



# Building Narratives for a Caring Green Economy

A Feminist Green New Deal Coalition Report

SEPTEMBER 2021

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## About the Author

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The author and Feminist Green New Deal Coalition would like to thank Data for Progress for their collaboration and administering of the polling elements of this report.

## About the Feminist Green New Deal Coalition

This global coalition consists of individuals and organizations working towards justice at all of the intersections that the climate crisis touches: migrant justice, racial justice, economic justice, labor justice, reproductive justice, global justice and gender justice. We come together to pursue intersectional climate justice, and we stand in solidarity with each other's movements for change. Together, this coalition advocates for feminist principles to guide our response to the climate crisis. Learn more about the Feminist Green New Deal Coalition at [feministgreen-newdeal.com](https://feministgreen-newdeal.com). *Deep gratitude to the allies in the feminist, climate and care movements who gave space and time to consult on and review this report, as well as to the Wallace Global Fund and Sierra Club for resourcing this work.*





## I. Introduction

There is a growing consciousness that care—of people and planet—needs to be centered in the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis. Both the climate crisis and the crisis of care in the United States have been ongoing, but too often sidelined by those in power due to the marginalization of those most impacted, and the reliance on [unpaid](#)<sup>1</sup> or [poverty-wage](#)<sup>2</sup> labor and [disposable communities](#).<sup>3</sup> However the crisis of care access and affordability in the United States could no longer be ignored when, at the onset of COVID-19, accessing care outside the home was no longer a safe option, and the burden on women, girls and marginalized communities—especially Black women—for care work increased exponentially. And as the paid care industry suffered, the ongoing crisis of care was felt by even more families as reliance on and invisibilization of unpaid care increased, and a [grim outlook](#)<sup>4</sup> made it impossible for anyone to ignore that care work is essential. But a robust, green care infrastructure that benefits and uplifts paid and unpaid care work is also crucial for a sustainable economy and climate action that centers gender equity.

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1 Kristalina Geogieva, et al., “[The Economic Cost of Devaluing ‘Women’s Work’](#),” IMF, October 2019.

2 Elise Gould, “[Child care workers aren’t paid enough to make ends meet](#),” EPI, November 2015.

3 Juliet Eilperin and Darryl Fears, “[Deadly air pollutant ‘disproportionately and systematically’ harms Americans of color. study finds](#),” Washington Post, April 2021.

4 Tommy Beer, “[40% Of U.S. Child Care Centers Say They’ll Close Permanently Without Public Assistance](#),” Forbes, July 2020.

Similarly, the ongoing climate crisis and its racist, colonial, and extractive roots, have been disrupting ways of life for, arguably, centuries. As global temperature rise and related environmental disruption grows, the broad and deep coordination needed to avoid its worst impacts is ramping up.

These crises, all simultaneously demanding massive shifts in society and the economy, can only be solved together. Planning for a future that centers well-being for people and the planet requires an understanding of the intersectionality of these crises, and the ways in which policy can deliver intersectional solutions.

What's needed now is nothing short of a revolution, but rather than the industrial revolution or wartime mobilizations that were driven by extraction, militarism and intensive resource use, one that centers the low-carbon work that is already being done, to ensure a fighting chance at sustaining life for all. In fact, the U.S. and the global north has already been shifting toward a service-oriented economy, however this transition has not been equitable [domestically](#)<sup>5</sup> or [internationally](#).<sup>6</sup> [Transitions](#) happen all the time, typically at the expense of women, people of color, communities of the Global South and nature, and the consequences have inevitably led to the need for a green economy that strives for equity and justice for all.<sup>7</sup> A green revolution must be managed with care and equity at its center.

Centering these intersections requires a narrative shift around what climate action means, and what the central components of a transition to a green economy should be. To explore promising narrative pathways, we deployed a survey with Data for Progress (of 1,438 likely American voters during the week of April 19, 2021) to test messages in three broad narrative buckets: a) care work is climate work, b) care work is essential and workers deserve better, and c) care infrastructure is climate infrastructure. Positive responses to most questions indicate that narrative shift is not only needed, but that specific messages resonate across ideological and demographic lines, and could provide a unifying basis upon which to push for an ambitious care and climate agenda. The rest of this report will explore why narrative change is needed and important, specific messages that could help catalyze that change, and areas for further exploration.

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<sup>5</sup> Christopher Kollmeyer, "[Trade union decline, deindustrialization, and rising income inequality in the United States, 1947 to 2015](#)," Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Hickel, "[The anti-colonial politics of degrowth](#)" Political Geography, April 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Mijin Cha, et al., "[Workers and communities in transition: Report of the Just Transition Listening Project](#)," Labor Network for Sustainability, 2021.



## II. Why Narratives Surrounding Care and Climate Need to Change

### a. Harmful Narratives Persist

Neoliberal principles of individualism, privatization, and deregulation are still pervasive in America, impacting narratives and actions around care and climate. However, as the COVID-19 crisis has made clearer than ever, care and climate both require collective solutions, and narratives that pose barriers to collectivism should be identified and dismantled.

*What key narratives have contributed to the issues plaguing our systems of care in the United States? What has led the U.S. to have [among the high rates of childhood and elder poverty](#),<sup>8</sup> more than half of families living in [child care deserts](#),<sup>9</sup> millions of women who [cannot work](#) due to a lack of affordable care,<sup>10</sup> and care workers who [cannot afford to care for themselves](#)?<sup>11</sup>*

It's difficult to tell a true story about the underinvestment in America's care infrastructure without first and foremost understanding its racist and sexist roots. Women of color comprise [more than half](#)<sup>12</sup> of the domestic care workforce, while getting paid poverty wages for their essential work, and being [less likely to have access to care](#) for their own families.<sup>13</sup> These disparities can be traced back to slavery, when white landowners demanded Black women care for their children. As Julie Kashen and Rakeen Mabud [state](#), "Even after chattel slavery was outlawed, domestic work, including caring for children in others' homes, was often one of the few occupations that laws and culture made available to Black women, at least until the 1960s. For most of U.S. history, Black and immigrant women have disproportionately occupied positions in the field of paid domestic work, including child care."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [OECD data](#).

<sup>9</sup> Rasheed Malik, "[America's Child Care Deserts in 2018](#)," Center for American Progress, December 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Leila Schochet, "[The Child Care Crisis Is Keeping Women Out of the Workforce](#)," Center for American Progress, March 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Elise Gould, "[Child care workers aren't paid enough to make ends meet](#)," EPI, November 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Wolfe et al., "[Domestic worker chartbook](#)," EPI, May 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Malik, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Julie Kashen and Rakeen Mabud, "[Nevertheless, It Persists: Disrupting the Vicious Cycle of Institutionalized Sexism](#)," TIMES UP, July 2020.



