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Gain Insight



City of Albany: 2011 Sales Tax Measure Feasibility Survey

March 2012

Overview and Research Objectives

The City of Albany commissioned Godbe Research to conduct a survey of local voters with the following research objectives:

- Assess potential voter support for a sales tax measure within the City of Albany;
- Identify the optimum tax amount and duration at which voters will support the measure;
- Assess voter support for a future UUT measure to fund the Climate Action Plan;
- Prioritize projects and programs to be funded with the proceeds of either the potential sales tax or UUT measures;
- Test the influence of supporting and opposing arguments on potential voter support of the sales tax; and,
- Gauge support for funding various capital improvement projects/services.

Methodology Overview

- Data Collection Telephone Interviewing
- Universe 8,426 registered likely November 2012 voters in the City of Albany
- Fielding Dates February 27 through March 4, 2012
- Interview Length 20 minutes
- Sample Size 352
- Margin of Error $\pm 5.1\%$



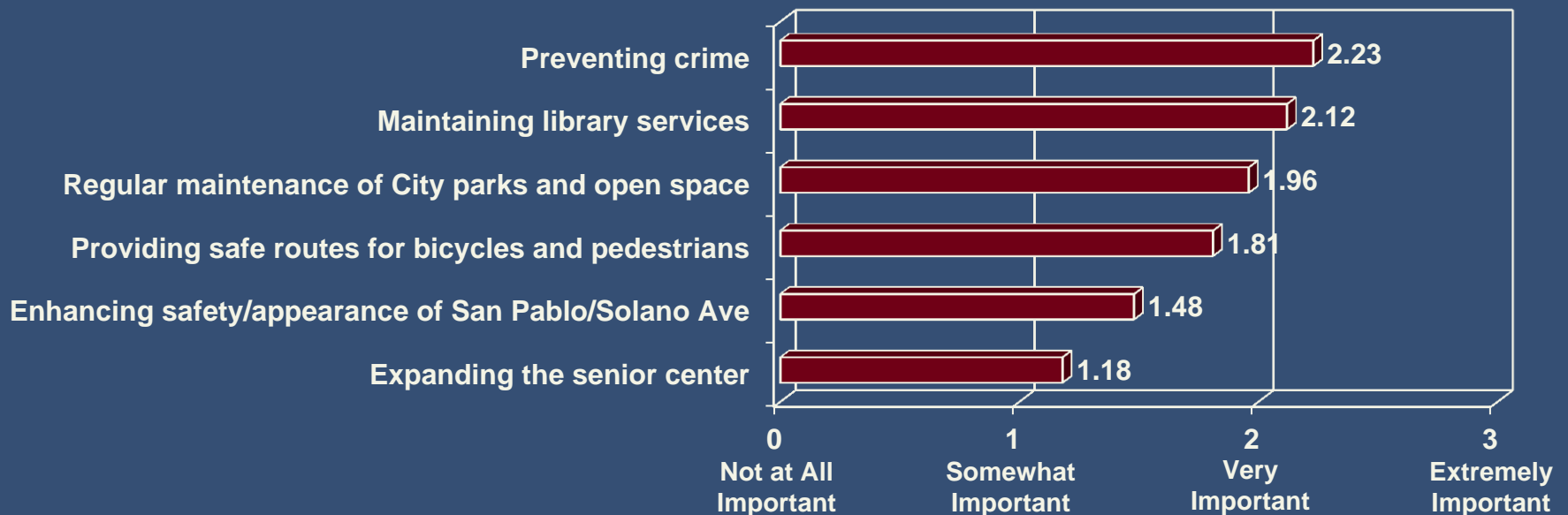
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Key Findings

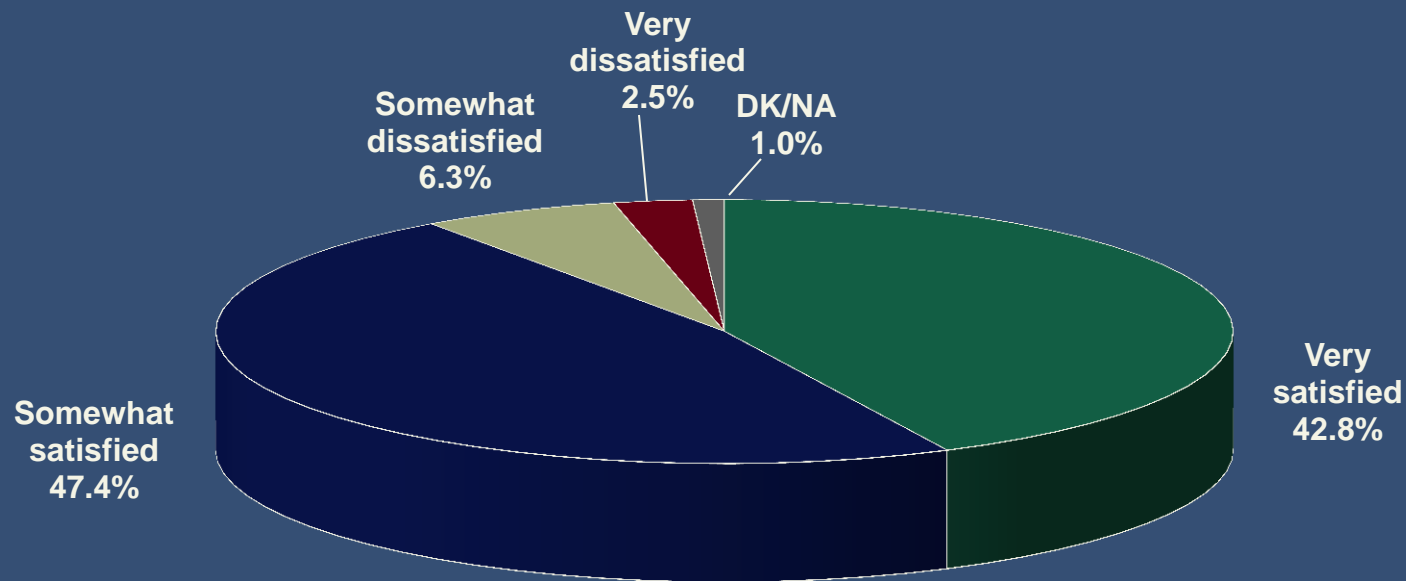
Importance of Local Issues (n=352)

To understand relative priorities in voters' minds, respondents in the survey were asked to rate the importance of various City services. The survey results indicate that preventing crime and maintaining library services are the most important services to the average voter in the City of Albany, rated as "very important" (mean score of 2.0 or higher). Specifically, more than 80% of the voters surveyed rated these two items as "extremely" or "very important." The next two highest ranking services ("Regular maintenance of City parks and open space" and "Providing safe routes for bicycles and pedestrians"), rated as "somewhat important" (mean score of 1.0 or higher), and more than 60% of voters rated these two items as "extremely" or "very important." In comparison, the lowest scoring services ("Enhancing safety/appearance of San Pablo/Solano Ave" and "Expanding the senior center") were relatively less important to voters, with the lowest mean scores and rated as "extremely" or "very important" by 30% of the voters.



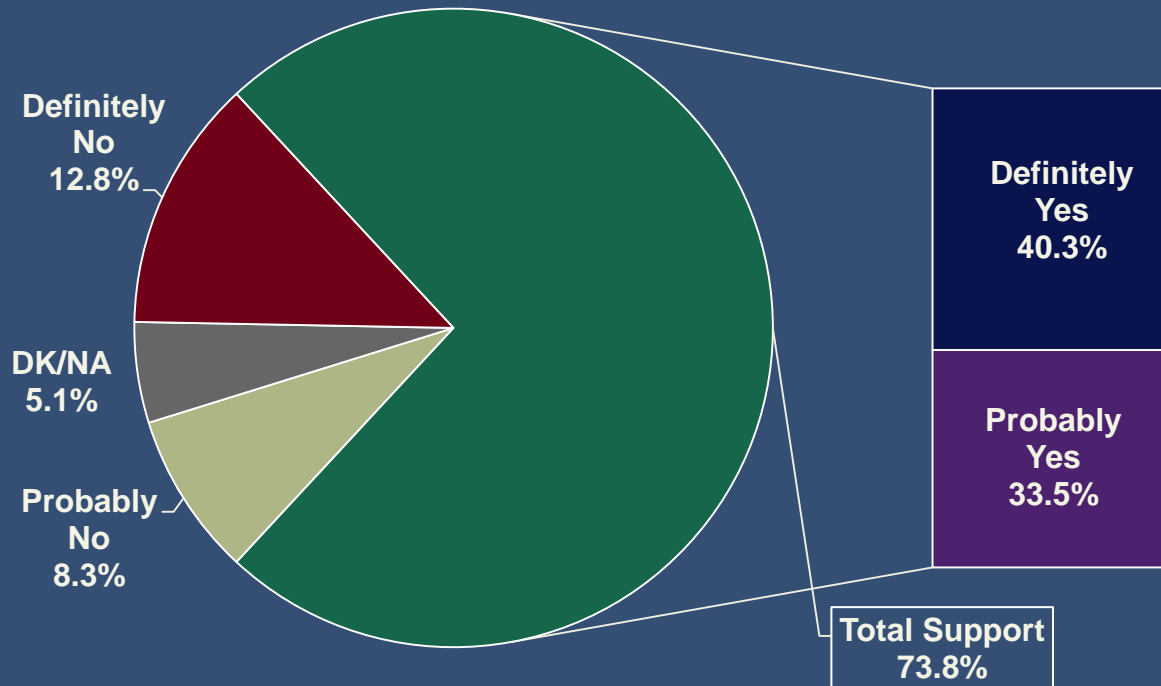
Satisfaction with City Services (n=352)

Next, the survey respondents were asked whether they had a favorable or unfavorable opinion of the job the City was doing to provide city services. The respondents gave the City a total satisfaction rating of 90.2% (“very satisfied” 42.8% and “somewhat satisfied” 47.4%). In comparison, the total dissatisfaction rating was only 8.8% (“very dissatisfied” 2.5% and “somewhat dissatisfied” 6.3%).



Uninformed Support (n=352)

As a test of uninformed support for a sales tax measure to maintain critical services and facilities, voters in the City were read only a ballot question that summarized the main features of a one-cent sales tax. In response total support registered at 73.8% (“definitely yes” 40.3%, “probably yes” 33.5%). In contrast, total opposition was at 21.1% (“definitely no” 12.8%, “probably no” 8.3%), with the remaining 5.1% undecided (DK/NA). These results indicate that there is a high level of support for the measure which requires a simple majority to pass. Additionally, when the 5.1% margin of error is accounted for, support could still be strong at 68.7%, well above the simple majority requirement.



