



# Ambassadors for Children: The Importance of and Need for Advocacy for Kids

Bruce Lesley

President, First Focus on Children

November 29, 2022



# Children's Issues: Often Ignored, Dismissed, Diminished



*“All too rarely is consideration given to what policies. . .do to children. This is all the more the case where the immediate focus of the policy is not children. But even in children’s legislation the unintended or indirect effects of changes are not given the critical attention they demand...”*

- Michael Freeman, *The Moral Status of Children* (1997)

# The Status of Children: We Must Do Better

## The Kids Aren't All Right

- The U.S. ranked 36<sup>th</sup> out of 38 wealthy nation on dozens of child well-being measures (UNICEF, 2020)

## Money Matters

- “...the United States is near the bottom of countries belonging to the OECD in ‘family benefits public spending’ as a share of GDP...” - Hilary Hoynes and Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach (2018)

*The Atlantic*

## The Kids Aren't All Right

COVID-19 doesn't appear to be a major concern for children's health, but the youngest among us will still bear the larger burdens of trauma and economic fallout.

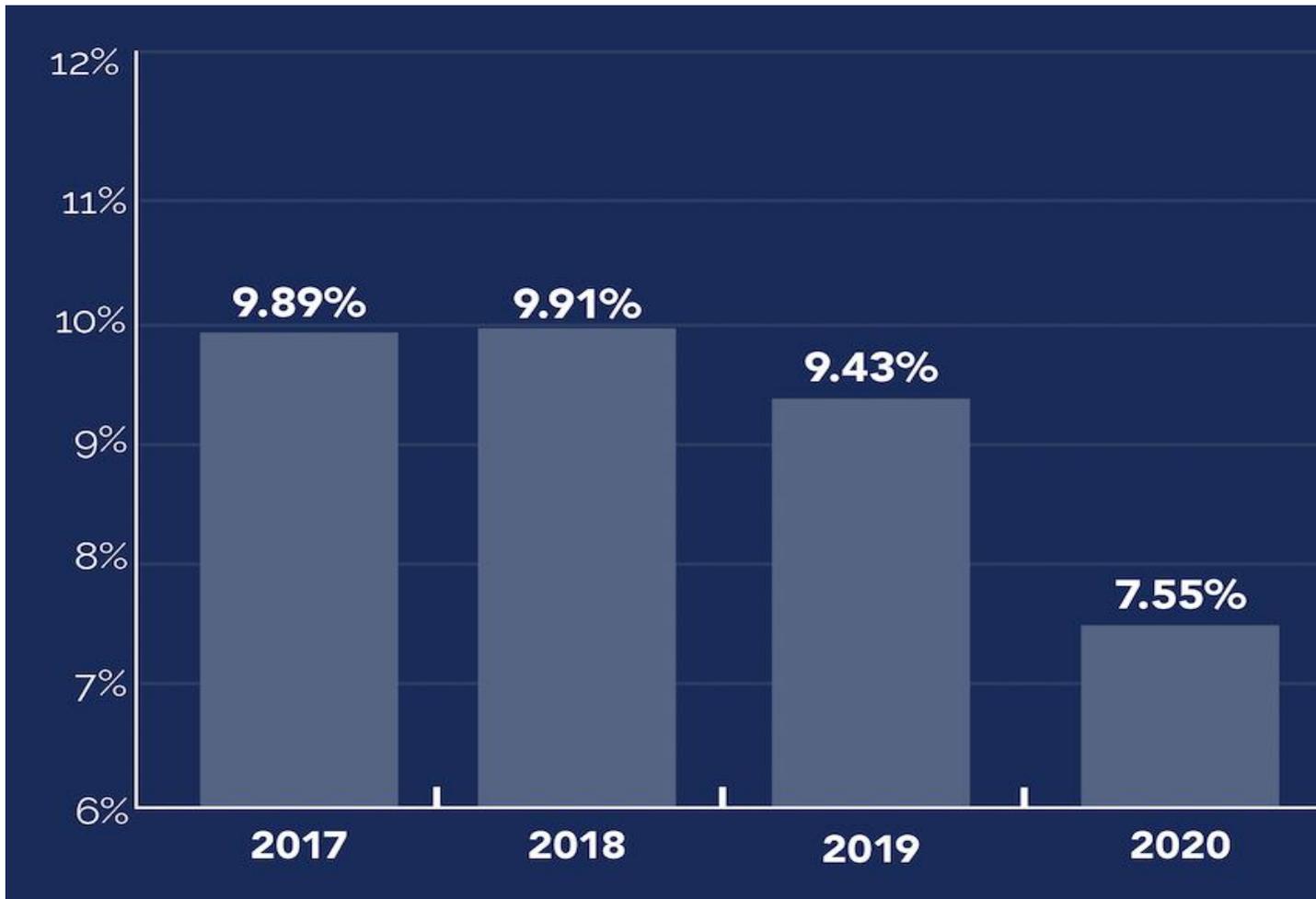
HILARY W. HOYNES  
*University of California, Berkeley*

DIANE WHITMORE SCHANZENBACH  
*Northwestern University*

*Safety Net Investments in Children*

# Divesting in Children: An Austerity Agenda

Children's Share: Dropped  
**24%** from FY 2016-2020



Children at a Crossroads:  
Worsening Outcomes

- Rising uninsured rates
- Rising child suicide rates
- High infant mortality
- High child mortality
- High child poverty
- Rising child abuse rates
- Increasing child homelessness
- Rising child hunger

# Children at a Crossroads: Kids Were Finally Being Seen

## The new child tax credit could lift more than 5 million kids out of poverty. Can it help them learn, too?

Moriah Balingit • July 13, 2021 at 8:00 a.m. EDT



## Why We've Declared a State of Emergency for Children's Mental Health

Kids are suffering from depression and anxiety and dying by suicide in record numbers. We must act now.



Fifteen months into the [pandemic](#), children and teens are suffering from depression and anxiety at such high rates that several Colorado children are trying to end their lives every week. This is as unacceptable as it is heartbreaking.

