



MEMO: December 2018 Nebraska Statewide Issues Survey

DATE: February 8, 2019

Takeaways:

- Most Nebraskans express optimism that the state is headed in the right direction, but fewer think that the state government is pursuing the right priorities – with opinion divided by partisanship, gender, and education.
- Voters want the state government to prioritize good-paying jobs, affordable healthcare, and K-12 public education. More generally, voters want a focus on expanding middle-class opportunities, not tax cuts.
- Voters statewide show a remarkable consensus on what policies would best support the middle class but are much more skeptical on whether the state is currently pursuing them.
- When asked to choose between policies from a paradigm of expanding government investment against those from a status quo/laissez-faire paradigm, voters consistently choose expanding government investment.
- Conversely, voters show broad agreement that proposed cuts to state services will have a big impact on the middle class.
- While few voters are familiar with the “Kansas experiment”, when presented with more information, voters reject bringing its policies to Nebraska by a strong margin.

Executive Summary:

Results from our recent statewide issues poll in Nebraska suggest voters are generally optimistic about the direction of the state—though dissatisfaction with state government’s policy priorities is both more widespread and highly polarized by partisanship, gender, and education. At the same time, we find evidence of a broad-based consensus among Nebraskans about what they think the priorities of state government should be. In particular, voters want government to focus on creating good-paying jobs, making healthcare affordable and accessible, and fully-funding K-12 public education.

More generally, Nebraskans are in overwhelming agreement—sometimes near-unanimity—about the policies that will support and grow the state’s middle class. While voters are much more divided on how much the state government is currently pursuing those priorities, most Nebraskans express support for increased government investment in expanding middle-class opportunities. When asked to choose between policy proposals reflecting a paradigm of increased government investment and those reflecting a status quo or laissez-faire paradigm, voters generally favor expanding government investment in areas like public education and workforce development. In particular, a clear majority of voters want their state government to prioritize expanding opportunities to support the middle class

over cutting taxes for businesses and families, perhaps because nearly six-in-ten think that the state currently prioritizes tax breaks for the wrong people—corporations and the wealth—leaving the middle class to foot the bill.

Similarly, voters of all partisan stripes agree that policy proposals premised on greater government investment in K-12 and higher education, as well as job training and career and technical education, will make a big impact on supporting and growing Nebraska’s middle class. Conversely, when asked about cuts to state services that have been proposed to offset the cost of Medicaid expansion, clear majorities of voters expect these cuts to have a big impact on the middle class. Taken together, these findings suggest broad-based support for specific policy proposals to expand the role of state government, as well as widespread opposition to cuts to state services.

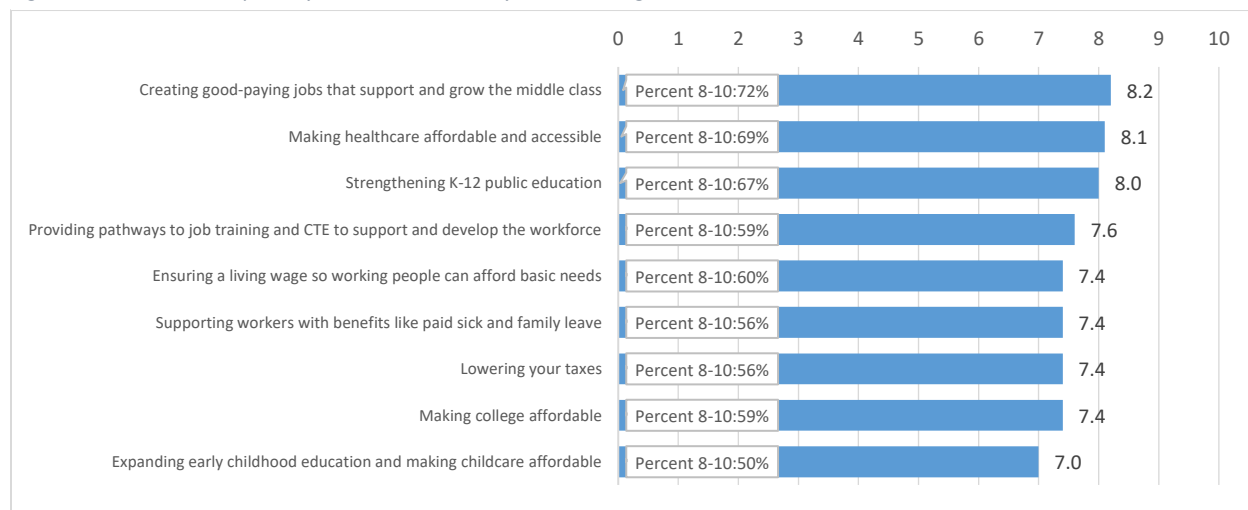
We find that few Nebraskans are familiar with the impact of the failed “experiment” in neighboring Kansas, but when voters are informed of arguments for and against its policies, a majority rejects bringing those policies to Nebraska. Importantly, this view is shared widely, among self-identified Democrats, independents, and Republicans, as well as across each congressional district, and voters from rural, suburban, and urban census blocks.

