

# SMART Board of Directors Meeting

## Agenda Item 7: Future Tax Measure Survey Results










# Sonoma and Marin County Voter Attitudes Toward a SMART Funding Renewal

*Key Findings of a Districtwide Survey Conducted March 24-31, 2025*



OPINION  
RESEARCH  
& STRATEGY

# Survey Methodology

<b>Dates</b>	March 24-31, 2025
<b>Survey Type</b>	Dual-mode Voter Survey
<b>Research Population</b>	Likely November 2026 Voters in the SMART District
<b>Total Interviews</b>	842
<b>Margin of Sampling Error</b>	(Likely November 2026) $\pm 3.9\%$ at the 95% Confidence Level (Each County) $\pm 4.9\%$ 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>	2024
<b>Languages</b>	English and Spanish

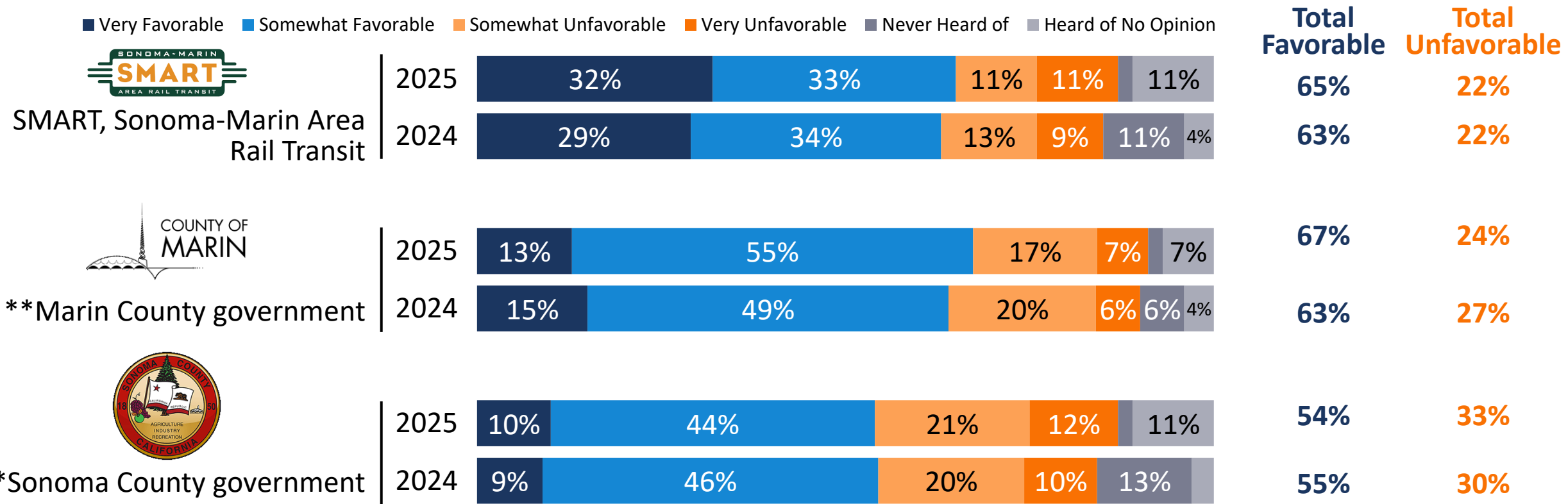
*(Note: Not All Results Will Sum to 100% Due to Rounding)*



# Issue Context

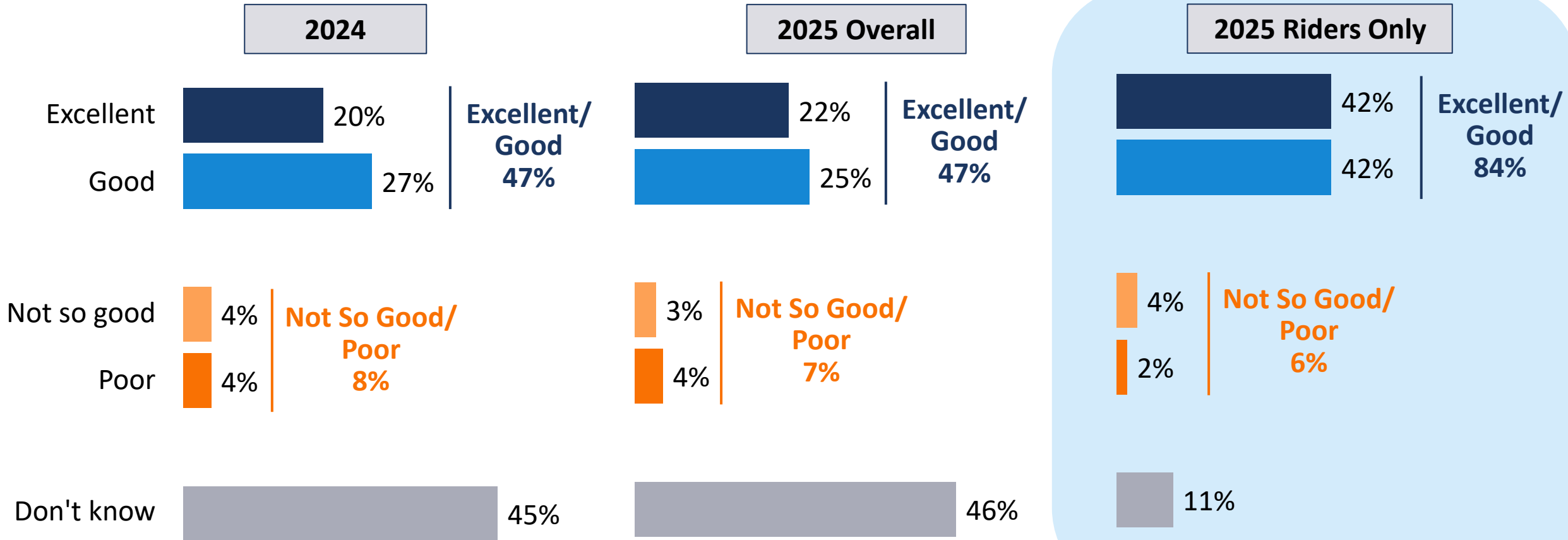
# A majority of voters continues to view SMART favorably.

Here are some names of organizations active in public life.  
Please indicate whether you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of that organization.



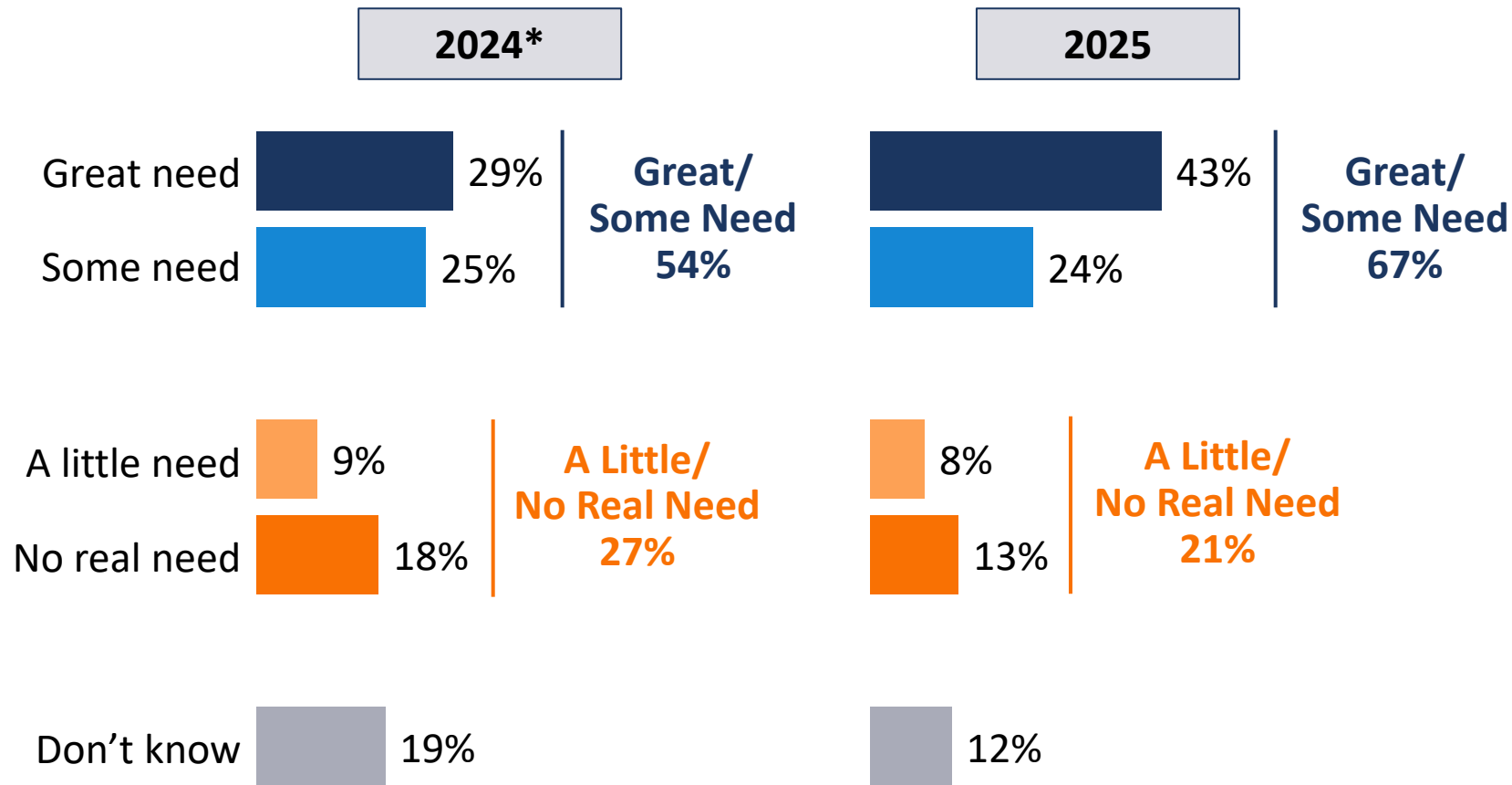
# Voters – and especially riders – rate SMART’s service positively.

Overall, how would you rate the quality of SMART’s service — is it excellent, good, not so good or poor?



# Two-thirds see a need for additional funds to maintain and improve SMART, with a sharp increase in perceived “great need.”

