



THE TOWN OF
WILTON
CONNECTICUT

Board of Finance
March 2023 Budget Survey Results

Prepared by Matt Raimondi
On Behalf of the Board of Finance
April 3, 2023

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Executive Summary

Survey Results

Budget & Mill Rate Context

- The Board of Finance (“BOF”) is currently in the process of deliberating on the proposed **Board of Selectmen (“BOS”) budget increase of 2.15%**, a **proposed Board of Education (“BOE”) budget increase of 4.5%**, and a **consequent mill rate increase of 5.69%**
- This consequent mill rate increase is a calculation based on the BOS and BOE budget increases described above, as well as: 1) a **14.7% increase in debt service**; 2) a **4.6% increase in reserves** (required to be 1% of the total budget per Wilton’s Charter); 3) a **(65%) decrease in the excess use of fund balance** (i.e., budget surplus); and 4) a **(3.2%) decrease in non-property tax revenue**. These impacts to the mill rate calculation are offset by a **1.1% increase in the grand list** and a **(9%) decrease in tax relief**
- The BOF decided to launch a survey to collect quantitative feedback on Wilton residents' sentiments towards the proposed BOS budget, BOE budget, and the consequent mill rate increase. This survey was launched on March 6, and was distributed digitally and physically. The survey was active through March 31
- As a note, this survey was fielded prior to both the BOS and BOE budget hearings (which occurred on March 21 and March 27, respectively). It was also released prior to the finalization of the required mill rate calculation. As a result, survey respondents were presented with a mill rate increase range of 5.5-6.0%. After the survey launched, the required mill rate increase was determined to be 5.69% (though the survey language remained unchanged)

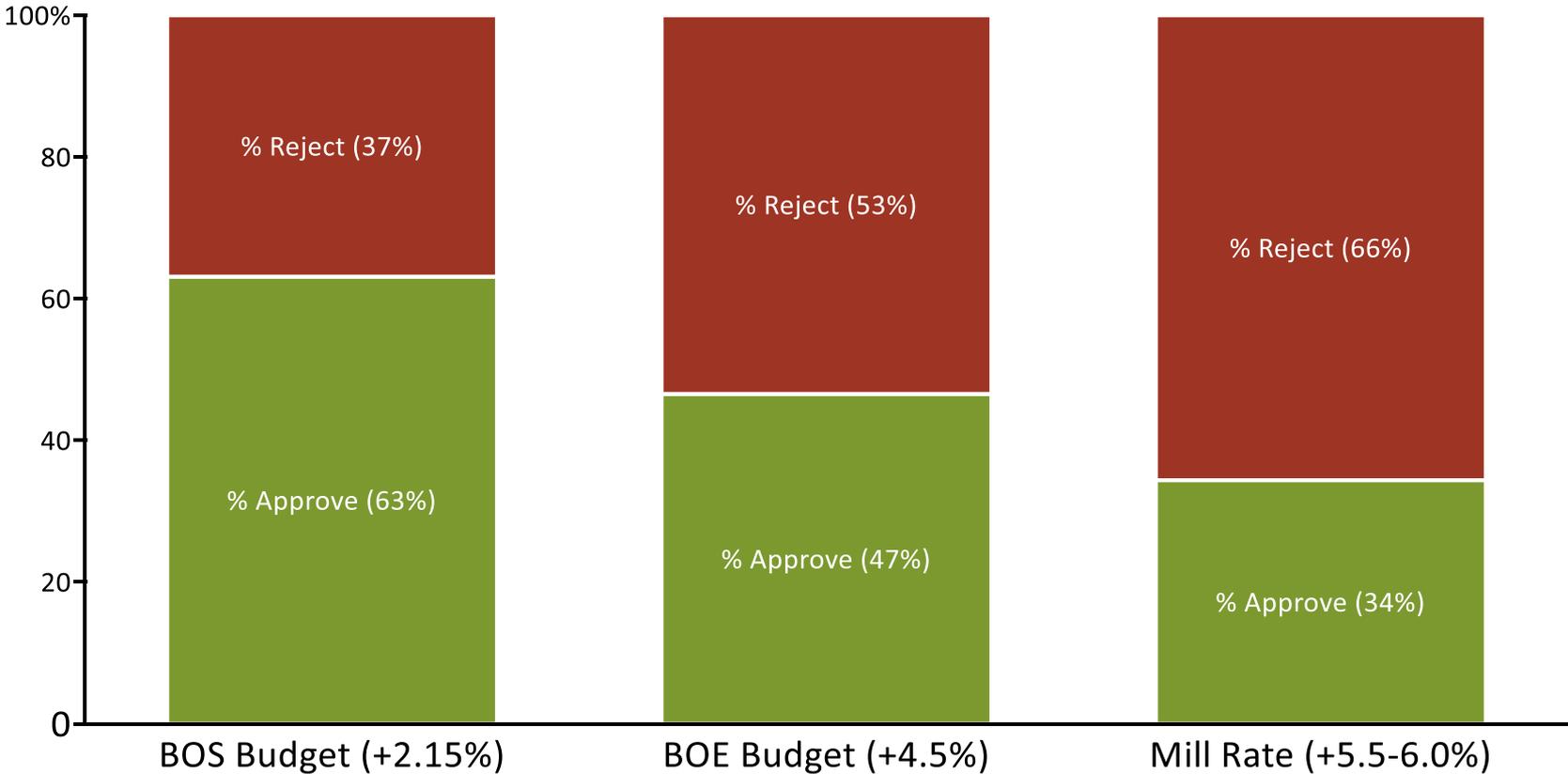
Survey Results Summary

- Overall, **the survey received 797¹ complete responses** from individuals who are registered to vote in Wilton. Please see the demographics slides on pages 9 and 11 for a full segmentation
- **63% of all respondents approved** the BOS budget (+2.15% increase). However, **53% rejected** the BOE budget (+4.5% increase) and **66% rejected** the proposed mill rate increase (+5.5-6.0% increase)
- Although a **majority of respondents responded in favor of the BOS budget and against the mill rate across all demographics**, only a majority of respondents with children in Wilton Public Schools (“WPS”) responded in favor of the BOE budget (**61% approval, vs 32% approval from respondents without children in WPS**). Relative to the 2020 census, the survey received responses from a greater proportion of parents with children (**55% of survey respondents, vs 44% of households per the census**)
- On a weighted average basis, respondents determined that the **maximum mill rate increase should be 2.5%**. 51% would support a mill rate increase below 2%, and 59% would like to see an increase below 3%
- Relative to last year’s survey, fewer respondents supported the BOS budget, the BOE budget, and the consequent mill rate increase. In 2022, the BOS (+1.37%) and BOE (+3.26%) budgets were approved by 71% and 58% of respondents respectively, but the mill rate increase (+1.94%) was rejected by 52%

Note: ¹Based on Wilton’s eligible voter population of 12,682, this sample size has a 95% confidence interval with an ~3.4% margin of error

While a majority of respondents approved of the BOS budgets (63%), a *- DRAFT -* majority rejected the BOE budget (53%) and the proposed mill rate increase (66%)

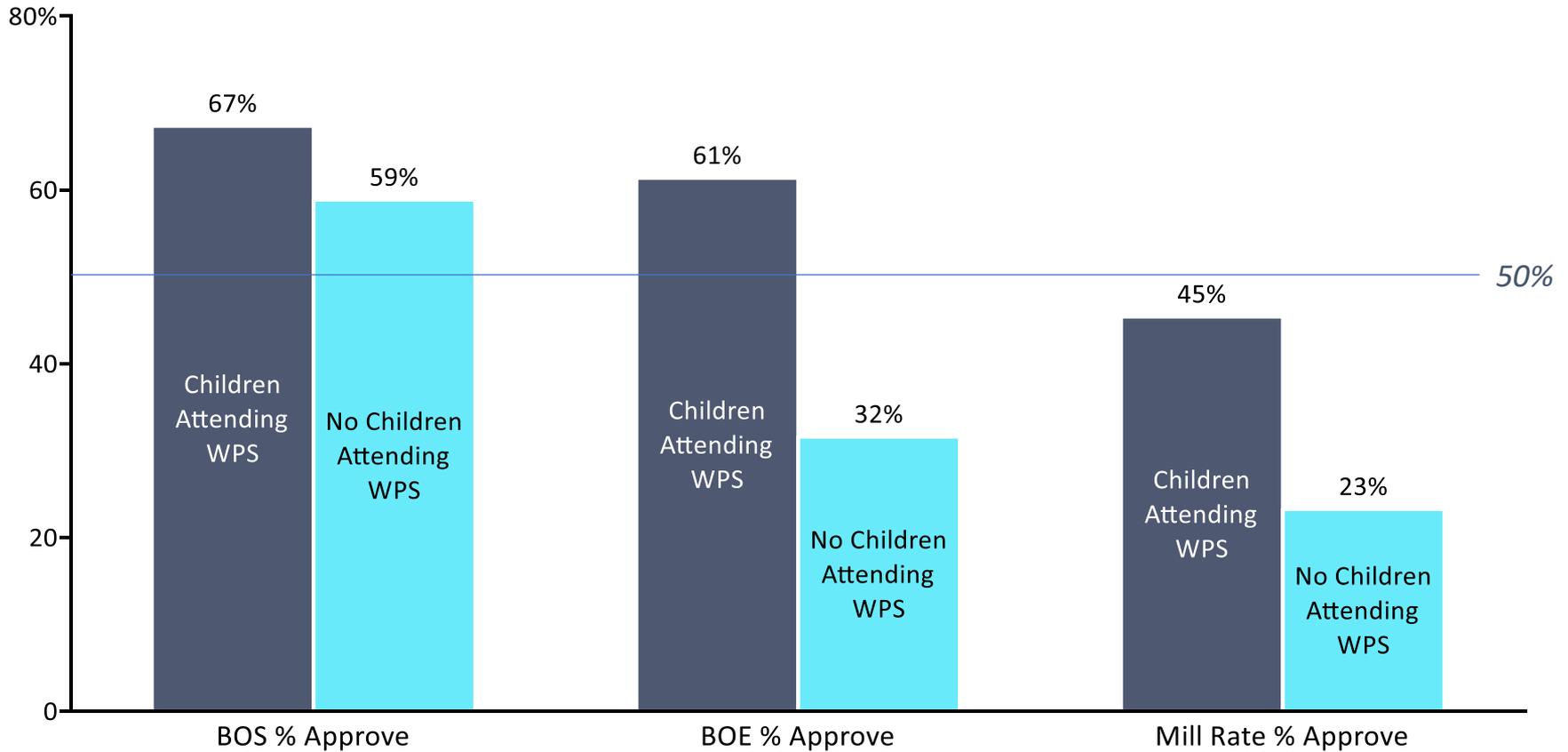
Budget & Mill Rate Support



Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman's budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education's budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?
- Wilton, CT Board of Finance -

