

The America250 Rocket Lawyer Small Business American Dream Survey Report (2026)

How U.S. small business owners define freedom, fulfillment, and opportunity as America turns 250

883

U.S. small business
owners surveyed

83.5%

say owning a business is
part of the American
Dream

78.8%

feel more fulfilled since
owning a business

53.9%

associate the American
Dream with freedom and
flexibility

This report examines how small business owners understand the American Dream today. The findings show broad belief in business ownership as part of that dream, but the deeper story is not ownership alone. Small business owners repeatedly tied business ownership to control over time, income, family stability, personal fulfillment, and the ability to build something lasting.

The survey also shows that the dream is practical and pressure-tested. Small business owners report high levels of fulfillment, but they also face barriers related to customer growth, economic conditions, funding, confidence, taxes, paperwork, and knowing what to do next.

Executive summary

The central finding is clear: small business owners still see entrepreneurship as part of the American Dream. 83.5% said owning a business is strongly or somewhat part of the American Dream, including 41.8% who said it is strongly part of the American Dream.

But they do not define that dream only as owning a business. They define it through the outcomes business ownership can help create: freedom, flexibility, financial independence, homeownership, family security, and a stronger sense of control over the future. Five high-level insights

- **Business ownership is widely seen as part of the American Dream.** More than four in five small business owners said owning a business is strongly or somewhat part of the American Dream (83.5%).
- **The dream is bigger than business ownership.** Small business owners were more likely to associate the American Dream with freedom and flexibility (53.9%), financial independence (43.9%), owning a home (43.7%), and providing for family (39.8%) than with owning a business itself (28.9%).
- **Motivations are about control.** The leading reasons for starting a business were more schedule flexibility (55.3%), more independence (53.5%), the ability to turn a passion or skill into income (46.2%), and more control over income (42.1%).
- **Practical obstacles remain.** The top barriers were finding customers (41.4%), economic conditions (39.8%), access to funding (31.4%), and understanding what steps to take (28.7%). The small business dream is alive, but owners need clearer paths from idea to sustainable operation.
- **Fulfillment is high, but not because ownership is easy.** Nearly four in five small business owners said they feel somewhat or much more fulfilled since owning a business (78.8%). Fulfilled owners still report barriers, suggesting that fulfillment can coexist with practical difficulty when business ownership supports independence, income control, family goals, and a sense of purpose.

The central insight: the American Dream is a control story

Across the survey, the strongest pattern is not simply optimism about entrepreneurship. It is a broader desire for control. Small business owners connect business ownership to the ability to choose how they work, earn, support their families, and build a future.

That matters because it changes the meaning of business ownership. For these small business owners, owning a business is not just a professional status. It is a way to pursue flexibility, financial independence, family security, and personal fulfillment.

The survey also shows that while small business owners value independence and want control over income, many struggle with finding customers, funding, and economic conditions. They feel fulfilled, but many also feel unsure about the steps required to build and protect what they have started.

The strongest interpretation is this:

For small business owners, the American Dream is not only about owning a business. It is about what ownership can make possible: freedom, financial independence, family stability, and the confidence to build something lasting.

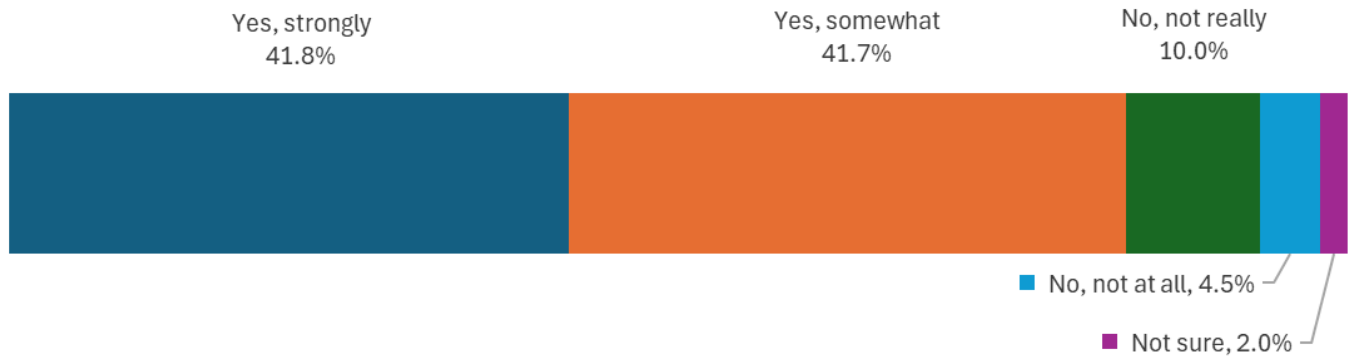
1. More than 4 in 5 small business owners connect business ownership with the American Dream

A large majority of small business owners said owning a business is strongly or somewhat part of the American Dream (83.5%). The strongest group was those who said “Yes, strongly” (41.8%), followed closely by those who said “Yes, somewhat” (41.7%).

