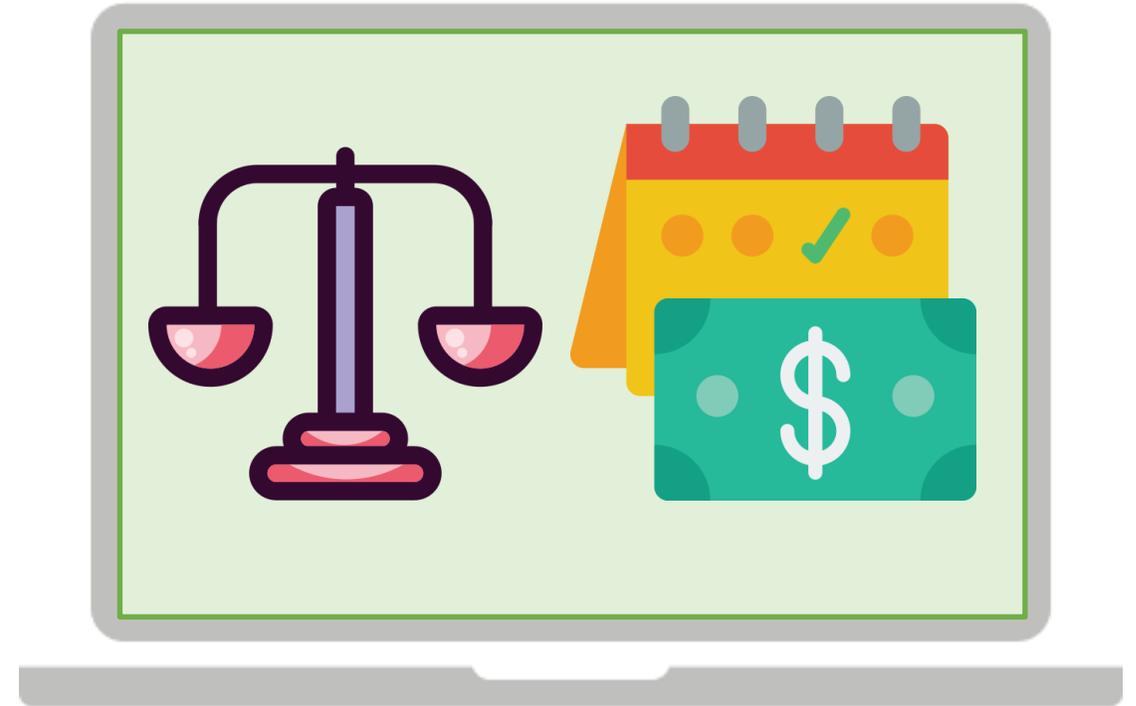


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FOCUS GROUP REPORT

Friday, August 5, 2022

Soft Partisan Women On Paid
Leave And Equal Pay



Methodology

On July 26, 2022, GBAO conducted three focus groups online with soft partisan women who varied across demographics—age, education, and race.



Soft partisan suburban women in Michigan, ages 25-45



Soft partisan women in Georgia from metro and suburban Atlanta, ages 25-45



Soft partisan suburban women in Minnesota, ages 25-45

Key Takeaways

- Abortion largely dominates how many view the status of women.
- Paid leave is widely supported, with many recognizing the clear, personal impact it can have for families.
- While many lament the ease “old white men” have in the workplace, equal pay policies are viewed as more complicated.
- Few participants have heard from candidates on any of these issues.
- Improved outcomes for families and increased employee morale are strong messages.

Views On The Country's Direction Continue To Be Bleak

"I feel [BLANK] about the way things are going in the country today."

Negative Hopeless Disgusted
Anxious Indifferent Worried
Stressed Sad Depressed
Distraught Embarrassed Disinterested

Yet Most Are Mixed On Their Own Personal Situation

"Things aren't bad for me, financially. My husband, he's worked all throughout the pandemic and has gotten several increases. I work and I'm a copywriter in [the] digital marketing industry. My work has only picked up since the pandemic. So we're doing well financially. So we're not taking a huge hit from the inflation and all that other stuff that's going on. Just what everybody else is dealing with, navigating the virus and the kids with all the school stuff and things that are changing." – MI woman



"Things are going great for me personally, just got a promotion, bought a house recently. I feel good about my personal life." – MN woman

