

**PUBLIC OPINION**  

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**STRATEGIES**



**Key findings from a Colorado River District survey of 500 registered voters conducted May 31 – June 2, 2009.**

**Lori Weigel, Partner // Public Opinion Strategies**

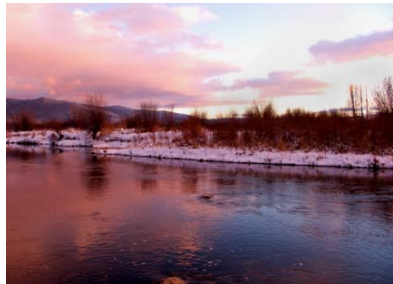
# Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies conducted this survey of 500 registered voters throughout the 15 county\* Colorado River Water Conservation District. The MOE is  $\pm 4.38\%$  overall. The margin of error for sub-groups varies and is dependent on their cell size. Interviews were conducted May 31-June 2, 2009.

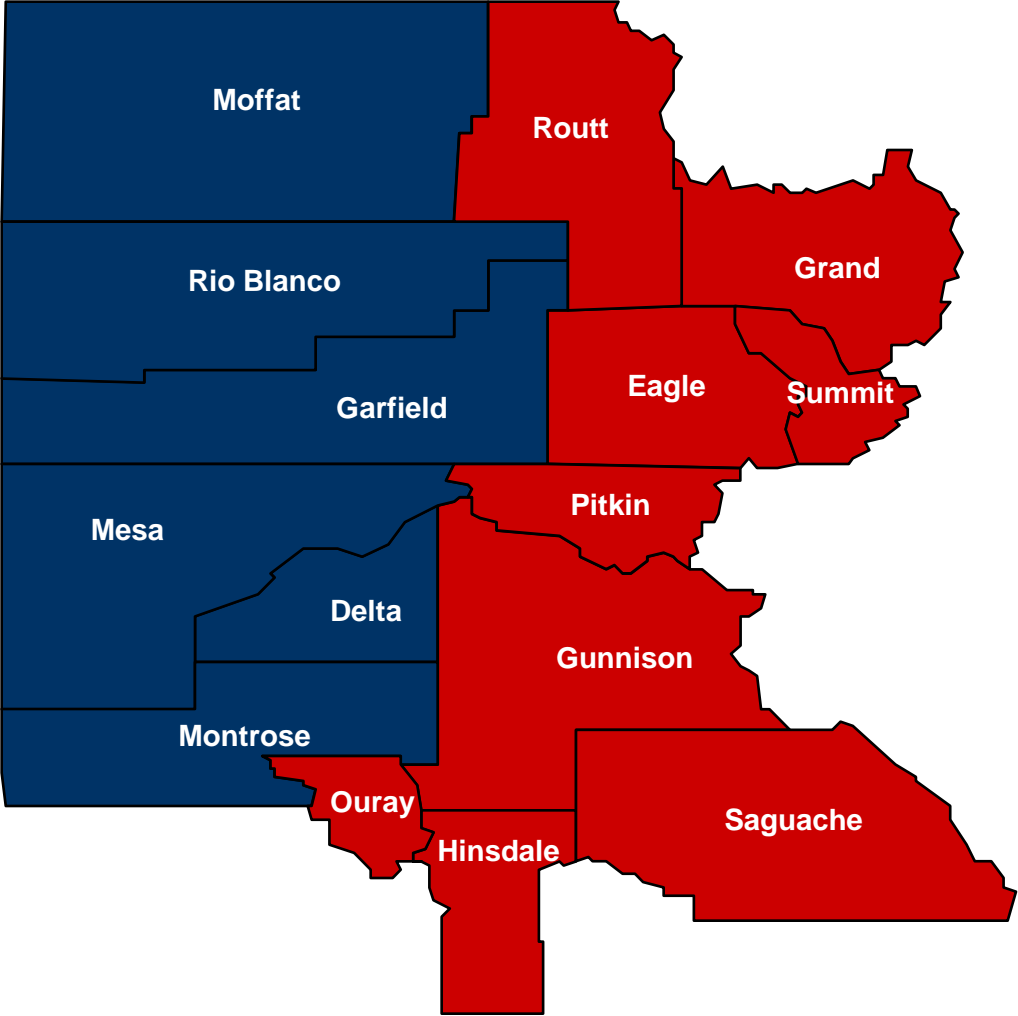
Comparisons are made to similarly constructed survey previously conducted by the District in 2003 and 2005.

\*Interviews were completed in the following counties:

- Delta
- Hinsdale (partial)
- Pitkin
- Eagle
- Mesa
- Rio Blanco
- Garfield
- Moffat
- Routt
- Grand
- Montrose (partial)
- Saguache (partial)
- Gunnison
- Ouray
- Summit



# Colorado River District Break-Down Map By Geography



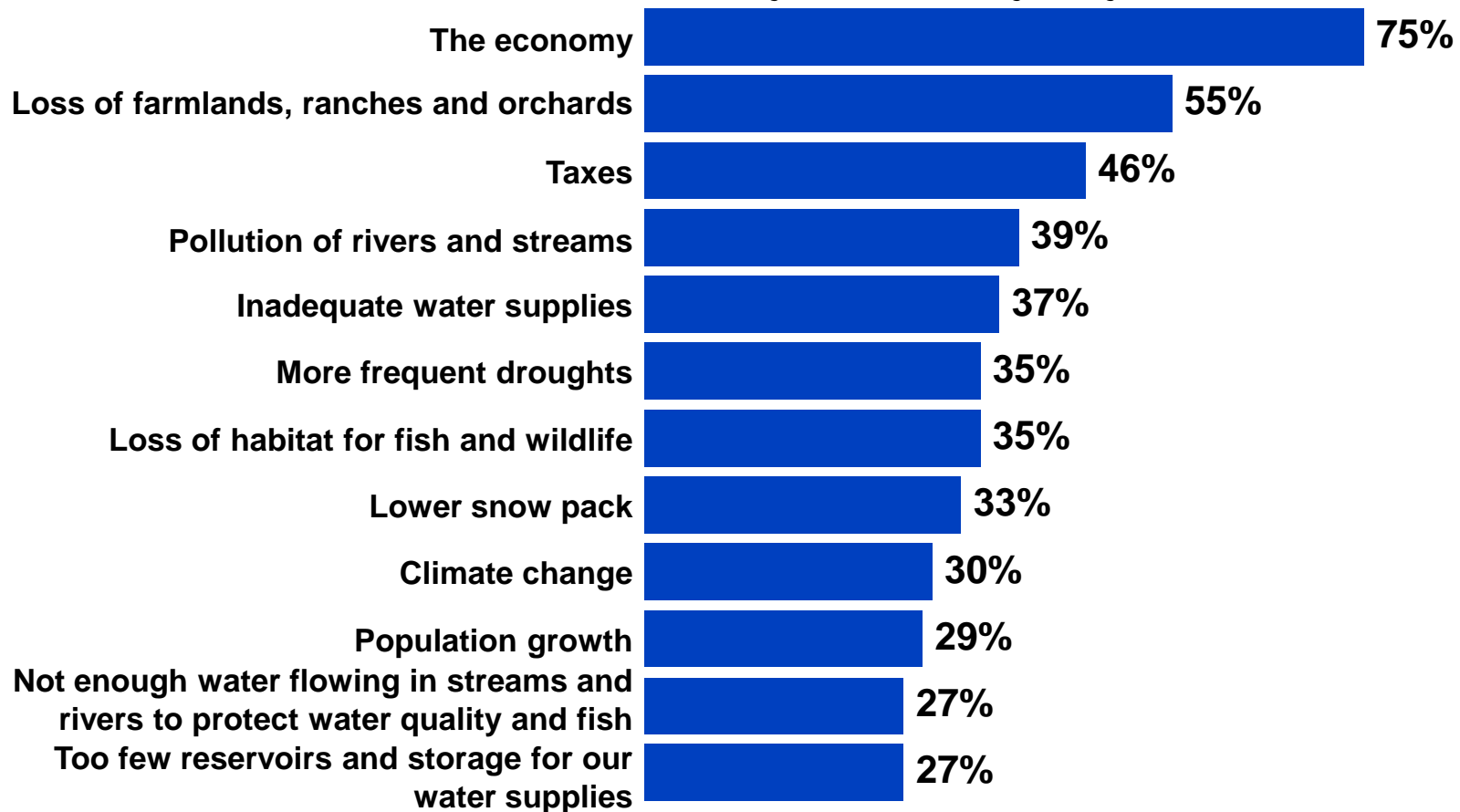
■ Downstream ■ Headwaters



# General Perceptions of Water

# It is important to recognize that issues other than water are at the forefront of regional concerns today.

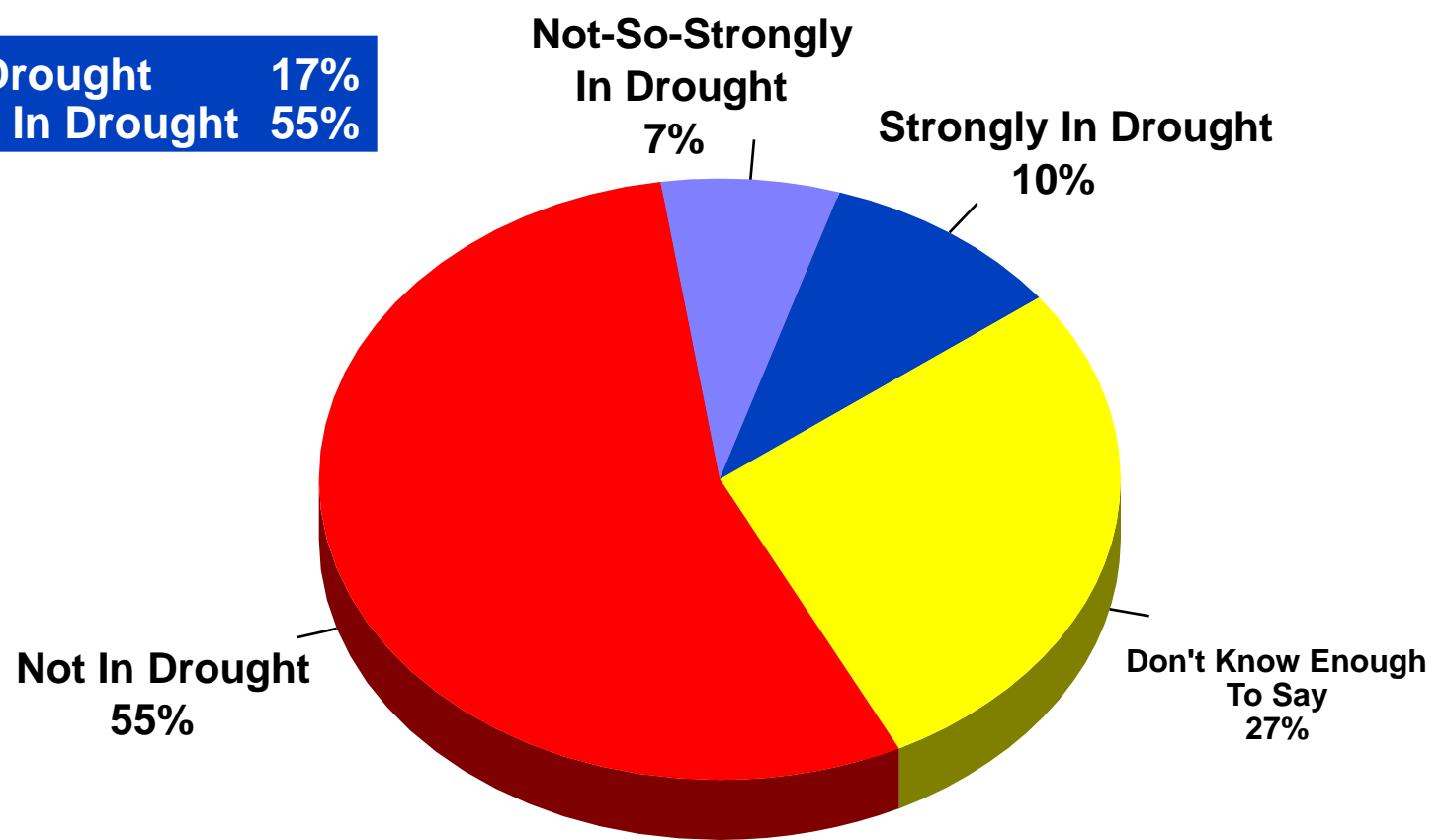
*Ranked by % Extremely/Very Serious Problem*



