

Voter Support for Investments in Water Infrastructure

*Key Findings from a National Voter Survey
Conducted March 7-18, 2020*



OPINION
RESEARCH
& STRATEGY



Bipartisan Research Team



Dave Metz – FM3

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) – a national Democratic opinion research firm with offices in Oakland, Los Angeles and Madison, Wisconsin – has specialized in public policy oriented opinion research since 1981. The firm has assisted hundreds of political campaigns at every level of the ballot – from President to City Council – with opinion research and strategic guidance. FM3 also provides research and strategic consulting to public agencies, businesses and public interest organizations nationwide.



Lori Weigel - NBS

New Bridge Strategy (NBS) – an opinion research firm that listens and creates connections on behalf of public policy efforts and campaigns. The firm's roots are in Republican politics, having conducted research on behalf of dozens of GOP candidates from City Council to the presidential level, and also assist coalitions from across the political spectrum in crafting winning ballot measure campaigns, public education initiatives, and legislative policy efforts. NBS helps our clients bridge divides to create winning majorities.

As a bipartisan team, Dave and Lori have researched a wide range of issues over the past 15 years, in particular on conservation-related initiatives and policies. Together, they have jointly conducted research on behalf of political campaigns, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and public agencies in 47 states and nationally.

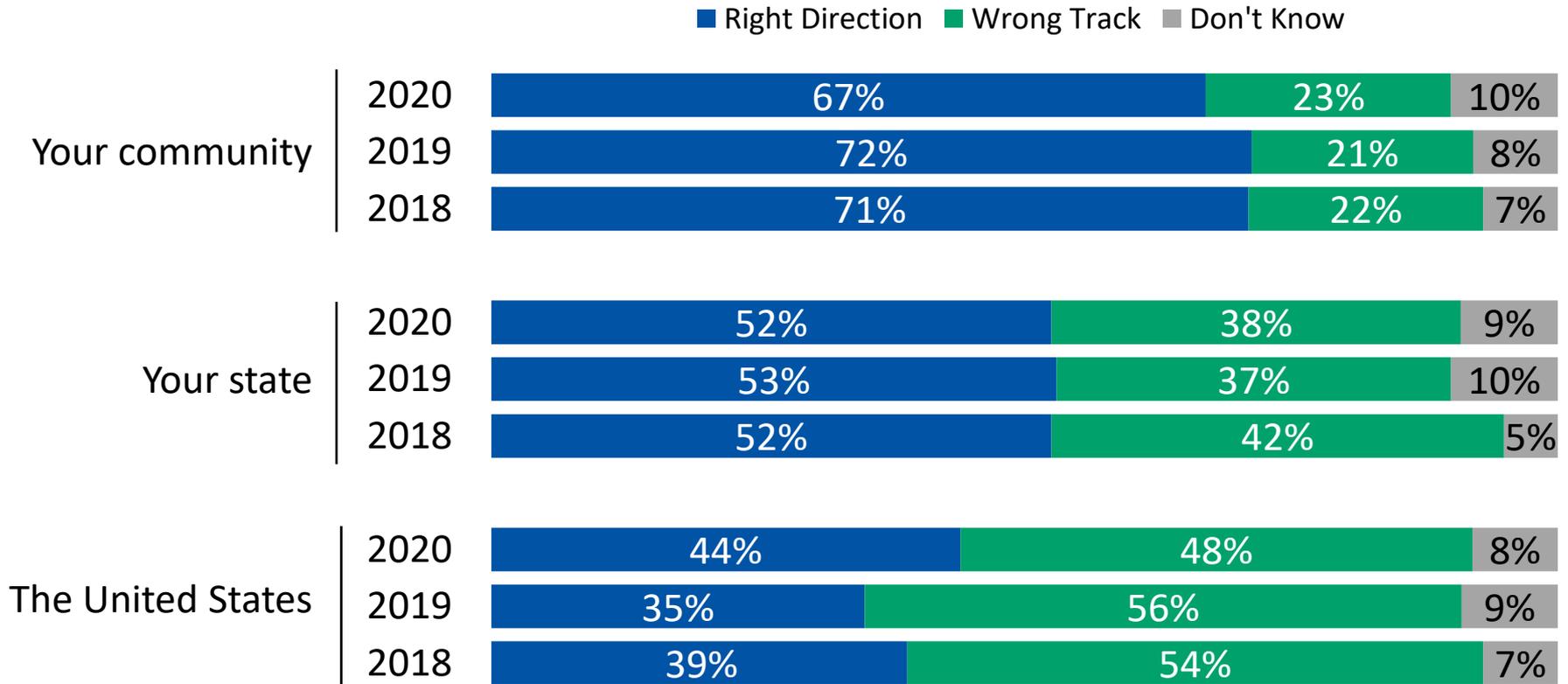
Methodology

- ✓ 1,056 telephone interviews with voters nationwide
- ✓ Interviews conducted March 7-18, 2020
 - This time period included the initial establishment of social distancing measures related to COVID-19 at the state and federal levels, as well as significant stock market turbulence
- ✓ Interviews conducted online and on landlines and cell phones
- ✓ Margin of sampling error of +/- 3.1% at the 95% confidence level
- ✓ Some percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding
- ✓ Select comparisons to results of previous years' surveys

Issue Context

Voters remain more optimistic about their communities than about their states or the country.

Would you say that things in _____ are generally headed in the right direction, or are they pretty seriously off on the wrong track?



Rebuilding America's infrastructure is a top priority, alongside strengthening the economy and reforming healthcare.

Here are some issues that the federal government may address this year. Please tell me how important you think it is for them to focus on each issue: extremely important, very important, somewhat important, or not too important?

