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**HUMAN**  
FLOURISHING LAB

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# HOPE IN AMERICA: VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

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## ■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Hope is a critical component of individual and societal flourishing, and it plays an important role in advancing human progress. When people are hopeful, they are more driven, resilient, open-minded, creative, innovative, and effective at solving problems. The United States has a reputation for being a hopeful nation, but surveys also suggest that Americans are feeling increasingly disheartened about the future. Our team at the Human Flourishing Lab conducted a survey to better understand the current state of hope in the United States. We asked a nationally representative sample of just over 2,000 American adults to report their agreement with statements regarding hopefulness for their own future, the future of their family, the future of their local community, and the future of their country. We also presented survey respondents with a positive and negative vision of the future of human progress and asked them which vision they agreed with most.

## ■ KEY INSIGHTS

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- Most Americans are hopeful for their own future (82%), the future of their family (85%), and the future of their local community (74%).
- Only a slight majority of Americans (56%) are hopeful for the future of the United States.
- A minority of Americans (44%) are hopeful that humans will make significant progress on big societal and global challenges and life will be better for future generations.
- Though there are some differences on hope across demographic groups, three-quarters or more of Americans in every gender, age, household income, and racial/ethnic group are hopeful for their own future and for the future of their family.
- Across most demographic groups, nearly 70% or more of Americans are hopeful for the future of their local community. Black Americans are the exception with 65% indicating that they are hopeful for the future of their local community.
- The differences between conservatives and liberals on hope are generally small except when it comes to hope for human progress; 51% of liberals believe that humans will make significant progress on major societal and global challenges and that life will be better for future generations, compared to 37% of conservatives.
- The largest differences across every indicator of hope are between those who perceive their mental health as good and those who do not. Americans who perceive their mental health as good are far more hopeful than Americans who perceive their mental health as poor.

## ■ INTRODUCTION

Hope is more than wishful thinking. It is a self-assured and action-oriented mental state. When people are hopeful, they are not just optimistic about the future; they have a firm confidence in themselves and an unwavering belief that they will attain positive change in their lives, which allows them to persist through adversity. They are flexible in coming up with effective pathways for attaining their goals and can quickly alter their approach when they encounter obstacles or setbacks. Finally, they understand the purpose and significance of their actions and in turn lead lives full of meaning. As a result, hope supports individual success in a wide range of life domains such as education, career, and athletics. Hope is also a powerful resource for overcoming challenges faced by vulnerable populations such as individuals experiencing homelessness and refugees.

The benefits of a hopeful mindset extend beyond personal achievement. Hope is infectious. Hopeful people can inspire others to adopt a hopeful way of thinking about and approaching their lives. Hopeful people are also driven to make positive contributions to their families, communities, and the broader society. For example, hope increases community engagement and the motivation to help address large societal and global challenges. Hope is also positively associated with tolerance for others (a key component of pluralism), cre-

ativity, and innovative problem-solving. Thus, hope—particularly a hope that extends beyond one’s personal aspirations—has the potential to play an important role in advancing societal flourishing and human progress. A Human Flourishing Lab comprehensive review of the science of hope can be found [here](#).

We conducted the current survey to better understand the state of hope in the United States. Are Americans hopeful about their own future and the future of their family? What about their local community and the nation more broadly? Do Americans believe that humans will make significant progress on big challenges so that life can be better for future generations?

To measure the current state of hope in the United States, we surveyed a nationally representative sample of just over 2,000 American adults. Survey participants were asked to report their agreement with statements regarding hopefulness for their own future, the future of their family, the future of their local community, and the future of their country. We also presented participants with a positive and negative vision of the future of human progress and asked them which vision they agreed with most.



