The Belonging Barometer

THE STATE OF BELONGING IN AMERICA

OVERZERO

American Immigration Council

Acknowledgments

This report is the product of a partnership between Over Zero and the Center for Inclusion and Belonging at the American Immigration Council.

Over Zero

Over Zero creates long-term societal resilience to political and identity-based violence and other forms of group-targeted harm. It connects cross-sector research to practice and equips diverse leaders with the tools and connections that they need to take action in their communities.

Center for Inclusion and Belonging, American Immigration Council

The Center for Inclusion and Belonging houses the signature culture and narrative change programs of the American Immigration Council. The Center also convenes institutions and stakeholders nationwide who share the common goal of building a more cohesive America where all people are welcomed and included.

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Executive Summary

Belonging is a fundamental human need, and one that is linked to many of the most complex challenges of our time. Without a sense of belonging, individuals and communities suffer; with it, they thrive. Yet, because belonging is notoriously difficult to measure, it is often ignored in efforts to address the deep fractures in our societies.

One purpose of this report is to call attention to belonging as a factor that matters deeply for leaders and stakeholders across diverse sectors. We make the case for including belonging in the design and implementation of programs and policies across all areas of life in the United States. A second purpose is to propose a nuanced new tool for measuring belonging—the Belonging Barometer—that is robust, accessible, and readily deployable in the service of efforts to advance the common good. As with any new tool, it is our hope that the Belonging Barometer can and should be refined and improved upon over time. We offer it up to changemakers across the world and welcome feedback and collaboration.

In this report, we review the concept of belonging and introduce a new measure, the Belonging Barometer. We then describe initial findings based on a nationally representative survey regarding the relationship between the Belonging Barometer and health, democracy, and intergroup dynamics in the US. Next, we report on the state of belonging across five life settings: family, friends, workplace, local community, and the nation. Lastly, we briefly discuss emerging themes and considerations for designing belonging interventions.

Key Findings From This Report

- **Belonging is measurably multifaceted.** Belonging is about the quality of fit between oneself and a setting. When one belongs, they feel emotionally connected, welcomed, included, and satisfied in their relationships. They know that they are valued for who they are as well as for their contributions, can bring their whole and authentic self to the table, and are comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions regardless as to whether they diverge from dominant perspectives. In addition, they understand how things work within a given setting, feel treated equally, and perceive that they are able to influence decisions.

- **Belonging is vital for American society.** Belonging Barometer scores were associated with critical life outcomes in **health** (e.g., better general and mental health; increased life satisfaction; decreased pain, stress, and loneliness), **workplace** (e.g., increased retention and greater willingness to recommend one's job), **social cohesion** (e.g., higher satisfaction with local community; increased trust in one's neighbors, other local residents, and local government; more civic engagement; decreased feelings of marginalization; decreased fear of demographic change; more openness to diversity; and greater desire to meet people who are different than oneself), and **democracy**

(e.g., greater satisfaction with life and democracy in the US; increased support for our democratic system of government).

- **A majority of Americans report non-belonging**, a cumulative term that includes people who are unsure or ambiguous about whether they belong and those experiencing exclusion. Sixty-four percent of Americans reported non-belonging in the workplace, 68% in the nation, and 74% in their local community. Further, nearly 20% of Americans failed to report an active sense of belonging in *any* of the life settings we measured, and a small subset (6%) report exclusion across all life settings. These deficiencies in belonging may hold significant costs to individuals, institutions, and our society as a whole.

- **Socioeconomic status and other systemic factors are strongly associated with belonging.** Americans were more likely to report belonging if they also saw themselves as better off or much better off economically than the average American. Other associated factors included being older; identifying as a woman or a man vs. another gender; or identifying as heterosexual/straight or homosexual/gay rather than bi/pansexual, asexual, or queer. In some life settings belonging also correlated with race, religion, and immigration status, however these differences often become statistically insignificant once we controlled for socioeconomic status. While we did not test associations between belonging and other forms of systemic marginalization, we note that socioeconomic status itself is influenced by them—this is the case, for example, with redlining, which prevents wealth accumulation, or being subject to racism or xenophobia, which would serve to block opportunities in ones life. For these reasons, belonging interventions—in families, workplaces, local communities, and at the national level—must be designed with an eye towards the life experiences that influence an individual systemically.

- **Large percentage of Americans feel they are treated as "less than others" in their daily lives,** and this experience is associated with non-belonging across all life settings—not only in local community but also nationally, in the workplace, and even among freinds and family. The Americans who report being treated as "less than" tend to be younger, first-generation or non-citizen immigrants, identify as non-Hispanic white, or identify as a gender minority. The range of demographic categories who reported being treated as "less than others" in their local communities suggests a broad social breakdown in civic norms and behavior, or at least the experience of such among a wide set of groups. It also presents an opportunity for local communities to inquire about whether their residents experience indignity in daily interactions, and to seek to address any issues

- **Belonging and diversity are interdependent,** an insight that will grow increasingly important as the US becomes increasingly diverse. Americans with one or more diverse friends reported higher levels of overall friendship belonging. Moreover, Americans living in diverse neighborhoods reported less marginalization and more openness to demographic change *if they* experienced local belonging. Our research suggests that we all win when we strive to inculcate belonging in diverse workplaces or civic spaces,

and conversely, we all lose when we don't combine diversity with belonging. However, our survey also revealed that large percentages of Americans lack relationships with people of a different race/ethnicity, partisan affiliation, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or country of origin. Taken together, these facts underscore the need to invest in social contact across differences.

- **Belonging is attainable.** In today's polarized, socially segregated, and increasingly diverse America, investments in belonging are more urgent than ever. Fortunately, there is burgeoning research on how to design effective belonging interventions, and there are already organizations and communities piloting such work. As work in this space continues, understanding what is and what is not working, and why, will be critical for advancing the field. While this first report serves as a "snapshot" of belonging in the US today, the Barometer can be adapted to measure levels of belonging over time (e.g., for workers, students, residents, citizens), or to track pre- and post-intervention changes. With such a robust measure, it will be possible to tailor interventions to improve belonging, and to identify the interventions that work best within a particular context.

To further explore any aspect of this report, or to learn how to use the Belonging Barometer in your town, team, office, etc., please contact Over Zero at belonging@projectoverzero.org.

Introduction

Introduction

The need to belong is among our most primal drives,[1] shaping our personal, societal, and political experiences in the 21st-century. Indeed, scholars have linked some of the most complex challenges of our time—loneliness,[2] caring for an aging population,[3] various forms of social and political division,[4] and school violence[5]—to belonging. Yet belonging is notoriously difficult to measure. As a result, it is often ignored in efforts to address the deep fractures in our societies, or is given only passing consideration—and rarely with a substantive evidence base.

One purpose of this report is to call attention to belonging as a factor that matters for key stakeholders, leaders, and philanthropists in the US today who care about health, democracy, and intergroup relations. Another is to propose a way of measuring belonging that is robust, accessible, and readily deployable in the service of efforts to advance the common good. Like all measures, the Belonging Barometer can be improved upon as it gains wider deployment. To begin that process, we offer it up to changemakers across the world and invite your feedback.

This report reviews the concept of belonging and introduces a new measure, the Belonging Barometer. Then, based on findings from a nationally representative survey (n=4905), it reveals the ways in which the Belonging Barometer is associated with US health, democracy, and intergroup dynamics, respectively. Next, it reviews the state of belonging in America across five life settings—family, friends, workplace, and local and national communities. It further explores two themes emerging from these data: the interdependence of diversity and belonging and the fact that belonging in one life setting correlates with belonging in other life settings. We close with a short introduction to belonging interventions.

The Roots of Belonging

In social psychology's "theory of belongingness," **belonging is an innate motivational drive—underpinned by our ancestral origins—to form and maintain positive emotional bonds with others.**[6] Our need for belonging is so great that it permeates our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors,[7] and is integrally connected to how we perceive and pursue our life goals.[8]

In fact, our brains are wired for belonging, and we are psychologically primed to form positive emotional bonds before we are even born. In the womb, our hearts beat in tandem with those of our mothers[9] and once when we're born, our hormones and brain activity mirror our caregivers' in a process called "biobehavioral synchrony."[10] This phenomenon lays the biological foundation from which empathy emerges later in life, and helps to shape our capacity to connect with others in the future. These are among the reasons why some scholars have deemed belonging to be as important as our need for love,[12] and as necessary to our survival as food or water.[11]

As we will discuss later in this report, individuals who experience belonging are happier, healthier, and more resilient.[13] They enjoy improved cognition, creativity, and performance, as well as bolstered immune systems, which protect them from stress and disease.[14] Within wider society,

belonging is associated with increased civic engagement and trust.[15] And, at a time when we seek to strengthen our pluralistic practices in the US, belonging may help to facilitate social cohesion by improving individuals' ability to process information that may be discordant with their worldview.[16]

It is no surprise, then, that belonging lays the foundation for thriving individuals and strong communities. Susie Wise, Stanford University professor and author of *Design for Belonging*, writes:

> *...belonging is the key that unlocks the best in everyone. Kids who feel they belong learn better in school. Elders with a sense of belonging stay healthy and aware. Immigrants who belong thrive in their new communities. Having a sense of belonging leads to flourishing in every environment and group, big and small, from your home to the culture at large.*[17]

Belonging & Othering

Research on belonging nearly always associates belonging with positive outcomes and non-belonging with negative ones. But this binary characterization is based on a snapshot of belonging relationships at a single moment. Since belonging is a need, those experiencing non-belonging will seek to fill it in some way. How one chooses to satisfy their need to belong could be harmful if done in a way that threatens their own healthy functioning or is detrimental to societal cohesion.[18] Think, for instance, of a drug addiction that is acquired because the drug enables a desperately needed sense of connection and wellbeing,[19] or, of narratives where some form of societal exclusion served to push individuals toward belonging within an extremist community.[20]

Indeed, one way that people forge a sense of belonging is by **othering** members of other groups. john a. powell and Stephen Menendian, both at UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute, call group-based othering "the problem of the twenty-first century." They write:

> *In a world beset by seemingly intractable and overwhelming challenges, virtually every global, national, and regional conflict is wrapped within or organized around one or more dimension of group-based difference. Othering undergirds territorial disputes, sectarian violence, military conflict, the spread of disease, hunger and food insecurity, and even climate change.*[21]

Othering is treating people from another group as essentially different and generally inferior to the group you belong to. —Susie Wise[17]
For a longer definition and explanation, see john a. powell, "the mechanisms of othering."

Setting a boundary between "us" and "them" can often lead to a stronger sense of belonging within the "us."[22] But even without othering, moving closer to one group of people can often mean moving farther apart from another group, an observation that reminds us that belonging is not just dynamic (always changing) but sometimes also compensatory (e.g., in a life of limited time and energy, an increased investment and experience of belonging in one life setting may mean a decreased sense of belonging in another).

The realities described above highlight the need for deeper contextual and longitudinal examinations of belonging. Specifically, future work can seek to understand how shifts in belonging and othering interact with societal bridges and divisions, and with our society as a whole. For now, we start by providing a baseline snapshot of belonging in America.

Why Create a Belonging Barometer?

Given widespread acknowledgment of the power of belonging within the social sciences, one might expect there to be a clear and shared definition for the term, or perhaps a standardized means of assessment. Unfortunately, neither is the case.[23] Scientific research on belonging has developed in parallel across different disciplines and sectors, often leading to measures that are long and hyperspecific (e.g., tailored to the nursing profession, schools or sports teams, Anglican congregants, etc.) or that lack nuance (e.g. such as a one-item survey question).[24] Thus, while the past 30 years have produced striking findings about the many impacts of belonging (itself, or through adjacent constructs such as social connection, social cohesion, loneliness, isolation, rejection, or ostracization), neither the measures used nor the populations studied are easily comparable. We created the Belonging Barometer in an attempt to fill this need, and to provide richer, more nuanced insights about belonging.

Introducing the Belonging Barometer

While belonging may be an innate motivational drive to form and maintain positive emotional bonds, it is not merely about social connection. For social psychologists Greg Walton and Shannon Brady, **belonging**:

> *...involves two parties, 'I' and 'here,' and, at least implicitly, an evaluation of who I am (or can become) and what the setting allows (or can allow)...It is a more general inference, drawn from cues, events, experiences, and relationships, about the quality of fit or potential fit between oneself and a setting.*[25]

Environments of "fit" allow us to pursue our goals, and belonging is fundamentally connected to goal pursuit. Environments that lack a "fit" are problematic because they hinder our goals. (Alternatively, they might simply feel irrelevant to us (e.g., "I don't care if I belong on Wall Street").

The idea that one is part of a system or environment that "fits," or doesn't, sets belonging apart from constructs that more specifically deal with social relationships (like social connectedness, loneliness, isolation, rejection, or ostracization).[26] While social relationships can be a source of belonging, one can feel belonging without them (for instance, in settings where they do not, or not yet, have strong relationships). One can also lack belonging despite having friends in a setting, especially if they feel that one of their **social identities** is marginalized there.[27]

Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership.

Further, belonging does not always involve the presence of other people—one can feel a sense of belonging to an environment (e.g., a park, mountain, or tribal land).[28]

The Science of "Belonging Uncertainty"

Belonging and belonging uncertainty are separate but related factors. Belonging uncertainty is the sense that one's belonging is tentative, up for negotiation, and always at stake. It occurs when environmental cues indicate that one's identity (e.g., race, religion, national origin) might not be compatible with success (e.g., at school or work, or within the community).[29] For instance, if a student who wants to become a math professor notices that the hallways in the math department are covered solely with pictures of male mathematicians, she may wonder if her aspirations are realistic.

People might think they belong most of the time, but still perceive and be reactive to threats—even subtle ones—to that belonging. When a person perceives that threats to their belonging are a possibility, they vigilantly monitor for such cues in the environment, which can take energy away from the social, educational, or professional task at hand. In the scientific literature, college students who experienced belonging uncertainty were more likely to disengage from school, and failed to build the relationships that they needed to succeed in the long term.[30] Thinking that one's belonging is at stake can also lead to a tendency to interpret negative experiences as matters of exclusion rather than situations that everyone goes through as part of a normal human experience.

People from minority, underrepresented, and stigmatized groups often find themselves in situations of belonging uncertainty because environmental cues tend to reflect the status quo. However, anyone can experience belonging uncertainty—and perhaps all of us experience it more amidst unsettled times, which are accompanied by both culture change and power shifts. Belonging uncertainty is greatest when people want to belong in a space—when they think it is valuable for them and who they want to be or become—but there is some deep question about their ability to belong there. While this study focuses on belonging, future work should also seek to track belonging uncertainty.

Creating a Measure for Multifaceted Belonging

There are many facets of experience that could influence how one "fits" or could potentially "fit" within an environment.[3] Those ultimately included in the Belonging Barometer were generated based on a review of the scientific literature, and in consultation with a cross-disciplinary team of academic reviewers (see "Acknowledgments" on pp. i-iii). When selecting items, we strove to reflect the multifaceted nature of belonging, keep the measure short enough to enable widespread usage, and make it easy to apply to diverse contexts. Those facets of experience included by the Belonging Barometer include:

- Feeling **emotionally connected**
- Being **welcomed and included**
- Perceiving that one is **able to influence decision-making**
- Feeling able to be **one's whole and authentic self**
- Being **valued as a person** and **for one's contributions**
- Being **in relationships that are as satisfying as one wants them to be**
- Feeling **like an insider** who understands how the environment works
- Feeling comfortable **expressing one's opinions**
- Being **treated equally**
- Feeling that one **"truly belongs"**

During our search to identify key and representative facets of belonging, we realized that several popular concepts—which might be seen as adjacent to belonging—provide a useful conceptual lens into items on the measure.

For instance, **social connection** and its opposites—**loneliness** and **social isolation**—often come to mind when people think about belonging. The concept of loneliness, in particular, has risen to popular consciousness in recent years, due in part to the gravity of its health associations: Experiencing loneliness has been shown to have the same life-shortening impact as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.[32] The US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, has framed loneliness as a public health crisis—a "loneliness epidemic"—affecting not only our health, but also our performance in schools and workplaces, and even the sense of division and polarization within US society.[33] Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased reports of loneliness in many populations.[34]

The Barometer taps into social connection by measuring the following themes: emotional connection, feeling welcomed and included, and relationship satisfaction.

Loneliness is the feeling of being alone, regardless of the amount of social contact. It is the subjective feeling that you're lacking the social connections that you need or want. For more, see Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions.

Social isolation is a lack of social connections. It can lead to loneliness in some people, while others can feel lonely without being socially isolated. See Loneliness and Social Isolation Linked to Serious Health Conditions.

Psychological safety is a shared belief held by members of a team (or community) that others on the team (or community) will not embarrass, reject, or punish them for speaking up with ideas, questions, and concerns, or for admitting mistakes.

Another adjacent concept is **psychological safety**. Studies in organizational psychology have established the importance of psychological safety for human resources and collaborative teams over the past 20 years,[35] and the term rose to prominence within the business community in 2015 after Google found it to be the most important factor associated with high-performing teams within its corporation.[36] There, psychological safety outperformed a host of more expected predictors of team performance, such as the number of top performers on the team, collective team intelligence, the use of consensus-driven decision-making, overall team workload or stress, and having team members that are co-located. It turns out that when people feel free to share dissenting, diverse perspectives or off-beat ideas—all actions that psychological safety facilitates—their teams solve problems more quickly and creatively. While psychological safety—in short, feeling sufficiently safe to be vulnerable and take risks[37]—has been studied and applied to business teams, the mechanism by which it works is relevant to any collaborative community, be it a family, friend group, local community, etc.

The Barometer reflects aspects of psychological safety by measuring the following themes: being able to freely express one's opinions, being valued for one's self and contributions, and perceiving that one is able to bring one's whole and authentic self to the table (not having to hide or diminish parts of one's identity).[38]

A last concept, considered essential to belonging by john a. powell, Director of the Othering and Belonging Institute, is the idea of agency, or **co-creation**.[39] This is the ability to co-create the organizations, systems, and structures that shape one's future, if desired. According to powell, feeling welcomed and included does not equate to belonging unless you are also able to *influence outcomes*. "Belonging or being fully human," powell writes, "entails being respected at a basic level that includes the right to both co-create and make demands upon society."[40]

"Belonging is being accepted and invited to participate. More than that, it means being able to raise issues and confront harsh truths as a full member of a community."

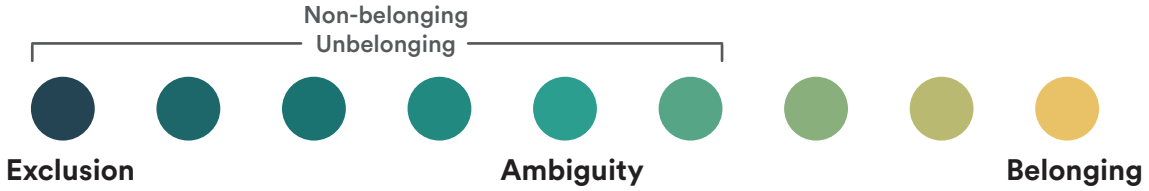
- Susie Wise, *Design for Belonging*

The Barometer taps into elements of co-creation by measuring the following themes: the perception that one is treated equally by others within the community of reference, feeling like an "insider" who understands how the system of reference works, and seeing oneself as able to influence decisions.

The Barometer in Context: Life Settings

The Belonging Barometer can be used across different contexts, whether that be a classroom or school, a social program or community center, an office or organization, a town or country. For this report, we examined Barometer scores across five life settings in the US: **family, friendships, workplace, local community**, and the **nation**. We chose these settings in part because they are primary components of modern life, where most people have reason to want to belong. Below, we will also sometimes refer to a sixth score, "intimate belonging," which is composed of the highest of two scores—family or friendship belonging.

Belonging as a Scale



In the real world, belonging is not a switch but a scale—and throughout this report we have used the terms belonging, ambiguity, and exclusion to describe where one falls along this gradient.

On one side of this gradient is **belonging**, in which one experiences social connection, psychological safety, and a sense of agency within a group, with all the richness that belonging entails.

At the other end of the spectrum is **exclusion**, in which one feels left out, ignored, rejected, or ostracized. To experience exclusion is to lack a desired connection to an environment. In the scientific literature, exclusion is associated with negative emotions like sadness and anger, as well as attitudes such as distrust, and outcomes such as decreased performance in work or school, and antisocial behavior.[41]

Between the extremes of belonging and exclusion is **ambiguity**. Here, scores reflect a middle ground. On the one hand, one may feel neither belonging nor exclusion. Alternatively, they might experience strong belonging for some Barometer items and strong exclusion for others, presenting an intense ambivalence that averages out to a neutral score.

In this report, we have at times grouped ambiguity and exclusion under the umbrella term **non-belonging**, because in both cases individuals are denied the benefits of belonging. Similarly, throughout the report we sometimes provide further nuance, noting that people who land in the zone of non-belonging might actually be anticipating or experiencing **unbelonging**, which has its own unique psychology. As Mary Healy writes:

> *...to 'unbelong' is to have what was thought to be certain or taken for granted removed, disconnecting us from others...In such cases, membership belonging has been revoked, removed or challenged in some way...unbelonging becomes positioned as a place of exile and danger, of homelessness and rootlessness for those who once belonged, but are now abandoned as outsiders.*[42]

Regardless of context, the negative emotions and action tendencies that can be associated with ambiguity, exclusion, and unbelonging are a reminder of just how urgent it is that we move forward in our communities and organizations with an eye towards belonging, bringing all of us along and leaving none of us behind.

Methodology

The Barometer scale—and the survey instrument in its entirety—was informed and reviewed by a team of scientists from the fields of social psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, and medicine, with specializations in democracy, intergroup relations, extremism, and health (see "Acknowledgments" on pp. i-iii).

