



**Survey of Sonoma County  
Likely 2022 Voters  
RE: Potential Sales Tax Measure  
*Summary of Results - January 2022***

# Research Process

## Qualitative Focus Group Discussions with Likely Voters

**Goal:** Hear opinions regarding fire protection and a potential sales tax measure

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*2 groups*  
*November 10, 2021*

## Quantitative Survey of Likely 2022 Voters

**Goal:** Test support for a potential ½ cent sales tax fire protection measure

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*Hybrid web/telephone survey*  
*500 interviews*  
*MoE ±4.4 percentage points*  
*December 1-8, 2021*

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

# Key Findings

- ▶ Though fire is not a top-of-mind concern today, the vast majority believe that fire protection is an important issue in Sonoma County and report using a local fire alert system themselves.
- ▶ Many think the County is currently doing a good job providing fire and emergency services and believe it is crucial to have high-quality fire protection in the County.
- ▶ However, there are a significant amount who continue to show a general aversion to new taxes.
- ▶ Support today for a ½ cent sales tax measure for local fire prevention and protection falls just below the the two-thirds threshold required for passage, with no statistical difference between likely June and November electorate models.
- ▶ There are a variety of reasons to support the measure that voters find compelling; support holds steady, but does not increase, after respondents hear about these reasons.
- ▶ Opposition messaging is compelling and has an impact on support for the measure.

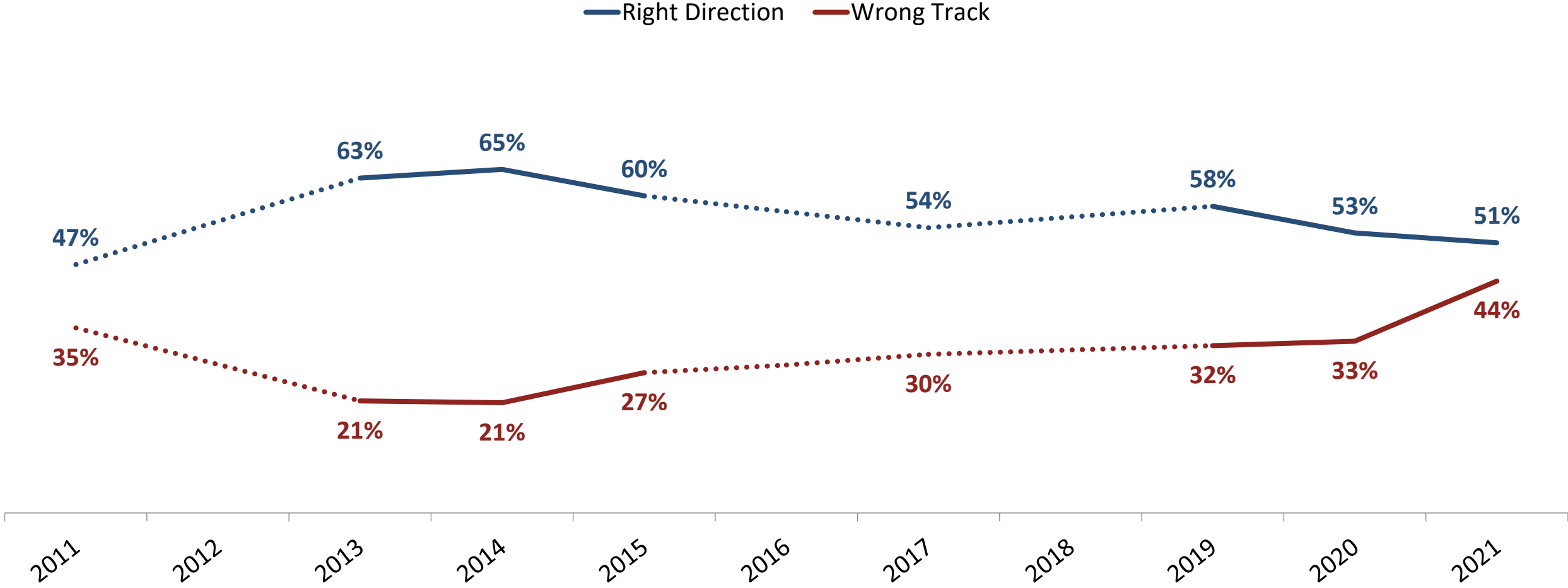


**Issue Environment**

# Sonoma County Right Direction/Wrong Track



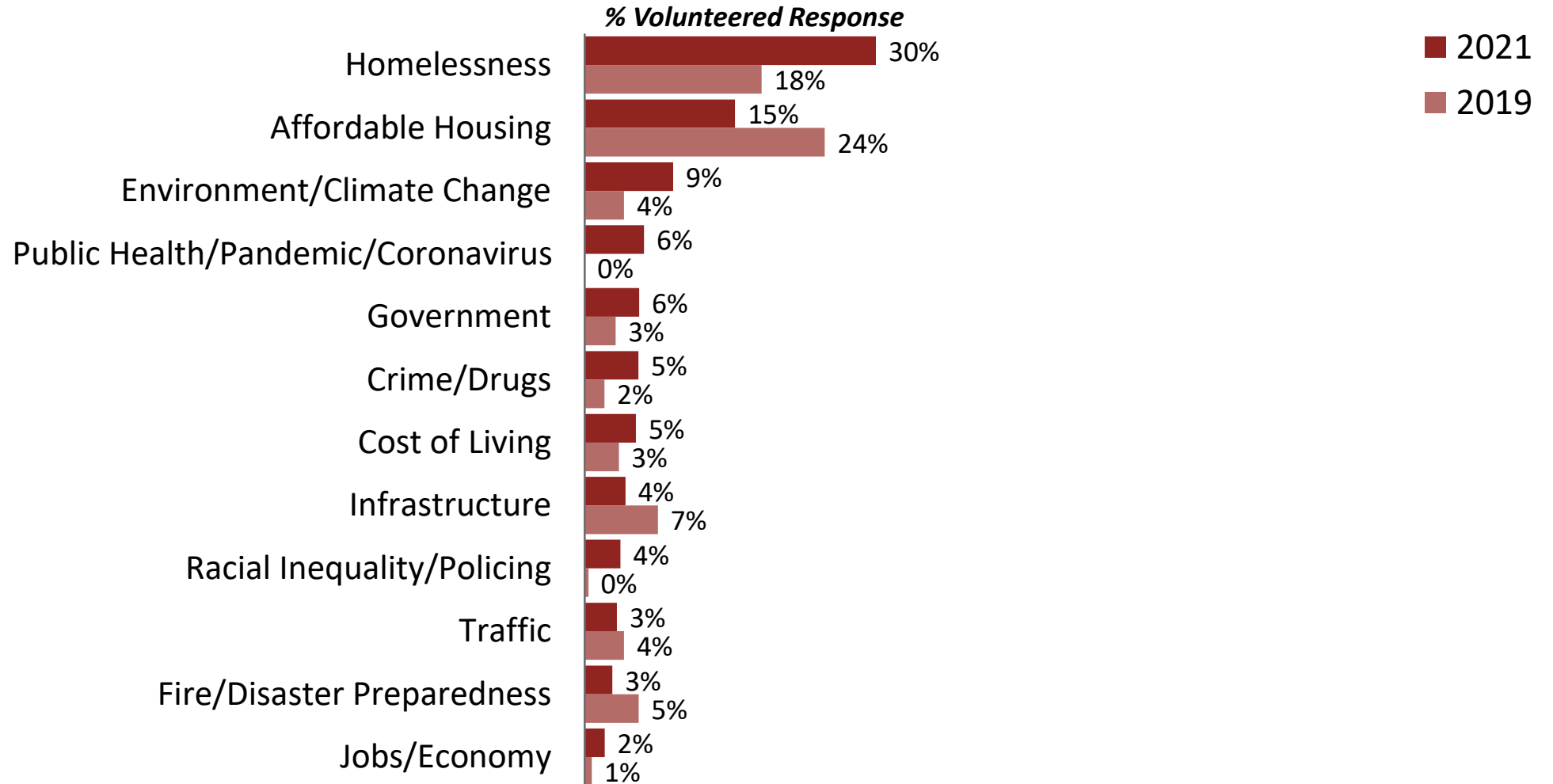
*Voters are split on the direction of the County, with an increase in general pessimism in recent years.*



