

Child Welfare Initiative 2023 Harris National Poll Results

November 8, 2023

Prepared by The Harris Poll on behalf of the
Bipartisan Policy Center



Methodology



Audience:
2,013 U.S. adults age 18+



Survey Timing:
15 minutes
Fielded from June 29 – July 19, 2023



Mode:
The research was conducted online in the US by The Harris Poll on behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center



Weighting:
Data are weighted to ensure results are projectable to the U.S. general population as well as Georgia and Ohio populations, respectively

Key Finding 1

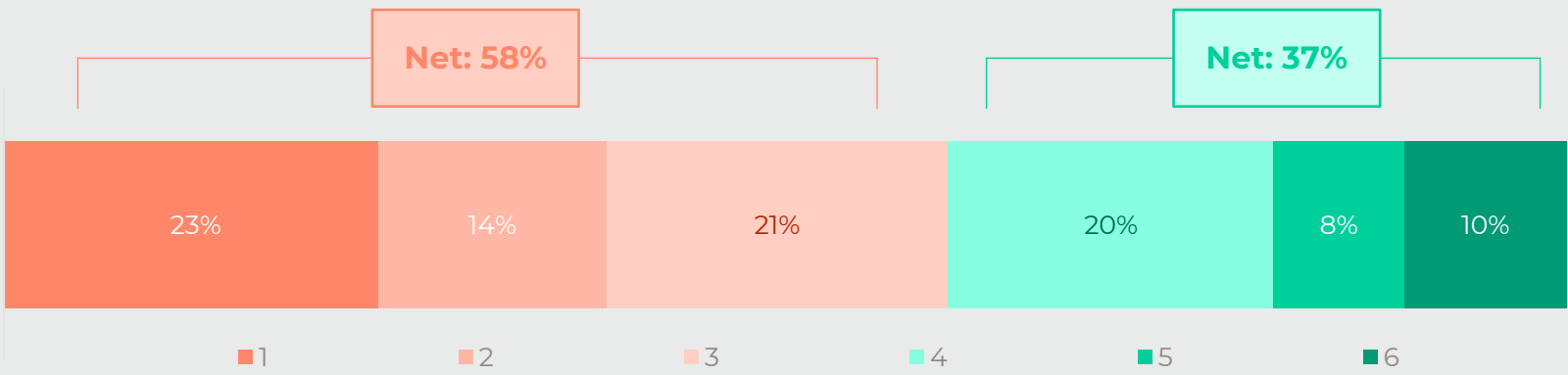
Largely, American adults, whether they are parents or not, understand that parenting is a difficult job and the majority tend to think that parents should have the authority to parent their children how they please.



6 in 10 adults lean towards favoring parents' authority to raise their children as they see fit

In your opinion, in balancing parents' authority with the government's interest in ensuring the well-being of children, should our country...?

Heavily favor parents' authority



Heavily favor the government's interest in ensuring children's well-being

89%
of Americans think that parenting is a hard job

↑
Mean: 3.06

Key Finding 2

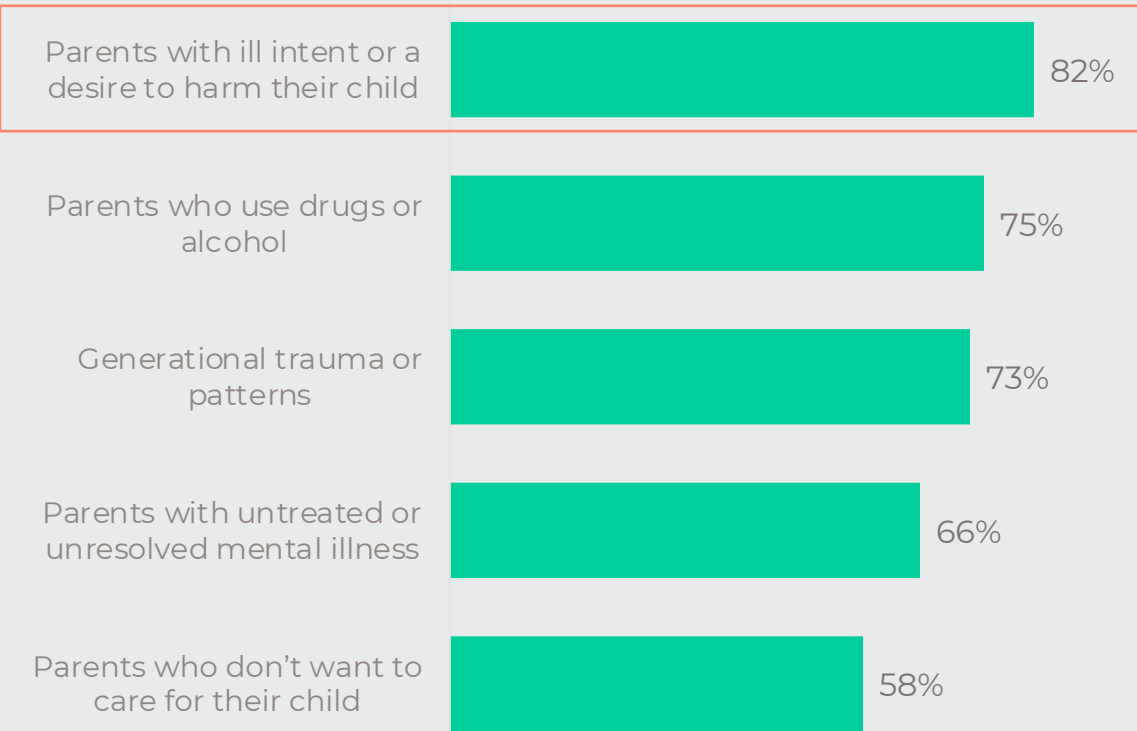
While child abuse is largely seen as an outcome of parents who want to harm their child, there is more room for redemption and second chances for neglectful parents.

Ultimately though, two-thirds of Americans think that overall, child neglect and abuse is intentional or willful on the parents' part, not simply a product of circumstances.

