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# Education for What?

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## Introduction

Today, the value of higher education is under more scrutiny than ever as tuition rates soar and enrollment and completion rates continue to tumble across the U.S. While COVID-19 exacerbated some of the challenges facing higher education institutions nationally, enrollments were declining prior to the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

Still, the economic case for earning a college degree remains solid. College graduates earn about \$1 million more over the course of their working years than U.S. adults with no college degree, on average.<sup>2</sup> But the benefits of a college degree extend beyond purely economic ones. Studies show postsecondary education also improves people's wellbeing, such as better cognitive skills<sup>3</sup> and health, and communities and societies also benefit from a more educated citizenry.<sup>4</sup>

To date, most studies exploring the benefits of higher education have focused on the relationship between education and a single outcome such as earnings or health. Not many have studied a variety of economic and non-economic outcomes made possible by educational attainment beyond high school. **This Lumina Foundation-Gallup report attempts to do that by assessing the relationship of postsecondary education to 52 different economic and non-economic outcomes.**

1 <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates-fall-2017/>; <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>

2 <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/research-summaries/education-earnings.html>; <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/collegepayoff2021/>

3 <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0956797618774253?journalCode=pssa>

4 <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0272775708000551>; <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/social-determinant-of-health-education-is-crucial/>; <https://archpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13690-020-00402-5>

Lumina Foundation and Gallup build upon existing research about the individual and societal benefits of postsecondary education by quantifying the association between each additional year of postsecondary education and a variety of outcomes. The associations between education and positive outcomes do not mean, necessarily, that education causes the better outcomes, because people who pursue longer and higher levels of study differ from those who do not in many ways, including their background and personal characteristics.<sup>5</sup> However, these positive associations are significant across dimensions and underscore the power of postsecondary education for millions of Americans who complete a credential or degree beyond high school.

In addition to assessing the effects education has on these outcomes, the analysis also looks at the extent to which Americans *believe* education promotes those benefits. Broader recognition of the range of ways in which postsecondary education may improve their lives could spur more people — particularly those in traditionally underserved groups — to continue their education beyond high school.

## Key Findings

1

**Out of 52 economic and noneconomic outcomes tested in the study** — such as higher income, greater job satisfaction, higher voting rates and greater volunteerism — **educational attainment has a meaningful statistical relationship with 50 of them.**

2

Education is positively related to **higher income, better health status, better wellbeing, increased likelihood to do work that fits with their natural talents and interests, voting participation, volunteerism and charitable giving.**

3

The relationships between education and positive life outcomes are generally **similar for people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds,** but the link between education and labor force participation is **slightly higher for Black adults.**

4

Most adults **agree that higher education boosts innovation, incomes and entrepreneurship.** However, the public is more skeptical that higher education improves physical health, mental health, cooperation or democratic representation.

<sup>5</sup> Richardson, M. M., Abraham, C. & Bond, R. (2012). "Psychological correlates of university students' academic performance: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *Psychological Bulletin* 138, no. 2: 353.

## Research Design

From a review of existing literature, Gallup identified a series of positive outcomes linked to additional education beyond high school, including physical and mental health, income, job quality, cognitive ability, civic engagement, service to others and social trust.

Gallup also explored the relationship between education and other under-researched outcomes, including experience of positive and negative emotions and aspects of personal character such as persistence and self-confidence. Gallup researchers then ran statistical models on a total of 52 separate outcomes to measure the average effect that additional years of postsecondary education have on each outcome.

In addition to using available survey data from Gallup and other research organizations, Gallup conducted a nationally representative survey of more than 10,000 members of the Gallup Panel<sup>6</sup> to address gaps in the data.

The new survey also measured the extent to which Americans believe that additional education leads to positive individual and societal outcomes.

## Where Education Matters Most

The 52 outcomes tested in this study are based on data from different publicly available surveys.<sup>7</sup> The items are measured using a variety of response scales, including yes/no questions, agree/disagree scales and self-reports of income, among others.

Gallup used a standardized statistical technique that allowed researchers to compare the effects of education across survey items with different scales. The technique also allowed the researchers to isolate the unique effect that education has on each outcome measure, and control for other factors like gender, age, race, ethnicity, marital status and political party affiliation.

*Of the 52 outcomes analyzed in the study, 50 show a meaningful statistical relationship with additional postsecondary education.<sup>8</sup> In all but one case, more education is associated with a more positive outcome.<sup>9</sup>*

Chart 1 details the outcomes and the relative strength of their relationships to additional postsecondary education using the standardized analytical approach. The appendix provides the full statistical results.

Detailed results on each relationship are organized by domain in the remainder of the report. Among these seven domains, the positive effects of education tend to be greater for **cognitive ability, income** and **work-related outcomes**. Civic engagement and pro-social attitudes also have substantial relationships with education, while the relationships are slightly less powerful for the health, social capital and character items.

Throughout this report, outcomes for people with no postsecondary education are compared to those for people with higher educational attainment, including some postsecondary education but no degree, an associate degree, a bachelor's degree and a graduate degree.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gallup.com/174158/gallup-panel-methodology.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> The appendix provides the measures and sources of those measures for each item.

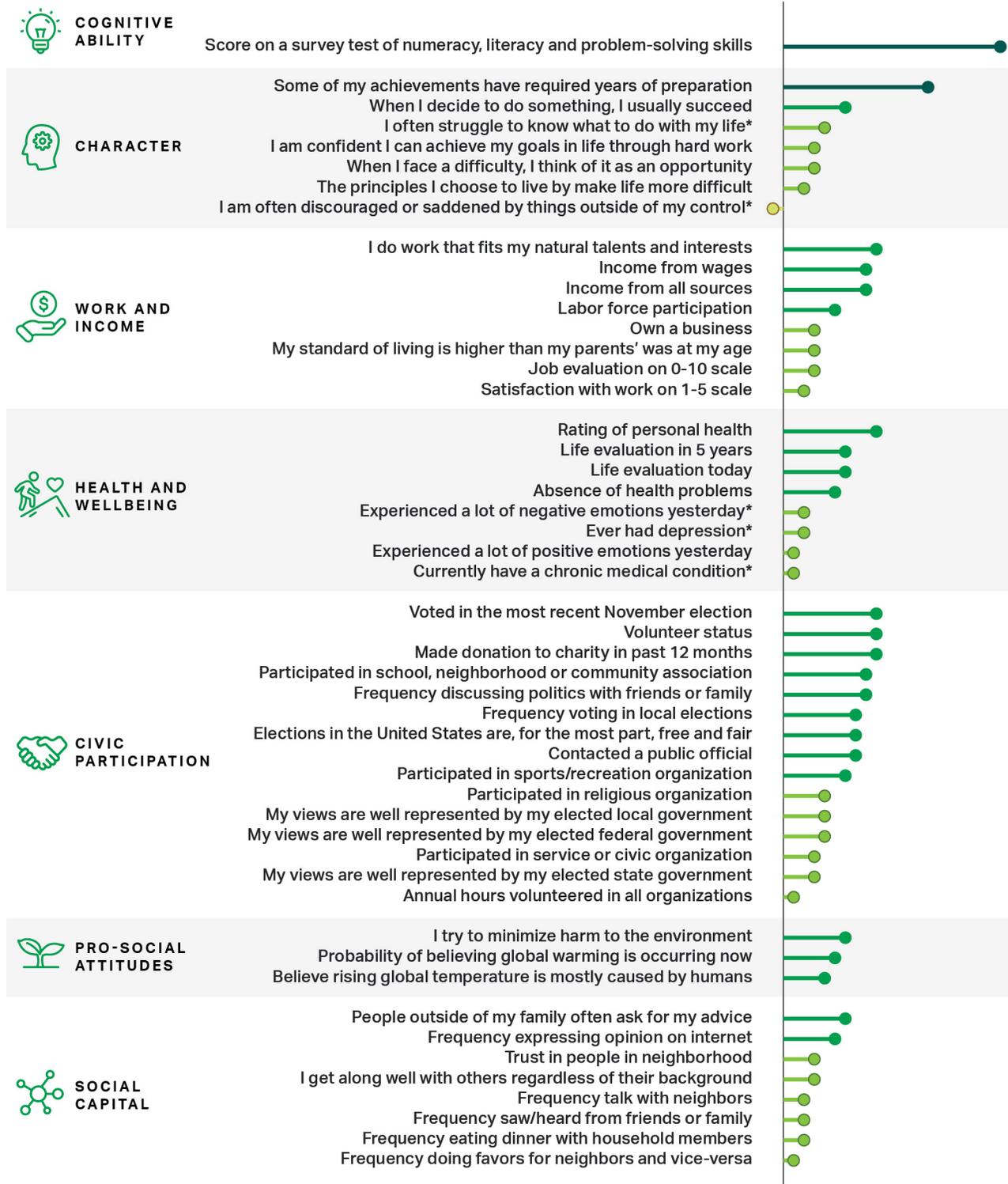
<sup>8</sup> The two items that did not show a meaningful statistical relationship are agreeing with the statement that "I respect most people who don't support my political views, even though I disagree with them" and the probability of doing domestic chores (based on respondent self-reports of what household chores they do).