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

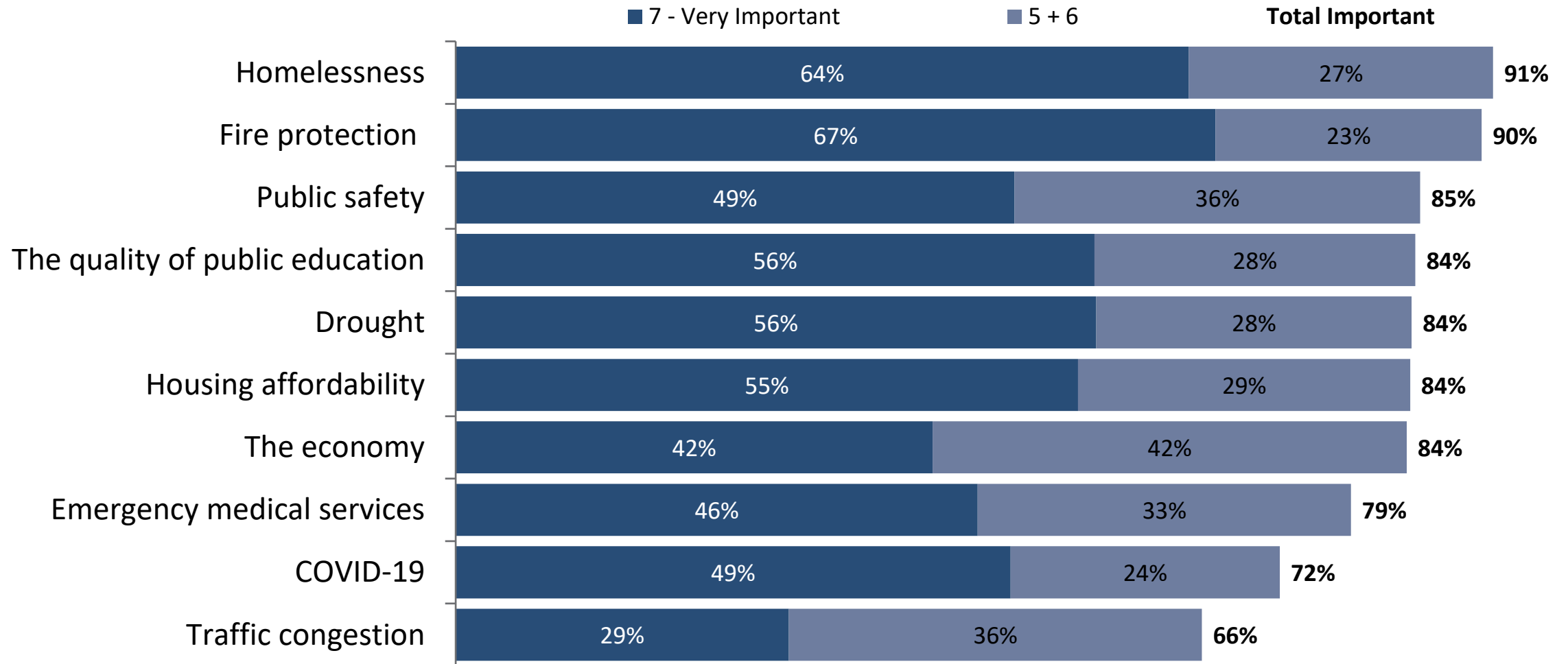
*Homelessness and affordable housing continue to be top-of-mind issues among voters in Sonoma County.*



