

National Study: Only 1 in 4 Americans Believe They Can Influence Their Local Community

Belonging Barometer points to local communities as a critical place to invest in belonging

WASHINGTON, DC, DC, UNITED STATES, July 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Most Americans feel safe and comfortable in their communities, but only about one in four believe they have any real influence over how those communities are run, according to a new national study released today.

[The Center for Inclusion & Belonging](#) at the American Immigration Council has fielded a second national wave of [The Belonging Barometer](#), this time focusing on belonging at the local level. The study offers a nuanced and actionable picture of Americans' sense of community belonging and shows there is great opportunity to build belonging by investing at the local level.

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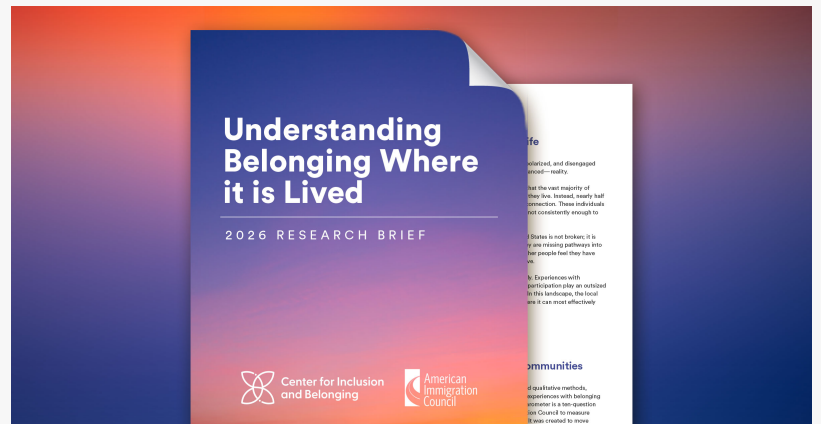
Belonging has become one of the defining social issues of our time”

*Emily Baird-Chrisohon,
Program Manager, Center for
Inclusion & Belonging*

Belonging means feeling emotionally connected to others, safe to be yourself, and able to help shape the communities where you live, work, and participate. The findings reveal that local belonging comprises more than simply feeling connected. While many Americans feel accepted in their communities, far fewer feel able to influence local decisions or help shape their community. This gap is especially pronounced among Americans 65 and older, who report the highest level of belonging (48%)

compared to younger adults ages 18-29 (34%).

Key findings of The Belonging Barometer: Understanding Belonging Where It Is Lived include: 61% of Americans either do not have a clear sense of community belonging or feel excluded. A relatively low percentage (14%) of Americans report actually feeling excluded. Instead, the



2026 Belonging Barometer findings, highlighting new national research on local belonging and the opportunities communities have to strengthen connection and participation

majority (47%) of Americans live in a state of ambiguity, uncertain about their place in their community, providing an opportunity for significant improvement through local action.

Local media matters. People who watch or follow local news at least weekly are significantly more likely to feel a strong sense of local belonging. National news consumption shows no such relationship.

Financial stability is linked to an increased sense of belonging. As Americans' incomes increase, so does their sense of local belonging. Just 34% of Americans earning less than \$50,000 annually report feeling a sense of belonging in their local community, compared with 47% of those earning more than \$100,000.

People feel safe in their communities, but not powerful. Respondents report feeling comfortable being themselves locally and speaking up, but only about one-quarter (24%) of study participants feel able to influence local decision-making or understand how their community works.

Local belonging is not defined by geography or politics. Research shows that belonging is not significantly affected by whether one lives in a small town or an urban environment, or by one's political party affiliation. Belonging is attainable everywhere, not limited to certain places or groups.

"Belonging has become one of the defining social issues of our time. As communities grapple with rising loneliness, declining trust, and increasing polarization, researchers and public health leaders are recognizing that belonging is a measurable condition that influences health, civic participation and community resilience," said Emily Baird-Chrisohon, Program Manager, Center for Inclusion & Belonging.

"These findings point to clear opportunities for cities, nonprofits, funders, and local institutions to strengthen belonging by listening to what people are experiencing and creating more ways for people to participate in civic life. People don't need perfect communities – they need to feel invited, be seen and have a real say in what's happening."

This study builds on past research revealing a consistent pattern: Americans report feeling less belonging in their local communities than in nearly every other area of life. The study takes a deeper look at local belonging to better understand what shapes people's sense of connection, where these gaps persist, and what communities can do to foster stronger, more inclusive places where everyone feels they belong. The full research brief is available at <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/belonging-barometer-2026>.

How Communities Can Take Action

The Belonging Barometer is the first tool of its kind to measure the quality of a person's "fit" within a group or setting. It's a simple, research-based set of ten questions that assesses three essential dimensions: emotional connection, psychological safety, and community influence.

The Barometer is freely available to help communities gather insights that drive action. Cities, nonprofits, funders, employers, schools, and other institutions can use the Belonging Barometer to understand whether their own communities or organizations feel connected, safe, and able to contribute, as well as guide investments and track progress over time. To learn more about the Belonging Barometer and how communities and organizations can begin measuring and strengthening belonging, visit <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/the-belonging-barometer/>

Study Methodology

Research was executed by SSRS. The study is a general population survey conducted during three waves of the SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus platform. The SSRS Opinion Panel Omnibus is a national, twice-per-month, probability-based survey of 3,000+ respondents. To complement the survey findings, SSRS conducted 16 in-depth interviews with panelists who had participated in one of the three survey waves.

The Belonging Barometer tool, a ten-question survey introduced in the 2023 report, “The Belonging Barometer: The State of Belonging in America,” was used again here alongside new survey and interview data. The original report was authored by Over Zero and the American Immigration Council’s Center for Inclusion and Belonging.

This study was made possible through funding by the Walmart Foundation. The findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in this research brief are those of the American Immigration Council’s alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Walmart Foundation.

About the Center for Inclusion & Belonging

The Center for Inclusion & Belonging at the American Immigration Council is dedicated to changing the conversation around immigration and building a more welcoming nation. Through research, narrative strategy, and cross-sector partnerships, the Center works to foster a culture of belonging where all people—regardless of background—can thrive, connect, and fully contribute to their communities.

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