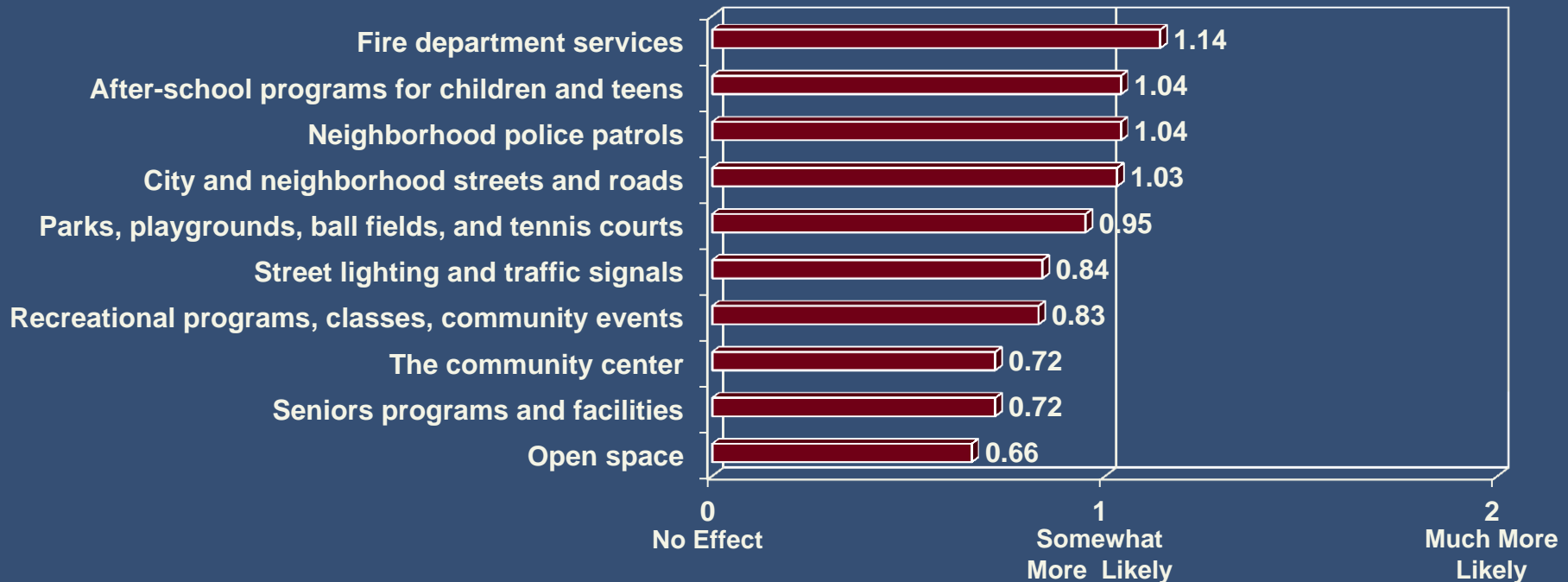
To preserve the quality of life and maintain critical city services and facilities, with funding that can't be taken by the State, including:

- Maintaining police and fire services;
- Maintaining recreational programs, parks, playgrounds and open space;
- Maintaining senior and youth programs and facilities; and,
- Other city services;

shall the City of Albany enact a one cent sales tax, with citizens' oversight, annual independent audits, with all funds spent only in Albany?

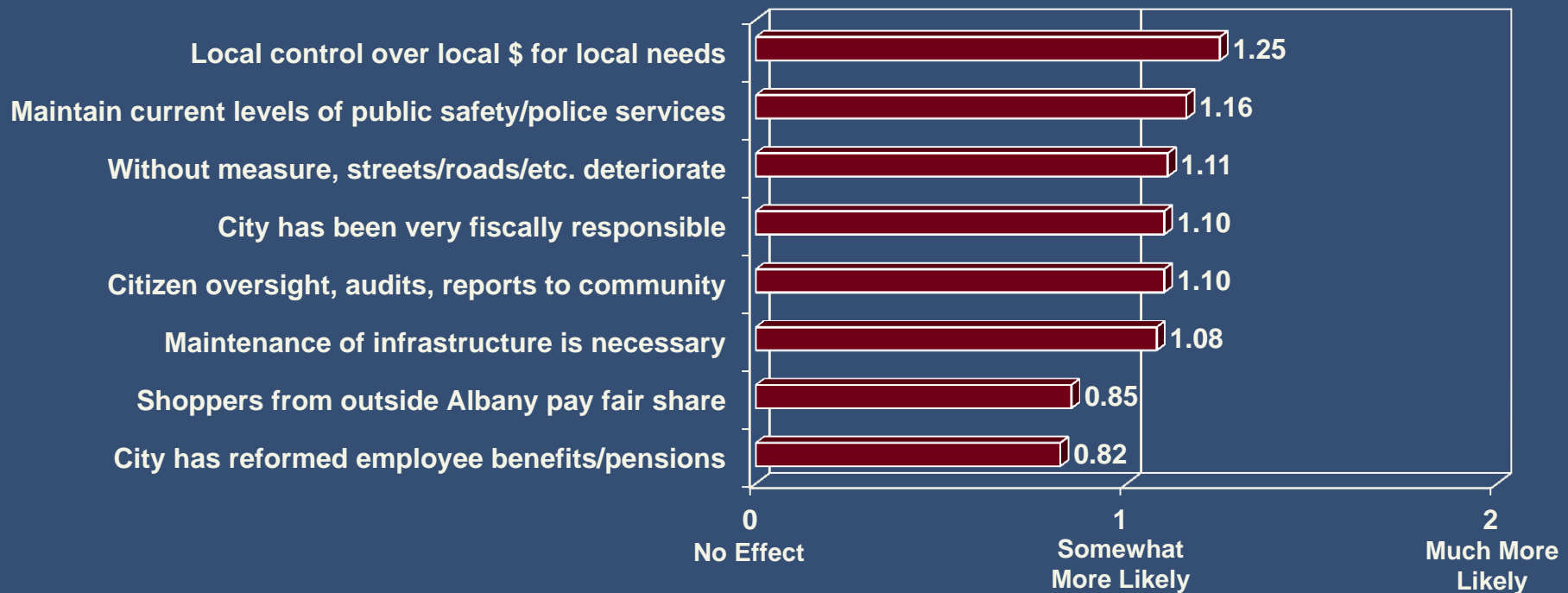
Features of the Measure (n=352)

Voters were then presented with ten potential services and facilities that would be maintained with the measure's funds, and asked whether they would be more or less likely to vote for the measure upon hearing each. The top four of these made the voters "somewhat more likely" to support the measure (mean score of 1.0 or higher), with at least 70% of the voters indicating they are somewhat more likely to vote for the measure. The next three features ("Parks, playgrounds, ball fields, and tennis courts", "Street lighting and traffic signals", and "Recreational programs, classes, community events") failed overall to make voters at least somewhat more likely to vote for the measure, but they made at least 60% of voters somewhat more likely to vote for the measure.



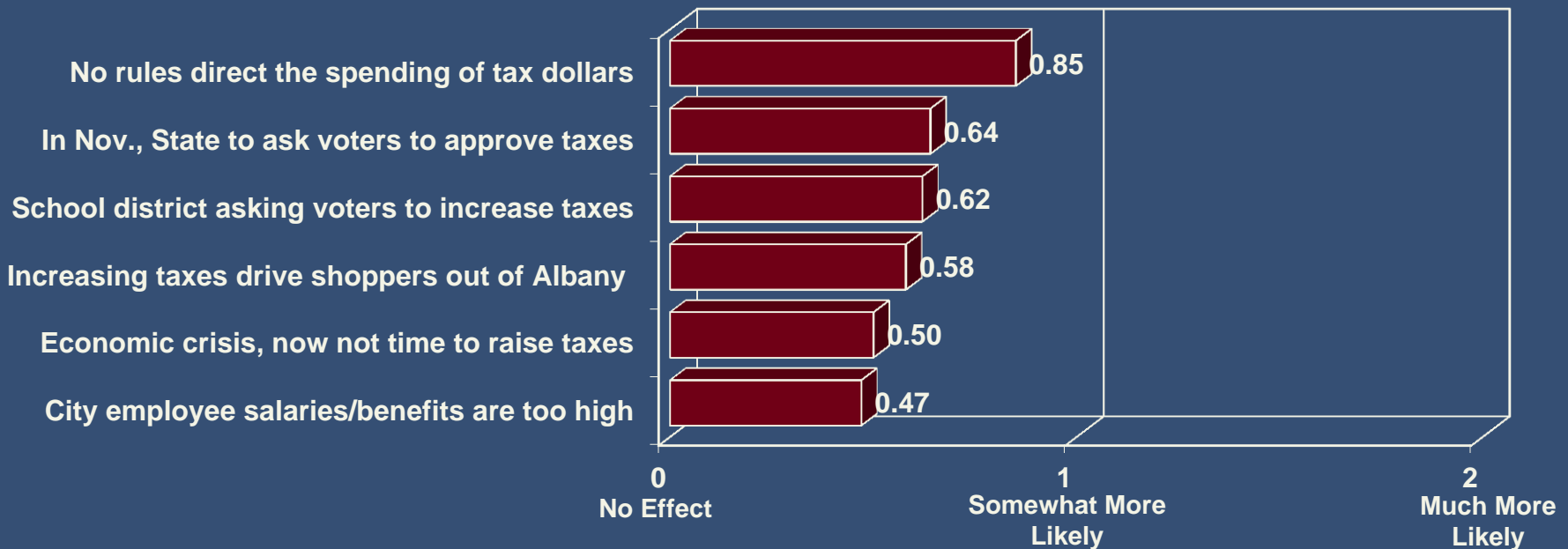
Influence of Supporting Statements (n=352)

Responses to the supporting arguments for the sales tax measure were coded and averaged such that a higher score indicated a message made voters more likely to vote yes. Six of the eight arguments made voters “somewhat more likely” to support the measure (mean scores higher than 1.0). This top tier of six arguments includes both regulatory features tested, local control of the funds and the measure requires citizens’ oversight. The top scoring statement “Local control over local \$ for local needs” (mean score of 1.25) made at least 70% of voters more likely to vote for the measure. The next five top statements with mean scores of at least 1.0 made at least 65% of the respondents more likely to support the measure..



