



Town-wide Governance Survey

Sharon Governance Committee

Final Report

August 31, 2022

Background

Survey conducted on-line and on paper in July and August 2022, promoted via Town emails, postcards to every residence, Facebook groups and other social media.

Sample size: n = 1,241 Sharon residents, ages 18 and older

Part 1: Executive Summary

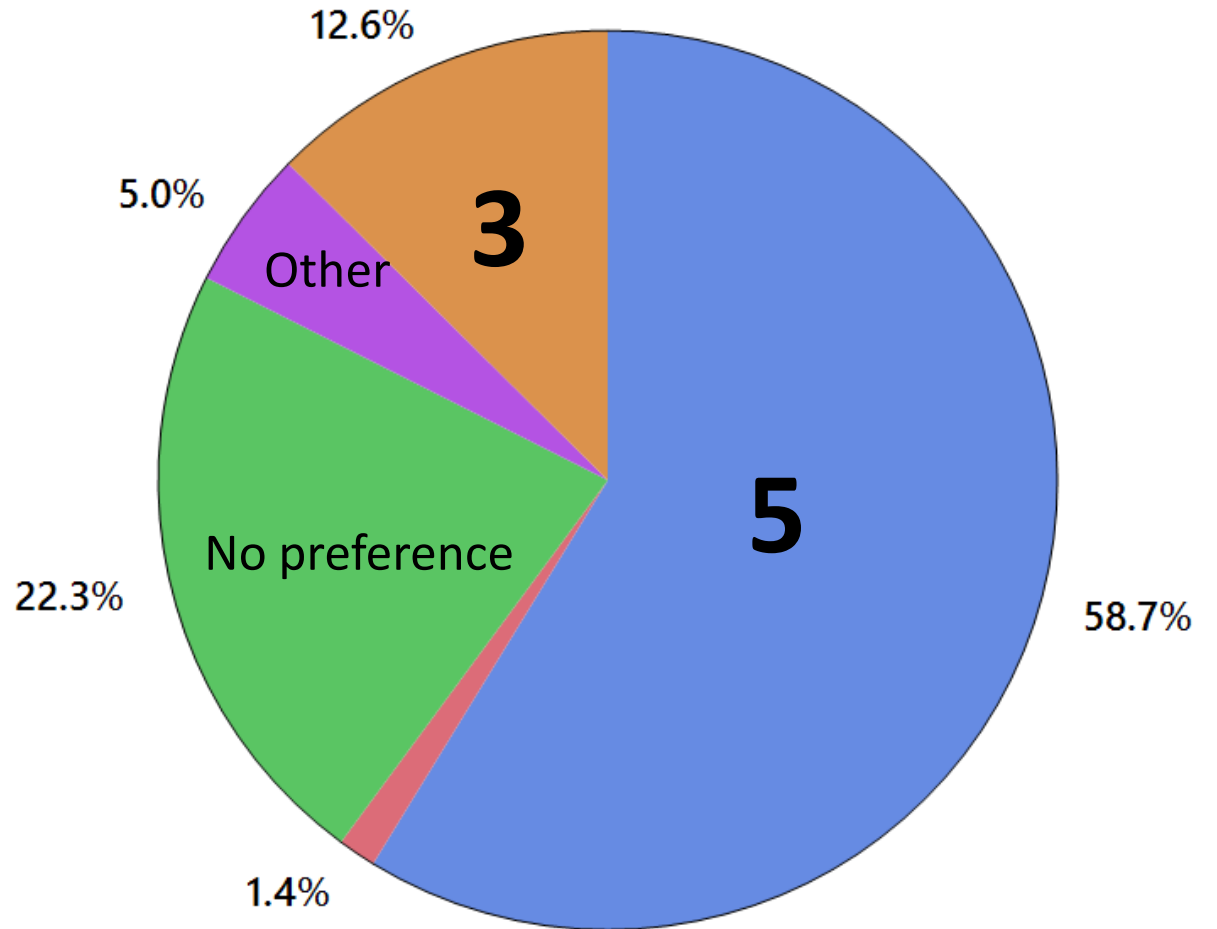
Executive Summary—3 Key Findings

- **Select Board**: A majority of respondents prefer a 5-member board
- **Form of government**: A plurality would keep the Open Town Meeting and Select Board. Slightly more favor another way of governing.
- **Noncitizen voting**: A majority of respondents favor permitting noncitizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as “green card,” refugee, other visa, etc.) to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting.

Part 2: Review of 3 Key Issues

3 Key Issues: Select Board

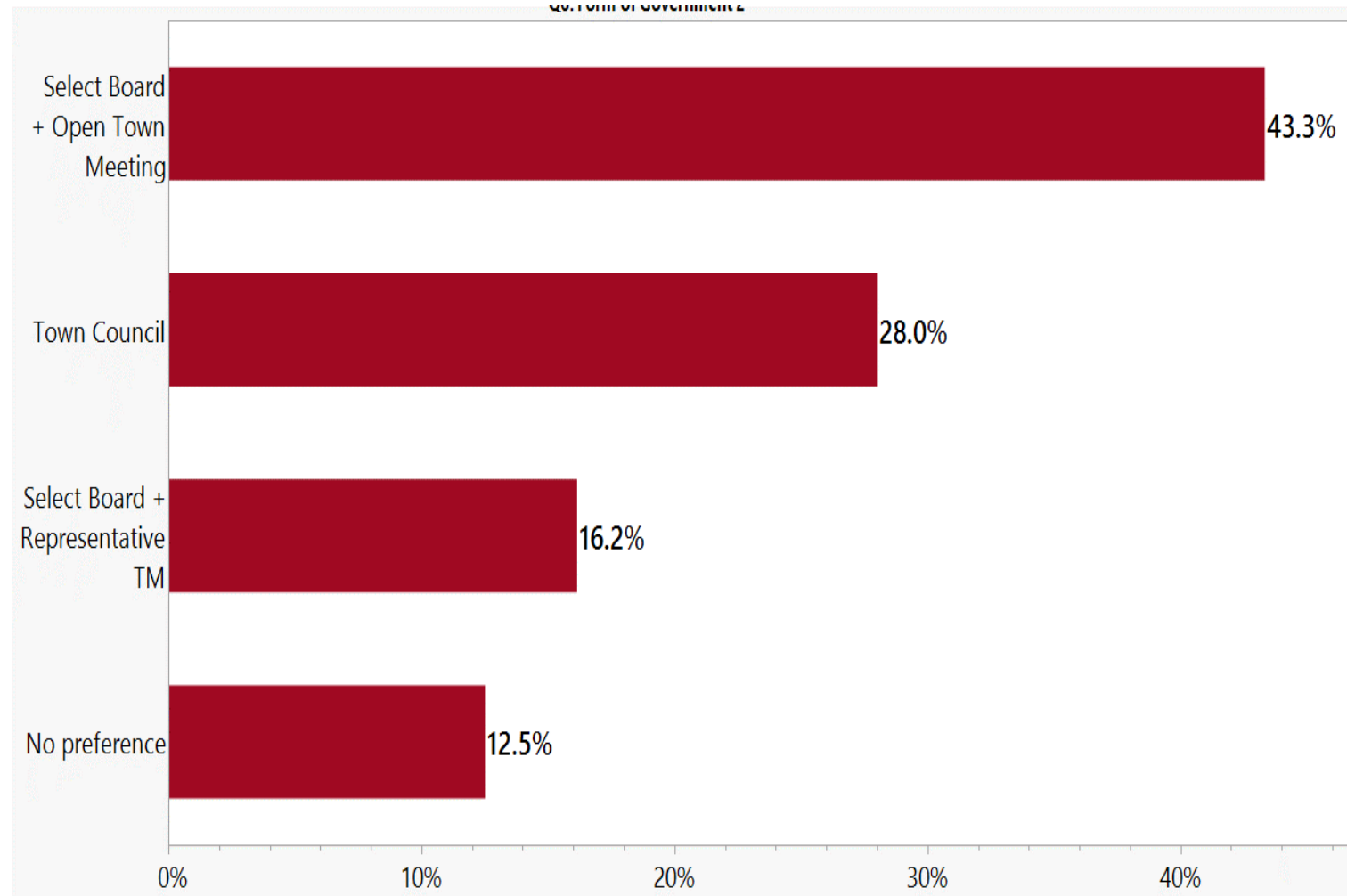
- **59%** prefer a 5-member board
- **22%** expressed no preference
- **12%** support having a 3-member board



Question 9: How many members do you think the Sharon Select Board should have?