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

Strengthening the economy



81%

Rebuilding America's infrastructure



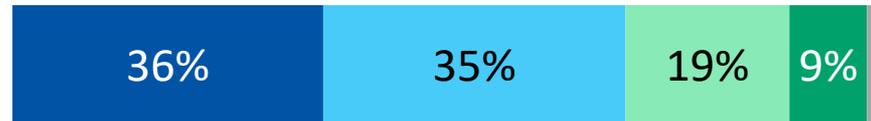
80%

Reforming our healthcare system



77%

Increasing the availability of high-quality early childhood education



72%

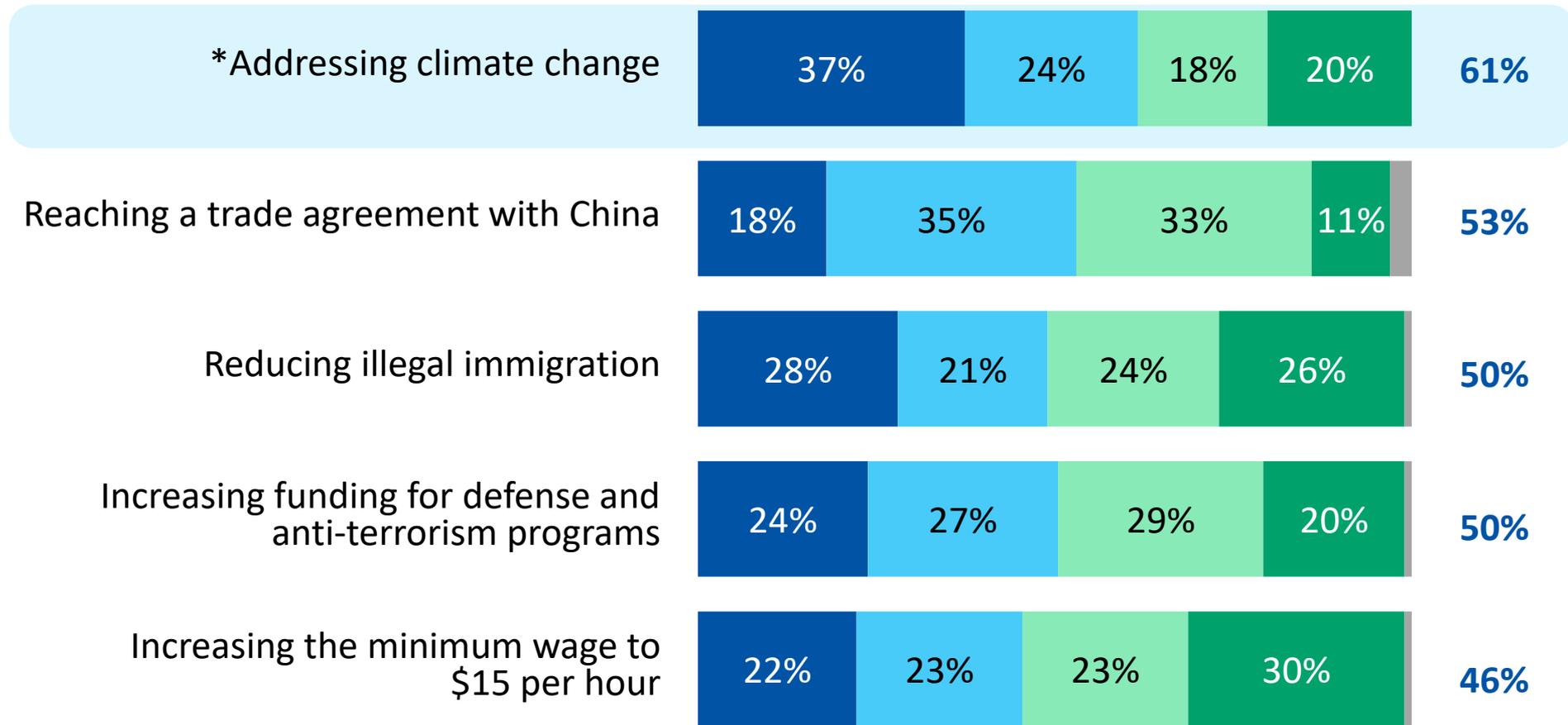
Ending America's opioid crisis



72%

Three in five view addressing climate change as "very important."

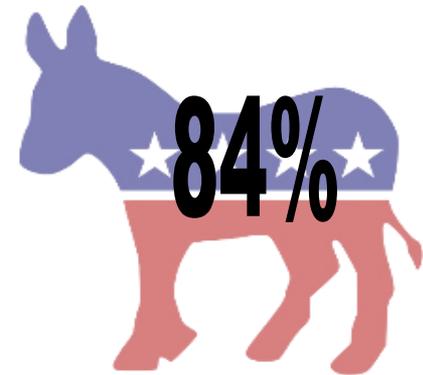
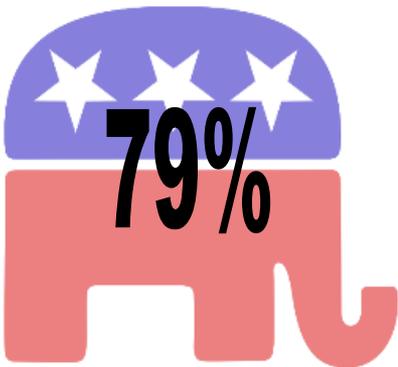
■ Ext. Impt. ■ Very Impt. ■ Smwt. Impt. ■ Not Too Impt. ■ Don't Know **Ext./Very Impt.**



Perceptions of the importance of rebuilding America's infrastructure have not changed since 2018 and remain bipartisan.

(Extremely/Very Important)

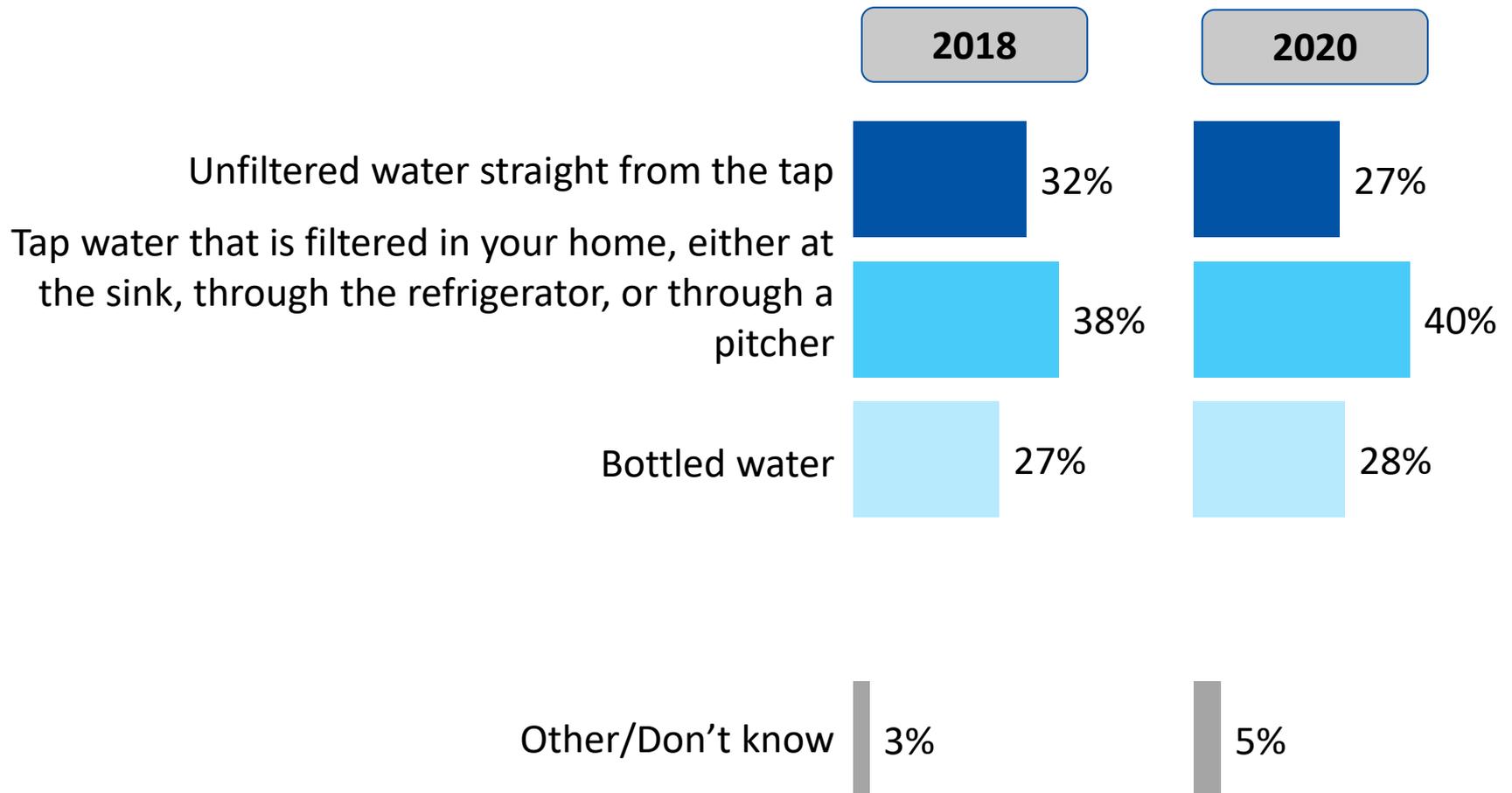
Issues	2017	2018	2019	2020	Difference 2019 to 2020
Rebuilding America's infrastructure	67%	80%	79%	80%	+1%



