



Survey Center  
on American Life

# The Social Workplace

Social Capital, Human Dignity, and Work  
in America, Volume II

**Daniel A. Cox, Brent Orrell, Kyle Gray, and Jessie Wall**

A Project of the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research

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# Executive Summary

The relationship between economic and noneconomic aspects of work is complex and dynamic. Work serves as not only a means (money) to an end (self-sufficiency) but also a source of social connection, personal fulfillment, and a sense of purpose. In work, Americans find mentors, friends, and even spouses. Work, in short, can be thought of as an expression of our social nature, not just our economic need.

This report is the second of three AEI reports reconsidering the social aspects of work. In our first report, *The Social Workplace: Social Capital, Human Dignity, and Work in America*, we explored how outdated assumptions have led many to believe that men are more likely to be careerists; our data revealed that college-educated women are actually the most likely to invest deeply in their

workplace, creating and benefiting the most from the non-monetary rewards found there.<sup>1</sup> Noncollege-educated men, on the other side of this spectrum, are the least likely to feel personally and professionally engaged at work.

In this report, we examine what Americans expect from work, whether they are getting what they say they need, and what factors play into their workplace priorities—specifically, the relationship between financial considerations, such as pay and benefits, and noneconomic workplace needs like mentoring and connections to supervisors. Our final report will center on the results from in-depth interviews conducted with survey participants to examine men’s and women’s relationships with their jobs on an individual level.

# The Social Workplace

## Social Capital, Human Dignity, and Work in America, Volume II

**Daniel A. Cox, Brent Orrell, Kyle Gray, and Jessie Wall**

The American workplace is remarkable in its reputation for the demands it places on American workers. As a country, America has enjoyed unrivaled economic success and prosperity, but at a cost non-Americans often have trouble understanding. Americans work more days, work longer hours, and take less time away, paid or unpaid, than most of their peers around the world.<sup>2</sup> Does all of this “hard-core” work actually yield greater satisfaction with and commitment to work, or are we exhausting ourselves at the expense of our own happiness?

Part of answering this question requires delving into the noneconomic returns of work. In this report, we wanted to explore how Americans think about the role work plays in meeting psychological and self-esteem needs—how it enhances self-worth, personal confidence, and a sense of purpose, identity, and making meaningful contributions to the world. Conversely, we also wanted to know whether work is failing to help meet these needs or adding to dissatisfaction and stress, contributing to both workforce turnover and declines in perceived social and emotional well-being.

### Overview of Findings

This report is based on a survey of 5,037 American adults conducted in June 2022, in which we asked respondents

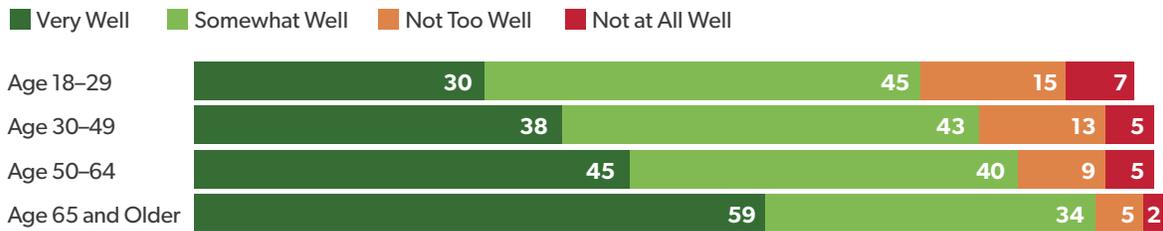
a series of questions relating to work identity, relationships with peers and superiors, social and professional investment, and the prevalence of satisfaction, anxiety, and stress at work.

Our data reveal just how varied workplace priorities can be depending on educational attainment, age, industry, race, and gender. A majority of Americans receive non-economic benefits through work, but at differing levels. While many take pride in their work, a significant number of people are reluctant to ascribe a major part of their identity to their job. Responses concerning opportunities for professional development and relationships between workers and managers reveal a similar dichotomy: Most Americans agree their bosses appreciate their work, but far fewer report regularly discussing career goals or professional development with their managers.

A consistent through line in this survey is the association between educational attainment and measures of social engagement and job satisfaction across a number of dimensions, including pay, work-sponsored social activities, support and engagement from managers and supervisors, and a sense of personal connection to work. This nexus between education and work-based social support is worth paying close attention to. Those who have a lot of education and skills going into jobs tend to receive more engagement and development, while those who have lower levels of education receive less

**Figure 1. Job Fit Increases with Age**

Percentage of American workers who report the statement "my current job is a good fit for my personal interests and abilities" describes their current job . . .



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

attention and support, thus reinforcing relative advantages and disadvantages.

At one level, this is easy to understand, an expression of how successes (and failures) can build on one another. At another level, it suggests that work can be yet another way that those who begin with less can struggle to catch up in the workplace regardless of how hard they try. It is also a caution to those who are tempted to devalue college degrees and other forms of postsecondary education that often define access to good jobs and on-the-job advancement opportunities.

### Workplace Experiences, Identity, and Fit

The vast majority of American workers feel their current job aligns at least somewhat well with their aptitude and interests. When asked whether their current work is a good fit for their personal interests and abilities, 81 percent of Americans think this describes their situation very (39 percent) or somewhat (42 percent) well.

Workplace fit tends to increase with age (Figure 1). Only 30 percent of younger workers (age 18 to 29) report their work is a good fit, compared to 38 percent of workers age 30 to 49 and 45 percent of workers age 50 to 64. Workers 65 and older (59 percent) are nearly twice as likely as young workers to report high levels of job fit.

Job fit also increases with education level. However, this is concentrated among advanced-degree holders. Workers with a college degree are only somewhat more likely than those with a high school education or less to report that their work is a good fit (40 percent vs. 35 percent). Nearly half (47 percent) of workers with a postgraduate degree say job fit describes their current occupation very well.

**Identity.** Most Americans feel their job at least somewhat reflects who they are. When asked how well “my work is an important part of who I am” describes them, more than seven in 10 American workers responded that this statement describes them somewhat (41 percent) or very (30 percent) well. More than one in four (27 percent) say this statement does not describe them too or at all well.

Younger workers who may still be searching for the right job or career are less likely to say their work defines them. Retirement-age workers (42 percent) are most likely to report that this statement describes them very well, compared to only one in four (25 percent) young workers.

**Pride in Work.** In general, Americans are proud to tell people about their work. More than eight in 10 (85 percent) say that the statement “I’m generally proud to tell people where I work or what I do for a living” describes them very (46 percent) or somewhat (39 percent) well. Pride in work increases with age. Among workers age 18 to 29, 39 percent report that the statement describes them very well, compared to 45 percent of workers age 30 to 49, 51 percent of workers age 50 to 64, and 61 percent of workers age 65 and older.

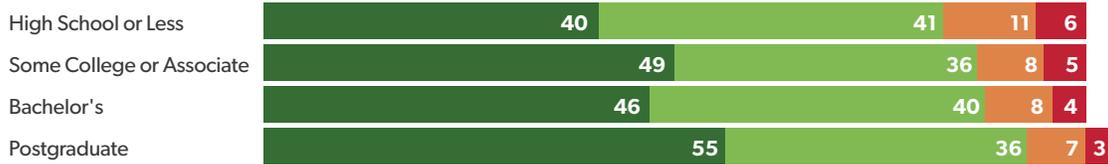
Male and female workers overall did not differ in how proud they are of their work, but women of varying education levels differ significantly. Half (50 percent) of female workers with a college degree say being proud about where they work and what they do describes their situation very well, compared to 40 percent of female workers with a high school education or less. On the other hand, college-educated men appear slightly more likely than noncollege-educated men to say they are proud to tell others where they work (48 percent vs. 44 percent). (See Figure 2.)

