



## FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY

### OKLAHOMA

04 December 2023

#### TOP TAKEAWAYS

- Participants say Oklahoma has a unique way of life that is marked by friendliness, supporting one another, and hard work. They view the influx of out-of-state liberals and foreign ownership of farmland as a threat to that way of life.
- Welfare recipients should be required to work to remain eligible for benefits. Participants overwhelmingly supported mandatory Employment and Training (E&T) programs for participants in the food stamp program.
- Ranked-choice voting is unpopular. Participants said that it is confusing and unnecessary, and that the state should focus on election security rather than trying to solve problems that don't exist.

#### THE BIGGEST ISSUES

**Work Requirements in Welfare:** Consistent with the Oklahoma value of compassion and helping others, participants support welfare as a temporary measure for people who need short-term assistance. However, they say that the support should be conditioned on working, also consistent with a core Oklahoma value of hard work, and support requiring able-bodied adults who are not working to be assigned to mandatory Employment and Training programs.

**Election Security:** Participants overwhelmingly support election integrity and security measures, especially voter ID. While they seemed to know that an ID is required for in-person voting, they didn't have a clear picture of the absentee ballot requirements and, as a result, believe the absentee process needs to be more secure, especially by requiring the voter to prove his or her identity.

**School Choice:** While none of the participants had heard anything about last session's school choice bill, they largely supported the description of it. It's clear that voters don't always know what's happening in the legislature, and when popular legislation has been passed, some fanfare may be in order.

## WHAT DID PARTICIPANTS THINK?

**Participants want to keep welfare benefits available for the truly needy but strongly favor conditioning those benefits on work for able-bodied adults.**

- Both compassion and hard work are considered Oklahoma values—they contribute to the Oklahoma way of life and to participants' views of requiring work for welfare participants.
  - *“You shouldn't be getting free money to live off the state for all your life. At some point, you need to get on your own two feet.”*
- For food stamp beneficiaries who are not working, participants strongly support mandatory E&T programs to help people move from welfare to work.
  - *“I have no problem with mandates...I think part of it is that we don't have enough incentives for people to get off of that and work toward something better in their lives.”*
- One participant, who is blind and has a disability, says that she would want to participate in an E&T program if it would help her find work that she could do.
  - *“I currently am on SNAP benefits, and I'd go to a program like that and I'm not able-bodied. If they can help me find a job, I'm all for it.”*

**Most participants say Oklahoma taxes are too high, while a few say they are just about right. Most participants also are not concerned about regulations, but a few express concerns about the number of regulations.**

- Participants who say taxes are too high are most concerned about the income tax and sales tax on groceries. They favor revisiting the tax code to shift the burden away from individuals onto (1) corporations, (2) casinos and gambling wins, and (3) marijuana farms, especially those owned by foreign entities.
- While only a couple of participants express concern about regulations, they say there are too many regulations, and that regulations lead to “unintended consequences.”
  - *“They seem to start with the assumption that any time something is wrong, we gotta pass a law, a rule, a policy...[they] are not cognizant of unintended consequences of over-regulating things.”*

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- Participants unanimously agree that the legislature should have the final say on regulations because there is a mechanism for holding them accountable.
  - *“When it’s on a faceless bureaucrat, we don’t know who that is. They can sit in their offices and write all these rules and regulations that have dramatic effects on people’s lives, and yet there is no accountability.”*

### **Participants care about election integrity and want to see the state do more to secure Oklahoma’s elections. They do not like or want ranked-choice voting.**

- Participants support photo ID for voting and want to see the practice extended to absentee voting, which they see as less secure and ripe for fraud.
  - *“I don’t trust absentee ballots.”*
  - *“How do you not have some form of ID? There’s always a way to get some kind of ID.”*
- Overwhelmingly, participants do not understand ranked-choice voting and react negatively to its description. They think it’s a solution in search of a problem, undermines people’s votes, and is time-consuming and confusing.
  - *“I would like my one vote to count, not get watered down.”*
  - *“You want to vote for the one person you want to win. I don’t understand why you would want to rank the ones you don’t want to win.”*
- When asked to describe ranked-choice voting in a single word, participants say it is:
  - *“Chaos.”*
  - *“Unnecessary.”*
  - *“Lengthy.”*
  - *“Excessive.”*
  - *“Overcomplicated.”*
  - *“Terrible.”*
  - *“Uncertain[ty].”*
  - *“Uninformed.”*

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### **Participants are unaware of the recent school choice bill but support it when it is described.**

- They say they want to make sure children are properly educated in the right educational environment for the child.
  - *“As a former public educator, I think the state’s role should be to encourage education, not a specific type of education. I don’t care where that education comes from as long as people are being educated.”*
  - *“I would want the state to send money that my child would get anyway to be able to send them to the school they’d want to go to.”*
- However, despite being well-informed voters, they are not familiar with the school choice bill that passed last session.