



Montana Voter Attitudes on Energy and Conservation in 2016

*Key Findings From a Statewide Voter
Survey Conducted September 1-8, 2016*

*Fairbank,
Maslin,
Maullin,
Metz &
Associates*

FM3

DAVE METZ & LORI WEIGEL



**PUBLIC OPINION
STRATEGIES**

220-4638

Research Methodology

- 503 interviews with Montana voters likely to participate in the November 2016 election
- Conducted September 1-8 via landline and cell phones
- Margin of error of +/-4.4% at the 95% confidence interval
- Due to rounding, some percentages do not add up to 100%
- Comparisons to previous surveys of Montana voters conducted in 2014 and 2012

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.

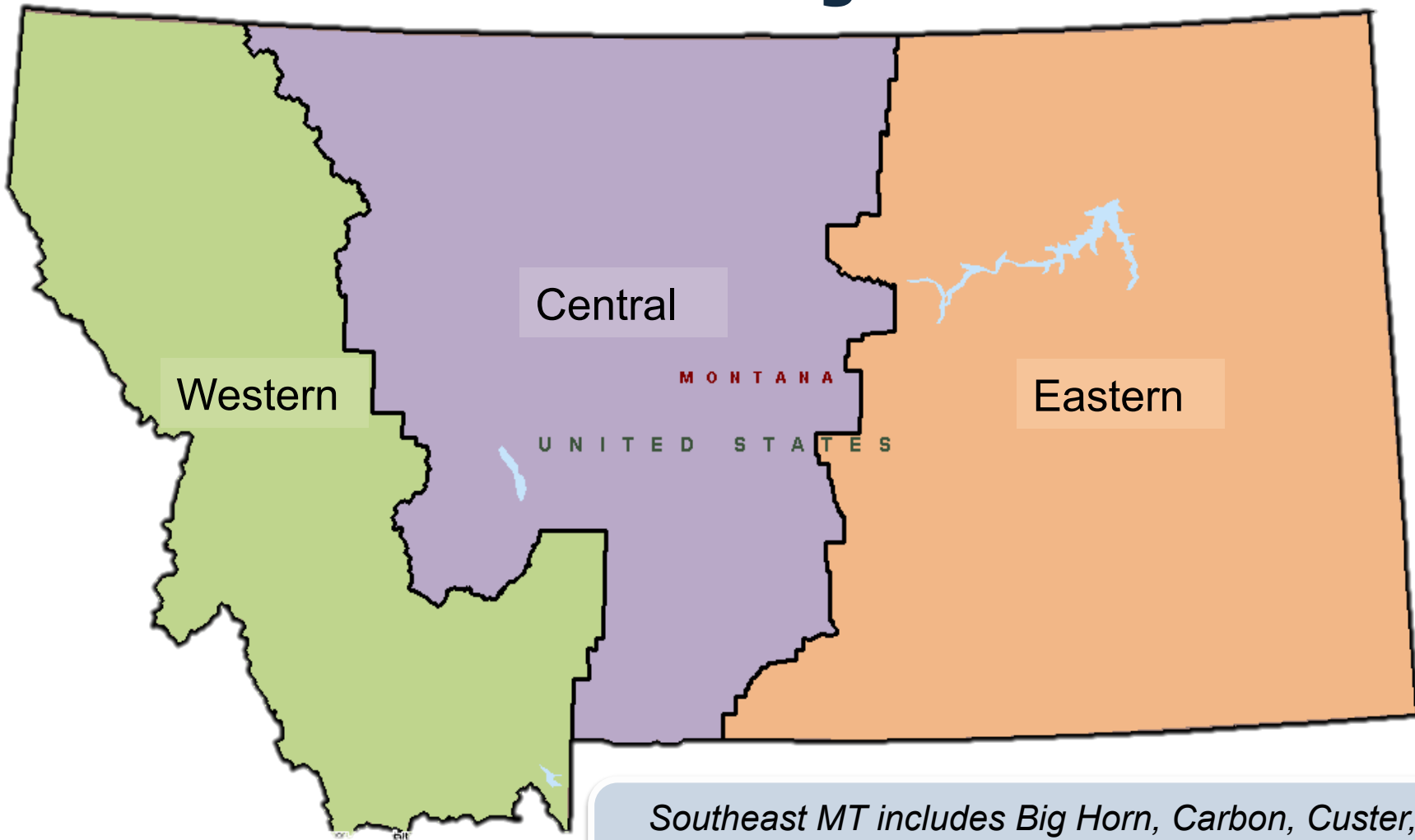


Lori Weigel - POS

Public Opinion Strategies (POS) is the largest Republican polling firm in the country. Since the firm's founding in 1991, they have completed more than 10,000 research projects, interviewing more than five million Americans across the United States. Media outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, NBC News, CNBC, and National Public Radio rely on Public Opinion Strategies to conduct their polling. The firm conducts polling on behalf of hundreds of political campaigns, as well as trade associations, not-for-profit organizations, government entities and industry coalitions throughout the nation.

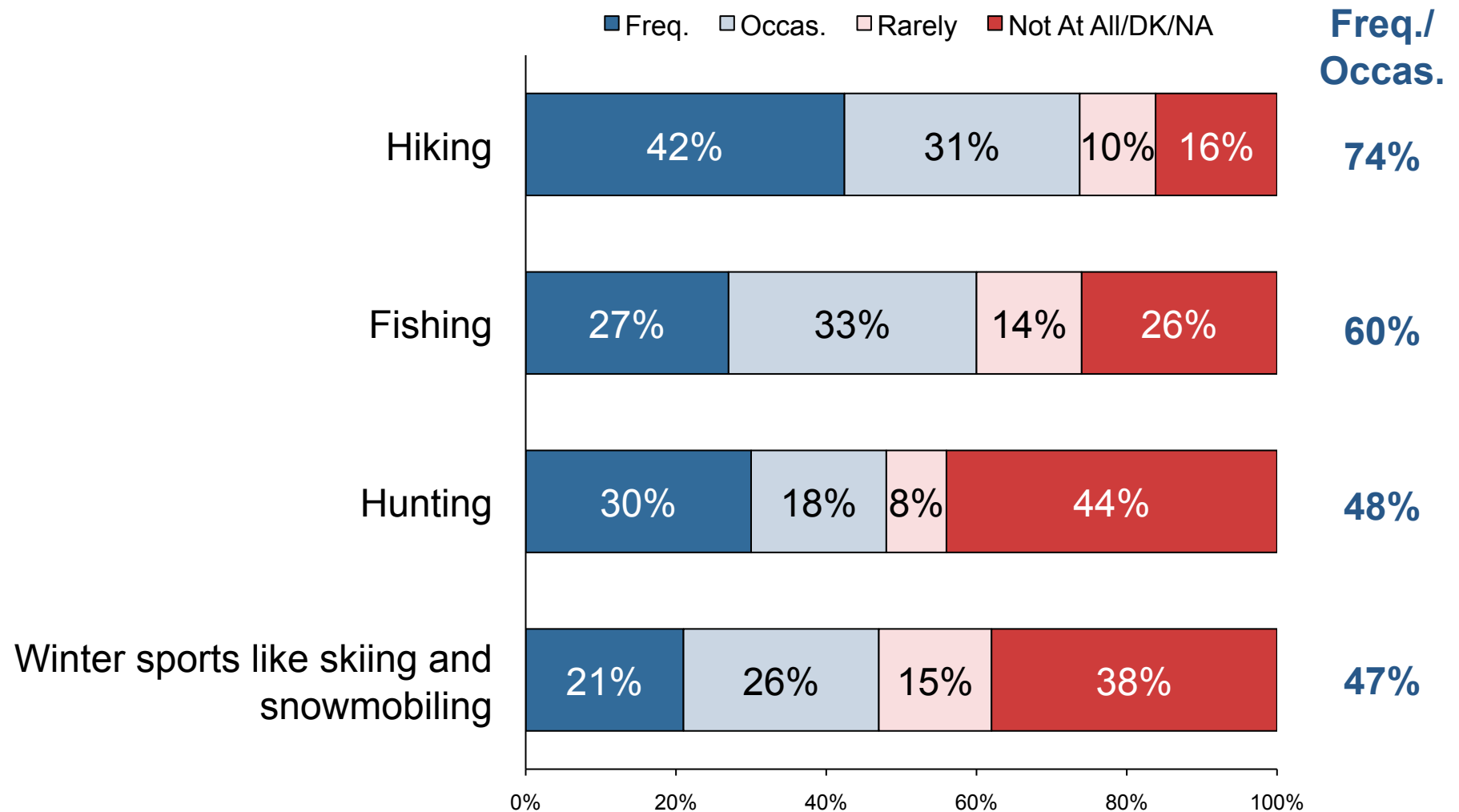
As a bipartisan team, FM3 and Public Opinion Strategies have researched a wide range of issues for nearly a decade, in particular on conservation-related initiatives and policies. Together, the two firms have jointly conducted research on behalf of political campaigns, businesses, not-for-profit organizations and public agencies in 44 states and nationally.

Montana Regions



Southeast MT includes Big Horn, Carbon, Custer, Fallon, Garfield, Musselshell, Powder River, Stillwater, Treasure, and Yellowstone Counties

Montana voters have extremely high rates of participation in outdoor recreation.





Climate Change

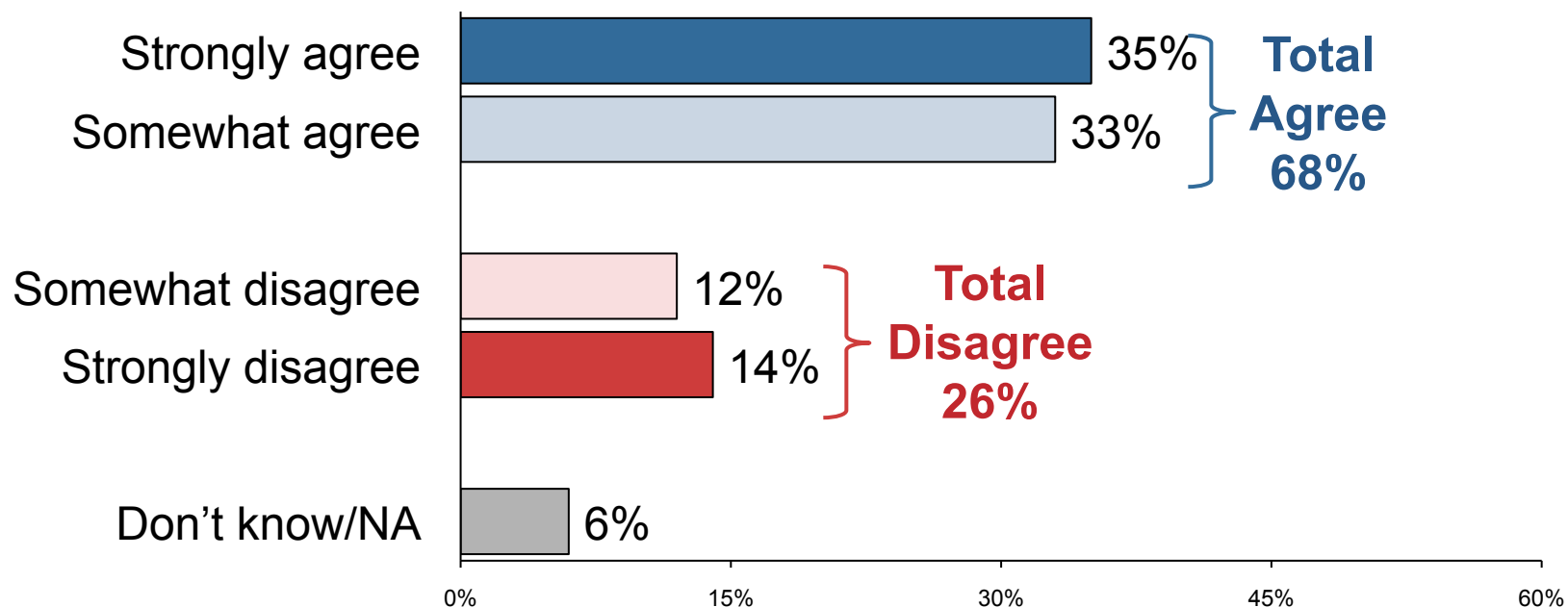
A desire for action on climate change has inched up to a narrow majority.

From what you know about climate change, which of the following four statements is closest to your opinion?