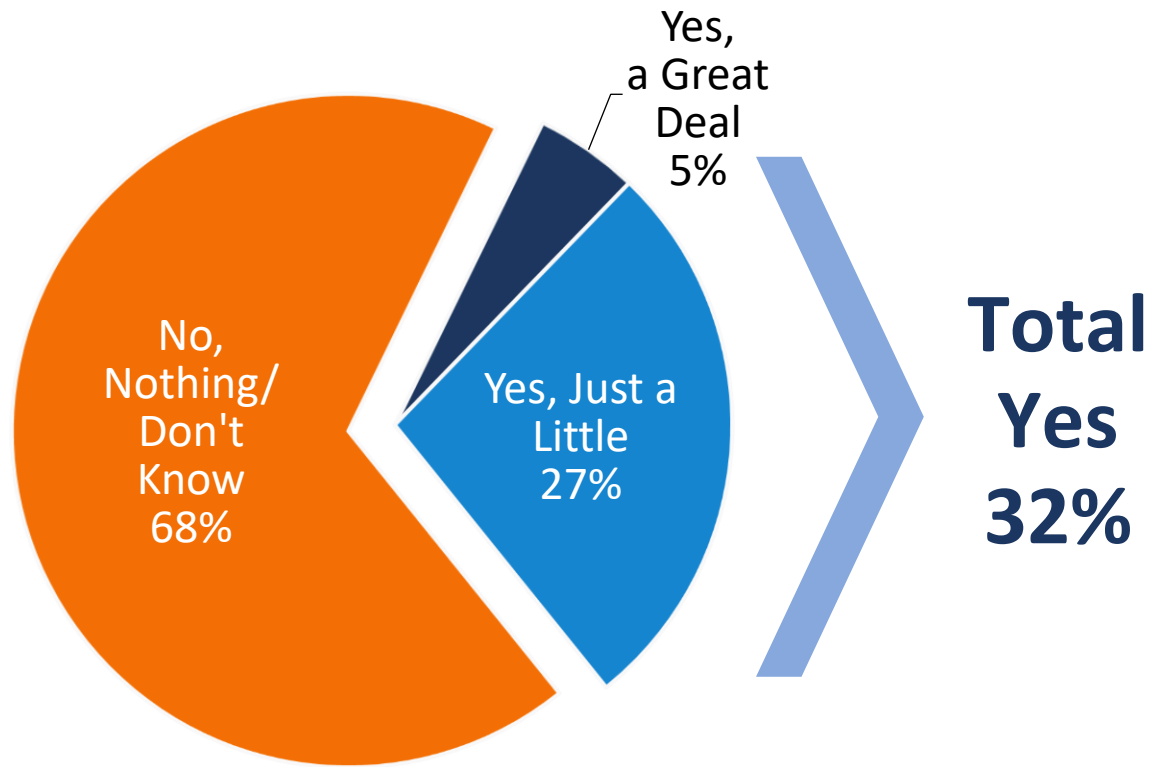
*Do you think there is a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funds to maintain and improve the SMART rail system?*



Subgroups Most Likely to See a “Great Need”
Progressive Democrats
Progressives
HH Income <\$50,000
Progressive/Liberal Independents
Renters
Democrats Ages 18-49
Single Democrat Households
Democratic Men
Sonoma Supervisorial District 2 - David Rabbitt
Liberal Democrats
Democrats
Liberals

# One-third have heard about SMART running out of funding, but few have heard a “great deal.”

Have you heard, seen or read anything recently about SMART running out of funding by 2029?



## Demographic Groups Most Aware of Shortfall

Marin Supervisorial District 2 - Brian Colbert
Republicans Ages 50+
Republican Men
Progressive/Liberal/Moderate Republicans
Marin Supervisorial District 3 - Stephanie Moulton-Peters
Marin Supervisorial District 4 - Dennis Rodoni
Single Republican Households
Marin County
Ages 75+
Marin Supervisorial District 1 - Mary Sackett
College-Educated Men
Men Ages 50+





# Introducing the Renewal Measure

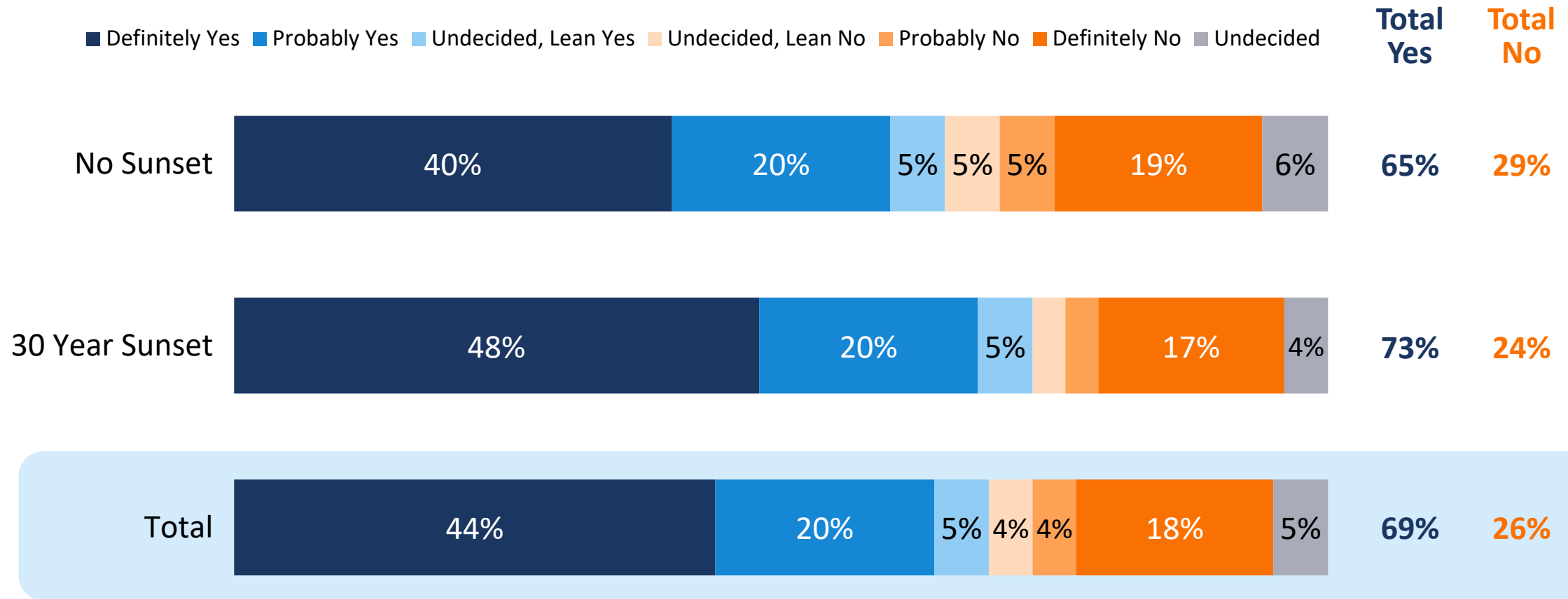
# Potential Ballot Language Tested

*66.7% Threshold for Passage*

Without raising taxes, continue Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District regional rail and pathway service beyond 2029 to serve residents including seniors, youth, essential workers, and low-income households; relieve traffic congestion; complete planned rail/pathway expansion; build upon record ridership; protect community's historic rail infrastructure investment for future generations; maintain clean/safe trains; reduce greenhouse gas emissions, shall the measure extending the  $\frac{1}{4}$  cent, voter-approved, sales tax **(HALF SAMPLE: until ended by voters)** **(HALF SAMPLE: for 30 years)**, generating approximately \$51,000,000 annually, be adopted?

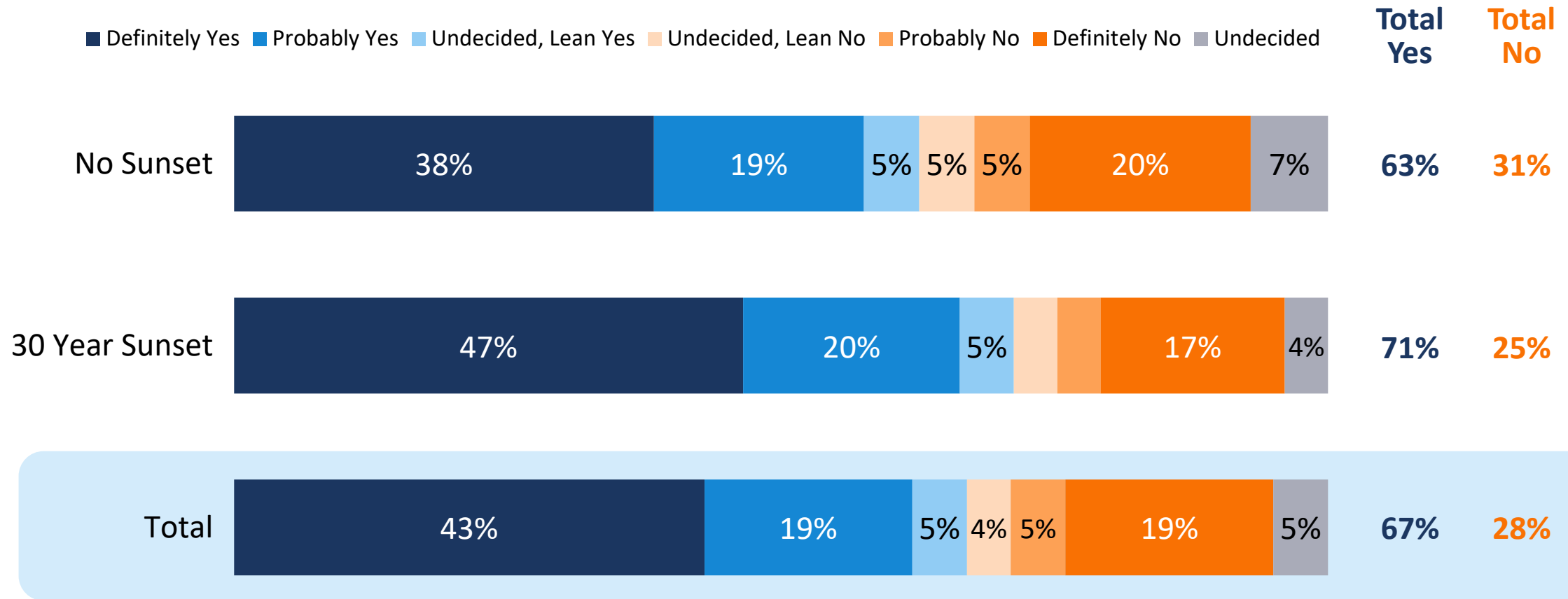
# Two-thirds support the proposed measure - and more than seven in ten when it includes a 30 year sunset.

