

WHAT THE FUTURE: FAMILY

How Gen Alpha and Beta will drive new family norms PAGE 8

How business can help families through the looming caregiver crisis PAGE 12

How different Gen Beta personas could define the future PAGE 16

Screen time is families' biggest tension. Here are 5 reforms they need PAGE 20

+ How brands can calibrate their strategies to support evolving modern families, according to a historical demographer, AARP's caregiving expert, two futurists and a family online safety policy leader



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Why tomorrow's family could be a radical shift from the past

Imagine it's 2052.

The family of tomorrow will be older and smaller, unless things change. The decades-long trends toward getting married and having kids later (or not at all), coupled with increasing lifespans, are culminating in two new life stages: Twentysomethings and what I call the “Omnigenarians.” The potential impacts for brands are enormous.

This could lead to shifts in whom we consider to be “family.” There are signals in the data: Half of younger Americans think that friends count as “family,” according to the Ipsos Future of Family Survey. It's plausible that we'll become even more tribal as a nation, building our own families and communities out of people we choose. We're seeing this with the tech-driven enclaves owned by the wealthiest Americans, and efforts to build ethnocentric communities in the Deep South.

A growing share of Americans also think that tomorrow's family will be worse off than today's. That's plausible. As we live longer, Americans have the greatest gap (12 years) between

our lifespan and our health span. Simply put, we're living longer but not healthier. That exacerbates a caregiving burden for people ill-equipped to manage it: the “sandwich generation” families with their own kids. That puts a squeeze on folks in the middle, while simultaneously draining funds from the older cohort. And there's a critical shortage in the workplace of professional caregivers, assuming that one can afford them.

There are broader labor issues with not having enough younger people in the workforce, too. In some ways, AI could help bridge that by literally reducing the number of younger people (entry-level jobs are perhaps more easily replaceable) in the workforce.

It's certainly problematic if AI accelerates the replacement of younger people faster than necessary. There are some signs that's already happening. The long-term consequences have not necessarily been well thought-out in our society.



23pts

is the drop among Millennials who say they plan to have children in the future, from 43% in 2024 to 20% in 2025.

(Sources: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 804 U.S. adults not a parent of child under 18; and Ipsos survey conducted Jan 18-22, 2024, among 850 U.S. adults not a parent of child under 18.)

Impact on consumer behavior

Whom we live with that we consider family also affects our spending and savings habits. Living alone is happening at both ends of the age spectrum. Many Twentysomethings haven't paired off and the Omnigenarians often outlive their spouses. Regardless, each has to buy the household necessities and cook for one, etc. When we consider our chosen family, we often invite them to gatherings and buy gifts for them at holidays. It all adds up.

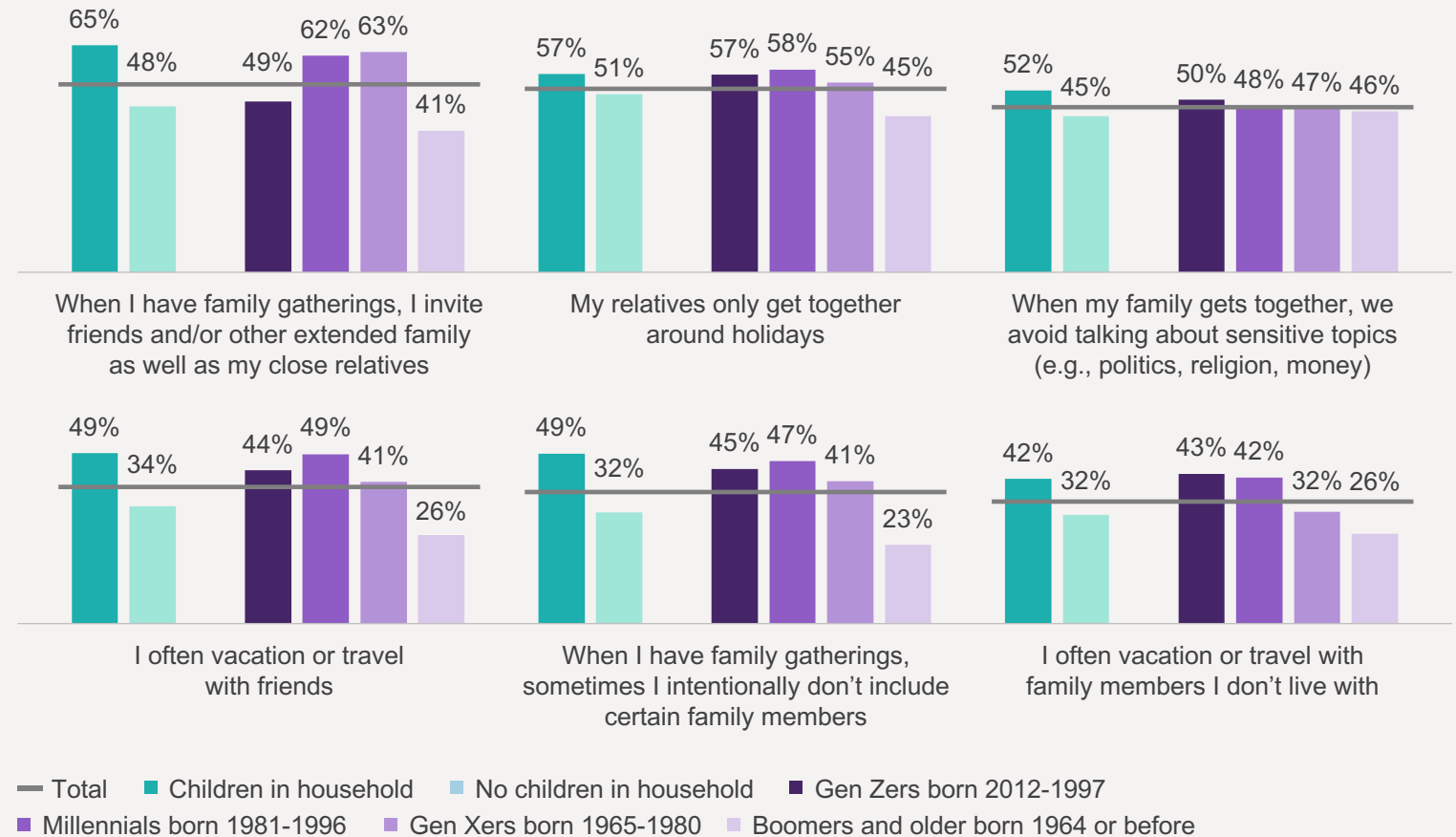
Screens and splintered culture

The biggest change is our move from a domestic economy to a tech-based one. For parents of younger kids, tech issues like screen time, privacy and safety are the biggest tensions in the household. Policy and platform solutions to those challenges would be welcome, as we'll discuss.

Beyond those tensions, the rise of streaming and algorithm-driven entertainment means that in many ways, it's harder to have family entertainment. There isn't necessarily one screen that the family gathers around.

How kids and generations shape who we include in family gatherings

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (% Agree)



Finding entertainment your family can agree on is just one symptom of the larger content diffusion problem. How many cultural conversations with friends and family do you have to start with “Have you seen ...” followed by an explanation, only to find the reference is lost on them anyway?

Global trends and countertrends

We mentioned that reversal of demographic trends is plausible. Unlikely, but plausible. The Trump administration has been clear in its desire for Americans to have more babies. It’s a manifestation of another [Ipsos Global Trends](#), Retreat to Old Systems, which is a mix of warm, fuzzy nostalgia and a gender dynamic countertrend rooted in the idea that the system is broken and things were better at some earlier point in time.