"I have a great family. Things are going well with my family. This year has been hard with me. I lost three family members this year and in the last year, five in the last 12 months, we lost five total. So that's been hard, but otherwise things are well. I have a job, some people can't say that. I have a beautiful home and a beautiful family." – MN woman

"Things could be better; they're not really going so great. I'm going through some health issues right now. So that's really preventing me from working. It's preventing me from driving. I don't have any family here, so that's really tough. Can't really go and do things with them. It's just me here. So it's been really difficult." – MN woman

"Personally, I'm okay, just because even with the whole pandemic and up to now, I've been able to keep my job and be promoted at my job. Financially, I've been okay. It's just emotionally and mentally dealing with everything that's happening is what's a lot." – GA woman

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Views On Women In Society Are Mixed, With Abortion Dominating The Negative And Women In Business And Social Media As Positives

"I definitely feel like we've made some strides. Can we do better? I feel like we need more women in CEO positions and we're starting to climb in those areas. More women in leadership. And also what I find, even in my employment, when they do take leadership roles, they still have men over them that necessarily don't listen to them as much. So I definitely feel like we've grown in a lot of areas." – MN woman

"You've got your overarching umbrella of fundamental rights and then abortion is under that umbrella. Well, now that abortion is under attack, the other fundamental rights, like the right to contraceptives, that's also under attack. They have forecasted that to be next to be in question. That's what I think about." – GA woman



"I'm thinking about on a systems level. We're in a patriarchal society so by default or by design, we're second-class citizens. I just think we're now more aware of how that works in the law and politics, but we've always been treated like second-class citizens and the same, or if there's a hopeful spin to it, at least we have women on social media who are challenging body image issues [and] like body positivity. I myself, I'm a fat yoga instructor. So those are good things for women that I think are for women, but in terms of larger structures, excuse my language, but shit has always been bad for us." – MI woman

"I feel that way because yes, while things have not always been historically great for women, I feel like those few freedoms and rights that we had that pertain to us as women, I feel like they're trying to take those away. And then with the Roe vs Wade thing, that just goes to show that our freedoms are under attack and it's kind of just like, okay, what are they going to look at next? So I think it's kind of one of those things." – MI woman

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Participants Can Personally Explain How Paid Leave Impacts Them

Moderator: "Paid family and medical leave – what does this phrase mean for people?"

"I wouldn't have to worry at night or stay up. Worrying about if I get injured, who's going to pay for extra stuff? If my husband gets injured, how are we going to pay for the mortgage? Because I don't have those protections. I worked at a private school, I didn't have any of that." – MI woman

"Not all my time was covered. I actually had to have my gallbladder removed. And I had to take it, it kind of felt like a C-section so I had to be off because of like lift restrictions. So, I just had to use out my sick time. **And then when I was able to go back or when I was done with sick time, it was just unpaid time. So, my job was protected, but then it was just unpaid time.**" – MI woman

"I took FMLA, we call it, for the birth of my two children and also when I had surgery. **A lot of times, I was able to plan out ahead of time. I was able to move a certain amount of money and put it aside to help cover the less amount of income coming in.** So basically, I tried to make sure that I had some type of coverage coming in and I was able to know ahead of time to plan towards that." – MN woman

"It's helped a little bit to pay my bills, but honestly, it hasn't really helped me much at all, to be honest, **because the income is just not enough because we only get 60% of your income and they take taxes out and all your benefits out so really, you're not getting enough at the end.**" – MN woman

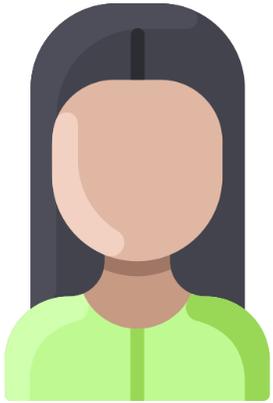
"When I had my children... **It affected me in a great way.** My husband has it on his job, so he was able to take off too. So it was ideal." – GA woman

"**I would definitely like to have it.** For the safe side, you never know what happens. Maybe that or anything that's happening in the family. It's good to have in your mind that you can take that portion of your family medical leave." – GA woman

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Paid Leave Is Uniformly Supported And Is Seen As A “More Realistic” Policy That “Affects Everyone” And Makes People “Feel Human”

