GALLUP | WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY VOICE

How Being Heard Expands Opportunity



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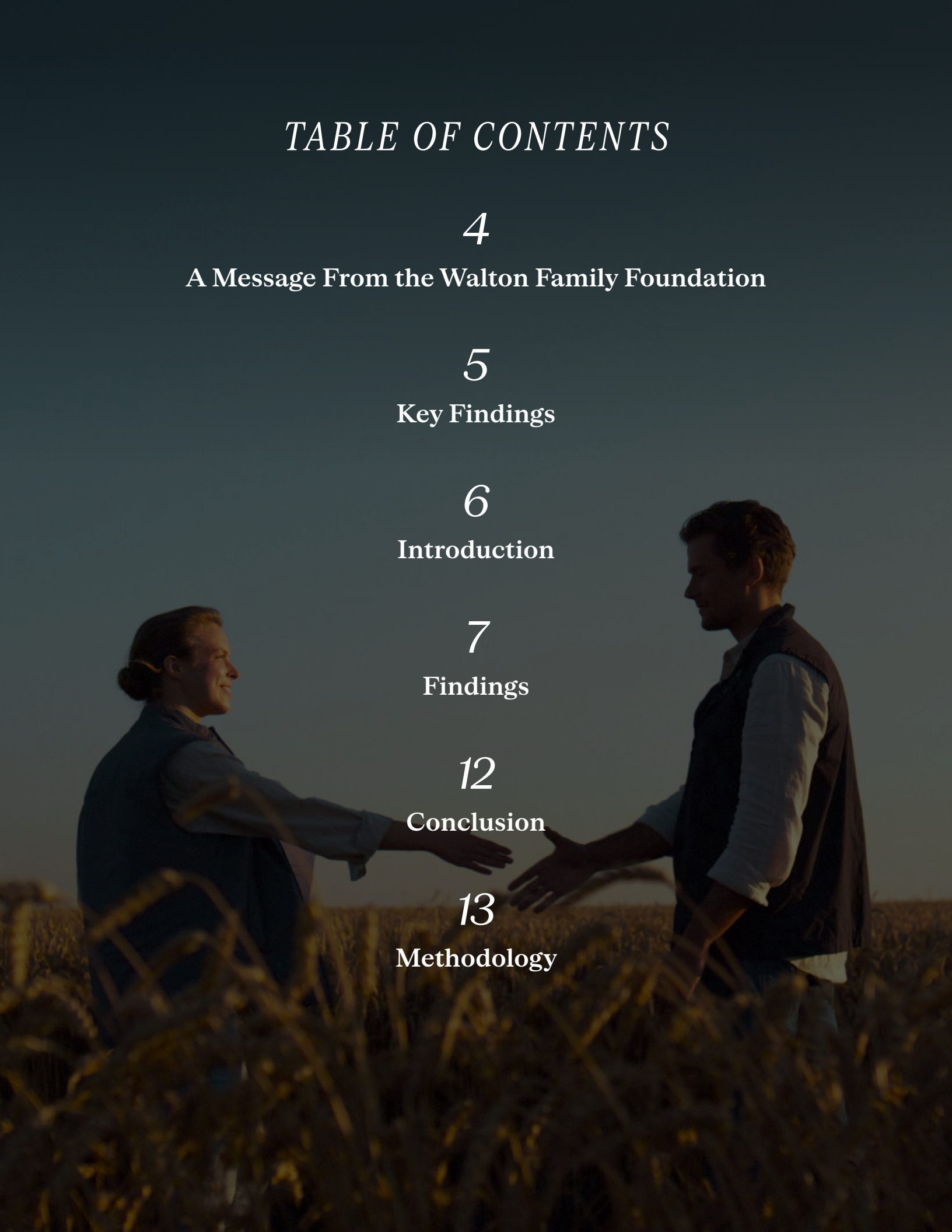
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A Message From the Walton Family Foundation





Building a stronger future for our communities often begins with an idea. A teacher who sees the promise of new tools that could help students learn and grow. A fisher who imagines more sustainable practices that will support livelihoods in their community for generations to come. Parents who advocate for sidewalks to give children a safer way to get to the park. Each sees the potential for something better. And when people believe their voices matter and are empowered to act, those possibilities can become reality.