You see this in the TikTok “tradwife” trend with women celebrating what they see as a return to traditional gender roles. It’s unclear if they just want to be “provided for” or want to go back to a full-on patriarchy. (Remember, there are a lot of American women alive today who once couldn’t get a credit card without their husband’s approval.) The pendulum of gender dynamics is swinging widely and wildly at the moment. But no experts think we can goose the fertility rate fast enough to really reverse population decline — and certainly not if we curb immigration, which historically is how America’s population has actually grown.

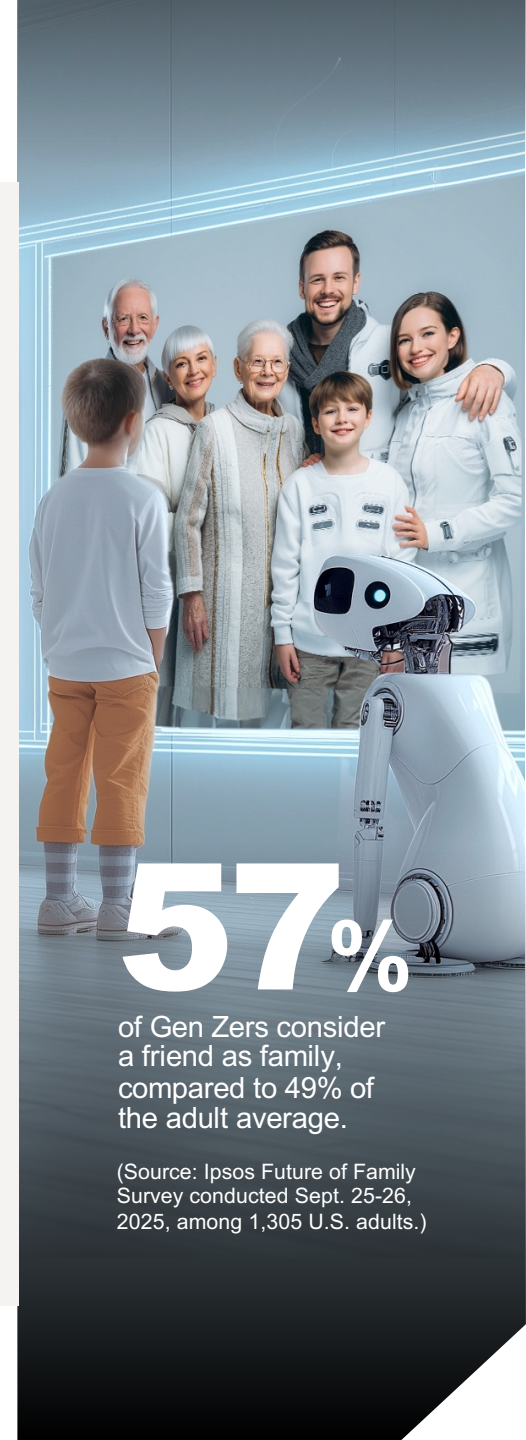
There are many plausibilities to plan for. And since we’re talking demographics of family, many of these are futures that will play out over decades. That said, questions abound in the near term, too:

- Is there a way to reduce the tension around screens in our families?
- What will parenting and caregiving look like in the future?
- How will gender-dynamic pendulums swing, and what will that mean for household formation and household roles?
- How will the changing makeup of households and families affect spending patterns?
- Oh, and what on Earth (and beyond Earth!) will happen with the kids being born now? We’ve got a stellar Q&A about Gen Beta later in this issue.

But as Dolly Parton has taught us, we’ll “try to find some better way/ to solve the problems day-to-day, in the family.”



Matt Carmichael is editor of *What the Future*.



57%

of Gen Zers consider a friend as family, compared to 49% of the adult average.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 1,305 U.S. adults.)

Shifts: Evolving from the nuclear family model

NOW:

From nuclear to nontraditional



Today's definition of family is evolving beyond the traditional nuclear structure to include friends and non-legal relations. Now, AI is being invited into family matters. As it becomes more pervasive, people are turning to AI companions to handle household tasks, allowing parents to spend more quality time with their children and even assist in resolving family disputes.

NEXT:

From family time to screen time



Technology will play a dual role as educational content becomes increasingly common. On one hand, algorithmically personalized content will help families meet their child's educational needs. However, if trends continue, using screens as a babysitter during formative years may result in developmental deficiencies.

FUTURE:

From chance to chosen



The concept of chosen family could expand to new legal and social forms. Hybrid family structures, where multiple adults form a committed household, may become more mainstream, driven by both personal desire and a pragmatic need to pool resources for childcare, housing and financial security.



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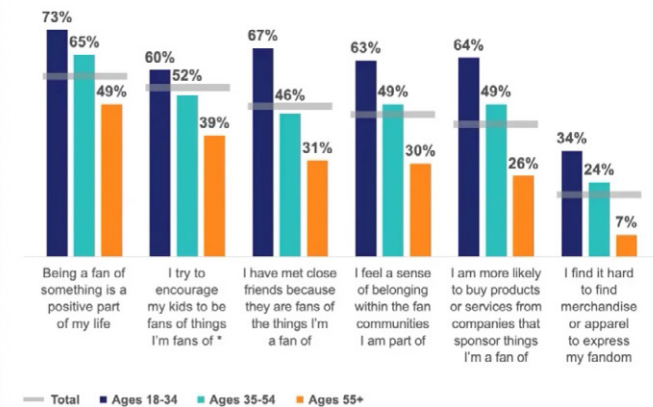
See beyond the horizon

Ipsos What the Future complimentary webinars give you **personalized insights** for your business



Younger fans show stronger fan engagement and community connection

Q. How much do you agree or disagree with the following? (% Agree)

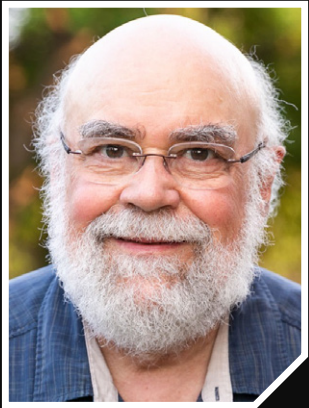


(Source: Ipsos survey conducted Jan. 31-Feb. 3, 2025, among 1,020 U.S. adults who are fans of anything, including 292 people with a child in the household.)

When you imagine possible tomorrows,
you ask better questions today.

BOOK NOW

How Gen Alpha and Beta will drive new family norms



Steven Ruggles

Regents professor; director, IPUMS Center for Data Integration, University of Minnesota

The dramatic rise in living alone and rejecting traditional marriage is redefining family, with big implications for society and business. Historical demographer Steven Ruggles has studied changing family structures for decades and built the world's largest public database of population statistics called IPUMS. Despite challenges for recent generations, he is optimistic for Gen Alpha and Gen Beta, seeing potential in demographic changes shaping their futures.

54%

of U.S. adults invite friends and/or other extended family as well as close relatives when they have family gatherings.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 1,305 U.S. adults.)



What The Future interview with Steven Ruggles

Kate MacArthur: Recent Census data shows a big drop in family-classified households in 2024 (64%) from 50 years ago (79%). What happened?