Attitudes Toward Drinking Water Quality and Infrastructure

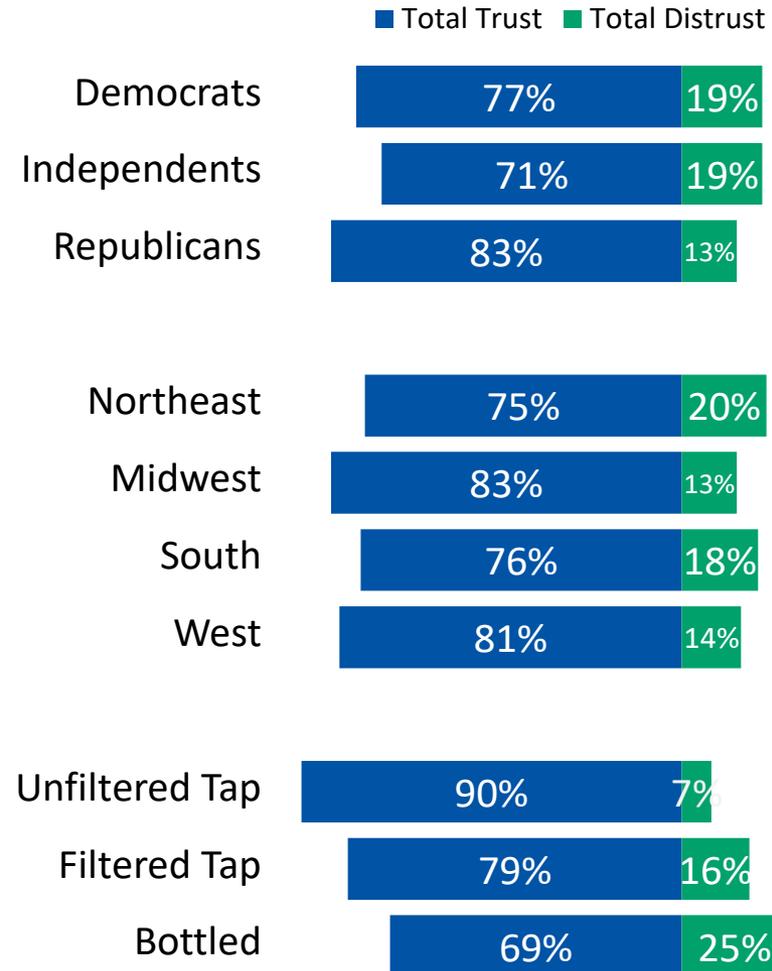
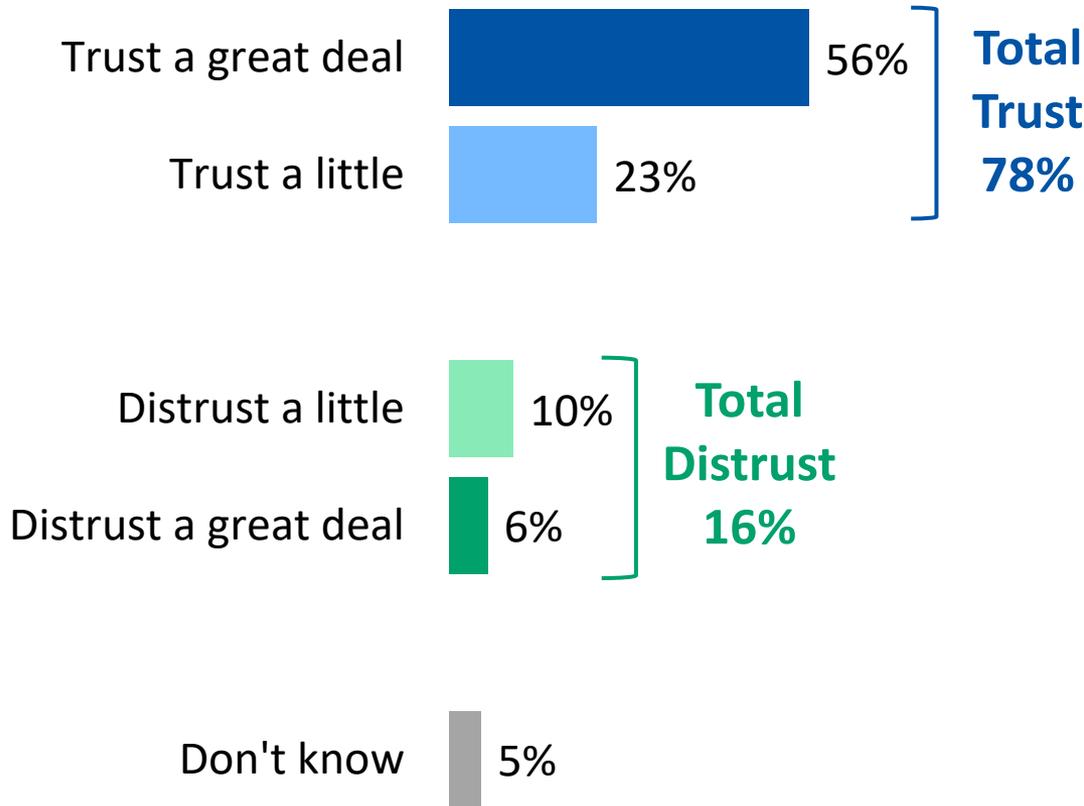
Americans tend to mostly drink tap water, whether filtered or unfiltered.

Thinking about the water that you drink at home, do you most often drink_____?



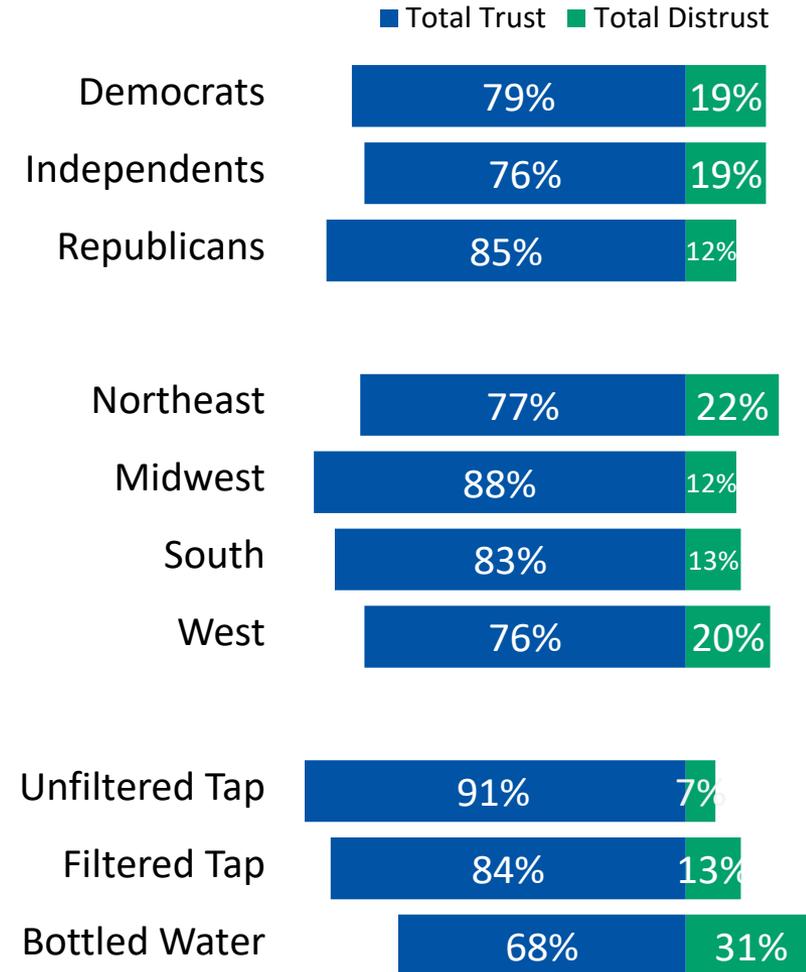
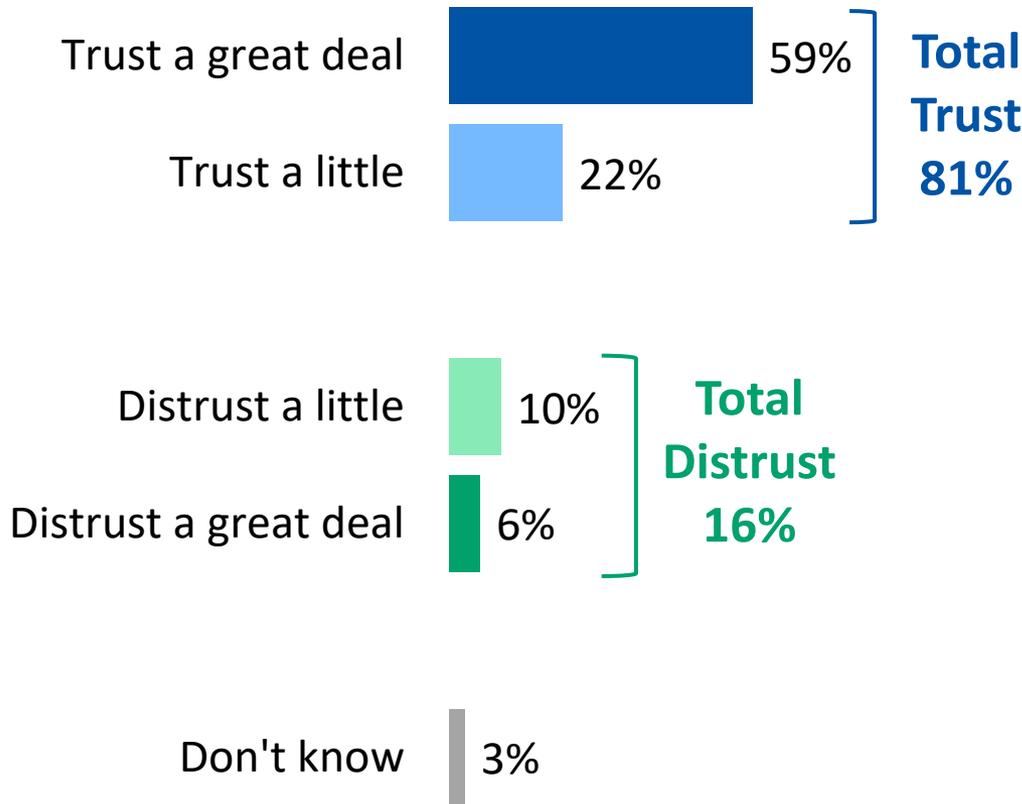
More than three-quarters say they trust that their drinking water is safe.