Voters Agree on What State Government Should Prioritize, Disagree on Whether State Policy Reflects Those Priorities

On the surface, Nebraska voters appear generally optimistic about the direction of the state, with nearly six-in-ten (58 percent) saying they think things in Nebraska are going in the right direction, while half as many (30 percent) say they feel things have gotten off on the wrong track. However, when voters are asked specifically to characterize state government’s priorities, only a narrow majority (51 percent) say it has the right priorities, while four-in-ten (40 percent) believe it has the wrong priorities and is not working to help them and their families.

Moreover, these evaluations are highly polarized by partisanship, as Republicans see the state government as having the right priorities by a 40-point margin (67 to 27 percent), while independents and Democrats disagree by 9- and 19-point margins, respectively (40 to 48 percent; 36 to 55 percent). Similarly, while most demographic groups say the state government has the right priorities by clear

Figure 1: Q. 6 Voters' Top Policy Priorities Ranked by Mean Ratings on a 1-10 Scale



margins, opinion is closely-divided among college-educated women (44 to 43 percent), voters living in urban census blocks (44 to 46 percent), and voters aged 18-34 (47 to 46 percent).

In contrast, voters express much more agreement about what they think state government’s substantive priorities should be. As shown in [Figure 1](#), when voters are asked to rate a series of issues on a scale of 1 to 10, three issues emerge as particularly salient: creating good-paying jobs that support and grow the middle class (8.2 mean rating; 72 percent 8-10 rating), making healthcare affordable and accessible (8.1 mean rating; 69 percent 8-10 rating), and strengthening K-12 public education (8.0 mean rating; 67 percent 8-10 rating). Moreover, these issues enjoy strong support from voters across the partisan spectrum. Creating good jobs, rated the top priority overall, is rated fifth by Democrats (who tended to award all issues higher ratings), first by independents, and first by Republicans (tied with lowering taxes). Similarly, affordable and accessible healthcare (rated second overall), is rated first by Democrats, second by independents (tied with K-12 public education), and third by Republicans (tied with K-12 public education), while K-12 public education (rated third overall), is rated third by Democrats and tied for second with independents and third with Republicans.

Likewise, by a 54 to 38 percent margin, voters prefer that state government focus on expanding opportunities to support the middle class and grow Nebraska’s workforce over cutting taxes for businesses and families. What’s more, nearly six-in-ten voters (58 percent) believe state government is currently prioritizing tax breaks for the wrong people, versus just 36 percent who think the state’s low taxes grow jobs and the middle class. Moreover, this opinion is shared by not only overwhelming majorities of Democrats (79 to 17 percent) and independents (63 to 13 percent), but by more than four-in-ten Republicans as well (44 to 50 percent).

Figure 2: Q.12B Tax Policy Paradigms

Statement A: Nebraska state government prioritizes tax breaks for the wrong people -- the wealthy and big corporations, leaving the middle class to foot the bill.

Statement B: Nebraska state government prioritizes keeping taxes low for our biggest private sector job creators, so we can attract and retain great employers large and small and grow the middle class.

In a similar vein, voters statewide show a remarkable consensus on the substantive policies that they think will support and grow the middle class—and the broader economy—in Nebraska. As shown in [Table 1](#), voters overwhelmingly agree on the policies that support the middle class—showing the

Table 1: Q. 10-Q. 11 Voters’ Policy Goals vs. Evaluation of Current Policies by Issue Area

