



Personal Care Accounts vs Universal Paid Leave Mandates

The problem

Across the country, Progressive organizations and politicians are pushing universal paid leave mandates.

Although these regulations often mandate benefits that most workers already enjoy, the mandates impose serious burdens on other business and workers. Paid leave mandates lead to job loss, increased prices, decreased flexibility in the workplace and other unintended consequences that hurt workers and the economy overall.

These negative consequences are difficult for many people to see or understand, however. And because the regulations *sound* as if they will *help*, mandates often enjoy high levels of support in public opinion polls.

But what happens when citizens are *informed of alternative policies* to help families, and of the *negative* consequences of paid leave mandates? Can we *persuade* citizens that these government mandates are not, in fact, a good way to help Americans, that alternatives such as Personal Care Accounts are a better way to help people? What's the best way to communicate the downsides of paid leave mandates?

The Independent Women's Forum commissioned Evolving Strategies to conduct a randomized-controlled experiment testing the effectiveness of three different messages explaining why Personal Care Accounts (PCAs) are good policy and why universal paid leave mandates are bad for employees, businesses and the country.

Overview of the methodology

We recruited a sample of over 3,000 *voters* from an online panel that is matched to individual voter file and consumer information and which approximates the general U.S. population of registered voters on major demographic characteristics. Respondents answered a series of demographic and other control questions, and then those in the treatment groups received one, and only one, set of messages.

Each respondent was then *randomly assigned* to one of the treatment conditions (where they hear a pro-PCA message alone, *or* anti-universal paid

leave message *plus* the pro-PCA message) or the Control condition (where they saw a non-policy, “placebo” message).

The respondents were *not* asked to evaluate the message. Following exposure to the messages, all respondents answered the same policy support and other “outcome” questions.

We conducted statistical analyses and predictive modeling to compare policy support in the Control group (saw “placebo” message) to answers in the treatment groups (saw policy message). The difference between the average support levels in the treatment compared with the control group is due to the impact of the messages, as everything else about the two groups is otherwise the same.

Using this randomized-controlled experiment — the same design used for pharmaceutical research trials — allowed us to identify which messages were the most effective at shifting opinion against greater workplace regulation.

Overview of the results

Voters don't need to be persuaded to support Personal Care Accounts (PCAs) — support for PCAs in the Control condition is an astronomical 84 percent. Voters are primed for hearing the truth about the tradeoffs and negative impacts of government mandates, and citizens respond when they hear a message explaining the problems with the regulations.

- There is no need to argue in detail *for* PCAs — the public is already on board with the policy.
- Framing the debate as a matter of *being honest* about the tradeoffs and harm caused by universal paid leave mandates does the most to increase a preference for PCAs over universal paid leave.
- Attacking universal paid leave mandates drags down support for both approaches, but PCAs come out ahead — 58 percent of registered voters prefer PCAs over universal paid leave mandates.
- Women and Democrats move the most toward PCAs.
- Bottom line: Voters prefer the alternative approach of Personal Care Accounts, and anti-regulatory messaging works.

Section I

Research details

Methodology

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Each respondent was then *randomly assigned* to one of the treatment conditions (where they hear a pro-PCA message alone, or anti-universal paid leave message *plus* the pro-PCA message) or the Control condition (where they saw a non-policy, “placebo” message).

As the table to the right shows, respondents were assigned to one of four different conditions. In each condition, respondents were exposed to one or more messages:

- 1) Control condition:
 - Samsung + Coca-Cola commercials (placebo)
- 2) “Positive” treatment condition:
 - Positive PCA message
- 3) “Honest” treatment condition:
 - “Honest” attack + Positive PCA message
- 4) “Risk” treatment condition:
 - “Risk” attack + Positive PCA message

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Experimental Design

Condition	Message(s) Seen by Respondents
Control	Samsung + Coca-Cola
Positive	Positive
Honest	Honest + Positive
Risk	Risk + Positive

Section II

Message impact on support for
PCAs over universal paid leave

Impact on Support for PCAs over Universal – By Gender

The chart at the top right of this page shows the impact that each message treatment had on support for Personal Care Accounts (PCAs) over a universal paid leave mandate.

For this question, respondents had to choose one policy or the other. Both policies garner very large majority support in general. However, since they are forced into an either-or choice, this question gives us a good measure of which policy they would prefer to be enacted.