Statement	2014	2016
Climate change has been established as a serious problem, and immediate action is necessary	23%	29%
There is enough evidence that climate change is taking place that some action should be taken	23%	22%
We don't know enough about climate change, and more research is necessary before we take action	29%	23%
Concern about climate change is unwarranted	22%	23%
Don't know/NA	4%	3%

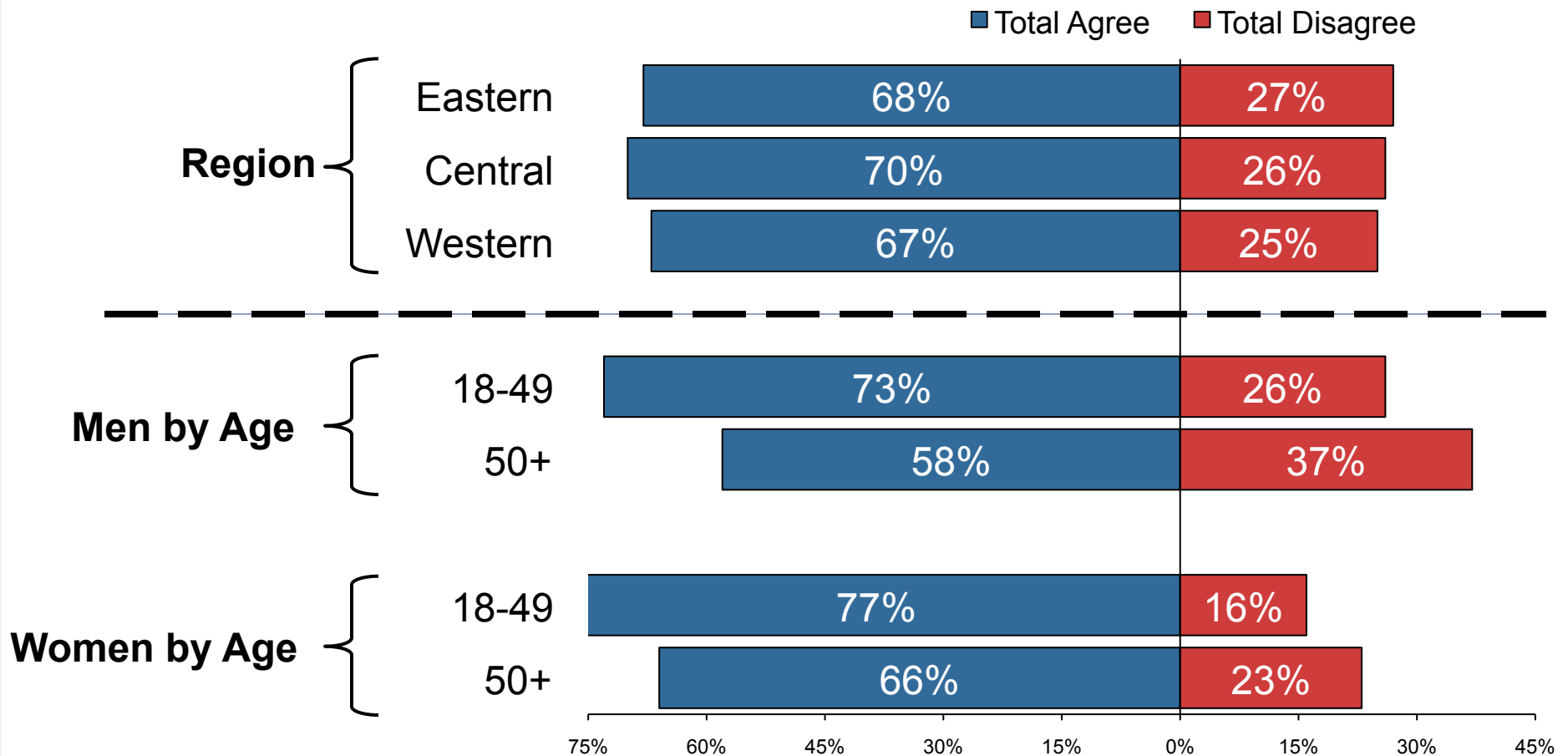
Montanans overwhelmingly believe we can reduce carbon pollution without increasing utility bills.

*Do you generally agree or disagree with the following statement:
We can reduce carbon pollution without increasing our utility bills.*



Men over 50 are more skeptical of the idea, while voters under 50 are largely optimistic.

Region and Gender by Age

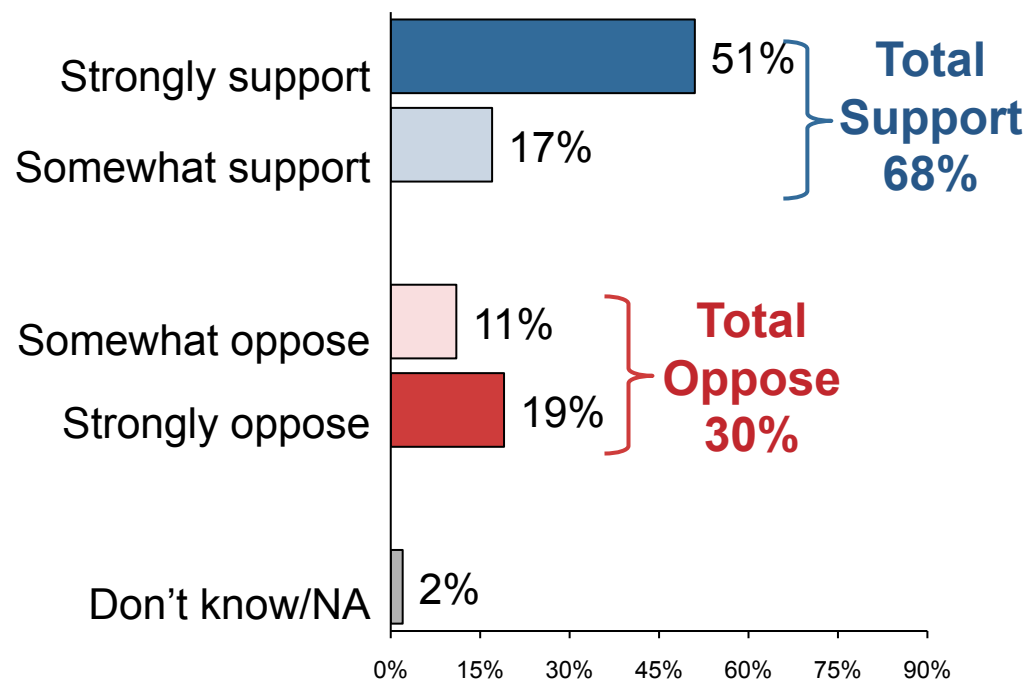




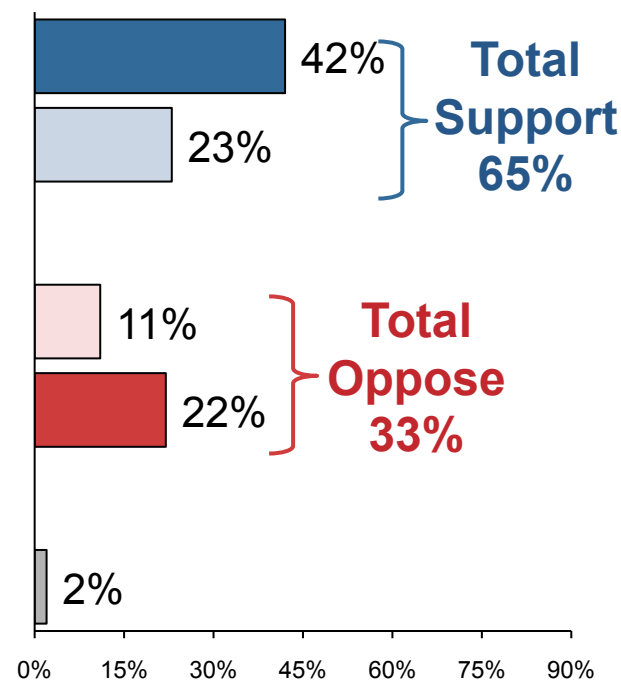
Views on Energy Policy

Two-thirds back the Clean Power Plan, when described either specifically or generally.

Establishing a state plan to address climate change, reduce carbon pollution and encourage development of clean, renewable energy

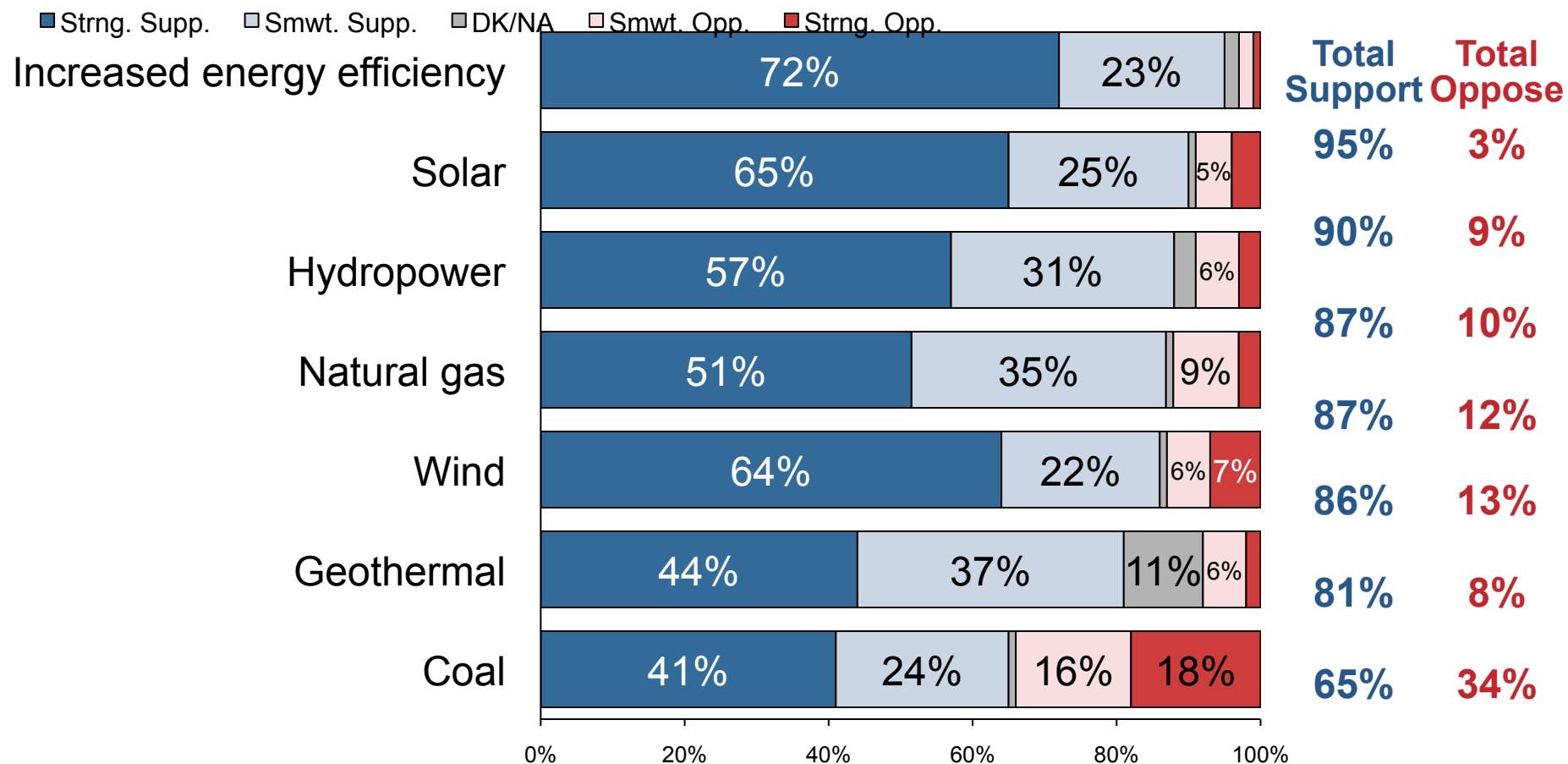


Developing a strategy to meet the goals of the EPA's Clean Power Plan, reducing air pollution from coal plants

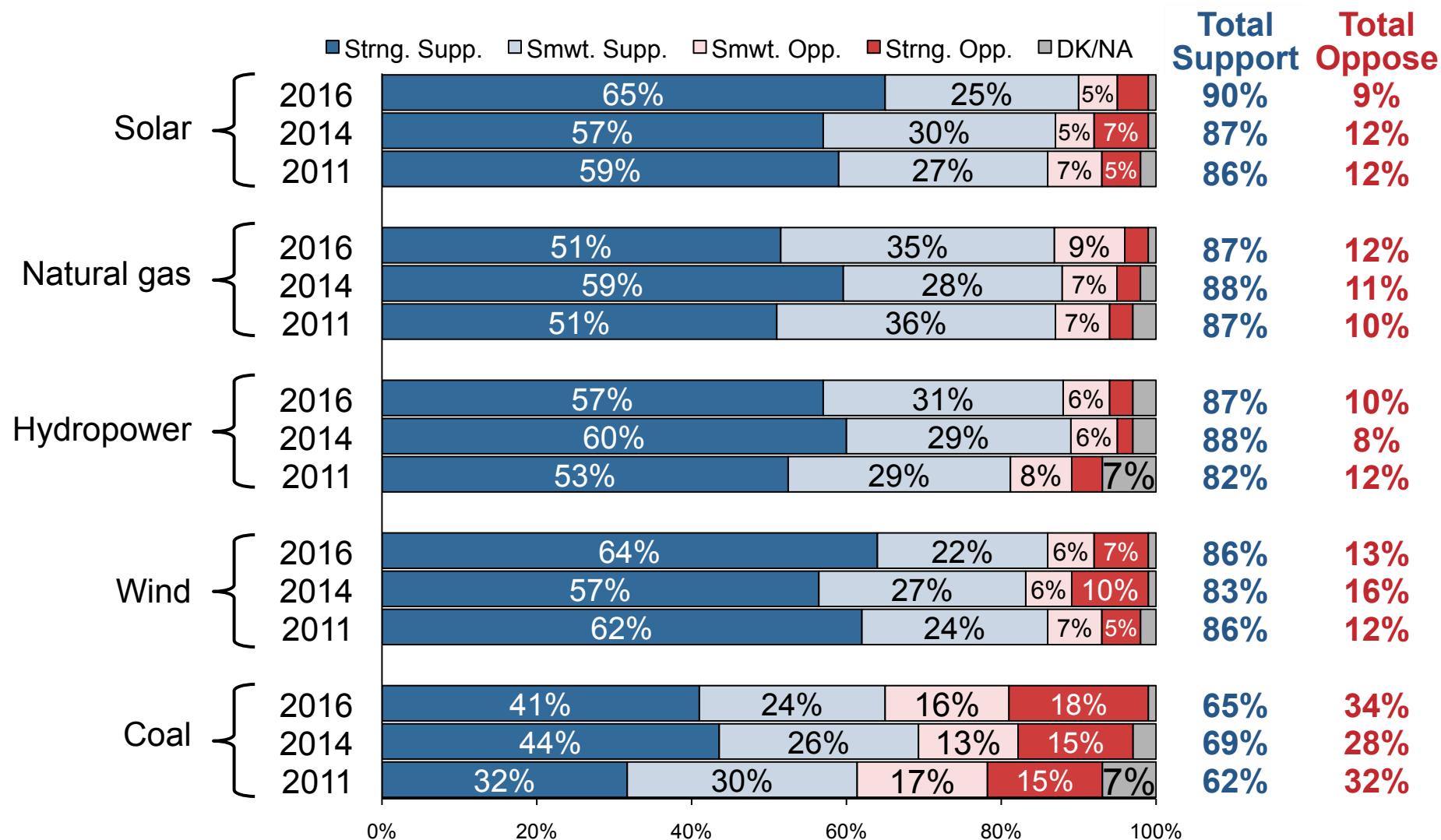


Renewable energy sources are hugely popular among Montana voters.

