



SECOND ANNUAL  
IDAHO PUBLIC  
POLICY SURVEY

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE  
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## ABOUT THE SURVEY:

The Second Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey was conducted December 3-8, 2016 and surveyed 1000 adults currently living in the state of Idaho. Respondents were asked about their attitudes concerning several key policy issues, including significant focus on revenue and spending, transportation, education, refugees, and energy and climate change. The survey sample was designed to be representative of all regions of the state and was administered on behalf of the School of Public Service by GS Strategy Group, a Boise-based polling firm. Statewide results have a margin of error of +/- 3.1%

### KEY FINDINGS:

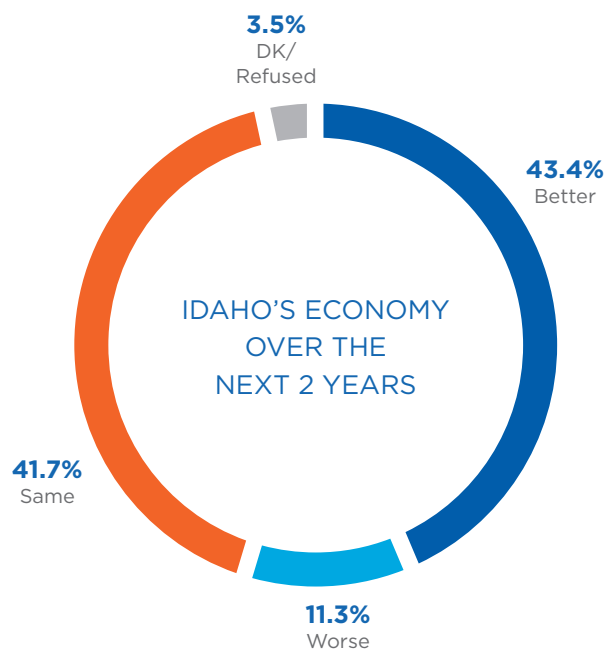
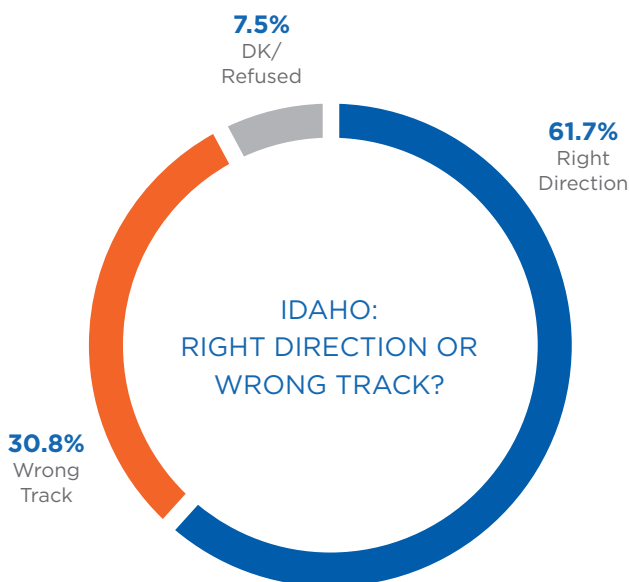
- Idahoans continue to be satisfied and optimistic concerning the state and its future
- Significant uptick in evaluation of K-12 public education quality but respondents view their own districts much more favorably than the state as a whole
- Significant increase in belief state government needs to address health care
- Significant support for reauthorization of surplus eliminator program
- Ambivalence about refugee resettlement but 2/3 who have interacted with refugees view experience positively

For more information visit:

[sps.boisestate.edu/2017-idaho-public-policy-survey](http://sps.boisestate.edu/2017-idaho-public-policy-survey)

The Second Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey indicates a general steadiness in Idahoans' attitudes about key public policy issues, although with a few noteworthy changes.

Taken together, the big picture results of this survey indicate overall satisfaction with the performance of the state and a general steadiness in public attitudes concerning the key challenges the state faces and which issues are most important for the state government to address, though public concern about health care and, to a lesser extent, transportation is growing. Overall, Idahoans appear more content and optimistic about the state's future than last year. 61.7% of respondents stated things in Idaho are generally headed in the right direction, up from 57% one year ago, and 43.4% believe the state's economy is going to get better over the next two years, up from 39.7% one year ago.



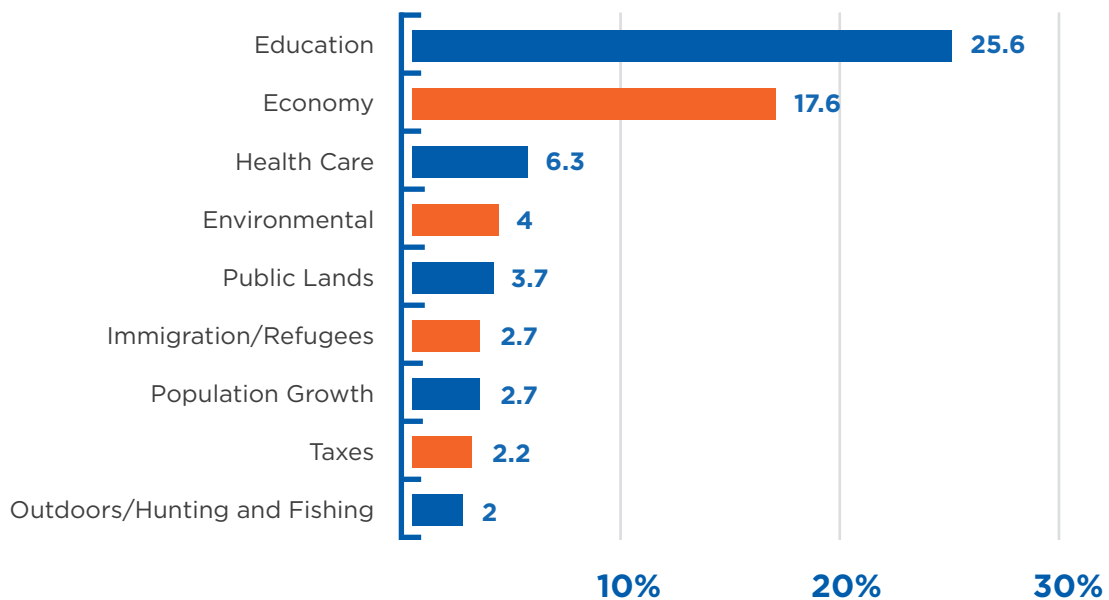
Policy attitudes were relatively steady compared to the previous year. Education was again identified as the most important issue facing Idaho (26.5%), followed by economic matters (17.6%), health care (6.3%), the environment (4.0%), and public lands (3.7%). 7.0% of respondents identified the conservative nature of Idaho and/or government policies themselves as the most important issue facing the state, with several other issue areas mentioned less than 3% of the time. This steadiness is also largely reflected in responses to questions about the importance of state legislative action on

several issues. When asked on a scale of 1-10 how important it is for the state legislature to address education, 80.5% stated it was very important (i.e., 8-10), which represents a slight increase (+3.6%) from last year, whereas 70.2% stated addressing jobs and the economy was very important, essentially the same as last year.

Health care, on the other hand, exhibited significant change; there was an 11.2% increase in those suggesting it was very important for the state legislature to address health care. Transportation also saw some change as there was a slight increase (+3.7%) in those

who felt addressing transportation issues was moderately important (i.e., 4-7) and a significant decrease (-7.9%) in those stating addressing transportation was not very important (i.e., 1-3). We also asked about the importance of two other policy areas for the first time: natural resources and taxes. 56.7% stated addressing natural resources as very important, with an additional 35.1% stating it was moderately important and 4.5% saying it was not very important, whereas 46.4% suggested addressing tax policy was very important with an additional 42.8% suggesting it was moderately important and 7.5% saying not very important.

### MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING IDAHO

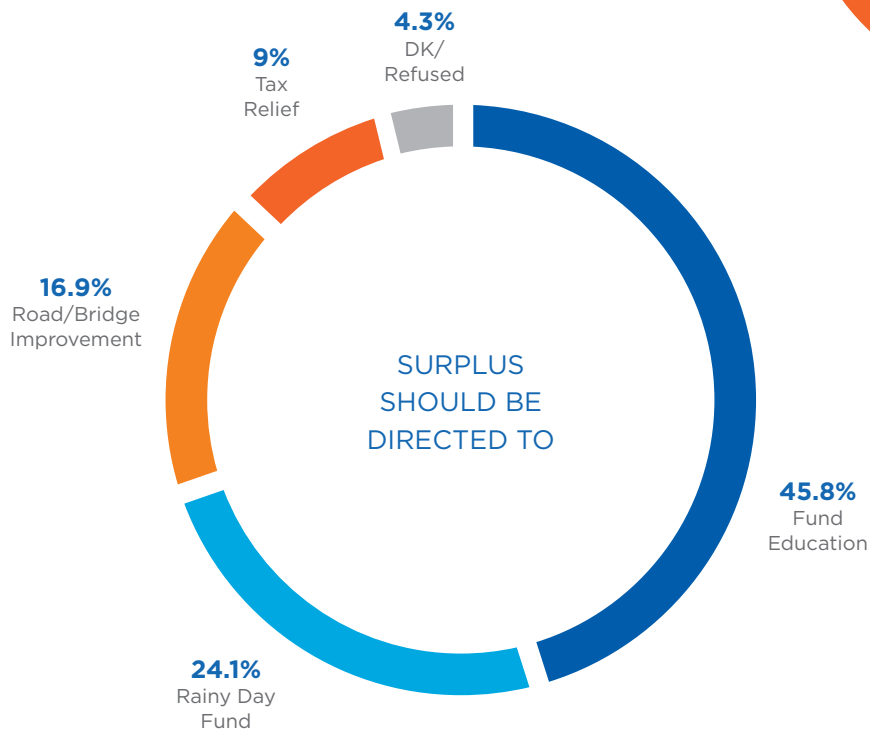
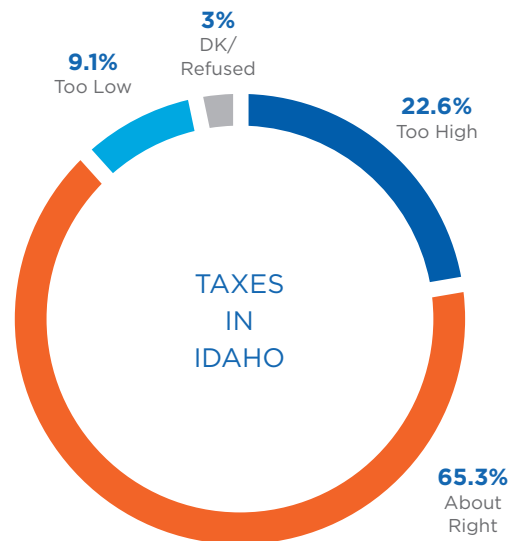
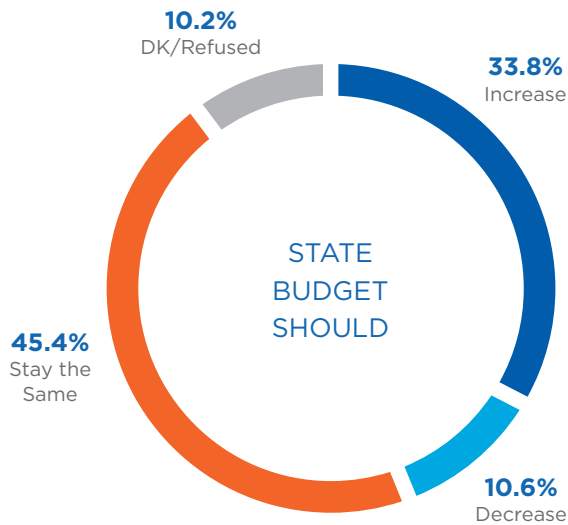


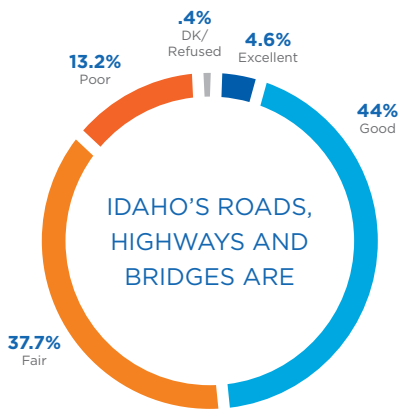
A deeper dive into the specific sections of the survey allows a more detailed analysis of attitudes concerning several key policy areas, including revenue and spending, transportation, education, health care, refugees, climate change and energy. Discussions concerning each of these areas follow.

# REVENUE AND TRANSPORTATION

Idahoans are generally satisfied with the current fiscal activities of the state. 45.4% of respondents think the state's budget should stay about the same, while about one-third (33.8%) of respondents think the state's budget should be increased and only 10.6% think the budget should be decreased. These figures are consistent with last year's. Similarly, almost two-thirds (65.3%) of Idahoans believe taxes in Idaho are about right, compared to 22.6% who say they are

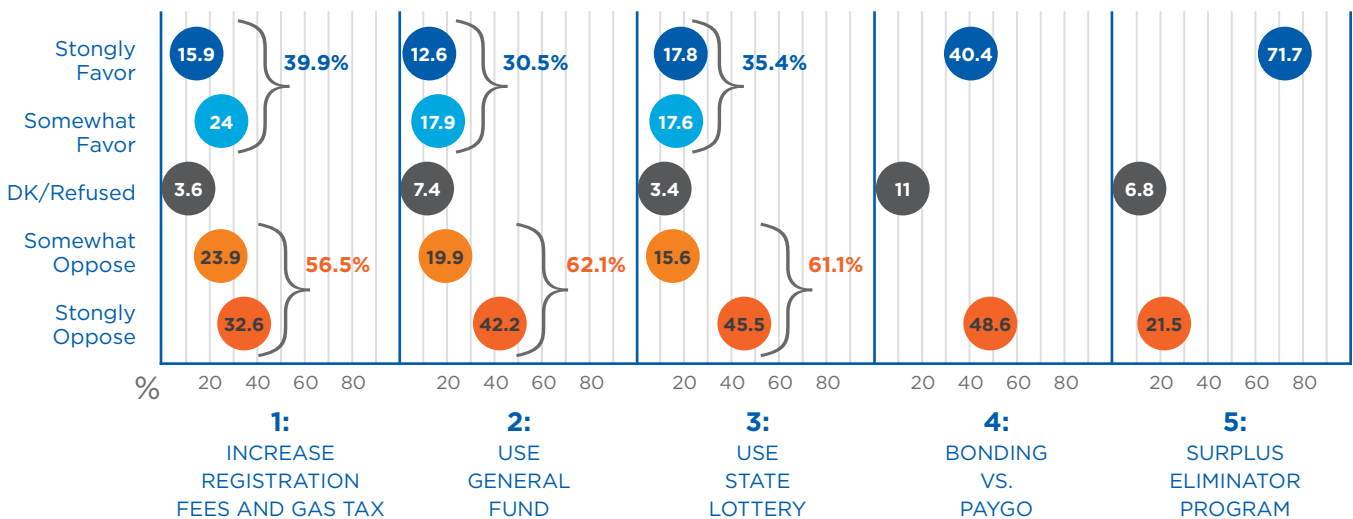
too high and only 9.1% who think they are too low. These figures are also almost identical to last year's. When asked about what should be done with the state's expected \$130M budget surplus, 45.8% think it should be used to fund public education, 24.1% think it should be deposited in the state's rainy day savings account, 16.9% think it should be invested in road and bridge improvements in Idaho, and 9% think it should be used to provide tax relief.