**Figure 2. Pride in Employment Increases with Education**

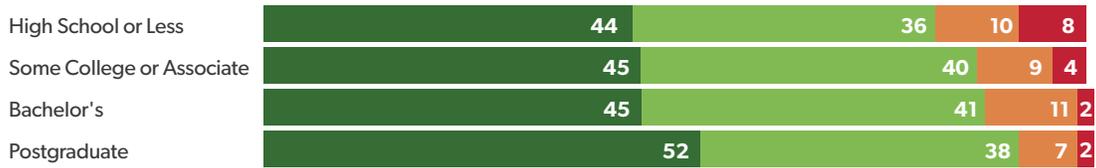
Percentage of American workers who report the statement "I'm generally proud to tell people where I work or what I do for a living" describes their current job . . .

■ Very Well ■ Somewhat Well ■ Not Too Well ■ Not at All Well

**Men**



**Women**



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

**Supervisor Relationships**

When asked about positive feedback on their work, 48 percent of American workers said their boss often expresses appreciation for their work. An additional 32 percent said this is true sometimes. A minority of workers say their boss sometimes (13 percent) or never (6 percent) expresses appreciation for their work.

College-educated workers report receiving more positive feedback about their work than do workers with less formal education. More than half (52 percent) of workers with a college degree report that their boss expresses appreciation "often," compared to 42 percent of workers with a high school education or less. College-educated women are slightly, but not significantly, more likely than college-educated men (55 percent vs. 50 percent) to report receiving positive feedback from their boss, but there is a much larger gender gap among those with less formal education. Nearly half (48 percent) of female workers with a high school education or less say their boss often expresses appreciation, compared to only 38 percent of men with a high school education or less.

**Being Treated Fairly by Your Boss or Supervisor.**

Most Americans say that they receive fair treatment at work. More than six in 10 (61 percent) American workers report that their manager or supervisor often treats them fairly. Twenty-seven percent of workers say they are

treated fairly some of the time. Roughly one in 10 (11 percent) workers say they are seldom (7 percent) or never (4 percent) treated fairly by their supervisor.

College-educated workers appear to have more positive work environments. Two-thirds (67 percent) of workers with a bachelor's degree or higher report that they are "often" treated fairly, compared to 55 percent of workers with a high school education or less.

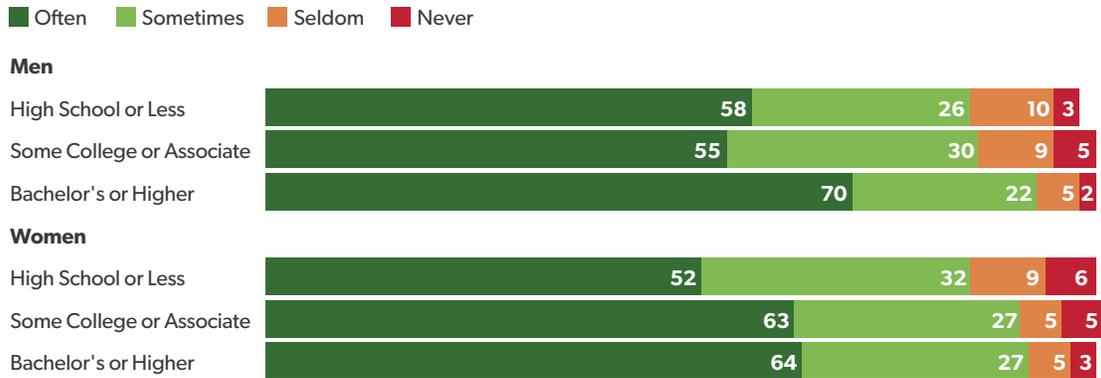
Overall, 63 percent of women and 60 percent of men report fair treatment at work. This modest gender gap rises to the level of significance only after education is factored in. (See Figure 3.) Seventy percent of college-educated women report they are often treated fairly, compared to 64 percent of college-educated men. In contrast, only about half (52 percent) of male workers with a high school degree or less say they are often treated fairly by their boss or supervisor, while 58 percent of female workers without a degree say the same. The trend inverts for workers with some college or an associate degree: 63 percent of men with some college report fair treatment often, compared to 55 percent of similarly educated women.

**Most Workers Say Their Boss Trusts Them.**

Trusting relationships are conducive to worker development and growth and integral to fostering dignity on the job. Overall, trust levels between American workers and supervisors appear high. Seventy-nine percent of American workers say their boss "often" trusts them to do their job, and

**Figure 3. College-Educated Men Are the Most Likely to Feel Treated Well by Their Boss**

Percentage of American workers who report the statement "you feel that you are treated fairly by your boss" describes their relationship with their current supervisor . . .



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

another 14 percent say their boss sometimes trusts them to do a good job. Only 6 percent say they feel their boss or supervisor seldom or never trusts their work.

There are no significant differences in reported feelings of trust among fully remote workers, those working full-time in person, and those working in hybrid workplaces. Among fully remote workers, 82 percent say their boss often trusts them to do their job, compared to 79 percent of in-person and 78 percent of hybrid workers.

**Discussing Career Goals.** Few workers report regularly discussing their career goals with their boss or supervisor. Fewer than one in five (19 percent) Americans report these discussions happen often. Another 34 percent report that these discussions happen sometimes. Close to half (46 percent) of workers report that they seldom (25 percent) or never (21 percent) have these conversations with their boss.

While there is no variation by gender, there are large differences across educational lines. Forty-four percent of workers with a high school degree or less report discussing career goals with supervisors at least some of the time. In contrast, more than six in 10 (62 percent) workers with a college education report the same.

**Investment in Workers: Compensation, Flexibility, and Culture**

To understand how companies invest in workers, promote satisfaction, and incentivize retention, we asked about the nature and frequency of company-level investments

in workers over the past 12 months. These include company-organized social activities, celebrations of company achievements, across-the-board salary increases, educational reimbursements, skill development, and work-from-home policies. We supplement this analysis by comparing workers across several major sectors of the economy, which are defined in Table 1.

**Company-Organized Social Activities.** More than one-third (36 percent) of workers reported that their employer organized a company-sponsored social activity, such as a happy hour, in the past 12 months. There are stark educational divisions in company-organized social outlets. Close to half (49 percent) of workers with at least a college degree report their workplace sponsored a social event in the past 12 months, compared to only about one in four (24 percent) workers with a high school degree or less.

The knowledge economy stands out when it comes to social investment. More than half (51 percent) of the current workers in the knowledge industry report their workplace hosted a company-sponsored social activity at least once in the past 12 months. This is far more often than in any other industry. Fewer than four in 10 workers in intangible services (36 percent), the resources industry (33 percent), government (33 percent), or commercial sales or tangible services (26 percent) report that their place of work hosted a social activity in the past 12 months.

