

Public Attitudes Toward Transportation

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Studies

Survey 1: November 12-17, 2024, 1,974 WI adults

Survey 2: February 26 to March 6, 2025, 1,559 WI adults

Focus Groups Late July, 2025

Women (demographically and politically mixed)

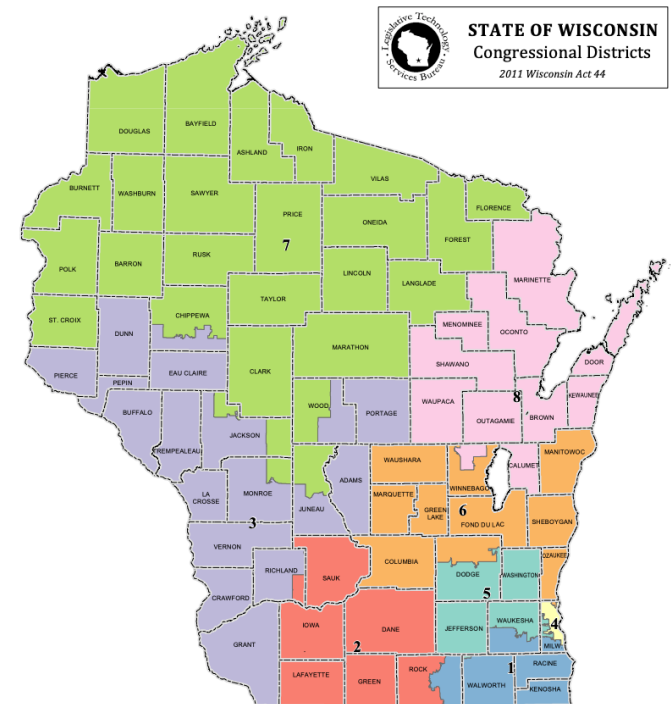
Non Madison and Milwaukee DMAs (demo and politically mixed)

Trump Supporters (demographically mixed)

Harris Voters (demographically mixed)

Women Under 35 (demographically and politically mixed)

Men Under 35 (demographically and politically mixed)