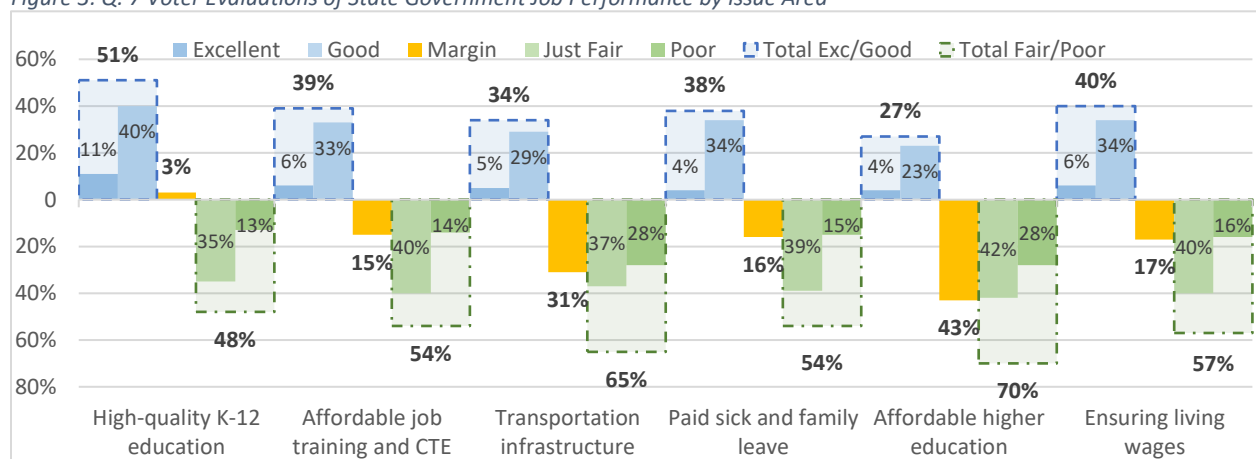
	Agreement with Policy Goals			Evaluations of Current Policy			Net Margin
	Agree	Disagree	Margin	Agree	Disagree	Margin	
K-12 funding	86%	13%	73%	48%	50%	-2%	-75%
Childcare and early ed	83%	14%	69%	45%	48%	-3%	-72%
Paid sick and family leave	79%	17%	62%	55%	35%	20%	-41%
Workforce development	92%	7%	84%	66%	31%	35%	-49%
College affordability	82%	15%	67%	25%	69%	-44%	-111%
Balancing the budget	88%	9%	79%	62%	33%	30%	-49%
Regulations and taxes	75%	20%	55%	45%	44%	1%	-54%

most unanimity on workforce development, balancing the budget, and funding public education and the least on low regulations and taxes. However, as shown in [Table 1](#), voters show much greater skepticism about the extent to which the state government is currently pursuing these policies. This gap between voters’ aspirations and the reality of state government policy emerges most profoundly around

education issues. While more than four-in-five (82 percent) voters agree that affordable access to higher education will grow and support the middle class and Nebraska’s economy, only one-in-four (25 percent) agree that state government is making college affordable. Similarly, despite the fact that voters overwhelmingly agree that properly funding K-12 public education (86 percent) and childcare and early education (83 percent) will support and grow the middle class, more Nebraskans disagree than agree that state government is properly funding public education (48 percent agree; 50 percent disagree) and investing in childcare and early childhood education (45 percent agree; 48 percent disagree).

Given this, it is unsurprising that voters also give state government weak job performance ratings across these and other issue areas. As shown in *Figure 3*, very few voters rate state government’s performance as “excellent” in any issue area, while majorities (aside from K-12 public education, where voters are closely divided) rate its performance as “just fair” or “poor.” Nebraskans are particularly pessimistic about state government’s performance on college affordability (27 percent excellent/good; 70 percent just fair/poor) and transportation infrastructure (34 percent excellent/good; 65 percent just fair/poor).

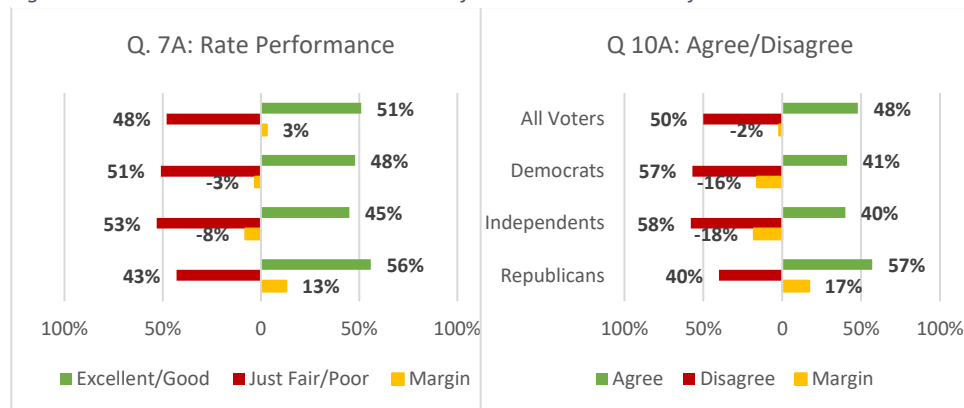
Figure 3: Q. 7 Voter Evaluations of State Government Job Performance by Issue Area