“I think there might be a little less stress and people would probably feel more respected knowing that they matter as a human... [Moderator: Tell me what you mean by that.] I just feel some people or some jobs, if you get sick or hurt or say it's even maternity leave and you leave for an extended amount of time, you're replaceable to some jobs. Some jobs there is respect. Even though I didn't get paid the whole time, I felt respected and they weren't going to replace me. But there are some jobs that they probably do, that if you leave, you're just, 'oh, you're done.'” – MI woman



“I think that **just the feeling that you're a human** would be more so because **it's not just for maternity leave. It's for other things too.** So realizing that you're a human and things do happen where you may have to take care of a family member. It just looks like the company or the state cares.” – GA woman

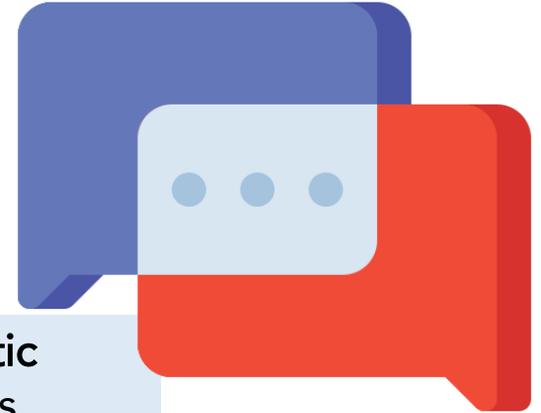
“I was going to say that there's a buy-in effect by everyone because it's not just one specific group of people. It's not just mothers. It's not just those with chronic illnesses. **It's not just those who have other circumstances that might come up. It's just everyone.**” – GA woman

“I feel that paid leave is just going to be a little bit more accessible. **And I think it's up to us as employees to do our due diligence when we're job hunting, when we're switching jobs. We can find those places that will give us paid maternity leave, paid family member leave, that kind of thing.** How do we know if we can find places that are paying our male counterparts the same? To me, **that seems like a more realistic goal, paid leave.**” – GA woman

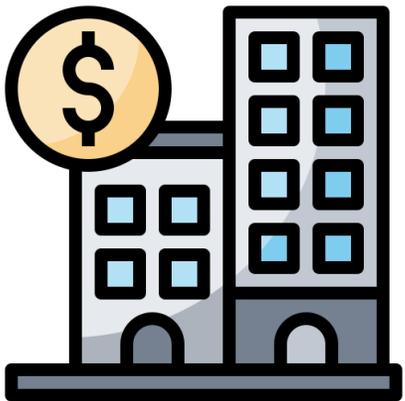
“Oh yeah. I don't see any downsides.” – MN woman

Support Notwithstanding, Most Resign Themselves To Political Divisions And Corporate Reluctance Standing In The Way Of Progress On Paid Leave

“All the changes we talked about, like paid family leave and equal wages, I don't see that [coming] into fruition at all. I can't imagine that happening because just the way the political climate is today, I just don't think it's realistic.” – GA woman



“I don't think any candidate wants to touch on subjects of that dynamic because it is a capitalistic society, and when you start talking about that type of thing, you're really hoping that business owners who would have to look at their bottom line and make a lot of different adjustments, and that's not something that's favored.” – GA woman



“I was going to say from the business perspective, yes. They're going to say it costs too much.” – MI woman

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Better Outcomes And Better Employee Morale Are Top Messages In Support Of Paid Leave

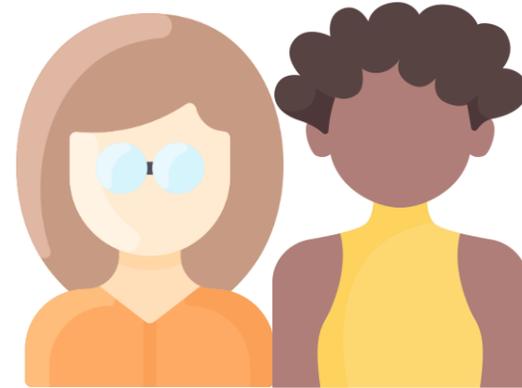
“People wouldn't lose their jobs. **People would have job security and you wouldn't have people looking for jobs after the fact**, especially when people have unexpected medical conditions and stuff that they were not expecting and wind up losing their job because they didn't have enough time to cover it.” – MN woman