<sup>9</sup> The one item that showed a meaningful, but negative statistical relationship with greater education is agreement with the statement "I am often discouraged or saddened by things outside my control." Those with more education were more likely to agree with the statement, though the expectation was those with higher education would be less likely to agree.

CHART 1

Relationship Between Outcomes and Additional Postsecondary Education

● Large effect ● Medium effect ● Small effect ● Negative effect



\*Items are reverse-coded for the analysis because lower scores or negative responses for that item are the desirable outcome, for example, having had depression or having chronic medical conditions.

For the full data, please see [page 33](#) in the Appendix.

# Detailed Findings: Relationship Between Education and Key Outcomes

WORK AND INCOME

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

SOCIAL CAPITAL, PRO-SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND CHARACTER

COGNITIVE ABILITY

PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION BENEFITS

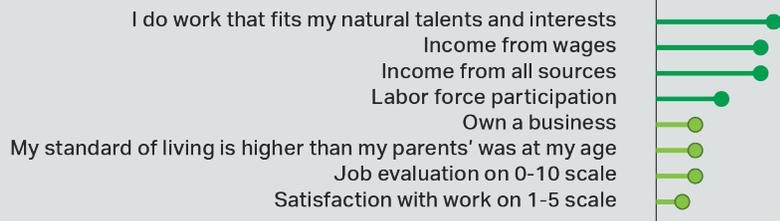




WORK AND INCOME

## Higher education translates into higher pay and jobs that better fit people's talents and interests

● Medium effect ● Small effect

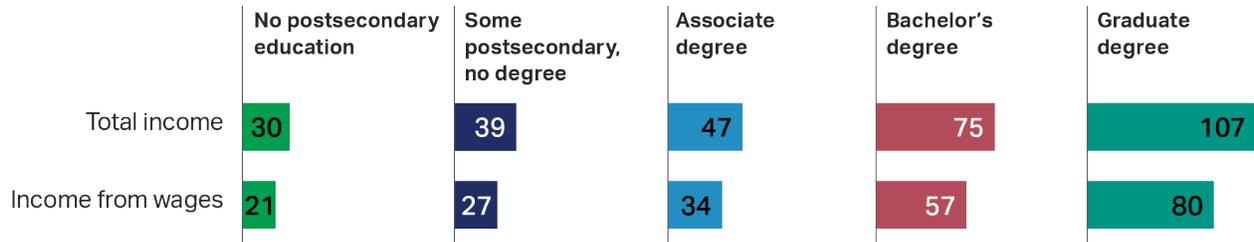


On average, U.S. adults with no postsecondary education earn about \$21,000 from wages and have average total incomes of \$30,000. Those with some postsecondary education but no degree earn about 30% more, and associate degree holders earn approximately 60% more. Bachelor's degree holders' average earnings are more than twice those of people who did not get education beyond high school, while postgraduate degree holders' incomes are even higher.

**CHART 2**

**Average Income, by Education Level**

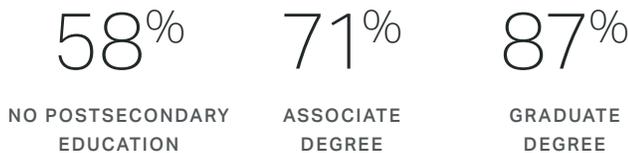
Figures are income in thousands of dollars (rounded to the nearest thousand)



Source: 2022 Current Population Survey

People with postsecondary education are more likely to participate in the workforce in general, and to say their job is a good fit for their talents and interests. Fifty-five percent of U.S. adults with no postsecondary education participate in the workforce, which means they are employed or actively looking for employment. That compares with more than two in three U.S. adults with associate degrees or higher.

**Work fits with talents and interests**



*Fifty-eight percent of workers with no postsecondary education say their job is a good fit for their talents and interests, well below the figures for workers with at least some postsecondary education.*

**CHART 3**

**Employment Situation, by Education Level**

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
% In the labor force (working or actively looking for work)	55	60	67	73	74
% Rate job satisfaction 8-10 on 10-point scale	47	49	37	45	49
% Strongly, somewhat or slightly agree they do work that fits their talents and interests	58	69	71	80	87

Sources: Labor force participation from 2022 Current Population Survey. Job satisfaction from 2019-2020 Gallup Great Jobs Survey. Having a job that fits talents and interests from 2022 Lumina/Gallup Education for What survey.

## Black and Hispanic adults generally see the same work benefits from education as all other U.S. adults.

*Higher educational attainment is just as strongly related to most of the outcomes tested in this analysis among underserved groups — including Black and Hispanic adults — as it is for U.S. adults overall. There are a few exceptions to this general pattern.*

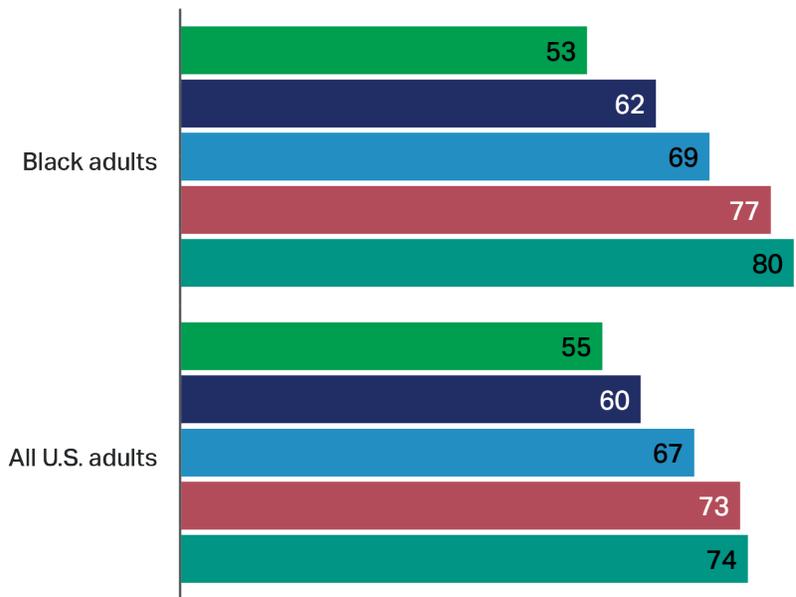
One exception is that the link between education and labor force participation is somewhat stronger for Black adults. Fifty-three percent of Black adults with no postsecondary education are in the labor force, slightly lower than the percentage of U.S. adults more generally with the same level of education. However, Black adults at various levels of postsecondary education, including associate degrees, bachelor's degrees or graduate degrees, are more likely to be in the workforce than U.S. adults overall at the same levels of education.