Racist underinvestment and devaluation of care work as non-productive work has harmed all working parents, especially mothers. Women have comprised [nearly half](#)<sup>15</sup> of the paid labor force for decades, forcing working mothers to “do it all” without a public plan to ensure access to care. Decades ago, a proposal passed in a bipartisan manner by Congress would have funded community care centers so that all families could access care. But it got [vetoed](#) by President Nixon, who deemed the idea of government supported child care “radical,” according to the Washington Post.<sup>16</sup> To date, when comprehensive federal measures are proposed, [they are derided](#)—by some—for a desire to maintain gendered roles in the home, to deny that care is an entitlement, and to resist progressive income and wealth distribution that the policies might require.<sup>17</sup>

Policies that have been put in place have reflected and been enabled by the ideology and narrative of “bootstraps” individualism, a powerful construct of neoliberalism that legitimizes self-discipline and personal responsibility at the expense of accountability of the state in fulfilling its social contract through provision of public goods and services. Reflecting this idea, care-related policies have focused on private markets, including subsidies and tax credits that are overly complicated, confusing, and let [too many families and children fall through the cracks](#).<sup>18</sup>

As Abby Cohen, JD [summed up](#) in 1996, federal solutions for working parents have always been “pragmatic and piecemeal, reflecting a continuing tension between public and private responsibility for the care of young children,” stemming from, she says, “the values of individualism and family autonomy, [that] taken together, have supported a position that government is an appropriate source of help only when a family—or the country itself—is in crisis.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> [BLS data](#).

<sup>16</sup> Emily Badger, “[That one time America almost got universal child care](#),” Washington Post, June 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Jill Filipovic, “[Conservatives say they want to help ‘parents’ stay home. They mean mothers](#),” Washington Post, May 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Nina Chein, “[Factsheet: Estimates of Child Care Eligibility & Receipt for Fiscal Year 2013](#),” U.S. HHS, November 2017.

<sup>19</sup> A. Cohen, “[A brief history of federal financing for child care in the United States](#),” The Future of Children, 1996.



## What narratives have led to the climate crisis and lack of action despite decades of understanding its sources and implications?

Individualism, privatization, and social hierarchies that prescribe more value to some lives than others are also key focal points of the human-caused climate crisis. Currently, [100 companies](#)<sup>20</sup> produce more than two thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions, privatizing life-giving land and resources, while “externalizing” the cost of pollution and displacement onto mostly Black and brown communities at home and abroad. Those same companies absolve their own responsibility, for decades [selling the idea of personal carbon footprints](#) and individual responsibility.<sup>21</sup> However none of the actions prescribed to reduce one’s carbon footprint can solve the climate crisis. Turning lights off, recycling, and flying less can not fundamentally change how energy is produced, how products are manufactured, or how anti-democratic the biggest polluters are, like the U.S. military, the largest GHG emitter, which acquires more and more funding each year, [against popular support](#).<sup>22</sup> Finally, focus on individual action contributes to the belief that climate action is about individual [sacrifice](#).<sup>23</sup> This tragically dampens support for the collective actions and state-led leadership and funding that actually have potential to mitigate and adapt to climate change while making everyone’s lives better.

In this context, it’s not surprising that the state has focused on corporate tax credits and other market-based solutions like carbon pricing and trading, that nudge individuals and companies toward behavioral change (that have [failed](#)<sup>24</sup> to [deliver](#),<sup>25</sup> [time](#)<sup>26</sup> and [time](#)<sup>27</sup> again) while ignoring or failing to adequately regulate toxic energy supply practices and invest in the future. Meanwhile, democratic and countervailing forces such as unions—which have the power to fight for a just transition off of fossil fuels—have been decimated, with unionization falling dramatically over time due to a mix of deregulatory [domestic](#)<sup>28</sup> and [trade](#)<sup>29</sup> regimes and an outright [disdain](#) toward labor.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Tess Riley, “[Just 100 companies responsible for 71% of global emissions, study say](#),” The Guardian, July 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Mark Kaufman, “[The carbon footprint sham](#),” Mashable, Accessed 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Congressman Mark Pocan, “[The American People Agree: Cut the Pentagon’s Budget](#),” Data for Progress, July 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Sarah Lazarovic, “[The Myth of Economic Sacrifice](#),” Yes! Magazine, June 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Chemnick, “[‘Utter Failure’: How carbon tax lost its allure](#),” E&E, February 2020.

<sup>25</sup> “[The EU Emissions Trading System: failing to deliver](#),” Friend of the Earth Europe, Accessed 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Brian Kahn, “[France’s Gas Tax Disaster Shows We Can’t Save Earth by Screwing Over Poor People](#),” Earthr, December 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel Rosenbloom et al., “[Opinion: Why carbon pricing is not sufficient to mitigate climate change—and how ‘sustainability transition policy’ can help](#),” Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, April 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence Mishel, “[The enormous impact of eroded collective bargaining on wages](#),” Economic Policy Institute, April 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Todd E. Vachon, Michael Wallace, and Allen Hyde, “[Union Decline in a Neoliberal Age: Globalization, Financialization, European Integration, and Union Density in 18 Affluent Democracies](#),” American Sociological Association, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Joe Burns, “[The PATCO Strike, Reagan and the Roots of Labor’s Decline](#),” In These Times, November 2011.

## b. Crises demand change

Thankfully there have been shifts in public narratives in both climate and care spaces. COVID-19 forced a reimagining of public purpose and opened space to demand massive investments in the economy in service of those suffering most. But a shift in consciousness about the role of government in mitigating the climate crisis had already been underway: climate policy has recently been leaning away from market-based solutions and toward investments, standards, and justice, in line with [public opinion](#) and climate activism.<sup>31</sup>

And care policy, such as the inclusion of home care investment in the Biden Administration's [American Jobs Plan](#),<sup>32</sup> has begun to acknowledge care as infrastructure. But these solutions are still not intentionally intersectional, and as our latest [Issue Brief](#) states, "Rather than advocating for these plans separately and in parallel, the Biden-Harris administration can make progress more effectively by directly linking care and climate policy."<sup>33</sup>

## c. Why an intersectional care and climate vision is needed now

The narratives surrounding care and climate are siloed, but they don't have to be. Our goal is to encourage a shift in thinking and policy making in line with the vision of a feminist Green New Deal, in which care for those of every age, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and ability, is centered in climate policy. That requires a narrative shift in culture, beliefs, and policy, in a way that is relevant and useful for movement activism and advocacy. Here are 5 reasons why we believe narrative shift is essential.

