

# **Georgia Statewide Public Opinion Poll**

## **League of Conservation Voters Education Fund**



## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted by Beth Schapiro & Associates of 600 registered Georgia voters. The survey, which examines public attitudes toward environmental issues, was conducted for the League of Conservation Voters Education Fund.

The poll was conducted January 12-19, 2000. Professional interviewers contacted respondents by phone and administered a questionnaire that required approximately twenty minutes to complete. The sample was stratified by region and gender, weighted by race, and is demographically representative of the state's voting population. The margin of error for the full sample is  $\pm 4\%$ .

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this study suggest Georgia voters are ready for more aggressive efforts to protect the state's environment and natural resources. Most believe Georgia is generally headed in the right direction, although they are still concerned about a variety of issues, including threats to our environment. Indeed, most support stronger enforcement of existing environmental laws and many support putting even tougher laws on the books.

The current political and economic climate presents promising opportunities for progress on environmental issues. When the economy is strong, voters are more likely to be interested in non-economic, or "post-materialist," issues, such as environmental protection. Moreover, in the current climate most voters do not see a conflict between a strong economy and a clean environment.

The results lead to several general conclusions.

### **Clean water and clean air top the list of environmental concerns.**

Voters across party lines are concerned about water and air quality. When Georgians think about threats to the state's environment, they tend to think about water and air pollution. And, when asked to rate their level of concern on nine different environmental and non-environmental issues, voters rank clean air and water third, behind education and crime and drugs.

### **Georgians are also concerned about sprawl and over-development, although they do not necessarily think of these as "environmental" issues.**

When asked an open-ended (i.e., unaided) question about their top environmental worries, less than 20% list growth-related issues. However, when asked directly, a large majority say they are concerned about sprawl, and roughly half are very concerned. Furthermore, most respond favorably to arguments that emphasize the negative impact of over-development. This shows that while many Georgians may not immediately think of sprawl as an environmental issue, they are receptive to arguments that link growth to well-known environmental threats.

**Georgians strongly support the preservation of undeveloped land.**

When presented with arguments both for and against requiring counties to preserve a certain percentage of their undeveloped land, voters overwhelmingly back the proposal.

**Georgia's elected officials receive mediocre marks for environmental issues.**

On environmental issues, voters give Governor Barnes an average grade of 2.5, which, depending on how generous one feels, is either a B- or a C+. The Legislature receives an even lower grade: 1.95, a solid C. These are just average marks for an issue that is of prime importance to voters.

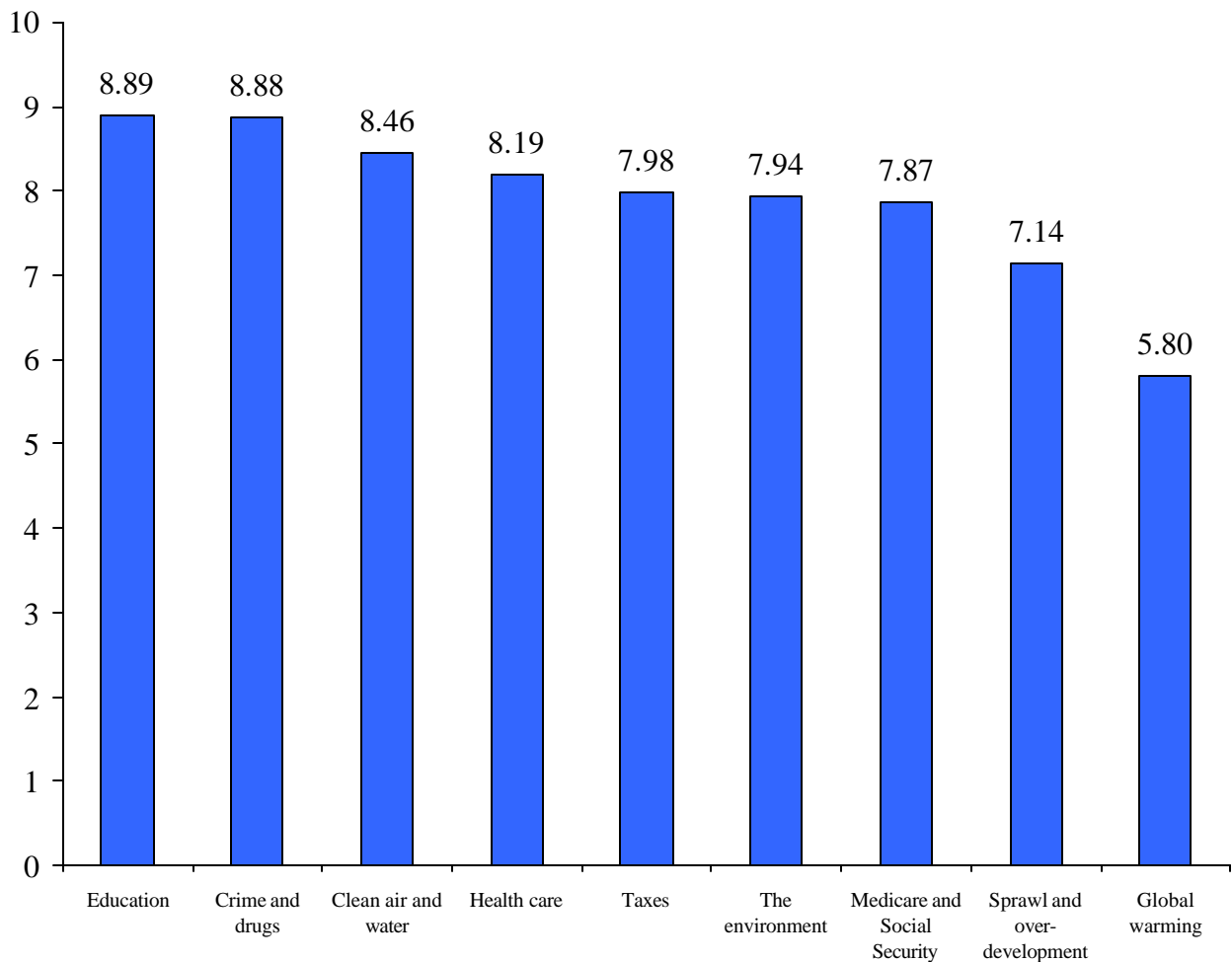
**Voters believe campaign contributions have a strong impact on how elected officials vote on environmental issues.**

Voters are aware of the role money plays in politics, and most believe politicians are influenced by the contributions they receive. A plurality believe political contributions generally influence elected officials to vote against environmental protections.

**Most voters are inclined to support a pro-environment candidate over a candidate who supports fewer regulations.**

When presented with two different candidate descriptions, over 70% choose a candidate who supports strong environmental laws over a candidate who believes there is too much government regulation. When voters are presented with the same choice, but given the additional information that the pro-environment candidate has received contributions from environmental groups, and that the candidate who favors fewer regulations has received contributions from known polluters, they favor the pro-environment candidate by an even greater margin.

# GEORGIANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT A VARIETY OF ISSUES, ESPECIALLY EDUCATION, CRIME AND DRUGS, AND CLEAN AIR AND WATER



*"Now I want you to think about the future. I'm going to read you a short list of issues. For each one, please tell me how concerned you are about that issue on a scale of 0 to 10, in which 10 means you are extremely concerned about the issue, 5 means you are somewhat concerned, and 0 means you are not concerned at all."*

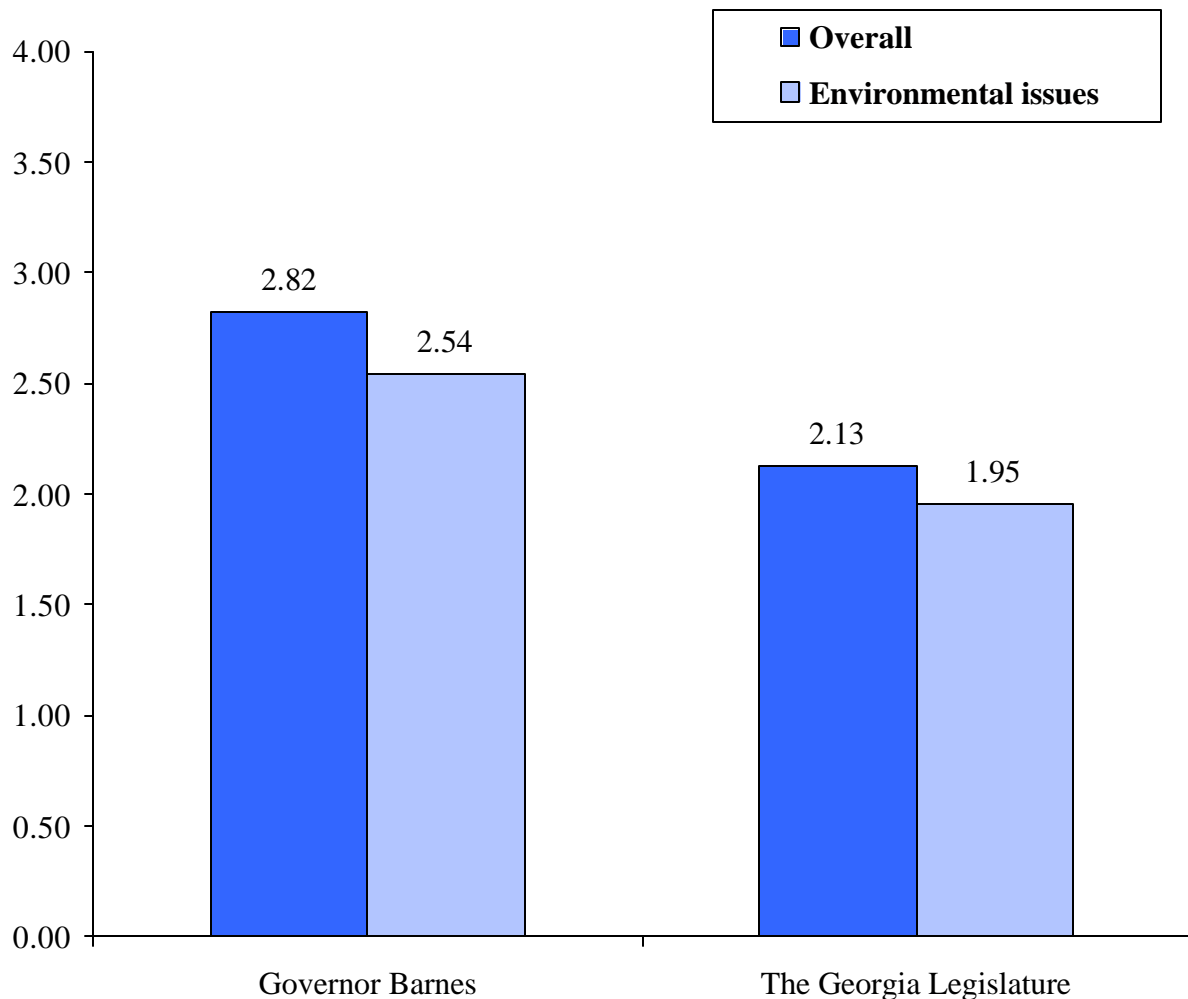
(Numbers in chart represent average scores)

# WATER QUALITY AND AIR QUALITY TOP THE LIST OF VOTER CONCERNS

<b>TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES</b>	
Water quality	50%
Air quality	44%
Sprawl/uncontrolled growth	17%
Excessive logging of forests	7%
Traffic congestion	5%
Clean up of hazardous and toxic waste	5%
Open space/wilderness preservation	5%
Tree or habitat loss	5%
Overpopulation	4%
Wildlife protection	3%
Trash/litter	3%
Factory, poultry, hog farms	1%
Global warming	1%
Over-regulation	1%
None	6%
Other	4%
Don't know	11%
<i>Note: Does not total 100% because respondents could give multiple responses. Percentages are based on the number of respondents.</i>	

*“Thinking specifically about Georgia, what, if any, conservation or environmental concerns do you worry about the most?”*

# VOTERS GIVE GOVERNOR BARNES AND THE LEGISLATURE MEDIOCRE MARKS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES<sup>1</sup>



*“People are often given grades to indicate the quality of their work. What grade would you give*

*Governor Barnes for his overall performance as Governor – an A, B, C, D, or F?”*

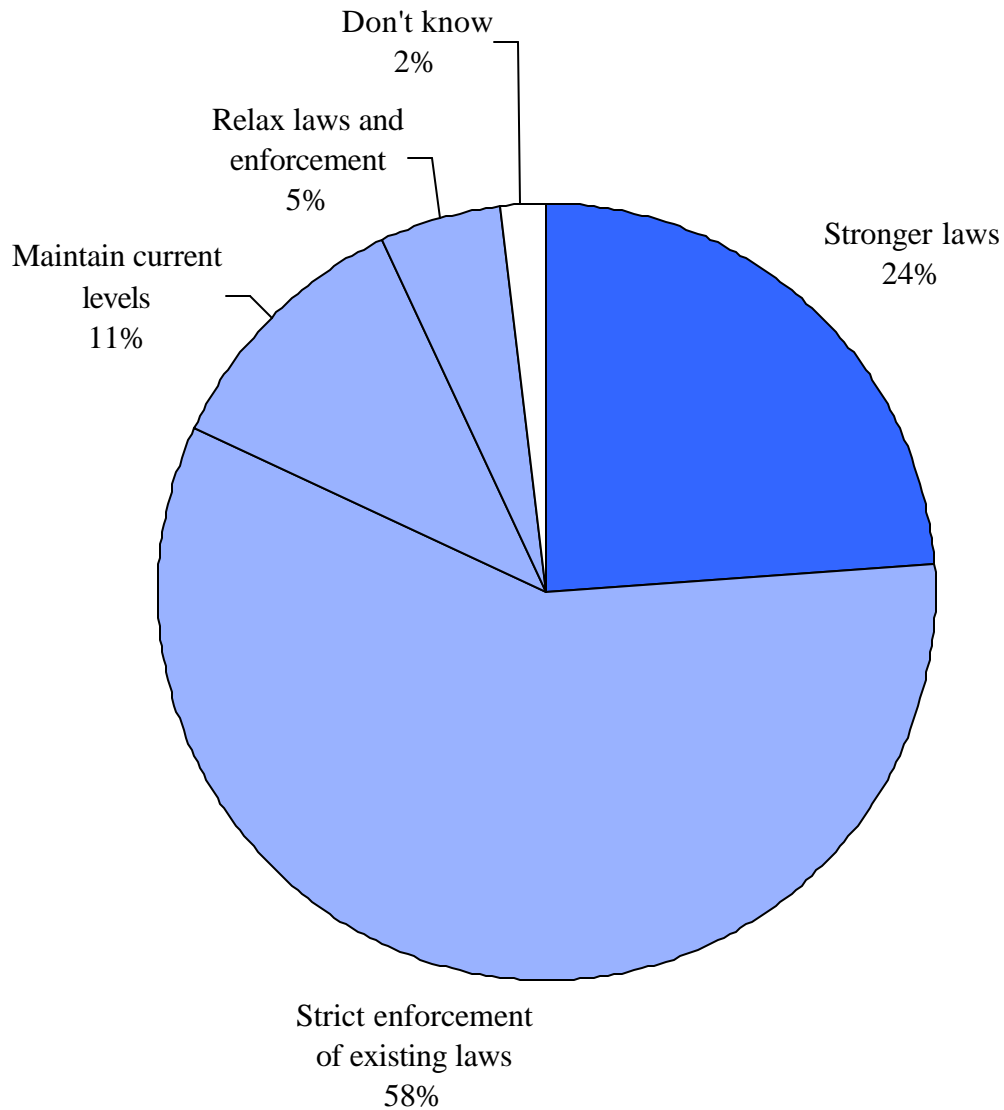
*“What grade would you give him just on environmental issues?”*

*“What grade would you give the Georgia Legislature on its overall performance?”*

*“What grade would you give the Legislature just on environmental issues?”*

<sup>1</sup> The numbers in the chart represent average grades. Average grades were calculated with a standard grade point average (GPA) formula using the following grading scale: A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and F=0.