*Next, I'm going to read you a list of issues that are sometimes said to be serious issues in this part of Colorado. After I read each one, please tell me if you think it is an extremely serious problem, a very serious problem, a somewhat serious problem, or not a problem in this part of Colorado.*

# A majority of district resident say we are not in a drought today.

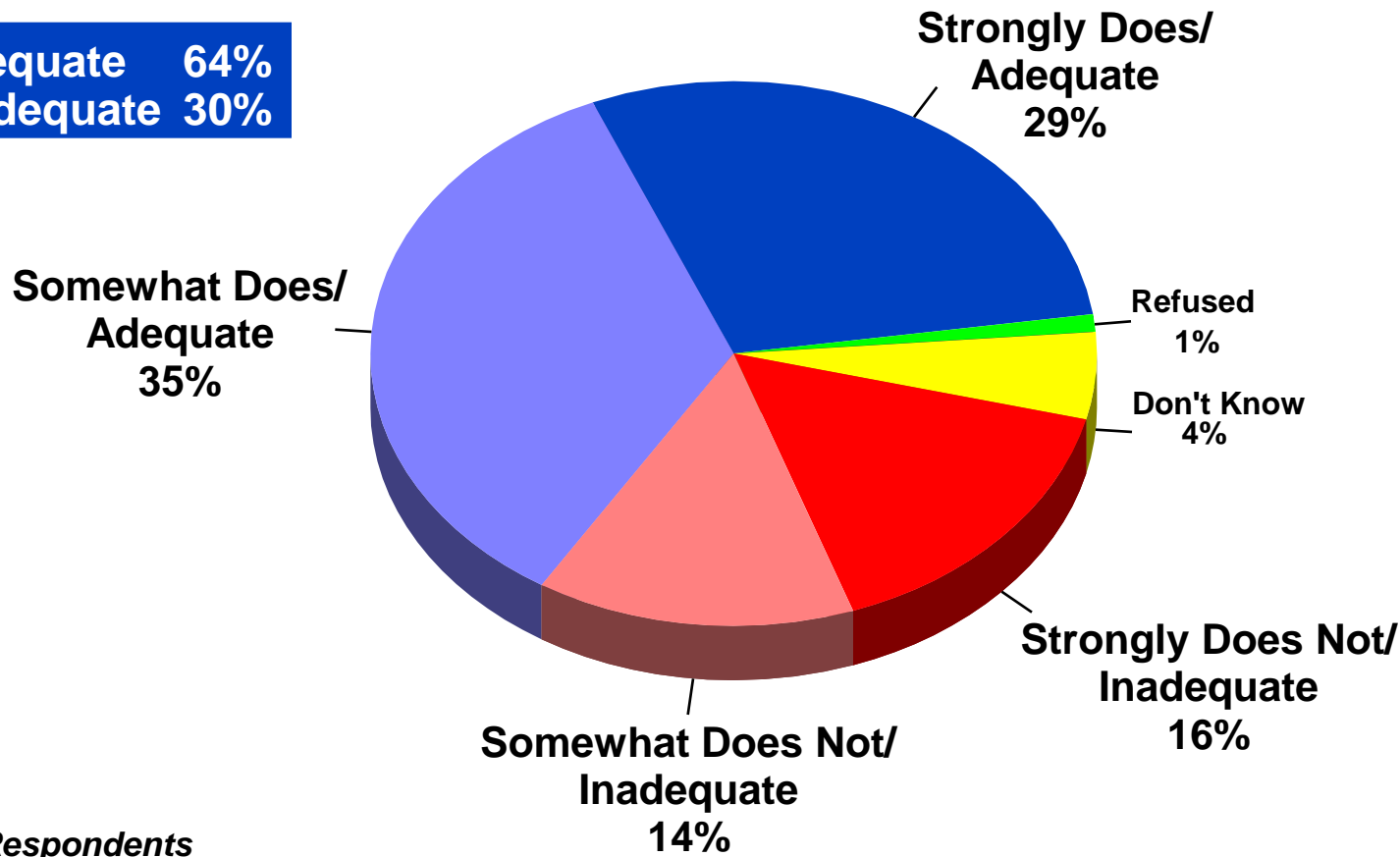
**Total In Drought 17%**  
**Total Not In Drought 55%**



*Would you say we are in a drought today, not in a drought, or do you not have enough information to say?*

# In fact, nearly two-thirds say that Colorado has an adequate supply of water to meet current needs.

**Total Adequate 64%**  
**Total Inadequate 30%**

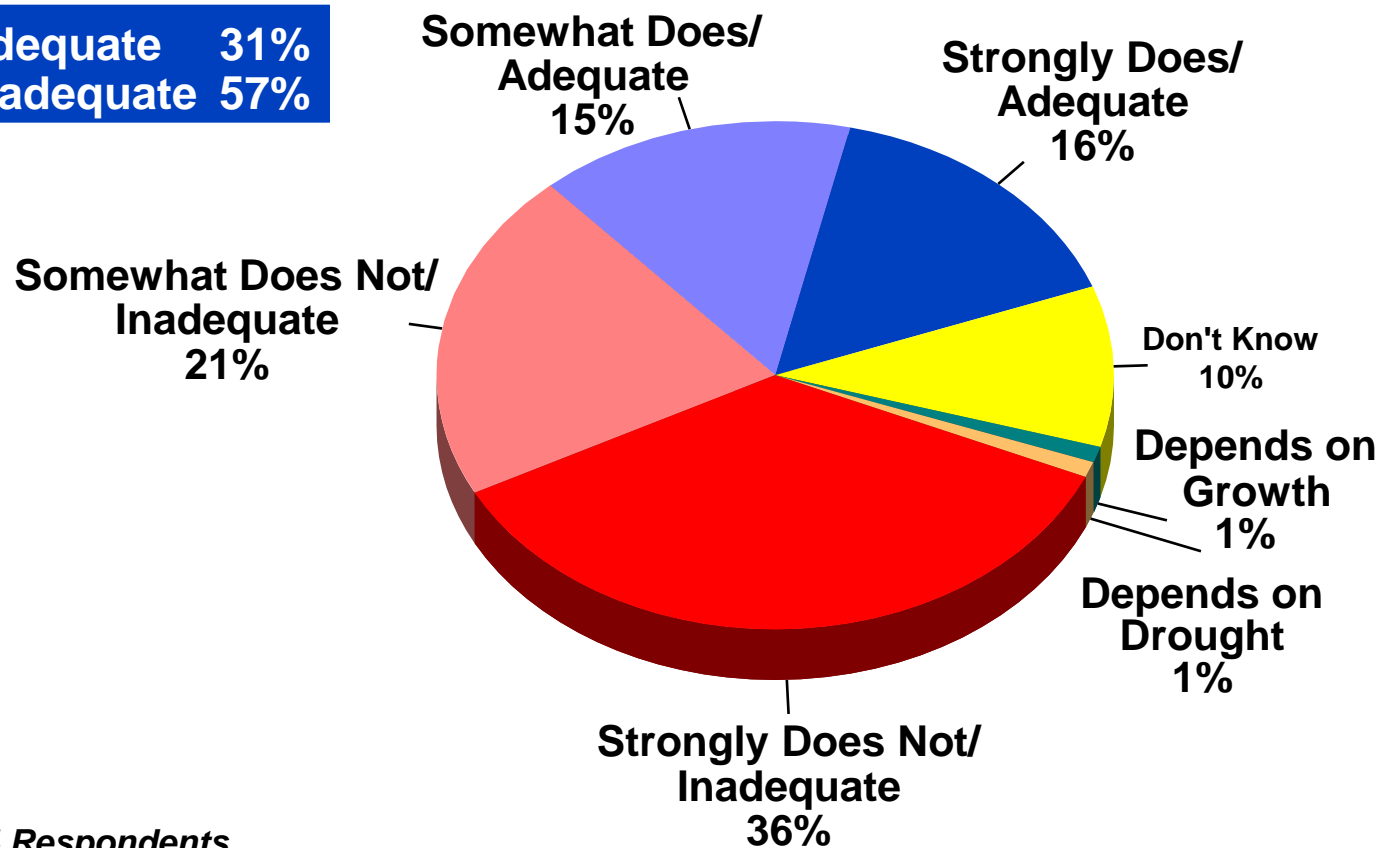


Asked 246 Respondents

*Based on what you have seen, read or heard would you say that Colorado does or does not have an ADEQUATE supply of water to meet current needs?*

# However, looking ahead ten years, most find Colorado water lacking.

**Total Adequate 31%**  
**Total Inadequate 57%**



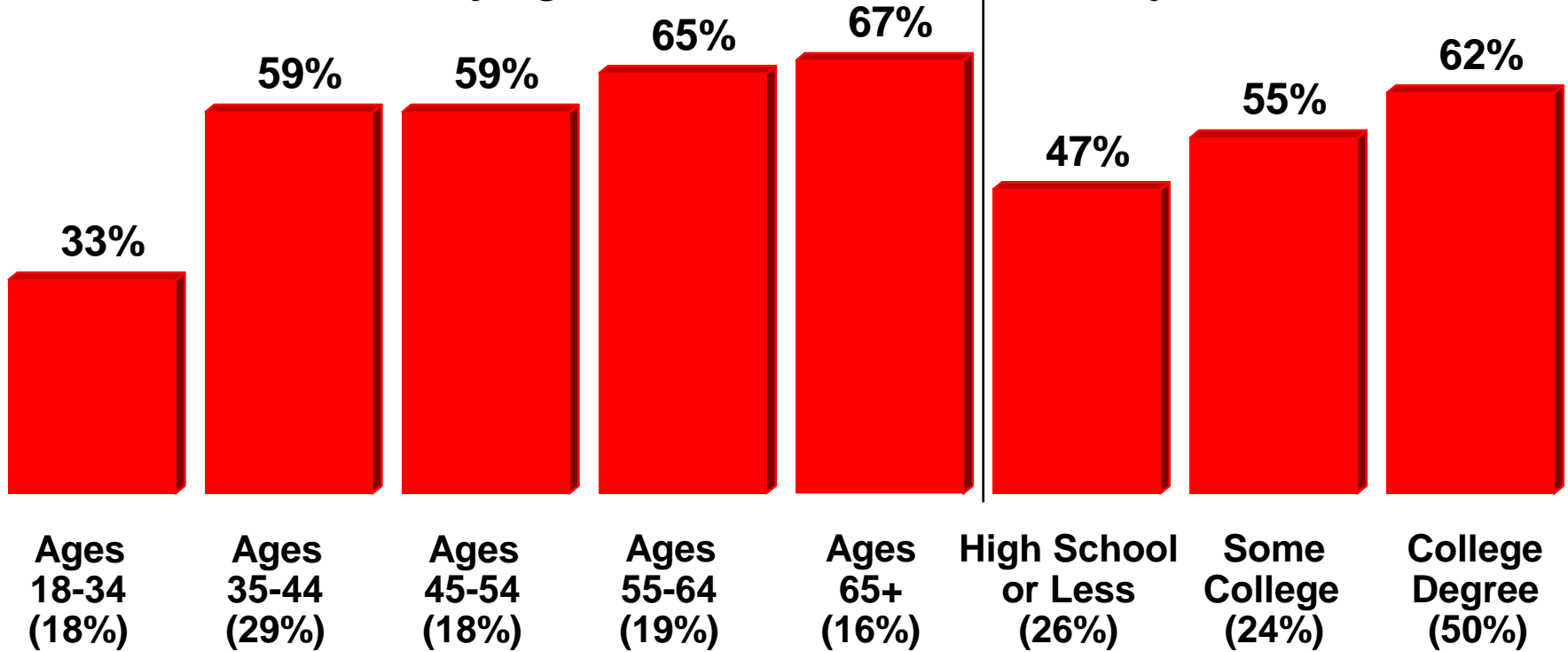
*Asked 254 Respondents*

*Based on what you have seen, read or heard, would you say that Colorado does or does not have an ADEQUATE supply of water to meet future needs, say ten years from now?*

# There are major variations in the view that Colorado will lack enough water in the future, including by age and education level.

