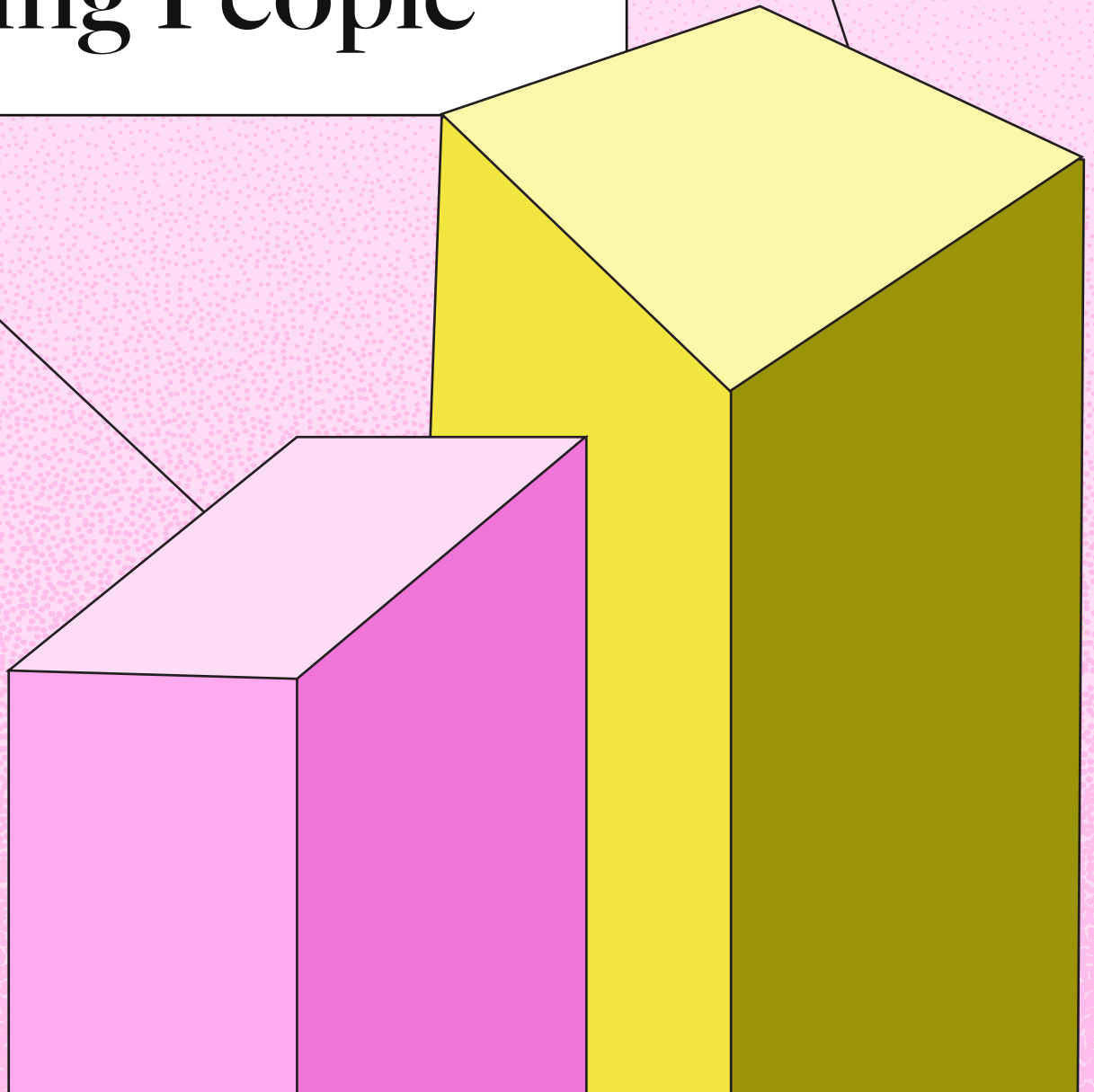


HOPELAB

MAY 2026

Mental Health Strains and Future Outlook for LGBTQ+ Young People



Introduction

The mental health and well-being of young people is a major focus in the United States. LGBTQ+¹ young people face some of the greatest mental health challenges. Across depression, anxiety, and suicide risk,^{2,3} they experience worse outcomes than their straight, cisgender peers with disparities persisting into young adulthood.⁴ Recent research links these disparities to rejection, discrimination, and victimization.⁵ These experiences reflect broader sociocultural pressures and structural inequities. At the same time, research also points to protective factors that may help mitigate many of the challenges LGBTQ+ young people face and support their well-being.⁶

As LGBTQ+ young people's rights face increasing challenges, and as public support for restricting transgender rights has grown in recent years,⁷ it is vital to understand what jeopardizes LGBTQ+ young people's well-being and how to respond to their needs in the current climate. Any effort must center their voices as experts in their own experiences. With that in mind, this project engaged 30 young people across the U.S., including 15 who identified as LGBTQ+, to co-create a survey that focused on factors impacting youth mental health and well-being.

This brief builds on findings from a [larger poll](#) produced by Hopelab and Data for Progress. That report surveyed 1,304 young people ages 13 to 24 about what supports their mental health and well-being and what undermines it. Consistent with prior research, it found that LGBTQ+ young people reported higher rates of poor mental health and unhappiness than their straight and cisgender peers. This brief focuses on findings specific to LGBTQ+ young people, with the goal of highlighting the most effective ways to support them.

1 The acronym LGBTQ+ means lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning. The "+" recognizes that many other sexual orientations and gender identities exist beyond those listed.

2 Surgo Health. (2024). Youth Mental Health Tracker: Survey data. Surgo Health. <https://www.trackyouthmentalhealth.com/survey-data>

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2013-2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbbs/dstr/index.html>

4 Green, A.E., Price-Feeney, M. & Dorison, S.H. (2019). Suicidality disparities by sexual identity persist from adolescence into young adulthood. New York, New York: The Trevor Project. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Suicidality-Disparities-by-Sexual-Identity-Persist-into-Young-Adulthood.pdf>

5 Hoy-Ellis, C. P. (2023). Minority stress and mental health: A review of the literature. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 70(5), 806-830. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2021.2004794>

6 Rivas-Koehl, M., Valido, A., Espelage, D. L., Robinson, L. E., Hong, J. S., Kuehl, T., Mintz, S., & Wyman, P. A. (2022). Understanding protective factors for suicidality and depression among US sexual and gender minority adolescents: Implications for school psychologists. *School Psychology Review*, 51(3), 290-303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2021.1881411>

7 Pew Research Center. (2025, February 26). Americans have grown more supportive of restrictions for trans people in recent years. Pew Research Center. <https://pewrsr.ch/3EWesBy>

Summary of Methodology

A full summary of the research methodology is available in the [overall report](#).

