

2015 BOULDER COUNTY ISSUES SURVEY

Report

~January, 2016~

Prepared for:



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I. OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY



OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this study are to better understand community support for several revenue issues, including some that could be placed on the November 2016 election ballot: a property/sales tax increase to pay for reconstructing local subdivision roads in unincorporated Boulder County; extending the open space sales tax for 15 years to pay for maintaining current open space and acquiring additional parcels of land, with an option for also funding sustainability programs; and tax increase options to fund a County-wide Transit Pass, and an employee Transit Pass for employees who work within the City of Boulder.



METHODOLOGY

Talmey-Drake Research & Strategy, Inc. conducted the 2015 Boulder County Ballot Issues Survey in December of 2015. A random sample was drawn from a list of Boulder County voters.

- *Interviews were conducted between December 3-13, 2015.*
- *Results are based on 605 telephone interviews.*
- *The margin of error is plus or minus 4.0% about any one reported percentage.*



II. KEY FINDINGS



KEY FINDINGS

I. The Climate Today

#1. Things are going along pretty well in Boulder County. Consistent with the past few years, 61% of voters feel things are going in the right direction, and other than issues relating to affordable housing (13%) and growth (10%), no concerns rise above a single digit mention by voters across the County, though issues relating to subdivision roads and infrastructure come close, being cited by 9% of County voters. Further, in terms of tax sensitivity, the percent of voters feeling County taxes are either “Way too high” (20%) or “High but acceptable” (40%) is creeping upward, rising 4 points to 60% in 2015, though the 20% “Way too high” figure has remained fairly constant for the past 20 years.



KEY FINDINGS

II. Revenue Proposals Tested

#2 Of the five issues tested, three did not show strong support in this poll. Both options for extending the Open Space Tax, which expires in 2019, would likely pass if put to the voters: the one for just funding open space; the other for funding a combination of open space and sustainability programs. Neither the County-wide transit pass, nor the City of Boulder “Head Tax” shows a majority of support in this poll. Similarly, the initiative to fund reconstruction of subdivision roads fails to garner great support from County voters.



KEY FINDINGS

II. Revenue Proposals Tested (cont.)

#3 Support for extending the .25% Open Space Sales Tax is high, coming in at 77%. Unlike in 2009 and 2010, support for extending the Open Space Tax has considerable support outside the City of Boulder, as sensitivity to growth and development has risen across the County.

#4 Support for extending the .25% Open Space Sales Tax in order to fund both Open Space and Sustainability programs likewise garners a high level of support, with 74% saying they would vote in favor. Support for this hybrid initiative pulls in significantly more support among City of Boulder voters, which is, however, offset by significantly less support from all other areas of the County.



KEY FINDINGS

II. Revenue Proposals Tested (cont.)

#5 Support for a tax to fund reconstruction of subdivision roads in unincorporated Boulder County is mixed. While just 46% support a sales tax increase for these roads, 52% do say they would support a property tax increase for roads. If put to a county-wide vote, passage of either version is unlikely; however a strong campaign mounted by those in favor of the property tax for subdivision roads, with no organized opposition, may succeed, depending on what other tax initiatives are on the ballot along with it.



KEY FINDINGS

II. Revenue Proposals Tested (cont.)

#6 The proposal to raise the County property tax to fund a County-wide transit pass for everyone living in Boulder County, falls well short of a majority at either level of tax tested.

The highest level of support for the tax comes not surprisingly from those who are least likely to pay the tax—those age 18-34, students and renters (63%+ voting in favor)—with lesser support from Democrats and the City of Boulder (55% in favor).

Less than a third of voters living in Longmont or in the small towns and unincorporated areas of the County support the initiative for a tax to fund a transit pass. Further analysis is necessary to determine the rationale for this lack of support, including the impact of a lack of currently available transit service in these areas or the perception of RTD held by respondents.



KEY FINDINGS

II. Revenue Proposals Tested (cont.)

#7 Support among voters in the City of Boulder (just 207 of the 605 survey respondents) for an employee “Head Tax” shows that as of today, this initiative does not have a great deal of support, particularly if it is considered in conjunction with a proposal for a county-wide transit pass. Just 48% of City of Boulder voters say they support a \$10 a month tax on each employee working in the City, half of which is paid by the employee, half by the employer.



III. THE CLIMATE TODAY



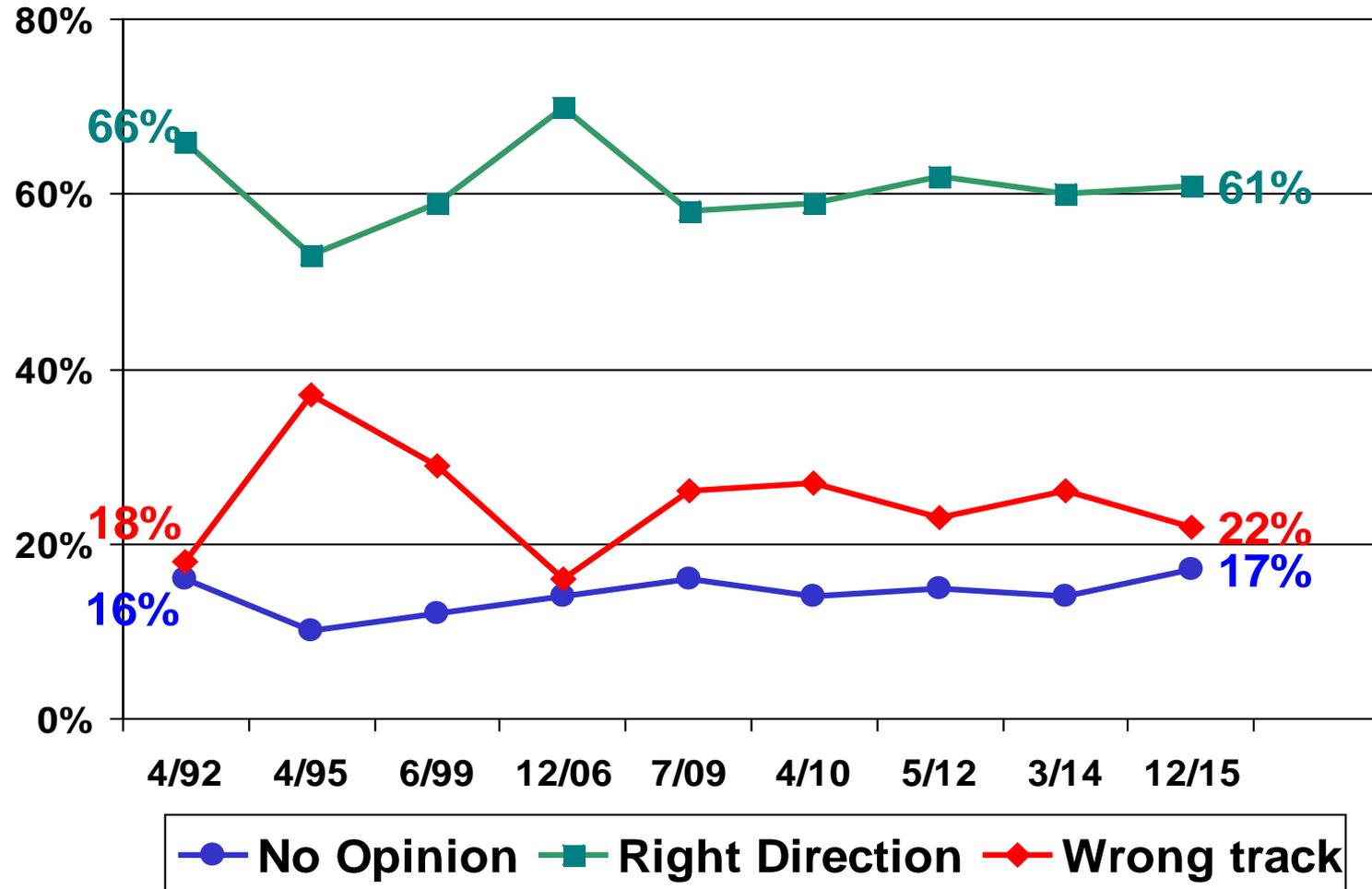
Climate and Overview

Things appear to be going well in Boulder County, and across the state. Just as in 2014, voters in Boulder County are more optimistic about how things are going in Boulder County than statewide voters feel about the direction of things across the state: But the gap is closing as the level of optimism statewide continues to catch up to Boulder's. Sixty-one percent say that things in Boulder County are going in the right direction, compared to 54% statewide.

As a follow-up, voters who feel things are off on the wrong track in the County (22%) were asked why they feel this way. Only one issue articulated by the disgruntled voters garners more than single digits.



How are Things Going in Boulder County Today?



