# Preliminary Findings from the Concord Town Meeting Survey

## Report of the Work Group

September 28, 1995

Prepared for:
Town Meeting Study Committee

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

# NOTE

*This document is a draft of the research findings prepared by a four-person work group of the Town Meeting Study Committee. Findings are preliminary and directional in nature. Further analysis may be required as the full Committee develops its conclusions and draws implications from this fact-finding activity.*

# Methodology

**In an effort to obtain as much public input as possible, the Town Meeting Study Committee conducted a survey of Concord residents to obtain insights on citizen attitudes and behaviors as they relate to the town meeting process.**

- In late May, a three-person work group (comprised of Dekkers Davidson, Tana Pluger, and Deena Whitfield) began drafting the survey.
  - Professional assistance was supplied by Opinion Dynamics Corporation (a Cambridge, MA, market research company and other market research consultancies.
- By mid-June, the TMSC approved the survey for distribution to all Concord residents (both registered and non-registered voters).
- In late June, surveys were mailed to approximately 9,600 registered voters. A return by July 31, 1995 was requested. 1,864 surveys were returned, a 19.4% response rate.
- In mid-July, surveys were mailed to approximately 1,700 other citizens (who were not registered to vote). A return by August 23, 1995 was requested. 41 surveys were returned, a 2.4% response rate.

Preliminary Findings
(Directional)

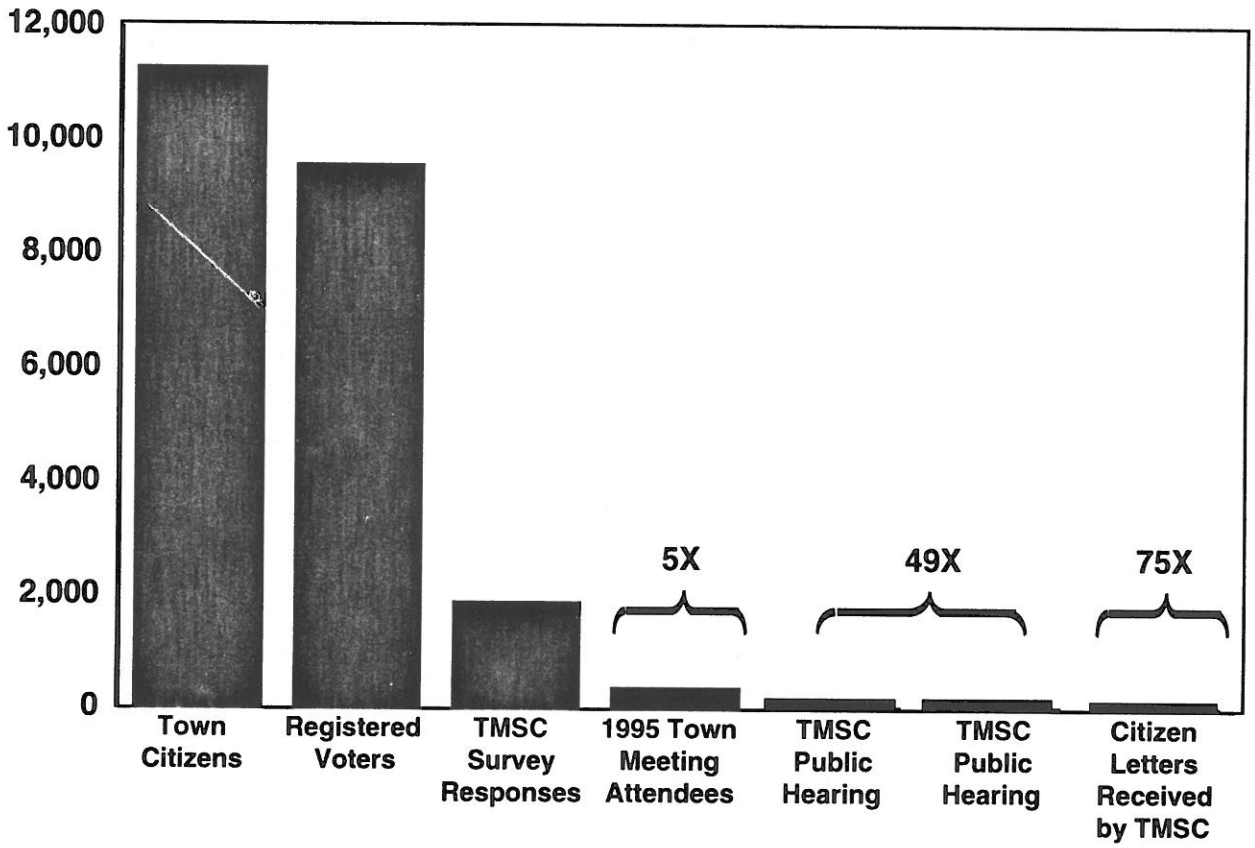
- Overall, 1905 surveys were received (for an overall response rate of 16.9%) and responses tabulated by the Opinion Dynamics Corporation. An additional 50 surveys were received after the August 23 deadline and were not tabulated.

