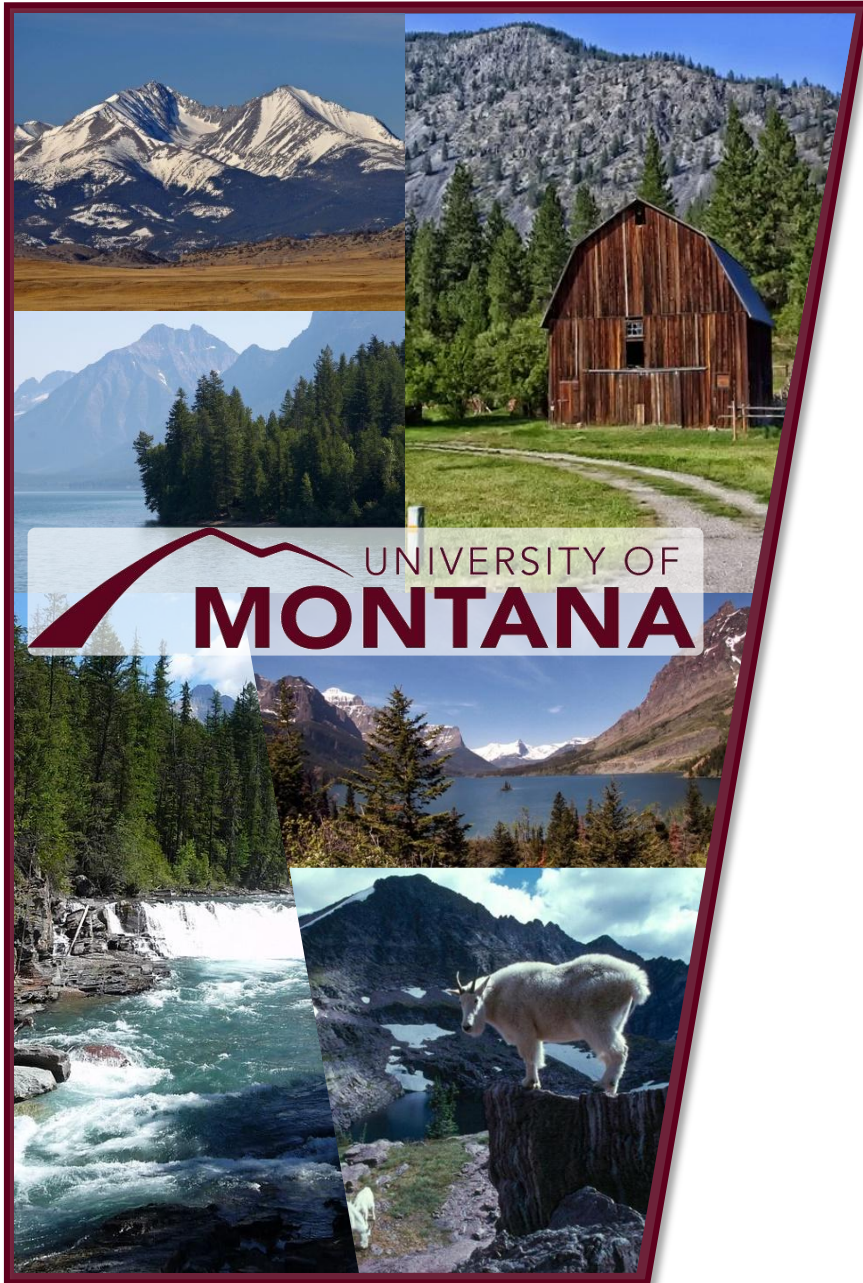


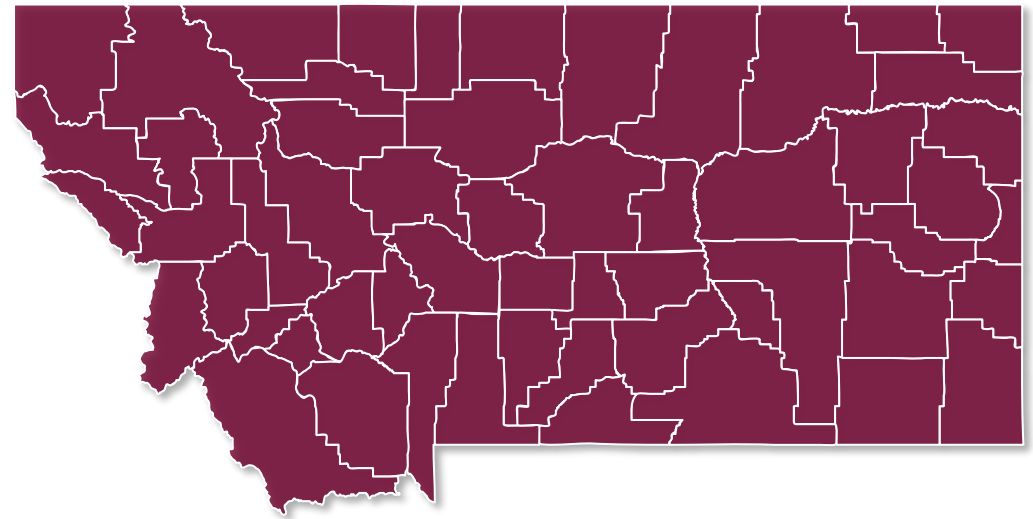
# University of Montana Crown of the Continent and Greater Yellowstone Initiative

## 2026 Montana Statewide Survey Key Findings



# Methodology

- Conducted by a bipartisan research team: New Bridge Strategy (Republican) and FM3 Research (Democrat).
- N=515 interviews conducted with registered voters throughout Montana.
- Statistically valid sample with an overall margin of sampling error of  $\pm 4.32\%$  at the 95% confidence interval for the total sample.
- Interviews conducted March 19-25, 2026, via online interviews from text invitation and phones (landline and cell).
- Trend data from similarly conducted surveys of Montana voters every two years since 2014.

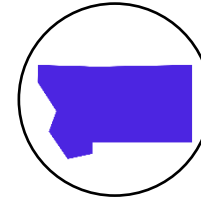


# Key Demographics



## Gender

<i>Male</i>	50%
<i>Female</i>	50%



## Time in State

<i>Less than 10 years</i>	21%
<i>11-30 years</i>	19%
<i>31+/All my life</i>	60%



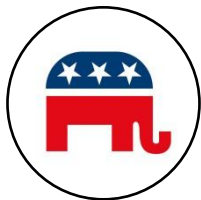
## Age

<i>18-34</i>	19%
<i>35-44</i>	24%
<i>45-54</i>	14%
<i>55-64</i>	22%
<i>65+</i>	20%



## Education

<i>High school or less</i>	19%
<i>Some college/technical</i>	28%
<i>College grad</i>	38%
<i>Post grad</i>	15%



## Party

<i>Republican</i>	33%
<i>Independent/Other</i>	42%
<i>Democrat</i>	25%



## Geography

<i>City</i>	25%
<i>Suburbs</i>	12%
<i>Small town</i>	26%
<i>Rural area</i>	37%

# Two-thirds of Montanans say that they hunt or fish.



**8%**

Hunter Only



**12%**

Angler Only

**48%**

Both Hunter  
& Angler

**67%**

Sportsmen

*Do you consider yourself a hunter, an angler or both?*

# Most Montana voters say that they regularly participate in outdoor activities, particularly hiking/trail running and camping.



**70%**

Camping



**69%**

Hiking or trail running



**56%**

Kayaking, canoeing or boating



**53%**

Bird watching and viewing wildlife



**40%**

Snow shoeing, skiing or boarding



**35%**

Riding an off-road vehicle or snowmobile



**24%**

Mountain biking

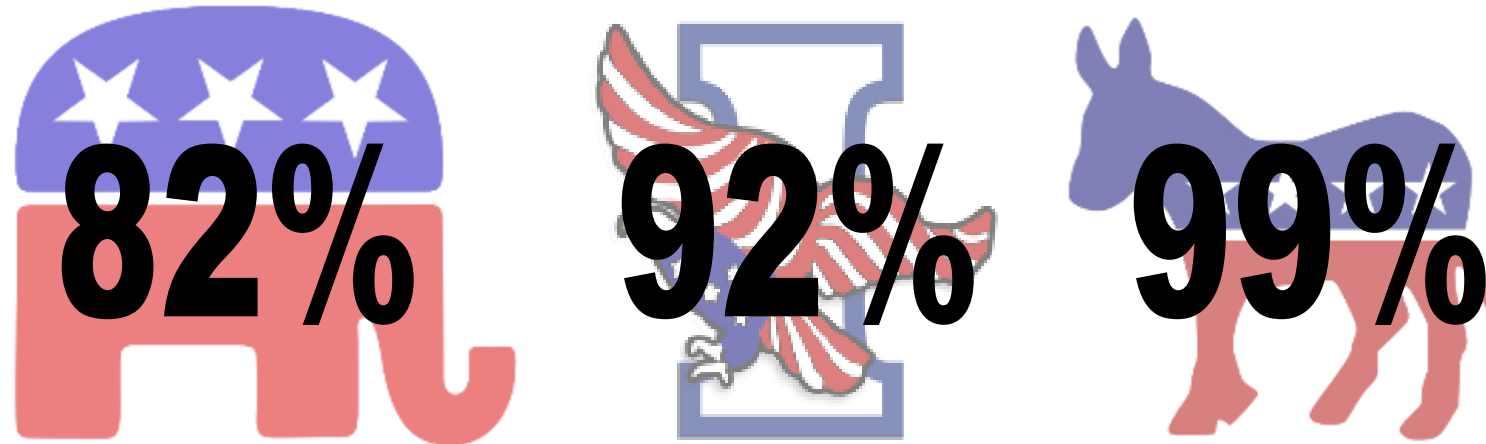
*Which of the following types of outdoor activities do you participate in regularly?  
Multiple answers accepted.*

# Nine-in-ten Montanans say that conservation issues are an important factor in deciding whether to support an elected public official, consistent with the past.

