

PROTECTING CHILDREN IN THE DIGITAL AGE

*What Americans Demand
from Tech and Government*

2026 RESEARCH REPORT



QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY & RESEARCH DESIGN

This report presents the results of a national quantitative research study conducted in March 2026, which collected self-reported data from 1,111 adult respondents aged 18 or older.



OVERVIEW

The study focused acutely on understanding public perceptions, awareness, and attitudes regarding online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC), as well as support for related policy measures.



METHODOLOGY

The survey was administered as a 10-minute questionnaire through an online panel. To ensure a representative sample nationwide, data was weighted across key demographics including age, gender, and race based on U.S. Census data. The estimated margin of error for the total sample of 1,111 respondents is approximately $\pm 2.94\%$ at a 95% confidence level. The margin of error is larger for subgroups.



CONTENT WARNING & RESOURCES

Given the sensitive nature of the topics covered, participants were explicitly informed about the content before proceeding with the survey. Comprehensive crisis and emotional support help resources were provided to all participants throughout the survey, as well as channels for reporting sexual abuse and child sexual abuse images and videos online, also known as child sexual abuse material (CSAM).



RESEARCH PARTNERS

This research was conducted by Breakthrough Campaigns on behalf of International Justice Mission.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Mandate to Act: American Support for Ending Online Sexual Exploitation of Children

Online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC) has emerged as one of the most urgent and rapidly escalating child safety crises of our time. What was once a largely hidden crime has grown — accelerated by technology, social media, and the internet’s expanding reach into the daily lives of children — into a global epidemic that demands immediate attention from policymakers, the technology industry, law enforcement, and the public alike.

The scale of the problem is staggering. The [Childlight Global Child Safety Institute](#) estimates that more than 300 million children worldwide were victims of technology-facilitated sexual exploitation and abuse in the past year. Childlight research also reveals that 1 in 13 (7.6%) surveyed American men have or would engage in sexually explicit webcam or livestream interactions with children. It also notes that, in the U.S. alone, 11% of men report that they have engaged in online behaviors at some point in their lifetime that could be classed as online child sexual abuse offending. The volume of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) — images, recorded videos, and live-streamed abuse — has surged to record levels. [INHOPE](#) reported a 218% increase in URLs containing suspected CSAM in 2024 alone, with over 1.6 million URLs confirmed as illegal.

Perhaps most alarming is the role of emerging technology in supercharging this crisis, allowing for quicker and more widespread dissemination of CSAM. Live-streaming of child sexual abuse — often facilitated across international networks in exchange for payment — remains one of the most severe and undetected forms of child sexual exploitation online. Unlike static images, live abuse occurs in real time, evading many of the hash-matching and image-detection tools currently deployed by technology companies. Despite this, most major platforms have yet to implement real-time detection and intervention capabilities.

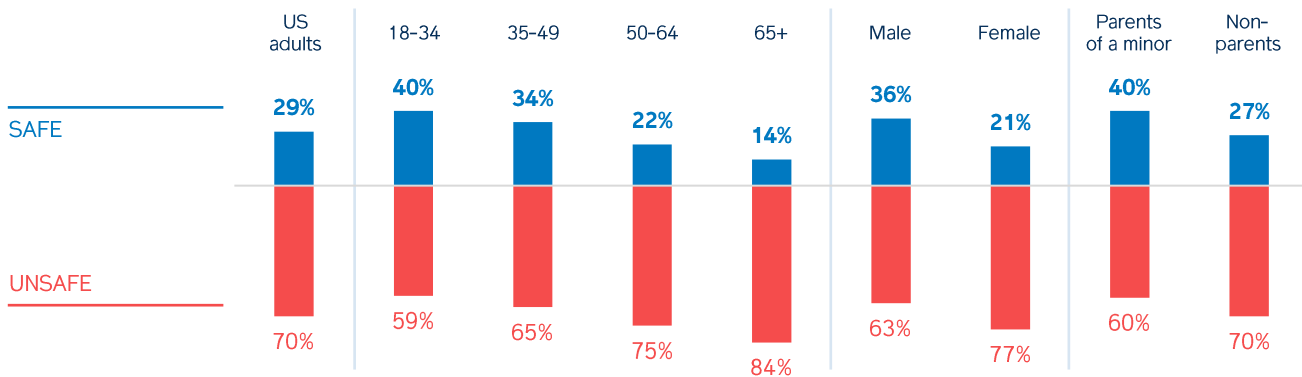
International Justice Mission (IJM), a global organization at the forefront of combating OSEC, commissioned this national survey to understand where the United States public stands on these issues — and what they expect from their government and from the technology companies whose platforms and smart devices have become the primary venues for exploitation. The findings reveal deep public awareness and concern, and a clear and bipartisan mandate for action.

