

# Humboldt County Voter Views of Potential Ballot Measures






*Key Findings of a Survey Conducted September 22-28, 2023*



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY



# Survey Methodology

<b>Dates</b>	September 22-28, 2023
<b>Survey Type</b>	Dual-mode Voter Survey
<b>Research Population</b>	Likely November 2024 Voters in Humboldt County
<b>Total Interviews</b>	661
<b>Margin of Sampling Error</b>	(Full Sample) $\pm 4.0\%$ at the 95% Confidence Level (Half Sample) $\pm 5.7\%$ at the 95% Confidence Level
<b>Contact Methods</b>	 Telephone Calls  Email Invitations  Text Invitations
<b>Data Collection Modes</b>	 Telephone Interviews  Online Interviews
<b>Survey Tracking</b>	Comparisons to Research from 2021, 2020, 2018, 2016, 2014 and 2013

*(Note: Not All Results Will Sum to 100% Due to Rounding)*

# Survey Goals and Approach

- Our objective was to evaluate the viability of either a general-purpose or special-purpose measure dedicated to road repair and safety
- To do so, voters were divided into equally sized subsamples, each hearing only one measure, either:
  - The general-purpose measure (50% +1 threshold)
  - The special-purpose road repair measure (2/3 vote threshold)
- Everyone was asked contextual questions about need for funding generally and specifically for roads, as well as problems facing the County
- All voters heard informational statements, randomized, with some more specific to road repair needs
- Then a re-vote
- Critical statements randomized, with some specific to the special-purpose measure only asked of that half sample
- Final re-votes
- Lastly, we evaluated a potential fiscal management measure, first with a potential 75-word ballot label, then by testing each potential provision individually

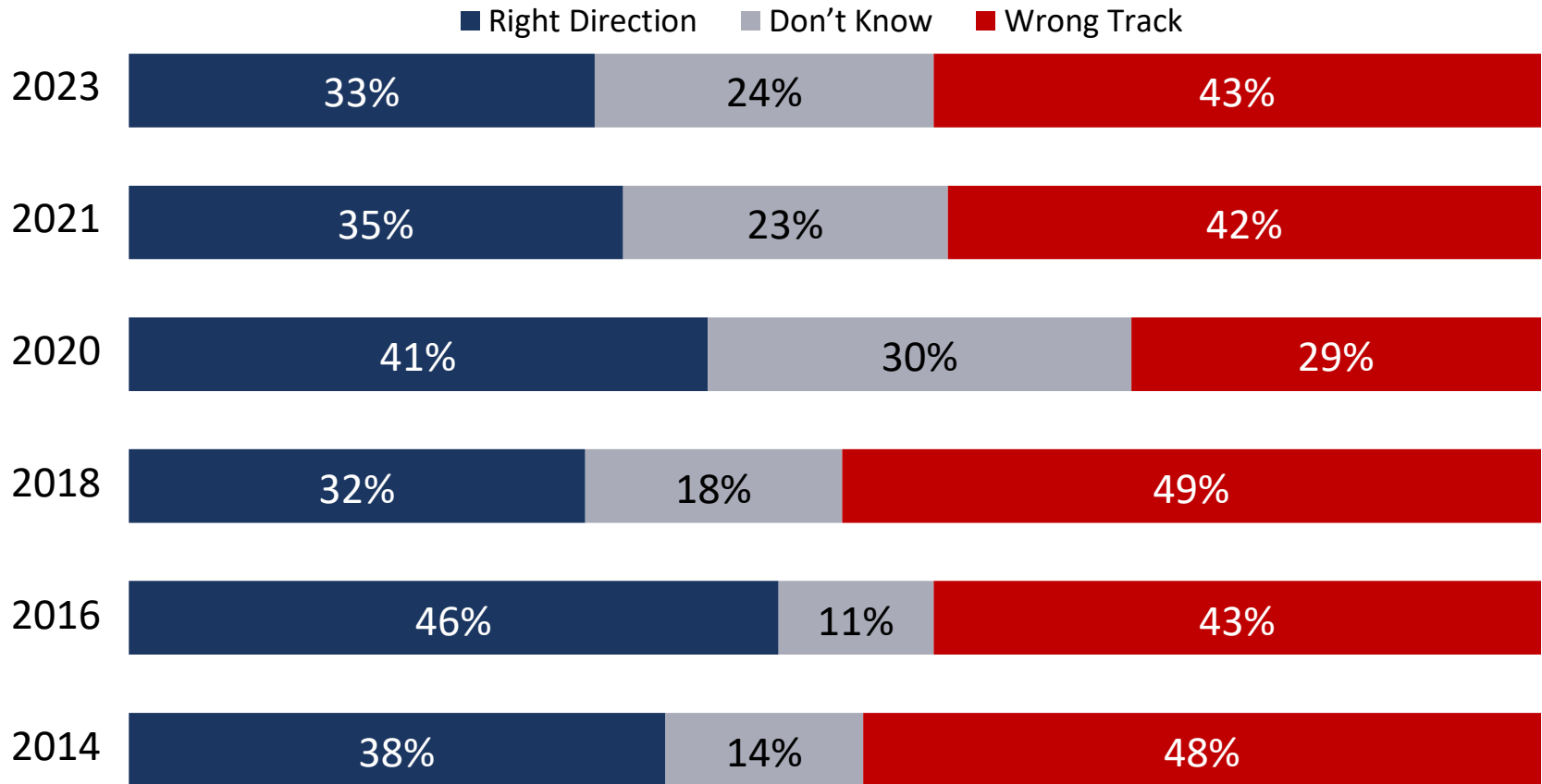




# **Views of Humboldt County**

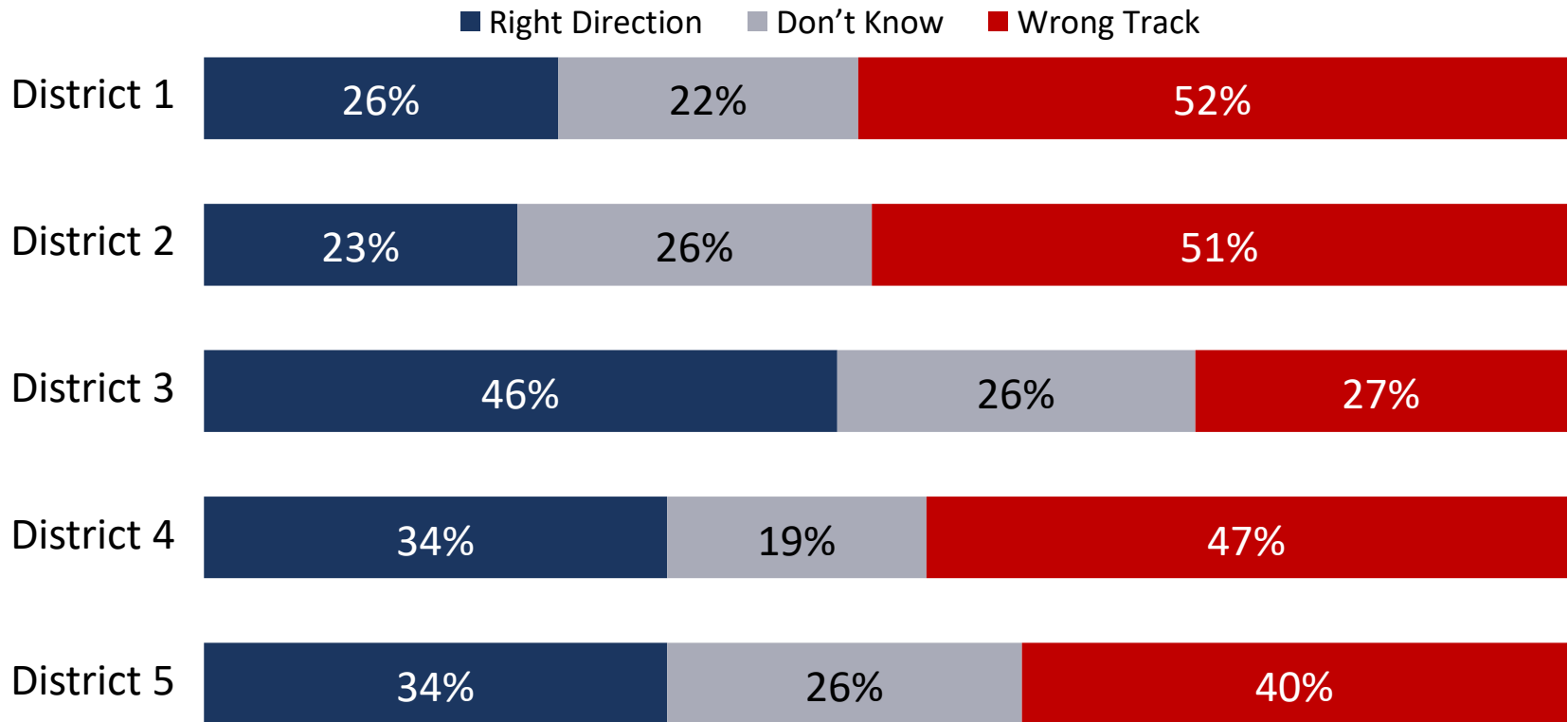
# A plurality of voters views the County as on the wrong track

