

City of Mercer Island

Budget & Priorities Survey Report

January 2008



MARKET
& OPINION
RESEARCH
SERVICES

Purpose and Methodology

- ◆ This is the third survey, conducted every two years, to help the City understand voter priorities, evaluate the City's performance in a variety of service areas, and to track changes in these figures over time.
- ◆ When possible, figures have been compared with results from the 2006 and 2004 budget surveys, and a 2002 survey on the Community Center survey.
- ◆ Trained, professional telephone interviewers calling from a central, monitored location conducted the interviews during the evening and weekend hours of January 24 – 28, 2008.
- ◆ Four hundred (400) interviews were conducted among registered voters in the City of Mercer Island for the 2008 survey.
- ◆ Results were checked against the entire voting population of the City, and were weighted when necessary to accurately reflect the demographics of voters on Mercer Island.
- ◆ The results of the 2008 survey can be projected to reflect the opinions of all registered voters on Mercer Island to within a margin of error of ± 4.9 points at the 95% confidence interval. This confidence interval means if the survey was repeated 100 times, the results shown would be the same to within ± 4.9 points 95 times out of 100.
- ◆ The margin of error for the 2006 and 2004 overall results is also ± 4.9 points.

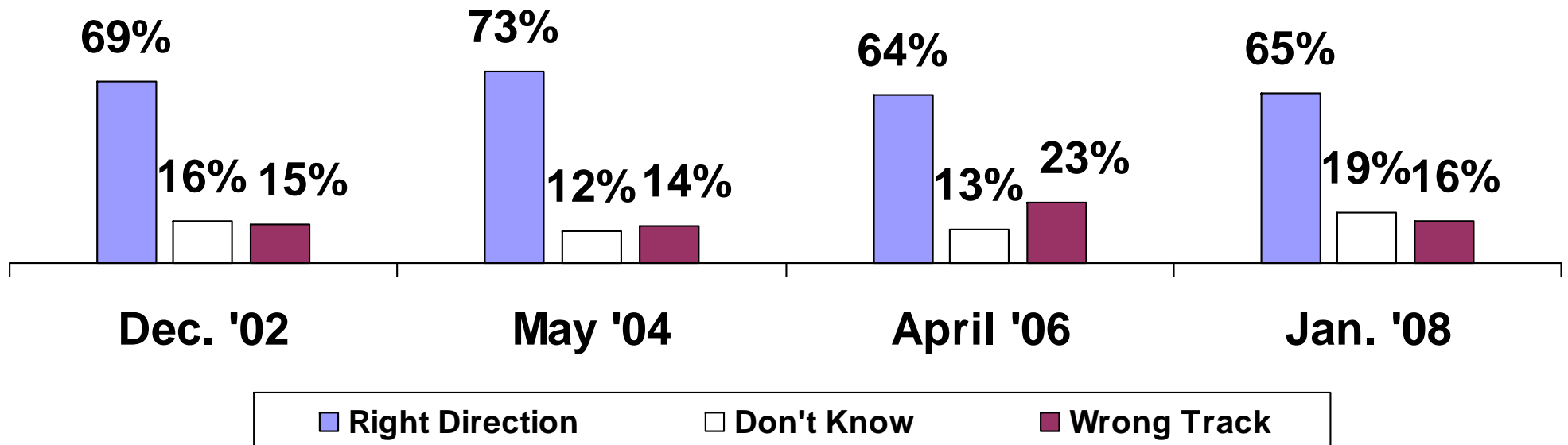
Key Findings

1. Island voters continue to be in a positive mood (65% Right Direction), and their relationship with City government remains strong.
2. Continuing a trend seen in 2006, transportation, traffic, overcrowding, and overdevelopment top the list of the most important problems.
3. Favorable ratings for the City Council remain solid (58%), and a majority give the City positive ratings for their responsible use of tax dollars (56%). The City continues to significantly outperform King County on both of these measures.
4. The vast majority of voters (86%) are satisfied with the service provided by Allied Waste because of their reliability and on-time service. Missed pickups are directly connected to lower satisfaction levels.
5. Voter priorities have remained constant over the past four years, with ensuring prompt fire/medical aid response times and preventing crime at the top of the list. Protecting the environment, a new item this year, ranks third, just above maintaining streets and promoting traffic safety.
6. The City receives strong positive ratings for almost all services tested (at least 62% positive). Only preparing for a natural disaster falls short of a majority positive rating.
7. A majority (58%) of voters say they are prepared to go without power or water for a week. Renters feel less prepared than homeowners, voters under 50 feel less prepared than those over 50, and homes with children feel less prepared than those without children.
8. An overwhelming percentage (86%) feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood or the town center.
9. The proportion of voters who are willing to increase taxes to maintain city services has steadily grown from 36% in 2004 to 49% in 2008.
10. While a strong majority of voters are satisfied with the appearance and condition of the town center (71%) a smaller majority are satisfied with the shopping and dining options there (58%).

General Issue Environment

Right Direction / Wrong Track

Q3 – Do you feel things on Mercer Island are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?



The 2008 general issue environment is similar to 2006, with a slight decrease in the “wrong track” figure, and a slight increase in the “don’t know” figure. The figure is strongly positive in each survey shown.

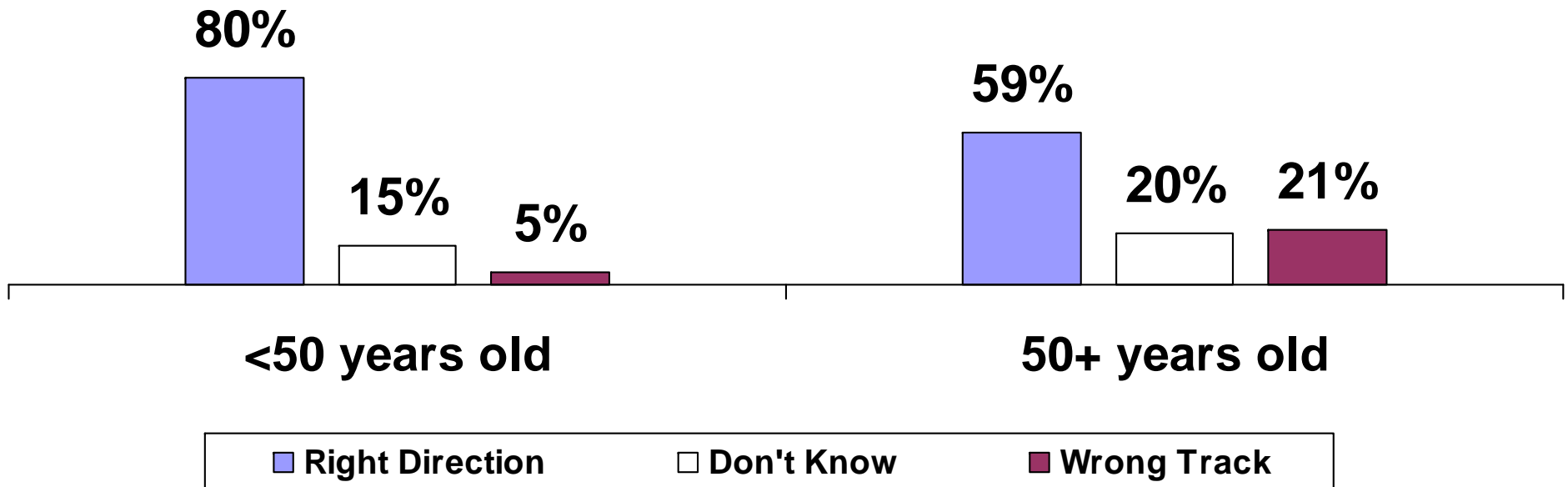
For comparison, a City of Seattle voter survey conducted in late January showed

Right Direction	54%
Wrong Track	33%
Don't Know	13%

General Issue Environment

Right Direction / Wrong Track by Generation

Q3 – Do you feel things on Mercer Island are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?



There are noticeable differences in the right direction/wrong track figures by age group. Voters over 50+ years of age are less likely to say things are going in the right direction, and more likely to say things are on the wrong track than voters under 50 years of age.

Most Important Problem

Q4 – *What do you think is the most important problem facing Mercer Island today?*

	<u>2004</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2008</u>
Transportation/Traffic	14%	26%	26%
Overcrowding/Overbuilding	23%	28%	24%
Education	15%	7%	9%
High Taxes/High Cost of Living	10%	6%	3%
Lack of Affordable Housing	3%	3%	3%
City Govn't/Council/Mayor/Spending	3%	3%	3%
Environment/Preserving Parks, Open Space	4%	4%	3%
Other	11%	11%	11%
Nothing	7%	6%	10%
Don't Know/Refused	10%	6%	9%

Continuing a trend seen in 2006, transportation, traffic, overcrowding, and overdevelopment top the list of the most important problems facing the Island.

Voters over 50 years old are more likely to cite overcrowding/overbuilding (30%) than those under 50 (11%).

Most Important Problem

Q4 – What do you think is the most important problem facing Mercer Island today?

	<u>North</u>	<u>Central</u>	<u>South</u>
Traffic	23%	21%	13%
Overbuilding	17%	17%	19%
Overcrowding	7%	6%	6%
Transportation	5%	4%	7%

The relative strength of the most important problem varies by geography within the Island. Voters in the North and Central are more likely to mention traffic than those in the South.