AMERICAN VIEWS TOWARD ONLINE CHILD SAFETY

Concern about online harms facing today’s youth is widespread among American adults.

Over two-thirds (70%) of U.S. adults believe that the internet is unsafe for children and teens, including nearly a third (30%) who say it is “not safe at all.” While the intensity of this belief varies across different groups, it is critical to note that it is not exclusively felt by any one demographic. Even younger adults, who are often more trusting of technology, are more likely than not to view the internet as unsafe for minors.

In your opinion, how safe is the internet for children and teens today?



THE PUBLIC SEES A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT THREATS THAT COME FROM GROWING UP ONLINE

When those who feel the internet is not safe for children were prompted to explain why, respondents cited several reasons. The most prominent concern these adults identified was the presence of online predators, with respondents citing the risk of catfishing as a means to groom or exploit. In congruence with this, the accessibility of inappropriate content, such as violence or sexually explicit material, contributes to adults’ perceptions of an unsafe environment for minors.

Many adults also attributed vulnerabilities stem from a perceived lack of parental supervision or inadequate parental controls available on many websites or apps.

Beyond these issues, respondents also voiced concerns about cyberbullying and misinformation.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“The anonymity of the internet allows predators to mask their identities and target minors through grooming and manipulation.”

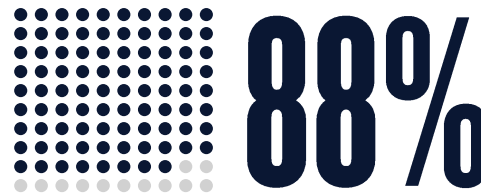
“There’s too much violence and a lot of sexual content that is not good for children.”

“Because [kids] think they are talking with another child or teen, but it is actually an adult predator.”

“Social media companies are not preventing bullying and abuse of minors.”

AMERICANS HAVE DEEP CONCERNS ABOUT ONLINE SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN (OSEC)

This widespread perception of the internet as a hazard is reinforced by a broad awareness of online sexual exploitation of children (OSEC). Over 8 in 10 (83%) adults report some awareness of online child sexual abuse, including grooming, live videos, or the sharing of images or recorded videos of child sexual abuse. In fact, nearly half (46%) say they are “very familiar” with the child sexual abuse or exploitation happening online. With this awareness comes deep-seated concern: Nearly 9 in 10 (88%) say they are very concerned about OSEC.



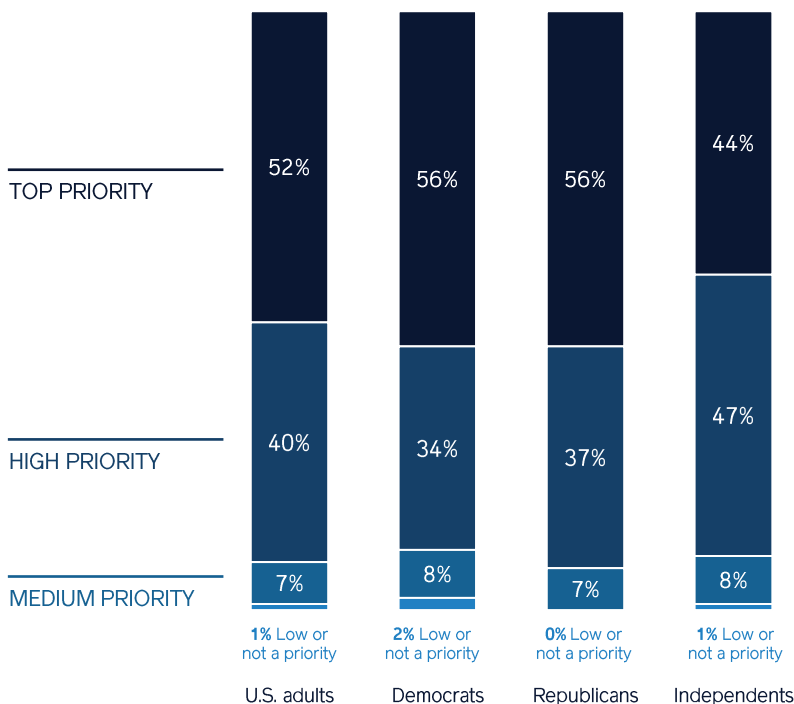
88%
of Americans find OSEC
very concerning