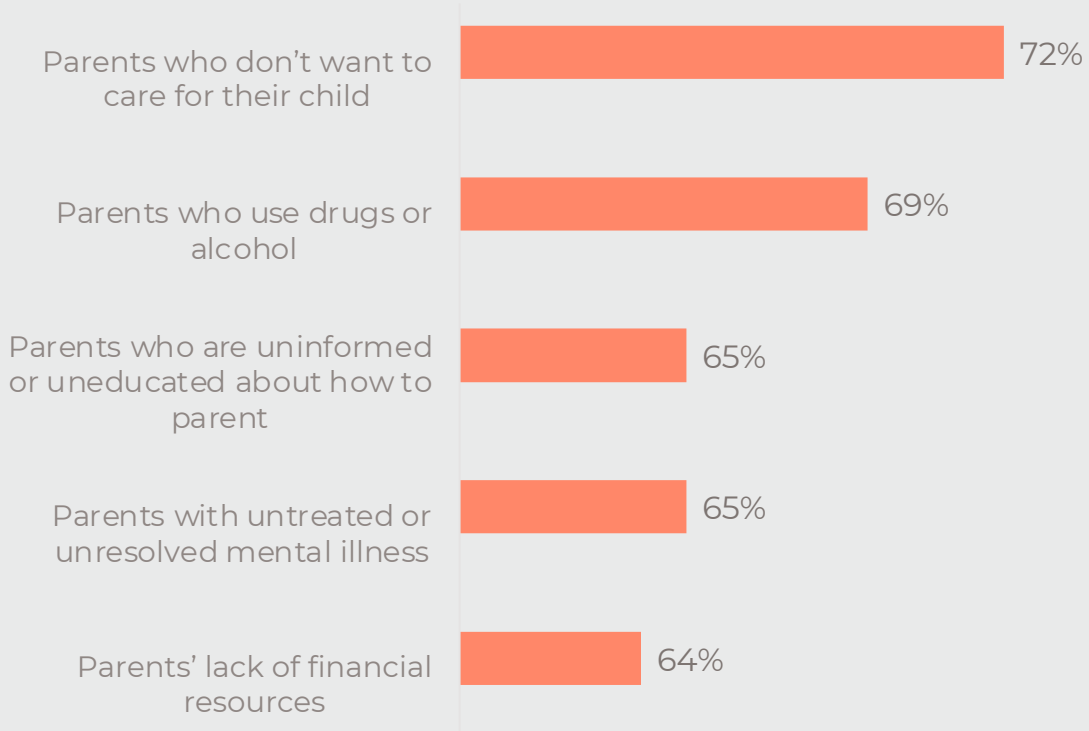


Child abuse is mostly attributed to parents with ill intent or a desire to harm their child, while neglect is attributed to a variety of possible factors

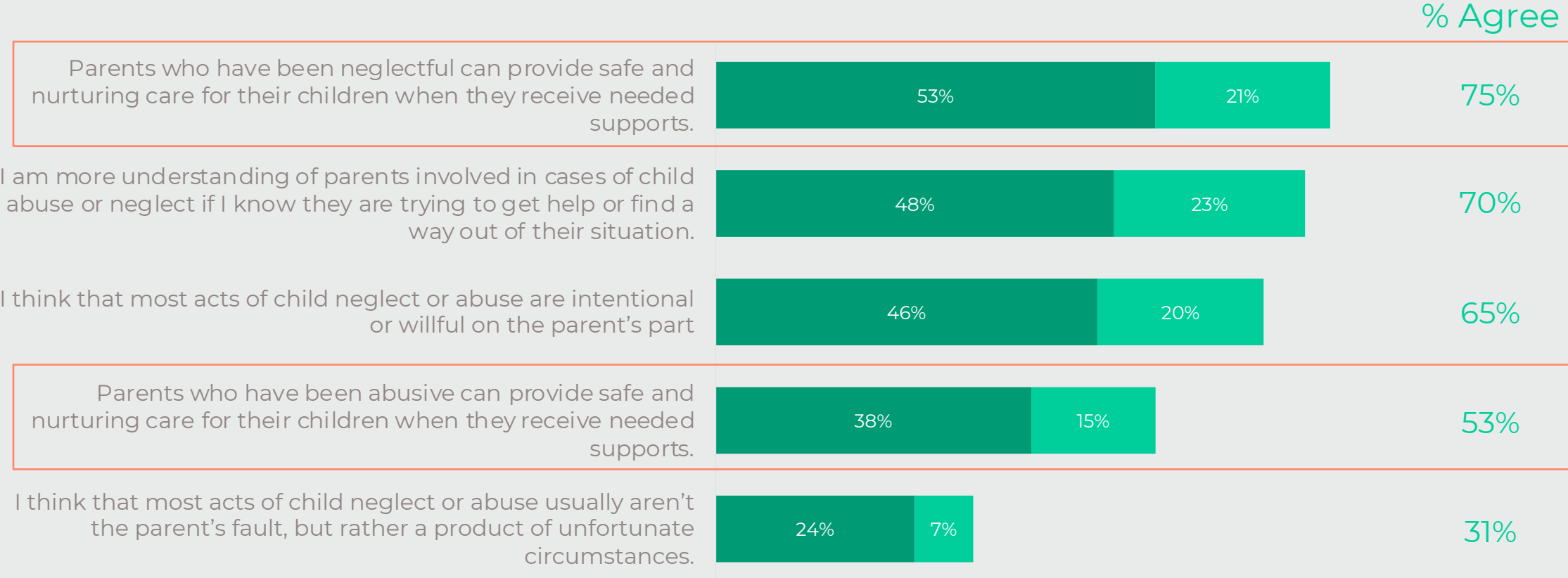
Perceived Top 5 Contributors to Child Abuse



Perceived Top 5 Contributors to Child Neglect



3 in 4 Americans agree that parents who have been neglectful can care for their children when they receive needed supports; half say the same for abuse



Key Finding 3

Most Americans know what they know about the US child welfare system through the media.