# GEORGIANS SUPPORT STRONGER ENFORCEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS



*“Now let me read you four statements about the environment and please tell me which comes closest to your own view:*

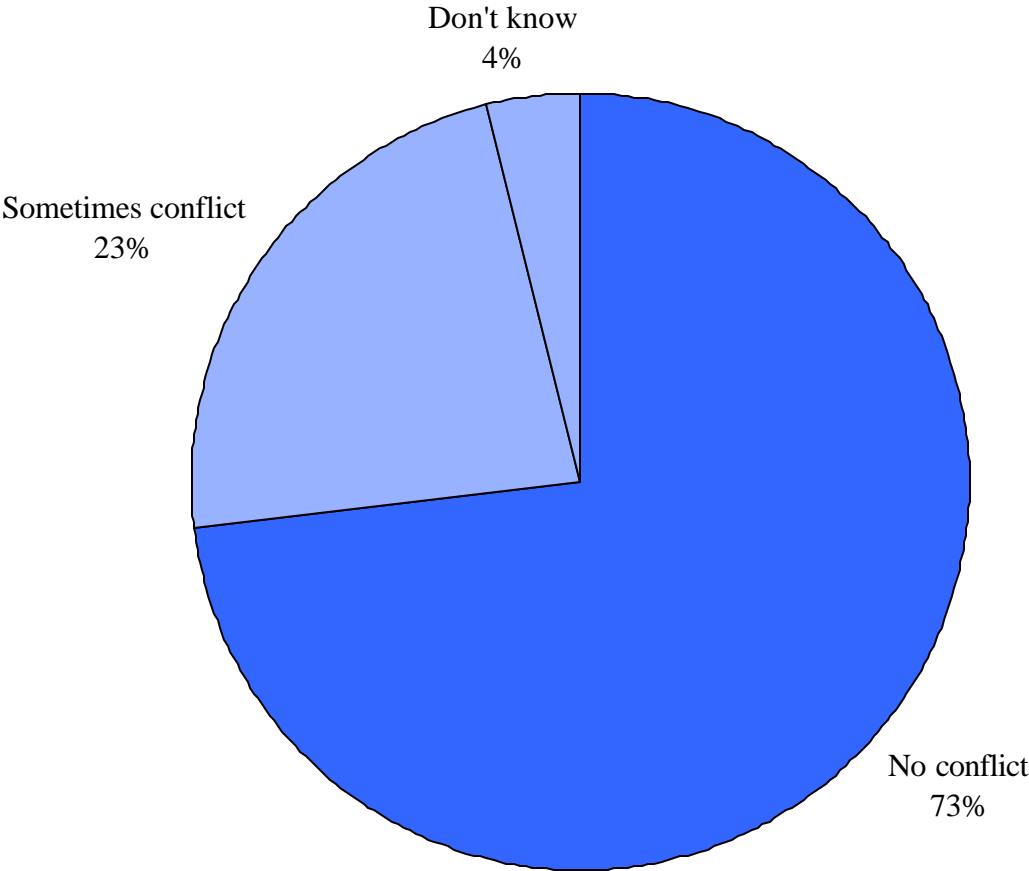
*The laws protecting the environment are not strong enough and stronger laws should be enacted.*

*The current laws are tough enough but they are not enforced, existing laws should be strictly enforced.*

*The current laws and enforcement of those laws are fine and should be left alone, or*

*The current laws protecting the environment and enforcement of those laws are too strict and need to be relaxed.”*

# GEORGIANS BELIEVE WE CAN HAVE A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT AND A STRONG ECONOMY

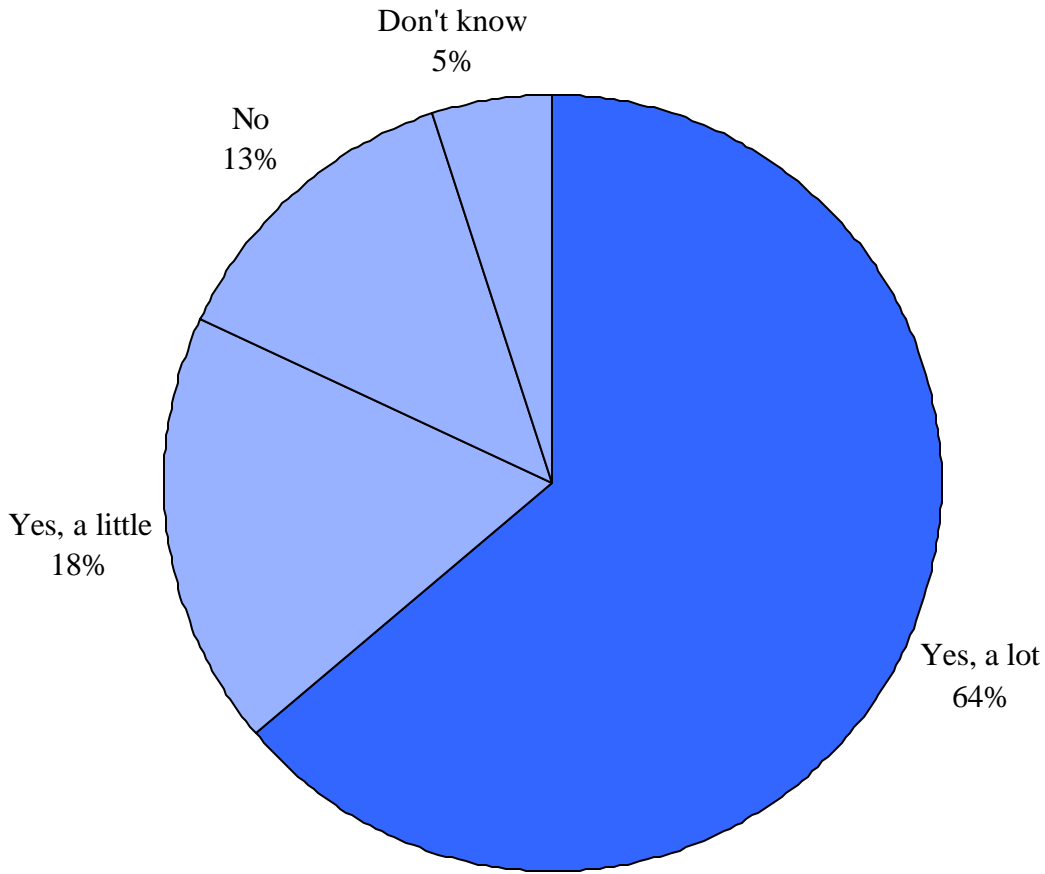


*“Please tell me which of the following statements comes closest to your own views, even if neither of the statements matches your views exactly.”*

*“We can have a clean environment and a strong economy at the same time without having to choose one over the other.”*

