GALLUP | MIDWESTERN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPACT

# Midwest Postsecondary Education Value and Opportunities



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# Foreword

The value of higher education is a topic of growing interest across the country, driven by concerns about student debt, barriers to entry and completion, changing demographics, and alignment with workforce needs. In its role as a convener of postsecondary leaders on issues important to the region, the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) is in a unique position to contribute to this conversation.

This report, developed through a partnership between MHEC and Gallup, presents the **first comprehensive data on perceptions of higher education across the Midwest.** It examines views on value, affordability, workforce preparation, and educational opportunity. MHEC seeks to provide its member states with actionable insights into how residents perceive post-high school education, the factors influencing their educational decisions, and opportunities to strengthen public understanding and engagement.

Gallup's findings reaffirm an encouraging reality: **Midwestern residents continue to believe in the value of higher education.** Across the region, most adults view postsecondary education as an important pathway to career success, economic opportunity, and long-term prosperity. The real challenge is to turn this interest into educational opportunities for Midwest adults that address their concerns — affordability and finding a program that offers the flexibility and support needed to balance education with work and family responsibilities. Career outcomes are also important. Adults are motivated by higher earnings and better job opportunities, but they also want confidence that a credential will provide a meaningful financial return.

For policymakers, institutional leaders, and employers, these findings represent an opportunity to put in place solutions that reduce barriers to enrollment and completion and expand flexible, workforce-responsive pathways.

MHEC looks forward to working alongside its member states to transform these insights into policies, practices, and communications that strengthen postsecondary attainment and workforce opportunity throughout the Midwest.



**SUSAN G. HEEGAARD**

President, Midwestern Higher Education Compact


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# Introduction

This report from the Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) draws on the 2026 Lumina Foundation-Gallup State of Higher Education Study to examine the experiences and perspectives of Midwestern adults aged 18 to 59 who have not earned an associate or bachelor's degree.

Each year, Gallup and Lumina study U.S. adults' attitudes toward education and training beyond high school, their interest in pursuing a degree or credential, and the barriers they face. This regional analysis, the first of its kind to examine these questions across the Midwest, explores the perspectives of adults throughout the region.

The analysis focuses on four groups:

- **Currently enrolled students:** adults currently enrolled in a certificate, industry certification, associate degree, or bachelor's degree program
- **Stopped-out adults:** adults who previously enrolled in a certificate, industry certification, associate degree, or bachelor's degree program but did not complete it
- **Never-enrolled adults:** adults who have never enrolled in a postsecondary degree or certificate program after high school
- **Not currently enrolled adults:** adults who previously enrolled in a certificate, industry certification, associate degree, or bachelor's degree program but did not complete it and adults who have never enrolled in a postsecondary degree or certificate program after high school

Many of the findings in the Midwest align with those observed nationally. Adults in the region, like adults nationally, recognize the value of postsecondary education, view it as an investment in their future, and identify many of the same financial, practical, and personal factors that influence enrollment and persistence.

This regional analysis helps identify the populations, priorities, and opportunities most relevant to supporting postsecondary enrollment and completion across the Midwest. It also highlights where strategies may need to be tailored to adults' backgrounds, responsibilities, and stages of life.


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# Key Findings

1

## Most Midwestern adults without a college degree recognize the value of postsecondary education.

Eighty percent of current students, 75% of those who have never enrolled, and 63% of those who stopped out of their programs say that two- and four-year degrees are at least as important today as they were 20 years ago.

2

## Most adults believe postsecondary education is worth the investment, but less than half view any type of four-year institution as affordable.

Public non-flagship four-year colleges receive the highest affordability ratings (46%), while public flagship four-year colleges (32%), for-profit colleges (32%), and private not-for-profit colleges (27%) receive lower ratings.

3

## Interest in postsecondary education is high, and nearly half of adults not currently enrolled say they are likely to enroll within the next five years.

More than half (56%) of adults in the Midwest who are not currently enrolled — those who never enrolled or who stopped out of their programs — have considered pursuing postsecondary education in the past two years. Forty-six percent say they are likely to enroll within the next five years.

4

## Adults view postsecondary education as an investment in their future.

Better job opportunities, higher earnings, and more fulfilling careers are the leading reasons adults who are not currently enrolled consider pursuing postsecondary education. Financial aid, confidence in the value of a degree or credential, program flexibility, and the ability to finish in a short timeframe are among the most important factors when deciding whether to enroll.


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# Value and Return on Investment

**Many adults in the Midwest without a college degree recognize the value of postsecondary education. Most view degrees as important to career success, relevant to their goals, and worth the investment.**

### Adults across the Midwest consider a college degree important for a successful career.

Regardless of their exposure to postsecondary education, strong majorities of adults without degrees across the Midwest view college degrees as vital to career success. These views closely mirror those of adults nationally, both overall and across most demographic groups.

Eight in 10 current students in the Midwest say earning a two- or four-year college degree is equally as or more important for people to have a successful career today as it was 20 years ago. Notably, students enrolled in certificate programs are more likely than those seeking degrees or industry certifications to say that two- and four-year degrees remain at least as important today.



Eight in 10 current students in the Midwest say earning a two- or four-year college degree is equally as or more important for people to have a successful career today as it was 20 years ago.

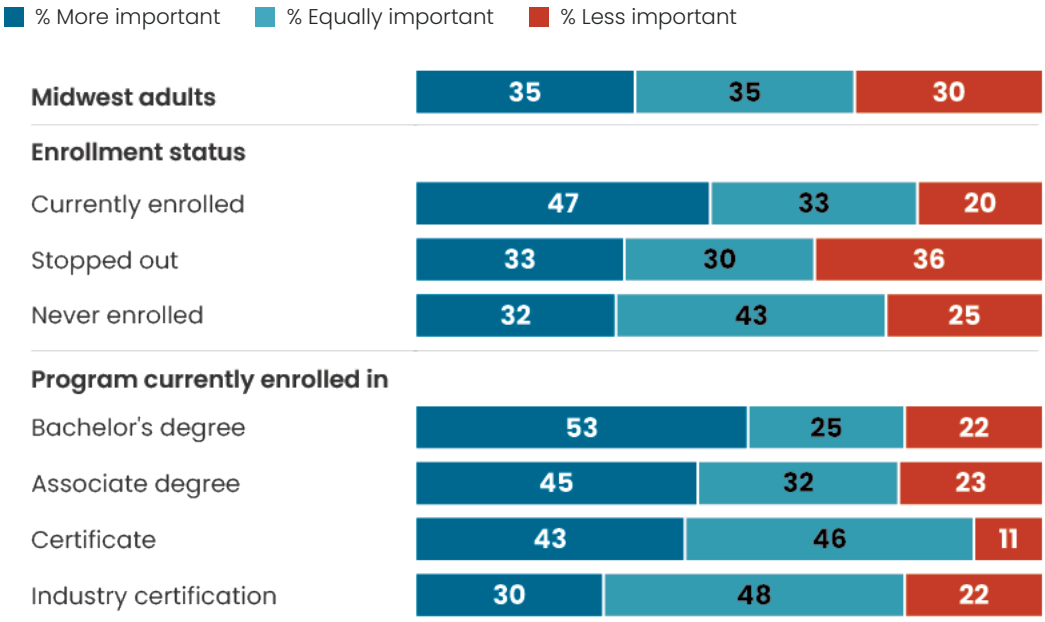

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CHART 1

**Views on the Importance of a College Degree**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential**

*Compared to 20 years ago, how important is it for people today to have a two-year or four-year college degree in order for them to have a successful career?*




Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Adults who are not currently enrolled also recognize the value of a college degree. This belief is especially strong among adults who have never enrolled: 75% say two- and four-year degrees are at least as important today as they were 20 years ago, compared with 63% of adults who previously enrolled but stopped out.

Enrollment status has the strongest association with adults' views of the value of a degree. Age, race, and political affiliation are also associated with these views among both current students and adults who are not currently enrolled, while gender differences appear only among adults who are not currently enrolled. Urbanicity is not associated with differences in either group.