*Would you say things in Humboldt County are going in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?*



# Voters are most optimistic in District 3.

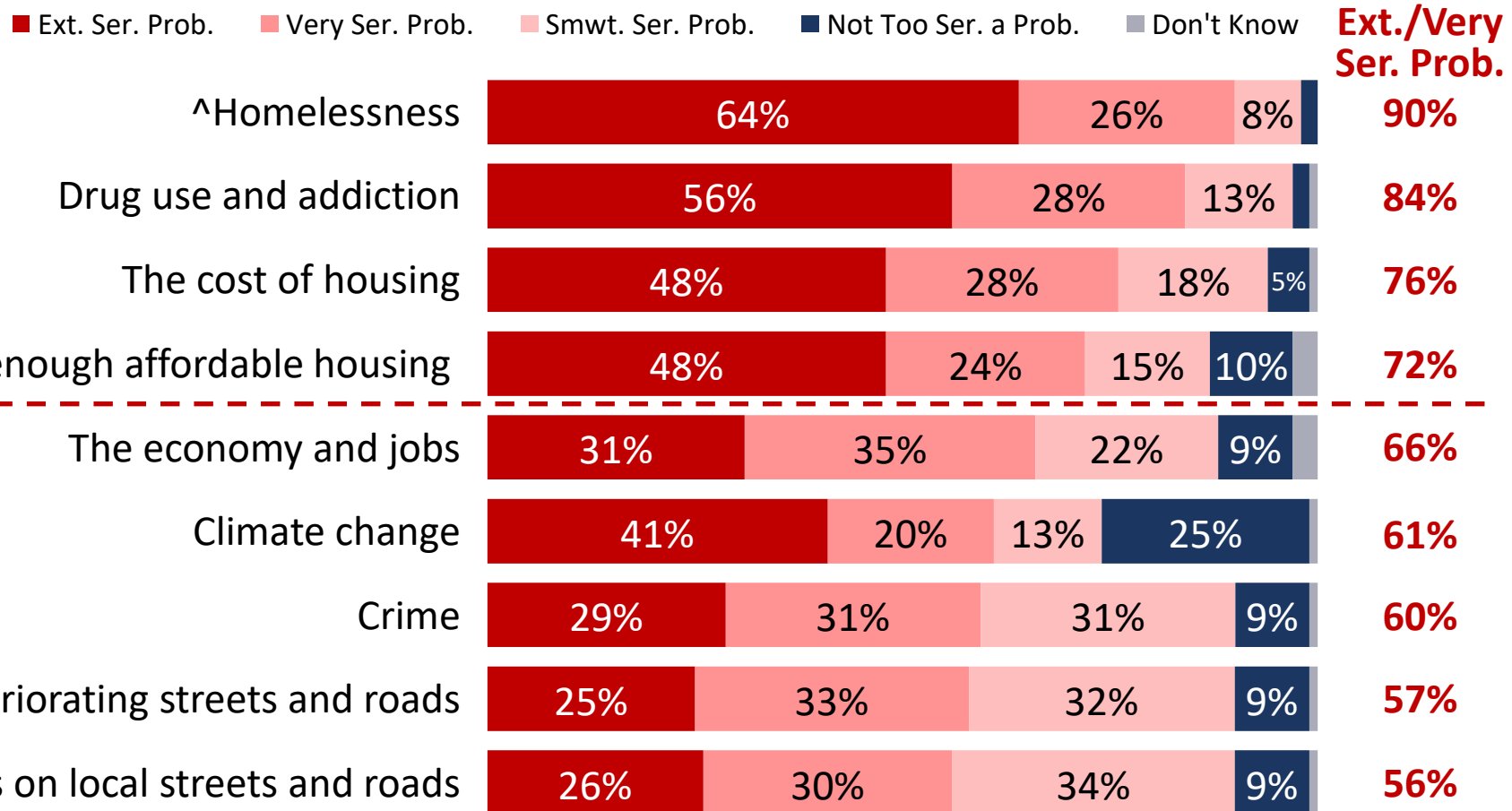
*Would you say things in Humboldt County are going in the right direction, or are they off on the wrong track?  
(By Supervisorial District)*



# Views of county government and the Board have continued to decline.

Organization (Total Approve)	2014	2016	2018	2021	2023	Difference (2021-2023)
Humboldt County Auditor/Controller	--	--	39%	30%	38%	<b>+8%</b>
The Humboldt County Board of Supervisors	62%	59%	52%	45%	42%	<b>-3%</b>
Humboldt County Government Overall	68%	65%	50%	54%	49%	<b>-5%</b>

# Homelessness, drug use, and housing costs are key concerns for Humboldt County voters.



I'm going to read you a list of issues, and I'd like you to tell me how serious a problem you think each one is in Humboldt County. Please tell me whether you consider it to be an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not too serious a problem for people who live in Humboldt County. ^Not Part of Split Sample



# A majority are concerned about waste and inefficiency; transit is a very low-ranking issue.

■ Ext. Ser. Prob. ■ Very Ser. Prob. ■ Smwt. Ser. Prob. ■ Not Too Ser. a Prob. ■ Don't Know

**Ext./Very Ser. Prob.**

^Waste and inefficiency in local government



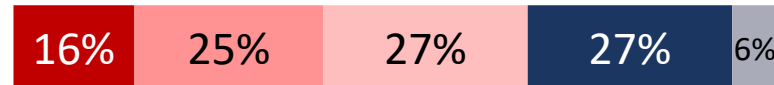
**51%**

The risk of wildfires



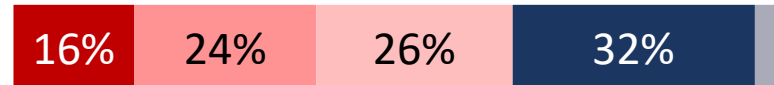
**47%**

Not enough public transit options



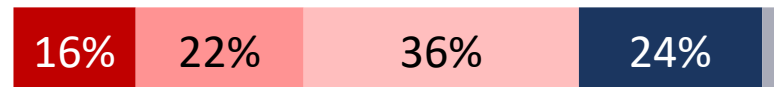
**41%**

Drought



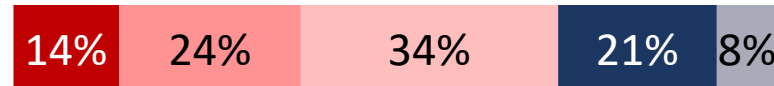
**40%**

^Traffic safety



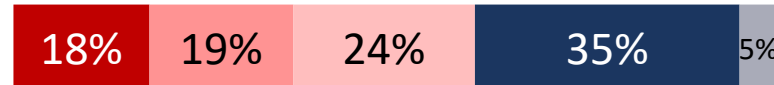
**38%**

^Narrow or deteriorating bridges



**38%**

^The amount you pay in local taxes



**37%**

Unsafe conditions for cyclists and pedestrians

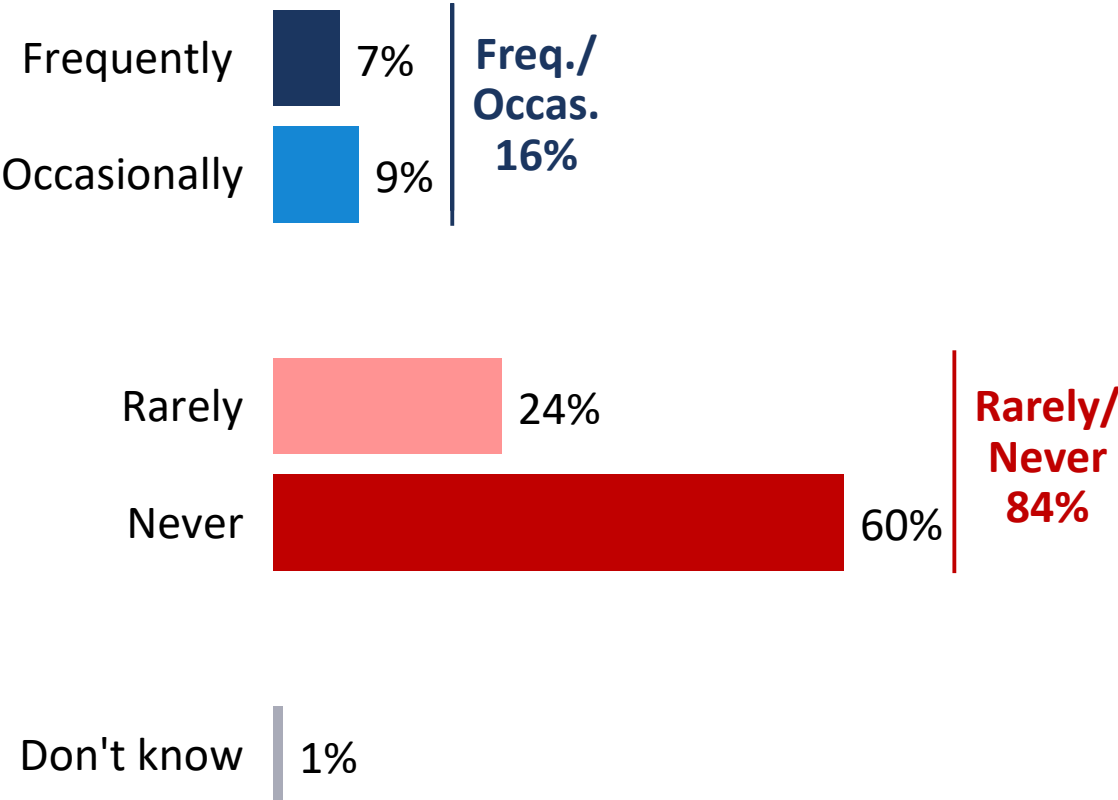


**35%**

*I'm going to read you a list of issues, and I'd like you to tell me how serious a problem you think each one is in Humboldt County. Please tell me whether you consider it to be an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not too serious a problem for people who live in Humboldt County. ^Not Part of Split Sample*