**Salary Increases.** Even as inflation spiked, most companies did not offer onetime across-the-board salary

**Table 1. Industry Breakdown**

Resources	Commercial Sales and Tangible Services	Knowledge Economy	Intangible Services	Government
Farming, Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Animal Production	Retail, Stores, and Shopping (Including Online Retail)	Information (Including Publishing, Media, Telecom, Internet Search, and Social Networking)	Education and Tutoring	Armed Forces
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	Delivery Services, Warehousing, and Transportation (Including Air, Rail, Water, Truck, and Passenger)	Finance, Banking, and Insurance	Education and Tutoring	Armed Forces
Factory, Manufacturing, and Woodworking	Wholesale Trade	Professional, Scientific, Technical, and Business Services	Health Care (Including Elder Care and Home Health Care)	Utilities, Waste Management, and Remediation Services
Construction and Specialty Contractors (Such as Plumbing and Electrical)	Real Estate and Property Management	Management of Companies and Enterprises	Personal Services (Including Beauty, Pet Care and Household)	Community and Non-profit Organizations (Including Religious and Political Organizations)
			Administrative and Support Services (Such as Call Centers, Security, Landscaping, and Janitorial)	
			Child Day Care Services	
			Repairs and Maintenance	
			Accommodation and Food Services	

Source: Authors.

increases or bonuses, although experiences vary significantly across industry type and educational background. Less than half (42 percent) of American workers report their workplace offered an across-the-board salary increase in the past 12 months.

Workers’ experiences varied across education levels. Forty-five percent of college-educated workers report having received a salary increase in the past 12 months, compared to 37 percent of workers with a high school degree or less.

The survey showed no pronounced differences across different sectors of the economy except among those working in commercial sales or tangible services. Close to half of government (47 percent), resources (46 percent), and knowledge-economy (45 percent) workers report having received a salary increase in the past 12 months. Forty-two percent of intangible-services workers and 37 percent of workers in commercial sales or tangible services reported the same.

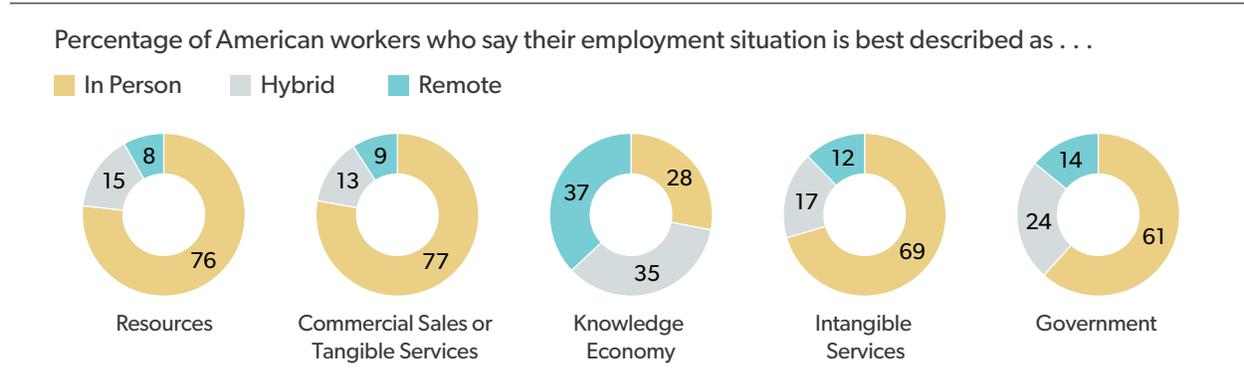
**Celebrating Company Achievements.** American workers report that marking company achievements and celebrating success are common. About half

(51 percent) of American workers report their company had celebrated an achievement or milestone at least once in the past 12 months.

College-educated workers are far more likely to report that their company or workplace took time to celebrate an achievement or success. More than six in 10 (62 percent) college-educated workers say their workplace did this, compared to only 35 percent of workers with a high school degree or less.

Workers employed in the knowledge economy are also more likely to work at places that celebrate company achievements. Sixty-five percent of workers in the knowledge economy, including workers in finance, real estate, and management, report their company celebrated achievements in the past year. In comparison, 53 percent of government workers, 48 percent of intangible-services workers, 45 percent of commercial-sales or tangible-services workers, and 46 percent of resources-industry workers said the same.

**Job Training and Education.** Only 30 percent of all workers report that their company provided education or training reimbursement in the past 12 months.

**Figure 4. Knowledge Workers Are the Most Likely to Work Remotely**

Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).

Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

Workers with more years of formal education tend to have jobs that provide greater support to pursue advanced training and educational opportunities on the job. Workers holding postgraduate degrees (44 percent) were most likely to receive such benefits, followed by workers with bachelor's degrees (34 percent), workers with some college or associate degrees (31 percent), and finally workers with a high school education or less (19 percent).

Fewer companies and workplaces introduced on-the-job training programs. Less than a quarter (24 percent) of workers report that their employer introduced a formal on-the-job training program for workers in the past 12 months. This share was consistent across all industries.

Educational differences are fairly muted when it comes to job-training opportunities for workers. College graduates are only slightly more likely than those without a degree to report their employer introduced a formal job-training program in the past 12 months (26 percent vs. 21 percent).

**Remote Work.** One-quarter (25 percent) of all workers report their company offered a permanent, flexible work-from-home schedule. Workers' experiences with remote-work opportunities varied considerably across industry type and education level.

Knowledge-economy businesses were most likely to offer flexible or remote-work arrangements (Figure 4). Fifty percent of knowledge-economy workers were offered a flexible remote-work policy, compared to 28 percent of government workers, 18 percent of resource-industry workers, 17 percent of services-industry workers, and 13 percent of commercial-sales or tangible-services workers.

Perhaps reflecting the divergence between service-oriented jobs and knowledge or creative work, there was a significant educational disparity in remote-work opportunities. Thirty-seven percent of workers with a college degree said their place of work offers flexible work-from-home policies, compared to 12 percent of workers with a high school education or less.

### Workers' Values and Priorities

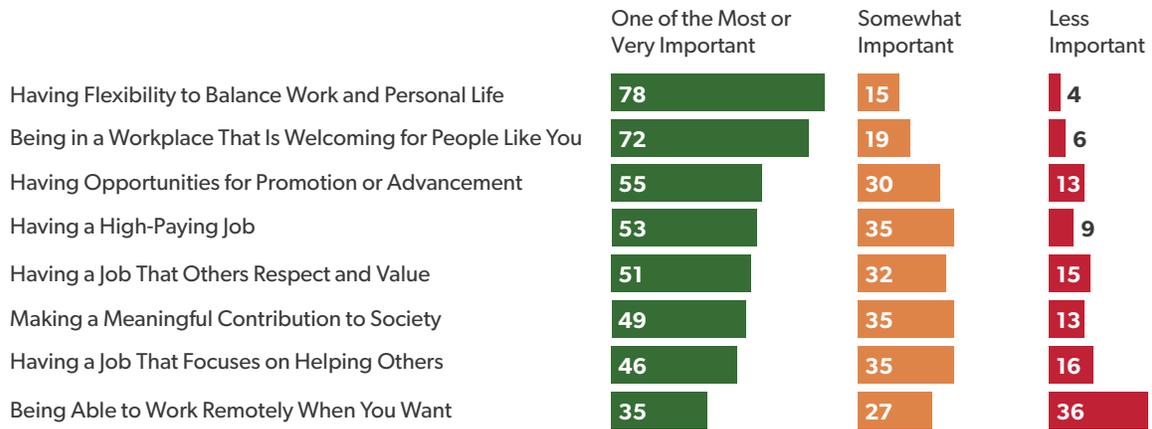
There is nothing Americans value more in their job or career than flexibility (Figure 5). Nearly eight in 10 (78 percent) workers say that flexibility is the most important or very important to them. More than half (53 percent) of workers say having a high-paying job is the most important or a very important priority. Similarly, 55 percent say that opportunities for advancement are important to them in a job or career.