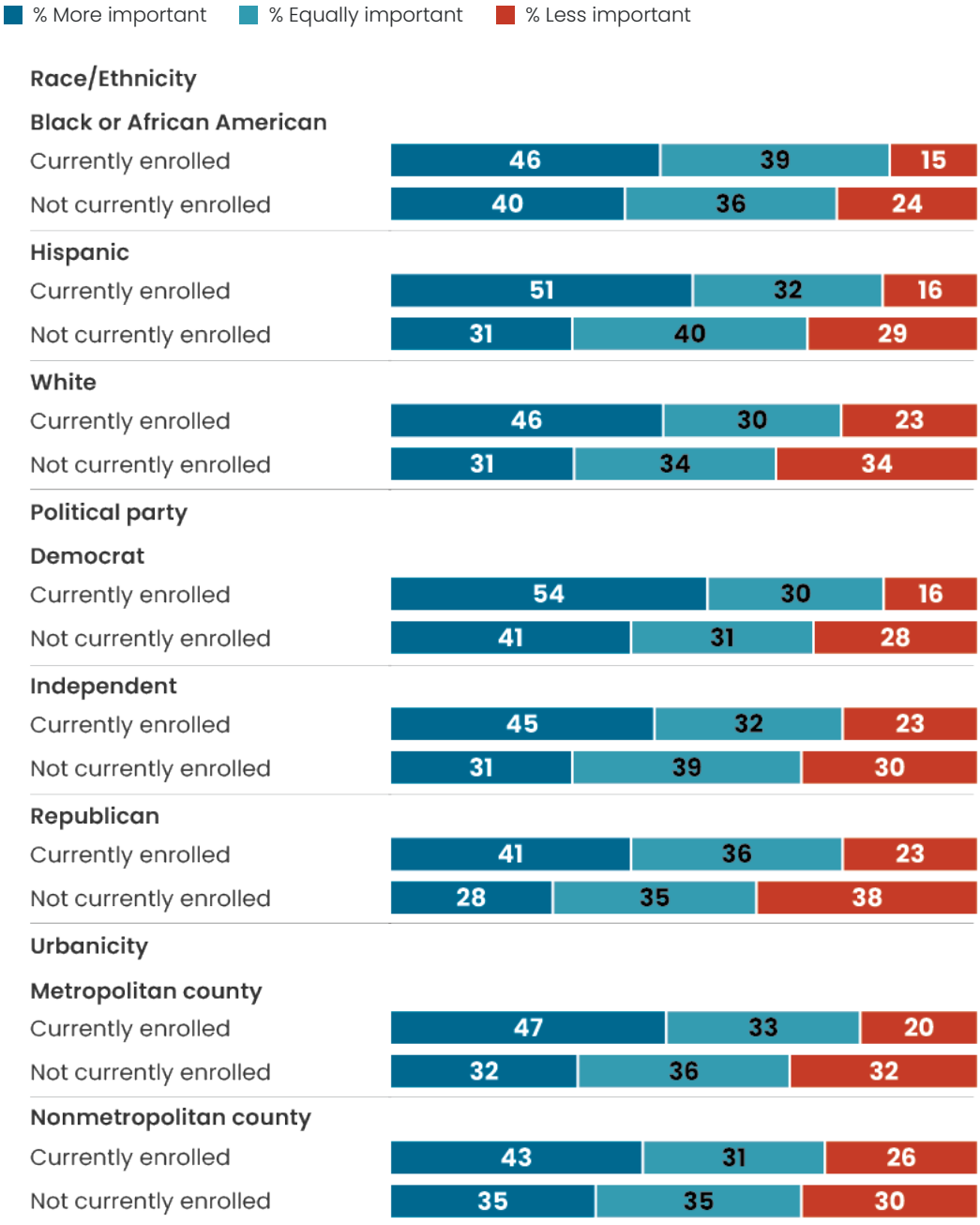

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**CHART 2**

**Views on the Importance of a College Degree by Key Demographic Group and Enrollment Status**

Among adults without a college degree or credential

*Compared to 20 years ago, how important is it for people today to have a two-year or four-year college degree in order for them to have a successful career?*




Note: Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Among currently enrolled adults, those aged 26 to 35 (87%) are more likely than those aged 18 to 25 (79%) to say college degrees are at least as important today as they were 20 years ago. Black adults are more likely than White adults to hold this view, and Democrats are more likely than independents or Republicans to do so.


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Among adults not currently enrolled, those aged 18 to 25 (73%) are more likely than those aged 26 to 35 (63%) to say college degrees are at least as important today as they were 20 years ago. Women are more likely than men (73% vs. 64%), Black adults are more likely than White adults, and Democrats and independents are more likely than Republicans to hold this view.

## Most see postsecondary education as relevant to achieving their career goals.

For many adults, the importance of a bachelor's degree is not just theoretical. Nearly six in 10 Midwestern adults without a college degree say a four-year degree is important or critical to reaching their career goals, similar to adults nationally (63%).

Regardless of the postsecondary pathway they are pursuing, most current students see a bachelor's degree as important to achieving their career goals. Majorities of adults who have stopped out and adults who have never enrolled also share this perspective.

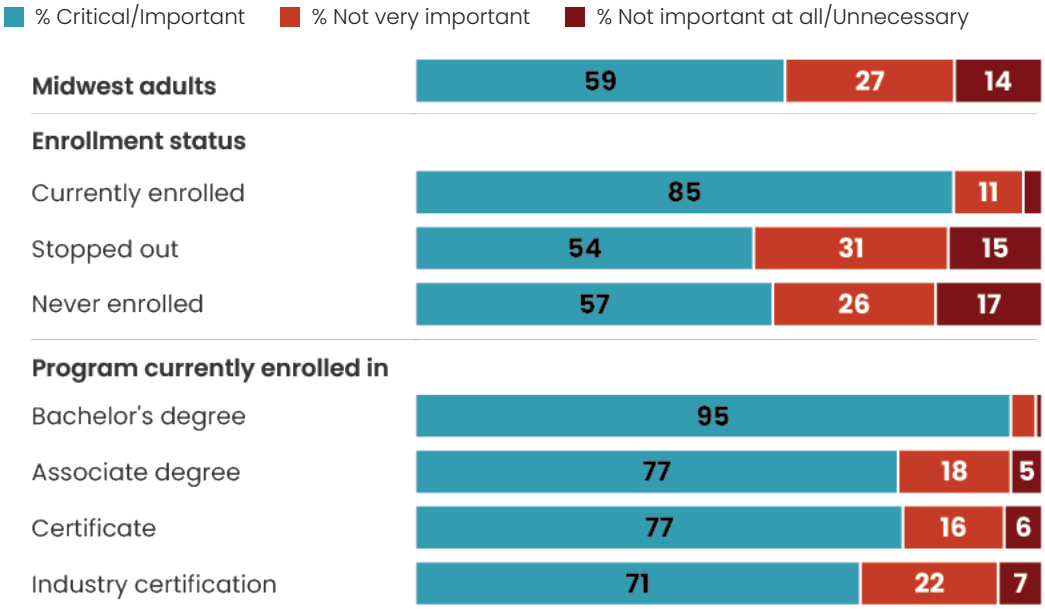
Current students are especially likely to see a bachelor's degree as relevant to their future: 85% say it is important or critical to reaching their career goals, including nearly all students pursuing bachelor's degrees (95%) and more than seven in 10 students pursuing associate degrees, certificates, or industry certifications.

CHART 3

**Views on the Importance of a Four-Year Degree to Reaching Career Goals**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential**

*How important is a four-year college degree for you to reach your career goals?*




Note: Percentages below 5% are not shown. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Demographic patterns differ somewhat between current students and adults who are not currently enrolled. Among current students, views differ by political party, but not by age, gender, urbanicity, or race and ethnicity. Among adults who are not currently enrolled, views differ across a broader range of demographic groups.

