

# Reforming Public Policy for Bonded Families in Animal Care and Control

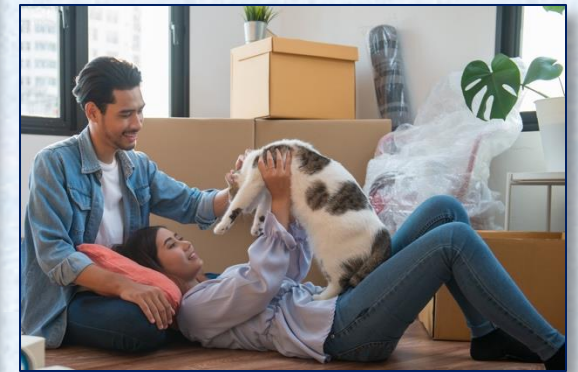


Michael J. Blackwell, DVM, MPH  
Assistant Surgeon General, USPHS (Ret.)  
Director, Program for Pet Health Equity  
University of Tennessee



# We are a Bonded Family Society

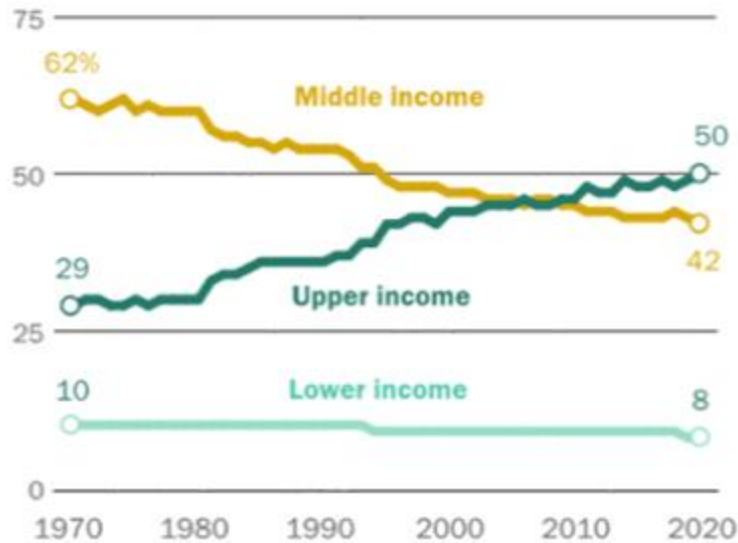
- ~ 66% of households in the United States have pets
- ~ 97% consider the pet a member of the family



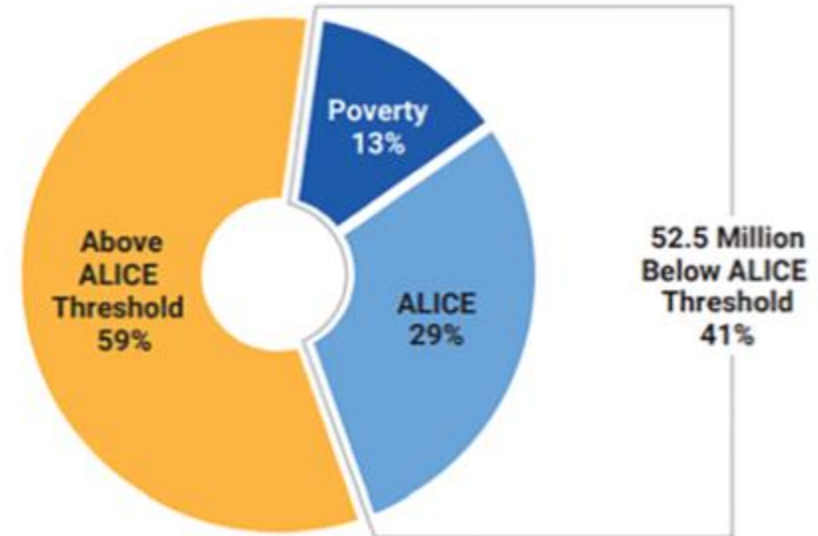
< 40% of households in the United States have children under age 18

# Changing Economic Landscape

% of U.S. aggregate household income held by lower-, middle- and upper-income households

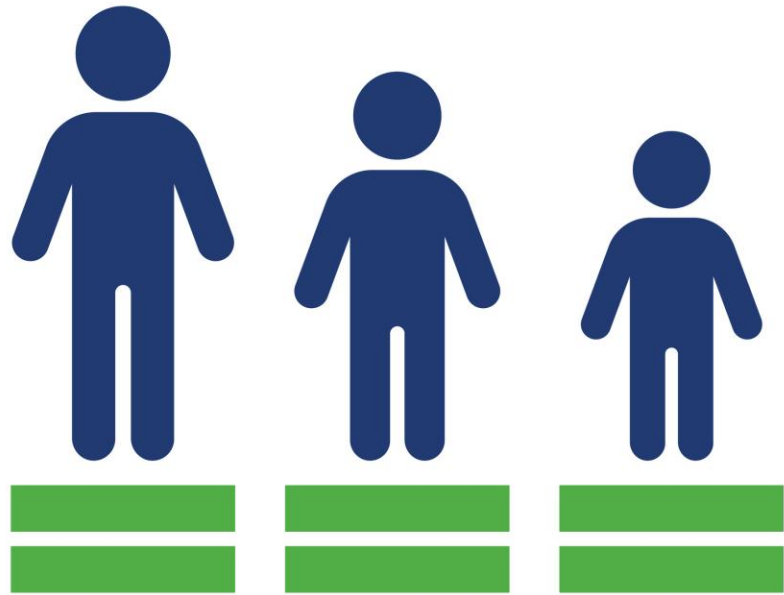


**FIG. 2** Share of aggregate income held by US middle class has plunged since 1970. Note: Households are assigned to income tiers based on their size-adjusted income in the calendar year before the survey year. Their unadjusted incomes are then totaled to compute the share of US aggregate household income held by each income tier. Shares may not add to 100% due to rounding. (From Kochhar R, Sechopoulos S. How the American middle class has changed in the past five decades. Pew Research Center, April 20, 2022. Accessed January 5, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/04/20/how-the-american-middle-class-has-changed-in-the-past-five-decades/>. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the current population survey, annual social and economic supplement (IPUMS).)



