



It's Time for Policies to Match Family Needs

New Polling Data Shows Widespread Support for an Agenda to Address Work-Family Conflict

By Heather Boushey | March 29, 2010

Men and women have a strong appetite for businesses and the government to implement policies to address work-family conflict. And it's not only progressives who want change. These issues have strong resonance across a wide range of demographic groups. People agree across ideology, class, and family type that government and businesses need to do more to adapt to the new ways we work and live. This includes increased access to work-place flexibility, more funding for child care, and paid family and medical leave.

The findings summarized here come from a poll conducted with The Rockefeller Foundation and *TIME* during early September 2009. The poll interviewed more than 3,400 adults across the country about how changes in the economy are influencing attitudes about gender relations, family, and the workplace.

The poll confirmed that overwhelming majorities of both men and women believe that government and businesses need to adapt and that businesses that do not change will be left behind. The only issues that reveal ideological differences involve government-funded childcare and, to a lesser extent, requiring businesses to provide employees with more flexibility in hours or schedules. Yet even in these cases a majority of even conservative respondents agree that policies need to change.

This new poll data shows that policies to address work-family conflict carry out the message quite well and resonate with the American public. Families have for too long struggled to make their jobs fit their family life as the institutions around them continue to assume that the typical worker has a stay-at-home spouse and that the typical caregiver has a full-time breadwinner for income support. The public is hungry for change.

The poll findings confirm that as the day-to-day reality of how families work and live has changed, the public's perception of the role of institutions has kept pace. The key transformation over the past half century in daily family life is that women now make up half of all workers in the United States. This is a threshold never reached before in the history of our nation, and as a result, mothers are now primary breadwinners in nearly 4 in 10 families—making as much or more than their spouse or doing it all on their own. And *The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Changes Everything* found that two-thirds of mothers are breadwinners or co-breadwinners in their families—contributing at least a quarter of the family income.

These developments alone are a dramatic shift from the late 1960s when women were one-third of the workers in the United States and just over a quarter were breadwinners or co-breadwinners in their families. Our workforce has not only changed; the very makeup of our families is dramatically different than it was in the mid-1970s, when women began entering the workforce in larger numbers. Nearly half of families with children in 1975 consisted of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. Today, that number is just one in five families. Single parents made up only 1 in 10 of our families with children in 1975. Today, single parent households are one in five of our families with children.

In *The Shriver Report*, top-notch academic and policy experts from around the country examined how the major institutions in our society—government, our health and education systems, business, faith-based institutions, and the media—are responding to these key changes in our society and where they fall short. The authors of the report found in each instance that our institutions are not adequately keeping up with these changes.

The poll data confirms that the public is looking for our institutions to adapt to this reality.

Women working is good for the economy and society

Question: Forty years ago just over one-third of all workers were women. Today about one-half of all workers are women. Do you think this change has been very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative, or very negative for American society/the American economy [split ballot]?

Our poll showed that most Americans agree that women working is good for the economy and society, and most also agree that our institutions need to embrace this new reality. Figure 1a shows that respondents from across the ideological spectrum—87 percent of liberals and 69 percent of conservatives—agreed with this statement. And even 71 percent of evangelical Christians agreed. Figure 1d shows party affiliation, where 69 percent of Republicans agree, compared to 89 percent of Democrats and 77 percent of independents.

Americans of both genders also agree that women working is good for economy and society. Figure 1b shows that 79 percent of working men agree, which is just below the 84 percent share of working women who agree. Both men and women with children at home are slightly more likely to agree (81 percent and 85 percent, respectively) than men and women without children at home (77 percent and 78 percent, respectively). This may be because people with children at home tend to be younger and this represents the views of a new generation.

Figure 1c shows that people from families across the income distribution also have similar views. The group with the lowest percentage in support of women working is those earning below \$60,000 at 77 percent. The highest is 85 percent among those from families with income between \$60,000 and \$100,000.

Forty years ago just over one-third of all workers were women. Today about one-half of all workers are women. This change has been very or somewhat positive for American society and the economy.

