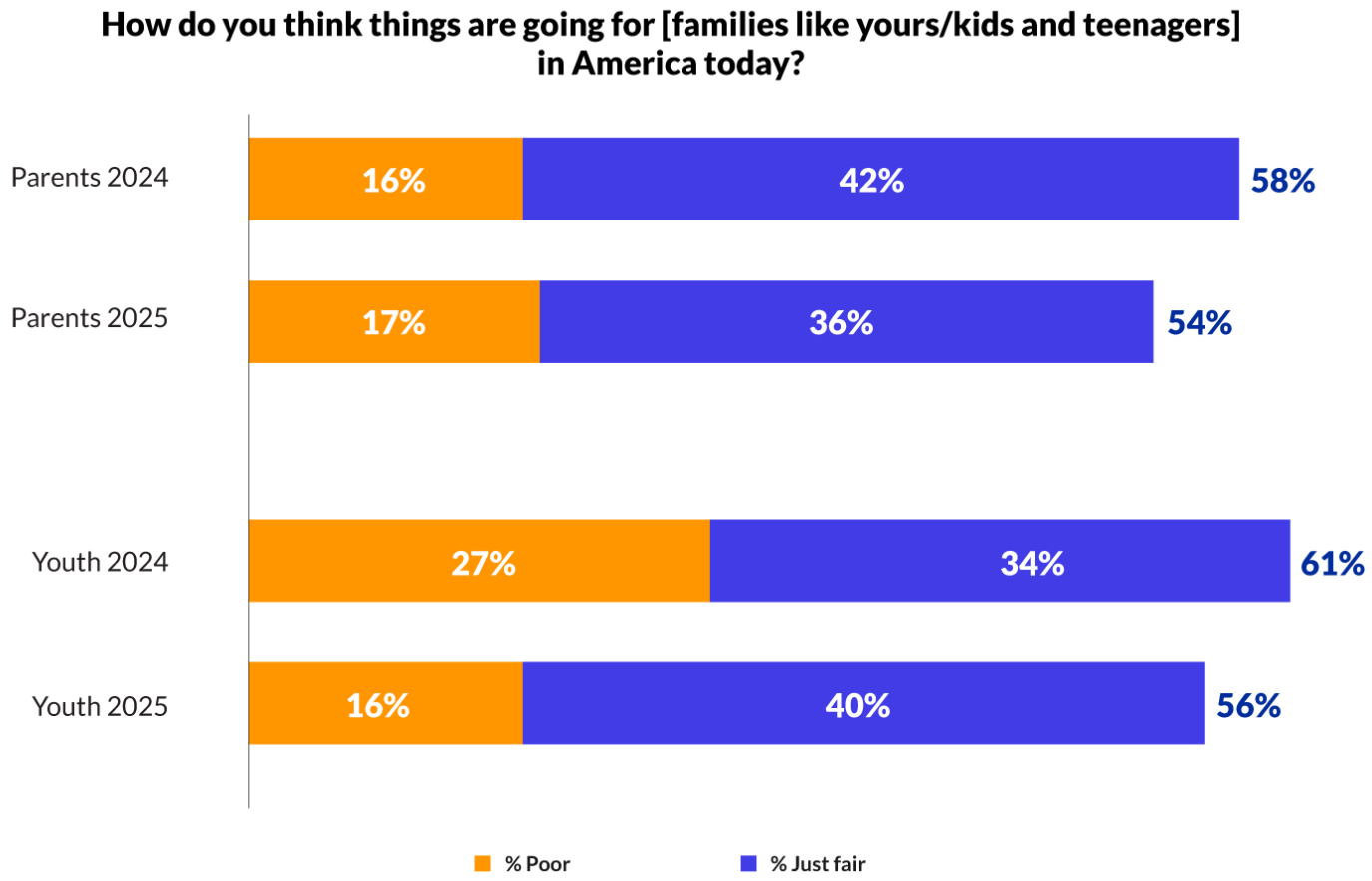
A majority of parents (54%) say that things are going just fair (36%) or poorly (17%) for families like theirs today. Only 12% say that things are going excellent, and another 34% say that things are going good. Kids and teens are similar to parents in their pessimism. A majority (56%) of kids and teens say that things are going just fair (40%) or poorly (16%) for kids and teens in America today.

Figure 15: Percentage of parents and youth who think things are going poor or just fair for families like theirs or kids and teens in America.



Compared to the last survey, parents still think things are going badly for families like theirs. Kids and teens are slightly less likely to think things are going poorly for kids and teens in America today.

Figure 16: Percentage of parents and youth who think things are going poor or just fair for families like theirs/kids and teens in America in 2024 and 2025.



Among parents, there are big partisan divides on how things are going, with Republican parents feeling some relief that things are back on track. A majority (55%) of Republican parents think things are going excellent or good for families like theirs, while independents (57% say just fair or poor) and Democrats (62% just fair or poor) think things are going badly for families like theirs.

Table 1: Percentage of parents, by party identification, who think things are going excellent or good or just fair or poor for families like theirs in America.

How do you think things are going for families like yours in America today?

	Dem. parents	Ind./DK parents	Rep. parents
Excellent/Good	38%	42%	55%
Just fair/Poor	62%	57%	44%

Black and Asian American and Pacific Islander parents are more positive than White and Latino parents: 53% of Asian American and Pacific Islander parents and 51% of Black parents say things are going excellent or good; 55% of White parents and Latino parents each say things are going just fair or poor.

Table 2: Percentage of parents, by race/ethnicity, who think things are going excellent or good or just fair or poor for families like theirs in America.

How do you think things are going for families like yours in America today?

	White parents	Black parents	Latino parents	AAPI parents
Excellent/Good	45%	51%	43%	53%
Just fair/Poor	55%	49%	55%	47%

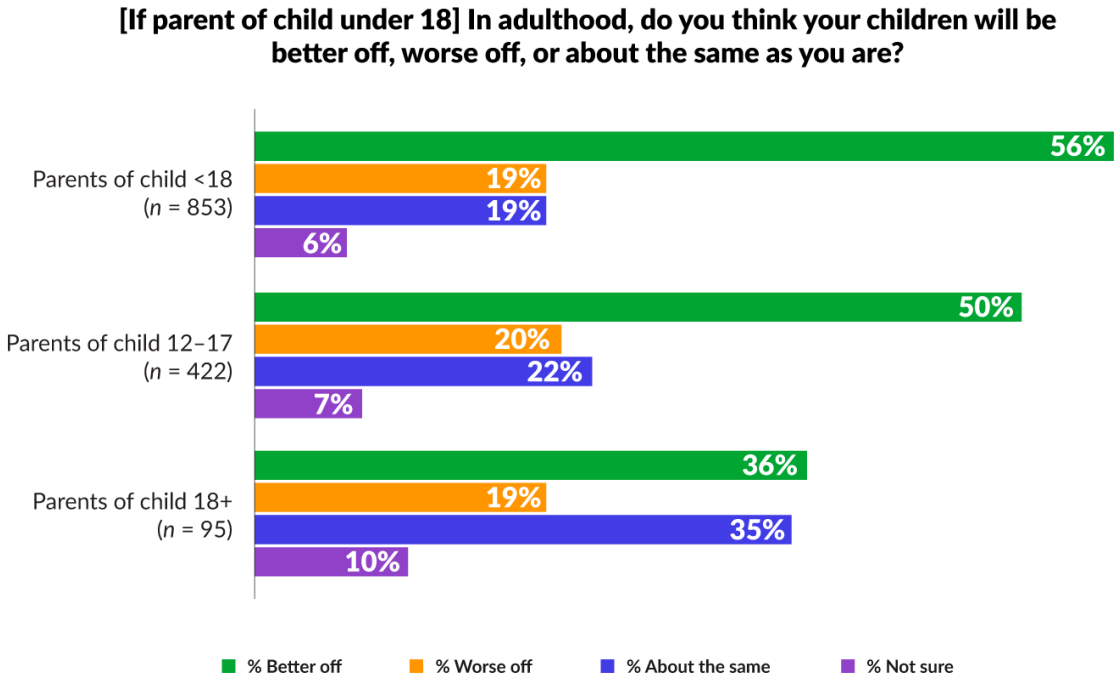
Younger dads drive the sense that things are going well for families like theirs; moms of all ages and older dads think things are going just fair or poor. Parents of children under 18 feel positively about how things are going, while parents of adult children feel negatively. Parents of children age 12 to 17 are split.

Table 3: Percentage of parents, by age and age of child, who think things are going excellent or good or just fair or poor for families like theirs in America.

	Dads <50	Moms <50	Dads 50+	Moms 50+	Parents of child <18	Parents of child 12–17	Parents of child 18+
Excellent/Good	63%	44%	41%	33%	54%	50%	37%
Just fair/Poor	37%	56%	59%	66%	46%	49%	63%

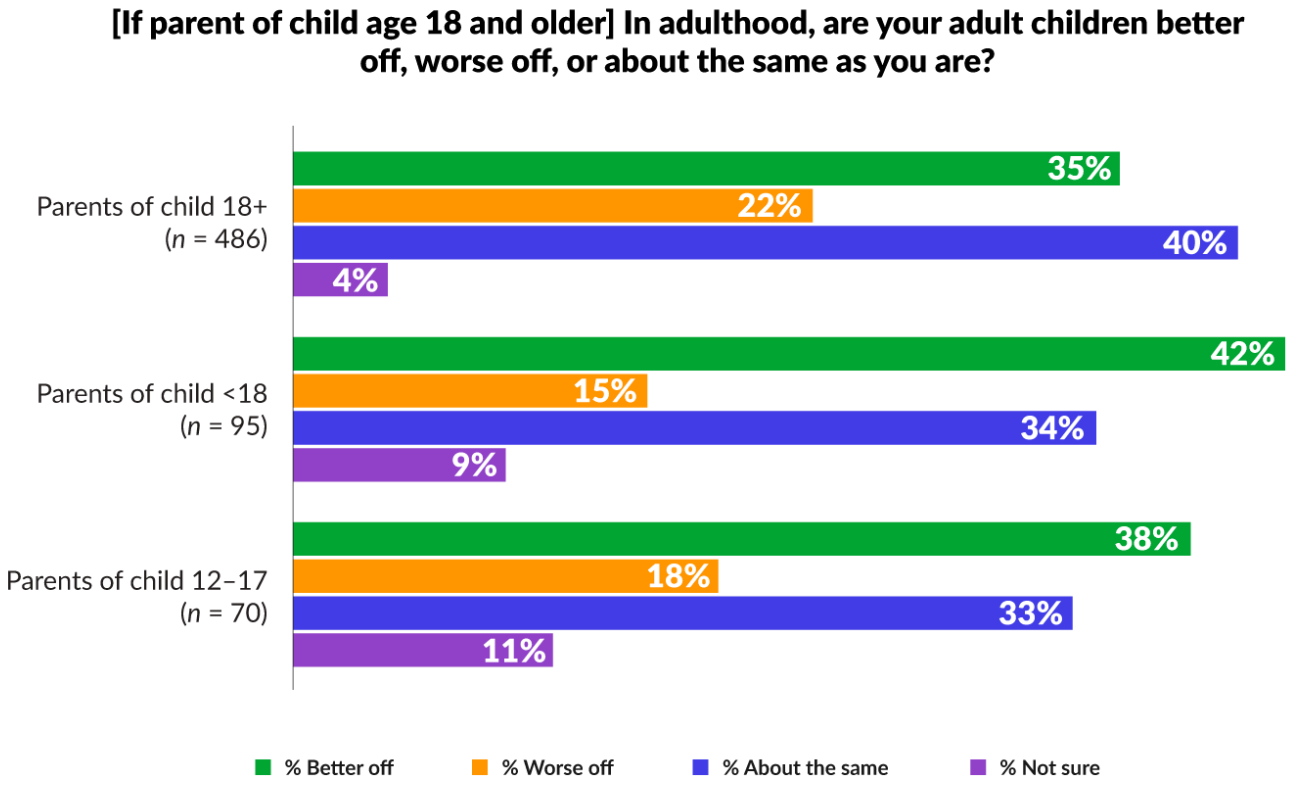
While they feel that things are not going well currently, parents are more optimistic about their children's general prospects in adulthood. A majority (56%) of parents of children under 18 think that their children will be better off than they are in adulthood, while 19% think their children will be worse off, and 19% think their children will be about the same.