Voters Support Expanded Government Investment over Tax Cuts and the Status Quo

Even in the policy area where voters are relatively more sanguine overall about state government’s job performance like K-12 public education (51 percent excellent/good; 48 percent just fair/poor), this is

Figure 4: Partisan Polarization in Evaluations of State Government Performance in Public Education



more reflective of partisan polarization on the issue than broad-based (relative) satisfaction with state policy. Republicans are more likely to rate state performance on K-12 public education as excellent or good rather than just fair or poor by a thirteen-point margin (56

percent to 43 percent), while both Democrats (48 percent to 51 percent) and independents (45 percent

to 53 percent) were instead more dissatisfied than satisfied. Similarly, Republicans are more likely to agree that state government properly funds K-12 public education (57 percent agree; 40 percent disagree), in contrast with both Democrats (41 percent agree; 57 percent disagree) and independents (40 percent agree; 58 percent disagree) who disagree by similar margins.

Despite this partisan polarization, voters overwhelmingly support increasing state funding for public education. When asked whether they agree more that state government currently underfunds public education, leading to high property taxes and poor educational outcomes—or that state government properly prioritizes and funds public education—over six-in-ten say state government is not doing enough (61 to 36 percent).

Figure 6: Q. 12 A K-12 Funding Paradigms

Statement A: State government in Nebraska under funds public education and as a result our property taxes are high and many kids get left behind.

Statement B: State government in Nebraska prioritizes public education, properly funding our kid's schools and setting them up to succeed in the future.

Figure 5: Q. 12D Workforce Development Paradigms

Statement A: Nebraska state government should do more to develop our workforce, from more investment in higher education, to making job training and career, technical, and vocational training more accessible.

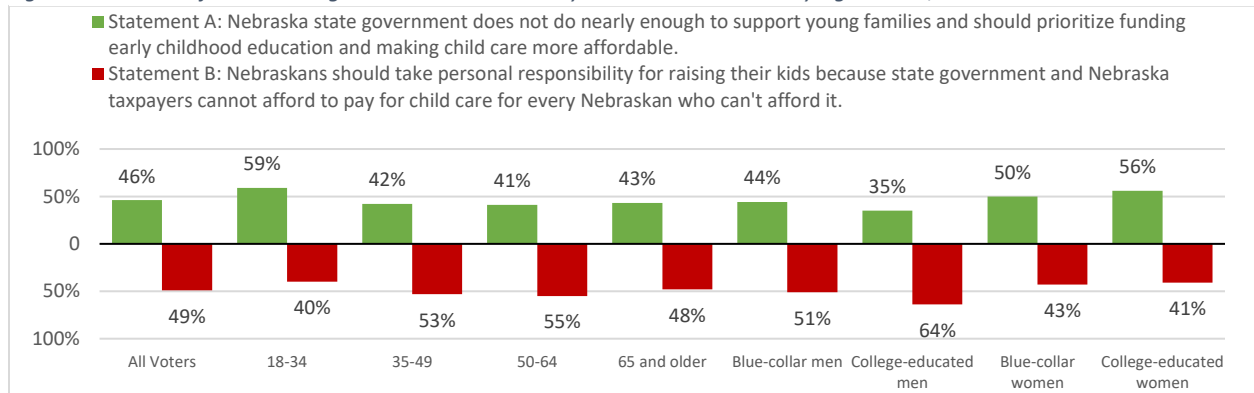
Statement B: Nebraska should continue giving more tax breaks and incentives to private sector job creators that will encourage them to develop our workforce.

Likewise, voters show a strong preference for a more active government role in workforce development. When asked whether they agree more with a statement that state government should increase investments in higher education and accessible job training and career, technical, and vocational education or that Nebraska should continue to give tax breaks and incentives to businesses

and individuals, more than six-in-ten voters choose the increased investment paradigm over the status quo or laissez-faire paradigm (61 percent to 34 percent).

