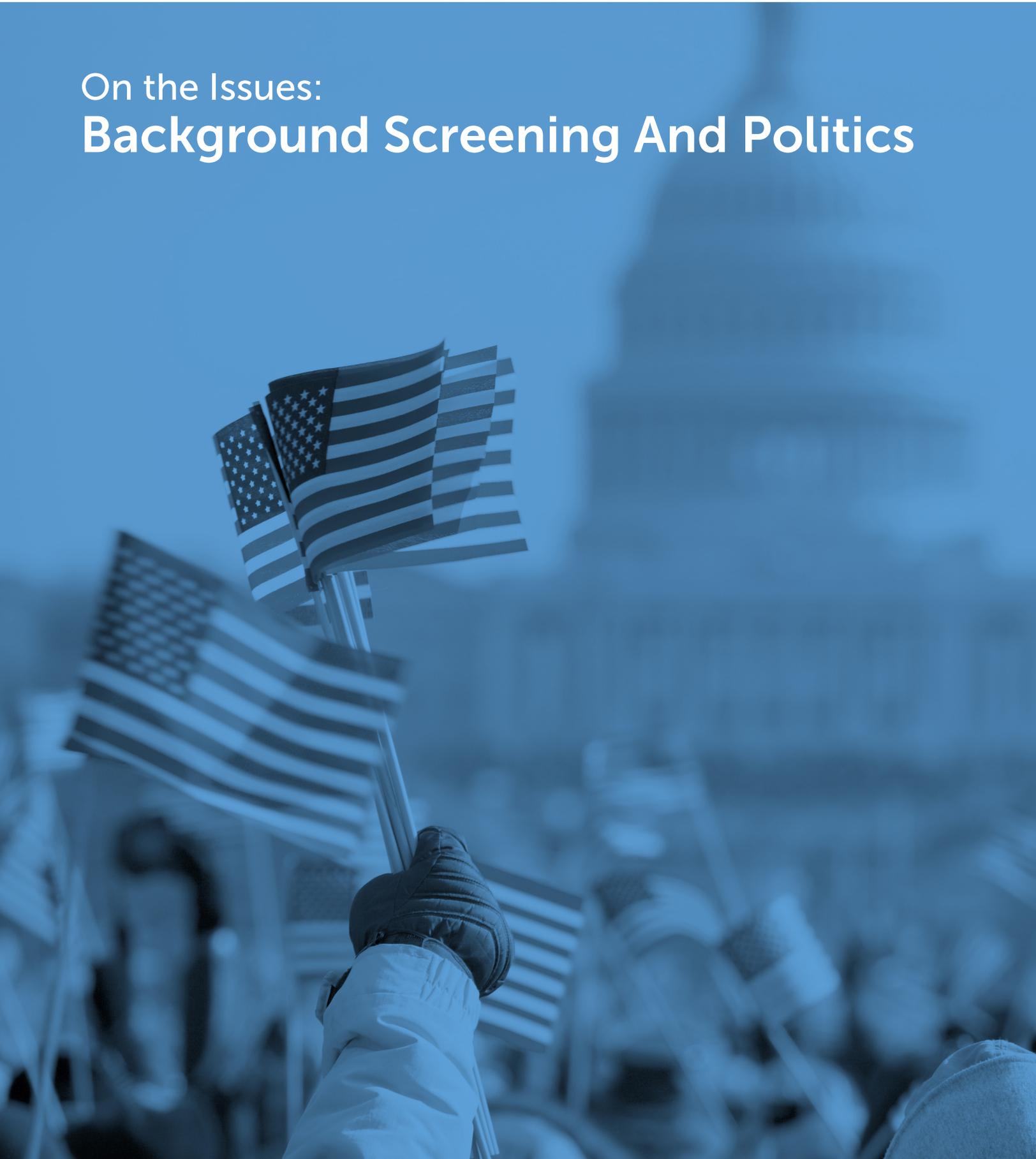


# On the Issues: Background Screening And Politics



## Introduction

Public safety is something on which all political parties can agree: just as many Democrats (47%) as Republicans (48%) as Independents (48%) see this as one of the most important issues.