Here is a list of specific sources of energy. Please tell me whether you would support or oppose increasing the use of that source of energy to meet Montana's future needs.

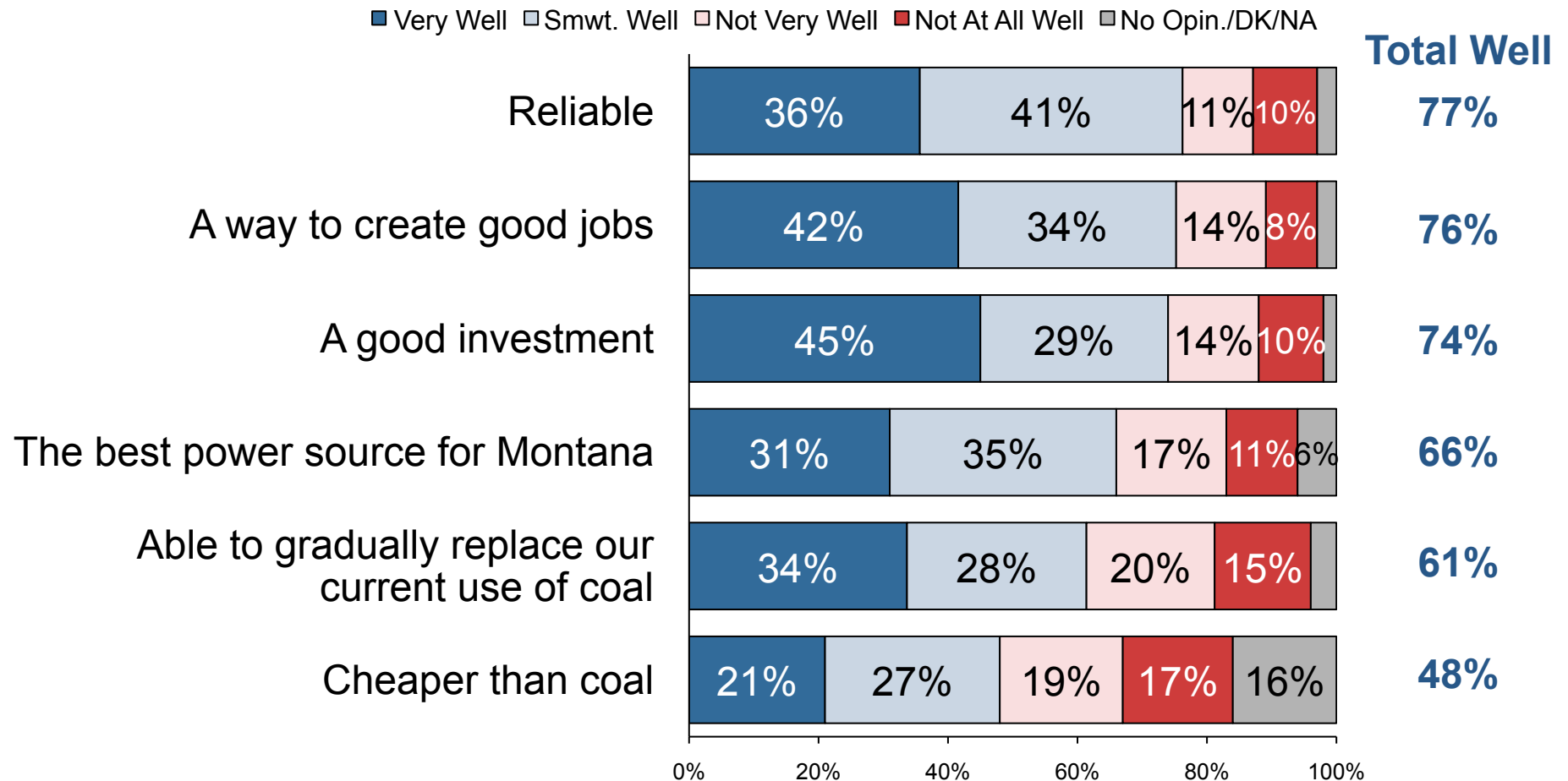


Support for renewables has held steady over the last six years.



Montanans have positive views of renewable energy.

Thinking about renewable energy like wind and solar power, please tell me if you think each of the following phrases describe renewable energy – very well, somewhat well, not very well, or not at all well.



More than three-quarters now believe renewable energy is reliable.

(Total Saying Each Phrase Describes Renewable Energy “Well”)

Description Phrase	2014	2016	Difference
Reliable	68%	77%	+9%
The best power source for Montana	62%	66%	+4%
Able to gradually replace our current use of coal	57%	61%	+4%
A way to create good jobs	74%	76%	+2%

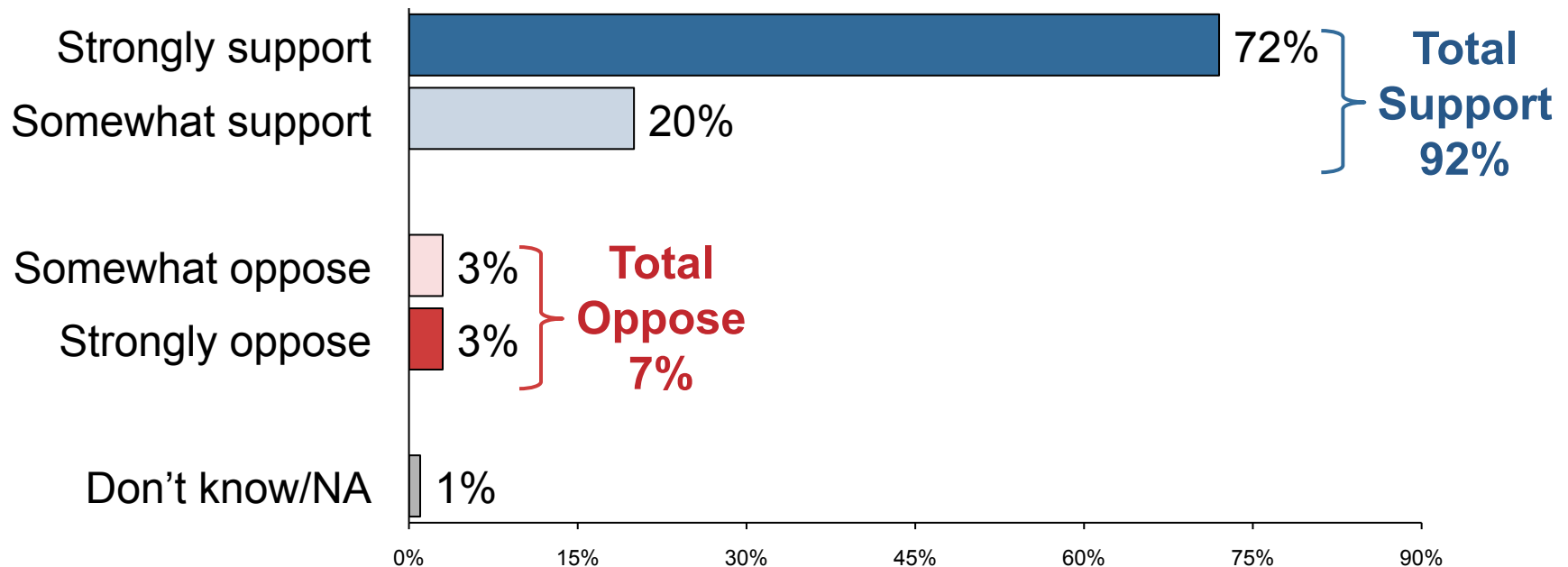
While coal is seen as more reliable, renewables are more often named “the best” power source for Montana.

(Total % Describes That Source of Energy “Well”)

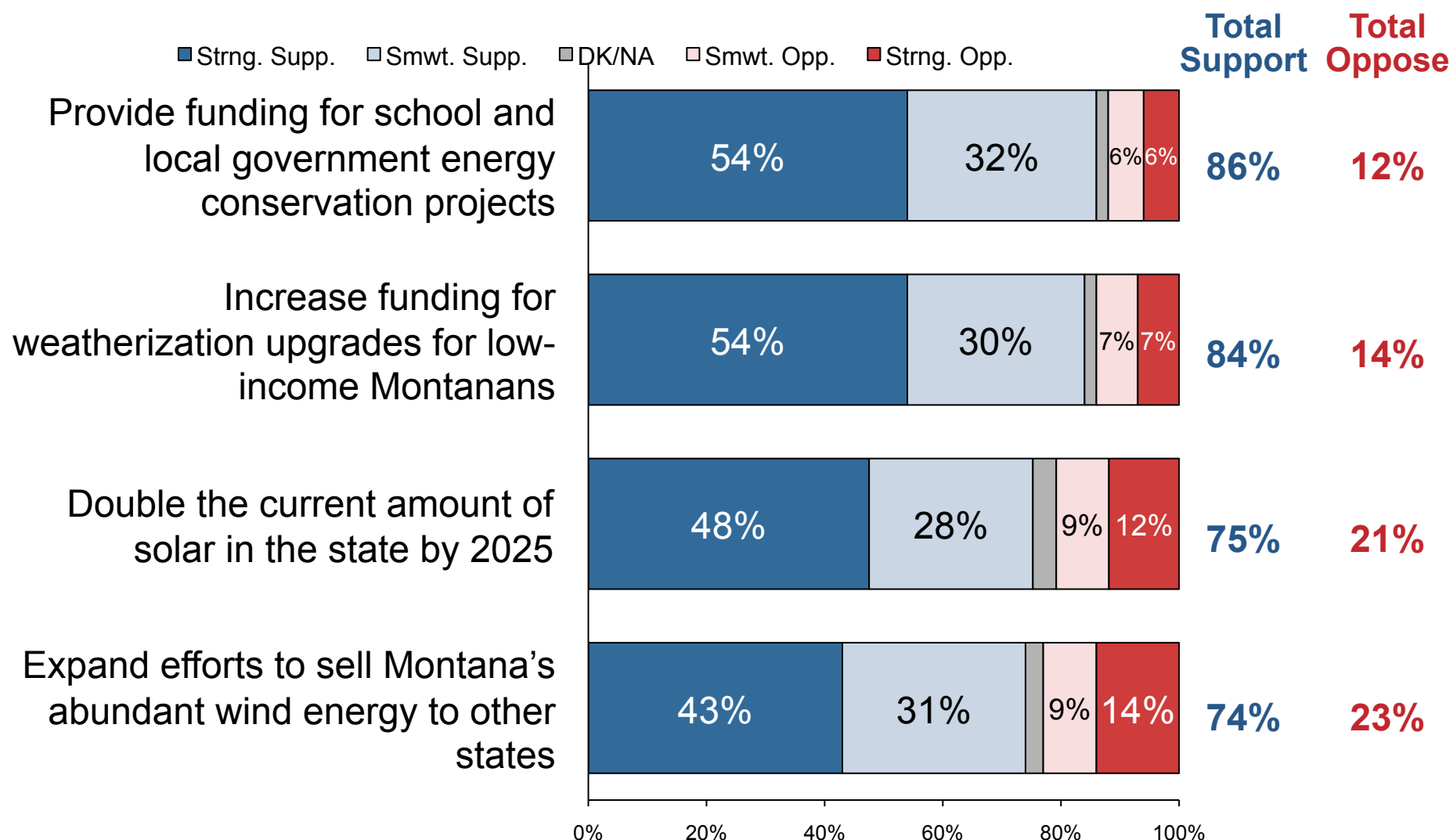
Description Phrase	Renewable Energy	Coal
Reliable	77%	83%
A way to create good jobs	76%	78%
The best power source for Montana	66%	54%

Montana voters strongly support the concept of net metering.

Some utility customers generate their own power with things like solar panels. At times, they generate more than they can use and these customers get credit on their bills for the power they generate on their homes and business that is fed back into the utility system. Does this sound like something you would support or oppose?



Voters *strongly* support a variety of policies to promote renewables.

