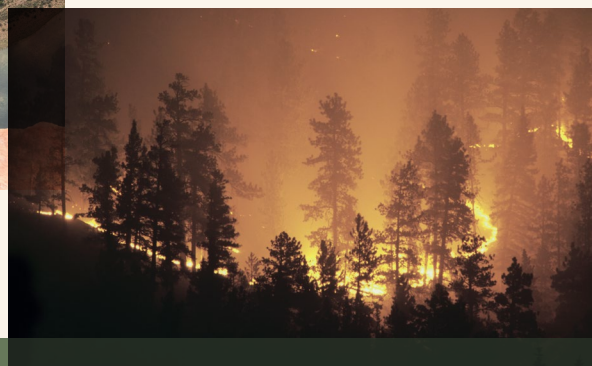


GALLUP®

WALTON FAMILY
FOUNDATION

UNDERSTANDING THE TOLL OF EXTREME WEATHER ON OPPORTUNITY



COPYRIGHT STANDARDS

This document contains proprietary research, copyrighted and trademarked materials of Gallup, Inc. Accordingly, international and domestic laws and penalties guaranteeing patent, copyright, trademark and trade secret protection safeguard the ideas, concepts and recommendations related within this document.

The materials contained in this document and/or the document itself may be downloaded and/or copied provided that all copies retain the copyright, trademark and any other proprietary notices contained on the materials and/or document. No changes may be made to this document without the express written permission of Gallup, Inc.

Any reference whatsoever to this document, in whole or in part, on any webpage must provide a link back to the original document in its entirety. Except as expressly provided herein, the transmission of this material shall not be construed to grant a license of any type under any patents, copyright or trademarks owned or controlled by Gallup, Inc.

Gallup® and Gallup Panel™ are trademarks of Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved. All other trademarks and copyrights are property of their respective owners.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4

Foreword

5

Findings

12

Conclusion

13

Methodology

(01) Foreword

Extreme weather often arrives as opposites. Storms and hurricanes bring too much water in some places; droughts leave others with not nearly enough. Town residents in Kentucky watch a hundred-year flood arrive for the third time in a decade, while a rancher in Colorado sees a long-running creek go dry.

The research in this report confirms how widely that change is being felt and how jarring it is where it occurs. Nearly four in 10 Americans say their community was damaged by extreme weather in the past year, impacting lives, livelihoods, ecosystems and even confidence in the future. People in these communities are meaningfully less likely to say they can shape their own path and are increasingly worried about what comes next.

That's no surprise, because extreme weather wears down the conditions people depend on to build a life. It eats away at certainty. It erodes opportunity. It damages the sense of agency people feel in the places that matter most to them.

The good news is that we have the power to change that — and nature itself is our most powerful tool. When we help support nature, it can rebalance our world and create a more resilient future for people and nature. In practical terms, that means restoring the systems that already hold water, slow floods and absorb storms. It means reconnecting rivers to their flood plains, bringing back forests and wetlands, and letting critical ecosystems return. And it means building resilience that lasts — in the land, and for the people who depend on it.

That opportunity is widespread, urgent and real. We're seeing its value across the country.

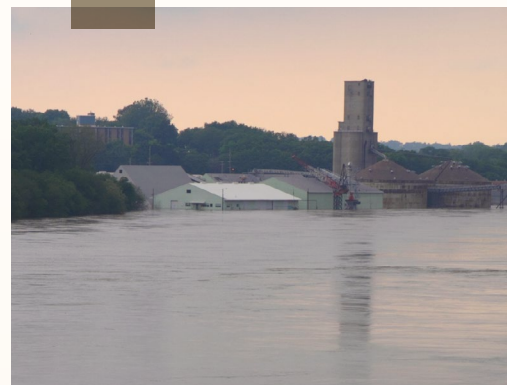
In the Mountain West, returning beavers to a degraded stream helps water pool and store in wetlands that hydrate the landscape, creating firebreaks that stop wildfires and save lives. In the Mississippi River Basin, restored hardwood forests hold back floodwaters and keep nutrients in the soil, building fertility instead of washing sediment and other nutrients downstream as pollution. Along the Gulf Coast, where residents report some of the highest rates of weather damage, restored wetlands, marshes and seagrasses can absorb storm surge before it reaches homes and businesses.

