HumboldtCounty California's Redwood Coast

Unincorporated Humboldt County Voter Views of Housing Policy

Key Findings from a Survey of Voters
Conducted June 9-14, 2020

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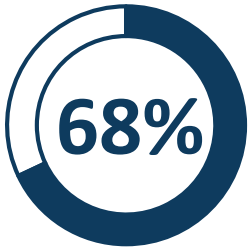
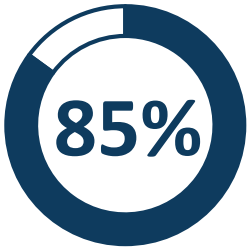
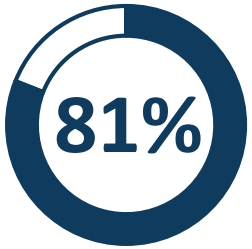
Key Numbers



See the cost of housing as an “extremely” or “very serious problem”



Support the County having a role in developing affordable housing



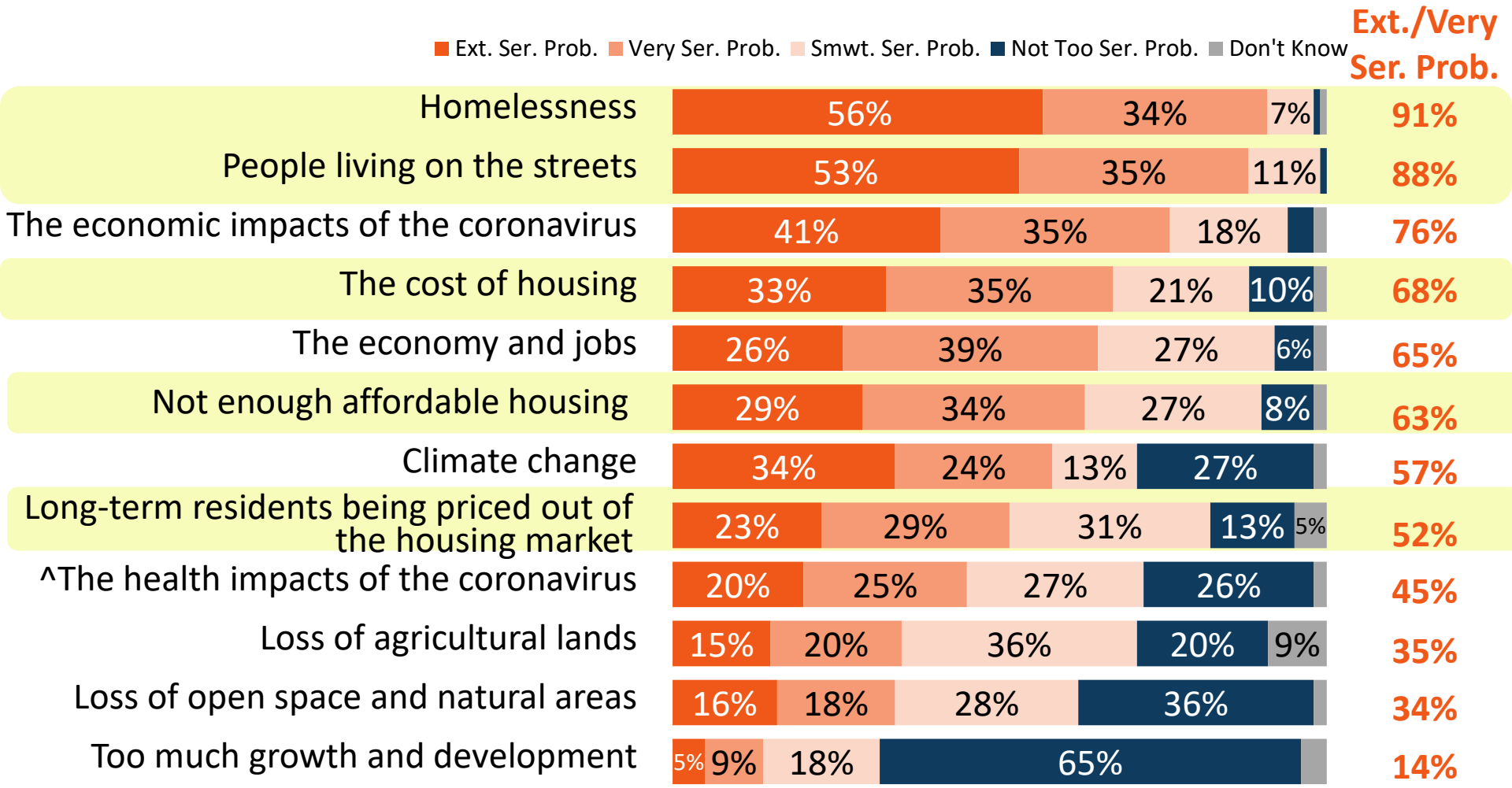
Support a measure that would allow the County to obtain state and federal funding for housing affordable for low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities

Methodology

- 513 interviews with unincorporated Humboldt County voters likely to participate in the November 2020 election
- Conducted June 9-14, 2020, online and via landline and cell phones
- Margin of sampling error of +/-4.4% at the 95% confidence level
- Due to rounding, some percentages do not add up to 100%
- Selected comparisons to prior research

Issue Context

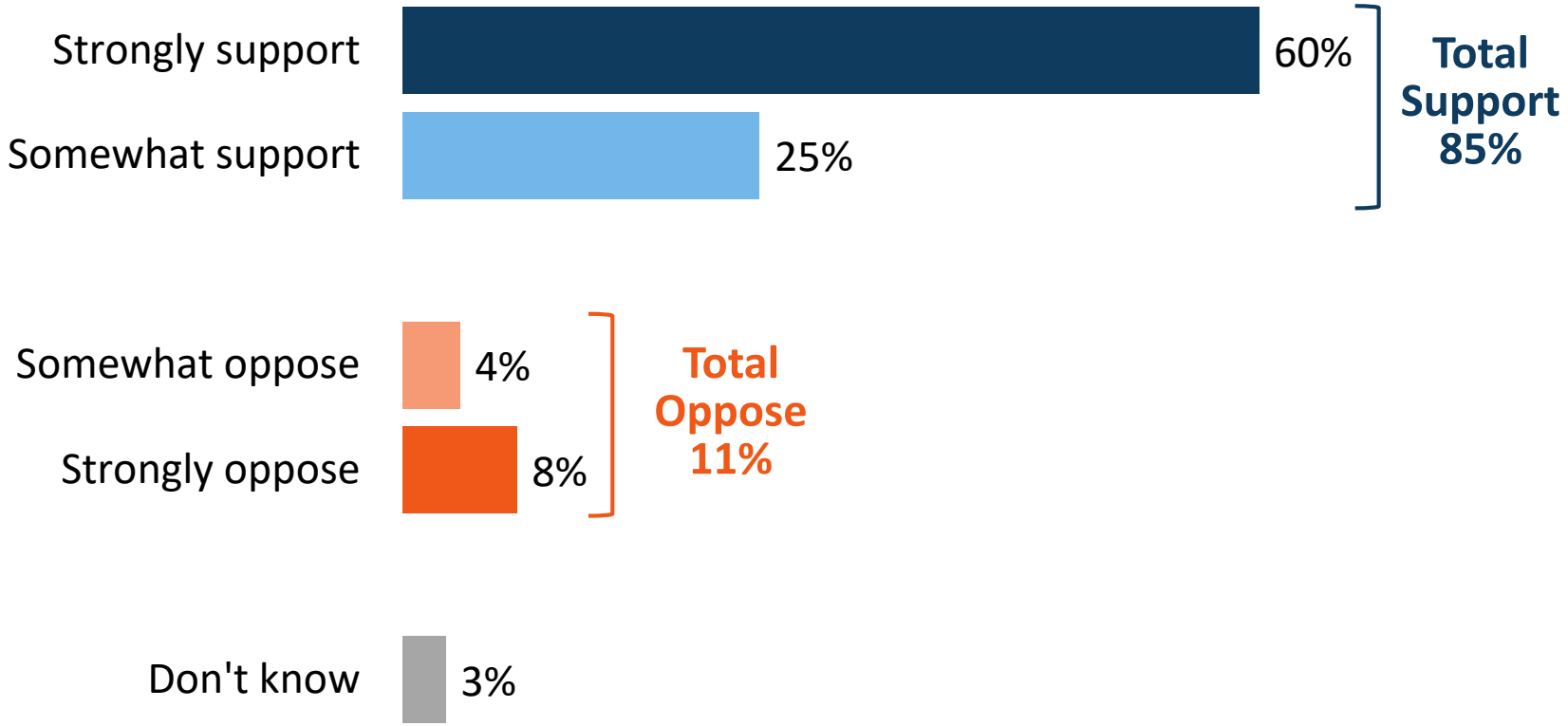
Homelessness is a top concern, above even economic impacts of the coronavirus.



