

Results from the 2021 Perspectives on Families in America Survey: A Typology of Values and Beliefs

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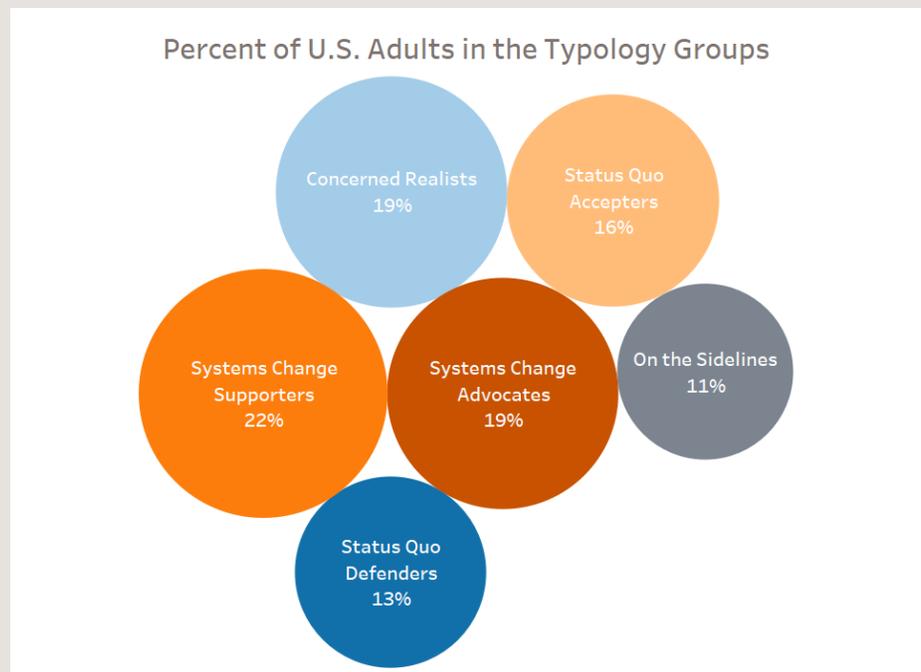
NORC at the University of Chicago (NORC) conducted the Perspectives on Families in America (PFA) survey for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to better understand the mindsets of U.S. adults as they relate to families with young children and their needs. A typology was created to discover the pattern of values and beliefs related to addressing three important resource problems many young families face—low incomes, lack of access to affordable and healthy food, and lack of access to child care and preschool programs. It also identifies differences in public views about the deservingness of low-income families, the importance of systemic-level causes for the lack of social resources, and the role of government in addressing the problems.

Why a Typology?

Typologies are helpful for understanding the pattern of value and belief differences within a population. The methods used to create typologies are similar to the approaches used by market researchers when they conduct market segmentation studies. In each case, understanding differences between the types, or segments, is helpful for developing products, policies, and programs and considering how to best promote them.

The Typology Groups

We identified six groups of U.S. adults based on their values and beliefs, three supportive of increased societal efforts to promote children’s and family health and three more skeptical. Systems Change Advocates, Systems Change Supporters and Concerned Realists emerged at the three supportive groups.



Typology Group Profiles

Profiles summarizing each of the groups based on key measures from the survey are below.^{1, 2}

SYSTEMS CHANGE ADVOCATES (19% OF U.S. ADULTS)

This group is the most supportive of societal efforts to promote child and family health. Those in this group are much more likely than U.S. adults in general to believe that child health and development is an important issue for the nation. They are also more likely to believe that lack of income and access to healthy food, child care, and preschool significantly impact the development of young children. Compared to U.S. adults in general, they also are:

- more likely to view the major causes of these problems, and the most effective solutions, as systems-level and not family-level.
- likely to see a role for society and especially government in addressing the problems.
- most likely to be civically engaged on children's and family issues.
- much less likely to question whether low-income families are deserving of government help, likely to believe that families deserve help because they contribute to society and are "trying hard, playing by the rules but just need help every now and then."
- less likely to embrace the "world is not fair" and the children's resilience justifications for the situation of the families.
- most likely to be civically engaged on children's and family issues.
- most likely to trust almost all media sources for information about current events and issues related to U.S. families. Exceptions include people they follow on social media, where they resemble other U.S. adults in terms of trust, and Fox News, which they are the least likely to trust. They have particularly high levels of trust for outlets including *the New York Times*, MSNBC, CNN, PBS/NPR, and network radio news.
- least likely to report being foreign-born.
- most likely to live in Urban Suburbs and Books and Barracks and least likely to live in Faith Driven America.
- more likely to be female; Black; younger; more highly educated; and earn higher incomes.
- most likely to identify as LGBTQ+.
- most likely to identify as Democrat and liberal and most likely among all groups to report a "strong" political opinion.