Americans already understand the value of this opportunity. The overwhelming majority say access to nature improves the quality of life where they live. Most say nature is essential to their local economy. And most believe that their community is worth investing in, whether extreme weather has already hit them or not.

Taking care of nature is how we take care of people, businesses and communities. Nature is the opportunity. And seizing it means building a future where people and nature thrive together.

MOIRA MCDONALD

Environment Program Director, Walton Family Foundation

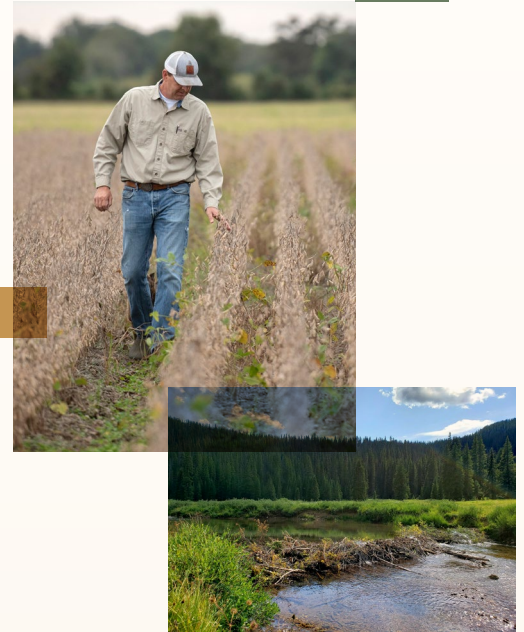


(02)

Findings

Opportunity is not solely based on individual effort and cannot grow on its own. But it can flourish in communities that have the social, economic and environmental conditions that allow residents to thrive. The Walton Family Foundation and Gallup's *How Opportunity Takes Root* study¹ finds that communities can expand opportunities by empowering residents to suggest local solutions for local problems.

Stable jobs, affordable housing and trusting relationships with neighbors all contribute to whether residents feel in control of their future — and whether their communities have the foundations needed for opportunity to flourish.



Extreme weather can put pressure on each of those conditions, and nearly four in 10 Americans say their community was damaged by extreme weather in the past year.

These residents are less likely than their unaffected peers to say they can shape their own path, a measure the study identifies as the foundation of opportunity.

The scale of the problem is significant. According to Climate Central, the U.S. experienced 23 weather and climate disasters in 2025 that each caused at least \$1 billion in damage, making it the third-highest year on record for such events. Together, they caused \$115 billion in damages.²

These events threaten resources Americans already recognize as essential to their communities: 84% of U.S. adults say access to nature improves quality of life in their towns and cities, and 64% say nature is essential to their community's economy.³ When extreme weather damages natural spaces and water systems, it does not just disrupt daily life; it undermines the environmental foundations communities depend on.

- 1 Gallup & Walton Family Foundation. (2026). *How opportunity takes root: Understanding the conditions for people and places to thrive*. <https://static.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/75/de/338841eb4c1e921344d0edb12b52/final-wff-gallup-how-opportunity-takes-root-final-report-05152026.pdf>
- 2 Climate Central. (2026, January 8). *2025 in review: U.S. billion-dollar disasters*. Climate Matters. <https://www.climatecentral.org/climate-matters/2025-in-review>
- 3 Gallup & Walton Family Foundation. (2026). *How opportunity takes root: Understanding the conditions for people and places to thrive*. <https://static.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/75/de/338841eb4c1e921344d0edb12b52/final-wff-gallup-how-opportunity-takes-root-final-report-05152026.pdf>

Extreme Weather Damage Felt by About Four in 10 Americans in Past Year

Thirty-eight percent of Americans say their community was affected by damage from extreme weather in the past year.

