

# LEGISLATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITY STUDENT LOBBYING EFFORTS ON PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION LEGISLATION: A CASE STUDY

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# RESEARCH QUESTION & PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- **Research Question:** Are student lobbyists effective in influencing legislators' decision-making on matters of public higher education policy in Kansas?
- The purpose of this study is to understand legislator perceptions of student lobbyists and to develop more effective strategies for influencing public policy.
- Parallels will be drawn between the Kansas and Texas to determine what is applicable in the Texas higher education climate.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- Public higher education interest groups in red states are fighting increasingly constrained budgets and skeptical views of higher education.
- 58% of Republicans have a negative view of higher education (Pew Research Poll, 2017).
- Students, higher education lobbyists, and administrators must understand the perceptions legislators have of student lobbyists to improve lobbying outcomes.
- More effective student lobbyists could mean more votes in favor of increased public resources for higher education.

# BACKGROUND ON RECENT HIGHER EDUCATION PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES IN KANSAS

- Regressive tax cuts in 2012, leading to budget shortfalls from 2013-2017.
- Budget shortfalls leading to 17% reduction in funding to Kansas Board of Regents universities
- Flagship universities (Kansas State University and the University of Kansas) were disproportionately affected
- Concealed campus carry – Kansas is now the only state with constitutional concealed carry on our public university campuses as of 2017

Year	State Funding to K-State (FY 2008 - FY 2017 inflation adjusted)	Tuition Revenue for K-State Manhattan and Polytechnic Campuses (FY 2008 - FY 2017 inflation adjusted)
2007 (FY 2008)	\$136,062,785.40	\$142,623,627.47
2008 (FY 2009)	\$133,102,557.56	\$147,378,060.46
2009 (FY 2010)	\$122,083,214.83	\$153,715,159.38
2010 (FY 2011)	\$117,728,948.07	\$162,423,987.11
2011 (FY 2012)	\$111,848,087.02	\$175,775,536.96
2012 (FY 2013)	\$109,345,018.69	\$189,045,088.86
2013 (FY 2014)	\$103,938,700.91	\$201,468,797.23
2014 (FY 2015)	\$104,278,997.96	\$209,757,071.02
2015 (FY 2016)	\$102,965,143.57	\$220,008,492.57
2016 (FY 2017)	\$98,095,502.37	\$226,002,677.57

Source: Kansas State University Budget Office

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

- **Student Lobbyist:** Any student enrolled at a Kansas public institution of higher education who calls, emails, or meets directly with a legislator to try to influence that legislator's vote on an issue pertaining to higher education.
- **Legislator:** Any one of the 125 members of the Kansas House of Representatives or 40 members of the Kansas Senate.

# THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **Pluralist Theory** - every citizen has a voice in public policymaking and can influence legislation (Loomis & Cigler, 2007)
- **Interest Group Theory** - individuals will coalesce around a shared cause with the goal of influencing legislators to enact their proposals (Skocpol, 2003)

