A close-up photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, smiling and hugging each other. The boy is on the left, wearing a white shirt, and the girl is on the right, wearing a purple floral shirt and green overalls. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

Raising Young Children in the Current Economy

Insights from Focus Groups and a National Survey

NEBRASKA PRESENTATION

September 2025

**PERRY
UNDEM**

Introduction.

The purpose of this study is to understand voters' feelings and experiences around raising young children today, including opinions about government programs designed to help children and families.

PerryUndem, a non-partisan research firm, led the research.

Methods

9 Focus Groups

Eight focus groups with voters were conducted in June 2025. We also conducted one focus group with diverse child care providers.

Here are details:

- 2 focus groups with Kansas voters
- 2 focus groups with Montana voters
- 1 focus group with metro Nebraska voters,
1 focus group with rural Nebraska voters
- 2 focus groups with New Hampshire voters
- 1 focus group with early childhood educators

National Survey

A national survey of 1,985 registered voters was conducted June 20 to July 7, 2025.

The survey included the following oversamples:

- 236 AAPI voters
- 235 Black voters
- 315 Hispanic / Latino voters
- 123 Kansas voters
- 117 Montana voters
- 123 Nebraska voters
- 124 New Hampshire voters



Key Takeaways

**These are challenging economic times for Nebraska voters.
Many are making hard choices to make ends meet.**

Q: How concerned are you about each of the following
right now, if at all?

% Concerned

	Total	NE
The cost of living	89	94
The cost of food and groceries	87	93
The cost of healthcare and insurance	85	91
The cost of housing or rent	76	78
The possibility of an economic recession	75	79



“I think I'm most concerned about what I don't know that I don't know, or what's coming, or what could be worse, or what could happen, you know?”

White woman, Democrat, 44, urban, no children <18 in household

“As far as low-middle income, you don't have a lot of choices. You got to live where it's cheap, and you got to buy when it's cheap, and you got to save when you can. If you have higher incomes the [choices] open up, you know, you can go buy an acreage and, you know, do what you want more or less. And that's just kind of the way that our society is set up, it's the more you make the more choice you have.”

White man, Independent, 40 urban, children <18 in household

“I think definitely the cost of food, transportation, you know, to a degree...and [health care]...how the cost, you know, of that is going up as well too. So you know, it definitely weighs on me as well.”

Indigenous woman, Republican, 44, Suburban, children <18 in household

Almost three-quarters believe families with young children are struggling a lot in this economy – and that government isn't doing enough to help.

Q. For the remainder of the survey, think about families with children age 5 or younger. How much, if at all, do you think families with young children are struggling with everyday costs right now?



60%

of Nebraska voters feel government is doing “too little” to support families with young children.

*14% Gov't doing too much
27% Gov't doing about the right amount*

Many in the focus groups say child care is hard to find in Nebraska and is usually not affordable.

“I don't think affordable child care is really a thing unless you fall into some of those programs that help pay for it. We're always just over the cusp.... We work fulltime jobs, but it's like, I couldn't be a stay-at-home mother because then you can't afford your bills, you know, raising a full household on just one income. So I think affordable, child care isn't too affordable.”

