

An aerial photograph of Mesa, Arizona, taken at dusk. The image shows a mix of urban architecture, including a prominent building with a red-tiled roof and arched windows on the left, and a large, modern multi-story building with many lit windows on the right. A winding road with a red brick median runs through the center. The scene is filled with palm trees and other greenery, with city lights visible in the background under a twilight sky.

Mesa Residents' Perceptions of the Mesa Police Department and Community Safety



Spring 2021

Prepared by ASU's Morrison Institute for Public Policy, a research unit of the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions

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Survey Methodology

To help the Mesa Police Department understand Mesa residents' current perceptions of policing in the community and attitudes toward potential reforms, a live telephone interview survey was conducted of Mesa residents.

Survey Conducted: Feb. 22, 2021, through March 8, 2021

Survey Type: Live telephone interview

Margin of Error: +/- 3.4 percentage points at 95% confidence level

Survey Size: N = 811

Weighting Applied: To closely mirror U.S. Census data for Mesa, the sample was mildly weighted on age; gender; Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin; and education level.

How a random sample can accurately reflect a community's views

The only way to know exactly what everyone in a community thinks about an issue is to talk to every person in the community.

But that's not realistic.

To accommodate for time and cost limitations, researchers use **random sampling**. This is the process of using a random portion of the community to determine what the overall population thinks.

The trade-off for not speaking to everyone in a community is called the **margin of sampling error**. For instance, if a survey of Mesa adults with a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points found that 60% approve of street sweeping, the street sweeping approval rating would be somewhere between 57% and 63% if Mesa's whole adult population had been surveyed.

Researchers typically calculate the margin of sampling error using a 95% **confidence level**—meaning there is only a certain level of confidence that the margin of sampling error is within the identified range. If researchers were to conduct a survey the same way 100 times, in 95 instances the responses will be within the margin of sampling error.

Quality of Life and Crime in Mesa

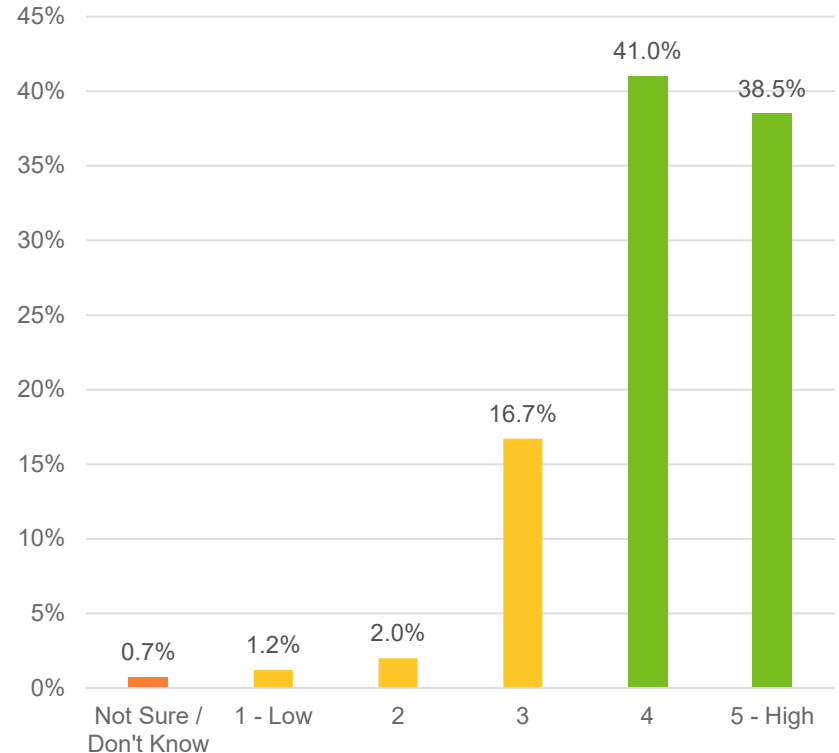


How would you rate the quality of life in Mesa?

Most respondents said they are satisfied with the quality of life in Mesa.

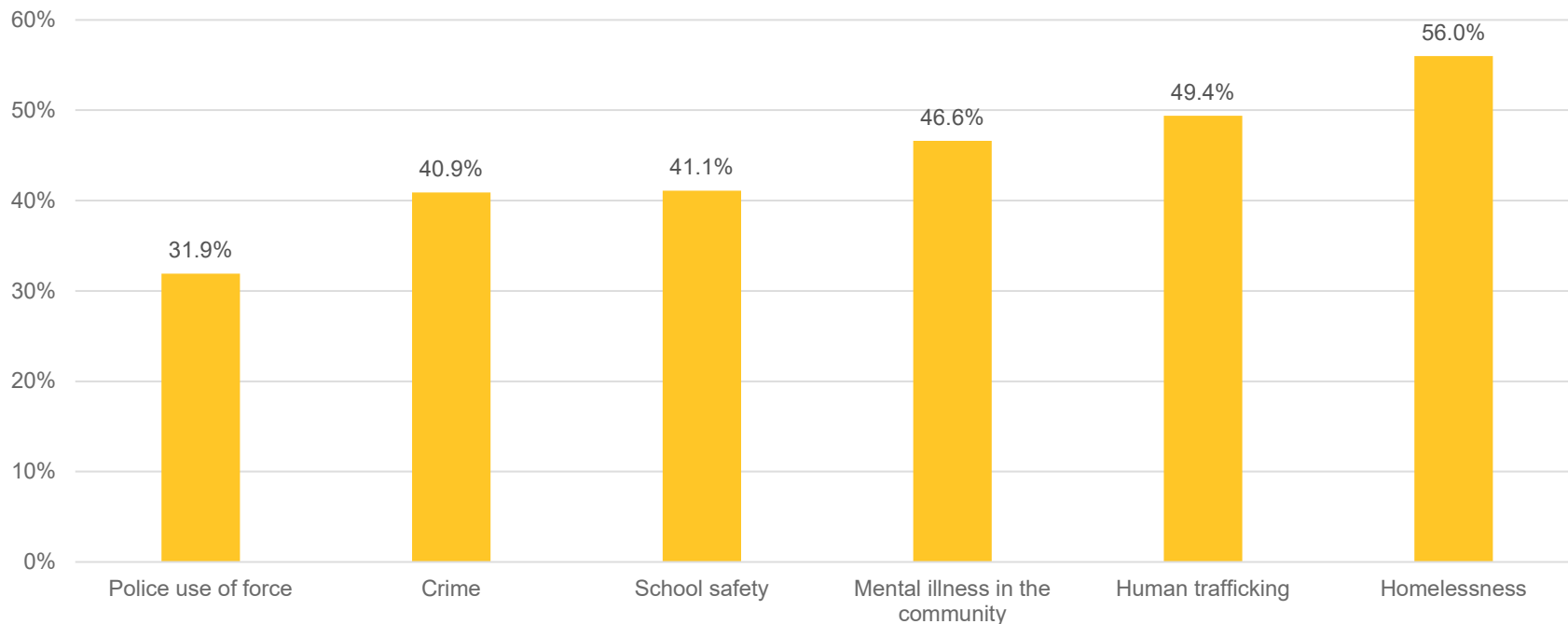
On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being high, 79.5% of respondents said 4 or 5.

These results are in line with the last policing community survey. In 2016, 79% of respondents said quality of life in Mesa was good or excellent.



How concerned are you about the following subjects in Mesa?

Of the six topics presented, the largest share of respondents stated concern about homelessness (56%) followed by human trafficking (49.4%) and mental illness in the community (46.6%).