### CHART 4

#### Labor Force Participation, by Race and Educational Attainment

% Who are employed or unemployed and actively looking for work

■ No postsecondary education ■ Some postsecondary, no degree ■ Associate degree  
■ Bachelor's degree ■ Graduate degree



Source: 2022 Current Population Survey

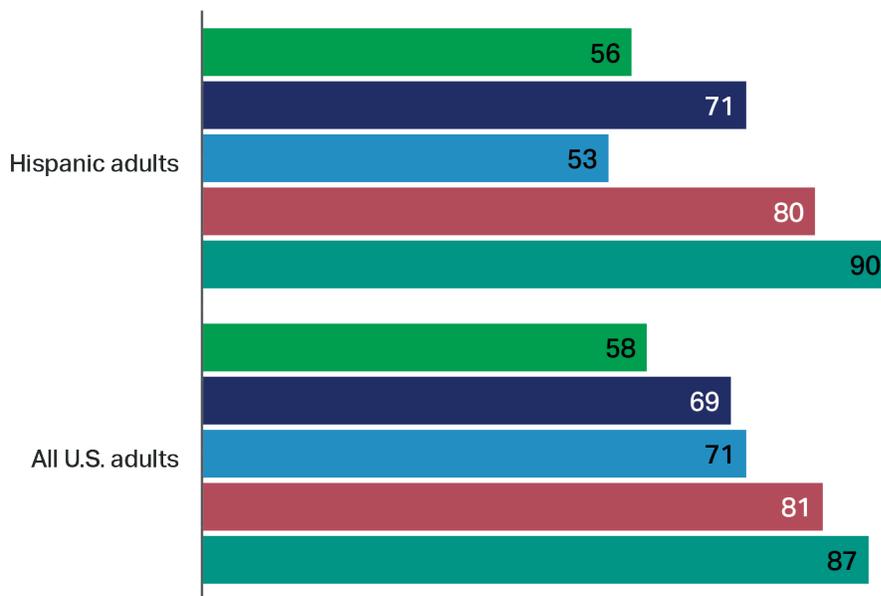
Additionally, Hispanic adults with higher educational attainment are more likely than those with less education to say they do work that fits with their natural talents and interests. Nine in 10 Hispanic adults with a graduate degree and 80% with a bachelor’s degree agree that their work is a good fit for their talents and interests, compared with 56% with no postsecondary education (and 53% with an associate degree).

**CHART 5**

**Fit Between Work and Talents and Interests, by Hispanic Ethnicity and Educational Attainment**

*% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree with the statement “I do work that fits my natural talents and interests”*

■ No postsecondary education ■ Some postsecondary, no degree ■ Associate degree  
 ■ Bachelor’s degree ■ Graduate degree



Source: November 2022 Lumina Foundation/Gallup Education for What survey

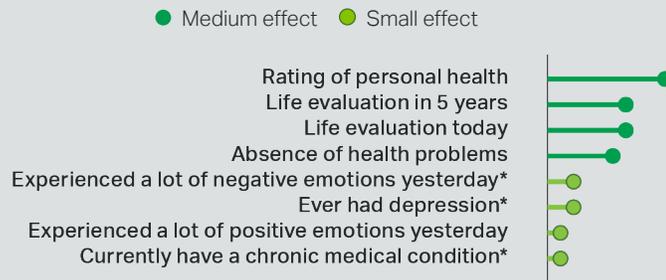
**Young adults with higher education are more likely to find jobs that fit their talents and interests.**

Half of adults (50%) aged 25 to 30 who have no postsecondary education agree their work fits well with their talents and interests, compared with 79% of adults in the same age range with a bachelor’s degree and 90% of those with a graduate degree. That 40-percentage-point gap among young adults is substantially larger than the 29-point gap among U.S. adults across all age groups (87% of those with a graduate degree versus 58% of those with no postsecondary education).



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Higher education is linked to increased life satisfaction and better health



\*Items are reverse-coded for the analysis because lower scores or negative responses for that item are the desirable outcome.

In this study, wellbeing is assessed by asking respondents to rate their current lives and future (five years from now) lives on a 0 to 10 scale. People are considered to be “thriving” if they rate their current life a 7 or higher, and their future life as an 8 or higher.

Additional education is associated with roughly 6% increases in life evaluation, both in respondents’ current and future lives. Overall, 61% of Americans with no postsecondary education rate their current lives at a 7 or higher. While associate degree holders rate their lives similarly, those with bachelor’s (69%) and graduate degrees (75%) are significantly more positive. The findings indicate even one additional year of postsecondary education is related to greater optimism about Americans’ future lives. Sixty-nine percent of those with no postsecondary education rate their future lives at an 8 or higher versus at least 75% of those with any level of postsecondary education (including those who did not receive a degree).

**CHART 6**  
**Wellbeing, by Education Level**

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
% Rate current life 7-10 on 10-point scale	61	56	59	69	75
% Rate life in five years 8-10 on 10-point scale	69	75	80	88	88

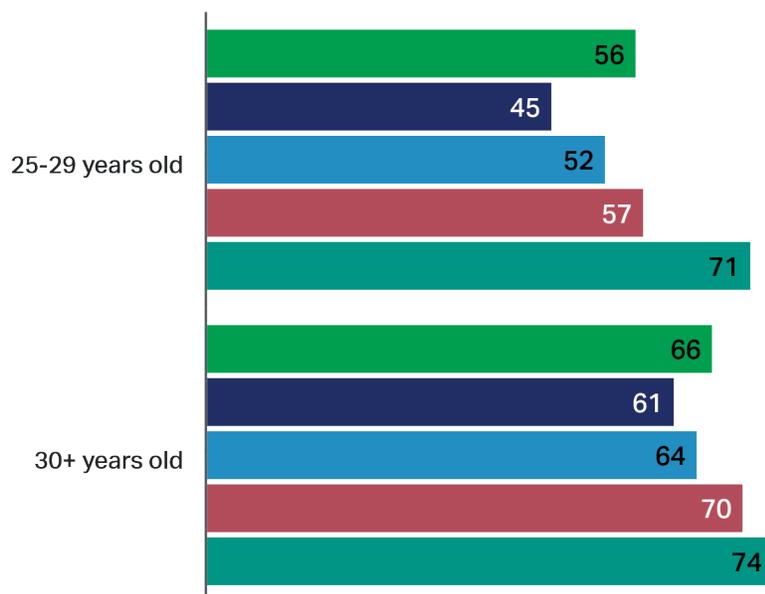
Source: 2020-2022 Gallup COVID-19 tracking survey

The relationships between education and life outcomes among young adults — those aged 25 to 29 who are most likely to have recently completed their education — are similar to those for the entire adult population on nearly all measures. However, current life evaluation ratings are an exception. Among young adults with a graduate degree, 71% rate their current life as a 7 or higher, compared with 56% of those with no postsecondary education. Among adults aged 30 and older, eight points separate those with no postsecondary education (66%) and those with a graduate degree (74%).