“**It also would affect our homelessness and our health. We would be much healthier.** If you look at other countries, there are some countries that give families a whole year off with the newborn when you have a child and those countries actually have healthier states and more productive workers.” – MN woman

“Honestly yeah, **because the mom has time to bond with the newborn baby. If she has postpartum depression, she has time to actually deal with those health concerns and then a lot of parents, new moms, have concerns about putting their family members in nursing homes during COVID.** If they can take care of their loved one and then they could still be around family, they would want to do those things.” – MN woman

“It's very convincing because of course, better health is always a good thing and **who wants to be stressed while they're trying to nurse or take care of a newborn**, or no one wants to have an early death or even have to go into a nursing home. So of course, better health is always a positive to me.” – MI woman

“Well, if you just had a baby you can have time to bond with the baby. And especially if you get paternal paid family leave too. So you can all have that family unit.” – GA woman



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Equal Pay Discussion Reminds Participants Of Their Own Wage Discrimination, Structural Disadvantages, And “Old White Men” Having It Easy



“I literally was making poverty where I had more of an education than the board members, and they were making more to work two hours a week, but it was based on my gender. It wasn't based on my work ethic or my degrees. But I still see it now. I do. I see my nieces struggle and I'm like, why are you getting paid less? You're doing the exact same thing. It makes no sense to me in 2022.” – MI woman



“Before I started working for myself, for my own company, I worked for a digital marketing company. So it's a bunch of tech guys. I was one of two females. I was the only female that was doing the more technical work. The other lady was doing more administrative work. And everybody was getting paid more than I was... **And I remember when it came time I went and talked to them about getting a raise because I was like, ‘Everybody here is making more than I am, but I'm doing the majority of work. I'm keeping your business running really.’ They gave me like such a hard time. It was like, ‘Oh yeah. But you're young still. We have people who have been here for this many years,’ and I was like, ‘Yeah, but I'm carrying your business right now.’ And I really felt like they undervalued me because I did work with a bunch of Caucasian men and I was the only Black person there, then one of two females that were there. I just think they didn't really take me serious.**” – MI woman

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Equal Pay Seemed “Unrealistic,” Too Hard And Systemic To Execute



“I do think it's up to the companies and I think... I don't know. There has to be some type accountability.” – MN woman

“I just think the idea of another regulation, I can't see how that would be implemented in a way that because you don't know what people's experiences are, why they're making a certain wage. It's really hard to dissect that and figure out when it actually is malicious, for lack of a better word.” – MN woman

“So let's say you want to give everyone paid medical leave. That means the opposing person is arguing for no medical leave whatsoever. That seems really jarring. Whereas when it comes to equal pay, it's like, no, but people are getting paid... It seems like there are less drastic counterparts to equal pay than there are for medical leave. That could be life or death, whereas equal pay could be argued in so many different ways and aspects.” – GA woman

“Well, I think there should be certain policies for things like being able to discuss your pay. People should be able to openly discuss that, but I don't know. It really depends on the workplace too. It's really hard to say, because every workplace is different. To have one policy for every workplace, is just not going to work out.” – MN woman

“I think that people will always find a way to get around things. And if they implement a policy, you can't do XYZ, they're going to find a way to do XYZ, whether [it's going] to be XYZ or ABC. There's always a way.” – GA woman

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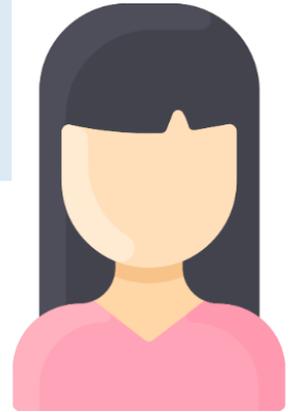
These Issues Connect To Abortion As “Women’s Rights” And Don’t Immediately Strike Respondents As Related To Economic Issues

“I was thinking about whether I felt like those were all female centric issues versus economic issues, but really all I could think of was those are divisive issues. And I feel like the same people who would be in support of the six-week ban would not be the same people in support of equal pay. So to imagine a candidate running on those three separate things, whichever way they run on them, certainly poses an issue for us as voters.” – GA woman

“Because I know I read something that was saying that statistically speaking, abortions are more common among people from a lower income group, and it would be the same thing with the equal pay. And then with paid medical leave, you gave us the percentage that 15% of the people that do get the paid medical leave, they're usually high executives. So, that's what makes it an economic issue.” – GA woman