3 Key Issues: Form of Government

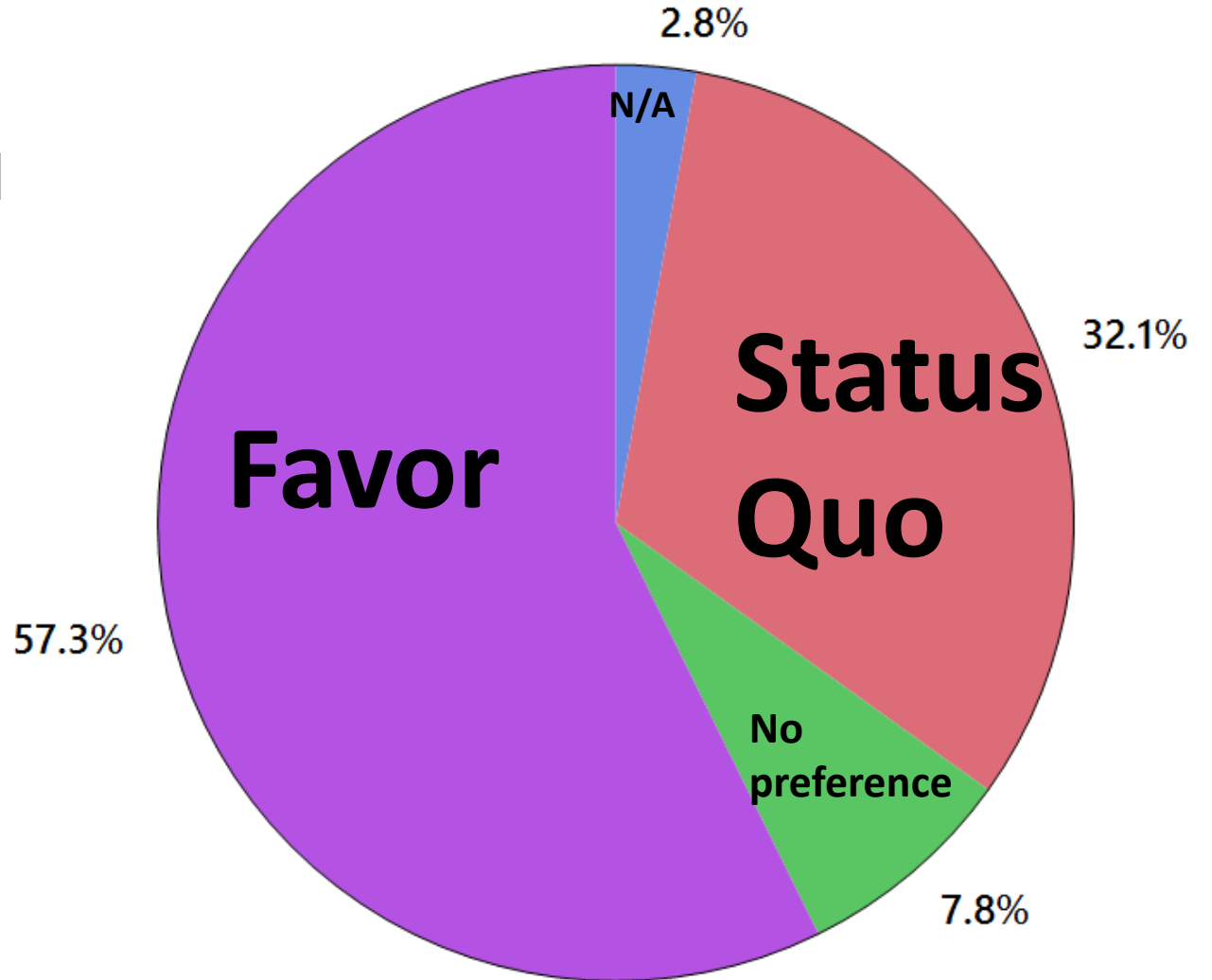
- **43%** would retain the Open Town Meeting and Select Board
- **28%** would replace the current system with a town council
- **16%** would replace the current system with a Representative Town Meeting and Select Board



Question 6: Which form of town government do you think would be best for our town of Sharon?

3 Key Issues: Noncitizen Voting

- **57%** would permit noncitizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as “green card,” refugee, other visa, etc.) to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting.
- **32%** do not support allowing noncitizens to vote in town elections (*status quo*)

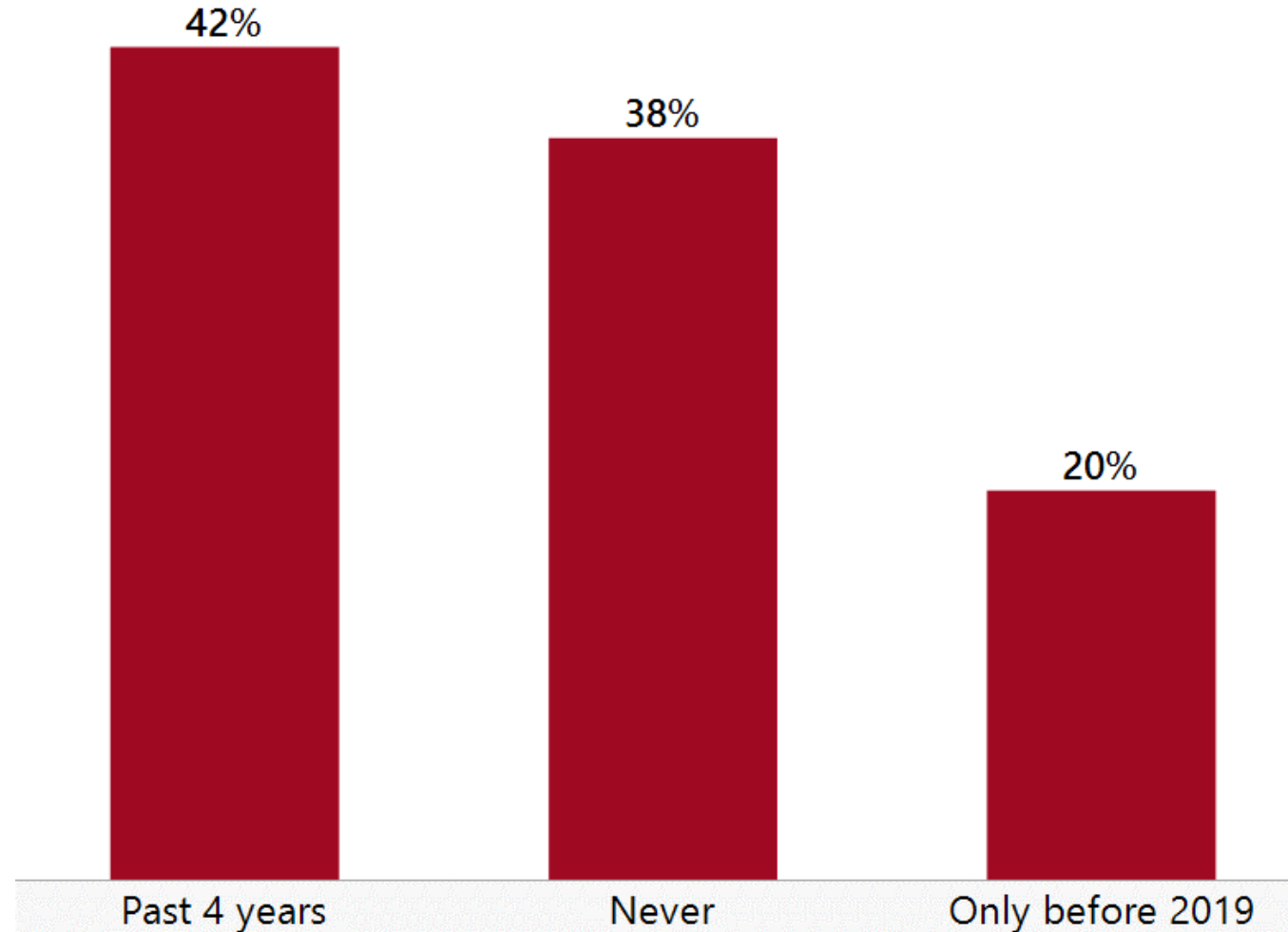


Question 10: “Should non-citizen legal residents of Sharon (with immigration status such as “green card,” refugee, other visa, etc.) be permitted to vote in town elections and at Town Meeting?”

