

# Californians' Needs and Experiences with Domestic Violence, Equity, and Safety

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Results from a Statewide Survey of Adults

CONDUCTED FOR BLUE SHIELD OF CALIFORNIA FOUNDATION

October 2025



**PERRY  
UNDEM**



# Introduction

This research was commissioned by Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) as part of an ongoing effort to document trends in Californians' needs and experiences with domestic violence, economic insecurity, racial equity, and gender-based harm.

This is the third survey on these topics (prior surveys occurred in 2017 and 2021), and the study continues to evolve with each iteration.

The 2025 survey was informed by 12 focus groups with diverse Californians (see methods). Two focus groups were also held with a total of 12 BSCF grantees working at the intersection of domestic violence, economic insecurity, racial equity, and gender.

PerryUndem and the Center for Advancing Innovative Policy (CAIP) developed and analyzed the survey.

# Methods

## SURVEY DETAILS

A statewide survey of 2,459 California adults 18+ was conducted May 1–22, 2025 using NORC’s representative online panel. The survey includes oversamples of:

- N = 756 Asian Californians
- N = 507 Black Californians
- N = 555 Latino / Hispanic Californians
- N = 140 Indigenous Californians
- N = 106 Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander Californians
- N = 383 LGBTQ+ Californians

The survey also included n = 797 Californians who self-identified as survivors of domestic violence and n = 240 Californians who self-identified as having committed abuse against a partner in the past.

The survey was offered in English, Chinese (simplified and traditional), and Spanish. The margin of sampling error for total results is  $\pm 3.45$  percentage points.

# Methods

## STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

Twelve focus groups were conducted between December 2024 and April 2025. Each focus group lasted approximately one hour and 45 minutes and had 4–8 participants. The groups were held virtually using Zoom.

One group each was conducted among:

- Survivors of domestic violence
- LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic violence
- Spanish-speaking survivors of domestic violence
- Past perpetrators of domestic violence
- Economically insecure adults
- Spanish-speaking young Latino men
- Young Black men
- Black women
- Indigenous women
- Vietnamese-speaking women
- Tagalog-speaking women
- Mandarin-speaking women

## 2025 Key Findings

- 1 *These are challenging times for many California households—***42%** *have faced a negative life event in the last year (a drop in income, a lost job, or a serious illness or injury).*
- 2 **82%** *want the state to help low-wage Californians access basic needs like health care, nutrition, and housing.*
- 3 **Most feel racism is on the rise.** Majorities agree immigrants (77%), LGBTQ+ individuals (57%), and people of color (57%) are facing more discrimination right now.
- 4 There is agreement that traditional beliefs about gender put pressure on Californians to act in certain ways (e.g., hide their feelings). But **majorities support** upending these beliefs and encouraging **more varied expressions of gender** (e.g., more women in leadership positions).
- 5 **Californians are more likely to say there are only two genders**, and they are decided at birth (60%) than they are to say gender is complex and there are more identities beyond man and woman (39%). *These beliefs drive lots of attitudes in this survey.*
- 6 **Most Californians have an expansive view of domestic violence**—it encompasses 12 types of behaviors including verbal abuse, physical abuse, financial control, trying to control reproductive health, control of technology/phones, and more.

**7** **63% of Californians have a personal connection to domestic violence**, including 31% who identify as survivors and 10% who say they committed abuse against a romantic partner.

**8** **Survivors face many barriers to getting help.** During the time they experienced harm, most say they felt afraid to tell others (43%), they had no place else to go (40%), did not have access to money to support themselves (39%), and were isolated (29%). *More than half (54%) also worried about backlash or blame* if they reported the harm they experienced.

**9** **Survivors have mixed feelings about involving police.** Of those who who reported abuse to the police, only 34% said they made the situation better. Also, when deciding whether to involve the police, 37% were concerned the police would "do nothing" and 28% felt the police would "not take them seriously."

**10** **What makes survivors feel safe:** *freedom to make their own decisions (94%), financial support (92%), an affordable/safe place to live (92%), and supportive family/friends (90%).*

**11** **78% of Californians are open to alternatives to jail** for people who cause domestic violence, including things like counseling. *Three-quarters (77%) also support a mental health first model of response to domestic violence* (social workers/mental health professionals are first to respond to non-violent crises).

**12** **84% of Californians support the state investing more resources in domestic violence services and programs.** Policies they support include mental health care (89%), help enrolling in programs like MediCal (88%), protections against job loss for survivors (86%) and paid cash assistance to survivors (83%)

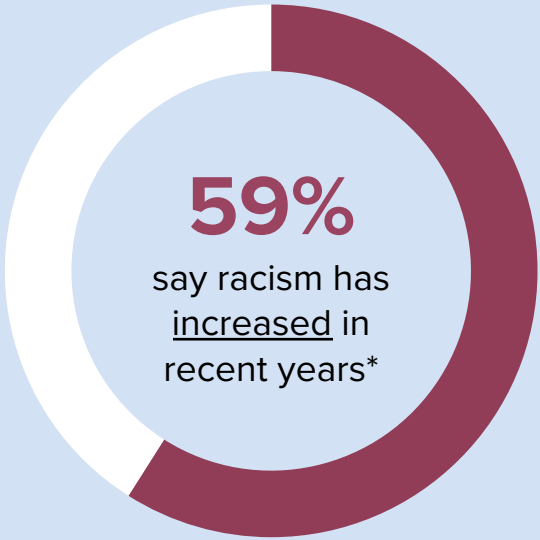
DETAILED FINDINGS

# Equity, Racism, & Gender



A majority of Californians say there is increased racism and discrimination against immigrants, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities.

Q. Do you think the following people face more discrimination or less discrimination, compared to a few years ago? Or have they faced about the same level of discrimination as a few years ago?



