

# EPA Lead and Copper Rule Nationwide Survey

Research Findings prepared by Global Strategy Group



# Methodology

## Sample

Global Strategy Group conducted an online survey of **1000 respondents nationwide**, including oversamples reaching **200 respondents in Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin** between October 10 – 17, 2022.

## Margin of error

The margin of error at the 95% confidence level for the nationwide sample is +/- 3.1%.

The margin of error on sub-samples is greater.

# Key findings

**Access to safe drinking water has broken through as a priority for Americans.** Outside of the economy and inflation, ensuring access to safe drinking water for all Americans is seen as the second highest ranking priority nationwide. It ties with reducing crime—which is a striking data point in today’s political environment.

**Majorities say lead pipes are a major problem and are worried about exposure to lead in their home tap water.** Seven in ten Americans nationwide say lead pipes in U.S. drinking water systems are either a crisis or a major problem – and a majority of Americans are worried about exposure to toxic chemicals, such as lead, in their home tap water.

**There is overwhelming support (across gender, race, age, and political ideology) to update an EPA rule that would require water utilities to replace all of their lead pipes within the next 10 years** – with nine in ten Americans supporting the proposal and a majority strongly supporting it. Support for updating the EPA’s lead and copper rule is even stronger in states where lead pipes are particularly problematic – such as Illinois, Missouri, and Wisconsin.

# Key findings

**Large majorities support equitable action to address lead in tap water.** More than nine in ten support provisions that require water utilities “to ensure no one’s tap water has an unsafe level of lead,” and nearly the same amount agree that investments in water infrastructure should be “targeted to communities that have been underserved for far too long.”

**Supporters of the proposal are poised to win a debate on the issue:**

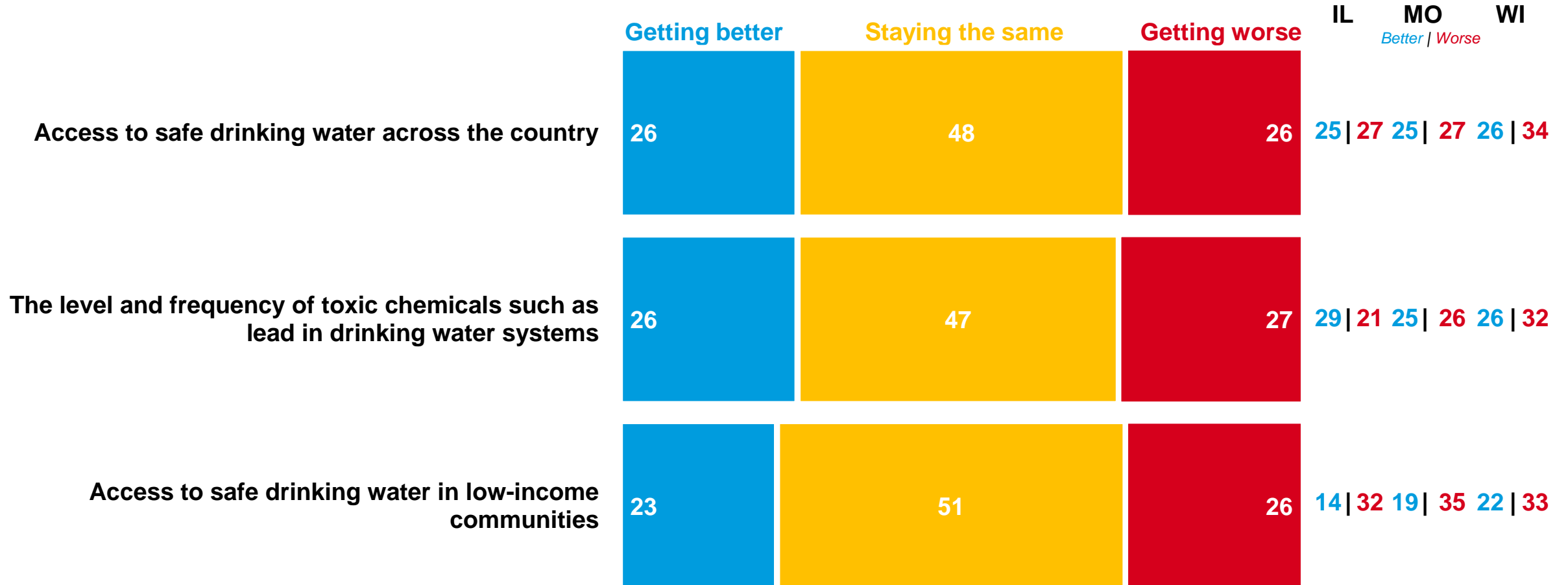
- There is a clear sense of urgency among Americans to replace lead pipes and the timing to replace lead pipes in the current rule falls short even in the face of opposition messaging that an updated plan will result in higher prices for consumers.
- Messaging that highlights the negative health impacts on children and framing access to safe drinking water as a human right is incredibly compelling.
- Even in a situation where supporters are at a communication disadvantage, support for the proposed rule remains strong and never drops below 83% overall.

**Policymakers who support updating the EPA rule to require water utilities to replace all their lead pipes in the next 10 years or less are viewed more favorably.** Large majorities across demographic groups, including independents and Republicans, maintain favoritism for policymakers who support updating the rule throughout the survey.

# Perceptions of Water Quality and Safety

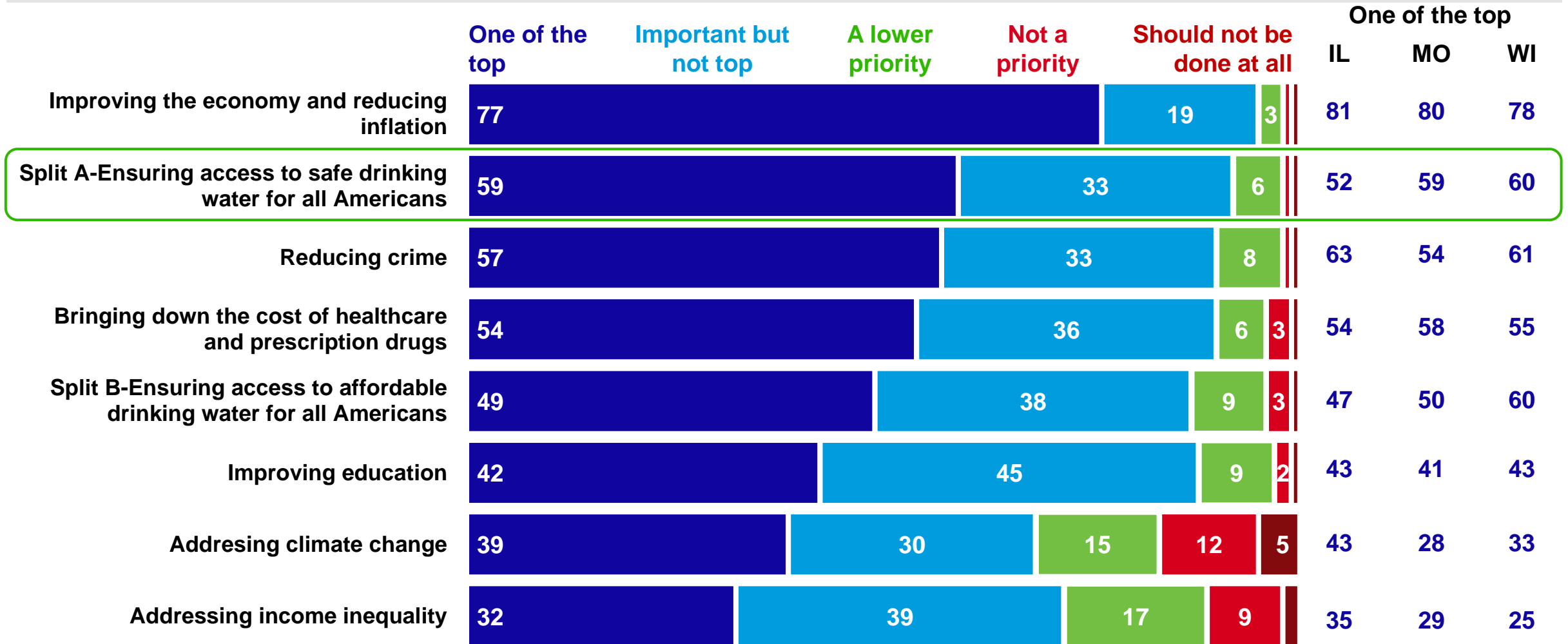
# Few believe that access to safe water is improving, most think it is staying the same

