



# **The Scouting Edge: A Study of Ethics & Character in America**





## The Scout Oath

On my honor I will do my best  
To do my duty to God and my country  
and to obey the Scout Law;  
To help other people at all times;  
To keep myself physically strong,  
mentally awake, and morally straight.

## The Scout Law

### A Scout is:

**TRUSTWORTHY.** Tell the truth and keep promises. People can depend on you.

**LOYAL.** Show that you care about your family, friends, Scout leaders, school, and country.

**HELPFUL.** Volunteer to help others without expecting a reward.

**FRIENDLY.** Be a friend to everyone, even people who are very different from you.

**COURTEOUS.** Be polite to everyone and always use good manners.

**KIND.** Treat others as you want to be treated. Never harm or kill any living thing without good reason.

**OBEDIENT.** Follow the rules of your family, school, and pack. Obey the laws of your community and country.

**CHEERFUL.** Look for the bright side of life. Cheerfully do tasks that come your way. Try to help others be happy.

**THRIFTY.** Work to pay your own way. Try not to be wasteful. Use time, food, supplies, and natural resources wisely.

**BRAVE.** Face difficult situations even when you feel afraid. Do what you think is right despite what others might be doing or saying.

**CLEAN.** Keep your body and mind fit. Help keep your home and community clean.

**REVERENT.** Be reverent toward God. Be faithful in your religious duties. Respect the beliefs of others.

# The Scouting Edge: A Study of Ethics & Character in America

## Introduction

As society changes, American values continue to be influenced by technology, media, and politics. Yet, one thing is constant: The enduring value of Scouting, which continues to give youth an edge in life and places them on a path toward success.

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has collaborated with The Harris Poll to delve into the ethical and character dimensions of Americans, comparing and contrasting Scouting vs. non-Scouting populations. The insights gained are instrumental in understanding the evolving ethos of both the young and the old.

## Research Objectives

This study is designed to capture a snapshot of the attitudes and trends that shape American society and the Scouting organization. This study strives to:

1. Examine the ethics and character of Americans — young and old — to see if values have changed over time.
2. Determine how Scouting has influenced the values of adults over their lifetime and the values of youth members who are Scouts.
3. Build upon prior research to better understand societal trends that will impact the organization, including the values of women/girls and LGBTQ members as well as critical topics in politics and environmental conservation.





## Key Findings

Americans report a wide satisfaction gap between their personal lives and the state of the country/world. Despite this, Americans express general pride in living in the USA, and several key ideals bind people together.

- Hard work is a shared “American” and “Personal” value.
- There is strong agreement that civic duties such as voting and fighting for our country are important – those who can do these ... should.
- Americans are overwhelmingly positive about what lies ahead; at least 7 in 10 adults and youth share feelings of hopefulness, optimism, or excitement about their future.
- More than half of Americans report that the values instilled in them growing up match the current values of most Americans today.
- Parents play a critical role in instilling values in their children, leading to a strong consensus that older people should be respected.
- Reverence continues to be relevant to Americans today as more than 7 in 10 Americans claim a primary religion, although fewer report attending religious services regularly.
- A strong majority of Americans report a belief in God or a higher power, and they connect with something bigger than themselves.
- Selflessness and kindness towards others are celebrated and viewed as important components of being a good citizen.

## The Scouting Edge...

The connection is clear between Scouting and the perception that Scouts and alumni act ethically and morally in their attitudes and behaviors. People who are Scouts as well as those who have never been Scouts believe that Scouts and Scouting alumni are more likely than their counterparts to act in ways that are described as ethical and moral. They believe that people with an affiliation to Scouting realize benefits beyond those who have never been in Scouting.

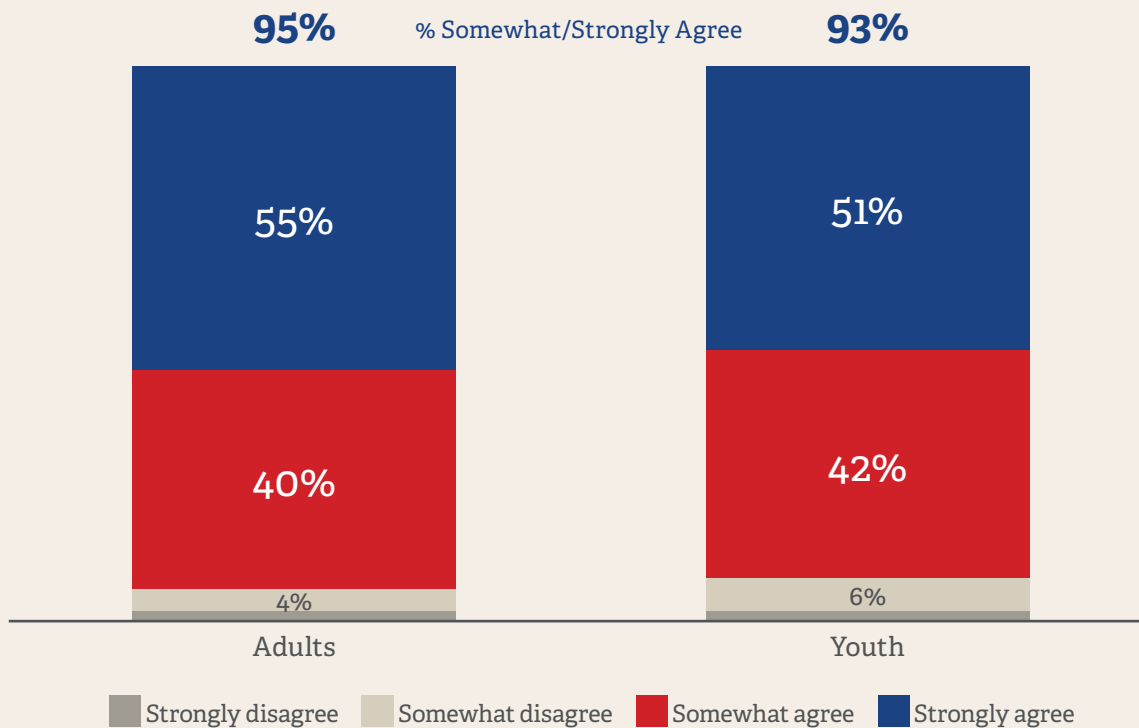
- Scouting alumni report teaching their children about values and ethics at an earlier age than their peers, and Scouts report learning about values and ethics from their parents at an earlier age than their peers.
- There is a strong link between Scouting and religion, as alumni and Scouts are more likely than their counterparts to indicate a primary religion, and alumni report attending religious services more frequently.
- Additionally, alumni and Scouts are more likely to indicate that “reverence” is both an American value and a personal value.
- Furthermore, alumni and Scouts express, in higher proportions than their counterparts, that voting in every election, volunteering time in the community, participating in youth-related organizations, and taking an active part in charitable organizations are somewhat to extremely important traits in being a good citizen.
- Scouts and alumni express a greater willingness, if necessary, to fight for their country.
- Scouts and alumni are more likely than their counterparts to identify negative behaviors as being “mostly” or “absolutely” wrong, including tossing out trash while driving, not declaring income to the IRS, exaggerating education/experience on a resume, or smoking cigarettes/vaping.
- Scouts and non-Scouts, alumni and non-alumni, agree that Scouting improves our country across a variety of vectors – in particular, they recognize the “somewhat” or “extremely” positive effects Scouting has on one’s leadership abilities and the competency to help others accomplish their goals.

# Values of Youth and Adults in America

## Parents Play a Critical Role in Teaching Values

Overall, there is strong alignment among Americans in where we learn our personal values. Greater than 9 in 10 believe that values are learned from parents. Parents play a critical role in shaping, in their children, a sense of right and wrong. They help define for their children the practices and behaviors that are important.

### Children learn their values mostly from their parents.



Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Adults n=1614; Total Youth n=1617)  
Q1040B/1040BT Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement

Not only do parents teach personal values, but they also have those discussions frequently and at an early age. Starting when their children are between the ages of 6 and 7, almost 9 in 10 parents regularly discuss values and ethics-based topics with their children...and it's having an impact! Youth recognize the emphasis parents are placing on being a good person and doing what is right. Most report regularly discussing these topics with their parents.