Our Gallup-Walton Family Foundation research finds something powerful: Americans want to invest in the places they call home and build stronger, more resilient communities. But that desire to contribute doesn't always come with confidence that they will be heard — or that they have a voice in shaping their community's future. When Americans believe their ideas matter and that someone is willing to listen, more than 70% say they're motivated to give back to their towns or cities.

At the Walton Family Foundation, we've long believed that those closest to the challenges are also closest to the solutions. We've seen firsthand that when we listen to the people who know their communities best, we can help turn their ideas into lasting change.

That's why listening to their experiences and learning from their expertise is central to how we work. That means trusting educators to try new approaches and tailor instruction to meet students' individual needs. It means drawing on the knowledge of local farmers and conservationists to find new ways to protect water and address climate change. And it means working alongside community leaders to create more vibrant public spaces and expand opportunities for families to build financial stability.

> *Every community is different, and so are the solutions that work for them. But the belief that guides our philanthropy remains constant: Communities grow stronger when people have a voice and a way to contribute.*

Americans want to help build a better future in the places they call home. Yet fewer than half feel like they have a voice in the local decisions that matter. Progress happens when we create the conditions that encourage and empower them to shape what's next. That's when opportunity takes root.

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Key Findings





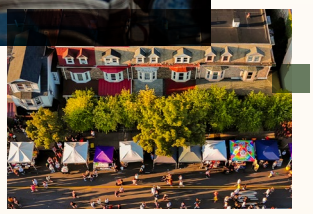
- **Americans see considerable value in the places where they live.** Seven in 10 adults (72%) agree their community is worth investing in, three in five (60%) agree they feel hopeful about its future, and half (50%) agree their town or city is moving in a positive direction.
- **Many Americans also want to help make their communities better.** About half (49%) agree they feel a strong sense of responsibility to help improve their town or city, and 46% agree they feel motivated to give back.
- **Fewer Americans are confident they can help shape local solutions,** an important part of how communities can support opportunity. Forty-two percent agree that people like them have a voice in local decisions that matter, and 34% agree that someone would listen if they had an idea for improving their town or city. Among those who agree someone would listen, 71% also agree they feel motivated to give back, compared with 33% of those who neither agree nor disagree or who disagree.
- **Americans have mixed views of their communities' preparedness for the future,** another key condition that shapes Americans' opportunity. Four in 10 adults (40%) agree their town or city is prepared to handle future challenges. Motivation to give back is higher among residents who agree their community is prepared than among those who neither agree nor disagree or who disagree (60% vs. 36%).
- **Younger adults are less positive about several aspects of their communities,** even though their motivation to contribute is similar to that of older adults. Adults aged 18 to 34 are less likely than adults 55 or older to agree that their community is worth investing in (64% vs. 76%), that someone would listen to their ideas (30% vs. 38%) or that their community is prepared for future challenges (38% vs. 45%). Agreement that they feel motivated to give back is nearly the same, at 45% and 47%, respectively.

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Introduction





Americans Believe in the Places Where They Live

> *Seven in 10 adults agree their community is worth investing in, three in five agree they feel hopeful about its future, and nearly half agree they feel motivated to give back.*

That belief in community connects to a larger question about opportunity. In Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation's research on opportunity in America, a central measure is agency: whether people feel able to shape their own path even when life is difficult. The research also finds that agency is linked to the conditions people experience where they live, reinforcing that opportunity is shaped not only by individual circumstances but also by communities.