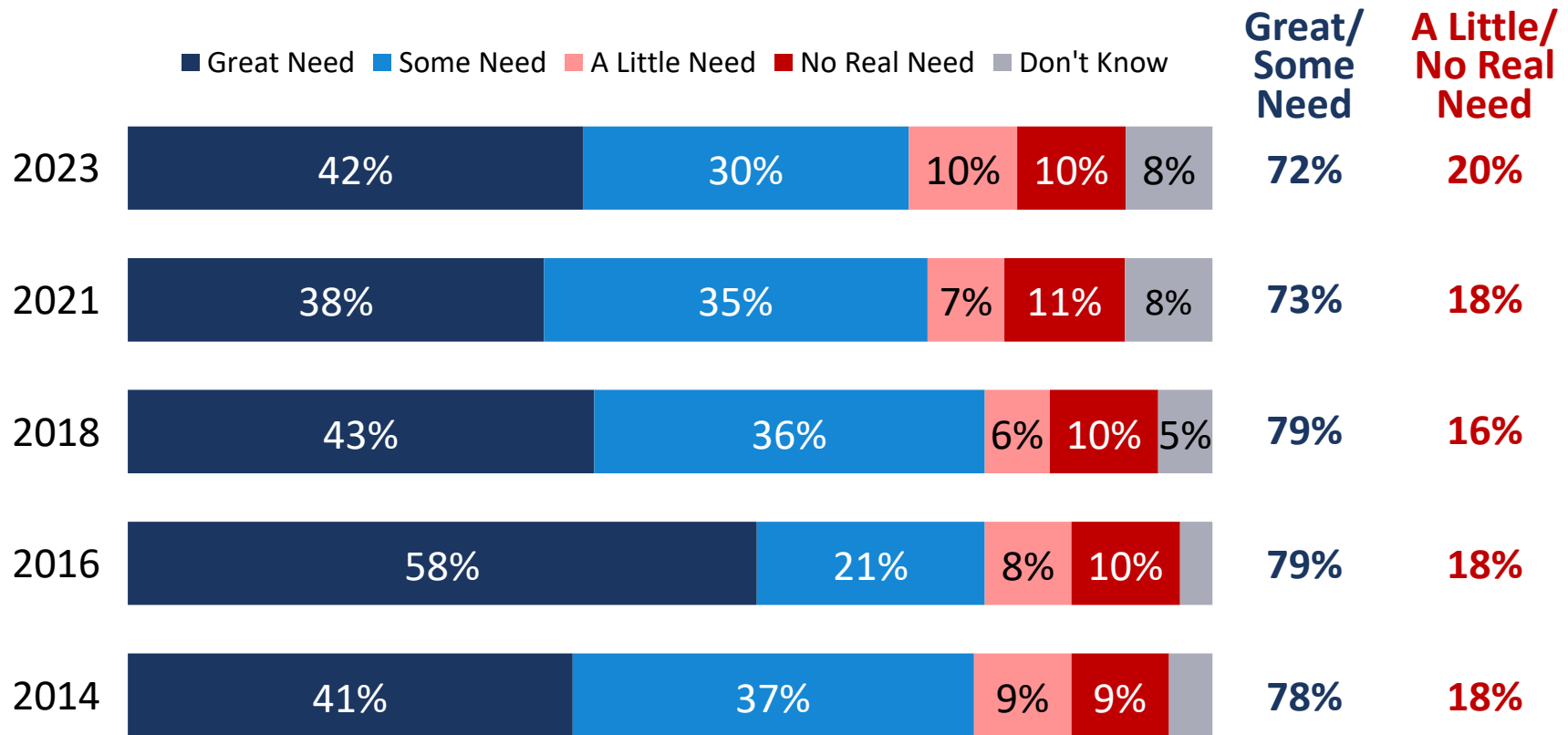
# Few people in the county ride transit frequently.

*How often do you use public transportation in your community?*



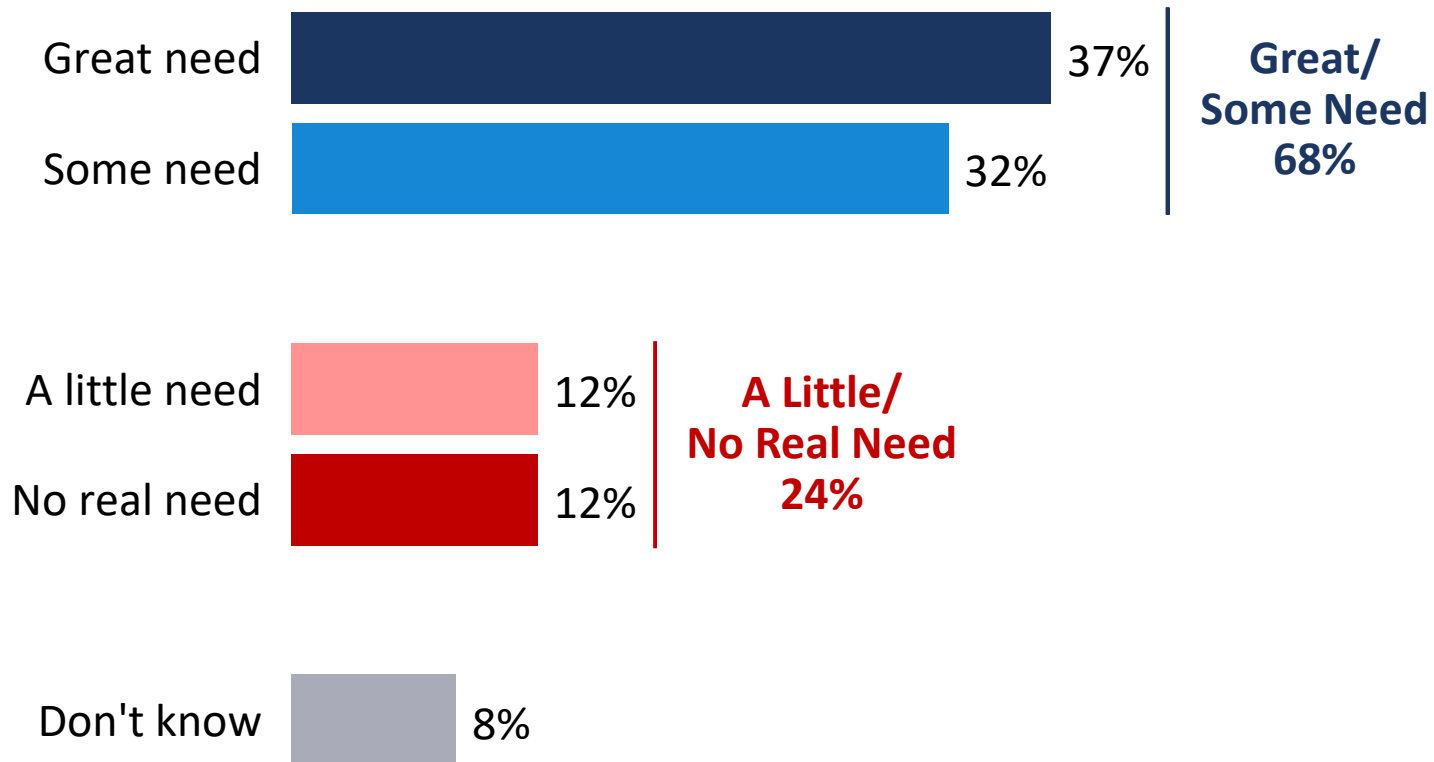
# Voters continue to recognize a high level of need for additional funds for essential services.