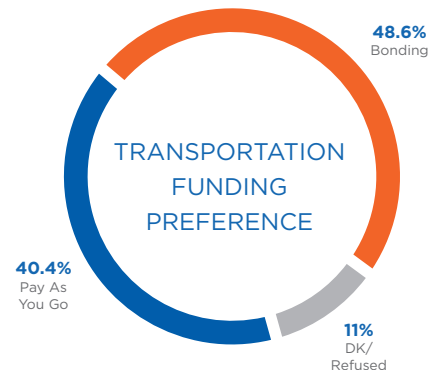


These figures are particularly meaningful when considering public attitudes about the state's transportation infrastructure. Idahoans are generally fine with the current condition of the state's roads, highways, and bridges, with 81.7% rating them as either good or fair, and only 13.2% rating them as poor. Perhaps because of this general satisfaction, most transportation funding solutions fail to achieve majority support. 56.4% of Idahoans oppose increasing registration fees and gas taxes to improve the state's roads, highways, and bridges, while 62.1% oppose funding transportation projects through the state's general fund and 61.1% oppose using Idaho state lottery money to fund those projects. Interestingly, Republicans are particularly opposed to raising registration fees and gas taxes while Democrats are particularly opposed to using either the general fund or state lottery. Overall, Idahoans are more open to funding transportation projects through bonding rather than the pay-as-you-go approach, with 48.6% supporting the use of bonding compared to 40.4% supporting the pay-as-you-go approach, which avoids taking on debt but is also more expensive. Democrats, more than any other group, favor bonding (61.6%).

### TRANSPORTATION FUNDING ALTERNATIVES



The one transportation funding solution that achieves majority support is the reauthorization of the surplus eliminator program, which Idaho created on a temporary basis in 2015. Informed that this program splits surplus revenue between transportation funding and the state's rainy day savings account, and that the program allows funding transportation projects without raising additional taxes or using the state's general fund, 71.7% think the state legislature should reauthorize the surplus eliminator program, while 21.5% think the state should let it expire. Republicans, more than any other group, are particularly supportive of reauthorizing this program (78.3%). Considered alongside not only the lack of support for other conventional funding solutions but also public preferences about how the surplus should be spent - 41% support either depositing the surplus in the state's rainy day account or investing in road and bridge improvements, even when funding public education is a stated alternative option - reauthorizing the surplus eliminator program is a decision that would clearly be met with support by the citizens of the state.



# EDUCATION

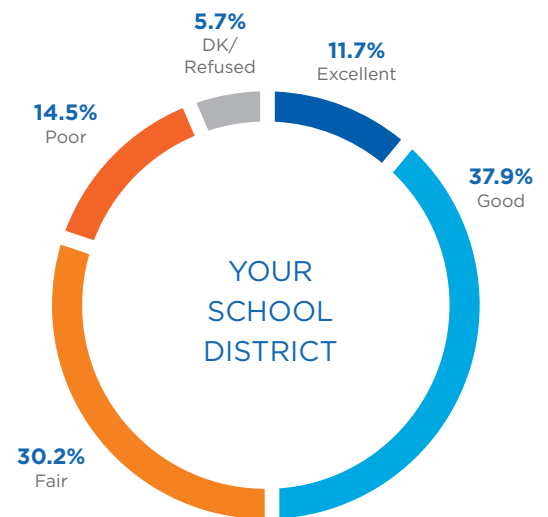
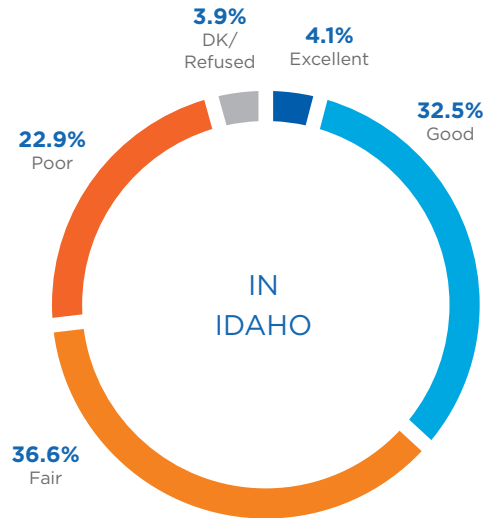
For the second consecutive year, Idahoans identify education as the most important issue facing the state, with 26.5% saying that it is the most pressing issue (compared to 28.2% in 2016).

When asked to rate the importance of the legislature addressing this issue on a scale of one to ten, 80.5% of citizens scored education an 8 or higher, indicating that it should be a priority for the legislature to address, a 3.6% increase over last year's results. This continued concern with education may be related to perceptions of quality in the state: only about one-third of Idahoans (36.6%) rated the state's K-12 public schools as "Excellent" or "Good". However, it is important to note that this represents a 9% increase over last year. Similarly, while 59.6% of Idahoans rate the state's K-12 schools as only "Fair" or "Poor," this represents a 10.5% decline from last year, suggesting that Idahoans have seen improvements in the past year. Dissatisfaction with education in the state is particularly pronounced among residents of Canyon County and self-identified Independents statewide, with 63.7% and 65.1%, respectively, characterizing state education as Fair or Poor. Older Idahoans are generally more satisfied with K-12 schools than younger Idahoans—68.2% of citizens aged 18-29 hold an unfavorable view, compared with 50.2% of those 65 or older. Republicans have the most favorable view (45.7% positive), followed by Democrats (35.5%).

When the question moved to the quality of education in one's own school district, opinions became generally more favorable. Almost half (49.5%) rated the K-12 public schools in their own district as "Excellent" or "Good" – a nearly 13% increase over the statewide system – suggesting that Idahoans view the schools they have most contact with more favorably than the reputation of education within the state itself. The least positive view was found among those aged 18-29 (42.9% positive) and Independents (42.7%). All other age groups and political parties had a net favorable view of the K-12 public schools in their district. The most significant change in assessment when moving from the state educational system to respondents' own districts was greatest among residents of Ada County (+17.6%), Democrats (17.6%), and those ages 18-29 (16%) and 30-44 (18.7%).

Another source of educational opportunities – the state's public libraries – received high marks, however. 82.8% agree that the libraries in their communities create educational opportunities for people of all ages, while 81.7% consider the library in their community a good resource for access to information and other technological resources. These figures are consistent across all groups, with respondents in northern Idaho the most favorably disposed toward public libraries.

