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Polling Results and Potential Tax Measures

April 2, 2024

**BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS**

Background

- County's most recent five-year forecast identifies potential budgetary shortfalls in the future fiscal years requiring prudent planning
- While finances are stable, existing revenue sources are not likely to be sufficient to address currently identified unmet needs or even fully keep pace with labor and other cost increases
- The County has over \$568 million in deferred maintenance projects with no identified funding source
- New sales tax revenue provides the County with the opportunity to address potential budgetary constraints and other critical infrastructure and program needs

Library Funding

- Local governments primary funders of California libraries since early 2010s
- The Board has provided discretionary general fund dollars to support a regional system
- Local libraries have faced chronic budget shortfalls for over a decade, County's Library Ad Hoc Committee created to address persistent budget challenges
- The countywide library system is a complex partnership between the County and the cities
- The Cities of Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Lompoc, Goleta, and Carpinteria ("Managing Cities") each have municipal libraries funded and governed by their City Councils
- The County contributes funding to these libraries, and contracts with four of the five Managing Cities to manage libraries in the cities of Guadalupe, Buellton, Solvang, and in the unincorporated communities of Orcutt, Los Alamos, Vandenberg Village, Cuyama, and Montecito

Board Direction Overview

- During the April 2023 budget workshops, staff presented a Special Issue – Tax Revenue Measures
- Board directed staff to retain a polling firm and conduct surveys for viability of a new tax
- Staff received further direction at May 9th Board hearing in support of County Library Ad Hoc Committee recommendations to include potential special sales tax or parcel tax for libraries in polling contract
- In October 2023 staff confirmed Board direction and confirmed tax measure options for polling

Tax Measure Option 1

General Sales Tax for General Purposes

- Requires 4/5 vote of the Board to place on the ballot
- Must be approved by a simple majority of voters
- Can be used for any purpose the County funds, examples include: libraries, address homelessness, increased workforce housing, public safety, climate change initiatives, road maintenance and capital improvements, veteran services, flood control improvements, economic development, parks, and trails

General Sales Tax in Santa Barbara County

2023 Total Tax	7.75%
State Share	6.00%
Roads/Transportation	0.25%
Measure A (SBCAG)	0.50%
Local Share	1.00%

Local Share = \$15.1M in FY 23-24

Jurisdiction	Tax Rate
Santa Barbara County	7.75%
Buellton	7.75%
Carpinteria	9.00%
Goleta	8.75%
Guadalupe	8.75%
Lompoc	8.75%
Santa Barbara	8.75%
Santa Maria	8.75%
Solvang	8.75%

Sales Tax Revenue Estimates

Increase	Proposed Rate	Estimated Annual Revenue Impact	Total Estimated Sales Tax
0.25%	8.00%	\$ 3.77M	\$ 18.85M
0.50%	8.25%	\$ 7.54M	\$ 22.62M
0.75%	8.50%	\$ 11.31M	\$ 26.39M
1.00%	8.75%	\$ 15.08M	\$ 30.16M

Estimated to generate \$3.77M for every quarter-cent increase to the existing sales tax of 7.75%

Tax Measure

Options 2 and 3

Special Sales Tax for Special Purpose - Libraries

- Requires 4/5 vote of the Board to place on the ballot
- Must be approved by a 2/3 of voters
- Can be only be used for a dedicated purpose

Special Parcel Tax for Special Purpose - Libraries

- Requires 3/5 vote of the Board to place on the ballot
- Must be approved by a 2/3 of voters
- Can be only be used for a dedicated purpose

Countywide Sales and Parcel Tax Revenue Estimates

Jurisdiction	Estimated Revenue Increase (0.25%)	New Tax Rate
City of Santa Maria	\$4,000,668	9.00%
City of Santa Barbara	\$3,632,184	9.00%
Unincorporated – County	\$3,770,426	8.00%
City of Goleta	\$1,090,758	9.00%
City of Lompoc	\$817,664	9.00%
City of Buellton	\$884,020	8.00%
City of Carpinteria	\$665,822	9.25%
City of Solvang	\$247,578	9.00%
City of Guadalupe	\$68,680	9.00%
Countywide Totals	\$15,177,800	

Jurisdiction	No. of Parcels (2022)	Estimated Revenue \$60/parcel
City of Santa Maria	24,575	\$1,474,500
City of Santa Barbara	25,268	\$1,516,080
Unincorporated - County	49,847	\$2,990,820
City of Goleta	10,094	\$605,640
City of Lompoc	11,052	\$663,120
City of Buellton	2,164	\$129,840
City of Carpinteria	5,013	\$300,780
City of Solvang	2,348	\$140,880
City of Guadalupe	2,123	\$127,380
Countywide Totals	132,484	\$7,949,040



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Santa Barbara County Ballot Measures Assessment Issues Survey

*Summary of Findings from a Survey of Santa Barbara County
Likely November 2024 Voters Conducted November 13-19, 2023*



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Survey Specifics and Methodology

Dates	November 13-19, 2023
Survey Type	Dual-mode Voter Survey
Research Population	Santa Barbara County Likely November 2024 Voters
Total Interviews	844; Voters in Unincorporated Santa Barbara County were Oversampled
Margin of Sampling Error	Countywide: $\pm 3.7\%$ at the 95% Confidence Level Unincorporated Area: $\pm 4.9\%$ at the 95% Confidence Level
Contact Methods	 Telephone Calls  Email Invitations  Text Invitations
Data Collection Modes	 Telephone Interviews  Online Interviews

(Note: Not All Results Will Sum to 100% Due to Rounding)