AMERICANS DEMAND LEGISLATORS ACTIVELY ADDRESS OSEC

Nearly all Americans surveyed are very concerned about OSEC, and they believe their elected officials should mirror their concern through legislative action. The majority (99%) of U.S. adults believe their U.S. elected officials should prioritize creating laws to effectively address OSEC, including 52% who say it should be a top priority for legislators. This attitude is seen across adults of varying party affiliation, with the majority saying it should be a high priority at the very least.

How big of a priority should it be for U.S. elected officials to create laws to address the online sexual exploitation of children?

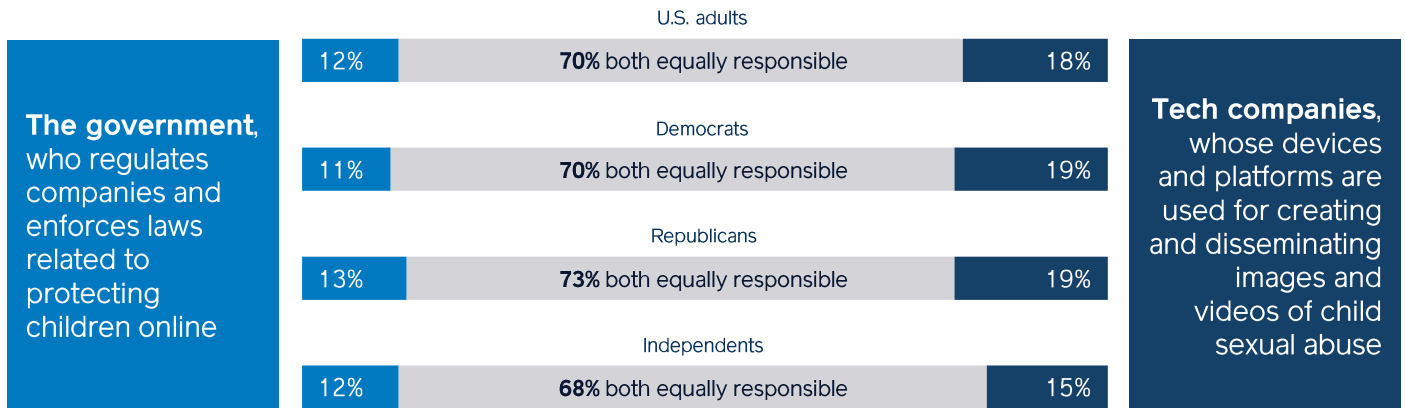


THE ROLE OF TECH AND GOVERNMENT

Adults hold a strong and consistent view that both technology companies and elected officials bear significant responsibility when it comes to combating online sexual exploitation of children.

When asked who holds more responsibility for preventing the spread of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) online, 70% of adults say the government and technology companies are equally responsible — a stance shared across party lines.

Who has more of a responsibility when it comes to preventing the creation and spread of child sexual abuse images and videos (known as 'child sexual abuse material') online?



COMPANIES AND ELECTED LEADERS WHO WORK TO FIGHT THE SPREAD OF CSAM WOULD BE REWARDED BY THE PUBLIC

Nine in 10 (90%) U.S. adults would view a tech company more positively if it invested in innovative solutions to prevent online child sexual abuse. Additionally, an equal share say they would be more likely to support officials who hold tech companies accountable.



