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Not Just a Job: New Evidence on the Quality of Work in the United States

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Executive Summary

The current economic expansion is now the longest in U.S. history, but not all Americans are feeling the benefits. Wage stagnation and shifting labor market needs have many U.S. workers stuck in low-paying jobs. And labor force participation, even among prime-age adults, is below levels achieved decades ago.

Since 1980, economic gains have increasingly gone to the wealthiest 10% — and even 1% — of income earners. While the resulting rise in inequality is troubling in and of itself, this trend has implications for Americans' wellbeing beyond their financial status. Higher-income jobs tend to confer advantages that extend far beyond salary, including access to benefits, career advancement, control over their schedule, job security, daily enjoyment and even a sense of purpose.

Remarkably, there is no widely recognized, comprehensive measure of job quality in the U.S. The few indicators developed in recent years are either based solely on income or on a small set of factors, such as access to healthcare and retirement plans, in combination with income. Lack of data on preferences for a broader range of job characteristics has meant that scholars have had to assume what workers value most.

The Great Jobs Study aims to address this deficit. This research examines how Americans define high-quality jobs by asking more than 6,600 U.S. workers about the factors that matter most for overall job quality, and how their jobs stack up on those characteristics. The resulting measure includes not just common considerations such as income and employment benefits, but also career advancement opportunities, autonomy and control over their working lives, job security, and other attributes important to workers.

Our primary measure of job quality combines worker ratings of satisfaction and importance across 10 dimensions of job quality. We classify our job quality index into "good," "mediocre" or "bad" based on the average response to these 10 items, giving higher weight to the items deemed more important to workers.

The result is a more comprehensive indicator of job quality, one that incorporates American workers' views on the job characteristics most likely to help them lead better lives amid changing labor market conditions. The analysis pays specific attention to income groups, reflecting the recognition in previous studies that income is central to any discussion of job quality in America. Finally, we ask workers about how their job quality has changed over time to get a sense of how their jobs have been evolving.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY INCLUDE:

01

Less than half of U.S. workers are in good jobs.

- Forty percent of employed Americans are in good jobs, meaning they express high satisfaction across 10 important job characteristics. Workers in good jobs provide an average rating of "4" or higher on a five-point scale across these 10 characteristics of their job. Forty-four percent of U.S. workers are in mediocre jobs, while 16% are in bad jobs.
- Job quality is closely related to quality of life. While most workers in good and mediocre jobs rate their overall quality of life as "high," most of those in bad jobs do not. Specifically, 79% of workers in good jobs have an overall high quality of life, compared to 63% in mediocre jobs and only 32% in bad jobs. Job quality is similar to health status and more powerful than income in terms of how well it predicts overall quality of life.

02

Income inequality translates into inequality in job quality across every dimension.

- Just 28% of those with incomes in the bottom one-fifth of all U.S. workers (roughly equivalent to those making less than $24,000 per year) are in good jobs, compared to 63% of workers in the top one-tenth of incomes (those making $143,000 or more).
- Lower-income workers are much less likely to be satisfied with all 10 aspects of job quality included in the good jobs measure — including those unrelated to income. Thus, income inequality corresponds with different experiences that reach far beyond income, including autonomy and the dignity associated with having a good job.
- Older workers, white workers and those with high levels of education are more likely to be in good jobs than other types of workers.
- Regional differences in job quality are not significant. Workers in the Midwest tend to have a small share of workers in good jobs, but a low share in bad jobs.
- Workers in nonmetropolitan towns and counties tend to have slightly higher average job quality than those in large metropolitan areas, despite lower incomes. These modest differences are largely driven by greater satisfaction among rural workers with enjoyment of day-to-day work, control over hours and stability of pay.

03 Workers at all income levels generally agree on the job quality dimensions most important to them. Enjoying one's work and having a sense of purpose are broadly prioritized; few workers want their employment situation to be "just a job."

- Enjoying their day-to-day work, having stable and predictable pay, and having a sense of purpose each rate more highly than level of pay among U.S. workers' criteria for job quality — even among those in the bottom 20% of incomes.
- The largest sources of job quality disappointment (the gap between satisfaction and importance) are in pay and benefits, factors commonly rated as important but for which satisfaction ratings are especially low. Just 54% of workers overall are satisfied with their current pay level. This finding is particularly worrisome in light of the current economic expansion — the number of quarters without a recession — now the longest in U.S. history.
- Workers' satisfaction is also low relative to their importance ratings for the power to change things at work and the potential for career advancement. Only 48% of workers are satisfied with their ability to change things about their job that they're unhappy with, suggesting that many need better mechanisms for voice and influence in the workplace.[1]

04 Race, ethnicity and gender are strongly correlated with job quality.

- Nearly one-third (31%) of black women work in bad jobs, a higher percentage than in any other large racial or gender group. Black women are also more likely than members of any other large racial/gender group to express disappointment with their job — as measured by a gap between satisfaction and importance ratings of specific job characteristics. These low scores from black women are driven by low-satisfaction in aspects of work unrelated to pay, such as control over schedule, stability of pay and enjoyment of day-to-day experiences.
- Asian workers express significantly lower job quality than white Americans despite higher levels of education and income. This result is largely due to the relatively low percentage of Asian workers who say they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day.
- White non-Hispanic males express the least disappointment with job quality, followed closely by white non-Hispanic females. Hispanic men and black women express the most disappointment.

1 Kochan, T. A., Yang, D., Kimball, W. T., & Kelly, E. L. (2019). Worker Voice in America: Is There a Gap between What Workers Expect and What They Experience? *ILR Review* 72 (1) 3-38.

05 Most workers say their level of pay has improved in recent years, but that other dimensions of job quality have not.

- Fifty-nine percent of U.S. workers say they have seen pay increases in the last five years, whereas only 11% say their pay has gotten worse. By contrast, no more than 37% of workers say any aspect of job quality unrelated to pay has improved during the last five years. That includes employee benefits; 23% say their benefits have improved over the past five years, while a similar 21% say they have gotten worse.
- High-income workers are much more likely to report a pay increase than low-income workers, but for dimensions unrelated to pay, high-income workers are generally no more likely than those in lower-income groups to say their work situation has improved in the last five years.
- Low-income workers give consistently low job evaluations when asked to rate their employment situation from five and 15 years ago — though most are optimistic about their future situation. By contrast, ratings from high-income earners indicate a rapid escalation in job quality that they expect to continue; many believe they will be in or close to their best job imaginable 15 years from now.

06 Workers are more likely to have good jobs if they work for larger organizations and are in roles that allow them to be creative, learn new skills and do their best work.

- Full-time jobs are associated with higher job quality than part-time jobs, but workers who put in 55 or more hours per week have relatively low job quality and usually work multiple jobs.
- Low-income workers are more likely to report higher job quality if they work for larger organizations; 42% of those in companies with 500 or more employees are in good jobs, versus 21% of those in companies with 20-499 employees and 29% of those in companies with less than 20 employees.
- Those who work multiple jobs out of necessity are unlikely to be in good jobs; just 23% give ratings that put their primary job in this category, while 30% have bad jobs. Such findings highlight job quality challenges facing many workers who may be piecing together a living in the "gig" economy.
- Workers who strongly agree that they are expected to be creative or innovative in their work are much more likely than those who disagree to be in a good job (54% vs. 19%, respectively); this positive effect is consistent across income groups. Likewise, workers who strongly agree that they have the opportunity to do their best work every day are far more likely to be in a good job than those who strongly disagree (62% vs. 13%, respectively). Most workers in low-paying jobs (51%) nonetheless qualify as having a good job when they get to do what they do best.
- The occupations with the highest job quality are managers and computer workers, with 50% and 49% in good jobs, respectively; meanwhile, just 29% of production workers, 23% of healthcare support workers and 18% of food preparation workers are in good jobs.
- Manufacturing workers are the most likely to have been terminated from their best job ever but score above average on job quality (42% are in good jobs). More than half (51%) of workers in the construction industry are in good jobs, compared to 23% of those in hospitality and food services.

07

Workers in low-quality jobs are less likely to be satisfied and more likely to be actively looking for another job.

- At a time of near-historic low unemployment, workers in bad jobs are roughly twice as likely as those in good jobs to be looking for new work (60% vs. 33%, respectively). It stands to reason that businesses can boost retention and productivity by enhancing the quality of employees' work experience in ways that matter most to them.

Introduction

As of July 2019, the U.S. unemployment rate stood at 3.7%, close to its lowest level since 1969, and GDP growth has been positive every quarter since 2014. However, other signs point to ongoing structural weaknesses in the labor market and the quality of jobs held by many workers.

Gallup's employee engagement research finds that only 34% of workers were actively engaged in 2018, defined as being involved in, enthusiastic about and committed to one's work and workplace.[2] This figure has risen somewhat in Gallup's trending since 2000, but still represents a massive shortfall in worker motivation and productivity. Likewise, fewer than half of workers tell Gallup that they are completely satisfied with their jobs, and even fewer express complete satisfaction with such key dimensions as pay, health insurance and retirement benefits.[3] Since 2000, the trends in these measures — while moderately favorable — have been largely unrelated to the U.S. unemployment rate.

The implication is that high job quality cannot be assumed to follow from low unemployment, and key features of the U.S. economy may help explain the disconnection. One problem is rising income inequality. In recent decades, economic growth has disproportionately favored the top 10% — and especially the top 1% — of income earners, with little to no gain in labor income for Americans at or below the median.[4]

Over the same period, a smaller share of the population is working — and not only because baby boomers are retiring. The labor force participation rate among prime-aged workers (those age 25 to 54) peaked in 2000 and has remained below that point even as the unemployment rate has plummeted. The reasons for this trend are not well understood, but one interpretation is that many job opportunities are not attractive enough to entice workers, particularly those without a postsecondary education.[5]

Another troubling sign for job quality is that employers are less likely to offer benefits now compared to the recent past. The share of adults aged 18 to 64 who are covered by private insurance fell to 61% in 2016, down from 69% in 2000 and 72% in 1980.[6] This decline in employer coverage comes at a time of escalating healthcare costs and has put more pressure on the public sector to fill the gap. Workers with lower levels

2 Harter, J. (2018, August 26). Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S. *Gallup News.* Retrieved from **https://news.gallup.com/poll/241649/employee-engagement-rise.aspx**

3 Gallup. Work and Workplace, Latest data available at **https://news.gallup.com/poll/1720/work-work-place.aspx** (Accessed August 15, 2019); For context, see Newport, F., & Harter, J. (2016, August 29). U.S. Workers' Satisfaction With Job Dimensions Increases. Retrieved from **https://news.gallup.com/poll/195143/workers-satisfied-job-dimensions.aspx**

4 Piketty, T., Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2017). Distributional national accounts: methods and estimates for the United States. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133, no. 2: 553-609.

5 Breitwieser, A., Nunn, R., & Shambaugh, J. (2018, August 2). The recent rebound in prime-age labor force participation. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from **https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/08/02/the-recent-rebound-in-prime-age-labor-force-participation/**

6 NCHS, National Health Interview Survey. See Appendix I, National Health Interview Survey (NHIS); Data table for Figure 27. Health insurance coverage among adults aged 18-64, by type of coverage: United States, selected years 1978-September 2016 (preliminary data). Retrieved from **https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus16.pdf**

of education are especially unlikely to receive employer-provided coverage.[7] Likewise, there has been a dip in the percentage of workers who have access to retirement benefits.[8]

While these trends are worrying, workers take many factors beyond compensation into account when considering the quality of their employment situation. Factors like autonomy, job security and career development influence whether workers decide to seek a new job, as well as the kinds of alternative jobs they would look for and whether they should invest in learning new skills relevant to a specific line of work.[9]

Therefore, a well-rounded picture of job quality is crucial to understanding labor market dynamics and the wellbeing of workers.[10] Developing strong research on job quality would arguably benefit policymakers, including Federal Reserve officials who pay close attention to the labor market, scholars, advocates and others tracking the conditions of workers in the United States. To facilitate these efforts, the data used in this report will be made publicly available.

U.S. leaders need a more nuanced measure of job quality.

There is currently no widely used, comprehensive measure of job quality in the United States, nor one that can be tracked consistently over time. As a result, public discussion about job quality tends to come down to income, and the availability of good jobs is judged mainly by the unemployment rate. Previous approaches to gauging job quality have been useful but limited by measures that focus on just one characteristic (typically wages) or two to three dimensions (such as full-time vs. part-time status, benefits and wages).[11] The strength of these metrics is that they can be tracked over time and rely on consistently measured data with clear definitions.

Still, such measures have two fundamental problems: First, they impose distinctions between good and bad jobs that do not take into account an individual's life circumstances, expectations or satisfaction with the job. A subjective-based measure — like the one used here — can do this. Second, these measures ignore non-compensation related aspects of work, which are important to overall satisfaction and retention.

Recent studies have focused on the availability of higher-paying jobs

Despite the above limitations, previous analyses have reached valuable conclusions about access to high-quality jobs in the United States by considering pay, benefits and advancement opportunities. Among the most significant recent studies:

- Research from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce defines "good jobs" as those that pay workers under the age of 45 at least $35,000 and workers 45 and older at least $45,000.[12] The research has focused on pathways to good jobs for workers without bachelor's degrees.[13]

7 U.S. Census Bureau. Current Population Survey, 2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. Table HI01. Health Insurance Coverage Status and Type of Coverage by Selected Characteristics: 2017. Retrieved from **https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2018/demo/p60-264.html**

8 Schmitt, J., & Jones, J. (2012). Where Have All the Good Jobs Gone? Center for Economic and Policy Research.

9 Esser, I., & Olsen, K. M. (2011). Perceived job quality: Autonomy and job security within a multi-level framework. *European Sociological Review*, 28(4), pp.443-454; Clark, A. (1998). Measures of Job Satisfaction: What Makes a Good Job? Evidence from OECD Countries. *OECD Labour Market and Social Policy Occasional Papers*, No. 34. Paris: OECD Publishing. Retrieved from **https://doi.org/10.1787/670570634774**

10 Harter, J. (2016, May 31). Moneyball for Business: Employee Engagement Meta-Analysis. *Gallup Business Journal*.

11 Carnevale, A. P., Jayasundera, T., & Gulish, A. (2015). Good jobs are back: College graduates are first in line. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce; Shearer, C., & Isha Shah, I. (2018, December 18). Opportunity Industries: Exploring the industries that concentrate good and promising jobs in metropolitan America. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from **https://www.brookings.edu/research/opportunity-industries/**

12 Carnevale, A. P., Stohl, J., Cheah, B., & Ridley, N. (2017). Good Jobs that Pay without a BA. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

13 Carnevale, A. P., Stohl, J., Ridley, N., & Gulish, A. (2018). Educational Pathways to Good Jobs: High School, Middle Skills, and Bachelor's Degree. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

- Economists John Schmitt and Janelle Jones of the Center for Economic and Policy Research have defined a good job as one that 1) pays at least $22 per hour (in 2019 dollars), 2) has employer-provided health insurance, and 3) has a retirement plan. Their report also defines bad jobs as jobs that meet none of the three criteria. Using these criteria, the authors find that the percentage of workers in good jobs declined from 27.4% in 1979 to 24.1% in 2011.[14]
- Finally, scholars at the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program defined good jobs as those that pay at least the median local income and identify "promising jobs" as occupations that typically lead to good jobs through career advancement.[15]

Measures of job quality that go beyond compensation are particularly salient as policymakers debate the causes and consequences of the "gig" economy. The digitization of administrative tasks associated with work (like finding customers and clients, scheduling, and making payments) has created demand for workers in contingent and alternative work arrangements. While standard government surveys show no increase in self-employment, there is compelling evidence from tax records that a large percentage of workers are engaged in multiple jobs, at least one of which does not involve a traditional employer-employee relationship.[16] Whether the "gig" economy has expanded or not, the large share of workers in alternative arrangements raises concerns about the predictability of work and access to benefits, which workers may sacrifice for the extra income, flexibility and autonomy these positions provide.