Q9. 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

In principle, more than four in five support a County role in developing affordable housing – and three in five "strongly" support it.

Regardless of how you would vote on the measure, do you support or oppose Humboldt County taking a role in developing affordable housing?

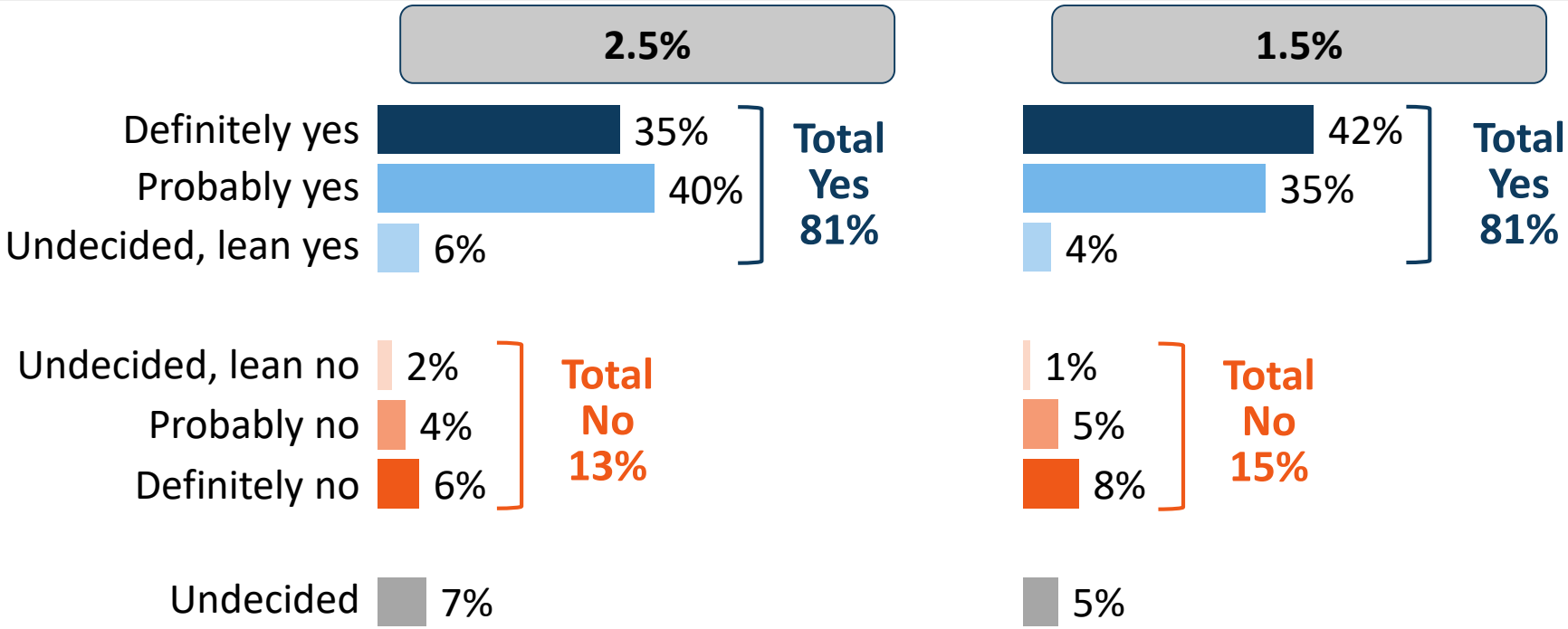


Q10.

Initial Opinions of an Article 34 Reform Measure

Four in five support a measure to allow more affordable housing, with slightly more intense support for a 1.5% threshold.

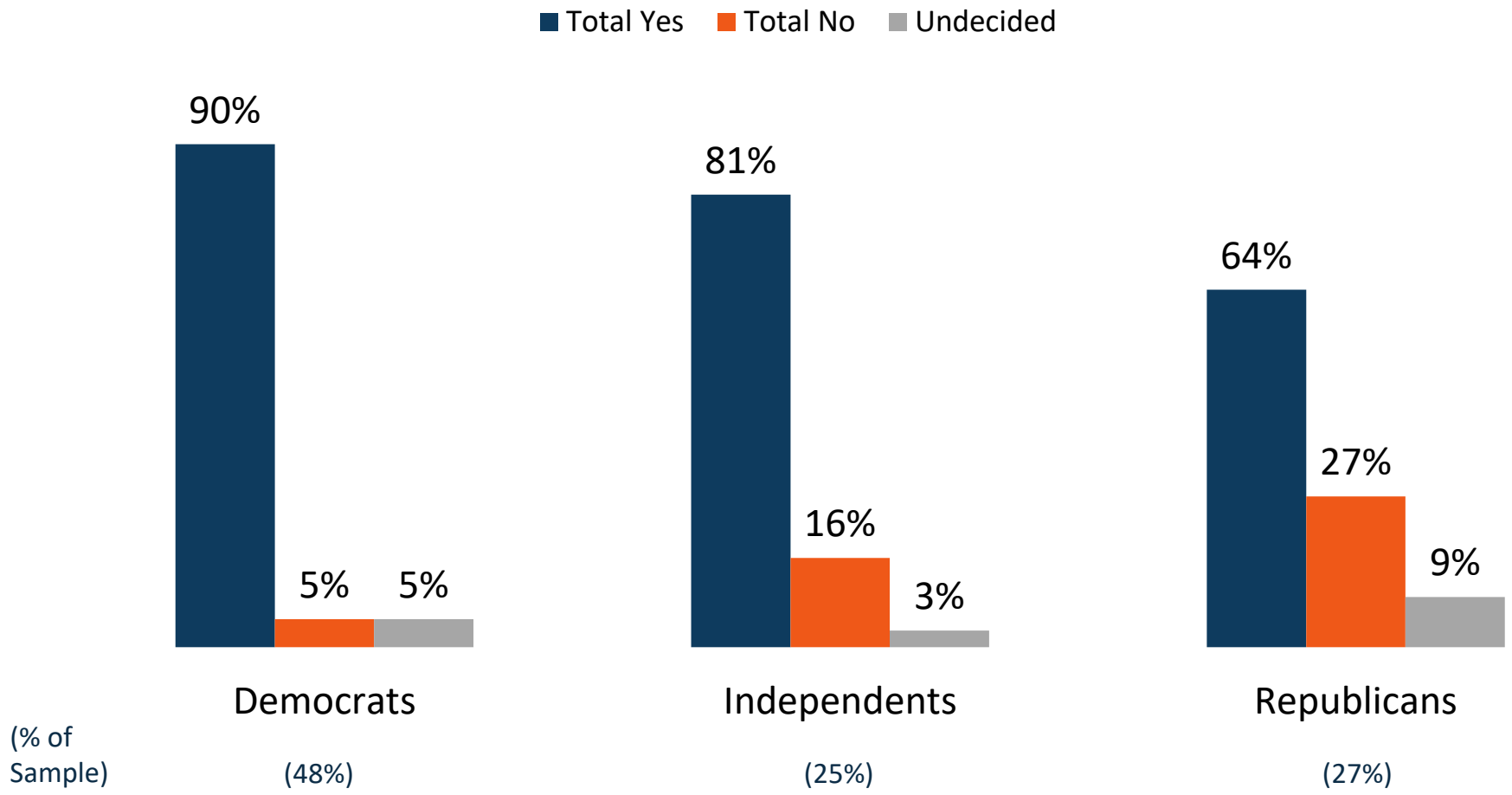
Shall a measure be adopted allowing Humboldt County to obtain state and federal funding and to construct, develop, or acquire housing affordable for low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities within unincorporated areas, either directly or through assisting private projects, up to ***(HALF SAMPLE:*** *2.5%****)*** ***(HALF SAMPLE:*** *1.5%****)*** *of the total number of housing units existing in unincorporated Humboldt County, without raising taxes?*



Q2 Split A & Split B. Do you think you would vote "yes" or "no" on this measure?

