

# Key Findings from the Long Island Sound 2024 Public Perception Study



# OpinionWorks Credentials

## Chesapeake Bay Program, EPA

- Development of a Baywide indicator of stewardship behavior

## *The Baltimore Sun*

- Elections and issues polling since 2007

## National Wildlife Federation

- Perceptions and engagement with the Ohio River

## The Recycling Partnership

- Creation of national Recycling Confidence Index

## New York State Office of Parks

- Recreational demand survey

## Mid-Atlantic Regional Council on the Ocean/NOAA

- Behavior change related to marine debris

## Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids

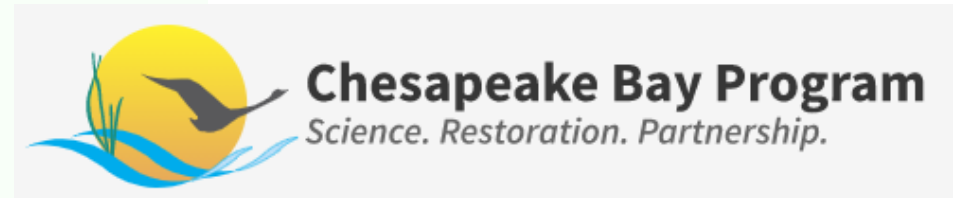
- Public attitudes about banning flavored tobacco products

## William Penn Foundation

- Assessing equitable access to the trails and parks in Greater Philadelphia

## Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

- Perceptions and behaviors related to air quality



# Research Objective

**Conduct a public perception survey among residents of the Long Island Sound watershed to assess their perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to the Sound.**

- Update understandings from the 2006 survey on factors impacting people's enjoyment of Long Island Sound and willingness to practice beneficial behaviors.
- Investigate emerging issues (e.g., resilience, plastics, marine debris, barriers to access, barriers to helpful behaviors).
- Update the Public Engagement and Knowledge target in the CCMP.

# Formative Questions/Hypotheses

- Impressions of the Sound
- People's feelings of connection to the Sound
- Barriers to connecting/accessing; how to better connect people to the Sound
- Ensure research model is representative of all residents
- Beneficial behaviors/actions: barriers and motivators
- Will appreciation for the Sound inspire people to do things?
- Update ecosystem targets

A map of the New York City area and Long Island Sound. The map shows the Hudson River, New York City, and Long Island. Major highways like I-95, I-87, and I-495 are visible. The title 'Survey Methodology' is overlaid on the map.

# Survey Methodology

**3,709 interviews**

**June 20-August 25, 2024**

**Deep segmentation**

**Comprehensive questionnaire:**

- Relationship with water and the outdoors
- Relevant attitudes and priorities
- Connections with the Sound
- Perceptions of the Sound across many indicators
- Perceived water quality and trendline
- Barriers to spending time outdoors/at the Sound
- Perceptions of the impact of personal actions
- 14 Behaviors: Level of adoption and likelihood in the future
- Trusted sources of information

# Focus Groups



## 4 focus groups

- A. Moderate to poor connection to the Sound
- B. Strongly connected to the Sound
- C. Desire a connection to the Sound but experiencing barriers
- D. Spanish language; spend moderate or more time outdoors

## Probing, 2-hour discussion to better understand key survey issues

- Perceptions of, feelings of connection to the Sound
- Health of the Sound and who is responsible
- Beneficial behaviors
- Long Island Sound Study: Public profile and potential renaming



**Varied perspectives  
from selected focus  
group participants,  
spread across the  
watershed**

**Catherine**

Middletown, CT  
Retired physician.  
Avid swimmer in Connecticut River.  
Nervous new boat owner.



Shirley Marte

**Zenida**

Bridgeport, CT  
Cancer survivor.  
Does not work. Volunteers for a non-profit.  
Worries about crime and the world's problems.

**Lynette**

Bronx, NY  
Lives alone.  
On her coop board.  
Pressured by that responsibility.

**Kenneth**

Stamford, CT  
Young adult. Lives with Mom.  
Loves sports. Considering trade school.  
Wondering about becoming a parent.

**Brina**

East Marion, NY  
Husband and 1-year-old daughter.  
Architect. Takes a ferry to work.  
Worries about the ecosystem.

**Rob**

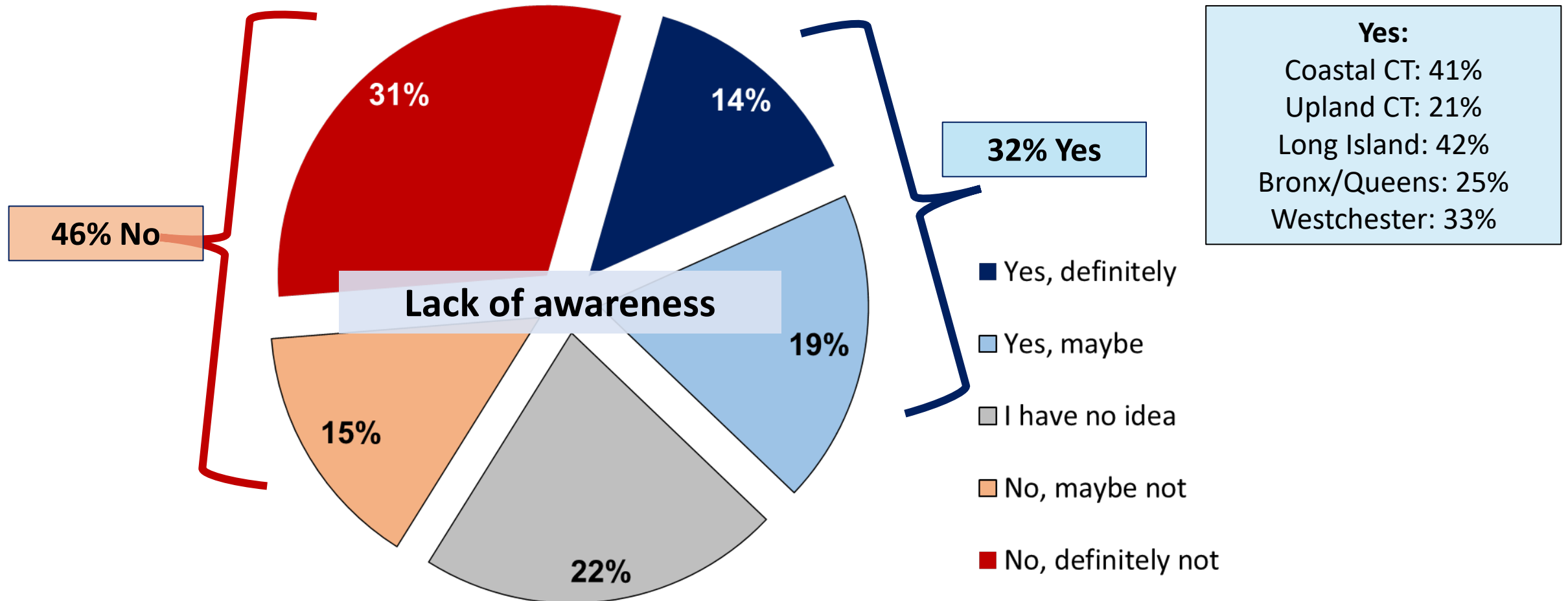
Bronx, NY  
Retired charter boat captain.  
Decades of perspective on the Sound.  
Seen great improvement.



# Research Findings: Perceptions of Long Island Sound and Feelings of Connection



# Do You Live in the Long Island Sound Watershed?



As far as you know, do you live in the Long Island Sound watershed?

## Describing Long Island Sound in 3 Words

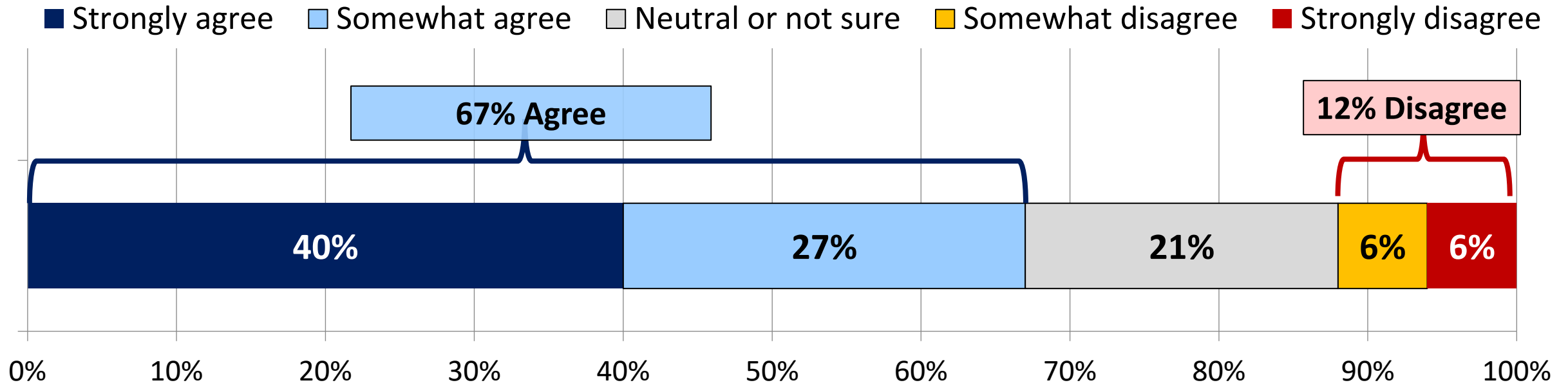
## Overwhelmingly positive word array



**What three adjectives first come to your mind when you think about Long Island Sound.**

# I Care About Long Island Sound

Agree or Disagree



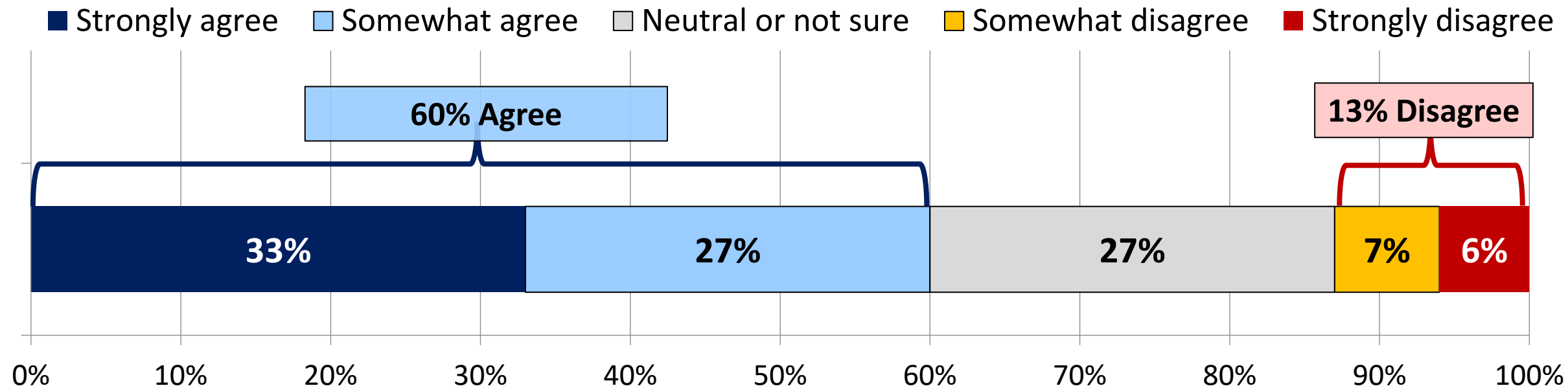
Do you agree or disagree with these statements about Long Island Sound?

