

# Tennessee Statewide Public Opinion Poll

## League of Conservations Voters Education Fund



## **INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY**

This report presents the findings of a survey conducted by Beth Schapiro & Associates of 600 registered Tennessee 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 11-19, 2000. Professional interviewers contacted respondents by phone and administered a questionnaire that required approximately fifteen 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  $\pm 4\%$ , while the margin of error for subgroups is somewhat higher.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this study suggest that many Tennessee voters are dissatisfied with the state's political status quo. A plurality believe Tennessee is headed in the wrong direction, and Governor Sundquist and the state legislature receive relatively poor marks, both in terms of their overall job performance and in the way they have handled environmental issues.

The current political climate presents some promising opportunities for progress on environmental issues. Most voters support stronger enforcement of existing environmental laws and many support putting even tougher laws on the books. Furthermore, few Tennesseans see a conflict between a strong economy and a clean environment.

Nonetheless, Tennessee remains a moderate to conservative state, where voters are generally suspicious of government regulation. When asked to rate the importance of issues, voters place environmental concerns behind other issues, such as public safety, education, and health care.

The results lead to several general conclusions and recommendations.

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

Voters across party lines are concerned about water and air quality. When Tennessee residents think about threats to the state's environment, they tend to think about water and air pollution.

◆ **Tennesseans 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 10% list growth-related issues. However, when asked directly, a large majority, including strong majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, say they are concerned about sprawl, with one-third being very concerned. Furthermore, most respond favorably to arguments that emphasize the negative impact of over-development. This shows that while many Tennessee residents may not immediately think of sprawl as an environmental issue, they are receptive to arguments that link growth to well-known environmental threats. The growth-related cluster of issues is particularly salient among urban residents.

◆ **An astonishing 78% of Tennesseans believe we can have a clean environment and a strong economy.**

A majority of voters believe that a strong economy can coexist with a clean environment and that they do not have to choose one over the other.

◆ **Tennessee voters overwhelmingly support setting statewide standards for the logging industry.**

Ninety percent support statewide standards, with 63% strongly supporting this idea.

◆ **Just over half oppose building golf courses within Tennessee state parks.**

Opposition is particularly strong among younger voters and liberals. Meanwhile, roughly one-third favor building golf courses in state parks.

◆ **Tennessee's elected officials receive poor marks for environmental issues.**

On environmental issues, voters give both Governor Sundquist and the state legislature an average grade of "C." These are poor evaluations for an issue that voters consider when making voting decisions.

◆ **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.

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

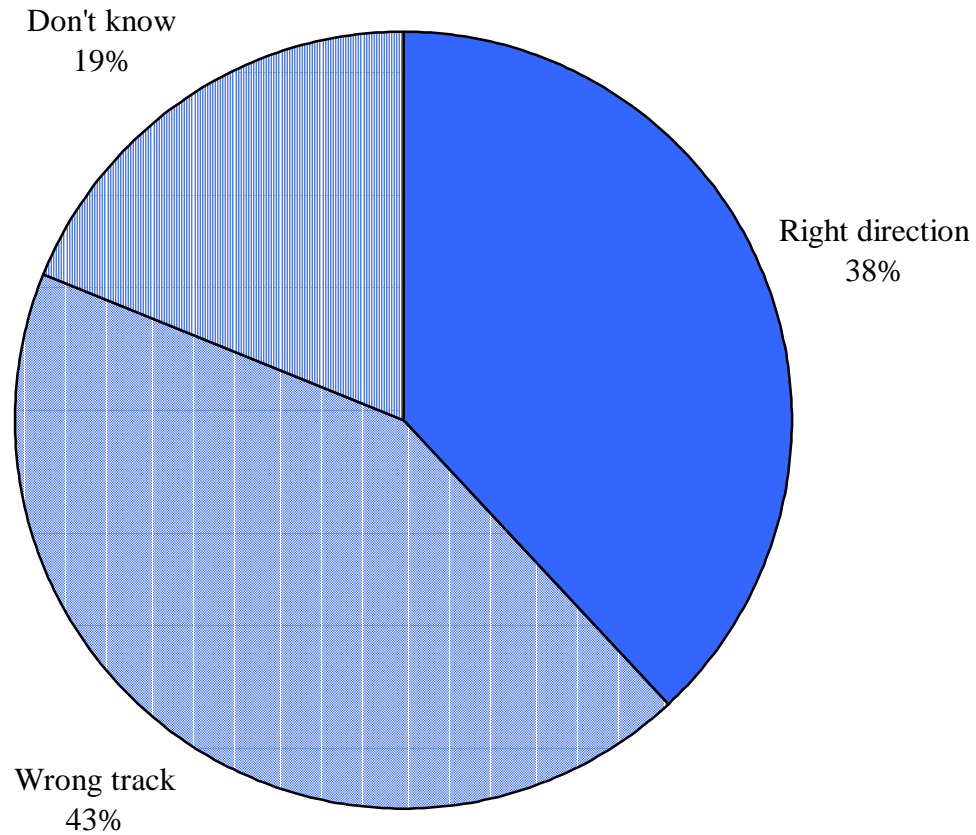
When presented with two different candidate descriptions, over 70% choose a candidate who supports strong environmental laws over a candidate who believes there is too much government regulation. When voters are presented with the same choice, but given the additional information that the pro-environment 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. Support for a pro-environment candidate is solid among all subgroups, including Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

◆ **Voters respond positively to a variety of pro-environment messages.**

All of the arguments for stronger environmental laws outperform the arguments against stronger laws. In particular, voters are persuaded by the argument that future generations deserve the same scenic beauty and diversity of wildlife that we enjoy today, although they are also moved by messages emphasizing the health dangers of air pollution, the environmental threats of over-development, and the impact excessive growth has on our quality of life.

# VOTERS ARE DIVIDED OVER THE DIRECTION OF THE STATE

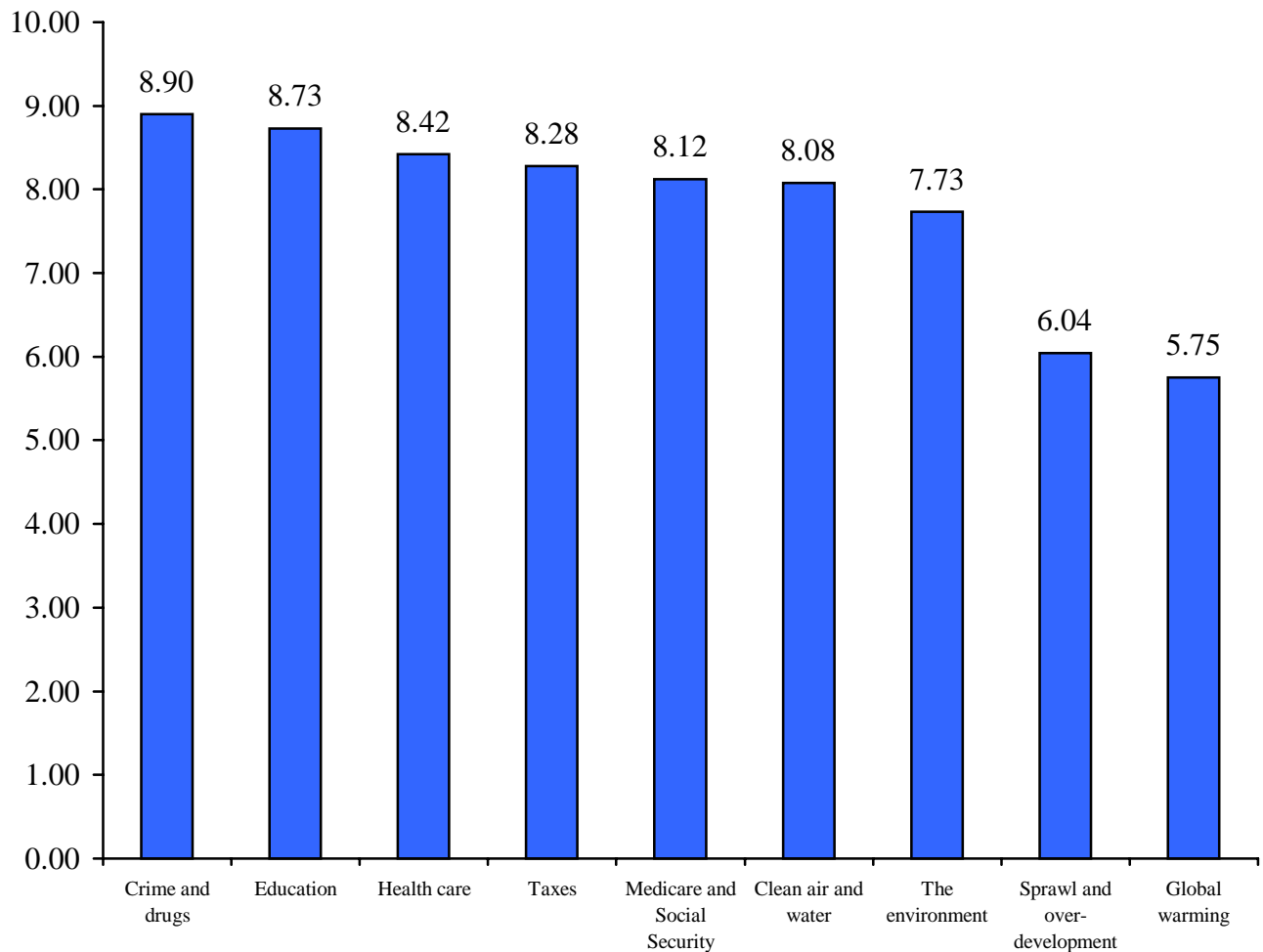
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*“Generally speaking, do you think things in Tennessee are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?”*

# VOTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, ALTHOUGH OTHER CONCERNS ARE RATED HIGHER

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*“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.”*

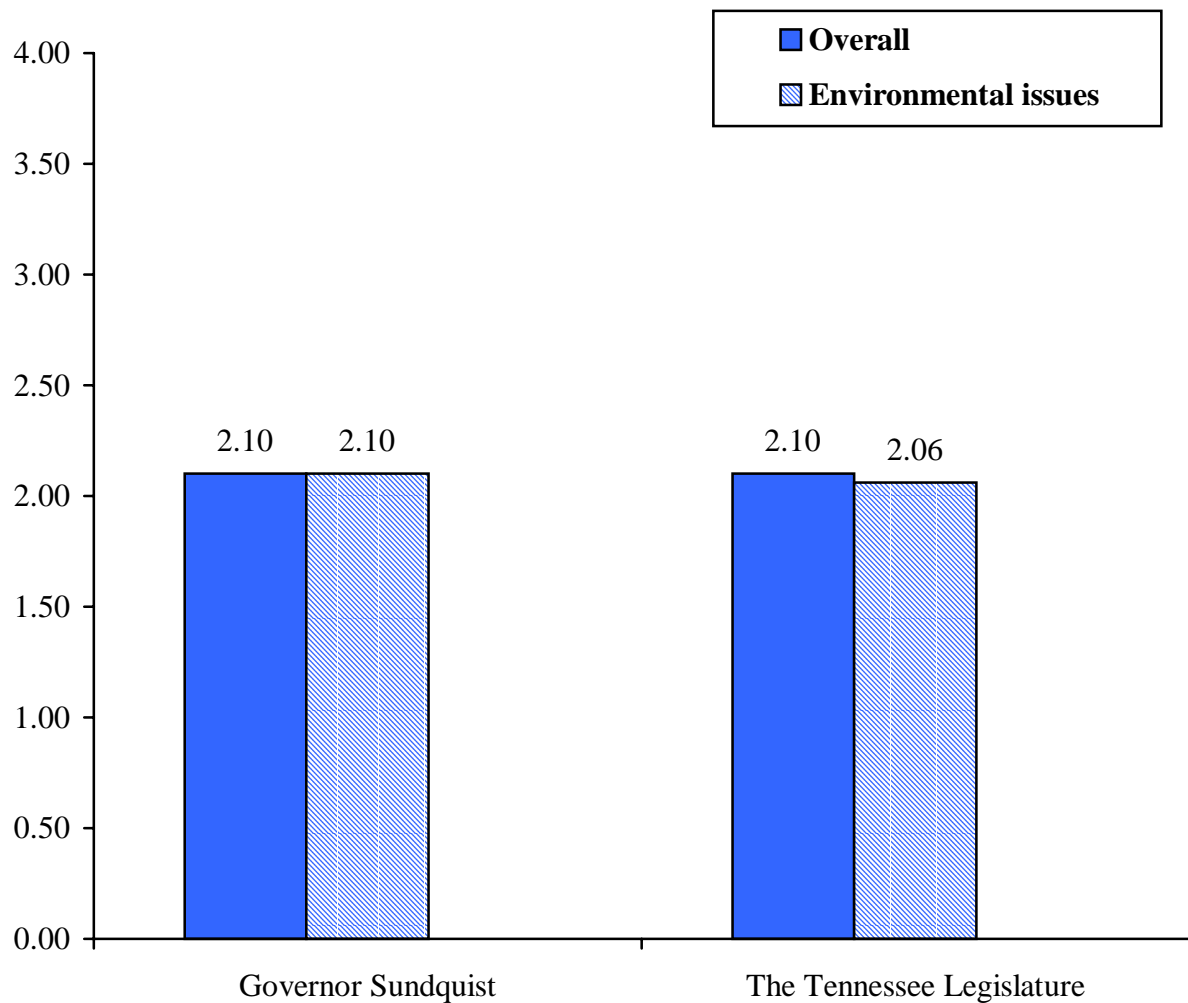
# WATER QUALITY AND AIR QUALITY TOP THE LIST OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

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<b>TOP ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES</b>	
Water quality	42%
Air quality	36%
Trash/recycling	8%
Sprawl/uncontrolled growth	7%
Clean up of hazardous and toxic waste	7%
Tree or habitat loss	6%
Open space/wilderness preservation	4%
Excessive logging of forests	4%
Traffic congestion	3%
Global warming	2%
Wildlife protection	2%
Factory, poultry, hog farms	1%
Overpopulation	1%
Oak Ridge/nuclear	1%
Over-regulation	1%
Erosion/flooding	1%
None	8%
Other	4%
Don't know	15%
<i>Note: Does not total 100% because respondents could give multiple responses. Percentages are based on the number of respondents.</i>	

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

# VOTERS GIVE GOVERNOR SUNDQUIST 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 Sundquist for his overall performance as Governor – an A, B, C, D, or F?”*

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

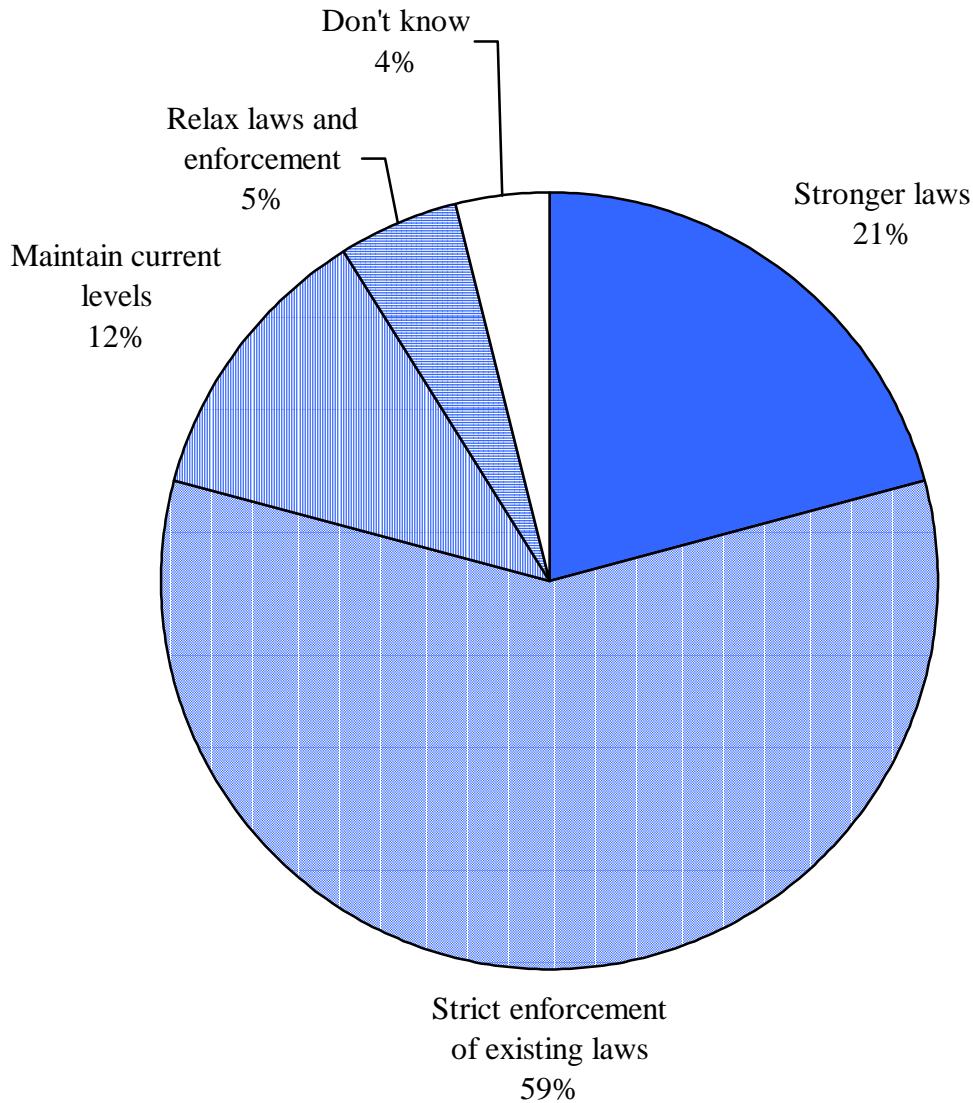
*“What grade would you give the Tennessee Legislature on its overall performance?”*

*“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.