Nine in ten Democrats support the measure, as do four in five independents and nearly two-thirds of Republicans.

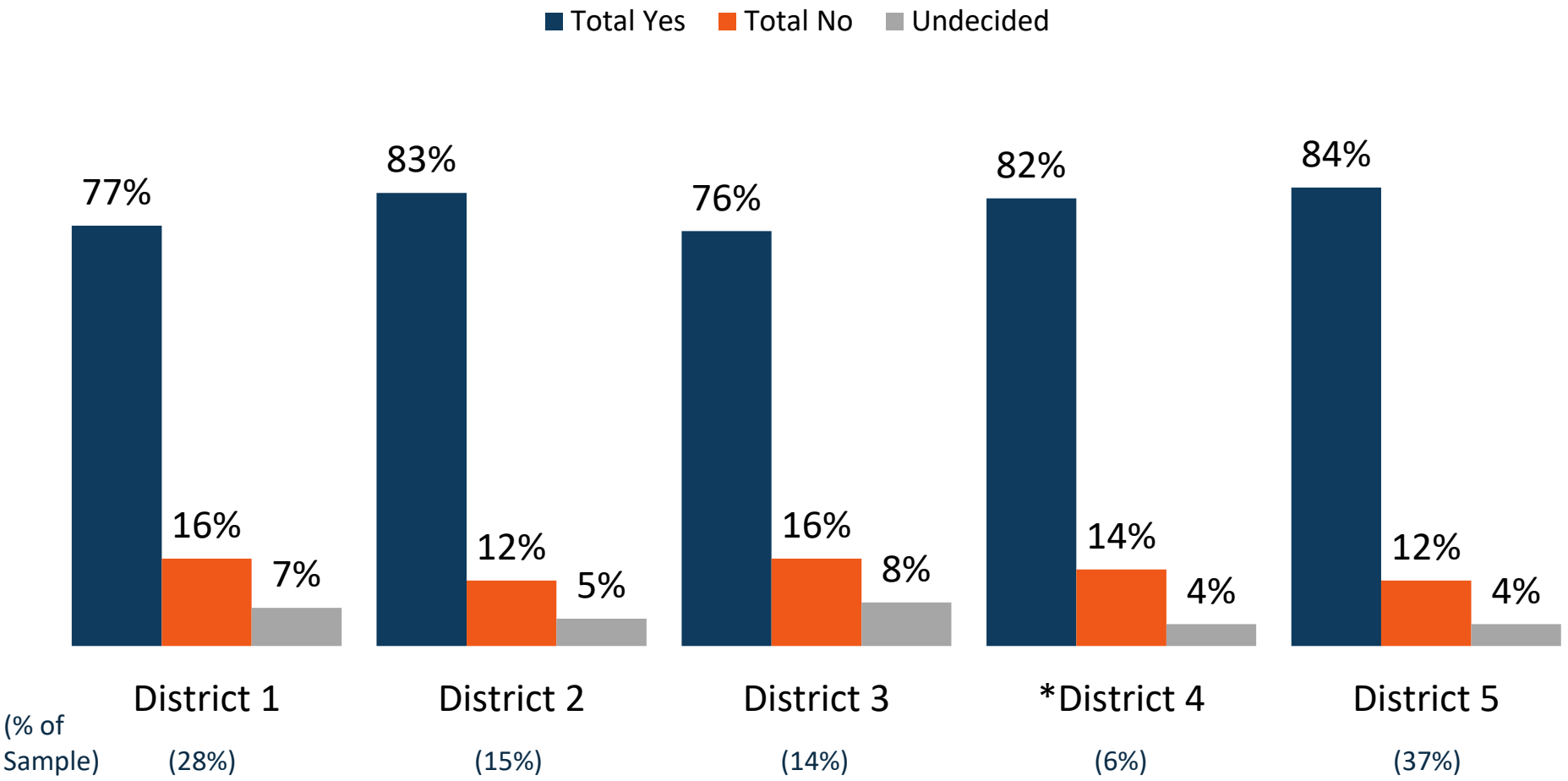
Combined Housing Measure Vote by Party



Q2 Total. Do you think you would vote "yes" or "no" on this measure?

Three-quarters or more support the measure in every supervisor district.

Combined Housing Measure Vote by Supervisor District



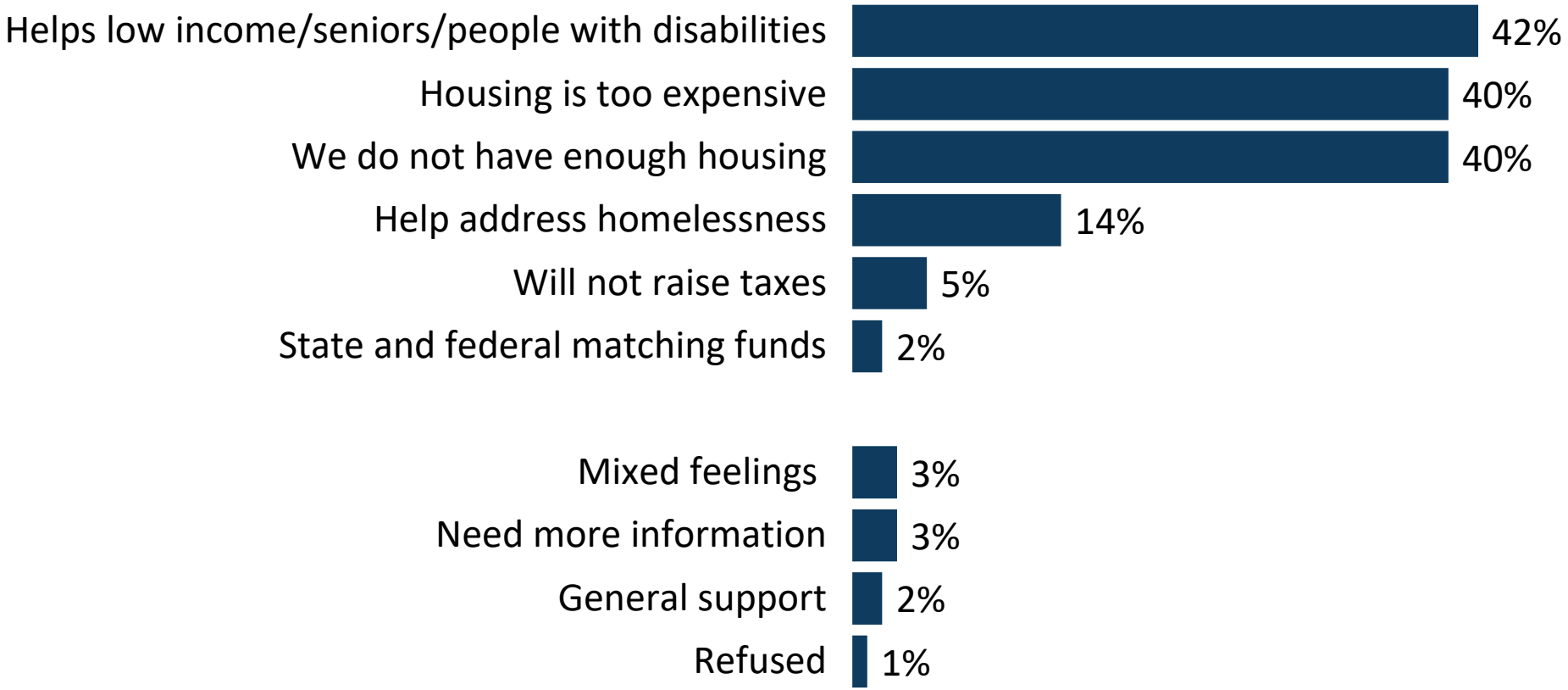
*Q2 Total. Do you think you would vote "yes" or "no" on this measure? *District 4 Has a Small Sample Size, n=31*

Approach to Open-Ended Response

- Half of the sample were asked the rationale for their vote after ballot language alone
- The other half were asked after the plain-language explanation.
- This can help us better-understand places of confusion that the 75-word ballot measure inspires – and what can be resolved with a neutral explanation of the measure's purpose and motivation.

