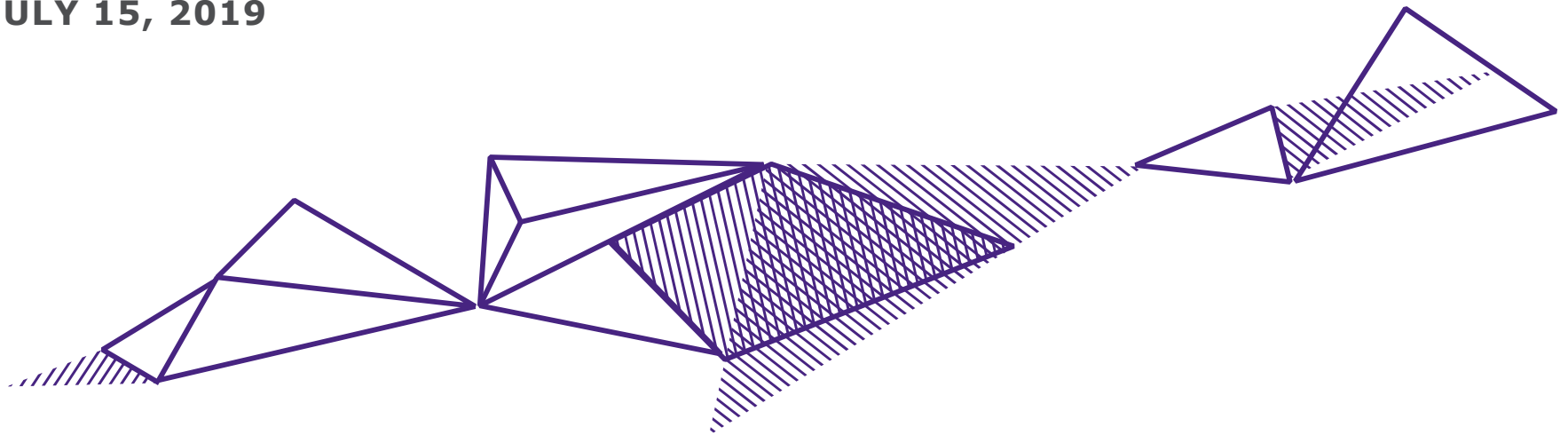


# **Regional Governance Review Survey Detailed Report**

**REGION OF NIAGARA**

**JULY 15, 2019**



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## **Positive perceptions of the current structure of governance.**

Overall, Niagara region residents have positive perceptions of current governance.

- The majority say they receive good value for tax dollars at both the lower-tier (76%) and Regional levels (67%).
- Most (50%) of those who have reached out to their municipal government say they have rarely or never encountered confusion over the division of responsibilities between their local municipal government and regional government. Only a quarter (27%) have sometimes or often encountered confusion.
- The majority (76%) feel well-served by the current two-tier structure of municipal government.

The majority (57%) feel that the current structure of elected officials is effective at representing their interests when making decisions for Niagara Region. At the same time, Niagara Region residents are evenly split between preferring separate councillors elected at the lower-tier and regional level (44%) versus one set of councillors elected for both (46%).

Of all 12 lower-tier municipalities, Wainfleet residents tend to have consistently less positive perceptions of the current governance structure.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## **Mixed opinions of the outcome of larger government.**

Niagara region residents hold mixed opinions regarding the impact on service delivery of amalgamating their local municipality into a larger government. Specifically, around half (48%) anticipate it would result in a decline in service, while four-in-ten (42%) say it would result in improvements.

When asked about the importance of different aspects of governance, efficient delivery of services and ease of access to service are most often identified as important (74% and 71% respectively).

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Opinions lean toward the current governance structure as best delivering on areas of responsibility.

Niagara residents were asked to select between three distinct governance models (current structure, partial amalgamation or total amalgamation) which they believe can best deliver on eight different areas of municipal government responsibility. A resident's preference for a model was determined by that resident selecting the model for a majority of the eight areas of responsibility tested:

- Only one-in-five residents prefer either amalgamation structure (20% and 19% respectively) in a majority of instances. Half (50%) and close to half (45%) never opt for partial or total amalgamation respectively for any area of responsibility.
- Two-in-five (38%) residents prefer the current structure in a majority of instances. A third (33%) of residents never opted for the current structure for any area of responsibility.

Preference for the current structure is more common among those saying they are well served by it (57%) and those believing they receive very good value for municipal (55%) and regional tax dollars (52%). Conversely, preference for total amalgamation is more common among those saying the current structure of elected officials is ineffective (27%) and those believing they receive poor value for municipal (29%) and regional tax dollars (26%).



# Research Overview & Methodology

# RESEARCH OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

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**Overview.** Niagara Region, in partnership with its 12 lower-tier municipalities, commissioned Environics Research to conduct a representative survey of residents across the Region. The research objectives included understanding attitudes towards municipal and regional governance, representation, and the potential of amalgamation.

**Methodology.** A telephone survey was fielded among a random sample of Niagara Region residents. This report is based on **832** interviews. The average interview length was 13 minutes.

The survey data are weighted by age and gender according to 2016 Census data. Quotas based on census subdivisions ensured geographical representation.

- A sample of 832 produces results that are statistically reliable to within **±3.4** percentage points, 19 times out of 20 (that is, at a 95% confidence interval). The margin of error is larger for smaller sub-segments of the total sample.

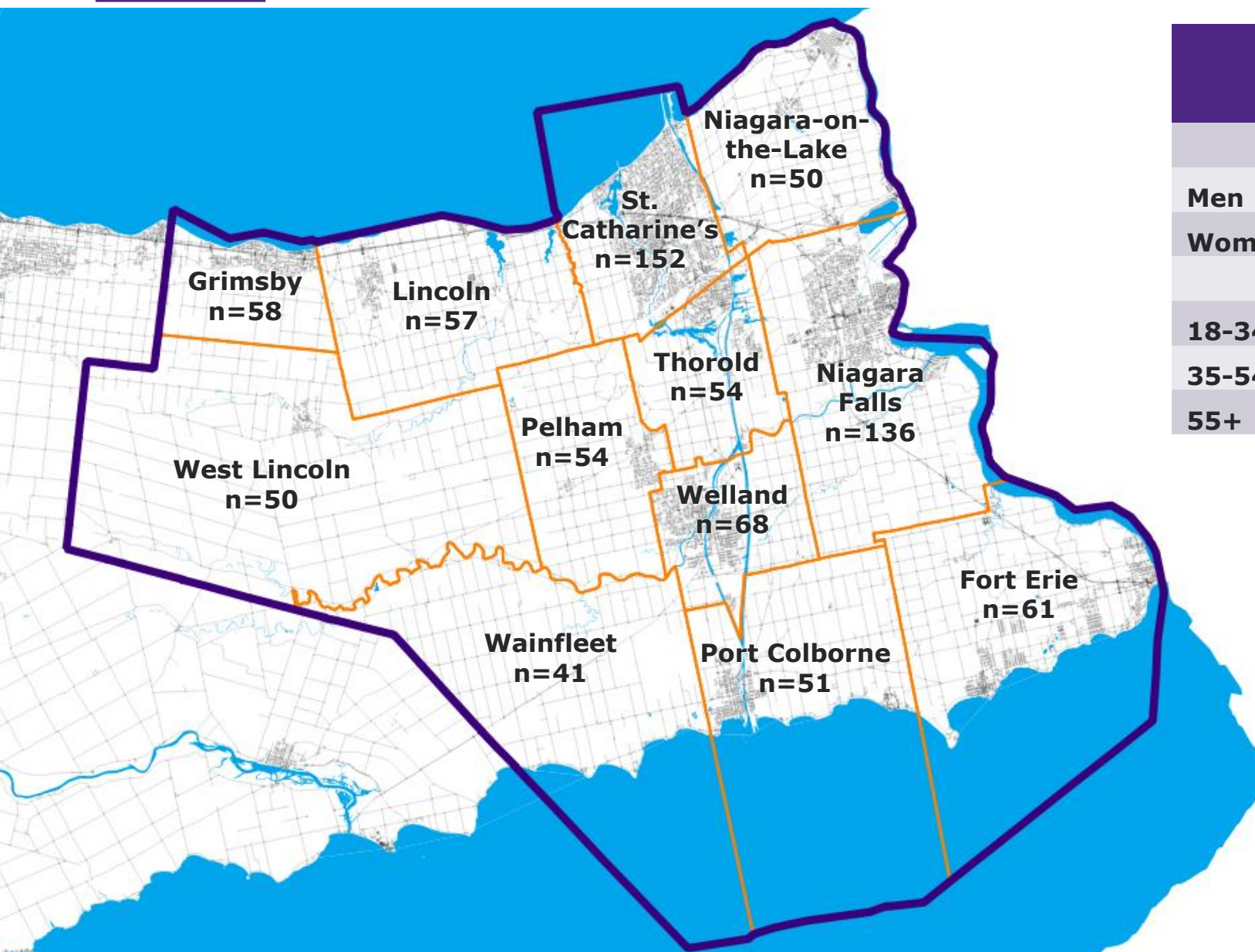
**Field dates.** May 30 to June 17, 2019.

## Notes:

- In this report, results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted.
- Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses.



# SURVEY REPRESENTATION ACROSS NIAGARA



	Actual sample (unweighted)	2016 Census (weighted)
<b>Gender</b>		
<b>Men</b>	45%	48%
<b>Women</b>	55%	52%
<b>Age</b>		
<b>18-34</b>	12%	24%
<b>35-54</b>	22%	31%
<b>55+</b>	66%	45%

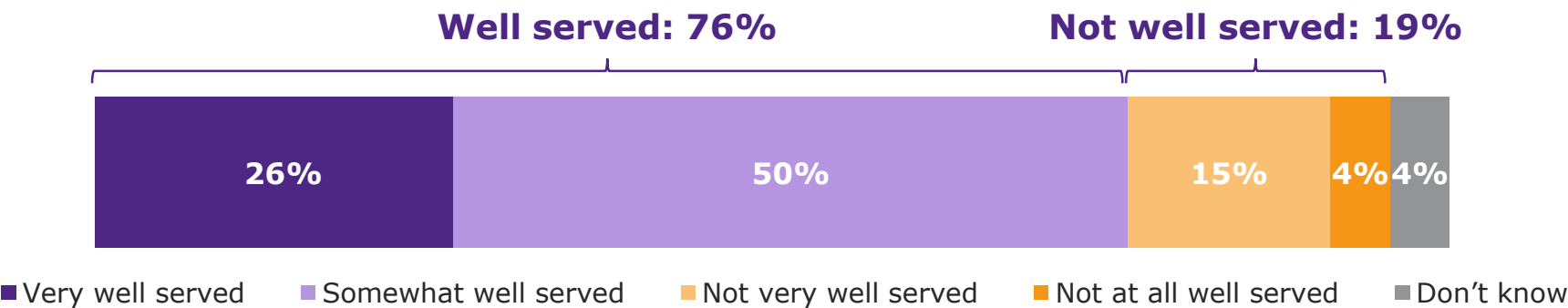




# **Survey Findings:** **Perceptions of Current Governance**

# DELIVERY OF TWO-TIER GOVERNMENT

Three-quarters of Niagara Region residents feel well-served by the current two-tier structure of municipal government. Holding the opinion of being well served declines with age.



## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

### Well Served

- **18 to 34 years old** (86%)
- **Believe receive *good* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (86%)
- **Believe receive *good* value for regional tax dollars** (89%)
- **Say current structure is *effective* at representing interests** (91%)

### Not Well Served

- **55 years and older** (26%)
- **Say receive *poor* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (51%)
- **Say receive *poor* value for regional tax dollars** (48%)
- **Say current structure is *ineffective* at representing interests** (42%)

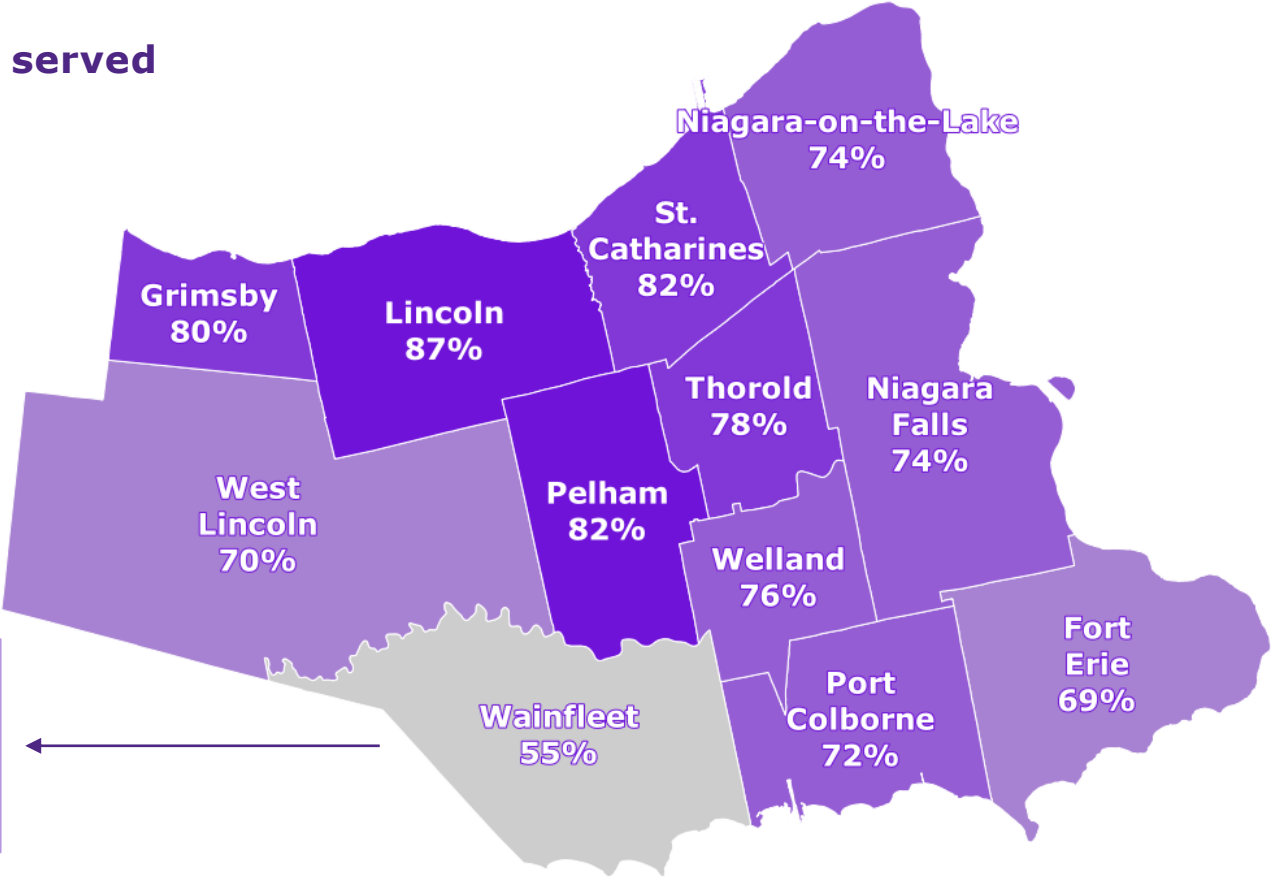
Q1. As you may know, <Municipality> residents are served by two levels of municipal government: <Municipality>, providing local services such as fire services, parks and recreation and community centres, and Niagara Region, which provides services across a broader geography such as emergency medical services, policing, public health, seniors services, and waste management. How well do you feel <Municipality> residents are being served by this current two-tier structure of municipal government?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# WELL SERVED BY TWO-TIER GOVERNMENT

Residents of Wainfleet are least likely to say that they are well-served by the current structure, while those in Lincoln are most likely.

% *Very/somewhat well served*



Compared to most other lower-tier municipalities, significantly fewer Wainfleet residents say they are *very/somewhat well served* by the current two-tier structure.

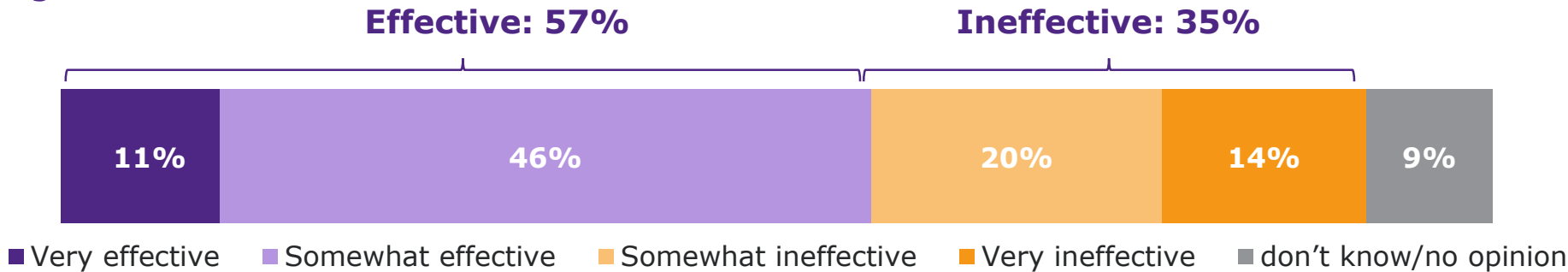


Q1. As you may know, <Municipality> residents are served by two levels of municipal government: <Municipality>, providing local services such as fire services, parks and recreation and community centres, and Niagara Region, which provides services across a broader geography such as emergency medical services, policing, public health, seniors services, and waste management. How well do you feel <Municipality> residents are being served by this current two-tier structure of municipal government?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

A majority of residents feel that the current structure of elected officials is effective at representing their interests when making decisions for Niagara Region.



## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

### Effective

- **18 to 34 years old** (70%)
- **Believe receive *good* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (65%)
- **Believe receive *good* value for regional tax dollars** (70%)
- **Prefer *separate sets of councillors*** (68%)

### Ineffective

- **35 to 54 years old (42%) & 55 years and older (35%)**
- **Believe receive *poor* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (64%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value for regional tax dollars** (65%)
- **Prefer *one set of councillors*** (45%)

Q2. Niagara Region is made up of five cities, five towns and two townships, each of which have elected local councils governing them. Each community also elects Regional councillors, who along with the elected mayor, make decisions for Niagara Region. The number of regional councillors elected depends on the size of the community. <Municipality> has <number of regional councillors>.

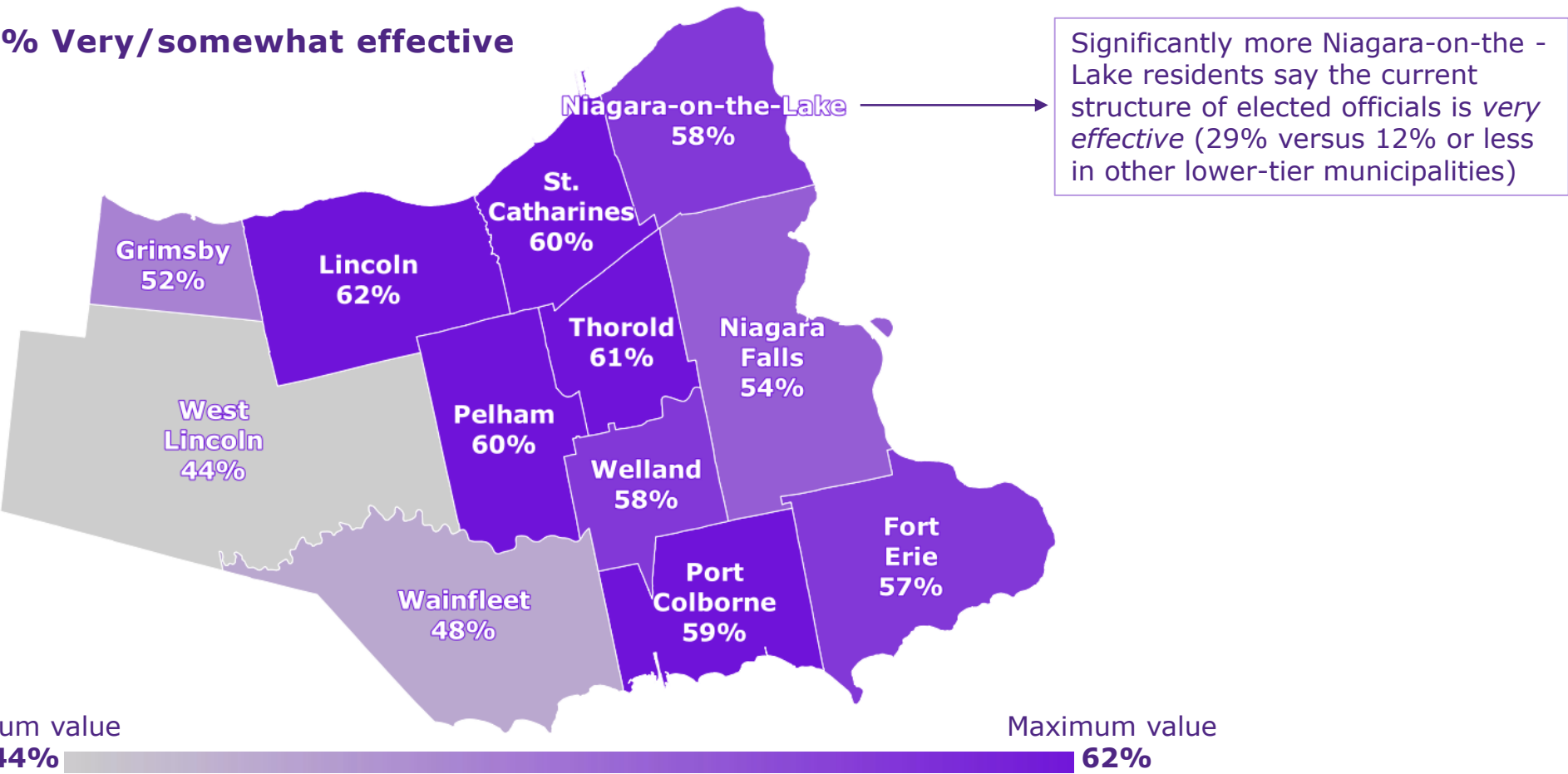
Setting aside your political views, how effective or ineffective do you feel this structure of elected officials is at representing your interests when they are making decisions for Niagara Region?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Residents of West Lincoln and Wainfleet are the least likely to say the current structure is effective at representing their interest. The majority of residents in other municipalities feel it is effective.

