Legislation and Communications Committee

Update on Public Opinion Research for Pure Water Southern California

Item 6a

August 19, 2024

Public Views of the Pure Water Southern California Program

Key Findings of Recent Opinion Research
August 2024

FM3 RESEARCH | OPINION RESEARCH & STRATEGY

320-1144

Survey Methodology

Dates	May 19-30, 2024
Survey Type	Dual-mode Resident Survey
Research Population	Residents in Los Angeles County to be Served by the Pure Water Southern California Program
Total Interviews	1,010
Margin of Sampling Error	(Full Sample) ±3.1% at the 95% Confidence Level (Half Sample) ±4.4% at the 95% Confidence Level
Contact Methods	 Telephone Calls  Email Invitations
Data Collection Modes	 Telephone Interviews  Online Interviews
Survey Tracking	2017 and 2022
Languages	English & Spanish

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

Qualitative Research Methodology

FM3 conducted four focus groups designed to:

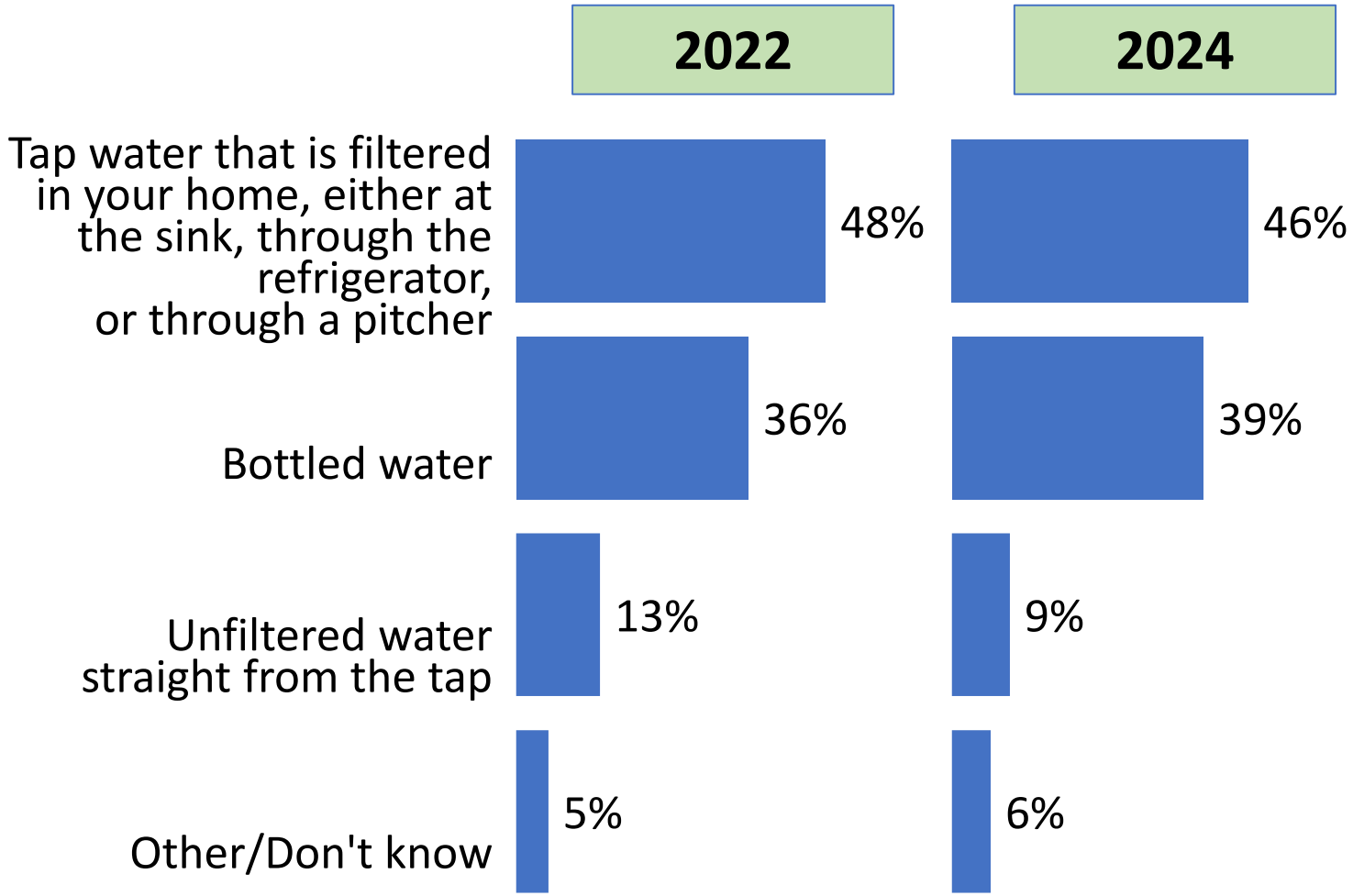
- Assess awareness and understanding of sources of water for the region;
- Gauge familiarity and comfort with recycled water, for non-potable and potable use, including direct potable reuse;
- Measure initial support for the Pure Water Southern California Program; and
- Review key messages and communications materials.

Focus Groups

Date	Location	Target Group	Language
February 28, 2024	Pasadena, CA	Female San Gabriel Valley Residents	English
February 28, 2024	Pasadena, CA	Male San Gabriel Valley Residents	English
February 29, 2024	Cerritos, CA	Mixed Gender Gateway Cities Residents	English
February 29, 2024	Cerritos, CA	Gateway Cities Latino Residents	Spanish