Public Attitudes in State are Salty

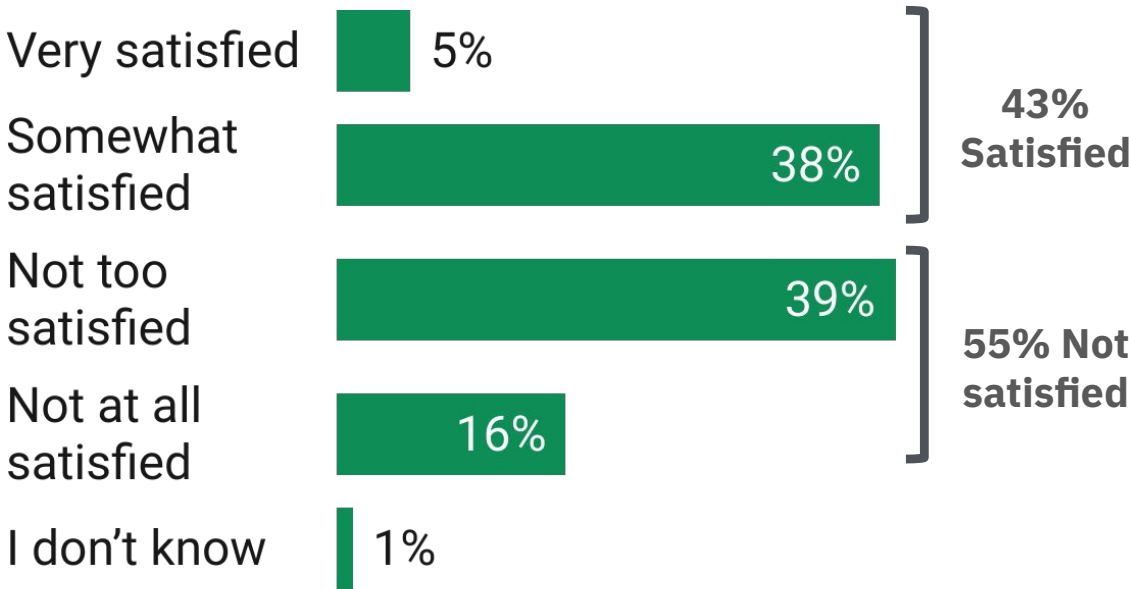
General Feelings

- Across Wisconsin, there's a **growing sense of frustration** that cuts across age, geography, and political identity. People are feeling the squeeze of everyday life – higher prices at the pump, the grocery store, and the rental market. Affordable housing feels out of reach for too many, and there's **deep concern** that public tax dollars aren't being invested where they're needed most.
- One area where this is especially visible, literally, is the state of roads. While Wisconsinites see construction cones and lane closures year after year, **they don't always see lasting improvements**. Many wonder why the same roads seem to be under construction repeatedly, or why rural areas continue to be neglected. Potholes, rough pavement, and poorly coordinated repairs aren't just a nuisance, they represent **a larger feeling** that the system isn't working efficiently or fairly – **for them**.
- Add to that a public education system that many believe is falling short, and a political climate where elected officials seem **more focused on fighting each other** than delivering solutions. And the result is a public that's unsure who, if anyone, is moving the state forward.
- People want **transparency**. They want **accountability**. And more than anything, they want proof that the investments they make as taxpayers are being returned in the form of safer roads, stronger schools, and communities they can afford to live in.
- And this is the **opportunity**...

The Wisconsin Public is
With Us on “Need”

Wisconsinites are **dissatisfied** with the condition of roads, **don’t believe** that our roads are better than other states, and think roads have stayed the same or **deteriorated** over the past 5 years.

Q. How satisfied are you with the condition of the roads and bridges you drive on most frequently in Wisconsin?



Q. Would you say the roads and bridges in Wisconsin are better, about the same, or worse than other states you’ve driven in?	
Better	18%
About the same	40%
Worse	34%
I don’t know	9%

Q. Over the past five years, do you think the roads and bridges that you drive on have gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?	
Gotten better	21%
Stayed about the same	39%
Gotten worse	38%
I don’t know	2%

Perceptions of road work: endless construction and short-term fixes

- Projects feel never-ending: the same stretch closes, re-opens, then closes again.
 - Participants perceive the state's road work as quick "patch jobs" that mask, rather than resolve, underlying problems.
 - Most participants grade the network C or D; no one gives an A.
 - Across the state, rural residents claim their roads receive temporary cosmetic fixes while the full budget flows to the cities. Urban drivers complain about traffic-choked arterials and detours, insisting that even Milwaukee and Madison see little return on those dollars.
 - Messaging must acknowledge that while conditions may be improving in some areas, the benefits are not spread across the state. Regional disparities matter.
-



"The only city I would downgrade is Madison 'cuz the last time I went there I saw they were using this black stuff. They pour on the roads with a bunch of rocks that the cars and trucks drive over to flatten it instead of flattening themselves. And you know, rocks are flying up and hitting windshields left and right."

- Women Under 35, 00:12:17



"I'll say I do see some projects that were done. But I feel like they were done really stupid, causing accidents and stuff like that. So I wouldn't call it an improvement. I live out in the country, so I say our roads out here are very rarely touched, and if they are, it's just gravel and tar being patched over, but not actually ever really fixed."

