

Awareness of California's Paid Family Leave Program Remains Limited, Especially Among Those Who Would Benefit From It Most

BY EILEEN APPELBAUM AND RUTH MILKMAN*

As part of our study of paid family leave,¹ the California Field Poll surveyed registered voters in California in September 2011 to assess their awareness of the state's Paid Family Leave (PFL) program. The poll included 1,001 registered voters and was conducted from September 1 to 12, 2011.

Overall, well under half (42.7 percent) of respondents had “seen, read or heard” of the PFL program, which was created by a 2002 law. Awareness varied by ethnicity, gender and age. (See **Figure 1**.)

Awareness also varied geographically, with the highest level in the San Francisco Bay Area and the lowest in Los Angeles County. Respondents whose households included a union member were substantially more aware of PFL than those in non-union households. (See **Figure 2**.)

Awareness was substantially lower among key disadvantaged groups: those with lower household incomes, limited education and renters (as opposed to homeowners). (See **Figure 3**.)

Among those respondents who had heard of the program, 22.3 percent were *not* aware that it could be used not only for bonding with a new child, but also to care for a seriously ill family member. Here there was no significant demographic variation.

Awareness of PFL has grown slowly over time. The Field Poll methodology is slightly different from that of earlier surveys of PFL that we have conducted, but a systematic comparison to results of our 2003 survey show that awareness has increased by about 50 percent over the past eight years (see **Table 1**). Here the comparison is limited to respondents who voted in the last general election (the 2008 election for the 2011 poll, and the 2000 election for the 2003 survey).



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Since 2003, awareness has grown substantially. Although fewer than half of these voters (44.9 percent) were aware of PFL in 2011, this is a dramatic increase over 2003, when the figure was 29.7 percent. Awareness has grown even more among female voters, from 25.9 percent to 51.2 percent. For men, there was very little change. Awareness nearly doubled among Latinos and Asians who voted in the 2008 election (of course, immigrant noncitizens are not part of this group).

The Field Poll also asked respondents if they had ever collected benefits from the state's PFL program. Contrary to some predictions before the program was created, only 10.9 percent of all PFL-aware respondents to the Field Poll (whether or not they had voted in 2008) had used the program. This means that only 4.7 percent of all respondents to the Field Poll had done so.

Among PFL-aware respondents, 13.5 percent of females, but only 6.9 percent of males, had collected PFL benefits at some point in the program's seven years of operation.

FIGURE 1
Paid Family Leave Awareness, September 2011

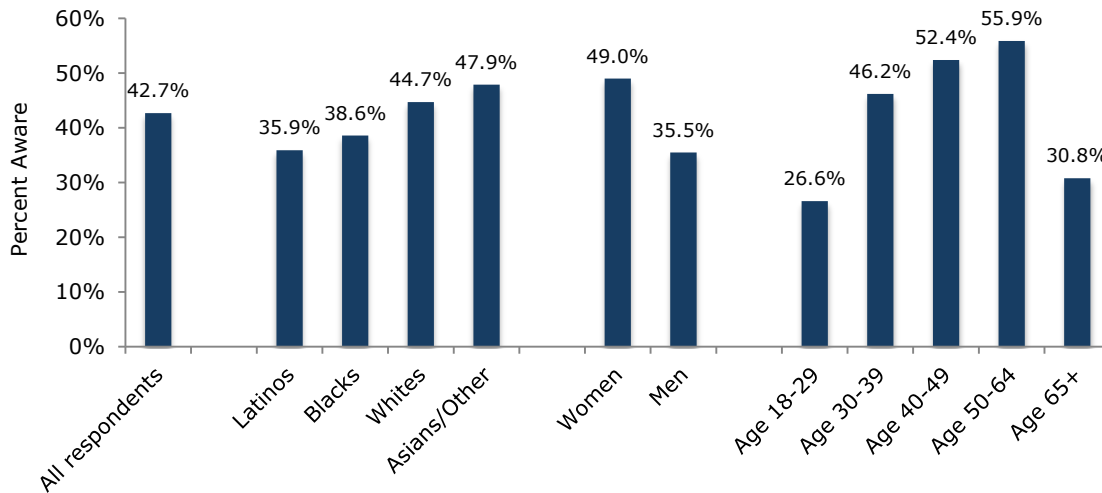


FIGURE 2
Paid Family Leave Awareness by Geography and Union Status, September 2011