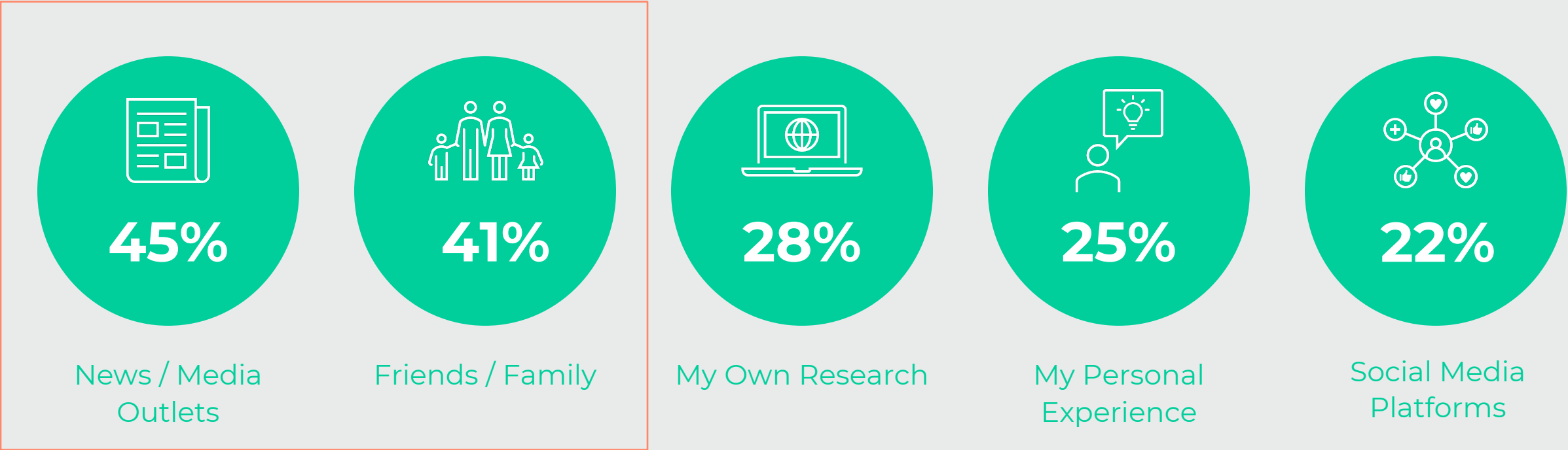
While they lean slightly more positively than negatively in their overall perception of the system, most err towards thinking that the system is broken and incapable of being fixed.

The American public understands that the system is overwhelmed and that most media coverage of the system only takes place when something bad happens.



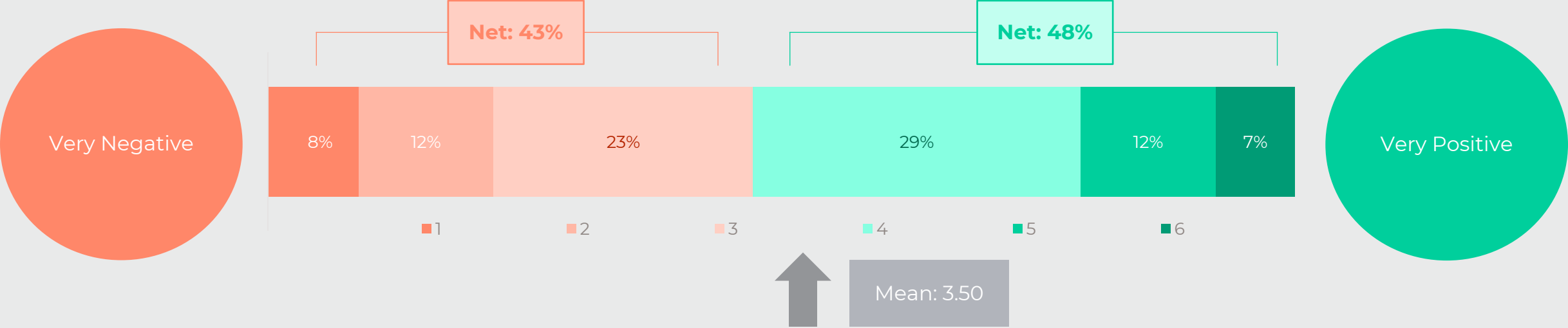
Americans mostly have learned what they know about the current child welfare system through news outlets and their friends or family

Top 5 Sources that Informs What the Public Knows About the U.S. Child Welfare System



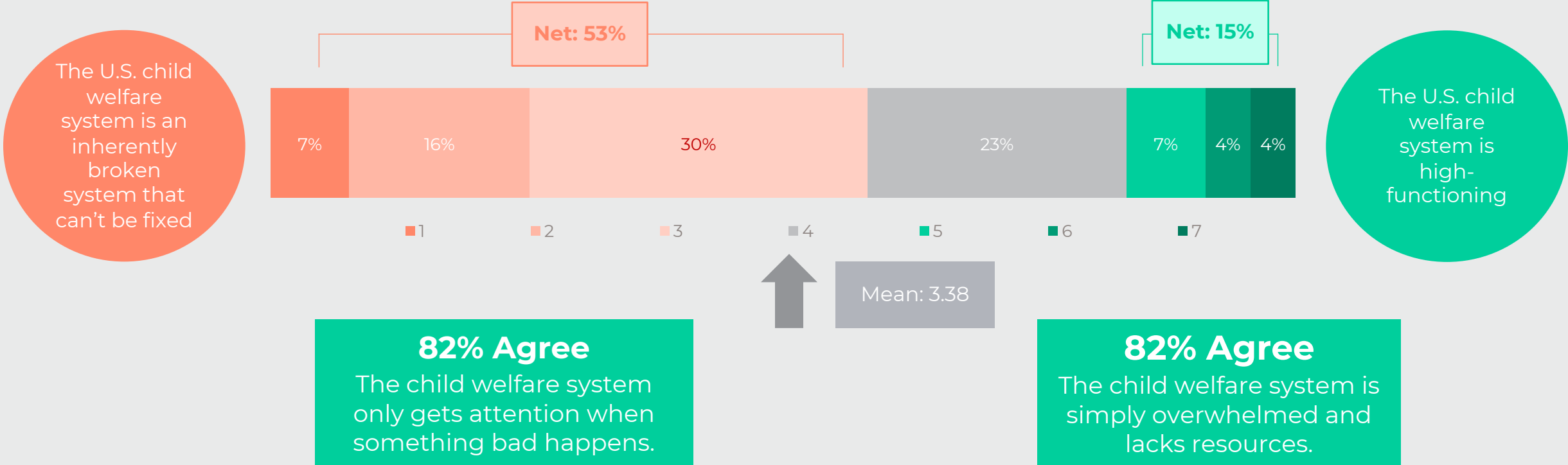
Americans lean slightly more positively than negatively in their overall perception of the system

