

City of Mercer Island

City Budget Survey Summary Report

June 2004



Purpose and Methodology

- ◆ The purpose of the survey was to help the City understand voter priorities, evaluate the City's performance in a variety of service areas, and establish baseline measurements to track changes in these figures over time.
- ◆ When possible, figures have been compared with results from the 2002 EMC voter survey about the Community Center.
- ◆ Four hundred and one (401) interviews were conducted among registered voters in the City of Mercer Island.
- ◆ The margin of error for the overall results is ± 4.9 points.
- ◆ Trained, professional telephone interviewers calling from a central, monitored location conducted the interviews during the evening and weekend hours of May 17 - 19, 2004.
- ◆ Results were weighted when necessary to accurately reflect the demographics of voters on Mercer Island.

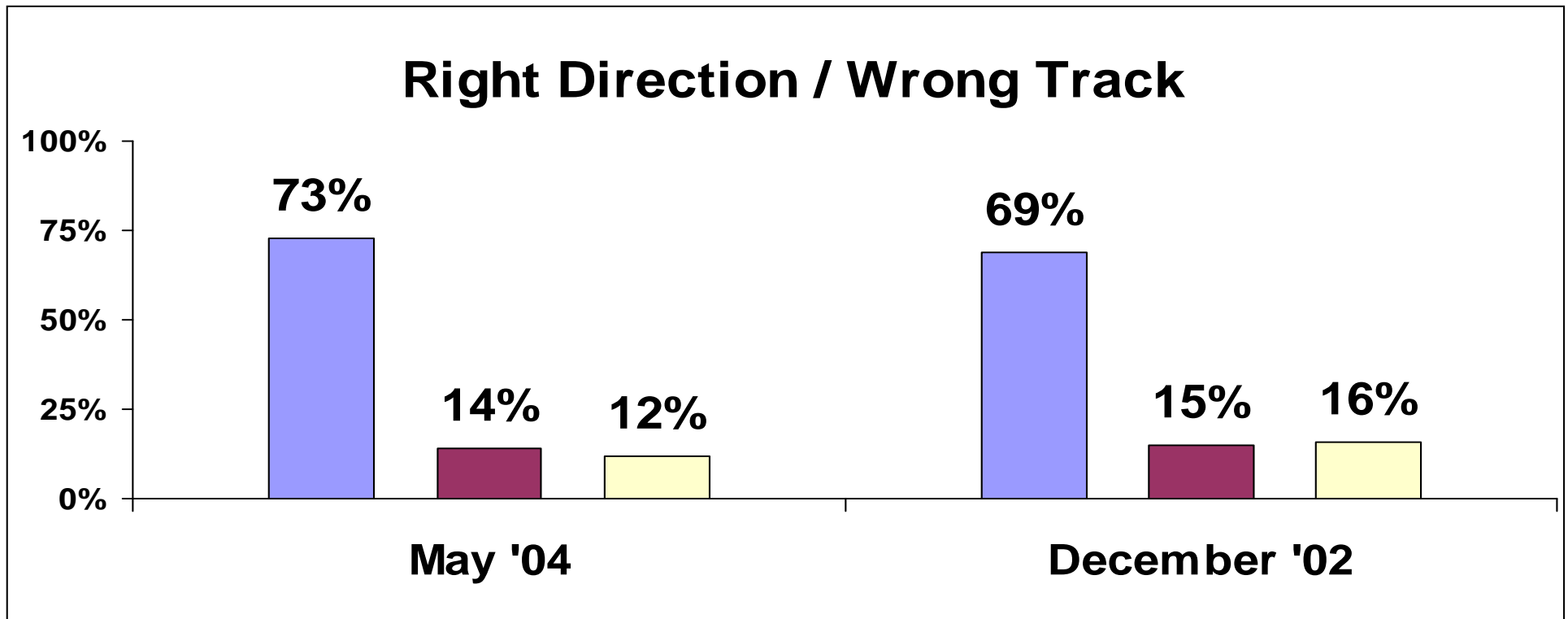
Key Findings

- 1. Voters trust the City to spend tax dollars responsibly.**
- 2. Voters have few concerns about City finances.**
- 3. Voters give outstanding job performance ratings to most City services and the Police Department.**
- 4. Emergency and Police services are clearly the top priorities of voters.**
- 5. Voters are closely divided on the tax rates they are paying.**
- 6. Opinions on tax rates vary depending on how directly voters are connected with how taxes are spent.**
- 7. The first instinct of a majority of voters is to hold the line on taxes. But once voters are informed of the cost, a majority prefer increasing taxes to maintain services.**

General Issue Environment

Right Direction / Wrong Track

Q4 – 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?