## The Scouting Edge...

While most parents discuss values and ethics with their children, Scouting alumni parents start these values and ethics-based discussions with their children at earlier ages than those who were never in Scouting. Scouting alumni who have children and Scouts themselves report that ethics and values discussions started during formative preschool years – between 4 and 5 years of age.

**Scouting alumni and parents of Scouts start talking to their children about values and ethics at a younger age than those who have never been in Scouting.**



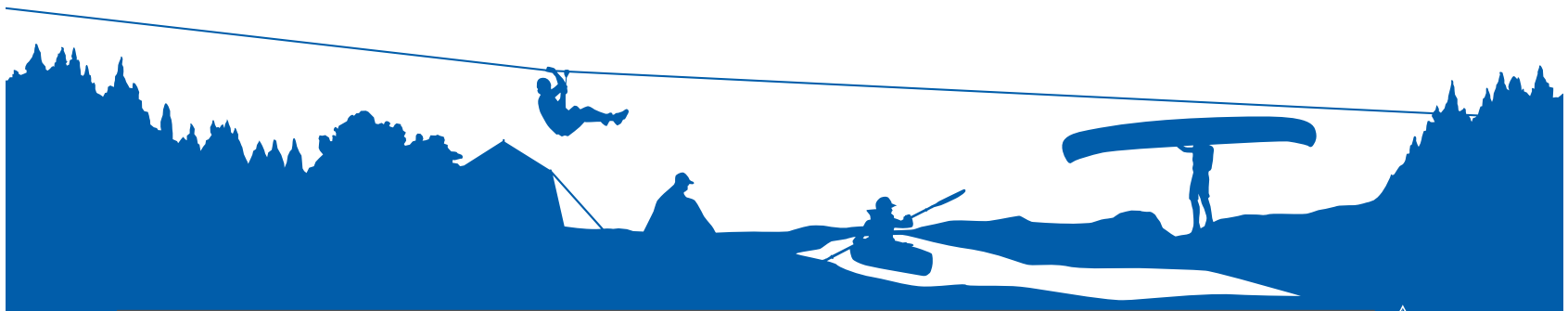
4.5 year of age  
Alumni Parents

4.7 years of age  
Scouts



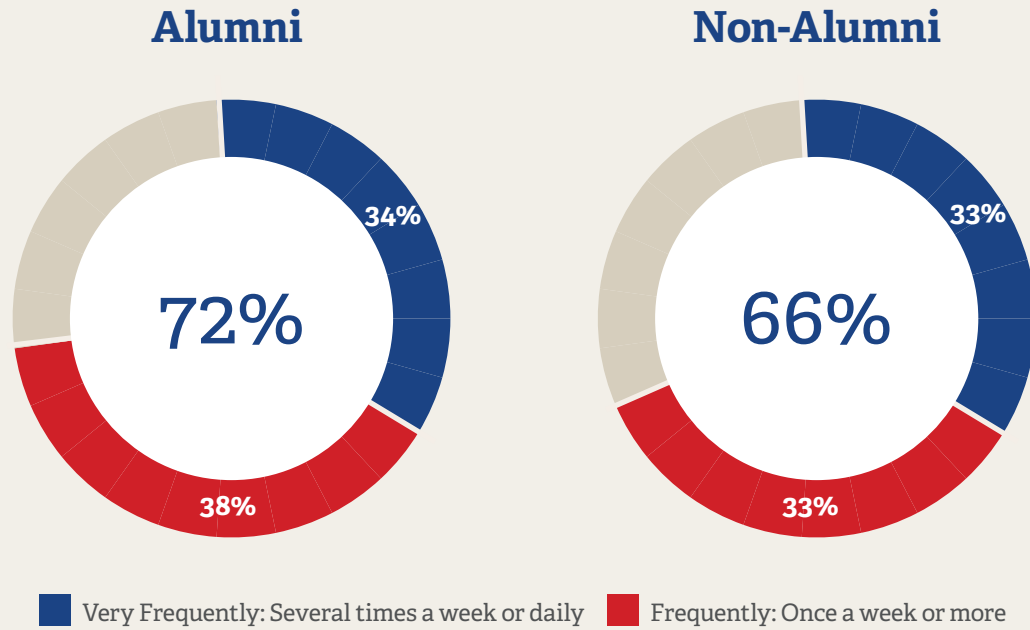
6.6 years of age  
Non-Alumni Parents

6.1 years of age  
Non-Scouts



And Scouting alumni parents report talking about values and ethics more frequently than do non-alumni parents. Scouting program activities are designed to reinforce these discussions parents are having with their children about ethical and moral behavior.

## Scouting alumni talk with their children about values and ethics more frequently than do non-alumni



Base: Parents/Guardians Who Discuss Values With Their Children (Alumni n=87; Non-Alumni-747)  
 Q1060. How old were your children when you started talking to them about values and ethics?

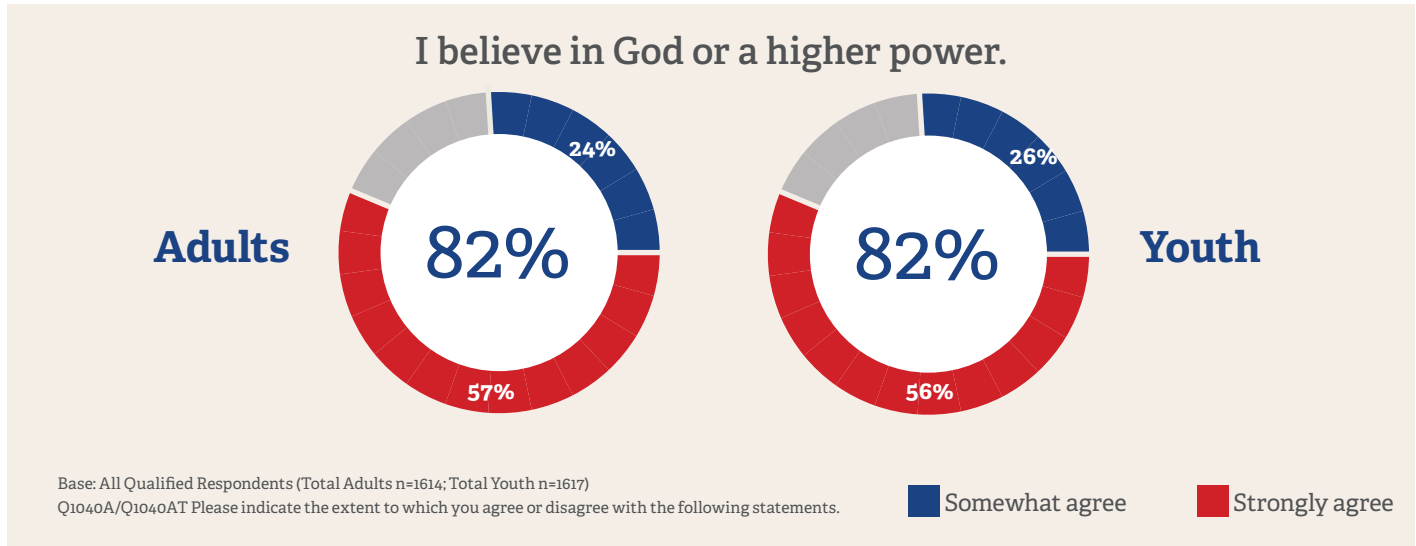
Base: Parents/Guardians (Alumni n=90; Non-Alumni n-774)  
 Q1055. How often do you talk to your children about the following?

Base: Young People Who Discuss Values/Ethics With Parents/Guardians (Scouts n=428; Non-Scouts n=1398)  
 Q1080. How old were you when your parents/guardians began talking to you about being a good person and doing what is right?