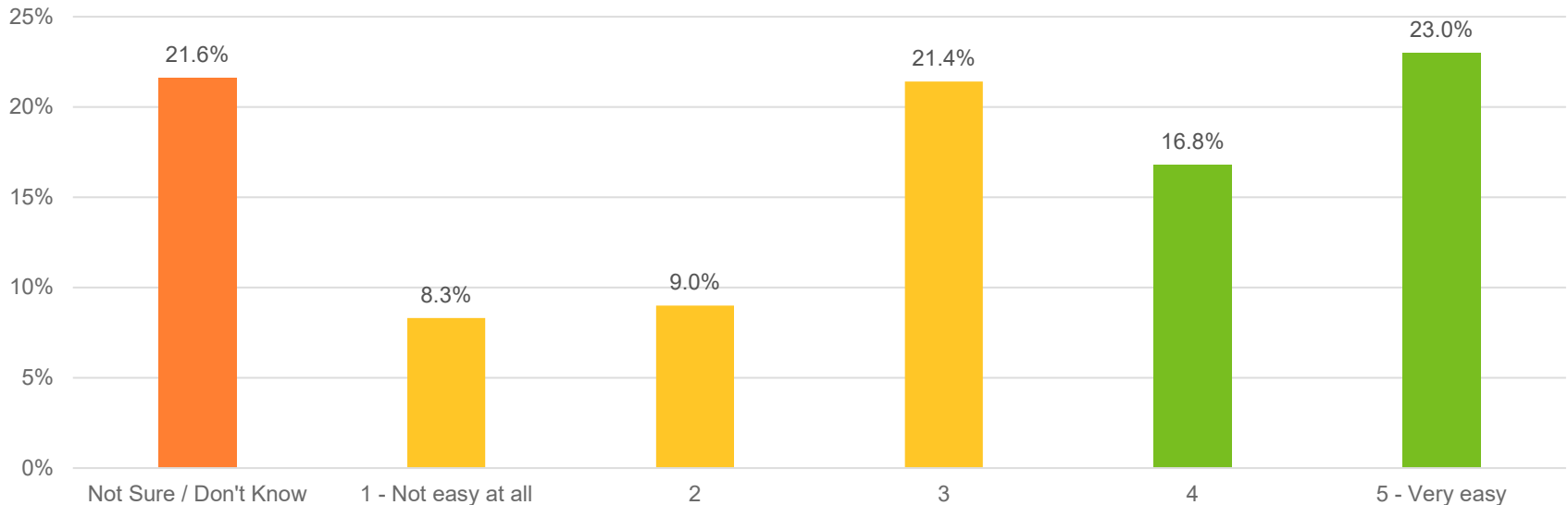


Community Policing



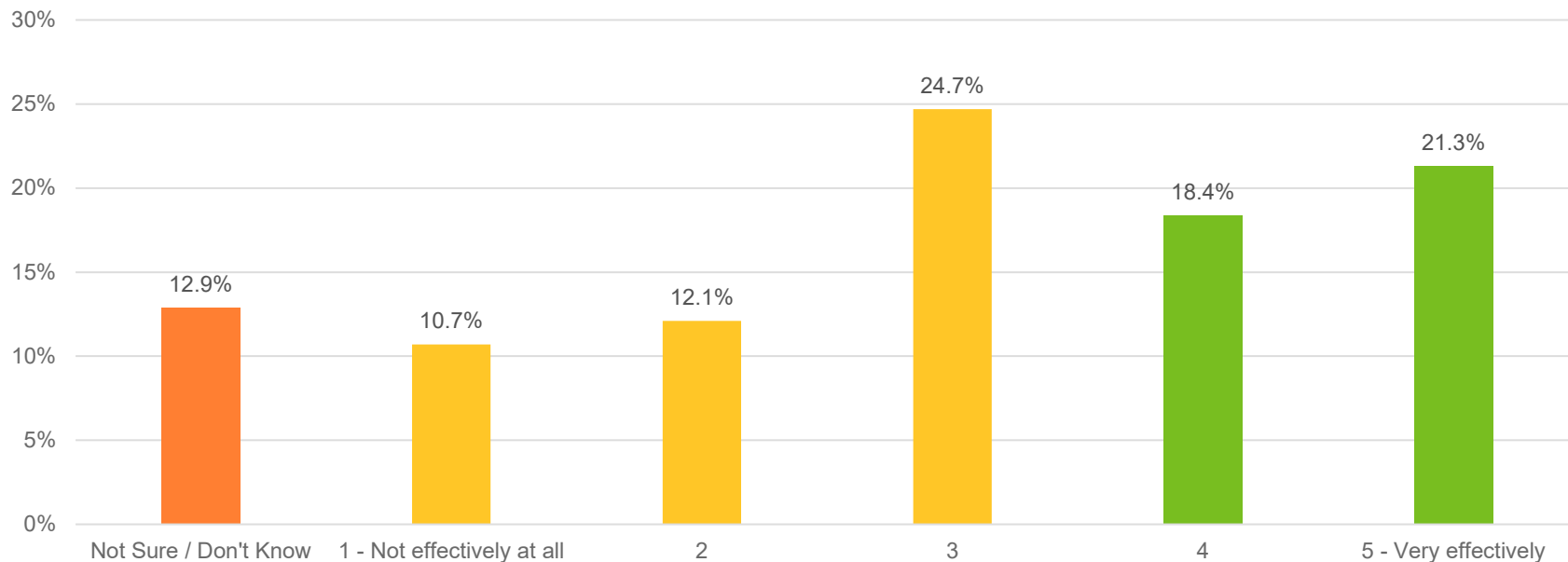
To what extent does the Mesa Police Department make it easy for community members to provide input (e.g., comments, suggestions, and concerns)?

About 40% of respondents said that the Mesa Police Department makes it easy for community members to provide input. However, 1 in 5 respondents were not sure or did not know, indicating a significant level of unfamiliarity with the department's community input processes.



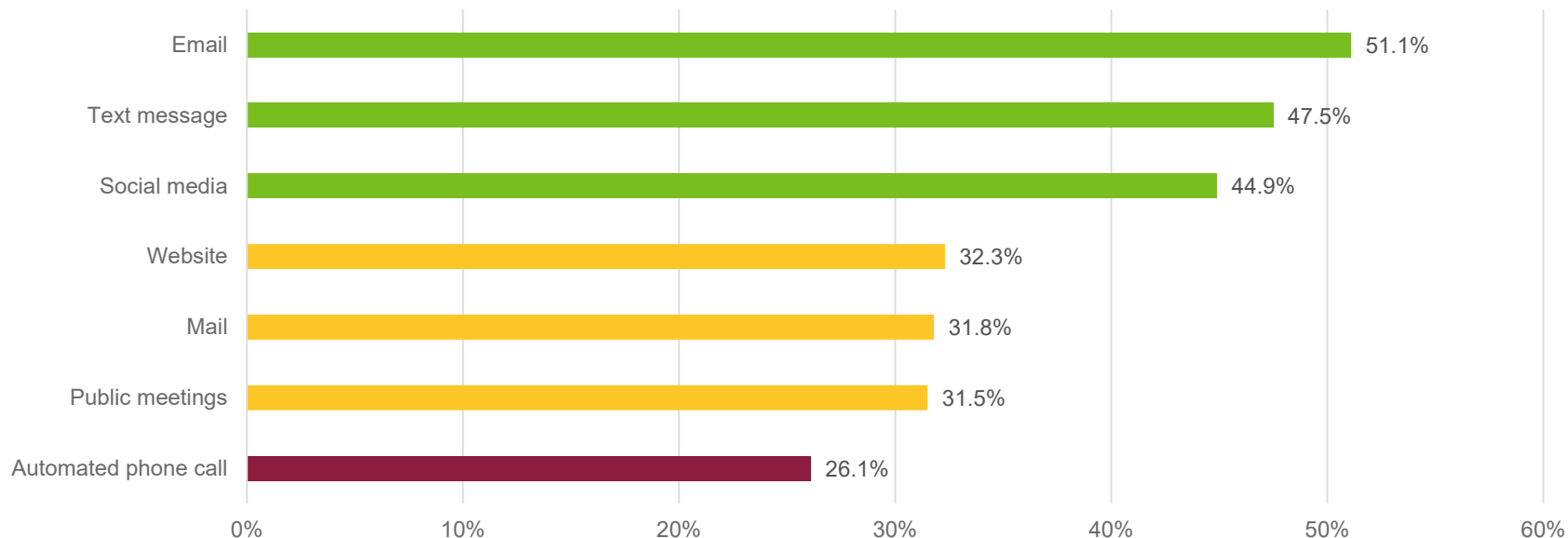
How effectively does the Mesa Police Department communicate with community members (e.g., through its website, emails, or public meetings)?

About 40% of respondents said that the Mesa Police Department communicates effectively with community members.



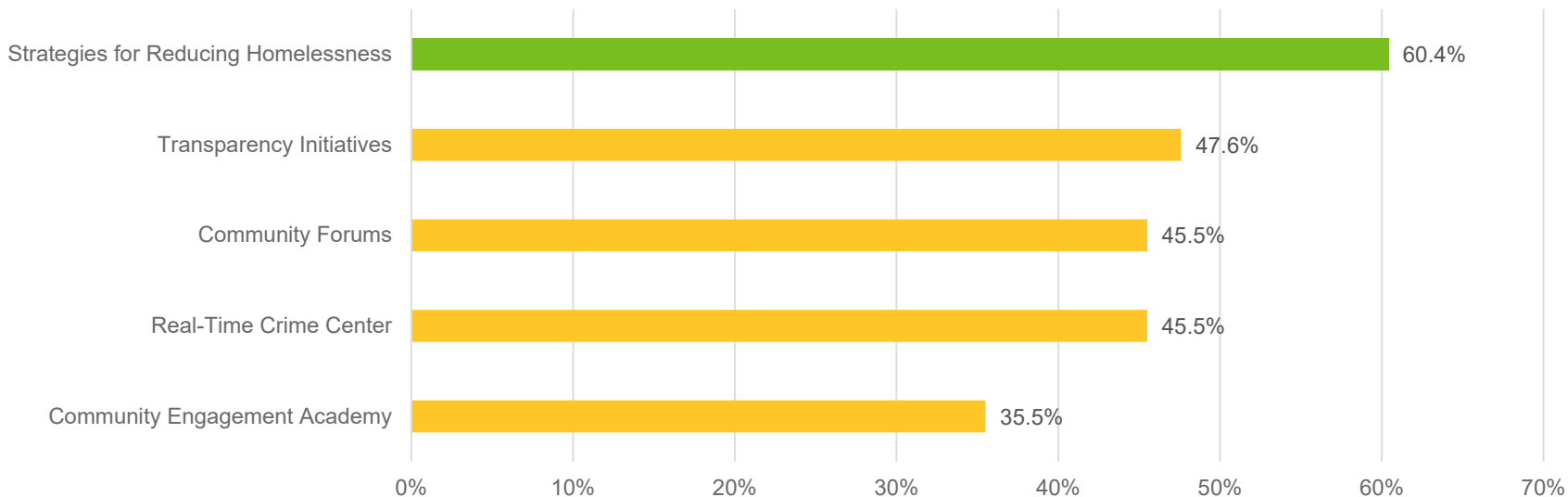
Of the following communication methods, which would you prefer when the Mesa Police Department wants to share information about its activities and services?

Email (51.1%), text message (47.5%) and social media (44.9%) are respondents' most-preferred communication methods for information from the Mesa Police Department. Automated phone calls (26.1%) are the least preferred.



What is your level of interest in each of the following community policing programs?

Of the topics presented, respondents were most interested in the City of Mesa's strategies for reducing homelessness (60.4%). It was the only topic that a majority of respondents showed interest in, although transparency initiatives, the Real-Time Crime Center, and the departments' Community Forums all had interest levels in the mid-40s.

