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## MARRIED PEOPLE ARE LIVING THEIR BEST LIVES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jonathan Rothwell** is the principal economist at Gallup and a nonresident senior fellow at The Brookings Institution.

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## Introduction

At least since humans could read and write and likely earlier still, people have debated the merits of marriage. Anthropologists have shown that marriage is a [cultural universal](#), found in every society from hunter-gatherers to ancient empires. Lectures from the Roman stoic philosopher [Musonius Rufus](#) contain much on the subject of marriage, including its benefits to individuals (saying no union is more necessary or agreeable), its proper aim (procreation as well as companionship and love), and its effects on society, saying: “Anyone who deprives people of marriage destroys family, city, and indeed, the whole human race.”

## Measuring Well-Being

While we don’t have quantitative measures of the ancient world, Gallup has what may be the largest database ever created on subjective well-being. From 2008 to 2020, Gallup collected data from 2,578,342 U.S. adults, mostly via phone surveys, and from March 2020 through November 2023, Gallup collected an additional 56,653 responses through the web.

Two [valid](#) and reliable measures of subjective well-being—the [Cantril ladder](#)—were included on those surveys:

*Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to ten at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?*

The second item builds off the first, but asks: “On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?” Respondents could pick options from 0–“worst possible” to 10–“best possible” for each item. Gallup social scientists code someone as thriving if they score a 7 or higher on current life evaluation and an 8 or higher on future life evaluation. Thus, to be thriving in well-being means to consider your life as near the best you can imagine in the present and likely to be near the best possible life in the coming future.

## Yes, Married People Report Higher Well-Being

Comparing across relationship status, adults who are married are by far the happiest, as measured by how they evaluate their current and future life. In 2023, married adults ages 25 to 50 are 17 percentage points more likely to be thriving than adults who never married, up from 12 percentage points in 2009. The gap favoring those who are married is consistently large over the entire 2009 to 2023 period, though it ranges from a low of 12 percentage points to a high of 24 percentage points.

The large gap in well-being favoring married people is not explained by simple demographic differences. The gap from 2020 to 2023 is 20 percentage points after adjusting for race, ethnicity, age, educational attainment, and gender. In fact, within each

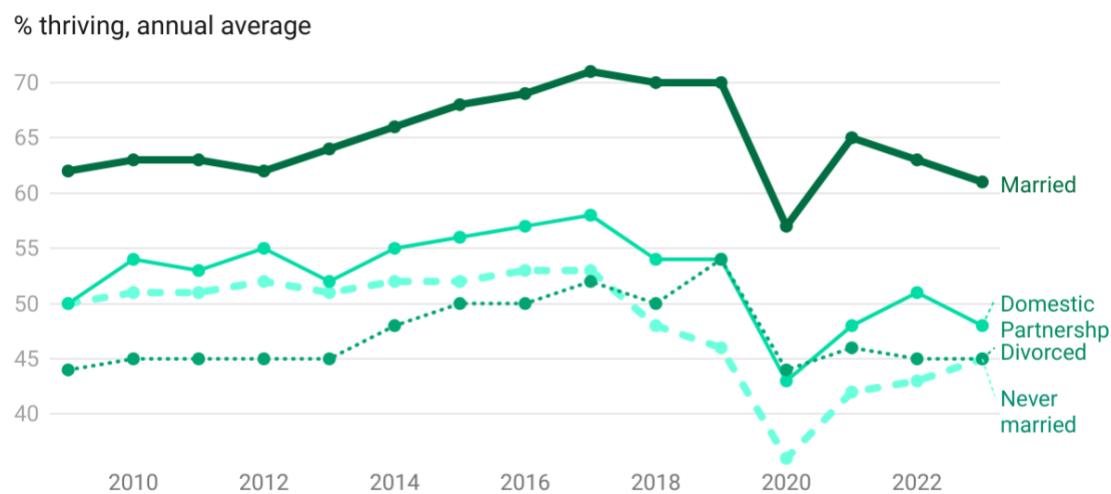
gender and race/ethnicity, married people report significantly higher well-being compared to those who never married. Both married men and married women see a 20-percentage-point advantage compared to their same-sex peers who never married (*see Supplemental Table 1 in the Appendix*).

The same is true for adults who are American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, or White. For instance, married Black Americans enjoy a 13-percentage-point advantage in well-being over their never-married peers.

This does not mean that marriage—as an institution or relationship—is necessarily the cause of a better life, though that certainly may be true. People who are persistently happier—or have attributes that tend to generate and sustain happiness, such as character traits like agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness—may be more likely to seek out marriage and may be more likely to receive marriage proposals. Marital status is not randomly assigned.

