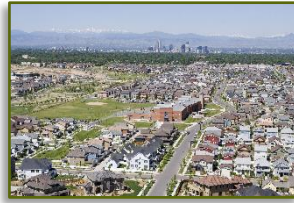




THE DENVER FOUNDATION



Perspectives on Homelessness in the Denver Metro Area: *Key Findings from Opinion Research to Guide Public Will-Building*

Survey Conducted January 14-22, 2015

320-629

Fairbank,
Maslin,
Maullin,
Metz &
Associates

FM3

DAVE METZ & LORI WEIGEL

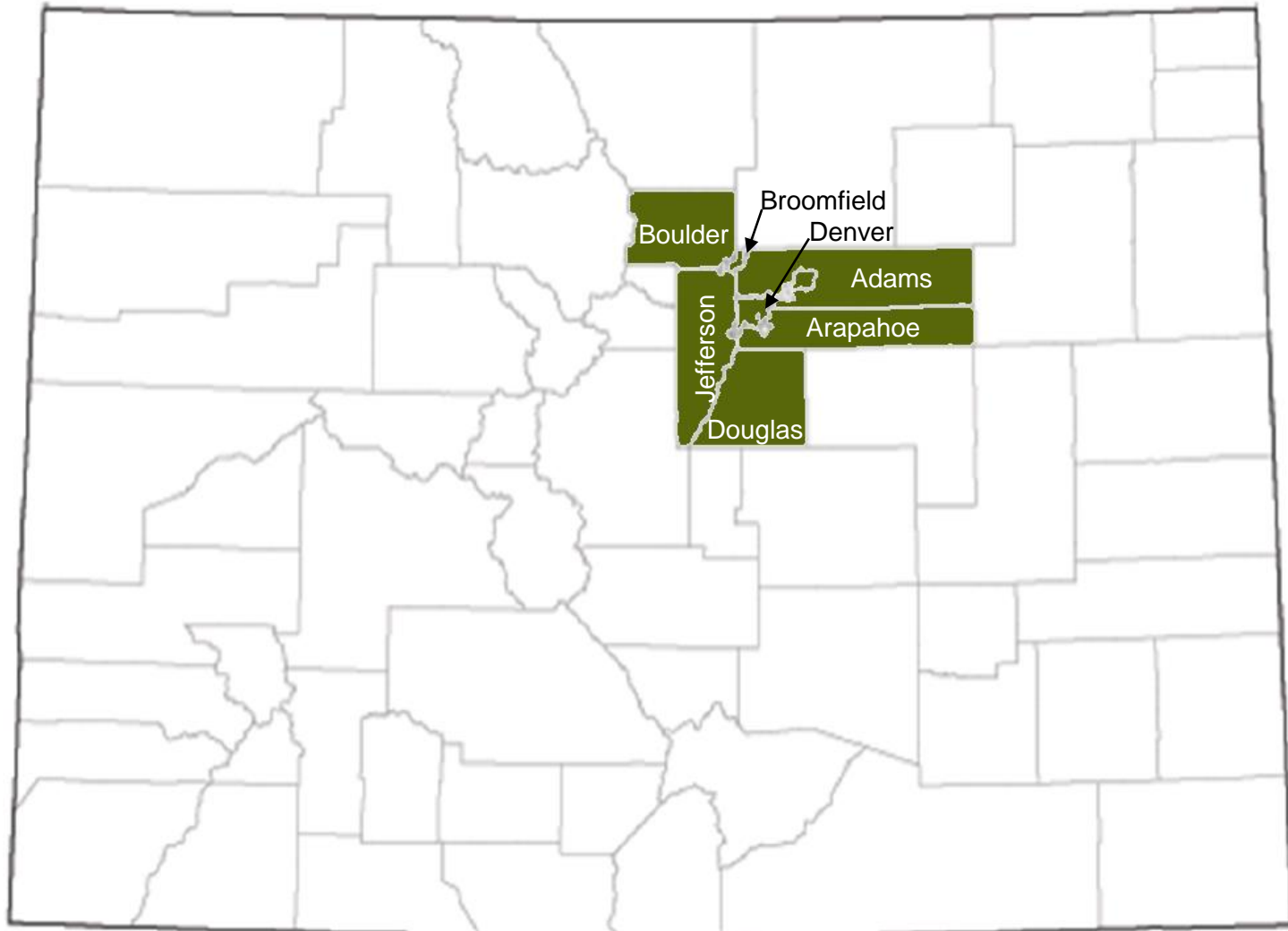


PUBLIC OPINION
STRATEGIES

Methodology

- ❖ Telephone interviews with 812 residents (registered voters) across the seven-county Denver Metro area
- ❖ Interviews conducted January 14-22, 2015
- ❖ Interviews in English and Spanish and on landlines and wireless phones
- ❖ Bipartisan research team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R)
- ❖ Base sample of 612 voters region-wide, with oversamples of 100 additional African-Americans and 100 additional Latinos
- ❖ All data statistically weighted to reflect the true ethnic composition of the regional electorate
- ❖ Total samples and margins of sampling error include:
 - *N=612 voters regionwide: +/- 4.0%*
 - *N=122 African Americans: +/- 8.9%*
 - *N=158 Latinos: +/- 7.8%*

The Denver Metro Region



Key Findings

- ❖ Fewer than one-third of residents (31%) view homelessness as a significant concern in their own city or town, but nearly twice as many (58%) see it as a problem in the Metro region.
- ❖ Residents' predominant image of the homeless is single males – particularly veterans.
- ❖ Residents view unemployment, drug abuse, and mental illness as the major drivers of homelessness; they attribute less impact to family dissolution or domestic violence.
- ❖ Many have experienced a period of homelessness or feared that they might (18%); nearly half have a friend or family member who has (43%).
- ❖ However, only seven percent believe that they themselves have a “major responsibility” to address homelessness – a low initial benchmark for public will-building; however, an additional 56% believe they have “some” responsibility.
- ❖ At the same time, residents are highly willing to take a variety of specific actions to address homelessness (making direct contributions, giving money, or volunteering time); they are more reluctant to take action through the political process.
- ❖ At the same time, sizable majorities support policies that would address homelessness through increased taxes or spending.
- ❖ The strongest messages are those identifying the homeless as families; stressing that anyone can become homeless; and urging assistance for those working to improve their lives.



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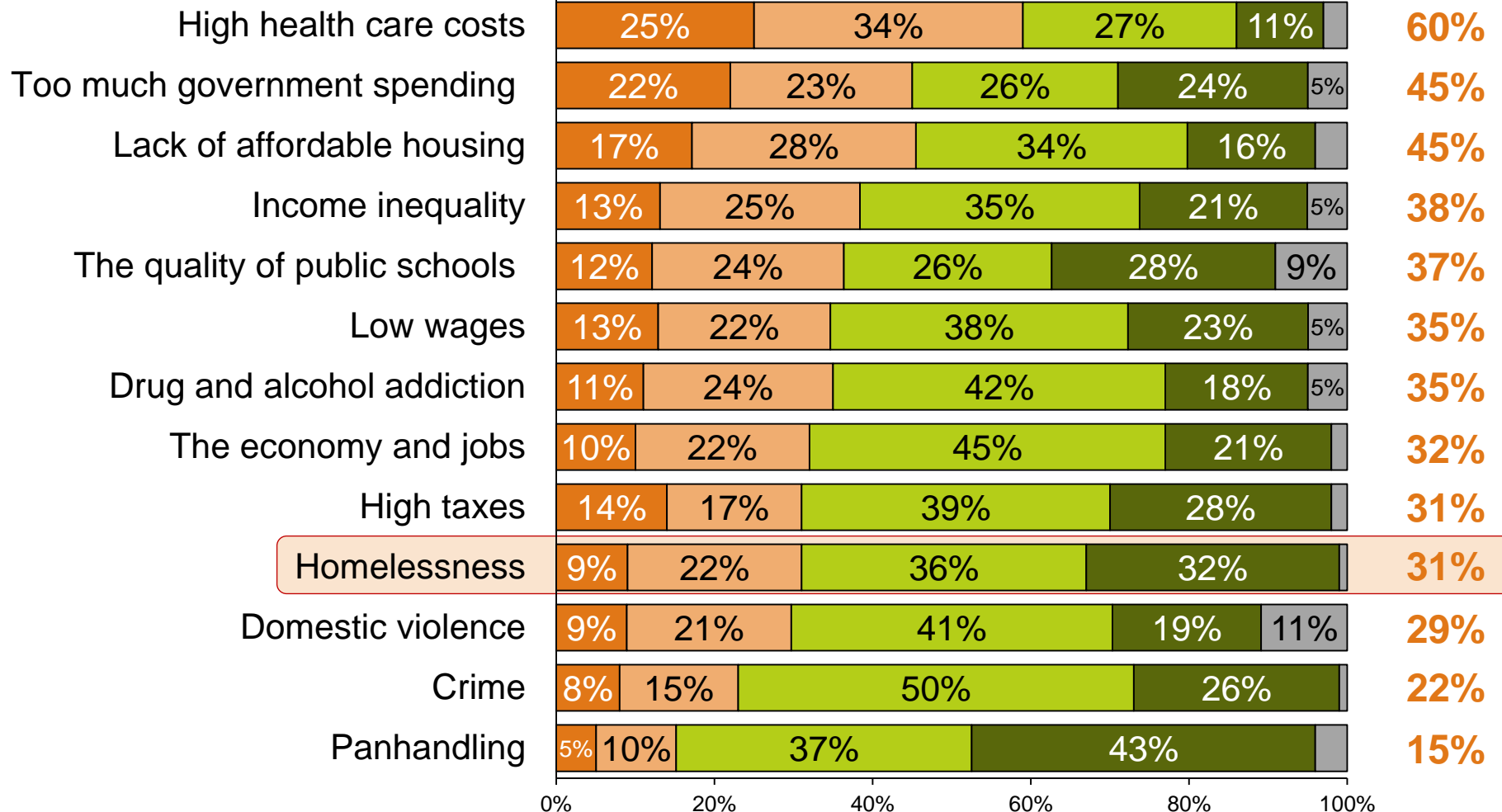


Recognition of the Problem of Homelessness

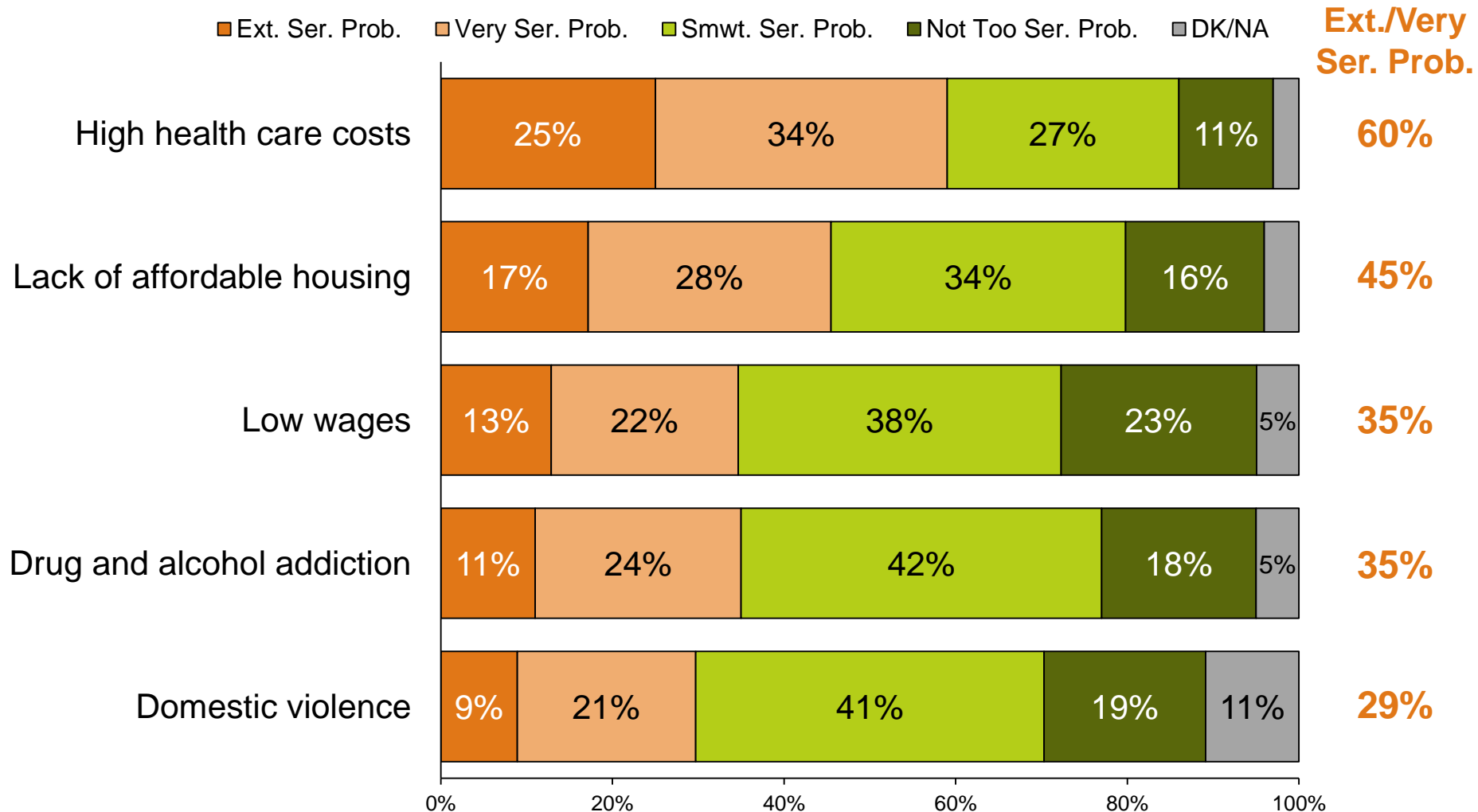
Homelessness is a lower-tier issue for residents in their own community.

Ext. Ser. Prob. Very Ser. Prob. Smwt. Ser. Prob. Not Too Ser. Prob. DK/NA

Ext./Very
Ser. Prob.