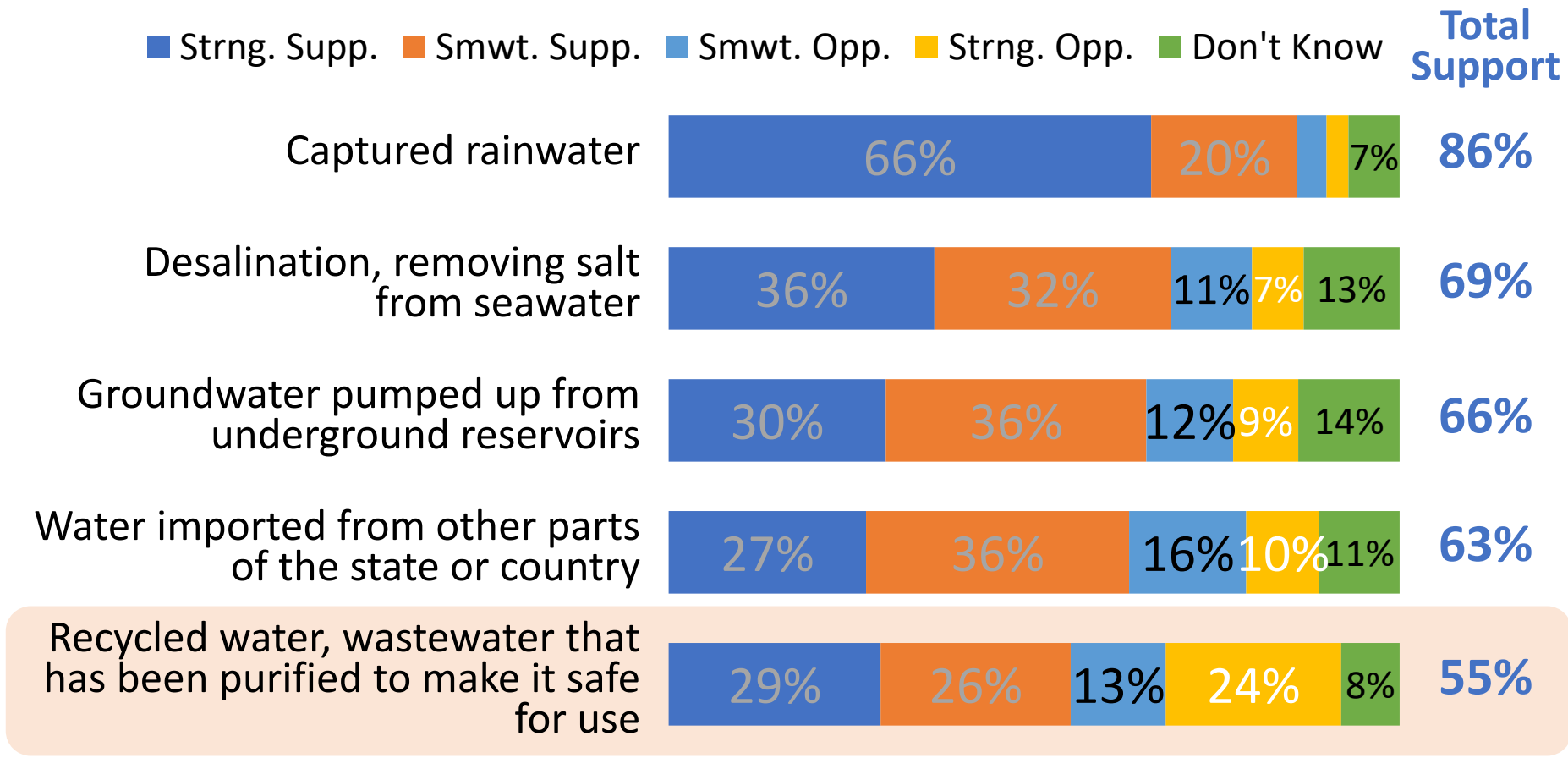
As in 2022, most local residents drink either filtered tap water or bottled water.

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



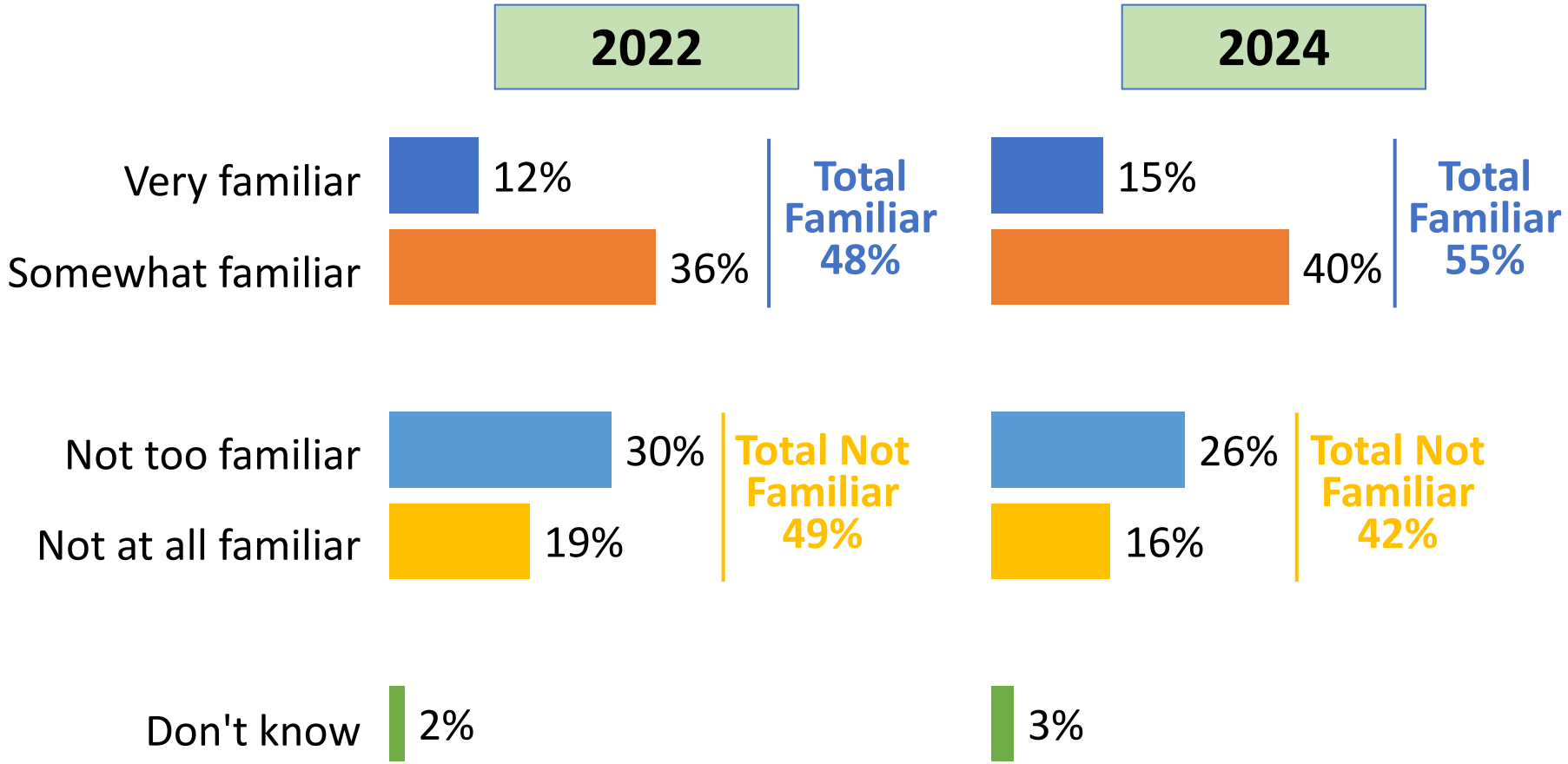
Q6.

With the amount of rainfall over the last two years, captured rainwater appears top of mind, but majorities open to every other source of drinking water.