While the BOS budget was approved by respondents who both do and do not have children attending WPS, only a majority of respondents who had children attending WPS approved of the BOE increase. Both groups rejected the mill rate increase

Budget Approval vs Children in WPS

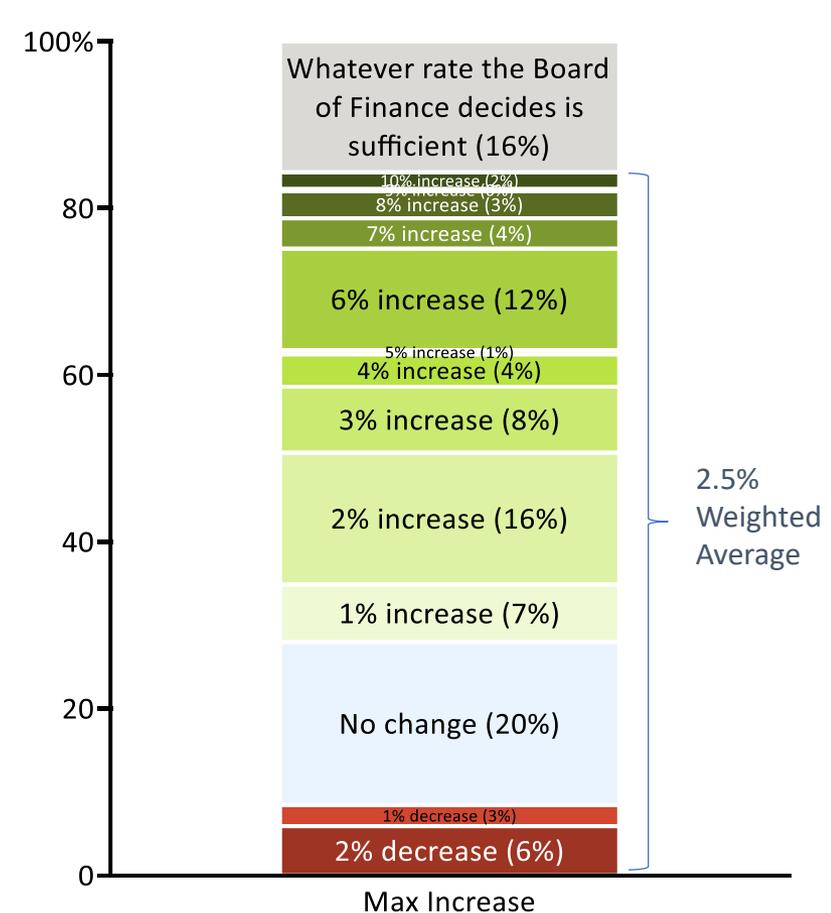
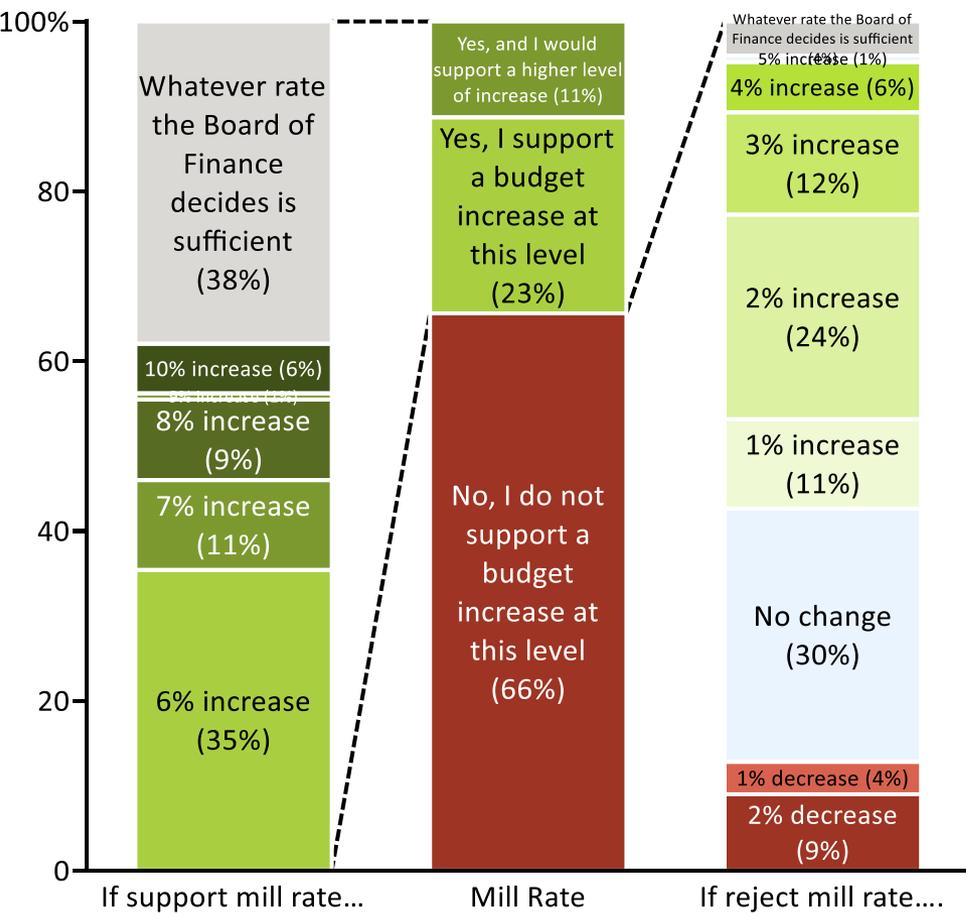


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51% of respondents would like to see a mill rate increase of 2% or less, with the weighted average increase calculated at 2.5%

Maximum Mill Rate Accepted

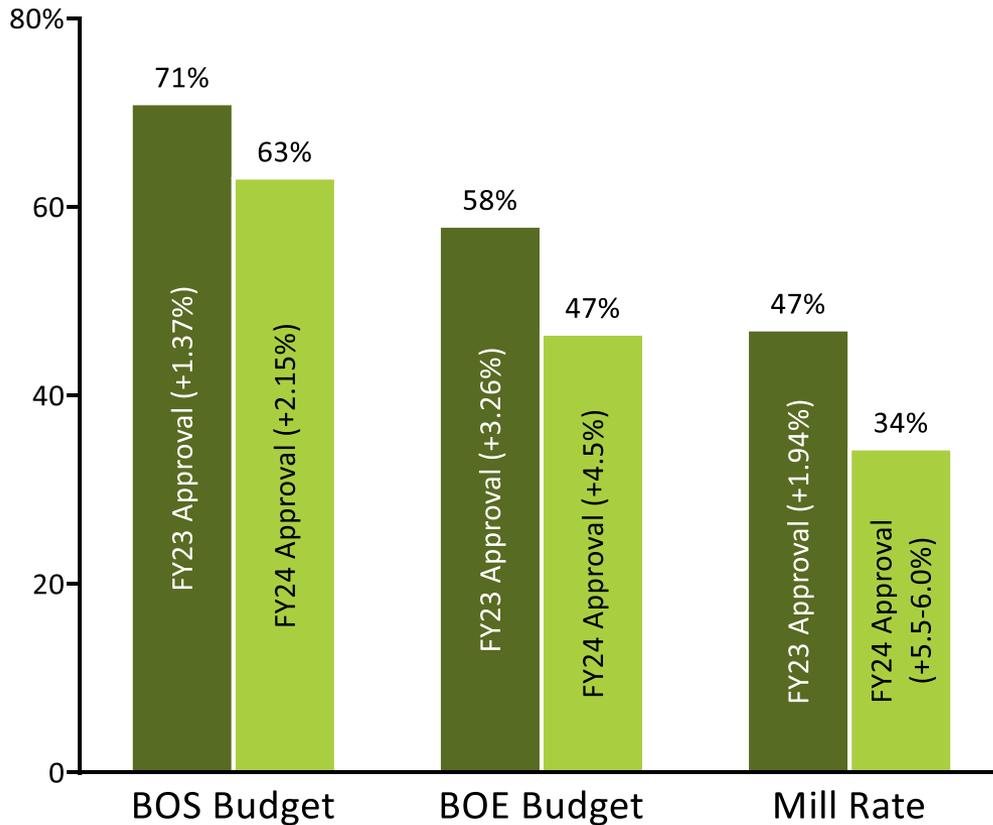
Max Mill Rate



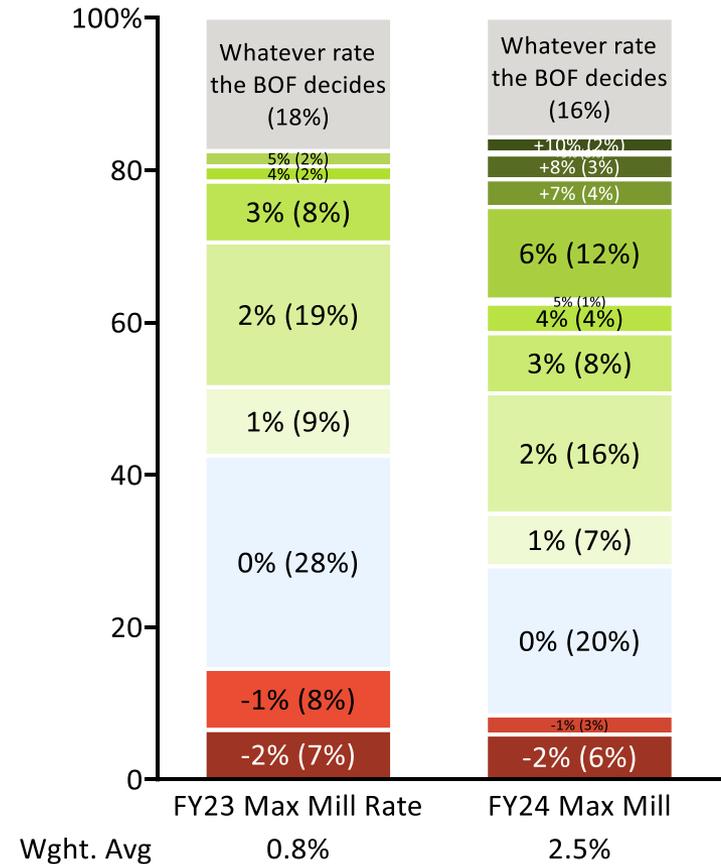
Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman’s budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education’s budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?; Q: What is the maximum mill rate change you would support?