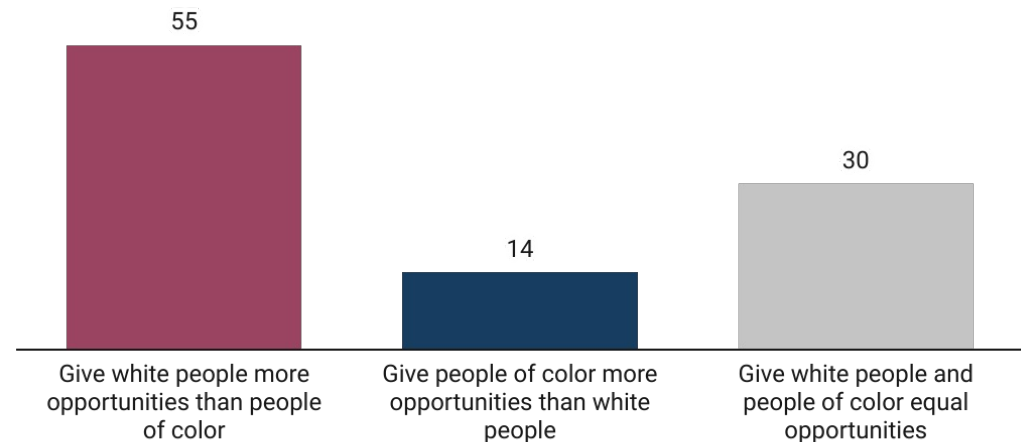
(31% say it has stayed the same, 9% say it has decreased)

\*No significant differences from the 2021 survey.

## Just over half of Californians believe the systems in our society are set up to give white people more opportunities.

Californians of color, those with a higher education, Democrats, LGBTQ+ Californians, residents of the Bay Area and LA region, and those living in urban/suburban areas are more likely to say the systems in our society are set up to give white people more opportunities.

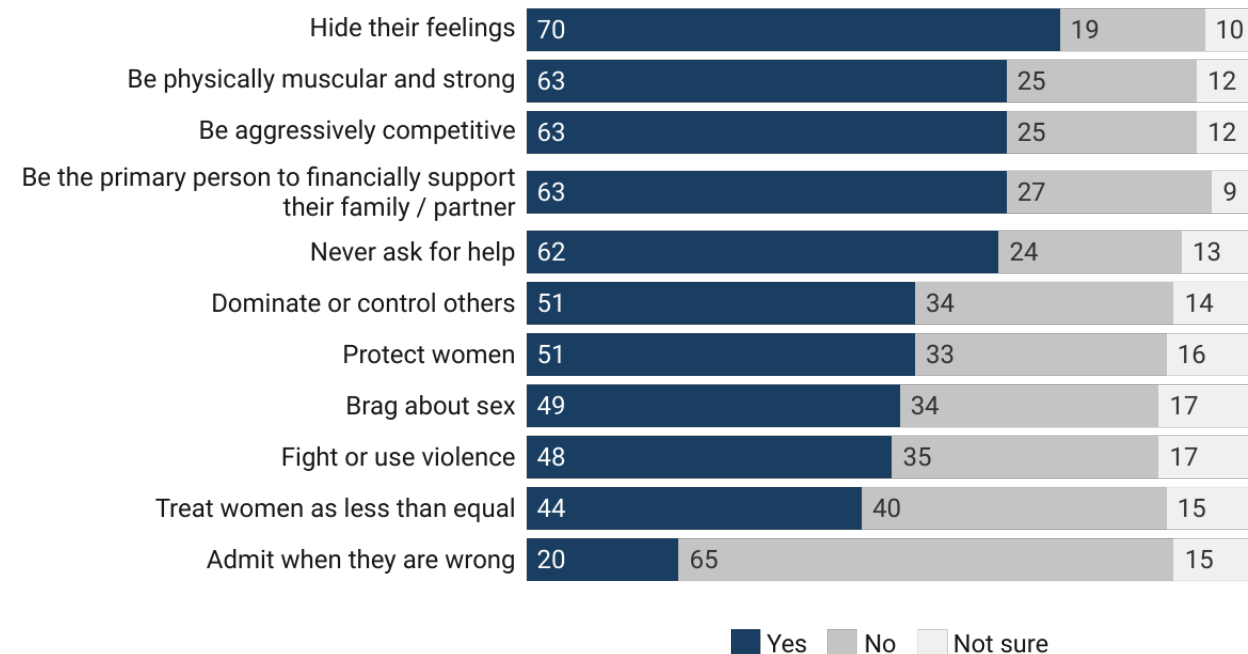
Q. Think about the systems in our society, such as housing, health care, business, banking, immigration, and the government. In general, do you think these systems are set up in ways that . . . \*



## Most Californians believe men face cultural pressure to act in traditionally “masculine” ways.

This includes hiding their feelings, being muscular/strong, aggressively competitive, the primary financial provider, and to never ask for help.

Q. Do you think our culture pressures men to...



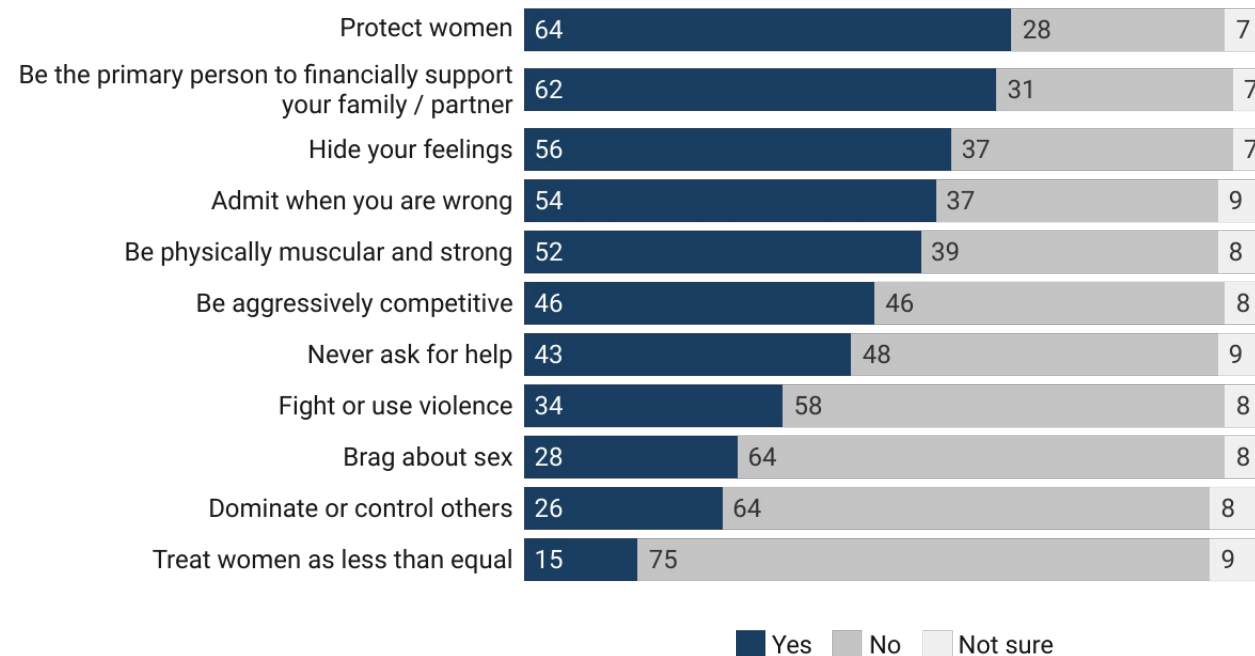
“We’re expected to be superman. We can’t have any emotion. We just got to go out and work, no excuses, no complaints, nothing.”