1. **Care work is climate work, and this notion should be mainstreamed** in media, literature, and policy. Historically, green jobs have been one aspect of the movement for environmental action at any given time. As [written](#) previously, the focus of the dominant environmental movement has shifted over time, from conservation to regulation of the mid- to late 1900's, to the relatively more recent movement for equity and investment.<sup>34</sup> With these shifts have come different ideas about the work needed to achieve those movements' goals. Now, with the Green New Deal's goal of society-wide decarbonization (in line with what science demands), the definition of green jobs should suit that goal, and decarbonization will not be possible without

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<sup>31</sup> Ethan Winter, "[Memo: Voters Prefer A Standards And Investment Approach To Climate Change](#)," Data for Progress, May 2020.

<sup>32</sup> "[Fact Sheet: The American Jobs Plan](#)," The White House, March 2021.

<sup>33</sup> Rhiana Gunn-Wright and Lenore Palladino, "[Care & Climate: Understanding the policy intersections](#)," Feminist Green New Deal Coalition, April 2021.

<sup>34</sup> Amanda Novello, "[Redefining Green Jobs for a Sustainable Economy](#)," The Century Foundation, December 2019.



lifting up all of the low-carbon, socially necessary work that's already being done, like care work. *As our polling below shows, a majority of Americans agree that care work is climate work.*

2. **Equity is central to a Green New Deal**, and transitional policies will not advance racial and gender justice without including care work.<sup>35</sup> If care is not centered in transitional policies like the Green New Deal, care will risk being left out, like domestic workers were left out of protections in the New Deal. If care is not included in climate policy, women, in particular women of color, will be left behind. As laid out in our [issue brief](#), a robust and affordable care infrastructure is necessary for an equitable green economy.<sup>36</sup> *Our survey, explored below, provides one such piece of evidence to prove that, without access to care services, women will be less able to participate in new green jobs*, which would further entrench gendered occupational segregation in the green economy.
3. **Climate action needs to address peoples' current needs**, but it's often positioned as an investment for future change and well being, especially the needs of those already most impacted by climate pollution and the climate crisis. This must involve both ramping down polluting activities and ramping up infrastructures of care. As Naomi Klein [described](#) in a panel event at Rutgers University,<sup>37</sup> in the wake of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico, thousands of people died not from the storm winds or tides, but because the health system collapsed and people were not able to access the care they needed. At the time of this talk - two years later - hospitals were still closed due to insufficient investment. The costs of excluding care in visions of a climate-safe future are not theoretical, and have begun to accrue long ago, especially in already underinvested-in communities. *A majority of respondents agree that more government investment should reflect the importance of care infrastructure as climate infrastructure.*
4. **Narratives drive public imagination.** The stories we tell help envision the world we want to build. Putting forth strong narratives is a critical strategy in shifting the Overton window, helping others visualize what is possible, and aligns a vision for collective advocacy work. What we find from this report and survey is that when the connections between care and climate are made with clear, concise messages, a majority of people do, in fact, agree. Establishing which messages are most compelling and resonant will help forge a clearer path toward building a cohesive vision of, and movement for, a caring green future. *Our survey shows that clear messaging demonstrating the linkages between care and climate can shift previously held biases.*

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<sup>35</sup> Any transitional policies must include an intersectional feminist analysis that recognizes the way race, class, gender, ability, and other identities shapes the way we experience the climate crisis. Though we lift up racial and gender justice here, we understand a just transition to demand holistic shifts in society and the economy, outlined further in our [Principles](#).

<sup>36</sup> Gunn-Wright & Palladino, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> [youtube.com/watch?v=SdQPYGxLLUA](https://youtube.com/watch?v=SdQPYGxLLUA)

5. Finally, **narrative shift is important for building a vision of a green economy that includes everyone.** While neoliberal narratives depend on people believing that the climate crisis is about complex, technological “fixes”, in reality, addressing climate change is about our ability to care for each other and the environments we live in relationship with and to. Highlighting our interconnectedness—in both what has got us to this point of crisis as well as our capacity to democratically transform destructive economic systems toward regenerative ones at home and abroad—can help us achieve mass transformation. If climate action is framed in stories that everyone can see themselves in and solutions that everyone will benefit from, they will be more likely to engage in solutions in their own lives and to see themselves as part of a greater movement for change. *While our survey shows that narratives about care and climate are relatable to respondents of every ideological and demographic group, it is important to continue to develop inclusive, intersectional narratives that resonate with everyone.*





# III. Interventions: Learning how to better integrate care and climate

We surveyed 1,438 likely voters during the week of April 19, 2021 on a range of questions related to care and climate in order to better understand existing narratives and promising narrative interventions. Respondent characteristics include:

- ➔ Respondents are roughly representative of the gender, racial, and ethnic composition of the likely voting population;
- ➔ **38 percent** are below the age of 45 and **62 percent** are above the age of 45;
- ➔ **27 percent**, or roughly 390 respondents, have children under the age of 18, and **32 percent**, roughly 460 respondents, identified as a primary caregiver;
- ➔ **61 percent** have no college degree, and **39 percent** have gone to college.

Here's what we found:

## a. *The idea: Care work is climate work.*

Green jobs should refer to all jobs related to the well-being of people and the planet, and that includes care. Care work is essential, is one of the fastest growing sectors and needs, it creates other jobs and makes all other work possible. It's also low-carbon work that requires little extraction compared with most other work (even less than other "green" work), and can improve resilience to shocks like pandemics or climate related disasters.

"Every time disaster strikes, care workers are on the front lines, saving lives," said Naomi Klein for [The Leap](#).<sup>38</sup>

As Rhiana Gunn-Wright and Lenore Palladino explain in our [Issue Brief](#), "Without an affordable care system with a well-paid workforce, access to good jobs in the clean energy economy will be restricted based on race and gender and a just transition for workers in the dirty energy sectors will be more challenging. In the short-term, a worsening climate will increase the need

"Every time disaster strikes, care workers are on the front lines, saving lives."

—NAOMI KLEIN, [THE LEAP](#)

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<sup>38</sup> [theleap.org/portfolio-items/carework](https://theleap.org/portfolio-items/carework)

for care, widening inequities unless access to care is improved. In addition, the care sector itself provides an opportunity for decarbonization. Ultimately, for the Green New Deal to succeed, care work must be centered.”<sup>39</sup>

## Findings

**Most people think green jobs are any job related to the well-being of people and the planet, but there is little consensus as to what those occupations are, especially with regards to care occupations.**