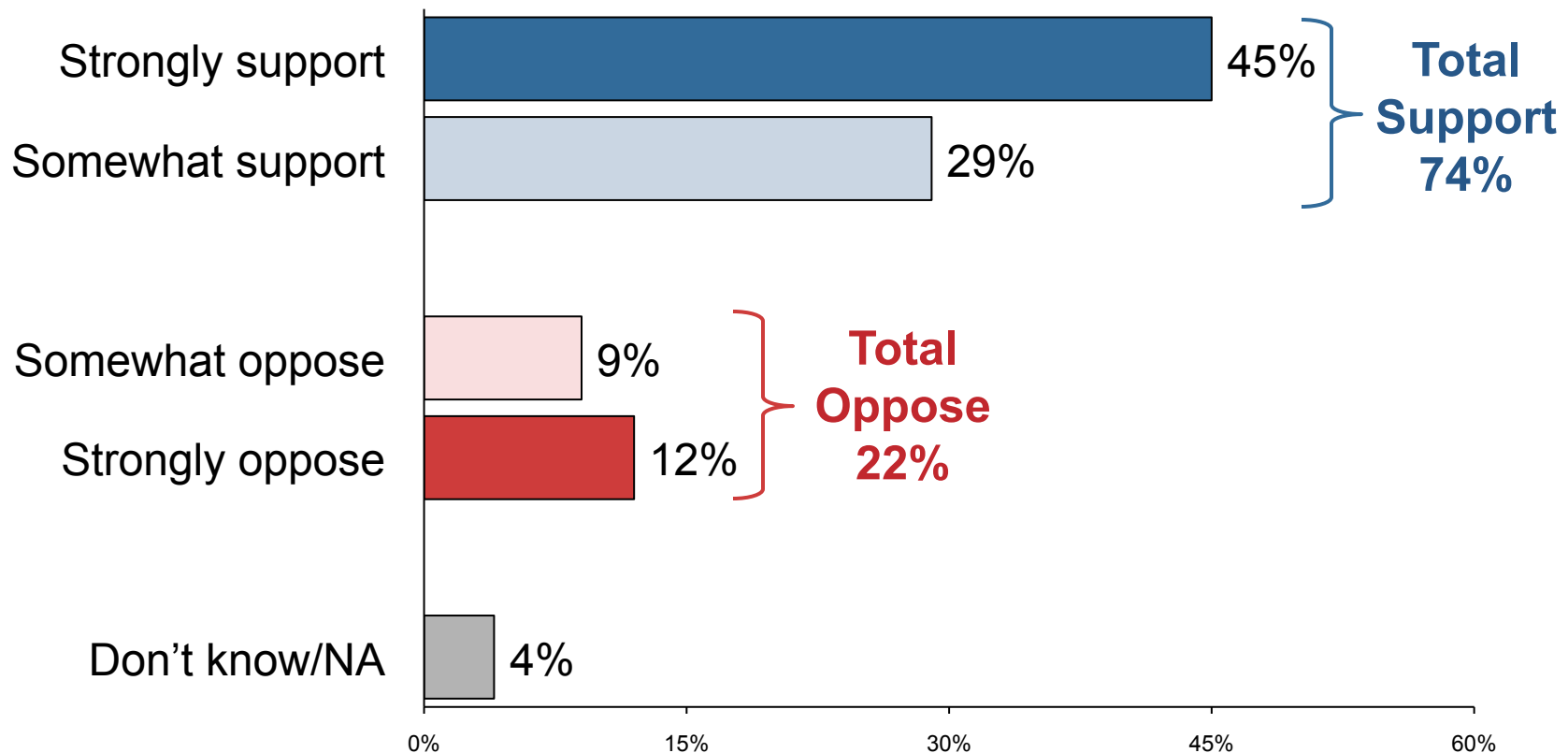




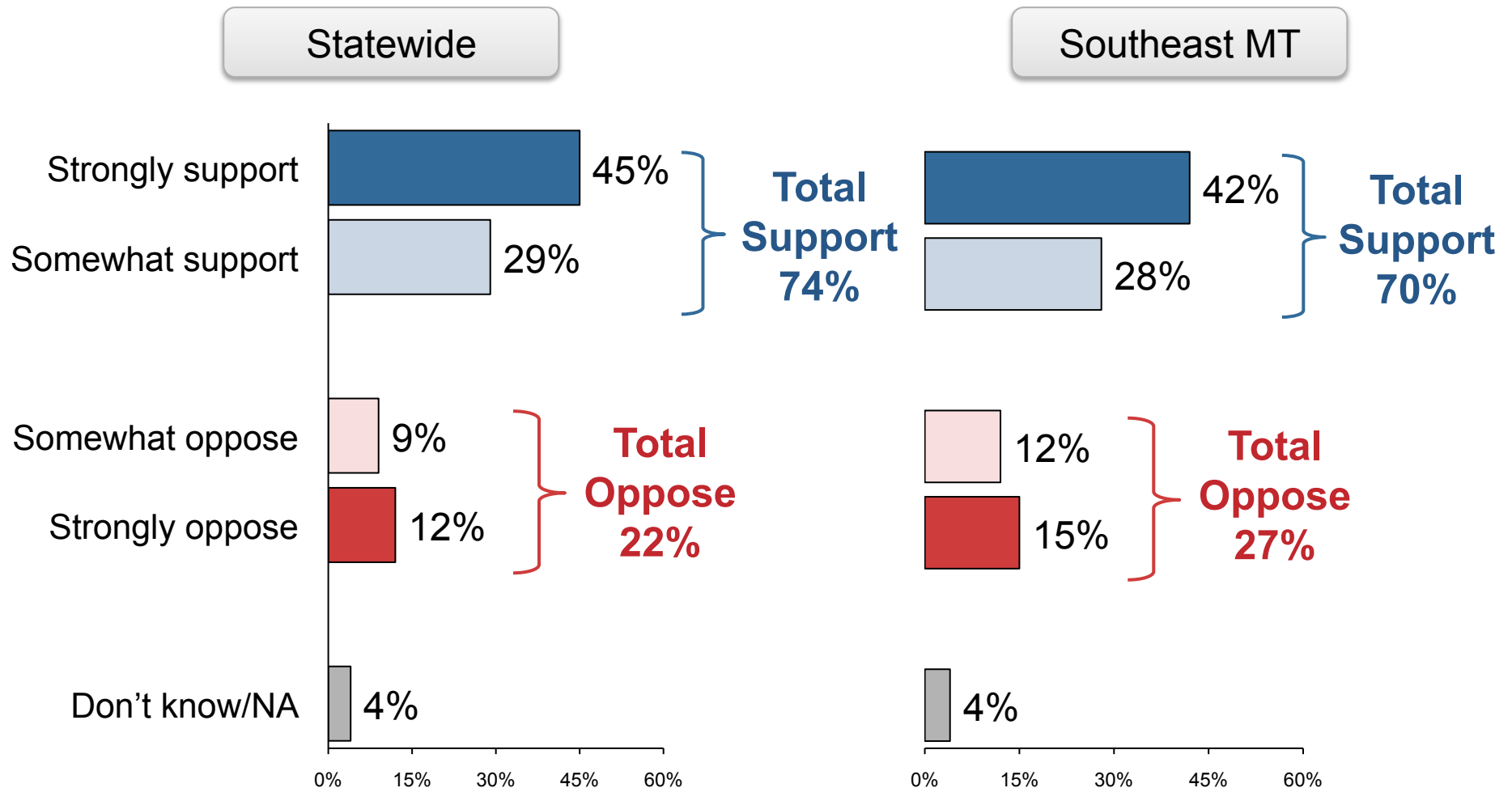
The Colstrip Power Plant

Framed generically, Montanans strongly support replacing retiring coal plants with renewables.

As coal plants are retired by their owners, replace them with more use of renewable energy



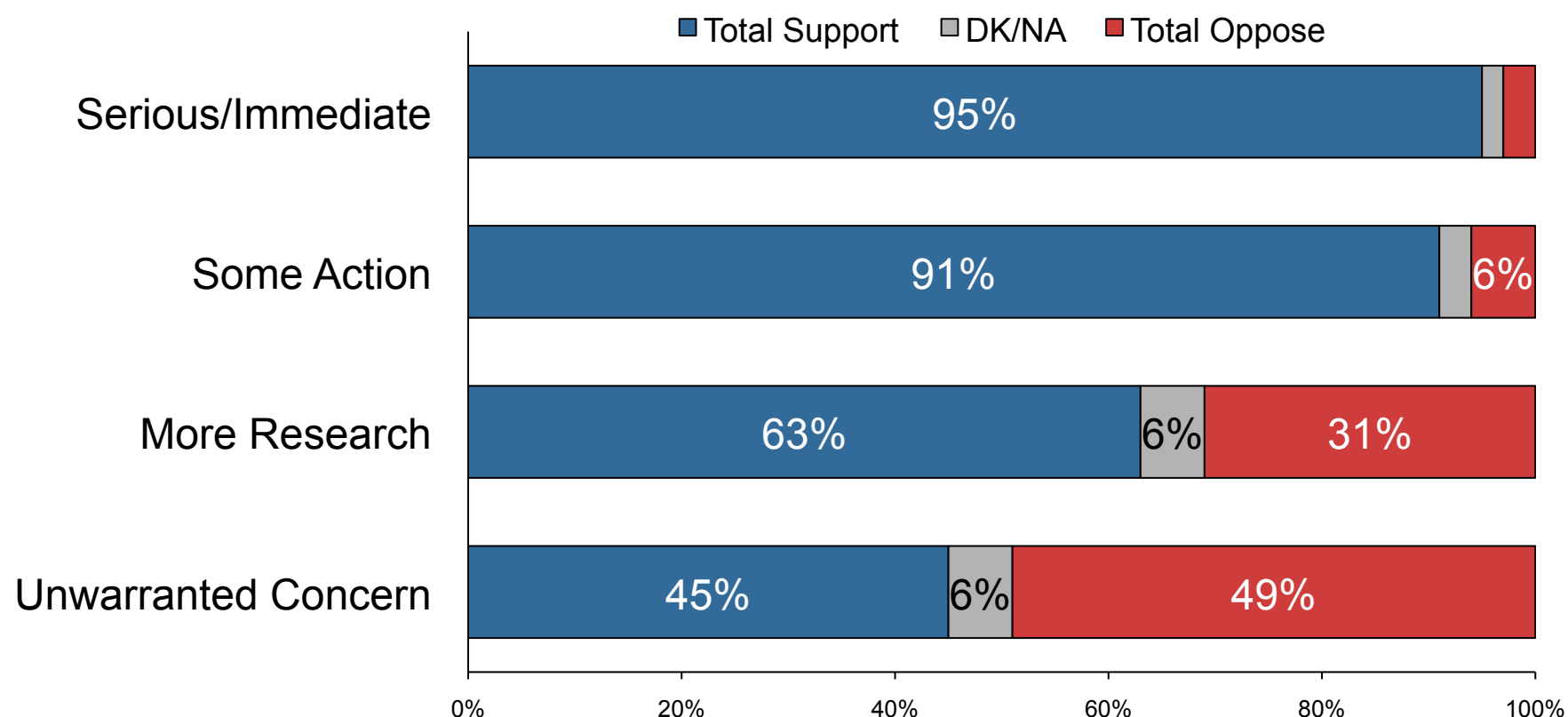
Support is just as strong in the counties nearest the Colstrip plant as it is statewide.



Only among those who dismiss climate change does a plurality object.

As coal plants are retired by their owners, replace them with more use of renewable energy

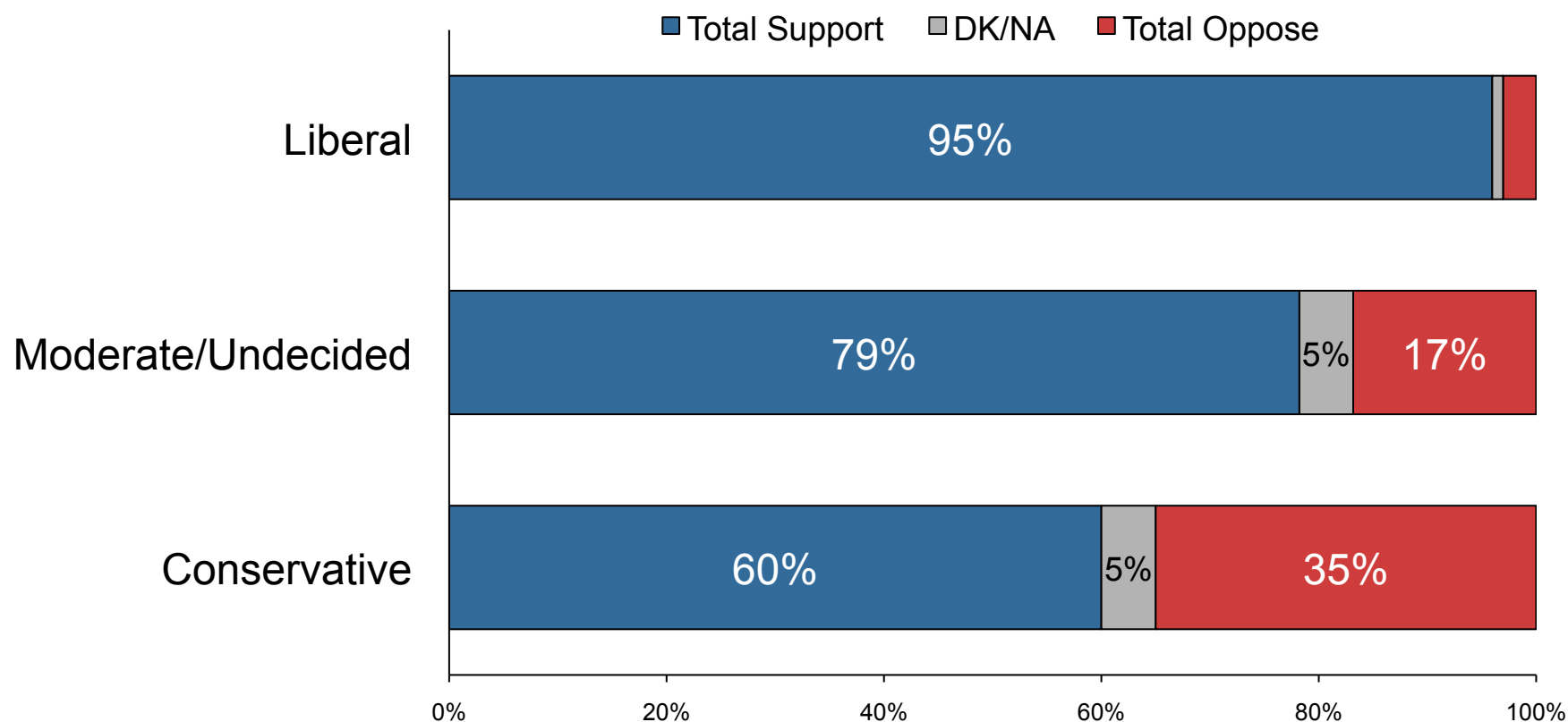
By Climate Change



Even three in five conservative voters support the concept.