Measure supporters cite the benefits for people and the need to decrease housing costs.

*In a few words of your own, why do you think you would vote **YES** on this measure?*
(Open-ended; Asked of Yes Voters Only, N=203)



Q3a.

Verbatim Responses from Supporters

Property values in the County are excessive and options are needed for lower income families.

Why should unincorporated areas be excluded from low income housing? It's vital for our workforce.

The problem is bigger than us and I think it would be appropriate to receive funding from outside sources. I do not think we should give full control to outside sources, but I understand there may be compromise needed.

Housing costs are outrageous for income that people have.

I would prefer a larger focus on our homeless population. It's an issue that has been insufficiently addressed.

Seniors without pensions, folks who have health, developmental, or live in circumstances that limit their income are not able to healthfully pay rent. These folks end up unhoused or in substandard living conditions.

The price of living here is much higher than some bigger cities

There is a great shortage of affordable housing in California. Humboldt County is not exempt from this.

Because we need more housing as the Baby Boomers age. I am a senior citizen and I have had to wait more than 3 years to access affordable housing and still have not moved much up the wait list.

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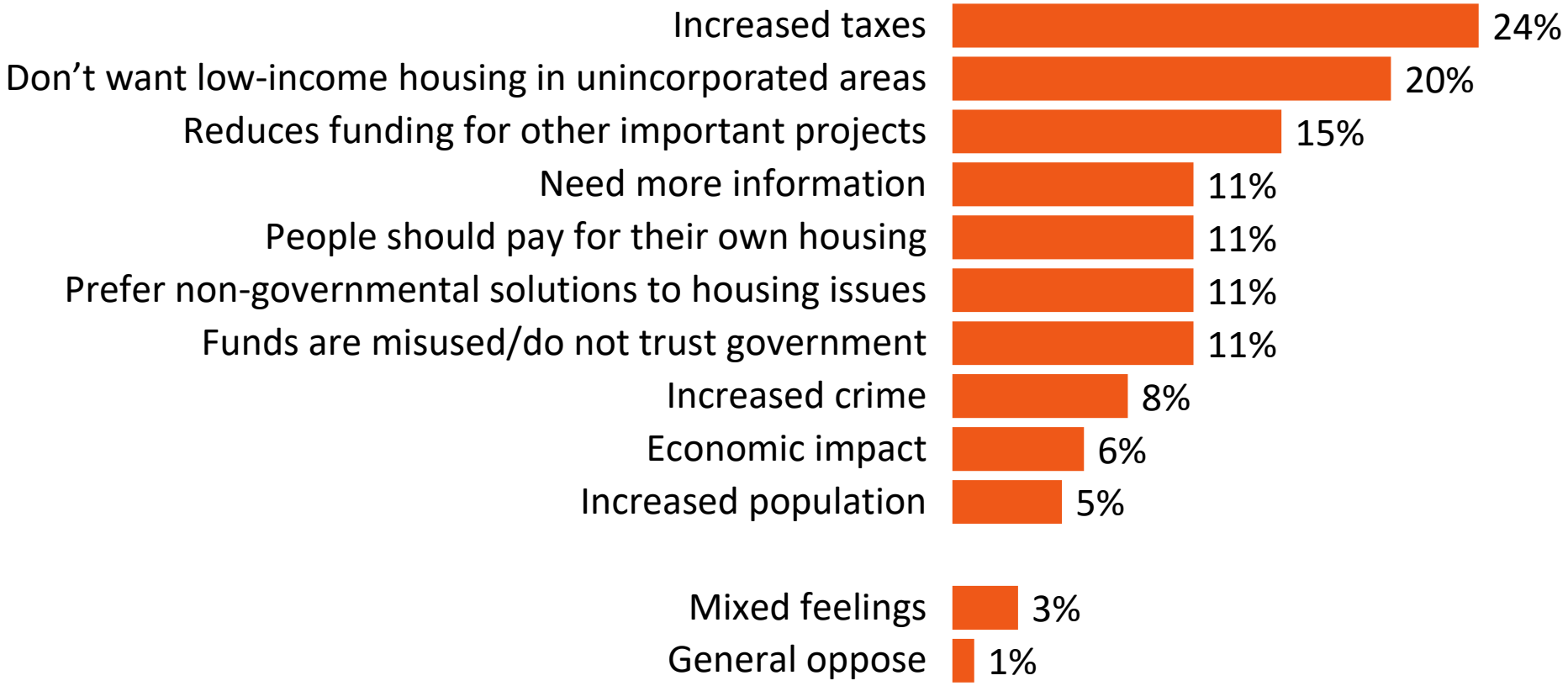
*Q3a. In a few words of your own, why do you think you would vote **YES** on this measure?*

Opponents are wary that the measure would increase taxes or object to low-income housing in areas near them.

*In a few words of your own, why do you think you would vote **NO** on this measure?*
(Open-ended; Asked of No Voters Only, N=39)



Q3b.

Verbatim Responses from Opponents

Statistically, low-income housing usually brings in crime. Also, we live in unincorporated areas is to get out of urban towns and live in a country setting. If we have housing projects this will change the small-town country feel.

We have enough services for low income people.

I don't believe that low income housing would improve or solve the root issue.

Because we are sick of seeing taxes raised on projects that never get done.

Because everything the state and local gov takes on becomes a boondoggle. No such thing as free money.

We are taxed to death already. Cut back on wasting money on stupid things.

I don't think the county should act as a landlord for people.

I prefer to keep the open spaces we currently have in this rural community.

Because it will include housing for NON-AMERICANS. Many homeless Americans are overlooked because my government has chosen to push them aside for non-Americans.

There's a big problem with vagrancy, drug abuse, and mental health issues in the County. Provide affordable housing to people who are willing to work for a living instead.

*Q3b. In a few words of your own, why do you think you would vote **NO** on this measure?*

Voters were then provided with a description of the measure and what it would do.

Current state law requires communities to put all publicly funded affordable housing to a public vote. This measure would change Humboldt County law so that rather than approving every individual potential project, the County could participate in development of affordable housing units up to **(HALF SAMPLE:** 2.5%**) (HALF SAMPLE:** 1.5%**)** of the total number of housing units that currently exist.

For example, over the next 10 to 15 years, that could mean up to (**HALF SAMPLE:** 870**) (HALF SAMPLE:** 525**)** new units for lower-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities in unincorporated Humboldt County.

However, projects would still have to conform to existing zoning, General Plan, and building regulations and receive all of the standard County approvals before proceeding. Also, this measure would not increase local taxes to pay for any new housing. Instead, it permits the County to utilize other state and federal funds that it cannot currently access.

Given this information, support remains very high for each approach.

Vote	Initial Vote	After Explanation	Difference
2.5% Version			
Total Yes	81%	80%	***-1%***
Total No	13%	14%	***+1%***
Undecided	7%	6%	***-1%***
1.5% Version			
Total Yes	81%	79%	***-2%***
Total No	15%	14%	***-1%***
Undecided	5%	6%	***+1%***

Q4 Split A & Split B. Having heard this, would you vote yes or no on this measure?

Supporters are more likely to include mention of matching funds as a reason for a "yes" vote after this explanation.

(Open-ended; Asked of Yes Voters Only)

Response	Initial Vote n=203	After Explanation n=204	Difference
State and federal matching funds	2%	11%	**+9%**
Housing is too expensive	40%	46%	**+6%**
Help address homelessness	14%	14%	**0%**
Will not raise taxes	5%	5%	**0%**
Helps low income/seniors/ people with disabilities	42%	41%	**-1%**
We do not have enough housing	40%	36%	**-4%**

*Q3a & Q5a. In a few words of your own, why do you think you would vote **YES** on this measure?*

Opponents largely abandon anti-tax sentiments as a driver of their vote after this information.

