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UChicago Harris/AP-NORC Poll: Nearly Half of U.S. Adults Believe It Is Hard for Their Family to Improve Their Standard of Living

Black adults and older adults have a more positive outlook on upward mobility than the rest of the public.

CHICAGO, October 4, 2022 – Although almost all adults say it is important to have a good standard of living, 46% say it is more difficult to achieve one now than it was for their parents. And 54% believe it is unlikely that today’s youth will have a better standard of living than their parents, according to a new study from the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

The new poll examines opinions surrounding upward mobility and equality of opportunity in the U.S. It reveals that most people value owning a home and raising a family, but half believe that both are more difficult to achieve than it was for their parents. However, there are significant differences in attitudes based on race and age.

Black adults are more likely than white adults to report that having a good standard of living (43% vs. 28%), raising a family (33% vs. 16%), and owning a home (37% vs. 22%) have become easier for them to achieve compared to their parents.

Likewise, adults aged 60 and older are more likely than younger people to believe it has gotten easier for them to achieve a good standard of living than it was for their parents (44% vs. 27%).

“The relative optimism of African Americans, against the background of historical and contemporary injustices and persistent inequalities is striking for 2022, given the last two years of turmoil, yet is consistent with past studies of optimism,” said Steven Durlauf, a professor at the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and director of the recently established Stone Center for Research on Wealth Inequality and Mobility.

“The poll also affirms that having a good standard of living, being able to pursue your passions, owning a home, raising a family, and having a successful career are all goals that most U.S. adults value,” he added.

The public believes some groups have a harder time improving their standard of living than others. About 60% of adults think it is hard for Black Americans and immigrants to improve their standard of living, while about half believe the same regarding LGBTQ people, Hispanic Americans, and women. Few perceive difficulties for men or white Americans.

Democrats are more likely than Republicans to believe that Black Americans (82% vs. 37%), LGBTQ people (66% vs. 30%), Hispanic Americans (74% vs. 31%), immigrants (78% vs. 45%), and women (59% vs. 27%) have a hard time getting ahead, while Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that men (18% vs. 8%) have a hard time improving their standard of living.

Democrats and Republicans also have differing views on what is important for improving standard of living. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say a college education (48% vs. 31%), the community one lives in (60% vs. 38%), parents' wealth (38% vs. 23%), race and ethnicity (44% vs. 8%), and gender (31% vs. 9%) are important for improving standard of living, while Republicans are slightly more likely to cite hard work (87% vs. 76%) as important.

Despite their differing views about how to improve standard of living, around a half of Democrats (50%) and Republicans (46%) report it is difficult to improve their standard of living.

“The poll highlights that most people believe achieving a good standard of living is important but difficult to achieve,” said David Sterrett, senior research scientist with The AP-NORC Center. “At the same time, there is little public consensus about what factors enable people to improve their standard of living in this country.”

About the Study

This study was conducted by the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research with funding from NORC at the University of Chicago. Staff from Harris Public Policy and The AP-NORC Center collaborated on all aspects of the study. Interviews for this survey were conducted between August 25 and August 29, 2022, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 1,014 completed the survey. Interviews were conducted in English. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

A full description of the study methodology for the survey can be found at the end of the report on www.apnorc.org.

The proper description of the survey's authorship is as follows: This study was conducted jointly by the [University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy](#) and [The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#).

About the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy

One of the largest graduate professional schools at the University of Chicago, Harris Public Policy has been driven by the belief that evidence-based research, not ideology or intuition, is the best guide for public policy. For more than three decades, our exceptional community of scholars, students, and alumni have applied this exacting perspective to the world's most pressing problems using the latest tools of social science. Through our undergraduate and graduate programs, we empower a new generation of data-driven leaders to create a positive social impact throughout our global society.

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About The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

Celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research taps into the power of social science research and the highest-quality journalism to bring key information to people across the nation and throughout the world.

www.apnorc.org

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The two organizations have established The AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research to conduct, analyze, and distribute social science research in the public interest on newsworthy topics, and to use the power of journalism to tell the stories that research reveals. In its 10 years, The AP-NORC Center has conducted more than 250 studies exploring the critical issues

facing the public, covering topics like health care, the economy, COVID-19, trust in media, and more.

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