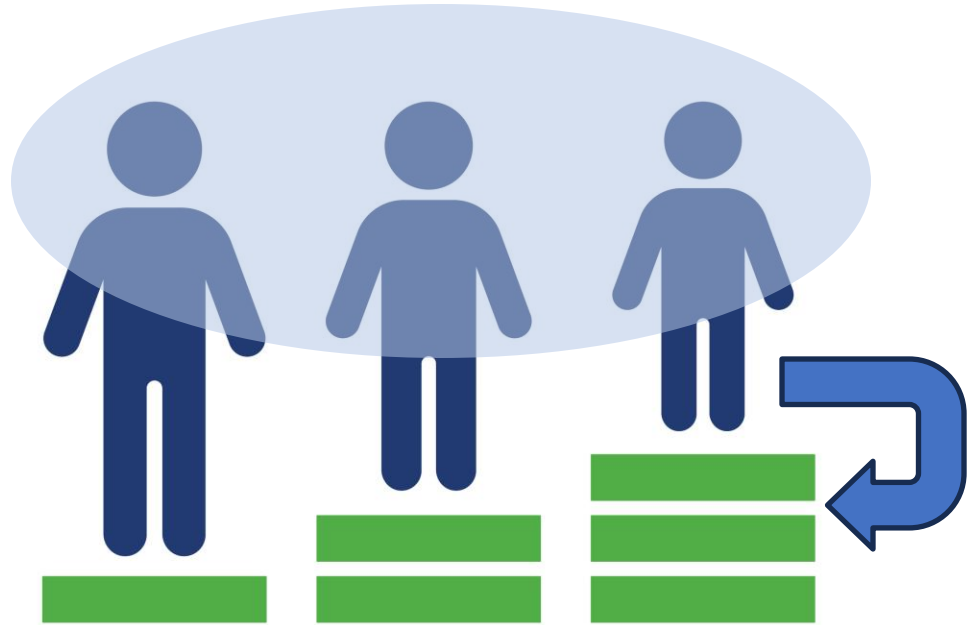
\* In the U.S., out of 127 million households, there were 16.2 million (12.8%) in poverty plus 36.3 million (28.6%) that were ALICE, which totals to 52.5 million (41.4%) below the ALICE Threshold and rounds to 41% in this Report.

**FIG. 1** Percentage of US Households who are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE). (From United for ALICE. *On Uneven Ground - ALICE and Financial Hardship in the U.S.*; 2020:3.)



**EQUALITY**

**VS**



**EQUITY**

# Pet Ownership Saves \$22.7 Billion in Health Care Costs

## Annual Health Care Cost Savings Associated with Pet Ownership

ANNUAL HEALTH CARE COST SAVINGS OF PET OWNERSHIP	SAVINGS
Physician Office Visits	\$14,986,493,000
Obesity	\$4,536,476,000
Treatment of C. difficile Infections	\$90,470,000
Mental Health Costs for Anxiety in Children 8-10 Years Old	\$671,711,000
Mental Health Care Costs of Socially Isolated Seniors	\$1,776,146,000
Veteran PTSD Treatments (Emotional Support & Service Animals)	\$688,017,000
<b>Total Identifiable Cost Savings</b>	<b>\$22,749,313,000</b>

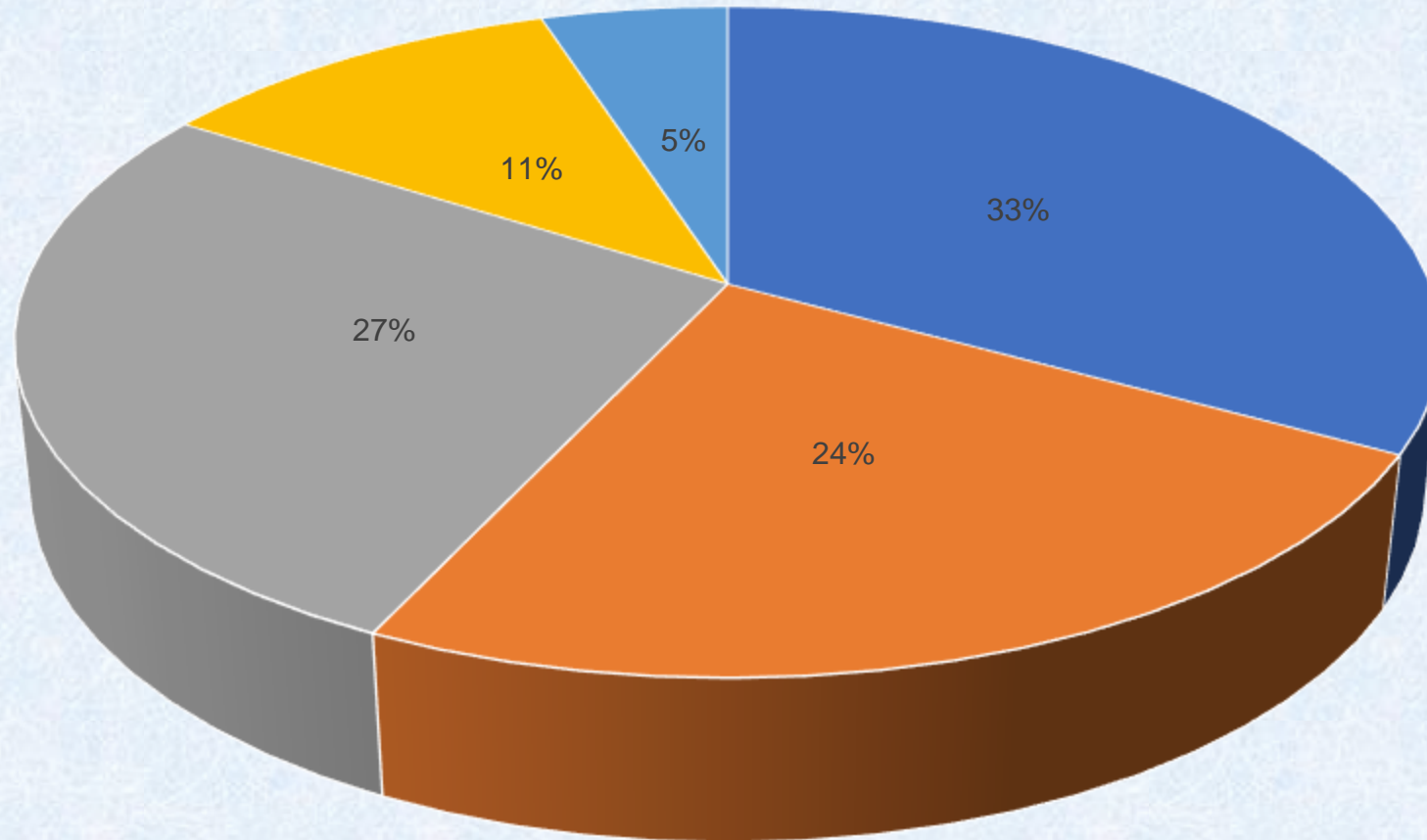


The full report, *The Health Care Cost Savings of Pet Ownership*, was made possible by a grant from Banfield Pet Hospital and is available for download at

[habri.org/health-care-cost-savings](https://habri.org/health-care-cost-savings)