(Open-ended; Asked of No Voters Only)

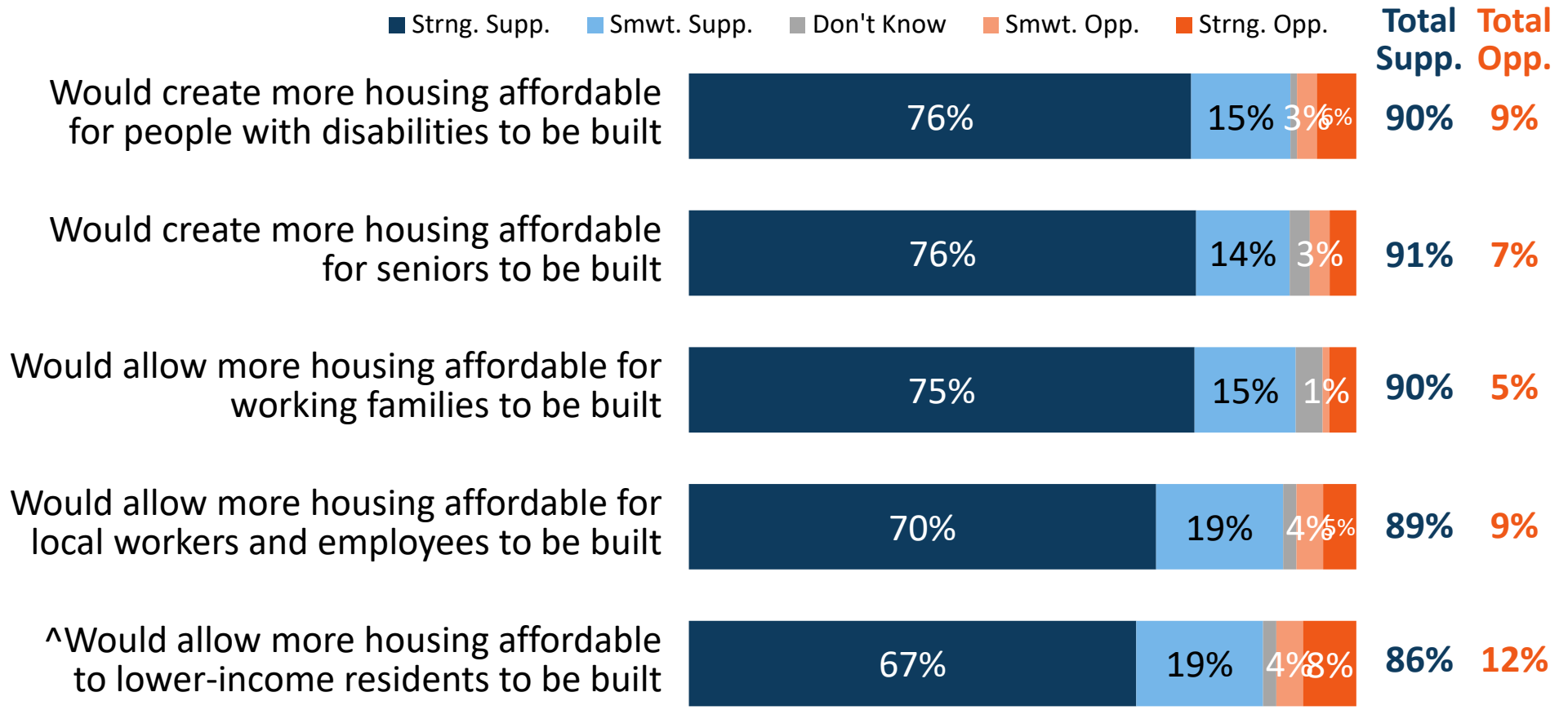
Response	Initial Vote n=39	After Explanation n=36	Difference
Don't want low-income housing in unincorporated areas	20%	30%	+10%
Economic impact	6%	16%	+10%
Prefer non-governmental solutions to housing issues	11%	15%	+4%
Increased crime	8%	12%	+4%
Increased population	5%	9%	+4%
Reduces funding for other important projects	15%	15%	0%
Need more information	11%	9%	-2%
People should pay for their own housing	11%	13%	-2%
Funds are misused/do not trust government	11%	7%	-4%
Increased taxes	24%	12%	-12%

*Q3b & Q5b. In a few words of your own, why do you think you would vote **NO** on this measure?*

Support for Measure Elements

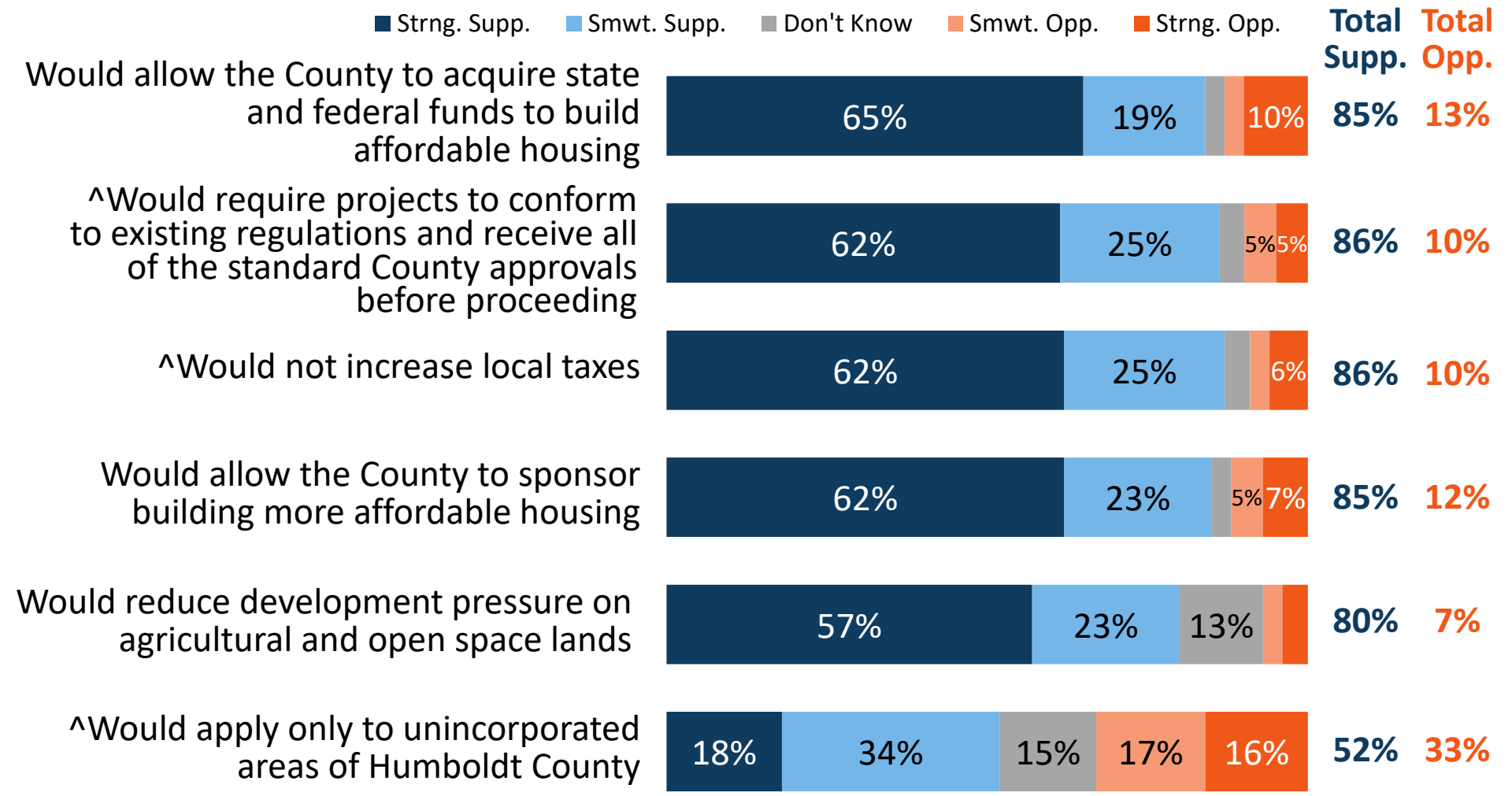
While every element of the measure has overwhelming support, naming groups of people who stand to benefit is compelling.

I'm going to read you a list of potential elements of the measure. Please tell me whether you support or oppose it.