Figure 17: Percentage of parents with at least one child under 18, by age of child, who think their children will be better off, worse off, or about the same as they are in adulthood.



Parents of adult children (age 18 and older) are split between thinking their children are about the same (40%) and are better off (35%) than they are, though 22% say their children are worse off.

Figure 18: Percentage of parents with at least one child 18 or older who think their children are better off, worse off, or about the same as they are in adulthood, by age of child.



Kids and teens believe they will be better off in the future than their parents. Close to half (49%) of kids and teens think they will be better off than their parents, while 24% think they will be about the same as their parents, and 20% think they will be worse off.

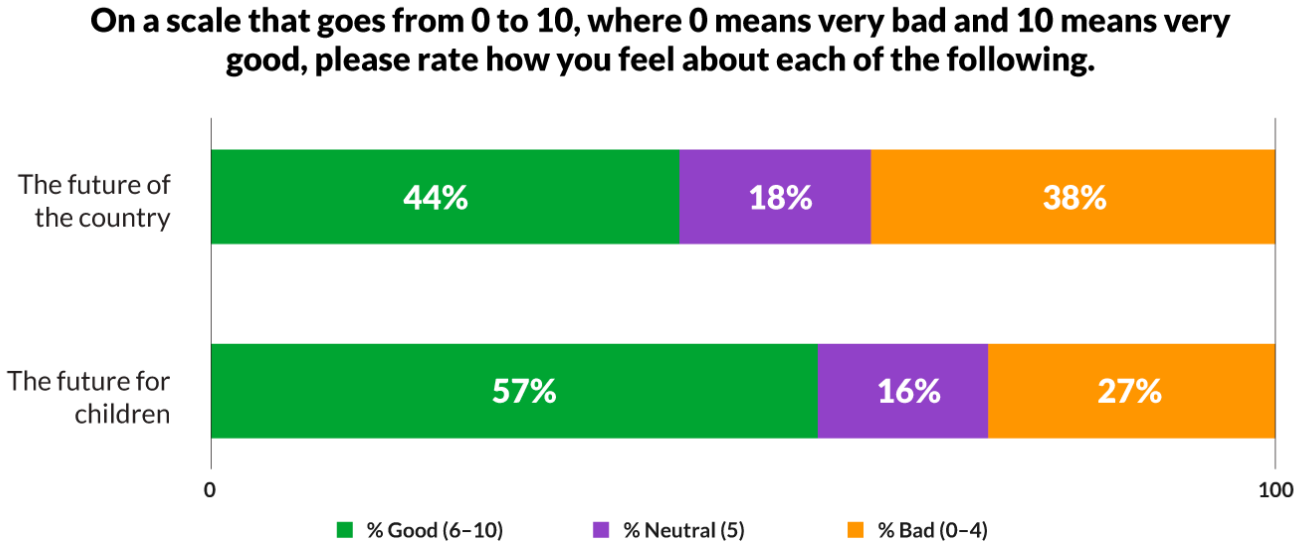
There are significant differences by race/ethnicity. Nearly two-thirds of Black kids and teens think they will be better off than their parents, as do over half of Latino and Asian American and Pacific Islander kids and teens. Conversely, only 43% of White kids and teens think they will be better off.

Table 4: Percentage of youth, by race/ethnicity, who think they will be better off, worse off, or about the same as their parents when they grow up.

	White youth	Black youth	Latino youth	AAPI youth
Better off	43%	63%	55%	52%
Worse off	23%	12%	21%	14%
About the same	29%	18%	17%	26%

Parents feel more optimistic than pessimistic about the future for children and, to a lesser extent, lean toward feeling more optimistic than pessimistic about the future of the country. A majority (57%) of parents feel good about the future for children, while a quarter (27%) feel bad, and 16% feel neutral or unsure. A slim plurality (44%) of parents feel good about the future of the country, though 38% feel bad, and 18% feel neutral or unsure.

Figure 19: Percentage of parents who feel good, neutral/not sure, or bad about…



Republican parents feel as good about the future of the country as they feel about the future for children. Democratic and independent parents feel good about the future for children but bad about the future of the country.

Parents of kids under age 18 are significantly more likely than parents of kids 18 and older to feel good about the future for children.

Parent attitudes about the future also have a gender gap, with moms feeling more negative than dads about the future for both the country and for children.

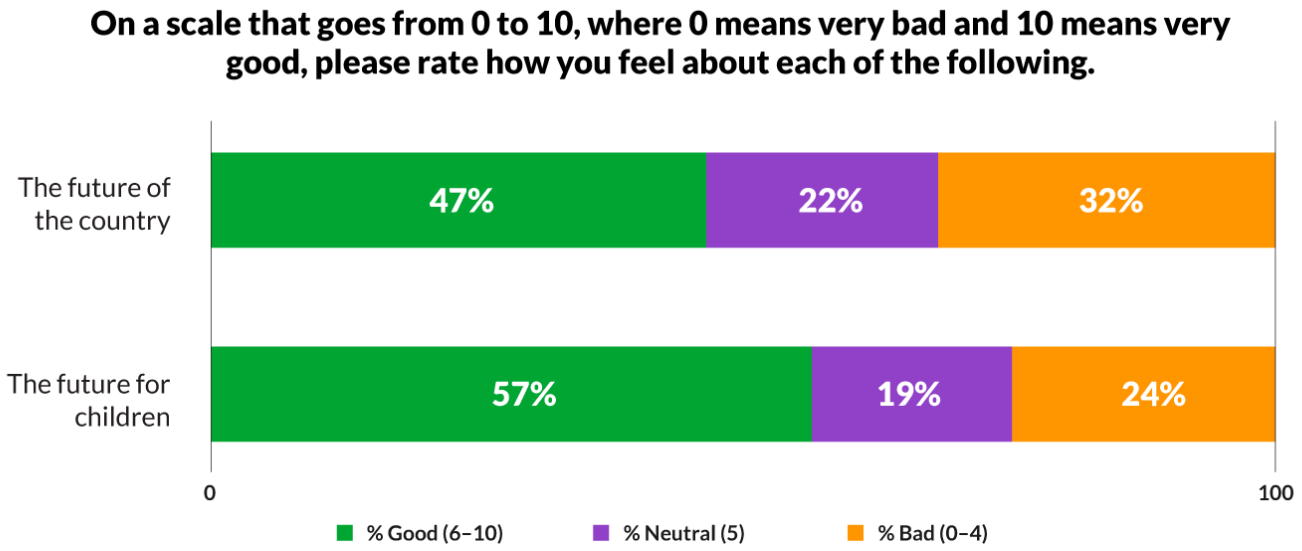
Table 5: Percentage of parents, by age of child, gender, race/ethnicity, and party identification, who feel good, neutral/not sure, or bad about:

Rate how you're feeling about...

	The future of the country		The future for children	
	Good (6–10)	Bad (0–4)	Good (6–10)	Bad (0–4)
Parents	44%	38%	57%	27%
Parents of child <18	46%	38%	65%	21%
Parents of child 12–17	47%	34%	64%	20%
Parents of child 18+	41%	41%	48%	33%
Dads	56%	28%	67%	19%
Moms	33%	47%	47%	34%
White parents	46%	37%	54%	30%
Black parents	41%	41%	61%	21%
Latino parents	39%	38%	61%	20%
AAPI parents	40%	35%	68%	17%
Dem. parents	31%	55%	50%	34%
Ind./DK parents	33%	44%	54%	30%
Rep. parents	62%	20%	65%	19%

In very similar numbers to parents, kids and teens also feel good about the future for children, and to a lesser extent, the future of the country. Almost 6 in 10 (57%) kids and teens feel good about the future for children, though only 9% feel very good (i.e., they give it a 10 rating). Under half (47%) of kids and teens feel good about the future of the country, while 32% feel bad and 22% feel neutral about the future of the county.

Figure 20: Percentage of youth who feel good, neutral/not sure, or bad about:



As with parents, we see a gender gap among kids and teens: Boys feel more positive about the future of the country (52% feel good) compared to girls (41%). Asian American and Pacific Islander kids and teens (53%) feel more positive about the future of the country than Black (45%) or Latino (45%) kids and teens.

For kids and teens, plans after high school reflect their sense of the future. Kids and teens who plan to attend a four-year college after high school feel more positive about the future of the country (55% feel good) than those who plan to attend a two-year college (44%), get specific job training (41%), join the military (35%), or are unsure of their plans (31%).

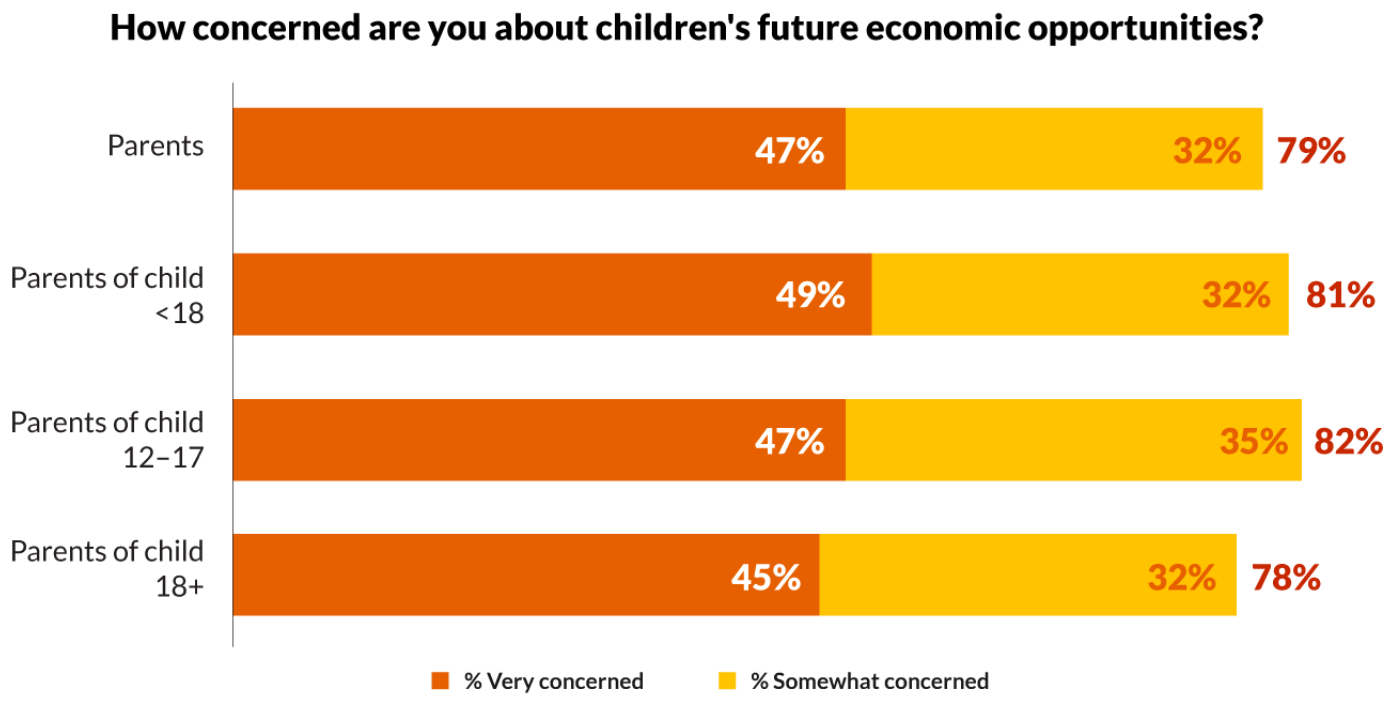
Economic Concerns Remain Vivid

Parents feel significant concern about children's future economic opportunities (47% very concerned, 79% concerned). Republican parents generally have a more positive outlook on this, compared to Democrats and independents, but economic concern crosses party lines. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Republican parents feel concerned about children's future economic opportunities (37% very

concerned), and majorities of Democratic parents (55% very concerned, 84% concerned) and independent parents (52% very concerned, 82% concerned) feel very concerned.