For each of the following, please indicate if it is getting better or getting worse



# Ensuring access to safe drinking water is now one of the top priorities Americans want the government to address, ranking higher than crime and health care

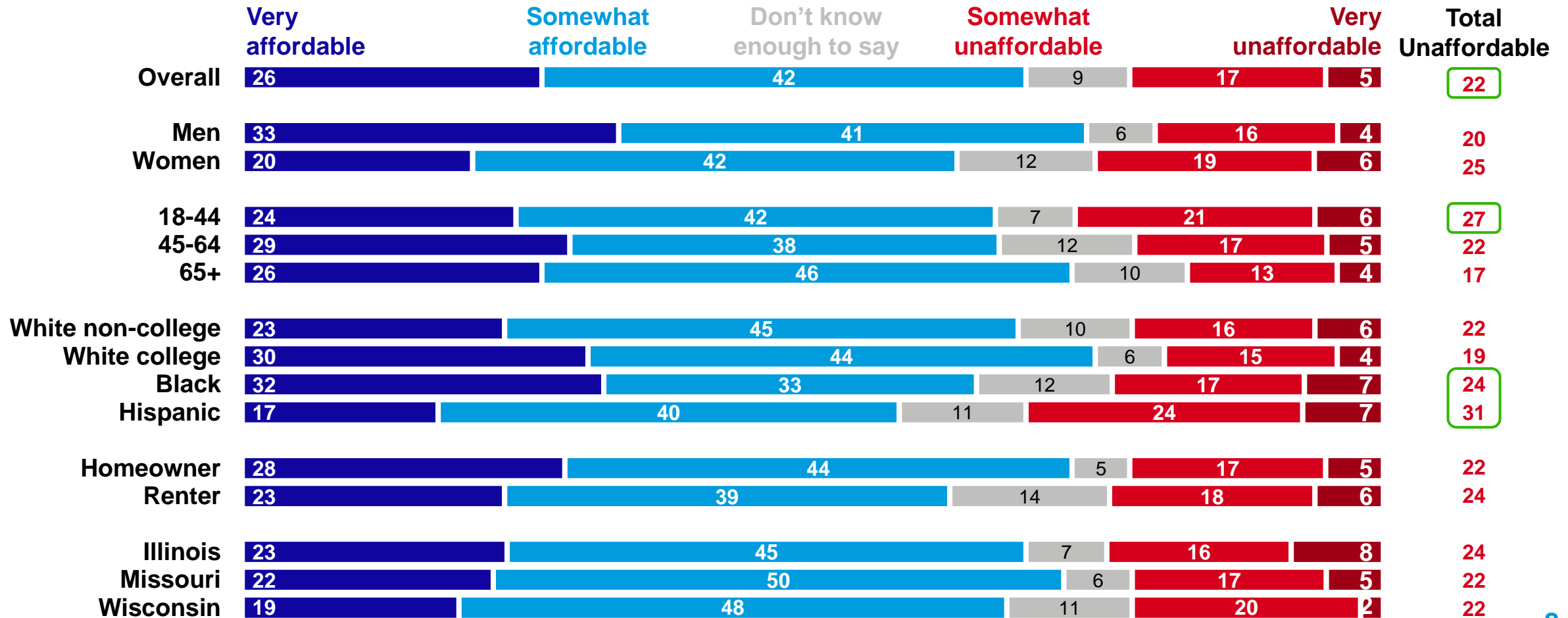
How important of a priority do you think each should be for the federal government?





# Nearly a quarter of Americans find the amount they pay for water utilities to be unaffordable – people of color are more likely to say this

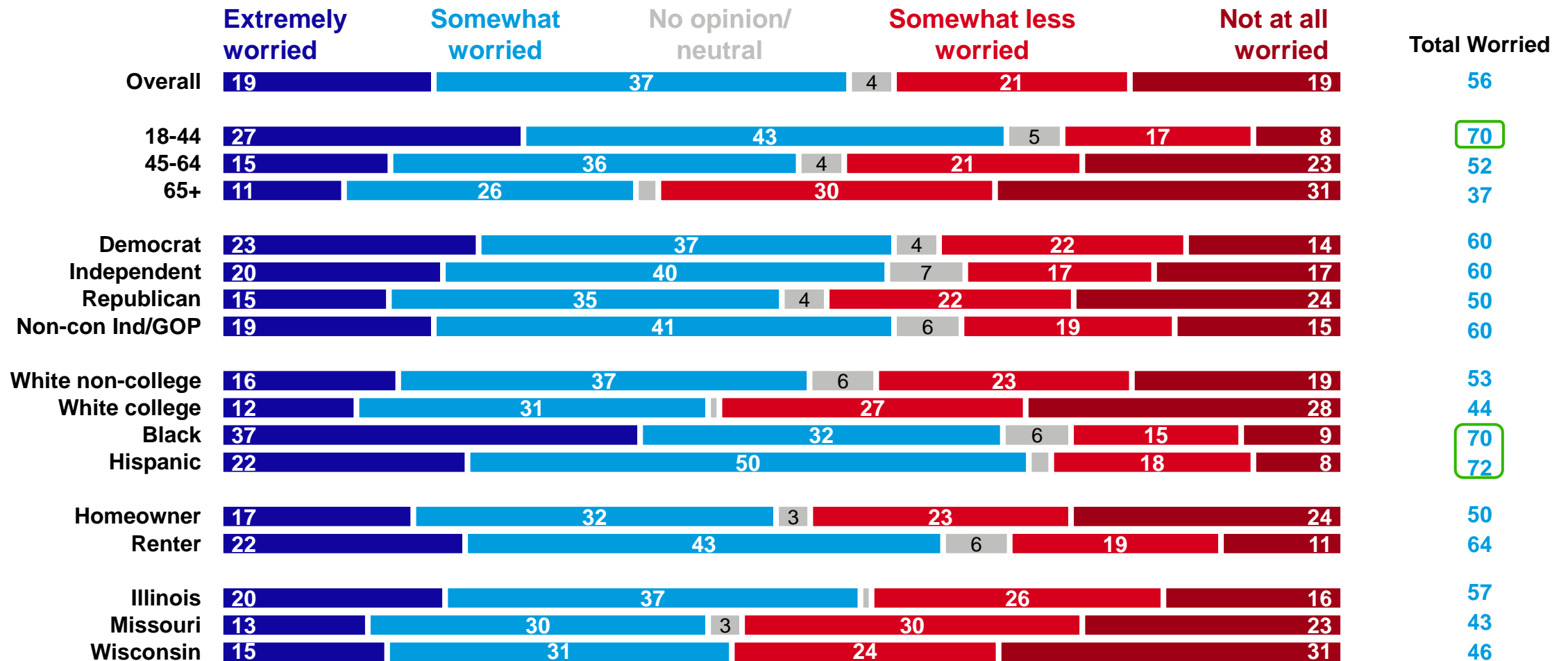
How would you describe the amount you pay regularly for water utilities?