Instrument Development

The Hopelab research team developed the polling instrument through a youth-engaged research process involving 30 young people from across the U.S. The survey consisted of 13 questions, with a mix of closed-ended and open-ended questions, along with validity and honesty checks. Data for Progress administered the survey in English.

Procedure

From July 8 to 19, 2025, Data for Progress surveyed 1,304 respondents ages 13 to 24 using a web panel. Quota-based sampling was used to recruit a diverse sample across key demographics, including age, gender identity, and race and ethnicity. Participants who did not meet the eligibility criteria, including being ages 13 to 24 and living in the U.S., were not included. Data for Progress also did not include additional participants from quota groups that had already been filled. The team weighted the sample to represent young people ages 13 to 24 living in the U.S. across age, gender, education, race, geography, and sexual orientation.



Data Analysis

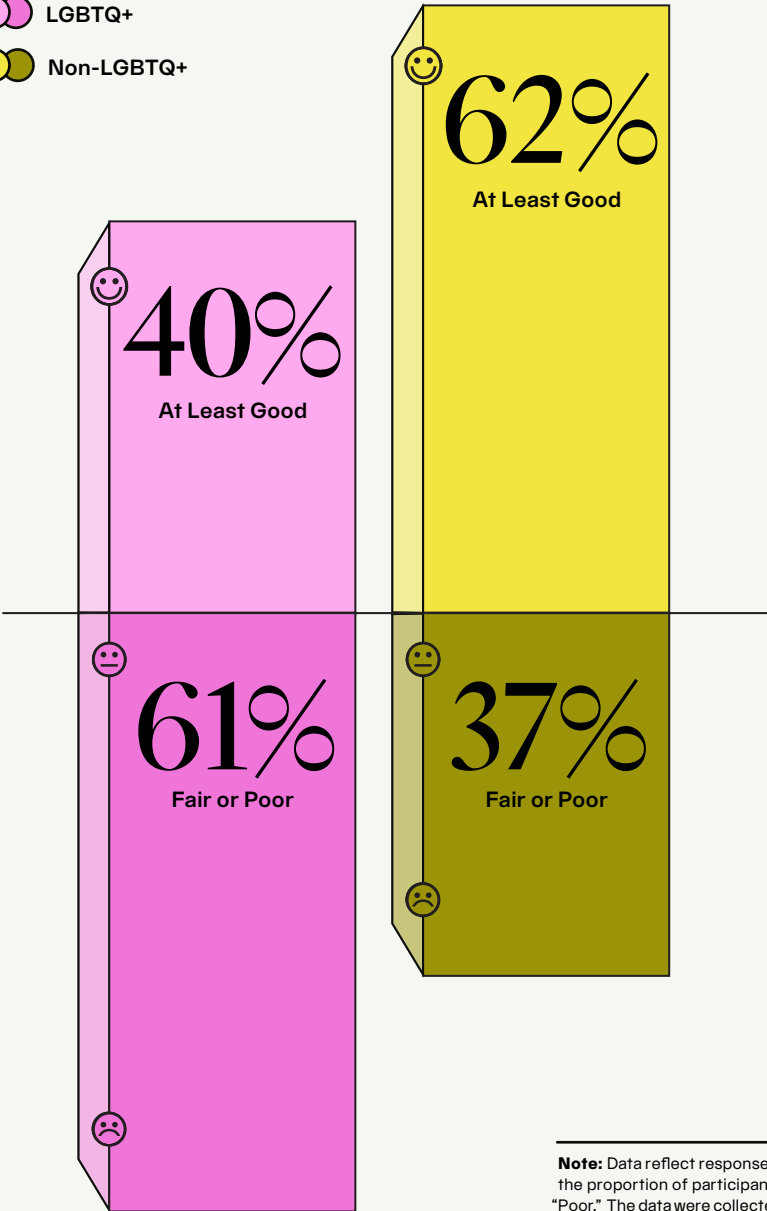
Analyses in this brief focus on LGBTQ+ identity status. They compare young people who identify as LGBTQ+ (n = 318, 24.4%) with young people who identify as straight and cisgender (n = 863, 66.2%). The margin of error for this subgroup comparison is plus or minus 5 percentage points.

The survey asked, “Do you personally identify as LGBTQ+?” The response options included: “No, I do not personally identify as LGBTQ+” (66.2%), “Yes, I personally identify as LGBTQ+” (24.4%), “Not sure” (5.2%), and “Prefer not to answer” (4.3%). For analysis, respondents who selected “Yes” were categorized as LGBTQ+, and those who selected “No” were categorized as straight and cisgender. Respondents who selected “Not sure” or “Prefer not to answer” were excluded from analyses.

Significantly More LGBTQ+ Young People *Report Fair or Poor Mental Health And Unhappiness* Compared To Straight, Cisgender Young People

In general, would you say your mental health is....

-  LGBTQ+
-  Non-LGBTQ+




Consistent with prior research, LGBTQ+ young people report worse mental health and well-being than straight, cisgender young people. About six in 10 LGBTQ+ young people rate their mental health as “fair” or “poor” (61%). By comparison, four in 10 straight, cisgender young people rate their mental health as “fair” or “poor” (40%). LGBTQ+ young people also report unhappiness more often than their straight, cisgender peers do (23% vs. 13%).