Barometer Design

The 10-item Barometer is pictured below, as adapted for the local community setting. While nine items on the scale capture elements we have associated with connection, psychological safety, and co-creation, discussed above, the tenth item allows respondents to project onto their answer whatever belonging means to them: "When I'm [with my family / with my friends / with my coworkers / in my local community / interacting with other Americans], I feel like I truly belong." Items three, four, and nine are framed in the negative (as a data quality check) and calculated accordingly (these statements, which are "reverse scored," are indicated with an asterisk). Barometer items were randomized on the survey; all items were rated on a 1-5 scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

Belonging Barometer

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

(1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

1. I feel **emotionaly connected** to [name of respondent's local community].
2. People in [name of respondent's local community] **welcome and include me** in activites.
3. I am **unable to influence decision-making** in [name of respondent's local community].*
4. I feel **unable to be my whole and authentic self** with people in [name of respondent's local community].*
5. People in [name of respondent's local community] **value me and my contributions.**
6. My relationships with others in [name of respondent's local community] are **as satisfying as I want them to be.**
7. **I feel like an "insider"** who understands how [name of respondent's local community] works.
8. I am **comfortable expressing my opinions** in [name of respondent's local community].
9. I am treated **as "less than" other residents** in [name of respondent's local community].*
10. When interacting with people in [name of respondent's local community], **I feel like I truly belong.**

In the survey, we first asked respondents to write the name of their local community, e.g., "Camden." That name was fed into the above Barometer items in place of "[name of respondent's local community]."

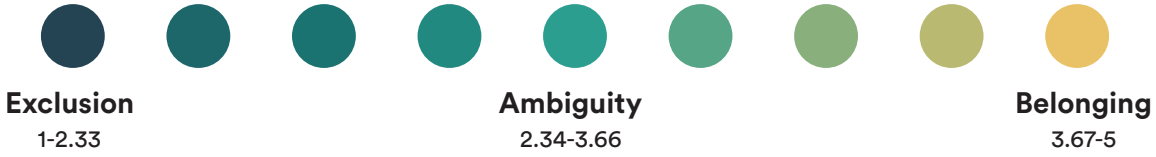
Data Collection

The findings in this report are drawn from a nationally representative sample of 4,905 respondents ages 18 and above. Data were collected in December 2021 by YouGov, which offered the survey to its panel of 5 million US respondents. YouGov employed a technique referred to as *sample matching*, a method of modeling a truly random sample of the population of interest, to produce the final dataset.[43] The resulting matched dataset was then weighted to account for any differences between matched cases and the sample frame.

A description of the survey sample can be found in the Appendix. The margin of error for the full sample is +(-) 1.4%.

Analysis

For this report, we created a composite measure of belonging for each respondent, in each life setting (a composite is a combination of the ten belonging items into a single score). We then broke the Barometer scores into three equal sections: 1-2.33 (Exclusion), 2.34-3.66 (Ambiguity), and 3.67-5 (Belonging).



- Respondents whose score on the Belonging Barometer was in the lowest third (1-.2.33) are in the "Exclusion" category, because they predominantly "disagreed" that the 10 items of belonging existed in their life in that particular setting (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree).
- Respondents whose score was in the middle third (2.34 - 3.66) are in the "Ambiguity" category because they might have "disagreed" with some statements and "agreed" with others, or frequently selected "3," meaning, "neither agree nor disagree."
- Respondents whose average score placed them in the top third (3.67 - 5) fall into the "Belonging" category because they predominantly "agreed" with the belonging statements (4=agree, 5=strongly agree).

Reporting

In the "Life Settings" section, we use graphs to visualize belonging scores according to statistically significant demographic (e.g., gender, race, sexual orientation) and lifestyle factors (e.g., level of stress or having children). Readers will note that some factors are typically included (like gender), while others are not (like education or immigration status). This is because we first employed regressions to identify which demographic and lifestyle factors are associated with belonging (per a given life setting) when all others were held constant.* Only if a factor remained

*For this analysis and preliminary report we used very basic controls. It is our hope that scholars with thematic expertise will further examine these data, controlling for factors known to be theoretically supported in their field.

statistically significant is it included within the narrative report. However, the Appendix includes graphs depicting belonging as it relates to all the major demographic and lifestyle factors, e.g., race, gender, generation, sexual orientation, religion, immigration category, and socioeconomic status—even if they are not statistically significant in a multivariate regression.

A Note to the Reader

- **Differentiating between correlation and causation.** Throughout this report we often talk about associations between belonging and other factors. Please note that any relationships identified between belonging and any other factor in this report are *correlational*, meaning that they change together (if one increases, the other increases; or, if one increases, the other decreases). But correlation is not causation: An association between belonging and another factor—for example, trust—does not necessarily mean that belonging causes trust, or vice versa. Establishing causal linkages between belonging and outcomes identified in this report will require further research, and, specifically, controlled experiments.

- **Referring to Americans.** Since we derived findings in this report from a nationally representative sample, we sometimes refer to "Americans" rather than "respondents." For the purposes of this report "Americans" is intended to refer to anyone 18 or above who currently resides in the United States (this was the eligibility criteria for our study). 2.9% of respondents in this study are immigrant non-citizens—they are included in our reference to Americans.

- **Defining "statistical significance."** Throughout this report, we only report on findings that are statistically significant, meaning the relationships we are reporting are caused by something other than chance. This is the case when the p-value for the relationship we are reporting is less than the commonly used alpha of .05.

The Power of Belonging in the US Today

The Power of Belonging in the US Today

This report includes many noteworthy findings but perhaps the most urgent is this: **Belonging is associated with thriving in the most important spheres of our lives, and conversely, non-belonging is associated with a vast array of social and physical ills facing Americans.*** Although we demonstrate this with selected outcomes below, readers should note that what we report here is not an exhaustive account of the associations we found. Future reports will delve deeper into the relationships between belonging and democracy, health, and intergroup relations.

The graphs we use throughout this section depict belonging outcomes that represent two extremes. Specifically—with the exception of the graphs in the "Health & Wellbeing" section (see explanation below)—they contrast predicted outcomes for respondents who scored 1 out of 5 on *all Barometer items in a life setting* ("Strongest Exclusion") with predicted outcomes for respondents who scored 5 out of 5 ("Strongest Belonging"). Of course, the vast majority of Americans fall somewhere between these two extremes (readers can access the prevalence of various scores on p. 24). For this reason, the endnotes accompanying each graph include output from a multivariate regression, enabling readers to better understand the role of belonging when a full set of belonging scores is included and when the model also controls for other factors (such as demographics, etc.).

Health & Wellbeing

Previous research has shown that people with a robust sense of social connection have stronger immune systems[44] and are less susceptible to disease.[45] They heal faster from injuries,[46] live longer,[47] and report up to 70% less cognitive decline and dementia.[48] They are also said to experience higher levels of motivation[49] and more happiness.[50] We wanted to see if the Belonging Barometer's more multifaceted measure—which includes items related to psychological safety and co-creation—would have similar results, or perhaps even add explanatory value. And it did.

For our health-related questions, we compared outcomes for those scoring "1" on the Barometer ("Strongest Exclusion") across all life settings to those scoring "5" ("Strongest Belonging") on even one life setting. Strongest exclusion scores are associated with the more frequent experience of physical and emotional pain,[51] and extreme levels[52] of stress and loneliness.[53]

*In this study, scoring less than 3.67 out of 5 on the Barometer refers to non-belonging, which is experiencing belonging ambiguity, exclusion, or unbelonging.

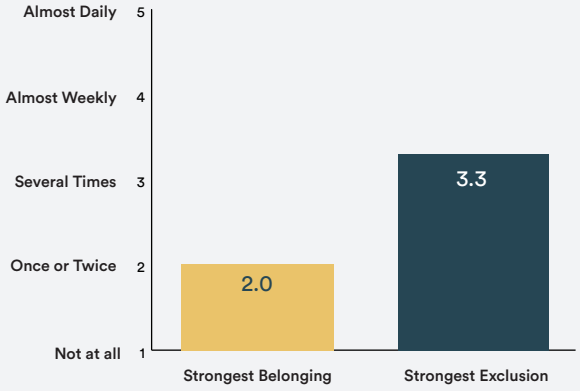
Health & Wellbeing, cont'd.

Pain

This is a composite variable made up of the three items in the survey question.

During the past four weeks, how often...

- Have you accomplished less than you would like as a result of any **physical** problems?
- Have you accomplished less that you would like as a result of any **emotional** problems, such as feeling depressed or anxious?
- Did you need to take **medication** to relieve the pain?

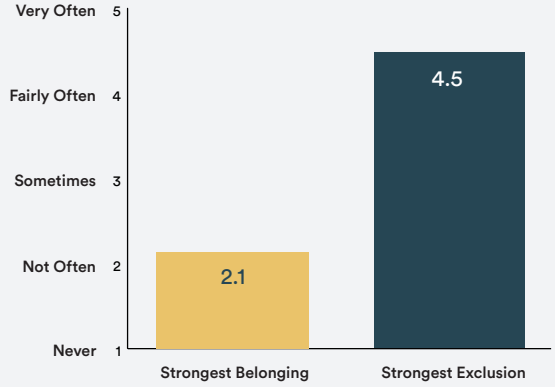


Stress

Composite. The first two items are reverse scored.

In the last month, how often have you felt...

- Confident about your **ability to handle your personal problems?**
- That things were **going your way?**
- Difficulties were piling up so high that you **could not overcome** them?

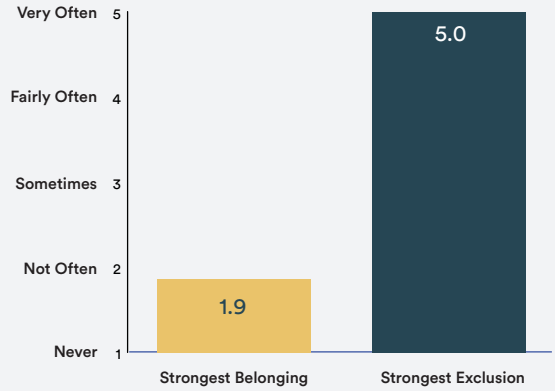


Loneliness

This is a composite variable made up of the three items in the survey question.

How often do you feel...

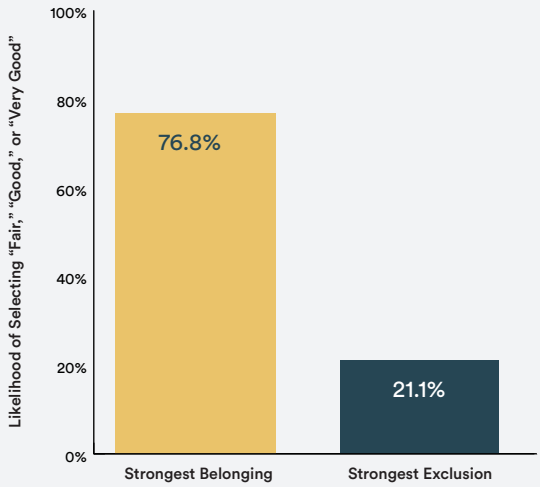
- That you **lack companionship?**
- **Left out?**
- **Isolated** from others?



Conversely, scoring "5" on the Barometer ("Strongest Belonging") in even one life setting is associated with significantly better self-reported general health and life satisfaction scores.[55] This latter finding is compatible with experimental research demonstrating the positive (causal) effects of a college belonging intervention on subsequent life satisfaction.[56]

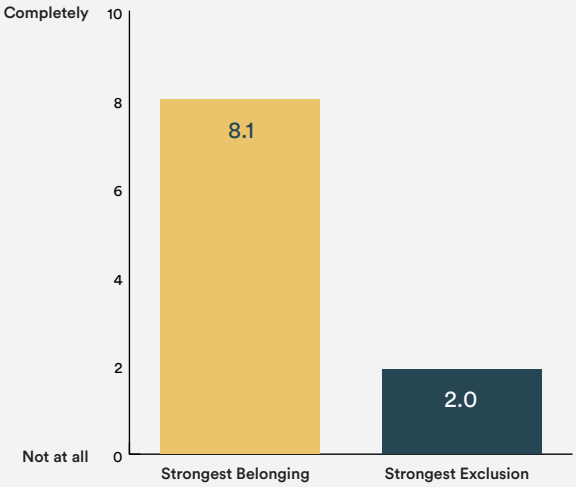
Subjective Health

In general, would you say your health is... [fair/good/very good]?



Life Satisfaction

In general, how satisfied would you say you are with your life as a whole?

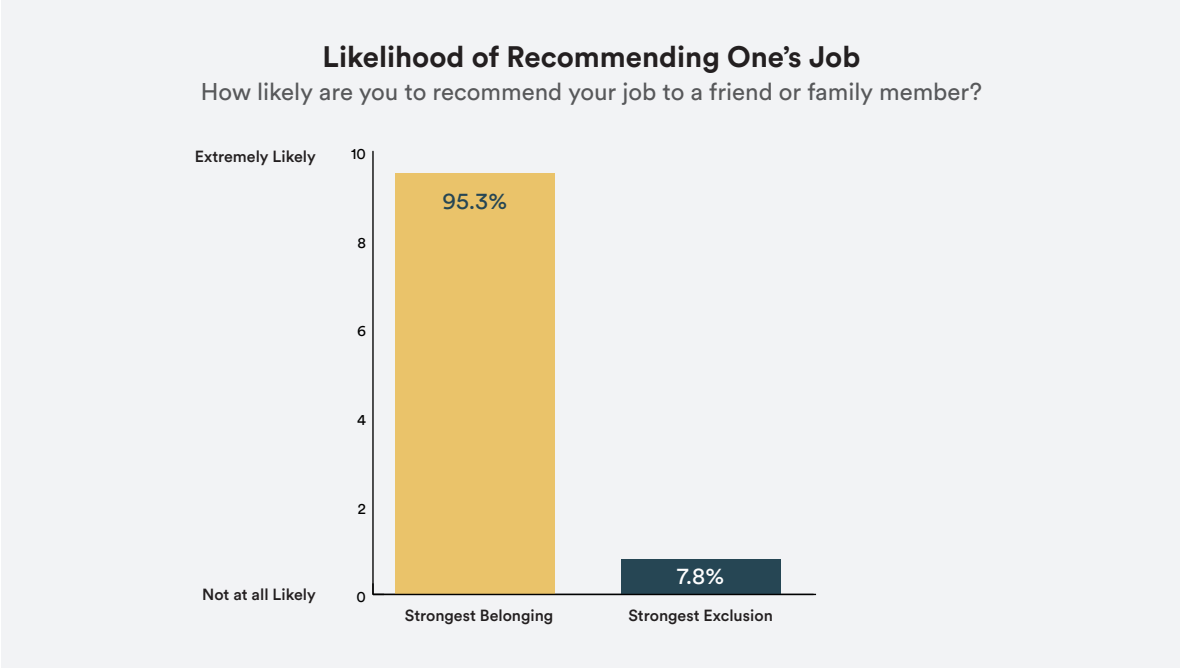


Overall, these findings corroborate what the scientific community has learned about the positive health impacts of belonging and its adjacent concepts from the scientific literature. Additionally, because it includes aspects of belonging beyond social connection, the Belonging Barometer has the potential to *add* to the conversation. We note that the health outcomes associated with the Belonging Barometer continued to be statistically significant even when we controlled for loneliness.[57] In sum, **the Barometer makes a unique contribution to our understanding of the interconnections between belonging and health.**

In the Workplace

Other research has shown that workplaces that have cultivated a healthy sense of belonging are likely to see more employee creativity,[58] better job performance[59] (even among CEOs),[60] increased organizational loyalty[61] and higher retention rates among workers,[62] and fewer employee health complaints and missed days at work.[63]

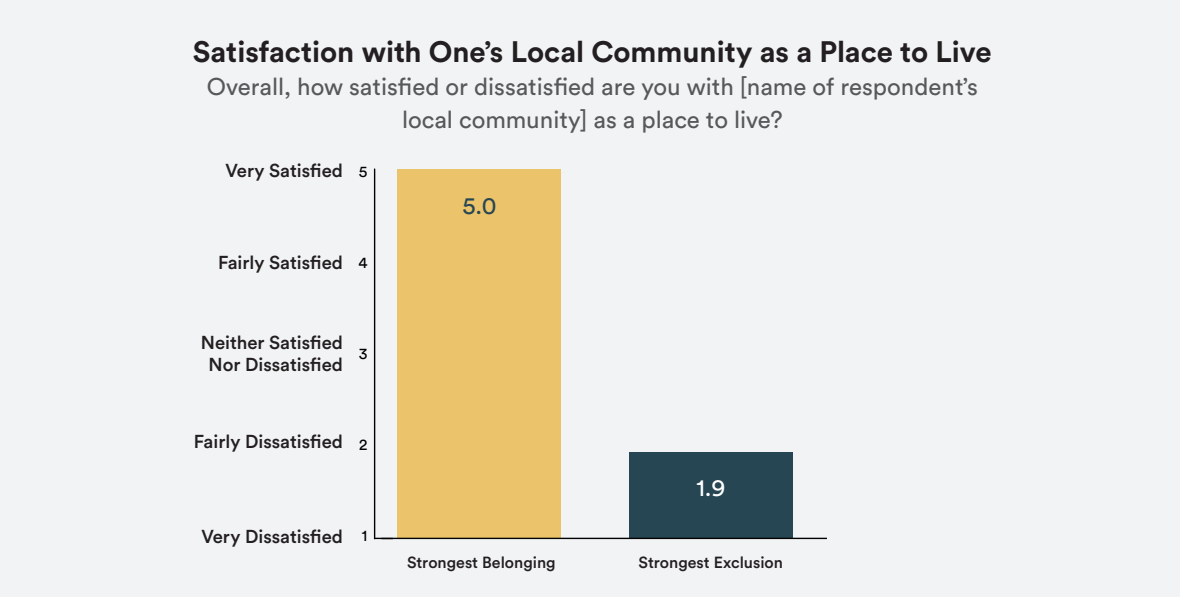
In our workplace data, strongest exclusion scores are associated with far less willingness to recommend their job to a friend or family member, compared to strongest belonging scores (e.g., "not at all likely" vs. "extremely likely"). See additional workplace findings on pp. 30-33, "Life Settings: Workplace."



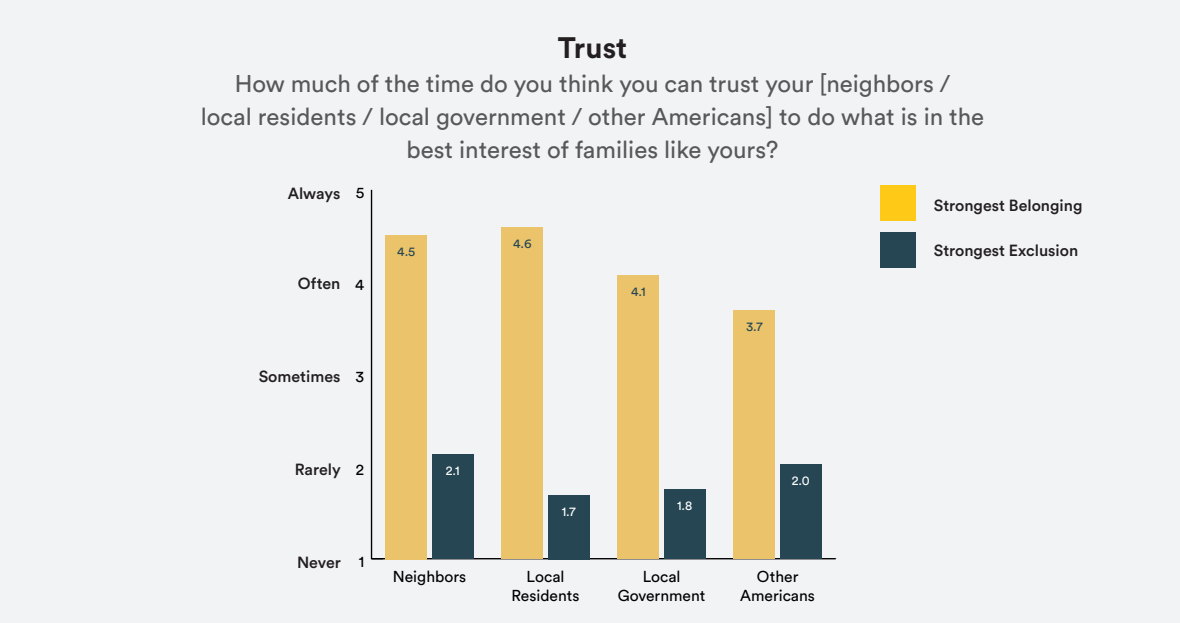
Civic & Social Life

Other research has shown that societal belonging and trust are correlated with lower crime rates and stronger economic growth.[64] Belonging has also been linked to more effective governance, and in a recent study, lack of belonging was a stronger predictor of distrust in the US federal government than race or age.[65] In our data, strong belonging in one's local community is associated with varied measures of social cohesion.

Satisfaction. Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with less satisfaction with one's local community.[66]



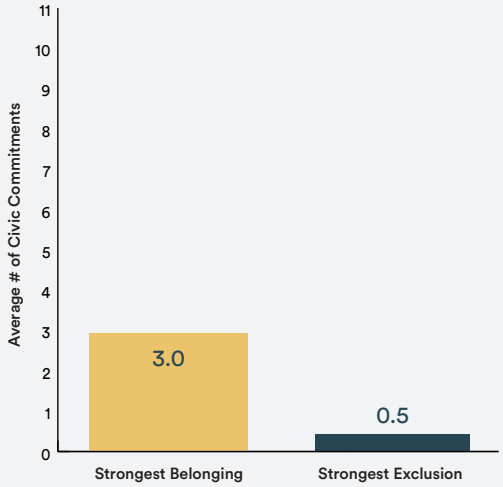
Trust. Strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with *rarely* trusting one's neighbors,[67] other local residents,[68] or local and national government,[69] while strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with often trusting these groups.



Civic Engagement. Strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with engaging in less than one civic commitment (on average, through schools, social clubs, religious institutions, political and activist groups, neighborhood organizations, etc. while strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with engaging in almost three civic commitments.[70]

Civic Engagement

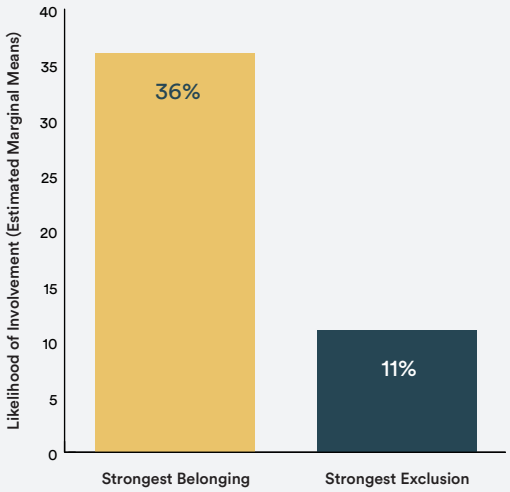
(Respondents were prompted by a list of 11 ways one might engage civically and their scores were summed.) During the past 12 months, have you been involved with any of these types of groups (either online or in person)?