Overbuilding and overcrowding are mentioned at equal rates in all areas, as is transportation.

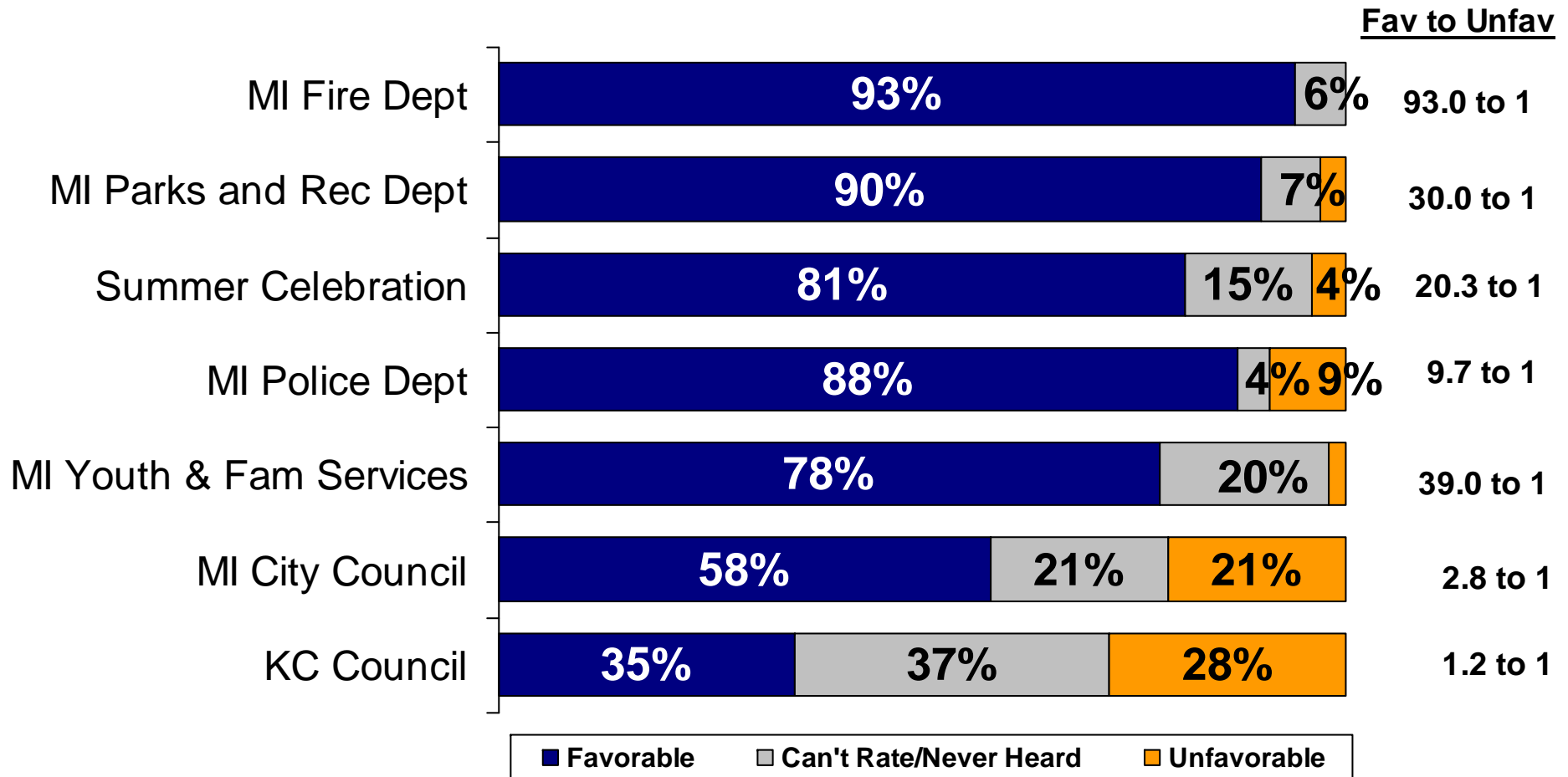
Most Important Problem – What makes you say that?

Q5 – *What makes you say that?*

	<u>All</u>
All the construction adding to traffic/Parking Problems	16%
Too many cars on the road/Not enough public transportation	14%
Schools need more funding/Teachers/Crowded classrooms	7%
Too much building	7%
Everything costs more here/Taxes are too high	6%
Too much building taking away appeal of Island/Open space	5%
Too many people are moving here causing overcrowding	5%

The strength of open-ended responses relating to transportation/traffic and overbuilding/overdevelopment in 2006 prompted an additional question in the 2008 survey to gather more details as shown above.

Favorable Ratings



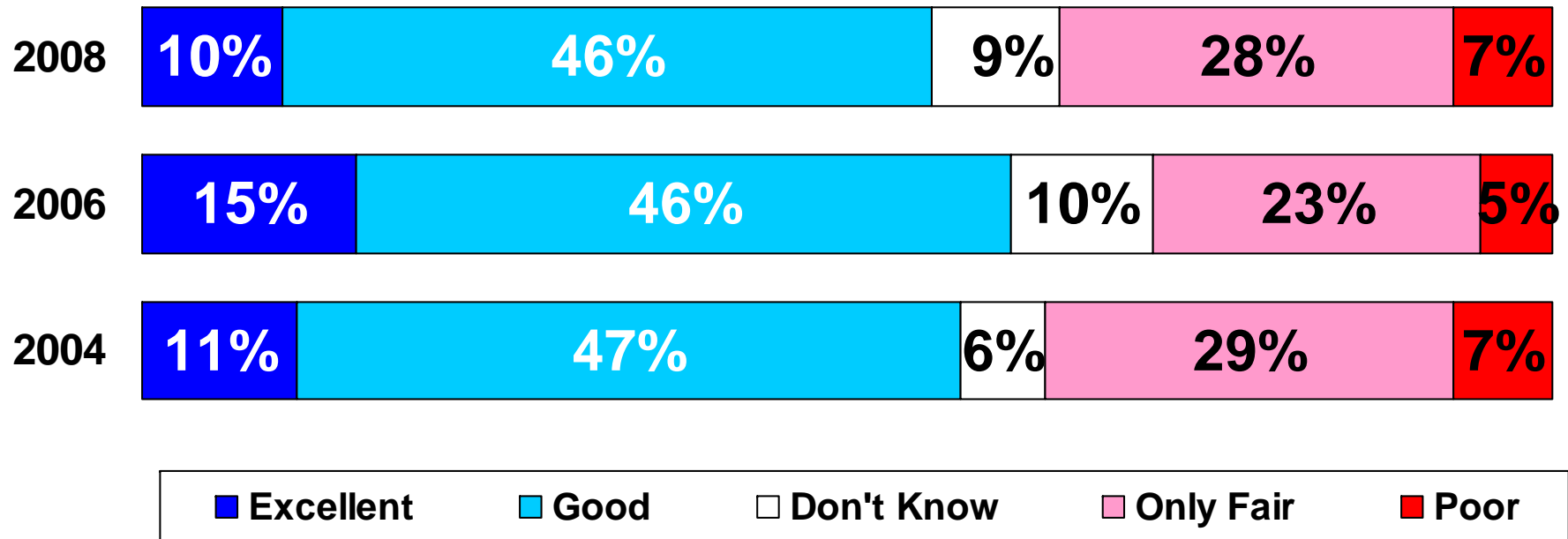
Ratings for the City Council continue to be solid, and significantly outperforms the King County Council.

Ratings for other Mercer Island agencies and events continue to be outstanding.

Favorable ratings on these items have remained stable since 2004.

City Use of Tax Dollars

Q13 – Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, how would you rate the job the City of Mercer Island is doing using tax dollars responsibly?

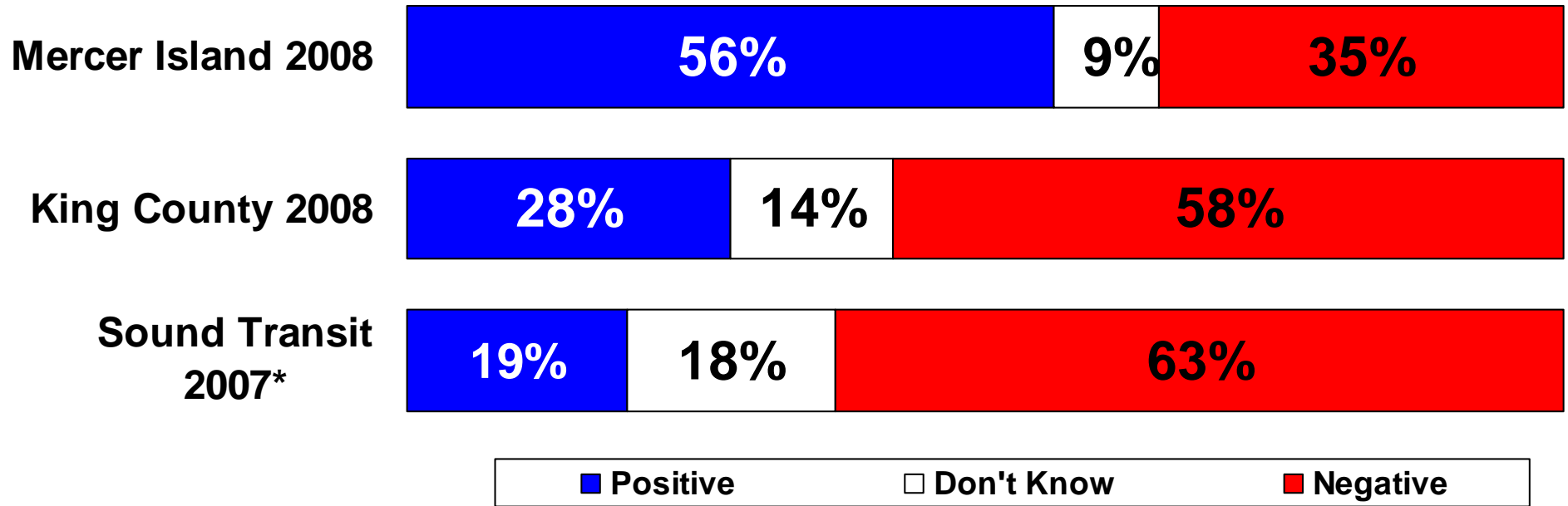


A majority of voters continue to say the City is doing a good job using tax dollars responsibly. The 2008 figures are down slightly from 2006, and look very much like the 2004 figures.