# Champions for Children: Striving to Make a Difference



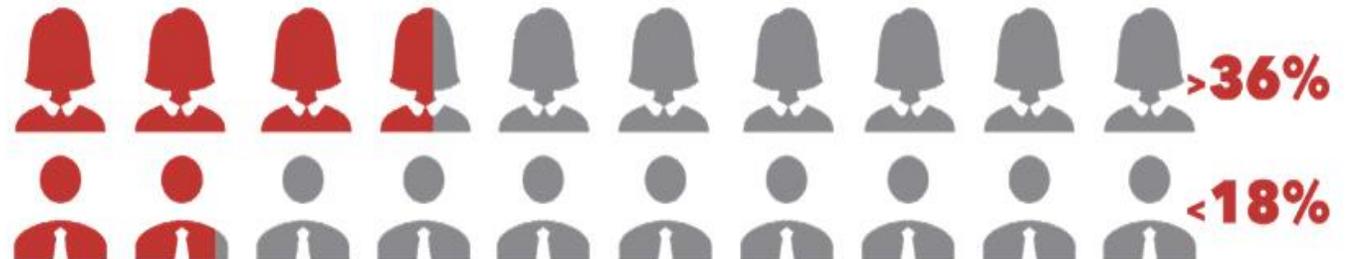
“ This would have the greatest permanent cut of child poverty in the history of the United States of America.

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J.

Women in Congress were

**2x more likely**

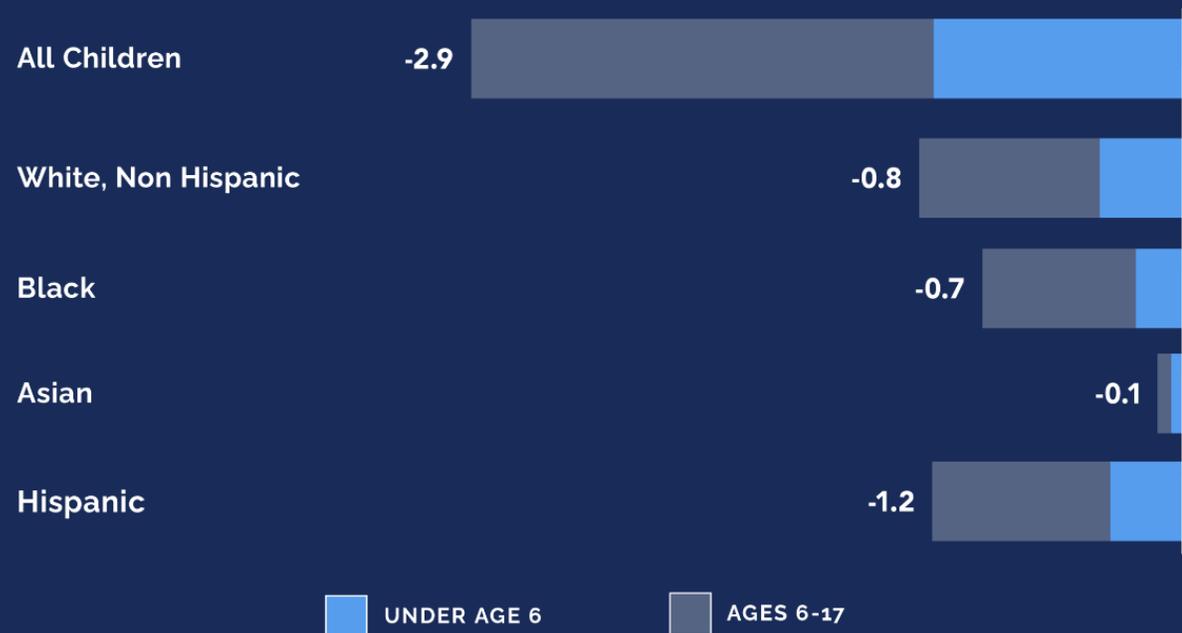
than men to stand as Champions or Defenders for children in 2021.



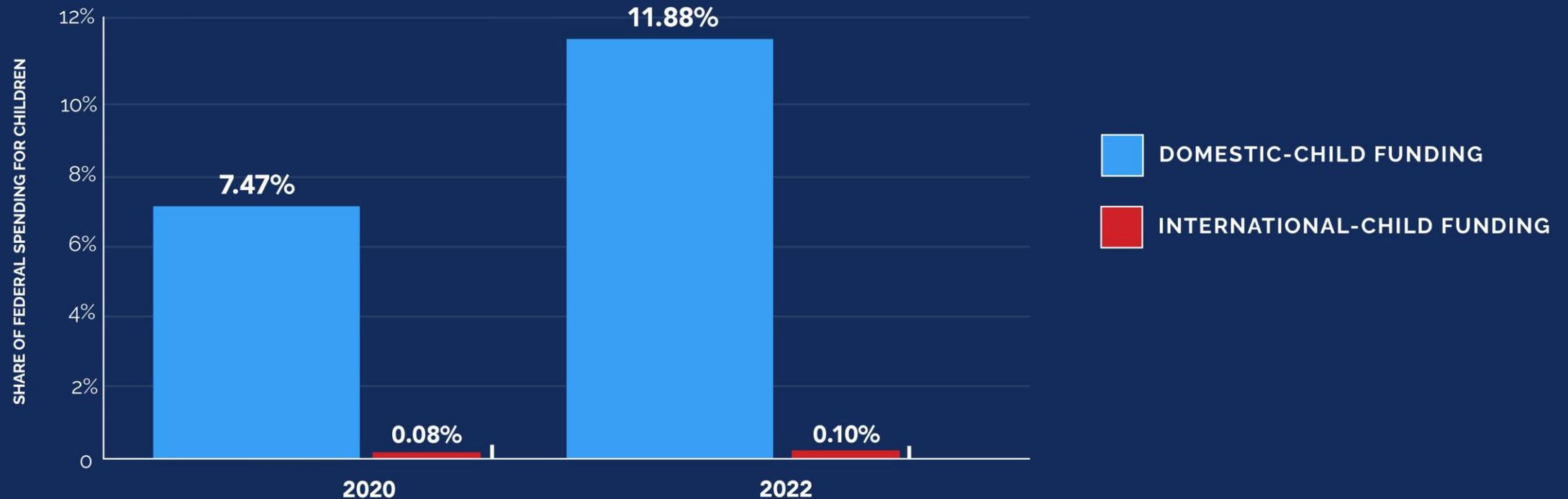
- *Money Matters*
- *Champions Matter*
- *Ambition and Perseverance Matters*

## THE CHILD TAX CREDIT RESULTED IN A **HISTORIC DROP IN POVERTY.** ENDING CHILD POVERTY IS A POLICY DECISION.

Change in Number of Children in Poverty Due to Child Tax Credit: 2021  
(In Millions)



# THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 2020 AND 2022 WAS **GAME-CHANGING** FOR CHILDREN



SOURCE: Children's Budget 2022

# Election 2022: A Few Shining Moments

For the most part, Democrats only mentioned children's issues on their social media and campaign websites in passing with some attention to the Child Tax Credit, child care, child nutrition, and gun safety.