This indicates broad agreement, but not uniform intensity. The idea of business ownership as part of the American Dream is widely accepted among small business owners, but some small business owners connect with it more strongly than others.

Most SMB owners say business ownership is part of the American Dream

Share agreeing whether owning a business is part of the American Dream.



Source: The America250 Rocket Lawyer Small Business American Dream Survey Report (2026)

What the data means

- The finding is that small business owners see entrepreneurship as part of the American Dream.
- The presence of a sizable “somewhat” group indicates that many small business owners believe in the connection, but may see ownership as one possible path rather than the only path.
- The interpretation is that business ownership matters, but the underlying dream is broader.

2. The small business American Dream cuts across groups

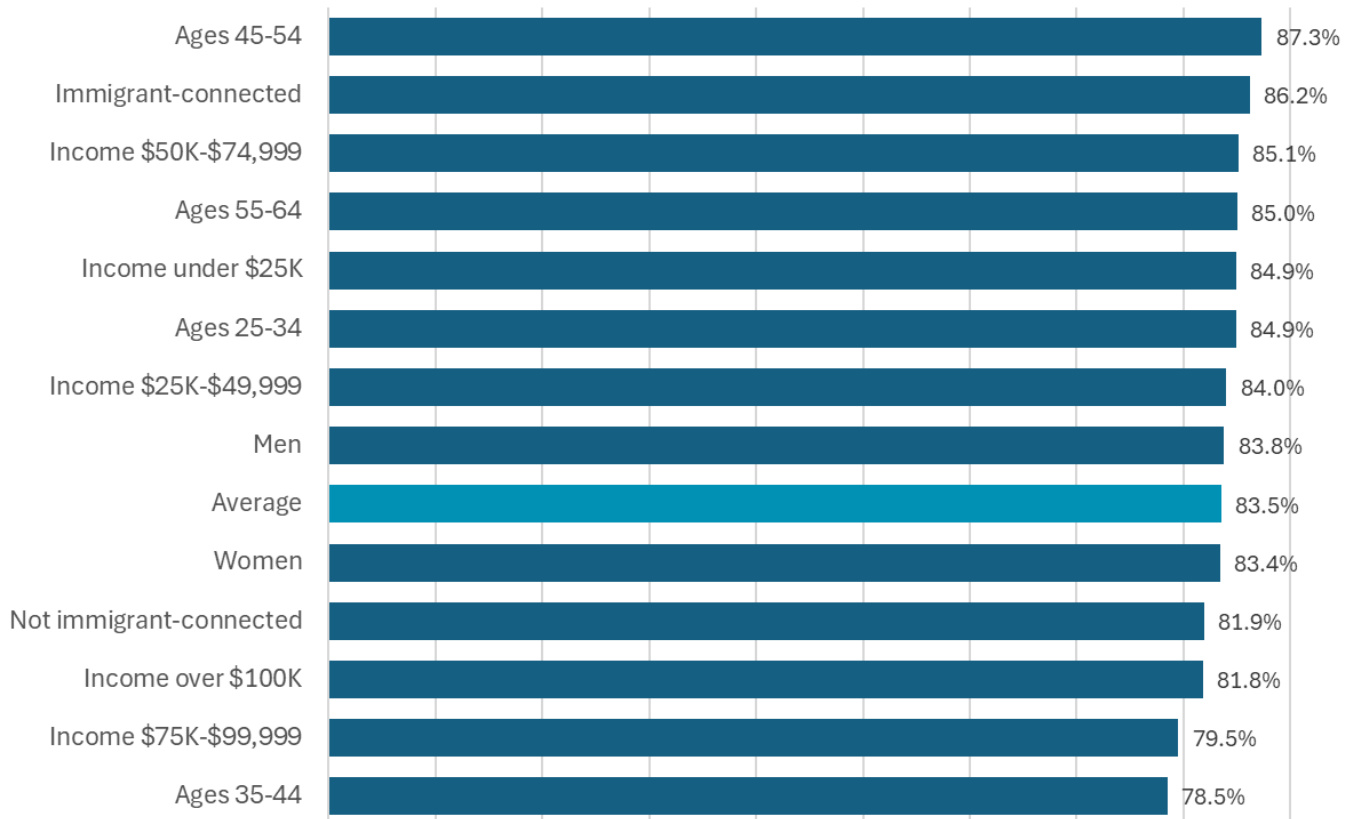
Belief that owning a business is part of the American Dream remained high across age, gender, household income, and immigrant or first-generation background. The strength of that belief varied somewhat by group, but most small business owners across groups see business ownership as part of the American Dream.