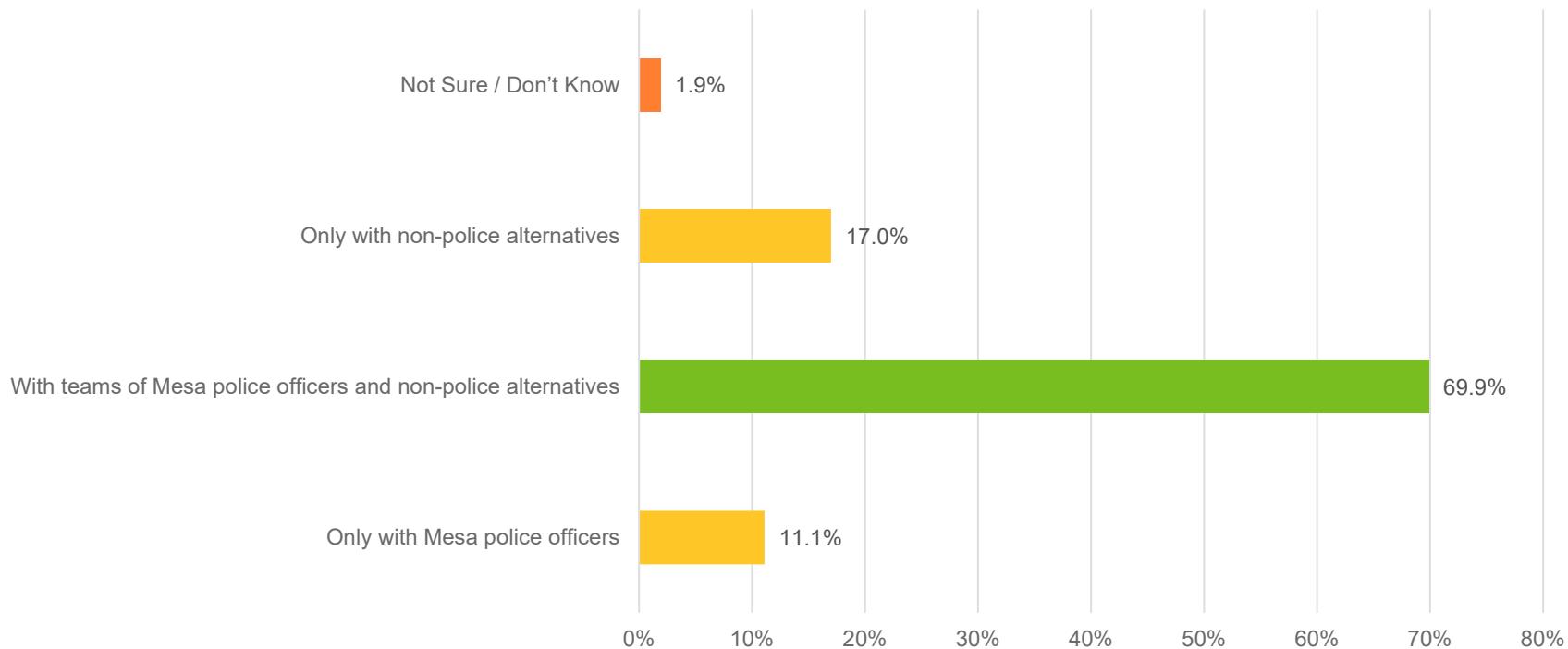


Mental Health Response and Homelessness



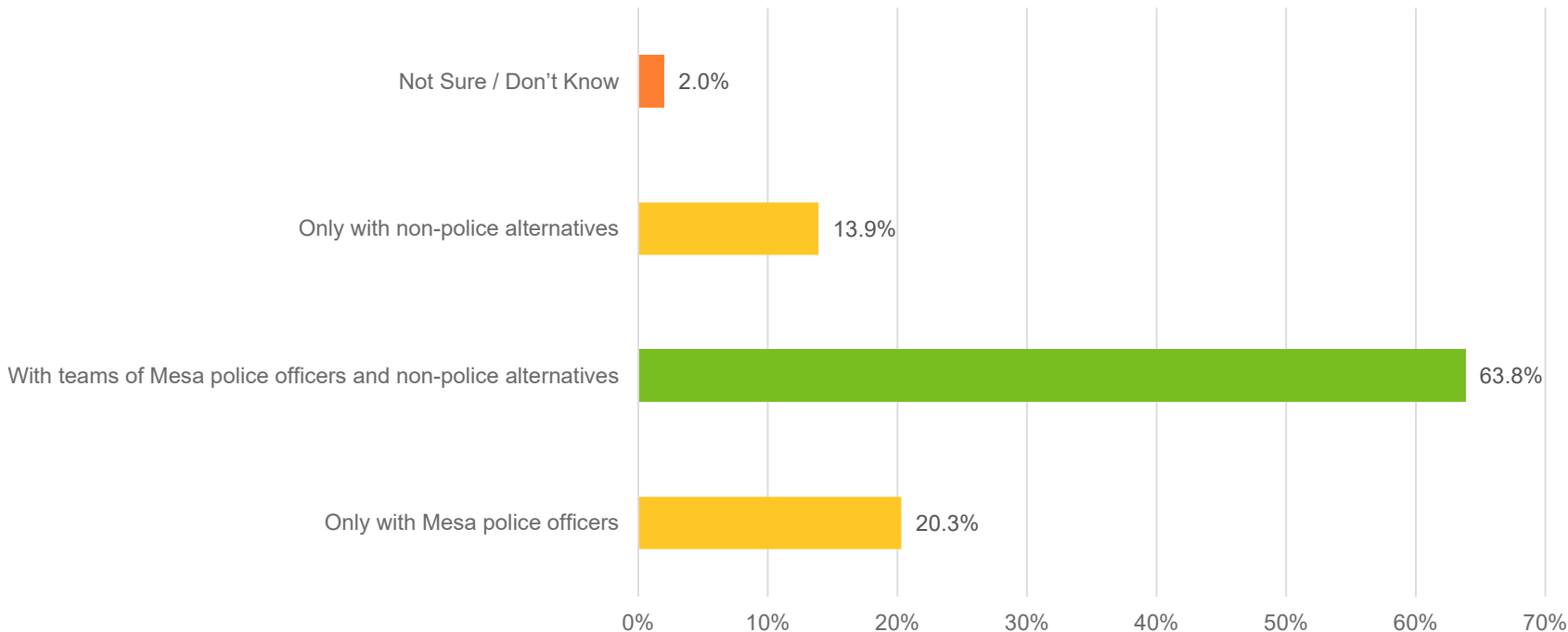
How would you like the City of Mesa to address calls about mental health crises?

Most respondents (69.9%) would like Mesa to address calls about mental health crises with teams of police officers and non-police alternatives.



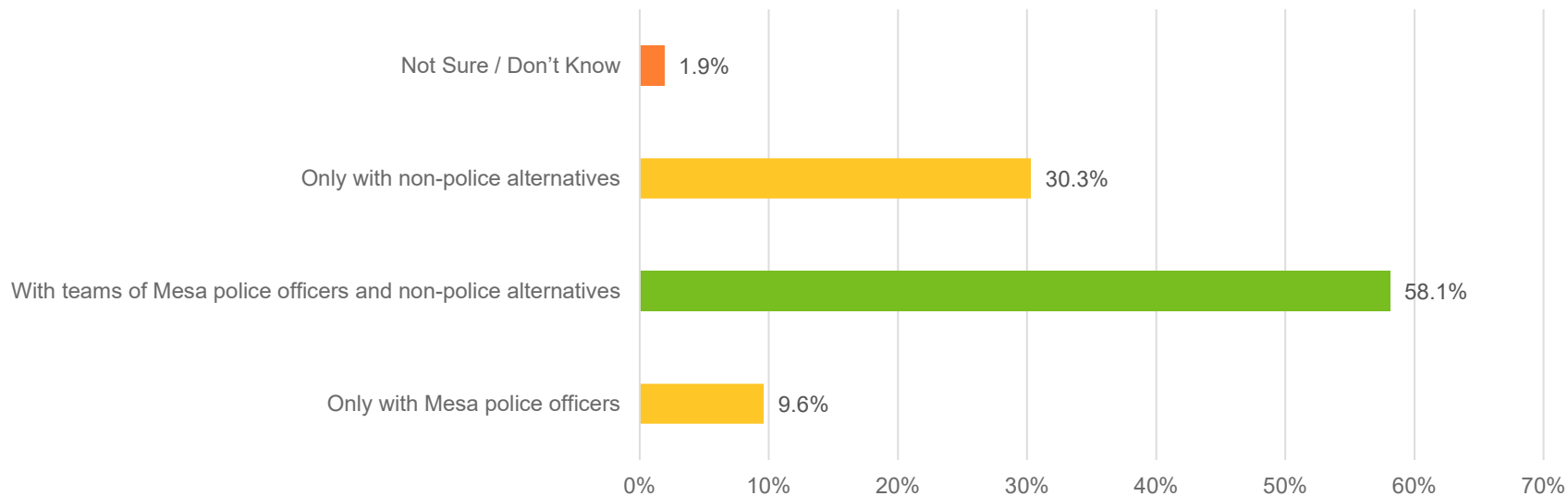
How would you like the City of Mesa to address calls about substance abuse?

Most respondents (63.8%) would like Mesa to respond to calls about substance abuse with police officers and non-police alternatives.



How would you like the City of Mesa to address calls about people experiencing homelessness?

While most respondents (58.1%) would like Mesa to address calls about people experiencing homelessness with teams of with teams of police officers and non-police alternatives, a significant portion of respondents (30%) said they would like only non-police alternatives to respond to these calls.

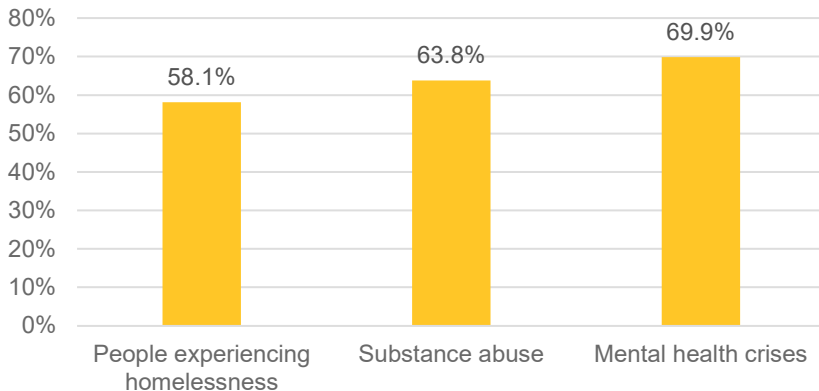


How would you like the City of Mesa to address calls about mental health crises/substance abuse/people experiencing homelessness?