Would be **more likely to support an elected official** who holds tech companies accountable for child sexual exploitation and abuse that occurs on their platforms



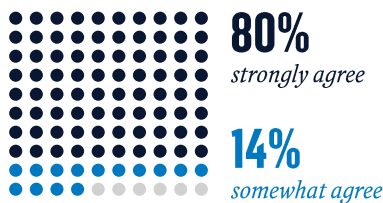
Would have a **more positive opinion toward a tech company** that invests in innovative solutions to prevent online child sexual abuse

U.S. ADULTS AGREE WITH A VARIETY OF ACTIONS COMPANIES CAN TAKE TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST OSEC

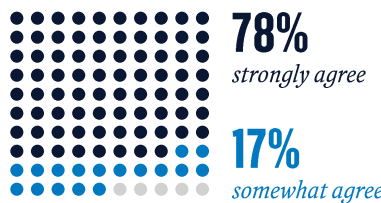
Concerns about online safety of children translates into strong support for tech companies to implement various preventative measures (80% strongly agree), including automatic alerts (78% strongly agree) and safeguards on devices to prevent the recording, streaming, or watching of CSAM (76% strongly agree).

Importantly, it's not enough to address this issue after-the-fact. Instead, there is a strong appetite for tech companies to use technology to prevent it in real-time, including by stopping live streaming as it occurs, something that is currently absent from the tools most companies already use.

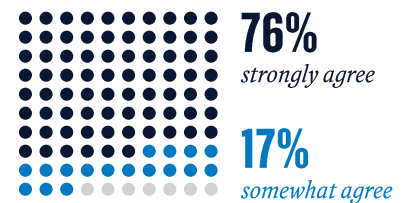
Americans who agree with each of the following statements:



Tech companies should use technology to **prevent real-time streaming/watching** of live videos of child sexual abuse on their platforms.



Companies should implement **automatic alerts** for potentially abusive content involving children.

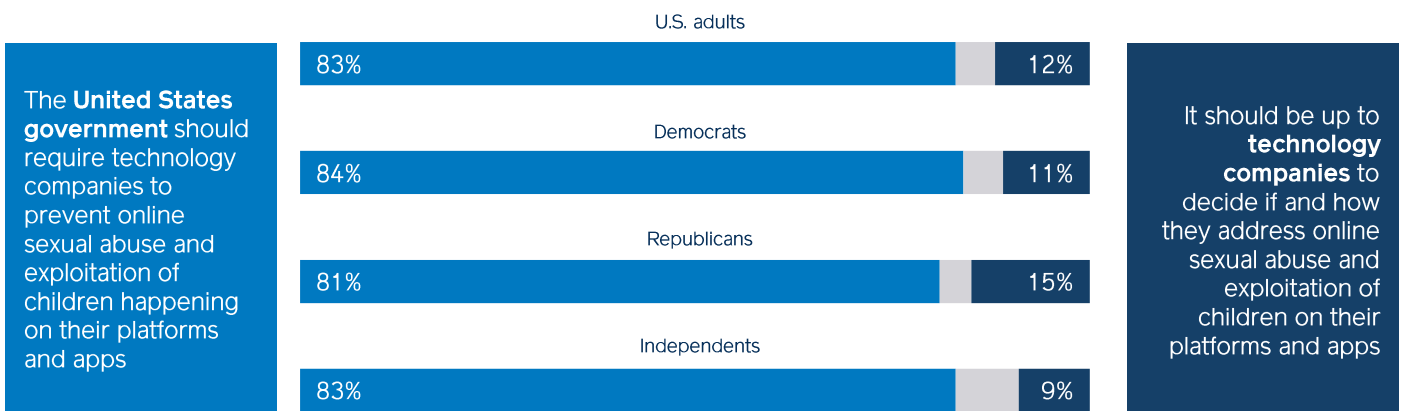


Devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets, laptops) should come with **safeguards** that prevent recording, streaming, or watching live videos of child sexual abuse.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTION IS NEEDED TO HOLD TECH COMPANIES ACCOUNTABLE

The data reveals a consensus that accountability is paramount and that government intervention is expected. While Americans believe tech companies share some responsibility for preventing child abuse on their platforms, companies' voluntary compliance is not enough. Standards must be enforced and Americans want policies that require tech companies to act. Eighty-three percent of adults believe the U.S. government should require tech companies to prevent online sexual abuse from happening on their platforms and apps, rather than leaving it to companies to do so voluntarily (12%).

Which of the following statements comes closer to your view?