Belief was high among small business owners ages 25 to 34 (83.2%), ages 35 to 44 (78.5%), ages 45 to 54 (87.3%), and ages 55 to 64 (84.6%). It was also similar among women (83.4%) and men (83.8%). The pattern remained consistent across income groups, including small business owners with household

incomes under \$25,000 (81.7%), \$25,000 to \$49,999 (85.0%), \$50,000 to \$74,999 (85.1%), \$75,000 to \$99,999 (79.5%), and over \$100,000 (85.0%).

Most SMB owners say business ownership is part of the American Dream

Share agreeing whether owning a business is part of the American Dream.



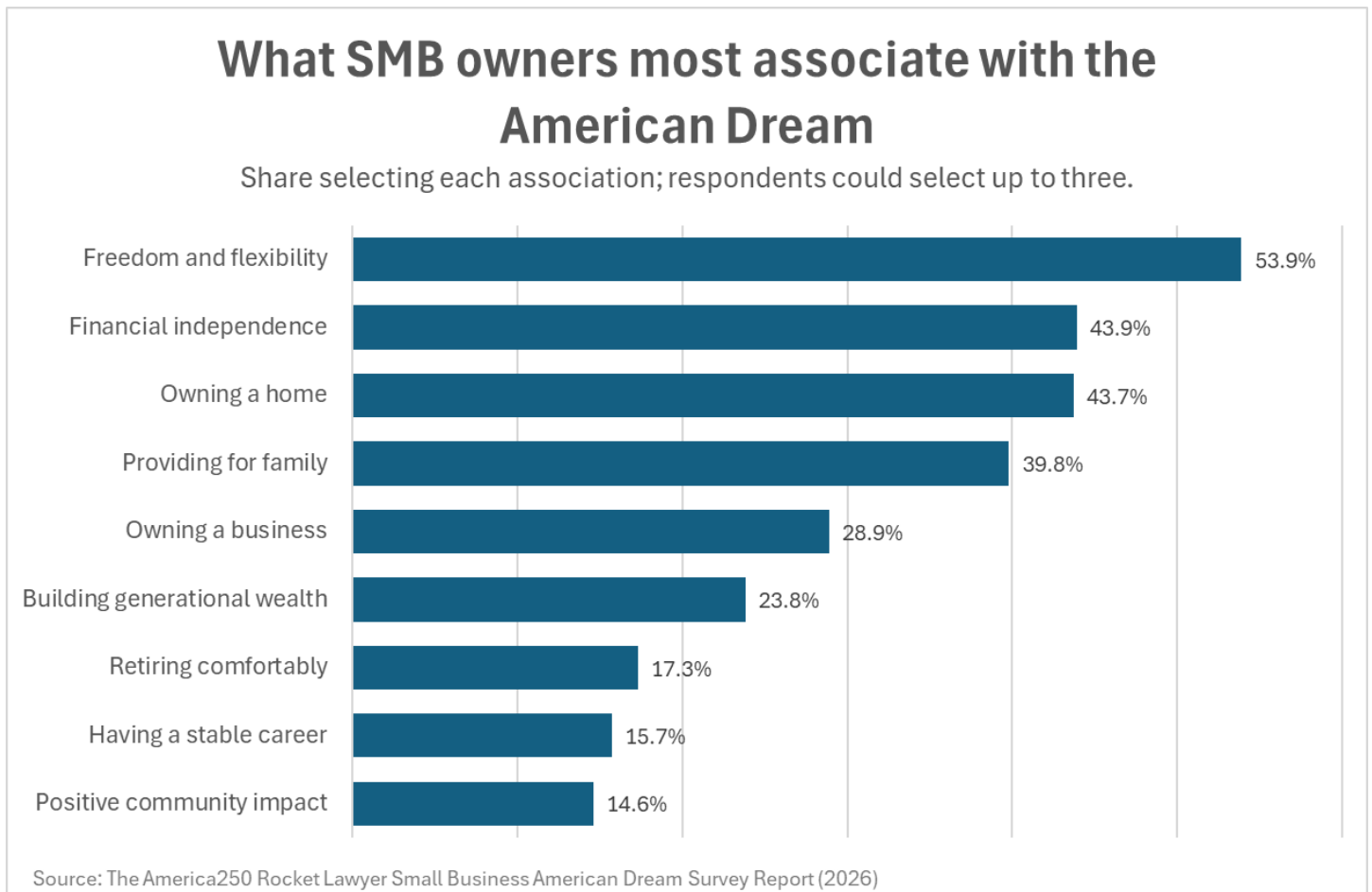
Source: The America250 Rocket Lawyer Small Business American Dream Survey Report (2026)