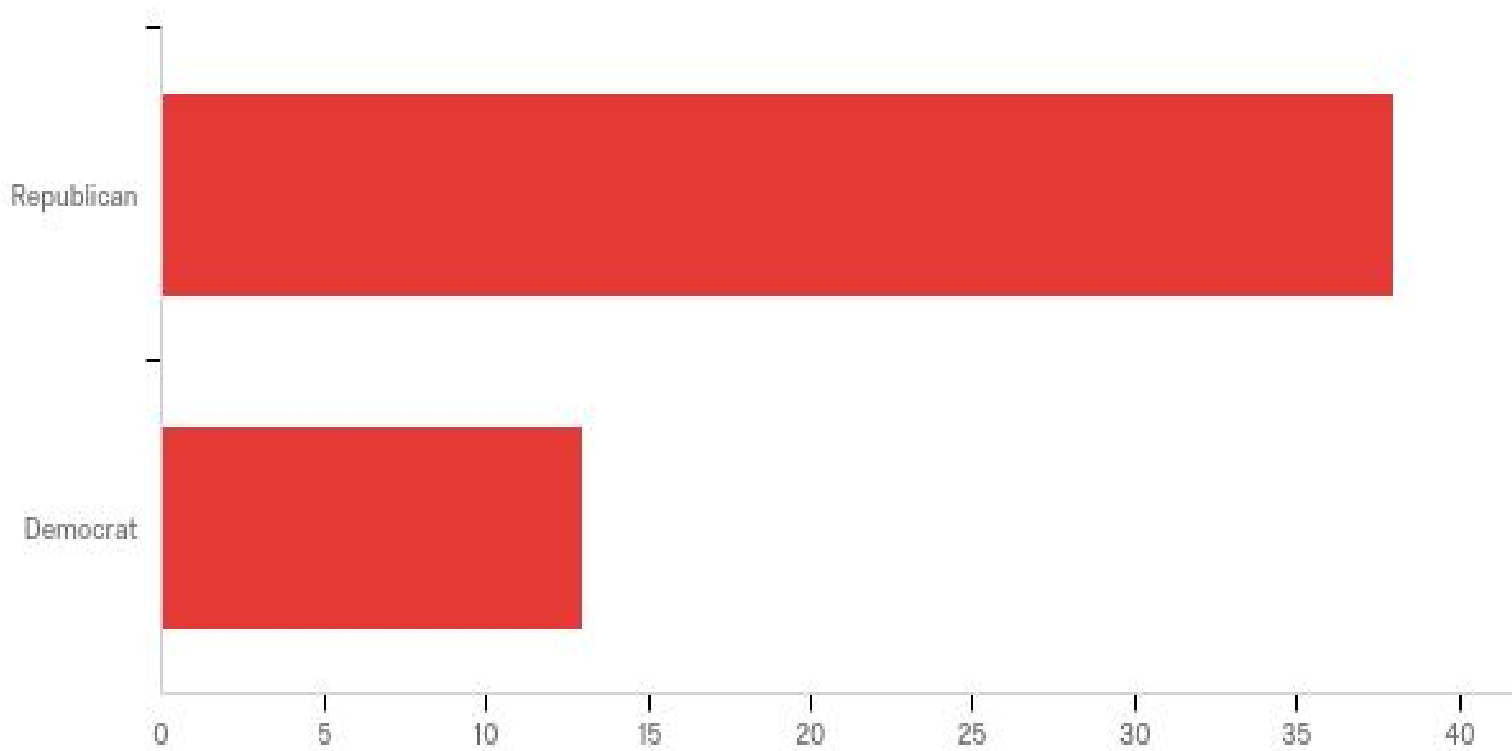
# LITERATURE REVIEW

- “Literature surrounding the politics of higher education is suffering from benign neglect” (Cook & McLendon, 1998, p. 32).
- Tankersley-Bankhead, 2009 – sought to measure student lobbyists’ impact on higher education legislation as compared to professional lobbyists’ impact in Missouri.
  - Did not measure the legislator’s perceptions, only the student’s and the lobbyist’s perceptions.
- There is a need to measure legislator’s perceptions of college student lobbyists in all states, especially “deep red” states such as Kansas and Texas.

## METHODOLOGY

- An IRB-approved qualitative survey was sent to all 165 members of the Kansas Legislature.
- Reminder emails were sent weekly for a period of one month during the six-month session.
- The survey addressed variables including party affiliation, perceptions of public higher education in Kansas, perceptions of student lobbyists as compared to professional higher education lobbyists, and frequency of contact with student lobbyists.