Part 3: Town Government and Communications

Government and Communications: Going to Town Meeting

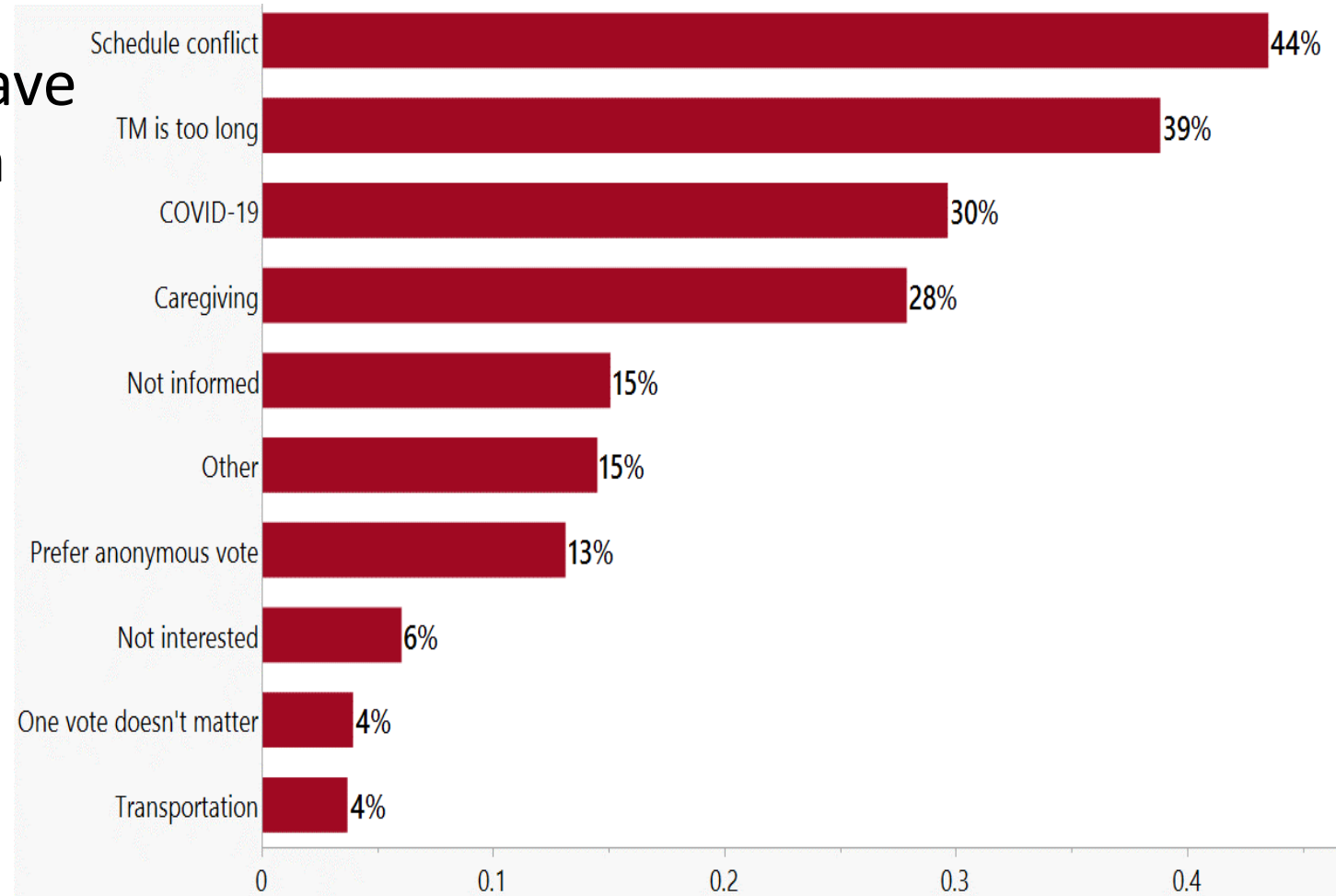
- **42%** say they've attended Town Meeting within the last 4 years
- **38%** have never attended a Town Meeting session
- **20%** attended before 2019, but not since



Question 4 asked about attendance at prior Town Meetings

Government and Communications: Barriers to Attendance

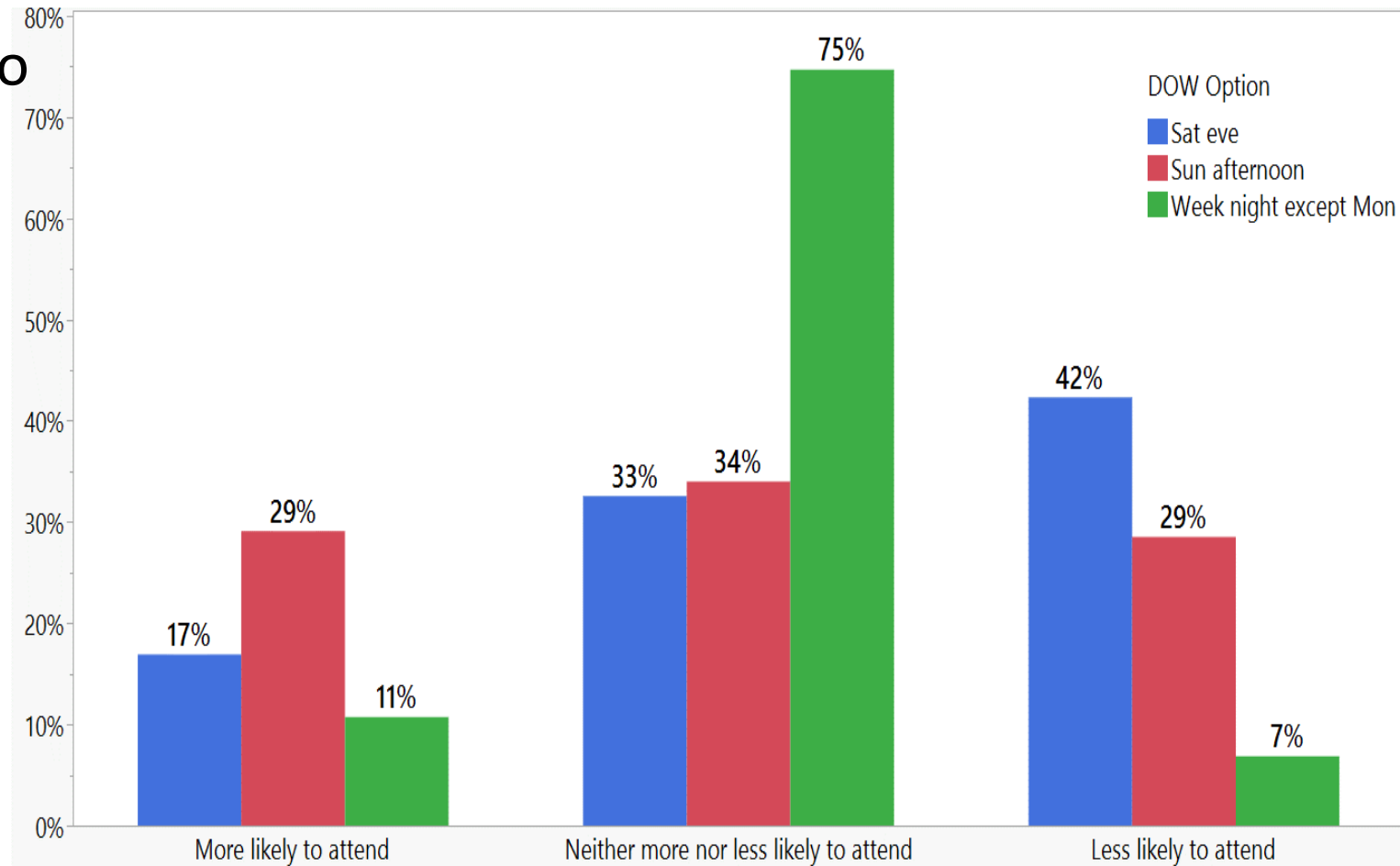
- **44%** say scheduling conflicts have kept them from attending Town Meeting
- **39%** say Town Meeting is too long
- **30%** were concerned about COVID-19
- **28%** say caregiving responsibilities were a barrier



Question 5: If you didn't attend a meeting, which of the following kept you from attending? (Check all that apply)