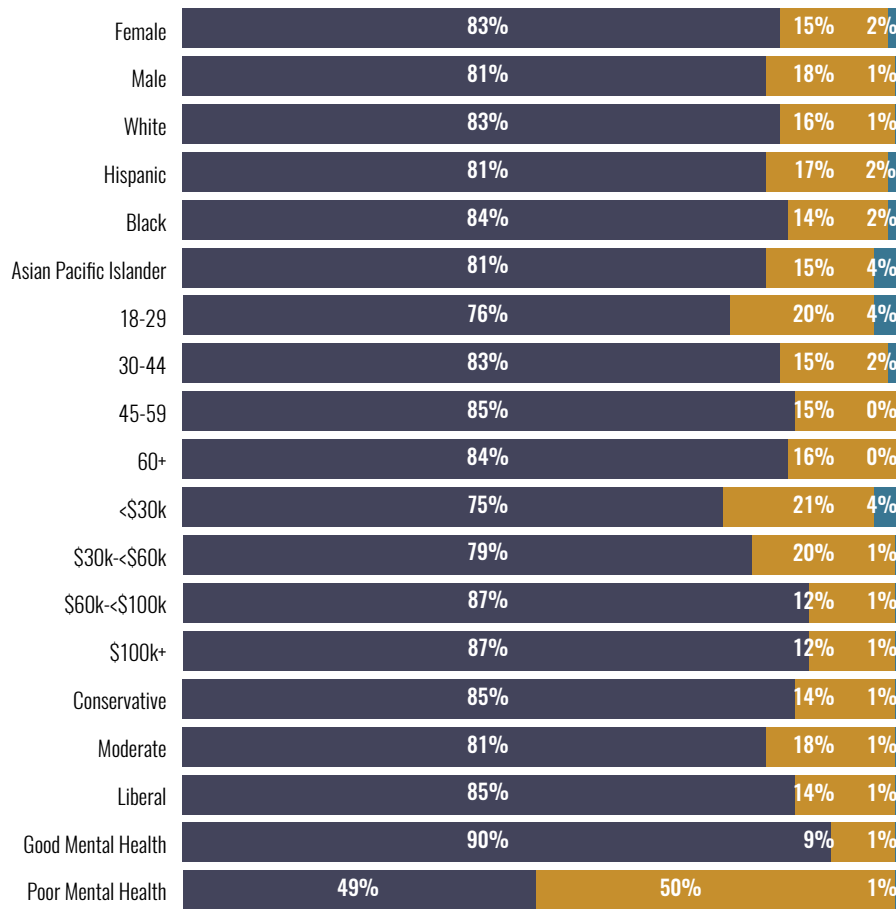
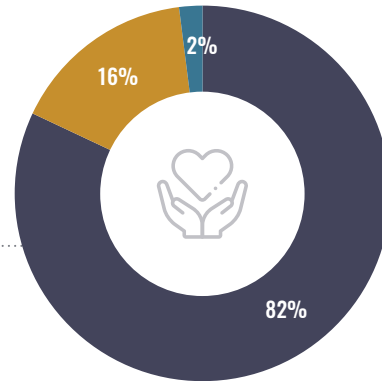
# HOPEFULNESS FOR THE FUTURE

## PERSONAL HOPE

**“I am hopeful for my future.”**

**Most Americans are hopeful for their future—**

IS THIS TRUE ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS?