	<u>2014</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>
Very important, they are a primary factor in deciding whether to support an elected public official	48%	41%	48%	44%	47%	47%
Somewhat important; they are one of several issues you consider	38%	48%	39%	41%	36%	43%
Not too important; they are not a significant factor to consider in deciding whether to support an elected public official	9%	7%	9%	8%	10%	7%
Not at all important for you in deciding whether to support an elected official	4%	4%	4%	6%	7%	3%

*Compared to other issues like the economy, health care and education, how important are issues involving clean water, clean air, open spaces and public lands for you in deciding whether to support an elected public official?*

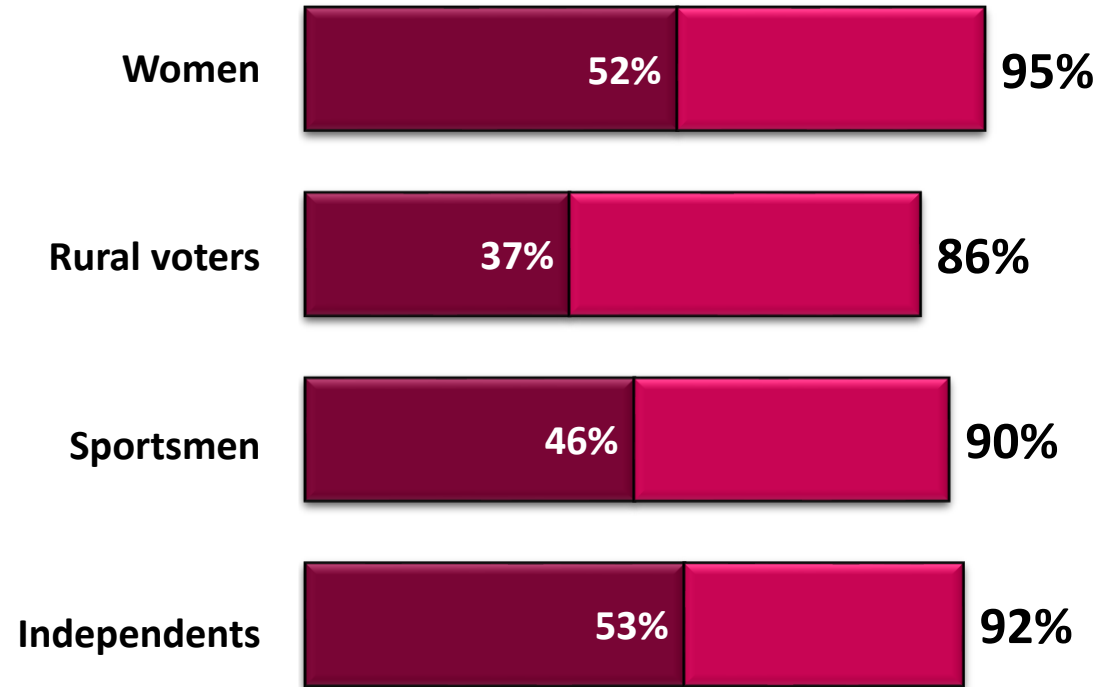
# There is bipartisan agreement on the importance of conservation issues when supporting an elected official.



*Showing % Total Important*

*Compared to other issues like the economy, health care and education, how important are issues involving clean water, clean air, open spaces and public lands for you in deciding whether to support an elected public official? Are they...*

# Strong majorities of key voter groups also view these issues as important.



■ Very Important

■ Total Important

*Compared to other issues like the economy, health care and education, how important are issues involving clean water, clean air, open spaces and public lands for you in deciding whether to support an elected public official? Are they...*

# Loss of access to public lands as well as low snowpack and drought top the list of voters' environmental concerns.

*State Problems Ranked by % Extremely Serious*

	Extremely Serious	Ext/Very Serious
Loss of access to national forests, lakes and other public lands	41%	71%
Low snowpack*	40%	74%
Drought^	38%	77%
Firings and reductions in the number of park rangers, scientists and other workers managing national parks, forests and other public lands here in Montana	36%	60%
Development sprawling into what were once ranches or open lands^	33%	63%
Funding cuts to management of national parks, forests and other public lands	33%	62%
Crowding and more people at places where you recreate outdoors*	16%	43%

*The following is a list of issues some people say are problems in Montana. For each one, please indicate if you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a problem in the state.*

*\*Asked of Sample A, N=259 ^Asked of Sample B, N=256*

# Low snowpack and drought have jumped up dramatically as concerns, while the other issues we tracked are within margin of error of last year.

Showing % Extremely/Very Serious	2022	2024	2026	2024-2026 change
Low snowpack*	-	56%	74%	+18
Drought^	-	60%	77%	+17
Development sprawling into what were once ranches or open lands^	52%	59%	63%	+4
Crowding and more people at places where you recreate outdoors*	45%	46%	43%	-3

The following is a list of issues some people say are problems in Montana. For each one, please indicate if you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a problem in the state.

\*Asked of Sample A, N=259 ^Asked of Sample B, N=256

# Voters throughout the state characterize changes to public lands management as extremely or very serious problems.

*Showing % Extremely/Very Serious*

	Missoula	Butte/ Bozeman	Great Falls	Billings	Balance
Firings and reductions in the number of park rangers, scientists and other workers managing national parks, forests and other public lands here in Montana	65%	63%	54%	58%	50%
Funding cuts to management of national parks, forests and other public lands	68%	63%	56%	61%	53%

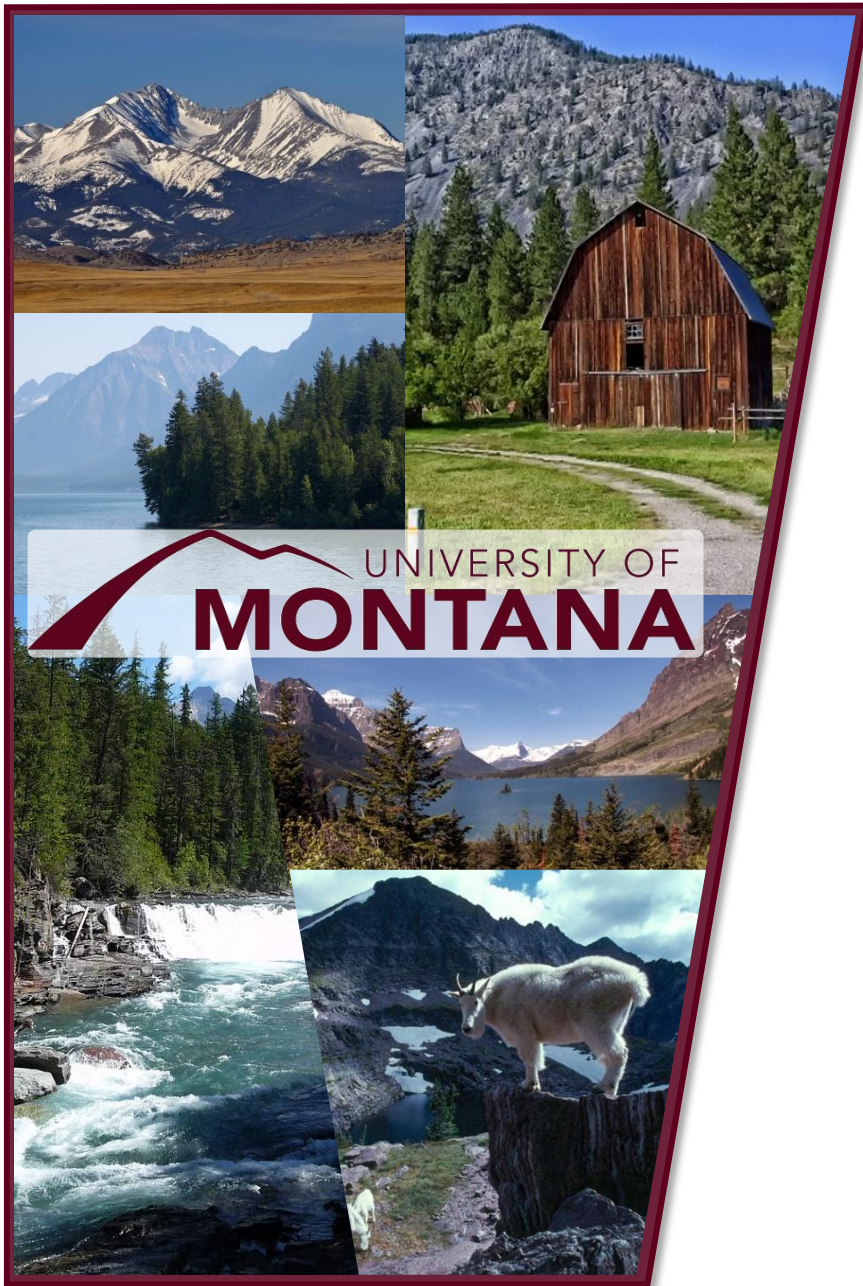
The following is a list of issues some people say are problems in Montana. For each one, please indicate if you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a problem in the state.