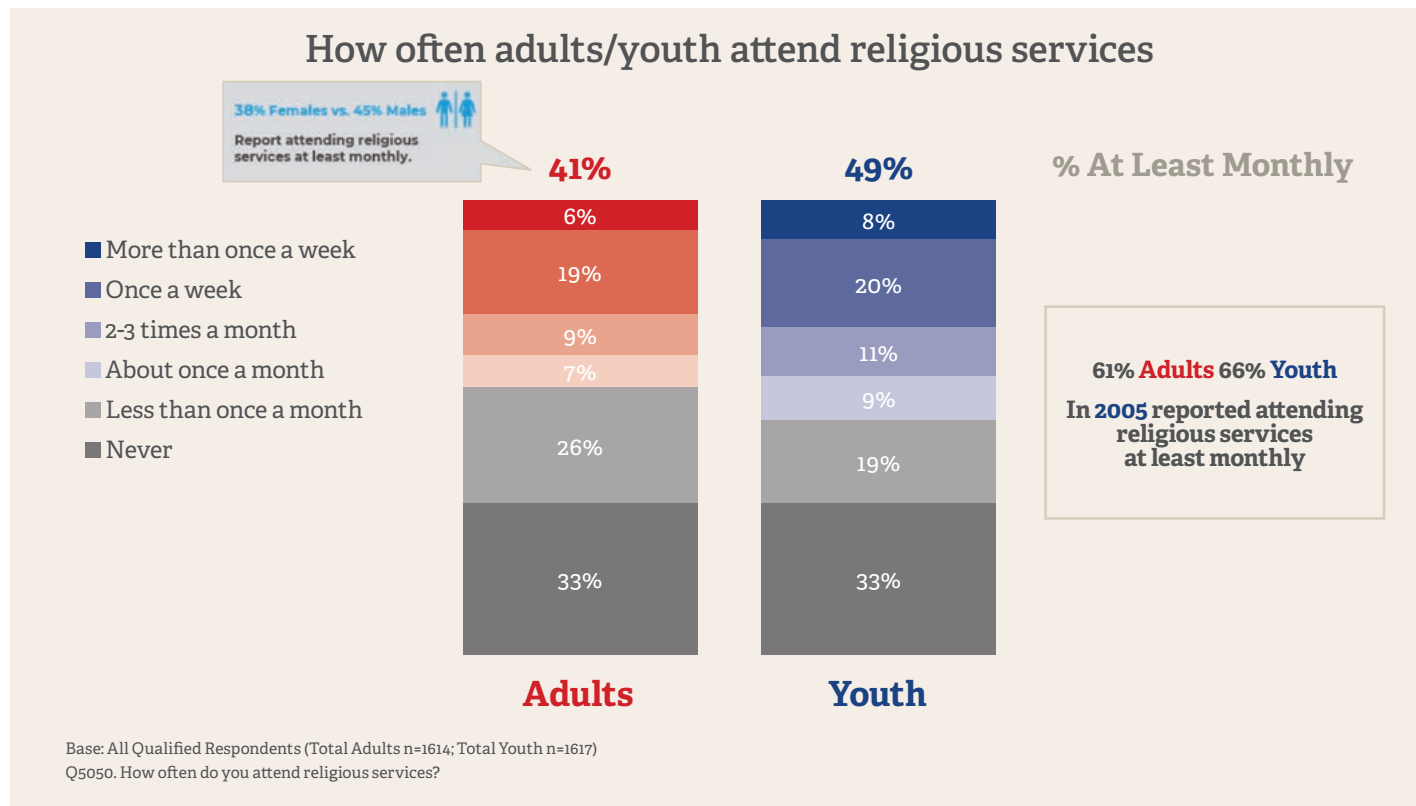


# Most Americans Believe in God or a Higher Power

Americans feel a sense of reverence and count that as a shared value, recognizing the importance of spirituality in their own lives and believing that other Americans do too. A vast majority, over 82%, of youth and adults believe in God or a higher power.



Religion continues to play a strong but diminishing role in Americans' lives. Over 82% of adults and 74% of youth consider themselves as being members of an organized religion, but their attendance at monthly religious services is low with less than half attending at least monthly. While American youth are less likely than adults to claim a religious affiliation, those that do are more likely than adults to attend regular services.

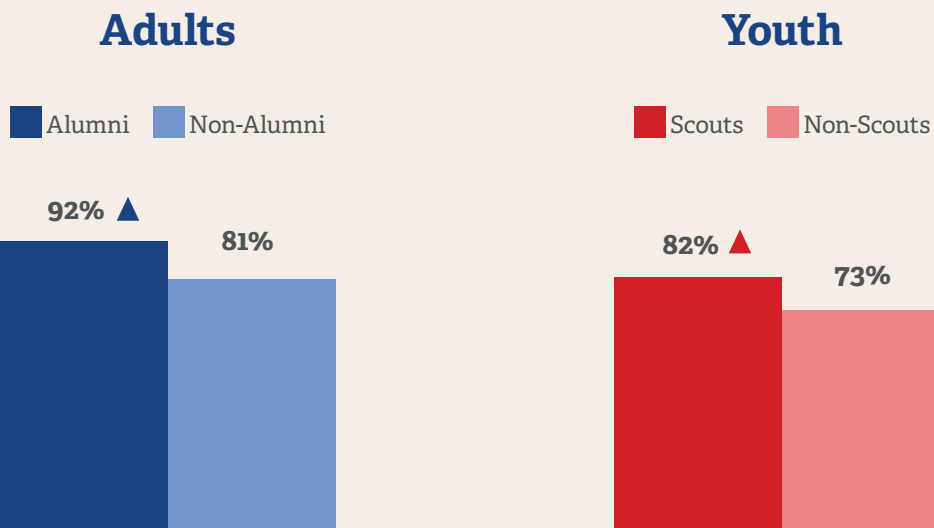




## The Scouting Edge...

Because of Scouting's Duty to God, it is not surprising there is a strong link between Scouting and religious participation. More than 92% of alumni and 82% of Scouts identify as members of an organized religion, which is significantly higher than those without any scouting experience. In addition, Scouts and alumni report attending services more frequently than the general population and vastly outperform the general population in classifying reverence as a core personal value.

Scouts and Alumni are more likely than the general population of Americans to indicate they have a primary religion.

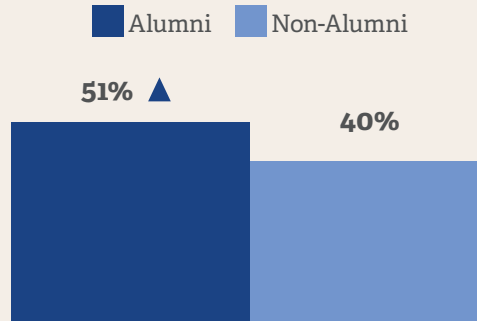


Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1305; Total Scouts n=440; Total Non-Scouts n=1432)  
Q5040. What is your primary religion, in any?



## Scouting alumni report attending religious services with greater frequency than non-alumni

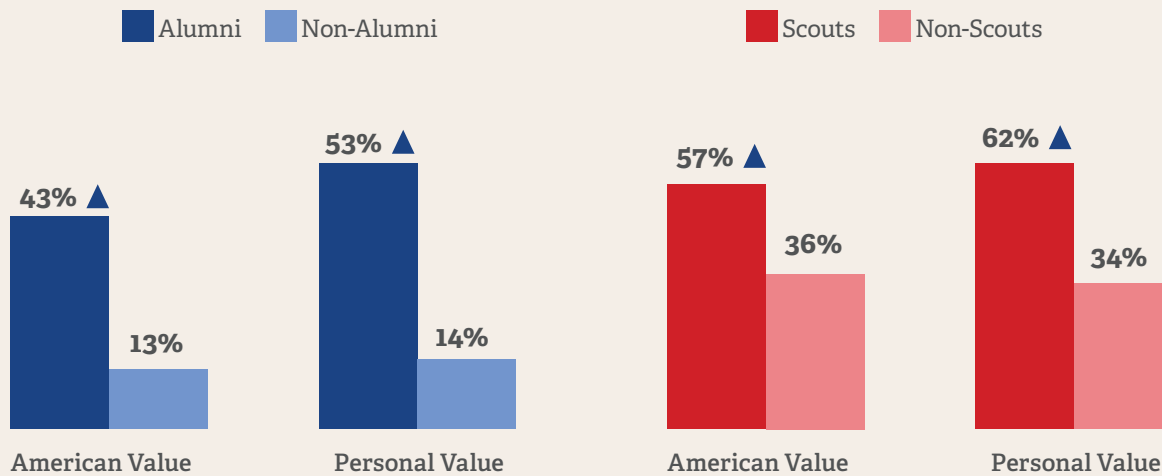
### Adults



Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1505)  
Q5051. How often do you attend religious services?