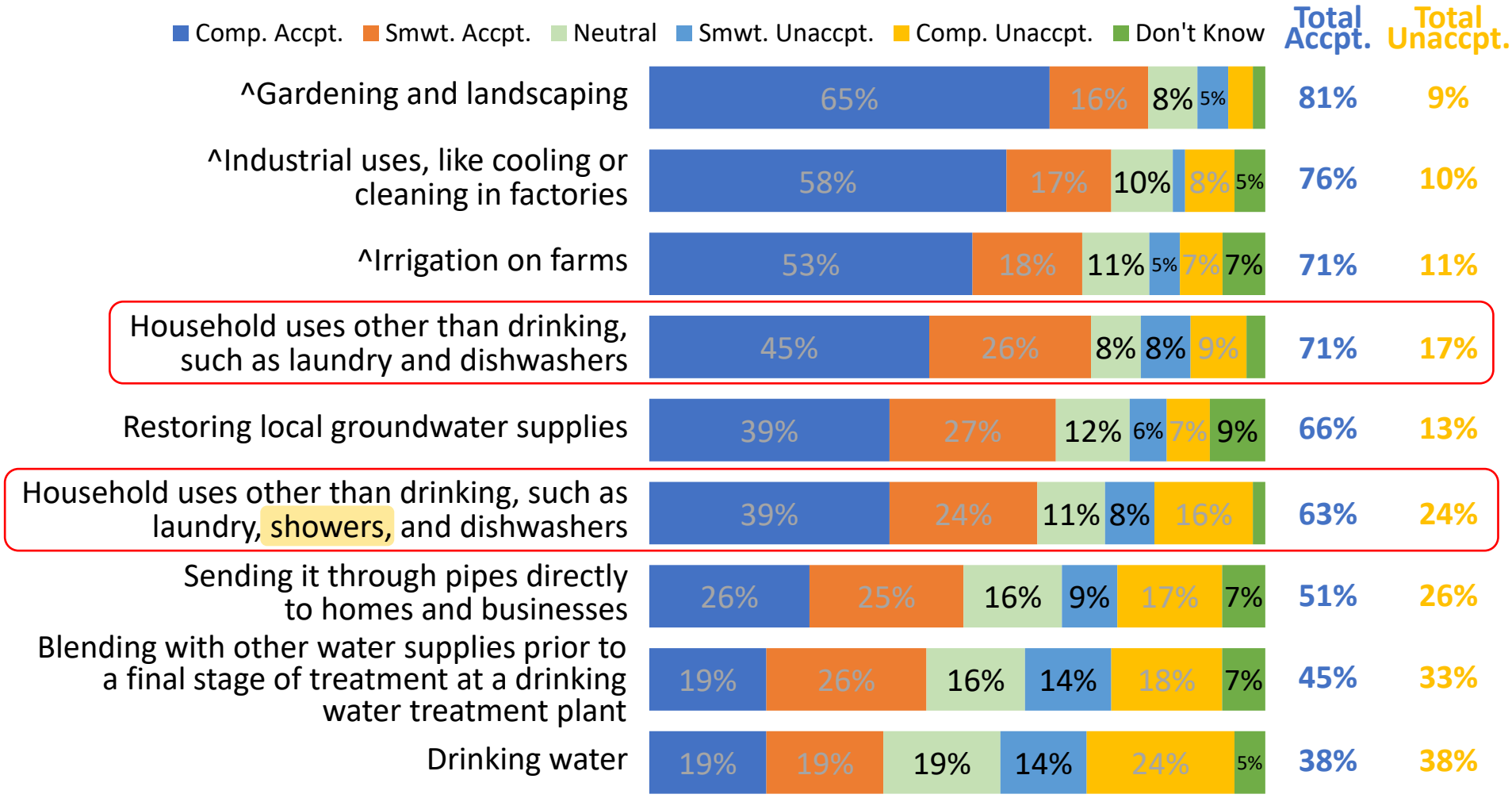
Q7. As you may know, there are many different ways that the Los Angeles area can get water to meet its future needs. I'm going to read you a list of potential sources of water for your region: please indicate whether, in general, you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose obtaining drinking water through each method.

Familiarity with recycled water has increased since 2022, with over half of local residents at least somewhat familiar with the concept.



Q8. How familiar would you say you are with recycled water: very familiar, somewhat familiar, not too familiar, or not at all familiar?

Residents remain most comfortable using recycled water for non-potable purposes.



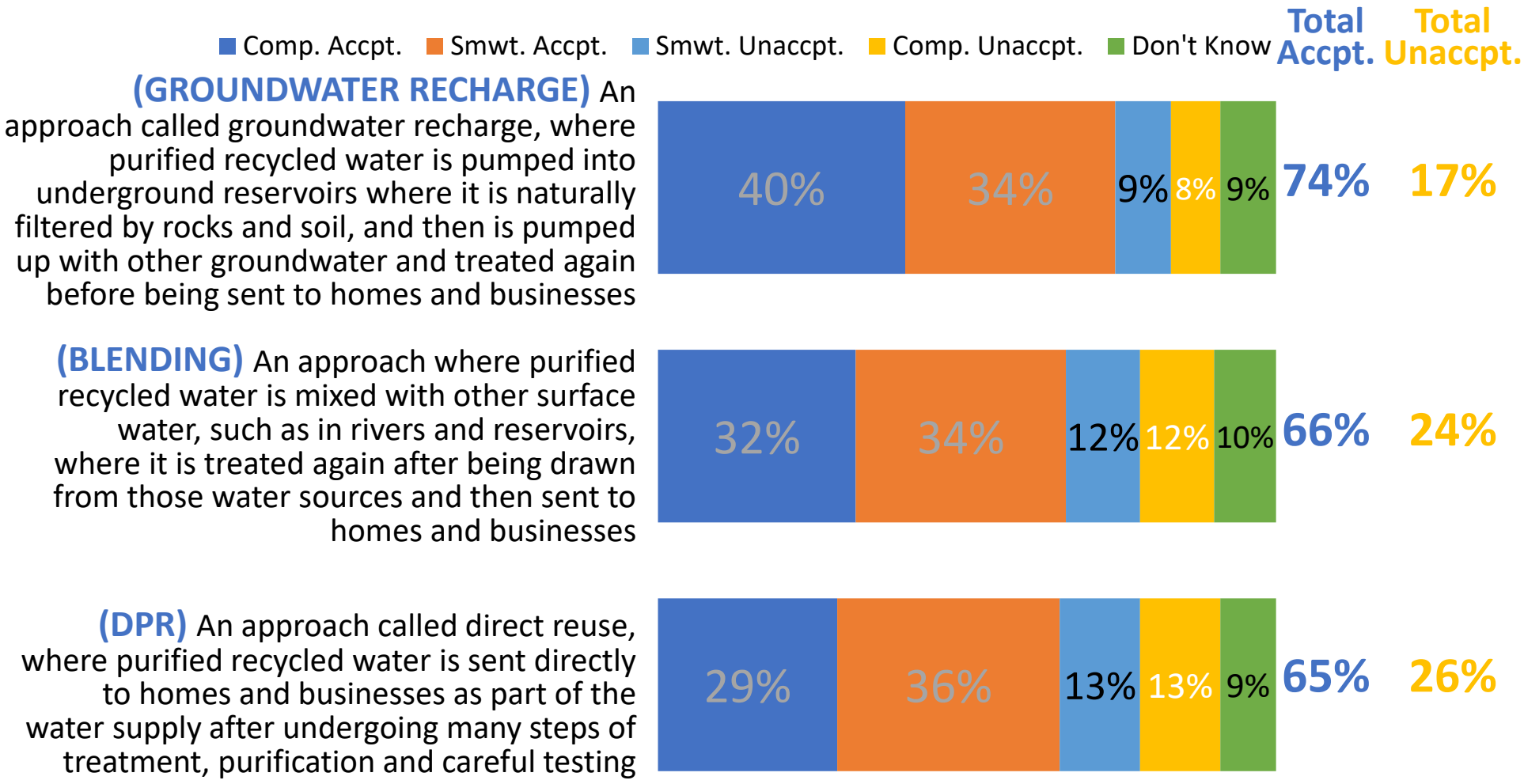
Q9. Recycled water refers to wastewater that comes from homes and businesses and is then treated to very high standards of purity so it can be reused. I am now going to read you a list of potential uses for recycled water that has been purified to drinking water standards established by the State of California. Please indicate whether you consider each item to be a completely acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable, or completely unacceptable use for purified recycled water. ^Not Part of Split Sample

Since 2022, there has been an increase in the proportions calling sending water directly to homes and businesses and restoring local groundwater "acceptable" uses.

