



LAKE COUNTY/CITY AREA PLANNING COUNCIL

Support for a Transportation Funding Measure in Lake County

Key Findings From a Countywide Voter Survey

May 29 – June 1, 2012

220-3379

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates - FM3

Public Opinion Research & Strategy

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Methodology

- 628 telephone interviews with likely November 2012 voters in Lake County, including:
 - *202 interviews with voters in the City of Clearlake*
 - *426 interviews with voters in the balance of the County*
- Data statistically weighted to reflect the true geographic distribution of voters through the County
- Interviews conducted between May 29-June 1, 2012
- Margin of sampling error of +/- 3.9 %
- Interviews on both landlines and cell phones
- Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
- Tracking from March 2003 survey

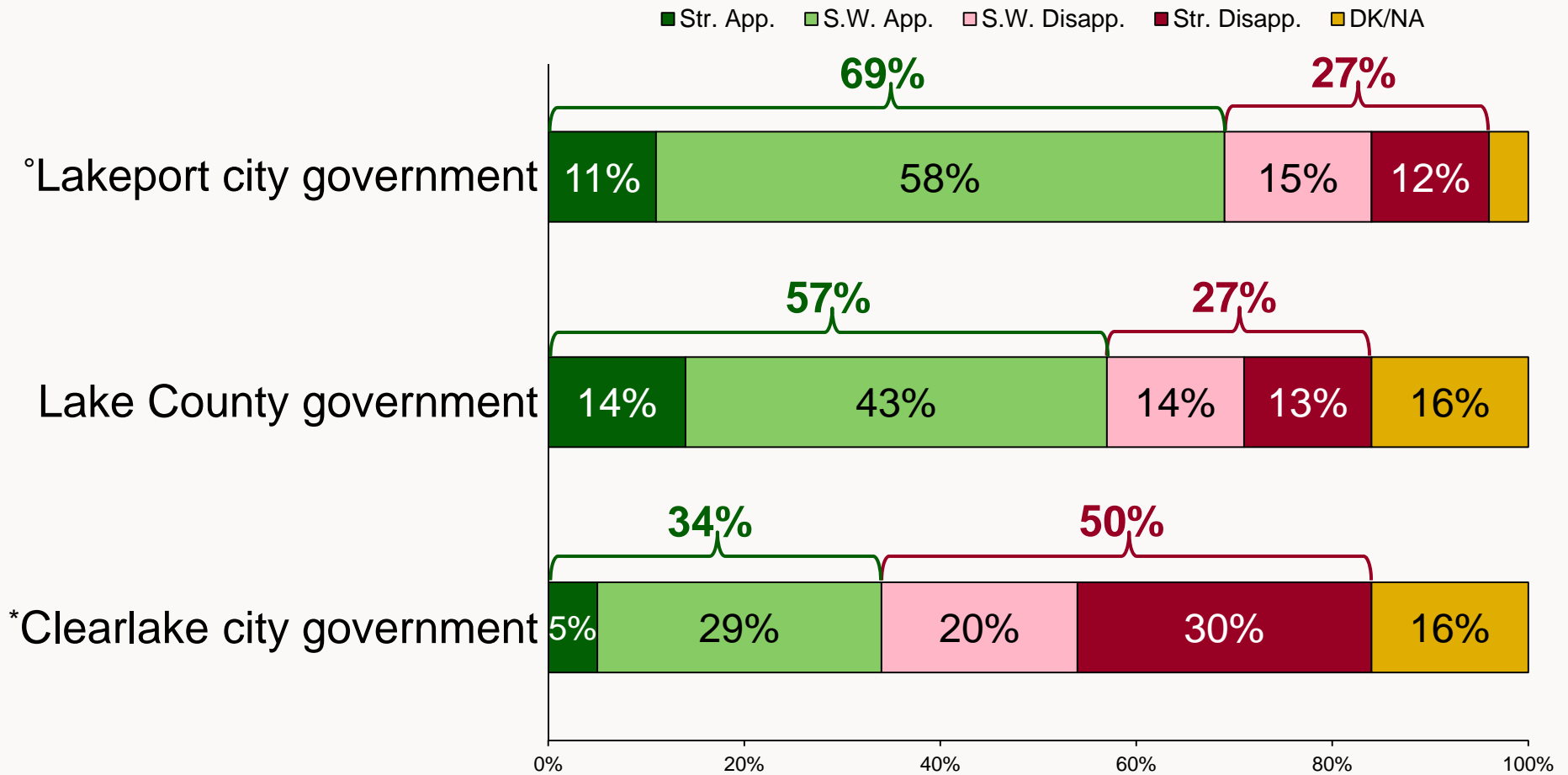
Key Findings

- While the economy is the greatest concern for voters, many believe the streets and roads are in bad shape and rank them as major concerns.
- A countywide sales tax measure has broad support, but falls just at the two-thirds vote thresholds (68%); support increases only slightly (to 70%) after pro and con messaging.
- Support is impressively broad, and cuts across most segments of the electorate – even winning clear majority support among Republicans.
- Voters place a clear priority on fixing potholes, improving safety and making repairs to existing streets and roads.
- Strict fiscal accountability provisions – like a 10-year sunset provision – could yield additional support.
- Voters are much more ambivalent about a one-cent sales tax, or about a ten-dollar vehicle registration fee.

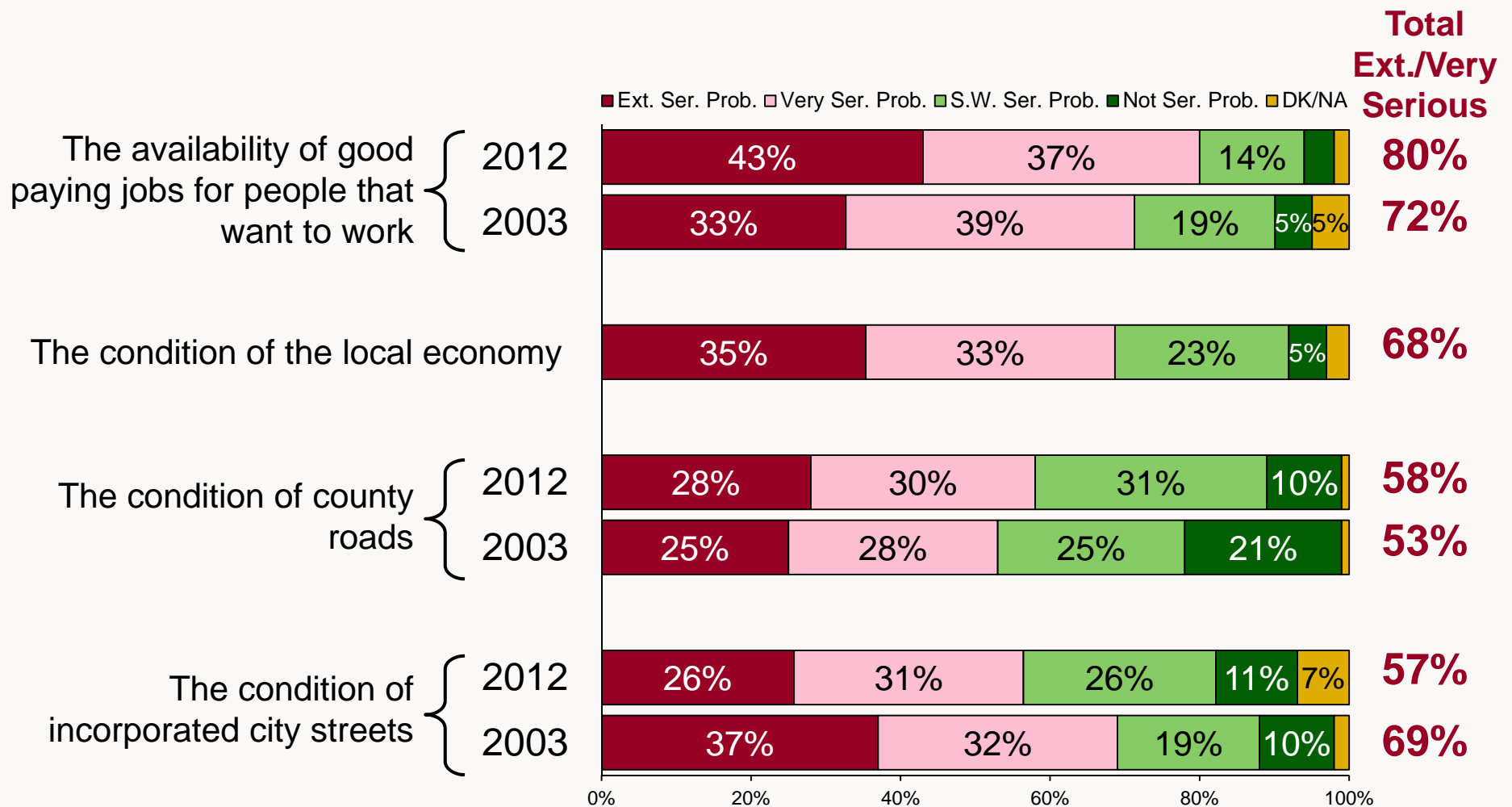


Mood of the Electorate

Half of voters in Clearlake disapprove of the job being done by City government; attitudes are more favorable toward Lakeport and County government.



The economy is by far the number one issue in the County, but voters are also concerned about the conditions of streets and roads.



In Clearlake, a majority of voters believes too many building code violations are an “extremely” or “very” serious problem.

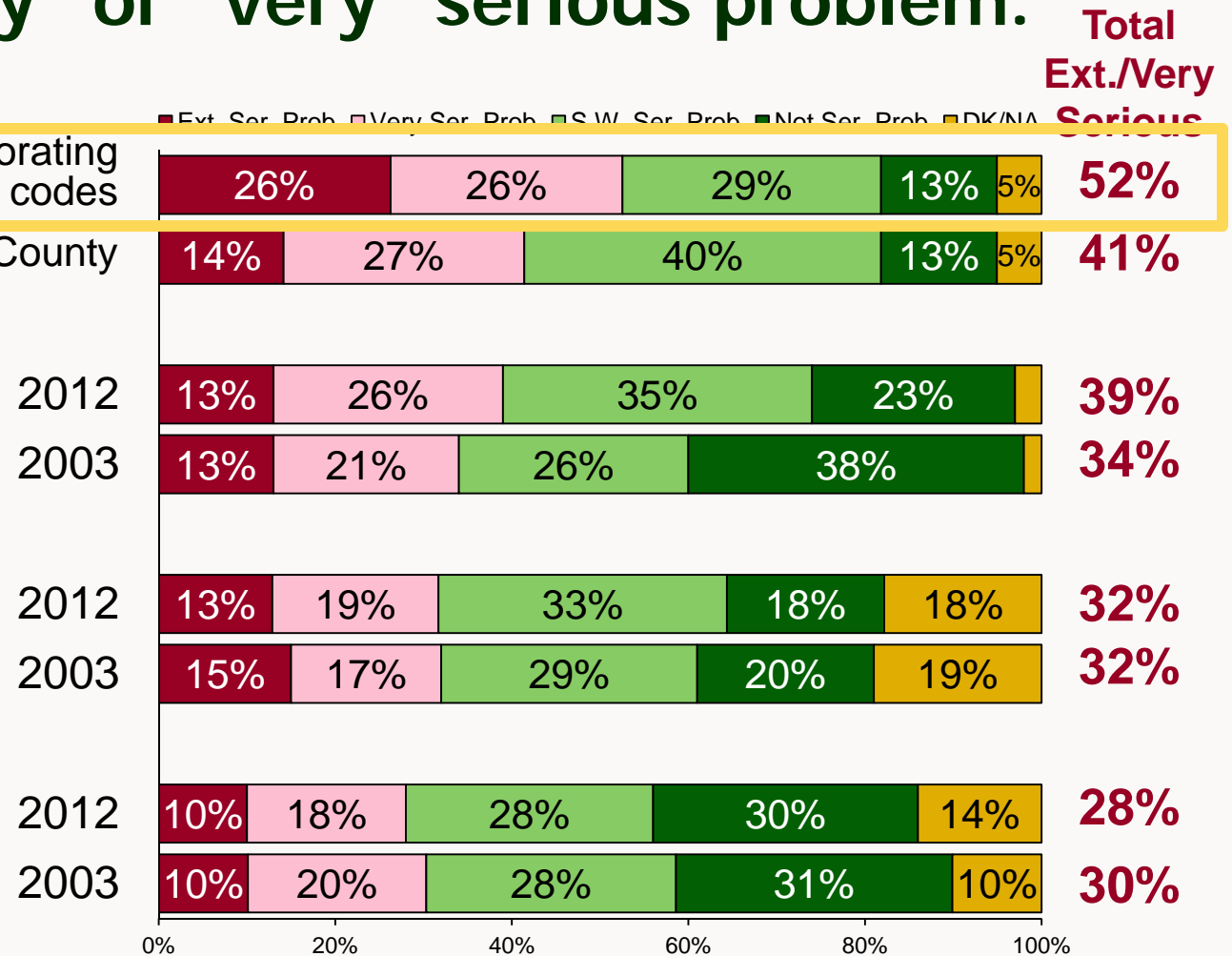
*Too many rundown and deteriorating buildings that violate building codes