Social Action. Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "1" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with less frequent engagement with local social actions—such as trying to set up a new service or program (or stop an existing one), volunteering for local services (e.g., childcare, youth services, parks, community centers), recruiting members to an organization or group, organizing community events, or participating in other local issues.[71]

Social Action

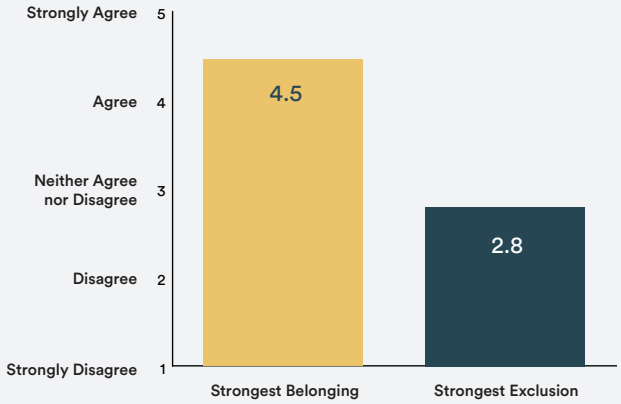
In the last 12 months, have you been involved in the following social action activities?



Personal Efficacy. Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with less confidence that residents' involvement in their community can change the way it is run.[72]

Belief That Residents Can Effect Local Change

"I feel that when local residents get involved in our community, they can change the way our community is run."

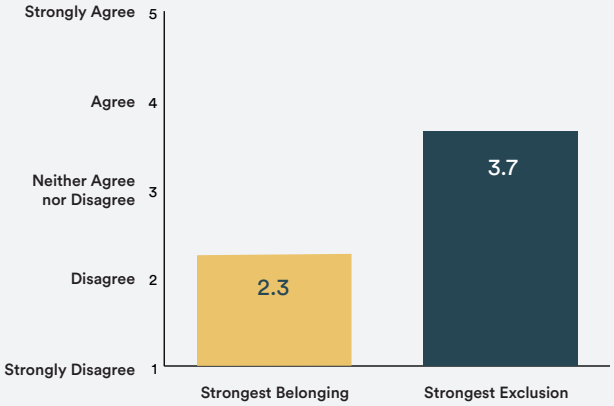


Marginalization. Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are more associated with feelings of local marginalization (e.g., feeling like a stranger in one's local community and fearing that one or one's family will be left behind due to technological and demographic change).[73]

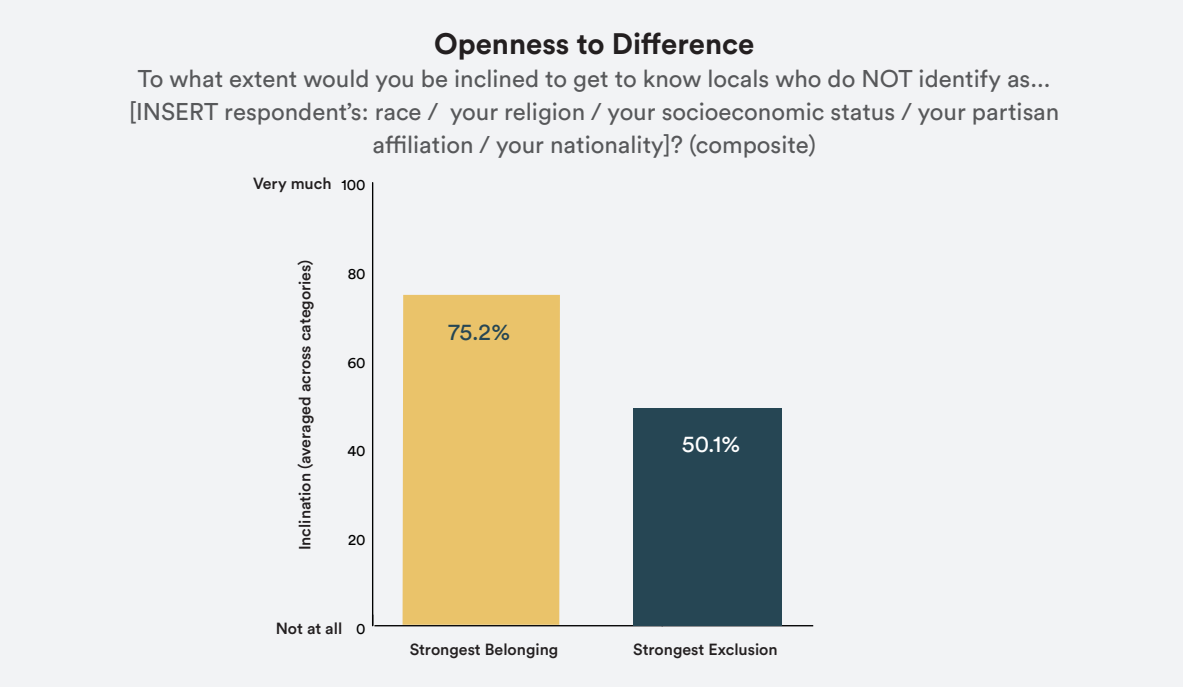
Marginalization

This is a composite variable made up of three items. The last item is reverse scored.

1. The demographic landscape in [name of local community] has changed so much already that I sometimes feel like a stranger here.
2. When I think about the anticipated demographic changes in [name of local community], I worry that I or my family will be left behind.
3. When I think about the anticipated demographic changes in [name of local community] I feel excited for the new opportunities my family and I might have.



Openness to Difference. Local communities thrive when residents interact with and understand the experiences of other residents across identities and differences. In our data, strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with less interest in getting to know locals who are different from themselves, in comparison to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging).[74]

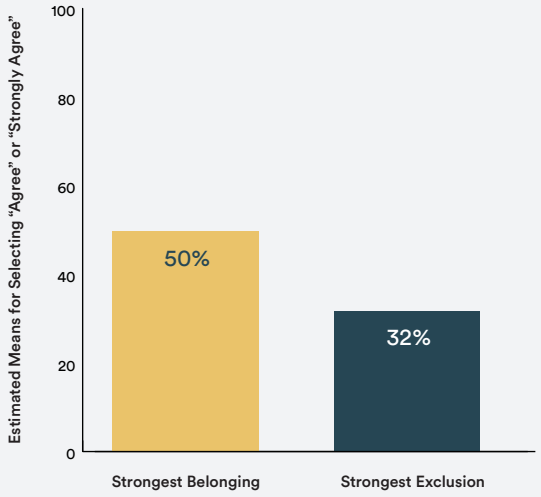


Openness to Local Demographic Change. Census projections show that by 2045, non-Hispanic white Americans will no longer be a majority in the national population, regardless of immigration policy predictions.[75] In our data, strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with—34% less inclination to get to know locals who are different from themselves, in comparison to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging).[76] Today in the US, we see an uptick in inflammatory rhetoric and conspiracy theories that push a threat-based frame and attempt to stoke fear and anxiety about demographic change among white populations.[77] Such narratives have fueled lone-actor shootings as well as coordinated acts of violence.[78]

We asked respondents about their openness to demographic change in their own community. In our data, as compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with less likelihood of agreement that it would be a good thing for more people of diverse race, religion, or nationality to move to their neighborhood (50% vs. 32% for strongest belonging and strongest exclusion, respectively).[79]

Openness to Neighborhood Demographic Change

"If more families from different races, cultures, countries, or religions were to move here, it would benefit my neighborhood."



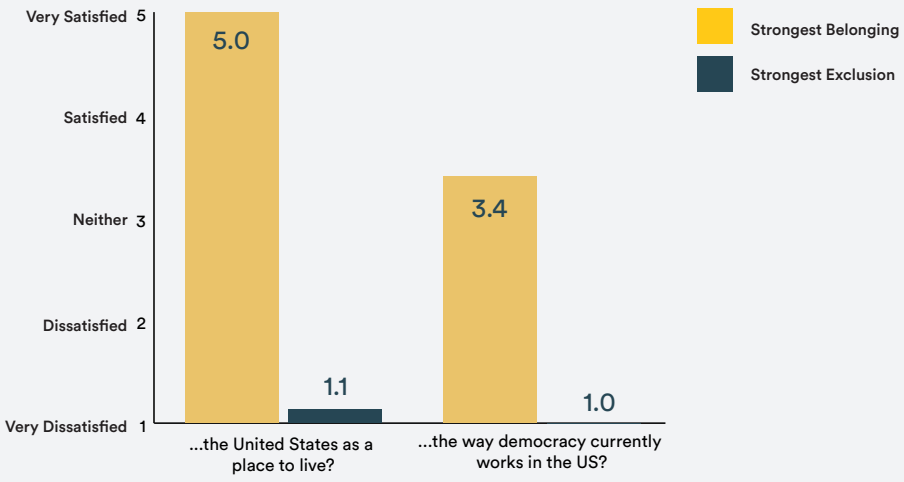
National Politics

Recent years have seen rising concerns around political violence[80] and threats to democracy[81] in the US. In our data, we explored the relationship between belonging and variables related to democracy.[82]

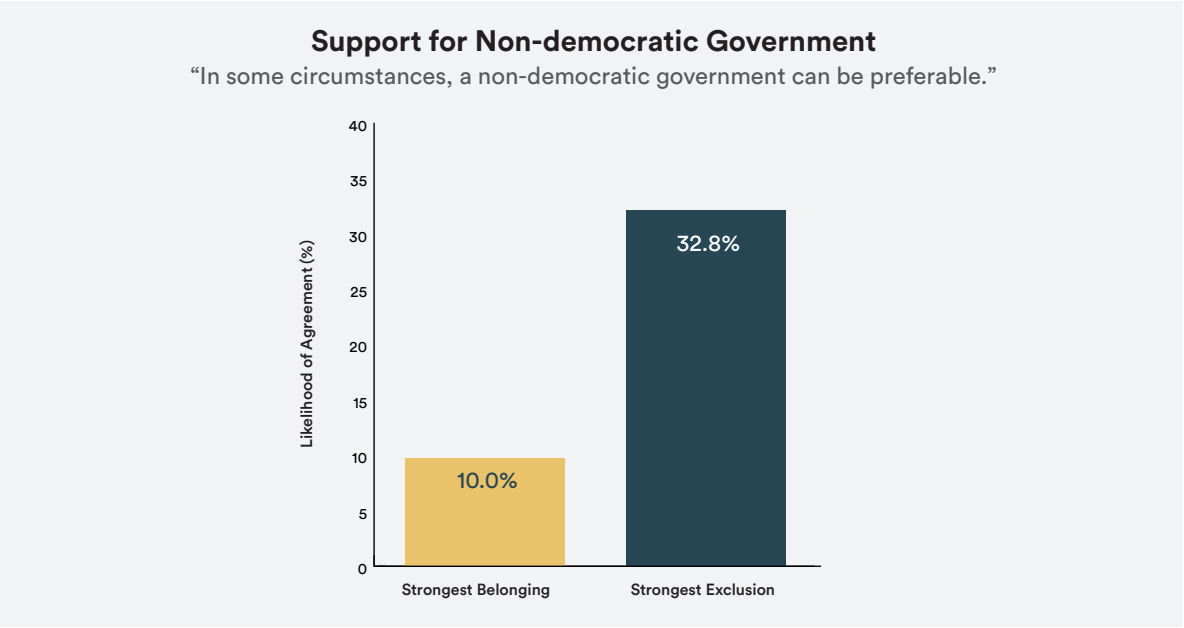
Satisfaction with democracy and life in the US. As compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on national belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on national belonging) are associated with less satisfaction with the US as a place to live, and less satisfaction with US democracy.[83]

Satisfaction with Democracy and Life in the US

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with...



Support for non-democratic government. Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on national belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on national belonging") are associated with greater agreement that, in some cases, a non-democratic government can be preferable to a democratic one.[84]



Summary

In closing, belonging is an essential element of thriving in some of the most important American life settings. Fortunately, other research shows that investments in belonging can be effective (see p. 55, "Belonging Resources"), and there are theoretical and empirical reasons to believe that when belonging increases in one life setting, it tends also to increase in other life settings (see "Belonging is Interconnected Across Life Settings" on p. 48).

The State of Belonging in the US Today

The State of Belonging in the US Today

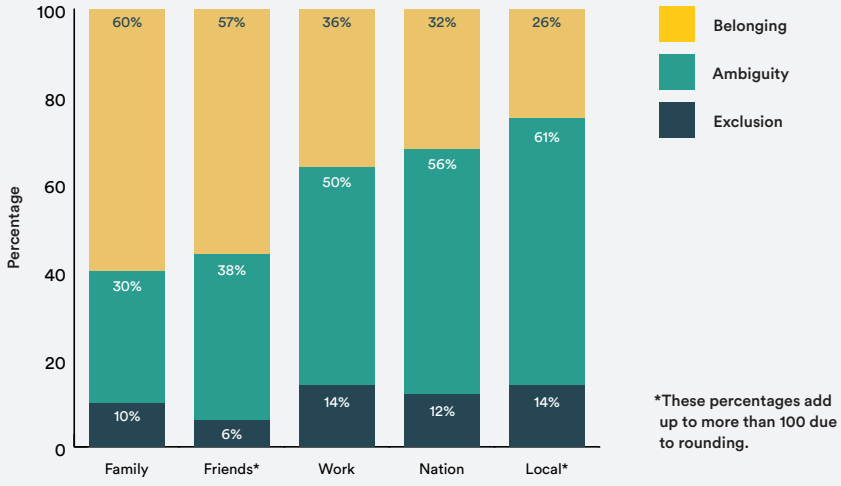
People do not experience belonging uniformly across all parts of their lives. A person may feel a strong sense of belonging in their family yet feel alienated in the workplace; one may feel excluded in the local community but experience deep belonging among their friends. There may even be places where we do not want to belong.

As revealed in the results below, the state of belonging in the US today is a mixed bag. While there are areas of concern, there are causes for optimism as well.

Non-belonging is Pervasive

Non-belonging (a cumulative term including people experiencing ambiguity and exclusion) is widespread throughout American life. In fact, a *majority* of Americans report non-belonging in the workplace (64%), the nation (68%), and their local community (74%). Even in the most intimate parts of life, the picture isn't especially rosy: 44% of Americans report non-belonging among their friends, and 40% of Americans say they experience non-belonging in their families. ***Indeed, nearly 20% of Americans—1 out of 5 people—report non-belonging across all five life settings.*** These results are difficult to fathom in part because of their unsettling implication: These deficiencies in belonging may have significant costs to individuals, institutions, and our society as a whole.

Levels of Belonging Across Life Settings in the US



*These percentages add up to more than 100 due to rounding.

Facets of Belonging are Prioritized Differently Across Life Settings

Identifying which Barometer items have the strongest association with belonging in each setting—and if or how this differs by target population—can be a useful tool for stakeholders seeking to understand their community, or to design and measure belonging interventions.

We ran a factor analysis to see which Barometer items were the best indicators of belonging in each setting.[85] Below, we show the three best indicators for each setting.

Family	Friends	Workplace	Local Community	National
1. Valued for oneself and one's contributions 2. Welcomed and included 3. Emotionally connected	1. Valued for oneself and one's contributions 2. Welcomed and included 3. Emotionally connected	1. Valued for oneself and one's contributions 2. Welcomed and included 3. Comfortable expressing my opinion	1. Welcomed and included 2. Emotionally connected 3. Valued for oneself and one's contributions	1. Welcomed and included 2. Emotionally connected 3. Valued for oneself and one's contributions

Table 1. How belonging attributes are prioritized across life settings.

The table reveals that certain facets of belonging, on average, matter more to Americans than others across the different life settings. For instance, being valued for oneself and one's contributions was the most important dimension for respondents when they rated their family, friend, and workplace belonging, while being welcomed and included was most important at the local and national levels.

In the workplace, respondents found it more important to feel comfortable expressing their opinions than to feel emotionally connected (which may fit with research showing that psychological safety is a priority for creativity and effective problem solving in teams).[86]

Belonging Among Family & Friends

As described in the Introduction, our early attachments to a caregiver help to shape our future experiences with belonging.[87] As we grow, research shows that children need at least one healthy attachment to thrive.[88] That attachment can come from family,[89] friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, etc.[90] In keeping with this finding, since some Americans who lacked family belonging in our study reported belonging with friends (and vice versa), we created an "intimate belonging" score utilizing the highest of family OR friend belonging for each respondent. We used this score when examining relationships between belonging and outcomes in health, democracy, and intergroup relations.

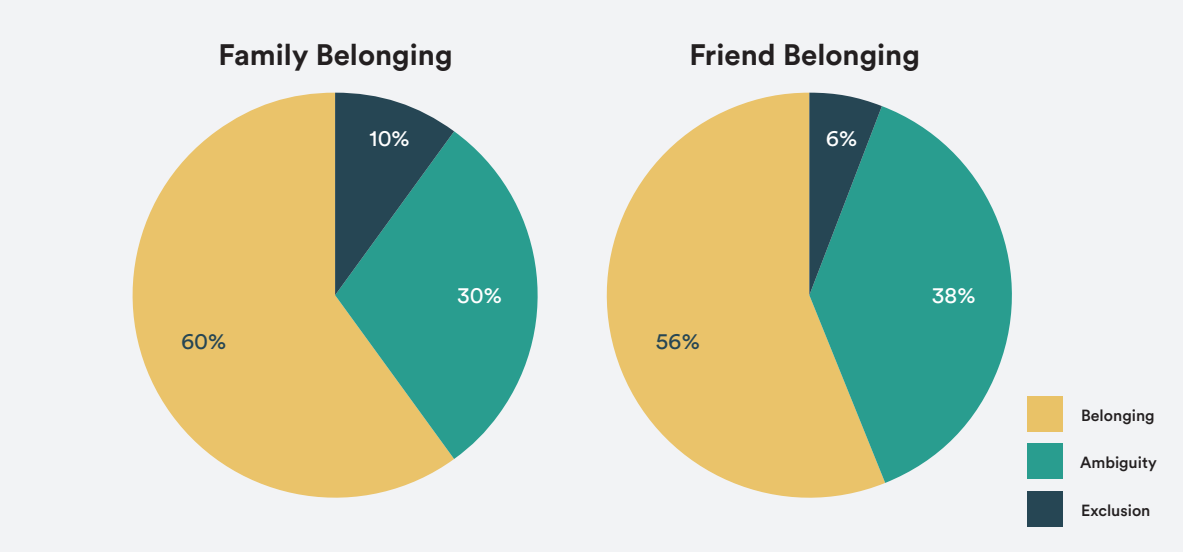
In our sample...

- Median family size: 7
- Median friend count: 3
- Almost 1 in 20 respondents reported not having family they could call upon, and 1 in 10 reported having no friends.
- The average number of adverse childhood events (ACEs) recorded in our sample was 2.6, but nearly 1 in 3 respondents reported "high" scores of 4 or more.

Despite news reports in recent years of how our most intimate networks have been impacted by the pandemic,[91] or larger societal divisions,[92] Americans reported their highest rates of belonging with family and friends (compared to this report's other life settings).

What is the state of family & friend belonging in the US?

When asked to rate their belonging to family, defined as "the adults and children with whom you are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and with whom you have a regular relationship," almost 3 out of 5 Americans, on average, report belonging. The findings are similar when Americans rate belonging to their "closest friends, those with whom you communicate regularly." **However, although these numbers represent the strongest levels of belonging across all the life settings examined in this report, 2 out 5 Americans experience some level of non-belonging in what could be their most intimate relationships.**



What factors are associated with intimate belonging?

Strong intimate belonging is primarily associated with higher socioeconomic status, being older, having more family support,* and experiencing fewer adverse childhood events (like losing a parent; enduring food scarcity; or being emotionally, physically, or sexually abused).[93] These correlations are especially strong in the case of family belonging, while friendship belonging follows a similar but less intense pattern.

In a separate, online Appendix, we show how family and friend belonging play out for these and other demographic groups and lifestyle factors in America. While you will see statistically significant differences in belonging between demographic groups, these belonging gaps cease to be significant once we control for socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic disparities are often deeply intertwined with other systemic issues of marginalization in the US, such as previous policies of redlining and other features of systemic racism, which might suggest why race loses significance. This also suggests that *systemic* approaches will need to be prioritized when envisioning belonging interventions for the life settings of family and friendship. (For more on interventions, see pp. 51-53.)

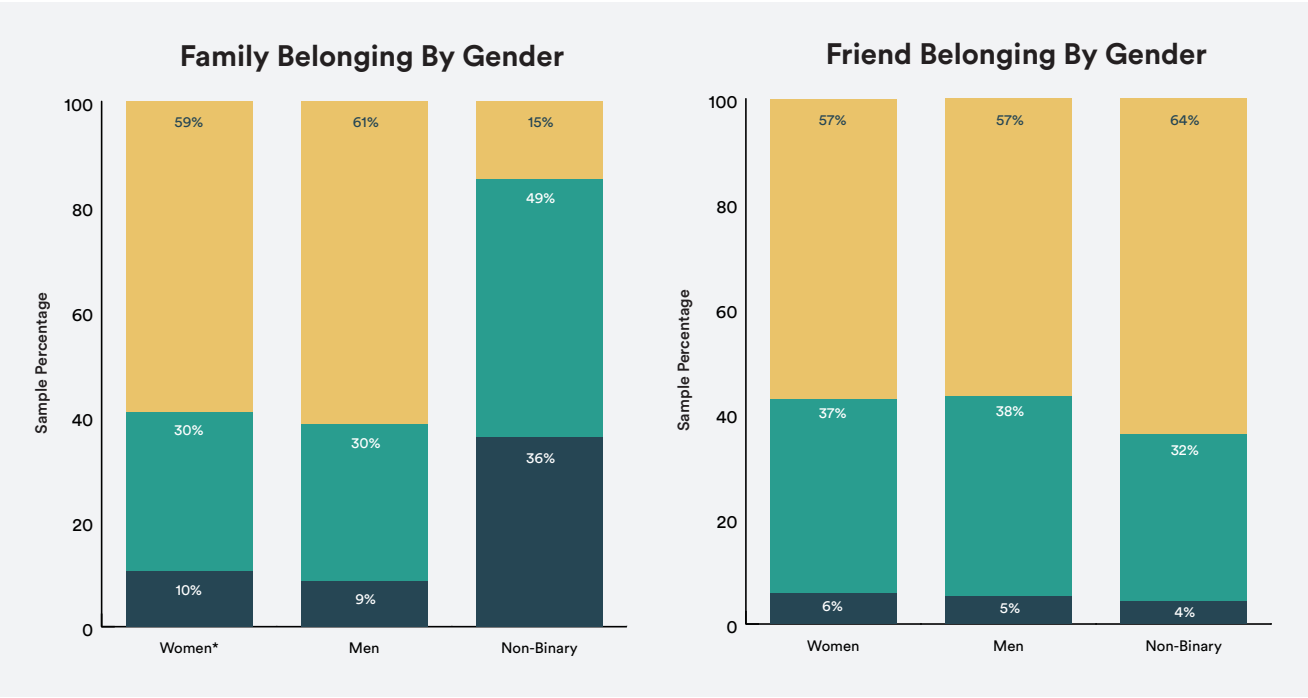
One noteworthy difference between family and friend belonging is the following: In our sample, gender minority Americans *(labeled gender non-binary in the charts)* and other sexual orientation minorities *(homosexual [gay], bi/pansexual, asexual, or queer)* were more likely to report family non-belonging than Americans who identified as a woman, man, or heterosexual (straight). These data were accompanied by a sense of unbelonging—the feeling that one has lost a sense of belonging they once had—in the stories respondents shared in the qualitative portion of our survey. Here is one example:

> *I left the church and came out as Queer. My entire family outside of my siblings essentially shunned me and said I was a sinner who lost their way.*

However, **on average, respondents from gender and sexual minorities reported greater belonging in the friend setting compared to the family setting.** This difference is consistent with other scholarly research, which also explores the reasons behind it.[94] Interestingly, respondents from gender and sexual minorities in our data also reported stronger friendship belonging scores than individuals who identified as woman or man, or heterosexual (straight).