**I care about Long Island Sound.**

**Much higher among older and more affluent residents, and coastal counties to the east.**

# Being Near the Sound Makes Me Feel Peaceful & Happier

Agree or Disagree



Do you agree or disagree with these statements about Long Island Sound?  
**Being near Long Island Sound makes me feel peaceful and happier.**

**Proximity to the Sound creates a positive emotional reaction for many residents.**



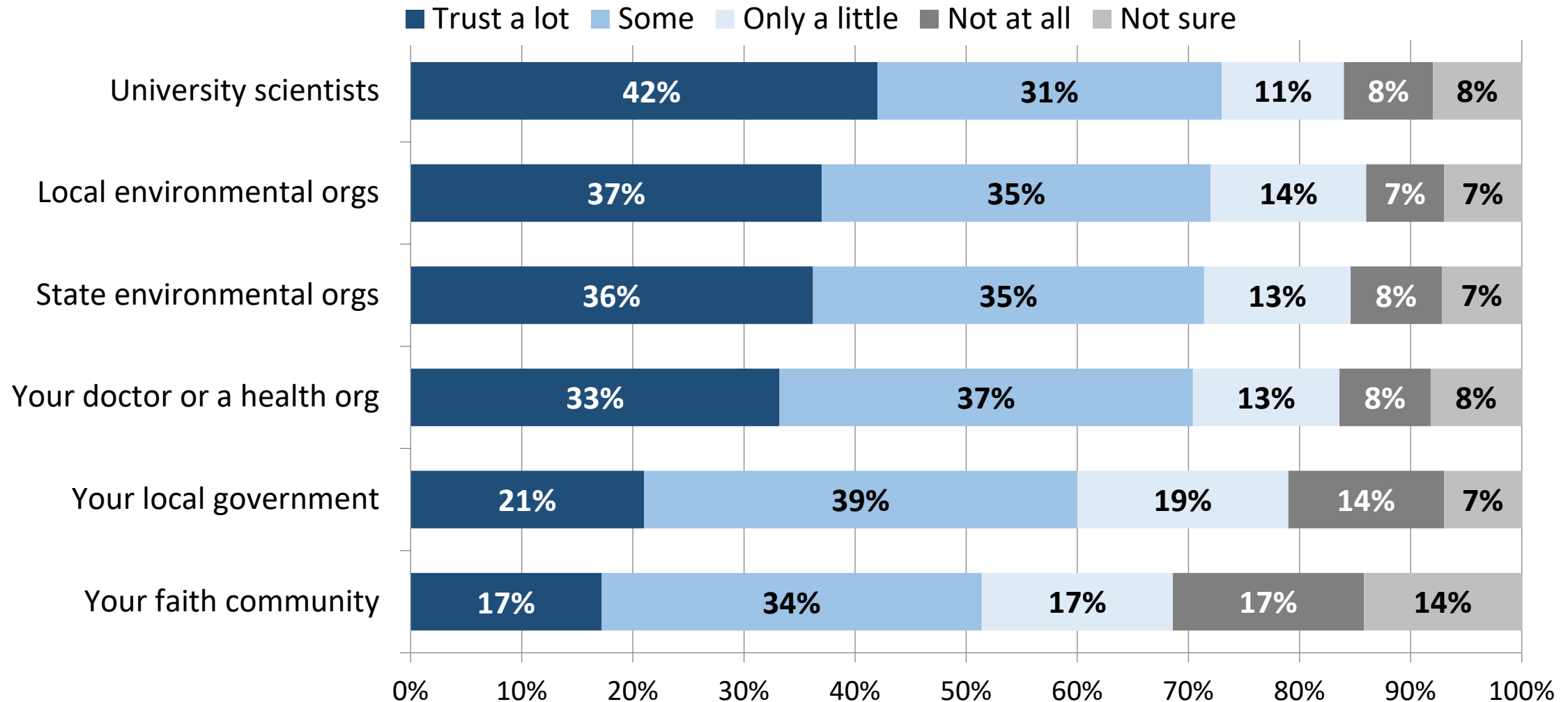
## Focus Group Observation

*“I think that this experience shows that we all come from different backgrounds and the Sound is a far-reaching thing. It's a far-reaching body of water...we all enjoy it. And we might not see eye to eye on everything, but I think there's a lot of common ground that we can find when talking about things we love like the Sound.”*

*“That's something that gives me hope that we can all find common ground. I think we all are on the same page with wanting the best for our environment and just the far reaches that Long Island Sound affects.”*

– Brina, Focus Group B, Connected to the Sound

# Trusted Sources of Information



How much would you trust information about water pollution and the environment that comes from each of these sources?

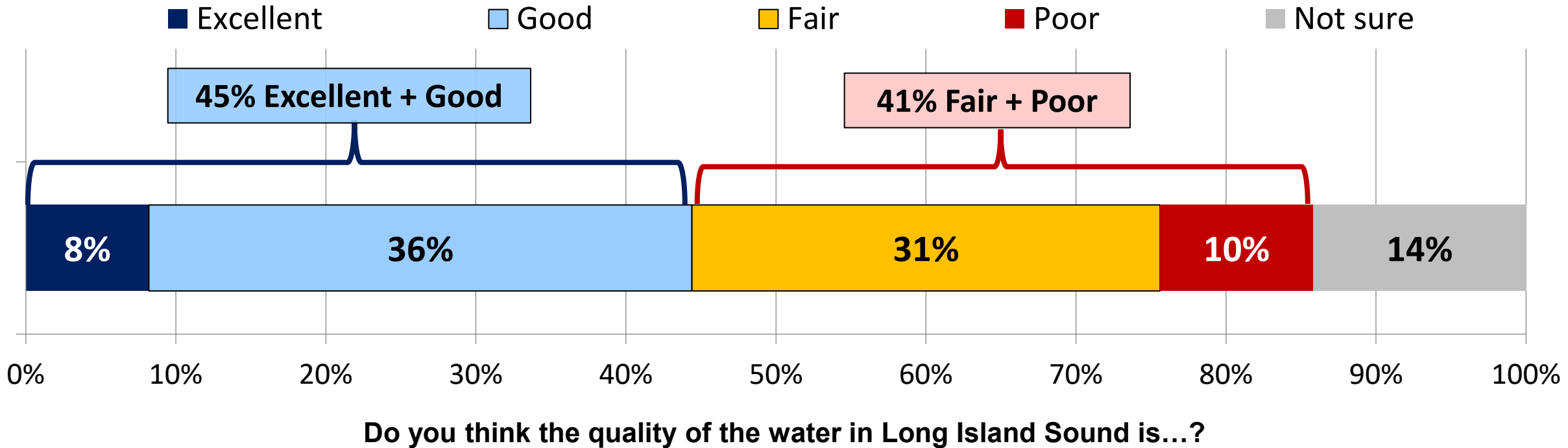
Focus group participants wanted greater visibility for LISS once they learned about it.



# Perceptions of Water Quality

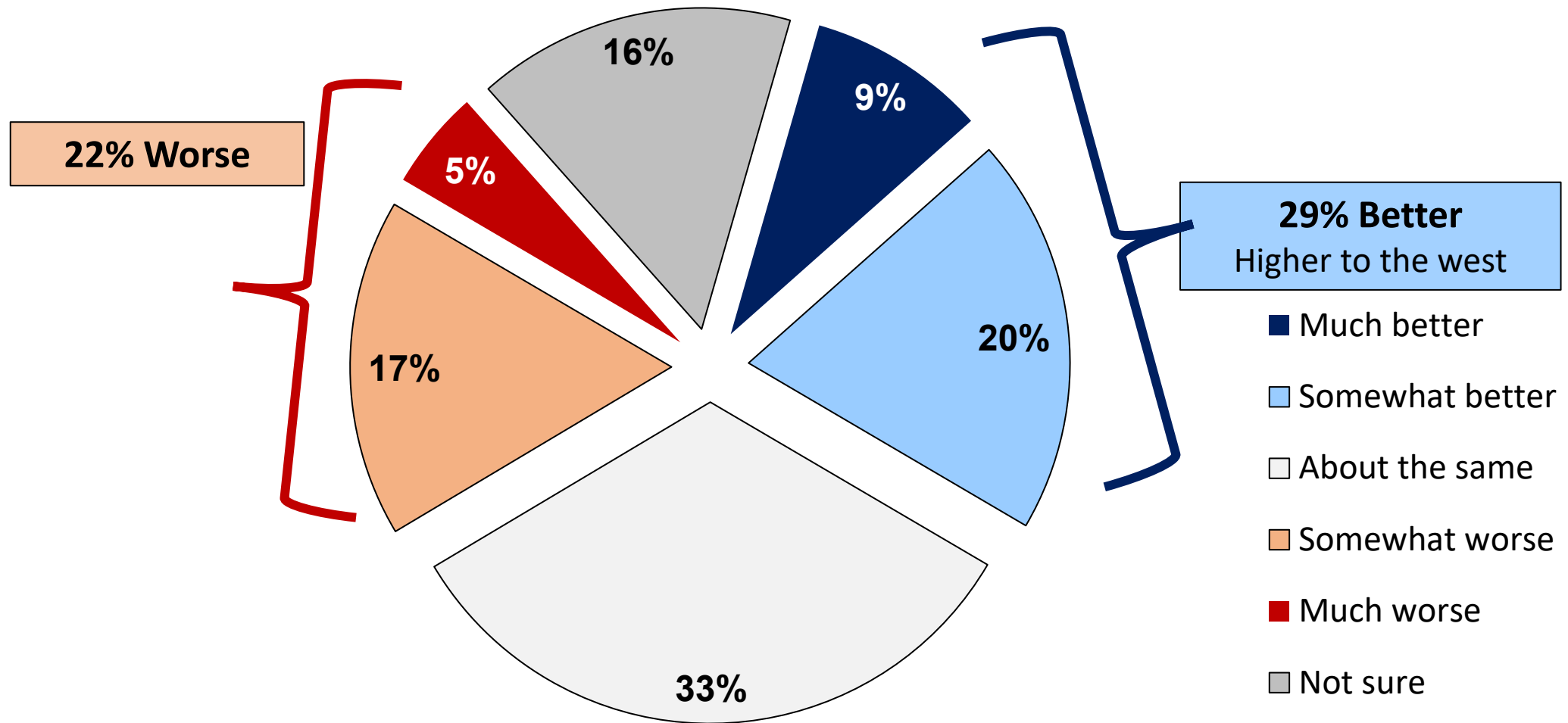
# Impressions of the Quality of Water in Long Island Sound

**Excellent + Good rises from west to east:**  
CT: Fairfield 41%, New Haven 40%, Middlesex 49%, New London 57%  
NY: Westchester 39%, Bronx/Queens 46%, Nassau 45%, Suffolk 57%





# Trend in Water Quality Compared to 5 Years Ago



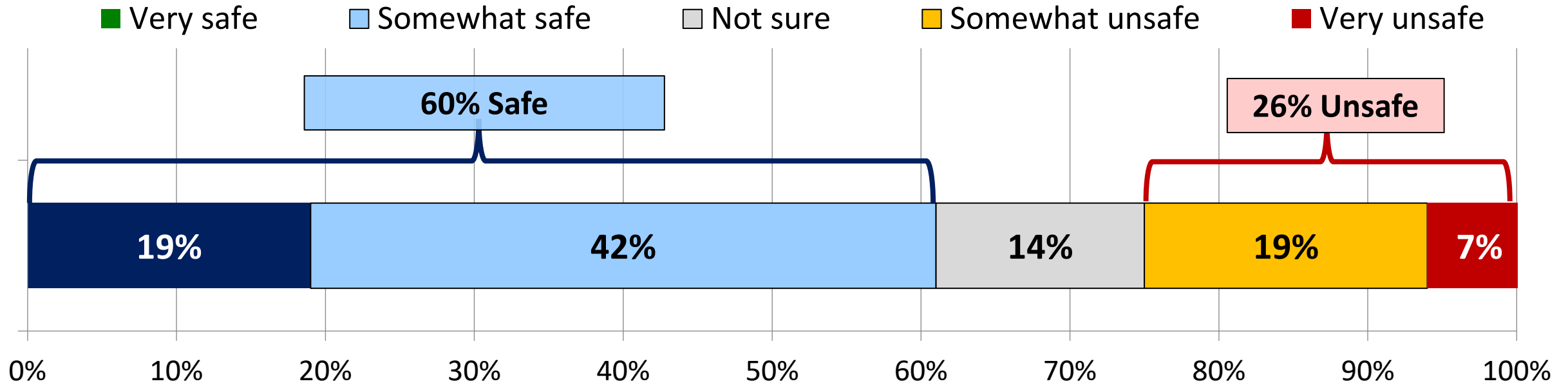
Compared to five years ago, do you think the quality of the water in Long Island Sound is...?