*Inadequate Supply of Water  
By Age*

*Inadequate Supply of Water  
By Education Level*



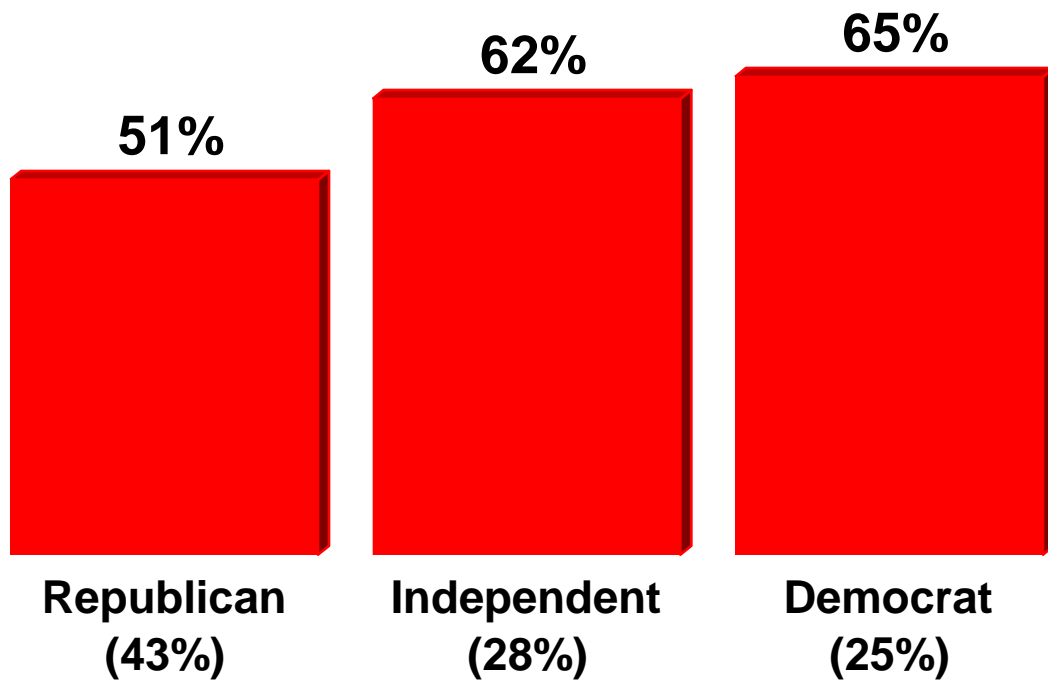
Asked 254 Respondents

■ Total Inadequate

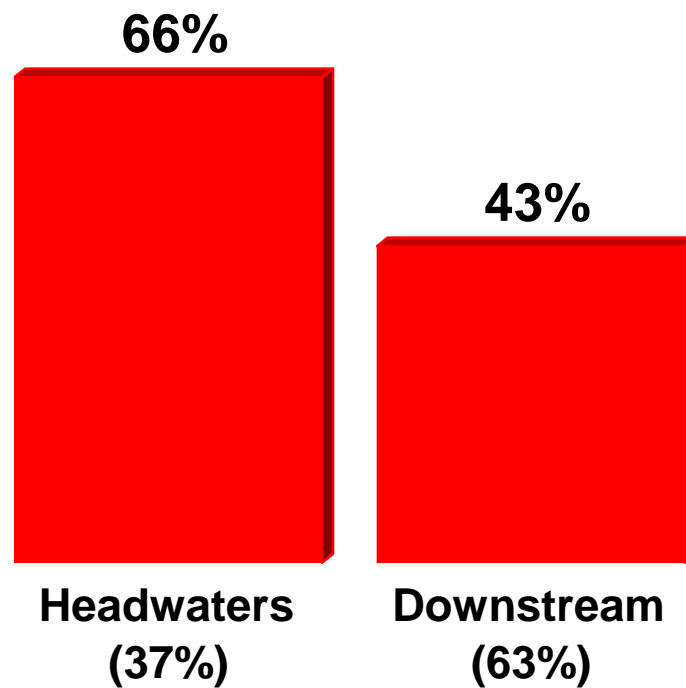
*Based on what you have seen, read or heard, would you say that Colorado does or does not have an ADEQUATE supply of water to meet future needs, say ten years from now?*

# As well as partisan affiliation and part of the district.

*Inadequate Supply of Water  
By Party*



*Inadequate Supply of Water  
By Geography*



Asked 254 Respondents

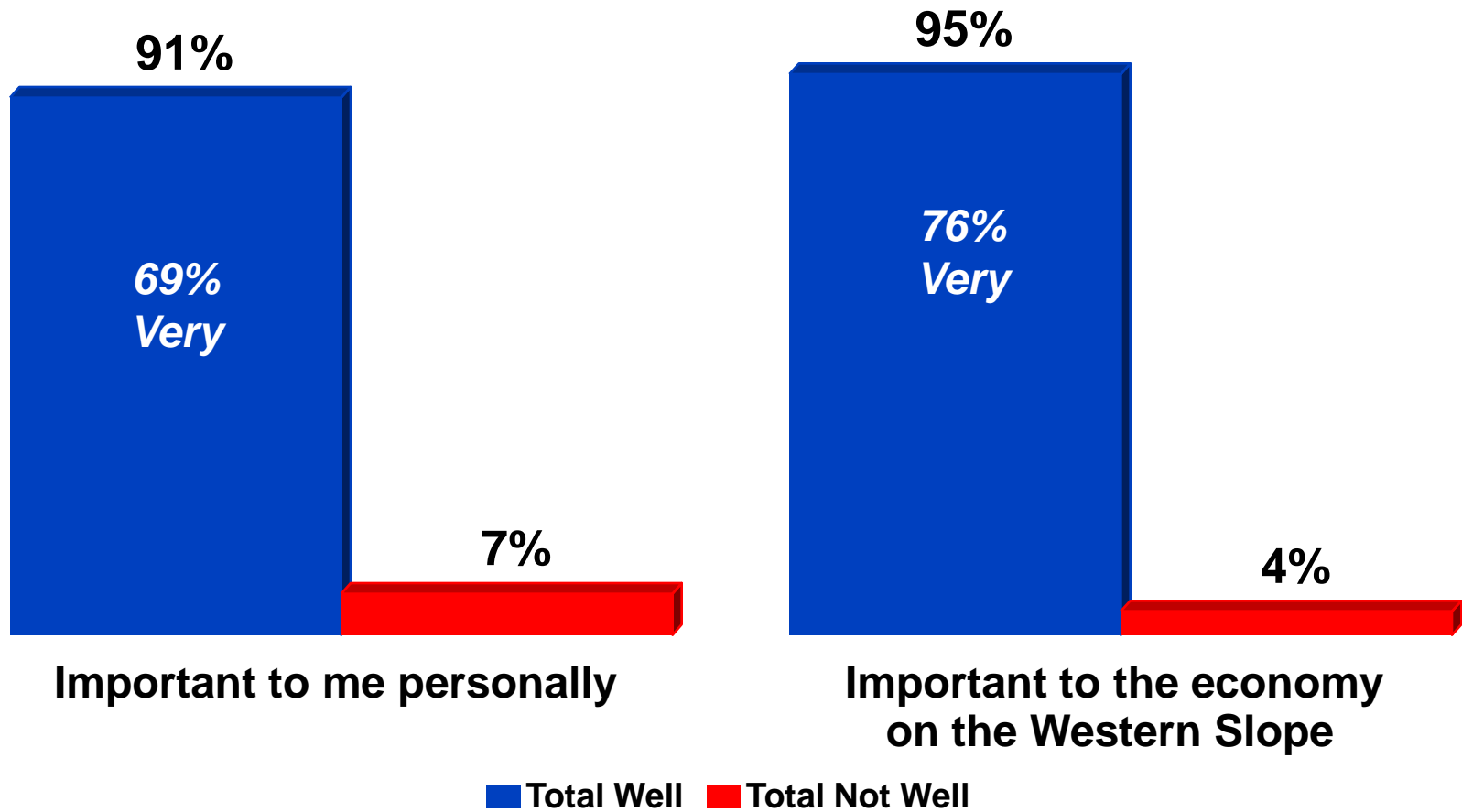
■ Total Inadequate

Based on what you have seen, read or heard, would you say that Colorado does or does not have an ADEQUATE supply of water to meet future needs, say ten years from now?



