Raising Young Children in the Current Economy

Insights from Focus Groups and a National Survey

KANSAS 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.

The research was commissioned by the United Methodist Health Ministry Fund and four other independent foundations that focus on improving the lives of 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/providers

National Survey

A national online survey of 1,985 registered voters using YouGov's panel 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

Note: *State oversamples are not large enough to be considered representative. The state-level data included in this report should be treated as directional.*

Key Takeaways

These are challenging economic times for many Kansas voters. Some feel no matter how hard they try, they can't get ahead.

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

% Concerned

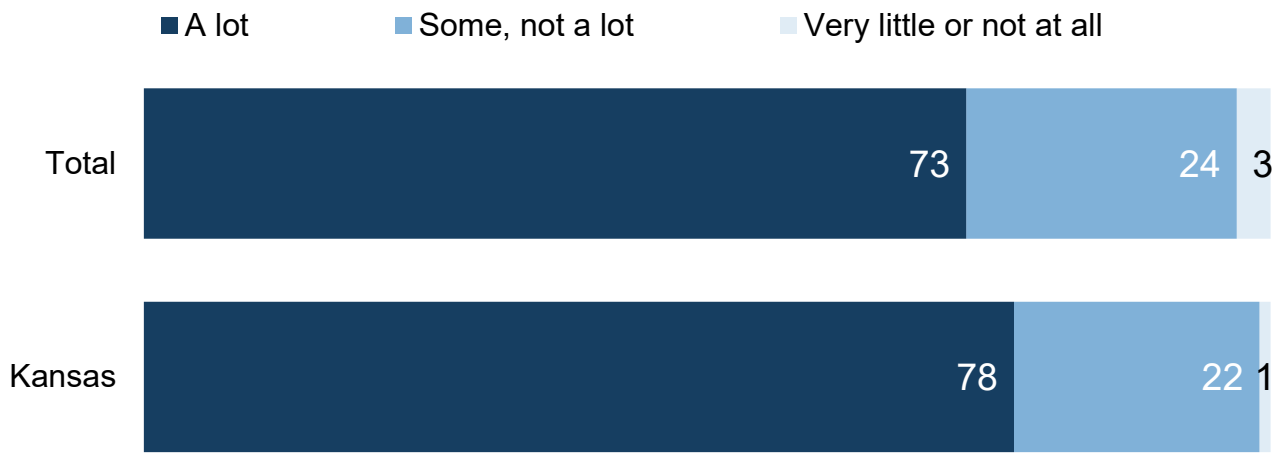
	Total	KS
The cost of living	**89**	89
The cost of food and groceries	**87**	85
The cost of healthcare and insurance	**85**	90
The cost of housing or rent	**76**	81
The possibility of an economic recession	**75**	75

"Even with getting raises and things like that, it's like the more money I make, the more things cost, the more daycare and camps and things cost, the more food costs.... So even though I'm making more now than I've ever made, I don't really feel like I'm reaping the benefits. The cost of living is going up and I just feel like I'm kind of in this complacent zone of kind of trying to feel optimistic, but at the same time, just kind of flatlining."

Woman, 36, urban Kansas, children <18 in home

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?



69%

of Kansas voters feel government is doing "too little" to support families with young children.

15% Gov't doing too much
16% Gov't doing about the right amount

Many parents say child care is not affordable and hard to find in Kansas.

“Right now, I work part time. It's not even worth it for me to work because I would be making like no money to pay for the childcare. You know, it was too expensive, so.

Woman, 35, suburban Kansas, children <18 in home

“I'm in a pretty small town, so we only have limited child care, and everything seems pretty full and you got to wait so many months for kids to age out for you to try to get a spot. And it's not even a guarantee that you're going to get a spot or not.”