This question measures general optimism, and is influenced by economic and more recently, public security concerns. Today's figures on the Island are nearly identical to those from late 2002.

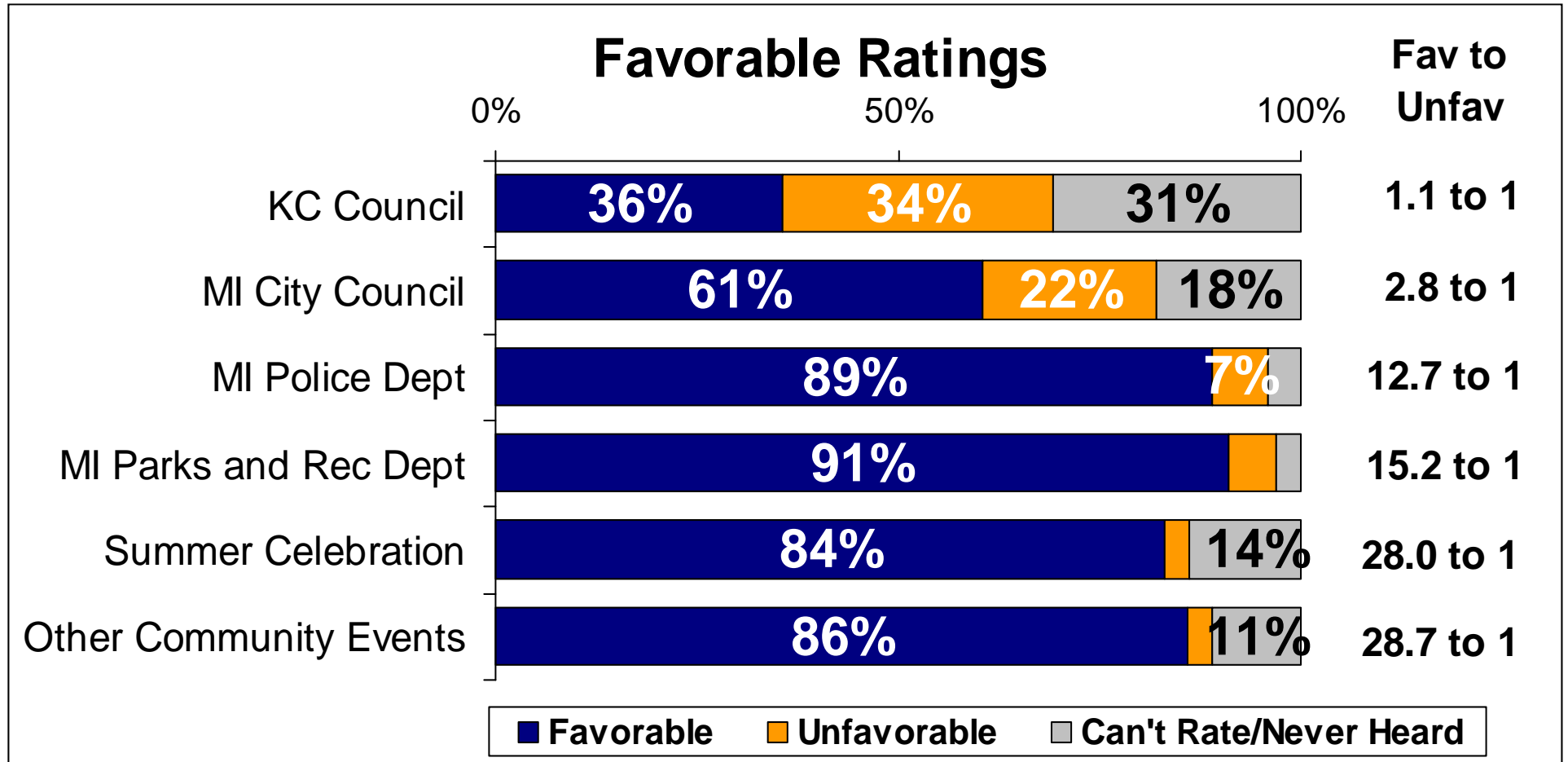
Most Important Problem

5. What do you think is the most important problem facing Mercer Island today?

Overcrowding/Overdevelopment	23 %
Education	15 %
Transportation	14 %
High Taxes/High Cost of Living	10 %
Environment/Preserving Parks	4 %
Lack of Affordable Housing	3 %

Specific open-ended responses in “overcrowding/overdevelopment” reveal many of these concerns revolve around development in the downtown core.