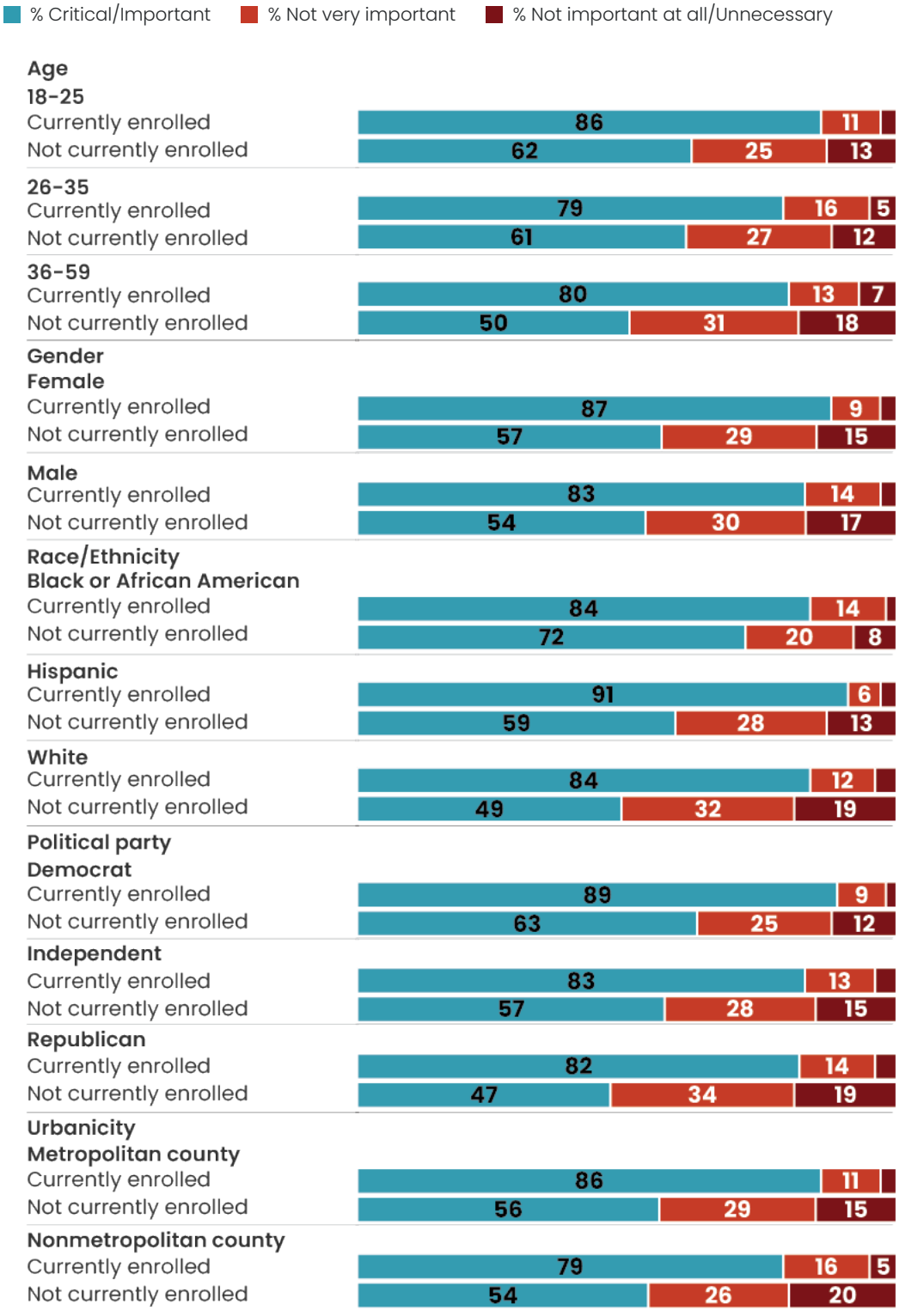

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CHART 4

**Views on the Importance of a Four-Year Degree to Reaching Career Goals by Key Demographic Group**

Among adults without a college degree or credential

*How important is a four-year college degree for you to reach your career goals?*




Note: Percentages below 5% are not shown. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.



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Among adults who are not currently enrolled, those aged 36 to 59 are less likely than their younger counterparts to view a four-year degree as important to their career goals. Black adults are more likely than White adults to hold this view, as are Democrats and independents compared with Republicans. Gender and urbanicity are not associated with meaningful differences in these views.

## Adults believe investing in a two- or four-year degree would be worth it for them and would pay off relatively quickly.

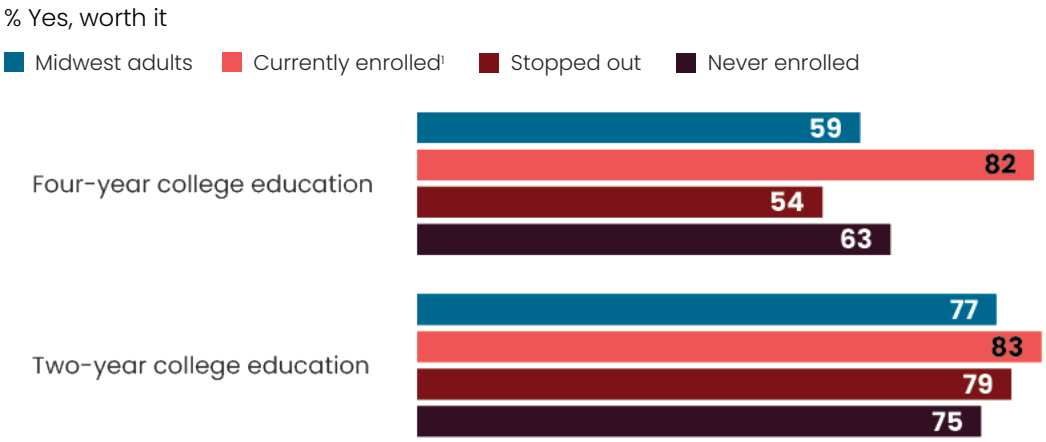
Majorities of adults currently enrolled in a certificate or industry certification program, adults who stopped out, and adults who have never enrolled believe both associate and bachelor's degrees would be worth the investment for them personally.

**CHART 5**

**Views on Whether Investing in Higher Education Would Be Worth It**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential who are not enrolled in a degree program**

*Generally speaking, do you think the investment you could make in a four-year/two-year college education (cost, time to complete program) would be worth it (in terms of knowledge and skills gained, job prospects, and earning potential) for you?*




Those currently enrolled in credential programs view associate degrees and bachelor's degrees as similarly worth the investment, with more than eight in 10 saying each would be worth it. Stopped-out and never-enrolled adults are more likely to say an associate degree would be worth the investment than a bachelor's degree. Still, majorities in both groups say a bachelor's degree would be worth the investment.

Perceptions among adults in the Midwest closely resemble those of adults nationally. Notable differences are limited to a handful of demographic groups. Republicans, adults aged 36 to 59, and stopped-out adults living in metropolitan counties are less likely than their national counterparts to say a bachelor's degree would be worth the investment. Nationally, 59% of Republicans, 57%

1 Currently enrolled in a certificate or industry certification program


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of adults aged 36 to 59, and 61% of stopped-out adults living in metropolitan counties say it would be worth the investment.

Among adults who are not enrolled in a degree program: Black (71%) and Hispanic (72%) adults are more likely than White adults (52%) to view a bachelor's degree as worth it. Views also vary by age and political party. Gender and urbanicity show little relationship to these views.