However, voters are closely divided on their preferred paradigm for addressing the high cost of childcare and access to early childhood education. While about half of voters (46 percent) say they agree more with a statement that state government should prioritize funding for early childhood education and affordable childcare, a statistically-equal number (49 percent) favor a statement emphasizing personal responsibility and arguing that taxpayers cannot foot the bill for childcare for those who cannot afford it. Opinion on this issue polarizes along demographic lines, with almost six-in-ten voters aged 18-34 favoring increased government investment (59 to 40 percent), while older groups of voters consistently

Figure 7: Q12 C. Preferred Paradigm on Childcare and Early Childhood Education by Age Cohort, Gender and Education

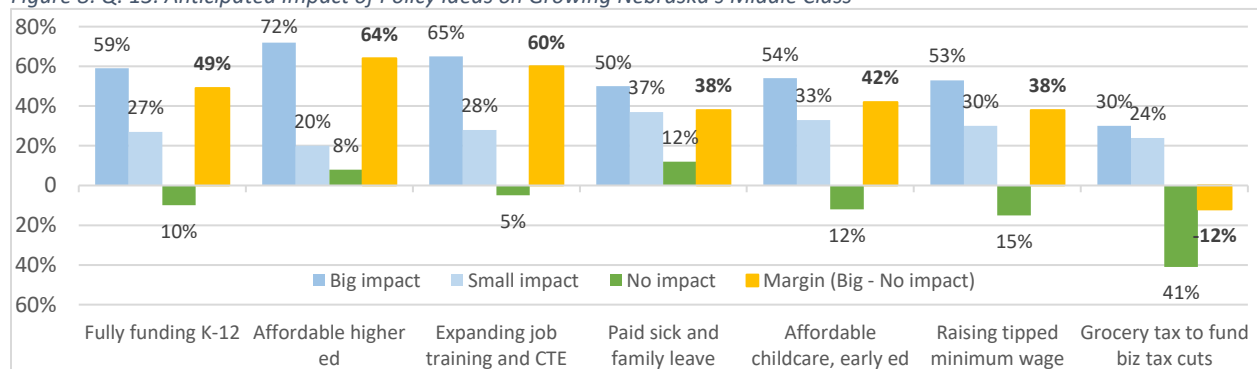


favor the personal responsibility paradigm.¹ Likewise, women are more likely to favor increased government investment, while men show more affinity for the laissez-faire paradigm—though this division is much more stark among the college-educated. College-educated men are distinctively opposed to increased investment in childcare and early childhood education (35 to 64 percent), whereas college-educated women favor it by a fifteen-point margin (56 to 41 percent).

Broad-Based Consensus on Anticipated Impacts of Increased Investments and Cuts for Nebraska’s Middle Class

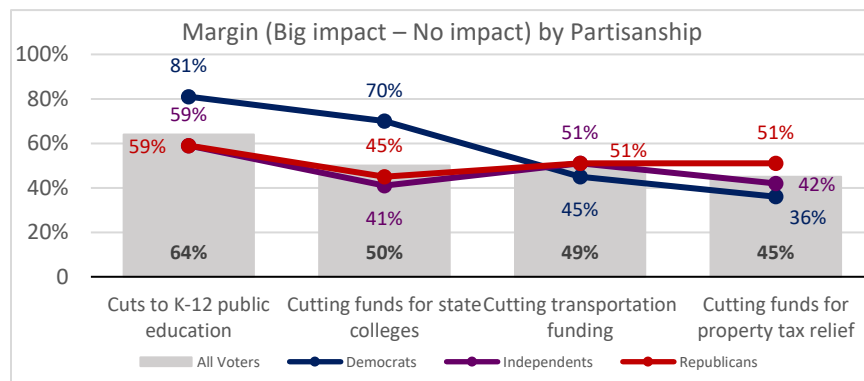
In line with findings throughout the survey, Nebraska voters express a broad-based consensus on which policy interventions are most likely to succeed in supporting and growing the state’s middle class. Consistent majorities agree that increasing government investment in K-12 education (59 percent), college affordability (72 percent), access to job training and career and technical education (65 percent), affordable childcare and early childhood education (54 percent), mandating paid sick and family leave (50 percent), and raising Nebraska’s tipped minimum wage (53 percent) would have a “big impact” on growing and supporting the middle class. At the same time, as shown in Figure 8, far fewer voters anticipate a “small impact” or “no impact” at all coming from these policy ideas. In contrast, a clear plurality of voters (41 percent) think that a grocery tax funding corporate tax cuts will have no positive impact on the middle class.