Last year, the BOS and BOE budget increases, as well as the consequent mill rate increase, received relatively more support than they did this year; Residents are more willing to tolerate a higher mill rate increase this year relative to last year

Budget & Mill Rate Support



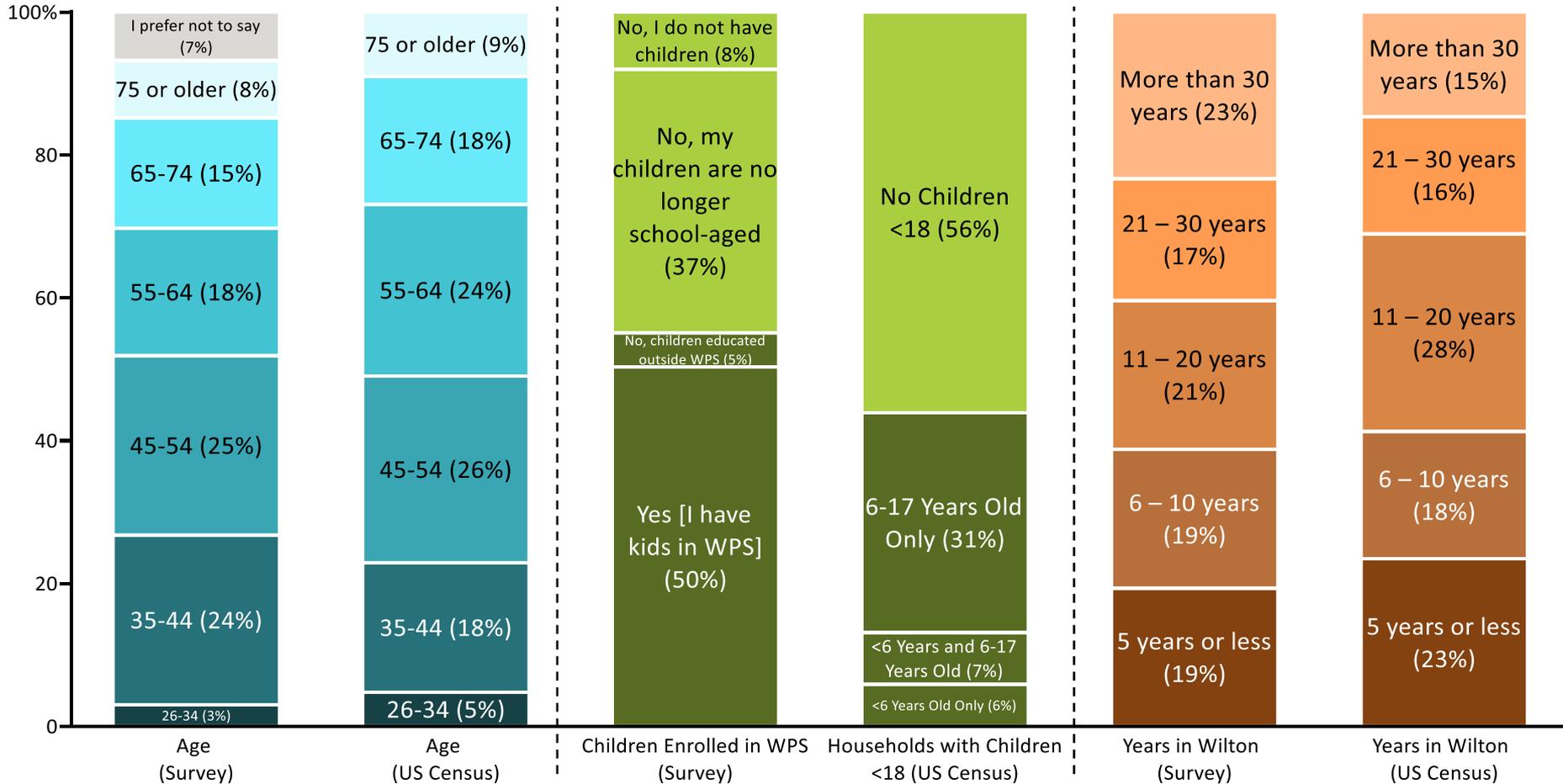
Max Mill Rate



Q: Do you support the proposed [x%] increase to the Board of Selectman’s budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed [y%] increase to the Board of Education’s budget?; Q: Do you support a [z%] increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education? Q: What is the maximum mill rate change you would support?

The survey skewed more heavily towards households with children relative to Wilton's population (per the US census)

Survey Demographics vs Wilton Demographics (US Census)



Q: How old are you?; Q: Do you have children enrolled in the Wilton Public Schools?; Q: How long have you lived in Wilton?

Source: United States Census Bureau (2020)

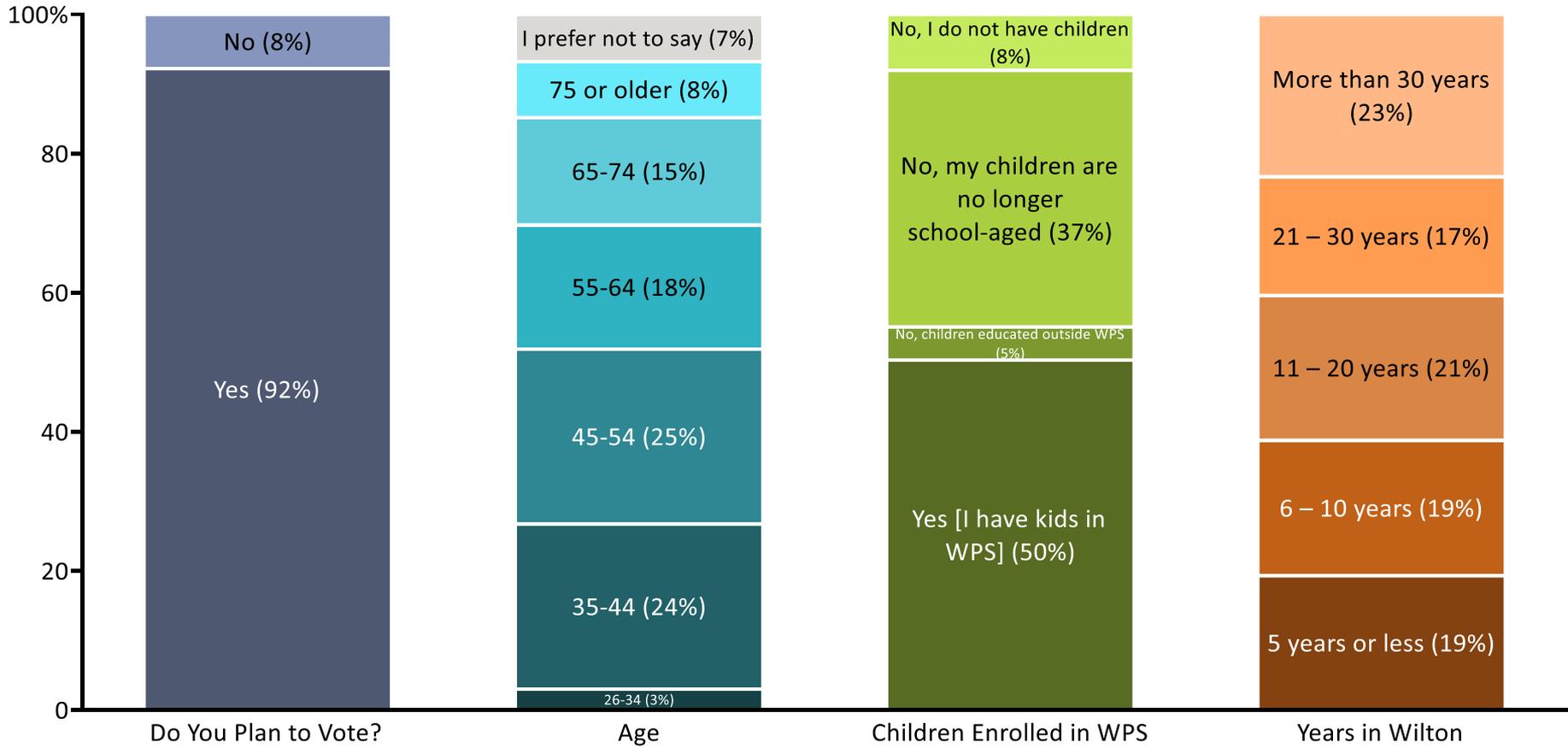
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Executive Summary