Note: Data reflect responses to the item, “In general, would you say your mental health is_____?” Values represent the proportion of participants who selected “Good,” “Very Good,” or “Excellent,” and those who selected “Fair” or “Poor.” The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 1,181 participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

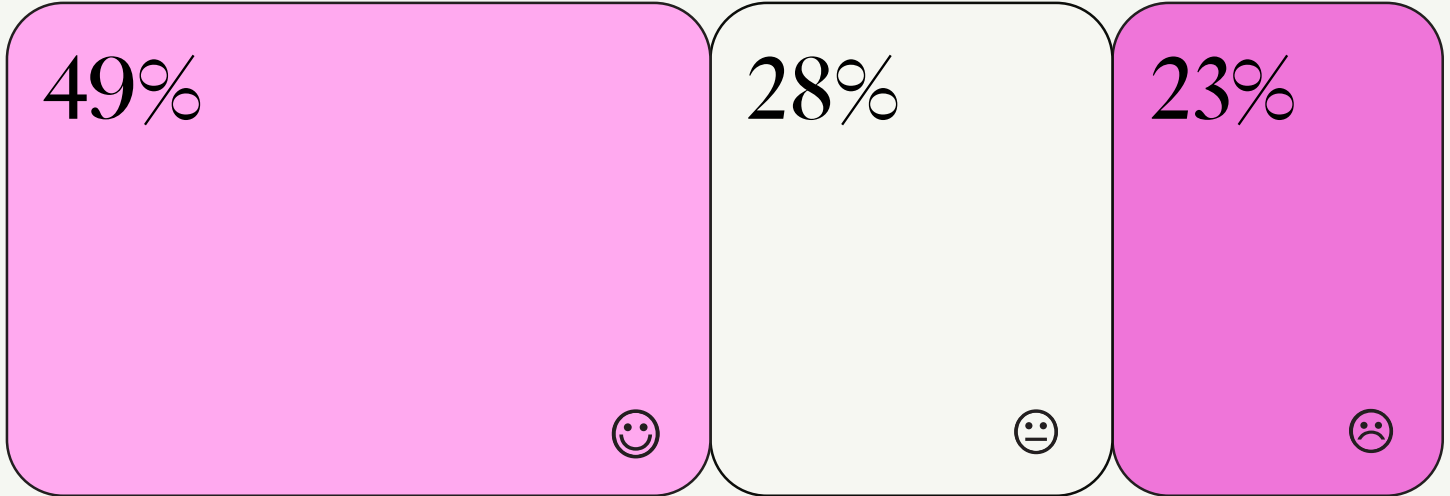
In general, I consider myself a _____ person.

 happy

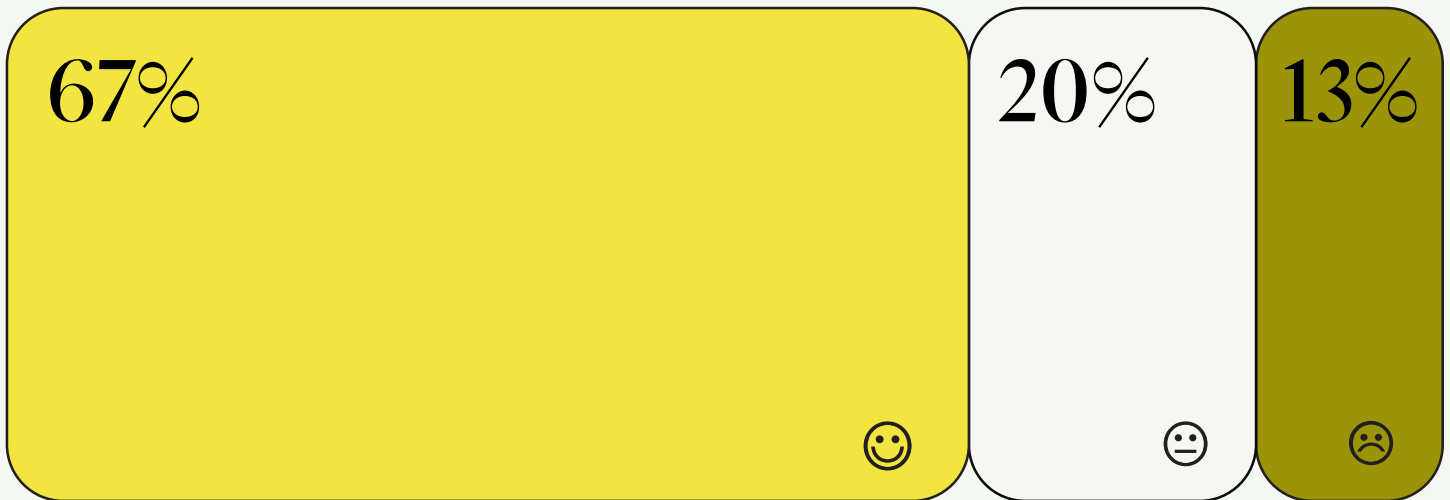
 neither happy nor unhappy

 unhappy

 LGBTQ+



 Non-LGBTQ+



Note: Data reflect responses to the item, "In general, I consider myself a _____ person." Values represent the proportion of participants who selected "Very happy," "Somewhat happy," and those who selected "Somewhat unhappy" or "Very unhappy." The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 1,181 participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

LGBTQ+ Young People Report Greater Mental Health Impacts From a *Wide Range of Stressors, Including Anti-LGBTQ+ Victimization*

