

# 2016 BOULDER COUNTY JUNE ISSUES SURVEY

Report  
~June, 2016~

*Prepared for:*



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# I. OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY



# OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to better understand community reaction towards three issues that could be on this November's election ballot: 1) a property tax increase to pay for reconstructing local subdivision roads in unincorporated Boulder County, as well as provide funds for County cities for road and bridge repair; 2) extending  $\frac{1}{2}$  the County open space sales tax for 15 years to fund open space acquisition and maintenance; and 3) extending  $\frac{1}{2}$  the open space sales tax for 15 years to fund County sustainability programs. In addition, a fourth proposal, tested late last year, was also included: extending the County open space tax, with one-half the funds going to fund open space acquisition and maintenance, and the other half earmarked for County sustainability programs.



# METHODOLOGY

Talmey-Drake Research & Strategy, Inc. conducted the 2016 Boulder County June Issues Survey in June of 2016. A random sample was drawn from a list of Boulder County voters, containing both landline and cell phone numbers.

- *Interviews were conducted between June 1-10, 2016.*
- *Results are based on 605 telephone interviews.*
- *The margin of error is plus or minus 4% about any one reported percentage.*



## **II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS**



# KEY FINDINGS

## I. The Climate Today

**#1.** The Boulder County electorate is slightly less optimistic today than seven months ago about how things are going in the County, but are still more optimistic than Coloradans as a whole. However, the gap is closing as the level of optimism statewide continues to catch up to that in Boulder County. Fifty-six percent (down from 61% in December of 2015) say that things in Boulder County are going in the right direction, compared to 48% statewide.

On the positive side, in spite of the recent re-assessments, the percent saying taxes are “Way too high” has remained surprisingly constant. The perception of current property taxes among homeowners is, however, a bit higher than that of taxes in general.



# KEY FINDINGS

## II. Roads Proposal Tested

**#2** Survey results show that support for the property tax increase to fund subdivision roads in unincorporated Boulder County, as well as roads and bridges in cities throughout Boulder County, comes in at just 49%, with a 15 year sunset; 45% without a sunset. Unfortunately the strength of support in favor of the initiative is also weak, while the strength of support of the opposition is strong. If the election were held today, given the low levels of support, and the strength of that support, it is doubtful this countywide vote for roads would be successful, with or without a sunset.



# KEY FINDINGS

## III. Sales Tax Extension Proposals Tested

**#3** Proceeds from one half of the existing .25% open space tax are likely to be adequate to acquire the targeted open space properties that are anticipated to be available for purchase during the 15 year life of the proposed extension.

Given that reality, two tax extension ballot proposals were tested: one to extend one-half of the .25% open space tax in order to fund further open space acquisition and maintenance; the other to extend one-half of the .25% open space tax to fund County sustainability programs.

If the election were held today, the chance of both versions of the tax extension passing is highly likely: open space alone by a margin of 75% to 19% (about the same as the 77% in '15); sustainability by 69% to 22%.



# KEY FINDINGS

## III. Sales Tax Extension Proposals Tested *(cont.)*

**#4** The highest level of support for extending this sales tax, for either open space or sustainability, comes not surprisingly from those who are least likely to pay the tax—those age 18-34, students and renters—and also from Democrats and Latinos.

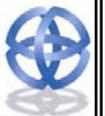


# KEY FINDINGS

## III. Sales Tax Extension Proposals Tested *(cont.)*

**#5** The top reason voters give for extending one-half of the tax for open space is, “To preserve wildlife habitat and maintain wildlife corridors on and between open space,” followed closely by, “To manage and maintain existing open space,” and “To restore open space wetlands and areas along streams damaged by the 2013 flood .”

**#6** The top reason voters give for extending one-half of the tax for sustainability is, “To fund programs to conserve our water resources by helping farmers, residents and businesses reduce their water use.”



# III. THE CLIMATE TODAY



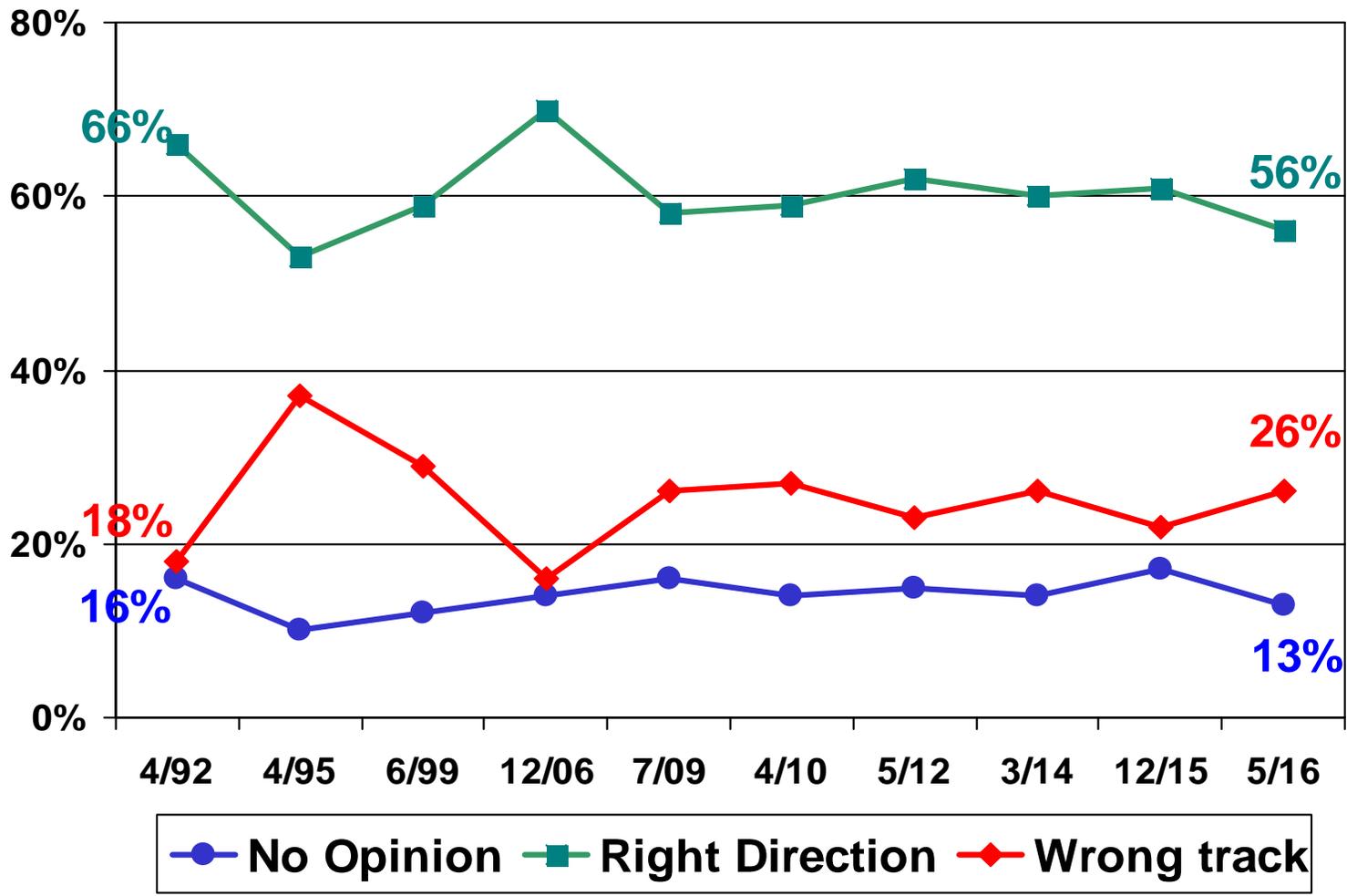
## Climate and Overview

The Boulder County electorate is slightly less optimistic today than seven months ago about how things are going in the County, but are still more optimistic than Coloradans as a whole. However, the gap is closing as the level of optimism statewide continues to catch up to that in Boulder County. Fifty-six percent (down from 61% in December of 2015) say that things in Boulder County are going in the right direction, compared to 48% statewide.