Potential Use for Recycled Water	Total Acceptable			Total Unacceptable			Change in Total Acceptable *(2022-2024)*
	2017	2022	2024	2017	2022	2024	
Sending it through pipes directly to homes and businesses	--	42%	51%	--	35%	26%	+9%
Restoring local groundwater supplies	--	58%	66%	--	15%	13%	+8%
[O] ^Industrial uses, like cooling or cleaning in factories	79%	71%	76%	9%	13%	10%	+5%
[O] ^Irrigation on farms	84%	69%	71%	6%	14%	11%	+2%
Drinking water	59%	36%	38%	32%	47%	38%	+2%
^Gardening and landscaping	88%	80%	81%	7%	9%	9%	+1%
[O]Blending with other water supplies prior to a final stage of treatment at a drinking water treatment plant	--	46%	45%	--	27%	33%	-1%

Q9. Recycled water refers to wastewater that comes from homes and businesses and is then treated to very high standards of purity so it can be reused. I am now going to read you a list of potential uses for recycled water that has been purified to drinking water standards established by the State of California. Please indicate whether you consider each item to be a completely acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable, or completely unacceptable use for purified recycled water. ^Not Part of Split Sample; [O] Worded Slightly Different in Previous Surveys

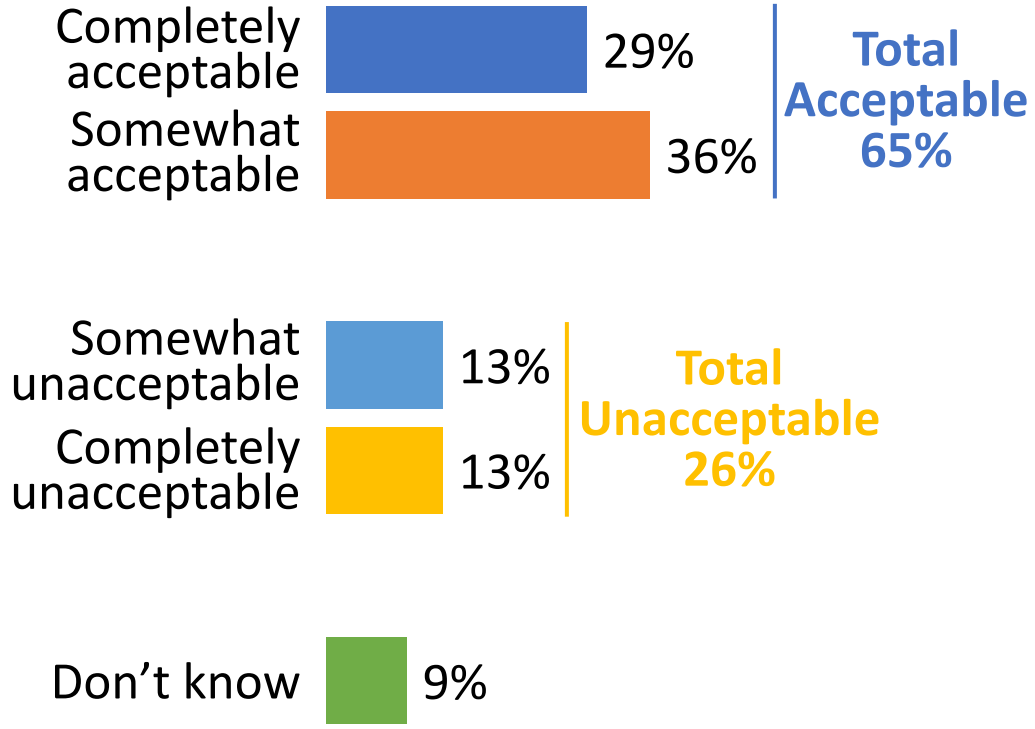
Residents are most likely to find groundwater recharge an acceptable method of delivering purified recycled water.



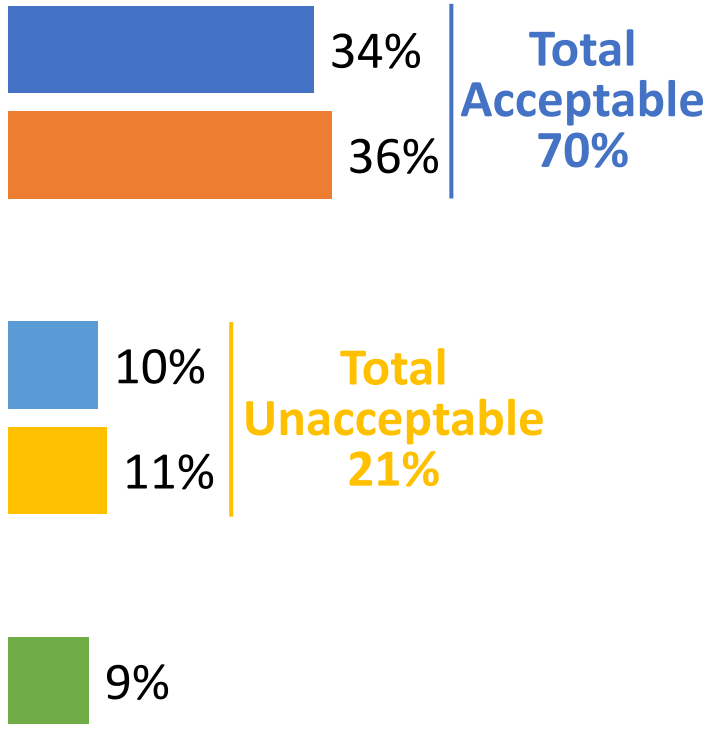
Q10. Purified recycled water can make its way to your home through a variety of methods. I am going to read you some ways in which purified recycled water may make its way to your home. Please indicate whether you consider each approach to be a completely acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable, or completely unacceptable way to deliver purified recycled water.

The acceptability of DPR increases slightly after residents hear more about Pure Water Southern California and its potential benefits.

***(DPR)** An approach called direct reuse, where purified recycled water is sent directly to homes and businesses as part of the water supply after undergoing many steps of treatment, purification and careful testing*



I'd like to ask you again about the approach called direct reuse, where purified recycled water is sent directly to homes and businesses as part of the water supply after undergoing many steps of treatment, purification and careful testing.