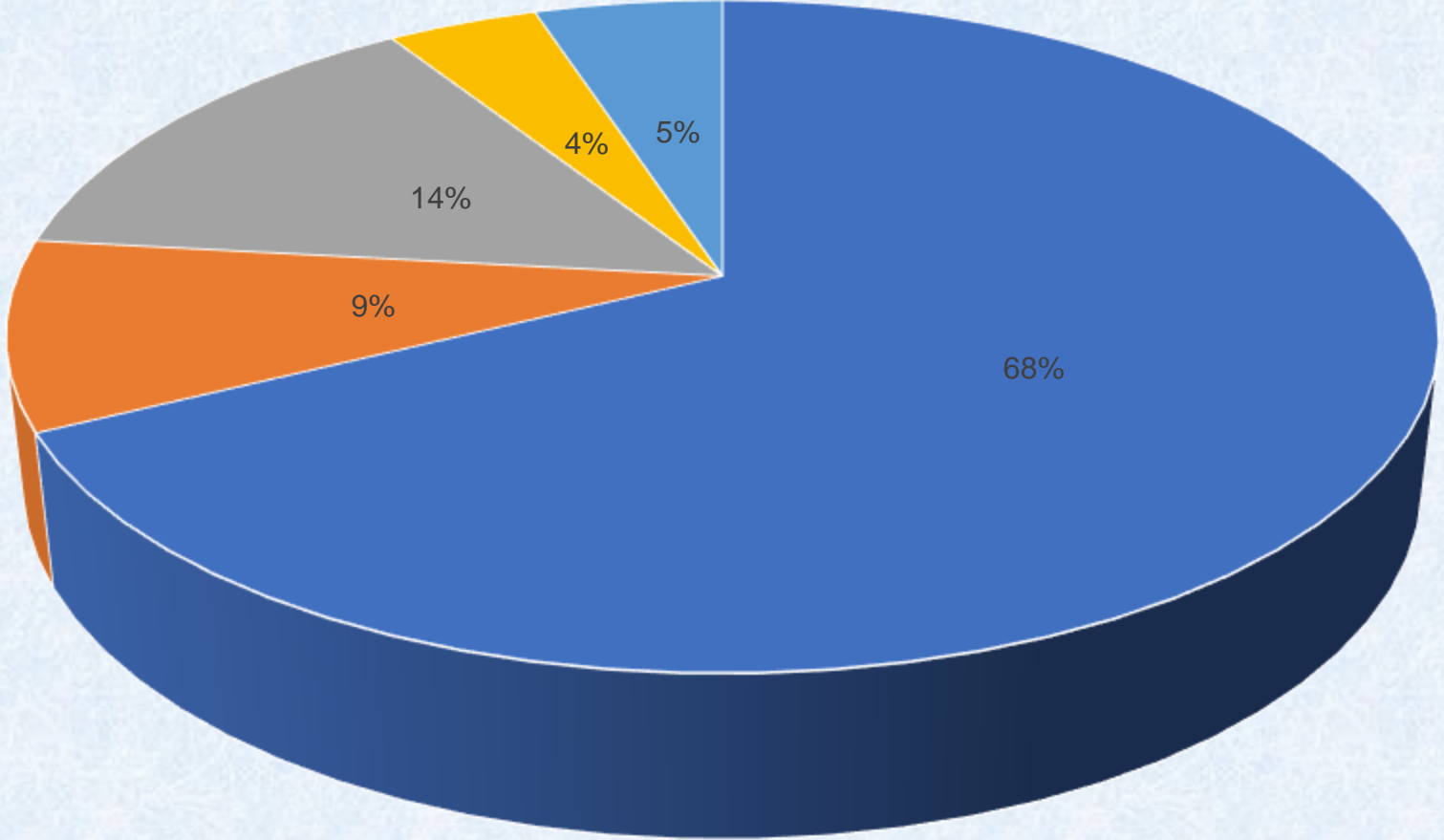


# Generational Pet Household Distribution



■ Millennials ■ Gen X ■ Baby Boomers ■ Gen Z ■ Silent Gen

# Racial Distribution of People with Pets

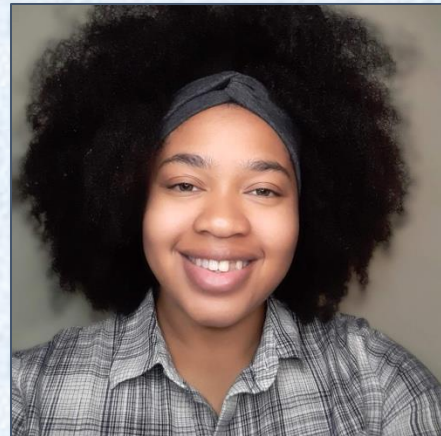


■ White ■ Black ■ Latino ■ Asian ■ Other

# Racial Disparities in Animal Welfare: The Research Team



Akisha Townsend Eaton, J.D.



Kayla R. Anderson, MSW



Eliza Galvez, LMSW



Kenyette S. Garrett, LCSW

[<https://pphe.utk.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/FINAL-Racial-Disparities-April-2024.pdf>]



# Why Was This Study Done?

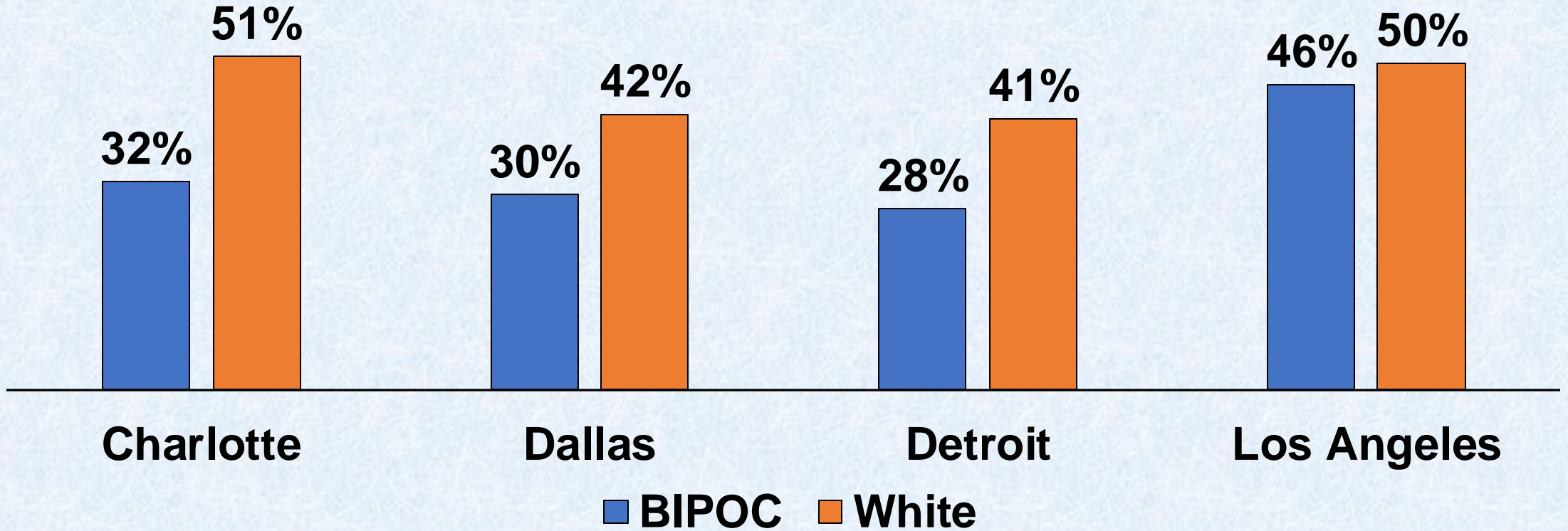
Lack of empirical research on racial disparities in animal welfare