**CHART 7**  
**Current Life Evaluation, by Age and Educational Attainment**

% Who rate their current life 7-10 on a 0-10 scale

■ No postsecondary education 
 ■ Some postsecondary, no degree 
 ■ Associate degree 
 ■ Bachelor's degree 
 ■ Graduate degree



Source: 2022 Lumina Foundation/Gallup Education for What survey

## Adults with postsecondary education rate their health better and have fewer health problems.

Less than half of U.S. adults with no postsecondary education (43%) say their health is excellent or very good, compared with 55% of associate degree holders and more than six in 10 of those with a bachelor’s degree.<sup>10</sup>

Those with more education are less likely to say they have a condition that prevents them from doing normal daily activities, and to have been diagnosed with a chronic medical condition such as asthma, high blood pressure or diabetes. These relationships between education and health persist even when considering a person’s age.

### CHART 8

#### Health Outcomes, by Education Level

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor’s degree	Graduate degree
% Rate current health excellent or very good	43	47	55	61	65
% Do not have health problems that prevent you from doing things you normally would do	73	76	79	84	86
% Have not been diagnosed with chronic health condition	30	39	40	53	44
% Ever been diagnosed with depression	23	29	29	26	25
% Experienced a lot of positive emotions yesterday	71	67	68	68	69
% Experienced a lot of negative emotions yesterday	31	37	36	37	35

Source: 2020-2022 Gallup COVID-19 tracking survey

Prior studies highlight several factors that may contribute to the relationship between education and better health outcomes, including greater exposure to health-related information,<sup>11</sup> appreciation of good health behaviors and access to social networks that encourage healthy lifestyles.<sup>12</sup>

However, Americans are largely unaware of the education-health link. Gallup’s survey on the benefits of education indicates less than half of U.S. adults agree that education leads to better physical (45%) or mental (40%) health. Black adults are more likely than white adults to say education leads to better mental health — 50% versus 37%, respectively — with Hispanic adults in between at 44%.

10 These results are based on Gallup’s COVID tracking survey. The five-point health rating scale was asked in March and April 2020. Gallup asked a similar health rating question on the 2022 Gallup/Lumina education survey and found similar results by educational attainment.

11 <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/social-determinant-of-health-education-is-crucial/>

12 <https://archpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13690-020-00402-5>



CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Highly educated U.S. adults are more involved in their communities and politics



Americans with higher educational attainment are much more likely to participate in civic life, including volunteering, donating to charities, joining local organizations or associations and voting in elections.

*Fourteen percent of U.S. adults with no postsecondary education say they volunteered in the past 12 months and 38% say they donated to a charity, compared with no less than 27% and 50%, respectively, among those with at least some postsecondary education.*

Among those who volunteer, there are also meaningful differences in the amount of time spent volunteering by the person’s level of education. On average, volunteers who have no postsecondary education report spending 92 hours on volunteer work in the past 12 months, compared with 102 hours among associate degree holders, and 105 hours among postgraduate degree holders.

**CHART 9**  
**Civic Engagement Activities, by Education Level**

*% Who participated in the activity in the past 12 months*

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor’s degree	Graduate degree
Volunteered	14	27	27	38	47
Donated to charity	38	50	59	67	77
Participated in school, neighborhood or community association	4	10	11	16	27
Participated in service or civic organization	5	7	7	9	14
Participated in religious organization	15	20	22	26	30
Participated in sports/recreation organization	4	11	10	15	19
Contacted public official	6	12	12	17	26
Participated in boycott	6	14	14	21	28
Discuss politics with friends/family monthly	44	56	59	67	74

Source: 2013 and 2017 Current Population Surveys

## Political engagement, including voter participation, rises sharply with education.

About one-quarter (24%) of Americans with no postsecondary education say they always vote in local elections, compared with 35% of those with an associate degree, 39% of those with a bachelor’s degree and 46% of graduate degree holders. While 59% of those without any postsecondary education report voting in the most recent federal election, no less than 75% of those with at least some postsecondary education say they did.

**CHART 10**  
**Political Participation Activities, by Education Level**

*% Who participated in the activity in the past 12 months (or most recent federal election)*

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
Voted in most recent federal election	59	75	79	87	92
Always vote in local elections	24	31	35	39	46

Source: 2012, 2016 and 2020 Current Population Voter Supplement and 2013 and 2017 Current Population Survey Civic Engagement Supplement



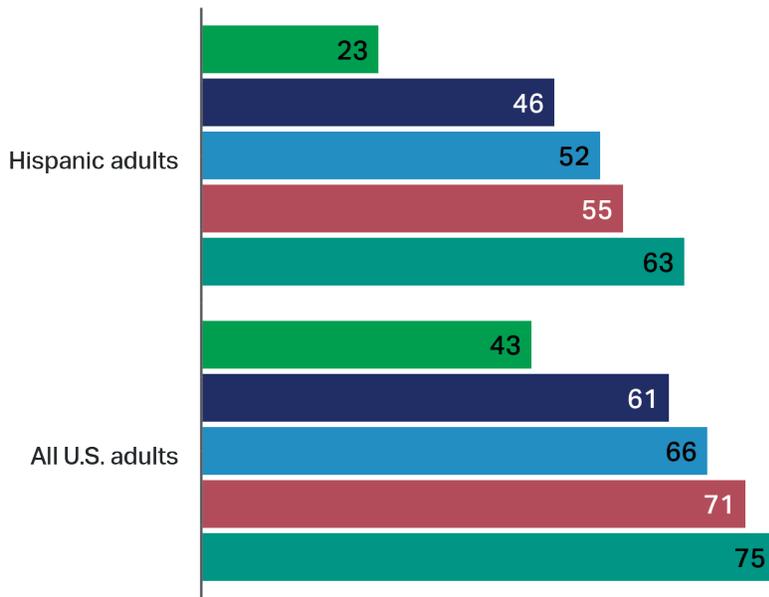
The relationship between education and political behaviors — including voting in the last federal election, always voting in local elections and regularly discussing politics with others — is stronger among Hispanic adults than among Americans overall.

*Twenty-three percent of Hispanic adults with no postsecondary education say they voted in the most recent federal election, compared with majorities of those with associate degrees or higher. The education gaps are smaller among all U.S. adults.*

**CHART 11**  
**Voting Participation, by Hispanic Ethnicity and Education**

*% Who indicated they voted in the last federal election*

■ No postsecondary education ■ Some postsecondary, no degree ■ Associate degree  
■ Bachelor's degree ■ Graduate degree



Source: 2012, 2016 and 2020 Current Population Surveys

Education is also more strongly related to voting participation among young adults beyond traditional college age (ages 25 to 30) than among Americans overall. However, the relationship between education and voting is weaker among Black adults than among U.S. adults overall.

People who have more education, particularly those with a bachelor’s degree or higher, also have more positive views about democracy, even after taking into account their political party affiliation. For example, slightly less than half of Americans (47%) with a high school education or less agree that “U.S. elections are, for the most part, free and fair,” while more than six in 10 with a bachelor’s degree or higher agree. More educated people also tend to believe that their views are well represented by their elected representatives in federal, state and local government.