% **Very/somewhat effective**

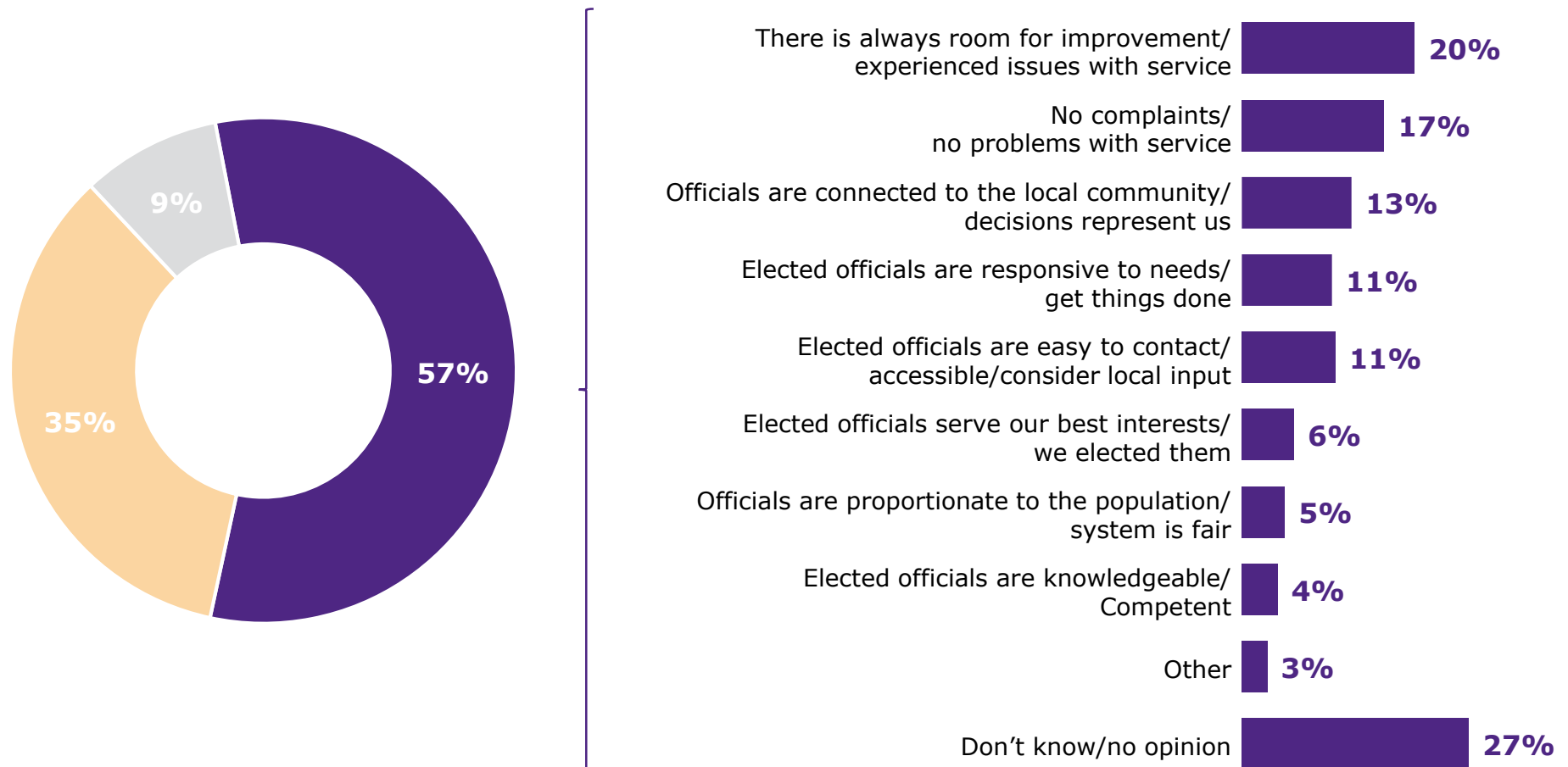


Q2. Setting aside your political views, how effective or ineffective do you feel this structure of elected officials is at representing your interests when they are making decisions for Niagara Region?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# REASONS FOR EFFECTIVENESS

Residents who consider the current structure effective say that there is always room for improvement, that they have no complaints, or that officials are connected to and represent the local community.

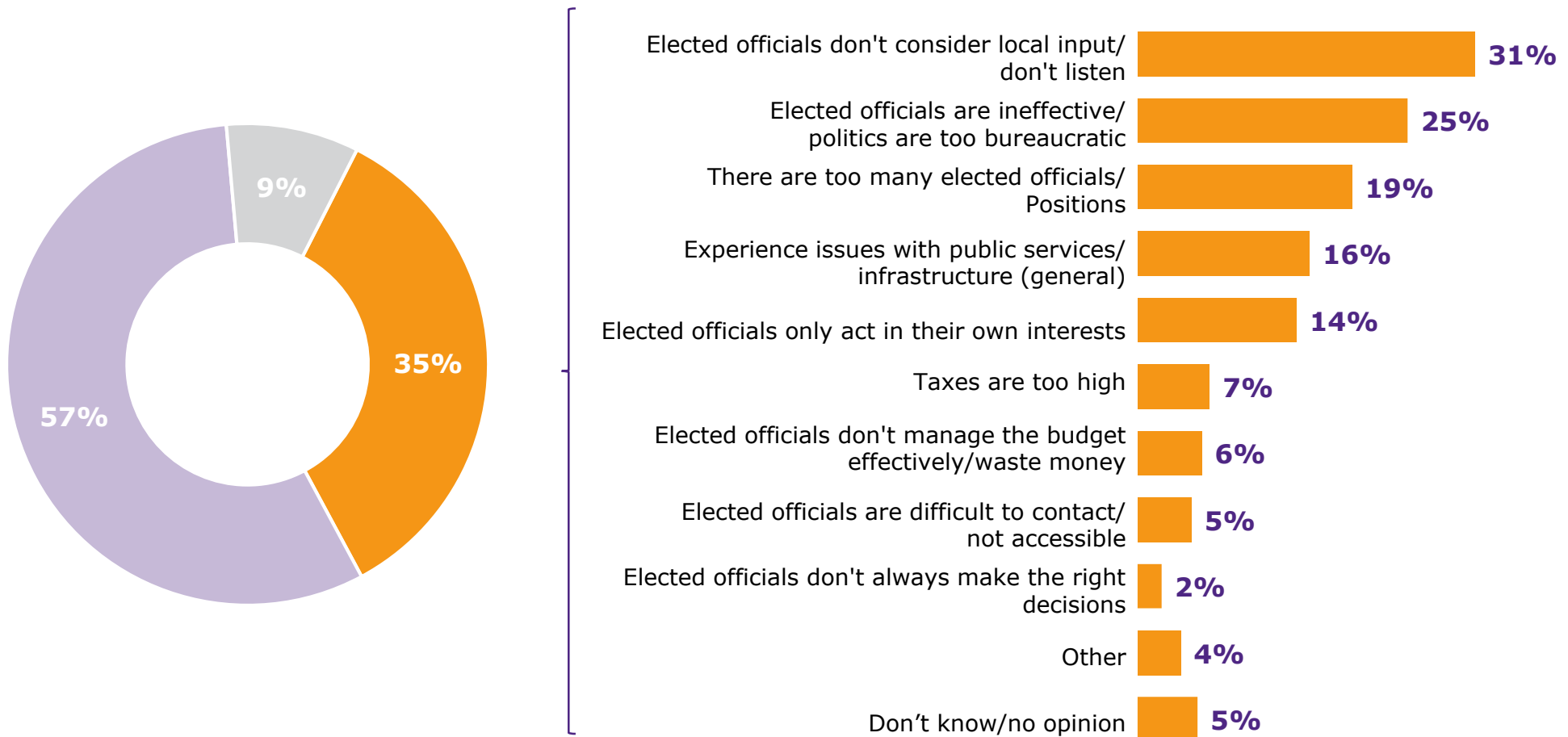


Q3A. Why do you say the structure of elected officials is effective at representing your interests when they are making decisions for Niagara Region?

Base: current structure is effective (n=466)

# REASONS FOR INEFFECTIVENESS

Residents who consider the current structure ineffective say the elected officials don't consider local input, or that the elected officials are ineffective.

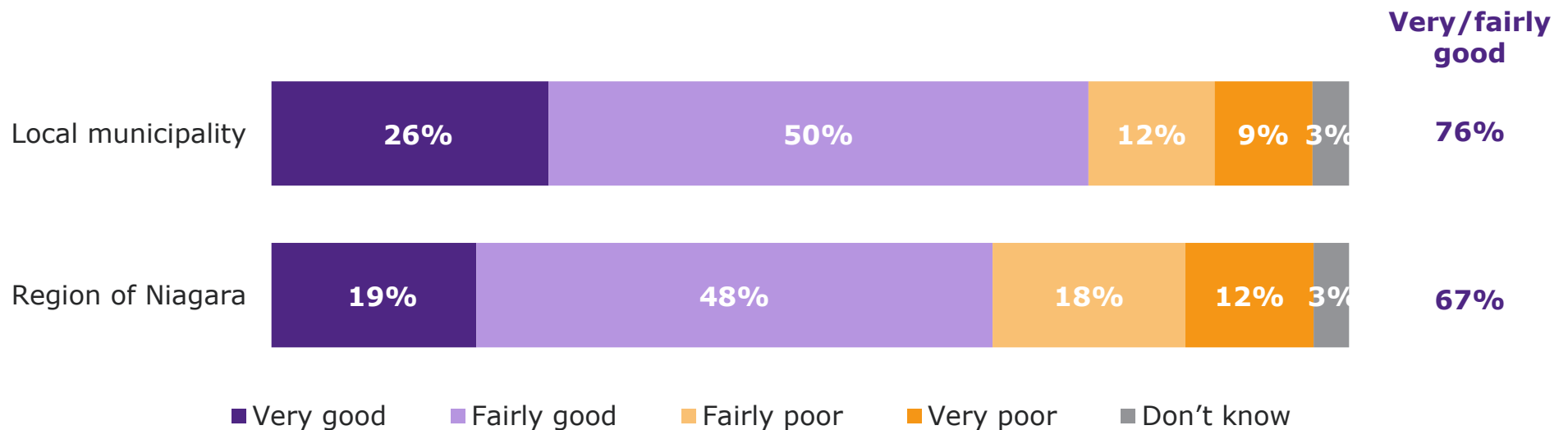


Q3B. Why do you say the structure of elected officials is effective at representing your interests when they are making decisions for Niagara Region? *Base: current structure is ineffective (n=295)*



# VALUE FOR TAX DOLLARS

Three-quarters of residents say they receive good value for their tax dollars from their local municipality, while two-thirds say the same of Niagara Region.



Q4. Thinking about all the programs and services you receive from <municipality>, would you say that, overall, you receive very good, fairly good, fairly poor or very poor value for your tax dollars?

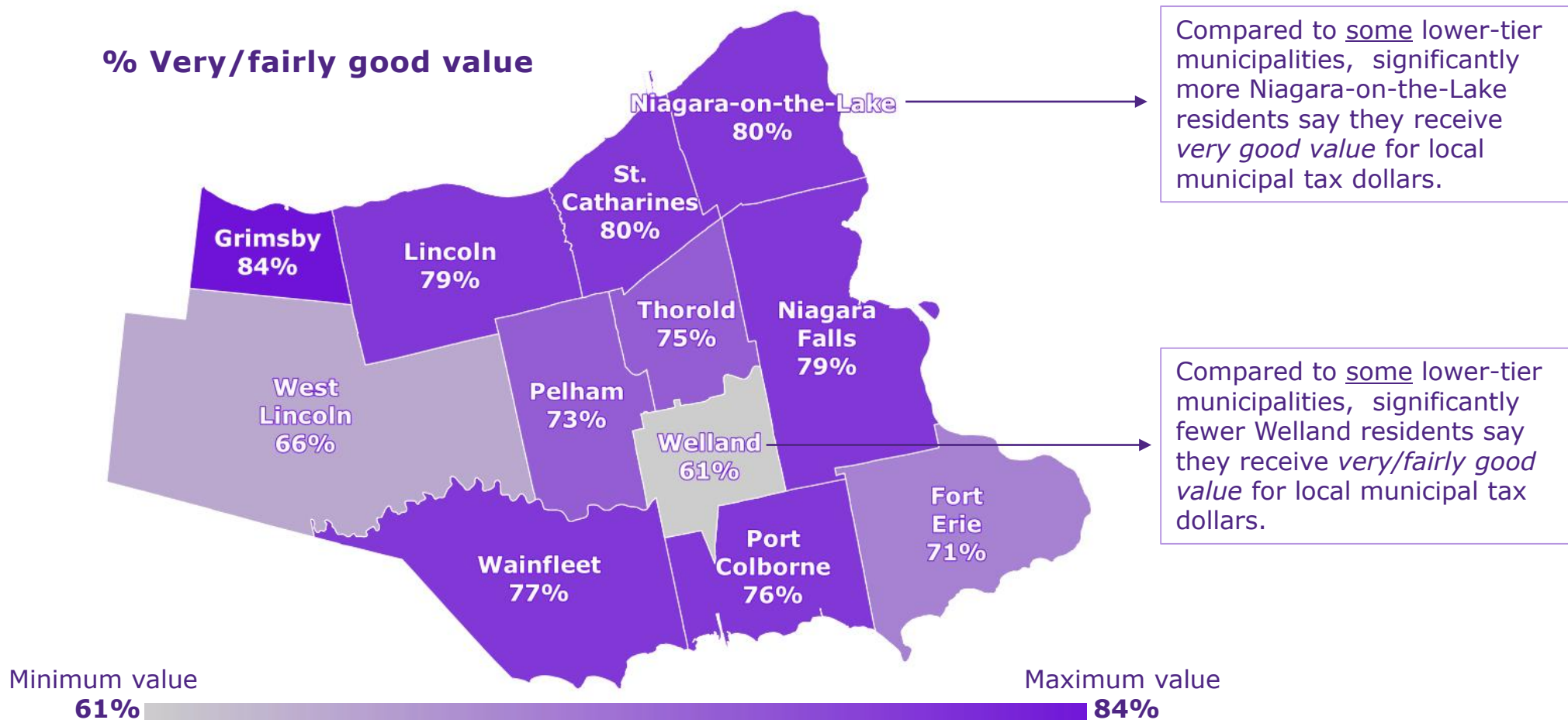
Q5. And thinking about all the programs and services you receive from the Region of Niagara, would you say that, overall, you receive very good, fairly good, fairly poor or very poor value for your tax dollars?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# GOOD VALUE FOR LOCAL MUNICIPAL TAX DOLLARS

Residents of Grimsby are the most likely to say they receive good value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars, while Welland residents are the least likely to say so.