A broader measure of job quality will also help inform dialogue about the effects of automation on the types of jobs available to Americans. Some scholars and policymakers speculate that self-driving automobiles, digitization and artificial intelligence have the power to displace large numbers of workers.[17] If so, those workers may face declining job quality as they seek new roles in a changing economy.

In light of these far-reaching changes to Americans' working lives, a well-rounded measure of job quality should include questions about control over scheduling as well as the stability, security and predictability of work and pay. Job quality should also consider employees' desire for career advancement, training and learning opportunities, as well as emotional needs such as positive workplace relationships and a sense of purpose. As Gallup's long-standing research on employee engagement has shown, such factors relate strongly to employees' overall wellbeing as well as their productivity and likelihood to remain with their employer.[18]

14 Schmitt, J., & Jones, J. (2013, April). Making Jobs Good. Center for Economic and Policy Research.

15 Shearer, C., & Shah, I. (2018, December 18). Opportunity Industries: Exploring the industries that concentrate good and promising jobs in metropolitan America. Brookings Institution.

16 Abraham, K. G., Haltiwanger, J., Sandusky, K., & Spletzer, J. (2019, May). The Rise of the Gig Economy: Fact or Fiction? *AEA Papers and Proceedings.* Vol. 109, pp. 357-61.

17 Stone, P., Brooks, R., Brynjolfsson, E., Calo, R., Etzioni, O., Hager, G., Hirschberg, J., et al. (2016). Artificial Intelligence and Life in 2030. One hundred year study on artificial intelligence: Report of the 2015-2016 Study Panel. Stanford, CA: Stanford University; Frey, C. B., & Osborne, M. A. (2017). The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation? *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 114: 254-80; Arntz, M., Gregory, T., & Zierahn, U. (2016). The Risk of Automation for Jobs in OECD Countries: A Comparative Analysis. OECD Social, Employment, and Migration Working Paper 189.

18 Harter, J. (2016, May 31). Moneyball for Business: Employee Engagement Meta-Analysis. *Gallup Business Journal.*

The Great Jobs Study broadens the concept of job quality to 10 dimensions workers care about.

The Great Jobs Survey addresses these issues with detailed information about the lives of a random sample of 6,633 working adults living in the U.S. The survey asks workers to rate the importance of 10 dimensions of job quality, including the concepts described above. Then, based on those answers, workers are asked to rate their level of satisfaction with each dimension. The overall measure of satisfaction provides a job quality index. Each dimension is considered in the final index, with more weight given to the items that the workers themselves regard as more important.

The index comprises workers' importance and satisfaction ratings for the following 10 workplace characteristics:

01 LEVEL OF PAY

02 STABLE AND PREDICTABLE PAY

03 STABLE AND PREDICTABLE HOURS

04 CONTROL OVER HOURS AND/OR LOCATION

(e.g., ability to work flexible hours, work remotely)

05 JOB SECURITY

06 EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

(e.g., healthcare, retirement)

07 CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

(e.g., promotion path, learning new skills)

08 ENJOYING YOUR DAY-TO-DAY WORK

(e.g., good coworkers/managers, pleasant work environment, manageable stress level)

09 HAVING A SENSE OF PURPOSE AND DIGNITY IN YOUR WORK

10 HAVING THE POWER TO CHANGE THINGS ABOUT YOUR JOB THAT YOU'RE NOT SATISFIED WITH

Workers are first asked to rate on a five-point scale the importance of each characteristic in determining whether or job is "good" or not. They are then asked to rate their satisfaction with their own jobs on the same set of characteristics on a five-point scale.

As defined below, a good job has an importance-weighted average score of "4" or above; a mediocre job has an importance weighted score that is less than "4" but above "3." A bad job has a score at or below "3." These cutoffs roughly correspond to good, mediocre and bad on a 1-5 scale, but more importantly, these categorizations correspond to other valuable measures of job and life evaluation, as we discuss in the appendix. For example, we use a cutoff of "3" or below for a bad job instead of "2" or below, because the majority of workers who answer with a "3," "2" or "1" express dissatisfaction on other items, whereas most who answer with a "4" or "5" do not. We also calculated the percentage of workers who averaged a 4.5 or higher across the 10 dimensions, again after applying a statistical weight for the importance of the job characteristic. We define jobs that meet this criterion as "great," but do not make this part of the main analysis.

Findings

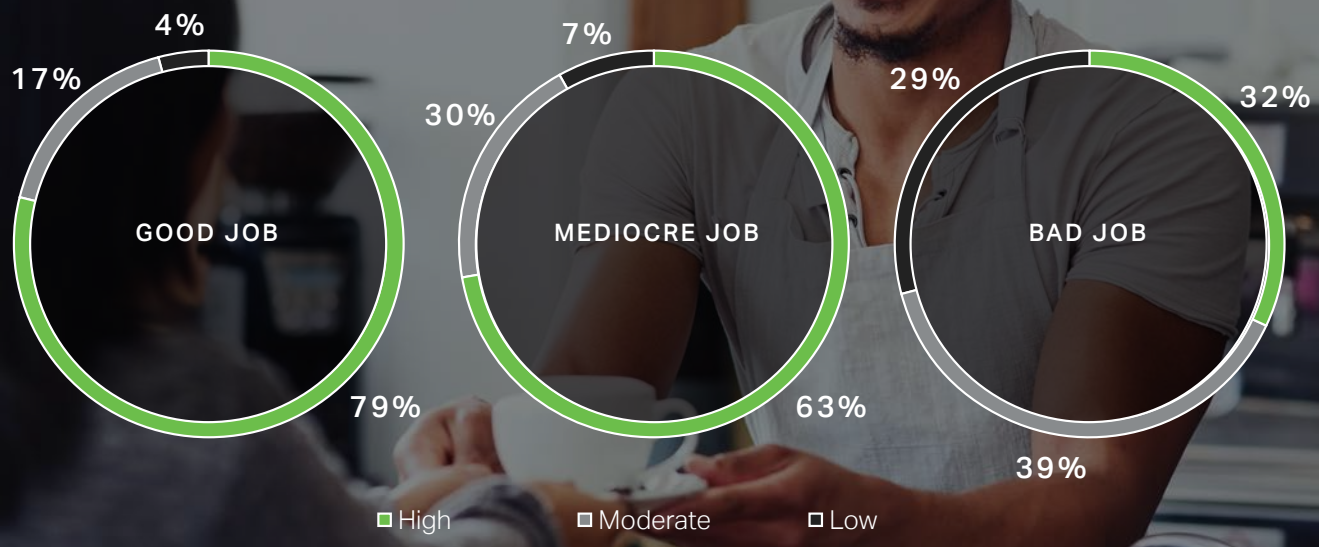
Less than half of American workers are in good jobs.

The 2019 Great Jobs Survey finds that 40% of American workers are currently in "good jobs," defined by high levels of satisfaction with the job characteristics workers care about most. Meanwhile, 16% of workers are in "bad jobs," which are rated poorly across most key characteristics. The rest of the U.S. workforce — 44% of employed Americans — are in "mediocre jobs," which warrant satisfaction on some but not all dimensions.

Job quality scores using this approach are highly predictive of how workers view the quality of their lives overall. Specifically, 79% of workers in good jobs evaluate their quality of life overall as "high," compared to 63% in mediocre jobs and only 32% in bad jobs. Most workers in bad jobs would have a quality of life defined as "moderate" or "low" (68%), based on their overall evaluation. To put this in perspective, job quality is similar to health status in terms of how well it predicts overall quality of life, and more predictive than income. Having a good job is akin to being in excellent self-reported health, whereas having a bad job is akin to having poor or fair health. Appendix Table 1 and the related discussion provide further details on how Gallup measures life evaluation and defines high, moderate and low.

CHART 1

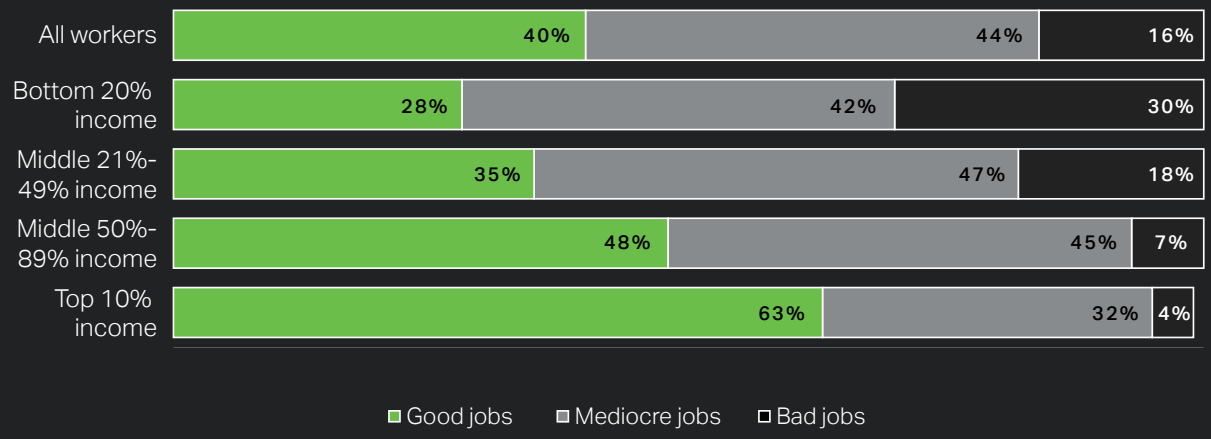
Percent of workers scoring as high, moderate or low in their life evaluation by whether they are in a good, mediocre or bad job situation



The index results also demonstrate that job quality is closely related to income. We measure income as personal labor income earned from employment and self-employment, including "all wages, salary, commissions, bonuses or tips from all jobs," but do not include capital income from nonwork activities, like dividends and interest earned on investments. Based on this definition of income, almost two-thirds of workers (63%) in the top 10% of earners are in good jobs, while just 4% are in bad jobs. By contrast, workers in the bottom 20% of income earners are more likely to be in bad jobs (30%) than good jobs (28%).

CHART 2

Percentage of workers in good, mediocre and bad jobs, by income level

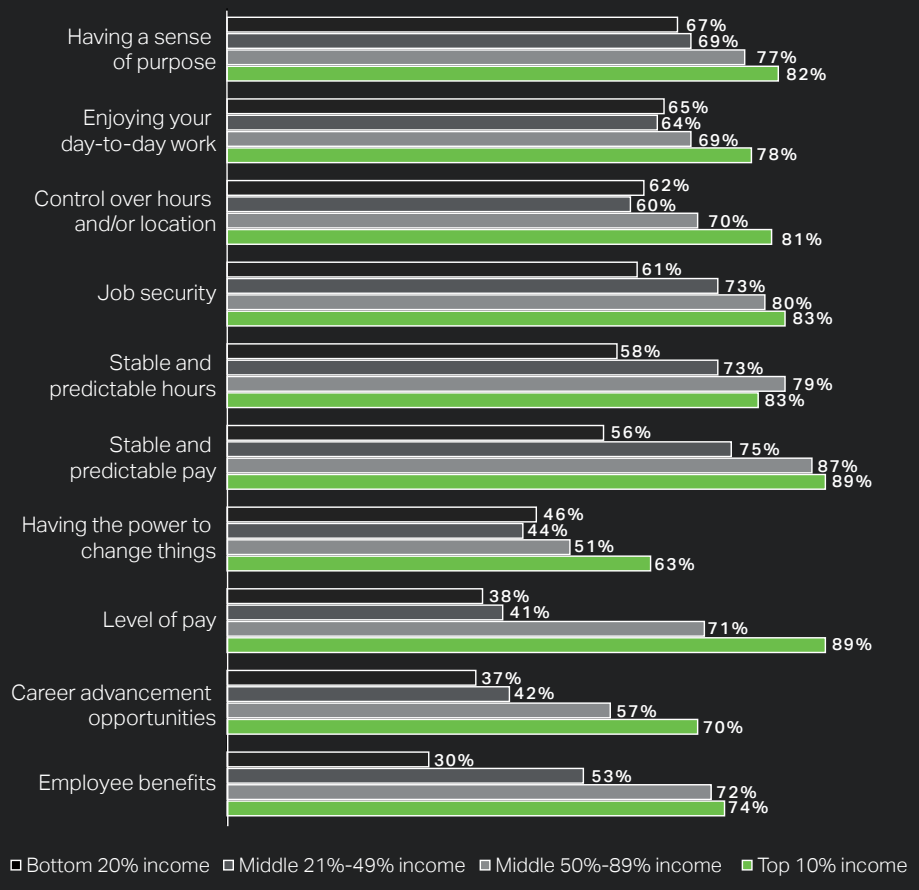


Level of pay is just one of 10 characteristics the index uses to gauge job quality and — despite the close relationship between workers' income differences and differences in their overall job quality scores — those scores are not driven primarily by satisfaction with wages and salaries. High-earning workers enjoy greater job satisfaction along every dimension of the job quality index, including those unrelated to pay.

It is true that level of pay is the characteristic with the single-largest difference in satisfaction between high-income (top 10%) and low-income (bottom 20%) workers (89% satisfied vs. 38%, respectively), but there are also considerable differences between these groups' satisfaction with their employee benefits, the stability and predictability of their pay, and their opportunities for career advancement. High-income workers are also more likely than their lower-paid counterparts to say they enjoy their day-to-day work, have a sense of purpose at work, and have the power to change things they're not satisfied with.