Half Sample Margin of Error: +/-4.9%

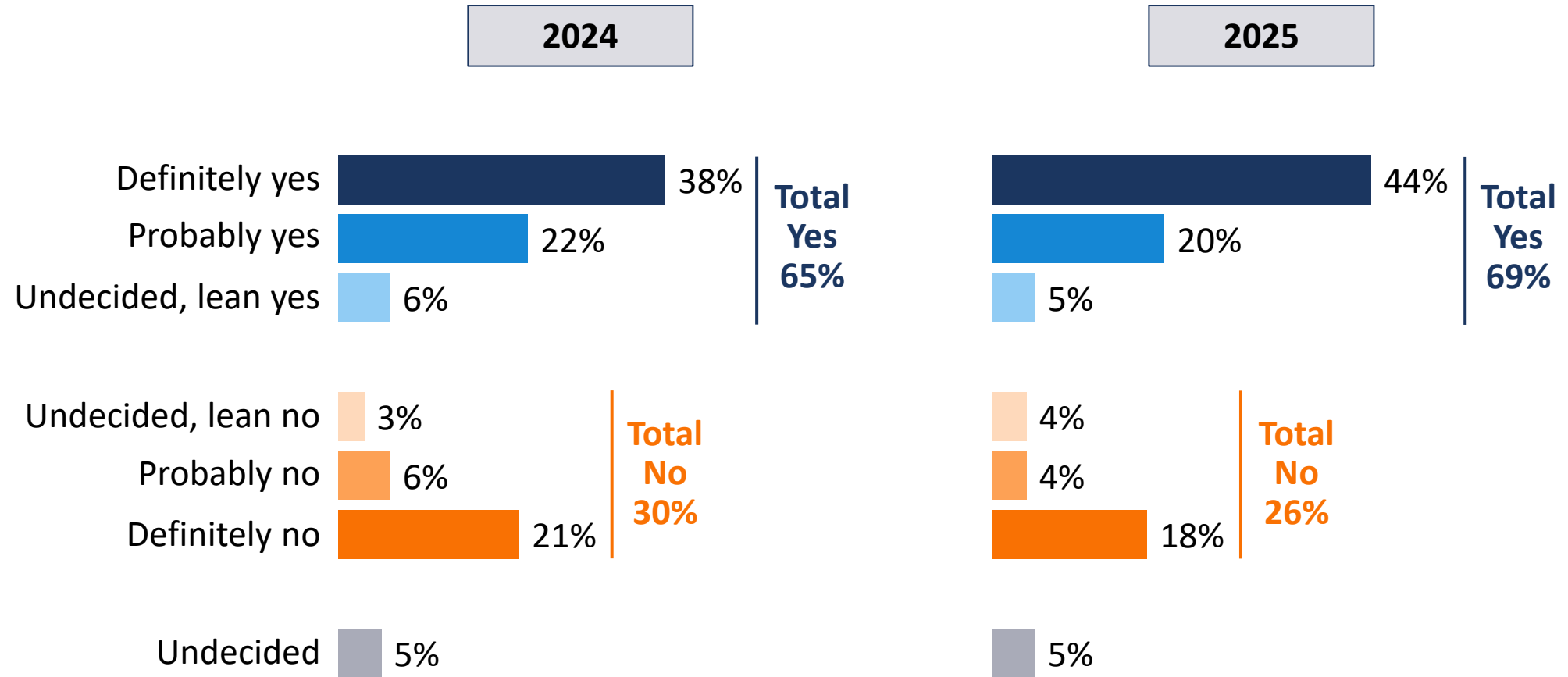


# Among likely June voters, support in each scenario is just two points lower.

*Likely June 2026 Voters Only*

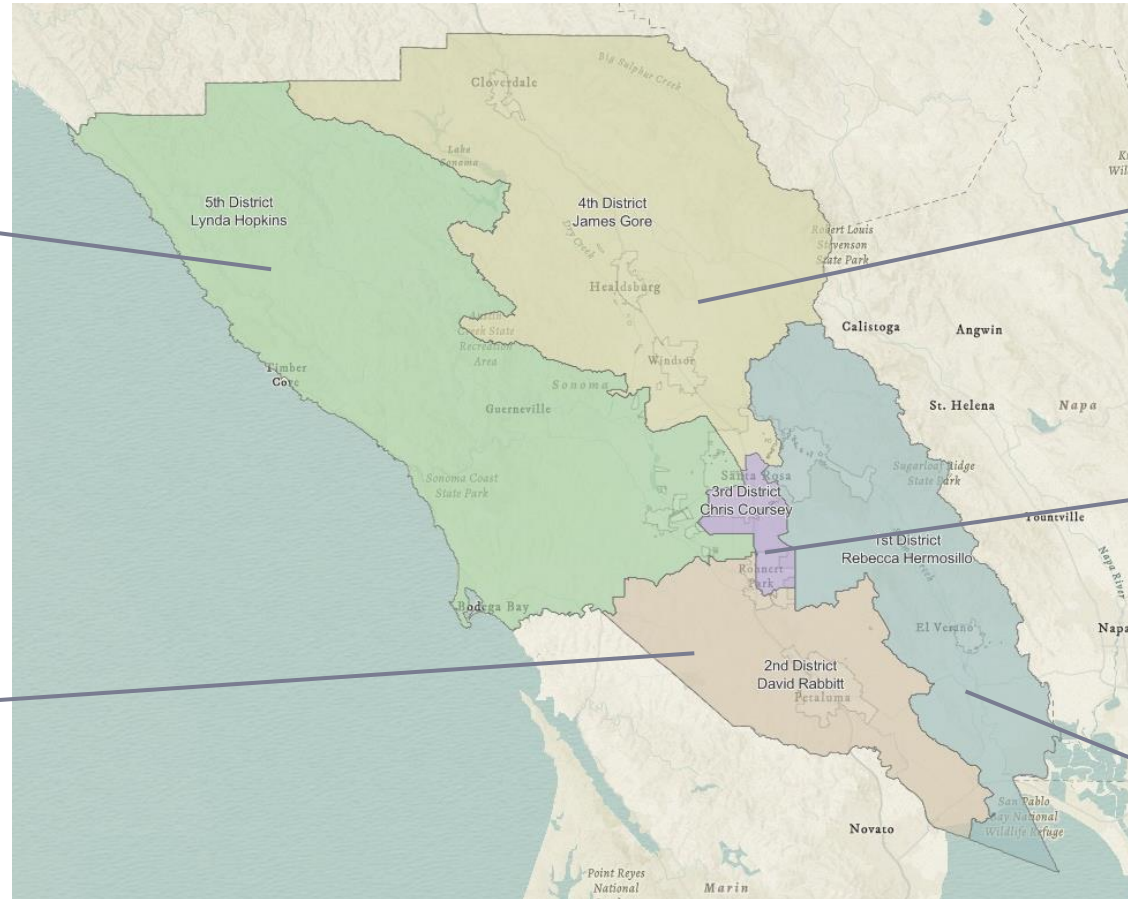


# Overall support for the measure has increased by four points since last year.



# Two-thirds of voters in Sonoma County say they are likely to vote “yes” on the measure.

Initial Vote by Sonoma County & Supervisorial Districts



SD 5: Lynda Hopkins	
Total Yes	71%
Total No	24%

SD 4: James Gore	
Total Yes	57%
Total No	37%

SD 3: Chris Coursey	
Total Yes	75%
Total No	22%

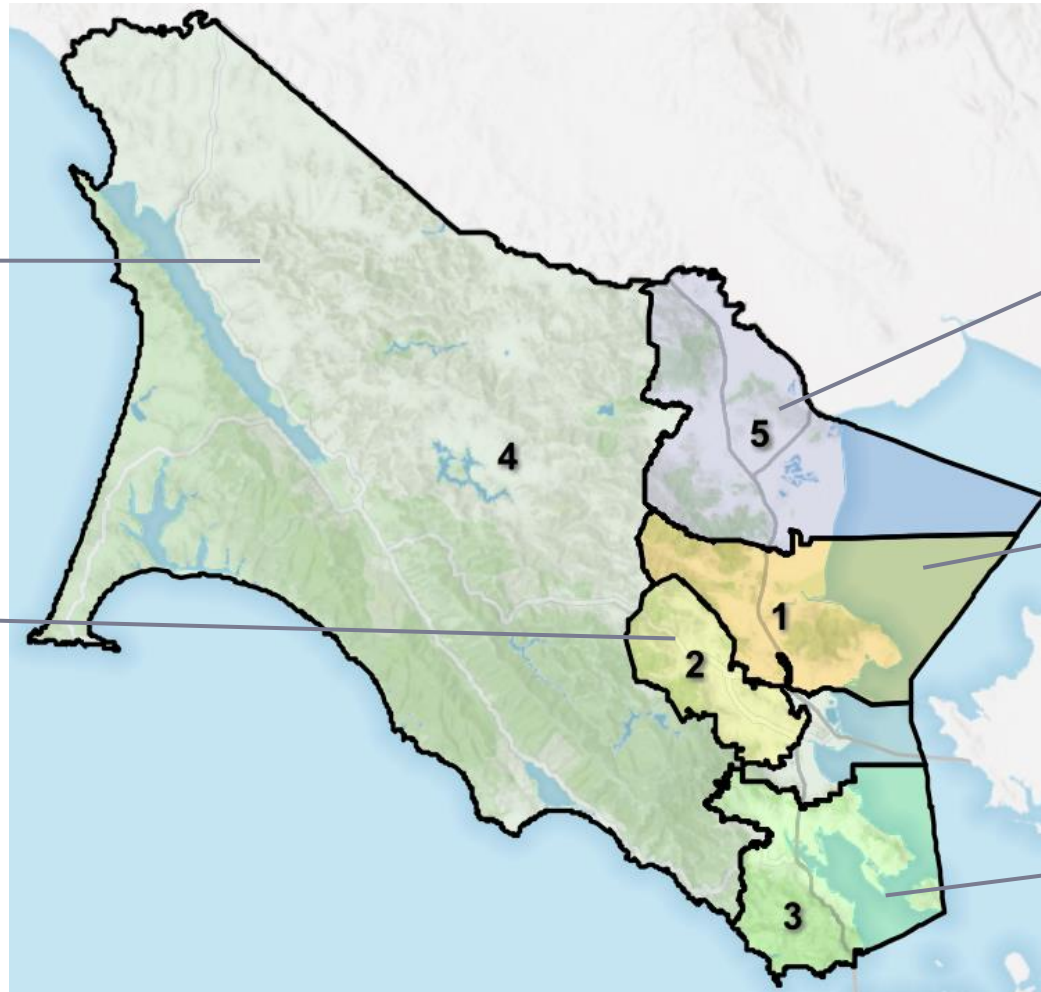
SD 2: David Rabbitt	
Total Yes	74%
Total No	24%

SD 1: Rebecca Hermosillo	
Total Yes	71%
Total No	27%

Sonoma County	
Total Yes	69%
Total No	27%

# Similarly, 68% of Marin County voters are in favor of the measure.

*Initial Vote by Marin County & Supervisorial Districts*



<b>SD 4: Dennis Rodoni</b>	
Total Yes	70%
Total No	21%

<b>SD 2: Brian Colbert</b>	
Total Yes	69%
Total No	26%

<b>SD 5: Eric Lucan</b>	
Total Yes	65%
Total No	25%

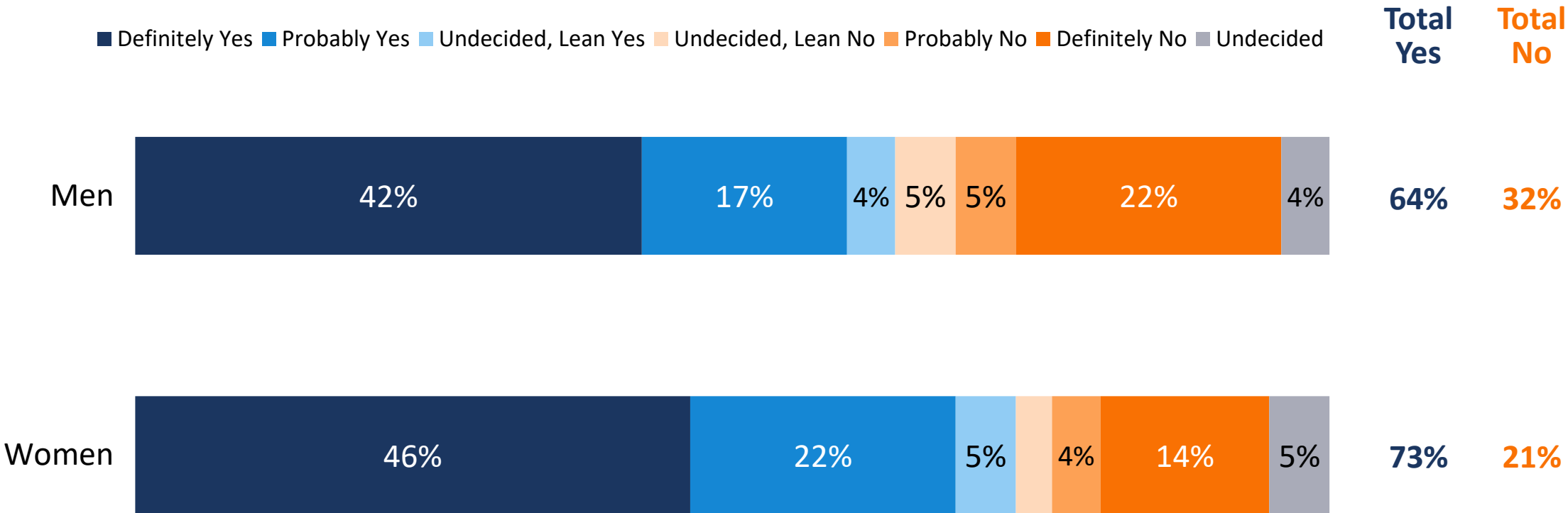
<b>SD 1: Mary Sackett</b>	
Total Yes	70%
Total No	21%