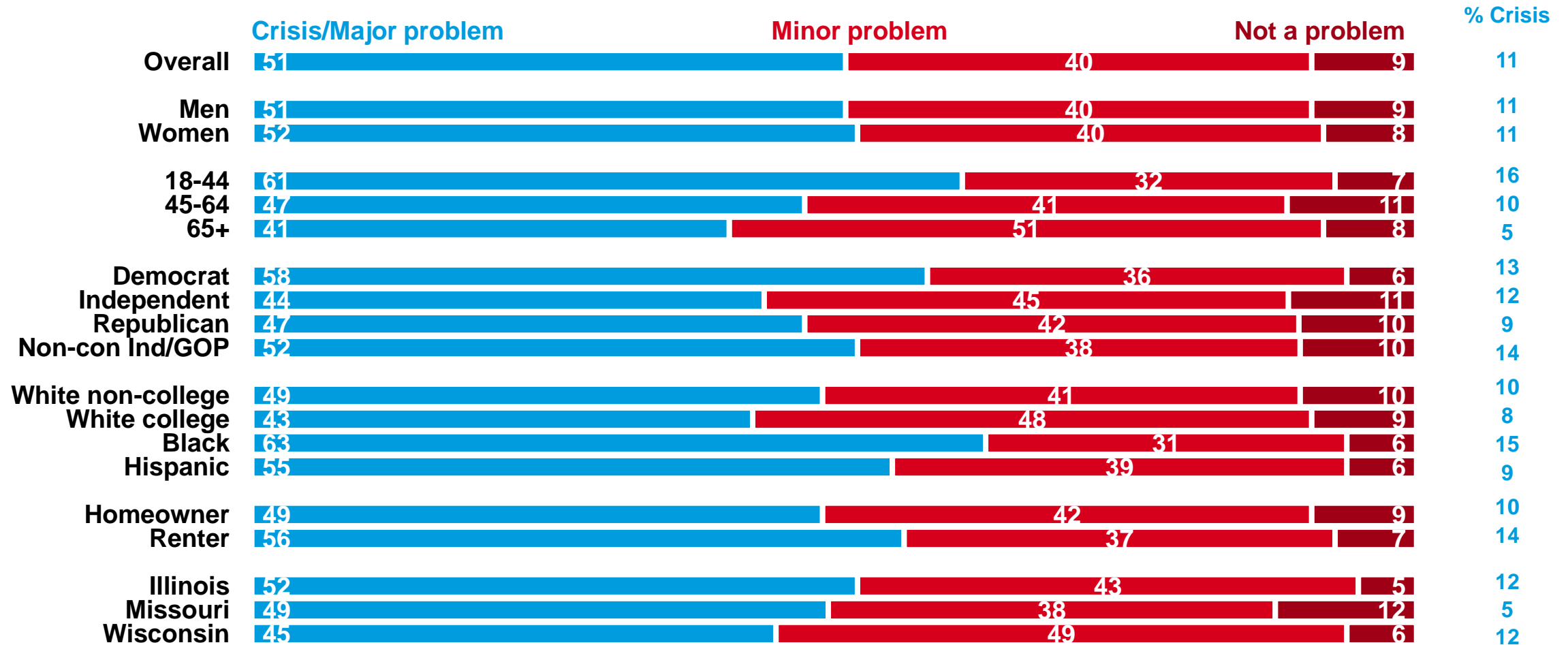
# A majority are worried about chemicals in tap water; Concern is driven by younger people and people of color – especially Black Americans

How worried are you about exposure to toxic chemicals, such as lead, in your home tap water?



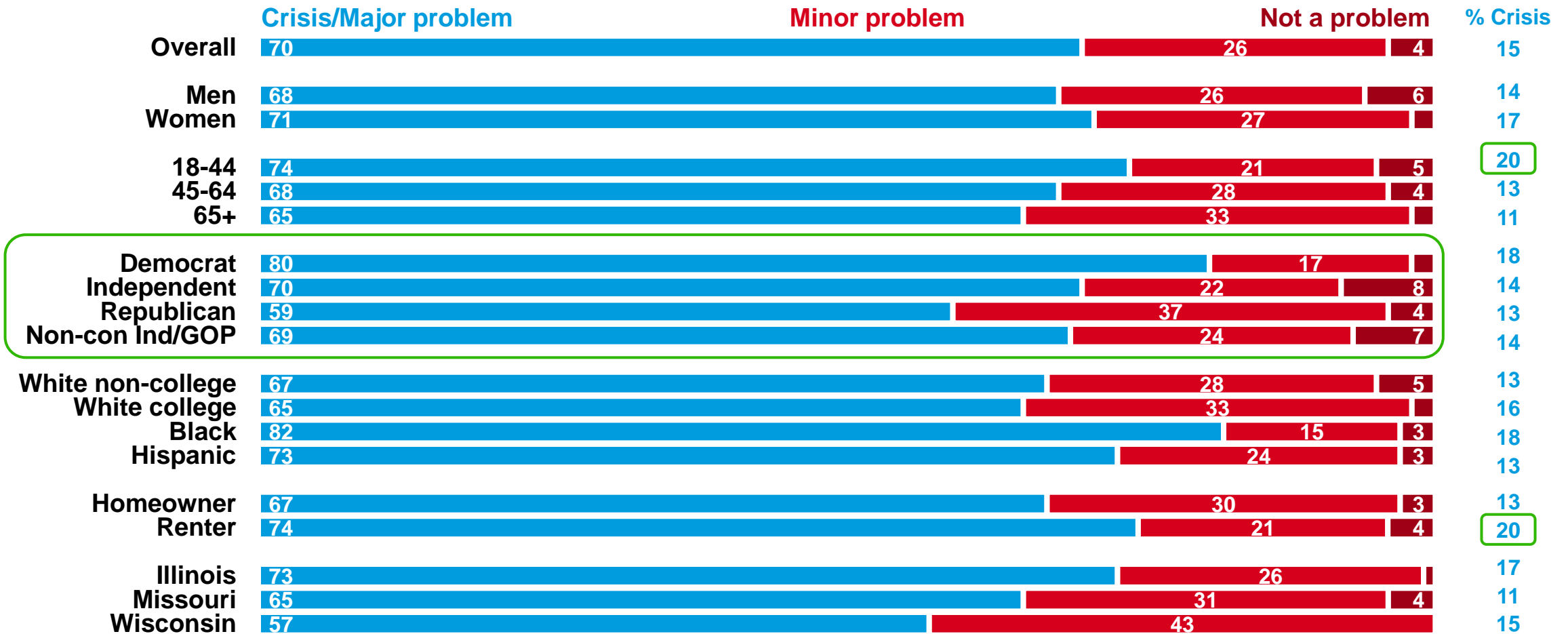
# Lead pipes in state drinking water systems are viewed as a problem, particularly among younger individuals and in Illinois

How big of a problem do you think lead pipes in your state's drinking water systems are?