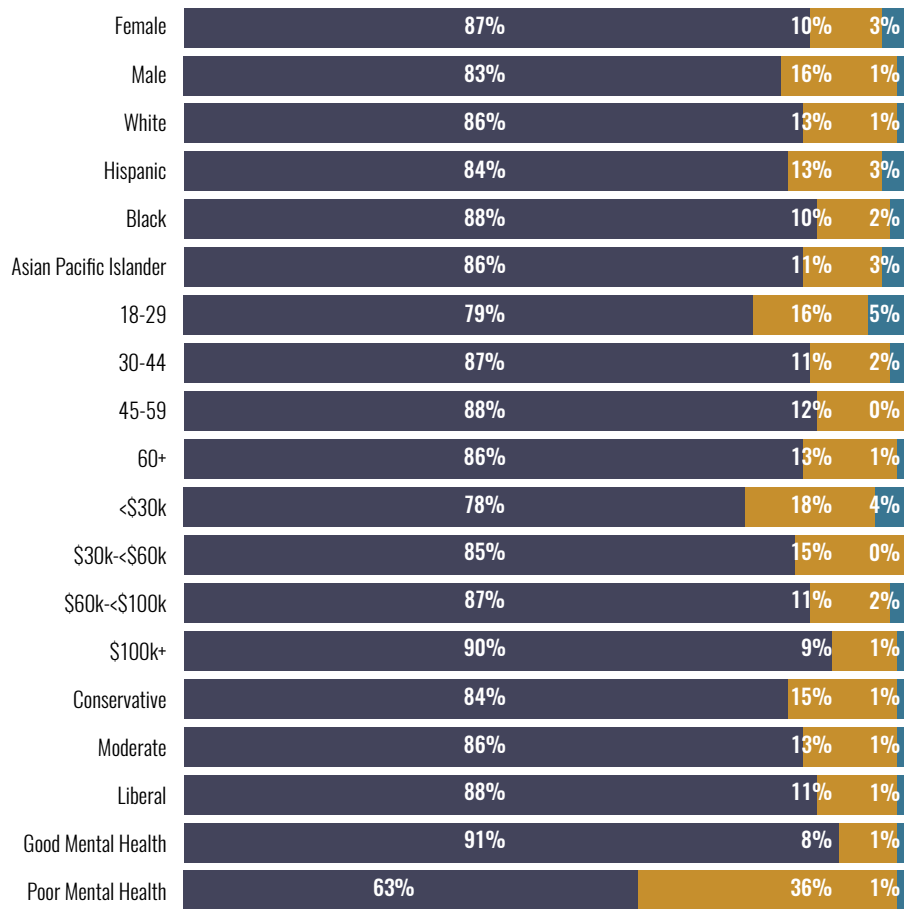
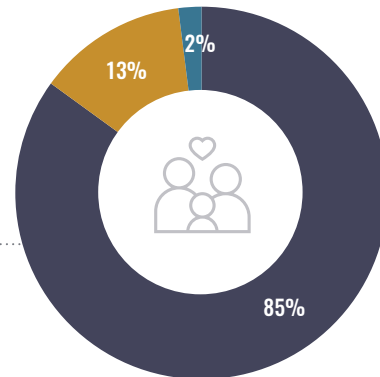
■ Somewhat/strongly agree ■ Somewhat/strongly disagree ■ Don't know or didn't answer

## FAMILY HOPE

**“I am hopeful for the future of my family.”**

**Most Americans are hopeful for the future of their family—**

IS THIS TRUE ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS?