– California man, young Black men’s group

## A majority of men experience pressure to protect women, be the primary provider, hide their feelings.

Younger men and Black men are among the most likely to report feeling pressure to be physically strong, aggressively competitive, and never ask for help.

Q. AMONG MEN: Has there ever been a time when you personally felt any pressure or encouragement to . . .  
N = 1,116



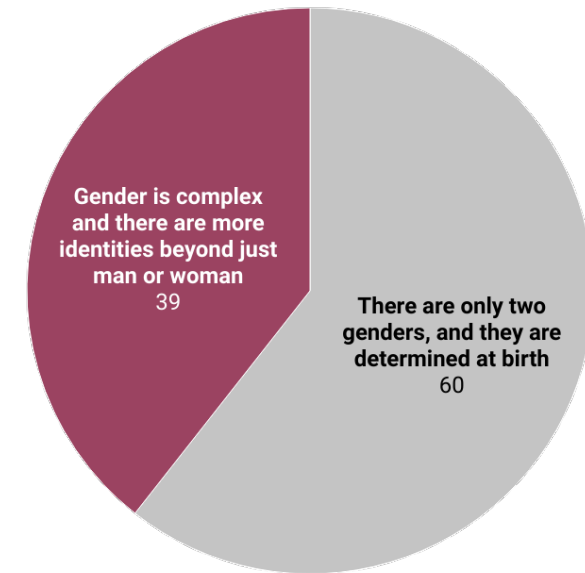
“As men, we are taught in most cultures that we’re the providers . . . there’s an underlying guilt and shame woven in with that because when we are somehow not taking care of those responsibilities and partners complain, we take that as an attack.”

– California man, past perpetrators’ group

## Californians hold conflicted views between traditional gender beliefs and more complex gender identities.

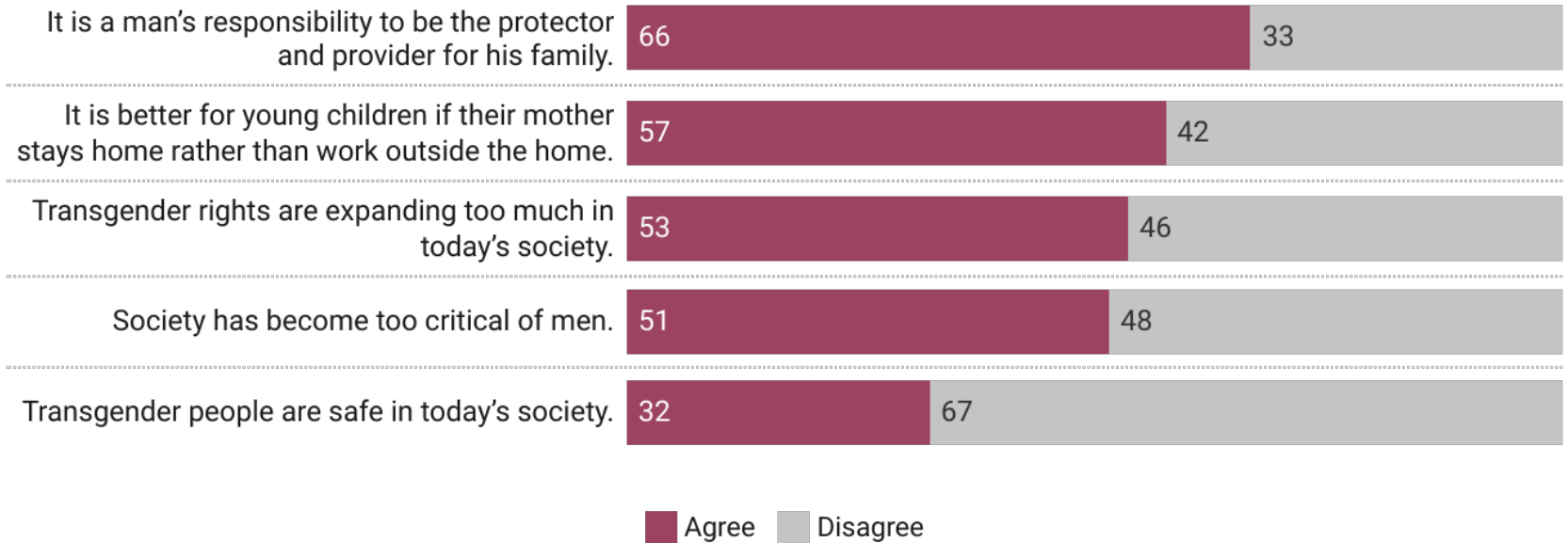
6-in-10 say gender is binary and determined at birth, while 4-in-10 see it as more nuanced. Californians with a higher education, those with higher incomes, and Democrats are more likely to take an expansive view of gender. Perpetrators of domestic violence, those living in rural areas, and Latino men are among the more likely to hold a binary view of gender.