QUALITY OF IDAHO K-12 EDUCATION



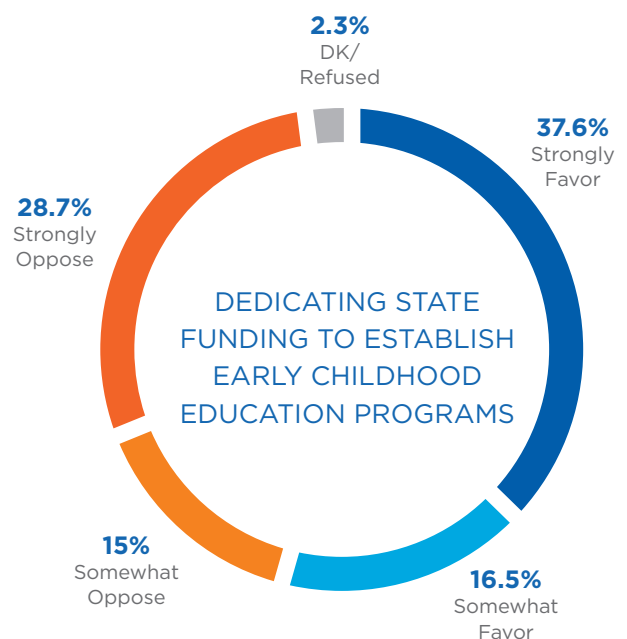
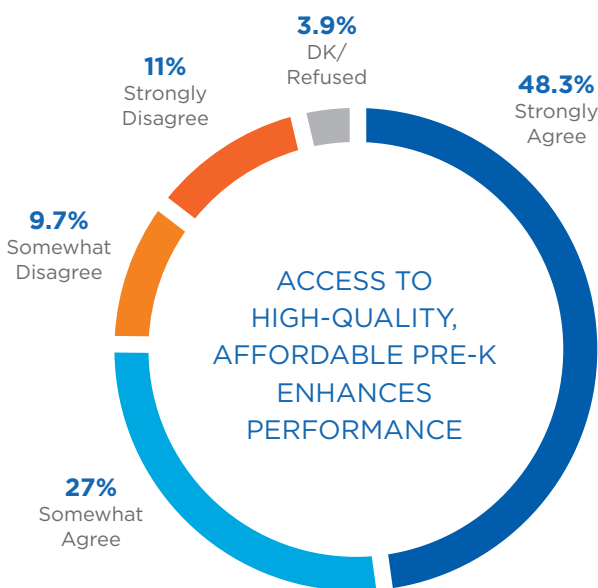


Despite this mixed assessment of educational quality, Idahoans remain split on the matter of funding. 44.4% agreed that school districts should raise additional tax revenue to increase education funding (although only 23.6% strongly), while 49.2% disagreed (29.2% strongly). These figures were generally steady across all regions of the state as well as gender groups, but there were some noteworthy age and partisan dynamics. Support was greatest among those aged 18-29 (54.4% strongly or somewhat agreed), with support declining as respondents' age increased, with those 65+ the least supportive of increased funding (38.4%). A majority of Democrats (56.6%) support increasing education funding through raised taxes, but

majorities of both Independents (50.1%) and Republicans (52.6%) were opposed to this alternative.

A similar story can be told when it comes to public attitudes about early childhood education. When asked about the potential benefits of pre-K education, 75.6% of Idahoans agreed that access to high-quality, affordable preschool for children enhances their educational performance in elementary school, while only 20.7% disagreed. This significant belief in the impact of access to early childhood education was consistent across all age groups, regions, genders, and parties. However, when informed that the state of Idaho does not currently fund early childhood education for 3- and 4-year olds, only a slight

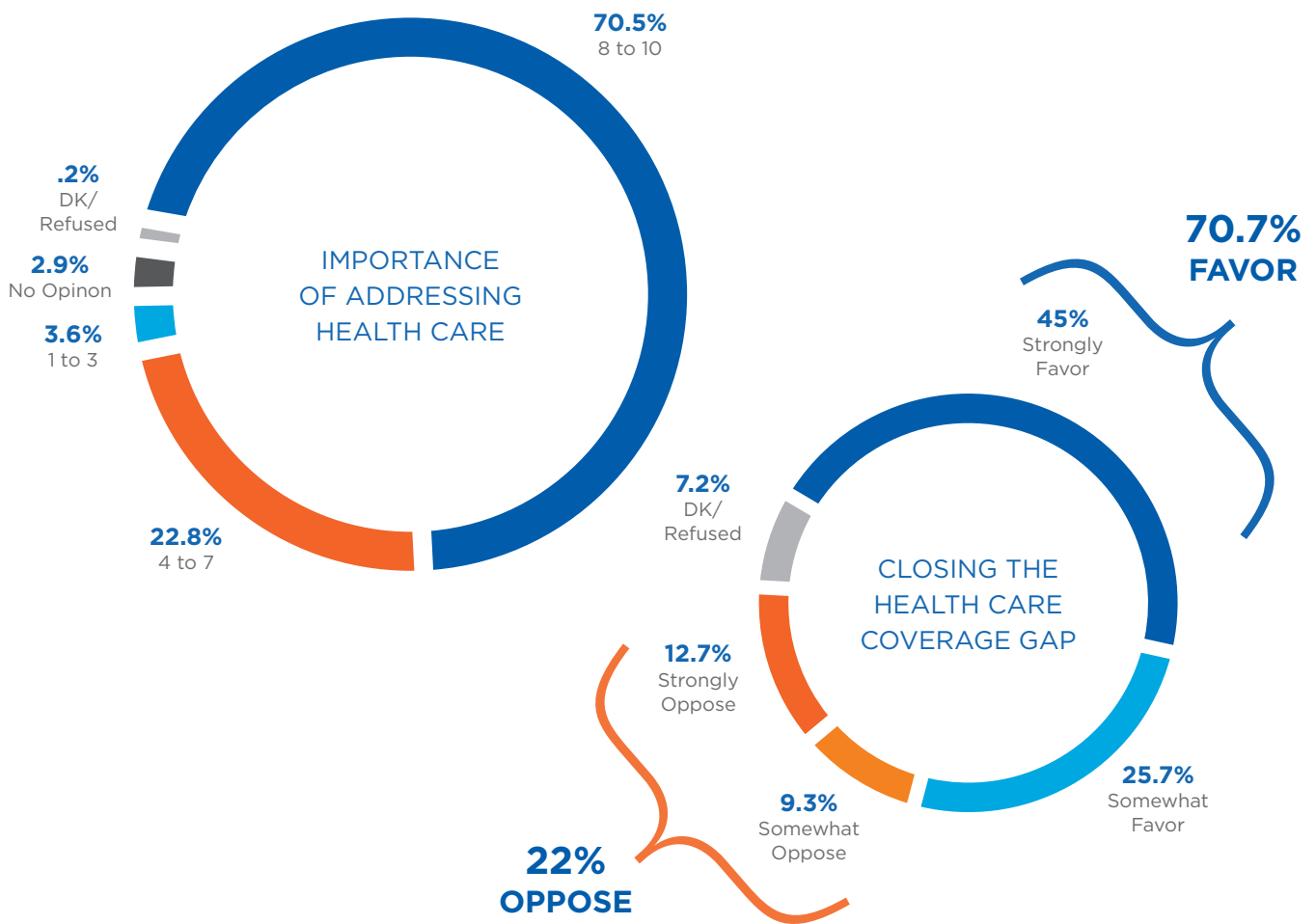
majority (54%) favored dedicating state funding to such programs, compared to 43.7% who opposed doing so. There was significant variation across key sub-groups, as well: women were significantly more likely than men to favor dedicated spending (+14%), as were respondents in the 30-44 age group more so than those 65+ (+20.3%). In other words, those most likely to have pre-K aged children are much more likely to support funding than those whose children are already out of the home. There was also significant difference across partisan affiliation, with 79.5% of Democrats favoring dedicated state funding compared to 57.8% of Independents and 38.6% of Republicans.



# HEALTH CARE

The results of the Second Annual Idaho Public Policy Survey indicate that the issue area with greatest increase in public concern is health care policy.