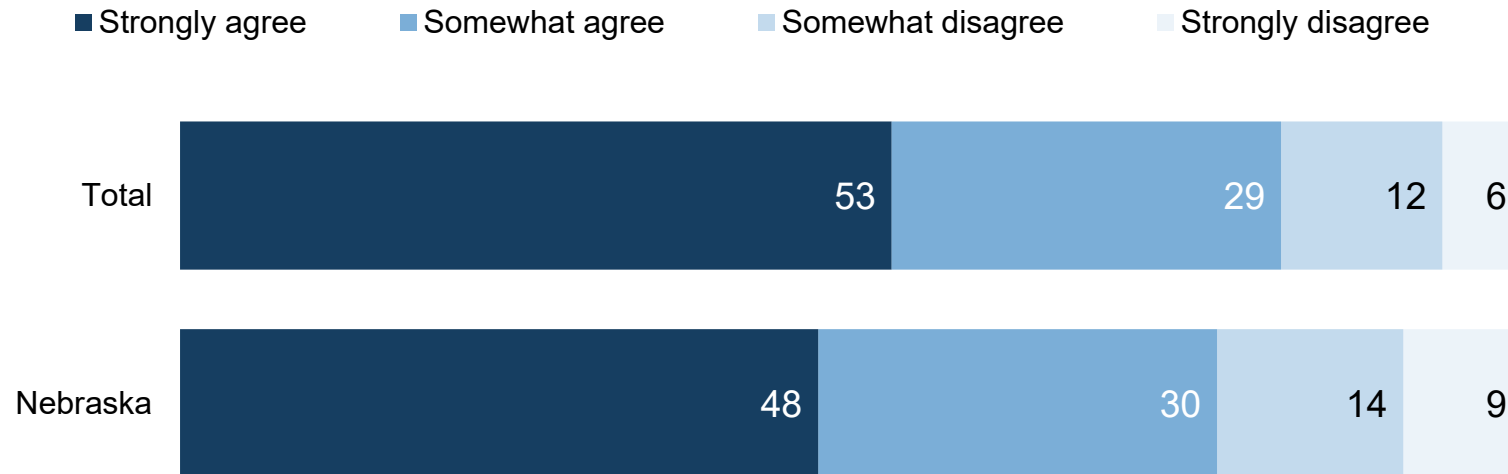
White woman, Republican, 25-34, rural Nebraska, children <18 in household

44%

of Nebraska voters say they are concerned about the cost of child care right now.

78% of Nebraska voters agree government should make it *easier* for families to get the help they need. But many feel income thresholds to qualify for assistance are too low in Nebraska.

Q. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: We should make it easier for families raising young children to enroll in government programs when they need help, not put barriers in their way or make it harder.





“My wife did apply for a couple of things when I was down and out of work. And we were turned down because of that, it was the income. So being in that middle-of-the-road financial space, our credits good enough to get credit cards, but it's too good to get assistance. So, it's kind of shoot yourself in the foot sort of deal.”

White man, Independent, 40, urban Nebraska, children <18 in household

“It's hard because I've never been able to qualify for those things. And, you know, we're just been over it, and it's very difficult for us. Just as hard as we work to even be where we're at, and then we see a lot of people that could be working harder, you know, to better themselves but they got full benefits. And it's just; it sometimes is disheartening to see.”

White woman, Republican, 25-34, rural, children <18 in household

Some in the focus groups say Nebraska has been cutting back on programs and services that help children and families in recent years. Most don't like this trend.

“One thing that I think is getting taken away is safety nets, because life is not always easy and people make mistakes, they fall down. There's just not a lot of safety nets, and those seem to be being taken away.”

White man, Independent, 58, urban Nebraska, no children <18 in household

“They tried to cancel the food programs over the summer for kids last session, so I would say we're not doing too great right now. Our politicians here are really not interested in helping families.”

Mixed race man, Independent, 40, suburban Nebraska, children <18 in household

The vast majority of voters (across political ideology) support government programs that help children and families, and don't want them cut.

Q. Here are some programs that help families and young children. Just based on what you know and the brief definitions below, do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each program?

% Favorable

	Total	NE
Children's Health Insurance Program	89	88
WIC	88	90
Head Start	87	83
Medicaid	86	83
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	86	89
SNAP/food stamps	84	85
State-funded Pre-school	81	77

only 13%

of Nebraska voters support decreasing funding for Medicaid. Generally, 18% or fewer voters support cuts to any of these programs. The largest group of voters wants to *increase spending* on all of these programs.

Most are open to more family-friendly ideas like state paid family leave programs, family tax credits, and paying child care workers more.

Q: Do you support or oppose...

