



**Survey of Sonoma County
Likely March 2024 Voters
RE: Potential Sales Tax Measure
*Summary of Results - March 2023***

Methodology

- ▶ Mixed-mode live telephone and email- and text-to-web survey
- ▶ Likely March 2024 voters in Sonoma County
- ▶ Survey conducted March 12 – March 16, 2023
- ▶ 400 interviews; overall margin of error ± 4.9 percentage points
- ▶ Telephone interviews were conducted by professional interviewers; landlines and mobile phones included
- ▶ Where applicable, results compared with the following:

Methodology	Dates	Universe	Sample Size	Margin of Error	EMC #
Multi-modal	December 1-8, 2021	Likely 2022 voters	500	± 4.4 percentage points	21-8297
Multi-modal	September 24-29, 2019	Likely 2020 voters	644	± 3.86 percentage points	19-7402

Please note that due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to exactly 100%.

Key Findings

- ▶ About half of voters are optimistic about the direction of the County. Homelessness and fire protection are top concerns.
- ▶ Voters give high marks to local fire and emergency services and recognize the need for high-quality fire protection services, but are largely critical of the county's management of budget and finances.
- ▶ The initial vote for a sales tax hovers just below two-thirds, consistent with prior polling and election results.
- ▶ Support messaging, especially about oversight by local firefighters and chief and proactive fire protection efforts, resonates with voters, though does little to move support.
- ▶ The measure is vulnerable to opposition messaging, particularly that which focuses on its regressive and evergreen nature and the number of taxes already in place, but support remains above a majority.

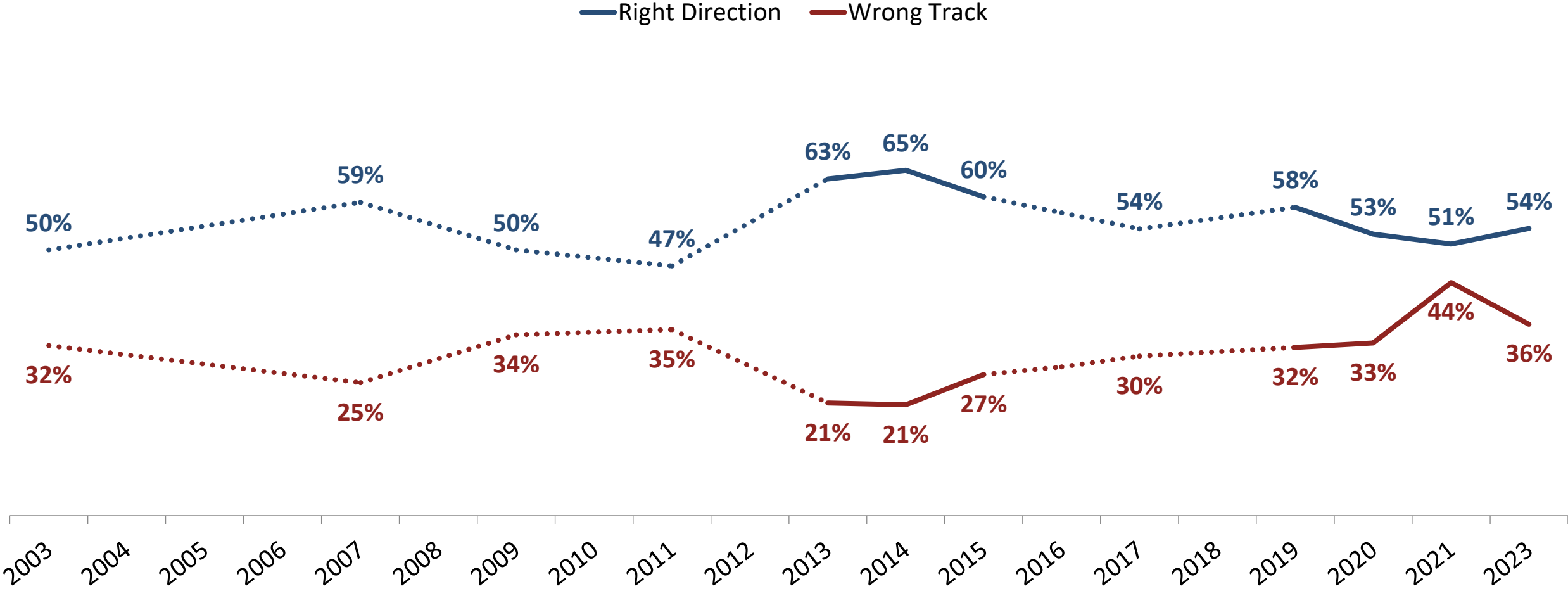


Issue Environment

Sonoma County Right Direction/Wrong Track



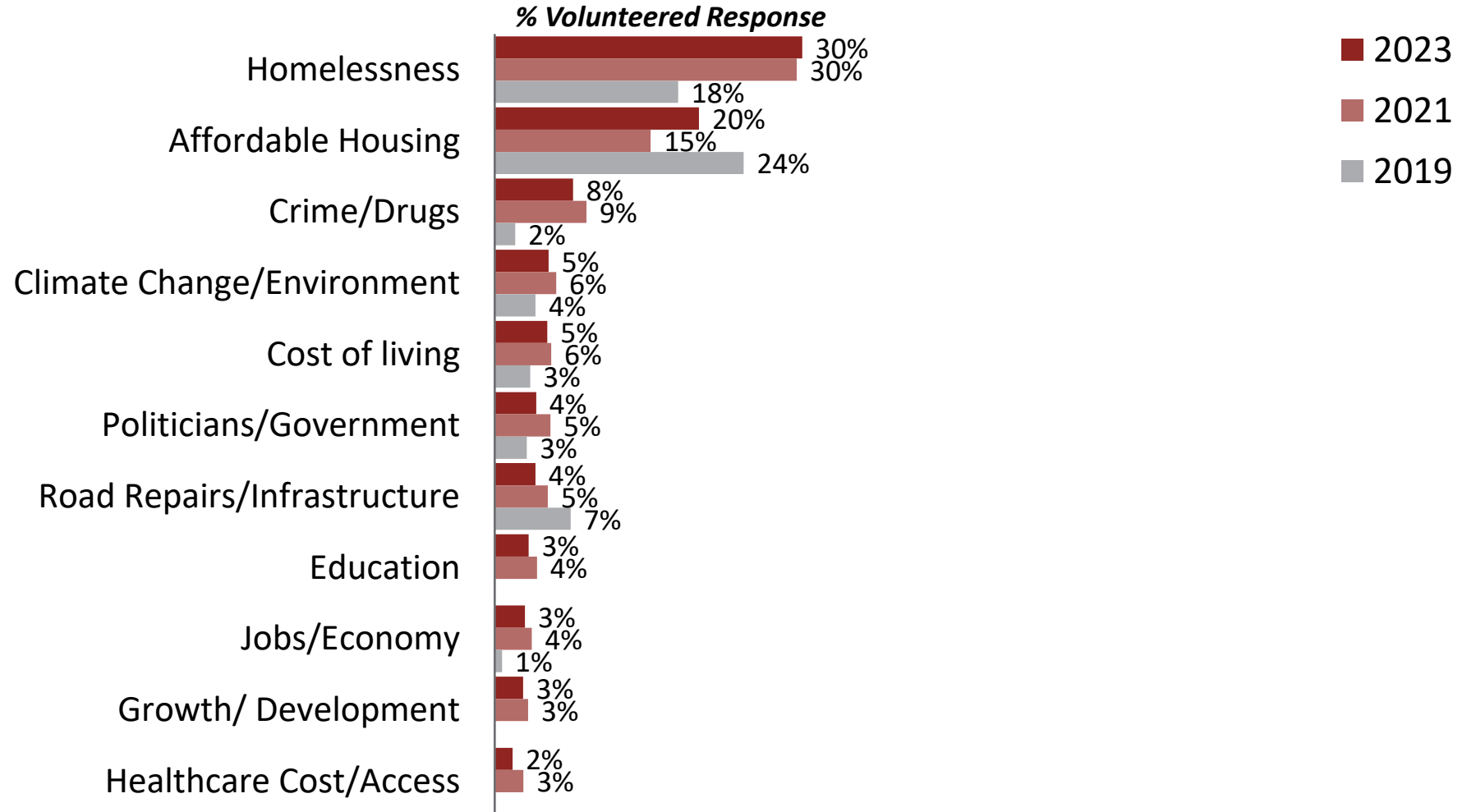
About half of voters are optimistic about the direction of the county.