# Americans believe lead pipes in U.S. drinking water systems are a crisis or major problem – including across the political spectrum

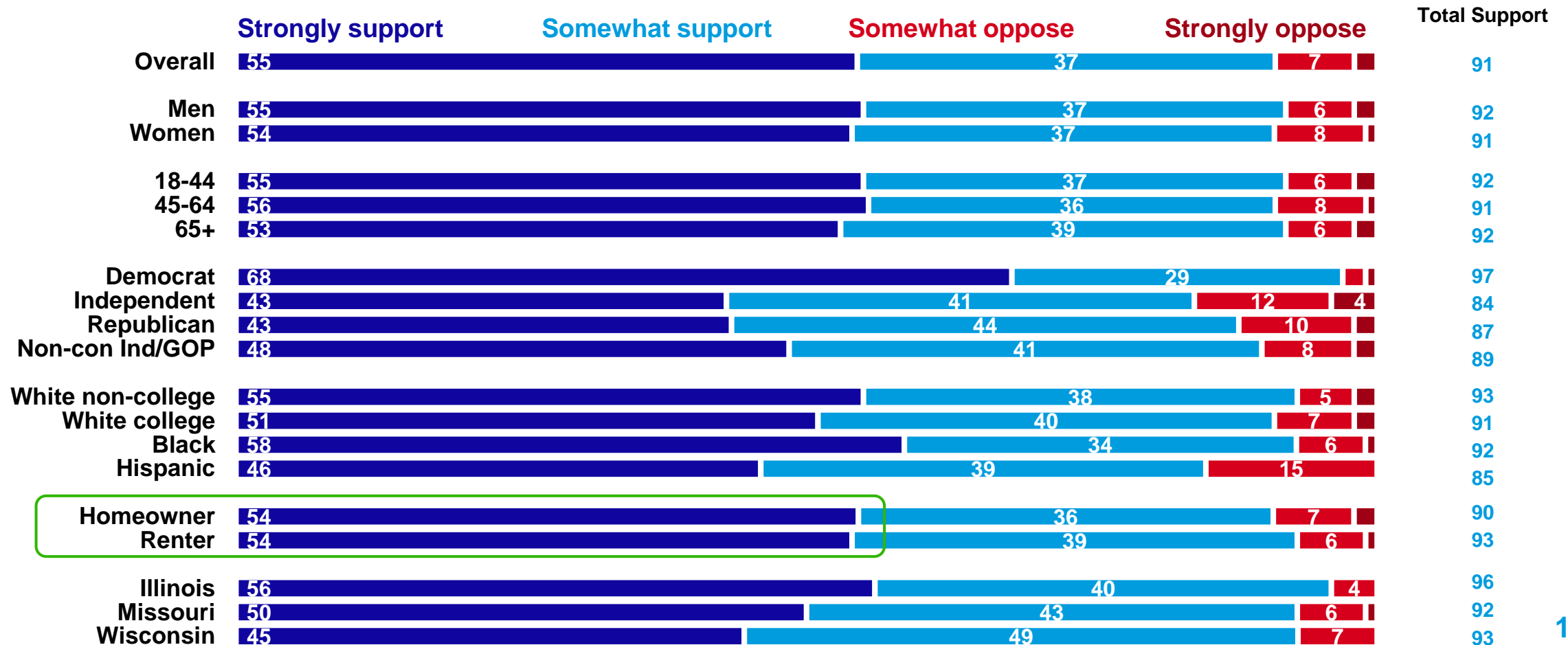
How big of a problem do you think lead pipes in U.S. drinking water systems are?



# Revised Lead and Copper Rule

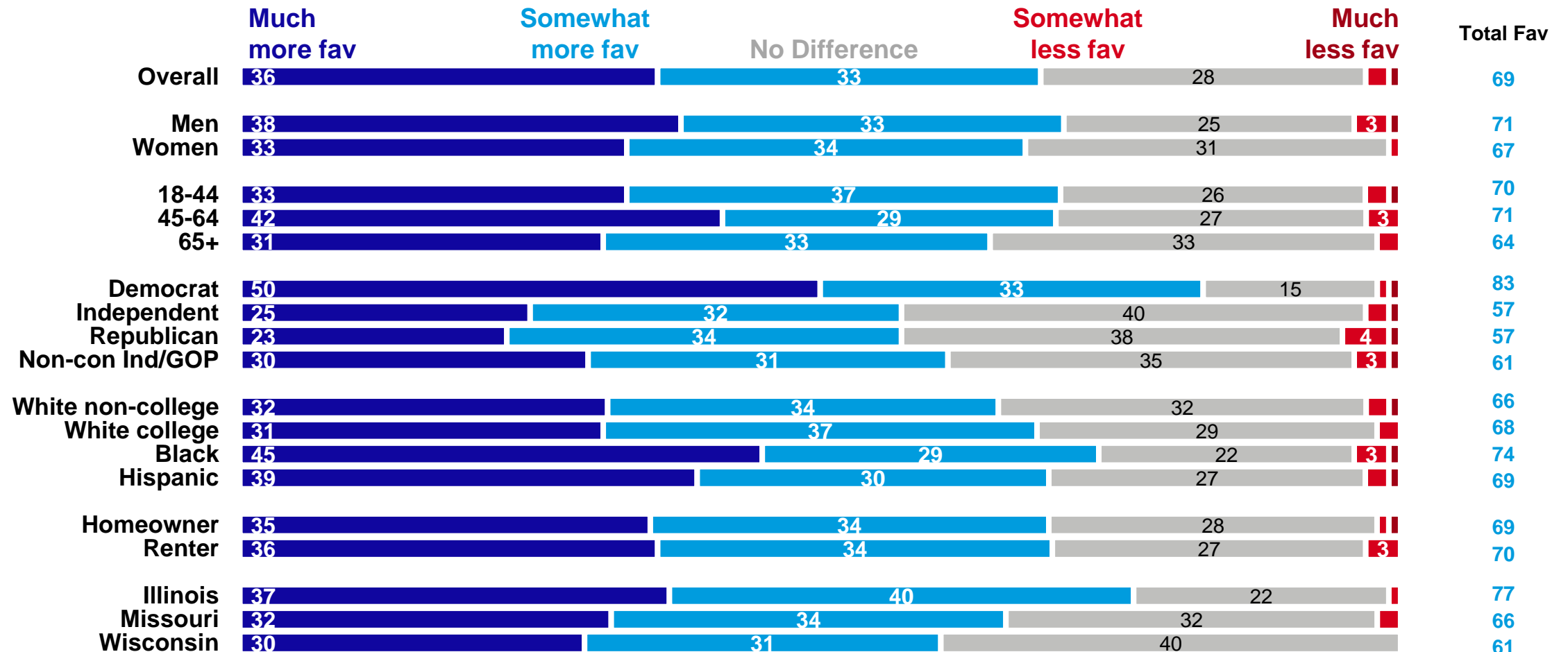
# Americans overwhelmingly support requiring water utilities to replace all lead pipes in the next 10 years; This is true across demographic groups and across key states

Do you support or oppose updating a rule from the Environmental Protection Agency that would require water utilities to replace all of their lead pipes within the next 10 years?