**Reverend Raphael Warnock**  @ReverendWarnock · Jun 12

 US Senate candidate, GA

It's National Children's Day! One piece of legislation I'm most proud of is the American Rescue Plan because of the expanded **Child** Tax Credit, which helped working families care for their kids. We've got to make it permanent.



**Senator Cortez Masto**  @SenCortezMasto · Dec 14, 2021

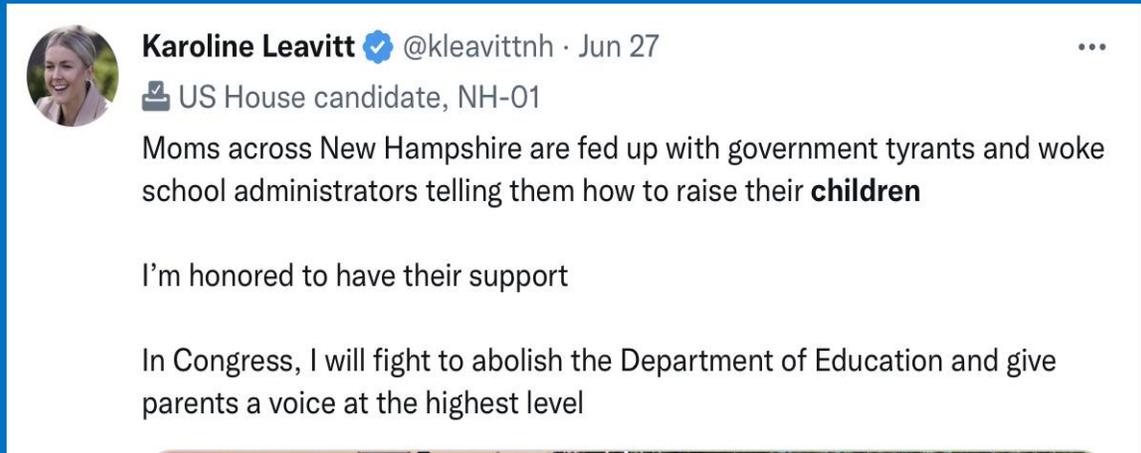
The **Child** Tax Credit is a middle class tax cut that has helped so many Nevadans put food on the table and provide for their families. I'm calling on Congress to extend this critical program.



# Election 2022: Kids Were, Once Again, Largely An Afterthought

In contrast, Republican candidates never once mentioned the Child Tax Credit or child care.

Their focus was on education but that agenda was often about “parental rights” or the eliminating the Dept. of Education.



In claiming that Laxalt “opposes the expanded child tax credit,” SMP cites an article from the *Nevada Current* that contains not a single reference to Laxalt.<sup>2</sup> **Indeed, a simple search of the article for “Laxalt” yields zero results.** Secondly, SMP cites a *KTVN* article that describes Laxalt’s position on partial-birth abortion, President Biden’s handling of the Afghanistan withdrawal, the Mexican border, and a “green” environmental spending plan, **yet does not include a single reference to Laxalt’s position on an expanded child tax credit.**<sup>3</sup> Despite this malicious attempt to attack Laxalt, a basic review of both articles leads to zero references about Laxalt’s position on the expanded child tax credit.

# Children Stand at a Crossroads: Threats

- Expiration of the American Rescue Plan Provisions
- End of COVID Funding and Public Health Emergency
- A Return to a Defunding “Normal”
- Cultural Wars in Schools