Q4. Do you feel that things in Sonoma County are going in the right direction or do you feel things are off on the wrong track?

Most Important Problem – Open Ended

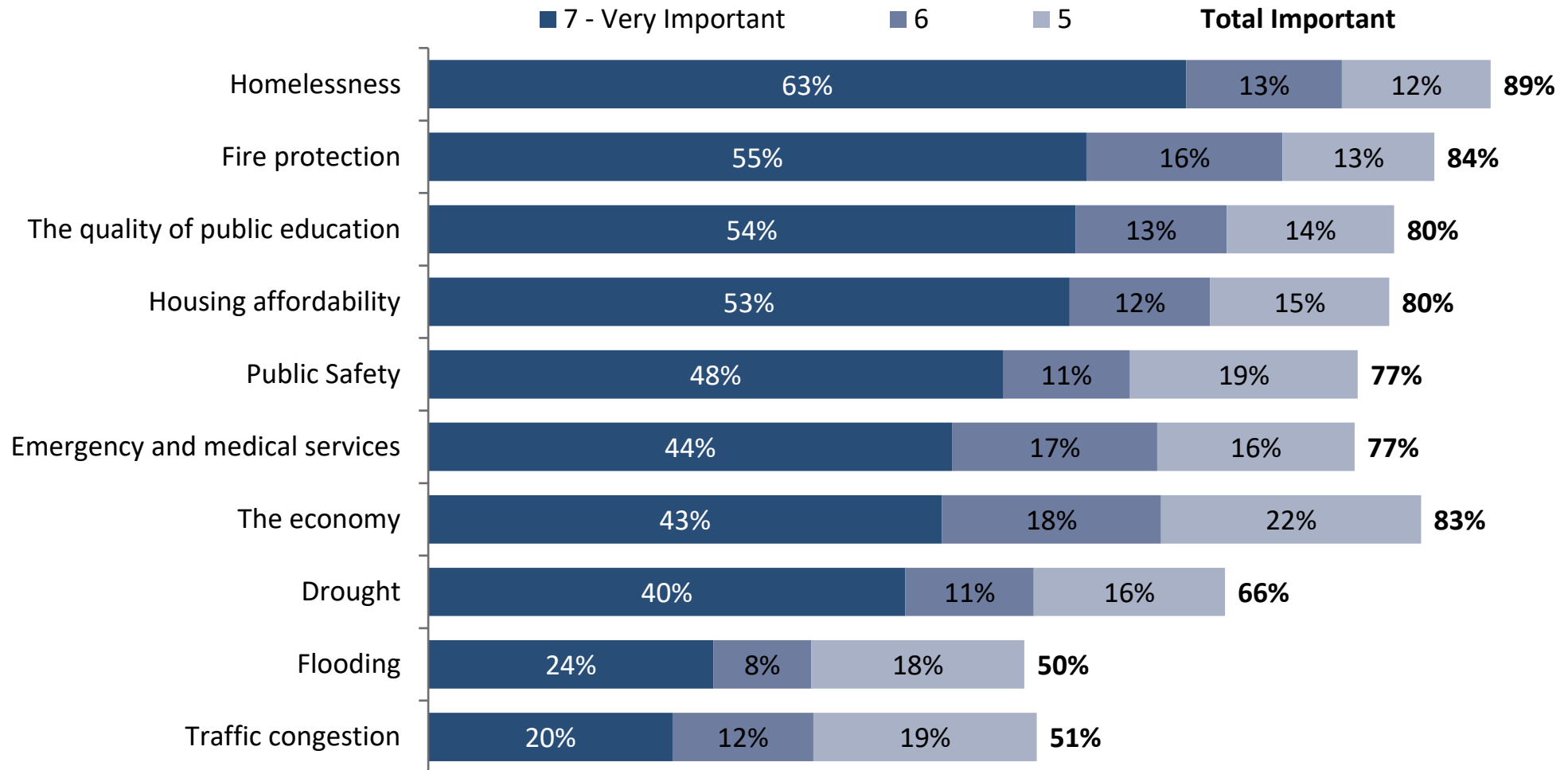
Homelessness remains a top-of-mind problem for voters.



Q5. What do you think is the most important problem facing Sonoma County today?
 (OPEN END, VERBATIM RESPONSES CODED INTO CATEGORIES, FIRST RESPONSE ACCEPTED)

Issue Importance

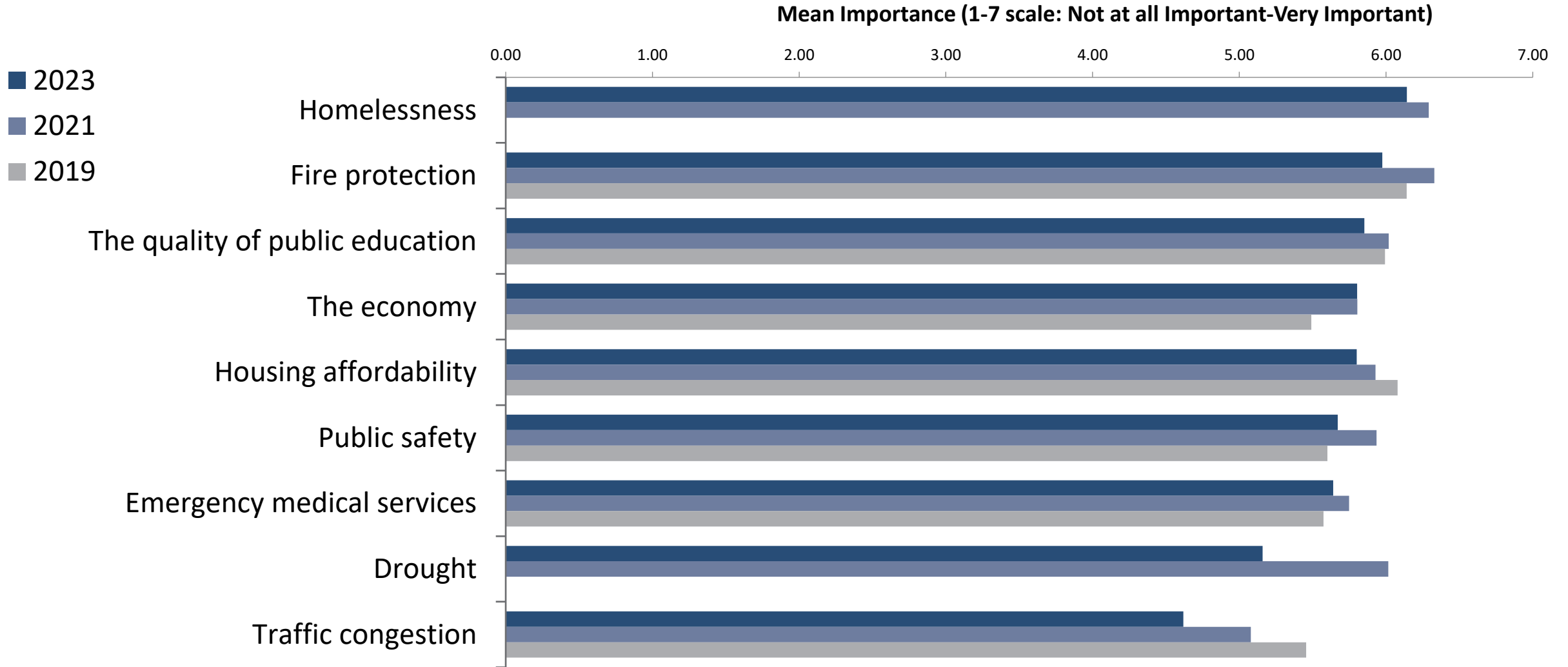
Fire protection is a top concern for voters, along with homelessness.



Q6-15. I'm going to read you a list of issues in Sonoma County. For each one, please tell me how important that issue is to you, using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not at all important, and 7 means very important.

Issue Importance Over Time

Voter prioritization has been largely consistent over time, with homelessness and fire protection remaining top issues.



Q6-14. I'm going to read you a list of issues in Sonoma County. For each one, please tell me how important that issue is to you, using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not at all important, and 7 means very important.

Self-Reported Local Fire Alert System Usage



A majority of respondents report using local fire alert systems.