**CHART 12**  
**Attitudes About Democracy, by Education Level**

*% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree with the statement*

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor’s degree	Graduate degree
My views are well represented by my local representatives	34	35	36	44	51
My views are well represented by my state representatives	31	34	36	40	46
My views are well represented by my federal representatives	24	25	27	33	42
U.S. elections are mostly free and fair	47	49	52	64	70

Source: 2022 Gallup/Lumina Education for What survey

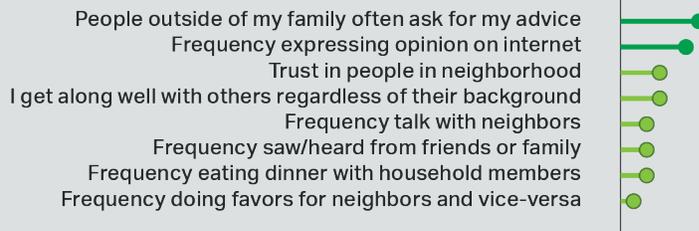


**SOCIAL CAPITAL, PRO-SOCIAL ATTITUDES AND CHARACTER**

**Better educated people are more likely to interact with and trust others**

**SOCIAL CAPITAL**

● Medium effect ● Small effect



U.S. adults with higher levels of formal education are more likely to engage in social behaviors with friends, family and neighbors, establish networks of relationships that can promote higher wellbeing<sup>13</sup> and provide resilience against adversity.<sup>14</sup> More educated individuals are also more inclined to trust their neighbors, interact with other people and do favors for them, and agree that they get along well with people from different backgrounds in terms of race, religion and sexual orientation.

*Whereas 29% of adults with no postsecondary education trust “all” or “most” of their neighbors, the percentages are at least 10 points higher among those with an associate degree or more.*

13 <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2019-62902-001>  
14 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42844-021-00049-3>

People with a postsecondary education are also more likely to be sought out for guidance; 56% of those with a high school education or less agree that people ask them for advice, compared with at least seven in 10 with an associate degree or higher.

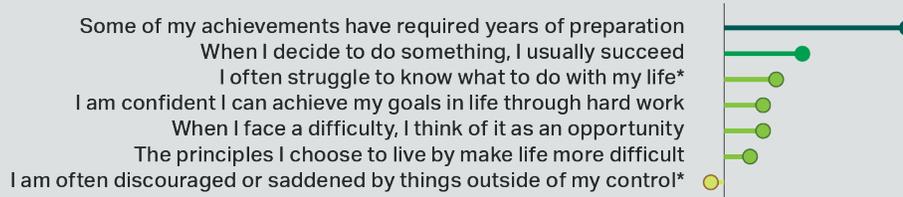
**CHART 13**  
**Social Capital Behaviors and Attitudes, by Education Level**

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree that people outside of my family often ask for my advice	56	67	71	70	80
% Eat dinner with family every day	54	51	57	54	59
% Do favors for neighbors once a month	35	35	40	41	44
% Have daily contact with friends and family	46	49	49	49	51
% Talk with neighbors monthly	60	63	66	68	73
% Trust all/most people in neighborhood	29	34	39	44	49
% Get along well with others regardless of their background, such as their race, religion or sexual orientation	87	91	92	94	96
% Share opinions on internet monthly	11	18	17	22	23

Source: 2013 Current Population Civic Engagement Supplement survey except for "advice" item from 2022 Gallup/Lumina Education for What survey

CHARACTER

● Large effect ● Medium effect ● Small effect ● Negative effect



\*Items are reverse-coded for the analysis because lower scores or negative responses for that item are the desirable outcome.

More highly educated people demonstrate greater self-confidence, persistence and sense of their life pathway, according to several measures of personal character asked on the 2022 Lumina/Gallup “Education for What” survey.

Education has a strong relationship with a measure of persistence; in fact, it is one of the largest effects observed in the study. More highly educated people are much more likely to agree that “some of [their] achievements have required years of preparation.” Fifty-seven percent of those with no postsecondary education say this, compared with 81% of associate degree holders and close to nine in 10 of those with a bachelor’s degree.

*People with education past high school also express more self-confidence and the ability to adapt to challenging circumstances.*



The sole area in which higher education is associated with a worse outcome is in being “discouraged or saddened by things outside of my control.” Sixty percent of U.S. adults with no postsecondary education agree with the statement, which can often be associated with anxiety or depression, but an even higher percentage of college graduates (70%) do as well.

**CHART 14**  
**Character Statements, by Education Level**

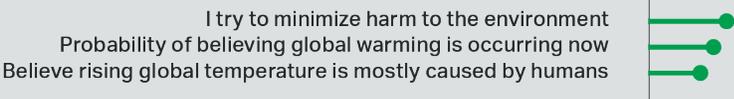
*% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree with the statement*

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
When I decide to do something, I usually succeed	78	81	84	85	89
Some of my achievements have required years of preparation	57	74	81	89	94
I often struggle to know what to do with my life	26	32	31	37	28
When I face a difficult experience, I think of it as an opportunity to learn and grow stronger	73	76	78	79	84
I am often discouraged or saddened by things outside of my control	60	62	65	70	70
The principles I choose to live by sometimes make my life more difficult	40	52	49	55	57
I am confident I can achieve my goals in life through hard work	72	70	75	76	79

Source: 2022 Gallup/Lumina Education for What survey

**PRO-SOCIAL ATTITUDES**

● Medium effect



Americans with higher educational levels are more inclined to say they try to minimize harm to the environment in their choices and actions.

However, education is unrelated to whether people agree that they respect those who hold different political views; graduate degree holders and those with no postsecondary education are equally likely to agree with this statement (70%).

**CHART 15**  
**Pro-Social Attitudes, by Education Level**

	No postsecondary education	Some postsecondary, no degree	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Graduate degree
% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree, I try to minimize harm to the environment when making choices about what to buy and how to use resources	60	68	71	77	80
% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree, I respect most people who don't support my political views, even though I disagree with them	70	75	74	69	70
Probability of doing equal or more domestic chores than spouse/partner	74	75	76	73	73
% Who believe global warming is occurring now	53	59	54	70	71
% Who believe rise in global temperatures is mostly caused by human activity	61	59	58	70	71

Source: 2022 Gallup/Lumina Education for What survey and 2019-2022 Gallup Poll surveys.



**COGNITIVE ABILITY**

## Higher education is associated with greater mental aptitude

● Large effect

Score on a survey test of numeracy, literacy and problem-solving skills



The strongest relationship among all outcomes tested in this study is between education level and cognitive ability. Each additional year of education beyond high school is associated with a 21% increase in the standard deviation of the score on a popular measure of cognitive ability that combines numeracy, literacy and problem solving.<sup>15</sup>

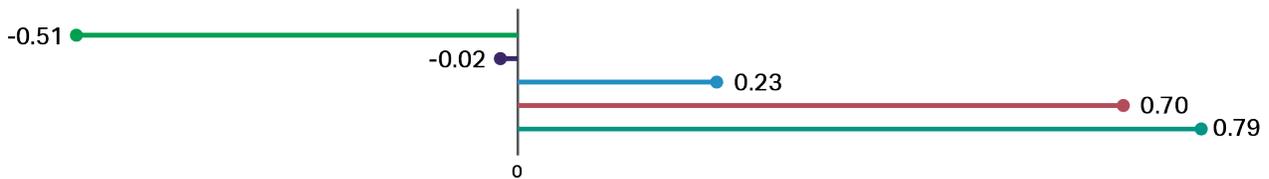
For the analysis, scores on the scale were coded to range from a low of -1 to a high of +1, with a score of 0 representing the average score for all U.S. adults. Among those with no postsecondary education the average score on the item is -0.51. The score rises to -0.02 among those with some postsecondary education with no degree, which is the biggest jump between education levels, though the increase from associate to bachelor's degree is nearly as high (0.23 to 0.70).

**CHART 16**

### Average Score on Cognitive Skills Test, by Education Level

Figures are the average standardized scores on the PIAAC cognitive skills scale (0 is the average or mean score)

- No postsecondary education
- Some postsecondary, no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree



15 The Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), or Survey of Adult Skills' combined score on numeracy, literacy and problem solving.



PERCEPTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION BENEFITS

## Americans See Higher Education Benefiting Individuals and Society

### More education leads to greater innovation, higher incomes and a more informed society

Majorities of U.S. adults agree that a more educated society leads to improvement in 14 of the 19 possible outcomes included in the survey. Americans are most likely to agree that further education fosters greater innovation in terms of new scientific, medical and technological discoveries (81%), that it leads to higher household incomes (73%) and results in a more knowledgeable population (71%).

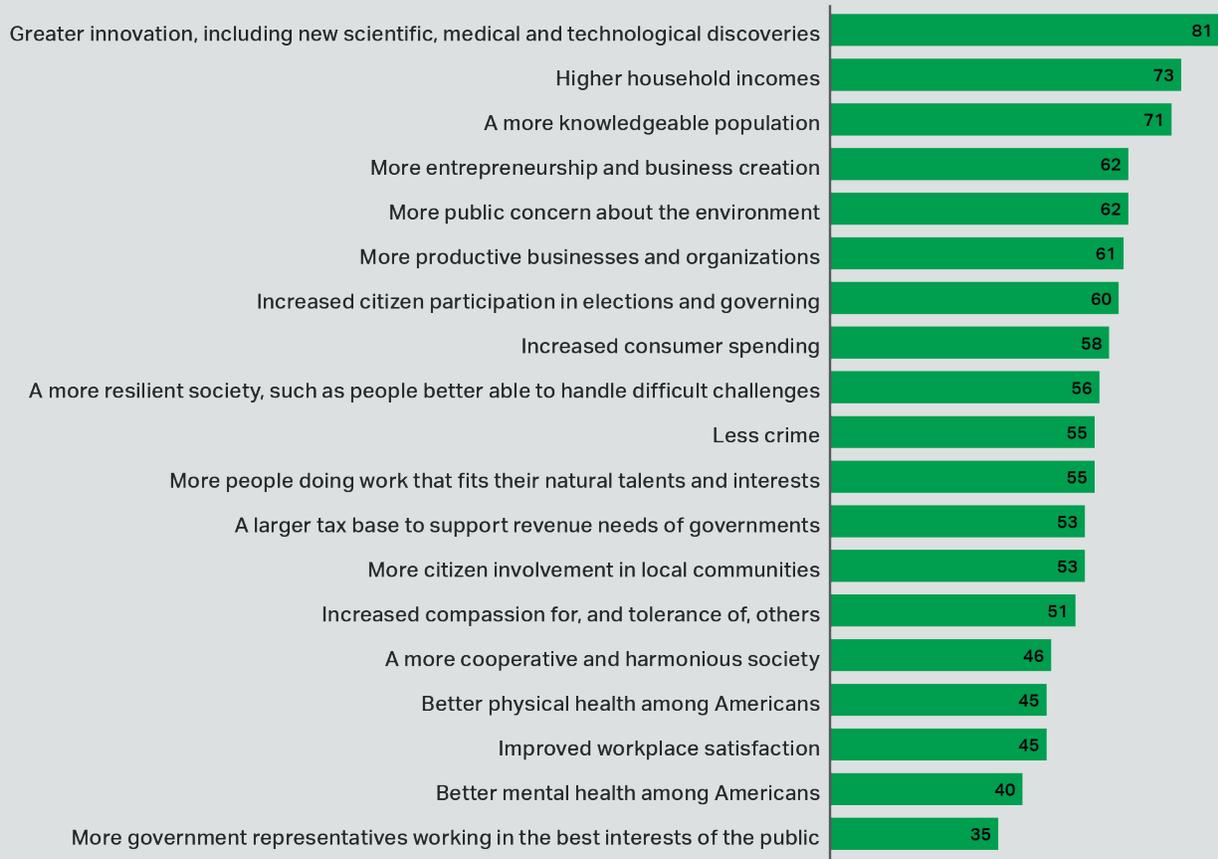
Roughly six in 10 Americans say higher levels of education facilitates greater concern about the environment, increased entrepreneurship and business creation, increased citizenship participation in elections and governing, more productive businesses and organizations and increased consumer spending.

Americans are more skeptical that increased education leads to better physical and mental health outcomes, a more cooperative and harmonious society and improved workplace satisfaction; they are least likely to agree that education is associated with more elected representatives working in the best interests of the public.

**CHART 17**

**U.S. Adults' Perceptions of Whether Increased Postsecondary Education Leads to Positive Outcomes**

*% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree with the statement*



Source: 2022 Gallup/Lumina Education for What survey

Americans' perceptions of whether education affects these outcomes generally align with the *actual* relationships between educational attainment and outcomes in each domain. Innovation, income and knowledge are strongly related to education, but the relationships are weaker for tolerance, workplace satisfaction or feelings of political representation. The only domain in which public perceptions are sharply at odds with real-world outcomes is physical health, which has been found to be strongly linked to education, though most Americans do not recognize that.

Adults who have personally attained more education are more inclined to see its personal and societal benefits. On average, agreement is eight percentage points higher with each of these statements for those with associate degrees than those with no postsecondary education. The gaps are even larger for bachelor's degree holders (15 points) and graduate degree holders (20 points).

### Racial/ethnic groups generally align on benefits of more education

Perceptions of education benefits are generally consistent across racial and ethnic groups. Across all items, the average level of agreement that education leads to specific positive outcomes is 59% for Black adults, 57% for Hispanic adults and 54% for white adults.

However, Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than white adults to say education leads to three of the 19 outcomes the survey asked about. Half of Black adults and 44% of Hispanic adults say education leads to better mental health, versus 37% of white adults.

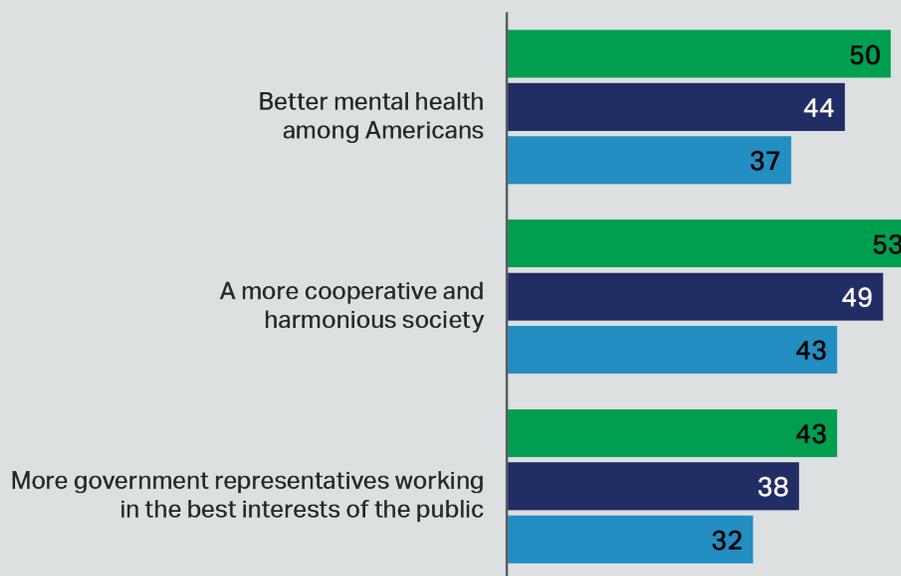
Black and Hispanic adults are also more likely than white adults to agree that more education leads to a more cooperative and harmonious society (53% and 49%, vs. 43%) and more government representatives working in the best interests of the public (43% and 38%, vs. 32%).

#### CHART 18

### Belief in Selected Positive Outcomes That Result From a More Educated Society, by Race and Ethnicity

% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree with the statement

■ Black adults ■ Hispanic adults ■ White adults



Source: 2022 Lumina Foundation/Gallup Education for What survey

### Young adults more inclined to see benefits of additional education

Younger adults are consistently more likely than the broader U.S. adult population to perceive education as having benefits for individuals and society. On average across the 19 possible outcomes, adults aged 18 to 29 are eight percentage points more likely than older adults to agree that education leads to more positive results.

