

Telling a Story About Families and Opportunity: Increasing support for Paid Family and Medical Leave policies among key audiences

March 2020

Overview of Research

The following is a summary of the research conducted by Lake Research Partners, who conducted six focus groups in May 2019 and a national online survey in October 2019. This summary reports the research findings and describes audience reactions. Therefore, the messaging and points included below should be viewed as a report of the findings and not necessarily recommendations, which are covered above.

Audience Considerations

In any communications strategy, knowing the audience you are hoping to influence is crucial. Each message should be tailored to that specific audience's needs. A narrative can span several audiences, with different language and points using the same general themes. A flexible narrative will be able to inspire messages to motivate our base, expand our constituency, bring along persuadables, and neutralize the opposition's effect on all of these groups. We do not need to spend time and resources trying to change the mind of the opposition—or even fighting with them. Instead, we should focus on how to address any influence they have over the audiences of the middle and draw distinctions between our approach and motivations and theirs, giving persuadable audiences a side they want to join.

The research divided participants into three audience segmentations and defined them as follows:

Base

- ▶ Strongly favor a nationwide program to guarantee access to up to 12 weeks per year of PAID family and medical leave to care for a new child joining their household through birth, adoption, or foster care; an aging or seriously ill family member; or their own serious health condition.
- ▶ Believe it is very important for America to establish a nationwide program to guarantee access to up to 12 weeks per year of PAID family and medical leave.
- ▶ Strongly favor a proposal that includes an option for all types of people to take paid leave—ranging from new mothers to someone supporting a family member who is deployed.

Characteristics of the Base

- ▶ 22% of adults
- ▶ Are likely to be very concerned that low-income, Black, and Hispanic people are less likely to have paid leave.
- ▶ About three-quarters agree that people, including low-income people and people of color, face barriers to accessing health care and can't afford to take time from work and that the burden is on people and families.
- ▶ More likely to be women and Democrats.

Opposition

- ▶ Oppose a nationwide program to guarantee access to up to 12 weeks per year of PAID family and medical leave to care for a new child joining their household through birth, adoption, or foster care; an aging or seriously ill family member; or their own serious health condition before messaging.
- ▶ Oppose a nationwide paid family and medical leave program after messaging.

Characteristics of the Opposition

- ▶ 10% of adults
- ▶ Are most acutely concerned about abuse, trusting the government to run it, waste, and the impact on small business.
- ▶ Believe we can't afford a program, it is too hard on small business, and it is each person's responsibility to take care of their own family—the government should stay out of it.
- ▶ More likely to be men, older than age 65, white, and Republican.

Persuadables are defined as anyone who is not a part of the Base or the Opposition.

Characteristics of Persuadables

- ▶ 67% of adults
- ▶ Are generally favorable toward a paid family and medical leave program.
- ▶ More closely reflect demographics of the general public.¹

¹ Lake Research Partners Paid Family and Medical Leave: Findings based on Focus Groups and a National Survey. November 2019



Demographics	Total	Base	Opp.	Pers.
Men	48	35	64	49
Women	52	64	36	51
Under 30	21	17	17	23
30-39	17	19	10	17
40-49	16	19	12	15
50-64	25	27	27	24
Over 65	22	17	34	21
White	59	61	70	57
AA	13	16	7	13
Latino	16	15	6	18
Asian/PI	7	6	9	7
Native Am.	2	2	3	2
Northeast	18	20	18	18
Midwest	20	17	23	21
South	38	42	32	37
West	23	21	26	24
Democrat	44	59	17	43
Independent	14	10	19	14
Republican	35	25	56	35

Key Findings: Support for Paid Family and Medical Leave Policies

- ▶ By a three-to-one margin, people side with an argument that the United States should ensure all employers nationwide adopt a paid family and medical leave program that is available to everyone (65%) over an argument that would maintain the status quo by letting employers choose whether to provide their employees paid leave (22%).
- ▶ Across every demographic and attitudinal subgroup, people side with the idea that the United States should ensure all employers adopt a universal paid family and medical leave program.
- ▶ Only the Opposition sides with employers deciding.
- ▶ Women, those under 30 and in their 40s, African Americans, those with a disability connection, Democrats, and the Base have the widest margins in favor of a national program.
- ▶ Three-quarters favor and 6 in 10 strongly favor a nationwide program to guarantee access to up to 12 weeks per year of PAID family and medical leave to care for a new child joining their household through birth, adoption, or foster care; an aging or seriously ill family member; or their own serious health condition.