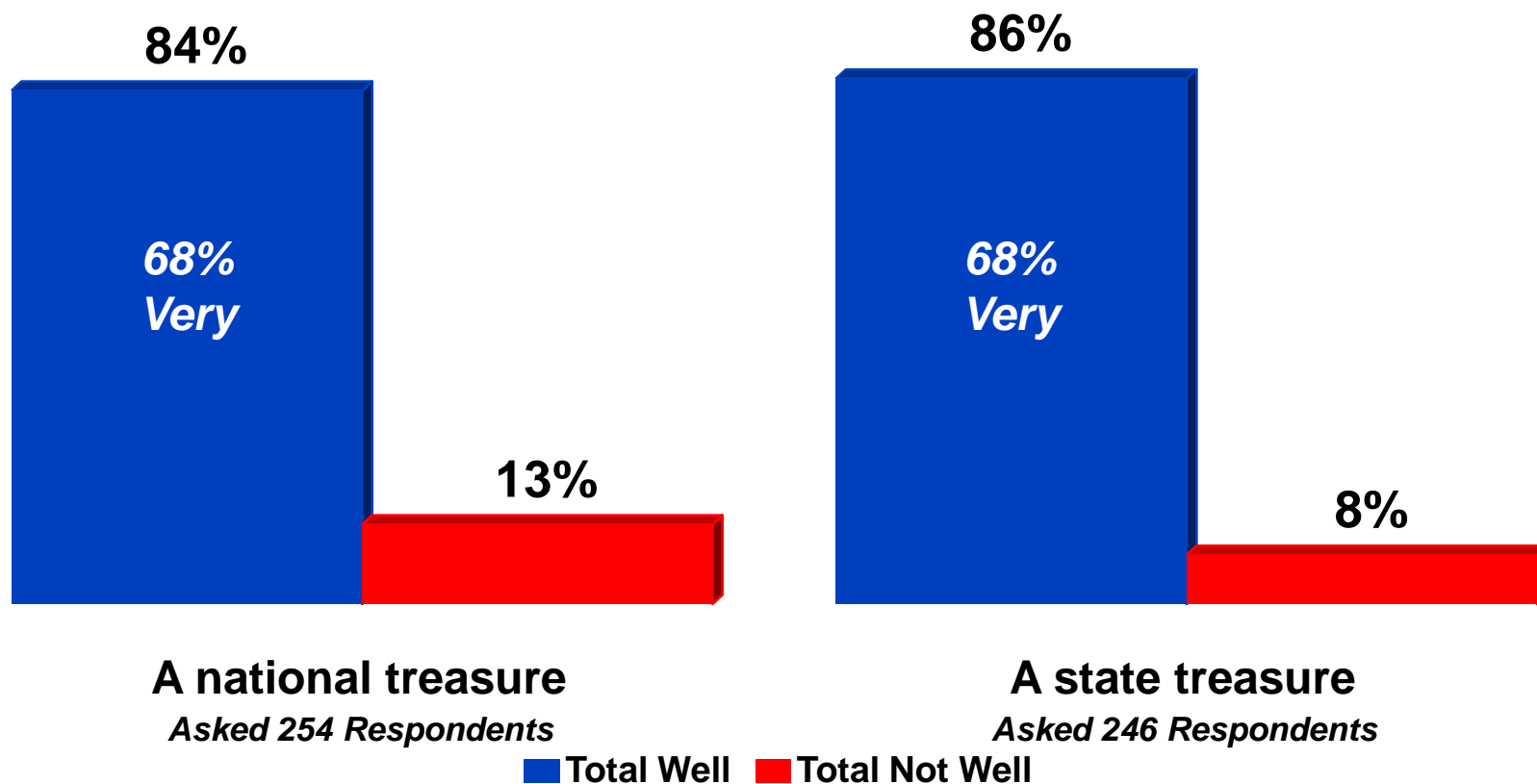
# Perceptions of the Colorado River and its Tributaries

# Residents very much recognize the value of the river to the economy and them personally.



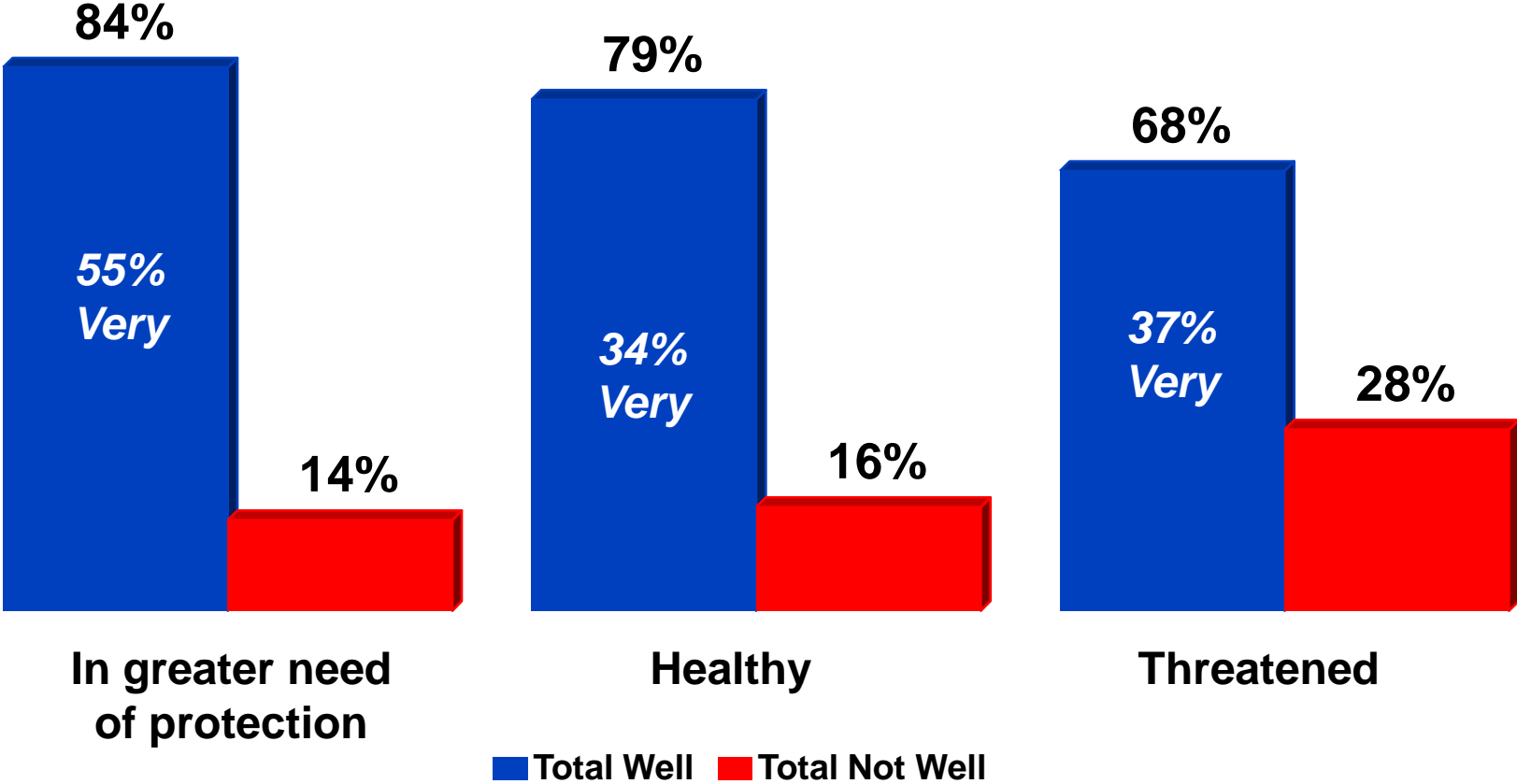
*Thinking specifically about the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it –I'm going to read you a list of words and phrases. For each one, please tell me how well you think it describes the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it.*

**Notably, the overwhelming majority see it as both a state and national treasure.**

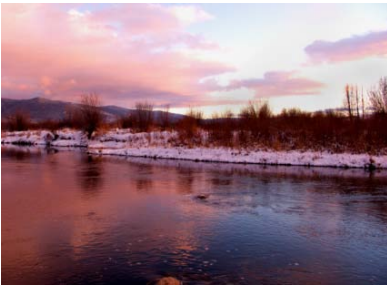


*Thinking specifically about the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it –I'm going to read you a list of words and phrases. For each one, please tell me how well you think it describes the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it.*

# District residents are more intense in their view that the river and its tributaries could use greater protection.



*Thinking specifically about the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it –I'm going to read you a list of words and phrases. For each one, please tell me how well you think it describes the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it.*



# Knowledge and Awareness of Water Issues

# Little has changed in the last six years in awareness of residents' source of water.

	2003	2009
CO River	21%	21%
Other river (named)	23%	21%
Well	12%	9%
Stream/creek (generic or named)	14%	8%
Reservoir	6%	6%
City	4%	6%
River (generic)	-	4%
Spring	4%	4%
Lake (generic or named)	1%	2%
Groundwater	-	1%
Cannot Name	10%	15%

*Can you name the river, stream, well, spring or other source of your in home water supply?*

# Less than half in this area recognize that Colorado is obligated to meet certain water obligations to down river states.

## *Flow into other states top group*

Must Colorado ensure that a certain amount of water from the Colorado River and the streams and rivers which flow into it flow to other states such as California

48%

Can Colorado keep all the water from the Colorado River and the streams and rivers which flow into it here in the state

19%

Or would you say you don't have enough information to say one way or the other

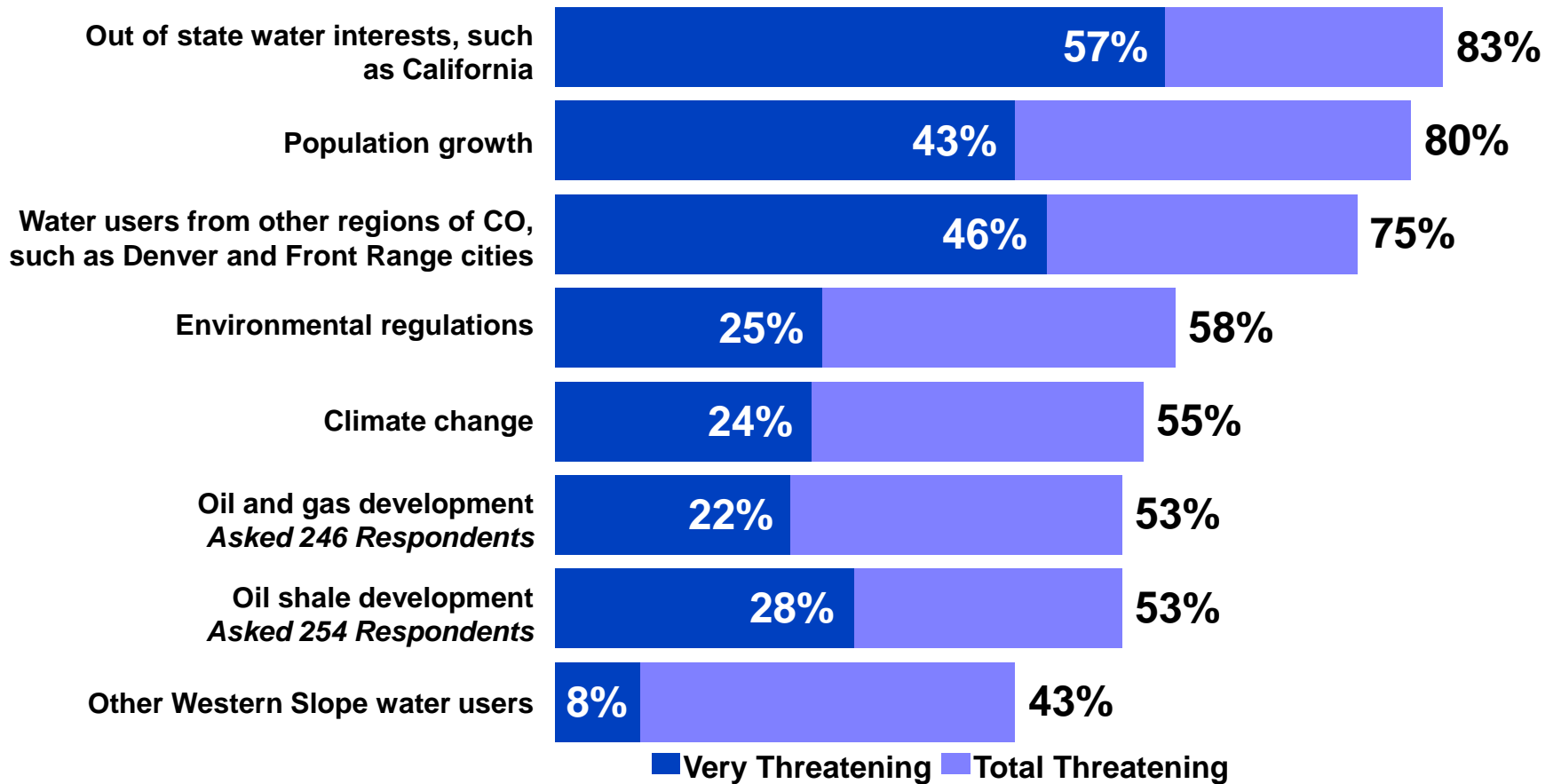
32%

Men With College Degree	69%
Democrat Men	63%
Ages 55-64	60%
Men Ages 45-64	60%
No License/Men	60%
Town Men	60%
College Degree	59%
Independent Ages 55+	59%
Men Ages 65+	59%
Republican Ages 55+	58%
White Men	58%