*Would you say that to provide essential services, the County of Humboldt has a great need for additional funding, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funding?*



# Voters also see a need for funding for street and road repair and maintenance.

*Would you say that to repair and maintain local streets and roads, the County of Humboldt has a great need for additional funding, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funding?*





# **Views of a Potential Revenue Measure**

# Two hypothetical revenue measure approaches were tested with voters.

**General Purpose**  
(50.1% Threshold)

## **Humboldt County Local Funding Measure.**

To:

- Repair/upgrade aging County roads, fix potholes, and make the County eligible for additional state and federal funding;
- Improve driver and pedestrian safety;
- Increase road safety for emergency vehicles and disaster response needs; and
- Fund other general County services,

Shall a measure to enact a half-cent sales tax, generating approximately \$12 million annually until ended by voters, with annual independent audits, citizen oversight, all funds used locally, be adopted?

**Special Purpose (Roads)**  
(66.7% Threshold)

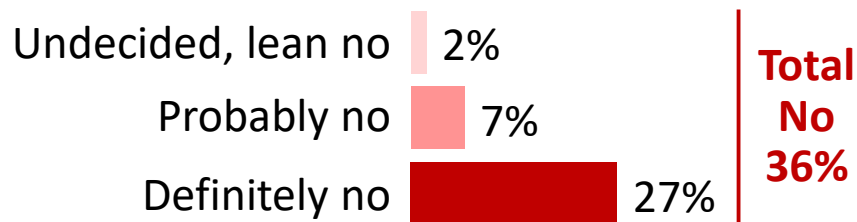
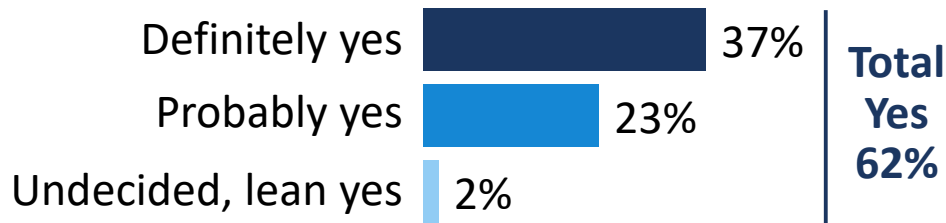
## **Humboldt County Road Repair and Safety Measure.** In order to:

- Repair deteriorating County roads;
- Maintain local streets and fix potholes;
- Repair storm drains;
- Improve driver, bicycle and pedestrian safety; and
- Make the County eligible for additional state and federal roads funding,

Shall a measure to enact a half-cent sales tax, generating approximately \$12 million annually until ended by voters, with annual audits, citizen oversight, all funds used locally, be adopted?

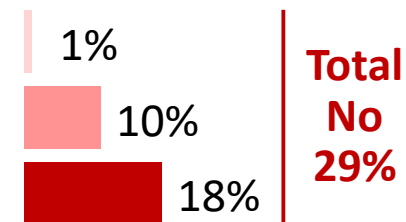
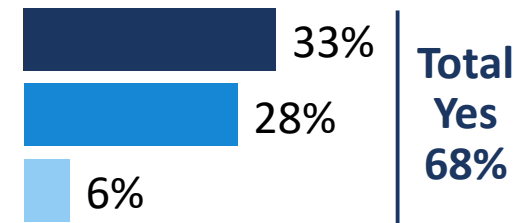
# Support for a general-purpose measure exceed its vote threshold by 12 points; a special-purpose measure saw support right at its vote threshold.

**General Purpose**  
(50.1% Threshold)



Undecided 2%

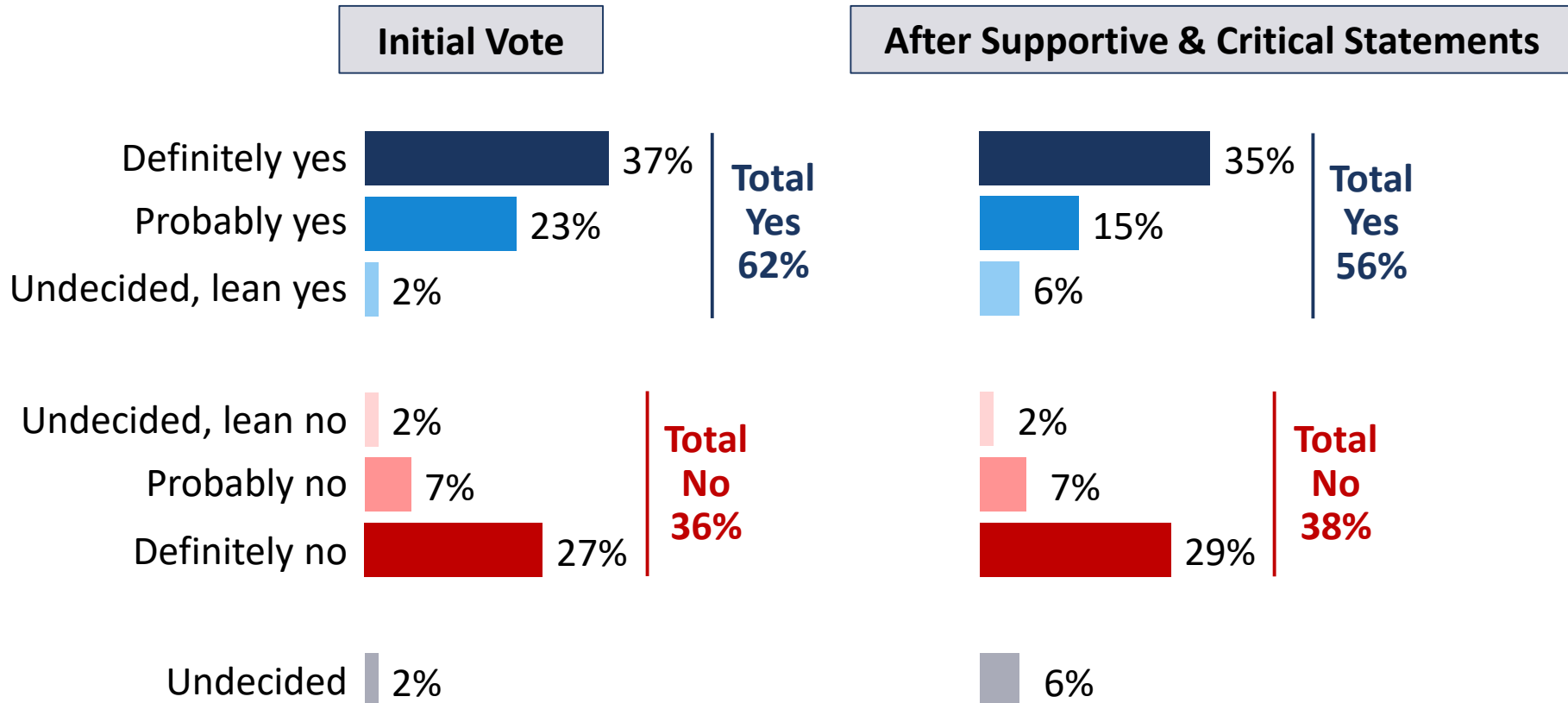
**Special Purpose**  
(66.7% Threshold)



Undecided 3%

# After supportive and critical statements, support for a general-purpose measure dropped, but remained six points above its vote threshold.

General Purpose Measure (50.1% Threshold)

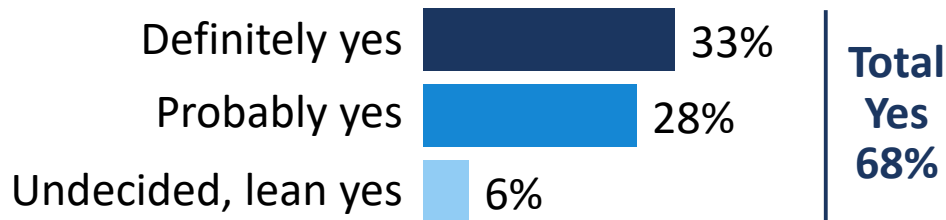




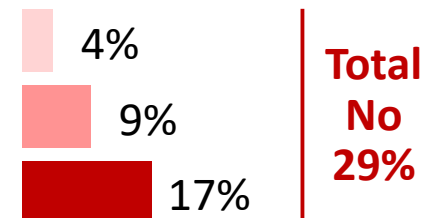
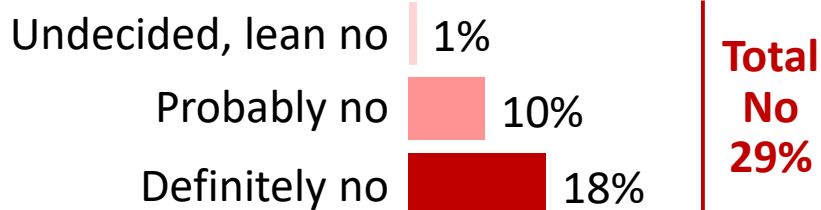
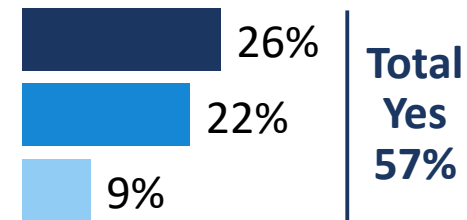
# Support for a special-purpose measure ends at a similar level, but ten points below its vote threshold.