Research on animal welfare has been “animal-centric”

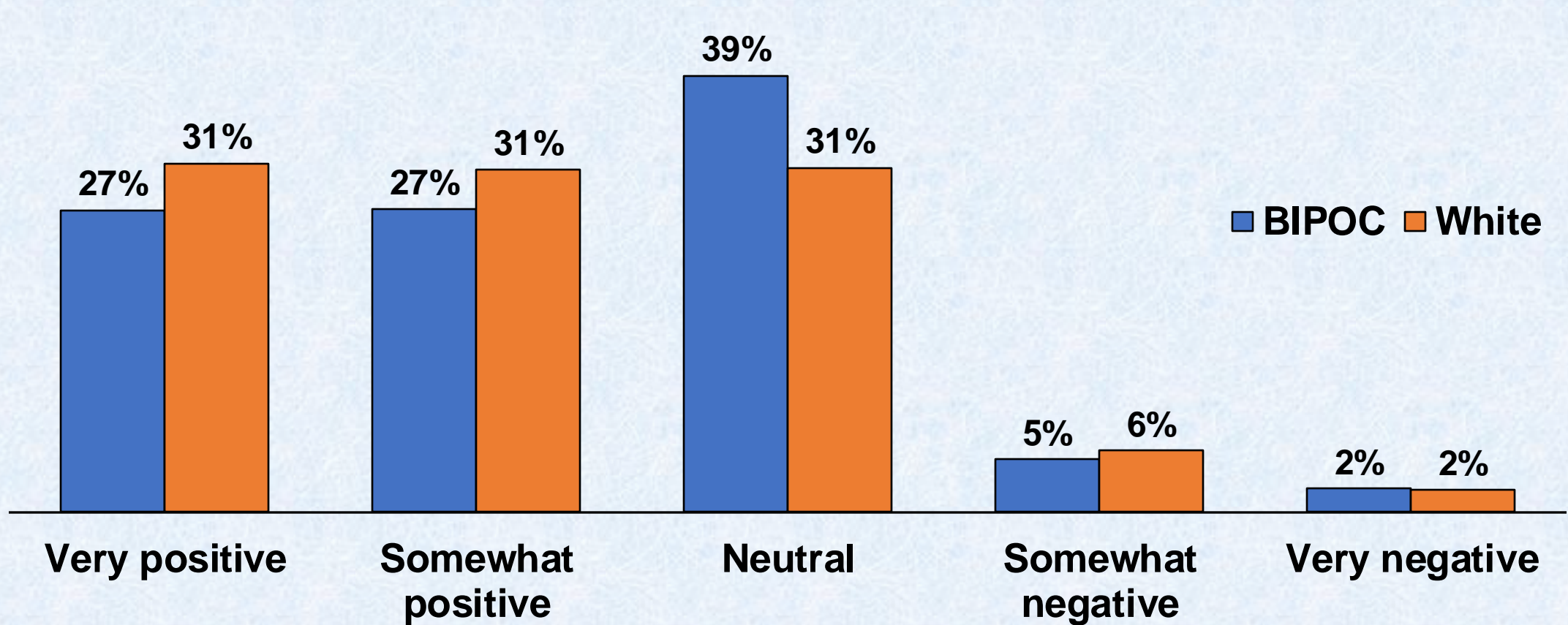
Conducting a study with empirical rigor can contribute to positive change in the animal welfare industry



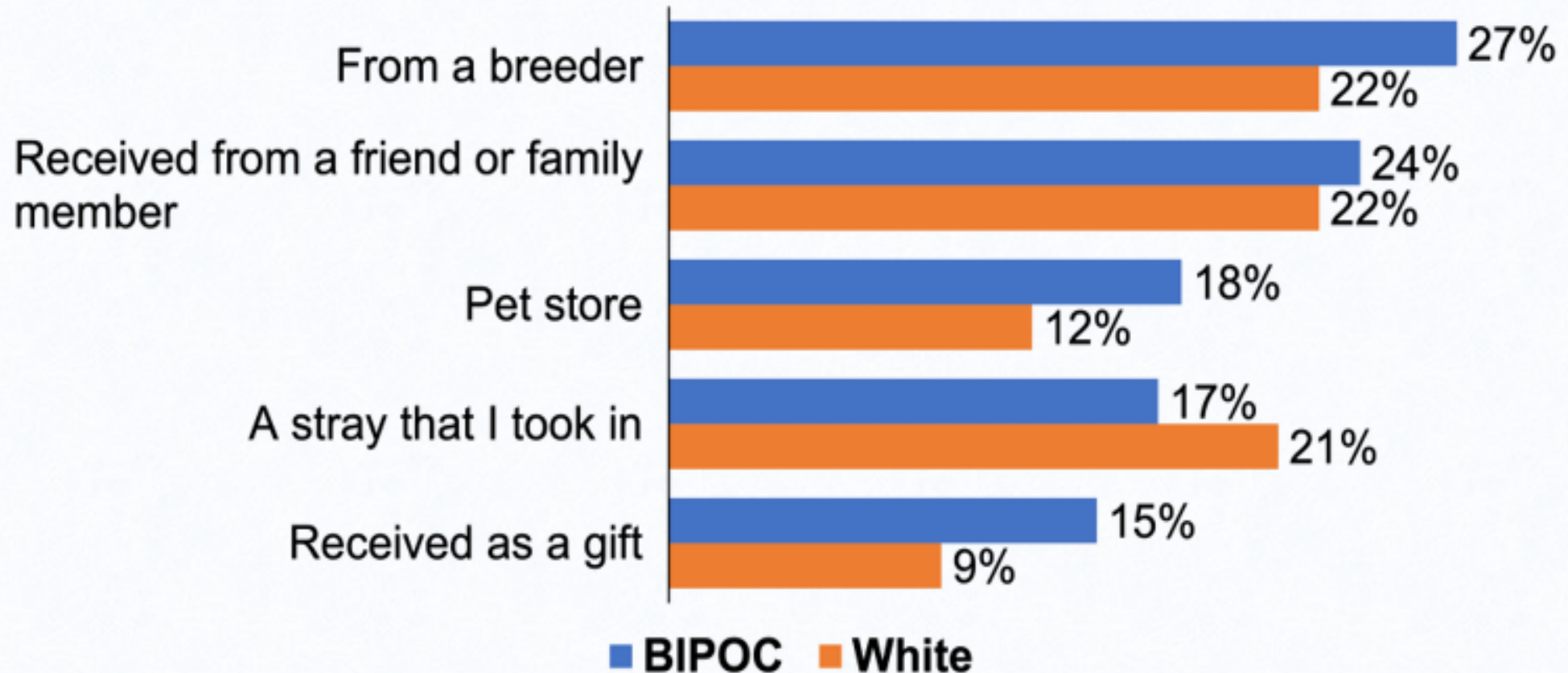
## Adopted Pet from Animal Shelter or Rescue Group