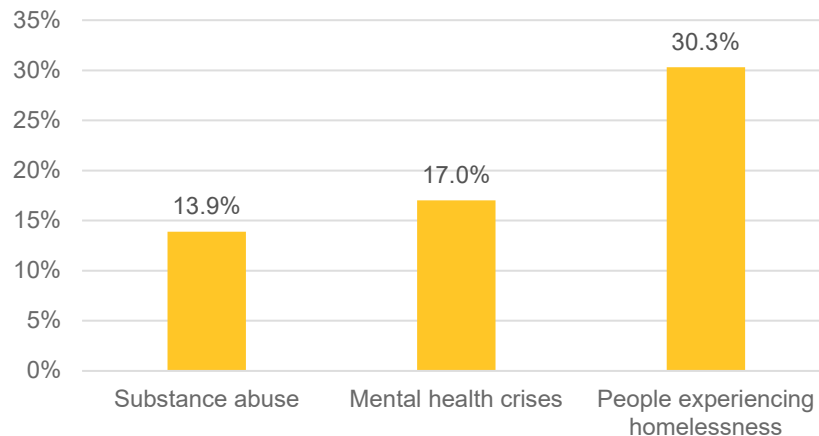
Examining the three questions together shows that there is majority support for team responses to all three types of calls.

Of the three call types examined, slightly less than one-third of respondents (30.3%) were in favor of only non-police alternatives for calls about people experiencing homelessness.

Percent support for teams of Mesa police officers and non-police alternatives, by call type

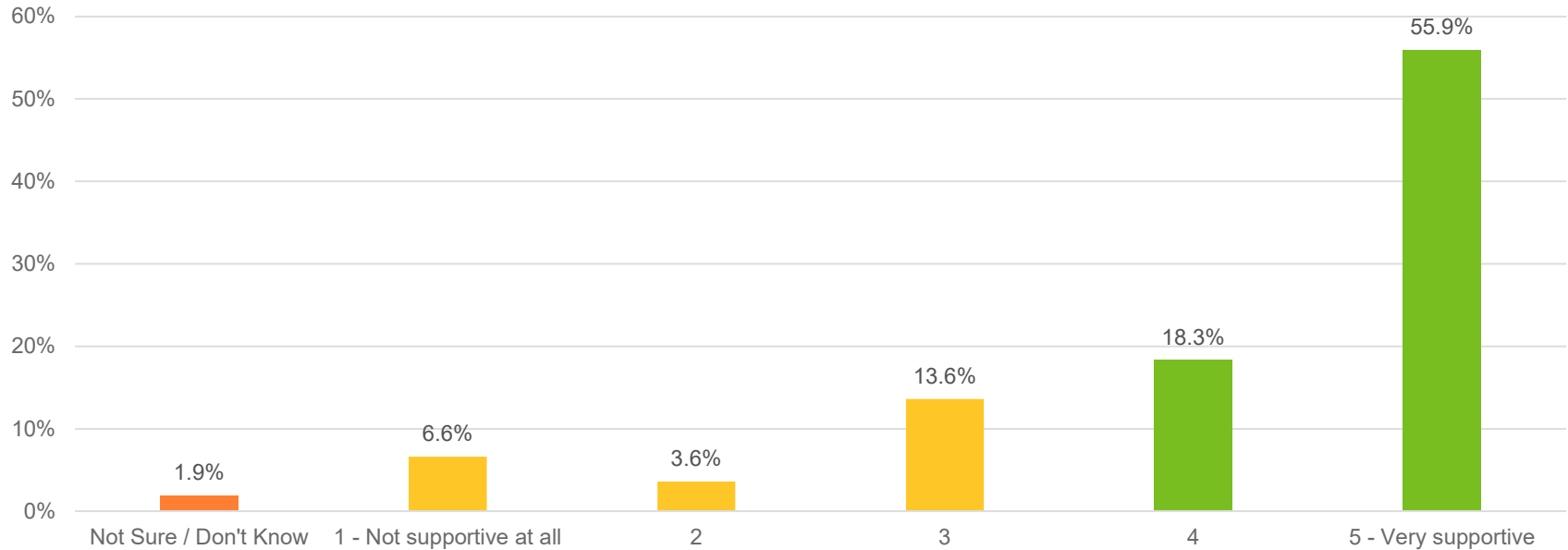


Percent support for only non-police alternatives, by call type



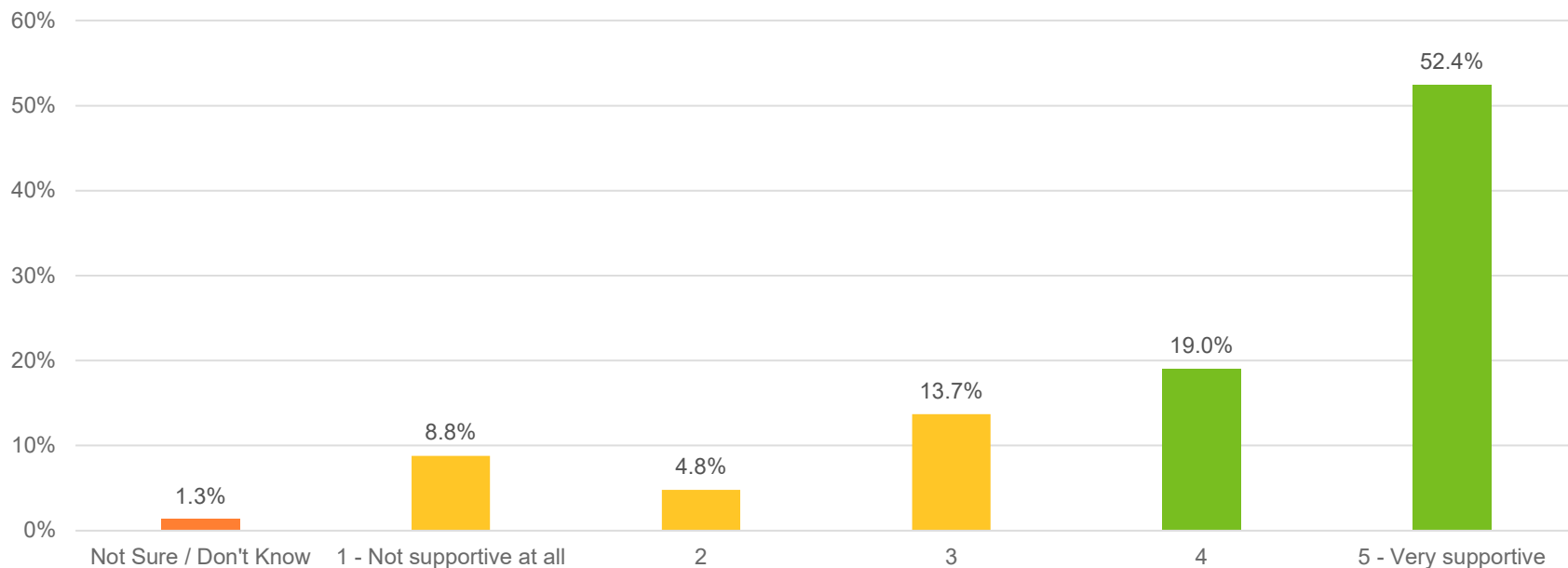
How supportive are you of using public funds to hire mental health professionals to handle non-violent mental health crisis calls?

Nearly three-quarters of respondents (74.3%) are supportive of using public funds to hire mental health professionals to handle non-violent mental health crisis calls. More than half of respondents (55.9%) are very supportive of this idea.



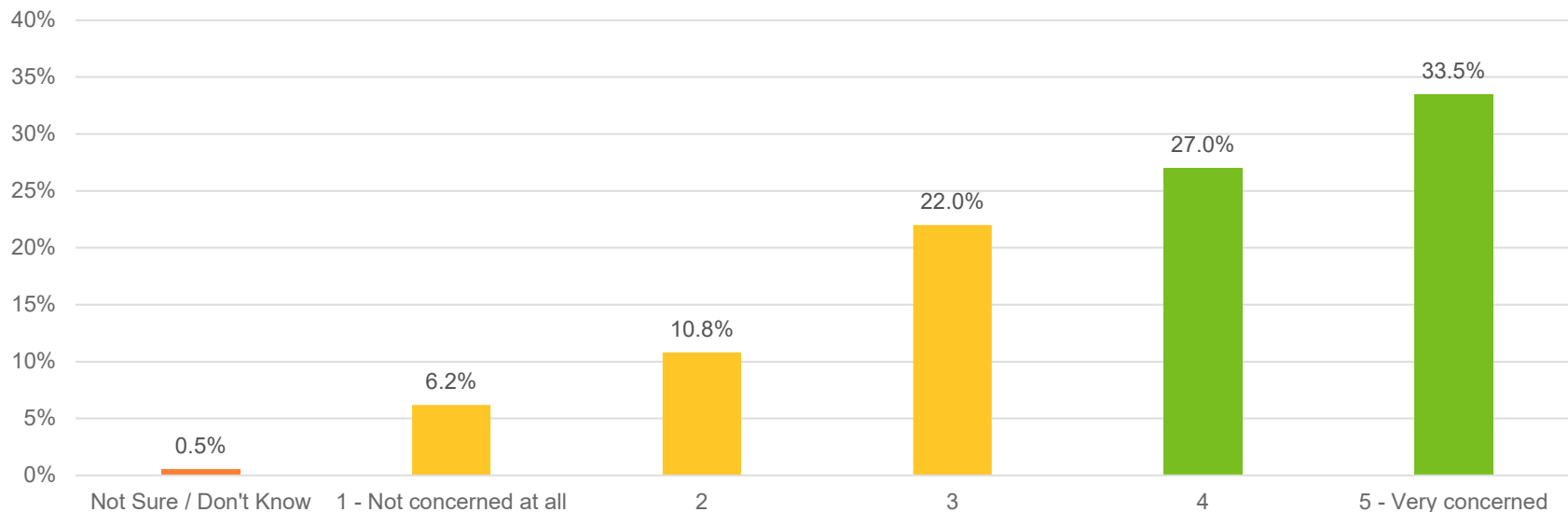
How supportive are you of using public funds to hire substance abuse counselors to help respond to substance abuse calls?

Most respondents (71.4%) are supportive of using public funds to hire substance abuse counselors to help respond to substance abuse calls. More than half of respondents (52.4%) are very supportive of this idea.