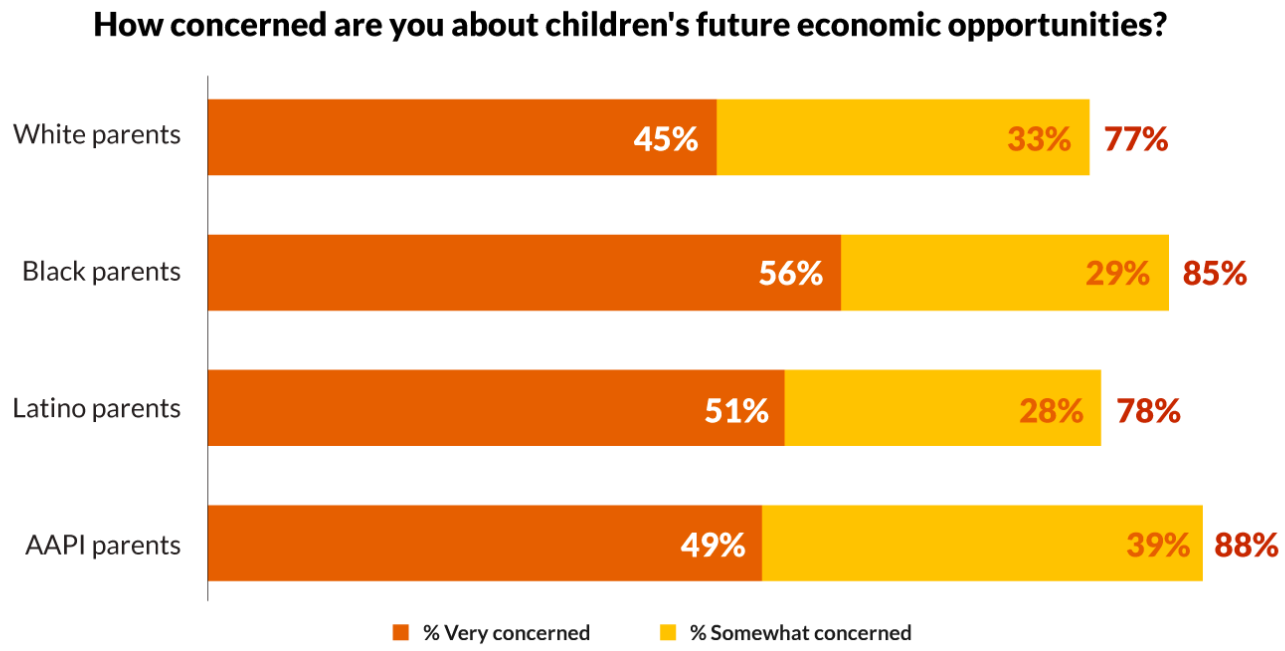
It does not matter how old parents' children are—all parents feel concerned about children's future economic opportunities.

Figure 21: Percentage of parents, by age of child, who are concerned about children's future economic opportunities.



Concern about children's future economic opportunities also crosses race/ethnicity, with pluralities or majorities of Black, Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and White parents feeling very concerned.

Figure 22: Percentage of parents, by race/ethnicity, who are concerned about children's future economic opportunities.



The bleak outlook about children's future economic opportunities leads parents to conclude that children are not going to be able to afford education, housing, and a family of their own when they grow up. Parents are not confident that children growing up today will be able to afford a house (65% not confident), to afford a college education or job training after high school (62% not confident), or to afford to have children (59% not confident).

There is a big generational story about parents' outlook on children's future ability to afford these milestones. Parents of today's kids feel more confident than parents of adults about the ability of children growing up today to afford post-secondary education, housing, and their own children.

However, parents across race/ethnicity are not confident that children growing up today will be able to afford higher education, housing, or children.

Across party, parents are more skeptical than confident about today's children's ability to afford higher education, housing, and children. Again, we see more optimism from Republican parents compared to Democratic or independent parents.

While moms and dads do not feel confident about children growing up today affording a house and post-secondary education, dads feel more confident than moms. Dads are split between feeling confident and not confident that today's children will be able to afford their own children; moms solidly feel not confident.

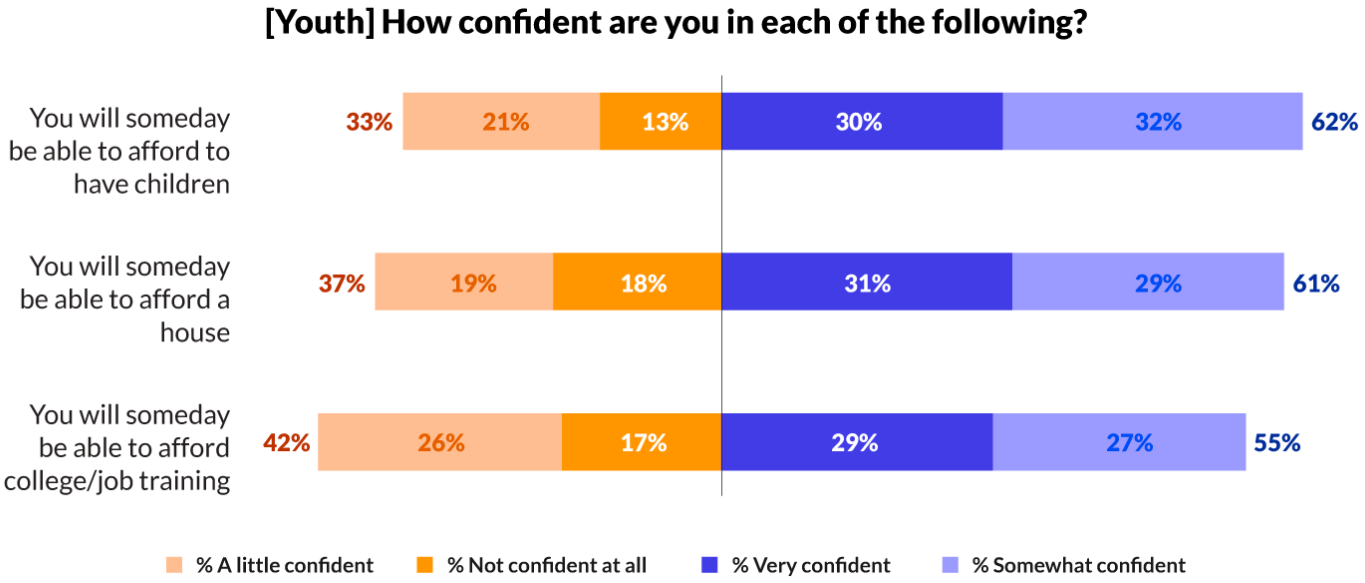
Table 6: Percentage of parents, by age of child, gender, race/ethnicity, and party identification, who are confident or not confident that children growing up today will be able to…

How confident are you that children growing up today will be …

	Able to afford a college education or job training after high school			Able to afford a house			Able to afford to have children		
	Confident	Not confident	Margin	Confident	Not confident	Margin	Confident	Not confident	Margin
Parents	35%	62%	-27	33%	65%	-32	37%	59%	-22
Parents of child <18	46%	53%	-7	42%	56%	-14	47%	51%	-4
Parents of child 12–17	44%	54%	-11	40%	57%	-17	47%	50%	-3
Parents of child 18+	22%	73%	-51	22%	74%	-52	26%	68%	-42
Dads	43%	54%	-11	39%	60%	-21	48%	50%	-2
Moms	27%	69%	-42	27%	69%	-42	27%	68%	-40
White parents	33%	63%	-30	32%	65%	-33	36%	61%	-25
Black parents	41%	57%	-15	38%	60%	-22	40%	57%	-17
Latino parents	35%	62%	-27	32%	67%	-35	42%	54%	-12
AAPI parents	39%	59%	-21	35%	63%	-28	42%	55%	-14
Dem. parents	28%	68%	-40	26%	71%	-45	29%	66%	-37
Ind./DK parents	29%	67%	-38	24%	72%	-49	29%	67%	-38
Rep. parents	44%	54%	-9	43%	55%	-12	48%	50%	-2

Kids and teens are more optimistic about their own future economic prospects. Sixty-one percent of kids and teens feel very or somewhat confident they will someday be able to afford a house, but only 33% of parents feel confident about this; 55% of kids and teens feel confident they will be able to afford college/job training, compared to just 35% of parents; 62% of kids and teens are confident they will be able to afford to have children, versus 37% of parents.

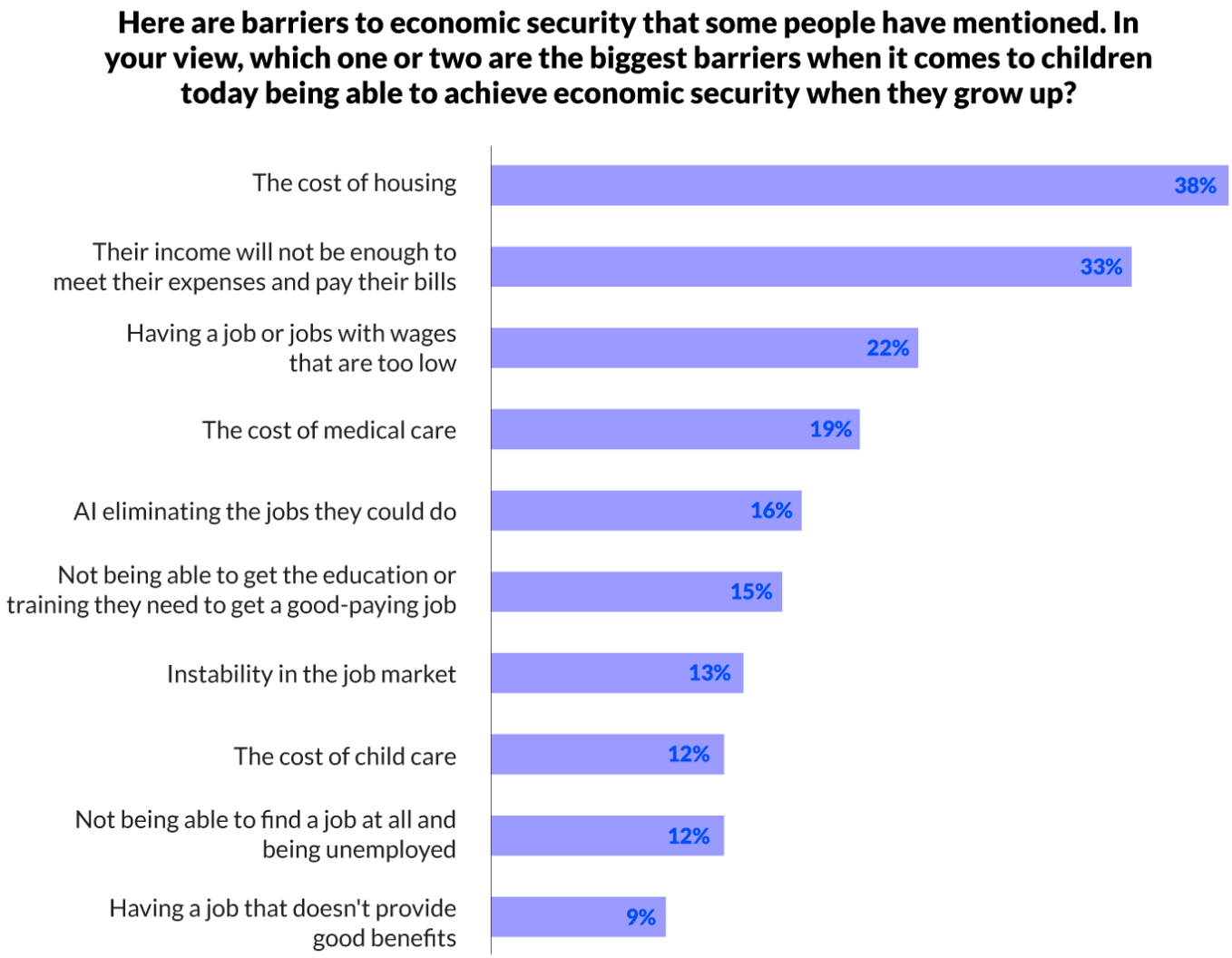
Figure 23: Percentage of youth who are confident that…



Most subgroups of kids and teens feel confident that they will be able to afford college or job training, a house, and to have children. Unlike their peers who plan to attend a two- or four-year college or join the military, kids and teens who plan to get specific job training feel less confident about their future economic prospects. Kids and teens who plan to get specific job training after high school are split between feeling confident and not confident that they will be able to afford to have children (+2) or a house (-3), and they do not feel confident they will be able to afford college or job training after high school (-18).