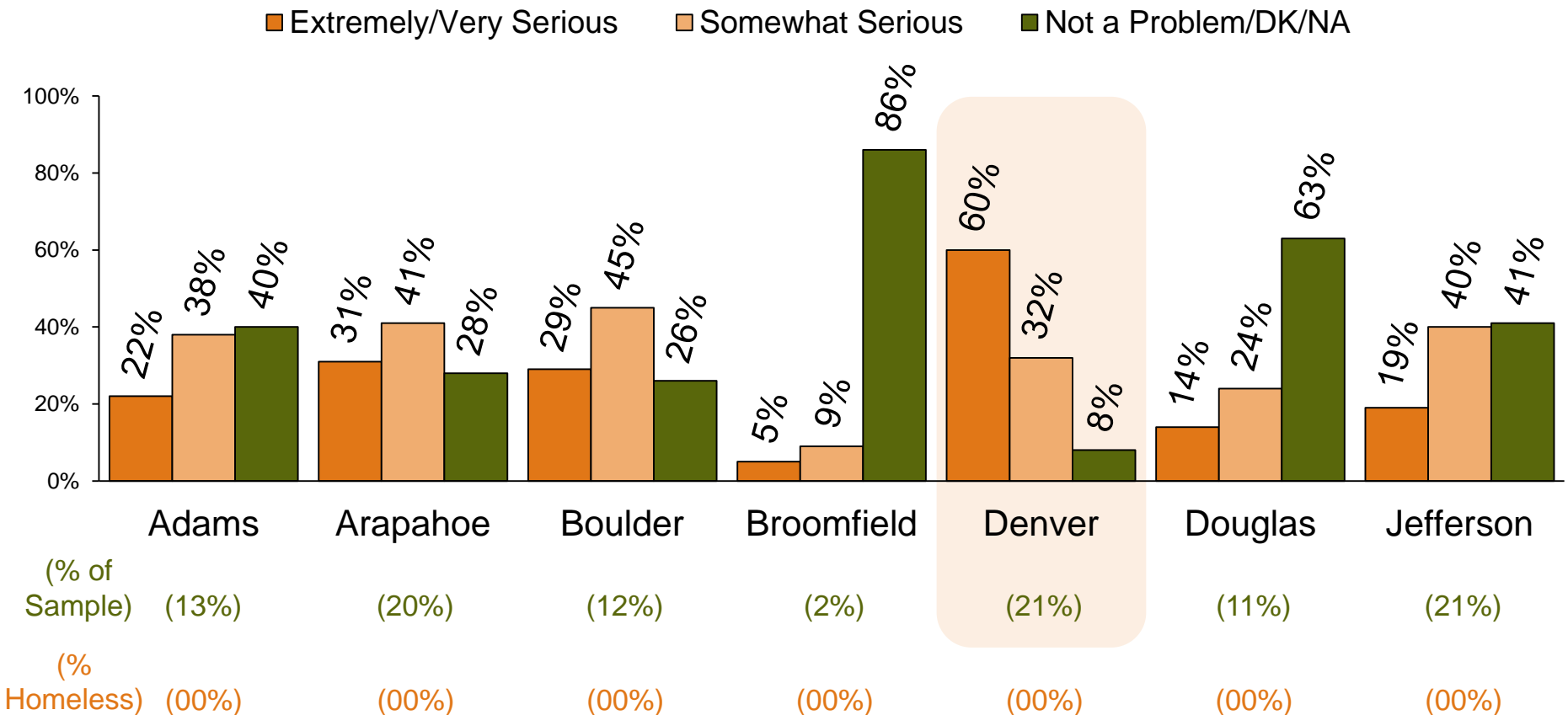


Of course, residents do express concern about a range of issues that contribute to homelessness.



Geographic distinctions were quite sharp, with Denver County residents vastly more likely to indicate concern about homelessness in their area.

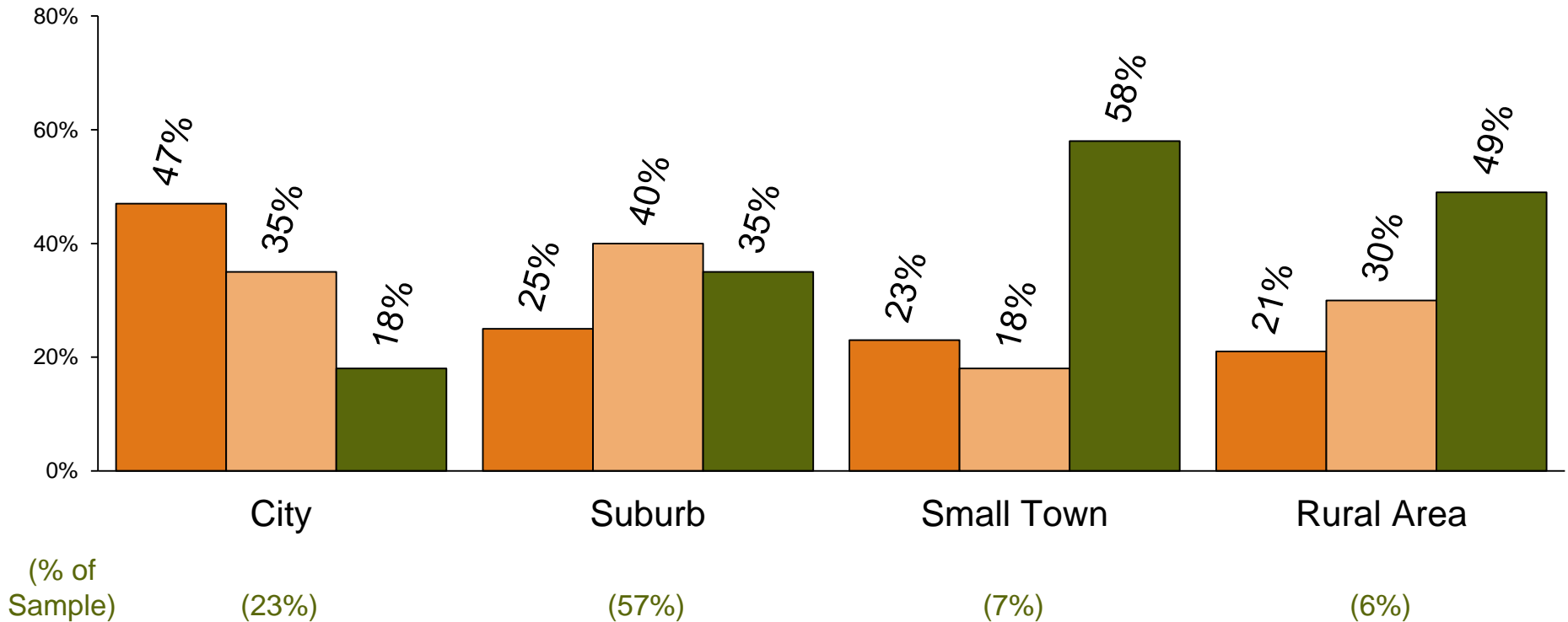
Concern About Homelessness by County



Correspondingly, urban residents are more likely to cite homelessness as a problem.

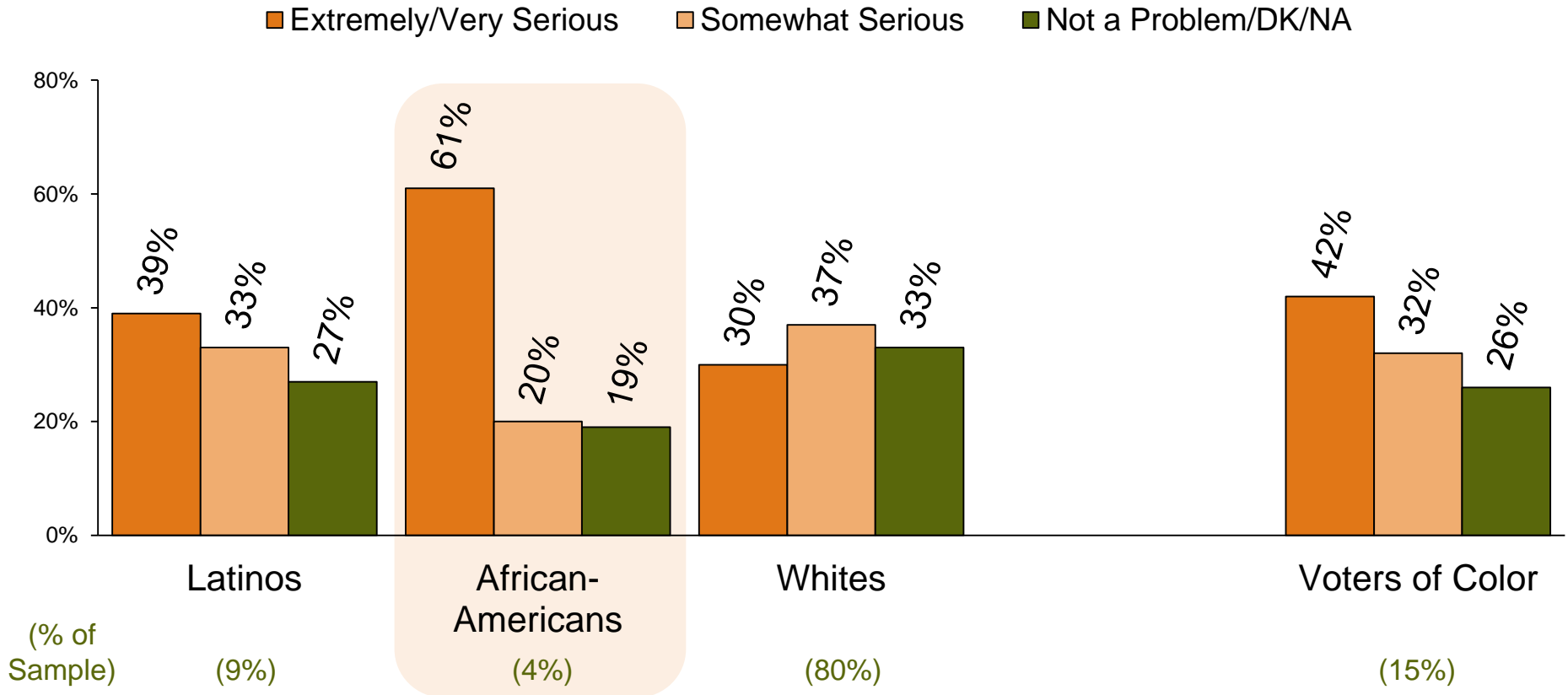
Concern About Homelessness by Geography

Extremely/Very Serious Somewhat Serious Not a Problem/DK/NA



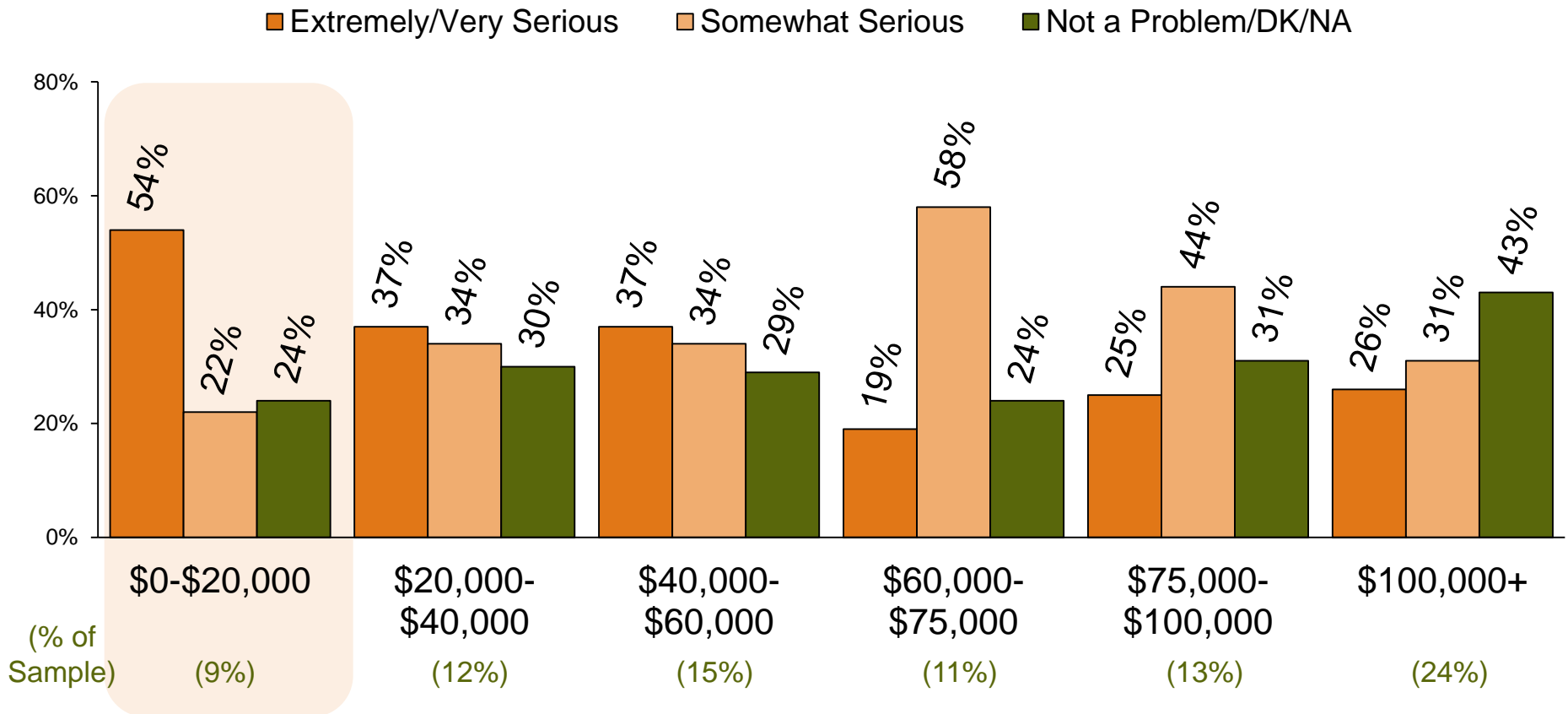
African-American residents express significantly elevated levels of concern.