Government and Communications: Day of Town Meeting

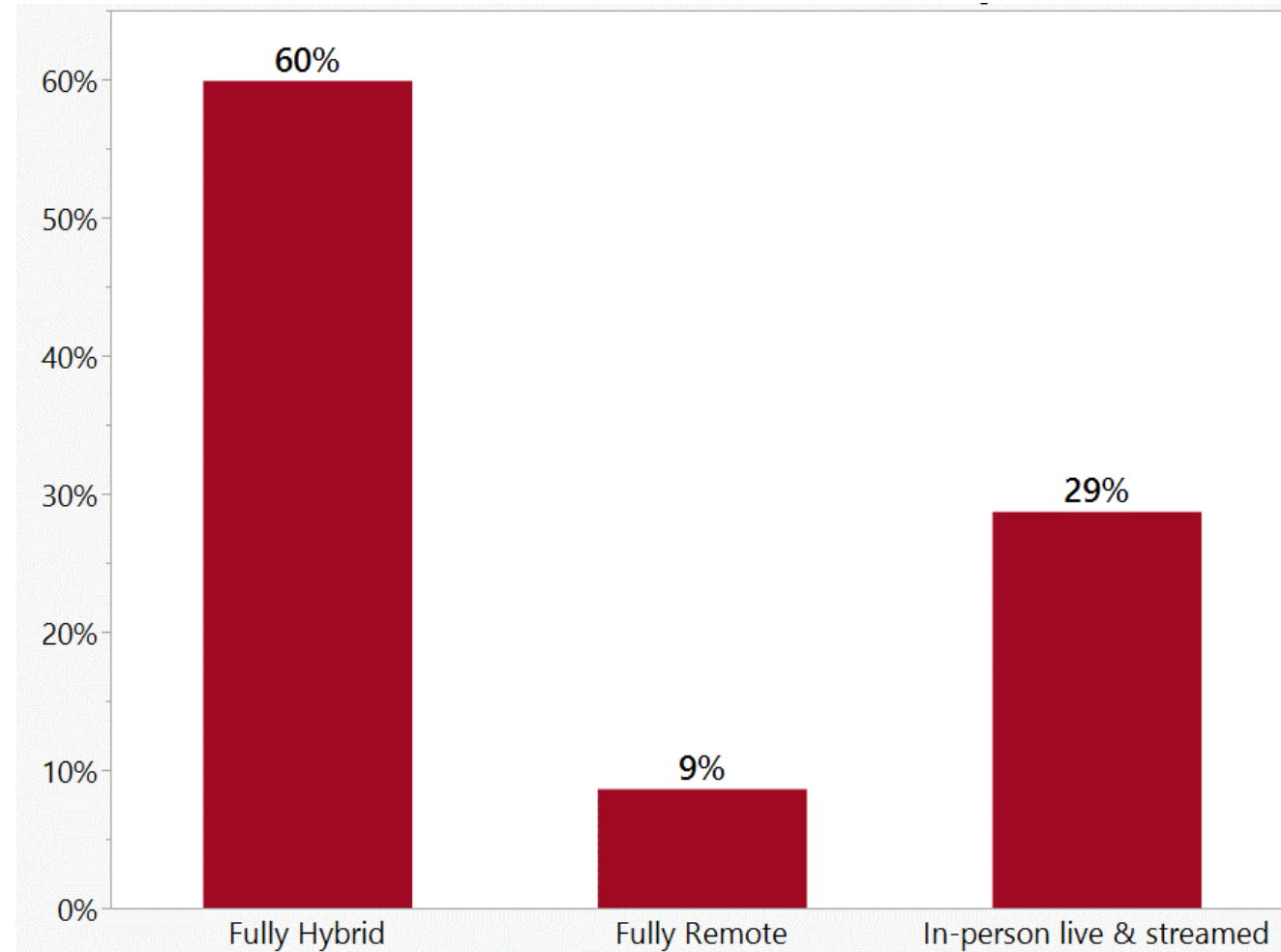
- **11%** say they'd be more likely to attend Town Meeting if it started on a weeknight other than Monday
- **17%** would be more likely to attend if Town Meeting were held on a Saturday evening
- **29%** would be more likely to attend if sessions were held on Sunday afternoons



Question 7 asked respondents about their likelihood of attendance if Town Meeting met at some time other than a Monday night

Government and Communications: Should Board Meetings Go Hybrid?

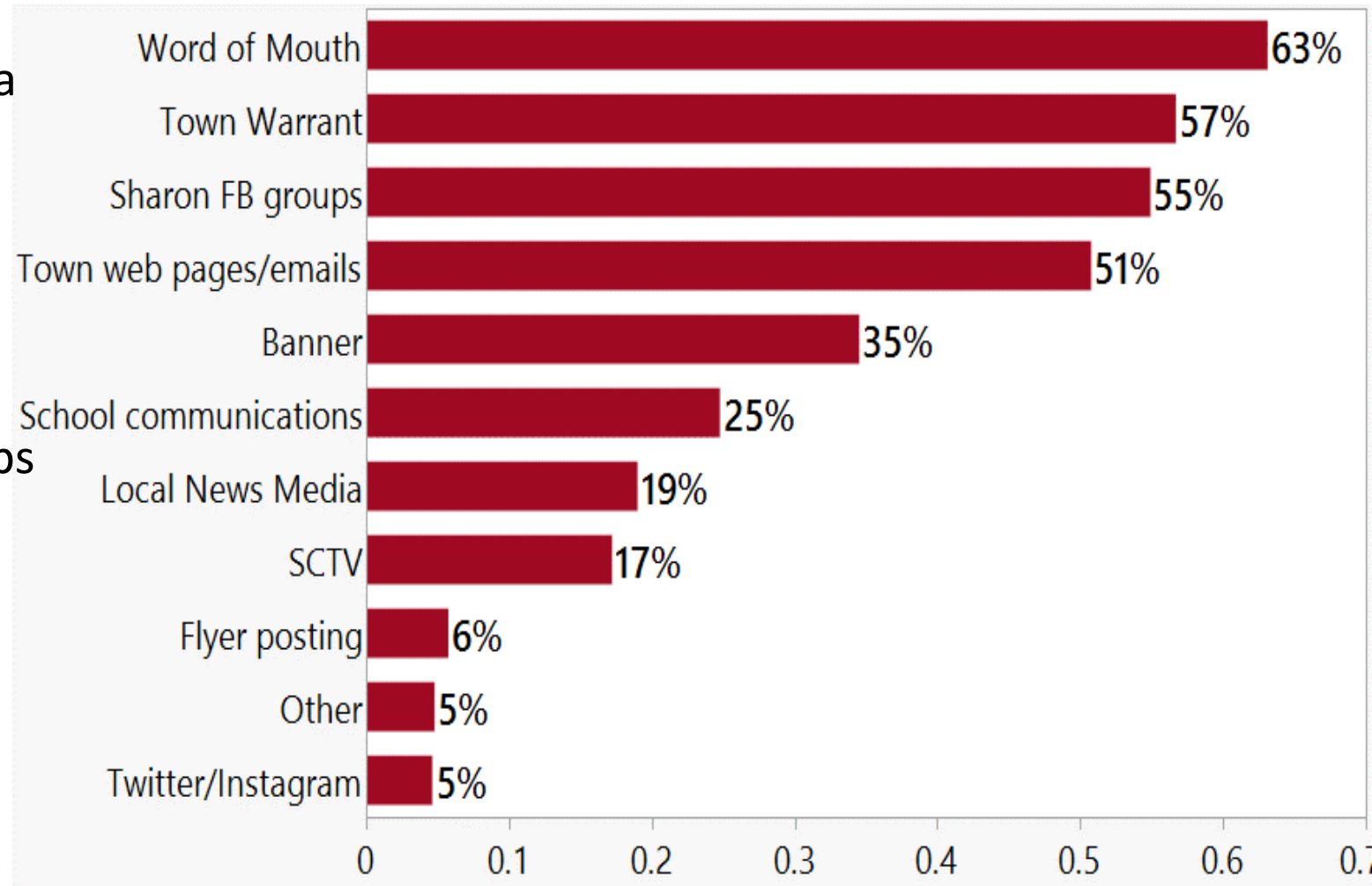
- **60%** want town boards to have hybrid meetings, with residents being able to speak from home
- **29%** -would like to town boards and committees to conduct in-person meetings, while showing the proceedings live on Sharon TV and the internet
- **9%** favor fully remote meetings with all participants online



Question 8: Would you prefer than Sharon public meetings (Select Board, School Committee, etc.) be...?

Government and Communications: Where Residents Learn About Government

- **63%** say friends and neighbors are a source of information
- **57%** learn about town government from the Town Meeting Warrant
- **55%** rely on Sharon Facebook groups
- Others get information from:
 - Town website/ emails (**51%**)
 - Banner on Main St (**35%**)
 - School communications (**25%**)



Question 2: Where do you learn about town government? (Check all that apply)

Part 4: Analysis

Analysis: Favor Open Town Meeting

- Respondents over age 47
- Long-time residents: 27 years or more
- People who have attended OTM
- Those who did not report conflicts impeding attendance

Analysis: Favor Town Council

- Residents for less than 27 years
- People ages 48 to 59
- Respondents who haven't attended town meeting in the last 4 years or who have never attended Town Meeting
- People reporting barriers to OTM participation
- Non-members (current or former) of town boards or committees