Favorable Ratings

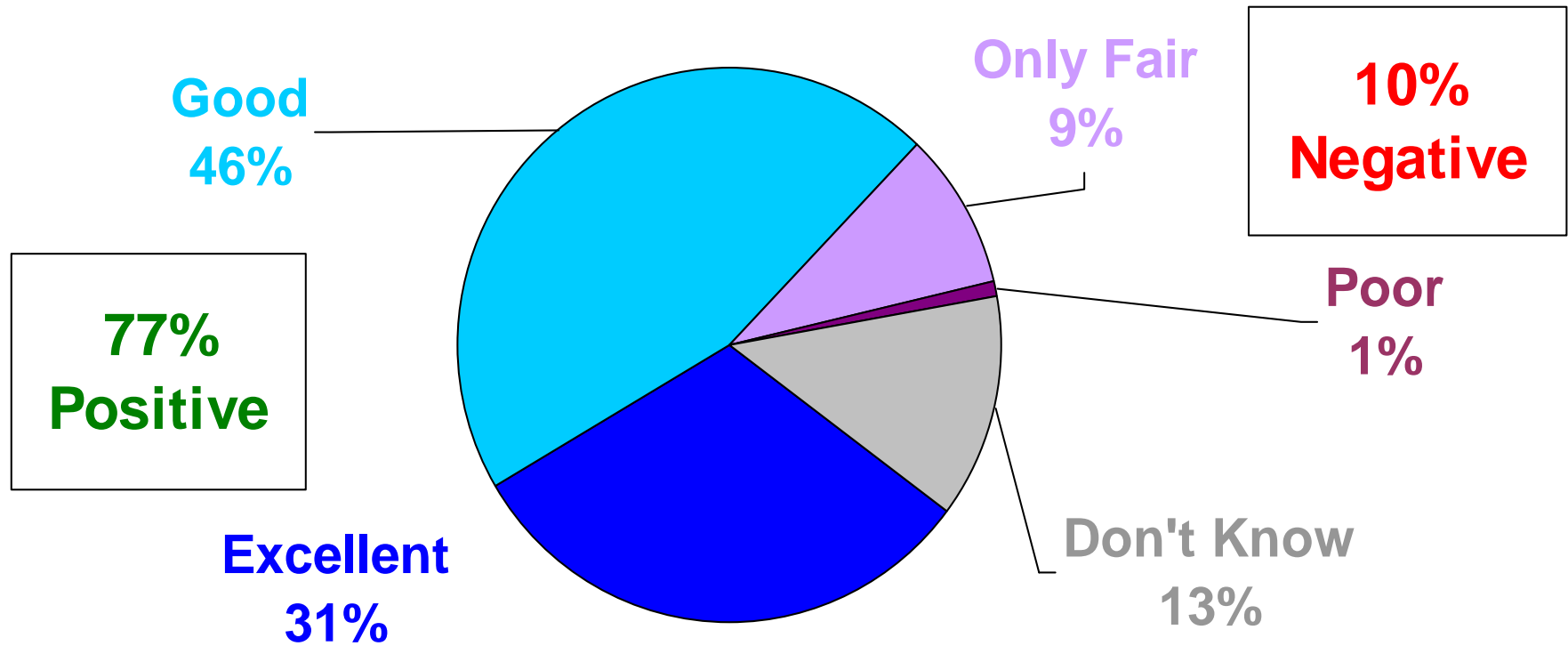


Ratings for the City Council are very strong, while ratings for other City agencies and events are outstanding.

City's Financial Health

Q12 – How would you rate the overall financial health of the City of Mercer Island?