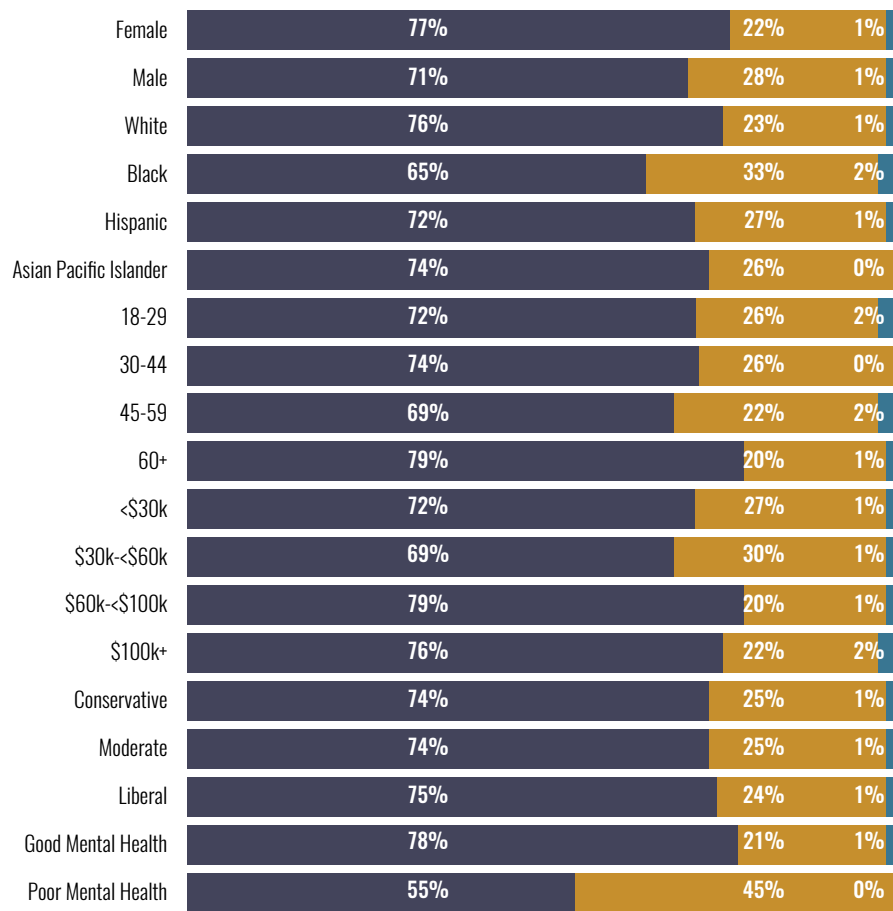
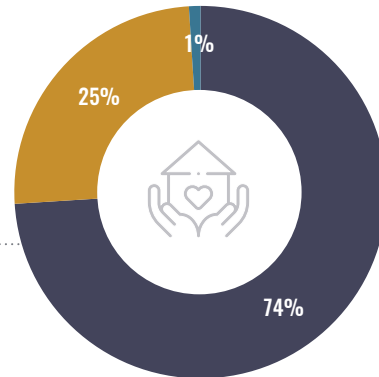
■ Somewhat/strongly agree ■ Somewhat/strongly disagree ■ Don't know or didn't answer

## LOCAL COMMUNITY HOPE

**“I am hopeful for the future of my local community.”**

**Most Americans are hopeful for the future of their local community—**

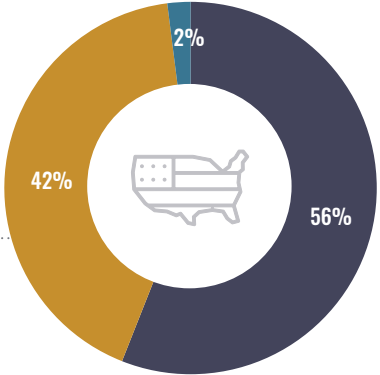
IS THIS TRUE ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS?



■ Somewhat/strongly agree ■ Somewhat/strongly disagree ■ Don't know or didn't answer