Q. Which statement comes closer to your view, even if neither is exactly right?



# Public deeply divided on gender roles and trans rights in California.

Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



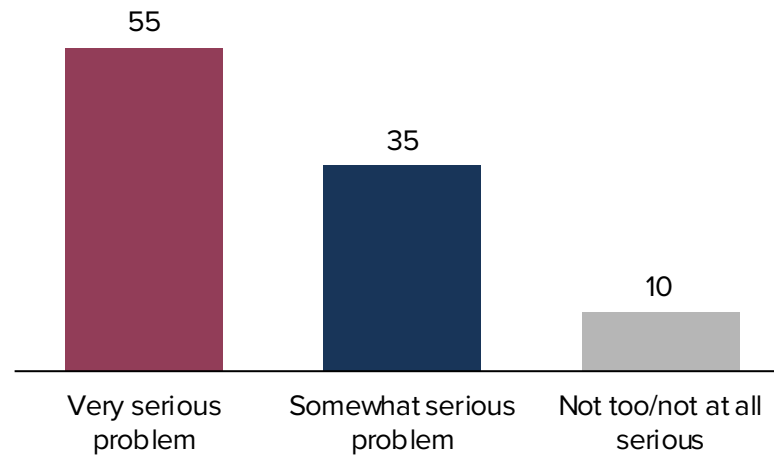
DETAILED FINDINGS

# Domestic Violence

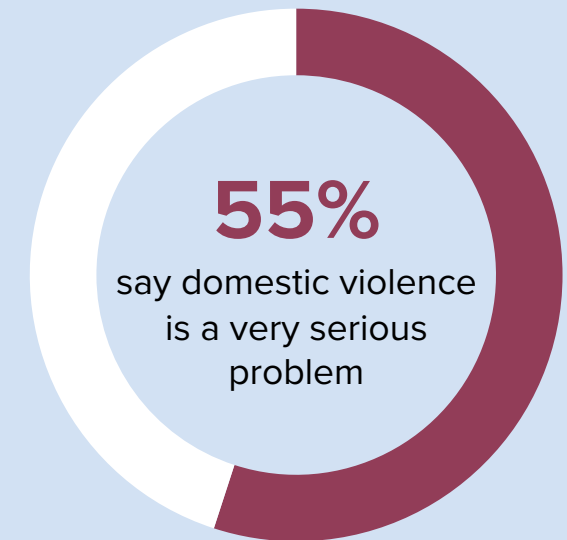
## More than half of Californians say domestic violence is a very serious problem in society.

Majorities across demographics agree. Women, Black adults, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander adults, LGBTQ+ adults, and Democrats are among the most likely to say domestic violence is a “very serious” problem in our society. Men, older adults, and Republicans are less likely to say domestic violence is a “very serious” problem.

Q. In your opinion, is domestic violence a serious problem or not a serious problem in our society right now?\*



\*2021 Survey:  
50% “very serious”  
41% “somewhat serious”

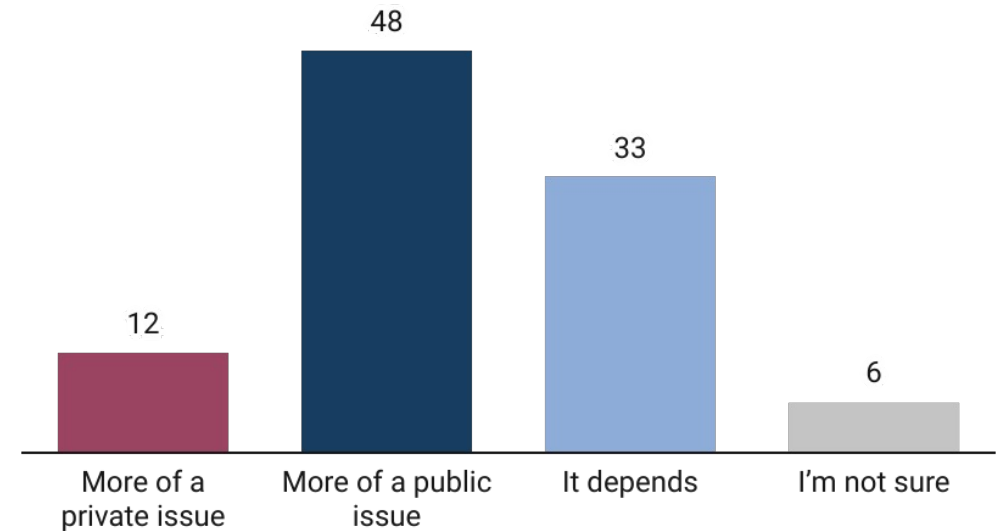




Half see domestic violence as more of a public issue, while others view it as a private matter or are unsure.

Those with a higher education and Democrats are among the most likely to see domestic violence as a public issue that should be addressed by all of us. Perpetrators of domestic violence are most likely to see it as a private issue.

Q. In your opinion, is domestic violence more of a private issue that should stay within families or more of a public issue that should be addressed by all of us in society?



## Most Californians recognize domestic violence includes many behaviors beyond physical violence.

Q. Would you consider each of these behaviors or situations to be domestic violence?

% YES

Physical abuse, which can include being pushed, slapped, blocked from exiting a room, punching the wall, or throwing things	76
Pressure to have sex when you don't want to or forcefully having sex	74
Verbal threats, which can include threatening to expose your immigration status or call immigration, calling the police and accusing you of a crime, taking away your children or pets, sharing your personal information like texts or photos, or harming themselves or your loved ones	74
Stalking or attempts to monitor you or violate your privacy	70
Verbal abuse, which can include put downs or words that make you feel small	69
Mental or emotional control, which can include trying to control how you see reality, making you doubt your memory or perceptions, gaslighting, or other behaviors that leave you feeling confused or guilty	69
Financial control of resources, which can include keeping you from having the money you need to buy necessities like food, taking out a loan or buying something on credit in your name without your permission, or giving you little or no say in what to spend money on	68
Attempts to control your housing, which can include making threats to kick you out or change the locks	67
Attempts to socially isolate or control how often you see or talk to your friends, family, and other social supports	67
Trying to control your reproductive or sexual health, including birth control and condom use	63
Attempts to control your employment, ability to work, or to get an education	63
Attempts to control any of your technology like cellphone, tablet, computer, email or passwords	62