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 – Close Ended

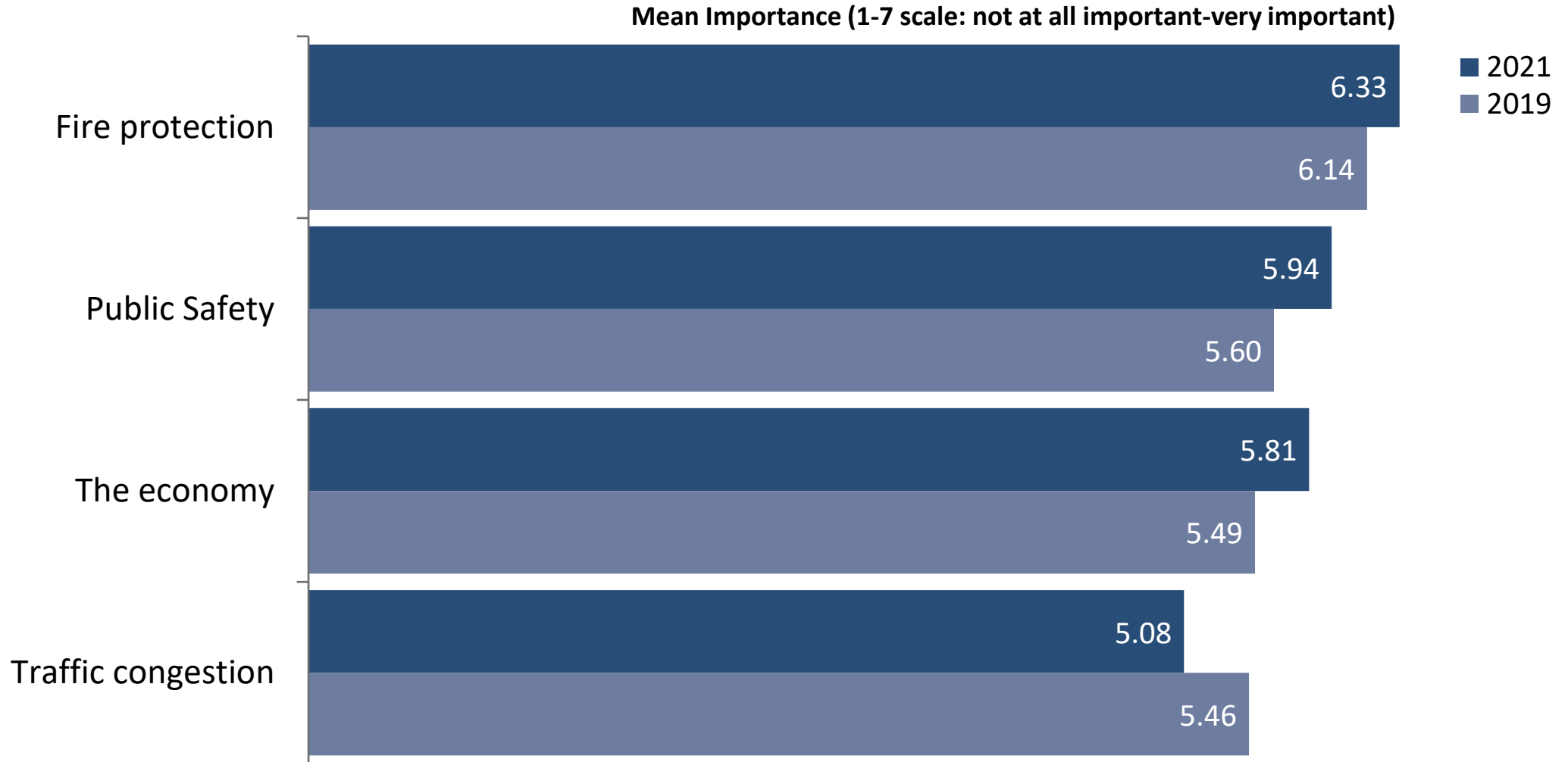
*When voters are asked about specific issues, nearly all believe homelessness and fire protection are important.*



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

*Concerns about fire protection remain high and there are slight increases in concern about public safety and the economy.*



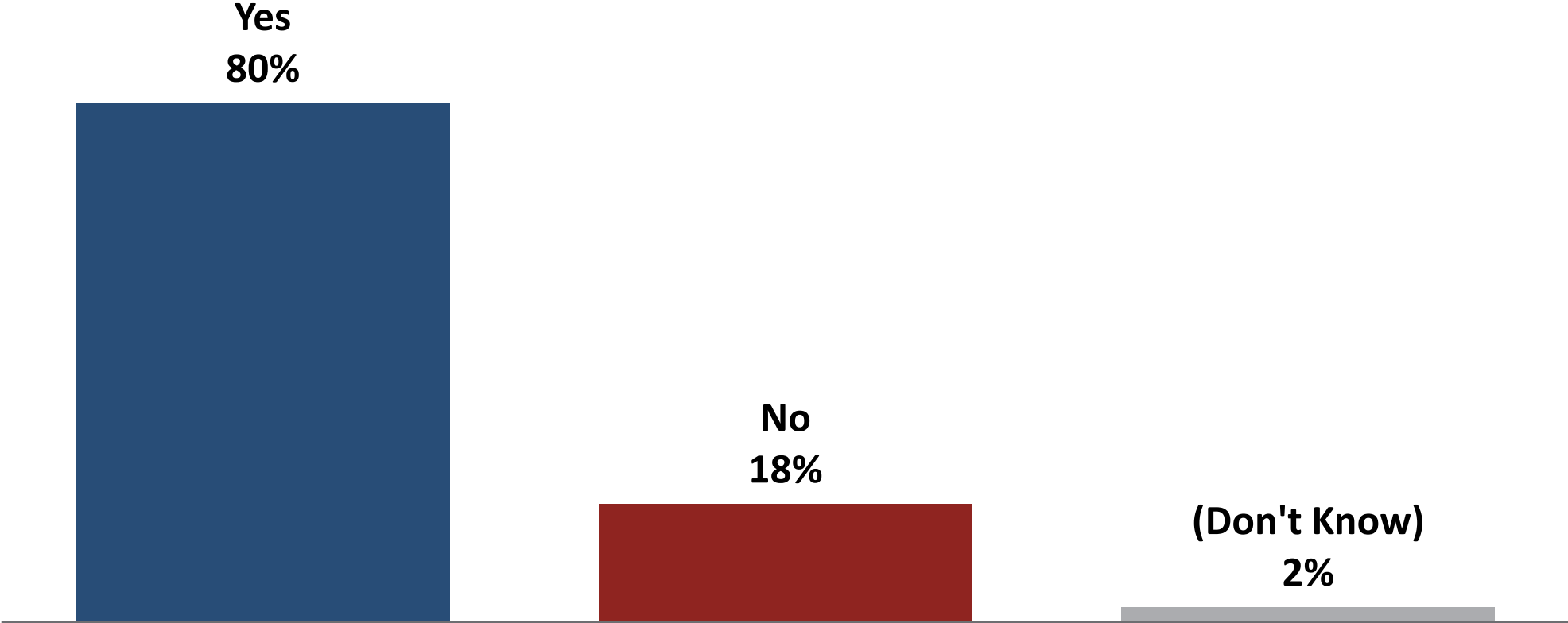
Q6-10. I'm going to read you a list of issues in Sonoma County. For each one, please tell me how important that issue is to you, using a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means not at all important, and 7 means very important.