As you can see, the “Positive” message, which simply describes how PCAs work and gives some context on the benefits in terms of personal control and flexibility, does not have a significant impact on PCA versus universal preferences.

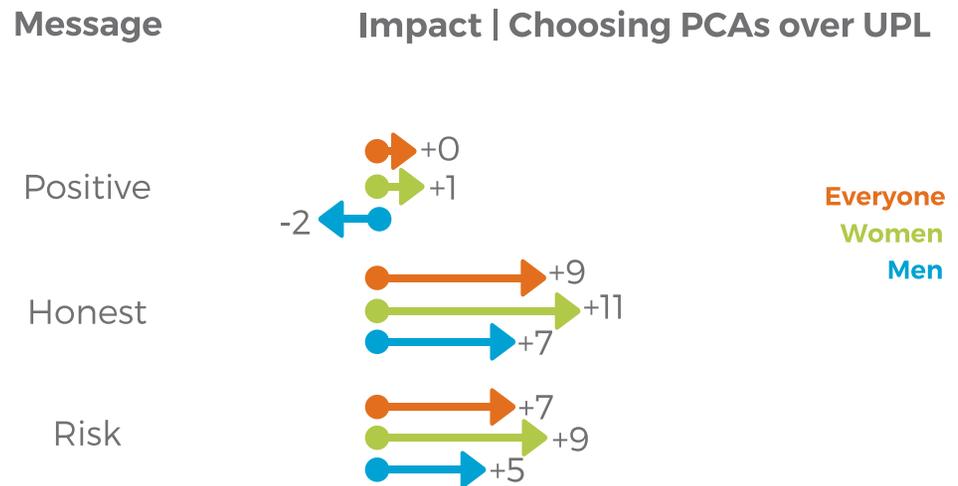
For the “Honest” and “Risk” treatments, respondents read both the “Positive” message and a message that describes the negative effects and unintended consequences of universal paid leave mandates. In other words, everyone in the treatment conditions reads the “Positive” message, and some also read a negative message attacking universal paid leave policies.

The “Honest” message argued that universal paid leave supporters aren’t being honest about the tradeoffs and downsides to that policy. The “Risk” message framed the *same* problems with universal paid leave as being too risky to enact. This framing of the attack on universal paid leave as a matter of “being honest” versus “too risky” is the only difference between the two treatments.

As you can see, the “Honest” treatment is most effective at moving opinion overall, and among both women and men.

In the baseline, Control condition (where no political message was seen), PCAs and universal paid leave are about equally balanced in support (49 to 51 percent). Both “Honest” and “Risk” substantially increase a preference for PCAs, between +7 and +9 points.

Women move the most toward PCAs, but they end up about equal to men in preferring PCAs over universal paid leave (57 and 59 percent respectively). In other words, women start out preferring universal paid leave more than men, but after reading the “Honest” message, men and women look very similar in their preference for PCAs.



Percent Choosing PCAs over UPL by Gender

Gender	All	Women	Men
Control	49%	46%	53%
Positive	49%	47%	51%
Honest	58%	57%	59%
Risk	56%	55%	57%

Impact on Support for PCAs over Universal — By Party

The chart at the top right of this page shows the impact that each message treatment had on support for Personal Care Accounts (PCAs) over a universal paid leave mandate.

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As you can see, the “Positive” message, which simply describes how PCAs work and gives some context on the benefits in terms of personal control and flexibility, does not have a significant impact on PCA versus universal preferences.

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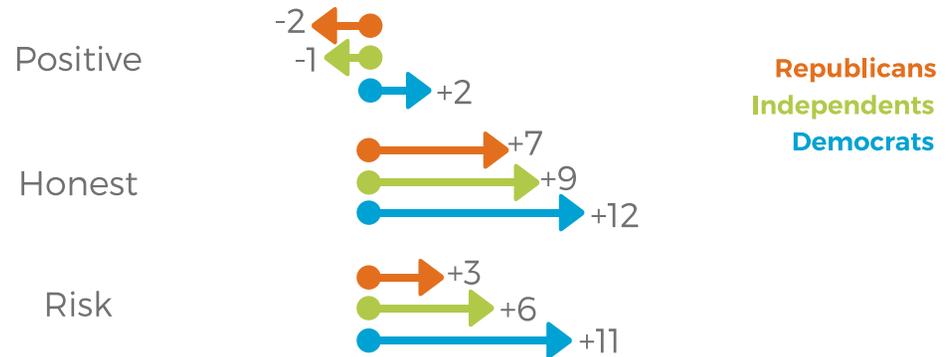
As you can see, the “Honest” treatment is most effective at moving opinion overall, and particularly among Republicans. For Democrats, both “Honest” and “Risk” are about equally effective.