Audience Considerations

- ▶ Across subgroups, two-thirds or more favor a national program.
- ▶ The strongest favorability comes from women, those in their 30s, African Americans, Latinx people, parents, those living with an aging relative, those who have a disability or an immediate family member or close friend with a disability, and Democrats.
- ▶ Three-quarters believe it is important for America to establish a nationwide program to guarantee access to up to 12 weeks of paid leave. Information about FMLA does not impact views.
- ▶ By wide margins across every demographic and attitudinal subgroup, people think it is important to establish a nationwide program.
- ▶ Those who are most likely to think it is important are people in their 30s, African Americans, Latinx people, parents, those who have a disability or an immediate family member or close friend with a disability, and Democrats.

Key Findings: Types of Leave and for Whom

- ▶ At least half of people strongly favor eligibility for certain scenarios, including for a personal need or family need due to a serious illness or injury, for new mothers, or to care for veterans. The best-testing are someone with a personal illness, condition, or injury; new mothers; and someone with an immediate family member with a serious illness, condition, or injury.
- ▶ Although about two-thirds favor eligibility to care for service members, new fathers, or new foster parents or to support a family member who is deployed, fewer than half strongly favor these scenarios.
- ▶ People are open to the idea that godparents, chosen family, friends who are like family, or other relatives should be included in the paid family leave program.

Key Findings – Length of Leave

- People favor every length of leave tested, but the most intense and broadest support is for a 12-week program. As the length increases, favorability decreases.

% Strongly Favor	
12 weeks	53
16 weeks	37
20 weeks	31
6 months	27



% Strongly Favor

A person who has a serious illness, health condition, or injury of their own which prevents them from working for a period of time	63
Mothers when they have a baby or adopt a child	60
A person who has an immediate family member with a serious illness, health condition, or injury	58
A person who is providing care for an elderly family member	54
A person who is providing care for a sick family member	53
A person who is providing care for a family member with a disability	52
A person who is providing care for a veteran's needs	50
A person who is providing care for a service member's needs	48
Fathers when they have a baby or adopt a child	48
Mothers when they foster a child	46
A person who is supporting a family member in the military during deployment	44
Fathers when they foster a child	42

Audience Considerations

- ▶ Younger people, parents, and those who are living with an aging family member are the most likely to agree.
- ▶ Only people older than age 50 and the Opposition disagree.
- ▶ Participants' definition of "family" was broad and expansive, becoming situational in some minds by bringing in the "auntie" or other non-nuclear family under the umbrella of covered paid leave situations, but most believed at a minimum that the core family—parent, child, sibling, grandparent—would be covered.

Key Findings—Favorability of Aspects of a National Program

- ▶ People favor all aspects of a national paid family and medical leave program, with few who oppose. The most favorable are as follows:
 - ▶ Eligibility for all, including low-income employees, hourly employees, and contractors
 - ▶ Covering all families, including LGBTQ families
 - ▶ Eligibility for people who work at businesses of all sizes

In a second tier are including part-time employees, a requirement that people earn income from employment during the year prior to needing leave, pro-rated rates for part-time employees, and funding the program through a small payroll tax.

Key Findings—Role of Government

- ▶ By a 33-point margin, people side with an argument that government should have an active role to ensure people can care for themselves and their families without experiencing financial harm (59%) rather than each person is responsible for their own family and government should stay out (26%).
- ▶ Only the Opposition thinks the government should stay out.
- ▶ When framed as “to ensure people can care for themselves and their families without experiencing financial harm,” Republicans side with the active role argument (49%) over government staying out (35%) by 13 points.
- ▶ Persuadables side with the active role argument (59%) over government staying out (23%) by a 36-point margin.
- ▶ Similarly, by a 30-point margin, people side with an argument that government should have an active role to guarantee a basic standard of living for families (58%) rather than each person is responsible for their own family and government should stay out (28%).
- ▶ Only Republicans and the Opposition think the government should stay out.
- ▶ Republican women split between the two arguments, and younger Republicans side by wide margins with the government playing an active role. It is Republican men and older Republicans who are driving the sentiment that government should stay out.
- ▶ Persuadables side with the active role argument (54%) over government staying out (27%) by a two-to-one margin.

