

OCTOBER 2019

 DATA FOR *PROGRESS*

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES  
FROM: DATA FOR PROGRESS AND YOUNGOV BLUE

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RE:  
**POLLING ON PAID  
FAMILY LEAVE**

The threat of financial instability plays a major role in American families' decisions about whether to temporarily or permanently leave the workforce either to tend to a personal or family medical crisis, or to care for a newborn or newly adopted child. In this memo, Data for Progress and YouGov Blue present new public-opinion data showing overwhelming support for an expansion of family-leave policies in this country.

We found that there is a clear appetite for family-leave policy reform in the United States, though some reforms are clearly more popular than others. Voters favor comprehensive policies funded through new tax revenue, but they are more lukewarm to reforms that offer new parents paid leave at the expense of personal financial sacrifices down the road.

## Executive summary

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- ▶ Two-thirds of US voters (66 percent) support a program providing up to twelve weeks of paid leave for serious personal or family health issues or to care for a new child, which would be paid for through a payroll tax increase. This includes large majorities of Democrats and independents, and a near majority of Republicans. Overall, only 27 percent of voters oppose this policy, and the remainder do not have an opinion.
- ▶ Voters clearly reject policies that provide paid leave to only new parents and that result in long-term net loss of tax breaks or social benefits to families. They especially reject one plan to “pull forward” Social Security benefits to cover leave for new parents (27 percent support, 59 percent oppose), and are split on a policy providing paid parental care grants in exchange for diminished child tax credits (CTC) later on (42 percent support, 41 percent oppose).
- ▶ When asked to choose among these three policies, voters overwhelmingly prefer twelve weeks of inclusive paid family and medical leave, even when informed such a policy will involve a payroll-tax increase.
- ▶ Three in five voters say they would face severe financial hardship if they had to take family or

medical leave. Among these voters, support for each policy—and especially for a policy that includes paid leave for new parents and for serious personal or family health issues—is even higher than among voters overall.

## Items summary on family leave

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The survey items on family leave began by giving respondents background information that included a brief description of the current state of family-leave policy in the United States. That description read:

*The United States does not currently require employers to provide paid family and medical leave, nor does it guarantee that workers can receive any kind of paid leave through a public program or fund for serious personal or family health issues or to care for new children. To address the economic effects on the country as well as effects on families, some elected officials and candidates are considering different paid family leave policy proposals. For the following three questions, you will read about three such proposals. For each proposal, please say whether you support or oppose the proposal.*

The respondents then saw several questions about specific policies. The first three questions asked voters whether they supported or opposed different paid-leave policy proposals, which were presented in a randomized order. The three proposed policies read as follows:

*12 Weeks Of Paid Family And Medical Leave: A policy creating a national paid family and medical leave program that provides all working people up to 12 weeks of paid leave to care for a new child, a seriously ill loved one, or their own serious health issue. This would be paid for with a 0.4 percent payroll tax increase shared by employees and employers, which translates into around \$2 out of each paycheck for a typical full-time worker.*

*Pull Forward Social Security Benefits To Take Leave: A policy allowing new parents who choose to do so to pull forward their Social Security benefits for 4, 8, or 12 weeks to take leave from work to care*

for their child. In exchange, they would work past their normal retirement date for double the length of time they take off for each parental leave, and they would receive lower lifetime Social Security benefits. New parents with a history of earnings from work would be eligible, but workers with serious health issues who need time away from their job and workers who need to care for a seriously ill or injured loved one could not use this plan.