Still, the effect of marriage is high. Educational attainment predicts well-being, but a married adult who did not attend high school evaluates life higher, on average, than an unmarried adult with a graduate degree, after adjusting for gender, race, and age. The Gallup data from 2020 to 2023 show that marital status is a stronger predictor of well-being for American adults than education, race, age, and gender (*see Supplementary Table 1 in the Appendix*).

## Well-being by marital status for U.S. population aged 25 to 50, 2009-2023



Sample size is 795,904 U.S. adults. Thriving defined as a 7 or higher on current well-being and 8 or higher on anticipated well-being in 5 years, both on a 0-10 scale.

Source: Data from 2009-2019 are based on the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index; data from March 2020-November 2023 are from the Gallup Panel. • Created with Datawrapper

Download this chart [here](#).

The marriage premium is not explained by political party preference, religious affiliation, nor, entirely, by household income. Adjusting for household income lowers the marital premium by about half—not surprisingly since the most obvious practical advantage of marriage is the pooling of resources, but married people remain significantly more likely to be thriving (9 percentage points) even after controlling for household income (*see Supplementary Table 2 in the Appendix*).

Moreover, these data also show that Republicans are significantly more likely to be thriving in their well-being compared to Democrats and Independents/third-party supporters, by 9 to 12 percentage points. Likewise, people with a religious preference are more likely to be thriving than atheists, agnostics, or those with no preference (by 6 percentage points). Yet, controlling for these things does not lower the effect of marriage, even though married people are more likely to be both Republicans and religious.

## People Report Higher Well-Being in Places With Higher Marriage Rates

The individual link between well-being and marriage plays out on the larger scale of towns, cities, or groups of cities that share commuting links. People living in metropolitan areas with higher rates of marriage enjoy higher subjective wellbeing.

The data are from 2016 to 2020. To measure well-being at the metropolitan scale, I updated a [database](#) published for the Brookings Institution with my co-author Andre Perry. This combines Gallup data from 2010 to 2023, so that even small areas have enough responses for reporting (100 is cutoff used here). In total, we have data on 919 metropolitan and micropolitan areas. These areas are based on the county or counties (or county equivalent entities) with at least one urban area consisting of 10,000 residents and the smaller adjacent counties that have strong commuting ties. Micropolitan areas are centered around an urban area that has between 10,000 and 50,000 residents, where a metropolitan area is based on an urban area with at least 50,000 residents.

Consistent with the individual analysis, well-being is measured as the percentage of adults who are thriving. I weighted the responses by the population size (ages 15 and over) to make the results more representative of the places where people live, thereby answering the question: “Are people living better lives where marriage rates are high?”

Marriage rates can be measured in several ways. First, I looked at the share of households that are married across metropolitan areas, where the Census defines a household as people sharing a home or housing unit. This has a modest but significant correlation with the percentage of adults thriving in their wellbeing (0.19). The problem with this is that some cities attract many young unmarried people for work or school or retired widowers, but the area may still have high marriage rates at middle-age when child-rearing is more likely.

For these reasons, I also looked at the relationship between well-being and the share of people aged 35 to 54 who are married. This has a stronger association with well-being ( $r = 0.35$ ). Finally, I looked at the share of children living in married-couple household. This was even more closely related to well-being ( $r = 0.41$ ).

Of course, as with the individual analysis, one would want to consider how communities differ aside from marriage. So, I ran regression models that adjust for the share of people in different age groups (15 to 19, 20 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64, and 65 and over), as well as the share in each of the major racial and ethnic groups, the share of population aged 25 and over with a Bachelor's degree or higher, and the population size of the area. I also considered the share of votes that went to Donald Trump in the 2020 election and the rate of [religious adherence](#).

For each measure of marriage, I find a statistically significant relationship between the marriage rate and well-being. The strongest measure is the share of households who are married. A 5-percentage-point increase in this marriage rate (1 standard deviation) predicts a 0.9 percentage point increase in the share who are thriving (see *Supplemental Table 3 in the Appendix*), which is about 0.19 standard deviations in well-being. The marriage rate has a similar effect size as the age composition and is somewhat less predictive of metro area well-being than education. By comparison, an increase of one standard deviation in the Bachelor's or higher attainment rate (0.09) predicts a 0.49 standard deviation increase in well-being.

The community-level well-being link to marriage is not limited to subjective well-being. Using an objective measure of well-being—or lack thereof—yields the same results. In my analysis with Andre Perry of Brookings, we found that subjective thriving was highly and negative correlated with deaths of despair at the metropolitan scale.

Here, I run models predicting the age-adjusted rate of deaths of despair, defined as deaths from suicide, drug or alcohol poisoning, or overdose. Again, marriage rates are strongly predictive—in this case negatively related to deaths of despair. The effect is even larger than the Bachelor's degree attainment rate.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the marriage rate measures are each more important than the college attainment rate, age composition, or racial composition in predicting deaths of despair.<sup>2</sup> (see *Supplemental Table 3 in the Appendix*).