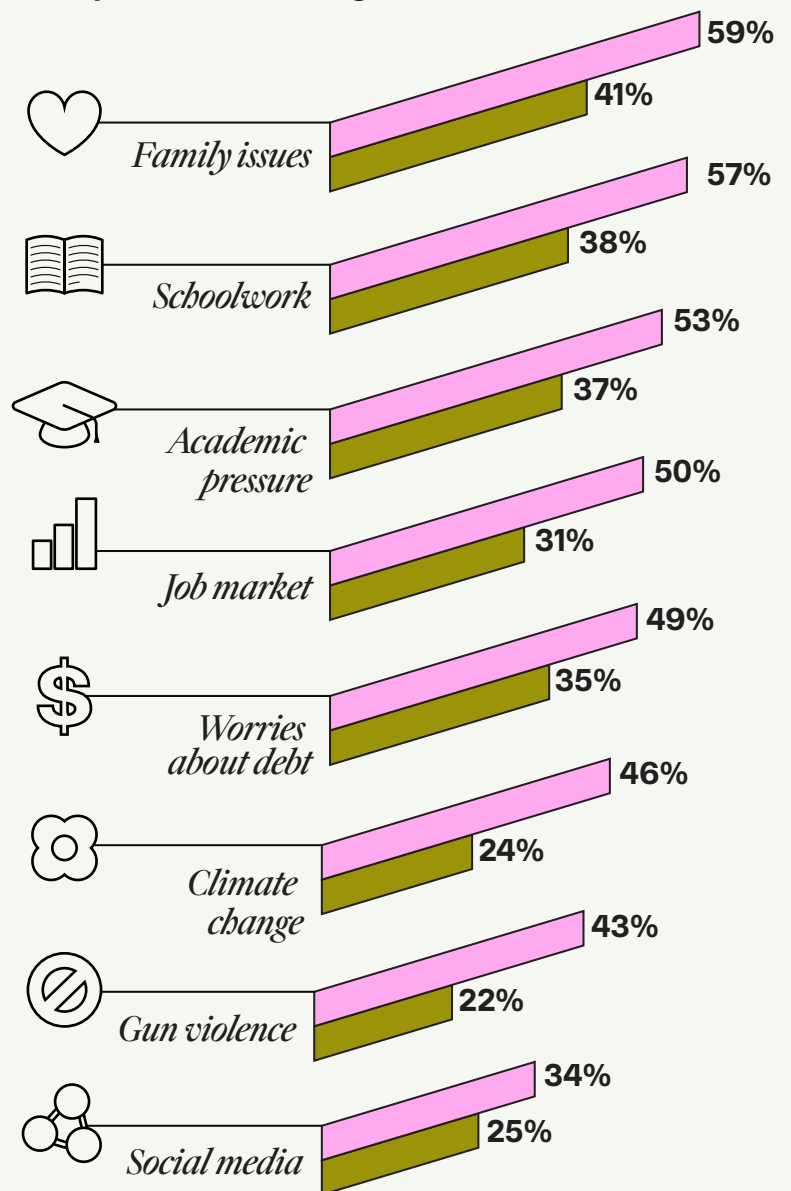
LGBTQ+ young people more often report that common stressors negatively affect their well-being or mental health compared with straight, cisgender young people. Nearly 60% of LGBTQ+ young people report that family issues, loneliness, schoolwork, and having no clear path in life each affect their well-being or mental health “a lot” to “quite a bit.” Among straight, cisgender young people, 41% or fewer report the same level of impact for these issues. When asked what hurts their mental health the most, a Black LGBTQ+ teen girl said, “I keep thinking about the worst year I’ve had at school and all the different decisions I could have made, but also being at home and being stuck with my parents’ negative views on me.”

In addition to these stressors, 51% of LGBTQ+ young people report that anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, including homophobia and transphobia, negatively affects their well-being or mental health.

An LGBTQ+ young adult woman who described their race as “other” shared

“My parents are very unaccepting of my sexual identity, and that is really hard right now.”

Issues that Negatively Affect Young People’s Well-Being

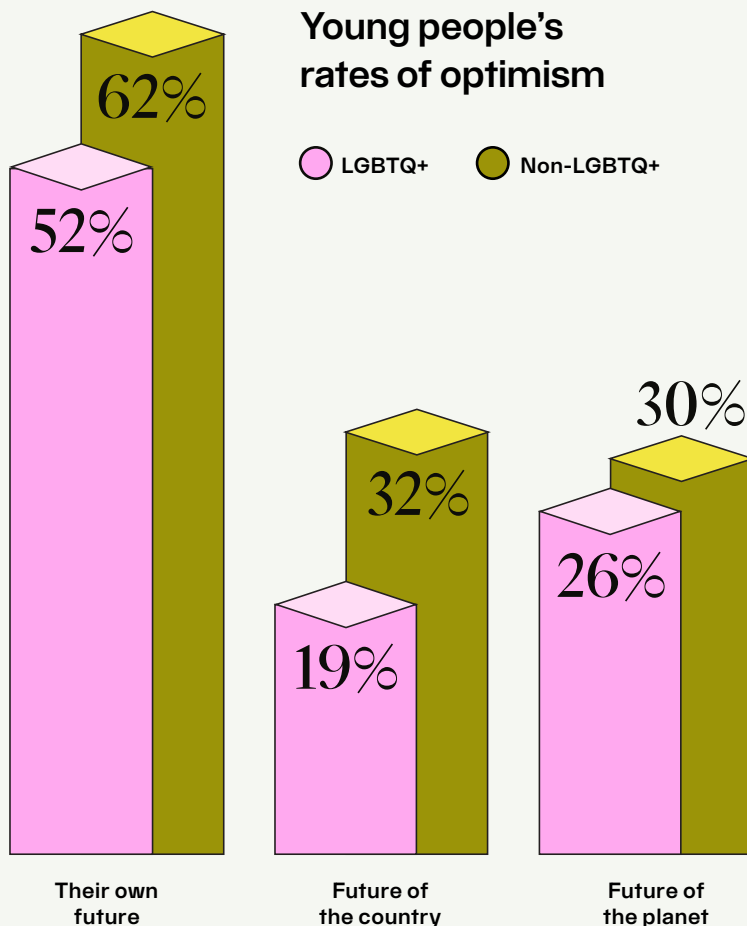


● LGBTQ+ ● Non-LGBTQ+

Note: Data reflect responses to the item, “How much do the following issues negatively affect your well-being or mental health right now?” Values represent participants who selected “A lot” or “Quite a bit.” Full data tables are available in the overall [report](#). The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 1,181 participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

LGBTQ+ Young People Report *Less Optimism About the Future* Than Straight, Cisgender Young People, Particularly About the Future of the Country



LGBTQ+ young people report lower optimism about the future of this country (19% vs. 32%) and their own future (52% vs 62%) than straight, cisgender young people. Despite experiencing less optimism about the future compared to their straight, cisgender peers, more than half of LGBTQ+ young people remain optimistic about their future. One LGBTQ+ teen girl described feeling both hopeful and weighed down at the same time, saying, “Thinking about the future helps me mentally, but also puts me down somehow. Knowing I will be independent and have my life together makes me happy. Knowing I can make my own decisions makes me happy.”

Both LGBTQ+ young people and straight, cisgender young people feel more optimistic about their own future than about the future of the country or the planet. Both groups report low optimism about the future of the planet.

A white LGBTQ+ young adult woman shared

“I’m worried that we will have a war in the United States the way our politicians are handling things currently.”