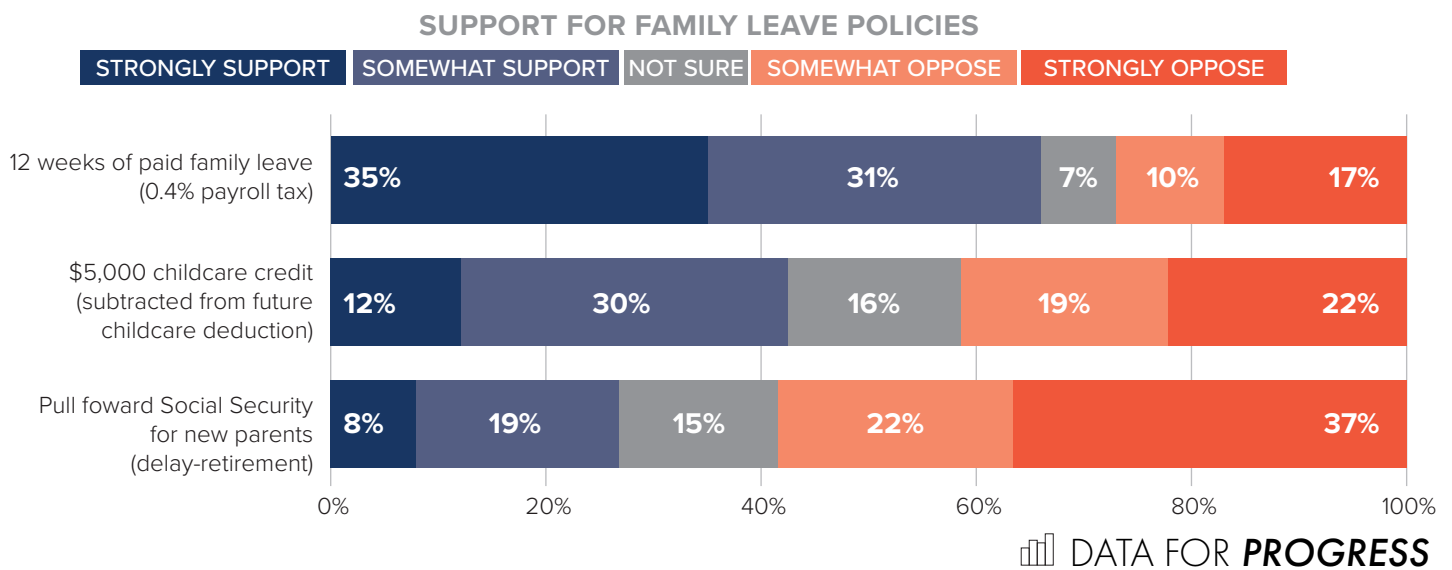
**\$5,000 In Exchange For Reduced Child Tax Credit:** A policy allowing new parents who choose to do so to receive up to \$5,000 when a child is born or adopted to help fund their leave from work or other expenses. In exchange, parents who take the \$5,000 payment would receive a reduced Child Tax Credit for up to 10 years, making their tax credit \$1,500 per year for 10 years, rather than the current \$2,000 per year. Workers with serious health issues who need time away from their job and workers who need to care for a seriously ill or injured loved one could not use this plan.

After this, the fourth question asked which of those three previously described policies would most help the

respondent's family the most. The fifth item in the module asked if it were likely or unlikely that the respondent or their family would face severe financial hardship if faced with a few months of unpaid family or medical leave.

For the first question, respondents indicated whether they strongly supported, somewhat supported, somewhat opposed, strongly opposed or were not sure about a given policy item. We found that 66 percent of voters somewhat or strongly supported the "12 Weeks of Paid Leave" item, and that policy enjoyed overwhelming net-positive support (39 percent or more). Voters were split on the "\$5,000 Credit" policy (42 percent support, 41 percent oppose), and they clearly opposed the "Pull Forward Social Security" policy, with just 27 percent of voters supporting it and 59 percent opposing it.

Voters' intensity for the twelve-weeks proposal was nearly three times that of the "5,000 Credit" policy: 35 percent strongly supported twelve weeks of paid leave, and 12 percent strongly supported the CTC pull-forward. And the share of voters who strongly supported the twelve-weeks proposal (35 percent) was twice as large as those who strongly opposed it (17 percent).