Overall, do you trust that the drinking water being delivered to your home is safe?



Four in five say they trust that the water pipes in their home are safe.

Overall, do you trust that the water pipes in your home are safe?



Nearly four in five worry about chemicals and pollutants in their drinking water.

I'm going to ask you about several types of contamination that may lead to water quality problems. Please tell me how concerned you are about each: extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not concerned.

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

Chemicals and pollutants in drinking water



77%

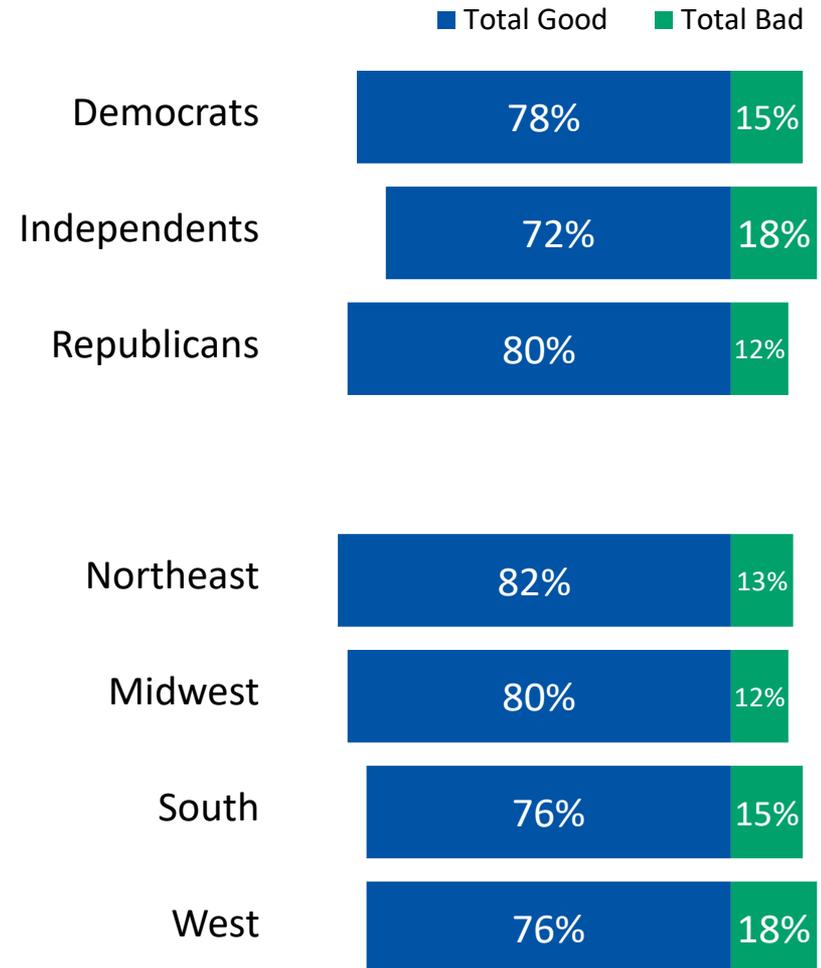
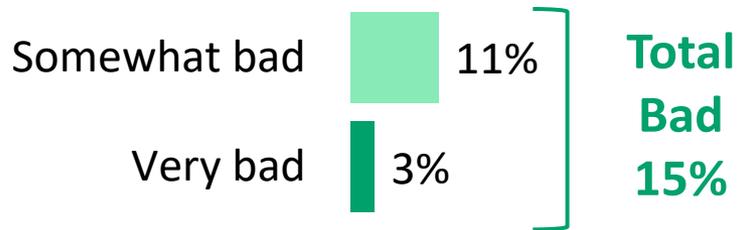
Chemicals and pollutants in local waterways



79%

Nearly four in five say the condition of local water infrastructure is "good."

How would you rate the current condition of the water infrastructure in your local community?



Evaluations of local water infrastructure are modestly less positive than in the past.

Evaluation of Local Water Infrastructure	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Very good	42%	44%	47%	42%	35%
Somewhat good	44%	40%	37%	40%	43%
Total Good	86%	84%	84%	83%	78%
Somewhat bad	3%	8%	9%	9%	11%
Very bad	10%	3%	4%	4%	3%
Total Bad	13%	11%	13%	13%	15%
Don't know	1%	4%	3%	5%	7%

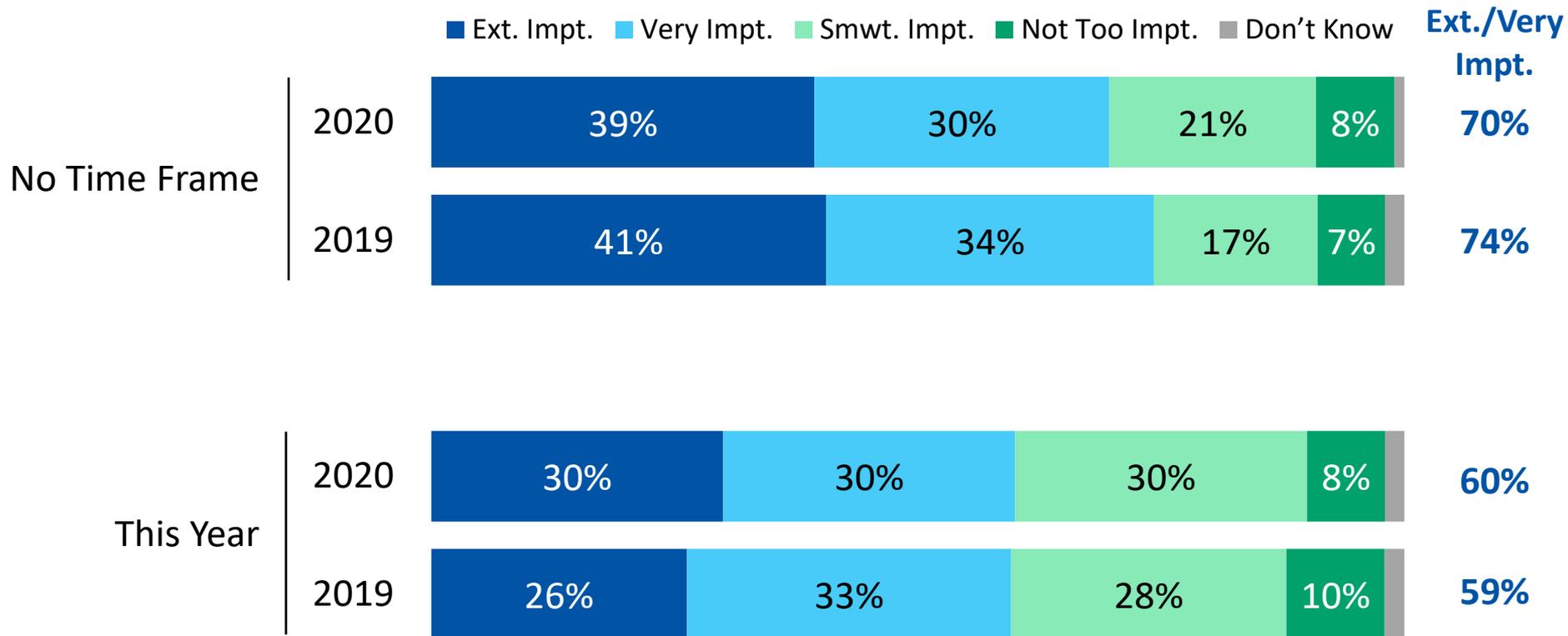
Perceptions that national water infrastructure is in good condition have declined by 10 points since 2016.