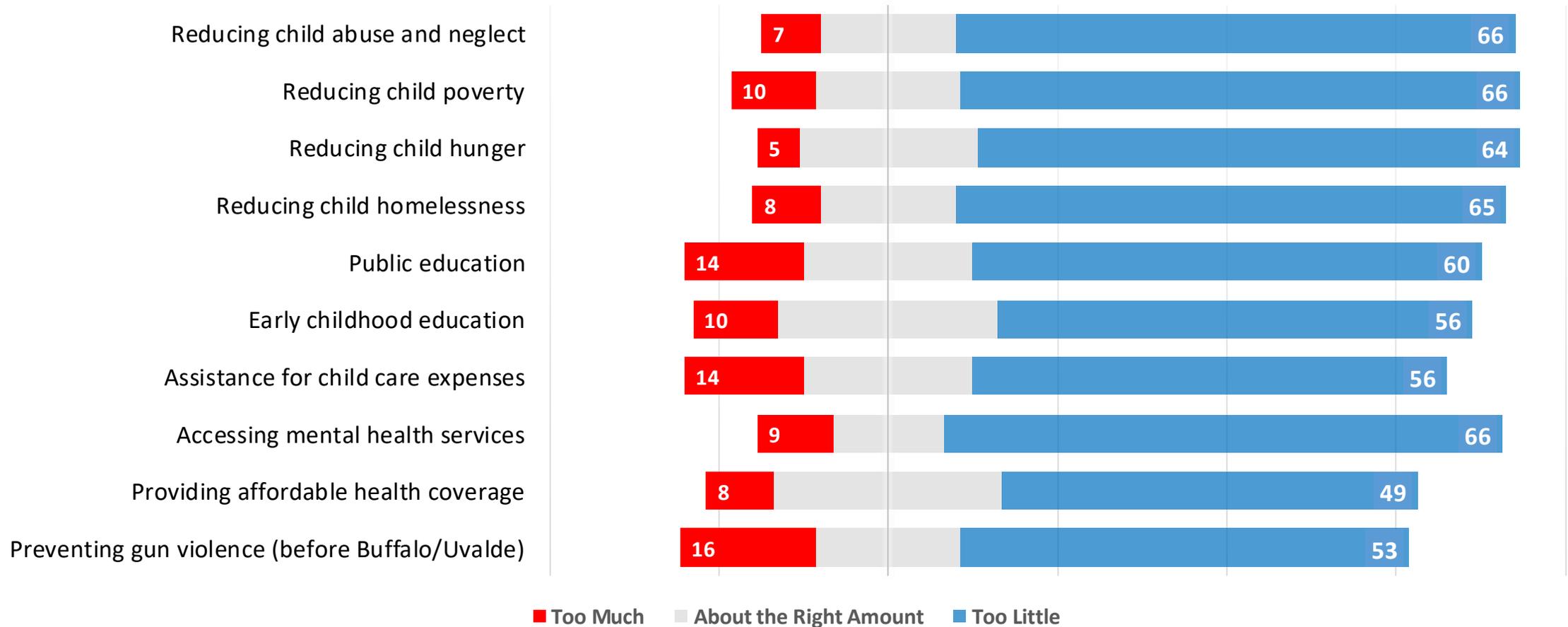


# Voters Agree that “Children’s Policy Needs and Concerns are Often an Afterthought or Dismissed by Policymakers”

- By a **71-17%** margin, voters agree.
- Parents agree by a **75-14%** margin
- With respect to age:
  - For those under age 30, voters agree by an **82-12%** margin **(+70%)**
  - For those under age 50, voters agree by a **78-13%** margin **(+65%)**
  - For those over age 50, voters agree by a **66-21%** margin **(+45%)**
- With respect to race:
  - White voters agree by a **70-18%** margin
  - Black voters agree by an **81-11%** margin
  - Hispanic voters agree by a **78-9%** margin
- With respect to party identification:
  - Democrats: **82-8%**
  - Independents: **69-16%**
  - Republicans: **60-28%**
- By an **82-13%** margin, voters believe “programs for children need greater attention and coordination across our federal, state, and local governments”

# Voters think we are spending too little on children when it comes to specific problems.

## GOVERNMENT SPENDS TOO MUCH OR TOO LITTLE?



\*Split sampled (except preventing gun violence)

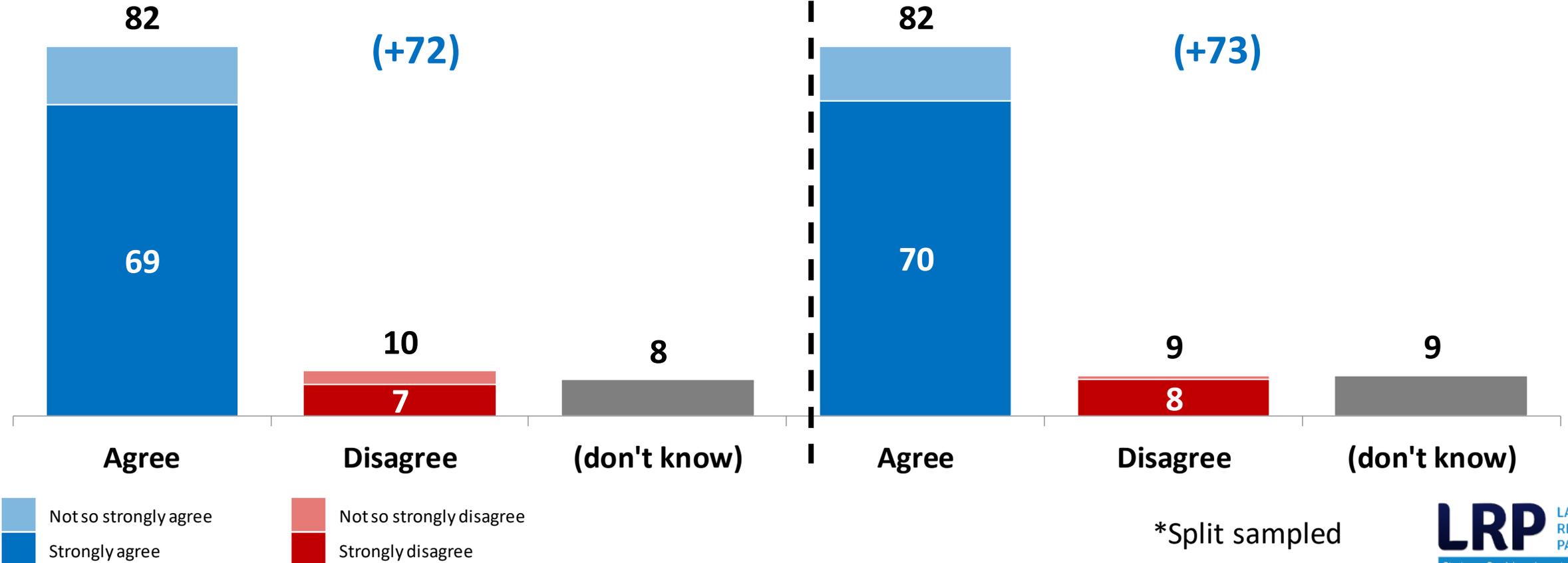
# Voters Agree with Reasons for Investing in Children

- There is powerful language to communicate about investing in or helping children.
  - “Investing in children is a good investment in our children and grandchildren” **93-5%** (78% strongly agree). This is strong across subgroups, including 69% of Republicans.
  - “Investing in children helps improve their lives, development, and outcomes” **90-8%** (77% strongly agree).
  - “Investing in children has a large return in a healthy society and a healthy economy” **89-7%** (76% strongly agree). This is strong among key groups, including 82% of younger women who strongly agree, 80% of independents, and 89% of Black voters.

# Voters express intense and broad support for federal policy protecting children – whether we refer to the best interest of the child or making child well-being the first priority. Both are core values.

Do you agree or disagree that federal policy involving children should always be governed by a “best interest of the child” standard that makes the protection and the safety of children the first priority?\*