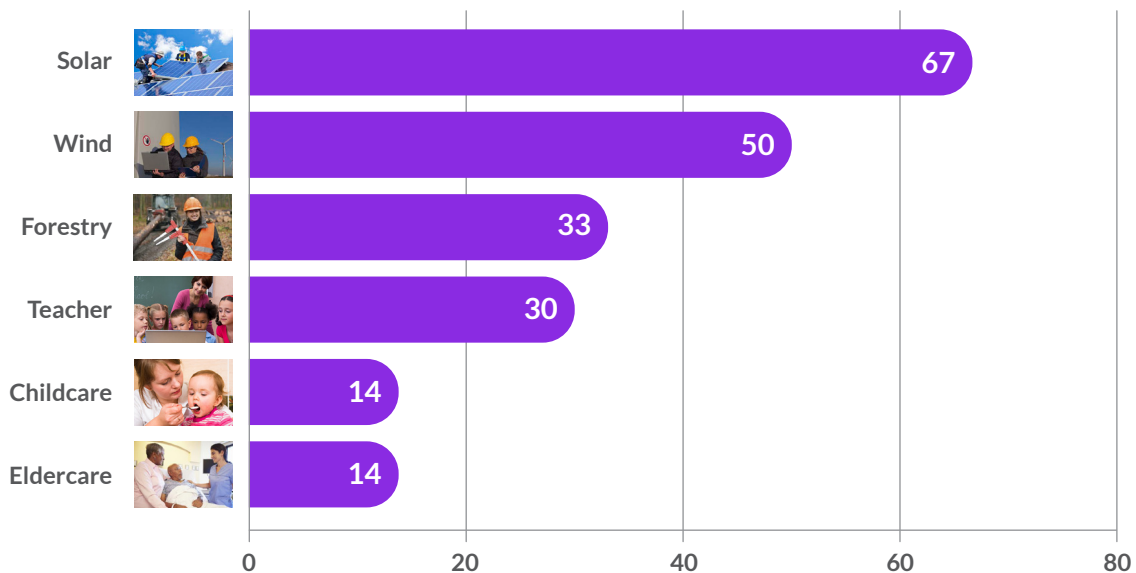
- ➔ **69% of all respondents agree that green jobs are any job related to the well-being of people and the planet** (82% of Democrats and 63% of Republicans). There are only very small differences in responses between self-identified male and female respondents, or those of different ages, racial identities, or education level.
- ➔ Yet when provided images of “green” jobs, there was little consensus as to what, exactly, constitutes work for people and the planet (six images, seen below, include wind turbine technicians, elder care, child care, and early education workers, solar installer, and a forestry worker), although a majority agrees that solar installer is a green job.



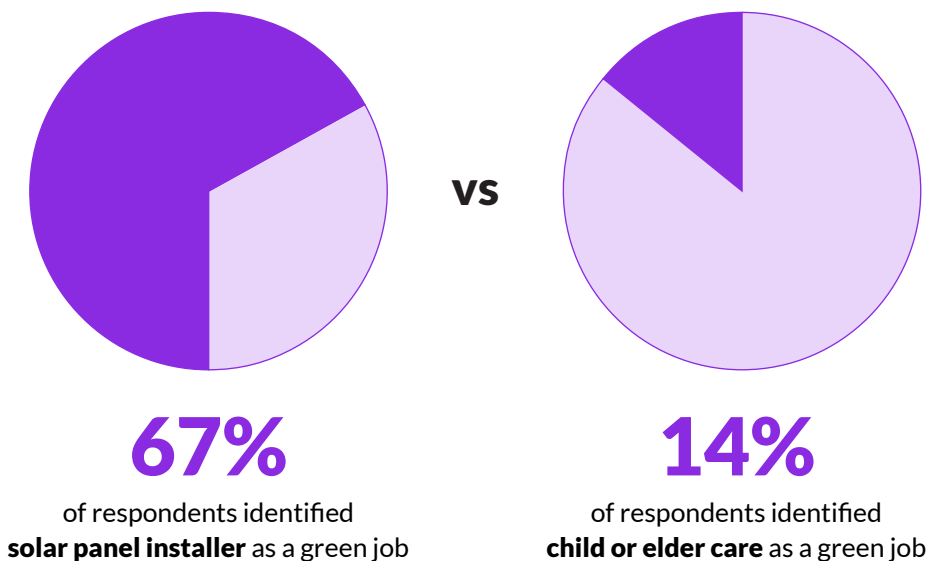
- When presented with images of the most talked-about “green” jobs—wind turbine technician and solar installers—50% and 67% of respondents identified them as “green” jobs, respectively. Only 33% identified forestry and conservation work as “green”, although typically considered green jobs in literature.

<sup>39</sup> Gunn-Wright & Palladino, 2021.

## % of respondents who identified the occupation as a “green” job



- Far fewer identified the images of less-talked about “green” care workers (elder care, child care, and pre-k teaching) as “green” jobs. Only 14% of respondents identified elder care and child care, and 30% identified the image of an early education teacher as “green” jobs. The higher percent of respondents selecting teachers as “green” could reflect the commonly held value that climate action is about the next generation. However, that value did not lead to support for image #3, which likely reflects the bias that care work done within a household setting (typically women’s work) is not actually “work”.





➔ Some messages, arguing that care work is climate work, resonate more than others:

**The message:**

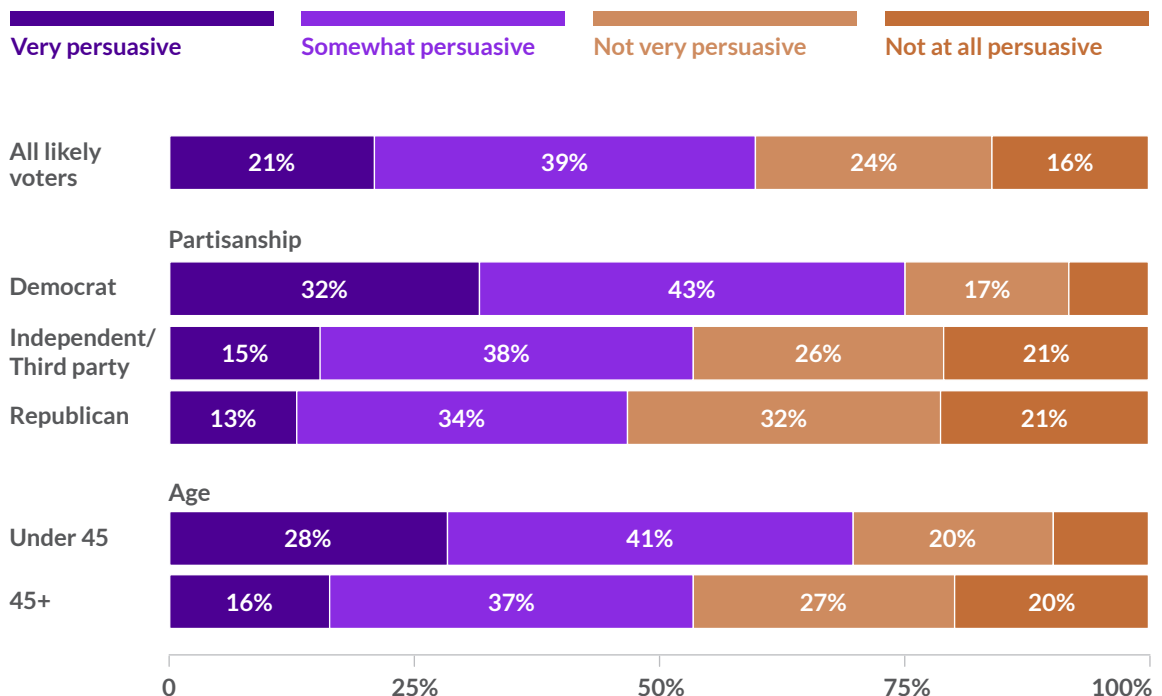
“Domestic workers ensure a clean and healthy home environment, child and elder care workers ensure the health, safety, and well-being of those in need, and teachers are responsible for paving the way for a prosperous future. These roles and responsibilities are in line with the needs and goals of climate action—of ensuring safe and healthy environments for everyone—and therefore domestic work, care work, and teaching are climate jobs.”

