NEW AMERICA

BETTER LIFE LAB

The Bipartisan Case for Caregiving

Despite the bitter divisions between U.S. political parties in recent years, people in the United States are largely united in their support for family, their belief in the value of caregiving, and their need for paid family and medical leave. This summary provides key findings on partisanship, care, and paid family and medical leave collected from a nationally representative survey conducted by Better Life Lab at New America and NORC at the University of Chicago.

Key Findings

Democrats and Republicans experience work-care conflict. Many can't afford to miss work to provide care, yet are faced with no choice but to care for their families anyway and cobble together time and money on their own.

- Regardless of gender and party, more than two-thirds (68–70 percent) of caregivers among our respondents said they were employed while providing care assistance. Among caregivers who worked while providing care, over two-thirds (64–71 percent) said they had at some point missed work to provide assistance. Among caregivers who are no longer working, over half of Democrats and Republicans (54 percent and 53 percent, respectively) said they left the workforce or retired early to provide care.

Across party lines, large majorities of people agree parents should share care responsibilities equally.

- Despite small differences along party lines, the vast majority of both groups (92 percent of Democrats and 87 percent of Republicans) agreed that men and women should evenly divide care work.

There were no differences by party affiliation on who has taken leave to care for an adult or child. However, about half of employed Democrats and Republicans did not have access to paid family and medical leave.

- A quarter of all men (25 percent) and almost a third of all women (31 percent) have taken leave to care for an adult, with no differences by party. Over half of all parents have taken leave to care for a child (48 percent of men and 55 percent of women), with no differences by party as well. Republicans and Democrats were just as likely to have taken leave to care for a family member or newborn in the past.

Men take leave from work when others in their lives need care chiefly because it is the right thing to do (62 percent of Democrats and 60 percent of Republicans agreed).

Men don't take leave from work to care for others because they can't financially afford it (74 percent of Democrats and 72 percent of Republicans agreed).

Counter to the dominant narrative of political polarization, both Democrats and Republicans show widespread support for family caregiving, support for men as involved caregivers, and report needing resources to help families balance work and care, albeit with a few differences in attitudes and opinions more likely to break along party lines. This data suggests broad support across the electorate for lawmakers and candidates for office across party lines to put care and gender-equal care-supportive policies at the center of their political agendas.