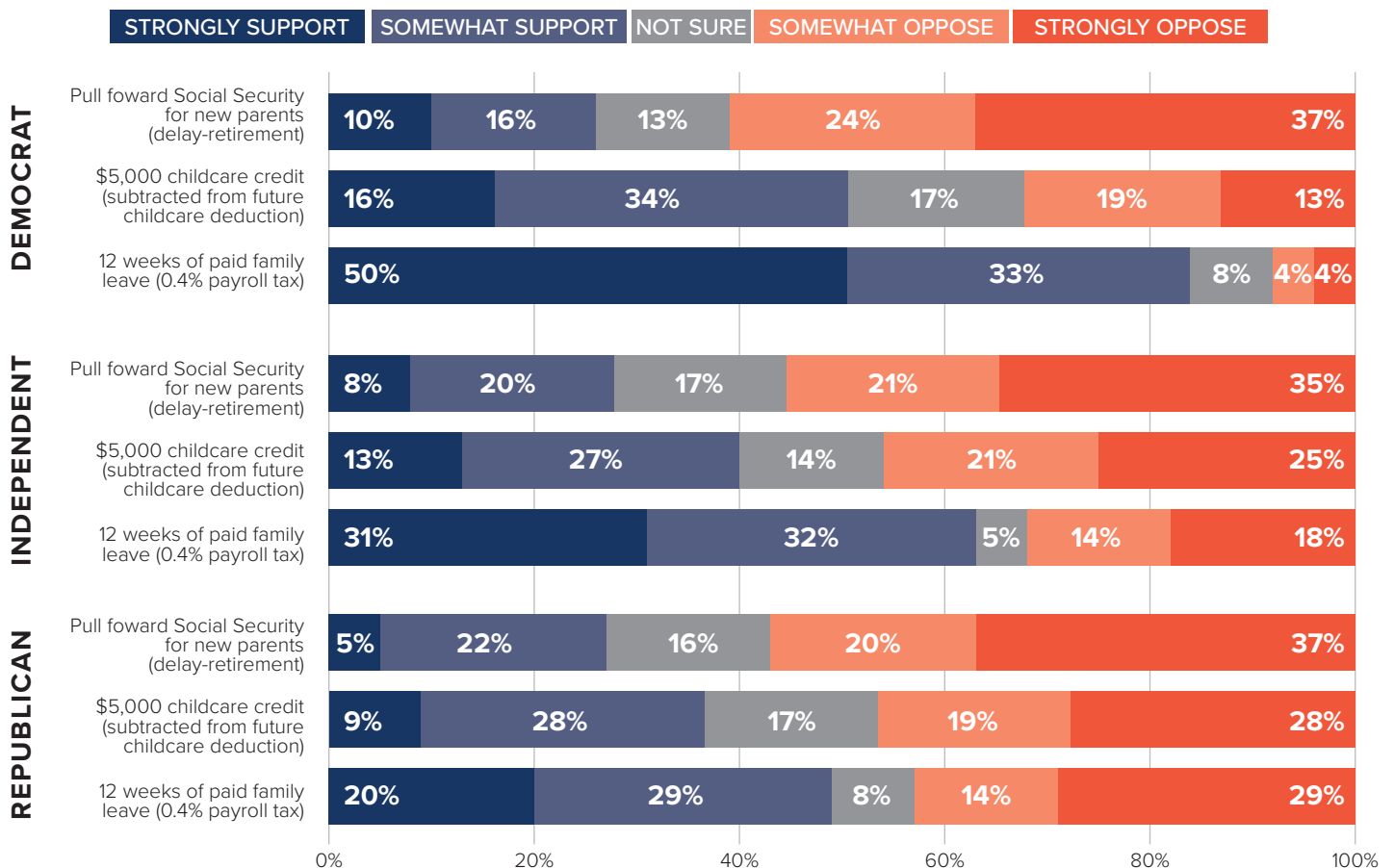
The other two proposals garnered higher shares of intense opposition than intense support, with more than five times as many voters saying they strongly oppose the Social Security pull-forward proposal than support it (8 percent strongly support versus 37 percent strongly oppose). The share of voters who strongly opposed the \$5,000 credit proposal is nearly twice as large as the share who strongly supported it (12 percent strongly support versus 22 percent strongly oppose).

We should expect some differences across party identification on these policies because involves a government benefit, which Democrats and Republicans value differently. Only one policy involved a government expansion and a tax increase, while the other two ultimately involve cuts to social-welfare spending. Despite this, the same order of preferences held across party lines.

Democrats, independents, and Republicans all clearly favored a policy providing twelve weeks of paid leave—even with higher taxes. All three groups also clearly opposed pulling forward Social Security, and were split on the \$5,000 credit policy.

While Republicans clearly favored the “12 weeks of paid leave” policy, which they viewed favorably (49 percent support, 43 percent oppose), they were surprisingly similar to other partisan groups in their preferences for the other plans. Only 27 percent of Republicans, along with 28 percent of independents and 26 percent of Democrats, approved of the “Pull forward Social Security” policy. About 37 percent of Republicans and 40 percent of independents favored the “\$5,000 credit” policy, compared to about 50 percent of Democrats.