<b>SD 3: Stephanie Moulton-Peters</b>	
Total Yes	66%
Total No	30%

<b>Marin County</b>	
Total Yes	68%
Total No	25%

# Women are more likely to say they would vote “yes” than are men.

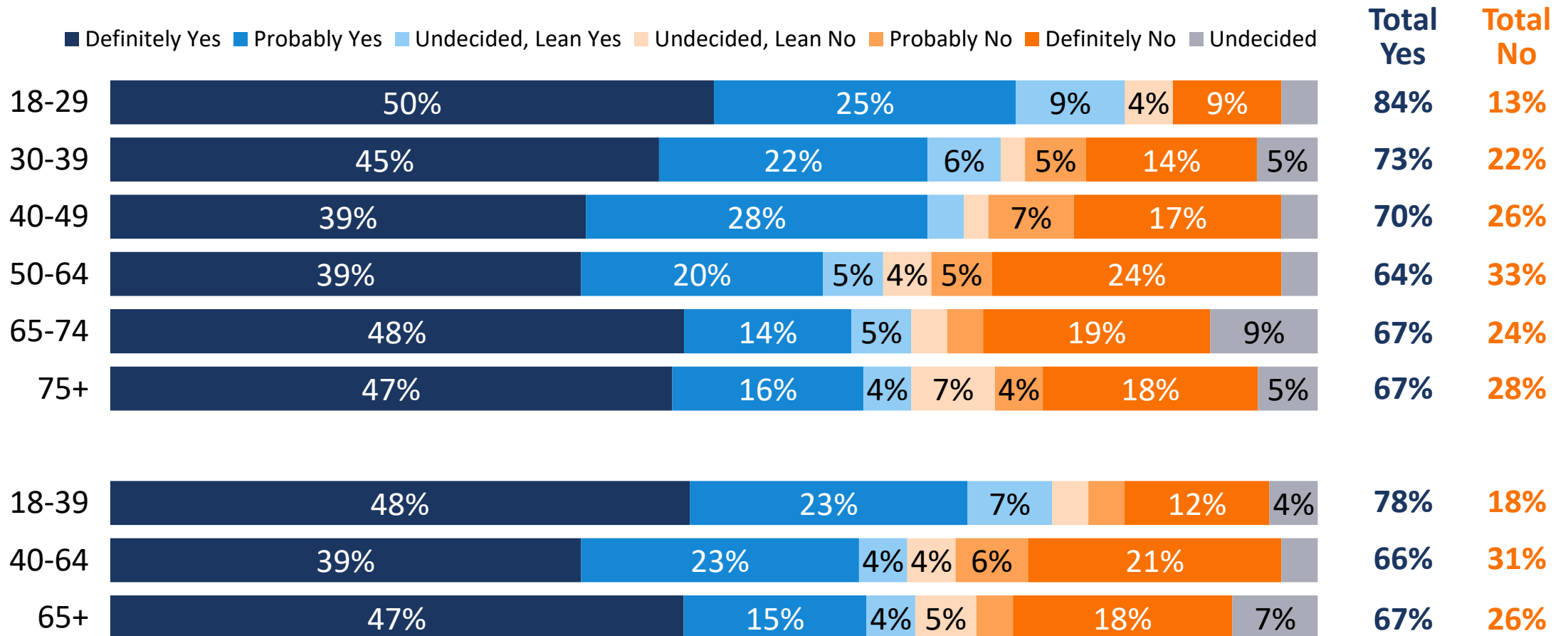
*Initial Vote by Gender*





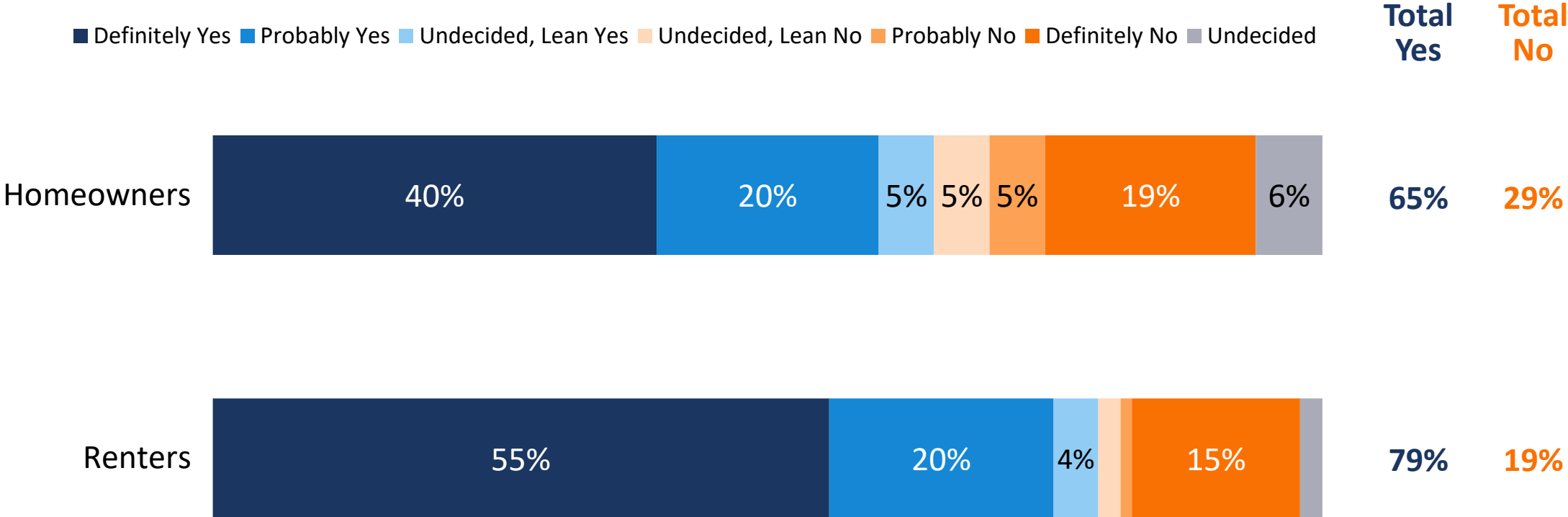
# Voters under age 50, especially those under 30, are most likely to vote “yes.”

Initial Vote by Age



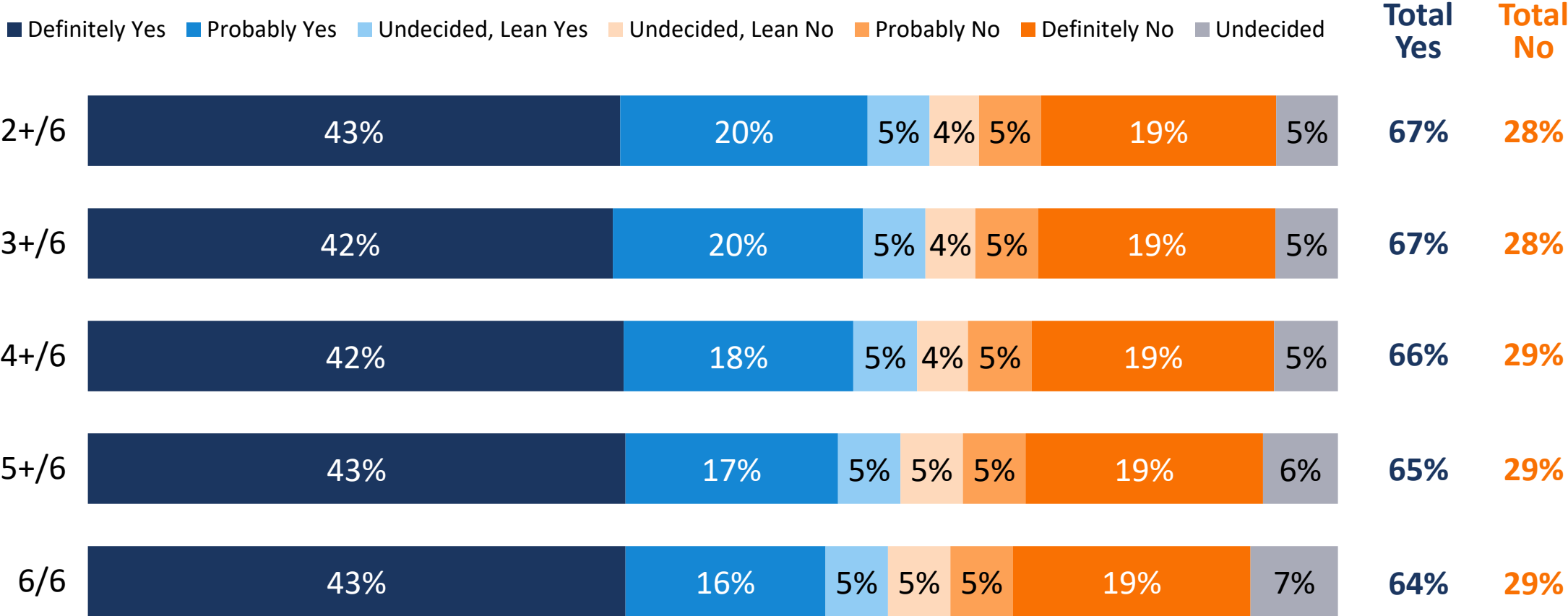
# Renters are particularly supportive of the proposed measure.