Evaluation of National Water Infrastructure	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Very good	10%	8%	16%	10%	9%
Somewhat good	49%	49%	40%	38%	40%
Total Good	59%	57%	55%	49%	49%
Somewhat bad	26%	21%	25%	27%	26%
Very bad	8%	10%	11%	9%	11%
Total Bad	34%	31%	36%	36%	37%
Don't know	7%	12%	9%	16%	14%

Support for Water Infrastructure Investments

Voters continue to perceive infrastructure investments as important and assign a higher priority without an immediate timeline.

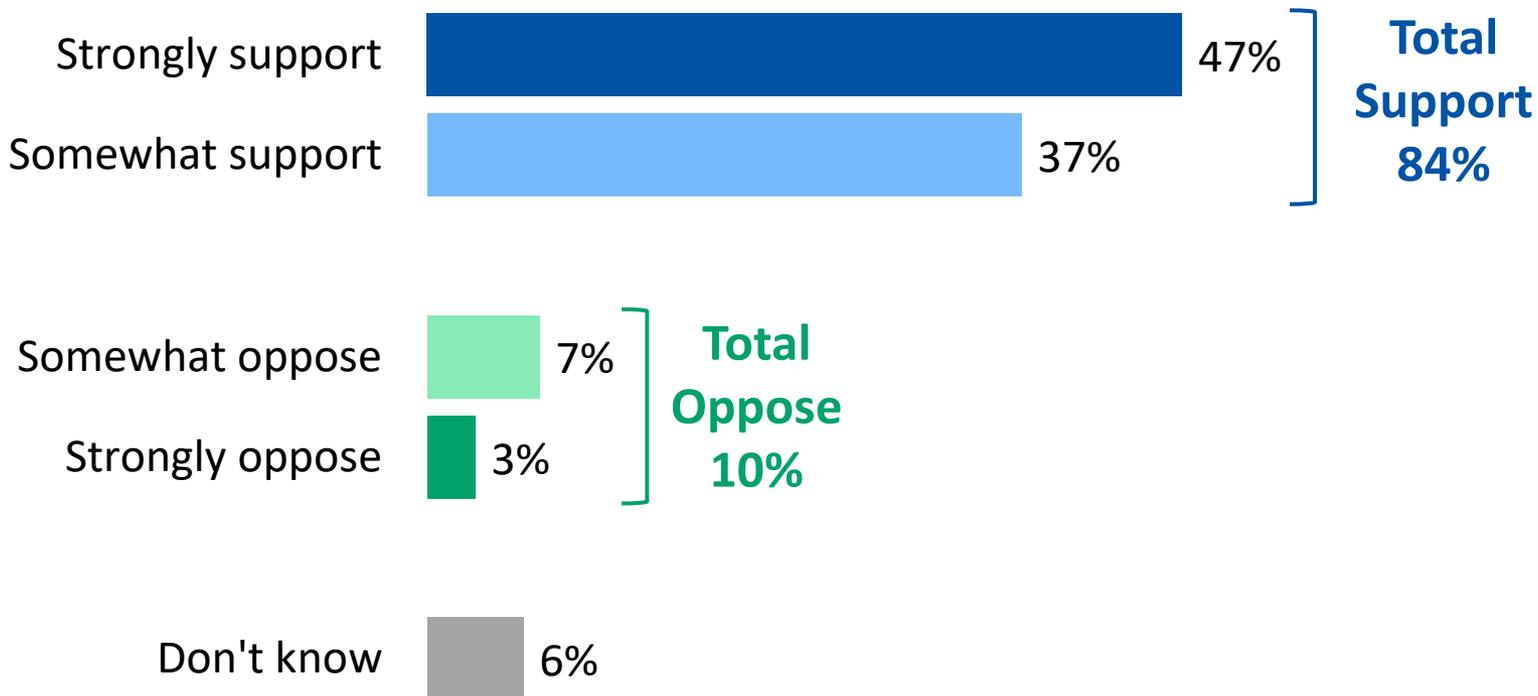
How important do you think it is for the President and Congress to develop a plan (Half Sample: this year) to rebuild our water infrastructure that brings clean drinking water to your home and removes and treats wastewater before safely returning it to the environment?



In principle, more than four in five support increasing federal investment in water infrastructure.

Some people have proposed increasing the federal investment in rebuilding our water infrastructure - including pipes, pumps, reservoirs, treatment plants, and other facilities - to ensure safe, reliable water service for all communities.

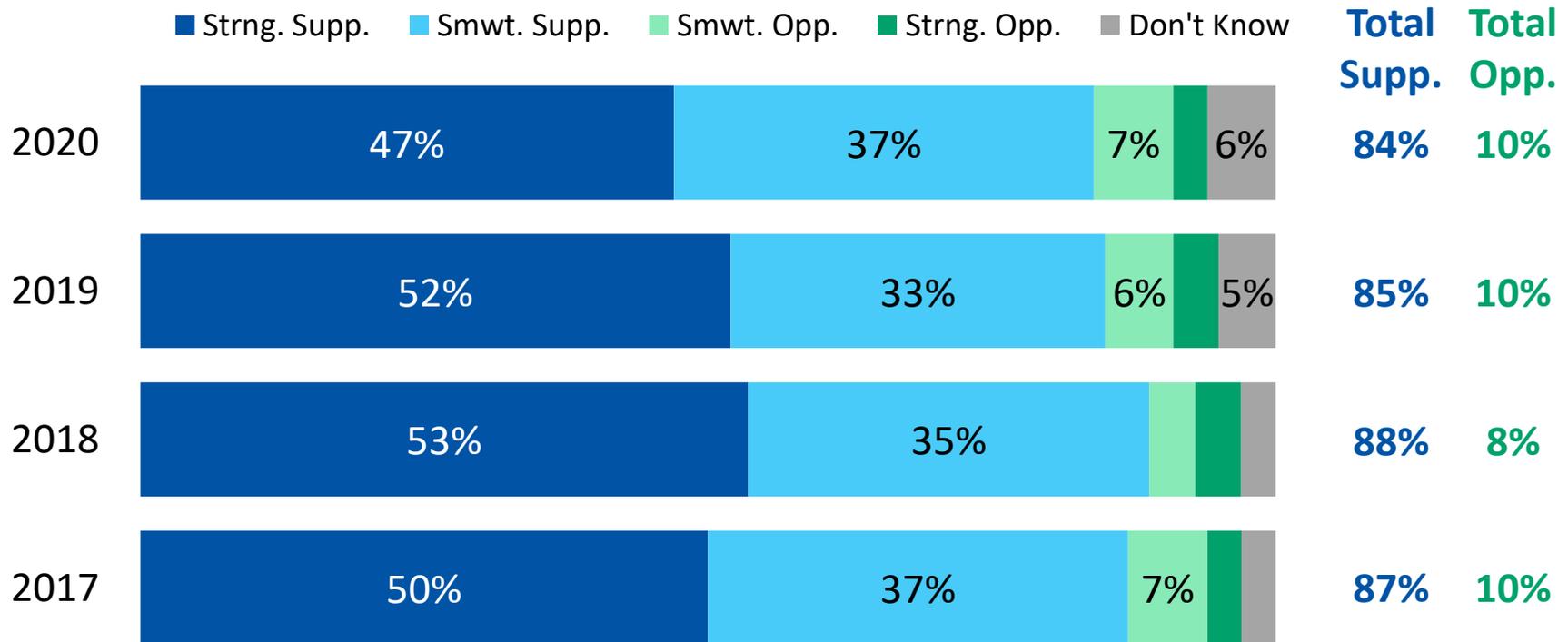
Does this sound like something you would support or oppose?



This strong and broad support is comparable to prior years.