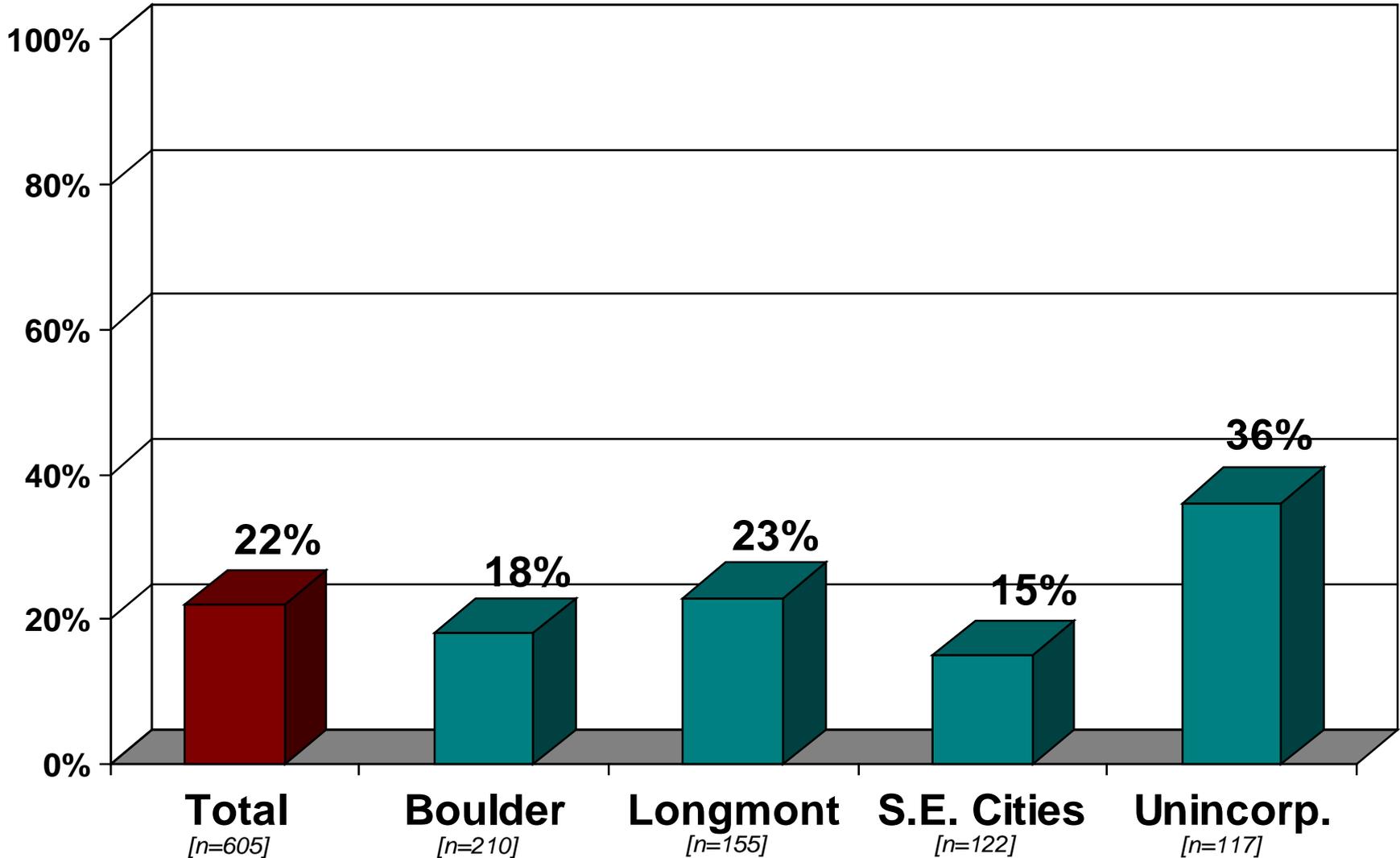
Sample sizes are approximately 600, except for 500 for 1995 & 2006



Direction of Things in Boulder County

- Shows percent saying "Wrong Track" by geographic area -

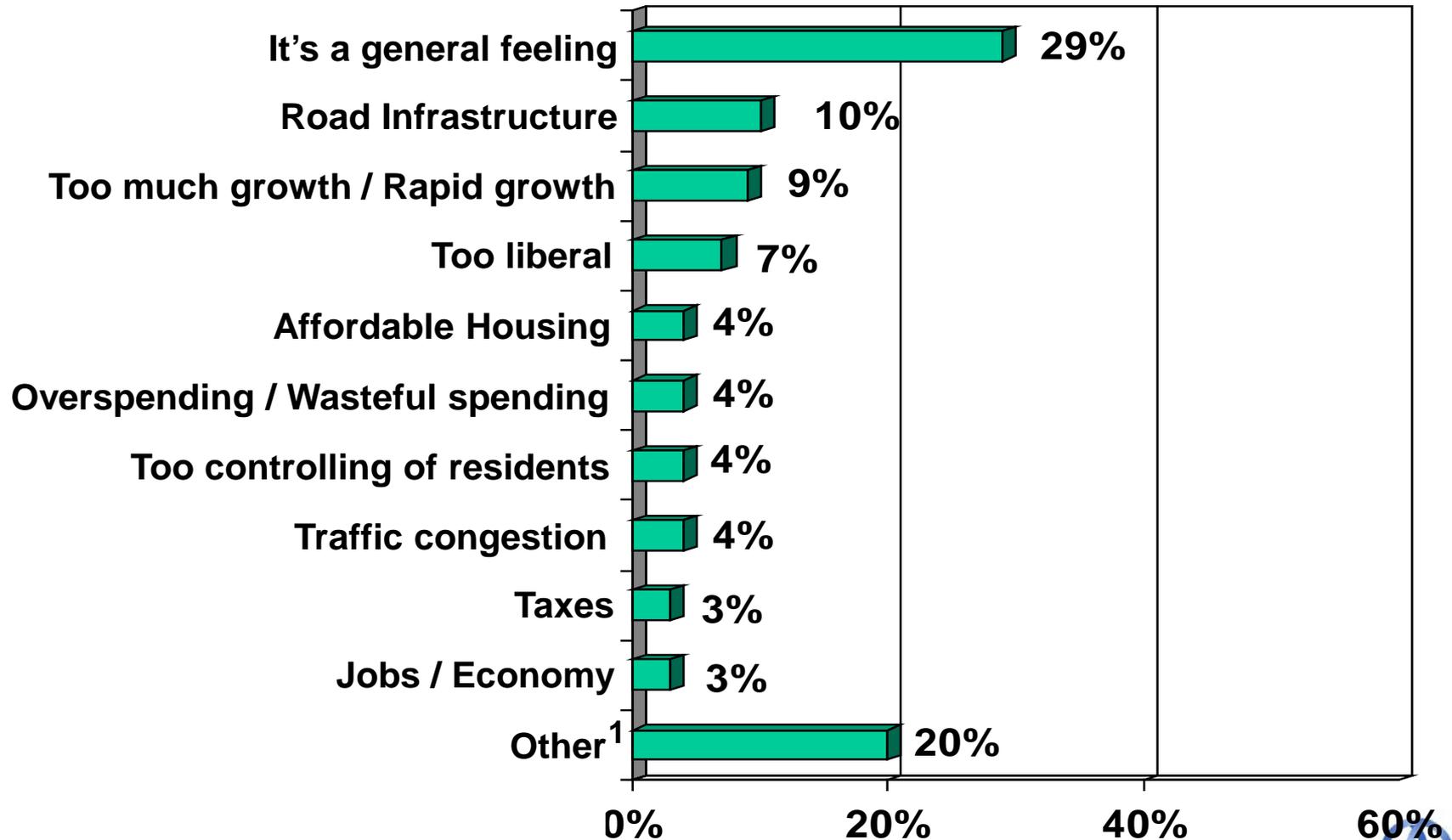
[n=605]



Why Are Things Off On The Wrong Track?

- Asked of those saying things “off on the wrong track” -

[n=134]



¹ No categories of responses included in “Other” exceed 2%.