Initial Vote by Residence



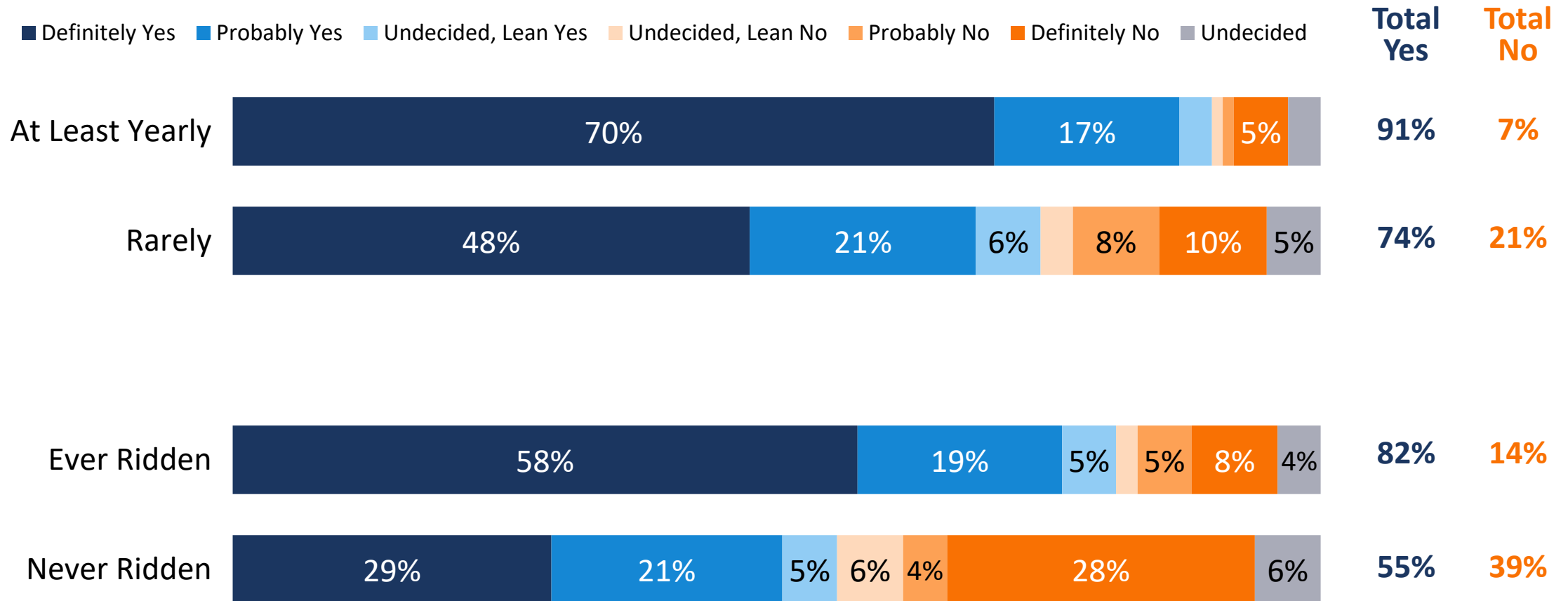
# Support for the measure is marginally weaker in lower-turnout scenarios.

*Initial Vote by Participation in the Last 6 Statewide Elections*



# Those who have ever ridden SMART are more likely to vote “yes” than are those who have no exposure to it.

*Initial Vote by SMART Use*

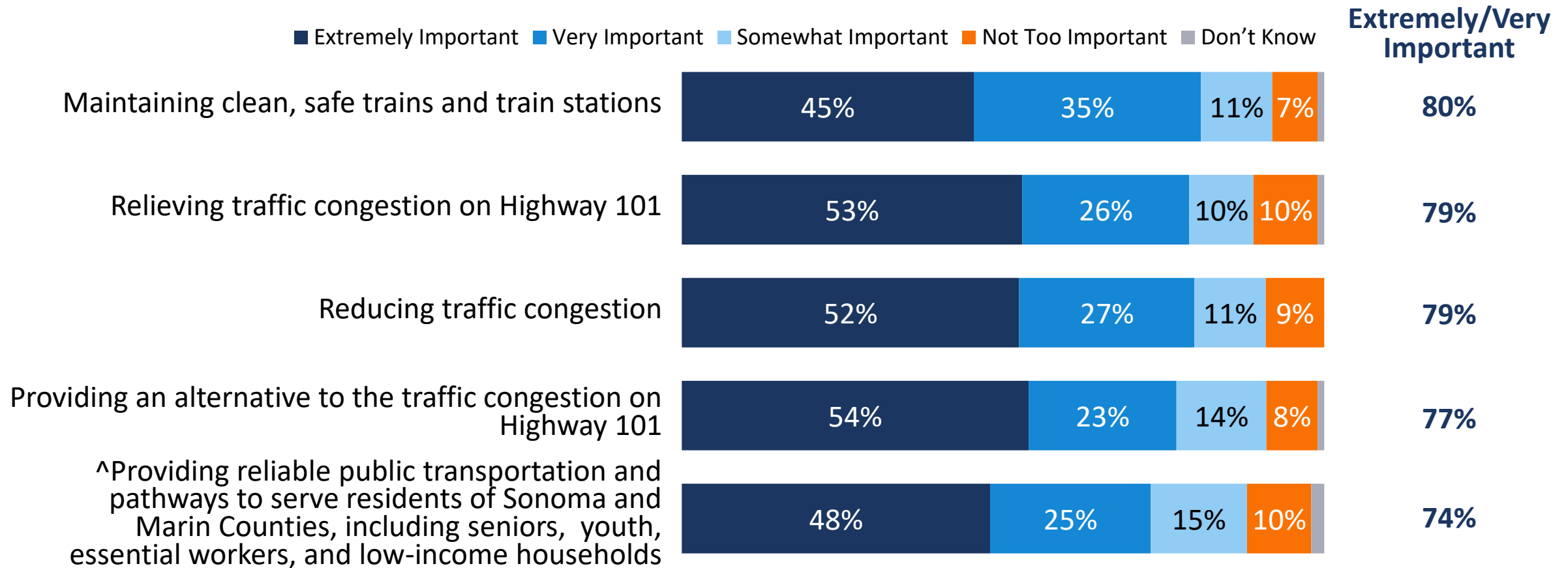




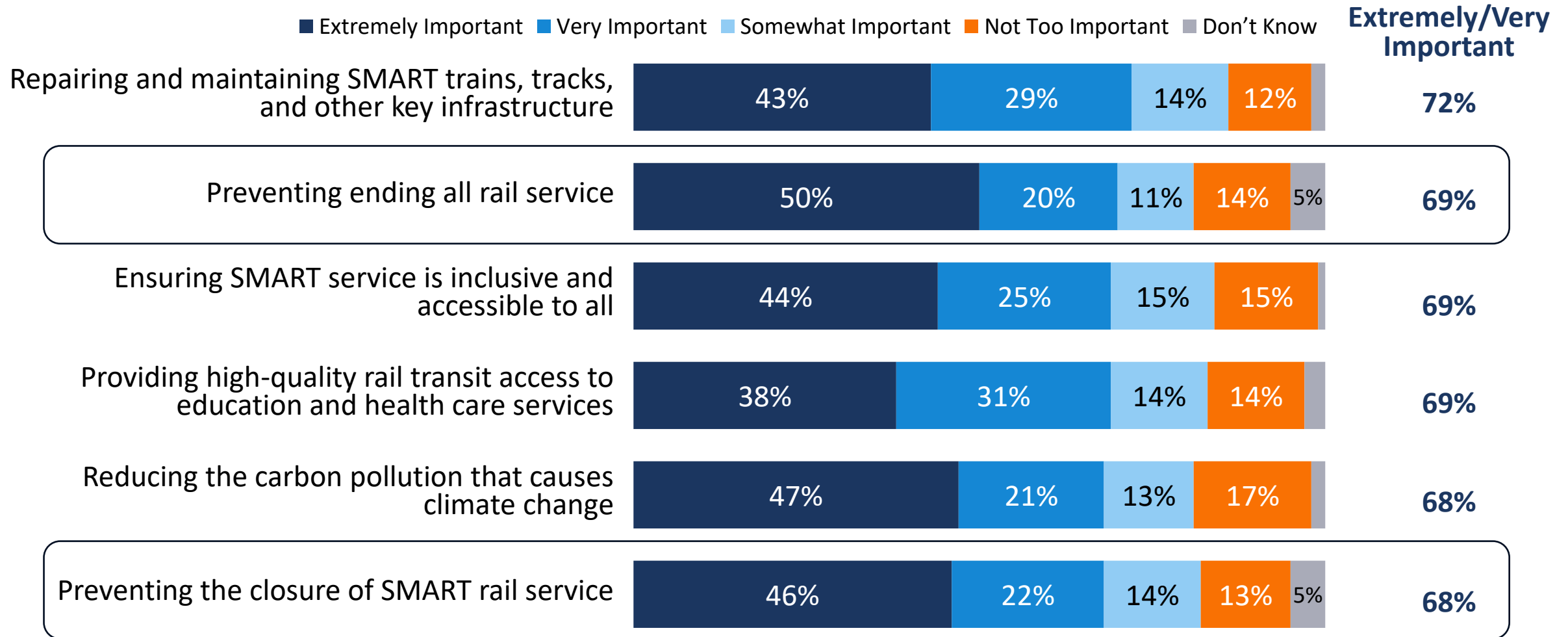
# Views on Spending Priorities

# Voters place the greatest priority on maintaining safe, clean trains and train stations, reducing traffic, and providing reliable public transportation.

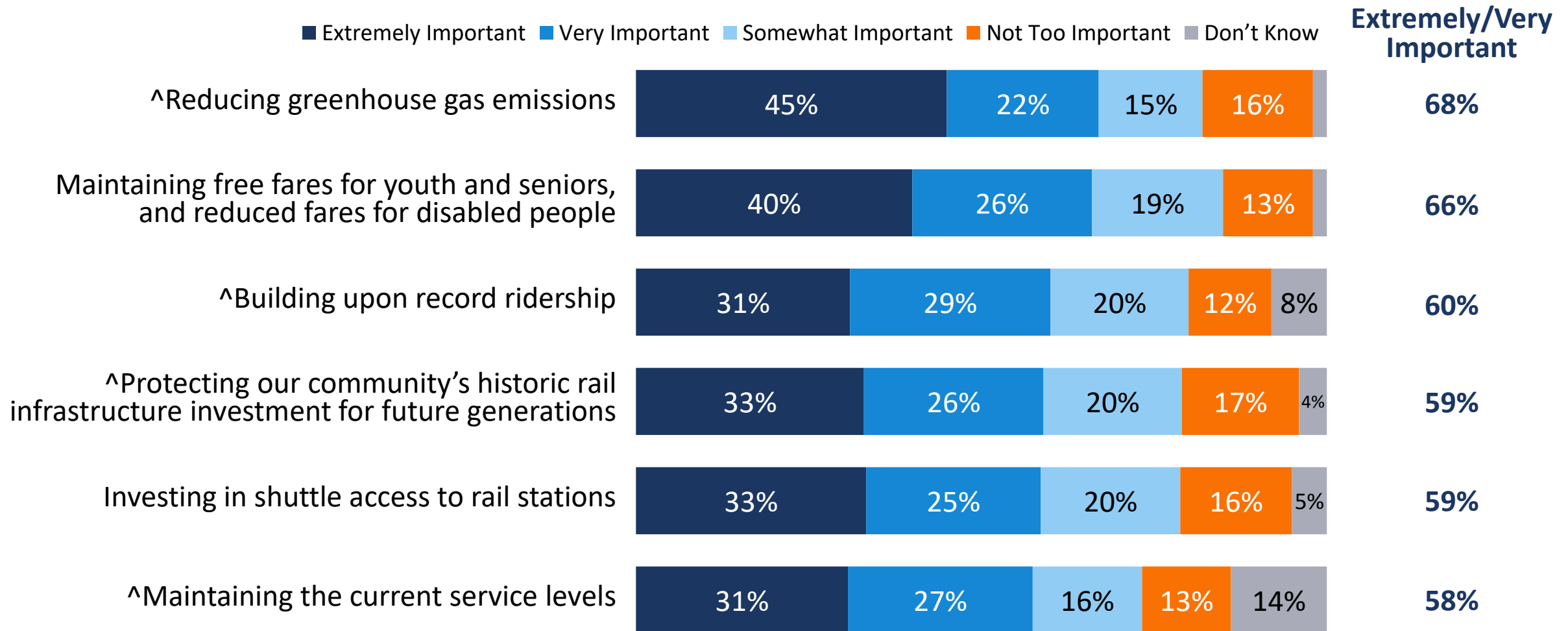
Please consider some potential elements of this measure, including ways in which funds it generates could be spent. Please indicate how important each one is to you personally, regardless of how you feel about the measure: either extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important.