Survey Results

797 respondents took the survey from March 6 to March 31

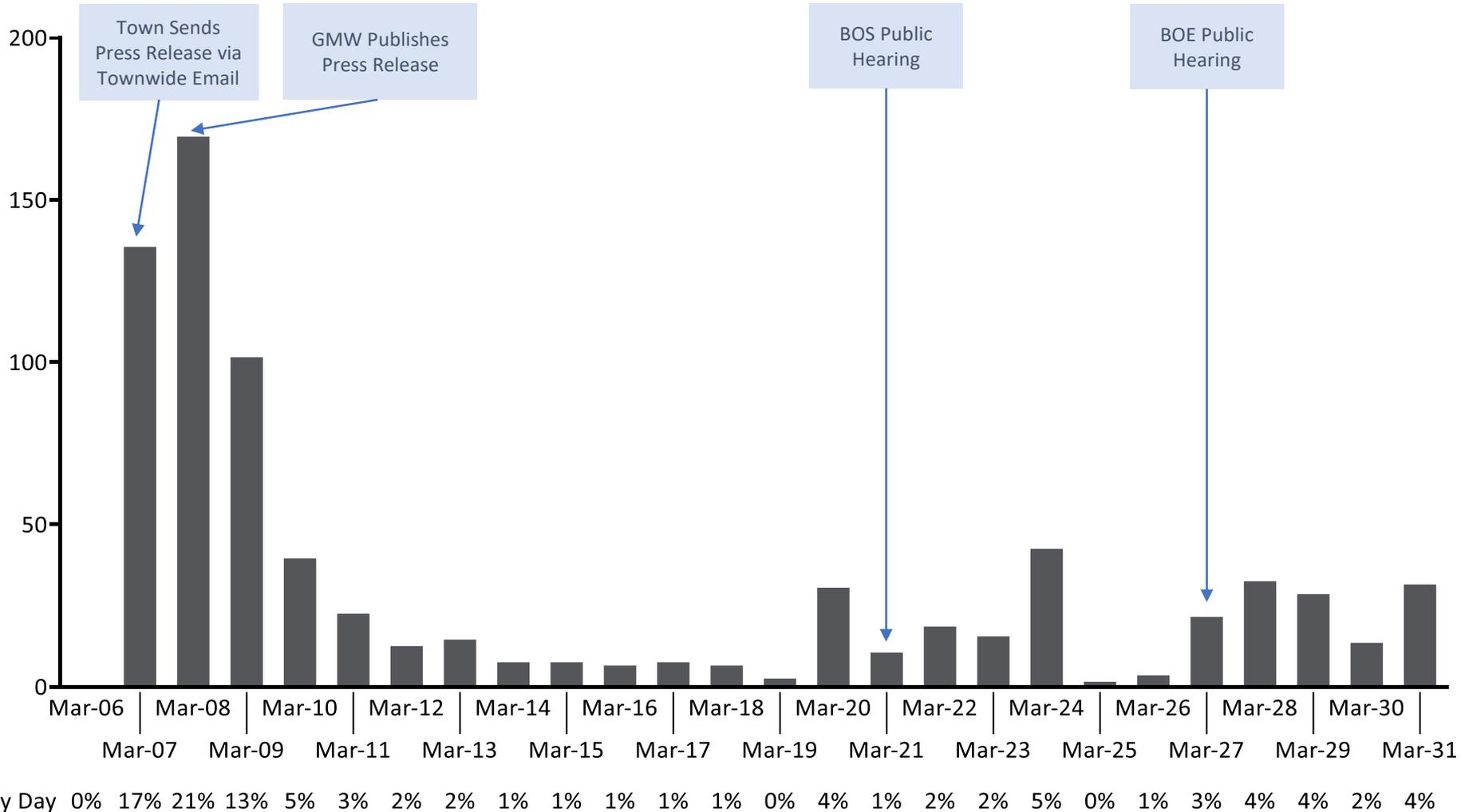
Survey Demographics



Q: Do you plan to vote at the Annual Town Meeting on May 2 or at the Adjourned Town Meeting on May 6?; Q: How old are you?; Q: Do you have children enrolled in the Wilton Public Schools?; Q: How long have you lived in Wilton?

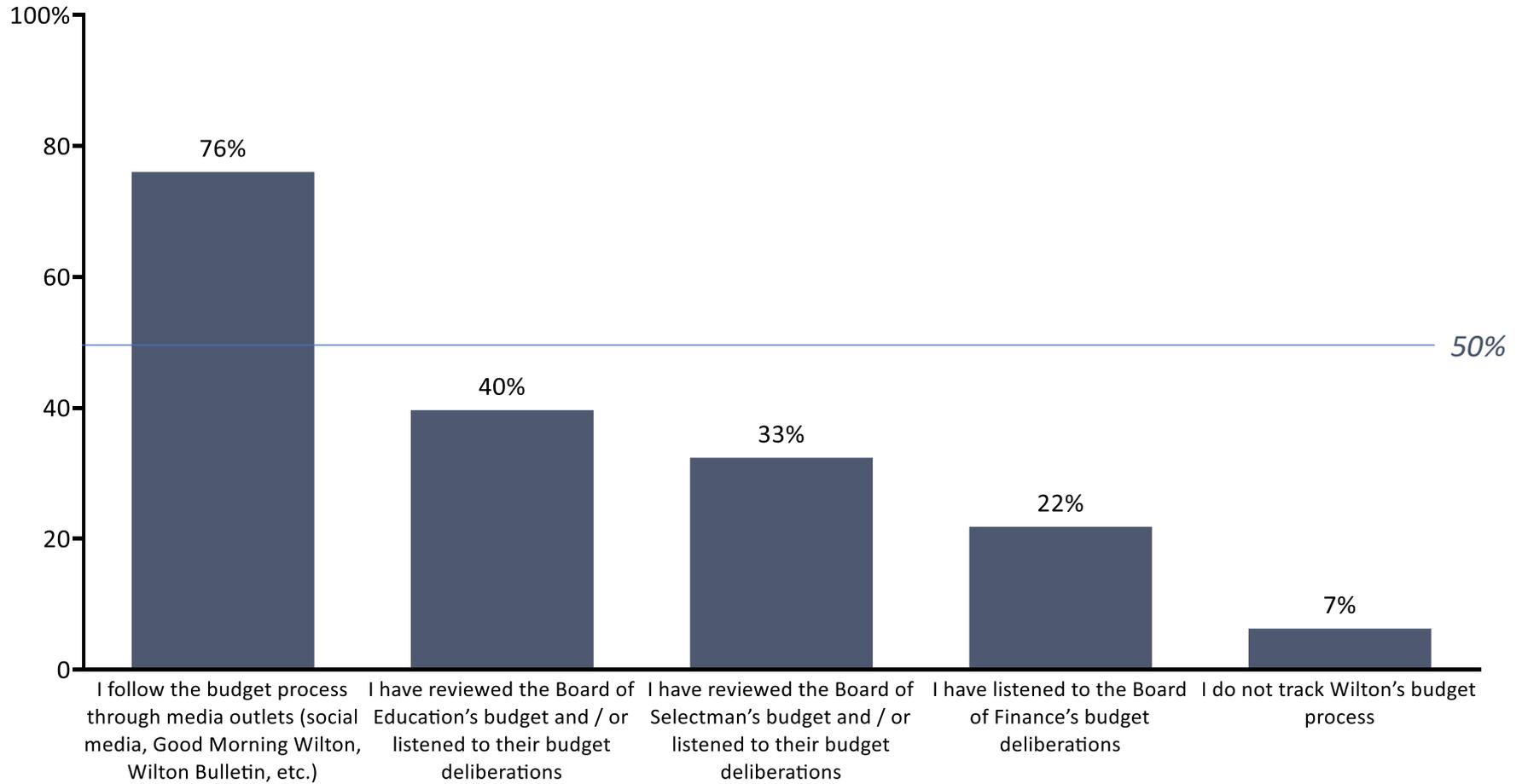
>60% of respondents took the survey within the first week of the survey launch

Survey Responses by Day



76% of respondents follow the budget process through media outlets. Significantly fewer track the BOS, BOE, and BOF budget deliberations

