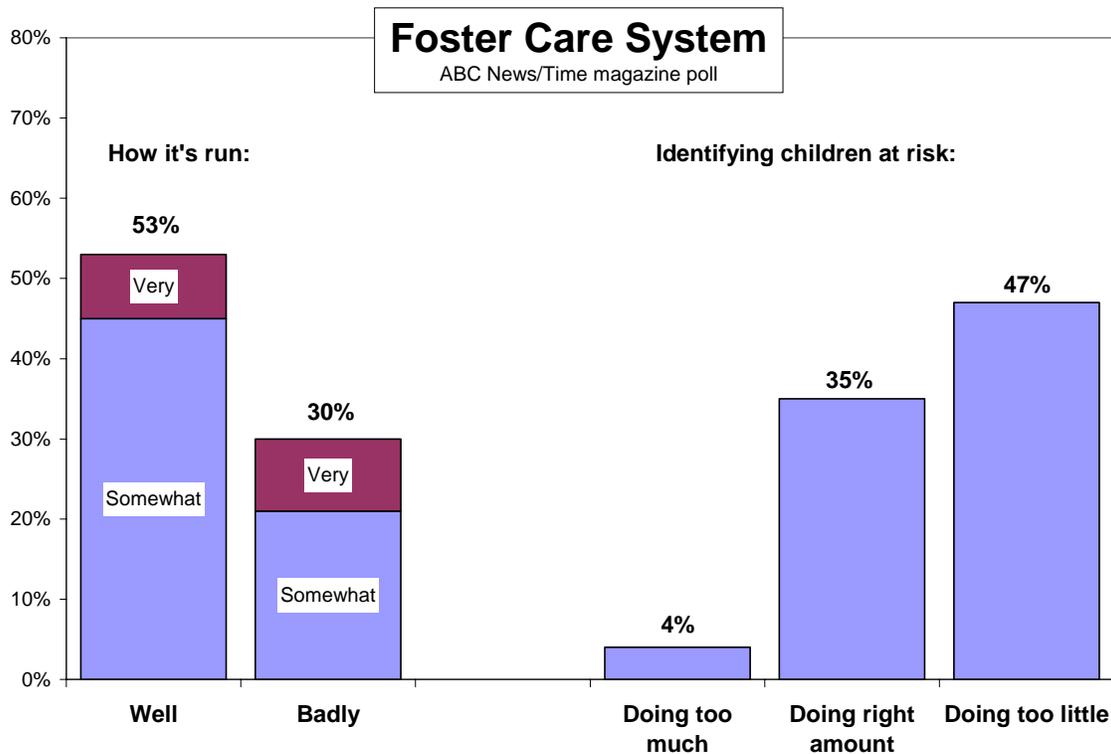


## **Broad Support for Reform in U.S. Foster Care System**

The foster care system is broadly unnoticed in this country, and to the extent they think about it most Americans believe it's doing an acceptable job. But there's also substantial concern about the system – and broad support for improving it, even at significant cost.

State foster care programs provide temporary shelter for about half a million children who've been removed from their homes for lack of adequate care. Overall, 53 percent in this ABC News/Time magazine poll say the system runs well – but a mere eight percent say it runs “very well.” And nearly half, 47 percent, think their state system is not doing enough to identify at-risk children.