Climate and Overview

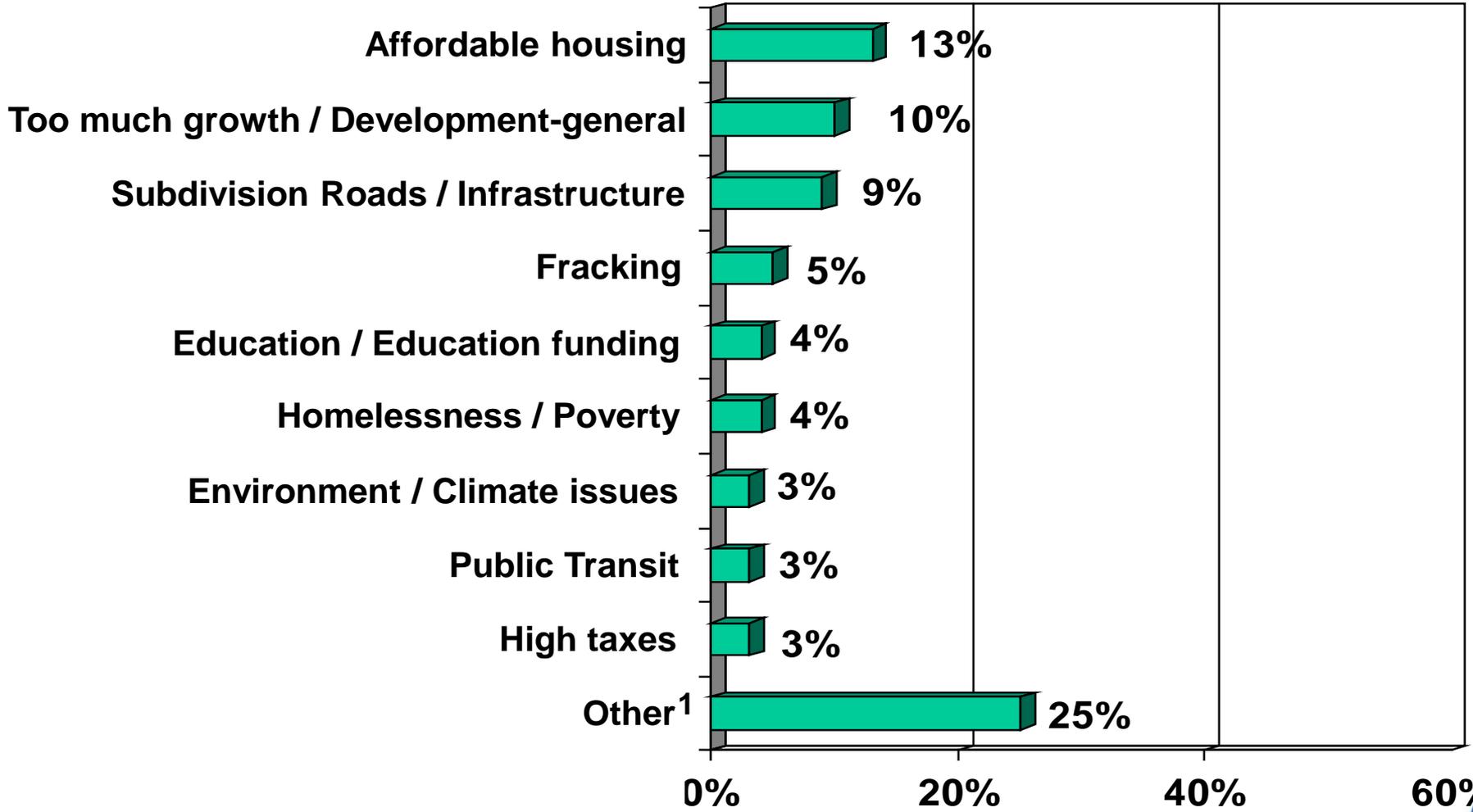
In order to further understand the climate in Boulder County today, voters were also asked what they feel is the number one issue the Boulder County Commissioners should be addressing today, as well as how they feel about the County's tax burden.

Affordable housing issues lead the pack of issues of concern that voters feel should be addressed by Boulder County.



What's The #1 Issue The County Commissioners Should Be Working On Today?

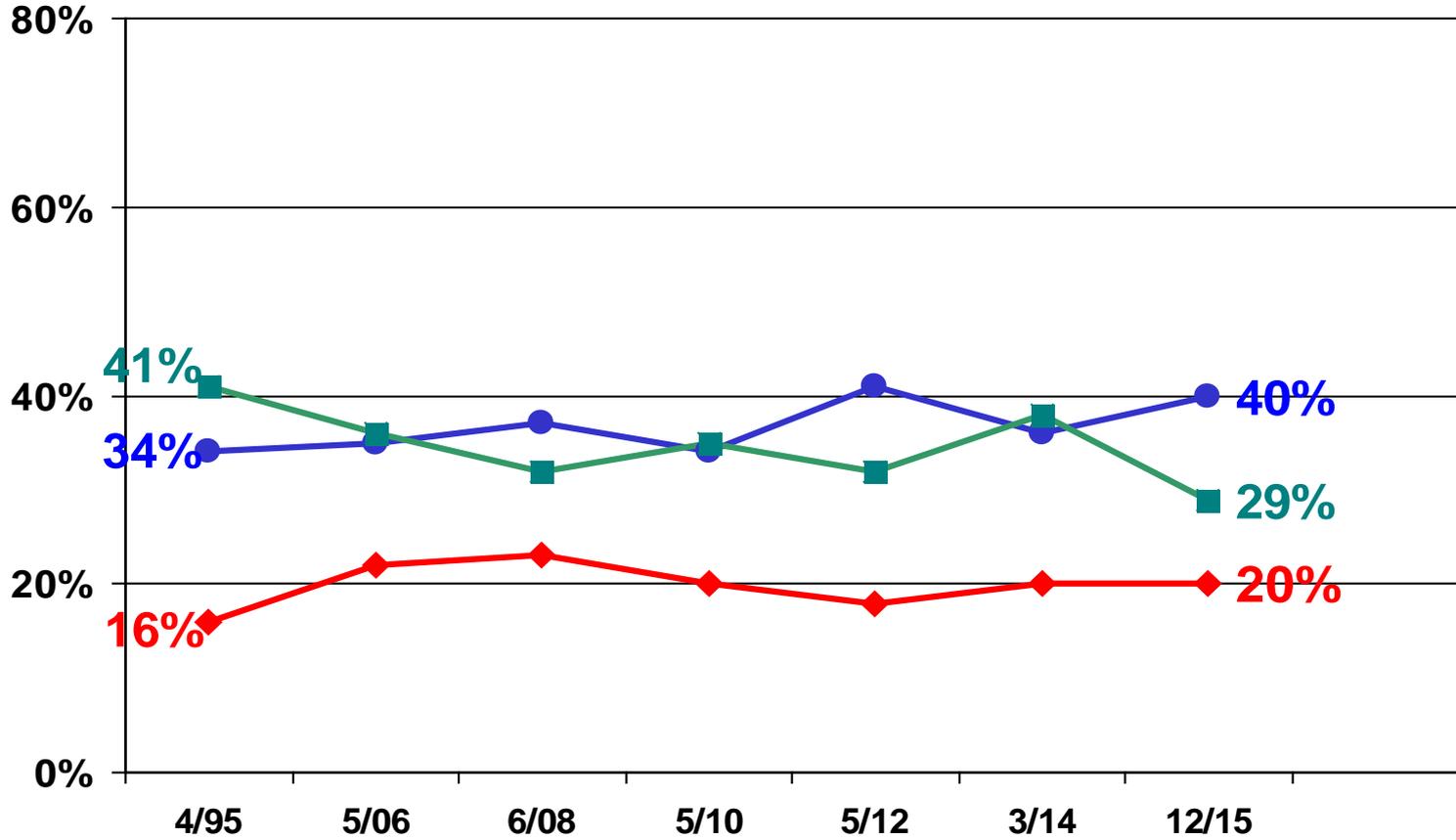
[n=605]



¹ No categories of responses included in "Other" exceed 2%.