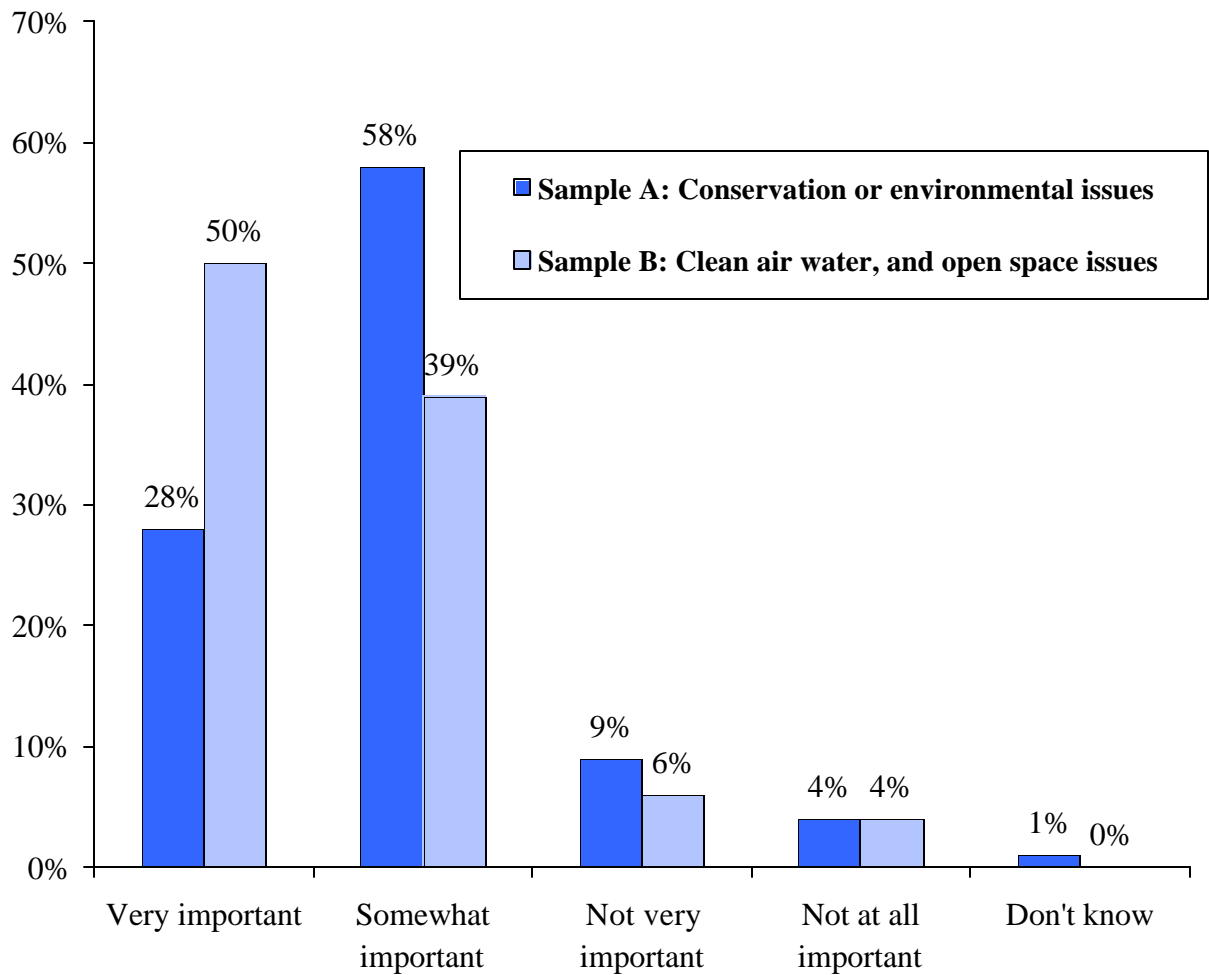
*“Sometimes a clean environment and a strong economy are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.”*

# VOTERS THINK CAMPAIGN CONTRIBUTIONS STRONGLY AFFECT HOW ELECTED OFFICIALS VOTE ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES



*“Now let me ask you – when you think about campaign contributions to candidates, do you think campaign contributions influence how elected officials vote on environmental issues?”*  
*[IF YES] “Would you say a lot or a little?”*

# PUBLIC OFFICIALS SHOULD KNOW THAT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AFFECT VOTING DECISIONS, ESPECIALLY WHEN FRAMED AS SPECIFIC PROBLEMS, SUCH AS CLEAN WATER, CLEAN AIR, AND OPEN SPACE

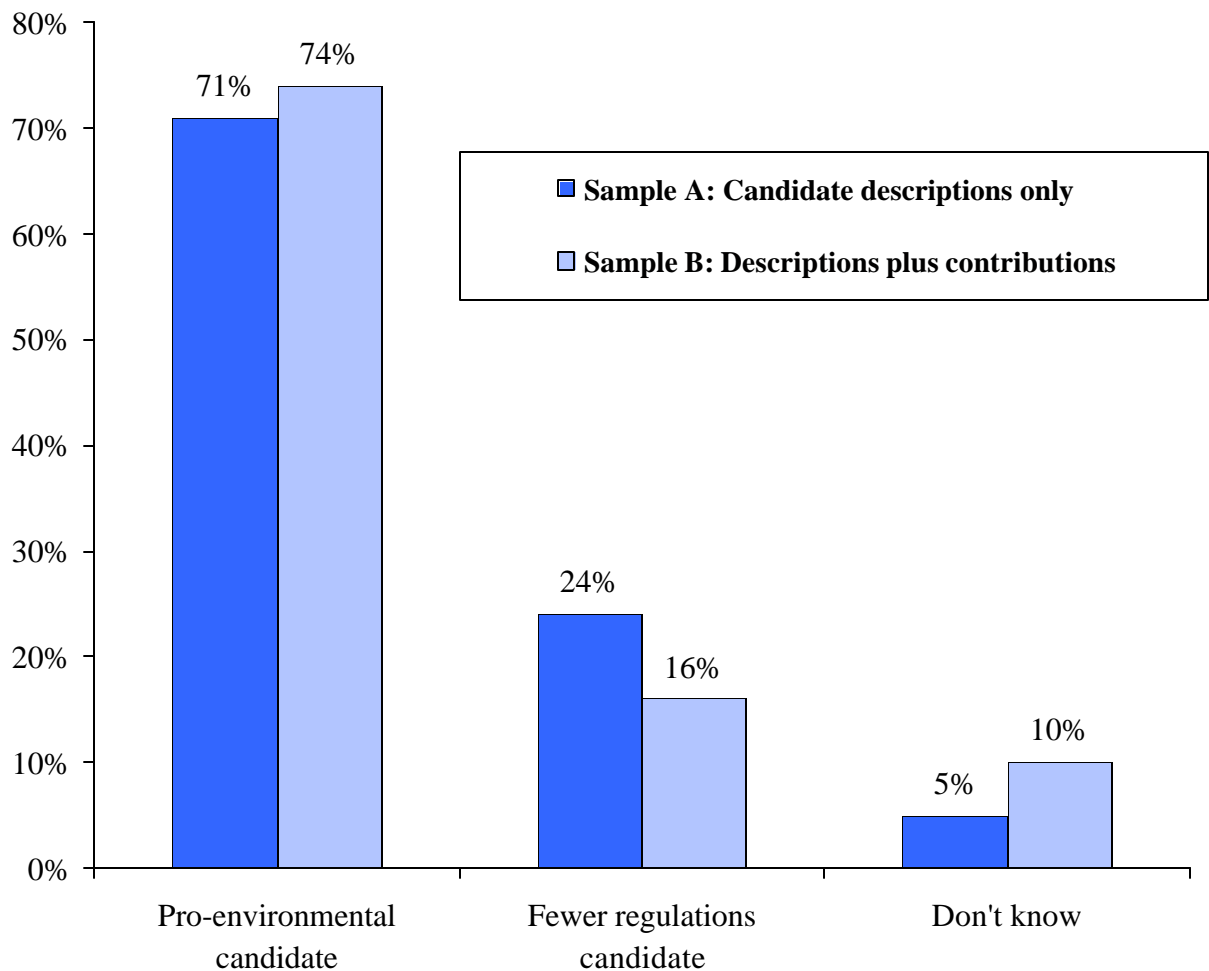


*In making a voting decision, how important are conservation or environmental issues for you when deciding how to vote? Are they ...?"*