Figure 1A: By identity

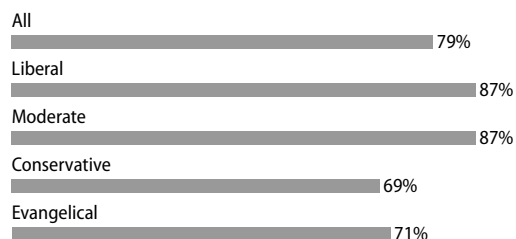


Figure 1B: By gender, work status, and children

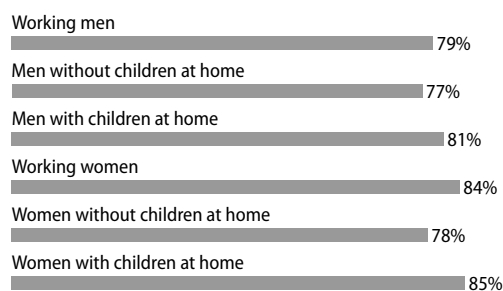


Figure 1C: By family income



Figure 1D: By political party



Businesses that fail to adapt to modern family needs risk losing good workers

Question: Businesses that fail to adapt to the needs of modern families risk losing good workers. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

A full 85 percent of Americans agree that businesses that fail to adapt to the needs of modern families risk losing good workers. This includes 84 percent of men, 87 percent of women, 91 percent of liberals, and 80 percent of conservatives (see Figure 2a).¹ Figure 2d shows that there is also strong agreement with this statement across party affiliation, with 81 percent of Republicans, 85 percent of independents, and 90 percent of Democrats agreeing.

There are no real differences in how people responded to this question based on gender or whether they have children in the home. Figure 2b shows that approximately 86 percent to 89 percent of men and women who are working or have children at home believe that businesses that fail to adapt risk losing good workers. Men without children at home show only slightly less agreement at 82 percent.

There is also consensus across income groups, ranging from 84 percent among those in families with less than \$40,000 in annual income to 87 percent among those in families with annual family income above \$100,000 (Figure 2c).

Businesses that fail to adapt to the needs of modern families risk losing good workers: Strongly or somewhat agree

Figure 2A: By identity



Figure 2B: By gender, work status, and children

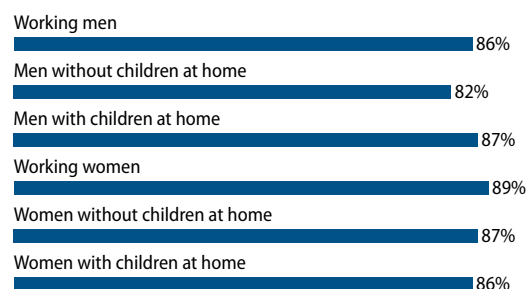


Figure 2C: By family income



Figure 2D: By political party



Workplace flexibility is most important for working parents

Question: Which of these things, in particular, would need to change in order for working parents to balance evenly their job or business, their marriage, and their children: longer school hours or longer school year, more flexible work hours/schedules, more paid time off, or better and/or more daycare options?

Workplace flexibility emerged as the most important issue in our poll when respondents were asked to rate which option would help working parents most. Figure 3a shows that the most common response by far was “more flexible hours/schedules,” indicating just how important the day-to-day challenges are for workers and their families.

Figure 3d confirms that these responses were fairly consistent across party affiliation: Fifty-four percent of Democrats and 51 percent of Republicans and independents said that more flexible hours/schedules was at the top of their list.

Men and women with children and those in lower-income families were more likely than other groups to say that “more paid time off” was the most important issue, with 21 percent of women and 23 percent of men with children at home giving that answer, as well as 18 percent of those living in families making less than \$40,000 a year. But even among these groups, more flexibility was most often seen as the key issue (Figures 3b and 3c).

Which of these things, in particular, would need to change in order for working parents to balance evenly their job or business, their marriage, and their children?