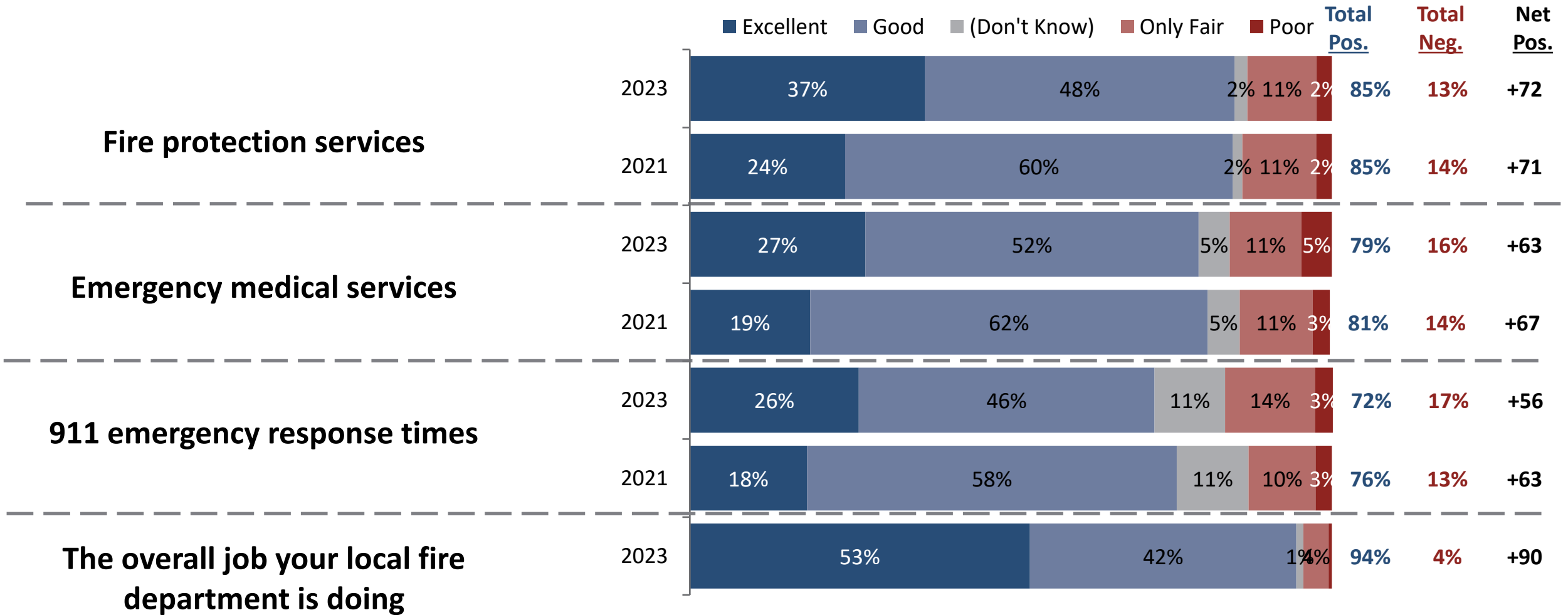
Are you using any type of local fire alert system like Nixle or Watch Duty to get alerts about local fires in Sonoma County?



Ratings Over Time

Voters continue to give high marks for fire and emergency services in the county.

Please rate each of the following in Sonoma County...



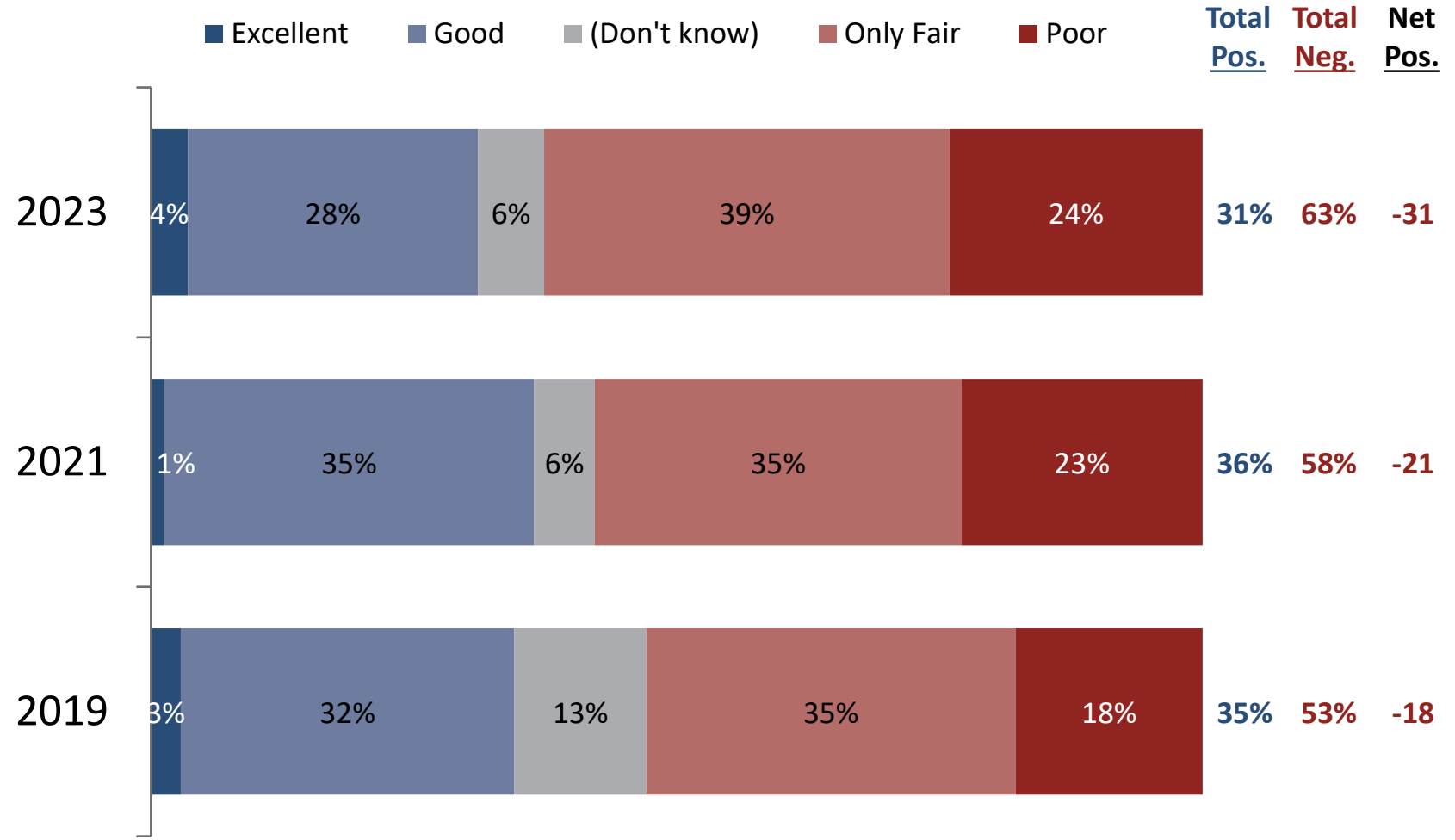
Q18-21. Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, please rate each of the following for Sonoma County.*

*Differences in may be attributed to question wording changes over time.

Sonoma County Job Ratings

Voters do not feel positively about the job Sonoma County is doing at managing its money.