MI's Financial Health

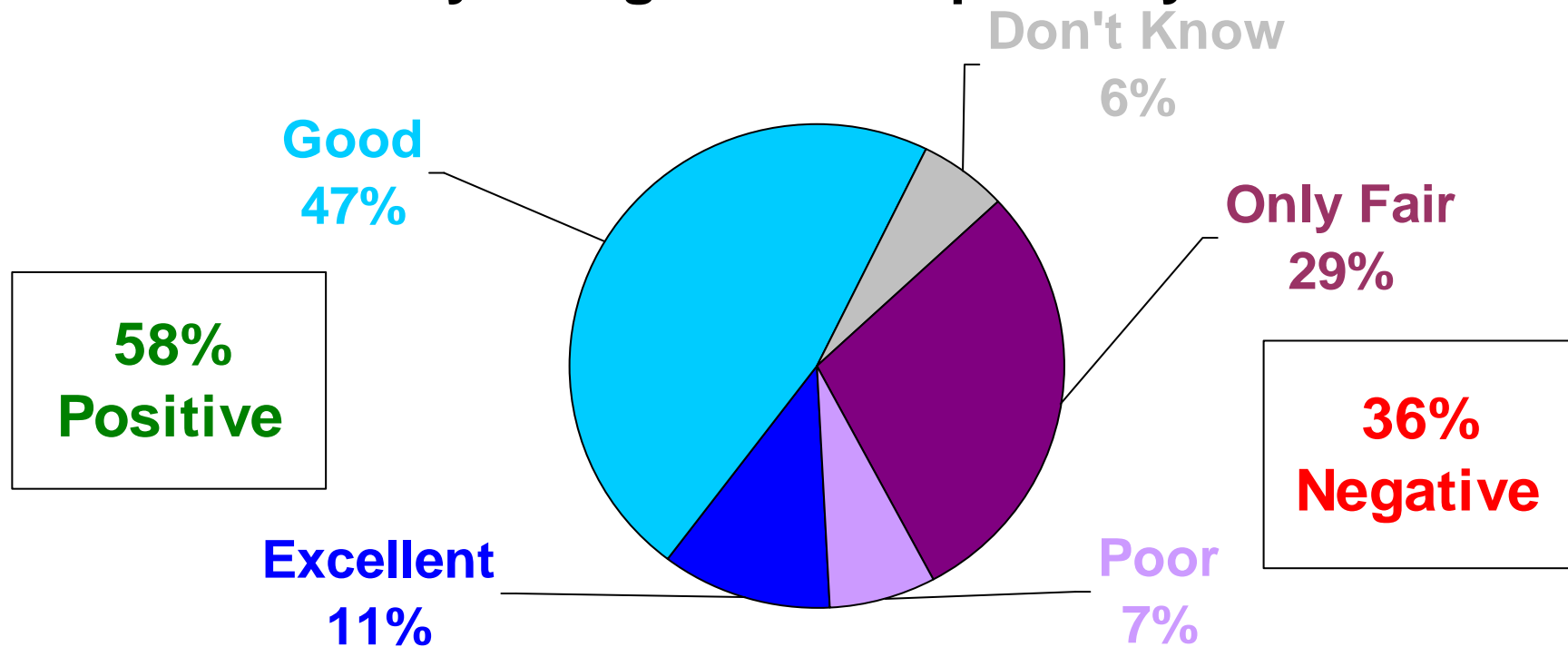


Few voters have concerns about the finances of the City.

City Using Tax Dollars

Q12 – 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?