CHART 3

Percentage of workers who are satisfied with various dimensions of job quality, by income level



Among the most notable differences is the steady drop by income level in workers' likelihood to be satisfied with opportunities for career advancement in their current job. These results speak to concerns about structural barriers to social mobility in a country where equality of opportunity is such a cherished ideal.[19] Workers in the top 10% of the pay spectrum are almost twice as likely as those in the bottom 20% to say they are satisfied with their career advancement opportunities, such as promotion paths and skills training.

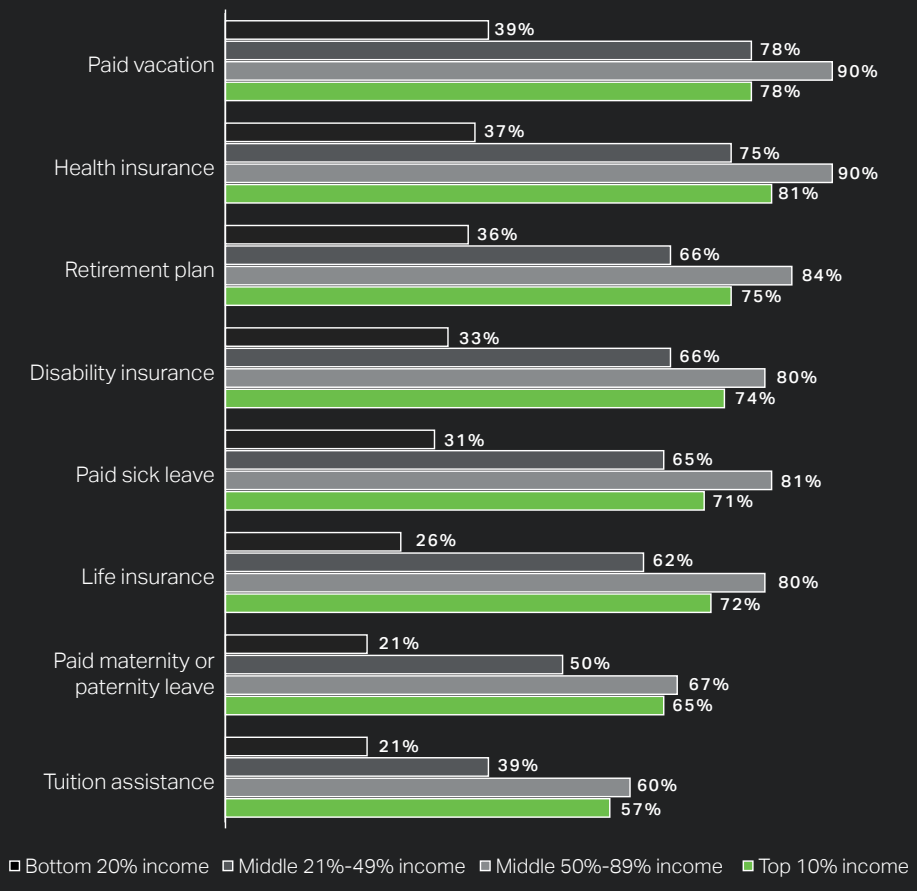
Low-income workers are far less likely to receive employment benefits, from health insurance and retirement plans to maternity and sick leave.

While the large gap in satisfaction with employee benefits between high-income and low-income workers may in many cases reflect an inadequacy of coverage, much of the difference is likely the result of lower-income workers not being offered coverage at all. When the Great Jobs Survey asked about eight different types of benefits, lower-income workers were much less likely than those above the median income to say they receive all of them. Just over one-third of workers in the bottom 20% of income receive health insurance benefits or retirement benefits, compared to at least three-quarters of workers in higher-income groups.

19 For discussion of career mobility, see Shearer, C., & Shah, I. (2018, December 18). Opportunity Industries: Exploring the industries that concentrate good and promising jobs in metropolitan America. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from **https://www.brookings.edu/research/opportunity-industries/**; For discussion of intergenerational mobility, see Reeves, R. V., & Krause, E. (2018, January 11). Raj Chetty in 14 charts: Big findings on opportunity and mobility we should all know. Brookings Institution. Retrieved from **https://www.brookings.edu/blog/social-mobility-memos/2018/01/11/raj-chetty-in-14-charts-big-findings-on-opportunity-and-mobility-we-should-know/**

CHART 4

Percentage of workers in jobs with benefits, by type of benefit and income



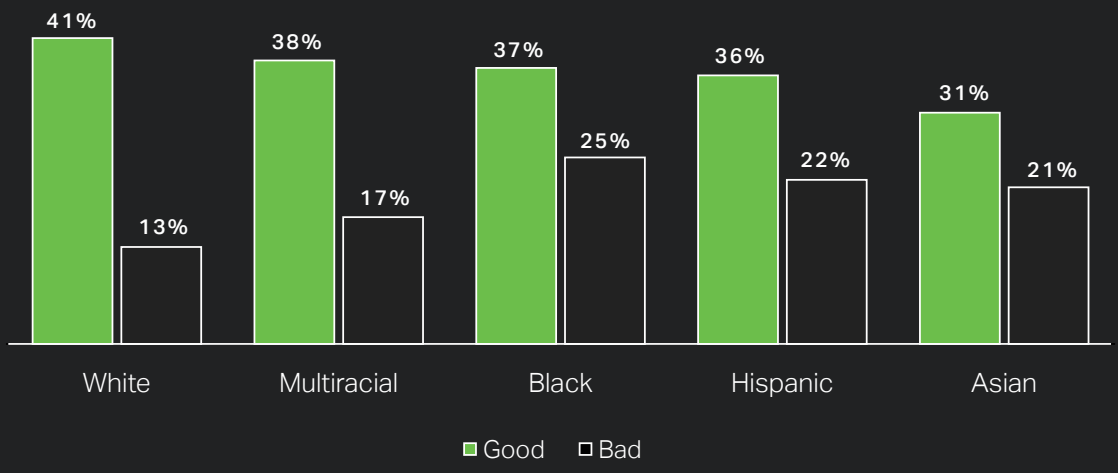
Older workers, white workers and those with high levels of education are most likely to be in good jobs.

The likelihood of working in a good or bad job varies significantly across racial and other demographic groups, with average job quality higher among older workers, white workers and those with more education. But it is not just postsecondary degrees that matter — professional certifications such as technical, trade or industry certifications make a significant difference in many workers' likelihood to feel they have good jobs.

Among employed Americans in the country's largest racial groups, whites are most likely to be in good jobs at 41%, and least likely to be in bad jobs at 13%. Asian Americans are least likely to have good jobs, at 31%; however, the highest percentage in bad jobs is seen among black workers, at 25%. Job quality scores among Asian and black workers are lower than those of whites and Hispanics at the same level of income, demonstrating that workers with similar compensation levels may nevertheless have different job quality experiences in other dimensions — and that those gaps may relate to demographic factors like race. To further explore the association of job quality with race and ethnicity, we disaggregated the data by gender and race/ethnicity in Appendix Table 4.

CHART 5

Percentage of workers in good and bad jobs, by race/ethnicity



Relatively low job quality ratings among Asian American workers are reflected in their low employee engagement scores. Specifically, they are less likely than other employees to feel that, "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day." Only 62% of Asian men agree or strongly agree with this statement, compared to 74% of white non-Hispanic men. This gap is particularly surprising given that Asian workers have higher levels of education and income than white workers (67% of Asian men have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 40% of white men in our sample of working adults).[20]

Further analysis of low job quality scores among black workers shows that the scores of black men reflect the objective circumstances of their work — especially lower income per hour worked. Among black women, however, pay does not fully explain the low job quality scores or the high percentage of black women in bad jobs, which is 31%, compared to 12% of white women.

Black women are only slightly less likely than white women to be satisfied with their pay (54% vs. 48%, respectively). However, black women rate their jobs overall much lower than white women at similar levels of pay. In particular, they are much less likely than white women to report satisfaction with the stability and predictability of their pay (64% for black women vs. 78% for white women), the stability and predictability of their hours (65% vs. 76%), and their control over their hours (55% vs. 71%). Likewise, black women are much less likely than white women to report enjoying their day-to-day work (56% vs. 71%).

Among sub-baccalaureate workers, certifications are strongly associated with good jobs.

Higher levels of education generally predict workers' likelihood of being in a good job, but the relationship is less straightforward than one might expect. Those with a high school education and a professional certification — but no other postsecondary education — are among the most likely to be in a good job, at 49%. That figure is on par

20 The sample population does not include enough working Asian women to report this figure.

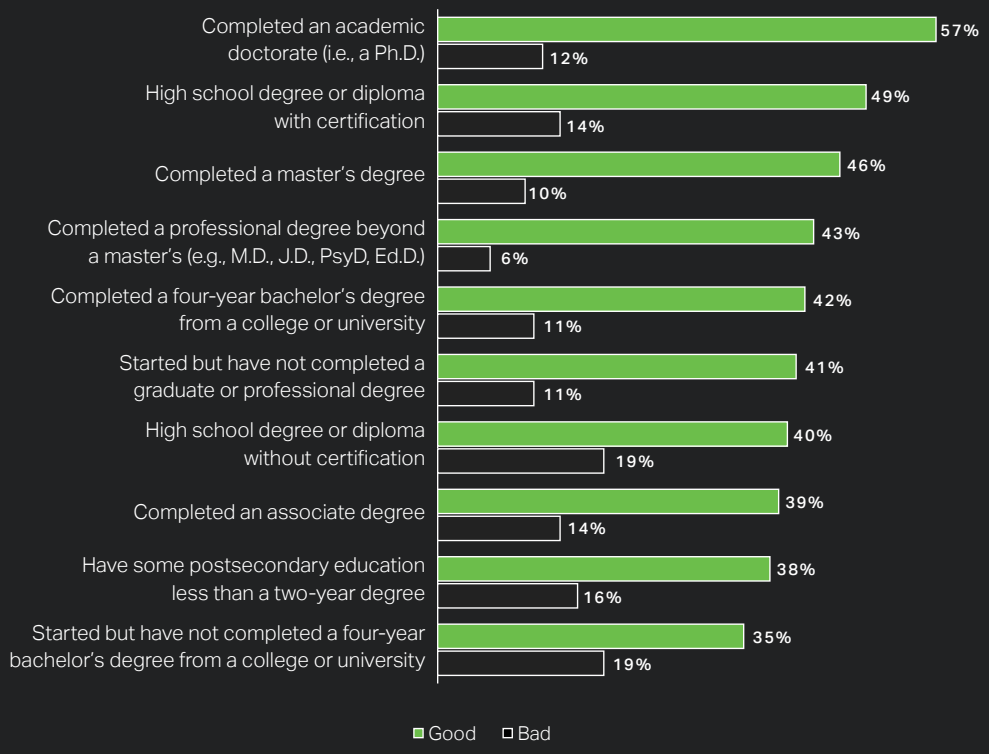
with the 47% of workers with a postgraduate degree who are in good jobs. Notably, high school-educated workers without a professional certification are less likely to be in good jobs, at 40%, and more likely to be in bad jobs (19%, vs. 14% for those with a certification).

However, the advantage a professional certification offers for job quality appears to be largely specific to workers with a high school diploma and no postsecondary education. Among workers overall (i.e., with any level of formal education), those with certifications are not statistically more likely than those without them to be in a good job. The factors that make certifications particularly helpful to high school graduates will be explored more fully in a future report.

A more detailed look at job quality differences by education level shows that 57% of workers with an academic doctorate (Ph.D.) are in good jobs and only 12% are in bad jobs, making this group the most satisfied by level of education. The group with the lowest probability of being in a bad job are those with a professional degree beyond a master's (such as a law degree or medical degree), of which only 6% are in bad jobs and 43% are in good jobs. The lowest-performing group are those who have started but not completed a four-year degree: Only 35% of these workers are in good jobs.

CHART 6

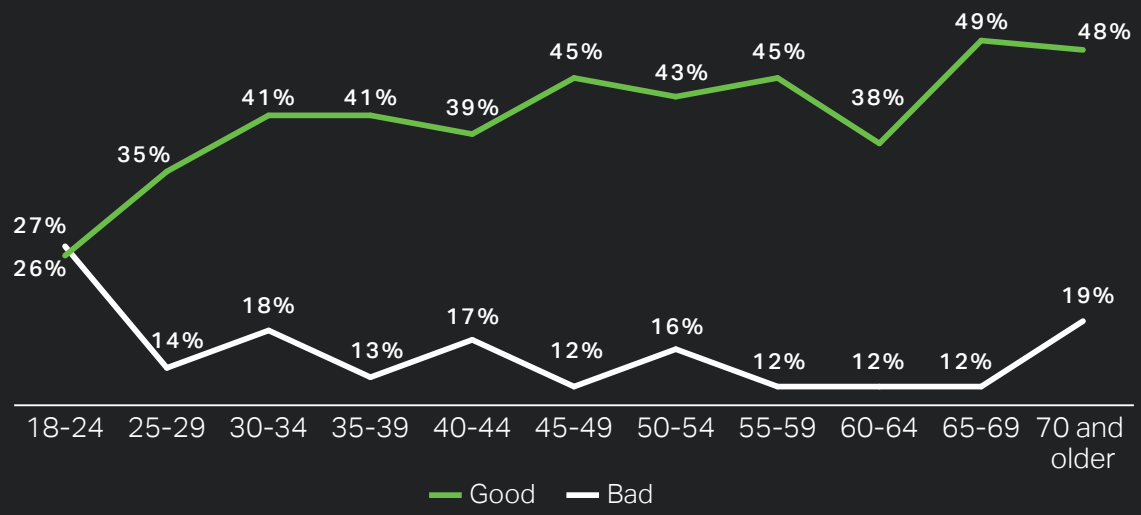
Percentage in good and bad jobs, by highest level of education



Age has an even stronger relationship to job quality than education, which likely speaks to the importance of work experience (job tenure is also strongly related to job quality). In general, older workers are more likely to be in good jobs and less likely to be in bad jobs than their younger counterparts. Only 31% of workers between the ages of 18 and 29 are in good jobs, and 21% are in bad jobs. Meanwhile, middle-aged workers between 30 and 49 are much more likely to be in good jobs (42%), as are workers over 50 (43%).

CHART 7

Percentage in good and bad jobs, by age



Workers in rural areas and small towns give higher job quality ratings despite lower average incomes.

U.S. workers' likelihood to have good jobs varies little by region of the country. Workers in the Midwest have the highest overall job quality score, largely because they are the least likely to be in a bad job (13%) compared to other regions (16% in the Northeast and South and 18% in the West); these differences are small but statistically significant.

There is greater variation across states. Among the 22 states with at least 100 respondents to the Great Jobs Survey, Missouri had the highest percentage of workers in good jobs, at 51%, while Michigan had the lowest, at 30%. At least 45% of workers in Pennsylvania, Texas and Massachusetts are in good jobs, versus just 30% of those in Maryland and Washington (see Appendix Table 5 for complete list).