Note: Data reflect responses to the item, “In general, do you feel optimistic or pessimistic about each of the following?” Prompts included “Your own future,” “The future of the country,” and “The future of the planet.” The presented data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 1,181 participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). In *Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

LGBTQ+ Young People More Often Worry That *Unfair Treatment, Legal Restrictions, and Financial Hardship Will Impact Their Future Mental Health* Than Straight, Cisgender Young People

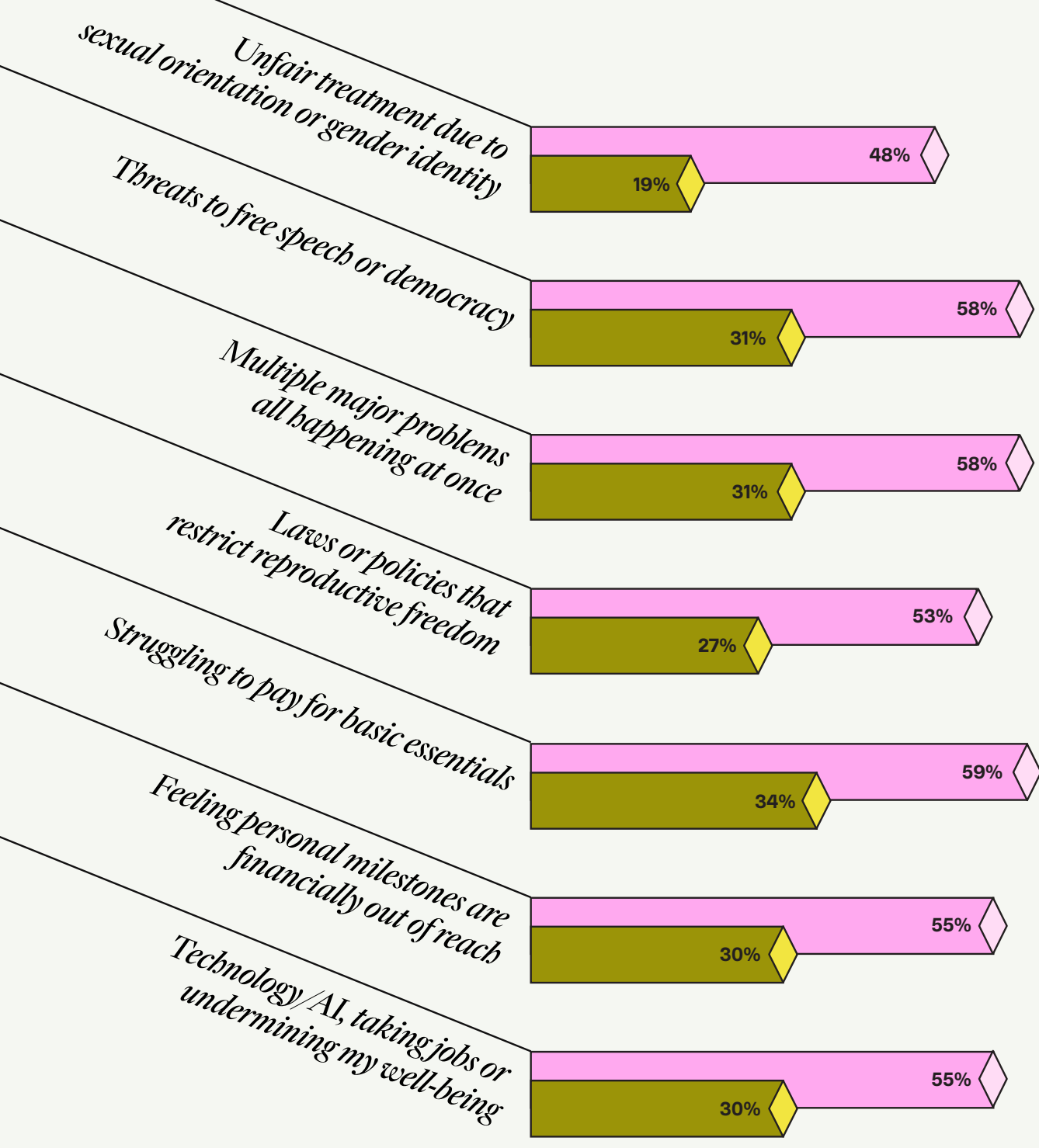
Compared with straight, cisgender young people, LGBTQ+ young people more often worry that major future stressors will harm their mental health and well-being. These concerns align with the pessimism many LGBTQ+ young people express about the future. The largest gap appears in worries about unfair treatment based on sexual orientation or gender identity. Nearly half of LGBTQ+ young people report this concern (48%), compared with 19% of straight, cisgender young people.

LGBTQ+ young people also report much higher worry about threats to free speech or democracy (58% vs. 31%) and multiple major crises happening at once, such as climate change, political conflict, and pandemics (58% vs. 31%). In addition, more LGBTQ+ young adults worry that laws or policies restricting reproductive freedom will impact their future mental health (53% vs. 27%).

A white LGBTQ+ young adult woman echoed this concern, saying

“The biggest thing making my mental health worse is fear of losing rights due to my gender and beliefs.”

Issues that Young People Worry Will Impact Their Future Mental Health or Well-Being



● LGBTQ+
 ● Non-LGBTQ+

Note: Data reflect responses to the item, "How worried are you that the following issues will negatively impact your FUTURE mental health or well-being?" Values represent participants who selected "Extremely worried" or "Very worried." Full data tables are available in the overall report. The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 1,181 participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

LGBTQ+ Young People Report *Low Confidence in Reaching Things* That Are Important to Them in the Future