Overall, how positive or negative is your perception of the current U.S. child welfare system?



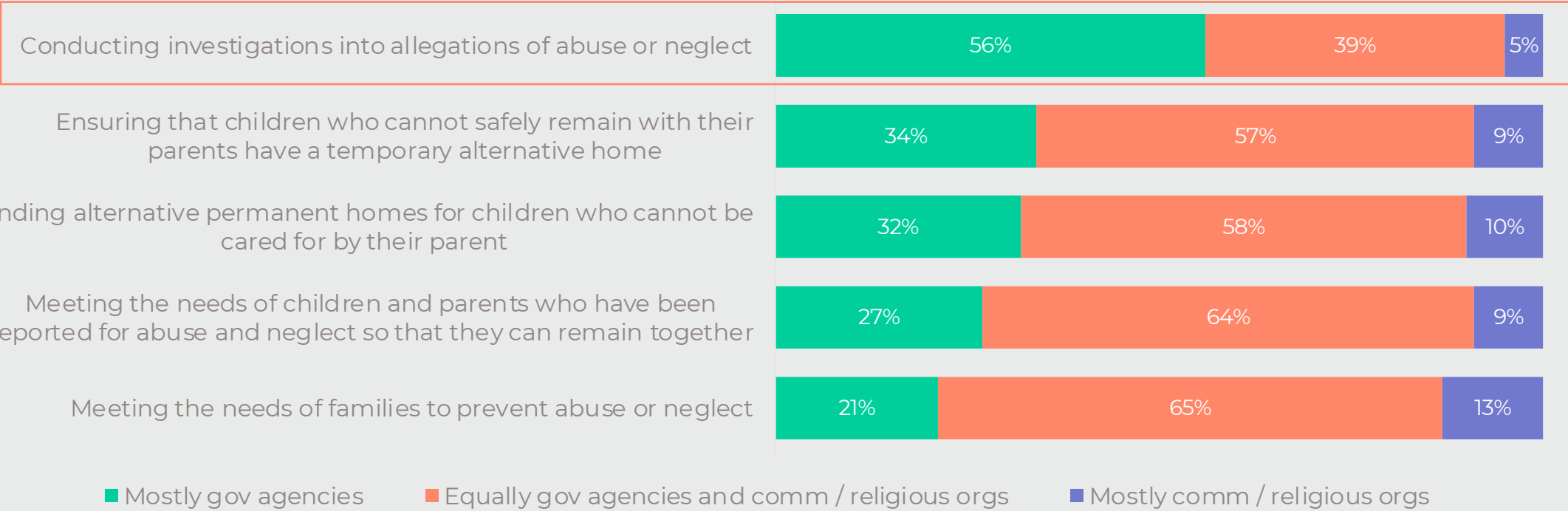
But, in terms of the functionality of the current system, most think that at best the system functions the way that it was designed to operate

Overall, how would you rate how the current U.S. child welfare system functions?



Adults see child welfare as a joint responsibility between gov agencies and community orgs with the exception of investigating reports

Entity Believed to be Primarily Responsible for Activities



Key Finding 4

The American public is split 50/50 in terms of familiarity with the US child welfare system.

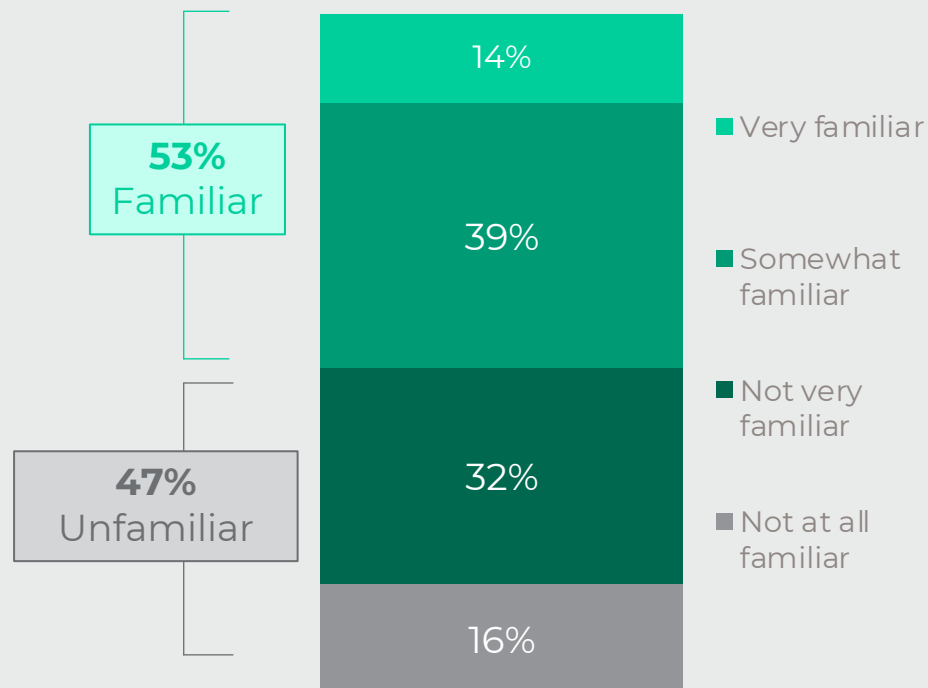
Adults appear similarly divided as to how the system should operate in an ideal world in terms of strengthening families vs. protecting children.