\*Asked of Sample A, N=259 ^Asked of Sample B, N=256

# Majorities of voters feel funding cuts and reductions in the number of workers will have a negative impact on various aspects of public land management.

<i>Ranked by % Hurt</i>	Hurt	Help	Little Impact
Reducing the risks of wildfires on national public lands	<b>63%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Maintaining national public lands	<b>62%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>25%</b>
Conserving and managing wildlife	<b>62%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>24%</b>
Ensuring the safety of visitors who recreate, encounter wildlife and visit these lands	<b>57%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>32%</b>
Accessing national public lands for recreation, hunting and fishing	<b>56%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>32%</b>

*Thinking about funding cuts and reductions in the number of workers who manage and work on national public lands – Please indicate whether these changes will help, hurt or have little impact on each of the following.*



# National Public Lands in Montana

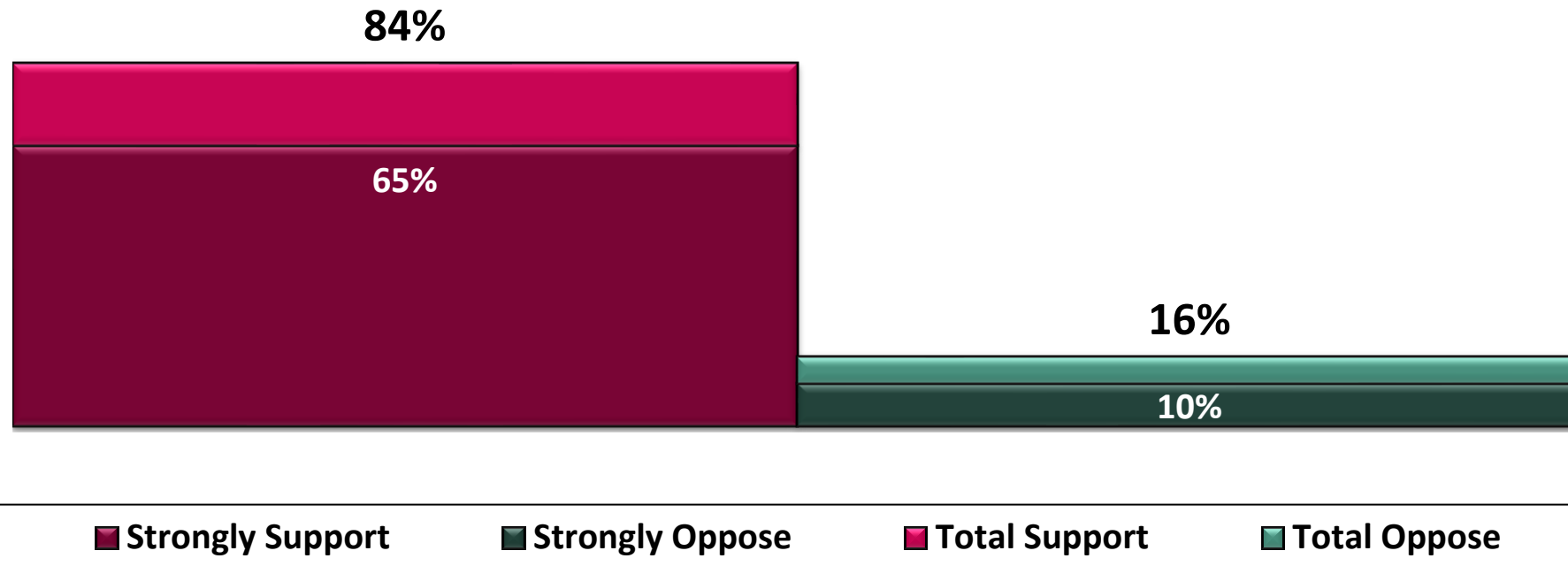
# An overwhelming share of Montana voters continue to say that the presence of national public lands in the state helps the economy.

	<u>2018</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>
<b>Helps our economy</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Has little impact on our economy</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Hurts our economy</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>

*When you think about the presence of national public lands in Montana – do you think that having such lands helps our economy, hurts our economy, or has little impact on our economy?*

# The overwhelming majority of Montana voters support a ban on the sale or transfer of national public lands.

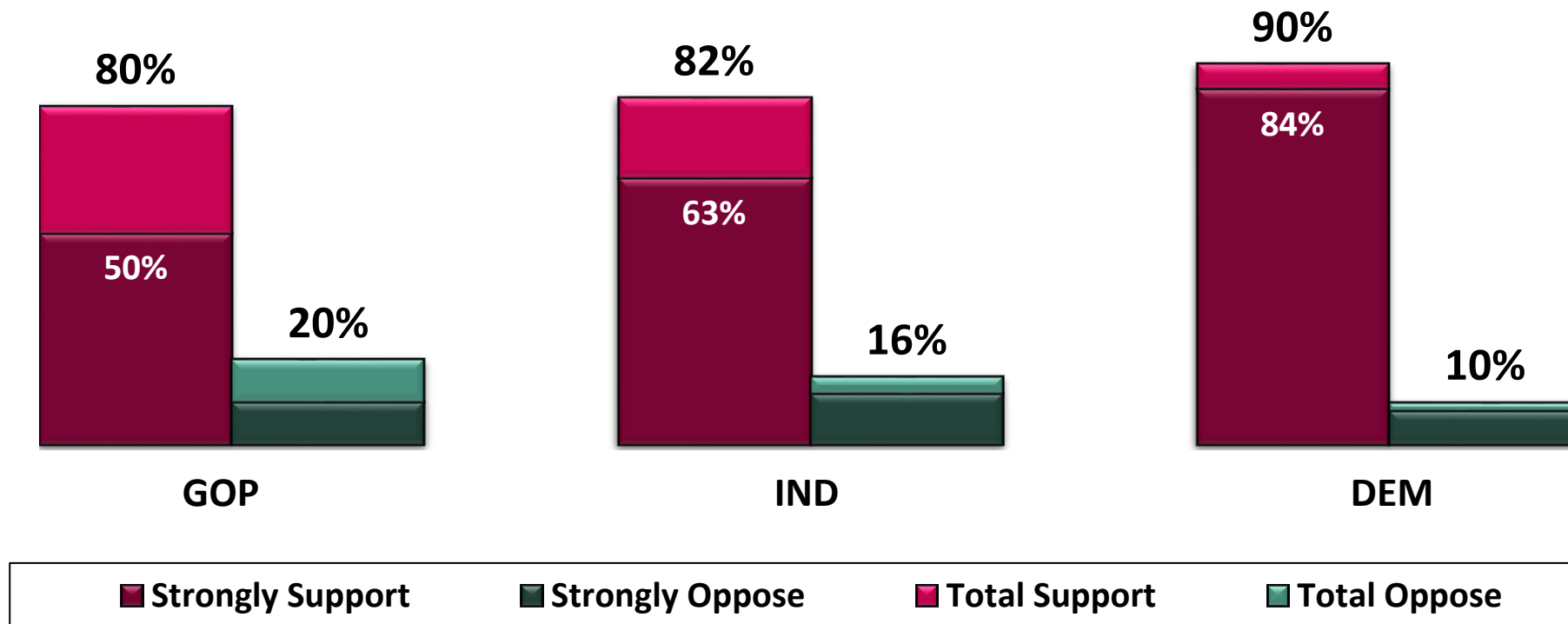
Maintain public access to public lands by banning the sale or transfer of most public lands like National Forests or National Monuments to private interests or other government entities unless approved by Congress or required by other laws.



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# Four-in-five or more across party lines support the ban on selling or transferring national public lands.

Maintain public access to public lands by banning the sale or transfer of most public lands like National Forests or National Monuments to private interests or other government entities unless approved by Congress or required by other laws.



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# Two-thirds of Montana voters want to see the funds appropriated to the LWCF used for conservation purposes, rather than infrastructure.

