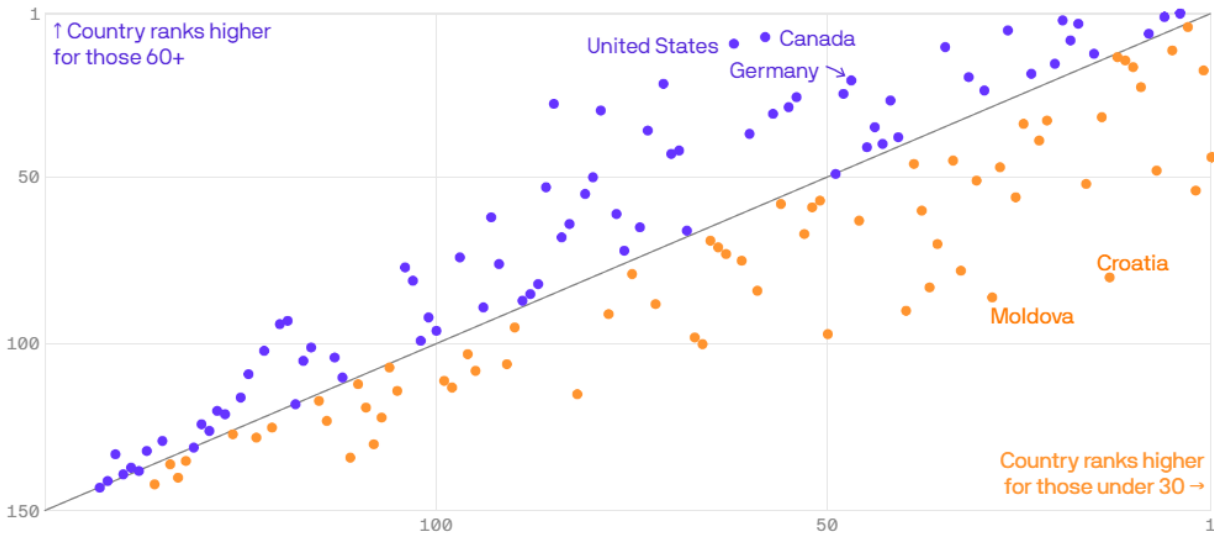


Why Americans over 60 are so happy

Emily Peck Axios 23 March 2024

2024 World happiness ranking for those under 30 compared to those 60 or older

By average life evaluation score, from survey of about 1,000 adults per country conducted annually



Data: World Happiness Report; Chart: Erin Davis/Axios Visuals

Older Americans are among the happiest people in the world, coming in 10th on [Gallup's worldwide happiness rankings](#) — the young, meanwhile, rank 62nd, just behind the Dominican Republic.

Why it matters: This all comes down to connecting with others; Americans age 60 and over are less lonely and feel more socially connected than their younger peers.

They're also doing great financially.

The big picture: Researchers have long pointed out that old age is generally a lot better than you may think. Psychological well-being plays out over a lifetime in a U-curve, according to a widely cited [study](#) from 2008.

It typically starts high in youth, plummets during the stresses of middle age and then picks back up after around age 55.

The U.S. is losing its U shape. Younger Americans aren't doing well right now. Rates of anxiety and depression and suicide have significantly [increased](#).

Countries where quality of life is improving — particularly in Eastern and Central Europe — are the reverse of the U.S. The young are happier than the old.

Zoom in: The oldest Americans reported having more social support, and were less lonely than the young — even though they had fewer social connections.

How can that be? Ilana Ron-Levey, a managing director at Gallup, compared the situation to the feeling of social disconnection you might get at a party.

Older folks were more likely to answer "yes" when Gallup asked if they have a friend they can call on in a time of need.

Then there's the money. Financially, Boomers are crushing it.

Americans over 70 hold 30% of the country's wealth — a record high share — but make up just 11% of the population, [Bloomberg](#) reported recently.

Nearly 80% of adults age 65 and over [own their homes](#). That means they were better protected from inflation — not dealing with rising rents.

Of course, retirees also get a form of universal basic income, via Social Security, which is adjusted for inflation.

What to watch: This was the first time Gallup looked at happiness by age, and it covered a particularly turbulent period — 2021 -2023, with many young Americans still emerging from the isolation of the pandemic when most weren't able to go to school in-person.

"Everyone's going to be watching closely to see how this evolves," says Ron-Levey.

Continue for next article ...

Governments Across the U.S. Are Handing Residents Cash—No Strings Attached

Dozens of guaranteed-income programs have popped up in cities and counties, and Republicans are trying to block them

[Andrew Restuccia](#) *The Wall Street Journal* March 19, 2024

HOUSTON—Bobbie Hines has been living in her modest home in southeast Houston for 56 years. But these days, she’s struggling more than ever to afford groceries and pay for mounting medical expenses.

“Everything is so expensive,” said Hines, 83 years old, a retired crossing guard. “It’s an everyday struggle.” Her Social Security benefits barely cover her bills, and she has started rationing bacon slices to save money. Earlier this month, her husband, Alfred, 85, died following a lengthy struggle with liver cancer. He was bedridden and on oxygen in their living room, and Hines spent nearly two years taking care of him.