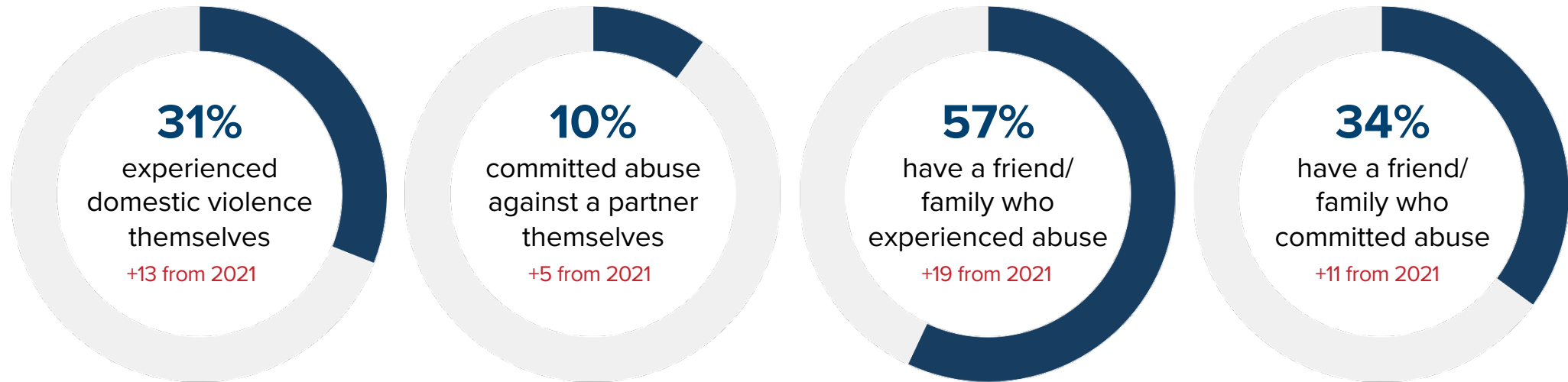
“I appreciate how, for me more recently, [the definition of abuse] has been more broad. Maybe the abuse has been made more, not normalized, but more broad. There’s so many forms, and these examples open it up to other areas that someone might not know they’re being abused. These might give pathways to them to be recognizing that they need to change something or need to get help.”

– California woman, LGBTQ+ survivors’ group

Six in 10 Californians have a direct connection to domestic violence,  
including three in 10 who personally identify as survivors.

Q. We recognize that domestic violence can come in many forms, such as physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and economic harm, abuse, or manipulation. Have you ever...

% Yes



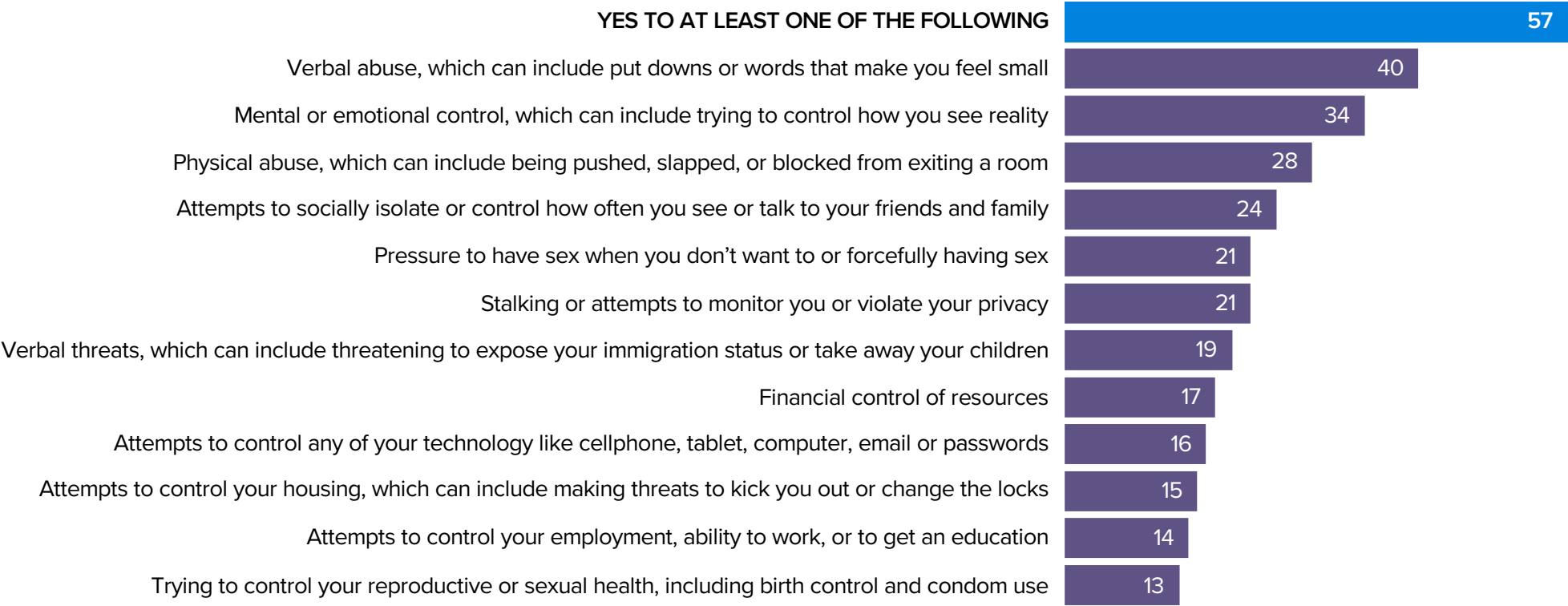
**63% say yes to at least one**

+18 from 2021

57% of Californians are more likely to say they experienced a harmful behavior or situation from a partner, yet just half of them self-identify as a survivor (31%).