## % Very/fairly good value



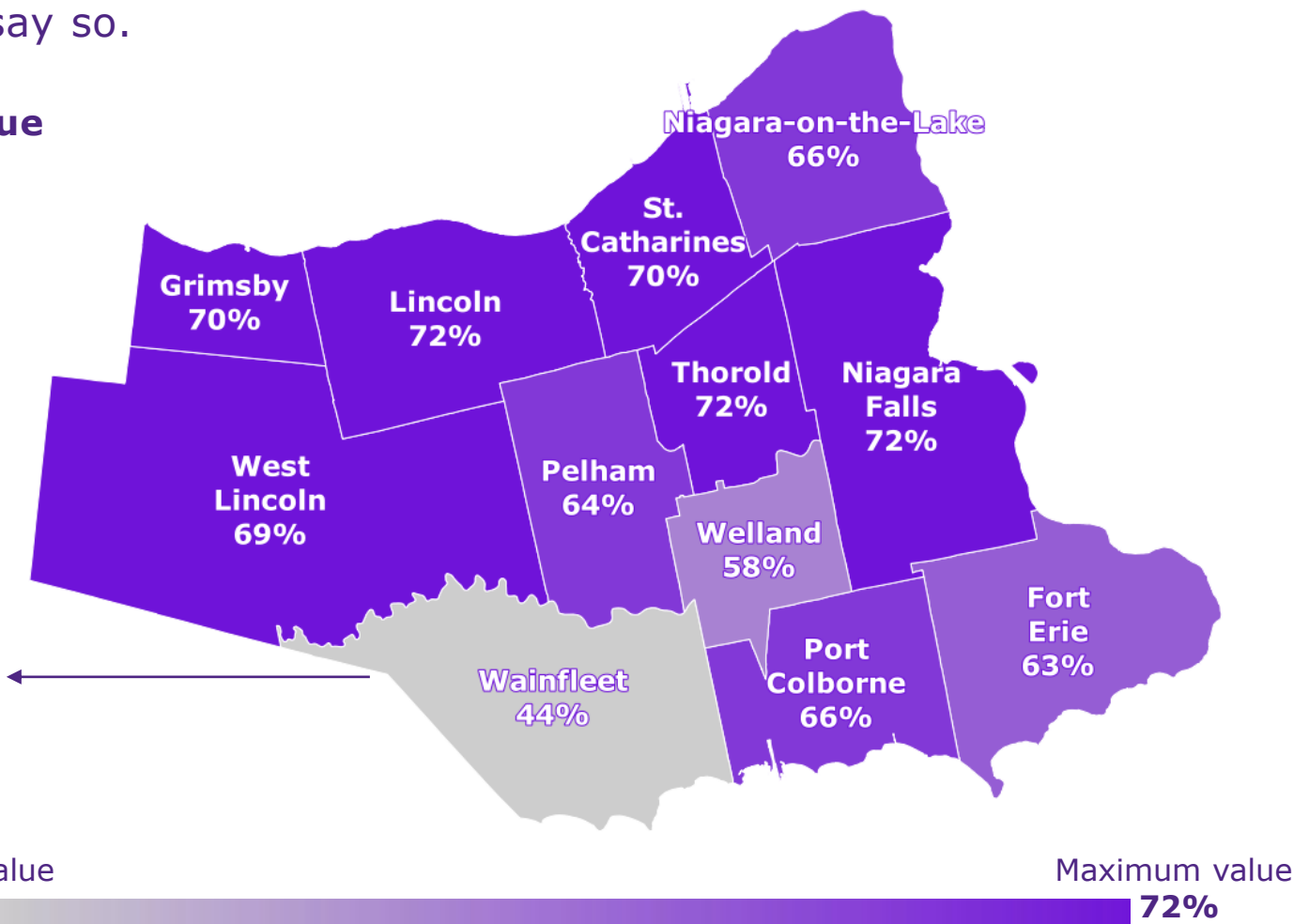
Q4. Thinking about all the programs and services you receive from <municipality>, would you say that, overall, you receive very good, fairly good, fairly poor or very poor value for your tax dollars?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# GOOD VALUE FOR REGIONAL TAX DOLLARS

Residents of Lincoln, Thorold and Niagara Falls are the most likely to say they receive good value for regional tax dollars, while Wainfleet residents are the least likely to say so.

## % Very/fairly good value



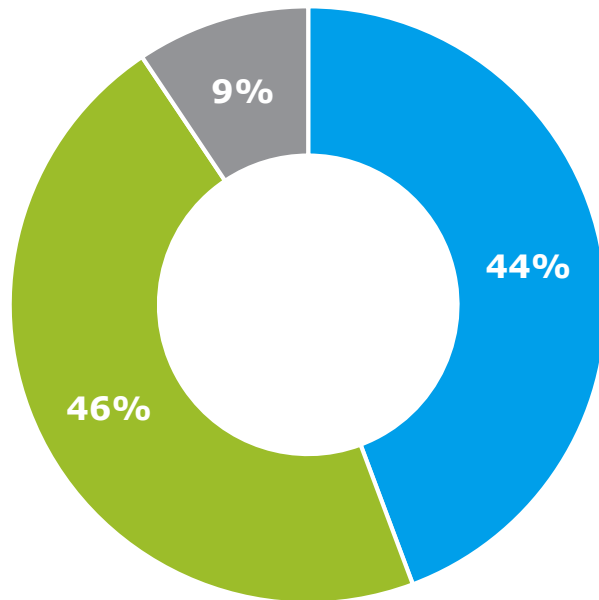
Significantly fewer Wainfleet residents say they receive *very poor* value for regional tax dollars (29% versus 18% or less in other lower-tier municipalities).

Compared to most other lower-tier municipalities, significantly fewer Wainfleet residents say they are receive *very/somewhat good* value for regional tax dollars.

Q5. And thinking about all the programs and services you receive from the Region of Niagara, would you say that, overall, you receive very good, fairly good, fairly poor or very poor value for your tax dollars?  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

# REPRESENTATION PREFERENCE

Niagara Region residents are closely split between a preference for separate councillors elected at the lower-tier and regional level and one set of councillors elected for both.



- Separate Councillors elected to represent residents at [lower-tier municipality] and regional levels
- One set of Councillors elected to represent residents at both [lower-tier municipality] and regional levels
- Don't know/no opinion

## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

### Separate

- **18 to 34 years old** (57%)
- **Female** (50%)
- **Believe receive *very good* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (55%)
- **Believe receive *good* value for regional tax dollars** (49%)

### One set

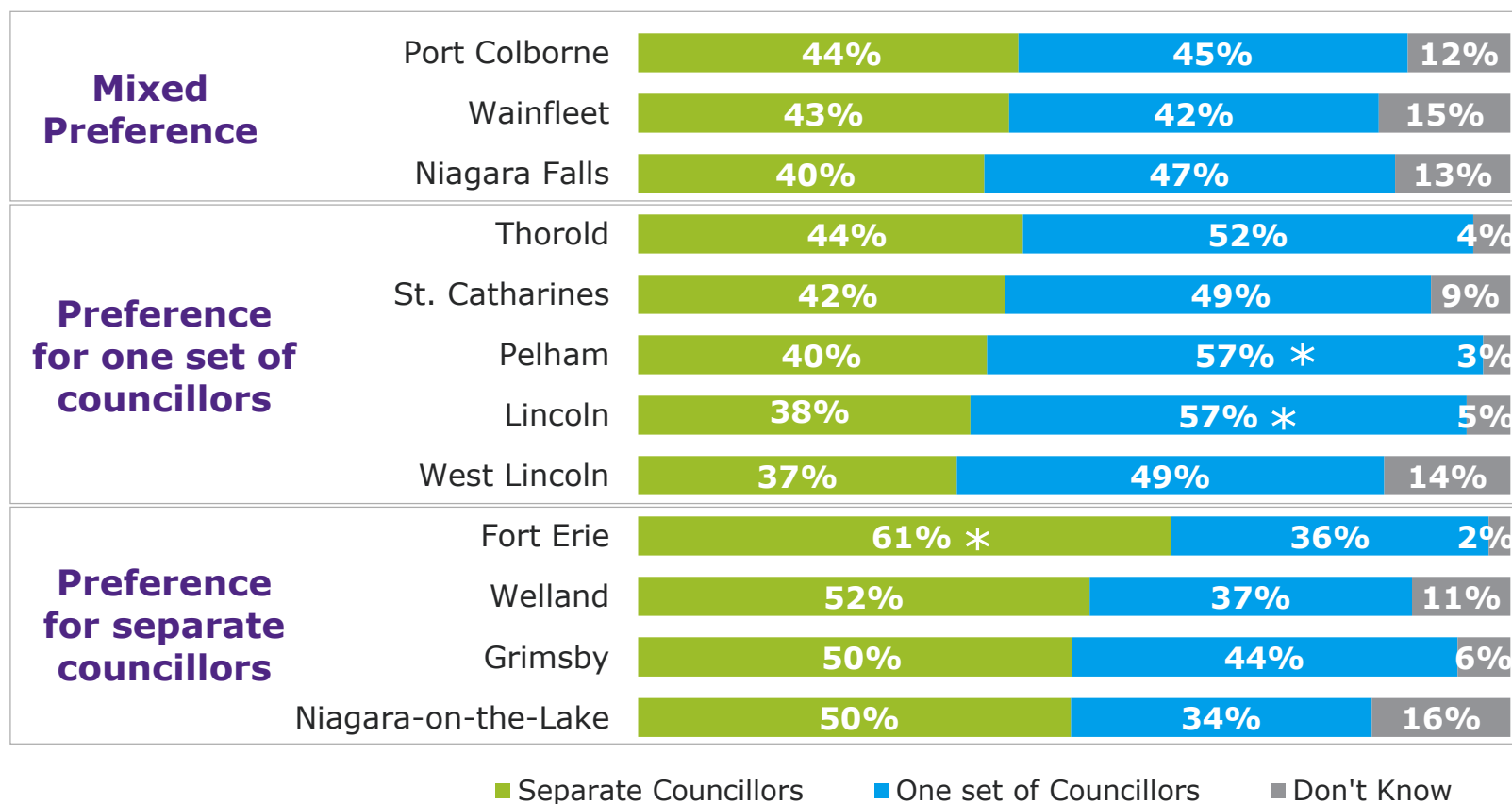
- **35 to 54 years old** (57%) **& 55 years and older** (47%)
- **Male** (52%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (55%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value for regional tax dollars** (55%)

Q6. When you think about how you are represented at both the <town/city/township> and Regional levels, which scenario would you prefer?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# REPRESENTATION PREFERENCE

There is a preference for one set of councillors among residents of the plurality of lower-tier municipalities.