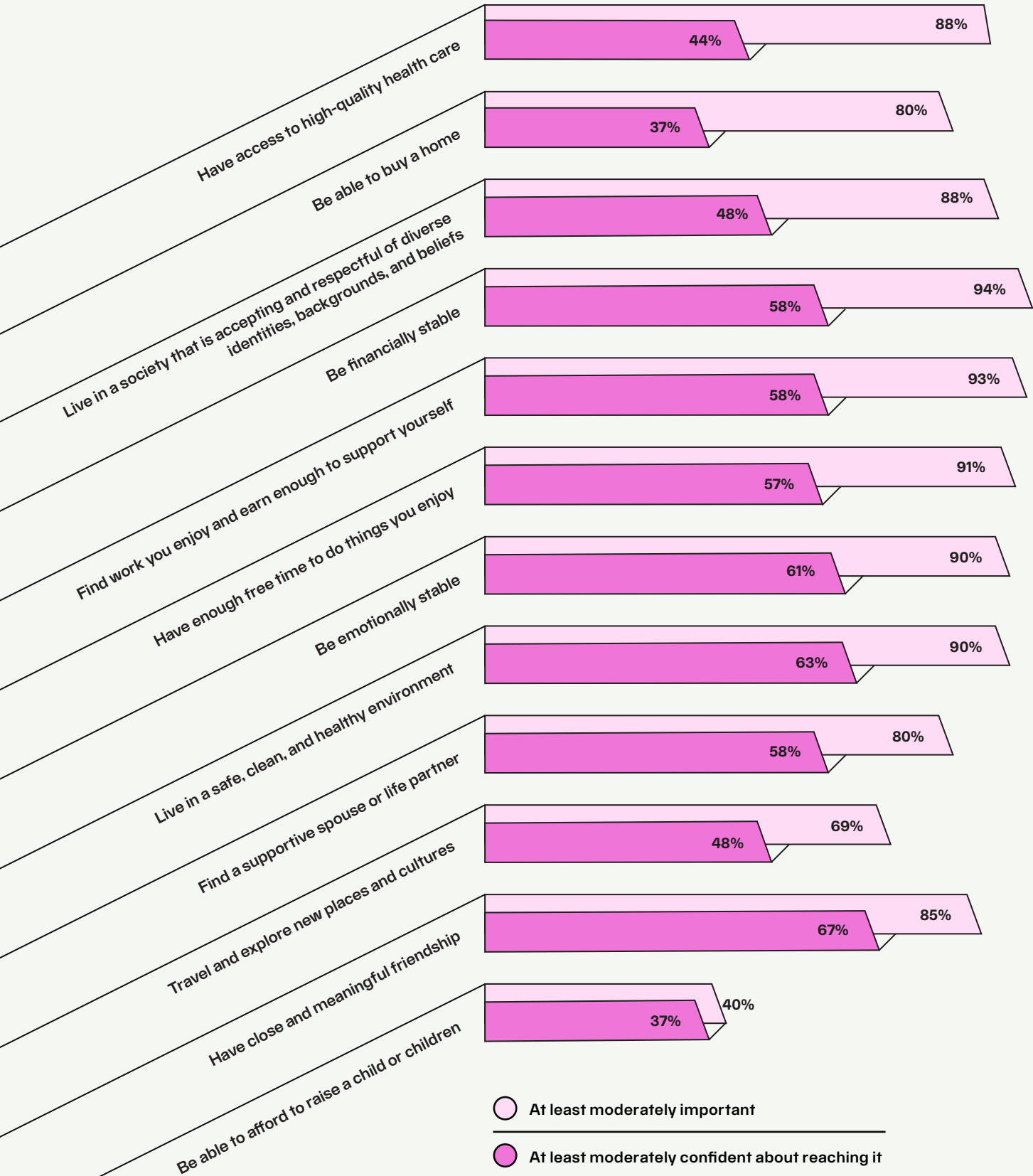
When they think about the future, LGBTQ+ young people report clear gaps between the milestones they say matter most and what they believe they can actually achieve. The largest gaps involve access to high-quality health care and homeownership. While 88% say access to high-quality health care is important and 80% say buying a home is important, fewer feel confident that they will achieve either goal (44% and 37%, respectively).

LGBTQ+ young people also place high importance on living in a society that is accepting and respectful of diverse identities, backgrounds, and beliefs (88%). Still, fewer than half (48%) feel confident they will have that kind of environment in the future. Straight, cisgender young people report smaller gaps between importance and confidence across most milestones, and they generally express more confidence in reaching goals they consider important. One exception is finding a supportive spouse or life partner. LGBTQ+ young people and straight, cisgender young people report similar levels of importance and confidence for that milestone.

A Black LGBTQ+ young adult woman described the tension of this achievement gap, saying

“It’s becoming harder for us to take care of our well-being due to the world making it harder to have access to health care and the price to have good health.”