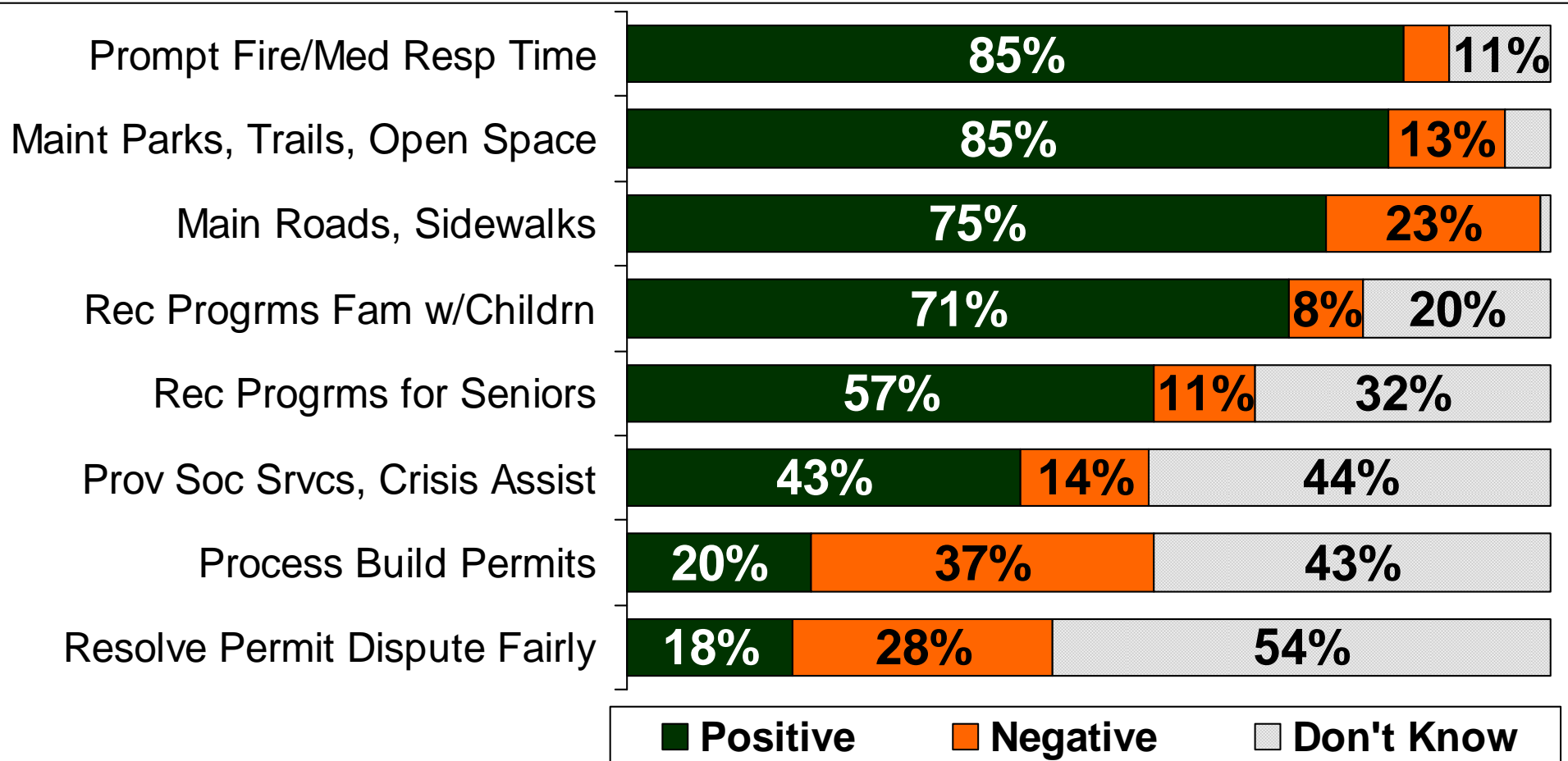
City Using Tax \$ Responsibly



A majority of voters think the City of Mercer Island is doing a good job using tax dollars responsibly, indicating a high level of voter trust in City government.

City Job Ratings

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

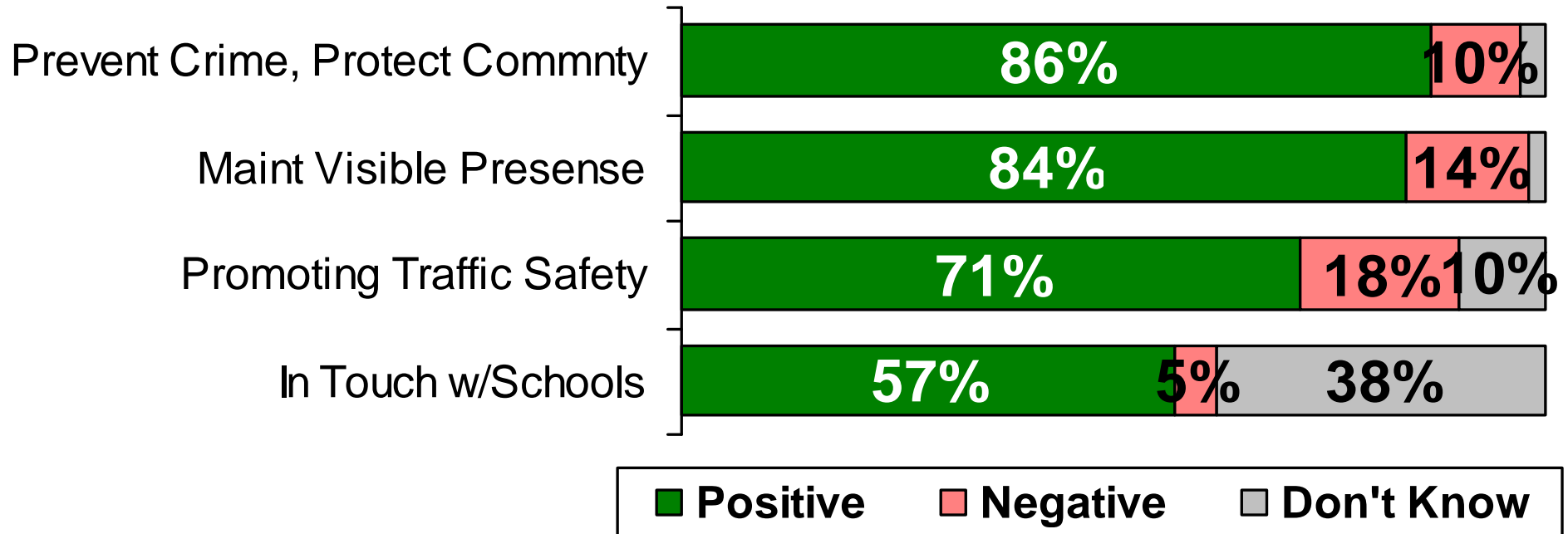


A majority of voters think the City of Mercer Island is doing a good job on all but two of the items tested, both of which relate to construction and permitting.