# Two-thirds want to avoid an end to rail service, no matter how it is framed.



# A majority prioritizes historic infrastructure investment, shuttle access, and service levels, but overall these items rank relatively lower in importance.



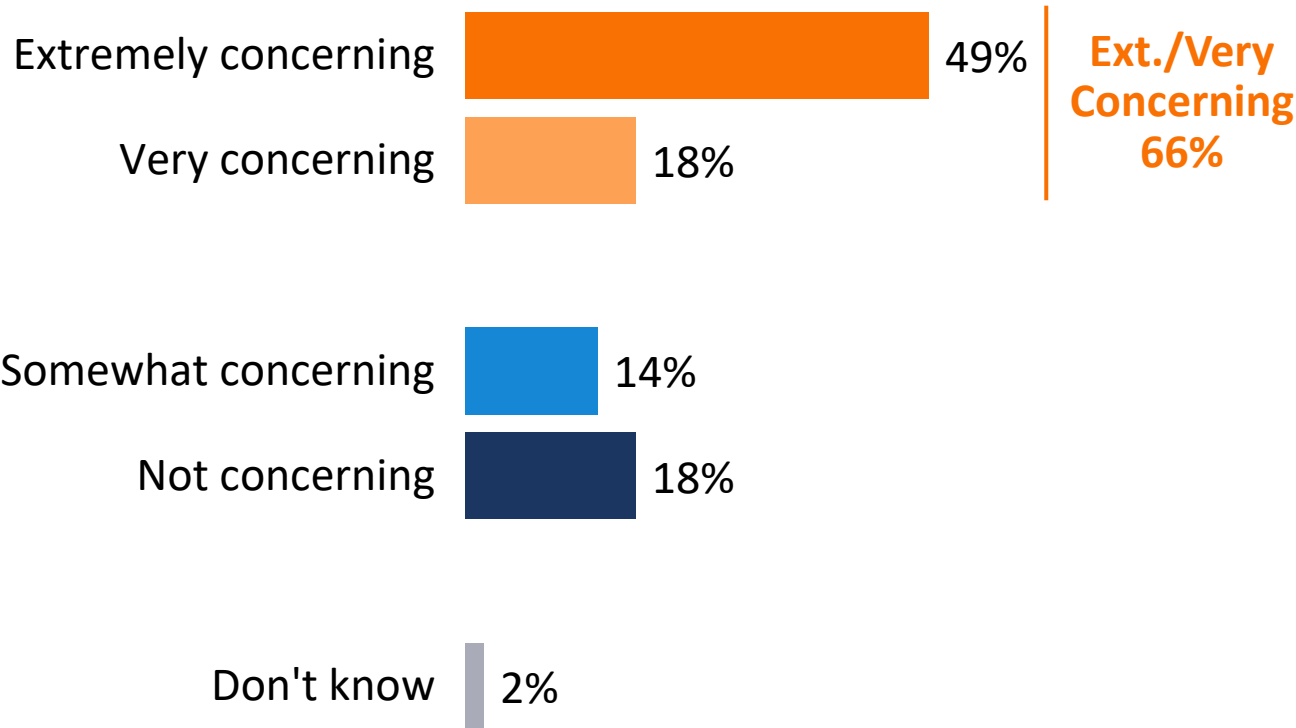


# Relative to 2024, relieving traffic on 101 has slightly grown in importance.

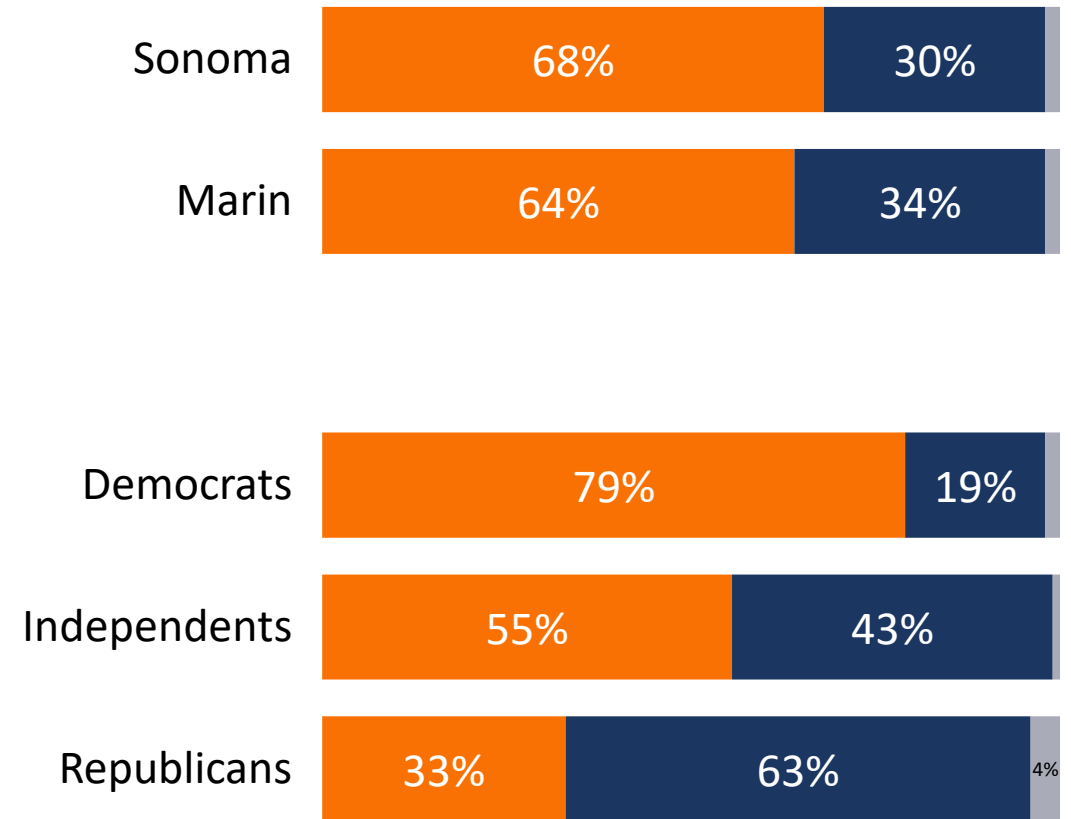
Element	Extremely/Very Important		
	2024	2025	Difference
Relieving traffic congestion on Highway 101	73%	79%	+6%
Repairing and maintaining SMART trains, tracks and other key infrastructure	67%	72%	+5%
Providing high quality rail transit access to education and health care services	64%	69%	+5%
Maintaining free fares for youth and seniors, and reduced fares for disabled people	62%	66%	+4%
*Preventing ending all rail service	66%	69%	+3%
Reducing traffic congestion	77%	79%	+2%
*Maintaining clean, safe trains and train stations	80%	80%	0%
^Providing reliable public transportation and pathways to serve residents of Sonoma and Marin Counties, including seniors, students, essential workers, and low-income households	74%	74%	0%
Ensuring SMART service is inclusive and accessible to all	70%	69%	-1%
Reducing the carbon pollution that causes climate change	70%	68%	-2%
Investing in shuttle access to rail stations	61%	59%	-2%
^Maintaining the current service levels	60%	58%	-2%

# Two-thirds find it concerning that if the sales tax is not renewed the agency will be forced to end all rail service.

*If this existing one-quarter cent sales tax to maintain SMART service is not renewed the agency will be forced to end all rail service by 2029. Please indicate if that is extremely concerning, very concerning, somewhat concerning, or not concerning.*



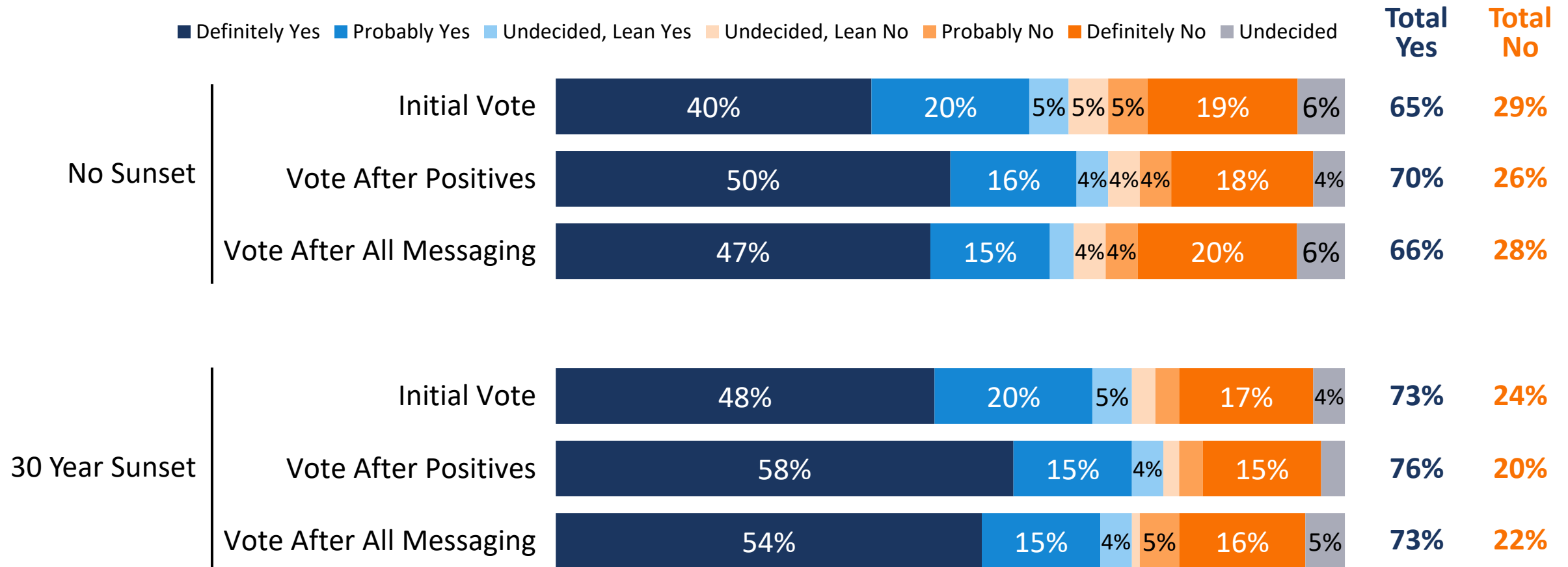
Extremely/Very   Somewhat/Not   Don't Know