*Special Purpose Measure (66.7% Threshold)*

## Initial Vote

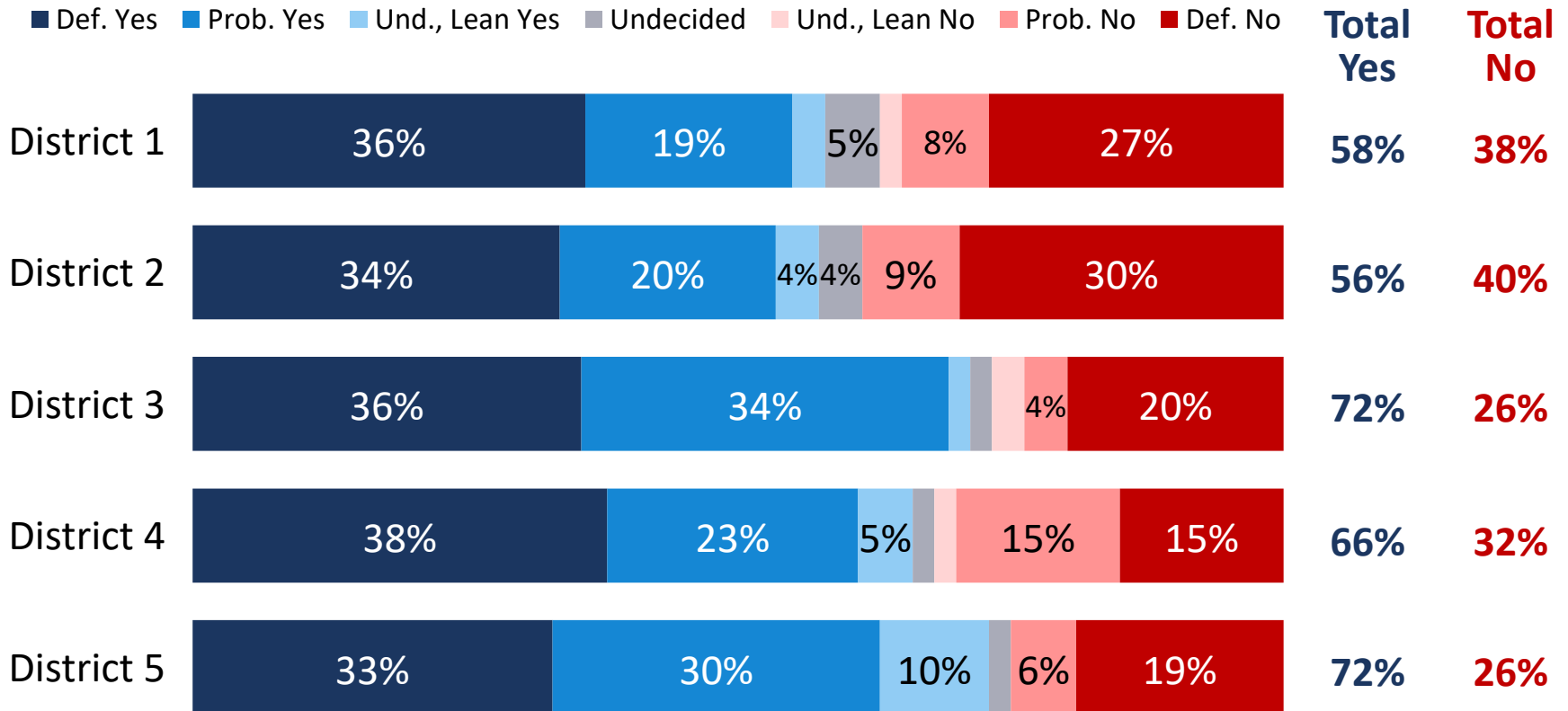


## After Supportive & Critical Statements



# Support for a revenue measure was greatest in Districts 3 and 5.

*Revenue Measure Vote by Supervisorial District  
(Both Versions Combined to Increase Sample Size per District)*





# **Revenue Measure Investment Priorities**

# 911 response times, emergency communications, and housing and homelessness investments are top priorities.

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not at All Impt. ■ Don't Know **Ext./Very Impt.**

Maintaining 911 emergency response times



**83%**

Providing communications services for medical and first responders after natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis



**74%**

Becoming eligible for additional state and federal matching funds for road repair