What the data means

- The small business American Dream is not a niche belief. It is widely shared across major respondent groups. Across age, gender, and income levels, business ownership was widely viewed as part of the American Dream and as a practical path toward more control over the future.

3. The American Dream is defined more by outcomes than by ownership itself

When small business owners selected the ideas they most associate with the American Dream, freedom and flexibility ranked first (53.9%). Financial independence (43.9%), owning a home (43.7%), and providing for family (39.8%) followed closely. Owning a business ranked lower than these broader outcomes, but was still selected by more than a quarter of small business owners (28.9%).



What the data means

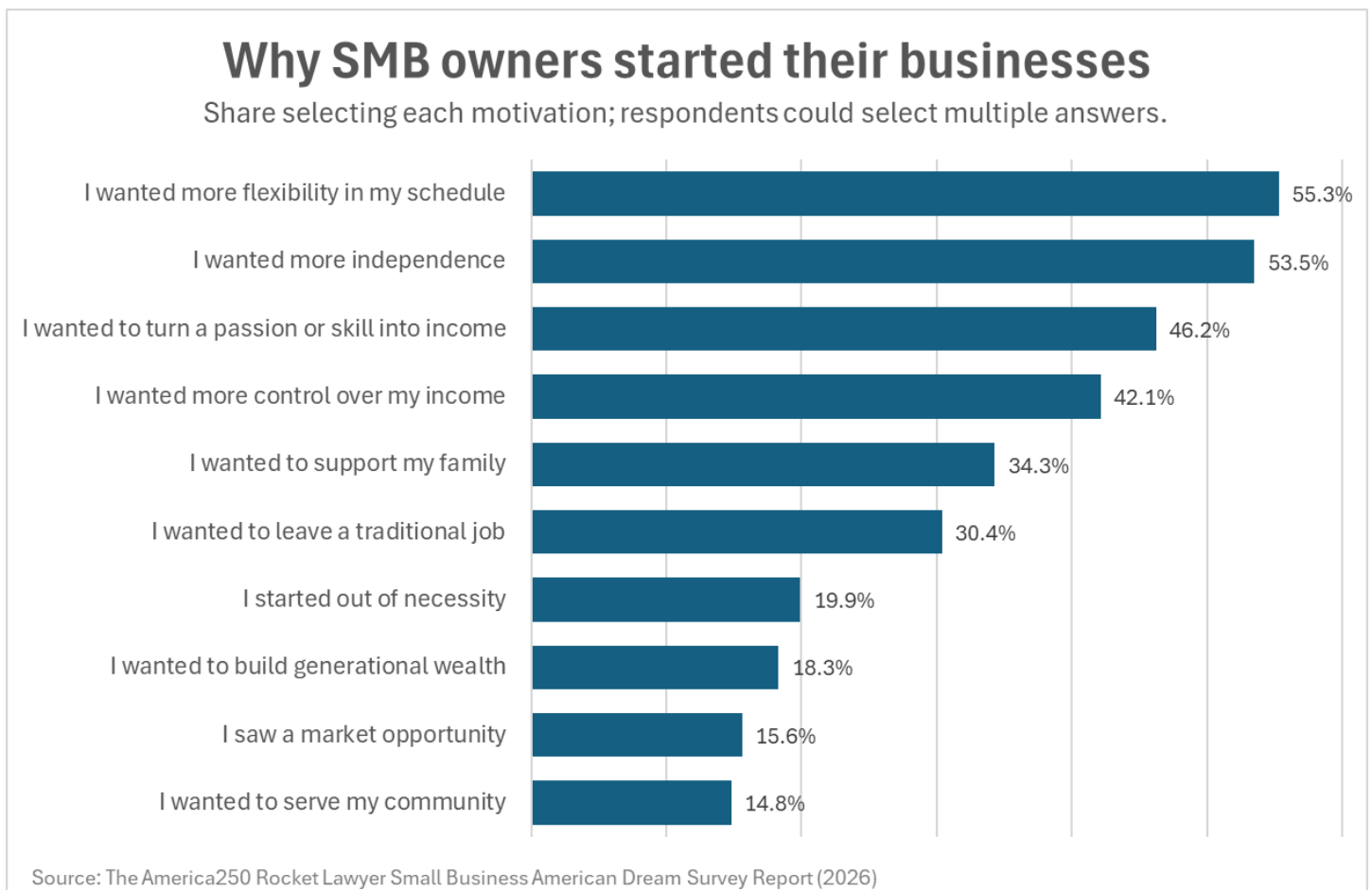
- Although most small business owners see business ownership as part of the American Dream (83.5%), it is not the top definition of the dream. This indicates that small business owners may view ownership as a vehicle for freedom, security, family support, and long-term stability.