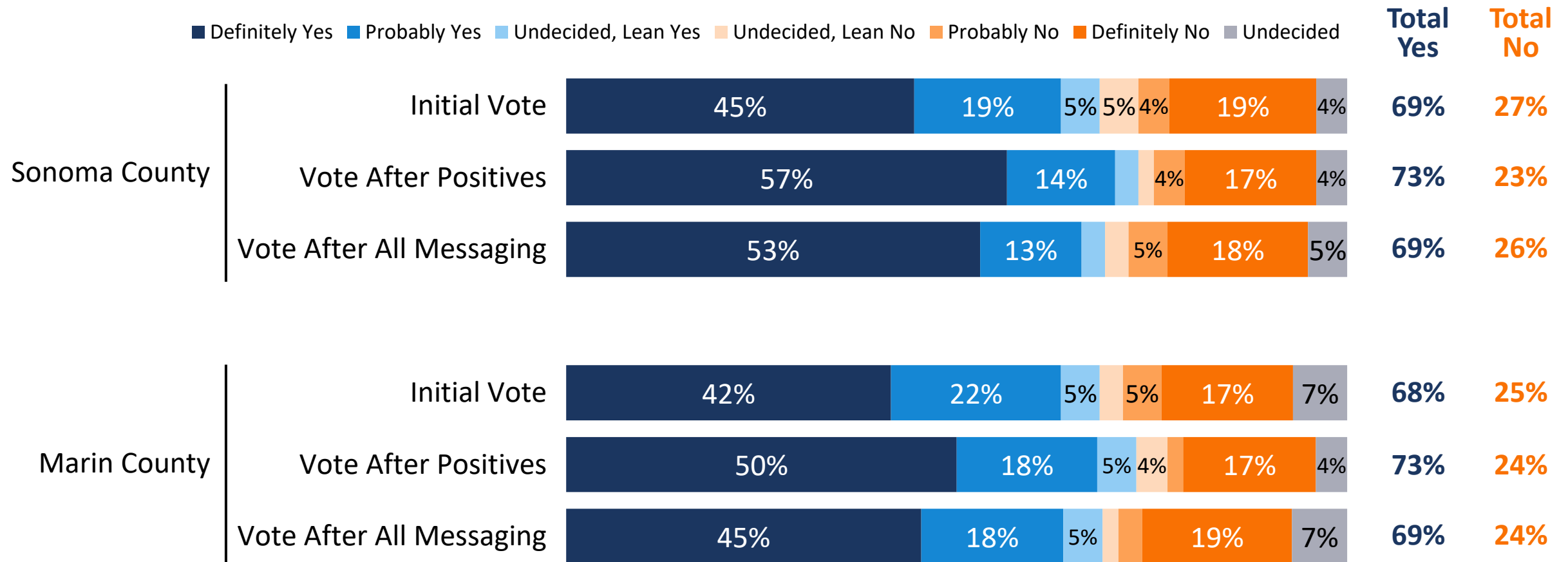


# Segmenting the Electorate

# The version of the measure that includes a 30-year sunset receives stronger support after pro and con messages.

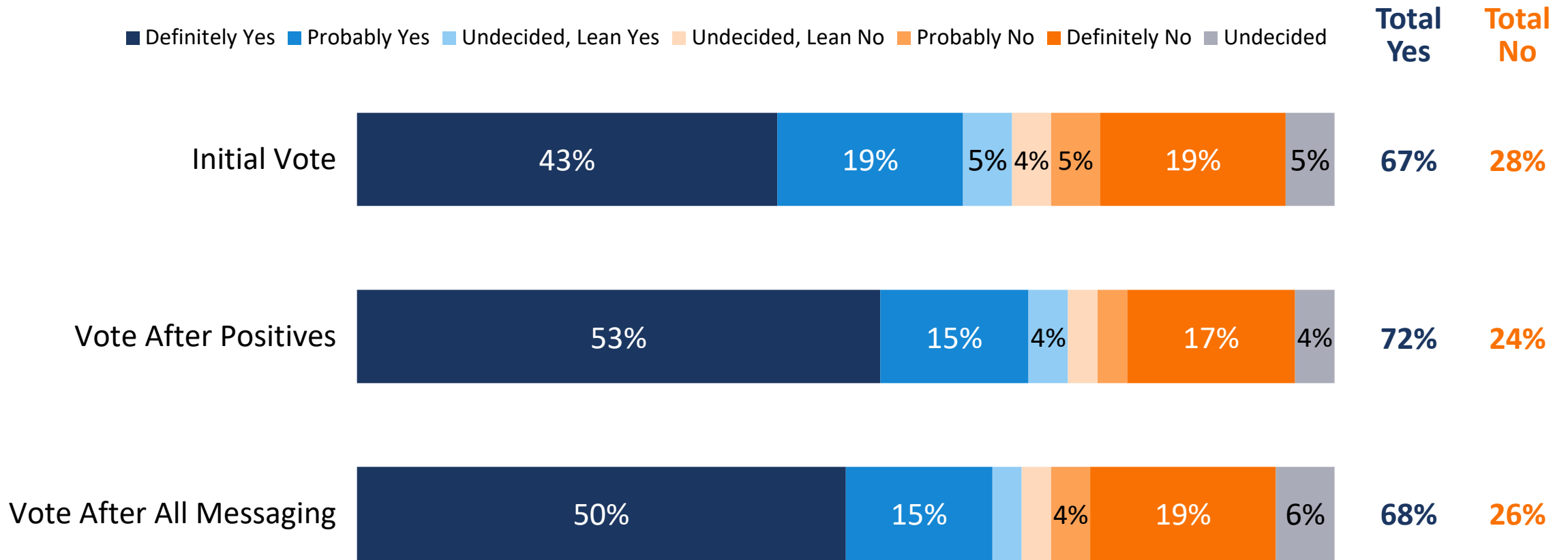


# Support is similar in Sonoma and Marin after messaging, although Sonoma County voters are more intensely supportive.



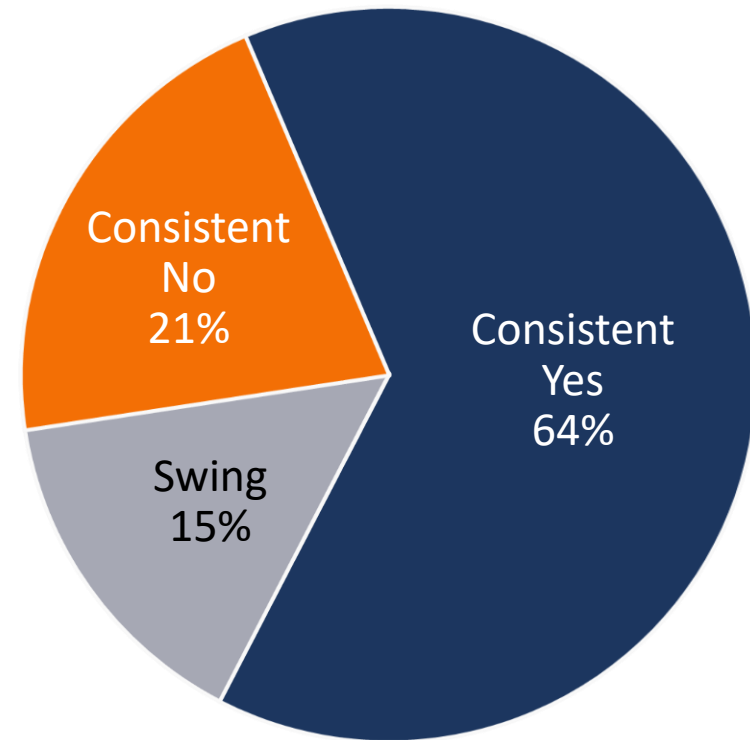
# Messaging has a similar impact among a likely June 2026 electorate.

Likely June 2026



# Segmenting the Electorate by Consistency of Support for a SMART Renewal Measure

- ❖ **Consistent Yes:** Voters who consistently indicated they would vote “yes” on the measure
- ❖ **Consistent No:** Voters who consistently indicated they would vote “no” on the measure
- ❖ **Swing:** Voters who do not fall into any of the other categories – remaining consistently undecided or switching positions





# Messages



# Messages in Favor of the Measure

## Ranked by Very Convincing

52%	^( <b>NO INCREASE IN TAXES</b> ) This measure is a simple renewal, with <u>no</u> increase in the sales tax. But by voting “yes” we will be able to maintain, improve and expand SMART rail and non-motorized transportation service in Sonoma and Marin, without paying any additional taxes.
50%	^( <b>TRUMP</b> ) Under the Trump Administration, the federal government is making sweeping cuts to public transportation investments. It’s more important than ever to control things locally and create sustainable, independent funding to protect our community’s public transit.
47%	( <b>RIDERSHIP</b> ) While many transit agencies in the area are struggling, SMART’s ridership has rebounded to exceed pre-pandemic levels. In the last year alone, ridership has increased by nearly 30%. Sonoma and Marin residents and visitors rely on SMART to get to work, school, and more. Renewing this measure will prevent the closure of a transit service that many local residents rely on.
45%	( <b>GROWING</b> ) SMART has been growing in recent years – opening stations in Petaluma and Windsor, serving more communities in Sonoma and Marin, expanding its bike and walking pathways, and offering free fares for youth and seniors; and SMART’s ridership has increased by nearly 30% in the past year. This measure will maintain and protect this critical service for the Sonoma and Marin communities.
45%	( <b>INVESTMENT</b> ) Sonoma and Marin County made a historic investment in creating, building, and growing the SMART rail network. SMART serves 1 million riders each year, provides free service for youth and seniors, and reduces traffic and greenhouse gas emissions – but if this measure is not renewed SMART will be forced to close and taxpayers’ investment will be lost.