## Scouts are more likely to report reverence as a core value

Reverence as an "American" and "Personal" Value

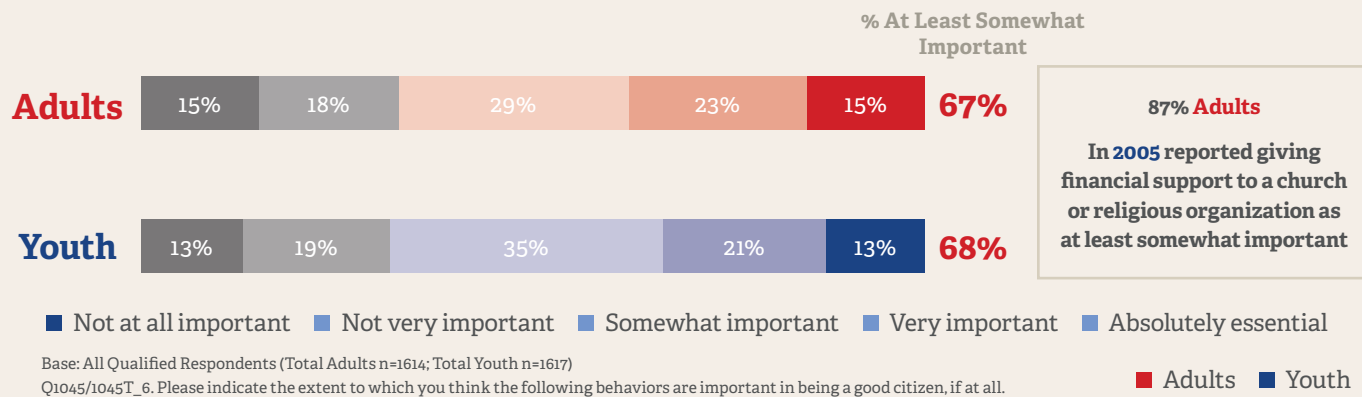


Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1305; Total Scouts n=440; Total Non-Scouts n=1432)  
Q1010/1010T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being "American" values? Please select all that apply.  
Q1035/1035T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being your values? Please select all that apply.

Although attendance at religious services may be low, most Americans (youth and adults) still feel that giving to religious organizations is a key component of being a good citizen. They value those institutions and feel it is the right thing to do to support them financially. In looking specifically at adults, almost 7 in 10 feel that their financial support is important, but that number is trending down from almost 9 in 10 as reported in 2005.

## Most Americans still feel giving to religious organizations is a key to being a good citizen

“Giving financial support to a church or religious organization is important in being a good citizen.”

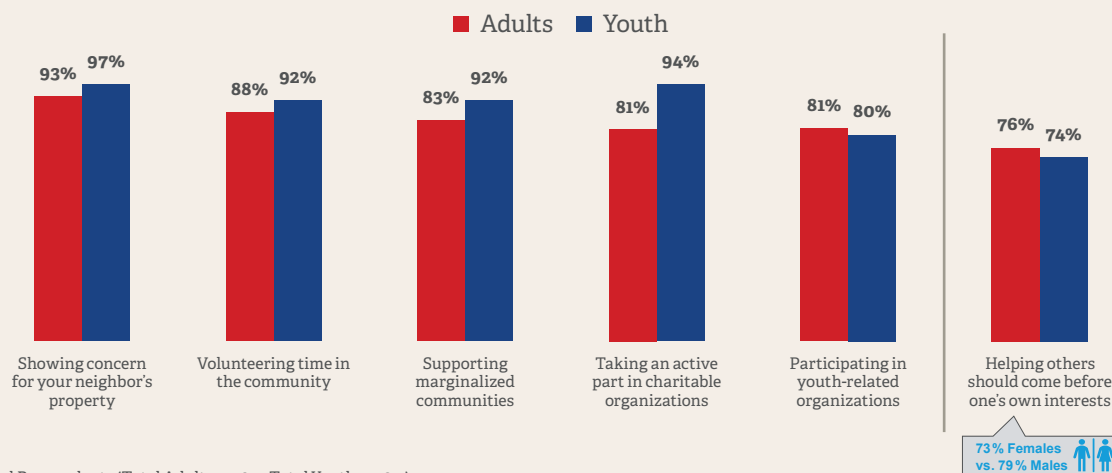


## Americans Believe in Helping Those In-Need

Helping others in the community is a core tenant of what it means to be a good citizen and a good American. Over 74% of youth and 76% of adults somewhat or strongly agree that helping others should come before one's own interests. The numbers grow even higher when asked about taking an active part in charitable organizations and supporting marginalized communities (at over 80% of adults and a whopping 90% of youth for each category). It is clear that the vast majority of youth and adults agree on the importance of caring for others.

## Selflessness and kindness towards others are celebrated and important to being a good citizen

Agreement on Involvement in Communal Activities  
% At Least Somewhat Important

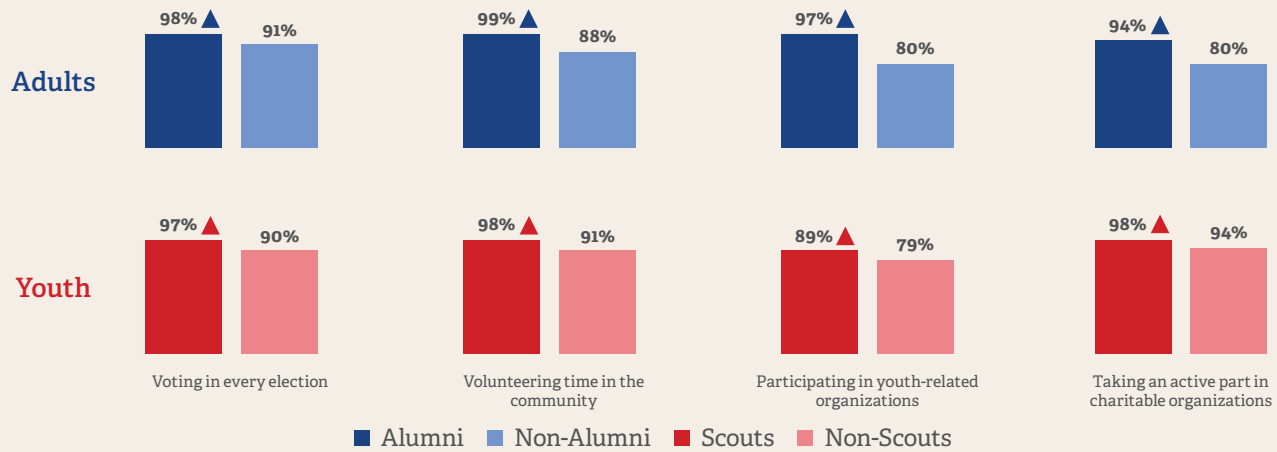


What are other components of good citizenship? Overall, Americans place a strong value on showing concern for your neighbor's property, voting in every election, and volunteering in the community. There is no question that selflessness and kindness towards others are celebrated and considered an important part of being a good citizen.

## The Scouting Edge...

Good citizenship and helping other people at all times are tenants of Scouting and are part of the program at every level. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Scouts and alumni are significantly more likely than non-Scouts youth and adults that voting in every election, volunteering in the community, and taking an active role in charitable organizations are essential for being a good citizen.

### Alumni and Scouts have stronger beliefs in communal involvement



Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1305; Total Scouts n=440; Total Non-Scouts n=1432)  
Q1045. Please indicate the extent to which you think the following behaviors are important in being a good citizen, if at all.