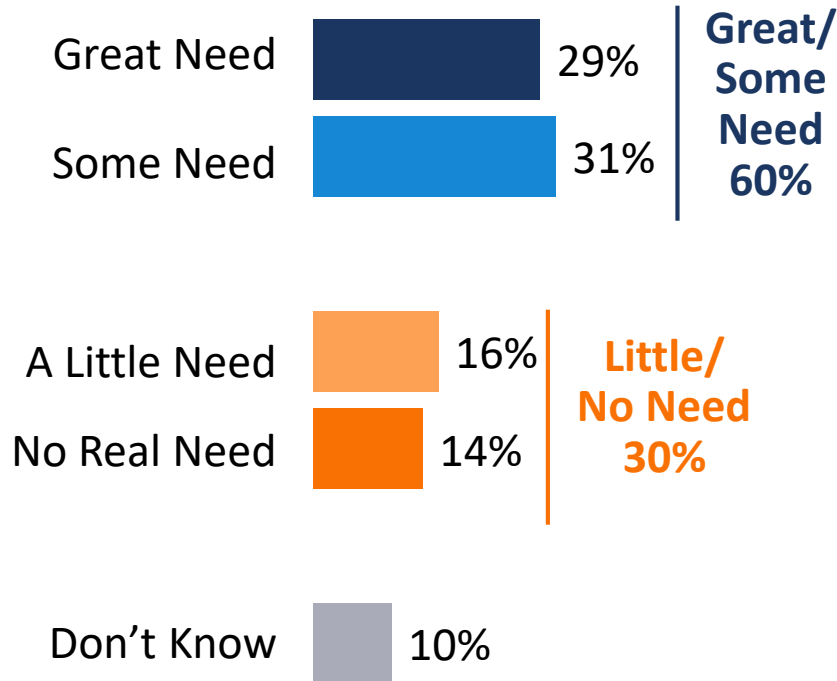
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The Need for Funding & Initial Reaction to Santa Barbara County Ballot Measures

Six in ten voters think Santa Barbara County needs additional revenue to provide quality local services.

Do you think Santa Barbara County government has a great need, some need, a little need, or no real need for additional funds to provide the level of services that residents in your area need and want?



Demographic Group	Great/Some Need	Little/No Real Need	Don't Know
Area			
Incorporated	60%	30%	9%
Unincorporated	60%	29%	10%
Gender			
Men	55%	36%	9%
Women	67%	23%	10%
Party			
Democrats	71%	17%	12%
Independents	48%	42%	10%
Republicans	52%	42%	6%
Age			
18-49	61%	30%	9%
50-64	66%	28%	6%
65+	55%	32%	13%
Race/Ethnicity			
Whites	59%	30%	11%
Latinos	67%	29%	4%
All Voters of Color	64%	30%	6%
Supervisorial District			
1	63%	28%	9%
2	55%	30%	15%
3	57%	32%	11%
4	68%	28%	5%
5	55%	35%	10%

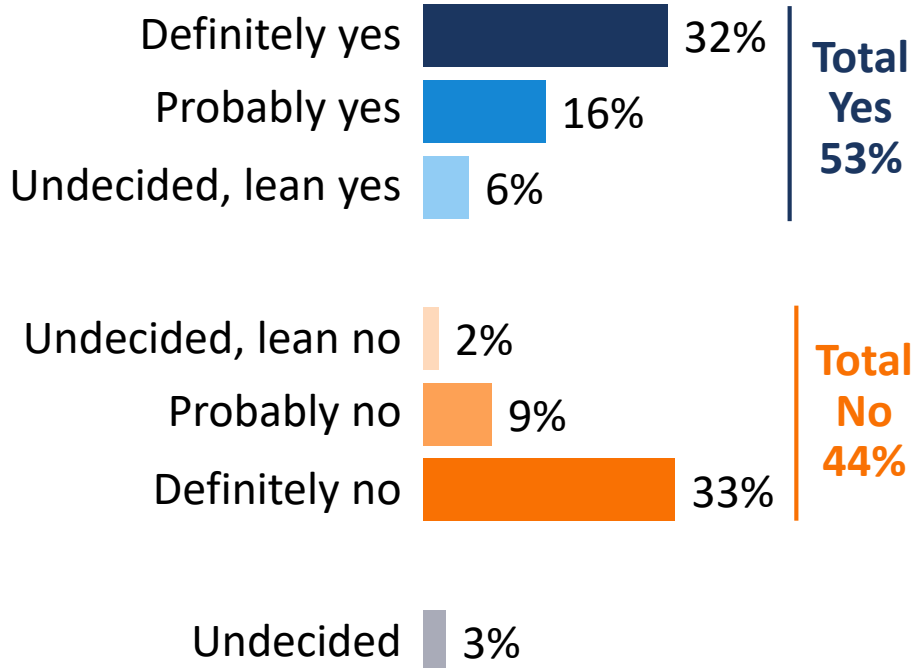
Unincorporated Santa Barbara County 1-Cent Sales Tax Measure Mock Title & Summary

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY PUBLIC SAFETY, EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES MEASURE.

To fund local services, including law enforcement programs; improve wildfire/natural disaster response/preparedness; upgrade roads/flood control; address local housing needs/homelessness; maintain mental health services; improve parks; protect groundwater resources; invest in local housing for workers, and other government uses, shall Santa Barbara County's sales tax be increased 1¢, generating approximately \$15 million annually until ended by voters, with audits, public disclosure, funds locally controlled, be adopted?

A “soft” and narrow majority of unincorporated voters supports the measure, but equal numbers say they would “definitely” vote yes or no.

If there were an election today, would you vote “yes” in favor of this measure or “no” to oppose it?



Demographic Group	Total Yes	Total No	Und.
Gender			
Men	54%	43%	3%
Women	53%	44%	3%
Party			
Democrats	74%	23%	4%
Independents	47%	49%	4%
Republicans	31%	67%	2%
Age			
18-49	60%	39%	2%
50-64	48%	44%	8%
65+	49%	49%	2%
Race/Ethnicity			
Whites	52%	44%	4%
Latinos	57%	41%	2%
All Voters of Color	59%	39%	1%
Supervisorial District			
1	59%	38%	3%
2	60%	39%	2%
3	47%	47%	6%
4	48%	48%	4%