Presidential elections, or any election for that matter, are often a time of reevaluation. It is a time to sit back and ask, “what do I believe on a political level and with whom does it most closely align?” While our inner thoughts can be clouded from Facebook statuses, media outlets, family members or friends, at our very core we all have thoughts, opinions and strong convictions on how to make the world a safer place – even if it is not always easy to express our ideas to others.

Recently, a group of us at Sterling Talent Solutions had the opportunity to partner with Kelton Research, a leading global insights firm serving as a partner to more than 100 of the Fortune 500 brands. We focused on one simple idea – how would consumers feel if we eliminated background screening? All too often we hear negativity surrounding background screening and wanted to approach the issue from a new angle.

We sampled 1,077 nationally representative Americans ages 18 and over using an e-mail invitation and an online survey managed by Kelton Research. Upon the completion of the survey, we collected a lot of data and it began to tell a story much larger than just

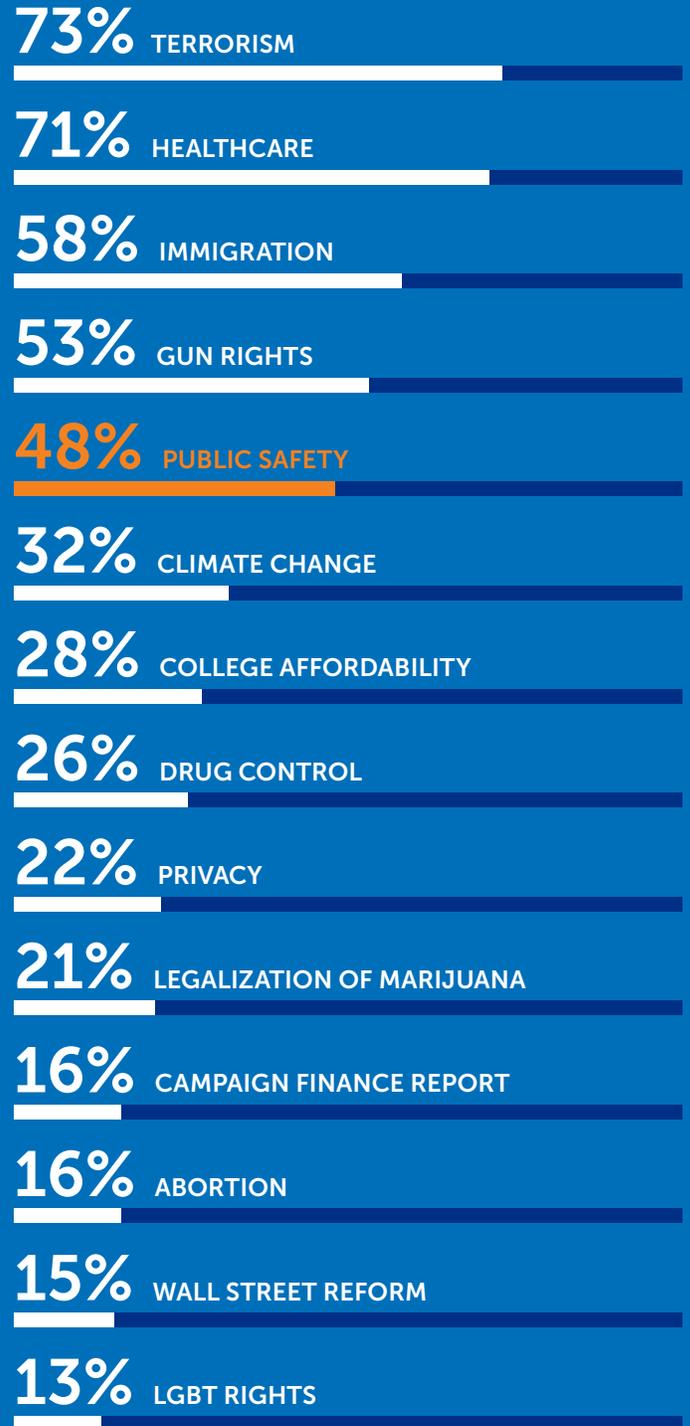
background screening. The data began to explore and narrate intersections between background screening and often talked about political issues, specifically: safety, immigration, right to work, gun control, privacy, homeland security, legalization of marijuana and education.