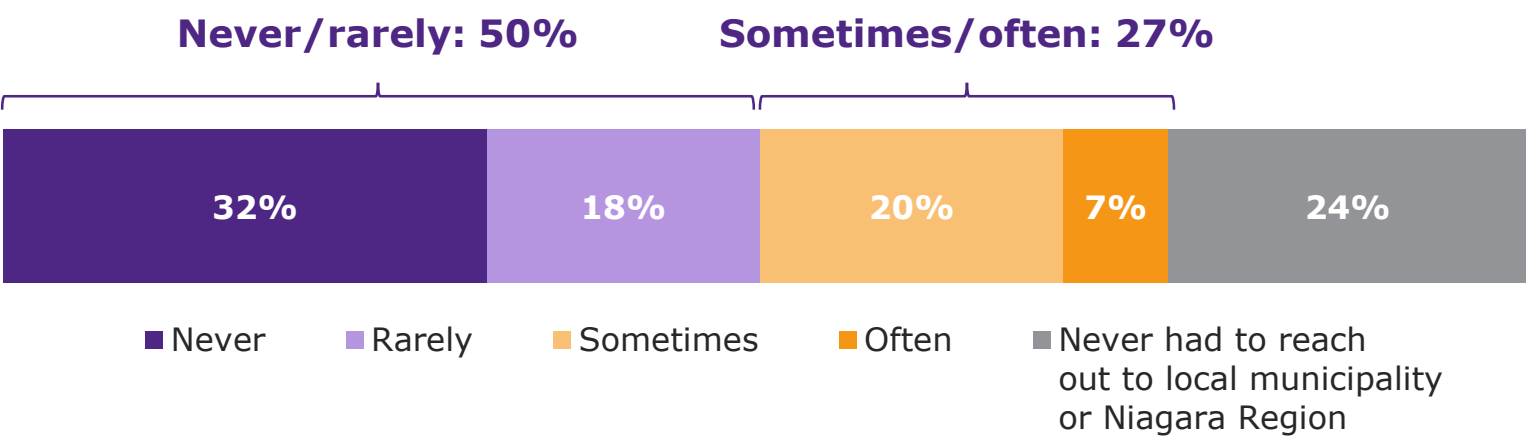
\*Significantly higher than most other lower-tier municipalities

Q6. When you think about how you are represented at both the <town/city/township> and Regional levels, which scenario would you prefer?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# CONFUSION OVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Only one-quarter of Region residents report they have sometimes or often experienced confusion as a result of the division of responsibilities between local and regional governments. Encountering confusion is more often associated with residents saying they receive poor value for tax dollars.



## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

### Never/Rarely

- Believe receive **good** value for local municipal tax dollars (53%)
- Believe receive **good** value for regional tax dollars (56%)

### Sometimes/Often

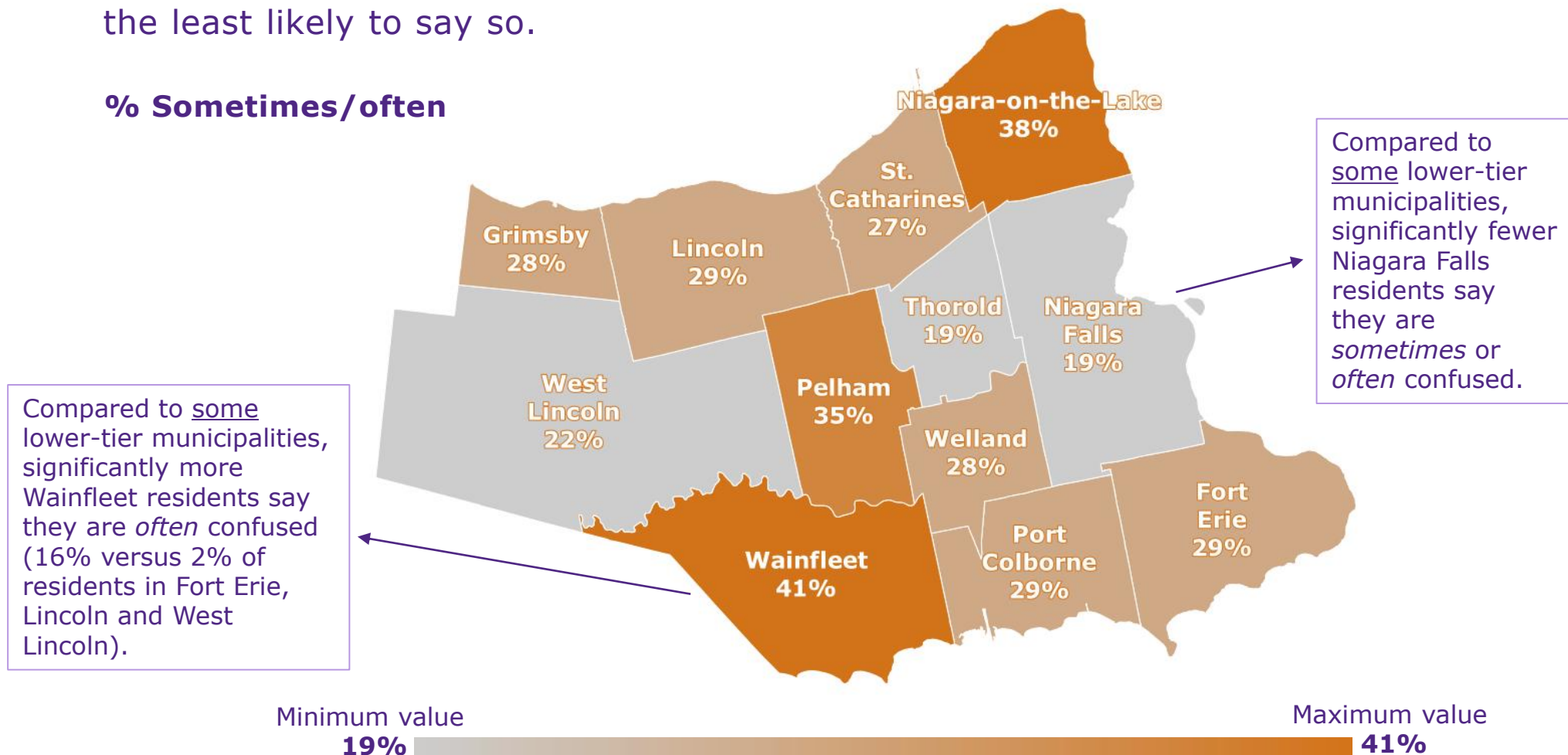
- **Male** (34%)
- **Poor** value for local municipal tax dollars (41%)
- **Poor** value for regional tax dollars (44%)

Q7. Have you encountered a situation where the division of responsibilities between the [local municipality] and the region has been a source of confusion, etc.?  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

# ENCOUNTERED CONFUSION OVER RESPONSIBILITIES

Residents of Wainfleet are the most likely to say they have encountered confusion over the division of responsibilities, while Niagara Falls residents are the least likely to say so.

## % Sometimes/often



Q7. Have you encountered a situation where the division of responsibilities between the [local municipality] and the region has been a source of confusion, etc.?  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

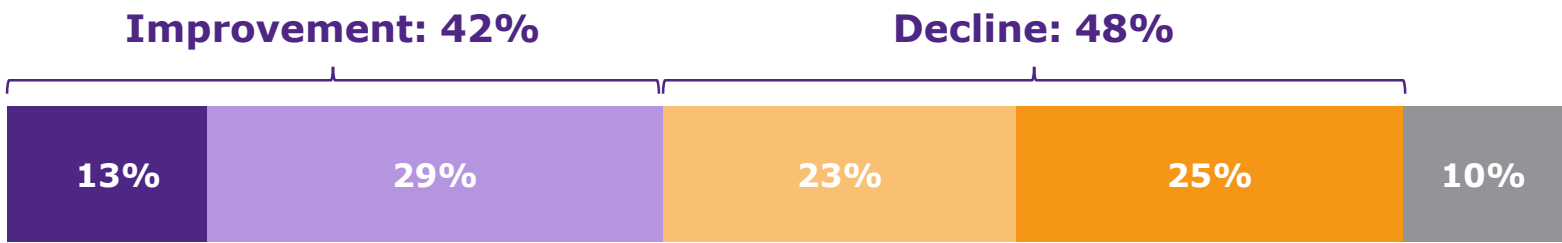




# **Survey Findings:** **Assessing Different Models of Governance**

# EFFECT OF LARGER GOVERNMENT ON SERVICES

Overall, residents are closely split in their expectations of the quality of service delivered if their local municipality became part of a larger municipal structure. A plurality lean towards an expectation of a decline in service, of which one-quarter anticipate the decline would be significant.



■ A significant improvement   ■ A moderate improvement   ■ A moderate decline   ■ A significant decline   ■ Don't know/no opinion

## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

### Improvement

- **18 to 34 years old** (51%)
- **Believe receive *very poor* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (62%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value for regional tax dollars** (51%)
- **Say current structure is *ineffective* at representing interests** (52%)
- **Prefer *one set of councillors*** (53%)

### Decline

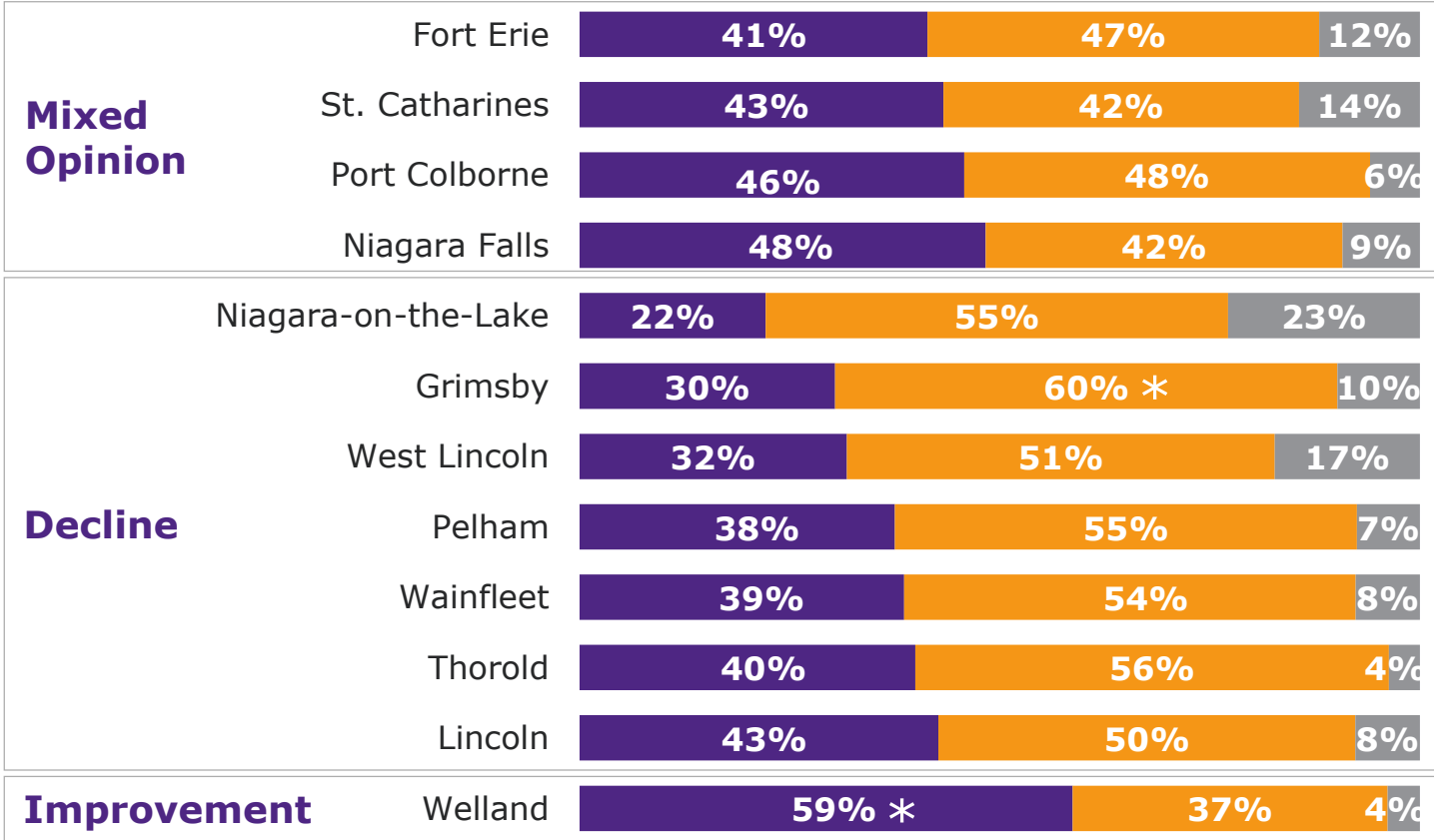
- **55 years and older** (54%)
- **Believe receive *very good* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (55%)
- **Say current structure is *effective* at representing interests** (50%)
- **Prefer *separate councillors*** (58%)