CHART 1
Americans' Experience With Extreme Weather in Past Year

In the past 12 months, has your town or city been affected by any of the following: Damage from extreme weather



People most commonly report extreme weather damage in the South. Fifty-eight percent of residents in the East South Central Census division (Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi and Tennessee), and 47% in the West South Central division (Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Texas), say their community was affected by severe weather in the past year. The Middle Atlantic division (New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania) also reports an above-average rate of impact (43%).

Meanwhile, the Mountain (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming) and East North Central (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Wisconsin) divisions report the lowest rates, at 26% and 28%, respectively.

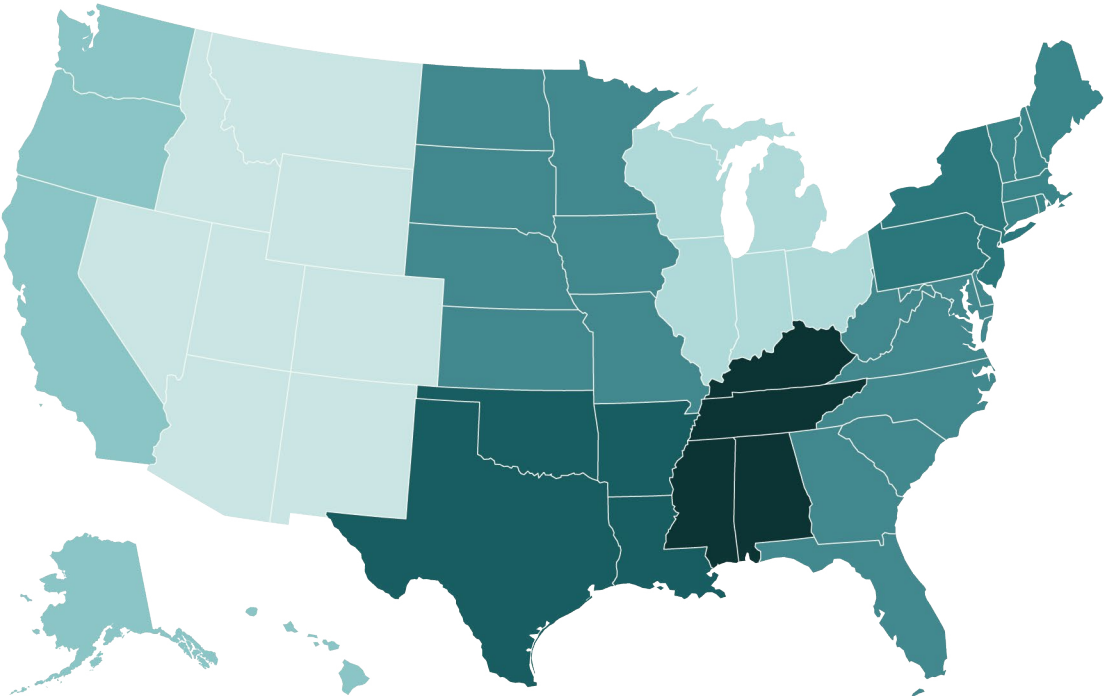
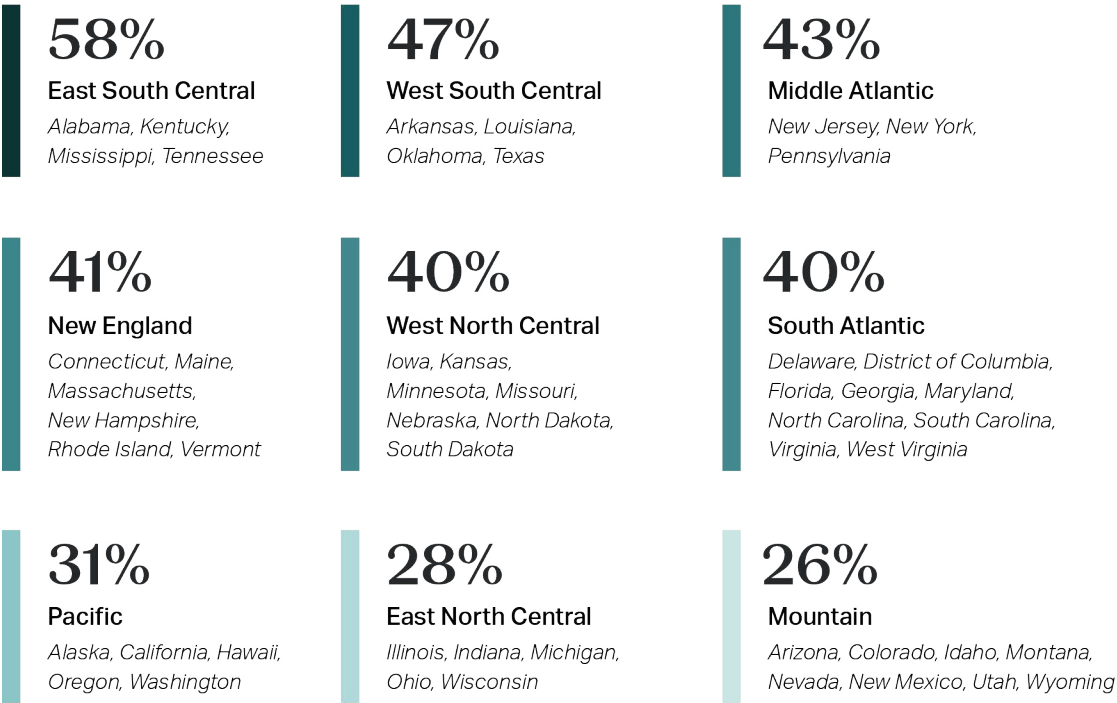
Thirty-eight percent of Americans say their community was affected by damage from extreme weather in the past year.