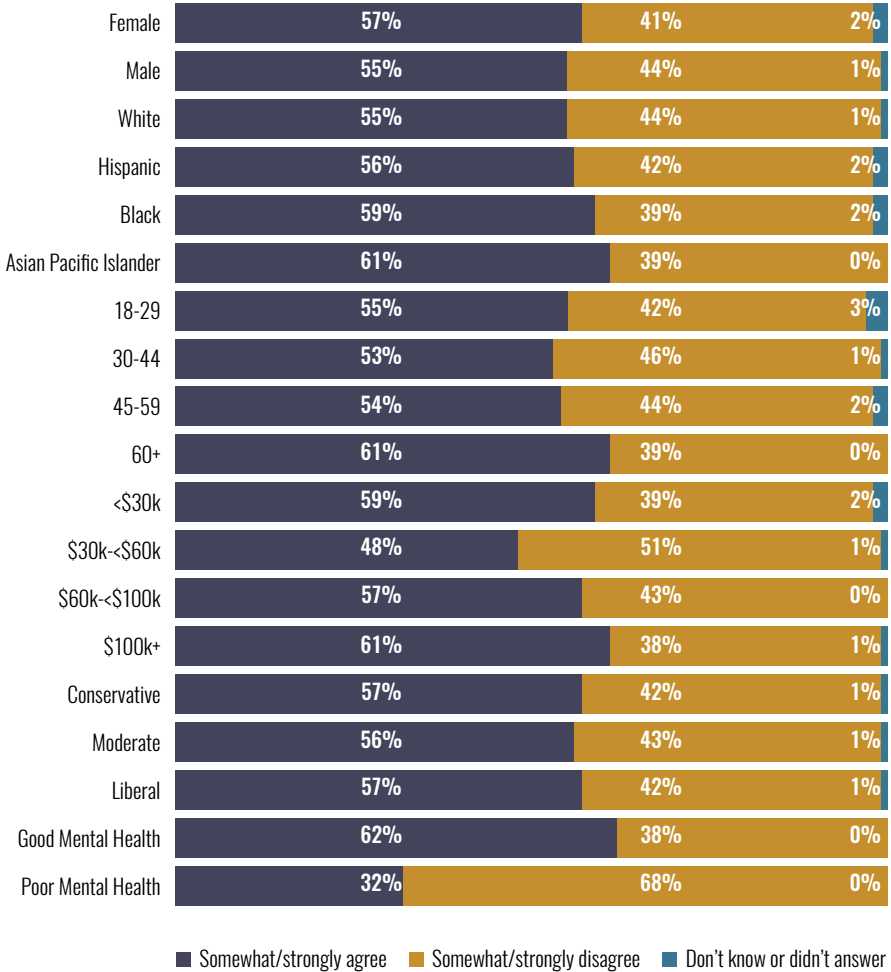
**NATIONAL HOPE**

**“I am hopeful for the future of the United States.”**



**Most Americans are hopeful for the future of the United States—**

IS THIS TRUE ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS?



## HOPE FOR PROGRESS

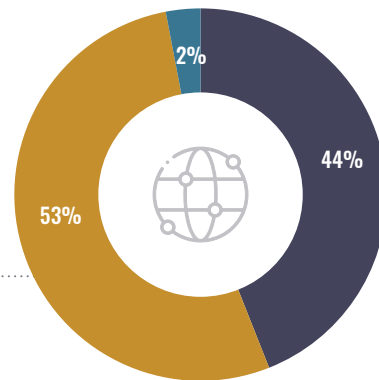
### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING CLAIMS DO YOU MOST AGREE WITH?

■ POSITIVE VISION OF HUMAN PROGRESS

**“In the coming decades, humans will make significant progress on big societal and global challenges and life will be better for future generations.”**