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<sup>1</sup> An increase of one standard deviation in the share of households married, predicts a -0.24 standard deviation decrease in deaths of despair. The effect size is -0.51 using the share of children living in married households, and for the Bachelor's attainment rate, the effect size is -0.16.

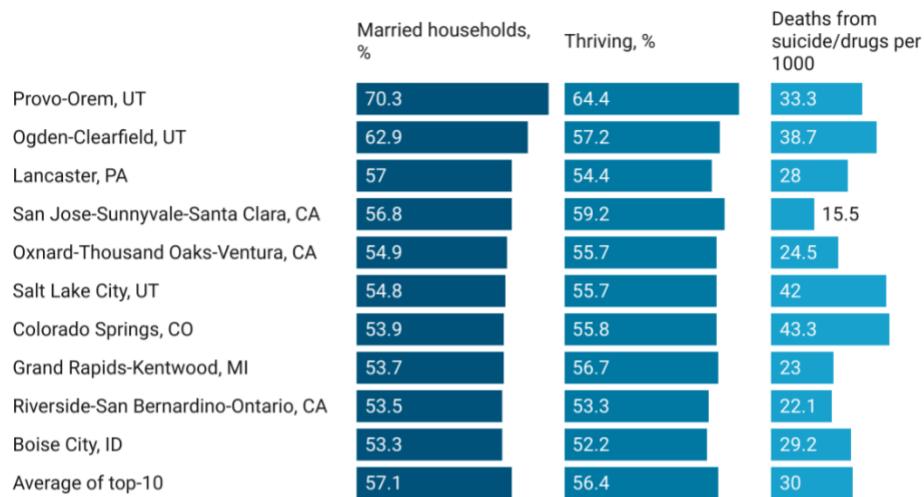
<sup>2</sup> The log of median household income was also included in an additional model predicting deaths of despair, but it was not significant using two of the three measures of the marriage rate, each of which remained significant. The inclusion of the log of income resulted in a weakly significant and negative relationship when the married household share was used, but it was weaker than the marriage share, and the latter remained significant.

In the figure below, I rank metropolitan areas by the share of households that are married for all areas with at least 500,000 residents.

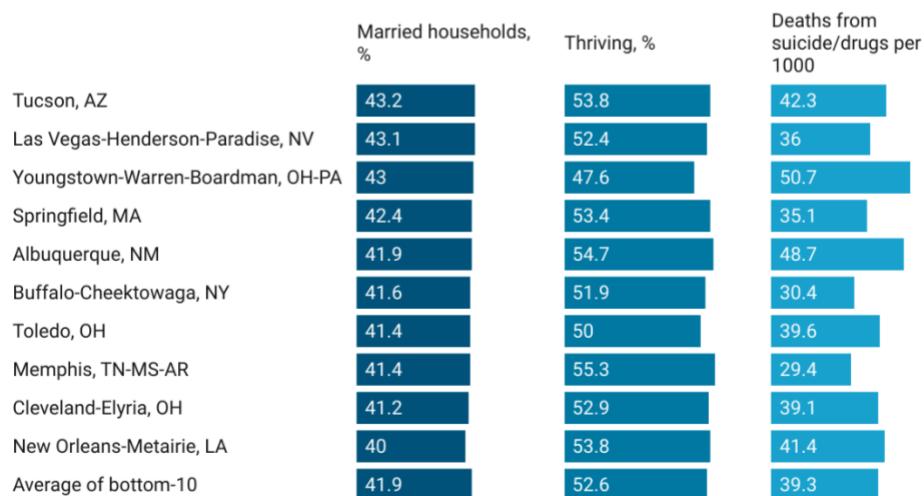
## Well-being and deaths of despair by metropolitan areas, ranked by share of households with married couple

Marriage is correlated with higher well-being and fewer deaths of despair

### Top 10



### Bottom 10



*Thriving is defined as a high score on current and anticipated evaluation of life. Deaths are age-adjusted by the CDC. Metro areas are limited to those with at least 500,000 population.*

Chart: Jonathan Rothwell • Source: Marriage data is from the U.S. Census Bureau data, 2016-2020; mortality data from CDC Wonder data, using county data from 2008-2020. Well-being data combine 2010-2019 are based on the Gallup National Health and Well-Being Index, combining data from 2010 to 2023. • Created with Datawrapper

Download this chart [here](#).

Provo, Utah, happens to have both the highest rate of subjective well-being (64.4% are thriving) and the highest household marriage rate (70%). Ogden, Utah, is second on the marriage rate (62.9%) and also enjoys a high rate of well-being, as does the San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA, metropolitan area and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Among the top 10 areas for marriage per household, the average share thriving in well-being is 56.4%, compared to a group average of 52.6% for the 10 areas with the lowest marriage rates per household. On this list, Cleveland and Las Vegas have well-being rates below 53%. Youngstown and Toledo have thriving rates at or under 50 percent.