*The Land and Water Conservation Fund is a federal fund that uses the income from offshore drilling fees to help conserve natural areas, wildlife habitat and forests and ensure access to outdoor recreation. The federal government has proposed diverting 43% of this Fund from land, water and wildlife to funding roads and infrastructure on public lands.*

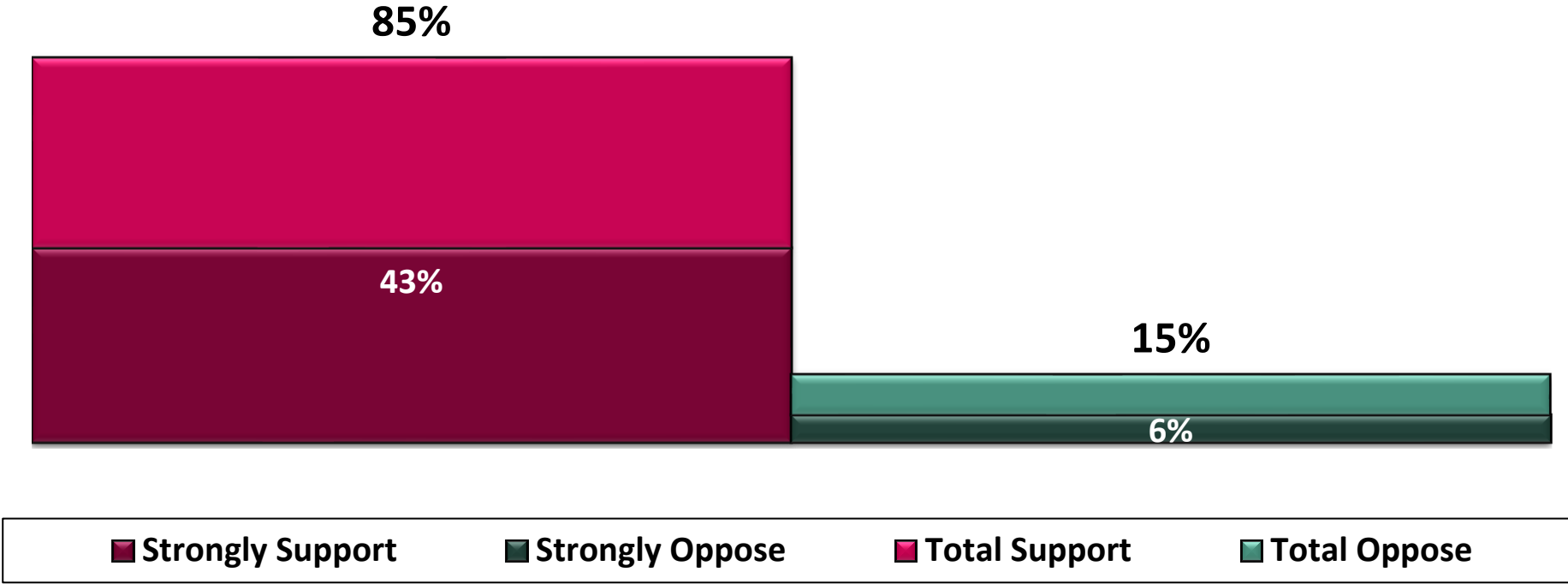
Funding conservation of land, water and wildlife, and providing access to nature and outdoor recreation **67%**

Funding roads and infrastructure on public lands **32%**

*Which of the following would you prefer? Please choose just one, even if it's hard to decide.*

# There is strong majority support for a separate proposal to increase federal funding to reduce the backlog of infrastructure repairs.

Increase federal funding to reduce the backlog of repairs for roads and infrastructure on national public lands



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# There has been a nearly 10-point increase since 2020 in the number of voters who want WSA protections increased.

*Here in Montana, there are seven areas of public lands protected as Wilderness Study Areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service. These seven Wilderness Study Areas include such places as the Big Snowy Mountains, the West Pioneers and the Gallatin Range. These public lands are accessible to hunters, anglers, hikers, and others on foot and horse, and allow grazing, mountain bikes, and motorized vehicle use in limited areas, but do not allow mining, drilling, or logging.*

*Only Congress can change the status of these areas, so would you prefer that Congress --*

	<u>2020</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2026</u>
Increase protections in all seven areas	23%	23%	31%	32%
Keep the seven areas as they are now	52%	49%	44%	41%
Add protections in some areas and eliminate protections in others	14%	19%	15%	18%
Eliminate existing protections in all seven areas	8%	6%	9%	7%

# Regardless of party, most Montana voters want to increase or keep protections for the Wilderness Study Areas.

	Overall	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Increase protections in all seven areas	<b>32%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>50%</b>
Keep the seven areas as they are now	<b>41%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>42%</b>
<b>TOTAL INCREASE/KEEP</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>92%</b>
Add protections in some areas and eliminate protections in others	<b>18%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>7%</b>
Eliminate existing protections in all seven areas	<b>7%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>1%</b>

*Here in Montana, there are seven areas of public lands protected as Wilderness Study Areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service. These seven Wilderness Study Areas include such places as the Big Snowy Mountains, the West Pioneers and the Gallatin Range. These public lands are accessible to hunters, anglers, hikers, and others on foot and horse, and allow grazing, mountain bikes, and motorized vehicle use in limited areas, but do not allow mining, drilling, or logging. Only Congress can change the status of these areas, so would you prefer that Congress --*

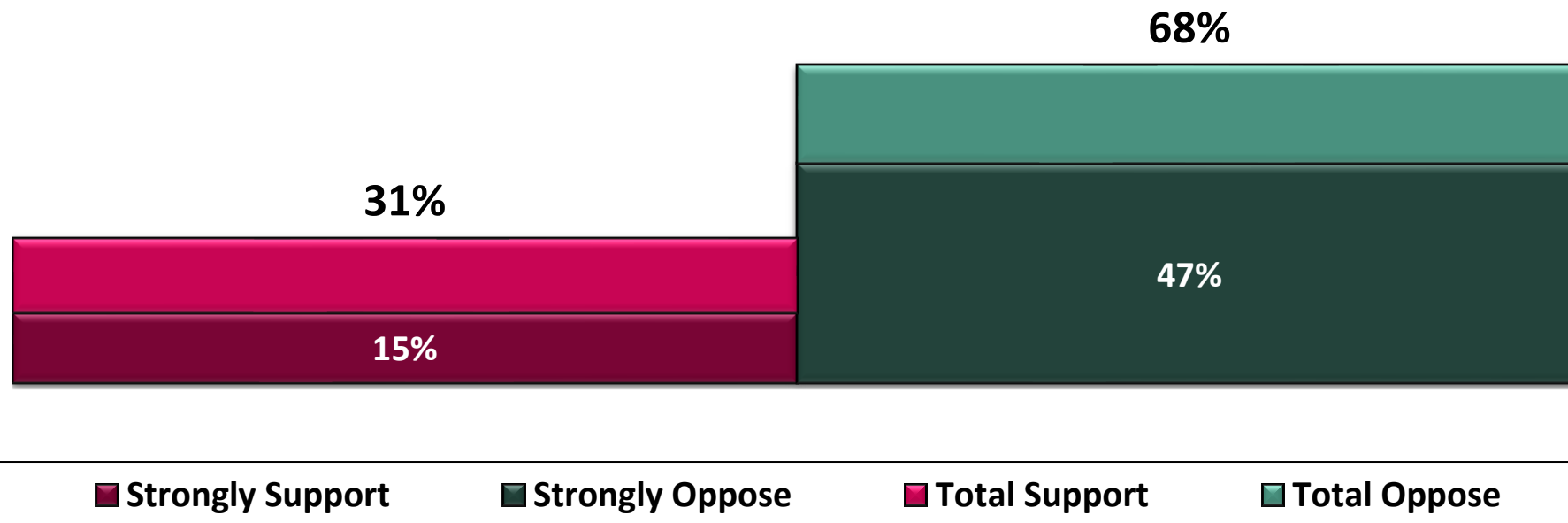
# Majorities of Montana voters in all types of communities want to increase or keep protections for the Wilderness Study Areas.

	Overall	City/Suburbs	Small Town	Rural
Increase protections in all seven areas	<b>32%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Keep the seven areas as they are now	<b>41%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>TOTAL INCREASE/KEEP</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>61%</b>
Add protections in some areas and eliminate protections in others	<b>18%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>24%</b>
Eliminate existing protections in all seven areas	<b>7%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>13%</b>

*Here in Montana, there are seven areas of public lands protected as Wilderness Study Areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service. These seven Wilderness Study Areas include such places as the Big Snowy Mountains, the West Pioneers and the Gallatin Range. These public lands are accessible to hunters, anglers, hikers, and others on foot and horse, and allow grazing, mountain bikes, and motorized vehicle use in limited areas, but do not allow mining, drilling, or logging. Only Congress can change the status of these areas, so would you prefer that Congress --*

# More than two-in-three voters also oppose changing the protections on three WSAs to allow for more extraction and fuel removal.