- In late August, a four-person work group (comprised of Dekkers Davidson, Tana Pluger, Deenna Whitfield and Carole Wayland) began analyzing the research findings on behalf of the full committee.

- These preliminary findings are designed to assist the TMSC in its diagnosis of the town meeting process. No conclusions nor implications have been drawn by the work group in this report.

# A Perspective on the Response Rate

**The survey provided the committee with input from a large number of citizens, more than has been gathered through public hearings and letters.**

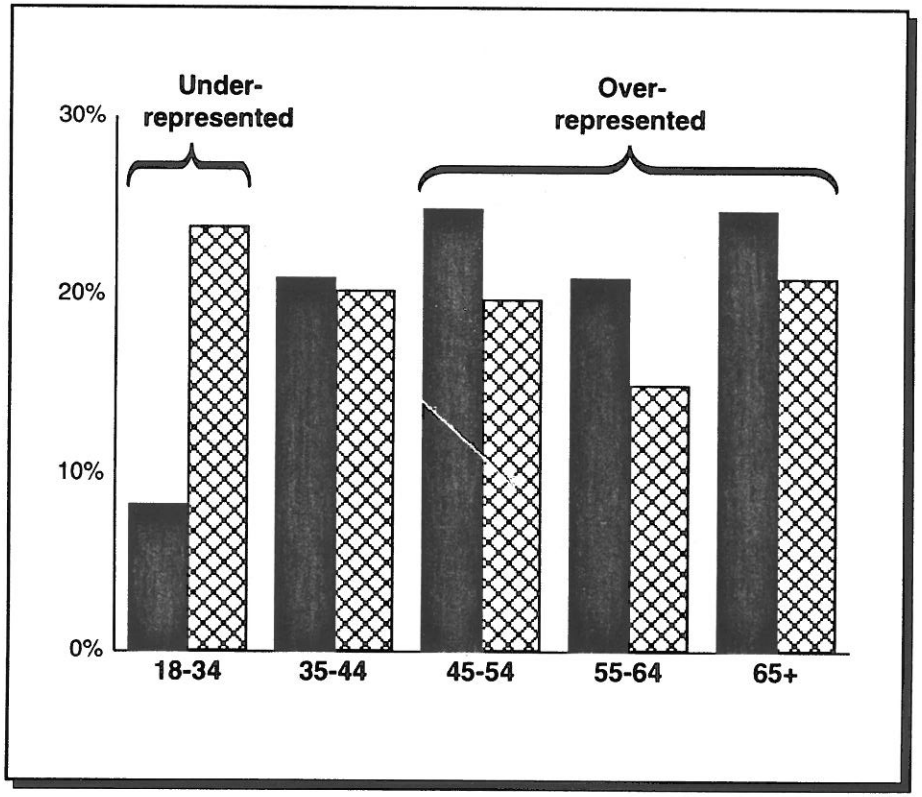



IMPORTANT NOTE: It is not possible to reliably project these findings to the townwide population. It is possible that these findings do reflect the townwide opinion and it is just as possible that they do not reflect townwide opinion.