Figure 8: Q. 13. Anticipated Impact of Policy Ideas on Growing Nebraska's Middle Class



Consistent with these views, when voters are asked about funding cuts that have been proposed to

Figure 9: Q. 14. Anticipated Impact of Proposed Offsetting Medicaid Expansion Cuts



offset the cost of the Medicaid expansion approved by voters in November 2018, consistent majorities say these proposed cuts will have a big (negative) impact on Nebraska’s middle class. More than seven-in-ten (71 percent) think that cuts to K-12 education will have a big impact compared to only seven percent who anticipate

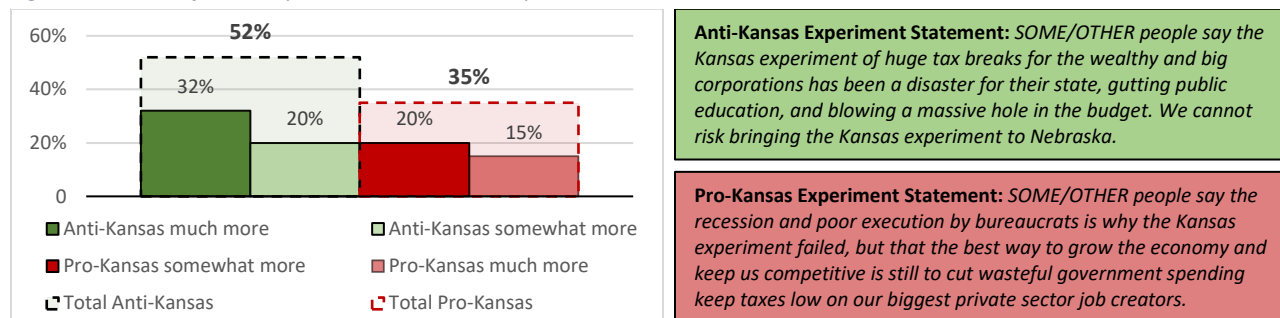
¹ Interestingly however, senior citizens (voters 65 and older) are more evenly divided on this issue (43 percent to 48 percent) than are those aged 35-49 (42 to 53 percent) and 50-64 (41 to 55 percent).

no impact. Similarly, about six-in-ten Nebraskans think cutting funds for state colleges (60 percent) and cutting transportation funding (59 percent) will have a big impact, while only about one-in-ten expect no impact (10 percent and 9 percent, respectively). Moreover, these topline figures reflect a strong consensus across the partisan spectrum. As shown in Figure 9, self-identified Democrats, independents, and Republicans alike anticipate—by huge margins—that the proposed cuts will have a big impact on the state’s middle class.

Majority Rejects Bringing Failed Policies of the “Kansas Experiment” to Nebraska

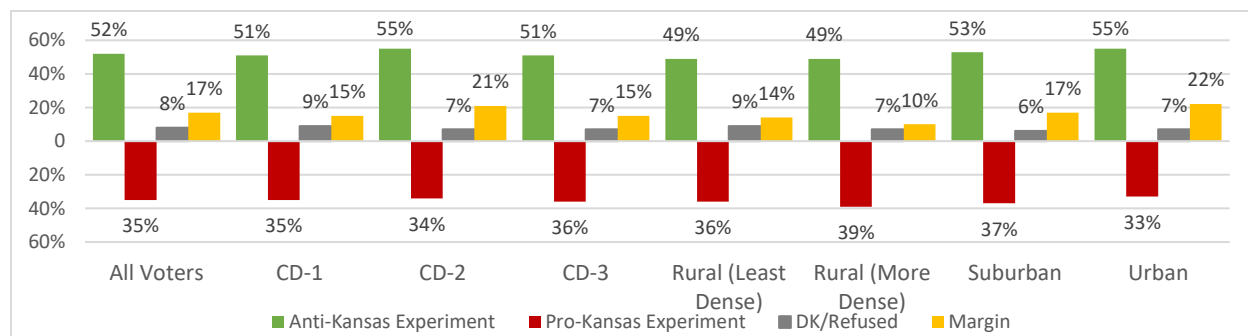
Few Nebraska voters are familiar with the “Kansas experiment”. Nearly three quarters of voters report they are “not at all familiar” (72 percent), just one-in-five (18 percent) voters across the state say they are either “very” or “somewhat” familiar with it. However, as shown in Figure 10, when voters are

Figure 10: Q. 16. Informed Opinion on the “Kansas Experiment”



informed of arguments for and against the Kansas experiment, they reject bringing its policies to Nebraska by a substantial margin (52 to 35 percent). Moreover, these views are shared by Nebraskans across the partisan spectrum and across the state. A plurality of Republicans (47 to 40 percent) agree with majorities of Democrats (65 to 24 percent) and independents (52 to 36 percent) in favoring the anti-Kansas experiment statement over the pro-Kansas experiment statement. Similarly, as shown in Figure 11, voters across each of Nebraska’s three congressional districts, as well as census blocks ranging from the most rural to urban, oppose bringing the Kansas experiment to Nebraska by consistent double-digit margins.