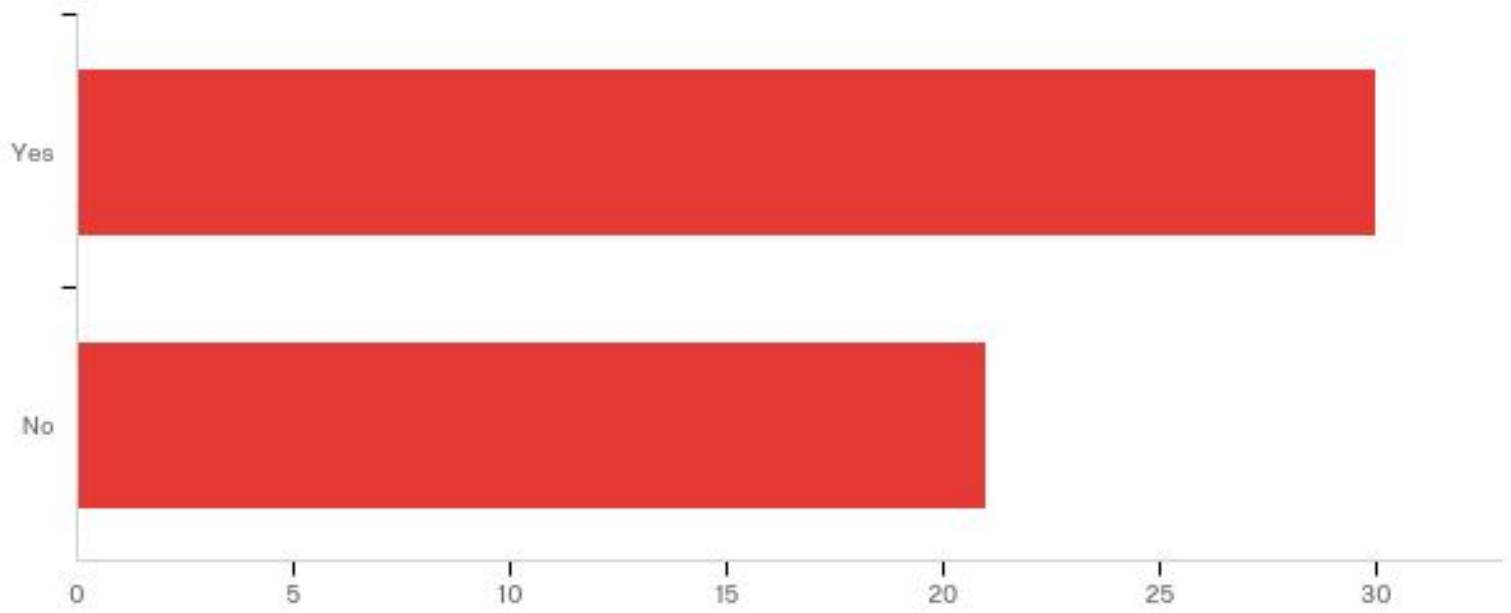


#	Field	Choice Count
1	Republican	74.51% 38
2	Democrat	25.49% 13

51

Showing Rows: 1 - 3 Of 3

**FINDINGS:  
POLITICAL  
AFFILIATION OF  
RESPONDENTS**  
- 38 (R)  
- 13 (D)

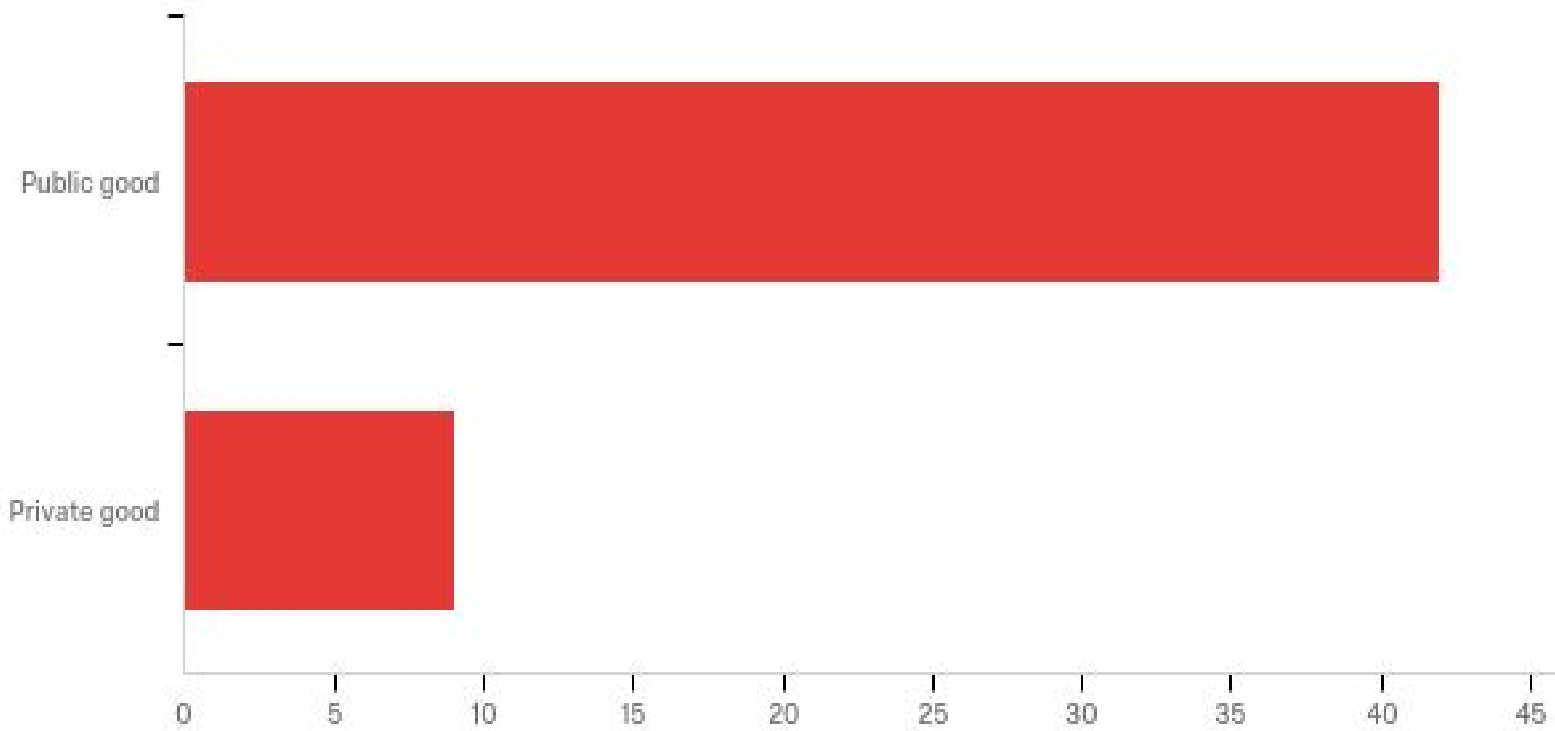


#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	58.82% 30
2	No	41.18% 21
		51