Perception of Boulder County Taxes



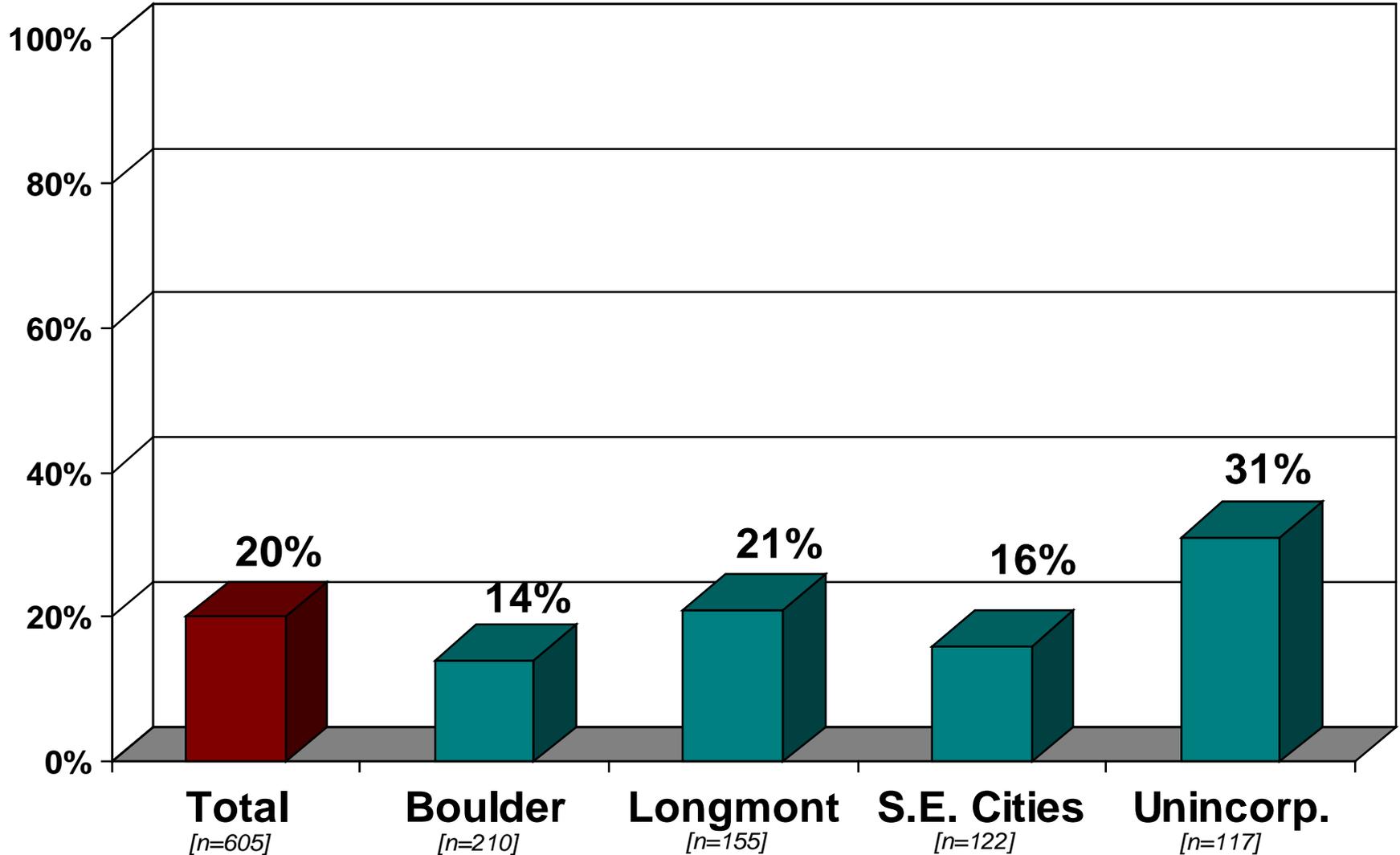
● High but Acceptable ■ About Right ◆ Way Too High



Perception of Boulder County Taxes

- Shows percent saying "Way too High" by geographic area -

[n=605]



IV. REVENUE PROPOSALS TESTED



Revenue Proposals Tested

Poll respondents were read five different revenue proposals, and were asked for their degree of support on each. The proposals tested include:

- A .1% sales tax increase/1% property tax increase to raise \$5 million a year for 15 years to fund reconstruction of local subdivision roads in unincorporated areas of the County;
- An extension of the current .25% County open space sales tax, set to expire in 2019, to fund acquisition and maintenance of Open Space;
- An extension of the current .25% County open space sales tax, set to expire in 2019, to fund acquisition and maintenance of Open Space, as well as County sustainability programs;
- A new \$50/\$150 per year property tax increase on a \$400,000 home to fund a community transit pass for anyone living in Boulder County;
- A \$10/month Head Tax on every employee working in the City of Boulder, to fund a community transit pass for each of those employees.



**A. COUNTY-WIDE TAX
INCREASE TO FUND
RECONSTRUCTION OF
SUBDIVISION ROADS**



Subdivision Road Funding

Given the controversy over the past few years about the reconstruction of rural subdivision roads in unincorporated Boulder County, the Commissioners thought it was important to test a proposal that would provide the funds to more quickly complete the project, without making cuts to other high-priority County programs.

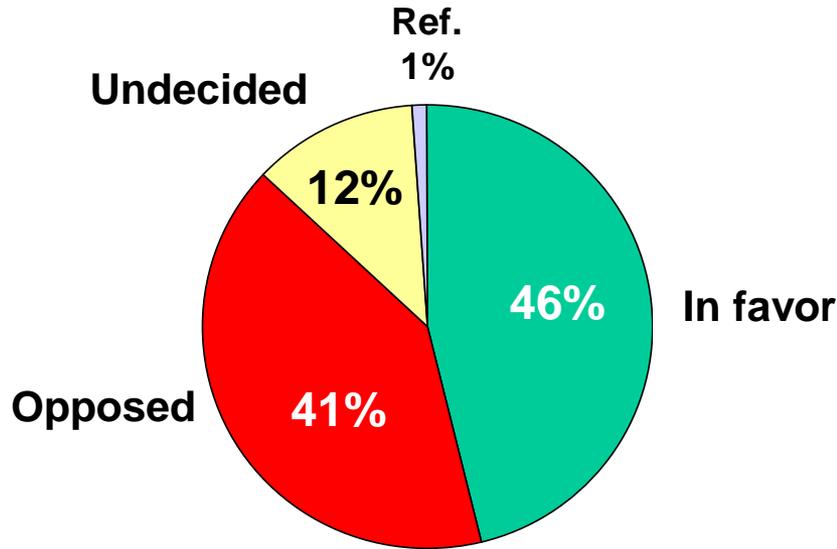
Survey results show that support for either the property tax or sales tax option hovers right around 50%. Given that level of support, it is doubtful a county-wide vote on either proposal would be successful.



Proposal To Fund Reconstruction of Subdivision Roads

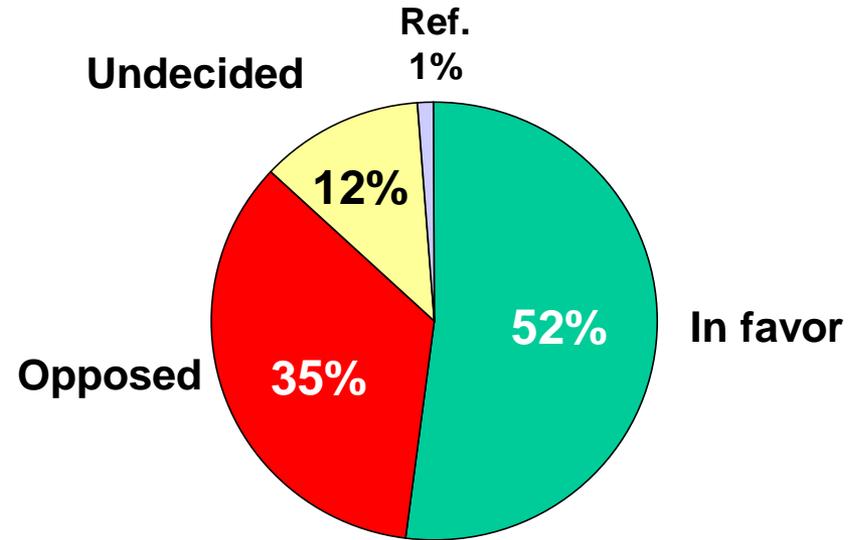
.10% Sales Tax

(n=301)



1% Property Tax Increase

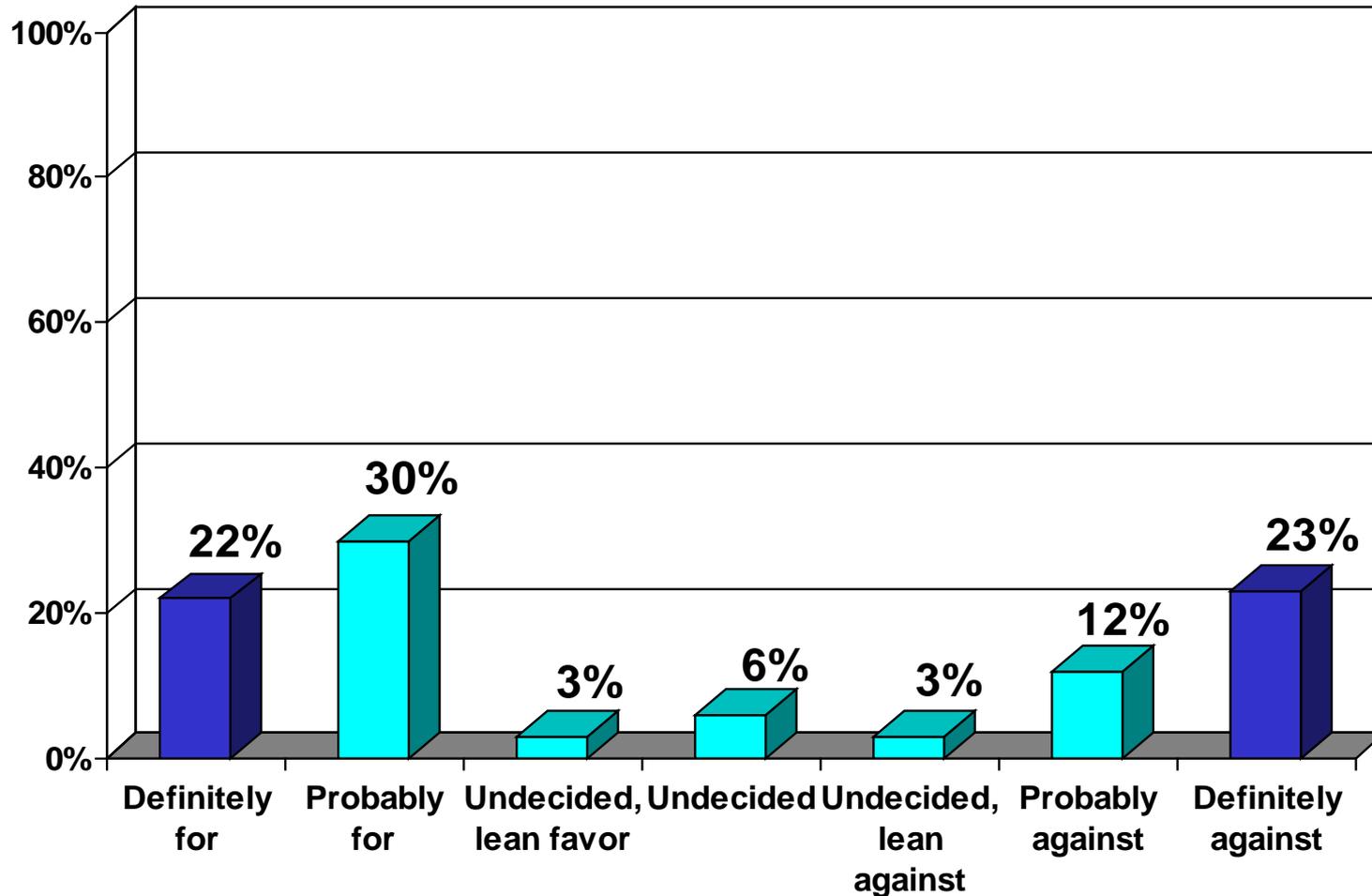
(n=304)