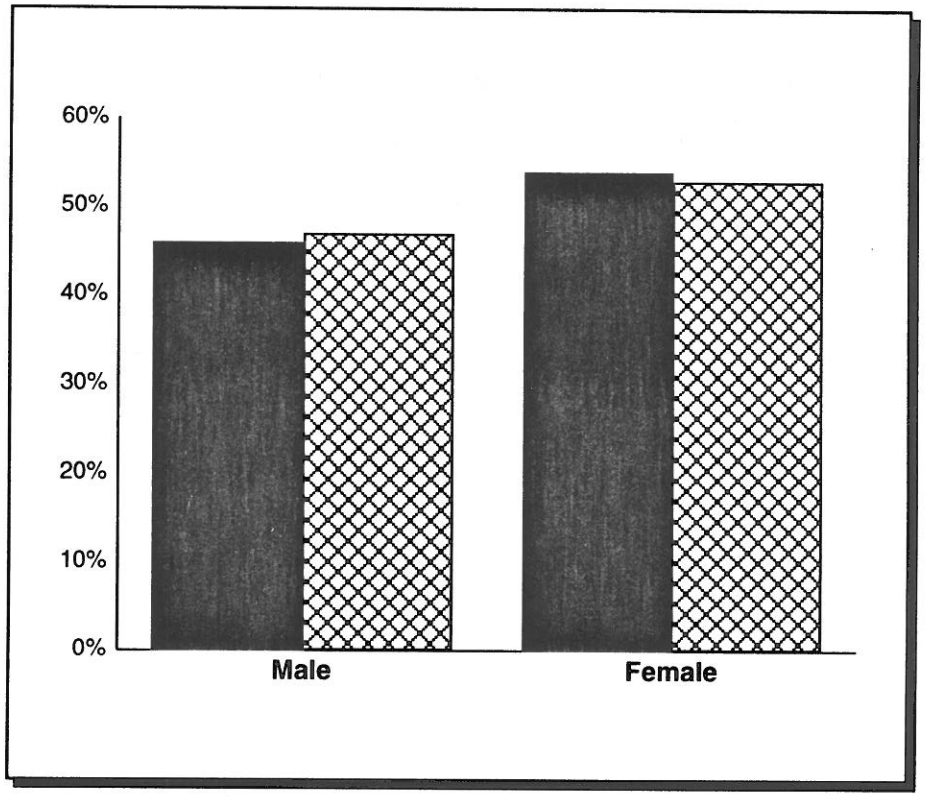
**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