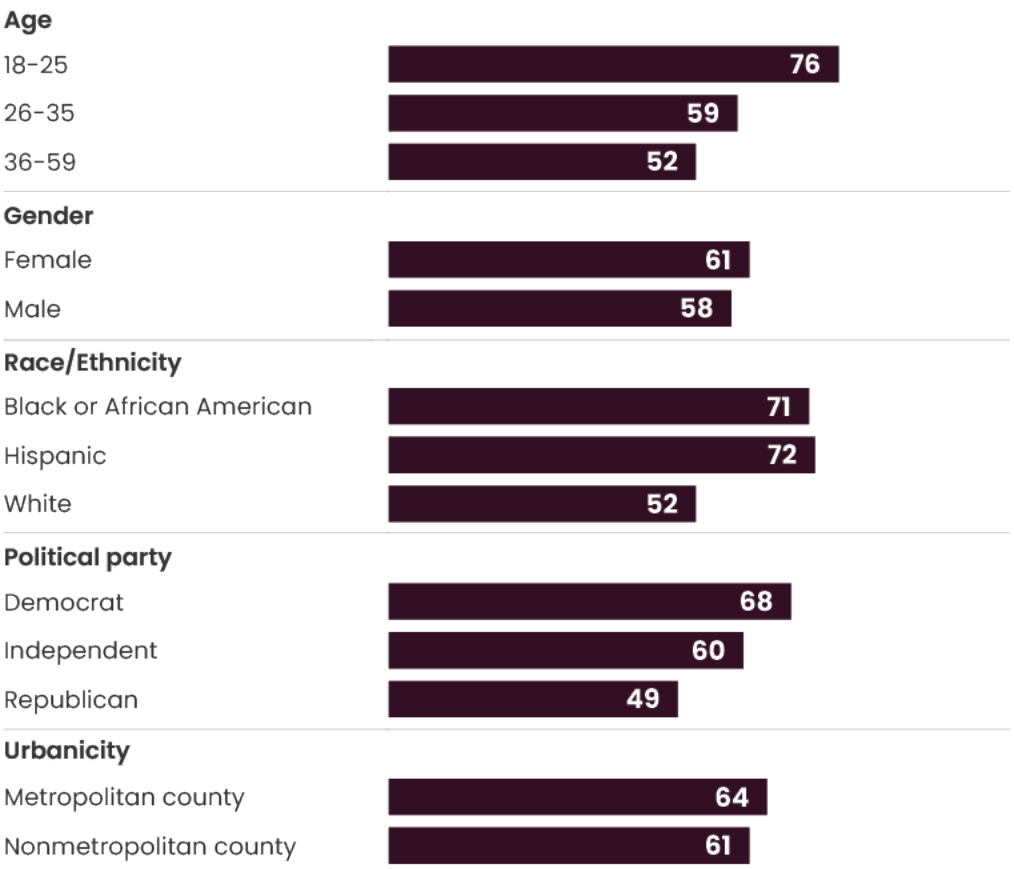
**CHART 6**

**Views on Whether a Four-Year Degree Would Be Worth It by Key Demographic Group**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential who are not enrolled in a degree program**

*Generally speaking, do you think the investment you could make in a four-year college education (cost, time to complete program) would be worth it (in terms of knowledge and skills gained, job prospects, and earning potential) for you?*

% Yes, worth it





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Adults without a degree who are younger than 36 are the most likely to say an associate degree would be worth the investment. Black adults are also more likely than White adults to hold this view, while perceptions do not differ significantly by gender, political party, or urbanicity.

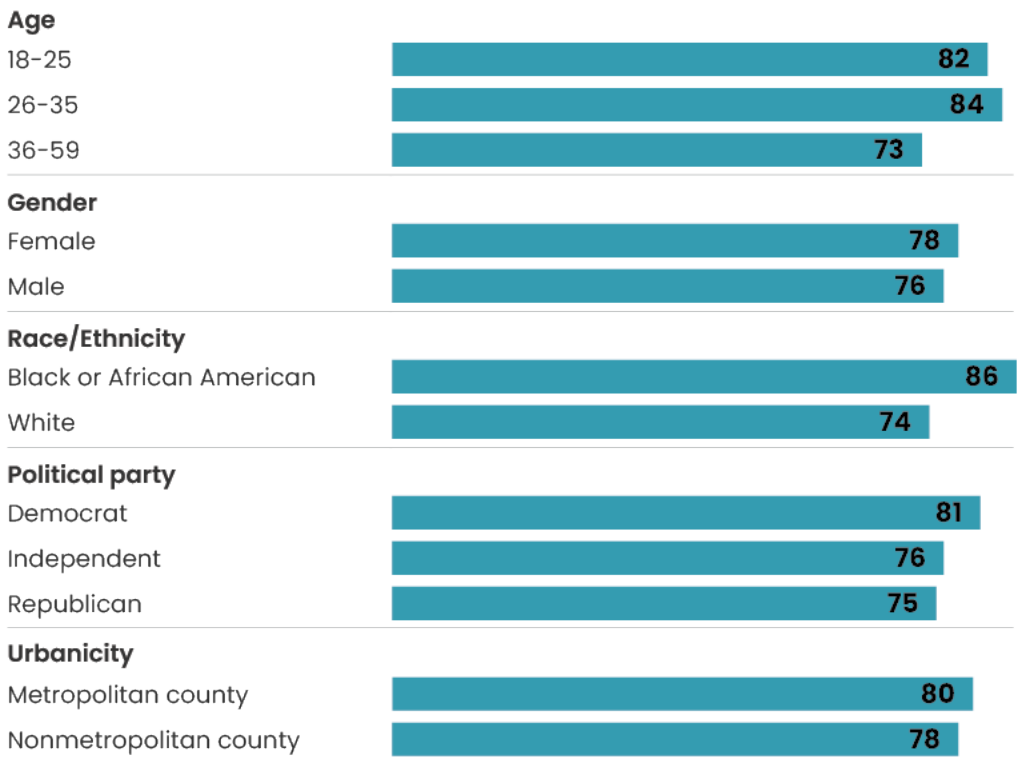
**CHART 7**

**Views on Whether a Two-Year Degree Would Be Worth It by Key Demographic Group**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential who are not enrolled in a degree program**

*Generally speaking, do you think the investment you could make in a two-year college education (cost, time to complete program) would be worth it (in terms of knowledge and skills gained, job prospects, and earning potential) for you?*

% Yes, worth it




Note: Hispanic adults not displayed because sample size fell below minimum reporting threshold.

Most adults expect a relatively quick return on investment in a two- or four-year degree: 71% believe an associate degree pays off within five years, and 83% believe a bachelor's degree pays off within 10 years.

Not everyone expects the same return on investment. Adults who stopped out are less likely than current students to expect a bachelor's degree to pay off within 10 years. Eight in 10 stopped-out adults (80%) believe it pays off within that timeframe, compared with 85% of adults who have never enrolled and 87% of current students.