**72%**

Providing services to address homelessness



**70%**

Helping get people off the streets and into permanent housing



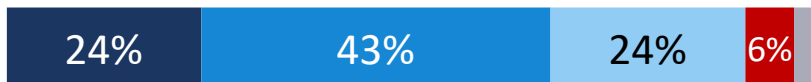
**69%**

Maintaining local streets and roads to reduce the need for future repairs



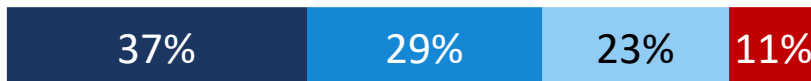
**69%**

Repairing deteriorating County roads



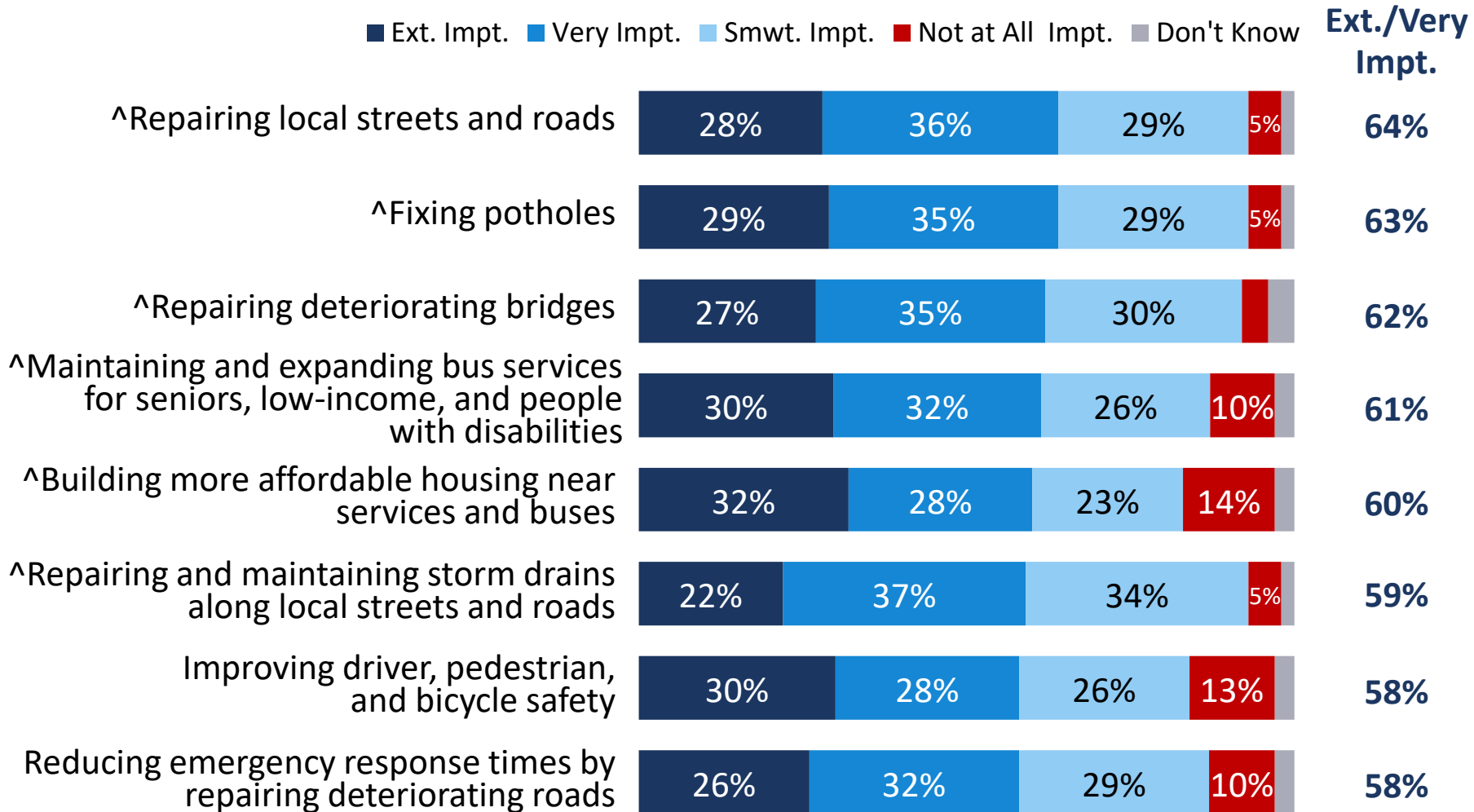
**67%**

Maintaining 24-hour sheriff's patrols

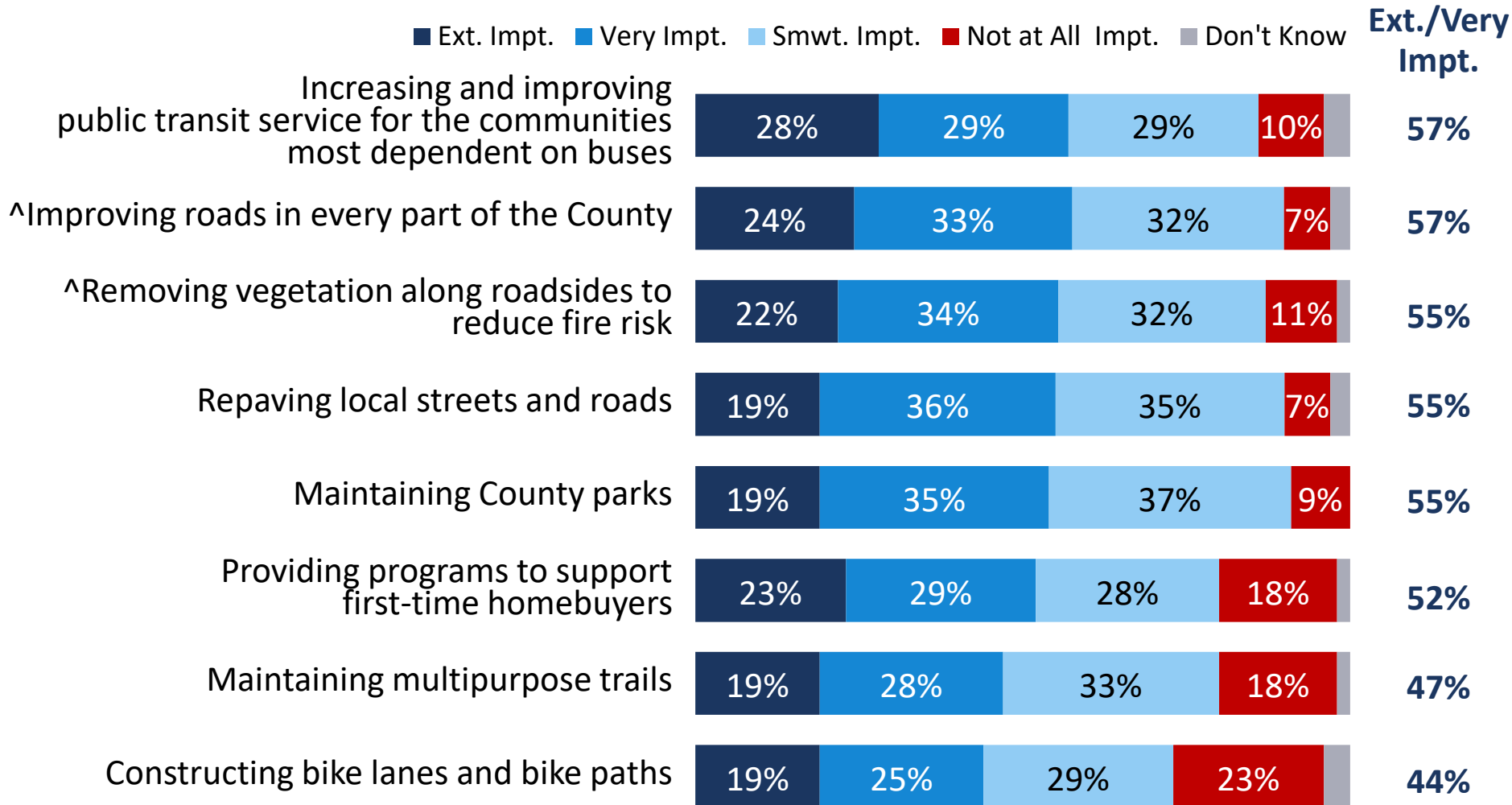


**65%**

# Repairing local streets and roads and fixing potholes are extremely or very important to just under two-thirds.

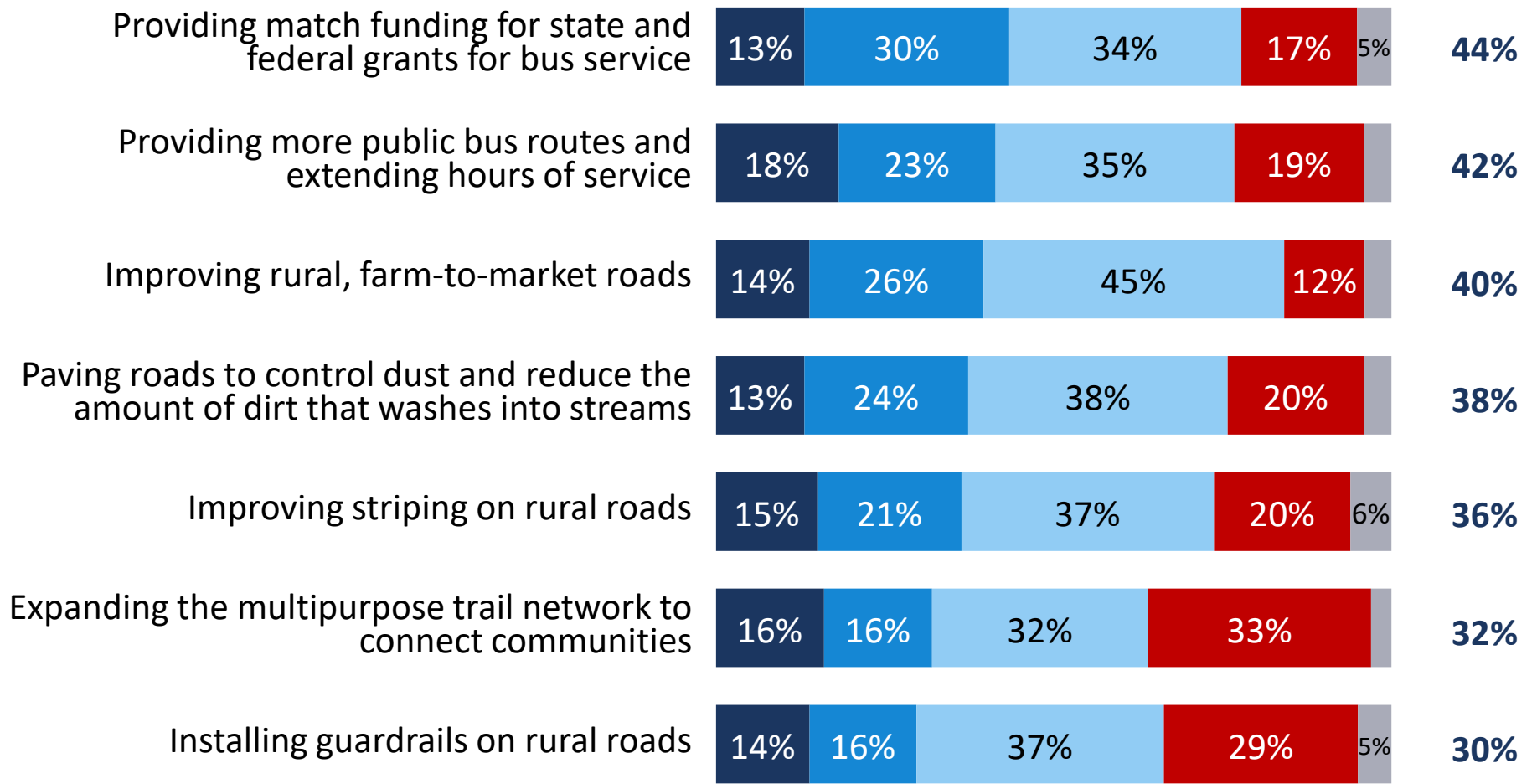


# Voters do not consider trails and bike paths to be important spending priorities.



# Trails and transit are at the bottom of the list of voter priorities.

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not at All Impt. ■ Don't Know **Ext./Very Impt.**



# Comparing Top-Ranking Priorities by Measure

*(Extremely/Very Important)*

General Purpose	%	Special Purpose ONLY	%
Maintaining 911 emergency response times	83%	Becoming eligible for additional state and federal matching funds for road repair	72%
Providing communications services for medical and first responders after natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis	74%	Maintaining local streets and roads to reduce the need for future repairs	69%
Becoming eligible for additional state and federal matching funds for road repair	72%	Repairing deteriorating County roads	67%
Providing services to address homelessness	70%	Repairing local streets and roads	64%
Helping get people off the streets and into permanent housing	69%	Fixing potholes	63%
Maintaining local streets and roads to reduce the need for future repairs	69%	Repairing deteriorating bridges	62%
Repairing deteriorating County roads	67%	Maintaining and expanding bus services for seniors, low-income, and people with disabilities	61%