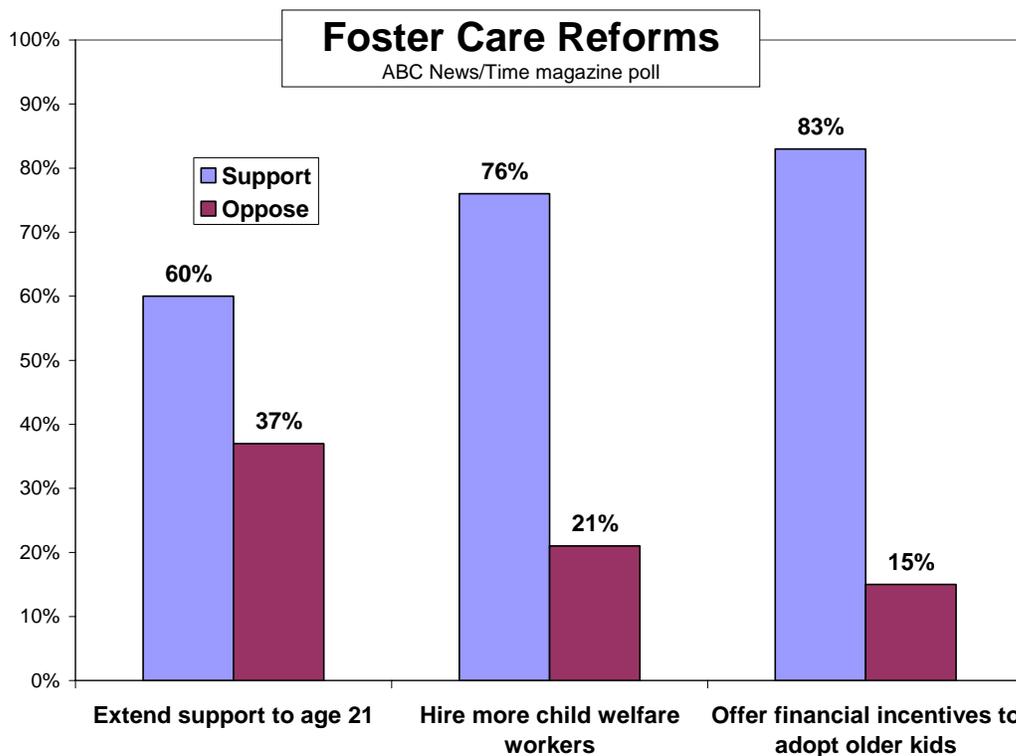


Only about a quarter of Americans say they pay much attention to foster care issues. Those who do follow the subject are 11 points more apt to rate the system negatively than those who are least likely to follow it and 20 points more likely to say their state is doing too little to identify at-risk children; they're also more supportive of some improvements in the foster care system.

REFORM – One fundamental reform – hiring more caseworkers – gets overwhelming support: Three-quarters of Americans favor hiring more child welfare workers in order to reduce their caseloads from the current average of 30 to a recommended 20, even if doing so costs tens of millions of dollars.

That view, moreover, commands bipartisan majorities: Eighty-two percent of Democrats and 69 percent of Republicans support hiring more caseworkers, as do both 83 percent of liberals and 72 percent of conservatives.

Even more popular are financial incentives, including tax breaks, to families who adopt older children out of foster care: Eighty-three percent of Americans support that approach, again including sizable majorities across political and ideological lines.



Among other steps, six in 10 also think foster care per diems should be extended to families until foster children reach 21 (support typically ends at age 18). And religious leadership may help: More than six in 10 say religious leaders should do more to encourage people to become foster parents or to adopt foster children.

INTEREST – Outreach to prospective foster parents might also help: Perhaps surprisingly, about a quarter of Americans say they’d seriously consider becoming foster parents or adopting a foster child – a huge group of individuals, and vastly more than the number actually needed, if only some of them were motivated to act.

Young adults, and people who already have kids at home, are much better prospects – 40 percent of those under 35 say they’d seriously consider it, compared with just four percent of those 65 and over. And 31 percent of non-whites would consider fostering a child, compared with 19 percent of whites.

	Age group				
	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Would seriously consider being a foster parent	40%	27	14	10	4

There’s a widespread belief that children in the foster care system carry behavioral baggage. More than six in 10 Americans think these children are more likely than others to have behavior problems. Fewer but still significant numbers see other problems: Forty-four percent think foster kids are more likely to have learning difficulties, and 47 percent think they’re more likely to have problems with drugs or alcohol.