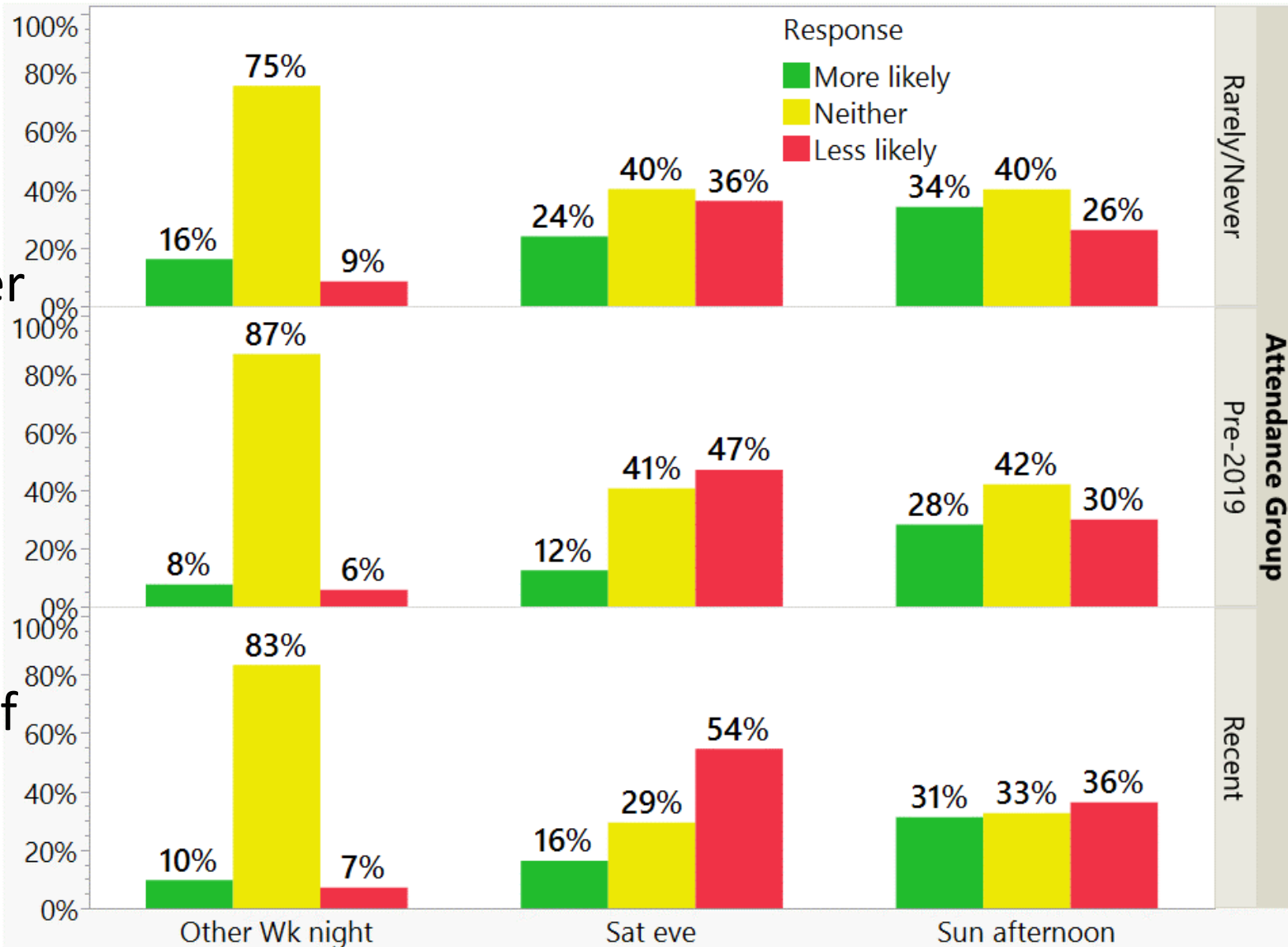
Analysis: Favor Representative Town Meeting

- Respondents ages 60+
- Respondents who've lived in Sharon 27+ years
- Current & former members of town boards or committees
- People who report barriers to OTM attendance
- People who have only attended TM before 2019

Analysis: Impact of Changing Day of Week

Do responses vary among those who rarely, sometimes, often attend?

- Patterns are similar across all 3 groups among those who responded.
- Other weeknight might encourage people who've never come
- Saturday night would discourage more than encourage.
- Sunday *might* potentially encourage more people to engage, at the risk of discouraging a larger fraction of recent attendees.

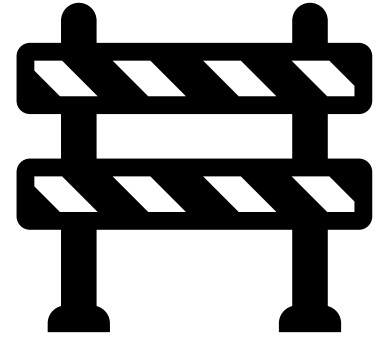


Analysis: Favor Noncitizen Legal Resident Voting

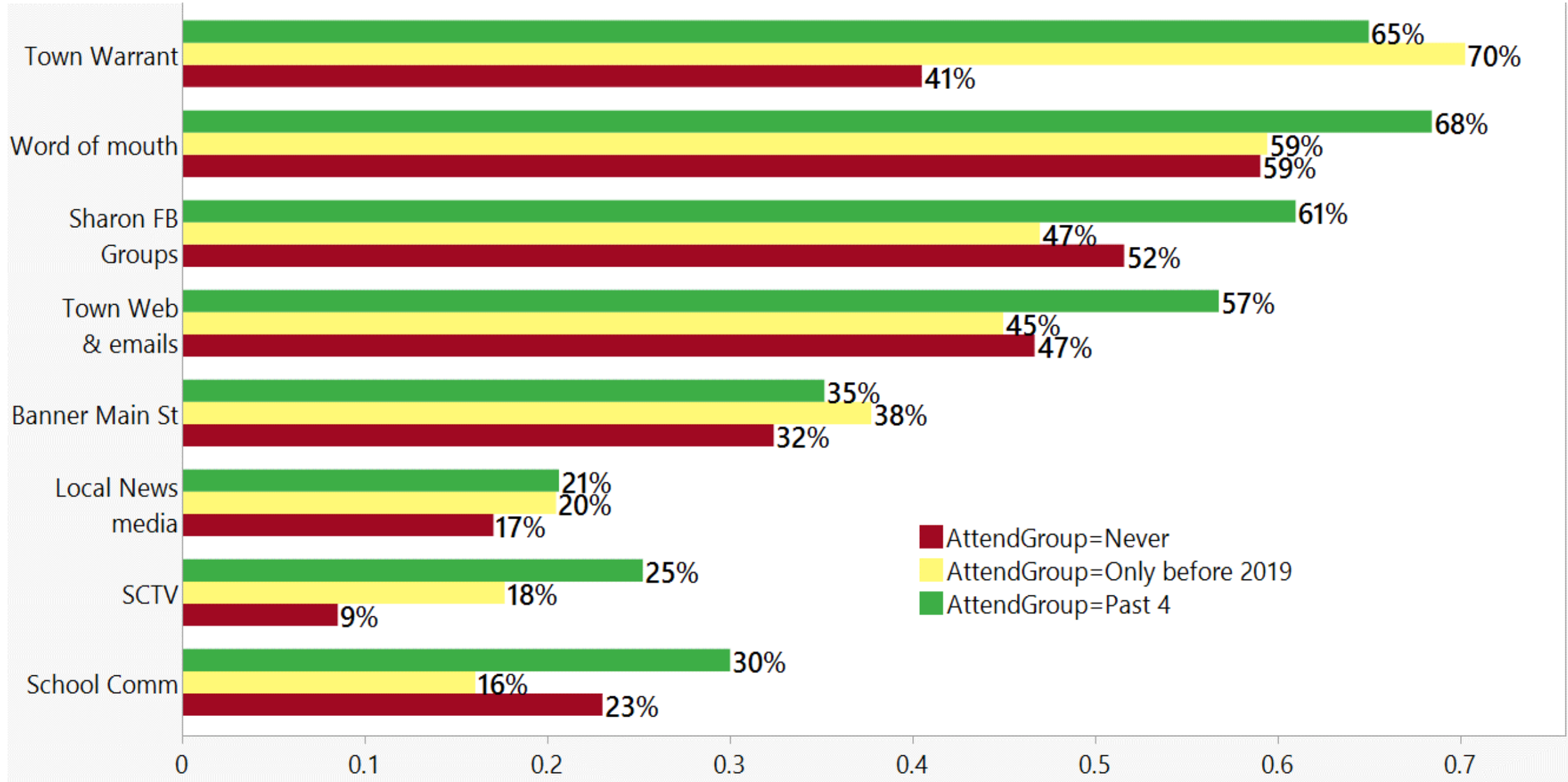
- **99%** of noncitizens
- **55%** of U.S. citizens
- Younger respondents