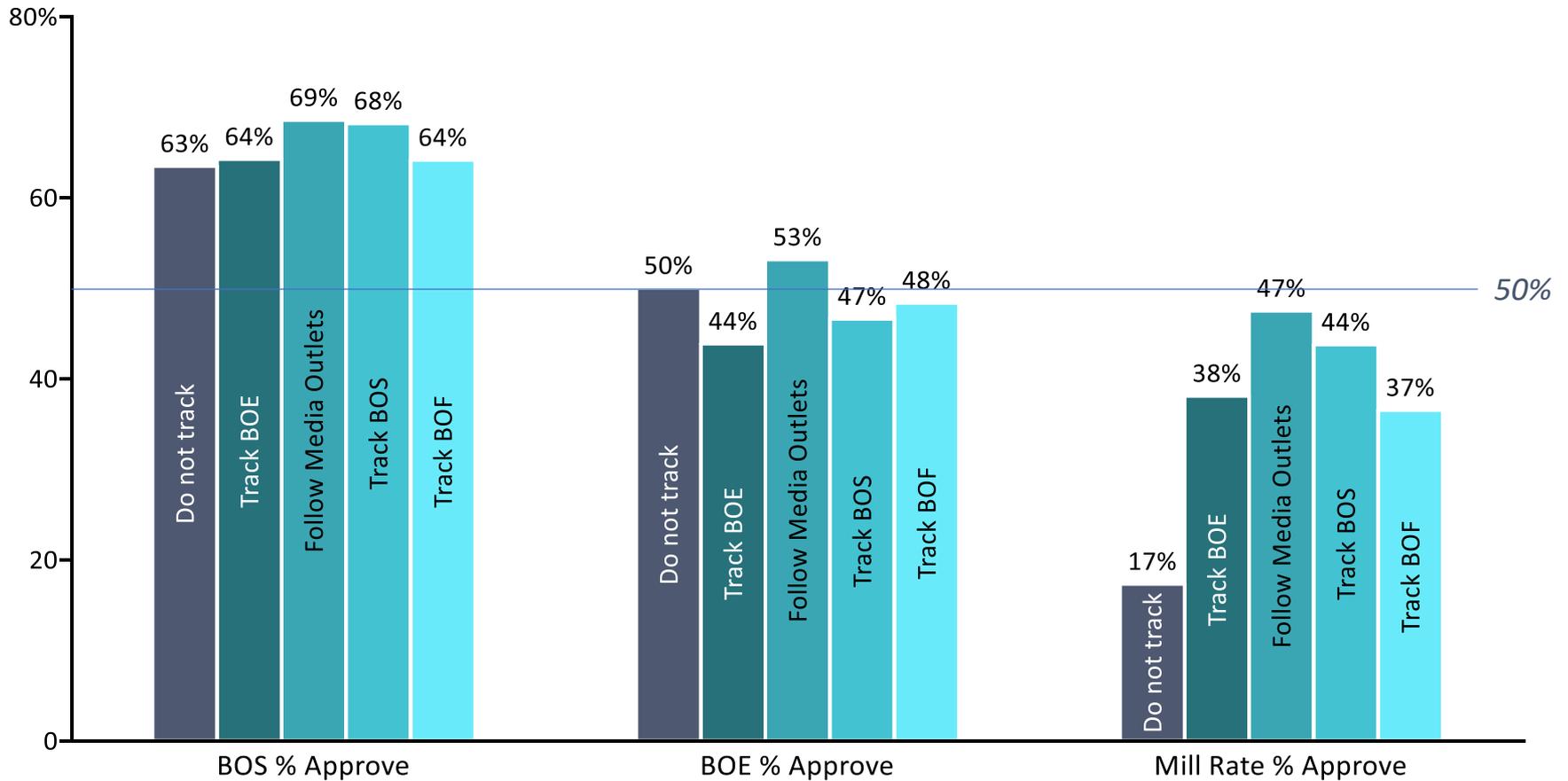
Engagement with Budget Process



Q: How closely do you follow Wilton's town budget process? Please select all the apply

Those who track the budget and mill rate deliberation in some capacity have a relatively similar level of acceptance for the budgets and mill rate

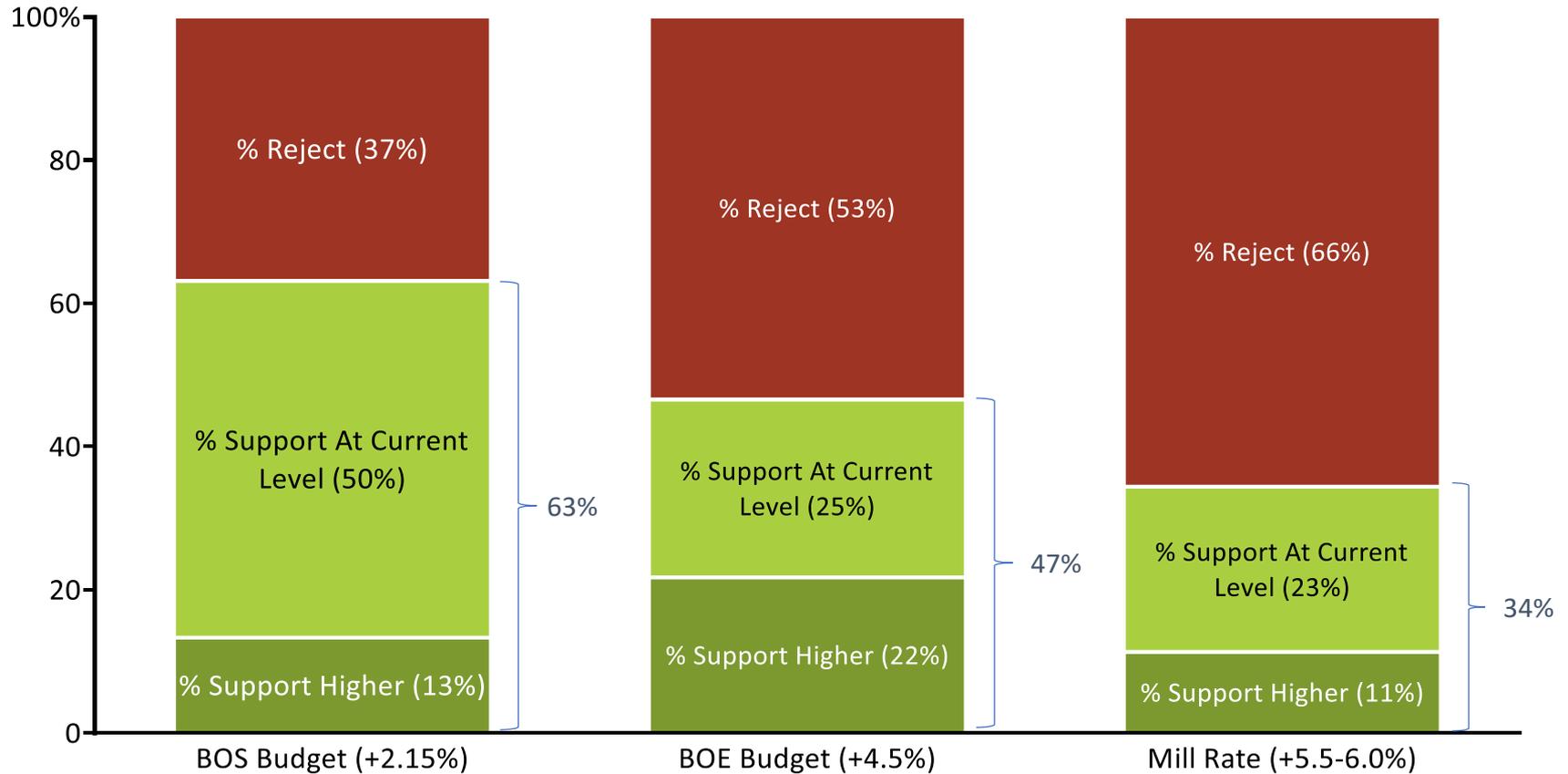
Budget Approval vs Engagement with Budget Process



Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman’s budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education’s budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?; Q: How closely do you follow Wilton’s town budget process? Please select all the apply

While a majority of respondents approved the BOS budget (63%), a majority rejected the BOE budget (53%) and the proposed mill rate increase (66%)

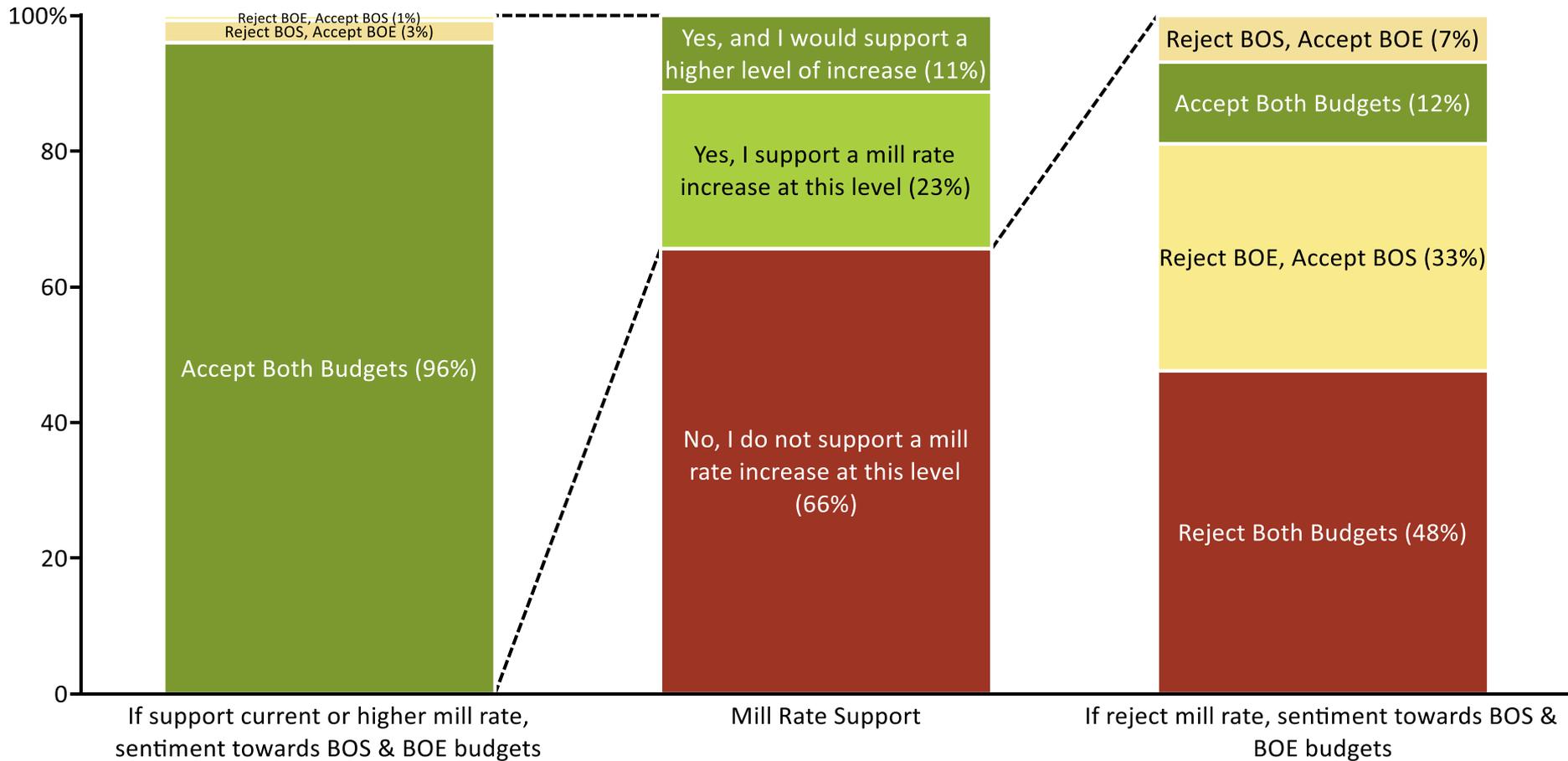
Overall Budget Approval Rating



Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman's budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education's budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?
- Wilton, CT Board of Finance -