However, when presented with the tradeoffs and the gray area that authorities often face during investigations, they err on the safe side, saying that authorities should investigate all reports.

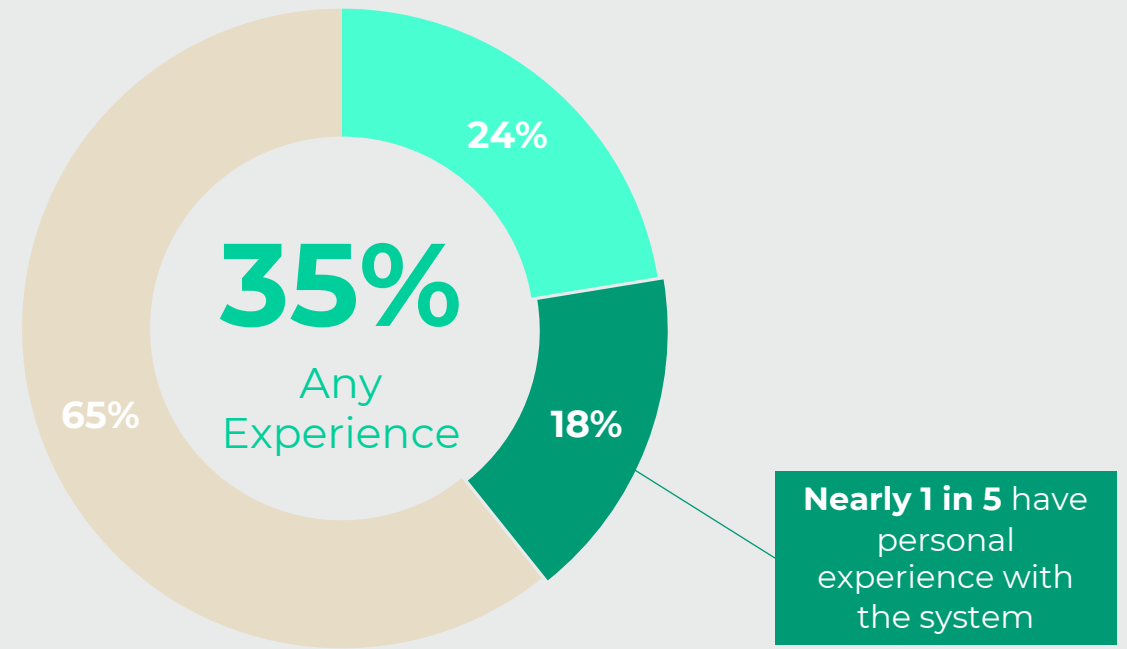


Familiarity with the child welfare system varies – half of Americans say they are familiar; half say they are not and over 1 in 3 have experience with the system

Familiarity with Child Welfare System



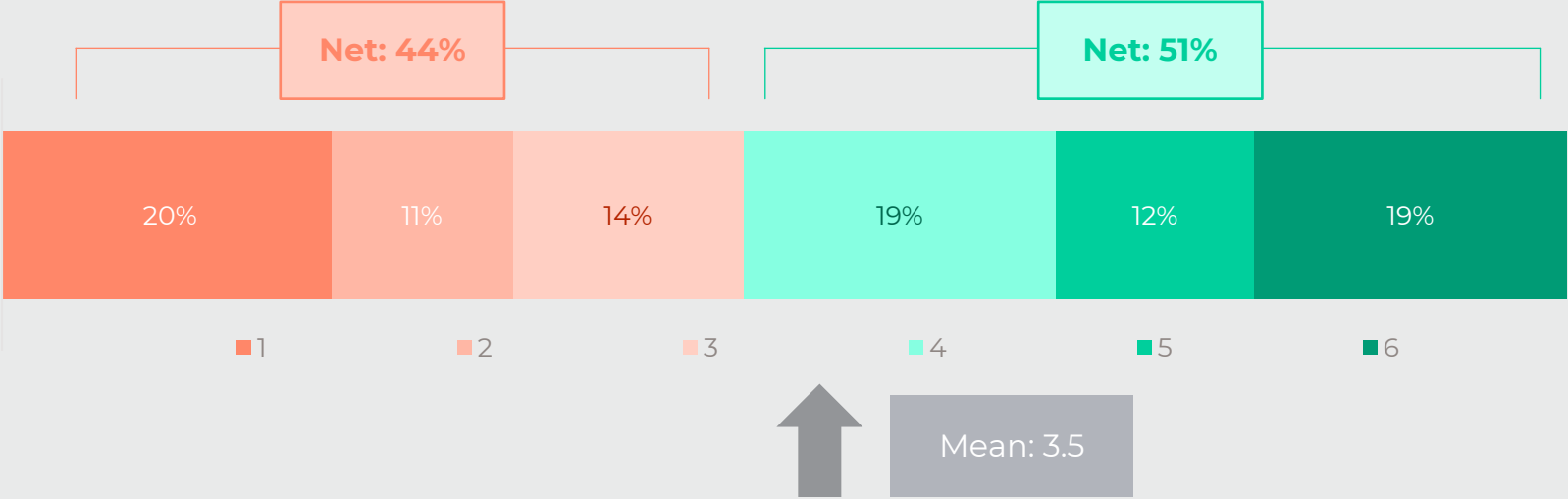
Personal Experience with System



Americans slightly lean towards the welfare system's purpose being strengthening families over protecting children from their families

In an ideal world, which of the following statements most closely reflects your position on what the primary purpose of the child welfare system in this country should be?