# Has Water Quality in the Sound Improved?

*“The Sound is much, much, much, much, much cleaner than even 20 years ago. Completely different animal. I mean, we have mussels growing. The mussels disappeared 30 years ago, 35, 40 years ago from the Sound. The western part of the Sound is loaded with mussels now all over the place. That tells you we have a healthy Sound... I don't know, but the fish are bountiful for the most part. The water is clean.”*

– Rob, Bronx, NY; Focus Group B, Connected to the Sound

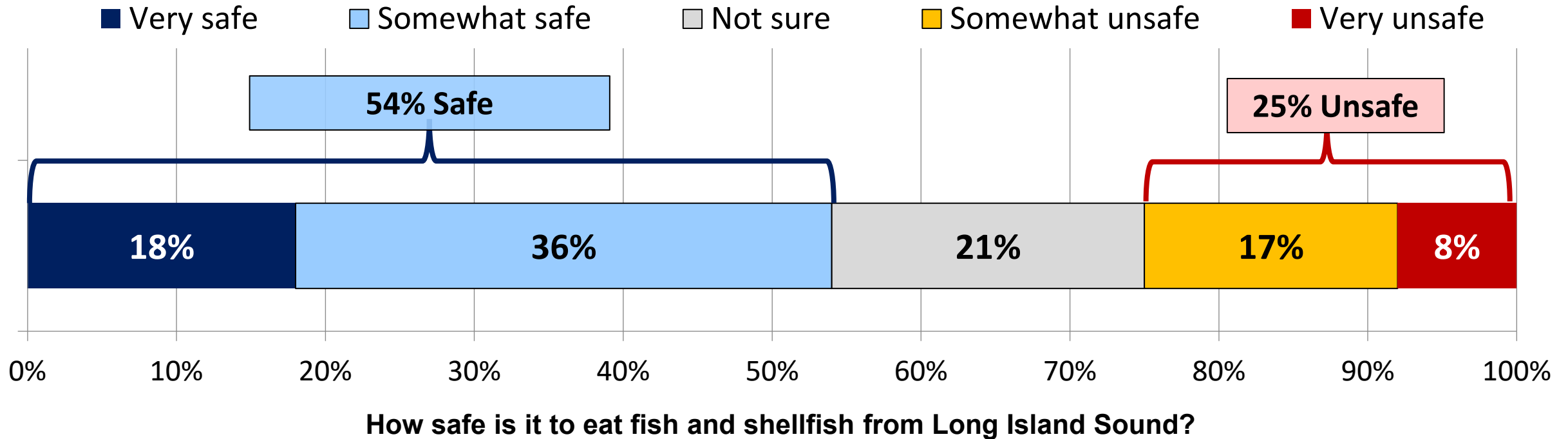
# Safe or Unsafe to Swim in Long Island Sound



From a public health perspective, how safe do you think it is for adults and children to swim in Long Island Sound?

2006: Unsafe = 38%  
2024: Unsafe = 26%

# Safe or Unsafe to Eat Fish From Long Island Sound



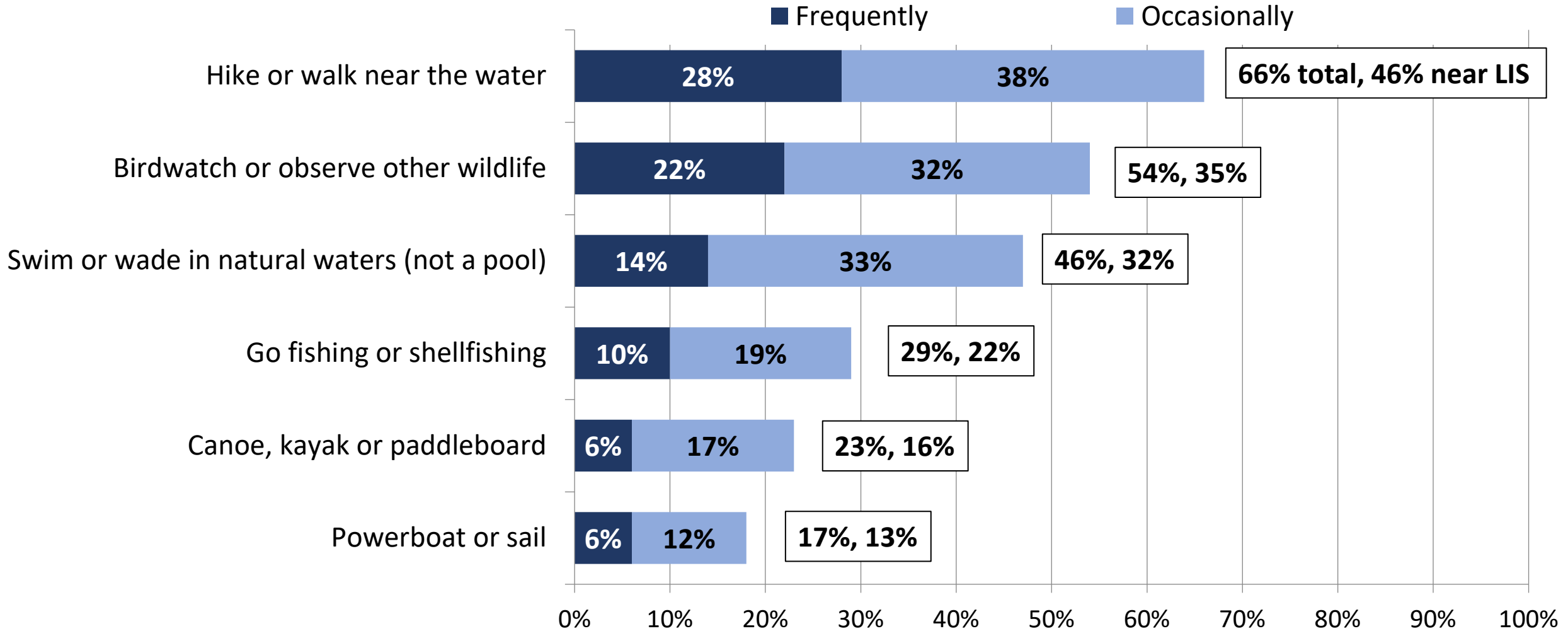
2006: Unsafe = 41%  
2024: Unsafe = 25%





# Water and the Outdoors

# Activities

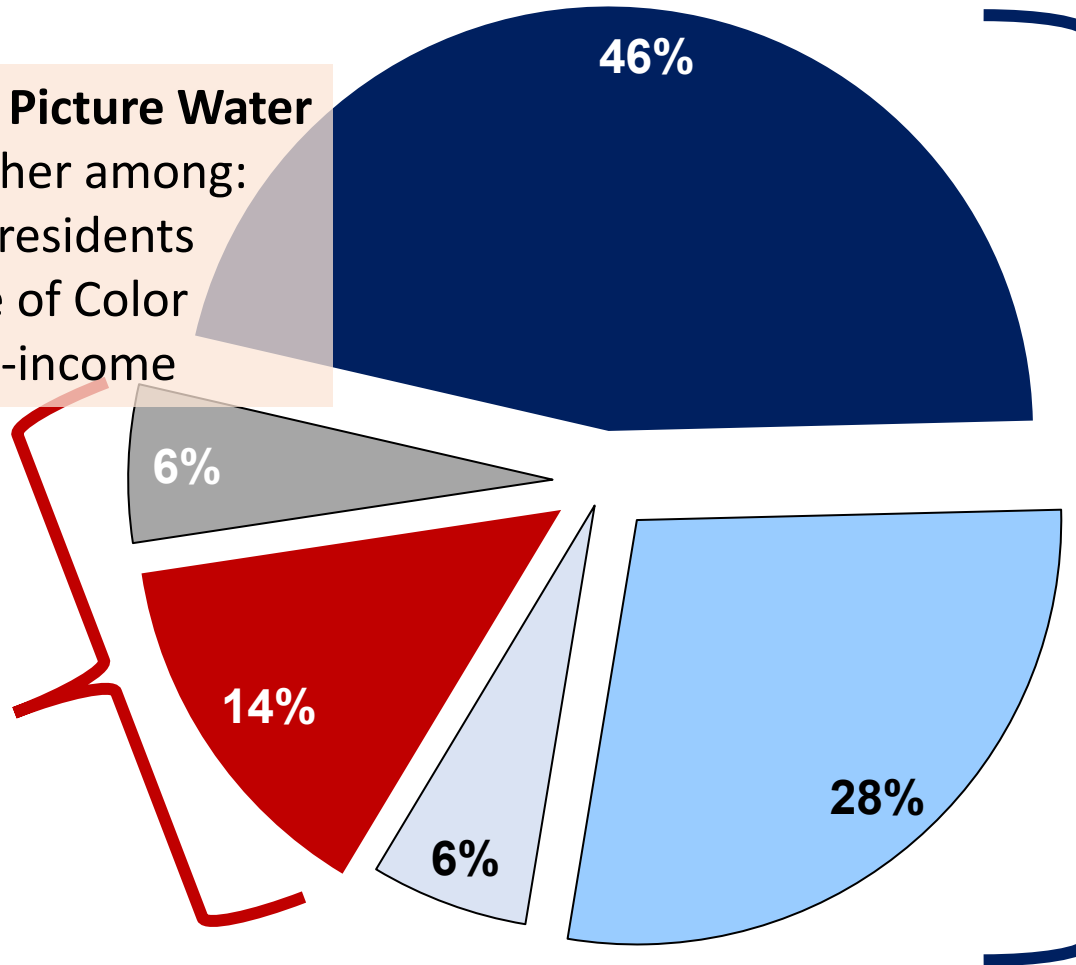


How often do you do any of these things?