*"In making a voting decision, how important are issues involving clean water, clean air and open space for you in deciding how to vote? Are they ...?"*

*"Very important, they are a primary factor in deciding how to vote, somewhat important, they are one of several issues you consider, not very important, they are not necessarily an issue you consider, or not at all important, they are just not a consideration in deciding how to vote?"*

# MOST VOTERS PREFER A PRO-ENVIRONMENT CANDIDATE OVER ONE WHO SUPPORTS FEWER REGULATIONS

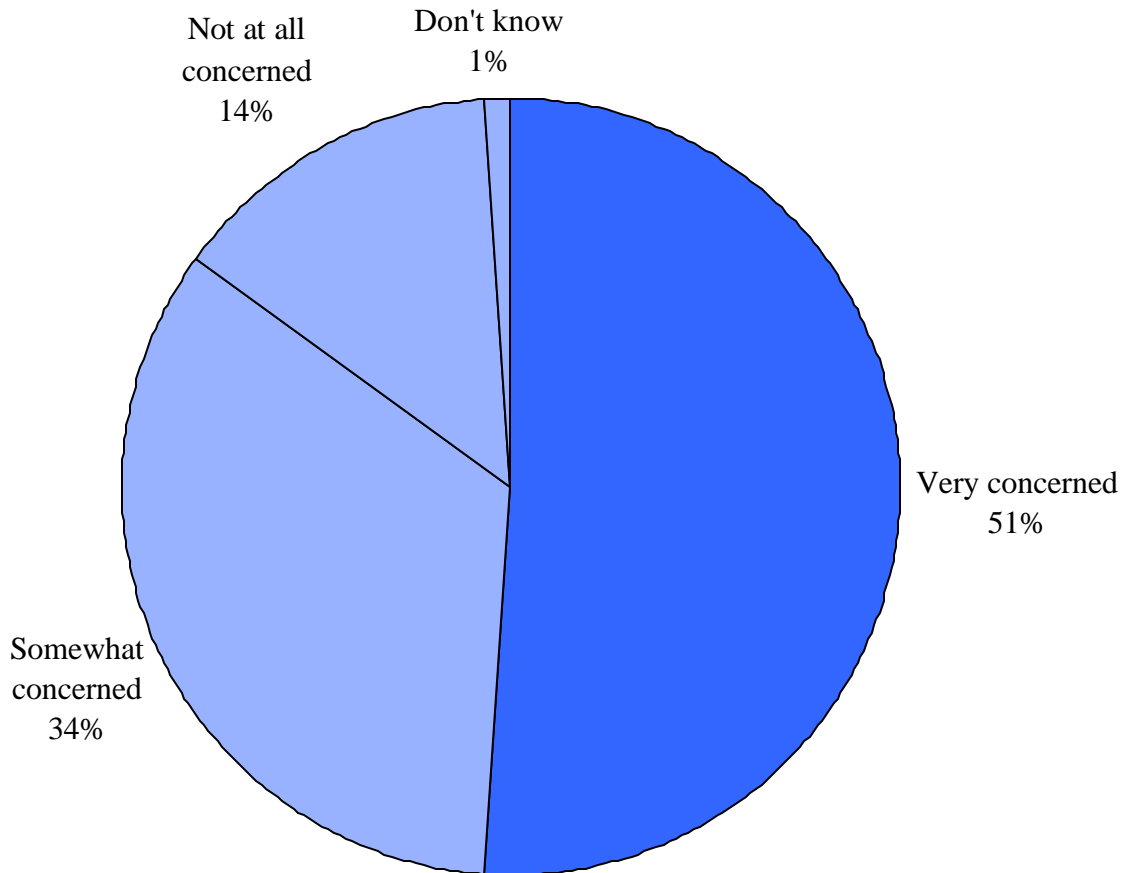


*“Now let me read you two short statements about two candidates and please tell me which one you favor.”*

*“Candidate A believes we must protect the environment, and supports strong laws and enforcement of those laws. Candidate B believes there are too many government regulations, and supports efforts to relieve the burden of regulation on business.”*

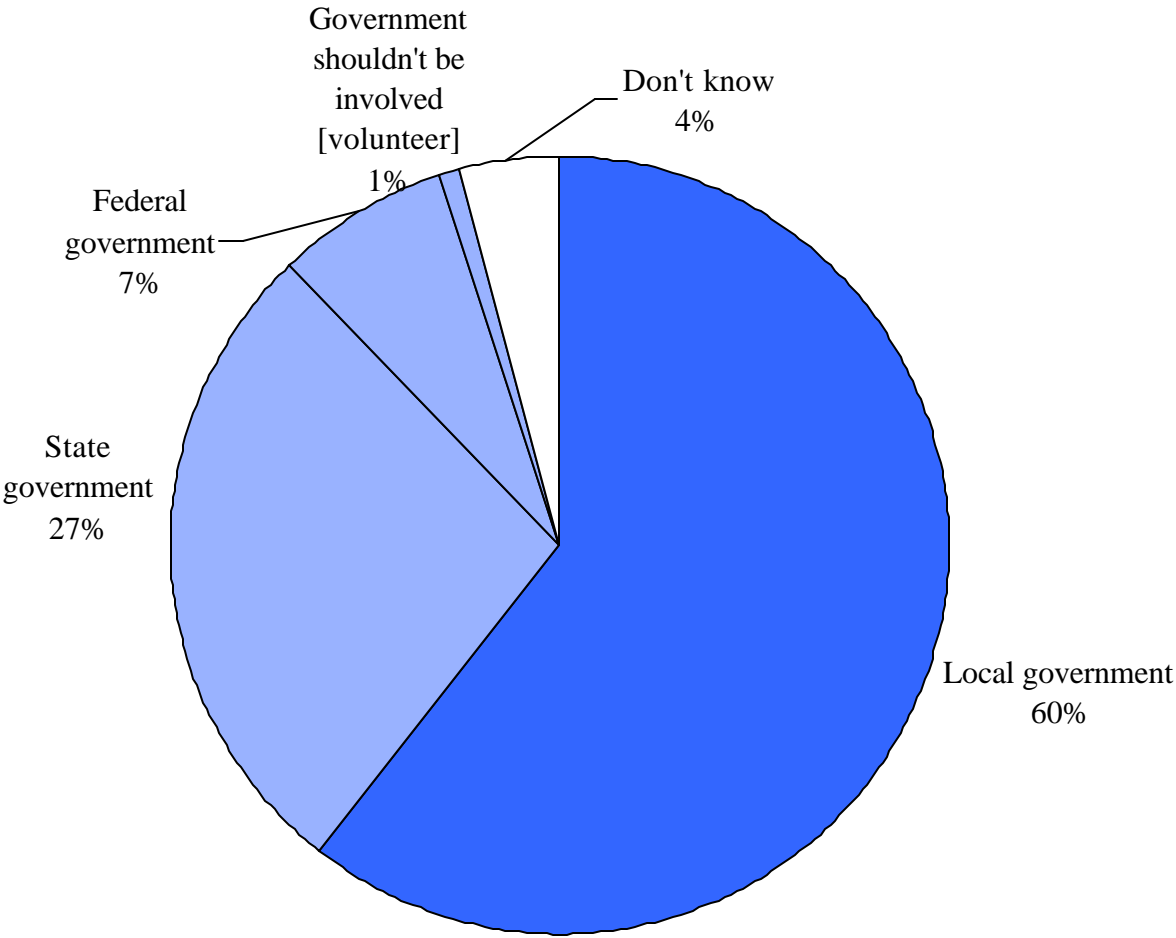
*“Candidate A believes we must protect the environment, and supports strong laws and enforcement of those laws. Candidate A has been endorsed by and has taken campaign contributions from environmental groups. Candidate B believes there are too many government regulations, and supports efforts to relieve the burden of regulation on business. Candidate B has also taken campaign contributions from developers and corporations that are known polluters.”*