Showing Rows: 1 - 3 Of 3

**FINDINGS:  
GRADUATES OF  
KANSAS PUBLIC  
UNIVERSITIES IN THE  
LEGISLATURE**

**- 58% YES**  
**- 41% NO**

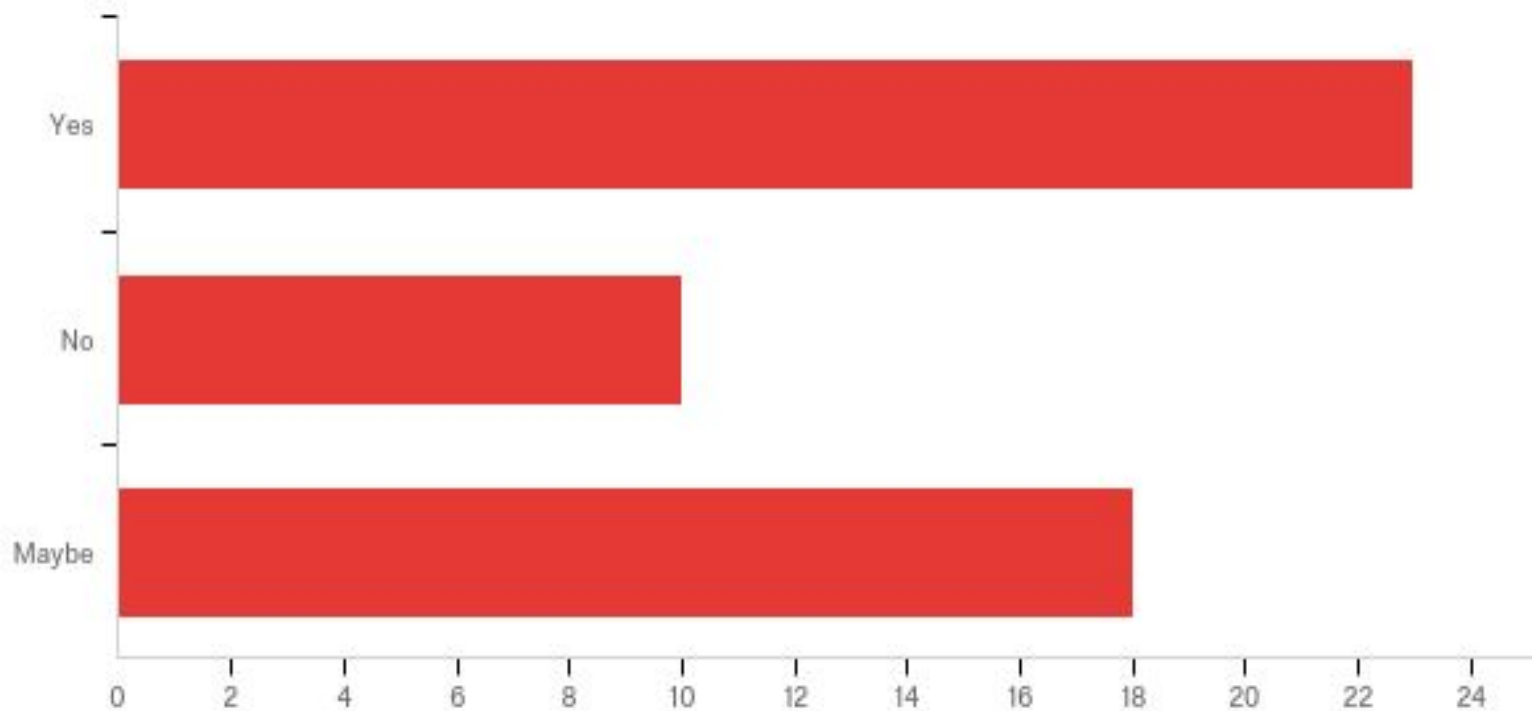


#	Field	Choice Count
1	Public good	82.35% 42
2	Private good	17.65% 9

Showing Rows: 1 - 3 Of 3