Primarily protecting children at risk of abuse or neglect by their families

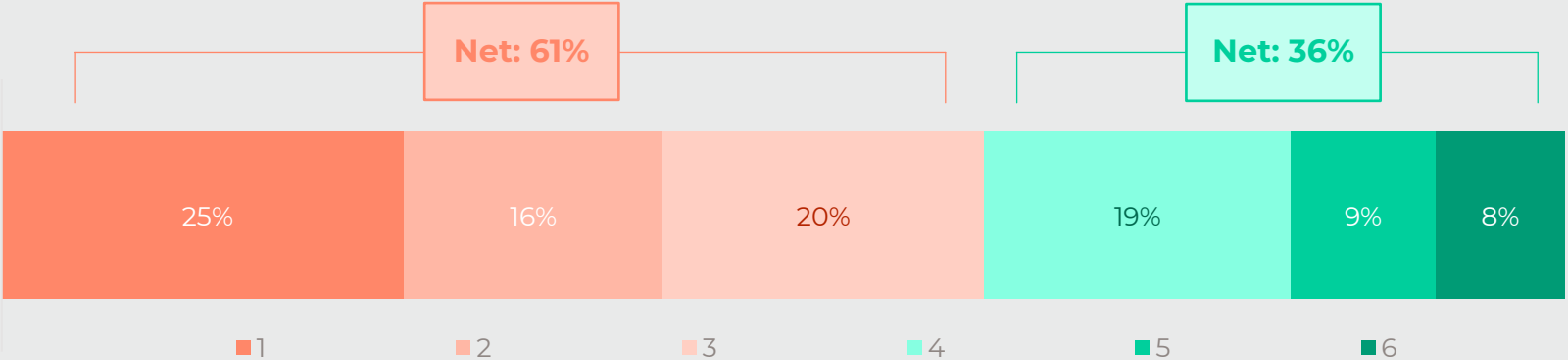


Primarily strengthening families' ability to care for their children

Americans lean towards authorities investigating every report, even if that means that some parents might be investigated unnecessarily

In your opinion, which of the following statements most closely reflects your position on how the U.S. child welfare system should work when deciding whether to investigate reports of abuse or neglect in these scenarios?

Investigate every report, even if that means that some parents might be investigated unnecessarily.



Only investigate reports where there is compelling evidence that abuse or neglect has occurred, or is occurring, even if some legitimate reports aren't investigated.

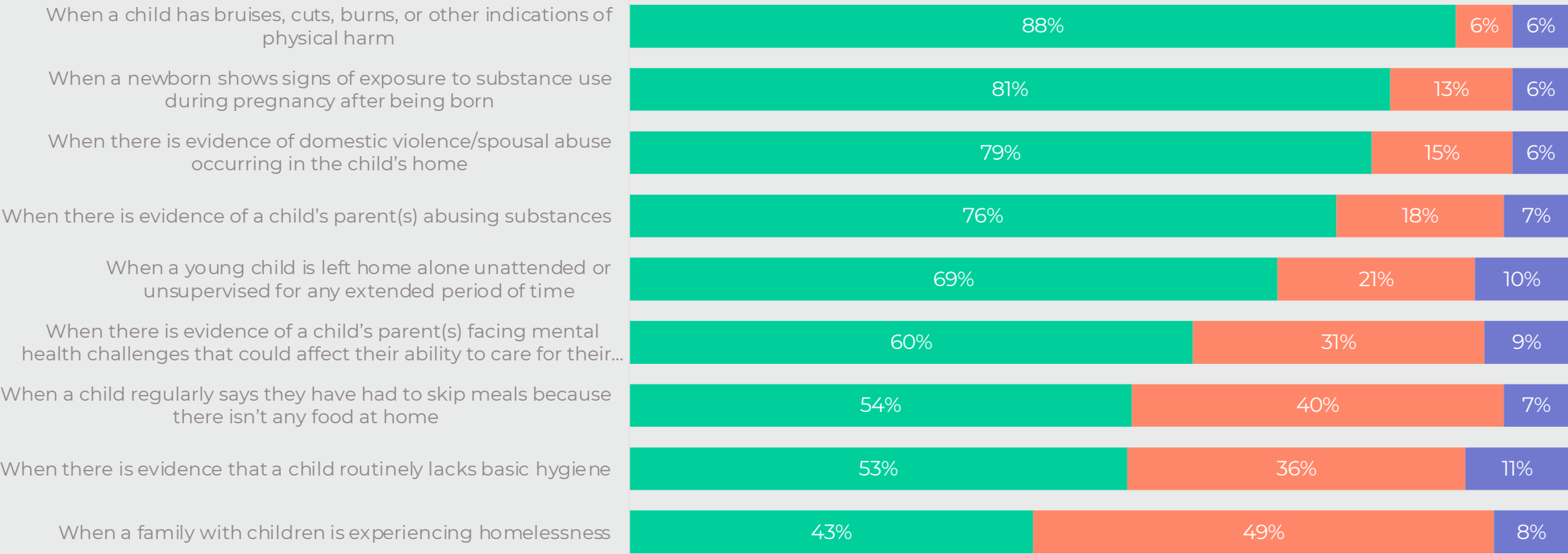
62%
of Americans say that they would need first-hand knowledge or a strong reason to suspect a child has been or is being harmed to feel comfortable filing a report

↑
Mean: 2.9

60%
of Americans think that authorities should need reports detailing first-hand knowledge or a strong reason to suspect a child has been or is being harmed

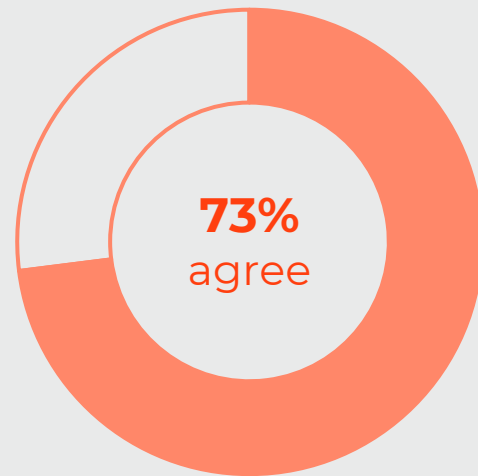
The public believes that most instances with evidence of abuse / neglect warrant investigation from CW authorities; are less clear on homelessness and hygiene