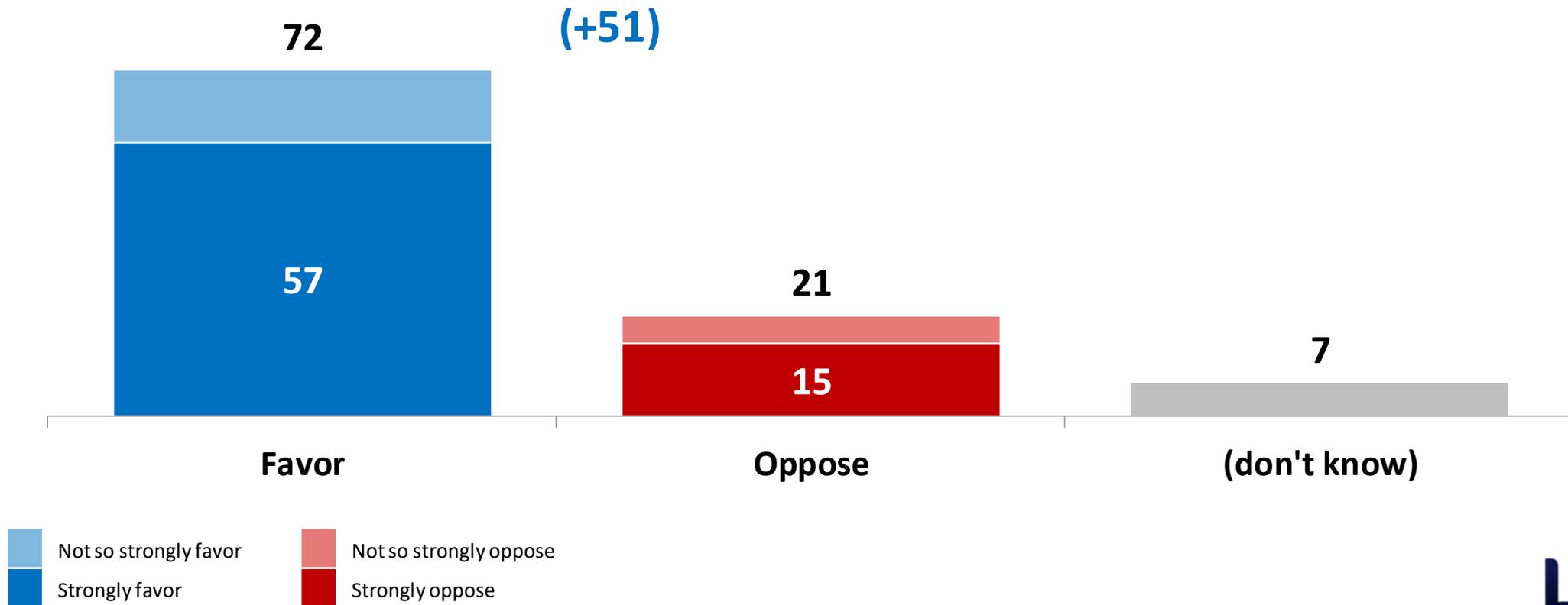
Do you agree or disagree that federal policy involving children should always be governed by a standard that makes child well-being the first priority?\*



\*Split sampled

# Over seven in ten voters support the Child Tax Credit as described, with a majority giving intense support.

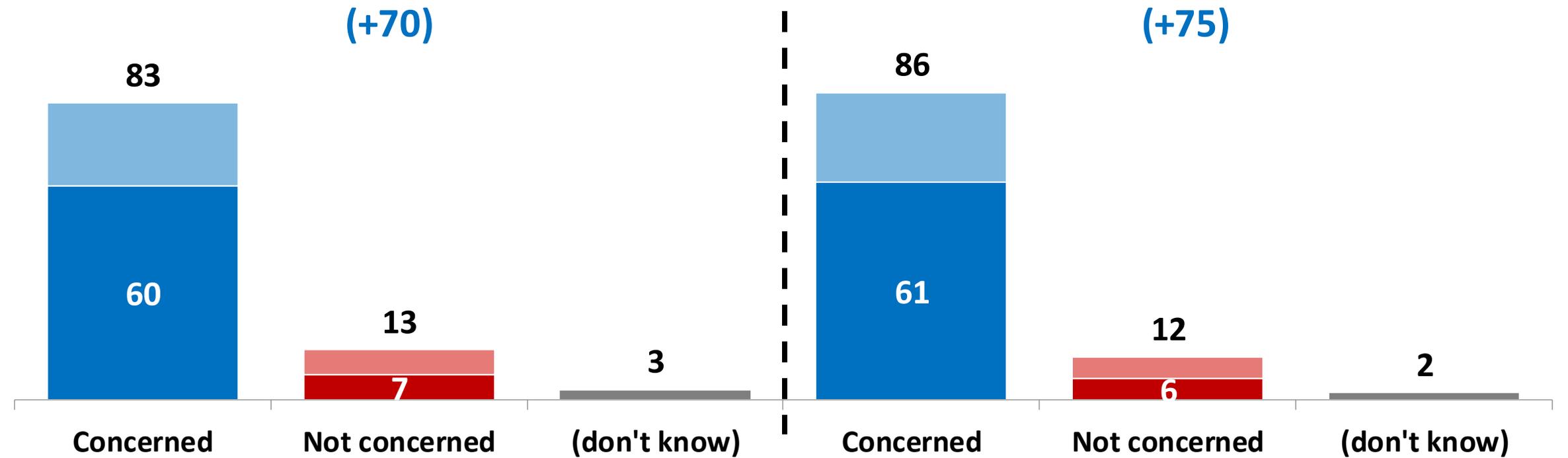
Now I want to read information about a tax credit that Congress passed in 2021. The Child Tax Credit is an expanded and improved tax credit that refunds middle-class families and families with low incomes more money for each child under age 18, creates a new tax credit for families with children under age six, and makes the credit fully refundable for all families with low incomes. Based on this, do you favor or oppose the Child Tax Credit?



# Overall, voters are concerned about child poverty both in terms of a comparison to adult poverty and the cost of it.

How concerned are you that the level of poverty is 59 percent higher than the level of adult poverty in America and that negatively impacts all aspects of the lives of children, including their health, education, and safety?\*

How concerned are you that child poverty costs our society up to \$1.1 trillion a year due to higher crime, poor health outcomes, and lower income levels when children living in poverty grow up?\*