The level of crime in Lake County

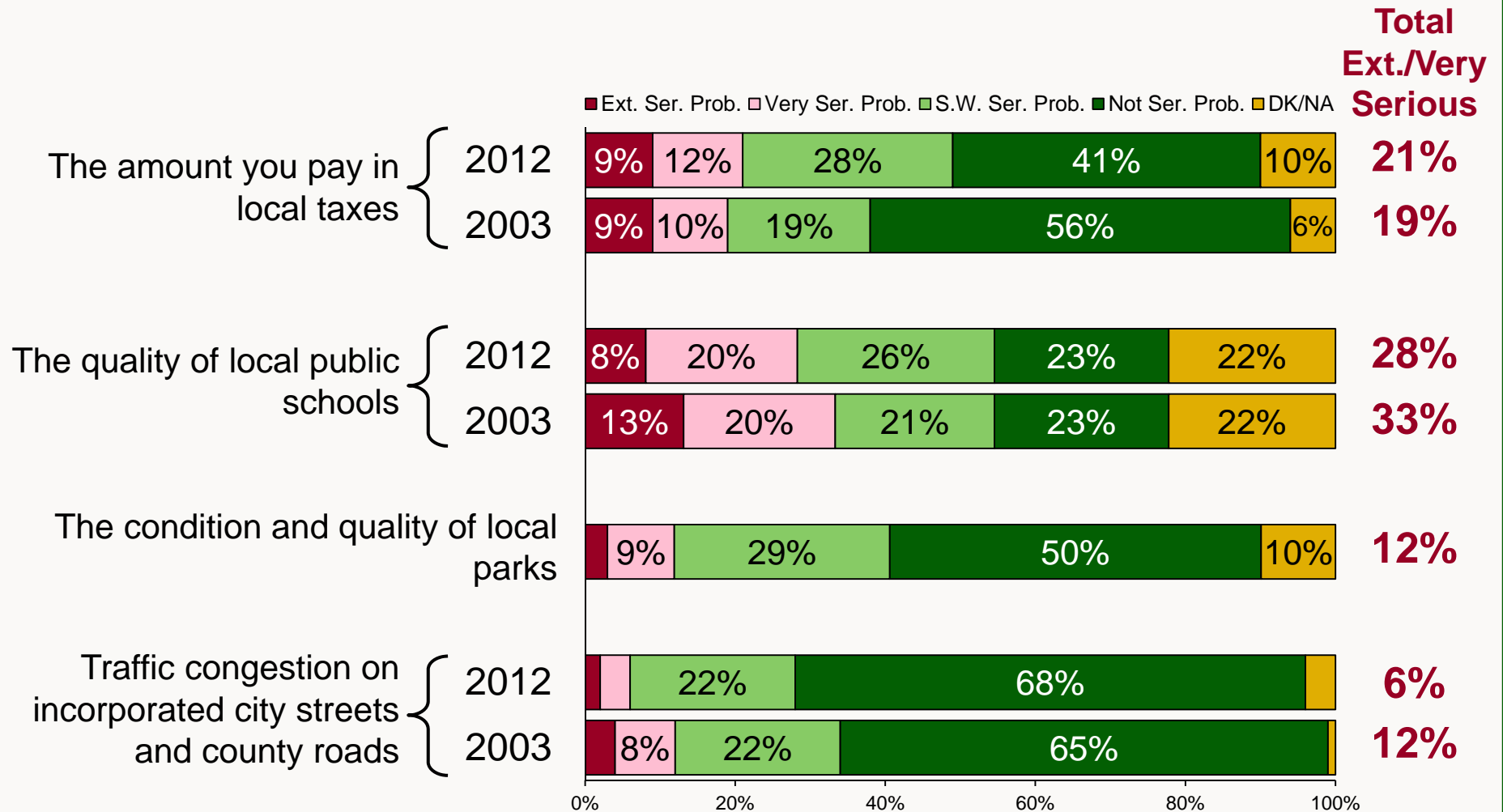
The safety of your city streets and county roads

Waste and inefficiency in local government

Unplanned growth and development



Taxes remain a relatively low-level concern.





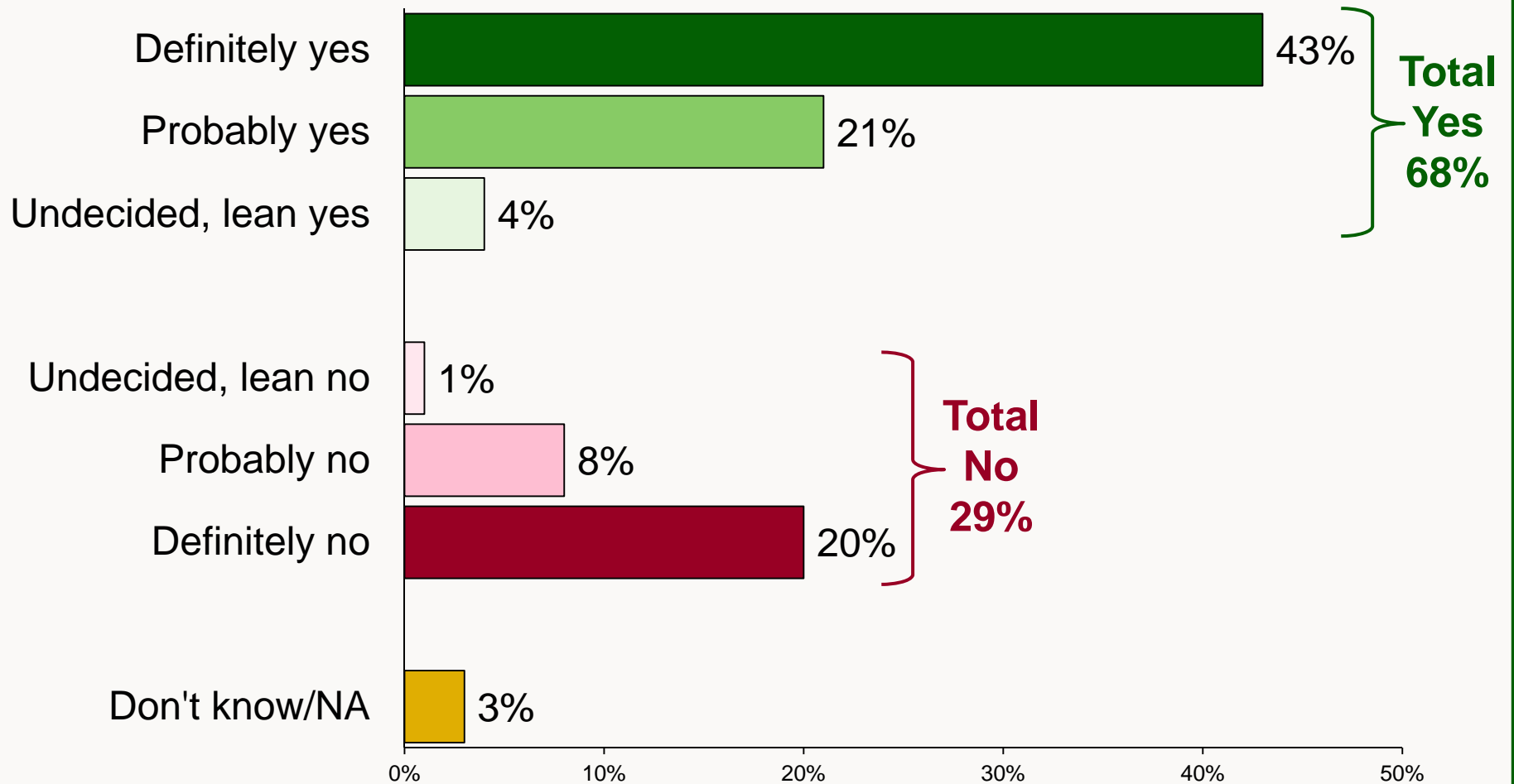
Testing a Sales Tax Ballot Measure

Ballot Language Tested

COUNTY-WIDE ROAD REPAIR AND IMPROVEMENT ACT.

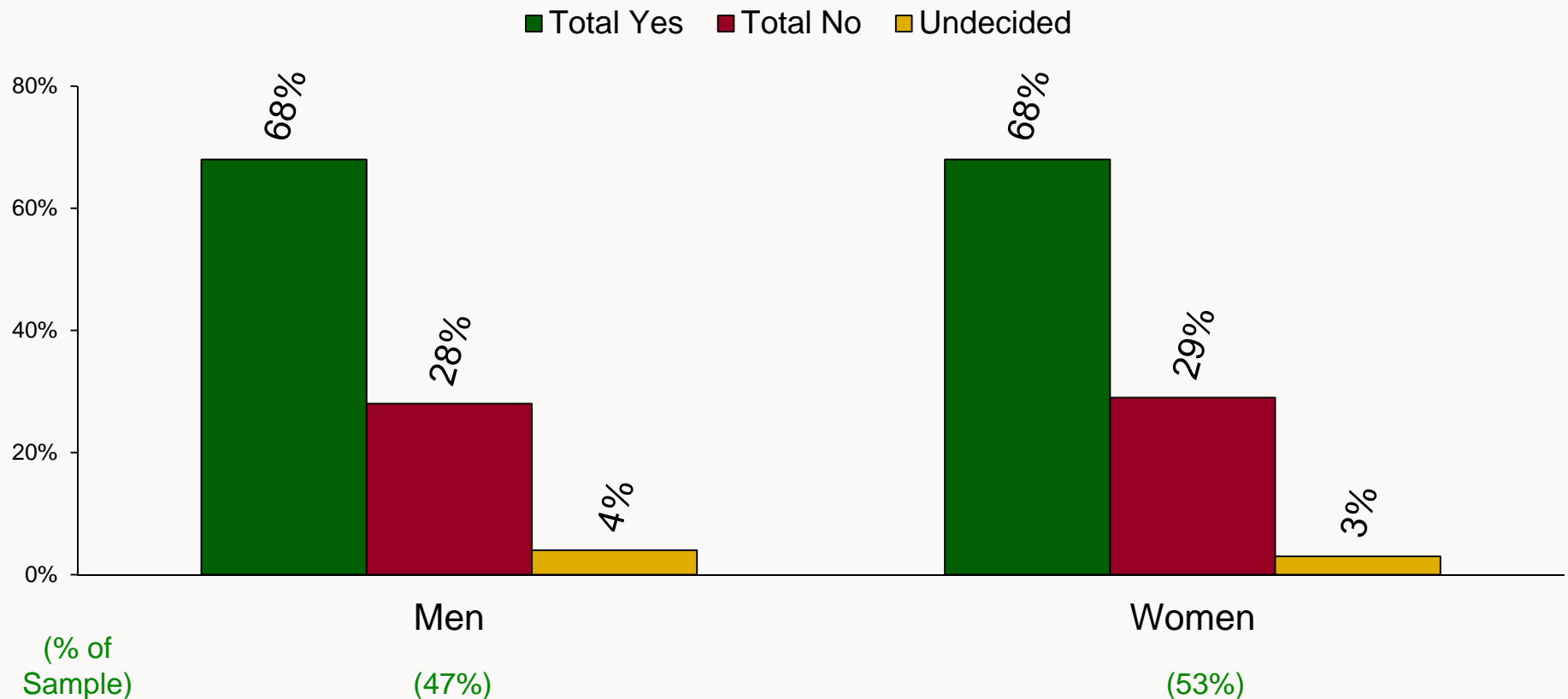
In order to repave and improve local city streets and county roads; fix potholes; and improve bicycle, pedestrian, vehicular, and transit rider safety in Lake County, shall the Lake County Board of Supervisors enact a one-half cent sales tax for 20 years, with an independent annual audit?

Initial support for the measure is broad, with just over two-thirds in favor.



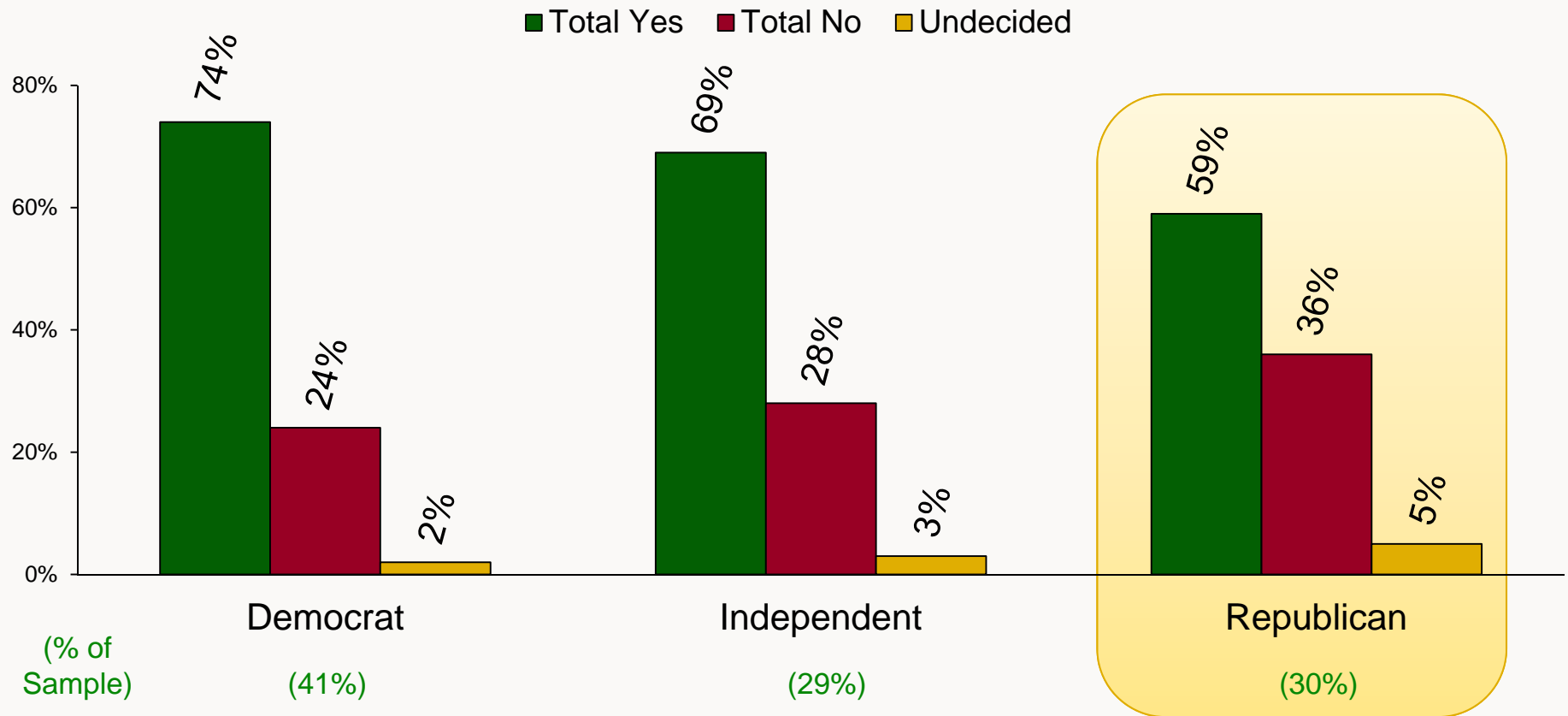
Male and female voters offer equal support for the potential measure.