70.5% of Idahoans scored health care at least an 8 when asked how important it was on a scale of 1-10 for the state legislature to address, an 11.2% increase from last year. The number of respondents giving health care a 10 (i.e., the highest level of importance possible) increased by 12.7% from 2016, further underscoring the fact that the public views health care as an area deserving of the state legislature’s attention. Although a significant majority of respondents in all groups indicated health care to be a high priority, this feeling was particularly pronounced among those ages 55-64 (76.1%), women (78%), Democrats (78.9%), and those in the Idaho Falls/ eastern Idaho region (72.7%)



A recurring issue in recent legislative sessions has been the question of what should be done for Idaho’s approximately 78,000 “gap” population—those who earn too much to qualify for Medicaid coverage, but too little to access the state’s health insurance exchange. Approximately 70.8% of Idahoans said they were in favor of the state legislature taking action to provide access to quality

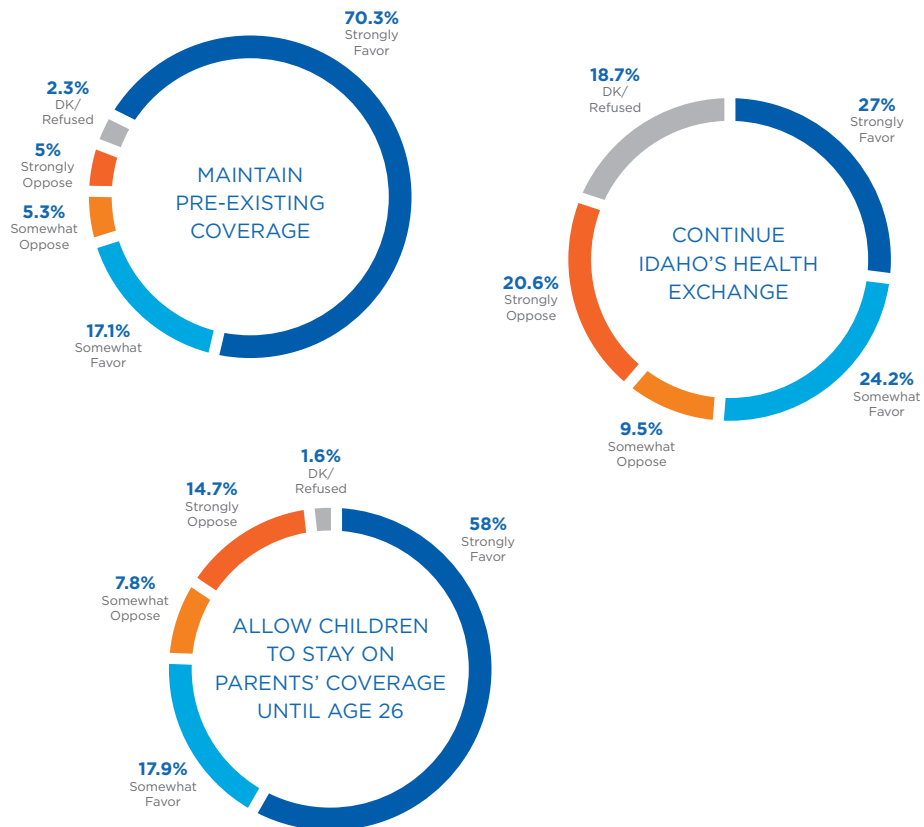
health care for low income Idahoans who currently lack affordable comprehensive health coverage. Support is generally strong across all regions and age groups, with it being greatest among those aged 18-29 (76.3%) and least among those aged 45-54 (68%). Democrats overwhelmingly support taking action (91.4%), followed by Independents (73%), and Republicans (59.1%).



With the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, the future of the Affordable Care Act is uncertain. Although Mr. Trump promised during the campaign that repealing the Affordable Care Act would be one of his first priorities, he also signaled openness to maintaining certain provisions of the Act as part of whatever replaces it. Idahoans demonstrated significant support for two of the major components of the Affordable Care Act, with 87.4% of respondents in favor of maintaining the guarantee of health insurance coverage for those with preexisting conditions (including 70.3% who strongly favor keeping it) and 75.9% in favor of maintaining the policy that allows children to stay on their parents' insurance until age 26. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the group most favorably disposed toward that provision was those aged 18-29

(80.3%). This significant support is consistent on both counts across all key sub-groups (i.e., age, gender, region, and partisanship).

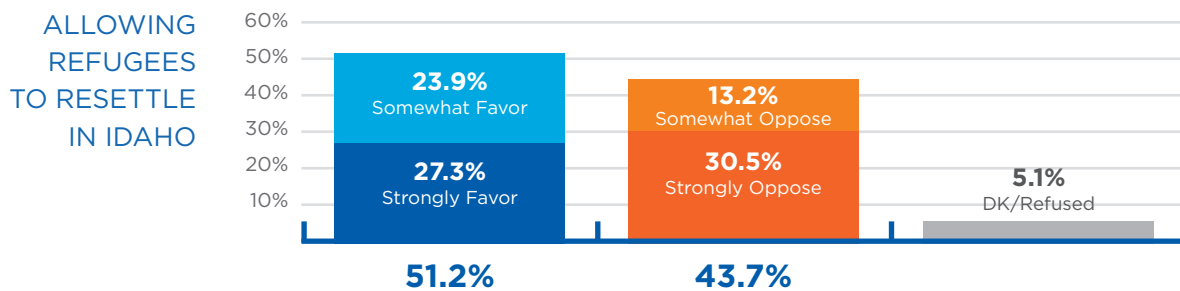
Attitudes toward the state's health insurance exchange (Your Health Idaho) were also consistent across groups, with just over half (51.2%) of respondents stating they were somewhat or strongly in favor of the state exchange and less than one-third (30.1%) stating they were somewhat or strongly opposed. (Nearly one-fifth of respondents (18.7%) said they did not know or refused to answer the question.) These figures were generally consistent across all groups, with the exceptions of partisan affiliation. Democrats were much more likely to be in favor (74.4%) than Republicans (40.1%), with Independents reporting a 51.3% favorability score, almost exactly the same as the overall state result.



# REFUGEES

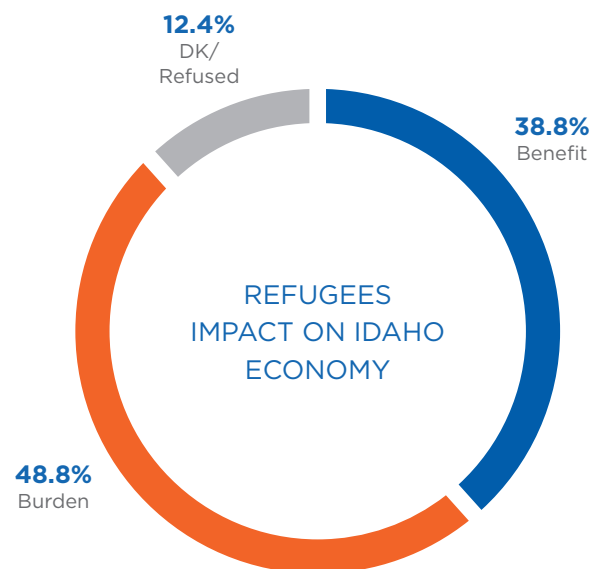
Idaho has had an active refugee resettlement program since the 1970s, and with recent surges in global refugee numbers, the issue has become salient again both in Idaho and throughout the nation.

Idahoans are divided in their support of resettling refugees in Idaho; a slim majority (51.1%) favor this program, while a sizeable minority (43.8%) of citizens oppose it. However, although more citizens of Idaho favor this program, those who oppose refugee resettlement appear to feel very strongly about the matter. Among the 43.8% who oppose refugee settlement, 30.5% strongly oppose it, compared to 13.2% who somewhat oppose it.