Q10a. Purified recycled water can make its way to your home through a variety of methods. I am going to read you some ways in which purified recycled water may make its way to your home. Please indicate whether you consider each approach to be a completely acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable, or completely unacceptable way to deliver purified recycled water.
Q15. Do you consider this to be a completely acceptable, somewhat acceptable, somewhat unacceptable, or completely unacceptable way to deliver purified recycled water?

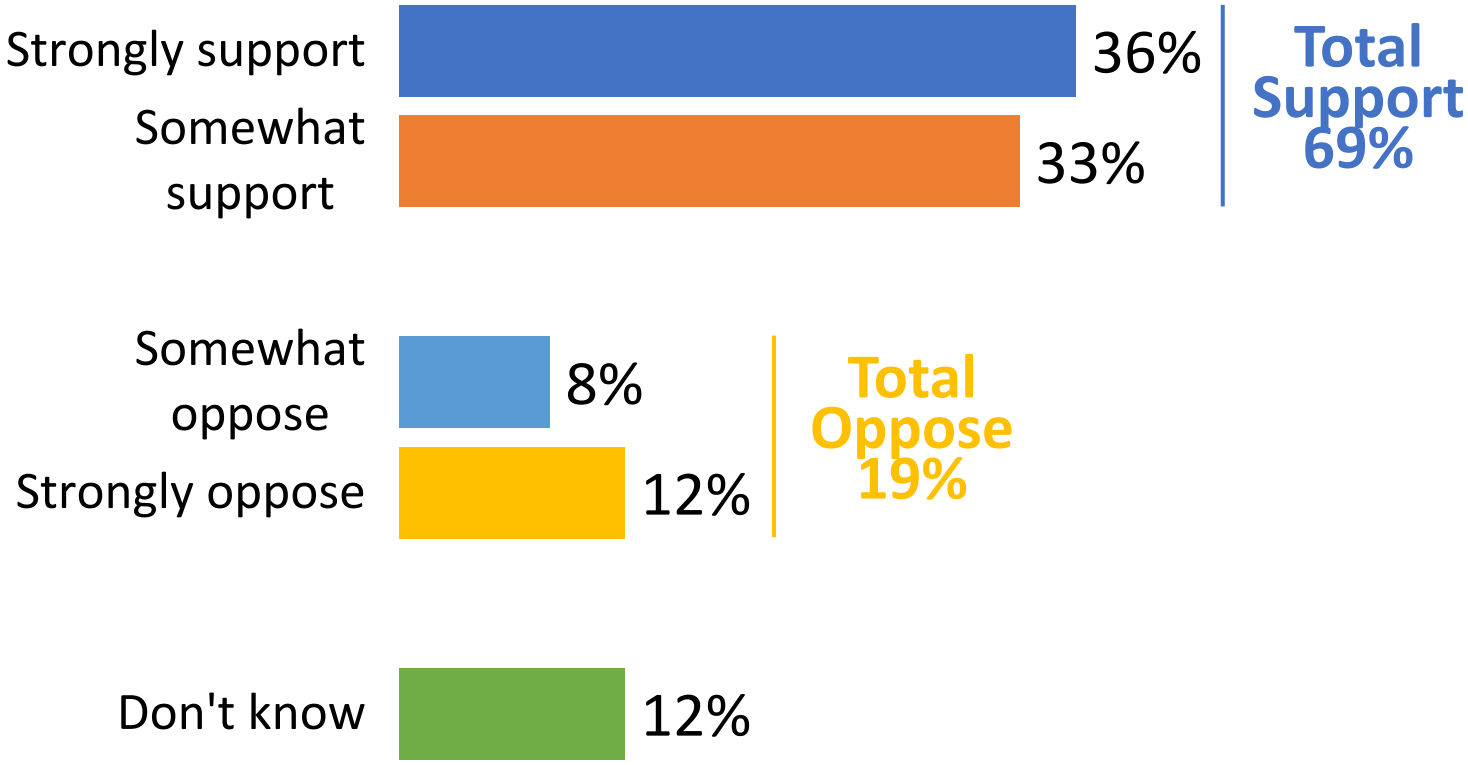
Survey respondents were provided a short description of the program.

The Metropolitan Water District and the Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts are introducing a new project to expand the use of recycled water in the region, called the Pure Water Southern California program. This program would clean and purify wastewater from homes and businesses at a facility near Carson, then re-introduce it back into our water supply — where it would be cleaned and purified again before being delivered to homes and businesses throughout the Los Angeles area.

Once fully implemented over ten to fifteen years, the program would provide 150 million gallons of water each day — enough for 1.5 million people. This would expand our local water supplies and reduce our reliance on water brought from other places hundreds of miles away.

After the short description, nearly seven-in-ten support the program.

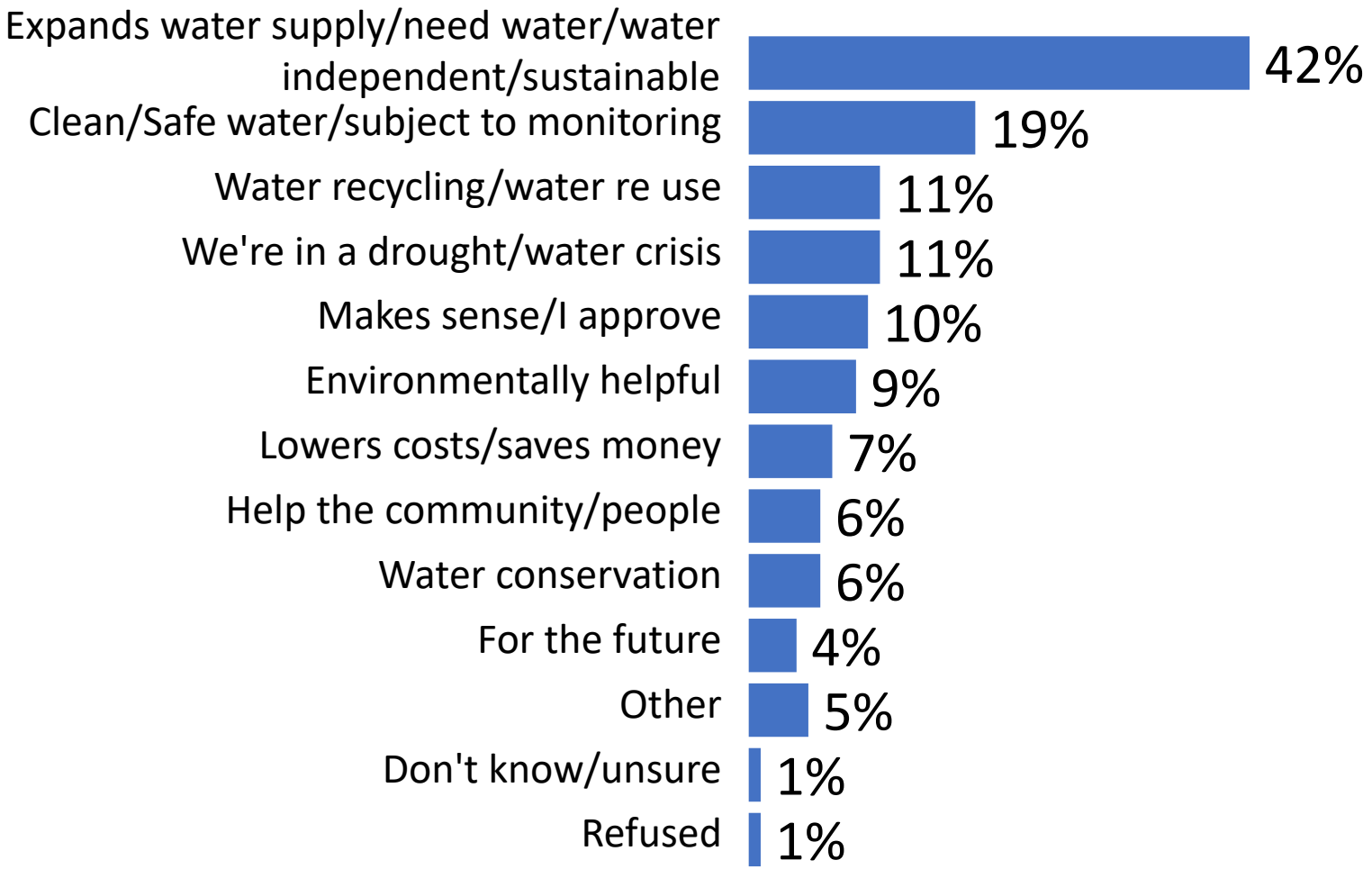
From what you have heard, would you support or oppose the Pure Water Southern California Program?