# MOST SUPPORT STRICT ENFORCEMENT OF CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

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*“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.*

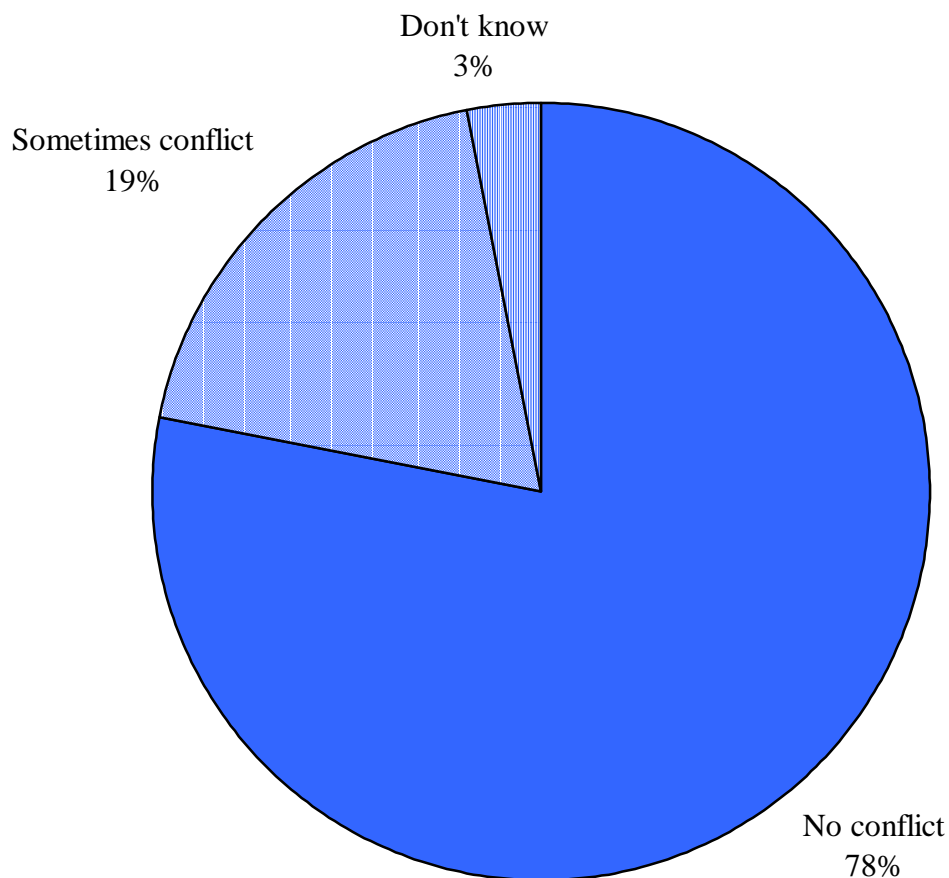
*The current laws are tough enough but they are not enforced, existing laws should be strictly enforced.*

*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.”*

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

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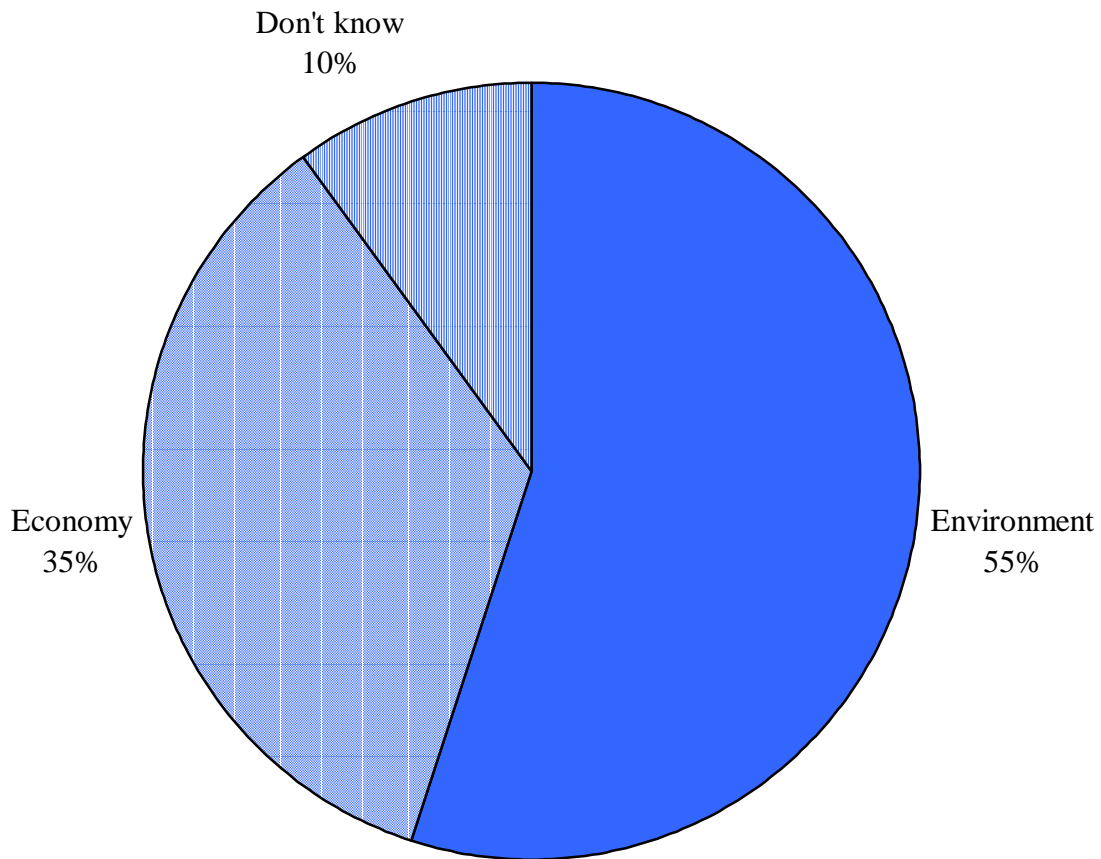
*“Please tell me which of the following statements comes closest to your own views, even if neither of the statements matches your views exactly.”*

*“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.”*

# THOSE WHO BELIEVE THERE IS A CONFLICT TEND TO FAVOR THE ENVIRONMENT OVER THE ECONOMY

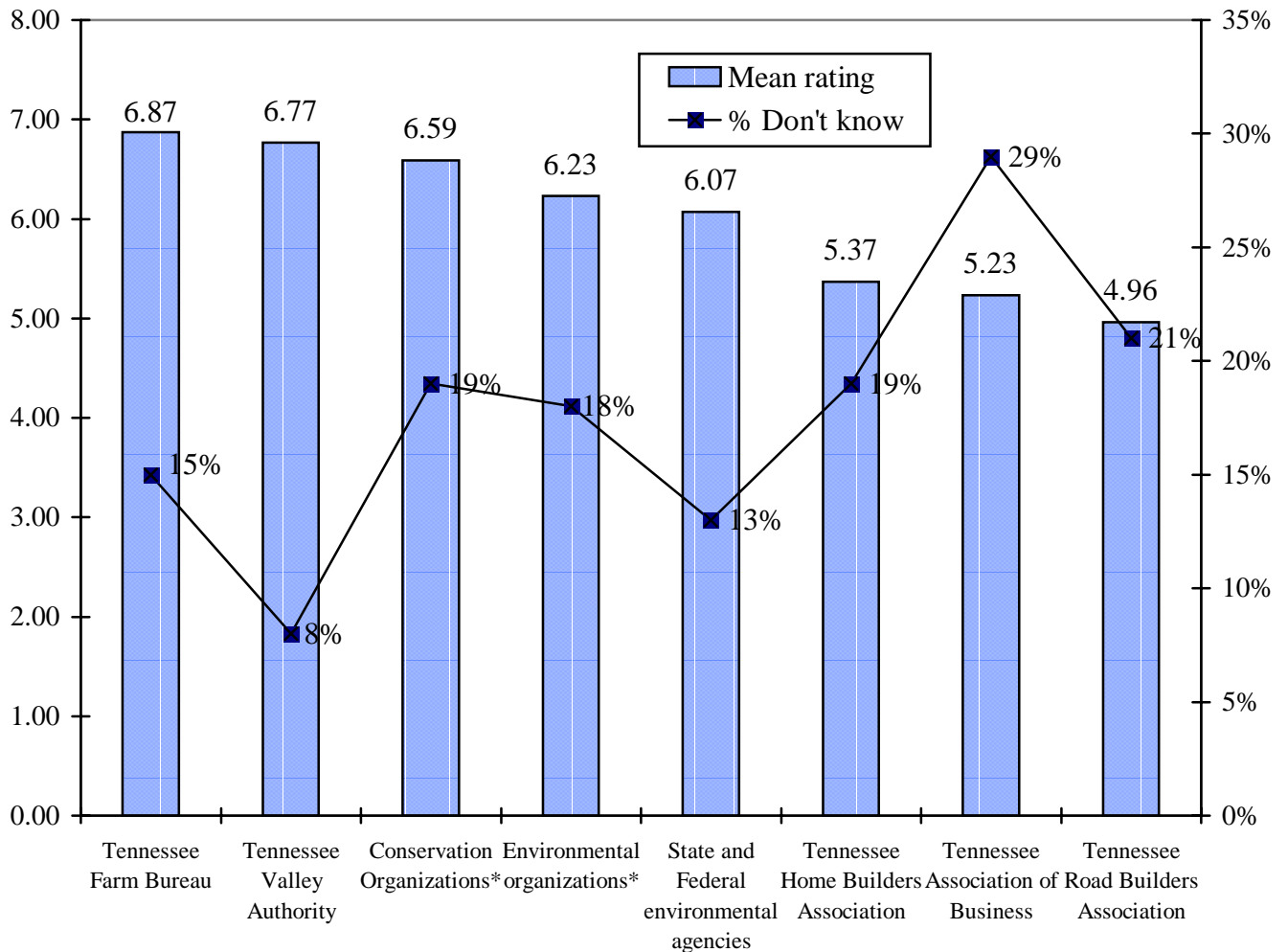
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*[Asked only of respondents who say that a clean environment and a strong economy are sometimes in conflict]*

*“If the choice must be made between a clean environment and a strong economy, which would you choose – the environment or the economy?”*