When Hines saw a local news report about a pilot program offering \$500 monthly payments to low-income residents, she thought it was a hoax. But after consulting with her family, she decided to apply. She says the extra money would change her life.

Hines is one of more than 80,000 residents of Harris County, the third most populous county in the U.S., who have applied. The program, which is set to start this spring, has roughly 1,900 spots.

Houston is joining dozens of American cities and counties—most led by Democrats—that are experimenting with guaranteed-income programs amid growing wealth inequality in the U.S. The programs are part of a trend at the local and national level toward providing direct, largely unconditional payments to Americans for everything from pandemic relief [to child assistance](#). They reflect a growing sentiment among economists, tech industry leaders and Democrats that distributing money without strings is one of the most effective and least bureaucratic ways to help struggling Americans.

Other cities that have experimented with guaranteed-income programs include Stockton, Calif., Birmingham, Ala., Louisville, Ky., and Nashville, Tenn.

The efforts are facing resistance from Republicans, who have called for tighter restrictions on who gets the money and how it can be used, with some expressing philosophical opposition to what they see as an unchecked handout. In private, senior Republicans have fretted about the potential political benefits Democrats might reap from the programs, a tacit acknowledgment of their popularity.

In Houston, a Republican state senator has asked Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, also a Republican, to declare the Harris County guaranteed-income program unconstitutional. If the effort succeeds, it could offer Republicans a template for blocking similar programs in other parts of the country. Already, GOP officials in Arkansas, Arizona, Iowa and Wisconsin have moved to ban or restrict the programs in their states.

While guaranteed-income programs haven't gained traction on the federal level, Washington is increasingly open to policies that offer Americans direct payments. On Capitol Hill, senators are weighing legislation that would increase the child tax credit for low-income families, while reviving expired breaks for businesses. House lawmakers passed the bill with bipartisan support early this year, but it has stalled in the Senate, amid concerns about the child tax credit provisions from some Republicans.

If approved, the expanded child tax credit would provide a payment of up to \$1,800 per child for 2023, a modified version of an enhanced credit backed by Democrats in 2021 that reduced child poverty.

Policymakers' views of direct payment programs have changed over the last half-century. In 1969, President Richard Nixon, a Republican, proposed a welfare plan that would have provided cash payments to no- or low-income families, though the program didn't win congressional approval. From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, several U.S. cities and states experimented with so-called negative income taxes, a concept championed by economist Milton Friedman in which households that earn below a certain income threshold are given money from the government in lieu of paying taxes.

But the notion of a guaranteed income lost favor in the late 1970s, with Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan alleging on the campaign trail that welfare recipients were bilking the system. In the following decades, politicians of both parties, including Democratic President Bill Clinton, pushed for [tighter restrictions](#) on welfare programs.

In recent years, guaranteed income [has seen a resurgence](#), backed by wealthy philanthropists and tech industry figures such as Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes, who have funded nonprofit groups that advocate for the idea and set up

pilot programs. Tech entrepreneur Andrew Yang, a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate, made a universal basic income of \$1,000 a month the centerpiece of his campaign.

The Covid-19 pandemic drove the issue to prominence. Lawmakers of both parties approved trillions of dollars in spending to cushion the economic effects of the crisis. Three coronavirus-response bills approved by Congress in 2020 and 2021 included \$931 billion in direct payments to Americans, according to the [Government Accountability Office](#).

[Donald Trump](#) was keenly aware of the political power of giving people money during his time in the White House, according to people who worked with him. He successfully pushed to have his name appear on stimulus checks, and told his advisers that he thought it would boost his chances of re-election, the people said, despite opposition to the effort from outside conservatives and some in his administration.

As he campaigns for president again, Trump has proposed providing direct cash payments dubbed “baby bonuses” to new parents to increase the fertility rate.

Academics have spent years studying how people spend money from direct payments programs, both in the U.S. and abroad. An analysis of [dozens of U.S.-based guaranteed- income pilot programs](#) by Stanford University’s Basic Income Lab found that participants spent most of the money on groceries and retail sales, which includes shopping at big box stores such as Walmart. About 3% of the participants’ expenditures were used for travel, leisure and entertainment.

“The evidence is overwhelming. People don’t spend it on vice,” said Sean Kline, the group’s director. “They spend it on necessities.”

Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis, a Democrat, who is leading the county’s guaranteed-income program, anticipates that most people will use the monthly \$500 payments for child care, housing and food. But he allowed for the possibility that a small number of recipients could spend the money on nonessential purchases. “Is anybody going to get me to say, ‘Nobody is going to be a jackass?’ No. I’m in Texas. Somebody will be a jackass,” he said.

Roughly 750,000 people in Harris County, more than 15% of the total population, are living in poverty, according to U.S. census data, including more than one in five children. Nearly 225,000 Harris County residents received food stamps in 2022, the most recent year for which comprehensive data is available. “This is about empowering people to make decisions for themselves about how to better their lives,” said Ellis, adding that the direct payments “give people the ability to control their own destiny.”