SUPPORT FOR FAMILY LEAVE POLICIES  
BY RESPONDENT'S SELF-REPORTED PARTY ID



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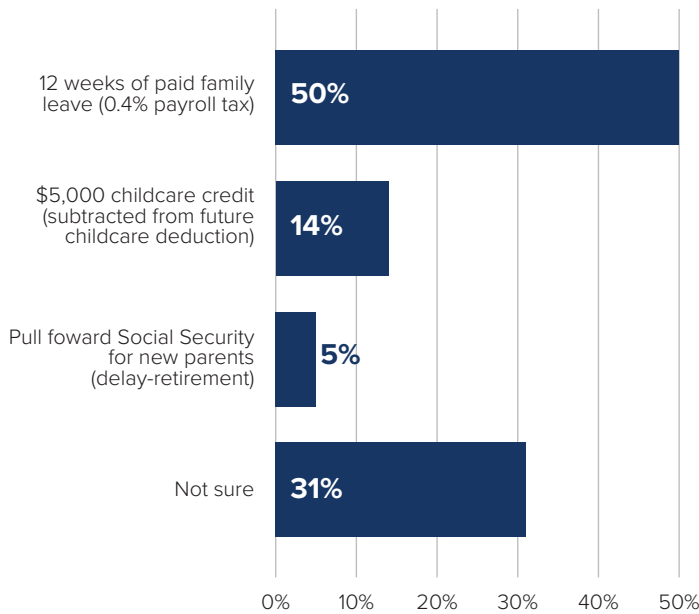
After asking voters whether they supported or opposed each policy, we asked them to select which of the three would be most helpful to them and their family. (Each plan’s wording was identical across the survey.) Under this framing, the preferred plan was clear: 50 percent of voters chose the “12 weeks” plan, with only 14 percent choosing the “\$5,000 credit” plan and barely 5 percent choosing the “Pull forward Social Security” option.

Similar preferences held across the partisan divide. When asked to choose explicitly among the three policies, Democrats, independents, and Republicans all clearly favored the “12 weeks” policy. Indeed, in each group, “Don’t know” not only outranked the other two policies but also

outranked them *combined*. Even among Republican voters, there is no appetite for allowing backdoor cuts to Social Security under the goal of providing family leave.

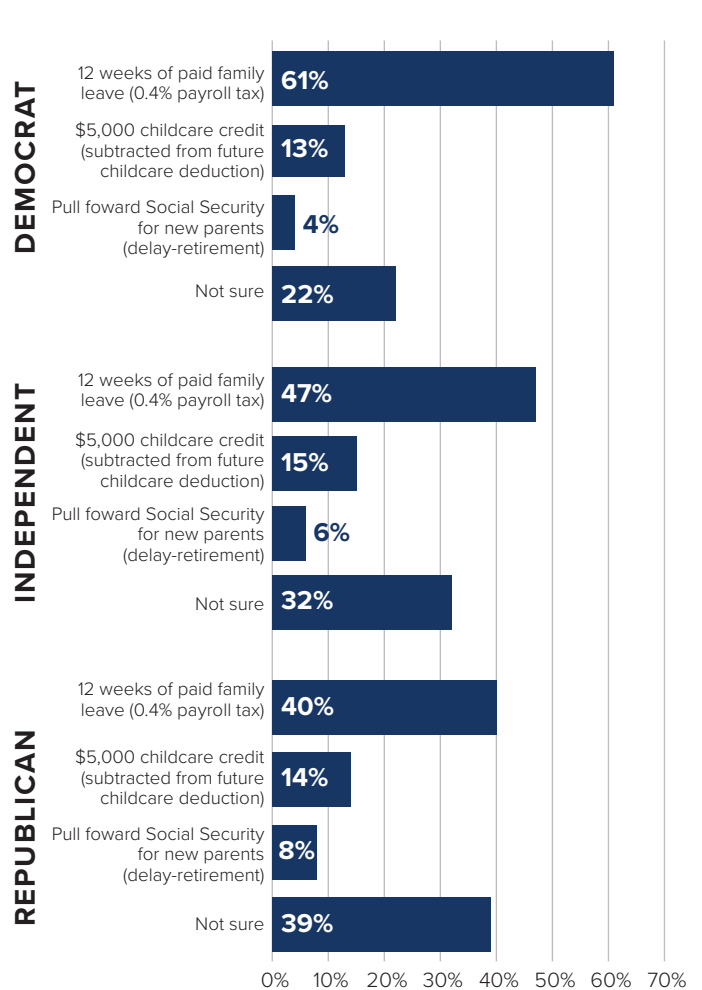
Most of the movement across party identification occurred between the “12 weeks” policy and “Don’t know.” Though Republican elites have their sights set on cutting Social Security, only 8 percent of Republicans prefer a paid-leave plan for new parents that would rely on weakening parents’ future Social Security benefits. When asked to choose, voters of all stripes clearly opted for twelve weeks of family leave funded by a payroll-tax increase.