Concern About Homelessness by Ethnicity



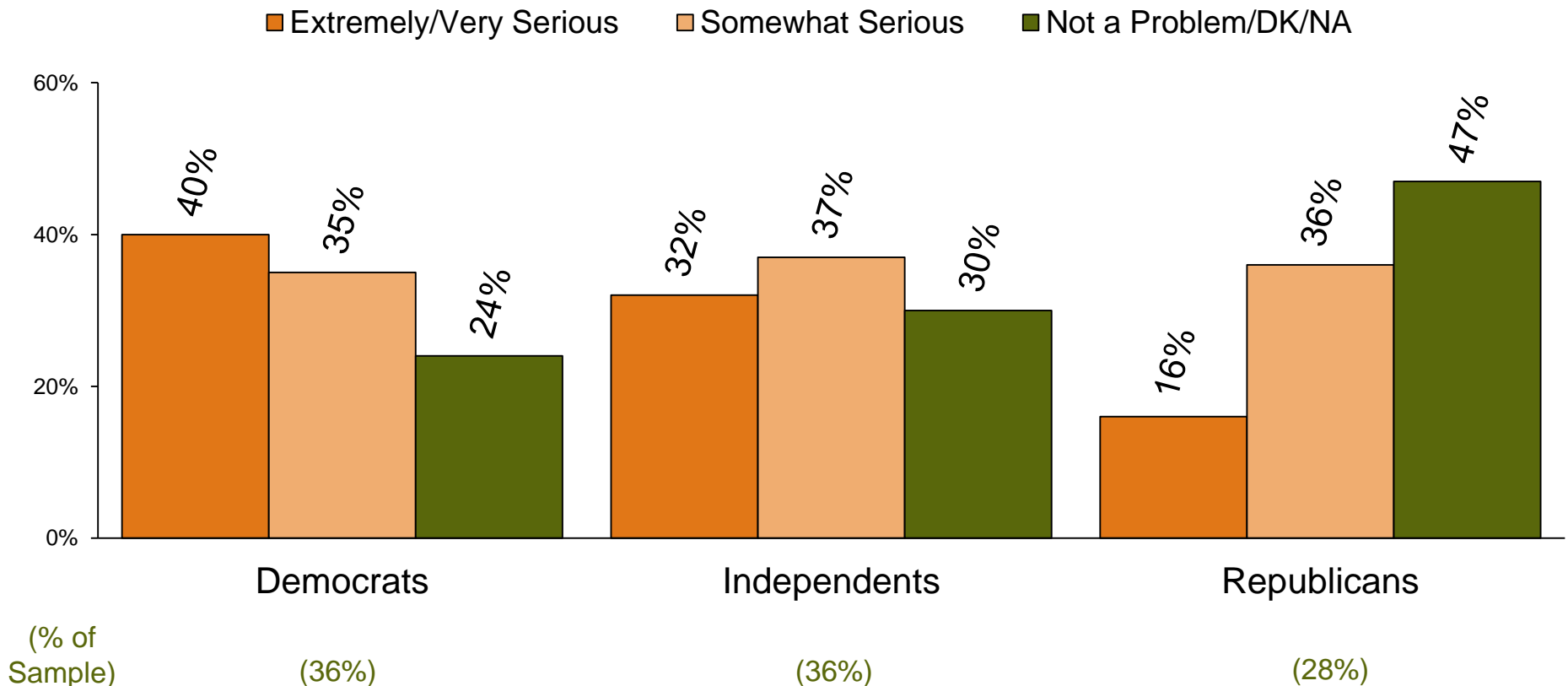
The lowest-income residents are also outliers on the issue, with a majority expressing concern.

Concern About Homelessness by Household Income



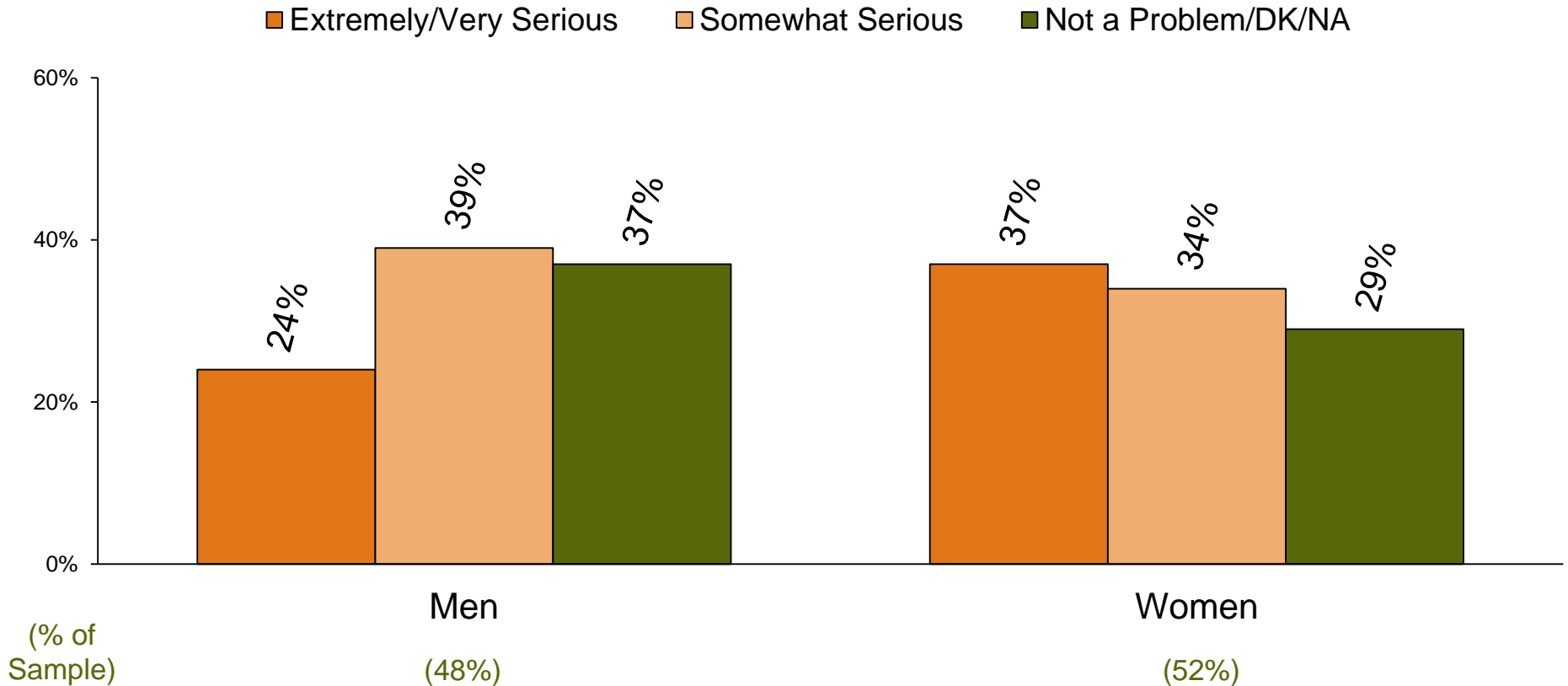
The issue is modestly partisan, with residents on the left more concerned than those on the right.

Concern About Homelessness by Party



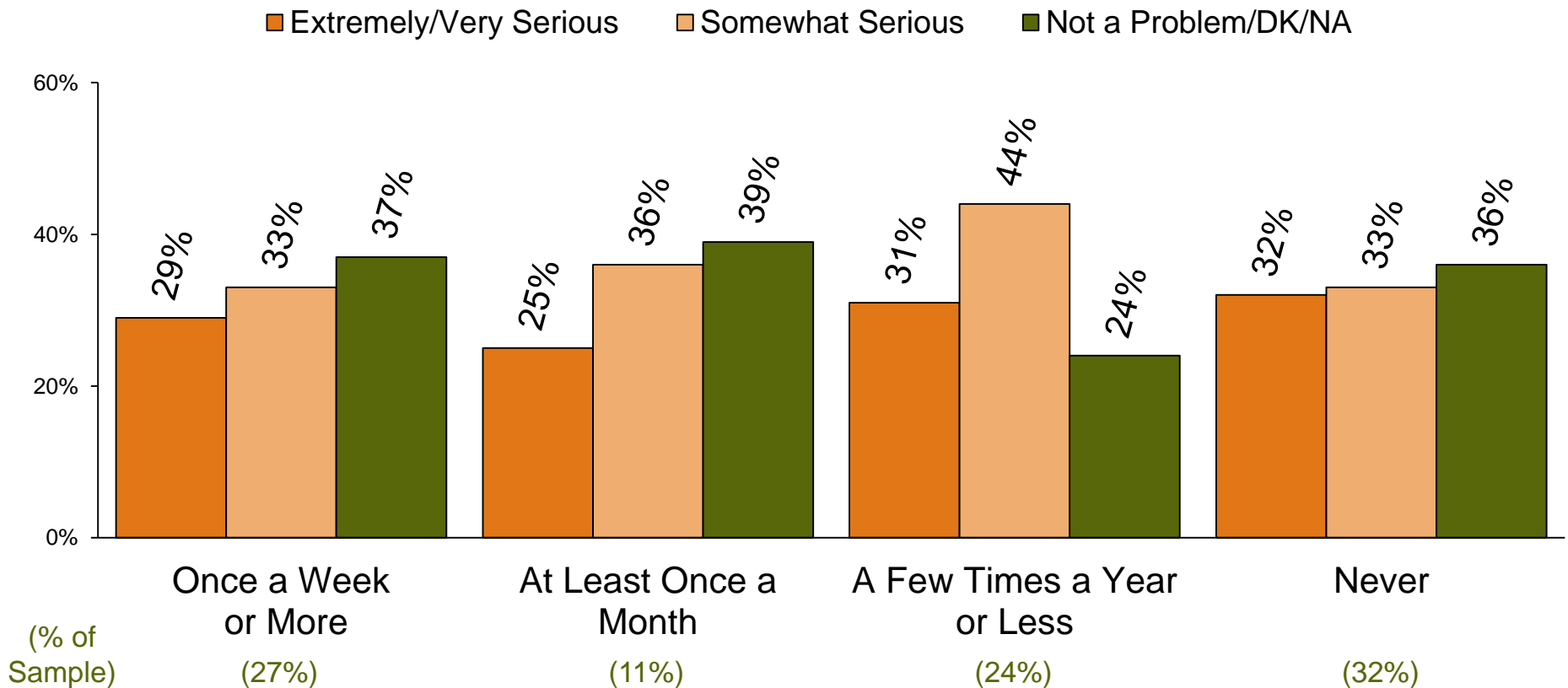
Women also indicate slightly more concern about homelessness in their community than do men.

Concern About Homelessness by Gender

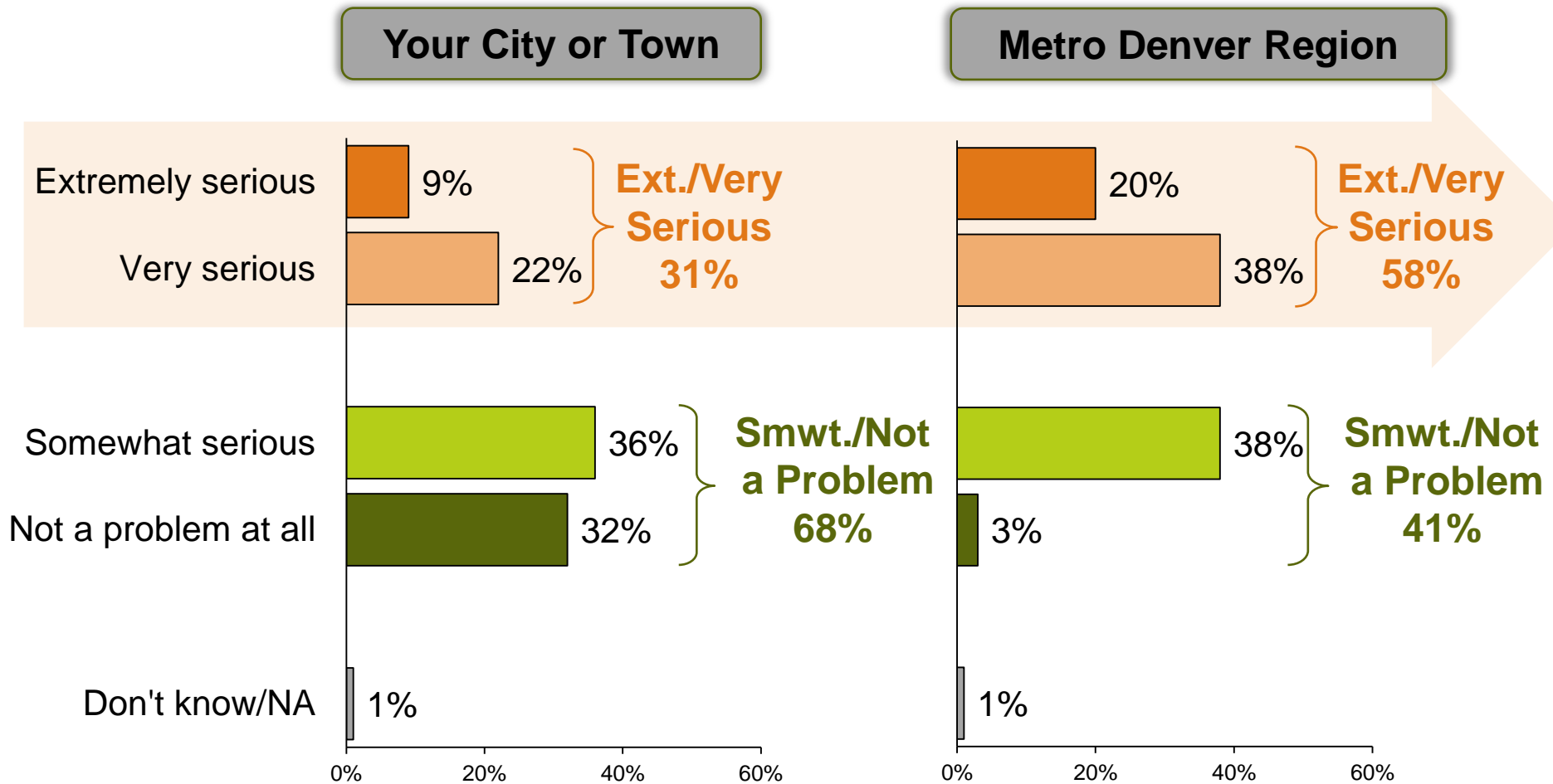


There is only modest correlation between religiosity and concern about homelessness.