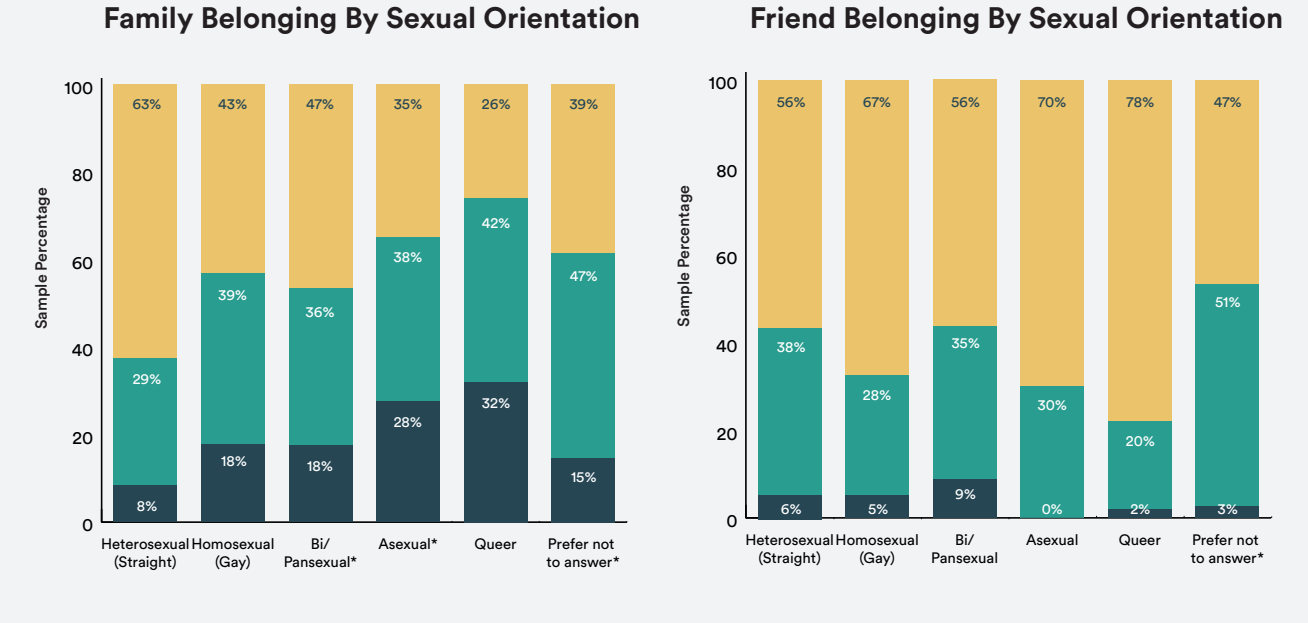
*"Family support" is a composite measure of three items: How many family members do you... communicate with at least once a month? / feel you can talk to about private matters? / feel close enough to call on for practical help? (Cronbach's alpha = .87, 1 factor explains 70% of total variance.)

Family & Friend Belonging by Gender



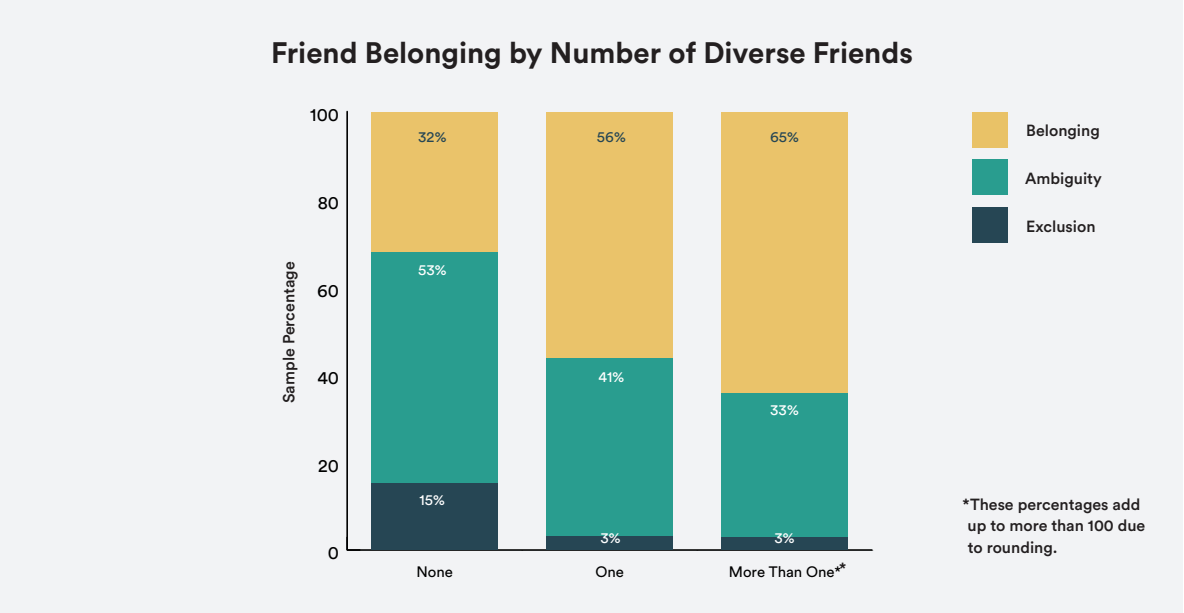
*These percentages do not add up to exactly 100 due to rounding.

Family & Friend Belonging by Sexual Orientation



*These percentages add up to more than 100 due to rounding.

A second noteworthy difference relates to diversity: **Having diverse friendships is associated with greater feelings of belonging amongst friends.** To measure the diversity of respondent friendships we asked six questions, all of which started with, "Using your best estimate, what number of your friends are from a different [...] than you?" The ellipses represent six areas of difference: racial or ethnic group, religious orientation, political party, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or national origin. Below, we report on the differences in friendship belonging experienced by Americans with zero, one, or more than one friend across differences.



Specifically, Americans who have more than one diverse friendship report higher percentages of friendship belonging than Americans with one or zero diverse friendships (65% compared to 56% and 32%, respectively). Americans with one or more than one diverse friends also report lower percentages of exclusion than Americans with zero diverse friends (3% and 3% vs. 15%, respectively).[95] Related findings have recently been reported with regard to college students.[96] We would encourage deeper exploration of this association and the mechanisms behind it. (For more on the interrelated nature of belonging and diversity, see "The Interdependence of Diversity & Belonging" on pp. 46-48.)

Is intimate belonging (i.e., family or friend belonging) associated more strongly with certain outcomes than belonging in other life settings?

Intimate belonging has a stronger correlation than Barometer scores in other life settings when it comes to health. **High scores of intimate belonging are more strongly associated with less stress,[97] less loneliness,[98] and less experience of emotional[99] and physical pain,[100] as well as higher life satisfaction and higher subjective general health.[101]** This association between intimate belonging and lower stress and pain holds even when we control for the effects of loneliness, suggesting that belonging itself rather than the mere absence of loneliness has a strong impact on these outcomes. The stronger correlation we observe between intimate belonging and outcomes across the board suggests that belonging—or its absence—in this foundational life setting is especially potent.

Interestingly, our results also suggest **a positive association between friendship belonging and civic engagement, and a negative correlation between friendship belonging and feelings of marginalization** (to a greater extent than family, local, or national belonging). When asked how much they agree or disagree with the statements, "The demographic landscape in America has changed so much already that I sometimes feel like a stranger in my own country,"[102] and, "When I think about the rapid pace of change in America, I worry that I or my family will be left behind," those who report friendship non-belonging are more likely to agree.[103] They also report being less engaged in civic activism.[104]

Belonging in the Workplace

People spend a great deal of time in the workplace, which makes it an important life setting in which to examine individual belonging.[105] Indeed, prior research has linked aspects of workplace belonging to individual wellbeing, life satisfaction, and physical and mental health.[106]

Additionally, understanding workplace belonging is crucial to US businesses.[107] Studies show that groups of people with different life experiences and perspectives are better at problem solving than homogeneous groups,[108] and that diverse teams perform better—helping bolster business success (e.g., bottom lines and competitiveness). But a team's diverse perspectives are of no help if its members aren't willing to share them (for instance, by voicing half-finished thoughts, challenging popular ideas, or asking questions out of left field).[109] By cultivating a culture of belonging, employers can create an environment that fosters the sharing of diverse perspectives.[110]

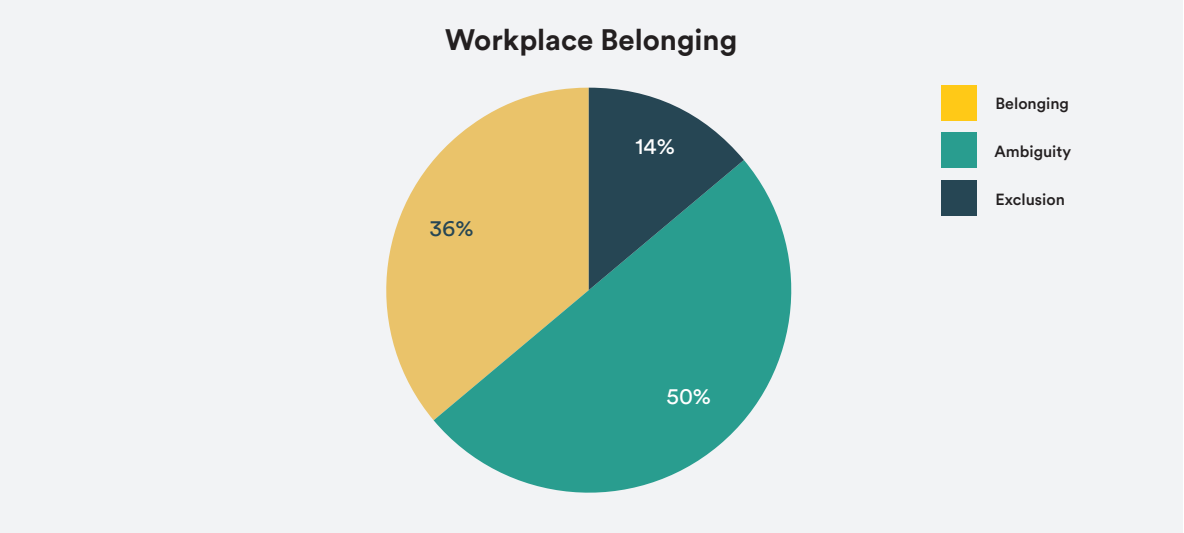
In our sample...

- 80% are willing to recommend their job to family/friends
- 26% have been at their job less than 1 year, 22% 2-3 years, 14% 4-5 years, and 38% 6 or more years

In prior studies, workplace belonging has been associated with increased employee engagement, retention, and loyalty,[111] as well as fewer health complaints[112] and days missed at work.[113] But often, either the measures or populations used in these studies make them difficult to compare. We wanted to see whether the Belonging Barometer would reveal similar relationships between belonging and the workplace.

What is the state of workplace belonging in the US?

In our sample, which includes both blue- and white-collar American workers, 36% reported belonging, 50% reported ambiguity, and 14% reported exclusion. The average workplace belonging score was 3.3 out of 5, falling in the category of ambiguity. **Strikingly, 64%, or almost 2 out of 3 employees in the US today experience non-belonging (a cumulative measure of ambiguity and exclusion) at work.**



What factors are associated with workplace belonging?

Workplace belonging is associated with being older, socioeconomically better off, less stressed, having children, identifying as a woman or a man (vs. another gender), and identifying as heterosexual (straight) or homosexual (gay) vs. queer.[114] While bar charts and additional details can be found in the Appendix, we include some of the differences here below.

- **Generation.** Older generations experience significantly more belonging (Silent 61%, Boomer 38%, Gen X 28%, Millennial 27%, Gen Z 4%). In keeping with a sociological theory called the "gendered life course,"[115] Boomer, Gen X, and Millennial males experience slightly more workplace belonging than their female counterparts.

- **Socioeconomic status.** Individuals who perceive themselves as much better off are much more likely to report belonging compared to those who perceive themselves as much worse off (39% vs. 18%, respectively). Conversely, those who perceive themselves as much worse off are significantly more likely to report workplace exclusion (31% vs. 9%, respectively).

- **Stress.** Americans experiencing lower stress in their lives overall report much more workplace belonging than those experiencing more stress (50% vs. 15%, respectively); they also report significantly less exclusion than more stressed Americans (8% vs. 35%, respectively).[116]

- **Gender.** Men and women report more workplace belonging (39% and 34%, respectively) than gender minority respondents (15%). Critically, nearly 41% of gender minority respondents report workplace exclusion, compared to men (13%) and women (14.5%).

- **Sexual orientation.** Individuals identifying as queer report exclusion nearly twice as much as heterosexual (straight) and homosexual (gay) respondents (30% vs 13% and 17%, respectively), and report belonging less than half as much (14% vs. 38% and 34%, respectively).

- **Parenthood.** A higher percentage of parents report workplace belonging than do non-parents (45% vs. 29%, respectively), and a lower percentage of parents than non-parents report exclusion (12% vs. 17%, respectively). These differences are largely driven by men: Men with kids are significantly more likely to report workplace belonging than women with kids (49% vs. 39%, respectively).

While we detected variation in workplace belonging depending on a respondent's race, religion, and immigration status, these differences were no longer statistically significant once we controlled for socioeconomic status. This does not suggest that these differences do not matter. Rather, it means that identity-based differences in workplace belonging are not a function of group-level attributes. If socioeconomic disparity is a systemic cause of non-belonging (again, tied to other systems of exclusion and marginalization), belonging interventions in the workplace will need to take their employees' systemic experiences—*including* those experienced outside the workplace—into account when they design belonging interventions. (For more discussion on this, see "Conclusion" on pp. 49-54.)

"Companies...must adjust to and empathize with the unique trauma populations face, and plan long term—with an equity lens—for the different modes of support employee groups will need."

The Power of Belonging: What It Is and Why It Matters in Today's Workplace, Coqual

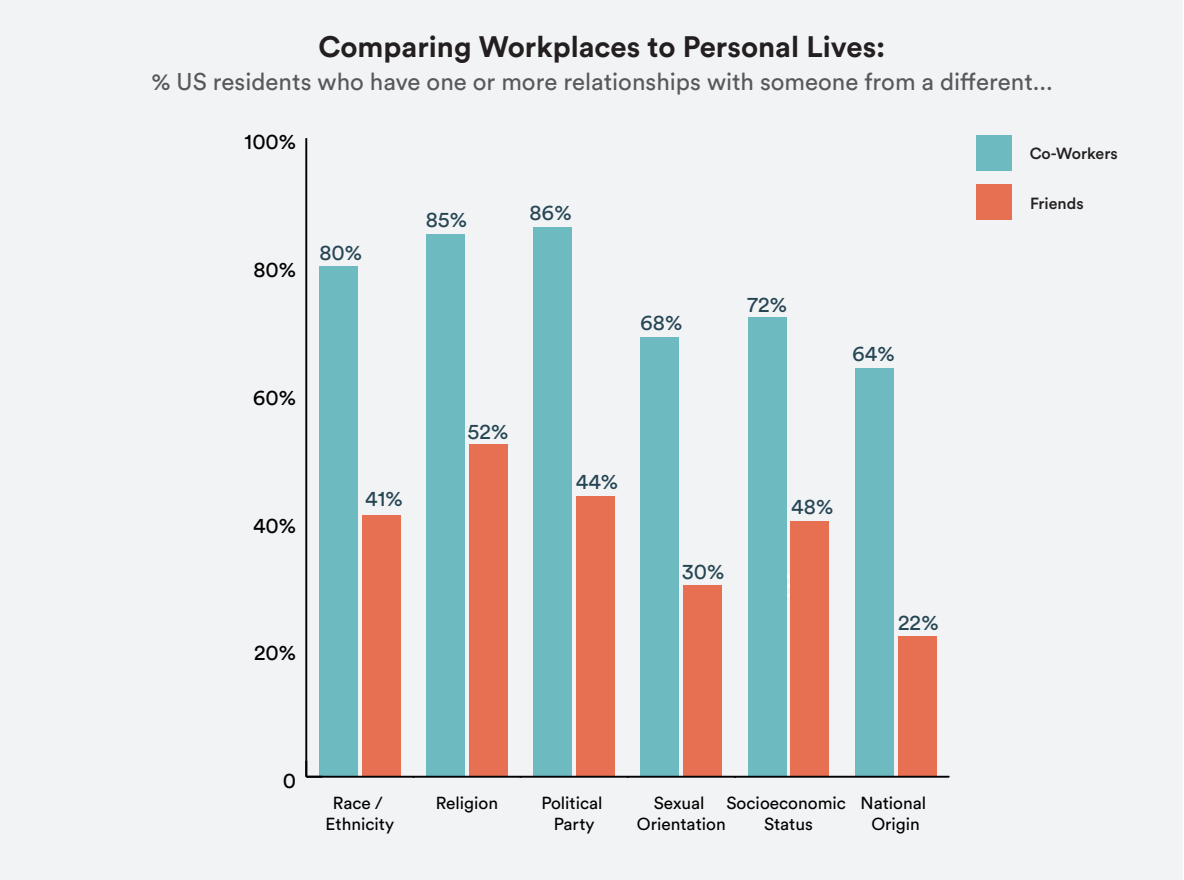
Why? Stressors resulting from systemic experiences are not easily put aside as one moves from one life setting to the next. Belonging interventions must therefore take a holistic view of employee wellbeing to provide equitable support for specific groups considering their unique stressors and circumstances.[117] One example given in the recent CoQual report, "The Power of Belonging," is that while the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced all employees, it has affected some groups more than others. In one survey, mothers were over four times as likely as fathers to be taking on the majority of childcare in the household (53% vs. 12%), and 21% of Asian women had changed their behavior outside of work to avoid racial harassment.[118] Additionally, people of color (in particular, Black Americans) in the US experienced higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death compared to white Americans, and were disproportionately impacted by surges caused by new variants.[119] By identifying the systemic challenges confronting employees, workplaces can begin to support them in ways that matter for belonging.

Is workplace belonging associated more strongly with certain outcomes than belonging in other life settings?

It is. As shown on p. 16, workplace belonging is associated with greater willingness to recommend one's job to a friend or family member.[120] In our data, it is also associated with longer retention at an employee's current job.[121]

Also congruent with prior research, workplace belonging in our survey is associated with greater life satisfaction,[122] and better general and mental health.[123]

Another noteworthy finding in our data is that **US workplaces provide a unique opportunity for positive social contact with diverse others.** In our sample, respondents were far more likely to know someone from a different race, political affiliation, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or national origin through work than as friends. At a time of increasing social segregation in the US,[124] workplaces may have an opportunity to provide the type of effective intergroup social contact[125] that can increase cross-group empathy and perspective taking.



Belonging in Our Local Communities

US towns, cities, suburbs, and rural areas are social and democratic laboratories: While at the forefront of global innovation and rapidly evolving social and economic dynamics,[126] they represent the "third places"—locations other than home and work—in which Americans can most easily experience commonality across differences and feel empowered to affect change.[127] It is in our local communities that Americans develop habits of association and practice civic participation (or not),[128] which play a critical role in shaping Americans' trust in government, institutions, and one another. In many ways, the idea of a flourishing democratic society is built upon them.[129] (In our sample, local and national belonging scores were highly correlated.[130])

Our society is also reliant upon **social cohesion**.[131] Other studies have shown social cohesion to be associated with economic resilience[132] and increased participation and community engagement.[133] Community engagement, in turn, has been linked to more inclusive, representative governance[134] and higher-performing public schools (even in communities with similar socioeconomic status).[135]

Unfortunately, social engagement and belonging at the local level has been declining since the late 1960s,[136] with more than 50% of Americans today reporting a lack of connection to their neighborhood.[137] Meanwhile, people today tend to live in environments where they are surrounded by people similar to themselves, a structural reality which leads to echo chambers, amplifying existing views and ideologies, suppressing social contact across socioeconomic, racial, or geographic lines, and discouraging understanding and dialogue across lines of difference.[138] The last decade has also seen a downward trend in trust—in other residents, local government, and institutions.[139] This is concerning, since distrust in institutions can disrupt adherence to social norms and previously shared values, potentially making society less predictable (which would reinforce a cycle of distrust).[140]

We sought to better understand how local-level belonging relates to various measures of social cohesion and attitudes towards democracy. To do this, we first asked respondents: "What is the name of the municipality where you live (e.g., your town, city, etc.)?" In all follow-up questions—about satisfaction, trust, civic engagement, voting, desire to get to know other locals who were different from them, or agreement that greater diversity would benefit their community—the municipal name they wrote was inserted into the question stem.

In our sample...