**60%**

think this message is **very or somewhat persuasive**, including 75% of Democratic respondents, 47% of Republican respondents, 69% of those under age 45, compared with 53% of those above age 45.

## Voters are Persuaded by Messaging that Ties Health and Safety to Both Climate and Care Jobs

Please indicate how persuasive or not persuasive you find each of the following statements: Domestic worker ensure a clean and healthy home environment, child and elder care workers ensure the health, safety, and well-being of those in need, and teachers are responsible for paving the way for a prosperous future. These roles and responsibilities are in line with the needs and goals of climate action—of ensuring safe and healthy environments for everyone—and therefore domestic work, care work, and teaching are climate jobs.



April 21-23, 2021 survey of 1,410 likely voters. Data for Progress.

### **The message:**

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“Care work is essential for families, the economy, and responding to needs of people during pandemics, but also when there are climate disasters like heat waves, fires, and floods. Therefore, care work is climate work.”

**59%**

**think this message is very or somewhat persuasive**, including 75% of Democratic respondents, 50% of Republican respondents, 67% of those under 45 years old, compared with 54% of those above age 45.

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“Care work is low-carbon work that doesn’t add to climate pollution and is necessary for health and well-being. Therefore, care work is a critical part of a green economy.”

**55%**

**think this message is very or somewhat persuasive**, including 67% of Democratic respondents and 43% of Republican respondents, and 65% of those under age 45 are persuaded compared with 56% of those over age 45.

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“The green economy should include all work that does not contribute to climate change, including those serving health and well-being to families and communities, and that includes care work.”

**52%**

**agreed**, including 69% of Democratic respondents and 40% of Republican respondents, and 64% of respondents under the age 45.





## **b.** *The idea: Care workers are essential and deserve better.*

Deemed essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, fundamental for families and the economy, care work is the unsung hero of a functioning society, but the people doing that work are often invisible, poorly paid or not paid, and left out of labor laws that allow workers to protect and advocate for themselves. This includes workers from many climate embattled countries, many of whom are undocumented women care workers who are also climate and economic refugees and deserve immigration relief.

Even beyond it being “fair,” a green transformation requires that low carbon work like care work be attractive to workers who are currently paid more in extractive jobs.

“A green job is a good job that is not harming the planet. Wages need to be good, we need to have health benefits, we have so many caregivers providing care that they will never be able to afford themselves. When you have a good job that gives you stability and flexibility so that you also can be an actor in creating a good, green society,” said Aquilina Soriano Versoza in an interview with [The Leap](https://theleap.org/portfolio-items/carework).<sup>40</sup> In other words, in order for care jobs to truly be green jobs that contribute to the type of world we need, care jobs need to be good jobs, too.

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<sup>40</sup> [theleap.org/portfolio-items/carework](https://theleap.org/portfolio-items/carework)





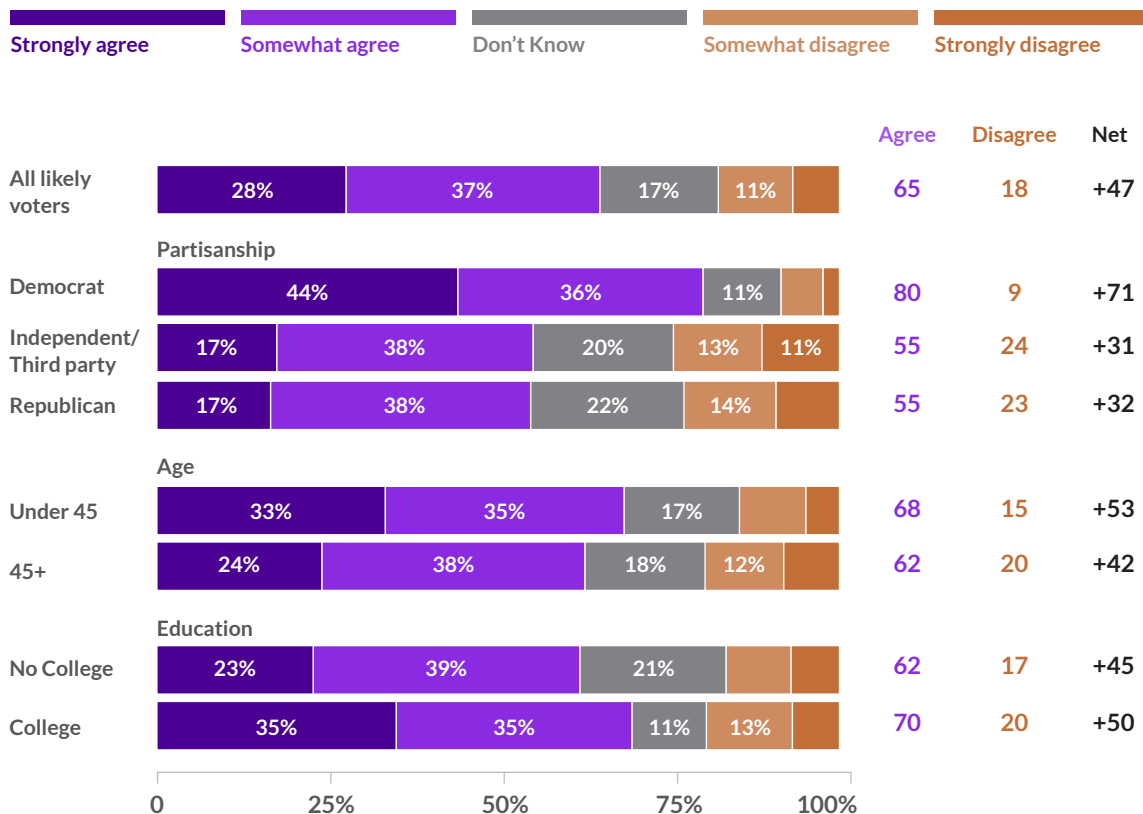
## Findings

**Most agree that care is critical green work and that care work deserves better pay and conditions.**

- ➔ A majority of respondents from every political and demographic group agree that low-carbon care work is critical for a healthy economy and environment, and care workers deserve better pay and working conditions.
  - **80% of Democratic** respondents and **55% of Republican** respondents agree (65% of all respondents)
  - **70% of those with college**, compared with **62% with no college**
  - **68% of those under the age of 45**, compared with **62% of those above the age 45**.