Q6. ^Not Part of Split Sample

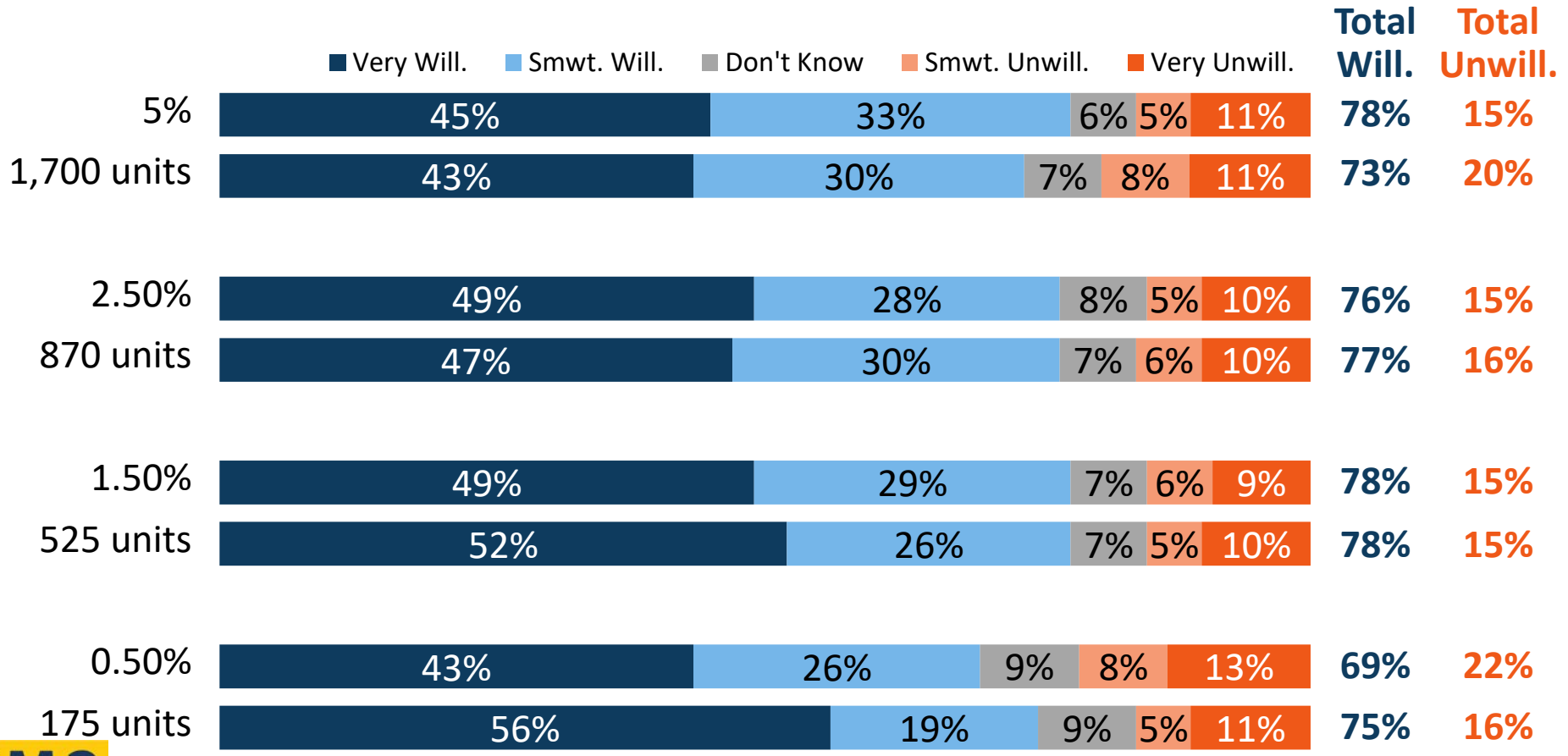
Highlighting that the measure would apply only to unincorporated areas is less popular.



Q6. I'm going to read you a list of potential elements of the measure. Please tell me whether you support or oppose it. ^Not Part of Split Sample

Broad majorities support even the most expansive scenarios, in units or percentage.

*The measure's structure has not been finalized. In principle, would you be willing to support an increase of affordable housing of up to __ **of the total number of housing units existing/ of affordable housing** in unincorporated Humboldt County?*



Q7 & Q8. Split Sample

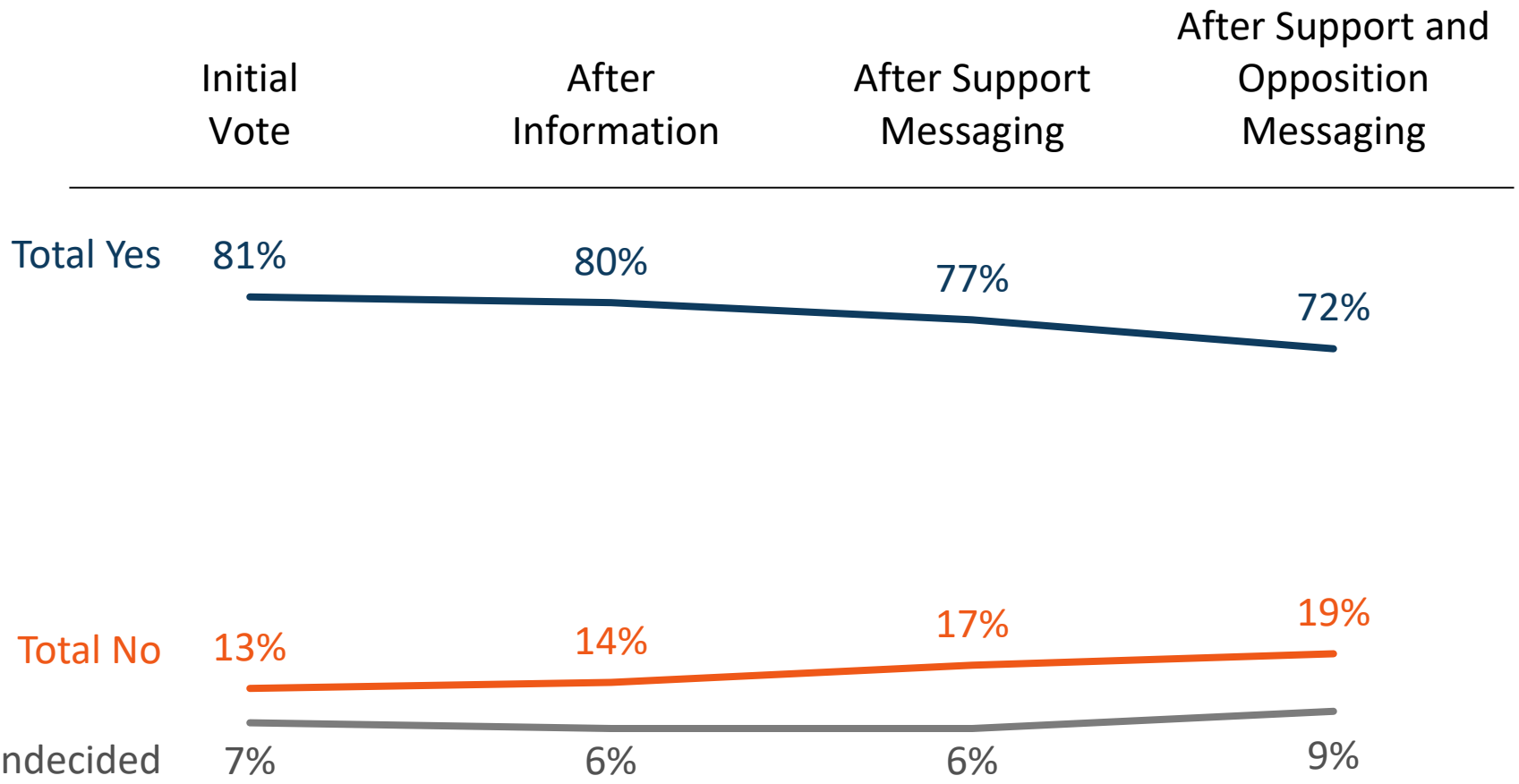
The Impact of Pro and Con Arguments

Arguments Tested

- ✓ Respondents were first presented with a variety of arguments in favor of a measure, including making federal and state matching funds available; that it is really more of a technical fix; that it will not raise taxes; that it will help the local economy by creating local construction jobs; that it will protect against urban sprawl; that it will help address climate change by reducing commutes; and it will help the area's local workforce afford to live near where they work.
- ✓ Respondents were also presented with a variety of arguments opposing a measure, including that the County mismanages its existing resources; that it will ultimately lead to more urban sprawl; that it's a giveaway to developers who want to build high-rise condos; that this shouldn't be a priority with so many other challenges facing the County; and that it will ruin the County's character.