Q. Have you ever experienced any of the following behaviors or situations from an intimate partner?

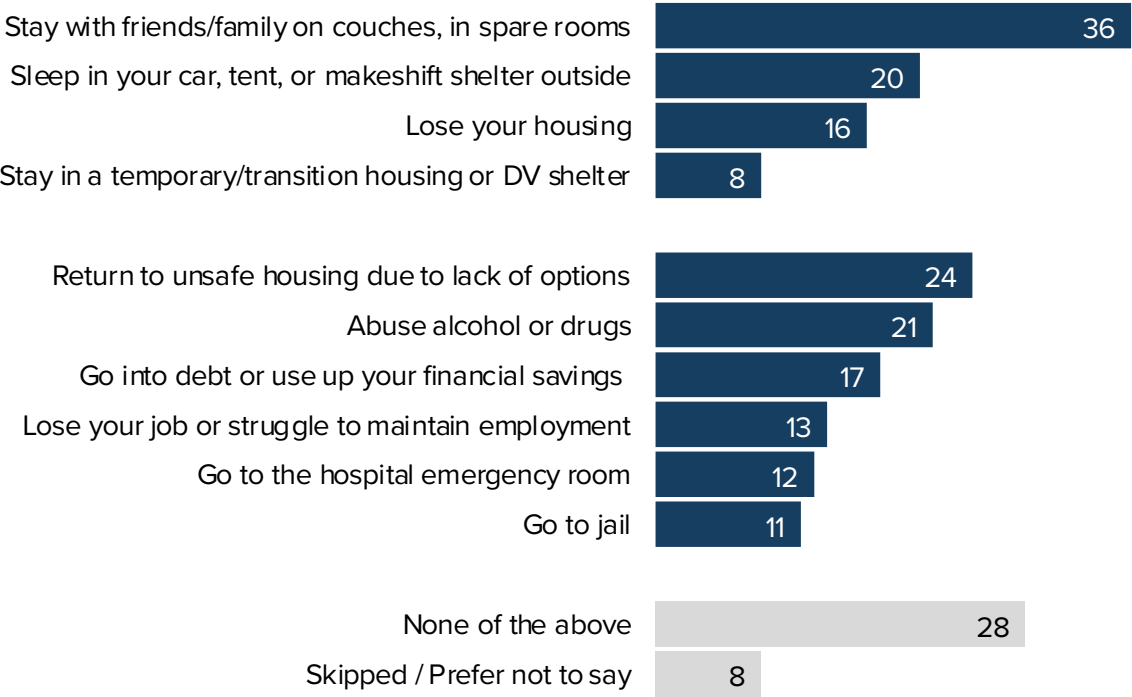
% Yes



Many survivors experienced housing instability and other harms because of domestic violence.

Q. AMONG SURVIVORS: Did your experience with harm or abuse ever cause you to do any of the following? Select all that apply.

N = 797  
% Yes



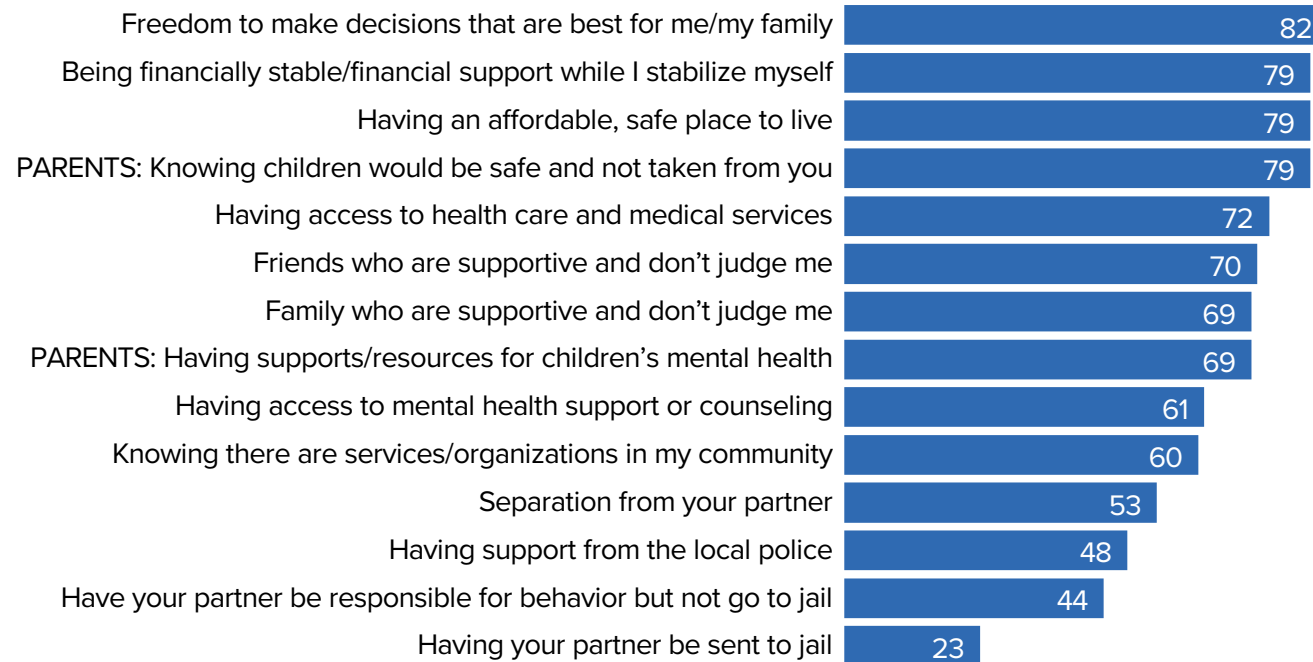
48% of survivors experienced at least one disruption to their housing as a result of the abuse they experienced.

## Survivors need freedom to make decisions, financial support, and housing to feel safe

Q. AMONG SURVIVORS: How important is each of the following in helping you feel safe?

N = 797

% Very important



“For me, feeling safe is definitely financial security . . . if you have a job, you're able to get housing . . . financial stability gets the ball rolling.”

—California woman, All women's survivors' group

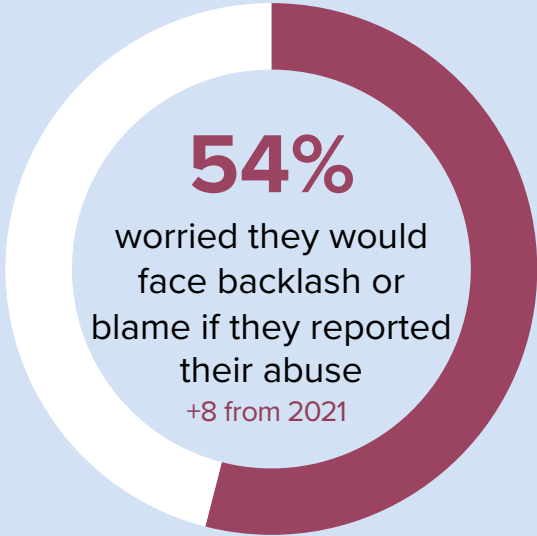
“[Safety is] spaces free of prejudice. Safe spaces. It could even be a therapy group or therapy. Or a space where we can feel validated in terms of what we're going through.”

—California woman, Spanish-speaking survivors' group

In 2025, survivors face many barriers to getting help, amid growing fears of backlash and financial hardships.

During the time they experienced harm, many survivors say they felt afraid to tell others, had no place else to go, did not have access to money to support themselves, and were isolated.