Some people have proposed increasing the federal investment in rebuilding our water infrastructure - including pipes, pumps, reservoirs, treatment plants, and other facilities - to ensure safe, reliable water service for all communities.

Does this sound like something you would support or oppose?



While support cuts across ideological and partisan lines, Democrats are particularly supportive.

Demographic Groups	Strong Support	Total Support	Total Oppose	Don't Know
Party				
Democrats	63%	94%	3%	3%
Independents	49%	76%	12%	13%
Republicans	30%	77%	16%	7%
Ideology				
Liberal	64%	94%	3%	4%
Moderate	52%	87%	6%	7%
Conservative	31%	77%	18%	6%
Race/Ethnicity				
Latinos	58%	94%	2%	4%
African Americans	68%	92%	6%	1%
Whites	43%	82%	11%	7%
All Voters of Color	58%	90%	7%	3%

Strong support for this proposal cuts across gender and age groups.

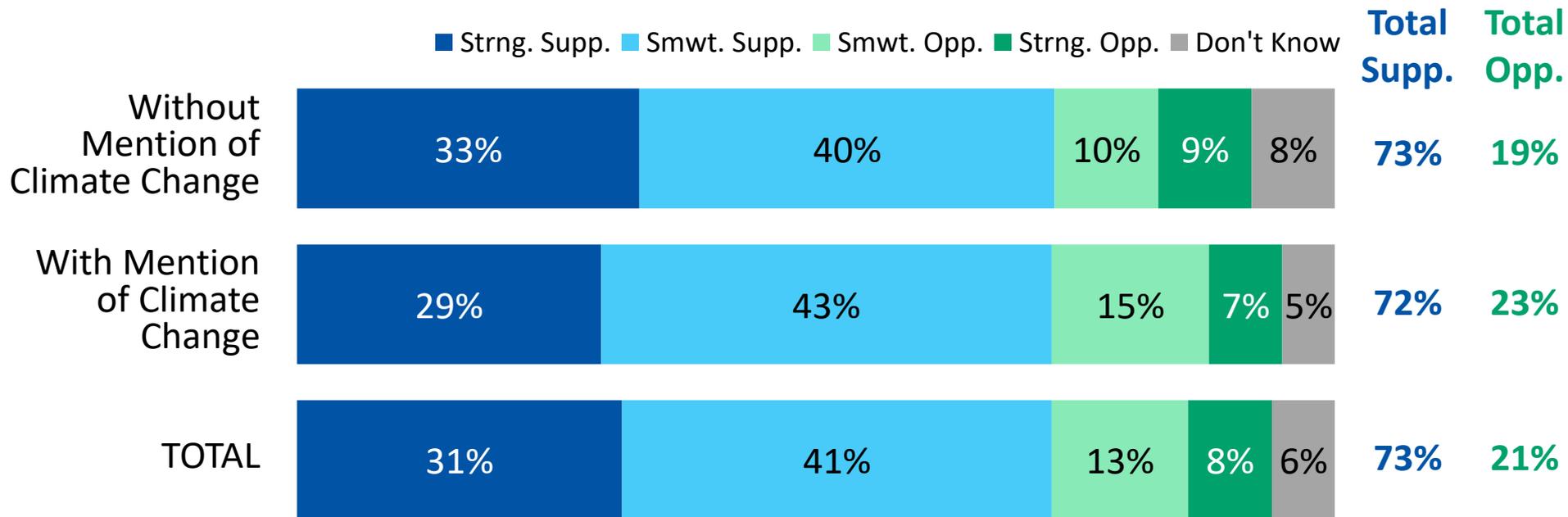
Demographic Groups	Strong Support	Total Support	Total Oppose	Don't Know
Gender				
Men	45%	82%	12%	6%
Women	48%	86%	8%	6%
Age				
18-29	50%	88%	4%	8%
30-39	46%	81%	11%	8%
40-49	52%	90%	5%	4%
50-64	45%	82%	14%	5%
65-74	47%	85%	10%	5%
75+	40%	79%	15%	6%

Voters across the country and from different income ranges back the proposal.

Demographic Groups	Strong Support	Total Support	Total Oppose	Don't Know
Household Income				
<\$60,000	48%	83%	8%	8%
\$60,000-\$100,000	51%	87%	10%	3%
\$100,000+	42%	83%	12%	5%
Census Region				
Northeast	50%	88%	6%	5%
Midwest	47%	85%	9%	5%
South	44%	81%	13%	6%
West	48%	82%	10%	8%

Three-quarters back resiliency investments, even when climate change is mentioned.

To withstand threats from storms, wildfires, and more extreme and unpredictable weather (Half Sample: caused by climate change) some people have proposed we begin a decades-long project to ensure our drinking water and wastewater systems are resilient. These types of projects would prepare water and wastewater systems for future flooding and changing weather before they occur, preventing damage to communities. The cost would be approximately \$1.2 trillion over 25 years. Funding would come from a mix of federal, state, and local sources – some of which would ultimately be paid by ratepayers.



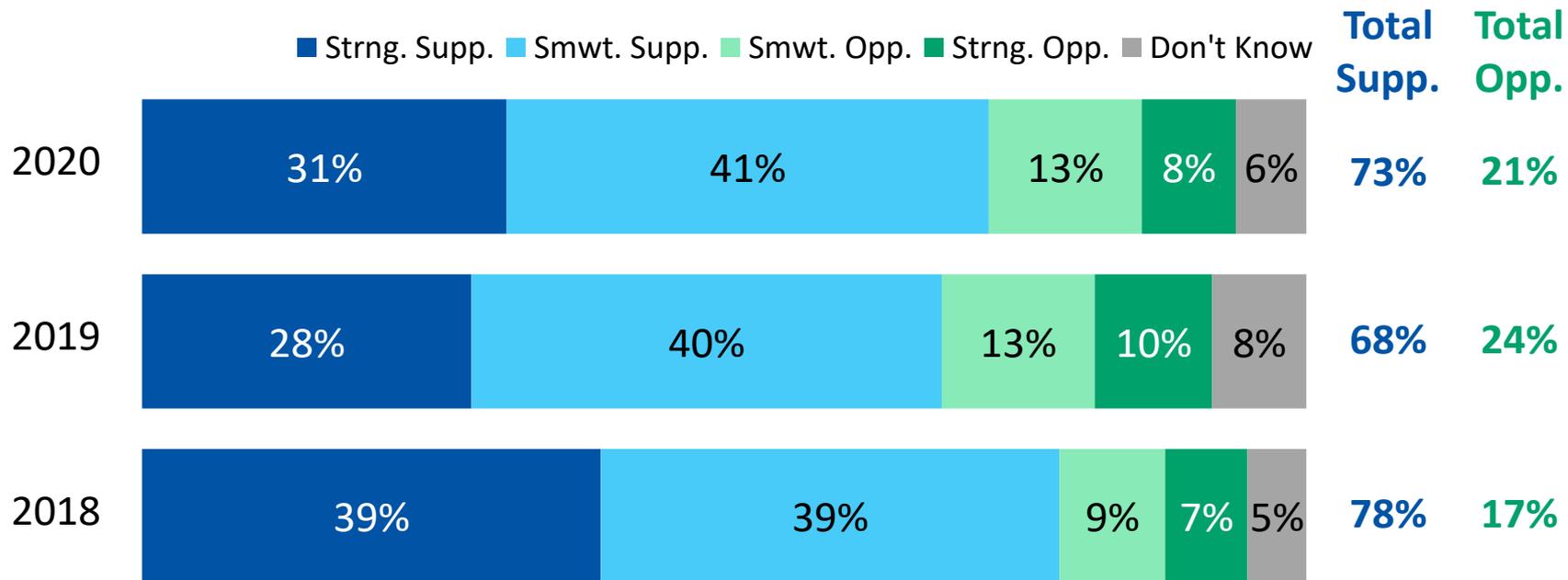
While there are overall partisan differences in support, the inclusion of climate change does not have an impact.