For example, we learned that when it comes to the national issues Americans think need to be addressed in the presidential debates this election year, more than twice as many prioritize public safety (48%) over privacy (22%). In fact, public safety is something on which all political parties can agree: just as many Democrats (47%) as Republicans (48%) as Independents (48%) see this as one of the most important issues.

Regardless of your political party or stance on the issues it is a time to pause and reflect on where we are at this moment in time and the endless possibilities of the future. As we explore this data together (in an apolitical manner) it is more than just a few stats on a page; it is the strong feelings and beliefs on how Americans feel about their safety, a priority always on their minds for both their loved ones and themselves.



Which national issues do you think are most important to be discussed in the presidential debates this year?



## Issue 1: Homeland Security

As we have mentioned earlier in this report, safety is a top priority this election year. We want to explore this topic a little more. When asked which national issues our participants thought would be the most important to be discussed in the presidential debate this year, terrorism came in at the number one spot at 73%. Our research shows that 81% of Americans believe that feeling safe at all times is a right – not just a privilege. As we dove a little deeper, we found that 60% of Americans think about their safety on a regular basis, while 40% think about their privacy this often.

Safety has become such an important factor in Americans' minds that it merits big sacrifices in other areas of their lives. Americans would give up more for their safety than their privacy when it comes to their smartphone (37% vs 32%), dream job (29% vs. 23%) and use of the Internet (32% vs. 29%). In probably the most shocking statistic, more working Americans would be willing to give up half of their salary\* (16% vs. 11%) or all of their vacation hours\* (28% vs. 24%) for the sake of their safety than their privacy.

Which of the following, if any, would you be willing to give up for one year to ensure...?