Parents identify multiple barriers to children today being able to achieve economic security when they grow up, with a clear affordability and pay agenda. Parents see the biggest barriers for children achieving economic security as the cost of housing (38%) and that their income will not be enough to meet their expenses and pay their bills (33%). About a fifth say that having a job or jobs with wages that are too low (22%) and the cost of medical care (19%) will be the biggest barriers to children achieving economic security. Other significant perceived barriers include AI eliminating jobs they could do (16%), not being able to get the education or training they need to get a good-paying job (15%), instability in the job market (13%), the cost of child care (12%), and not being able to find a job at all and being unemployed (12%).

Figure 24: Percentage of parents who say the following are the biggest barriers to children today being able to achieve economic security when they grow up:



Most subgroups of parents see the cost of housing and income not meeting expenses as the top two barriers. Across party identification, these factors are seen as the biggest barriers to children's future economic security. Younger dads,[1] Black dads, and Asian American and Pacific Islander dads are less likely to see income failing to meet expenses as a barrier and are more likely to see too low wages as a top barrier. Latino dads also name jobs with low wages as one of the biggest barriers. Asian American and Pacific Islander dads see the cost of medical care as one of the biggest barriers. Older moms[2] and Asian American and Pacific Islander moms see income not meeting expenses as the top barrier, instead

[1] *Younger* is defined as under age 50.
[2] *Older* is defined as age 50 and older.

of the cost of housing. Parents in the Mountain region[3] stand out for significantly focusing on housing (52% see it as a barrier), and also see AI eliminating jobs as a secondary concern (29%).

Parents are under real economic pressure. Parents feel like affording the things they need to buy for their children is growing more difficult. When parents of kids under 18 think about this time last year and being able to afford the things they need to buy for their children, half (51%) say it is now getting worse—up from 39% who said the same in January 2025. A quarter (25%) say it is getting better, and 23% say it has stayed the same.

Parents of children age 18 and older have worse perceptions when they think about how things are for parents of kids under 18 affording what they need to buy for their children: 59% of parents of adult children say things are getting worse for parents of kids under 18, 13% say they are getting better, and 24% say it has stayed the same.

While in the past, people have striven to achieve or maintain economic security, that goal feels out of reach for many parents. Seven in 10 (70%) parents strongly or somewhat agree that they are living paycheck to paycheck and have little ability to save, including 40% who strongly agree. Six in 10 (60%) parents agree that they are one unexpected major crisis, illness, or injury away from financial disaster or major debt, with 31% who strongly agree. Under half (42%) agree that they consider themselves to be financially secure, and only 13% strongly agree they are secure. The future doesn't look that secure, either. Forty-five percent of parents agree that when it comes to money, they see a comfortable future for themselves, but only 14% strongly agree.

Table 7: Percentage of parents, by race/ethnicity, who strongly agree that…

** Split sampled.*

^ Note: small sample size.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (% strongly agree)

	All parents	White parents	Black parents	Latino parents	AAPI parents^
I am living paycheck to paycheck and have little ability to save	40%	42%	39%	40%	28%
I am one unexpected major crisis, illness, or injury away from financial disaster or major debt	31%	32%	32%	30%	25%
When it comes to money, I see a comfortable future for myself*	14%	21%	21%	16%	16%
I consider myself to be financially secure*	13%	14%	14%	12%	13%

[3] The Mountain region includes Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming.

Economic Solutions: Education and Caregiving

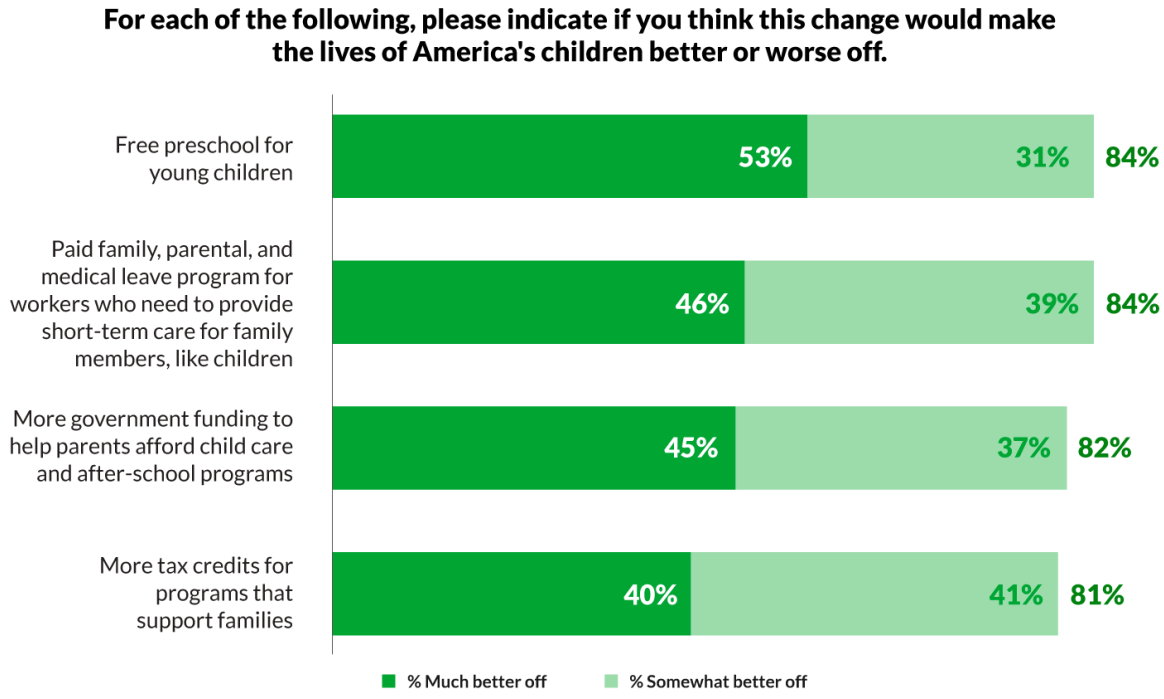
Parents confront significant and ongoing economic problems, and they feel that high costs and low pay will impact children's economic futures. But they also identify real solutions to these problems, starting with education.

As we've seen in the previous surveys, parents volunteer improving or reforming the education system (24% suggest this) as the most important thing they'd recommend to improve the lives of American children. Over half (58%) of parents say better K–12 public schools would make the lives of American children much better off.

In addition to education reforms, **one of the most important things that parents would recommend doing to improve the lives of American children is fixing the economy and inflation and improving wages**. Seventeen percent of parents say that this is the most important thing they would recommend.

Parents believe that children would be better off if policies lessen some of the financial pressure of caregiving. More than 8 in 10 parents say the lives of American children would be better off if workers had a paid family, parental, and medical leave program (84% say children would be better off, 46% much better off), free preschool for young children (84% better off, 53% much better off), if parents could afford child care and after-school programs by receiving more government funding (82% better off, 45% much better off), and if programs that support families got more tax credits (81% better off, 40% much better off).

Figure 25: Percentage of parents who think the following caregiving changes would make children better off.



Majorities across party lines see these policies as beneficial, though Democratic parents are more likely than Republican parents to think they would make the lives of American children much better off.

Table 8: Percentage of parents, by party identification, who think the following caregiving changes would make children better off.

For each of the following, please indicate if you think this change would make the lives of America's children better or worse off.

	Dem. parents		Ind./DK parents		Rep. parents	
	Much better off	Total better off	Much better off	Total better off	Much better off	Total better off
Free preschool for young children	63%	85%	54%	86%	44%	82%
Paid family, parental, and medical leave	53%	84%	47%	86%	38%	84%
More government funding to afford child care	59%	87%	45%	82%	34%	78%
More tax credits for programs that support families	49%	85%	42%	76%	32%	81%

No matter the age of their child, parents overwhelmingly think these caregiving policies and tax credits will make children better off.

Table 9: Percentage of parents, by age of child, who think the following caregiving changes would make children better off.

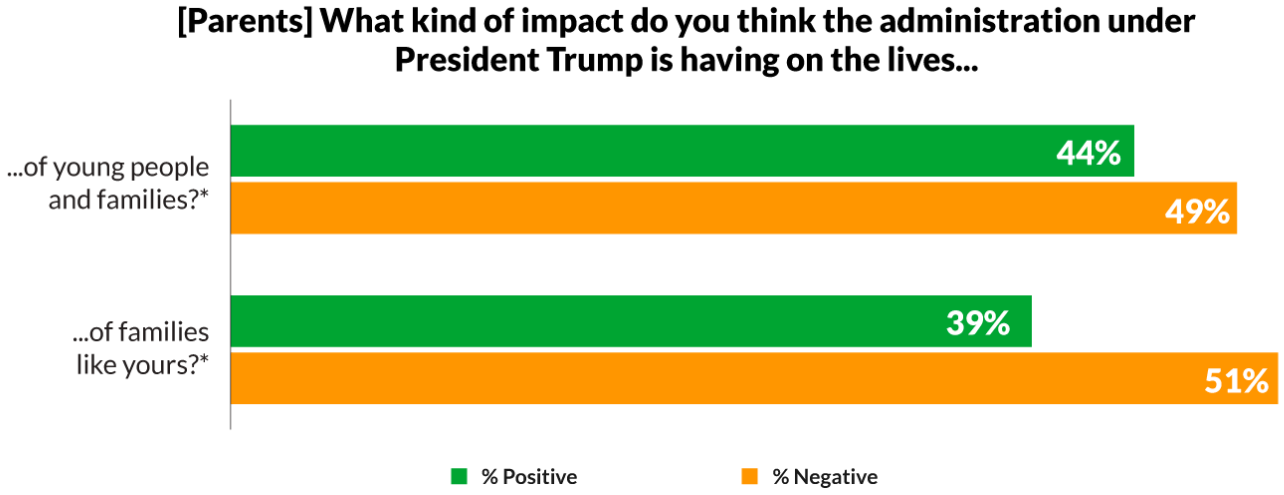
For each of the following, please indicate if you think this change would make the lives of America's children better or worse off.

	Parents of child under 18		Parents of child 12–17		Parents of child 18+	
	Much better off	Total better off	Much better off	Total better off	Much better off	Total better off
Free preschool for young children	58%	89%	55%	88%	47%	79%
Paid family, parental, and medical leave	48%	86%	46%	89%	43%	83%
More government funding to afford child care	50%	86%	49%	84%	41%	78%
More tax credits for programs that support families	44%	84%	44%	82%	37%	79%

Feeling Unheard by Government and Wanting More Investment

Parents and youth share concerns about the government meeting their needs. One year into the Trump administration, around half of parents and a slim majority of kids and teens say the administration has negatively impacted young people and families in general and families like theirs. About half of parents think the Trump administration has had a negative impact on the lives of young people and families (49%) and on the lives of families like theirs (51%).

Figure 26: Percentage of parents who believe the Trump administration is having a positive or negative impact on the lives…
** Split sampled.*



Partisanship is a key driver of assessments of the Trump administration. Three-quarters or more of Republican parents say the administration's impact both on the lives of young people and families (75%) and on families like theirs (78%) has been positive. A majority of independent parents think the impact on the lives of young people and families has been negative (57%), and 7 in 10 (71%) say the impact on families like theirs has been negative. Democratic parents solidly believe the administration's impact on the lives of young people and families (81%) and on the lives of families like theirs (82%) has been negative.