# Self-Reported Local Fire Alert System Usage

*4-in-5 report using a local fire alert system.*

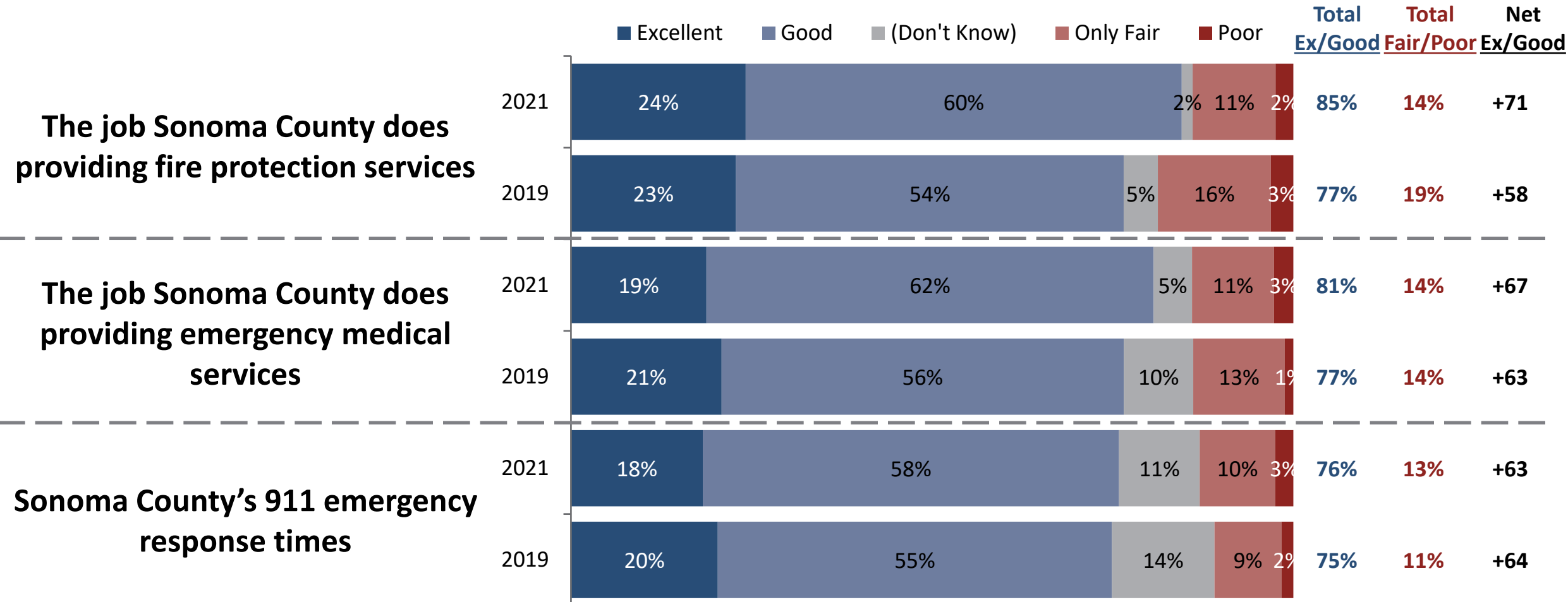
***Are you using any type of local fire alert system like Nixle or Watch Duty to get alerts about local fires in Sonoma County?***



*Note: margin of error for the above subgroups ranges from ± 5.5 to ± 12.2 percentage points.*

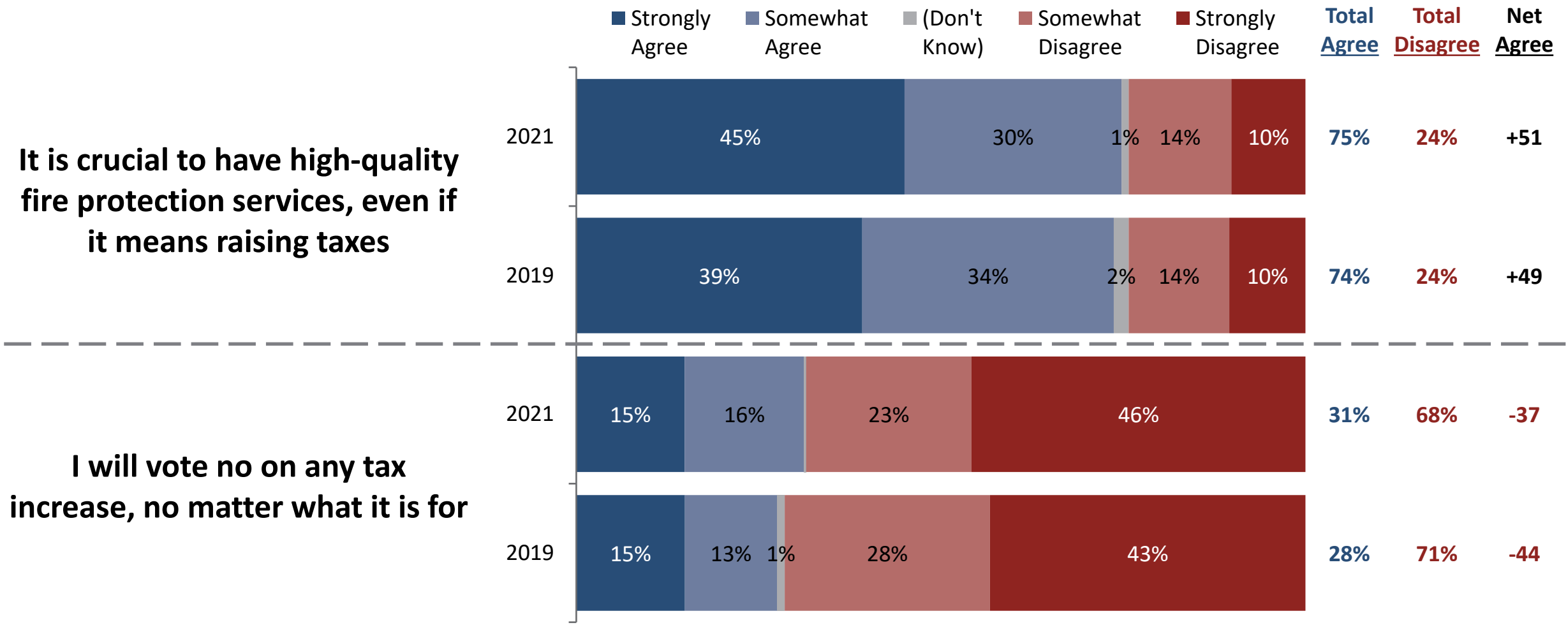
# Sonoma County Job Ratings

Many continue to have positive perceptions of County responsibilities tested, with slight increases in the positive perceptions of fire protection services and emergency medical services since 2019.



# Sonoma County Voter Attitudes

*Three-quarters agree that high-quality fire protection services are crucial, with a slight increase in intensity since 2019, and about two-thirds express a willingness to consider a new tax.*



Q22-4. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following statements.