**FINDINGS: DO YOU SEE KANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC OR PRIVATE GOOD?**

- 82% PUBLIC (!!!)
- 17% PRIVATE

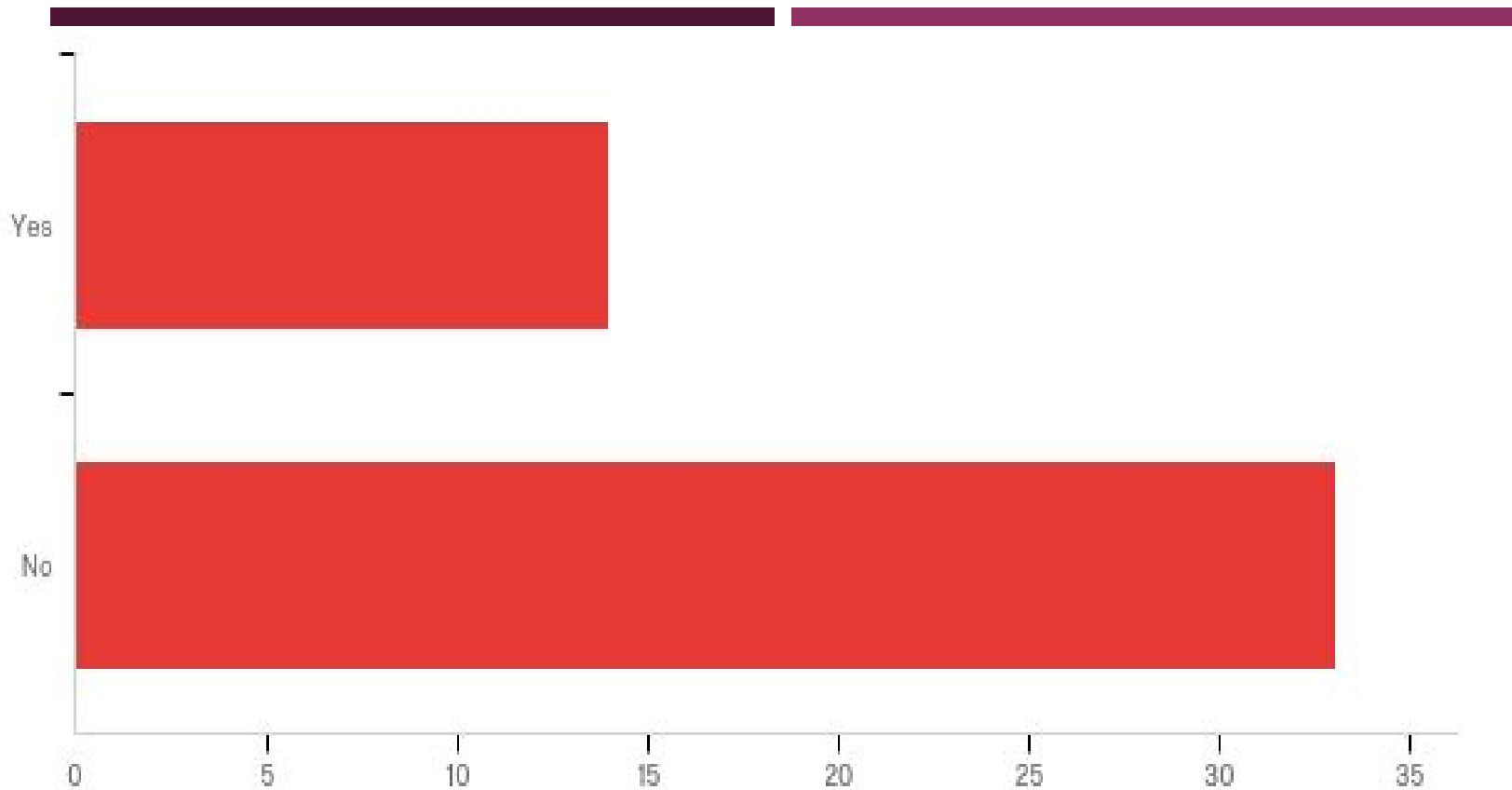


#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	45.10% 23
2	No	19.61% 10
3	Maybe	35.29% 18
		51