**FAMILY LEAVE POLICY PREFERENCE**



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**FAMILY LEAVE POLICY PREFERENCE**



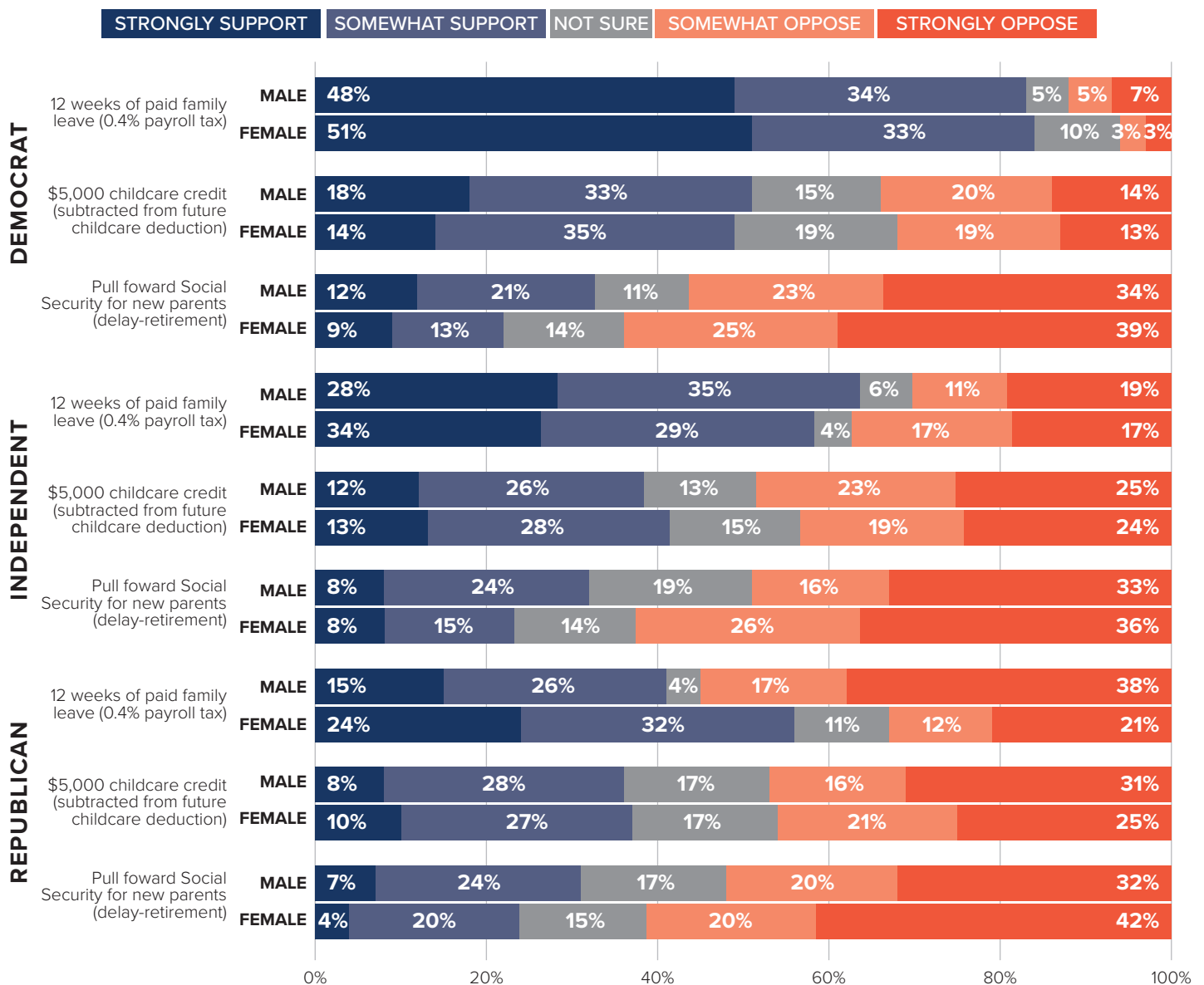
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## Results by gender and party identification