To further understand the climate in Boulder County today, voters were also asked how they feel about the County's tax burden. In spite of the recent re-assessments, the percent saying taxes are "Way too high," has surprisingly remained fairly constant. The perception of current property taxes among homeowners is, however, a bit higher than that of taxes in general.



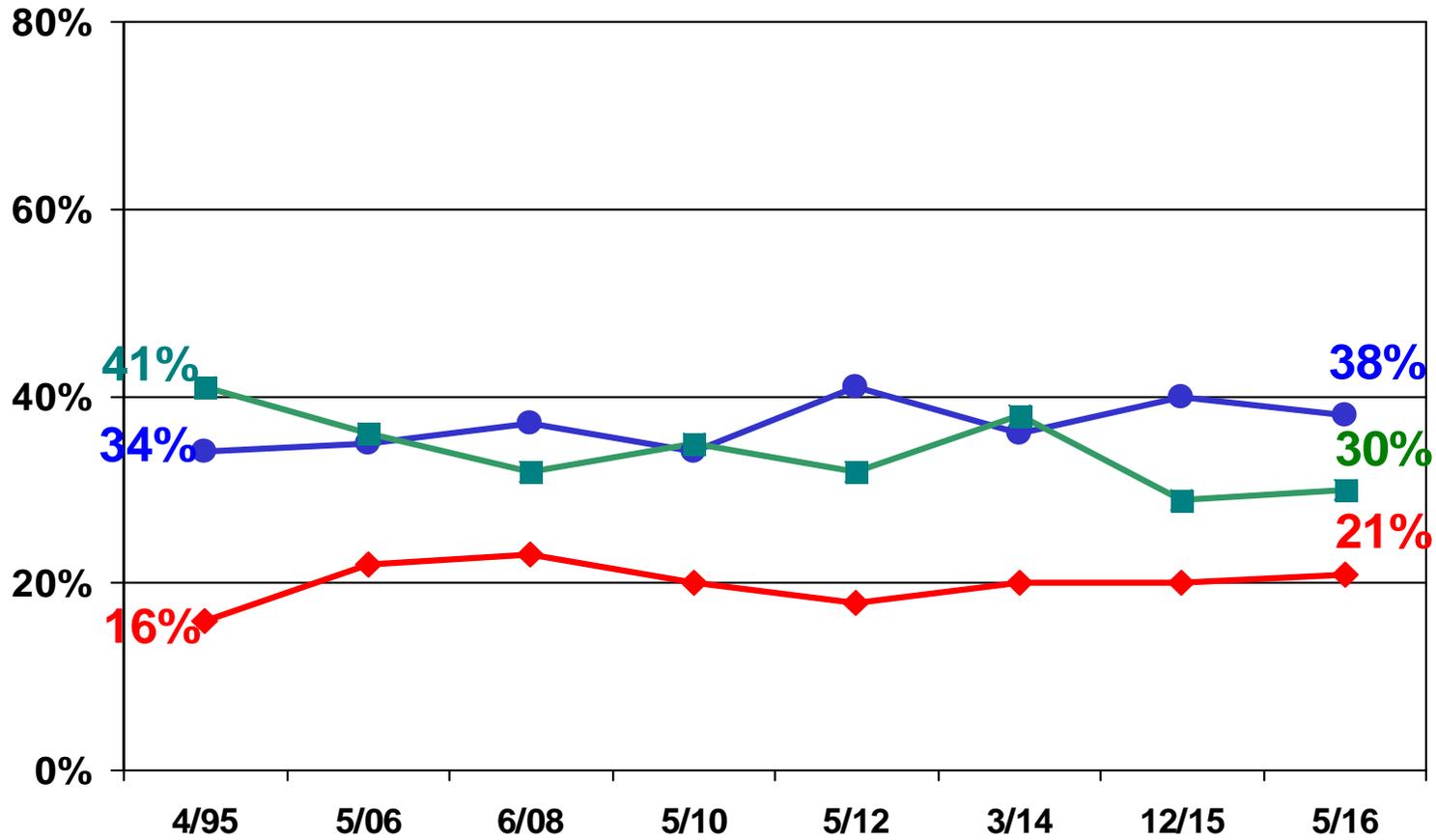
# How are Things Going in Boulder County Today?