# VOTERS TRUST THE FARM BUREAU, TVA, AND CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

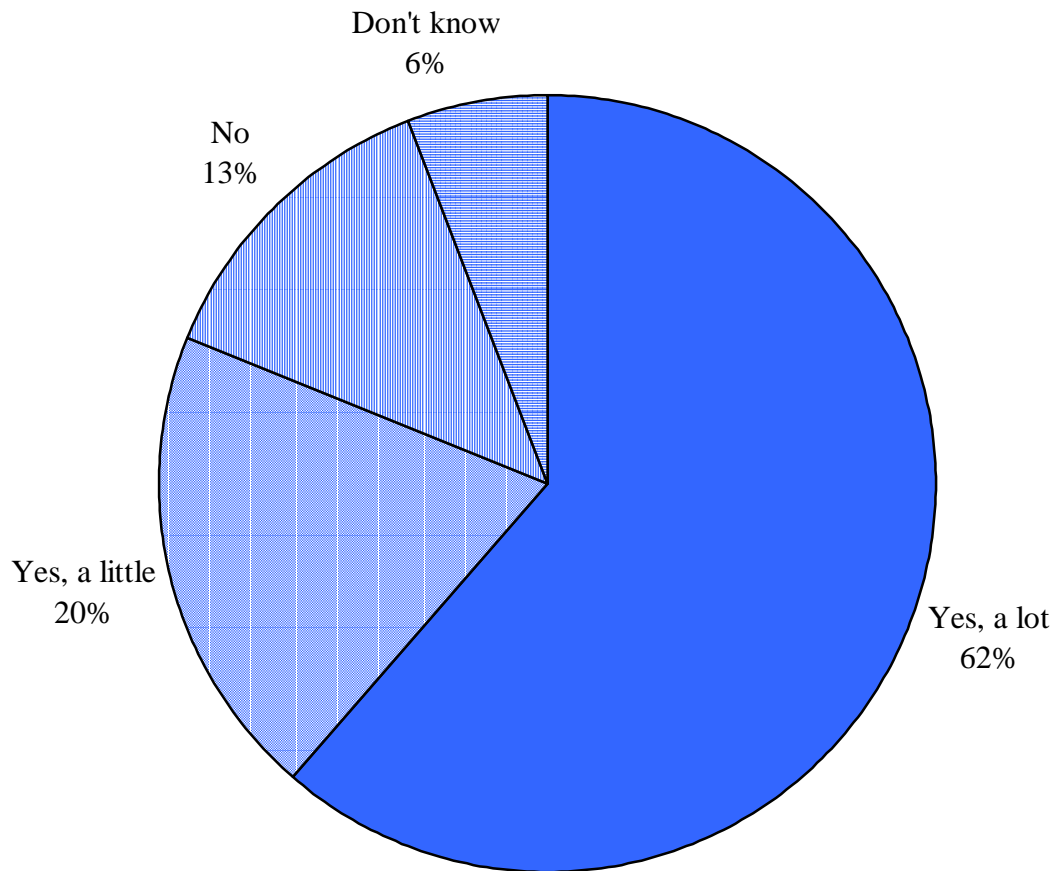


\* Split sample (N=300)

*“Now, I am going to name some groups or organizations that may provide information about the environment. Please rate each one on a scale of 0 to 10, where a 10 means that this group or organization is a very trustworthy source of information on the environment and a 0 means it is not at all a trustworthy source of information on the environment.”*

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

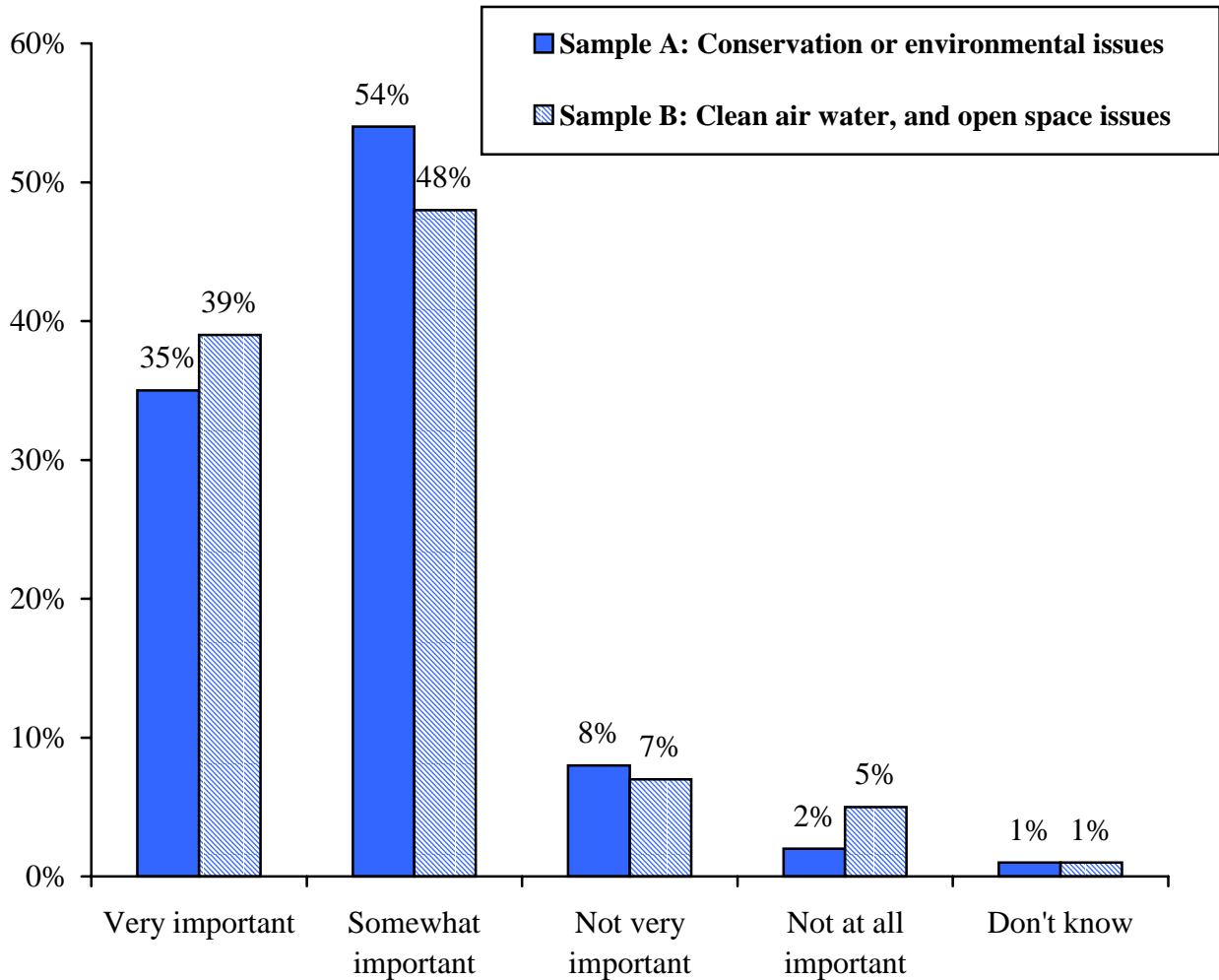
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*“Now let me ask you – when you think about campaign contributions to candidates, do you think campaign contributions influence how elected officials vote on environmental issues?”*  
*[IF YES] “Would you say a lot or a little?”*

# PUBLIC OFFICIALS SHOULD KNOW THAT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AFFECT VOTING DECISIONS

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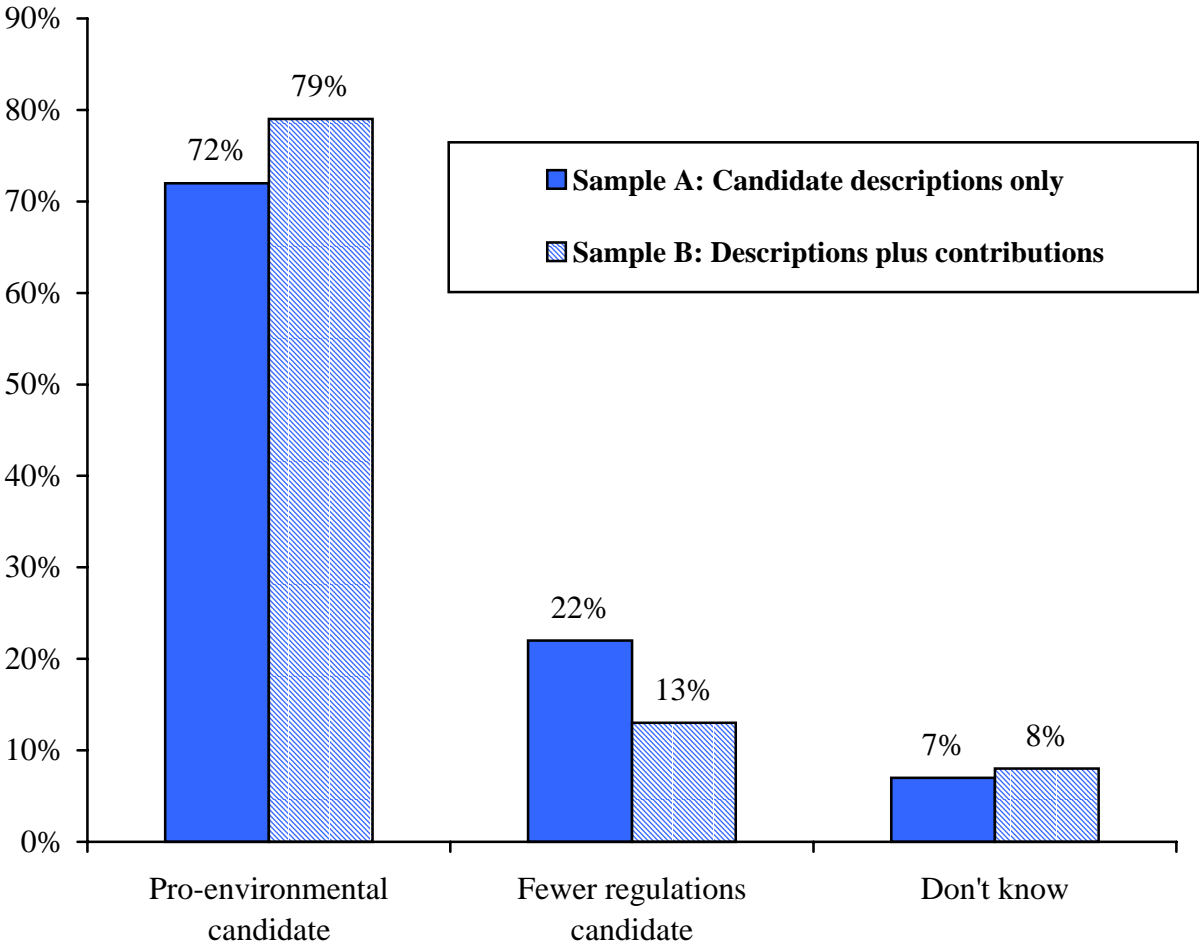