% Support

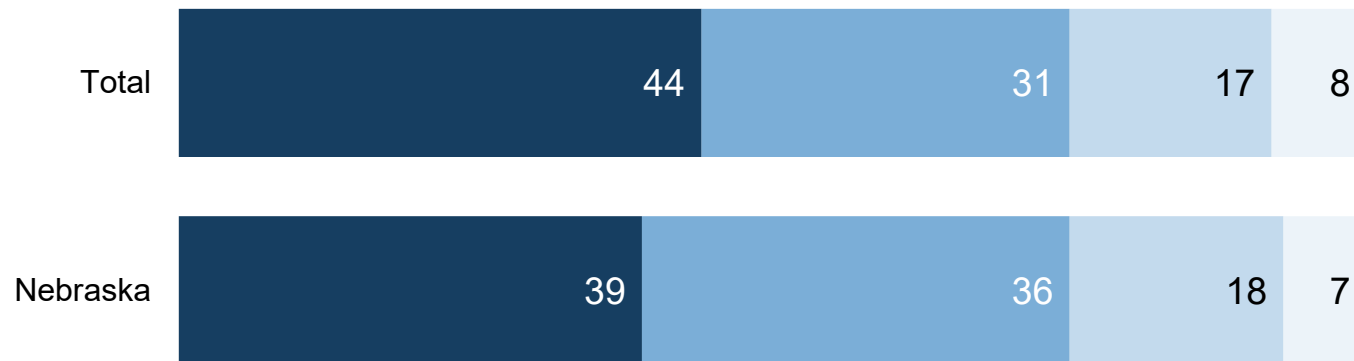
	Total	NE
A state paid family leave program that allows all working parents to take paid time off from work to care for a new child? (N = 985)	82	—*
Tax credits that would go to families to help them pay for child care and other expenses that come with raising young children. (N = 1,001)	87	—*
Increasing wages for early childhood educators and child care providers to attract more qualified people into the field, reduce turnover, and improve the quality of care children receive.	89	89

* The sample of voters for Nebraska was too small to report for some of these questions.

But 75% of Nebraska voters say they have concerns about waste and abuse in government programs.

Q. How concerned are you, if at all, about waste and abuse in government programs that support families and young children?

■ Very concerned ■ Somewhat concerned ■ Not too concerned ■ Not at all concerned



63%

of Nebraska voters also agree that some politicians exaggerate how much waste and abuse there is in government programs and use it as a reason to cut programs that help children.

Some Nebraska voters (particularly those in rural areas) say they want less government in their lives. But others in the focus groups feel it is “reckless” to cut back government assistance and are worried about the scaling back of government programs they are seeing.

“I kind of just try to keep the government out of everything. But I do think there's definitely a need for that [help], and I think that would fall more on nonprofits, religious groups, things of that nature.”

White man, Independent, 35-50, rural Nebraska, children <18 in household

“I think there needs to be support from government. People don't come from the same place so everybody's got a different experience... it's reckless to think that people don't need help at certain times, whether it's FEMA, whether it's [school] lunches, whatever it happens to be.”

White woman, Republican, 51-65, small town Nebraska, no children <18 in household

65% of Nebraska voters (63% nationally) oppose cuts to Medicaid and SNAP that are part of the *One Big Beautiful Bill*. Most are concerned about potential negative impacts.

Q. How concerned would you be if the following happens as a result of this budget proposal?

% Concerned

	Total	NE
Some hospitals and other healthcare providers, particularly those in rural areas, close down	84	81
More children lose healthcare coverage	83	80
More families with young children experience hunger and food insecurity	83	82
Your own healthcare costs go up	81	77
Fewer parents can afford quality child care	78	85
New mothers and infants experience more health problems as a result of healthcare and home visiting programs ending	78	73
School meal programs in your state are cut	76	77
The paperwork burden for low-income parents rises and it gets harder to keep themselves and their children enrolled	71	68



“I see in my job just the impact that like food insecurity can have on families and kids and learning and mental health and all the things just wrapped into one. And so I think that there would definitely be, pitfalls if that were to happen, because there's already a lot of families who are struggling.”

White woman, Democrat, 34, suburban, children <18 in household

“Well, it's basically they got to figure out a way to justify a huge tax increase and a trillion dollar budget increase. So it's less blaming on these people who are cheating the systems. They really haven't found anybody, but they're going to tell you that because they have to justify a huge tax benefit to the ultra-rich.”

White man, Independent, 58, urban, no children <18 in household

“Yeah, I think it's just kind of a bullshit that they said they wanted to help families and then they're immediately cutting programs, and claiming that there's waste and fraud that they're finding, but they're not giving us any receipts to show that there's waste and fraud that's being found.”