- Trump Supporters, 00:25:43

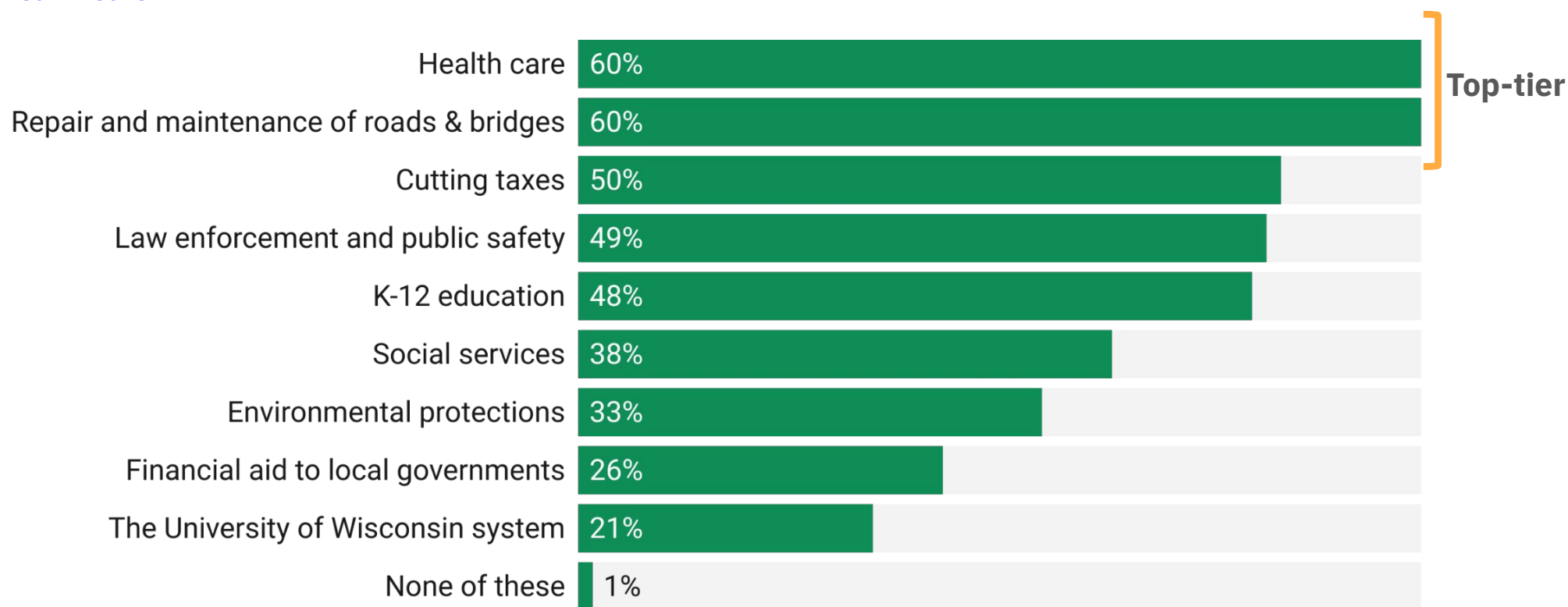


"Growing up in the North Woods, we're sort of used to getting, you know, the trickle-down idea, but we're up here, so whatever money is left being spent in the urban areas, metros makes its way to us."

- Rest of State, 00:23:44

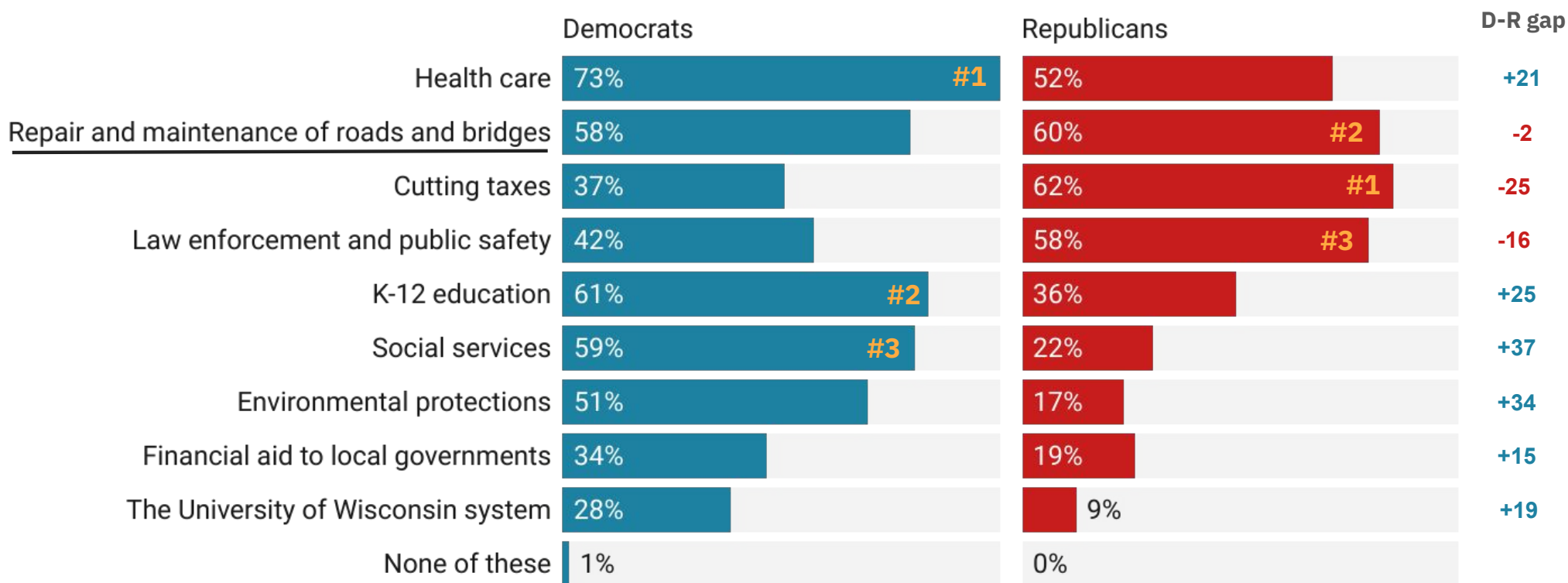
Roads & Bridges Are in
Top Tier - Tied with
Health Care