# Picturing Water Near Where You Live

## 20% Cannot Picture Water

Much higher among:  
Urban residents  
People of Color  
Lower-income



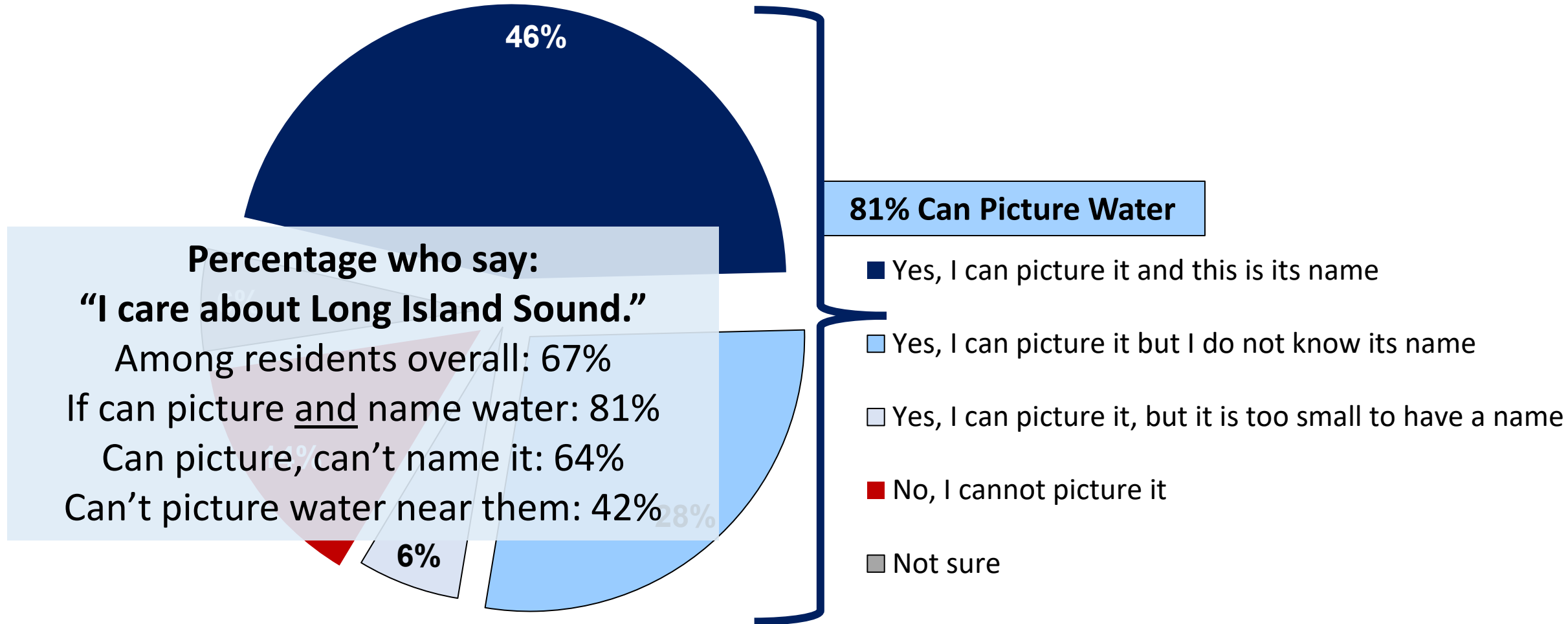
## 81% Can Picture Water

- Yes, I can picture it and this is its name
- Yes, I can picture it but I do not know its name
- Yes, I can picture it, but it is too small to have a name
- No, I cannot picture it
- Not sure

Can you picture in your mind a stream, river, bay, or coastline close to where you live? If yes, what is its name?

(Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)

# Picturing Water Near Where You Live

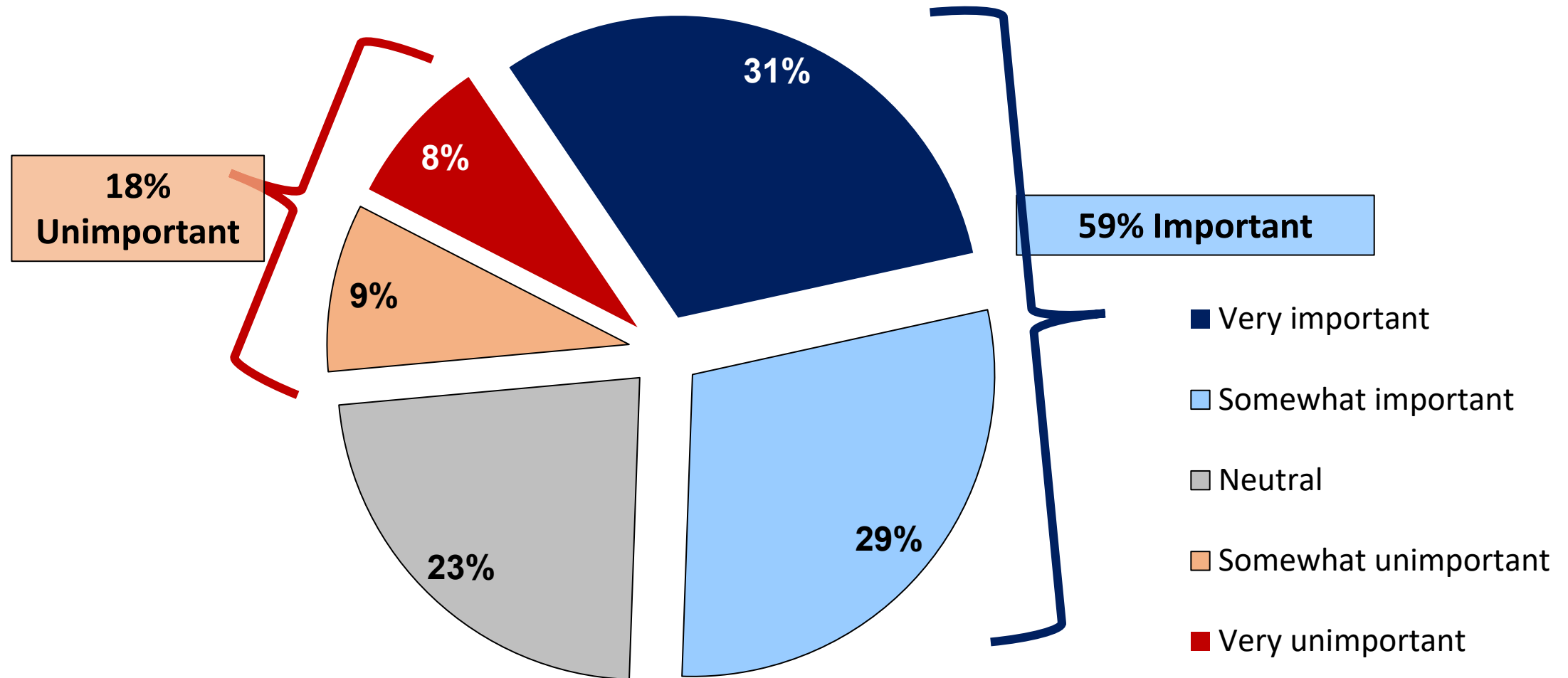


Can you picture in your mind a stream, river, bay, or coastline close to where you live? If yes, what is its name?

(Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)



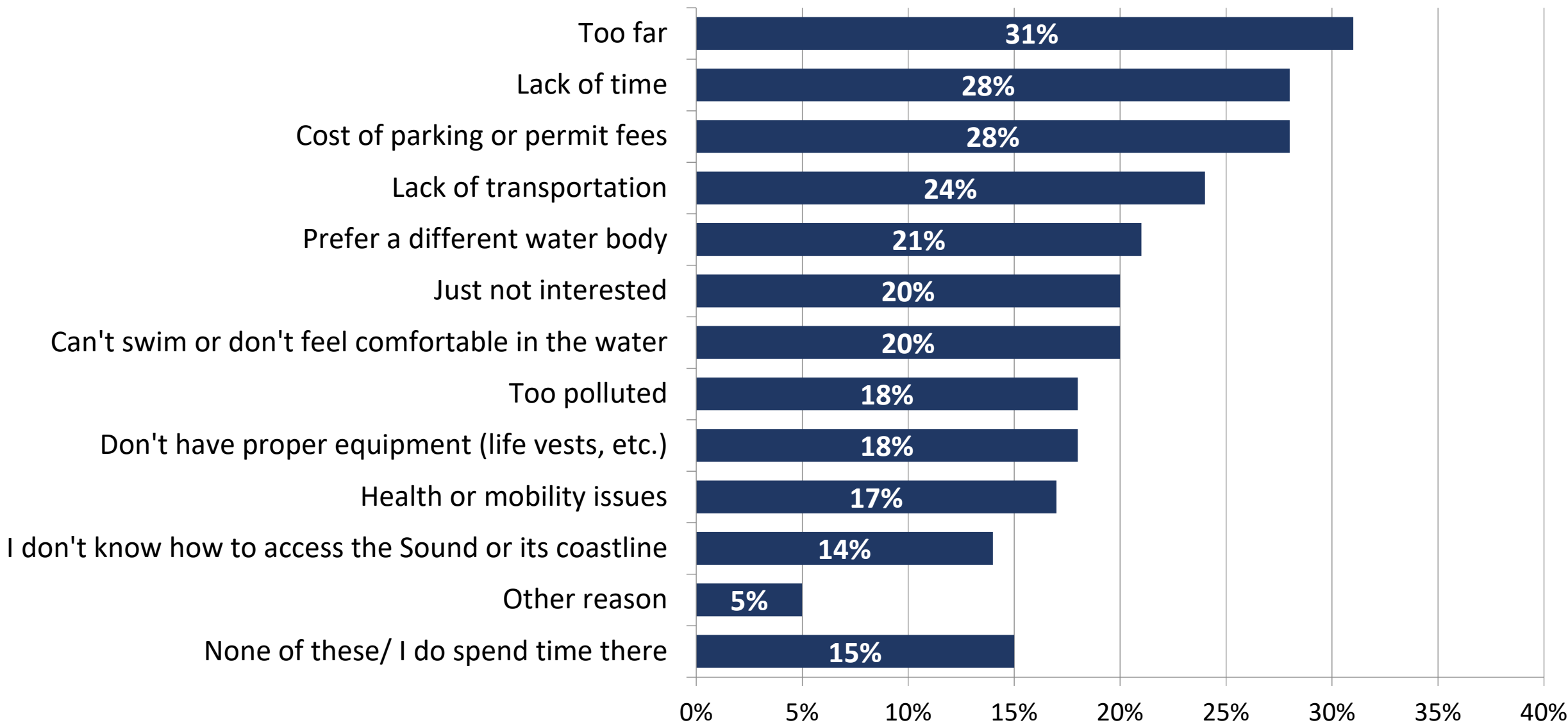
# Importance of Convenient Access



**When you think about all the other things you could be doing with your time,  
how important is it to you to have convenient access to the water for outdoor activities?**  
(Numbers may not appear to add correctly due to rounding.)

# Reasons People Do Not Visit Long Island Sound

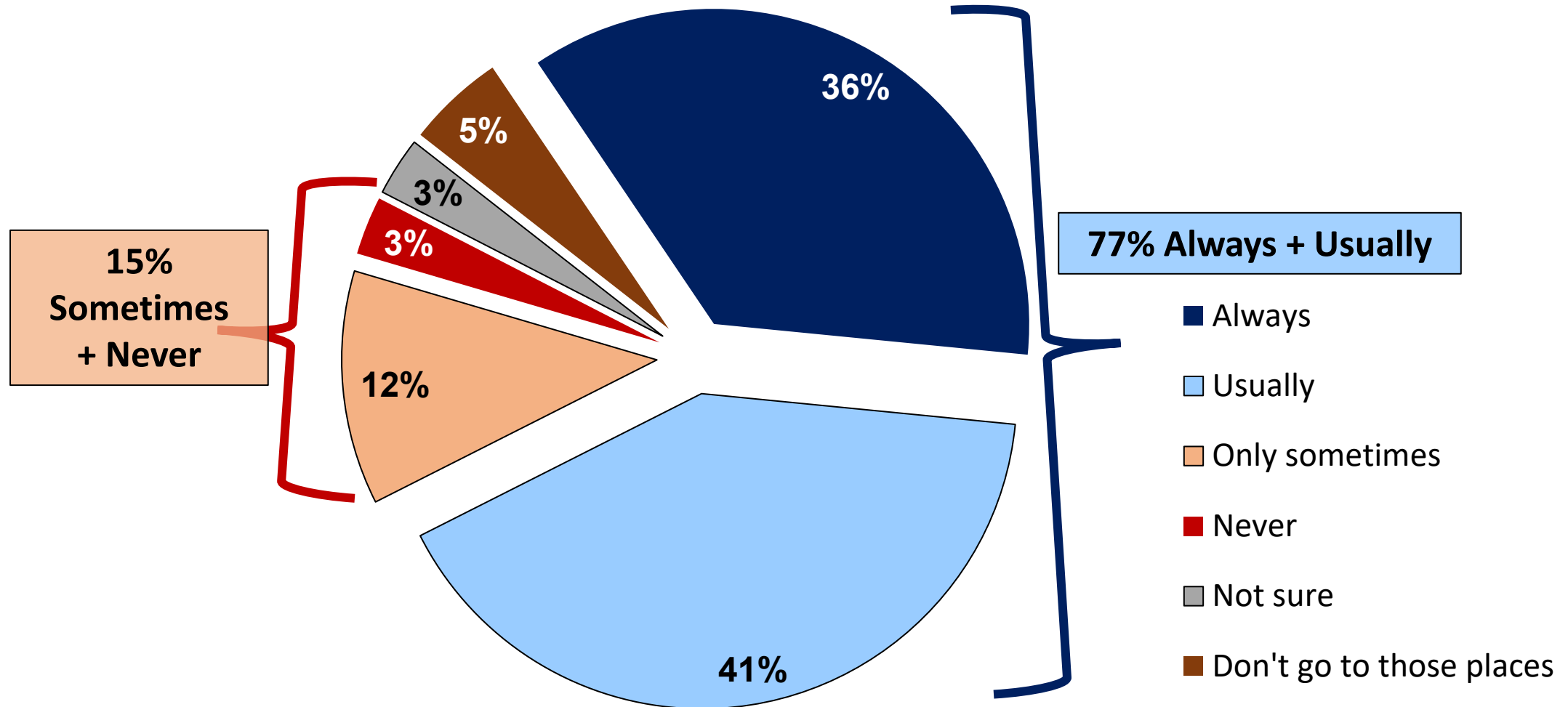
Choosing Reasons from a List



Here are some reasons why people might not visit Long Island Sound. Mark any that apply to you.