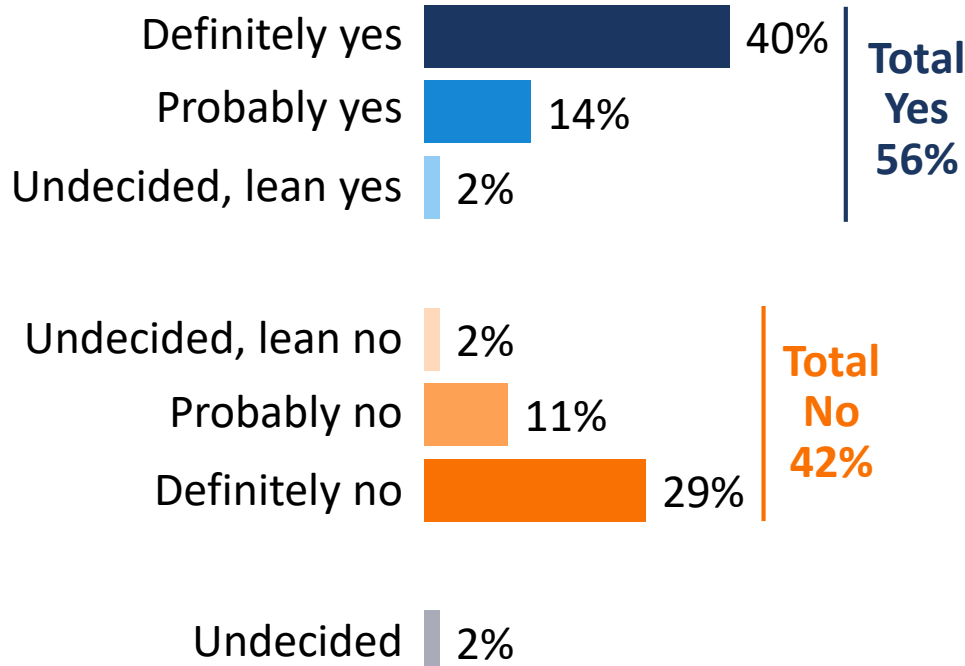
Santa Barbara County Library Services ¼-Cent Sales Tax Measure Mock Title & Summary

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY AND EDUCATION SERVICES MEASURE.

To increase access to libraries/educational services by improving book/digital materials collections, computer access/technology; hire/retain/train librarians; expand library hours/programs, including youth reading/homework/bookmobile/adult literacy/job training/online learning/senior services; repair outdated buildings; ensure earthquake safety/handicapped accessibility; shall Santa Barbara County's sales tax be increased ¼¢, generating approximately \$15 million annually, until ended by voters; requiring audits, funds locally controlled, be adopted?

While a majority votes in favor, support for this library sales tax falls short of the two-thirds threshold required.

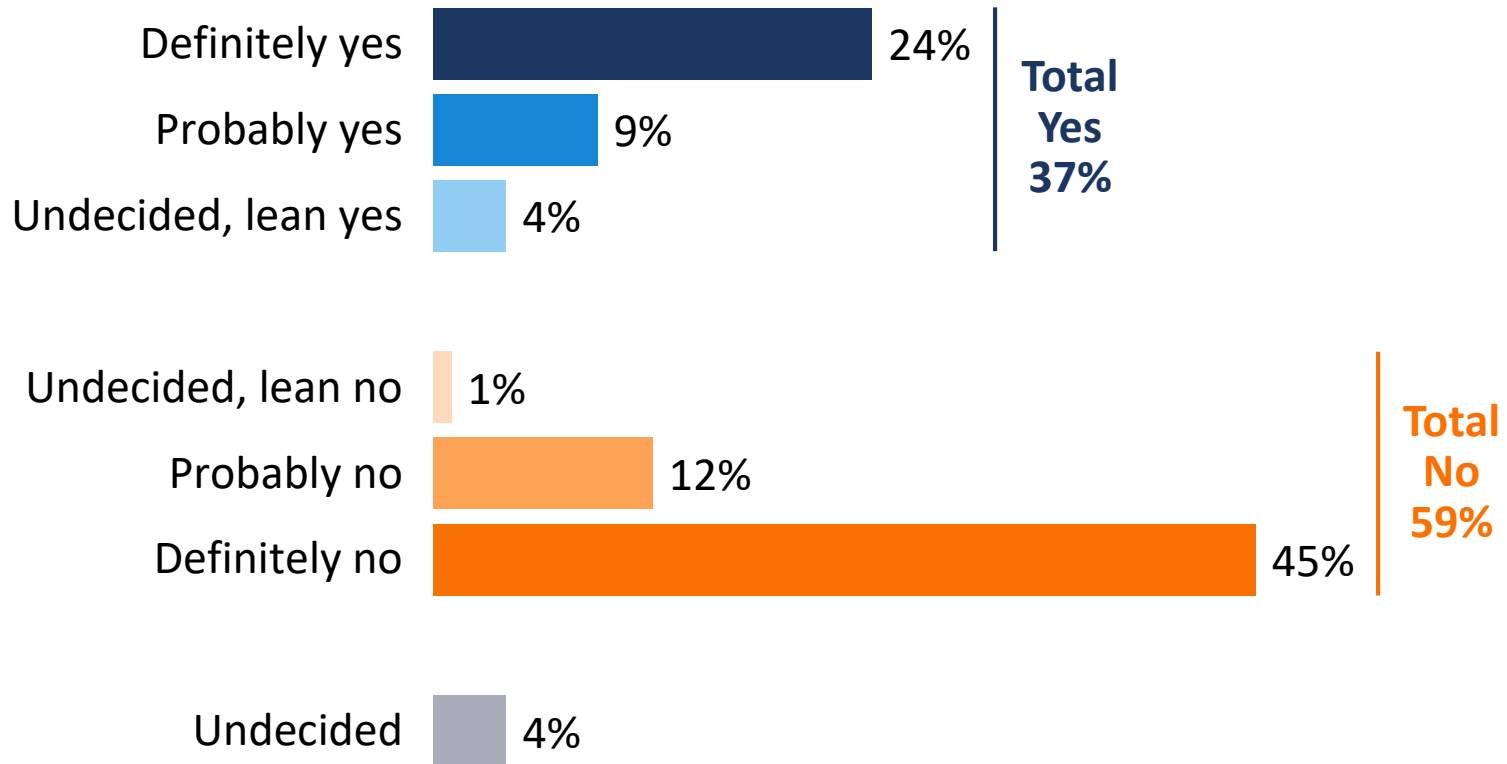
If there were an election today, would you vote “yes” in favor of this measure or “no” to oppose it?