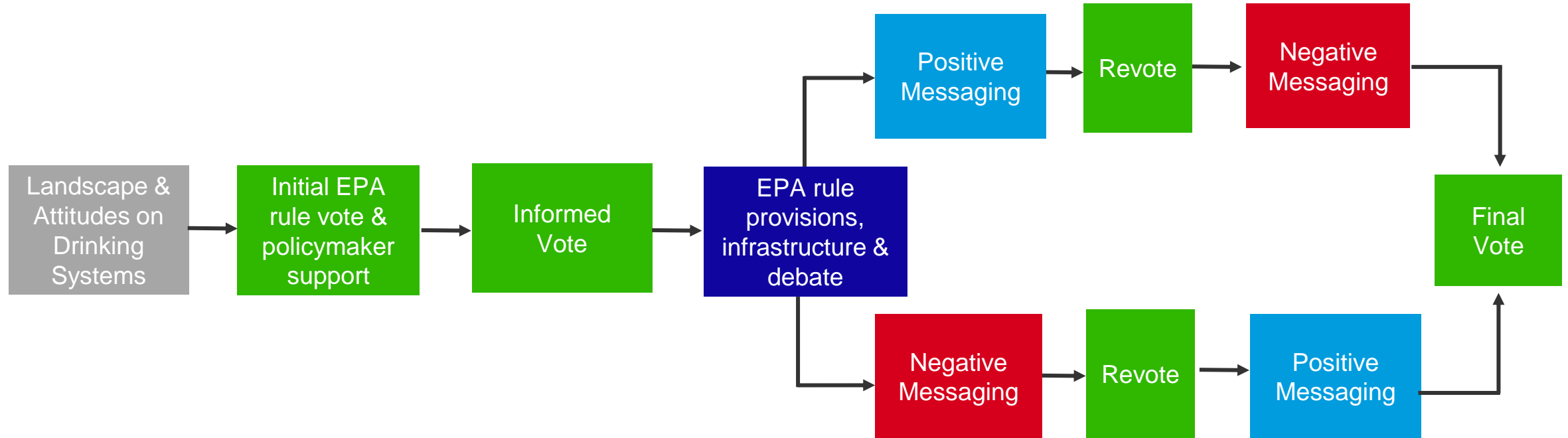


# Support for the EPA rule is politically popular– even among traditionally unfriendly groups like Republicans

Would you have a more or less favorable opinion towards a policymaker who supports an EPA rule that requires water utilities to replace all of their lead pipes in the next 10 years or less?



# Survey Structure





# Hispanics, Younger people (especially younger men), renters, and white Democrats are more likely to be swing

## Nationwide Policymaker Targets



### Base

Always much more favorable toward a policymaker who supports revised EPA rule

**Democrats (38% are base)**

**Black (35%)**

- Black men (44%)\*

**45-64 (32%)**

**College men (31%)**

**Urban (30%)**

### Swing

Everyone else

**Hispanic (58% are swing)**

**18-44 (57%)**

- Men 18-44 (57%)

**Non-college Men (56%)**

**GOP Men (55%)**

**HH income of \$60-100k (56%)**

**White Democrats (55%)**

**Renters (54%)**

### Non-communications targets

Always no difference or somewhat/much less favorable toward a policymaker who supports revised EPA rule

**Independents (35% are non-comm)**

- Non-conservative independents (36%)

**Republicans (32%)**

- GOP women (35%)
- Conservative GOP (36%)

**55+ (27%)**

- 65+ (28%)
- Men 55+ (30%)
- White Americans 55+ (31%)

**Non-college women (27%)**

# Strong support for updating the EPA rule grows with Republicans and within target states after brief background on lead pipes; Strong support increases the most among Hispanics

## Informed Support or Oppose

Three decades ago, Congress banned the installment of lead water pipes, but allowed existing lead pipes to remain in use. Today, as many as 12 million lead pipes still carry drinking water to millions of homes every day. The EPA – which is responsible for ensuring safe drinking water across the country – currently has a rule that allows most lead pipes to remain in use, and gives the most lead-contaminated water utilities more than 30 years to replace their lead pipes. However, there is a proposal to update the current lead rule that would require all lead pipes to be replaced by water utilities in the next 10 years.

	Strongly support		Change		Strongly support		Change
	Initial	Informed	Initial to Informed		Initial	Informed	Initial to Informed
<b>Overall</b>	55	56	+1	<b>Overall</b>	55	56	+1
<b>Men</b>	55	55	0	<b>White non-college</b>	55	55	0
<b>Women</b>	54	57	+3	<b>White college</b>	51	52	+1
<b>18-44</b>	55	52	-3	<b>Black</b>	58	56	-2
<b>45-64</b>	56	63	+7	<b>Hispanic</b>	46	57	+11
<b>65+</b>	53	52	-1	<b>Illinois</b>	56	57	+1
<b>Democrats</b>	68	68	0	<b>Missouri</b>	50	57	+7
<b>Independents</b>	43	43	0	<b>Wisconsin</b>	45	50	+5
<b>Republicans</b>	43	46	+3				
<b>Non-con Ind/GOP</b>	48	51	+3				

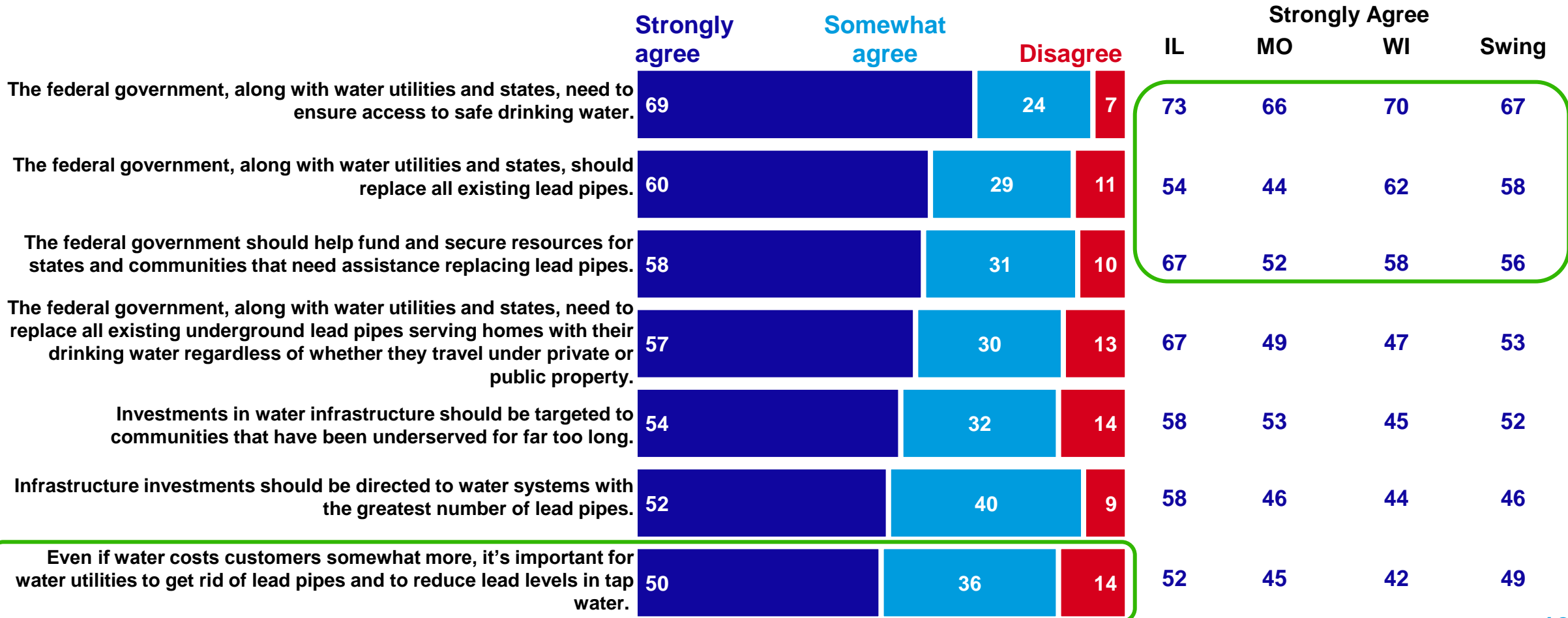
Potential provisions in a revised EPA rule are widely supported, including strong support from majorities of Americans requiring water utilities to replace all lead pipes at a rate of 10% per year and on both private and public property