SYSTEMS CHANGE SUPPORTERS (22% OF U.S. ADULTS)

Like Systems Change Advocates, this group is also very supportive of societal efforts to promote child and family health. They also agree that not all children in the nation have the same opportunity to thrive. They are more likely to believe that the income and food problems have major impacts on the development of children than the child care/preschool problem. Compared to U.S. adults in general, they also are:

¹ A comprehensive list can be found in the final report at [Every Family Forward](#).

² Terminology from the American Communities Project, such as Big Cities, Urban Suburbs, Sprawl, Rural America, Faith Driven America, Minority Centers and Books and Barracks, is included to provide representation of geographic types (<https://www.americancommunities.org/>).

- more likely to see systems-level causes, and embrace systems-level solutions to the income, food and child-care/preschool problems facing families with young children.
- more likely to favor a role for society in solving the problems, however, they also have mixed views about a government role as well as the importance of child health and development as an issue, and they are less likely to believe that child health and development should be given top priority by the federal government.
- less likely to question whether low-income families deserve government help.
- less likely to embrace the “world is not fair” and children’s resilience justifications for the status quo.
- less likely to be civically engaged on children’s and family issues.
- more likely to trust almost all the media sources for information about current events and issues related to U.S. families, with the exception of people they follow on social media and Fox News, which they are slightly less likely to trust.
- most likely to be employed and less likely to be retired.
- more likely than U.S. adults to live in Urban Suburbs and less likely to live in Faith Driven America.
- almost equally male/female; more likely to be younger; to be of Hispanic ethnicity or Asian race; and to be low-income.
- most likely to identify as moderate and more likely to identify as Democrat or Independent.

CONCERNED REALISTS (19% OF U.S. ADULTS)

Concerned Realists are also supportive but less so than Systems Change Advocates or Systems Change Supporters. They are more likely to see child health and development as an important issue facing the nation and the three problems as significantly impacting child development. Compared to U.S. adults in general, they also are:

- more likely to believe that that both systems- and family-level causes of the problems are major issues and that solutions at both levels are very effective.
- likely to see a role for society in addressing the problems but have mixed views about a role for government.
- likely to have mixed views about the deservingness of low-income families, believing that those who receive government assistance should feel grateful for what they receive and should only receive assistance if the need is great.
- most likely of all the groups to embrace the “world is not fair” justification for the situation the families find themselves in and more likely to accept the children’s resilience justification.
- similar in their degree of civic engagement on children’s and family issues.
- more likely to trust information about current events and issues from all media sources. Notably, they are most likely of all groups to trust people they follow on social media.
- least likely to be employed and most likely to be disabled, to have a job working with children, and be foreign-born.
- one of the two groups most likely to live in Minority Centers and the least likely to live in The Sprawl.

- slightly more likely to be older; most likely to be female; non-White; to have achieved lower levels of education; to earn lower incomes; not be married; and to not own their homes.
- less likely to report identifying as LGBTQ+.
- more likely to identify as Democrat or Independent.

