

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 8, 2021



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## **Americans Still Care For Each Other Across Political Difference, But Fail To Address Many Types of Biases**

***A New Report From Harvard's Making Caring Common Examines Key Questions About the Extent to Which Americans Do—and Do Not—Care for Those Who Are Different From Them***

**Cambridge, MA** – Americans still fundamentally care for each other despite political differences, but persistent biases of many kinds may be preventing many Americans from caring for those who are different from them and may impede a path to unity, according to a new report from Harvard's Making Caring Common project.

The report, [\*Do Americans Really Care For Each Other? What Unites Us—And What Divides Us\*](#), seeks to answer key questions about the extent to which Americans care for each other and what might spur more Americans to value and invest in others, particularly those who are different from them in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, and political orientation. The report is based primarily on research by Making Caring Common over the past three years, including a survey in April, 2021 of a nationally representative sample of more than 2,600 Americans. More information about the research methodology can be found in the [report](#).

The report findings, outlined below, suggest that Americans tend to value caring, are engaging in caring acts, and still tend to care for each other across the political divide. But many Americans don't appear to have substantial concern for people who are different from them in terms of race, ethnicity, and religion. Many also struggle to extend compassion to others when they believe others have made mistakes, such as people who refuse the COVID-19 vaccine and become ill. Many fail to treat as fully human those with whom they disagree on issues that are important to them. And large numbers of Americans are failing to confront obstacles to their own capacity to care for others, including their stereotypes and biases.

“The good news is that most Americans appear to value caring for others, seem to be taking steps to improve others’ lives, and seem to feel a sense of collective or civic care—including a bottom-line concern for all Americans, even across the political divide,” said Richard Weissbourd, Senior Lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Faculty Director of the Making Caring Common project. “At the same time, many Americans are not engaging in the harder forms of caring that are critical to healthy communities and that promote the common good. It is one thing to value caring or to be nice; it is quite another to do the hard work of caring, including examining your biases and caring for those who are not in your circle of family and friends. And many Americans don't seem to be doing this hard work.”

The report also offers eight possible strategies, outlined below, for increasing Americans’ capacity to care for others, especially for those who are different from them, and for bridging our differences.

“We must do better,” said Weissbourd. “Too much is at stake. We need to be far more intentional and systematic about developing our capacity—and our children’s capacity—to care for and tend to others and our collective fate.”

## Key findings

### 1. Americans care for each other across political difference and aren't ready for a political “divorce.”

- About two-thirds of respondents to our survey indicated that they care about all Americans, regardless of their political views. Uniting the country also appears to be a very high priority for both Democrats and Republicans.
- Large majorities of Democratic and Republican respondents reported that they had at least one or two friends in the other political party and two-thirds of respondents indicated that they would prefer to live in a politically diverse neighborhood than a politically homogeneous one. Given the option to peacefully divide the country into two separate countries (one Democrat and one Republican), only a small percentage of respondents (8%) were in favor.
- Americans tend to be interested in talking about their political views with people they disagree with politically if the conditions are right. Only 15% percent of survey

respondents reported being interested in talking about political issues with someone they generally disagreed with, but when we asked respondents if they would be interested in these conversations if they would “be listened to respectfully,” the percent interested jumped to 61%.

- 2. Large numbers of Americans aren’t doing the “hard work” of caring, including addressing their own biases and stereotypes.**
  - Despite strong evidence on the pervasiveness of biases, only 9% of respondents view themselves as having biases or stereotypes they need to work on against Black and Muslim Americans; even fewer respondents believe that they have biases against other major racial, ethnic, and religious groups in the U.S.
  - Americans are far more likely to prioritize their own happiness over caring for others, and they’re far more invested in cultivating their children’s happiness than their children’s caring for others.
- 3. Americans tend to view racism as a significant problem in our country, but they tend to think of it as other people’s failing.**
  - Both Republicans and Democrats are far more likely to believe that they’re less racist than people in both their own political party and the other party.
  - In another survey we conducted in May, 2020, respondents were far more likely to view themselves as less racist than people in their families, people they interact with daily, and people in the country in general.
- 4. Americans struggle to hold conflicting feelings and too often lack compassion for those whom they believe are misguided on important issues.**
  - Our data suggest that large numbers of Americans are rushing to judgement and struggling to hold conflicting feelings, including anger and compassion, towards fellow Americans. In an online survey we conducted in May, 2021, for example, we asked respondents whether they would feel bad for people who don’t take the COVID-19 vaccine and end up hospitalized; only about half of respondents expressed substantial levels of concern.
- 5. Americans appear to be more responsive to criticism from within their party than from the other party.**
  - Our data indicate that Democrats are significantly more likely to agree with criticism about hypocrisy in their party when the messenger is a Democrat, and Republicans are significantly more likely to agree with criticism about racism in their party when the messenger is a Republican.

## **Possible Solutions**

- 1. Wrestling with our biases.** Moving beyond current bias trainings, which are commonly ineffective, and developing and rigorously assessing new approaches for motivating Americans to address biases, including public education campaigns that help Americans identify and reflect on gender, ethnic, and racial biases that affect individuals and institutions.

2. **Creating conditions that enable constructive conversation.** Developing norms and conditions in our workplaces and institutions, including listening respectfully, that enable people to talk constructively about their political views across political difference while being guided by principles of fairness and justice.
3. **Finding fulfilling and fun ways for people to connect across difference.** Creating many types of energizing formal and informal opportunities for Americans across ethnic, racial, class, political, and religious divides to engage with one another and to express various aspects of their identities, whether around shared interests, personal challenges, or service to others.
4. **Bringing people together in common cause.** Developing coalitions that bring people together regionally or nationally across various divides around common causes, e.g., initiatives to increase access to broadband, efforts to secure more affordable housing, or campaigns to support new parents or to alleviate loneliness.
5. **Challenging our own party.** Challenging not only our political opponents but members of our own party when they act hypocritically or violate important moral principles.
6. **Lifting up the bonds that unite us.** Elevating the voices of those who are fed up with our current antagonistic politics and want greater fairness and unity. These efforts might take many forms, including media stories of the many individuals and organizations engaged in bridging divides, schools supporting and elevating parents who are willing to uphold norms of decency and respect in their parent communities, or local elections that utilize ranked choice voting, which tends to favor candidates who are less extreme.
7. **Combining a moral narrative with moral action.** Supporting political and community leaders who combine a moral narrative that emphasizes decency and fairness with concrete actions that promote decency and fairness across divides. Americans need to see community leaders, for example, taking actions that tangibly improve their lives who belong to different political, racial, ethnic, and religious groups.
8. **Preparing the next generation.** Focusing in our homes, schools, and communities on developing children's capacity to care across difference, to bridge divides, and to advance justice.

For more information, visit Making Caring Common online: [www.makingcaringcommon.org](http://www.makingcaringcommon.org).

### **About Making Caring Common**

Making Caring Common (MCC), a project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, helps educators, parents, and communities raise children who are caring, responsible to their communities, and committed to justice. Learn more at [www.makingcaringcommon.org](http://www.makingcaringcommon.org).

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