Ellis is using \$20.5 million from the 2021 coronavirus relief law to fund the program, which will last for 18 months. The county has hired outside groups to administer the program and evaluate its success.

Texas state Sen. Paul Bettencourt, a Republican, argues that Ellis doesn't have the authority to enact a guaranteed-income program without approval from the state. He also contends that the program violates the Texas constitution's gift provisions.

"It's wide-open, no-strings-attached lottery socialism," Bettencourt said. In late January, Bettencourt [asked Paxton to issue a legal opinion](#) on the program's constitutionality, which could lead to it being overturned. It's unclear when Paxton's office will make a determination.

Ellis dismissed Bettencourt's criticism and signaled he was bracing for a prolonged fight. "I'm prepared to take it all the way to the Texas Supreme Court," Ellis said.

Jeannie Cheeks, 69, applied for the Harris County guaranteed-income program after hearing people talking about it on a city bus. She has never been married, has no children, and she is out of work following a recent back injury.

Cheeks says the cost of groceries is unmanageable. She recently called her utility companies in a bid to negotiate lower bills. "It's a very, very difficult time," she said. "I live alone, I don't have transportation or anything like that. Things have been pretty tough."

If she is accepted into the program, Cheeks said she would spend the monthly payments on food, bills and insurance: "I would definitely do the right thing."

Continue for next article...

Joe Manchin: Our energy policy is a success. President Biden should be proud.

Joe Manchin III *Washington Post* March 18, 2024

Joe Manchin III, a Democrat, represents West Virginia in the U.S. Senate.

I'm going to do something you probably haven't heard me do much in the past three years: I want to congratulate President Biden for the record-breaking energy production we are seeing in America today. The United States is producing more oil, gas and renewable energy than ever before. We are exporting more fossil fuel energy than we import. Our country has never been more energy-independent than we are today.

This is something to celebrate. And it would not have been possible without the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that Biden signed. Thanks to these two historic laws, we are unlocking major opportunities throughout the country, implementing an "all-of-the-above" energy strategy that we need today while continuing to innovate the technologies we want for tomorrow.

You won't hear about our historic energy production on TV, on social media, at Democratic campaign events — or from many administration aides. As a result of these bills, there has never been a better time to invest in American energy. But as energy leaders from across the world gather this week in Houston for the annual CERAWEEK conference, I bet the rhetoric from White House officials in attendance will be muted.

Here are some statistics we ought to be proud of: In 2023, the United States produced a record 38 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, 4.7 billion barrels of crude oil and 238 million megawatt-hours of solar. This is more than at any other time in history, including during the Trump administration. In 2016, we were exporting almost zero liquefied natural gas; seven years later, our peak capacity is around 14 billion cubic feet per day. This past week, analyses from J.P. Morgan and the Energy Information Administration confirmed that American energy is booming. No other country in history has produced as much oil and gas as the United States is producing today.

Moreover, we are ensuring that the American energy produced today is cleaner than ever. The International Energy Agency reported this month that the United States is implementing some of the most innovative policies in the world for reducing emissions from energy production.

I have always said you are entitled to your own opinion, but you cannot make up your own facts. And the fact is that the United States and its allies need fossil fuels for reliable power. That need cannot be met today with the technologies of tomorrow. Those technologies need more investment to become viable. This is why we made the largest investment in climate and energy technologies in U.S. history. For example, the Inflation Reduction Act invests \$10 billion in tax credits to build clean technology manufacturing facilities in the United States, such as facilities that make wind turbines and solar panels.

We shouldn't be picking winners and losers when the cost of doing so could very well produce rolling brownouts or complete blackouts. We are proving that innovation, not elimination, is the key to energy security.

Maintaining that balance — between improving today's technology and betting on the future — will remain critical for years to come. That is why I made sure the Inflation Reduction Act guaranteed parity between oil and gas and wind and solar in future offshore and onshore lease sales. This provision will ensure that future presidents would have to embrace the all-of-the-above approach to meeting America's energy needs.

To me and millions of voters, all of this is something to celebrate — from the mountaintops of West Virginia, where we have seen a natural gas boom, to the wind farms in Iowa, the oil fields in Texas and the solar farms in Arizona. This is the all-of-the-above strategy in action, showing results. But it seems some of the president's radical advisers in the White House are so worried about angering climate activists that they refuse to speak up about these accomplishments. The result is that a president who was elected as a centrist is being dragged further and further to the left.

Only the president can decide how he wants to finish his first term in office and what vision he wants to embrace for the future. For me, in my final months in office, I will do everything I can to continue to strengthen our energy security for our children and grandchildren. I will continue to fight to make this administration implement the balanced all-of-the-above strategy that runs through the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Even in an election year, we cannot allow political division to jeopardize our growing energy independence, our strengthening economy or our national security. I urge Biden to join me in celebrating America's energy accomplishments and recommit to working in a bipartisan way with Congress to build upon that success this year. Our achievements are worthy of celebration, but there is more work to be done.