Concern About Homelessness by Religious Service Attendance



Broadening the focus to the Metro area as a whole yields nearly twice as much concern about homelessness.

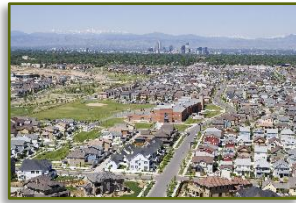


Q2a. I am going to read you a few things some people say are problems or issues affecting their communities today. Please tell me whether you personally think it is an extremely serious, very serious, or somewhat serious problem or if it is not a problem at all in the city or town where you live.

Q3. Thinking about the Metro Denver region as a whole, how much of a problem do you think homelessness is in the region: extremely serious, very serious, somewhat serious, or not a problem at all?



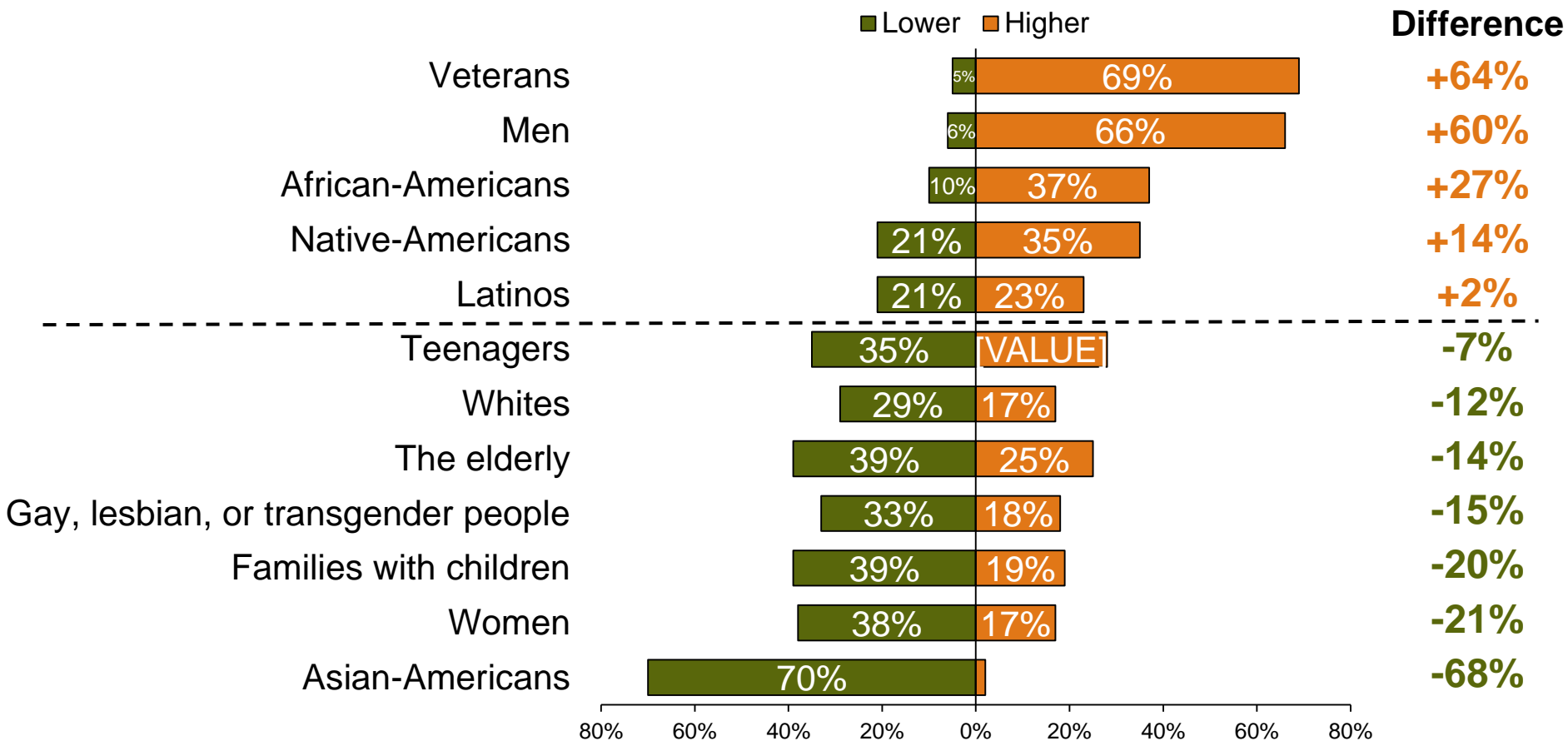
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Perceptions of Who is Homelessness & Causes

Voters' image of homeless people tends to focus on single males and veterans.

I am going to read you a list of different subgroups of the Metro Denver population. Please tell me whether you think rates of homelessness tend to be higher, about the same, or lower among that subgroup than among the population at large.

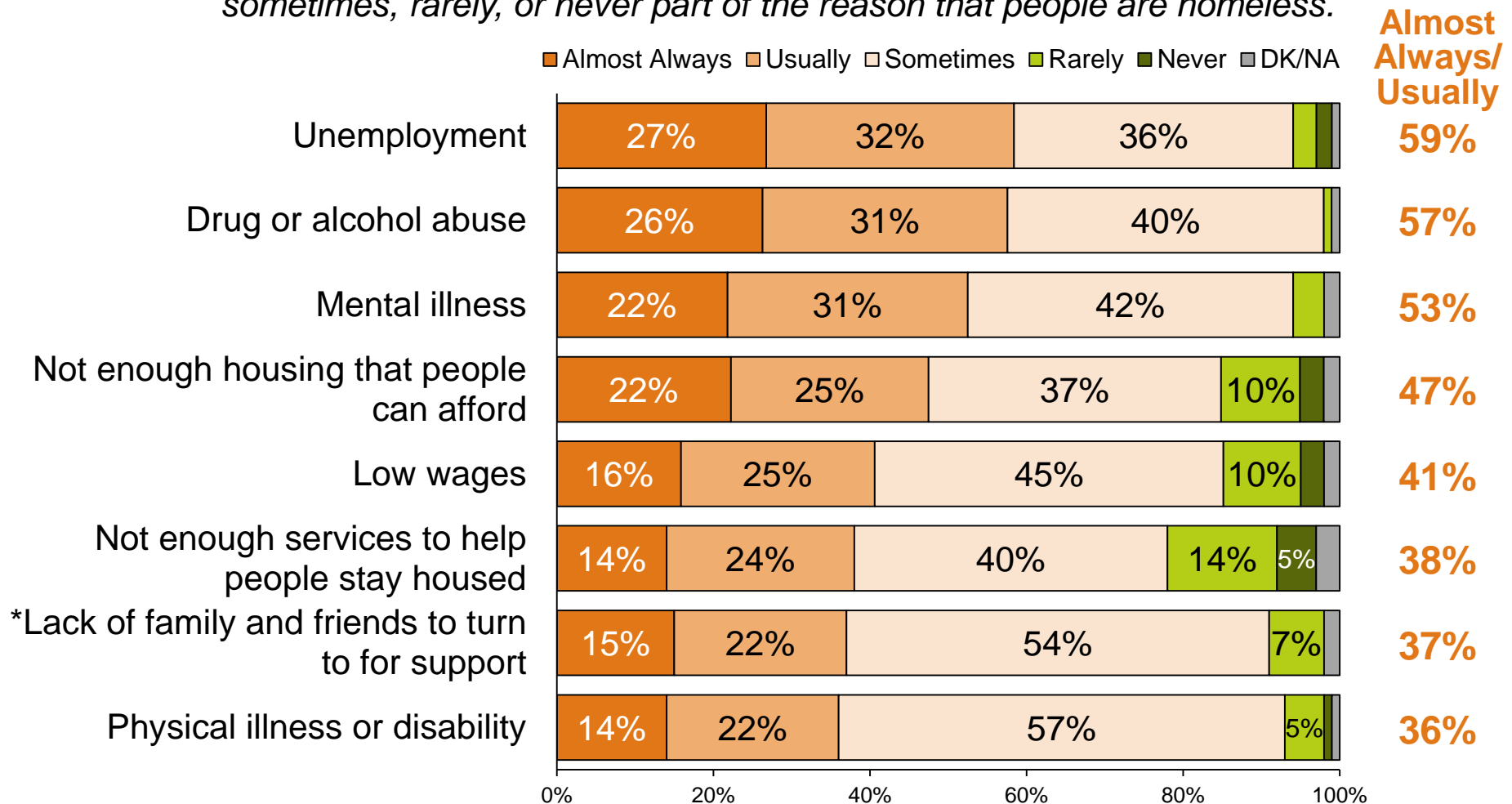


Public perceptions of who is homeless do not necessarily align with the realities.

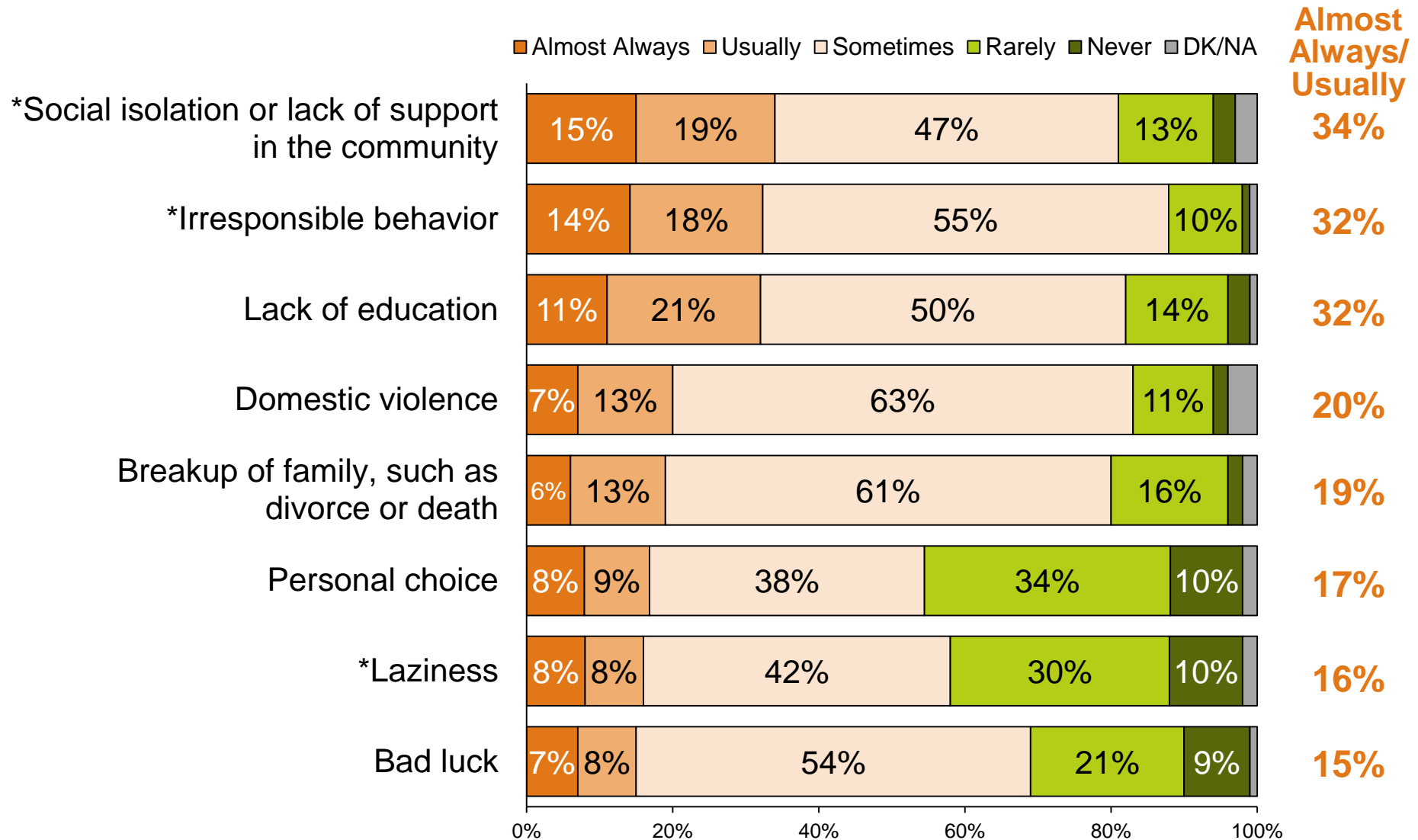
- Poll findings also show some misperceptions among those polled about who is homeless, compared to the latest data on homelessness.
- Those surveyed were more likely to say that men are disproportionately homeless than any other group (66%). Only 19% believed there to be higher rates of homelessness in families with children, or homeless women (17%).
- Yet the annual Point-In-Time Survey, which provides a current estimate of homelessness in Metro Denver, shows that families with children make up more than half (53.1%) of the homeless population in region.
- In addition, while the ratio of homeless men (60.2%) is higher than women (39.5%) for the region as a whole, only Denver and Boulder have a *majority* of men experiencing homelessness; the other five metro counties have a majority of women who are homeless.

Residents see substance abuse, mental illness, & unemployment as key drivers of homelessness.

I am going to read you some things people have said cause homelessness. Please tell me if you think it is almost always, usually, sometimes, rarely, or never part of the reason that people are homeless.



They are far less likely to attribute homelessness to luck, chance or choice.



Public perceptions of the causes of homelessness do not entirely align with objective data on those causes.