Voters are more divided on family-leave policy by party identification than they are by gender. The differences between men and women are not statistically distinguishable from one another, with women voters on average about 2 percent more likely to somewhat

or strongly approve of any given policy—a negligible difference. Accounting for party identification, the biggest gender gap in our data concerned Republican men and women. About 41 percent of Republican men supported the twelve-weeks policy, compared to 56 percent of Republican women. Even considering this, men and women of each party identification clearly prefer the twelve-weeks policy.

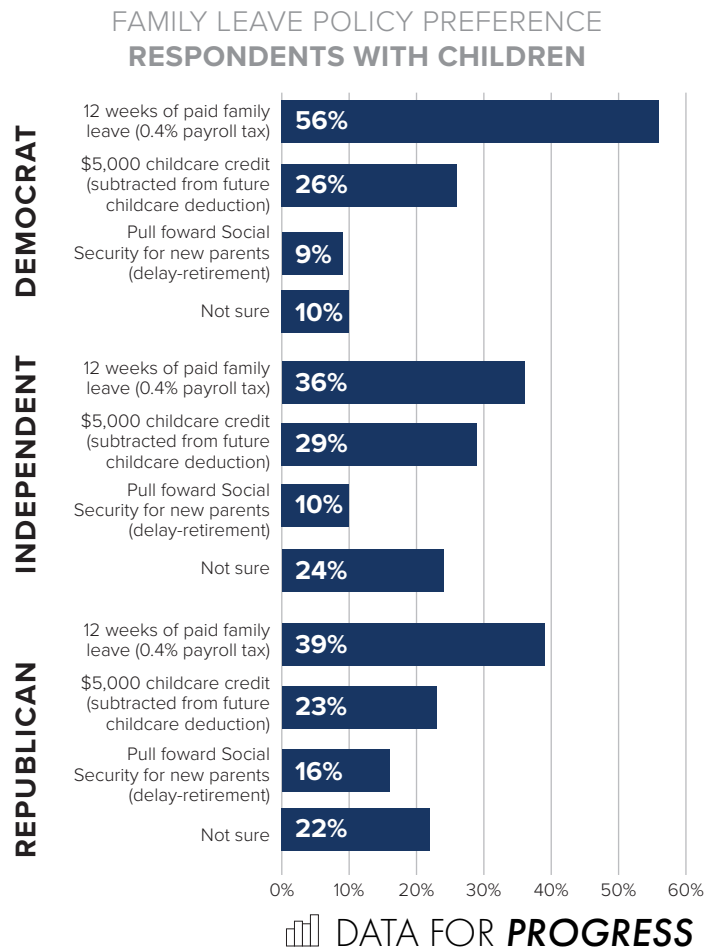
SUPPORT FOR FAMILY LEAVE POLICIES  
BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION AND GENDER



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## Results by whether voters have children

Voters with children also prefer the twelve-weeks plan to the other two options; this is true for Democrats, Independents and Republicans. With the notable exception of independents, this result is the same even accounting for whether the voter has children. This breakdown is important to understand because each policy has implications for the ability of voters to take time off for childcare. The quantities of Democrats and Republicans who support the “12 weeks” plan are statistically the same when comparing all Democrats and Republicans to only those who have children. The following chart breaks down preferred family-leave policy by party identification, subsetted to the 22 percent of respondents who reported they were the parent or guardian of a child under eighteen.