Total Support

Party	With Mention of Climate Change	Without Mention of Climate Change
Democrats	91%	88%
Independents	68%	69%
Republicans	56%	57%

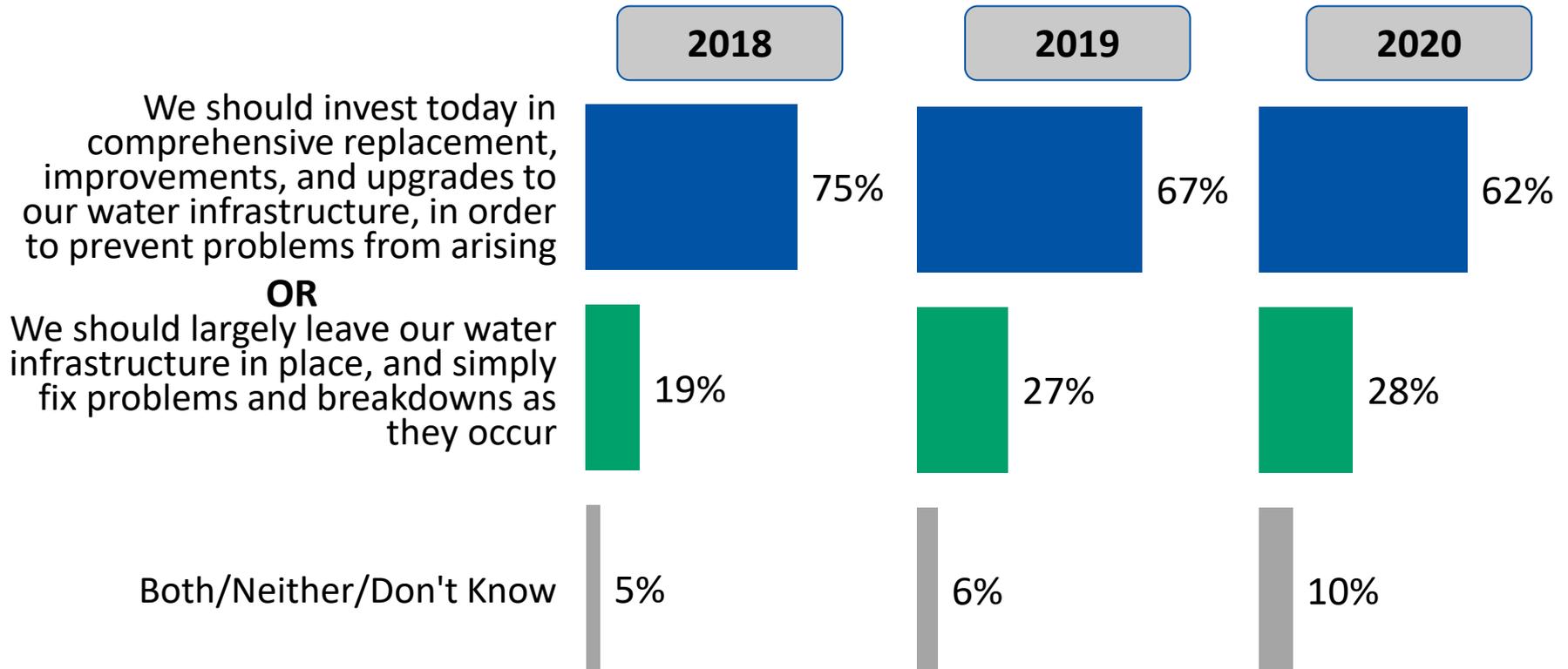
Support for these types of investments has increased slightly in the past year.

To withstand threats from storms, wildfires, and more extreme and unpredictable weather (**Half Sample:** caused by climate change) some people have proposed we begin a decades-long project to ensure our drinking water and wastewater systems are resilient. These types of projects would prepare water and wastewater systems for future flooding and changing weather before they occur, preventing damage to communities. The cost would be approximately \$1.2 trillion over 25 years. Funding would come from a mix of federal, state, and local sources – some of which would ultimately be paid by ratepayers.



Three in five favor investing in infrastructure even with a \$1.27 trillion price tag.

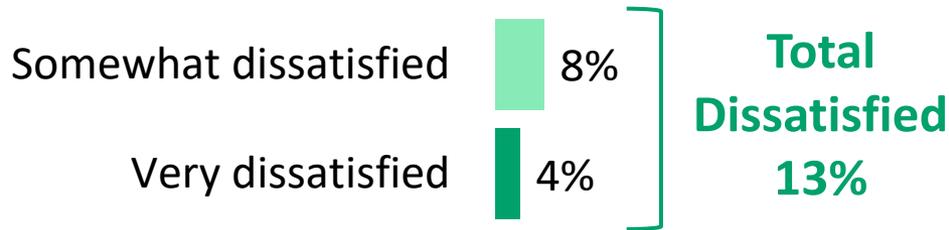
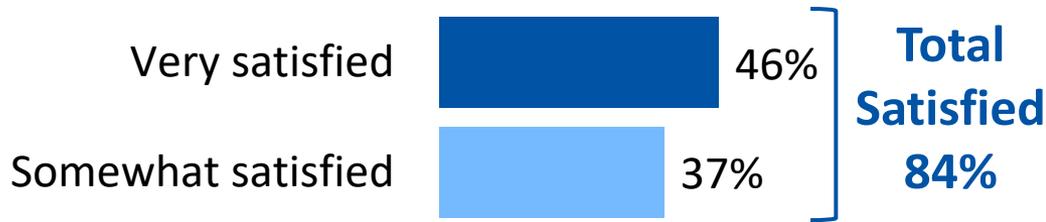
Water systems in many communities across the United States are aging and in need of repair. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives our water and wastewater infrastructure a D grade. They estimate the price tag for repairing and improving America's drinking water and wastewater infrastructure will be \$1.27 trillion dollars over the next 25 years. Having heard this, which of these approaches do you think we should pursue as it relates to water infrastructure?



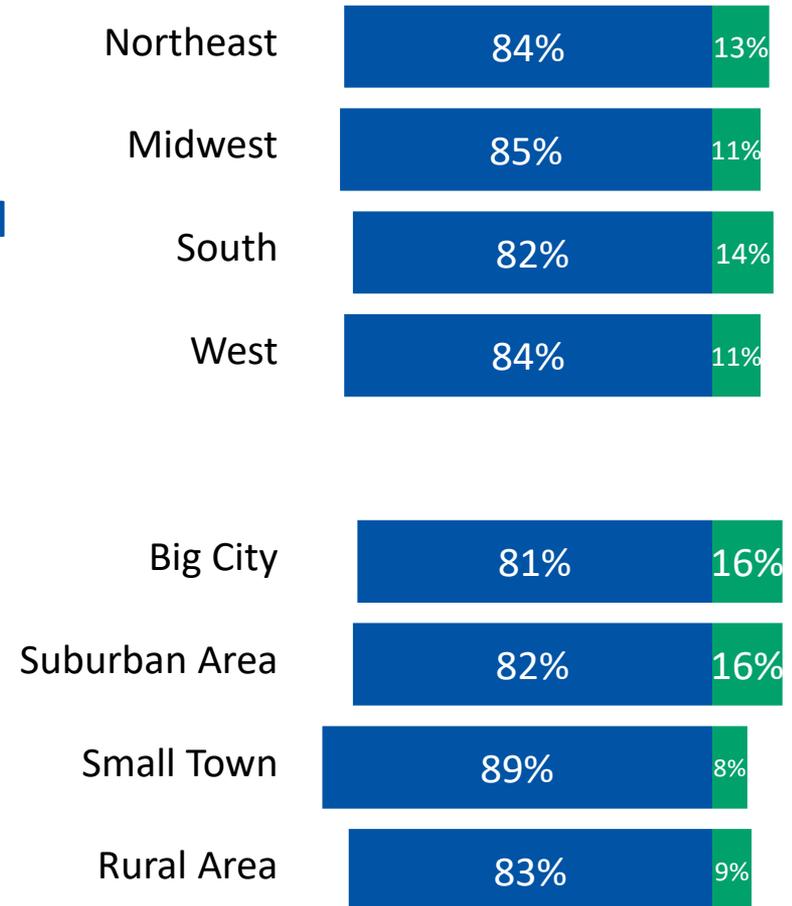
Attitudes Toward Local Water and Wastewater Service

More than four in five are satisfied with their local water and wastewater service.

Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with your water and wastewater service?