Figure 11: Geographical Distribution of Views on the “Kansas Experiment”



Survey Methodology

TargetSmart designed and administered this telephone survey conducted by professional interviewers. The survey reached 600 adults, age 18 or older, who indicated they were registered to vote in Nebraska. The survey was conducted from December 11-13, 2018. The sample was randomly selected from TargetSmart's enhanced voter file. Forty percent of respondents were reached on wireless phones. Quotas were assigned to reflect the demographic distribution of registered voters in Nebraska. The data were weighted by gender, age, region by congressional district, and party registration to ensure an accurate reflection of the population. The overall margin of error is $\pm 4.0\%$. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies. Percentage totals may not add up precisely due to rounding.

In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error: that is, the results of a survey may differ from those which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of responses to a particular question. For example, if a response to a given question to which all respondents answered was 50%, we could be 95% confident that the true percentage would fall within $\pm 4.0\%$ of this percentage or between 46.0% and 54.0%. The table below represents the estimated sampling error for different percentage distributions of responses.

Sampling Error by Percentage
(at 95 in 100 confidence level)
 PERCENTAGES NEAR

	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
Sample Size									
600	2.4	3.2	3.7	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.7	3.2	2.4
500	2.6	3.5	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.0	3.5	2.6
400	2.9	3.9	4.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.5	3.9	2.9
300	3.4	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.2	4.5	3.4
200	4.2	5.5	6.4	6.8	6.9	6.8	6.4	5.5	4.2

Appendix: Survey Instruments Referenced in Text (Listed in Order of Appearance)

Q.4 Generally speaking, do you think that things in Nebraska are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten off on the wrong track?

Q.8 Which of the following best describes how you feel about state government in Nebraska?

State government in Nebraska tends to have the right priorities and is always working to help me and my family

OR

State government in Nebraska has the wrong priorities and is not working to help me and my family.

Which of those best describes how you feel about state government in Nebraska?

Q.6 Now I'm going to read you a series of issues on which Nebraska state government could focus. Please rate each of them on a scale from 1 to 10, in which 1 means that issue is not at all important to you, and 10 means that issue is extremely important to you.

- A. Creating good-paying jobs that support and grow the middle class
- B. Making health care affordable and accessible
- C. Lowering your taxes
- D. Strengthening K-12 public education
- E. Making college affordable
- F. Providing pathways to job training and career, technical, and vocational education to support and develop the workforce
- G. Expanding early childhood education and making child care affordable
- H. Supporting workers with benefits like paid sick and family leave
- I. Ensuring a living wage so working people can afford basic needs

Q.12 Now I am going to read you some pairs of statements about state government in Nebraska and I want you to tell me whether you agree more with the first statement or more with the second statement, even if neither is exactly right.

Do you agree more with the first or second statement?

- A. (STATEMENT A) State government in Nebraska under funds public education and as a result our property taxes are high and many kids get left behind.
(STATEMENT B) State government in Nebraska prioritizes public education, properly funding our kid's schools and setting them up to succeed in the future.
- B. (STATEMENT A) Nebraska state government prioritizes tax breaks for the wrong people -- the wealthy and big corporations, leaving the middle class to foot the bill.
(STATEMENT B) Nebraska state government prioritizes keeping taxes low for our biggest private sector job creators, so we can attract and retain great employers large and small and grow the middle class.

- C. (STATEMENT A) Nebraska state government does not do nearly enough to support young families and should prioritize funding early childhood education and making child care more affordable.
(STATEMENT B) Nebraskans should take personal responsibility for raising their kids because state government and Nebraska taxpayers cannot afford to pay for child care for every Nebraskan who can't afford it.
- D. (STATEMENT A) Nebraska state government should do more to develop our workforce, from more investment in higher education, to making job training and career, technical, and vocational training more accessible.
(STATEMENT B) Nebraska should continue giving more tax breaks and incentives to private sector job creators that will encourage them to develop our workforce.

*Q.9 And if you had to choose a priority for Nebraska state government, would you rather they focus on:
Expanding opportunities to support the middle class and grow Nebraska's workforce?*

OR

Cutting taxes for businesses and families?

Do you feel that way strongly, or not so strongly?

Q.10 Now I am going to read you some statements about ways government in Nebraska can support and grow the middle class. Each statement will make a claim about something government in Nebraska is currently doing to grow the middle class. After I read you each statement, I want you to tell me if you agree or disagree that government in Nebraska is currently doing the thing the statement claims.