*[SAMPLE A] “In making a voting decision, how important are conservation or environmental issues for you when deciding how to vote? Are they ...?”*

*[SAMPLE B] “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



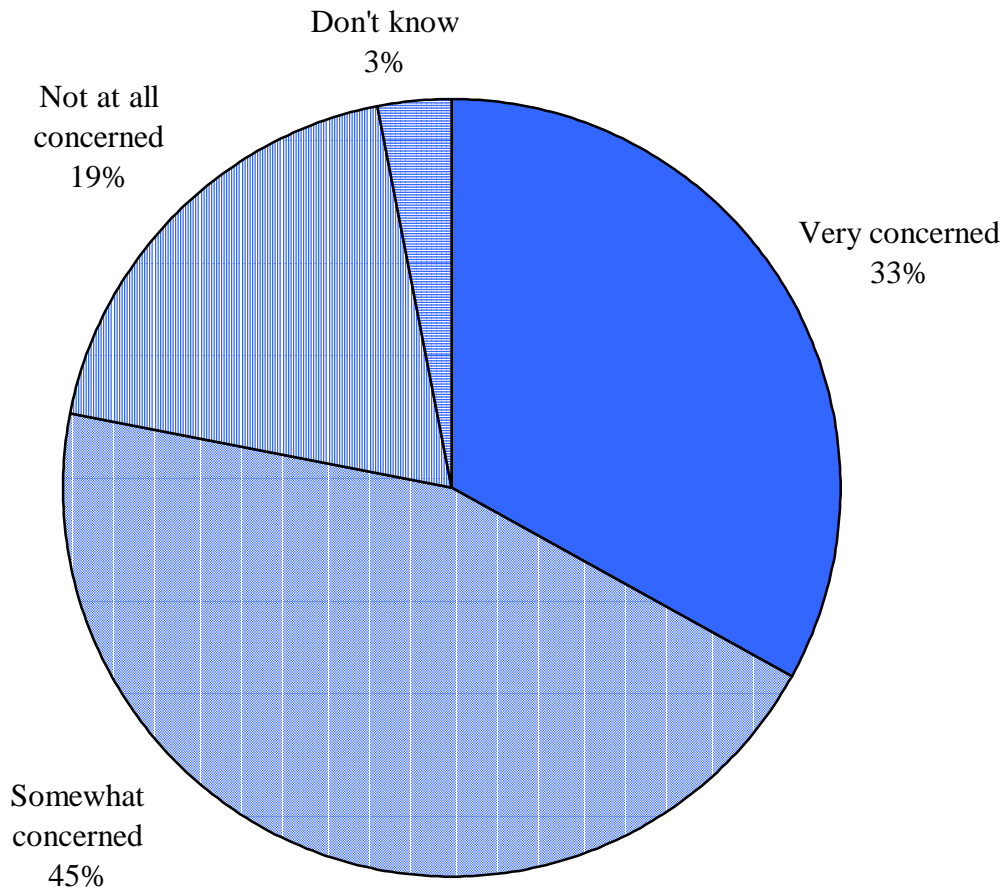
“Now let me read you two short statements about two candidates and please tell me which one you favor.”

*[SAMPLE A] “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.”*

*[SAMPLE B] “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

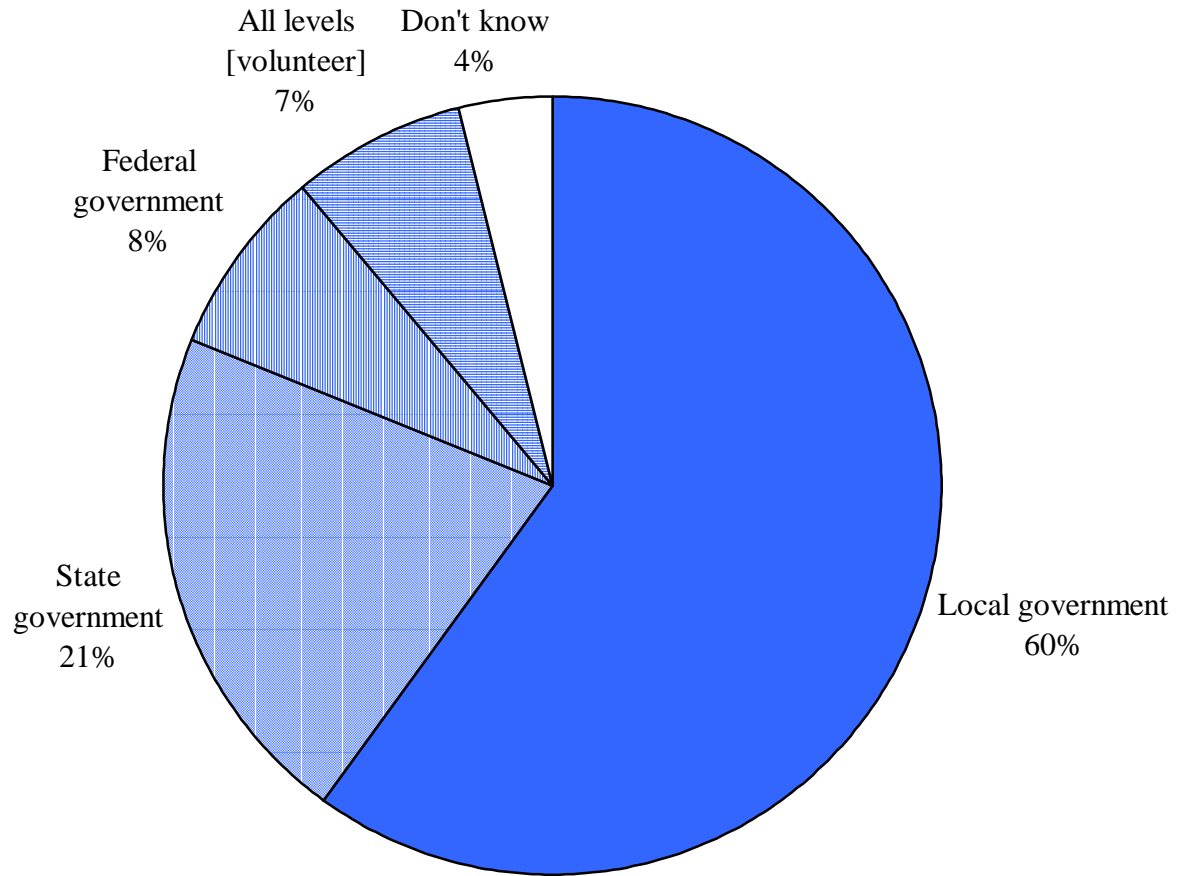
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*“Thinking now about environmental and land use issues, how concerned are you about growth and sprawl in your area? Are you ...?”*

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

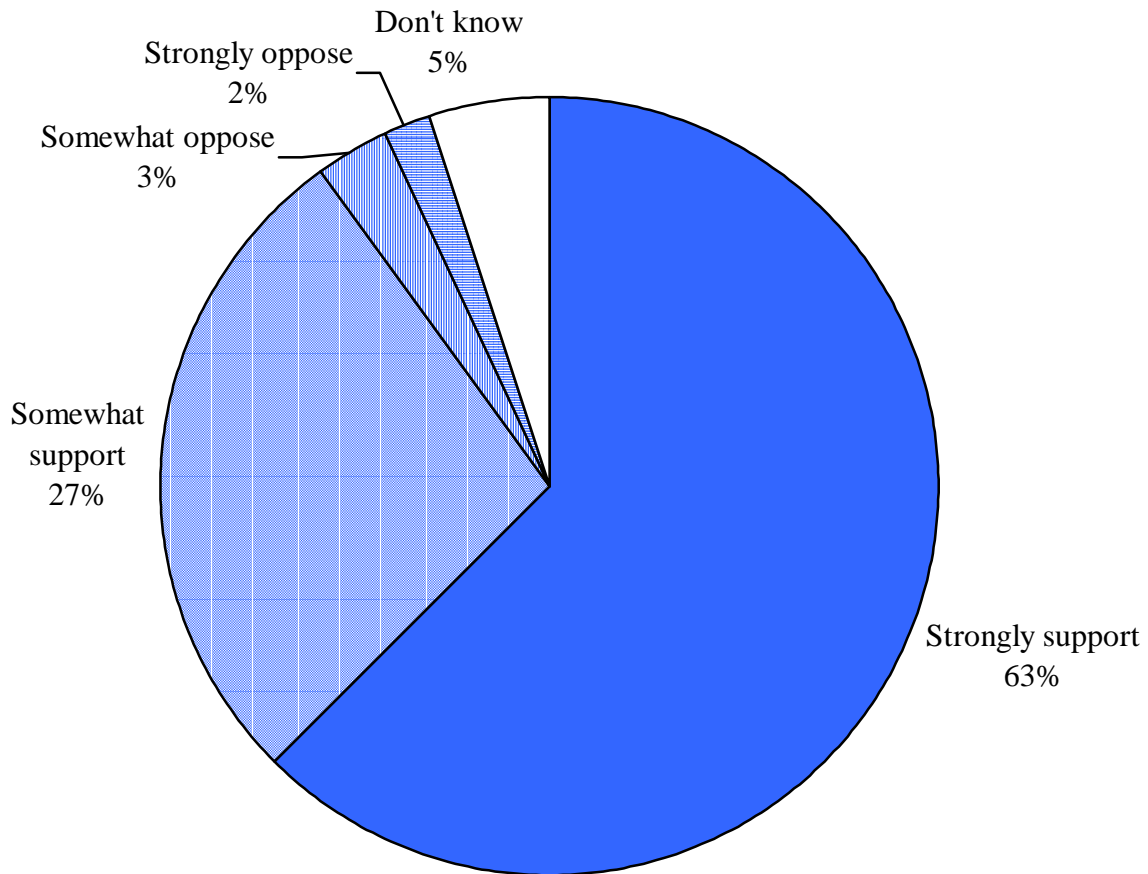
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*“What level of government should take primary responsibility for managing sprawl and growth issues ...?”*