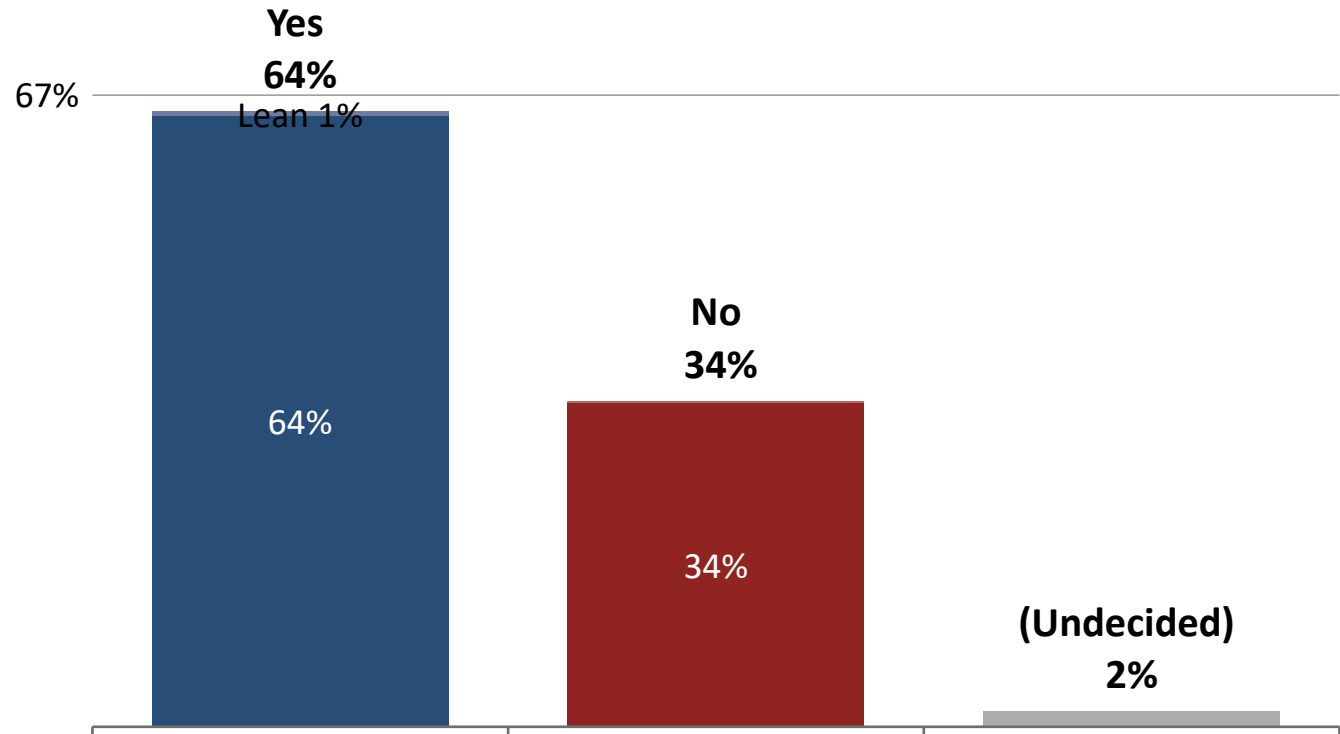


# Potential Sales Tax Measure

# Sales Tax Measure: Support Today

*Support today falls just below the two-thirds threshold require to pass.*

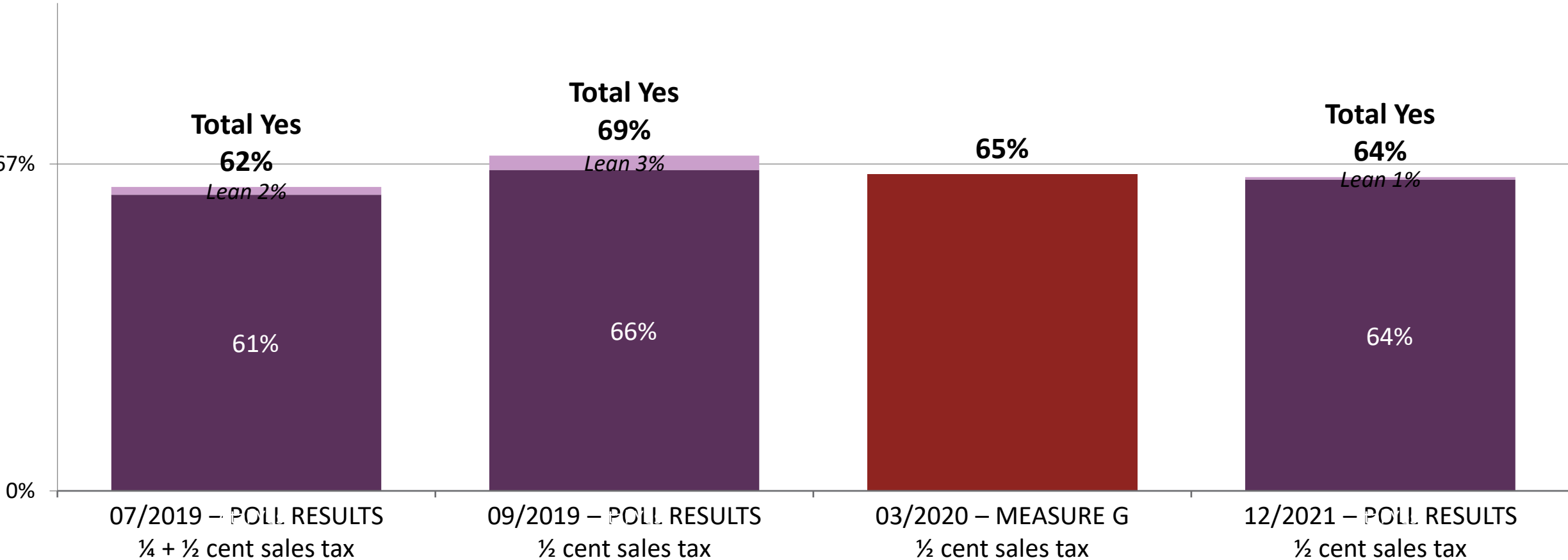
*To improve and enhance local fire prevention, protection, and emergency and disaster response throughout Sonoma County by: improving countywide vegetation management by reducing flammable brush to prevent wildfire spread; attracting and retaining qualified, local firefighters; and, updating firefighting 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?*



