



New Poll Suggests Parents Could Play Pivotal Swing Role in Upcoming Elections

Soccer moms make room. There is a much larger group that could well swing the November elections - Parents. That's the message of a new nationwide survey conducted by Charney Research for the Center for Work-Life Policy/National Parenting Association. Their findings reveal that mothers and fathers are remarkably unified in opinions that cut across the usual divisions of gender, race, income and party. Issues that could galvanize parents include easing work-family time pressures, stemming the violence threatening their kids, and improving public education.

Fifty-eight percent of the parents surveyed identified themselves as swing voters. "That means that not only are parents a huge, unified group - 63 million Americans - but their votes are more up for grabs than is commonly thought," says Ruth Wooden, President of the National Parenting Association. Parents make up 38 percent of registered and likely voters, which is a larger share of the electorate than most other groups; seniors, for example are 17 percent.

"Parents have not been seen as a voting bloc," adds Nancy Rankin, the parenting group's research director, "but they have powerful common interests. In an era of niche market politics, pollsters have sliced and diced the population into segments that politicians appeal to with narrow agendas. If politicians really want to unify Americans, parenting is the cross-cutting concern that can do it."

- Mothers most often say that balancing the demands of home and job is their biggest daily challenge. What's news is that dads now say so, too, and with the same high frequency. Among parents working full-time, 40% said work-family balance was their toughest challenge, twice as many pointing to this as to any other matter. "Absolutely, it's an issue for fathers," says William Thompson, a Plain City, Ohio father. "Professionally and personally, work-family balance is the biggest issue I struggle with."
- Though parents reported a surprising degree of flexibility and family-friendly attitudes in the workplace, changes have not gone far enough to address the magnitude of the dilemma. Over half (56%) of all parents say they don't have enough time for themselves, and nearly a third (32%) worry they don't have enough time for their kids.
- Though a major concern for parents, measures to ease the time crunch are just starting to appear on the political radar screen. "It's like where health care was ten years ago," says Ruth Wooden. But when specific policy ideas were posed to parents, the measures drew wide-ranging support. Ninety percent of parents favor tax incentives to encourage family-friendly policies by employers such as benefits for part-time workers and flexible hours. This proposal received the highest level of support of any of the policies asked about in both this year's survey and a similar poll done four years ago.

- Parents say "improving public schools" should be the next President's top priority. The measures which received the most support were federal funding for building and repairing schools (favored by 85% of parents) and extending public education to include pre-Kindergarten programs (favored by 81%).
- Violence tops the list of parents' worries. When asked in an open-ended question what their biggest worries were, as parents, 40% said crime and violence, up from 30% in 1996, despite recent steep declines in crime. Seven out of ten parents said they worried that a shooting could happen at a school near them.
- Parents don't let themselves off the hook; over half put most of the blame for school violence on "parents' failure to teach and watch their kids." But parents distinguish between the causes and the cures. While parents may not see access to guns as the prime cause (only 14% pointed to this), the overwhelming majority - including both mothers and fathers - see stricter gun control as an important solution to the problem. More than 8 out of 10 parents favor measures to require trigger locks, register all guns and license gun owners, and raise the age of gun possession to 21.

See *What Will Parents Vote For? Update 2000* on the Research & Publications section of our website, <http://www.worklifepolicy.org>, to download the Summary and Analysis. You may also download the Charney Research Report for complete findings and the survey questions.

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