There are also stark divides in race/ethnicity on the perceived impact the Trump administration is having on the lives of both young people and families as well as families like theirs. White parents are the only subgroup who lean toward believing the impact has been positive on young people and families, and they are split between thinking the impact has been positive and negative on families like theirs.

Table 10: Percentage of parents, by race/ethnicity, who believe the Trump administration is having a positive or negative impact on the lives of…

** Split sampled.*

^ Note: small sample size.

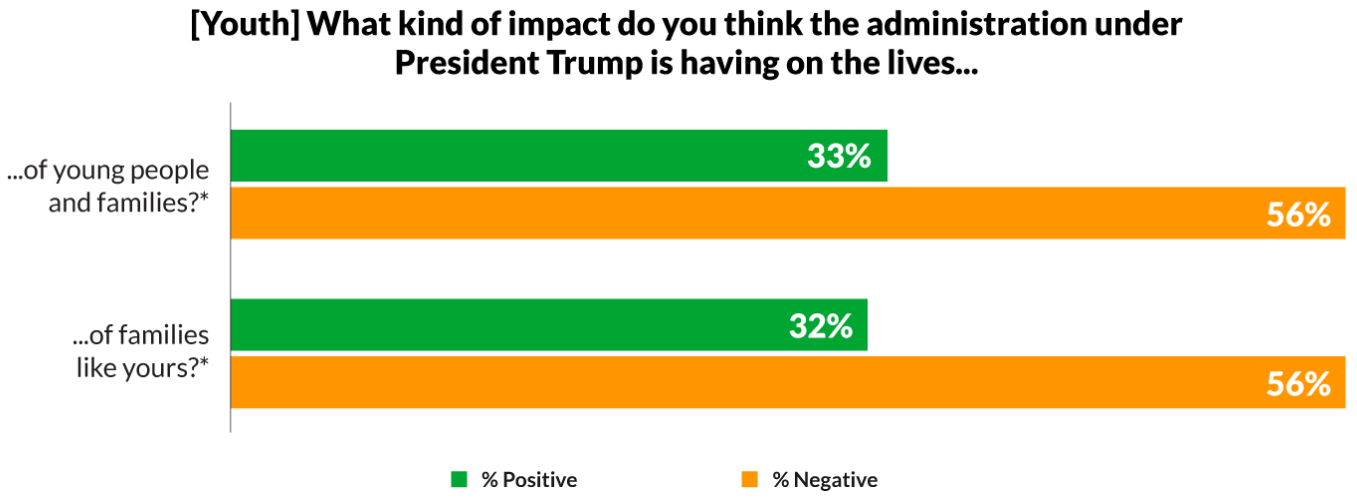
[Parents] What kind of impact do you think the administration under President Trump is having on the lives of …

	…young people and families*			…families like yours*		
	Positive	Negative	Margin	Positive	Negative	Margin
White parents	50%	42%	+8	45%	46%	-1
Black parents	29%	64%	-34	25%	66%	-41
Latino parents	33%	59%	-27	30%	63%	-33
AAPI parents^	35%	54%	-19	26%	48%	-22

Kids and teens are significantly more negative in their views of the Trump administration's impact on the lives of young people and families (56% negative) and on the lives of families like theirs (56% negative).

Figure 27: Percentage of youth who believe the Trump administration is having a positive or negative impact on the lives…

** Split sampled.*



As with parents, there are divides in race/ethnicity among kids and teens as well.

Table 11: Percentage of youth, by gender and race/ethnicity, who believe the Trump administration is having a positive or negative impact on the lives of…
** Split sampled.*

[Youth] What kind of impact do you think the administration under President Trump is having on the lives of …

	...young people and families*			...families like yours*		
	Positive	Negative	Margin	Positive	Negative	Margin
Boys	38%	52%	-14	34%	55%	-21
Girls	29%	59%	-30	30%	55%	-26
White youth	40%	51%	-11	39%	47%	-8
Black youth	18%	67%	-50	13%	77%	-64
Latino youth	32%	58%	-26	27%	63%	-36
AAPI youth	30%	55%	-24	30%	55%	-24

Kids and teens think the government needs to do a better job of reflecting them and their needs. Seven in 10 (70%) kids and teens think that politicians and elected officials are not doing well at reflecting the needs, desires, and experiences of young people in this country. Only 22% think politicians and elected officials reflect the needs, desires, and experiences of young people well.

A majority of parents and kids and teens feel their voice matters only a little or doesn't matter at all in decisions made by government. **Kids and teens are less likely than parents to think their voice matters in decisions made by government.** Only 29% of kids and teens believe their voice matters, and 68% of kids and teens say their voice does not matter; 54% of parents say their voice does not matter in decisions made by their local government, and 55% say their voice does not matter in decisions made by the federal government.

Republican parents are more likely than Democratic or independent parents to say their voice matters. Independent parents are feeling especially neglected.

Table 12: Percentage of parents, by party identification, who feel their voice matters in decisions made by…
** Split sampled.*

How much do you feel your voice matters in decisions made by…

	...your local government*			...the federal government*		
	Matters	Does not matter	Margin	Matters	Does not matter	Margin
Dem. parents	41%	57%	-15	41%	57%	-16
Ind./DK parents	31%	63%	-31	28%	67%	-40
Rep. parents	52%	46%	+6	50%	49%	+1

Increasing Government Investment and Policymaking

Across party, parents believe both the federal government and their state government spend too little on programs that benefit children and youth. Over two-thirds (68%) think the federal government spends too little on programs that benefit children and youth, and 61% think their state government spends too little. Democratic and independent parents overwhelmingly believe that the federal government is spending too little.

Table 13: Percentage of parents, by party identification, who think government spends too much, too little, or about the right amount on programs that benefit children and youth.
** Split sampled.*

Do you think the [federal/state] government spends too much, too little, or about the right amount on programs that benefit children and youth?

	...the federal government*				...your state government*			
	All parents	Dem. parents	Ind./DK parents	Rep. parents	All parents	Dem. parents	Ind./DK parents	Rep. parents
Too much	8%	6%	7%	11%	10%	3%	8%	17%
Too little	**68%**	**83%**	**78%**	**50%**	**61%**	**74%**	**72%**	**47%**
About the right amount	17%	7%	6%	31%	19%	15%	10%	29%

Parents and youth alike want the government to prioritize making policies that benefit younger people in the country over the next four years. Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) parents think the federal government should prioritize making policies that benefit younger people in this country over the next four years, including 44% who say this should be a top priority. Similarly, 87% of parents think state and local governments should prioritize making policies that benefit younger people in this country over the next four years, including 46% who say this should be a top priority.

Table 14: Percentage of parents, by party identification, who believe government should prioritize policies that benefit younger people.
** Split sampled.*

Over the next four years, how much of a priority do you think … should place on making policies that benefit younger people in this country?

	...the federal government*			...your state government*		
	Dem. parents	Ind./DK parents	Rep. parents	Dem. parents	Ind./DK parents	Rep. parents
Should be a top priority	45%	48%	40%	54%	40%	41%
Should be a priority	85%	90%	93%	91%	81%	87%

Similarly, 9 in 10 (90%) kids and teens think that the government should place a priority on making policies that benefit younger people in the country, with 47% who say it should be a top priority. Across age cohorts and race/ethnicity, close to 9 in 10 kids and teens want the government to prioritize policies that benefit young people.

Table 15: Percentage of youth, by age and race/ethnicity, who believe government should prioritize policies that benefit younger people.

Over the next four years, how much of a priority do you think the government should place on making policies that benefit younger people in this country?

	All youth	12–14	15–17	White youth	Black youth	Latino youth	AAPI youth
Should be a top priority	47%	47%	46%	40%	56%	54%	50%
Should be a priority	90%	89%	92%	91%	91%	89%	89%

Over three-quarters of parents agree that families need more economic assistance from the government to get by in the early years of a child's life (78% agree, 38% strongly) and when their children are teens and young adults (73% agree, 35% strongly). This agreement with the need for more government economic assistance for families at different stages of life crosses subgroups.

Table 16: Percentage of parents, by age of child, race/ethnicity, and party identification, who believe government should prioritize policies that benefit younger people.

** Split sampled.*

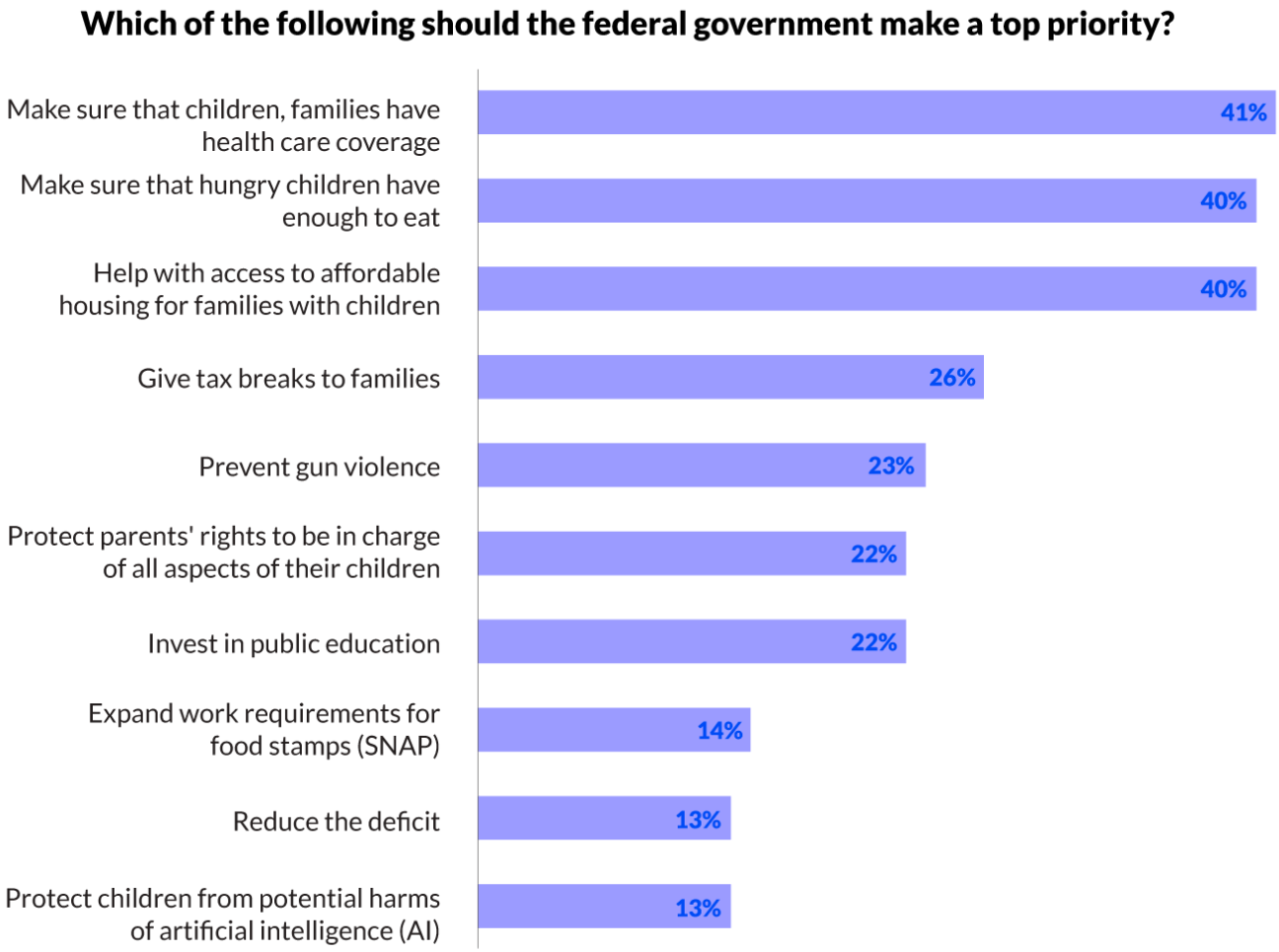
^ Note: small sample size.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Families need more economic assistance from the government to get by in the early years of a child's life*		Families need more economic assistance from the government to get by when their children are teens and young adults*	
	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Parents	38%	78%	35%	73%
Parents of child <18	43%	85%	43%	80%
Parents of child 12–17	48%	85%	44%	87%
Parents of child 18+	31%	70%	27%	66%
White parents	35%	75%	33%	72%
Black parents	45%	90%	46%	67%
Latino parents	42%	80%	41%	83%
AAPI parents^	31%	84%	33%	70%
Dem. parents	51%	92%	45%	77%
Ind./DK parents	32%	71%	41%	75%
Rep. parents	29%	69%	26%	68%

Parents want to see the federal government prioritize ensuring that families can meet their basic needs. Parents believe the government should make the following a top priority: making sure that children and families have health care coverage (41% selected this as a top priority), making sure that hungry children have enough to eat (40%), and helping with access to affordable housing for families with children (40%). Lower tier priorities include giving tax breaks to families (26%), preventing gun violence (23%), protecting parents' rights to be in charge of all aspects of the upbringing, education, and health of their children (22%), and investing in public education (22%).