Potential EPA Rule Provisions

	Support	Oppose	IL	MO	WI	Swing
Water utilities should be required to rigorously monitor lead levels in areas that are at high-risk for lead exposure.	95 71% Strongly Support	5	72	67	70	69
Water utilities should be required to ensure that no one's tap water has an unsafe level of lead.	94 71% Strongly Support	6	74	69	67	70
Water utilities should be required to treat their water in ways that will reduce the amount of lead contamination in water.	94 68% Strongly Support	6	76	67	62	67
Water utilities should institute water sampling protocols that fully capture lead levels in tap water and should be banned from using methods that minimize detections of lead.	94 66% Strongly Support	6	72	64	66	63
Water utilities should be required to identify and disclose all lead pipes that are currently in use.	93 68% Strongly Support	7	76	62	67	65
Water utilities should be required to replace lead pipes at a rate of at least 10% per year.	91 56% Strongly Support	9	58	53	52	53
Water utilities should help schools and daycare centers install water filters to remove lead in their drinking water.	90 64% Strongly Support	10	72	63	65	63
Water utilities should be required to fully replace all lead pipes on public and private property.	88 58% Strongly Support	12	67	50	50	55
Water utilities should fund the full cost of replacing all lead pipes.	84 54% Strongly Support	16	50	40	44	49

# There is near universal support for Federal government intervention on lead pipe replacement

## Water infrastructure policies – Agree or Disagree



# **Messaging and Movement**

# Negative health impacts on children and framing access to safe drinking water as a human right is very convincing at driving additional support to an updated EPA rule – especially with swing targets

## Positive Messaging

NW Swing IL MO WI

*% very convincing*

-	-	68	-	-	<b>[LOCAL – IL]</b> Illinois has more lead pipes than any other state in the nation. This means that families and children are more at risk of exposure to unsafe drinking water than anywhere else in the country – in fact, studies show that nearly 700,000 or more homes in Illinois are served by lead pipes, putting children and families at risk. Many of the Illinois residents may not even suspect their tap water could be contaminated with lead and elected officials have not made significant progress toward fixing this problem.
66	67	67	63	64	<b>[CHILDREN]</b> Young children are especially vulnerable to lead. A dose of lead that would have little effect on an adult can have a significant effect on a child. In children, low levels of lead exposure have been linked to brain damage, learning disabilities, slowed growth, lower IQ, and impaired hearing. In fact, more than half a million children in the U.S. have elevated levels of lead in their blood.
64	65	64	56	58	<b>[HUMAN RIGHT]</b> Safe drinking water is a basic human right. No person in America should be forced to drink or cook with poisoned water that exposes them to severe health risks. While other countries have established more rigorous limits on lead levels in their water, U.S. policymakers have failed to protect Americans from excessive lead exposure.
-	-	59	-	-	<b>[LOCAL - CHICAGO]</b> Illinois has more lead pipes than any other state in the nation and elected officials have not made significant progress toward fixing this problem. In two years, the city of Chicago has replaced less than one tenth of one percent of the 400,000 lead pipes despite other cities with similar lead problems replacing their lead pipes at a much faster rate.
57	57	59	51	55	<b>[HEALTH]</b> Studies show there is no safe level of lead in drinking water. Today, lead pipes expose millions of Americans to long-term serious health risks – including cardiovascular complications, decreased kidney function, and reproductive problems in both men and women.
-	-	-	57	-	<b>[LOCAL - MO]</b> Missouri has the fourth-highest number of lead pipes per capita in the U.S. with an estimated 330,000 or more lead pipes carrying drinking water to Missourians daily – many of whom may not suspect their tap water could be contaminated with lead and elected officials have not made significant progress toward fixing this problem.
56	54	65	50	50	<b>[NO SHORTCUTS]</b> Safe drinking water is a basic human right. No person in America should be forced to drink or cook with poisoned water that exposes them to severe health risks. While other countries have established more rigorous limits on lead levels in their water, U.S. policymakers have failed to protect Americans from excessive lead exposure.
55	56	56	50	52	<b>[EQUALITY/JUSTICE]</b> Communities of color and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by contaminated water that results from outdated, inadequate, or failing infrastructure. Access to safe drinking water should not be a privilege for the few. No one should have to suffer from lead contamination and the severe health risks it causes just because they live in the wrong zip code
52	50	50	55	42	<b>[EPA LIMITS]</b> The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for ensuring safe drinking water across the country, but the EPA's current rule on lead in water falls short. The U.S. rule sets no maximum amount of lead exposure allowed from tap water, unlike many other industrialized nations, and studies show that lead levels in many Americans' drinking water needs to be sharply lower to prevent lead poisoning among young children.
-	-	-	-	52	<b>[LOCAL - WI]</b> Wisconsin has the highest number of lead pipes per capita in the U.S. with an estimated 329,000 or more lead pipes carrying drinking water to Wisconsinites daily – many of whom may not suspect their tap water could be contaminated with lead and elected officials have not made significant progress toward fixing this problem.

# Messaging highlighting the negative financial impacts of updating the EPA rule raises concerns, but support remains high – even with swing targets

## Does this statement raise concerns for you about the proposal?

Access to safe water is important, but we already have rules in place to monitor lead levels and replace pipes that cause danger. Requiring water utilities to replace all existing pipes regardless of location or lead exposure is unnecessary, inefficient, and expensive. **Water utilities that we rely on will go bankrupt** in the process and those that don't will be forced to **raise prices on consumers** – leading to skyrocketing water bills. This is just another example of **burdensome and underfunded government mandates that will harm taxpayers and raise prices on American families.**

	NW	Swing	IL	MO	WI
			% raises concerns		
	86	92	89	90	90

## Re-Vote After Either Positive or Negative Messaging

	Support	Oppose	Swing	Total Support		
				IL	MO	WI
Informed vote	93	7	98	91	94	89
Re-vote: heard positives only	92	8	98	97	90	94
Re-vote: heard negatives only	83	17	87	77	85	80



# Still, Americans are not easily swayed by threats of rising costs

## [RISING COST] Thinking about the proposed rule you read about who do you agree with more?

Supporters of the proposal who say access to safe drinking water is a basic human right. They say no person in America should be forced to drink contaminated water that exposes them to severe health risks, and the **EPA has the responsibility to put American lives and health ahead of the costs to water utilities.**

Opponents of the proposal who say forcing water utilities to replace all lead pipes, regardless of location or levels of lead exposure, is unnecessary and **will cause many utilities to go bankrupt or raise prices on consumers.**

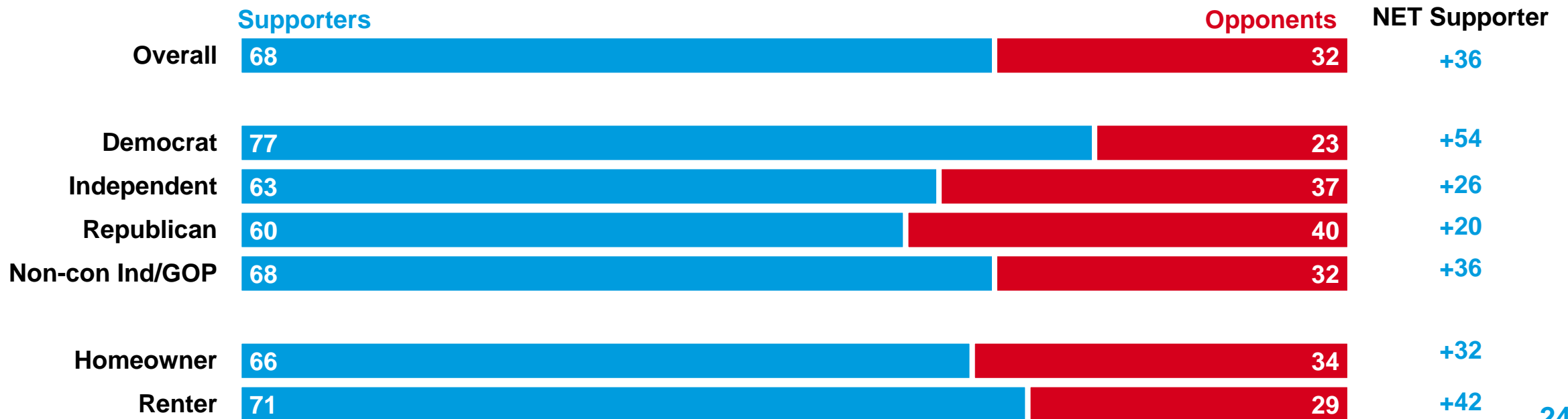


# There is a clear sense of urgency to replace lead pipes and timing to replace lead pipes in the current rule falls short

