

# 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



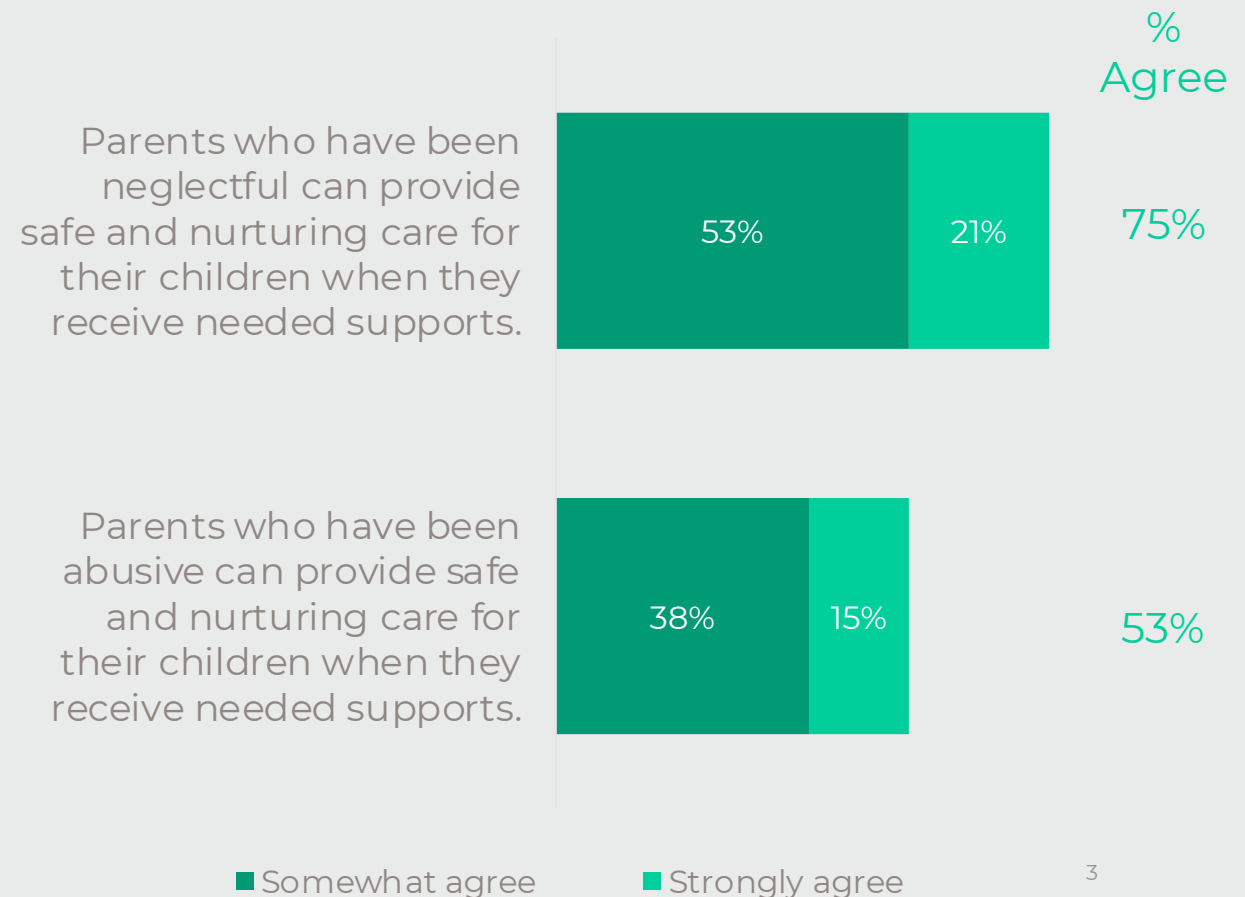
**Mode:**  
The research was conducted online in the US by The Harris Poll on behalf of the Bipartisan Policy Center



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

# Parenting is hard, but abuse and neglect are seen as willful, though US adults see more potential for redemption in scenarios of neglect vs. abuse

- **9 out of 10 Americans** agree that parenting is hard
- 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
- **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



# Americans believe that agencies should err on the side of caution in considering investigation, but express concern over bias in decision making

- Americans lean towards authorities investigating every report, even if that means that some parents might be investigated unnecessarily.
- **Three quarters of Americans** think that decisions about intervention are influenced by socioeconomic bias, 6 in 10 believe decisions are influenced by racial bias

## Position on How System Should Work When Deciding Whether to Investigate Reports

Net: 61%

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

vs.