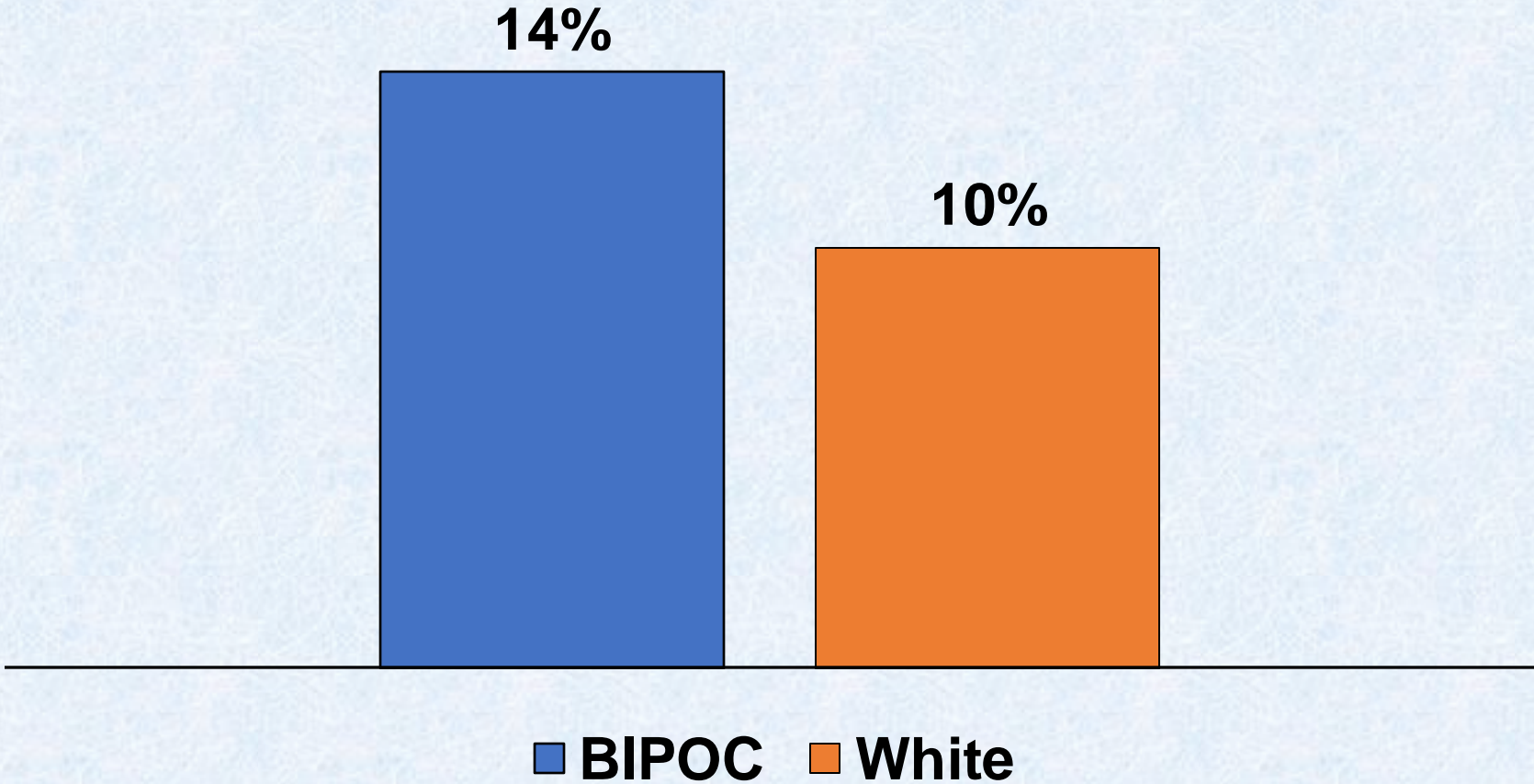
# Overall, what are your feelings about the animal shelter in your community?



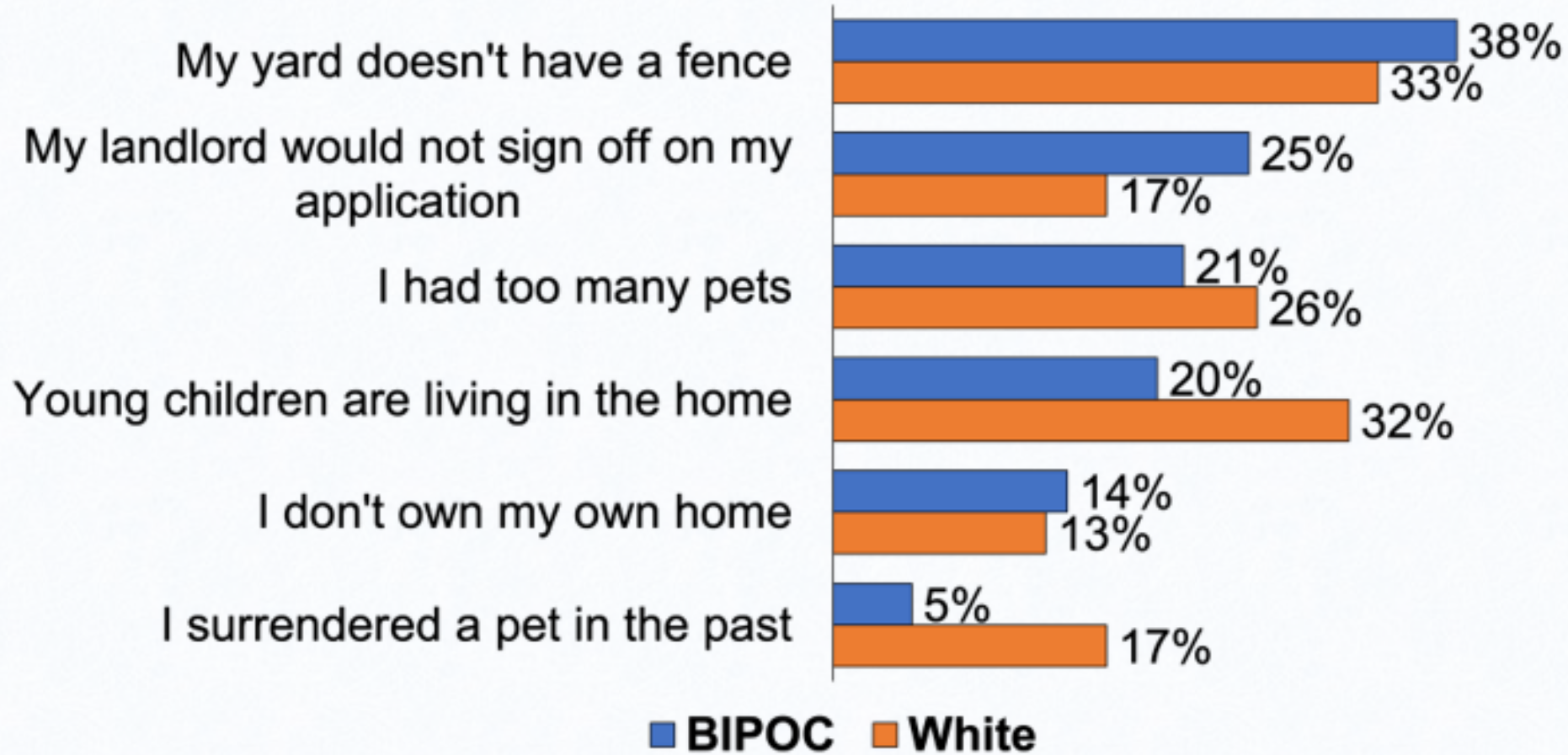
## Where did you get your pet?