Downgrade protections for wildlife, water and natural resources on over 100,000 acres in the Middle Fork Judith, Hoodoo Mountain and Wales Creek Wilderness Study Areas, which would allow for expanded motorized recreation, commercial timber harvesting, hazardous fuels removal, mining and drilling on these public lands

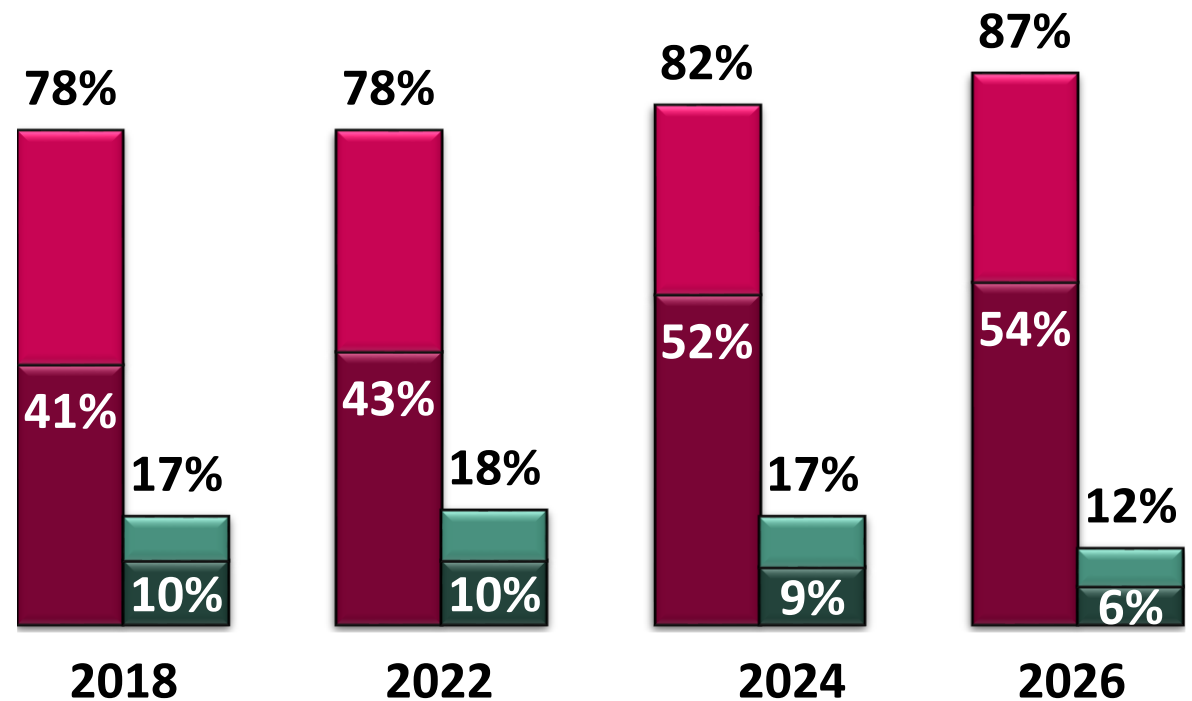


*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# Support for ensuring Presidents can designate national monuments has risen steadily since 2018.

*Presidents of both parties have used the ability to protect existing public lands as national monuments in order to maintain public access and protect the land and wildlife for future generations.*

*Knowing that...Do you support or oppose Presidents continuing to use their ability to protect existing public lands as national monuments?*

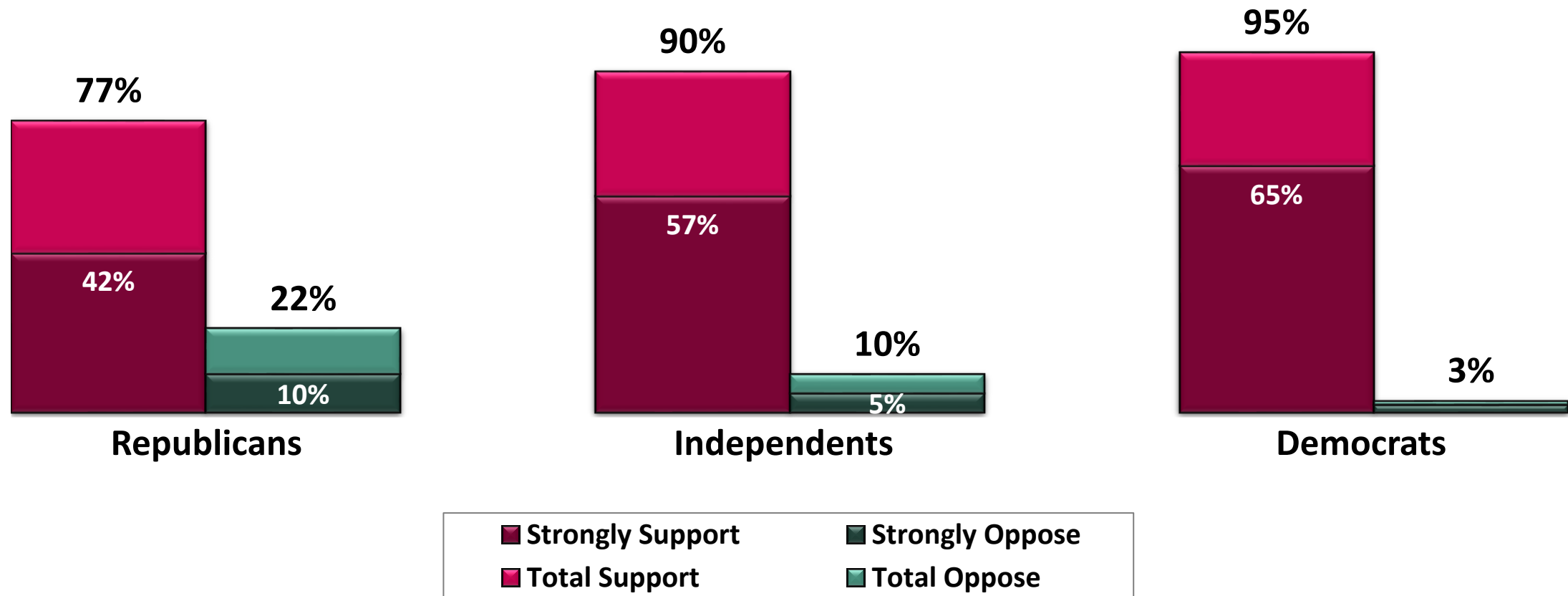


■ Strongly Support 
 ■ Total Support  
■ Strongly Oppose 
 ■ Total Oppose

*\*In 2018, we asked about Presidents having the ability, rather than continuing to use their ability to protect existing public lands as national monuments.*

*\*\* In 2022, the introduction was changed to reflect President Trump's use of this tool as well.*

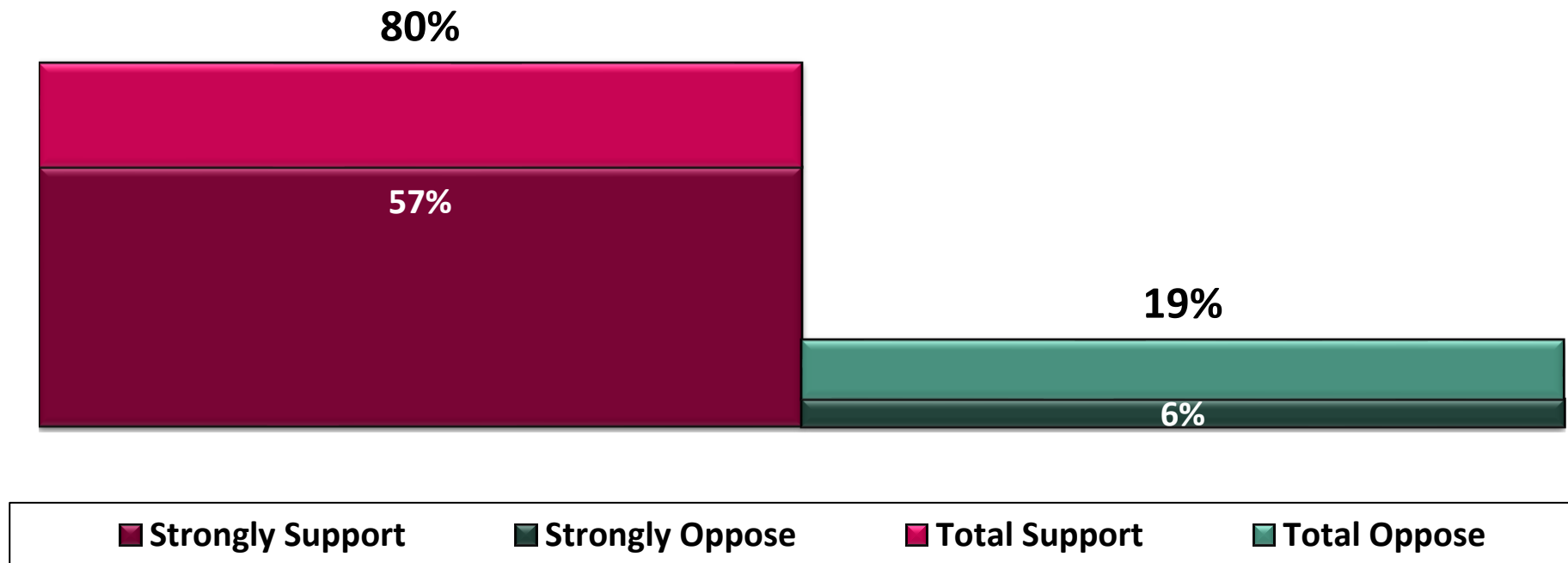
# Across party lines, vast majorities support Presidents using their Antiquities Act powers to designate national monuments.