Net: 36%

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

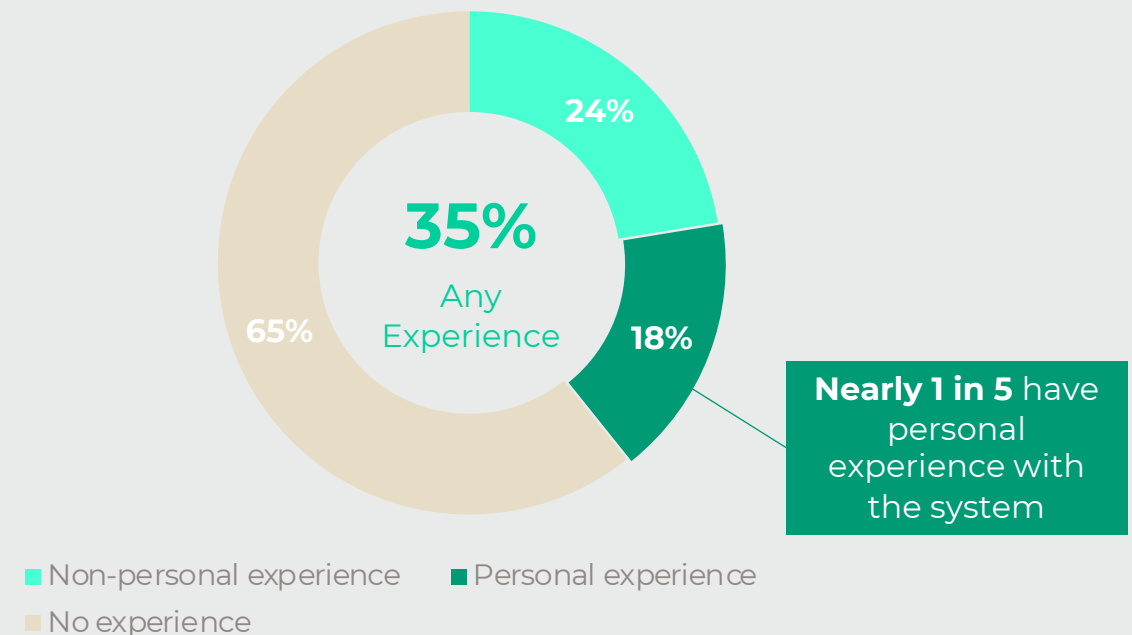
# US public recognizes the complexity of the welfare system, and a third of Americans have experience with the system

More than **1 in 3 U.S. adults** have direct experience with the child welfare system

**Two-thirds** agree that child safety and family assistance should be a shared effort between government and community/religious organizations

**8 in 10** agree that the child welfare system only gets attention when something bad happens and that the system is simply overwhelmed and lacks resources

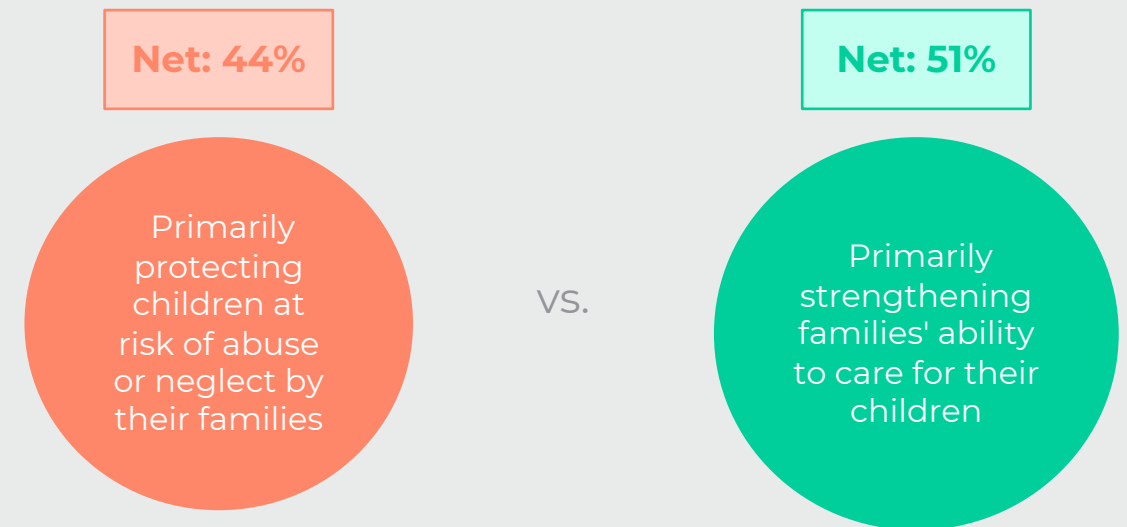
Personal Experience with System



# Americans are divided with how the system should operate in strengthening families vs. protecting children and prioritize keeping children with their family

- Americans slightly lean towards the welfare system's purpose being strengthening families over protecting children from their families
- When it comes to removing a child from their family after an investigation, Americans lean towards the system keeping the child with their family
- 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

## Primary Purpose of System in an Ideal World



# Americans agree that extended family should be given priority and supported when children require placement and that adoptions should remain open

- **9 in 10 Americans** overwhelmingly support engaging extended family members before resorting to foster care and providing similar support to family as foster parents
- Americans also believe that extended family should be prioritized in adoption
- Most Americans feel that if adoption must take place, biological parents should still be able to maintain safe and ongoing relationships with their children