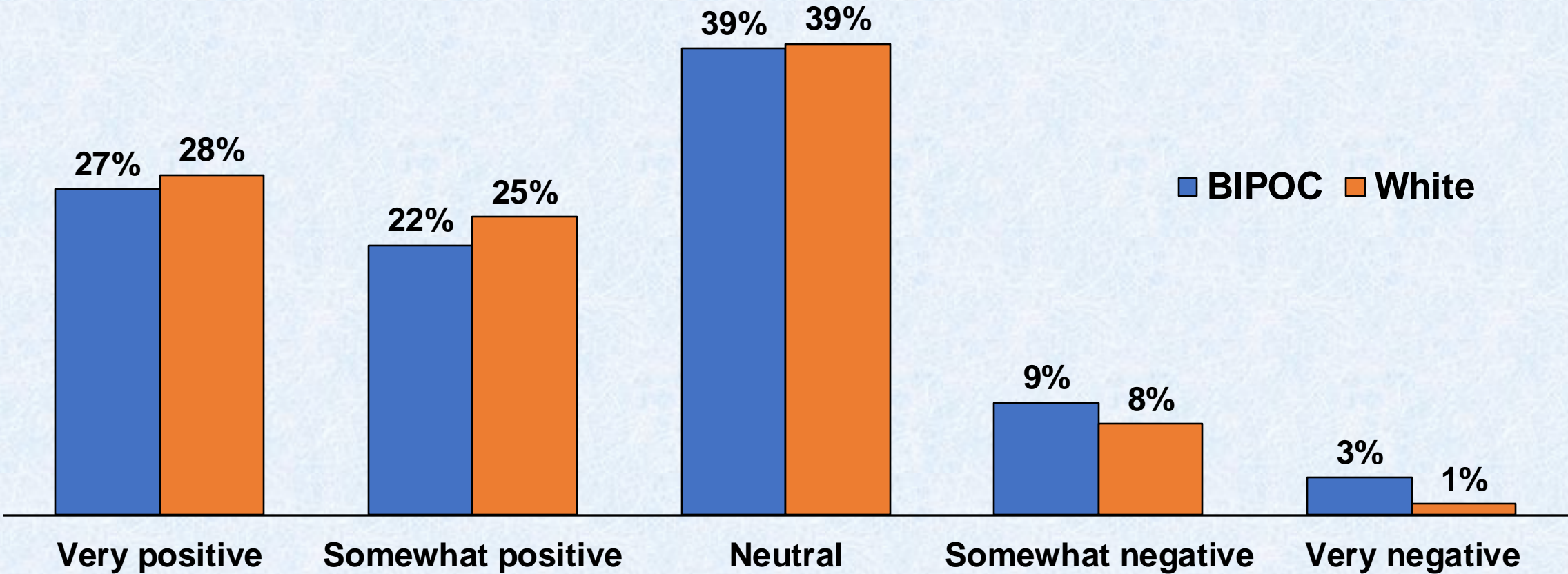
# Been Turned Down by Animal Shelter or Rescue Group when Tried to Adopt a Pet