Police Department Job Ratings

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

Police Department Job Ratings



A strong majority of voters give positive ratings to specific components of the work of the Mercer Island Police Department.

Voter Opinion of City Priorities

Forced Choice Ranking – Group One

Item	1 st Choice %	Average Rank	Overall Rank
GROUP ONE			
Ensuring prompt fire and medical aid call response times	32 %	2.9	1
Preventing crime and protecting the community	35 %	3.2	2

Police and emergency services are the two most important items to voters.

Voter Opinion of City Priorities

Forced Choice Ranking – Group Two

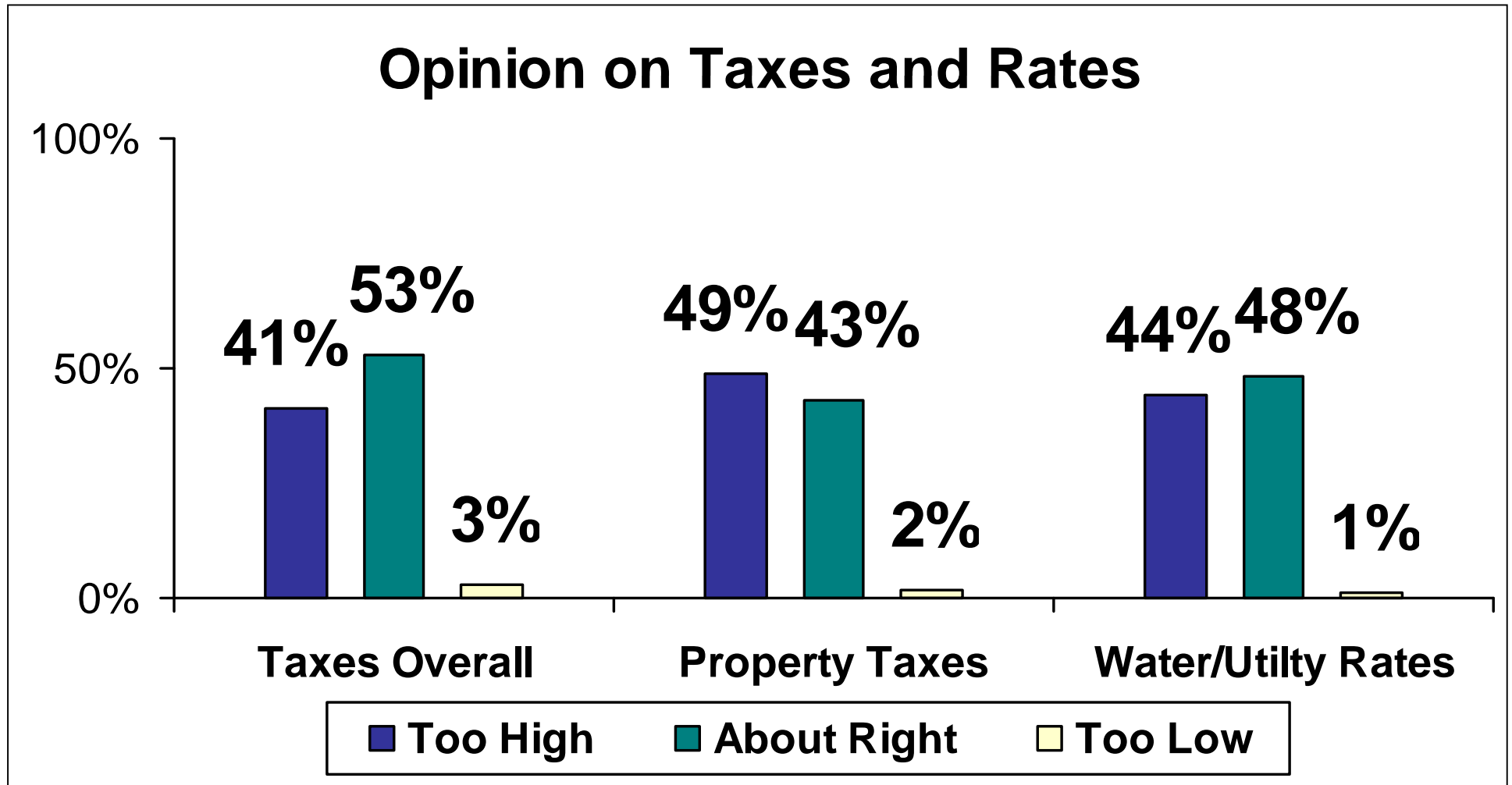
Item	1 st Choice %	Average Rank	Overall Rank
GROUP TWO			
Maintaining roads and sidewalks	5 %	5.0	3
Protecting our water from pollution	5 %	5.4	4
Maintaining parks, trails, and open space	4 %	5.8	5
Providing police officers in schools through the DARE program	3 %	6.1	6
Providing social services, like mental health counselors or temporary crisis assistance to families in need with clothing, some food, or help with bills	4 %	6.2	7
Providing recreation programs for kids, adults, and seniors	4 %	6.2	8
Providing senior services like help for seniors and their families evaluating their need for assisted living	4 %	6.2	9
Providing mental health & drug and alcohol counselors in schools	3 %	6.4	10

