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She Votes: Women, the Workplace, and Pandemic Politics

New Survey of Women Voters Shows That the Covid-19 Pandemic Has Widely Shifted Perceptions of American Politics, Work Norms, and Gender Roles

CAMBRIDGE, MA (March 16, 2021)—The Covid-19 pandemic has upended women’s lives, highlighted inequities in health care, education and the economy, and underscored the importance of having women in political office, according to a new online survey released today by [Gender on the Ballot](#), a partnership between the [Women & Politics Institute at American University’s School of Public Affairs](#) and the [Barbara Lee Family Foundation](#). [Benenson Strategy Group](#) conducted the survey, which aimed to explore the issues shaping women voters and their political opinions one year after the start of the pandemic.

“This new research shows that the pandemic has caused women to be more passionate and political about critical issues than ever,” said Barbara Lee, President and Founder of the Barbara Lee Family Foundation. “In this historically challenging time, women remain unwavering in their commitments--to their families, their communities, and our country. In light of the last year, I am sure that more women than ever will be motivated to vote, to run for office, and to advocate for the causes they care about!”

“Women faced unprecedented adversity over the course of the last year, and we now know that they are reckoning with the political and cultural systems that shape their professional and personal lives,” said Betsy Fischer Martin, Executive Director of the Women & Politics Institute. “*She Votes* delivers insights about what issues are top-of-mind for women and how they plan to act on their values as the country recovers.”

Pollster Katie Connolly, who conducted the research, noted that, “In both 2018 and 2020, women voters played a decisive role, boosting turnout and flipping seats. The concerns women have raised here, and the particular consequences this tumultuous year has had for women at home and at work, will shape the electoral landscape heading into 2022. Lawmakers at every level should take heed.”

Key Findings:

For women, the 2020 election was singularly consequential. Over half of the women surveyed said it was the most important election of their lifetime, and a further 36% said it was more important than most elections. Covid-19 was the issue most cited as a deciding factor in women’s votes. The presence of Kamala Harris on a major party ticket was also meaningful for the majority of women overall, though her impact differed according to political disposition. Her presence on the ticket was highly motivating for Biden voters (68% said she was a factor in their vote), while just 39% of Trump voters said she was a factor in their choice. Over 60% of women expressed excitement about having a female vice president for the first time, including close to one in three Republican women. But a majority of women voters (55%) still believe there are too few women in elected office. There is again a stark difference of opinion based on party identity, with 58% of Republican women voters believing that the current number of women in political office is “about right” compared to only 23% of Democratic women.

This survey further reveals the extent of the pandemic’s economic toll on women. Over one in three say their financial situation has gotten worse since Covid-19 emerged, and a quarter of working women indicate that the pandemic has affected their careers—delaying raises, bonuses, and promotions, with mothers feeling this more acutely. In terms of their emotional well-being, 60% of women, and a staggering 71% of women under the age of 40, say that the situation with the pandemic has affected their mental health.

The pandemic's impact has led women across the political spectrum to reflect on systemic problems and support related policy shifts. Covid-19's disproportionate effect on low-income workers, older Americans, and people of color is concerning to most women, and especially to suburban women. *She Votes* found that nearly all women believe in the need for more affordable and accessible healthcare, including three quarters of Republican women. This view extends to expanding Medicare, Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, which 77% of women now say they agree with, including 70% of Fox News viewers. Eight in 10 women support better paid sick and maternity leave policies.

Women are challenging models of work and employment norms in light of the pandemic, with 78% indicating that workplaces should allow more flexibility than the "outdated" 9-5 model. Among women currently working from home, three quarters say that when the pandemic is over, they would prefer to either work from home permanently or have a more flexible arrangement where they could work from home more often. Only 25% say they want to resume fulltime work outside home. And in terms of workplace safety during the pandemic, 57% of women of color and 42% of low-income women feel that their employer has prioritized profits over their wellbeing, and one in four women believe their employer put them at risk of contracting Covid-19.

Covid-19 has been difficult for mothers, and pulled them in competing emotional directions. Over half of moms surveyed feel that taking care of their kids during this time has been isolating and stressful, and one in two working moms report difficulty juggling work and virtual schooling. Amid this stress, 86% of moms say they have loved having more time with their children. Two in three moms with school-age children are eager for them to return to in-person school, but the majority are wary of re-opening schools without fully accounting for the risks and won't send them back till things feel safe.

The survey was conducted nationwide among 809 women who voted in the 2020 presidential election and who are likely to vote in the 2022 midterm election. The margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level and is higher among subgroups.

"Women on Wednesdays" Virtual Panel Event on *She Votes*

Katie Connolly, Betsy Fischer Martin, and Amanda Hunter (Executive Director, Barbara Lee Family Foundation) will discuss the survey's findings with Errin Haines, Editor at Large, *The 19th* on Wednesday, March 17th at 6 pm EST. Registration for the event and more information is available here: <https://www.crowdcast.io/e/gotb>.

About *Gender on the Ballot*

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation and the American University's Women & Politics Institute are proud partners on *Gender on the Ballot*, a nonpartisan project that examines and contextualizes gender dynamics in American politics. As the conversation and culture around running for office in the US continues to evolve, *Gender on the Ballot* contributes to the dialogue on gender and politics through accessible content from experts and practitioners.

About The Barbara Lee Family Foundation

The Barbara Lee Family Foundation works to advance women's equality and representation in American politics through political research, strategic partnerships, and grants and endowments. The Foundation's work is guided by its core belief that women's voices strengthen our democracy and enrich our culture.

About the Women & Politics Institute at American University's School of Public Affairs

The mission of the Women & Politics Institute is to close the gender gap in political leadership. WPI provides young women with academic and practical training that encourages them to become involved in the political process and facilitates research by faculty and students that enhances our understanding of the challenges and opportunities women face in the political arena.

About Benenson Strategy Group

Benenson Strategy Group delivers game-changing strategies to help clients navigate tough issues and develop winning campaigns. BSG uses innovative and provocative techniques that probe deeply on core beliefs, attitudes, and emotions to uncover the hidden architecture of opinion.

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