The Denver Foundation Poll *Perceptions about why Metro Denver Residents are Homeless**

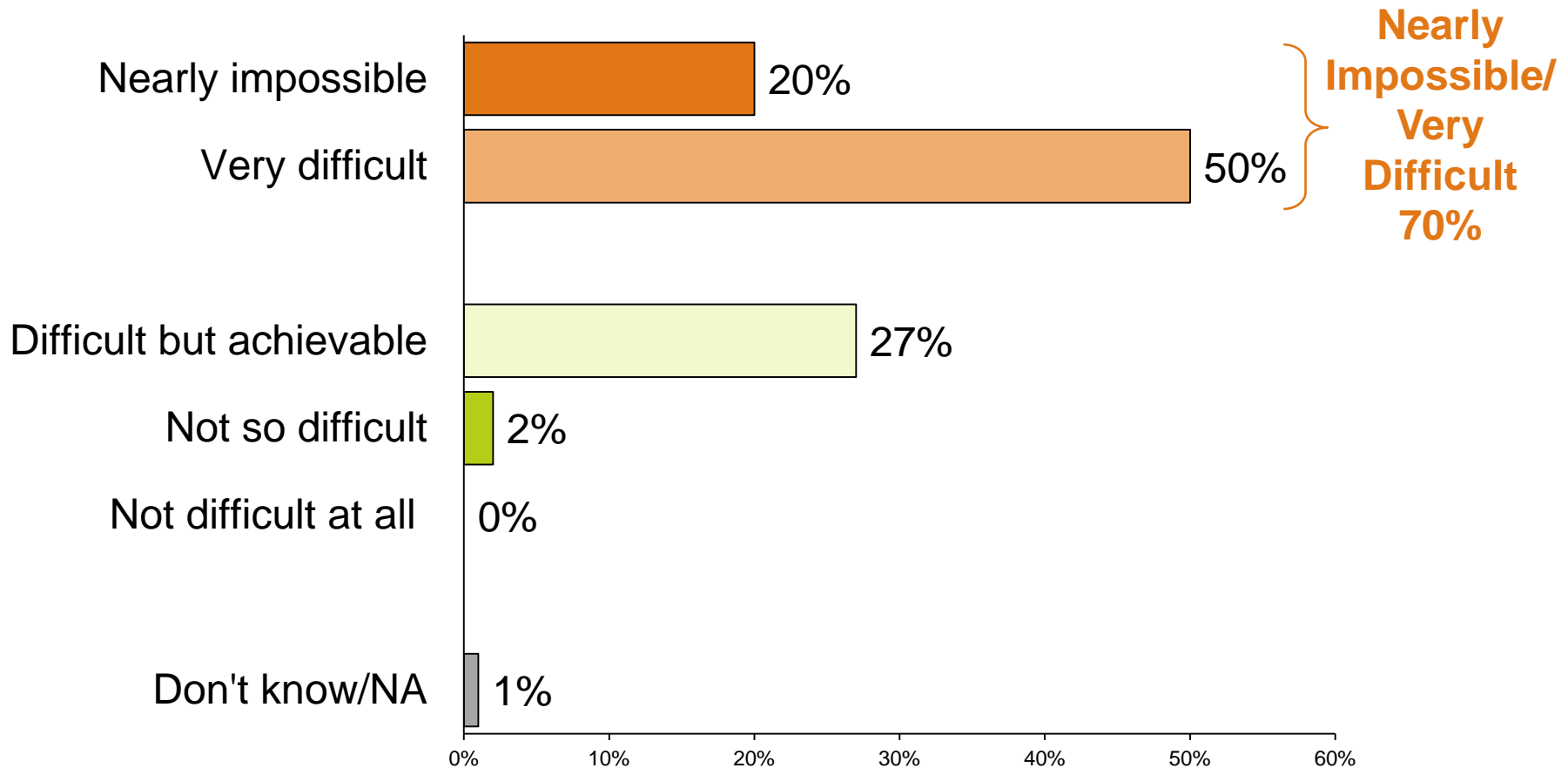
| | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-----|---|
| 1 | Unemployment | 59% | → |
| 2 | Substance abuse | 57% | → |
| 3 | Mental illness | 53% | → |
| 4 | Housing costs too high | 47% | → |
| 13 | Relationship/Family break up | 19% | → |

2014 Point-In-Time Survey *Reasons why Metro Denver Residents say they are Homeless*

| | | |
|---|------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Lost job/Can't find work | 43.9% |
| 2 | Housing costs too high | 31.9% |
| 3 | Relationship/Family break up | 28.2% |
| 4 | Mental illness | 21.3% |
| 5 | Substance abuse | 18.9% |

Residents perceive that it is highly difficult for people who are homeless to find a home.

In general, when someone is homeless, how difficult do you think it is for them to find a permanent place to call home: nearly impossible, very difficult, difficult but achievable, not so difficult, or not difficult at all?





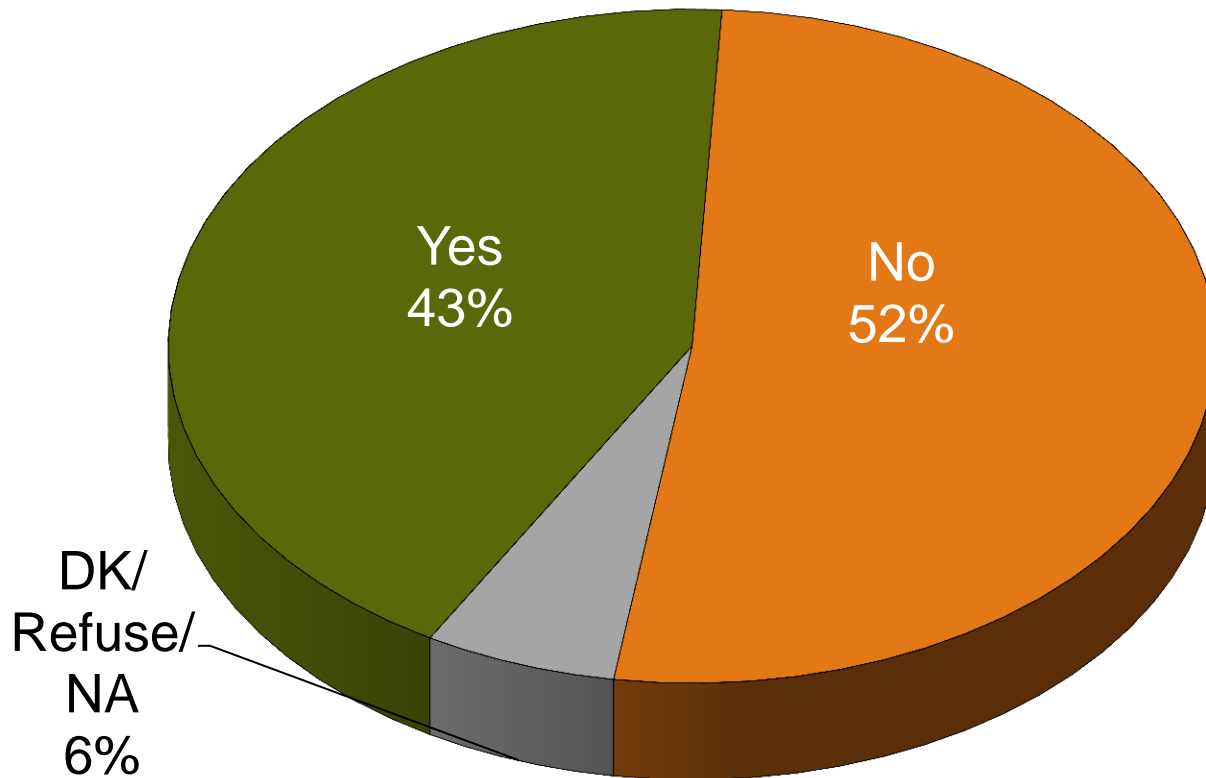
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Personal Engagement with the Issue

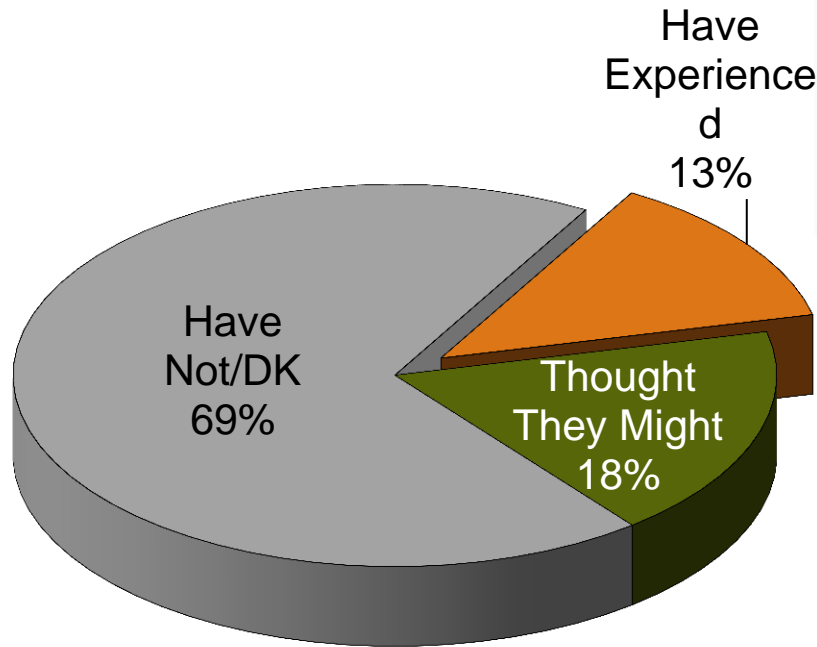
Nearly half of residents have friends or family who have experienced homelessness.

Do you have close family or friends who have experienced a period of homelessness?



More than one-in-ten residents say they themselves have experienced homelessness, and one-in-five have come close.

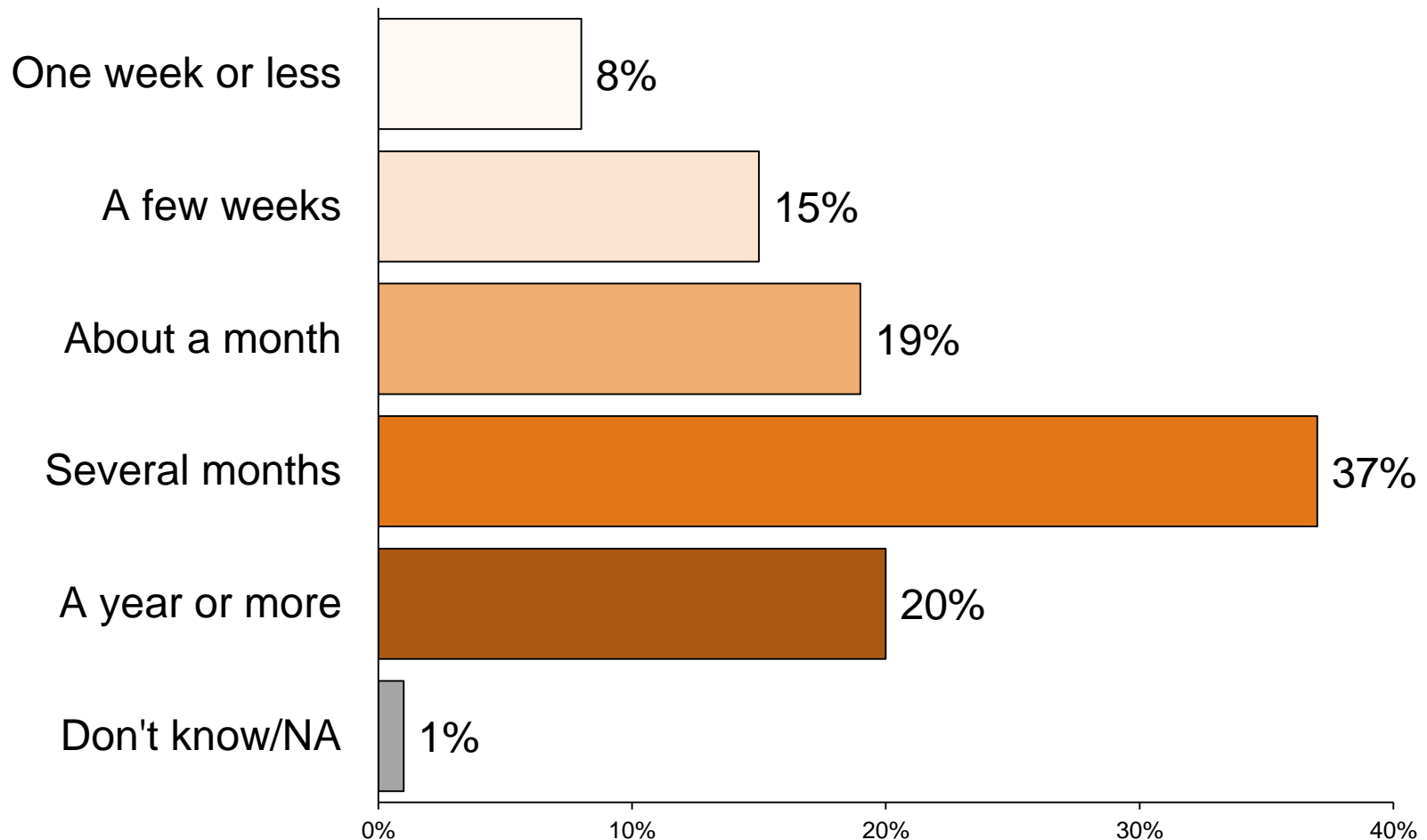
Have you personally ever experienced a period of being homeless? (IF NO: Have you ever had so much trouble paying rent or a mortgage that you thought you might become homeless?)



| Demographic Group | Have Experienced | % of Sample |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| All Voters | 13% | 100% |
| African-Americans | 30% | 4% |
| HH Income <\$20,000 | 27% | 9% |
| Voters of Color | 25% | 15% |
| Not Working | 24% | 15% |
| Have Had Homeless Friends or Family | 23% | 43% |
| Non-College Educated Men | 23% | 20% |
| High School Educated | 23% | 18% |
| Latinos | 22% | 9% |
| Ages 30-39 | 20% | 18% |
| HH Income \$40,000-\$60,000 | 20% | 15% |
| Men Ages 18-49 | 19% | 26% |
| Fathers | 19% | 12% |