# Demographic Profile of Respondents
*(compared to town population)*

## Q20. By Age Groups




## Q19. By Gender



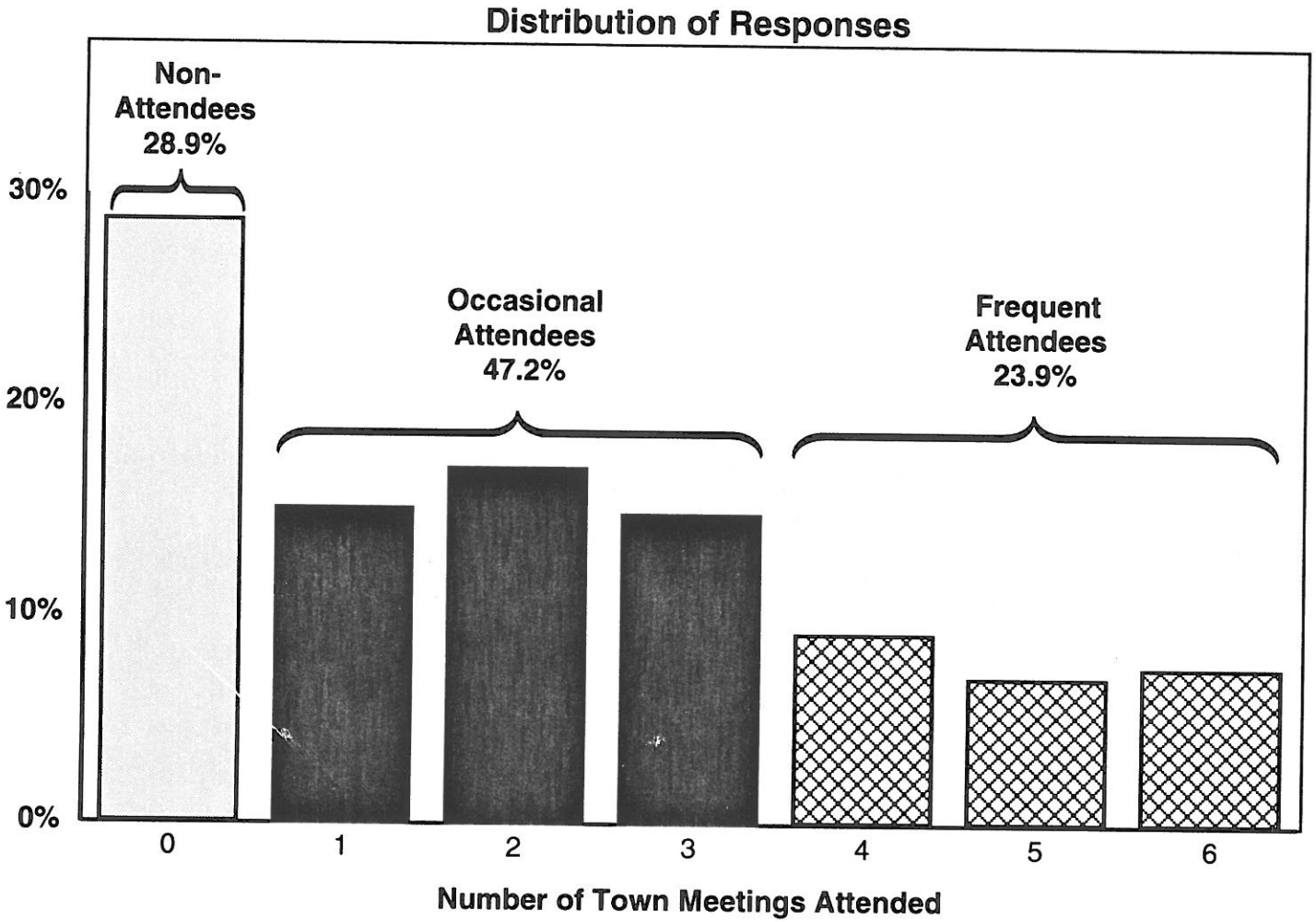

Note: Town census uses slightly different age breakdowns than TMSC survey. Some adjustments made to facilitate comparisons.

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

Key: TMSC Survey Respondents; Town Population (Census)

# Behavioral Profile of Respondents

(Reported attendance at town meeting during the past 5 years)