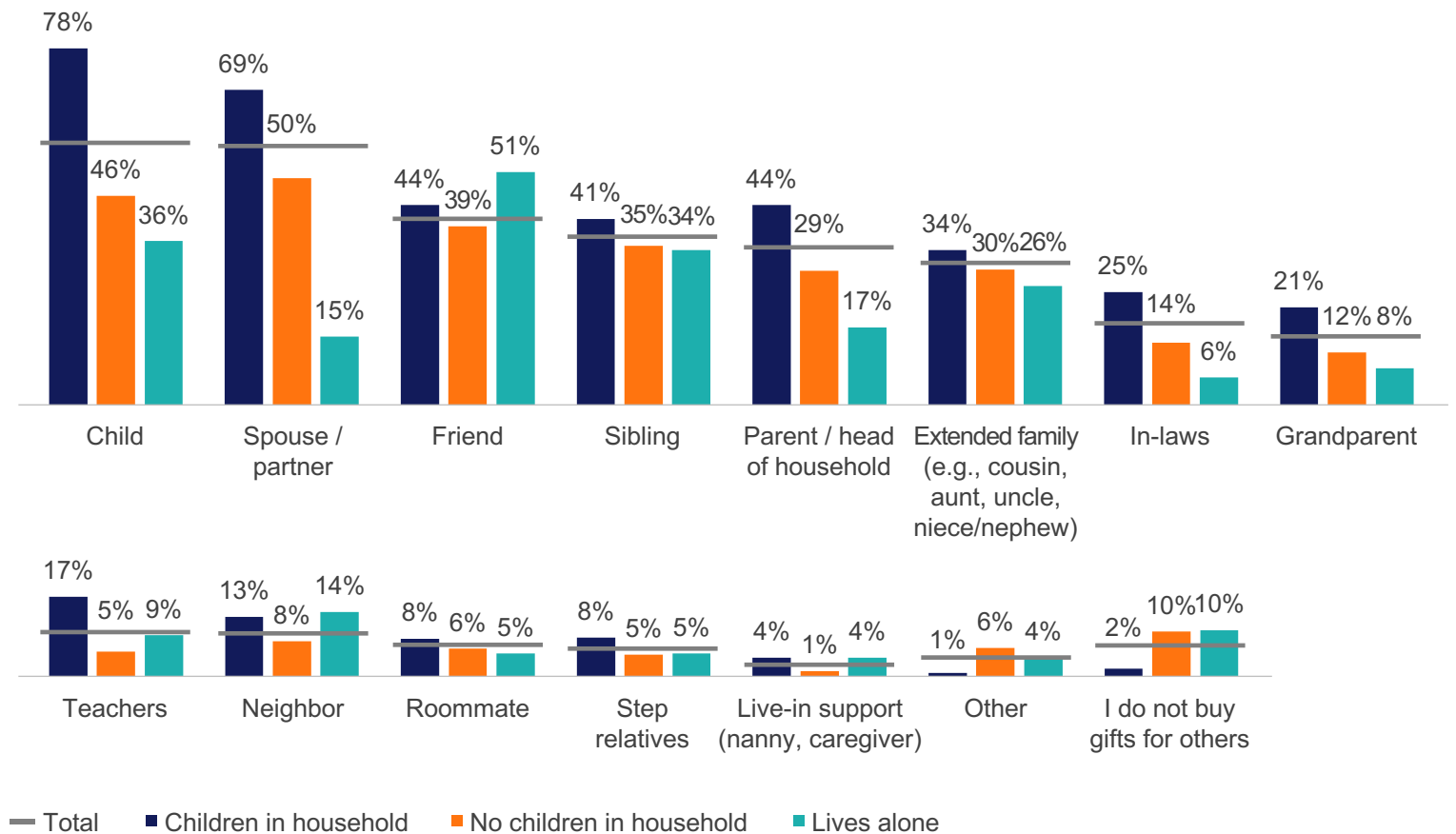
Steven Ruggles: All that means is there's a rise of one-person households. It has accelerated in the last 30 or 40 years. It continues to accelerate because the kids are not only *not* getting married, they're also not cohabiting. Then there are a lot of old people because the Baby Boomers are getting old, and old people are more likely to live alone if they're widowed or divorced.

MacArthur: What is driving this decline?

Ruggles: The leading hypothesis for this initially came from economist Richard Easterlin, who argued that it was due to relative cohort size. He argued that people make marriage decisions based on their circumstances compared to the circumstances they knew growing up. If it's a lot worse, they don't think they have enough wherewithal to start a family and get married. You had these Baby Boomers hitting the job market, and it became difficult to get a job. The peak wages were in 1973, so throughout the rest of the '70s and '80s, wages were declining for young people. Easterlin predicted marriage would bounce back in the '80s because the cohorts entering the job market were smaller. That didn't happen. Incomes for young people kept going down until 2015. I argue that this is because the Baby Boomers were clogging up the system.

How household composition shapes gift buying

Q. Who do you tend to buy gifts for at family celebrations or holidays?



(Source: Ipsos Future of Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 1,305 U.S. adults.)

MacArthur: What does that mean for the future?

Ruggles: We are on the verge of an enormous change where because of the retirement of the Baby Boomers and the decline of fertility 20 years ago, the number of people entering the labor force is about to fall off a cliff. Plus, add in the decline of immigration and of immigrant labor lately, and that's going to compound it. In the last decade there has been an uptick in the wages of young people, and it's quite possible that pretty soon they might get higher than they were in 1973.

MacArthur: How do marital rates shape society, how we build laws and how we understand business?

Ruggles: That obviously has implications for the housing market and stuff like that. I imagine it's got a lot of implications for how people spend their time. Divorce is finally going down. It is particularly marked among young people. The reason why is because the ones who would've been most likely to divorce don't get married in the first place.

MacArthur: What about birth rates, whether they're happening in marriage or in partnerships or not?

Ruggles: It's obviously got implications for old age support. By 2040, there's going to be a huge shortfall of incoming workers, and the final retirement or die-off of the Baby Boomers will have occurred by then.

I would anticipate that there will be lots of incentives for people to mechanize production. There'll be a lot of pressure to open immigration.

MacArthur: How does that shape society and the needs of society?

Ruggles: The fertility decline is a worldwide phenomenon, and the pronatalist policies that have been adopted in other countries have had limited to zero impact. I'm not sure that it's a problem in the long run. It does mean that young people will be in short supply, and they're going to get paid more. You'll probably see a reduction in generational inequality. It could be that if the economic circumstances of young people improve, maybe they'll get married more or otherwise partner more. But there are a lot of pluses to having small birth cohorts. Colleges are wanting to recruit you, and everything is easier when you're in a small cohort compared to what came before.

MacArthur: How could things get better for incoming generations, like Gen Alpha and Gen Beta?

Ruggles: The 10- to 19-year-olds probably will be in better shape than we were. But the real beneficiaries are the really little kids now. When they hit the job market, it is going to be super good for them.

Kate MacArthur is managing editor of What the Future.



Because of the retirement of the Baby Boomers and the decline of fertility 20 years ago, the number of people entering the labor force is about to fall off a cliff.”

New views on family are changing how Americans shop and celebrate

If today's demographic trends continue, the future U.S. will have fewer marriages, fewer parents and more single-person households. Ipsos research shows that those living alone are more likely to consider friends as family (54%). As social structures evolve, how people celebrate and who they get gifts for will change, too.

These new attitudes toward family and life milestones are shaping younger Americans' relationships and their spending. To truly connect with Gen Z, retailers need to understand and adapt their offers to those shifts.