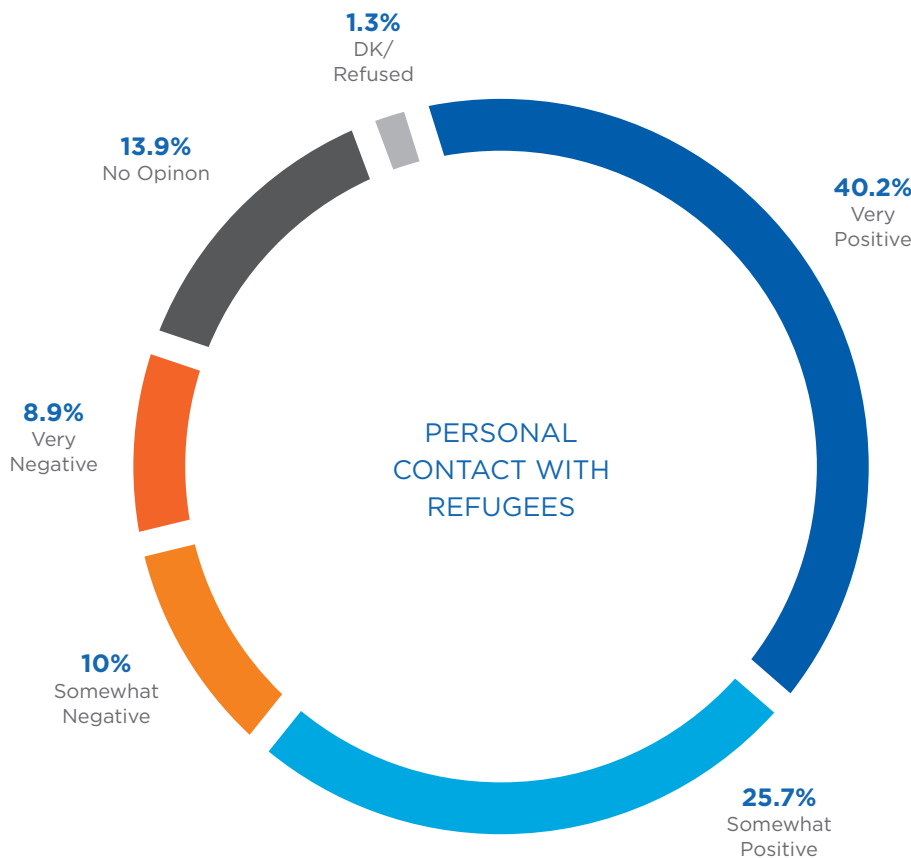
With this in mind, certain kinds of citizens are markedly more supportive of this program than others. In general, younger Idahoans have more favorable attitudes towards refugee resettlement than older citizens. Amongst those between the ages of 18-29, 59.5% support resettlement, and for those between 30-44, 61.8% support refugee resettlement. In contrast, those over the age of 65 oppose refugee resettlement by a slim margin (53.7%). There are also geographic differences that emerge. Those in the Treasure Valley are the most supportive of resettlement (57.9%), while residents of northern Idaho show the lowest levels of support (42.4%). Democrats are overwhelmingly supportive of refugee resettlement (79.8%), Independents are modestly supportive (52.5%), while only a minority of Republicans (36.7%) support refugee resettlement.

Although Idahoans are modestly supportive of refugee resettlement in general, they hold less positive assessments of the impact of resettlement on the state's economy. More Idahoans believe that refugees are a burden (48.8%) on the economy, than a benefit (38.8%). It also appears that Idahoans are less certain about the role of refugees in Idaho's economy, with 12.4% responding that they don't know what the economic impact are. Similar patterns emerge for different groups of citizens as we saw with the previous question. Younger Idahoans tend to have a rosier outlook on the economic impact of resettlement (44.5% of 18-29 year olds and 46.5% of 30-44 think it benefits the economy, compared to only 31.5% of those over 65), and Democrats tend to believe that it is largely a benefit (69.2%), while a much smaller percentage of Republicans (23.3%) share that view.



At the same time, those who have actually interacted with refugees generally report positive experiences. Almost half of respondents (47.4%) reported having had some or significant contact with refugees in their communities, while 50% have either had no contact or are unaware of any refugees in their communities. When we ask those who have had contact with refugees in their communities about whether this contact has been positive or negative, a sizeable majority (66%) report that their contact has been positive, while

only 18.9% report that it has been negative. Notably, majorities of citizens across all age groups, both genders, all geographic locations, and all partisan groups reported positive contact with refugees. This pattern even holds amongst groups who were opposed to refugee resettlement by large margins. Amongst Republicans, we see that 51.2% report positive contact compared to 19.2% who report negative contact, and for those over the age of 65, 52.8% report positive contact compared to 19.3% who report negative contact.



**In sum, there appears to be slightly more support for refugee resettlement in Idaho than opposition, but a good deal of nuance lies beneath the surface of this attitude.**

On the one hand, Idahoans are more pessimistic than optimistic about the economic consequences of resettlement. Even among groups that are supportive of resettlement in general, such as Independents and women, more see resettlement as an economic liability than an asset. However, it appears that for the (nearly) half of the state who has had contact with refugees, this has largely been a positive experience. Even among groups that have a negative view of resettlement in general, such as Republicans and those over 65, we see majorities reporting positive interactions with refugees. Perhaps the best way to characterize Idahoans' views on refugee resettlement is that narrow majorities support resettlement, and that relations with refugees who are here are largely favorable, but support is not likely to be rooted in perceived economic benefits to the state.

# ENERGY AND CLIMATE

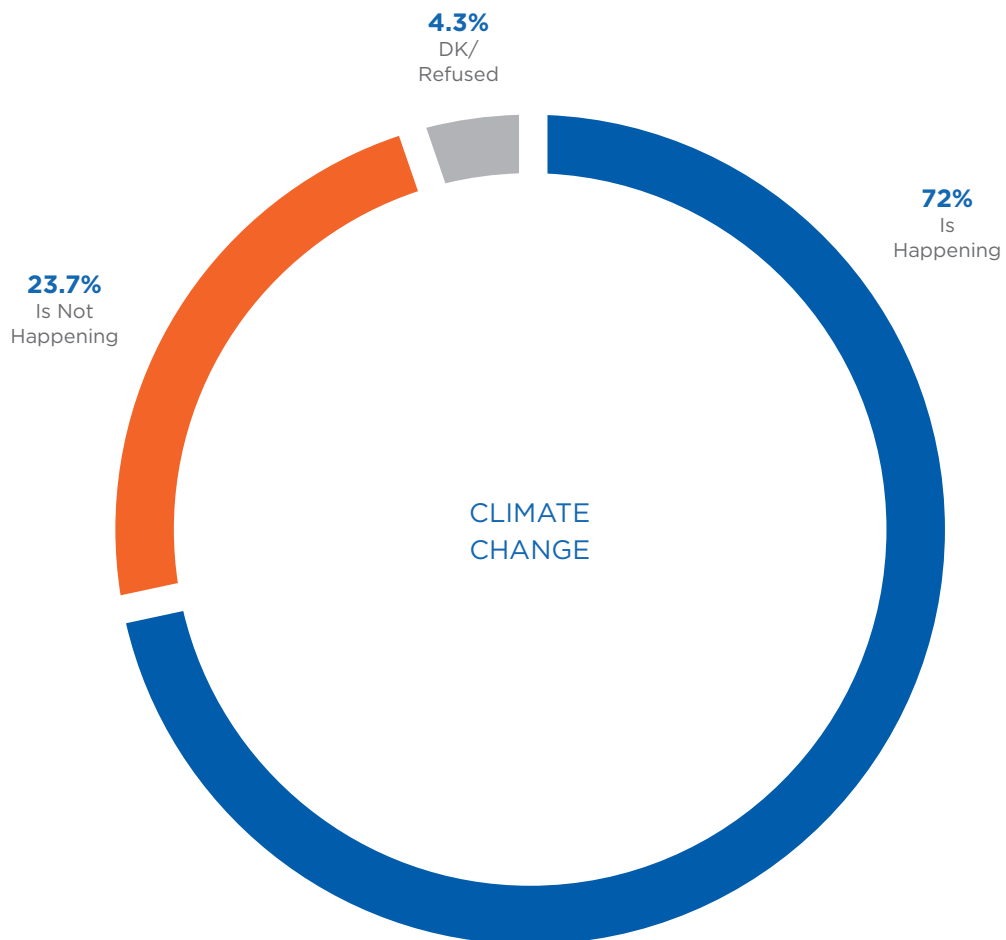
Idaho, like much of the nation, continues to face questions about how to best provide energy for our state, and the nature of the environmental tradeoffs that arise from different energy sources.