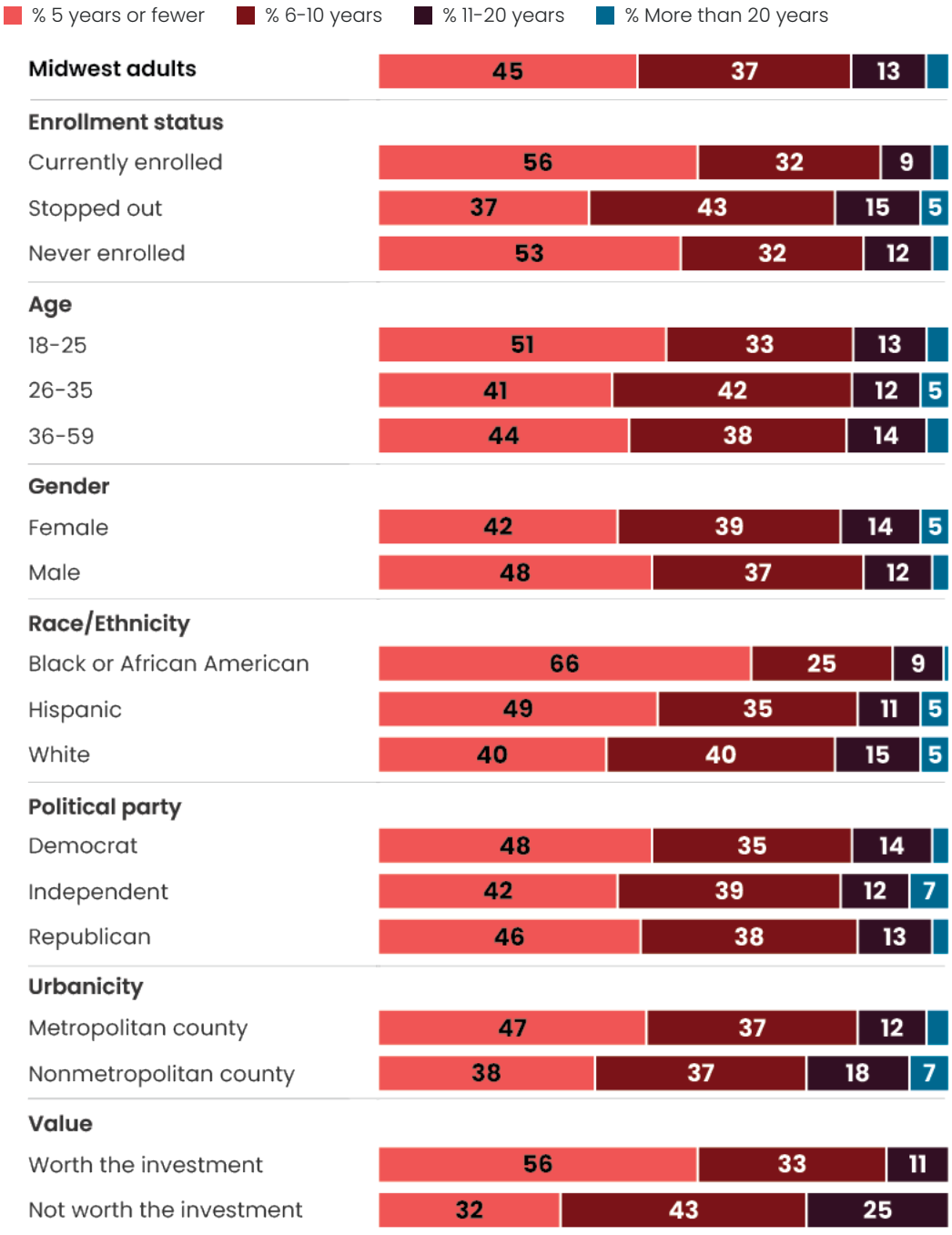

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CHART 8

**Expected Time for a Four-Year Degree Investment to Pay Off**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential**

*About how much time, in years, do you think it takes for a bachelor's degree (four-year college) graduate's investment in college to pay off once they leave college?*




Note: Percentages below 5% are not shown. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Expectations differ across demographic groups. Black adults are significantly more likely than White adults to believe a bachelor's degree pays off within 10 years (91% vs. 80%). Views also differ by urbanicity, with adults living in nonmetropolitan counties slightly less likely than those in metropolitan areas to believe a bachelor's degree would pay off within 10 years (75% vs. 84%).



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Perceived value and expected payoff are closely related. Adults who believe a bachelor's degree is worth the investment are more likely than those who do not to expect it to pay off within 10 years.

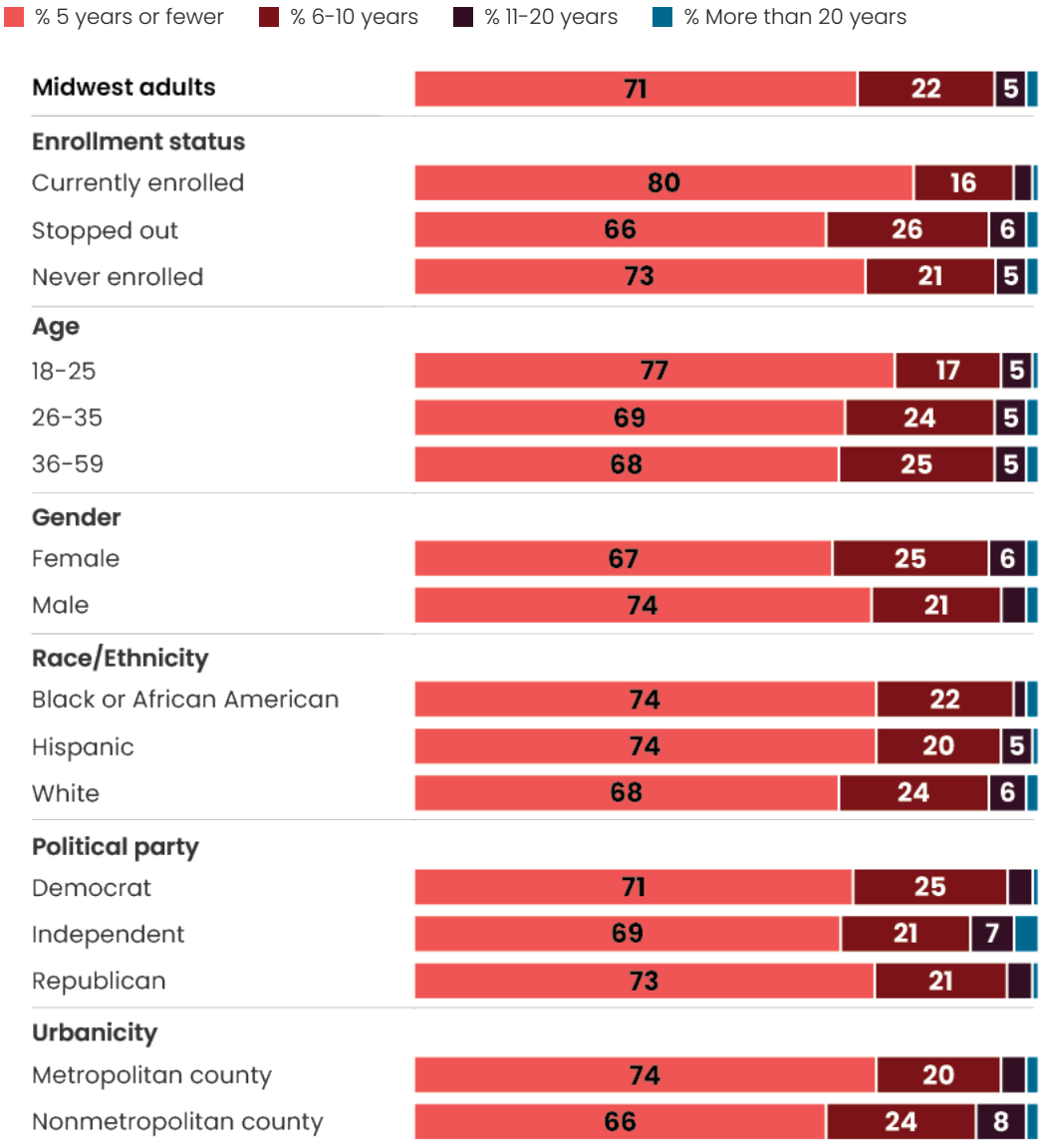
The demographic pattern differs somewhat for associate degrees. Men are significantly more likely than women to believe an associate degree pays off within five years (74% vs. 67%). Unlike expectations for bachelor's degrees, expectations do not differ by race or urbanicity.

CHART 9

**Expected Time for a Two-Year Degree Investment to Pay Off**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential**

*About how much time, in years, do you think it takes for an associate degree (two-year college) graduate's investment in college to pay off once they leave college?*




Note: Percentages below 5% are not shown. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.


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# Affordability

**Many Midwestern adults believe a bachelor's degree is worth the investment. They are less convinced that earning one is affordable.**

## Less than half of adults view any four-year college option as even somewhat affordable.

Midwestern adults are largely aware of a more affordable entry point into postsecondary education, with more than eight in 10 saying community colleges are very or somewhat affordable. Less than half say the same about any four-year college option.

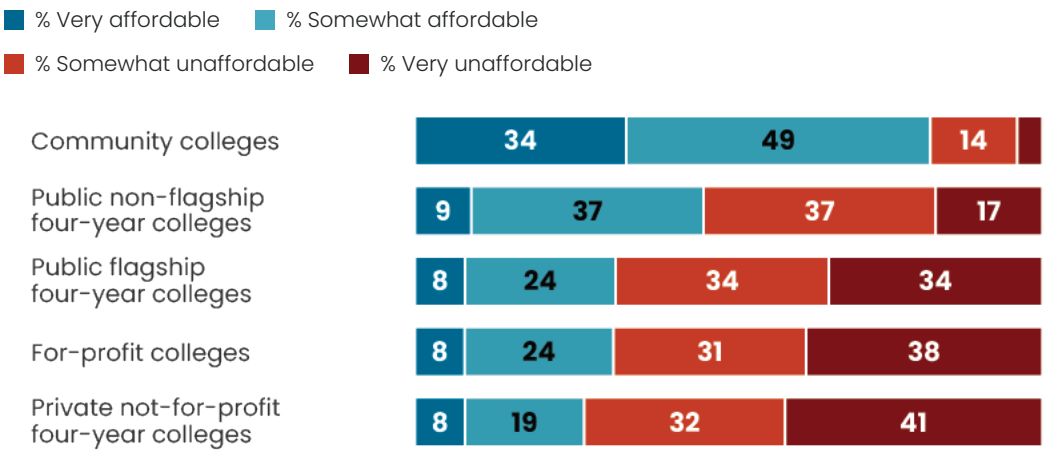
Among the institution types included in the survey, private not-for-profit four-year colleges are viewed as the least affordable option. Just 27% of adults say they are at least somewhat affordable.