Roughly half of Americans (51 percent) say that prestige—having a job others respect and value—is at least very important to them. Less than half say that being able to make a meaningful contribution to society (49 percent) or having an opportunity that focuses on helping others (46 percent) is the most important or very important to them. About one-third (35 percent) of Americans say that being able to work remotely is the most important or very important to them.

**Work-Life Balance.** Achieving work-life balance is the biggest priority for Americans when it comes to their jobs. Seventy-eight percent of American workers respond that work-life balance is one of the most important factors or a

**Figure 5. Workers Value Flexibility and Welcoming Workplaces**

Percentage of American workers who say the following are personally important when choosing a job



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

very important factor in choosing a job. Fewer than one in five (19 percent) workers report that this is only somewhat or less important.

Early and midcareer workers (82 percent and 83 percent, respectively) are most likely to report that work-life balance is one of the most important or a very important employment consideration. Older workers are less likely to emphasize work-life balance. Among late-career workers (age 50 to 64), 79 percent cited work-life balance as an important factor, while just 68 percent of post-retirement-age workers (age 65 and older) said the same.

Women are slightly more likely to report a preference for work-life balance (80 percent vs. 76 percent) compared to men. This gender gap is present across educational attainment levels.

Unsurprisingly, parents with children under age 18 are more interested in flexibility. Eighty-five percent of parents cite work-life balance as one of the most important or a very important aspect of selecting a job, compared to 77 percent of workers without children. Mothers in particular drive this trend. Nine in 10 (90 percent) mothers say that work-life balance is one of the most important aspects of selecting a job, compared with 78 percent of women without children. The same gap is not evident among men. Men with children are only a bit more likely to value flexibility than are men who do not have children (79 percent vs. 75 percent).

**Compensation.** When it comes to pay, more than half (53 percent) of American workers say that having a high-paying job is one of the most important factors or a very important factor in choosing where to work. About one-third (35 percent) of workers say this is somewhat important, and just 11 percent say it is less important to them.

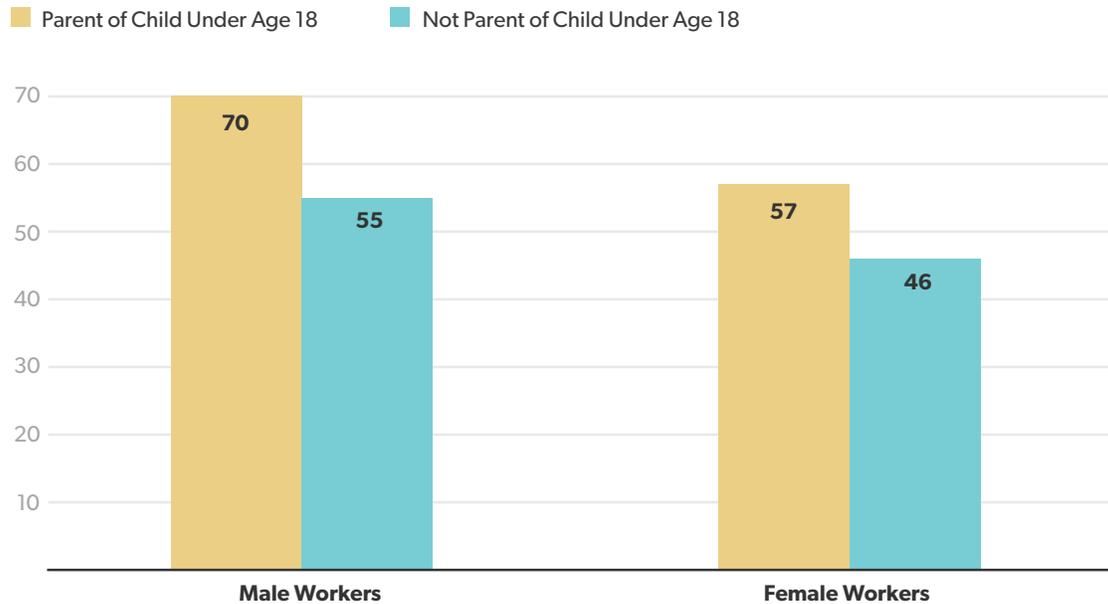
Generally, pay is consistently important in early and midcareer workers and wanes in late career. Among both workers age 18 to 29 and workers age 30 to 49, 62 percent say pay is one of the most important or a very important part of their job selection. In contrast, about half (52 percent) of workers age 50 to 64 and just 37 percent of workers age 65 and older say the same. Older workers are three times more likely to say pay is less important compared to younger workers (16 percent vs. 5 percent).

Men are more likely than women to report that pay is one of the most important factors or a very important factor in choosing a job (59 percent vs. 49 percent). This gender difference holds across age cohorts. Sixty-eight percent of midcareer men say compensation is important to them, compared to 55 percent of midcareer women.

Having a high-paying job appears to be more of a priority for parents, but this trend is concentrated among men (Figure 6). Among men with children under the age of 18, 78 percent say that pay is the most important part of job selection, compared to 55 percent of men without children under age 18. The trend also holds true among

**Figure 6. High Pay Is More Important to Parents**

Percentage of American workers who say that pay is the most or a very important part of job selection



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).

Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

women. Fifty-seven percent of mothers with children under age 18 prioritize pay, compared to 46 percent of women without children.

Views on the importance of pay vary considerably along racial and ethnic lines. Hispanic and black men are the most likely to prioritize pay when considering employment opportunities: 70 percent of Hispanic men and 60 percent of black men say having a high-paying job is one of the most important parts of job selection. Fewer white men (54 percent) say that pay is one of the most important factors in job selection. Black and Hispanic women (64 percent and 65 percent, respectively) are nearly as likely as black and Hispanic men to prioritize pay. White women (40 percent) are the least likely to say pay is one of the most important things.

**Promotion and Career Advancement.** Opportunities for career advancement are another top consideration in taking a job. More than half (55 percent) of American workers say that promotion potential is one of the most important factors or a very important factor when choosing a job.

Similar to pay, prioritizing opportunities for promotion or advancement relates inversely to age. Sixty percent of workers age 18 to 29 report that promotions are one

of the most important parts or a very important part of choosing a job, compared to 47 percent of workers over the age of 65.

Overall, men (57 percent) are slightly more likely than women (52 percent) to say promotion and advancement are top priorities. This gender gap is most pronounced among workers without a college education (58 percent vs. 49 percent).

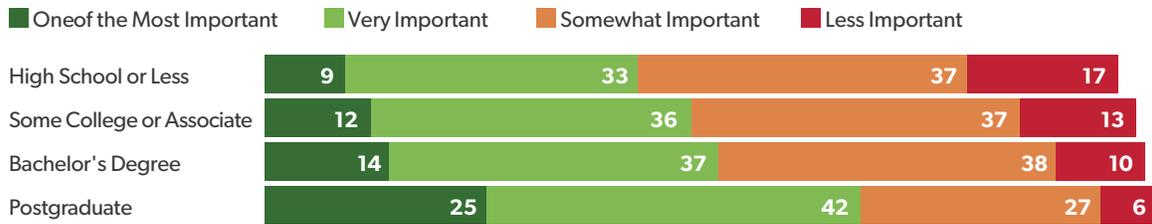
**Altruism.** For about half of Americans (49 percent), making a meaningful contribution to society is one of the most important or a very important factor in choosing a job. Thirty-five percent say it is somewhat important to them. Roughly one in 10 (13 percent) say it is less important.