*From what you've seen, read or heard...*

# That being said, they see out of state interests as the greatest threat to Western Colorado water.

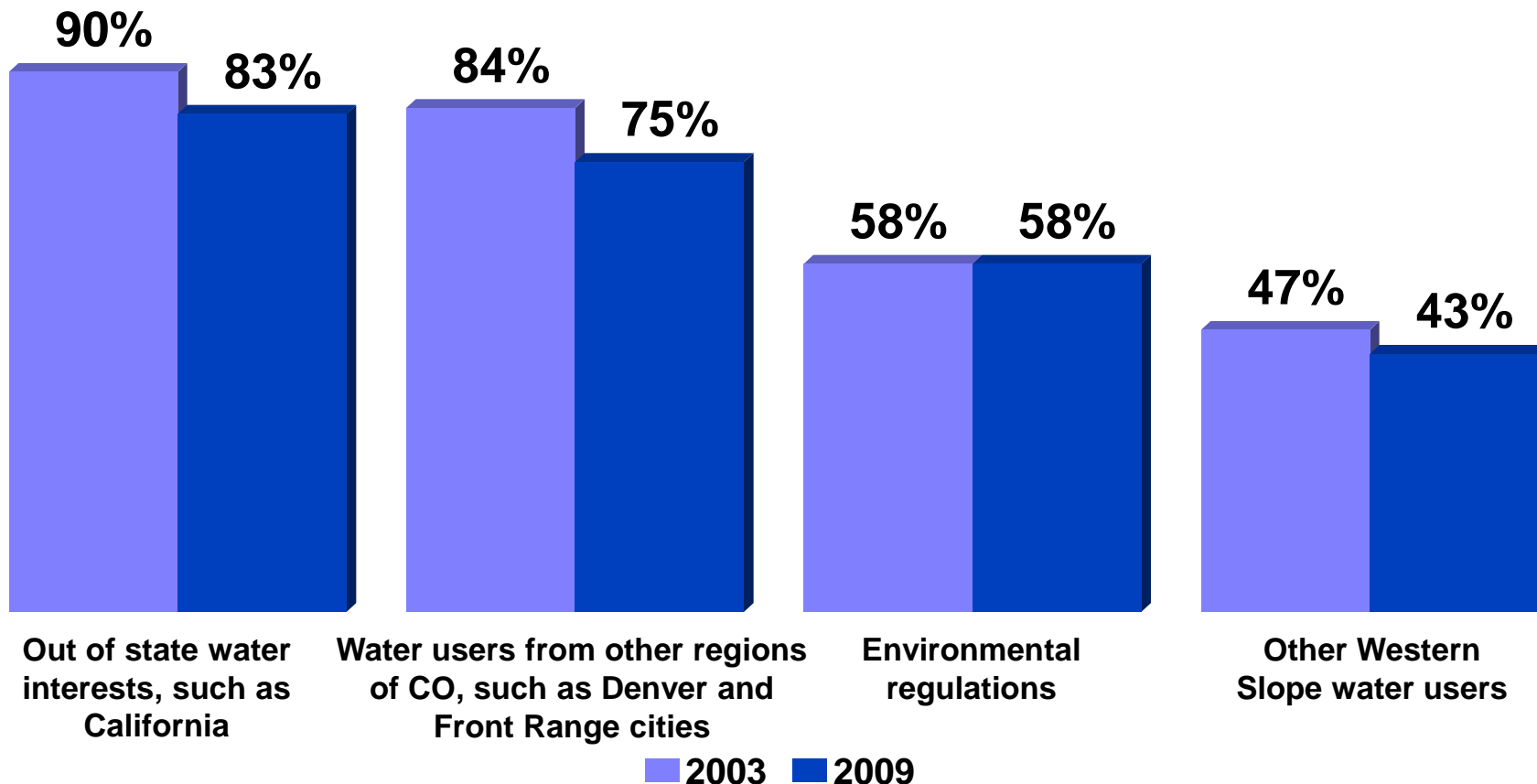
*Ranked by % Total Threatening*



*Next I will read you a number of items which some people say are threats to the amount of water available for use here in Western Colorado. For each one, please tell me if you see that as very threatening, somewhat threatening, only a little threatening, or not threatening at all to the amount of water available for your use.*

# That perception is not very different from the height of the drought in 2003.

*% Total Threatening 2003 vs. 2009*



*Next I will read you a number of items which some people say are threats to the amount of water available for use here in Western Colorado. For each one, please tell me if you see that as very threatening, somewhat threatening, only a little threatening, or not threatening at all to the amount of water available for your use.*

# Climate change is seen as a greater threat among Democrats.

*% Very/Somewhat Threatening Grid: By Party*

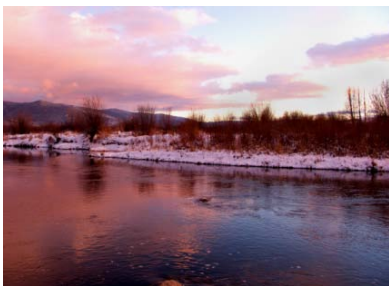
	<b>Republican (40%)</b>	<b>Independent (27%)</b>	<b>Democrat (29%)</b>
<b>#1</b>	Out of state water interests, such as California. (86%)	Population growth. (86%)	Population growth. (91%)
<b>#2</b>	Water users from other regions of Colorado, such as Denver. (73%)	Out of state water interests, such as California. (82%)	<b>Climate change*. (85%)</b>
<b>#3</b>	Population growth. (69%)	Water users from other regions of Colorado, such as Denver. (80%)	Out of state water interests, such as California. (81%)

*\*Climate change ranks 8th among GOP (33%) and 6th among Ind (58%)*

# There is little difference in perceptions of the chief threats based on geography.

*% Very/Somewhat Threatening By Geography*

	Headwaters (37%)	Downstream (63%)
Out of state water interests, such as California	82%	84%
Population growth	82%	78%
Water users from other regions of CO, such as Denver	75%	75%
Environmental regulations	55%	60%
Climate change	66%	48%
Oil and gas development	58%	50%
Oil shale development	62%	47%
Other Western Slope water users	54%	37%



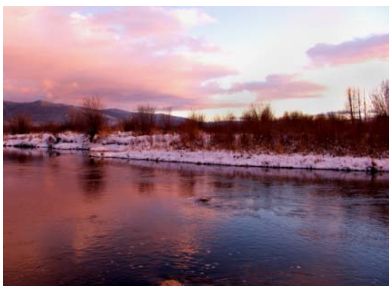
**Toward the end of the survey, we provided respondents with a number of facts about the increasing scarcity of water on the Western Slope.**

# All facts are concerning, but fish rank last.

## Water Scarcity Facts - Ranked By % Extremely Concerning

	% Extremely Concerning	% Extremely/Very Concerning
Experts now believe that water-sharing agreements with other states were negotiated decades ago using incomplete and incorrect assumptions about how much water is available. In the future, CO could be legally obligated to restrict our residents' use, in order to make sure that states (CA) receive their allocations.	47%	79%
The demand for water supply could mean the drying up of farm and ranch lands as their water is put to new uses, affecting our rural way of life and harming the economy in Western Colorado.	43%	79%
The Colorado River and the streams and rivers that flow into it are the major source of drinking water for millions of Coloradans. Less water could mean higher costs for drinking water, more restrictions on outdoor use and possibly even threaten the quality of life and economy in our communities.	33%	71%
Western Colorado has legal access to only about 80 percent of water than was previously thought available in the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it. That means we will have to choose between water going to build our economy, to protect fish and wildlife, or to keep our farms and ranches.	32%	73%
Less water flowing in streams and rivers could make worse existing water quality issues. For example, less water can lead to higher than normal water temperatures that threaten the health of trout and other cold water fish. Greater concentrations of minerals can affect our drinking water.	30%	67%

*I would like to read you some facts about the increasing scarcity of water on the Western Slope. After I read each one, please tell me if you are extremely concerned, very concerned, somewhat concerned or not too concerned.*



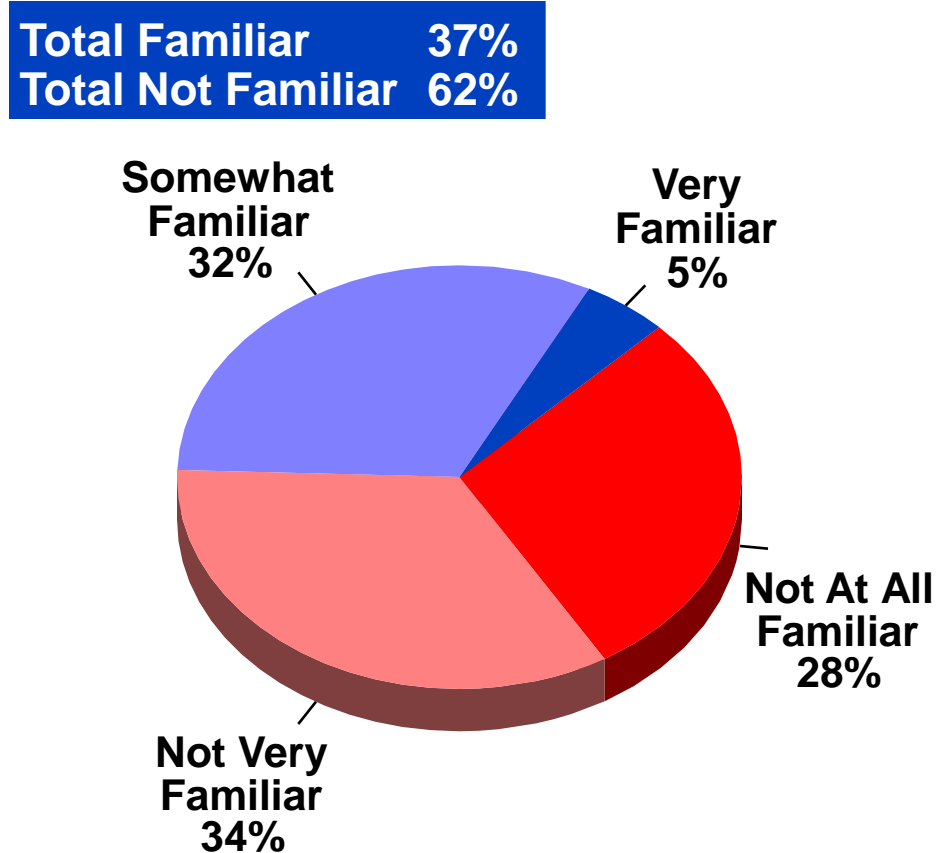
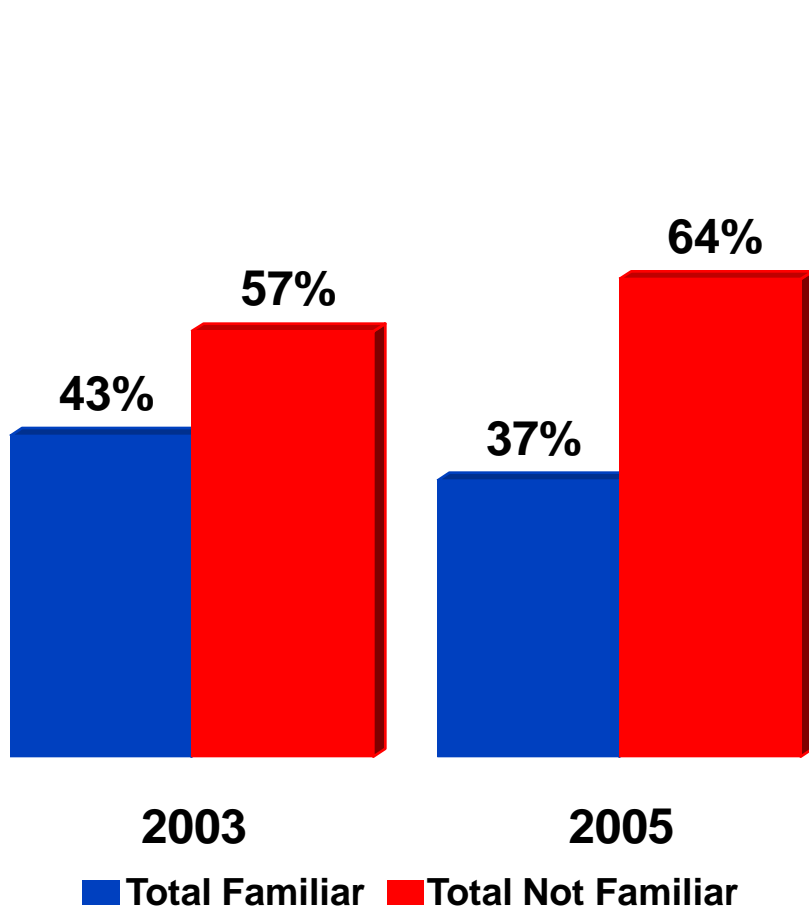
# The Colorado River District