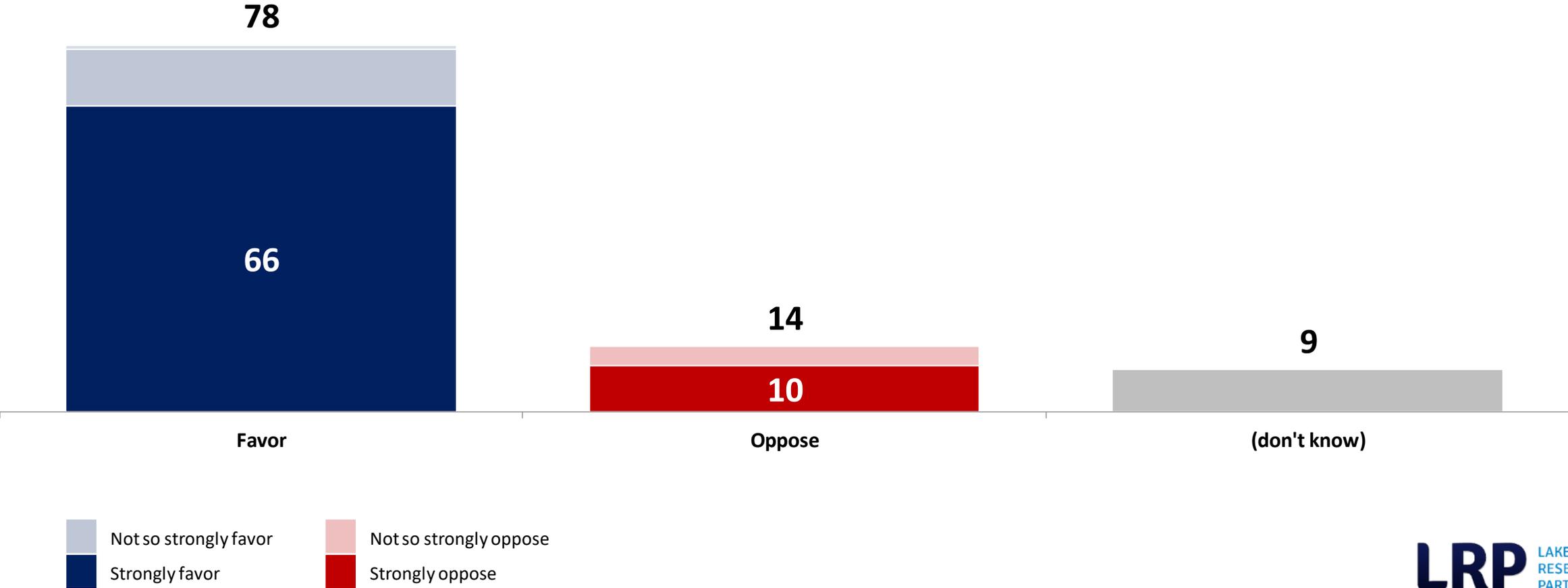


■ Somewhat concerned  
■ Very concerned  
■ A little concerned  
■ Not concerned at all

\*Split sampled

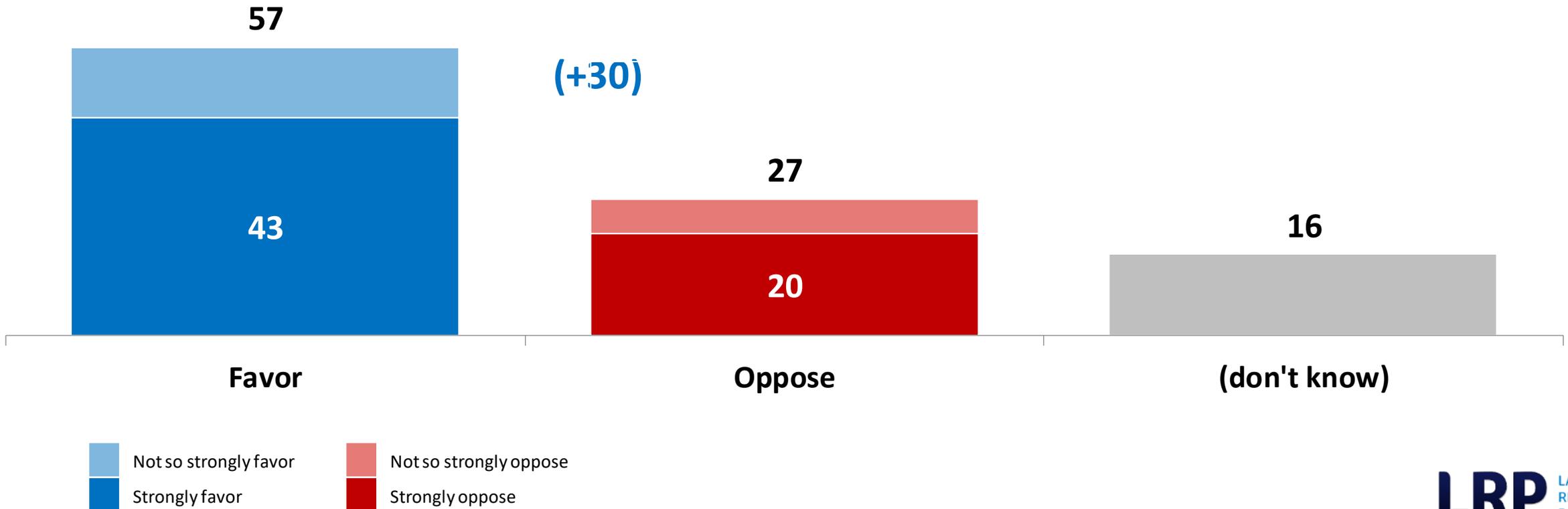
# A very strong base of support for making CHIP a permanent health insurance program.

The Children’s Health Insurance Program, also known as CHIP, which provides children with health insurance who are not covered by their parents is set to expire unless Congress acts to continue the program. Do you favor or oppose that Congress make CHIP a permanent health insurance program?