ON THE SIDELINES (11% OF U.S. ADULTS)

This group tends to be skeptical—it is less likely to see child health and development as an important national issue and less likely to see the three problems having major impacts on the development of young children. Compared to U.S. adults in general, they also are:

- least likely to believe that family-level causes of the problems are major, and that family-level solutions are very effective. At the same time, they are less likely to believe that systems-level causes and solutions are important.
- similar in their beliefs about societal responsibility, but less likely to see a role for government.
- less likely to question that low-income families are deserving of government help.
- least likely to embrace a “world is not fair” justification for the status quo. They are similar in the extent to which it embraces the children’s resilience justification for the status quo.
- less likely to be civically engaged on children’s and family issues generally.
- less likely to trust most media sources, with the exception of people they follow on social media, which they are slightly more likely to trust, and Fox News, where they resemble other U.S. adults.
- most likely of all groups to be unemployed, and least likely to be retired.
- one of the two groups most likely to live in Minority Centers.
- least likely to be married and less likely to own their own homes, but most likely to both have one or more children and have children in the household.
- more likely to be male; of Hispanic ethnicity or identify as “other” race; younger; be lower income; and have achieved less education.
- most likely to identify as Independent and more likely to identify as conservative or moderate.

STATUS QUO ACCEPTERS (16% OF U.S. ADULTS)

This skeptical group is also less likely to see child health and development as important issue for the nation and less likely to see the three specific problems as significantly impacting child development. Compared to U.S. adults in general, they also are:

- more likely to see family-level factors as major causes of the problems and family-level actions as the most effective solutions.
- less likely to see a role for either society or government in addressing the problems.
- more likely to question whether low-income families with children deserve government help.
- more likely to embrace the “world is not fair” and children’s resilience justification for the status quo.
- least likely to be civically engaged on children’s and family issues.

- one of two groups most likely to somewhat or completely trust Fox News for information about current events and issues related to U.S. families. They are less likely to trust all other media sources.
- most likely of all groups to be retired and least likely to be unemployed.
- less likely than U.S. adults to live in Big Cities and Urban Suburbs, more likely to live in Faith Driven America, and most likely to live in Rural America.
- less likely to have children.
- equally likely to be male or female; generally more likely to be White; older; married; and own their own homes.
- much less likely to report being LGBTQ+.
- much more likely than U.S. adults to identify as Republican and conservative.

STATUS QUO DEFENDERS (13% OF ADULTS)

This group is the most skeptical of the groups in their support of families with young children. It is least likely of the groups to see child health and development as important issue for the nation and the three specific problems as significantly impacting child development. Compared to U.S. adults in general, they also are:

- more likely to see family-level causes and embrace family-level solutions for the problems rather than those at a systems-level.
- less likely to see societal role and governmental role.
- more likely to question whether low-income families with children deserve government help. They are less likely to feel that the families deserve help because they contribute to society. They are more likely to believe that the families should only receive assistance if the need is great, if parents are U.S. citizens, and if family problems are not the result of their own choices. They are more likely to believe that the families should feel grateful for any assistance they get.
- more likely to embrace the “world is not fair” and children’s resilience justification for the status quo.
- less likely to be civically engaged on children’s and family issues.
- one of two groups most likely to trust Fox News for information about current events and issues related to U.S. families, however, they are least likely to trust all the other media sources, including television, newspaper, radio, and social media. Distrust of MSNBC and CNN was notable in this group.
- most likely to be self-employed.
- most likely to live in The Sprawl and Faith-Driven America and least likely to live in Big Cities or Urban Suburbs.
- least likely overall to have children.
- most likely to be White; male; married; and older in age; to own their own home; more likely to earn a higher income; and have achieved some college or a bachelor’s degree.
- least likely to report LGBTQ+ sexual orientation.
- most likely to identify as Republican and conservative.

Differences in Beliefs among the Typology Groups

Exhibit 2 visually compares the typology groups on important measures in the survey. The exhibit presents the differences in key measures that define the groups and create the typology. The exhibit shows how much more or less the groups' views tend to differ compared to the overall sample of U.S. adults. The warm colors (orange, red) represent instances when the group proportion is *more* than the overall sample proportion. The cool colors (blue, dark blue) represent instances when the group proportion is *less* than the overall sample proportion. The darker the color, the further the distance from the overall sample proportion.