Figure 28: Percentage of parents who think the federal government should prioritize…



Parents across party lines find common ground in the government prioritizing health, hunger, and housing.

Table 17: Parents' top priorities for the federal government, by party identification.

Which of the following should the federal government make a top priority?

Democratic parents	Independent parents	Republican parents
• Make sure that children and families have health care coverage **(50%)** • Help with access to affordable housing for families with children **(45%)**	• Help with access to affordable housing for families with children **(45%)** • Make sure that hungry children have enough to eat **(42%)**	• Make sure that hungry children have enough to eat **(38%)** • Make sure that children and families have health care coverage **(35%)** • Help with access to affordable housing for families with children **(33%)**

White, Latino, and AAPI parents find common ground in the government prioritizing health care coverage. White, Black, and Latino parents find common ground in the government prioritizing affordable housing for families.

Table 18: Parents' top priorities for the federal government, by race/ethnicity.

Which of the following should the federal government make a top priority?

White parents	Black parents	Latino parents	AAPI parents
• Make sure that children and families have health care coverage **(41%)** • Make sure that hungry children have enough to eat **(41%)** • Help with access to affordable housing for families with children **(38%)**	• Help with access to affordable housing for families with children **(43%)**	• Help with access to affordable housing for families with children **(45%)** • Make sure that children and families have health care coverage **(43%)**	• Make sure that children and families have health care coverage **(47%)**

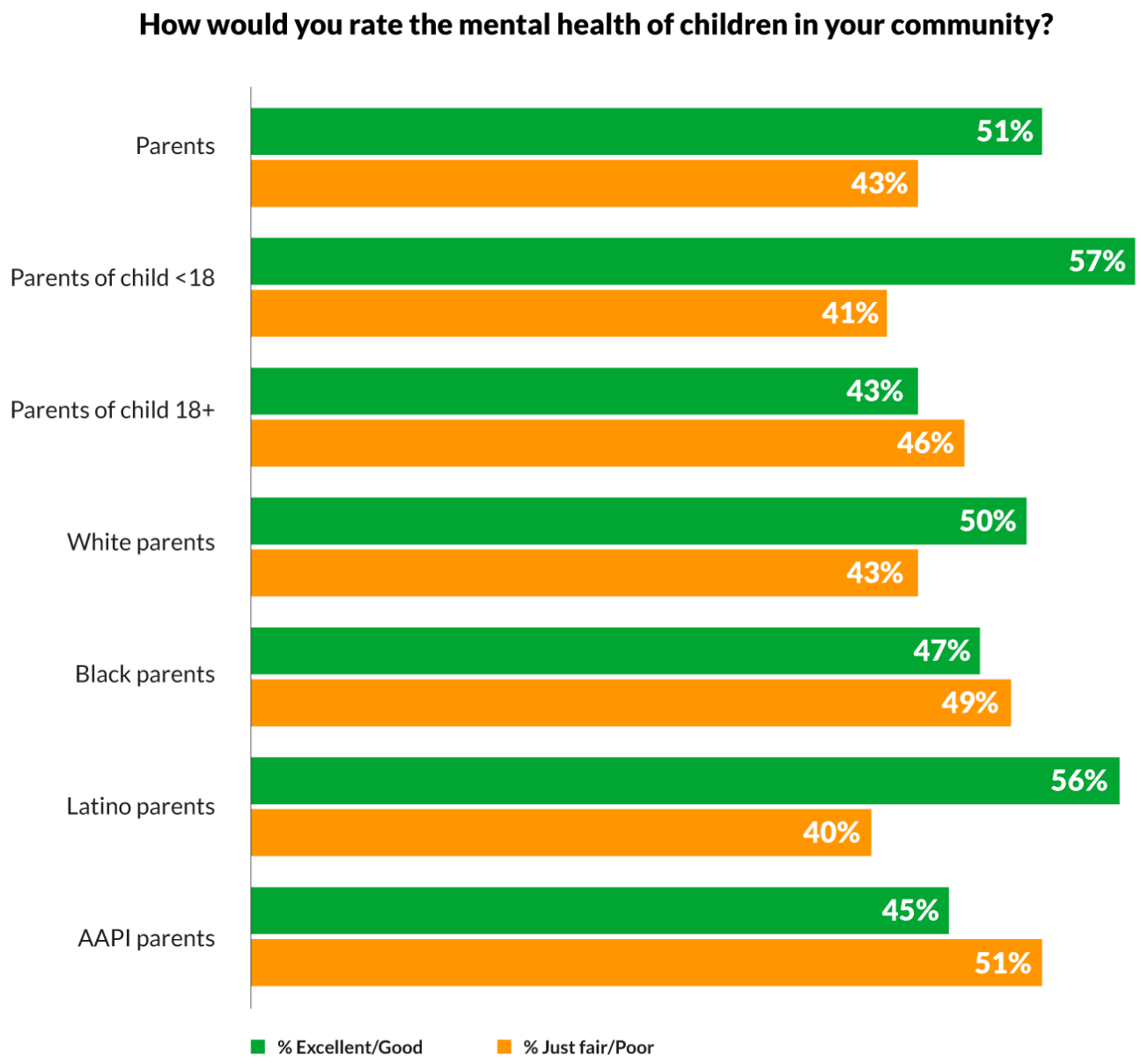
Role for Religion

Parents believe increasing religious participation is part of the solution. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of parents believe that more participation in religious activities would make the lives of American children better off, and 30% think this would make their lives much better off. Every subgroup of parents think more participation in religious activities would make the lives of children better off.

Mental Health Concerns Remain a Prevalent Worry

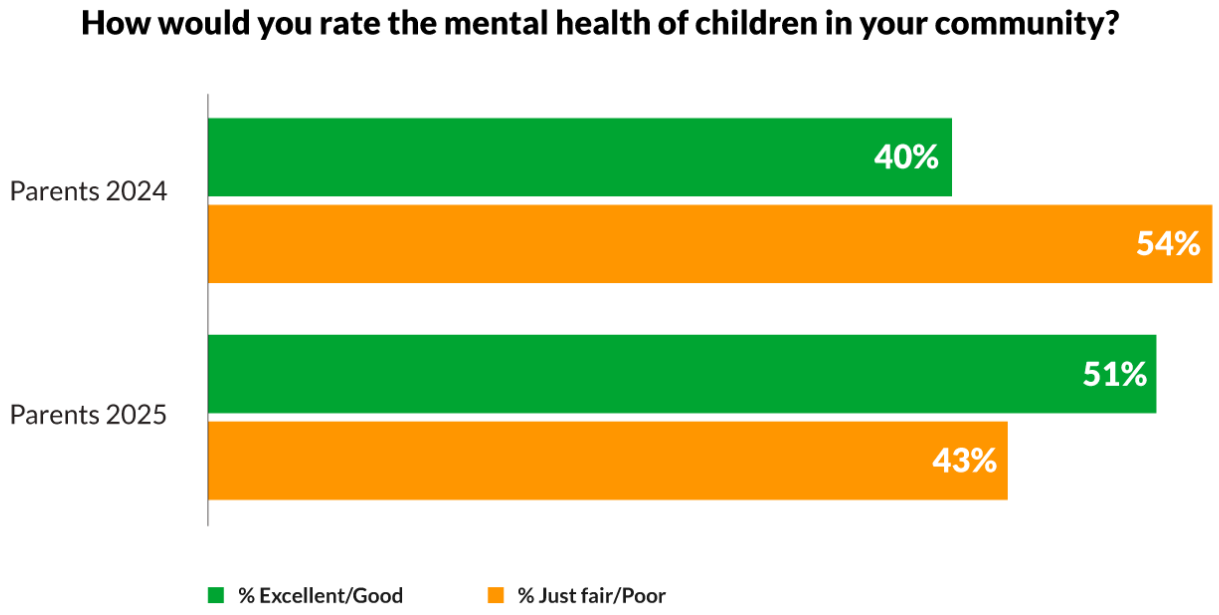
About half (51%) of parents rate the mental health of children in their community as excellent/good, though 43% rate it as just fair/poor. Parents of children 18 and older are more mixed in their assessment of children's mental health. Parents of children under 18 rate children's mental health positively. White and Latino parents rate children's mental health positively, Asian American and Pacific Islander parents lean toward a negative rating, and Black parents feel ambivalent.

Figure 29: Percentage of parents, by age of child and race/ethnicity, who rate the mental health of children in their community positively or negatively.



Compared to the last survey, parents are more likely to rate the mental health of children in their community as excellent/good.

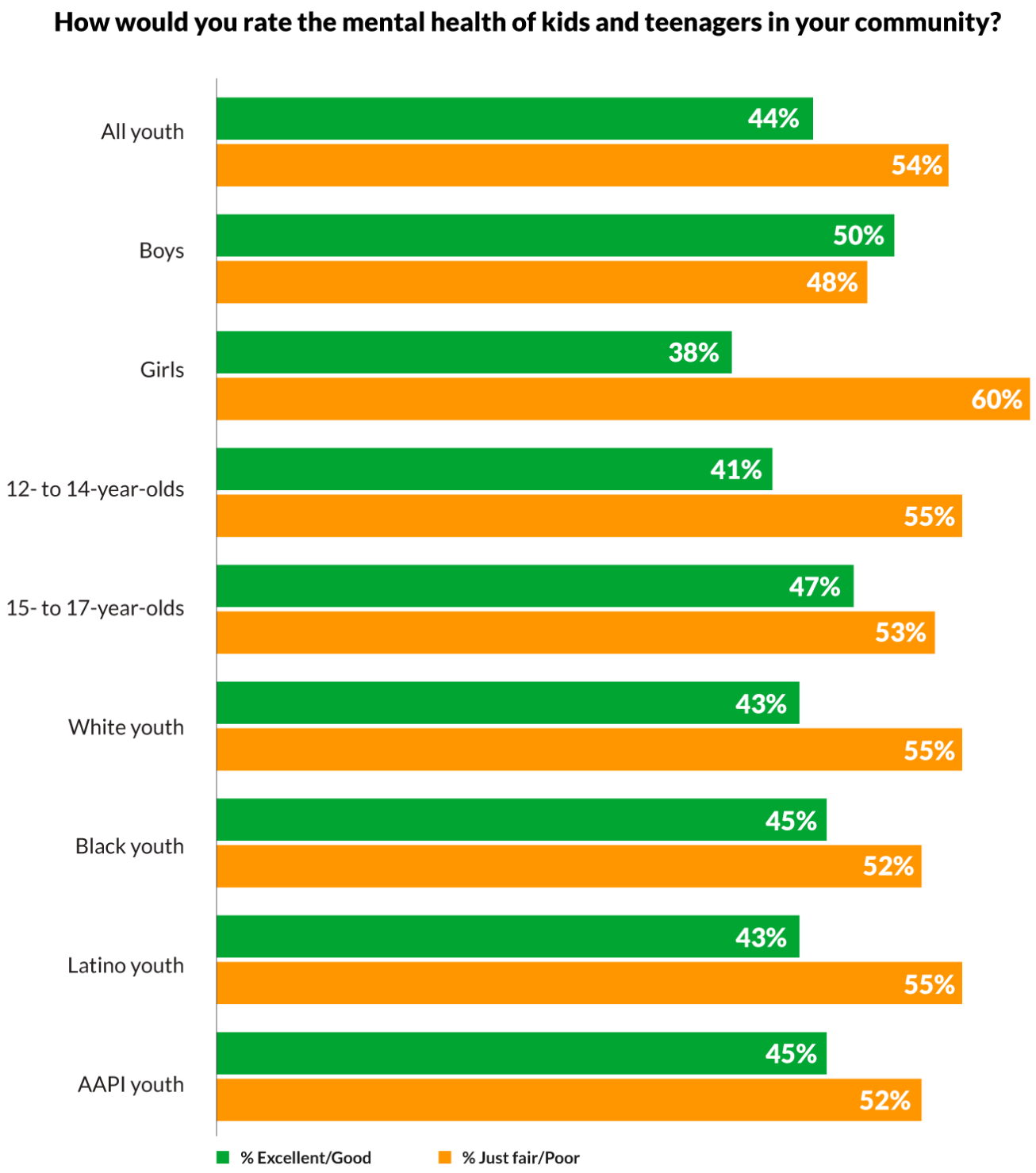
Figure 30: Percentage of parents who rated the mental health of children in their community positively or negatively in 2024 and 2025.