Those most likely to give the City a negative rating are men (42% Fair/Poor vs. 29% of Women) and residents who have lived on the island for more than 11 years (39% Fair/Poor vs. 28% <10 Years).

There are no statistically significant differences by age group or geography.

City versus County Using Tax Dollars



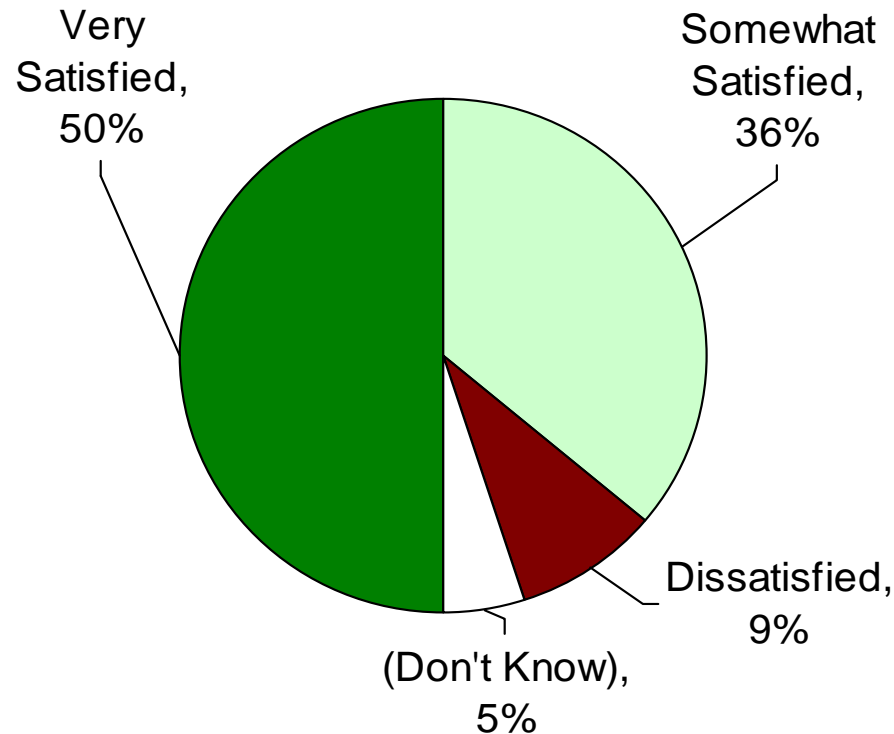
** Percentages for Sound Transit are from a recent survey among residents in the ST District.*

As in 2004 and 2006, voters in 2008 give the City of Mercer Island a positive rating for its responsible use of tax dollars twice as often as for King County. Mercer Island also significantly outperforms Sound Transit in its responsible use of tax dollars.

This gap is seen in all significant subgroups.

Satisfaction with Allied Waste

Q15 – How would you rate your level of satisfaction with the garbage, recycling, and yard waste services provided by Eastside Disposal Service, also known as Allied Waste?



The 2008 survey included some questions about Allied Waste.

Mercer Island voters are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service of Allied Waste (86% positive); only one voter in ten is dissatisfied (9%).

Satisfaction with Allied Waste

What make you say that?

Very Satisfied

41% Reliable/On-time

28% Gets the job done

15% Have no problems

8% Offer Recycling

4% Do not leave a mess

Somewhat Satisfied

19% Gets the job done

16% Missed pick-ups

13% Reliable/On-time

10% Not enough recycling

9% Expensive/Price increases

8% Not enough yard waste pick-ups

5% Have no problems

Dissatisfied/Don't Know

31% Missed pick-ups

14% Don't use them

10% Leave mess/Garbage in street

7% Not enough recycling

7% Expensive/Price increases

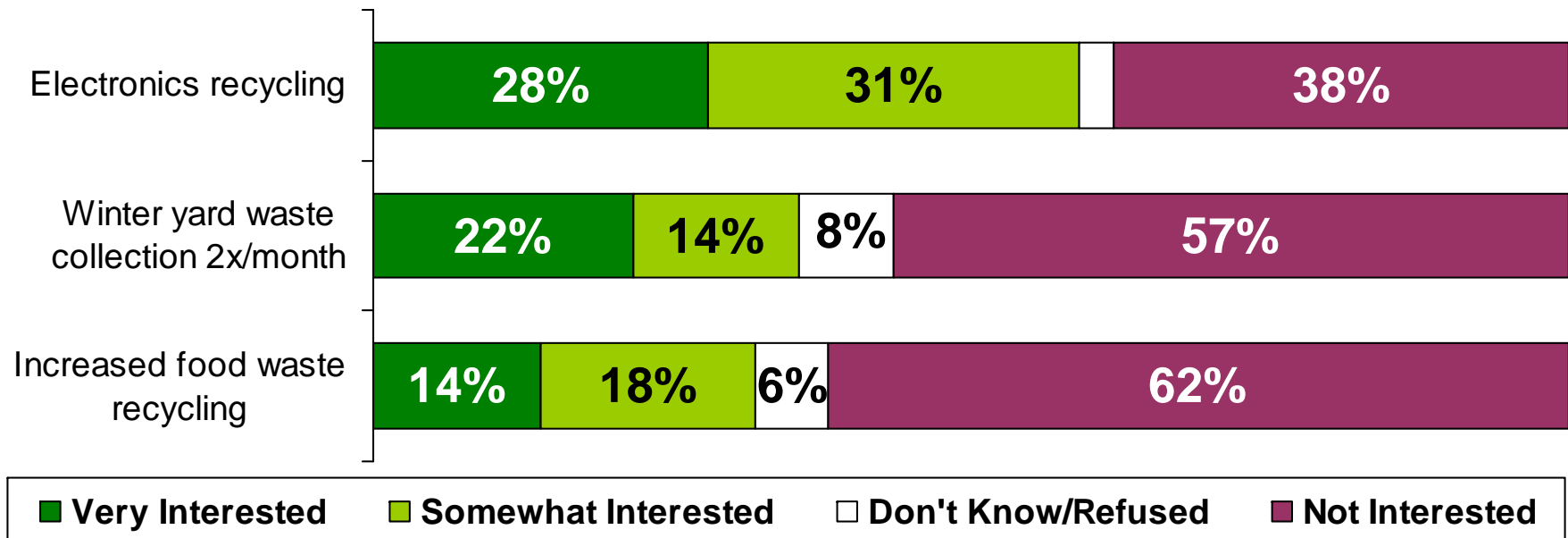
All respondents, whether satisfied or not, were asked a follow up question about the reasons for their rating.

Reliability and on-time service is clearly the most important factor to those who are very satisfied.

Missed pick-ups are strongly connected to lower levels of satisfaction, particularly in the dissatisfied group.

Additional Disposal Services

Q18, 19, 20 – Additional disposal services are available for Mercer Island residents. I'm going to read the options, and after each, I would like you to tell me if you are interested or not in that service.