Future Aspirations for LGBTQ+ Young People vs. Their Confidence in Achievement

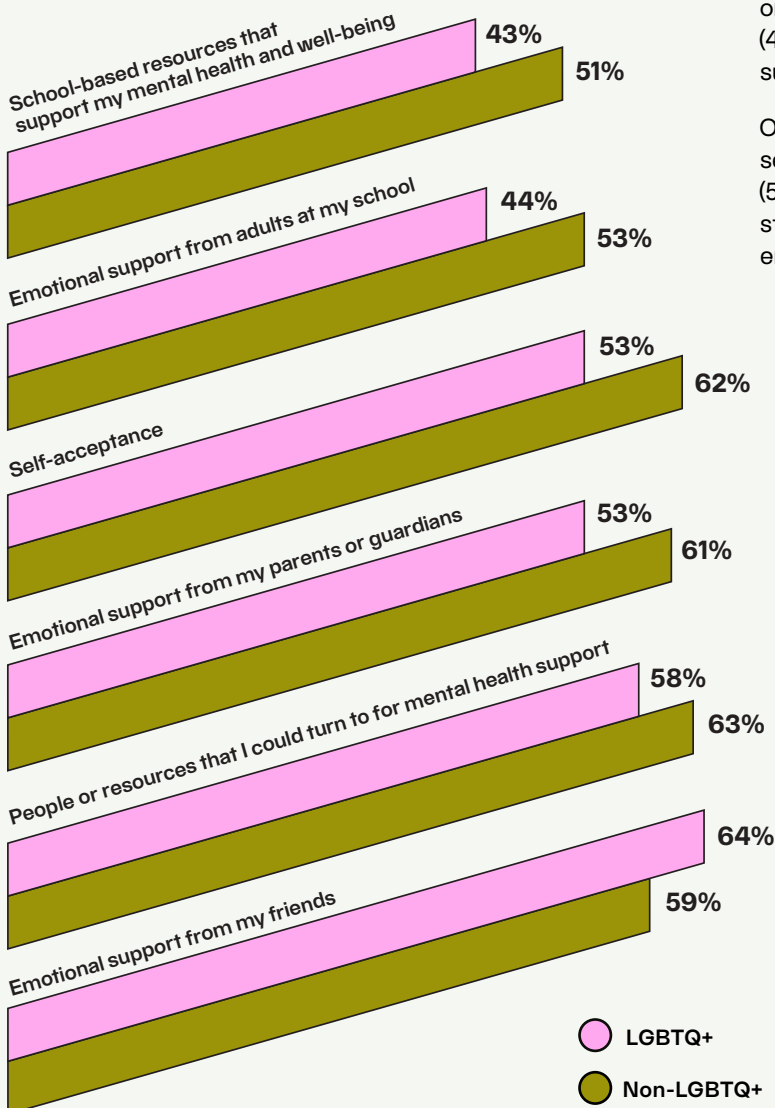


Note: Data reflect responses to the items: "When you think about your future, how important is it to you to:" and "When you think about your future, how confident are you that you'll..." Values represent participants who selected "Very important" and "Moderately important" for the first item and "Very confident" and "Moderately confident" for the second item. Full data tables are available in the overall report. The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 318 LGBTQ+ participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

LGBTQ+ Young People Report *Stronger Emotional Support From Friends But Less Sufficient Support from Adults* and School-Based Mental Health Programs

Young People Agree They Have Enough...



LGBTQ+ young people describe several areas where they need more support, especially for emotional and mental health. Among young people enrolled in school,⁸ fewer than half of LGBTQ+ students say they have enough school-based resources or programming to support their mental health and well-being (43%). Fewer than half also say they receive enough emotional support from adults at their school (44%).

Outside of school, LGBTQ+ young people report lower levels of self-acceptance (53% vs. 62%), emotional support from parents (53% vs. 61%), and mental health support (58% vs. 63%) than their straight, cisgender peers. At the same time, they report more emotional support from friends (64% vs. 59%).

A Black LGBTQ+ young adult woman described the challenge of finding care, saying

“The biggest thing negatively affecting my mental health is the fact that I have no idea where or how to get professional help in my area. I suspect I have autism and/or ADHD, and I just have no idea where to go and get any sort of opinion from someone who knows what they're talking about.”

Note: Data reflect responses to the item, “Rate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements. I have enough_____.” Values represent participants who selected “Strongly Agree” or “Somewhat agree.” Full data tables are available in the overall report. The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 1,181 participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

The Most Common Sources of Hope for LGBTQ+ Young People Are *Support From Others and Their Own Resilience*

LGBTQ+ young people face many hardships, yet nearly all can name at least one source of hope or optimism (97%). About half (49%) say knowing that people love them and want to see them succeed gives them hope.

Many LGBTQ+ young people also find hope in their own resilience. Nearly half say belief in their inner strength and resilience gives them hope (45%). In addition, 44% say greater autonomy and freedom, such as no longer being under the control of parents or school, gives them hope. Fewer straight, cisgender young people say the same (29%).

Finally, 44% of LGBTQ+ young people say Gen Z activism and advocacy efforts give them hope. One white LGBTQ+ teen boy described what inspires him, saying, “Seeing classmates make eco-friendly tools with 3D printers, this creativity of the younger generation makes me think there will always be solutions to future problems.”