As coal plants are retired by their owners, replace them with more use of renewable energy

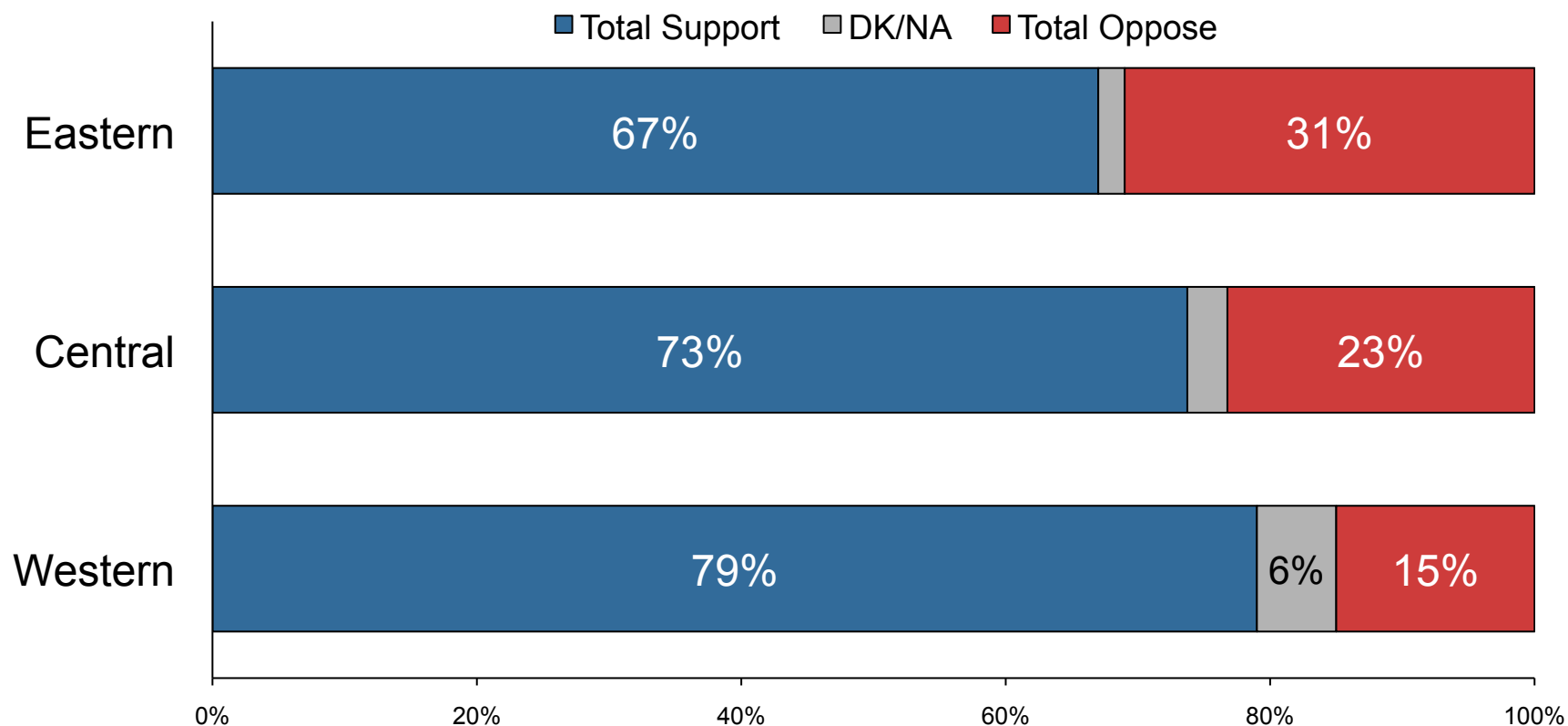
By Ideology



Two-thirds support it in Eastern Montana, as do more than seven in ten elsewhere.

As coal plants are retired by their owners, replace them with more use of renewable energy

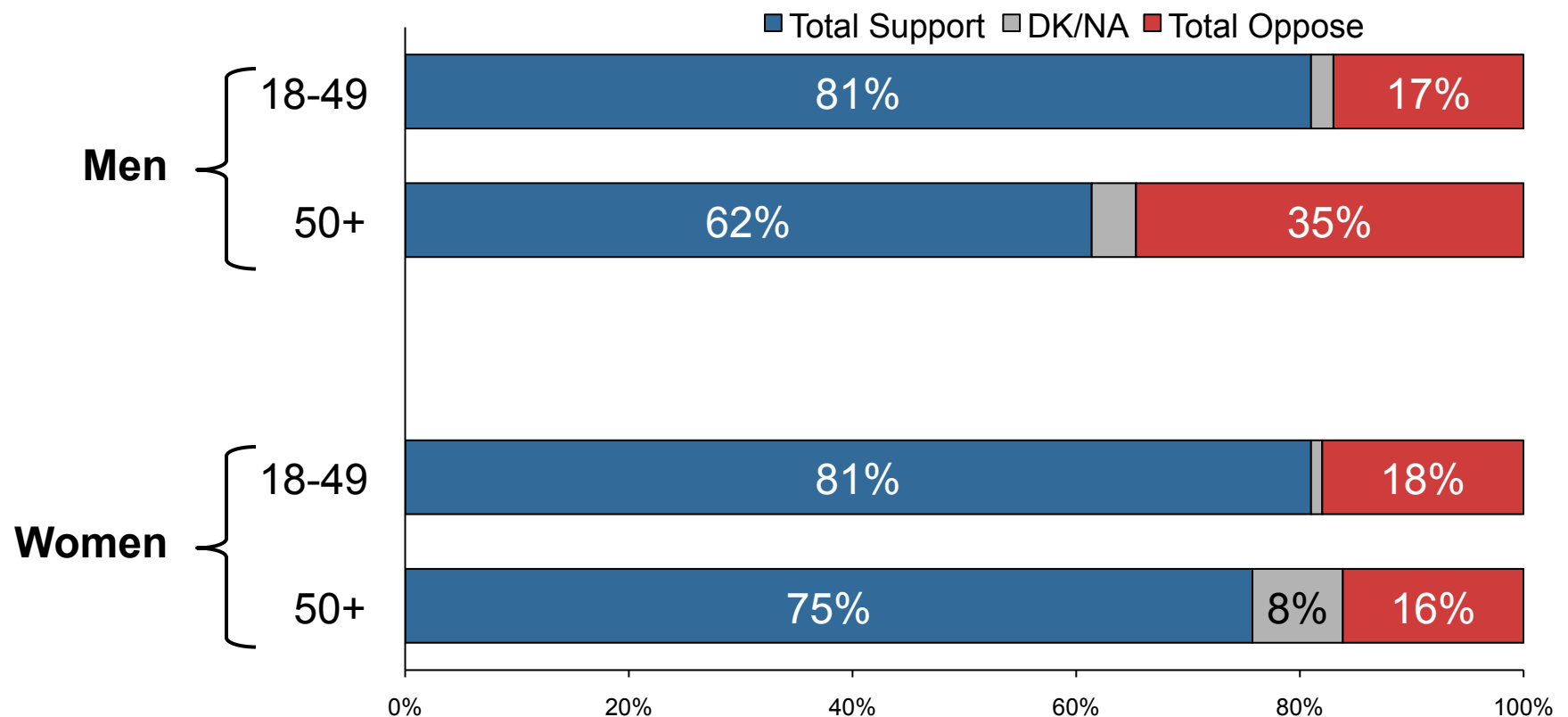
By Region



Men over age 50 are a notable base of skepticism – on this issue as others.

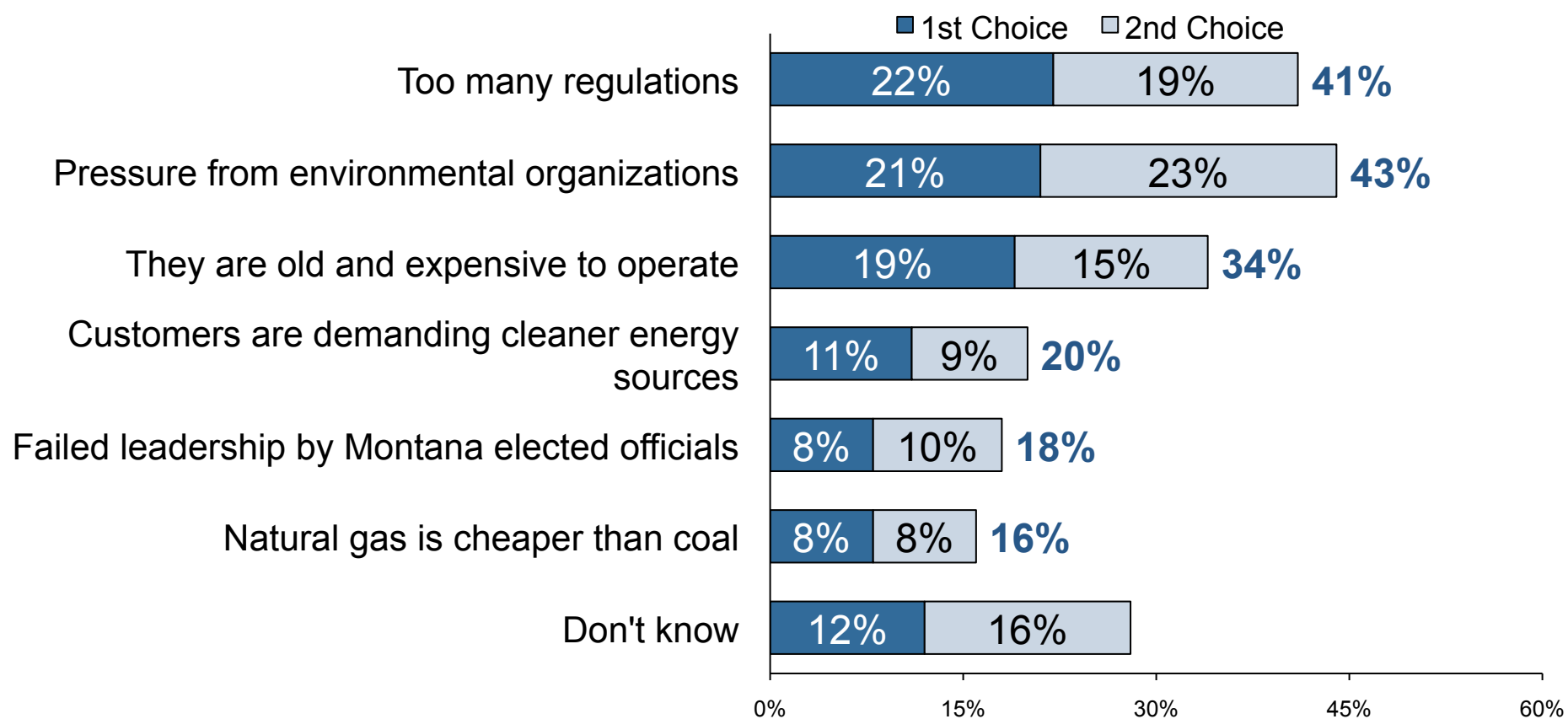
As coal plants are retired by their owners, replace them with more use of renewable energy

By Gender by Age



Pluralities see regulations and environmentalists at the root of the Colstrip closure.

Based on what you know, which of the following do you believe is the biggest reason behind the retirement of the units at the Colstrip coal-fired power plant?



Liberals and moderates understand the Colstrip units were old and expensive.

(1st Choice)

Reason	All Voters	Ideology			Union Households	
		Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Union	Non-Union
Too many regulations	22%	8%	18%	32%	12%	24%
Pressure from environmental organizations	21%	8%	17%	30%	23%	20%
They are old and expensive to operate	19%	34%	26%	6%	24%	18%
Customers are demanding cleaner energy sources	11%	26%	9%	5%	14%	10%
Failed leadership by Montana elected officials	8%	3%	6%	12%	7%	8%
Natural gas is cheaper than coal	8%	10%	11%	4%	6%	8%
Don't know	12%	11%	13%	11%	13%	11%

Nearly one-third of older men blame regulations for the closures.

(1st Choice)

Reason	All Voters	Men by Age		Women by Age	
		18-49	50+	18-49	50+
Too many regulations	22%	22%	32%	17%	16%
Pressure from environmental organizations	21%	18%	22%	15%	25%
They are old and expensive to operate	19%	19%	11%	25%	23%
Customers are demanding cleaner energy sources	11%	12%	8%	14%	11%
Failed leadership by Montana elected officials	8%	13%	8%	6%	5%
Natural gas is cheaper than coal	8%	7%	7%	9%	8%
Don't know	12%	10%	12%	13%	12%

Eastern Montanans are more likely than others to blame failed leadership.