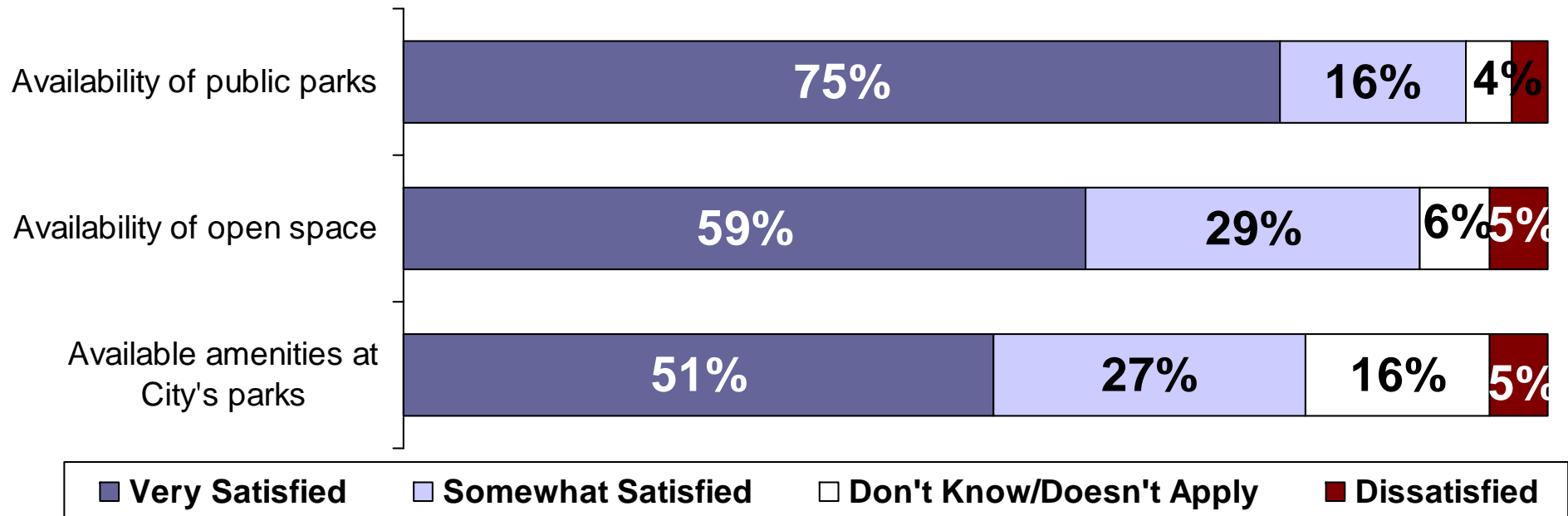


A proportion of voters is interested in each of the new services, with the highest interest in electronics recycling (50%).

There is little demographic differences between those interested in electronics recycling and those who are not, though voters with children are more likely to be interested (69%) than those without kids (53%).

Mercer Island's Park System

Q21, 22, 23 – Now I am going to ask you about the City of Mercer Island's park system. For each item, please tell me if you are...

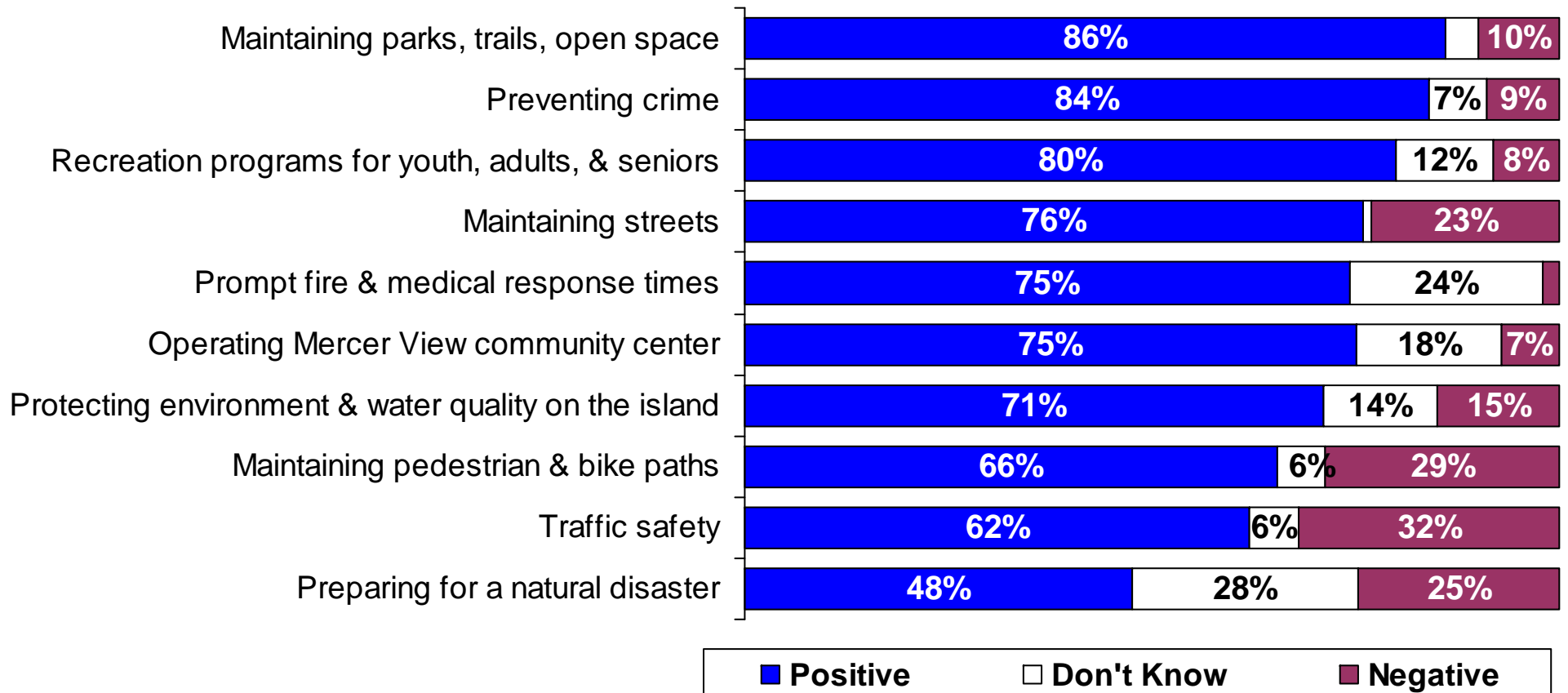


There are high levels of satisfaction (at least 78%) for the availability of Mercer Island parks, the amenities at those parks, and the availability of open space. In fact, when it comes to availability of parks alone, virtually all voters are satisfied (91%).

Some voters (16%) don't use the amenities at City parks.

City Job Ratings

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing...



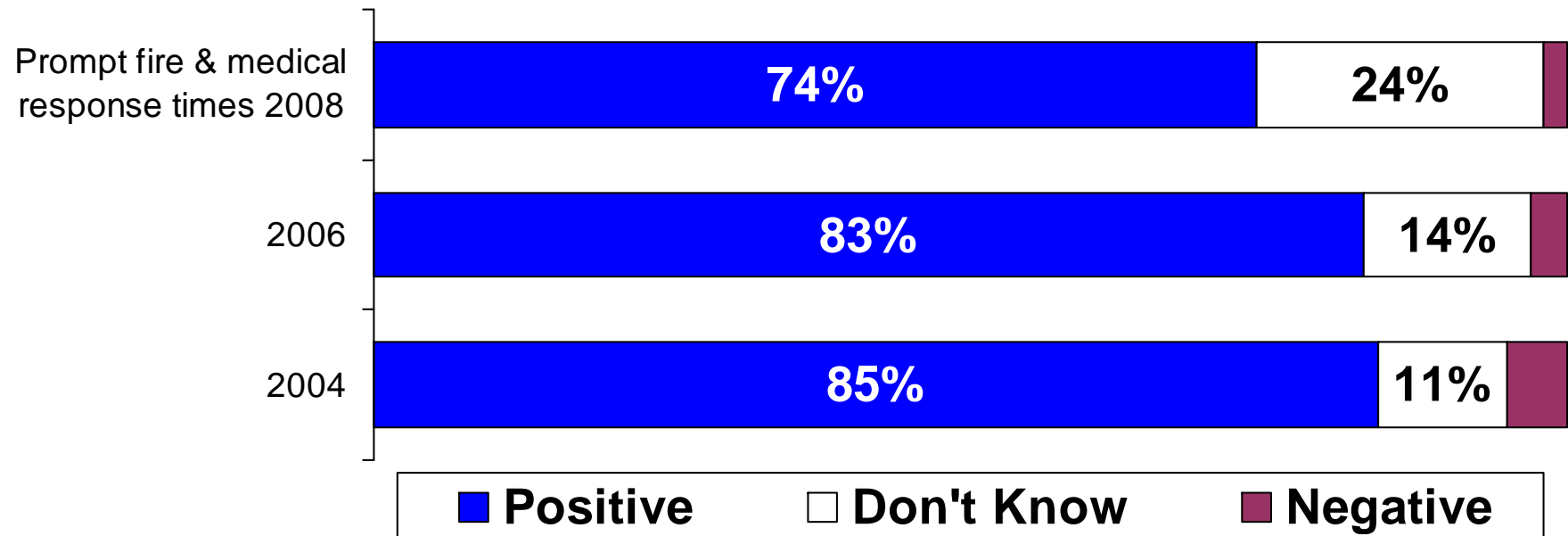
The City receives strong positive ratings for almost all items. Only preparing for a natural disaster falls short of a majority positive rating.

There are also significant proportions giving negative ratings for street maintenance (23%), maintaining pedestrian & bike paths (29%), and traffic safety (32%).

City Job Ratings

Ensuring prompt fire & medical response times

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing...