- 69% of respondents report feeling fairly or very satisfied with their neighborhood, and 64% report feeling fairly or very satisfied with their local community.
- 65% of respondents report being civically engaged in at least one activity.
- 64% of respondents believe that when local citizens get involved they can change the way their community is run.
- 71% of respondents reported voting in their last local election.
- 40% and 43% of respondents believe that greater diversity would benefit their neighborhood or local community, respectively.
- 60-68% of respondents were inclined to get to know locals across difference, depending on whether the identity difference centered on race, party, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, or national origin (see "Local Belonging," Appendix).

Social cohesion is defined as the quality of interactions among members of a geographic community and measured as the strength of a community's social relations, residents' positive emotional connectedness to the community, and how strongly committed residents are to the common good.

What is the state of local belonging in the US?

The average local belonging* score was 3.17 out of 5 (ambiguity), ranking as the lowest score of all life settings. Just over 1 in 4 Americans feel a sense of belonging in their local community (26%), while nearly 3 out of 4 Americans report non-belonging (74%, and of these, 60% report ambiguity and 14% report outright exclusion).

What factors are associated with local belonging?

Local belonging is associated with factors such as higher socioeconomic status, higher levels of community engagement, not being treated as less than others in local settings,[141] and lower stress levels.[142] Also associated but to a lesser degree are being older, more educated, and identifying as a man or woman (vs. another gender). Specific findings related to these factors include:

- **Socioeconomic status.** About half as many respondents who consider themselves "much worse off" or "worse off" than the average American experience local belonging compared to those who see themselves as "better off" and "much better off" (18% and 19% vs. 32% and 39%, respectively). Nearly three times as many experience exclusion (31% and 18% vs. 10% and 9%, respectively).

- **Age.** Of all the generations, Millennials and Gen Z experience the lowest rates of belonging (23% and 16%, respectively) and the highest rates of exclusion (16% and 18%, respectively) in their local communities.

- **Gender.** Gender minority individuals experience substantially less belonging. Only 9% of individuals who identify as another gender report a sense of local belonging (as compared to 26% who identify as men and 26% who identify as women). Conversely, more than 1 in 3 of respondents who identify as another gender report exclusion (compared to 14% and 13% who identify as men or women, respectively).

*For "local" belonging, we asked: *"What is the name of the municipality where you live (e.g., your town, city, etc.)?"* For every follow-up question, they saw the name of their municipality (e.g., Newton) and we used the full Barometer to assess local belonging.

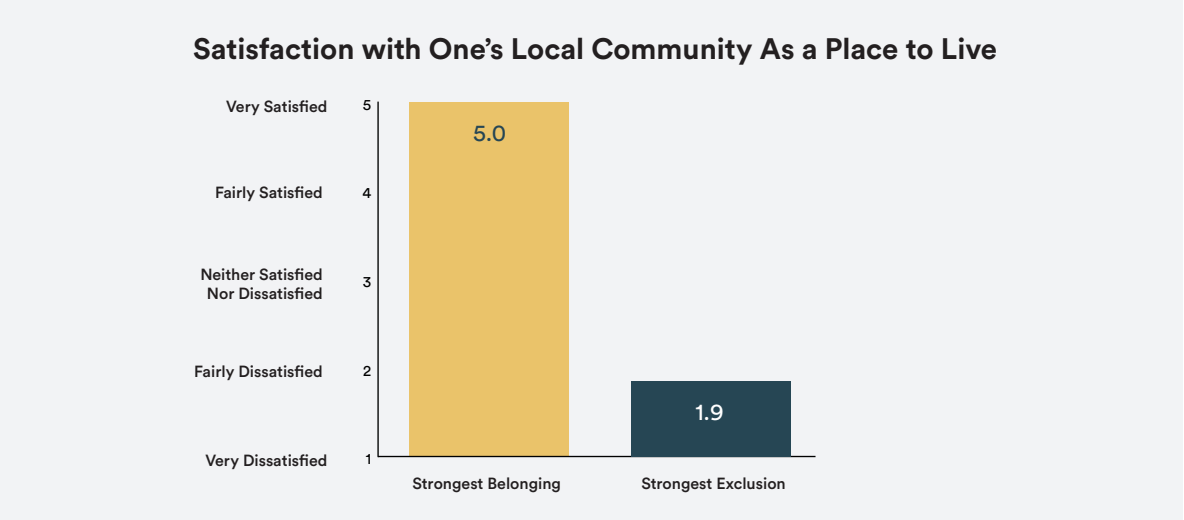
- **Education.** As educational attainment increases, we see a slight increase in belonging and a decrease in exclusion.

While we detected correlations between local belonging and race, immigration status, and living in more urban vs. rural areas, these differences became statistically insignificant once we controlled for socioeconomic status. (For additional details on these factors and other demographic and lifestyle differences, "Appendix: Local Belonging.") We are not suggesting that these differences do not matter—to the contrary, they warrant further investigation.[143] The fact that identity-based differences fall away when socioeconomic status is included in the model means that they are not a function of inherent group attributes. Rather, local communities will want to identify differences in residents' systemic and intersectional experiences and use them to inform their design of belonging interventions. (For more discussion on this, see "Conclusion" on pp. 49-54.)

Is local belonging associated more strongly with certain outcomes than belonging in other life settings?

In our survey, local belonging is most significantly associated with measures of social cohesion and intergroup dynamics, as described for specific outcomes below.

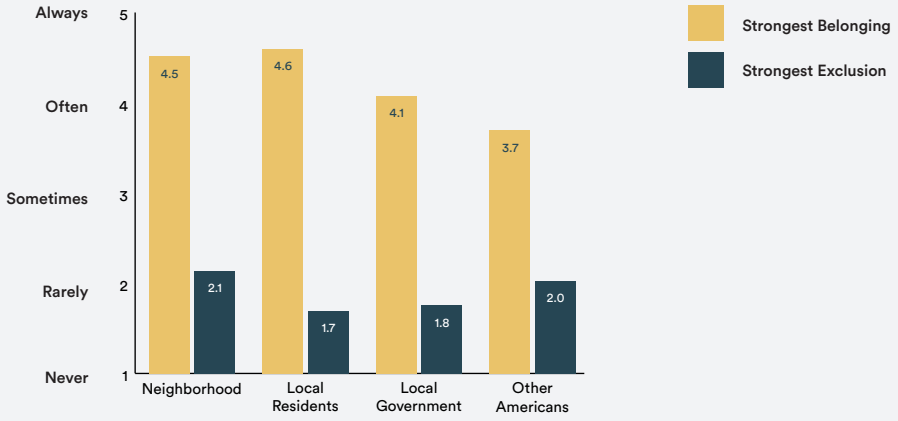
Satisfaction with the community. As compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with less satisfaction with one's local community (5.0 vs. 1.9, respectively).[144]



Trust in neighbors, other residents, and local government. (As seen on pg. 17, "The Power of Belonging.") Compared to strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging), strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with greater trust in one's neighbors (4.5 vs. 2.1),[145] other local residents (4.6 vs. 1.7),[146] local government (4.1 vs. 1.8),[147] and Americans generally (3.6 vs. 2.0).

Trust in Neighbors, Other Residents, Local Government, and Other Americans

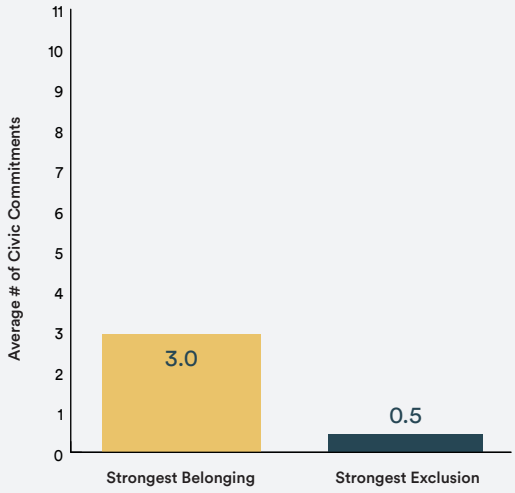
How much of the time do you think you can trust your [neighbors / local residents / local government / other Americans] to do what is in the best interest of families like yours?



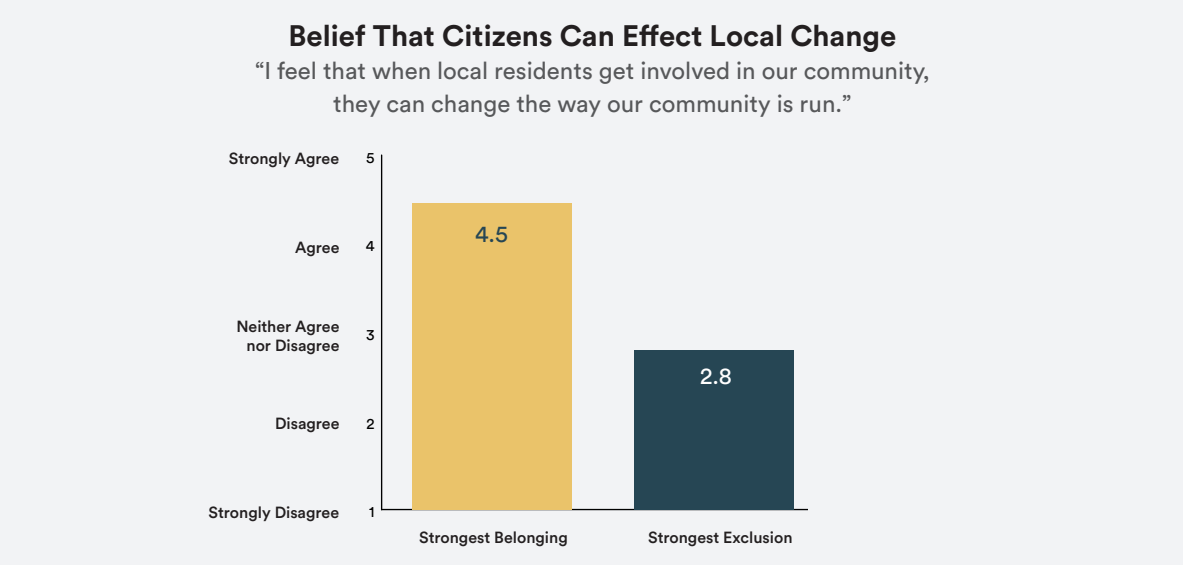
Civic engagement. Strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging), are associated with engaging in less than one civic commitment (.5 engagements) while strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with engaging in three commitments.[148]

Civic Engagement

(Respondents were prompted by a list of 11 ways one might engage civically and their scores were summed.) During the past 12 months, have you been involved with any of these types of groups (either online or in person)?



Belief that citizens can effect change. (As seen on pg. 19, "The Power of Belonging.") Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with less agreement that residents' involvement in their community can change the way it is run (2.8 vs. 4.5, respectively).



In addition, strong local belonging is associated with a desire to get to know locals who are different from oneself. Americans with strong belonging scores are ~31% more inclined than Americans with strong exclusion scores to get to know residents across categories of difference. This number falls to ~20% more with regard to race, demonstrating the particular challenge and importance of addressing racism in America.[149]

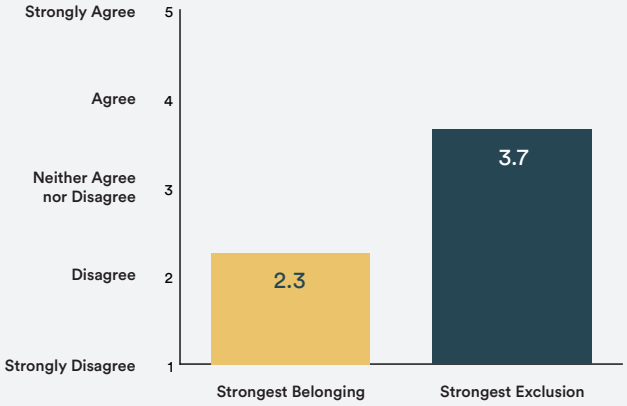
This is an especially important finding today. As referenced on p. 20, according to current census projections, by 2045, non-Hispanic white Americans will no longer be a majority of the national population.[150] Compared to strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging), strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with a stronger desire to get to know residents across categories of difference (71% vs. 37%). We note that this ~34% gap falls to ~20% with regard to race, demonstrating the particular challenge and importance of addressing racism in America.[151] When we asked respondents about their openness to demographic change in their own community:

Compared to strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging), strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging) are associated with more feelings of marginalization, e.g., agreement that one "feels like a stranger in my own community" or "fears being left behind" due to demographic change (3.7 vs. 2.3, for exclusion and belonging, respectively).[152]

Feelings of Marginalization

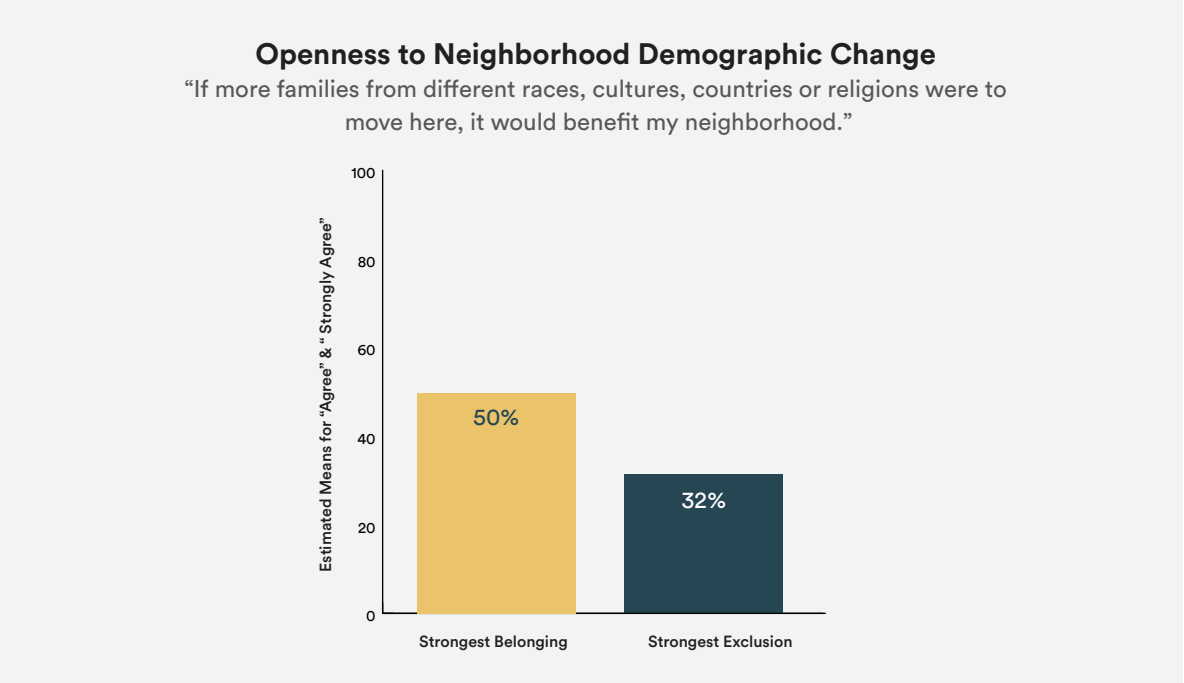
This is a composite variable made up of the three items. The last item is reverse scored.

1. The demographic landscape in [name of local community] has changed so much already that I sometimes feel like a stranger here.
2. "When I think about the anticipated demographic changes in [name of local community], I worry that I or my family will be left behind."
3. "When I think about the anticipated demographic changes in [name of local community] I feel excited for the new opportunities my family and I might have."



We also asked respondents whether they feel treated as *less than others* when interacting with law enforcement or locally elected officials, voting, or shopping at local stores.[154] One in 2 Americans said they were treated as less than others when interacting with local law enforcement. **On average, Americans who feel they are treated as "less than" in local interactions also tend to report more feelings of local marginalization (e.g., "feels like a stranger" and "fear being left behind.")**[153] Two out of 5 felt this way about voting; almost 3 out of 5 felt this way with respect to interacting with local elected officials; and, more than 1 out of 3 felt this way with respect to shopping at local stores.

On average, local belonging is associated with more openness to diversity in one's neighborhood (as seen on pg. 21, "The Power of Belonging").[155] Compared to strongest exclusion scores (scoring "1" on local belonging), strongest belonging scores (scoring "5" on local belonging) are associated with being more likely to agree that it would be a good thing for more people of diverse race, religion, or nationality to move to one's neighborhood (50% vs. 32%, respectively).



Additionally, for non-Hispanic whites—the group currently receiving the most attention in research dealing with perceptions of demographic change—a sense of belonging appears to counteract anxieties around demographic change.[156] On average, white residents who experience strong exclusion and live in an ethnically/racially diverse neighborhood report a greater fear of losing their place amidst demographic change, while whites with strong belonging who live in an ethnically/racially diverse neighborhood are less likely to fear demographic change.[157]

In sum, our research suggests that efforts to improve local belonging may have clear benefits for all local communities, and that they may be especially important for communities expecting to experience change and increased diversity in the foreseeable future.

Belonging in the Nation

As a range of thought leaders have noted, American democracy is at a dangerous inflection point.[158] The age and strength of our democratic institutions may serve as a bulwark against authoritarianism, yet nearly every esteemed measure of international democracy shows US scores to be in democratic decline.[159] Reasons for this are many and complex—e.g., leaders who flout democratic norms and foment "us vs. them" frames, as well as growing threats of political violence and election interference, the divisive effects of social media, and so on.[160]

The political philosopher Hannah Arendt once warned that authoritarianism "bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man."[161] While most analyses of US democracy do not take belonging (or adjacent concepts such as loneliness or social connection) into account,[162] scholars have linked non-belonging to both societal and institutional mistrust—with ramifications for democracy—and to extremism.[163] These are not small stakes. Indeed, the number of hate groups in the US has doubled since 1999[164] and domestic extremism is on the rise.[165] Further, the US Department of Justice has identified social isolation as a risk factor associated with individuals becoming involved in both group-based and lone-actor terrorism in the US,[166] and a global review of the root causes for violent extremism found that a host of psychological states related to non-belonging—such as isolation, loneliness, depression, low self-esteem, personal alienation, friendlessness, and feeling like a misfit—appeared to make a person more vulnerable to radicalization.[167]

It can also be useful to consider how Americans are making sense of this moment. Studies show that while Americans across partisan (and other) lines hold much in common when it comes to national identity[168] and salient political issues,[169] they are often unaware of these similarities. Instead, many Americans worry that our nation will not hold a place for them, their family, or their way of life in the future.[170] In tandem with this worry, in recent years Americans have lost trust—in each other (horizontal trust) and in their media platforms, politicians, and democratic institutions across the board (vertical trust).[171] During this same period, conspiracy theories have fed into false mainstream claims, such as the "Stop the Steal" election denialism that ultimately laid the groundwork for the January 6th Capitol Insurrection.[172] Some surveys have also found an increase in public support for non-democratic policies and political violence.[173]

Baseline Stats

- How much of the time can you trust other Americans to act in ways that are considerate of you and your family?
  Never/rarely = 25.1%
  Sometimes = 49.7%
  Often/always = 25.1%

- I feel that when average Americans get involved (voting, protest, advocacy, etc.), they can change the way our nation is run.
  Strongly disagree/disagree = 14.8%
  Neither agree nor disagree = 28.2%
  Agree/strongly agree = 56.9%

- The demographic landscape in America has changed so much already that I sometimes feel like a stranger in my own country.
  Strongly disagree/disagree = 37.1%
  Neither agree nor disagree =32.1%
  Agree/strongly agree = 30.8%

- When I think about the rapid pace of change in America, I worry that I or my family will be left behind.
  Strongly disagree/disagree = 33.9%
  Neither agree nor disagree = 34.7%
  Agree/strongly agree = 31.4%

- When I think about the rapid pace of change in America, I feel excited for the new opportunities I might have.
  Strongly disagree/disagree = 30.7%
  Neither agree nor disagree = 38.9%
  Agree/strongly agree = 30.4%

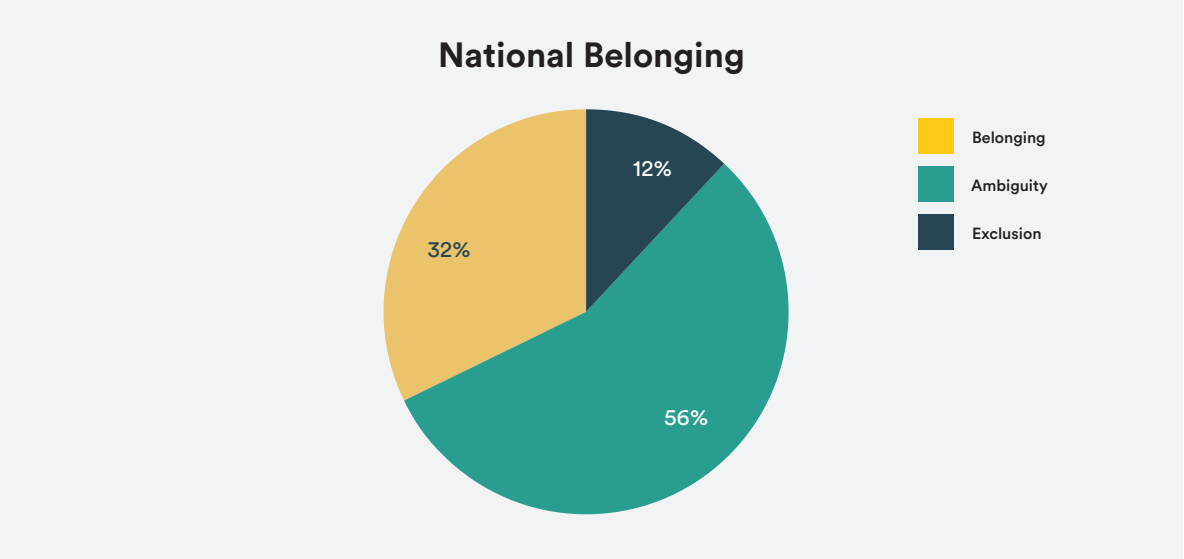
- It is a good thing for our nation to have a diverse population with people of different races, cultures, and religions.
  Strongly disagree/disagree = 8.5%
  Neither agree nor disagree = 25.3%
  Agree/strongly agree = 66.2%

- Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy currently works in the United States?*
  Very/fairly dissatisfied = 35.9%
  Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied = 16.4
  Very/fairly satisfied = 13.6%
  *33.1% weren't asked

Below, we report on the relationship between belonging and several variables related to democracy.

What is the state of US national belonging?

Though 32% of respondents report a sense of national belonging, 68% do not (56% fall in the range of ambiguity, and 12% report exclusion).