Mental health is a serious issue for kids and teens. A majority (54%) of kids and teens rate the mental health of kids and teens in their community as just fair (36%) or poor (18%). Only 7% rate it as excellent, and 37% rate it as good.

A significant gender gap exists in kids' and teen's ratings of youth mental health. Girls rate the mental health of kids in their community as worse than boys (60% of girls say just fair/poor vs. 48% of boys). There are fewer differences by age or race/ethnicity.

Figure 31: Percentage of youth, by gender, age, and race/ethnicity, who rate the mental health of children in their community positively or negatively.



Social Media Use Seen as a Root Cause of the Crisis

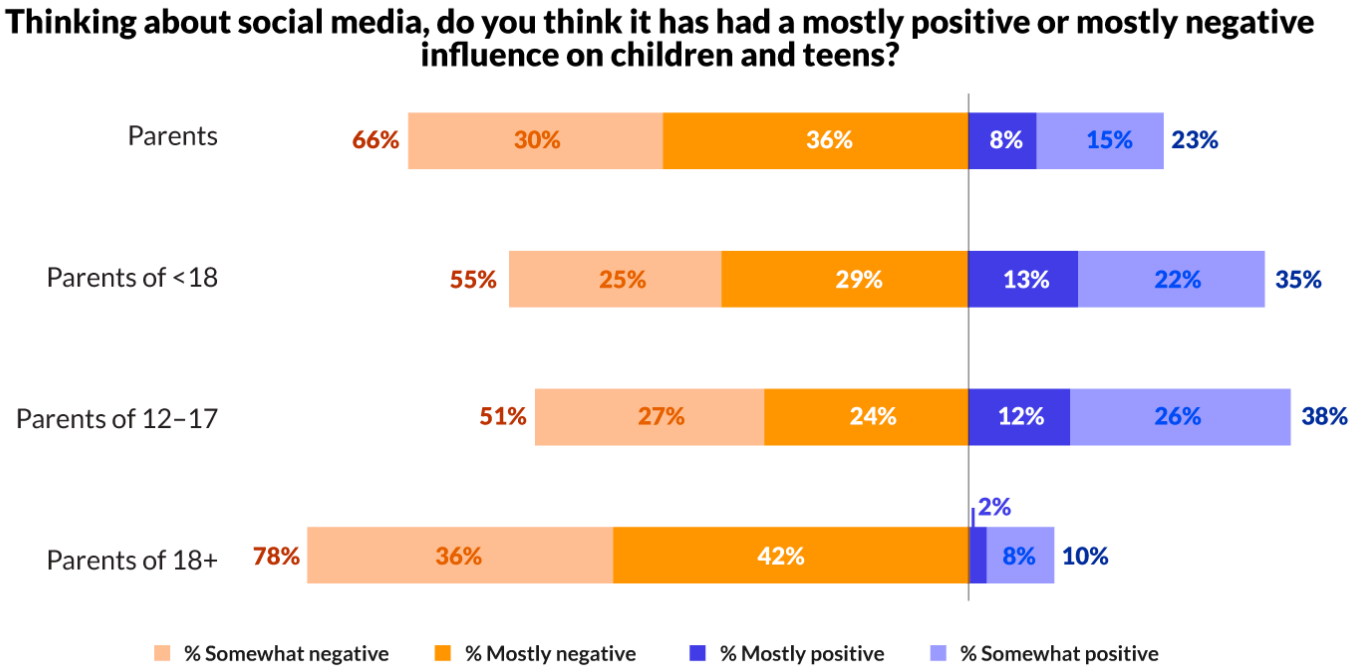
Parents still see social media, technology, and screen time as a main cause of today's mental health crisis (30% identify this as a main cause), followed by lack of parental support and involvement (15%), stigma, lack of knowledge, or scarce mental health resources (13%), poverty, the current economy, and lack of access to necessities (11%), and bullying (10%).

Kids' and teens' top perceived cause of the mental health crisis is "the negative impact of social media and the internet" (32%), followed by "bullying and discrimination" (20%) and lack of parental/adult support (17%).

Parents believe that less use of social media and smartphones would make the lives of American children better off: 82% say their lives would be better off, including 45% who say they would be much better off. Every demographic and attitudinal subgroup of parents thinks less social media and smartphone use would improve the lives of kids.

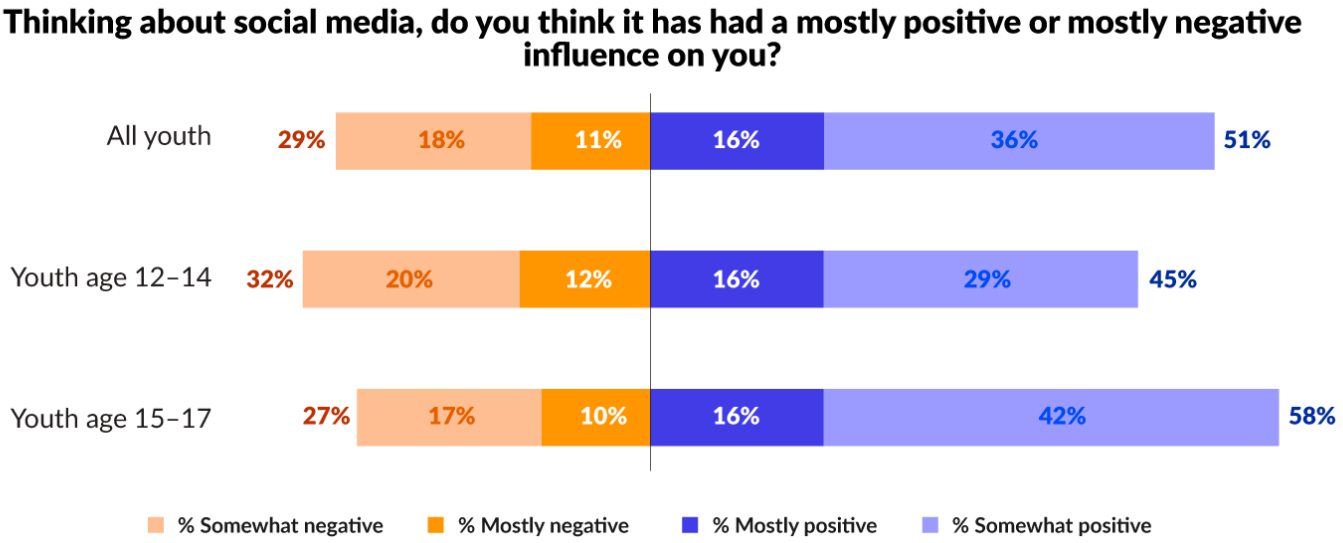
By about a three to one margin, parents think social media has had a mostly negative influence (66%) on children and teens rather than a mostly positive one (23%). Regardless of the age of their children, parents believe social media has had a negative influence on children and teens. Parents of older children are especially likely to believe the impact has been negative overall.

Figure 32: Percentage of parents, by age of child, who think social media has had a mostly positive or mostly negative influence on children and teens.



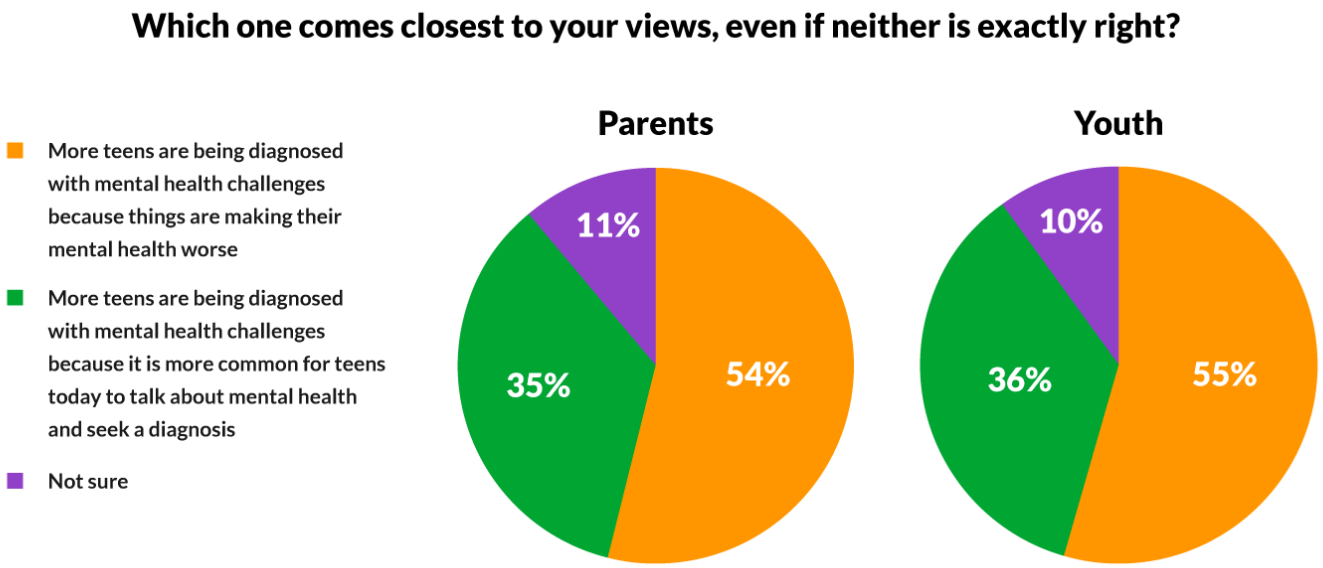
Conversely, kids and teens say social media's influence on their generation has been mostly positive, although kids and teens age 12 to 14 are less likely than kids and teens age 15 to 17 to see the influence as positive.

Figure 33: Percentage of youth, by age, who think social media has had a mostly positive or mostly negative influence on them.



The rise in mental health diagnoses is attributed more to rising challenges facing mental health, rather than changing norms around diagnosis. Parents attribute the rise in teens being diagnosed with mental health challenges more to "things making their mental health worse" (54%) rather than "it is more common for teens today to talk about mental health and seek a diagnosis" (35%). Kids and teens also think it is more likely that more teens are being diagnosed with mental health challenges because things are making their mental health worse (55%) versus teens being diagnosed because it is more common for teens today to talk about mental health and seek a diagnosis (36%).

Figure 34: Percentage of parents and youth who think the increase in diagnosis is due to external things worsening mental health or who think it is due to increased comfort with seeking care.