Instances When CW Should Investigate vs. Other Agency Should Offer Support

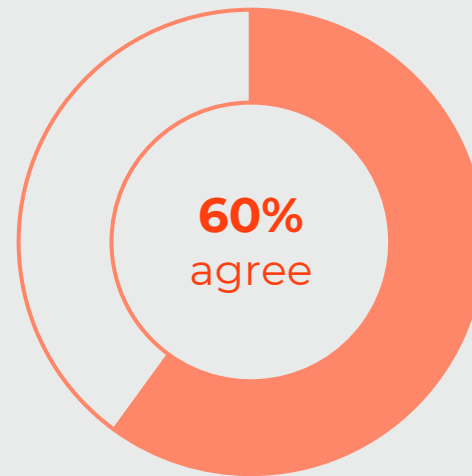


However, most Americans think that decisions about intervention are influenced by socioeconomic or racial biases

Attitudes About Systemic Biases in Intervention Decisions



Too often, decisions on whether the child welfare system should intervene in families are influenced by socioeconomic/poverty biases.



Too often, decisions on whether the child welfare system should intervene in families are influenced by racial biases.

Key Finding 5

The US public thinks that the system should keep children with their families in situations of child removal and that parents should have more time to address challenges.

Before moving on to permanent rehoming, Americans feel strongly that any suitable extended family / kin options be exhausted first.

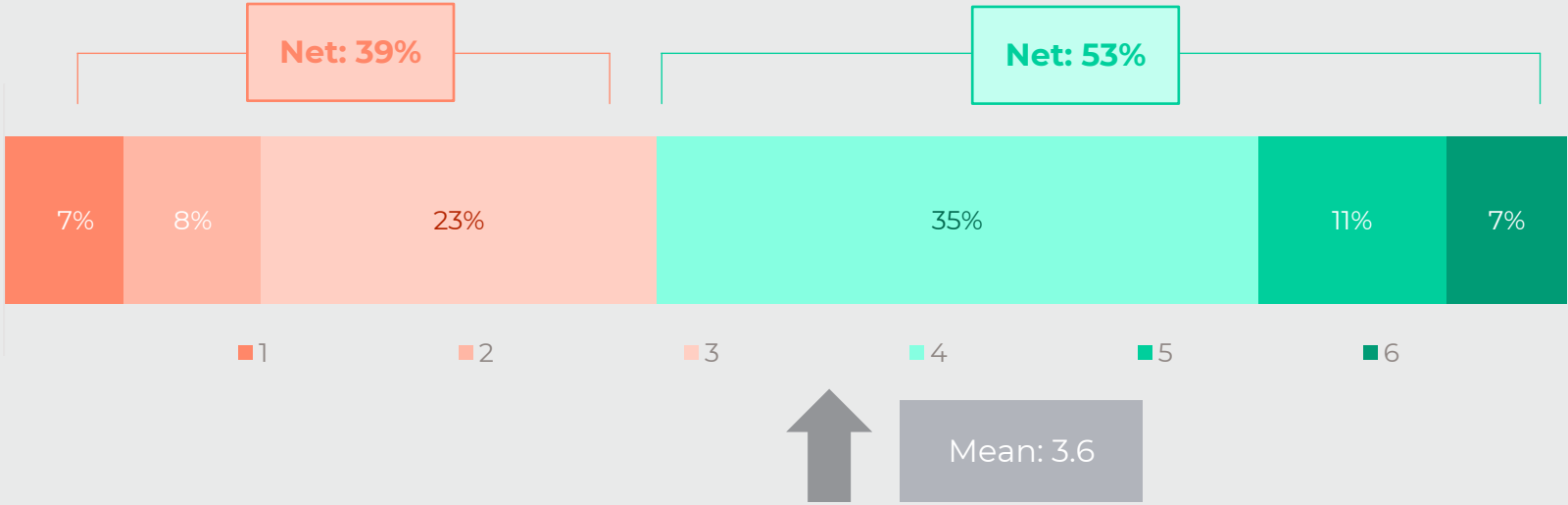
Further, if adoption must take place, biological parents should still be able to maintain safe and ongoing relationships with their children.



When it comes to removing a child from their family after an investigation, Americans lean towards the system keeping the child with their family

In your opinion, which of the following statements most closely reflects your position on how the U.S. foster care system should work when it comes to considering removing a child from their families?

Heavily favor the system removing the child from their home, even if removal might not be absolutely necessary.