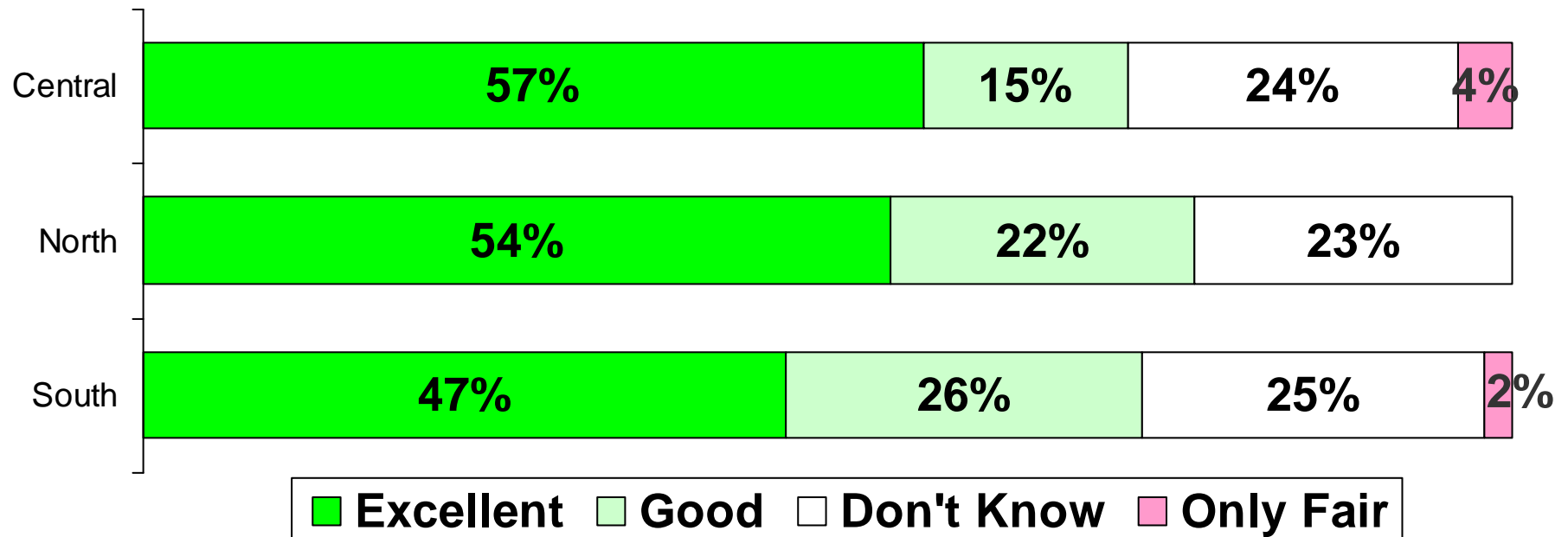
The “don’t know” rating for ensuring prompt fire and medical aid response times increased 10 percentage points in 2008.

The 24% of respondents giving this rating in 2008 are disproportionately newer to the island and are younger. Three-quarters (74%) have lived on the island less than 20 years, and 55% are under 50 years of age.

City Job Ratings

Fire & medical response times by geography

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing ensuring prompt fire and medical aid call response times.



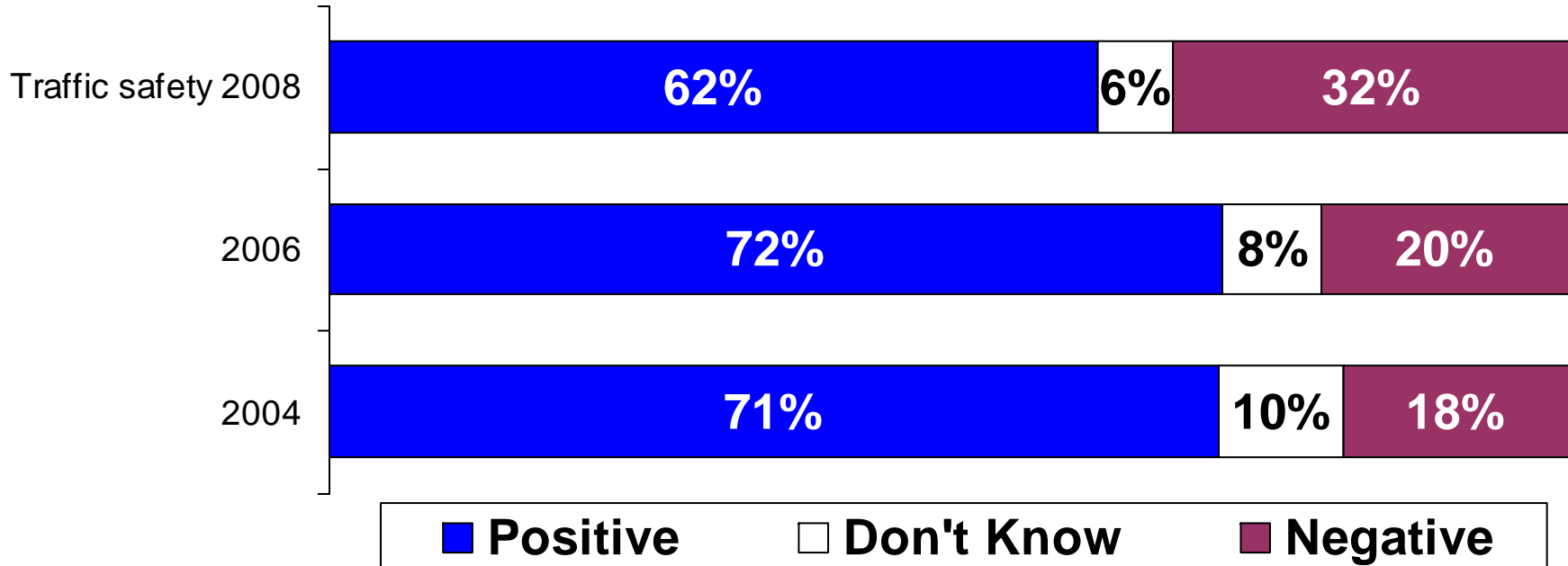
Even though the City's overall "Don't Know" rating increased 10 points from 2006, there is little geographic difference in this rating for 2008.

The highest performance scores come from voters living in the Central part of the Island (57% excellent).

City Job Ratings

Traffic safety

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing...



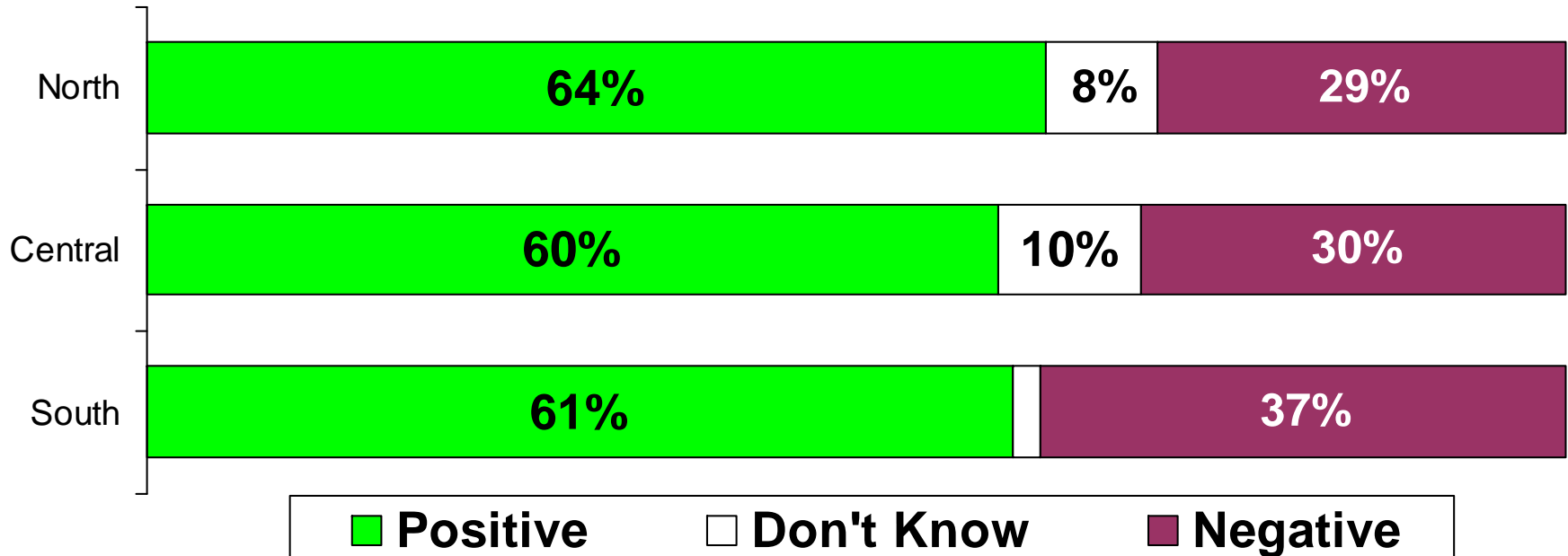
The negative rating for promoting traffic safety increased 12 percentage points in 2008.

In 2006 and 2004, this question was specifically applied to the MI Police Department, so the ratings were likely been boosted by association with the police and their high favorable ratings.

City Job Ratings

Traffic safety by Geography

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing promoting traffic safety.