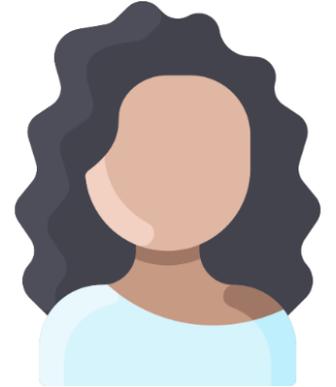
“I mean, abortion, for me, falls under woman's health, right? I mean, equal pay and FMLA – that's something totally different, right? I mean... who's to say that people, everybody, people or women who are having abortions or whatever, maybe they don't have a job. I know. It's two different categories. It falls under two different categories.” – MN woman

“Tying all of the issues, because to me, abortion is not just about women, because as far as I know, we don't self populate, right? So it takes two to tango. And I think when we only discuss abortion as a women's rights issue, we absolve the other partner of the responsibility. So, I'm hesitant to label all of those things, even though the common thread is they have to do with women. I think it positions us. It's like it's our fault [that the] system is messed up. And so, if we just fix the women, we can fix everything. That's my hesitancy.” – MI woman



Very Few Recounted Hearing Anything From Any Candidate About These Issues

"I don't remember... I heard someone talk about it probably... **Maybe it was an election or so back. I can't remember, but I don't remember who...** That's for sure. I do remember hearing it. I do also remember hearing, I don't remember, Donald Trump's daughter or whatever, talking about having daycare paid for everybody who works. Obviously, that never happened." – MN woman



"I haven't heard anything yet." – MI woman

"I've heard about it, but I feel like it never goes anywhere." – MI woman

"**Very little** because primarily they're men. You might hear about it during election time. You might not, likely not." – GA woman

"I can't remember hearing anything about it." – GA woman



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Abortion Dominates Assessments Of Women's Status Compared To 20 Years Ago Or 20 Years From Now

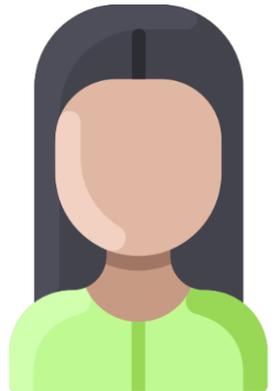


"I think that if changes aren't made immediately, or if people [don't] stand together and stand for a change, things will definitely be horrible, even worse in the next 20 years. **I think that if someone can make laws and rights about your body, that's very frightening.**" – GA woman

"Well, just going back to the fundamental rights umbrella. Just women in general, **I think things will get worse.**" – GA woman

"In 2002, I feel like women were doing the same as they were probably six months ago, before this all happened, so I don't think anything has really changed since 20 years ago except for this [Roe v. Wade] right now, **so maybe I would say 20 years ago we were doing better. Six months ago we were doing better.**" – MN woman

"I do feel like in the aspect of employment, **I think women are doing better now than they were 20 years ago, but I still think there's a long way to go.** I come up against it in my employment a lot, sexism, and I'm used to it and was naive to think that we were in a day and age that that wasn't how it was, but I've been proven wrong. And now I see it and I just have to swallow it." – MN woman



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About Navigator

In a world where the news cycle is the length of a tweet, our leaders often lack the real-time public-sentiment analysis to shape the best approaches to talking about the issues that matter the most. Navigator is designed to act as a consistent, flexible, responsive tool to inform policy debates by conducting research and reliable guidance to inform allies, elected leaders, and the press. Navigator is a project led by pollsters from Global Strategy Group and GBAO along with an advisory committee, including: Arkadi Gerney, The Hub Project; Joel Payne, The Hub Project; Christina Reynolds, EMILY's List; Mike Podhorzer, AFL-CIO; Jesse Ferguson, progressive strategist; Navin Nayak, Center for American Progress Action Fund; Stephanie Valencia, EquisLabs; and Melanie Newman, Planned Parenthood Action Fund.

About the Study

GBAO conducted three online focus groups on July 26, 2022 with soft partisan women voters ages 25-45 in three states: Michigan, Georgia, and Minnesota. Some quotes have been lightly edited for brevity. Qualitative results are not statistically projectable.

For Press inquiries contact:

press@navigatorresearch.org

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Navigator:

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