Demographic Group	Total Yes	Total No	Und.
Area			
Incorporated	58%	41%	1%
Unincorporated	53%	44%	3%
Gender			
Men	49%	49%	2%
Women	64%	35%	2%
Party			
Democrats	76%	22%	2%
Independents	43%	55%	2%
Republicans	32%	67%	1%
Age			
18-49	58%	41%	1%
50-64	47%	51%	2%
65+	60%	37%	3%
Race/Ethnicity			
Whites	57%	41%	2%
Latinos	60%	39%	0%
All Voters of Color	58%	41%	0%
Supervisorial District			
1	60%	38%	1%
2	58%	39%	2%
3	56%	42%	2%
4	52%	46%	2%
5	49%	51%	0%

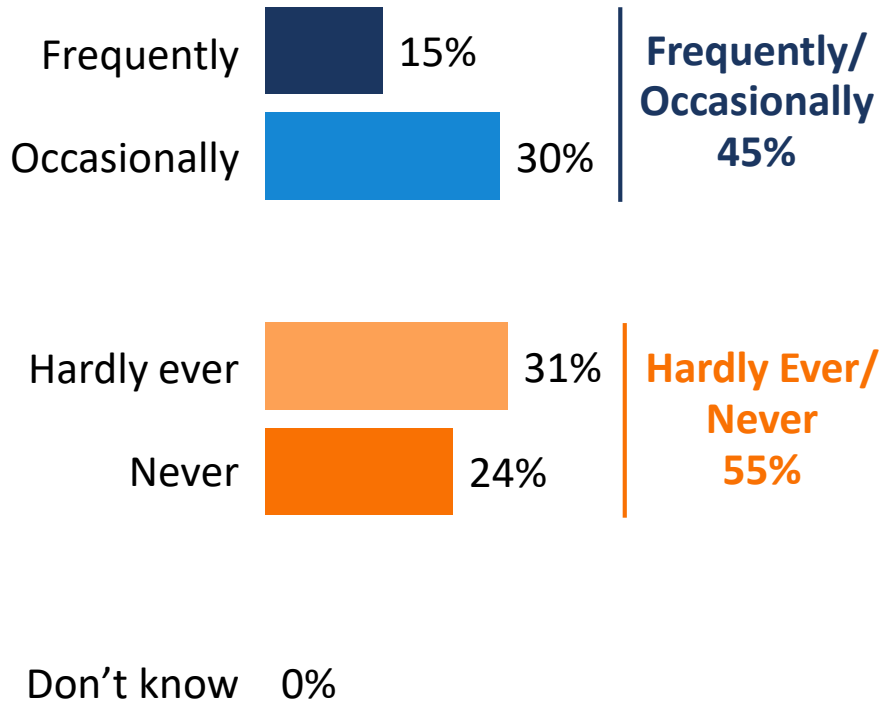
Six in ten Santa Barbara County voters oppose raising funds for local libraries by establishing an annual \$60 parcel tax.

If instead of raising the County's sales tax ¼¢, this measure to improve local libraries and library services required all County property owners to pay an annual \$60 parcel tax, would you vote "yes" in favor of it or "no" to oppose?



Women, seniors and residents of the 2nd Supervisorial District are more regular users of local public libraries.

How often would you say you visit local public libraries and/or use their services? Would you say you visit frequently, occasionally, hardly ever, or never?



Demographic Group	Freq.	Occ.	Hardly Ever/ Never
Area			
Incorporated	14%	31%	56%
Unincorporated	16%	30%	53%
Gender			
Men	10%	25%	65%
Women	19%	36%	45%
Party			
Democrats	19%	33%	48%
Independents	11%	30%	58%
Republicans	11%	25%	64%
Age			
18-49	13%	32%	55%
50-64	14%	23%	63%
65+	18%	33%	48%
Race/Ethnicity			
Whites	17%	30%	54%
Latinos	12%	33%	55%
All Voters of Color	11%	32%	57%
Supervisorial District			
1	16%	25%	59%
2	14%	42%	44%
3	14%	35%	51%
4	15%	29%	56%
5	11%	20%	69%



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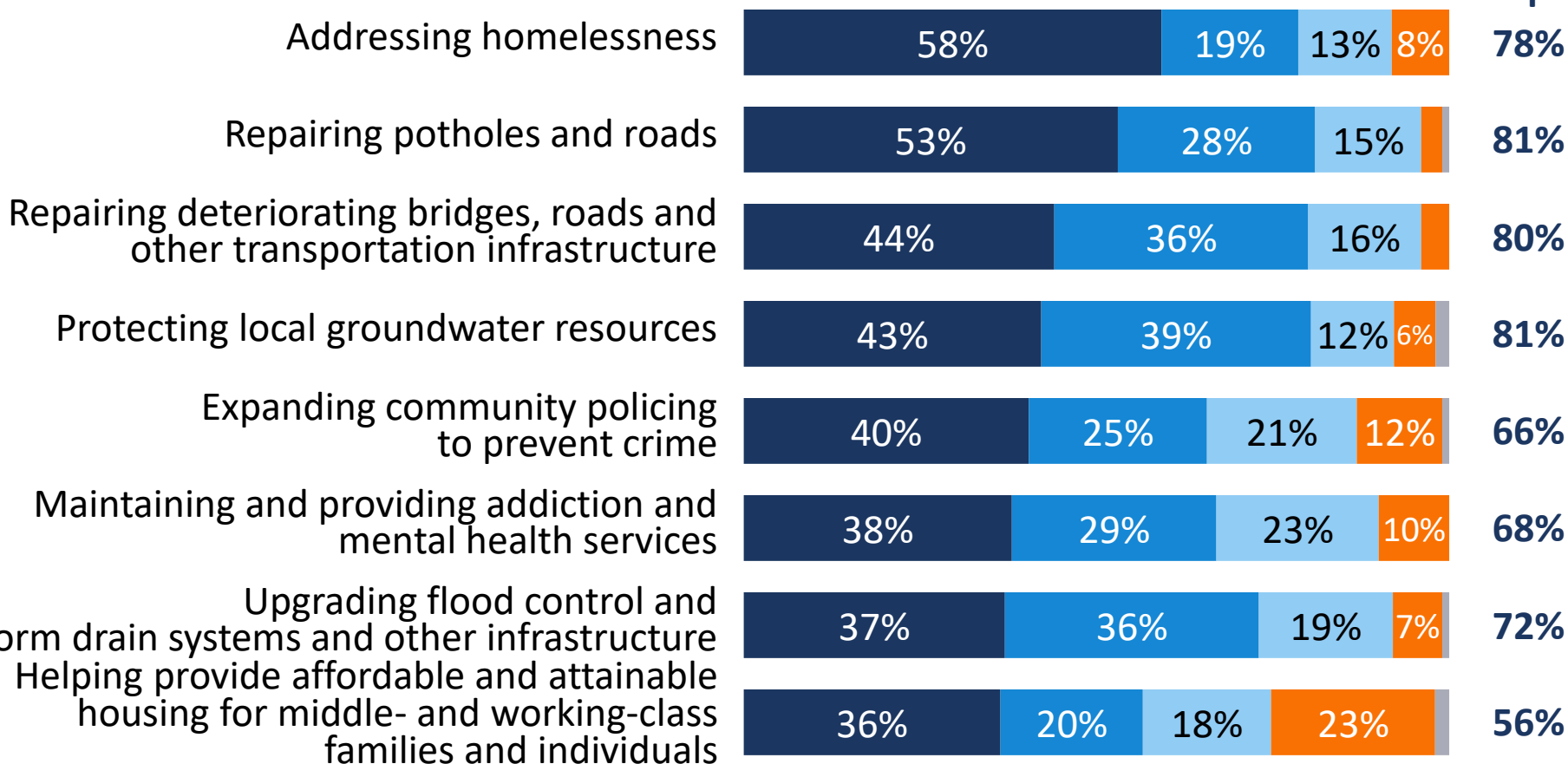
Santa Barbara County Voters' Funding Priorities