Initial Vote by Gender



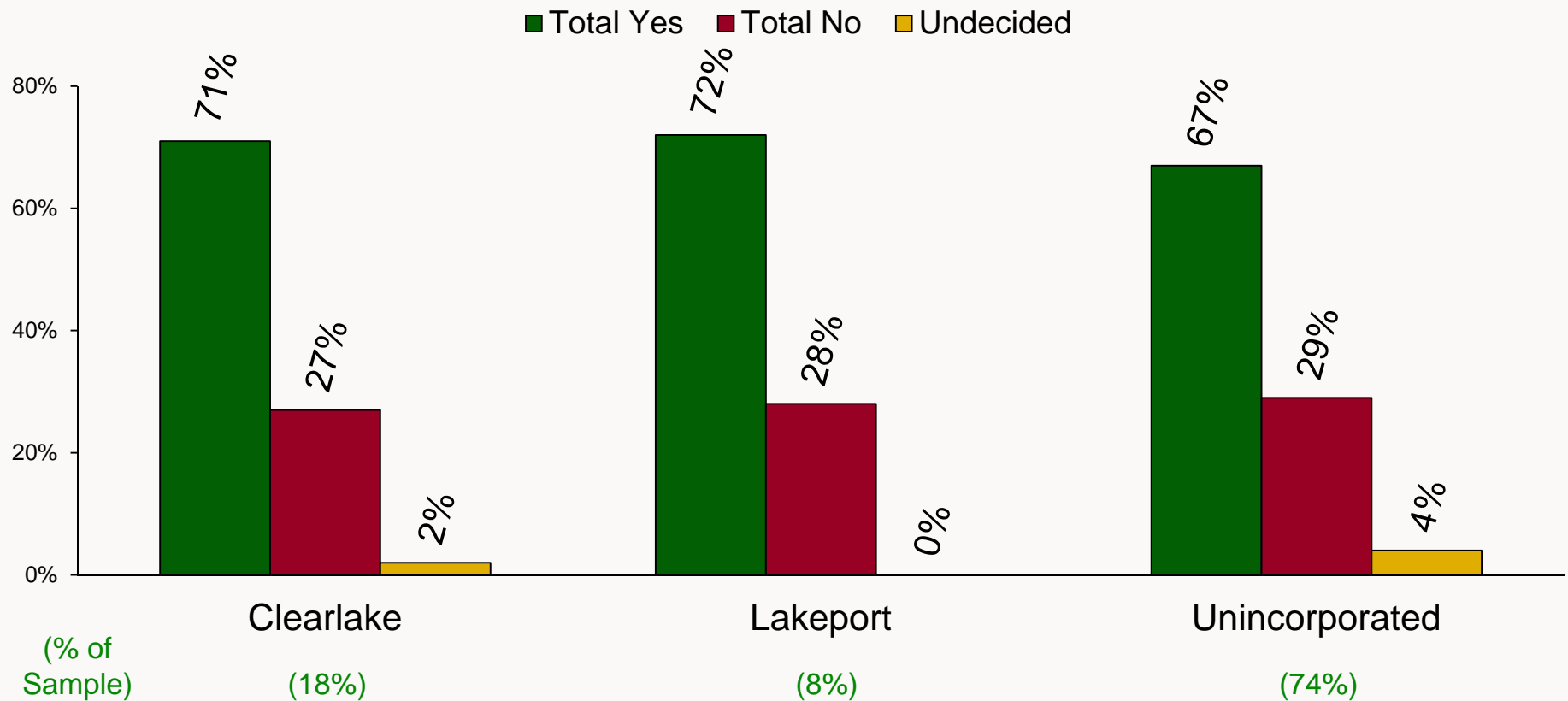
Even Lake County Republicans say they will vote for the measure with a 23-point margin.

Initial Vote by Party



Support cuts across geographic areas within the county.

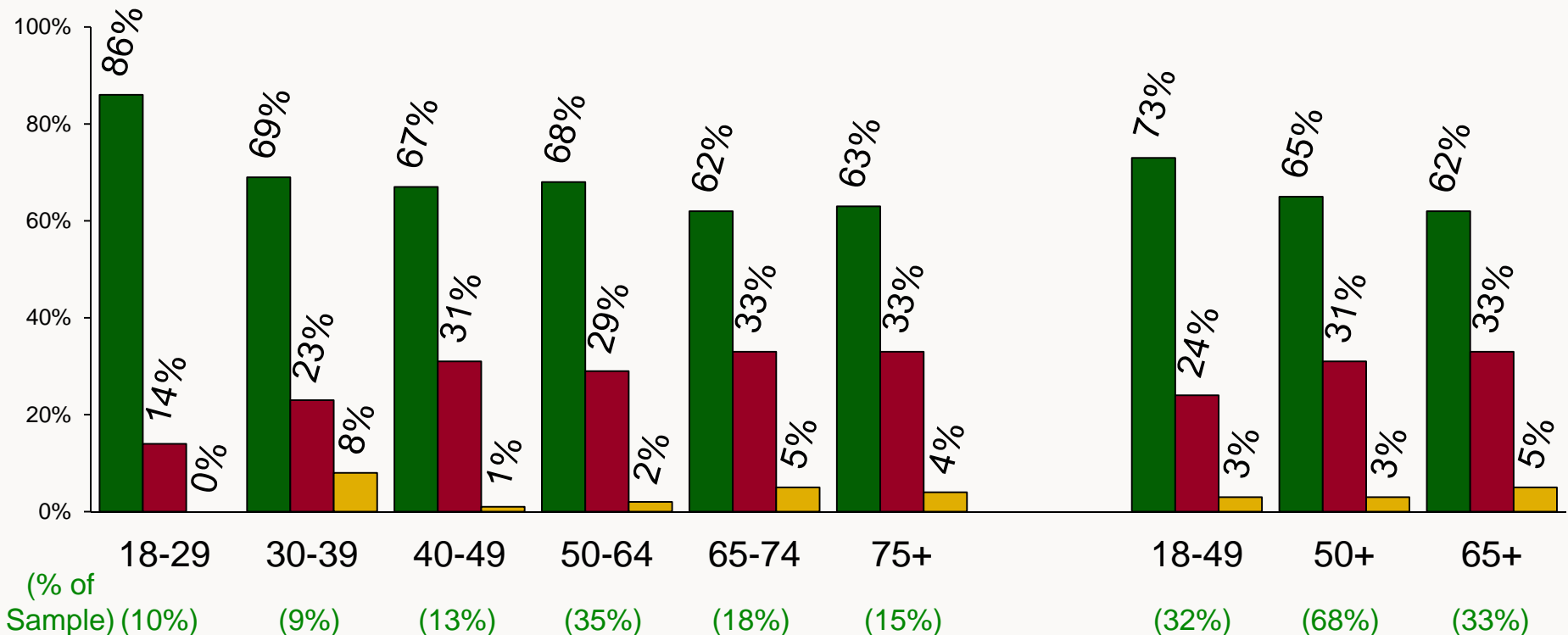
Initial Vote by City



The sales tax sees greater support among younger voters, and greater opposition among older voters.

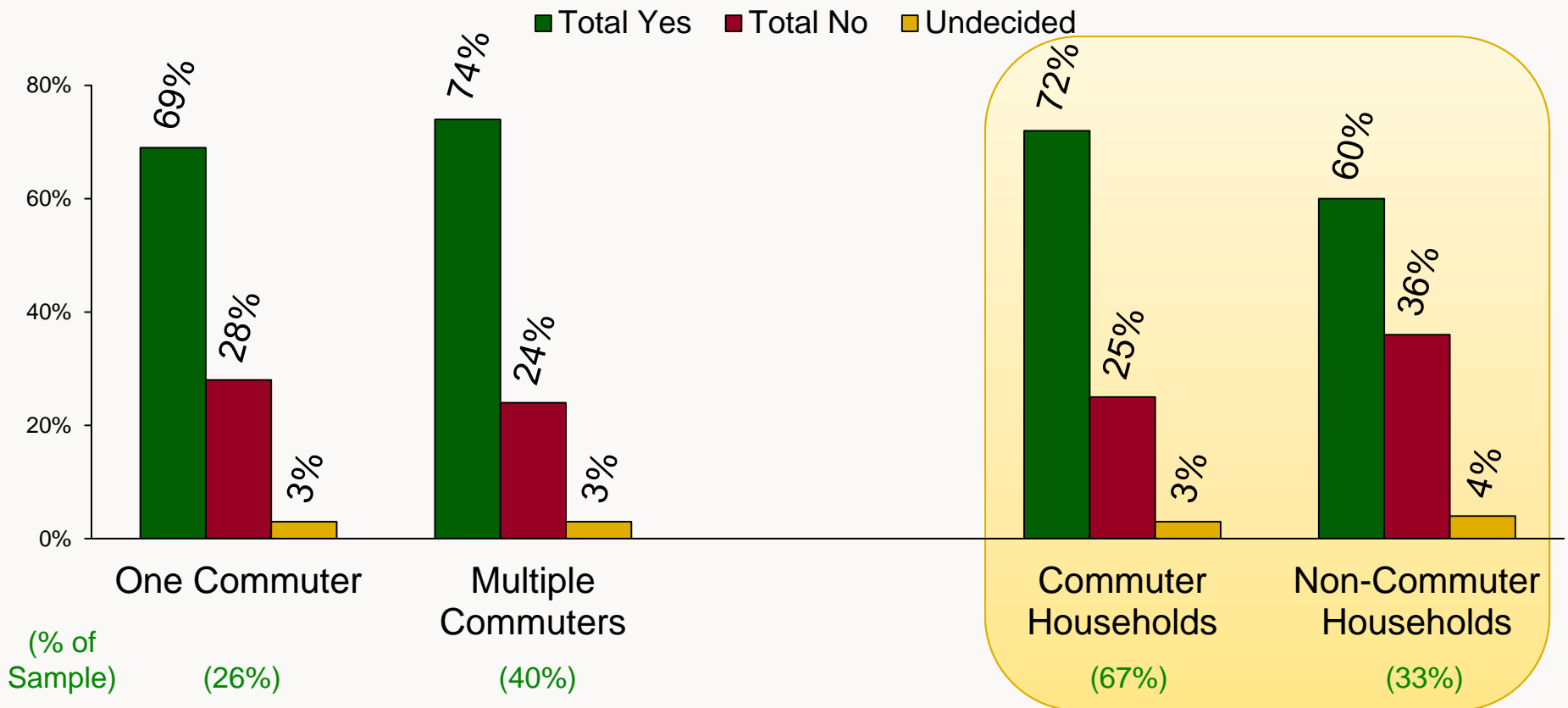
Initial Vote by Age

■ Total Yes ■ Total No ■ Undecided



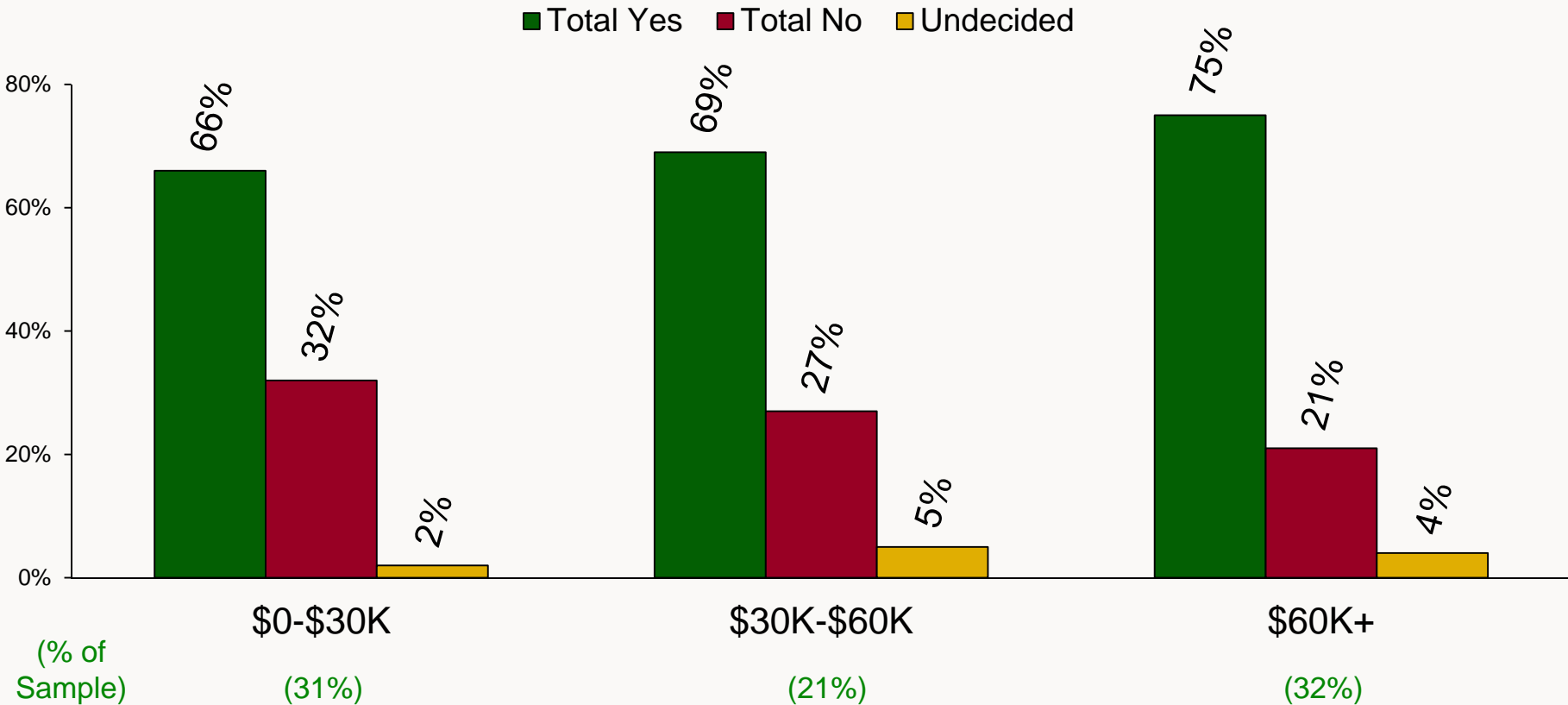
Households with car commuters are marginally more likely to support the sales tax.