Because discussions of energy sources are tied closely to the environmental tradeoffs that come with them, we wanted to know what citizens in Idaho think of climate change. A large majority (72%) of Idahoans believe that climate change is taking place, while a much smaller number (23.7%) do not believe that it is occurring. Moreover, the number of Idahoans who believe that climate change is occurring

is slightly higher (+3.4%) than the number who reported this attitude one year ago (68.6%).

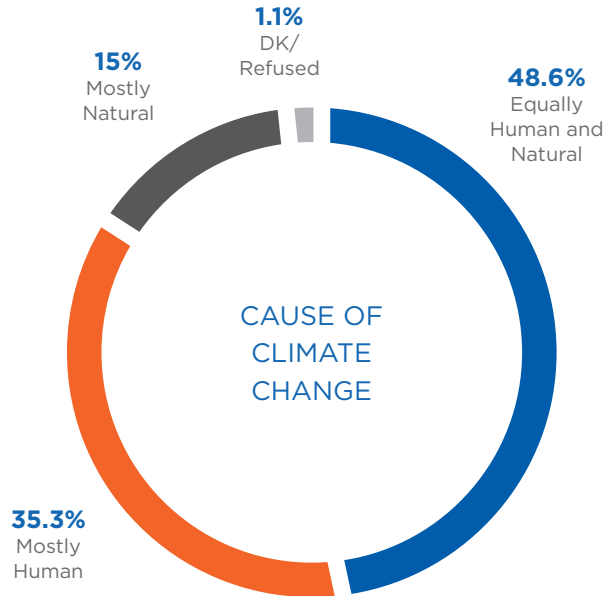
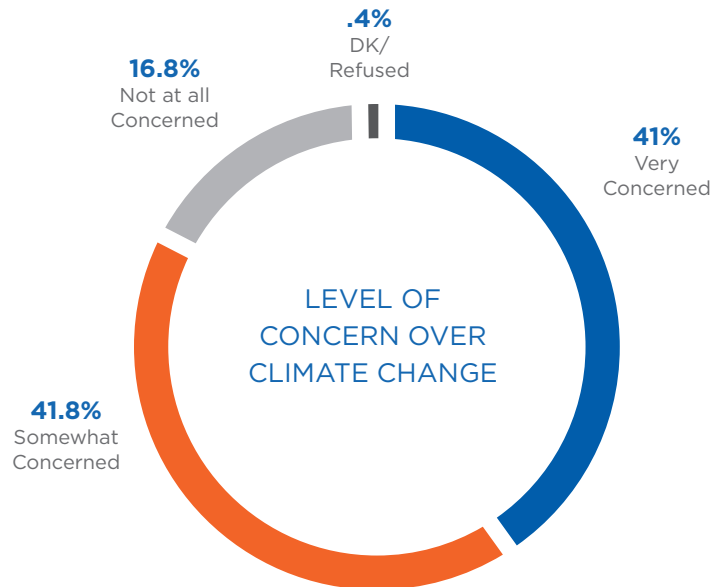
Across all geographic regions of the state, and across citizens identifying with both political parties, we see significantly more people believing that climate change is occurring than believing that it is not occurring, though there are differences across groups in terms of how unified they are in this belief.

Democrats are more likely to believe that climate change is occurring (93.5%) compared to Independents (76.1%) and Republicans (57.7%). In terms of geographic variation in support, people living in the Treasure Valley are the most likely to believe that climate change is occurring (76%), while those in the Idaho Falls/Eastern Idaho region believe that climate change is taking place by a lower margin (64.9%).



We asked those Idahoans who reported that they believed climate change is happening follow-up questions concerning their level of concern about climate change and what they believe to be the cause of the phenomenon.

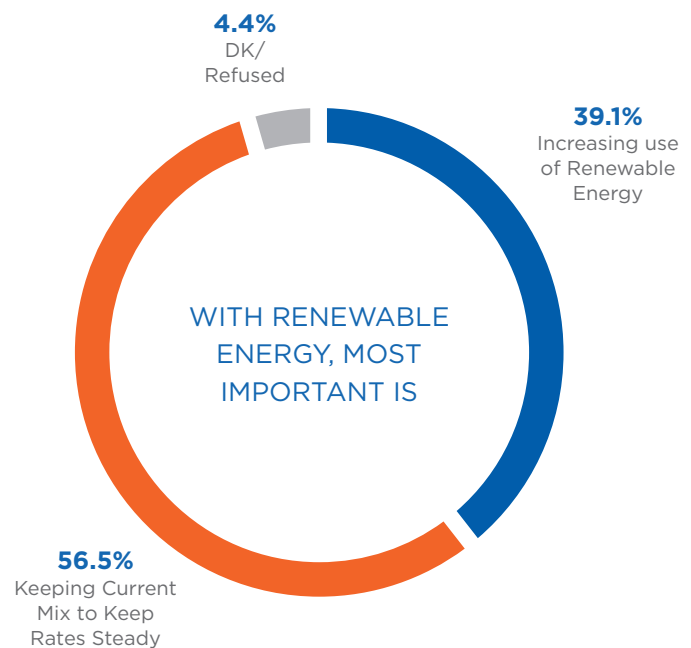
A large majority (82.8%) are either somewhat or very concerned, though interestingly, Democrats are more likely to be “very concerned,” while Republicans tend to be “somewhat concerned.”



Among those who believe that climate change is occurring, a sizeable 83.9% believe that there is some role that humans have played to cause it. Opinions are more divided with respect to whether humans are the sole cause of climate change, however. Almost half of those asked (48.6%) believe climate change is the result of both human activity and natural changes, while over a third (35.3%) believe that it is being caused solely by humans. A relatively small minority (15%) of those who believe that climate change is occurring think that it is solely due to natural changes. When we step back from looking only at those who believe that climate change is occurring and think about what these numbers mean about opinions in the state as a whole, it suggests that of all Idahoans, a solid majority (60.4%) believe both that climate change is occurring and that humans are playing at least some role in producing these changes.

## Given these attitudes, we turn to how Idahoans view our energy supply.

Idahoans are overwhelmingly in favor of maintaining a diversity of energy sources, with 92.5% stating that doing so is either somewhat or very important. However, it appears that despite the belief that climate change is occurring and that humans are playing a role in causing it, there is not majority support for changing our energy base in favor of renewables such as solar or wind power if it costs more money to ratepayers. When presented with a tradeoff between maintaining current rates on the one hand, and increasing rates to use more renewable energy source, Idahoans expressed a preference for keeping rates steady with the current bundle of energy sources (56.5%), rather than shifting to renewable energy even if it increases rates (39.1%). It is possible that absent this tradeoff - if renewables could be offered at the same rates as current energy sources - there would be more support for switching our supply, but if a tradeoff exists then it appears that Idahoans prioritize rates over renewables.