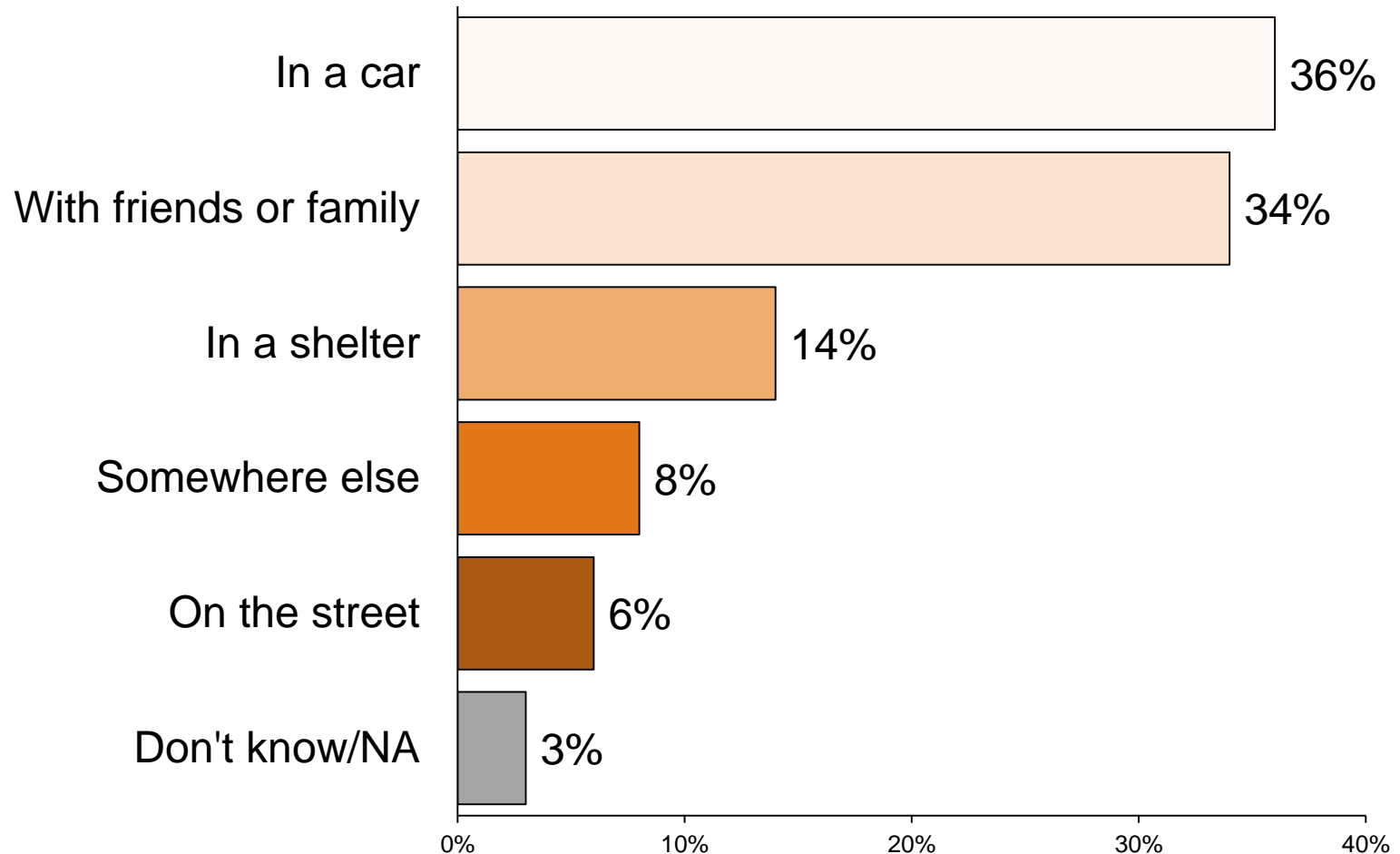
For most, the duration was fairly limited.

How long did the last time you were homeless last?



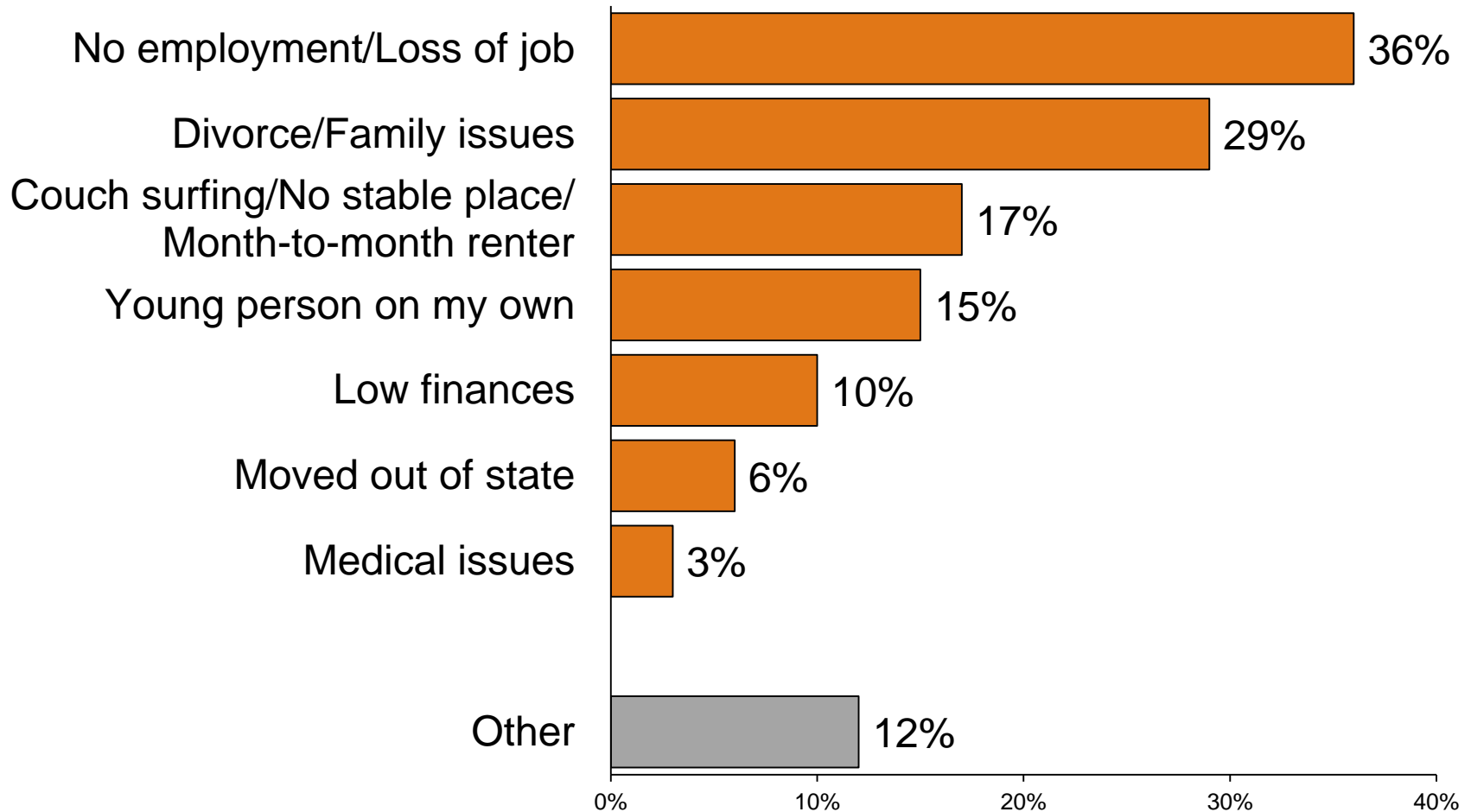
Most stayed with family or friends, or in a car.

During the time that you were homeless, where did you stay?



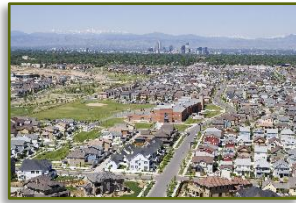
Residents offer widely varying circumstances for their time being homeless.

In a few words of your own, could you describe the circumstances that led you to be homeless for a period of time?





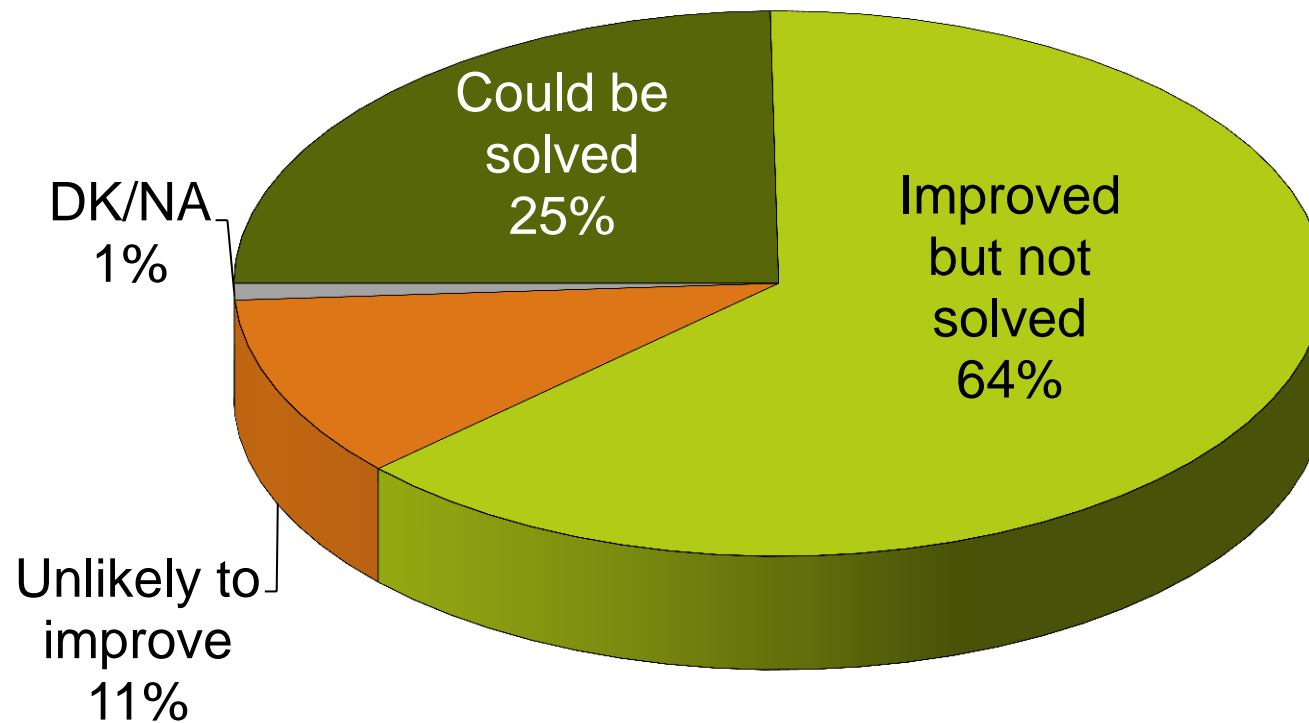
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Support for Potential Solutions

Residents are confident that the problem of homelessness can be improved – and one-quarter believe it can be solved.

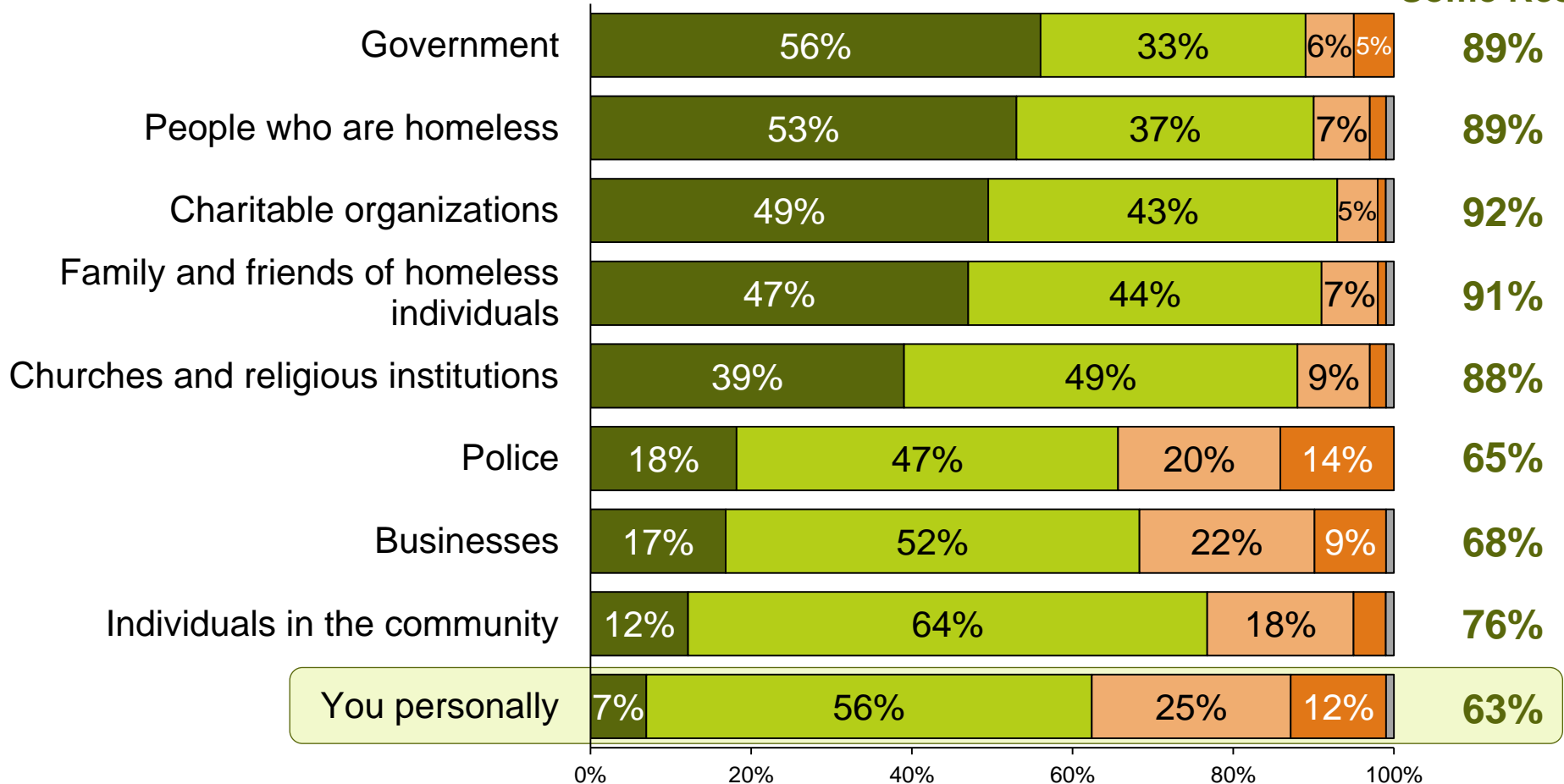
Would you say homelessness is a problem that could be solved, a problem that could be improved but not solved, or a problem that is unlikely to improve?