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



# Perception of Boulder County Taxes

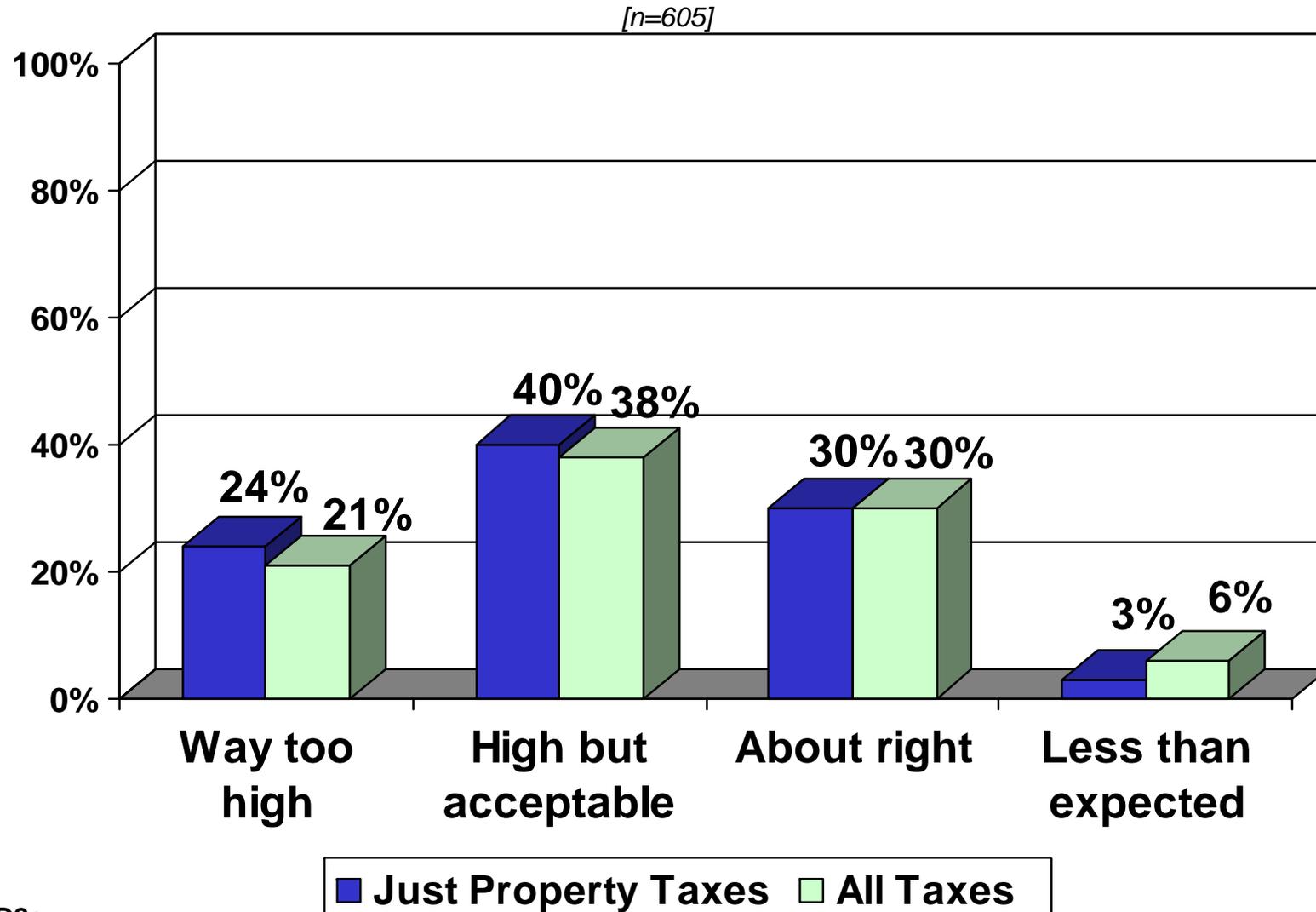


● High but Acceptable    ■ About Right    ◆ Way Too High



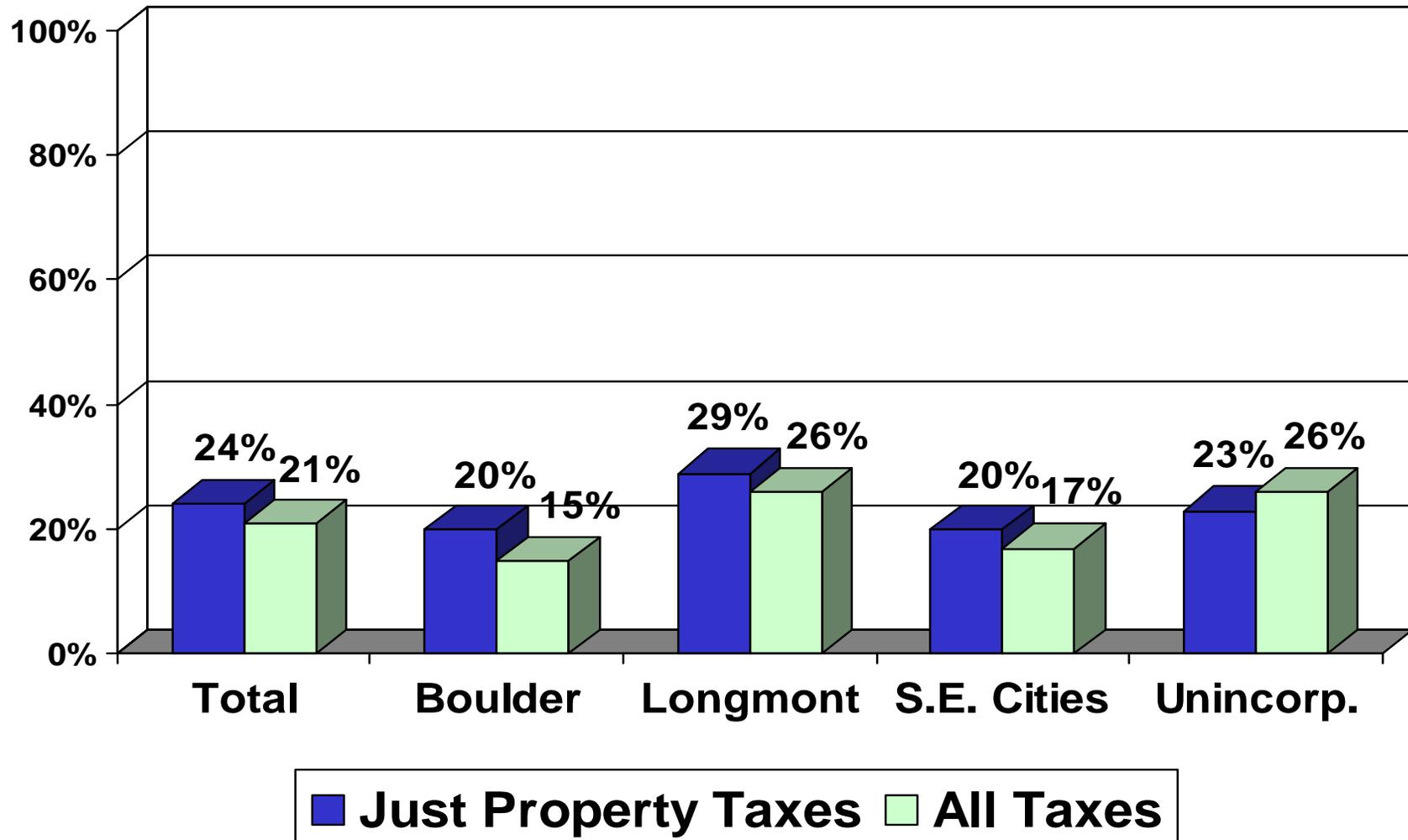
# 15 Perception of Boulder County Property Tax vs. All Taxes Taxes

- Only those who own home are asked about property taxes -



# 16 Perception of Boulder County Property Tax vs. All Taxes Taxes: By Region

- Percent saying taxes are "Way too high" -



# **IV. REVENUE PROPOSALS TESTED**



# Revenue Proposals Tested

Poll respondents were read three different revenue proposals, and were asked for their degree of support on each. In addition, respondents were read a proposal identical to one asked in late 2015 in order to verify the results of that proposal. The proposals tested include:

- A 2% property tax increase to raise \$10 million a year for 15 years to fund road and bridge projects within Boulder County cities, as well as reconstruction of local subdivision roads in unincorporated areas of the County;
- An extension till 2034 of one-half the current .25% County open space sales tax, set to expire in 2019, to fund acquisition and maintenance of Open Space;
- An extension till 2034 of one-half the current .25% County open space sales tax, set to expire in 2019, to fund County sustainability programs; and
- An extension, for an additional 15 years, 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.



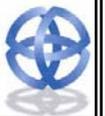
**A. COUNTY-WIDE PROPERTY  
TAX INCREASE TO FUND  
CITY & COUNTY ROAD &  
BRIDGE PROJECTS**



## Road and Bridge 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. Approximately one-half of the property tax funds raised would, by law, be remitted to municipalities within Boulder County to be used for municipal road and bridge projects.

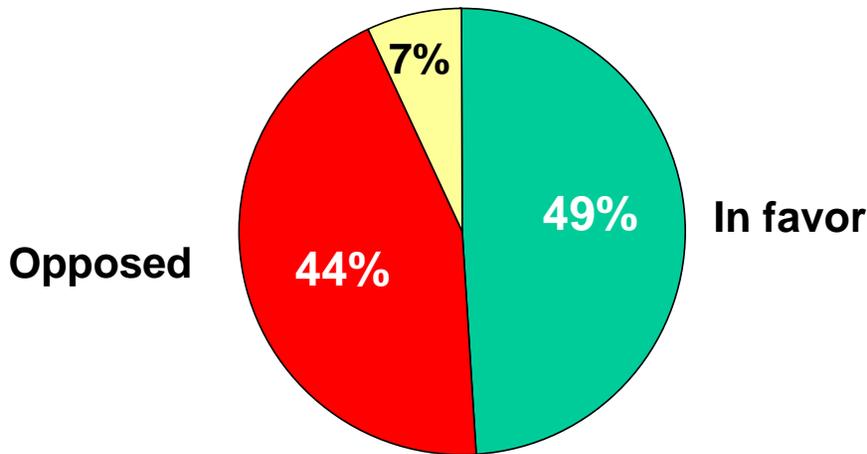
Survey results show that support for the property tax comes in at 49%, with a 15 year sunset; 45% without a sunset. Unfortunately the strength of support in favor of the initiative is also weak, while the strength of support of the opposition is strong. If the election were held today, given the low levels of support, and the strength of that support, it is doubtful a county-wide vote for roads would be successful, with or without a sunset.