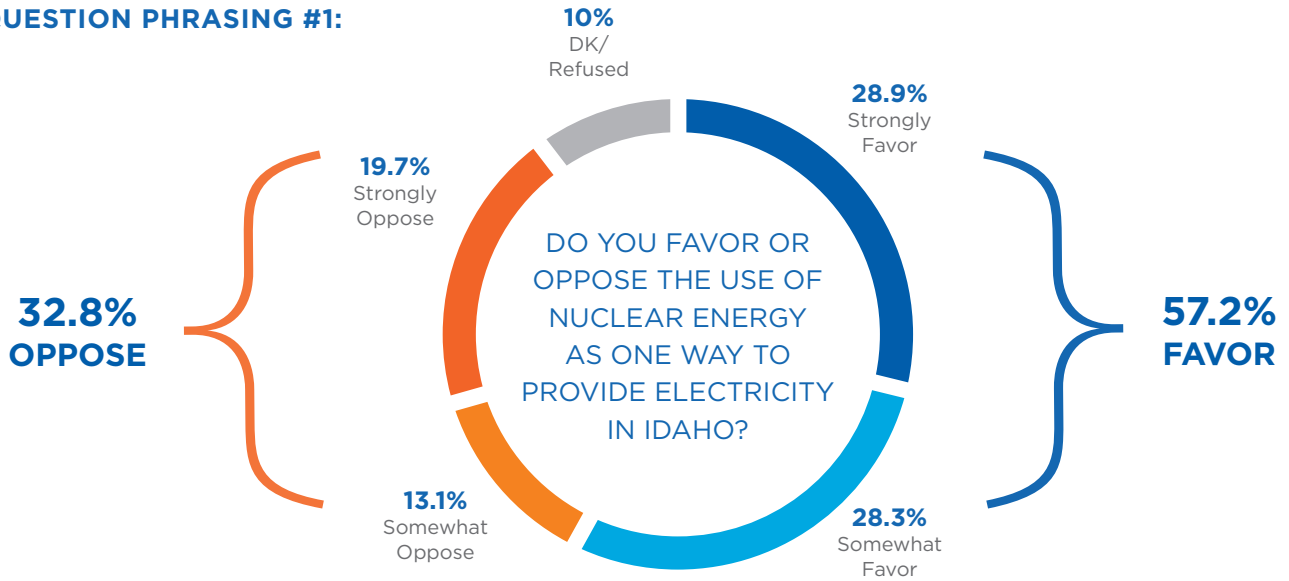
## This result is not consistent across all groups, however; there are significant differences that emerge across citizens of different ages, geographic regions in the state, and party affiliations.

First, younger Idahoans age 18-29 have the highest levels of support (47.8%) for paying increased rates for renewables, compared to older Idahoans over the age of 65 where support is more limited (31.6%). Geographically, there are some parts of the state where citizens are more willing to pursue renewable energy despite higher costs. Ada County shows the highest level of support for renewables, with more citizens favoring renewables (49.2%) than the current sources (45.4%). In other parts of the state such as the Twin Falls area, it is a clear minority (31.1%) who desire switching to renewables, as opposed to maintaining the current mix (66.5%). Finally, Democrats are the most supportive of paying higher rates for renewable energy (66.2%), compared to Independents (39.6%), and Republicans (26.3%).

Interestingly, although support for renewables at higher cost was relatively unpopular amongst Idahoans, some sources of clean energy did prove

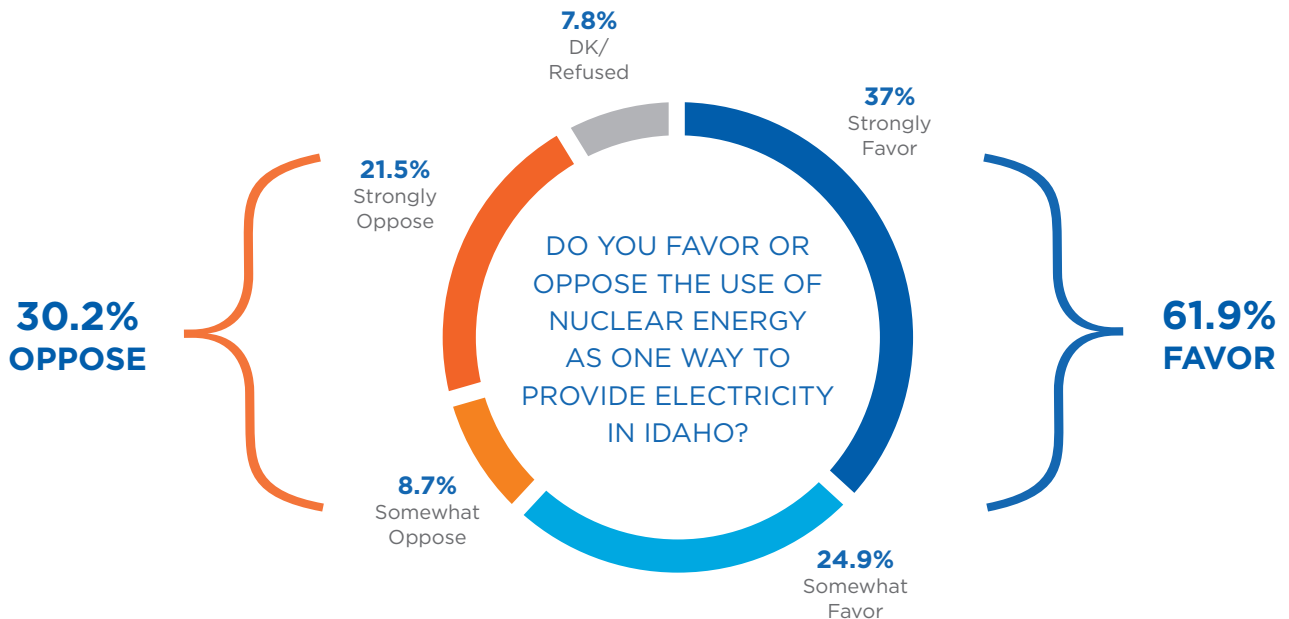
more popular. A majority of citizens in the state (57.2%) favor the use of nuclear energy, compared to a minority (32.8%) who oppose it. Further, in an effort to find out how information about nuclear energy might change support for it, half of the survey respondents were given extra information stating that it is a clean energy source that produces no air pollution or carbon dioxide to see if their responses were altered by this knowledge. When the question about support for nuclear energy is asked in a way that highlights the fact that this source of power is clean and minimizes pollution, it increases support for using nuclear energy (by 5.6%) to 62%. This increase in support is strongest amongst Republicans (a 6.9% increase), suggesting that even though these citizens are reluctant to support renewables like wind and solar if they come with higher rates, they are supportive of other clean energy sources and do appear to respond to information stating that an energy source is environmentally friendly.

**QUESTION PHRASING #1:**



**QUESTION PHRASING #2:**

Advocates of nuclear energy argue that nuclear energy is among the best sources of energy when it comes to preventing additional global climate change because nuclear energy facilities produce no air pollution or carbon dioxide.



In sum, clear majorities of Idahoans believe that climate change is occurring, that humans have some role in causing it, and are concerned about the matter. However, the state's populace is less clear on preferences for their energy sources, which is what could be done at the state level to combat climate change. A minority of Idahoans support using more renewable sources of energy such as wind and solar power if it means increasing electricity rates. However, there is a broader base of support for using nuclear energy, with a majority of citizens in Idaho favoring this method of delivering clean electricity.



# CONCLUSION

Taken together, the results of this survey indicate general steadiness in the public policy attitudes of Idahoans.

Education remains a top priority, even as we see a more nuanced picture when we compare the results of this year's survey with last year's and when we compare attitudes about the state with perceptions of one's own district. Economic issues matter, but the populace appears largely content with the current budget and revenue picture and optimistic about the state's forecast. In the meantime, health care has become a more pressing matter, with key

aspects of the Affordable Care Act proving quite popular while attitudes on the state's exchange being more mixed. Recent global and domestic political events have increased the salience of refugee-related issues, and Idahoans exhibit ambivalence about refugees overall, but those who have met and interacted with refugees are much more likely to report those experiences as positive than the alternative.



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