# A LARGE MAJORITY OF VOTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT GROWTH AND SPRAWL



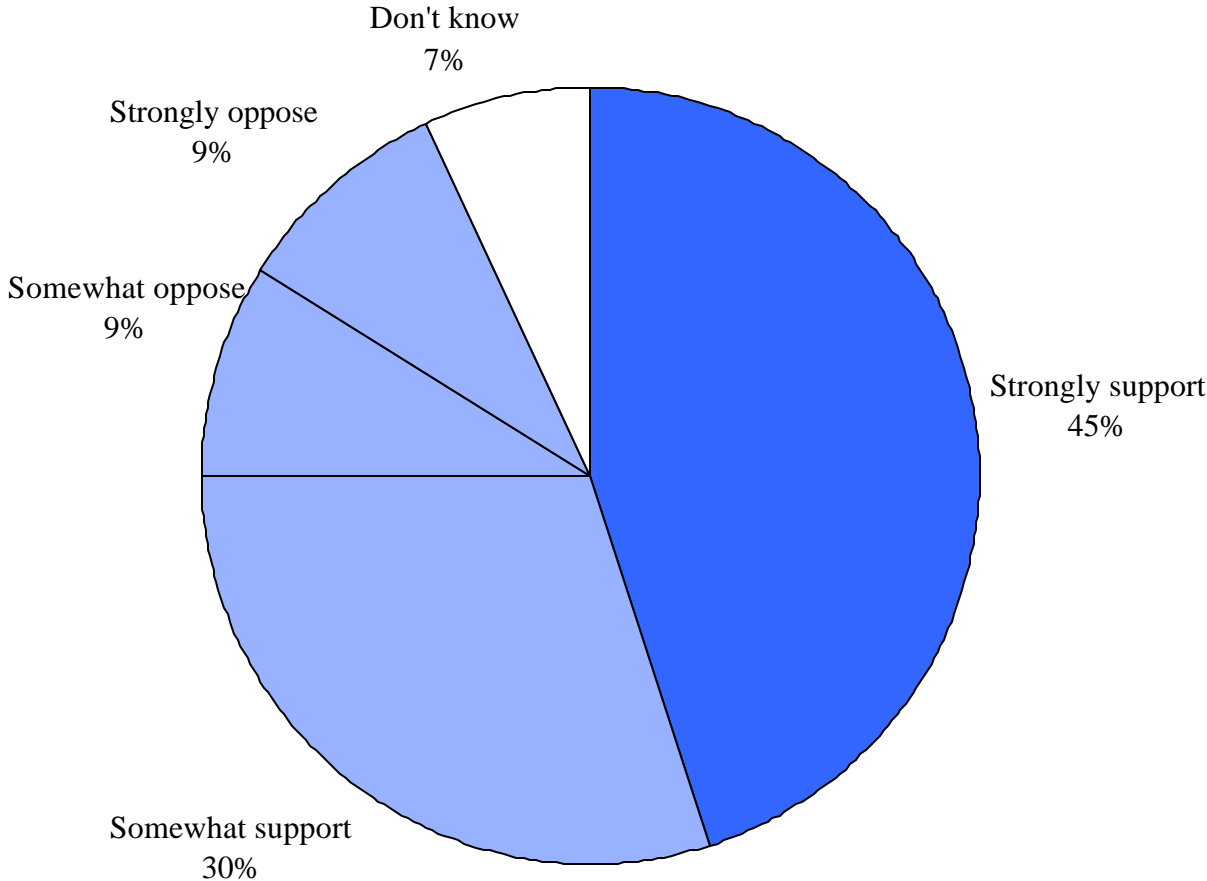
*“Thinking now about environmental and land use issues, how concerned are you about growth and sprawl in your area? Are you ...?”*

# MOST VOTERS BELIEVE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD ON SPRAWL AND GROWTH ISSUES



*“What level of government should take primary responsibility for managing sprawl and growth issues ...?”*

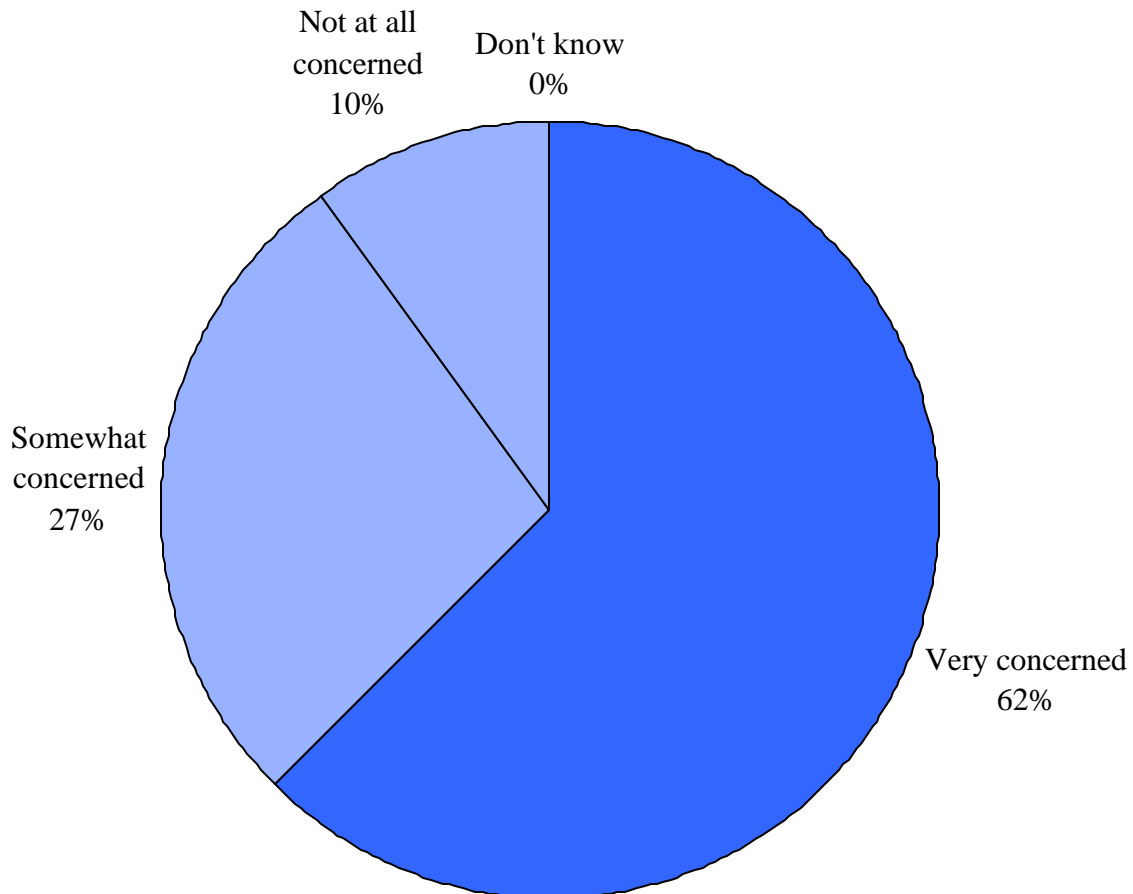
# GEORGIANS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT THE PRESERVATION OF UNDEVELOPED LAND