Figure 3A

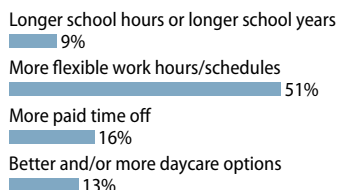


Figure 3B: By gender and work status

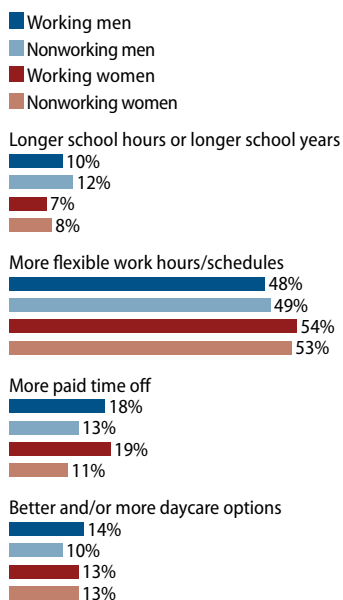


Figure 3C: By family income

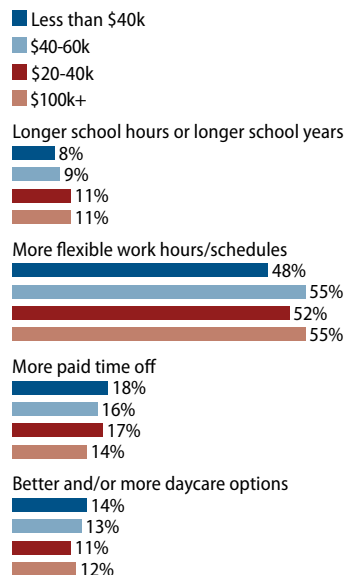
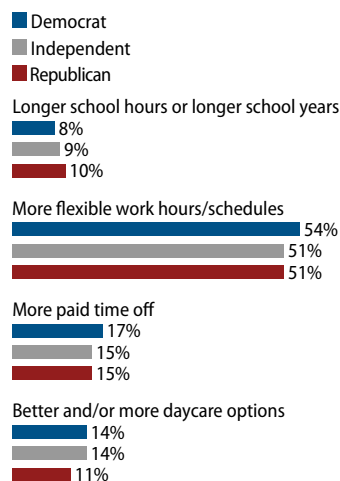


Figure 3D: By political party



Employers should be required to give workers more flexibility in their work schedules

Question: Employers should be required to give workers more flexibility in their work schedules. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

Seventy-five percent of Americans agree that employers should be required to give workers more flexibility. There are some divergences across ideology—85 percent of liberals, but only 65 percent of conservatives, agree with this statement (see Figure 4a). There is a similar divergence across party affiliation: Sixty-four percent of Republicans, 74 percent of independents, and 85 percent of Democrats agree that workers need more flexibility (Figure 4d).

There are some notable differences in how people responded to the question based on gender or whether they have children in the home. Figure 4b shows that women are more likely to agree that employers should be required to give workers more flexibility in their work schedules. Eighty-three percent of working women believe this, as do 82 percent of women with children at home and 80 percent of women without children at home. Men have slightly less agreement: Sixty-nine percent of working men, 66 percent of men without children at home, and 73 percent of those with children at home agree with the statement.

This is not an issue that has wide divergence across income groups, but support is slightly higher among those in lower-income families. Support ranges from 78 percent among those in families with less than \$40,000 in annual income to 72 percent among those in families with annual family income above \$100,000.

Employers should be required to give workers more flexibility in their work schedules: Strongly or somewhat agree

Figure 4A: By identity

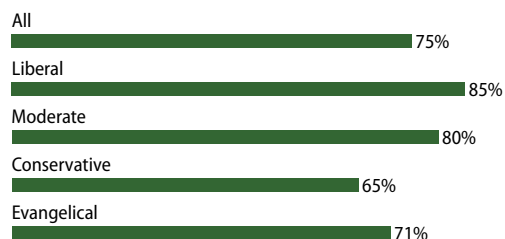


Figure 4B: By gender, work status, and children

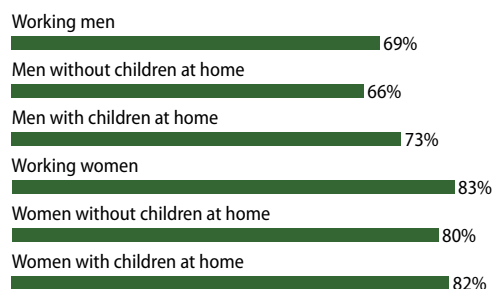


Figure 4C: By family income



Figure 4D: By political party



Businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave for every worker who needs it

Question: Businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave for every worker that needs it. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

Very few workers have paid family and medical leave, but the majority of the public desires this policy.² Nationwide, 77 percent of Americans believe that businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave for every worker who needs it.

It's important to note that most policy proposals would actually not require businesses to provide paid family and medical leave out of their own pockets—it would typically be provided through a social insurance program. This is the way paid family and medical leave is provided in California and New Jersey, and in both cases it is paid for by a payroll tax on employees only, not employers.

This support for paid family and medical leave from businesses cuts across the political spectrum, but with lower support among conservatives: Sixty-four percent of conservatives and 89 percent of liberals agree that businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave (see Figures 5a). Figure 5d shows that this issue is very strong among Democrats, with 92 percent agreeing, while 62 percent of Republicans and 71 percent of independents also agree.

Support for paid leave is also higher among those men and women with children at home, compared to those without children at home. Eighty-four percent of working women with children at home believe that businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave for every worker that needs it. Men with children at home have slightly lower agreement, but it is still high at 73 percent.

Those from lower-income families are slightly more likely than those from higher-income families to agree with this statement (Figure 5c). Among respondents from families with income of \$40,000 or less per year, 85 percent agree, compared to 69 percent of those in families with annual income of \$100,000 or more.