# Unaided awareness of the River district as an entity helping protect water resources has remained the same over time.

	2003	2005	2009
US Federal Government	1%	5%	8%
CO river water conservation district or CO river district	7%	7%	7%
BLM	1%	6%	5%
State of CO/state government	2%	6%	3%
County government	2%	4%	2%
City/town government	2%	2%	2%
Other	18%	14%	14%
Cannot think of any	46%	36%	56%

*Can you name any governmental agencies or other entities that are doing the most for your region to protect and preserve water resources?*

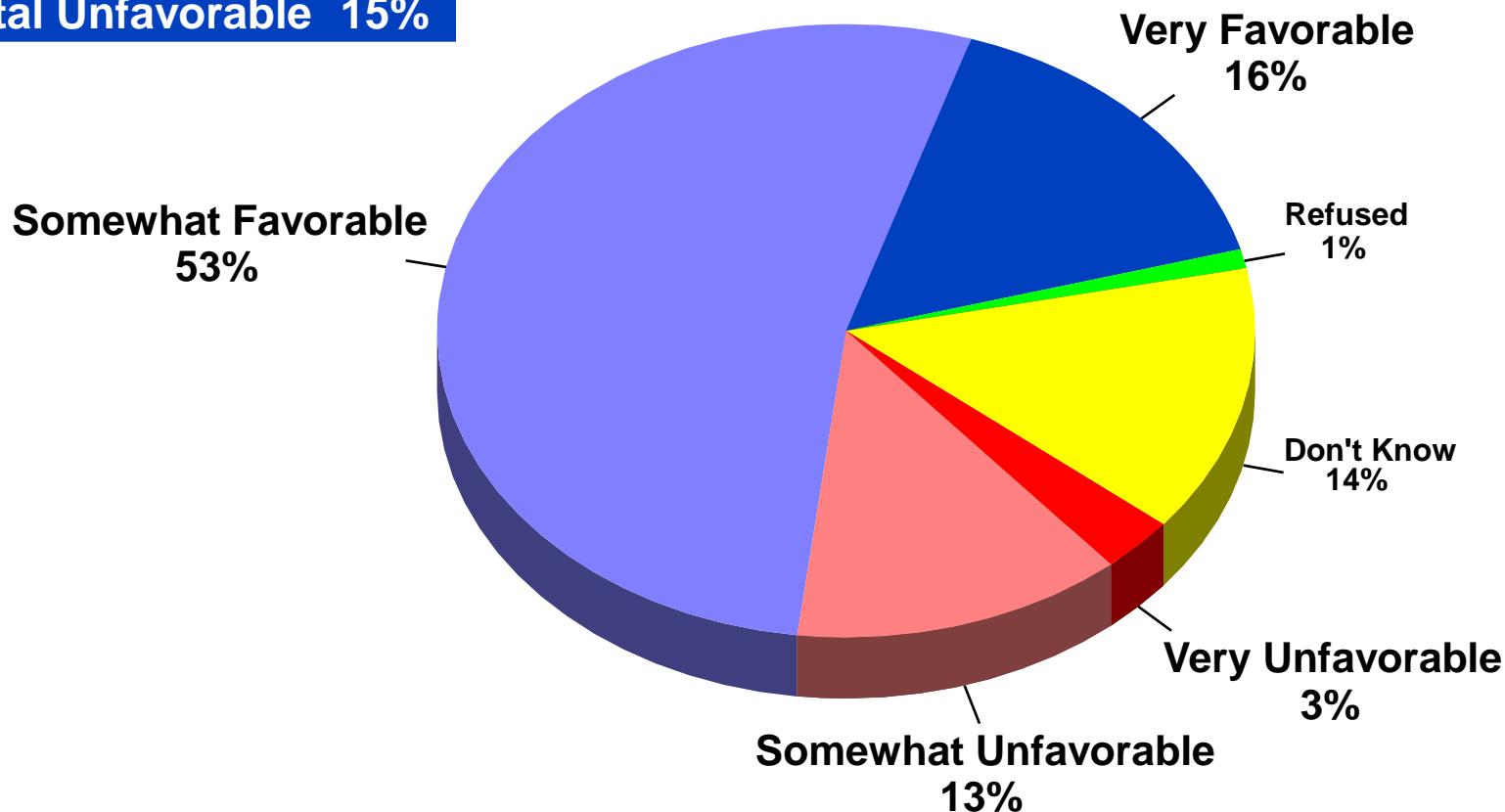
# Similarly, familiarity with the district has remained the same.



*How familiar would you say you are with the Colorado River Water Conservation District, often called the Colorado River District? Are you...*

# Those who do know of the Colorado River District are quite positive in their impression.

**Total Favorable 69%**  
**Total Unfavorable 15%**



*And do you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the Colorado River District?*

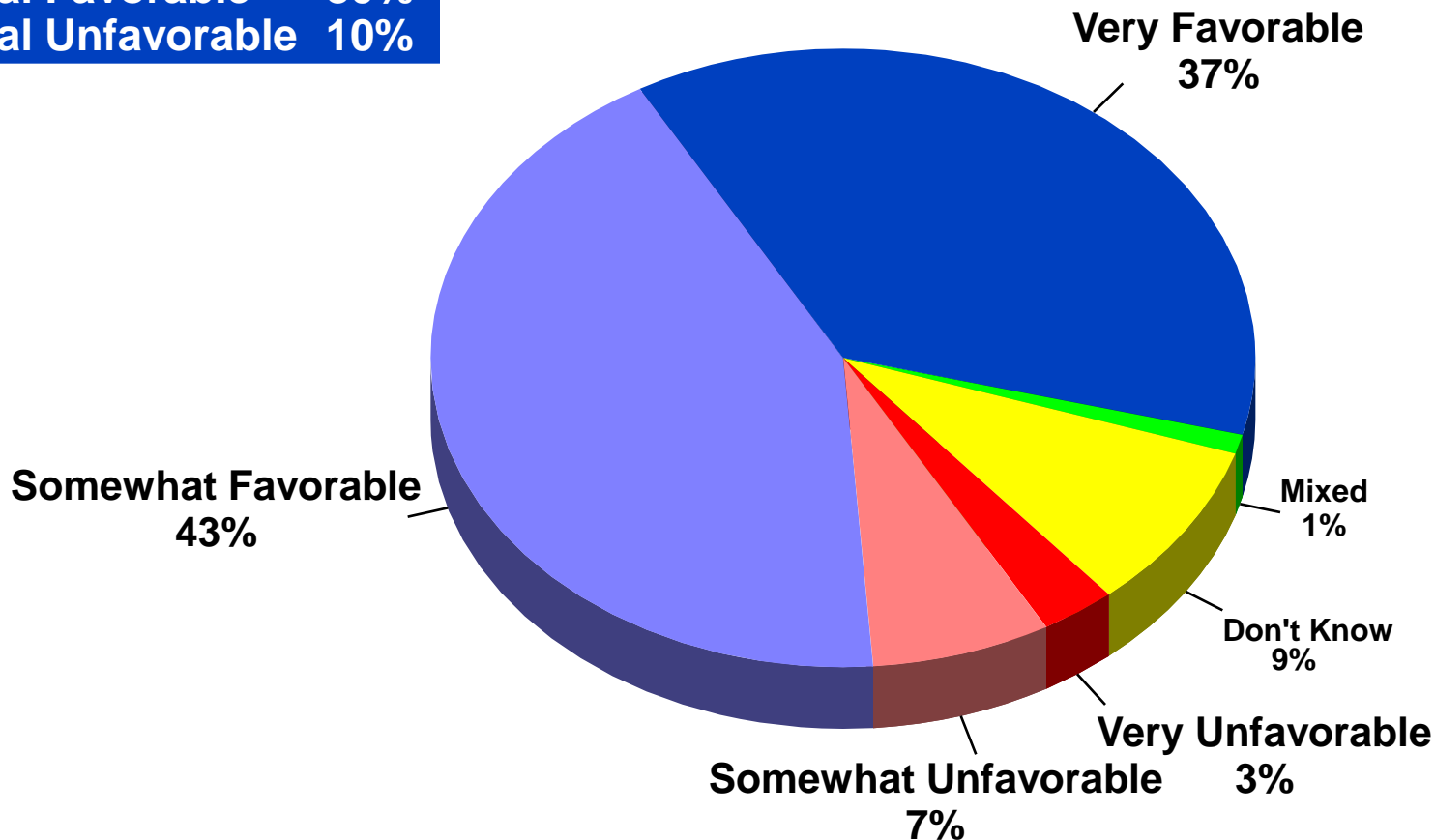
**We then provided respondents with some background about the River district, and then asked for their impression again.**

**The Colorado River District was created in 1937 and is the principal water policy and planning agency for the Colorado River and the rivers and streams that flow into it in Colorado. It is composed of fifteen counties on the Western Slope, and is funded through a small property tax. In part, the district seeks to safeguard all waters of the Colorado River to which Colorado is entitled.**

***“Having heard that would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the Colorado River District?”***

# By an eight-to-one margin respondents have a favorable impression of the River District having heard this information.

**Total Favorable 80%**  
**Total Unfavorable 10%**



*Having heard that would you say you have a favorable or unfavorable impression of the Colorado River District?*