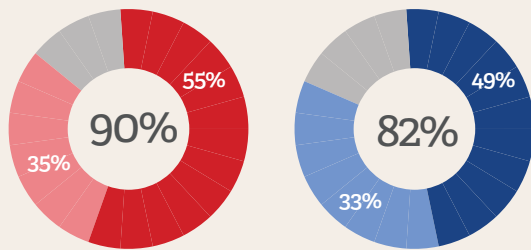
# For most Americans Honesty is the Best Policy

Americans see honesty as a critical behavior for the world, and for themselves personally. Both youth and adults overwhelmingly believe that a person should not do something they know is wrong, even if it will lead to success. Although they believe that honesty is the best policy, over 65% of adults and 71% of youth feel that telling the truth does not always bring good results in our world, indicating the pervading feeling that sometimes honesty has a price.

## Americans see honesty as a critical behavior for the world and themselves personally

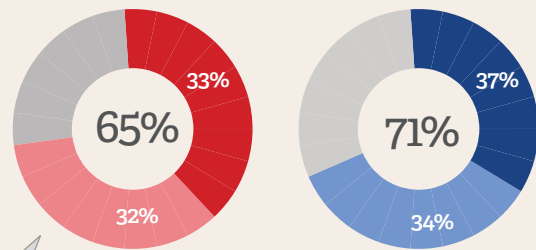
Telling the truth leads to positive outcomes.

"A person should not do something they know is wrong, even if it will lead to success."



**Adults & Youth**  
% strongly/somewhat agree

"Telling the truth does bring good results in our world."



**Adults & Youth**  
% strongly/somewhat agree

68% Females vs. 62% Males  
Report telling the truth bringing good results to our world

Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Adults n=1614; Total Youth n=1617)  
Q1040B/Q1040BT\_5. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.  
Q1040B/Q1040BT\_8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements



## The Scouting Edge...

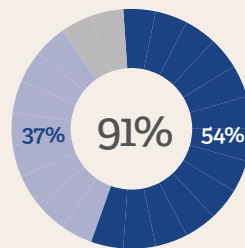
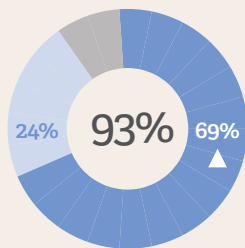
Scouts and alumni are more likely than those who have never been Scouts to strongly agree that a person should not do something they know is wrong, even if it will lead to success. In addition, Scouting alumni have a markedly better outlook on the real-world results of telling the truth, with 80% of alumni and 78% of Scouts believing that telling the truth brings good results in the world.

### Alumni see honesty as a critical behavior for the world and themselves personally

"A person should not do something they know is wrong, even if it will lead to success."

"Telling the truth does bring good results in our world."

% Somewhat/Strongly Agree



Alumni & Non-Alumni

Alumni & Non-Alumni

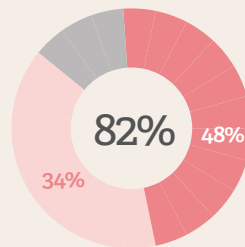
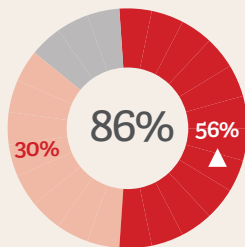
Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1305)  
 Q1040B/Q1040BT\_5. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.  
 Q1040B/Q1040BT\_8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

### Similarly, Scouts see honesty as a critical behavior for the world and themselves personally

"A person should not do something they know is wrong, even if it will lead to success."

"Telling the truth does bring good results in our world."

% Somewhat/Strongly Agree



Scouts & Non-Scouts

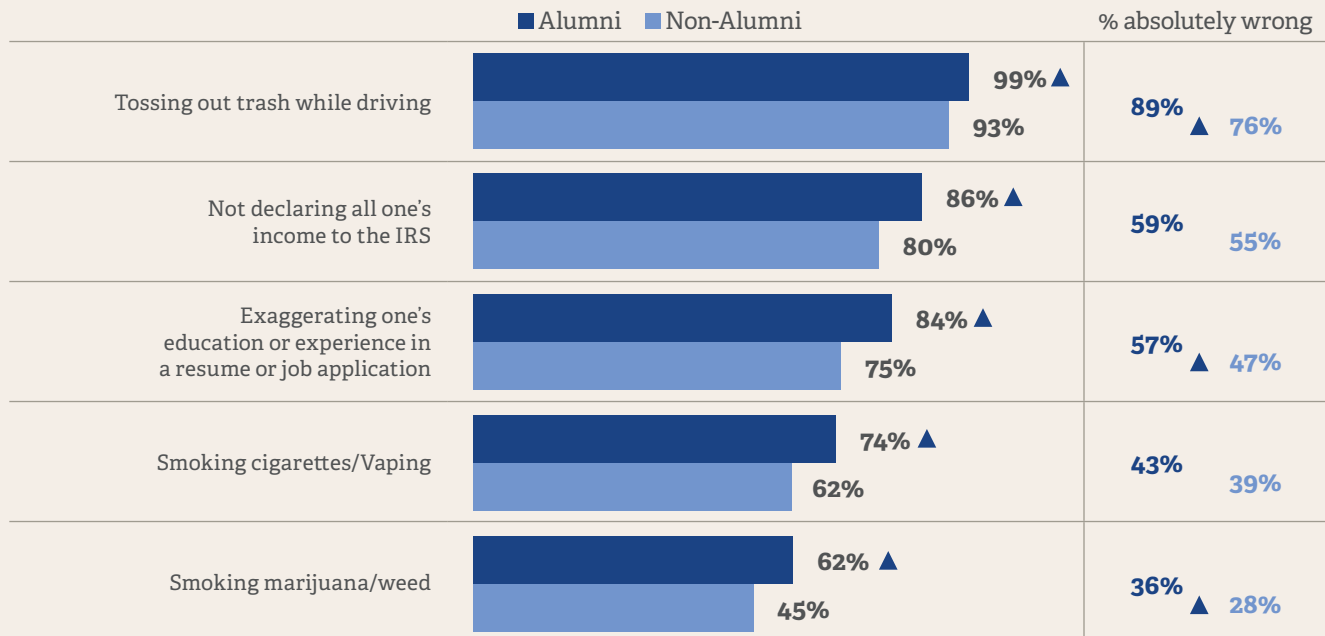
Scouts & Non-Scouts

Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Scouts n=440; Total Non-Scouts n=1422)  
 Q1040B/Q1040BT\_5. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.  
 Q1040B/Q1040BT\_8. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements

Alumni and Scouts also expressed greater recognition of unethical behaviors. From littering to exaggerating on one's resume, members of the Scouting organization are significantly more likely to recognize unethical behaviors and treat them as such indicating these behaviors are mostly or absolutely wrong.

## Alumni expressed greater recognition of unethical behaviors

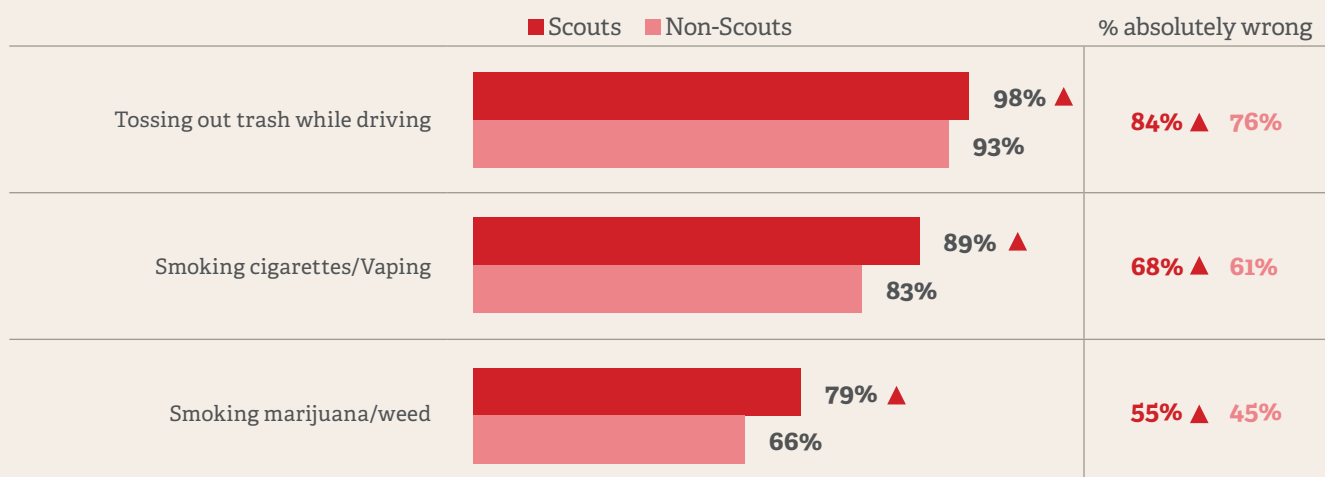
% Believe the Following Behaviors are Mostly/Absolutely wrong  
Ordered based on % of Alumni



Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1305)  
Q1050. Please indicate the extent to which you think the following behaviors are wrong, if at all.