Voter Opinion of City Priorities

Forced Choice Ranking – Group Three

Item	1 st Choice %	Average Rank	Overall Rank
GROUP THREE			
Processing building and construction permitting in a timely manner and addressing permitting disputes fairly	2 %	7.8	11
Providing and maintaining sports and athletic facilities	1 %	7.9	12
Conducting community events like Summer Celebration	0 %	8.1	13
Caring for the community's trees and planter beds	1 %	8.2	14
Sponsoring public art programs	0 %	9.3	15

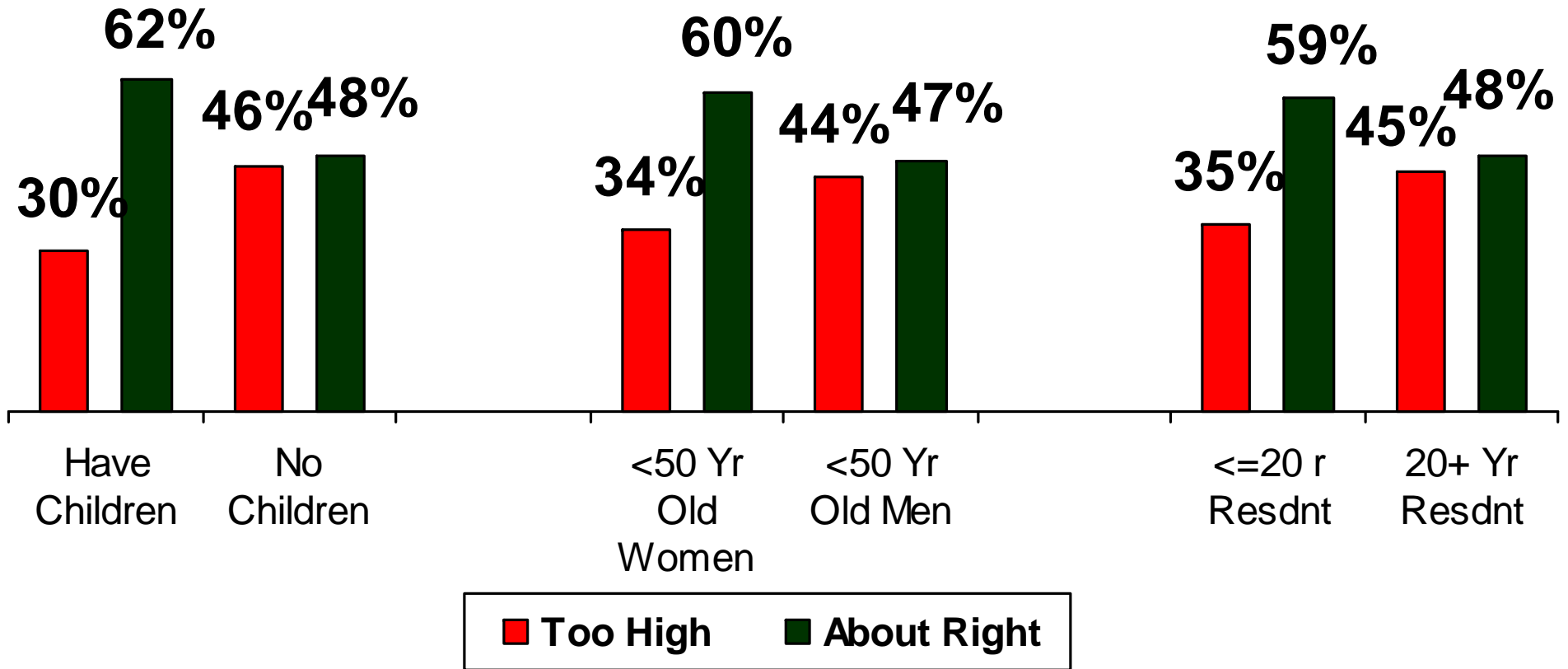
Opinions on Taxes and Rates



Voters are closely divided about the rate of taxes they pay overall.