# Voters tend to prioritize the River District's mission to legally fight to keep water, and to protect agriculture.

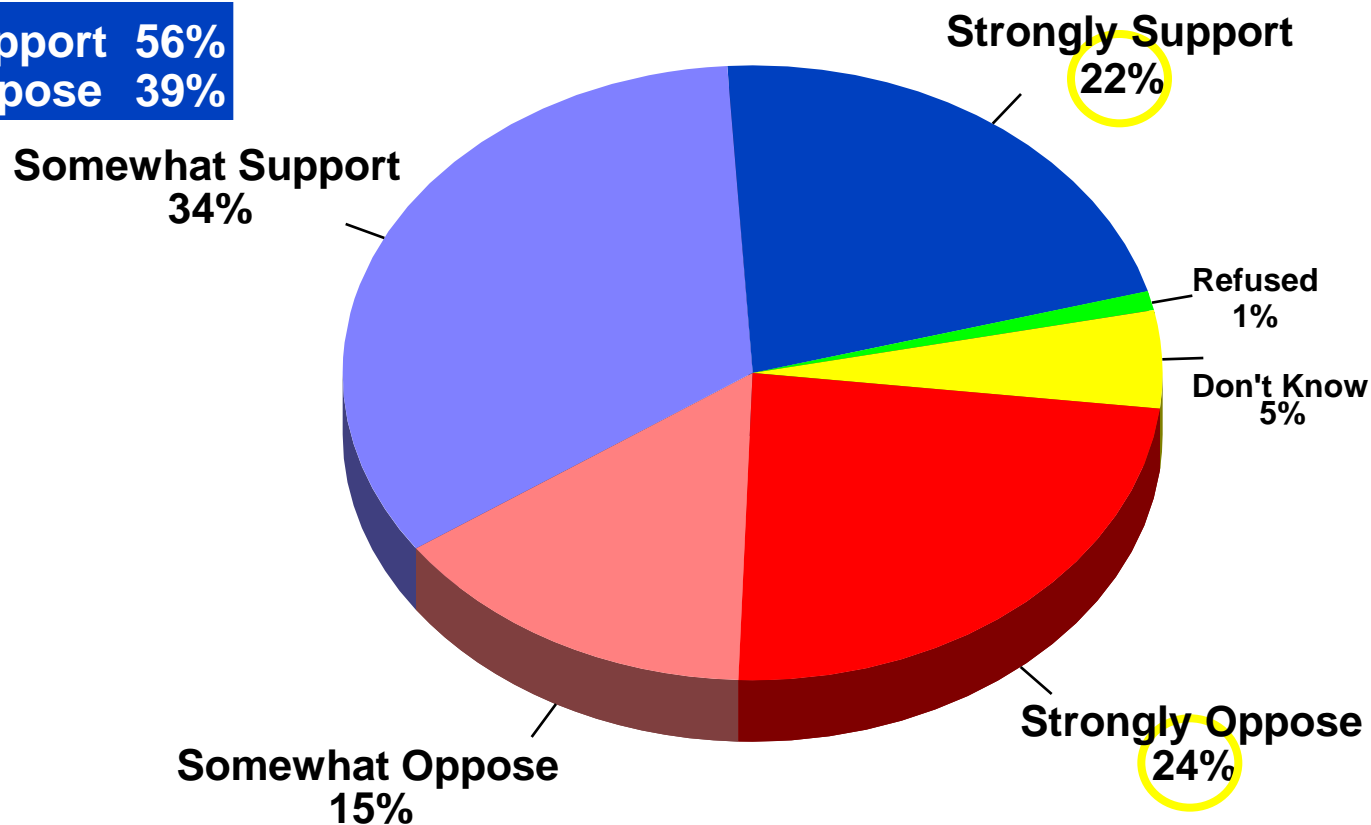
Potential Projects and Programs	% Extremely Important	% Total Important
Protecting Colorado's agricultural heritage by ensuring adequate water supplies for farmers	34%	85%
Legally fighting to keep our water for use on the Western Slope	34%	81%
Protecting fish and wildlife habitat	25%	69%
Creating reservoirs to use for drinking water, irrigation, and recreation	20%	62%
Generating electricity	18%	62%
Ensuring adequate water to help ensure the recovery of endangered fish in rivers	16%	48%
Ensuring adequate water for use by local businesses, from ski resorts to manufacturers	14%	46%
Ensuring adequate water for recreation on rivers, such as rafting, kayaking, and fishing	12%	43%

*Putting aside how you feel about an increase in taxes, there are a number of projects and programs that are or could be supported by tax dollars spent by the Colorado River District. Please tell me how important it would be to you that each project be funded:*

# District voters are fairly mixed in their views of a potential property tax increase to fund these efforts, however.

*Note that intensity of opposition matches intensity of support.*

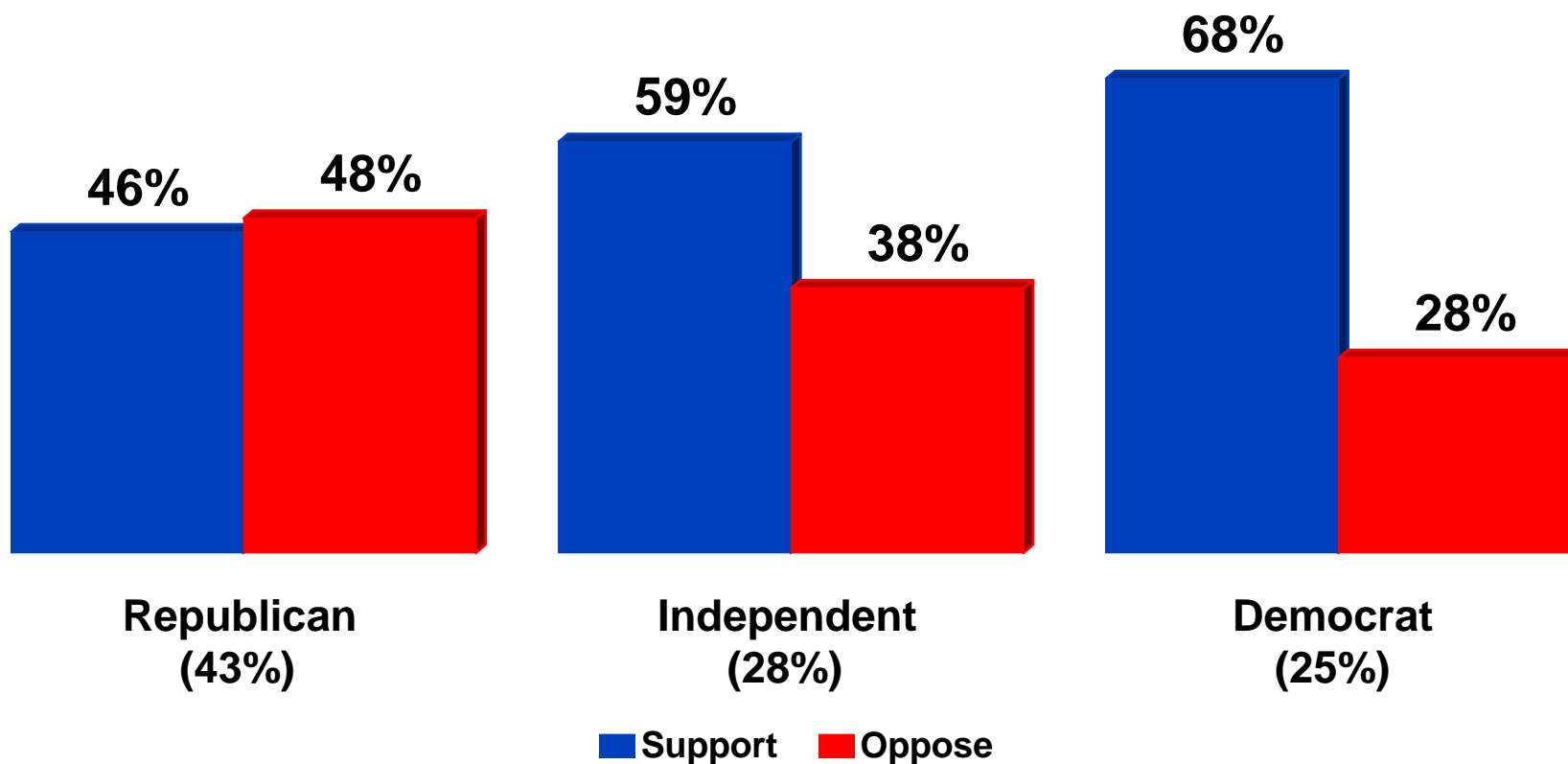
**Total Support 56%**  
**Total Oppose 39%**



*In general, would you support or oppose a small increase in property taxes to be dedicated to the Colorado River District to help protect and safeguard western Colorado water?*

# Party is the greatest predictor of attitudes toward a tax increase.

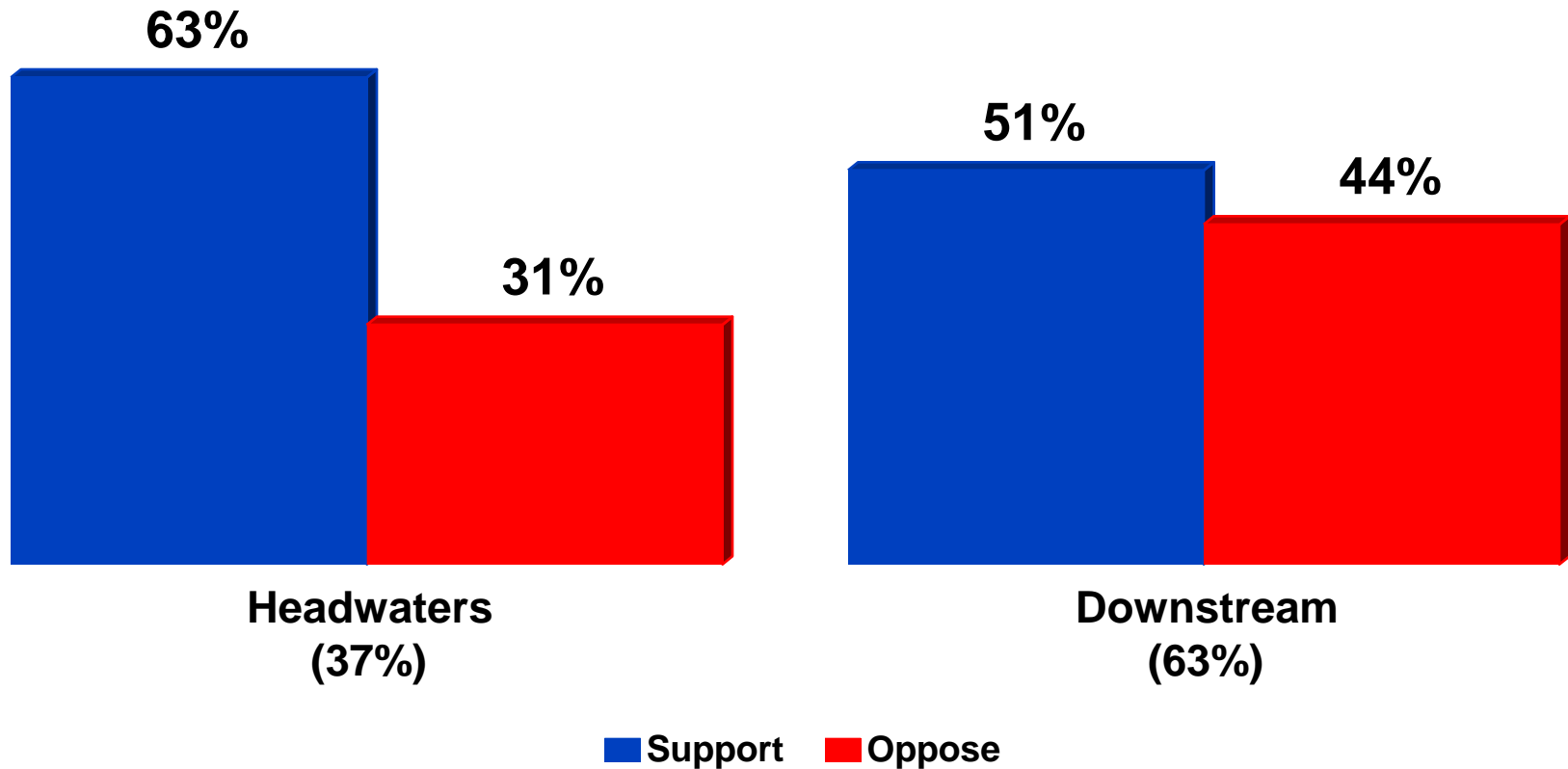
*Property Tax Increase Ballot  
By Party*