- My safety
- My privacy

### USE OF A SMARTPHONE



### USE OF THE INTERNET



### MY DREAM JOB



### ALL MY VACATION HOURS \*



### MY CAR \*\*



### HALF OF MY SALARY \*



\* among those who are employed

\*\* among those who own a car

## Issue 2: Immigration And Right To Work

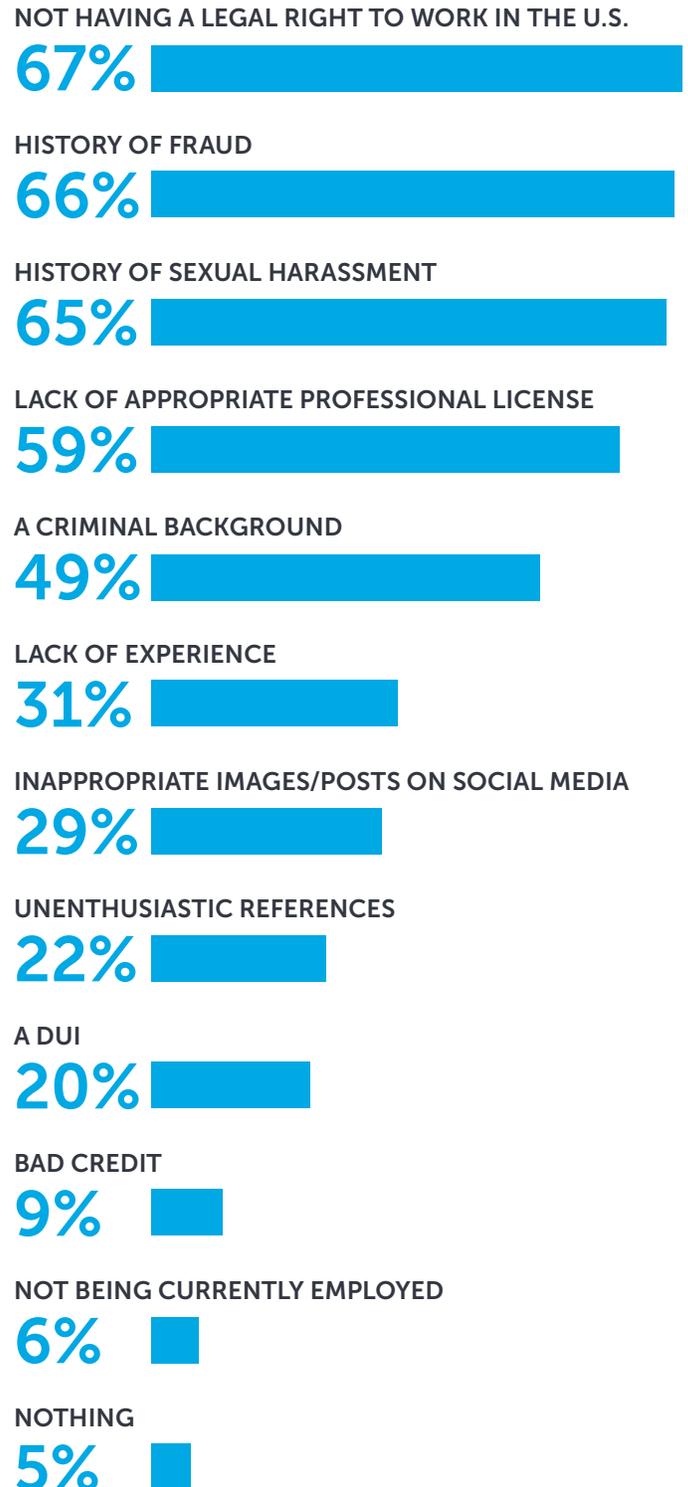
The United States is often praised for being the land where anything is possible. The American Dream – the idea hard work and opportunity can lead to immense success – often draws people into our country for hopes of a better future. And it is a topic on which Americans have strong opinions.

Diving right into our survey results, more Americans think that potential employers should investigate a person’s legal right to work in the U.S. (69%) than his or her experience (57%) or references (53%). In fact, 67% believe that not having the legal right to work in the U.S. should prevent someone from getting a job.

The survey also revealed that 49% of respondents think a criminal background should prevent someone from getting a job, while 35% don’t think that anyone with a criminal record should have the opportunity to work. However, it is crucial to remember that not all infractions or convictions necessarily pertain to the function of a job. For example, while a DUI is a serious matter, it may not be relevant to a job in which the applicant is not required to drive. It is important to consider factors such as the type of conviction, the severity of the crime, how long ago it occurred, the relevance of the criminal activity to the job, etc. within the context of the job for which you are hiring.

But, there is one topic on which an overwhelming majority of Americans can agree. 95% of Americans think it should be mandatory to determine whether a person has a criminal background before he or she takes on the responsibilities of a job. While we sometimes hear background screening framed in a negative context, this research illustrates that nearly all Americans strongly support the benefits that come along with background screening.

Which of the following, if any, do you think should prevent someone from being able to get a job?



## Issue 3: Gun Control

Since the signing of our Constitution, Americans have had the right to bear arms. Gun control regulation has become a very hot topic in 2016, driven by a rash of mass shootings in the US and worldwide. In fact, "there were more than 372 mass shootings in the U.S. in 2015, killing 475 and wounding 1,870."\* This has generated concerns about many gun and safety related issues, particularly within the context of background screening. From nightly newscasts to the latest season of Netflix's "House of Cards," gun control conversation seems to be appearing more and more every day.

Our research shows that gun control is the fourth most important topic (53%) to be discussed this year in the presidential debates behind immigration (58%), healthcare (71%) and terrorism (73%).