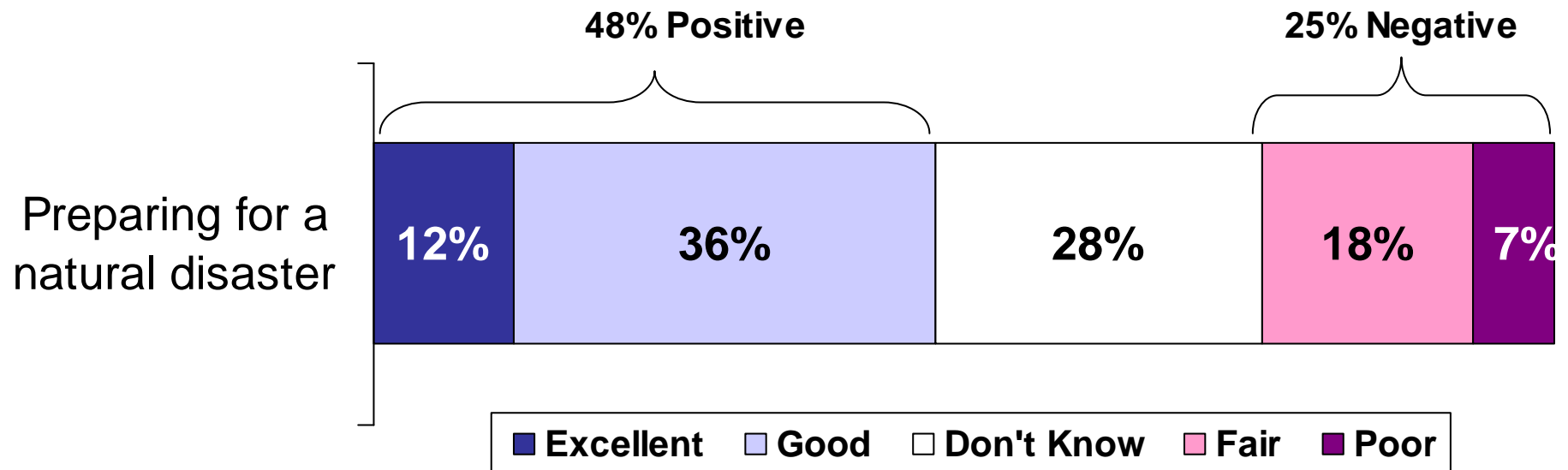


Residents in the South end give the highest negative rating (37% only fair/poor) to traffic safety. Voters living in the island's Center (30% only fair/poor) and North (29% only fair/poor) are almost identical in their traffic safety ratings.

City Job Ratings

Preparing for a natural disaster

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing...



Preparing for a natural disaster was the only item to not receive a majority positive rating.

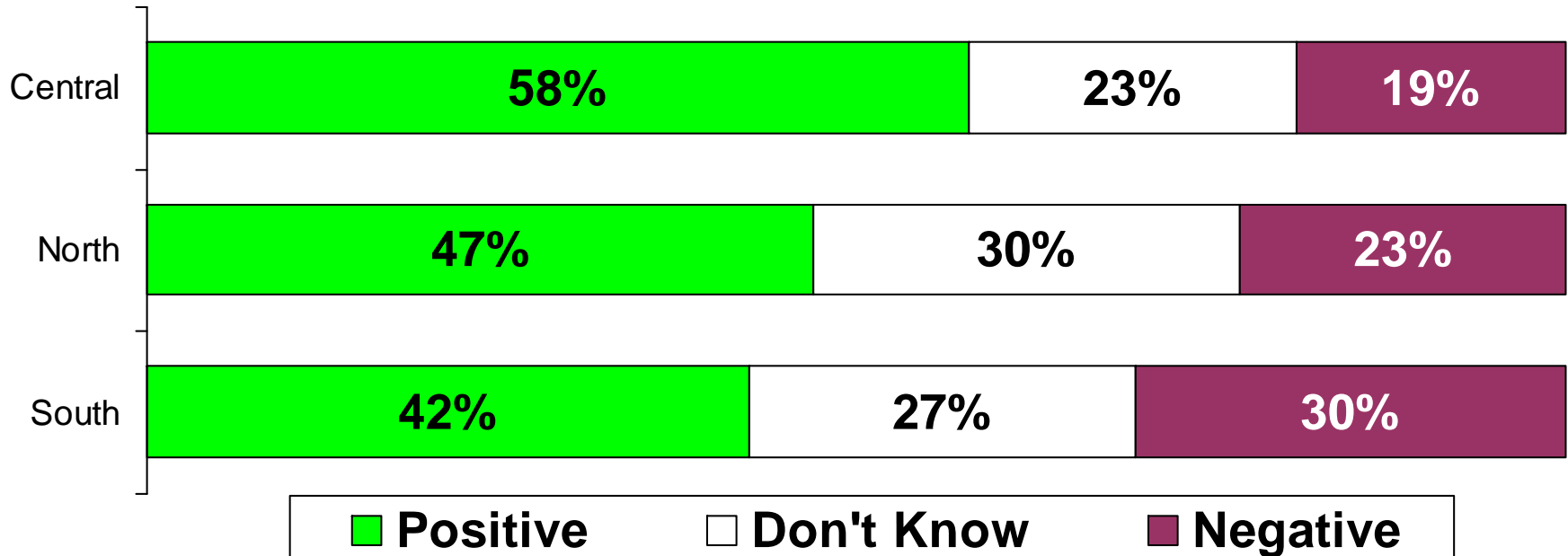
A quarter (28%) of residents say they don't know what kind of job the city has done on this issue.

The groups most likely to give a negative rating are voters who have been residents for less than 10 years (32% vs. 21% residents 11+ years), voters under 50 years old (31% vs. 22% voters 50+), and voters in the south (30% vs. 23% north and 19% central).

City Job Ratings

Preparing for a natural disaster by geography

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing preparing for a natural disaster, like an earthquake or windstorm.



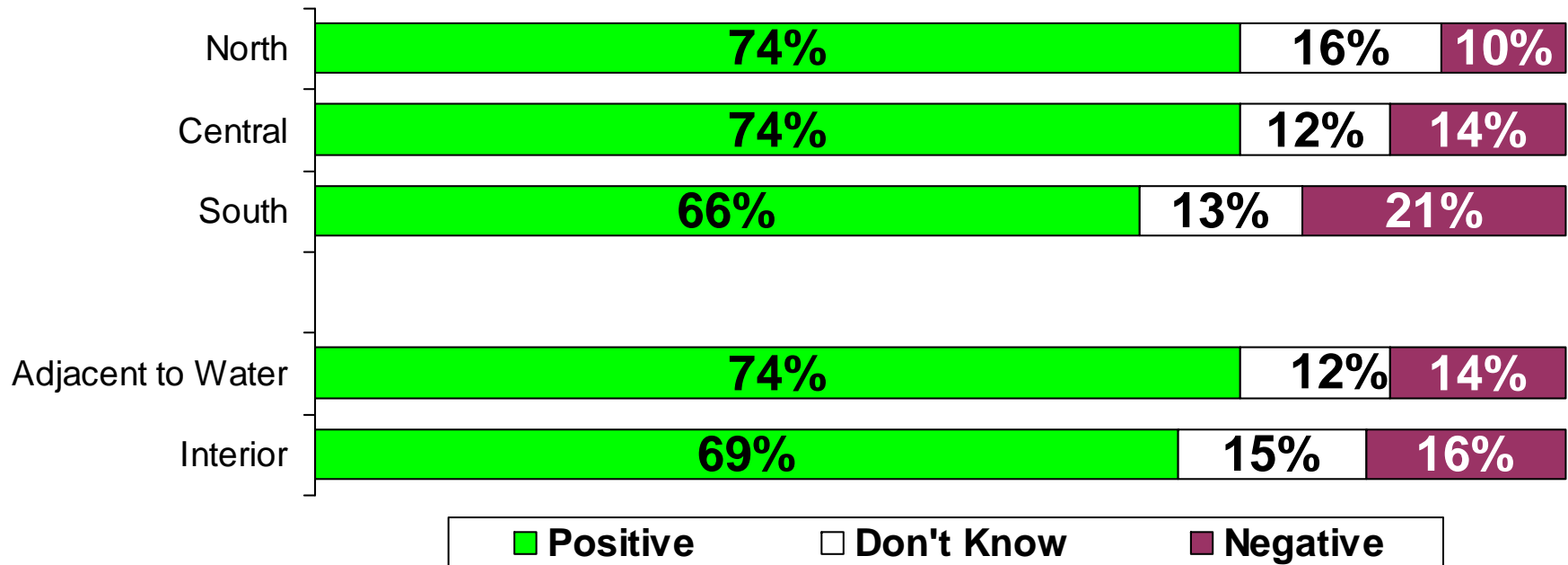
Voters living in the Central part of the Island give a more positive rating for natural disaster preparedness (58% positive) than those in the island's North (47% positive) or South (42% positive).

The South is the most likely to give negative rating.

City Job Ratings

Protecting the environment and water quality

Using a scale of excellent, good, only fair, or poor, rate the job the City is doing protecting the environment on the island and the water quality around the island.