Q11.

Taken together, the need to ensure a reliable local water supply is the leading reason to support the program.

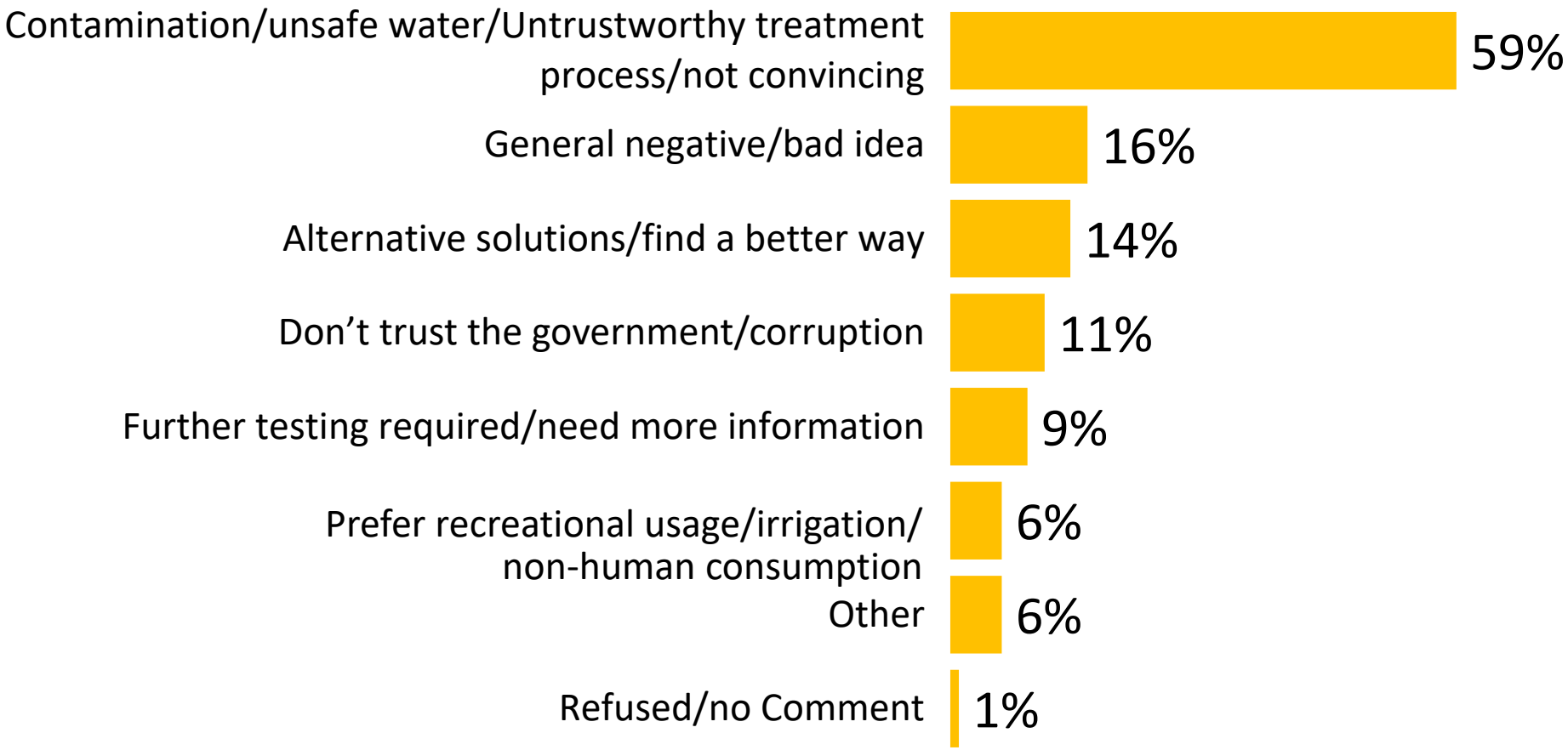
*In a few words of your own, why would you **SUPPORT** this program?*
(Open-ended; Asked of Supporters Only; n=697)



Q12a.

The top reasons to oppose the program include distrust of treatment process and fear recycled water could be unsafe.

*In a few words of your own, why would you **OPPOSE** this program?*
(Open-ended; Asked of Opponents Only; n=196)



Q12b.

The most impactful message focuses on securing a reliable supply of water for future generations.

Ranked by Very Convincing	
44%	**(FUTURE)** We need to consider all options to ensure a reliable and locally-controlled supply of water for ourselves and future generations. In order to make sure our children and grandchildren have a reliable supply of water, we need to make investments in new, local water supplies today.
40%	**(RESILIENT)** With climate change and frequent drought, and groundwater supplies steadily being drained, it is important that communities in Southern California do not have to rely on a single source of water. This program creates a local supply of water that is drought-proof and reliable, even in case of emergencies like earthquakes that could potentially disrupt our current supplies from the Colorado River and Sierra Nevada.

*Q13. I am going to read you some statements made by supporters of the Pure Water Southern California Program. Please tell me if you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support this program. *Split Sample*

Highlighting monitoring is critical.

Ranked by Very Convincing	
39%	*(MONITORING) California's drinking water standards are among the strictest in the nation, with new State standards for using purified recycled water for drinking recently announced after ten years of careful planning and review. Water from this program would comply with those standards. Recycled water produced here in LA County will be regularly tested in real time with online sensors and in laboratories - and the quality of the water, once it has been purified, will be monitored by the State of California Division of Drinking Water.
39%	(ADOPTION) Several California communities, including those in Orange County, have already used recycled water for drinking and household use for more than 20 years. They have been taking advantage of the more reliable local water supply that recycled water provides, and there have been no reported health problems from its use. There's no reason LA County can't benefit from using more recycled water as other communities have.
38%	(ENVIRONMENTAL) Instead of letting wastewater from our homes and businesses flow out to the ocean, this program uses a state-of-the-art purification process to capture and recycle this water. The more recycled water we use, the less we have to take out of rivers and streams, and the less wastewater ends up in the ocean. That's good for rivers, streams, and the fish, plants and wildlife that rely on them.