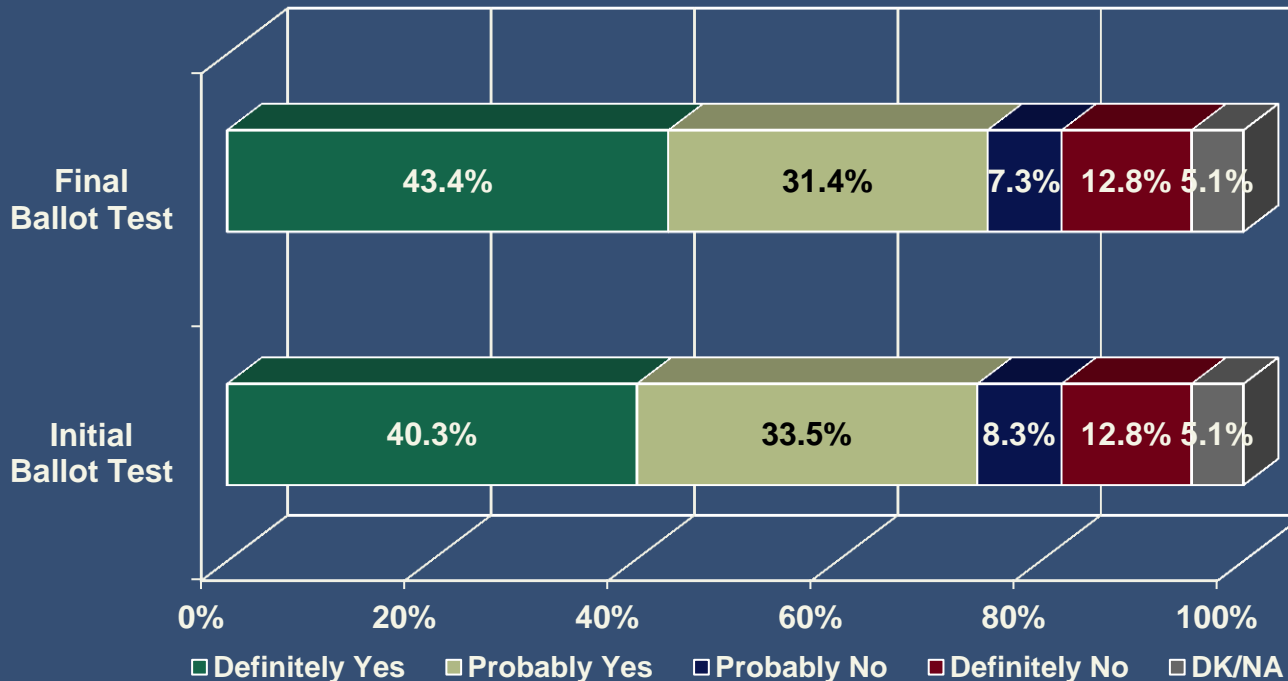
Potential Opposition Statements (n=352)

Responses to the potential opposition arguments were coded and averaged such that a higher score indicated an argument made voters more likely to vote no. None of the tested statements reached the level of making voters “somewhat more likely” (mean score of 1.0 or higher) to vote against the measure. However, the top argument tested in the survey, “No rules direct the spending of tax dollars,” could be somewhat detrimental to the success of a measure, as it made at least five out of ten voters more likely to vote no. The next two statements, “In Nov., State to ask voters to approve taxes” and “School district asking voters to increase taxes,” also made at least four out of ten voters more likely to vote against the measure. The strength of these arguments highlights the need for a well-organized independent community education effort to address voter concerns, in addition to communicating funding needs of the City and benefits of the measure.



Informed and Uninformed Support (n=352)

After simulated public information, total support for a one-cent sales tax measure was at 74.8% (43.4% “definitely yes” and 31.4% “probably yes”) which is statistically unchanged from support in the initial ballot test. With the 5.1% margin of error, we can conservatively estimate that total informed support could be as low as 69.7%, well above the requisite simple majority. Total opposition remained essentially unchanged (20.1%), when compared with the initial ballot test (21.1%).



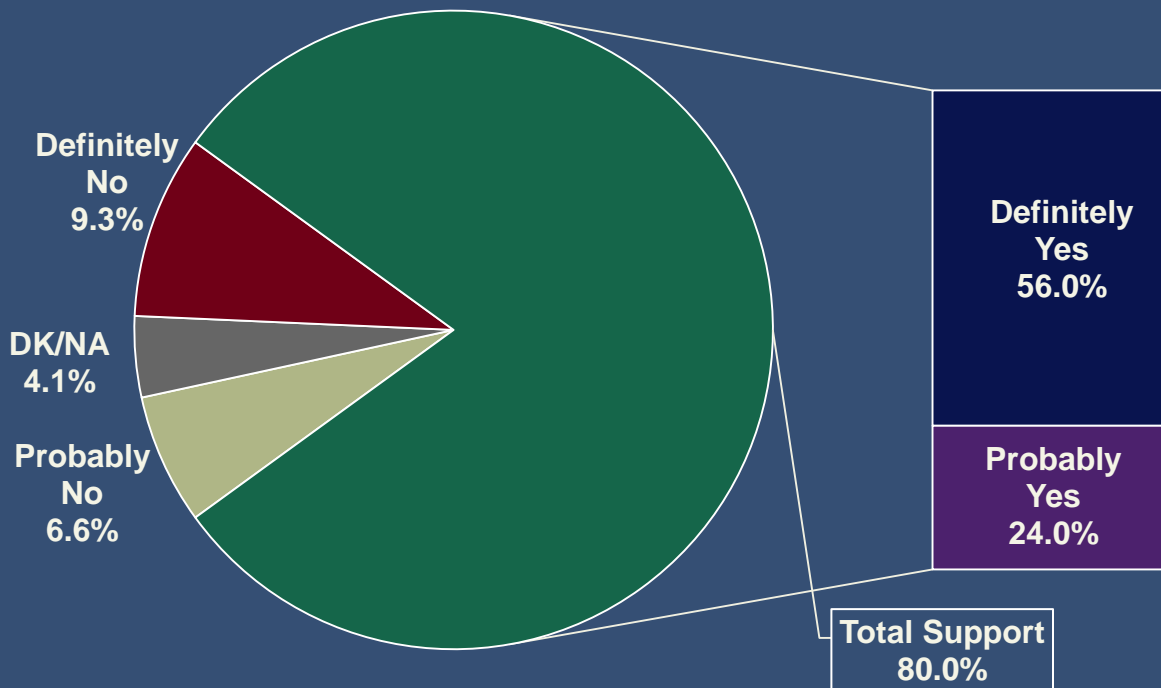
To preserve the quality of life and maintain critical city services and facilities, with funding that can't be taken by the State, including:

- Maintaining police and fire services;
- Maintaining recreational programs, parks, playgrounds and open space;
- Maintaining senior and youth programs and facilities; and,
- Other city services;

shall the City of Albany enact a one cent sales tax, with citizens' oversight, annual independent audits, with all funds spent only in Albany?

Support for ½-Cent Alternative Measure (n=352)

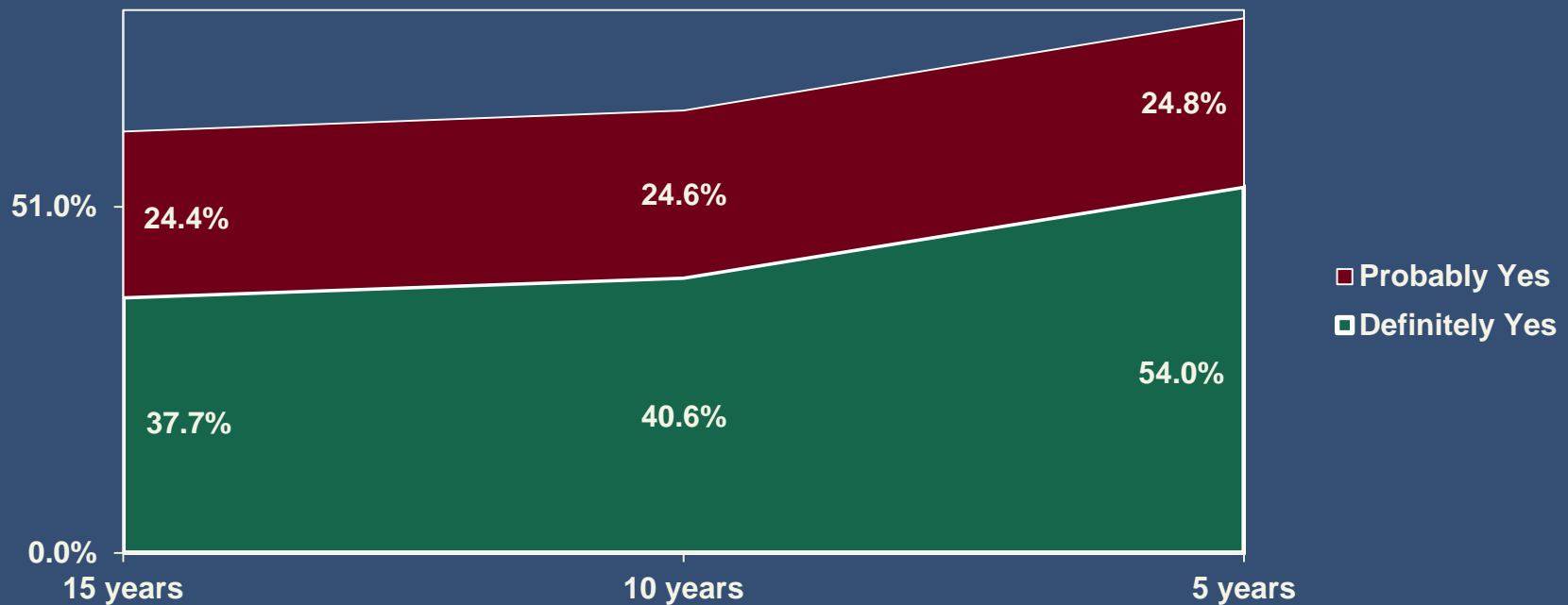
Next, survey respondents were asked if they would support or oppose an alternative measure for a half-cent sales tax. In response total support registered at 70.0% (“definitely yes” 56.0%, “probably yes” 24.0%). In comparison, total opposition reached 15.9% (“definitely no” 9.3%, “probably no” 6.6%), with the remaining 4.1% undecided (DK/NA). These results indicate that there is a strong base of support for this reduced sales tax measure, even when the 5.1% margin of error is accounted for, although it is probably unnecessary to pursue a half-cent sales tax given the strong support for the one-cent sales tax measure.