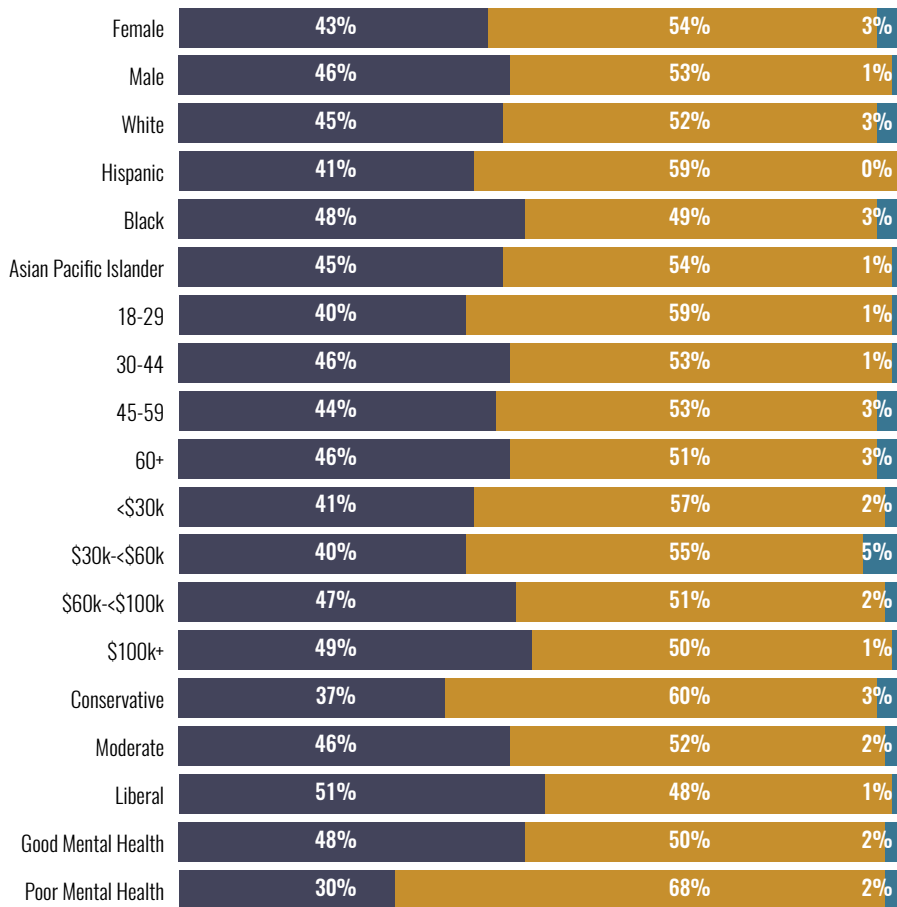
■ NEGATIVE VISION OF HUMAN PROGRESS

**“In the coming decades, humans will not make significant progress on big societal and global challenges and life will be worse for future generations.”**



### Most Americans are not hopeful for the future of human progress—

IS THIS TRUE ACROSS DIFFERENT GROUPS?



■ Positive vision of human progress ■ Negative vision of human progress ■ Don't know or didn't answer



## ■ CONCLUSION

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Are Americans a hopeful people? It depends. When it comes to their own lives, their families, and their local communities, most Americans are hopeful for the future. This is true regardless of gender, age, income, race/ethnicity, or politics. Critically, hope declines across all groups when expanded beyond the local community to the national and global level. Just a slight majority of Americans report being hopeful for the future of the United States, and a minority of Americans have a hopeful vision of human progress. Liberal Americans are the only group in which at least a majority (51%) have a hopeful vision of human progress.

Hope is a positive mental state. Therefore, it is not surprising that we observed a strong relationship between mental health and hope. Most Americans (82% in the current survey) consider their mental health to be good. However, with rising rates of mental health problems, particularly among younger generations, mental health may increasingly become a major barrier to societal flourishing and human progress. Indeed, in the current survey, only 64% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 reported their mental health as being good, compared to 76% of those between the ages of 30 and 44, 89% of those between the ages of 45 and 59, and 91% of those 60 and older.

It is important to note that the current survey was not designed to examine a causal relationship between mental health and hope. However, given that conditions such as depression and anxiety involve negative cognitions strongly tied to hope, it is reasonable to believe that these conditions play a powerful role in undermin-

ing a hopeful mindset. It is also worth noting that the relationship between mental health and hope is likely bi-directional. For instance, hope is a protective factor when people are facing life experiences such as loneliness and trauma which are risk factors for the development of mental health conditions.

Mental health likely plays an important role in shaping people's attitudes about their nation and human progress. However, even among Americans who report good mental health, only 62% are hopeful for the future of the United States, and only 48% have a positive vision of human progress. There must then be other psychological, social, cultural, or situational factors that deter mentally healthy people from extending their hope for the future to the nation and humanity. For example, suppose people perceive that there are significant barriers to progress such as increasing political polarization, or that they are regularly exposed to overwhelmingly negative news. In that case, they may have difficulty imagining pathways for change and progress. Given these significant sociocultural obstacles, people may also feel powerless and unsure of their ability to bring about the change they want for the world beyond their local community.