While those in favor of the proposed mill rate increase generally support both budgets, the BOE budget received the greatest scrutiny from those not in favor of the mill rate increase

Mill Rate Approval vs Budget Approval

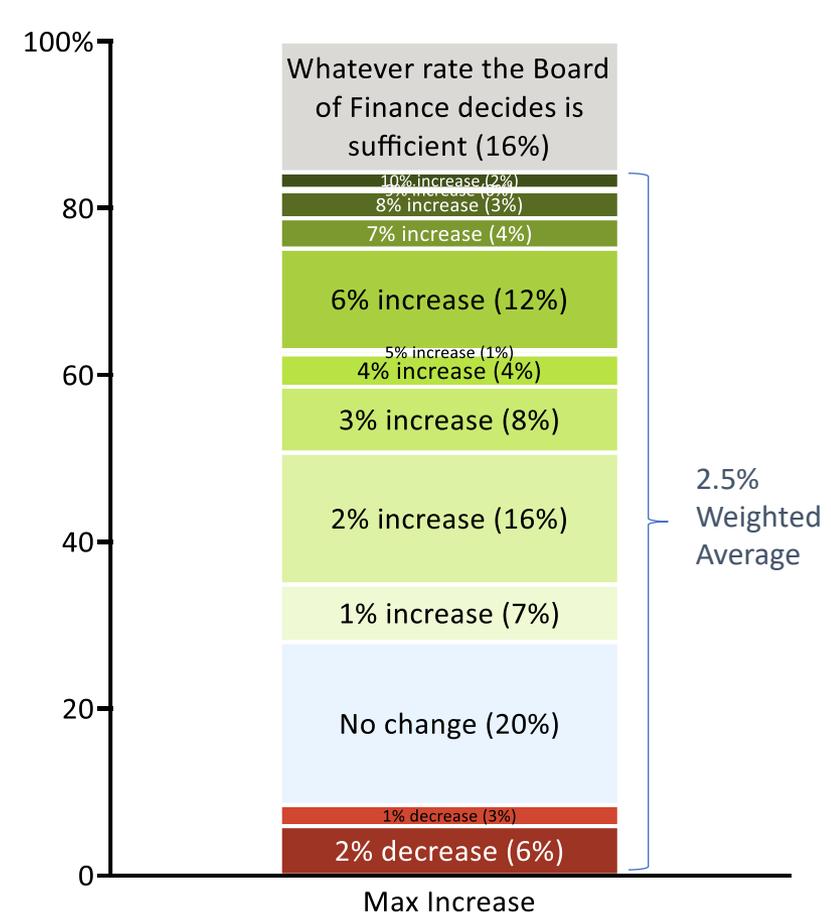
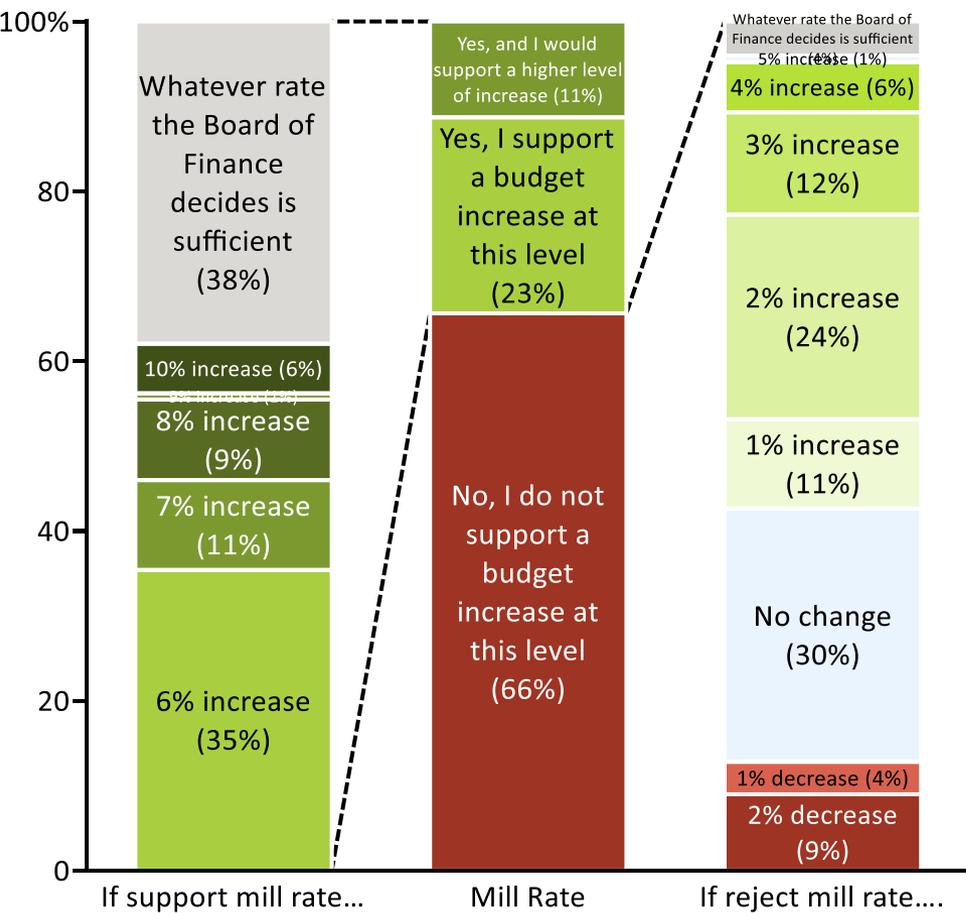


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51% of respondents would like to see a mill rate increase of 2% or less, with the weighted average increase calculated at 2.5%

Maximum Mill Rate Accepted

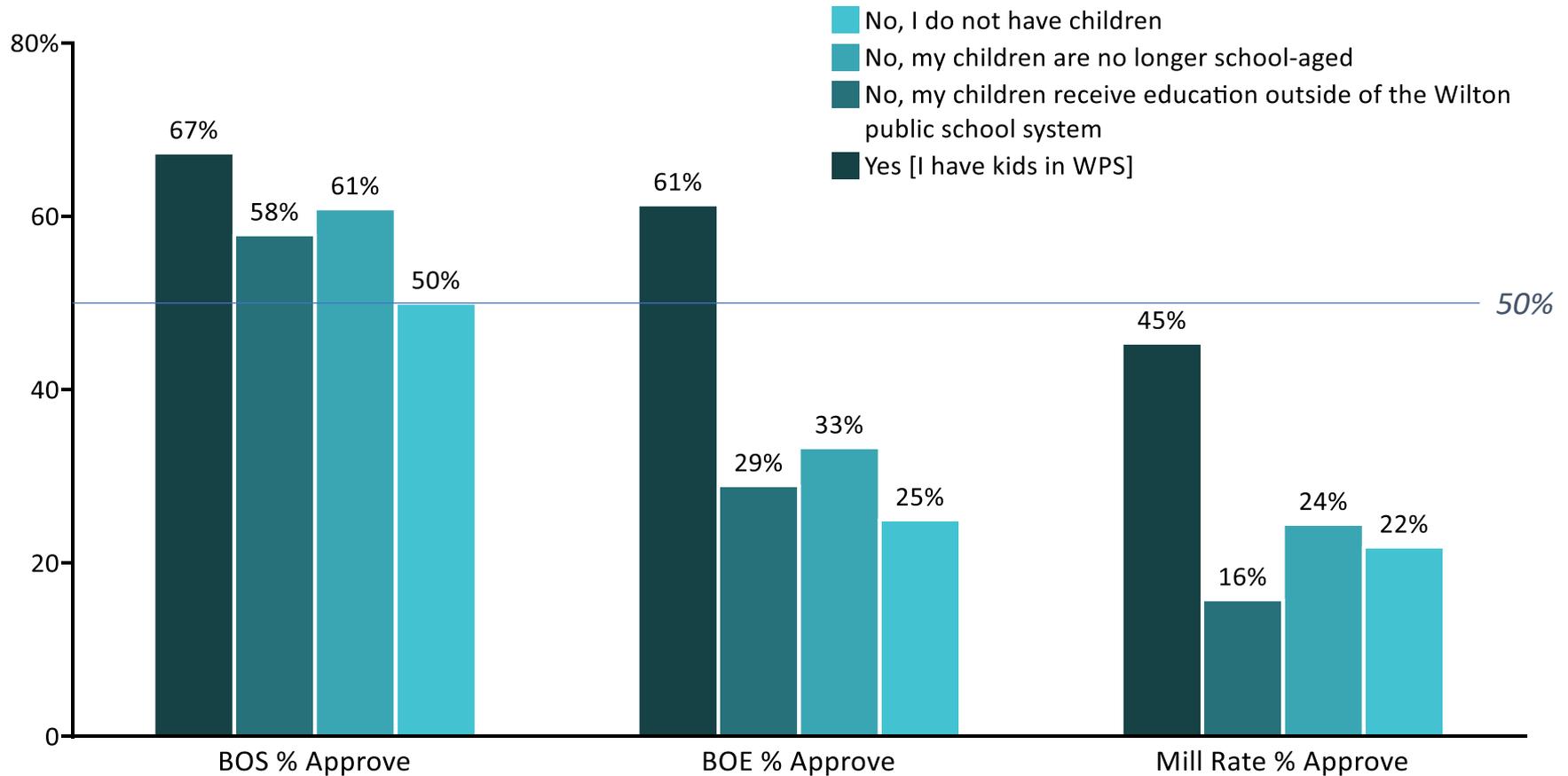
Max Mill Rate



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While the BOS budget was approved by respondents who both do and do not have children attending WPS, only respondents who had children attending WPS approve of the BOE budget increase. Both groups rejected the mill rate increase