Proposal To Fund Reconstruction of Subdivision Roads

-Results shown are for the property tax proposal-

[n=605]



**B. EXTENTION OF THE
COUNTY OPEN SPACE
SALES TAX**



Extension of the Open Space Tax

The major source of Boulder County Open Space funding, a .25% County sales tax, expires in 2019. And in order to be able to continue to purchase the remaining parcels targeted for acquisition prior to its expiration, it is important to have the certainty of an extension in place well before 2019.

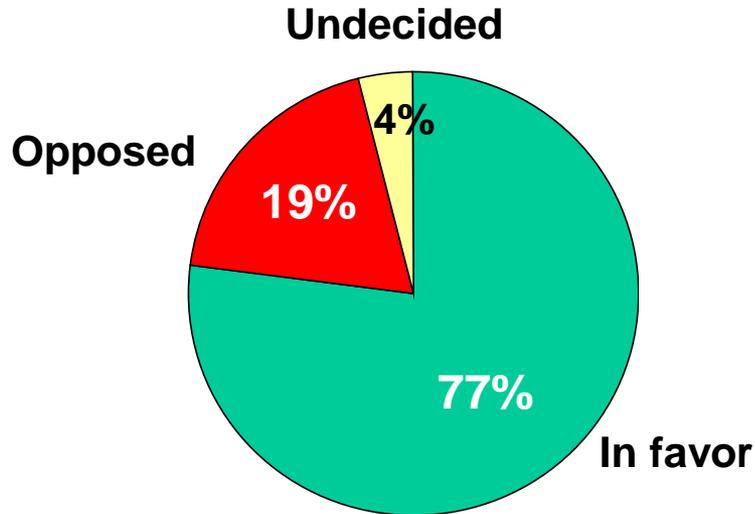
With that in mind, the Commissioners sought to test two versions of a proposal to extend the tax: one that funds just further open space acquisition and maintenance; and another that proposes to fund not only open space purchases and maintenance, but also certain County sustainability programs. While both test well, the clean open space version tests slightly better.



Extension of the Existing County Open Space Sales Tax

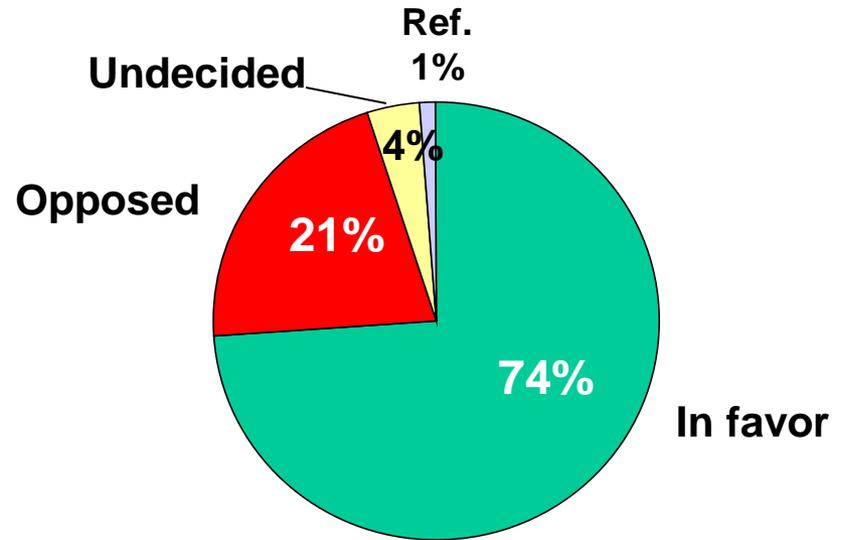
Q4. To Fund Just Open Space

(n=306)



Q5. To Fund Open Space & Sustainability

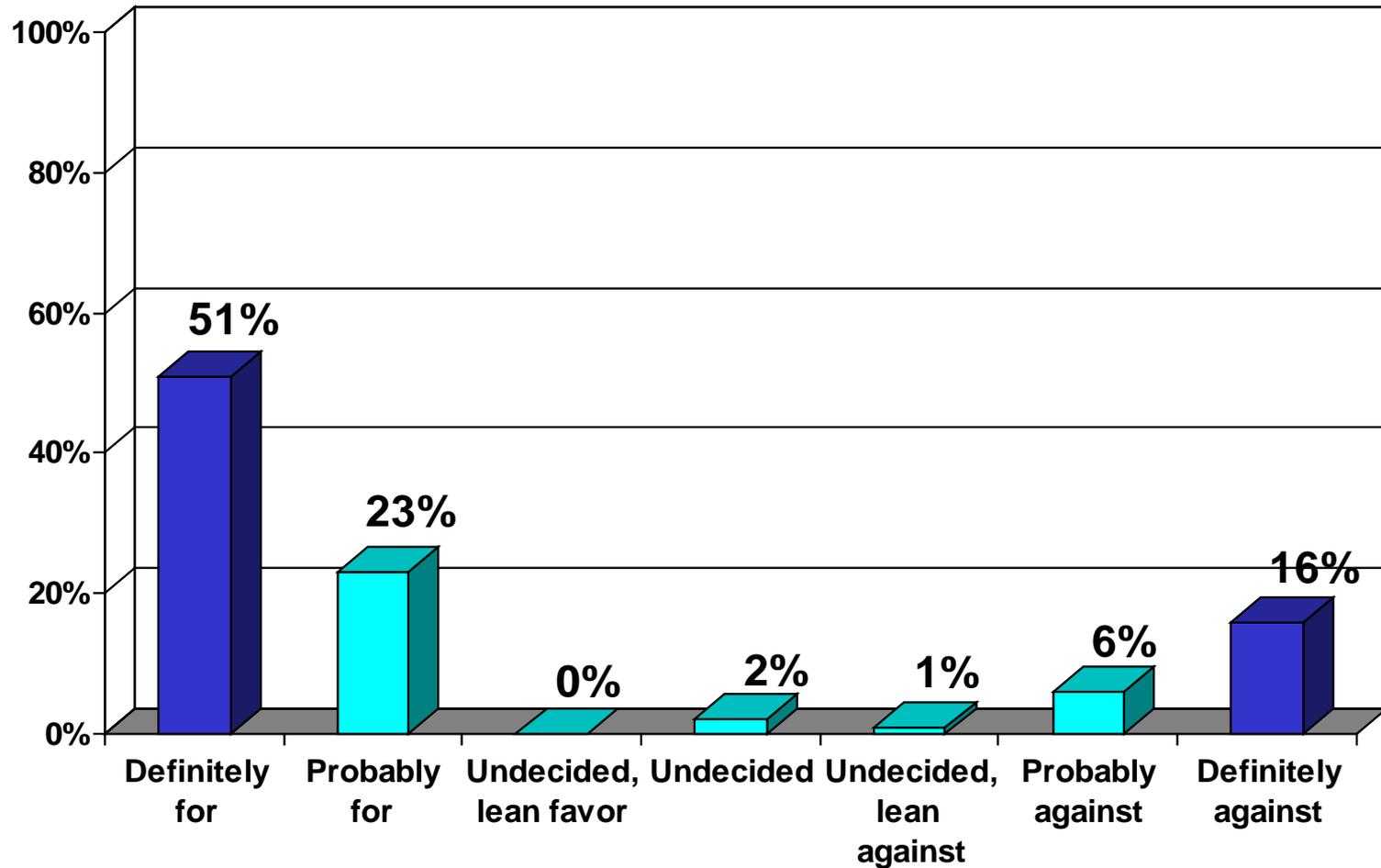
(n=299)



Strength of Vote for Open Space Tax Extension

-Results are for Initiative with Sustainability-

[n=299]



**C. NEW TAXES TO FUND
COUNTY-WIDE AND CITY
OF BOULDER TRANSIT
PASSES**



Transit Pass Initiatives

The concept of a City of Boulder or a County-wide EcoPass is one that has been floated around for years. On the 2015 Survey, voters were asked how they would vote on two types of EcoPass-like transit passes: One, asked of County voters, would raise County property taxes by either \$50 or \$150 on a \$400,000 home to fund an EcoPass-like community transit pass for everyone living in Boulder County; a second, asked just of City of Boulder voters (207 of the 605 survey respondents), would be a “Head Tax” on every employee working in the City of Boulder, to fund a transit pass for those employees.