# VOTERS STRONGLY SUPPORT STATEWIDE STANDARDS FOR THE LOGGING INDUSTRY

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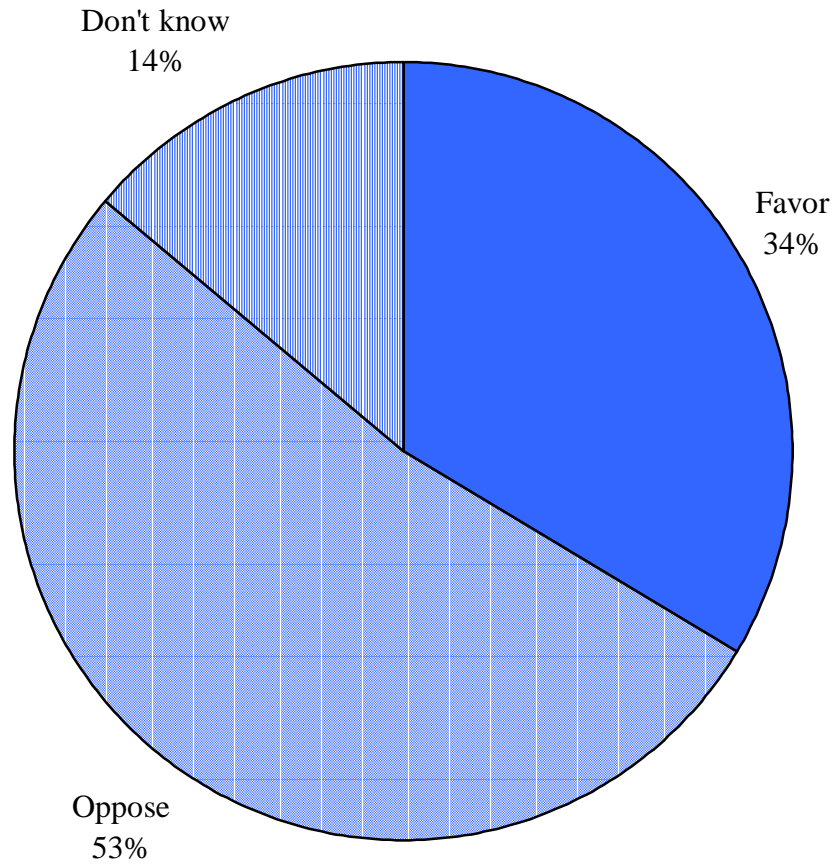


*“Thinking about forestry and logging, would you favor or oppose setting statewide standards for the logging industry that would prevent erosion and protect the state’s waterways?”*

*[IF SUPPORT/OPPOSE] “Is that strongly (support/oppose) or somewhat (support/oppose)?”*

# OVER HALF OPPOSE GOLF COURSES IN TENNESSEE STATE PARKS

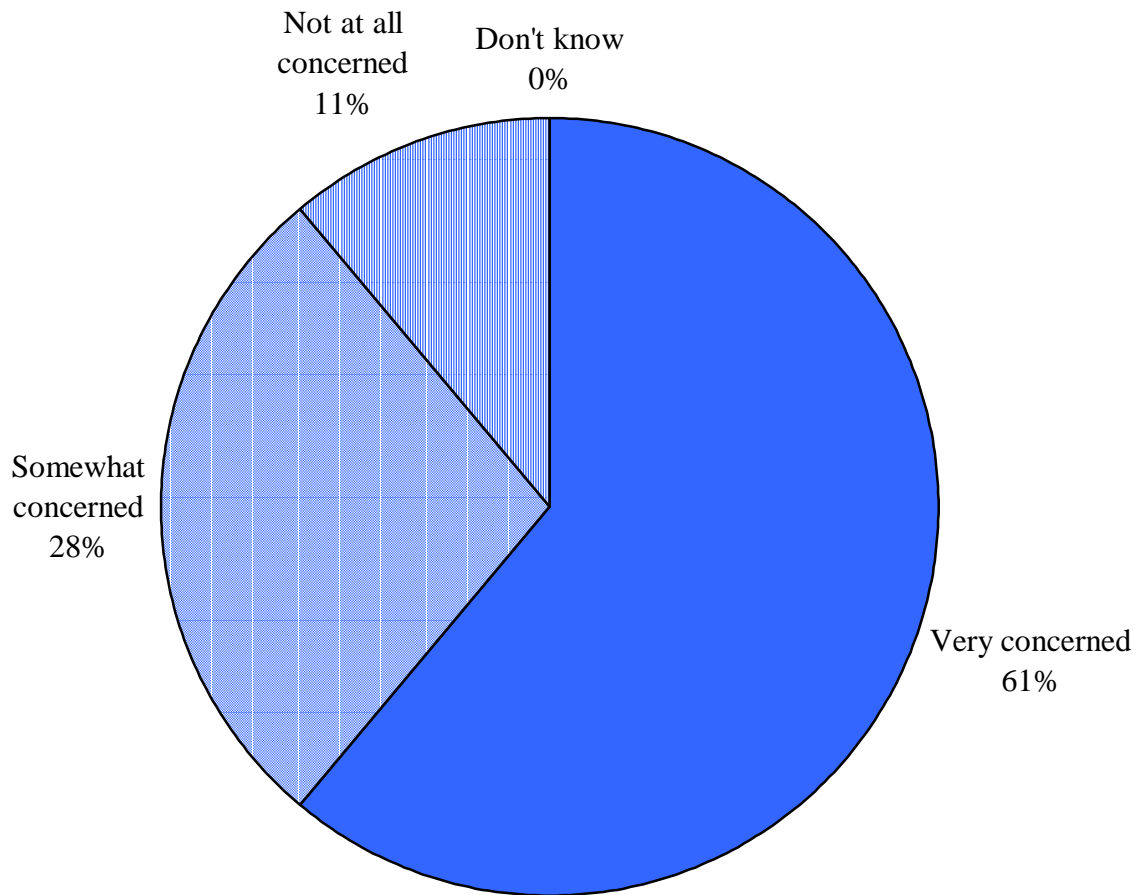
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*“Thinking about the land use specifically of state parks, do you favor or oppose the building of golf courses within Tennessee state parks?”*

# A MAJORITY OF VOTERS ARE VERY CONCERNED ABOUT WATER QUALITY

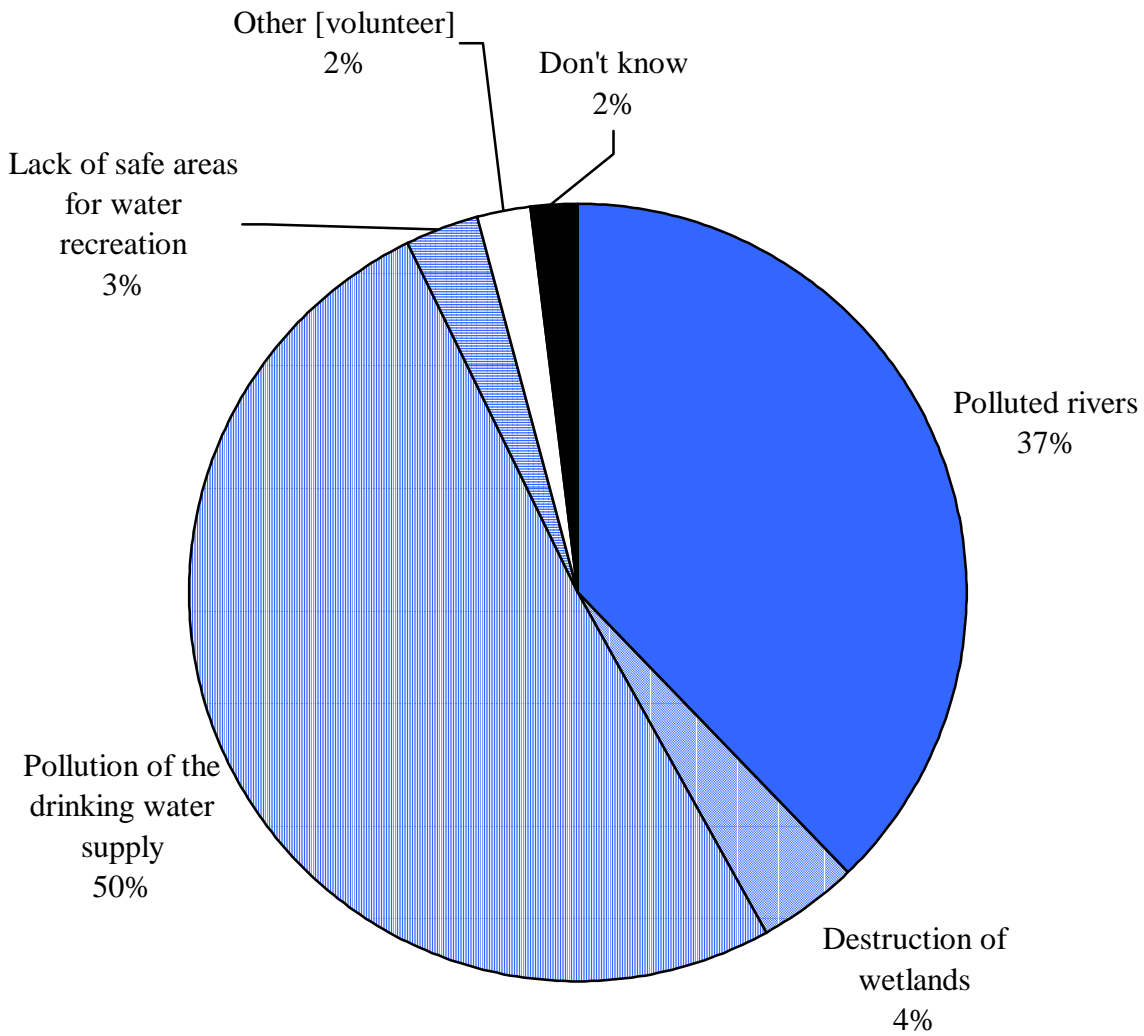
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*“Thinking now about water quality issues, how concerned are you about water quality in your area? Are you ...?”*