Across age of child, kids' and teens' ages, and race/ethnicity, people ascribe the rise in mental health diagnoses to external challenges that worsen mental health.

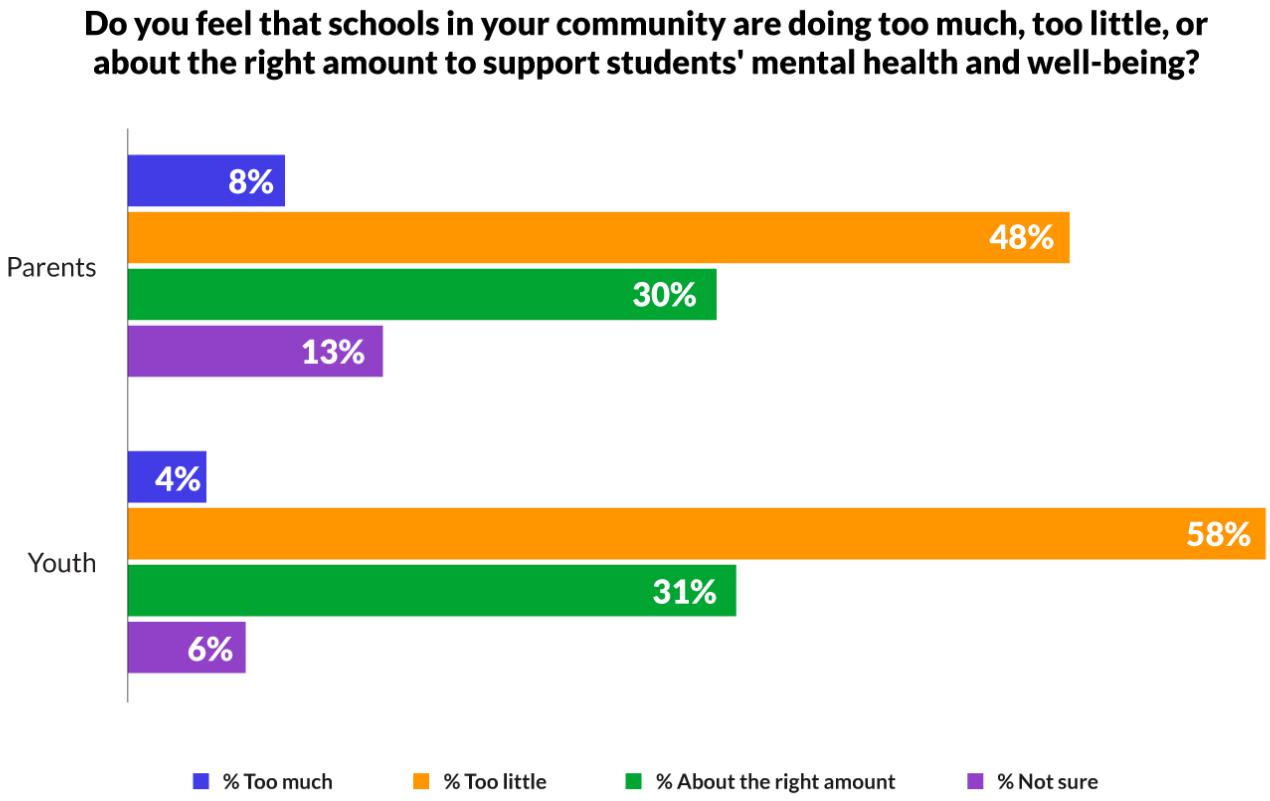
Table 19: Percentage of parents and youth, by subgroups, who think the increase in diagnosis is due to external things worsening mental health or who think it is due to increased comfort with seeking care.

More teens are being diagnosed with mental health challenges because ...

	...things are making their mental health worse	...it is more common for teens today to talk about mental health and seek a diagnosis	Margin
Parents	54%	35%	+20
Parents of child <18	54%	39%	+15
Parents of child 12–17	55%	36%	+18
Parents of child 18+	54%	30%	+24
White parents	55%	34%	+20
Black parents	55%	36%	+17
Latino parents	53%	37%	+17
AAPI parents	54%	36%	+18
Youth	55%	36%	+19
12- to 14-year-olds	54%	35%	+18
15- to 17-year-olds	56%	36%	+20
White youth	55%	35%	+19
Black youth	49%	42%	+7
Latino youth	56%	34%	+22
AAPI youth	65%	28%	+37

Parents and youth believe that schools still have more to do to adequately meet students' mental health needs. Kids and teens are clear that schools in their communities are doing too little (58%) to support students' mental health and well-being, and only a third (31%) say schools are doing about the right amount. Parents—especially Black parents (57%)—also say that the schools in their communities are doing too little (48%) to support students' mental health and well-being.

Figure 35: Percentage of parents and youth who feel schools in their communities are doing too much, too little, or about the right amount to support students' mental health and well-being.

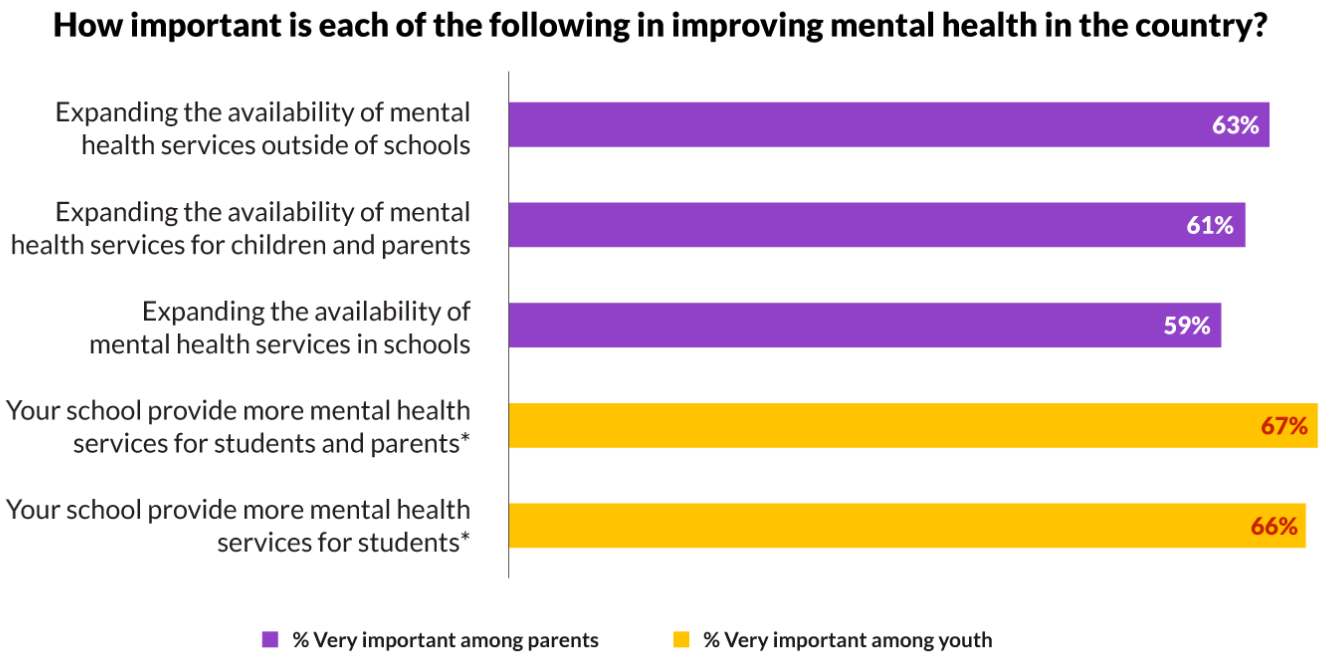


Parents believe children need better access to mental health care. Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) parents believe children would be better off with better access to mental health care, and over half (55%) think they would be much better off.

Parents and kids and teens value expansions of mental health services. In order to improve mental health in the country, parents as well as kids and teens believe it is important to expand the availability of mental health services both inside and outside of schools, as well as to expand the availability of mental health services for children and parents.

Kids and teens think it is important for their school to provide mental health services for students* (66% say this is very important; 92% say important) and for students and parents* (67% very important; 89% important).

Figure 36: Percentage of parents and youth who believe it is important to expand mental health availability.
** Split sampled.*



Conclusion

Today's kids and teens are our nation's future. The parents who are raising these young people are tasked with the enormous job of laying a firm foundation for their families. But they can't do it alone—as challenges new and old present themselves, our surveys show they are looking for support as they build their families and their lives.

Some of the challenges American families are facing have faced families for decades, if not centuries: the need to have food on the table, to have a roof over one's head, to have health care. But some are new and rapidly evolving. Changes in our economy have raised doubts about whether the next generation will be able to buy that first home or save for their future. Smartphones and social media have introduced new mental health challenges. Parents of kids over age 18 report seeing the struggles their own kids are experiencing as they enter adulthood, and are routinely among the more pessimistic people in our surveys. Girls feel less positive than boys about the present and the future, and more negatively about the mental health of their peers, though the reasons for this are unclear and invite further investigation.

Through all of this, the kids and teens themselves—as well as the parents of today's kids and teens—feel some sense of positivity about the future. They have hope that things will improve, and faith in today's young people to overcome the obstacles coming their way. While there is clearly a lot to worry about regarding young people today, there is also optimism for a future that is not yet written.

But even that optimism doesn't absolve policymakers from hearing their concerns. Across the board, American families feel they aren't being heard by leaders. And across party lines, they're asking policymakers for help making sure that families can afford the most critical things they need. From health care to housing, as prices rise and families feel a financial struggle, they are looking for leaders who see and hear their concerns.

We present this report to guide policymakers, employers, tech companies, educators, and communities in navigating these challenges. In these divisive times, parents and youth share similar goals, hopes, and aspirations for a brighter tomorrow.

Methodology

Parent survey: Lake Research Partners, in partnership with Echelon Insights, designed and administered this online survey, which was conducted from November 17 to 26, 2025. The survey reached a total of 1,244 parents nationwide, which includes a base sample of 843 parents, with oversamples of 100 Black, 100 Latino, and 101 Asian American and Pacific Islander parents and 100 parents of children age 12 to 17. The oversamples were weighed down into the base sample to their proper proportion of the universe for a total sample size of 843.

Kid and teenager survey: Lake Research Partners, in partnership with Echelon Insights, designed and administered this online survey, which was conducted from November 17 to 28, 2025. The survey reached a total of 1,100 kids and teens age 12 to 17 nationwide, which includes a base sample of 800 kids and teens, with oversamples of 100 Black, 100 Latino, and 100 Asian American and Pacific Islander kids and teens. The oversamples were weighed down into the base sample to their proper proportion of the universe for a total sample size of 800.

Quantitative results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not sum or add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses.

Split-sampled questions marked with an asterisk (*) are instances of controlled language experiments, where half of the respondents read one version of a question and the other half read another version—and we controlled for demographic, regional, and partisan variables.

To refer collectively to kid and teenager participants, we also use the terms *youth* and *young people*.

About Lake Research Partners

Lake Research Partners is a nationally recognized qualitative and quantitative research firm with over 25 years of experience in all phases of public opinion research for public entities and private enterprises. LRP's principals are leading strategists with experience serving as tacticians and senior advisors to a wide range of government agencies, advocacy groups, universities, labor unions, nonprofits, and foundations across the United States. LRP is a Woman-Owned Small Business (WOSB) and is certified through the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce.

About Echelon Insights

Echelon Insights is an opinion research and analytical intelligence firm based in Alexandria, Virginia, known for providing strategic guidance to brands, political organizations, advocacy groups, and nonprofits. Founded in 2014, Echelon Insights has stayed on the cutting edge of polling and data analysis, and in 2022 was ranked as one of the most accurate pollsters in the 2022 election cycle by FiveThirtyEight's analysis.

About Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is the leading nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the research-backed information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in the age of apps, algorithms, and AI. We rate, educate, and advocate for policies to protect and prepare kids online. Our ratings, research, and resources reach more than 150 million users globally, over 1.4 million educators, and more than 100,000 schools worldwide every year. Learn more at commonsense.org/research.

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