What factors are associated with national belonging in the US?

On average, respondents experiencing a sense of national belonging tend to report being economically better off than the average American; being older; identifying as a woman or man (vs. another gender); identifying as heterosexual (straight); adhering to a faith tradition (vs. being agnostic or atheistic); and feeling that religion is "important" or "very important" in their lives.[174] Specific findings related to these factors include:

- **Socioeconomic Status.** Though only about a third of Americans report a sense of national belonging, those who do are much more likely to see themselves as doing well compared to their neighbors. Belonging increases—and exclusion decreases—in tandem with increases in perceived socioeconomic status.[175]

- **Generation.** National belonging is much higher for the Silent, Boomer, and Gen X generations than for Millennials and Gen Z (58%, 38%, and 34% vs. 23% and 18%, respectively). In contrast, exclusion is much higher for the younger generations (17% for both Gen Z and Millennials vs. 3% and 6% for the Silent and Boomer generations).

- **Gender.** National belonging is much higher for women and men than it is for respondents identifying as another gender (not as a woman or man): 32% (women) and 33% (men) vs. 4% (another gender), respectively. Exclusion is much higher for those identifying as another gender than for women and men (45% vs. 10% and 12%, respectively).

- **Sexual Orientation.** National belonging is highest for respondents identifying as heterosexual/straight (35%) and lowest for those identifying as queer (6%). Conversely, exclusion is highest for those identifying as queer (52%) and lowest for those identifying as heterosexual (straight) (10%).

- **Religion.** Respondents identifying as atheist or agnostic report less belonging than those identifying as Protestant, Jewish, or Roman Catholic: 19% and 18% vs. 40%, 39%, and 43%, respectively. These groups also report higher exclusion: 22% (atheist) and 19% (agnostic) vs. 13% (Jewish), 8% (Protestant), and 7% (Roman Catholic).

- **Importance of Religion.** Higher percentages of respondents who report that their religion is "very" or "somewhat" important to them experience national belonging in comparison to those who find religion "not too" or "not at all" important (42% and 34% vs. 20% and 29%, respectively). Conversely, those who find religion "not too" or "not at all" important report exclusion at higher rates (19% and 11%, respectively) than those who say that their religion is "very" or "somewhat" important to them (8% for both categories).

Unlike the cases of intimate, workplace, and local belonging, several demographic differences remain significant for national belonging even when socioeconomic status is included as a factor in the model. Specifically:

- **Race.** Hispanic and white respondents report the highest percentages of national belonging (34% and 35%, respectively), while those identifying as multi-racial or selecting "other" report the highest percentages of exclusion (17% and 23%, respectively).

- **Partisan affiliation.** Americans identifying as Republican report the highest percentage of national belonging (42%, vs. 28% for Democrats and 23% for Independents), while those identifying as Independent or Democrat report the highest exclusion (12% and 11%, respectively, vs. 6% for Republicans).

- **Immigration category.** Naturalized and second-generation immigrants report the highest percentages of belonging (37% for both), while first-generation and immigrant non-citizens report the highest percentages of exclusion (14% and 13%, respectively).

- **Urbanicity.** Rural and suburban respondents reported the highest percentages of national belonging (35% and 34%, respectively) vs. 29% for respondents from big cities, 30% from small cities, and 31% from small towns. Respondents from small and big cities reported the highest levels of exclusion (13% and 12%, respectively).

We note that national belonging is the one life setting where group differences remained significant even when we controlled for socioeconomic status. We hope that future research will more deeply explore the reasons behind this. In the meantime, we encourage national stakeholders to spend time reflecting on the bar graphs and details associated with these group-based differences in the Appendix.

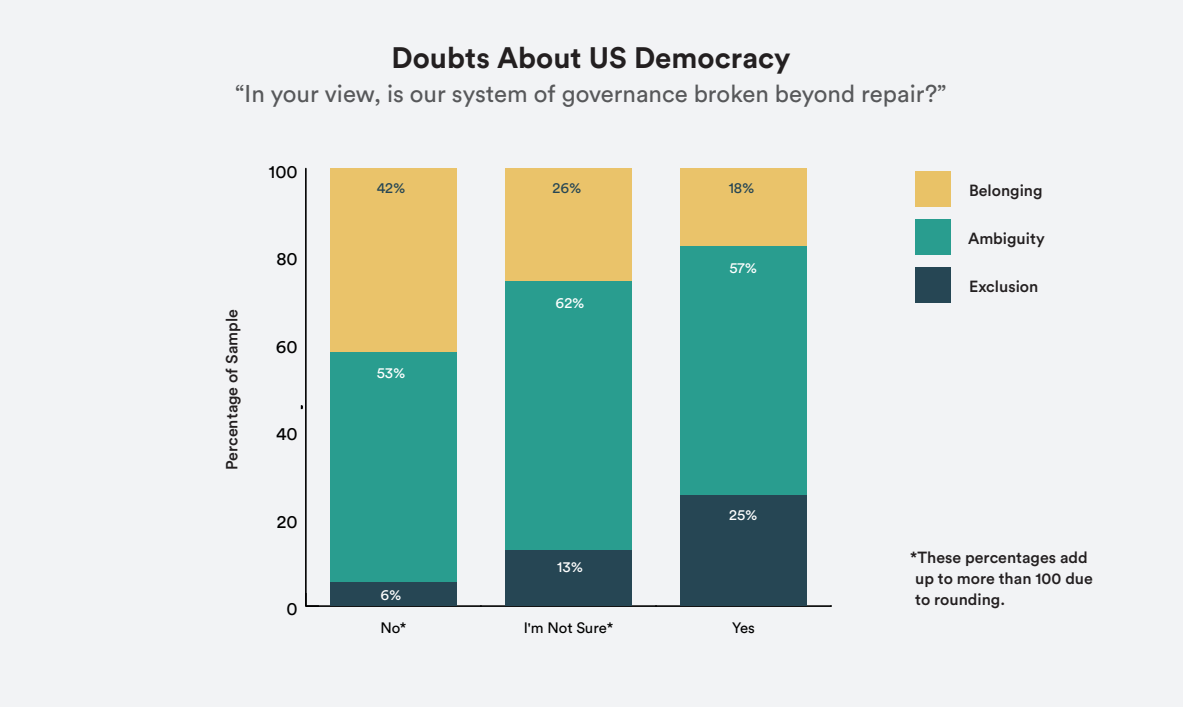
Is national belonging associated more strongly with certain outcomes than belonging in other life settings?

National belonging is the life setting most associated with the following outcomes:

- **Satisfaction and dissatisfaction.** Compared to strongest exclusion scores, strongest belonging scores are associated with more satisfaction with the US as a place to live (5.0 vs. 1.1 for strongest belonging and exclusion, respectively, on a 1-5 scale), and with the way US democracy works (3.4 vs. 1.0 for strongest belonging and exclusion, respectively, on a 1-5 scale). (See graph on p. 21 in "The Power of Belonging in the US Today").

- **Support for anti-democratic government.** Compared to strongest exclusion scores, strongest belonging scores are associated with being less likely to say that a non-democratic government can be preferable (10% vs. 33% for strongest belonging and exclusion, respectively). (See graph on p. 22, "The Power of Belonging in the US Today").

- **Doubts about US democracy.** Americans experiencing belonging are less likely to have doubts about the US's democratic system of governance. Respondents were asked, "In your view, is our system of governance broken beyond repair?" with possible responses being: "No," "I don't know," or "Yes." Those reporting national belonging had fewer "Yes" responses than "No" responses ("18% vs. 42%), whereas Americans reporting exclusion had fewer "No" responses than "Yes" responses ("6% vs. 25%).



Emerging Themes

The Interdependence of Diversity & Belonging

Diversity can benefit friendships, families, schools, houses of worship, communities, businesses, and countries. As mentioned earlier, because diverse groups bring novel perspectives to the table, they often experience enhanced creativity and more effective problem solving. As a consequence, communities where diverse residents live alongside one another enjoy better outcomes in health, education, and income (on average) compared to segregated communities.[176] Additionally, companies that have a diverse workforce significantly outperform companies that do not.[177]

When we refer to diversity in this report, we mean the range of human differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability or attributes, religious or ethical values system, national origin, and political beliefs.

But the picture isn't quite as simple as that. The same studies that point to the beneficial effects of diversity also find that it can come with significant costs "due to difficulty in communication, difference in preferences, and conflict between polarized groups," to quote the authors of one such study.[178] *In other words, diversity without belonging is at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive.*

If diversity without belonging can backfire, belonging without diversity is similarly suboptimal. In genetics, diversity increases a species or population's ability to adapt and survive.[179] In communities, as described above, belonging without diversity means poorer outcomes in community health, education, income and weaker workplace performance. Why? Groups characterized by belonging but lacking diversity risk growing insular in their thinking: Studies show that they focus less on facts[180] and process facts less carefully.[181] Further, without having dissenting voices to make them aware of biases in their decision making, homogeneous groups are less likely to think outside of their comfort zone, which also makes them less innovative.[182] Lastly, when belonging is limited to homogeneous groups it is often accompanied by othering, becoming a source of division vis-a-vis larger society.

Only by pairing belonging with diversity can we spark new configurations of ideas, solutions, and stories. Together, belonging and diversity are creative, generative, and transformative. One supports the other in a virtuous cycle.

Findings from across life settings in this report underscore ways in which belonging and diversity are interdependent, as highlighted below.

Friendship

- **Diverse friendships are associated with higher friendship belonging.** Americans who have more than one diverse friendship report higher percentages of friendship belonging than Americans with one or zero diverse friendships (65%, 56%, and 32%, respectively).

- **Friendship belonging is associated with fewer feelings of national marginalization.** Americans who report friendship belonging (as opposed to belonging in any other life setting) are significantly less likely to report feeling marginalized ("like a stranger in my own country" and "worry that I or my family will be left behind") due to national demographic change.

Workplace

- **Workplaces offer an opportunity for positive social contact across differences, which could have positive ripple effects in interpersonal and community life.** Americans are significantly more likely to hold one or more workplace relationships across differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, religion, partisanship, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and national origin) than they are to have one or more diverse friendships outside the workplace.

Local Community

- **Local belonging is associated with wanting to get to know people different from oneself.** Compared to strongest exclusion scores, strongest belonging scores are associated with a greater inclination to get to know people of a different socioeconomic status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation (37% vs. 71% for strongest exclusion and belonging, respectively, a 34% gap). While this pattern holds with respect to getting to know locals from a different race or ethnicity, the gap falls to 20%, demonstrating the particular challenge and importance of addressing racism in America.[183]

- **A sense of community belonging, as well as resident interactions characterized by dignity and equality, are associated with less anxiety about the future.** Local non-belonging, and separately, feeling treated as "less than" in local interactions (such as interactions with law enforcement or local officials, or while voting or shopping at local stores) are associated with "feeling like a stranger in my own community" and "worry that I or my family will be left behind" due to demographic change.[184]

- **Local belonging is associated with thinking that increased diversity in one's neighborhood would be a good thing.** When asked whether increased diversity in their neighborhood would be a good thing or not, strong local belonging scores indicated residents who were considerably more likely to agree.[185]

Generally

- **Belonging in *any* life setting is related to reduced anxiety about one's "fit" and future in their community.** In our dataset, belonging in any life setting—at home, with friends, at work, in one's neighborhood or local community, or even in the nation—is associated with a decrease in "feeling like a stranger in my own community" and "worrying that I or my family will be left behind" due to demographic change.

Belonging is Interconnected Across Life Settings

In our dataset, higher belonging in one life setting correlates with higher belonging in other life settings.[186] This suggests the possibility that increases in belonging *within any of the life settings* might reverberate into other life settings, with far-reaching effects. However, correlation is not causation—it may also be the case that correlations between life settings are a result of individual differences (e.g., that individuals with strong interpersonal connection skills report more belonging in one setting and are also more likely to report belonging in another).[187] While this study cannot establish causal links, further investigation can help to determine if belonging—or lack thereof—might have a causal influence across settings, and, if so, with what limitations or constraints.

For better or worse, belonging and its relationships with outcomes across life settings are deeply interconnected. An example of "for better" is the finding that friendship belonging is associated with greater civic engagement and activism, suggesting that the connection, safety, and agency one feels with friends may spill over towards greater connection and engagement at the local and national levels. This may mean that investments in targeted and localized initiatives bent on building friendship capacity—such as socioemotional learning in schools, youth sports, or arts organizations—could contribute to civic and democratic gains (all the better if these are diverse friendships, see p. 29).

An example of "for worse" might include the finding that respondents who report being treated poorly by local officials are more likely to report non-belonging across *all* life settings, not only in their local community but also nationally, in the workplace, and even among friends and family.[188] Thus, indignities experienced at the local level may undermine feelings of belonging in settings we would not have thought related. This could mean that investments in belonging at the local level—such as building up civic infrastructure to foster inclusive social contact and pluralistic practice, designing programs to support healthy intergroup contact, and bolstering efforts to address discrimination—may have potential to reverberate well beyond local belonging.

For stakeholders who wish to invest in belonging, this is an important takeaway: Leaders, policymakers, and funders who are committed to building more vibrant, inclusive, and pluralistic spaces in America have a chance to influence belonging and wellbeing in life settings beyond their immediate focus.

Conclusion

Summary

The need to belong is fundamental to the human experience and notoriously difficult to measure. The term is used interchangeably with adjacent concepts such as social connection and loneliness, but belonging extends beyond social relationships. It is "a general inference about the 'quality of fit' (or "potential fit") between ourselves and the cues, events, experiences, and relationships in a life setting."[189] Environments where we don't "fit" hinder our goals, of whatever nature they may be, and can lead to negative outcomes. A desire to better understand this is one of the reasons why we created the Belonging Barometer.

In lieu of a commonly accepted definition or measure for belonging, we created the Belonging Barometer and sought to draw richer insights about its role in American life. The 10-item Barometer captures nuanced facets of belonging, including items that reflect popular themes of social connection, psychological safety, and co-creation.

In our nationally representative survey, t**he Belonging Barometer is associated with critical outcomes in the US.** Americans who experience belonging are healthier and less stressed. They are more satisfied at work and in their local communities, experience increased trust in each other and in our systems of governance, and are more engaged citizens. Perhaps most importantly, during this unsettled time, they are open to meeting people who are different from themselves, are ready to embrace change, and are supportive of US democracy.

This study also suggests that **diversity and belonging are interdependent**, an insight that will grow increasingly important as the US becomes increasingly diverse. We all win when we strive to inculcate belonging in diverse workplaces or civic spaces. Conversely, we all lose when we don't combine diversity with belonging. Change is always a challenge, but it does not have to be threatening—it appears that belonging may alleviate common anxieties.

Unfortunately, **non-belonging is widespread throughout American life** (non-belonging is a cumulative term including people who experience belonging ambiguity and exclusion). In fact, the majority of Americans report non-belonging in three life settings: the workplace (64%), the nation (68%), and their local community (74%). Perhaps more concerningly, 1 in 5 Americans report feeling non-belonging across each and every life setting measured here—meaning they do not feel a "fit" with their friends and family, workplace, local community, or the nation.

Who is more or less likely to belong? Across the life settings, **Americans are more likely to report belonging** if they see themselves as better off or much better off economically than the average American; are older; identify as a woman or a man (vs. another gender); or identify as heterosexual (straight) or homosexual (gay) rather than bi/pansexual, asexual, or queer. Though these results may not be surprising, they are critically important. Our society transmits the parameters of belonging through cues, events, experiences, and relationships. These daily realities across American life settings appear to be imparting a message to these demographic groups, that, at least sometimes: "You don't belong."

By demonstrating that lower levels of stress, more diversity in one's social network, and greater community engagement are also associated with belonging, this study offers individuals actionable pathways for increasing their wellbeing. But unfortunately, not all factors associated with our sense of belonging are our choices to make. For instance, large percentages of Americans feel they are "treated as less than others" in their daily lives, and this experience is associated with non-belonging across *all* life settings—not only in local community but also nationally, in the workplace, and even among friends and family.[190] While systemic racism or other forms of marginalization likely play some role in this phenomenon, the Americans who report being treated as "less than" tend to be younger, be first-generation or non-citizen immigrants, identify as non-Hispanic white, and identify as a gender minority. This suggests a broad social breakdown in civic norms and behavior, or at least the experience of such among a wide set of groups, and also presents an **opportunity for local communities to inquire about dignity in daily interactions as experienced by their own residents, and address any issues that are identified.**

In some life settings belonging also correlates with race, religion, and immigration status, however—with the exception of national belonging—these differences become statistically insignificant once we control for socioeconomic status. This suggests that socioeconomic status, which is itself influenced by marginalizing systems (for instance, systems that prevent wealth accumulation, such as redlining, or that block opportunities, such as racism or xenophobia, etc.), explains variation in belonging better than the group identities themselves. Thus, **belonging interventions—in families, workplaces, local communities, or at the national level—must be designed with an eye towards the systemic life experiences that influence an individual beyond the setting at hand.**[191]

We close by highlighting one last finding from our survey: Higher belonging in one life setting correlates with higher belonging in other life settings.[192] It is therefore possible that investments in one life setting or sector could hold benefits for others. In our view, this presents further opportunity for common cause among policymakers, practitioners, researchers, leaders, and funders.

To Build Belonging

Our hope is that this work will support organizations and individuals working in communities, government, philanthropy, business, and health, among others, to **take note** of the importance of belonging, **take action** to foster it in the spaces they lead, and **take time** to do so thoughtfully and with intention.

Efforts to increase belonging, sometimes referred to as **belonging interventions**, can and do work. For instance, by addressing a student by their first name in a letter being sent to the home, a school principal increased a sense of connection among socially excluded adolescents.[193] In another study, by making first-year Black college students aware that *all* students experience feelings of nonbelonging in the transition to college (making it less likely that they would attribute their own feelings to racial identity—drawing on stereotypes that Black students are less smart

or capable), college administrators were able to reduce the racial achievement gap by 50% and increase these students' confidence in their belonging.[194] And, in a separate study, by replacing objects that evoked masculine stereotypes of computer science with neutral objects, a computer science department increased women's interest and anticipated belonging in the field (while also not reducing belonging among men).[195] In "The Many Questions of Belonging," Greg Walton and Shannon Brady offer a summary of useful, evidence-based approaches for creating belonging.[196]

We hope that organizations, workplaces, and communities will invest in belonging by being intentional in how they structure their groups and teams, how they create connections, and how they design their spaces. That said, stakeholders who wish to do this work should also proceed with care, taking into consideration that belonging interventions can be ineffective, or even backfire. Consider, for instance, the potential impact of a common, well-intended statement such as, "I want you to belong," or the request that students repeat a mantra like "I belong" to themselves. These strategies can inadvertently imply that most other people in that setting feel they belong, highlighting a person's felt lack of belonging, and offering little hope for their future.[197]

Efforts to increase belonging can fail when they target the wrong belonging-related psychological process for a specific group.[198] Recall that belonging involves a perceived "fit" between the self and a context. Walton and Brady argue that, to draw inferences about their belonging in any given context, people ask six key questions, even if implicitly; the way that one answers these questions informs their behavior in that setting, often making their expectations come true.[199] The questions are: *Does anyone here notice me? Are there people here that I connect to? Do people here value (people like) me? Is this a setting in which I want to belong? Could I be more than a stereotype here? Are people like me compatible with this setting or behavior?* Of course, the same situation might yield different answers to the six questions for different people, as everyone is informed by their own experiences, group identities, and more. The goal of psychology-based belonging interventions is to vary cues in the environment in ways that help all people answer the six questions affirmatively, regardless of where they are coming from.

Knowing how to do this is not always easy, or obvious, but when an intervention targets the wrong belonging-related psychological process (for a given community, or sub-population), it will likely be ineffective. It is therefore important to understand when and for whom the different questions of belonging arise within a given context—and this often requires baseline research. For example, having "swag" sent to new college students to promote affiliation increased belonging among white students but not Black students,[200] perhaps because minority students—who faced the possibility of group-based devaluation—were less concerned with affiliation and more concerned with being respected and valued.[201]

Belonging interventions may also be ineffective when exercises seem inauthentic or coercive, or when people fail to connect an exercise to their broader personal experience.

Belonging is about the symbolic meanings people draw from experiences,[202] but that doesn't mean that concrete resources and realities don't matter—to the contrary, people draw symbolic meaning from pictures on a wall, the diversity modeled in leadership, and the systemic privileges

or barriers placed before them. If we do everything we can to increase belonging for a particular individual or group, but then they cannot take advantage of that new, secure sense of belonging to pursue their goals due to resource or structural barriers, it will fail. For that reason, for some populations, efforts to increase belonging will need to address systemic barriers alongside programmatic and psychological ones.

We hope that a better understanding of belonging and its stakes leads to efforts to increase belonging across sectors and settings, and that some of the ideas referenced here and in the Belonging Resources page are a helpful foundation. Additionally, given the importance of thoughtful design and the fact that efforts to increase belonging will be delivered in complex social contexts, we think it critical—for individual stakeholders and for the belonging field as a whole that we hope will emerge—to commit to a robust evaluation of belonging intervention outcomes and a mechanism for the sharing of best practices.

Using the Belonging Barometer

To that end, the Belonging Barometer offers a start in the following ways:

- **Provides baseline assessments.** The Barometer can draw insights about belonging and its relationship to outcomes of interest throughout a community or among particular groups of people in that community. Assessments such as this can contribute to overall understanding of a context; they can also identify differences between groups within that community and areas where work is needed.

- **Informs the design of programs, interventions, and communications.** Analyses such as those within this report can determine which belonging themes are most important to the population, enabling the identification of themes that might be prioritized in programming. Belonging scores can also be analyzed by sub-themes—e.g., social connection, psychological safety, and co-creation—to determine which domain community members (or sub-groups within the community) are feeling strongest in, or which areas could be targets for growth.

- **Enables longitudinal tracking over time.** The Barometer can be adapted to measure levels of belonging over time. For example, institutions might want to incorporate longitudinal tracking of belonging (among workers, students, residents, citizens, etc.), or track changes pre- and post-intervention. By surveying belonging in more than one setting over time, larger collaborations could see whether an improvement in belonging at a localized setting (e.g., family services, youth sports teams, or via a YMCA) translates into an improvement in belonging at the community level (a town).

Who Might Use the Belonging Barometer?