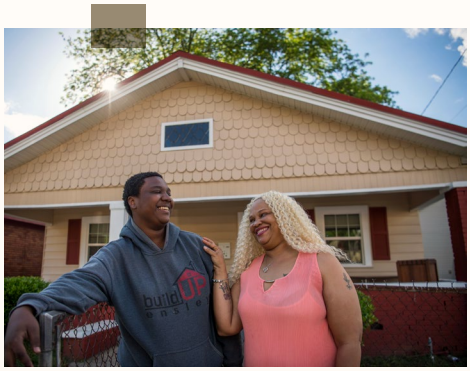
This report looks at a related part of that experience. Rather than measuring agency itself, it asks what happens when residents want to help improve their communities. Do they believe their ideas will be heard? Do they believe their towns and cities are prepared for future challenges? And how are those views related to their willingness to give back? To explore those questions, Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation surveyed 6,732 U.S. adults through the Gallup Panel from Feb. 26 to March 6, 2026.

The findings reveal both willingness and uncertainty. Many Americans want to contribute to the places where they live, but fewer believe someone would listen if they had an idea for improvement, and only four in 10 agree their community is prepared for future challenges. Younger adults are just as motivated as older adults to give back, even as they are less positive about whether their communities are worth investing in, whether their ideas will be heard and whether their communities are prepared for what comes next.

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Findings



Americans Believe Their Communities Are Worth Investing In

Seven in 10 adults (72%) agree the area where they live is worth investing in. Views of how their communities are doing today are more mixed. Half (50%) agree their town or city is moving in a positive direction, while 21% disagree and 29% neither agree nor disagree.

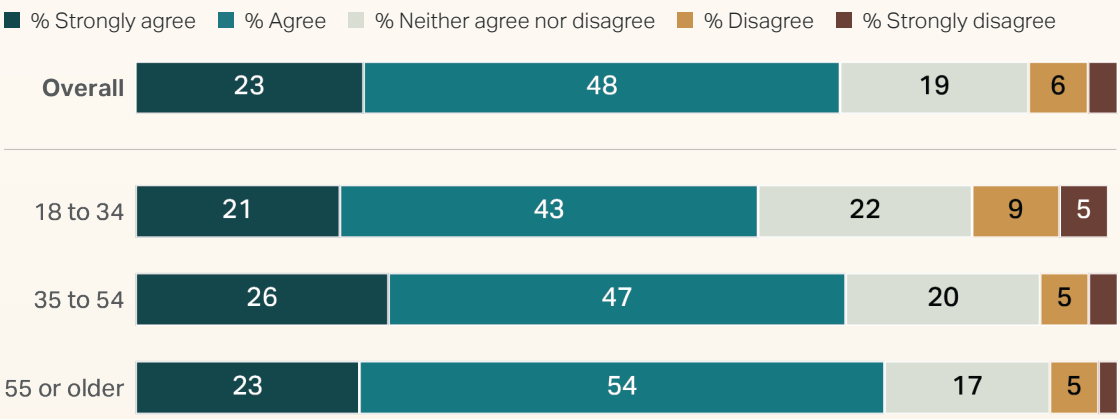


Older adults are more likely than younger adults to see their communities as worth investing in. Among adults aged 18 to 34, 64% agree the area where they live is worth investing in, compared with 76% of adults 55 or older.

CHART 1

American Perceptions of the Long-Term Value of Their Communities

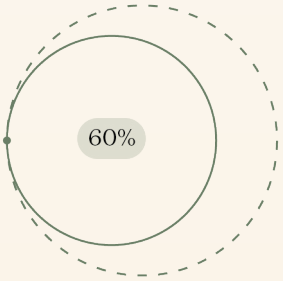
The area where I live is worth investing in.



Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding. Data labels less than 4% are not displayed.

Totals of response percentages are calculated based on addition prior to rounding. As such, totals listed in text may vary by ±1 percentage point from totals derived by adding rounded values.

Click this link to view the full dataset.