Surprisingly, average job quality ratings do not differ substantially between urban and rural areas. Many may assume that workers living in mostly rural counties outside of metropolitan areas would be more negative on average about their employment situation, but 45% are in good jobs — well above the national average — and only 11% are in bad jobs. In general, workers outside of metro areas and those in smaller metro areas tend to give somewhat higher job quality ratings than workers in large metro areas, despite their significantly lower average incomes.

This finding is consistent with previous Gallup research showing that people living in smaller towns and counties tend to enjoy higher subjective wellbeing.[21] Looking at specific dimensions of jobs quality helps explain this result. Workers outside of metropolitan areas are roughly 5 to 6 percentage points more likely than their counterparts in

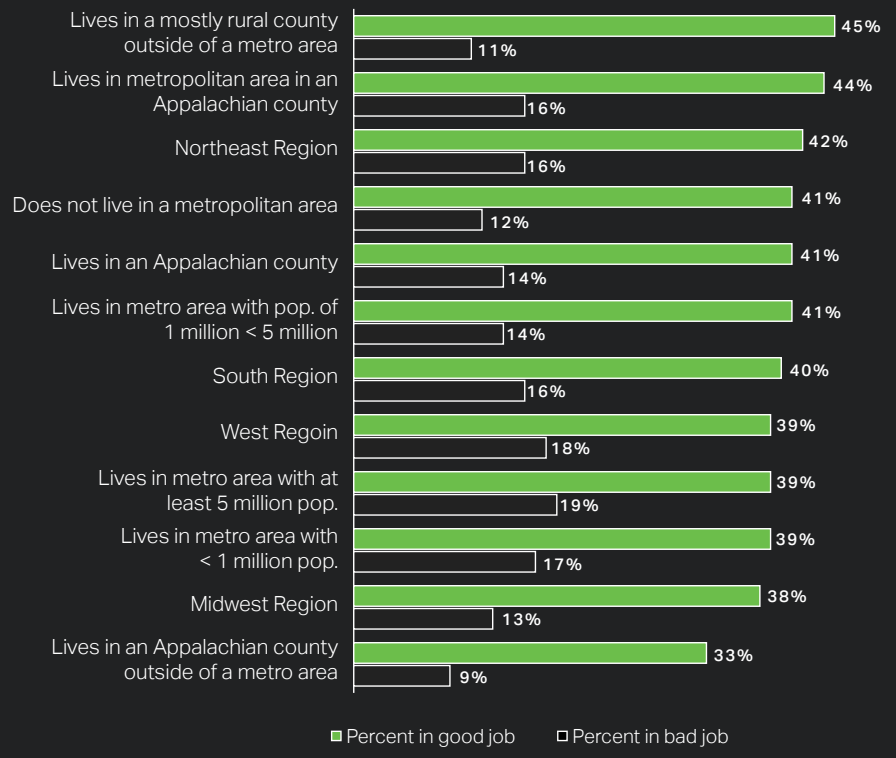
21 Rothwell, J. (2019, February 12). The Biggest Economic Divides Aren't Regional. They're Local. (Just Ask Parents.) *The New York Times*. Retrieved from **https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/12/upshot/the-biggest-economic-divides-arent-regional-theyre-local-just-ask-parents.html**

metro areas with 5 million or more residents to report satisfaction with the enjoyment of work, control over hours and the stability of pay.

Even workers in the Appalachian region, which has struggled economically, are just as likely as those outside of Appalachia to be in good jobs (41%).[22] The exception is that Appalachian workers outside of the region's metro areas are relatively unlikely to be in good jobs (33%). Still, they are also unlikely to be in bad jobs, at just 9%, and there is considerable variation across individuals within the nonmetro areas of Appalachia, so that the differences in job quality with other parts of the country are not statistically significant. An important limitation of this analysis is that we do not consider differences in labor force participation, which may be significantly lower in Appalachia.

CHART 8

Percentage of workers in good and bad jobs, by geography



Workers across income levels generally agree on the most important job quality dimensions.

Though Americans in low-income jobs are less likely to be satisfied with their pay, they are no more likely than those in higher-income positions to place a singular focus on pay when rating the importance of job characteristics. In particular, those in the bottom 20% on the income scale are just as likely as workers further up the scale to value a sense of purpose, an enjoyable work experience and career advancement opportunities.

In fact, all 10 dimensions of job quality are viewed as important or extremely important (a rating of "4" or "5" on the five-point importance scale) by a majority of workers across all income groups. "Stable and predictable pay" receives the highest importance rating (again, combining "4s" and "5s"); 92% overall indicate this dimension is important, versus 86% who say the same about their level of pay. Among the 10 job characteristics, workers are

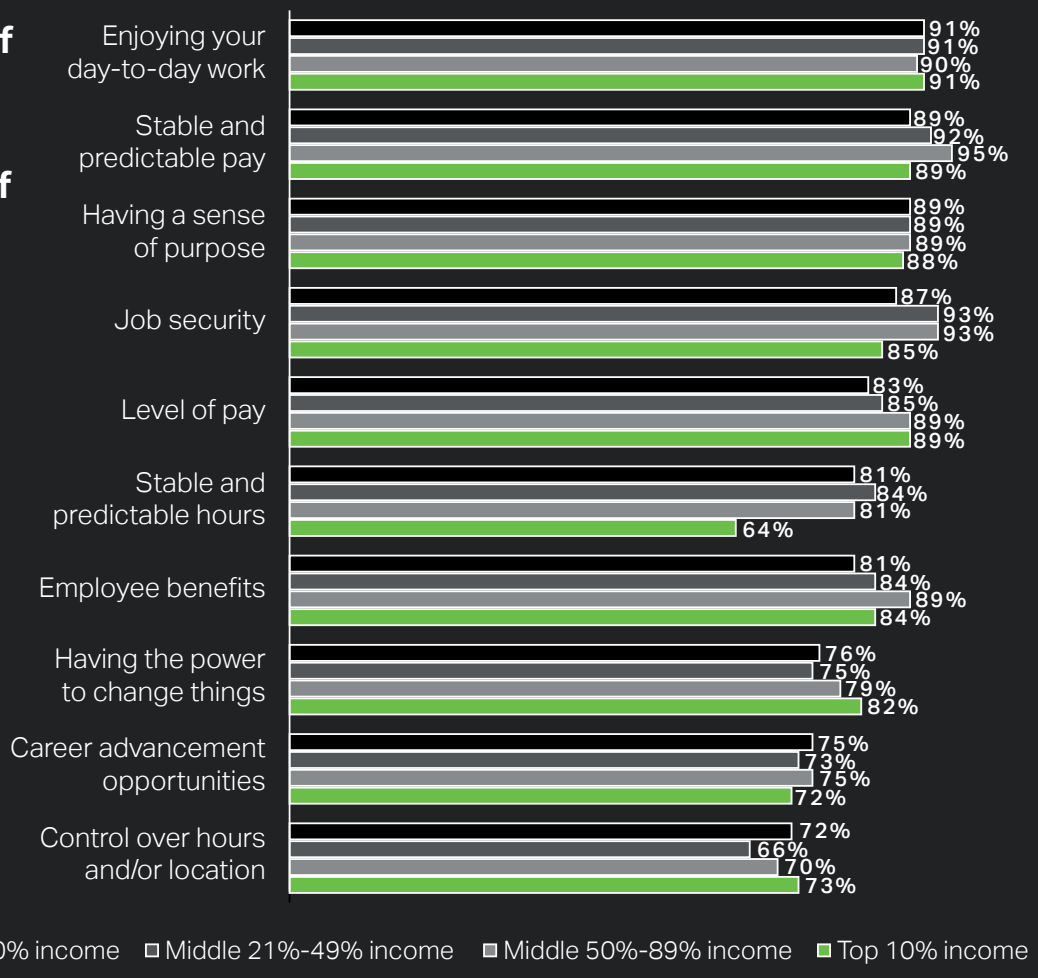
22 In this analysis, Appalachian counties were identified by the Appalachian Regional Commission. Counties in Appalachia. Retrieved from **https://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/CountiesinAppalachia.asp** (Accessed August 2, 2019); Appalachian Regional Commission. County Economic Status in Appalachia, FY 2020. Available at **https://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=149** (Accessed August 23, 2019).

least likely to say control over their hours or schedule is important; nonetheless, this factor is still considered important by 70% overall.

Looking at differences in importance ratings between high-income (top 10%) and low-income (bottom 20%) earners, the only significant gap is in stable and predictable hours, which is considerably more likely to be important to low-income earners (81%, vs. 64% for high-income earners). High-income workers may also be more likely to accept irregular hours as a consequence of their career choice — particularly in an era when many job tasks can be performed at any time and in any place.

CHART 9

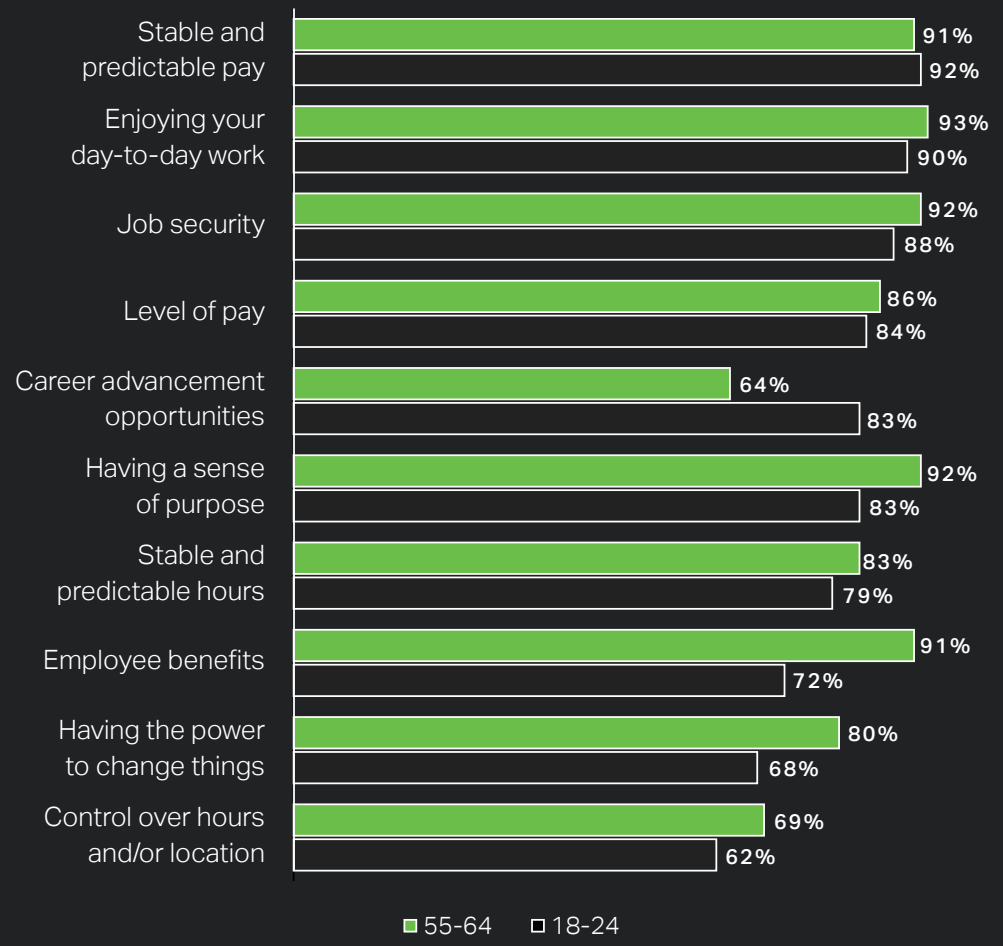
Percentage of workers who rate various dimensions of job quality as important, by income level



The priority American workers attach to various aspects of job quality varies more substantially by age. Not surprisingly, young workers are much more likely than those in the later stages of their working lives to see career advancement as important. For their part, older workers are more likely to prioritize employee benefits, as well as the power to change things at work they don't like.

CHART 10

Percentage of younger vs. older workers who rate different dimensions of job quality as important

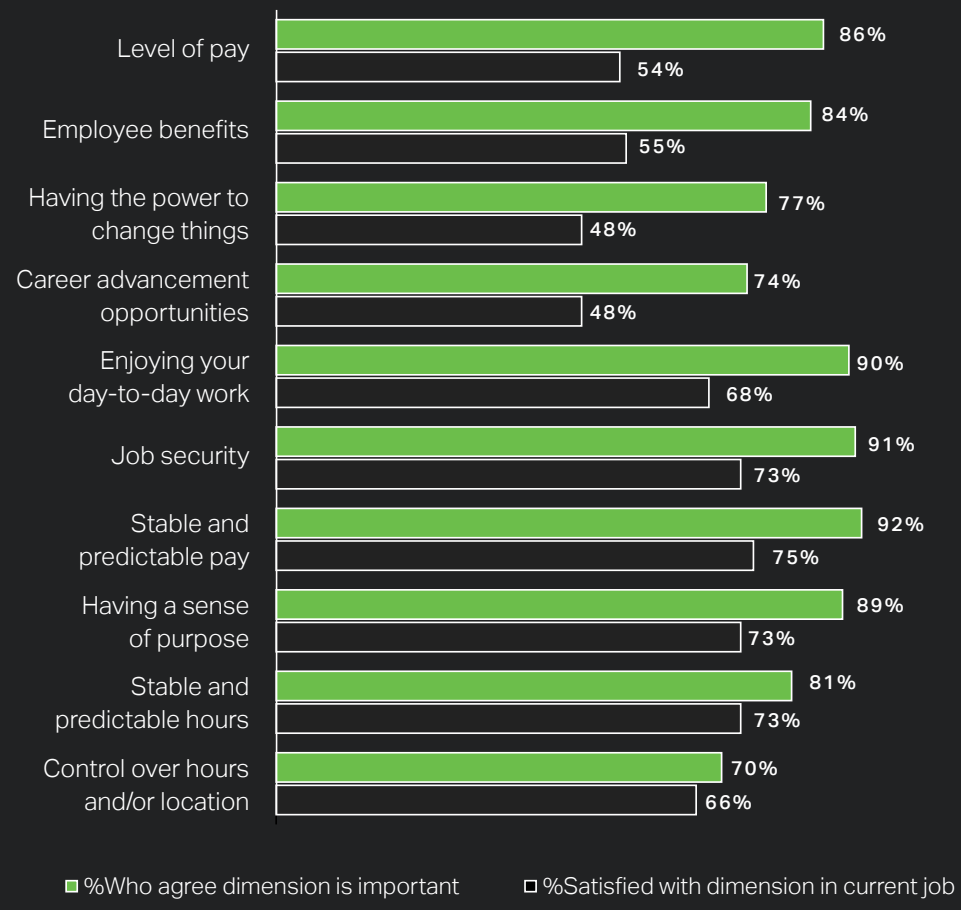


Low-income workers are more likely to be "disappointed" with all aspects of job quality.