Among the largest differences:

- Two-thirds of young adults (67%) say more education results in increased compassion for, and tolerance of, others; just under half (48%) of those aged 30 and older agree.
- More than three-fourths of young adults (77%) see greater education leading to increased concern about the environment, compared with 59% of adults aged 30 and older.



## Conclusion

This research adds to the body of evidence that shows additional education beyond high school benefits individuals and societies in ways beyond creating economic opportunities. People with greater education tend to have better health, are more engaged citizens and contribute more to their local communities. They also tend to be more likely to interact with neighbors and family members and are more inclined to trust their neighbors.

Americans generally believe that a more educated society can promote these benefits, although they are slightly less likely to understand the benefits for their health. The research builds a strong case for education attainment beyond high school, despite Americans' concerns about affordability and accessibility, which must be addressed to improve attainment levels.

# Appendix

## Methods

### 1 Operationalization of years of postsecondary education

For the purposes of this analysis, Gallup derived the total additional years of education for each of the levels of education included in these surveys. For example, a doctorate degree confers eight additional years of education beyond high school.

Educational category	Additional years of education
High school graduate or less	0
Technical, trade, vocational school or some college, no degree	1
Two-year associate degree	2
Four-year bachelor's degree	4
Some postgraduate education, no degree	5
Master's degree	6
Postgraduate degree (if unspecified)	6
Doctorate degree	8

In reporting out the results by graduate degree holders from data sources that reported master's degree separately from doctorate degrees, the graduate degree results represent a weighted average of the master's and doctorate degree estimates.

Statistical models controlled for effects of age, gender, race/ethnicity and education. For some variables, additional controls for political party and gender were included.

## 2 Survey items used

Description	Survey	Time period
My views are well represented by my elected local government representatives	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
My views are well represented by my elected state government representatives	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
My views are well represented by my elected federal government representatives	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I get along well with others regardless of their background, such as their race, religion or sexual orientation	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
People outside of my family often ask for my advice	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
When I decide to do something, I usually succeed	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
Some of my achievements have required years of preparation	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I often struggle to know what to do with my life	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
When I face a difficult experience, I think of it as an opportunity to learn and grow stronger	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I am often discouraged or saddened by things outside of my control	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
The principles I choose to live by sometimes make my life more difficult	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I try to minimize harm to the environment when making choices about what to buy and how to use resources	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
Elections in the United States are, for the most part, free and fair	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I respect most people who don't support my political views, even though I disagree with them	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I am confident I can achieve my goals in life through hard work	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
I do work that fits my natural talents and interests	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
My standard of living is higher than my parents' was at my age	Lumina/Gallup Education for What	Nov. 2022
Rating of personal health (1-5 scale)	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Mar. 2020-April 2022
Life evaluation in 5 years (0-10 scale)	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Feb.-Oct. 2022
Life evaluation today (0-10 scale)	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Feb.-Oct. 2022
Absence of health problems	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Mar. 2020-Aug. 2022

## Education for What?

Description	Survey	Time period
Satisfaction with work (1-5 scale)	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Jan.-Dec. 2021
Experienced a lot of positive emotions yesterday	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Mar. 2020-Aug. 2022
Own a business	Census Annual Business Survey reports/Current Population Survey <sup>16</sup>	2020, 2022
Currently have a chronic medical condition	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Mar. 2020-Aug. 2022
Experienced a lot of negative emotions yesterday	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Mar. 2020-Aug. 2022
Ever had depression	Gallup COVID Tracking Survey	Mar. 2020-Aug. 2022
Income from wages	Current Population Survey	2022
Income from all sources	Current Population Survey	2022
Labor force participation	Current Population Survey	2022
Probability of believing rising global temperature is mostly caused by human activity	Gallup Poll Social Series Environment survey	Mar. 2020-2021
Probability of believing global warming is occurring now	Gallup Poll Social Series Environment survey.	Mar. 2020-2021
Job evaluation (0-10 scale)	Gallup Great Jobs Survey	2019-2020
Probability of doing equal or more domestic chores than spouse/partner, across multiple types of chores	Gallup Poll	July 2019
Participated in service or civic organization	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Participated in school, neighborhood or community association	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Participated in religious organization	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Participated in sports/recreation organization	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Contacted a public official	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Frequency saw/heard from friends or family	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Frequency eating dinner with household members	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017

16 Current Population Survey were analyzed from microdata prepared by IPUMS CPS: Sarah Flood, Miriam King, Renae Rodgers, Steven Ruggles, J. Robert Warren and Michael Westberry. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 10.0 Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Voter Supplement, Civic Engagement Supplement, and Volunteer Supplement (multiple years). Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V10.0>

Education for What?

Description	Survey	Time period
Frequency doing favors for neighbors and vice-versa	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Frequency expressing opinion on internet	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Frequency talk with neighbors	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Frequency discussing politics with friends or family	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Trust in people in neighborhood	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Frequency voting in local elections	CPS Civic Engagement Supplement	2013 and 2017
Made donation to charity in past 12 months	CPS Volunteer Supplement	2017
Annual hours volunteered in all organizations	CPS Volunteer Supplement	2017
Volunteer status	CPS Volunteer Supplement	2017
Voted for the most recent November election	CPS Voter Supplement	2012, 2016 and 2020
Cognitive ability	PIAAC, combined score on numeracy, literacy, and problem solving	2012, 2014 and 2017

## Detailed Results

### 1 Standardized regression analysis

Variable	Percentage change in one standard deviation of outcome explained by education
Cognitive ability	0.21
Some of my achievements have required years of preparation	0.14
I do work that fits my natural talents and interests	0.09
Rating of personal health (1-5 scale)	0.09
Voted for the most recent November election	0.09
Volunteer status	0.09
Made donation to charity in past 12 months	0.09
Income from wages	0.08
Income from all sources	0.08
Participated in school, neighborhood or community association	0.08
Frequency discussing politics with friends or family	0.08
Frequency voting in local elections	0.07
Elections in the United States are, for the most part, free and fair	0.07
Contacted a public official	0.07
I try to minimize harm to the environment when making choices about what to buy and how to use resources	0.06
Life evaluation in 5 years (0-10 scale)	0.06
Participated in sports/recreation organization	0.06
People outside of my family often ask for my advice	0.06
When I decide to do something, I usually succeed	0.06
Life evaluation today (0-10 scale)	0.06
Labor force participation	0.05
Probability of believing global warming is occurring now	0.05
Frequency expressing opinion on internet	0.05
Absence of health problems	0.05
Participated in religious organization	0.04

Education for What?