The job the county government is doing managing its budget and finances

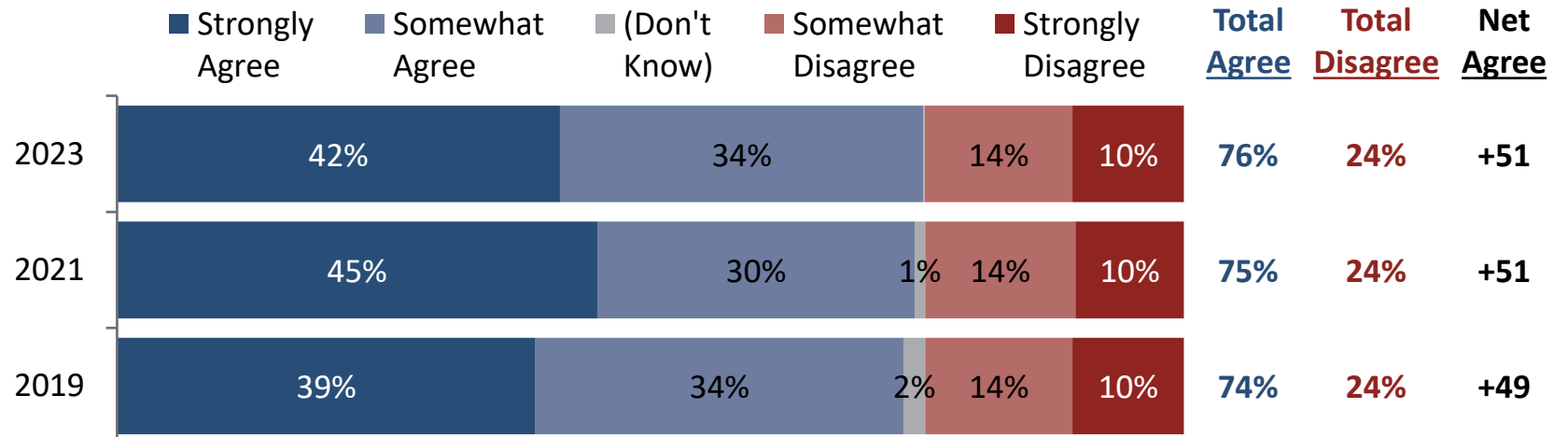


Q18-21. Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, please rate each of the following for Sonoma County.

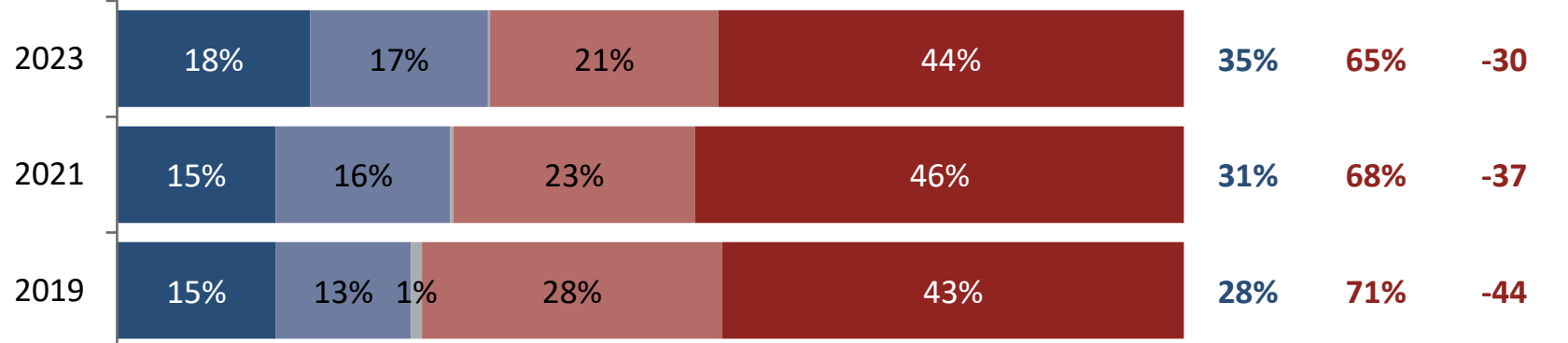
Sonoma County Voter Attitudes Over Time

While a third say they'd vote against any tax increase, voters recognize the need for high-quality fire protection services, even if it means raising taxes.

It is crucial to have high-quality fire protection services, even if it means raising taxes



I will vote no on any tax increase, no matter what it is for

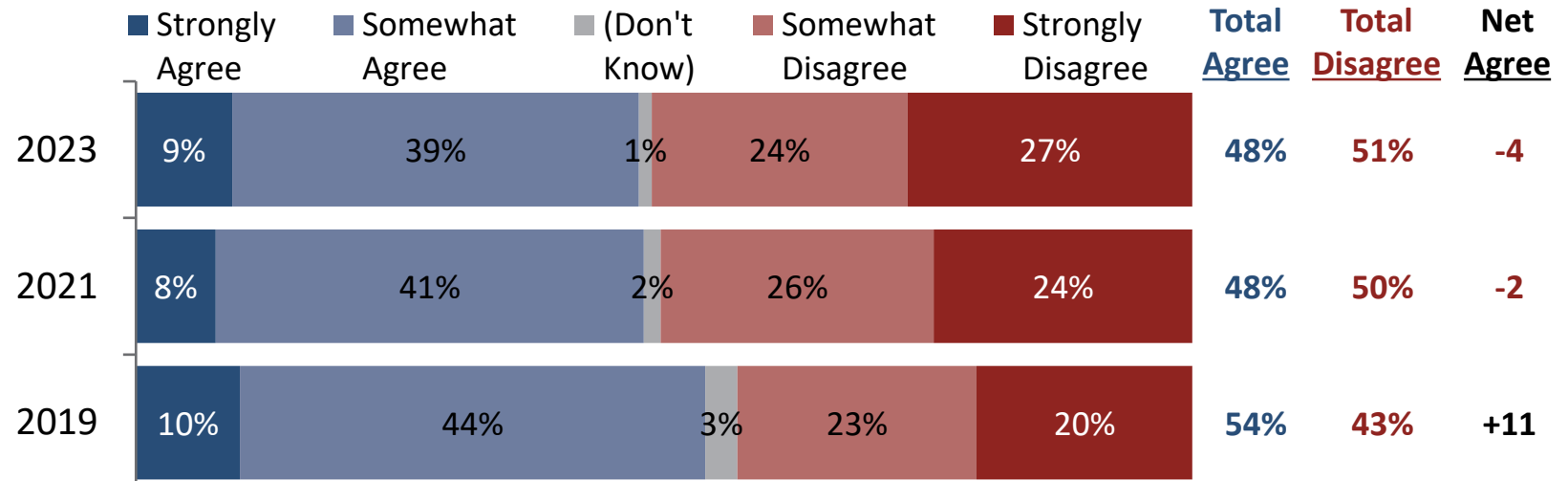


Q22/24. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

Sonoma County Voter Attitudes Over Time

Voters trust local firefighters and chiefs to make revenue spending decisions for a fire protection measure more than they do the county.

I trust Sonoma County to properly handle our tax dollars



I will only vote for a fire protection tax measure if I know that the spending decisions will be made by local fire chiefs and firefighters



Q23/25. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.



Potential Sales Tax Measure

Ballot Language Comparison

There have been slight variations in the language of the ballot question over time.

07/2019 – POLL

To improve emergency medical services, provide improved wildfire prevention and protection, reduce response times for 911 emergency calls, and modernize fire protection equipment, shall the County of Sonoma establish a [Sample A: ½ / Sample B: ¼] cent sales tax countywide for a 25-year period, providing approximately [Sample A: \$45,000,000 / Sample B: \$23,000,000] annually, with citizens' oversight and annual audits?

09/2019 – POLL

To improve local fire prevention and protection by: installing emergency warning sirens and alerting systems; improving vegetation management to prevent the spread of wildfire; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters and emergency personnel; and, modernizing fire department equipment, facilities and stations, shall the County of Sonoma establish a half cent sales tax until ended by voters, providing approximately \$45,000,000 annually, with annual audits and citizen oversight?

03/2020 – Measure G

To improve local fire prevention and protection by: installing emergency warning sirens and alerting systems; improving vegetation management to prevent the spread of wildfire; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters and emergency personnel; and, modernizing fire department equipment, facilities and stations, shall Sonoma County establish a 1/2-cent sales tax until ended by voters, providing approximately \$51,000,000 annually, with annual audits and citizen oversight, and increase its annual appropriations limit to allow expenditure of the proceeds?

12/2021 - POLL

To improve and enhance local fire prevention, protection, and emergency and disaster response throughout Sonoma County by: improving countywide vegetation management by reducing flammable brush to prevent wildfire spread; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters; and, updating firefighting facilities and equipment, shall Sonoma County establish a ½ cent sales tax until ended by voters, providing approximately \$51,000,000 annually, with annual audits and citizen oversight, and increase its annual appropriations limit to allow expenditure of the proceeds?