Showing Rows: 1 - 4 Of 4

**FINDINGS: DO THE STUDENTS WHO COME TO LOBBY YOU HAVE VALUABLE INSIGHT ON HIGHER EDUCATION ISSUES?**

- 45% YES
- 19% NO
- 35% MAYBE

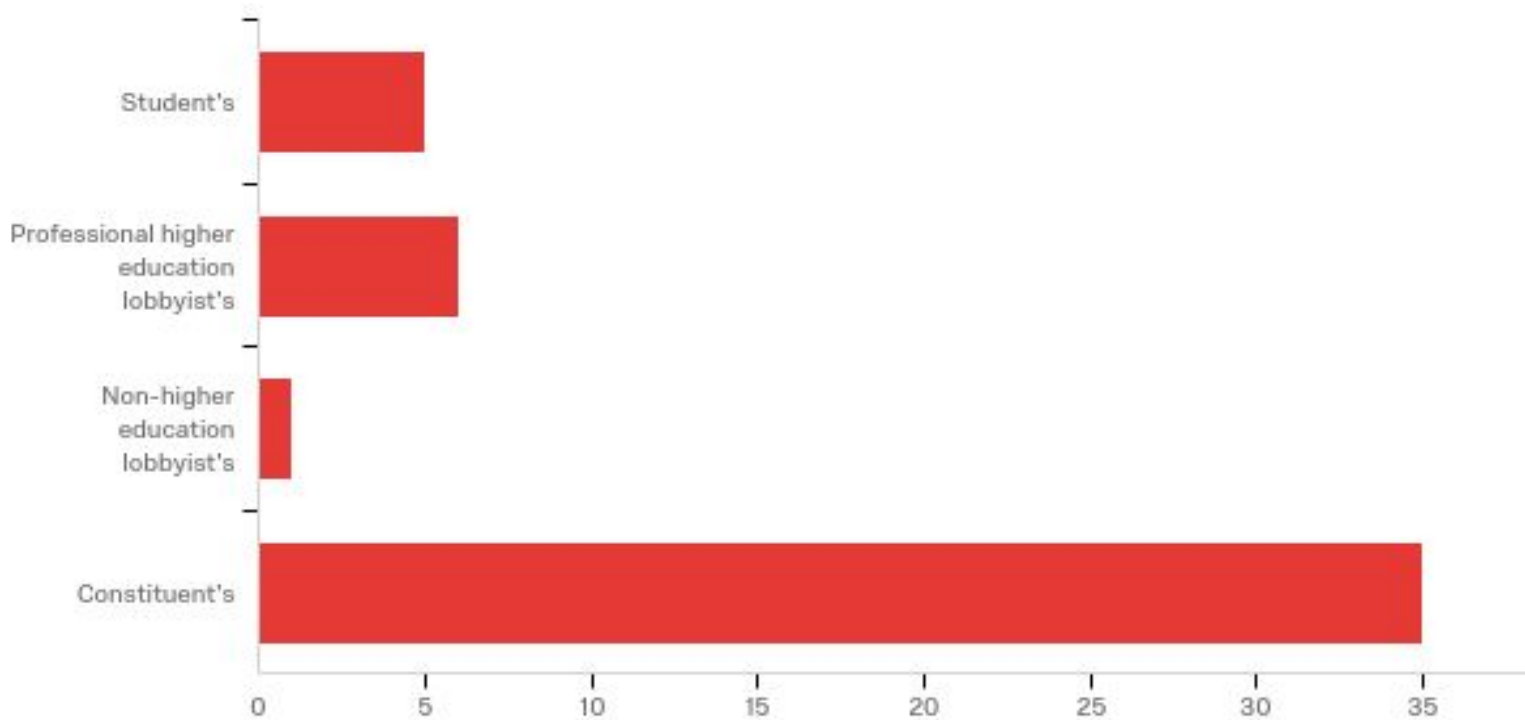


#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	29.79% 14
2	No	70.21% 33

Showing Rows: 1 - 3 Of 3

**FINDINGS: HAS A STUDENT'S TESTIMONY EVER CHANGED YOUR MIND ON A HIGHER EDUCATION ISSUE?**

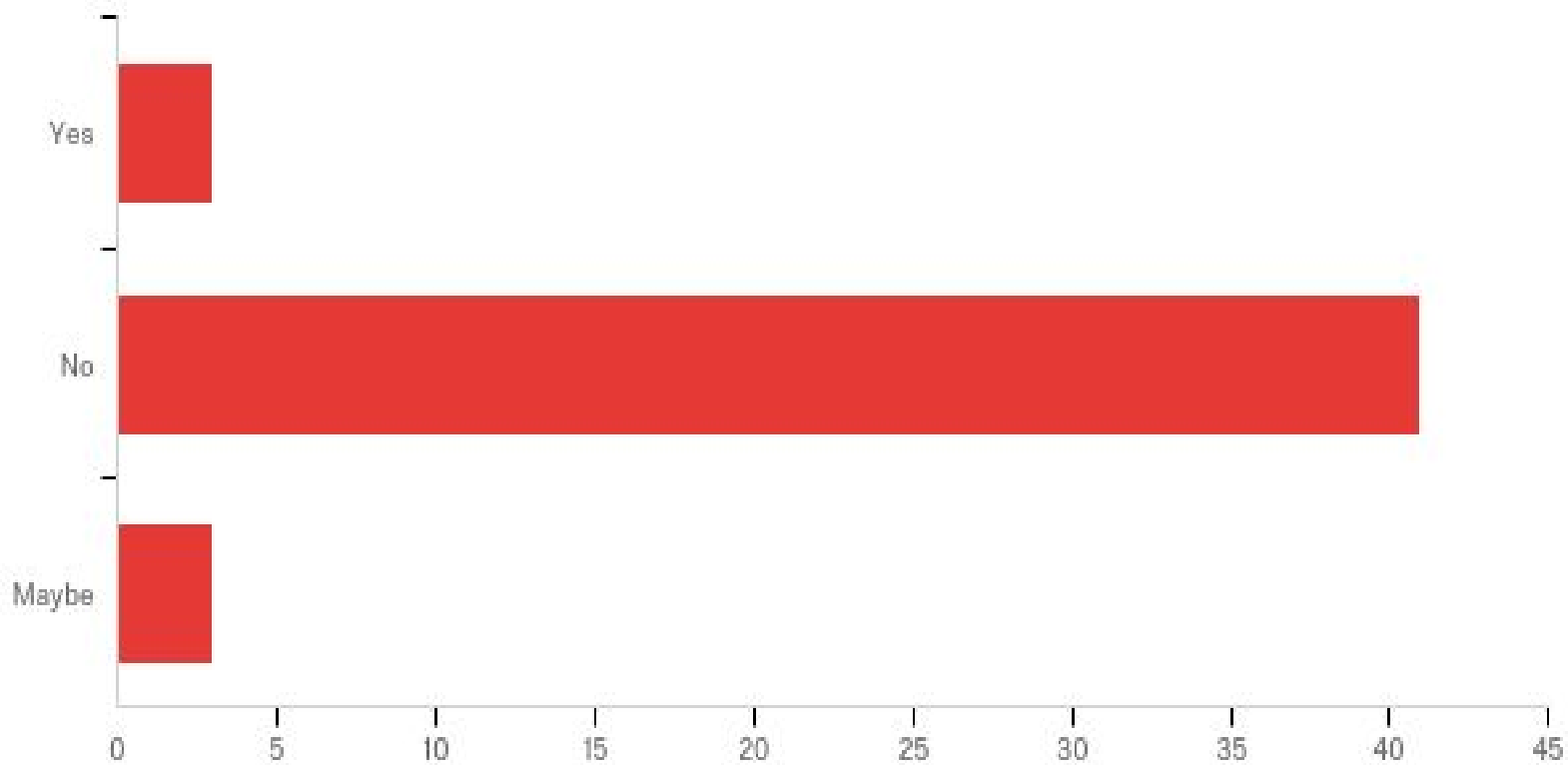
- 30% YES
- 70% NO (!!!)