Unincorporated voters' top priorities are addressing homelessness, improving roads and infrastructure, protecting groundwater and public safety.

(Asked of Unincorporated County Voters Only)

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know

Ext./Very Impt.



More than seven in ten unincorporated voters also identify investing in local law enforcement as highly important.

(Asked of Unincorporated County Voters Only)

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know

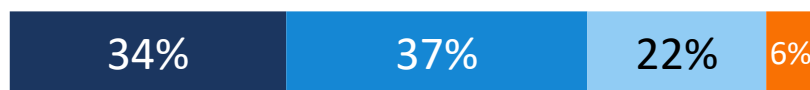
Ext./Very Impt.

Maintaining sheriff's custody and law enforcement deputies staffing levels



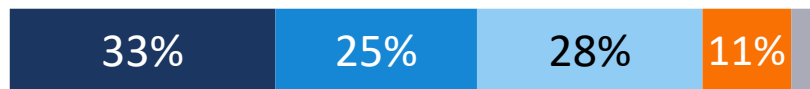
72%

^Funding municipal services like law enforcement programs, repairing roads and maintaining parks



70%

Upgrading 911 communications equipment



58%

Upgrading flood control projects



67%

Repairing and upgrading parks, playgrounds and sports fields



60%

Providing senior services, including free health screenings



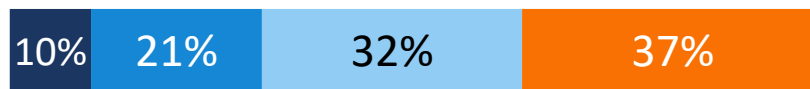
51%

Attracting sheriff's deputies



56%

Upgrading local hiking and biking trails



31%

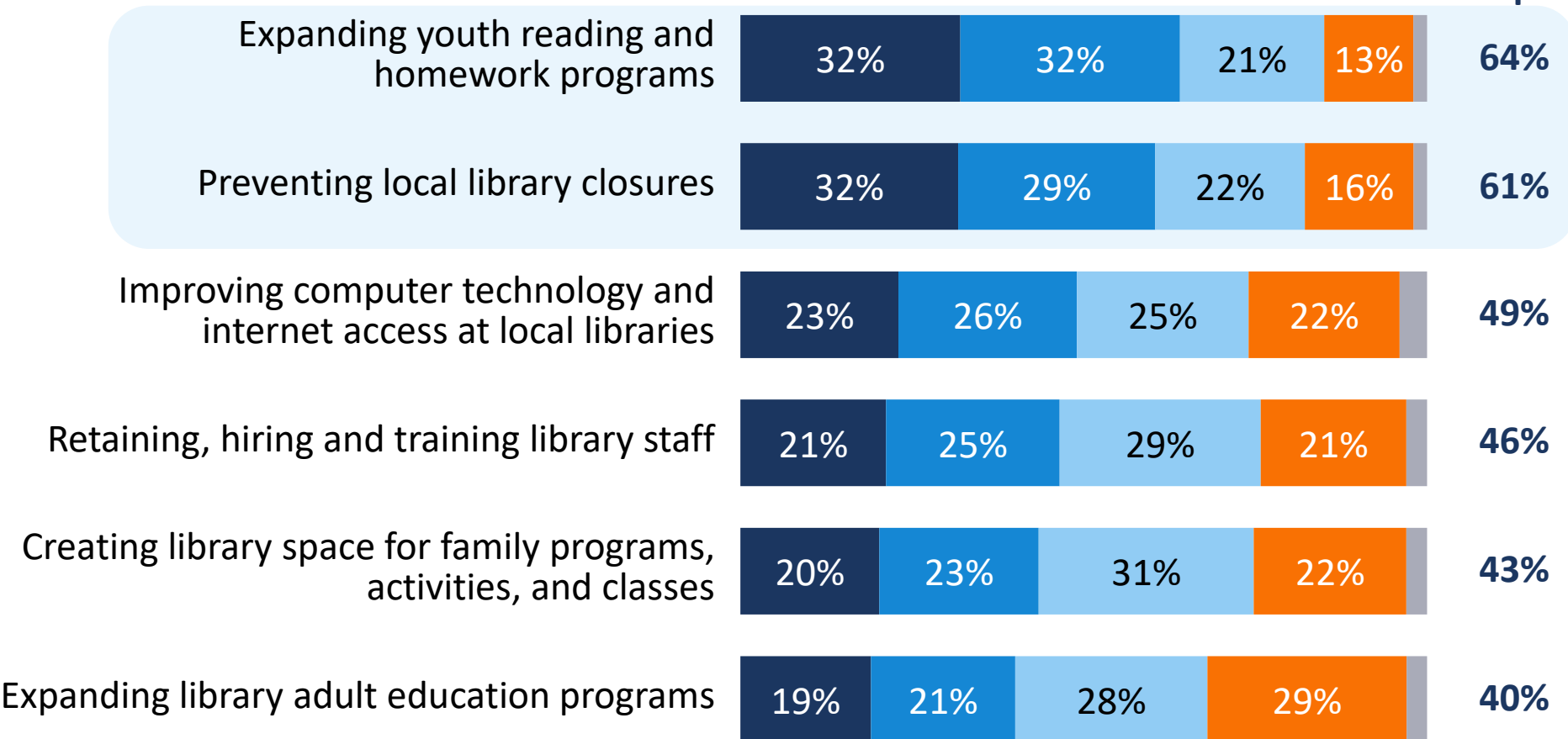
Q8a-p (Unincorporated Voters). I am now going to read you different ways ballot measure funds may be used and possible provisions that may be included. Please tell me how important it is to you personally: is it extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important?