# Feel Welcome and a Sense of Belonging

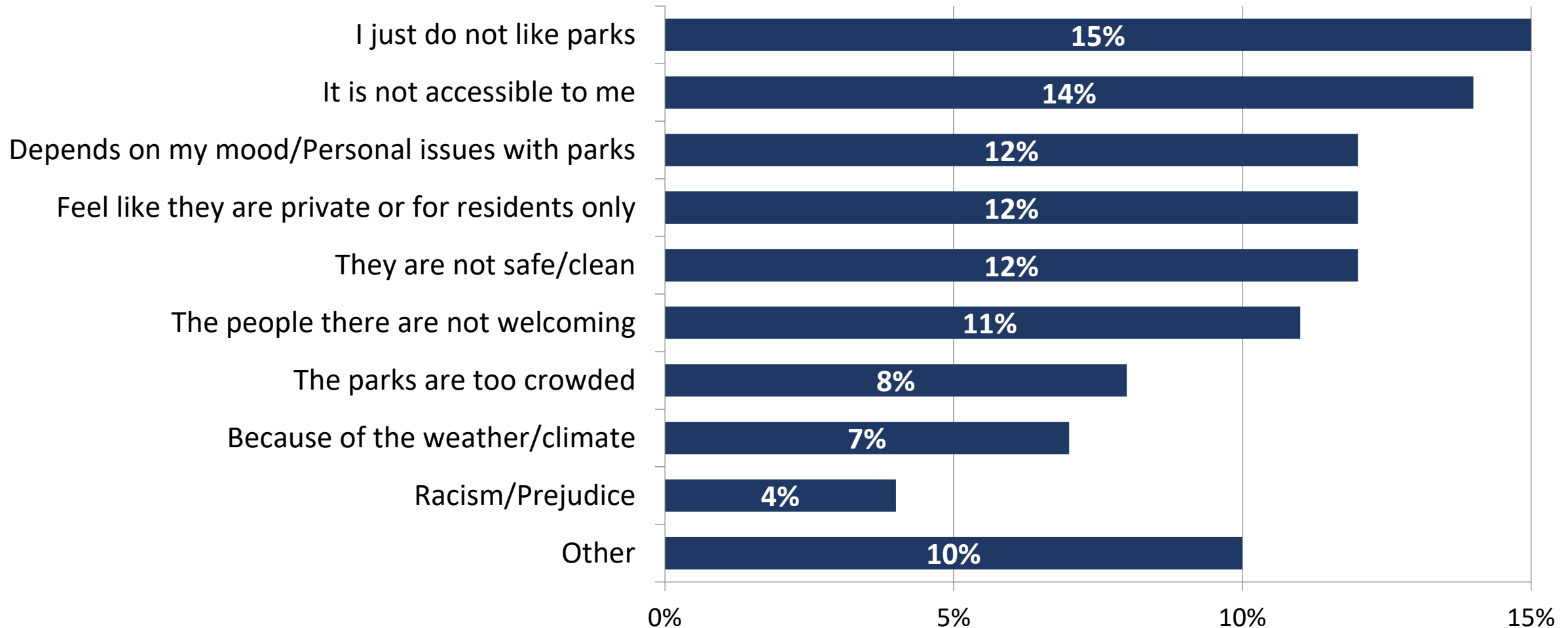
In Parks or on Trails Near the Water



If you are in parks or on trails near the water, do you feel welcome and a sense of belonging there?

# Why I Don't Feel Welcome

Asked of Those Who Said They “Only Sometimes” or “Never” Feel Welcome

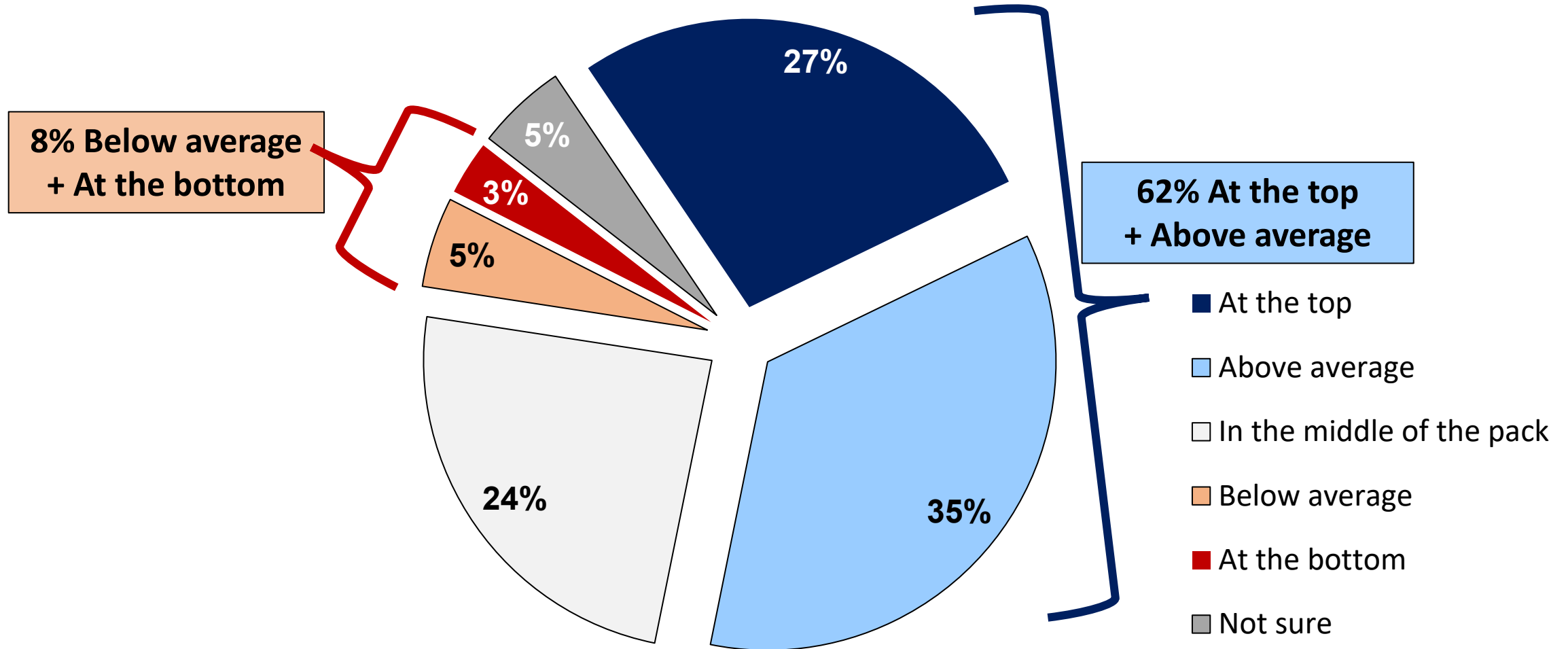


**Please briefly describe why you said you {never/only sometimes} feel welcome and a sense of belonging in parks or on trails near the water? (Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)**



# Personal Attitudes & Behavior

# Protecting the Natural Environment as a Personal Priority

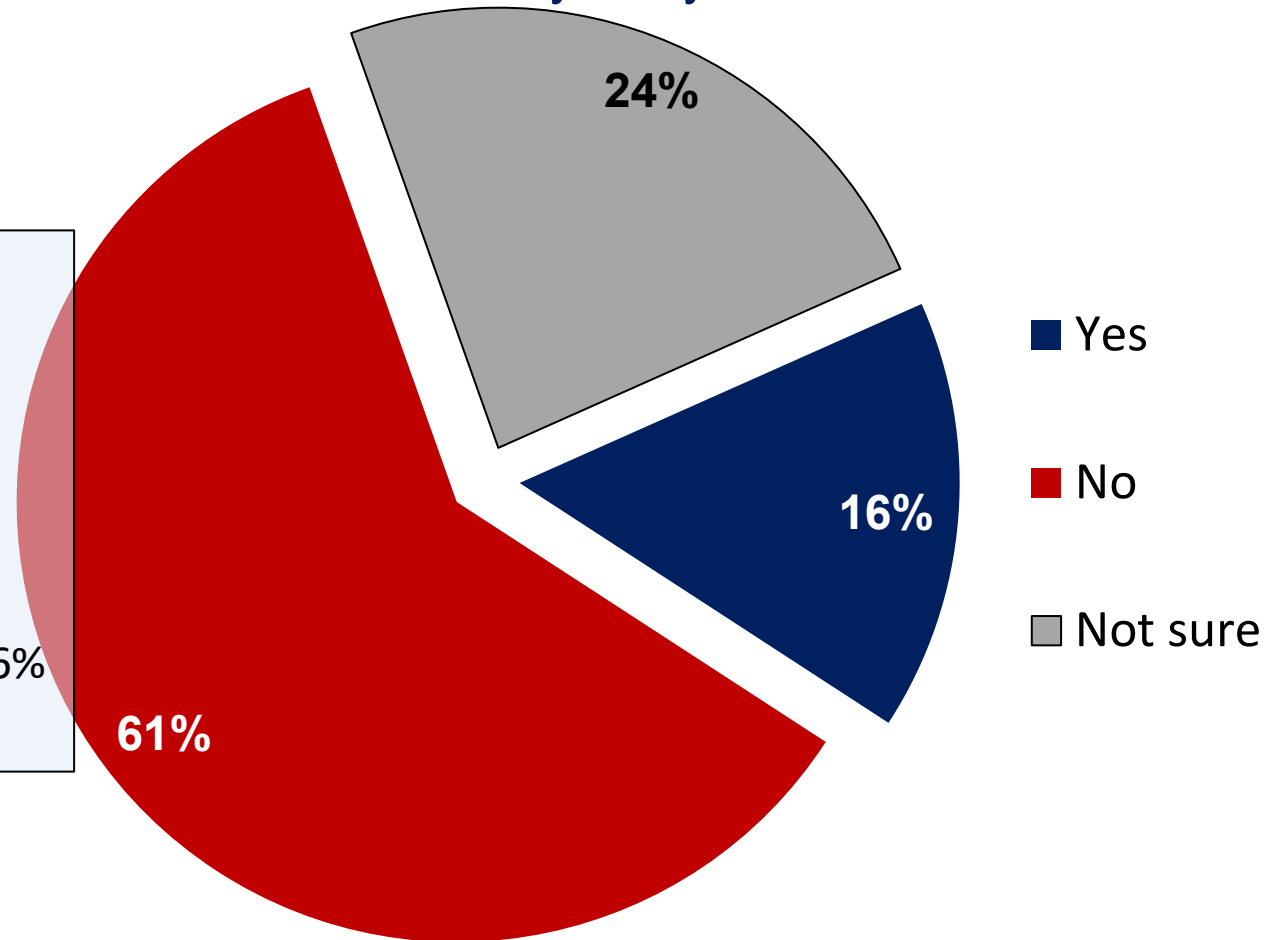


If you were to consider all the issues and challenges facing this area today, where would protecting the natural environment rank on that priority list for you?