Q. Which of the following areas are important for the State of Wisconsin to direct funding towards? **Select all that apply.**



**Roads and Bridges Are
Least Polarized Funding
Area**

Q. Which of the following areas are important for the State of Wisconsin to direct funding towards? Select all that apply.



Ordered by % selected among all respondents

**Roads and Bridges are a
“Bridesmaid” Issue for
Both Ds and Rs**

Q. Which of the following areas is the most important for the State of Wisconsin to direct funding towards?

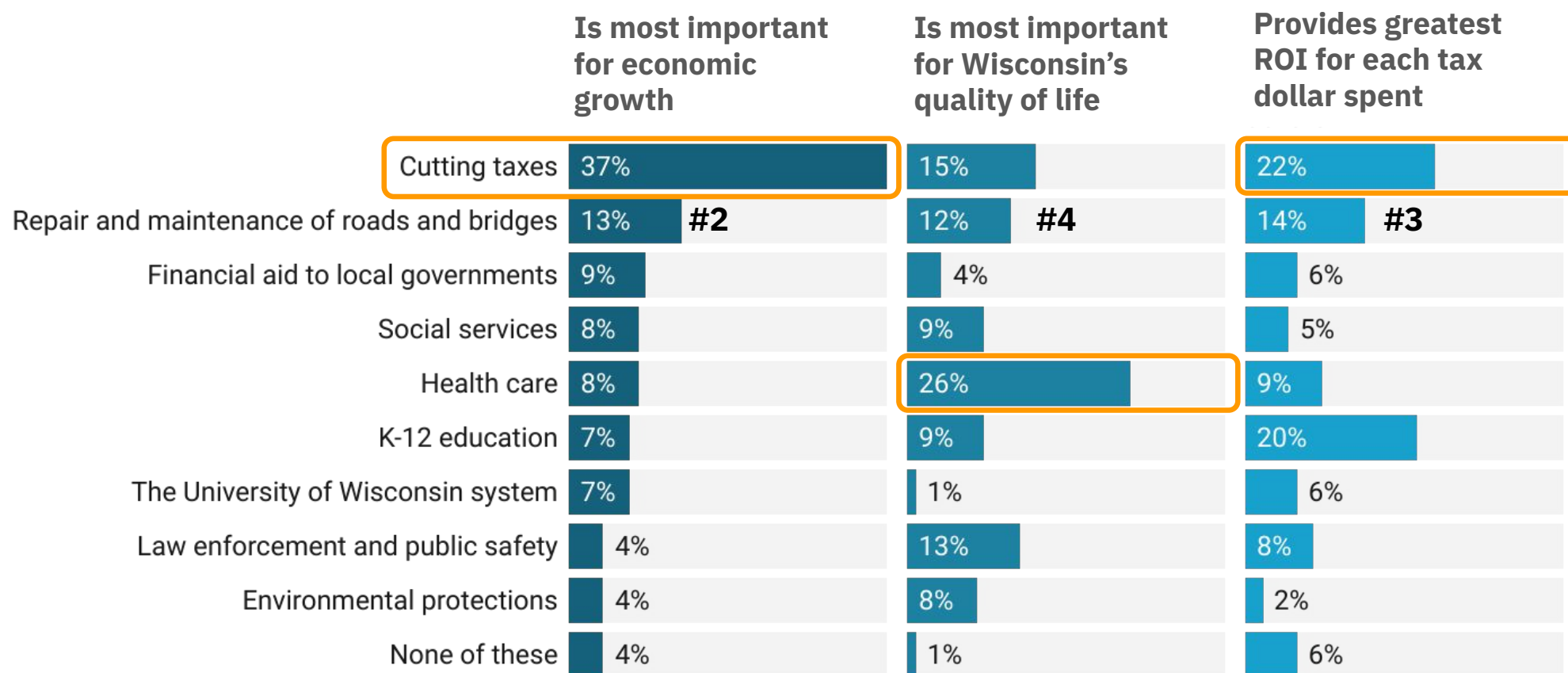
When pressed for ‘most important’ areas, Democrats and Republicans both gravitate to other priorities