A few examples include:

- **Schools and universities** looking to devise support services, report on student wellbeing, or demonstrate programmatic or interventional impacts over time.
- **Workplaces** wishing to track belonging within teams or across the workforce over time, identify areas of focus for improving belonging, or derive evidence-based insights to inform new programs or interventions.
- **Funders** who desire nuanced relational feedback from their grantees, or who wish to support their grantees with resources that can help them: a) assess their own relationship to program participants and communities, or b) demonstrate programmatic or intervention impacts.
- **Community centers and programs** who wish to make belonging a theme in their operations, seek impact measures, or are looking for evidence-based ways to target and improve their programming.
- **Mayors and town managers** who wish to appeal to prospective residents, or desire baseline or longitudinal feedback from the community about what is working or how things might be improved.
- **National think-tanks or governmental departments** that wish to track citizen wellbeing (as a whole or across sub-populations), examine relationships between belonging and other outcomes, or better understand the impact of national events on belonging overall (or across regions, sub-populations, etc.).
- **Civil society organizations focused on democracy** who wish to further explore the relationship between democracy and belonging and explore or experiment with related programming.
- **Hospitals, health institutions, and public health institutions** seeking to identify how patients, participants, and communities feel in relation to their physical spaces and programs, and to evaluate potential belonging interventions and their impact on health.

Belonging Resources

We hope readers find the following list of books, articles, podcasts, websites, videos, and real-world examples useful, though it is far from exhaustive. We also encourage readers to visit the Othering and Belonging Institute's Resource Page; it provides a regularly updated array of belonging resources—including toolkits, case studies, the Inclusiveness database, and academic articles and blog essays—in one place.

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53. Using a composite measure of *stress* and controlling for age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race, education, religion, and having children, R^2 = .30 and we see significant associations for intimate belonging (-.38), age, subjective income, and having children, as well as for multiple categories within the variables of race, sexual orientation, and religion.
54. Using a composite measure of *loneliness* and controlling for age, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, race, education, religion, and having children, R^2 = .28 and we see significant associations for intimate belonging (-.64), age, education, subjective socioeconomic status, and having children, as well as for multiple categories within the

variables of race, sexual orientation, and religion.

55. R^2=.213. Positive associations also existed for age, higher socioeconomic status, and higher education. Negatively associated were higher loneliness, not being straight, identifying as Asian, and identifying as agnostic.
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68. $F(19, 4671) = 143.9$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$. Other significant factors include age, socioeconomic status, being an unnaturalized immigrant, years in neighborhood, local experiences of indignity, and stress. We included age, gender, identification as white vs. minority/multi-ethnic, subjective socioeconomic status, education, immigration status, stress, experiences of discrimination, religion, and neighborhood diversity in the regression.
69. $R^2 = .373$. We included local belonging,* age, gender, identification as white vs. minority/multi-ethnic,* subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, immigration status,* stress,* local experiences of indignity,* religion, and neighborhood diversity in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
70. $F(19, 4497) = 71.67$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .23$. We included age,* gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority,* subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood,

immigration status,* stress,* local experiences of indignity,* religion, and neighborhood diversity in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.

71. Logistic regression: AIC=5782.9, Deviance = 6207.9 (4796). We included age,* gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, immigration status,* stress,* experiences of discrimination,* and religion* in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
72. R^2 = .11. We included local belonging,* age,* gender,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* faith tradition,* and having children* in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
73. R^2 = .13. We included local belonging,* age, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status, education,* faith tradition,* immigration status,* years in neighborhood,* neighborhood diversity,* discrimination,* experiences with daily local indignity,* and stress* in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
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75. $F(19, 4674) = 19.97$, $p < .000$, R^2 = .06. We included local belonging,* age,* gender,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, frequency of chats with neighbors,* immigration status,* and stress* in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
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78. For examples of how such rhetoric is aimed at minorities and immigrants, and for a review of how incendiary rhetoric "can make political violence more likely, gives violence direction, complicates the law enforcement response, and increases fear in vulnerable communities," see Byman, D.L. (2021, April 9). How hateful rhetoric connects to real-world violence.

Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/04/09/how-hateful-rhetoric-connects-to-real-world-violence/

79. Byman, D.L. (2021, April 9). See also, Peters, J., Grynbaum, M., Collins, K., & Harris, R. (2019, August 11). How the El Paso killer echoed the incendiary words of conservative media stars. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/11/business/media/el-paso-killer-conservative-media.html
80. $F(16, 4674) = 29.12$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .09$. We included local belonging,* age,* gender,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, frequency of chats with neighbors, immigration status, and stress in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
81. Argo, N., Brown, R., Livingston, L., Hurlburt, H., & Owens, S. (2019, December). Building US resilience to political violence: A globally informed framework for analysis and action. *Over Zero and New America*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7f1da1ea15cd5bef32169f/t/602eed99c1b4c803c52ed8a6/1613688243138/Full+-+Building+Resilience+to+Political+Violence.pdf. See also: Kalmoe, N., & Mason, L. (2022). *Radical American partisanship: Mapping violent hostility, its causes, & the consequences for democracy*. University of Chicago Press. Westwood, S., Grimmer, J., Tyler, M., & Nall, C. (2022). Current research overstates American support for political violence. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United State of America, 119*(12). https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2116870119; and, Brown, R., Hameed, S., Hurlburt, H., Livingston, L., and Stark, A. (2022). *Violence-proofing U.S. democracy: Immediate priorities for philanthropy*. (Over Zero, New America, and Thought Partnerships Working Paper). https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5f7f1da1ea15cd5bef32169f/t/61d4b6c79f7689273c5434e6/1641330376308/Working_Paper_Violence-Proofing_U.S._Democracy1.pdf
82. Sunstein, C. (2018). (Ed.). *Can It Happen Here? Authoritarianism in America*. Harper Collins; Kleinfeld, R. (2022, September 15). *Five strategies to support U.S. democracy [Working paper]*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/15/five-strategies-to-support-u.s.-democracy-pub-87918; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2021). *The global state of democracy report 2021: Building resilience in a pandemic era*. https://www.idea.int/gsod/sites/default/files/2021-11/the-global-state-of-democracy-2021_1.pdf; and, *Freedom House (2021). Freedom in the world 2021: Democracy under siege*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege
83. One element that significant research has explored deals with perceptions of marginalization and fears of social change. Strikingly, in November 2021, 41% of Americans agreed that they felt like a stranger in their own country. See: Jones, R.P., Jackson, N., Orcés, D., Huff, I., & Holcomb, T. (2021). *Competing visions of America: An evolving identity or a culture under attack? Findings from the 2021 American Values Survey.* Public Religion Research Institute. https://www.prri.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/. Research has also looked at the ways in which Americans who feel this sense of marginalization are more likely to support anti-democratic policies. See: Bartels, L. M. (2020). Ethnic antagonism erodes Republicans' commitment to democracy. *Proceedings*

of the National Academy of Sciences of the United State of America, 117(37), 22752-22759. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2007747117. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd's death, Bartels surveyed Republicans and found that 40% agreed that "a time will come when patriotic Americans have to take the law into their own hands," and 47% agreed that "strong leaders sometimes have to bend the rules in order to get things done." This kind of anti-democratic support did not correlate with support for the GOP, but was instead associated with a sense that "the traditional American way of life is disappearing so fast that we may have to use force to save it," and "discrimination against whites is as big a problem today as discrimination against blacks and other minorities."

84. For satisfaction with US democracy, $R^2 = .23$. We included national belonging,* age,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority,* subjective socioeconomic status, education,* and trust in other Americans* in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
85. Contact Over Zero for more information on the regression output, or to request the dataset.
86. Contact Over Zero for more information about the methodology.
87. Merrington, N. (2018). *The five dynamics of an effective team*. Think with Google. https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/intl/en-gb/consumer-insights/consumer-trends/five-dynamics-effective-team/
88. Cassidy, J. (1999). The nature of a child's ties. In J. Cassidy & P.R. Shaver (Eds.). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research and clinical applications*. Guilford Press. https://archive.org/details/handbookofattach0000unse/page/3/mode/2up
89. Schaffer, R. (2007). *Introducing Child Psychology*. Blackwell.
90. Theisson, A. (2021, December 8). *Is having a sense of belonging important?* Mayo Clinic Health System. https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/is-having-a-sense-of-belonging-important. See also: King, V., & Boyd, L. M. (2016). Factors associated with perceptions of family belonging among adolescents. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 78*(4), 1114–1130. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12322
91. See Brendtro, L. K. (2006). The vision of Urie Bronfenbrenner: Adults who are crazy about kids. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 15*(3), 162–166. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234721190_The_Vision_of_Urie_Bronfenbrenner_Adults_Who_Are_Crazy_about_Kids Although our survey did collect data about non-friend and family social support, we did not include this in the regressions reported in this section. Please contact Over Zero if you would like more information.
92. For instance, families and friends have experienced increased stress due to isolation and increased food, economic, and housing insecurity. See: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2021, October). *The COVID-19 economy's effects on food, housing and employment hardships*. https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/8-13-20pov.pdf
93. Pinsker, J. (2021, March 30). Trump's presidency is over. So are many relationships. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2021/03/trump-friend-family-relationships/618457/. See also: Adcox, S. (2022, May 26). *When Families Disagree About*

Politics. Very Well Family. https://www.verywellfamily.com/when-families-disagree-about-politics-4112342

94. F(10, 4776) = 144.5, p <.001, R^2 = .23. Also associated but to a lesser degree were age and education. In the regression analysis, we probed age, gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education level, subjective socioeconomic status, having children, community engagement, childhood trauma, and family support.
95. Hull, K. E., & Ortyl, T. A. (2019). Conventional and cutting-edge: Definitions of family in LGBT communities. *Sex Research and Social Policy, 16*, 31–43. https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-018-0324-2. The influence of family ties compared to friendship ties as regards LGBTQ health is debated. See: Milton, C. (2020). *The buffering effect of chosen family networks in LGBT adults* (Order No. 27830056) [Master's thesis, Southern Illinois University]. Carbondale ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. See also: Milton, C., & Knutson, D. (2021). Family of origin, not chosen family, predicts psychological health in a LGBTQ+ sample. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000531
96. We asked, "Using your best estimate, what number of your friends…are from a different [racial or ethnic group / religious orientation / political party / sexual orientation / socioeconomic status / national origin] than you?" The measure we report on here counted anyone who had more than one diverse friend.
97. Carey, R. M., Stephens, N. M., Townsend, S. S. M., & Hamedani, M. G. (2022). Is diversity enough? Cross-race and cross-class interactions in college occur less often than expected, but benefit members of lower status groups when they occur. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 123*(5), 889–908. https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000302. See also: Hussain, M., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Discrimination, diversity, and sense of belonging: Experiences of students of color. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 14*(1), 63–71. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000117. Lastly, see: Shook, N. J., & Clay, R. (2012). Interracial roommate relationships: A mechanism for promoting sense of belonging at university and academic performance. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 48*(5), 1168–1172. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.05.005
98. We used a stress composite score comprised of the following statements: "In the last month, how often have you felt…that you were unable to control the important things in your life / confident about your ability to handle your personal problems / that things were going your way?" R^2=.304, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.
99. We used the UCLA-3 Loneliness Scale: "How often do you feel that you lack companionship / left out / isolated from others?" R^2 = .276, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.
100. "During the past four weeks, how often have you accomplished less than you would like as a result of any emotional problems, such as feeling depressed or anxious?" R^2=.208, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.

101. "During the past four weeks, how often have you accomplished less than you would like as a result of any physical problems?" R^2=.113, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.
102. R^2=.213. Positive associations also existed for age, higher socioeconomic status, and higher education. Negatively associated were higher loneliness, not being straight, identifying as Asian, and identifying as agnostic.
103. R^2=.08, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.
104. "When I think about the rapid pace of change in America, I worry that I or my family will be left behind." R^2=.08, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.
105. R^2=.11, controlling for gender, race, education, subjective income, religion, and having children.
106. Gettysburg College News. *One Third of Your Life is Spent at Work*. https://www.gettysburg.edu/news/stories?id=79db7b34-630c-4f49-ad32-4ab9ea48e72b
107. This is particularly through two mechanisms: relationships and sense of purpose. See Weziak-Bialowolska, D., Bialowolski, P., Sacco, P. L., VanderWeele, T. J., & McNeely, E. (2020). Well-being in life and well-being at work: Which comes first? Evidence from a longitudinal study. *Frontiers in Public Health, 103*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00103
108. Baldoni, J. (2017, January 22). Fostering the sense of belonging promotes success. *Forbes Magazine*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnbaldoni/2017/01/22/fostering-the-sense-of-belonging-promotes-success/?sh=27b83cbd10f2
109. Hong, L. & Page, S. (2004). Groups of diverse problem solvers can outperform groups of high-ability problem solvers. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United State of America, 101*(46) 16385-16389. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0403723101. More recent work has focused on the importance of cognitive diversity: Reynolds, A., & Lewis, D. (2017, March 30). *Teams solve problems faster when they're more cognitively diverse.* Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse
110. Edmondson, A. C. (2018). The fearless organization: Creating psychological safety in the workplace for learning, innovation, and growth. John Wiley & Sons.
111. Civic Alliance, Health Action Alliance, Ad Council, & Belonging Begins with Us. (2022). *Cultivating belonging in the workplace: An employer guide*. https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/6010e149d9130a63e7b78adb/633f00540531286ad1514020_CBWGuide_10.6%20.pdf
112. See: Goldberg, E. (2022, March 4). Why Your Boss Wants to Know Your Love Language. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/04/business/employee-satisfaction-remote-work.html; and, Coqual. (2022). *The power of belonging: What it is and why it matters in today's workplace*. https://coqual.org/reports/the-power-of-belonging/
113. Scott, B. A., Colquitt, J. A., Paddock, E. L., & Judge, T. A. (2010). *A daily investigation of the role of manager empathy on employee well-being. Organizational Behavior and Human*

Decision Processes, 113(2), 127–140. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2010.08.001

114. Goldberg, E. (2022, March 4) and Coqual (2022).
115. F(19, 4777) = 47.6, p <.001, R^2 = .16. We probed age, gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education level, subjective socioeconomic status, religion, immigration status, stress, and having children.
116. Moen, P. (2016). *Encore adulthood: Boomers on the edge of risk, renewal and purpose.* Oxford University Press. https://www.amazon.com/Encore-Adulthood-Boomers-Renewal-Purpose/dp/0199357285
117. We do not know whether stress causes (lack of) belonging or vice versa (or both). This, as with many other findings in this report, merits further inquiry.
118. Coqual (2022).
119. Coqual (2022).
120. "The higher rates of infection among people of color likely reflect increased exposure risk due to working, living, and transportation situations, including being more likely to work in jobs that cannot be done remotely, to live in larger households, and to rely on public transportation." See: Hill, L., & Artiga, S. (2022). *COVID-19 cases and deaths by race/ethnicity: Current data and changes over time*. Kaiser Family Foundation. https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-by-race-ethnicity-current-data-and-changes-over-time/
121. F(20, 3415) = 95.8, p <.001, R^2 = .36. We controlled for other factors that were associated with workplace belonging in our sample, such as age and education (greater age and more education lead to slightly more belonging), income (more income leads to increased belonging), and having children (having children is associated with slightly less belonging).
122. 23% of the sample reported experiencing belonging at their workplace of 1 year or less, as opposed to 32% at 2-3 years, 40% at 4-5 years, and 46% at 6 or more years. F(20, 2587) = 38.8, p <.001, R^2 = .23. We controlled for age, gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education level, subjective socioeconomic status, stress, religion, and having children.
123. In other studies, life satisfaction also increases alongside workplace belonging, which may indicate a virtuous cycle. See Bowling, N. A., Eschleman, K. J., & Wang, Q. (2010). A meta-analytic examination of the relationship between job satisfaction and subjective well-being. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 83*(4), 915-934. https://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X478557
124. For general health, we controlled for other factors that were associated with workplace belonging in our sample, such as age and education (greater age and more education lead to slightly more belonging), income (more income leads to more belonging) and having children (having children is associated with slightly less belonging). Contact Over Zero for more information on our findings related to mental health.
125. See Semuels, A. (2021, June 21). The U.S. is increasingly diverse, so why is segregation getting worse? *Time Magazine*. https://time.com/6074243/segregation-america-increasing/;

Covid appears to have heightened the problem. See Li, X., Huang, X., Li, D., & Xu, Y. (2022). Aggravated social segregation during the COVID-19 pandemic: Evidence from crowdsourced mobility data in twelve most populated U.S. metropolitan areas. *Sustainable Cities and Society, 81*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2022.103869

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127. Liu, A. & Berube, A. (2021, November 9). Big cities aren't dividing America. They hold the key to our collective future. *Brookings Institution*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2021/11/09/big-cities-arent-dividing-america-they-hold-the-key-to-our-collective-future/
128. Butler, S. & Diaz, C. (2016, September 14). "Third places" as community builders. Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2016/09/14/third-places-as-community-builders/
129. Putnam, R. (2001). Bowling alone: *The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster.
130. Klinenberg, E. (2018). *Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life*. Crown Publishing Group.
131. r =.51.
132. The Social Cohesion Radar comprises 9 measures: social networks, trust in people, acceptance of diversity, identification, trust in institutions, perceptions of fairness, solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation. See Dragolov, G., Ignacz, Z., Lorenz, J., Delhey, J., & Boehnke, K. (2012). *Social cohesion radar: Measuring common ground: An international comparison of social cohesion*. Bertelsmann Stiftung. https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/GP_Social_Cohesion_Radar.pdf. The IPSOS Social Cohesion Index (ISCI) is a combination of 9 measures: people trust, shared priorities, diversity, identification, system trust, fairness, helping others, respecting laws, and corruption. See IPSOS (2020, October). *Social cohesion in the pandemic age: A global perspective*. https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-11/a_global_perspective_of_social_cohesion_in_the_pandemic_age.pdf
133. Knack, S., & Keefer, P. (1997). Does social capital have an economic payoff? A cross-country investigation. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 112*(4), 1251-1288. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2951271; and, National Conference on Citizenship. (2012). *Civic health and unemployment II: The case builds*. https://www.ncoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/2012IssueBrief_CivicHealth_UnemploymentII.pdf
134. Kim, M., & Cho M. (2019). Examining the role of sense of community: Linking local government public relationships and community-building. *Public Relations Review, 45*(2), 297-306. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.02.002; Warner, M. (2001). Building social capital: The role of local government. *The Journal of Socio-Economics, 30*, 187-192. https://doi.

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136. National Conference on Citizenship. (2011). *Civic health and unemployment: Can engagement strengthen the economy?* https://ncoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2011UnemploymentCHI.pdf
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138. Jackson, C., & Ballard, N. (2018, May 1). Over half of Americans report feeling like no one knows them well. *IPSOS*. https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/us-loneliness-index-report
139. Bishop, B. (2008). *The big sort: Why the clustering of like-minded Americans is tearing us apart*. Houghton-Mifflin.
140. About three quarters of Americans trusted the US government to do the right thing in 1958, as compared to 21% who trust it "most of the time" or "just about always" today. See: Pew Research Center. (2022, June 6). Public trust in government: 1958-2022. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/06/06/public-trust-in-government-1958-2022/. For a discussion of the decline in social, institutional, and political trust, see: Brooks, D. (2020, October 5). America is having a moral convulsion. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/collapsing-levels-trust-are-devastating-america/616581/
141. Christakis, N.A., & Fowler, J.H. (2013). Social contagion theory: Examining dynamic social networks and human behavior. *Stat Med, 32*(4), 556-77. https://doi.org/10.1002/sim.5408
142. Contact Over Zero to receive more information about these statistics.
143. $F(9, 4787) = 95.7$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .15$. We probed age, gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education level, subjective socioeconomic status, having children, community engagement, and stress.
144. We encourage interested local community stakeholders to spend time with the data in the Appendix.
145. $F(19, 4671) = 127.5$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .34$. We included local belonging,* age, gender, socioeconomic status,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education, religion, immigration status, local experiences of indignity,* and stress* in the regression. All starred factors (*) were significant.
146. $F(19, 4671) = 143.9$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .35$. We included in the regression: local belonging,* age,* gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, socioeconomic status,* education,* being an unnaturalized immigrant,* years in neighborhood,* local experiences of indignity,* stress,* religion, and neighborhood diversity. All starred factors (*) were significant.
147. $F(19, 4497) = 71.67$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .23$. We included the following variables in the regression: local belonging,* age,* gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority,* subjective

socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, immigration status,* stress,* local experiences of indignity,* religion, and neighborhood diversity. All starred factors (*) were significant.

148. F(19, 4497) = 71.67, p <.000, R^2 = .23. We included the following factors in the regression: age,* gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority,* subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, immigration status,* stress,* religion, neighborhood diversity, and local experiences of indignity.* All starred factors (*) were significant.
149. Civic engagements include volunteering at schools or participating in social clubs, religious institutions, political and activist groups, etc. Logistic regression: AIC=5782.9, Deviance = 6207.9 (4796). We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* age,* gender, identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* education,* years in neighborhood, immigration status,* stress, local experiences of indignity, and religion.* All starred factors (*) were significant.
150. F(19, 4674) = 19.97, p <.000, R^2 = .06. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* gender,* age,* socioeconomic status,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education,* being a first-generation immigrant,* stress,* years in neighborhood, and frequency of chats with neighbors. All starred factors (*) were significant.
151. For an analysis of state and public responses to majority-minority demographic transitions across six societies, and for suggestions about how to reduce the appeal of nativism in the US and Europe, see: Gest, J. (2022). *Majority Minority*. Oxford University Press.
152. See: Jones, R.P., Jackson, N., Orcés, D., Huff, I., & Holcomb, T. (2021). *Competing visions of America: An evolving identity or a culture under attack? Findings from the 2021 American Values Survey*. Public Religion Research Institute. https://www.prri.org/research/competing-visions-of-america-an-evolving-identity-or-a-culture-under-attack/). For examples of how such rhetoric is aimed at minorities and immigrants, and for a review of how incendiary rhetoric "can make political violence more likely, gives violence direction, complicates the law enforcement response, and increases fear in vulnerable communities," see Byman, D. (2021, April 9). How hateful rhetoric connects to real-world violence. *Brookings Institution*. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/04/09/how-hateful-rhetoric-connects-to-real-world-violence/ See also, Peters, J., Grynbaum, M., Collins, K., & Harris, R. (2019, August 11). How the El Paso killer echoed the incendiary words of conservative media stars. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/11/business/media/el-paso-killer-conservative-media.html
153. F(9, 4786) = 70.02, p <.000, R^2 = .12. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* age,* gender,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* and education.* All starred factors (*) were significant.
154. Contact Over Zero for more information.
155. The actual percentages who "disagreed" or reported feeling equal across these settings were: 52% (interacting with law enforcement), 59% (voting), 42% (interacting with local officials), and 63% (shopping in local stores).