# VOTERS' CHIEF WATER QUALITY CONCERNS ARE POLLUTED DRINKING WATER AND POLLUTED RIVERS

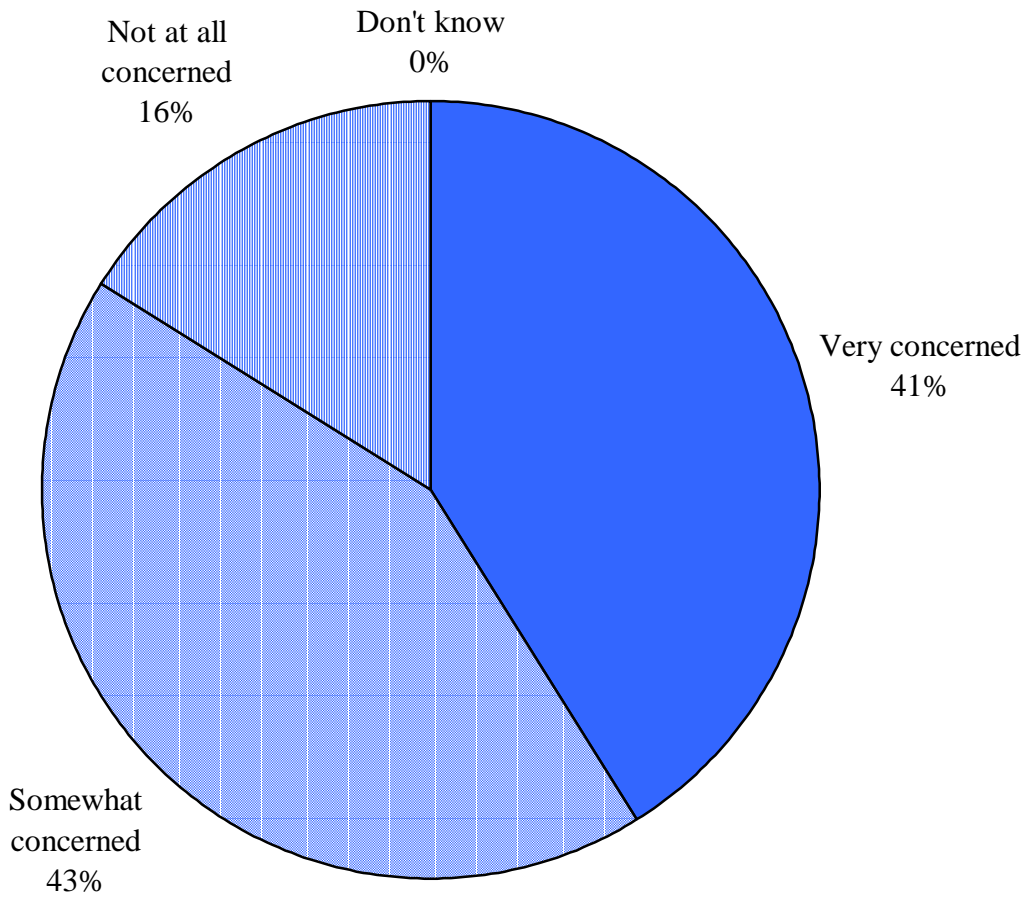
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*[Asked only of respondents who express concern in previous question]  
“Which one of the following water quality issues most concerns you ...?”*

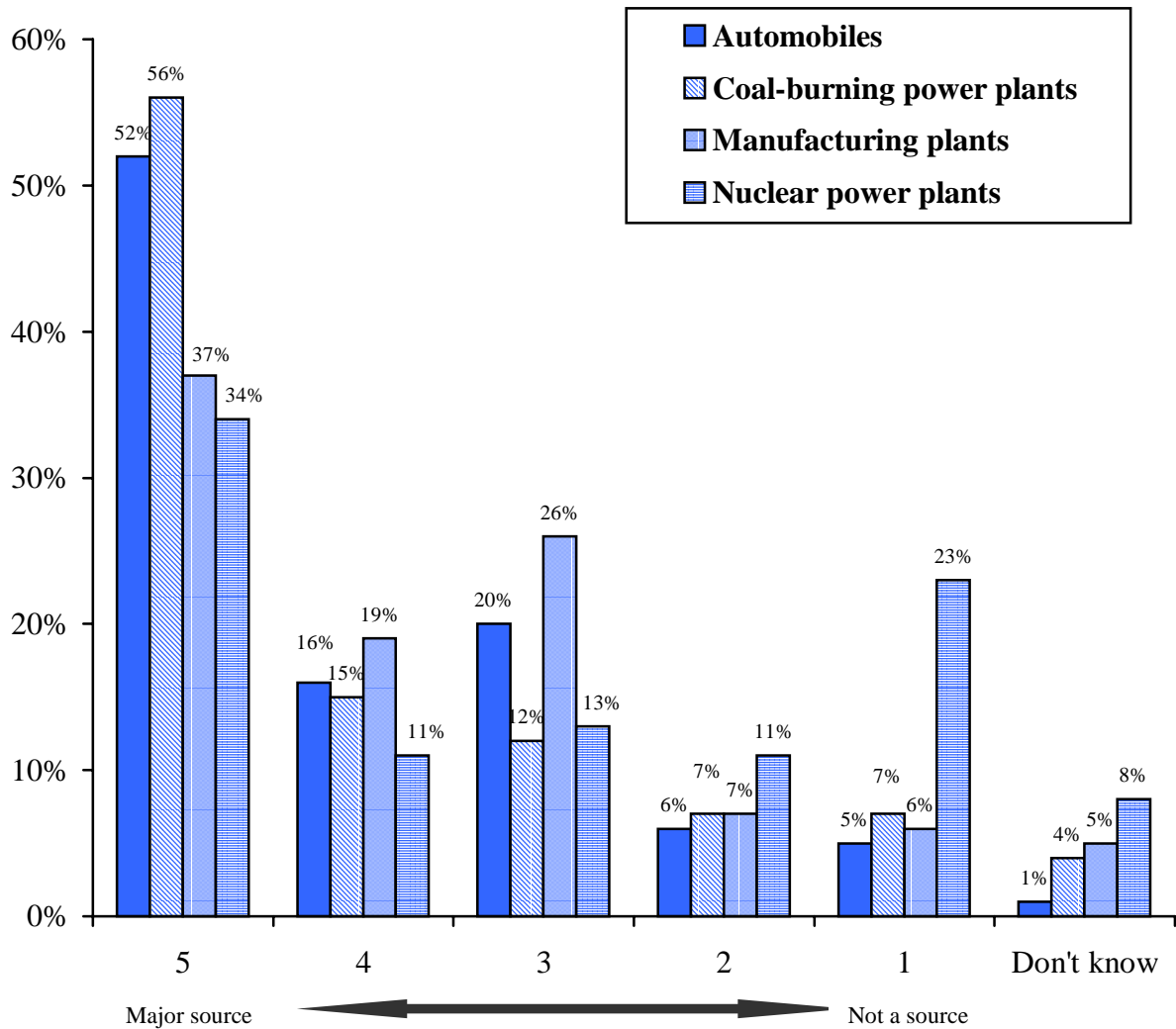
# A LARGE MAJORITY OF VOTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT AIR QUALITY