Democrats' Most Important Areas	
Health care	27%
K-12 education	21%
Social services	13%
Roads and bridges	9%
Cutting taxes	8%
Aid to local gov.	7%
Law enforcement	6%
Environm. protections	5%
The UW system	3%

Republicans' Most Important Areas	
Cutting taxes	29%
Law enforcement	17%
Health care	16%
Roads and bridges	14%
K-12 education	13%
Social services	4%
Aid to local gov.	3%
Environm. protections	2%
The UW system	2%

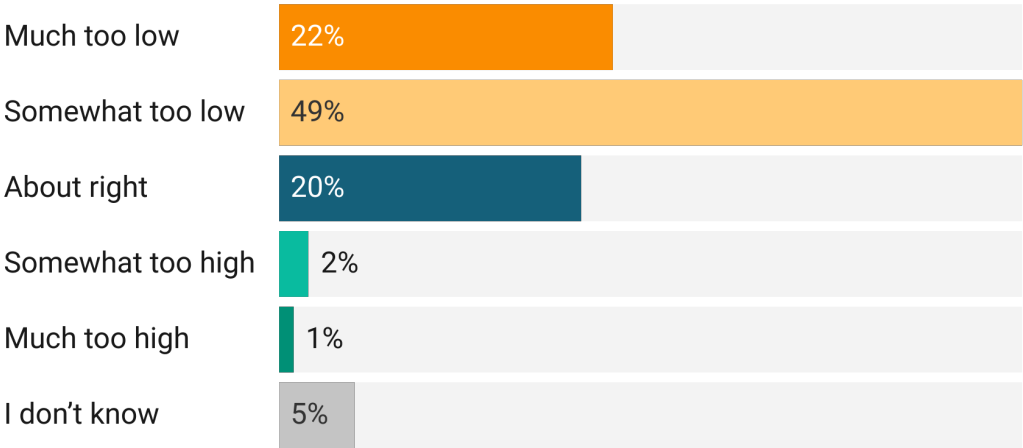
Roads and Bridges are
Not Immediately
Identified w/ Outcomes

Q. Which spending area...



Nearly 3-in-4 Wisconsinites Say Spending on Roads & Bridges is Too Low

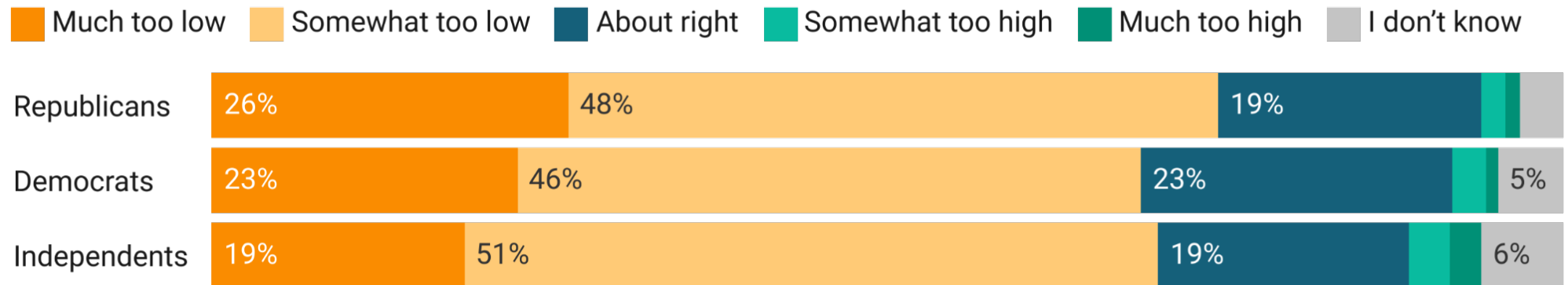
Q. The state currently spends less than 10% of its budget on repair and maintenance of roads and bridges. Do you think spending on roads and bridges in Wisconsin is too low, about right, or too high?