- Freedom and flexibility are the most common associations, suggesting that autonomy is a core value for small business owners.
- Financial independence, homeownership, and family support show that the dream remains grounded in economic stability and personal security.

4. Why people start businesses: flexibility, independence, skill, and income control

The top motivations for starting a business were more flexibility in schedule (55.3%), more independence (53.5%), turning a passion or skill into income (46.2%), and more control over income (42.1%).

This shows that small business ownership is often motivated by a desire to reshape work around life, income, and purpose. The dream is not just to own something; it is to have more say in how work and life fit together.



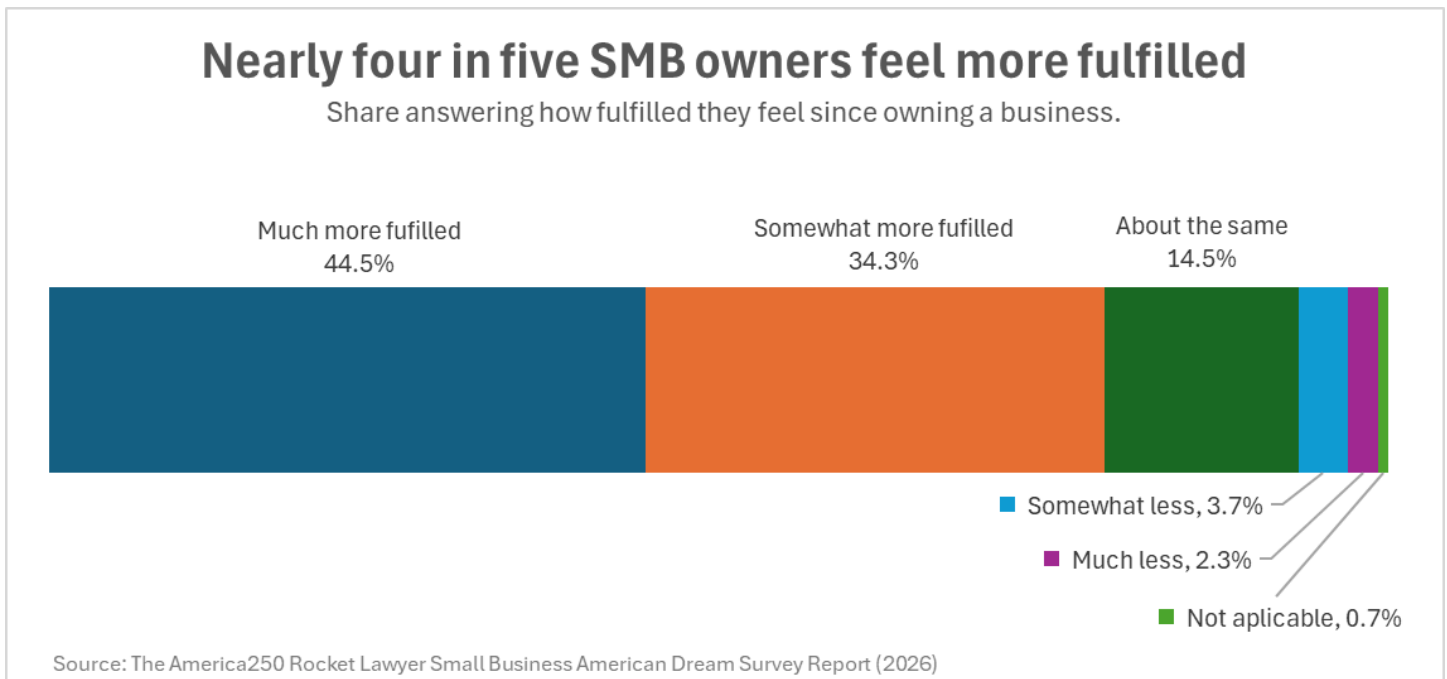
What the data means

- Flexibility and independence results suggest that many owners are trying to regain control over time and work.
- Passion and skill income suggest that many businesses begin when an ability, interest, or side activity becomes a source of income.
- Family support and generational wealth show that business ownership can also function as a family stability strategy.