Q24. If [MUNICIPALITY] was reorganized to make it larger would that result in an [improvement/decline] in the quality of service delivery to [MUNICIPALITY]?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# EFFECT OF LARGER GOVERNMENT ON SERVICES

The majority of residents in most lower-tier municipalities anticipate a larger government would result in a decline in service quality. The majority of Welland residents alone say it results in improvements.



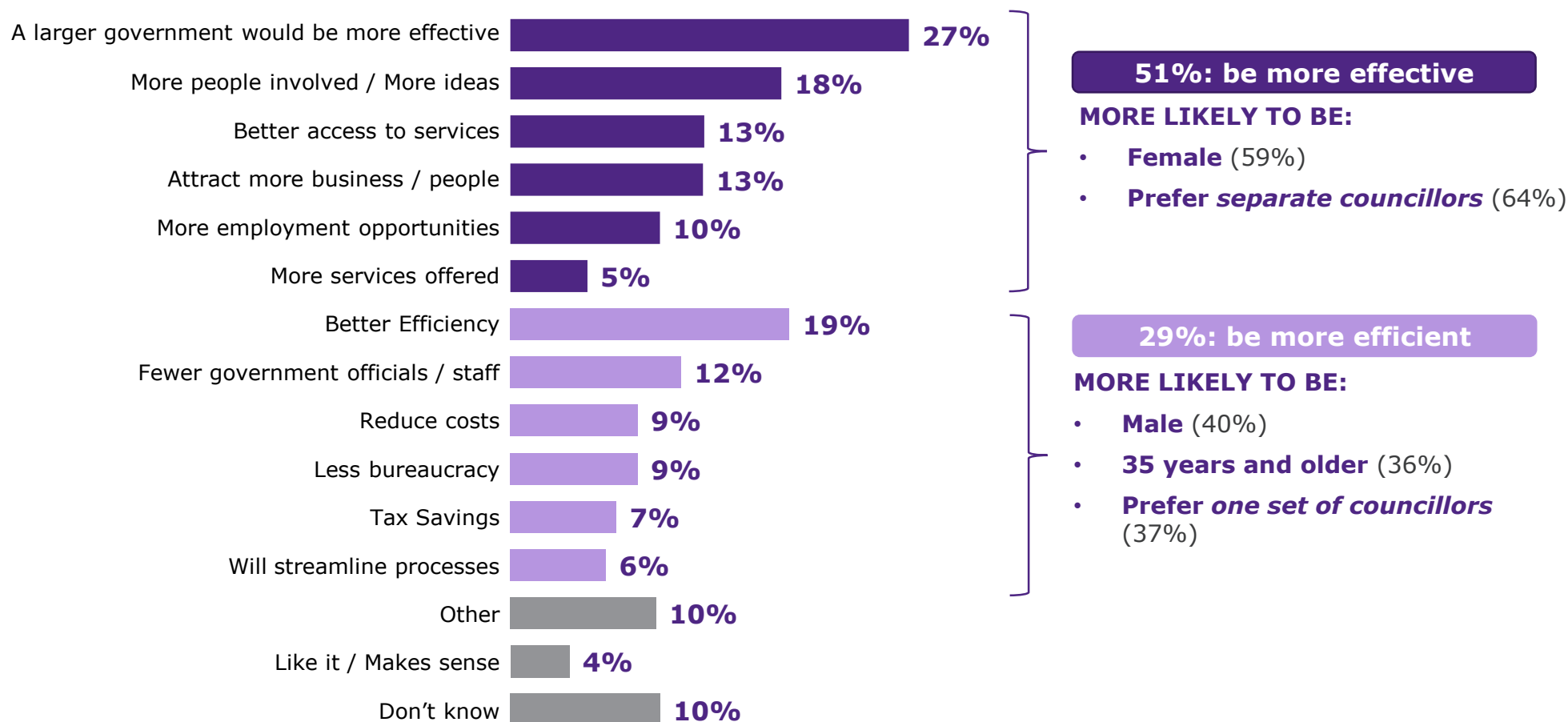
\*Significantly higher than most other lower-tier municipalities

■ Improvement (Significant + Moderate) ■ Decline (Significant + Moderate) ■ Don't Know

Q24. If [MUNICIPALITY] was reorganized to make it larger would that result in an [improvement/decline] in the quality of service delivery to [MUNICIPALITY]?  
 Base: all respondents (n=832)

# REASONS FOR SAYING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

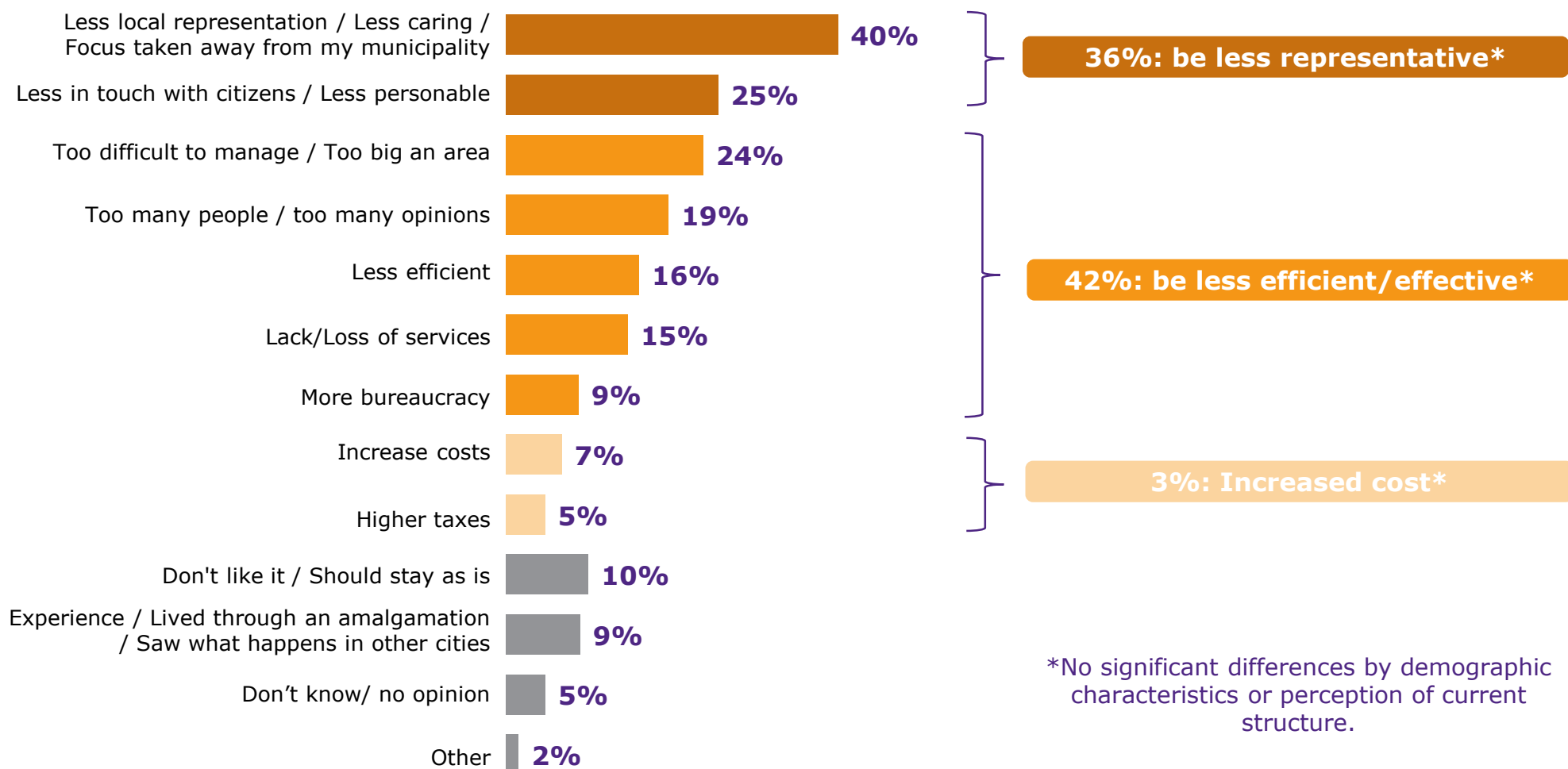
Residents who anticipate a service improvement resulting from larger government believe it would be more effective, would achieve better efficiencies, and would benefit from more people generating ideas.



Q25. Why do you believe a larger government will represent an improvement of service delivery in [MUNICIPALITY]?  
 Base: Improvement in Q24 (n=328)

# REASONS FOR SAYING DECLINE IN SERVICE

Residents who anticipate a decline in the quality of services resulting from a larger government believe there would be less representation, that it would be less in touch, and would be difficult to manage.

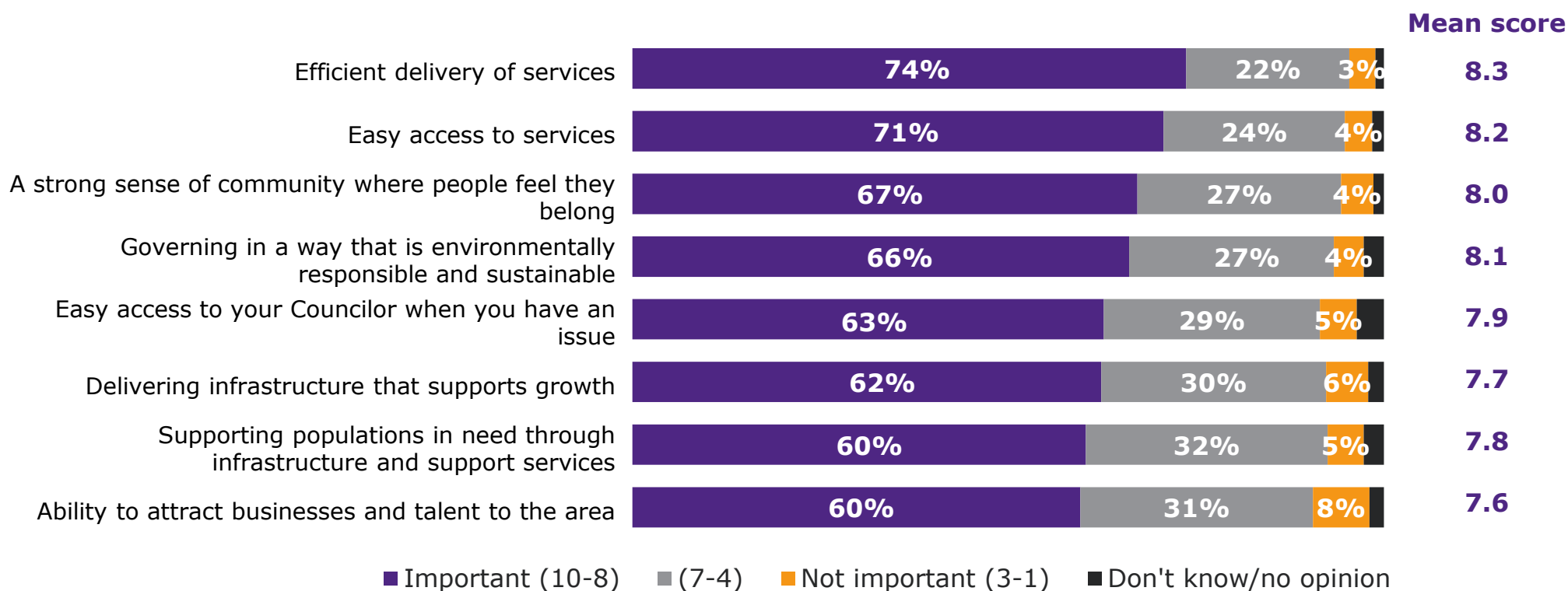


Q25. Why do you believe a larger government will represent a decline of service delivery in [MUNICIPALITY]?