The emphasis on contributing to society through work rises with educational attainment (Figure 7). Of workers with a high school degree or less, 42 percent say making a contribution is one of the most important or a very important aspect of job selection. In contrast, 51 percent of workers with a four-year college degree and more than two-thirds (67 percent) of postgraduate-degree holders say this is one of their top considerations.

Women are more likely than men to say that making a societal contribution is an important factor. Fifty-three percent of women say making a meaningful contribution is

**Figure 7. Postgraduates Prioritize Societal Contributions in Their Work**

Percentage of American workers who say making a meaningful contribution to society is personally important when choosing a job



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

one of the most important factors in choosing a job, 8 percentage points higher than men (45 percent).

Few Americans prioritize altruism in employment more than college-educated women do. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of college-educated women say making a contribution to society is an important factor, compared to 51 percent of college-educated men. Among those without a college education, gender differences are more muted (40 percent of men vs. 44 percent of women). This gender gap extends across racial groups as well, though the differences are small.

The importance of making a meaningful contribution varies by industry as well. Two-thirds (66 percent) of government workers say it is very important or one of the most important considerations. Over half (56 percent) of intangible-services workers and less than half of knowledge-economy workers (47 percent), resource-industry workers (43 percent), and commercial-sales and tangible-service workers (41 percent) also say that making a meaningful contribution to society is important to them.

**Respect and Status.** Working a job that others respect holds less value than America’s work-hard culture might suggest. Fifty-one percent of American workers say that having a job others respect is one of the most important considerations. Thirty-two percent of workers say this is somewhat important to them when making employment decisions. Fifteen percent of workers say this is a less important consideration. There are only modest differences among workers across industries.

Women are more likely than men to say a job that others value and respect is most important to them (53 percent vs. 48 percent). This gender divide is true across racial lines.

**Helping Others.** Having a job that centers on helping others is a top priority for less than half (46 percent) of workers. Thirty-five percent say it is somewhat important, and 16 percent say it is less important.

Women (54 percent) are far more likely than men (39 percent) to prioritize having a job that focuses on helping others. Women of color are the most likely to say that helping others is one of the most important considerations. Sixty-two percent of black women and 60 percent of Hispanic women report that this is one of their most important considerations. (See Figure 8.)

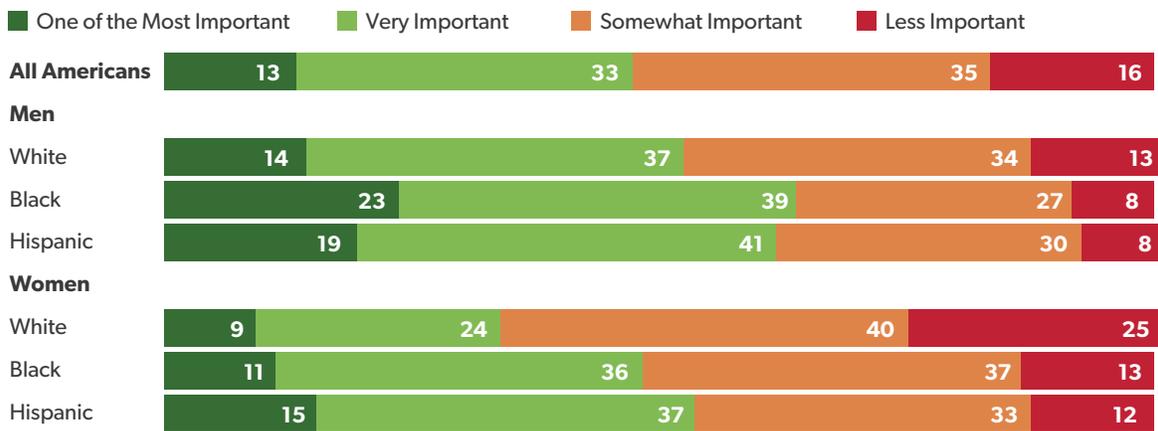
There are notable differences among workers across industry and employment sectors. A majority of intangible-service (59 percent) and government (57 percent) workers say having a job that helps others is one of the most important considerations or a very important consideration. By contrast, less than half of commercial-sales or tangible-services (42 percent), knowledge-economy (38 percent), or resources workers (38 percent) say that being able to help others is one of the most important parts or a very important part of choosing a job.

**A Welcoming Workplace.** Nearly three-quarters of Americans (72 percent) say a welcoming workplace is one of the most important parts of choosing a job. About one in five (19 percent) say this is somewhat important, and just 6 percent say this is less important.

Women (77 percent) are more likely than men (68 percent) to consider a welcoming workplace to be one of the most important considerations or a very important consideration. Young women (79 percent) are the most likely to say that a welcoming workplace is the most important consideration. Young men (71 percent) lag slightly in prioritizing this aspect of the work environment. This pattern holds for all age categories and

**Figure 8. Black and Hispanic Workers Are More Likely to Value Helping Others**

Percentage of American workers who say having a job that focuses on helping others is personally important when choosing a job



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

reflects a broader age trend: Older workers place less value on finding a welcoming workplace.

These gender differences persist across racial lines. Eighty-one percent of black women say having a welcoming workplace is one of the most important considerations, and 72 percent of black men say the same. There is also a significant divide between white women (75 percent) and white men (64 percent) on this question. However, this gender divide does not exist for Hispanic workers. Seventy-seven percent of Hispanic male workers and 76 percent of Hispanic female workers prioritize a welcoming workspace as one of the most important considerations in job choice.

**Remote Work.** A minority of workers say remote work is an important consideration. Only 35 percent of American workers say being able to work remotely when they want is an important factor for making job decisions. A comparable portion (36 percent) say this is less important to them. Twenty-seven percent fall in between and say this is somewhat important to them.

Midcareer workers place the highest importance on remote-work options. This priority fades with age. Forty-four percent of workers age 30 to 49 say being able to work remotely when they want is an important job consideration, compared to 37 percent of workers age 18 to 29 and 32 percent of workers age 50 to 64. Only 23 percent of workers age 65 or older report

that remote work is one of the most important factors of choosing a job.

Midcareer often corresponds with parenthood, and parents are significantly more likely to value remote work than nonparents are. Among parents with children under age 18, 44 percent say remote work is important, compared to 32 percent of nonparents. Mothers are more likely to place high importance on remote work than are fathers (48 percent vs. 39 percent).