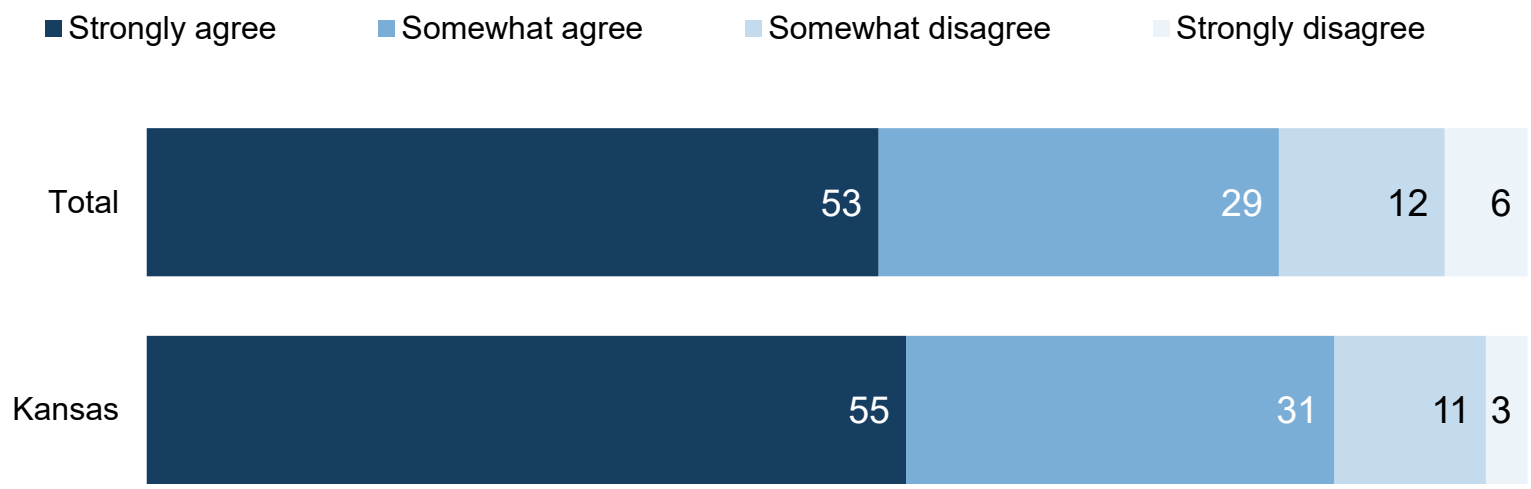
Woman, 28, small town Kansas, children <18 in home

60%

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

86% of Kansas voters agree government should make it *easier* for families to get the help they need – not put barriers in their way.

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.



Many in the focus groups feel it’s too hard to qualify for government assistance in Kansas.

“If someone needs SNAP benefits, you know, you make a dollar too much and it's like, ‘Oh, well.’ But in reality, you're making three, four hundred dollars too little to live and survive with a family. And that for me is why I will never have another child, not in this economy. My one is enough with what I have available.”

Woman, 36, suburban Kansas, children <18 in home

“Sometimes they want you to be flat broke. And I think sometimes the only way to get assistance is they want you completely desperate with no money, and then they'll help. But at that point, it's still not enough to live.”

Man, 52, small town Kansas, no children <18 in home

“Sometimes the paperwork, what you have to go through to dot the I's and cross T’s and everything, they make it difficult for them. And that's what's complicated. It just seems that a lot of times there's more bureaucracy than trying to help the people and everything else is from what I've seen.”

Man, 65, suburban Kansas, no children <18 in home

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	KS
Children's Health Insurance Program	**89**	93
WIC	**88**	90
Head Start	**87**	93
Medicaid	**86**	92
Temporary Assistance for Needy Families	**86**	90
SNAP/food stamps	**84**	88
State-funded Pre-school	**81**	86

only 7%

of Kansas voters support decreasing funding for Medicaid. Generally, 16% 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…

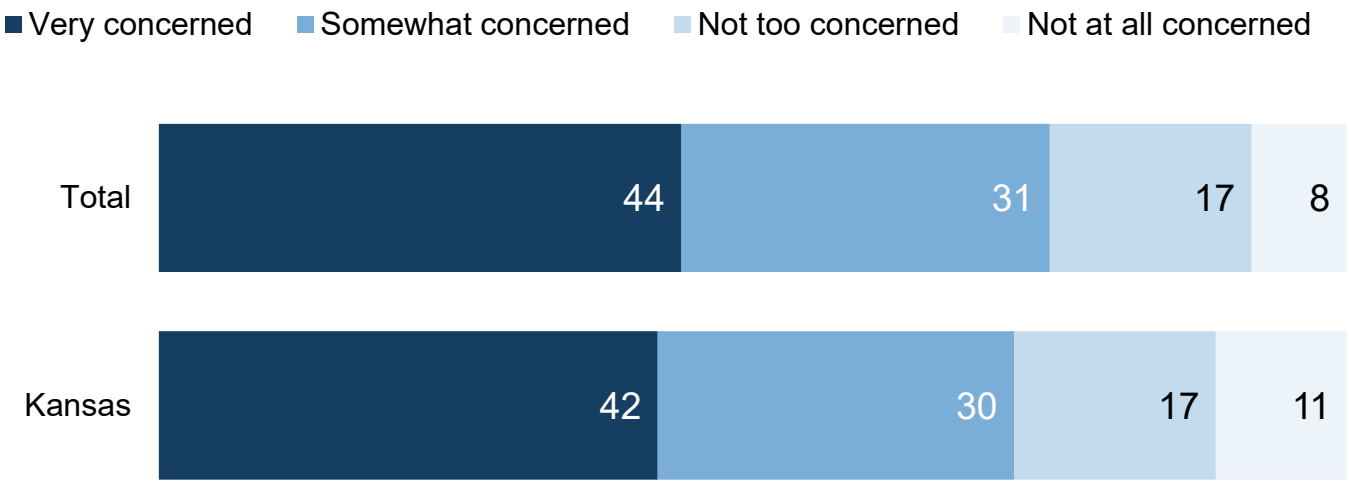
% Support

	Total	KS
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**	95

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

But 72% of Kansas 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?