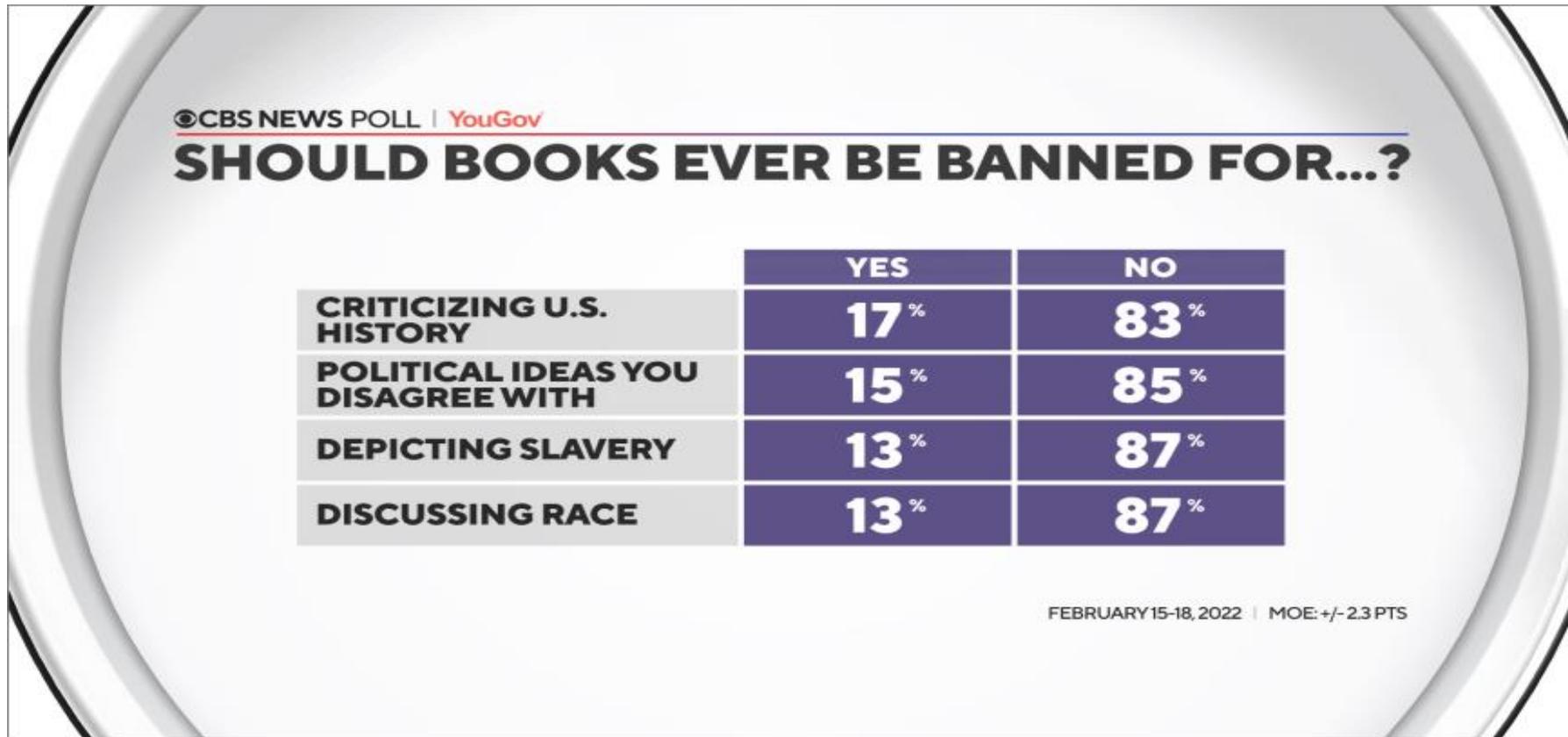


# Voters are also favorable toward creating a Commissioner for Children.

Do you favor or oppose the creation of an independent Commissioner for Children to investigate and make recommendations on ways to protect and improve the care and well-being of children in the U.S?



# Support for a “Child and Family Agenda” is much stronger than that for Cultural Wars and Book Bans



# WHAT JUST HAPPENED?



## HOUSE

**R+10\***

2021-22

223D-212R

2023-24

**222R - 213D**

## SENATE

**TBD\*\***

50D-50R

**50D - 49R**

## GOVERNORS

**D+2**

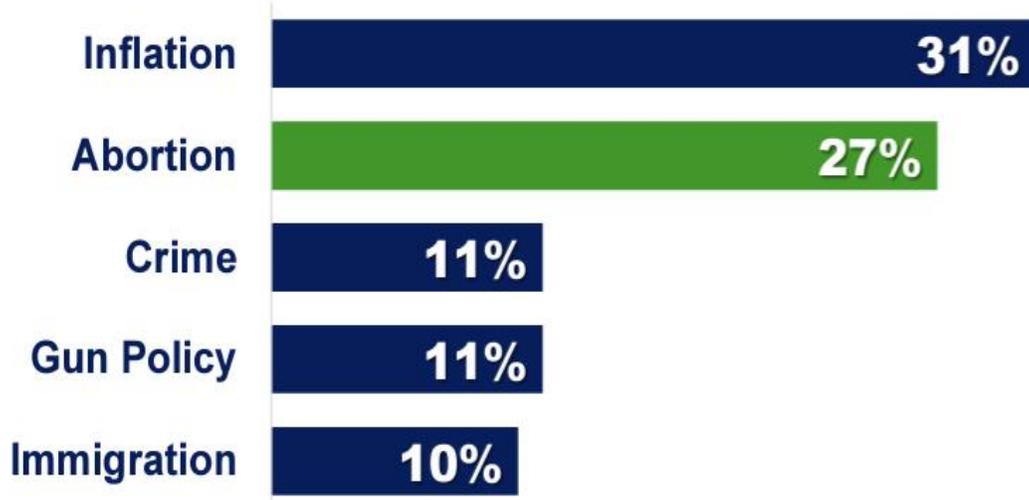
28R-22D

**26R - 24D**

\* Unofficial: several races still not called; this reflects NBC forecast as of 11/20, 10am

\*\* GA runoff 12/6; Counting Independents Sens. Sanders & King as D's

“What as the most important issue to your vote?”



**Katie Paris**  
@katiebparis

Think you've heard all there is to know out of MI?

How about this:

Out of 172 extremist school bd candidates (the ones who want to ban books, etc) who ran in suburban counties, 129 — that's 76% — LOST.