Initial Vote by Commuter Status



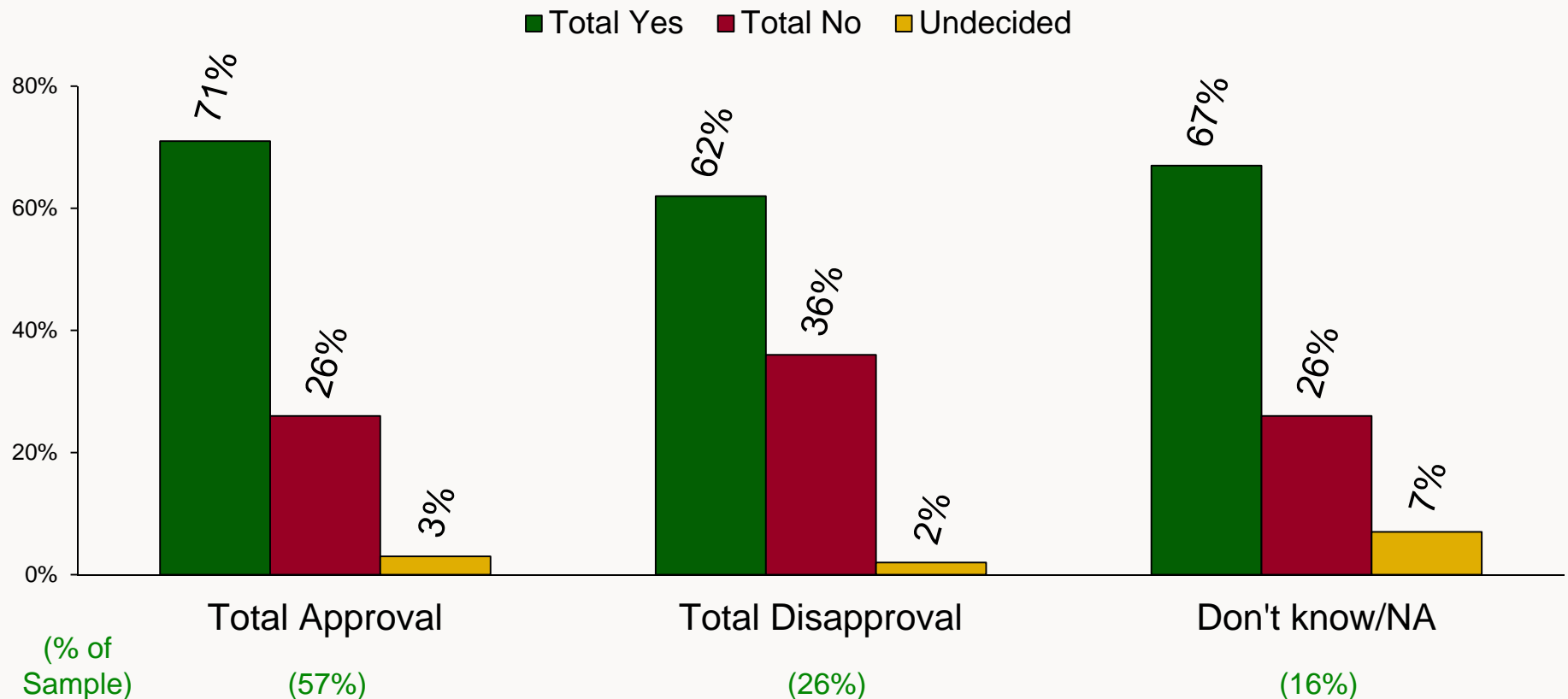
Higher income households tend to be more supportive of a sales tax.

Initial Vote by Household Income



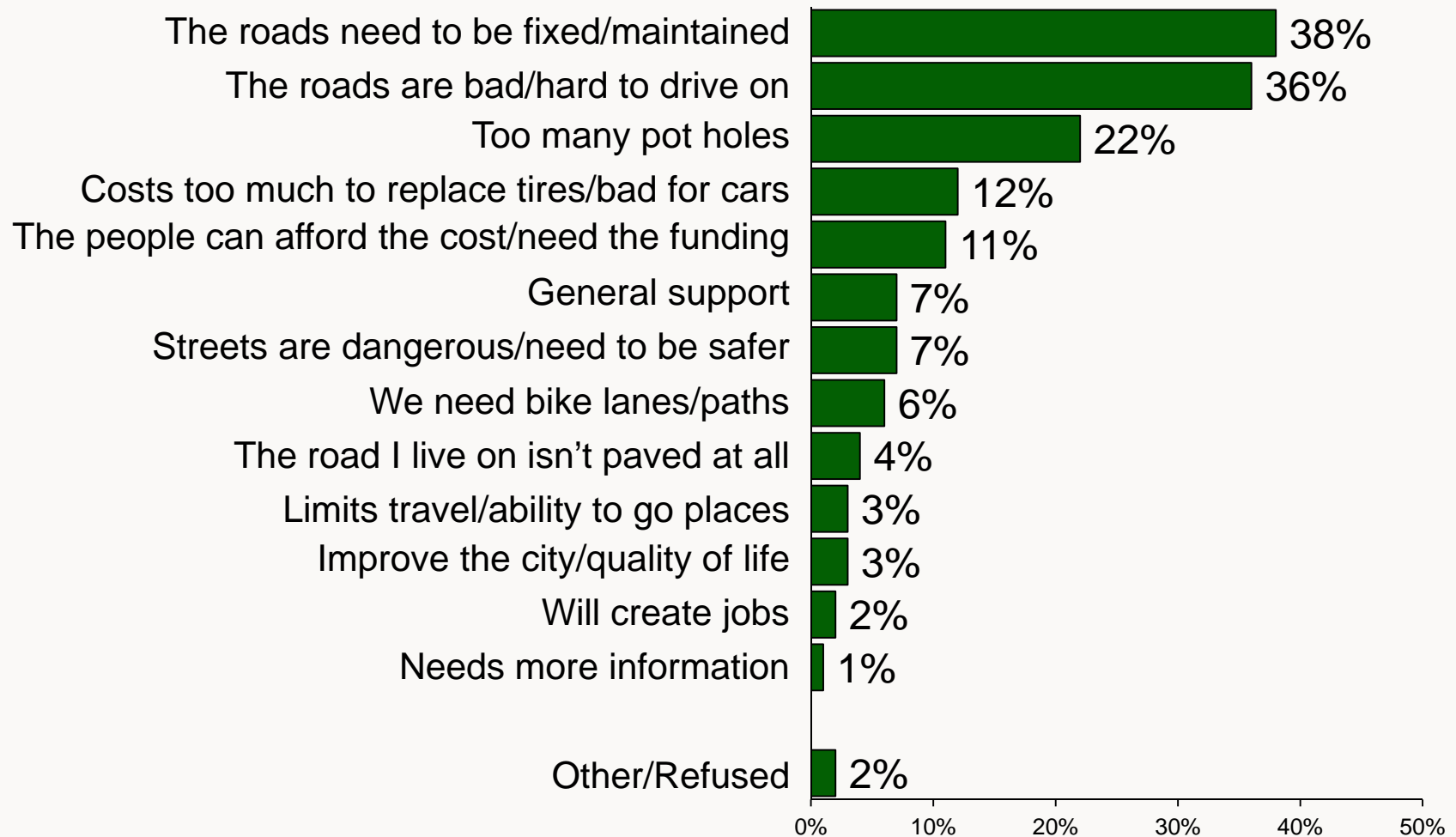
Even among the minority of voters who disapprove of County government's performance, support for the measure is high.

Initial Vote by County Government Approval



Supporters agree that roads in the County need major improvements.

(Open-Ended Explanations From “Yes” Voters)



Sample Comments From Supporters

The emergency vehicles are having a hard time so they desperately need to have [the roads] fixed.

The roads are terrible. Me and my husband try and bike ride but we can't because the roads are too rough.

Our roads are in really bad shape here and it wouldn't hurt to help pay for it.

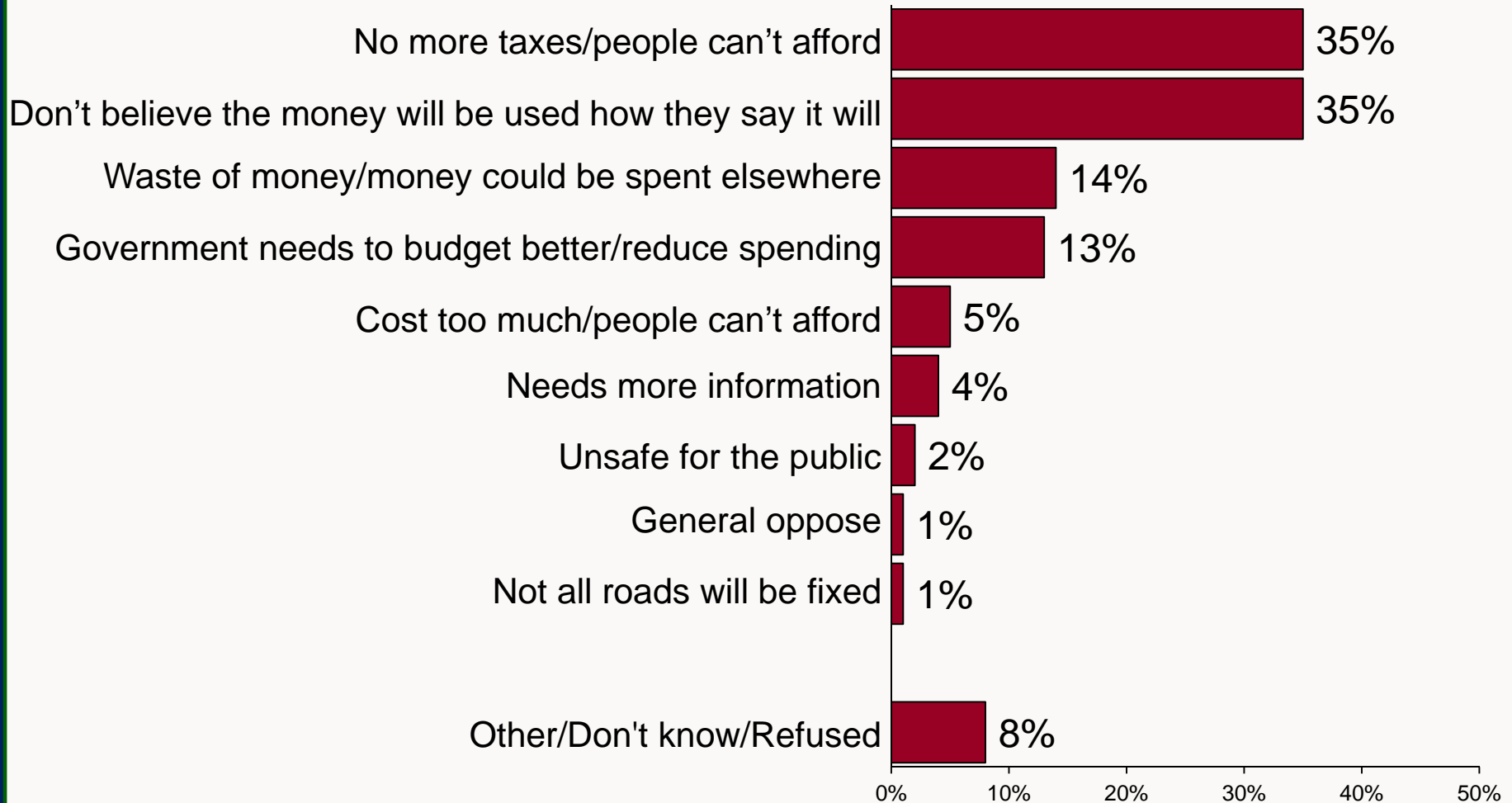
Our roads are a mess. We hate driving on them. Many of the streets are unsafe for our cars. The potholes are unsafe.

I think improving major roads, improving bicycle safety and residential roads will help our community as well as our tourism.

The county roads are not in the best shape. My girlfriend got into a bad accident because of the potholes in the roads.

Opponents are wary of more taxes and are doubtful that the money would be spent well.

(Open-Ended Explanations From "No" Voters)



Sample Comments From Opponents

I just don't think the money goes where it is supposed to and taxes are high enough.

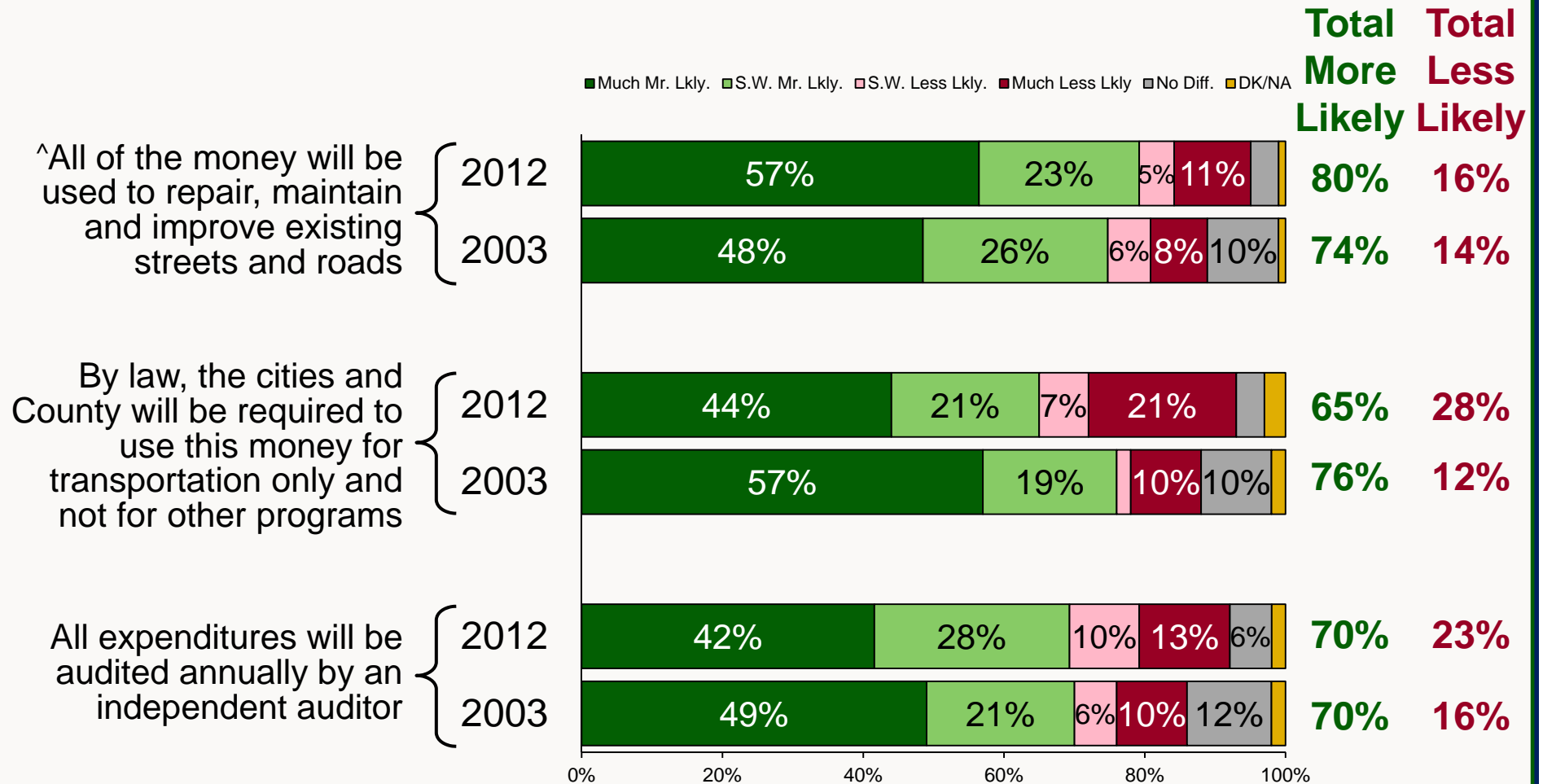
It's ill-defined. The money would end up going to the two big cities, not us.