# Special Sales Tax Historical Context

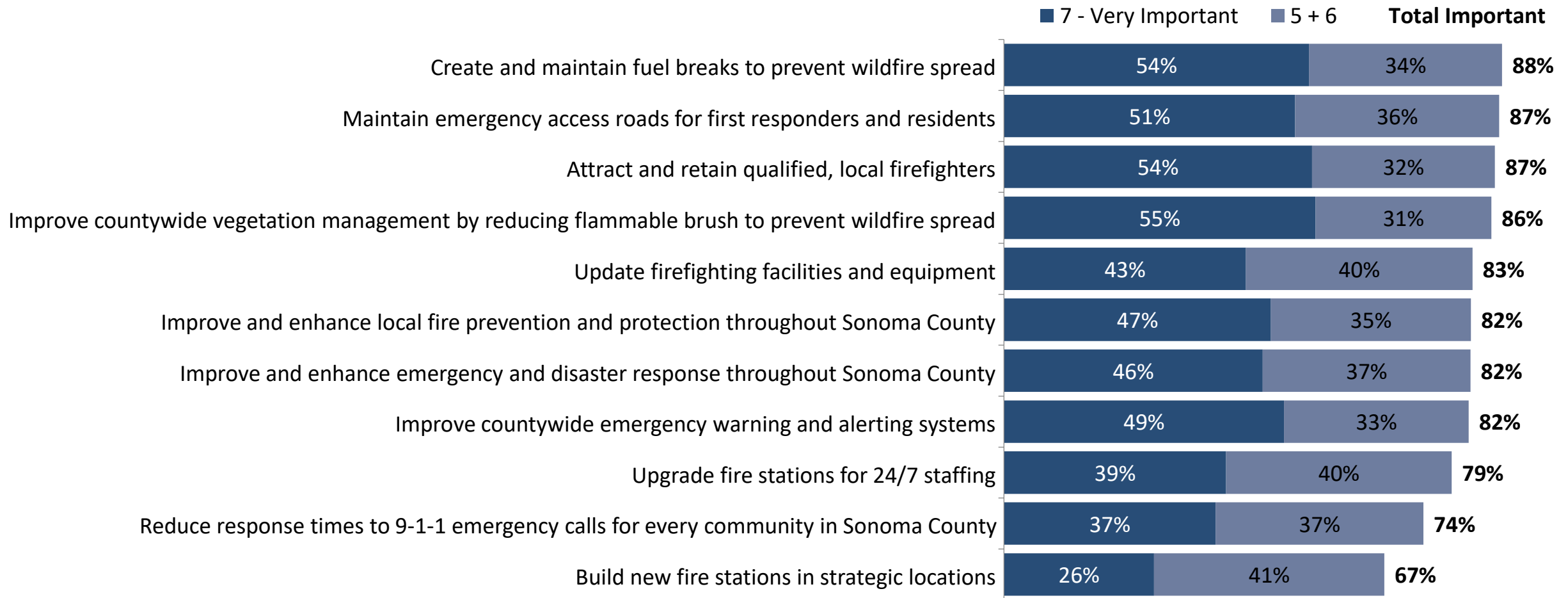
Support for a sales tax measure for fire prevention and protection has historically hovered right around the 67% threshold.

■ Measure Failed  
■ Poll Results



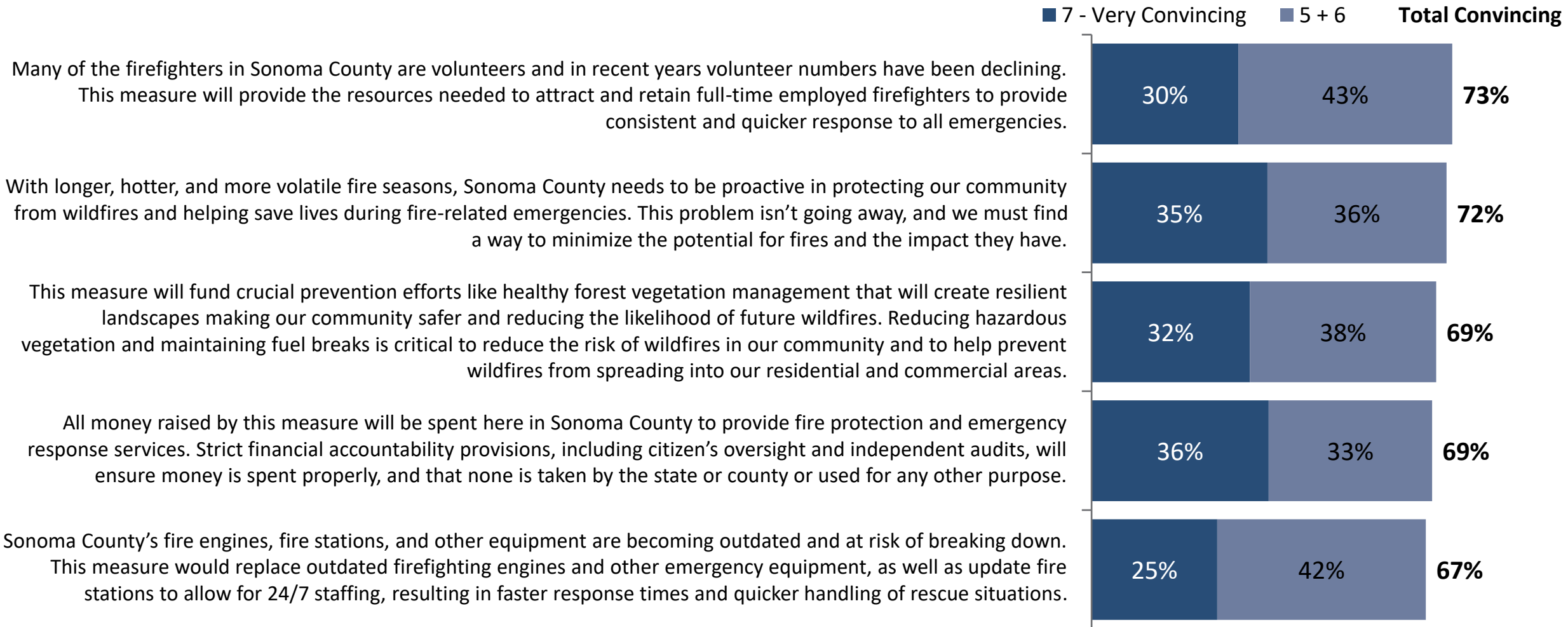
# Potential Measure Components

*Potential projects tested are important to at least two-thirds of voters with voters prioritizing creating and maintaining fuel breaks, maintaining emergency access roads, attracting and retaining firefighters, and improving vegetation management.*



# Additional Information

*Information related to attracting and retaining firefighters, the need for proactive protection, vegetation management, accountability provisions, and updating equipment are compelling reasons to support a measure.*



Q36-43. 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.