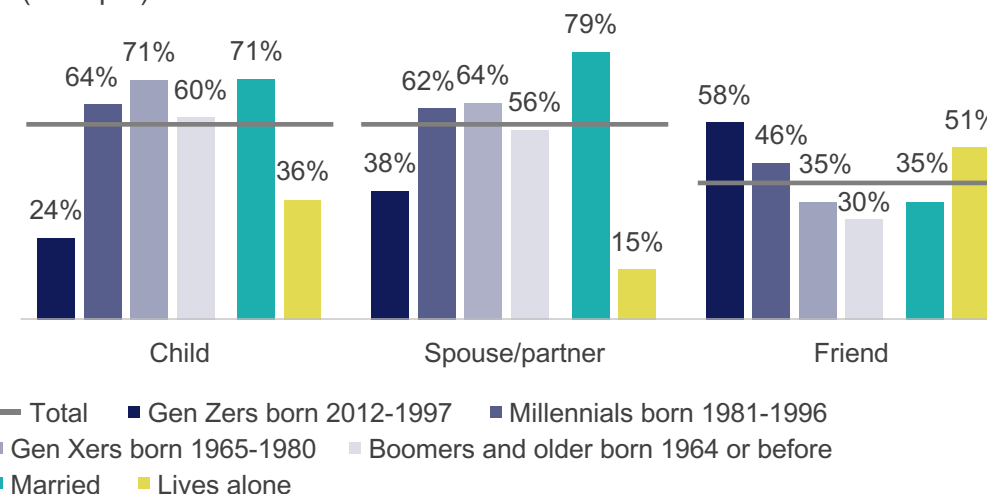
Qualitative research delivers this insight, but traditional methodologies have limits on scope, staffing and timing. Ipsos' AI Co-Moderator bridges this gap by combining both human and AI moderators to interact flexibly with respondents, in context. That can help brands get faster answers with more varied insights, whether they want to capture the nuance of family celebrations, "Friendsgiving" or everyday social life. Then, they can develop their strategies to resonate with those needs.



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Younger and solo Americans gift friends most

Q. Who do you tend to buy gifts for at family celebrations or holidays?
 (% Top 3)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 1,305 U.S. adults.)

How business can help families through the looming caregiver crisis



Rita Choula

Senior director, caregiving, AARP Public Policy Institute

As unpaid family caregivers surged 50% in the last decade to 63 million, America is approaching a caregiving cliff. Demand will further rise while available family members shrink, leaving a care gap, says AARP's Rita Choula. Already, one in three adults who care for other adults are "sandwich generation" caregivers juggling the care of children, according to the 2025 Caregiving in the U.S. report from AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving, powered by Ipsos research. Choula says immediate policy action, technology innovations and corporate involvement are urgently needed.

16mil

"Sandwich generation" Americans balance caregiving for both adults and children simultaneously.

(Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. Caregiving in the U.S. 2025.)





What The Future interview with Rita Choula

Kate MacArthur: How do you expect the growth of caregivers in the U.S. to evolve?

Rita Choula: The need for caregiving is going to increase but the availability of family members to provide care is likely going to decrease. There's also a potential decrease in availability of paid care. Then where does that leave the older adult that needs that care? We also know that as this need continues to grow, that caregiver is getting younger. One in three caregivers is under age 50.

MacArthur: What will be the needs for these caregivers over the next five or 10 years?

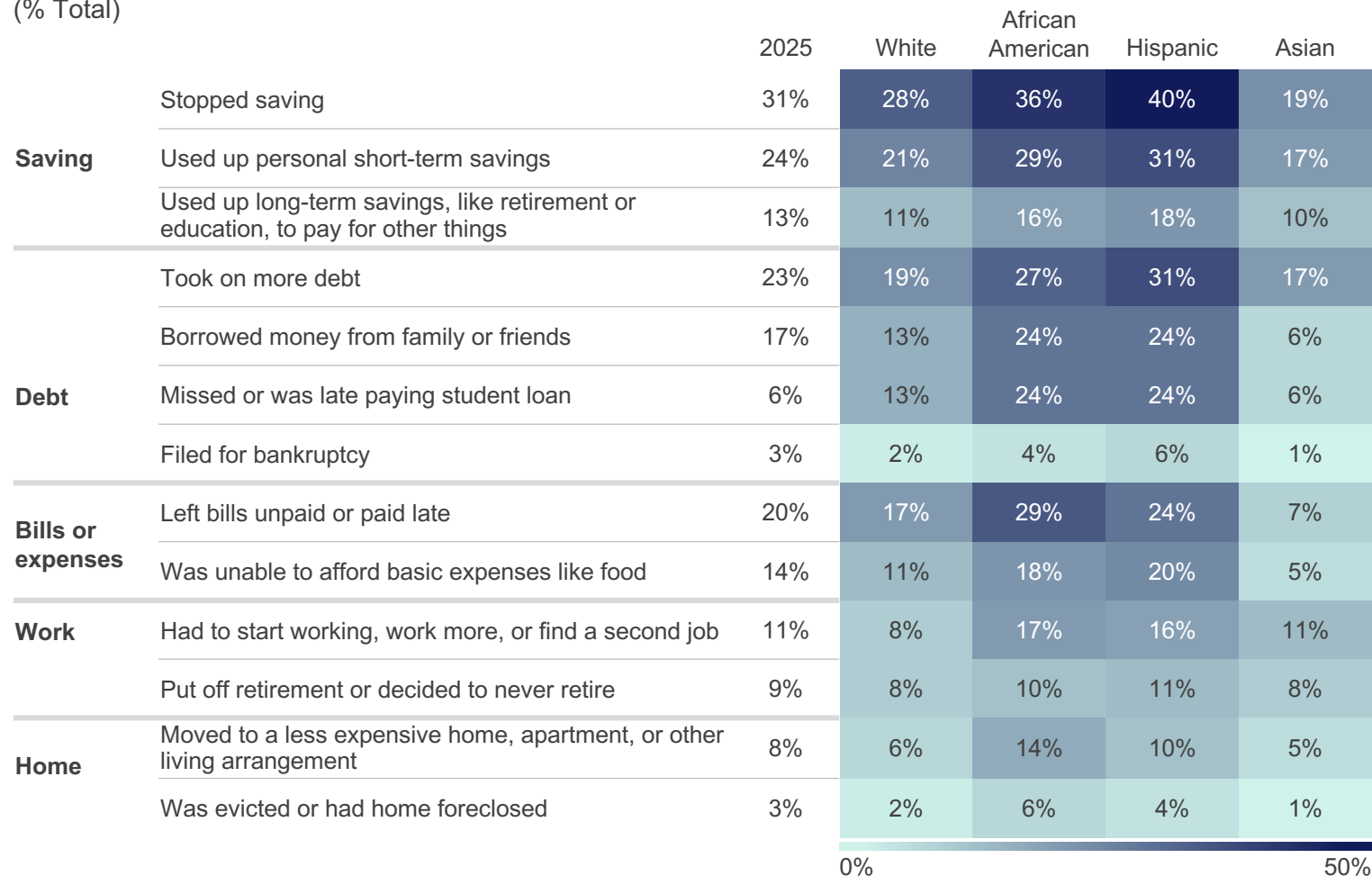
Choula: Nearly half of the caregivers face major financial consequences. They are paying over \$7,200 a year in out-of-pocket costs. They're draining their savings. They're falling into debt. Oftentimes they're struggling to afford basic needs like housing and food. Some states have paid opportunities for caregivers through Medicaid waiver programs. That is not a high amount of income coming in, but it does provide some supports to individuals. AARP also advocates for things such as paid family leave, which is very critical, as well as federal and state tax credits.

MacArthur: How urgent is it to fix this?

Choula: The time is now.

Black and Hispanic caregivers are more often hit harder with financial strain

Q. As a result of providing care to your [care recipient], have you ever experienced any of these financial things?
(% Total)



(Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. Caregiving in the U.S. 2025.)

MacArthur: What other support is needed?

Choula: Family caregivers are managing high-intensity, complex care. They're preparing specialized medical diets, and they're doing things such as advanced wound care. Almost half are saying, "We are not getting the supports and the training we need to feel confident."

MacArthur: What else are people giving up?