Exhibit 2. How PFA Typology Groups Differ from Adults in the U.S. on Key Measures

	Systems Change Advocates	Systems Change Supporters	Concerned Realists	On the Sidelines	Status Quo Accepters	Status Quo Defenders
Belief that All Children in the U.S. Have the Same Opportunity to Thrive	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Light Blue	Orange	Orange	Dark Orange
Agree Families Without Enough Income Should Not Receive Special Help if their Problems Stem from their Own Poor Choices	Dark Blue	Light Blue	Orange	Light Blue	Orange	Dark Orange
Belief in Societal Causes for Children Not Thriving	Dark Orange	Orange *	Orange	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue
Agree the Gov Should Do More to Help Families Without Enough Income, Even if it Costs U.S. Taxpayers More	Dark Orange	Orange	Orange	Light Blue	Light Blue	Dark Blue

Dark Orange	Most likely
Orange	More likely
Light Blue	Less likely
Dark Blue	Least likely

*Note that Systems Change Supporters are only slightly more likely to believe in societal causes for children not thriving.

Implications for Reaching Audiences

Typologies are primarily tools for understanding differences—in our case, how U.S. adults differ in their values and beliefs related to the promotion of child and family health. People with value and belief profiles similar to **Systems Change Advocates** and the two other supportive segments, **Systems Change Supporters** and **Concerned Realists**, are likely to be most receptive to pro-family policies and child health promotion. They are likely already part of coalition building efforts and are likely to respond positively to messages about these policies.

Those with profiles similar to **Status Quo Accepters** and **Status Quo Defenders** are skeptical across-the-board and are least likely to be receptive. Messages aimed at these groups will need to be carefully developed and tested to be effective. The **On the Sidelines** group are also skeptical about many aspects of the work and overall, are less engaged on the issues related to families with children. The comprehensive report provides additional insights into the more skeptical groups to help stakeholders consider ways to engage with them based on their views.

Methodology

The development of survey items for the study was based on the focus of the Healthy Children and Families theme area at RWJF. A technical expert panel was consulted to develop the constructs and measures for the instrument. During instrument development we conducted a literature search and review, in-depth interviews, cognitive testing, and a pre-test.

Data collection began on January 25, 2021 and ended March 8, 2021. We collected data using a multi-mode web and phone survey design from a general population sample of U.S. adults aged 18 and older with oversamples of parents of children age 0–5 years old, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and American Indian/Alaska Natives from the NORC probability-based panel, AmeriSpeak.³ In total, NORC collected 6,207 responses, 5,831 by web mode and 376 by phone mode.

A general population sample of U.S. adults aged 18 and older was selected from NORC's AmeriSpeak Panel for this study. Statistical weights for the study-eligible respondents were calculated using panel base sampling weights to start. Finally, panel weights are raked to external population totals associated with age, sex, education, race/Hispanic ethnicity, housing tenure, telephone status, and Census Division. The external population totals are obtained from the CPS. The weights adjusted to the external population totals are the final panel weights. The weights adjusted to the external population totals are the final study weights.

K-means clustering was used to develop the segments within the typology. The goal in this work was to identify a set of segments such that within-segment homogeneity and between-segment heterogeneity were optimized. Solutions from two k-means options⁴ with between two and fifteen segments each were examined for diagnostics. The values and beliefs measures were used to generate the solutions. Several metrics were used to investigate the solutions; specifically, the cubic clustering criterion was examined to understand the model fit, the area under the curve was examined to understand the separation between clusters, and the Pseudo F statistic was examined to understand the tightness of the clusters. Based on these metrics, a six-segment solution was selected for further investigation. To ascertain validity of this solution, we examined differences in the demographic and other purely descriptive variables across the segments. From this evaluation, a six-segment solution⁵ was selected because of its simplicity and ease of interpretation.

Additional Resources

TOPLINE TABLES

The topline data tables provide results for the full sample for each survey question. This document also provides basic background information about the study. The topline tables can be found at [Every Family Forward](#).

COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

The final report is a comprehensive formal report with an executive summary, overview of study objectives and methodology, detailed presentation of results and a discussion of study conclusions. The final report can be found at [Every Family Forward](#).

³ NORC at the University of Chicago. (2021). Technical Overview of the AmeriSpeak® Panel: NORC'S Probability-Based Household Panel. <https://amerispeak.norc.org/Documents/Research/AmeriSpeak%20Technical%20Overview%202019%2002%2018.pdf>.

⁴ All observations may be a cluster seed vs. observations that include missing values cannot be a cluster seed.

⁵ Observations that include missing values cannot be a cluster seed.

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ABOUT NORC

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