Hope for the future follows a similar pattern. Three in five adults (60%) agree they feel hopeful about the future of the area where they live, including 54% of adults aged 18 to 34, 59% of those aged 35 to 54 and 66% of adults 55 or older.

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Willingness to Contribute Is Similar Across Age Groups

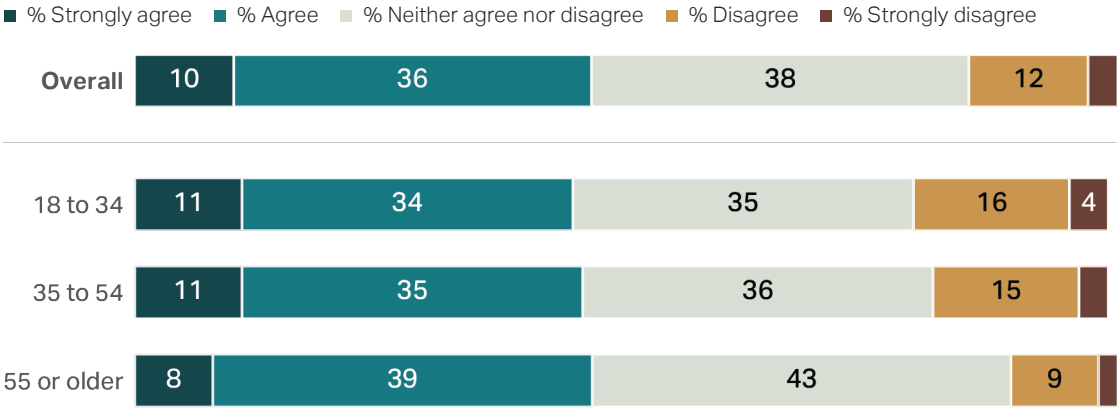
About half of Americans agree they feel a strong sense of responsibility to help make their town or city better (49%), and nearly as many agree they feel motivated to give back (46%).

Motivation to give back is similar across age groups. Forty-five percent of adults aged 18 to 34 agree they feel motivated to contribute, compared with 46% of those aged 35 to 54 and 47% of adults 55 or older. Younger adults are less likely than older adults to see their communities as worth investing in and to feel hopeful about their future, but they are just as likely to want to help make them better.