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Slightly more Republicans Say Spending on Roads “Too Low” - Generally Narrow Partisan Difference

Q. The state currently spends less than 10% of its budget on repair and maintenance of roads and bridges. Do you think spending on roads and bridges in Wisconsin is too low, about right, or too high?

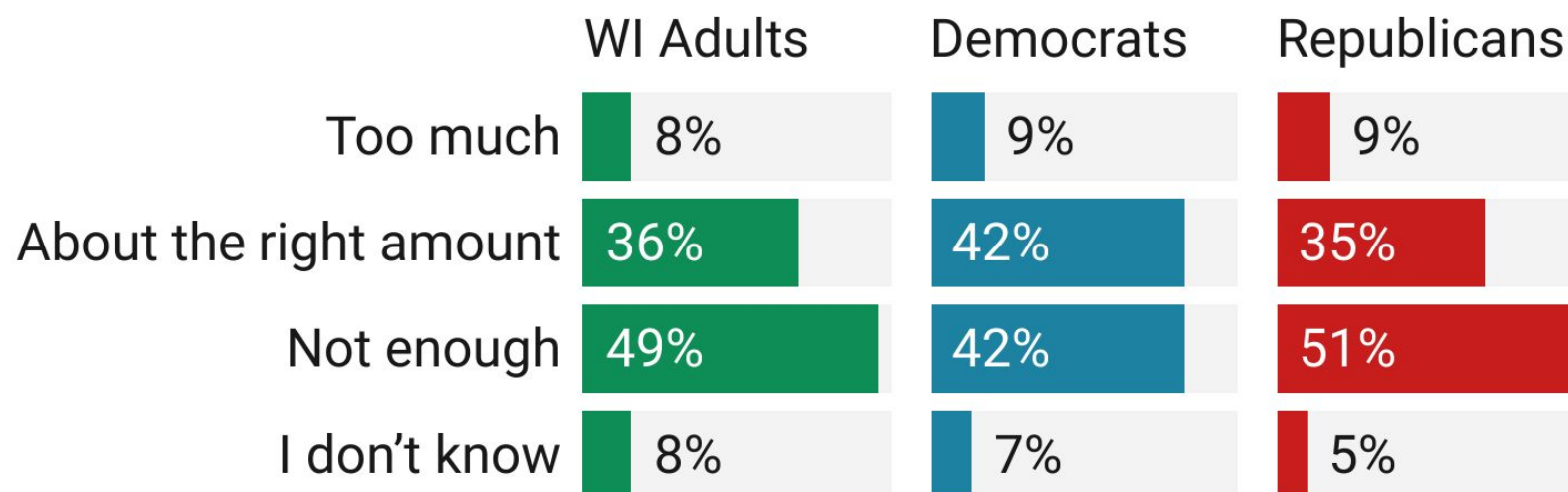


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**The Wisconsin Public is
With Us on “Need”**

Nearly half of Wisconsinites think there is **“not enough”** road and bridge construction and maintenance - consistent across parties. Few in the state believe there is “too much” construction.

Q. Do you think we have too much, not enough, or about the right amount of road and bridge construction and maintenance in Wisconsin?



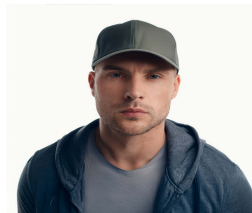
People want accountability, not just revenue

- A 5¢ bump in the gas tax feels reasonable to many (except the Trump supporters) once they learn the rate has been frozen since 2006. Proposals to jump to 10¢ spark resistance, with residents warning of a slippery slope.
- Weight-based registration fees track as “fair share” logic, but those with larger families worry about shouldering the heavier financial burden.
- Toll roads face stiff pushback: residents call them a “double tax,” balk at transponder hassles and queue-heavy lanes, yet some welcome the chance to make Illinois and Indiana drivers pay their share.
- Last-mile delivery surcharges are seen as regressive fees that land back on the customers.
- Any funding solution must be paired with clear accountability, local project visibility, and reassurances that the cost won't quietly expand in the future.