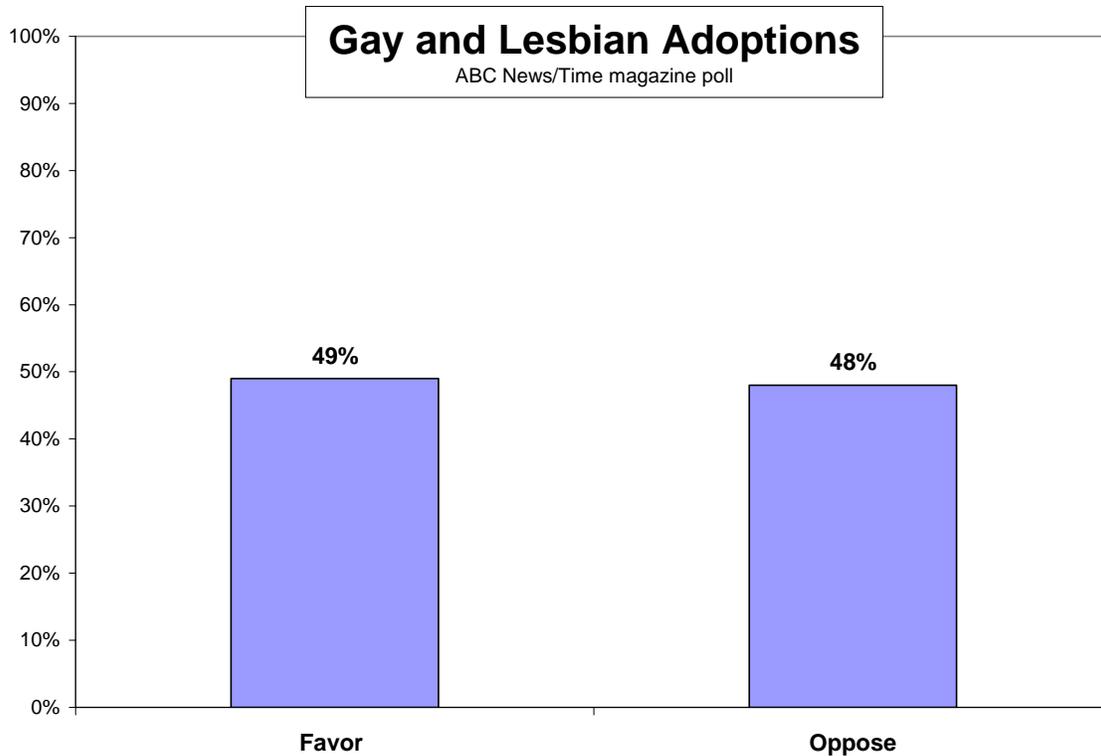
Whites are more likely than non-whites to think foster care children have these problems, but overall these assessments don’t seem to impact Americans’ willingness to become foster parents. Those who think these children are more likely than others to have behavioral problems are just as likely as those who say there’s no difference to consider becoming a foster parent.

GOAL – One of the complexities in foster care policy is the underlying goal for the children: Reunification with rehabilitated parents or permanent placements with other caregivers. Americans divide on this core question; 50 percent say reunification should be the primary objective, while 44 percent say it’s to find a permanent alternative.

In fact, the goals differ case-by-case. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, 48 percent of foster care cases are targeted for reunification, 20 percent for adoption, eight percent for placement with a relative or guardian, eight percent for long-term foster care and six percent for emancipation. Ten percent are undetermined.

GAY ADOPTION – The two in 10 children in foster care classified as having adoption as a goal means there’s a significant need for prospective parents. And coincidentally, there’s a growing national debate about gay and lesbian adoption.

New laws are being considered in at least 16 states this year to ban gay adoption. (Florida, Mississippi and Utah already have bans in place.) In this poll Americans divide right down the middle on the issue: Forty-nine percent favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children, 48 percent are opposed. Support has grown over the years from, for example, 14 percent in 1977 and 35 percent in 1998.



Women are far more supportive than men of gay adoption, 56 percent to 42 percent, and there's a large partisan divide on the issue, with more than half of Democrats and independents in favor but more than six in 10 Republicans opposed.

Support for gay adoption is highest in the more liberal Northeast, 63 percent, and lowest in the more conservative South, 41 percent. Part of the divide is religious: Seventy-six percent of those with no professed religion support gay adoption, compared with only 24 percent of evangelical white Protestants.

