

## **Poll: Republicans and Democrats Share Same Challenges to Family Life, but Diverge When Considering Challenges of Other Families**

*Ninth annual American Family Survey examined the many issues affecting marriage and family, including economics, mental health, fertility and abortion; cultural issues rank the lowest concern of any previous year of the study*

**PROVO, Utah, December 5, 2023** – Republicans and Democrats are united in their assessments of the challenges facing their own families – with top concerns being mental or physical health struggles and finding family time – but part ways when asked to consider the challenges facing families generally, according to the ninth annual American Family Survey. The report, by the Wheatley Institute and Deseret News, found that the way Americans perceive the challenges facing The Family as an institution has less to do with the actual challenges families face and more to do with differences in partisan world views. Democrats express more concern about stress on parents and the cost of raising a family, for example, while Republicans worry about single parenting and a decline in religious faith.

The opposing views applied to attitudes on marriage as well, the report found that views on marriage fell into three camps: A Republican, church-going group that largely favors marriage; a Democratic, non-church going group that is becoming more skeptical; and an odd collection of change in the middle. The survey also found increasing support of marriage among certain groups, including Blacks, Hispanics, pure independents, lower income respondents and those without a college degree. Those making more than \$120,000 annually and those who have a college degree have decreased in their approval.

Where all parties tended to agree was on the question of the strength of their own marriages, with 45% of respondents reporting that their marriages or relationships became stronger over the past two years. Additionally, the top five challenges within their own families were similar, with mental or physical health struggles, difficulty finding quality family time, high work demands and stress on parents, the costs associated with raising children, and tensions or disagreements between family members ranking high. When compared to last year's survey results, Americans also report more concerns with structural items such as parents not disciplining their children sufficiently (44%), with a surprisingly high number of respondents saying that spanking is sometimes necessary. Cultural issues such as the decline in religious faith (a concern to 13% of participants), the widespread availability of drugs and alcohol (15%) and sexual permissiveness in society (12%) saw a decrease from last year, indicating the lowest amount of concern in any previous year of the survey.

The 2023 American Family Survey was administered to over 3,000 adult respondents representing the general population based on quotas for age, race, education level, and geographic region, and aimed at creating a demographically diverse sample.

“The American Family Survey is an invaluable resource in documenting shifting challenges for families of all kinds in the United States,” said Christopher F. Karpowitz, professor of political science and a senior scholar at Brigham Young University’s Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy and principal investigator of the survey. “While no single survey can cover every impactful insight, this year’s results portray that although the institution of the family remains politicized, Americans report many commonalities with how they approach their own families, and children remain a focal point. Nevertheless, the struggle for American families is real, particularly for those who fall on the lower-income scale.”

Among the report's other findings:

### **Marriage and Family**

- While marriage rates are declining among all groups (down from 70% to 55% in some demographics), parenting rates remain consistent.
- 45% of respondents who are married or have been in a relationship for 2+ years report that their marriage or relationship is stronger than it was two years ago, yet 38% of them believe that marriages in the United States are generally weaker.
- The top five challenges facing American families include mental and physical health struggles (chosen by 29% of respondents), difficulty finding quality time (23%), high work demands and stress on parents (23%), the costs associated with raising a family (22%) and tensions or disagreements between family members (20%).
- Respondents who reported making a low annual income were more concerned about the lack of good jobs or wages (19% vs. 11% when compared to respondents who reported higher annual incomes).

### **Social Media and Parenting**

- 24% of respondents reported that they either rarely or never feel concerned about the content their children see on social media.
- 66% of parents reported that they followed their children on social media, 48% claimed to have the username and password of their child's account and 47% claimed to check their child's social media account at least once a week.
- Only 28% of parents who worried about inappropriate content online placed any content restrictions on their children and only 35% of parents who worried about cybersecurity and phishing required a private account for their children. However, 7 out of 10 parents report that they want the government to do something about social media usage among children, yet only 38% report that they would favor suing social media companies.

### **Mental Health**

- 4 in 10 Americans report that they believe teen mental health, including suicidality and overuse of technology, is the most important problem facing teenagers today. Women (46%) expressed greater concern than men (34%) about teen mental health.
- 29% of respondents feel that mental or physical health struggles are the most important challenge facing their family.
- 46% of respondents reported that they have faced financial constraints or an inability to find a medical care provider they can trust.
- 52% said that expanded access to mental health service for children and families would be very helpful for improving family well-being in the United States.