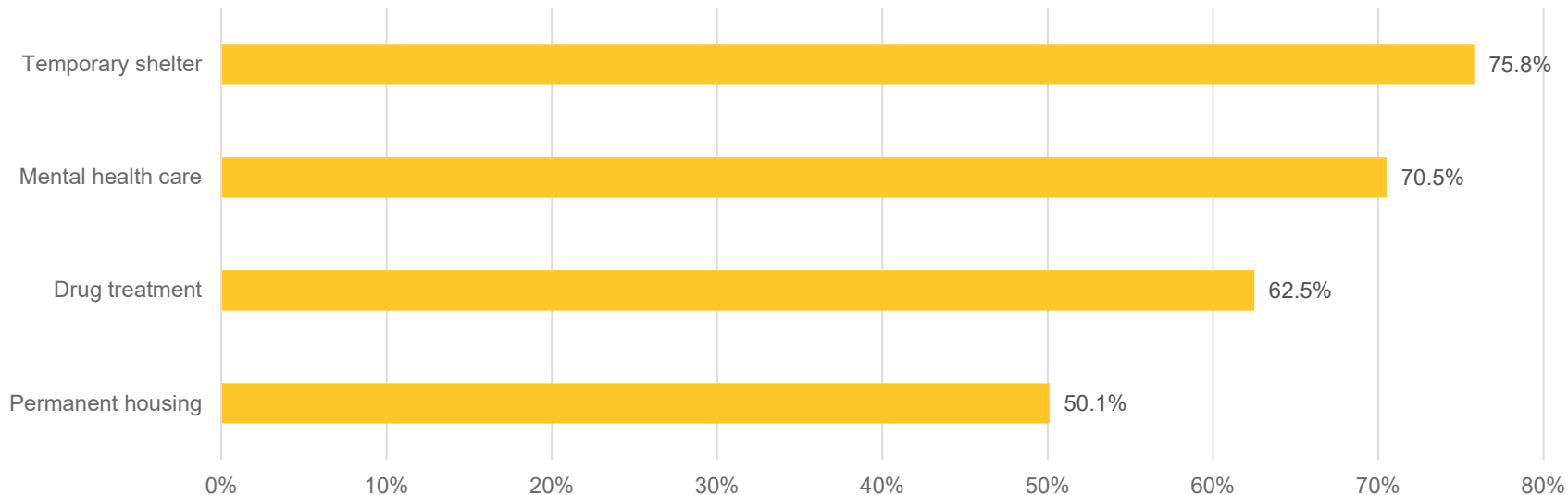
How concerned are you about homelessness in Mesa?

Over 60% of respondents said they are concerned about homelessness in Mesa. This echoes the high level of concern about homelessness expressed by respondents in the question that asked them their level of concern about six topics in Mesa.



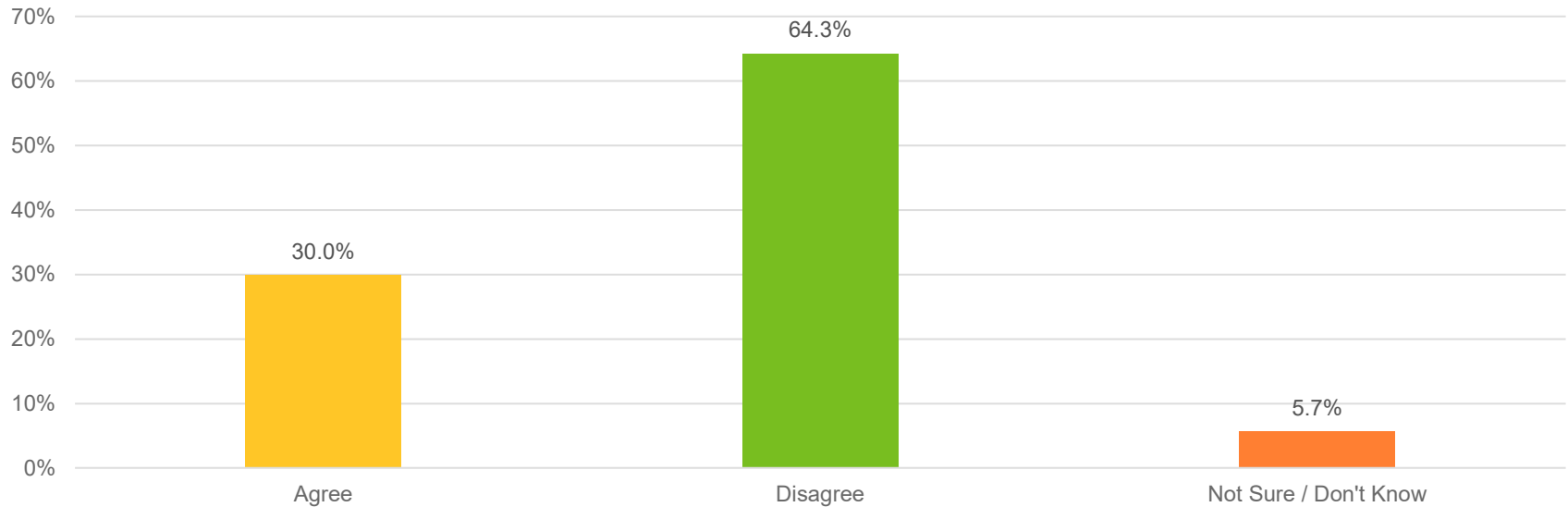
How supportive are you of the City of Mesa using public funds to help people experiencing homelessness by providing....?

Three-quarters of respondents are supportive of using public funds to help people experiencing homelessness by providing temporary shelter. There are also majority levels of support for providing mental health care (70.5%) and drug treatment (62.5%). About half of respondents expressed support for using public funds to help people experiencing homelessness by providing permanent housing.



Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Arresting people experiencing homelessness for minor criminal offenses is an effective public safety strategy.

Most respondents (64.3%) do not think that arresting people experiencing homelessness for minor criminal offenses is an effective public safety strategy.



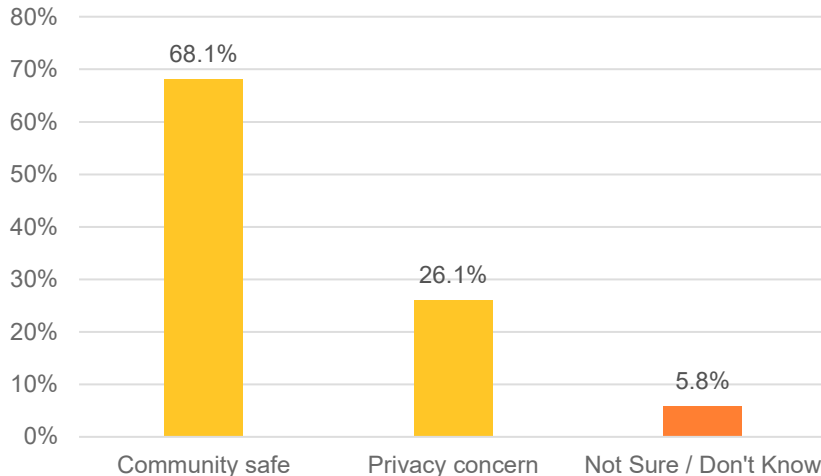
Policing Technology and Traffic Enforcement



Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your own position – even if neither is exactly right?

It would help keep the community safe if when crime is suspected the police had real-time access to video feeds from businesses.

It would be a privacy concern if when crime is suspected the police had real-time access to video feeds from businesses.

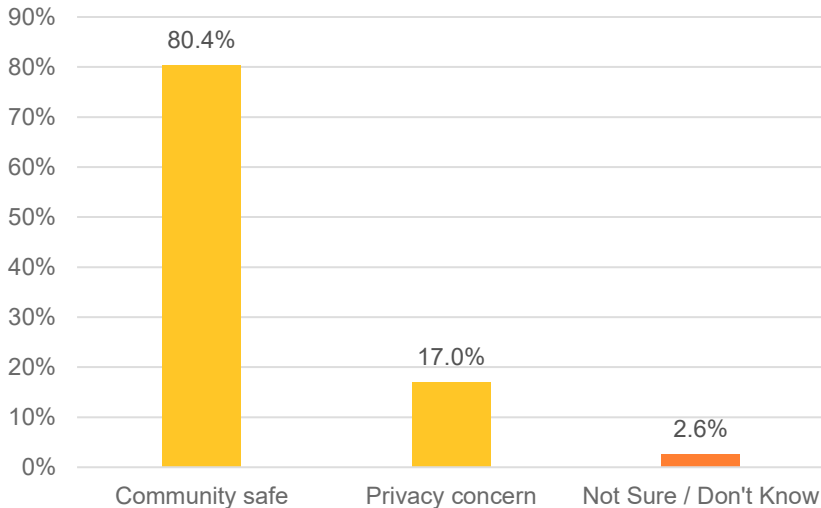


Most respondents (68.1%) said that it would help keep the community safe if when crime is suspected the police had real-time access to video feeds from businesses.

Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your own position – even if neither is exactly right?

It would help keep the community safe if when crime is suspected the police had real-time access to video feeds from schools.