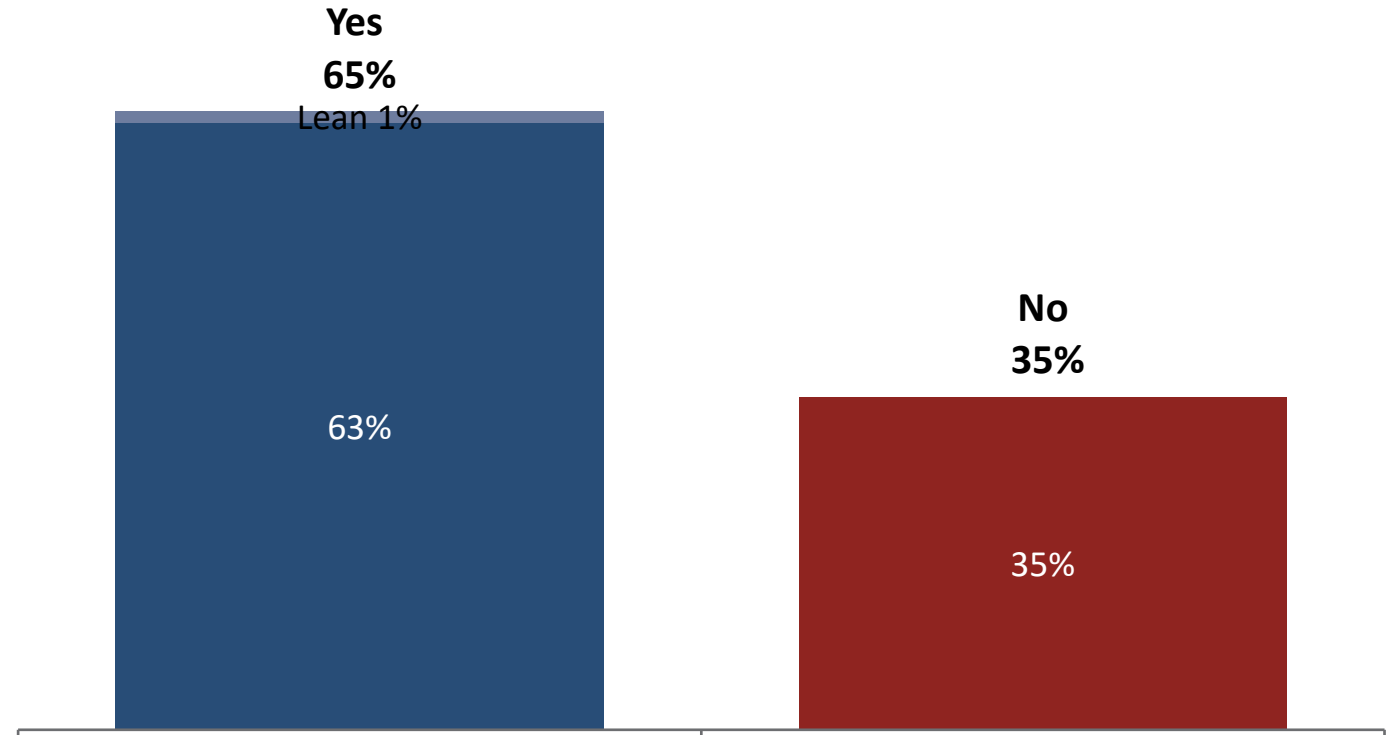
03/23 – POLL

To improve and enhance local fire protection, emergency paramedic services and disaster response throughout Sonoma County by: improving vegetation management to prevent wildfire spread; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters; reducing response times; and updating firefighting facilities and equipment, shall Sonoma County establish a ½ cent sales tax until ended by voters, providing approximately \$60,000,000 annually, with annual audits and citizen oversight, and increase its annual appropriations limit to allow expenditure of the proceeds?

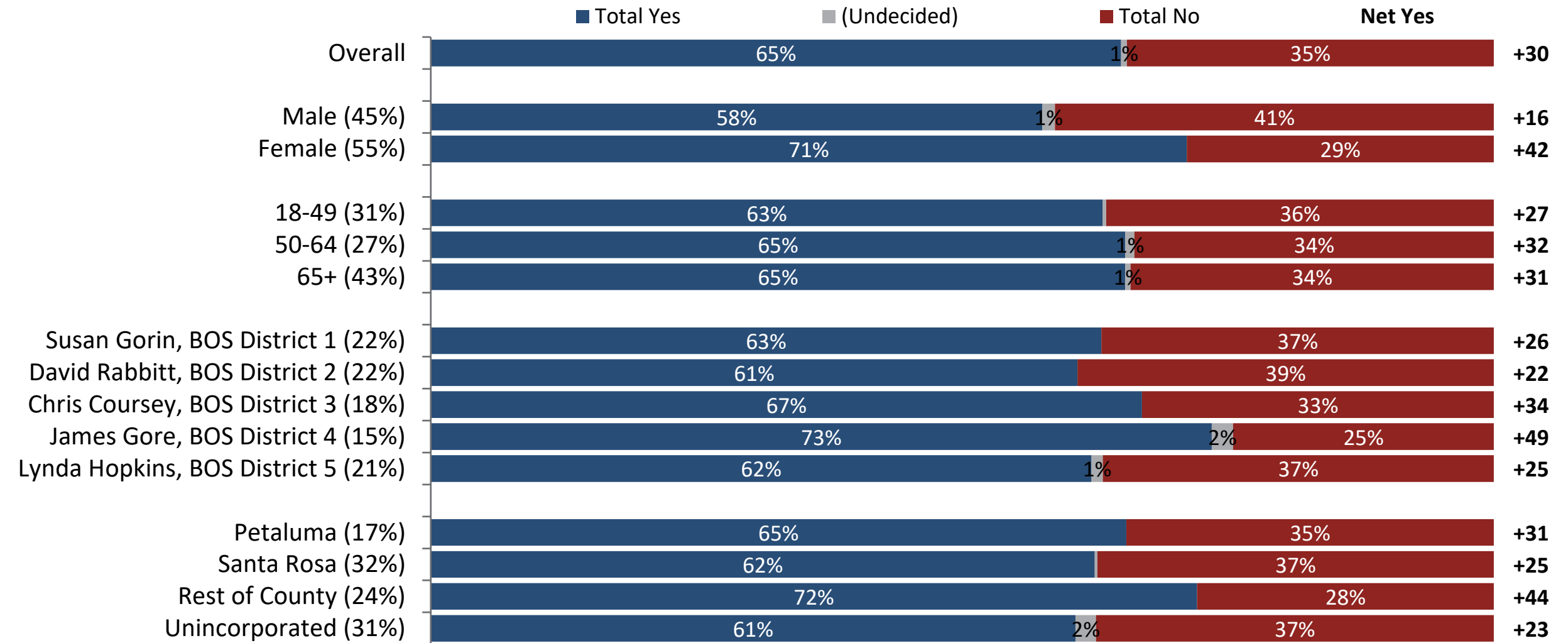
Sales Tax Measure

Initial support is well above a simple majority, but short of two-thirds.

To improve and enhance local fire protection, emergency paramedic services and disaster response throughout Sonoma County by: improving vegetation management to prevent wildfire spread; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters; reducing response times; and updating firefighting facilities and equipment, shall Sonoma County establish a ½ cent sales tax until ended by voters, providing approximately \$60,000,000 annually, with annual audits and citizen oversight, and increase its annual appropriations limit to allow expenditure of the proceeds?