# Proposal For 2% Property Tax Increase To Fund Road Projects

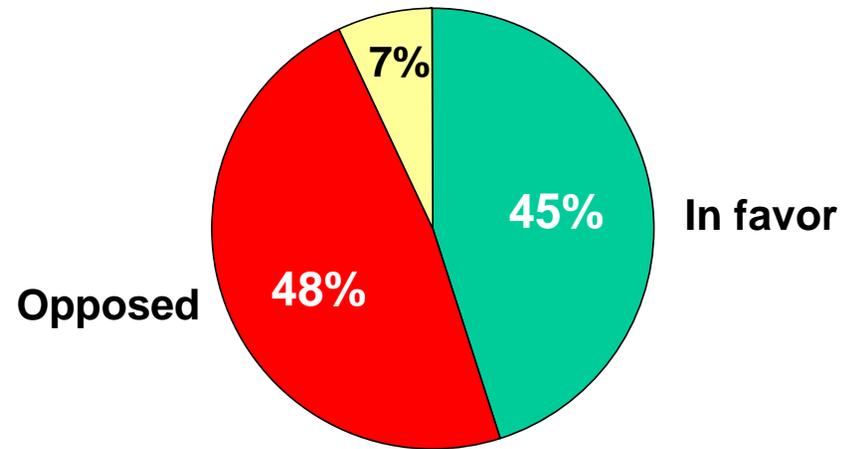
With Sunset  
(n=303)

Undecided



Without Sunset  
(n=302)

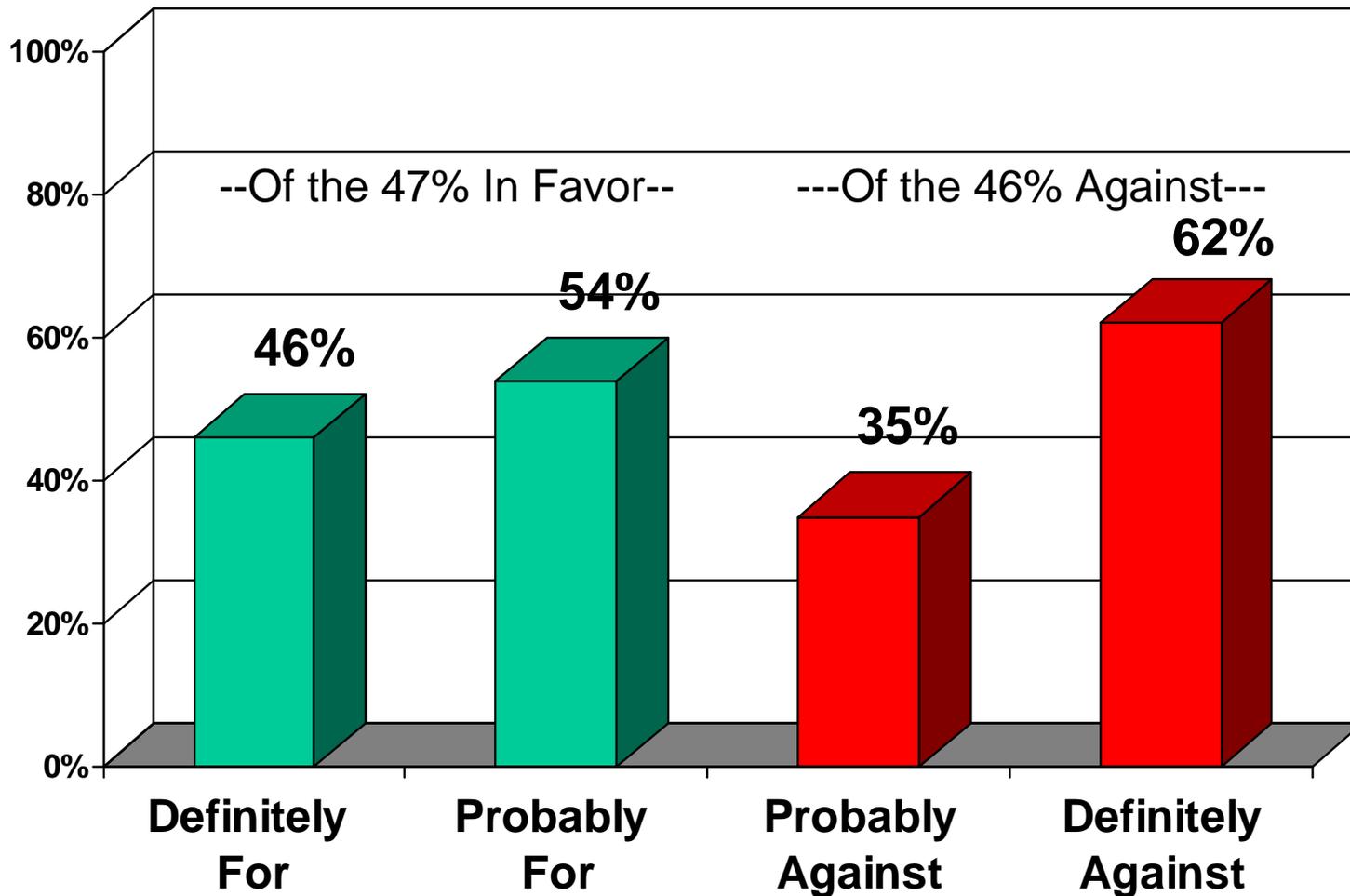
Undecided



# Strength of Support/Opposition For 2% Property Tax Increase To Fund Road Projects

-Results shown for combined results, with and without sunset-

[n=605]



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



## Extension of the Open Space Tax

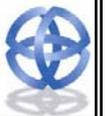
The major source of Boulder County Open Space funding, a .25% County sales tax, expires in 2019. In order to be able to continue purchasing the remaining parcels targeted for acquisition and maintaining and managing open space lands, it is important to have the certainty of an extension in place well before 2019.

That said, the potential open space land that is currently being targeted for acquisition could be purchased, and current and future land maintained, from money generated from just one-half of the current open space .25% sales tax.