In the baseline, Control condition (where no political message was seen), Democrats heavily prefer universal paid leave over PCAs (65 to 35 percent). Both “Honest” and “Risk” substantially increase a preference for PCAs (+11 to +12 points) and bring the policies almost to parity among Democrats (53 to 47 percent).

Independents move from a tie between PCAs and universal, to a solid preference for PCAs (56 to 59 percent), and Republicans shift toward an overwhelming preference for PCAs in the “Honest” condition (71 percent).

Message

Impact | Choosing PCAs over UPL



Percent Choosing PCAs over UPL by Party

Party	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.
Control	35%	50%	64%
Positive	37%	49%	62%
Honest	47%	59%	71%
Risk	46%	56%	67%

Impact on Support for PCAs over Universal — By Age

The chart at the top right of this page shows the impact that each message treatment had on support for Personal Care Accounts (PCAs) over a universal paid leave mandate.

For this question, respondents had to choose one policy or the other. Both policies garner very large majority support in general. However, since they are forced into an either-or choice, this question gives us a good measure of which policy they would prefer to be enacted.

As you can see, the “Positive” message, which simply describes how PCAs work and gives some context on the benefits in terms of personal control and flexibility, does not have a significant impact on PCA versus universal preferences.

For the “Honest” and “Risk” treatments, respondents read both the “Positive” message and a message that describes the negative effects and unintended consequences of universal paid leave mandates. In other words, everyone in the treatment conditions reads the “Positive” message, and some also read a negative message attacking universal paid leave policies.

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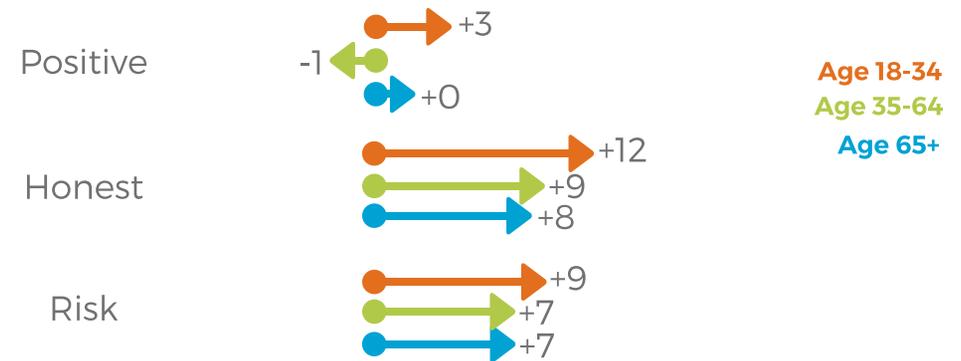
As you can see, the “Honest” treatment is most effective at moving opinion overall, and is especially effective at persuading Millennial voters (+12 points for PCAs).

In the baseline, Control condition (where no political message was seen), Millennial voters heavily prefer universal paid leave over PCAs (59 to 41 percent). Both “Honest” and “Risk” substantially increase a preference for PCAs (+9 to +12 points), with “Honesty” leading Millennials to a net preference for PCAs (53 to 47 percent).

The other two age groups begin with a fairly even split in preferences for PCAs versus universal paid leave, but move toward a solid preference for PCAs in both the “Honest” and “Risk” conditions (56 to 60 percent).

Message

Impact | Choosing PCAs over UPL



Percent Choosing PCAs over UPL by Age

Age	18-34	35-64	65+
Control	41%	49%	52%
Positive	44%	48%	52%
Honest	53%	59%	60%
Risk	50%	56%	59%

Section II

Policy support and importance tables

Percent Supporting PCAs by Group



Group	All	Women	Men	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	18-34 yrs.	35-64 yrs.	65+ yrs.
Control	84%	86%	83%	84%	86%	83%	85%	85%	83%
Positive	80%	79%	81%	80%	80%	81%	80%	79%	81%
Honest	74%	74%	74%	74%	73%	74%	73%	74%	74%
Risk	76%	76%	76%	76%	76%	76%	77%	76%	75%