*In general, would you support or oppose a small increase in property taxes to be dedicated to the Colorado River District to help protect and safeguard western Colorado water?*

# There is a clear difference between “headwaters” and “downstream” on the tax issue.

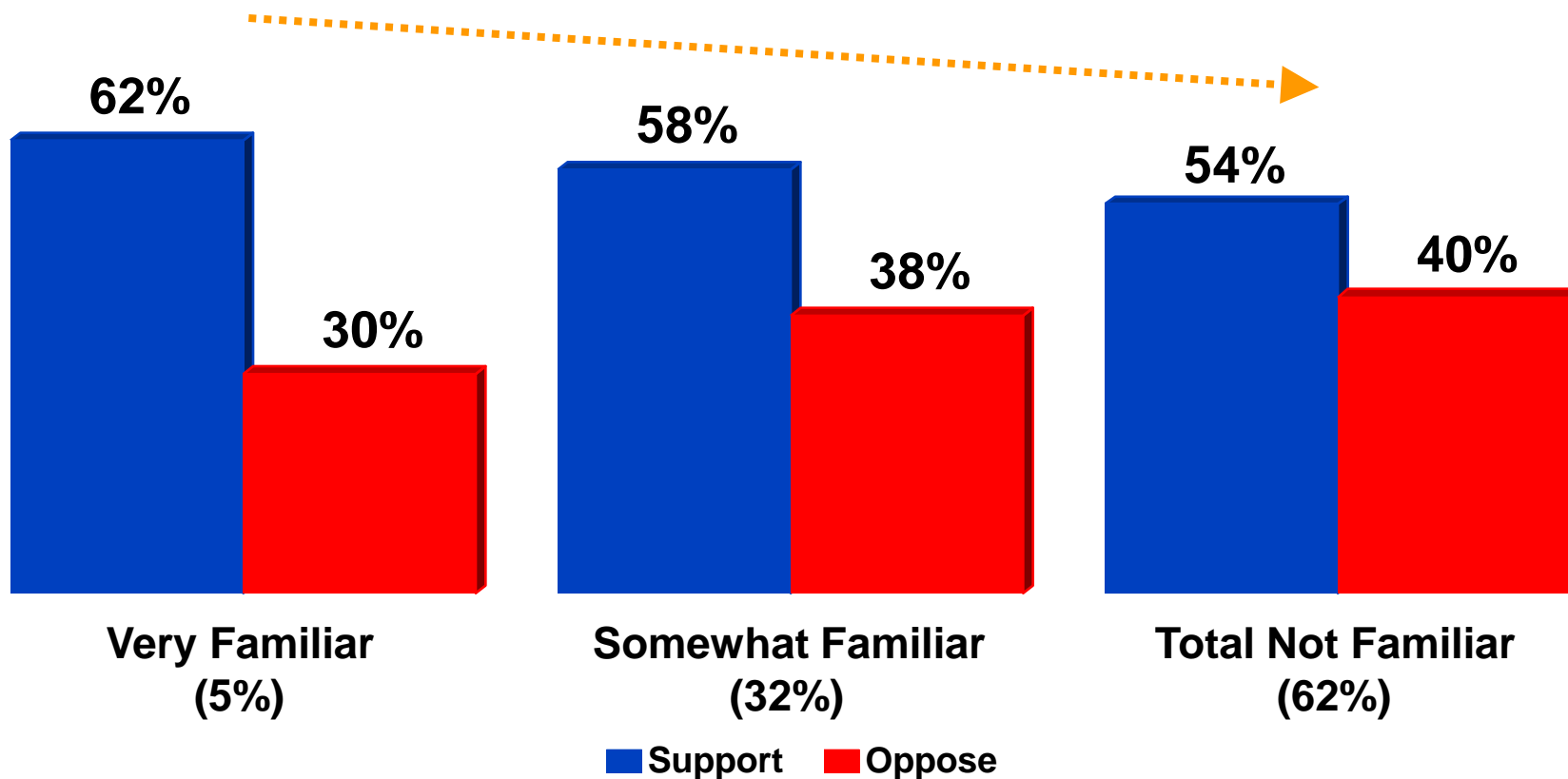
*Property Tax Increase Ballot  
By Geography*



*In general, would you support or oppose a small increase in property taxes to be dedicated to the Colorado River District to help protect and safeguard western Colorado water?*

# Those most familiar with the district are also most likely to support a tax increase to fund its efforts.

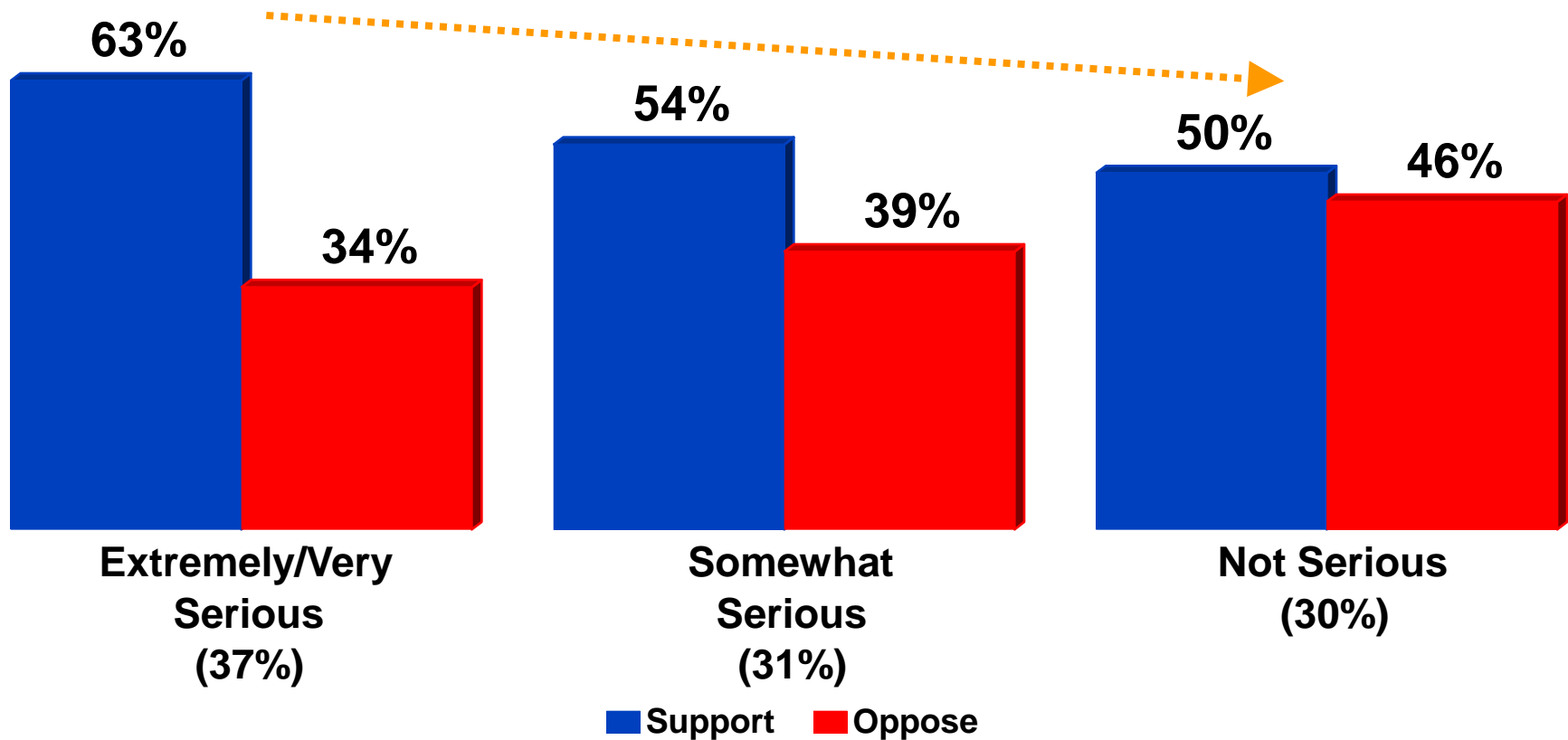
*Property Tax Increase Ballot  
By Colorado River District Familiarity*



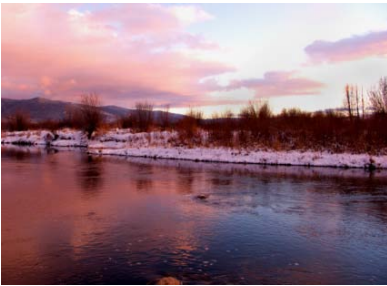
*In general, would you support or oppose a small increase in property taxes to be dedicated to the Colorado River District to help protect and safeguard western Colorado water?*

# There is also a relationship to concern about inadequate water supplies.

*Property Tax Increase Ballot  
By Inadequate Water Supply*

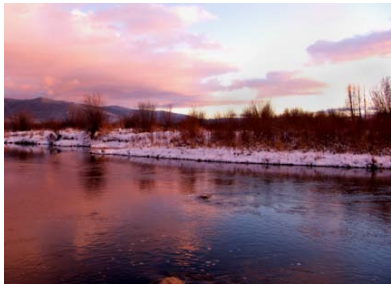


*In general, would you support or oppose a small increase in property taxes to be dedicated to the Colorado River District to help protect and safeguard western Colorado water?*



# The Bottom Line

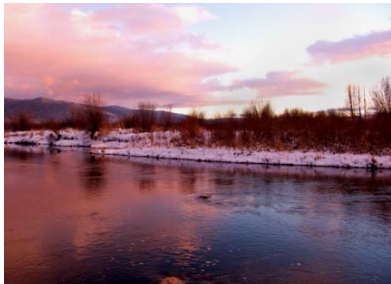
# The Bottom Line



**Residents generally rank water as a fairly low concern these days, do not perceive their area as being in a drought today, nor worry that supplies are not adequate to meet current needs.**

**However, residents do think supplies may be lacking in the near future, perceiving out of state interests, the Front Range and population growth as major threats to Western Slope water.**

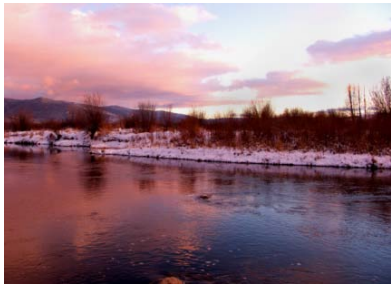
# The Bottom Line



**They also register alarm when provided with a number of facts, particularly those that focus on the future impact on farms and ranches, and that their use might have to be curtailed rather than those down river.**

**The Colorado River District's awareness has remained steady over time, and once voters hear more about it are quite positive about the agency's background and goals. In particular, legally fighting to keep water in Western Colorado and preserving the region's agriculture resonate very strongly.**

# The Bottom Line



**The concept of a property tax increase receives mixed reviews among district voters, who label taxes as a more serious problem than water from the outset.**

**While covering a wide and diverse region, it is interesting that there is much more in common between demographic and geographic sub-groups than differentiating. In fact, partisan registration is often more determinate of views than any other factor.**



**PUBLIC OPINION**  

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**STRATEGIES**

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