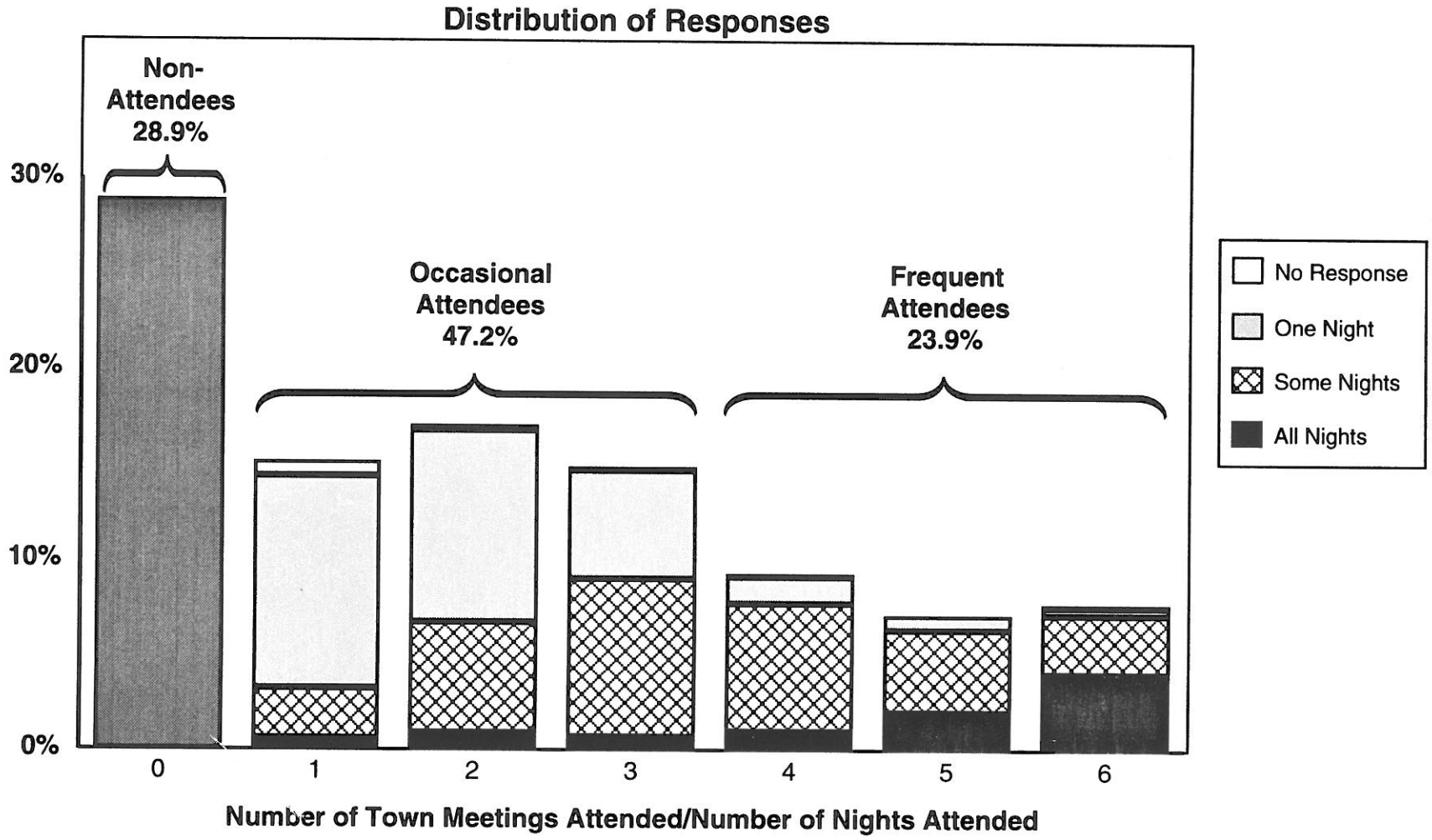



n = 1905

Preliminary Findings (Directional)

# Behavioral Profile of Respondents

## (Reported attendance at town meeting during the past 5 years)




n = 1905

Preliminary Findings (Directional)

# Overview of Preliminary Findings

| *Initial Hypothesis* | *Supported?* | *Survey Findings* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Issues decided at town meeting are important to a large number of citizens. | Yes | Most (78%) indicate that issues decided at the town meeting are important to them. |
| 2. Many citizens are willing to let others deliberate and decide the issues. | No | Most (68%) are not satisfied to let others deliberate and decide the issues.<br><br>Many (47%) want to be more involved in deliberating and deciding the issues and many (43%) want to participate more in town meetings. |
| 3. Most people attend town meeting for the primary purpose of voting on the warrant articles. | Yes | All aspects of town meeting were viewed as important; voting, however, is viewed as the most important (2x more valuable than any other element) and is the area of the greatest gap in satisfaction levels.<br>– Most (83%) are attracted to attend to "exercise their civic rights and responsibilities."<br>– Most (82%) are attracted to attend to "vote on issues of special interest to me."<br>– Most (75%) are attracted to attend to "shape the future of the town." |
| 4. Town meeting is a primary source for information about warrant articles. | No | Many sources of information are used to become informed about warrant articles at town meeting; attendance at town meeting is the fourth most used source of information. |
| 5. There are significant shortcomings with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of information that is available about town meeting warrant articles. | No | Most (5-6:1 satisfied/dissatisfied) are satisfied with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of information that is available about warrant articles at town meeting. |

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

| Initial Hypothesis | Supported? | Survey Findings |
|---|---|---|
| 6. There are significant shortcomings with the fairness of the process and the conduct of town meeting. | No | Most (2-3:1 satisfied/dissatisfied) are satisfied with the fairness of the process and the conduct of town meeting; a significant minority, however, appears to be dissatisfied. |
| 7. Town meeting produces good outcomes. | Yes and No | Respondents were divided in their levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Respondents evenly split (42% to 42%) on the question of whether the decisions made at town meeting accurately reflect views of Concord citizens. A modest majority (by a 49-35% margin) believe that town meeting decisions are generally in the best interests of the town. |
| 8. The level of attendance at town meeting is related closely to the stages of adult life; adults with young children and those early in their careers are less likely to attend. | Yes | Younger citizens (35-44 yrs old) with full-time jobs, young children at home and those who travel are much less likely to attend town meeting. |
| 9. Some citizens are prevented from attending town meeting because of their livelihood or lifestyle. | Yes | Most respondents (65.7%) indicated that there are a lot of things in their daily life that prevent them from attending town meeting. |
| 10. Voting in public is a problem or concern for a broad number of citizens. | No | Some respondents (10-25%) indicated that they did not like voting in public. |
| 11. Individuals from dual income households are less likely to attend town meeting than those from households with only on wage earner. | No | There was no apparent difference in the attendance levels, attitudes, behaviors of those from a single or dual income household. |
| 12. The town meeting, as a form of local governance, is a positive tradition. | Yes | Most (61%) respondents indicated that "the town meeting makes me proud to be from Concord." |