Variable	Percentage change in one standard deviation of outcome explained by education
My views are well represented by my elected local government	0.04
My views are well represented by my elected federal government	0.04
Probability of believing rising global temperature is mostly caused by human activity	0.04
I often struggle to know what to do with my life (reverse coded)	0.04
Trust in people in neighborhood	0.03
Participated in service or civic organization	0.03
Own a business	0.03
I am confident I can achieve my goals in life through hard work	0.03
When I face a difficult experience, I think of it as an opportunity to learn and grow stronger	0.03
My views are well represented by my elected state government	0.03
I get along well with others regardless of their background, such as their race, religion or sexual orientation	0.03
My standard of living is higher than my parents' was at my age	0.03
Job evaluation (0-10 scale)	0.03
The principles I choose to live by sometimes make my life more difficult	0.02
Satisfaction with work (1-5 scale)	0.02
Frequency talk with neighbors	0.02
Frequency saw/heard from friends or family	0.02
Frequency eating dinner with household members	0.02
Experienced a lot of negative emotions yesterday (reverse coded)	0.02
Ever had depression (reverse coded)	0.02
Experienced a lot of positive emotions yesterday	0.01
Annual hours volunteered in all organizations	0.01
Frequency doing favors for neighbors and vice-versa	0.01
Currently have a chronic medical condition (reverse coded)	0.01
I respect most people who don't support my political views, even though I disagree with them	0.00
I am often discouraged or saddened by things outside of my control (reverse coded)	-0.01
Probability of doing equal or more domestic chores than spouse/partner across multiple chores	-0.02

## 2 Differences in items by education level (in original scale)

Years of education are defined as follows: 0=no postsecondary education; 1=some postsecondary education, no degree; 2=associate degree; 4=bachelor's degree; 5=some postgraduate education, no degree; 6=postgraduate degree

Item	Years of postsecondary education					
	0	1	2	4	5	6
Cognitive ability (standardized score with mean of 0)	-0.51	-0.02	0.23	0.70	n/a	0.79
Some of my achievements have required years of preparation (% agree)	57	74	81	89	91	94
I do work that fits my natural talents and interests (% agree)	58	69	71	80	86	87
Rating of personal health (rate as excellent or very good)	43	47	55	61	58	65
Voted for the most recent November federal election (% yes)	59	75	79	87	n/a	92
Volunteer status (% who volunteered in past 12 months)	14	27	27	38	n/a	47
Made donation to charity in past 12 months (% yes)	38	50	59	67	77	77
Income from wages (average in thousands of dollars)	21	27	34	57	70	80
Income from all sources (average in thousands of dollars)	30	39	47	75	95	107
Participated in school, neighborhood or community association (% yes)	4	10	11	16	27	27
Frequency discussing politics with friends or family (% who do so monthly)	44	56	59	67	n/a	74
Frequency voting in local elections (% always vote)	24	31	35	39	n/a	46
Elections in the United States are, for the most part, free and fair (% agree)	47	49	52	64	64	70
Contacted a public official (% yes)	6	12	12	17	n/a	26
I try to minimize harm to the environment when making choices about what to buy and how to use resources (% agree)	60	68	71	77	83	80
Life evaluation in 5 years (% giving 8-10 rating on 0-10 scale)	69	75	80	88	85	88
Participated in sports/recreation organization (% yes)	4	11	10	15	n/a	19
People outside of my family often ask for my advice (% agree)	56	67	71	70	82	80
When I decide to do something, I usually succeed (% agree)	78	81	84	85	90	89
Life evaluation today (% giving 7-10 rating on 0-10 scale)	61	56	59	69	67	75
Labor force participation (% working or actively looking for work)	55	60	67	73	74	74

Education for What?

Item	Years of postsecondary education					
	0	1	2	4	5	6
Believe global warming is occurring now (%)	53	59	54	70	n/a	71
Frequency expressing opinion on internet (% monthly)	11	18	17	22	n/a	23
Absence of health problems (% without a condition that prevents them from doing things they would normally do)	73	76	79	84	80	86
Participated in religious organization (% yes)	15	20	22	26	n/a	30
My views are well represented by my elected local government (% agree)	34	35	36	44	43	51
My views are well represented by my elected federal government (% agree)	24	25	27	33	29	42
Believe rising global temperature is mostly caused by human activity (%)	61	59	58	72	n/a	71
Trust in people in neighborhood (% trust all/most neighbors)	29	34	39	44	n/a	49
Participated in service or civic organization (% yes)	5	7	7	9	n/a	14
I am confident I can achieve my goals in life through hard work (% agree)	72	70	75	76	81	79
When I face a difficult experience, I think of it as an opportunity to learn and grow stronger (% agree)	73	76	78	79	83	84
My views are well represented by my elected state government (% agree)	31	34	36	40	39	46
I get along well with others regardless of their background, such as their race, religion or sexual orientation (% agree)	87	91	92	94	96	96
My standard of living is higher than my parents' was at my age (% agree)	62	57	59	60	58	66
Job evaluation (rate as 8-10 on a 0-10 scale)	47	49	37	45	27	49
The principles I choose to live by sometimes make my life more difficult (% agree)	40	52	49	55	61	57
Satisfaction with work (rate job satisfaction 4 or 5 on a 1-5 scale)	69	64	68	64	68	70
Frequency talk with neighbors (% who do so at least once a month)	60	63	66	68	n/a	73
Frequency see/hear from friends or family (% who do so at least once a month)	88	91	92	92	n/a	93
Frequency eating dinner with household members (% who do so "basically every day")	54	51	57	54	n/a	59
Experienced a lot of positive emotions yesterday (%)	71	67	68	68	66	69
Own a business (estimated % who own a business with at least \$1,000 in revenue and 1 or more employees other than the owner)	1	2	1	2	n/a	3

Education for What?

Item	Years of postsecondary education					
	0	1	2	4	5	6
Annual hours volunteered in all organizations (average number of hours)	92	95	102	94	n/a	105
I am often discouraged or saddened by things outside of my control (% agree)	60	62	65	70	67	70
Frequency doing favors for neighbors and vice-versa (% who do so monthly)	35	35	40	41	n/a	44
I respect most people who don't support my political views, even though I disagree with them (% agree)	70	75	74	69	74	70
Have not been diagnosed with any of these medical conditions – asthma, COPD, immune-compromised, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, cancer, heart disease (%)	30	39	40	53	46	44
Probability of doing equal or more domestic chores than spouse/partner, across multiple types of chores	.73	.75	.76	.73	n/a	.73
Experienced a lot of negative emotions yesterday (%)	31	37	36	37	38	35
Ever had depression (% yes)	23	29	29	26	28	25
I often struggle to know what to do with my life (% agree)	26	32	31	37	32	28

### 3 U.S. adults' agreement or disagreement that increased education leads to the following outcomes, from 2022 Lumina/Gallup Education for What survey

Outcome	% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly agree	% Who neither agree nor disagree	% Who strongly, somewhat or slightly disagree
Greater innovation, including new scientific, medical and technological discoveries	81	11	8
Higher household incomes	73	13	14
A more knowledgeable population	71	12	17
More public concern about the environment	62	23	15
More entrepreneurship and business creation	62	21	17
More productive businesses and organizations	61	22	17
Increased citizen participation in elections and governing	60	24	17
Increased consumer spending	58	29	14
A more resilient society, such as people better able to handle difficult challenges, like natural disasters, public health crises, recessions or international conflicts	56	20	24
Less crime	55	20	25
More people doing work that fits their natural talents and interests	55	23	23
More citizen involvement in local communities	53	27	20
A larger tax base to support revenue needs of governments	53	25	22
Increased compassion for, and tolerance of, others	51	20	29
A more cooperative and harmonious society	46	24	29
Better physical health among Americans	45	32	23
Improved workplace satisfaction	45	31	24
Better mental health among Americans	40	29	30
More government representatives working in the best interests of the public	35	26	39

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Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world. Gallup has served more than 1,000 education organizations with advice and analytics based on over 85 years of research, including nearly half a million interviews with education leaders and their teams about their workplace experiences and the perspectives of more than 6 million students and alumni captured by the Gallup Student Poll and Gallup Alumni Survey. Gallup assists districts, schools, universities and institutions nationwide with research-based strategies to provide a culture shift in education to help students on their path toward great careers and great lives.

## About Lumina Foundation

Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation in Indianapolis committed to making opportunities for learning beyond high school available to all. We envision higher learning that is easy to navigate, addresses racial injustice, and meets the nation's talent needs through a broad range of credentials. We are working toward a system that prepares people for informed citizenship and success in a global economy.



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