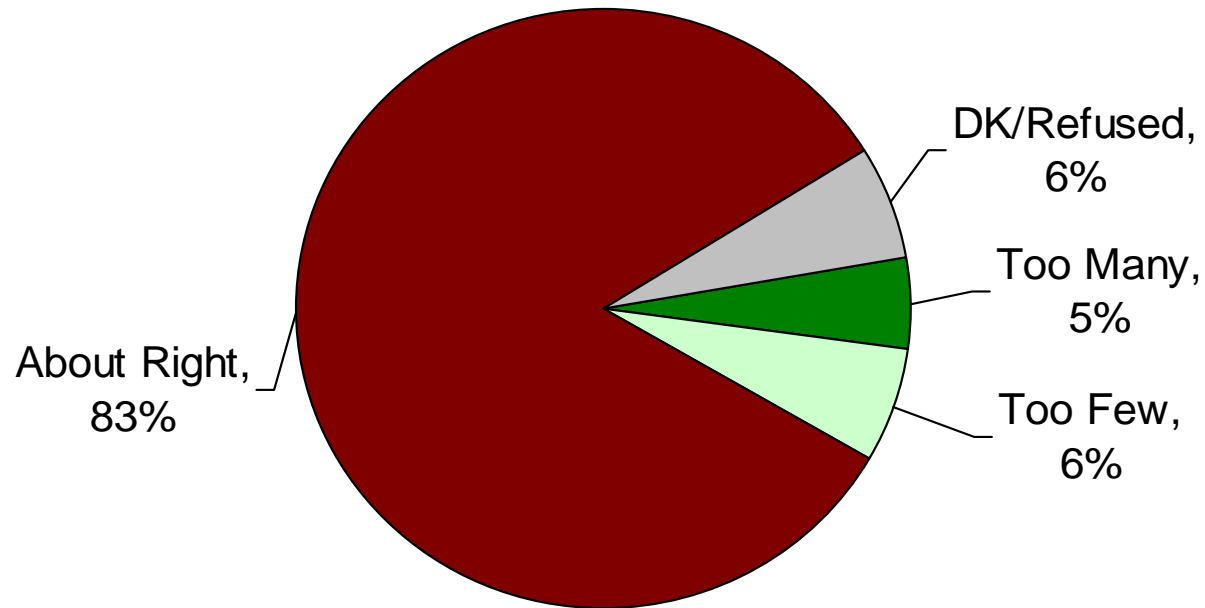
Mercer Island voters strongly believe the City is doing a good job (excellent/good) protecting the environment on the island and its surrounding water quality.

The South end is the most likely to give the City a negative rating (21% only fair/poor), compared to the Center (14% only fair/poor) and the North (10% only fair/poor).

Those living in precincts adjacent to the water are more likely than those in the interior to view the City's environmental/water protection as positive---74% to 69%.

Amount of Services

Q34 – *In terms of services provided by the City of Mercer Island, do you think that overall the city provides too many services, too few services, or about the right amount of services?*



Voters overwhelmingly feel that the City provides the right amount of services (86%).

What are the priorities?

Priority of items tax dollars could be spent on

2008

Rank	Item	2004	2006	2008
1	Ensuring prompt fire and medical aid call response	6.62	6.55	6.64
2	Preventing crime and protecting the community	6.32	6.27	6.26
3	Protecting the environment and the water quality	--	--	5.91
4	Maintaining streets	--	--	5.77
5	Promoting traffic safety	5.44	5.44	5.59
6	Preparing for a natural disaster	--	--	5.57
7	Maintaining parks, trails, and open space	5.47	5.59	5.43
8	Maintaining sidewalks, pedestrian paths, and bike paths	--	--	5.37
9	Providing counseling/intervention/crisis assistance	4.99	5.03	5.28
10	Providing recreation programs for youth, adults, and seniors	--	--	5.25

Ensuring prompt fire and medical response call response and preventing crime and protecting the community, continue to be the top-ranked priorities of Mercer Island voters.

All items rank above the midpoint of 4 on the scale, though there are clear separations between the highest and lowest ranking items.

What are the priorities?

Priority based on Intensity

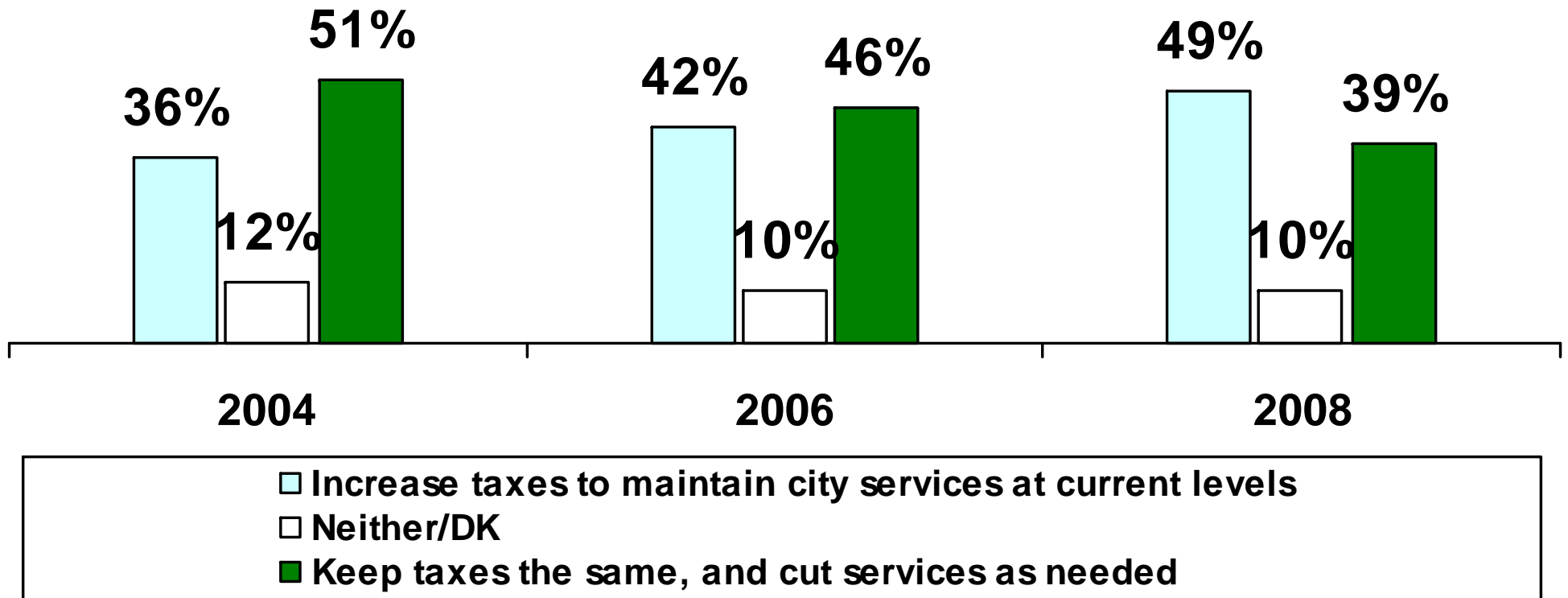
2008 Rank	Item	Rating of 7 (Highest Priority)	Mean Ranking
1	Ensuring prompt fire and medical aid call response times	74%	1
2	Preventing crime and protecting the community	57%	2
3	Protecting the environment and water quality	41%	3
4	Promoting traffic safety	33%	5
5	Preparing for a natural disaster like an earthquake or windstorm	31%	6
6	Maintaining streets	28%	4
7	Providing counseling/intervention/crisis assistance services	24%	9
8	Maintaining sidewalks, pedestrian paths, and bike paths	23%	8
9	Maintaining parks, trails, and open space	20%	7
10	Providing recreation programs for youth, adults, and seniors	18%	10

When comparing the mean (average) rank of priorities to the intensity ranking (7 percentage), the order of priorities remains relatively unchanged. Ensuring prompt fire and medical response times, preventing crime, and protecting the environment are still the top three.

However, the differences on the percentage ranking these items is much clearer between the top ranked and lowest ranked item.

Taxes & Services

Which of the following would you choose?

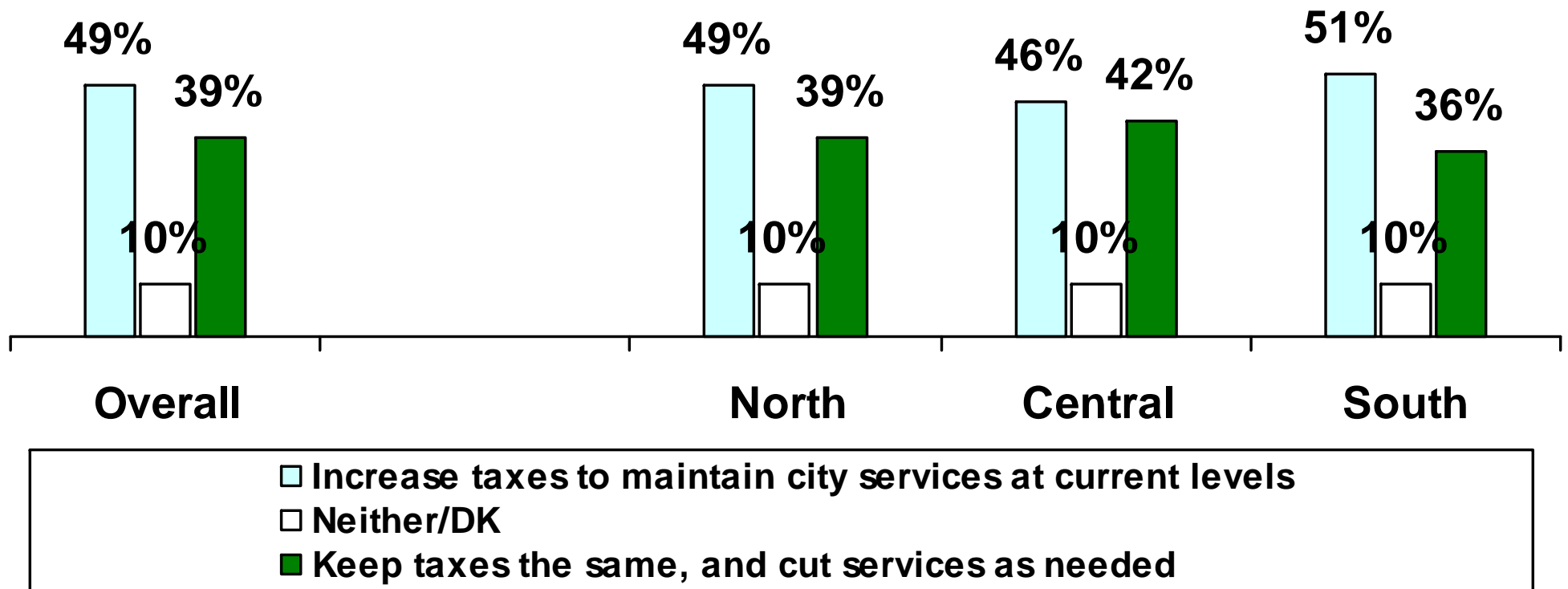


The proportion of voters who select increasing taxes to maintain city services has grown from 36% in 2004 to 49% in 2008.