*Q13. I am going to read you some statements made by supporters of the Pure Water Southern California Program. Please tell me if you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support this program. *Split Sample*

Messaging around the multi-stage treatment process is more effective when combined with comparing purity standards to those of bottled water.

Ranked by Very Convincing	
36%	**(GROUNDWATER)** Groundwater basins in the region provide 30% of Southern California's water supply. However, we have seen levels drop to historic lows in recent years. This program will produce safe, high-quality water that can refill these basins and ensure our communities continue to have access to safe, reliable groundwater.
36%	***(PURIFICATION/BOTTLED)** Public health is the top priority in this program. The water purification process uses state-of-the-art multi-stage technology, including reverse osmosis and advanced oxidation. The purification processes used in this program will produce water that meets even higher standards of purity than bottled water does.
36%	**(COST EFFECTIVENESS)** Over time, this program is far more cost-effective than alternative approaches like taking the salt out of seawater. With inflation on the rise and many families having a hard time making ends meet, we need to make the most of all of our water resources to avoid dramatic rate increases. Over time, this program will be one of the best ways to keep water rates as low as possible.

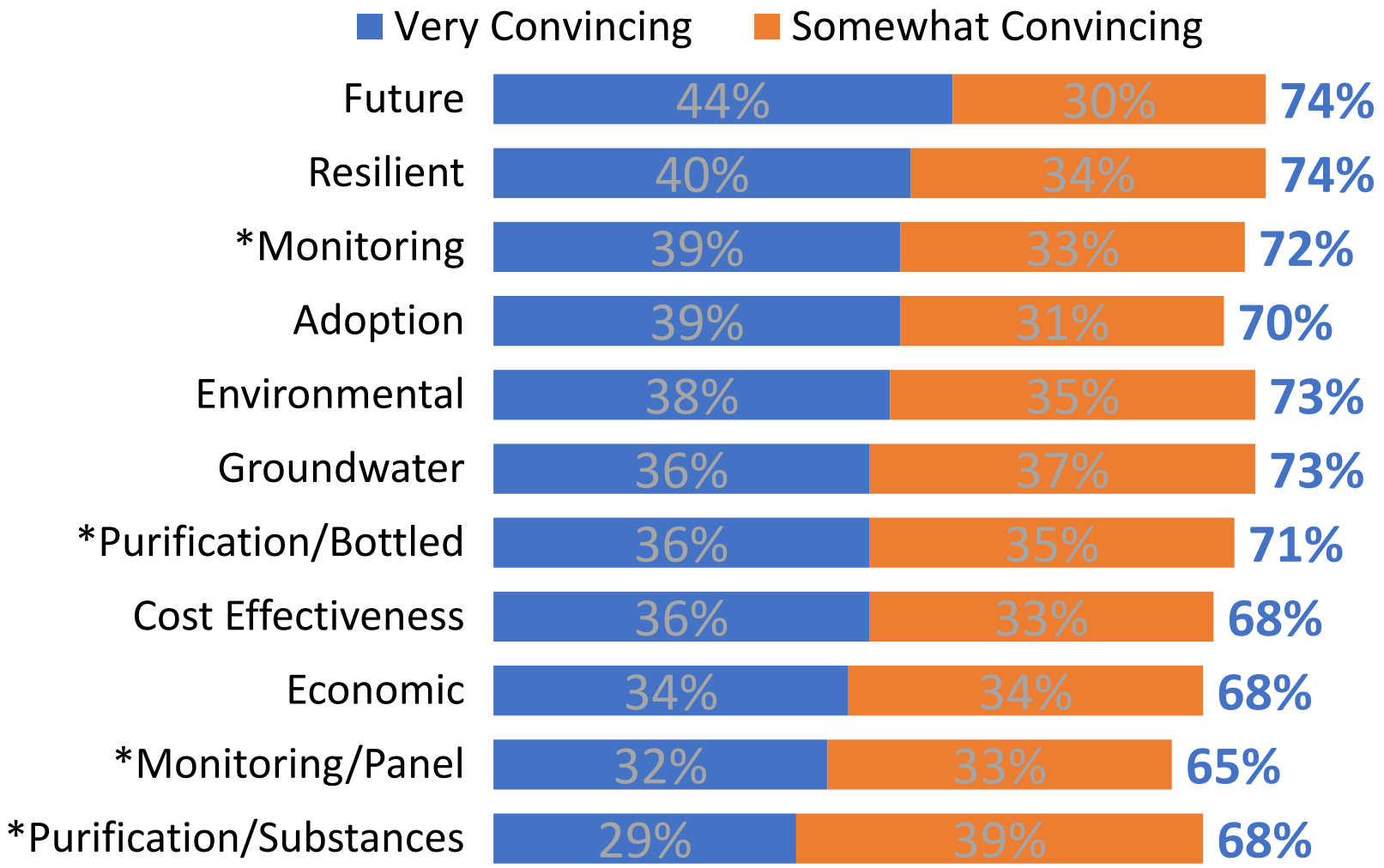
*Q13. I am going to read you some statements made by supporters of the Pure Water Southern California Program. Please tell me if you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support this program. *Split Sample*

A handful of messages are relatively less compelling.

Ranked by Very Convincing	
34%	**(ECONOMIC)** This program could provide nearly 50,000 jobs for the region in industries ranging from construction to retail, while boosting our economy during construction and operation. And it is cost-efficient — costing us the same or less than other ways of getting the same amount of water.
32%	***(MONITORING/PANEL)** California's drinking water standards are among the strictest in the nation, with new State standards for using purified recycled water for drinking recently announced after 10 years of careful planning and review. These new regulations were determined by an independent panel of scientists and engineers to be protective of public health. Recycled water produced here in LA County will be regularly tested in real time with online sensors and in laboratories - and the quality of the water, once it has been purified, will be monitored by the State of California Division of Drinking Water.
29%	***(PURIFICATION/SUBSTANCES)** Public health is the top priority in this program. The water purification process uses state-of-the-art multi-stage technology, including reverse osmosis and advanced oxidation to remove pharmaceuticals, pesticides, viruses, bacteria and other particles to produce highly-purified water.

*Q13. I am going to read you some statements made by supporters of the Pure Water Southern California Program. Please tell me if you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support this program. *Split Sample*

Nearly two-thirds find each message tested at least “somewhat convincing.”