There's also a generational gap on the issue: Fifty-five percent of those under age 45 favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children, compared with 43 percent of those 45 and older.

**METHODOLOGY** – This ABC News/Time magazine poll was conducted by telephone May 10-14, 2006, among a random national sample of 1,000 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by Jon Cohen.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com at <http://abcnews.com/pollvault.html>.

Media contact: Cathie Levine, (212) 456-4934.

Full results follow (\*= less than 0.5 percent).

1. Foster care is the system run by state governments mainly to provide homes for neglected or abused children. How much attention have you personally paid to issues involving the foster care system - a great deal, a good amount, just some or hardly any?

	-- More attention --			----- Less attention -----				
	NET	Great deal	Good amount	NET	Only some	Hardly any	None (vol.)	No opin.
5/14/06	26	13	14	73	31	39	4	1

2. From what you know about it, do you think the foster care system in your state is run very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly or very badly?

	----- Well -----			----- Badly -----			No opin.
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Very	
5/14/06	53	8	45	30	21	9	17

3. Would you seriously consider becoming a foster parent or adopting a foster child, or not?

	-----Yes-----						
	NET	Yes	Have done (vol.)	Depends (vol.)	No	Foster not adopt (vol.)	No opin.
5/14/06	26	22	1	3	74	*	1

4. In the case of a child who has been removed from home because of abuse or neglect, which of these do you think should be the main goal of the foster care system - (to send the child back to live with his or her parents once the parents have gone through counseling or rehab), or (to permanently place the child with another family?)

	Parents	Another family	Depends (vol.)	No opinion
5/14/06	50	44	5	1

5. Do you think the foster care system in your state is doing (too little), (too much) or about the right amount to try to identify children at risk and remove them from their parents' custody?

	Too little	Too much	Right amount	No opinion
5/14/06	47	4	35	14

6. Do you think local churches and religious leaders (should do more) to encourage people to become foster parents or adopt foster children, or do you think they (are doing enough) in that area?

	Should do more	Doing enough	Doing too much (vol.)	No opin.
5/14/06	63	27	1	9

7. States pay money to foster parents, usually about 15 dollars a day, ending when the foster child reaches age 18. Would you favor or oppose extending this support for foster care families up to age 21?

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
5/14/06	60	37	3

8. Child welfare workers have an average of 30 children in their caseload, while some groups recommend 20 cases at most. Would you support or oppose hiring more child welfare workers to reduce their caseload, if doing so cost tens of millions of dollars?

	Support	Oppose	No opinion
5/14/06	76	21	3

9. Do you think families should or should not be given financial incentives, including tax breaks, to adopt older children out of foster care?

	Should	Should not	No opinion
5/14/06	83	15	3

10. In general, do you think foster care children are (more) likely than other children to (INSERT ITEM), (less) likely, or is it about the same?

5/14/06 - Summary Table

	More Likely	Less Likely	About the same	No opin.
a. have behavior problems	63	2	33	1
b. have learning difficulties	44	4	50	2
c. have problems with drugs or alcohol	47	3	48	2

11. Overall, do you think older children in foster care have (more) problems than younger ones, (fewer) problems, or about the same amount?

	More	Fewer	Same	No Opinion
5/14/06	58	2	39	2

12. On another subject, thinking about adoption in general, would you favor or oppose allowing gay or lesbian couples to adopt a child?

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
5/14/06	49	48	3
3/12/06*	46	48	6
3/30/04**	40	52	8
10/15/98***	35	57	8
6/16/94***	28	65	7
8/20/92***	29	63	8
6/20/77****	14	77	9

\*Pew Research Center: (As I list some programs and proposals that are being discussed in this country today, please tell me whether you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose each.)...Allowing gays and lesbians to adopt children.

\*\*LA Times: Do you favor or oppose gay couples legally adopting children?

\*\*\*Time/CNN: Do you think that homosexual couples should be legally permitted to adopt children, or don't you think so? ("or don't you think so" in 1998 only).

\*\*\*\*Gallup: Do you think homosexuals should or should not be allowed to adopt children?

\*\*\*END\*\*\*