We're retired and we can't afford it.

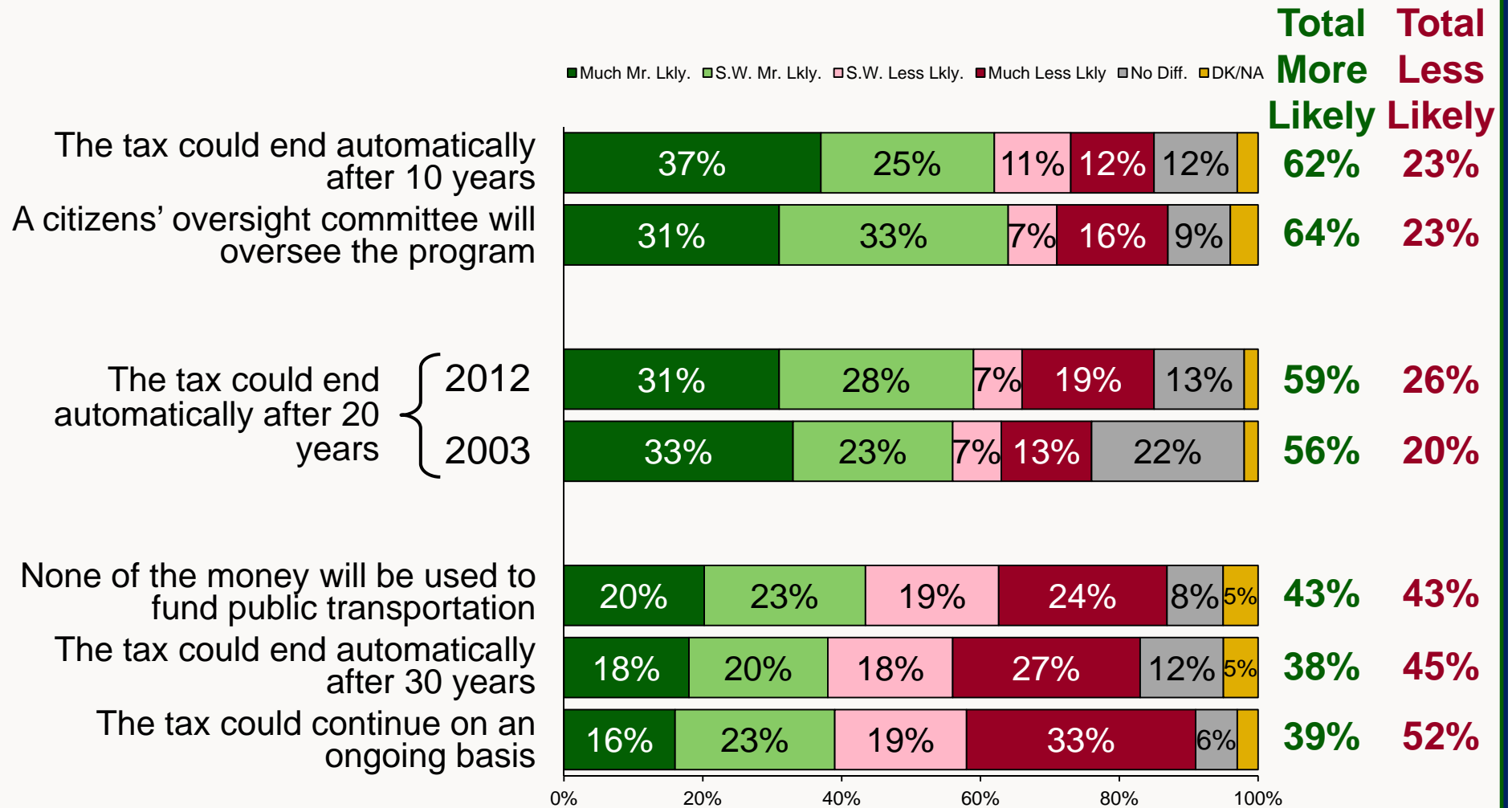
People are unemployed and now is not the time to raise taxes. But another time I would say "yes."

I vote "no" on everything that increases taxes.

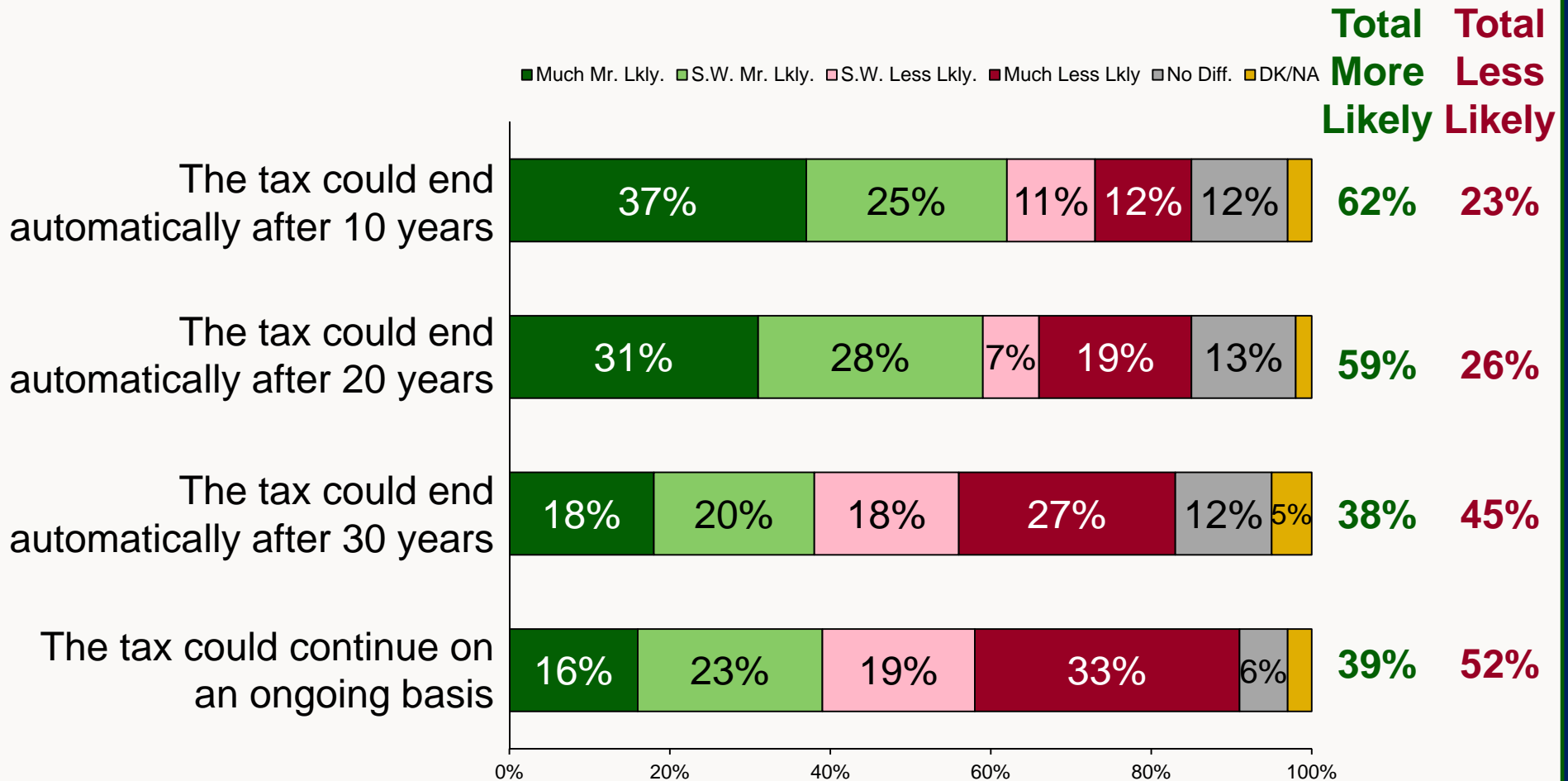
Dedicating revenue only to existing roads and including oversight and accountability provisions could increase support for the measure.



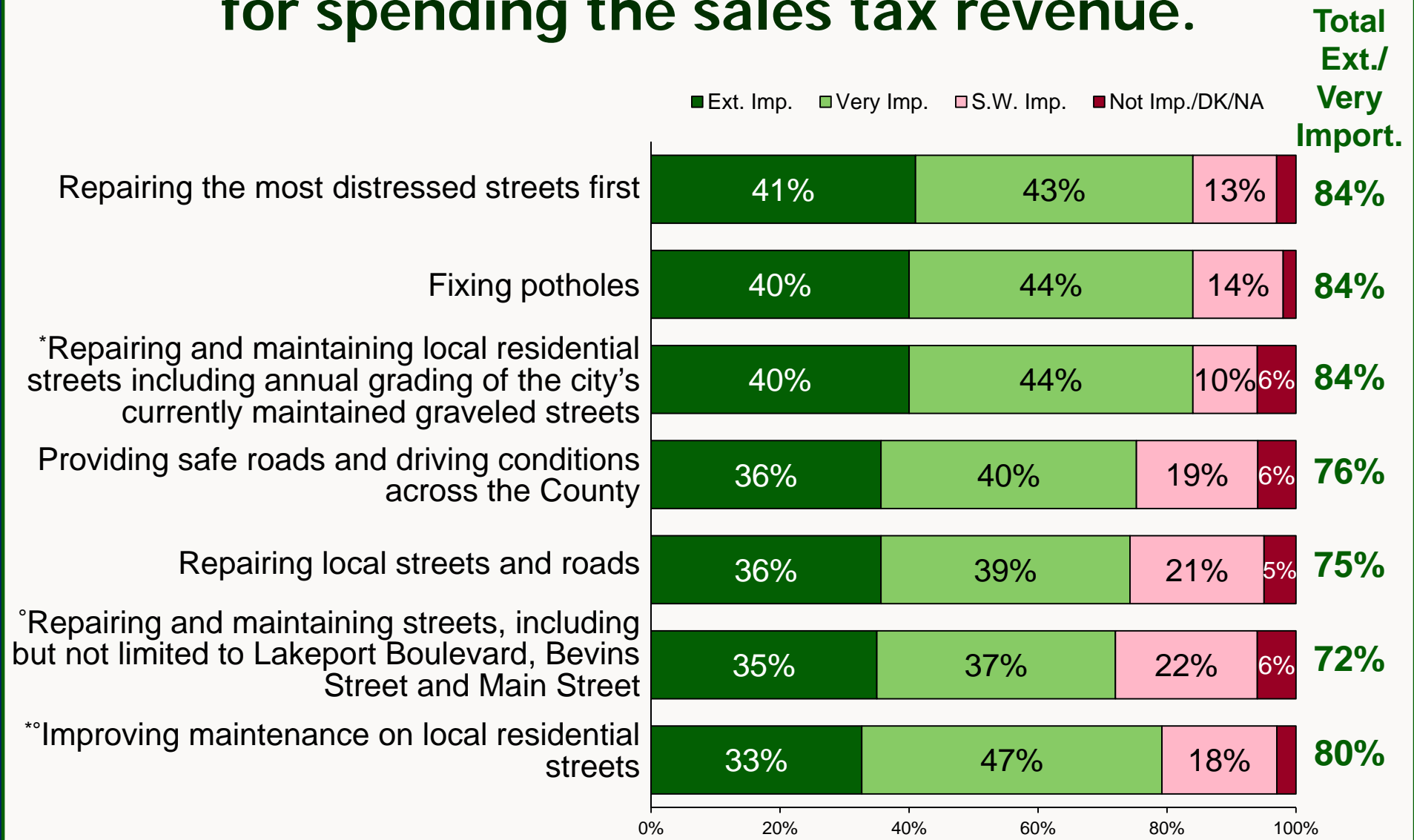
Voters are also enthusiastic about the idea of a citizens' oversight committee.



Having a sunset of no more than ten years seems likely to maximize support for the measure.



Road and pothole repairs are the top priorities for spending the sales tax revenue.



Street widening is clearly the lowest priority.