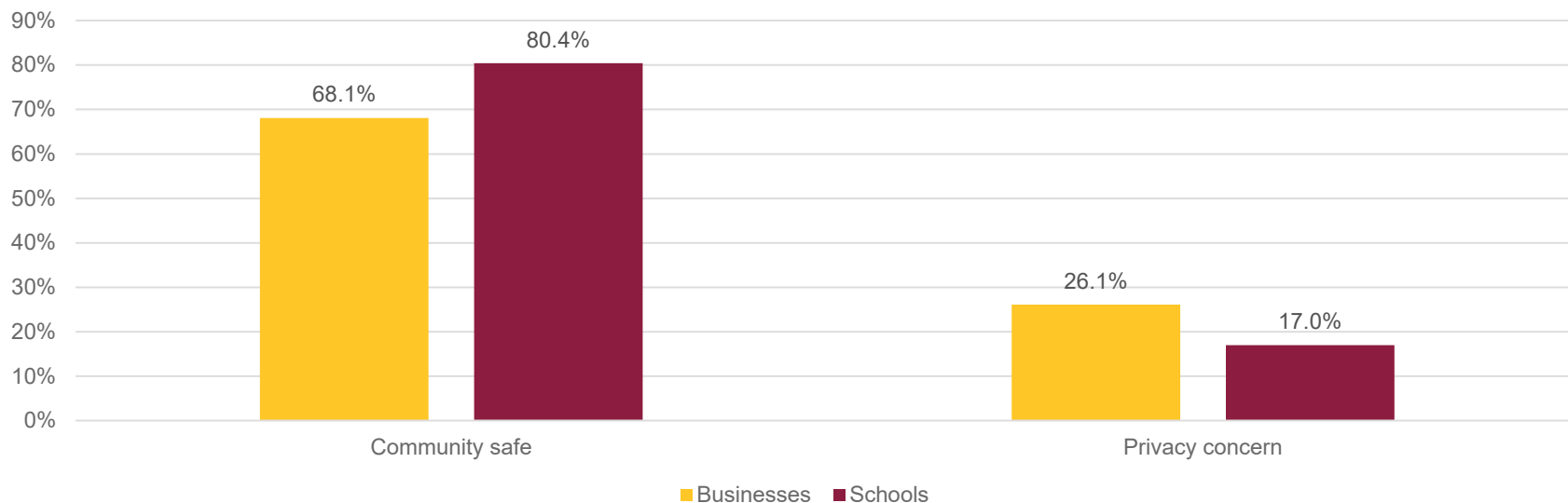
It would be a privacy concern if when crime is suspected the police had real-time access to video feeds from schools.



Most respondents (80.4%) said that it would help keep the community safe if when crime is suspected the police had real-time access to video feeds from schools.

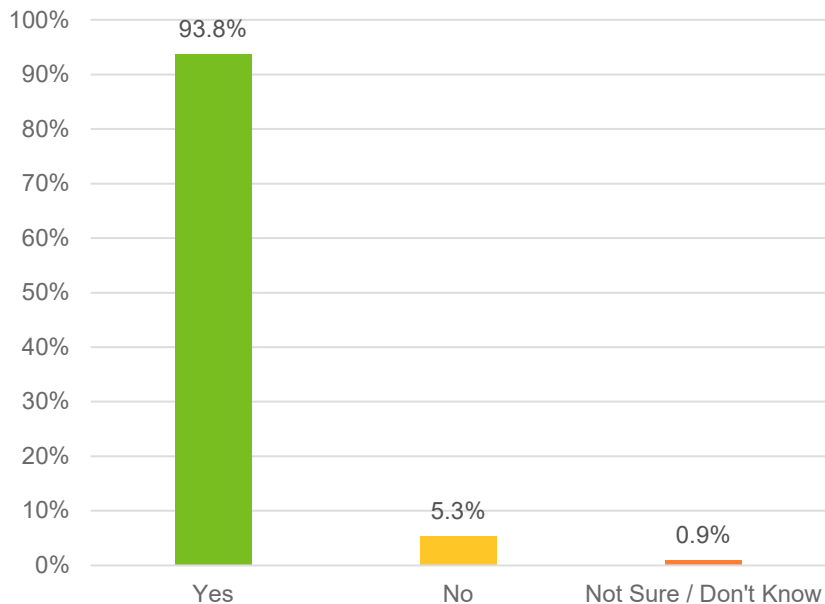
Real-time access to video feeds: Businesses vs. schools

More respondents said that having real-time access to video feeds in schools would help keep the community safe than access to video feeds from businesses. More respondents said real-time access to video feeds in businesses would be a privacy concern.



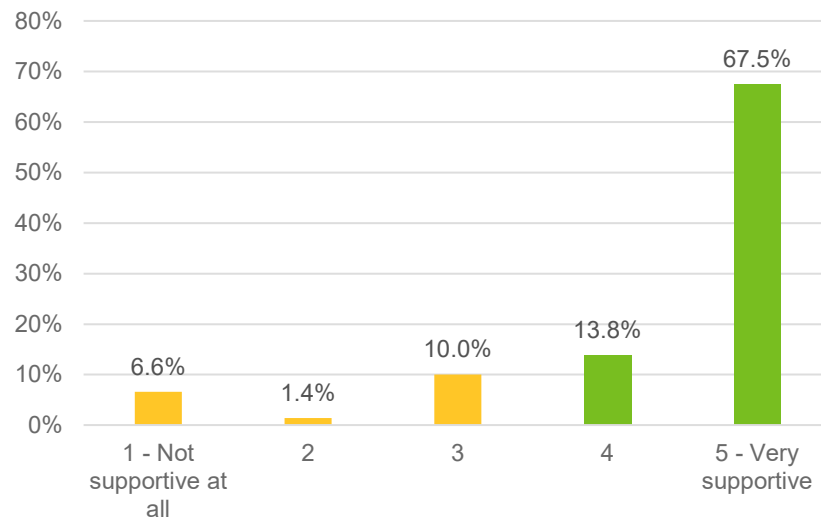
Yes or no, do you think the Mesa Police Department should purchase on-body cameras for every police officer?

Nearly all respondents (93.8%) said the Mesa Police Department should purchase on-body cameras for every police officer.



How supportive are you of using public funds for purchasing on-body cameras for every police officer?

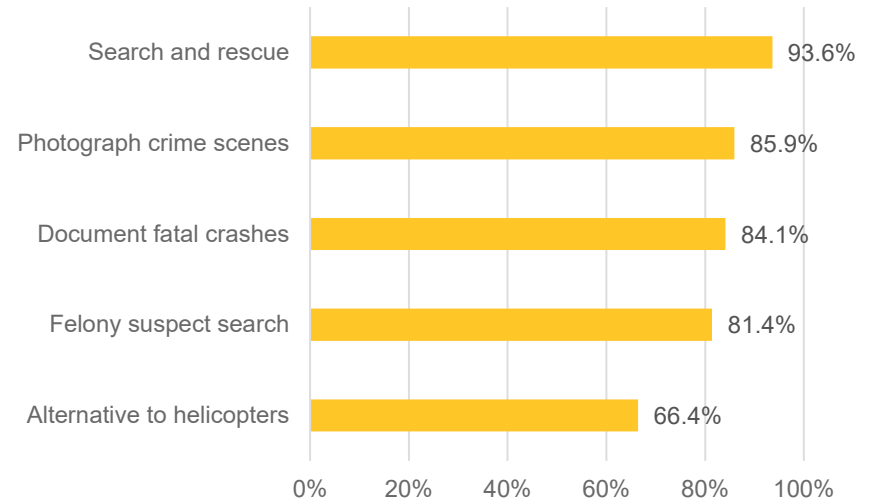
About two-thirds of respondents (67.5%) are very supportive of using public funds for purchasing on-body cameras for every police officer. The share of respondents who indicated clear support (a 4 or 5) was 81.3%.



Yes or no, do you support the use of drones by law enforcement...

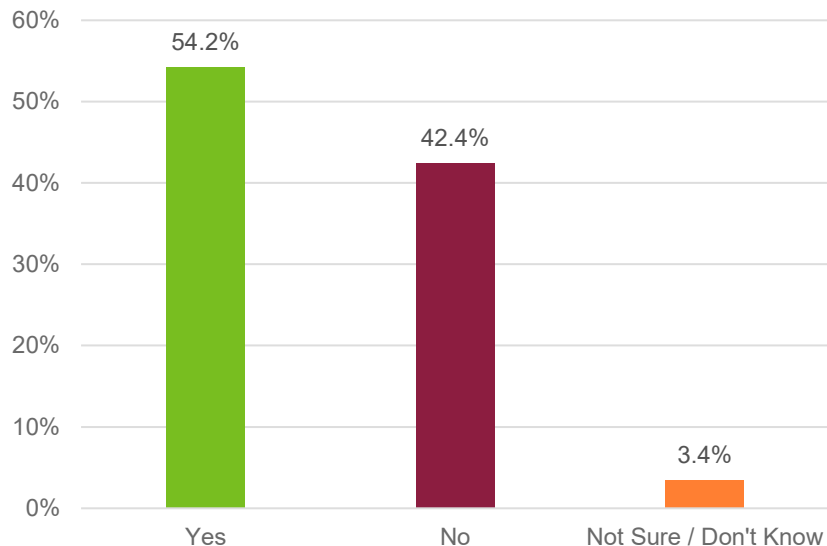
- for search and rescue operations?
- to photograph crime scenes?
- to document evidence in fatal traffic investigations?
- in searches for felony suspects?
- as an alternative to police helicopters?

Nearly all respondents (93.6%) expressed support for using drones for search and rescue operations. There were high levels of support (above 80%) for using drones for photographing crime scenes, documenting evidence in fatal traffic investigations, and searching for felony suspects. There was majority support (66.4%) for using drones as an alternative to police helicopters.



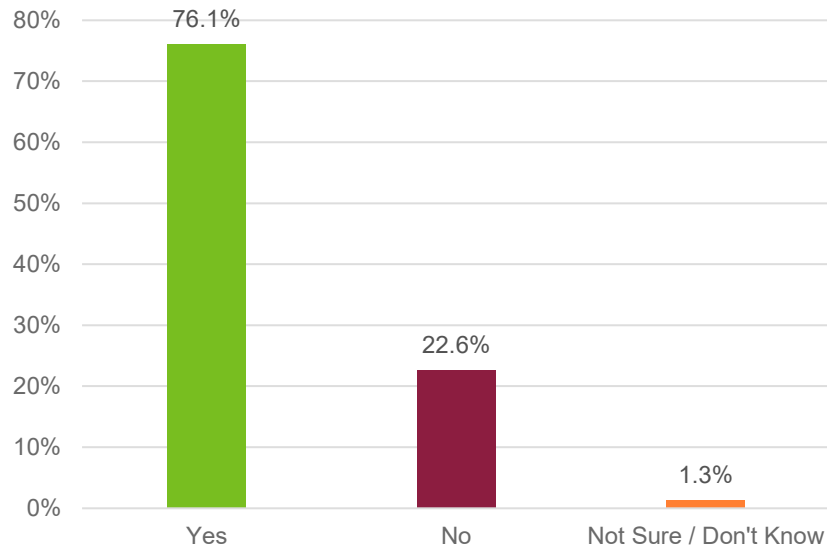
Yes or no, do you support the use of red-light cameras to reduce accidents at major intersections in Mesa?