Key Findings—Small Business

- ▶ While small business is a vulnerability, we can contest this. By 20 points, people agree that a national program would take the burden off small business (53%) rather than an argument that says leave is too hard on small businesses (33%).
- ▶ Republicans split and the Opposition sides with this being a burden on small business.
- ▶ Persuadables side with the taking the burden off small business argument (49%) over government staying out (33%) by a 16-point margin.
- ▶ Although participants across groups were supportive of 12 weeks paid leave, they also shared reservations around a small business’s ability to operate while offering such leave. Concerns about the employer’s ability to afford paying two workers at the same time also were echoed by the small business owners.

Key Findings—Doubts about a National Program

- ▶ Support a coherent “drumbeat” of stories, messages, and events—both short and long term
- ▶ The idea that we cannot afford a national program is the strongest opposition frame (34%). People still side with the idea of pooling contributions to afford it (49%) but by just a 14-point margin.
- ▶ Republicans and the Opposition side with not being able to afford it.
- ▶ Persuadables side with the pooling contributions argument (46%) over the can’t afford it argument (34%) by a 12-point margin.
- ▶ Participants were more likely to believe “a national program would ensure standards of living for people and greater economic security for us all” rather than “this sounds like a great idea, but we just can’t afford it.”
- ▶ Doubts about a national program are low overall and driven by Republicans and the Opposition.
- ▶ About a third are very concerned that people will abuse a national program and that small businesses can’t operate with their employees taking off for weeks or months.
- ▶ In a second tier of concerns are this being a national big government tax and program, people paying in who won’t use it, it being too hard to fairly administer, and distrust in government.
- ▶ The only concern that people push back on is that the program will be wasteful.
- ▶ Persuadable voters resemble the Base more than the Opposition. The strongest doubts among Persuadables are that small businesses can’t operate if their employees can take time off for weeks or months (33% very concerned) and people will abuse the program (31% very concerned).

Methodology

Online Dial Survey

Lake Research Partners designed and administered this dial survey that was conducted online from October 17th–29th, 2019. The base and the oversamples were in the field those dates, and the advocates sample was in the field until November 14. The survey reached a total of 1,000 adults with oversamples of 100 African Americans, 150 Latinx, 150 Asian American/Pacific Islanders, 150 Native Americans, and 100 Advocates. The sample was drawn from an online panel of listed adults, and the advocate sample was drawn from a client list.

The base sample was weighted slightly by gender, region, age, race, race by gender, party identification, and educational attainment. The African American oversample was weighted by gender, region, age, and educational attainment. The Latinx oversample was weighted by gender, region, party identification, and educational attainment. The Asian American/Pacific Islander oversample and the Native American oversample were weighted by gender, region,



age, party identification, and educational attainment. The oversamples were weighted down into the base to reflect their actual proportion of the population of adults nationwide.

The margin of error for the total sample is $\pm 3.1\%$. The margin of error for the oversamples is $\pm 9.8\%$.

Focus Groups

Lake Research Partners conducted six in-person focus groups in May 2019 broken down as follows:

City	Date	Composition
Detroit, MI	May 6	White Non-College, Mixed Gender
		African American, Mixed Gender
Phoenix, AZ	May 7	Native American Women
		Latinas
Raleigh, NC	May 13	Small Business Owners, Mixed Gender
		Asian/Pacific Islander Women

Participants were recruited to reflect a mix of age, marital status, educational attainment, employment status, party identification, parental status, and caregiver status. Those who were strongly opposed to a program that allows people 12 weeks per year of paid family and medical leave that working families can use when they need to care for a new baby or adopted child, when they need to care for a seriously ill family member, or when they have an illness were not invited to participate in the focus groups.

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