While we are not here to take a stand on gun control, we will report the main findings on this topic, which are:

- 64% of Americans would be scared to learn that someone with whom they interacted had not undergone a background check before purchasing a firearm
- 70% would feel safer if they knew that everyone who buys a firearm is screened through a background check

All of this data leads up to our main fact finding that nearly three in four Americans (72%) think it should be mandatory to determine if someone has a criminal record before they buy a gun. In juxtaposition, 15% think someone with a criminal record should have the ability to purchase firearms. Regardless of your stance on gun control, we foresee this issue continuing to rank among the top five hot topics throughout the duration of this election.

# 64%

of Americans would be scared to learn that someone with whom they interacted had not undergone a background check before purchasing a firearm



# 70%

would feel safer if they knew that everyone who buys a firearm is screened through a background check



\* <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2015-the-year-of-mass-shootings/>

## Issue 4: Safety

When it comes down to it, most Americans are natural skeptics. With real time access to breaking news wherever they turn, Americans tend to view everything in their lives through a closer lens.

Our research has indicated that almost six in ten people (56%) are more inclined to believe that you can't be too careful in dealing with people rather than that most people can be trusted (44%).

We wanted to compare this against the General Social Survey, a leading source for sociological trend data, who asked the question, "generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" When we adjusted the percentages to account for variances in sample size, we found that the percentage went from 21.8% (2012) to 20.4% (2014) for "can trust" and went from 42.9% (2012) to 42.4% (2014) for "cannot trust,"\* implying that in 2016 people are overall less trusting.

The research also discovered that being cynical is more common among women than men (62% vs. 50%) and Millennials than older age groups (64% vs. 53%), implying that these groups may feel more skeptical when it comes to safety.

But, safety isn't restricted to a simple mindset. Many Americans expect to feel safe in various situations, such as when visiting a doctor (83%), at work (78%) or flying on an airplane (65%), as evidenced in the chart. As evidenced in the question of trust above, older generations are more likely to see safety as a given, as opposed to younger generations.

### I expect to be able to feel safe...

AT THE DOCTOR



AT WORK \*\*



DINING AT A RESTAURANT



WITH A SERVICE PROFESSIONAL IN MY HOME



ON AN AIRPLANE



USING THE INTERNET



ON A TRAIN OR SUBWAY



IN A TAXI OR UBER



I NEVER EXPECT TO BE ABLE TO FEEL SAFE



\* <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/441/vshow>

\*\* among those who are employed

In many cases, the importance of feeling safe trumps the quality of service one is receiving. More participants would like to feel safe than feel that they are getting good customer service.

Even indicators of competency aren't as important as signs of safety. More Americans think potential employers should investigate a person's criminal background (71%) and legal right to work in the U.S. (69%) than his or her experience (57%) or references (53%).

Finally, when it comes to safety, 65% believe that background checks provide a sense of safety and 59% believe they are necessary for safety. In fact, 56% would feel safer interacting with employees at a company that conducts background checks and 52% would be more inclined to support a company that conducts background checks.

**When it comes to the following professionals, it is important...**

- That I feel safe
- That I get a good service

**AIRLINE PILOT**



**DOCTOR**



**NURSE**



**DRIVER**



**IN-HOME CARE PROVIDER**



**71%**

think employers *should* investigate an applicant's criminal background

## Issue 5: Child Safety And Education

More than one in three parents admit that they worry that their child's teacher (37%) might have a criminal record. It's no wonder that, when it comes to many professionals with whom their children interact, few parents feel confident in their child's safety if they don't have a clear knowledge of the professional's background. This goes for the child's babysitter (22%), coach (23%) or teacher (53%). Similarly, seven in ten Americans think it should be mandatory to determine if someone has a criminal background before they teach children in school (70%) or take care of children (70%).

In fact, when it comes to interacting with teachers, our research revealed that 62% of people surveyed would only want to interact with a teacher who has undergone a background check, ranking equally with a nurse (62%) and a pharmacist (62%).