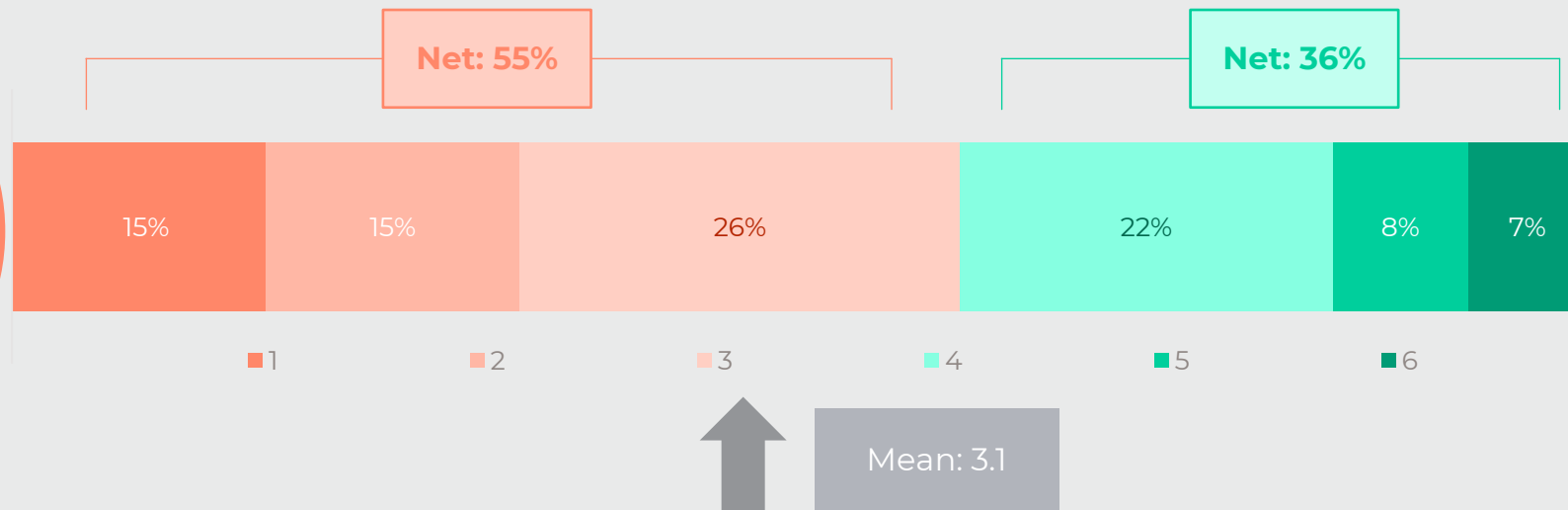


Heavily favor the system keeping the child with their family, even if the risk of future harm is unclear.

U.S. adults favor the system giving parents more time to address challenges and reunify, even if it means more time in foster care for their child

In your opinion, which of the following statements most closely reflects your position on how the U.S foster care system should work when deciding how long parents should be given to address challenges?

Heavily favor the system giving parents more time to address challenges and reunify with their children, even if it means that children spend more time in foster care.



Heavily favor the system minimizing the amount of time that children remain in foster care, even if it means that parents and children are less likely to be reunited.

Americans agree that extended family should be given priority and supported when children require placement

CW authorities should identify extended family members to take in children before resorting to foster care with somebody the child does not already know.



% Agree

90%

Extended family members should receive similar screening, support and resources as foster parents when they take on full-time care of children.



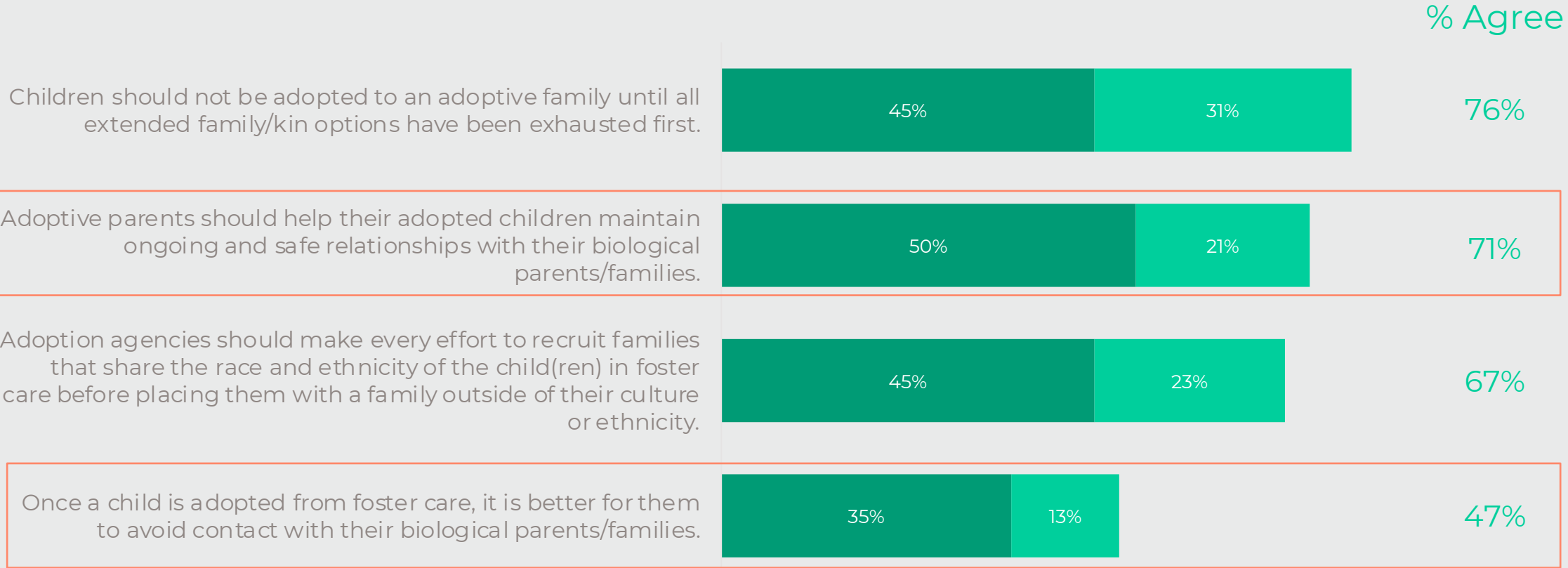
90%

Children should not be adopted to an adoptive family until all extended family/kin options have been exhausted first.



76%

Most Americans feel if adoption must take place, biological parents should still be able to maintain safe and ongoing relationships with their children



Method Statement:

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bipartisan Policy Center among 3,635 US adults aged 18+. The sample was divided into three groups: The national sample which included 2,013 respondents from all over the U.S., Georgia oversample which included 813 Georgia residents, and Ohio oversample with 809 Ohio residents. The survey was conducted from June 29 – July 19, 2023.

Data for the main sample is weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, household income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Data for Georgia and Ohio oversamples is weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, marital status, household size, household income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within the following percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

- Main sample, accurate to within ± 2.9 percentage points
- Georgia Oversample, accurate to within ± 4.6 percentage points
- Ohio Oversample, accurate to within ± 4.8 percentage points

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.