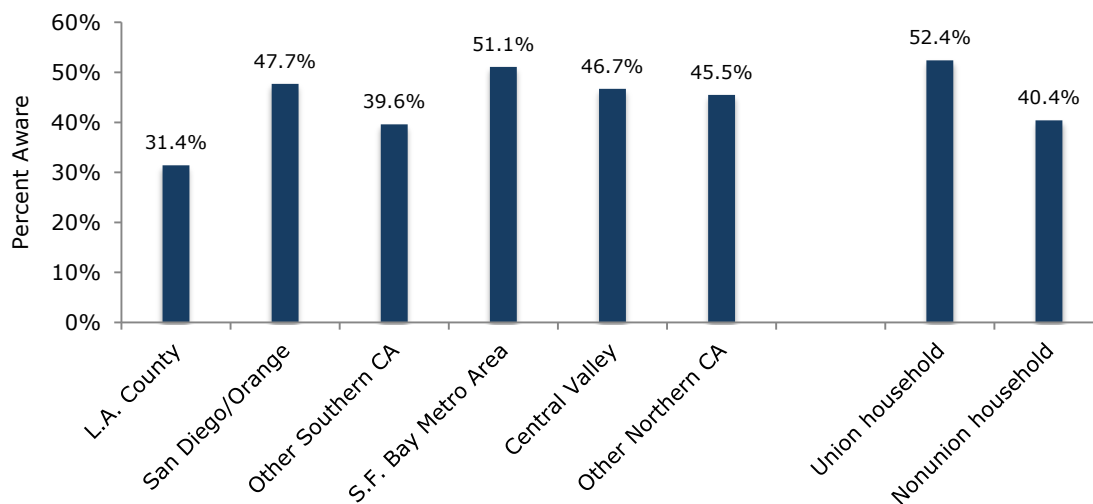


FIGURE 3
Paid Family Leave Awareness by Household Income, Education, and Homeownership Status, September 2011

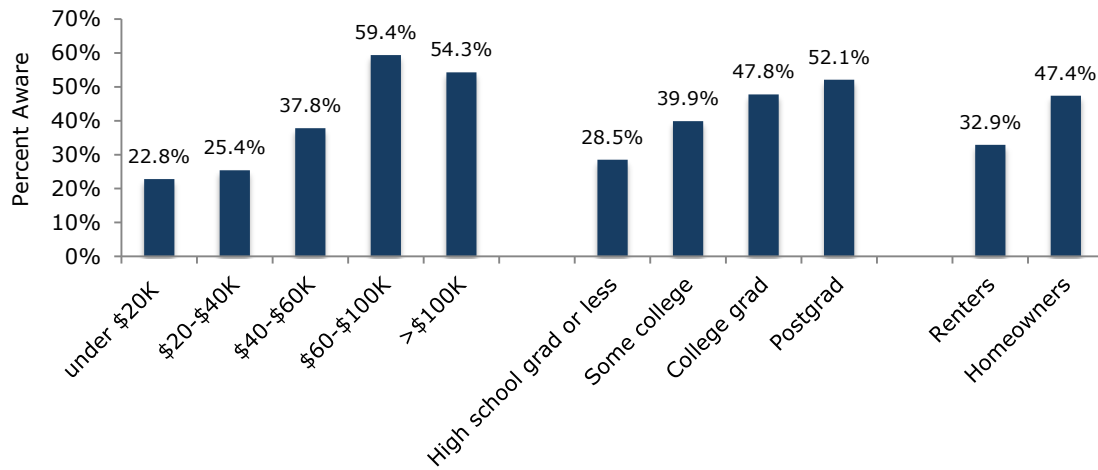


TABLE 1
Paid Family Leave Awareness Among Respondents Who Voted in the Previous General Election (percent)

	2003	2011
All Respondents	29.7	44.9
Women	25.9	51.2
Men	34.3	37.7
Latinos	22.0	40.8
Blacks	35.3	38.0
Whites	30.9	45.7
Asians/Other	24.9	49.3

1 Appelbaum, Eileen and Ruth Milkman. 2011. "Leaves That Pay: Employer and Worker Experiences With Paid Family Leave in California." <http://www.cepr.net/documents/publications/paid-family-leave-1-2011.pdf>