- A. Government in Nebraska properly funds public education, we have motivated, well-paid teachers, and our world class public schools help develop our workforce and grow the middle class.
- B. By investing in child care and early childhood education, government in Nebraska makes it easy and affordable for middle class families to grow and succeed.
- C. Government in Nebraska supports working people with policies that allow for paid time off when you have a new child, need to care for a sick family member, or get sick yourself.
- D. Government in Nebraska equips the state's workforce with the tools and education it needs to be prepared for the jobs of the future, growing the middle class through investment in affordable community college, and career, technical and vocational training.
- E. Government in Nebraska is making college affordable for Nebraska students so that they can graduate debt free, join the workforce, and grow the middle class.
- F. By balancing the budget and keeping our fiscal house in order, government in Nebraska ensures stability and growth for the middle class.
- G. Government in Nebraska grows the middle class by keeping regulations to a minimum, and taxes on private sector job creators low.

Q.11 OK, the next set of questions are pretty similar to the last set of questions. For this set though, I want your opinion about ways to grow and support the middle class and grow the economy in Nebraska. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

- A. Properly funding public education, so we have motivated, well-paid teachers and world class public schools will help develop our workforce and will grow Nebraska's middle class.
- B. Investing in child care and early childhood education would make it easier and affordable for middle class families in Nebraska to grow and succeed.
- C. Policies that allow for paid time off when you have a new child, need to care for a sick family member, or get sick yourself support working people in Nebraska and will grow our middle class.
- D. Equipping Nebraska's workforce with the tools and education it needs to be prepared for the jobs of the future through investment in affordable community college, and career, technical and vocational training will grow the middle class.
- E. Making college affordable for Nebraska students so that they can graduate debt free and join the workforce will grow the middle class.
- F. Making college affordable for Nebraska students so that they can graduate debt free and join the workforce will grow the middle class.
- G. Making college affordable for Nebraska students so that they can graduate debt free and join the workforce will grow the middle class.

Q.7 Please tell me if you think state government in Nebraska is doing an excellent, good, just fair, or poor job on each of the following.

- A. Providing high quality public education
- B. Providing job training and access to career, technical, and vocational education that is affordable
- C. Building and maintaining a 21st century system of well-kept roads and other transportation infrastructure
- D. Supporting workers with benefits like paid sick and family leave
- E. Making sure college and higher education is affordable
- F. Ensuring workers are paid reasonable wages so they can afford basic needs

Q.13 OK next I am going to read you some policy ideas that Nebraska state government may consider. Please tell me whether you think each policy idea would have a big impact, a small impact, or no impact at all on supporting and growing the middle class in Nebraska.

- A. Fully funding K-12 public education across the state.
- B. Making college affordable for middle class families.
- C. Expanding access to job training, and career, technical and vocational education.
- D. Creating a paid leave program that allows workers to take paid days off if they or a family member get sick or need to take care of a new child.
- E. Making child care affordable and expanding access to early childhood education.
- F. Raising the minimum wage for tipped workers for the first time since 1991.
- G. Creating a grocery tax to fund tax cuts for corporations and businesses.

Q.14 As you may know, in the election that just took place in November, Nebraska voters decided to expand Medicaid in the state. Governor Ricketts has suggested that in order to pay for that expansion of Medicaid, various cuts will need to be made to state services. Please tell me whether you think each of Governor Ricketts' proposed cuts would have a big impact, a small impact, or no impact at all on Nebraska's middle class.

- A. Cutting funding for K- 12 public education.**
- B. Cutting funding for public colleges and the University of Nebraska.**
- C. Cutting funding for roads and other transportation infrastructure.**
- D. Cutting funding for property tax relief.**

Q.15 Switching gears a bit and thinking about the problems the state of Kansas has encountered when it comes to taxes, their budget, and funding public education -- would you say you are very familiar, somewhat familiar, a little familiar, or not at all familiar with that issue in Kansas?

Q.16 Now I am going to read you two perspectives about the situation in Kansas and how it relates to Nebraska.

SOME/OTHER people say the Kansas experiment of huge tax breaks for the wealthy and big corporations has been a disaster for their state, gutting public education, and blowing a massive hole in the budget. We cannot risk bringing the Kansas experiment to Nebraska.

SOME/OTHER people say the recession and poor execution by bureaucrats is why the Kansas experiment failed, but that the best way to grow the economy and keep us competitive is still to cut wasteful government spending keep taxes low on our biggest private sector job creators.

Which of those statements, the first or the second, do you agree with more, even if neither of them is exactly right?