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Student's	10.64% 5
2	Professional higher education lobbyist's	12.77% 6
3	Non-higher education lobbyist's	2.13% 1
4	Constituent's	74.47% 35

**FINDINGS: WHOSE OPINION CARRIES THE MOST WEIGHT WHEN VOTING ON A HIGHER EDUCATION ISSUE?**

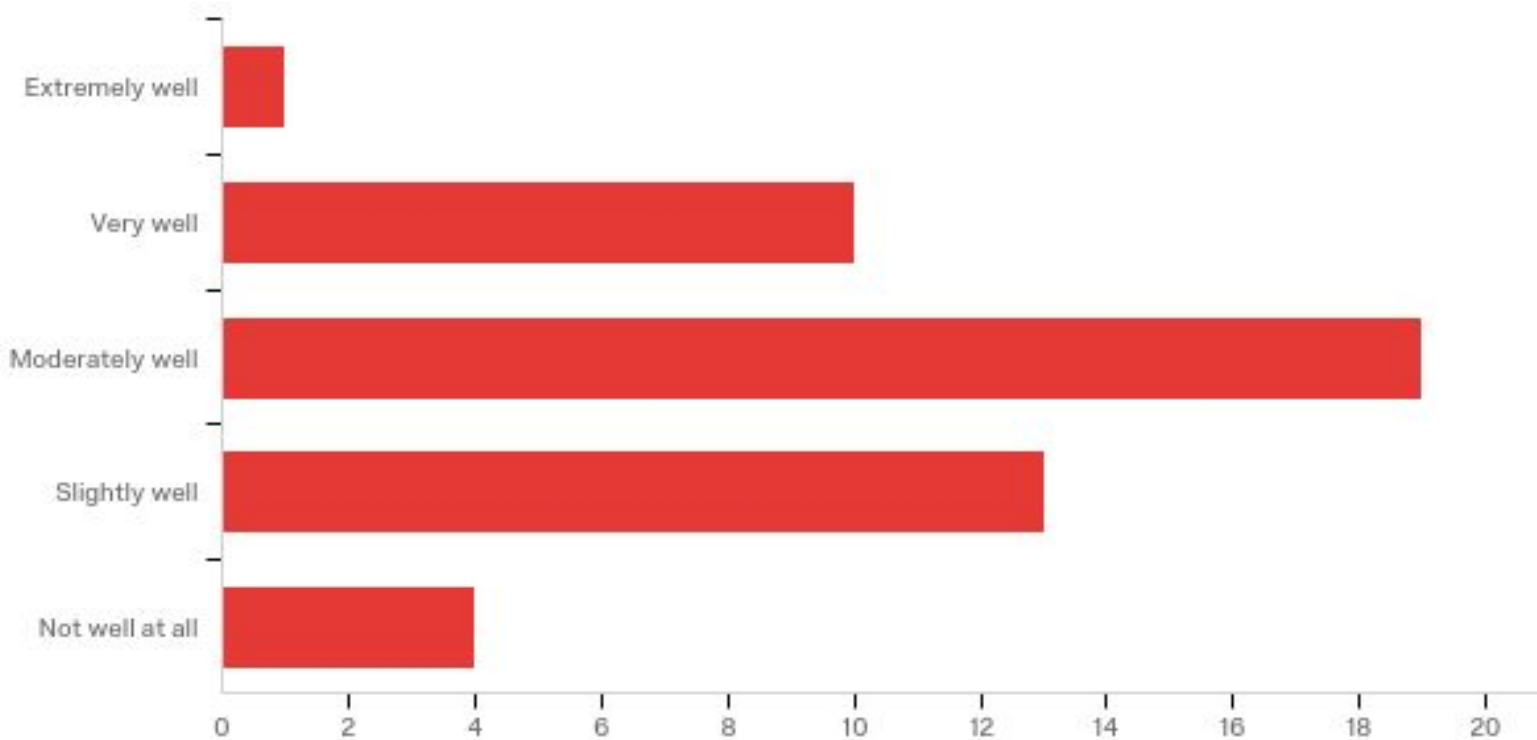
- 10% STUDENT
- 12% HIGHER ED LOBBYIST
- 2% NON-HIGHER ED LOBBYIST
- 74% CONSTITUENT



**FINDINGS: HAVE YOU EVER CHANGED YOUR VOTE DUE TO A MEETING OR TESTIMONY FROM A KANSAS COLLEGE STUDENT?**

**6% YES  
87% NO (!!!)  
6% MAYBE**

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	6.38% 3
2	No	87.23% 41
3	Maybe	6.38% 3
		47



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Extremely well	2.13% 1
2	Very well	21.28% 10
3	Moderately well	40.43% 19
4	Slightly well	27.66% 13
5	Not well at all	8.51% 4
		47