Research indicates that hopeful visions from leaders who are viewed as credible and trustworthy can inspire feelings of hope among constituents. Thus, it may be necessary to determine the extent to which trust in national and global leaders, as well as major institutions, explains this lack of hope for the future of the United States and human progress.

## ■ METHODOLOGY

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For this survey, we partnered with NORC at the University of Chicago and its AmeriSpeak® panel. AmeriSpeak® is a probability-based panel designed to represent the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and

address-based sampling, with a known, nonzero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. The nationally representative sample consisted of 2,049 respondents. The survey was conducted from October 5-9, 2023.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**DR. CLAY ROUTLEDGE** is the Vice President of Research and Director of the Human Flourishing Lab at the Archbridge Institute. He is also co-editor-in-chief of *Profectus*, an online magazine dedicated to human progress and flourishing. As a leading expert in existential psychology, Clay's work focuses on helping people reach their full potential and build meaningful lives.

Clay is a highly cited researcher who has published more than 100 scholarly papers, co-edited three academic books, authored three books, and received numerous awards for his research and mentorship. As a public intellectual, Clay has authored dozens of articles for popular outlets including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Newsweek*, *Fortune*, *The Hill*, and *Harvard Business Review*.

His work has been covered by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, *CBS News*, *ABC News*, *BBC News*, *CNN*, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *Vox*, *National Geographic*, *HGTV*, *Men's Health*, *Wired*, *Forbes*, *Oprah Daily*, *Shondaland*, *Discover Magazine*, *Reason Magazine*, and many others. He has appeared on numerous television and radio programs and podcasts such as *NBC Today*, *Hidden Brain*, *Science Friday*, *Cheddar News*, and *NPR Morning Edition*. He has also appeared in a number of documentary programs including *The Overview* from *NBC Peacock*, *The Benefits of Being Nostalgic* from *BBC Reel*, *Cursed Films* from *Shudder*, and *The Well* from *Big Think*.

He is the author of the book, *Past Forward: How Nostalgia Can Help You Live a More Meaningful Life* (2023), and he wrote the TED-Ed documentary short film, *Why Do We Feel Nostalgia?*



**ANDREW ABEYTA** is a fellow with the Flourishing in Action project at the Archbridge Institute's Human Flourishing Lab. Dr. Abeyta is also an assistant professor of psychology and director of the Social and Existential Motives Lab at Rutgers University in Camden, New Jersey. He is a social psychologist who studies how people satisfy the psychological needs for meaning in life and social belonging. Dr. Abeyta's research focuses on psychological factors, like the experience of nostalgia, religion, and supernatural beliefs, that promote social belonging and meaning in life. Additionally, Dr. Abeyta's research is interested in the implications of the needs for meaning in life and social belonging for human flourishing, psychological resilience, and human agency.

Dr. Abeyta earned his BA in psychology from Colorado College, his MA in experimental psychology from the University of Colorado in Colorado Springs, and his PhD in social and health psychology from North Dakota State University. His research and scholarly insights are published in many of the top journals in personality and social psychology, including *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Emotion*, *Social Psychology and Personality Science*, and *Current Opinion in Psychology*. Moreover, his work and expert opinions are featured in media outlets such as *The Atlantic*, *CNN*, *The Guardian*, *Science Friday*, *NBC News LX*, *USA Today*, and more.

# HUMAN

FLOURISHING LAB

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The Human Flourishing Lab—a project of the Archbridge Institute, a non-partisan, independent, 501(c)(3) public policy think tank—is dedicated to the study and promotion of human flourishing, as well as exploring the connection between human flourishing, civilizational progress, and freedom. We conduct original research, identify and highlight existing knowledge, and provide resources for researchers, the media, and the general public.