5. Small business ownership is broadly fulfilling

Nearly four in five small business owners said they feel somewhat or much more fulfilled since owning a business (78.8%). That is one of the strongest positive findings in the survey.

Again, there is no strong implication that small business ownership is not easy. The barrier data shows that owners face real challenges. But fulfillment appears to coexist with difficulty when business ownership supports independence, income control, family goals, and a sense of purpose.



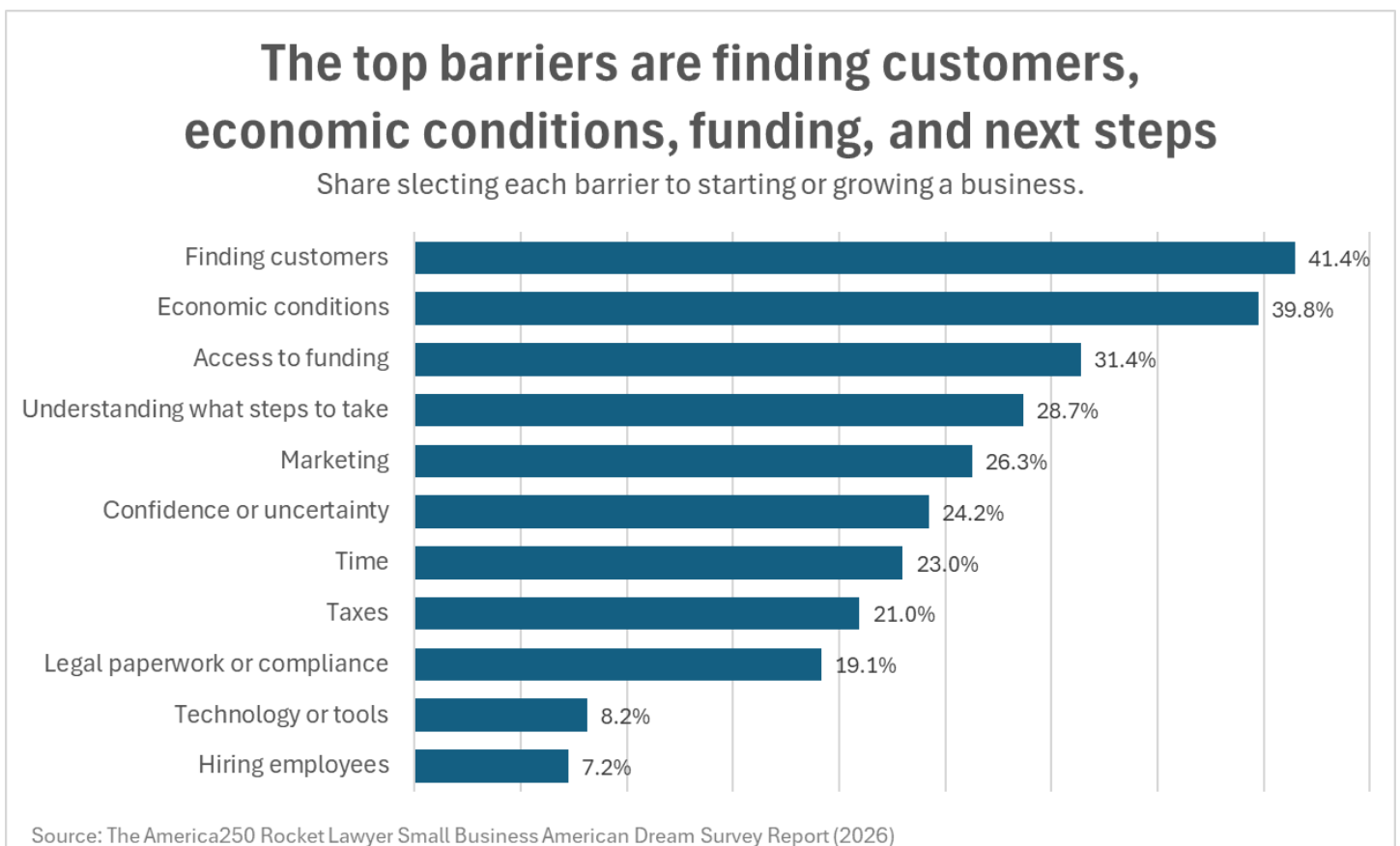
What the data means

- The interpretation is not that ownership is simple or stress-free, but that many owners find meaning in the control and purpose it provides.