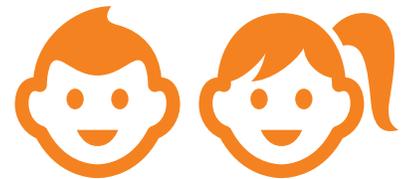
Parents now more than ever are taking an active role in their child's education. As discovered through our survey, 56% are more inclined to believe that you can't be too careful in dealing with people, and educators are no exception.

In February 2016, The USA TODAY NETWORK prepared a large study on how background screening of educators varied largely from state to state. They ultimately determined that "America's system for checking teachers' backgrounds is a loosely-connected patchwork of state laws and procedures, inconsistent practices by school districts and state officials, and wide variations in who's accountable for what and how accountable they are."\* For example, the rules governing one state's background check can vary greatly from another state, oftentimes causing mistakes, errors and a lack of transparency.

With education being such an important part of one's upbringing, it is important to ensure that the Department of Education is doing their best to ensure a safe, friendly and welcoming environment for all.

# 70%

of Americans think it should be mandatory to determine if someone has a criminal background before they teach children in school or take care of children



\* <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/02/14/how-we-graded-states-teacher-background-checks/80214540/>

## Issue 6: Privacy

As we become more connected and interconnected with our data and technology, concerns about our personal privacy continue to build. From the collection of online data to consumer privacy rights, privacy concerns keep some Americans up at night – although it's less worrying than safety concerns.

The research shows that four in five (84%) of Americans believe that the safety that comes with screening employees through a background check is more important than the right to refuse a background check (16%). We wanted to explore this topic a little more, which led us to find that 73% of Americans see it as a right to conduct a background check on someone caring for them or their loved ones. Moreover, 44% don't think a person has the right to refuse a background check.

While privacy is a concern for many, the research shows that for some people, the benefits that come with a background check outweigh privacy concerns.

**The ability to conduct a background check on someone caring for myself or my loved ones:**

PRIVILEGE

27%

RIGHT

73%

**The ability to refuse a background check:**

PRIVILEGE

44%

RIGHT

56%

## Conclusion

When you start a project of this scale, you're never quite sure what to expect. Every person has a different experience shaping their world and, more importantly, how they feel about the world. But, when you begin to aggregate all of the data, patterns slowly begin to emerge. And it is through these patterns that we begin to tap into something more than just emotions; we tap into truth.

And truth is that safety permeates throughout the minds of all Americans at varying levels.

Regardless of your political beliefs or your stances on the issues, the desire for safety is a common thread that connects us all as we navigate through our daily lives and the lives of those we love.

Despite every opinion in the debates, the heart of the matter remains that the real issue on everyone's mind is the safety and well-being for themselves and their loved ones.

And that's a story worth telling.

## About This Survey

This study was commissioned by Sterling Talent Solutions and conducted by Kelton Global, a leading global insights firm which works with more than 100 of the Fortune 500 and thousands of smaller companies and organizations. The research was conducted between December 28, 2015 and January 11, 2016 among 1,077 Americans, 18 years of age and older, who are statistically representative of the national population. Potential participants were sent an email invitation and given access to an online survey form. The survey's margin of error is equal to +/- 3.0%.

**1,077**  
Americans

**18+**  
years of age



**Respondents are most concerned about professions in which their personal safety, health and well-being are at stake.**

## About Us

Sterling Talent Solutions provides hiring peace of mind by delivering a simpler, smarter background screening and onboarding experience for employers worldwide. Our comprehensive suite of cloud-based background screening and onboarding solutions deliver accurate, reliable results and tools to maintain compliance throughout the hiring cycle.

With 20 offices in nine countries, our team of more than 3,700 employees proudly serves over 50,000 customers around the world, including 25% of the Fortune 100. Sterling Talent Solutions is accredited by the National Association of Professional Background Screeners (NAPBS), a distinction earned by fewer than 10% of all background screening companies.

Visit [www.sterlingtalentsolutions.com](http://www.sterlingtalentsolutions.com)

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