Residents see government, charities, and the homeless and their families as primarily responsible – but see little personal role.

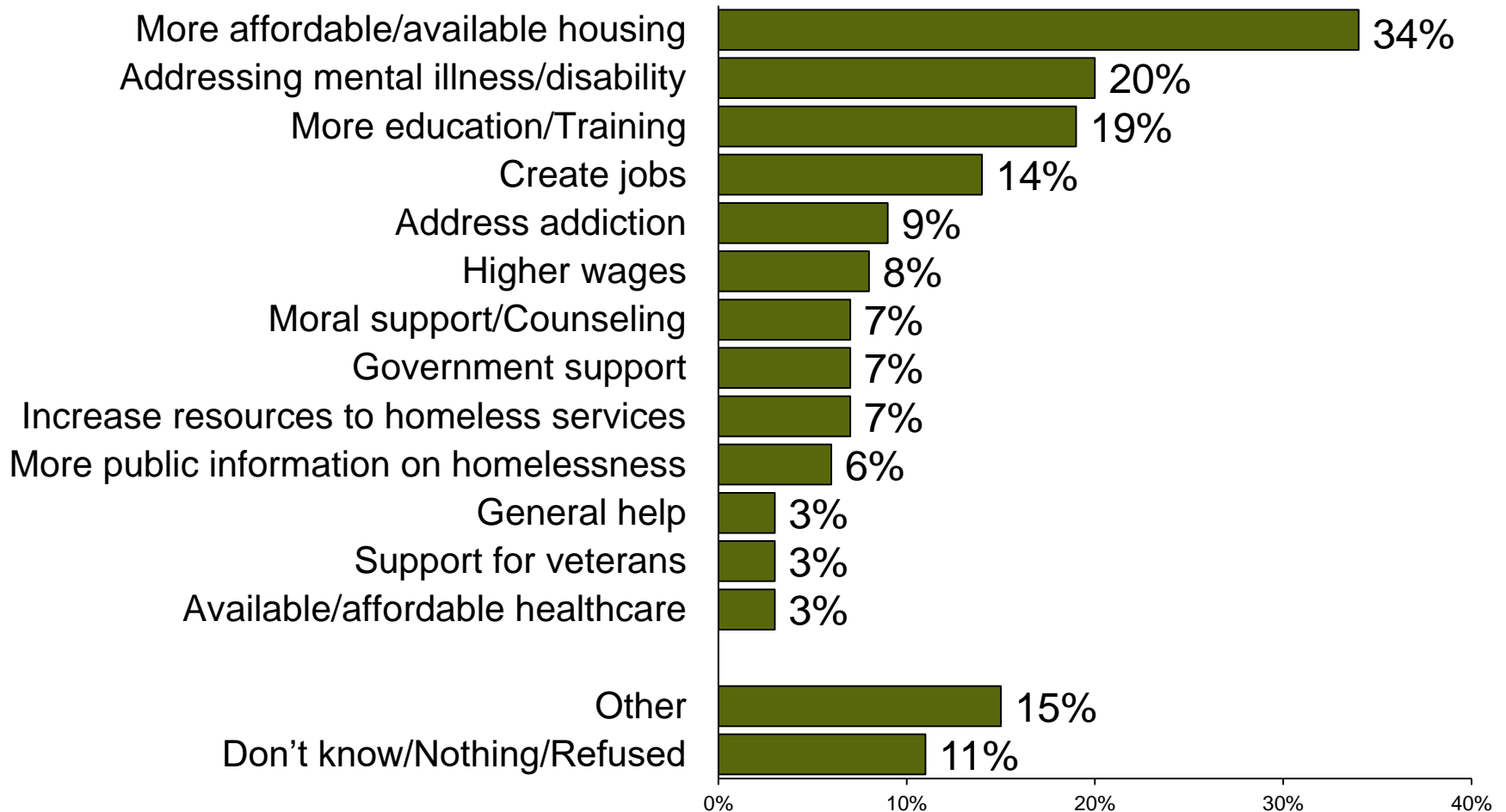
**Major/
Some Resp.**

■ Major Resp. ■ Some Resp. ■ A Little Resp. ■ No Resp. ■ DK/NA

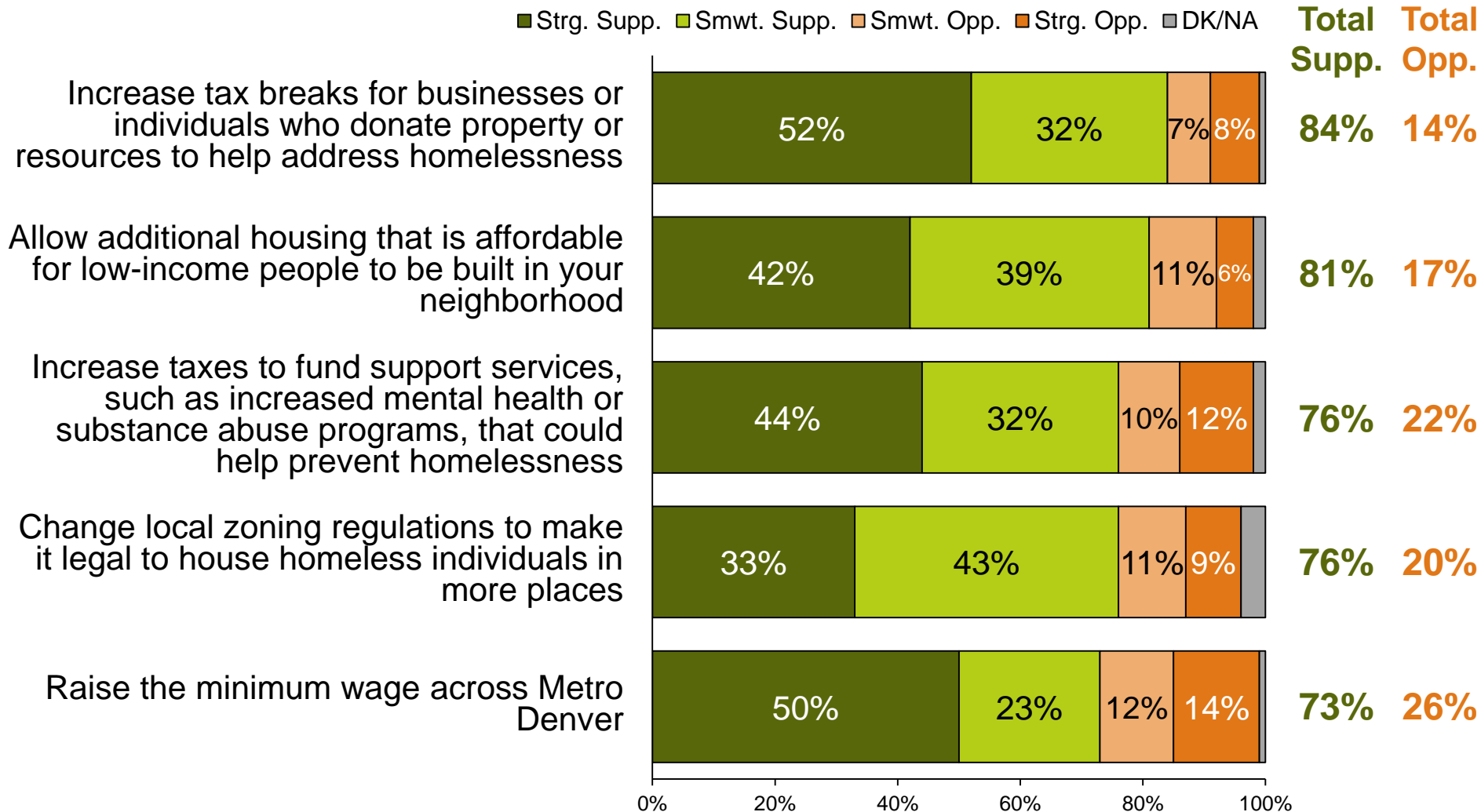


Residents' suggestions for solutions tie back to the root causes they identify for homelessness.

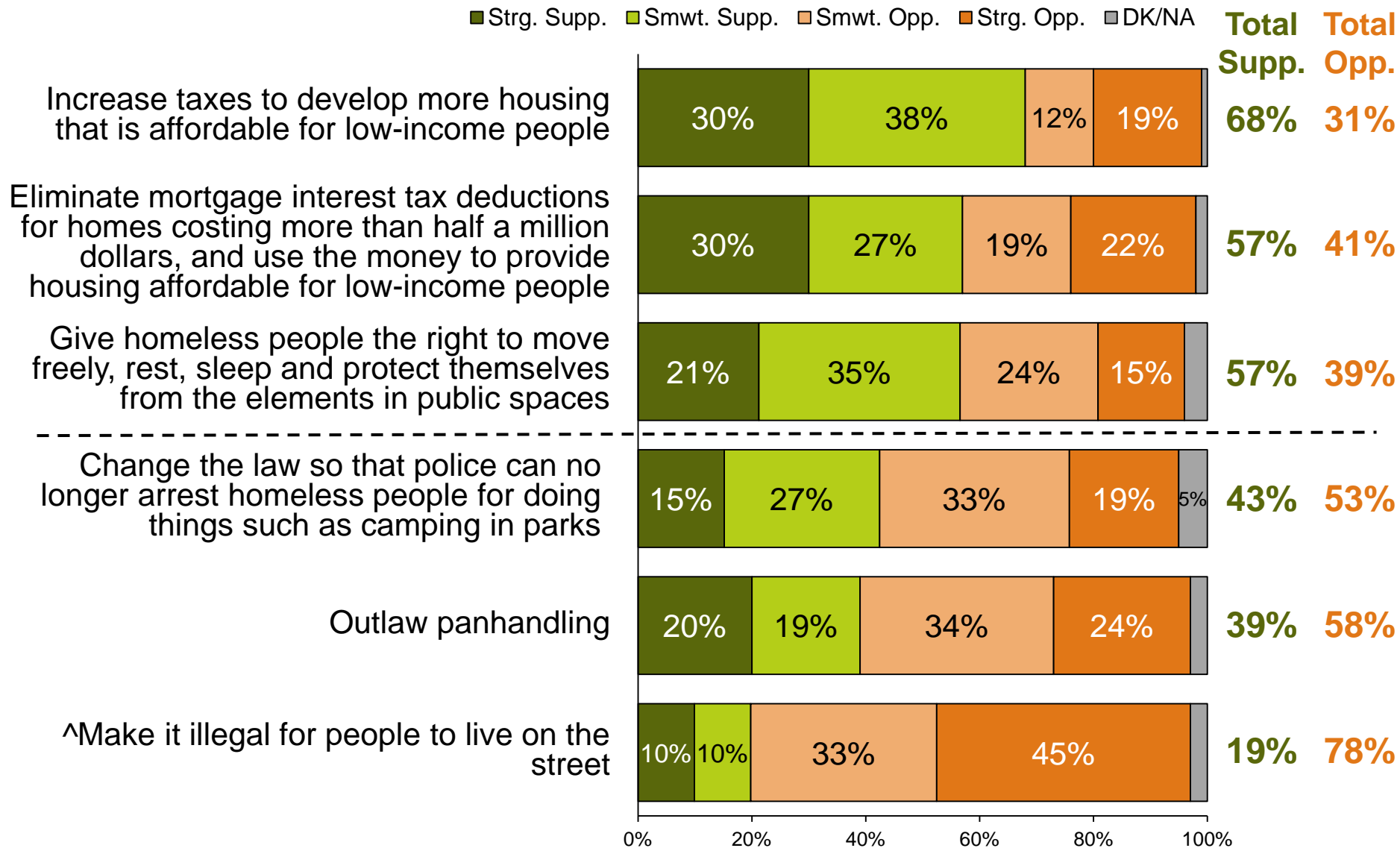
What types of solutions, if any, do you think would help address the problem of homelessness?