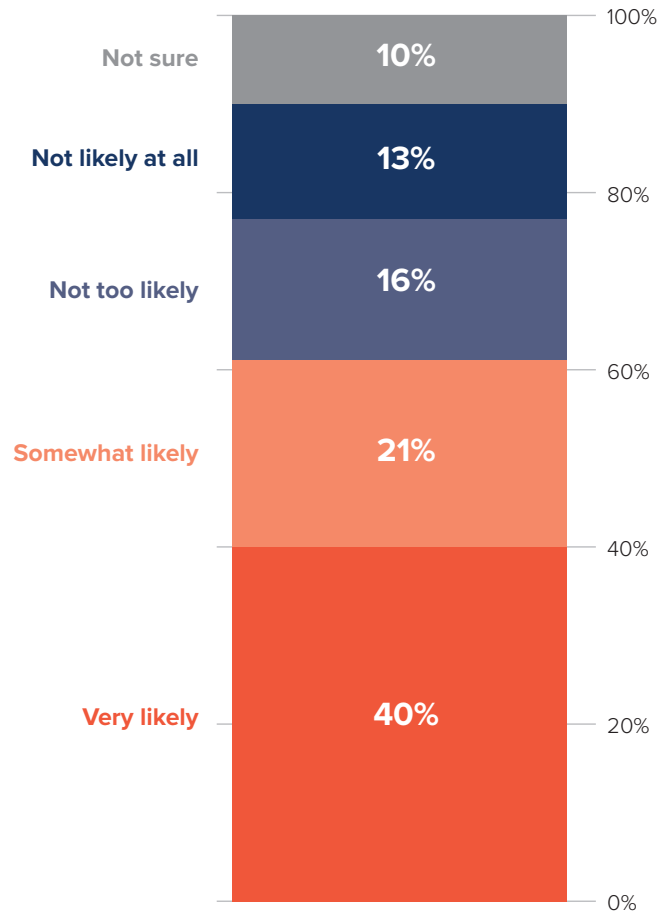
## Financial insecurity and support for paid leave

Finally, we asked voters to describe the hardships they might face if they had to take time off work. We asked:

*How likely is it that you or your family would face serious financial hardship if you had to take up to a few months of unpaid time off from your work because of a serious illness or injury, to care for a new child, or to care for a family member with a serious illness, injury, or disability?*

- <1> Very likely
- <2> Somewhat likely
- <3> Not too likely
- <4> Not likely at all
- <5> Not sure