If you heard that the sales tax was going to be one-half cent instead of one cent, but would still be used to protect and maintain City services and facilities, would you vote yes or no on this measure?

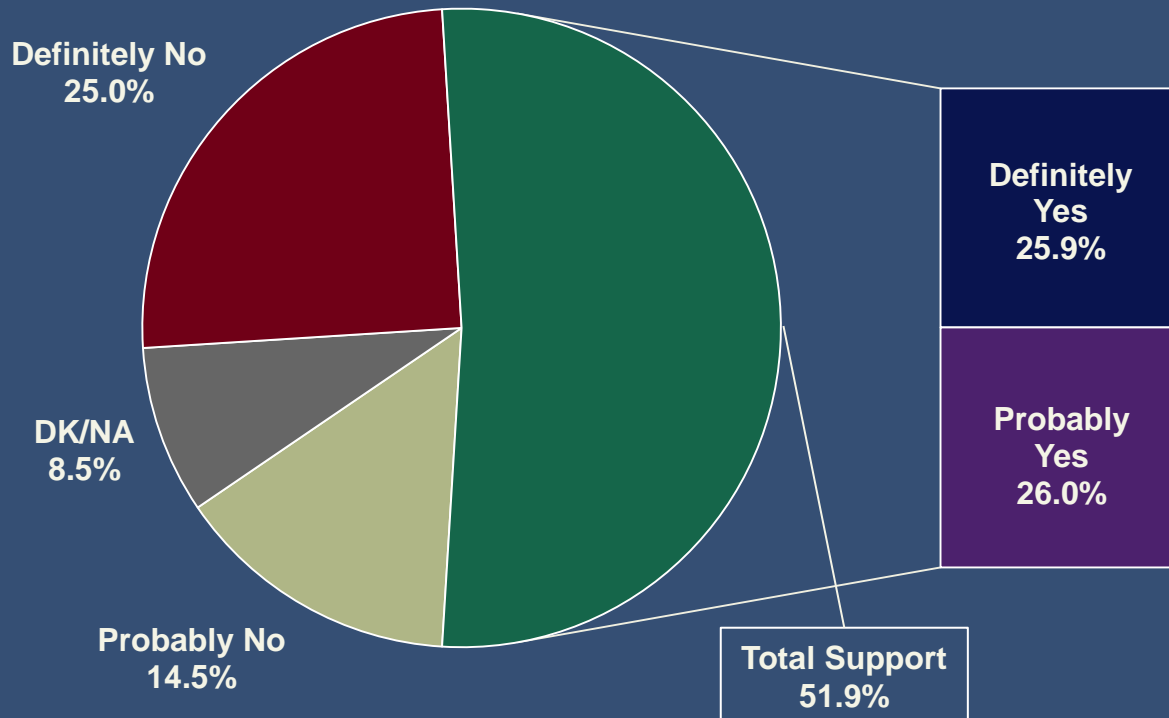
Support for Different Durations (n=352)

To further investigate potential support, voters were read a list of potential tax durations for the sales tax measure and asked if they would vote yes or no on the measure for each length of time. As expected, voter support for the measure increased as the tested tax duration dropped. However, support levels at each of the tested durations registers above the simple majority requirement. At the longest duration of 15 years, 62.1% of voters said “yes” to the measure (37.7% “definitely yes” and 24.4% “probably yes”). Support increased incrementally over all the tested tax rates, and peaked at 78.8% when the duration dropped to five years. Considering the 5.1% margin of error, support 15 years could be as low as 57% – above the simple majority requirement.



Support for Climate Action Plan Funding (n=352)

Next, survey respondents were asked to think ahead to 2013 and consider funding issues regarding the City's Climate Action Plan. Voters were read only a ballot question that summarized the main features of a two percent utility user tax. In response total support registered at 51.9% ("definitely yes" 25.9%, "probably yes" 26.0%). In comparison, total opposition was at 39.5% ("definitely no" 25.0%, "probably no" 14.5%), with the remaining 8.5% undecided (DK/NA). These results indicate that there is a base of support, but it is just at the simple majority requirement threshold. Additionally, when the 5.1% margin of error is accounted for, support could be as low as 46.8%.



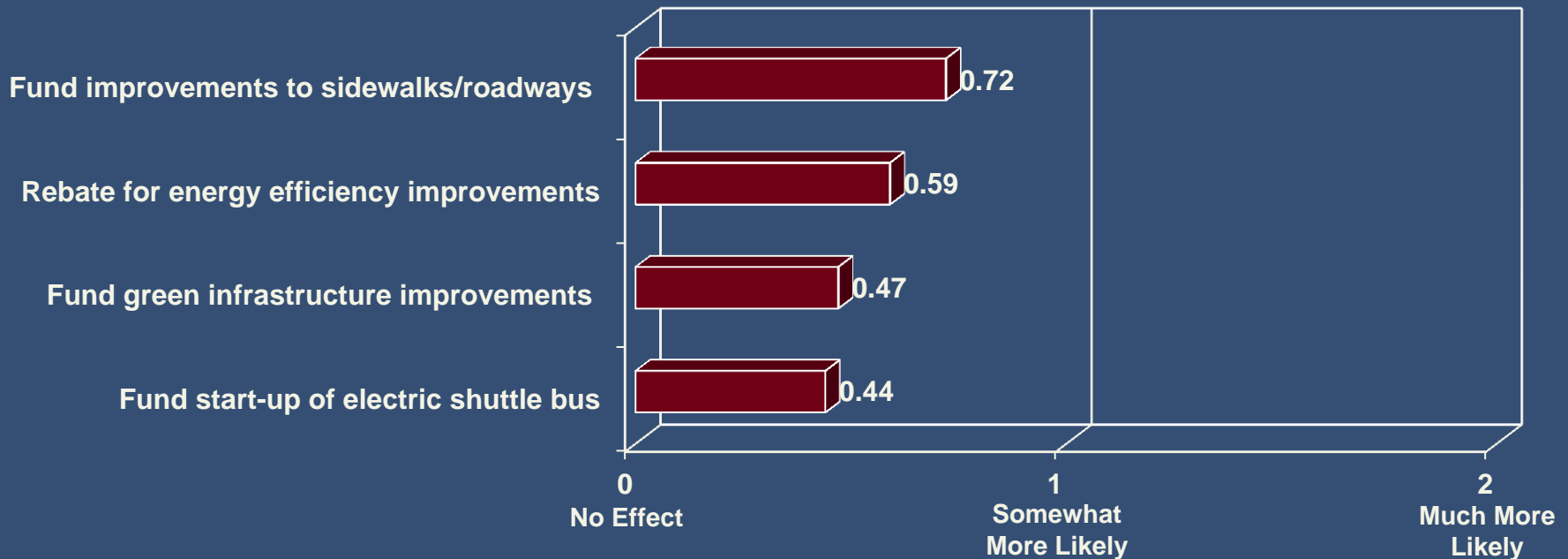
To help fund the City of Albany's Climate Action Plan, with funding that can't be taken by the State, including funding:

- Energy efficiency and solar programs for homes and businesses;
- Sidewalk and roadway improvements for alternatives to driving;
- Green infrastructure, including mini-parks, street trees, and community gardens;

shall the City of Albany increase the current Utility User Tax on gas and electricity by 2 percent, with citizens' oversight, annual independent audits, with all funds spent in Albany?

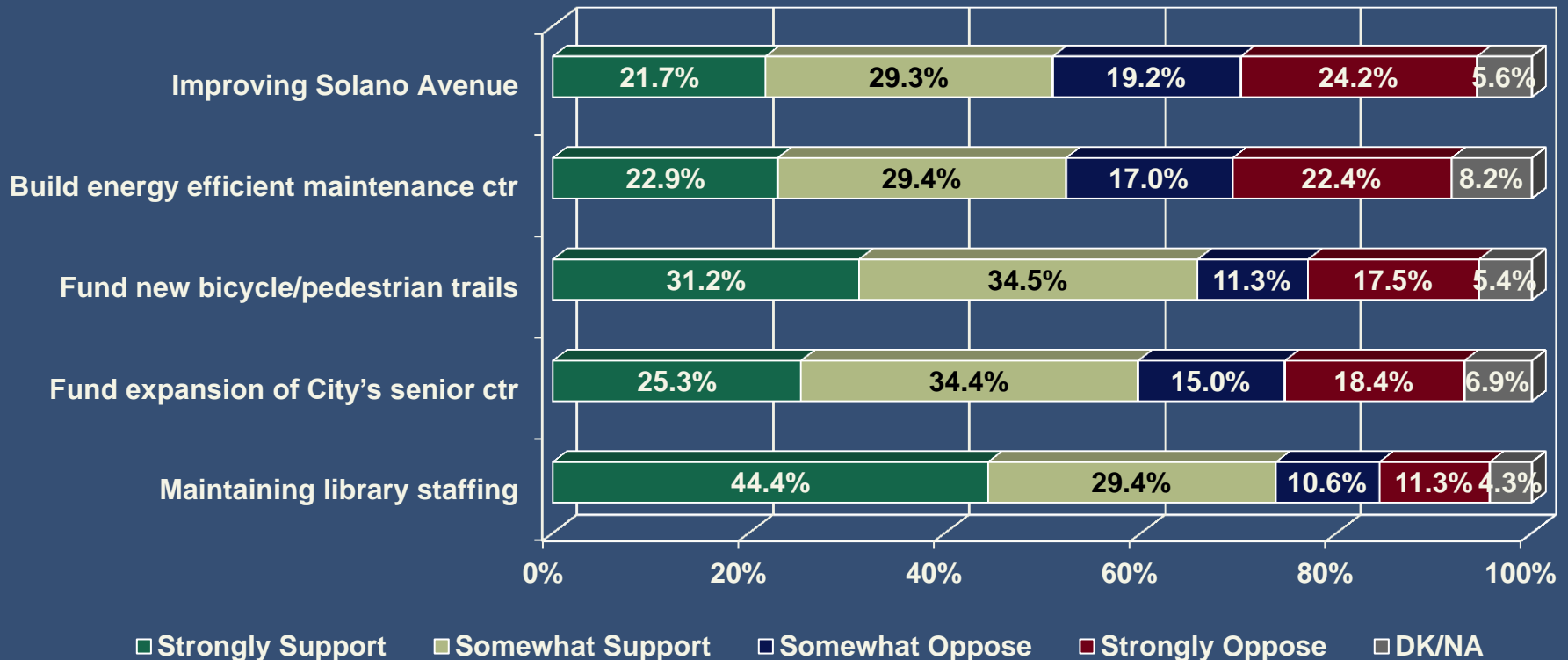
Support for Climate Programs to Be Funded (n=352)

Next, the respondents were asked to indicate whether they would be more or less likely to vote for the climate programs measure with respect to four programs that could be funded by the measure. As shown in the chart below, none of the four programs reached the overall level of making the voters “somewhat more likely” to vote for the measure (mean score of 1.0 or higher). However, top scoring program, “Fund improvements to sidewalks/roadways.” made at least 60% of voters somewhat more likely to vote for the measure, and the program “Rebate for energy efficiency improvements” made at least 50% of voters somewhat more likely to vote for the measure.