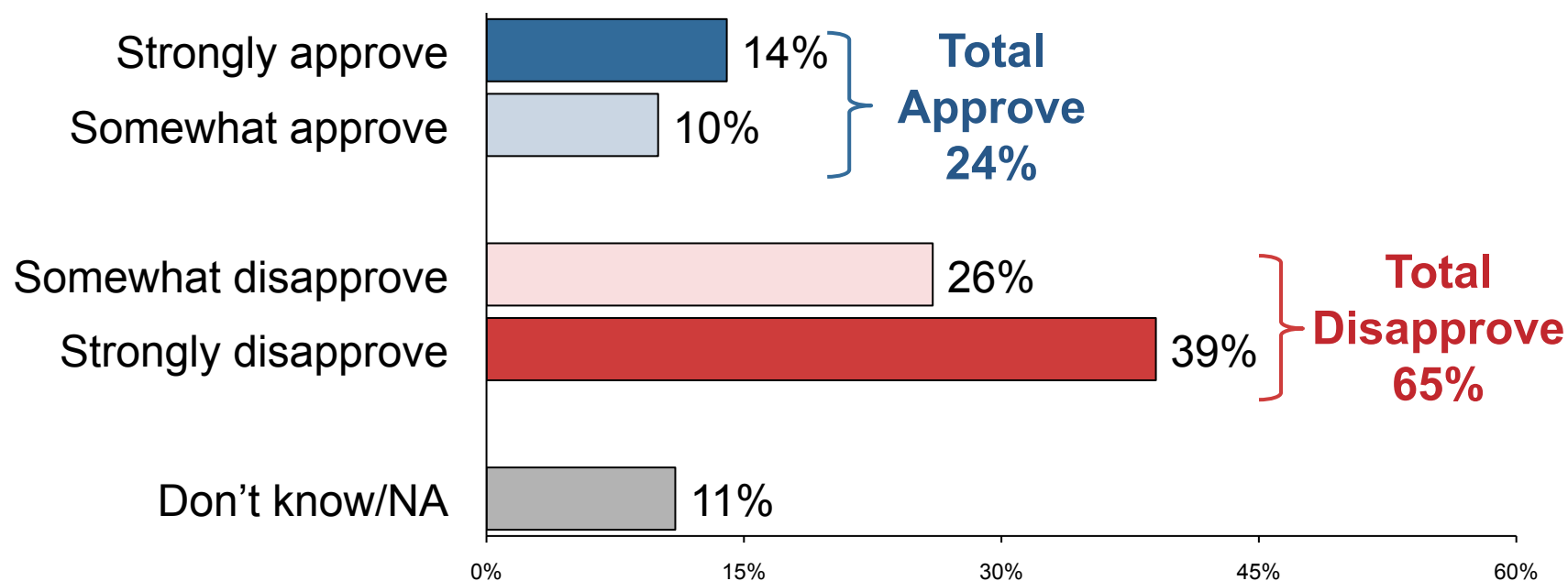
(1st Choice)

Reason	All Voters	Eastern	Central	Western	Southeast
Too many regulations	22%	23%	18%	23%	25%
Pressure from environmental organizations	21%	26%	23%	16%	25%
They are old and expensive to operate	19%	17%	20%	21%	18%
Customers are demanding cleaner energy sources	11%	4%	14%	13%	5%
Failed leadership by Montana elected officials	8%	13%	6%	5%	10%
Natural gas is cheaper than coal	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%
Don't know	12%	10%	11%	14%	11%

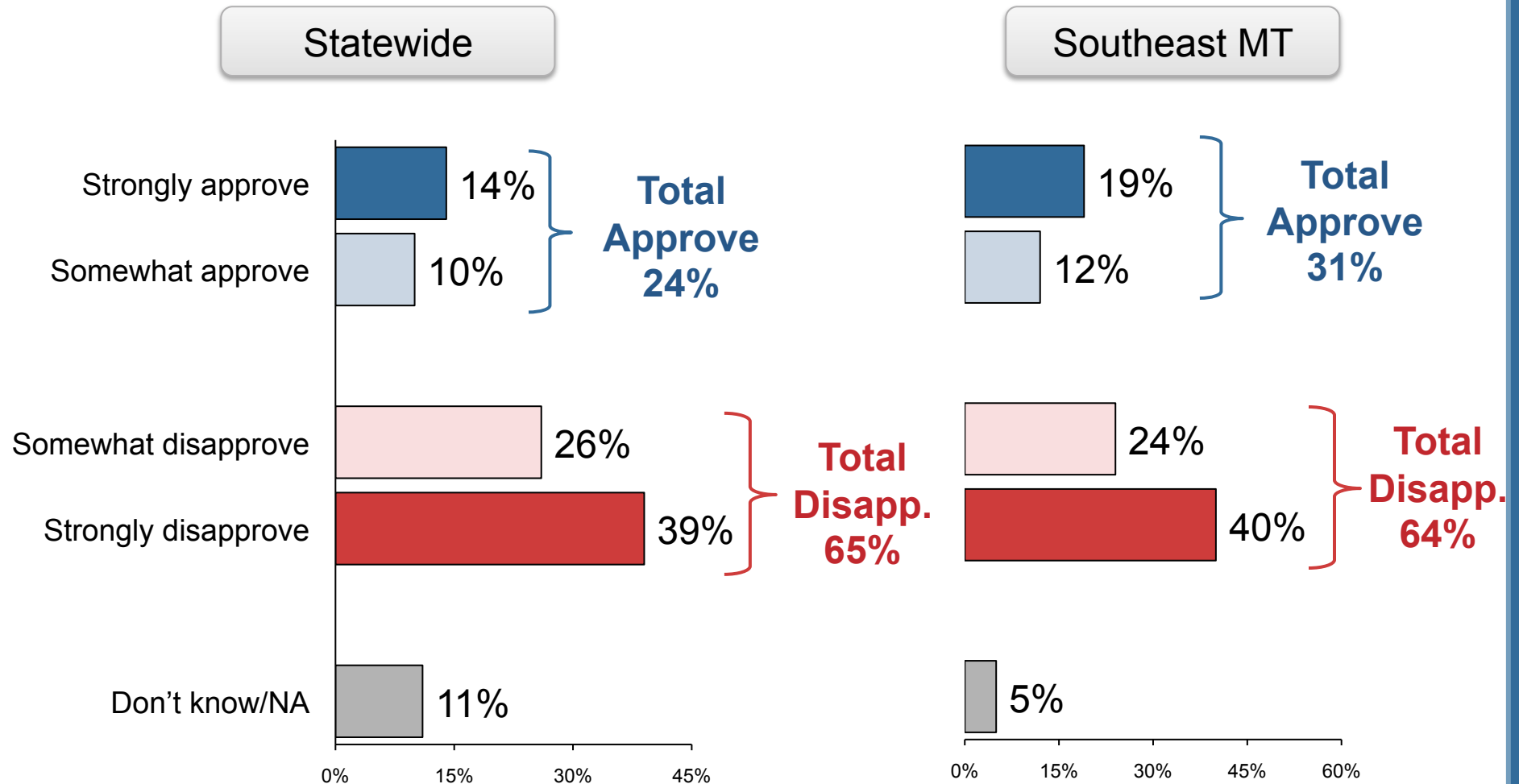
Montana voters disapprove of punishing the owners of Colstrip.

As you may know, the owners of the Colstrip coal-fired power plant have set a deadline to close the two oldest units, which were constructed in the 1970s and are becoming too costly to run efficiently. Some have proposed that the owners pay a penalty for this closure.

Do you approve or disapprove of a proposal to charge the owners of Colstrip?



Colstrip neighbors are just as likely to disapprove of penalties as voters statewide.



Strong majorities favor transitioning over continuing to fight to keep Colstrip open.

State leaders should work with businesses, the community, and state and federal agencies to develop transition plans for the Colstrip community, including pushing for new wind and solar energy development

64%

State leaders should work with businesses, the community, and state and federal agencies to develop transition plans for the Colstrip community, including training for displaced workers

67%

State leaders should fight to keep these coal-fired units open despite the utility's decision to close them down, even if it means spending taxpayer money to support the plant

26%

State leaders should fight to keep these coal-fired units open despite the utilities' decision

29%

Don't know

9%

Don't know

5%

Support for retraining workers is especially high near the Colstrip power plant.

Southeast MT

State leaders should work with businesses, the community, and state and federal agencies to develop transition plans for the Colstrip community, including pushing for new wind and solar energy development

51%

State leaders should work with businesses, the community, and state and federal agencies to develop transition plans for the Colstrip community, including training for displaced workers

66%

State leaders should fight to keep these coal-fired units open despite the utility's decision to close them down, even if it means spending taxpayer money to support the plant

34%

State leaders should fight to keep these coal-fired units open despite the utilities' decision

32%

Don't know

15%

Don't know

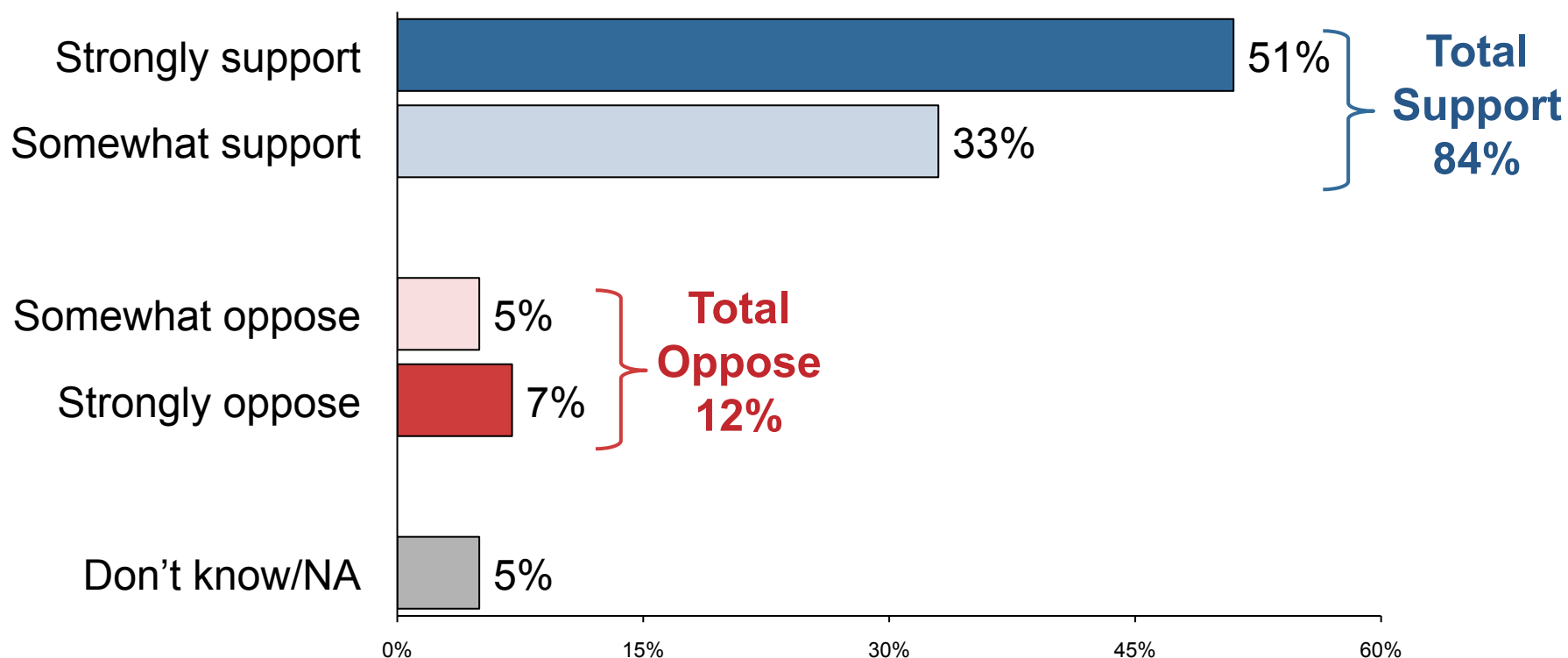
2%



Public Lands

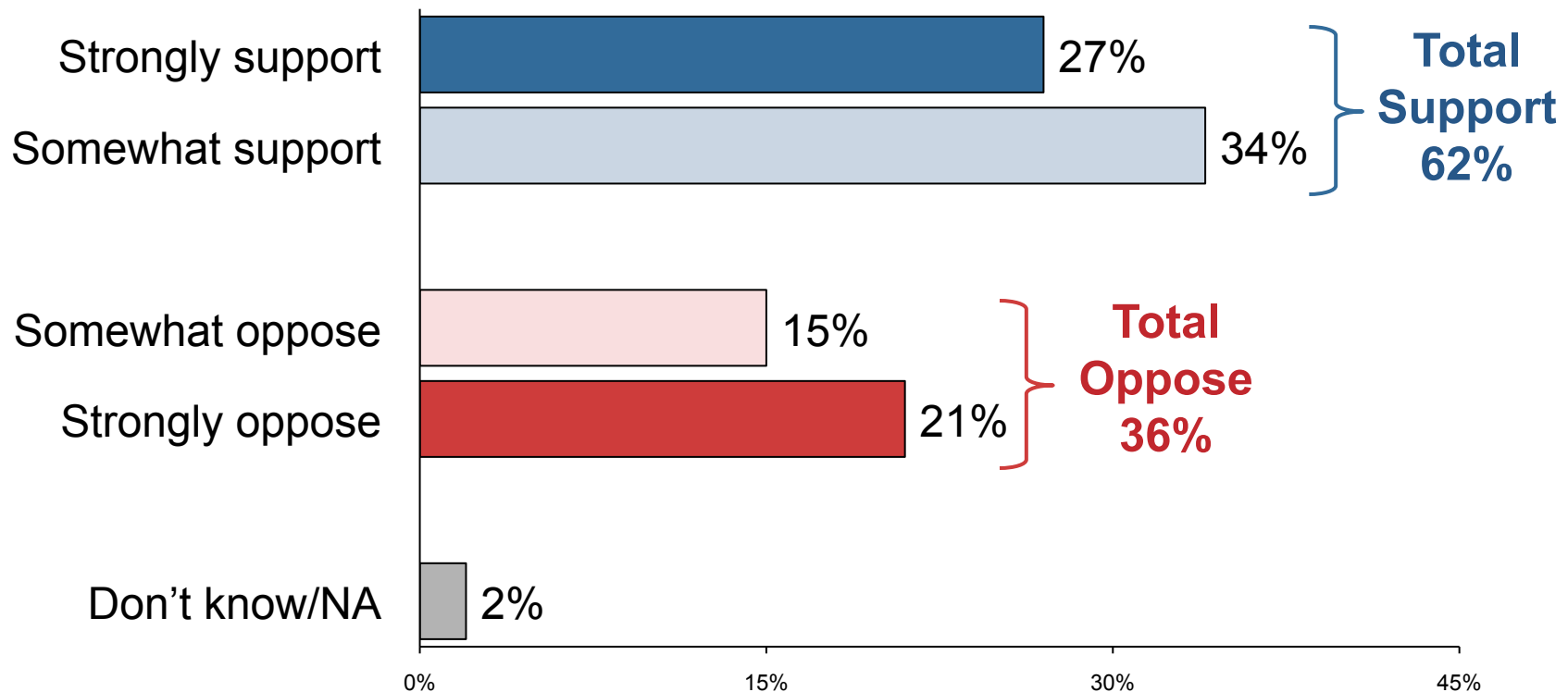
Voters strongly support restoring funding to Habitat Montana.