### Voters Agree Care Workers Are Essential for the Economy and Environment, and Deserve Better Labor Standards

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements: Low-carbon care work is critical for a healthy economy and environment, and care workers deserve better pay and working conditions.



April 21-23, 2021 survey of 1,410 likely voters. Data for Progress.

“A green job is a good job that is not harming the planet. Wages need to be good, we need to have health benefits, we have so many caregivers providing care that they will never be able to afford themselves. When you have a good job that gives you stability and flexibility so that you also can be an actor in creating a good, green society.”

—AQUILINA SORIANO VERSOZA, [THE LEAP](#)

➔ A majority of respondents think that if care jobs were high-quality jobs,<sup>41</sup> they’d be good green jobs for a transitioning workforce, and could help dismantle gender stereotypes in this work and bring more men into the sector. When presented with the following message:

“Care jobs, like child and elder care, are often unpaid or low-paying. However, they are essential jobs that provide meaningful and rewarding work. If care jobs paid wages that were more in line with other occupations and industries, they would be more attractive to a wider range of workers, including men.”

- **84% of Democratic** respondents thought the message was persuasive compared with **64% of Republican** respondents.
- **73% of women** thought the message was persuasive, compared with **69% of men**.
- **72% of White respondents** thought the message was persuasive, compared with **67% of both Black and Hispanic** respondents.
- There were few discrepancies in opinion among respondents of other demographic groups.

➔ Care workers should also have access to care for themselves, and the United States should join the [rest of the industrialized world](#) in providing access to paid time off.<sup>42</sup> This means paid leave for all.

- **80% of Democrats think federal policy should ensure care workers can take paid leave so that they can care for themselves and their families, too. 61% of Independents and 50% of Republicans agree.** Political affiliation was the strongest indicator of support for paid leave.
- **70% of college educated respondents agree**, compared with 61% of those with no college.
- **67% of White respondents agree**, compared with 55% of Black and Hispanic respondents.

<sup>41</sup> While not defined in the survey, high-quality jobs entail living wages, safe, secure and dignified workplaces, and access to benefits.

<sup>42</sup> [“Paid Leave Across OECD Countries,”](#) Bipartisan Policy Center, January 2020.

## **C.** *The idea: Care infrastructure is climate infrastructure.*

The COVID-19 crisis has shown that the United States is ill-equipped to handle a crisis with the current care infrastructure. And just like the climate crisis, the care crisis is a threat and vulnerability multiplier.

The inclusion of home care investment in the Biden Administration's American Jobs Plan, and public [support](#) for its inclusion,<sup>43</sup> marks a shift in public understanding of infrastructure and its important role in peoples' lives. But care infrastructure is also fundamental to an equitable [green economy](#) and should be considered climate infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> It's essential, low-carbon human infrastructure that's critical for community resilience. And, without it, [women pay the price](#).<sup>45</sup>

Care infrastructure can be supported through different types of investments, including by investing in a Care & Climate Corps program that trains workers and ensures that care is accessible to every community. And unlike investing in roads and bridges, the impacts of investing in care infrastructure can be felt almost immediately, without the environmental harm.

Further, "hard infrastructure—seawalls, energy grids, communication systems—tends to break down when it's stressed in heat waves or hurricanes or floods. And in moments like that, it's social infrastructure that makes the difference between life and death," sociologist Eric Klinenberg told Kate Aranoff for [The New Republic](#).<sup>46</sup>

**When these connections are spelled out, people agree: care infrastructure is climate infrastructure.**

## Findings

**A majority believe that a robust care infrastructure and good jobs in the care economy are needed for an equitable and resilient green economy, and that investments in care and climate should go hand in hand.**

<sup>43</sup> Ethan Winter and Evangel Penumaka, "[Voters Support the American Jobs Plan](#)," Data for Progress, April 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Casey Berkovitz, Amanda Novello and Olivia Chan, "[Care Infrastructure Is Key to an Equitable, Green Recovery from the COVID-19 Crisis](#)," Ms Magazine, April 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Julie Kashen, "[Paid Leave, Child Care, and an Economy that Failed Women](#)," The Century Foundation, May 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Kate Aranoff, "[Care Work is Climate Work](#)," The New Republic, April 2021.