Analysis: Barriers to Participation

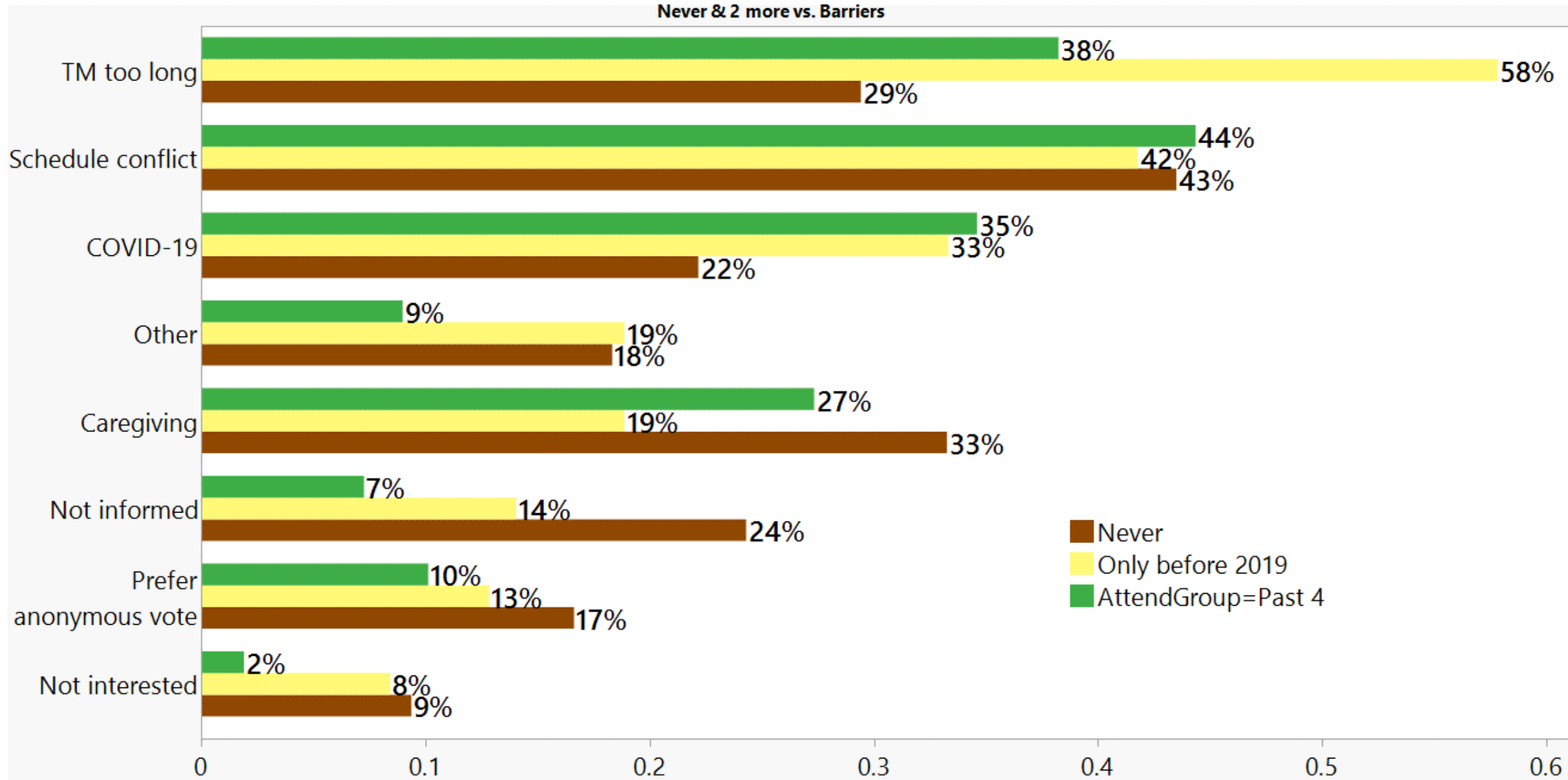
- Those identifying scheduling conflicts as an issue (44%), tend to be younger
- Those citing caregiving (28%) are more likely to identify as female, younger
- Those citing COVID-19 (30%) are more likely to identify as female
- Those citing length of Town Meeting (39%) tend to be male, registered voters who have lived in town 11 to 26 years



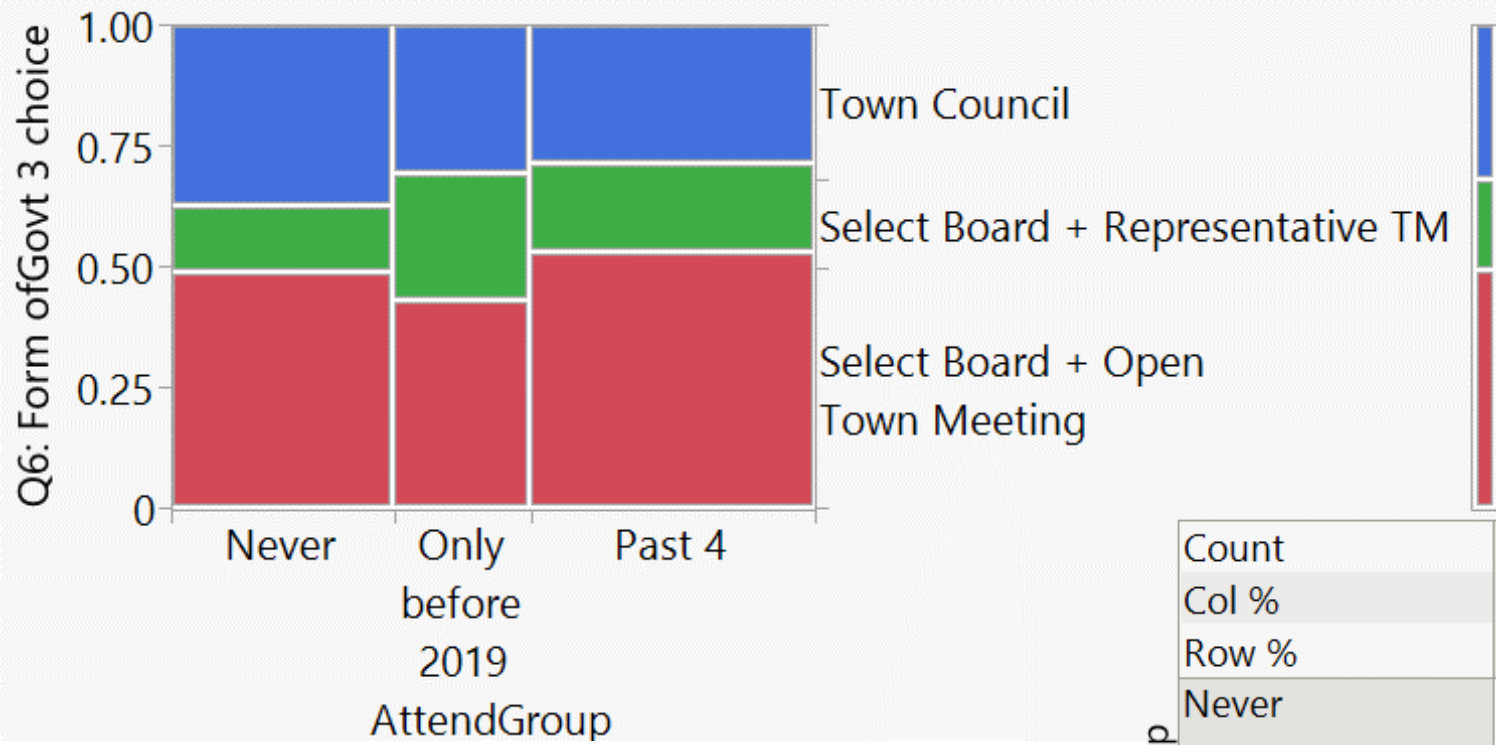
Analysis: Information Sources by attendance groups