The Head Tax, as described to voters, is a \$10 per month tax on employees who work in the city, half of which would be paid by the employer, half by the employee.

Neither proposal, without additional public education, receives sufficient support to pass at this time.



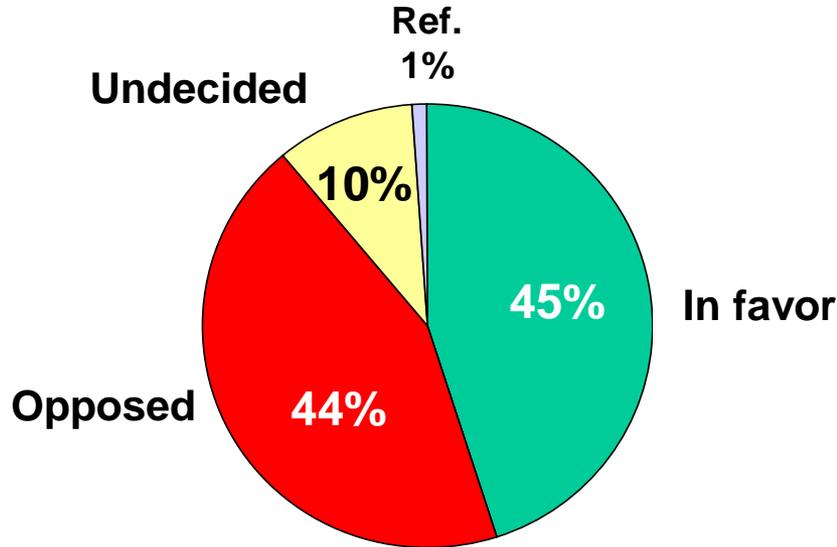
COUNTY-WIDE TRANSIT PASS TAXES



Proposal To Increase Property Taxes To Fund a County-Wide Transit Pass

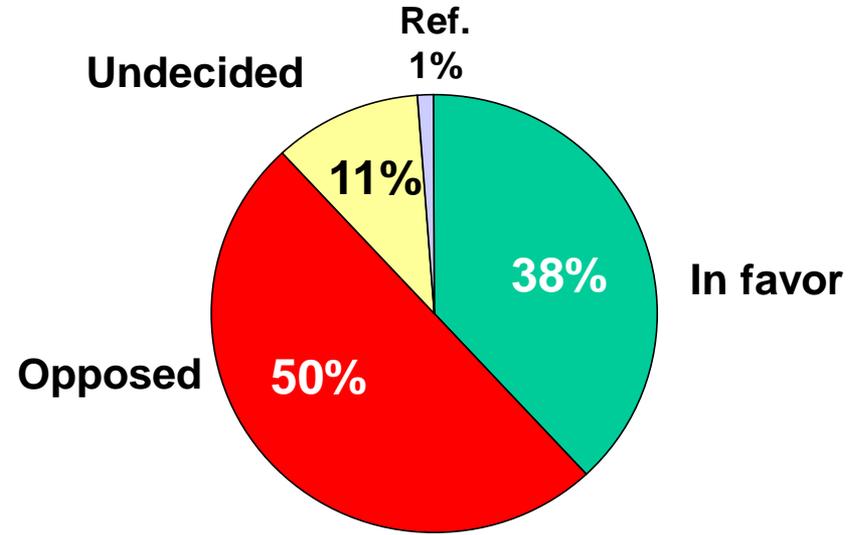
\$50/yr increase on a \$400K home

(n=306)



\$150/yr increase on a \$400K home

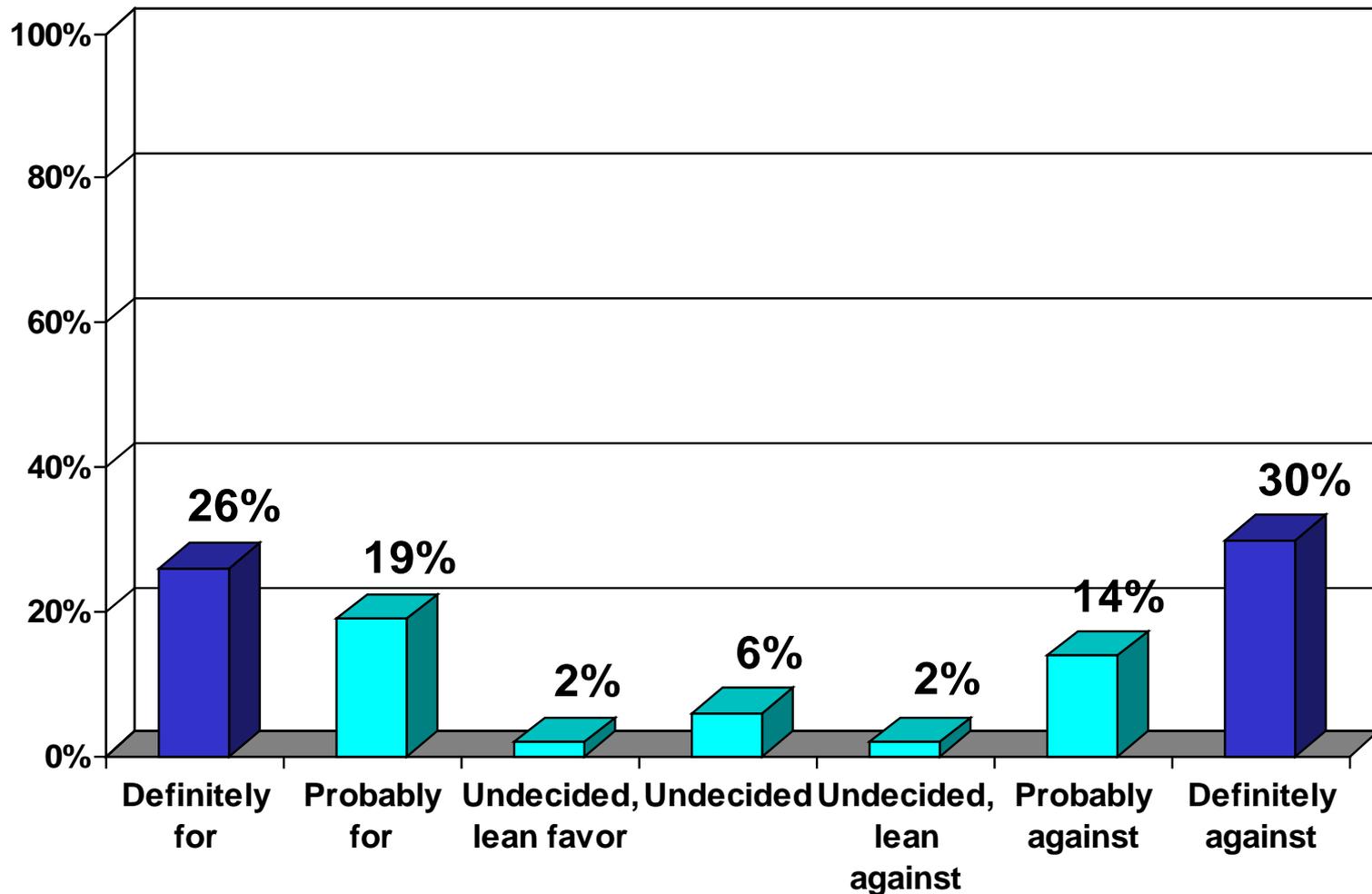
(n=299)



Strength Of Support For A County-Wide Transit Pass

-Results are for the \$50 Property Tax -

[n=299]



WHAT DRIVES SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTY-WIDE TRANSIT PASS



County-Wide Transit Pass Proposal

Before a decision is made on whether or not to pursue a County-wide transit pass proposal, and to possibly help frame the proposal, it is instructive to see which statements about the proposal that were tested resonate the most with County voters.