CHART 2

Americans' Experience With Extreme Weather, by Census Division

% Who say their town or city has been affected by damage from extreme weather in the past 12 months



Extreme Weather Affects Perceived Ability to Shape Own Path

Adults who say extreme weather damage has affected their communities are less likely than those in unaffected communities to say they can shape their own path (62% vs. 71%).

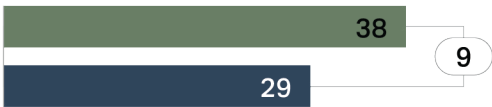
CHART 3
Americans Affected by Extreme Weather Damage Feel Less Able to Shape Own Path

■ % Affected by extreme weather damage ■ % Not affected by extreme weather damage

I mostly feel able to shape my path, even when things are difficult.



I mostly feel pushed by circumstances beyond my control.



The stakes of this gap are significant. Communities play a critical role in empowering residents to reach their full potential. However, that role is harder to play when extreme weather strains the conditions communities depend on. Alongside pressures on jobs and housing, extreme weather damage impacts access to natural spaces — a vital component of those conditions that more than eight in 10 Americans say improves quality of life in their towns and cities.

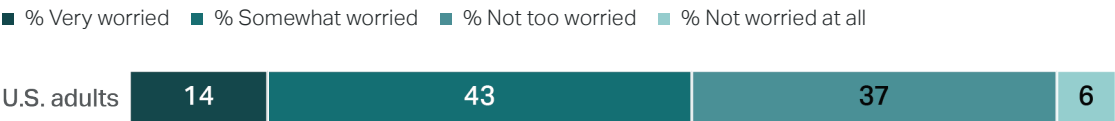
At the individual level, adults who feel in control of their lives are more than twice as likely to rate their present and future lives highly enough to be considered thriving. They are also nearly twice as likely to say they have a great future ahead of them. No other factor, including income or education, predicts wellbeing as strongly as this sense of agency.