The gap between the share of workers who rate a given dimension of job quality as important and the share who are satisfied with that dimension in their current job can be seen as a measure of job disappointment — i.e., the extent to which American workers' greatest hopes for their jobs are left unfulfilled. The largest gaps are in level of pay and benefits, which are commonly seen as important ratings but for which satisfaction ratings are relatively low. However, satisfaction is also low relative to importance for the power to change things at work and the potential for career advancement.

CHART 11

Importance vs. satisfaction ratings for all dimensions of job quality



As expected, high-income workers are least likely to be disappointed with all dimensions of job quality. Among those in the top 10% of incomes, importance ratings exceed satisfaction ratings by more than 10 percentage points for just two items (having the power to change things and enjoying their day-to-day work). What's more, importance ratings are lower than satisfaction ratings for two items: stable and predictable hours and control over hours and/or location.

These results are dramatically different for the bottom 20% of income earners, who express considerable disappointment with nearly every aspect of their jobs. Importance ratings outstrip satisfaction ratings by more than 20 percentage points for all but one item (control over hours and/or location). The disappointment measure is highest, at 50 percentage points, for employee benefits — meaning that half of low-income workers rate benefits as highly important but are not satisfied with them in their current job. Disappointment with the level and stability of their pay, as well as their prospects for career advancement, is also high among this group.

TABLE 1

"Disappointment" (importance minus satisfaction ratings) with various job characteristics among high-income and low-income workers

	High-Income (top 10%)			Low-Income (bottom 20%)		
	Important	Satisfied	Gap	Important	Satisfied	Gap
Level of pay	89%	89%	-1 pt.	83%	38%	-44 pts.
Employee benefits	84%	74%	-10 pts.	81%	30%	-50 pts.
Having the power to change things	82%	63%	-19 pts.	76%	46%	-30 pts.
Career advancement opportunities	72%	70%	-2 pts.	75%	37%	-38 pts.
Enjoying day-to-day work	91%	78%	-14 pts.	91%	65%	-26 pts.
Job security	85%	83%	-2 pts.	87%	61%	-26 pts.
Stable and predictable pay	89%	89%	0 pts.	89%	56%	-33 pts.
Having a sense of purpose	88%	82%	-6 pts.	89%	67%	-21 pts.
Stable and predictable hours	64%	79%	+15 pts.	81%	58%	-23 pts.
Control over hours and/or location	73%	81%	+8 pts.	72%	62%	-9 pts.

*Due to rounding, gap difference may be +/- 1 percentage point.

Job disappointment is higher among women than men, by an average of 3 percentage points across dimensions — a modest but statistically significant difference. The job characteristic with which female workers expressed the most disappointment relative to men is control over hours or location. Because women place notably higher importance on this aspect of job quality, the gap between satisfaction and importance is higher among women, even though men express similar satisfaction levels. Women are also somewhat more likely than men to be disappointed with the power to change things at work (with a difference of 6 percentage points).

There are also notable differences by race in this measure of job disappointment. For all aspects of job quality, gaps between importance and satisfaction ratings are larger among black, Hispanic and Asian workers than among white workers. The contrast between black and white workers is particularly stark: Disappointment scores average 13 percentage points (weighted by importance) higher across the 10 job characteristics among the former than the latter. By contrast, the average difference between Hispanic workers and white workers is 8 percentage points, while the average difference between Asian workers and white workers is 7 percentage points.

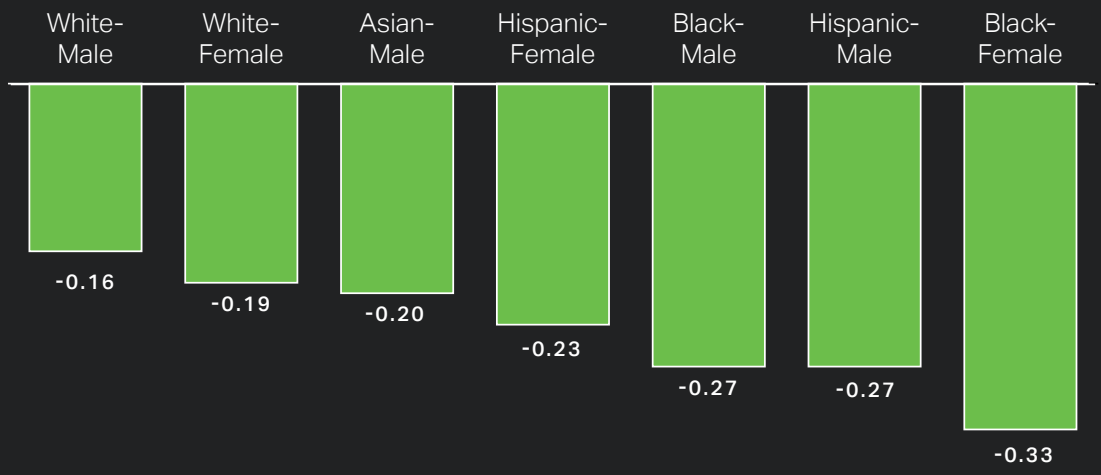
The combination of race and gender is revealing when it comes to disappointment with working conditions. Black women are the most disappointed (-33 percentage point gap) and white men the least disappointed (-16 percentage point gap) when comparing satisfaction to importance and taking the average across each dimension. Hispanic females and black and Hispanic males also express considerable disappointment. The groups analyzed are limited to those with at least 100 respondents, so female Asians are not included, but white females score higher than any of the remaining groups except white males.

We compared this measure of disappointment with the CEPR measure of good jobs — defined as working in a job that pays at least $22 per hour and has health insurance and retirement benefits. Hispanic women and black women are least likely to be in a good job by that standard (11% and 20%, respectively), while Asian and white men

are most likely to have one (43% and 38%, respectively). As discussed in the appendix, there is only some modest overlap between this objective measure of job quality and the one revealed by our analysis of the subjective judgments of workers.

CHART 12

Average importance vs. satisfaction ratings for all dimensions of job quality, by race and gender (for large groups)



It's worth noting that varying expectations about job quality may factor in to how workers in different demographic groups rate their satisfaction with each dimension relative to its importance. For example, if women or minority workers tend to have lower expectations for the kinds of jobs available to them, they may give higher satisfaction ratings than men or white workers under the same conditions. This seems to be the case for Hispanic women, who tend to rate their job situation higher than other groups with the same level of income and benefits.[23]

Most workers say their pay has improved in the last five years, but other aspects of their job have not.

About six in 10 workers overall (59%) say their pay has increased over the last five years, a time frame in which the U.S. economy has seen steady if unspectacular economic growth. On some job quality dimensions, however, less than one-fourth of workers report an improvement — for example, just 23% report say their employee benefits have improved in that time, whereas 21% report that their benefits are now worse. Most workers rate their employment situation from five years ago similarly to their current situation.

Predictably, lower-income workers are much less likely than higher-income workers to report a pay increase. Among those with incomes in the bottom 20%, a minority (42%) say their pay has increased, versus 74% of those

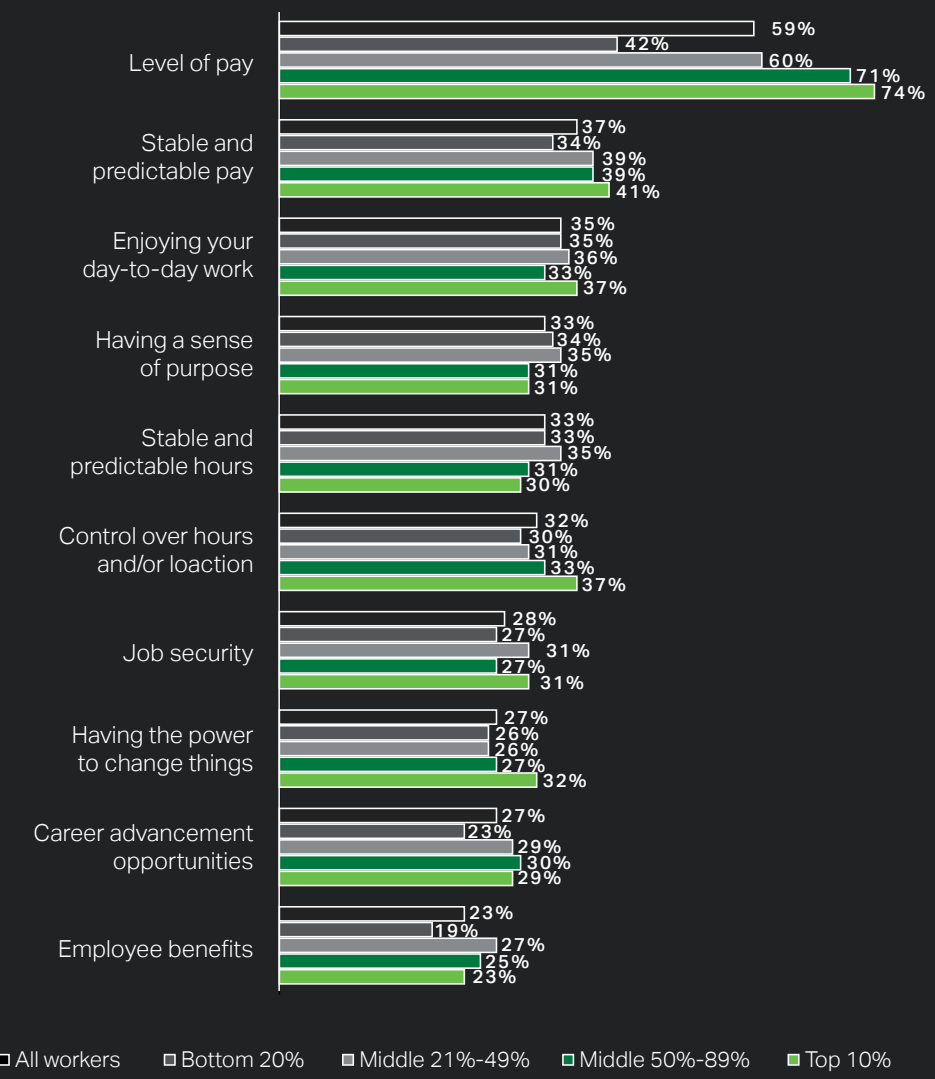
23 To assess this, we regressed job quality on the log of hourly income, healthcare and retirement benefits, age, age squared, company size, gender and race. Hispanic women were significantly more likely to provide higher job quality ratings than other groups, after controlling for these factors. Men, Asians and black women provided significantly lower ratings. As mentioned in a previous section, controlling for agreement with the engagement item "Getting to do your best work every day" eliminates any significant effect from Asian men, but leaves significant effects for other groups, which seem to be driven by substantive differences in how the non-pay related dimensions are experienced.

with incomes in the top 10%. In this context, it is essential to point out that workers are classified by income using their current (2019) incomes, so any income growth experienced by low-income workers would have had to come up from a very low base. Some of those who would have been classified as low-income workers five years ago but saw a pay raise would now fall into a higher income category, suppressing somewhat the percentage of remaining low-income workers who say their pay increased.

Given these caveats, looking at how nonincome aspects of job quality have changed may be more meaningful when analyzing across income groups. On these other dimensions, changes in job quality are generally — but not always — more favorable for higher-income workers and many of the differences are small. Relative to workers with incomes in the top 10%, those with incomes in the bottom 20% are slightly more likely to report improvement in terms of stable and predictable hours and having a sense of purpose.

CHART 13

Percentage of workers saying that various dimensions of the quality of their job have improved in last five years, by income level



Among workers in the lowest income category, there is also a notable difference by race in the likelihood to have had a pay raise: 27% of black workers with incomes in the bottom 20% say their pay level has improved in the last five years, versus 46% of white workers and 36% of Hispanic workers in this income group. However, low-income women are as likely as low-income men to say their pay has improved in that time (41% for both).

Two-thirds of U.S. workers say they are currently in their "best job ever."

Workers' perceptions of how various aspects of job quality are changing in their working lives raise an important question: Is the standard career life cycle — which assumes people move into progressively better jobs until they retire — working? Earlier, we noted that job quality generally improves with age, but the Great Jobs Survey also addresses this question from another angle by asking U.S. workers whether they are currently working in the best job they've ever had. Those who say no have presumably either encountered difficulty maintaining a clear upward career trajectory or have had to sacrifice some degree of job quality to address other goals or responsibilities.

For about two-thirds of American workers, the career life cycle seems to be working as expected — 65% say they are currently in their best job ever. However, this figure is lower among older workers, lower-income workers and blacks. Surprisingly, the percentage who say they are in their best job ever begins to taper at a relatively young age — workers aged 35 to 44 are less likely than those aged 25 to 34 to feel this way (66% vs. 72%, respectively). Middle-aged and older workers are not only less likely to be working in their best job ever, but those who are not are more likely to say they were laid off from that job (that is, let go for reasons beyond their control, such as downsizing). Workers laid off from their best job ever may experience not only negative financial circumstances, as research shows, but could also be at risk for psychological or other health problems.[24]

TABLE 2

According to how you define a good job, are you currently working at the "best job" you've ever had?

		Percent "yes, in best job ever"	Percent not in their best job ever who say they were laid off from that job
All workers		65%	9%
Age	18-24	64%	3%
	25-34	72%	4%
	35-44	66%	9%
	45-54	65%	12%
	55-64	61%	13%
	65 and older	53%	11%
Race/ethnicity	White	67%	9%
	Black	50%	9%
	Hispanic	68%	13%
	Asian	63%	8%
Income level	Bottom 20%	51%	8%
	Middle 21%-49%	65%	12%
	Middle 50-89%	75%	7%
	Top 10%	72%	5%

To further investigate how workers perceive their job quality trajectory, they were asked to imagine a ladder with steps numbering zero to 10, where zero is the worst possible employment situation for them and 10 the best possible situation. They first indicated which step their current employment situation is on, then which step it was

24 Couch, K., & Placzek, D. (2010). Earnings losses of displaced workers revisited. *American Economic Review*, 100(1), 572-589.