CHART 10

**Perceived Affordability of Institutions and Programs**

**Among adults without a college degree or credential**

*How affordable do you think each of the following institutions or programs are?*




Note: Percentages below 5% are not shown. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Adults view the affordability of four-year institutions through the lens of their educational experiences. A majority of current students view public flagship four-year colleges (51%) and public non-flagship four-year colleges (64%) as at least somewhat affordable.

Among adults who have never enrolled, those figures fall to 37% and 51%, respectively. Adults who stopped out are the least likely group to view public institutions as affordable, with 22% saying flagship public four-year colleges and 37% saying non-flagship public four-year colleges are at least somewhat affordable.


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## Adults who believe a degree is worth the investment are more likely to view it as affordable, but many still think it costs too much.

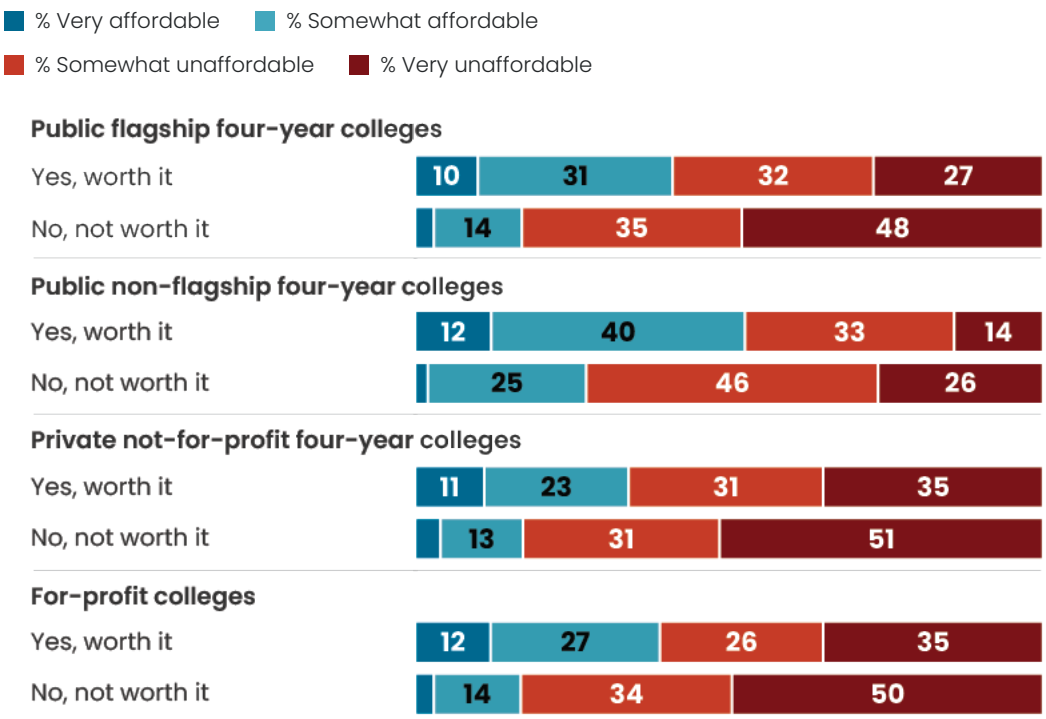
Among adults who are not enrolled and believe a bachelor's degree is worth the investment, public non-flagship four-year colleges stand out as the only four-year institution type that a slim majority view as affordable. Less than half say the same about flagship public four-year colleges, for-profit colleges, and private not-for-profit four-year colleges. Majorities see all three of these as somewhat or very unaffordable.

CHART 11

**Four-Year Degree Affordability by Belief It's Worth the Investment**

Among not currently enrolled adults

*How affordable do you think each of the following institutions or programs are?*




Note: Percentages below 5% are not shown. Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Current bachelor's degree students who believe their degree is worth the investment have different perceptions of affordability than adults who are not currently enrolled. They are more likely to view each type of institution as affordable than unaffordable and distinguish among institution types, with more rating public non-flagship four-year colleges (69%) as affordable than public flagship four-year colleges (52%) or private not-for-profit four-year colleges (29%).


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# Motivations and Enrollment Decisions

**Many Midwestern adults without a college degree value postsecondary education, but this does not necessarily lead to enrollment. Understanding who is interested in enrolling and what motivates them may help institutions identify the greatest opportunities to engage prospective students.**

### Interest in pursuing postsecondary education is high, particularly among adults with prior college experience.

Similar to their national counterparts, Midwestern adults show strong interest in postsecondary education, especially those with prior experience. Nearly two-thirds of adults who have stopped out have considered pursuing postsecondary education in the past two years, compared with four in 10 adults who have never enrolled. Nationally, 69% of stopped-out adults and 43% of never-enrolled adults have considered doing so.

In every age group, stopped-out adults are more likely than never-enrolled adults to consider postsecondary education, although interest declines in both groups after age 35. The types of programs these groups consider also differ. Stopped-out adults express interest across a broader range of educational pathways that often align with the programs they previously pursued, while never-enrolled adults are most interested in shorter-term credentials.



**Nearly two-thirds of adults who have stopped out have considered pursuing postsecondary education in the past two years.**


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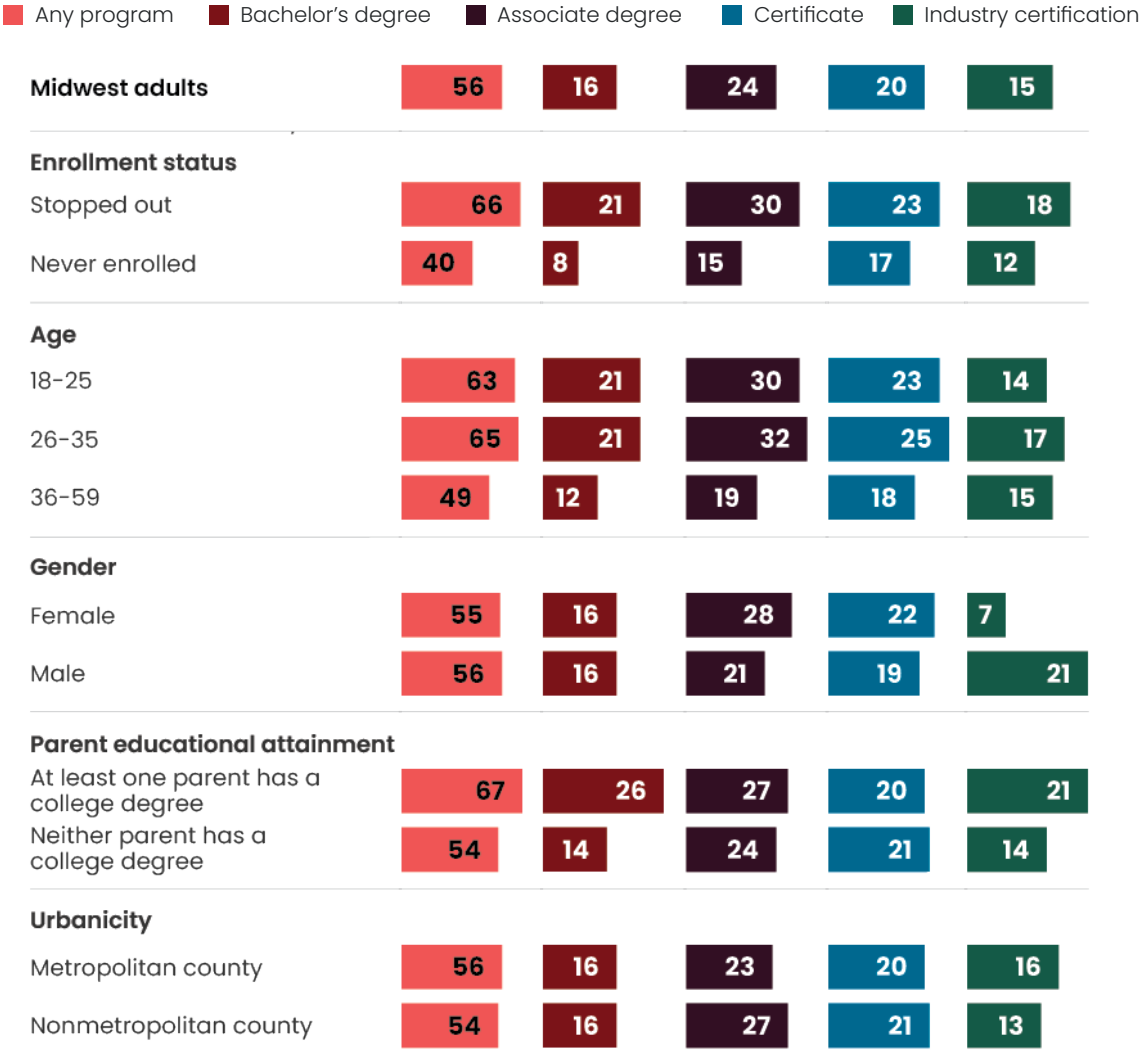
CHART 12