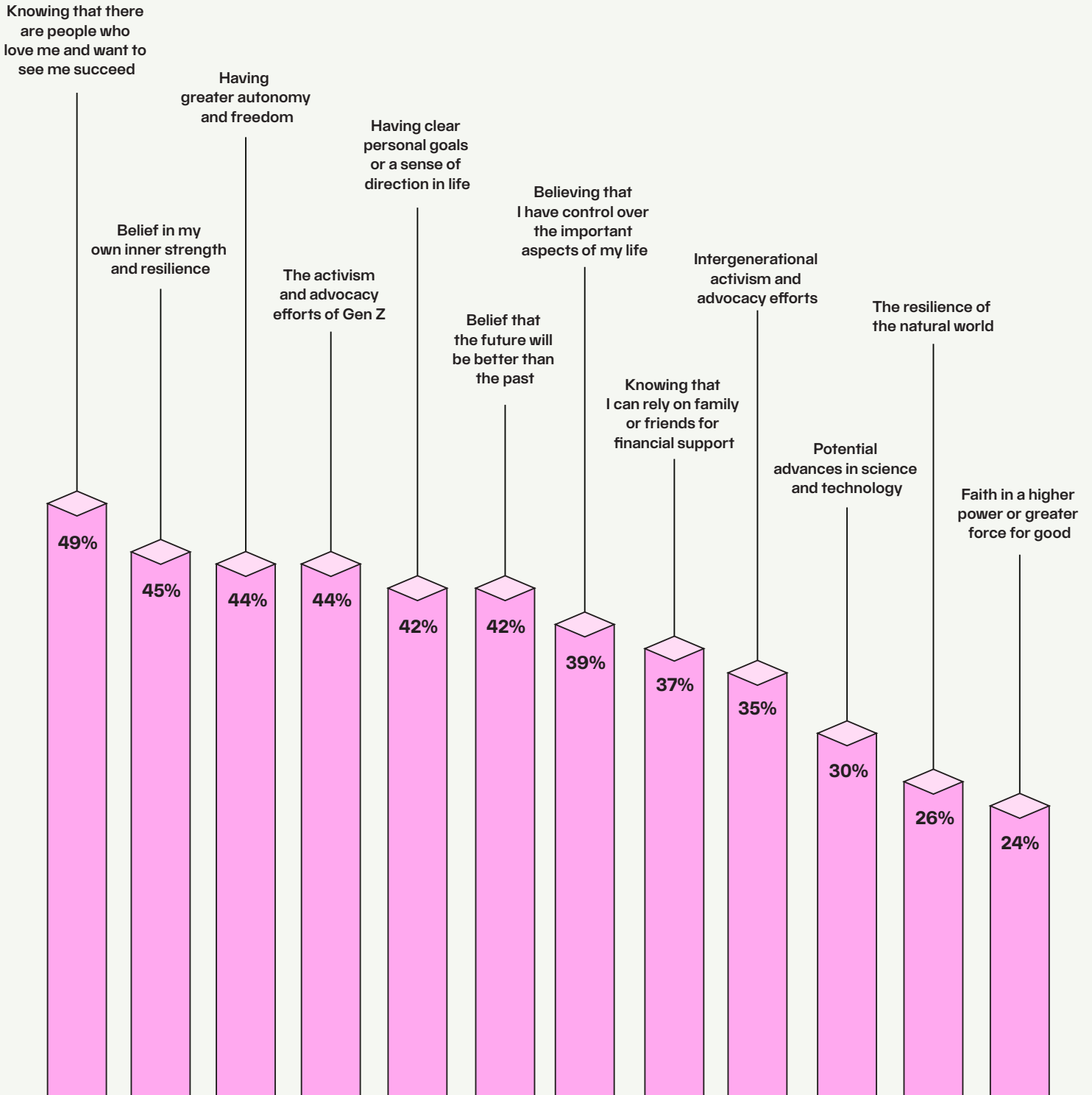
A white LGBTQ+ young adult man shared

“I have a very strong group of close friends that I am in regular contact with and feel very comfortable with. They give me a lot of support, hope, and happiness.”

A multiracial LGBTQ+ teen girl shared

“What brings me a sense of hope when thinking about the future is the fact that I will not be forced to be around family 24/7 and their expectations, and the same with friends. It brings me hope to think about having a lot more time alone.”

Sources of Hope or Optimism for the Future Among LGBTQ+ Young People



Note: Data reflect responses to the item, "When you think about the future, which of the following gives you a sense of hope or optimism? Select all that apply." The data were collected in July 2025 and represent a subset of 318 LGBTQ+ participants from a larger sample of 1,304.

Source: Hopelab & Data for Progress. (2025). *In Their Own Words: Youth Voices on Mental Health and the Future*. Hopelab. <https://hopelab.org/stories/nationalpoll>

Conclusions & Implications

Disparities in mental health and well-being between LGBTQ+ young people and their straight, cisgender peers are well-documented. Prior to changes in federal research priorities, widespread efforts existed to address them. The removal of dedicated attention and funding does not by any means denote resolution, but represents an increased cause for alarm for LGBTQ+ young people. This brief shows that LGBTQ+ young people continue to report higher rates of current poor mental health and unhappiness. They also report greater pessimism about their own future, the planet's future, and especially the country's future. As this generation of LGBTQ+ young people navigates these realities, we can help break this cycle by expanding the support they so desperately need.

While the stigma and discrimination LGBTQ+ young people face can feel overwhelming, individual and community support can help reduce this burden. LGBTQ+ young people most often say hope comes from knowing that people love and support them and want them to succeed. At the same time, many report not having enough support from parents or adults at school. They also report that loneliness and family issues negatively impact their mental health at high rates.

LGBTQ+ young people in this study were also more likely to say they have enough emotional support from friends than adults or family. This pattern suggests that they may rely on peers for support that they do not consistently receive elsewhere. Research also suggests that parental support and acceptance play a distinct role in LGBTQ+ young people's mental health, beyond what peer support can provide. Programs and interventions should help parents and caregivers strengthen connection and acceptance, and help families understand how rejection can harm a young person's well-being.⁹

Communities can also expand support by connecting LGBTQ+ young people with trusted adults, such as educators, counselors, or professionals in their desired career fields, who can offer them guidance and support. Programs, including Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, can strengthen these connections by recruiting adult volunteers and reaching out to parents and caregivers to emphasize the value of participation.

These findings point to a need for youth-centered LGBTQ+ groups and community spaces, especially given the high rates of loneliness that LGBTQ+ young people report. These spaces can reduce isolation and make it easier to build supportive relationships with both peers and adults. Any in-person option should also address transportation so young people can get to and from the space safely and consistently.

⁹ Green, A. E., Price-Feeney, M., & Dorison, S. H. (2021). Association of sexual orientation acceptance with reduced suicide attempts among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth. *LGBT Health, 8*(1), 26-31. <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2020.0248>.

LGBTQ+ young people also need spaces where they can feel safe and thrive. For many young people, school is either compulsory or required, and it often shapes future success in a given career path. That makes schools an important place to provide mental health support, especially for students who may otherwise not have it. At the same time, many K-12 schools, colleges and universities have reduced inclusion initiatives, which can increase risk for LGBTQ+ young people. Schools can respond by adopting zero-tolerance bullying policies that explicitly protect LGBTQ+ students. Schools can also create inclusive learning environments by incorporating LGBTQ+ topics in instruction where appropriate and by allowing students to start and sustain LGBTQ+ focused clubs, such as Gender and Sexuality Alliances (GSAs) or LGBTQ+ Student Centers. These steps can help students feel connected and supported so they can stay engaged, attending, and achieving.¹⁰

Nearly half of LGBTQ+ young people in this study also said that belief in their inner strength and resilience gives them hope. With strong social support, affirming school environments, and evidence-based efforts to improve resilience, LGBTQ+ young people can strengthen a sense of inner strength, ownership, and autonomy over their future. These efforts can also include opportunities to participate in advocacy or to support those already engaged. In this study, nearly half of LGBTQ+ young people said activism and advocacy also give them another source of hope.

As communities look for ways to address youth mental health and well-being, we should not rely only on scalable, one-size-fits-all approaches. LGBTQ+ young people have reported worse mental health outcomes than their peers prior to the current social and political climate. They will likely continue to do so without specific, targeted approaches that reflect their experiences and meet their needs. This brief highlights those needs and offers translatable, actionable findings for those working to support the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ young people.

¹⁰ McBrien, J., Rutigliano, A., & Sticca, A. (2022). *The inclusion of LGBTQI+ students across education systems: An overview*. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 273. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/91775206-en>.

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About

Hopelab envisions a future where all young people have equitable opportunities to live joyful and purposeful lives. As a funder, connector, and science translator, Hopelab supports and builds equity-centered solutions for the mental health of Brown, Black, and Queer young people. For more information, visit hopelab.org.

Data for Progress is a progressive think tank and polling firm, which arms movements with data-driven tools to fight for a more equitable future. DFP provides polling, data-based messaging, and policy generation for the progressive movement, and advises campaigns and candidates with the tools they need to win. Learn more at dataforprogress.org or follow DFP on X at [@dataprogress](https://twitter.com/dataprogress).

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