Majority in U.S. Worry About Repeat Extreme Weather Damage

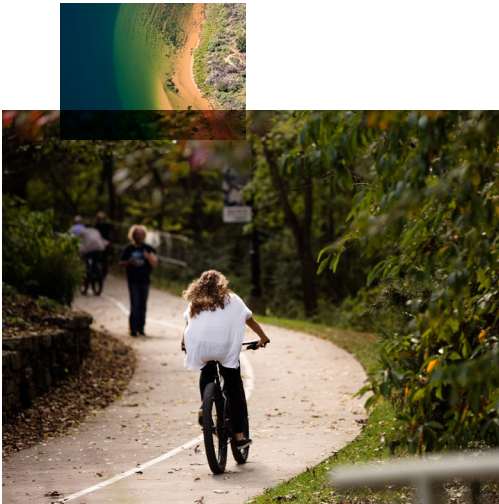
Among Americans whose communities were affected by extreme weather damage in the past year, 57% say they are “very” or “somewhat” worried that damage from extreme weather will negatively impact their town or city in the next year. Thirty-seven percent say they are “not too worried,” and 6% say they are “not worried at all.”

CHART 4
Americans Hit by Extreme Weather Worry About More Damage

How worried are you that damage from extreme weather will negatively impact your town or city in the next 12 months?



Based on those who said their town or city has been affected by damage from extreme weather in the past year.

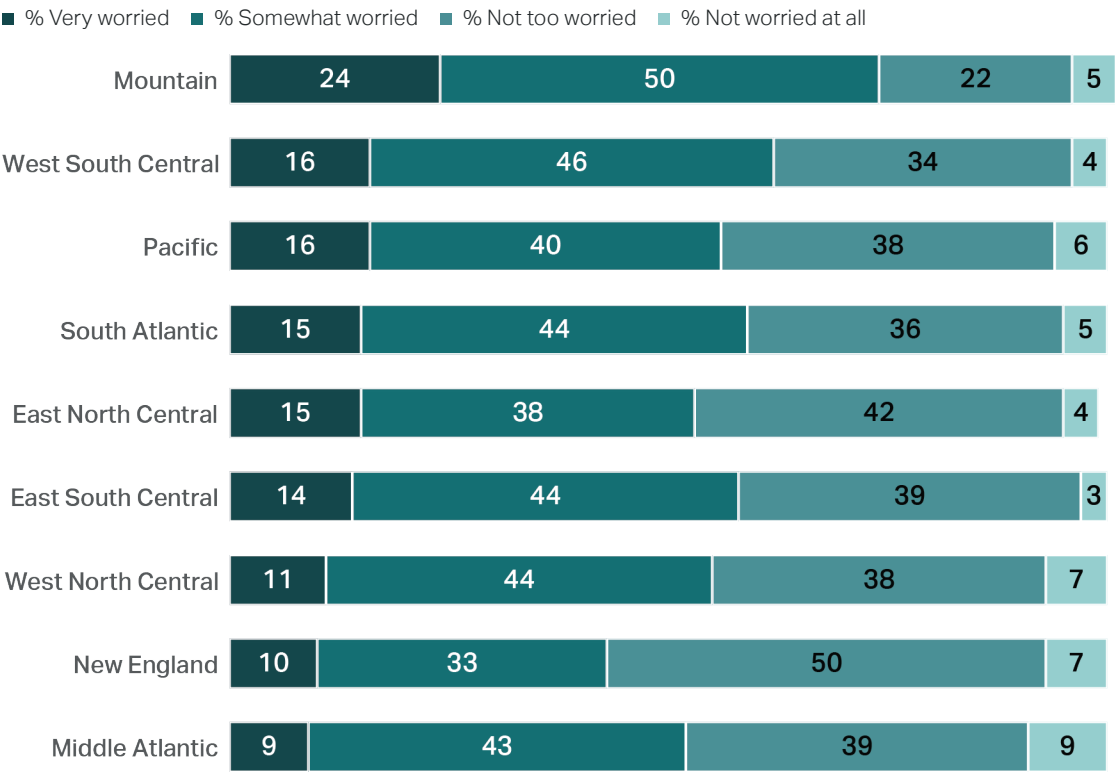


Worry about extreme weather damage in the next year is highest in the Mountain Census division, where 74% of affected residents say they are worried, including 24% who are very worried. The West South Central and South Atlantic divisions also show elevated concern, with about six in 10 residents in each region expressing worry.