Choula: Many face a high level of stress. They face a high level of mental health challenges, and they're not even really going to see doctors and other providers for themselves. They're giving up care of themselves, which is very significant, particularly when we're talking about "sandwich generation" caregivers. Particularly in Millennial and Gen Z ages, they are sacrificing their careers. We're really concerned about caregivers that quit working altogether and give up their contributions to Social Security and other financial standing. They oftentimes are giving up the opportunity to be in relationships with others to build friendships, to nurture marriages.

MacArthur: Are there products or services from corporate America to support caregivers?

Choula: This is an area where there is much opportunity for growth. For far too long, caregivers were not necessarily seen, especially those ages 50 and up,

as being a strong consumer base. Family caregivers contribute billions of dollars a year from a consumer standpoint. AARP is looking to do more with consumer retailers and others to feature what these caregivers need in their shopping experience.

MacArthur: In your report, you mention emerging technologies that could alleviate pressures for caregivers. What has the most potential impact for the future?

Choula: Technology resources that allow caregivers to have some control over how care is coordinated are highly sought after. From an assisted devices perspective, as more caregivers are providing that complex care in the home, how do you use a Hoyer lift to get someone out of the bed? These devices are becoming more technology-based, and individuals need to know how to utilize them.

Another resource is around management of medications. There are technology advances that allow you to see if a pill has been removed from the pillbox for the day, or if the refrigerator has been opened. Another important thing, especially around technology, is privacy considerations, ensuring that that individual is comfortable and aware of the monitoring that may be going on.

Kate MacArthur is managing editor of What the Future.



Family caregivers contribute billions of dollars a year from a consumer standpoint."

Why family caregivers need a financial lifeline, and how brands can help

As America faces a caregiver shortage, 63 million Americans are taking up the slack — but many are going broke doing so. One in four U.S. adults juggles caregiving alongside their jobs and family duties, according to Ipsos research conducted for AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving.

These caregivers spend an average of \$7,200 each year to cover costs. For “sandwich generation” adults caring for aging parents *and* their kids, the financial toll is devastating: They’re draining retirement accounts, racking up credit card debt and cutting work hours to keep their families afloat.

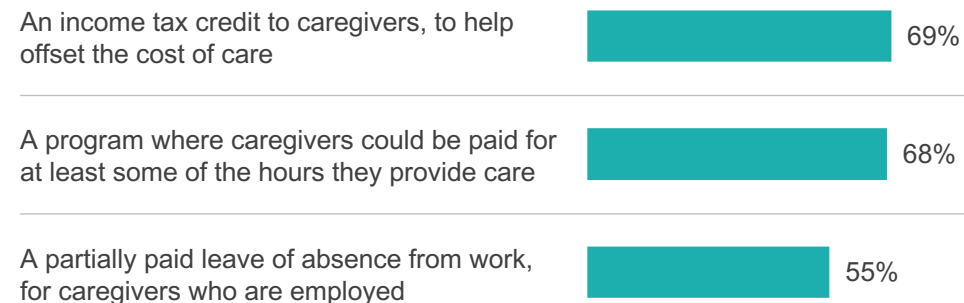
And more will step up in the years to come. A recent Ipsos study for Thrivent found that nearly one in three Americans expects to be caring for their parents in the future.

Just 17% of caregivers receive some compensation whether through Medicaid, the Veterans Administration or state programs, according to the AARP/NAC Caregiving in the U.S. 2025 report. But too few people know about these programs, and they only offset some of the burden.

Caregivers see tax credits, pay for care and employer paid time off as most helpful. It’s time for policymakers to connect them with these benefits and reduce that financial strain before families reach their breaking point.

Caregivers want cash more than time off

Q. Below are some ways that people are proposing to help caregivers financially. How helpful would you find/have found each? (% Helpful)



(Source: AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. Caregiving in the U.S. 2025.)



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How different Gen Beta personas could define the future



Joana Lenkova and Alexandra Whittington

Futurists

2025 is the first year of a new generation. Futurists Joana Lenkova of Futures Forward and Alexandra Whittington teamed up to consider what life will be like for these new kids, creating a series of six personas of Gen Beta. Among them, there's the Smart City Kid, surrounded by urban tech. There's the NeoIndigenous Hippie Kid who challenges ideas about climate resilience, drawing on revived ancient wisdom. There's even the first post-nation kid, born in space. Thinking about these kids now can set up leaders to build a better future for these generations.

88%

of Democrats worry that kids born today will have to deal with the effects of climate change, far more than Republicans (47%) and the general population (68%).

(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 1,305 U.S. adults.)



What The Future interview with Joana Lenkova and Alexandra Whittington

Matt Carmichael: What kind of inputs did you use to imagine the worlds these kids would grow up in?

Joana Lenkova: Already nearly half of the world's young people live in areas that are facing extremely high climate risk. By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities, which is up from just over 50% today, meaning that these billions of kids will grow up entirely within urban ecosystems. The market for “smart city” tech is projected to increase threefold to over \$3.7 trillion. That shows how quickly our living environments change and evolve. This tells us that both society and its underlying systems are preparing for this new generation that will live in a more complex unpredictable world with fluid and unpredictable lives.

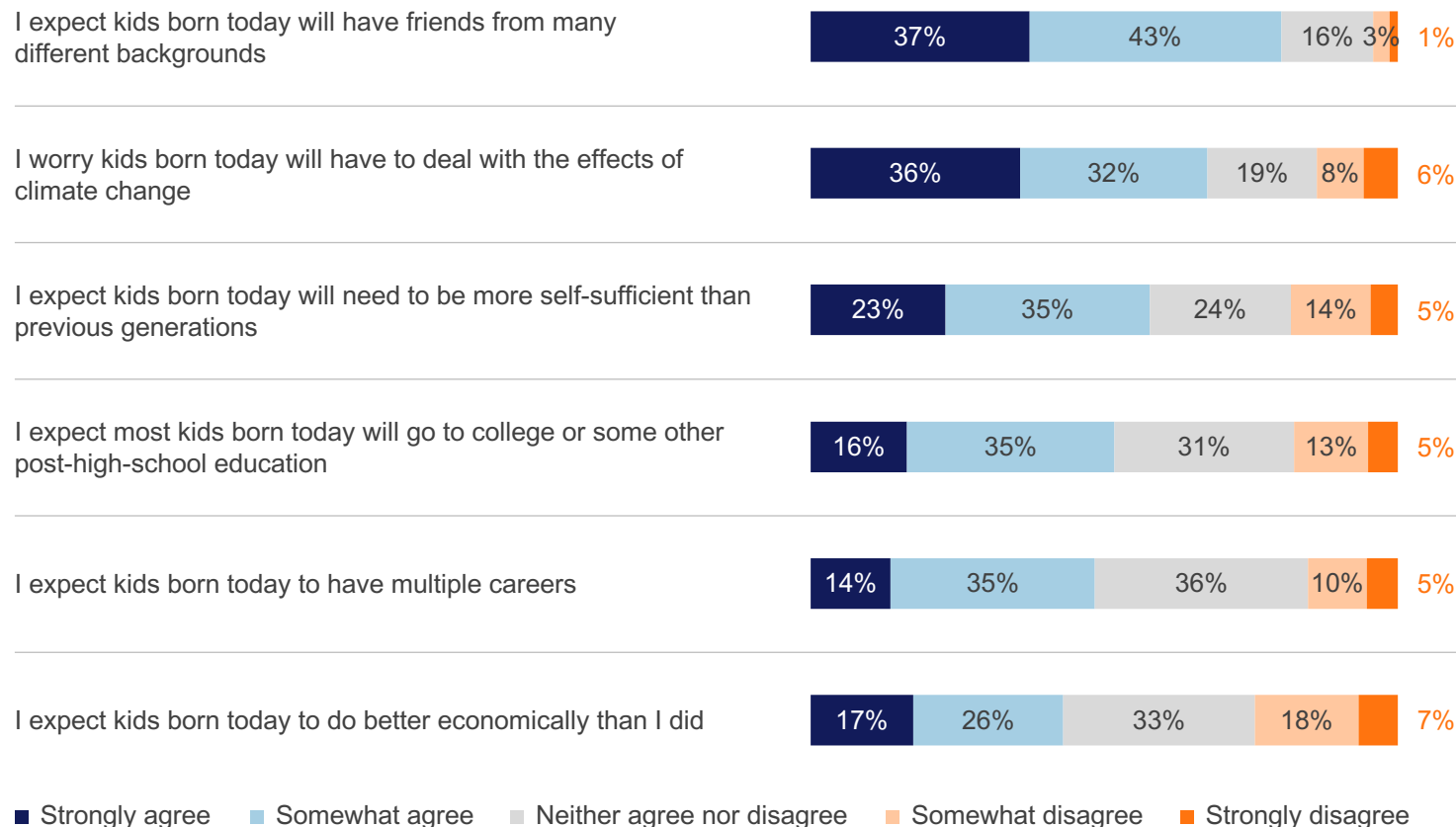
Alexandra Whittington: The idea that children could be more prominent or have a more important, even survival, role in society is not a new idea. So we're looking for the direction or hints about how the culture is changing more so than the signals themselves.