Support for the version with a 2.5% limit stays well above the vote threshold, though it drops a bit as voters get more information.

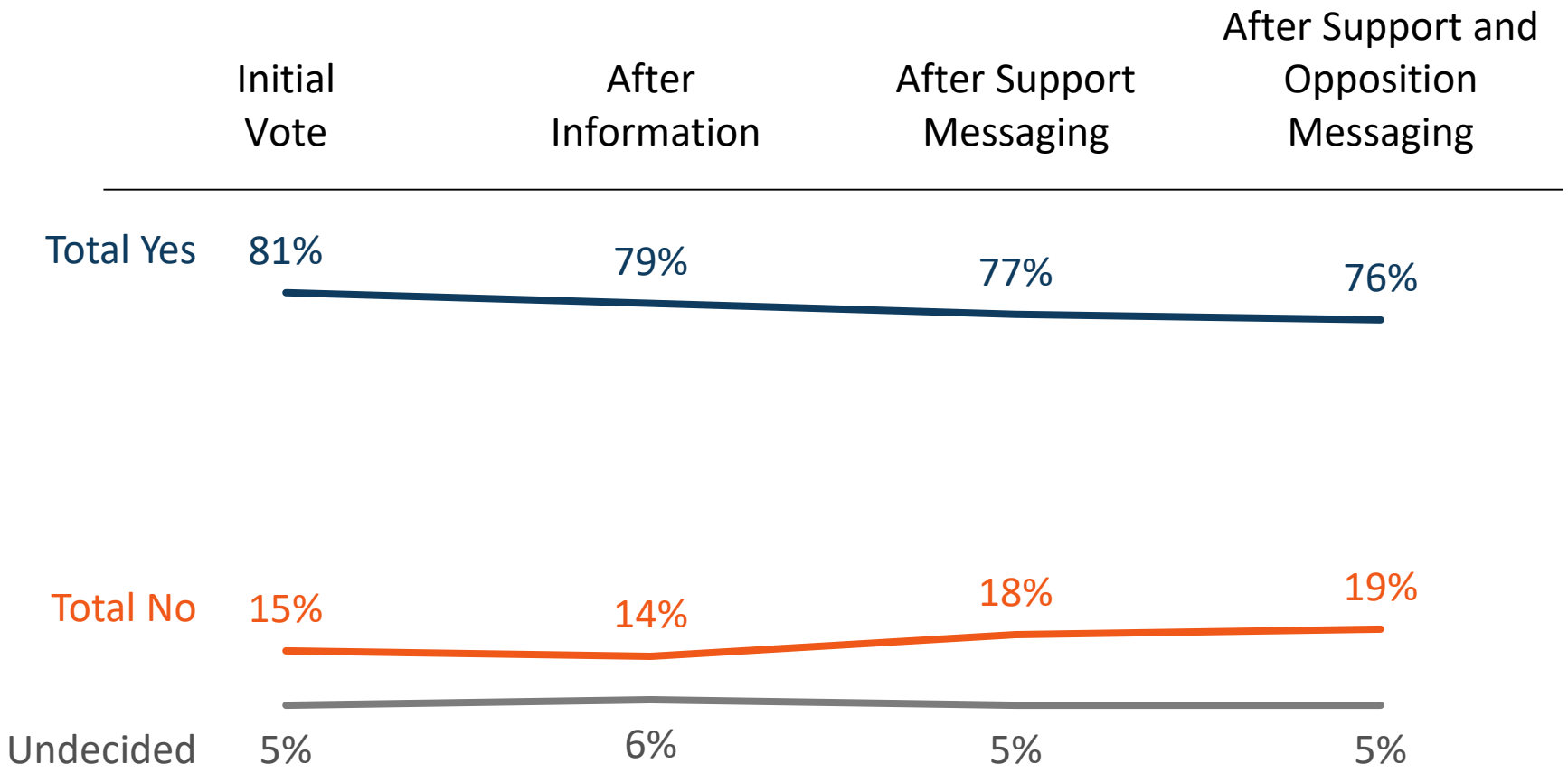
Half Sample, 2.5% Increase



Q2 Split A, Q4 Split A, Q13 Split A & Q15 Split A. Do you think you would vote "yes" or "no" on this measure?

The 1.5% measure has support from at least three-quarters throughout.

Half Sample, 1.5% Increase



Q2 Split B, Q4 Split B, Q13 Split B & Q15 Split B. Do you think you would vote "yes" or "no" on this measure?

Conclusions

Conclusions

- ✓ Homelessness and housing costs are top-ranking issues -- and supporters understand that this measure would help address these concerns. Too much growth and development, or loss of open space and agricultural lands are not broadly shared worries.
- ✓ In principle, fully 85% support the County having a role in affordable housing development – and 60% strongly support it.
- ✓ An Article 34 reform measure appears viable for November. The measure starts with support from 81% of voters, with considerable intensity on the “yes” side.
- ✓ A plain-language description modestly increases the intensity of support.
- ✓ This level of support is fairly consistent and remains well above the 50% threshold required for passage after pro and con arguments, though it declines slightly.
- ✓ Each element of the measure tested is broadly, and quite strongly, supported (though highlighting that the measure applies in only unincorporated areas is less popular). Naming impacted populations resonated.
- ✓ The amount of the increase is relatively unimportant – more than two-thirds support even the highest percentage and unit numbers tested.

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Appendix

Messaging in Support of the Measure
(Ranked in Order of Effectiveness)

(MATCHING) This measure will unlock millions of dollars in state and federal funding available to the County that Humboldt currently cannot access. By voting "yes," we can, tap into federal and state funds, make County dollars go further, and create more housing affordable to people who need it most.

(FIX) This measure simply makes a change to local law that will allow the County to open up funding streams and partner to provide sorely needed housing for working families, seniors and people with disabilities. It does not change zoning laws, raise taxes, or modify the general plan.

(NO TAX INCREASE) This measure will allow the County to provide more housing without raising taxes – especially important as local governments face the challenges of decreased revenue as we recover from the economic impacts of the coronavirus.

(ECONOMY) This measure will help boost our local economy by opening up funding for more affordable housing in our county, creating good-paying, local jobs in construction close to home.