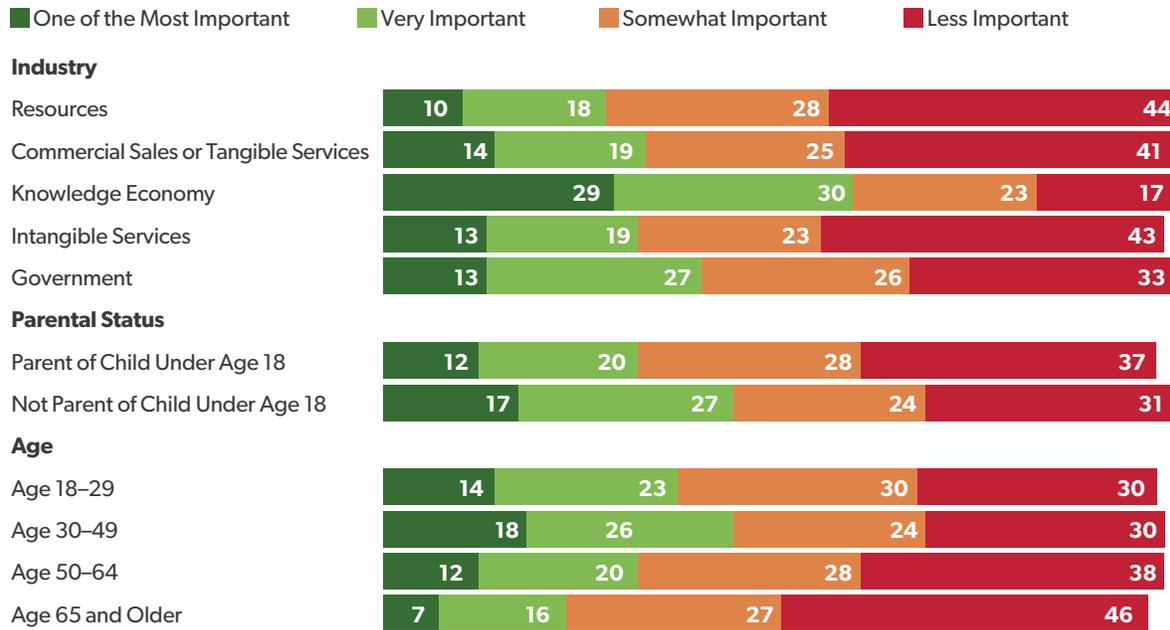
Knowledge-economy workers place the highest priority on remote work (Figure 9). Nearly six in 10 (59 percent) knowledge-economy workers say that being able to work remotely is one of the most important or a very important employment consideration. Only 40 percent of government workers and even fewer workers in commercial sales (33 percent), intangible services (32 percent), and resources (28 percent) say the same.

### Worker Satisfaction and Retention

Workplace satisfaction is a complex picture influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. Americans value, to differing degrees, pay, a welcoming environment, opportunities for advancement, work-life balance, and a sense that they are contributing to society. These factors carry varied importance for different segments of American workers.

**Figure 9. Knowledge-Economy Workers Value Remote Work**

Percentage of American workers who say being able to work remotely when they want is personally important when choosing a job



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

**Who Is Satisfied with Their Job?** Overall, the majority of American workers appear satisfied with their work. Most workers (56 percent) report being completely (19 percent) or very satisfied (37 percent) with their current work or employment situation. A further 31 percent of American workers report that they are somewhat satisfied. Only about one in 10 (13 percent) say they are not too or at all satisfied with their current employment situation.

Worker satisfaction appears to increase with age (Figure 10). Older workers (age 65 and older) are more than twice as likely as young workers (age 18 to 29) to report that they are completely satisfied (30 percent vs. 14 percent) and 9 percentage points more likely to report being very satisfied (44 percent vs. 35 percent). But age and experience are not the only factors that matter.

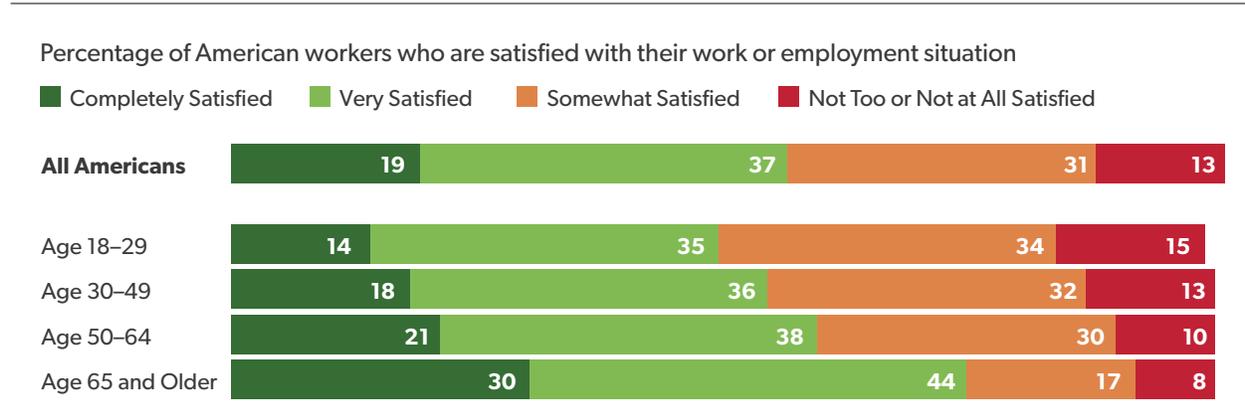
Slight satisfaction differences exist by remote-work status: 55 percent of in-person workers, 57 percent of hybrid workers, and 59 percent of remote workers report being completely or very satisfied. However, remote workers are significantly more likely to report being completely satisfied (23 percent) than are both hybrid workers (15 percent) and in-person workers (19 percent).

**Worker Retention and Turnover.** Despite the tight labor market, few workers report that they are currently exploring new job or career opportunities. Only 17 percent of workers say they are currently looking for a new position or role, and most job seekers (11 percent) are looking for a full-time position. Eleven percent of workers say they will likely be looking for a new opportunity in the next six months. Nearly seven in 10 (69 percent) workers are not currently looking or planning to look for new positions.

Notably, among unemployed workers who are looking for work, only half (50 percent) report they are looking for a full-time position. About one in three (31 percent) report they are looking for a part-time position.

Young workers are most likely to be looking for a new job or position. Three in 10 (30 percent) young workers (age 18 to 29) report they are currently seeking a new full-time (19 percent) or part-time (11 percent) role. About one in five (19 percent) report they will be looking for a new job in the next six months.

**Correlates of Satisfaction.** A number of company, individual, and interpersonal factors influence overall job

**Figure 10. Older Workers Are Also the Most Satisfied**

Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).

Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

satisfaction. Among these, compensation and opportunities for development stand out as key correlates of satisfaction.

*Compensation.* Twenty-eight percent of workers report that being paid fairly for their labor describes their current workplace situation “very well,” while close to half (45 percent) say being fairly compensated describes their current job “somewhat well.” About one-third of workers say fair pay does not describe their current work situation well.

There is a modest gender gap in satisfaction with compensation levels. Men are more likely than women to report that being fairly compensated for their work describes their job “very well” (31 percent vs. 25 percent). The gender gap is larger among young workers (age 18 to 29). While 28 percent of young male workers say that fair pay describes their employment “very well,” the same is true of only 19 percent of young female workers. Satisfaction also varies slightly by educational attainment and gender (Figure 11). Roughly half of high school–educated male workers (48 percent) report being satisfied with their employment situation, compared to 63 percent of women with a postgraduate degree.

While differences in reports of fair pay do not vary significantly by education level, gender gaps are present regardless of educational background (Figure 12). Women with a high school degree or less are the least likely to report that being paid fairly describes their employment “very well” (22 percent), compared to 29 percent of men with the same education. On the other hand, men with a college degree are most likely to report that being paid fairly describes their employment

“very well” (32 percent), compared to 25 percent of college-educated women.