Carmichael: How is childhood itself changing?

Whittington: Children have traditionally had important jobs or roles to play in society. This idea of “childhood” is only about 150 years old, right? Life stages and phases can evolve. I think there may be new demographic categories that are going to alter not just childhood, but parenting and grandparenting.

Americans have deep concerns over challenges facing future generations

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (% Total)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 1,305 U.S. adults.)

Carmichael: How did technology surrounding today's kids factor into the personas?

Lenkova: There is a widening gap between those who have access to tech and those who are impacted severely by resource scarcity. When we are looking at these different personas, we tried to picture what the different childhoods in the future could look like. We're heading toward a future where some kids will grow up in this hyper-optimized environment where there is governance and learning and schedules, and daily life is somewhat engineered. That could look like a dystopia to someone, but at the same time it could look like utopia to someone else who doesn't have all of that.

Carmichael: Polarity comes up a lot in the personas. Why?

Lenkova: AI, robotics and synthetic biology are going to have a huge impact on how kids learn and how they communicate with each other. Tech will impact what it means to be human. But AI-free and human-made trends are accelerating as well. Parents are trying to find balance between having the kids spending time in the digital environment and being in nature, but we have climate disruption. Eighty-eight percent of adults in your survey believe climate change will shape kids' futures. That will determine how these kids live and what sort of childhoods they have.

Carmichael: What other big shifts are you watching?

Whittington: This will be the first generation in a while that hasn't experienced American hegemony. As you talk about in your [American Dream](#) issue, we're seeing different power structures in the world. We and our parents grew up with "America's No. 1." I think it's going to be strange to see a generation where that's just not in their reality.

Carmichael: How can leaders use these personas to think about the future?

Lenkova: They can help stress test assumptions about the future. One prompt would be, "How do you design for this generation that is expecting to cocreate this environment rather than just consuming it?" Or, "How do you support learning and education and creativity when in one part of the world you have AI mentors and in another you don't?"

Carmichael: Why is thinking like that useful?

Whittington: If leaders can digest and reverse engineer to their own liking some of the way we put the story together, it can be insightful in how futurists think. When you're talking about generations, we've got 20, 30 years to plan. We should take advantage of it!

Matt Carmichael is editor of What the Future.



AI, robotics and synthetic biology are going to have a huge impact on how kids learn and how they communicate with each other. Tech will impact what it means to be human."

AI chatbots steer shoppers to brands. Here's how to join the conversation

Americans with children in their household spend more on gifts than those without (See pg. 9). And in 2025, they were twice as likely as those without kids to use AI for holiday shopping.

This makes it critical for brands to understand how chatbots influence parents and other shoppers.

39%

of Americans with children in their household say they have used or plan to use AI for gift ideas or shopping lists this holiday season.

(Source: Ipsos Consumer Tracker conducted Oct. 7-8, 2025, among 1,093 U.S. adults)

New generative engine optimization (GEO) tools evaluate which brands and products are suggested by chatbots, and the sources they cite when making those recommendations. Those insights help marketers and strategists use the communication styles and channels that influence AI, making it more likely that their brand comes up when someone asks a question about their category.

But families aren't just turning to AI for ideas about what to buy. Chatbots guide users directly to retailers and, in some cases, now let them go from query to checkout without changing tabs. As the technology evolves and platforms commercialize, a growing share of shopper experiences could transpire entirely within chatbot windows. The competition to influence those conversations will be fierce. Brands will need marketing strategies rooted in GEO to stay in the conversation and capture that spending.



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Screen time is families' biggest tension. Here are 5 reforms they need



Marissa Edmund

State policy lead, Family Online Safety Institute

In What the Future issues on Teens and Parenting, the biggest tensions in the household were around screen time and online behavior. Having tech so prevalent in kids' lives is uncharted waters, and safety is a concern. The Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) is a nonprofit funded by member organizations that include many of the largest tech and gaming companies. Its state policy lead, Marissa Edmund, explains how informed policies and education can empower families to efficiently manage digital risks and benefits to ensure privacy, safety and balanced screen time.

73%

of parents say their kids have access to a smartphone, up from 67% in 2024, while 70% have access to a tablet, up from 64% in 2024.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 501 U.S. parents of child under 18; and Ipsos survey conducted Jan 18-22, 2024, among 500 U.S. parents of child under 18.)



What The Future interview with Marissa Edmund

Matt Carmichael: From previous *What the Future* issues (and my own house!) we know there are lots of challenges with technology to address as a family. Can policy help?