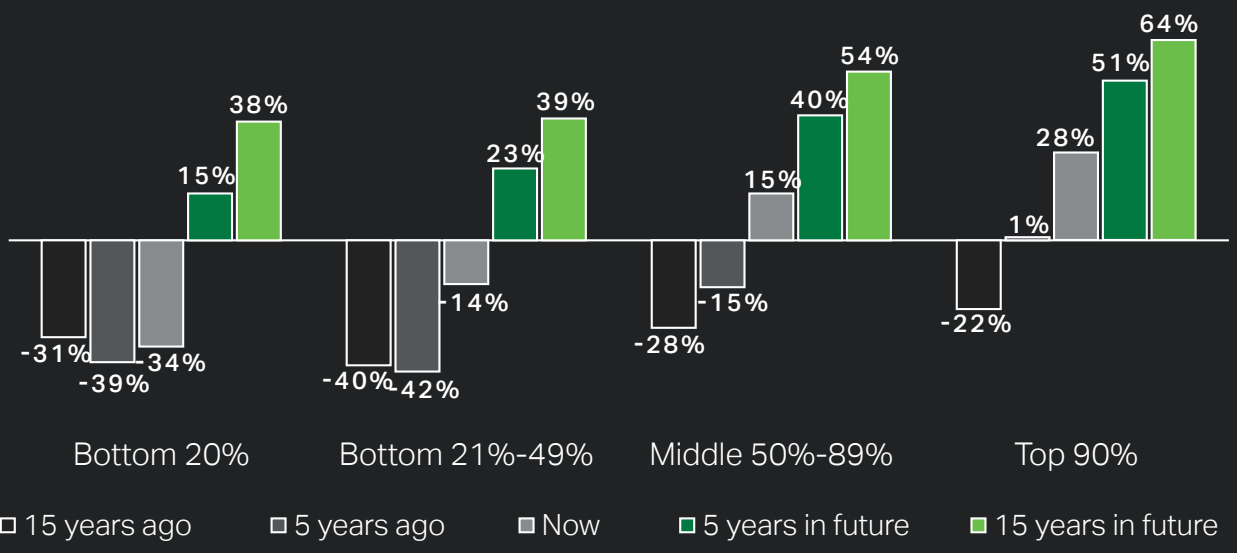
on five years ago, and 15 years ago. Finally, they were asked to predict which step their job situation would be on five years from now, and 15 years from now.[25]

The following chart shows the net positive evaluations (percentage who give a "9" or "10" minus the percentage who give a "6" or less) for each point in time among workers in each income group.

The results demonstrate that higher-income workers view their past work experiences somewhat negatively (more likely to be below "7" than "9" or above) but see themselves on a sharply upward trajectory that will continue 15 years into the future. By contrast, low-income workers view their past job situations rather harshly, and have seen little to no progress over the past 15 years. Nonetheless, even low-income workers are generally optimistic that their job quality will improve.

CHART 14

Percentage of workers with positive job evaluations minus the percentage with negative evaluations in the past, present and future, by income level



*This net job evaluation metric is calculated as the percentage of workers who respond a "9" or "10" minus the percentage of workers who respond with a "6" or below, when asked to rate their job on a zero to 10 scale, with 10 being the best possible job and zero being the worst. When asked to evaluate their overall job now compared to five years ago or fifteen years ago, the average worker in each income group gives a higher evaluation to their job now. This contrasts somewhat with data from Chart 13, which shows that income was the only job dimension on which a majority of workers expressed improvement relative to five years ago. Thus, it seems that, when asked about specific job characteristics, workers are less satisfied with progress than when they think of their job as a whole. In other words, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts when it comes to changes in job quality in this survey.

25 The question about jobs 15 years ago was not restricted by age, but it was missing for 86% of workers under 25 and just 22% of workers above 25. Removing all responses from workers 31 and under for the 15 years ago item changes the percentages slightly, but the results are qualitatively the same in terms of understanding the broad patterns.

Job quality varies systematically by type of job (full time, part time, multiple), organization size, type of work, occupation, and sector

Aside from demographic variables like income, several other circumstances are associated with workers' likelihood to be in high-quality jobs — including the amount of time devoted to work, the size of their employer, the nature of their work and the number of jobs they have.

Full-time employees (those working 35 hours or more) are significantly more likely to be in a good job (42%) than part-time employees (30%). However, the data also suggest that too much work is a detriment to job quality. The percentage of workers in good jobs peaks for those working between 40 and 54 hours per week across all jobs and falls sharply thereafter. Most workers at 55 hours or above (nearly one-fifth of the workforce) indicate that they work too many hours and often have multiple jobs, an issue we discuss further below.

TABLE 3

Job quality, hour preferences and share with more than one job by hours worked per week across all jobs

	Work less than 40 hours	Work 40-54 hours	Work at least 55 hours
Percent in good job	32%	45%	35%
Percent who work too many hours	8%	23%	63%
Percent who work too few hours	29%	5%	2%
Percent with multiple jobs	26%	20%	55%
Share of workforce	20%	62%	18%

Employees' job quality ratings improve steadily with the number of people who work at their organization; while only about one-third of those in the smallest companies are in good jobs, that figure rises to almost half among those whose companies have 100 or more employees. This finding speaks to advantages — like stability of pay and hours and employee benefits — that larger employers are in a better position to offer.[26]

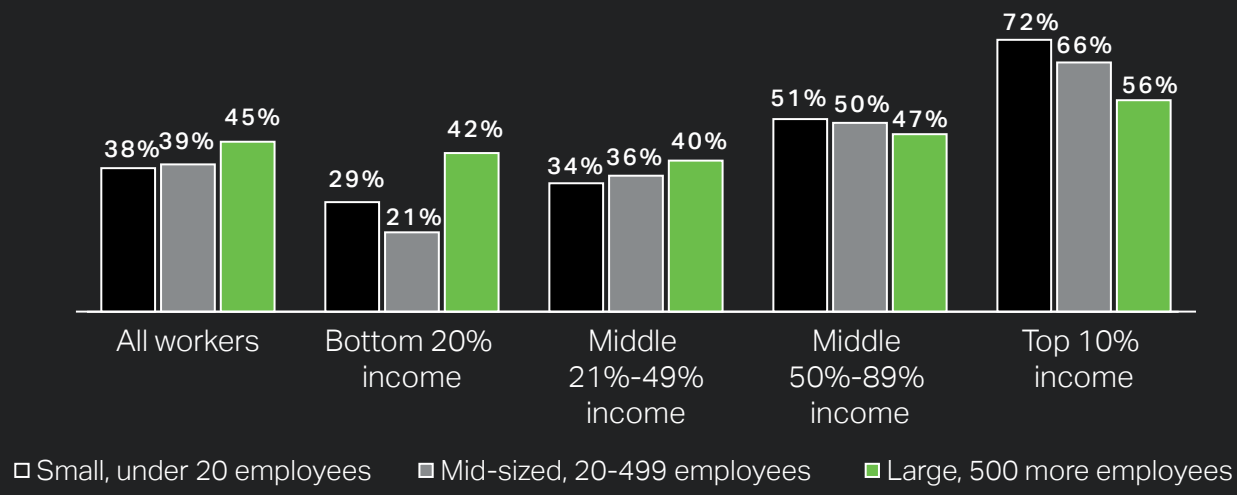
Workers in large companies (500 or more employees) are far more likely to be satisfied (by 41 percentage points) with their employee benefits than workers in companies with less than 10 workers. This dimension is the principal advantage of working in a large company, but not the only one. Workers are also more satisfied with their level of pay, the stability of their pay and hours, and their opportunities for career advancement. Conversely, workers in smaller firms enjoy more power to influence things they don't like about their job. Other aspects of satisfaction are roughly the same between workers in large and small firms.

26 Thirty-two percent of workers say they are in organizations with less than 20 employees; 33% are in organizations with 20 to 499 employees, and 27% say they work for an organization with at least 500 employees.

The positive relationship between job quality and company size is only found for workers earning below the median income. For those in the bottom income quintile, 42% of workers in larger firms (500 employees or more) are in good jobs, compared to only 21% of workers in mid-sized companies (between 20 and 499 employees). By contrast, the gap goes the other direction among workers in the top income decile — 72% of workers in small companies are in good jobs compared to only 56% in large companies. In this way, large companies even out the experiences of their workers across income levels much more so than smaller companies.

CHART 15

Percentage of workers in good jobs, by income and size of company



The relationship between satisfaction, income and company size plays out differently across the dimensions of job quality. Workers at all income levels are more satisfied with benefits in large companies, but higher-income workers in large companies are much less satisfied than their lower-income counterparts with having the power to change things, having a sense of purpose and enjoying their day-to-day work. One potential explanation for the dissatisfaction of top-earners in large companies is they are much less likely to be executives than top-earning workers in small companies, by a margin of 6% to 30%, respectively.

TABLE 4

Percentage satisfied with each job quality dimension in large companies vs. small companies, results among high-income and low-income workers*

	High-Income (top 10%)			Low-Income (bottom 20%)		
	Large companies	Small companies	Gap	Large companies	Small companies	Gap
Employee benefits	57%	25%	33 pts.	83%	66%	18 pts.
Level of pay	55%	43%	12 pts.	92%	86%	6 pts.
Stable and predictable pay	71%	60%	11 pts.	91%	79%	12 pts.
Career advancement opportunities	51%	40%	10 pts.	74%	72%	2 pts.
Stable and predictable hours	70%	62%	8 pts.	75%	76%	-1 pt.
Job security	75%	66%	8 pts.	83%	86%	-3 pts.
Having a sense of purpose	79%	73%	5 pts.	75%	92%	-17 pts.
Enjoying day-to-day work	72%	71%	1 pt.	76%	84%	-8 pts.
Control over hours and/or location	62%	69%	-7 pts.	78%	88%	-10 pts.
Having the power to change things	43%	55%	-12 pts.	52%	80%	-28 pts.

* Large companies are defined as having 500 or more workers; small companies are defined as having less than 20 workers. Due to rounding, gap difference may be +/- 1 percentage point.

In addition to company size, there are notable differences in job quality by sector. Service industry jobs in accommodation and food services have the lowest percentage of workers in good jobs, at 23%, and a relatively low percentage of workers who say they are in their best job ever (55%). Workers in arts, entertainment and recreation, transportation and warehousing, and retail are also unlikely to be in good jobs.

By contrast, 51% of workers in construction are in good jobs, as are almost half of those in finance and insurance, administrative and support positions, and education. Workers are most likely to say they are in their best job ever if they work in construction or professional services, and most likely to say they have been terminated from their best job ever if they work in manufacturing, transportation, or accommodation and food services.

The current distribution of good jobs across sectors reveals insights about how job quality today may compare to the recent past and to a forecasted future workforce.[27] Using industry data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections Program, we find that the growth or decline of certain industries in the U.S. economy has likely not had much effect on the overall share of good jobs in the labor market — and that this is likely to remain

27 The Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections Program reports employment by sector in 2006 and 2016 and forecasts employment data for 2026 using various technical assumptions and modelling exercises. If we assume that the probability of being in a good job in a given industry is the same in 2006, 2016, and 2026, we can estimate how the probability of being in a good job has changed and is likely to change; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Employment by major industry sector. Available at **https://www.bls.gov/emp/tables/employment-by-major-industry-sector.htm**. (Accessed August 12, 2019).

the case through 2026 (in so far as the projections are accurate).[28] That's because growth in industries with a high percentage of good jobs seems to largely be offsetting losses in other industries with good jobs.

TABLE 5

Percentage in good jobs, bad jobs, best job ever and terminated from best job ever, by sector

	Percent in good job	Percent in bad job	Percent in best job ever	Percent terminated from best job ever
Construction (n=184)	51%	9%	74%	8%
Finance and Insurance (n=367)	49%	9%	73%	6%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services (n=203)	48%	13%	68%	9%
Educational Services (n=744)	46%	11%	68%	4%
Public Administration (n=526)	43%	6%	74%	6%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (n=462)	42%	9%	73%	8%
Manufacturing (n=484)	42%	16%	60%	15%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing (n=127)	41%	14%	72%	6%
Other Services (except Public Administration) (n=312)	39%	14%	65%	7%
Health Care and Social Assistance (n=858)	39%	14%	64%	8%
Information (n=218)	36%	18%	68%	9%
Retail Trade (n=451)	34%	27%	53%	9%
Transportation and Warehousing (n=206)	32%	21%	61%	13%
Arts, Entertainment and Recreation (n=143)	28%	35%	70%	6%
Accommodation and Food Services (n=136)	23%	25%	55%	10%

* List of sectors limited to those with at least 100 responses.

There are notable differences in job quality by occupation. Low-paying occupations in services or manufacturing have the lowest percentage of workers in good jobs, with food preparation, healthcare support and production workers scoring the lowest at 18%, 23% and 29%, respectively. On the opposite end, managers and computer workers are almost twice as likely to be in good jobs (50% and 49%, respectively). Consistent with the long-term decline in the manufacturing sector, production workers are also the most likely to say they've been terminated from their best job ever (17%), followed by transportation and material moving workers (13%).

28 Among the largest changes are the loss of manufacturing and the gains in healthcare. The share of workers in manufacturing is expected to fall by 1 percentage point (from 7.9 in 2016 to 6.9 in 2026), whereas healthcare is expected to increase its share of employment from 12.2% to 13.8%. Healthcare jobs receive slightly lower job quality ratings than manufacturing jobs, but other changes rebalance the share in good jobs, such as projected growth in the share of jobs in professional and business services and projected declines in the share of employment in retail. Major changes in the types of jobs within industries or changes that affect workers across industries would reduce the accuracy of these estimates.

TABLE 6

Percentage in good jobs, bad jobs, best job ever and terminated from best job ever, by occupational category

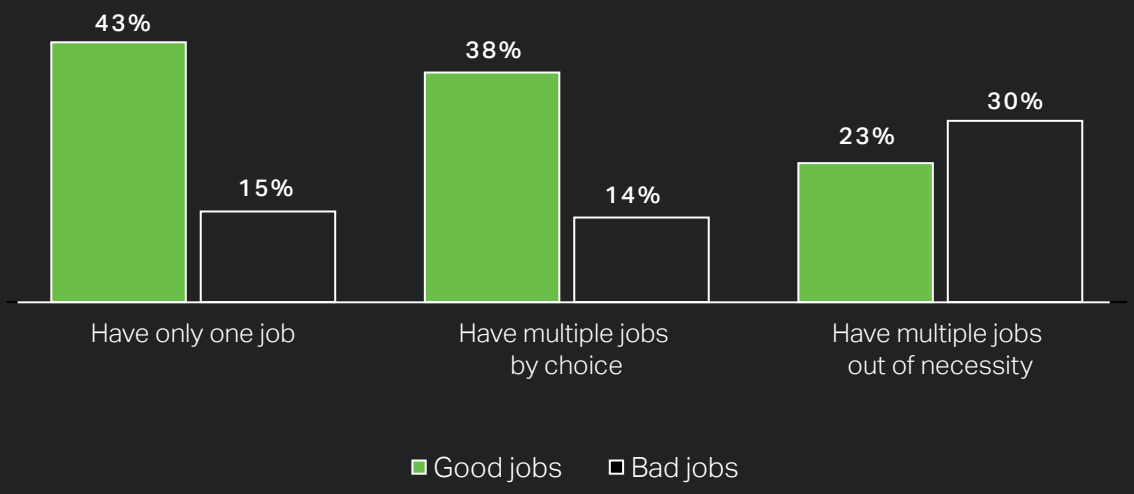
	Percent in good job	Percent in bad job	Percent in best job ever	Percent terminated from best job ever
Management (n=1,187)	50%	10%	72%	7%
Computer and Mathematical (n=263)	49%	6%	73%	11%
Educational Instruction and Library (n=507)	45%	11%	67%	4%
Legal (n=104)	45%	6%	82%	4%
Architecture and Engineering (n=211)	43%	5%	78%	5%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical (n=424)	42%	10%	71%	4%
Office and Administrative Support (n=548)	41%	16%	67%	9%
Life, Physical and Social Science (n=131)	40%	8%	78%	4%
Transportation and Material Moving (n=160)	40%	18%	55%	13%
Installation, Maintenance and Repair (n=128)	39%	17%	64%	11%
Construction and Extraction (n=128)	38%	17%	73%	9%
Business and Financial Operations (n=498)	37%	16%	61%	11%
Community and Social Service (n=143)	36%	22%	59%	2%
Sales and Related (n=398)	36%	20%	57%	10%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media (n=207)	32%	21%	79%	5%
Production (n=149)	29%	24%	56%	17%
Healthcare Support (n=116)	23%	21%	54%	11%
Food Preparation and Serving Related (n=110)	18%	44%	45%	11%

* List of job categories limited to those with at least 100 responses.