CHART 2

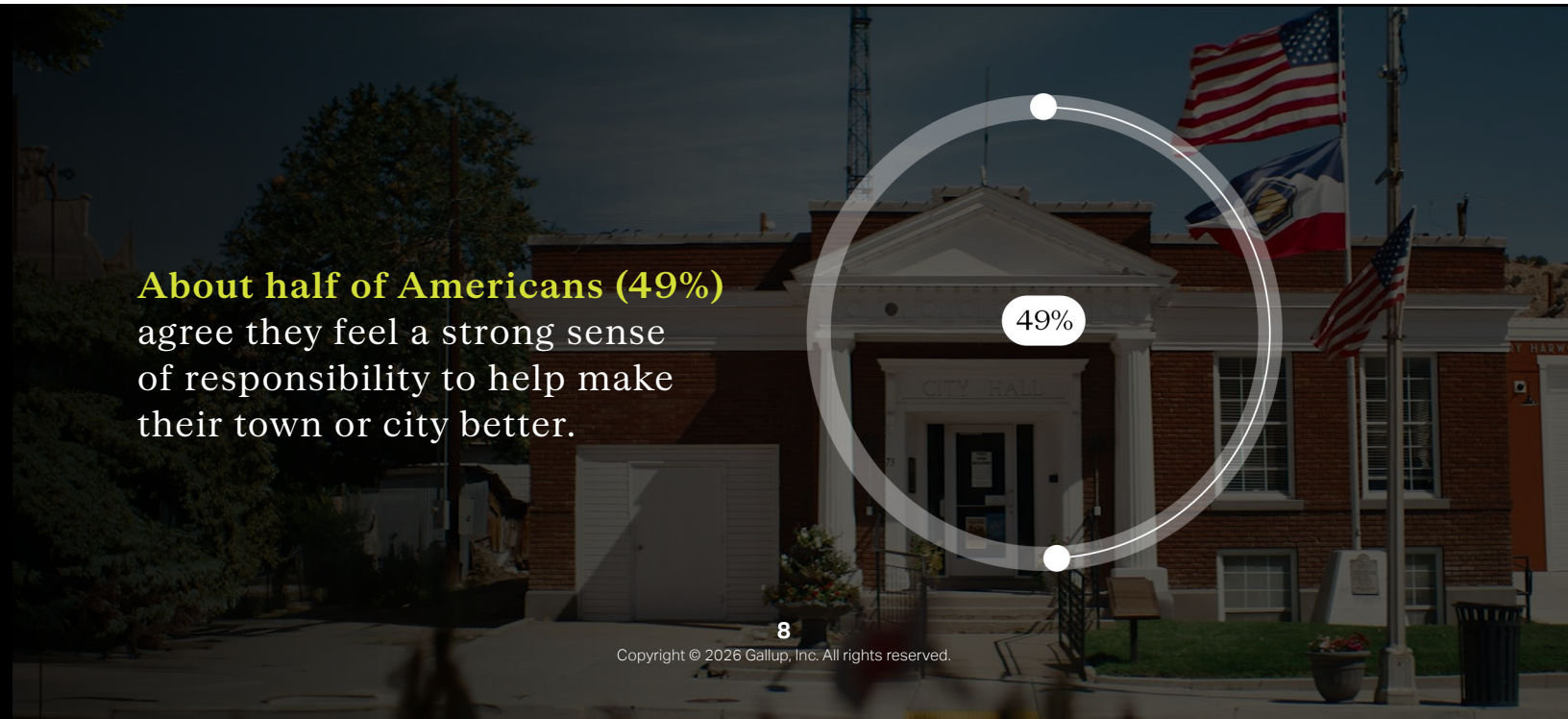
Americans' Motivation to Give Back to Their Communities

I feel motivated to give back to my town or city.



Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding. Data labels less than 4% are not displayed.

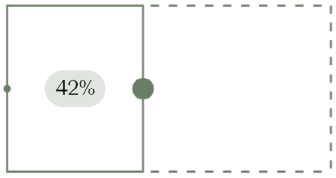
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Few Americans Believe They Would Be Heard

Wanting to help is only part of participating in community life. Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation's broader research on opportunity finds that communities can support residents' sense of agency when people have meaningful ways to contribute ideas and suggest local solutions. Whether residents expect those ideas to be heard is an important part of that experience.



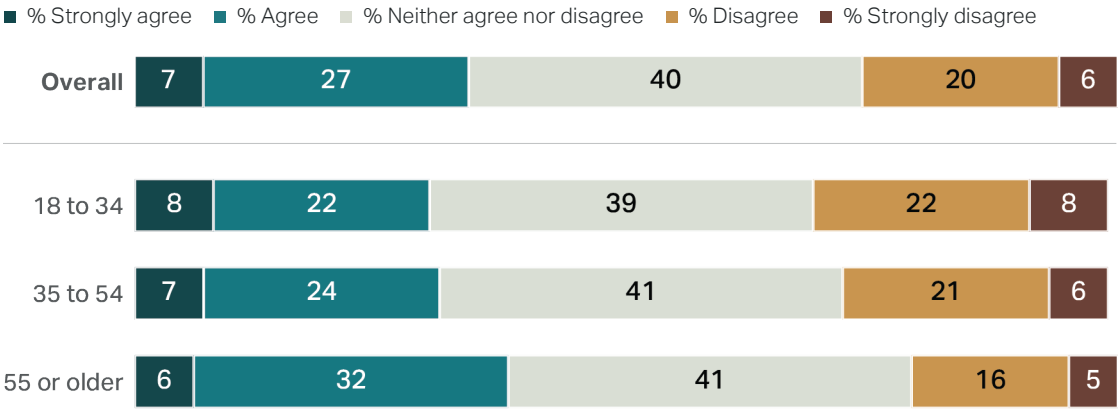
Fewer than half of Americans (42%) agree that people like them have a voice in local decisions that matter, and just one in three (34%) agree that someone would listen if they had an idea to improve their town or city.