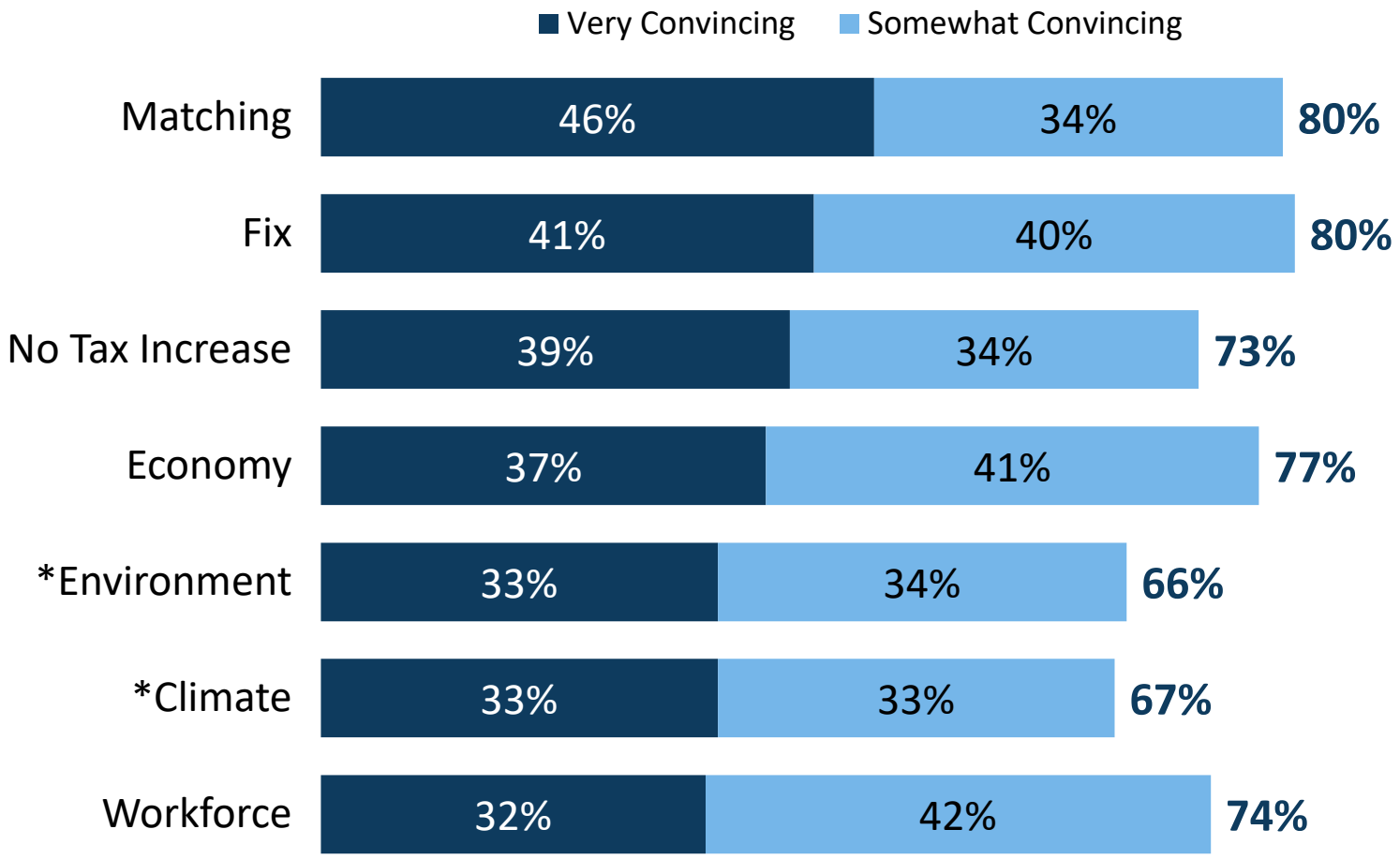
***(ENVIRONMENT)** Building affordable housing according to the County's General Plan will prevent suburban sprawl that eats up forests and open space. This measure will help protect the land, water, and wildlife that makes life in Humboldt County so special, while ensuring that people of all income levels can afford to live here.

***(CLIMATE)** Building housing close to where people work is one of the best ways to the reduce carbon emissions caused by long commutes. This measure will help reduce climate change by building affordable housing in the more-developed areas of the county where it's easier to travel without a car or take shorter daily trips.

(WORKFORCE) The measure would allow the County to partner to build housing for working families that's located close to where the jobs are.

*Q12. I am going to read you some statements from people who support this measure. Please tell me whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support such a measure. *Split Sample*

Straightforward explanations of what the measure would do, including unlocking matching funds, are especially compelling.



*Q12. I am going to read you some statements from people who support this measure. Please tell me whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support such a measure. *Split Sample*

Messaging Opposing the Measure
(Ranked in Order of Effectiveness)

(MISMANAGED) The County is understaffed and overwhelmed, mismanaging the resources they already have. We should not vote to give them even more discretion until they clean up their act.

***(SPRAWL)** There is no way to increase the number of housing units in the county without creating sprawl. This measure is sure to lead to less of the land, water, and spaces for wildlife and recreation we cherish.

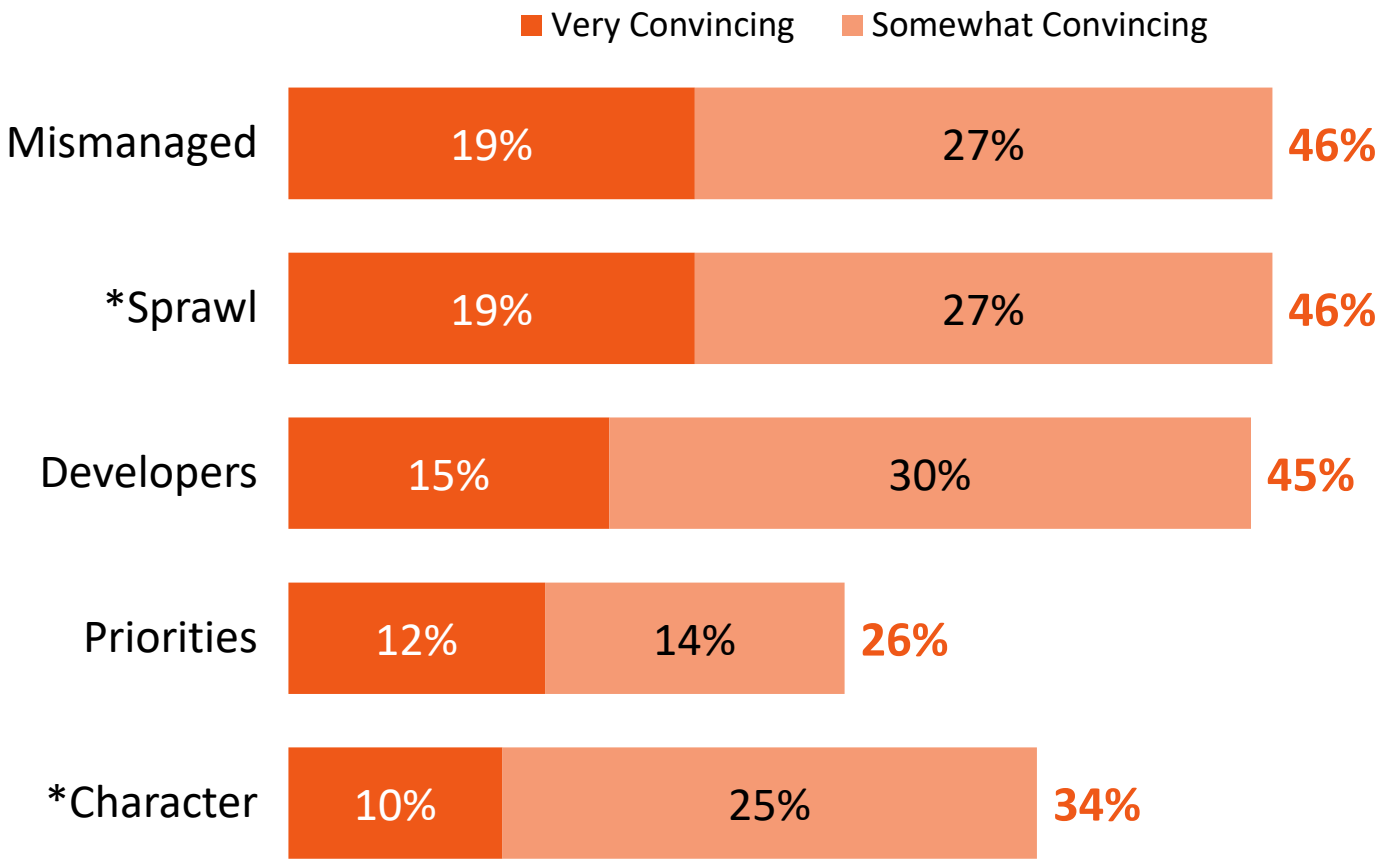
(DEVELOPERS) This measure is a giveaway to developers who will be able to build high-rise condos if they promise to make just a few units quote-unquote "affordable." We should vote "no" and keep greedy developers' influence out of local government and our communities.

(PRIORITIES) We are currently facing a global pandemic, a historic recession, and civil unrest across the country. Now is not the time to play around with County laws.

***(CHARACTER)** New development just doesn't match the character of our cities, small towns, and neighborhoods throughout the county. We should vote "no" on this measure to keep the historic, rural character of Humboldt County.

*Q14. I am going to read you some statements from people who oppose this potential ballot measure. Please tell me whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to oppose such a measure. *Split Sample*

Of a set of less-compelling critiques, alleging that the county is mismanaged, the measure could encourage sprawl or is a developer giveaway stand out a bit more.



*Q14. I am going to read you some statements from people who oppose this potential ballot measure. Please tell me whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to oppose such a measure. *Split Sample*