## Similarly, Scouts were more likely to recognize unethical behaviors

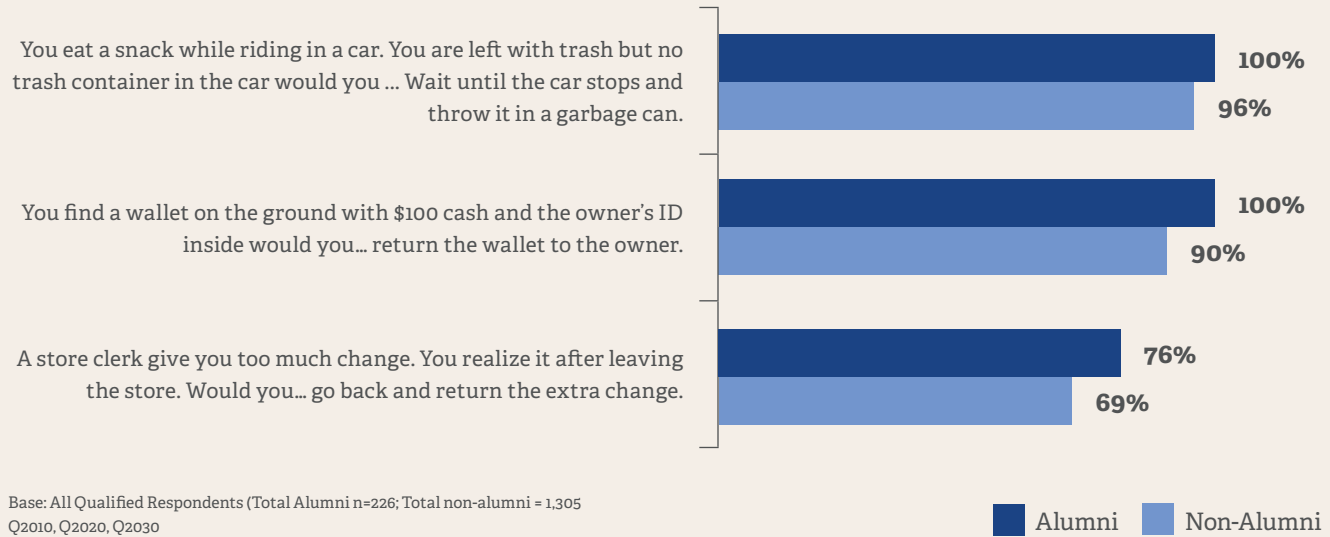
% Believe the following Behaviors are Mostly/Absolutely wrong  
Ordered based on % of Youth Scouts



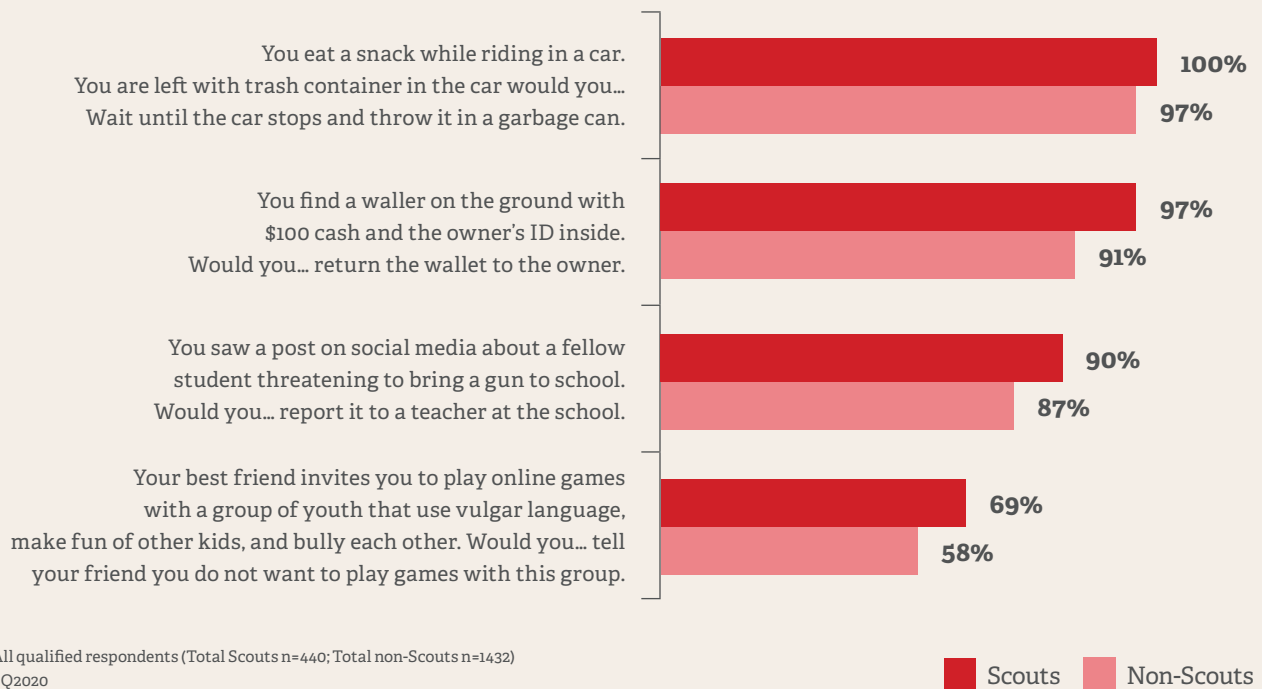
Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Scouts n=440; Total Non-Scouts n=1432)  
Q1050. Please indicate the extent to which you think the following behaviors are wrong, if at all.

When given scenarios where their honesty is challenged, alumni and Scouts were more likely than adults and youth who had never been in Scouting to say they would do the right thing, such as giving the clerk back excess change from a transaction, returning a lost wallet intact, and throwing away trash, or not engaging with youth who are bullies.

## Alumni actions are more likely to align with honesty and integrity.



## Scouts actions are also more likely to align with the values of honesty, integrity, and courage.



{Female Scouts (93%) are more likely than female non-Scouts (87%) to report the threat to bring a gun to school.

Female Scouts (76%) are more likely than female non-Scouts (61%) to tell their friend they do not want to play games with the bullying group.

Female Scouts (97%) and male Scouts (96%) were more likely than female non-Scouts (91%) or male non-Scouts (90%) to return the wallet to the owner.

Female Scouts (100%) were more likely than female non-Scouts (97%) to wait until the car stops and throw away trash in a garbage can.



## Americans Believe Hard Work and Education are the Pathways to Success

The American spirit of putting in a good hard day's work lives on in the minds of contemporary society. About 6 in 10 youth and adults recognize hard work as both a personal value and an American value. They see it as an essential trait and view it as a stronger determining factor than luck in achieving success.

### Hard work viewed as both an American and personal value

About 6 in 10 youth and adults recognize hard work as both a personal and American value.