## [TIMING] Thinking about the proposed rule you read about who do you agree with more?

Supporters of the proposal say U.S. water infrastructure is outdated and no American should have to face severe health risks from water contaminated by lead pipes. They say the current EPA rule, which allows utilities to leave most lead pipes in use and lets highly lead-contaminated systems more than **30 years of continued lead pipe use, falls short. We need a better plan that will solve this issue sooner.**

Opponents of the proposal say access to safe water is important, but **we already have a rule in place that will replace lead pipes** if they are found to cause ongoing lead contamination above the EPA's acceptable level. **They say the current rule puts the U.S. on a path to safe water for all** without overburdensome government regulations and unnecessary costs.



# Americans believe lead pipes replacement is the responsibility of water utilities

[UTILITY] Thinking about the proposed rule you read about who do you agree with more?

Supporters of the proposal who say that *it was the water utilities who installed or approved of these lead pipes years ago, and it should be their responsibility to pay for replacing them.*

Opponents of the proposal who say *forcing water utilities to replace all lead pipes, regardless of location or levels of lead exposure, is unnecessary and will cause many utilities to go bankrupt or raise prices on consumers.*



# Private property is not an issue that turns back opinions; In fact, messaging is the strongest among even the most conservative groups

## [PRIVATE PROPERTY] Thinking about the proposed rule you read about who do you agree with more?

Supporters of the proposal who say that exposure to lead poses serious health risks that cannot be ignored, and that's why any lead pipe replacement plan should pay for 100% of the cost to replace the lead pipes providing water to homes, **no matter whether the pipes are under public property or under someone's front yard**. Otherwise, low-income families and people who rent will still have to drink water from these lead pipes.

Opponents of the proposal who say replacing all lead pipes will burden water utilities, **and that they shouldn't be required to remove the part of a lead service line that is under private property** or under someone's front yard – they say individual homeowners should pay for that.

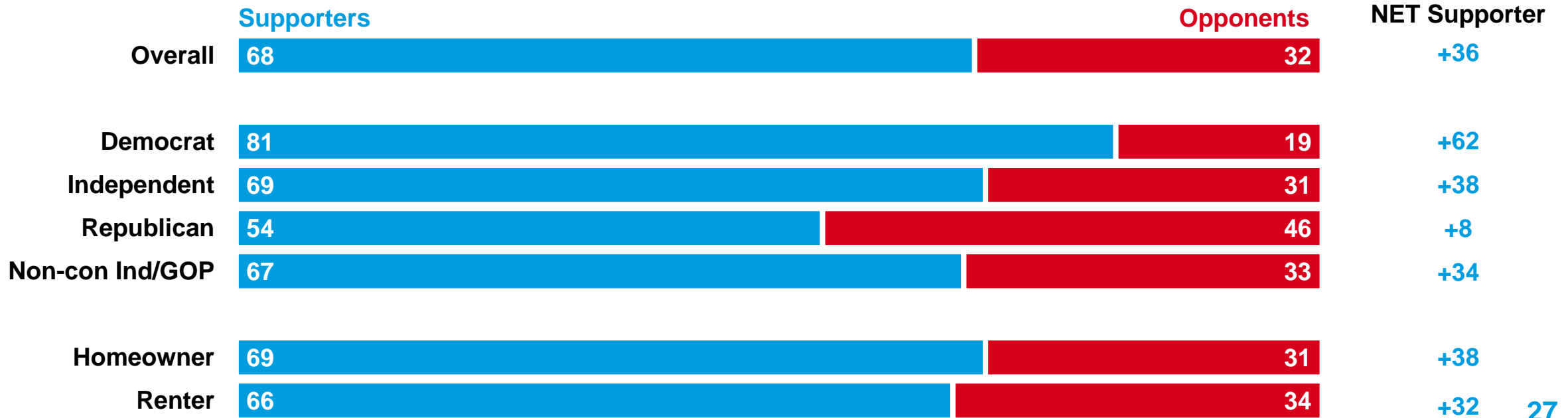


# While still net positive, we begin to lose Republicans when we talk about environmental justice communities

## [JUSTICE] Thinking about the proposed rule you read about who do you agree with more?

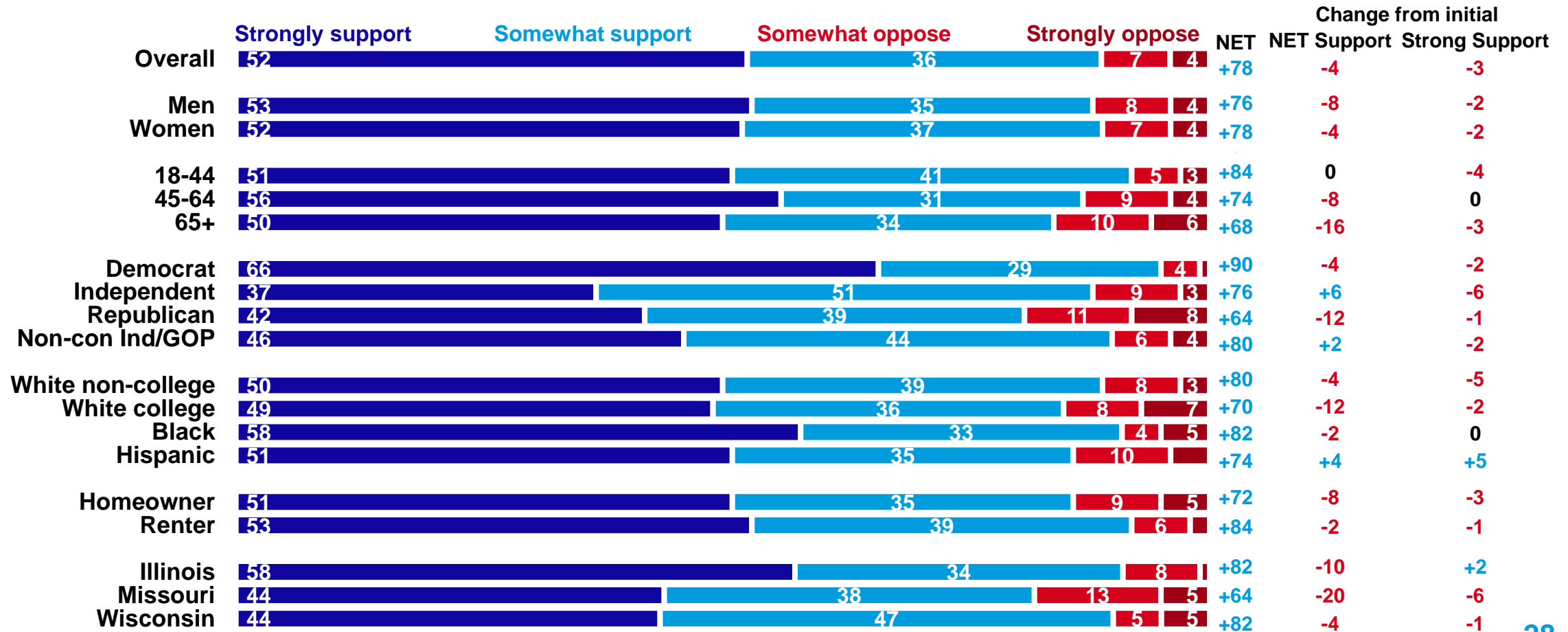
Supporters of the proposal who say U.S. water infrastructure is severely outdated, especially in low-income areas and communities of color who are disproportionately impacted by contaminated water. They say **access to safe drinking water should not be determined by how much money someone makes.**