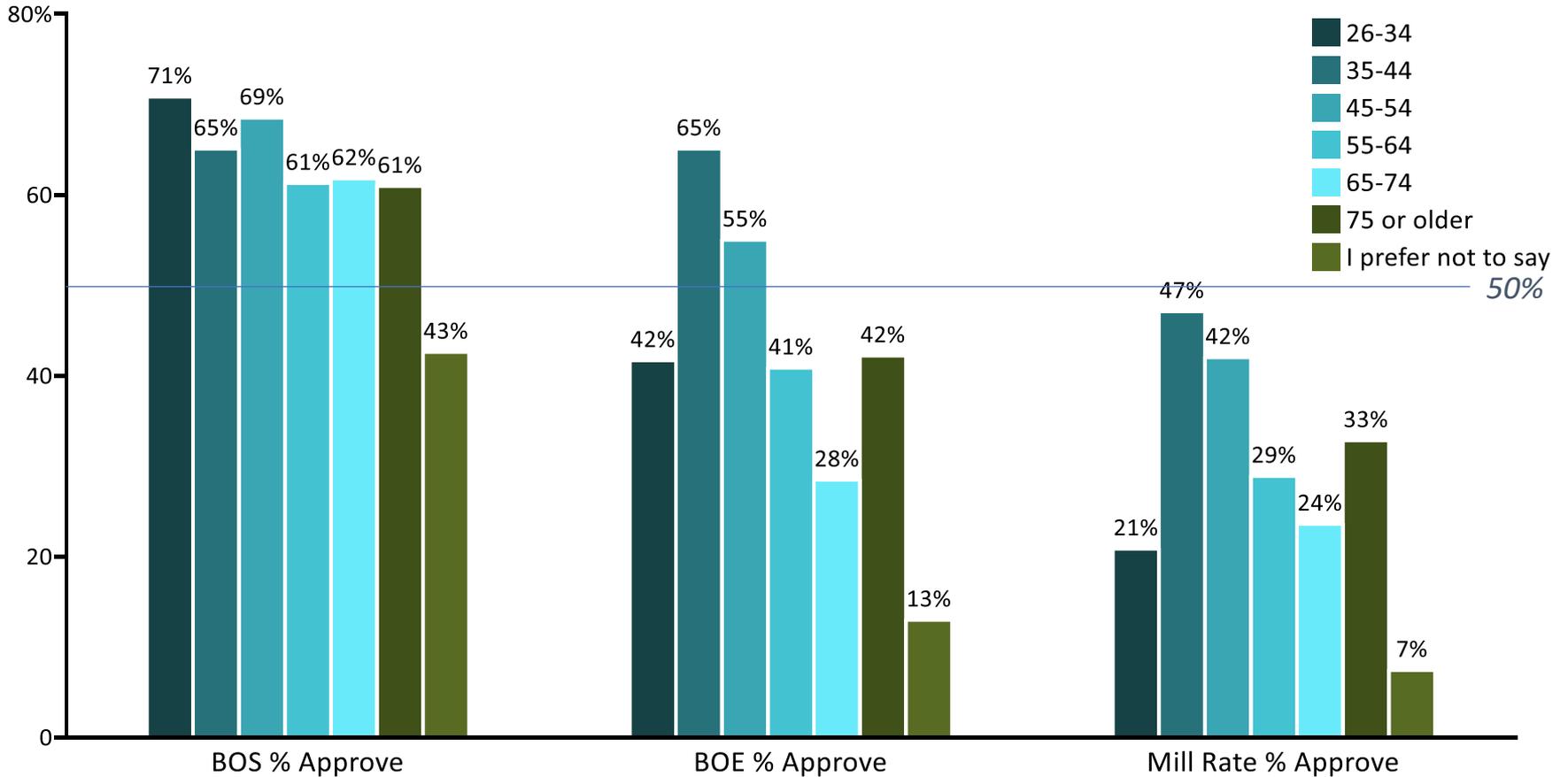
Budget Approval vs Children in WPS



Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman's budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education's budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?; Q: Do you have children enrolled in the Wilton Public Schools?

While respondents across most age brackets responded in favor of the BOS budget, only the 35-54 age bracket approved of the BOE budget increase. All age brackets rejected the proposed mill rate increase

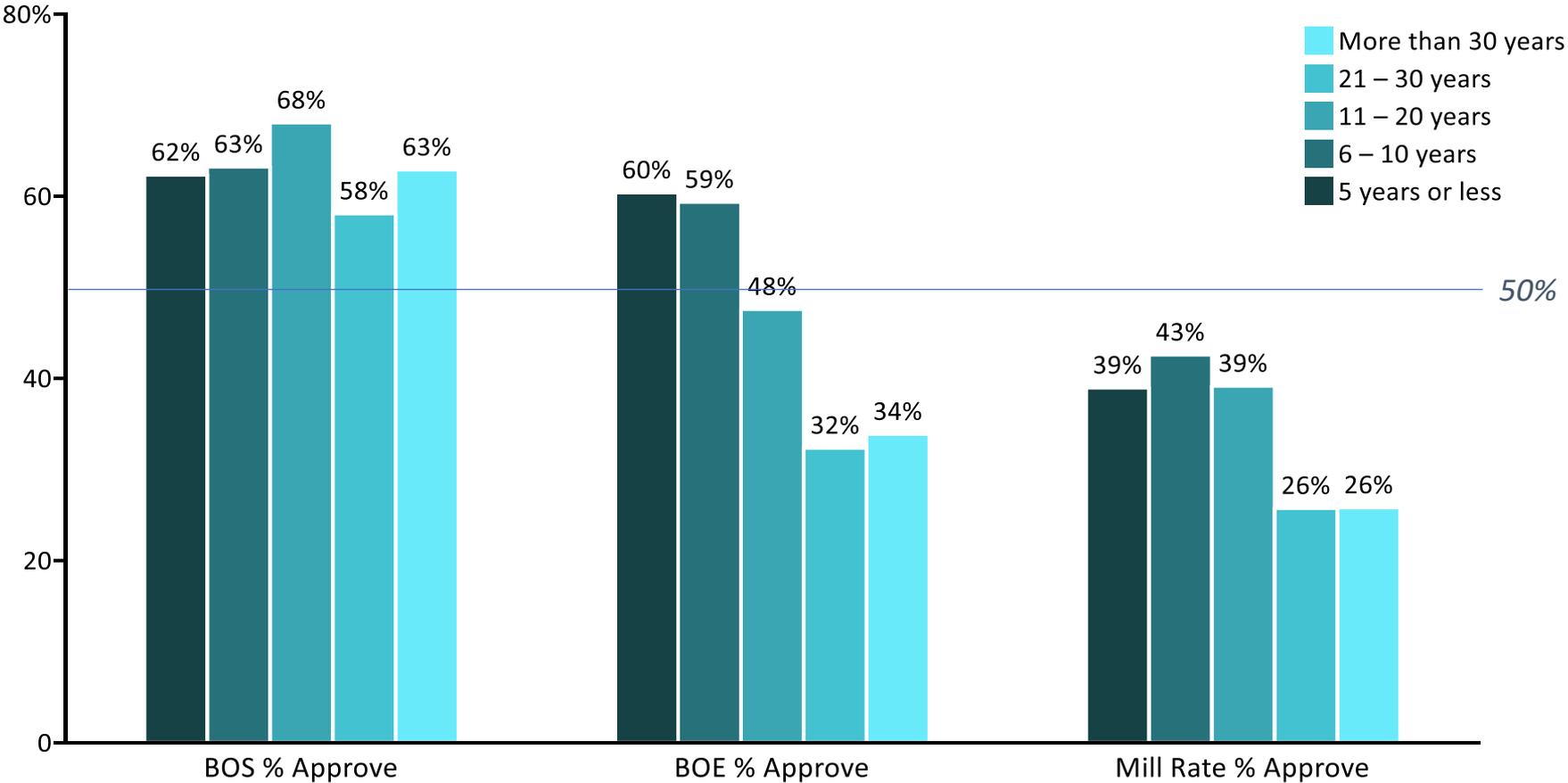
Budget Approval vs Age



Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman’s budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education’s budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?; Q: How old are you?

While a majority responded in favor of the BOS budget, the BOE budget and mill rate received less support from residents who have been in Wilton longer