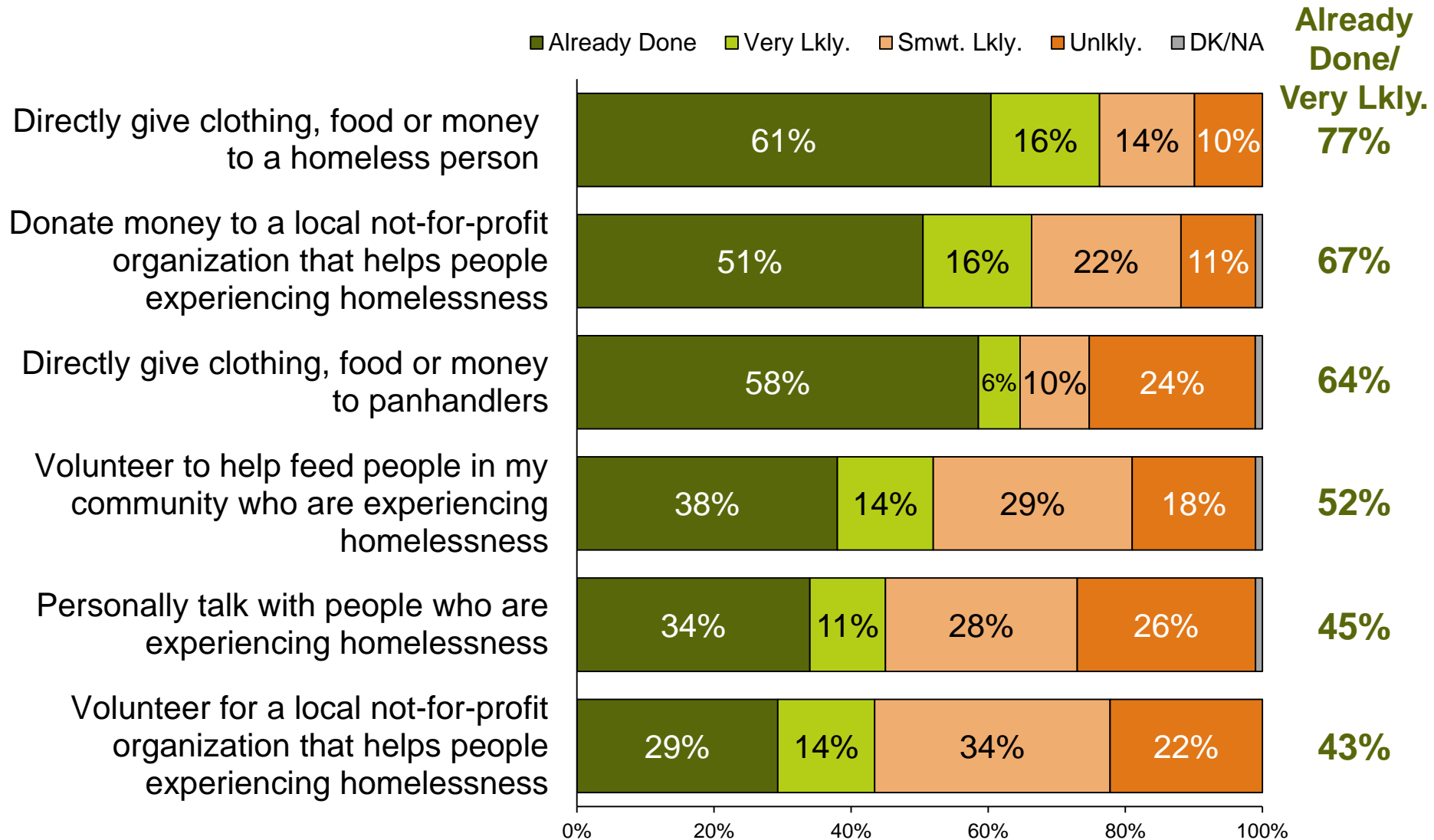
Residents back a wide range of policy solutions – including some that would cost them money.



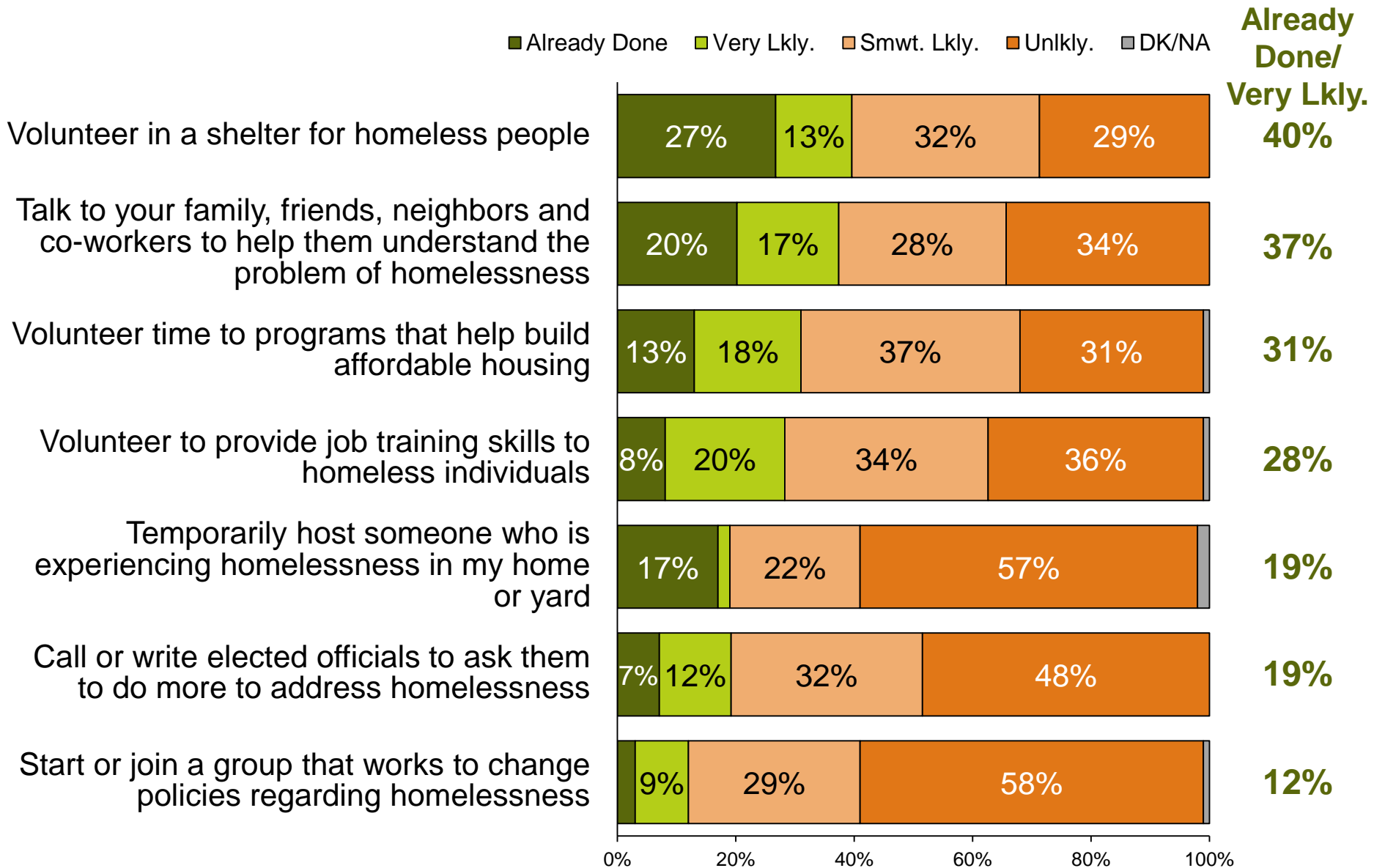
Residents are less supportive of punitive approaches



Residents express broad willingness to take small personal actions to address homelessness...

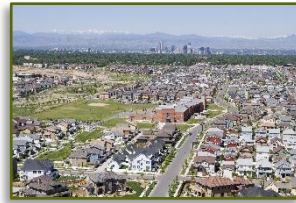


...but are less willing to engage politically.





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Identifying Key Values & Themes

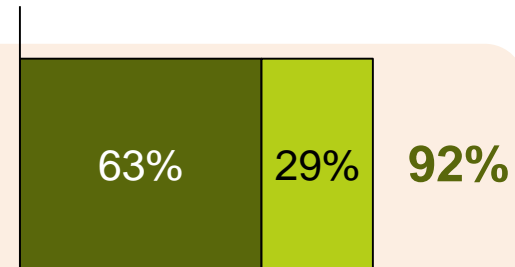
Demographic Profile of Engagement Segments

| Uninterested/Opponents | Middle/Persuadable | Best Targets |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 44% of the Electorate | 32% of the Electorate | 24% of the Electorate |
| Republican Men | Asians/Pacific Islanders | African-Americans |
| Republicans Ages 50+ | Democratic Men | Women Ages 18-49 |
| Ages 75+ | Boulder County | Democrats Ages 18-49 |
| Republicans | Democrats Ages 50+ | Democratic Women |
| Men Ages 50+ | Voters of Color | Ages 40-49 |
| Broomfield County | Democrats | College-Educated Women |
| Republicans Ages 18-49 | Ages 18-29 | Independents Ages 18-49 |
| Ages 65+ | Denver County | Independent Women |
| Dads | Democrats Ages 18-49 | Ages 18-29 |
| Retired | HH Income \$40,000-\$60,000 | Voters of Color |
| Douglas County | Latinos | Ages 18-49 |
| Republican Women | Women Ages 50+ | Women with No Children |
| Jefferson County | Homelessness Was a Possibility | Moms |
| Men | Use Cell Phone/Landline Equally | Non-College Educated Women |
| Ages 50+ | HH Income \$60,000-\$75,000 | Not Working |

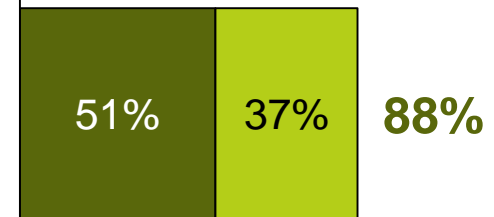
The strongest messages identify families as affected and appeal to compassion.

■ Very Conv. ■ Smwt. Conv.

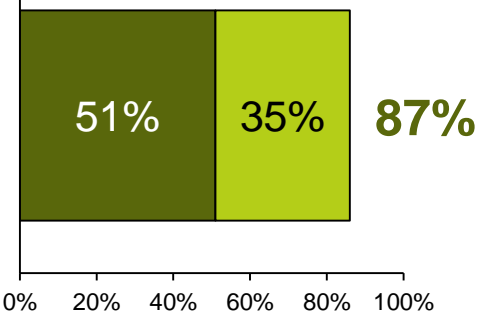
(FAMILIES) Over half of the homeless households in Metro Denver are families with children. Children need stability and shelter so they can grow into their full potential. We should help those families to give their children that chance.



(COMPASSION) Sometimes individuals face multiple, serious challenges that are hard for most of us to imagine. It's important that we put ourselves in their shoes, and continue to show compassion and make sure everyone in our community has a place to call home where they can live with hope and dignity.



(ANYONE) Most people tend to experience homelessness because of financial problems, domestic violence, or poor health. These things can happen to anyone, even those who never expected to become homeless. We should do more to address homelessness, because we never know when it could happen to us or someone we love.



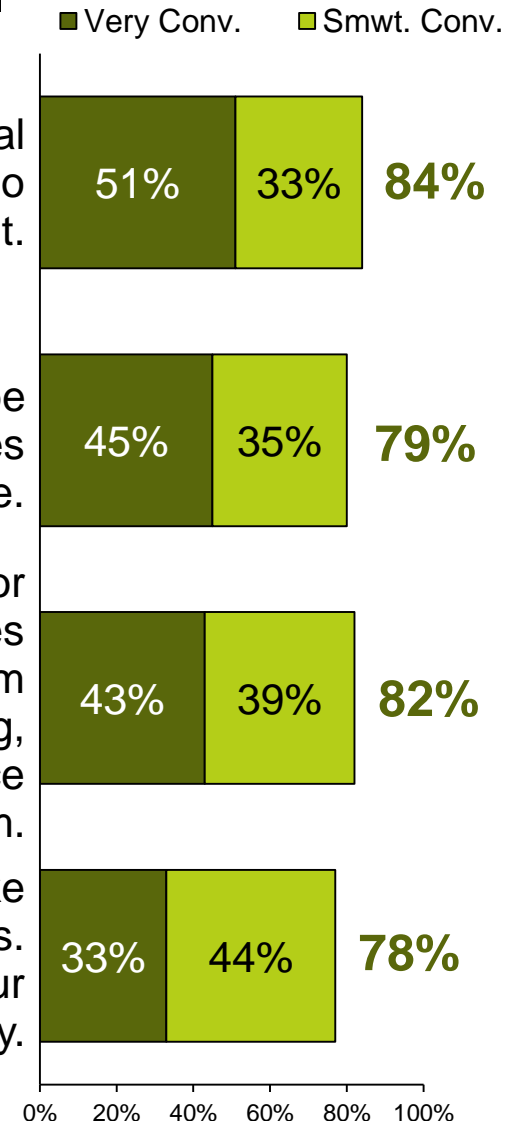
A message about economic impacts largely falls flat.

(RESPONSIBILITY) People who are homeless need to take personal responsibility for improving their situation. When they are ready to do so, we should give them the hand up they need – not a handout.

(HUMAN RIGHT) Safe shelter is a basic human right that should not be denied to anyone in our communities. We need to commit the resources to make sure everyone has a safe place to call home.

(MORE HOUSING) People living in temporary homeless shelters, or outdoors, often lack the stability to address other problems in their lives – problems which, unless addressed, will continue to make them vulnerable to homelessness. If we provide more affordable housing, with supportive services, we can break this cycle and reduce homelessness for the long-term.

(ECONOMIC IMPACT) Homeless people and panhandling make neighborhoods feel unsafe and keep people away from businesses. Addressing the problem of homelessness is vital to the health of our local economy.



Themes

- ❖ The data suggest four themes that will be critical in building public will around homelessness:
 1. Too many Denver area families are homeless. Residents do not think of the homeless as families, but as single men. Messaging that reframes the issue as one affecting families is highly effective in building support.
 2. Homelessness can affect anyone. Many residents have experienced homelessness themselves; have feared that they would; or have a friend or family members who have. Messaging which stresses that circumstances can leave our loved ones homeless has an impact.
 3. The homeless deserve our compassion. Denver Metro residents show many signs of compassion for homeless people: most say they acknowledge or assist homeless people they meet, and have given money, time, or material support to help the homeless. Messaging appealing to this instinct is effective.
 4. We owe help to those trying to help themselves. Many Metro-area residents, but particularly conservatives and seniors, respond strongly to messaging which notes that homeless people must work to better their own circumstances – but that we must all contribute to helping them succeed.