One could also rank metropolitan areas by the share thriving and observe marriage rates. Doing so, I find that, after Provo, Urban Honolulu has the second highest well-being (62.2% are thriving), among metropolitan areas with at least 500,000 people, followed by Washington DC (61.9%), Austin (60.7%), San Jose (59.2) and San Francisco (58.8%). As they attract many young workers, these places do not have especially high percentages of households who are married, but they score very high on the percentage of children raised in married households (72% to 78%).

## Conclusion

Marriage is a legal and cultural institution that, at least in part, symbolizes, establishes, celebrates, and cements a profoundly intimate partnership between adults. Identifying the precise causal effect of marriage on mental health or well-being through statistical analysis is likely beyond the capacity of social science.

Yet, it is relatively easy to observe that married people enjoy higher well-being, when asked to reflect upon their life. They evaluate their current and future lives as being closer to the best possible life. They are much less likely to be struggling or suffering in their well-being, as defined by [Gallup](#). Likewise, communities are happier when more married people live there and when children are being raised in married households. At the individual level, marriage has a larger predicted effect on wellbeing than other common demographic variables, except household income, which marriage usually [raises](#). At the MSA scale, marriage is not as predictive of subjective well-being as educational attainment, but accounts for much of the variation and is more important than income, political orientation, race, and religious adherence. Marriage rates are more predictive of metro area deaths of despair than these other factors. In sum, in America at least, it looks like well-being ebbs and flows with marriage.

## Appendix: Supplemental Tables

### Methodological Note

Well-being data are based on the Gallup National Health and Wellbeing Index (2009-2020) and the Gallup panel (2020-2023). Methodological details are described in Witters and Bayne (2024). The data were collected across studies and modes of data collection. The means of data collection (e.g., mail/web versus phone) can result in differing estimates for some metrics in randomized large population polling. Gallup has extensively studied these effects and has determined that Life Evaluation (% thriving) is comparable across modes, thus effectively preserving past trending or combination of data without need for an adjustment due to the change in mode.

### Contents

Supplemental Table 1. Results of OLS model, regressing a binary measure of thriving on categorical variables for marital status, sex, age, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity in pooled 2020-2023 sample and separately by sex and by race/ethnic group. Data are from the Gallup Panel.

Supplemental Table 2. Results of OLS model, regressing a binary measure of thriving on categorical variables for marital status, sex, age, educational attainment, political party affiliation, religious adherence, and race/ethnicity in pooled 2020-2023 sample. Data are from the Gallup Panel.

Supplemental Table 3. Results of OLS model at the metropolitan and micropolitan level, regressing the percentage of adults who are thriving in well-being (columns 1-3) on the share of households who are married, or the share of adults aged 35 to 54 who are married, or the share of children living in married households. Data are from the Gallup Panel, U.S. Census Bureau, and other sources described at the bottom of the table. Columns 4 to 6 replace well-being with the age-adjusted mortality rate from suicide deaths, deaths from alcohol, and drug poisoning, as reported by CDC Wonder, using county-level data aggregated from 2008 to 2020.