Opponents of the proposal say access to safe water is important, but we **already have a rule in place** that will replace lead pipes if they are shown to cause lead contamination in excess of the EPA's acceptable level. This proposal is simply a **radical transfer of wealth from working Americans to liberal ideologues who will hurt American consumers in the name of phony environmental justice.**



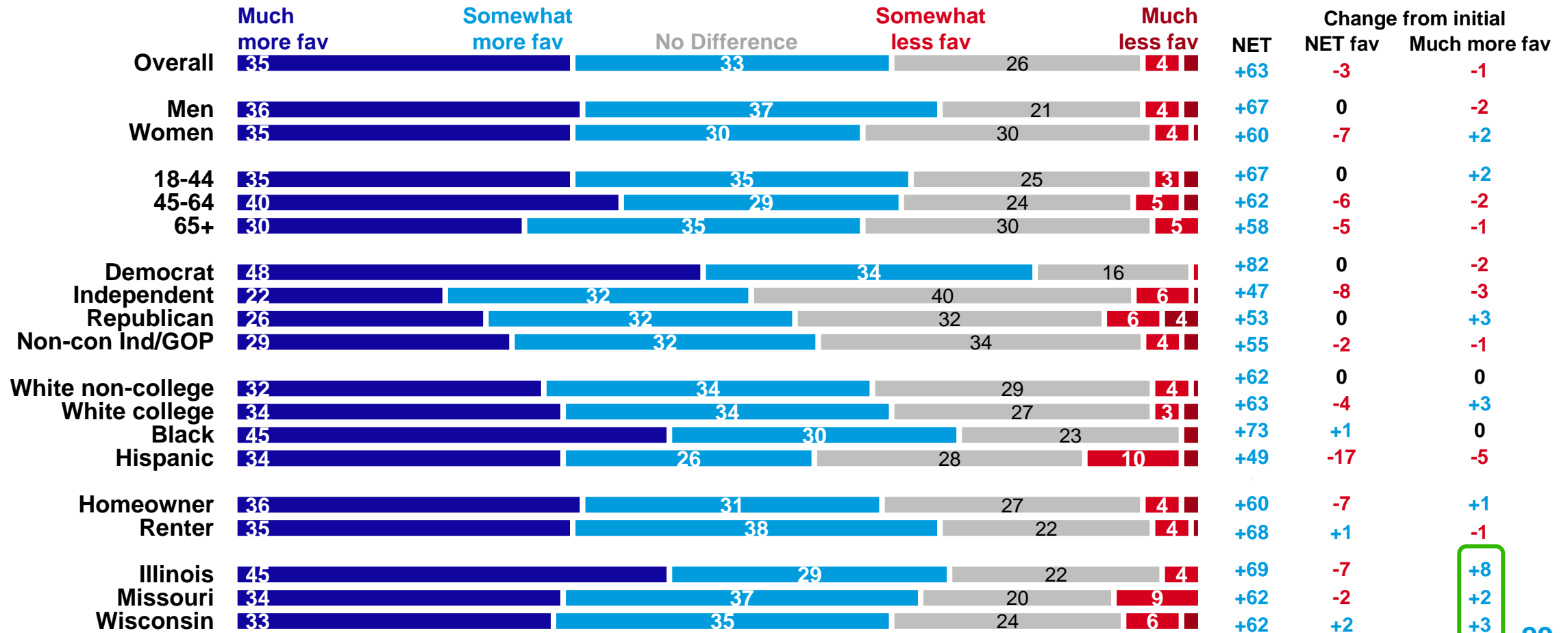
# Despite small decreases post-messaging, support for an updated EPA rule remains strong and broad across majorities of demographic groups

Do you support or oppose updating a rule from the Environmental Protection Agency that would require water utilities to replace all of their lead pipes within the next 10 years? (FINAL)



Similarly, Americans maintain favoritism for policymakers who will support an updated EPA rule to replace all lead pipes in the next 10 years; Intensity grows in each of the target states

Would you have a more or less favorable opinion towards a policymaker who supports an EPA rule that requires water utilities to replace all of their lead pipes in the next 10 years or less?





# Conclusions & Recommendations

# Conclusions and Recommendations

**In persuasion efforts, lead with the negative health impacts on children and frame access to safe drinking water as a human right. When possible, localize the message to increase the sense of threat.**

- Both the negative impacts lead poses on child health and themes that safe drinking water is a basic human right were very convincing at driving additional support to (the already widely-supported) updated rule – this is especially true with swing targets.
- Localized messages in Illinois and Missouri were either the top or second-top testing message when it comes to driving support for the EPA rule. In Illinois, focus on state-level statistics rather than mismanagement of the issue in Chicago specifically.

**When communicating to policymakers, demonstrate the broad and unwavering support for the proposal itself in conjunction with evidence that Americans will view them more favorably for supporting an updated rule.**

- Ensuring access to safe drinking water for all Americans is seen as the second highest ranking priority for Americans nationwide – tied with crime, which should be a striking data point for policymakers.
- Updating the EPA rule has overwhelming support throughout the survey – even with independents and Republicans.
- Moreover, there is near universal support for federal government intervention on lead pipe replacement and potential provisions in a revised EPA rule are widely supported – including strong support from majorities of Americans requiring water utilities to replace ALL lead pipes, doing so at a rate of at least 10% per year, and regardless of whether pipes are on public or private property.
- On the core debate issues – around timing, costs, private vs. public property, environmental justice – supporters of the proposal win the debate against opponents in each scenario. At no point in the survey did support for an updated EPA rule drop below 83% -- and after both positive and negative messaging, support for the plan was at net +78 and favorability towards policymakers who support the plan was at net +66 – making this a winning issue for policymakers.

# Quick Hits: Making the Case

## With American Public

- ✓ Safe drinking water is a basic human right. No person in America should be forced to drink or cook with poisoned water that exposes them to severe health risks. While other countries have established more rigorous limits on lead levels in their water, U.S. policymakers have failed to protect Americans from excessive lead exposure.
- ✓ Young children are especially vulnerable to lead. A dose of lead that would have little effect on an adult can have a significant effect on a child. In children, low levels of lead exposure have been linked to brain damage, learning disabilities, slowed growth, lower IQ, and impaired hearing. In fact, more than half a million children in the U.S. have elevated levels of lead in their blood.
- ✓ [State] has the [X]-highest number of lead pipes per capita in the U.S. with an estimated [XX] or more lead pipes carrying drinking water to [State residents] daily – many of whom may not suspect their tap water could be contaminated with lead and elected officials have not made significant progress toward fixing this problem.

## With Policymakers

- ✓ Across the nation, Americans overwhelmingly support updating the EPA's lead and copper rule to require water utilities to replace ALL lead pipes in the next 10 years.
- ✓ This is not a partisan issue! More than 4 in 5 Democrats, independents, and Republicans support this effort.
- ✓ Nearly every potential provision in an updated rule has universal support, including fully replacing all lead pipes on public and private property, and at a rate of at least 10% per year.
- ✓ Policymakers who push this through stand to benefit as majorities of Americans across party, race, and age will have a more favorable opinion for those who support updating the rule.
- ✓ The risk for blowback is incredibly low. Supporters win all major debate issues and even in a scenario where opponents of the plan have a communication advantage, support never drops below 4 in 5.

# Thank You

New York

Washington, DC

Hartford

Chicago

Denver

Seattle