Slightly more than half of respondents (54.2%) said they support using red-light cameras to reduce accidents at major intersections in Mesa.



Yes or no, do you support the use of speed cameras in school zones?

Three-quarters of respondents (76.1%) said they support the use of speed cameras in school zones.

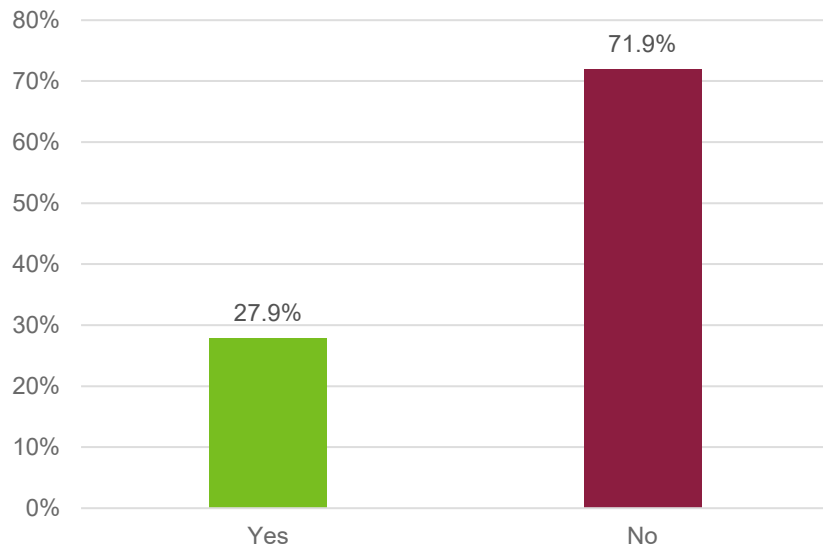


Police Contact and Professionalism



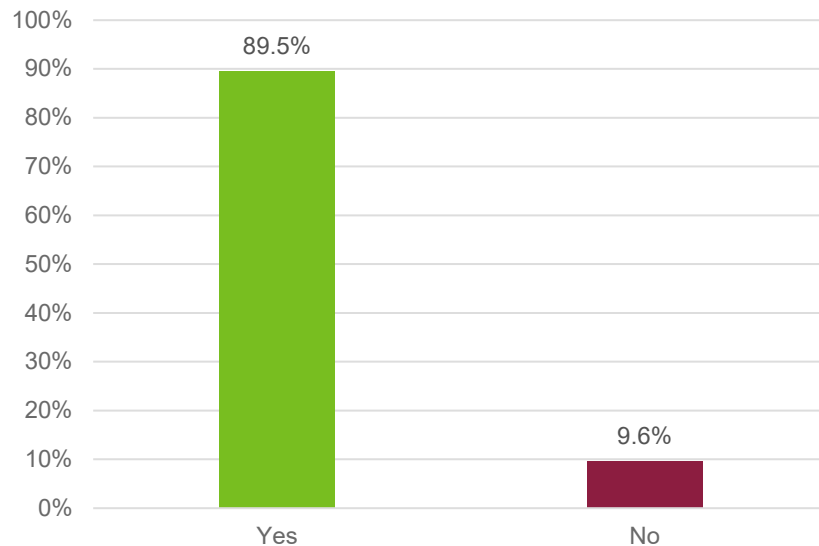
Have you been a victim of crime in Mesa?

Just over one-quarter of respondents (27.9%) reported being a victim of crime in Mesa.



Did you report the crime to the police?

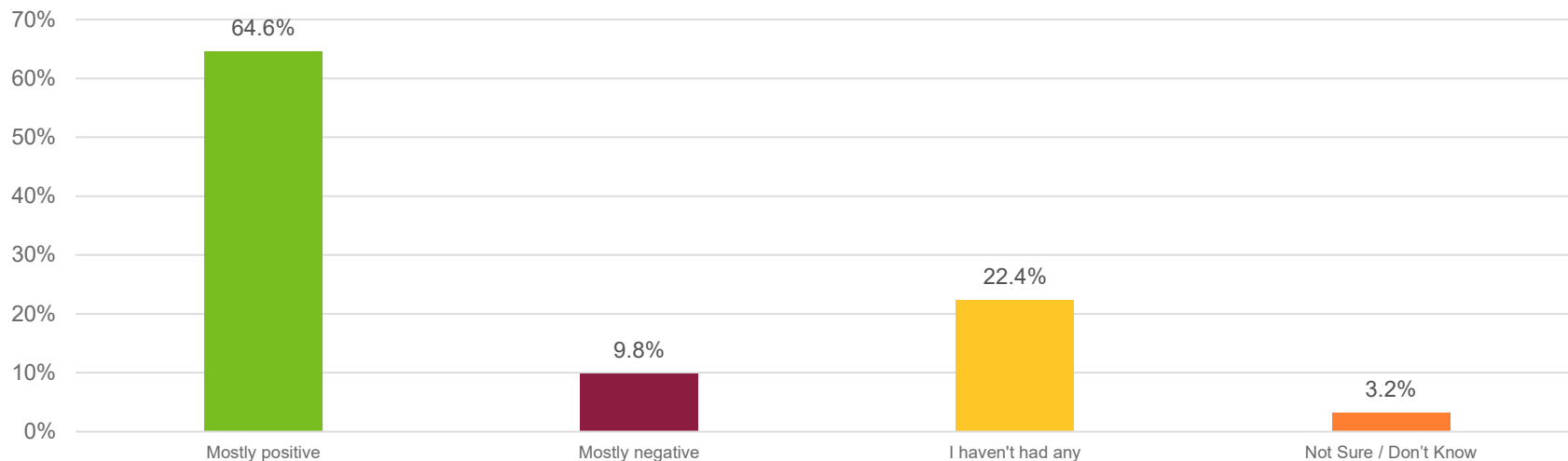
Of the respondents who reported being a victim of crime in Mesa (N=226), nearly all (89.5%) reported the crime to the police.



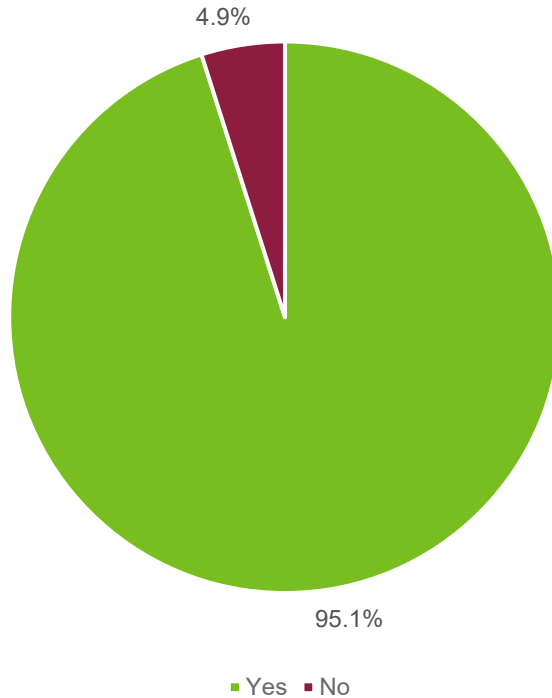
How would you describe your experiences with Mesa Police Department officers?

Most respondents (64.6%) said that their experiences with Mesa Police Department officers were “mostly positive.” About 10% said their experiences were “mostly negative.” **Almost one-quarter of respondents (22.4%) said they have not had any experiences with Mesa Police Department officers.**

In 2016, 85% of survey respondents said that during their most recent contact with a member of the Mesa Police Department, the employee treated them fairly (excellent or good rating).



During your contact with the Mesa PD during the past year, did the officer sufficiently explain his or her actions?



Of the respondents who indicated that the Mesa Police Department initiated contact with them in the past year (N=98), nearly all (95.1%) said that the officer sufficiently explained their actions.

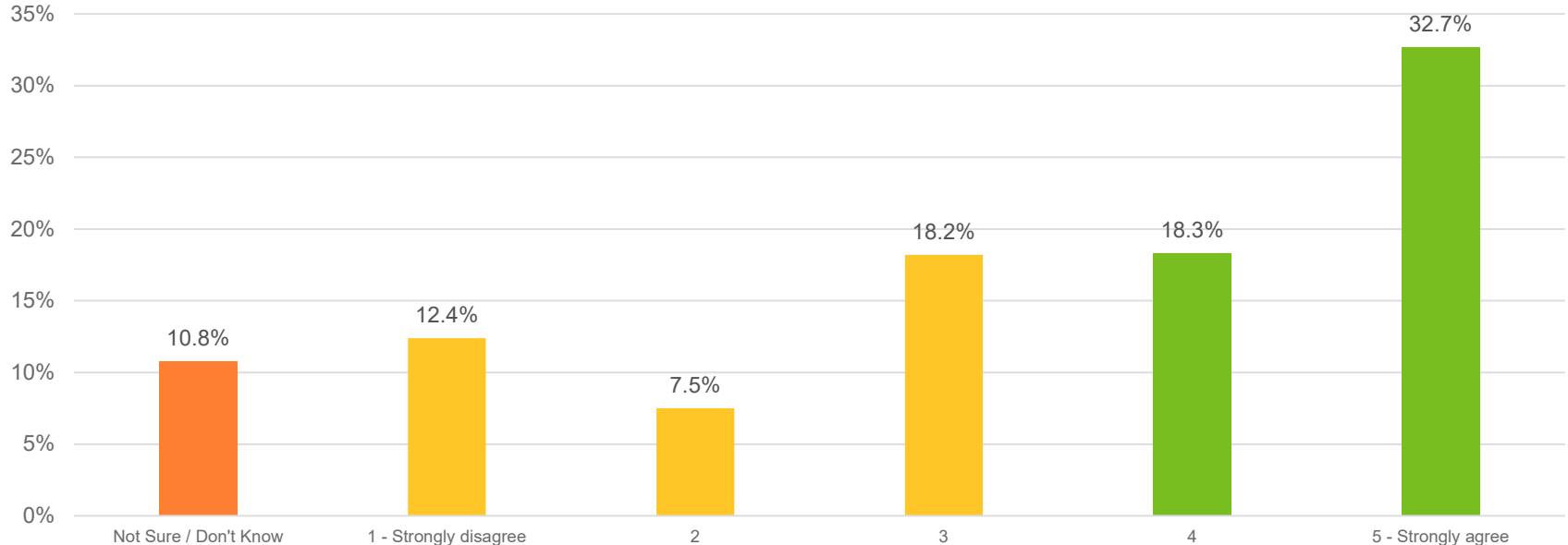
In 2016, 87% of survey respondents said that during their most recent contact with a member of the Mesa Police Department, the employee treated them professionally (excellent or good rating).