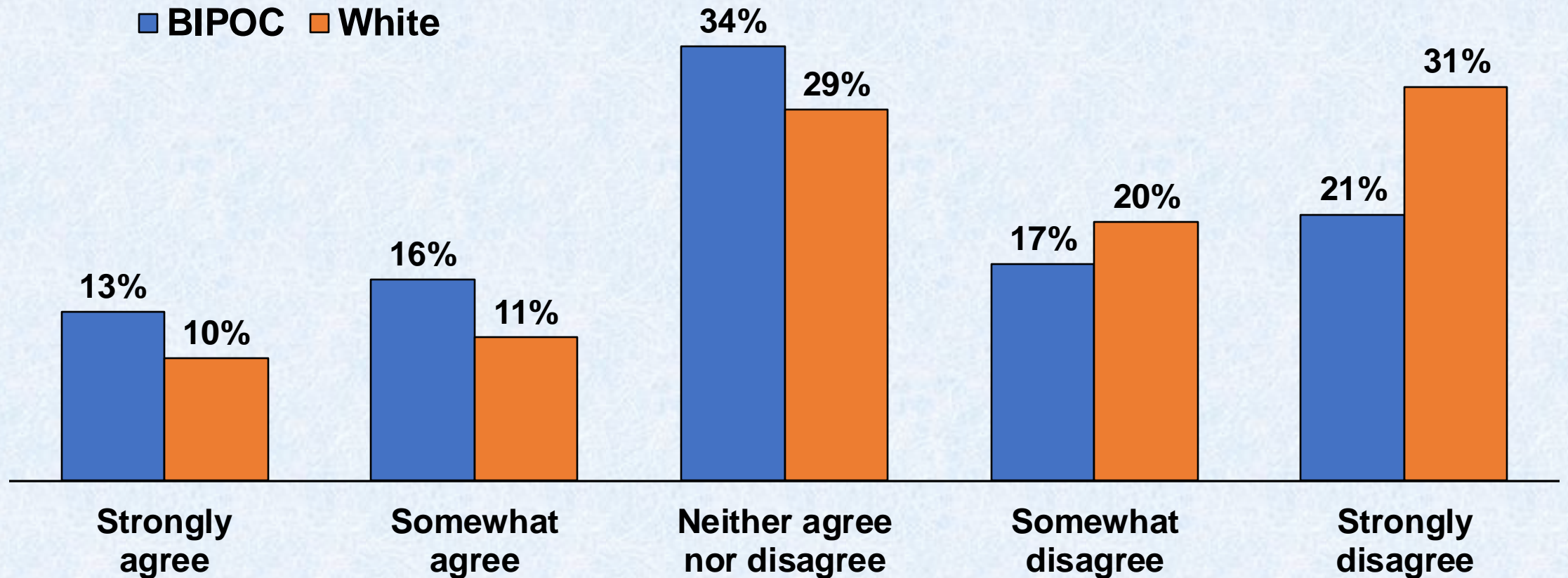
## Reasons for Not Being Able to Adopt



# Overall, what are your feelings about animal control in your community?

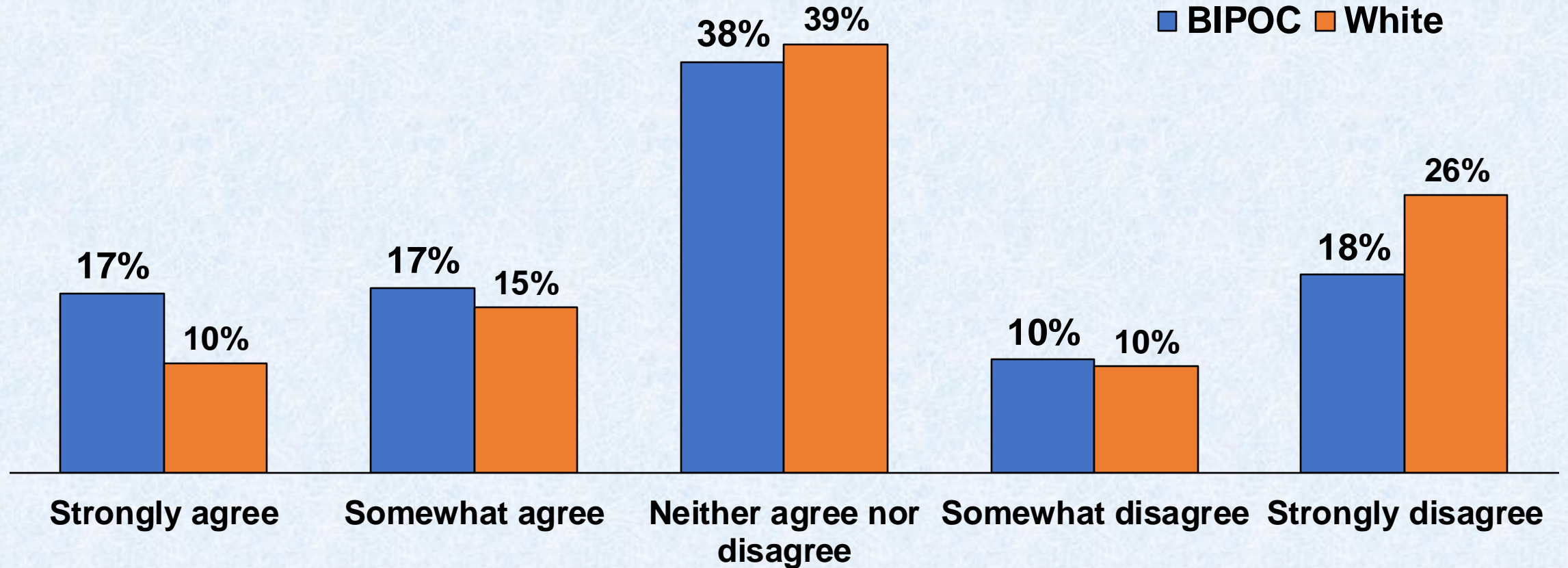


# Law Enforcement or Animal Control Officers in My Community Take Away Pets to Punish the Owners

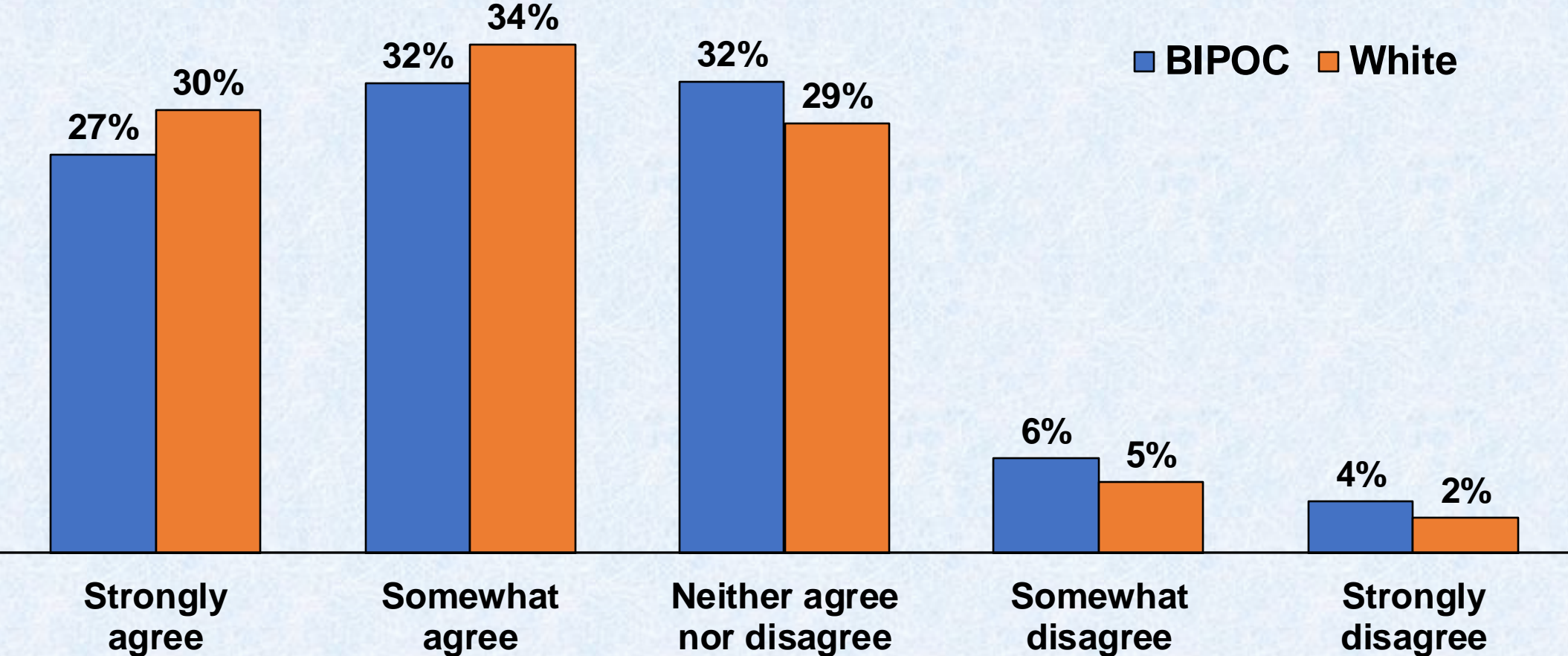




# Law Enforcement or Animal Control Officers are More Likely to Take Away Pets from Pet Owners of Color than from Pet Owners Who are White