# Comparing Road and Transit/Trail Priorities

*(Extremely/Very Important)*

Road Related Investment Areas	%	Transit/Trails Related Investment Areas	%
Becoming eligible for additional state and federal matching funds for road repair	72%	Maintaining and expanding bus services for seniors, low-income, and people with disabilities	61%
Maintaining local streets and roads to reduce the need for future repairs	69%	Building more affordable housing near services and buses	60%
Repairing deteriorating County roads	67%	Increasing and improving public transit service for the communities most dependent on buses	57%
Repairing local streets and roads	64%	Maintaining multipurpose trails	47%
Fixing potholes	63%	Providing match funding for state and federal grants for bus service	44%
Repairing deteriorating bridges	62%	Constructing bike lanes and bike paths	44%
Reducing emergency response times by repairing deteriorating roads	58%	Providing more public bus routes and extending hours of service	42%
Improving driver, pedestrian, and bicycle safety	58%	Expanding the multipurpose trail network to connect communities	32%



# **Evaluating a Government Reform Measure**

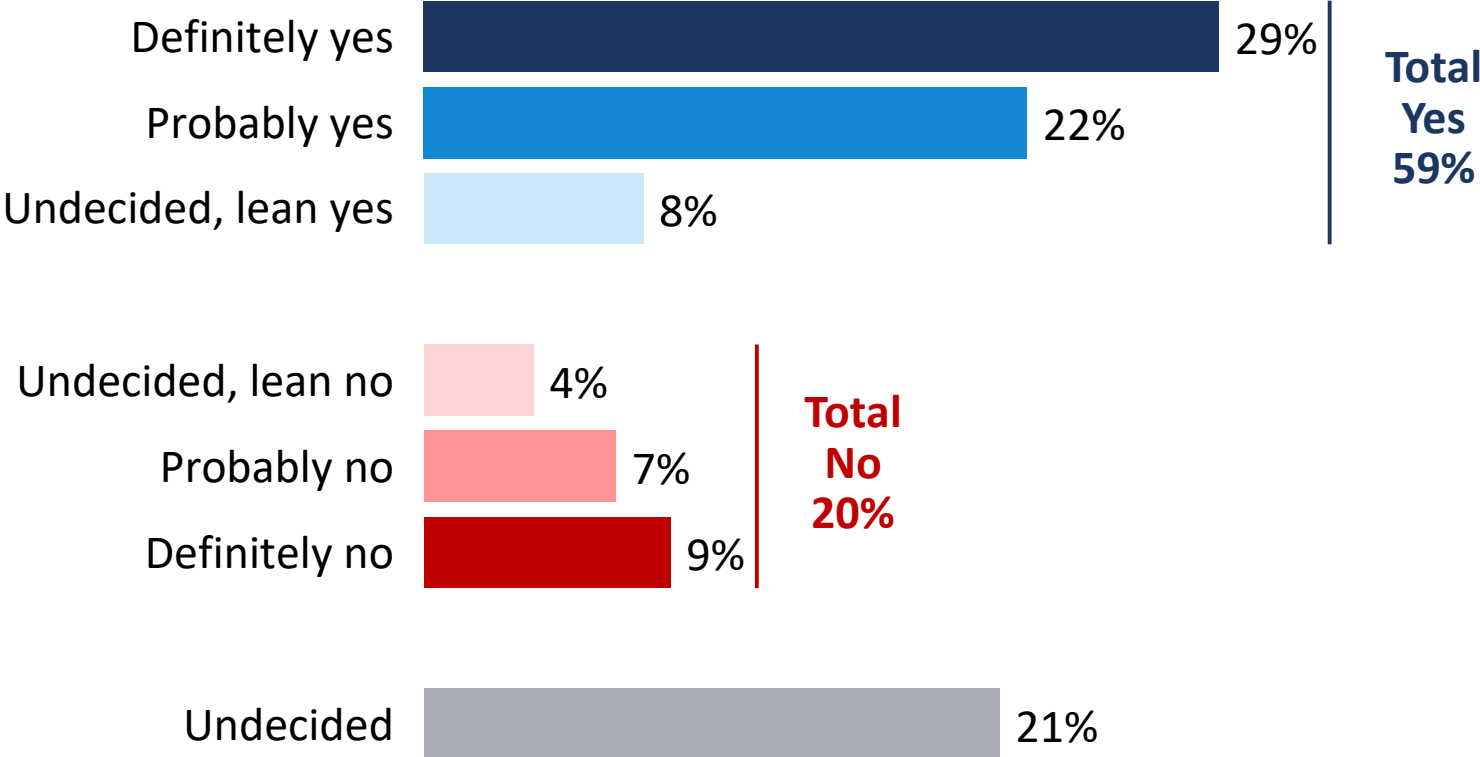
# All voters heard or read a potential government reform measure.

## **Humboldt County Fiscal Management Act.**

To eliminate duplication and increase efficiency, shall the County of Humboldt consolidate the offices of Auditor-Controller and Treasurer-Tax Collector into a centralized department led by an appointed, professionally trained Director of Finance responsible for:

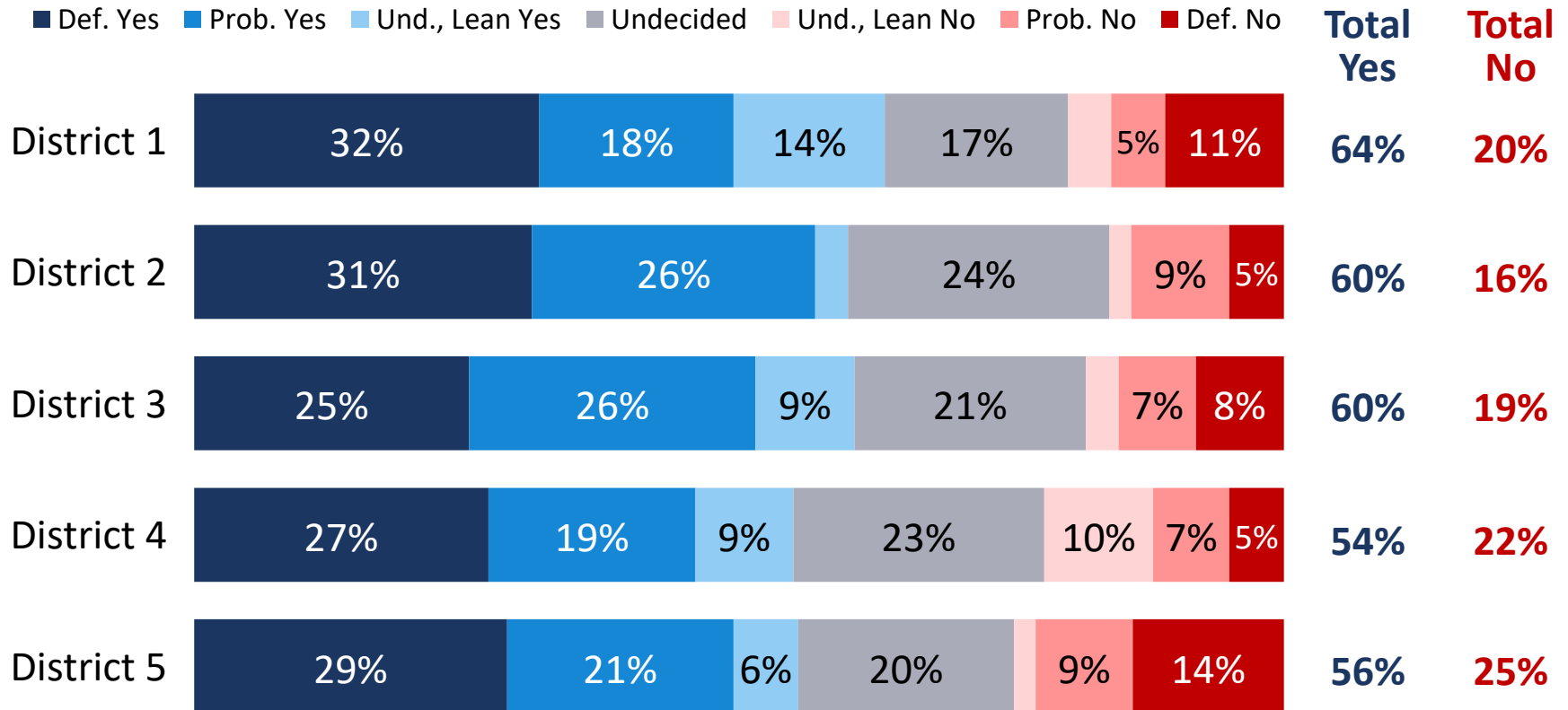
- providing professional fiscal management of taxpayer dollars;
- conducting and publicly publishing annual audits, and County financial reports;
- ensuring financial checks and balances; and
- maintaining/enforcing stringent fiscal accountability and transparency standards?