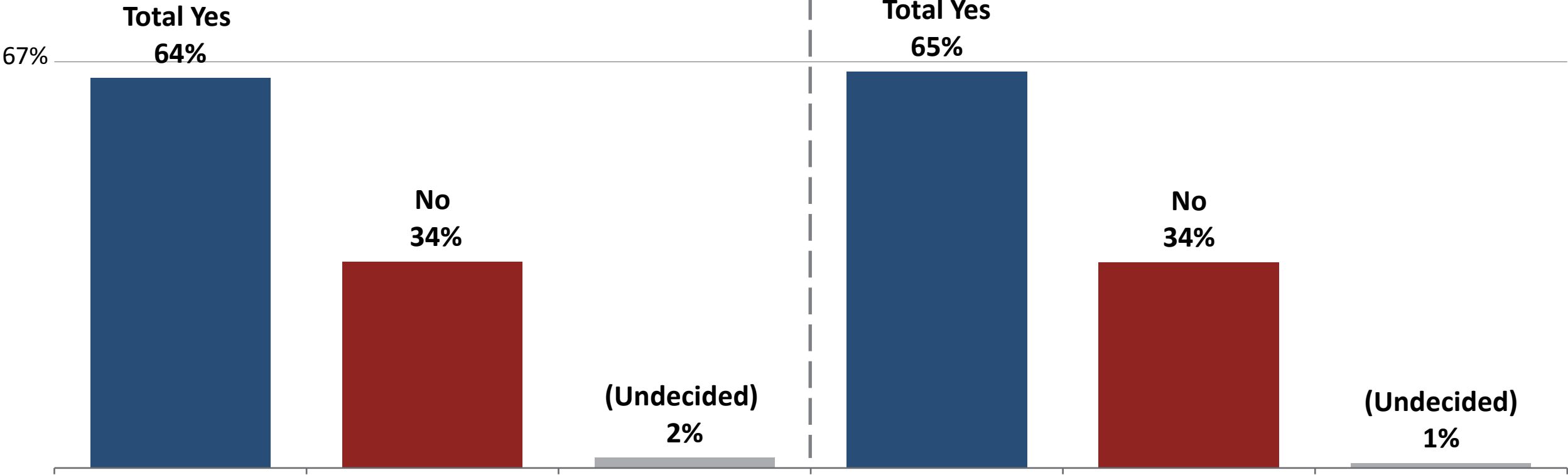


# Support After Additional Information

*Support holds steady after respondents learn more.*

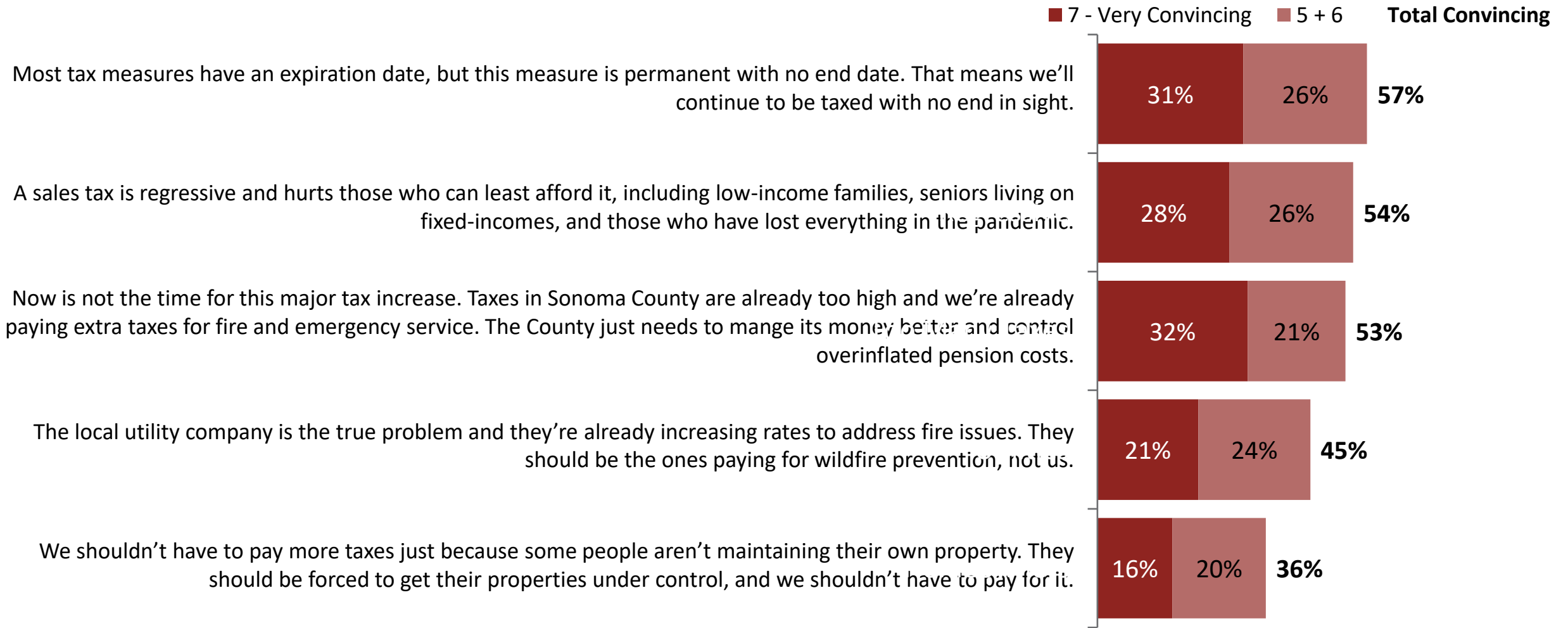
## Initial Vote

## After Additional Information



# Opposition Messages

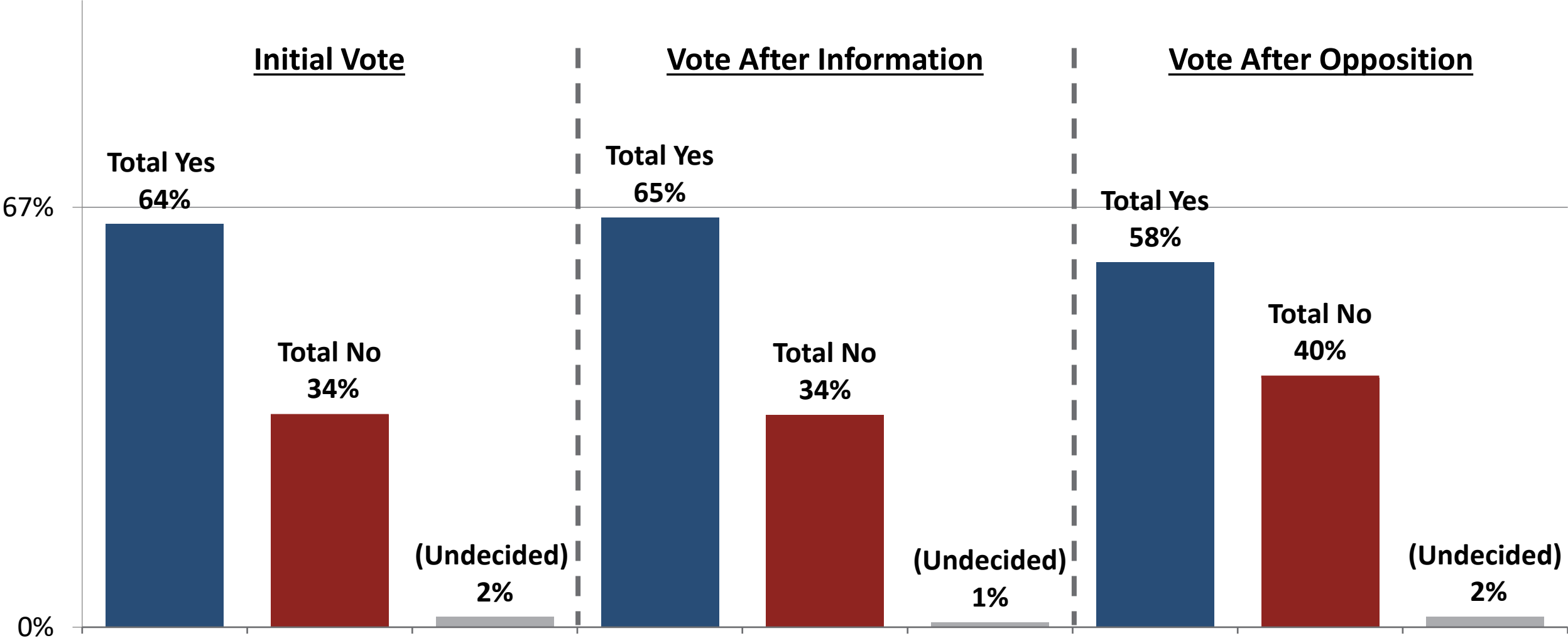
*Potential opposition messages are compelling to many—particularly that this measure is permanent with no end date.*