*Do you support or oppose Presidents continuing to use their ability to protect existing public lands as national monuments?*

# Four-in-five support continuing the current policy of prohibiting road construction in key undeveloped areas.

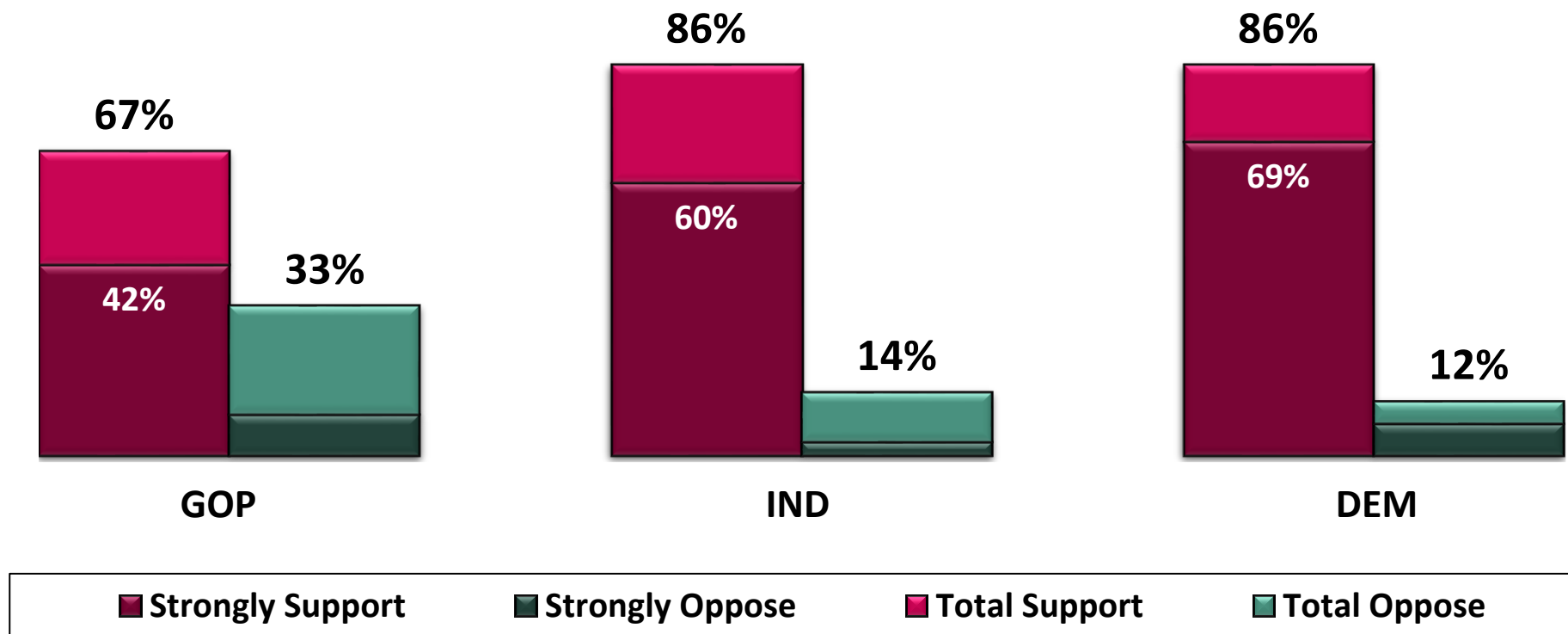
Continue the current policy of prohibiting road construction in key areas of undeveloped national forest land



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# Two-thirds or more across party lines support the current Roadless Rule.

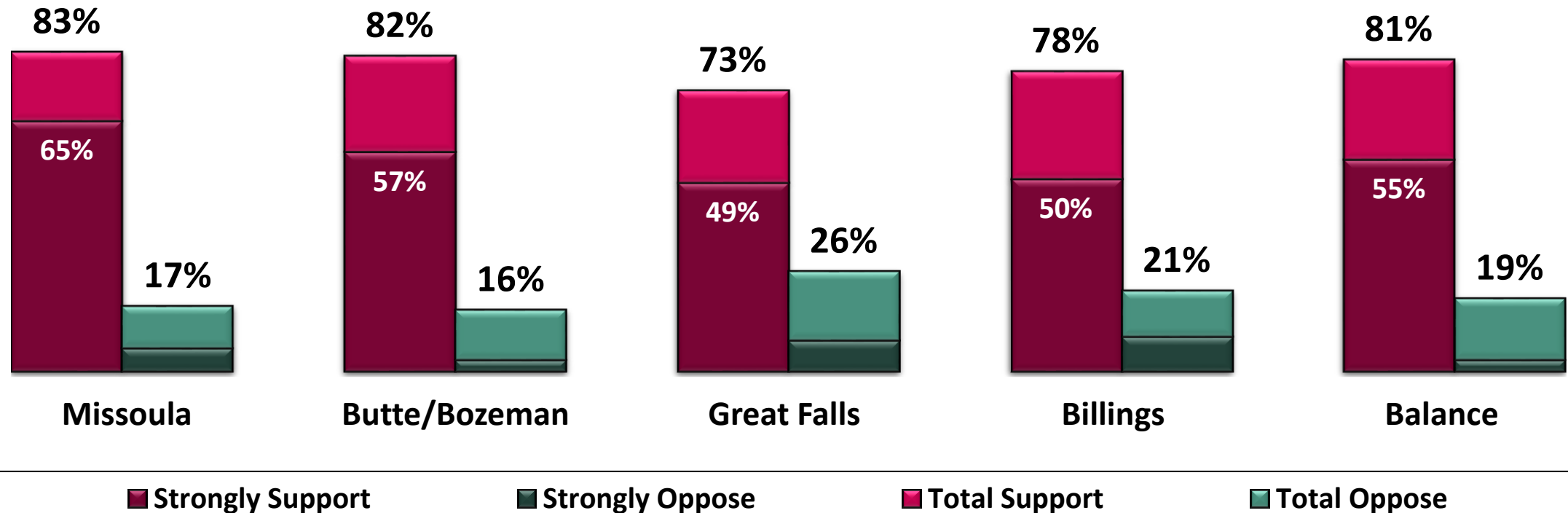
Continue the current policy of prohibiting road construction in key areas of undeveloped national forest land



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# As well as the overwhelming majority in all regions of the state.

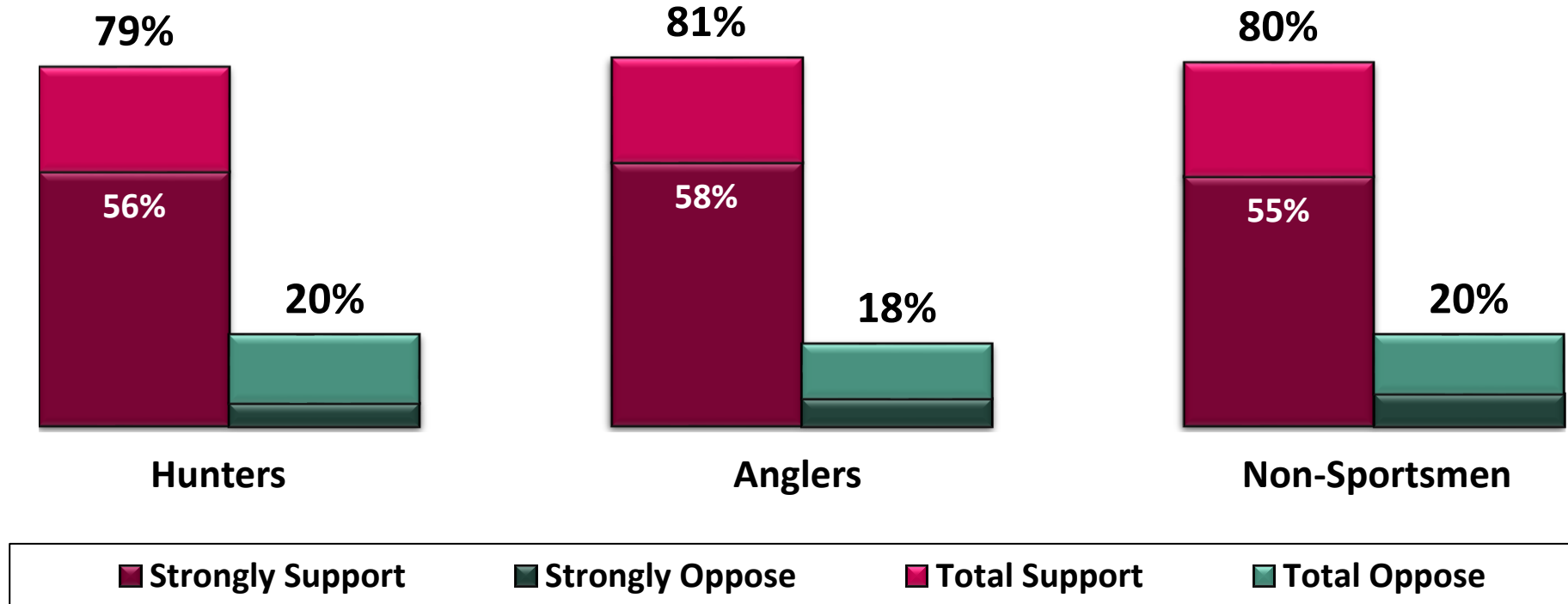
Continue the current policy of prohibiting road construction in key areas of undeveloped national forest land



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# There is little difference between sportsmen and non-sportsmen.