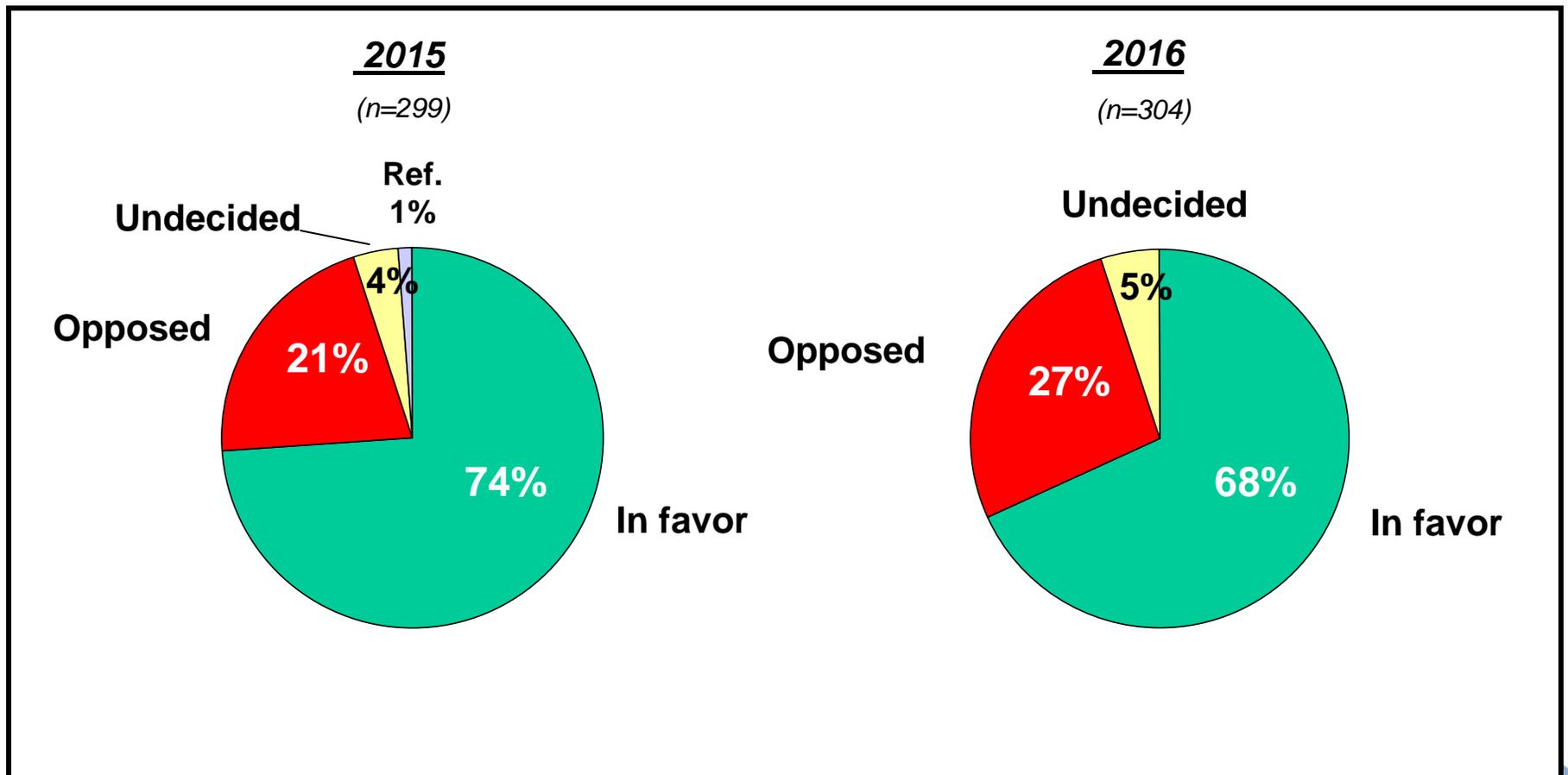
## **Extension of the Open Space Tax** *(cont.)*

With that in mind, in late 2015, the Commissioners tested a single ballot proposal to extend the current .25% County open space sales tax, set to expire in 2019, so that it would fund not only the acquisition and maintenance of Open Space, but also County sustainability programs. The results were so positive that the County wanted to retest that proposal again as part of this latest study. This year when asked to vote on the same initiative, voter support came in somewhat lower, though still quite high.



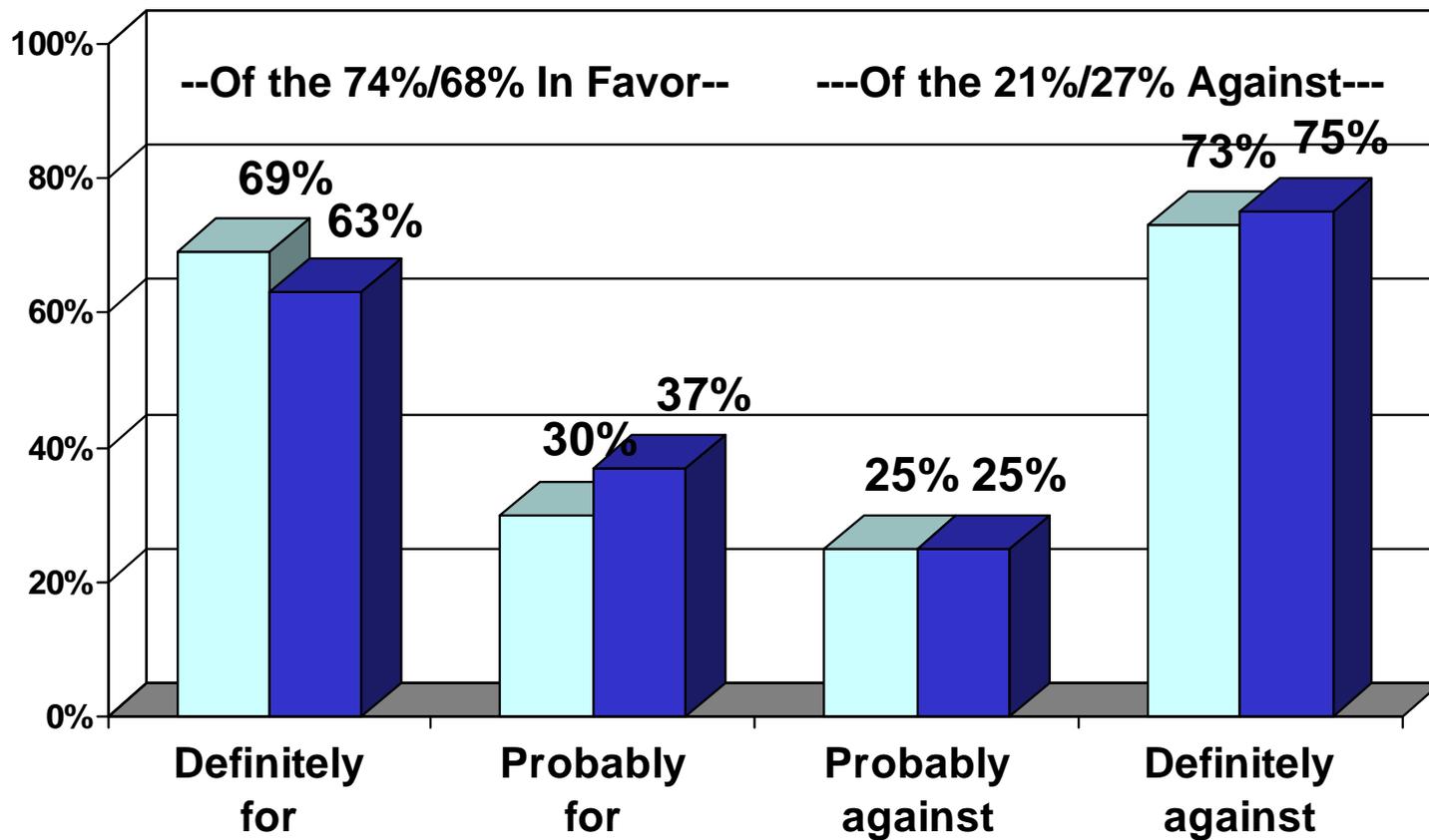
# Extending the Existing County Open Space Sales Tax to Include Sustainability Programs

-Results are for the re-test of Extension with Sustainability-



# Strength of Support/Opposition For Open Space Tax Extension

-Results are for the re-test of Extension with Sustainability-



Q5 ('15); Q4 ('16)

2015 [n=299]    2016 [n=304]



## **Extension of the Open Space Tax** *(cont.)*

Given the findings in the 2015 survey, the Commissioners wanted to test two additional ballot initiatives: one to extend one-half of the .25% open space tax in order to fund further open space acquisition and maintenance; the other to extend one-half of the .25% open space tax to fund County sustainability programs.

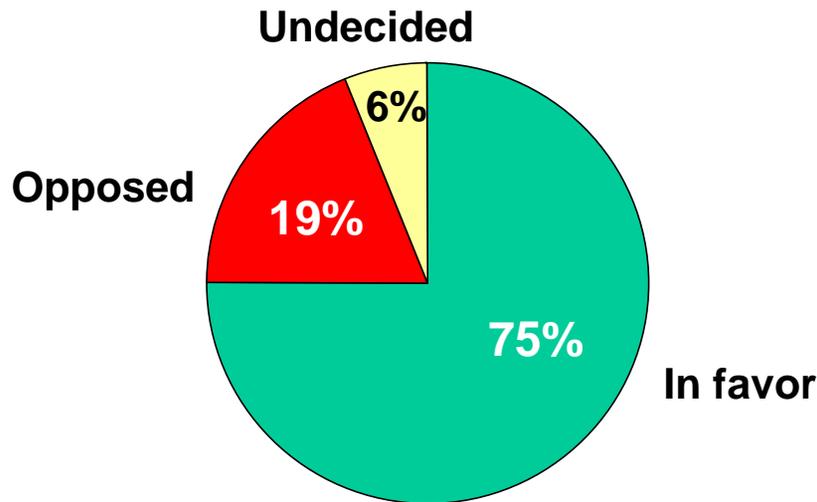
If the election were held today, the chance of both versions of the tax extension passing is highly likely: open space alone by a margin of 75% to 19% (about the same as the 77% in '15); sustainability by 69% to 22%.