* Repairing and maintaining streets including but not limited to Lakeshore Drive, Old Highway 53, Olympic Drive, San Joaquin Drive, 18th Avenue, Phillips Avenue, and Boyles Avenue

Paving unpaved streets and roads

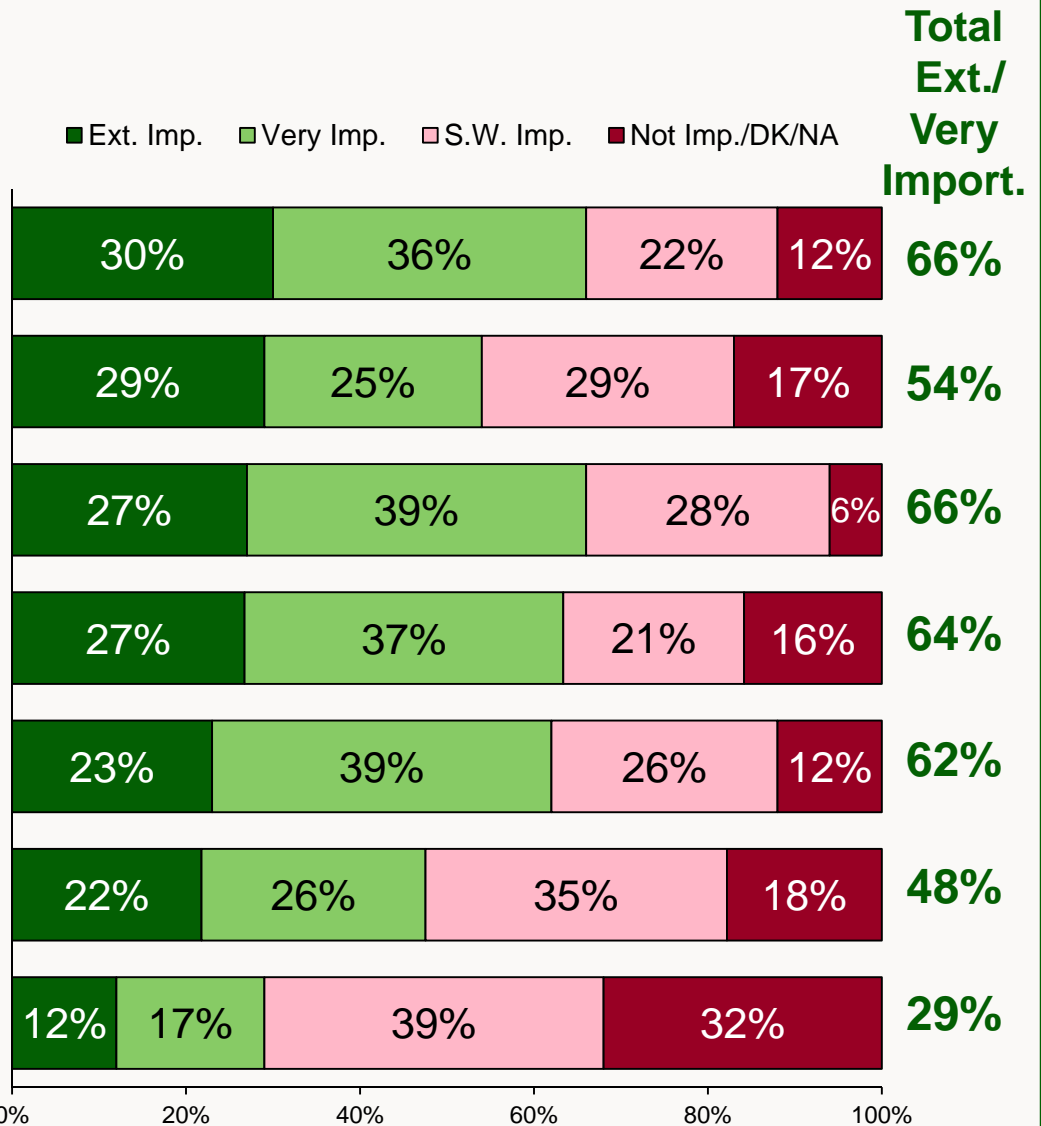
Repaving local streets and roads

Repairing deteriorating bridges

Repairing unpaved streets and roads

Repairing and maintaining major county roads, including but not limited to Nice-Lucerne Cutoff, Hartmann Road, Soda Bay Road, and Bottle Rock Road

Widening local streets and roads



The importance of fixing potholes has increased modestly since the 2003 survey.

(% Extremely/Very Important)

Project	2003	2012	Difference
Fixing potholes	78%	84%	+6%
Repairing local streets and roads	78%	75%	-3%
Repaving local streets and roads	72%	66%	-6%
Repairing deteriorating bridges	59%	64%	+5%
Repairing unpaved streets and roads	58%	62%	+4%
°Widening local <i>streets and</i> roads	37%	29%	-8%

These same priorities generally resonate across each area within the county.

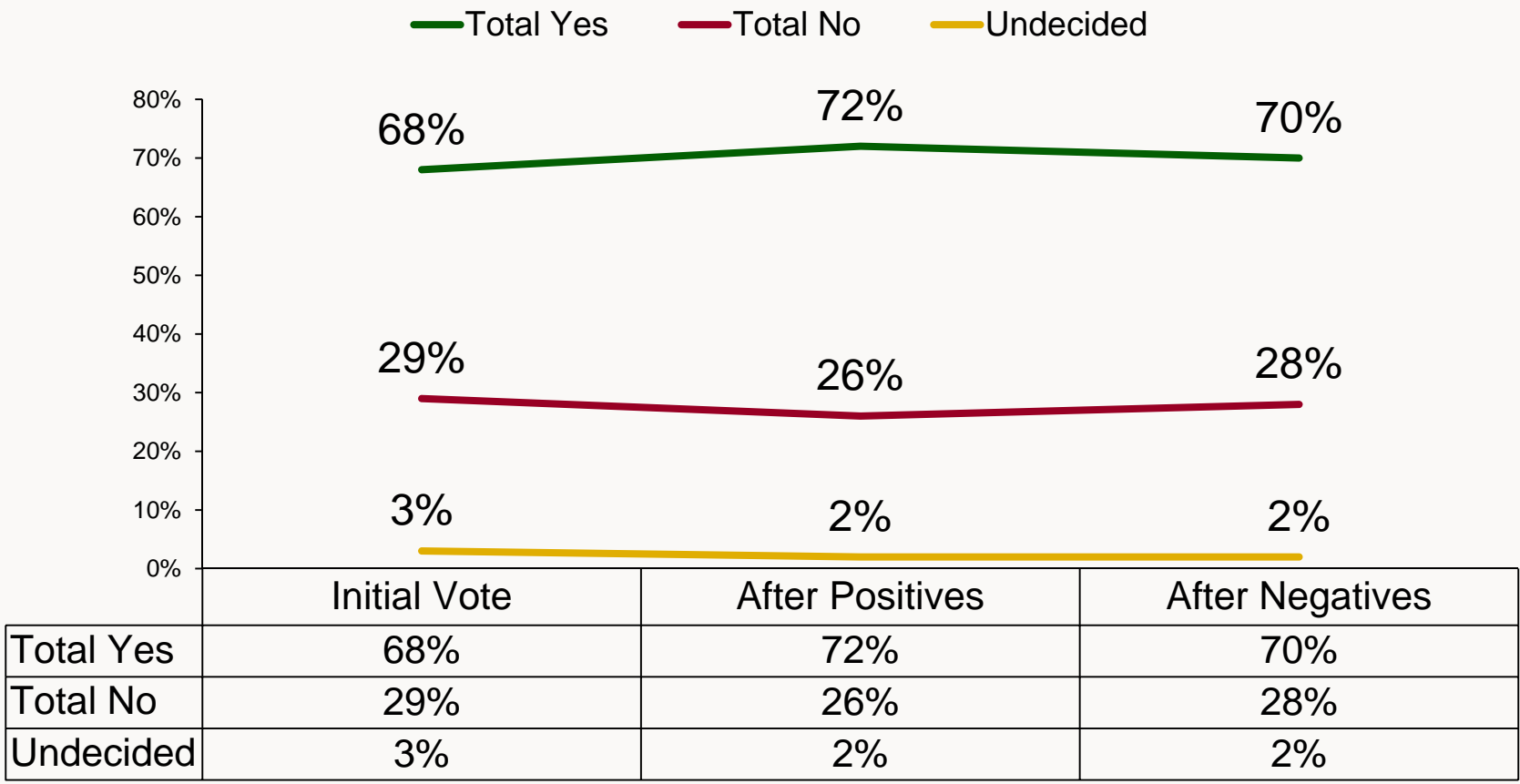
(% Extremely/Very Important)

Project	All Voters	Clearlake	Lakeport	Unincorporated
Fixing Potholes	84%	89%	90%	82%
*Local Residential/Graveled	N/A	84%	N/A	N/A
Repair Distressed Streets	84%	82%	83%	84%
*Local Street Maintenance	79%	86%	64%	N/A
Safe Roads/Driving Conditions	75%	73%	81%	75%
Repair Local Streets/Roads	75%	86%	69%	73%
°Lakeport Blvd, Bevins St	N/A	N/A	72%	N/A
*Lakeshore Dr, Old Hwy 53	N/A	67%	N/A	N/A
Repaving Local Streets/Roads	66%	75%	68%	64%
Deteriorating Bridges	64%	57%	79%	64%
Repairing Unpaved Streets	62%	79%	46%	59%
Paving Unpaved Streets	54%	72%	44%	50%
Repair Major Country Roads	47%	36%	37%	51%
Widening Local Streets/Roads	29%	39%	31%	26%

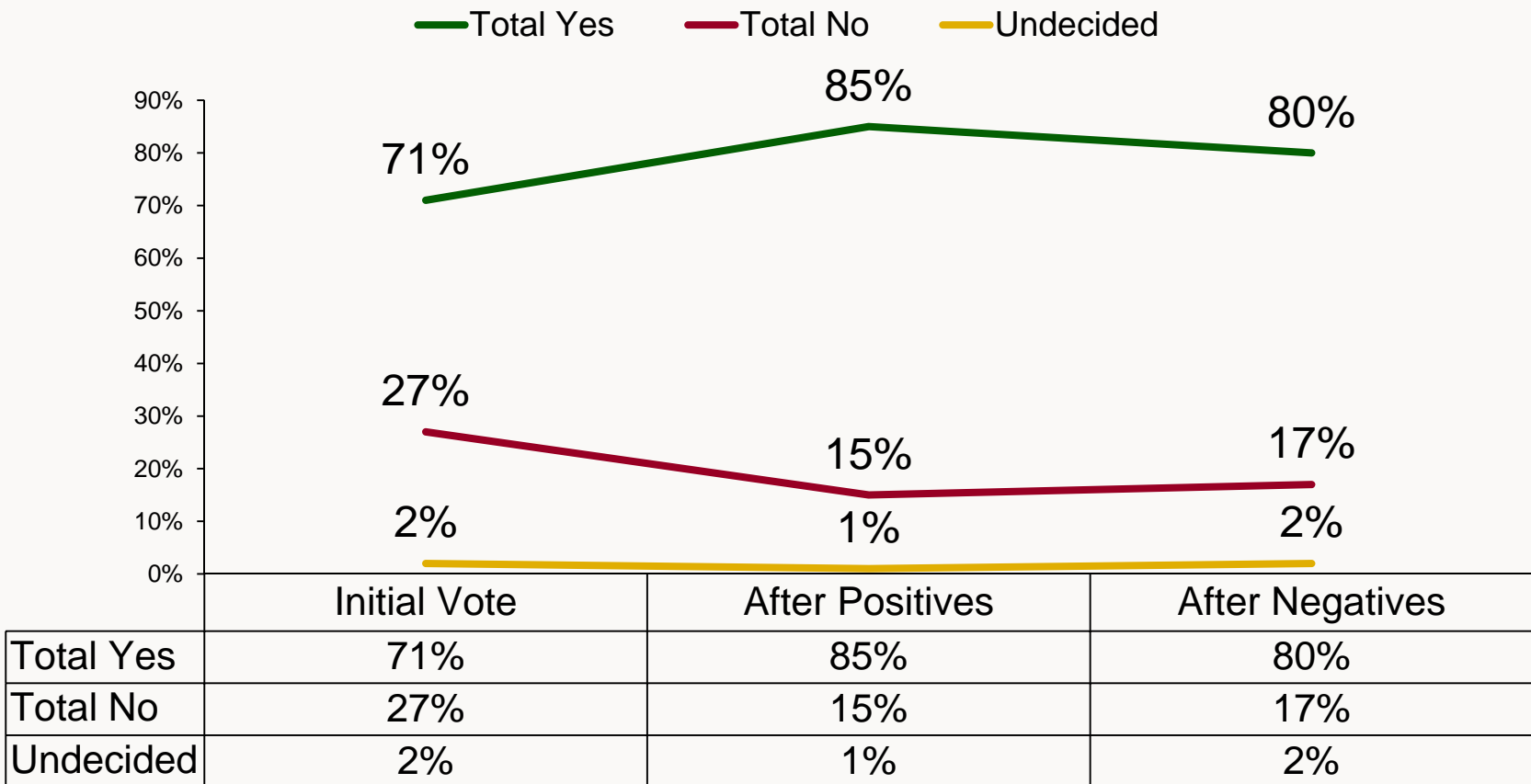


Messaging and Communications

The net impact of pro and con messaging slightly increases support -- to 70 percent -- at the end of the survey.



Support for the measure in Clearlake is especially strong.



Segmenting the Lake County Electorate

❖ **Consistent Definitely Yes:**

Voters who indicated consistently that they would vote “definitely” vote for the measure.

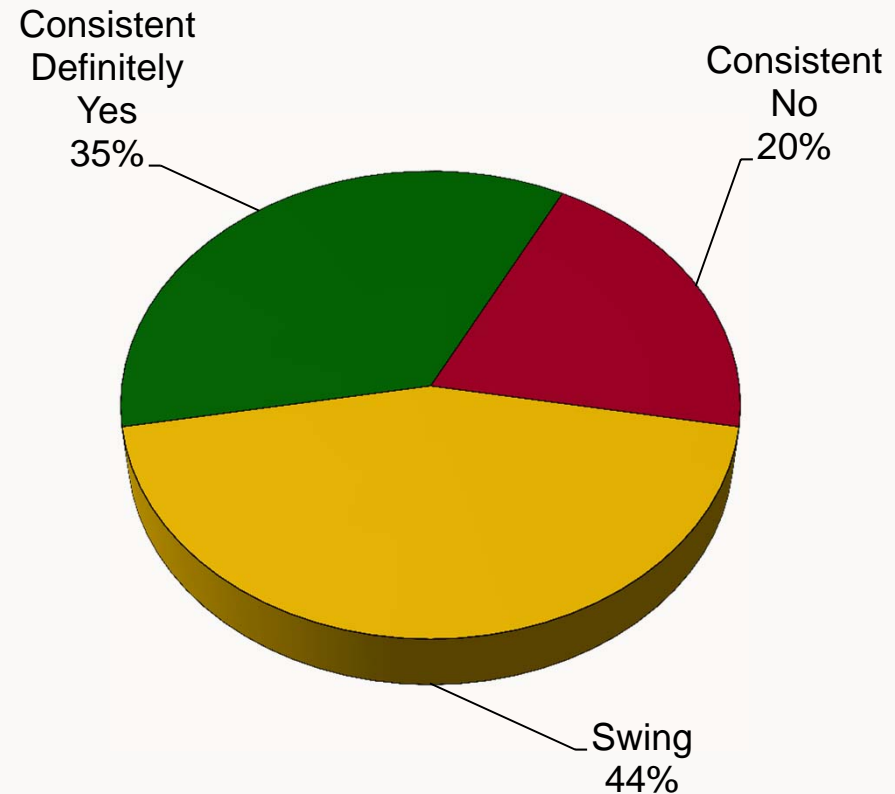
❖ **Consistent No:**

Voters who indicated consistently that they would vote against the measure.