^Not Part of Split Sample

Among the library-related funding priorities, youth education and preventing library closures are rated as the most important uses of ballot measure funds.

(Asked of ALL Santa Barbara County Voters)

■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know **Ext./Very Impt.**





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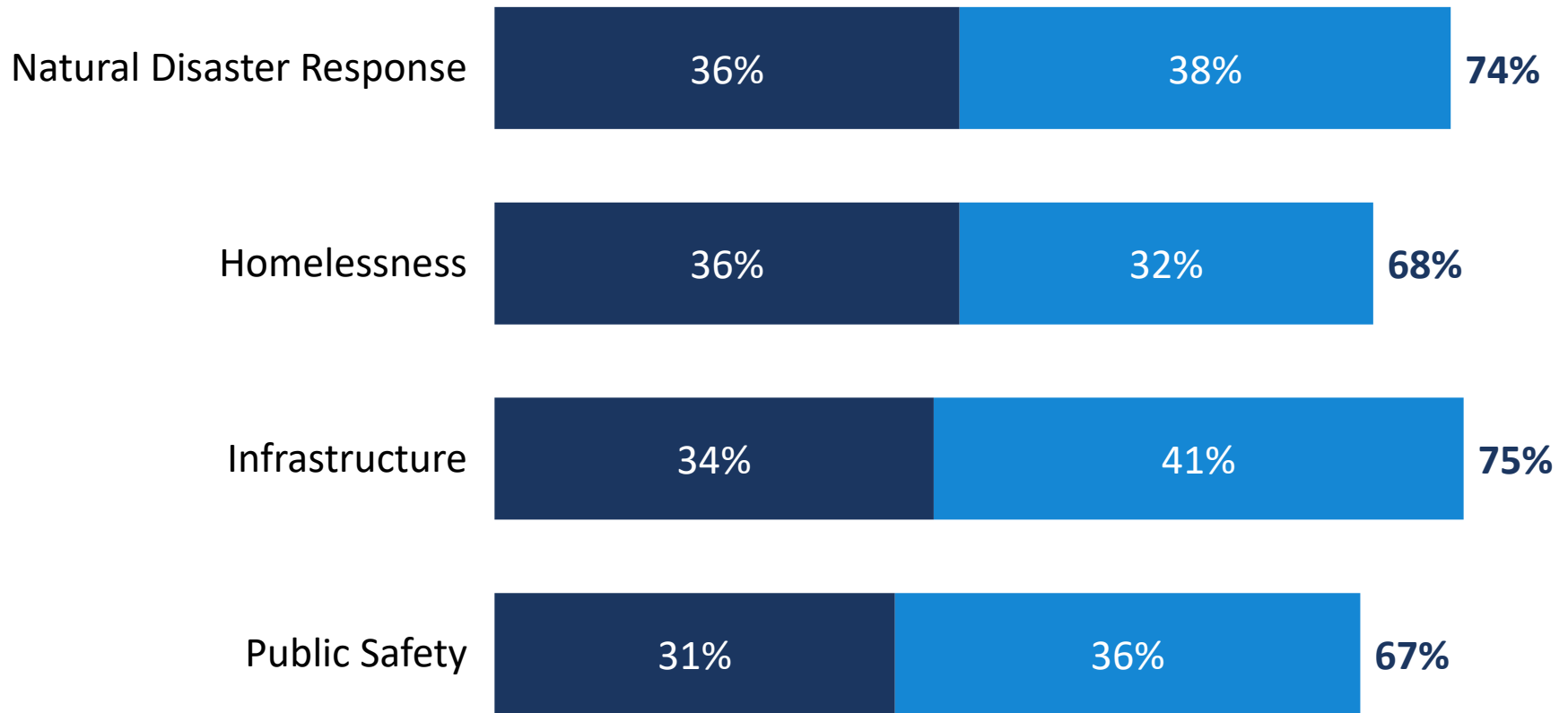
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The Impact of Educational Statements

Most Unincorporated voters regard these statements as convincing reasons to consider supporting a sales tax measure to fund County services.

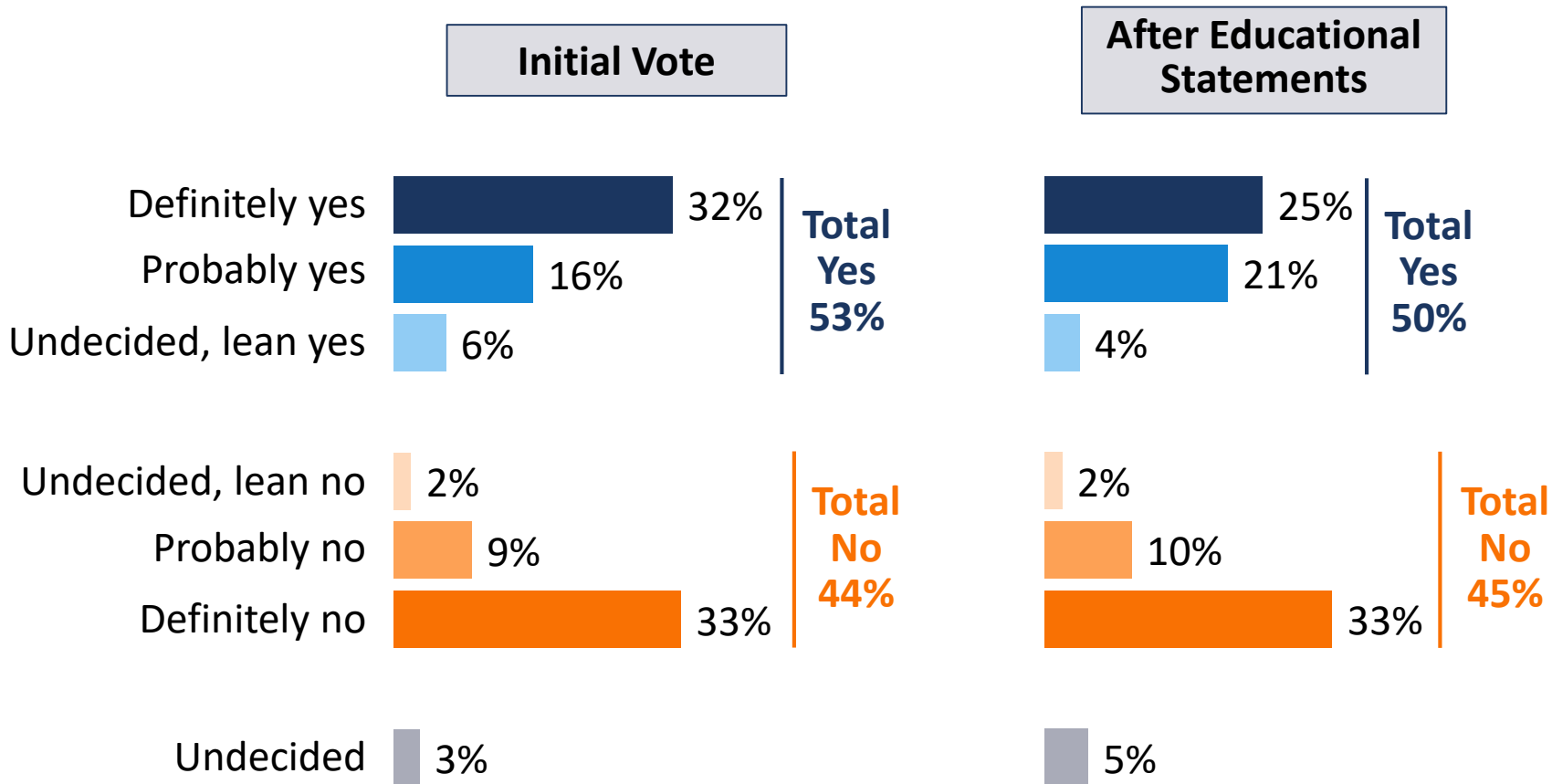
(Unincorporated Voters; Ranked by Very Convincing)