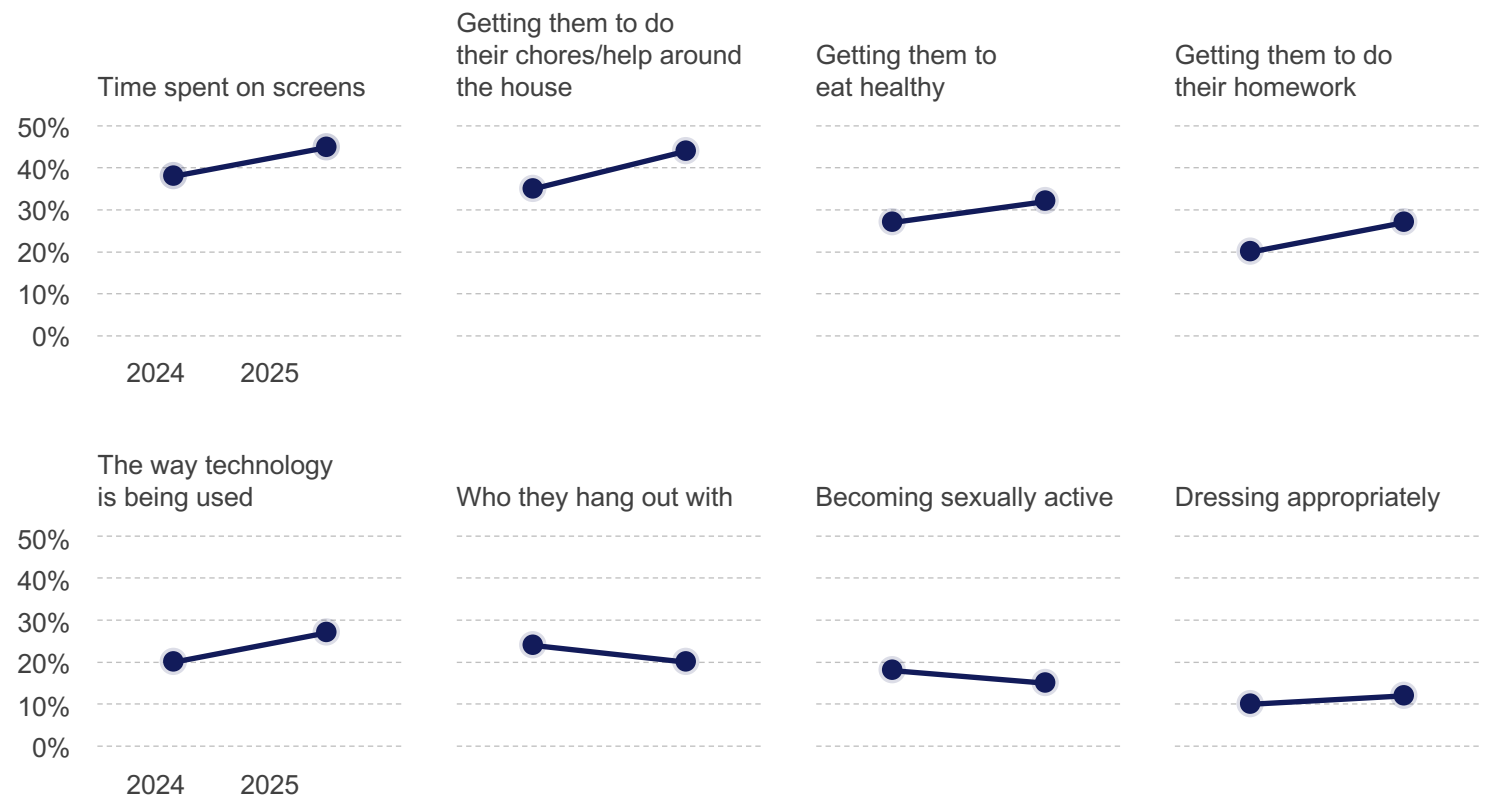
Marissa Edmund: Definitely. Policymakers are hearing from their constituents that this is an issue. On all levels, everyone wants to grapple with the topic of kids' screen time and safety, but policymakers need to understand how technology works. They're working on hundreds of issues, and they don't always have that baseline education on how technology works. There's a difference between a social media platform, a gaming system or a website.

Carmichael: I suspect education is important for the family, too.

Edmund: First is ensuring that parents know the types of platforms that their kids are using. At FOSI, we have a "Platforms Explained" series that says in very layman's terms what each of these platforms does. Then, instead of just a complete rejection of the platform, parents can understand what it is. Next is having media and digital literacy programs within schools so children are learning what is safe and appropriate behavior online and how to identify what's misinformation and disinformation.

Screen time and chores jump out as family tension points

Q. When thinking about possible tensions you may have with your child(ren), which of the following are the top issues in your household? (% Selected as top 3)



(Source: Ipsos Future of Family Survey conducted Sept. 25-26, 2025, among 240 U.S. parents of children ages 12-17; and Ipsos survey conducted Jan 18-22, 2024, among 265 U.S. parents of children ages 12-17.)

Carmichael: As a parent, it's hard to keep up and I don't often feel like I have the tools to do so.

Edmund: Something that's super helpful is ensuring that users can easily access those tools that help create the experiences they want to have online. Your kid might say they are interested in a gaming platform and there's a chat feature. Can parents turn this chat feature off? Being able to access some of those user controls is very important so it gives agency to the user, and they're able to have the experience online that works for them.

Carmichael: What would be the most helpful policy shift?

Edmund: We would like to see a federal data privacy law so we can start implementing online safety measures that could help protect kids online. Many states already have implemented their own privacy laws. But a baseline federal data privacy law would be helpful so users can feel comfortable that their data is protected, that they can trust platforms, and that their data is being protected while they engage with these platforms.

Carmichael: There are three legs to all of this: time spent on screens, privacy and actual safety. How do you balance those priorities?

Edmund: We want to protect kids on the internet, not from the internet. We want to shield our kids from the

worst of online experiences. Beginning in that middle school, high school age, the training wheels come off metaphorically in the digital space.

We would love to see platforms advertise their parental and user controls so we're able to block unwanted contact and folks that we don't want, or block certain features rather than entire platforms. As children age, they should have a trusted adult to speak with if something happens online and be able to use those controls for themselves.

Carmichael: AI is driving a lot of fear in privacy and safety. What kind of policies do you think we need as these technologies proliferate?

Edmund: We hope any legislation that comes out is rooted in research and not fear-based. Collaboration among all of those involved, including parents and families will help to ensure that industry is being held accountable and is being responsible about the technologies they're building. It will also help ensure that policymakers are responsive to what parents and families want.

I believe that smaller, more narrowly focused pieces of legislation are going to be most effective.

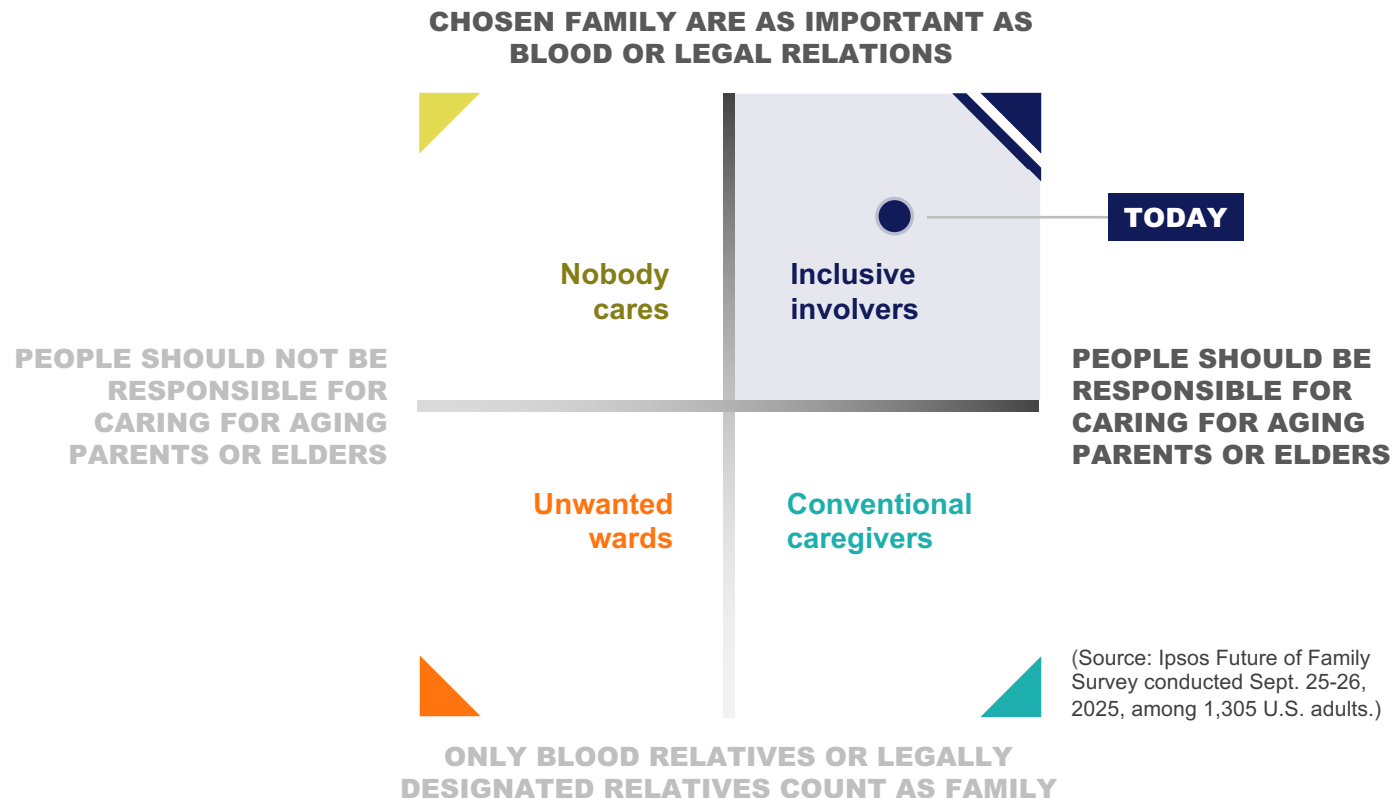
Matt Carmichael is editor of What the Future.