New England stands out at the other end, with just 43% of affected residents saying they are worried about extreme weather damage in their area in the next year, the lowest share of any division. The Middle Atlantic and East North Central divisions fall in the middle, with roughly half of affected residents expressing concern.

CHART 5
Worry About More Extreme Weather Damage, by Census Division

How worried are you that damage from extreme weather will negatively impact your town or city in the next 12 months?



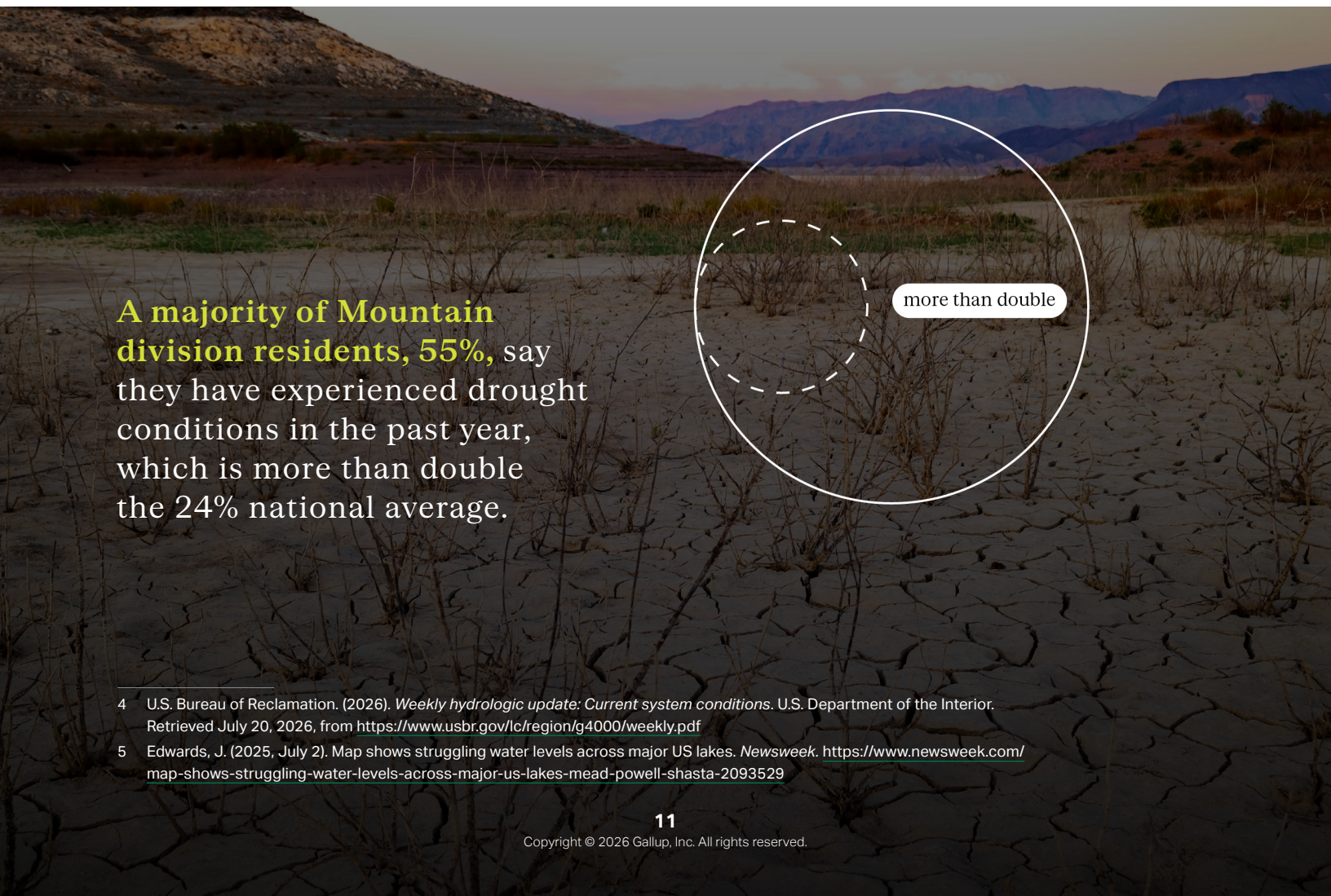
Note: Values shown do not include DK/REF responses; percentages may total 100% ±1 due to rounding.
Based on those who said their town or city has been affected by damage from extreme weather in the past year.