Taxes & Services

By Geography

Which of the following would you choose?

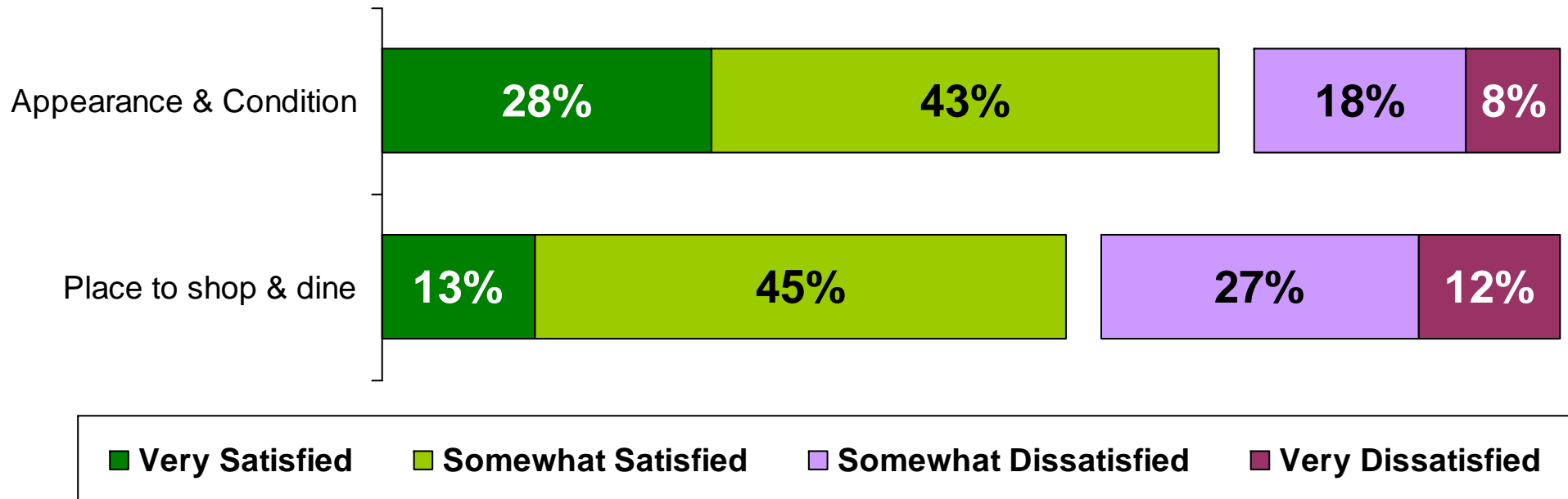


Increasing taxes to maintain city services is the top choice in each part of the Island, though the differences in North and Central are close.

Support for increasing taxes to maintain services is strongest in the South (51%).

City's Town Center

How would you rate your satisfaction with the City's Town Center?



A majority of voters are satisfied with the City's Town Center, both in its appearance/condition (71%) and as a place to shop and dine (58%).

Dissatisfaction with the appearance runs higher with voters 50+ years old (31%) than <50 (15%). Geographically, dissatisfaction with appearance varies only slightly (North 28% / Center 26% / South 23%).

Dissatisfaction with the Center as a place to dine and shop is higher among women (41%) than men (36%), but there are no differences by geography or age groupings.

Safety

Using a scale of one to seven, where 1 is completely unsafe and 7 is completely safe, how would you rate your feeling walking alone . . .

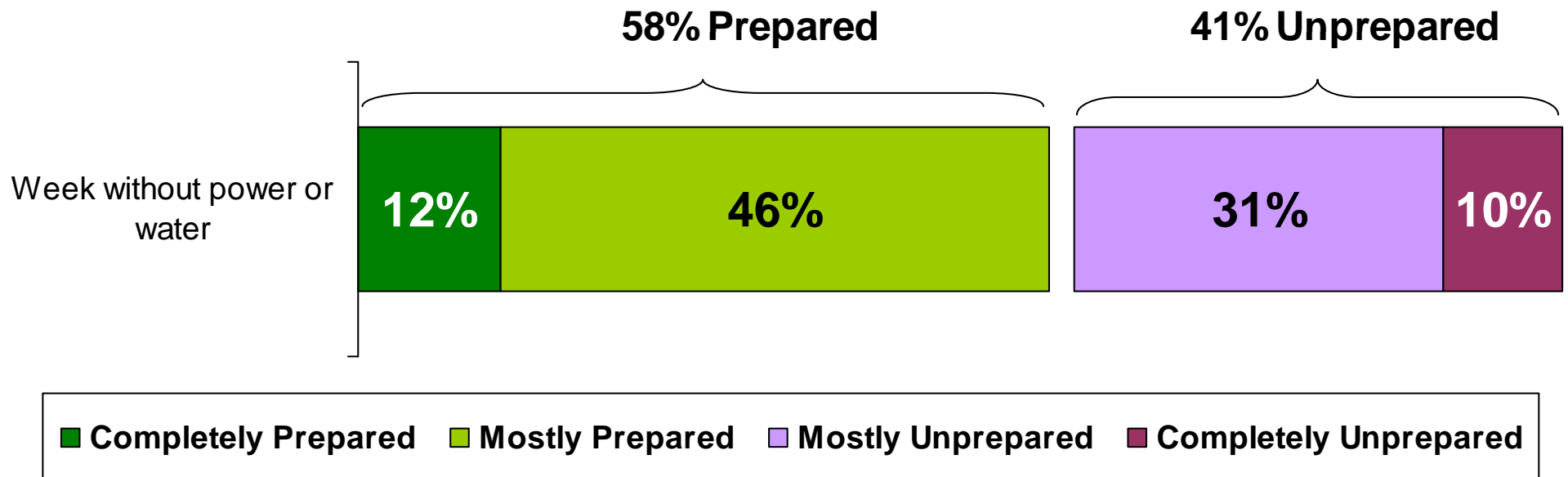
	<u>Overall</u> <i>(mean)</i>	<u>North</u> <i>(mean)</i>	<u>Central</u> <i>(mean)</i>	<u>South</u> <i>(mean)</i>
In your neighborhood	6.44	6.37	6.42	6.53
In the City's town center	6.48	6.53	6.45	6.45

Voters overwhelmingly feel safe walking alone in both their neighborhood and the City's town center, regardless of their geographic area. The mean score is very close to 7, the highest rating.

Virtually all voters (86%) rate their safety as a "6" or "7" for both questions.

Earthquake Preparedness

Q50 - If there were an earthquake, and your household lost power and access to the City's water system for 7 days, how prepared would you say your household is to be completely self-sustaining for this time period?



Renters (45% Prepared) are much less likely than homeowners (60% Prepared) to be prepared.

The younger generation is also less prepared (53% of <50 year olds prepared vs. 60% of those 50+).

Households with children are less prepared (54% Prepared) than households without children (61% Prepared).

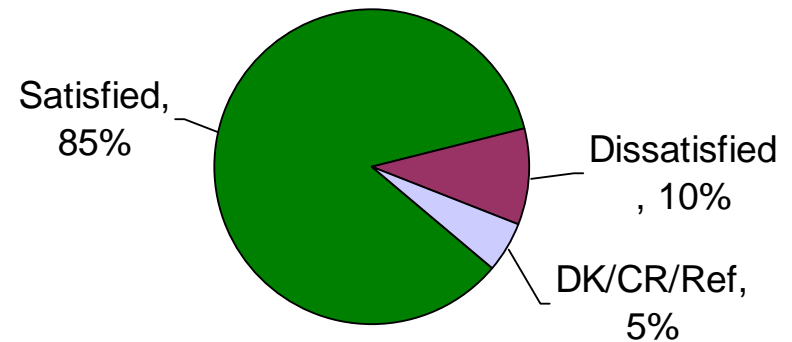
Keeping Voters Informed

From what source do you receive most of your information regarding issues facing the City of Mercer Island?

- 51% Mercer Island Reporter**
- 6% Mercer Island Website**
- 5% Mercer Island Quarterly**
- 2% City of Mercer Island**
- 1% Mercer Island Weekly**

35% Other

How satisfied are you with the City's efforts to keep you informed through newsletters, the City's website, and the Mercer Island Reporter?



A majority of voters receive their information about Mercer Island through the Reporter (51%) and the overwhelming majority are satisfied with the City's efforts to keep them informed (85%).

Voters in all geographies are equally satisfied.