# Extending the Existing County Open Space Sales Tax

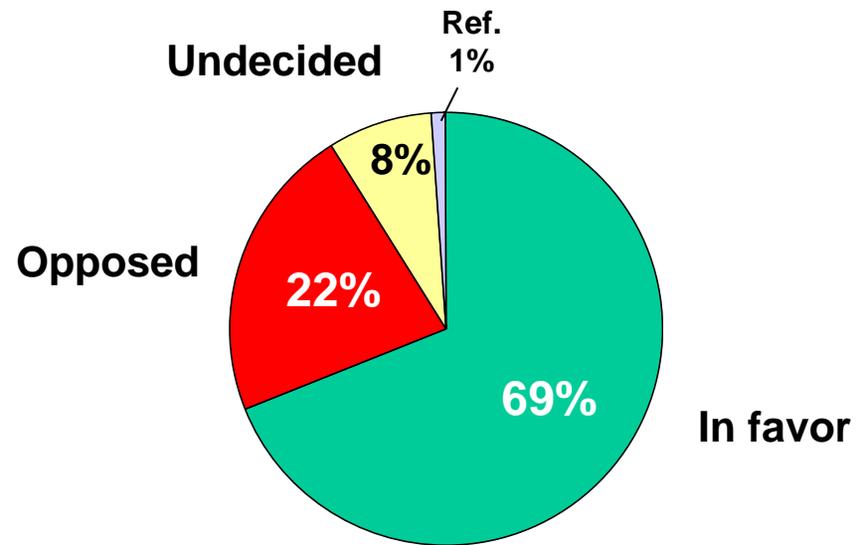
To Fund Open Space

[n=301]



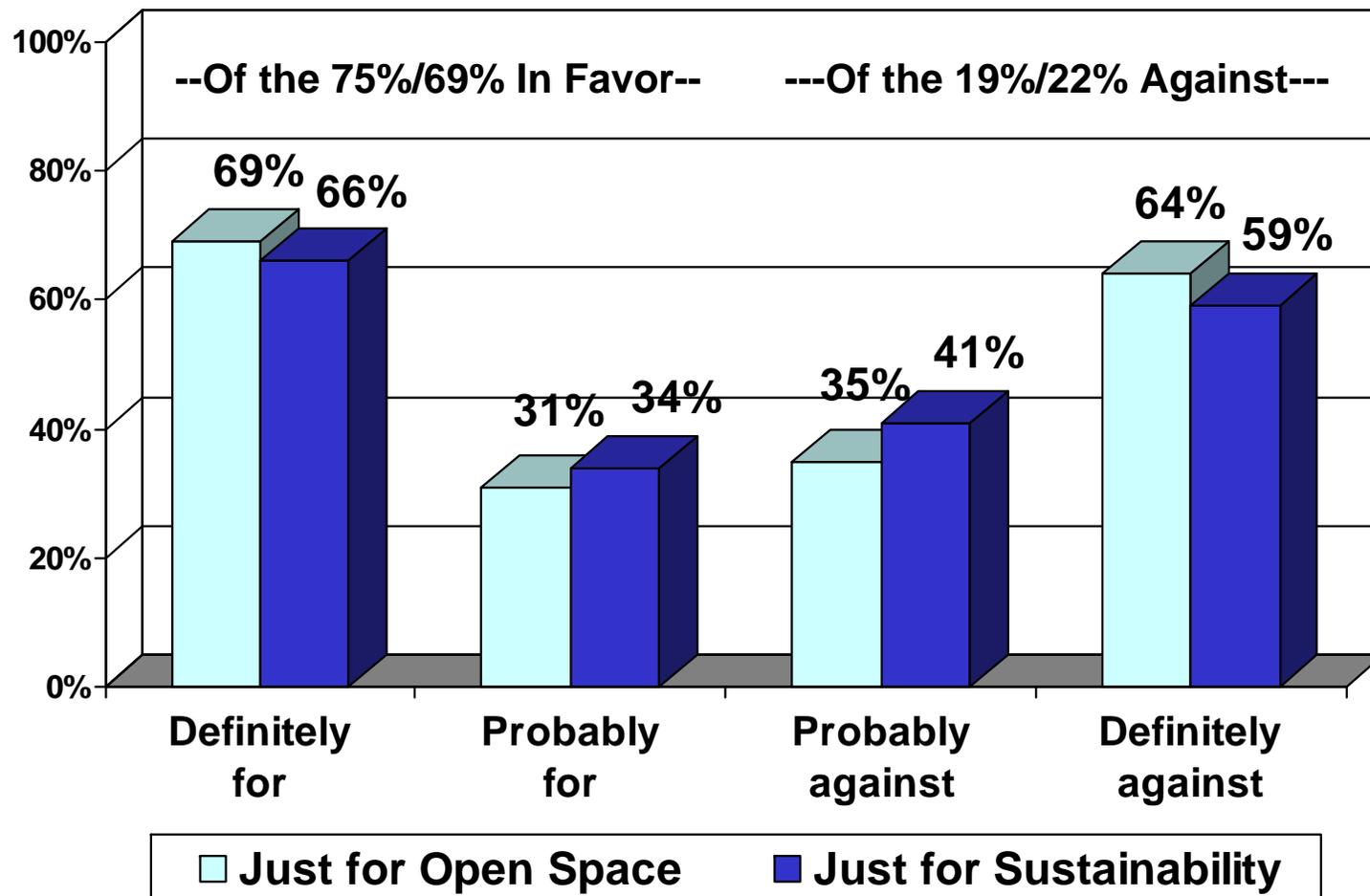
To Fund Sustainability

[n=301]



# Strength of Support/Opposition For Open Space Tax Extension

-Extending for Just Open Space v. Just Sustainability-



## **Extension of the Open Space Tax** *(cont.)*

After voters were read the two alternative ballot proposals to fund sustainability programs out of a portion of the existing Open Space tax, those who said they were opposed to, or undecided about splitting the funding were then given the following rationale for redirecting some County open space money to County sustainability efforts:

“All the land likely to be available to buy for open space during the fifteen years the tax is in place, could be purchased by the County with just one-half of the existing open space tax, leaving enough money to also manage and maintain existing and future open space lands.”