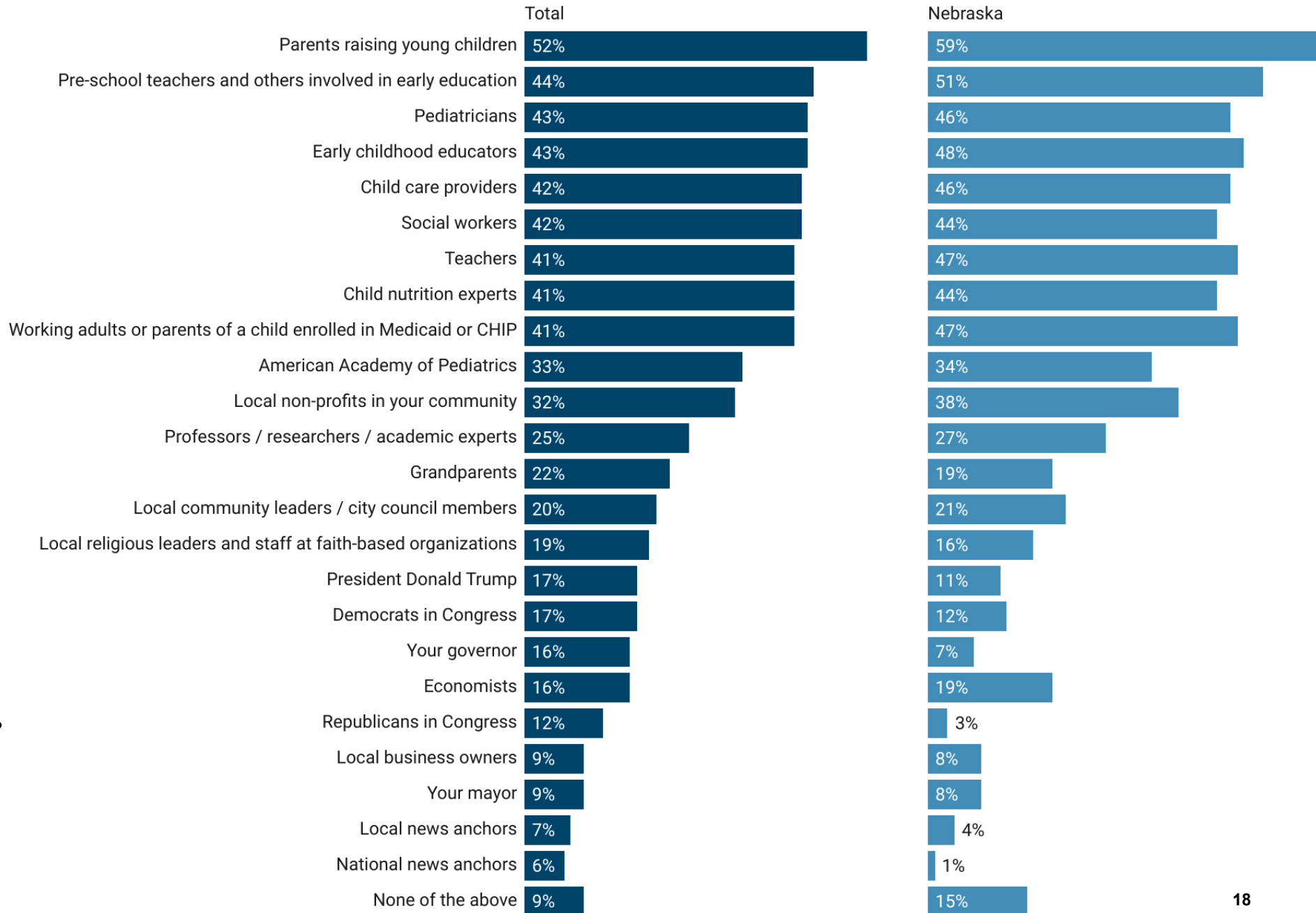
Mixed race man, Independent, 40, suburban, children <18 in household

“I think \$700 billion is an insane amount of money to cut at once.”

White woman, Republican, 25-34, rural, children <18 in household

The best messengers on these issues are those closest to them.

Q. Which people, groups, or organizations would you trust most to talk about what services and support families need most to thrive right now?



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