# I Do Things That Might Hurt Water Quality in the Sound

As Part of My Daily Life

**If yes, what people cite:**  
Litter/Create trash 34%  
Drive too much 12%  
Pollute or waste water 12%  
Use plastic 7%  
Not recycle 7%  
Use fertilizer/pesticide/chemicals 6%  
Other 23%

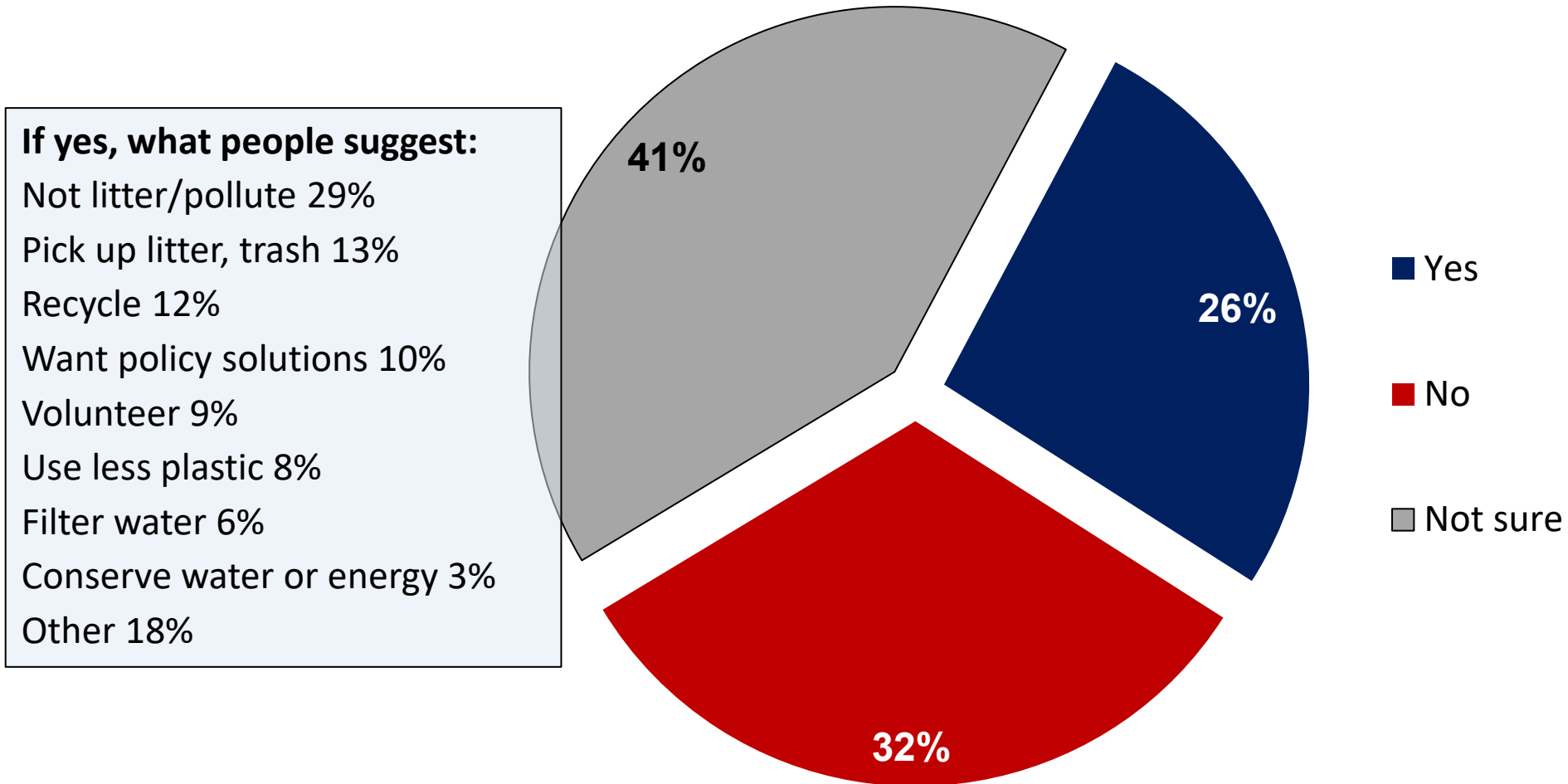


**Do you think there is anything that you do now as part of your daily life that might hurt the quality of water in Long Island Sound?**



# I Could Help Improve the Quality of Water in the Sound

By Making a Change in My Daily Life



**Do you think there is any change you could make in your daily life that might help to improve the quality of water in Long Island Sound?**

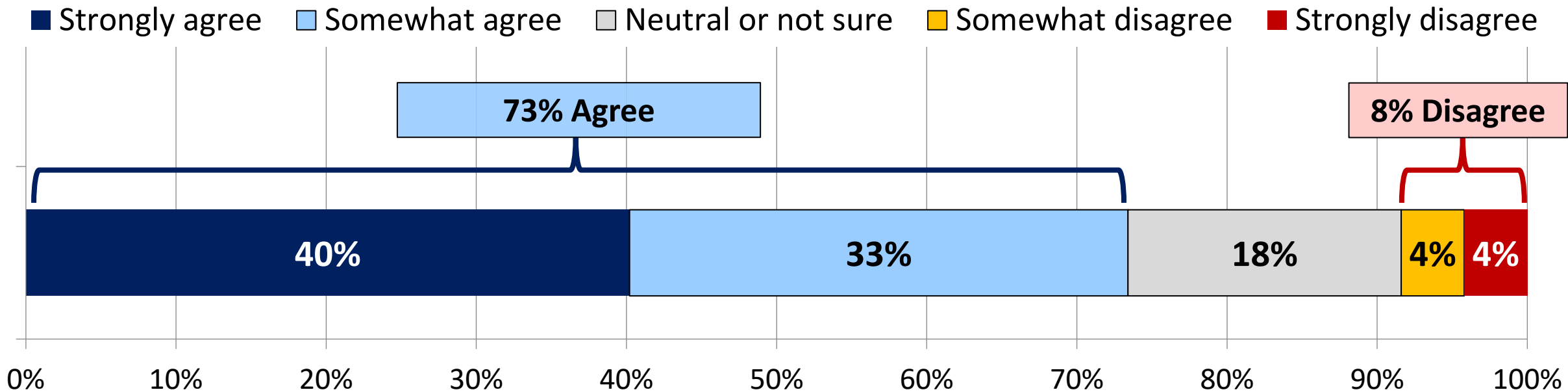
# Focus Group Observation

*“I feel if people see other people do things, they want to get in on the trend or get in on everything so they could say they're a part of it...I have a friend who she actually volunteers at the beach to clean up, and because she started doing it, my other friends started doing it. So I feel people love doing things once they see that other people start doing it.”*

– Paola, Focus Group A, Not connected to the Sound

# Actions on Land Impact the Health of Long Island Sound

Agree or Disagree



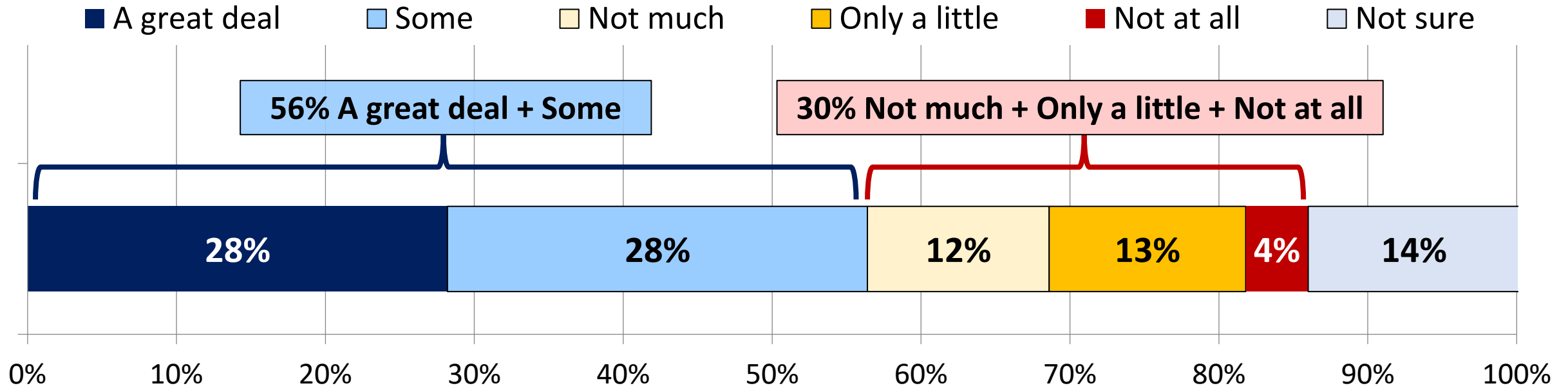
Do you agree or disagree with these statements?

The actions of people on land have an impact on the health of Long Island Sound.

Very strong agreement with this concept.

# Impact on Water Quality

If Most Local Residents Changed Their Everyday Behavior

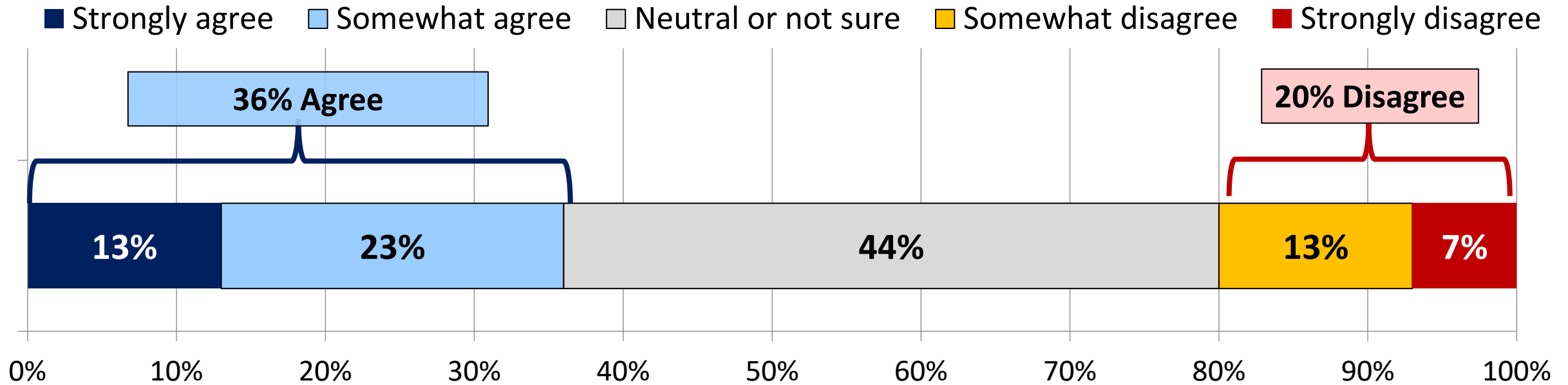


In your view, if most local residents changed their everyday behavior, how much would it improve the quality of water in Long Island Sound?

Many residents doubt that collective actions would add up to anything impactful.

# I Know What I Can Do to Help

Agree or Disagree



Do you agree or disagree with these statements about Long Island Sound?