Attitudes toward compensation correlate with job satisfaction. Eighty percent of workers who say being paid fairly describes their work situation very well are very or completely satisfied with their job. This number falls to 55 percent among those who say fair pay describes their work situation somewhat well. As satisfaction with pay falls, so does the percentage of workers who say they are mostly satisfied with their work.

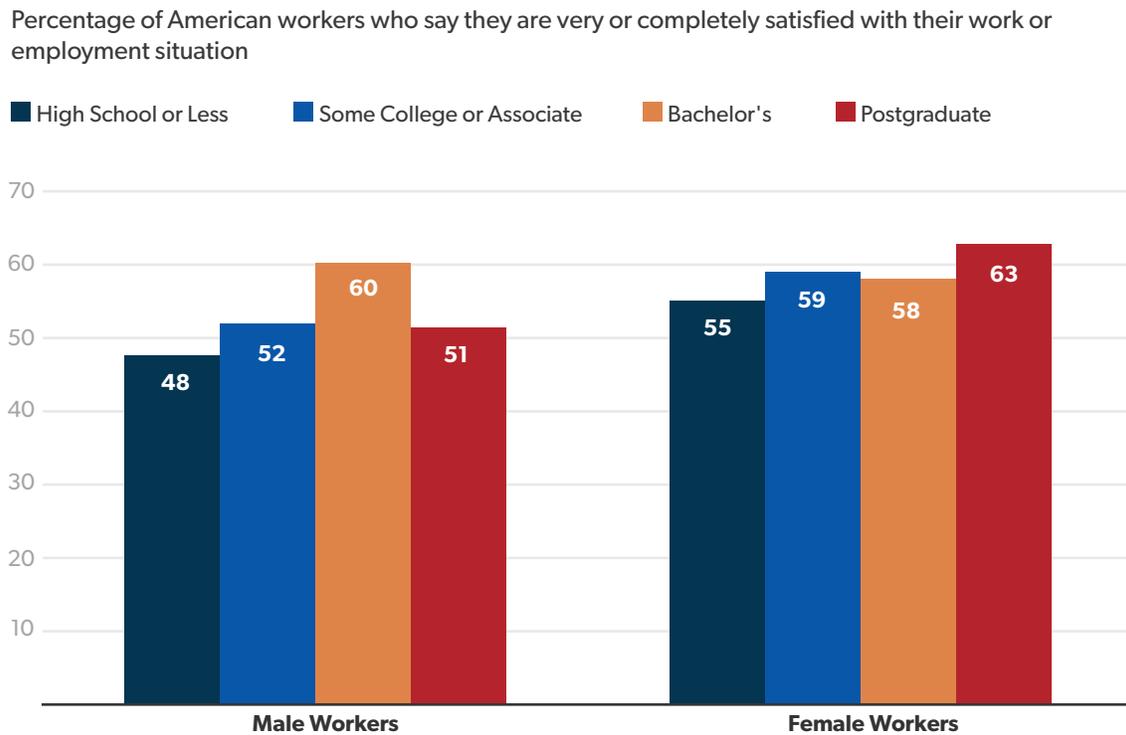
*Opportunities for Development.* In addition to recognition, opportunities for development on the job appear to contribute to overall feelings of worker satisfaction.

Most workers say there are at least some opportunities to expand their skill set on the job. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of workers report the statement “I have the opportunity to develop new skills” describes their job either very or somewhat well. Only one in four (25 percent) workers say this does not describe their current work experience well.

Opportunities for skill development appear abundant for early career workers and decline somewhat with age. Thirty-five percent of young workers (age 18 to 29) report that having opportunities to develop new skills describes their work situation very well, compared to 30 percent of midcareer workers and 25 percent of those late in their career.

Workers in the knowledge economy are most likely to report they have opportunities to develop new skills. Thirty-six percent of workers in the knowledge economy say development of new skills describes their work very well, which is higher than all other industries.

**Figure 11. Job Satisfaction Varies by Gender and Education**



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
 Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

Remote work does not appear to hinder opportunities for skill development. Seventy percent of fully in-person workers report the statement describes their employment experience very or somewhat well, compared to 72 percent of fully remote workers. Further, remote (34 percent) and hybrid (33 percent) workers are more likely than in-person (27 percent) workers to say the statement describes their experience very well. This difference is statistically significant.

Satisfaction also correlates with developmental opportunities (Figure 13). More than three-quarters (77 percent) of workers who say that having opportunities to develop new skills describes their employment very well are very or completely satisfied. The percentage of those who are very or completely satisfied decreases to 55 percent among workers who say skill development describes their job somewhat well. A plurality (46 percent) of workers who say skill development describes their job not too well are somewhat satisfied with their job, and 21 percent of these workers say they are not too or at all satisfied. Workers who say skill development does not describe their job at all well are even

more likely to be dissatisfied: 37 percent say they are not too or at all satisfied.

### Gig Workers

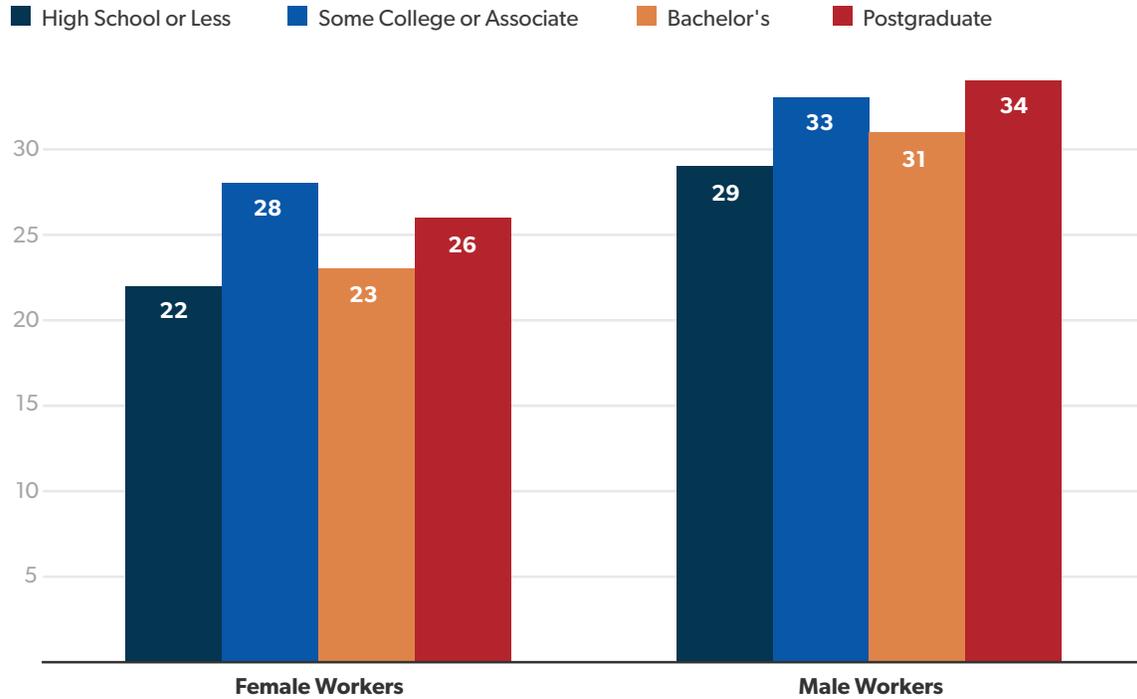
The gig economy is booming. Nearly one in 10 Americans (9 percent) have driven a rideshare, rented their home, delivered food through an app-based service, provided childcare, or done chores for others through an online service. Gig workers comprise 17 percent of all currently employed Americans.