# Support for this question as written is soft, with a majority softly supportive or undecided.

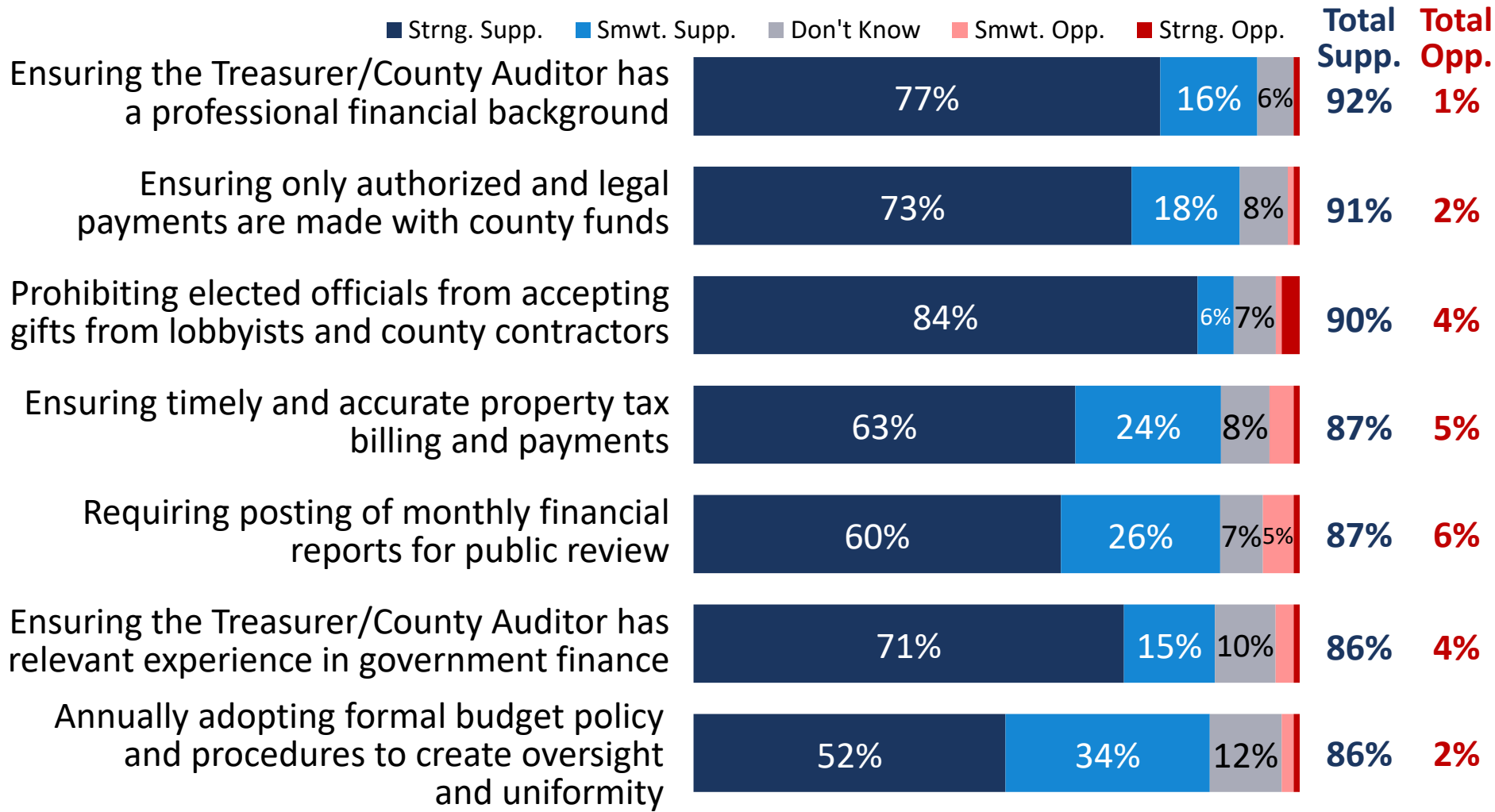


# Support is also broad in each Supervisorial District, with more undecideds in 2 and 4.

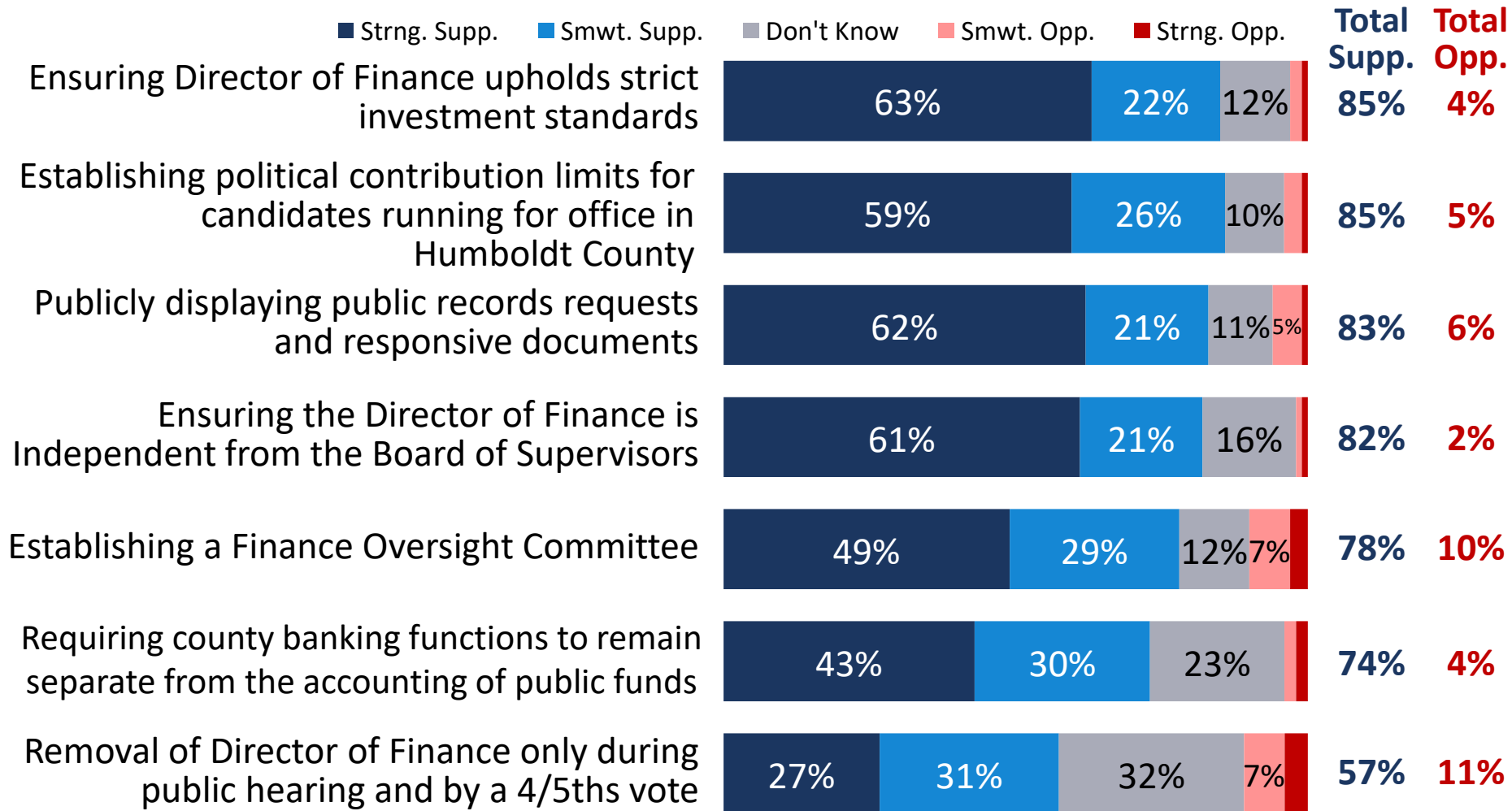
*Government Reform Measure by Supervisorial District*



# However, a number of specific provisions are overwhelmingly supported.



# There is less enthusiasm for removal during a public hearing, though it is still favored by a majority.



# Recommended Revised Ballot Question

**Humboldt County Fiscal Accountability and Financial Management Act.** To maintain stringent fiscal accountability standards and ensure the Treasurer/County Auditor is professionally trained/qualified, shall the County of Humboldt consolidate the offices of Auditor-Controller and Treasurer-Tax Collector into one department led by an appointed, professionally qualified Director of Finance responsible for:

- making only authorized and legal payments;
- ensuring timely and accurate property tax billing and payments; and
- requiring posting of monthly financial reports for public review?





# Consulting Team Recommendation

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- Consistent with what we are finding in other regions, these results show Humboldt County voters are pessimistic.
- Voters broadly see a need for new funding for essential services, and prioritize additional funding to repair and maintain local streets and roads.
- Given the results and the unsurprising lack of trust in government and elected leaders nationally, statewide and in your region, the strong recommendation of The Lew Edwards Group (LEG) is that continued planning be conducted to preserve the option of a General Purpose Measure in November 2024, following a comprehensive public engagement and stakeholder team-building effort.
  - The general-purpose measure remains just above the Margin of Error and vote threshold by the end of the survey, while the special-purpose measure does not.
  - Road safety and conditions are mid-tier concerns for voters generally; lack of transit options lower.
  - Their top priorities for measure spending include maintaining 911 response times, emergency communications, services for people who are homeless, and repairing local streets and roads. Other, more-specific transportation priorities rank much lower.
  - A March election scenario does not provide the engagement/consensus building lead time necessary.
- A properly drafted government reform measure could be placed on the March ballot, and doing so would minimize distraction from the other's placement in November.

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