❖ **Swing:**

All voters who do not fall into other categories – those who are consistently “soft yes” or undecided, or who switch positions.

The following slide shows demographic groups that *disproportionately* fall into one category or the other.



Demographic Profiles of Voter Segments

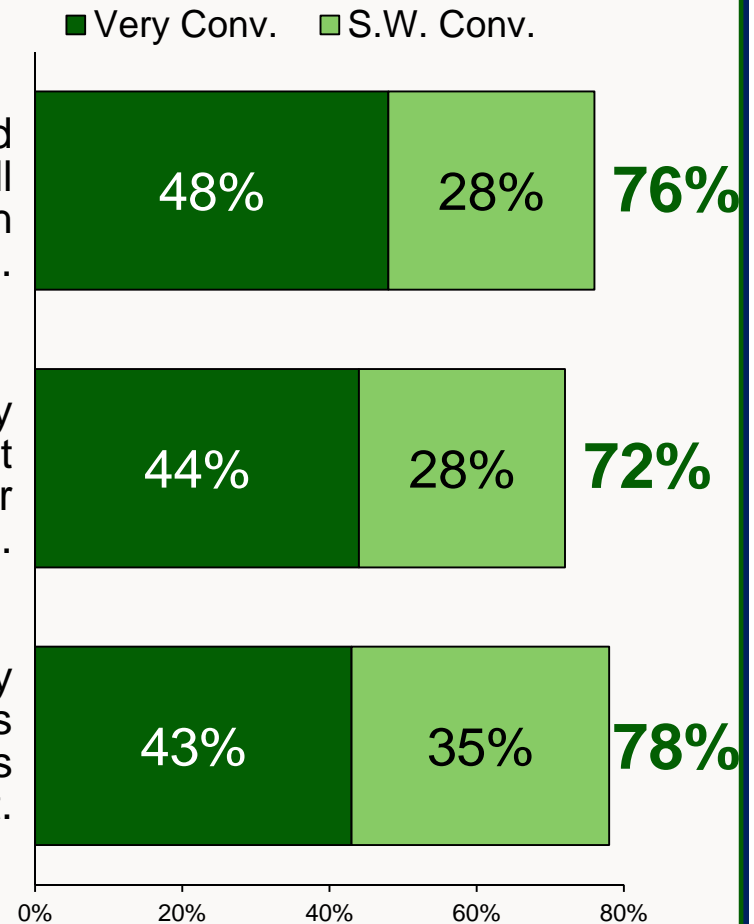
Consistent Definite Yes	Swing	Consistent No
35% of the Electorate	44% of the Electorate	20% of the Electorate
Clearlake Voters Age 18-49	Voters Age 18-29	Republican Women
Clearlake Independents	Clearlake Voters Age 50+	Republicans Age 18-49
Household Income \$30k-\$60k	Democrats Age 18-49	Non-Clearlake Republicans
Interviewed on Cell Phone	Clearlake Democrats	Multi-Republican Households
Men Age 18-49	Supervisorial District 5	Republicans
Households with an Independent	Age 75+	Non-Commuter Households
Clearlake women	Non-Clearlake Age 18-49	Republicans Age 50+
Household Income \$60k+	Single-Democrat Households	Supervisorial District 1
Supervisor District 4	Democratic Men	Mixed Party Households
Clearlake	Clearlake women	Single-Republican Households
Supervisor District 2	Democrats	Age 40-49
Multi-Democrat Households	Household Income Under \$30k	Age 65-74
City of Lakeport	Independents Age 18-49	Independents Age 50+

Improving conditions for emergency workers, preparing for population growth, and comparing the County's roads to others are strong messages.

(EMERGENCY WORKERS) Police, paramedics, and firefighters strongly support this measure because it will reduce the response time for emergency workers to reach people who need help.

(POPULATION GROWTH) The population of Lake County will continue to increase over the next 20 years. If we don't pass this measure, local roads will deteriorate even faster under the pressure of this growth.

(WORST IN STATE) A recent study found that Lake County has among the worst pavement conditions in the state. This measure will go a long way in helping us improve our roads in a way that all Lake County residents will benefit.



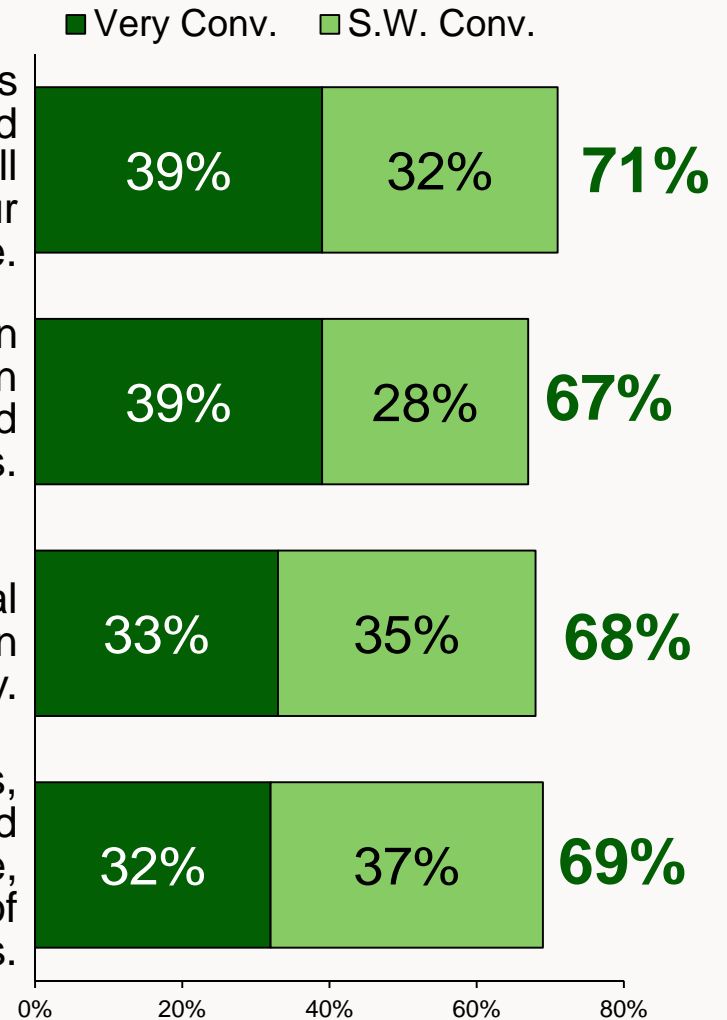
Messages focused on the backlog of repairs and on safety also resonate.

(BACKLOG) Independent experts say that Lake County has over \$700 million in backlogged needs for repairs and maintenance to local streets and roads. This measure will make it possible to begin to address these repairs before our roads get even worse.

(SAFETY) Without this measure, traffic safety problems in Lake County will continue to increase, with more wrecks on local roads, more local people at risk of injury and death, and increased maintenance costs for vehicles.

(ACCOUNTABILITY) This measure has tough financial accountability provisions including an annual audit by an independent agency.

(STATE BUDGET CUTS) Because of shrinking revenues, state funding for local transportation repairs and improvements are declining. But by passing this measure, we can ensure that Lake County will have a reliable source of funding for road repairs, no matter what the state does.

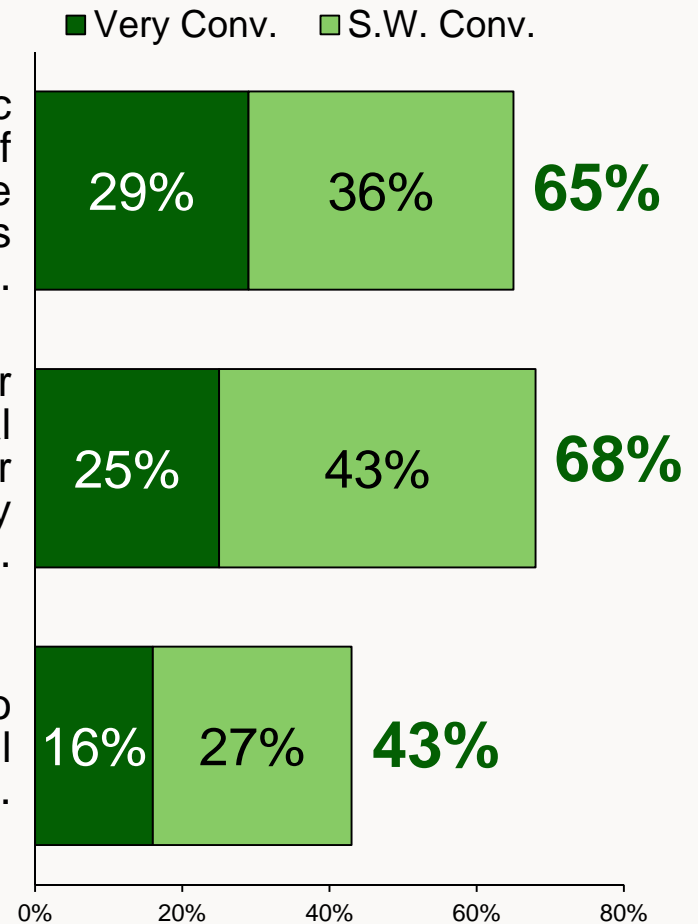


A message focused on the sales tax itself is less effective.

(PUBLIC TRANSIT) This measure would help make public transportation in Lake County better by reducing the cost of maintaining vehicles and providing smoother, more comfortable rides. Better roads will also mean that buses will run more efficiently and more on-time.

(STIMULUS IS GONE) One-time sources of funding for transportation projects, such as state bonds and federal stimulus, have been used up, forcing counties to fend for themselves. Passing the measure will help Lake County keep up with its transportation demands.

(NON-RESIDENTS) Because Lake County generates so much of its revenue from tourist spending, this sales tax will substantially be paid for by outside visitors, not residents.



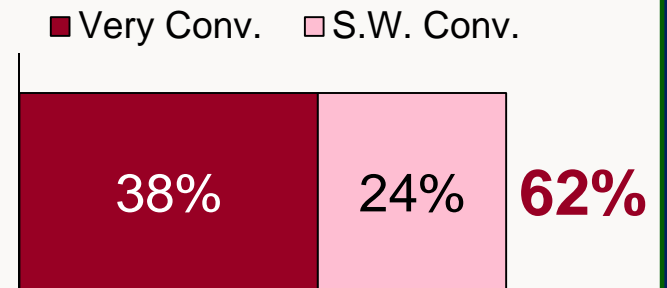
The emergency workers, population growth, and traffic safety messages were the most popular among “positive movers.”

(% Very Convincing)

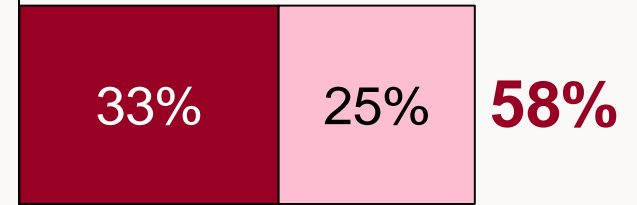
Message	All Voters	Swing	Positive Movers
Emergency Workers	48%	51%	57%
Population Growth	44%	43%	53%
Worst In State	43%	41%	39%
Backlog	39%	36%	39%
Safety	39%	37%	46%
Accountability	33%	32%	32%
State Budget Cuts	32%	29%	22%
Public Transit	29%	29%	23%
Stimulus Is Gone	25%	20%	14%
Non-residents	16%	14%	18%

The most effective negative messages reflect voter concerns over the economy and that the money would not be spent as promised.

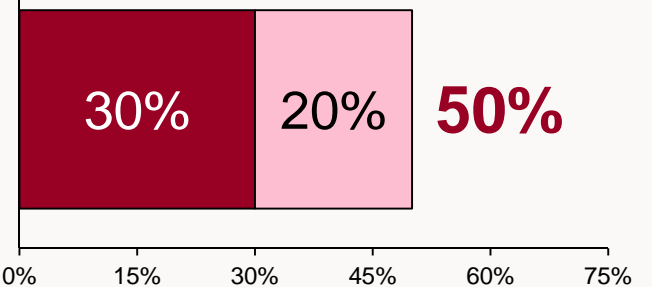
(ECONOMY) We are currently experiencing the worst economy in generations—businesses are closing, unemployment is high and there are many foreclosures. This is not the right time to raise taxes.



(WASTE) If additional revenue is needed, Lake County should cut wasteful spending and reduce bureaucracy rather than increasing the sales tax.



(PUBLIC EMPLOYEE SALARIES) Money from this measure will ultimately go to higher salaries and pensions for County bureaucrats. The County should scale back high cost employee pensions and benefits instead of raising taxes.