# Messages in Favor of the Measure *(Continued)*

## Ranked by Very Convincing

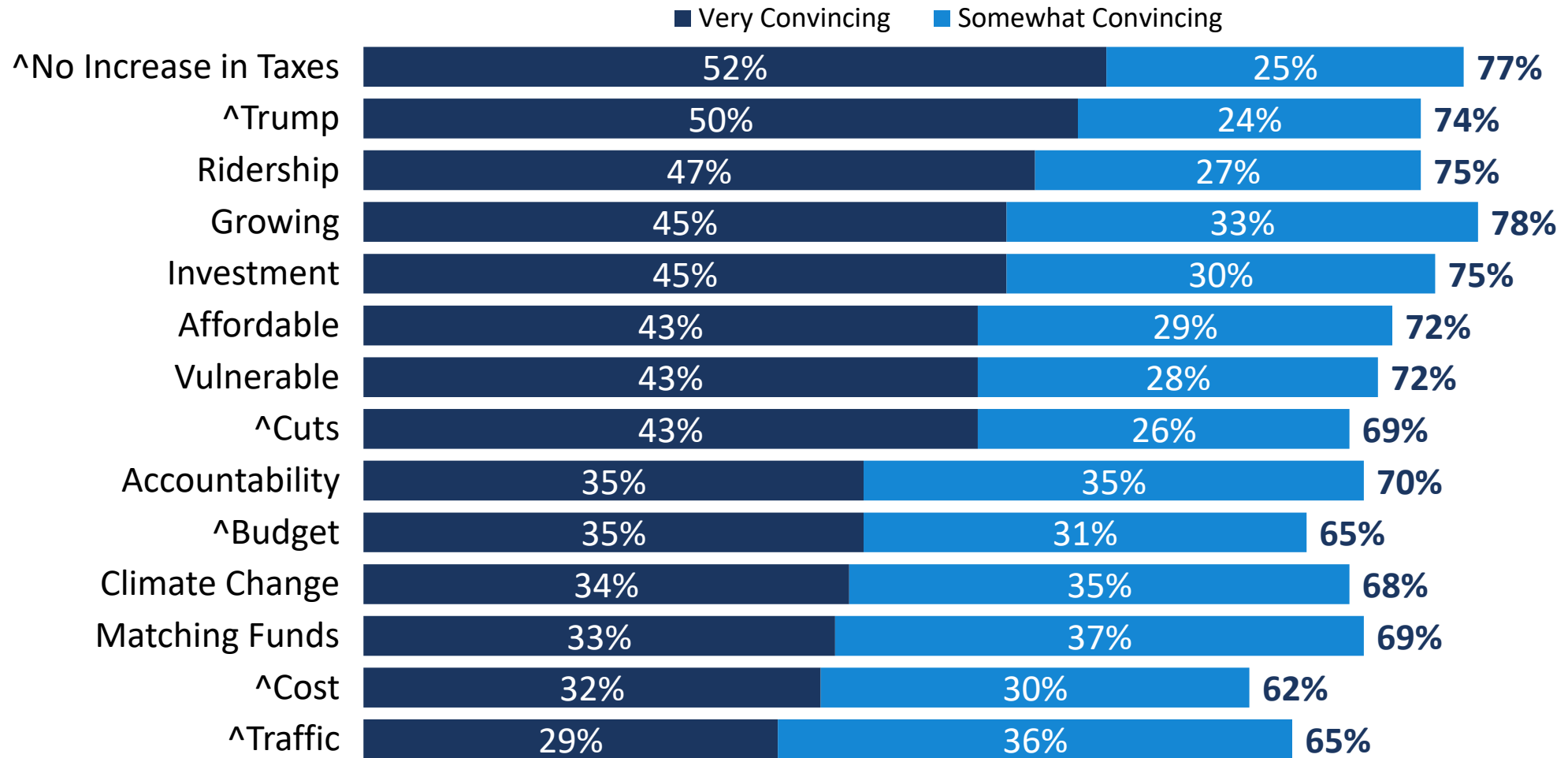
43%	<b>(AFFORDABLE)</b> SMART is free for youth and 25% of SMART’s ridership are youth who depend on it to get to class. Preserving affordable transit service is essential to creating more opportunities for young people in our community.
43%	<b>(VULNERABLE)</b> SMART service is critically important for residents of our area who don’t own a car or can’t drive – including many seniors, youth, people with disabilities, and lower-income households – including many of the North Bay’s essential workers. This measure will ensure that vulnerable communities who rely on SMART can continue to count on it.
43%	<b>^(CUTS)</b> If this measure is not approved, the loss of funding will force SMART to eliminate all rail service entirely by 2029. Voting for this measure will ensure that local residents can continue to count on SMART service and facilities for generations to come.
35%	<b>(ACCOUNTABILITY)</b> This measure has strong taxpayer safeguards to ensure the money is spent as promised, including annual independent audits, independent citizens oversight, and full public disclosure of all spending.
35%	<b>^(BUDGET)</b> Even though SMART has used funds wisely and qualified for hundreds of millions of dollars in state matching funds and grants, the sales tax makes up 65% of the agency’s operating budget. If this measure is not renewed at its existing level, SMART will be unable to continue operating and will become ineligible for grants.

# Messages in Favor of the Measure *(Continued)*

## Ranked by Very Convincing

34%	<b>(CLIMATE CHANGE)</b> Strong public transit systems are one of the most important tools we have to fight climate change. SMART gives people an affordable, effective alternative to driving, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution.
33%	<b>(MATCHING FUNDS)</b> As of 2023, SMART has matched local sales tax funds dollar for dollar with grant funding. Over the past five years, the agency brought in over \$390 million in grant funds to improve service for riders. This measure will continue to make SMART eligible for millions in state and federal grant funds over the life of the measure. Every dollar we spend locally can generate additional funds from outside the North Bay to improve SMART, which will otherwise be spent outside our region.
32%	<b>^(COST)</b> This measure will cost the average taxpayer less than 25 cents per day and allow SMART to qualify for millions of dollars in state matching funds.
29%	<b>^(TRAFFIC)</b> Too many people spend hours and hours in their cars every week – keeping them away from their loved ones and wasting precious free time. SMART provides an alternative to the congestion on Highway 101 and keeps people off the roads. If we don't renew this measure and continue funding SMART, more people will be back on the roads and commute times will continue to worsen.

# A number of messages resonate very strongly, particularly those highlighting that the measure will not increase taxes and that public transportation funding is under threat.



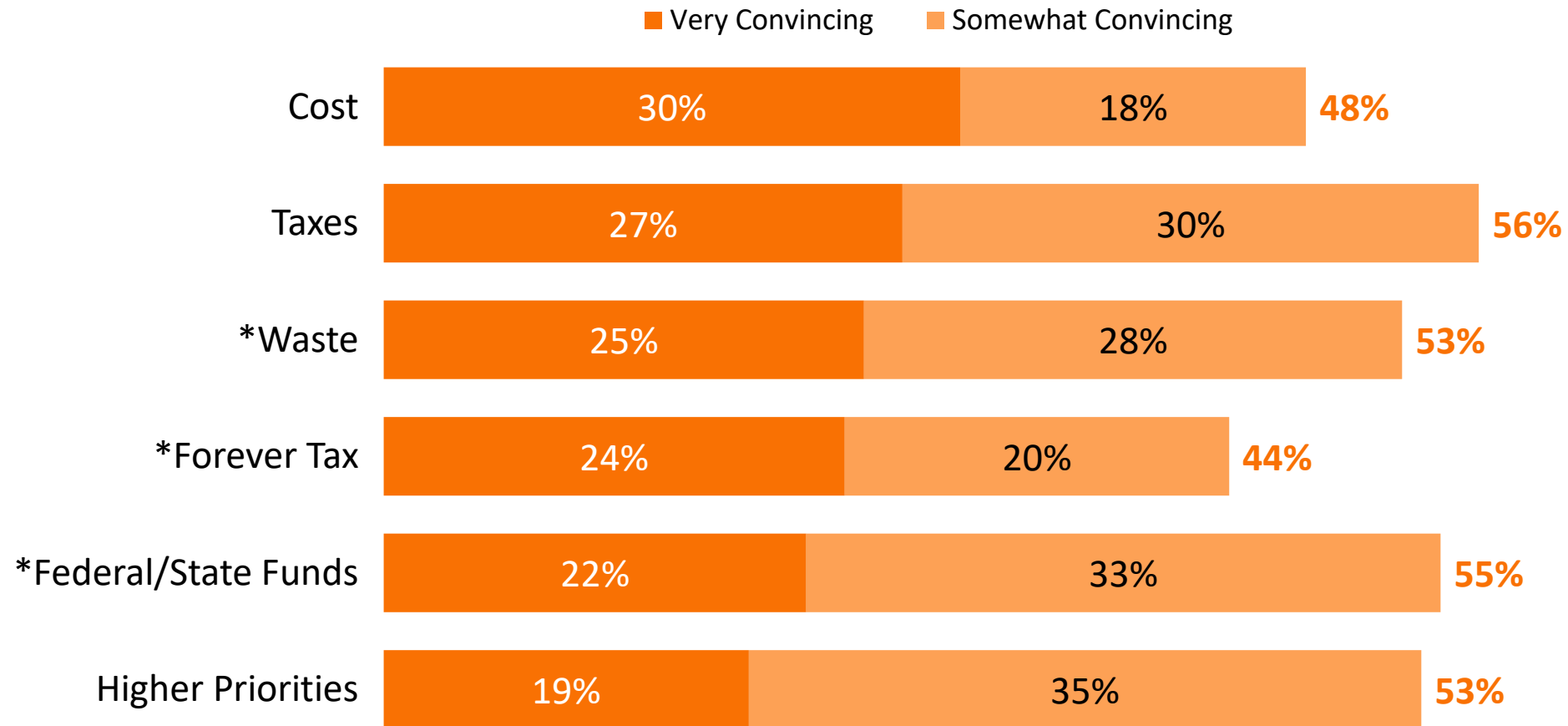
Q9. Please consider the following statements from people who may support this potential measure. For each one, please indicate whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support the measure. ^Not Part of Split Sample

# Messages in Opposition to the Measure

## Ranked by Very Convincing

30%	<b>(COST)</b> This measure could cost households up to \$8,000. This tax is too expensive for the average person.
27%	<b>(TAXES)</b> The cost of living in Sonoma and Marin is out of control and rising. There will be more taxes on the ballot in 2026 and the last thing we need to do is continue a regressive sales tax that raises the price of everyday goods.
25%	* <b>(WASTE)</b> SMART has received hundreds of millions of dollars in matching funds. The agency needs to tighten its belt and use what it has instead of asking taxpayers for more.
24%	* <b>(FOREVER TAX)</b> This measure has no sunset and will be in place forever.
22%	* <b>(FEDERAL/STATE FUNDS)</b> In the past few years, both the state and federal government have issued massive infrastructure grants. We should see how much of those federal and state funds we can use for SMART before renewing the local sales tax.
19%	<b>(HIGHER PRIORITIES)</b> The North Bay has higher priorities for our local tax dollars than SMART – like dealing with housing costs, homelessness, wildfire prevention, and the increase in crime.

# Negative messages are less broadly persuasive overall – but only need to move one-third of voters.





# Conclusions

# Conclusions

- The proposed SMART renewal measure is well-positioned for the 2026 ballot.
- Support for the proposed measure exceeds two-thirds at every point in the survey, although it is within the margin of error of two-thirds initially.
  - Likelihood of success is similar, but slightly narrower among a likely June 2026 electorate.
- Voters offer stronger support for the measure when it includes a 30-year sunset.
- They place the greatest priority on using funds to maintain clean and safe trains, reduce traffic, and provide public transportation for all.
- Positive messaging is highly compelling, particularly statements highlighting that the measure will not increase taxes and that public transit funding is vulnerable under the current federal administration.
- In contrast, negative messages are less individually convincing; the statement highlighting the long-term costs of the measure is most resonant.
- In general, the findings suggest that the measure is viable for November 2026, however, the two-thirds threshold is challenging; while support for the renewal is broad, it is within the margin of error for passage initially and returns to that level after opposition messaging.
- Overall, raising voter awareness of SMART's funding needs; emphasizing that the measure will not increase taxes; and highlighting its growing ridership will be important themes to communicate to the public.





**Dave Metz**

Dave@FM3research.com

**Lucia Del Puppo**

Lucia@FM3research.com



[www.sonomamarintrain.org](http://www.sonomamarintrain.org)



Customer Service:

[CustomerService@sonomamarintrain.org](mailto:CustomerService@sonomamarintrain.org)

(707) 794-3330