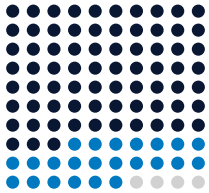
FURTHERMORE, THE PUBLIC DEMANDS THAT TECH COMPANIES TAKE PROACTIVE MEASURES AND ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE FOR NON-COMPLIANCE

The overwhelming majority support technology companies sharing suspected abuse reports to help boost law enforcement efforts against child predators (96%). Additionally, over 9 in 10 (93%) support requirements for tech companies to issue annual transparency reports for child abuse prevention on their platforms. And when technology companies don't meet requirements, the public wants them to be held accountable through penalties.

Americans who support each of the following potential policies:

96%

of U.S. adults support



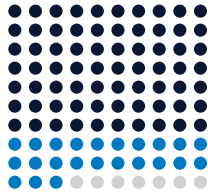
73%
strongly support

23%
somewhat support

Require tech companies to include **specific information in their suspected abuse reports** to help increase the effectiveness of law enforcement investigations into child predators.

93%

of U.S. adults support



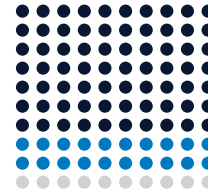
70%
strongly support

23%
somewhat support

Require tech companies to issue an **annual transparency report** about their efforts to address online sexual exploitation of children on their platforms.

90%

of U.S. adults support



70%
strongly support

20%
somewhat support

Technology companies should **face penalties** for failing to prevent or remove child sexual abuse material (e.g., images and recorded or live videos) from their platforms and apps.

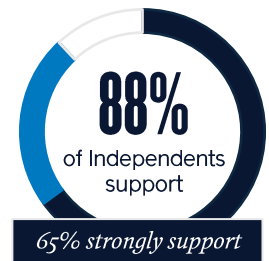
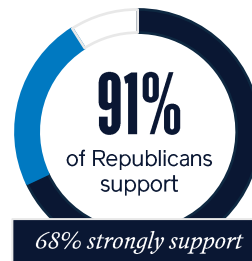
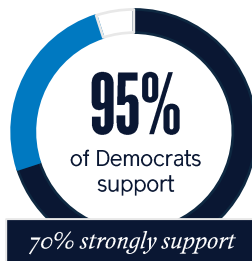
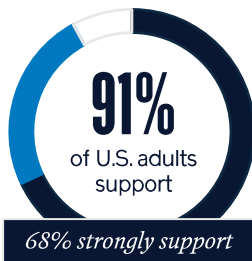


PUBLIC SENTIMENT TOWARD THE STOP CSAM ACT

The overwhelming majority of Americans support the STOP CSAM Act as a way of combating online sexual exploitation of children – one issue all sides can agree on.

When presented with a brief description of the proposed law*, a remarkable 91% of adults expressed support, with only 2% indicating opposition. This strong initial endorsement underscores the deep-seated public concern regarding OSEC and their desire for decisive legislative action to combat it. There is a clear public mandate for the bill's objectives: empowering survivors, strengthening tech company accountability, and enhancing transparency in reporting and prevention.

Do you support or oppose the STOP CSAM Act becoming a law?



A LOOK INTO SUPPORTERS OF THE STOP CSAM ACT

Among Americans who support the STOP CSAM Act, there is a clear, profound motivation centered on the well-being of children. Beyond this fundamental protection, respondents highlight a pressing need for platforms to be held responsible for the content disseminated on their services, believing these companies have a duty to prevent the spread of harmful material. There is also a strong desire to support victims of abuse, ensuring they have access to the necessary justice services and resources to heal from their experiences.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“The main reason I support the STOP CSAM Act is that it helps protect children from sexual abuse and exploitation online by ensuring technology companies take responsibility and take stronger action to prevent the creation and spread of human content.”

“I believe that children should be priority in making sure they are protected against any predator and/or inappropriate harm.”

“To make tech companies, government, and or anyone else held accountable for these videos being shown on any platform. Being able to sue such platforms helps keep our children safer.”

*Description of the STOP CSAM Act shown to respondents: “The STOP CSAM Act is a proposed law that would empower survivors, strengthen accountability for tech companies, and enhance transparency and reporting standards across online platforms. The act would also make it easier for victims to sue these companies for failing to prevent the spread of images and videos of child sexual abuse.”