Restore the use of existing hunting and fishing license fee funds to improve access to public lands and wildlife habitat



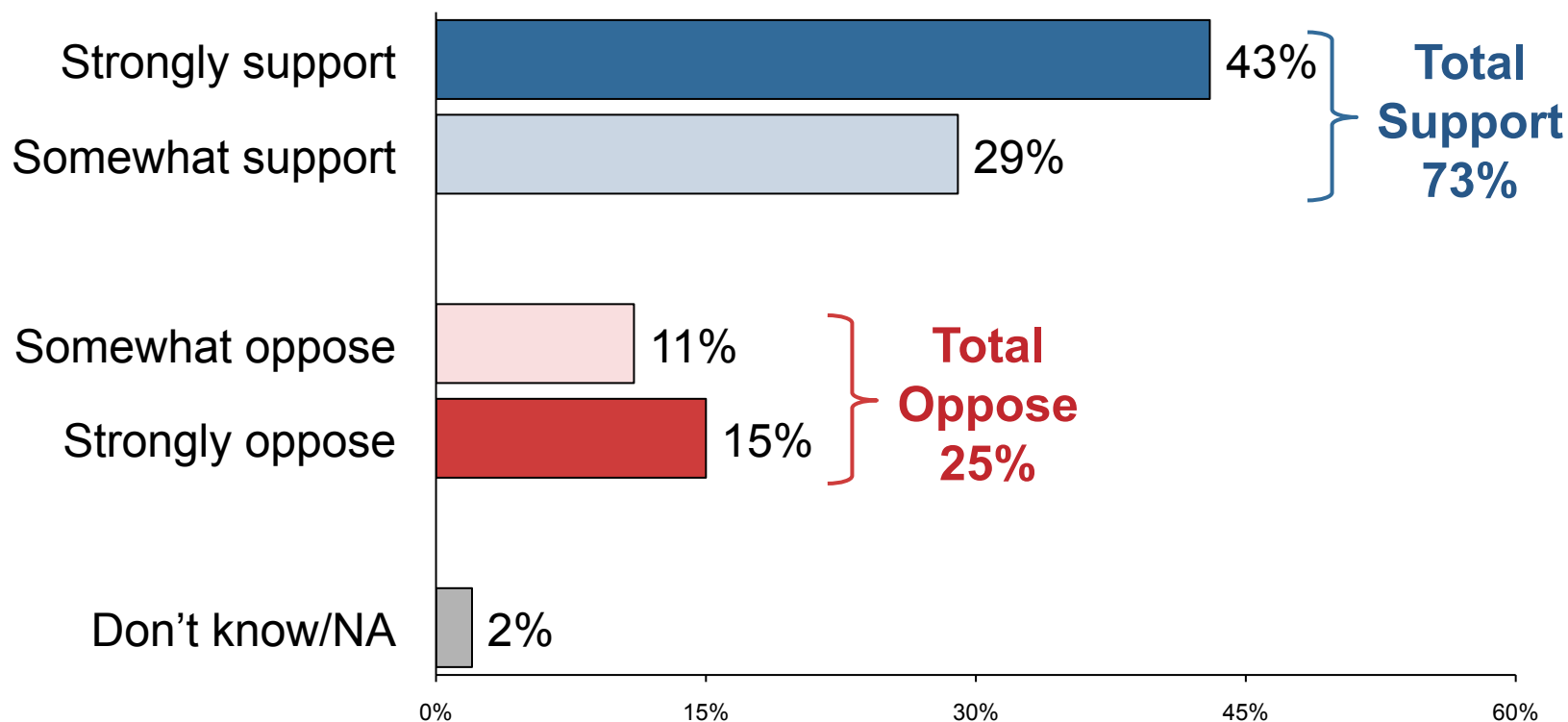
More than three in five favor creating an Office of Outdoor Recreation.

Create an Office of Outdoor Recreation to promote tourism and recreation



Nearly three-quarters support an advocate for public access to public lands.

Create a state advocate who would work to protect access to public lands



Each idea is less popular in Eastern Montana than the rest of the state.

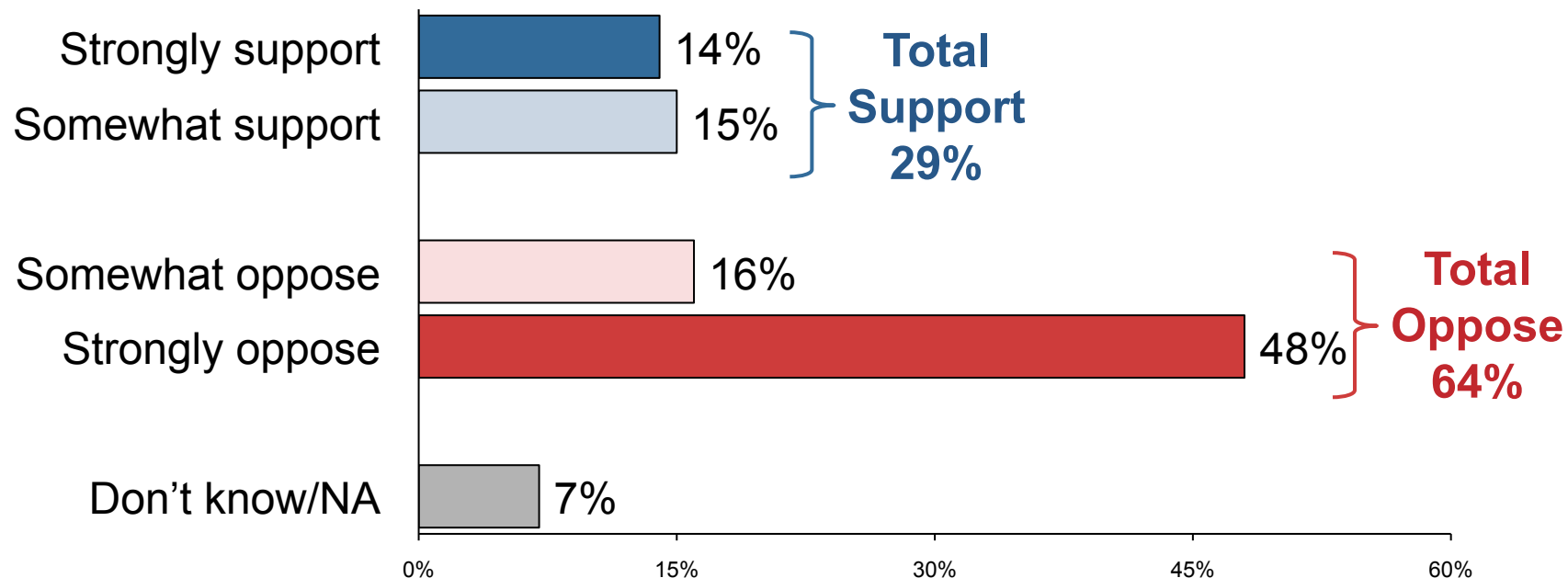
Proposals	All Voters		Eastern		Central		Western	
	Total Supp.	Total Opp.	Total Supp.	Total Opp.	Total Supp.	Total Opp.	Total Supp.	Total Opp.
Restore the use of existing hunting and fishing license fee funds to improve access to public lands and wildlife habitat	84%	12%	79%	18%	84%	12%	86%	8%
Create a state advocate who would work to protect access to public lands	73%	25%	68%	27%	71%	28%	76%	23%
Create an Office of Outdoor Recreation to promote tourism and recreation	62%	36%	52%	46%	61%	37%	68%	31%



River Protections

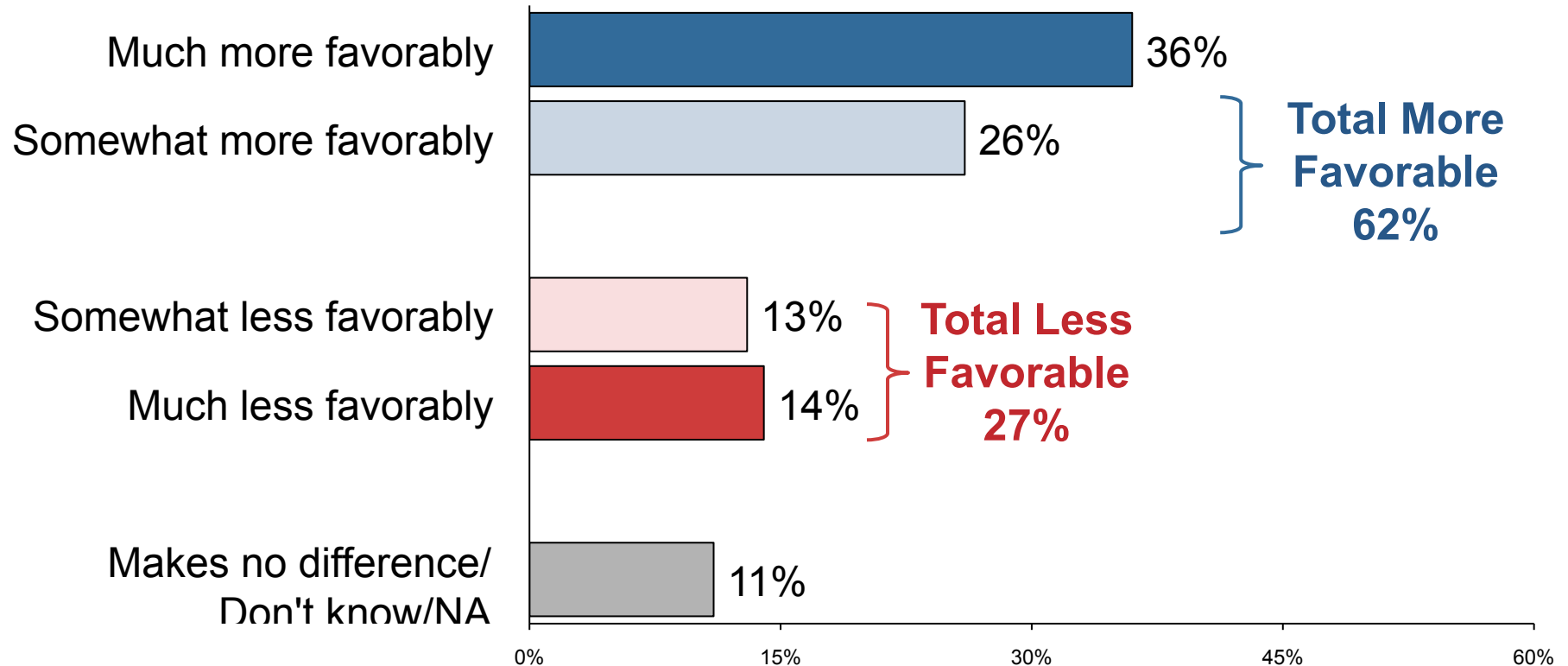
A strong majority opposes a mine on the Smith River.

A Canadian mining corporation is proposing to build a copper mine at the headwaters of the Smith River in Central Montana. This mine would create more than 200 jobs for 12 to 14 years in a community with a struggling economy, but it has the potential to pollute the river with mine waste and chemicals, decrease river flows, and severely harm fish populations for generations to come. Does this proposal sound like something you would support or oppose?