6. The top barriers are customers, economic conditions, funding, and knowing what to do next

The barriers small business owners most often selected were finding customers (41.4%), economic conditions (39.8%), access to funding (31.4%), and understanding what steps to take (28.7%). Other common barriers included marketing (26.3%), confidence or uncertainty (24.2%), taxes (21.0%), and legal paperwork or compliance (19.1%).

Small business owners need demand, money, confidence, guidance, and operational clarity. Legal paperwork matters, but it is part of a larger set of practical problems.



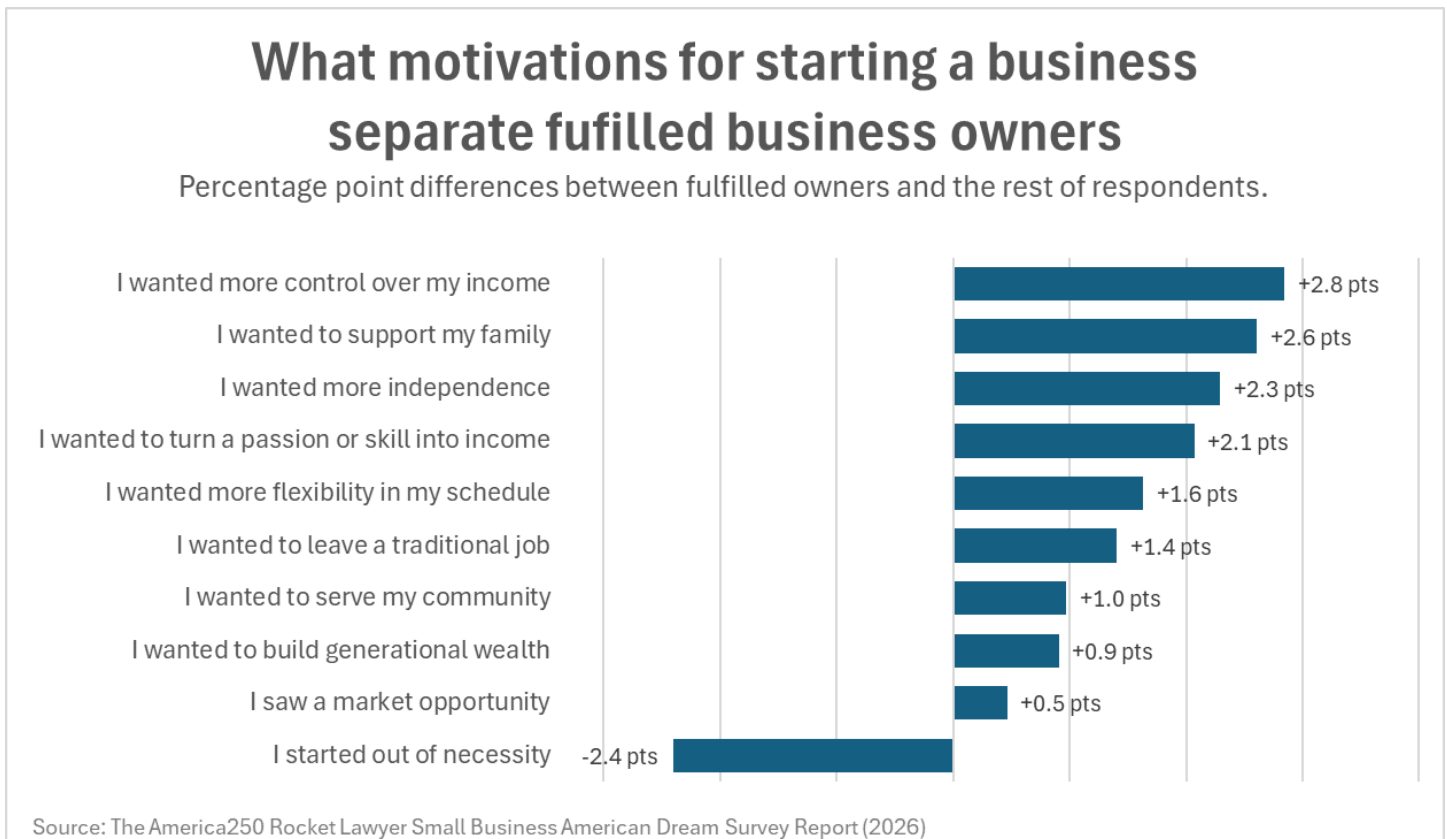
What the data means

- The top barrier is customer growth, indicating that demand is front of mind for many owners.
- Economic conditions are nearly as common, indicating that the small-business dream is strongly shaped by external pressures.

7. Fulfilled owners are different because of their motivations, not because they have no barriers

Small business owners who said they feel somewhat or much more fulfilled since owning a business (78.8%) were more likely to have started their business for agency-driven reasons, including income control, family support, independence, passion or skill income, and schedule flexibility. They were less likely to say they started out of necessity.

This suggests that fulfillment is tied to agency. Business ownership appears more fulfilling when it feels like a chosen path toward control, purpose, and stability. It is less fulfilling when it begins as a last resort.



What the data means

- Fulfillment is strongly connected to the reason someone started the business.
- The most fulfilled owners tend to have a variety of motivations: income control, independence, family, flexibility, and purpose.
- Necessity-started businesses can still succeed, but small business owners who started out of necessity were less likely to report higher fulfillment.

Conclusion

The survey shows that small business owners still see business ownership as closely tied to the American Dream, but not in a simple or symbolic way. For most small business owners, owning a business is not the dream by itself. It is a path toward the things they most associate with the American Dream: freedom, flexibility, financial independence, family stability, fulfillment, and greater control over the future.

The findings suggest that small-business ownership remains aspirational but is also deeply practical. Small business owners are not only motivated by the idea of entrepreneurship. They are motivated by what entrepreneurship can make possible: more control over their time, more independence in their work, more control over income, the ability to support their family, and the chance to build something lasting.

At the same time, the survey makes it clear that belief in the small-business dream does not erase the pressure of building one. Owners report high levels of fulfillment, but they also face real barriers, including finding customers, navigating economic conditions, accessing funding, managing taxes and paperwork, and understanding what steps to take next. The small business dream is not without challenge. It requires clarity, planning, confidence, and practical support.