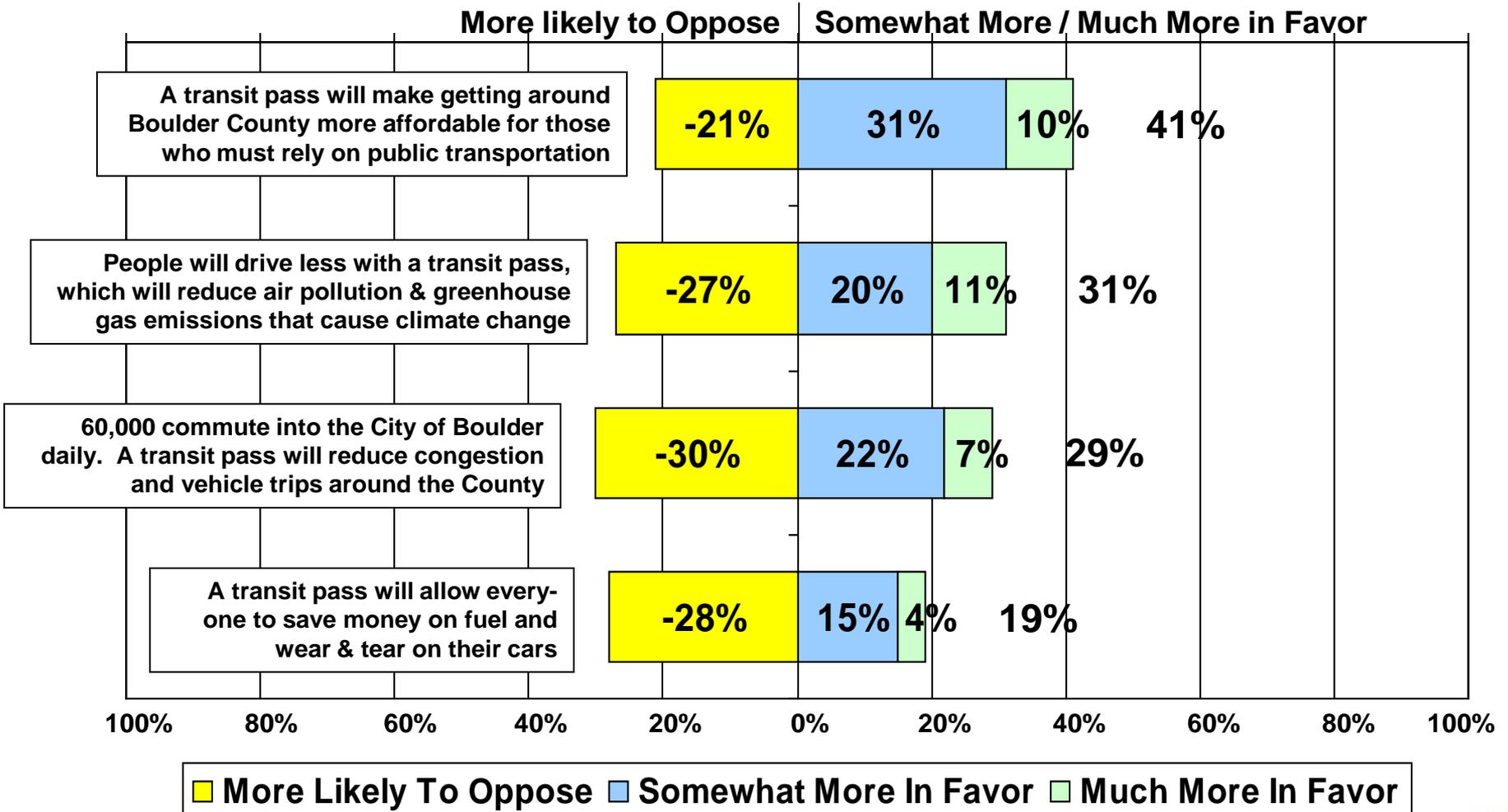
Of the four tested, the most compelling reason driving support for the measure is to make getting round the County more affordable for those who rely on public transit the most—seniors, students and low income populations.

Curiously, after being read the statement that a County transit pass would alleviate traffic congestion and reduce vehicle trips around the County caused by the 60,000 people who commute into the City of Boulder every day, a greater number say the statement makes them more likely to oppose the transit pass than support it.



Testing Statements in Support of the County-Wide Transit Pass Program

[n=349]



**PROPOSAL FOR A TAX ON ALL
EMPLOYEES IN THE CITY OF
BOULDER**



City of Boulder Transit Pass Proposal

The proposal for a Head Tax on all employees working in the City of Boulder to fund a transit pass for those employees polls far better than a County-wide transit pass does. But it does not test well enough to suggest it will pass at this time without additional public education.

And the Head Tax may have fared even better if it had been tested without City of Boulder voters being first queried about a property tax increase to fund a County-wide transit pass.

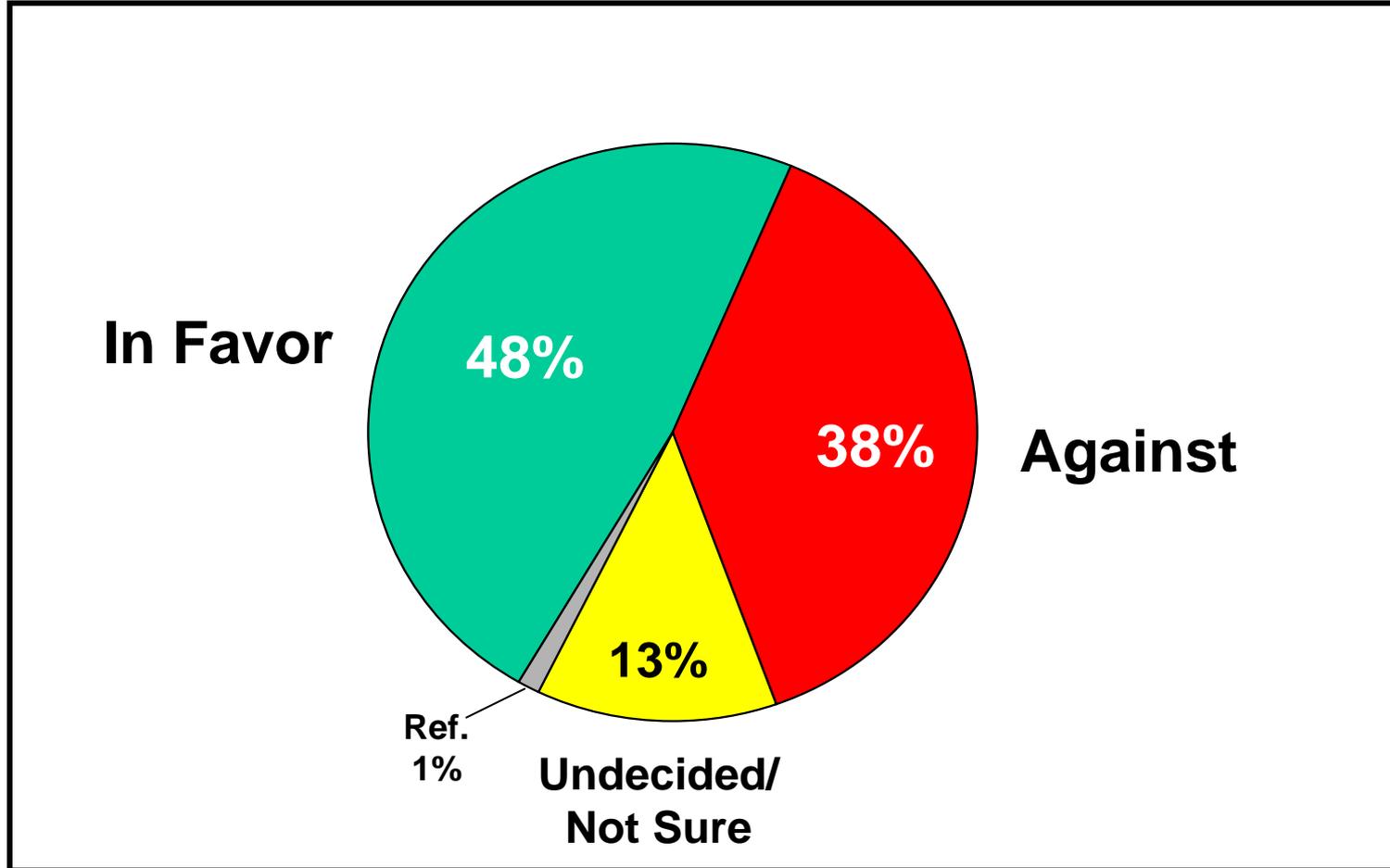
With both these proposals being tested at the same time, each seeking to provide funding for transit passes, a voter's response to one will no doubt impact a voter's response to the other. However, how much it impacts the results of one or the other is the big unknown.