# Law Enforcement or Animal Control Officers Try to Support Pet Owners in Their Efforts to Take Care of Their Pets



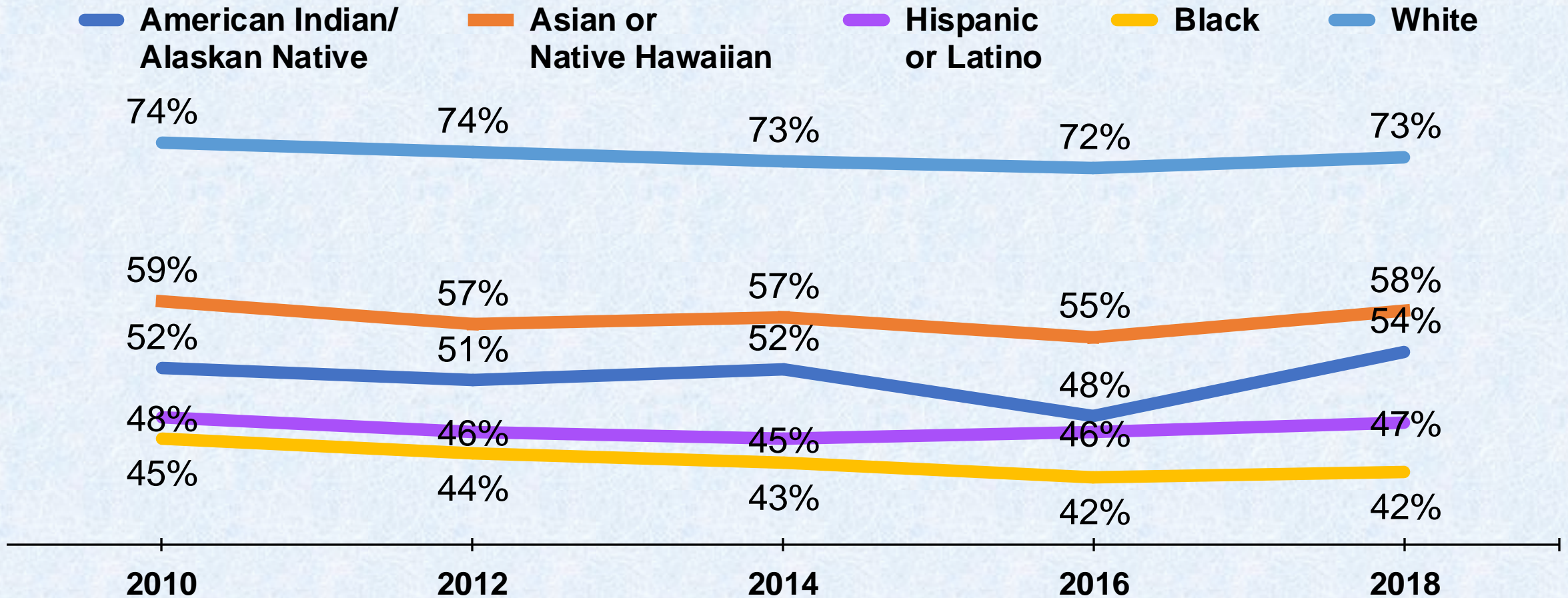
# Barriers to Adoption

“When I first started (18 years ago) you had to:

- ***own your own home or***
- ***you had to bring in a lease showing that you're allowed to have a dog***
- ***your dogs at home had to be current on their rabies shots***
- ***dogs had to be licensed before you can adopt.”***



# Rates of Home Ownership

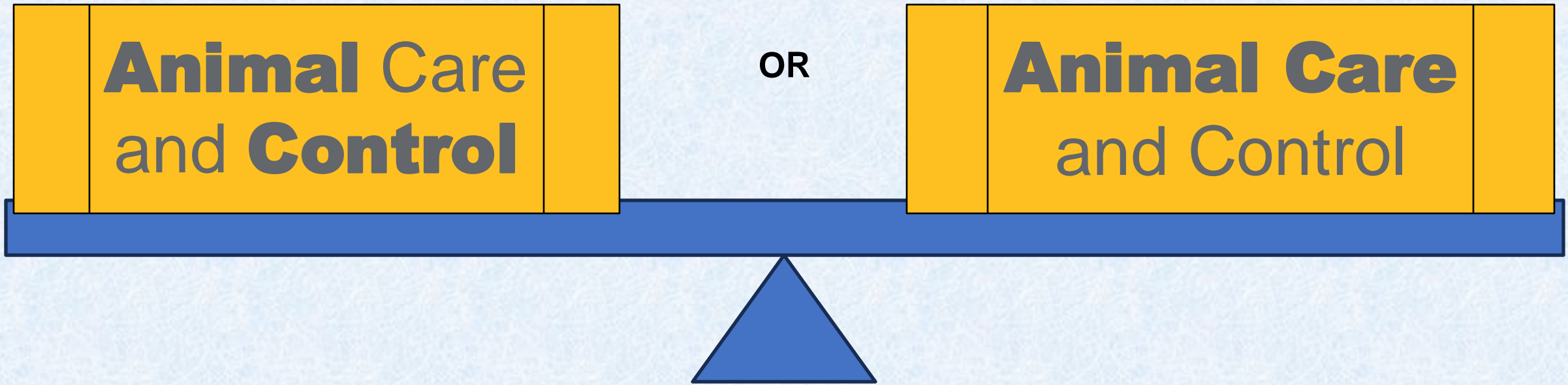




# Summary of Results

- Differences in how pets are acquired
- Factors that impact acquisition of pets
- Mission of animal shelters and rescue organizations
- Public perception of animal control
- Reasons for optimism

# Barriers to Change





**Public Policy**

A photograph of a woman with long brown hair, wearing a yellow sweater, smiling and looking towards a dog. The dog is a Bernese Mountain Dog with black, white, and brown fur, and its tongue is hanging out. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

**Questions?**  
**[ppheweb@utk.edu](mailto:ppheweb@utk.edu)**