The findings also show that business ownership can carry meaning beyond individual ambition. For many small business owners, especially those motivated by supporting family or building generational wealth, owning a business is connected to family security and financial mobility.

These findings point to a version of the American Dream that is both optimistic and grounded. Small business owners believe in what they are building, but they also understand the work required to sustain it. Their dream is not only to own a business. It is to build a life with more freedom, security, purpose, and control.

Methodology and notes

Rocket Lawyer surveyed 883 small business owners in the United States to better understand how business owners define the American Dream, why they start businesses, what challenges they face, and how business ownership relates to fulfillment, family, financial independence, and future opportunity.

The survey was fielded from June 9, 2026, through June 26, 2026, through the UserTesting platform. Respondents were screened to include only individuals who identified as small business owners.

The survey included questions about small business owners' views on whether owning a business is part of the American Dream, the ideas they most associate with the American Dream, their motivations for starting a business, barriers they have faced while starting or growing a business, and whether they feel more fulfilled since owning a business. Demographic and business-profile questions were also included, such as age, gender, household income, company size, and immigrant or first-generation background.

Definitions used in this report

- **Small business owners / SMB owners:** Respondents who passed the survey screening criteria and identified as small business owners.
- **Fulfilled business owners:** Respondents who said they feel either **“much more fulfilled”** or **“somewhat more fulfilled”** since owning a business.
- **Less-fulfilled / rest of small business owners:** Respondents who said they feel **about the same, somewhat less fulfilled, or much less fulfilled** since owning a business. Respondents who selected **“Not applicable”** were excluded from fulfillment cross-cuts where noted.
- **Motivation clusters:** Some analysis groups individual motivations into broader themes. These clusters were created for analysis and are not separate survey questions.

Reporting notes

- Several survey questions allowed respondents to select more than one answer. For those questions, percentages may total more than 100%.
- Percentages have been rounded to the nearest tenth. As a result, totals may not always add up exactly.
- This report is based on survey responses from a screened sample of U.S. small business owners. Results should be interpreted as directional insights from the surveyed population and are not weighted to represent all U.S. small business owners.