City Of Boulder \$10/Mo. Head Tax On All Employees Working in the City

-Asked of just City of Boulder Voters-

[n=207]



**WHAT DRIVES SUPPORT
FOR THE CITY OF BOULDER
TRANSIT TAX PROPOSAL**



City of Boulder Head Tax Proposal

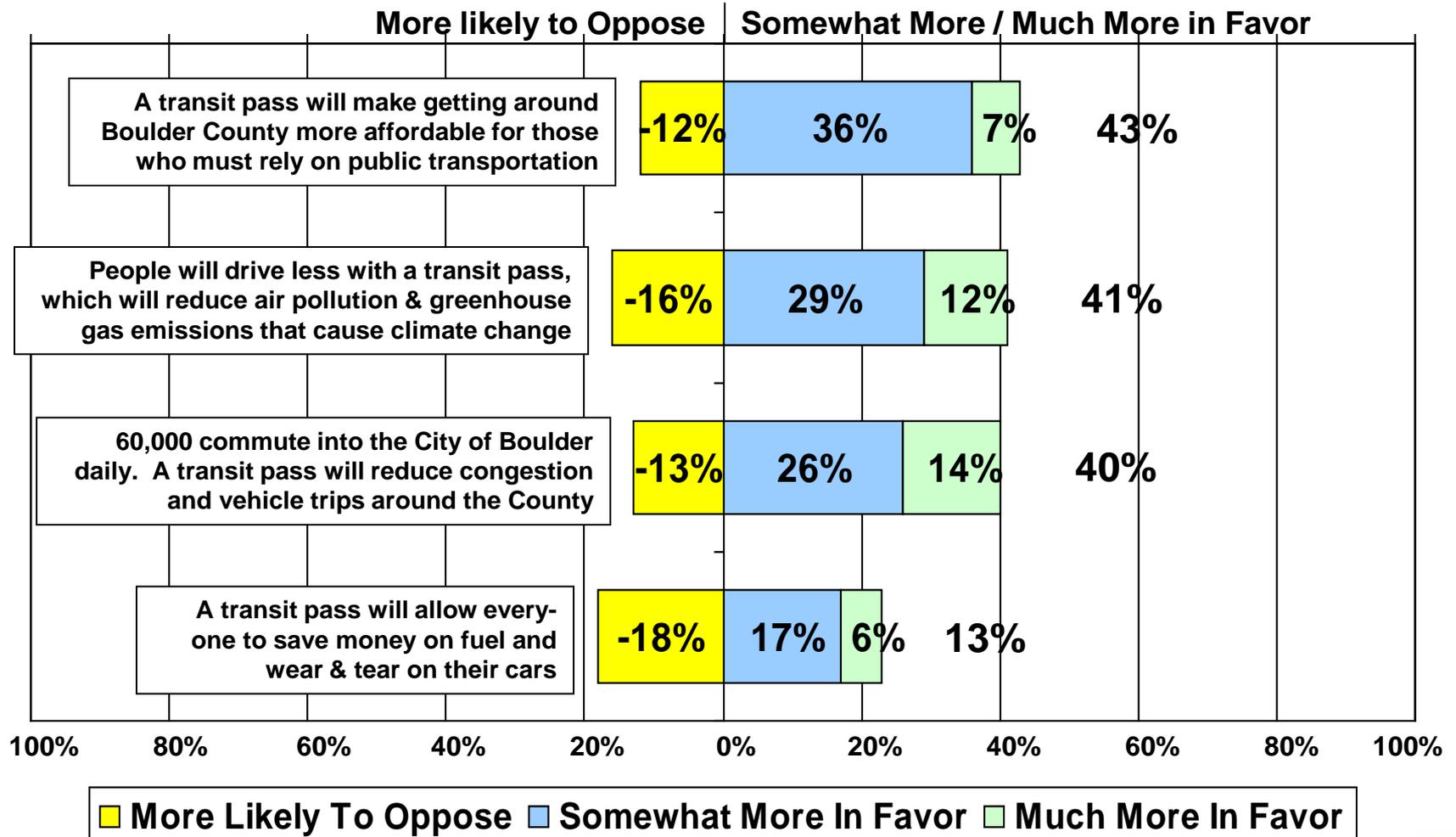
As with the County-wide transit pass proposal, before a decision is made on whether or not to pursue a Head Tax proposal to fund employee transit passes, it is instructive to see which of the same statements about the proposal resonate the most with City voters in regard to the Head Tax.

Unlike with the County transit pass, after being read the statement that a Head Tax to fund an employee transit pass would alleviate traffic congestion and reduce vehicle trips from 60,000 City of Boulder commuters, a far greater number say the statement makes them more likely to support, as to oppose, the Head Tax.



Testing Statements in Support of a \$10/Month City of Boulder Head Tax

[n=105]



V. DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKOUTS ON REVENUE PROPOSALS



Demographic Breakouts

The four charts that follow show how the support for the revenue proposals differs by where people live and by other key demographics, such as:

- Geography
- Most likely Voters¹
- Gender
- Age
- Own v. Rent homes
- Students
- Political party
- Children in Household
- Income
- Race

¹ Most likely voters, who make-up 61% of the survey respondents, are defined using a combination of likelihood to vote, how much they follow politics, as well as their past self-identified voting behavior in the 2012 Presidential election.



Demographic Breakouts for all Proposals

As expected, voters living within the City of Boulder lead the charge in support of most of the proposals tested. And also as one might expect, voters in Longmont present a significant counter balance to its neighbors to the southwest, particularly on the subdivision roads and county-wide transit proposals.

Only two initiatives grab a greater than 50% level of support among Seniors, a critical demographic because of their proclivity to vote in greater numbers than the general population. Those two initiatives are the two versions of the extension of the County Open Space Sales Tax.

Breakouts by party are also instructive. Predicatively, a majority of Democrats support every initiative tested, but it is their relatively low level of support for all but the open space initiatives, coupled with extremely low levels of support among Republicans as well as unaffiliated voters, that doom most of the proposals.



Demographic Breakouts

- Shows percent saying “In Favor” -

| Revenue Proposal | Total | Blder | Long't | SE Cities | Uninc. | Student |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-----------|--------|---------|
| Open Space | 77% | 79% | 71% | 89% | 67% | 90% |
| Open Space + Sustainability | 74% | 91% | 61% | 74% | 55% | 88% |
| Unincorp. Roads | 49% | 55% | 38% | 54% | 48% | 58% |
| County Transit Pass | 42% | 55% | 27% | 45% | 32% | 65% |
| City Head Tax | 48% | 48% | -- | -- | -- | 55% |

 Shading indicates there is a statistical difference

¹ As in the past, the “S.E. Cities” category is comprised of Louisville, Lafayette, Superior and Erie, while “Uninc” includes unincorporated areas as well as other small towns.



Demographic Breakouts

- Shows percent saying “In Favor” -

| Revenue Proposal | Total | 18-34 | 35-54 | 55-64 | 65+ | Own | Rent |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-----|-----|------|
| Open Space | 77% | 91% | 81% | 69% | 69% | 75% | 86% |
| Open Space + Sustainability | 74% | 88% | 74% | 72% | 67% | 69% | 91% |
| Unincorp. Roads | 49% | 59% | 47% | 50% | 45% | 47% | 61% |
| County Transit Pass | 42% | 63% | 37% | 41% | 31% | 36% | 63% |
| City Head Tax | 48% | 59% | 44% | 39% | 49% | 45% | 56% |

 Shading indicates there is a statistical difference



Demographic Breakouts

- Shows percent saying "In Favor" -

| Revenue Proposal | Total | Male | Female | Most Likely Voters | Rep. | Dem. | U's |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|--------|--------------------|------|------|-----|
| Open Space | 77% | 71% | 82% | 74% | 54% | 92% | 68% |
| Open Space + Sustainability | 74% | 71% | 76% | 69% | 40% | 87% | 77% |
| Unincorp. Roads | 49% | 54% | 44% | 49% | 35% | 56% | 48% |
| County Transit Pass | 42% | 41% | 42% | 39% | 19% | 55% | 36% |
| City Head Tax | 48% | 47% | 48% | 44% | 32% | 54% | 41% |

 Shading indicates there is a statistical difference



Demographic Breakouts

- Shows percent saying “In Favor” -

| Revenue Proposal | Total | <\$40K | \$40-\$99K | \$100K+ | Child. | No Child | White | Latino |
|-----------------------------|-------|--------|------------|---------|--------|----------|-------|--------|
| Open Space | 77% | 74% | 83% | 77% | 84% | 73% | 78% | 85% |
| Open Space + Sustainability | 74% | 82% | 76% | 76% | 76% | 73% | 75% | 75% |
| Unincorp. Roads | 49% | 51% | 56% | 51% | 43% | 52% | 51% | 43% |
| County Transit Pass | 42% | 51% | 46% | 44% | 42% | 41% | 44% | 39% |
| City Head Tax | 48% | 46% | 50% | 51% | 46% | 48% | 49% | 63% |

 Shading indicates there is a statistical difference



VIII. APPENDIX: PERCENTAGE RESULTS