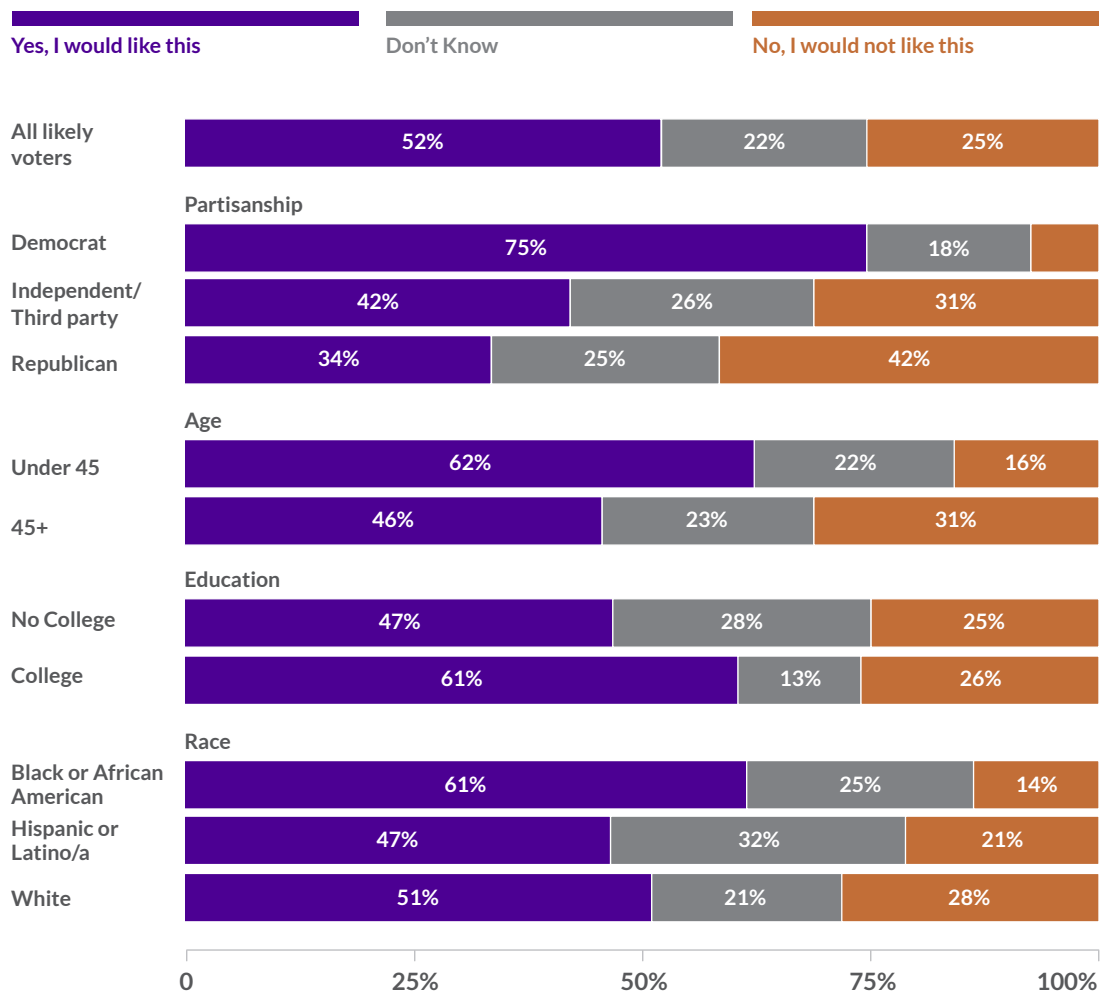


➔ More government investments should reflect the role of care as vital infrastructure, and care work as essential work.

- **75% of Democratic respondents would like to see more investments** that reflect the role of care as vital infrastructure, compared with 42% of Independent and 34% of Republican respondents. **62% of respondents under the age of 45 agree**, as opposed to 46% over the age of 45. **60% of respondents who've gone to college agree**, as opposed to 47% of those with no college. **A majority of Black respondents would like more investment in care infrastructure (61%)**, as compared with Hispanic and White respondents (46 and 51%, respectively).

## A Majority of Voters Would Like to See More Government Actions That Reflect the Importance of Care Infrastructure

The recently released American Jobs Plan for improving infrastructure includes investment in new and existing child care facilities and a major investment in in-home care. As a part of the American Jobs Plan, would you like to see more policies and investments that reflect the role of care as vital infrastructure?



April 21-23, 2021 survey of 1,410 likely voters. Data for Progress.

- **A majority, 62%, of all respondents support a \$700 billion investment** over ten years to build caregiving infrastructure and create millions of good care jobs (83% of Democratic respondents, 55% of Independents, and 45% of Republicans support). A majority of respondents from every demographic group support this investment.

➔ A robust care infrastructure could be strengthened nationwide through a Care and Climate Corps that recruits, trains, and employs people for living wages, with benefits. To improve capacity of our green social infrastructure by including care workers in a corps program, more workers could be trained in climate-responsive care, including caring for clients, community and family members experiencing ills related to extreme heat, drought, freezing temperatures, and evacuation. Our polling shows this is a popular proposal, just like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) was one of the most popular components of the New Deal. However, like most of the New Deal, the CCC excluded women and people of color. We should not make these mistakes again.

A majority agree that care work should be included in any climate corps program, since it's low-carbon work, needed for resilience, is an increasing need across the country, and does not require a college degree for most jobs. A Care and Climate Corps as proposed in this question garners more support than just a Climate Corps as surveyed [by Data for Progress](#) (61% total support compared with 50%).

- **82% of Democratic respondents and 43% of Republican respondents agree** that the American Jobs Plan's climate corps proposal should include care in addition to environmental jobs (61% total support).
- **68% of respondents under age 45 agree**, compared with 56% of those over age 45.
- **67% of Black respondents agree**, compared with 57 and 59% of Hispanic and White respondents.

➔ A majority of respondents believe that care is vital infrastructure for climate resilience. When presented with the following message:

**“Because climate change and related environmental outcomes, like pollution of air and water, extreme heat, fire, and droughts impact peoples’ health and well-being, investing in workers that provide care makes communities more resilient, and should be part of climate solutions.”**

- **79% of Democratic respondents agreed** (compared with 46% of Independents and Republicans), **66% of those with college** (compared with 56% with no college), and **64% of those under age 45** (compared with 57% of those above the age 45) agreed.

- ➔ Without strategic investments in a robust care infrastructure, women will disproportionately be left out of the green economy. Respondents also understand that without investing in care as infrastructure, most other infrastructure investments will create jobs geared toward men.
- 33% of respondents said that if child care was not available to them, they would not be able to take a good-paying job in the clean energy sector, and 13% of respondents were not sure if they'd be able to.
  - Men would be much more available to take a green job if child care were not available than women. 32% of men said they would definitely be able to take a job, compared with 19% of women who said they'd definitely be able to. Another 30% of men would "probably" be able to, compared with 24% of women.
  - More than half of all respondents (53%) agree that "Most green economy jobs are done by men in construction and manufacturing related to renewable energy and energy efficiency."





## d. Parents and Primary Caregivers

### Respondent Details:

- ➔ 60 percent of self-identified primary caregivers have children under age 18, and 40 percent of self-identified primary caregivers are caring for someone other than their child.
- ➔ 72 percent of women who have a child under age 18 identify as a primary caregiver, compared with 68 percent of men.
- ➔ In this survey group, parents and caregivers are more likely to be under the age of 45. As already established in the findings above, being under age 45 is correlated with more support and agreement with care as green work and part of a green economy, compared with older respondents. Therefore, the differences in responses (shown below) between parents, caregivers, and all respondents can be partly explained by age and partly explained by identity as a parent or caregiver, in addition to other factors.

## Findings

**Parents and caregivers are more likely to believe that care has a critical role in the green economy, than respondents overall. Here's what we found (see Appendix for full results):**

- ➔ Along with political affiliation and age, being a parent or caregiver is one of the leading indicators of support for a care and climate narrative. Despite ideological and demographic differences among parents and caregiver respondents, they are, overall, more likely to view care work as climate work and critical to a green economy.
- ➔ Visualizing green work
  - Parents are more likely to identify care work as “green” jobs than all respondents. When presented with images of elder care workers, child care workers, and teachers:
    - 17% identified an elder care worker as a “green” job, 18% identified child care as “green”, and 35% identified an early childhood teacher as “green” (compared with 14%/14%/30%, respectively, for all respondents).
- ➔ Care as Climate Work
  - **Parents and caregivers are more likely to agree with every message that demonstrates how care work is climate work,** than all respondents.
  - Up to 10% more parents and caregivers agree with some messages, compared with all respondents.

➔ Gender, Climate and Care

- Parents and caregivers are more likely to understand that “clean economy” sectors, as typically defined, will provide more jobs for men than for women.
- Self-identified female respondents will be much less able to take a green job if child care was not available than men, even if they are not parents or caregivers, and are more persuaded by the need for accessible care to make sure the clean economy is not gender segregated.