We want to protect kids on the internet, not from the internet.”

Reconciling family definitions with duty to care

The future is always in tension. We can measure those contradictions today with forced-choice questions. We plotted two responses against each other in a classic 2x2 grid. If nothing changes, we'll stay where we are. But this way you can see how far opinion would have to shift to move us into a different quadrant in the future.



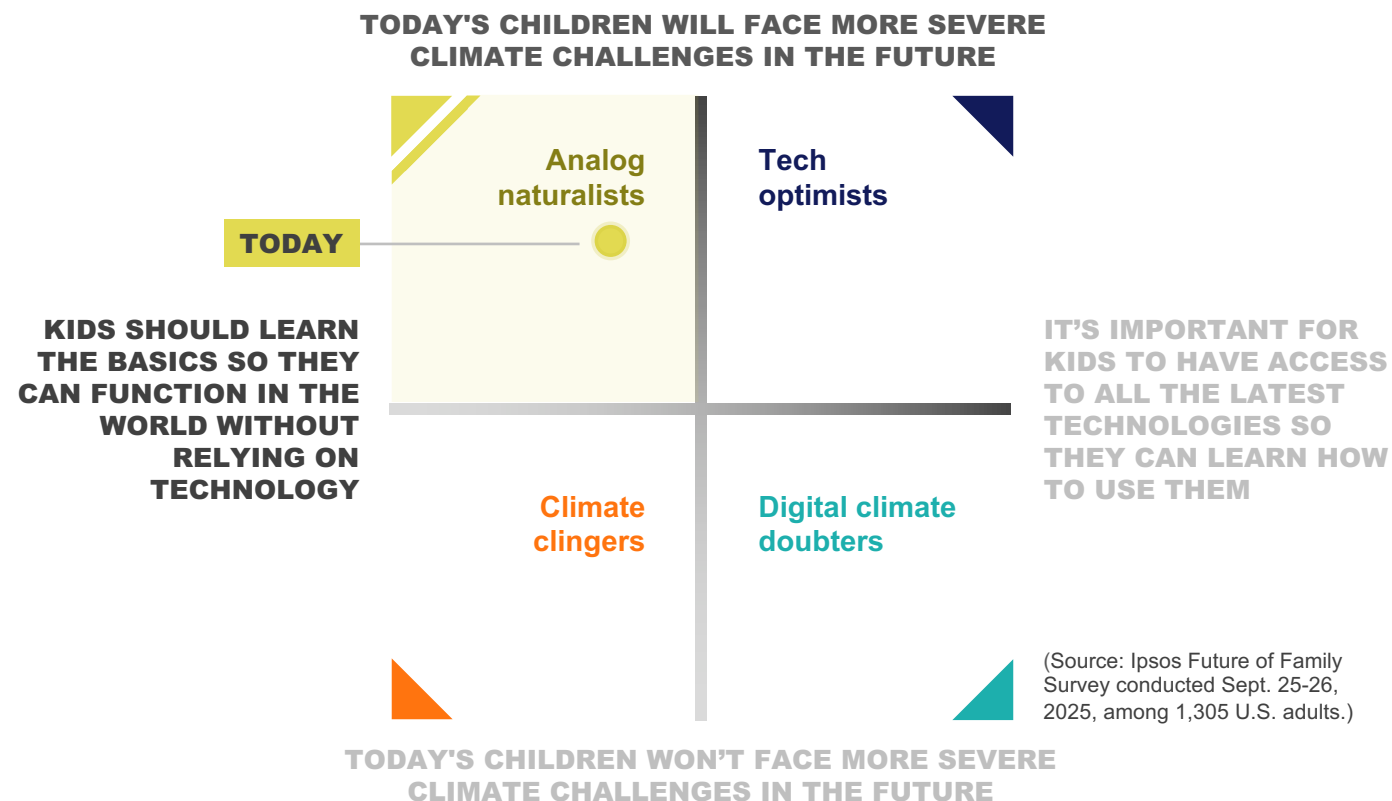
Today, 76% of Americans agree with the longstanding tradition of family having an obligation to care for elder relatives. At the same time, 80% of people consider chosen family as important as blood or legal kin.

If this view continues, it could encourage more people to share responsibility for elders as we face a care gap. But it could also lead to fewer people feeling personally accountable, which could widen the care gap. Without new policies or mechanisms to support shared caregiving networks, tension over who is responsible may rise, which could drive people into the lower right quadrant, especially as more older people live alone, longer.

With fewer young people, families could face widespread hardships if social or financial support isn't expanded. Then, people might reject their duty to care, as in the lower left quadrant. If so, more elders could be abandoned and forced into guardianships or even homelessness.

Balancing environmental resilience and digital readiness

The future is always in tension. We can measure those contradictions today with forced-choice questions. We plotted two responses against each other in a classic 2x2 grid. If nothing changes, we'll stay where we are. But this way you can see how far opinion would have to shift to move us into a different quadrant in the future.



This future presents a complex challenge: the rise of climate uncertainties alongside rapid technological advancement. Most Americans, 77%, expect that today's children will face more severe climate conditions. Meanwhile, 65% prioritize the importance of learning fundamentals over digital readiness.

This puts Americans in the upper left quadrant today. But these views could leave the next generation technologically underprepared. To move to the upper right quadrant, they would need a dramatic shift in opinion, embracing both technology and ecological adaptability.

If people prioritize technology access and dismiss climate concerns, opinion could shift to the lower right quadrant. But they would risk the loss of essential life skills. On the other hand, if people's support for technology weakens, public opinion could shift to the lower left quadrant, making children unprepared for both climate and technology changes.

Questions for the future



Retail

How can brands make sure AI chatbots are recommending their products?

How can stores use the gift-buying habits of families with children to improve their marketing strategies and holiday promotions?

How can retailers support more gift-buying for people without families or kids during holidays who shop for friends instead?



Demographics and society

How can government and NGOs make it easier for people to access financial help for caregiving?

How can schools update their lessons to prepare students for a future with new generations like Gen Beta?

How can companies work together with policymakers and families to create effective online safety policies backed by research?



Caregiving

How can companies and policymakers make it less expensive for family caregivers to find lasting care solutions?

What proof and data are needed to show lawmakers the economic and social benefits of supporting and promoting proposals like paid family leave and tax credits for caregivers?

How should policies about caregiving define families to include chosen families or other nontraditional groups?



Financial services

How can banks create financial products that work for nontraditional families, including friends and singles?

How can banks develop financial products to support group investments among friends or chosen families rather than traditional family setups?



Technology and media

How can brands help gamify household chores to get kids to do them more consistently and enjoyably?

What are the best rewards to encourage young people to spend less time on screens outside of school?

How can industries get ready for the ethical implications of AI, robotics and synthetic biology that will affect how incoming generations learn and communicate?



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