Continue the current policy of prohibiting road construction in key areas of undeveloped national forest land



*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# There is solid and intense support for several proposals to protect specific areas of public lands and rivers in the state as well.

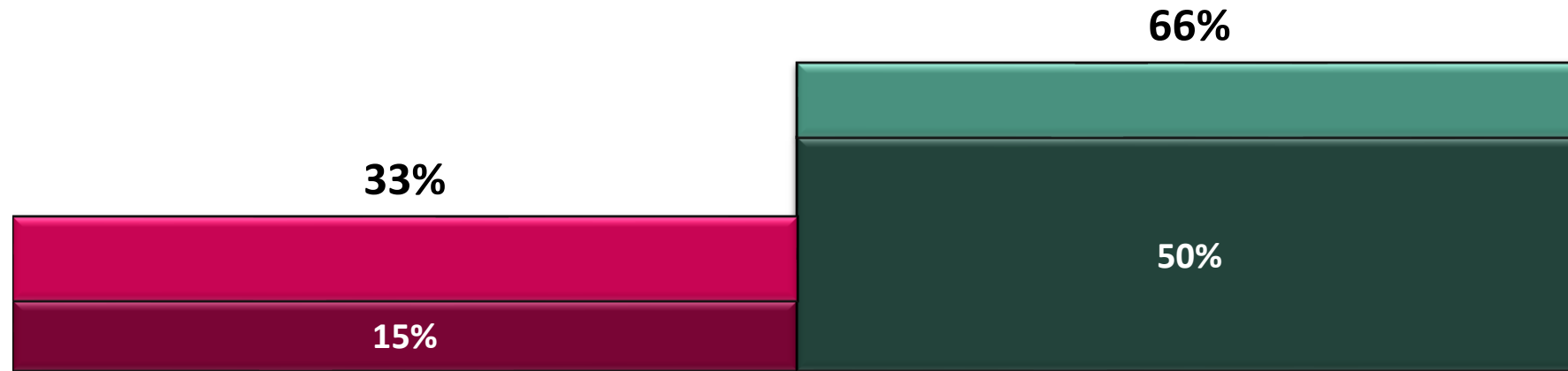
*Ranked by % Strongly Support*

	Strongly Support	Total Support
Protect nearly 100 miles of the Madison and Gallatin rivers with Wild and Scenic River designations, which helps sustain fish and wildlife, recreation and water quality, while preventing new dams and industrial activities like mines or industrial roads that could affect those rivers.	<b>59%</b>	<b>70%</b>
Pass legislation developed by local communities to protect the Gallatin Range, which borders Yellowstone National Park, by maintaining the existing recreation uses, conserving areas for wildlife habitat and migration, protecting the headwaters of the Gallatin and Yellowstone rivers, and designating some new wilderness. Mining, new road building, and oil and gas development would not be allowed.	<b>58%</b>	<b>81%</b>
Pass legislation developed by local communities in the Blackfoot Valley that would promote forest restoration and timber harvest, maintain existing motorized and non-motorized recreation access, safeguard the headwaters of the Blackfoot River, provide improved trails for motorized users and mountain bikes, and add important lands to the Bob Marshall, Scapegoat and Mission Mountains wilderness areas where mining, drilling, logging, and road building would not be allowed.	<b>57%</b>	<b>83%</b>

*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# Two-in-three voters oppose limiting public input and review of a rare earth mining project in Southwest Montana.

Speed up approval of an exploratory mine for rare earth minerals at the headwaters of the Bitterroot River in Southwest Montana by reducing environmental reviews and local public input.



Strongly Support

Strongly Oppose

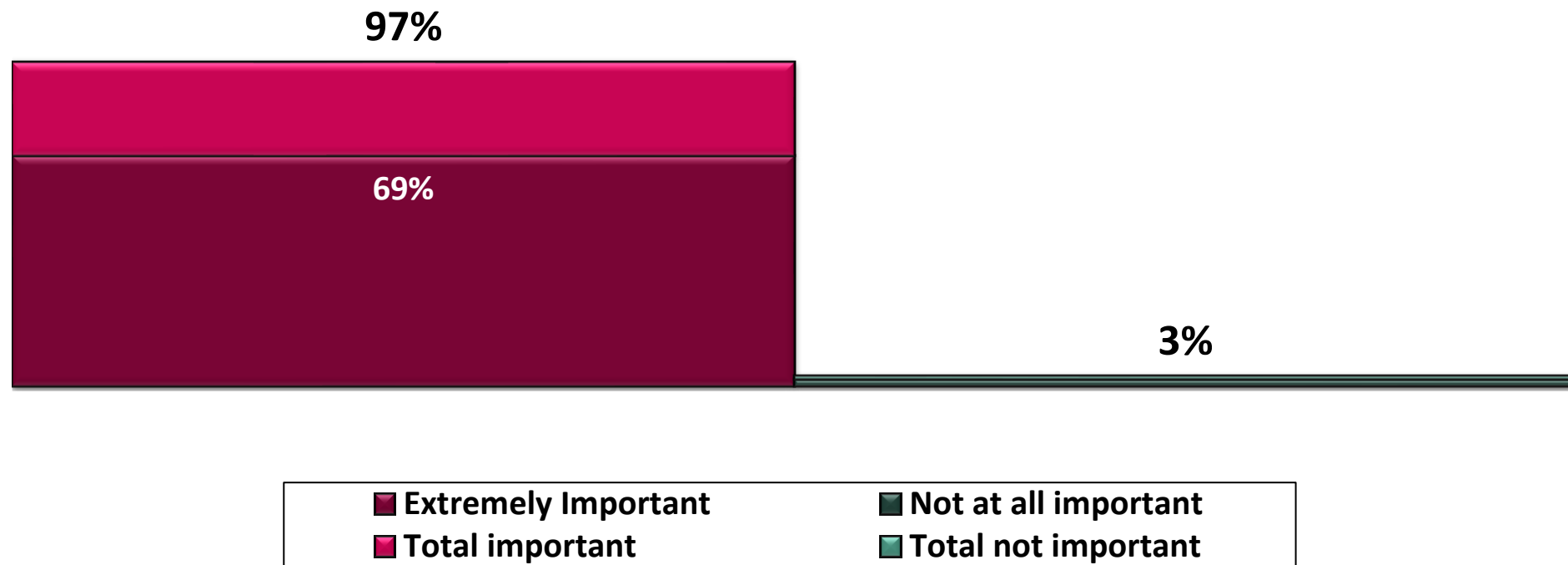
Total Support

Total Oppose

*There are some other policies and proposals that could affect existing public lands here in Montana - For each one, please tell me if that seems like something you would support or oppose -*

# In fact, there is nearly unanimous agreement on the importance of public input regarding changes to public lands management.

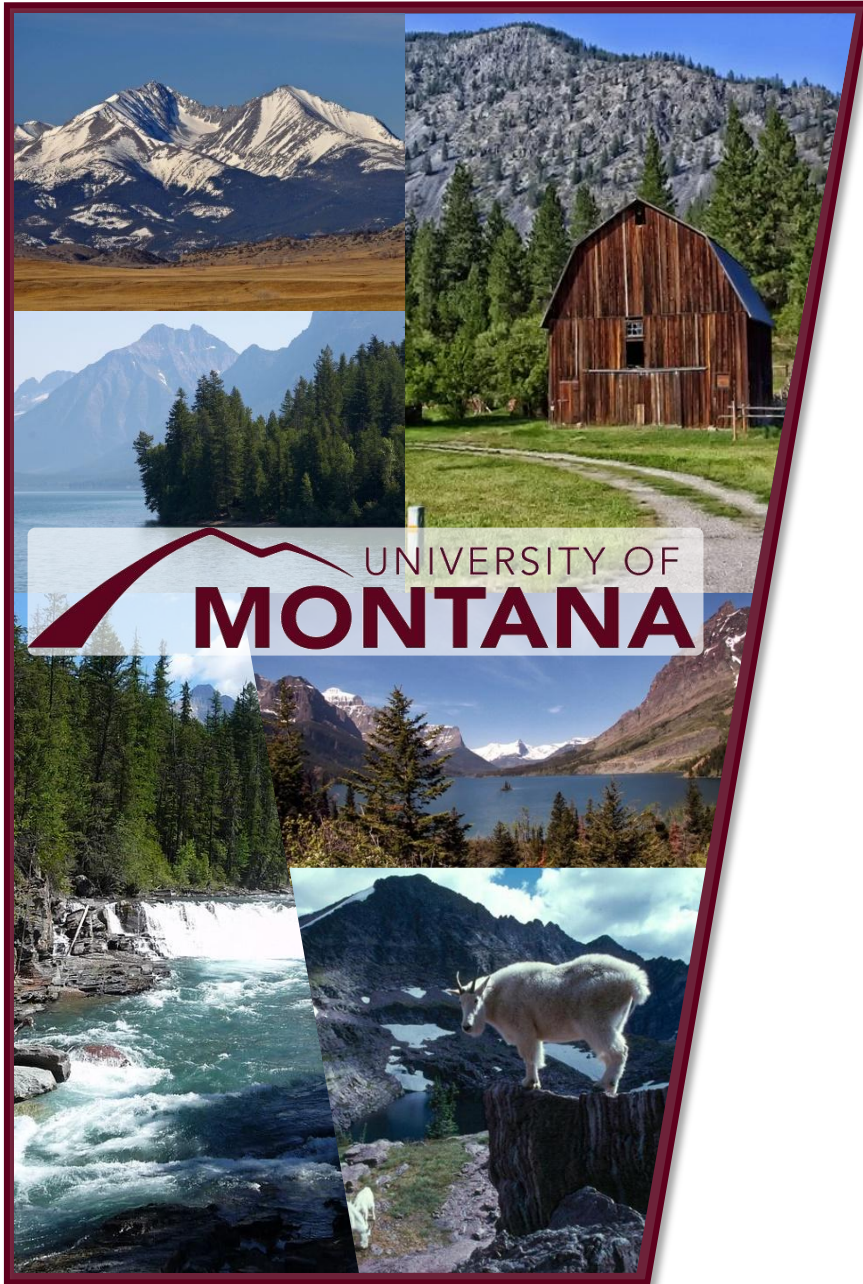
*In the past, most changes to national public lands were made after public meetings and opportunities for public input. That is not always happening today. How important do you think it is for government agencies to hold public meetings and provide opportunities for public input? Is it...*