### **Economics**

- When asked about the most important issues facing families today, economic issues were of high concern, with 41% citing the costs associated with raising a family, 31% citing the high work demands and stress on parents, 14% a lack of government programs to support family and 11% the lack of good jobs.
- This increase in economic anxiety occurred even though worries about a lack of good jobs was lower than in any previous AFS and 10 percentage points lower than in 2015.
- While no partisan differences were detected in concerns about high work demands and stress on parents when answering for "your family", when asked about "families

generally,” Democrats expressed substantially more worry about the issue than Republicans, resulting in a 4.1 percentage difference.

- 36% of respondents earning a low income are worried about the national debt, 32% are worried about unemployment and 39% are worried about lack of government assistance.

### **Children’s Education**

- 7 out of 10 Americans think schools should spend more time teaching practical life skills, and both Republicans and Democrats worry about bias in school curriculum, though their concerns about the direction of that bias differ.
- About 2/3 respondents said they were “somewhat” or “very” worried about how LGBTQ+ content might be taught in their local schools, yet Republicans express more concern and the partisan differences are large, with a 24 percentage-point difference between Republicans and Democrats.
- More than 6 out of 10 expressed levels of worry about sex education and instruction about racism in schools, with a 14 percentage-point difference between Republicans and Democrats.
- More than 6 in 10 Republicans and Democrats expressed concern about biased teaching about racism and the nation’s history of race relations, but when asked whether schools should teach about the history of racism in the United States, more than 8 in 10 Democrats said yes, compared to less than half of Republicans.

### **Fertility**

- 38% of Americans are uncertain about whether declining fertility in the United States is a positive or negative trend, and Republicans and Democrats remain divided on this issue with 55% of Republicans stating that declining fertility is a negative sign for the nation, more than double the percentage of Democrats (27%).
- 37.5% said they thought declining fertility was a negative sign. Both parents and non-parents expressed similar attitudes.
- There was also a difference between men and women’s attitudes towards the declining fertility rate: men were just over 10 percentage points more likely to think that it is a negative sign for the nation (43% vs. 32%), while women were more likely than men to express ambivalence (44% of women said they were unsure, compared to 32% of men).

### **Abortion**

- A supermajority of 68% of respondents place the line for legal abortions in either the first or second trimester.
- Attitudes about where to make abortion policy are largely unchanged between 2022 and 2023, with 62% of respondents favoring a national policy. 77% of Democrats feel this way, yet only 45% of Republicans agree.
- Many people do want to see prosecutions for abortions obtained in states where abortion is restricted – 39% would prosecute a doctor for an abortion; 30% would prosecute the woman receiving the abortion; and 22% would prosecute those paying for the procedure.

As the survey illustrates, Republicans and Democrats remain divided in their attitudes toward marriage. Republicans, with a few exceptions, argue that marriage is important, but they are far less willing to support families through government spending. Democrats do favor that spending and want to help families and children, but they are less convinced that marriage is necessary to support children.

“We are pleased to see that although the institution of marriage is not viewed as necessary by some Americans, the public still largely supports the family and the problems families face do not differ much by partisanship,” said Jason S. Carroll, associate director of the Wheatley Institute. “Still, it is disappointing to see that family as a concept is increasingly used by political parties for their own ends. This is unfortunate – the institution of family is a vital component of American life. We need a true coalition for families to put aside their prejudices and come together for the greater good.”

You can read the full report at: [INSERT LINK]

### **About the Wheatley Institute**

The Wheatley Institute at Brigham Young University engages students, scholars, thought leaders, and the public in research-supported work that fortifies the core institutions of the family, religion, and constitutional government.

### **About the Deseret News**

The Deseret News was founded in 1850 and is the longest-running news organization in Utah and the state’s oldest continuously operating business. In addition to its award-winning website and mobile app, the Deseret News publishes a twice-weekly edition and Deseret Magazine. The Deseret News is committed to being a standard-bearer of journalistic integrity and principled reporting.

### **About the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy**

The Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy (CSED) at Brigham Young University is a nonpartisan academic research center seeking to increase knowledge about the practice of American democracy. Founded in 1998, CSED is committed to the production and dissemination of research that meets high academic standards, is useful to policy makers, and informs citizens. CSED-sponsored research has been published by leading academic journals and presses, and CSED scholars frequently provide expert commentary on national and local politics.