**Supplemental Table 1. OLS Regression of thriving in well-being on marital status and demographic characteristics, 2020-2023**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
married	0.197*** (58.763)	0.197*** (43.558)	0.197*** (39.120)	0.106*** (2.655)	0.209*** (7.239)	0.130*** (10.660)	0.220*** (19.435)	0.184*** (13.206)	0.205*** (51.124)
separated	0.029*** (2.644)	0.064*** (4.243)	-0.007 (-0.424)	-0.165* (-1.678)	0.023 (0.214)	0.004 (0.121)	0.092** (2.417)	0.001 (0.023)	0.019 (1.363)
divorced	0.064*** (13.047)	0.069*** (9.601)	0.060*** (8.756)	0.017 (0.244)	0.011 (0.184)	0.027 (1.606)	0.127*** (7.072)	0.160*** (7.626)	0.050*** (8.642)
widowed	0.112*** (17.594)	0.099*** (8.913)	0.111*** (13.523)	0.102 (1.124)	0.377*** (2.601)	0.098*** (3.926)	0.157*** (5.302)	0.215*** (7.803)	0.102*** (14.458)
domestic partnership	0.072*** (13.619)	0.114*** (15.157)	0.038*** (5.042)	0.261*** (3.515)	-0.020 (-0.384)	0.056** (2.218)	0.089*** (5.271)	0.073*** (2.991)	0.073*** (12.135)
male	0.029*** (12.667)			0.079** (2.471)	0.032 (1.392)	0.012 (1.242)	0.059*** (7.214)	0.043*** (4.149)	0.023*** (9.172)
age 21-25	-0.108*** (-3.195)	-0.028 (-0.563)	-0.174*** (-3.740)	0.172 (0.775)	-0.137 (-1.187)	0.112 (0.838)	0.069 (0.658)	-0.224** (-2.464)	-0.192*** (-4.217)
age 25-29	-0.130*** (-3.992)	-0.053 (-1.098)	-0.187*** (-4.211)	-0.346 (-1.413)	-0.060 (-0.545)	0.139 (1.120)	0.041 (0.405)	-0.287*** (-3.448)	-0.229*** (-5.182)
age 30-34	-0.116*** (-3.578)	-0.054 (-1.112)	-0.159*** (-3.607)	-0.034 (-0.188)	-0.026 (-0.235)	0.209* (1.697)	0.085 (0.834)	-0.317*** (-3.853)	-0.228*** (-5.175)
age 35-39	-0.140*** (-4.311)	-0.091* (-1.873)	-0.169*** (-3.829)	-0.123 (-0.689)	-0.082 (-0.714)	0.195 (1.579)	0.049 (0.484)	-0.284*** (-3.449)	-0.250*** (-5.683)
age 40-44	-0.152*** (-4.641)	-0.074 (-1.525)	-0.209*** (-4.717)	-0.131 (-0.696)	-0.140 (-1.162)	0.151 (1.223)	0.103 (1.007)	-0.221*** (-2.672)	-0.282*** (-6.385)
age 45-49	-0.142*** (-4.360)	-0.087* (-1.786)	-0.180*** (-4.050)	0.275 (1.534)	-0.177 (-1.492)	0.188 (1.525)	0.062 (0.608)	-0.211** (-2.559)	-0.261*** (-5.910)
age 50-54	-0.110*** (-3.372)	-0.039 (-0.805)	-0.161*** (-3.638)	-0.114 (-0.636)	-0.137 (-1.152)	0.249** (2.025)	0.071 (0.691)	-0.280*** (-3.419)	-0.221*** (-5.005)
age 55-59	-0.105*** (-3.207)	-0.025 (-0.515)	-0.167*** (-3.769)	0.208 (1.153)	-0.149 (-1.113)	0.223* (1.813)	0.145 (1.416)	-0.212*** (-2.579)	-0.231*** (-5.235)
age 60-64	-0.080** (-2.458)	-0.010 (-0.205)	-0.132*** (-2.978)	-0.012 (-0.068)	-0.076 (-0.578)	0.318*** (2.580)	0.099 (0.971)	-0.270*** (-3.307)	-0.202*** (-4.581)
age 65-69	-0.113*** (-3.455)	-0.050 (-1.027)	-0.157*** (-3.540)	0.028 (0.154)	-0.094 (-0.747)	0.273** (2.214)	0.148 (1.437)	-0.383*** (-4.694)	-0.237*** (-5.380)
age 70-74	-0.127*** (-3.880)	-0.048 (-0.982)	-0.184*** (-4.165)	0.085 (0.459)	-0.228* (-1.759)	0.257** (2.072)	0.160 (1.555)	-0.318*** (-3.831)	-0.255*** (-5.774)
age 75-79	-0.180*** (-5.477)	-0.127*** (-2.605)	-0.219*** (-4.923)	-0.029 (-0.149)	0.022 (0.159)	0.216* (1.737)	0.141 (1.344)	-0.389*** (-4.625)	-0.312*** (-7.059)