#### Hard work "American" Values Rank

Adults	
2	Hard Work 60%

Youth	
3	Hard Work 59%

#### Hard work "Personal" Values Rank

Adults	
5	Hard Work 64%

Youth	
6	Hard Work 61%

Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Adults n=1614; Total Youth n=1617)

Q1010/1010T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being "American" values? Please select all that apply.

Q1035/1035T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being your values? Please select all that apply



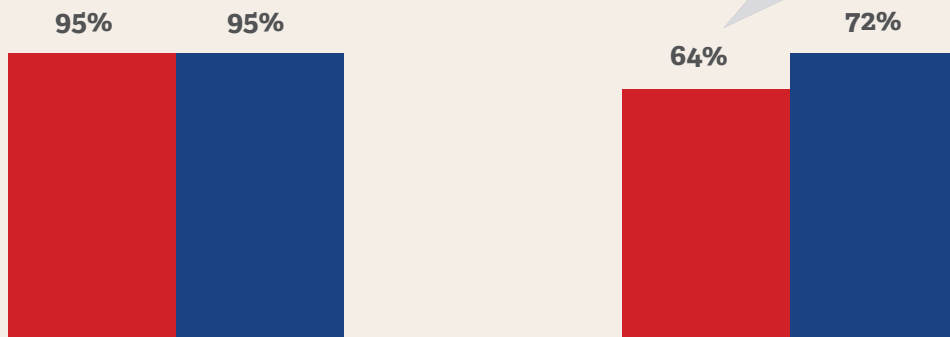
In addition to hard work, the concept of lifelong learning is important to the vast majority of Americans. Over 9 in 10 youth and adults agree that learning is a lifelong priority. Learning and hard work continues to be a recipe for success.

## Both adults and youth value learning, and most say luck is not as important as hard work to achieve success

% Somewhat/Strongly Agree

■ Adults ■ Youth

68 % Females vs. 59% Males  
Report lucky breaks being less important to success than hard work.



Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Adults n=1614; Total Youth n=1617)  
Q1040B/Q1040BT\_9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.  
Q1040A/Q1040AT\_1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.



## The Scouting Edge...

The numbers grow even larger when isolating the Scouting community. Over 84% of alumni and 86% of Scouts consider hard work a personal value. Scouts learn and do. They are not afraid to put in the work to create something of value.

### Alumni also strongly believe that hard work is a key value

More than 8 in 10 alumni recognize hard work as both a personal and American value –significantly higher than non-alumni.

#### Hard work “American” Values %

Alumni	
Hard Work	81% ▲

Non-Alumni	
Hard Work	59%

#### Hard work “Personal” Values %

Alumni	
Hard Work	84% ▲

Non-Alumni	
Hard Work	62%

Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Alumni n=226; Total Non-Alumni n=1305)

Q1010/1010T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being “American” values? Please select all that apply.

Q1035/1035T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being your values? Please select all that apply.

### Scouts also strongly believe that hard work is a key value

Greater than 8 in 10 scouts recognize hard work as both a personal and American value compared to only 6 in 10 non-scouts who said the same.

#### Hard work “American” Values %

Scouts	
Hard Work	80% ▲

Non-Scouts	
Hard Work	58%

#### Hard work “Personal” Values %

Scouts	
Hard Work	86% ▲

Non-Scouts	
Hard Work	61%

Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Scouts n=440; Total Non -Scouts n=1432)

Q1010/1010T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being “American” values? Please select all that apply.

Q1035/1035T. Which of the following, if any, would you describe as being your values? Please select all that apply.





## The Impact of Scouting

When it comes to the “Scouting edge,” there is no question that Scouting positively impacts those who participate. Ninety-eight percent of alumni and 93% of Scouts agree that Scouting has positively impacted their lives. It gives them an “edge” in life and helps increase their chances of success. Scouting alumni indicate the skills, confidence, and character gained as youth participants carry through into adulthood. They say they are better parents, employees, and citizens due to their involvement in Scouting. They have that little something that gives them an extra leg up on the general population. They have that edge...the Scouting edge.

So, what advantages do Scouting alumni and Scouts attribute to being a Scouting member?

- 99% of alumni and 95% of Scouts agree that Scouting helps character development.
- 95% of alumni and 90% of Scouts agree that Scouting helps youth respect the differences of other people.
- 96% of alumni and 96% of Scouts agree that Scouting has had a positive effect on their leadership abilities.
- 95% of alumni and 91% of Scouts agree that Scouting has had a positive effect on their ability to work with others.
- 76% of Scouts and 72% of alumni indicate that Scouting has had a great deal of impact in their willingness to volunteer in their community.
- 68% of alumni and 62% of Scouts indicate that Scouting has had a great deal of influence in making them a better team player.
- 69% of alumni indicate Scouting had a great deal of influence in building confidence in their abilities.
- 67% of alumni and 66% of Scouts say Scouting has had a great deal of influence on them taking better care of the environment.
- 64% of alumni and 51% of Scouts say Scouting has had a great deal of influence on their ability to overcome adversity or problems with courage.

## Even non-Scouts agree! Scouting has a positive impact on its members.

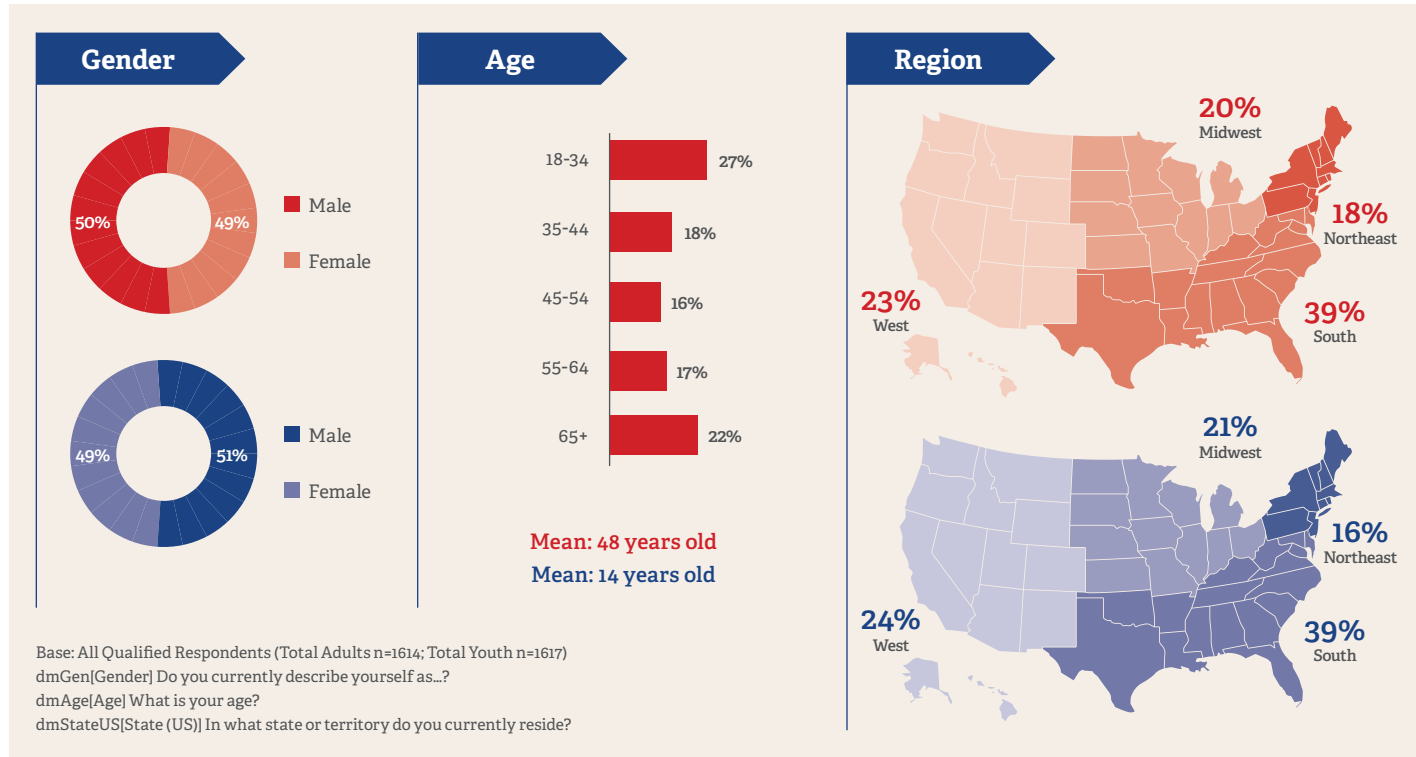
- 91% of non-alumni adults and 83% of non-Scout youth agree that Scouting helps character development.
- 86% of non-alumni adults and 82% of non-Scout youth agree that Scouting helps youth respect the differences of other people.
- 82% of non-alumni adults and 84% of non-Scout youth agree that Scouting had a positive impact on its members' ability to work with other people.
- 81% of non-alumni adults and 82% of non-Scout youth agree that Scouting had a positive impact on its members' leadership abilities.
- 80% of non-alumni adults and non-Scout youth indicate they believe Scouting had a positive impact on its members' ability to accomplish tasks given to them by others as well as their ability to set and achieve goals they set for themselves.
- 77% of non-alumni adults and non-Scout youth also agree Scouting has a positive impact on member's ability to help others achieve their goals.