**Interest in Pursuing Postsecondary Education in the Past Two Years by Enrollment Status and Key Demographic Group**

Among not currently enrolled adults

*Which of the following, if any, have you considered pursuing in the past two years? Select all that apply.*

% Selected




Not everyone who considers postsecondary education expects to enroll. Still, nearly half (46%) of adults in the Midwest who are not currently enrolled say they are likely to enroll within the next five years.

Expectations vary by prior enrollment and age. Adults who have stopped out are more likely than those who have never enrolled to report that they are likely or very likely to enroll within the next five years (54% vs. 35%). Enrollment expectations are also highest among adults under age 36.


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Urbanicity is associated with the likelihood of enrollment only among adults who have never enrolled. Within this group, adults living in nonmetropolitan counties are less likely than those in metropolitan counties to expect to enroll within the next five years. Expectations among adults who have stopped out do not differ by urbanicity.

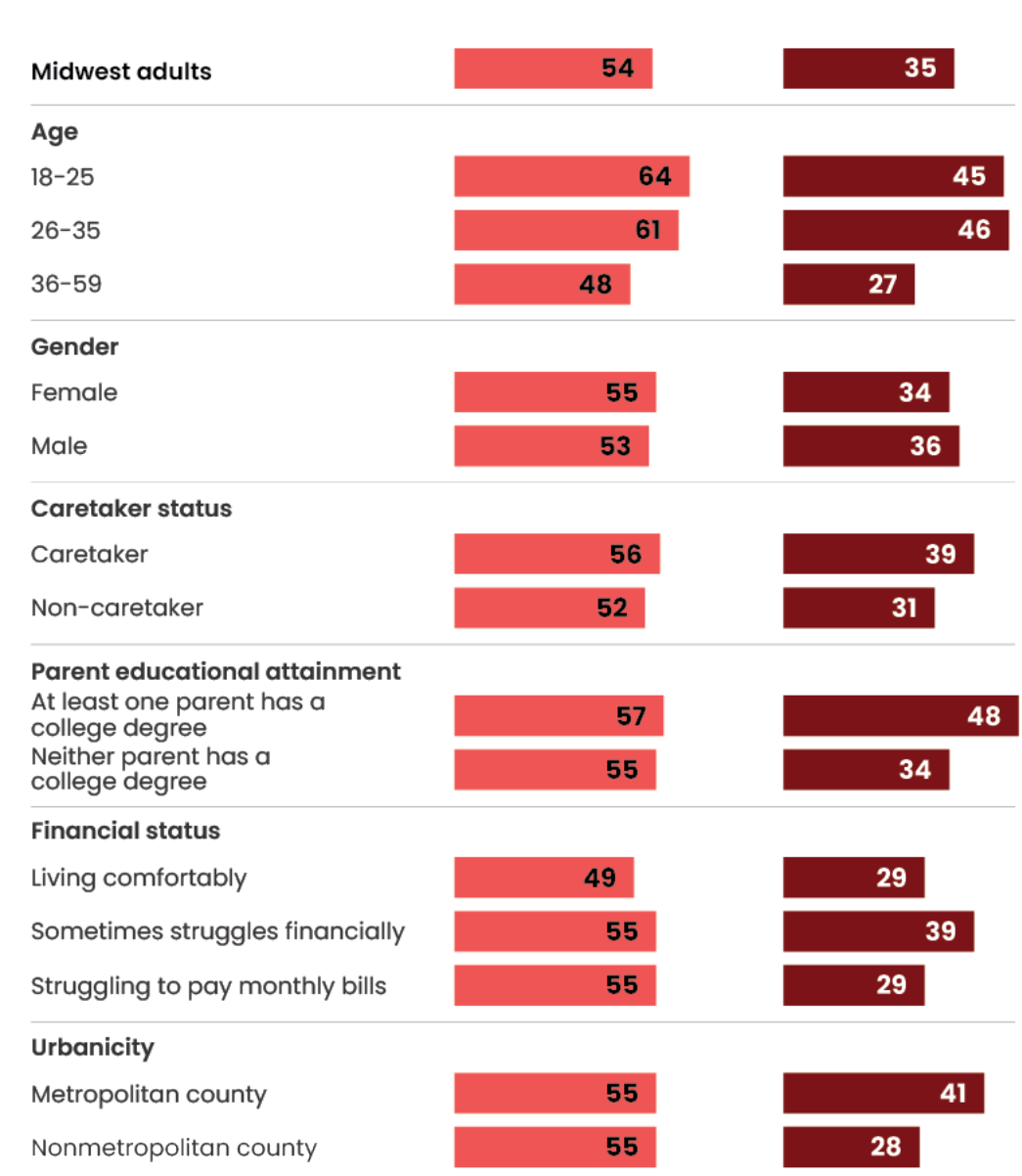
CHART 13

**Likelihood of Pursuing Higher Education in the Next Five Years by Enrollment Status and Key Demographic Group**

Among not currently enrolled adults

*Please indicate how likely you are in the next five years to enroll in a program for any of the following: industry certification, certificate, associate degree, bachelor's degree*

% Very likely/Likely to enroll





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## Adults weigh career opportunities and practical considerations when deciding whether to enroll.

Adults see postsecondary education as an investment in their future and evaluate enrollment decisions based on opportunity, value, affordability, and fit. Better job opportunities, higher earnings, and more rewarding careers are among the strongest motivations for pursuing additional education.

Adults in the Midwest who are not currently enrolled are most likely to cite future job opportunities, confidence that a degree or credential is worth the investment, financial aid, shorter completion times, and program flexibility as important factors in getting them to enroll in the next 12 months. These priorities are broadly consistent across metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties, as well as among adults who have stopped out of a postsecondary program and those who have never enrolled.

Some priorities vary by life circumstances. Among never-enrolled adults, for example, caretakers are significantly more likely than non-caretakers to say financial aid or scholarships would be important in their decision to enroll (80% vs. 70%).

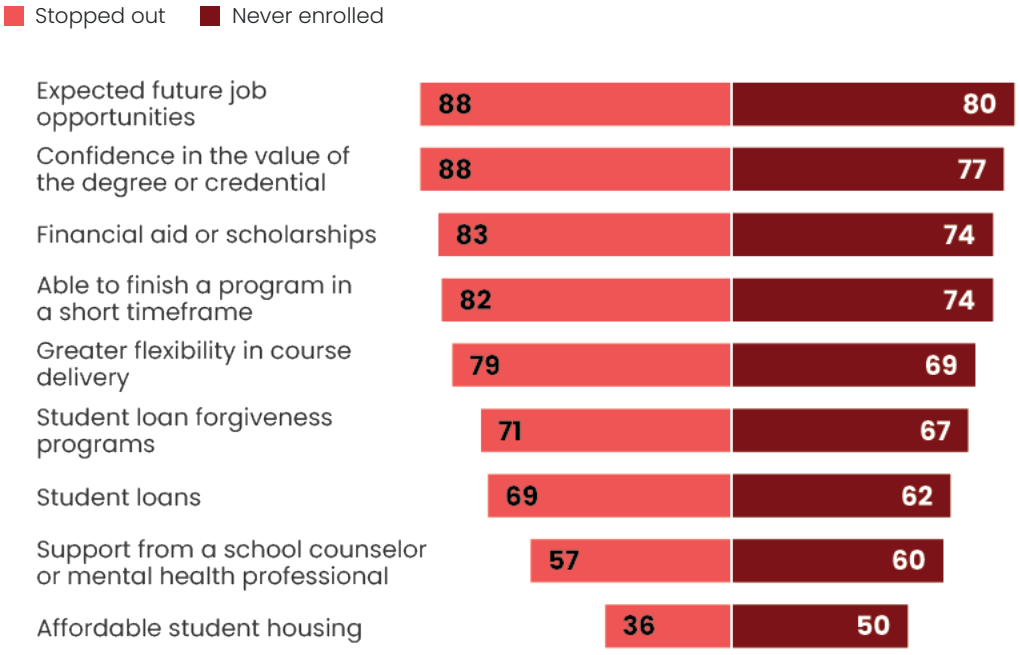
CHART 14

**Factors Influencing Enrollment Decisions by Previous Enrollment Status**

**Among not currently enrolled adults**

*How important would each of the following be in getting you to enroll in a program in the next 12 months?*