➔ Policy

- Overall there is more support among parents and caregivers for every policy intervention surveyed, garnering at least 65% and 61% support for every policy from parents and caregivers, respectively.
- There is a narrower ideological divide among parents and caregivers, in most cases because Republican parents and caregivers support care policies more than non-parent and caregiver Republican respondents.







## IV. Takeaways and Moving Forward

This is perhaps the first attempt at a comprehensive survey to understand public perception of green jobs, and care work as climate work, but this intends to be just the start.

Although respondents have a clear image-based bias of what a “green” job looks like, which does not include care work, there is much broader support for care as “climate work” when prompted with written messages explaining why that is the case. This bias is not surprising given that there has been [years of work that has limited the idea of green jobs](#) to renewable energy, energy efficiency, and conservation.<sup>47</sup> In other words, there is a gap between how green jobs are popularly portrayed, and what people perceive as the role of green work in society. Exploring and closing this gap will be important work to follow on these findings.

Some narrative interventions unify across ideological and demographic groups, and some resonate more with certain groups. The particular messages polled in this survey resonate more with Democratic, younger, and more college educated respondents. Further work is needed to understand biases and experiences that prohibit support. That work could begin to uncover the *causes* of some commonly held beliefs, rather than just the correlation between certain groups and beliefs.

Overall, positive and often resounding support for a holistic vision of climate and care, as reflected by these survey results, is indicative of the potential for broad-based narrative shift on this issue. And in terms of policy, there is clear, often bipartisan, support for large public investments in care workers and care infrastructure, especially when framed as green work and green infrastructure, and a majority of respondents from every group think care workers deserve better pay and conditions.

Lastly, polling likely voters is useful to start to understand broad public opinion, but future work should aim to engage directly with those most impacted by crises of care and climate. Working with care workers, environmental justice communities, with families in care deserts, and in other countries and places hardest hit by climate disasters, would help to ensure that solutions match community needs.

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<sup>47</sup> Novello, 2019.

# V. Appendix

Table 1

Message	Parents	Caregivers	All Respondents
<b>Care as Climate Work</b>			
“Green jobs are any job related to the well being of people and the planet.”	76% agree	76% agree	69% agree
“Care work is essential for families, the economy, and responding to needs of people during pandemics, but also when there are climate disasters like heat waves, fires, and floods. Therefore, care work is climate work.”	70% think the message is persuasive	64% think the message is persuasive	59% think the message is persuasive
“Domestic workers ensure a clean and healthy home environment, child and elder care workers ensure the health, safety, and well-being of those in need, and teachers are responsible for paving the way for a prosperous future. These roles and responsibilities are in line with the needs and goals of climate action—of ensuring safe and healthy environments for everyone—and therefore domestic work, care work, and teaching are climate jobs.”	70% think the message is persuasive	73% think the message is persuasive	60% think the message is persuasive
“Low-carbon care work is critical for a healthy economy and environment, and care workers deserve better pay and working conditions.”	69% agree	70% agree	65% agree
“The green economy should include all work that does not contribute to climate change, including those serving health and well-being to families and communities, and that includes care work.”	67% agree	65% agree	52% agree
“Because climate change and related environmental outcomes, like pollution of air and water, extreme heat, fire, and droughts impact peoples’ health and well-being, investing in workers that provide care makes communities more resilient, and should be part of climate solutions.”	67% agree	67% agree	59% agree
“Care work is low-carbon work that doesn’t add to climate pollution and is necessary for health and well-being. Therefore, care work is a critical part of a green economy.”	65% think the message is persuasive	60% think the message is persuasive	55% think the message is persuasive



Message	Parents	Caregivers	All Respondents
<b>Gender, Climate and Care</b>			
“Care jobs, like child and elder care, are often unpaid or low-paying. However, they are essential jobs that provide meaningful and rewarding work. If care jobs paid wages that were more in line with other occupations and industries, they would be more attractive to a wider range of workers, including men.”	75% agree	76% agree	71% agree
“During the pandemic, women have provided more care work within households, often keeping them from fully participating in the workforce. To ensure that new green jobs are accessible to all Americans, not only men that largely comprise the current clean energy sector, care must be affordable and accessible to all families.”	75% think the message is persuasive	72% think the message is persuasive	69% think the message is persuasive
“As jobs are created in clean economy sectors, most of those jobs will be in the construction and manufacturing sectors and will go to men.”	62% agree	59% agree	49% agree
“If you had access to a good-paying job in the clean energy sector, but child care was not available, would you be able to take that job?”	42% women - yes 62% men - yes	41% women - yes 60% men - yes	43% women - yes 62% men - yes
<b>Policy Questions</b>			
“The recently released American Jobs Plan includes a proposal for a climate corps that will put young Americans to work on projects to conserve our public lands and waters, improve community resilience to climate change, and advance environmental justice.	82% Democrats agree 63% Republicans agree (73% of all parents agree)	84% Democrats agree 55% Republicans agree (70% of all caregivers agree)	82% Democrats agree 43% Republicans agree (61% of all respondents agree)
Some lawmakers say that since care work is low-carbon work that’s essential for a green economy, jobs offered in this program should include care.			
Do you agree or disagree that the American Jobs Plan should expand this proposal to include both care and environmental jobs?”			
“Would you support or oppose a new federal policy to ensure that care workers, including new clean economy jobs created through the American Jobs Plan, can take paid leave so they can care for themselves and their families in times of need?”	78% Democrats support 56% Republicans support (73% of all parents support)	75% Democrats support 49% Republicans support (66% of all caregivers support)	80% Democrats support 50% Republicans support (65% of all respondents support)

Message	Parents	Caregivers	All Respondents
<p>“President Biden has proposed a \$700 billion investment over the next 10 years to build a caregiving infrastructure by investing in child care and social services like Medicaid. Some independent academic researchers suggest that this investment could create over 20 million good-paying jobs over the next decade in jobs both for caregivers and others in their communities.</p> <p>Do you support or oppose this investment?”</p>	<p>73% Democrats support 64% Republicans support (70% of all parents support)</p>	<p>77% Democrats support 49% Republicans support (65% of all caregivers support)</p>	<p>83% Democrats support 45% Republicans support (62% of all respondents support)</p>
<p>“The recently released American Jobs Plan for improving infrastructure includes investment in new and existing child care facilities and a major investment in in-home care.</p> <p>As part of the American Jobs Plan, would you like to see more policies and investments that reflect the role of care as vital infrastructure?”</p>	<p>82% Democrats - yes 56% Republicans - yes (65% of all parents - yes)</p>	<p>81% Democrats - yes 46% Republicans - yes (61% of all caregivers - yes)</p>	<p>75% Democrats - yes 34% Republicans - yes (52% of all parents - yes)</p>

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