Adults under 55 are less likely than older adults to expect someone to listen to an idea for improving their community. Thirty percent of adults aged 18 to 34 and 32% of those aged 35 to 54 agree someone would listen, compared with 38% of adults 55 or older.

CHART 3

Americans' Confidence Their Ideas Will Be Heard

If I have an idea for how to improve my town or city, I know someone will listen to me.



Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

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Adults under 55 are also somewhat less likely to agree that people like them have a voice in local decisions that matter. Four in 10 adults aged 18 to 34 and 35 to 54 agree, compared with 45% of adults 55 or older.

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Four in 10 Americans Say Their Communities Are Prepared for Future Challenges

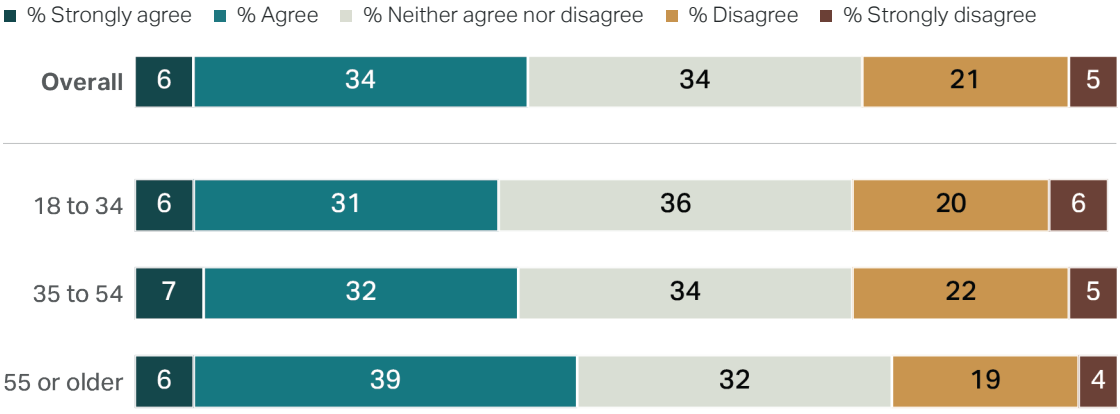
Confidence that a community is prepared for what comes next is another part of how residents experience the places where they live. Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation's research on opportunity in America points to strong, resilient communities as part of the environment that helps people thrive and contribute. Yet many Americans see room for growth in their communities. Four in 10 adults (40%) agree their town or city is prepared to handle future challenges, while 34% neither agree nor disagree and 26% disagree.

Younger adults are less confident about their community's preparedness. Thirty-eight percent of adults aged 18 to 34 agree their town or city is prepared for future challenges, compared with 45% of adults 55 or older.

CHART 4

Americans' Confidence Their Communities Are Prepared for Future Challenges

My town or city is prepared to handle future challenges.



Note: Responses may sum to 100% ±1 due to rounding.