Analysis: Barriers Reported by attendance groups



Analysis: Governance Preferences Across Attendance Groups

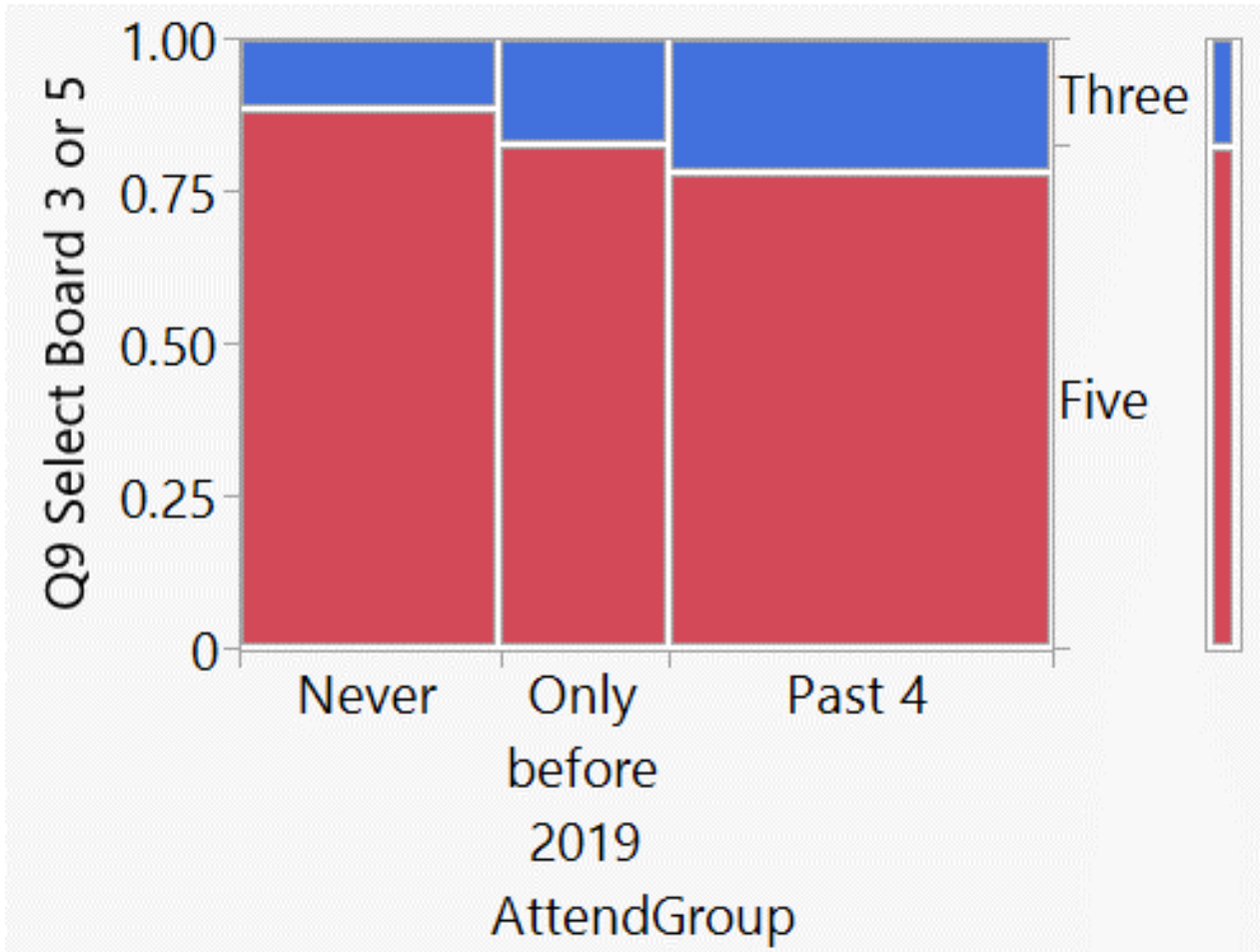


In the graphic above, the heights of the blocks are proportional to the number of people favoring each form of governance, and the widths of the blocks are proportional to the number of people in each attendance category.

Q6: Form ofGovt 3 choice

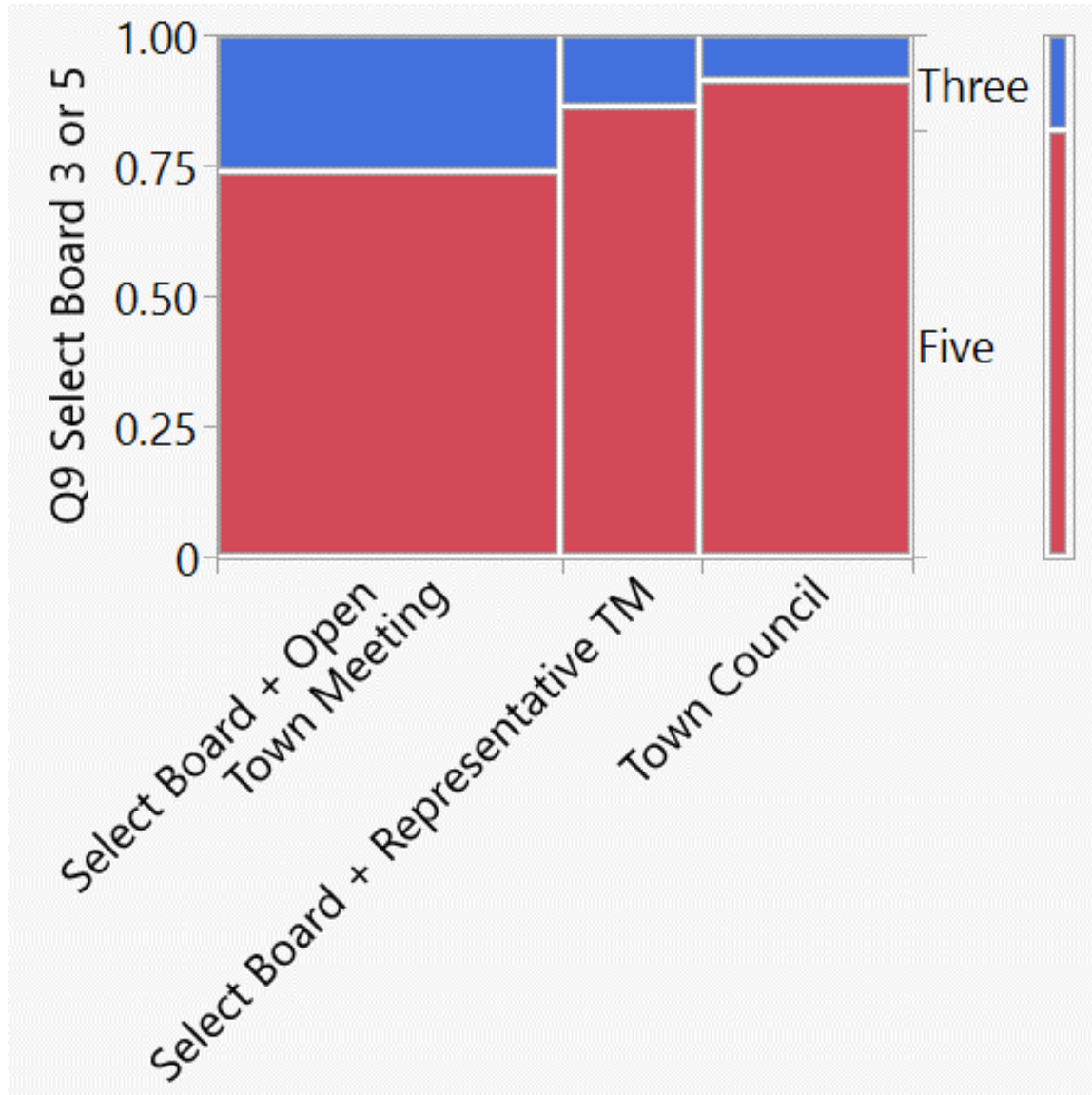
	Count	Select Board + Open Town Meeting	Select Board + Representative TM	Town Council	Total
AttendGroup	Never	179	51	136	366
		34.23	26.15	40.24	
		48.91	13.93	37.16	
AttendGroup	Only before 2019	97	58	69	224
		18.55	29.74	20.41	
		43.30	25.89	30.80	
AttendGroup	Past 4	247	86	133	466
		47.23	44.10	39.35	
		53.00	18.45	28.54	
Total	523	195	338	1056	

Analysis: Select Board Size preferences Across Attendance Groups



Q9 Select Board 3 or 5				
AttendGroup	Count	Five	Three	Total
Never	Col %			
	Row %			
		251	33	284
Only before 2019		34.43	21.15	184
		88.38	11.62	
		152	32	184
Past 4		20.85	20.51	417
		82.61	17.39	
		326	91	417
Total		44.72	58.33	885
		78.18	21.82	
		729	156	885

Analysis: Select Board Size and Governance Preferences



Q9 Select Board 3 or 5			
Count	Five	Three	Total
Col %			
Row %			
Select Board + Open Town Meeting	289	102	391
	44.88	70.83	
	73.91	26.09	
Select Board + Representative TM	136	21	157
	21.12	14.58	
	86.62	13.38	
Town Council	219	21	240
	34.01	14.58	
	91.25	8.75	
Total	644	144	788

Q6: Form of Govt 3 choice

Part 5: Appendix

- The next few slides describe the respondents, with comparisons to understand how well this group of people represent the entire town.
- The survey was publicized by a postcard sent to all of Sharon's residential households, emails to a list managed by the Sharon Department of Public Works, posts on Sharon Facebook groups and other methods
- The survey was made available on-line and in paper versions at several public locations (e.g. Library, Town Hall, Senior Center)