# Overwhelming majorities of all sub-groups say public input is extremely or very important.

<i>Showing % Extremely/Very Important</i>	<b>%</b>
<b>Men</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Women</b>	<b>91%</b>
<b>GOP</b>	<b>79%</b>
<b>IND</b>	<b>86%</b>
<b>DEM</b>	<b>96%</b>
<b>Sportsmen</b>	<b>85%</b>
<b>Non-Sportsmen</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>City/Suburb</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>Town</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>83%</b>

*In the past, most changes to national public lands were made after public meetings and opportunities for public input. That is not always happening today. How important do you think it is for government agencies to hold public meetings and provide opportunities for public input? Is it...*



UNIVERSITY OF  
**MONTANA**

# Emerging Issues

# Three-quarters of voters think corner crossing should be legal.

*Roughly one million acres of public lands in Montana cannot currently be accessed by the public, but could be if they are allowed to corner cross. Corner crossing is stepping from one public land parcel to another, where they meet at the corners. This has been ruled legal by courts in some states, but the issue has not been considered in Montana yet.*

*Do you think that corner crossing should or should not be legal here in Montana?*

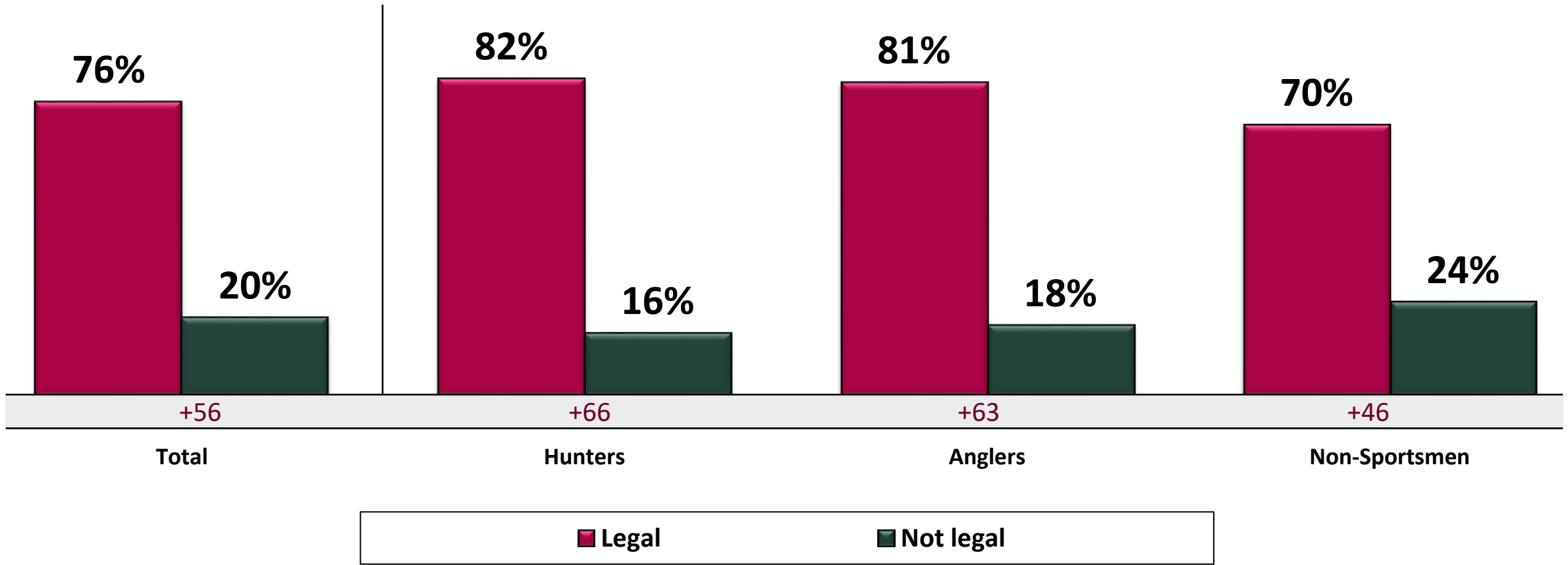
**76%**

**Legal in Montana**

**20%**

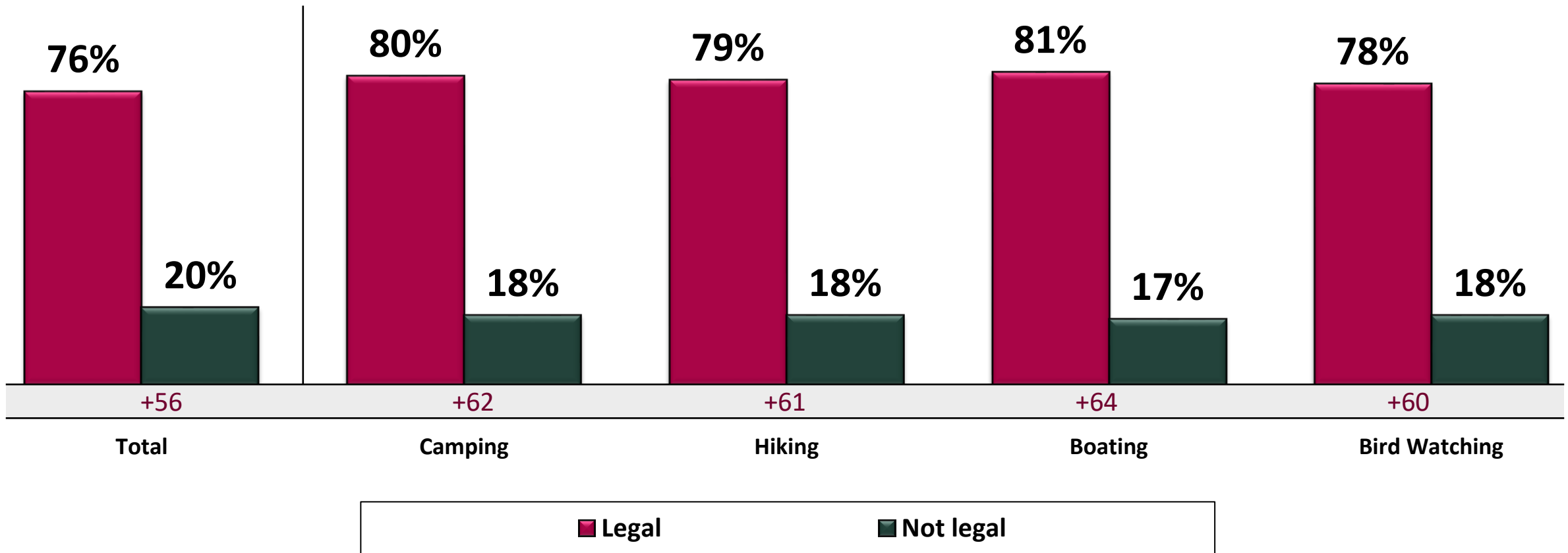
**Not legal in Montana**

# Sportsmen are more likely to support corner crossing.



Do you think that corner crossing should or should not be legal here in Montana?

# Other recreationalists also support legalizing corner crossing.



*Do you think that corner crossing should or should not be legal here in Montana?*

# On a different topic, voters foresee negative impacts to the environment and their electric rates and reliability as a result of data centers being built.

	Positive	Negative	No Difference
The price you pay for electricity*	10%	76%	6%
The reliability of the electric grid	12%	68%	6%
The availability of water	8%	69%	10%
The state's economy	40%	35%	9%

Switching topics and thinking about data centers which are large buildings that store and manage computer systems and data, including for AI. A number of new data centers will potentially be constructed in the future here in Montana. Do you think that would have a positive or negative – impact on each of the following here in Montana. If you think it would make no difference or are completely unsure, please indicate that instead.

\*Asked of Sample A, N=259 ^Asked of Sample B, N=256



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