**The Washington Post**  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

**SOCIAL ISSUES**

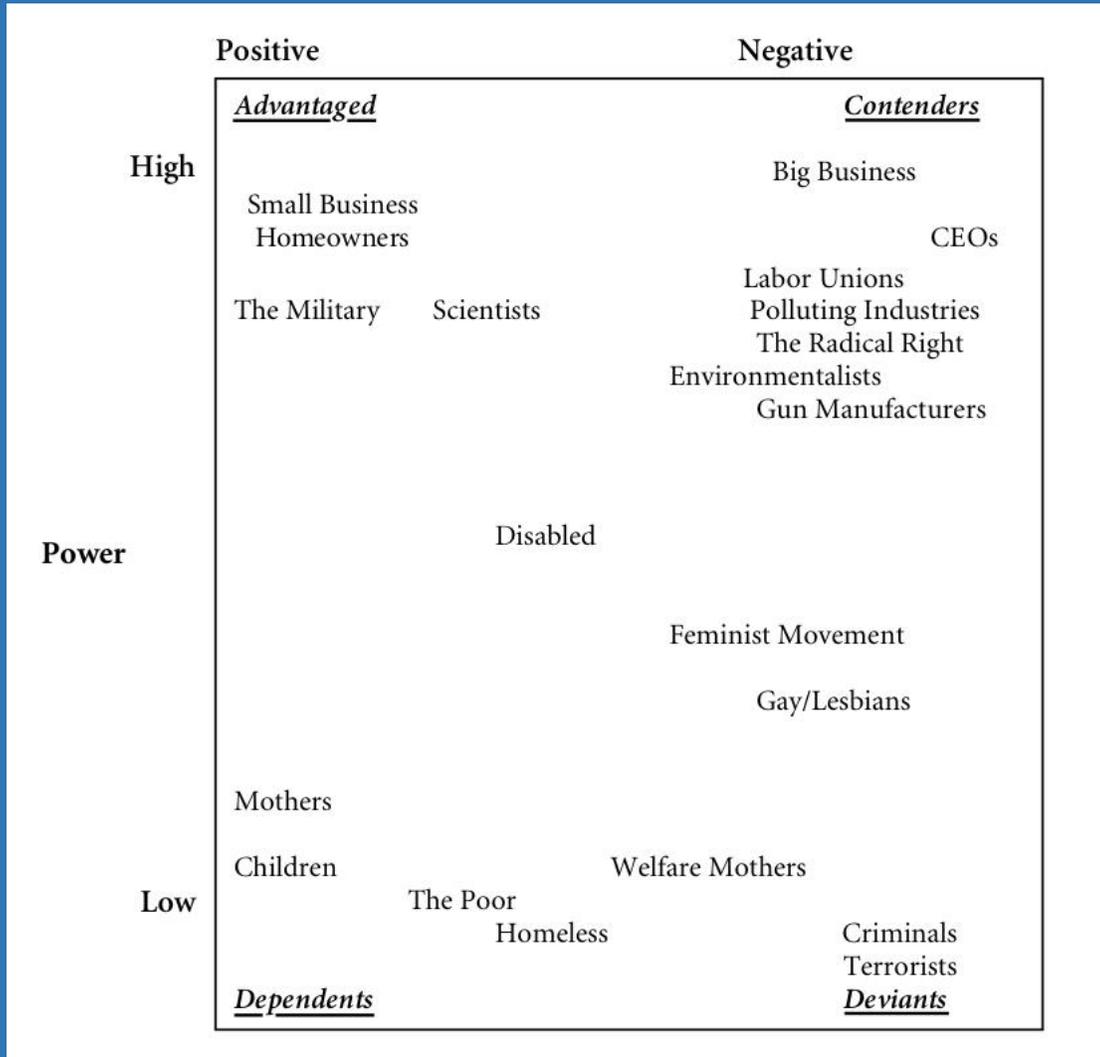
# In N.M. child-care funding win, providers nationwide see road map



By [Casey Parks](#)

November 10, 2022 at 8:00 a.m. EST

# Children Need Our Voice



- Children don't have lobbyists, PACs
- Children can't vote
- Children are "invisible" in political conversations
- Children are an afterthought

**THEREFORE...**

**CHILDREN NEED US TO LIFT UP THEIR NEEDS, CONCERNS, AND THEIR VOICE TO OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS**

Source: Ingram, Schneider, & DeLeon (2007), *Social Construction and Policy Design*

# Children's Issues in Play in 2022

- Child Tax Credit: extension keeping 3 million children out of poverty
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP): either extension or making permanent
- Home Visiting program: extending and increasing funding for program
- Appropriations: funding for programs like child care, education, child abuse prevention, child nutrition



# The Children's Agenda 2023

- Bipartisan: Congress will be split
- Biden Administration: implementation and regulatory changes
- System Change: We need Congress and federal agencies to keep kids' issues at the forefront
- Expand Champions for Children: new leadership in House, new members, Republican strategy
- Defense: fight efforts to extend cultural wars to children



## A CHILDREN'S AGENDA FOR THE 117TH CONGRESS

Every Issue is a Children's Issue

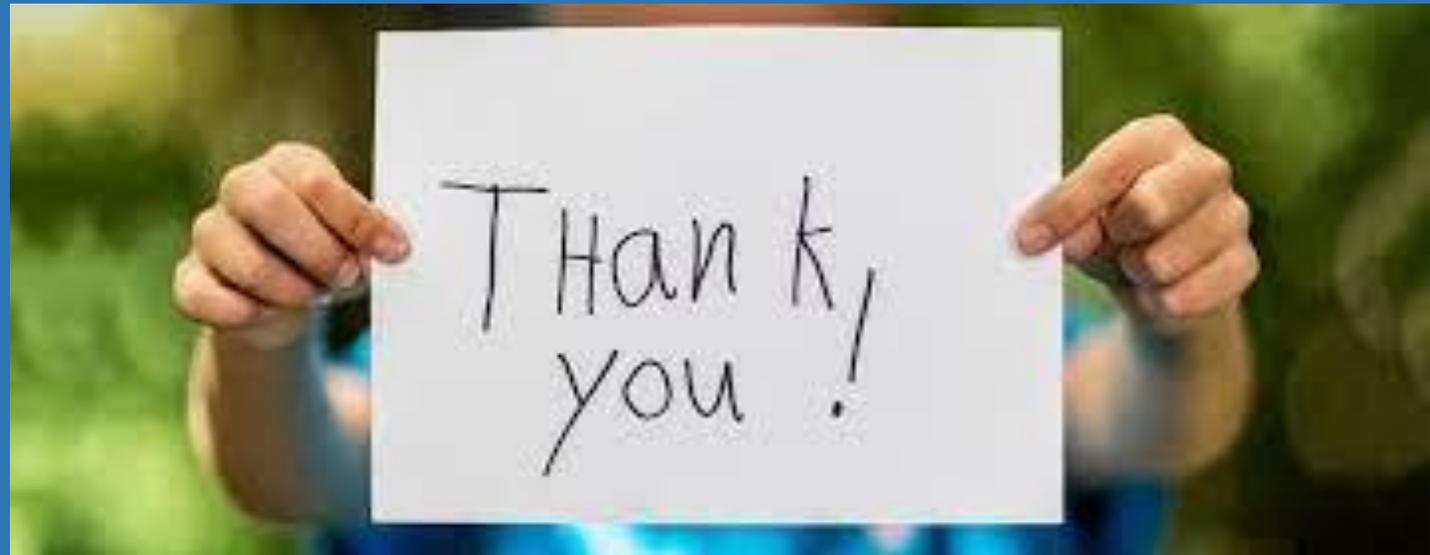


# Ambassadors for Children

THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU

We look forward to working with you to improve the health, education, well-being, and safety of our nation's children

QUESTIONS???





Thank You!



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