Support for Funding Capital Improvement Projects/Services (n=352)

The last test in the survey identified a number of capital improvement projects and ongoing service needs that lack funding, and asked the respondents to indicate their level of support or opposition for a property assessment to pay for them. While the results were fairly positive overall, “Maintaining library staffing” garnered the most total support at 73.8% (“strongly support” 44.4%, “somewhat support” 29.4%), followed by “Fund new bicycle/pedestrian trails” at 65.7% (“strongly support” 31.2%, “somewhat support” 34.5%).





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Summary and Recommendations

- The survey revealed a robust base of voter support for a city sales tax measure, and Godbe Research recommends that City of Albany consider placing a city sales tax measure on the November 012 ballot.
- The survey results indicate potential voter support for a one-cent sales tax measure to maintain city services.
 - Support for the sales tax measure was 75% at one cent, and increased to 80% when the ½ cent rate was subsequently tested.
- With respect to the sales tax portion of the study, the survey results indicate the City of Albany should:
 - Begin the necessary steps to place a sales tax measure on the November 2012 ballot.
 - Be prepared to head off criticisms that there are no rules guiding the use of the money, concerns associated with Statewide revenue measures appearing on the same ballot, and differentiating with a school district measure, if any.
- There is a limited base of support for a Utility Users Tax to fund the City's Climate Action Plan (52%), but because a special tax requires a two-thirds super-majority, this is below the necessary support to move forward.

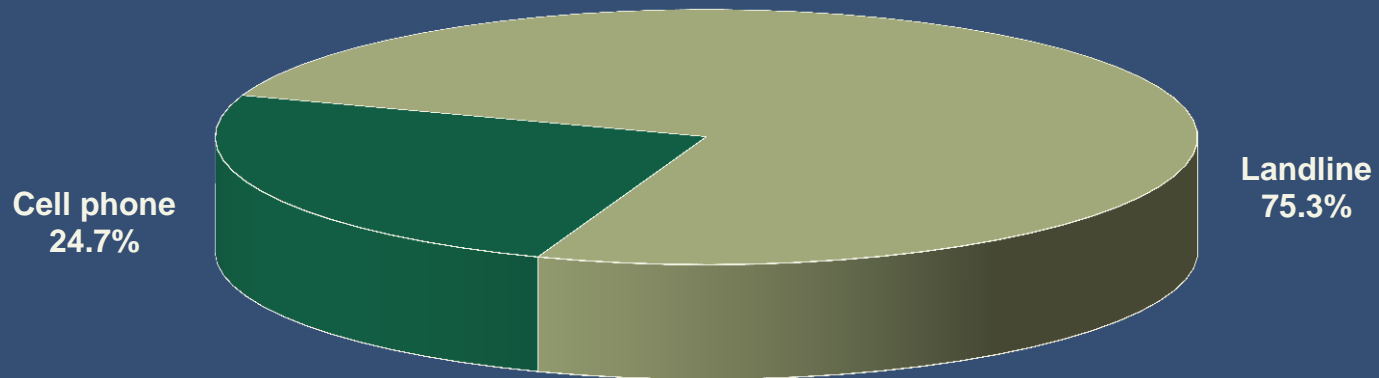


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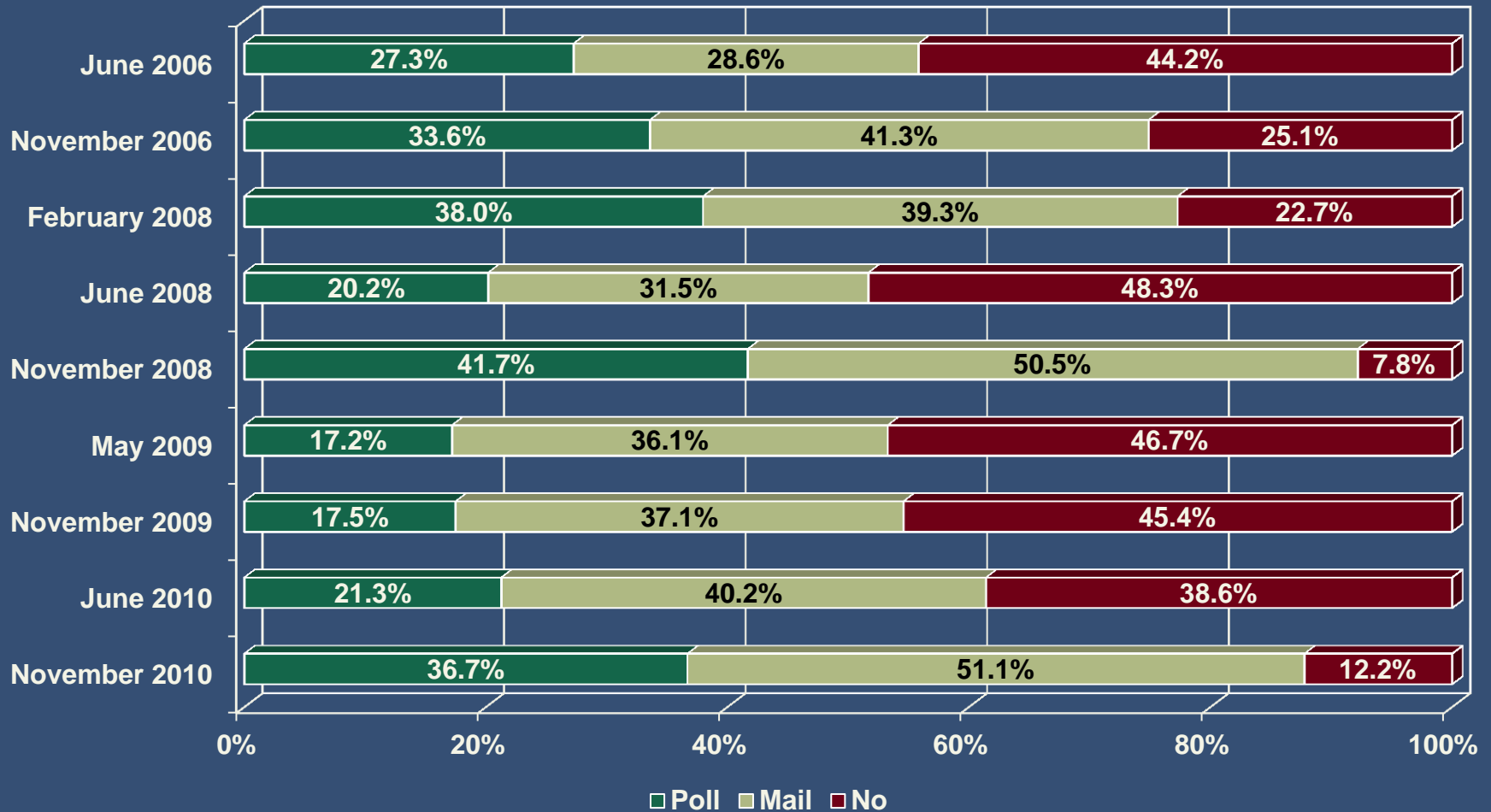