**I know what I can do to help improve the health of the Sound.**

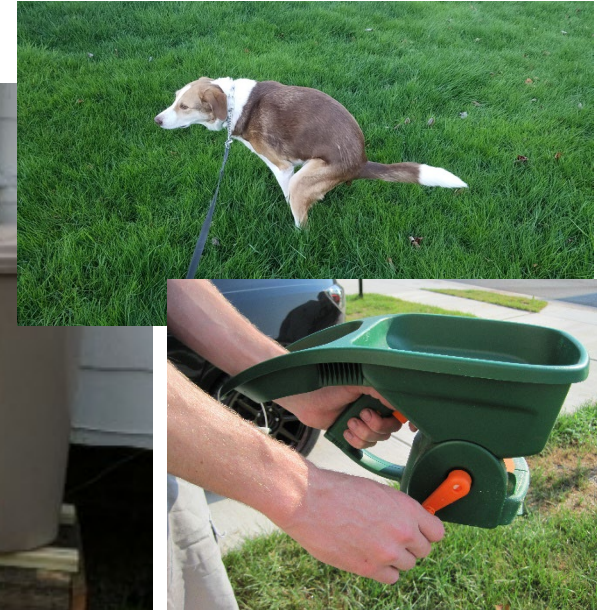
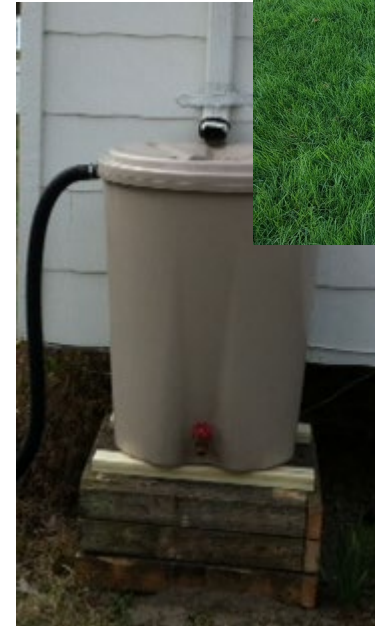
**Only about one-third feel like they know what they could do to help.**



# Beneficial Behaviors

# Measured Behaviors

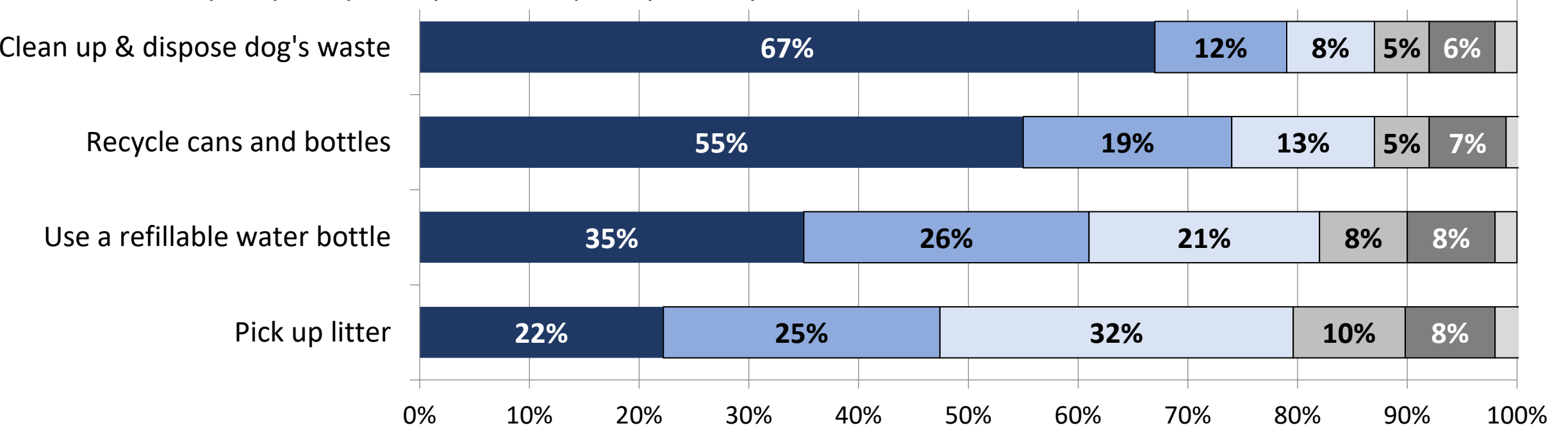
- Recycle cans and bottles
- Use chemical pesticides
- Use herbicide
- Volunteer to help clean up or beautify
- Connect a rain barrel and use the water
- Create a rain garden
- Fertilize your lawn
- Replace grass with native plants, pollinators
- Upgraded septic
- Toss wrappers, cups, cigarette butts
- Pick up litter
- Use refillable instead of disposable water bottles
- Wash car in paved driveway or street
- Pick up after dog and dispose in trash





# Litter/Waste : Positive Practices

Very frequently/Always    Frequently/Usually    Sometimes    Seldom    Never    Not sure



In the last two years, have you...? (Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

**Recycled cans and bottles**

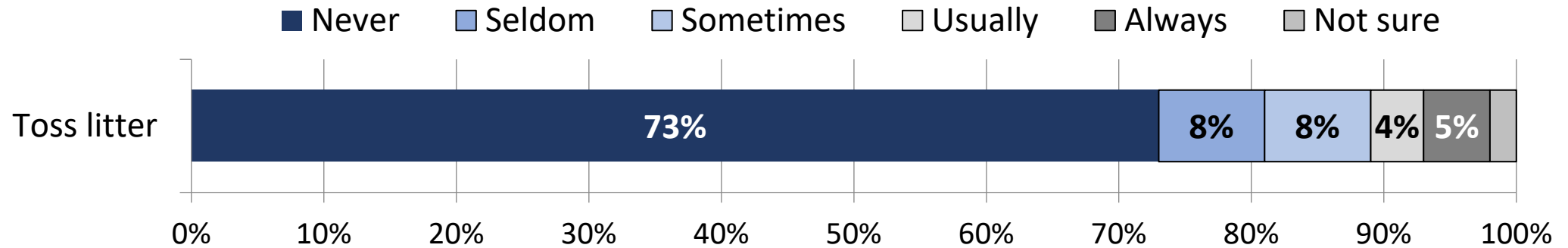
Do you typically...? (Always, Usually, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

***(Those with a dog):* Pick up your dog's waste and dispose of it in the trash**

**Use a refillable water bottle instead of disposable plastic water bottles**

**Pick up litter when you see it**

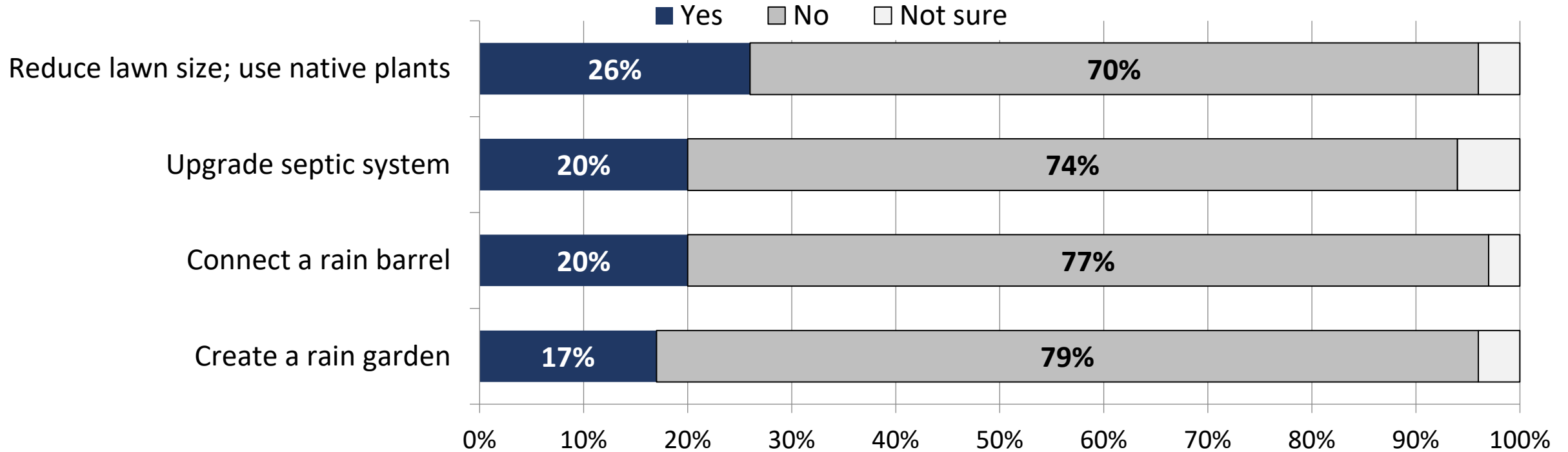
## Litter/Waste: Negative Practice



Do you typically...?

**Toss food wrappers, cups, or cigarette butts on the ground when you are not near a trash can**

# Yard & Property: Positive Practices



In the last two years, have you...?

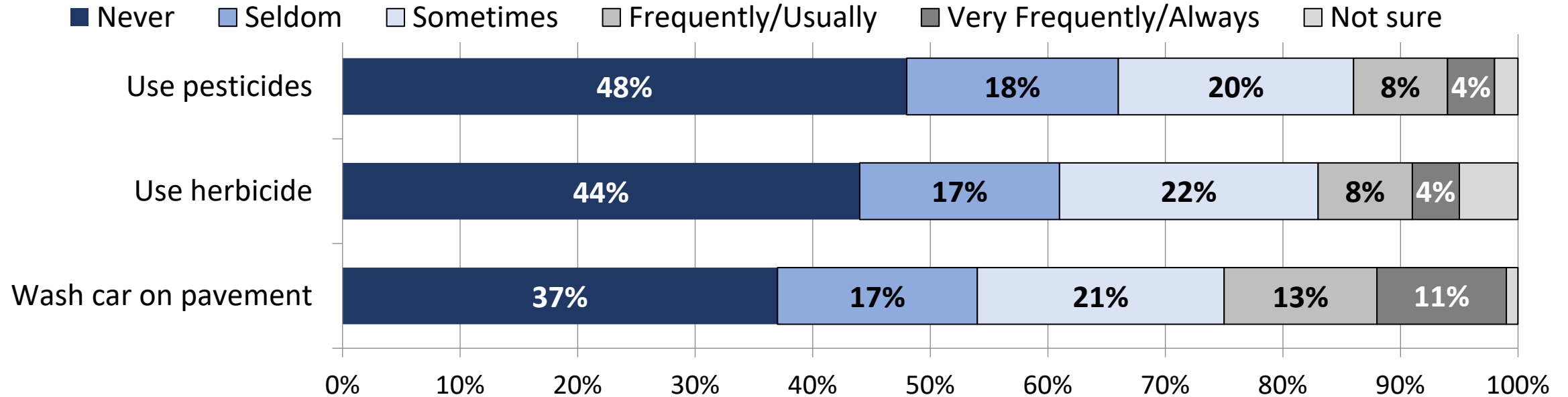
***(Those with a grass lawn):* Reduced the size of your lawn and replaced the grass with native or pollinator plants.**

***(Homeowners with septic):* Upgraded your septic system with the latest advanced technology.**

***(Those with a yard or property):* Connected a rain barrel to your downspouts and used the water between rainstorms**

***(Those with a yard or property):* Created a rain garden, which is an area that has been dug out and planted with water-loving native plants to capture and quickly absorb excess rainwater.**

# Yard & Property: Negative Practices



In the last two years, have you...? (Very frequently, Frequently, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