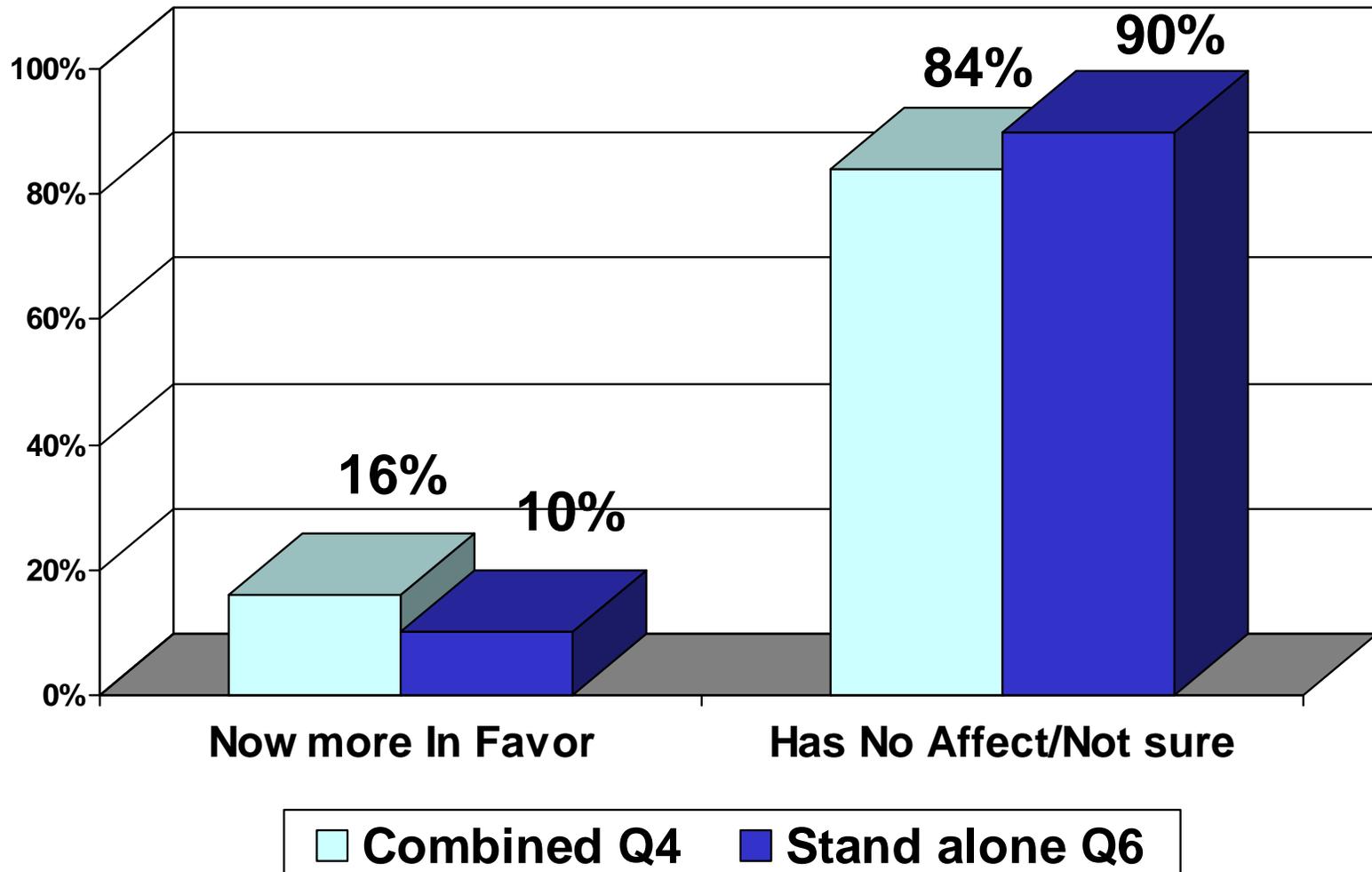
Once having heard that rationale, 13% of skeptical voters say they are more likely to support switching open space funds to sustainability, while 87% remain unconvinced.



# The Affect On Voters of Giving Reason for Splitting Open Space Tax

-Asked of those Undecided or voting NO on Sustainability-

[Q4n=96; Q6n=90]



# Rationale For Extending The Tax For Open Space

Boulder County voters were asked to rate the importance of five overarching reasons to support the extension of the County's open space tax:

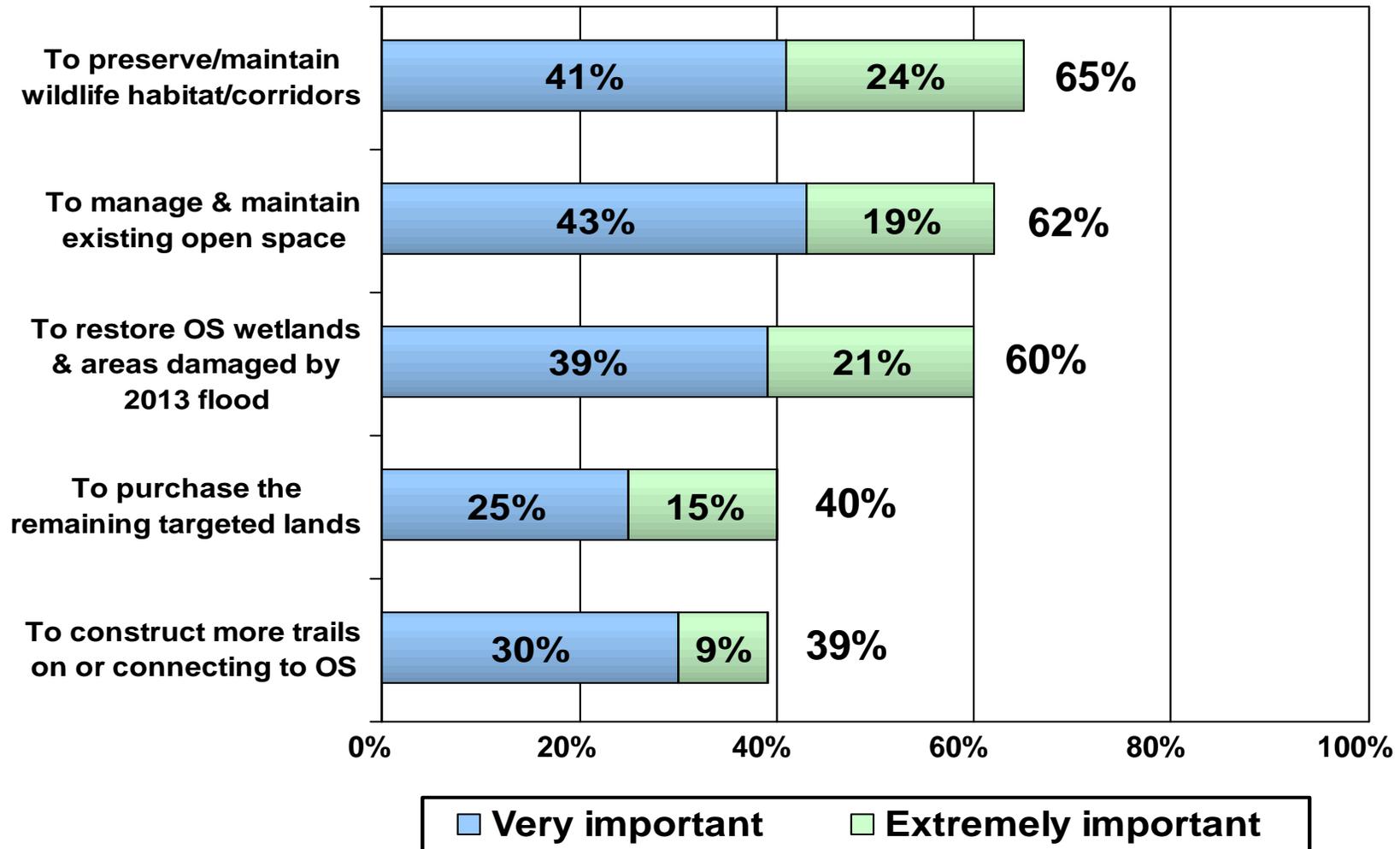
- *To purchase the remaining lands targeted for acquisition*
- *To manage and maintain existing open space*
- *To construct more trails on and connecting to open space*
- *To restore open space wetlands and areas along streams that were damaged by the 2013 flood*
- *To preserve wildlife habitat and maintain wildlife corridors on and between open space*



# Reasons to Extend Tax For Open Space

- Percent saying “Extremely / Very” important-

[n=605]