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

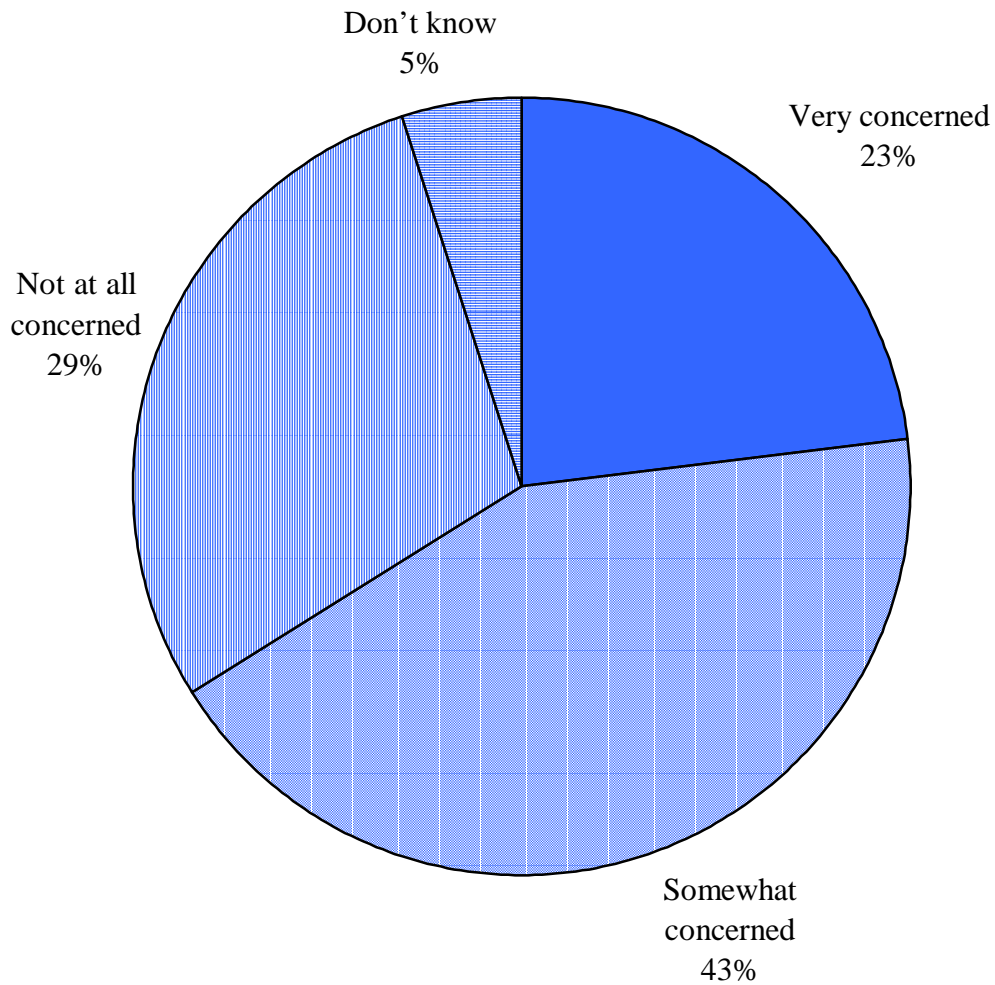
# MOST VOTERS RATE COAL-BURNING PLANTS AND AUTOS AS MAJOR SOURCES OF AIR POLLUTION



*“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 ...”*

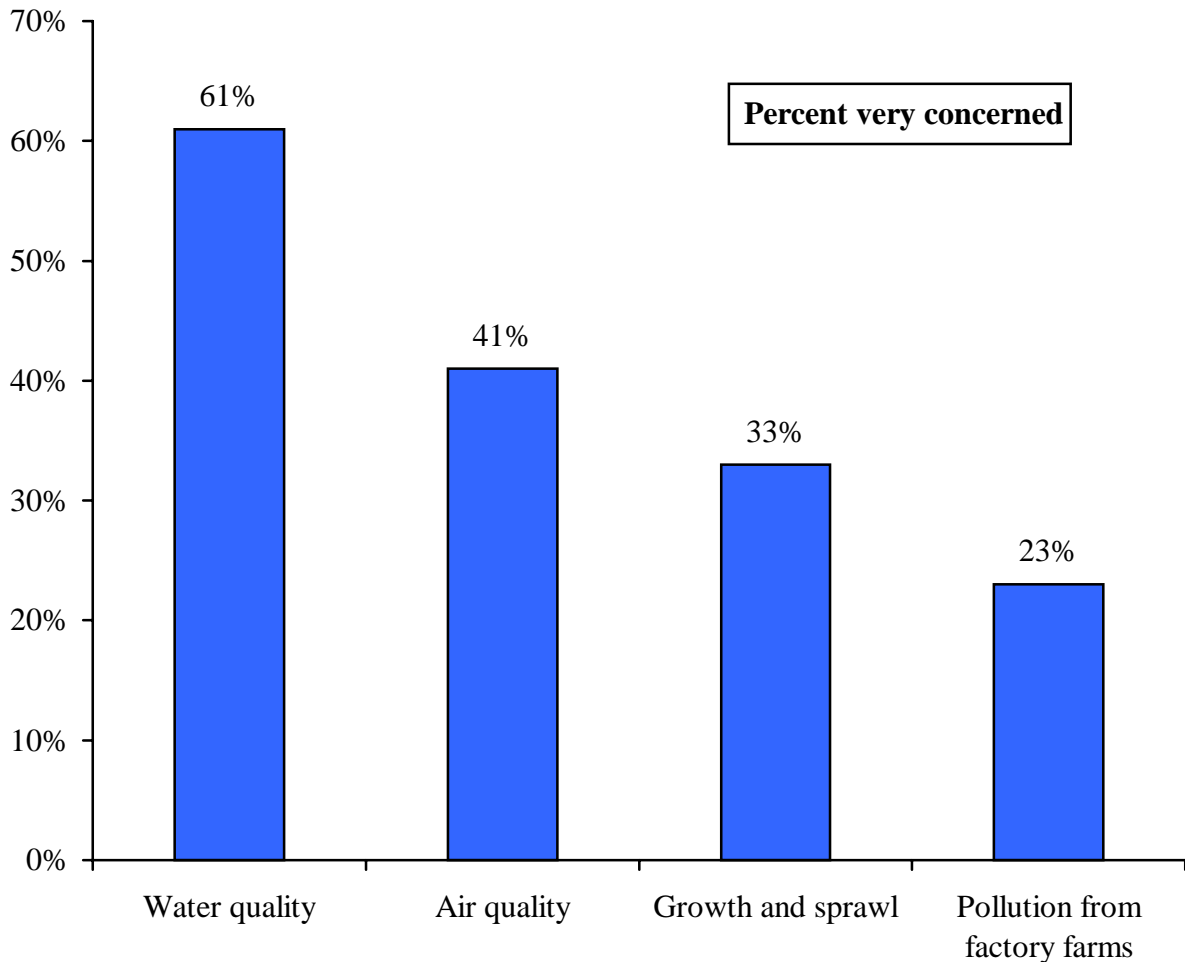
# VOTERS ARE CONCERNED ABOUT POLLUTION FROM FACTORY FARMS

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*“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 Tennessee ...?”*

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



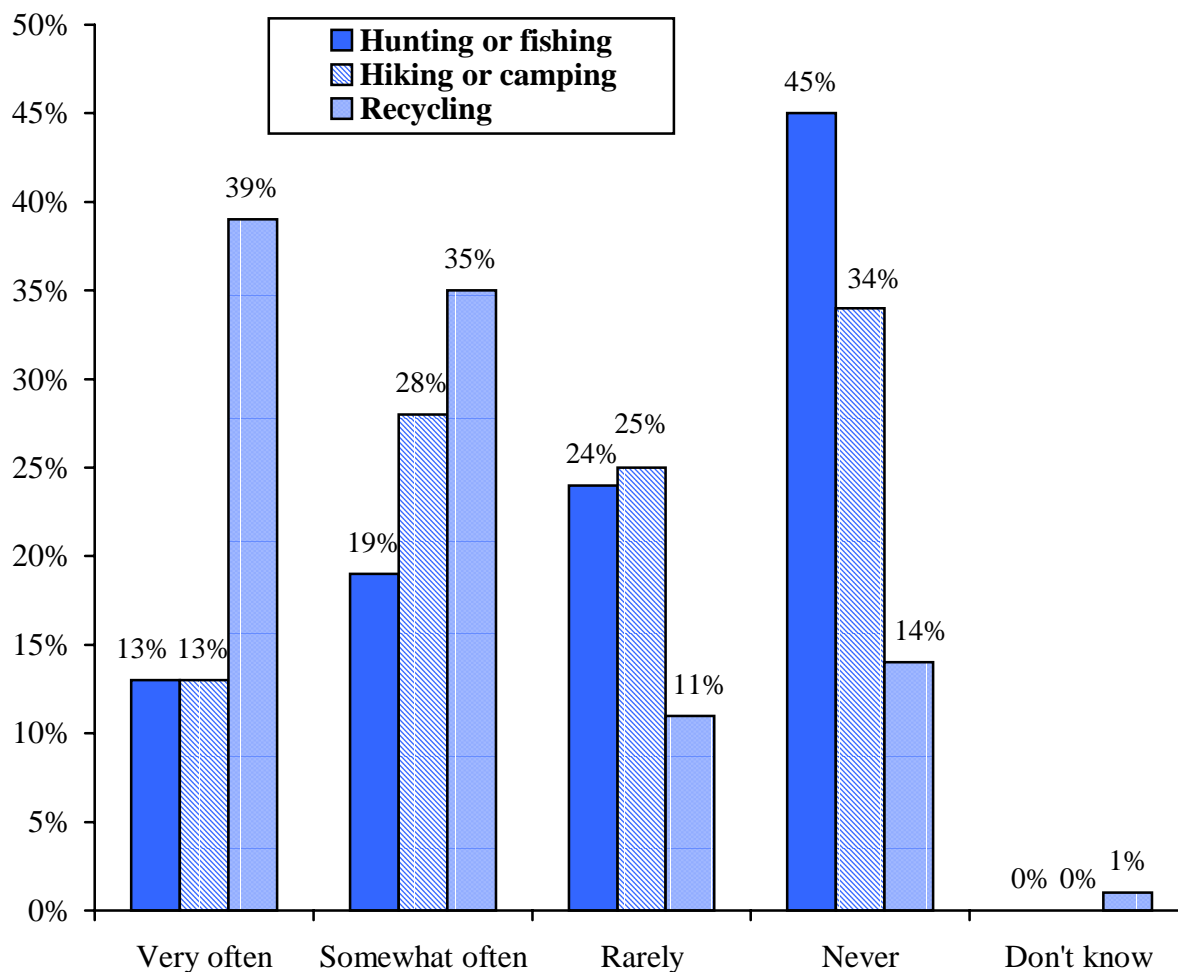
*“Thinking now about water quality issues, how concerned are you about water quality in your area?”*

*“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 Tennessee?”*

## TENNESSEANS FREQUENTLY RECYCLE, BUT HUNTING, FISHING, HIKING, AND CAMPING ARE LESS COMMON



*“I’m going to read you a list of activities or behaviors. Please tell me how often you participate in each one – very often, somewhat often, rarely, or never.”*