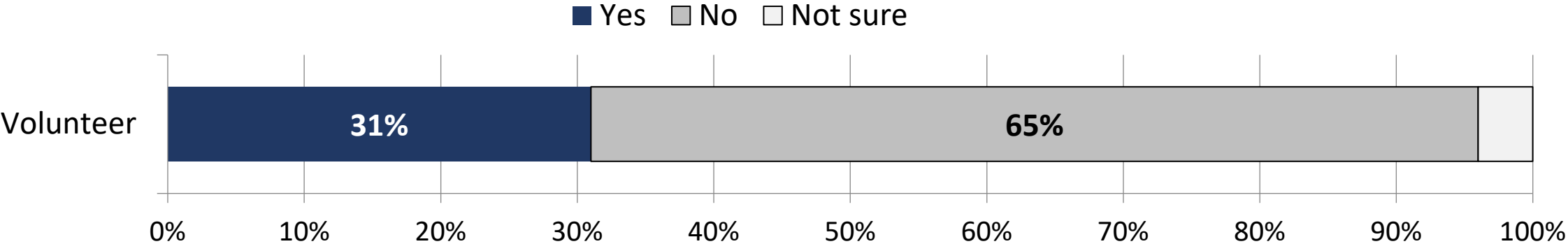
***(Those with a yard or property): Used chemical pesticides in or around your home to control mosquitos and ticks.***

***(Those with a yard or property): Used herbicide to control weeds in your yard.***

Do you typically...? (Always, Usually, Sometimes, Seldom, Never)

***(Those with a vehicle): Wash your car in a paved driveway or street.***

# Volunteering in Your Community

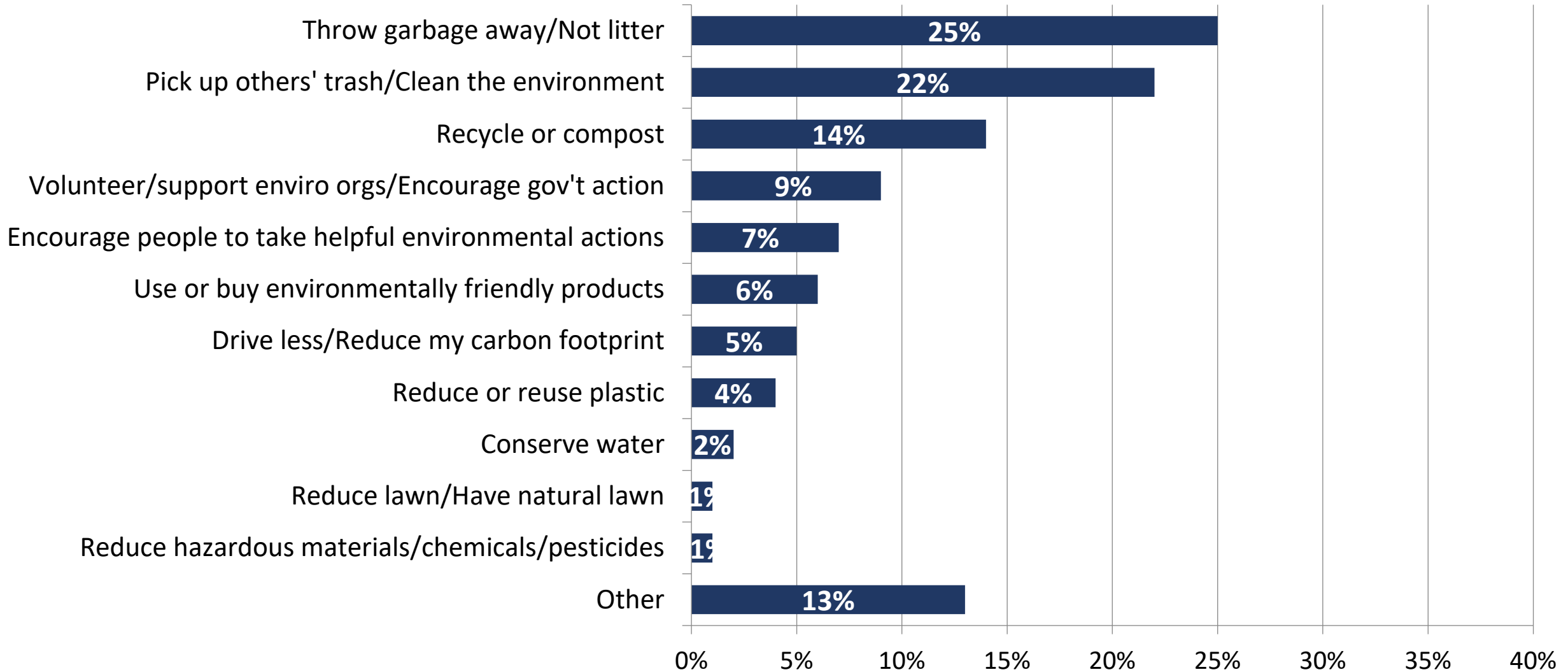


In the last two years, have you...?

**Volunteered in your community to help clean up or beautify a neighborhood park, beach, or garden.**

# Other Things Residents Are Doing

To Improve the Health of Long Island Sound or Nearby Waters

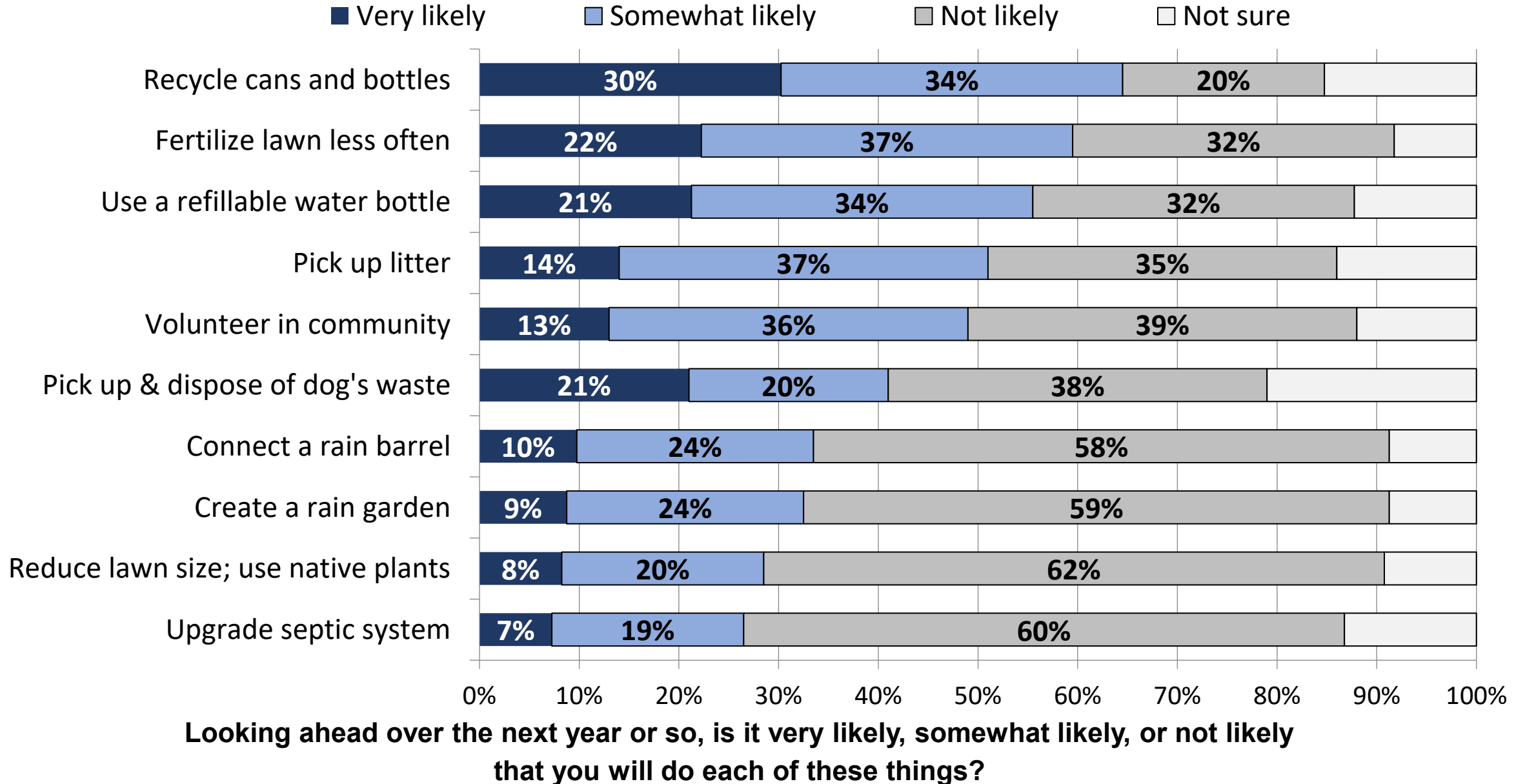


**Is there anything else you are doing to help improve the health of Long Island Sound or any nearby waters?**

*(Open-ended. Categorized responses shown.)*

# Likelihood of Adopting Positive Practices

Measured Among the “Opportunity Group” (Those Not Practicing) Each Behavior

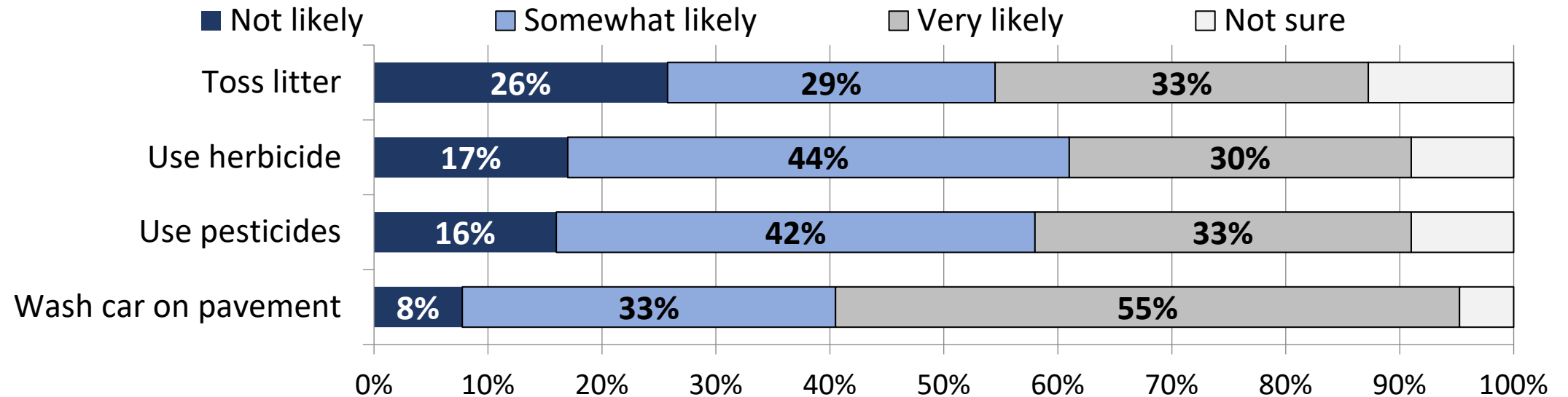






# Likelihood of Continuing Negative Practices

Measured Among the “Opportunity Group” for Each Practice



Looking ahead over the next year or so, is it very likely, somewhat likely, or not likely that you will do each of these things?



# Let's Sum Up

- There is some lack of awareness of one's own connectedness to Long Island Sound.
- But general impressions of the Sound are very positive.
- Water quality perceptions are a mixed bag. But residents to the west are seeing improvement.
- Residents want access to the water. Access brings an emotional response and fosters caring.
- There is good public trust in many partners to this work, and residents want to hear from them.
- People know what happens on the land affects the Sound. But very low numbers think their own actions (positive or negative) affect the Sound.
- Know that residents can be engaged. The survey provides deep behavioral and attitudinal guidance for outreach practitioners.