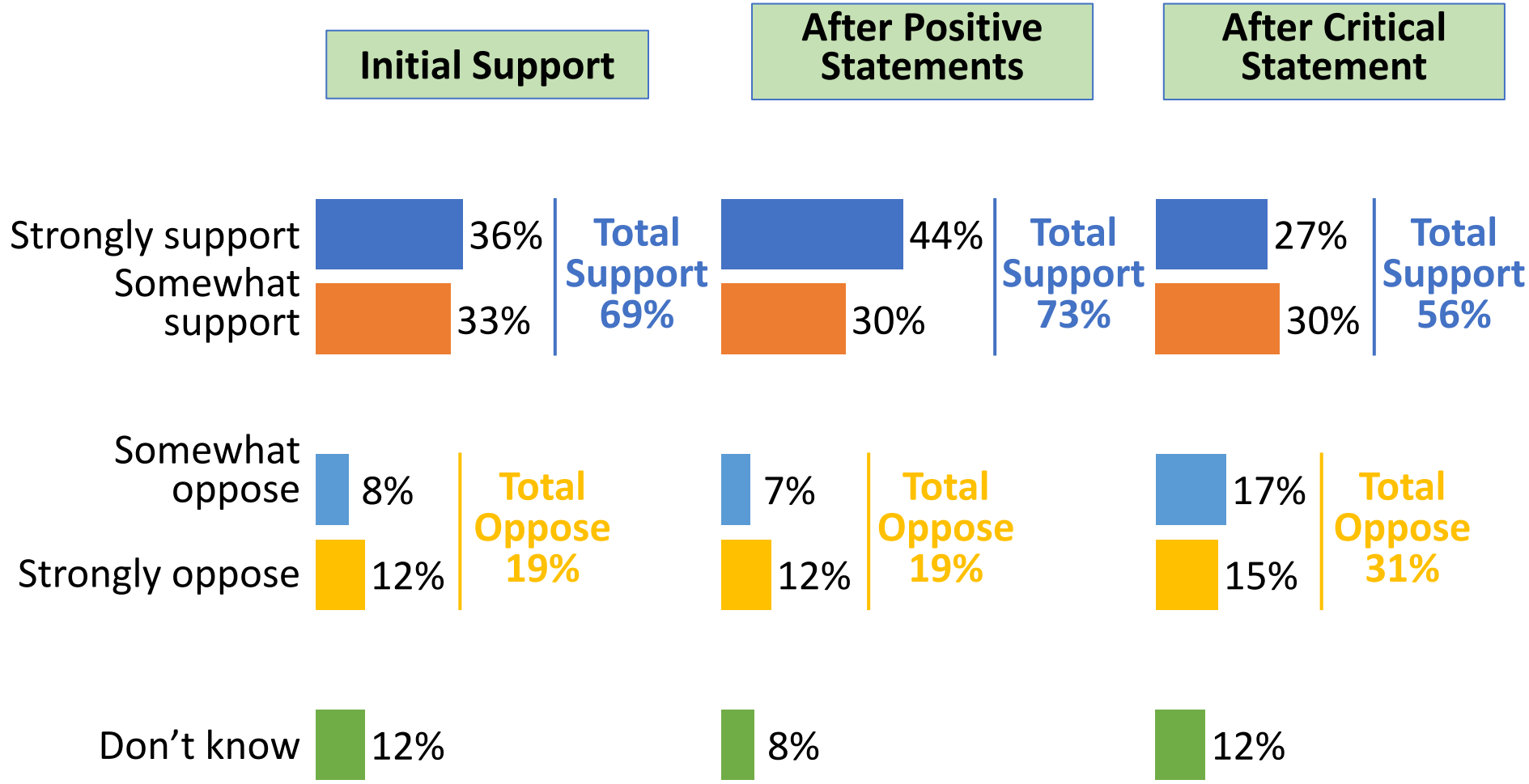
*Q13. I am going to read you some statements made by supporters of the Pure Water Southern California Program. Please tell me if you find it very convincing, somewhat convincing, or not convincing as a reason to support this program. *Split Sample*

Critical Statement

Recycled water contains everything that has been in the human body — including prescription and over-the-counter drugs, household products and chemicals, food additives, and much more. Opponents say a similar “toilet to tap” project was rejected two decades ago when local residents protested. Local authorities have a history of mismanaging water and not taking care of their own pipes and infrastructure and we can’t trust them to follow all of the complex procedures and maintain quality control of recycled water. Besides, this program will cost billions, which will show up on our monthly water bills — when we are already struggling with record inflation and gas prices.

Q16. Having heard this, I’d like to ask you one last time: do you support or oppose the Pure Water Southern California Program, which would provide 150 million gallons of purified recycled water each day as part of our regional water supply?

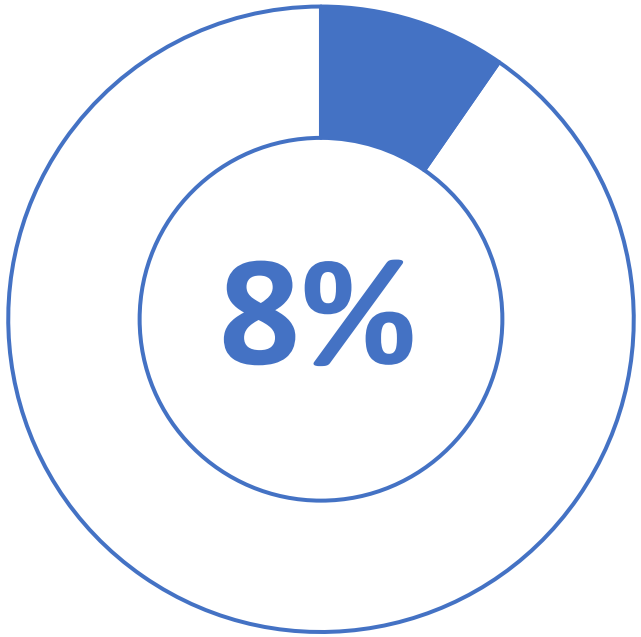
A solid majority continues to support the program after a statement from critics.



Q11, Q14 & Q16. Would you support or oppose the Pure Water Southern California Program?

Almost 10% of residents become at least one degree more supportive after messaging.

Positive Movers



These residents are disproportionately:

- **Non-College Educated Women**
- **Some College Education**
- **Household income Over $150,000**
- **Latinas**
- **Women with no Children**

Key Findings

- Residents see a need for a diverse range of water sources, and support using a wide variety of them – including recycled water.
- Residents' familiarity with the concept of recycled water has increased by seven points since 2022.
- Most residents are highly comfortable with using recycled water for irrigation, agricultural and industrial uses.
  - Residents are also more comfortable with household uses other than drinking, when this does not include showers.
- Groundwater recharge is the most-favored method of delivering purified recycled water to homes.
  - At the same time, roughly two-thirds rate blending, and direct potable reuse as "acceptable."
  - The acceptability of direct potable reuse increases to 70% after residents hear more about Pure Water Southern California and its potential benefits.

Key Findings *(Continued)*

A brief description of Pure Water Southern California wins support from nearly 7-in-10 residents – support which spans almost all subgroups of the population.

- Support increases slightly after positive messaging; however, we see a drop after a critical statement, with support for the program ending at 56%.

The idea of providing more reliable and local water supplies for future generations is the most appealing message, followed by water resiliency.

The critical statement hurts support for the program because it reminds residents of their concerns about water quality and safety.

- As was evident in the focus groups, the biggest obstacles to acceptance of the program are the "yuck factor" and lack of trust that the water will be monitored and tested correctly.

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