Base: Decline in Q24 (n=420)

# CITIZEN PRIORITIES

When considering aspects of local government that are of importance, Niagara Region residents prioritize efficient delivery and easy access to services.



Q8-Q15. Using a ten-point scale where one means “not at all important” and ten means “extremely important”, please indicate how important each of the following are to you personally when thinking about your local government.

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# DEFINITIONS OF POTENTIAL STRUCTURES

Residents were given the following descriptions of potential municipal governance structures before proceeding to subsequent questions.

As you may know, the provincial government is currently undertaking a review of the governance, decision-making and service delivery functions of Ontario's regional municipalities, including the Niagara Region and its twelve municipalities. Some possible outcomes from this review could include the following:

**Current Structure.** The province may decide to leave the current structure in place where the <municipality> remains a lower-tier municipality within Niagara Region. Each level of government would retain responsibility for delivery of services.

**Partial amalgamation.** A scenario that combines some Niagara area municipalities into larger municipal governments which are responsible for delivering services within the new municipality.

**Total amalgamation.** A scenario whereby the 12 municipalities within the Niagara Region are brought together into one central government which has the sole responsibility for administering services across a new amalgamated geography.

I'd like to ask you about the different aspects of municipal governance and administration discussed earlier and get your sense of which of these three municipal models you think would do the best job of delivering services in a way that meets your expectations.

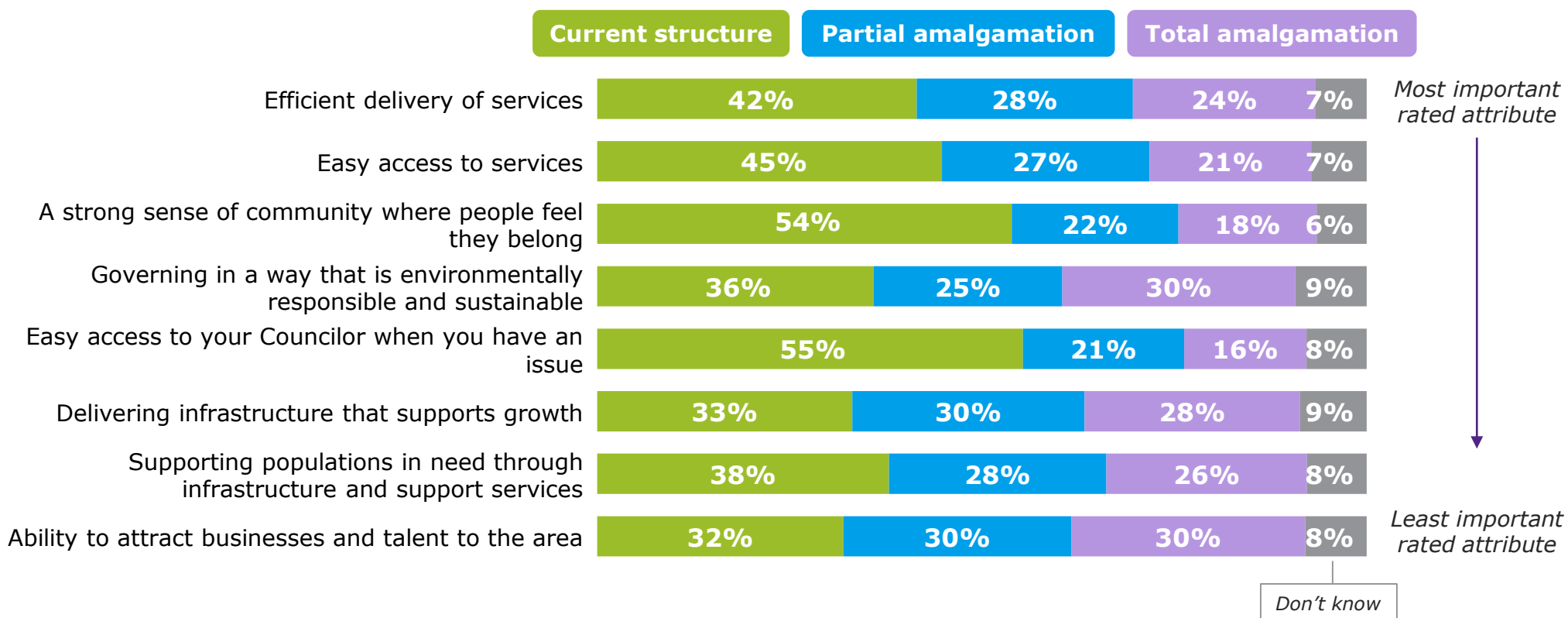
To recall, the three options are:

- The **current structure**, or two-tier model, in place now in Niagara Region;
- The **partial amalgamation** of a few municipalities into one municipality
- A **total amalgamation** of all of the municipalities currently within Niagara Region.



# PREFERRED GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Majorities of residents express a preference for the current structure when considering delivering a strong sense of community and providing easy access to Councillors.



Q16-Q23. Which of the three models would do the best job of...  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

# Governance Structure Options - Analysis

Support for amalgamation structures is limited and diffuse, while preference for current two-tier structure is articulated frequently.

Niagara residents were asked to select between three distinct governance models which they believe can best deliver on different areas of municipal government responsibility. They were permitted only one selection for each area of service, governance and representation.

When examining the frequency with which each structure was chosen across all eight (8) areas of responsibility, the following was observed:

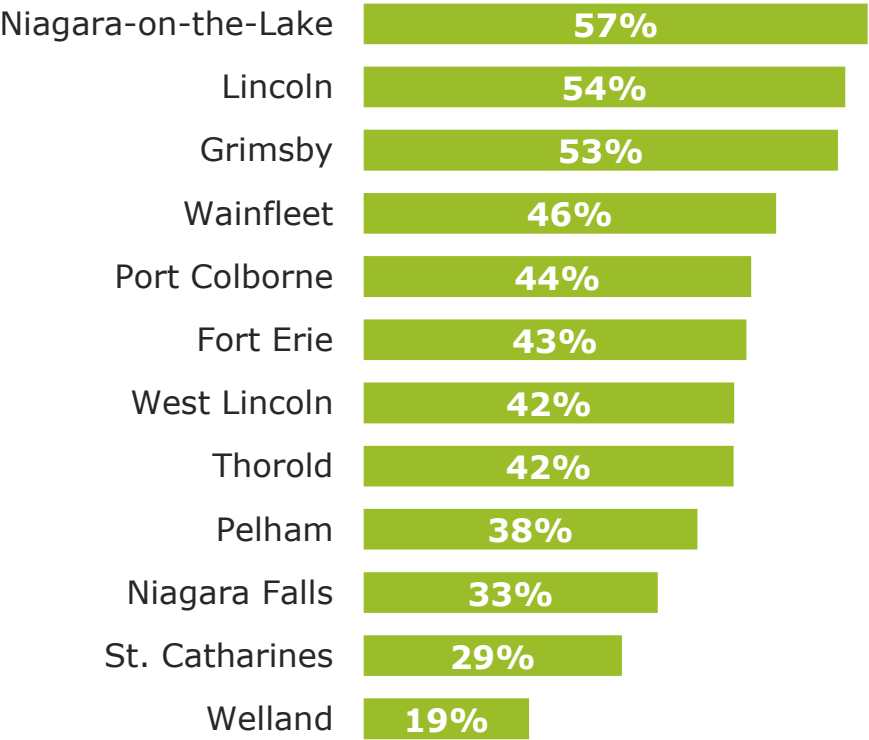
- 33% of residents never selected “current structure” for any of the 8 areas of responsibility
- 45% of residents never selected “partial amalgamation” for any of the 8 areas of responsibility
- 50% of residents never selected “total amalgamation” for any of the 8 areas of responsibility

By comparison:

- Only one-in-five residents opted for either amalgamation structure for more than half of the 8 areas of responsibility (20% and 19% respectively)
- The “current structure” option was selected for more than half of all 8 areas of responsibility by two-in-five residents (38%).
- One-in-five residents showed mixed preference as they did not opt for any one option for more than half the 8 areas of responsibility (18%).

# PREFER CURRENT STRUCTURE

The majority of Niagara-on-the-Lake, Lincoln and Grimsby residents show a preference for the delivery of responsibilities via the current structure.



## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

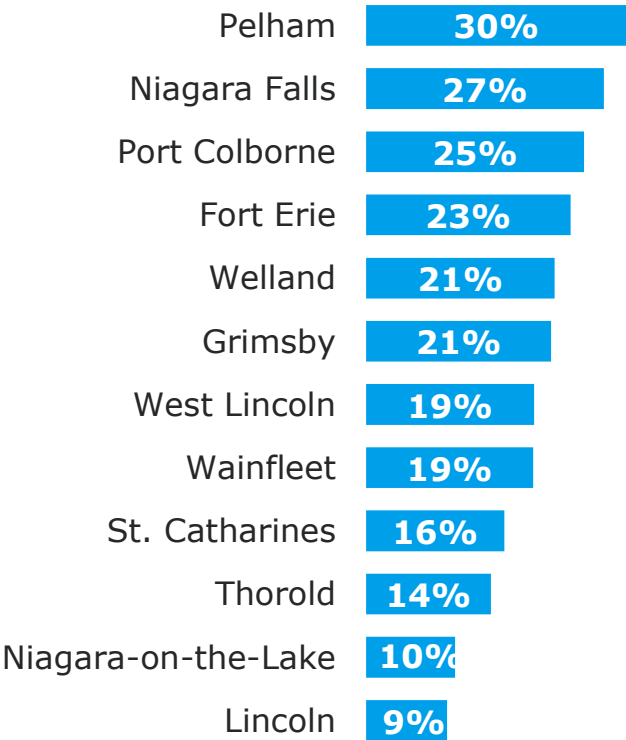
- **55 years and older** (46%)
- **Female** (42%)
- **Say very well served by two-tier structure** (57%)
- **Believe receive very good value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (55%)
- **Believe receive very good value for regional tax dollars** (52%)
- **Say Current structure is effective at representing interests** (44%)
- **Prefer separate councillors** (50%)
- **Compared to some other lower-tier municipalities, significantly more Niagara-on-the-Lake (57%), Lincoln (54%) and Grimsby (53%) residents opted for the current structure for more than half of the 8 areas of responsibility.**

Q16-Q23. Which of the three models would do the best job of...  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

# PREFER PARTIAL AMALGAMATION

Preference for partial amalgamation is more common among residents of Pelham and Niagara Falls, and least common among Lincoln residents.