Mountain Division Residents' Worry Driven by Drought Conditions

The Mountain Census division, which covers the eight states most directly in or adjacent to the Colorado River Basin, is the only division in which a majority of residents (53%) strongly agree that access to nature makes their town or city a desirable place to live.

However, severe drought conditions are causing a dire situation in this area. The Colorado River's major reservoirs are down to about one-quarter to one-third of capacity⁴ after being nearly full in 2000.⁵ Water managers in the area are now taking emergency steps to keep the river's major dams above the threshold needed to generate hydropower. Some projections suggest reservoirs could fall below that level as early as fall 2026.

A majority of Mountain division residents, 55%, say they have experienced drought conditions in the past year, which is more than double the 24% national average. Among Mountain division residents who have felt the impacts of drought in the past year, 85% are worried that extreme weather damage will affect their community in the next year.



A majority of Mountain division residents, 55%, say they have experienced drought conditions in the past year, which is more than double the 24% national average.

more than double

⁴ U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. (2026). *Weekly hydrologic update: Current system conditions*. U.S. Department of the Interior. Retrieved July 20, 2026, from <https://www.usbr.gov/lc/region/g4000/weekly.pdf>

⁵ Edwards, J. (2025, July 2). Map shows struggling water levels across major US lakes. *Newsweek*. <https://www.newsweek.com/map-shows-struggling-water-levels-across-major-us-lakes-mead-powell-shasta-2093529>

(03)

Conclusion

Taken together, these findings suggest that extreme weather is not just a physical or economic problem. Extreme weather threatens opportunity by weakening the community conditions residents need to feel in control of their lives. That sense of lost agency has real consequences, as it is the single strongest predictor of whether someone is thriving overall.

Despite these challenges, the data show a degree of resilience, as worry about future events does not appear to push people out of their communities. Nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults believe their community is worth investing in, even when they acknowledge it has room for improvement. Equal shares of residents who have experienced damage from severe weather and those who have not share this view.

Part of what makes communities worth investing in is their natural environment. Nearly two-thirds of Americans say nature is essential to their community's economy, and three-quarters of those who hold that view also say their community encourages residents to guard water, land and natural spaces.⁶

That collective commitment to natural resources points toward a path for building more resilient communities.

Yet that commitment is not enough on its own. When people cannot translate concern into action, the gap between caring about their community and being able to protect it remains wide. And communities cannot create opportunity if the conditions that support agency and wellbeing are disrupted. As extreme weather becomes more frequent and more costly, strengthening these conditions — stable jobs, affordable housing and trusting community relationships — will be essential to helping opportunity take root.



⁶ Gallup & Walton Family Foundation. (2026). *How opportunity takes root: Understanding the conditions for people and places to thrive*. <https://static.waltonfamilyfoundation.org/75/de/338841eb4c1e921344d0edb12b52/final-wff-gallup-how-opportunity-takes-root-final-report-05152026.pdf>

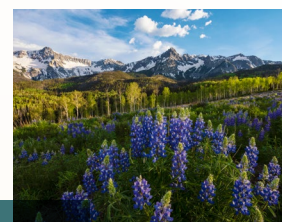
(04)

Methodology

Results for *How Opportunity Takes Root: Understanding the Toll of Extreme Weather on Opportunity* 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.



GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.888.500.8282

www.gallup.com