Total Survey Participants

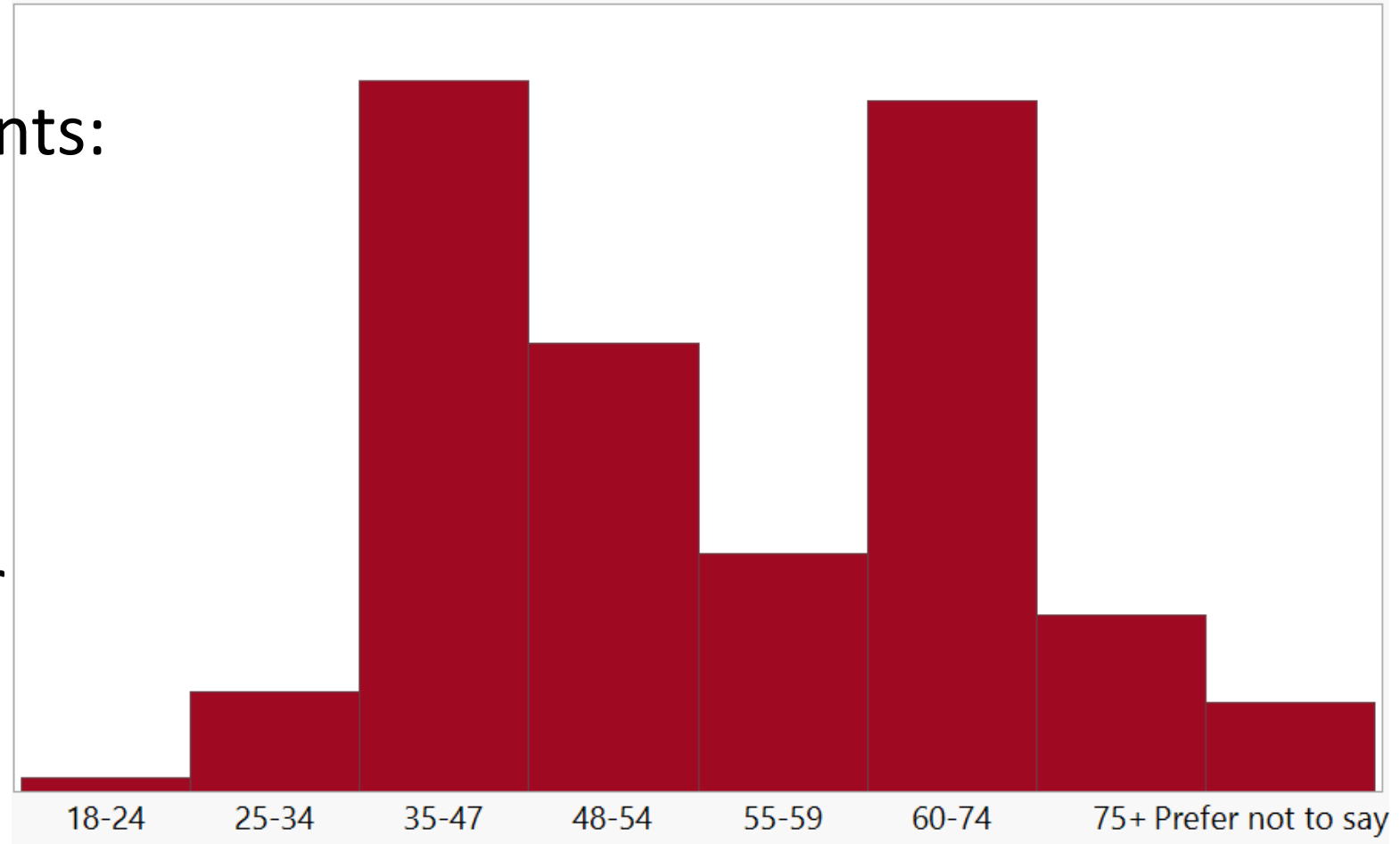
- Participants in survey: **1,241**
 - The number is the equivalent of 9.5% of the Sharon's 13,132 registered voters
- **92%** of respondents are registered voters in Sharon
- **12%** of respondents currently or formerly served on a town government board or committee

Demographic Information: Age

- Average age of respondents:

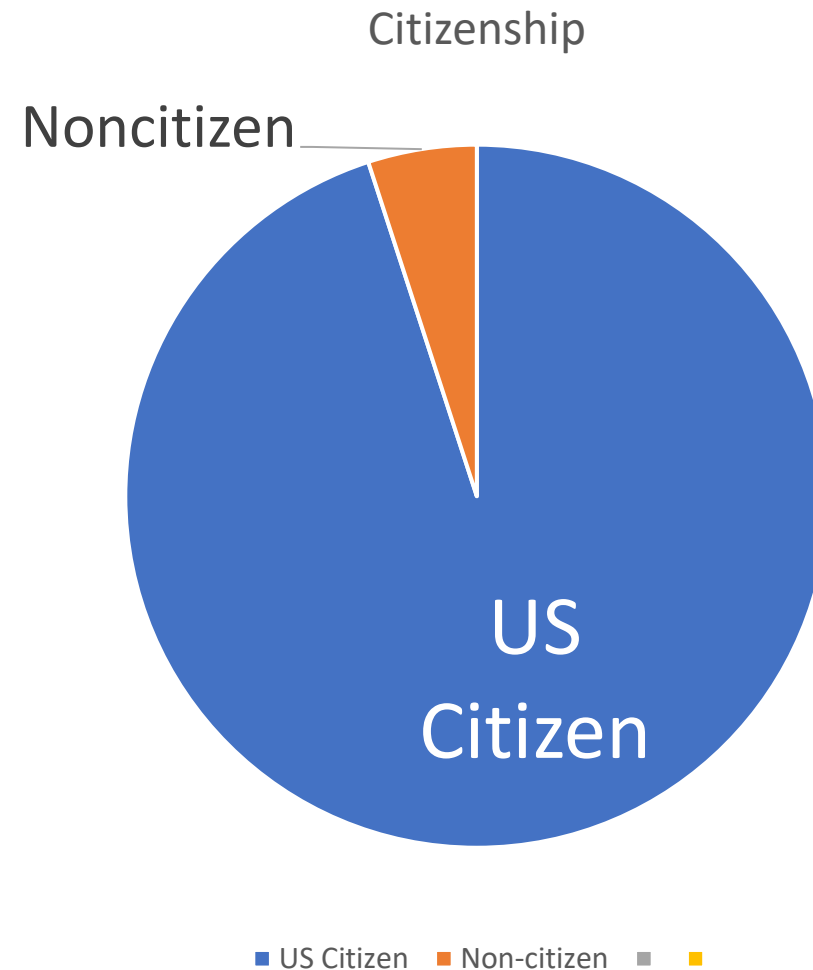
55 years

- **61%** are under 60 years
- **35%** are 60 years or over



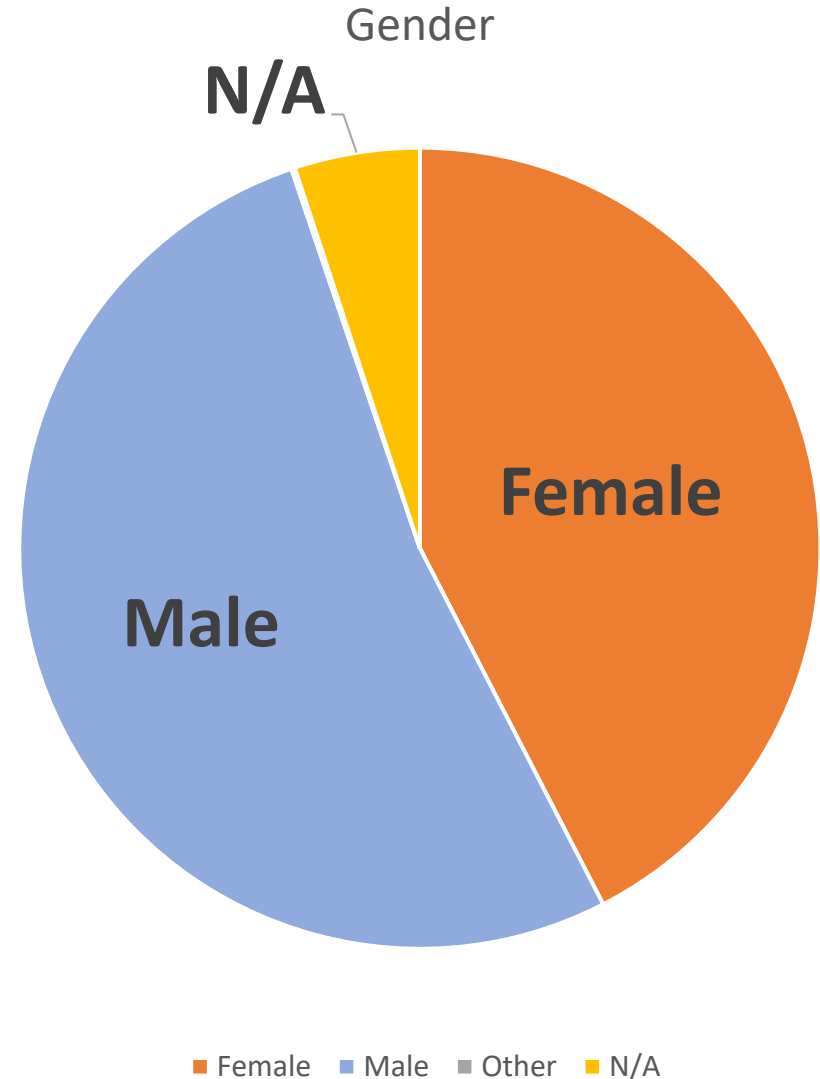
Demographic Information: Citizenship

- **95%** of participants are U.S. citizens
- **5%** are noncitizens
- Quite similar to entire town



Demographic Information: Gender

- **47%** of participants identify as female (per US Census, Sharon is 52% female)
- **48%** identify as male



Demographic Information: Race and Ethnicity

- **73%** of participants identify as Caucasian
- **17%** identify as Asian
- **2%** identify as Black or African-American
- **2%** identify as Hispanic or Latino

Demographic Information: Years in Sharon

- Average length of residence in Sharon:
21.1 years
- Median length of residence in Sharon:
18 years