age 80-84	-0.164*** (-4.939)	-0.093* (-1.891)	-0.215*** (-4.791)	0.010 (0.050)	-0.074 (-0.374)	0.290** (2.297)	0.037 (0.337)	-0.355*** (-4.040)	-0.293*** (-6.587)
age 85 or older	-0.198*** (-5.875)	-0.162*** (-3.228)	-0.221*** (-4.844)		-0.145 (-0.852)	0.196 (1.454)	-0.077 (-0.657)	-0.466*** (-4.938)	-0.313*** (-6.970)
education: less than high school	-0.049*** (-5.803)	-0.051*** (-4.882)	-0.047*** (-3.348)	0.178** (2.489)	-0.215 (-1.589)	-0.287*** (-4.290)	0.001 (0.018)	-0.150*** (-5.316)	-0.035*** (-3.916)
education: trace school	-0.011* (-1.793)	-0.032*** (-3.836)	0.014 (1.398)	0.120* (1.691)	-0.079 (-0.731)	0.065** (2.206)	-0.004 (-0.187)	-0.059** (-2.425)	-0.019** (-2.562)
education: some college	-0.003 (-0.739)	0.001 (0.216)	-0.005 (-0.856)	0.053 (1.222)	0.001 (0.034)	-0.007 (-0.406)	0.049*** (3.594)	-0.025* (-1.725)	-0.012*** (-2.997)
education: Associates' degree	0.046*** (11.067)	0.055*** (9.549)	0.038*** (6.218)	0.206*** (4.054)	0.022 (0.442)	0.016 (0.829)	0.123*** (7.840)	0.002 (0.125)	0.036*** (7.544)
education: Bachelor's	0.092*** (24.180)	0.107*** (20.291)	0.081*** (14.474)	0.254*** (4.832)	0.032 (0.910)	0.031* (1.676)	0.168*** (11.853)	0.014 (0.794)	0.093*** (21.484)
education: Some post-graduate	0.081*** (13.355)	0.094*** (10.406)	0.073*** (8.800)	0.136* (1.716)	0.099* (1.929)	0.085*** (3.503)	0.132*** (6.384)	0.074*** (2.681)	0.073*** (10.177)
education: Graduate degree	0.132*** (34.153)	0.150*** (26.999)	0.119*** (21.685)	0.217*** (4.061)	0.005 (0.142)	0.157*** (8.737)	0.194*** (13.370)	0.141*** (8.091)	0.113*** (25.187)
RACE==American Indian or Native Hawaiian	-0.063*** (-3.436)	-0.026 (-1.141)	-0.110*** (-3.714)						
RACE==Asian	0.025* (1.951)	0.033* (1.924)	0.018 (0.893)						
RACE==Black	0.058*** (15.061)	0.040*** (6.916)	0.070*** (13.344)						
RACE==Hispanic	0.019*** (5.769)	0.031*** (6.713)	0.008 (1.578)						
RACE==Multiracial	-0.038*** (-6.502)	-0.027*** (-3.571)	-0.054*** (-5.824)						
HH income \$12K to <\$24k									
HH income \$24k to <\$36K									
HH income \$36k to <\$48K									
HH income \$48k to <\$60K									
HH income \$60k to <\$90K									
HH income \$90k to <\$120K									

HH income \$120k to <\$180K

HH income \$180k to <\$240K

HH income \$240K and up

Constant	0.453*** (13.975)	0.388*** (8.063)	0.525*** (11.960)	0.226 (1.216)	0.507*** (4.752)	0.266** (2.184)	0.171* (1.688)	0.560*** (6.776)	0.572*** (13.048)
Observations	190,213	96,872	93,341	1,137	2,097	10,247	14,605	10,022	152,105
Adjusted R-squared	0.041	0.044	0.041	0.113	0.056	0.046	0.063	0.050	0.039
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sex	All	Men	Women	All	All	All	All	All	All
Race	All	All	All	American Indian	Asian	Black	Hispanic	Multiracial	White

t-statistics in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Supplemental Table 2. OLS Regression of thriving in well-being on marital status, household income, political party preference, and religious preference, 2020-2023**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
married	0.105*** (29.726)	0.183*** (54.195)	0.183*** (54.195)	0.092*** (26.034)	0.184*** (53.591)	0.091*** (25.281)
separated	0.014 (1.265)	0.022* (1.942)	0.022* (1.942)	0.006 (0.562)	0.028** (2.534)	0.009 (0.832)
divorced	0.063*** (12.829)	0.061*** (12.338)	0.061*** (12.338)	0.060*** (12.159)	0.062*** (12.391)	0.060*** (12.036)
widowed	0.099*** (15.354)	0.106*** (16.620)	0.106*** (16.620)	0.094*** (14.595)	0.104*** (16.351)	0.091*** (14.026)
domestic partnership	0.023*** (4.379)	0.073*** (13.874)	0.073*** (13.874)	0.025*** (4.768)	0.087*** (15.975)	0.037*** (6.815)
Democrat Party member		-0.117*** (-39.704)	-0.117*** (-39.704)	-0.116*** (-39.386)	-0.099*** (-32.033)	-0.095*** (-30.689)
Independent or third-party supporter		-0.109*** (-36.151)	-0.109*** (-36.151)	-0.101*** (-33.164)	-0.098*** (-31.763)	-0.089*** (-28.463)
No religious preference					-0.056*** (-20.325)	-0.064*** (-23.391)
HH income \$12K to <\$24k	0.020** (2.417)			0.020** (2.359)		0.036*** (4.269)
HH income \$24k to <\$36K	0.051*** (6.548)			0.053*** (6.750)		0.069*** (8.603)
HH income \$36k to <\$48K	0.128*** (16.265)			0.126*** (16.030)		0.139*** (17.345)
HH income \$48k to <\$60K	0.156*** (20.389)			0.154*** (20.085)		0.169*** (21.553)
HH income \$60k to <\$90K	0.224*** (30.506)			0.220*** (29.999)		0.232*** (30.810)
HH income \$90k to <\$120K	0.275*** (36.594)			0.272*** (36.122)		0.285*** (37.049)
HH income \$120k to <\$180K	0.338***			0.336***		0.351***