Appendix A: Additional Voter Information

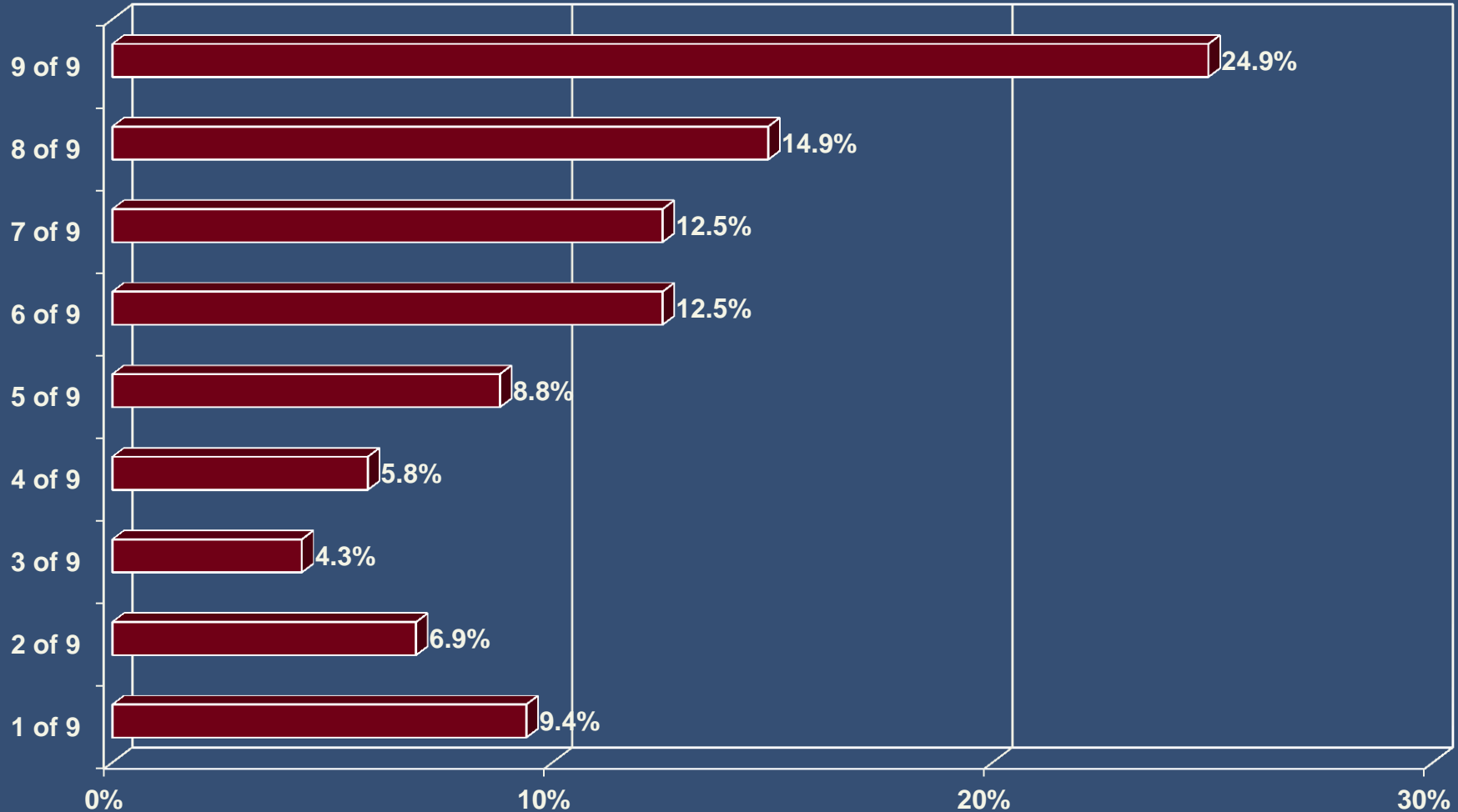
Phone Type



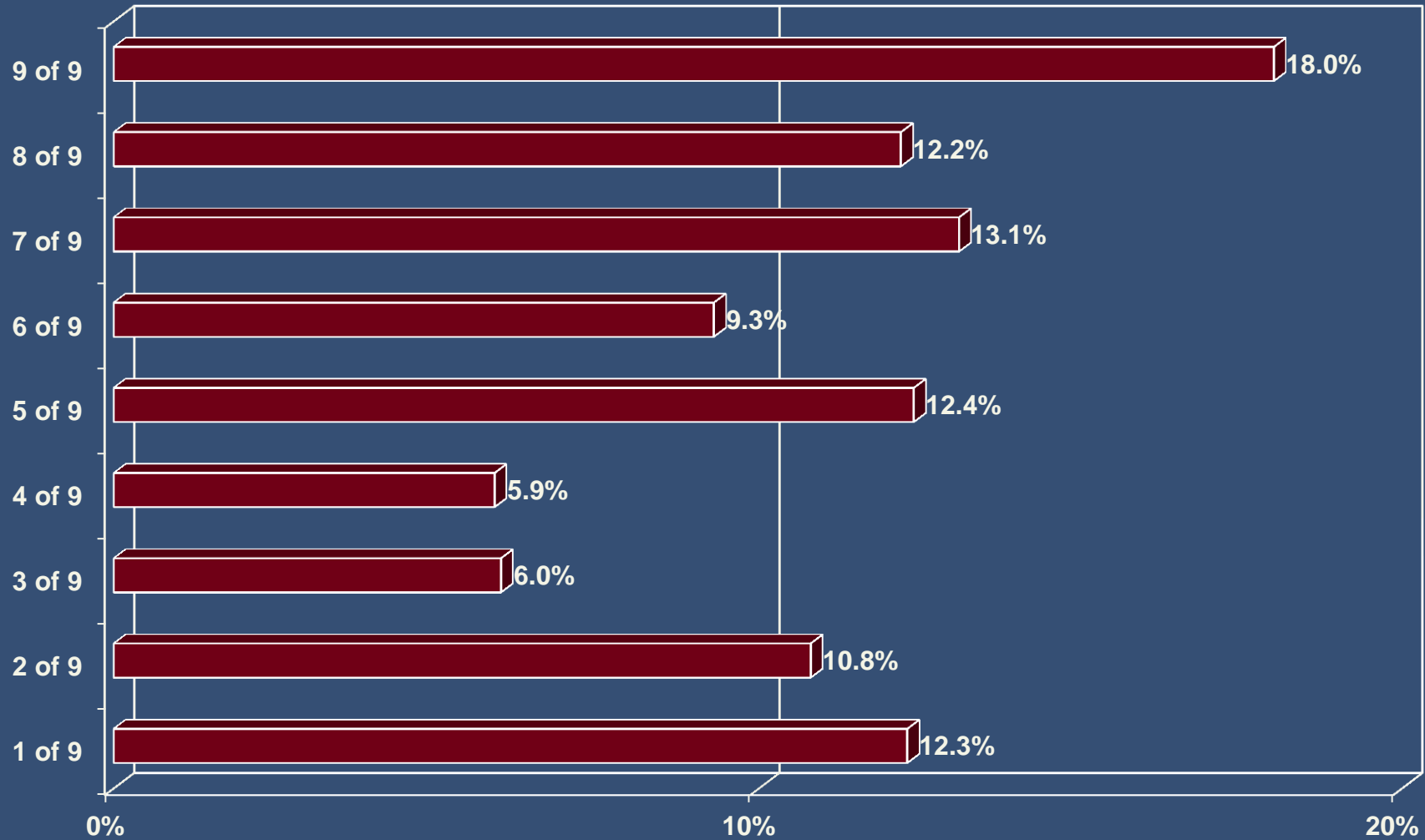
Voting History



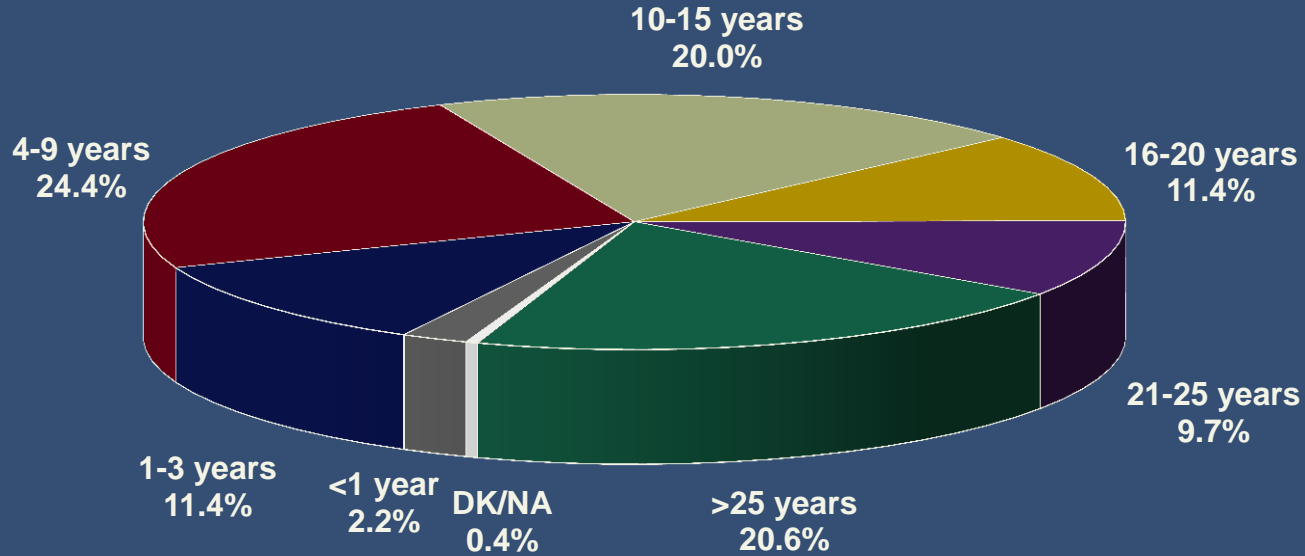
Times Voted in Last Elections



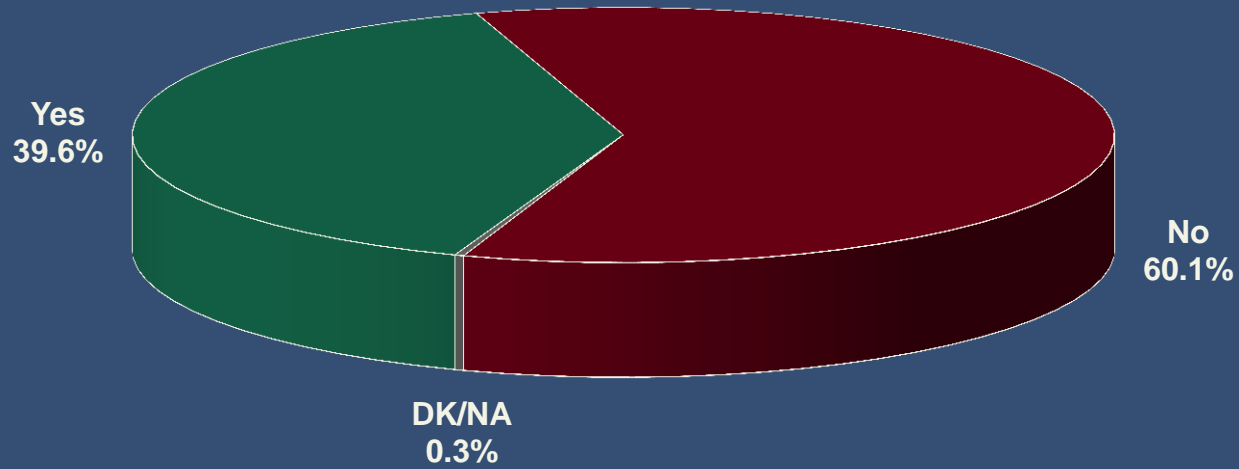
Times Voted Absentee



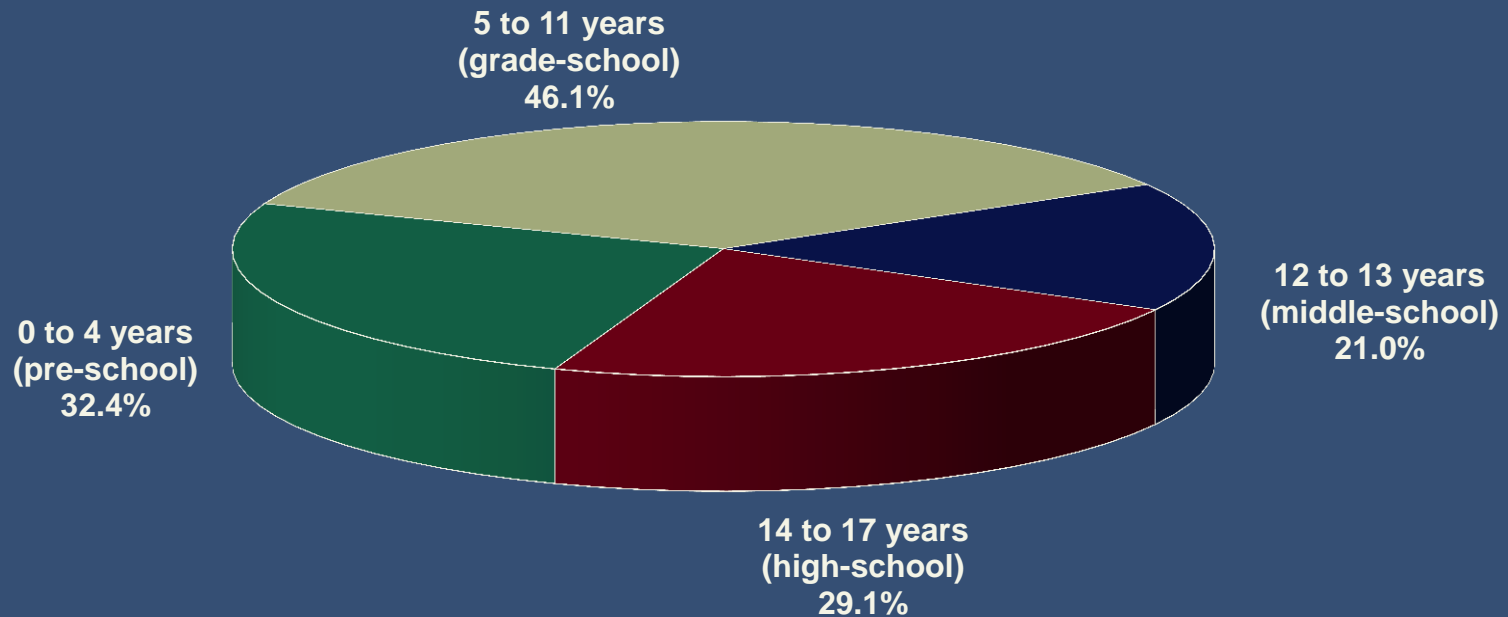
Length of Residency in Albany



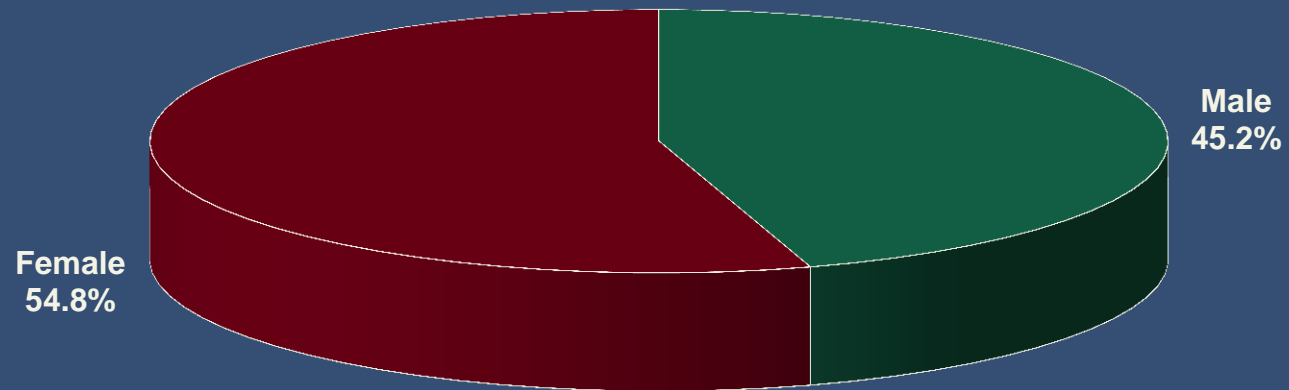
Children Living in Household