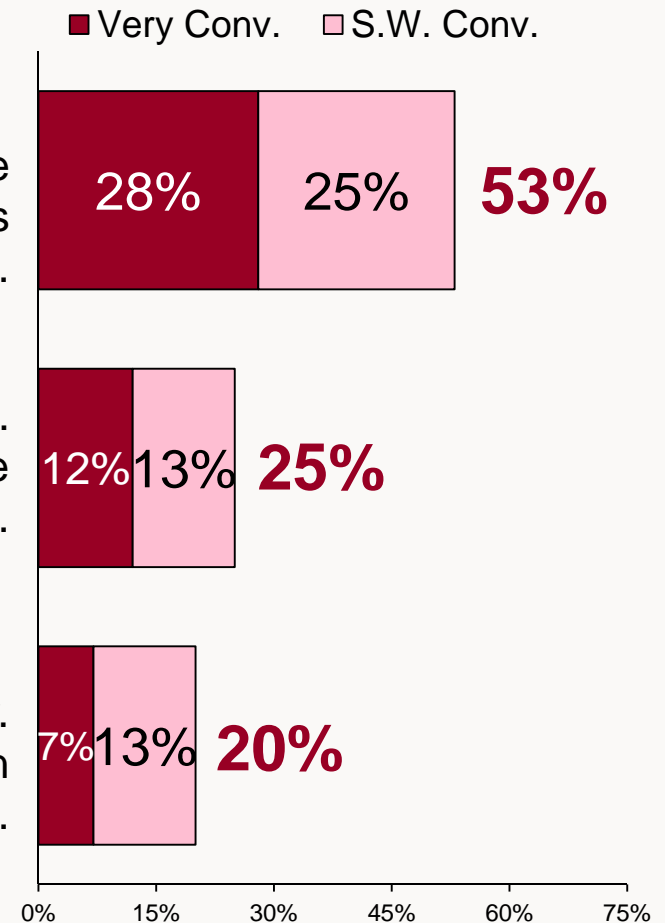


However, voters dismiss arguments that road repairs are unnecessary, or that taxing tourists is unfair.

(TAXES) Taxes are too high already in Lake County, and the state might be increasing the sales tax this year too. Enough is enough. No new taxes.

(TOURISTS) It is unfair to use a sales tax that targets tourists. This measure will drive out-of-town visitors away from Lake County and hurt local businesses.

(NOT NECESSARY) This measure is simply not necessary. The condition of county roads and incorporated city streets in Lake County is not that bad.



A message focused on the economic climate resonated with those who switched to vote against the measure.

(% Very Convincing)

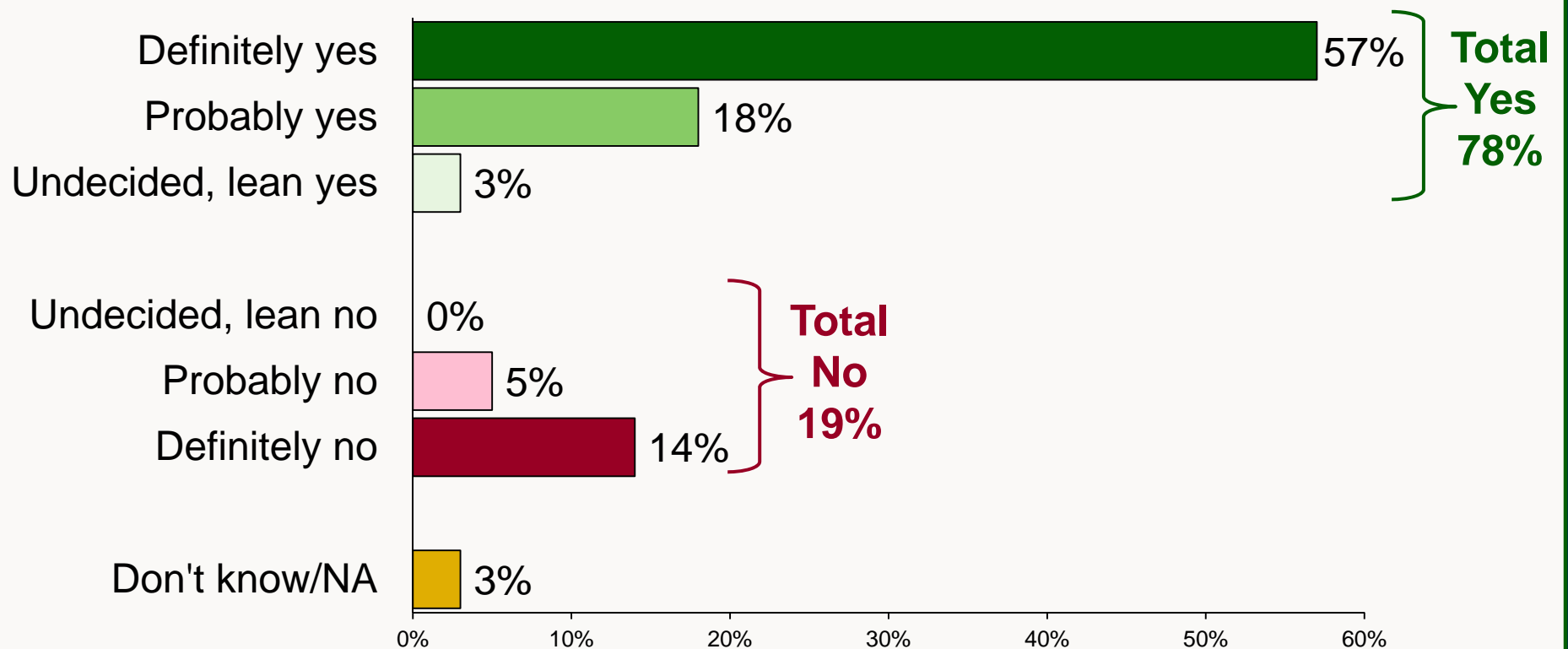
Message	All Voters	Swing	Negative Movers
Economy	38%	33%	47%
Waste	33%	33%	40%
Public Employee Salaries	30%	29%	37%
Taxes	28%	23%	52%
Tourists	12%	12%	17%
Not Necessary	7%	4%	2%



Alternative Measures

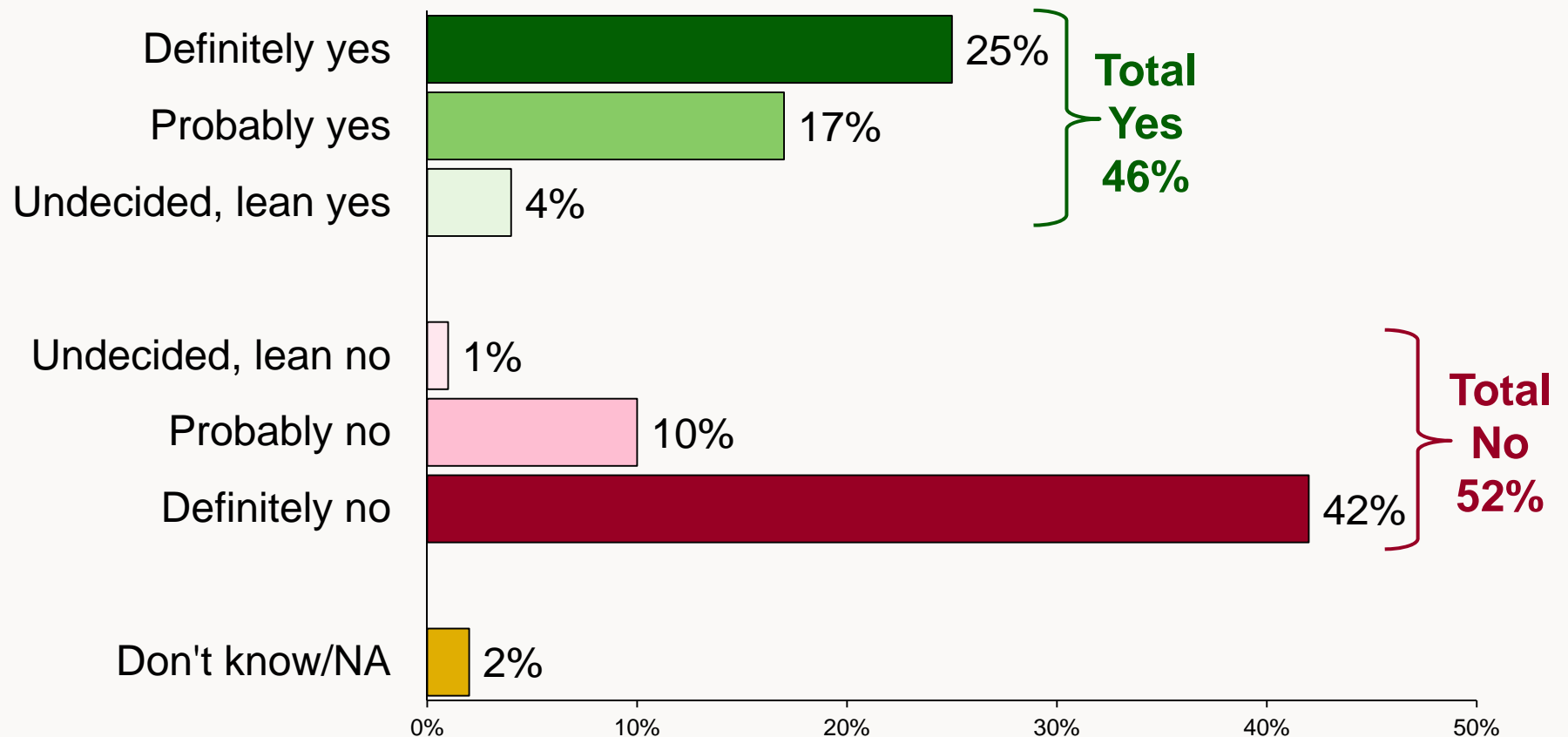
Clearlake voters say they would support a sales tax measure that targeted only their city.

Suppose that instead of being Countywide, this half-cent sales tax increase were limited to the City of Clearlake, and all funds would be used to repave and improve local city streets; fix potholes; and improve bicycle, pedestrian, vehicular, and transit rider safety in Clearlake. If that were the case, would you vote yes to support it, or no to oppose it?



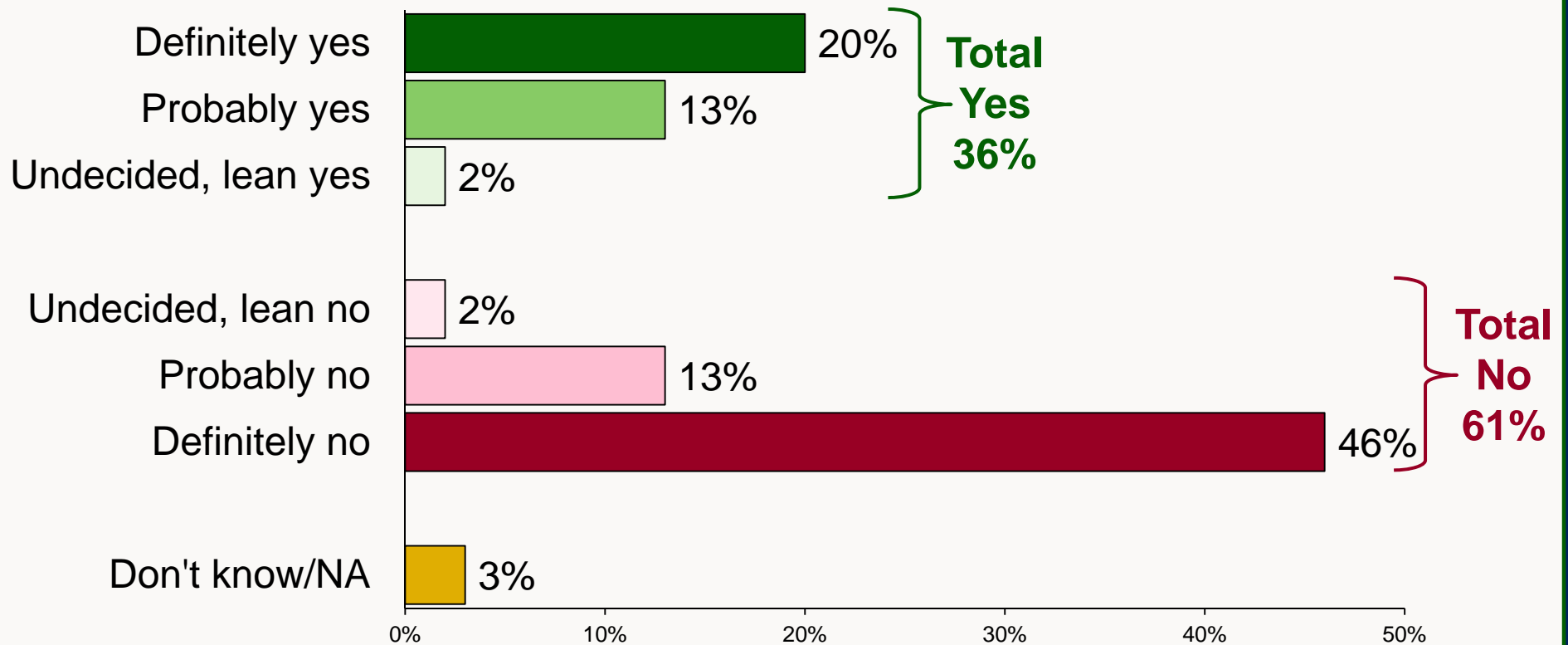
A one-cent sales tax is opposed by a majority of voters countywide.

Suppose the countywide transportation sales tax measure that I described would enact a one-cent sales tax instead of a one-half cent sales tax. If that were the case, would you vote yes to support it, or no to oppose it?



A ten-dollar vehicle fee only garners support from one-third of voters.

Upon approval of the necessary state law in California, this measure would enact up to a ten dollar annual vehicle registration fee that would fund the repaving and maintenance of streets and roads in Lake County. If the election were held today, would you vote “yes” in favor of this measure or “no” to oppose it?





Conclusions

Conclusions

- Overall, the results are encouraging: voters clearly see an urgent need to repair roads; two-thirds of voters initially back the measure; more than 40% are “definitely” in favor; support cuts across demographic subgroups within the electorate; and the “yes” vote holds up well after pro and con arguments.
- At the same time, support barely tops two-thirds even in a best-case scenario, and history has shown that tax elections in the County are challenging.
- To maximize a measure’s chances of winning approval, the following are recommended:
 - ✓ *A clear focus on basic road and street repairs;*
 - ✓ *A 10-year sunset provision;*
 - ✓ *Inclusion of other accountability mechanisms, like a citizen oversight committee;*
 - ✓ *A robust public education effort about the need for the measure; and*
 - ✓ *A strong citizen-funded “yes” campaign, without funded opposition.*

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