Subgroup Differences on Taxes Overall

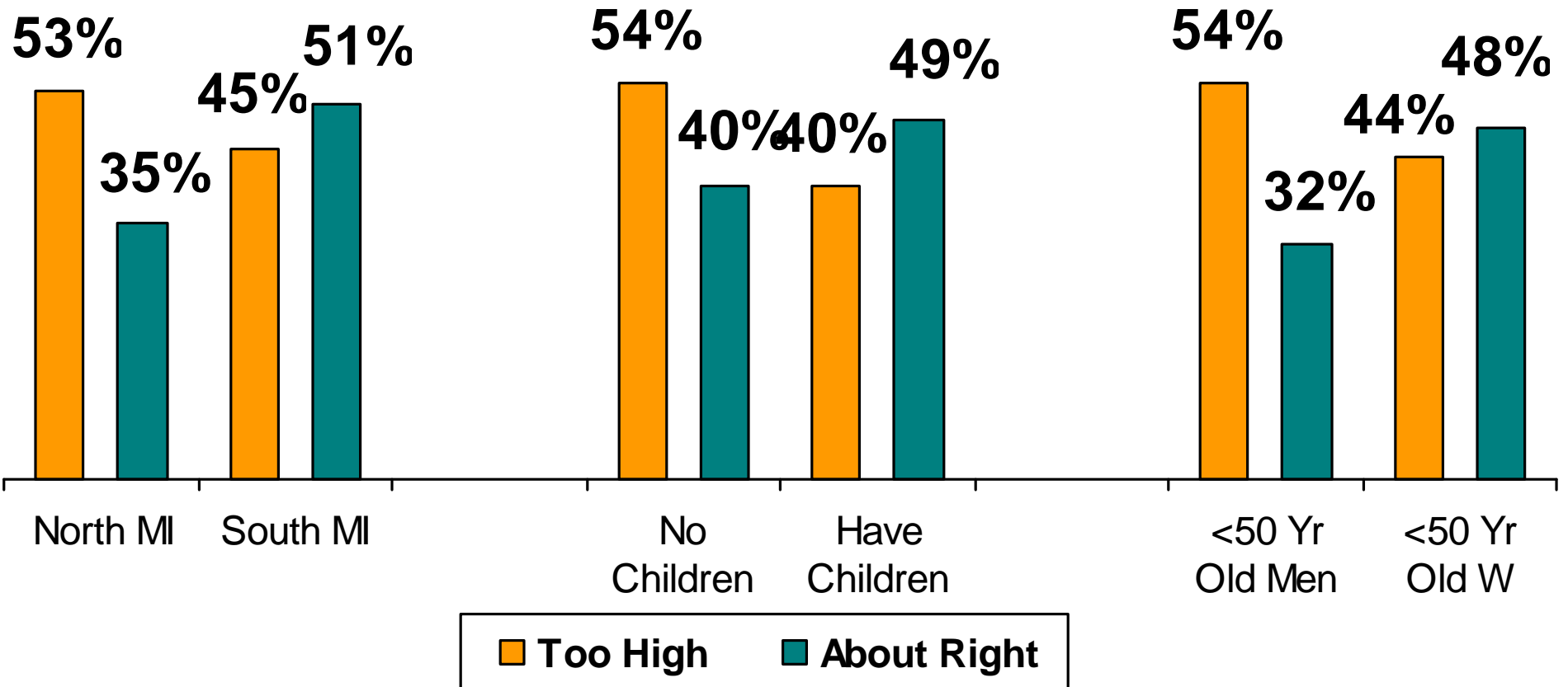
Opinion on Taxes Overall



Voters with more direct ties to how taxes are spent are more likely to say their tax rate is “about right”.

Subgroup Differences on Property Taxes

Opinion on Property Taxes



Services and Taxes

If you had to choose only one, which of the following would you choose for the City of Mercer Island?

Increase taxes to maintain city services at current levels allowing for population growth and inflation **36**

OR

Keep taxes the same, and cut services as needed when population growth and inflation outpace revenues **51**

Other **13**

A majority of voters initially say that taxes should be kept the same, and services should be cut as needed.

Services and Taxes

If you knew that the difference between these two choices is a one percent increase per year in property taxes, which is about six dollars a year for the average Mercer Island homeowner, which would you choose?

Increase taxes one percent per year, or about six dollars for the average homeowner, to maintain services at current levels, allowing for population growth and inflation	57 (+21)
OR	
Keep taxes the same, and cut services as needed when population growth and inflation outpace revenues	34 (-24)
Other	9

When voters know the difference between keeping taxes the same and maintaining services is about \$6 per year, a majority choose increasing taxes.