One in four (25 percent) gig workers report driving for a rideshare company, such as Uber or Lyft. Three in 10 say they have rented a home or property (30 percent) or delivered food, such as for a service like DoorDash, Grubhub, or Seamless (31 percent). Fewer than one in 10 have performed home duties or maintenance tasks, such as through TaskRabbit, or provided childcare (6 percent and 7 percent, respectively).

Gig workers are more likely to be early career workers or retirement age. Nearly one in three gig workers are

**Figure 12. Male Workers Are More Likely to Report Fair Pay**

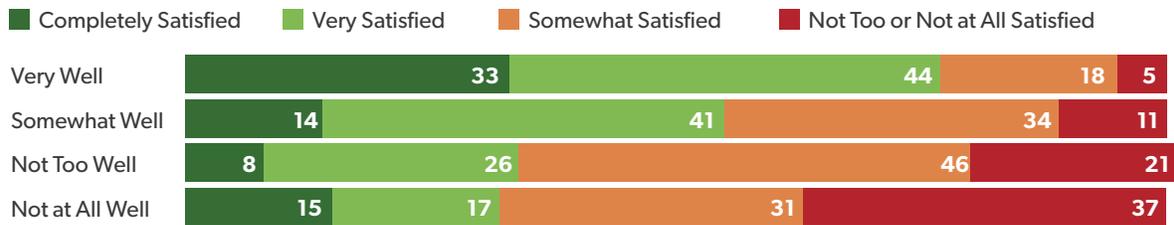
Percentage of American workers who say "I am paid fairly for the work that I do" describes their current job very well



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

**Figure 13. Workers with Development Opportunities Are the Most Satisfied**

Percentage of American workers who say having opportunities to develop new skills describes their current job well and who are satisfied with their work or employment situation



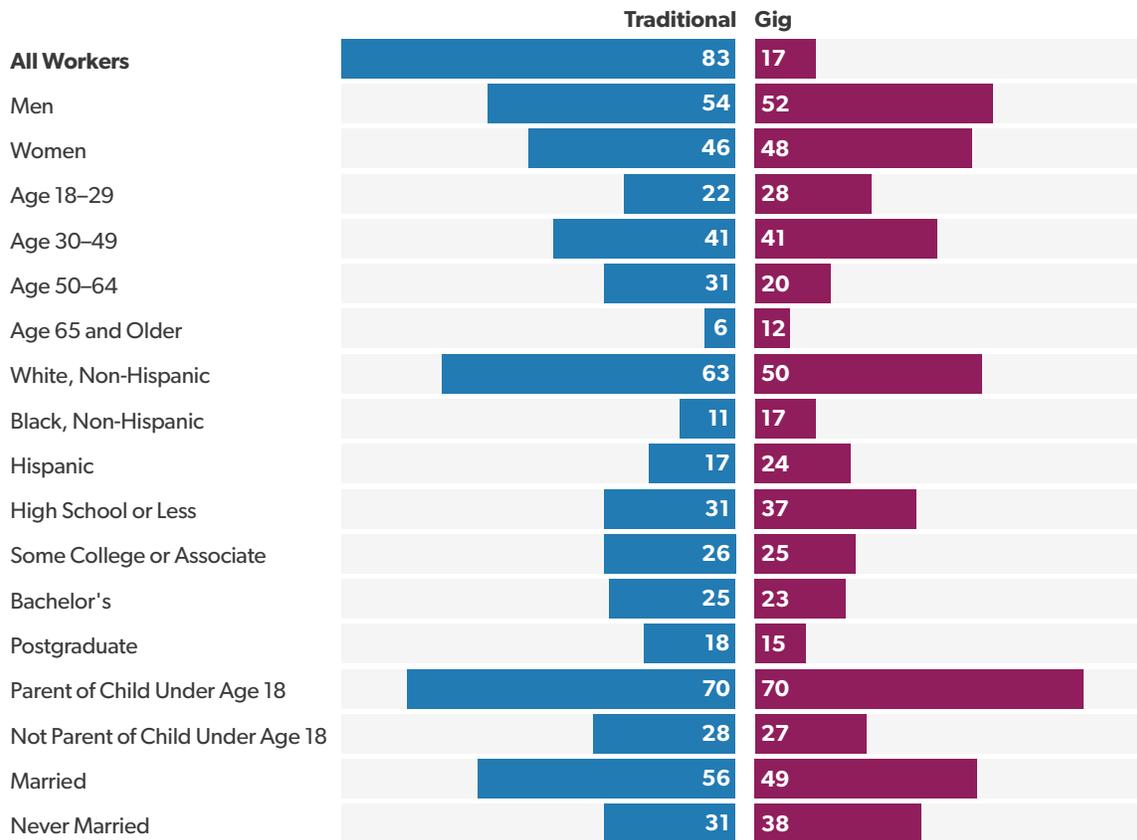
Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

age 18 to 29 (28 percent), compared to 22 percent of the traditional labor force. Midcareer workers comprise 41 percent of both the gig and traditional economy.

Fewer late-career workers are in gig jobs. Retirement-age workers are overrepresented in the gig economy (12 percent of gig workers vs. 6 percent of the total workforce).

**Figure 14. The Demographic Profile of Workers in the Gig and Traditional Economies**

Percentage of workers in the gig or traditional economy



Note: Survey of US adults (N = 5,037).  
Source: American Perspectives Survey, June 2022.

Men and women are about equally likely to engage in gig work. However, certain gig jobs have a strong gender bias. Sixty-three percent of workers who have ever driven rideshares are men. Men are also more likely to rent their homes (55 percent vs. 45 percent) but not to have delivered food (51 percent vs. 49 percent).

Gig workers also differ from the traditional worker population by race, with black and Hispanic workers making up a disproportionate share of the gig workforce. For comparison, these workers comprise 11 percent and 17 percent, respectively, of the traditional worker population. While half of gig workers are white, white workers comprise 63 percent of the traditional worker population and so are underrepresented in the gig economy.

Though demographic differences do arise (Figure 14), few attitudinal differences exist between gig and trad-

itional workers. Gig and traditional workers are equally likely to value flexibility (82 percent vs. 83 percent). They are equally likely to say that the statement “Work is an important part of who I am” describes them very or somewhat well (71 percent vs. 72 percent). They are also equally likely to say that the statement “My current job is a good fit for my personal interests and abilities” describes them very or somewhat well (80 percent vs. 82 percent).

Similarly, gig workers are equally likely to report being very or completely satisfied with their job as traditional workers are (56 percent vs. 55 percent). When it comes to time spent with family, gig and traditional workers are equally likely to be very or completely satisfied (52 percent vs. 49 percent).

## Conclusion

The American workplace, famous for increasing living standards, places high demands on workers compared to other countries. Well-structured and well-managed workplaces have much to contribute to workers' social, psychological, and emotional well-being by helping provide meaning, purpose, and a sense of social contribution. By attending to both sides of the workforce ledger—the financial and the social—we can help build our economy and our sense of connection.

## About the Authors

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## Notes

1. Brent Orrell, Daniel A. Cox, and Jessie Wall, *The Social Workplace: Social Capital, Human Dignity, and Work in America*, October 25, 2022, AEI Survey Center on American Life, <https://www.americansurveycenter.org/research/the-social-workplace-social-capital-human-dignity-and-work-in-america>.

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