Businesses should be required to provide paid family and medical leave for every worker that needs it: Strongly or somewhat agree

Figure 5A: By identity

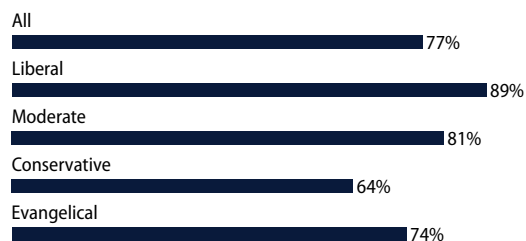


Figure 5B: By gender, work status, and children

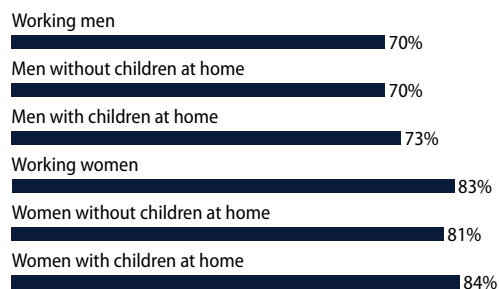


Figure 5C: By family income



Figure 5D: By political party



Government or businesses should provide more funding for child care to support parents who work

Question: [split ballot] The government should provide more funding for child care to support parents who work. [or] Businesses should provide their employees with more child care benefits. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.

Most Americans (68 percent) agree that the government or businesses should provide more funding for child care to support parents who work. The support is weaker among conservatives, but half agree (50 percent), compared to 85 percent of liberals and 66 percent of evangelical Christians (see Figure 6a). Figure 6d shows that this is the one specific policy area discussed in this memo where support among Republicans falls below 60 percent, as 47 percent agreed with the statement, compared to 84 percent of Democrats and 64 percent of independents.

There is more of a gender gap on this issue than other work-family issues. Women, especially those with children at home, are more likely to agree with this policy agenda than men, although the support among men is still considerable with 60 percent of men without children at home agreeing (see Figure 6b).

Support for government or businesses playing a role in funding child care is strongest among lower-income families, even among conservatives, with 75 percent of conservatives with annual family income below \$20,000 and 60 percent with family income between \$20,000 and \$40,000 agreeing, compared to 85 percent of liberals with family income of \$60,000 per year.³ Figure 6c shows that 77 percent of respondents from families with income below \$40,000 agreed, compared to 63 percent among those from families with annual income above \$100,000.

Endnotes

1 For data by gender, see John Halpin and others, "Battle of the Sexes Gives Way to Negotiations." In Heather Boushey and Ann O'Leary, eds., *The Shriver Report: A Woman's Nation Changes Everything* (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2009).

2 It is important to distinguish paid family and medical leave, which is designed to cover caring for and bonding with a new child or a significant illness of the worker or family member, from paid sick days, which are designed to cover illnesses, such as the flu or common cold.

3 Analysis of unpublished data from The Rockefeller Foundation/ *TIME* poll commissioned by the Center for American Progress and Maria Shriver (2009).

The government should provide more funding for childcare to support parents who work/ businesses should provide their employees with more childcare benefits: Strongly or somewhat agree

Figure 6A: By identity

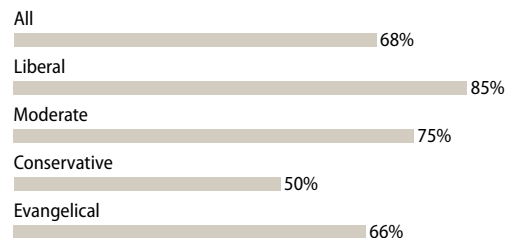


Figure 6B: By gender, work status, and children

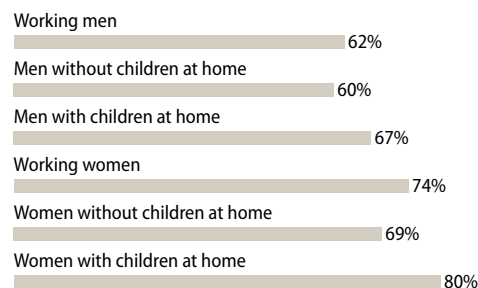
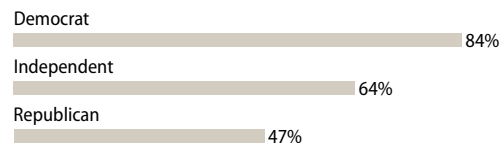


Figure 6C: By family income



Figure 6D: By political party



Source: Rockefeller/*TIME* Poll commissioned by the Center for American Progress and Maria Shriver, 2009.