# Rationale For Extending The Open Space Tax For Sustainability

Boulder County voters were asked to rate the importance of five reasons to support the extension of the County's open space tax to fund sustainability programs:

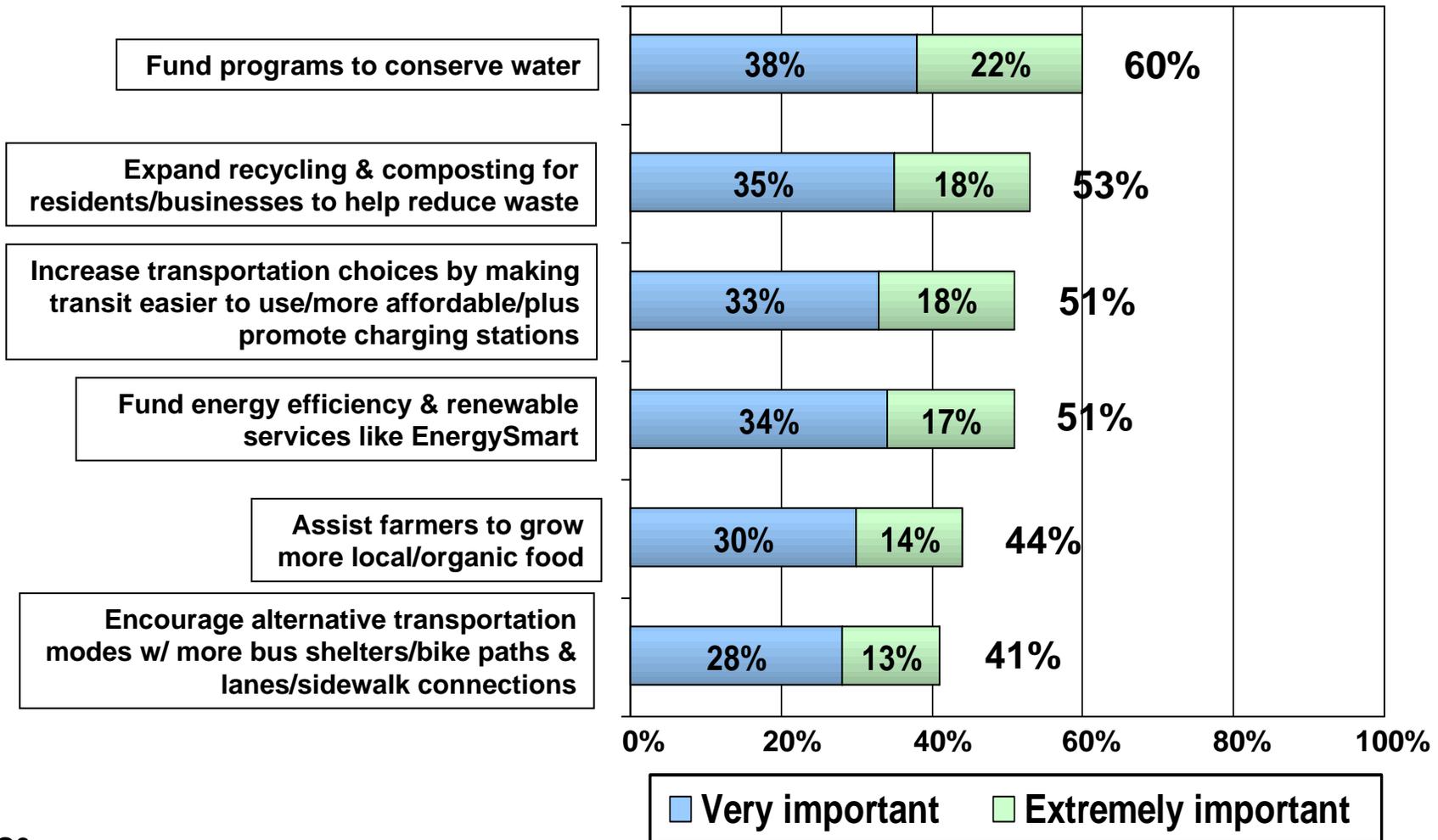
- *To fund programs to conserve our water resources by helping farmers, residents and businesses reduce their water use*
- *To expand recycling and composting services and facilities for Boulder County residents and business owners to help reduce waste*
- *To provide assistance to local farmers to grow more local and organic food for Boulder County residents*
- *To fund energy efficiency and renewable energy services such as EnergySmart programs*
- *To increase transportation options by providing more bus shelters, bike paths, bike lanes, and sidewalk connections to improve transportation choices and safety*



# 36 Reasons to Extend the Open Space Tax For Sustainability

- Percent saying "Extremely / Very" important-

[n=605]



# **V. DEMOGRAPHIC BREAKOUTS ON REVENUE PROPOSALS**



# Demographic Breakouts

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

- Most likely voters<sup>1</sup>
- Gender
- Age
- Own v. Rent homes
- Students
- Political party
- Children in Household
- Income
- Race

<sup>1</sup> Most likely voters, who make-up 58% of the survey respondents, are defined using a combination of likelihood to vote, age, how much they follow politics, as well as their past self-identified voting behavior in the 2012 Presidential election.



## Demographic Breakouts for all Proposals

Contrary to the past, the City of Boulder is not leading the charge in support of the proposals tested: there is no statistical difference between the “In Favor” vote coming out of Boulder and that coming from other areas. However, on three of the four initiatives tested, Boulder does bring in a higher level of support than seen in other cities.

And three of the initiatives, all versions of the extension of the open space sales tax, grab a substantial level of support among Seniors, a critical demographic because of their proclivity to vote in greater numbers than the general population.

Breakouts by party are also instructive. Predictably, Democrats support every initiative tested, but it is the level of support for the open space initiatives that is surprising: above 80% for each open space initiative. Support among unaffiliated voters for open space is also high, but “only” in the upper 60% range. The extension of the open space tax for just open space even garners a majority of Republican voters.



# Demographic Breakouts

- Shows percent saying "In Favor" -

Revenue Proposal	Total	Blder	SE Cities	Long't	Uninc.	Student
Road & Bridge Projects	47%	50%	42%	47%	47%	58%
Open Space + Sustainability	68%	74%	59%	66%	74%	88%
Just Open Space	75%	77%	85%	68%	69%	88%
Just Sustainability	69%	76%	69%	66%	64%	88%

Revenue Proposal	Total	18-34	35-54	55-64	65+	Own	Rent
Road & Bridge Projects	47%	57%	51%	33%	43%	44%	56%
Open Space + Sustainability	68%	79%	73%	59%	61%	67%	75%
Just Open Space	75%	88%	81%	63%	65%	73%	85%
Just Sustainability	69%	89%	73%	56%	57%	64%	89%

 Shading indicates there is a statistical difference

<sup>1</sup> 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	Male	Female	Most Likely Voters	Rep.	Dem.	U's
Road & Bridge Projects	47%	48%	46%	45%	21%	63%	42%
Open Space + Sustainability	68%	62%	76%	64%	34%	85%	70%
Just Open Space	75%	72%	78%	71%	51%	87%	69%
Just Sustainability	69%	62%	76%	66%	44%	80%	66%

Revenue Proposal	Total	<\$60K	\$60-\$99K	\$100K +	Child.	No Child	White	Latino
Road & Bridge Projects	47%	42%	53%	54%	51%	45%	49%	48%
Open Space + Sustainability	68%	69%	76%	69%	68%	69%	70%	72%
Just Open Space	75%	75%	79%	80%	76%	75%	75%	92%
Just Sustainability	69%	74%	62%	77%	69%	69%	68%	92%

 Shading indicates there is a statistical difference



# **VI. APPENDIX: PERCENTAGE RESULTS**