75%

of Kansas 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.

70% of Kansas 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

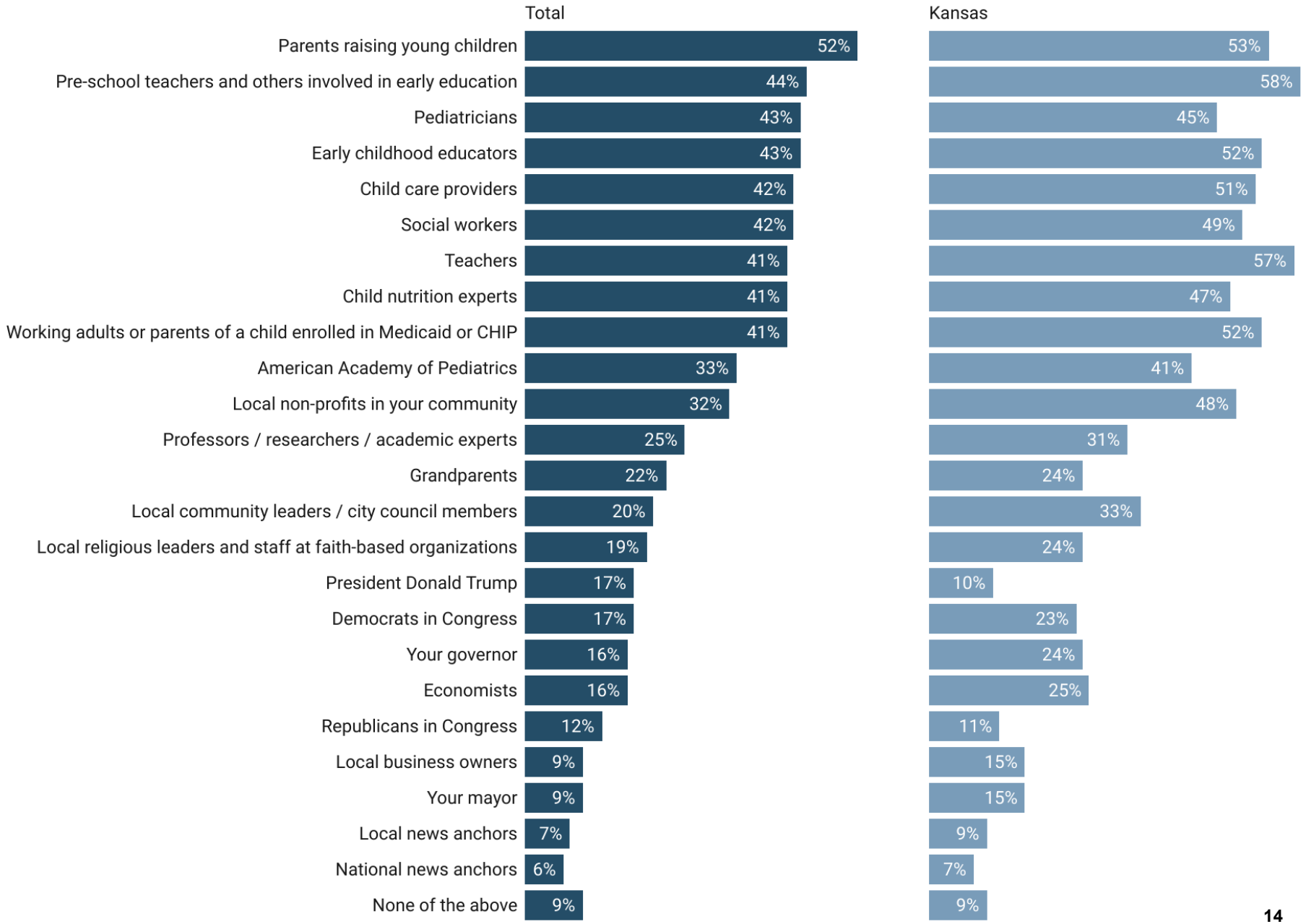
	Total	KS
Some hospitals and other healthcare providers, particularly those in rural areas, close down	**84**	86
More children lose healthcare coverage	**83**	84
More families with young children experience hunger and food insecurity	**83**	84
Your own healthcare costs go up	**81**	81
Fewer parents can afford quality child care	**78**	83
New mothers and infants experience more health problems as a result of healthcare and home visiting programs ending	**78**	81
School meal programs in your state are cut	**76**	80
The paperwork burden for low-income parents rises and it gets harder to keep themselves and their children enrolled	**71**	76

"I feel like you're barely making ends meet and you just need that little bit of help still, and they're trying to rip that away from you when you're barely just making it."

Woman, 28, small town Kansas, children <18 in home

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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