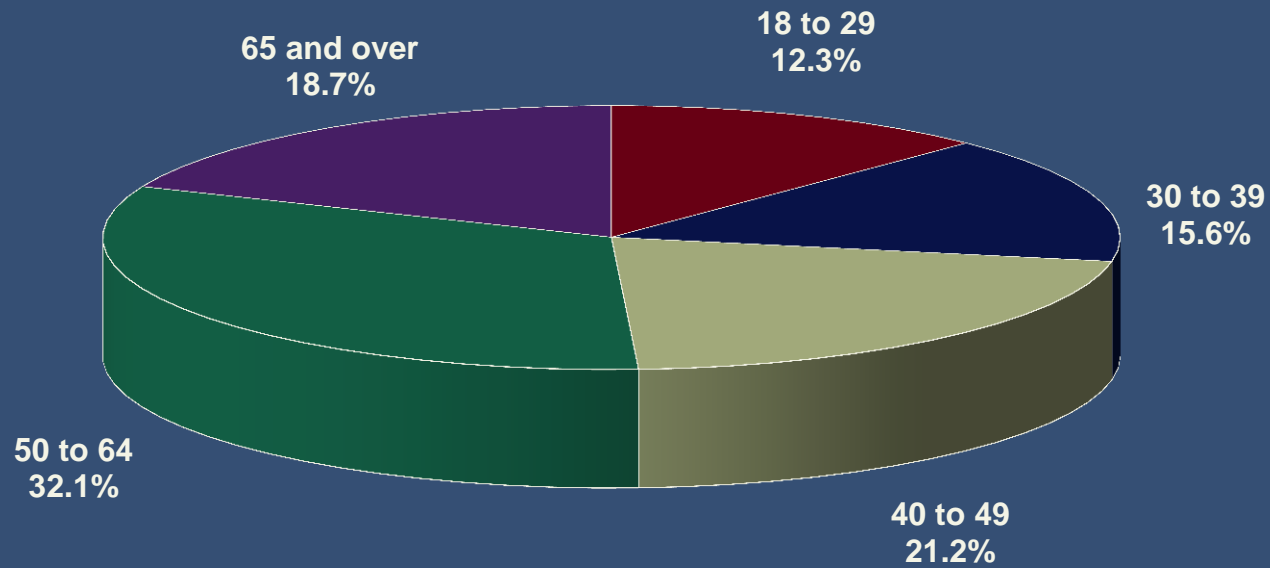


Ages of Children Living in Household

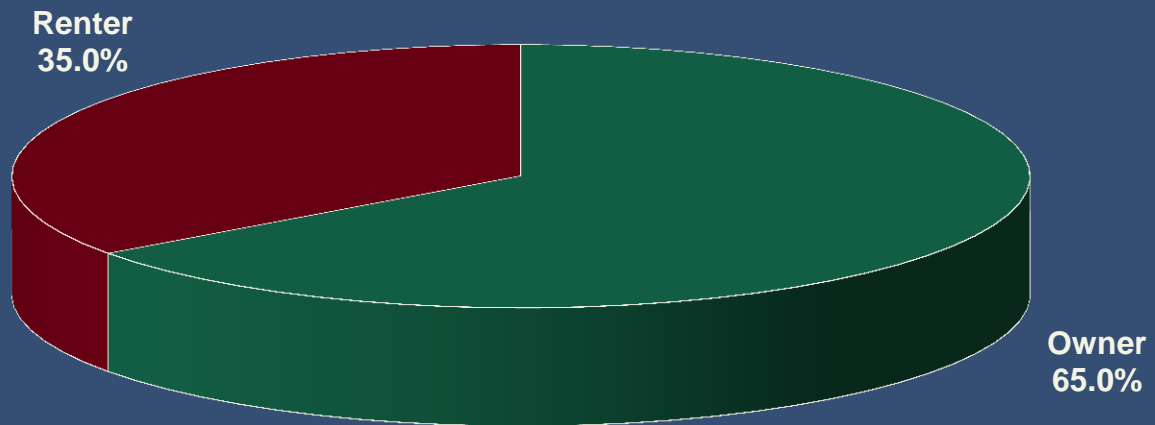


Gender

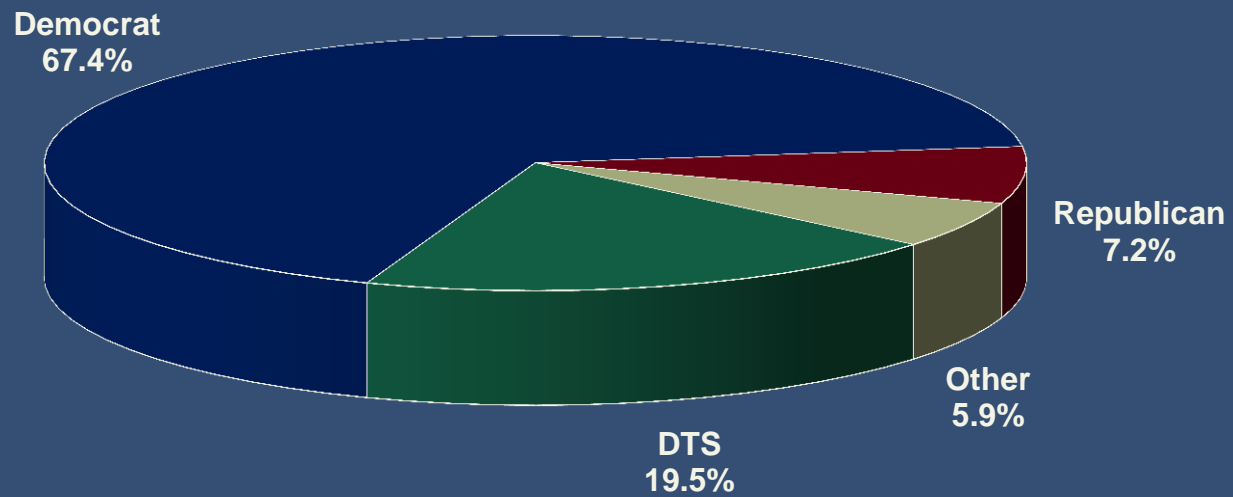




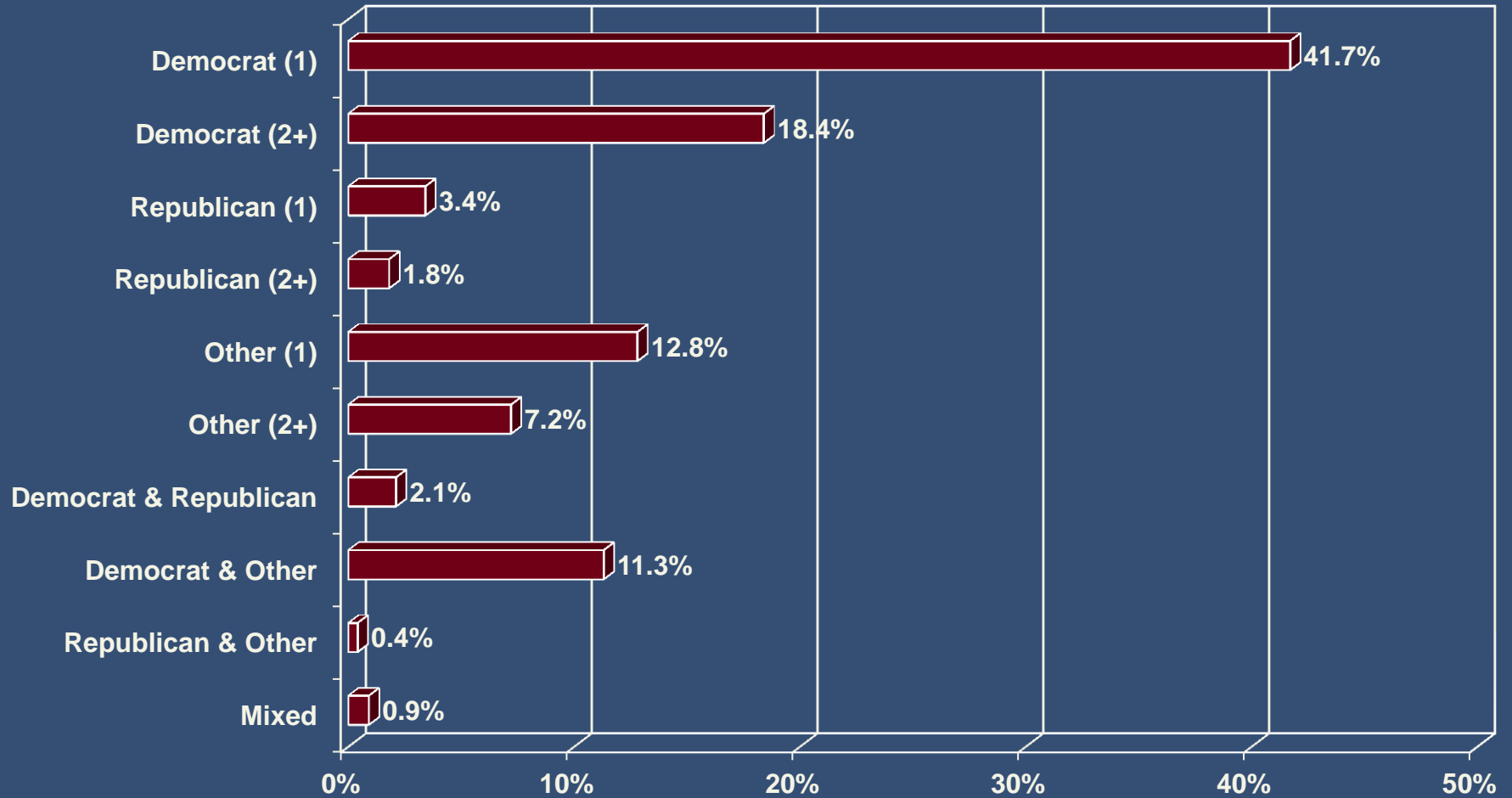
Home Ownership



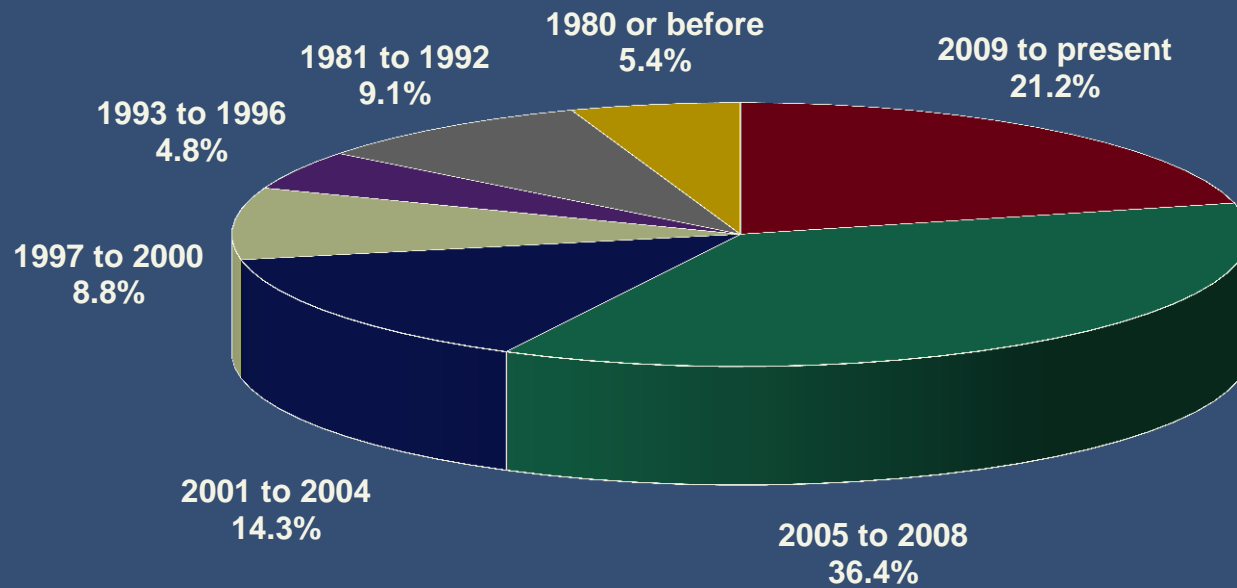
Individual Party



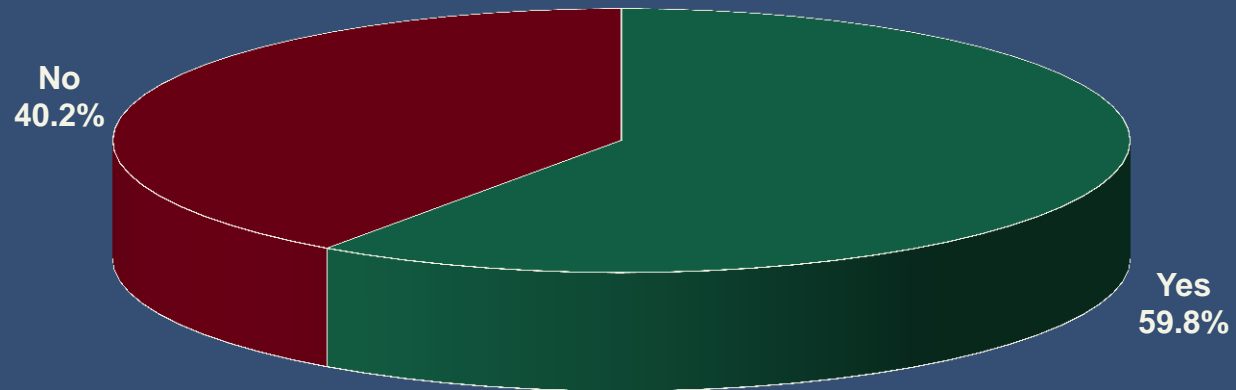
Household Party Type



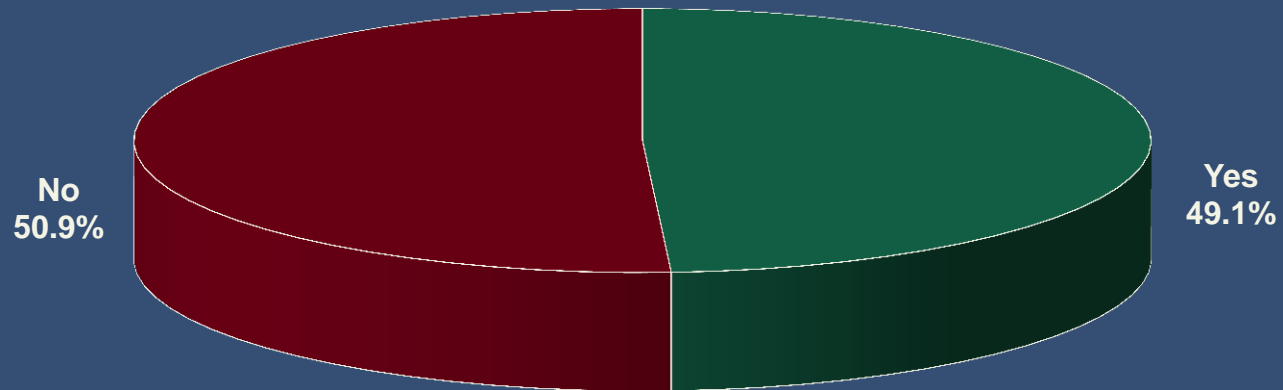
Registration Date



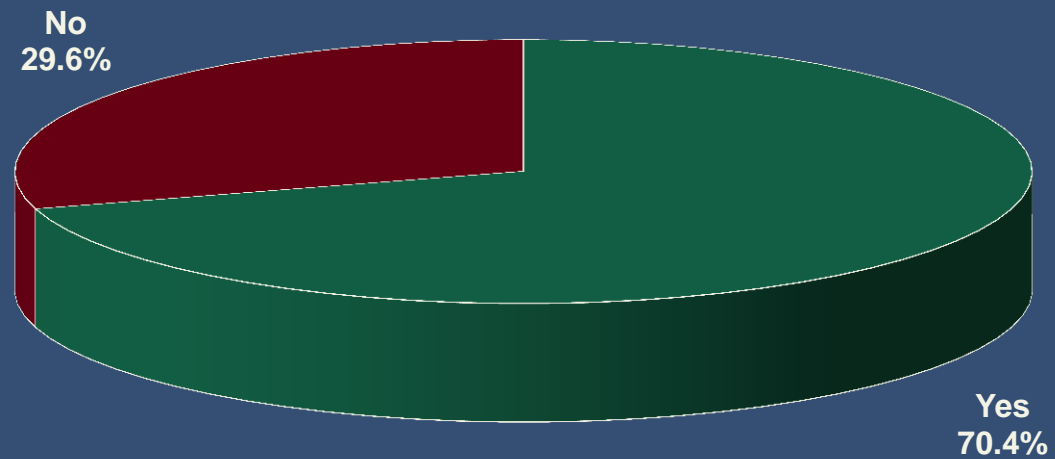
Permanent Absentee Voter



Likely Absentee Voter



Likely June 2012 Voter





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Northern California and Corporate Offices
1660 South Amphlett Boulevard, Suite 205
San Mateo, CA 94402

Southern California Office
4695 MacArthur Court, 11th Floor
Newport Beach, CA 92660

Nevada Office
59 Damonte Ranch Parkway, Suite B309
Reno, NV 89521

Pacific Northwest Office
601 108th Avenue NE, Suite 1900
Bellevue, WA 98004