Q. AMONG SURVIVORS: During the time period you experienced harm or abuse—including up to the current time period—did you feel...  
N = 797  
% Yes



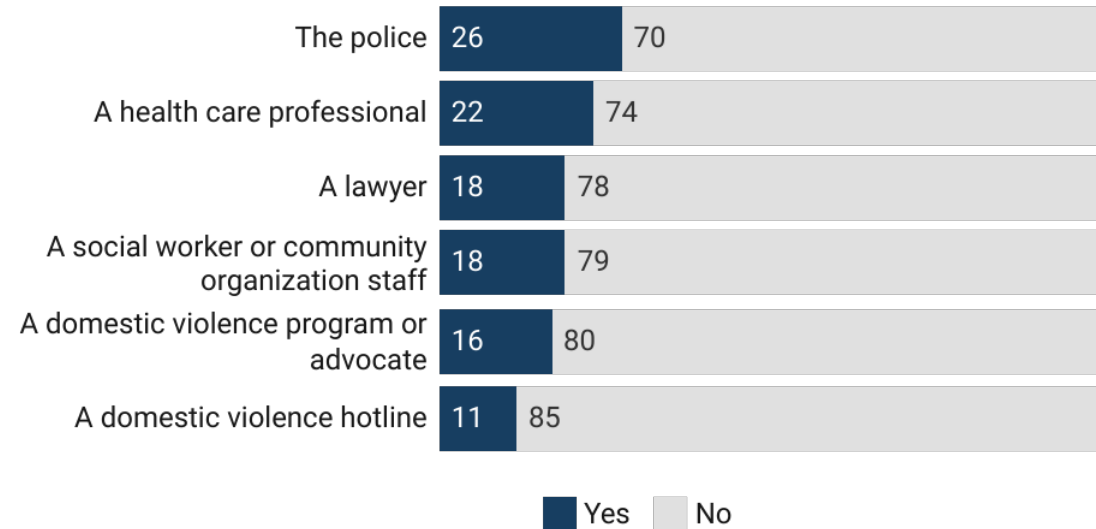


Most survivors did not report the harm or abuse they experienced to any authority or domestic violence resource.

Q. AMONG SURVIVORS: Have you ever reported the harm or abuse you experienced to . . .

*N = 797*

*% YES*

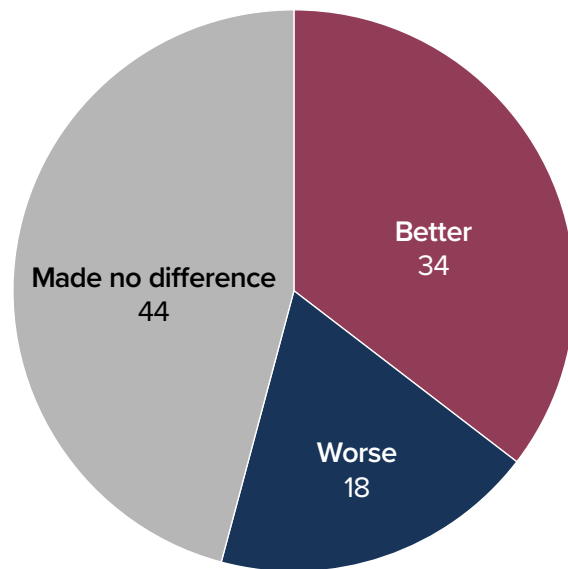


## Many survivors who reported their abuse to police feel they made no difference.

One third (34%) think the police helped their situation; 18% say the police made their situation worse.

Q. IF REPORTED TO POLICE: Do you feel the police made your situation . . .

*N = 238*



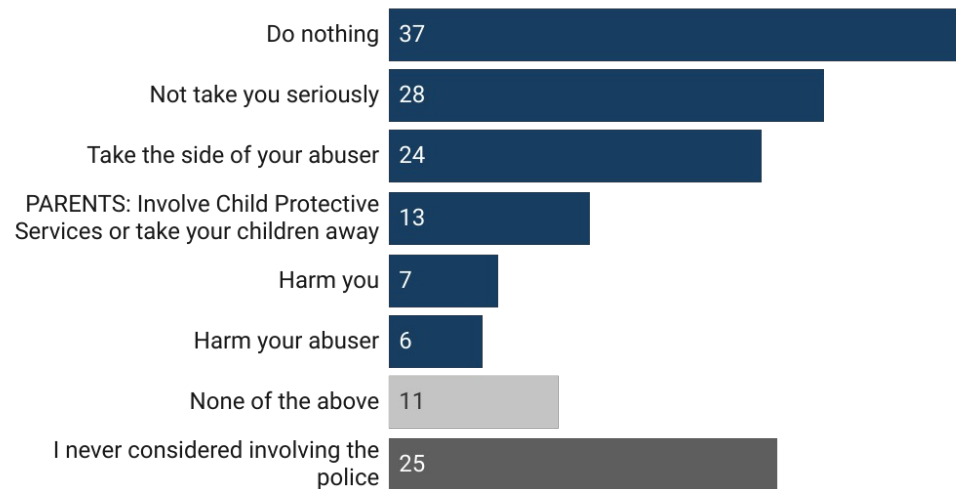
“[Involving the police] is just escalation. They’re not trained to de-escalate. The energy is all wrong. It’s way too scary . . . Tension is high and then you want to bring in somebody who is ready for tension with a gun; it’s not very safe.”

–*Californian man, LGBTQ+ survivors’ group*

## Survivors were concerned police would do nothing, not take them seriously, or take the side of their abuser.

Q. AMONG SURVIVORS: When considering whether or not to involve the police, were you ever concerned the police would . . .

*N = 797*



“When you call [the police]—they say, ‘But why are you in this situation? You can leave. Why don't you leave? You shouldn't allow it.’ I'm like, ‘Oh, OK. Wow.’ You feel worse.”