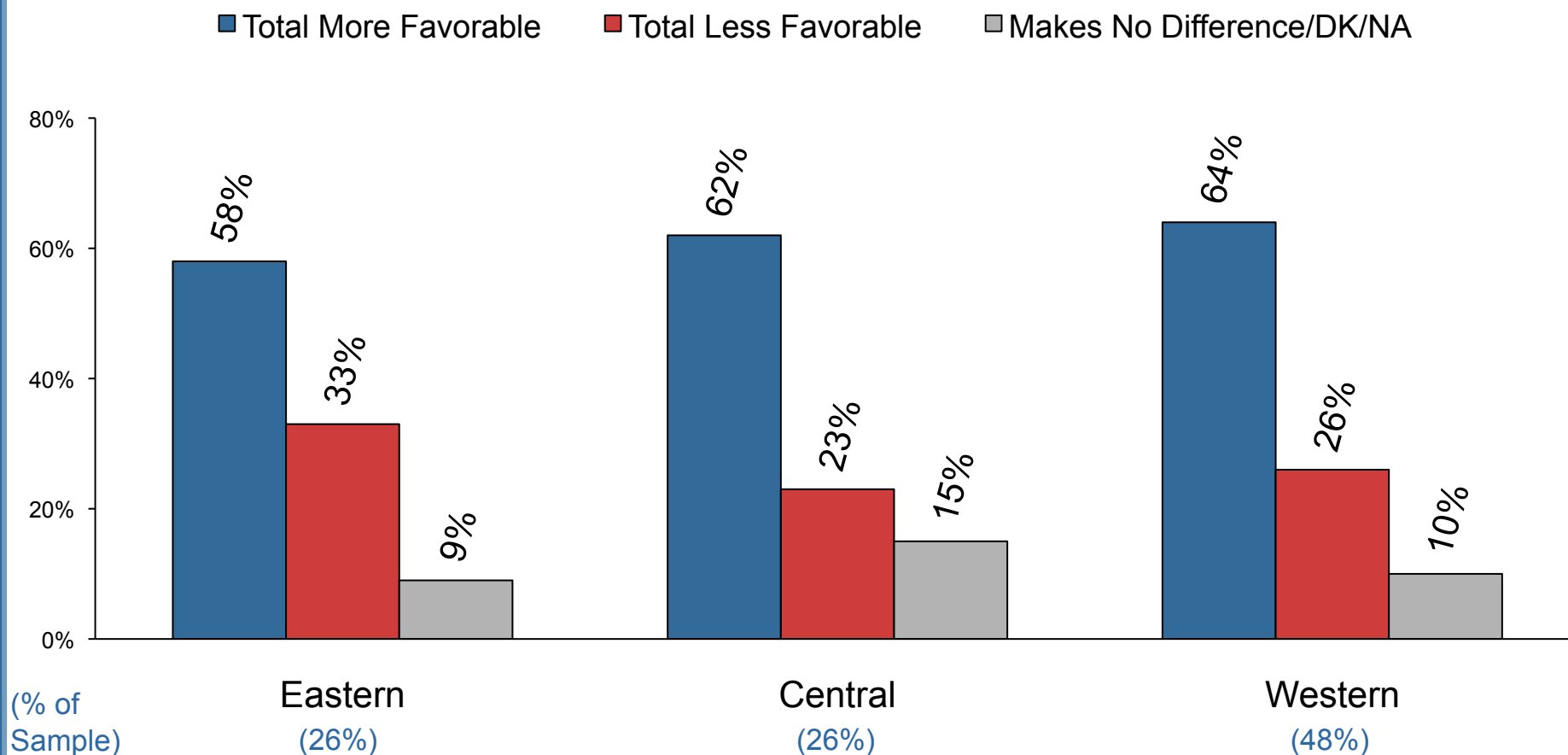
More than three in five are more likely to back an official who opposes the mine.

The state of Montana could determine that a copper mine in the headwaters of the Smith River would pose a serious environmental risk to water quality and the wild trout fishery there. Generally speaking, would you view an elected official more favorably, or less favorably if they opposed the construction of such a mine?



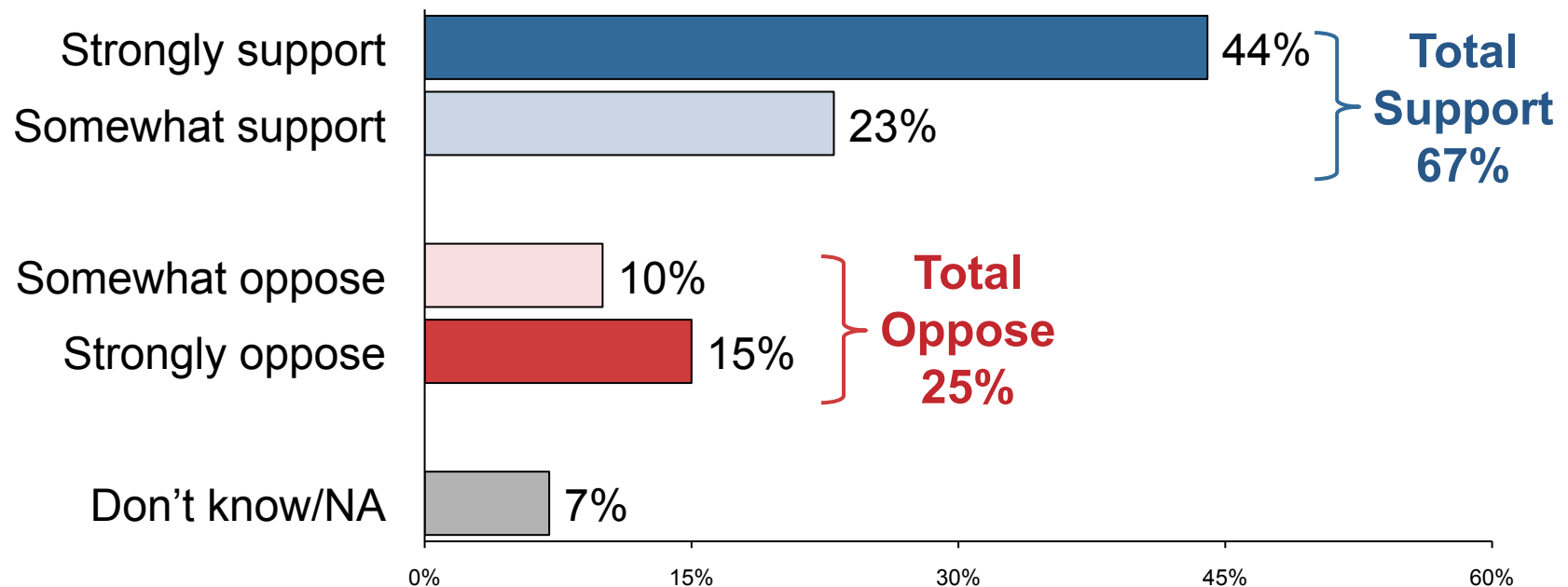
Voters in Eastern Montana are more split, but still see such an official favorably.

By Region



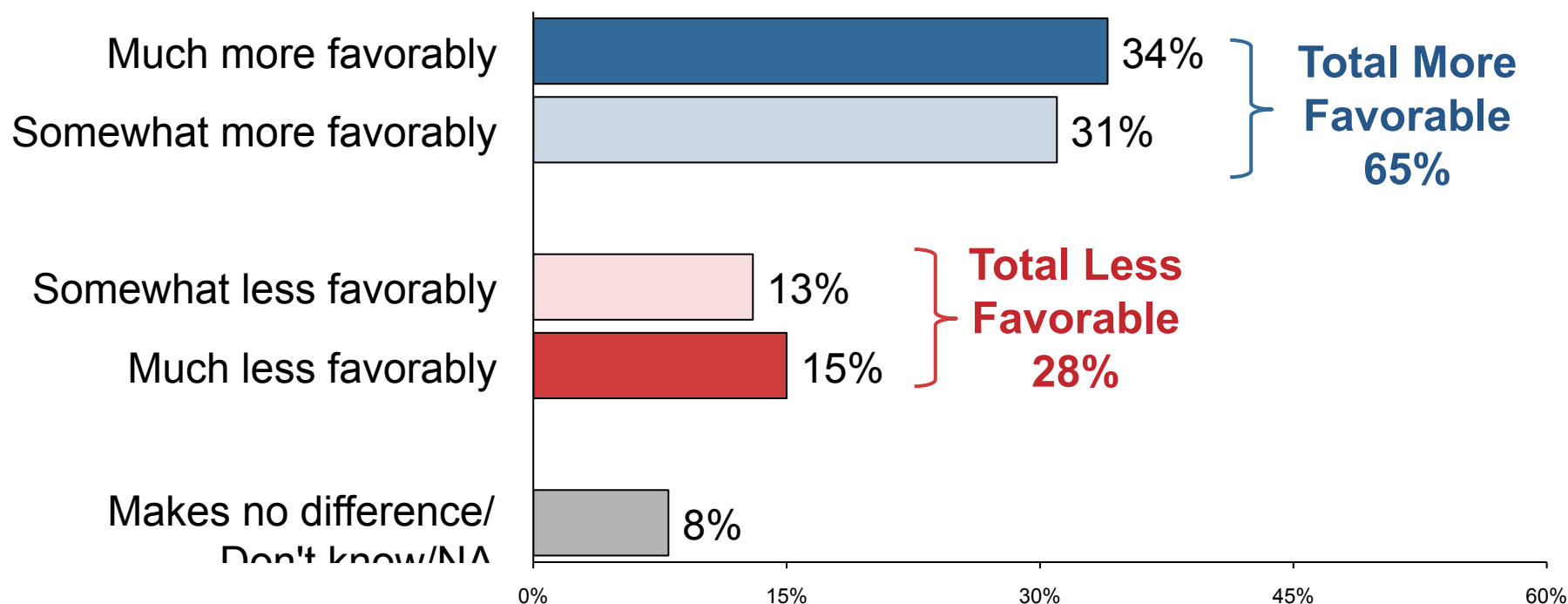
Montanans broadly support the designation of additional Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Currently, only four segments of Montana rivers enjoy status as Wild and Scenic Rivers, and the last one was designated 40 years ago. Do you support or oppose permanently protecting more of Montana's rivers that flow across federal public lands using the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act?



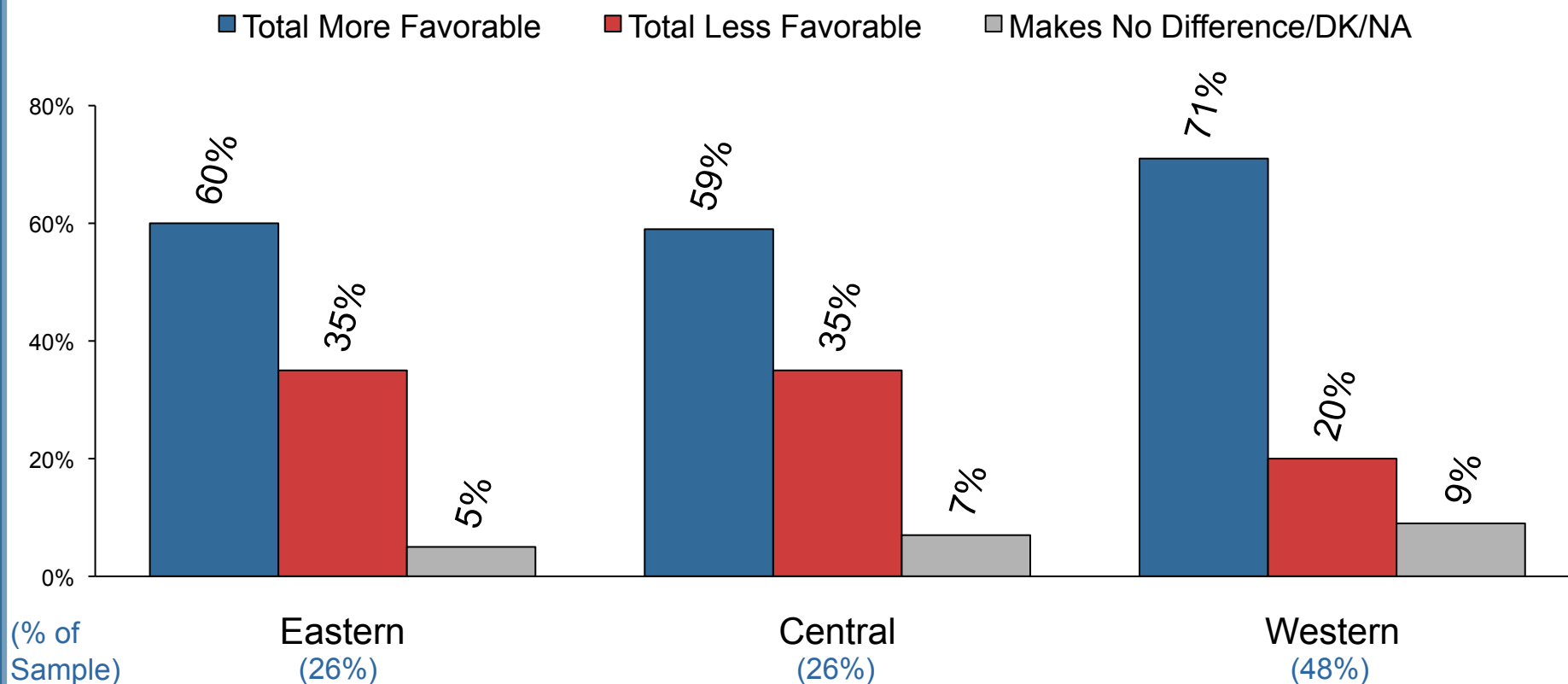
More than three in five favor an official who does, too.

Generally speaking, would you view an elected official who supports new Wild and Scenic designations for rivers flowing across Montana's federal public lands more favorably, or less favorably?



Seven in ten western Montanans have a more favorable view of an official who backs more Wild and Scenic Rivers.

By Region





Conclusions

Conclusions

- More than half of Montana voters now believe that action is needed on climate change – and more than two-thirds believe we can reduce carbon pollution without increasing our utility bills.
- Voters offer strong support for expanding the use of clean energy, believe it will create jobs in Montana, and see it as both reliable and a good investment.
- However, two-thirds continue to support more use of coal, which Montanans view as reliable, available and also a way to create good jobs.
- While most attribute the Colstrip closure to regulations or environmentalists, voters still support the transition to renewable energy and oppose fining the owners.
- Protecting the Smith River and designating more Wild and Scenic Rivers are broadly supported goals, and majorities would have a more favorable view of an elected official who backed those proposals.
- Voters strongly support restoring funding to Habitat Montana and protecting access to public lands.