## FINDINGS: HOW WELL INFORMED ARE KANSAS COLLEGE STUDENTS ON THE ISSUES FACING KANSAS HIGHER EDUCATION?

- 2% EXTREMELY WELL
- 21% VERY WELL
- 40% MODERATELY WELL
- 27% SLIGHTLY WELL
- 8% NOT WELL AT ALL



# FINDINGS: DESCRIBE A POSITIVE INTERACTION YOU HAVE HAD AS A LEGISLATOR WITH A STUDENT WHO CAME TO LOBBY YOU.

- “I found the college students to be positive and respectful.”
- “They came to the office with a specific topic and answered any questions I had and asked many questions of me. They were engaged in the process and knew more than just the bullet points they were given to spew out. I appreciate honesty and how a student feels in their own words, rather than someone telling them what to say.”
- “When the individual approaches me respectfully and has verifiable data, I listen with interest. Also, when they are well informed concerning the data, I listen with added interest.”
- “I have had college students speak to me on a controversial issue in a very respectful and genuine voice that helps to keep me included in the conversation. A couple of occasions of particular note involved campus carry. I enjoy respectful debate on issues and would encourage the formal education of all to learn this valuable art of persuasion.”
- “In discussing the current ‘conceal carry issue’ on our Regent Institutions I was impressed with the rationale many have used to formulate their opinion. Their views were informed and presented in fact based discussion.”
- “I have met with numerous college students during the session and they have made a very positive impression on me and made me more committed to supporting our institutions of higher education in Kansas.”

## FINDINGS: DESCRIBE A NEGATIVE INTERACTION YOU HAVE HAD AS A LEGISLATOR WITH A STUDENT WHO CAME TO LOBBY YOU.

- “A couple of the students did not have the necessary knowledge to discuss a topic.”
- “Dress unprofessionally, constantly looking at their phone, saying ‘whatever’ and simply being here to get out of class. Does not bode well when it comes to voting for funding higher education when they send someone who doesn't care to ‘lobby’ on their behalf.”
- “When the individual approaches me with anger and uncontrolled emotion, I tend not to listen. Passion is acceptable, but raw emotion without facts is wasted.”
- “Had a grad student first bomb my email with perhaps hundreds of emails before coming in to the committee to give testimony, calling us racists for disagreeing with her point of view, screaming at us, and inferring that her intellect trumps our stupidity on every point. She was not well received by either side of the issue, nor were Regent members in the audience very impressed.”
- “Have an idealist viewpoint that may not reflect district constituents values. Liberal professors have too much influence on basic values instilled by parents and family. That aspect makes me not want to send kids off to be brainwashed on liberal doctrine.”
- “The students were seriously reading off of the handout that Higher Education Day provides them. They didn't have anything to back up their statements unless they were canned questions.”

# Results Broken Down By Party Affiliation

[https://kstate.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/?](https://kstate.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/)

# CONCLUSION

- Student lobbying and interest groups must reevaluate their approaches to lobbying
- They must present more data on their issues (e.g. the economic impact of universities in their states, suicides on campuses that allow firearms, etc.)
- Professional higher education lobbyists are more trusted by legislators than students are. Therefore, administrators and professional higher education lobbyists must lend their credibility and expertise to student lobbyists to legitimize them in the eyes of legislators.
- It was also found that a student lobbyist is more likely to be an effective advocate for their cause if they are a resident of the legislator's district.
- The more students are involved in the decision-making process, the more likely legislators are to vote with their interests.

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# SURVEY QUESTIONS

- What is your political affiliation?
- Which chamber of the Legislature are you a member of?
- Are you a graduate of a Kansas Board of Regents university (K-State, KU, Fort Hays, Pittsburg, Emporia, Washburn, or Wichita State)?
- Do you see higher education in Kansas as a public good (benefits all of Kansas) or a private good (primarily benefits the individual graduate)?
- How often do Kansas College students email you to try to influence your vote on an issue pertaining to higher education?
- How often do Kansas College students call you to try to influence your vote on an issue pertaining to higher education?
- Have you ever had Kansas college students meet with you in your legislative office to lobby you on an issue?
- Do the students who come to lobby you help you to see higher education issues in Kansas from their point of view?
- Do the students who come to lobby you have valuable insight into issues pertaining to higher education?
- Do the students who come to lobby you come across as respectful of your views on higher education?
- Has testimony from or a meeting with a Kansas college student ever altered your view of an issue pertaining to higher education?

# SURVEY QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

- Is a Kansas college student more likely or less likely to convince you to vote a certain way on a higher education bill than a professional higher education lobbyist?
- Are you more likely to consider a college student's opinion if that student is a resident of your legislative district?
- Whose opinion carries the most weight on your decision when voting on a bill pertaining to Kansas higher education?
- Which of these groups is most informed on issues pertaining to Kansas higher education?
- Have you ever changed your vote on an issues pertaining to Kansas higher education due to testimony from or a meeting with a Kansas college student?
- How well-informed are you on the issues facing higher education in Kansas?
- How well-informed are Kansas college students on the issues facing higher education in Kansas?
- Open-ended Question 1 – Describe any positive experiences you have had as a legislator when meeting with a college student who is trying to lobby you (if any).
- Open-ended Question 2 - Describe any negative experiences you have had as a legislator when meeting with a college student who is trying to lobby you (if any).