Percent Supporting UPL by Group

Group	All	Women	Men	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	18-34 yrs.	35-64 yrs.	65+ yrs.
Control	76%	78%	73%	84%	79%	64%	80%	76%	72%
Positive	67%	69%	64%	80%	70%	50%	76%	68%	60%
Honest	57%	60%	54%	72%	60%	38%	65%	57%	54%
Risk	61%	63%	58%	71%	63%	47%	70%	61%	55%

Percent Thinking PCAs Important by Group



Group	All	Women	Men	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	18-34 yrs.	35-64 yrs.	65+ yrs.
Control	66%	67%	65%	67%	69%	62%	69%	66%	64%
Positive	59%	60%	59%	63%	59%	55%	61%	60%	57%
Honest	61%	61%	60%	61%	61%	60%	61%	61%	60%
Risk	60%	60%	59%	60%	59%	59%	60%	60%	59%

Percent Thinking UPL Important by Group

Group	All	Women	Men	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	18-34 yrs.	35-64 yrs.	65+ yrs.
Control	66%	70%	62%	80%	70%	49%	74%	67%	62%
Positive	57%	58%	55%	73%	61%	36%	68%	58%	50%
Honest	56%	58%	55%	66%	58%	45%	64%	57%	52%
Risk	55%	56%	53%	67%	57%	39%	64%	55%	49%

Text Used in Treatments

Positive — Personal Care Accounts (PCAs)

People have a lot of ways to save for retirement, but not a lot of ways to save for time off if they need it – to take care of a new child, or a sick spouse or relative, or some other life change.

That's why we need "Personal Care Accounts." With a PCA, you can save money – tax free – for when you need to take time off beyond your sick days and vacation days.

With a Personal Care Account it's not just you who can add money to your savings. Employers can add money to Personal Care Accounts too. And employers have a good reason to help you out – they get a tax credit for adding money to your PCA. This is a great alternative for small businesses who can't afford generous paid leave benefits. In addition to businesses, even charities can help fund these accounts too.

It's like an IRA retirement account, but for family emergencies instead of retirement. You have cash to spend when you need time off, for what you need at the time. It puts you in control. The Personal Care Account protects you and gives you flexibility.

Honest — (Always seen in conjunction with the Positive Message.)

Supporters of so-called "universal paid leave," which forces almost all businesses to provide paid family and medical leave benefits, aren't being honest – they ignore the very real costs of these government mandates. Let's be honest about the tradeoffs.

Many businesses can't afford a costly new benefit, and they will either reduce pay, cut jobs and hours, or go out of business. That's bad news for everyone, especially low-income workers who are most vulnerable to losing hours or their jobs.

A government mandate also means fewer choices for workers. Some people want to take home more money save up in case they need time off. Some want more benefits and will take a lower salary for that security.

Others want to work part-time, work from home, or arrange something else at work. Government-mandated paid leave gets in the way of that kind of flexibility.

Nearly 8 out of 10 full-time workers already have paid sick leave. Almost 9 out of 10 have paid vacation time. And taking time off to deal with a family medical problem is already guaranteed by law.

What people need most are good job opportunities and a growing, stable but flexible job market. This government mandate will actually hurt those they are supposed to help.

It's a costly, one-size-fits-all government mandate that will impact all workers – even those who already have plenty of paid leave.

We can't just wave a magic wand and give people unlimited time off. The real world doesn't work that way. There are flexible solutions to help more people. But we can't fall for the false promise of a one-size-fits-all government mandate.

Risk — (Always seen in conjunction with the Positive Message.)

Proposals for so-called "universal paid leave," which force almost all businesses to provide paid family and medical leave benefits, are too risky for all of us. And the people it's supposed to help are the ones most likely to be hurt by it.

Many businesses can't afford a costly new benefit, and they will either reduce pay, cut jobs and hours, or go out of business. That's bad news for everyone, especially low-income workers who are most vulnerable to losing hours or their jobs.

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Paid leave mandates are just too risky for all of us.

About the Researchers

Adam B. Schaeffer

Adam Schaeffer is founder and director of research for Evolving Strategies. He is consumed by an itch to understand what makes people tick, why they think and do the things they do.

Adam has spent the last ten years running sophisticated experiments in the field and in the “lab” to maximize the impact of advertising and optimize messaging tactics. He led the design, execution and analysis of the largest applied political science field experiment in history, involving more than half a million test subjects.

Adam’s focus and passion is designing experiments that go beyond mundane A/B testing to get at bigger questions and much greater ROI for clients. He helps clients discover not just what works, but why it works, and that understanding provides hugely valuable strategic advantages.