Q45-49. Next I'd like to read you statements from people who oppose the proposed measure. After you hear each statement, please tell me how convincing it is as a reason to vote against the measure.

# Vote Progression

*Opposition messaging is impactful and affects support.*

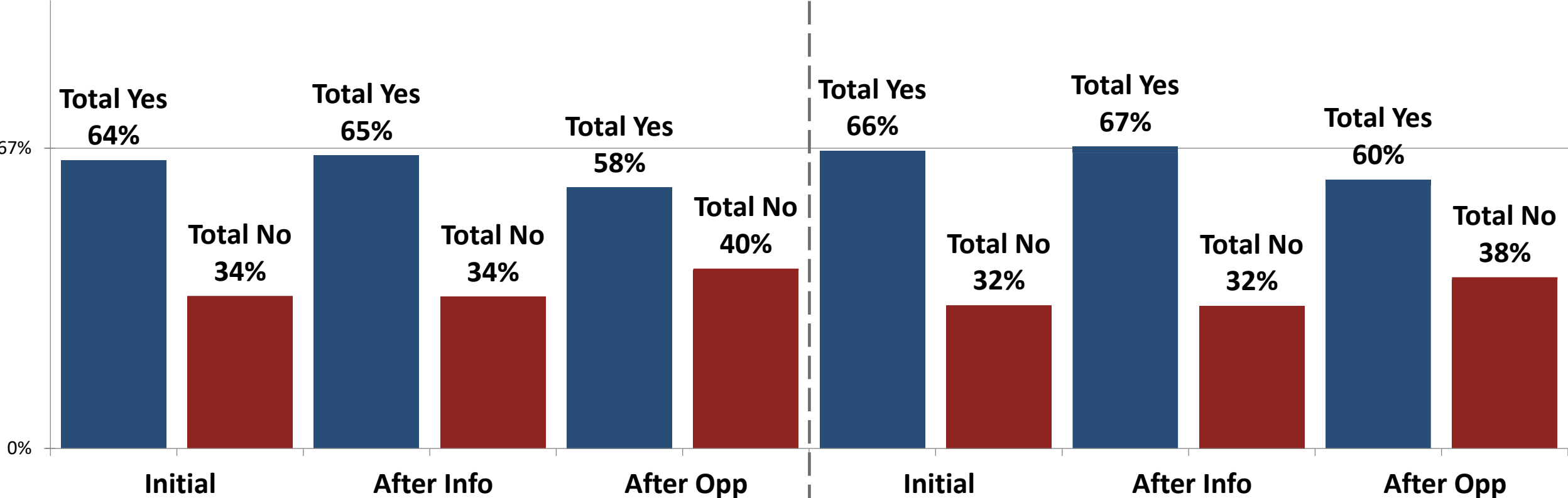


# Support Progression by Electorate

Statistically there is no difference in support levels between the projected likely November and likely June electorate models.

**Likely November 2022 Voters**  
(n=500)

**Likely June 2022 Voters**  
(n=386)



Note: margin of error for the above data ranges from ± 4.4 to ± 5.0 percentage points.

# Focus Group Findings

Quantitative survey results support focus group discussion findings:

- ▶ Nearly all participants were aware of and using warning and alert systems and applications.
- ▶ Vegetation management was universally recognized as important. Participants expressed a desire for their communities to be proactive about fire prevention, not just reactive.
- ▶ While there was an awareness of wildfires as a threat, participants were less aware of the needs of local firefighters and fire departments.
- ▶ There was real hesitation around new taxes. Participants were feeling fatigued by recent tax measures and averse to tax increases.
- ▶ Participants noticed the 'until ended by voters' clause and expressed concern about an evergreen tax.

*"To me, [vegetation management] feels like the most proactive way to try to get our arms around this."*

*"Yeah. I feel Nixle has definitely improved this past year. I think that they're more proactive for one and then, they give good updates as well."*

*"I agreed with every single word except for the word tax."*

*"I just don't like a continuation forever and ever unless voted with another special measure that has to be done. If it's every five years and it comes up, that's a better way to keep track of it."*

# Conclusions

- ▶ While voters continue to find fire protection and prevention in Sonoma County important and general voter sentiment holds relatively constant, support for a sales tax measure continues to fall just below the two-thirds threshold.
- ▶ The sales tax to fund fire protection may be feasible in the right environment, however, it would require a strong privately funded communication effort to solidify and maintain support.
- ▶ These data do not demonstrate statistically significant differences in support between the projected June and November electorate models—the broader environment should be considered in timing decisions.
- ▶ The survey data, along with the qualitative focus group findings, point to considering a sunset provision.

# Recommendations

1. Add a sunset to the measure and make minor tweaks to the ballot question
2. Comprehensive outreach plan to get key stakeholders on the same page
  1. Business Groups
  2. Environmental Groups
  3. Labor Groups
  4. Elected Officials and City Managers
3. Informational messaging to community through direct mail and digital advertising
4. Privately funded robust campaign



Ruth Bernstein  
ruth@emcresearch.com

Andie Morhous  
andie@emcresearch.com



Barry Barnes  
bbarnes@propsandmeasures.com

Robin Gerrity  
rgerrity@propsandmeasures.com