*“Some people have proposed requiring Georgia counties to preserve a certain percentage of their undeveloped land. Supporters of this proposal say we need to preserve our green spaces and natural resources for future generations. Opponents say that anti-development laws infringe on the rights of property owners. How do you feel – would you support or oppose this proposal?”*

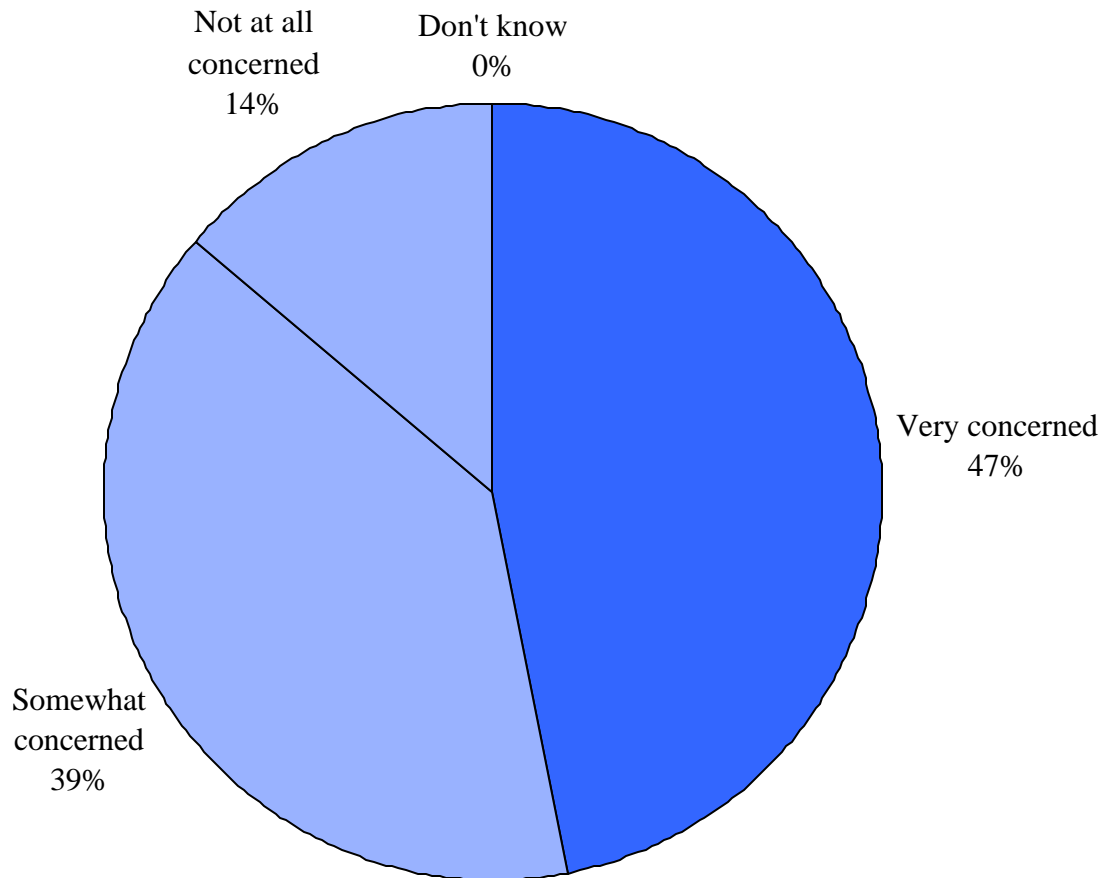
*“Is that strongly (support/oppose) or somewhat (support/oppose)?”*

# A MAJORITY OF VOTERS ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WATER QUALITY



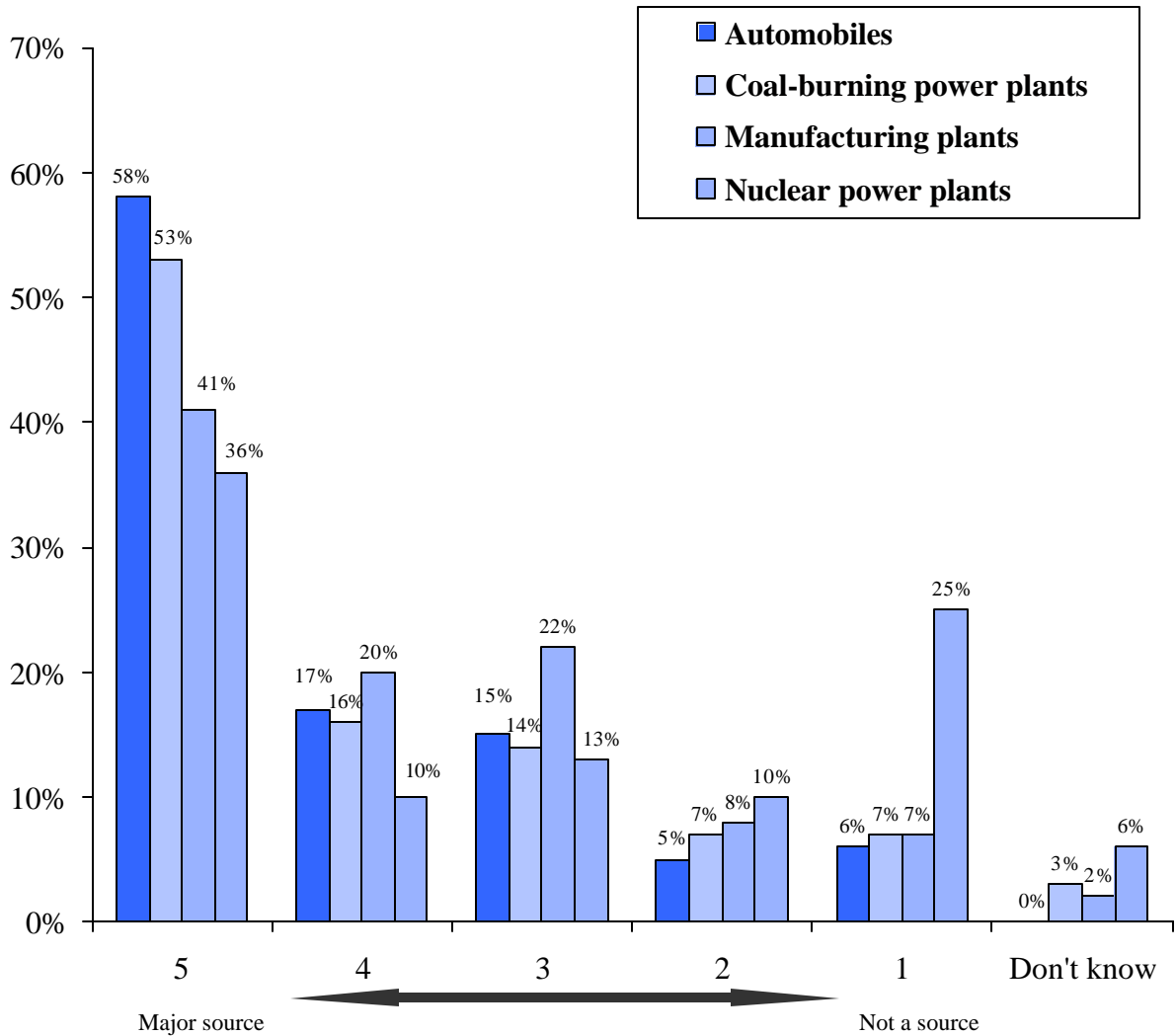
*“Thinking now about water quality issues, how concerned are you about water quality in your area? Are you ...?”*