### HARDSHIP FROM UNPAID TIME OFF



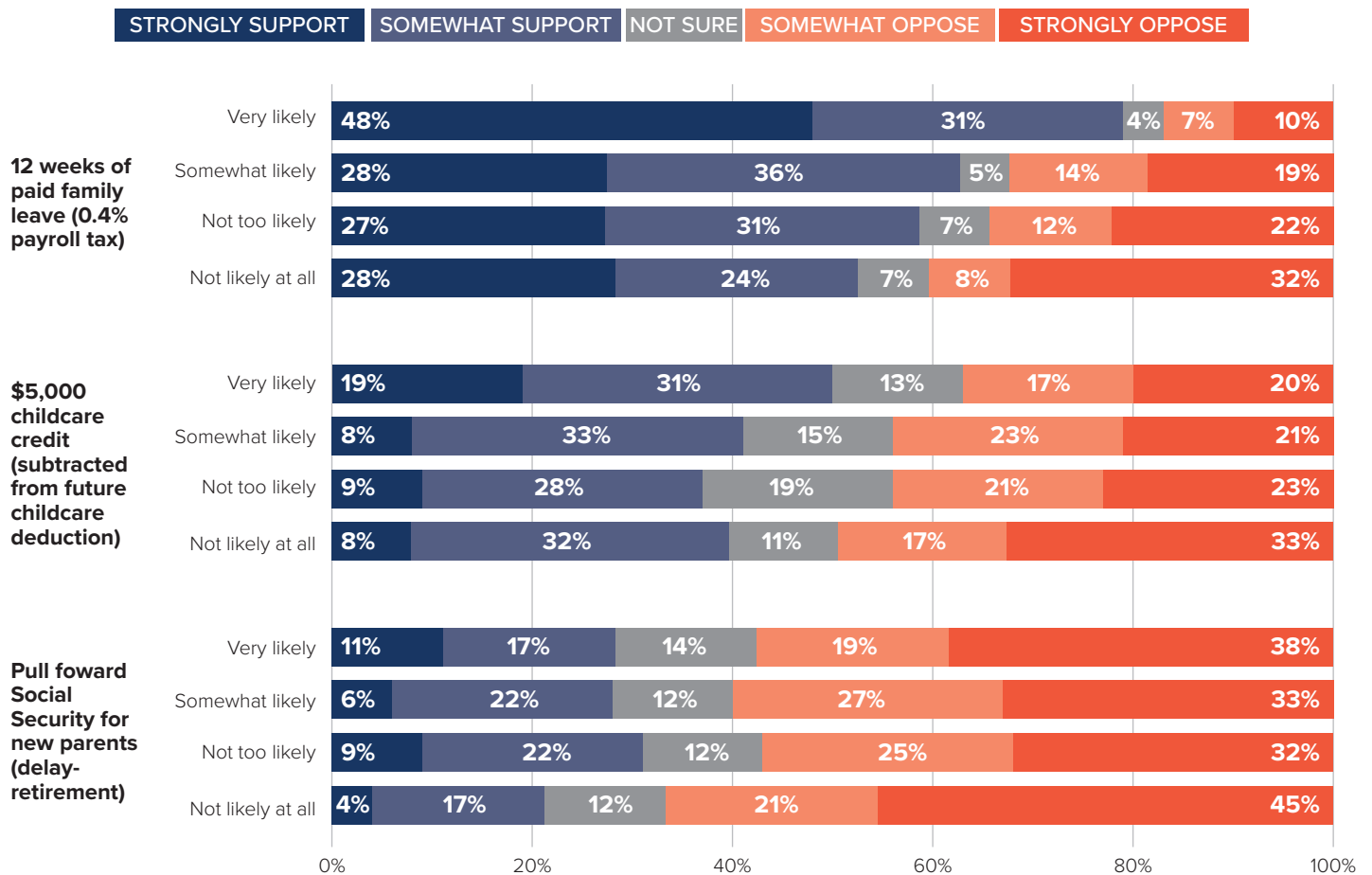
American voters are clearly concerned about potential hardships if they had to take unpaid time off from work for serious family or medical issues or to care for a new child. The plurality of voters (40 percent) said it was “very likely” they would face “serious financial hardship” if they had to deal with a few months of unpaid time off.

Voters clearly favored the twelve-weeks plan, with support for each rising as voters perceived more rising potential hardship. Even respondents who believed they wouldn’t face hardships from losing a few months of work strongly preferred the twelve-weeks plan, with 52 percent of voters supporting that policy (a net support of 12 percent) and just 21 percent supporting pulling forward Social Security (a net opposition of 45 percent).

Emergency family leave would be a particular burden to voters in lower income brackets. Fifty-one percent of voters earning less than \$30,000 per year say they would face severe hardship from a medical emergency, compared to 25 percent of those earning over \$150,000 per year. As 25 percent of black voters and 36 percent of Latinx voters report earning less than \$30,000 per year (compared to 16 percent of white voters), this burden is particularly acute among voters of color.

Voters across all income brackets preferred the twelve weeks policy the most, with 53 percent of voters earning under \$30,000 per year and 57 percent of voters earning over \$150,000 per year preferring that policy, with similar numbers in between.

### SUPPORT FOR FAMILY LEAVE POLICIES BY PERCEIVED HARDSHIP OF UNPAID FAMILY LEAVE



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## Conclusion

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Americans are clearly concerned about the financial hardships they may face from unexpected loss of work, with 61 percent reporting it was very or somewhat likely they would face significant hardship. Voters clearly prefer a policy providing twelve weeks of paid leave, even when informed that it would involve tax increases on both employers and workers. Those same voters clearly rejected a policy requiring families to dip into their Social Security benefits to afford family leave. Support for a \$5,000 child tax credit was mixed at best, with Republicans being split and majorities of Democrats and independents rejecting such a policy.

## Methods Appendix

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On behalf of Data for Progress, YouGov Blue fielded a survey on a sample of 1,280 registered voters using YouGov's online panel. The survey was fielded between 9/11/19–9/13/19, and was weighted to be representative of the national population of US voters by age, race/ethnicity, sex, education, US census region, and 2016 presidential vote choice. This survey included a module asking support levels for three different policy proposals regarding family leave, a question asking which of the three policies would be most helpful, and a question asking about financial hardship related to unpaid leaves of absence.

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COVER PHOTO  
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