	(44.306)		(44.049)		(44.959)
HH income \$180k to <\$240K	0.361*** (42.154)		0.364*** (42.537)		0.378*** (43.245)
HH income \$240K and up	0.424*** (48.393)		0.425*** (48.589)		0.441*** (49.438)
male	0.009*** (3.810)	0.025*** (11.004)	0.025*** (11.004)	0.004* (1.760)	0.027*** (11.430)
age 21-25	-0.065* (-1.873)	-0.102*** (-3.039)	-0.102*** (-3.039)	-0.058* (-1.669)	-0.150*** (-4.357)
age 25-29	-0.057* (-1.708)	-0.126*** (-3.875)	-0.126*** (-3.875)	-0.051 (-1.538)	-0.145*** (-4.382)
age 30-34	-0.059* (-1.767)	-0.112*** (-3.459)	-0.112*** (-3.459)	-0.054 (-1.618)	-0.133*** (-4.009)
age 35-39	-0.092*** (-2.738)	-0.138*** (-4.253)	-0.138*** (-4.253)	-0.088*** (-2.633)	-0.164*** (-4.952)
age 40-44	-0.118*** (-3.517)	-0.153*** (-4.698)	-0.153*** (-4.698)	-0.118*** (-3.527)	-0.182*** (-5.478)
age 45-49	-0.117*** (-3.474)	-0.145*** (-4.466)	-0.145*** (-4.466)	-0.118*** (-3.534)	-0.173*** (-5.227)
age 50-54	-0.094*** (-2.796)	-0.119*** (-3.669)	-0.119*** (-3.669)	-0.101*** (-3.022)	-0.150*** (-4.539)
age 55-59	-0.082** (-2.458)	-0.118*** (-3.645)	-0.118*** (-3.645)	-0.094*** (-2.817)	-0.154*** (-4.641)
age 60-64	-0.043 (-1.276)	-0.089*** (-2.744)	-0.089*** (-2.744)	-0.049 (-1.479)	-0.125*** (-3.766)
age 65-69	-0.055* (-1.655)	-0.123*** (-3.795)	-0.123*** (-3.795)	-0.063* (-1.876)	-0.160*** (-4.824)
age 70-74	-0.057* (-1.686)	-0.131*** (-4.034)	-0.131*** (-4.034)	-0.059* (-1.769)	-0.167*** (-5.034)
age 75-79	-0.109*** (-3.226)	-0.189*** (-5.780)	-0.189*** (-5.780)	-0.116*** (-3.458)	-0.229*** (-6.875)
					-0.161*** (-4.711)

	-0.081**	-0.172***	-0.172***	-0.088***	-0.213***	-0.133***
age 80-84	(-2.366)	(-5.227)	(-5.227)	(-2.587)	(-6.333)	(-3.847)
age 85 or older	-0.116***	-0.212***	-0.212***	-0.129***	-0.253***	-0.176***
education: less than high school	(-3.357)	(-6.320)	(-6.320)	(-3.745)	(-7.391)	(-4.994)
education: trace school	-0.019**	-0.049***	-0.049***	-0.023***	-0.045***	-0.018**
education: some college	(-2.206)	(-5.803)	(-5.803)	(-2.637)	(-5.262)	(-2.074)
education: Associates' degree	-0.035***	-0.006	-0.006	-0.030***	-0.006	-0.031***
education: Bachelor's	(-5.477)	(-0.870)	(-0.870)	(-4.667)	(-0.979)	(-4.832)
education: Some post-graduate	-0.031***	0.011***	0.011***	-0.018***	0.009**	-0.020***
education: Graduate degree	(-8.652)	(3.017)	(3.017)	(-5.057)	(2.348)	(-5.493)
RACE==American Indian or Native Hawaiian	0.011**	0.059***	0.059***	0.022***	0.059***	0.022***
RACE==Asian	(2.508)	(14.105)	(14.105)	(5.324)	(13.980)	(5.265)
RACE==Black	0.014***	0.113***	0.113***	0.035***	0.110***	0.032***
RACE==Hispanic	(3.645)	(29.310)	(29.310)	(8.755)	(28.260)	(7.902)
RACE==Multiracial	0.005	0.104***	0.104***	0.026***	0.102***	0.025***
Constant	(0.741)	(17.069)	(17.069)	(4.298)	(16.639)	(4.000)
Observations	(6.992)	(40.385)	(40.385)	(13.320)	(39.613)	(12.667)
	(-1.863)	(-3.503)	(-3.503)	(-1.953)	(-2.892)	(-1.472)
	(-0.034*)	-0.064***	-0.064***	-0.036*	-0.055***	-0.028
	(-0.225)	(3.022)	(3.022)	(0.731)	(3.320)	(1.106)
	0.070***	0.087***	0.087***	0.098***	0.080***	0.089***
	(18.007)	(22.189)	(22.189)	(24.918)	(19.991)	(22.002)
	0.025***	0.026***	0.026***	0.032***	0.023***	0.029***
	(7.693)	(7.965)	(7.965)	(9.640)	(6.814)	(8.523)
	(-0.029***)	-0.032***	-0.032***	-0.025***	-0.037***	-0.031***
	(-4.966)	(-5.485)	(-5.485)	(-4.183)	(-6.261)	(-5.219)
	0.289***	0.532***	0.532***	0.365***	0.569***	0.396***
	(8.574)	(16.460)	(16.460)	(10.857)	(17.291)	(11.505)