# NEARLY HALF OF THOSE SURVEYED ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT AIR QUALITY



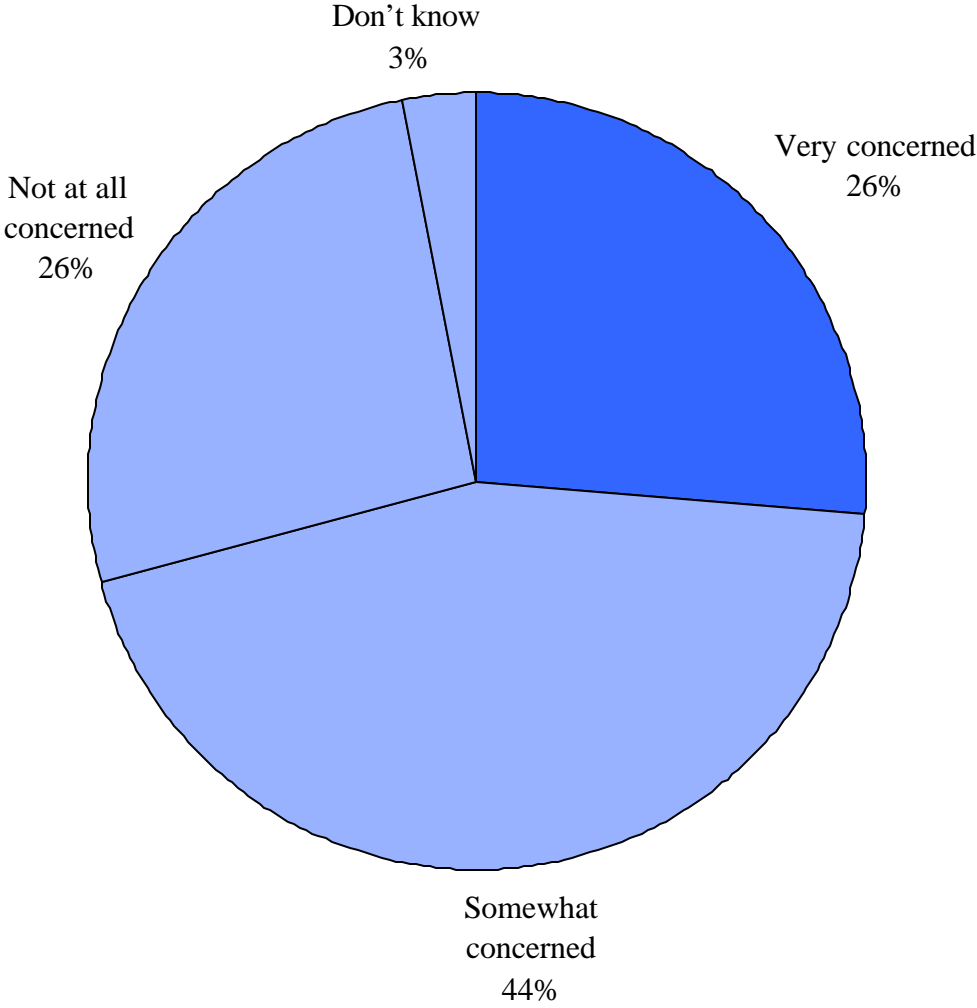
*“Thinking now about air quality issues, how concerned are you about air quality in your area? Are you ...?”*

# MOST VOTERS RATE AUTOS AND COAL-BURNING POWER PLANTS AS MAJOR SOURCES OF AIR POLLUTION



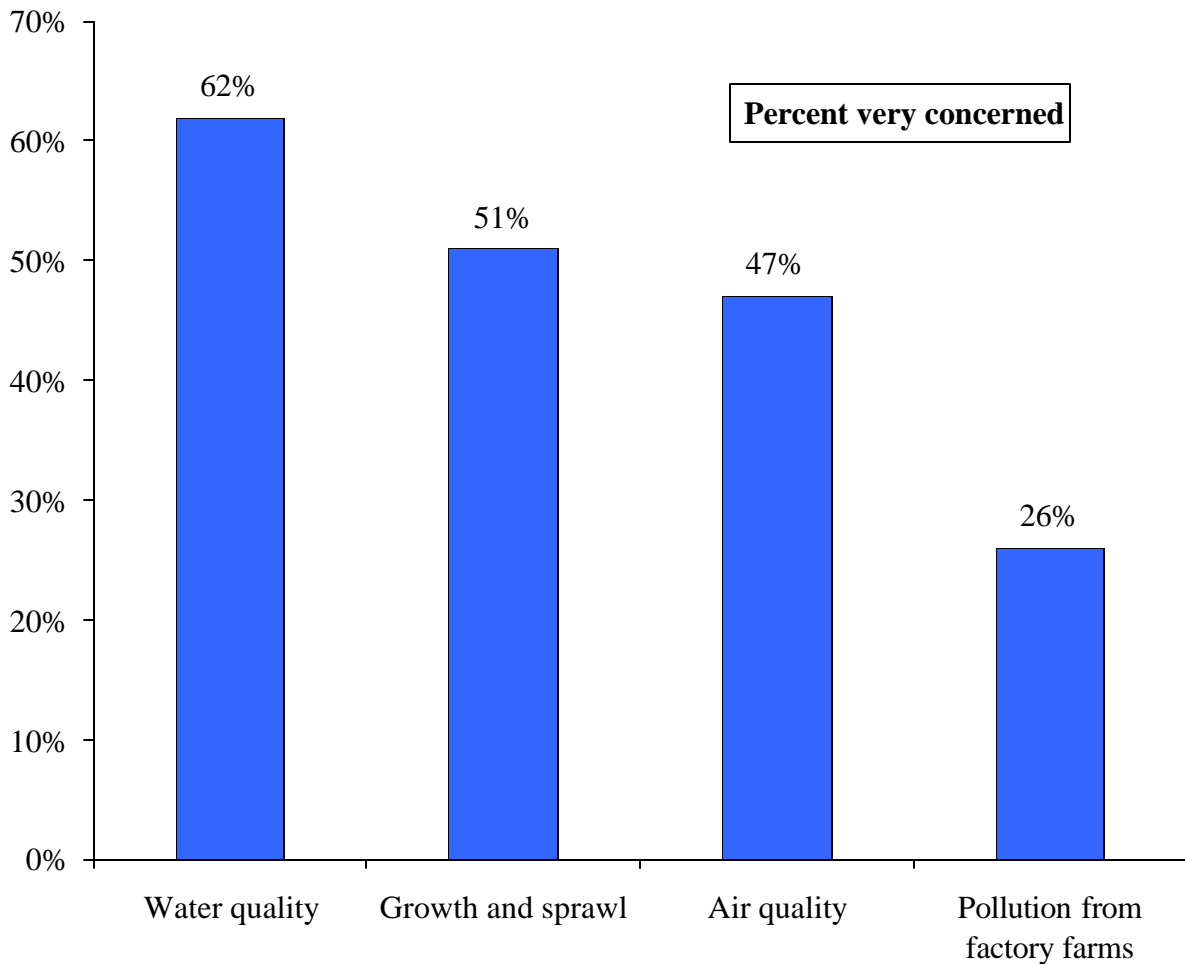
*“I’m going to read you a list of several items. Please rate each one on a scale of one to five, where a one means something is not a source of air pollution and a five means something is a major source of air pollution. The first item is ...”*

# GEORGIANS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT POLLUTION FROM FACTORY FARMS



*“Thinking now about a different topic, in general, how concerned are you about pollution from large-scale factory farms for hogs, poultry or other livestock in Georgia ...?”*

# VOTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT MANY ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, ESPECIALLY WATER QUALITY



*“Thinking now about water quality issues, how concerned are you about water quality in your area?”*

*“Thinking now about environmental and land use issues, how concerned are you about growth and sprawl in your area?”*

*“Thinking now about air quality issues, how concerned are you about air quality in your area?”*

*“Thinking now about a different topic, in general, how concerned are you about pollution from large-scale factory farms for hogs, poultry or other livestock in Georgia?”*