Those who work multiple jobs out of necessity are less likely than those who have a single job (or those who work more than one job but not out of need) to be unsatisfied with their level of pay.[29] However, such workers are also significantly less likely to be happy with other aspects of job quality, such as the stability of their pay and hours. Overall, 23% of those who work multiple jobs out of need are in good jobs, versus 43% of those with a single job and 38% of those who have multiple jobs by choice rather than necessity. Such findings highlight that while the "gig" economy has made it easier for people to earn income from multiple sources as independent workers — perhaps to compensate for stagnant or modest wage growth relative to the cost of living — many face trade-offs in terms of job quality.

CHART 16

Percentage of workers in good and bad jobs, by need to work multiple jobs



The type of work people do is also strongly related to their perceptions of job activities and opportunities. A majority of workers who strongly agree that they are expected to be creative and innovative at work (54%) are in a good job, versus about one in five (19%) of those who strongly disagree with this statement. Positions that incorporate learning and development are also more likely to be associated with overall job quality; workers who say their primary job gives them the opportunity to learn new skills are twice as likely as those who do not to be in good jobs — 45% versus 22%, respectively. Finally, workers who strongly agree that they get to do what they do best are also much more likely to be in a good job than those who strongly disagree (62% vs. 13%, respectively).[30]

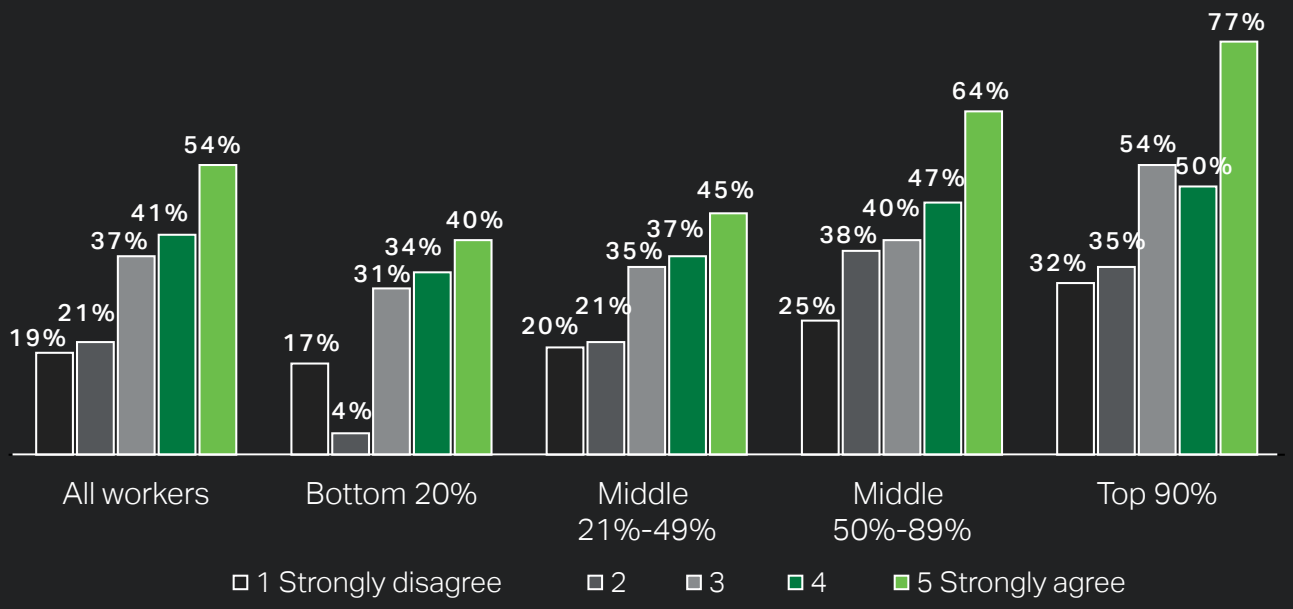
The positive association between good jobs and opportunities to be creative and innovative is very strong at all income levels. For workers in the bottom quintile, 40% are in good jobs if they strongly agree that they have these opportunities, compared to only 17% who strongly disagree. There are similar differences for other income groups as well.

29 We find that 72% of workers hold only one job, 19% hold multiple jobs for reasons other than financial need, and 8% hold multiple jobs out of financial need.

30 The item reads: "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day," and asks for agreement on a one to five scale, with "5" indicating strongly agree and "1" indicating strongly disagree. Forty-one percent of workers strongly agree.

CHART 17

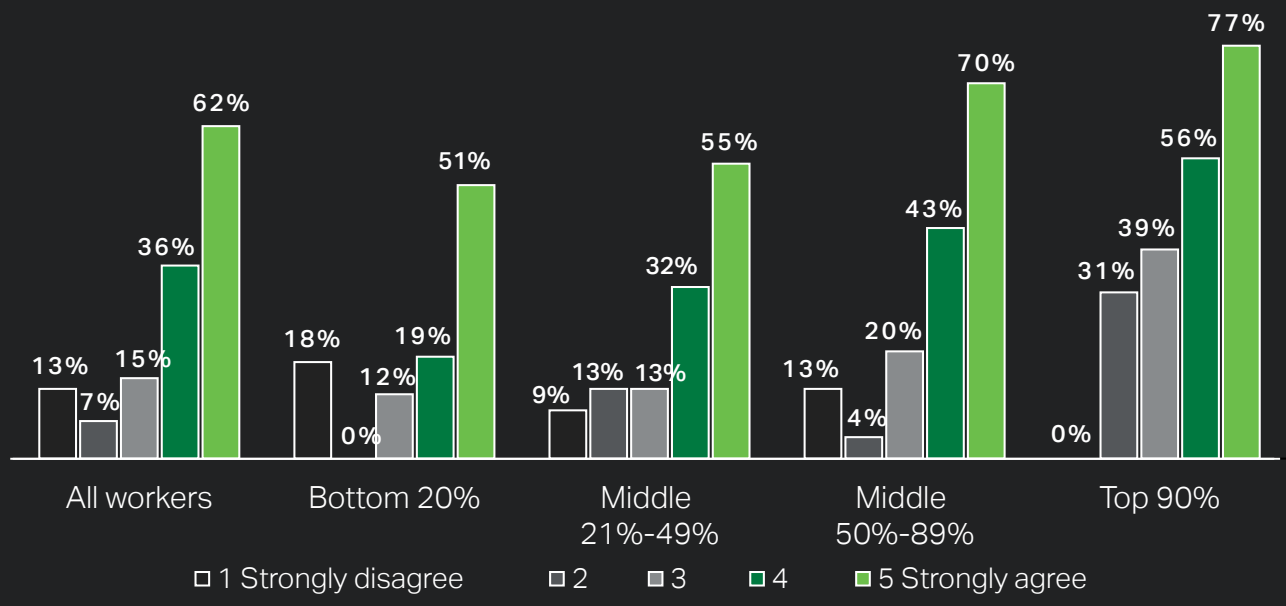
Percentage of workers in good jobs, by income and level of agreement that they are expected to be creative or innovative at their job



A similar pattern is found for workers who say they have the opportunity to do what they do best every day. In fact, the relationship with job quality is even stronger. Even for those at the bottom 20% of the income distribution, the majority (51%) of workers who strongly agree that they get to do their best work qualify as having a good job. Across the income distribution, workers are more generally satisfied with even objective aspects of their job when they do work that draws on their strengths and abilities.

CHART 18

Percentage of workers in good jobs, by income and level of agreement that they have the opportunity to do what they do best at work



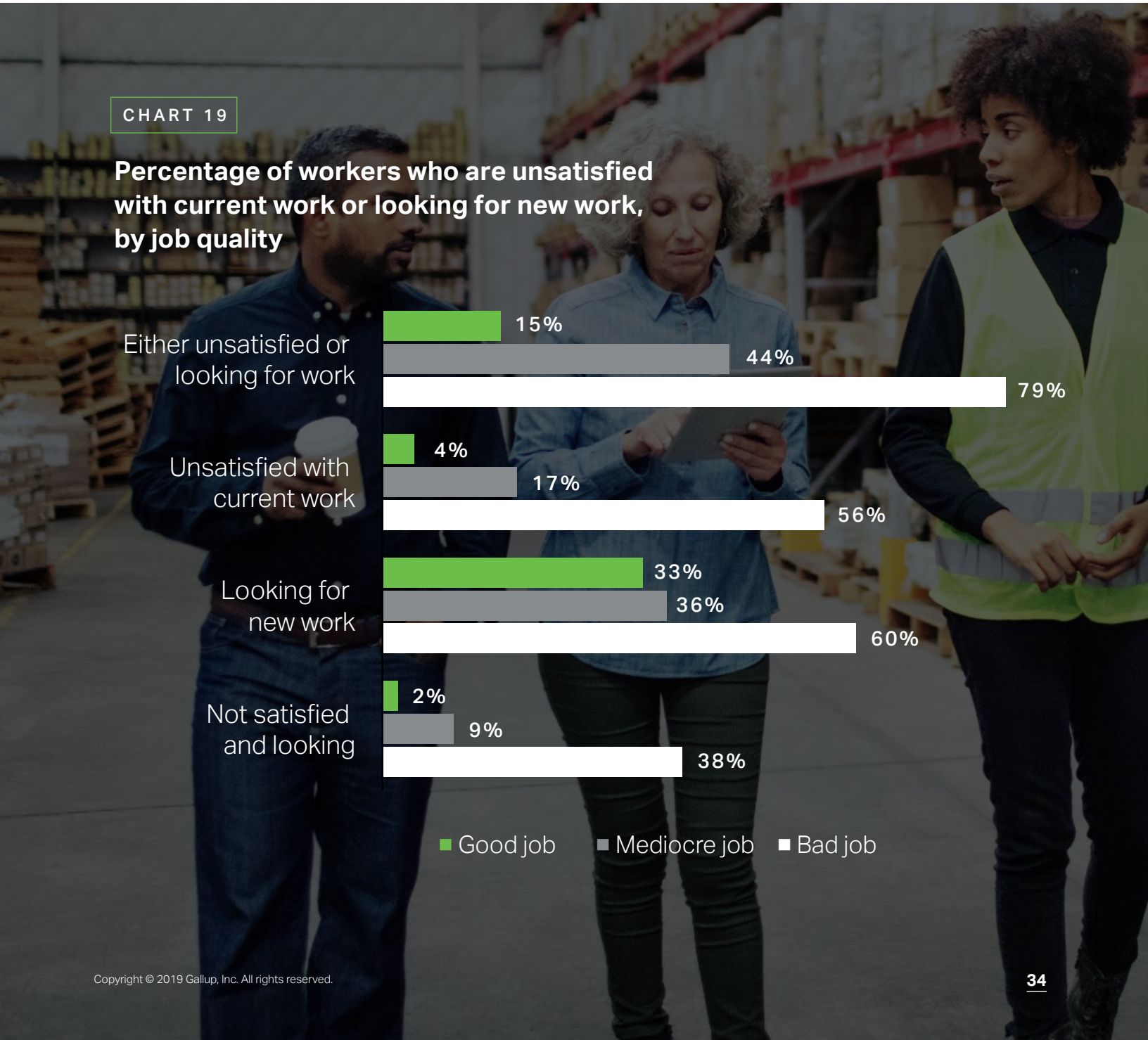
The importance of opportunities to use one's strengths, as well as creativity and other cognitive skills at work, implies that changes brought about by automation and artificial intelligence should improve job quality in the long run in so far as it frees workers from the need to perform the simple, repetitive tasks we find predict lower job quality. However, getting to that point means expanding many workers' access to a broad array of training opportunities that equip them to meet these changing labor market needs.

Implications

Given the time and energy most Americans invest in their working lives, job quality is important — not just to their financial wellbeing, but to their overall quality of life. Perceptions of job quality also have broad implications for economic efficiency, as satisfied workers tend to be more productive and loyal to their employers. At a time of low unemployment, we find that workers in bad jobs are roughly twice as likely as those in good jobs to be looking for new work, and 20 times more likely to be both unsatisfied and looking for a new job.

CHART 19

Percentage of workers who are unsatisfied with current work or looking for new work, by job quality



However, the Great Jobs Survey finds that 60% of U.S. workers overall — and 72% of low-income workers — are not in a good job. Income inequality is unusually high in the United States relative to other democracies. While troubling enough, income inequality translates into substantial inequality in all 10 dimensions of job quality that we measured. In addition to lower compensation, work for low-income Americans brings fewer opportunities for advancement and less job stability, control over hours, influence, purpose, and enjoyment than work for higher-income Americans. This inequality raises concerns about the fairness of economic opportunity in this country, even as it raises practical issues. At a time of relatively low labor force participation, boosting job quality has important macroeconomic implications.

The survey provides a more detailed look than previous measures at how low-quality employment impacts people's lives. This more multifaceted view of job quality has the potential to offer useful insights about which trade-offs between specific job characteristics workers are most likely to find acceptable. While workers' priorities for job quality are generally consistent by income level, the data also provides the opportunity to examine how they may vary by workers' other life circumstances, such as age or family size. Younger workers value career advancement more than older workers, for example, while older workers put greater weight on benefits.

The Great Jobs Survey gives policymakers a more nuanced tool than previous studies for understanding how education opportunities can be tailored to improve workers' broad satisfaction with their employment status, rather than just their incomes. While this evidence is not causal, the positive job quality results among high school graduates with professional certifications suggest that educational opportunities that are less costly and time-consuming than postsecondary degrees are also associated with pathways to high-quality jobs. Notably, we do not find that certifications predict higher job quality when paired with other educational attainment levels, a finding which warrants further study as opportunities for on-the-job training is strongly predictive of job quality.