Adjusted R-squared	0.078	0.050	0.050	0.087	0.053	0.090
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sex	All	All	All	All	All	All
Race	All	All	All	All	All	All

t-statistics in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Supplemental Table 3. OLS metropolitan and micropolitan area regression of percent thriving and deaths of despair mortality rate on marriage rate, using various measures**

	Percent thriving in well-being	Percent thriving in well-being	Percent thriving in wellbeing	Age-adjusted deaths of despair rate	Age-adjusted deaths of despair rate	Age-adjusted deaths of despair rate
	1	2	3	4	5	6
percent of households with married couple	0.185*** (7.475)			-52.593*** (-6.056)		
percent of adults 35-54 who are married		0.112*** (4.293)			-77.611*** (-8.863)	
percent of children living in married household			0.072*** (3.032)			-75.862*** (-9.528)
Black population share	0.068*** (5.167)	0.054*** (3.928)	0.056*** (3.537)	-5.783 (-1.247)	-11.852** (-2.580)	-22.679*** (-4.290)
Hispanic population share	0.009 (0.683)	0.003 (0.223)	0.002 (0.109)	-4.764 (-1.060)	-5.493 (-1.252)	-9.270** (-1.990)
Non-Hispanic white population share	-0.056*** (-4.724)	-0.067*** (-5.688)	-0.068*** (-5.393)	17.126*** (4.142)	18.897*** (4.733)	16.242*** (3.854)
Religious adherence rate	0.001 (0.136)	-0.001 (-0.108)	-0.000 (-0.005)	-7.275** (-2.412)	-5.868** (-1.986)	-6.412** (-2.031)
Trump vote share	0.002 (0.144)	0.015 (1.173)	0.020 (1.532)	14.292*** (3.329)	17.817*** (4.249)	18.680*** (4.206)
population (in logs)	-0.002*** (-3.158)	-0.003*** (-3.727)	-0.003*** (-3.479)	1.166*** (4.603)	1.307*** (5.290)	1.285*** (4.810)
Bachelor's or higher attainment rate	0.269*** (16.474)	0.268*** (14.848)	0.267*** (13.011)	-19.364*** (-3.378)	-4.057 (-0.667)	6.452 (0.938)
population share 15-19 years	0.218** (2.238)	0.194* (1.871)	0.302*** (2.852)	-44.739 (-1.308)	24.299 (0.694)	-58.849* (-1.658)
population share 20 to 34	0.110** (0.110)	-0.011 (-0.011)	-0.003 (-0.003)	-49.281*** (-49.281)	-13.540 (-13.540)	-15.273 (-15.273)

	(2.126)	(-0.215)	(-0.062)	(-2.713)	(-0.800)	(-0.846)
population share 35 to 44	0.599*** (7.443)	0.683*** (8.413)	0.701*** (8.103)	66.233** (2.343)	76.914*** (2.811)	82.652*** (2.845)
population share 45 to 54	-0.798*** (-7.879)	-0.852*** (-8.221)	-0.822*** (-7.398)	-174.842*** (-4.908)	-146.155*** (-4.184)	-161.218*** (-4.324)
population share 55 to 64	0.218* (1.697)	0.032 (0.247)	0.067 (0.481)	88.113* (1.949)	163.163*** (3.708)	117.560** (2.508)
Constant	0.369*** (9.528)	0.456*** (12.317)	0.453*** (11.252)	52.799*** (3.883)	33.841*** (2.709)	51.930*** (3.845)
Number of metropolitan or micropolitan areas	915	915	785	915	915	785
Adjusted R-squared	0.713	0.702	0.707	0.479	0.501	0.523

t-statistics in parentheses, \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. The thriving data are aggregated from Gallup using respondent zip codes for the years 2010-2023.

Deaths of despair data are measured from 2008 to 2020. Election data are from 2020 Tony McGovern via Github:

[https://github.com/tonmcg/US\\_County\\_Level\\_Election\\_Results\\_08-20](https://github.com/tonmcg/US_County_Level_Election_Results_08-20); Religious adherence data are from Grammich et al 2022. Other data are from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2016-2020.

## References

Clifford Grammich, Erica Dollhopf, et al., "2020 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Adherents Study," Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2022.

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