156. F(16, 4674) = 29.12, p <.000, R^2 = .09. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* gender,* age,* socioeconomic status,* education,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, years in neighborhood, frequency of chats with neighbors, immigration status, and stress. All starred factors (*) were significant.
157. Much attention has been paid across disciplines to the underlying causes and dynamics of anxiety about demographic change, specifically among some white Americans. While it is beyond the immediate scope of this report to delve more deeply into the root causes and dynamics of this perception of identity threat, we would be remiss not to note that these types of demographic fears (particularly racism and xenophobia) have been created and exploited throughout US history (including, increasingly, in recent years) as a key strategy for authoritarian, anti-democratic actors.
158. F(8, 3088) = 60.53, p <.000, R^2 = .14. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* gender,* age,* socioeconomic status,* education,* neighborhood diversity,* and identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority. All starred factors (*) were significant.
159. See Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2019). *How democracies die*. Penguin Books. See also Kleinfeld, R. (2022, September 15). *Five strategies to support U.S. democracy [Working paper].* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/09/15/five-strategies-to-support-u.s.-democracy-pub-87918
160. Boese, V.A., Alizada, N., Lundstedt, M., Morrison, K., Natsika, N., Sato, Y., Tai, H., & Lindberg, S.I. (2022). *Autocratization changing nature? Democracy report 2022*. Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem). https://v-dem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf; and, Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021). *Democracy index 2021: The China challenge*. https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2021; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2021). *The global state of democracy report 2021: Building resilience in a pandemic era*. https://www.idea.int/gsod/sites/default/files/2021-11/the-global-state-of-democracy-2021_1.pdf; and Freedom House (2021). *Freedom in the world 2021: Democracy under siege*. https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege
161. More thorough renderings of our nation's current challenges are available elsewhere. For an example, see: Coleman, P. (2022). *The way out: How to overcome toxic polarization.* Columbia University Press. Over Zero offers a range of relevant reports at: https://www.projectoverzero.org/media-and-publications.
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164. Not belonging to society at all, or belonging to factional or polarized groups but not an overarching polity, may lead to disinterest or distrust in information from civic sources (other than one's ingroup). In terms of extremism, it is worth considering the way that belonging overlaps with the "quest for significance" theory, where extreme behavior is more likely under psychological conditions that induce a search for significance and social recognition. See

Jasko, K., Webber, D., Kruglanski, A. W., Gelfand, M., Taufiqurrohman, M., Hettiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2019, July 25). Social context moderates the effects of quest for significance on violent extremism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.* Advance online publication. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000198

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167. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. *FAQ sheet: What are risk factors and indicators?* https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/risk_factors_and_indicators.pdf. See also: Bushman, B.J., Coyne, S.M., Anderson, C.A., Björkqvist, K., Boxer, P., Dodge, K.A., Dubow, E.F., Farrington, D.P., Gentile, D.A., Huesmann, L.R., Lansford, J.E., Novaco, R.W., Ostrov, J.M., Underwood, M.K., Warburton, W.A., & Ybarra, M.L. (2018, June). Risk factors for youth violence: Youth violence commission, International Society For Research On Aggression (ISRA). *Aggressive Behavior, 44*(4), 331-336. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21766
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170. See the work of Beyond Conflict on how Democrats and Republicans overestimate the gap between them on major issues as well as feelings of like and dislike: Moore-Berg, S.L., Ankori-Karlinsky, L., Hameiri, B., & Bruneau, E. (2020). Exaggerated meta-perceptions predict intergroup hostility between American political partisans. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 117*(26) 14864-14872. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/d6bpe. The video inspired by this work, which was designed to reduce toxic polarization between Democrats and Republicans, was named a top intervention by The Strengthening Democracy Challenge at Stanford University. See the video: Beyond Conflict. (2022, October 4). *America's divided mind: Video intervention* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzDGV1p_u_E
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and ongoing threats to democracy. Just Security and Protect Democracy. https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22415614-jan6-citizens-guide_final?responsive=1&title=1; DFRLab (2021, February 10). #StopTheSteal: Timeline of social media and extremist activities leading to 1/6 insurrection. *Just Security*. https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthesteal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/; Homans, C. (2022, July 28). How 'Stop the Steal' captured the American right. *The New York Times Magazine*. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/19/magazine/stop-the-steal.html. To this day, a significant wing of a major political party still contests "what happened" during the attack and resists accountability for those responsible—in some cases even celebrating those who were arrested as "political prisoners." See: Over Zero, New America, and Protect Democracy. (2022). *Sacred values, willingness to sacrifice, and accountability for the capitol insurrection: Exploring how deeply and why Americans hold their January 6-related views.* https://www.projectoverzero.org/media-and-publications/opportunitiesforaccountability

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176. 39% and 32% of Americans who see themselves as "much better" and "better" off than the average American report belonging, while only 18% and 19% do for "much worse" and "worse" off, respectively. Meanwhile, 31% of those in the "much worse" category experience exclusion while only 9% of those in the "much better" category do.
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Business Review. https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation. Also, a 2015 McKinsey report on 366 public companies found that those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely to have financial returns above their industry mean. See: Hunt, D., Layton, D., & Prince, S. (2015, January 1). *Why diversity matters*. McKinsey & Co. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/why-diversity-matters. In another study, those companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15% more likely to have returns above the industry mean. Rock, D., & Grant, H. (2016, December 4). *Why diverse teams are smarter*. Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter

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184. $F(19, 4674) = 19.97$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .06$. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* gender,* age,* socioeconomic status,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, education,* being a first-generation immigrant,* stress,* years in neighborhood, and frequency of chats with neighbors. All starred factors (*) were significant.
185. The regression results for the relationship between local belonging and feelings of marginalization are: $F(9, 4786) = 70.02$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .12$. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* age,* gender,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, subjective socioeconomic status,* and education.* All starred factors (*) were significant. Contact Over Zero for more information about the relationship between feelings of marginalization and experiences with local indignity.
186. $F(16, 4674) = 29.12$, $p < .000$, $R^2 = .09$. We included the following factors in the regression: local belonging,* gender,* age,* socioeconomic status,* education,* identification as white vs. multi-ethnic/minority, years in neighborhood, frequency of chats with neighbors, immigration status, and stress. All starred factors (*) were significant.
187. **Family** and Friend belonging, $r = .32$; Family and Local belonging, $r = .34$; Family & National

belonging, r=.35; Family and Workplace belonging, r = -.21. **Friend** and Local belonging, r=.38; Friend and National belonging, r=.28, Friend and Workplace belonging, r=.34. **Local** and National belonging, r=.51; Local and Workplace belonging, r=.44. **National** and Workplace belonging, r= .39.

188. When we removed individual differences and looked at residuals (second order factors), we found compensatory patterns—e.g., if a respondent is invested in family, they are less invested in community. Thus, while individual differences do matter, they are not the entire story.
189. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "I feel treated as less than others when I am…[interacting with law enforcement / voting / interacting with locally elected officials / shopping at local stores]." Percentages for those who say they "strongly disagree," "disagree," or "neither agree nor disagree" are: 52% (interacting with law enforcement), 59% (voting), 42% (interacting with local officials), and 63% (shopping in local stores).
190. Walton, G.M., & Brady, S.T. (2017).
191. Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: "I feel treated as less than others when I am…[interacting with law enforcement / voting / interacting with locally elected officials / shopping at local stores]." Percentages for those who say they "strongly disagree," "disagree," or "neither agree nor disagree" are: 52% (interacting with law enforcement), 59% (voting), 42% (interacting with local officials), and 63% (shopping in local stores).
192. While it is outside the scope of this report to suggest pathways for addressing group-based differences like this, **targeted universalism** was designed with these issues in mind. Developed by john a. powell at UC Berkeley, the idea behind targeted universalism is that universal societal goals can be achieved when the strategies used to pursue them are targeted by groups and based on how different groups are situated within systems, culture, and across geographies. See: powell, j.a., Menendian, S., & Ake, W. (2019, May). *Targeted universalism: Policy & practice*. Othering & Belonging Institute. https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism
193. **Family** and Friend belonging, r = .32; Family and Local belonging, r=.34; Family & National belonging, r=.35; Family and Workplace belonging, r = -.21. **Friend** and Local belonging, r=.38; Friend and National belonging, r=.28, Friend and Workplace belonging, r=.34. **Local** and National belonging, r=.51; Local and Workplace belonging, r=.44. **National** and Workplace belonging, r= .39.
194. Brummelman, E., Thomaes, S., Walton, G., Reijntjes, A., Orobio de Castro, B., & Sedikides, C. (2016). *Addressing people by name reduces their loneliness, even months later: Evidence from inside and outside the laboratory*.
195. Walton, G.M., & Cohen, G.L. (2007). And, Walton, G.M., & Cohen, G.L. (2011).
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197. Walton, G.M., & Brady, S.T. (2017). In addition, Greg Walton and his team have also created a searchable database of psychologically "wise" interventions—some of which are focused on belonging—meant to help people flourish. See: Walton, G., Wilson, T., Ospina, J., & Guzman, C. *Wise Interventions: A Searchable Database.* Mindset Scholars Network. https://www.wiseinterventions.org/database
198. Walton, G.M., & Brady, S.T. (2011).
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201. Hausmann, L., Ye, F., Schofield, J. & Woods, R. (2009). Sense of belonging and persistence in White and African American first-year students. *Research in Higher Education, 50*(7), 649-669.
202. Covarrubias, R., & Fryberg, S. (2015.) The impact of self-relevant representations on school belonging for Native American students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 21*(1), 10-18. This leads Walton & Brady to write, "When there is a risk of group-based devaluation, generic efforts to promote affiliation may be less effective." In fact, for those involved in bridging work, the act of bringing people together across differences is fundamental to what they do. Here, too, science offers some best practices for establishing contact imbued with belonging, and the following lessons come from the social contact literature: 1) Balance participation (work to recruit similar numbers of people from different groups), 2) Make sure participants engage as equals, 3) Ensure multiple interactions, 4) Work towards shared goals, and 5) Establish organizational support for these processes. See Tropp, L.R. & Dehrhone, T.A. (2022, September 27). *Cultivating contact: A guide to building bridges and meaningful connections between groups.* American Immigration Council. https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/cultivating-contact?emci=28972d69-953e-ed11-a27c-281878b83d8a&emdi=1385770c-aa3e-ed11-a27c-281878b83d8a&ceid=9446048
203. Walton, G.M., & Brady, S.T. (2017). p.272.

Appendix

***Descriptive data and graphs for belonging throughout the life settings are provided here.**

Methods

The Belonging Barometer Items per Life Setting

Below, we list the question items for each life setting. Responses were given on a 1-5 scale (1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree). All items were counterbalanced. Statements with an asterisk (*) represent negatively worded items, a method that enables us to confirm response/data quality—these were reverse-scored in analysis.

Family Belonging

Think about how you feel when you are with your family. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I feel emotionally connected to my family.
Family members welcome and include me in family activities.
I feel unable to influence decisions within my family.*
I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self with members of my family.*
Family members value me and my contributions.
My relationships with family members are as satisfying as I want them to be.
I feel like an "insider" who understands how my family works.
I am comfortable expressing my opinions within my family.
I feel like I am treated as "less than" other family members.*
When I'm with my family, I feel like I truly belong.

Friend Belonging

Think about how you feel when you are with your closest friends. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I feel emotionally connected to my friends.
My friends welcome and include me in activities.
I feel unable to influence collective decisions within my friend-group.*
I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self with my friends.*
My friends value me and my contributions.
My relationships with my friends are as satisfying as I want them to be.
I feel like an "insider" who understands how my friend-group works.
I am comfortable expressing my opinions amongst my friends.
I feel like I am treated as "less than" other friends.*
When I'm with my closest friends, I feel like I truly belong.

Workplace Belonging

Think about your relationship with your coworkers. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I feel emotionally connected to my company or organization.
My co-workers welcome and include me in activities.
I feel unable to influence collective decisions at my company or organization.*
I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self with my coworkers.*
My co-workers value me and my contributions.
My relationships with my co-workers are as satisfying as I want them to be.
I feel like an "insider" who understands how my company works.
I am comfortable expressing my opinions with my co-workers.
I feel like I am treated as "less than" other employees at my workplace.*
When I'm with my co-workers, I feel like I truly belong.

Local Belonging

Think about your relationship to [name of respondent's local community]. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I feel emotionally connected to [name of respondent's local community].
People in [name of respondent's local community] welcome and include me in activities.
I feel unable to influence local decision-making in [name of respondent's local community].*
I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self with people in [name of respondent's local community].*
People in [name of respondent's local community] value me and my contributions.
My relationships with others in [name of respondent's local community] are as satisfying as I want them to be.
I feel like an "insider" who understands how [name of respondent's local community] works.
I am comfortable expressing my opinions in [name of respondent's local community].
I feel like I am treated as "less than" other residents in [name of respondent's local community].*
When interacting with people in [name of respondent's local community], I feel like I truly belong.

National Belonging

Think now about how you feel in America. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

I feel emotionally connected to the United States.
I am welcomed and included in activities with other Americans.
I feel unable to influence decisions that affect me in America.*
I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self when interacting with other Americans.*
Americans value the contributions of people like me.
My relationships with other Americans are as satisfying as I want them to be.
I feel like an "insider" who understands how the country works.
I am comfortable expressing my opinions to the average American.
I feel like I am treated as "less than" others in this country.*
I feel like I truly belong in America.

Survey Design

All respondents answered questions about belonging, social cohesion in their local communities, and demographics. As part of the belonging component, each respondent wrote about a time when they experienced belonging OR lack of belonging within one of five life settings: family or friends, workplace, local community, or the nation. We welcome inquiries about our preliminary findings with these data—please contact Over Zero to learn more.

In addition to the core components of belonging, social cohesion, and demographics, respondents were randomly assigned to answer questions from two out of the following three topics:

- **Health:** This included questions related to general health, chronic disease, mental illness, nutrition, drug and alcohol use, stress, loneliness, self-harm, insurance, having a primary care doctor, frequency of hospitalization, frequency of use of pain medication, physical and emotional pain barriers to accomplishing daily tasks, etc.

- **Democracy:** This included questions related to satisfaction with life and democracy in the US, engagement in political news/events, view of Presidential role, support for democracy, national voting participation, trust in democratic institutions, government honesty, national pride, perceptions of the 2020 election, extent of worry about US democracy, and support for political violence.

- **Intergroup Relations:** This included questions related to intergroup threat perceptions, social dominance orientation, social identity-based activism and radicalism, and attitudes towards different societal groups.

With the exception of items in the Belonging Barometer, survey items populating the three sections described above were sourced from commonly used and validated measures from medicine and social science. Three moderate-to-difficult attention-check questions were also interspersed throughout the survey.

Data Collection

YouGov administered the survey to 6,000 respondents from its five million US panelists in November and December of 2021. The survey was administered using its proprietary survey platform, Gryphon. YouGov employed a technique referred to as sample matching to produce the final dataset. Specifically, YouGov overcollected the sample by 10-15%, and then matched these cases back to a sample frame (based on interlocking parameters of age, gender, race, and education) generated by random sampling within the full ACS datafile. The resulting matched dataset was then weighted to account for any differences between matched cases and the sample frame.

Analysis

Data Cleaning

The average completion time for the survey was approximately 20 minutes. After confirming poor data quality for respondents who finished the survey in less than five minutes or incorrectly answered two out of three attention checks, responses that fit these criteria were omitted from analysis. The final sample size was 4,905, and these data were re-matched back to a sample frame.

Regressions

Many of the outcome variables presented in the main report include endnotes which detail the partial results of statistically significant regression analyses. Regression analysis is a statistical tool that allows us to examine many factors simultaneously and understand how each factor uniquely and independently contributes to an outcome of interest. In addition to belonging scores, most of our regressions involved the following variables: gender, age, sexual orientation, perceived socioeconomic status, race, immigration status, and religion. Note: These regression models are meant to be preliminary explorations of these data—in future reports, we are likely to present findings using more theoretically-informed models. Meanwhile, we encourage subject matter experts who wish to examine these data more deeply to contact Over Zero..

Description of the Sample

We provide descriptive statistics below. Note that the sample size for groups listed in orange font is very small. Because these groups represent less than 1% of the overall sample (e.g., less than 49 responses), they are often omitted from narrative content and graphs in this report. Groups that fall into this category include respondents who identify as neither a woman nor man; respondents who identify as Muslim, Greek Orthodox, Buddhist, or Hindu; respondents who identify as asexual; and respondents who identify as Mideastern or Native American. When we do include these groups in our observations, we denote them with an asterisk (within this Appendix) and with a disclaimer at the base of the graph.

Description of Survey Sample, N = 4,905	
Survey Question	**% of sample**
With which of the following genders do you identify?	
Women	51
Men	47
Other	1
In what sort of place do you currently live?	
City	35
Suburban Area	35
Rural Area	30
What is your present religion, if any?	
Protestant	32
Roman Catholic	19
Jewish	2
Atheist	8
Agnostic	7
Nothing in Particular	23
Muslim/Greek Orthodox/Buddhist/Hindu	<1
Something Else	6
Do you consider yourself to be:	
Heterosexual	87
Gay, Bi, or Pansexual	11
Asexual	<1
Prefer not to answer	2
What racial or ethnic group best describes you?	
Hispanic	18
White	67
Black	10
Asian	3
Mideastern & Native American	<1

Which of these statements best describes your immigration status?	
Third-generation American or longer	60
Second-generation American	20
First-generation American	12
Immigrant Citizen	6
Immigrant Non-Citizen	2
Which of the following describes your employment status right now?	
Working in person or remotely	50
Temporarily laid off, on voluntary leave, or permanently laid off	21
Retired	24
Student	5
How would you judge your own economic situation compared to the average American?	
Much worse	7
Worse	23
Same as	44
Better	22
Much better	4
Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent?	
Democrat	37
Republican	29
Independent	34
Which language do you speak most often at home?	
English	97
Other	8
What is your marital status?	10
Never married	33
Married	43
Divorced	10
Widowed	6
How many children do you have?	
None	44
One or more	66
What is the highest level of education you have completed?	
Did not graduate from high school	5
High school graduate	30
Some college, but no degree (yet)	21
University degree	22
Postgraduate degree	13

Have you served or are you serving in the military?	
Yes	11
No	89
What most accurately describes your housing situation?	
Homeowner (fully paid off or with mortgage)	54
Renter	32
Rent-free	9
Other	6
Does anyone in your household own a gun?	
Yes	34
No	66

Limitations & Future Research

All research has limitations. Below, we list some of the limitations related to this report and to the Belonging Barometer itself.

- **Regarding the measure itself.** One thing that sets belonging apart from other measures of social connectivity is that it can be felt with respect to an environment or a place—it does not require the presence of other people. The Belonging Barometer, however, is a better measure for social settings.

- **This report is sure to raise as many questions as it answers.** Our analyses are largely descriptive, with the exception of a few fairly simple regression models, thus we neither ask nor answer a range of important research questions. Many such questions could be further explored with this dataset, and it is our intention to work with partners to do so. For example:

    - We did not deeply examine differences in **belonging based on race or religion**. Our regression model used a binary race variable based on whether a respondent identified as "white, non-Hispanic" or not. While this serves to illuminate gaps in belonging between those who identify as white compared to those who identify as other races, it obscures differences between respondents of color that will hopefully be examined in the future.

    - We consistently found that, among all the factors associated with belonging, socioeconomic status has the most significant effect size. This implies that **systemic forces play a major role in belonging** (a finding in line with theories of belongingness). We hope that future partners with subject matter expertise will further examine these data with more theoretically-informed statistical models, and be able to utilize additional survey variables—many of which did not make it into this report—to illuminate why these findings are the case.

    - While we focused largely on belonging and exclusion, large numbers of Americans score somewhere in between. Future work with this dataset might seek to better characterize those respondents whose composite score reflects **ambiguity**. For example, do these individuals rank some items high and others low, averaging out to neutral? Or do they feel neutral towards the Barometer items generally (e.g., perhaps not feeling that the life setting is relevant for them)? Would these different patterns correspond to different belonging-related outcomes?

    - This report introduces both **belonging uncertainty**—the idea that you might feel that you have belonging but that it could be taken away at any moment, and **unbelonging**—the sense that you've lost a belonging you once had. These are relevant concepts for anyone trying to understand the role of belonging in US life today, yet we did not yet address them with these data. How can belonging uncertainty and

unbelonging help us to better understand American society at this moment? We note that, as part of our nationally representative survey, we collected vignettes of belonging and lack of belonging across the life settings. It is possible that these qualitative data—in addition to other quantitative variables we did not report on here—could help to answer these questions.

- Future research might also examine some of the conceptual and methodological choices made in this report. For instance, the belonging scale we used for this report divided belonging scores into three equal parts—1-2.33 (exclusion), 2.34-3.66 (ambiguity), and 3.67-5 (belonging). While there is a strong rationale for this breakdown (each third corresponds, on average, to disagreement, neutrality, or agreement on the Barometer items, respectively), the numbers of Americans who report belonging according to this scale are relatively low. This prompts a question: Does such a scale set too high a bar for belonging? Or, is it possible that strong belonging is more of an aspirational state and less of a reality for most people? One way to answer these questions would be to compare Barometer scores cross-nationally (to capture the effects of different cultures, social systems, etc.) or longitudinally (to identify changes over time, after significant events, etc.).

Lastly, this report identified some belonging-related associations that should be further clarified, such as:

- In our dataset, **belonging increases with age** (with the Silent generation scoring highest and Gen Z scoring lowest). However, other studies show that older Americans are at increased risk for social isolation and loneliness. Social connectivity is a correlate of belonging in this dataset, so how might we explain this discrepancy?

- When we control for socioeconomic status we find that race, religion, and immigration status become statistically insignificant—except in the life setting of national belonging. Why would race, religion, and immigration status retain significance as factors related to national belonging but not do the same in the other life settings?

- We hope future research will probe further into the association between **being "treated as less than"** in local interactions and reporting non-belonging across all life settings. A better understanding of the patterns related to who is most likely to have these experiences, where they are most likely to happen, and how these interactions come about could help communities address the problem.

OVER ZERO