Use of Force



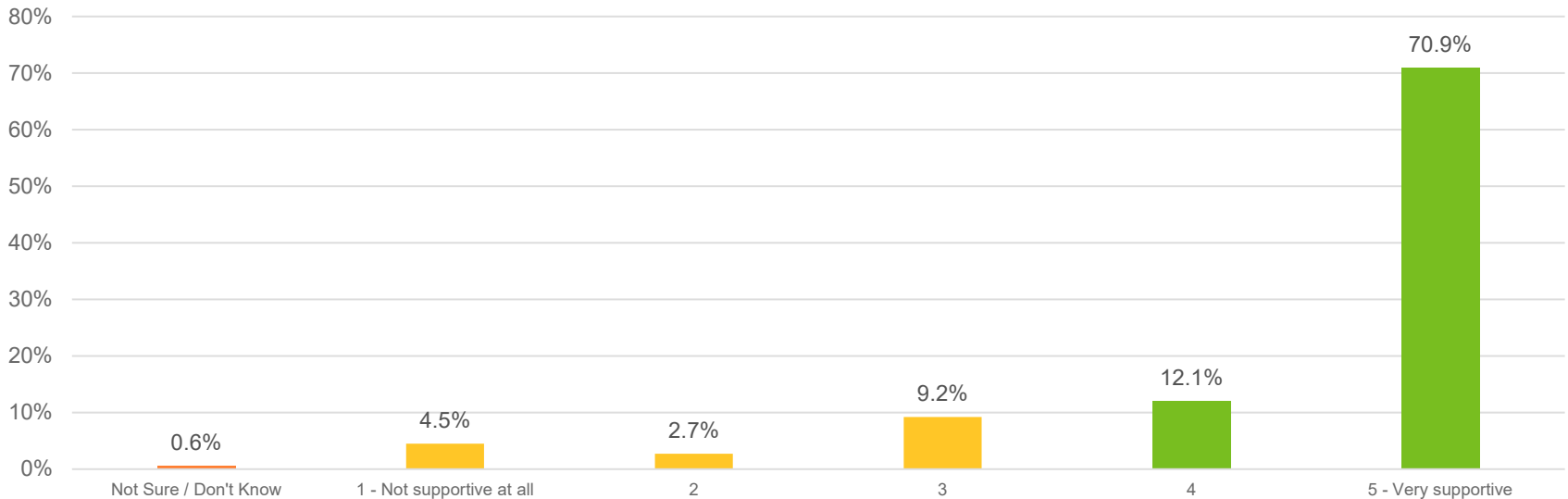
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Mesa police officers only use the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks.

About half of respondents (51.1%) said Mesa police officers only use the amount of force necessary to accomplish their tasks. About one in 10 respondents (10.8%) said they were not sure or didn't know. About one in five (19.9%) disagree.



How supportive are you of using public funds for de-escalation training where officers would learn strategies to reduce the likelihood of injury or death?

Most respondents (83%) said they are supportive of using public funds for de-escalation training. The intensity of support for de-escalation training was high, with 70.9% saying they were very supportive of the idea.

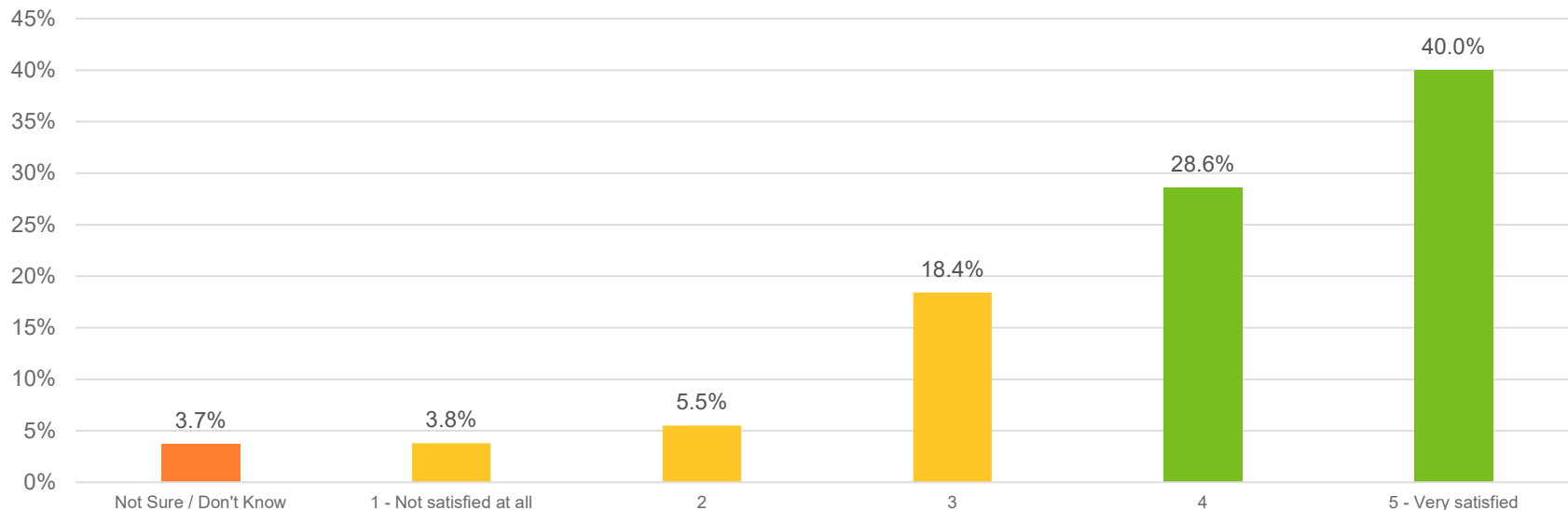


Overall Satisfaction and Priorities



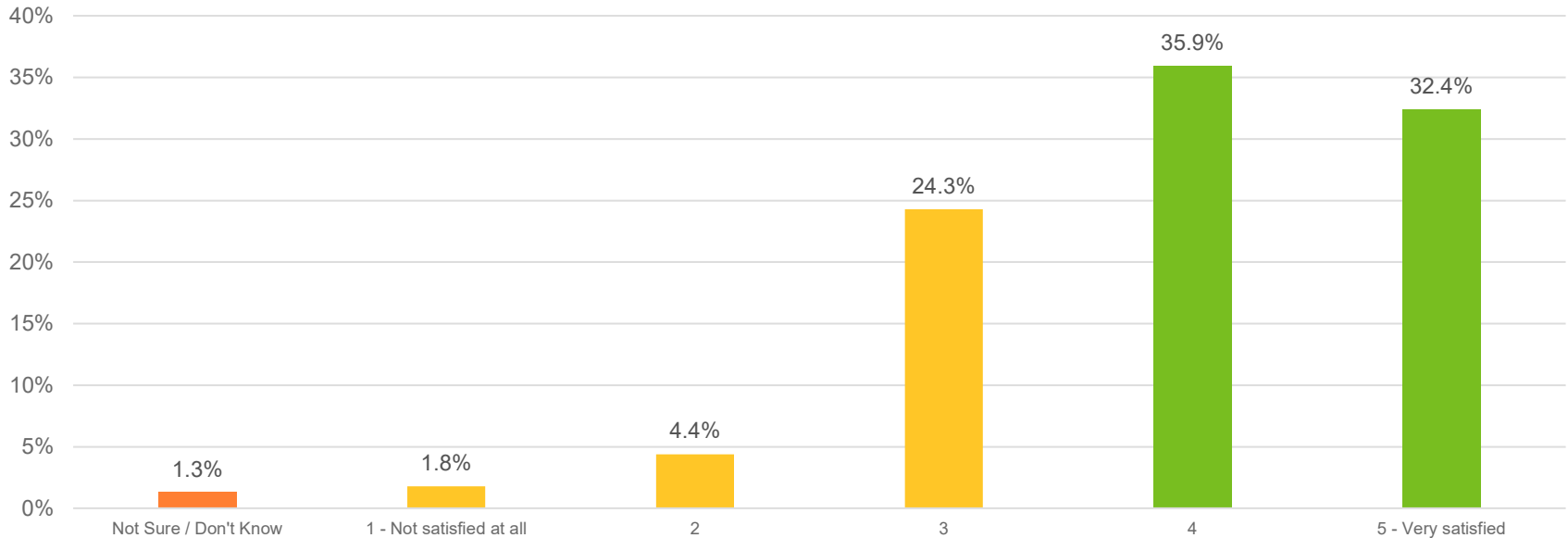
How satisfied are you with the performance of the Mesa Police Department?

Satisfaction with the Mesa Police Department is high (68.6% said 4 or 5). The share of respondents who said they were not satisfied was under 10%. Although the scale and questions were different, overall, the high level of satisfaction was consistent with findings in the 2016 survey. In 2016, 64% of respondents said they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the Mesa Police Department's presence in their neighborhood.



How satisfied are you with public safety in Mesa?

Satisfaction with public safety in Mesa is high (68.3% said 4 or 5). A small share (6.2%) said they were not satisfied.



Of the following list, which item would you like the City of Mesa to prioritize in the coming year?

- **Equip all police officers with on-body cameras**
- **Hire more mental health professionals to respond to crisis calls**
- **Train police officers in de-escalation strategies**
- **Hire more police officers**
- **Provide more support for people experiencing homelessness**

Three priorities for the City of Mesa to pursue in the coming year rose to the top: equipping all police officers with on-body cameras, hiring more mental health professionals to respond to crisis calls, and training police officers in de-escalation strategies.