**20%** Residents opted for the **Partial Amalgamation** for more than half of the 8 areas of responsibility.



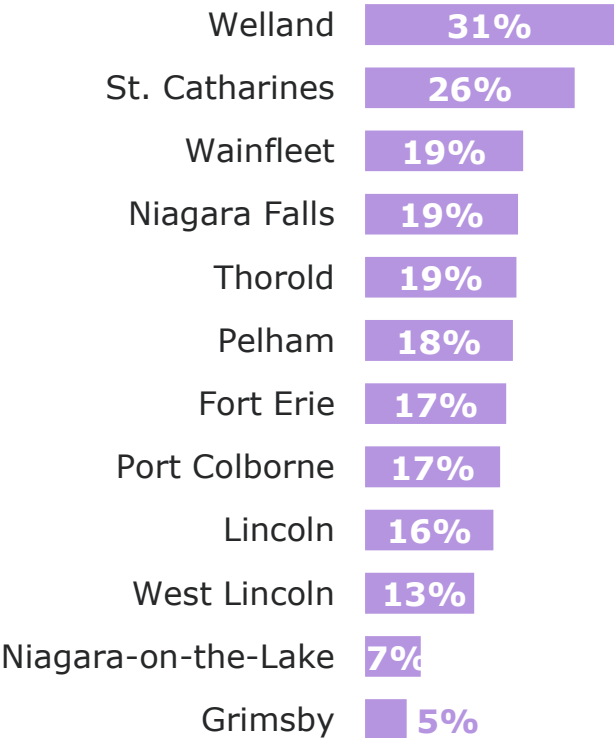
## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

- Compared to some other lower-tier municipalities, significantly more Pelham (30%) and Niagara Falls (27%) residents opted for the partial amalgamation for more than half of the 8 areas of responsibility.

Q16-Q23. Which of the three models would do the best job of...  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

# PREFER TOTAL AMALGAMATION

Preference for total amalgamation is more common among residents of Welland and St. Catharines, and least common among Niagara-on-the-Lake and Grimsby residents.



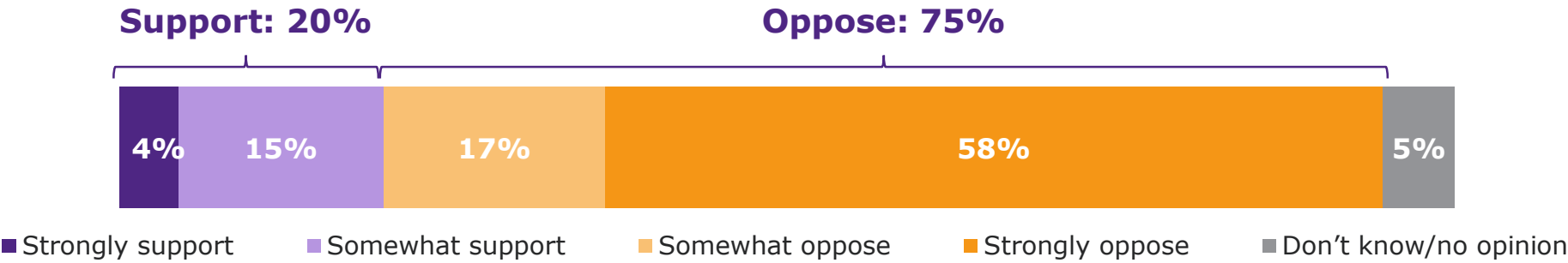
## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

- **Male** (25%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value for lower-tier municipal tax dollars** (29%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value for regional tax dollars** (26%)
- **Say current structure is *ineffective* at representing interests** (27%)
- **Prefer *one set of councillors*** (30%)
- **Compared to some other lower-tier municipalities, significantly more Welland (31%), and St. Catharines (26%) residents opted for the current structure for more than half of the 8 areas of responsibility.**

Q16-Q23. Which of the three models would do the best job of...  
Base: all respondents (n=832)

# POST-AMALGAMATION TAX INCREASE

Six in ten Niagara Region residents would be strongly opposed to a increase in property taxes to support service delivery by a new amalgamated municipality.



## MOST LIKELY TO SAY:

### Support

- **18 to 34 years old** (32%)
- **Male** (23%)
- **Renters** (40%)
- **Lived in local municipality for fewer than 4 years** (23%)
- **Prefer *one set of councillors*** (26%)
- **Say quality of service would *improve* with larger government** (32%)

### Oppose

- **35 years and older** (78%)
- **Own home** (79%)
- **Lived in local municipality for 4 to 15 years** (74%)  
**or more than 15 years** (78%)
- **Believe receive *poor* value regional tax dollars** (78%)
- **Prefer *separate councillors*** (81%)
- **Say quality of service would *decline* with larger government** (87%)

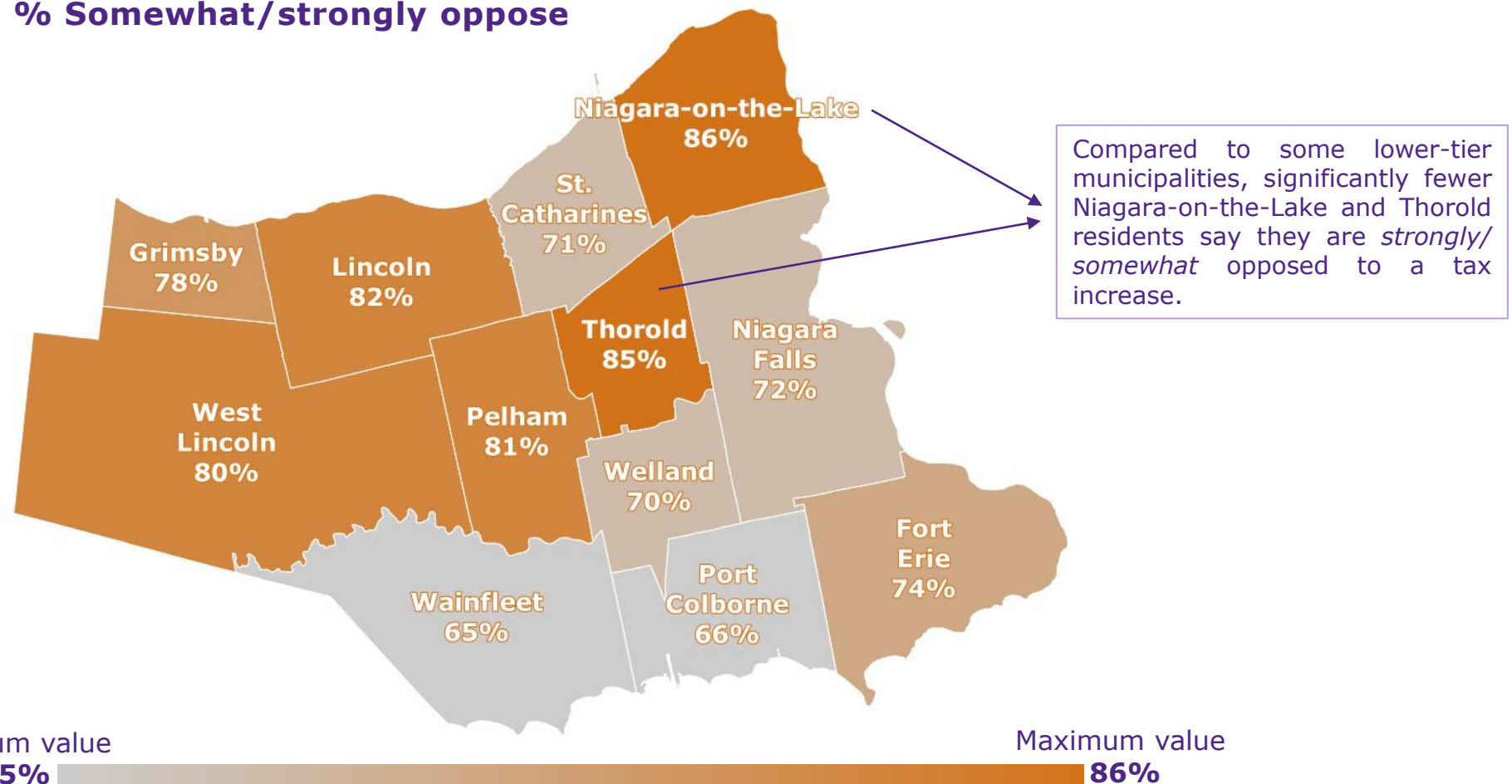
Q26. If <municipality> were to be amalgamated with other municipalities to make it larger, would you support or oppose a moderate increase in property taxes to support service delivery by the new municipality?

Base: all respondents (n=832)

# OPPOSITION TO POST-AMALGAMATION TAX INCREASE

Across lower-tier municipalities, the majority would oppose a property tax increase to support service delivery by a new amalgamated municipality.

**% Somewhat/strongly oppose**



Q26. If <municipality> were to be amalgamated with other municipalities to make it larger, would you support or oppose a moderate increase in property taxes to support service delivery by the new municipality?

Base: all respondents (n=832)



# Key Takeaways

- ▶ Residents generally express **confidence in the current state** of representation in Niagara Region; they feel well-served by current political representation, feel their interests are well represented by the two-tier system and derive value for the taxes they pay to both tiers of municipal government.
- ▶ There are small pockets of evidence of a **limited appetite for some changes** to the two-tier system. A significant proportion of Niagara Region residents anticipate efficiencies derived from one set of councilors to represent residents at both municipal levels. However, this sentiment is limited as it runs into opposition from a majority of residents who believe a larger government will result in a decline in service delivery and who strongly oppose any increase in property taxes to fund a new, larger municipality.
- ▶ Support for the current government structure translates into confidence that **existing representation can best deliver important services and community character**. Amalgamation scenarios receive diffused support for the delivery of some municipal responsibilities, however the overall tone of support for the current structure, and pronounced opposition to any changes that would negatively impact service delivery or taxation suggest that resistance to change would be vocalized should amalgamation be imposed throughout the region.



# Respondent Characteristics

# DEMOGRAPHICS (WEIGHTED)

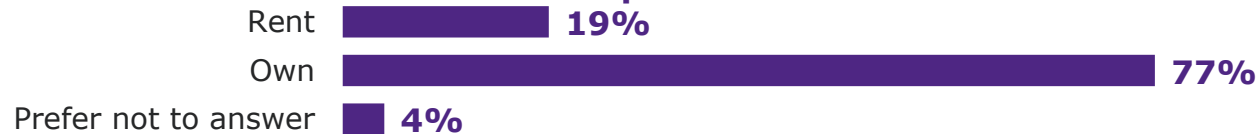
## Gender



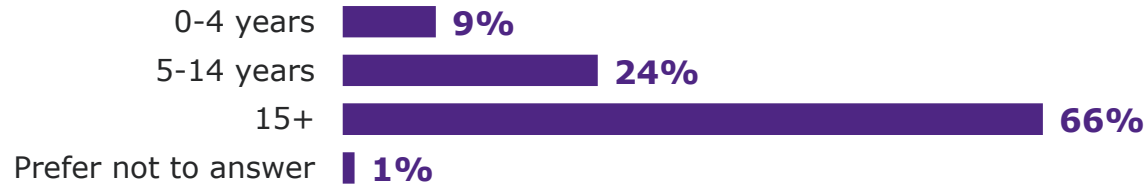
## Age



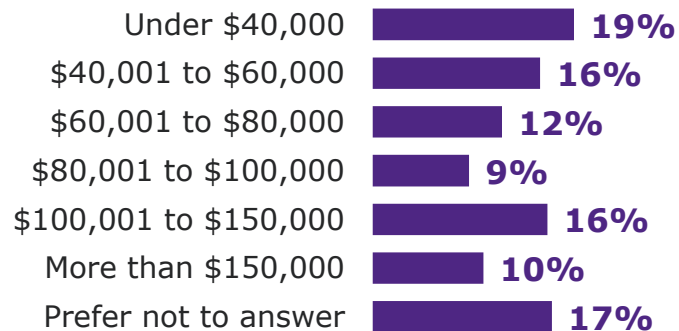
## Homeownership



## Time living in municipality



## Household income



## FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR QUESTIONS CONTACT:



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