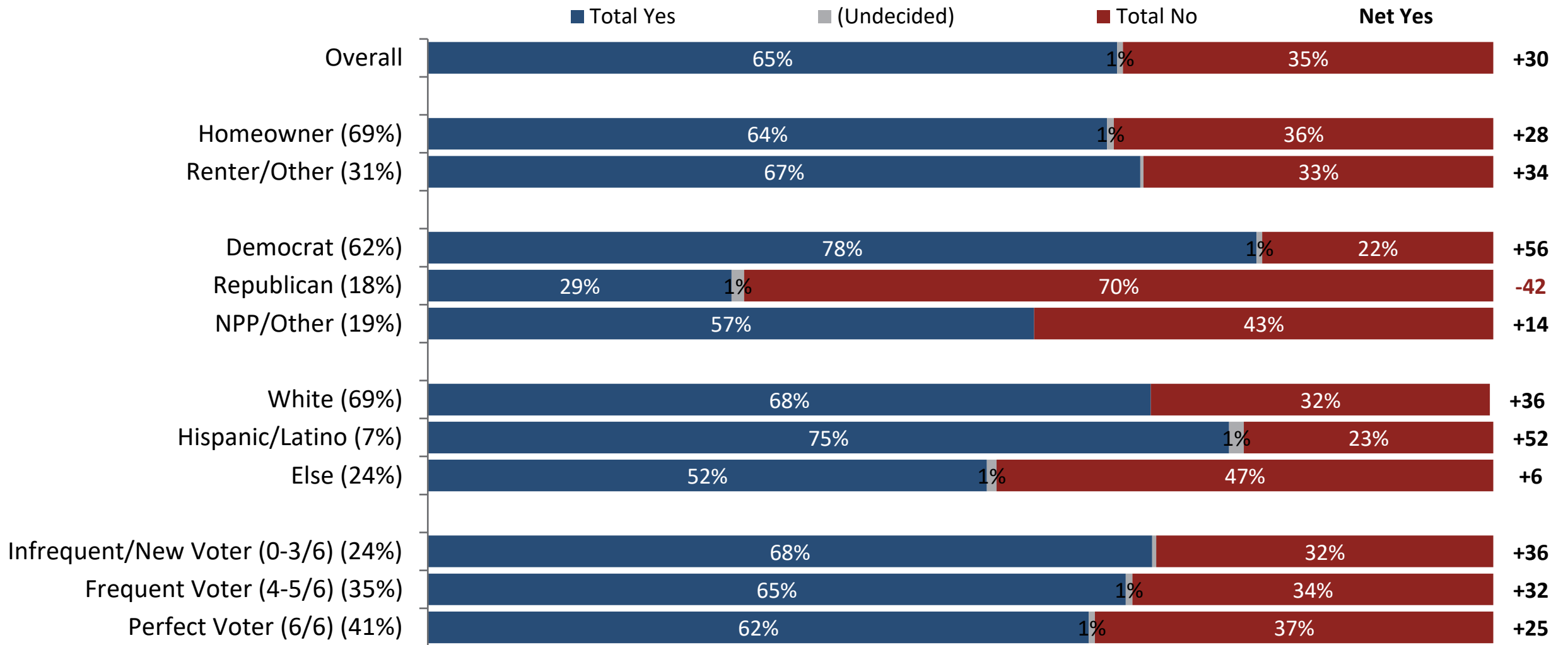
Sales Tax Measure by Subgroups



Q16. If the election were held today, would you vote yes to approve or no to reject this measure?

Margin of Error ranges from ±14.29% - 5.76%

Sales Tax Measure by Subgroups



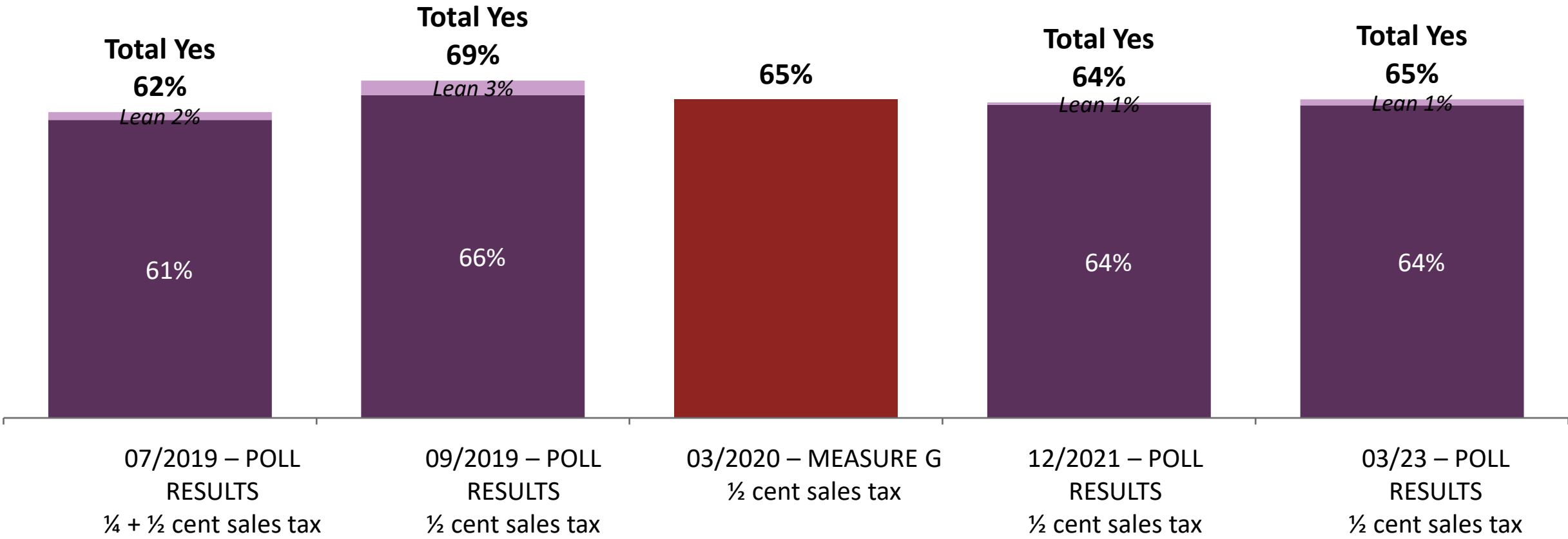
Q16. If the election were held today, would you vote yes to approve or no to reject this measure?

Margin of Error ranges from ±14.29% - 5.76%

Special Sales Tax Historical Context

Support for a sales tax measure for fire prevention and protection has historically hovered around, but usually below, the 67% threshold.

- Measure Failed
- Poll Results



Measure Support Messages

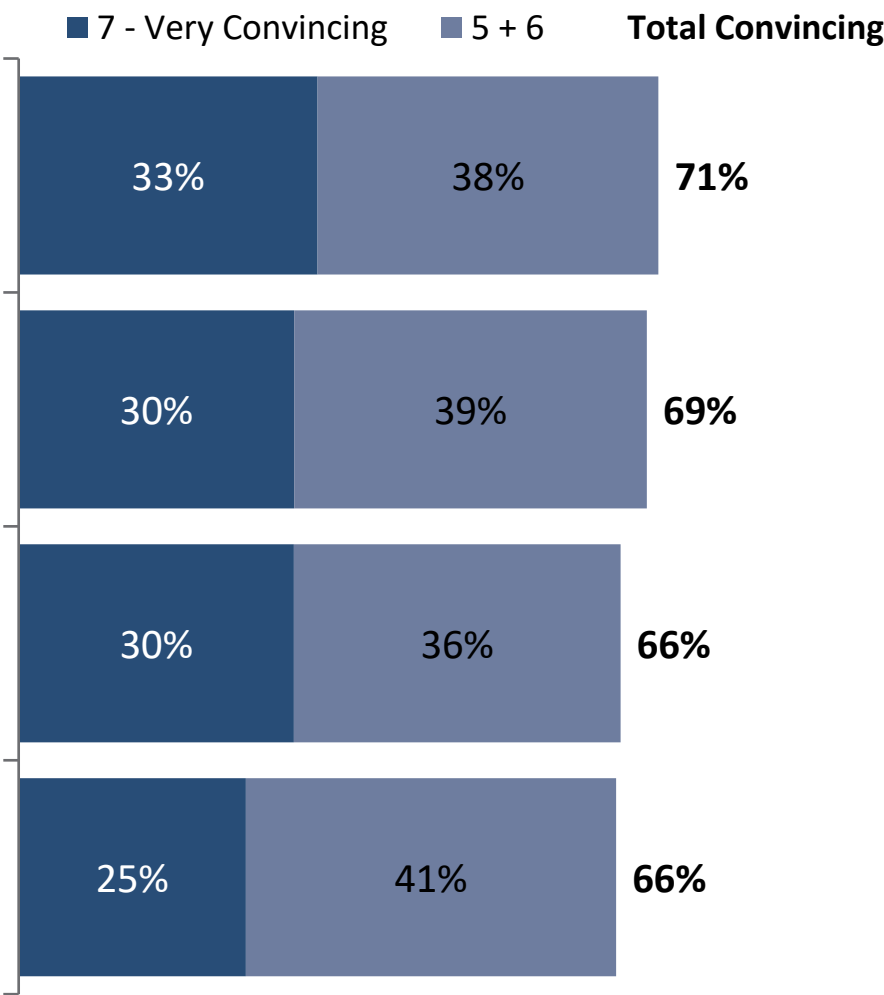
Oversight by firefighters and chiefs is popular with voters, as is vegetation management and other proactive efforts.