"I wouldn't mind paying the extra cents if I know that it's gonna go back into the infrastructure and it's gonna go back into the roads. Like again I've, I had to change my tires almost three times in six months because of the roads here. So it's just, I would rather the roads be nice and let uh, and don't have to do that. I don't have to spend the extra money on tires."

- Women Under 35, 01:01:23



"Yeah, it works...it's very logical for me because it is a little bit, like I said earlier, a wealth tax [on] people who want the bigger vehicles and it also makes sense because the bigger vehicles do the most damage."

- Trump Opponents, 01:21:43

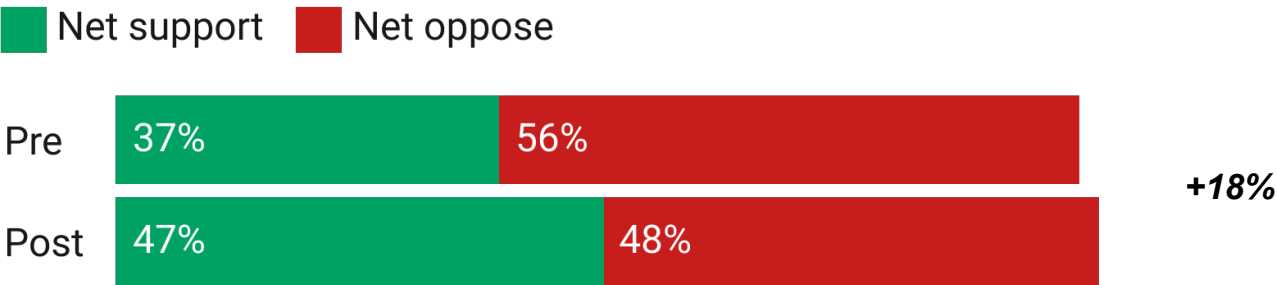


"I just don't want the hassle of [toll roads] and I feel like it's just another big added expense and I do feel like it would hurt businesses and it would hurt people more."

- Women Under 35, 01:16:54

Net Gains for Gas Tax on Message Test

Gas tax adjustment



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Gas tax knowledge gap resets the conversation

- Every participant was stunned to learn the state gas tax has been frozen since 2006, which reframed a 5¢ increase as “*catch-up*,” not a new burden.
- All groups showed low or incorrect understanding of how roads are funded and how much gas tax they actually pay. Guesses for annual gas tax ranged from a couple hundred dollars to \$3,000 - far higher than reality.
- The gas tax’s flat-rate structure triggers fairness questions but also budgeting appeal.
- Learning the fund is segregated boosts its credibility.
- There is a huge opportunity for education-based persuasion. Once people know how little they pay, and that it hasn’t changed in 19 years, they’re more open to an increase.



“I would rather the 5 cents a gallon than \$300 repairs on my car because I had a pothole.”

- Men Under 35, 00:55:43



“I think that [the flat rate is] smart because then you're able to estimate how much you're gonna get despite gas price fluctuations, which I think makes it easier to budget for sure transportation costs. So I like that aspect of it. But I also am irritated that like when gas prices go up to \$5 it's not because taxes are going up.”

- Women Under 35, 00:53:35



“We've all been complaining about the roads for the last hour and a half. If 5 cents is what it takes on every gallon half, you know, half the time just from going to QuickTrip, I get a 5 cent discount per gallon anyway.”

- Trump Opponents, 01:03:31

Reinforced messaging recommendations

Closing the Knowledge Gap

Most residents believe they pay hundreds – sometimes even thousands – in state gas tax each year, when the reality is closer to \$148. Hearing the rate has been unchanged for 19 years surprises them and makes them realize they've been paying far less than they thought – raising the question: *How has the system kept up at all?*

Rural vs. Urban Focused Investments

Wisconsinites in rural and underserved regions see fewer benefits but face the worst roads. A smarter, fairer investment plan must level the playing field.

Local Storytelling

When people see investments that touch their daily lives—school bus routes, mail delivery, snow removal—they support more funding. But only if they see it.

Transparency First

Support grows when the state commits to transparency: where the money goes, who gets the contracts, and how fast things get done. Voters don't want vague promises, they want proof.