Adam received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in political psychology and behavior. His dissertation assessed how different combinations of school choice policies and messages can expand and mobilize elite and mass support. He received his M.A. in Social Science from the University of Chicago, where his thesis integrated aspects of evolutionary theory and psychology with political theory and strategy.

Adam’s academic research and teaching centered around social psychology and human behavior, and this emphasis continues to animate his applied research. He considers himself akin to a research biologist who happens to have the great privilege of studying the behavior of the most complex and fascinating animal on the planet; *Homo sapiens*.

Alexander J. Oliver

Alex Oliver is director of experimental research at Evolving Strategies. He tends to be a bit preoccupied — colleagues might say borderline obsessed — with precision and details: from the exotic ink in his fountain pen to managing public opinion during wars and natural disasters.

Over the last seven years in both academic and private sector contexts, he’s executed survey and field experiments to gain global strategic insights about how people think and act during crises—from political campaigns to combat missions abroad—and how to respond to them.

Alex co-authored the definitive review article on the politics of disaster relief for the forthcoming *Emerging Trends* project, which New York Times bestselling author and neuroscientist Daniel J. Levitin has called “an indispensable reference work for the 21st century” and the director of the Harvard Institute for Quantitative Social Science Gary King has called an “unconventional guide to the future.”

He’s held faculty positions at Brandeis University and Boston University where he taught both undergraduate and graduate courses in the use of force abroad, public opinion, voter behavior, congressional behavior, and campaign strategy. His research has been presented at both national and international conferences.

Alex received his MA in economics from Tufts University, where he received the department’s most prestigious endowed scholarship, and his BA in mathematics and economics from Merrimack College. He will receive his PhD from Boston University in quantitative methods and public opinion in 2015.

The ES Network

Evolving Strategies taps a broad network of academics with a range of specialized skills and domain expertise – experimental designs, political behavior/psychology, statistics, etc. – across disciplines such as political science, psychology, economics, marketing, statistics and computer science. Every project is unique, and we bring the best set of people and skills together for each engagement.



About IWF

IWF's mission is to improve the lives of Americans by increasing the number of women who value free markets and personal liberty. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government. IWF is a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution.

The current project touches three of IWF's six issue pillars.

Dollars and Sense Economics

IWF's Dollars and Sense Economic Project highlights the problems with costs of government overreach, including how government's overspending impacts the economy and taxpayers and how programs that sound compassionate, such as extended unemployment benefits and generous welfare programs, can discourage work and ultimately harm those they are intended to help.

IWF offers an alternative vision of how government can be scaled back, so that aid and intervention is targeted where it is really needed and a thriving private sector and civil society can emerge. IWF highlights ways that government could be cut (including reform of our entitlement programs) and how the tax code could be made fairer and less burdensome, and encourage greater growth and innovation. IWF also explains how regulations are strangling the private sector, preventing job creation, and needlessly constricting Americans' private life. IWF highlights how regulations in particular make the economy less dynamic and less flexible. IWF also analyzes other government attempts to micromanage the way Americans live (from the content of our food to the cars we drive) and highlights how these policies erode our freedom and quality of life.

Women at Work

Through IWF's Women at Work project, IWF helps shape conversations about women in the economy and particularly how government helps and hinders women's opportunities. IWF provides an important voice in explaining that the disproportionate number of women who take time out of the work place to raise children, care for elderly parents or opt for lower-paying, more-flexible and fulfilling jobs has more to do with preferences and choice than unequal opportunities.

Government efforts to close the wage gap by micromanaging wages or mandating benefits end up backfiring on women by diminishing choice and opportunity and creating a less flexible, dynamic workplace, which is what women really want and need. IWF is the leading group discrediting and explaining what Progressive proposals, such as the Paycheck Fairness Act and the FAMILY Act, would actually do and helping make the case for developing alternative, conservative solutions to give women greater economic opportunity.

Women and Politics

The role of women in the public and political sphere is also an increasingly important issue that influences Americans' support for different political philosophies. IWF encourages an appreciation for the unprecedented opportunities the United States provides women, as well as how we can continue to improve our society to help women reach their full potential.

IWF has a common sense approach to discussing natural differences between men and women, as well as society's role in encouraging both sexes to make the most of their talents. IWF is a leader in discussing how to engage women in conversations about politics and policy, and encouraging women not to see themselves as victims, but as empowered individuals with many options and opportunities.