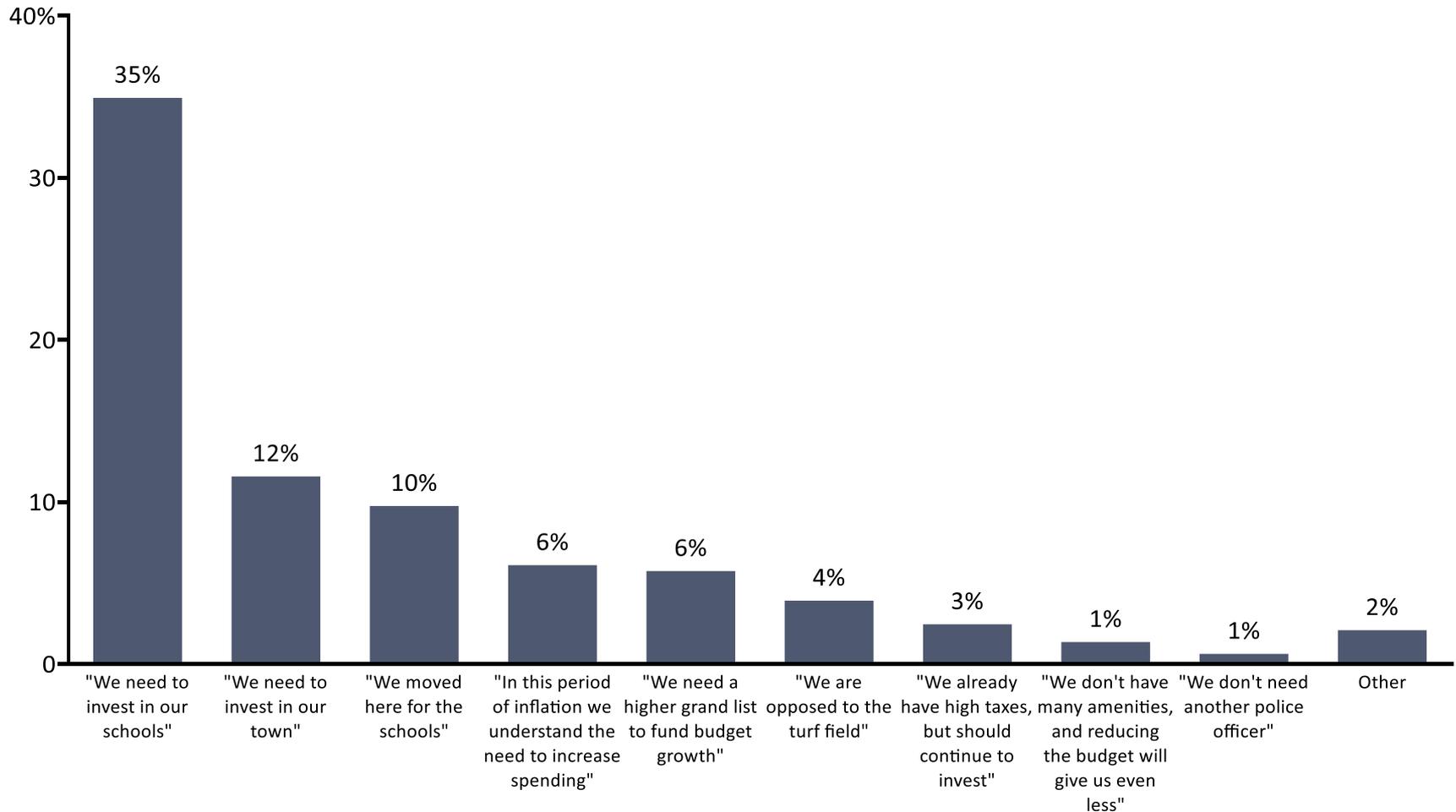
Budget Approval vs Years in Wilton



Q: Do you support the proposed +2.15% increase to the Board of Selectman’s budget?; Q: Do you support the proposed +4.5% increase to the Board of Education’s budget?; Q: Do you support a +5.5-6.0% increase to the mill rate, as calculated based on the proposed budgets from the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Education?; Q: How long have you lived in Wilton?

Respondents in favor of the mill rate generally cite the need to support the schools and the town

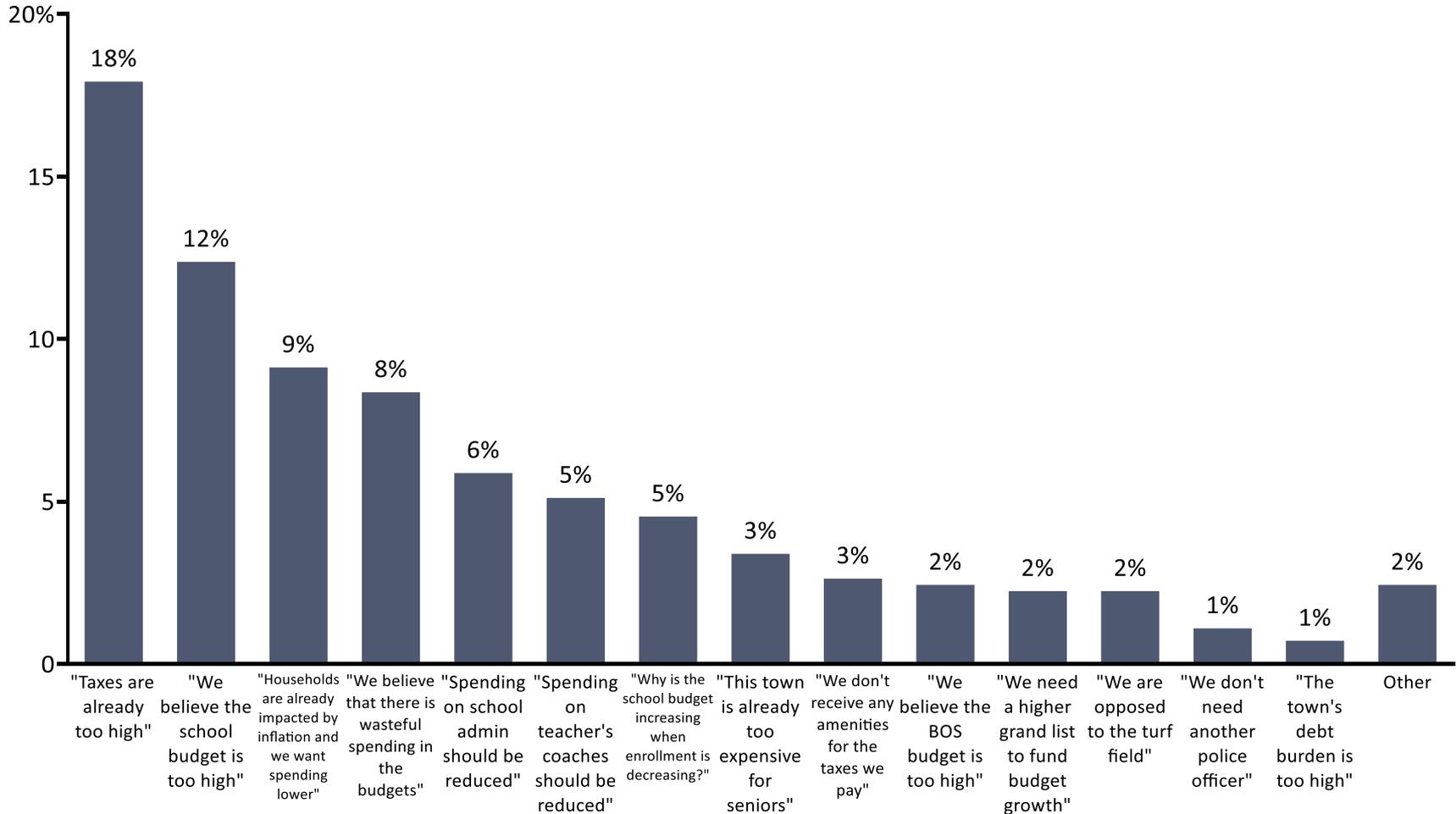
% of Respondents with Commentary In Favor of the Mill Rate



Q: Is there any commentary you wish to add regarding the 2024 budget and mill rate?

Respondents who rejected the mill rate increase generally cited that taxes and spending are already too high

% of Respondents with Commentary Against the Mill Rate Increase



Q: Is there any commentary you wish to add regarding the 2024 budget and mill rate?

In the words of our residents who favor the mill rate increase....

We need to support our schools; many families moved here because of the school system

- *Like many who moved to Wilton, my family and I moved here for the high-quality schools. Please provide the resources requested so that the Wilton Schools can maintain and grow this level of education provided for our kids.*
- *The priority for my family and I continues to be supporting the strength of Wilton's schools and community infrastructure, and I understand the connection between doing this and ensuring that taxes are sufficient to cover the cost.*

We need to support the town

- *Our town is well-governed and our schools are excellent. Those are the things that bring people here. I support these budgets*
- *Recent budgets have been flat or a slight increase . We need to catch up with the needs of the town.*
- *We have competent and dedicated people working on these Town projects. We should support their deliberations and recommendations as they come from the best we have*

This time of heightened inflation means we should support higher spending

- *There has been significant cost pressure due to inflation that can't be ignored and, therefore, increasing the budgets by the requested amounts by BOE and BOS seems like the right decision*
- *The expectation is to increase each budget both the Selectmen and Education each year, as every year inflation and costs increase. Considering much of the Board of Education's costs are fixed along with a high portion of workforce costs it's obvious that the budget would increase. The Board of Education has also deferred costs in years past, so a 4% increase seems very inline.*

We need a larger grand list to afford our amenities

- *Please expand the grand list, it's the only actual way to improve town finances*
- *We desperately need to develop more business opportunities for our economic areas (downtown and along Rte.7)*
- *I would also strongly advocate that the town press forward with efforts to selectively promote higher value commercial development, particularly in South Wilton, and grow the grand list to reduce the burden on homeowners*

Q: Is there any commentary you wish to add regarding the 2024 budget and mill rate?

In the words of our residents who are opposed to the mill rate increase....

Our taxes are already too high

- *Town spending is out of control. Taxes must not continue to rise. Connecticut is bad enough but Wilton makes it worse. Neighboring towns do better. Home owners are leaving and potential buyers are turned off by Wilton's high taxes. Bring fiscal discipline to bear please. Families are tightening our belts — town officials should too*
- *I'm concerned about the increase in mill rate compared to surrounding towns. This could impact the real estate market since our property taxes are disproportionately higher and as a town we don't offer the amenities of surrounding towns (direct train line, beach access, town pool, shopping area downtown).*

There is opportunity to cut spending at our schools

- *Someone needs to take into account the administrative headcount for the BOE. We have coaches, coordinators, a slew of central office admin with ambiguous job descriptions. It's time for the Superintendent to stop cutting teachers and student experiences, and time to start finding a way to streamline his admin team at CO*
- *Too many administrators at the school! Enrollment is decreasing*
- *Academic Coaches at Board of Ed are not providing direct education. Eliminate and you can save a ton of money*

This time of heightened inflation means we should not increase spending

- *This is an insane increase in the mill rate at a time when middle class families are already getting hammered by inflation at the grocery store and bonkers energy prices. It's unaffordable to live here as is, a 6% mill rate increase could well be the deciding factor for our family to leave Wilton.*
- *It is evident we are entering a recession over the next year. Inflation is not under control and earnings on money is not keeping up. The town and most importantly the schools have to understand many of us cannot afford tax increases.*

We should focus on cutting expenditures

- *Taxes will go up perpetually if we don't do due diligence by carefully reviewing all current expenditures and balance sheet items. Administration needs to be held accountable and remove any and all wasteful items before requesting an increase.*
- *Need to focus on opportunities for cost cutting rather than tax increase*
- *STOP SPENDING MONEY WE DON'T HAVE! Reduce the expenditures so the town can make due with the money it is already confiscating*

Q: Is there any commentary you wish to add regarding the 2024 budget and mill rate?

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