■ Very Convincing ■ Somewhat Convincing



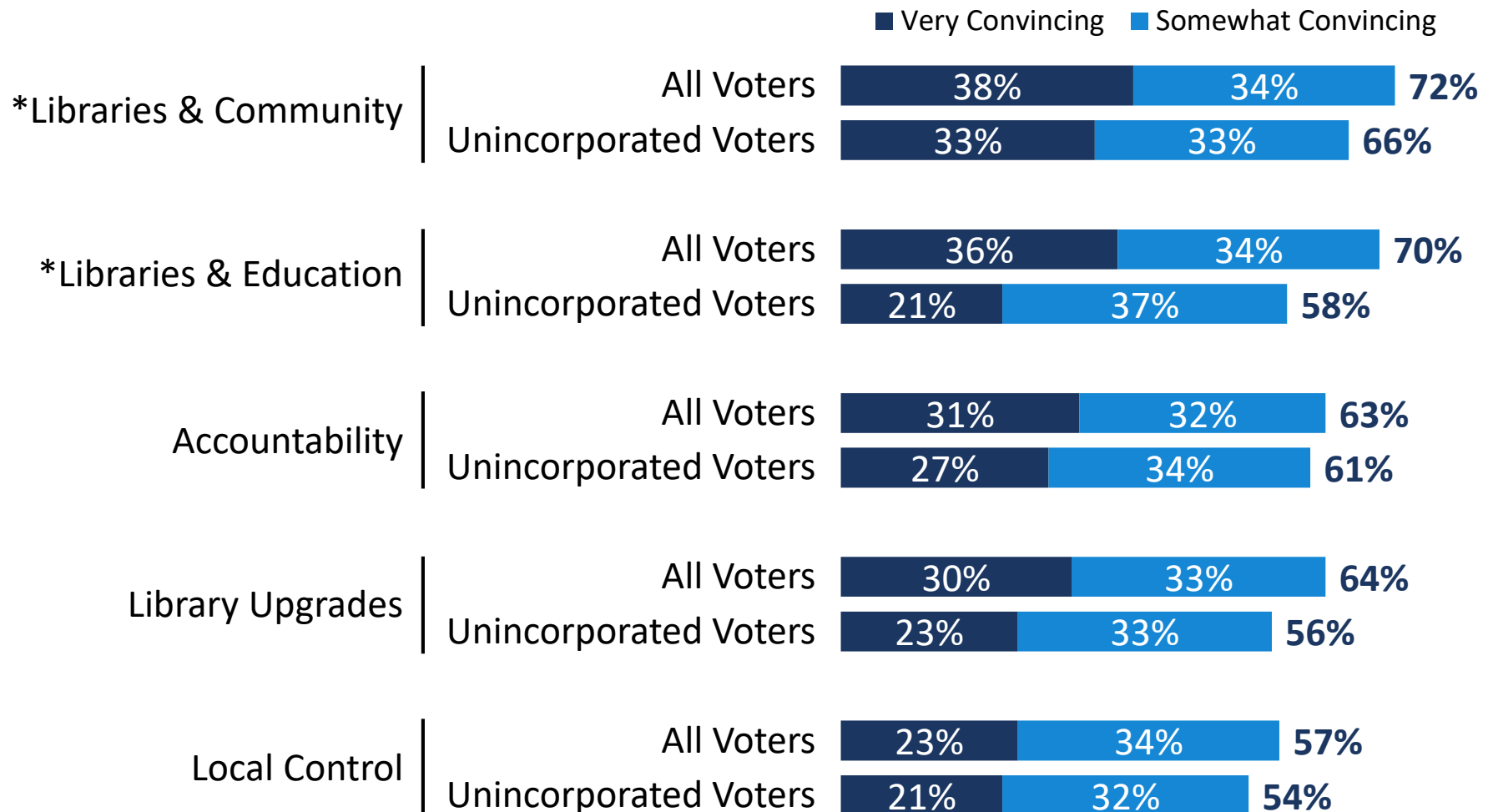
However, total support for the proposed one-cent sales tax ballot measure decreases and fewer say they would “definitely” vote yes in favor.

Unincorporated Area 1-Cent Sales Tax Measure



Identifying the benefits of local libraries resonated more with all Santa Barbara County voters than residents of unincorporated communities.