ACCOUNTABILITY: All money raised by this measure will be spend here in local fire districts to provide fire protection and emergency response services. Strict financial accountability provisions, including oversight by citizens and local firefighters and chiefs and independent audits, will ensure money is spent properly, and that non is taken by the state or used for any other purpose.

VEG MANAGEMENT: This measure will fund critical vegetation management efforts which will create resilient landscapes making our community safer and reducing the likelihood of future wildfires. Reducing hazardous vegetation and maintaining fuel breaks is critical to reduce the risk of wildfires in our community and to help prevent wildfires from spreading into our residential and commercial areas.

CONTINUED BATTLE: With longer, hotter, and more volatile fire seasons, local fire departments need to be proactive in protecting our community from wildfires and helping save lives during dire-related emergencies. This problem isn't going away, and we must find a way to minimize the potential for fires and the impact they have.

FIREFIGHTERS – VOLUNTEERS: Many local firefighters are volunteers and in recent years volunteer numbers have been declining. This measure will provide the resources needed to attract and retain full-time employed firefighters to provide consistent and quicker response to all emergencies.



Q26-34. Next, I'd like to read you statements from people who *support* the proposed measure. After you hear each statement, please tell me how convincing it is as a reason to vote *for* the measure.

Measure Support Messages

Other messages are also convincing to about six in ten voters.

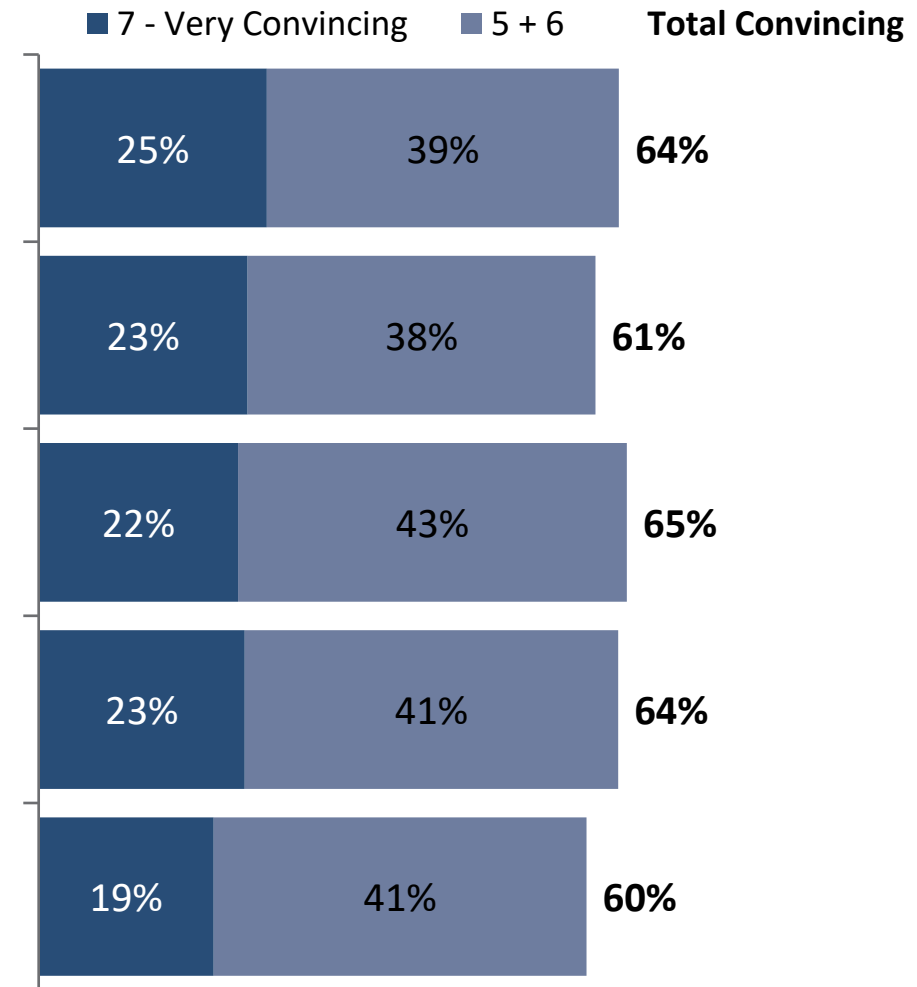
PARAMEDICS: When an emergency strikes, we want to know that help will be there for us or a loved one when we most need it. This measure will support hiring more emergency paramedics and medical personnel to more quickly respond to a variety of emergencies in our community, from medical emergencies to floods and fires.

EQUIPMENT: The fire engines, fire stations, and other equipment of local fire stations are becoming outdated and are at risk of breaking down. This measure would replace outdated firefighting engines and other emergency equipment, as well as update fire stations to allow for 24/7 staffing, resulting in faster response times and quicker handling of rescue situations.

FIRE CHIEFS: This measure was written by local firefighters and fire chiefs, who best know the challenges and needs for fire protection in our community. They believe the measure addresses a critical need facing Sonoma County and are coming together to gather signatures and generate community support.

FLOODING AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS: Severe drought, fires, and floods are all putting a strain on our emergency services. This measure will fund the staff, equipment, and other resources needed to ensure that emergency services are there promptly and fully prepared when you need them.

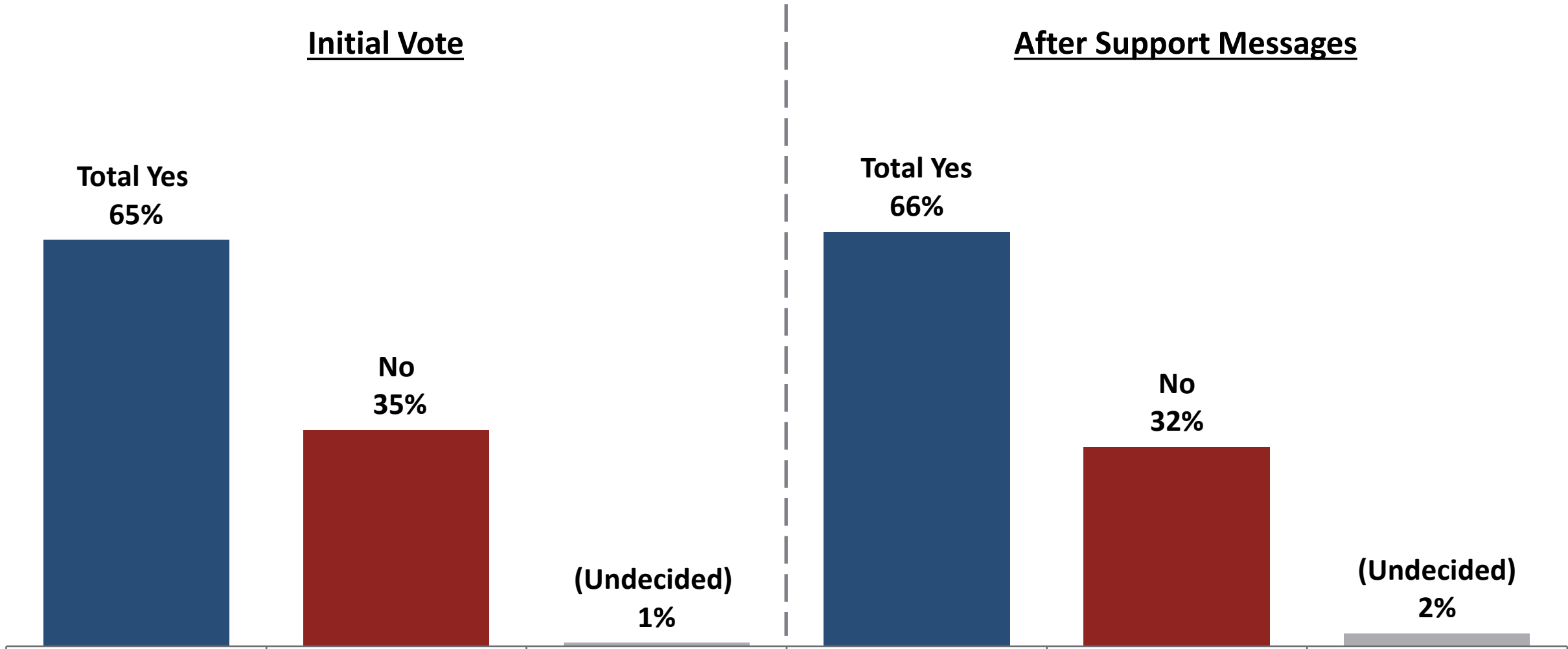
ONGOING FUNDING: This measure will provide an ongoing source of funding that our local fire departments can rely on. This will help with staffing and resource decisions to ensure we have the fire and emergency protection and response we need to stay safe in the years to come.