The Great Jobs data offer many opportunities for future analyses that may help policymakers better understand and meet the needs of the U.S. labor force. Specific topics to be addressed in future reports include:

- a deeper dive into the job quality and experiences of the bottom 20% of income earners
- how education, credentials, training and field of study relate to job and life satisfaction
- the work experience and preferences of people out of the labor force
- how technology and skills relate to job quality and job security
- the prevalence of alternative work arrangements, including multiple-job holders

We would also like to track how job quality is changing nationally, regionally and over time for individuals by collecting data from a larger sample over time and including follow-up questions on a yearly basis to previous respondents. Important but unanswered questions relate to how changes in job quality — such as the loss of a valued job or finding a good one — affect psychological health and a broad range of other behaviors, from civic engagement to innovation.

Appendix: Methodological Details

Results for this study are based on mail surveys conducted February 8-April 1, 2019, with a random sample of 9,671 adults aged 18 and older living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Of the 9,671 individuals who responded to this survey, 6,633 were working adults and were included in the analysis in this report.

Gallup randomly selected individuals to participate in the study using an address-based sample (ABS) frame. Respondents had the opportunity to respond to the survey via web or mail. Surveys were conducted in English and Spanish. The final response rate to this survey was 14.5% (AAPOR 1).

Samples were weighted to correct for unequal selection probability and nonresponse. Demographic weighting targets are based on the 2017 American Community Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. population. The data were weighted to match national demographics of age, education, gender, race, ethnicity, region, labor force participation and population density.

All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects from weighting.

- For results based on all working adults (n=6,633), the margin of sampling error is ± 1.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on all low-income (bottom 20%) working adults (n=911), the margin of sampling error is ± 5.3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.
- For results based on all high-income (top 10%) working adults (n=513), the margin of sampling error is 7.0 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error and bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

THE DETAILS AND VALIDITY OF OUR JOB QUALITY INDEX

The primary measure of job quality used in this report is based on two items with 10 stems. One asks respondents to report their level of satisfaction with 10 dimensions of their employment situation. It is worded as follows:

> *"In your current employment situation (across all jobs), on a five-point scale, where 5 means extremely satisfied and 1 means not at all satisfied, how satisfied are you with each of the following characteristics?"*

The anchors are such that a response of five indicates "extremely satisfied" and one "not at all satisfied." An average across the 10 dimensions yields a measure of job quality. Yet, we did not assume that each dimension was equally important. Instead, we applied a weight using responses from another item with 10 stems:

> *"On a five-point scale, where 5 means extremely important and 1 means not at all important, how important are each of the following characteristics for you personally to consider a job to be a good job?"*

For our baseline measure of job quality, we calculated the average importance rating on a 1-5 scale for each of the 10 dimensions and divided this by the sum of the 10 averages. If all dimensions were identically important, each would receive a weight of 10%. In fact, the lowest weight was 9.17% (career advancement) and the highest was 10.59% (job security). The final measure of job quality is the sum of each individual's satisfaction score multiplied by the national weight for that particular dimension.

We were also considering allowing importance weights to vary across individuals but decided this may be difficult for our audience to understand or interpret, so we applied the same importance weight to all workers. In practice, the correlation between the two measures (job quality using the national or individual importance weight) was 0.99, so the results reported would be substantially the same regardless.

LIFE EVALUATION AND JOB QUALITY

In addition to the job quality items described above, the Great Jobs Survey asks respondents to describe the quality of their life using the Cantril ladder[31]:

> *"Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 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?"*

A score of seven or above is considered "high" by Gallup, based on analysis of responses across a wide number of surveys and 150 countries. Scores of five and six are considered "moderate" and scores of four or below are considered "low." When paired with an item that asks the same question five years into the future (an indicator of optimism), the responses are highly predictive of health status — both physical and psychological — as well as behaviors associated with higher wellbeing.[32]

One important question is whether or not the job quality metric we created is highly correlated with life evaluation, and how it compares to other measures like income in terms of predicting life evaluation.

We find that job quality has a moderately high correlation of 0.44 with life evaluation. This is slightly higher than self-reported health status on a five-point scale (0.43). Indeed, job quality has roughly the same predictive power for determining life evaluation as health status.

By contrast, individual income has a correlation with life evaluation of only 0.24 when aggregated to deciles or centiles and no correlation (-0.03) using raw income data. The lack of correlation using raw income data likely stems from the very extreme distribution. When income is transformed into log form, the correlation with life evaluation is 0.25 (though this excludes those with zero income), which is much closer to the correlation obtained using the decile rank of income, which also smooths out outliers at the high end. The log of income has a slightly higher correlation with job quality (0.27) than with life evaluation, and household income is less correlated with both life evaluation and job quality than individual income. Interestingly, people get less satisfaction from their partner's income than from their own: The correlation between the log of partner income and life evaluation is just 0.09.

In summary, if you want to know how well someone's life is going, job quality is a considerably better predictor than income, measured for the individual or at the household level.

31 Gallup. Understanding How Gallup Uses the Cantril Scale. Retrieved from **https://news.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx**. (Accessed August 12, 2019).

32 Harter, J. K. & Gurley, V. F. (2008, September). Measuring Well-Being in the United States. *APS Observer,* 21, 8. Retrieved from **http://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.cfm?id=2394**. (Accessed August 10, 2019).

THRESHOLD CONSIDERATIONS FOR A "GOOD JOB"

As mentioned, job quality is the weighted average of satisfaction on 10 dimensions of job attributes, across all jobs held by an individual, on a one to five scale. Scores below three on the combined index indicate a "bad job." Score between three and four are "mediocre," and a score of four or above indicates a "good job."

We considered a more stringent definition of a "bad job," in which scores between two and three would be classified as mediocre rather than bad. After examining the distribution of responses to other items (reported below), we rejected this approach. The majority of workers with job quality scores between two and three (but not three or above) report very low overall job satisfaction when asked to evaluate their job using language that matches the Cantril ladder, but for "best possible employment situation" instead of life (Appendix Table 1). Likewise, the majority of workers in the 2-3 range on job quality are not scoring "high" on life evaluation, whereas the majority of workers at three or above are. Similarly, the average person in the 2-3 range reports that their job quality has declined in the last five years, but this is not true for those with scores of three or above. Overall, we find this to be compelling evidence that scores below three indicate distinctly unfavorable job situations compared to those at three or above. There are also notable differences between scores between 3.5 and four and those at four and above, suggesting that our threshold for a good job is meaningful.

At it happens, the percentage of workers in bad jobs matches the share who would meet our criterion for a "great" job (also 16%), which requires a mean rating of a 4.5 or higher on a five-point scale. To simplify reporting, preserve tractable sample sizes and avoid overstating small differences between those just below 4.5 and those just above it, we emphasize the "good" job threshold in the reporting, while reserving the "great" jobs threshold as an aspirational goal for the economy.

COMPARISON WITH ALTERNATIVE MEASURE OF GOOD JOBS FROM CEPR

We compared our measure of a good job with the approach from Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR). We estimate that 29% of workers are in good jobs using the CEPR requirements of health insurance, retirement benefits and hourly earnings of $19 or more in 2010 dollars (or $22 in 2019 currency). This estimate compares to 40% using our method. We also find that many workers (34%) meet our good job threshold even if they fail the CEPR threshold, and that 25% of workers who fail to meet our threshold for a good job nonetheless meet CEPR's criteria. In the end, the correlation is only 0.17, suggesting a large gap between our more subjective measure and their measure. The CEPR good jobs measure correlation is slightly higher (0.22) but still only moderate when arrayed against our continuous measure of job quality (before we convert it into good, mediocre or bad).

Appendix Table 1. Considerations in defining the threshold for good, mediocre or bad jobs

Job quality score	N	Job evaluation is 7 or higher	Job evaluation is 5 or below	Change in job evaluation relative to five years ago	Income is below median	In best job ever	Life evaluation is below 7
Between 0 and <1	14	21%	78%	-2.91	100%	7%	85%
Between 1 and <1.5	16	0%	100%	-3.00	85%	20%	50%
Between 1.5 and <2	66	6%	89%	-2.46	79%	9%	78%
Between 2 and <2.5	195	9%	84%	-1.37	77%	18%	71%
Between 2.5 and <3	447	24%	60%	-0.34	66%	31%	54%
Between 3 and <3.5	922	44%	37%	0.22	53%	48%	41%
Between 3 and <3.5	1,643	71%	13%	0.85	42%	64%	27%
Between 4 and <4.5	1,501	86%	5%	1.28	34%	76%	19%
Between 4.5 and 5	989	94%	2%	1.32	31%	87%	10%

Appendix Table 2: Summary statistics of income thresholds used in this report

Income group	Observations	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum
Bottom 20%	911	$9,330	$10,000	$0	$23,700
Middle 21%-49%	1,547	$37,537	$38,000	$24,000	$52,000
Middle 50%-89%	2,121	$85,775	$80,000	$55,500	$140,000
Top 10%	513	$520,152	$190,000	$143,000	N/A

Note: Sample is limited to working population.

Appendix Table 3: Job quality and other job characteristics, by income

	Bottom 20% income	Middle 21%-49% income	Middle 50%-89% income	Top 10% income
Observations	909	1,545	2,114	511
Job quality index	3.42	3.66	3.95	4.15
Job quality index, upper bound (95% conf.)	3.48	3.69	3.97	4.20
Job quality index, lower bound (95% conf.)	3.36	3.62	3.92	4.10
In good jobs	27.2%	34.7%	48.1%	63.7%
In mediocre jobs	42.2%	47.3%	45.2%	31.8%
In bad jobs	30.6%	18.0%	6.7%	4.5%
In CEPR good jobs ($22+ wage, benefits)	0.6%	8.7%	74.8%	70.6%
Have retirement benefits	36.0%	66.0%	84.0%	75.0%
Have health insurance	37.0%	75.0%	90.0%	81.0%
Satisfied with level of pay	38.5%	40.7%	71.4%	88.9%
Satisfied with stable and predictable pay	56.7%	75.2%	87.5%	88.8%
Satisfied with stable and predictable hours	58.4%	73.4%	83.0%	78.5%
Satisfied with control over hours and/or location	62.1%	60.4%	69.4%	81.1%
Satisfied with job security	61.4%	73.4%	80.3%	83.3%
Satisfied with employee benefits	29.8%	52.5%	72.2%	74.7%
Satisfied with career advancement opportunities	36.8%	42.3%	56.5%	70.1%
Satisfied with enjoying your day-to-day work	64.8%	64.3%	68.9%	78.1%
Satisfied with having a sense of purpose	67.0%	69.3%	77.0%	81.7%
Satisfied with having the power to change things	45.1%	43.8%	50.5%	63.0%
Median wage	$7.80	$16.90	$34.60	$74.00
Do best work every day, agree or strongly agree	63.9%	69.5%	79.0%	82.9%
Working multiple jobs out of need	12.4%	8.3%	5.1%	1.6%

Appendix Table 4: Job quality and other job characteristics, by gender and race/ethnicity

	White		Black		Asian	Hispanic	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Men	Women
Observations	2,266	2,117	136	256	106	215	212
Job quality index	3.78	3.80	3.68	3.51	3.64	3.56	3.78
Job quality index, upper bound (95% conf.)	3.81	3.83	3.80	3.64	3.77	3.67	3.89
Job quality index, lower bound (95% conf.)	3.75	3.78	3.55	3.38	3.51	3.45	3.67
In good jobs	41.2%	40.8%	39.0%	37.1%	30.7%	31.5%	41.9%
In mediocre jobs	45.6%	47.6%	45.3%	31.8%	48.1%	44.1%	39.5%
In bad jobs	13.2%	11.6%	15.7%	31.1%	21.2%	24.3%	18.6%
In CEPR good jobs ($22+ wage, benefits)	38.1%	25.8%	27.9%	19.6%	43.3%	26.8%	11.1%
Have retirement benefits	69.0%	63.0%	66.0%	65.0%	71.0%	55.0%	58.0%
Have health insurance	75.0%	67.0%	74.0%	71.0%	82.0%	59.0%	68.0%
Satisfied with level of pay	58.2%	53.9%	49.7%	48.3%	55.5%	47.8%	52.1%
Satisfied with stable and predictable pay	77.7%	78.1%	77.2%	64.0%	62.8%	67.2%	72.6%
Satisfied with stable and predictable hours	73.2%	76.2%	68.0%	65.2%	68.7%	66.8%	73.6%
Satisfied with control over hours and/or location	67.0%	70.9%	44.3%	55.4%	57.6%	61.2%	62.8%
Satisfied with job security	75.8%	74.7%	63.8%	62.8%	65.7%	67.5%	77.0%
Satisfied with employee benefits	56.1%	54.2%	59.4%	53.9%	50.1%	50.6%	51.2%
Satisfied with career advancement opportunities	50.3%	48.4%	38.5%	38.8%	50.9%	37.5%	58.4%
Satisfied with enjoying your day-to-day work	68.1%	70.6%	67.8%	56.1%	55.8%	68.5%	71.6%
Satisfied with having a sense of purpose	72.6%	75.9%	68.5%	66.8%	65.3%	71.3%	75.1%
Satisfied with having the power to change things	50.9%	46.5%	31.7%	42.8%	47.5%	45.7%	58.1%
Median wage	$25.60	$18.80	$16.80	$15.40	$33.70	$19.20	$14.40
Do best work every day, agree or strongly agree	74.1%	74.8%	67.3%	64.7%	61.6%	66.6%	76.2%
Working multiple jobs out of need	4.2%	7.9%	16.9%	14.4%	3.8%	13.5%	12.7%

* The number of observations for employed Asian women was too small to meet our standard for reporting.

Appendix Table 5. Job quality and percent in good and bad jobs by state, for areas with sample size of at least 100 workers

	Job quality index (1-5 scale)	Percent in good jobs	Percent in bad jobs
Missouri	3.92	51%	7%
Minnesota	3.90	41%	7%
Texas	3.88	48%	13%
Massachusetts	3.86	47%	10%
Virginia	3.84	38%	6%
Arizona	3.81	42%	13%
Florida	3.81	43%	17%
Wisconsin	3.80	40%	9%
Pennsylvania	3.78	45%	14%
Illinois	3.77	38%	15%
Georgia	3.76	43%	17%
Indiana	3.74	43%	20%
North Carolina	3.73	38%	20%
Ohio	3.71	35%	14%
Colorado	3.71	36%	14%
Michigan	3.68	30%	16%
Maryland	3.64	30%	20%
Tennessee	3.64	37%	23%
California	3.63	38%	23%
New Jersey	3.62	40%	20%
Washington	3.61	30%	22%
New York	3.60	40%	19%

Note: Average margin of error on the job quality index, percent in good jobs and bad jobs, is 0.11, 7% and 5%, respectively.

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