% Very/Moderately important





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The practical considerations adults weigh before enrolling can also affect persistence after enrollment. Students who are caretakers (47%) or experiencing financial strain (44%) are among the groups most likely to have considered stopping out, underscoring the importance of supporting students not only through enrollment but also through program completion.



**Among never-enrolled adults, caretakers are significantly more likely than non-caretakers to say financial aid or scholarships would be important in their decision to enroll.**


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# Opportunities for Postsecondary Institutions and Policy in the Midwest

**Many adults across the Midwest without a college degree need little convincing that postsecondary education is valuable. Most believe degrees and credentials can improve career opportunities, many view them as worthwhile investments, and more than half of those not currently enrolled have considered pursuing additional education.**

**The challenge may lie in helping more adults translate those beliefs into enrollment and, ultimately, completion. The following examples illustrate how different groups of Midwestern adults perceive higher education and highlight opportunities to develop programs, policies, and supports that help individuals attain a credential or degree aligned with their career goals.**

## Adults Who Have Never Enrolled

Adults who have never enrolled consistently express positive views of postsecondary education, and just over one-third expect to enroll in the near future.

### Key Findings

- Most say associate degrees (75%) and bachelor's degrees (63%) are worth the investment. Seventy-three percent believe an associate degree would pay off within five years, and 85% believe a bachelor's degree would pay off within 10 years.
- Many continue to view bachelor's degree programs as unaffordable. About half (51%) view public non-flagship four-year colleges as affordable, compared with 37% who view public flagship four-year colleges as affordable and 34% who say the same about private not-for-profit four-year colleges.
- Four in 10 have considered pursuing postsecondary education in the past two years, while 35% say they are likely or very likely to enroll in at least one program or credential in the next five years.
- Expected future job opportunities (80%) are the most important consideration when deciding whether to enroll. More than seven in 10 also identify confidence in the value of a degree or credential, financial aid, and the ability to finish a program in a shorter timeframe as important considerations.


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- Eleven percent applied for admission as a first-year or transfer student during the 2025-26 academic year.

**Program and policy opportunity:** Reducing barriers related to affordability, financial aid, program flexibility, and time to completion may increase first-time enrollment among interested adults.

# Adults in Rural Communities

Adults living in nonmetropolitan counties generally recognize the value of postsecondary education. A strong majority believe a bachelor's degree would pay off within 10 years, though they are somewhat less likely than adults in metropolitan counties to hold that view.

### Key Findings

- Adults living in nonmetropolitan counties believe associate degrees (78%) and bachelor's degrees (60%) are worth the investment when considering the time and cost required to earn them.
- Three-quarters of adults living in nonmetropolitan counties believe a bachelor's degree would pay off within 10 years, which is a slightly lower rate than among those living in metropolitan counties (75% vs. 84%).
- More than half of adults living in nonmetropolitan counties (54%) who are not currently enrolled have considered pursuing at least one postsecondary program or credential in the past two years.
- Among adults who have never enrolled, 28% of those living in nonmetropolitan counties say they are likely or very likely to enroll in at least one program or credential within the next five years, compared with 41% of those living in metropolitan counties.

**Program and policy opportunity:** Reinforcing confidence in the return on investment of postsecondary education may be particularly important in rural communities.

# Caretakers and Working Adults

Many adults considering postsecondary education are balancing work, finances, and family responsibilities. Financial aid is an especially important enrollment consideration for caretakers.

### Key Findings

- Among adults who have never enrolled, caretakers place relatively high importance on financial aid or scholarships (80%) and shorter time to completion (77%) when deciding whether to enroll. Non-caretakers are less likely to identify financial aid as important (70%).


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- Among adults who are not enrolled, half of caretakers (50%) say they are likely or very likely to enroll in a program or credential within the next five years, making them no less likely than non-caretakers (43%) to expect to enroll.
- Nearly half of current students who are caretakers (47%) have considered stopping out during the past six months.
- Working adults represent a substantial pool of prospective learners. Despite work responsibilities, half of adults employed full time (50%) expect to enroll within the next five years.
- Majorities of adults who are caretakers (61%) and employed full (55%) or part time (70%) think the investment they could make in a four-year degree would be worth it.

**Program and policy opportunity:** Designing programs that accommodate adults' work, family, and financial responsibilities may help more adults enroll and complete their education.

# Conclusion

The three highlighted Midwestern subgroups — adults who have never enrolled in postsecondary education, adults coming from rural communities, and adult caretakers — provide examples of the potential and possibilities for increasing postsecondary attainment. Each of these three subgroups recognizes the value of postsecondary education, with majorities saying it is worth the investment and will help them achieve their career goals. However, it is important to develop clear throughlines that connect the prospect of enrollment with career-related outcomes so they and other adults can clearly see how postsecondary education can lead to fulfilling and rewarding careers.

The findings show that positive perceptions of postsecondary education do not always translate into enrollment and completion. Midwestern adults without a college degree have considered pursuing additional education, but less than half expect to enroll in the coming years. Affordability, financial aid, program flexibility, and confidence in career outcomes shape these decisions. It is important for states and institutions to build on these adults' interests in higher education and address the barriers that stand between considering postsecondary education and completing a credential.

The Midwest can capitalize on this interest to increase attainment and strengthen workforce outcomes. These findings demonstrate the potential and opportunity in the Midwest to help turn perceptions into action and expand opportunity to individuals while supporting communities, the workforce, and the broader economy.


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# Methodology

This report is based on responses from adults living in the Midwest region who participated in the 2026 Lumina Foundation-Gallup State of Higher Education Study. The region includes Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

Results are based on web surveys conducted from Oct. 2-31, 2025. Respondents were eligible to complete the survey if they were between the ages of 18 and 59 and had a high school diploma or equivalent, but not an associate or bachelor's degree. Respondents were interviewed via Dynata's nonprobability web-based panel.

The full study includes 6,010 students currently enrolled in a postsecondary education program, 5,052 adults who had previously enrolled in a postsecondary education program but had not completed an associate or bachelor's degree, and 3,000 adults who had never enrolled in a postsecondary education program.

This report focuses on the 3,045 respondents living in the Midwest region, including 1,269 currently enrolled students, 1,151 adults who had previously stopped out of a postsecondary education program, and 625 adults who had never enrolled in a postsecondary education program.

The national data are weighted to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, and region for the population of U.S. adults aged 18 to 59 with a high school diploma but without a college degree. Demographic weighting targets are based on the most recent American Community Survey figures. Respondents from the Midwest region were separately weighted to ensure the results reflect the demographic distribution of adults within the region. Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois were each weighted separately, while the remaining states were combined into a single category.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls. T-tests were used for statistical significance testing with small sample sizes.


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**The Midwestern Higher Education Compact** (MHEC) brings together leaders from Midwestern states to develop cost-savings opportunities, generate collaborative solutions to challenges and opportunities in higher education, and promote postsecondary alignment with workforce needs. Its contracts, programs, initiatives, and research save institutions and states millions of dollars annually, addressing issues that advance student success, postsecondary access and affordability, and workforce readiness.

**MHEC staff are available to speak to and present on the research found in this report**, as well as its other services to Midwestern states and postsecondary education. Contact **mhec@mhec.org** to learn more.