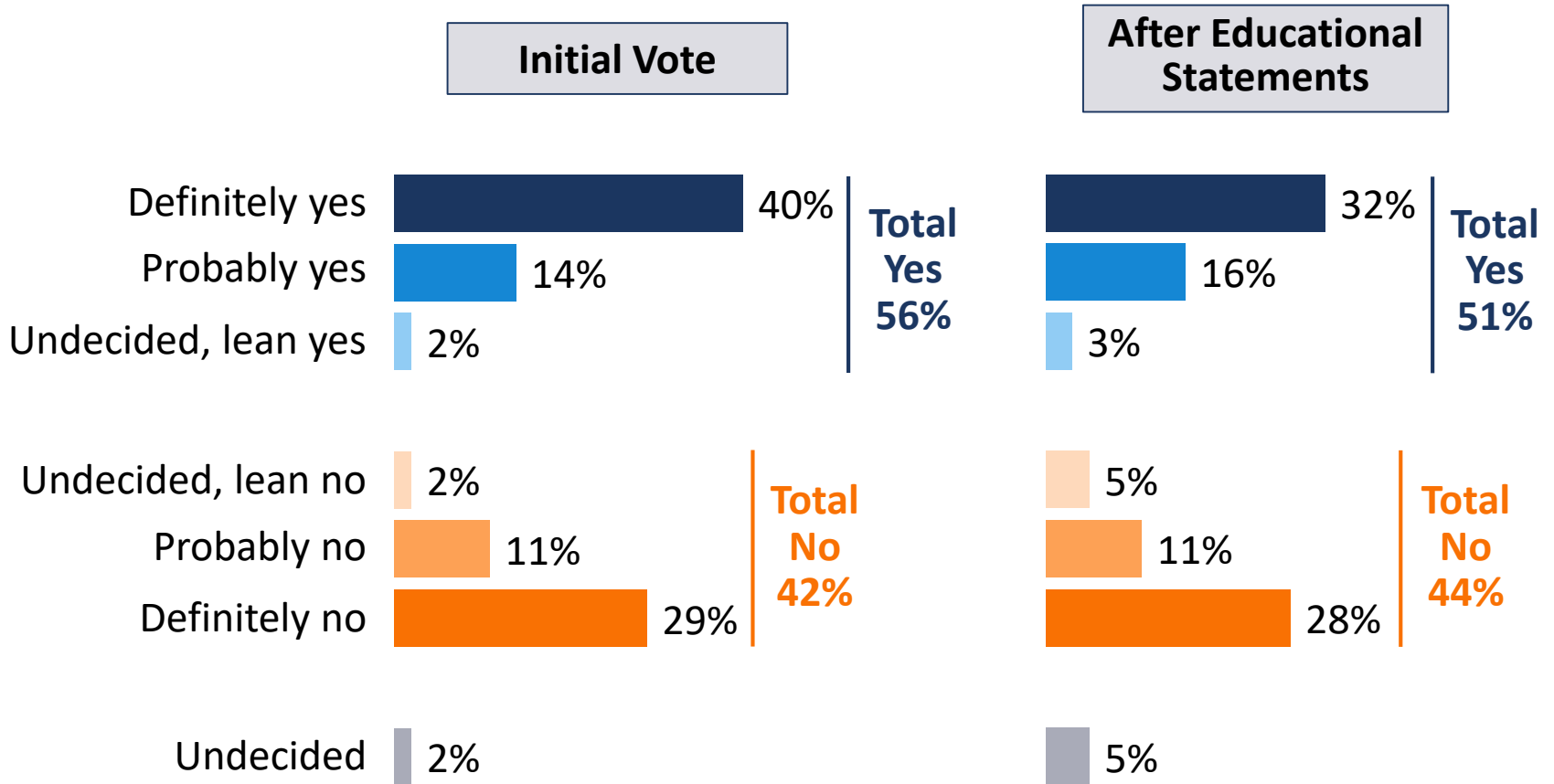
(Ranked by Very Convincing)



Q9a-e. I'm going to read some statements made by supporters. Please tell me whether you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to vote yes. *Split Sample

Half of County voters support a proposed sales tax to provide additional funding to local libraries, which is well below the two-thirds threshold needed for passage.

Countywide Quarter-Cent Library Sales Tax Measure





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Conclusions

Conclusions

- In total, six in ten voters believe the County has a “great” or “some” need for additional funds to provide local services, but there are demographic differences as women, Democrats, voters of color and voters ages 18-64 are more likely to see a need for additional funding for local services.
- After a mock ballot summary, just over half of unincorporated County voters vote in favor of a one-cent sales tax to fund local services – notably, three in four Democrats support it, two-thirds of Republicans oppose, and nonpartisans are almost evenly divided.
- Among all County voters, a majority votes in favor of a quarter cent Library sales tax, but this is well short of the two-thirds vote needed to pass a special purpose measure.
- Unincorporated County voters’ top funding priorities for potential ballot measure revenue are addressing homelessness, improving roads and local infrastructure, and investing public safety services to reduce crime.

Conclusions (*continued*)

- Simulating community engagement and public education did not alter voter opinion towards either measure – following a series of educational statements only half of unincorporated voters support a sales tax increase to fund a range of local services.
- In contrast, a statement from hypothetical opponents of these measures that focused on the high cost of living and rising prices for food, gas, and housing elicits a strong reaction and reduces support for both measures to less than 50%.
- Voters in unincorporated communities identify a number of County services as highly important and worthy of funding, but these survey results suggest it would be challenging to secure their support for a one-cent sales tax measure.
- This survey also finds that reaching the two-thirds threshold to pass a Countywide Library sales tax measure is unlikely.
- Voters value County services but likely due to concerns about the cost of living and their own financial security, they are sensitive to the tax increases associated with these measures.

For more information,
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November 2024 Ballot Timeline

Schedule

June 25, 2024: Introduce new tax ordinance(s)*

July 9, 2024: Adopt new tax ordinance(s) and request consolidation with the November election*

July – Oct. 2024: Public information and education period

Nov. 5, 2024: Election

*Board Decision Points/Action

- Ballot is expected to be crowded; several (>10) initiatives/referenda are eligible
- “The Taxpayer and Government Accountability Act” likely on November ballot and may affect ballot language for local tax measures including those on the same ballot

Potential Options for Next Steps

- Authorize additional outreach in the form of:
 - Focus Groups
 - Additional Polling
 - Public Education Campaign(s)

- Direct staff to prepare ballot language for a tax measure in November 2024

- Re-evaluate for next ballot cycle (2026)
 - Consider additional tax generation including Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT)

Recommendations

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Receive and file the presentation from FM3 on potential county tax measure(s) survey results; and
- b) Provide other direction, as appropriate; and
- c) Determine that pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15378(b)(5) the above actions are not a project subject to CEQA review because they are administrative activities that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes in the environment.