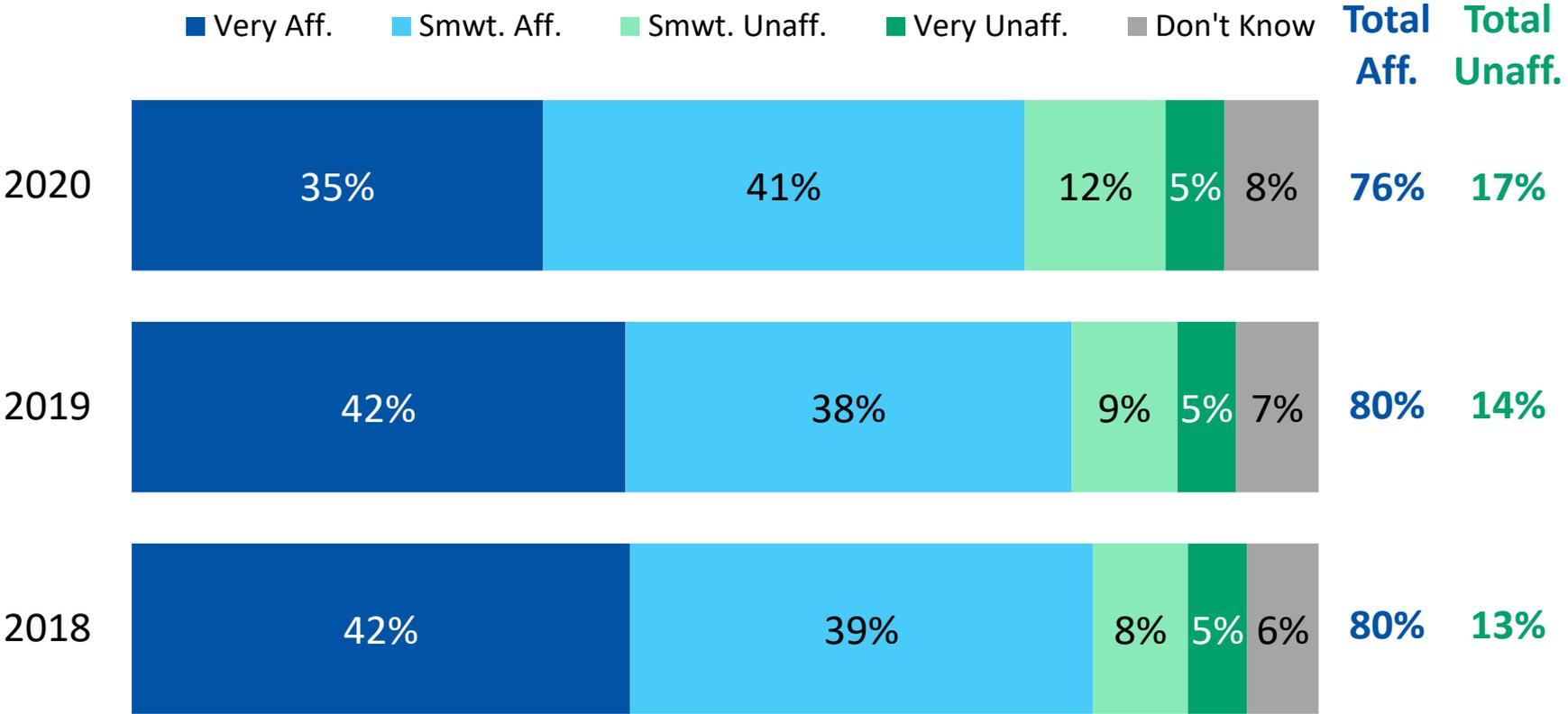


■ Total Satisfied ■ Total Dissatisfied



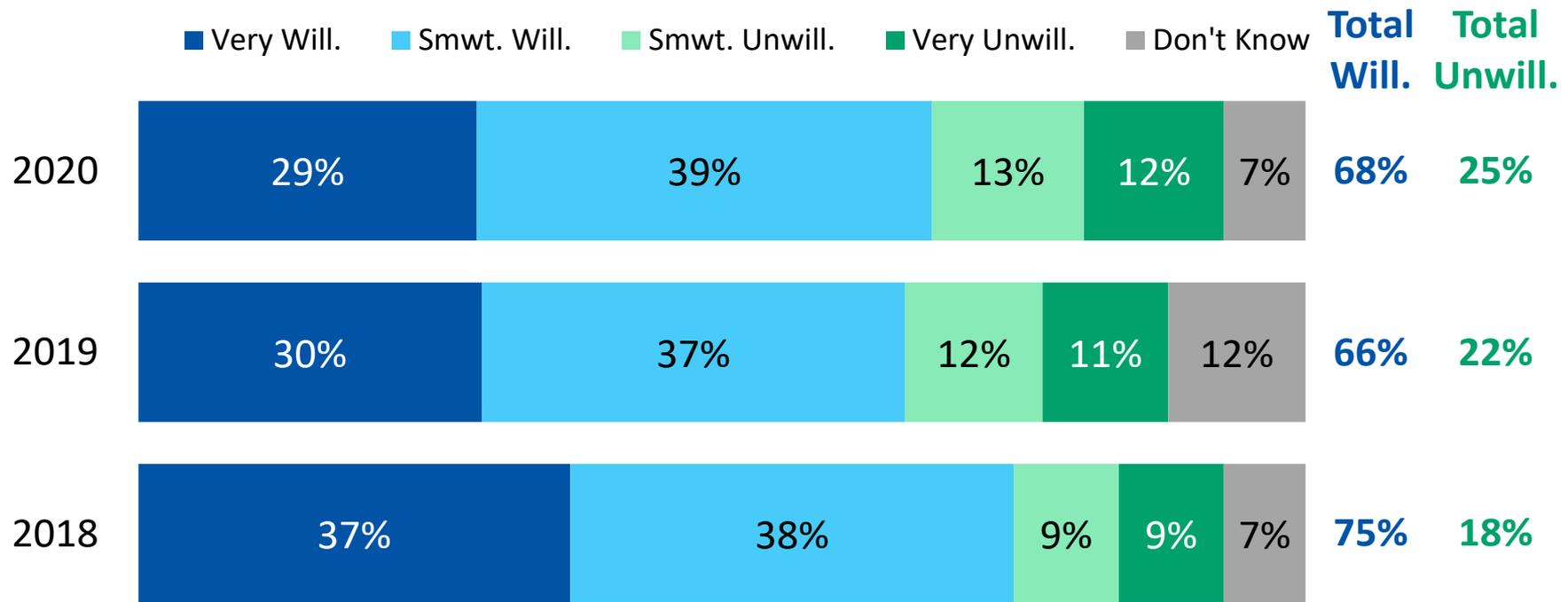
Three-quarters say what they pay for water and wastewater is affordable; the proportion labeling it "very affordable" is down.

Do you think what you pay currently for water and wastewater service is affordable or unaffordable?



Approximately two-thirds would be willing to pay more for service improvements, but relatively few are “very willing.”

Suppose your water and wastewater service provider increased rates by a modest amount to pay for infrastructure and water quality improvements, including preventing pollution of local streams and rivers, protecting your area’s drinking water supply, and improving wastewater service. Would you be willing or unwilling to pay a modest rate increase in order to improve your water and wastewater service?



The most notable declines among those “very willing” since 2018 have been among big city residents, Latinos, Democrats under age 50, and residents of the Northeast – perhaps reflecting overall affordability concerns.

Conclusions

Conclusions

- ✓ Voters' perceptions of water infrastructure and support for investing in improvements has remained consistent over the course of the last year.
 - Voters continue to offer positive evaluations of local water infrastructure, although they are more divided about national water infrastructure.
 - Voters prioritize rebuilding America's infrastructure over most competing federal priorities.
 - Three-quarters say that investing in water infrastructure is "very" important and more than four in five back a proposal for federal investments.
 - Voters continue to express a continue preference for making investments in the short-term rather than deferring them.
 - These views cut across major demographic groups, including partisan lines.
- ✓ Voters feel confident in the safety of their drinking water and the pipes that bring it to them.
- ✓ Voters offer positive evaluations of their local water and wastewater service and broadly see it as affordable.
- ✓ Majorities are willing to pay a modest additional amount for improvements to the water and wastewater systems, but many are tentative.

Questions?

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Value of Water Campaign, program manager