# APPENDIX

## Demographic Characteristics of Samples

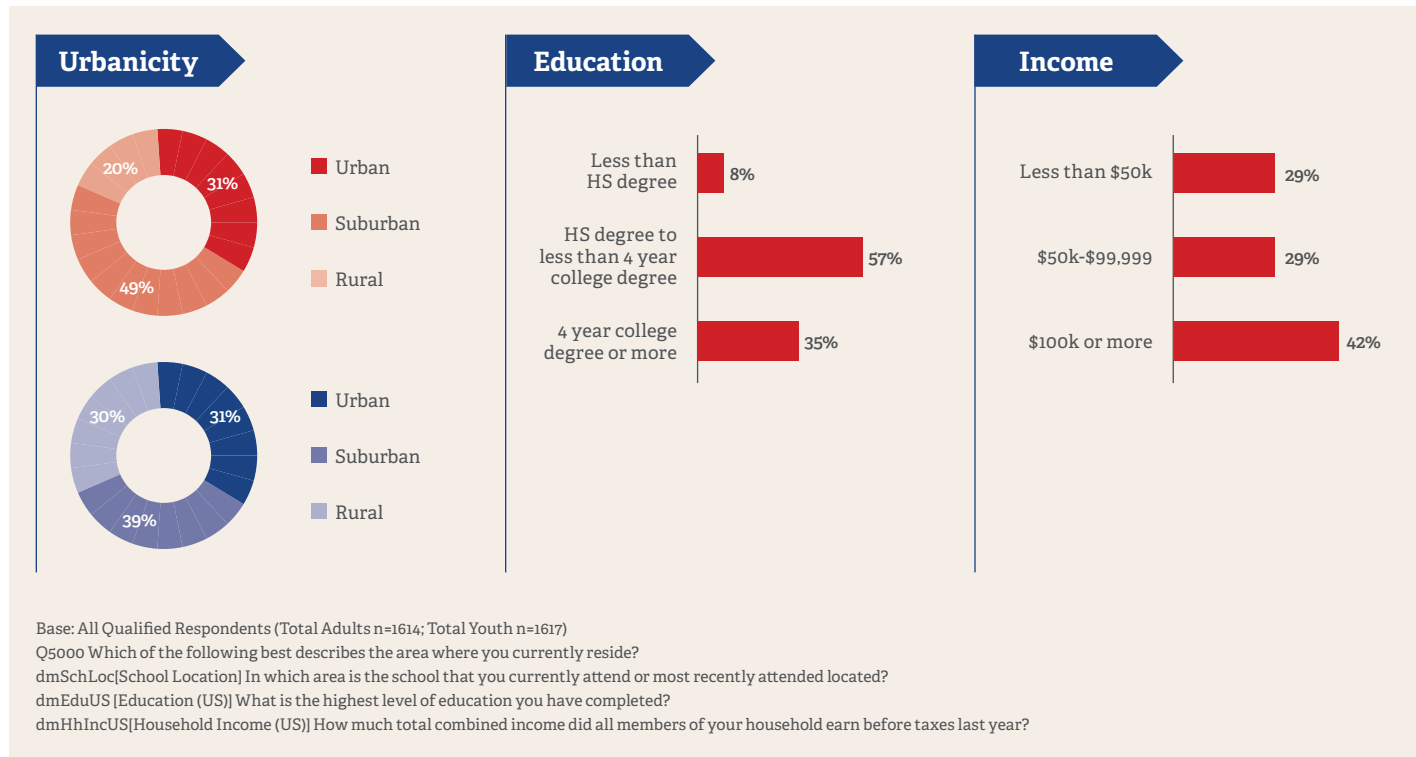
### Demographics

**Adults** **Youth**



### Demographics

**Adults** **Youth**

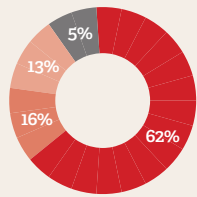


# Demographics

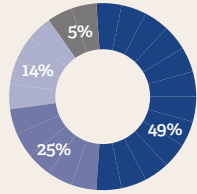
Adults

Youth

## Race

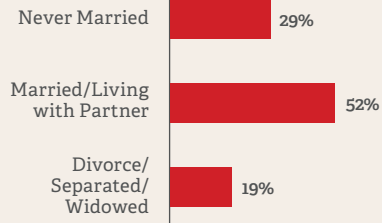


- White
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian

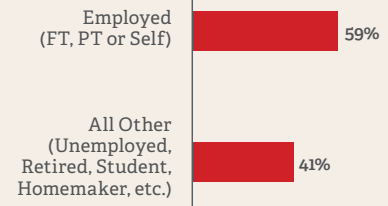


- White
- Hispanic
- Black
- Asian

## Marital Status



## Employment



Base: All Qualified Respondents (Total Adults n=1614; Total Youth n=1617)  
 dmRaceMUS[Race-Multi (US)] What is your race? Please select all that apply.  
 dmMarStat[Marital Status] What is your current marital status?  
 dmEmploy[Employment Status] Which of the following best describes your employment status





## Methodology

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These findings comprise results from two parallel studies fielded online in the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the Boy Scouts of America between November 29<sup>th</sup> and December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

The first study was fielded among 1,617 youth ages 10-17 and 1,614 adults ages 18+ residing in the U.S. In this study, data for youth ages 10-17 are weighted, where necessary, by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, household size, and school location to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the U.S. population. Data for adults 18+ are weighted, where necessary, by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, household size, marital status, household income, education, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the U.S. population.

Respondents for the first study were selected from those who agreed to participate, or who received parental consent, in The Harris Poll surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the youth (ages 10-17) sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 3.0$  percentage points, and the adult (ages 18+) sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 3.4$  percentage points – each using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

The second study was fielded among 440 youth ages 10-17 and 226 adults ages 18+ residing in the U.S., all randomly sourced from the BSA's membership and alumni databases. Raw data was not weighted and is therefore only representative of the individuals who completed the survey. 10,000 records were selected at random from each of the two databases (current members and alumni) and invitations to participate in the survey were sent only to these 20,000 records.

For the second study, youth (ages 10-17) sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 4.7$  percentage points and adult (ages 18+) sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 6.5$  percentage points – each using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether they use probability sampling or not, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question-wording and response options, and any post-survey weighting and adjustments (not applicable in the second study).

## A Note About Charts...

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### In Tables and Charts:

- Percentages may not add up to 100% due to weighting and/or rounding.
- Results based on small samples (n<100) should be interpreted as directional only.

### Audience Naming:

- The term “Scouts or Non-Scouts” refers to youth and “Alumni or Non-Alumni” refers to adults throughout this report.
- Youth saw different question text for many questions throughout the survey where the adult language would not be easily understood.



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