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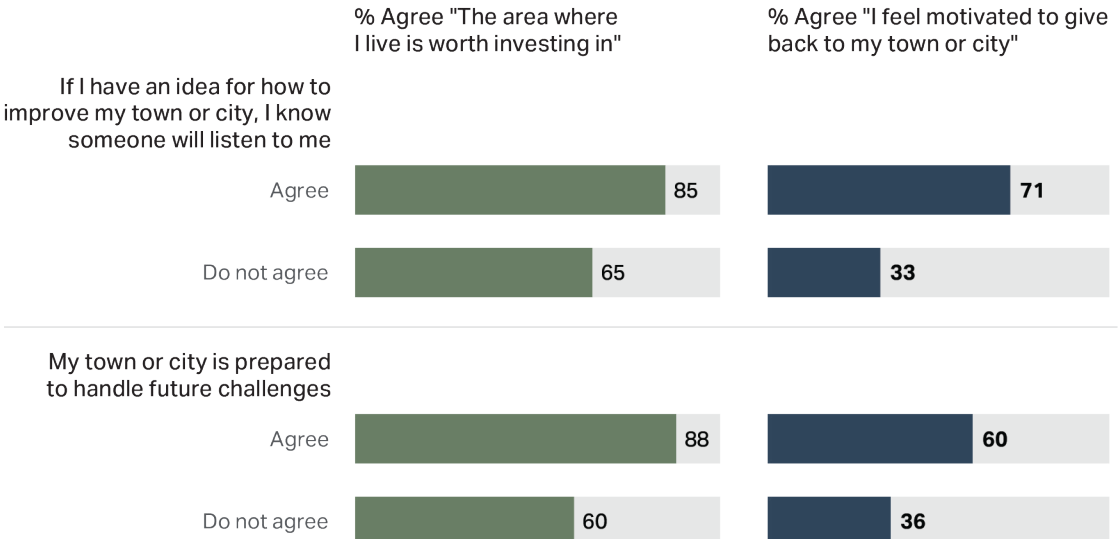
Being Heard and Being Prepared Are Closely Linked to Community Investment

Americans who expect someone to listen to their ideas are more likely to feel motivated to give back. Seventy-one percent of residents who agree someone would listen say they feel motivated to contribute, compared with 33% of those who neither agree nor disagree or who disagree. These Americans are also more likely to agree their area is worth investing in, at 85%, compared with 65% among those who do not agree someone would listen.

Preparedness shows a similar relationship. Six in 10 residents who agree their community is prepared for future challenges feel motivated to give back, compared with 36% of those who are neutral or disagree. Americans who see their community as prepared are also more likely to say it is worth investing in, at 88% compared with 60% among those who do not agree their community is prepared to handle future challenges.

CHART 5

Community Confidence Is Linked to Investment and Motivation



Click this link to view the full dataset.

Being heard and community preparedness matter to opportunity in different ways. Expecting ideas to be heard speaks to whether residents believe they can play a meaningful role in shaping local solutions, while confidence in preparedness speaks to whether they see their community as ready to meet future challenges. Residents who are more positive on either measure are also more likely to feel motivated to contribute.

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Conclusion



Many Americans already see their communities as places worth investing in and want to help make them better. Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation's research on opportunity in America shows that people's sense of agency is tied in part to the conditions around them. This report extends that work by examining whether residents who want to contribute believe their ideas will be heard and whether they see their communities as prepared for what comes next.



Younger adults are about as motivated as older adults to give back, even though they are less likely to expect someone to listen to their ideas, to see their communities as prepared or to believe those communities are worth investing in. Their willingness to contribute does not appear to track those views, suggesting that other factors also shape motivation.

The relationship between being heard and motivation is clear. Residents who expect someone to listen are much more likely to feel motivated to give back than those who are neutral or disagree. The survey cannot determine which comes first, but the pattern is consistent with the broader opportunity research, which found that people report feeling more agency when they experience stronger conditions in the communities around them.

> *For communities, the challenge is not simply creating ways for residents to participate, but making participation feel meaningful. Many Americans already want to help improve the places where they live. Ensuring that residents believe their ideas are heard may be one important part of turning that willingness into deeper involvement and opportunity.*

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Methodology

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web study completed by 6,732 U.S. adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. All responses were collected between Feb. 26 and March 6, 2026.

For results based on the overall sample of adults, the margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level is ±1.5 percentage points for response percentages around 50% and is ±0.9 percentage points for response percentages around 10% or 90%. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.













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