—California woman, Spanish-speaking survivors' group

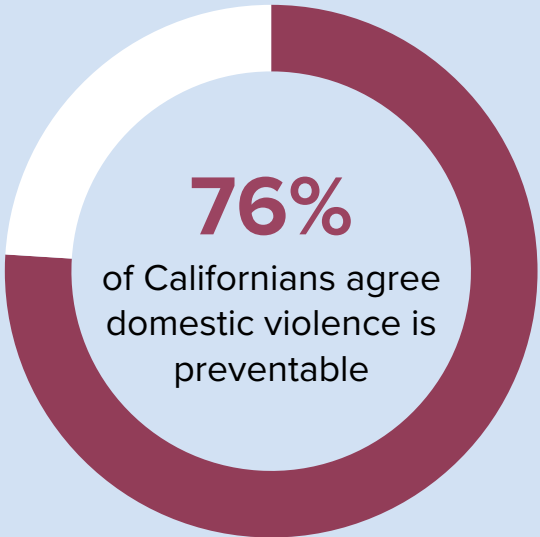
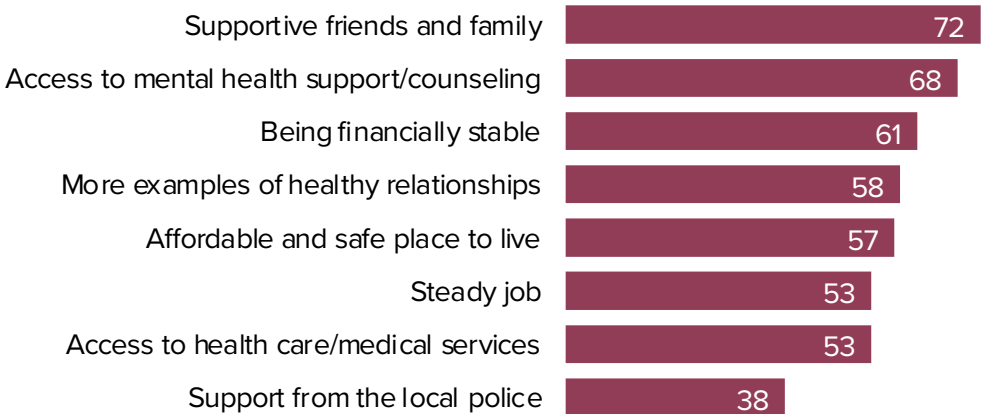
DETAILED FINDINGS

# Prevention, Policy, & Directions for Change

# A majority of Californians agree domestic violence is preventable and identify key supports for it.

Mental health care, financial stability, and a supportive social network are most top-of-mind as key to preventing domestic violence—support from local police ranks lowest.

Q. Which of the following do you think would be most helpful in preventing domestic violence? Select any that apply



“If I had been in therapy, or just had check-ins with somebody safe growing up who [could ask] ‘does this relationship look healthy to you?’”

—Californian man, LGBTQ+ survivors’ group

“I do think [domestic violence] is preventable if we're able to educate women what some of those forms of abuses look like.”

– California woman, *All women's survivors' group*

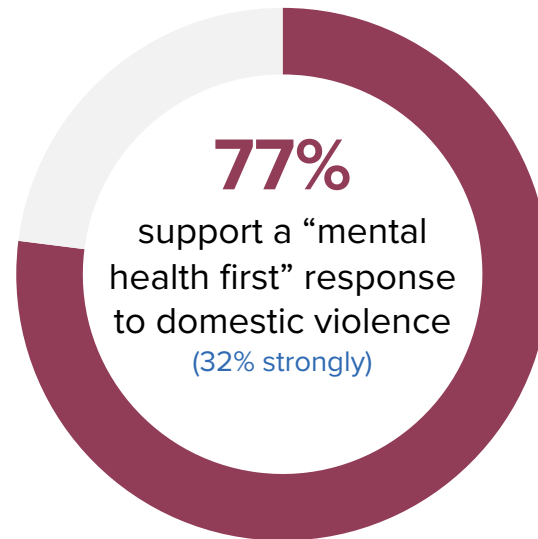
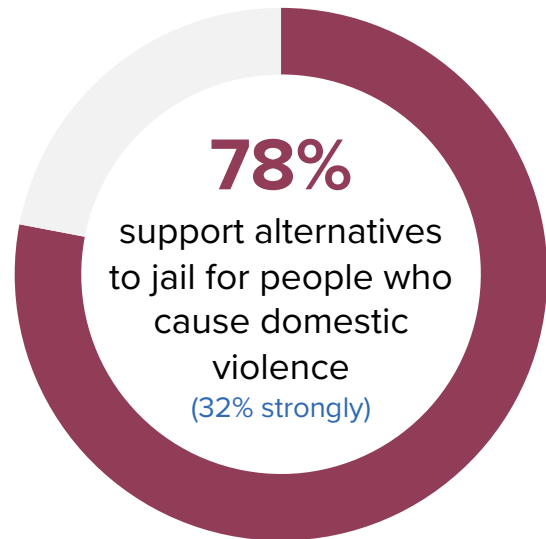
“[If] they put some type of course in high school . . . that's when you're the most vulnerable as far as learning things . . . young boys could learn something new, like ways to de-stress or . . . effectively communicate.”

– California man, *young Black men's group*

## Californians express broad support for alternative responses to domestic violence, including restorative justice programs.

Most Californians (78%) are open to alternatives to jail for people who cause domestic violence including things like counseling. Three-quarters (77%) also support a mental health first model of response to domestic violence (social workers/mental health professionals are first to respond to non-violent crises).

Support for both is high across demographics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, education) and political affiliation.



“We ask too much of police officers . . . if we had mental health professionals, we stop asking police officers to be those mental health professionals in the moment.”

—California man, past perpetrators' group

“These are the right steps, moving in the right direction of addressing mental health . . . involving family members, accountability, community.”

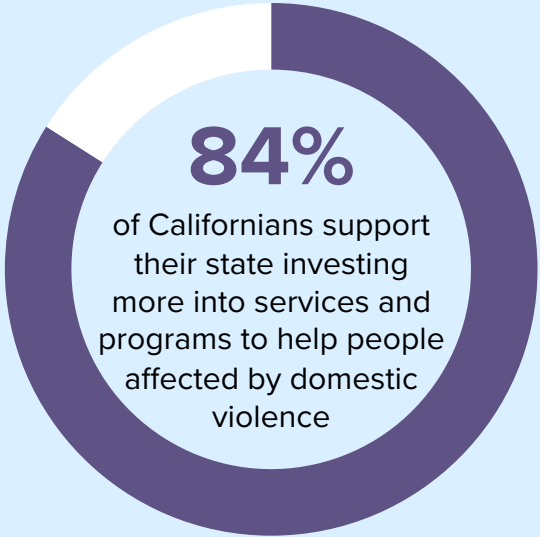
—California woman, All women's survivors' group

# Most Californians support their state investing more into services and programs to help people affected by domestic violence.

Most Californians (84%) support the state investing more resources in domestic violence services and programs. Policies they support include mental health care (89%), help enrolling in programs like MediCal (88%), protections against job loss for survivors (86%) and paid cash assistance to survivors (83%).

Q. Would you support or oppose the following programs or policies to help those affected by domestic violence?

*% Strongly or somewhat support*



“[Investing more in resources] could break the cycle. If a woman and her children receive basic support, she won’t have to rely on [someone] who might become abusive again.”

–California woman, Vietnamese women’s group

“There’s so much need. So many places that [resources are] stretched so thin.”

–California woman, LGBTQ+ survivors’ group



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