Q26-34. Next, I'd like to read you statements from people who *support* the proposed measure. After you hear each statement, please tell me how convincing it is as a reason to vote *for* the measure.

Vote After Support Messages

Support messaging does little to move the vote.



Opposition Message Convincingness

Opposition messaging about the number of taxes, and the evergreen and regressive nature of this measure, is convincing.

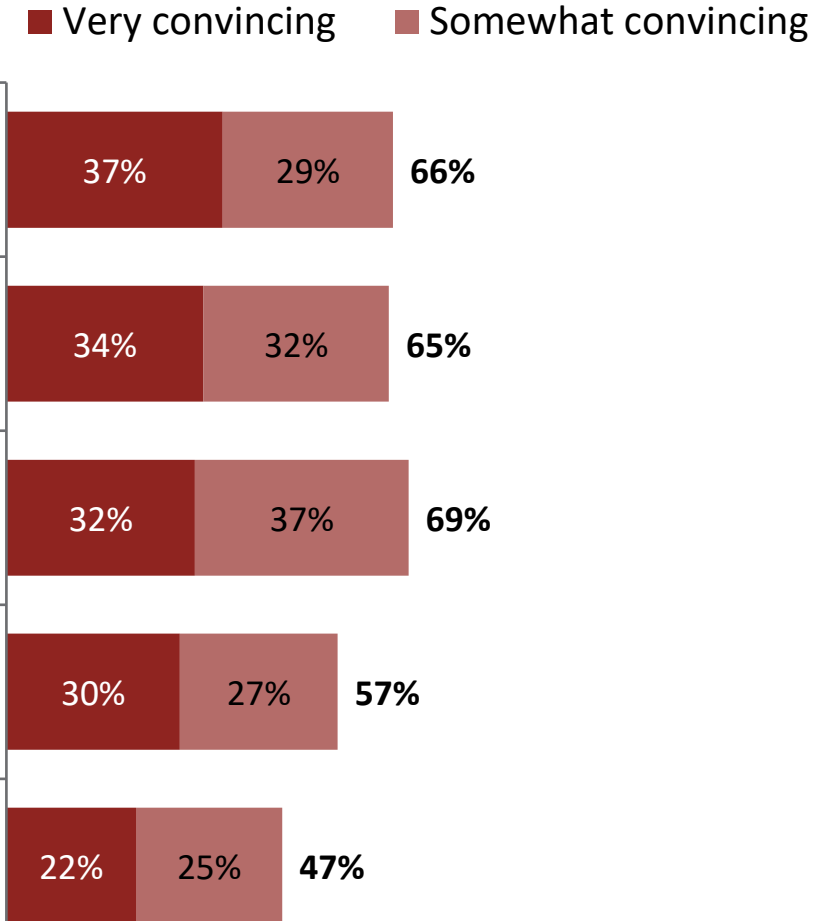
EVERGREEN: Most tax measures have an expiration date, but this measure is permanent with no end date. That means we'll continue to be taxed with no end in sight.

TOO MANY TAXES: Now is not the time for this major tax increase. Taxes in Sonoma County are already too high and we're already paying extra taxes for fire and emergency service. The County just needs to manage its money better and control overinflated pension costs.

REGRESSIVE: A sales tax is regressive and hurts those who can least afford it, including low-income families, seniors living on fixed-incomes, and those who have lost everything in the pandemic.

UTILITIES: The local utility company is the true problem and they're already increasing rates to address fire issues. They should be the ones paying for wildfire prevention, not us.

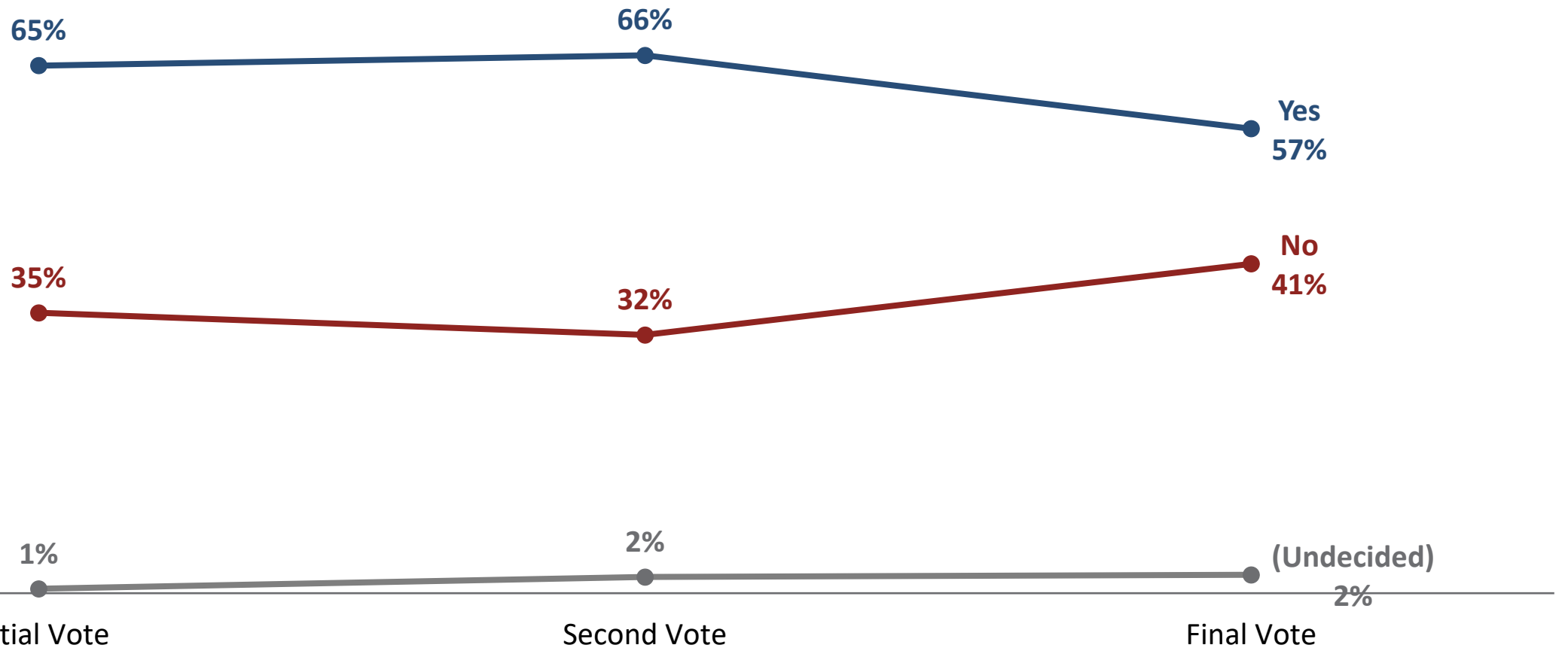
HOMEOWNERS: We should have to pay more taxes just because some people aren't maintaining their own property. They should be forced to get their properties under control, and we shouldn't have to pay for it.



Q36-40. Next, I'd like to read you statements from people who *oppose* the proposed measure. After each one, please tell me how convincing that statement is as a reason to vote *against* the measure – very convincing, somewhat convincing, not too convincing, or not at all convincing.

Final Vote Progression

Opposition messaging drives down support, but it remains above a majority.



Q41. Now given everything you've heard, would you vote yes to approve or no to reject the proposed ½ sales tax measure for Sonoma County?

Conclusions and Recommendations

- ▶ Initial support for the ballot measure matches historical data, hovering around two-thirds.
- ▶ Opposition messaging demonstrates a level of vulnerability. However, support remains above 50%.
- ▶ Voters recognize the need for strong local fire protection services and give high marks to their local fire departments. Framing this as the measure of fire fighters and fire chiefs, and not of the County, will be critical to its success.



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