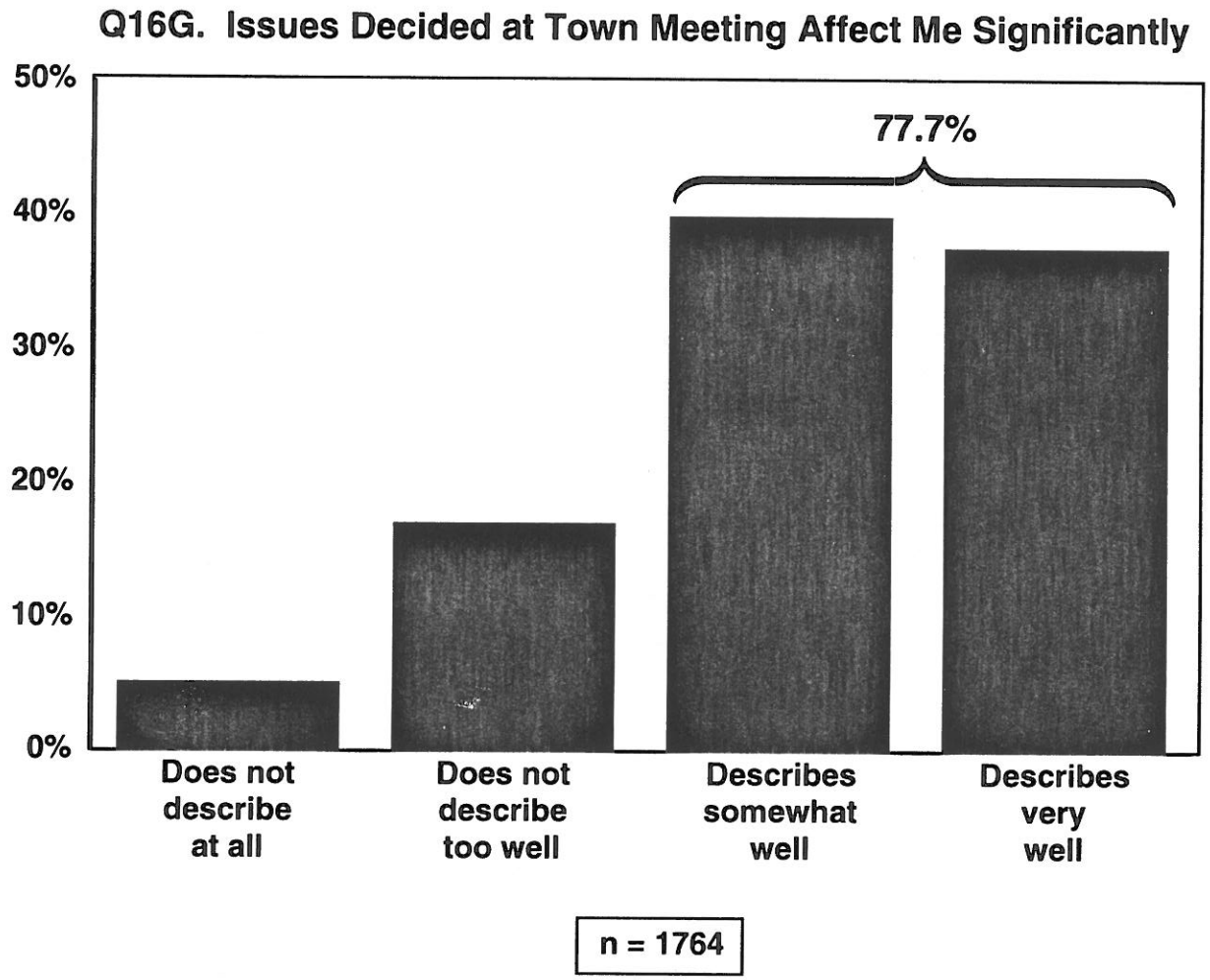
**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 1. Issues decided at town meeting are important to a large number of citizens. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| Yes |

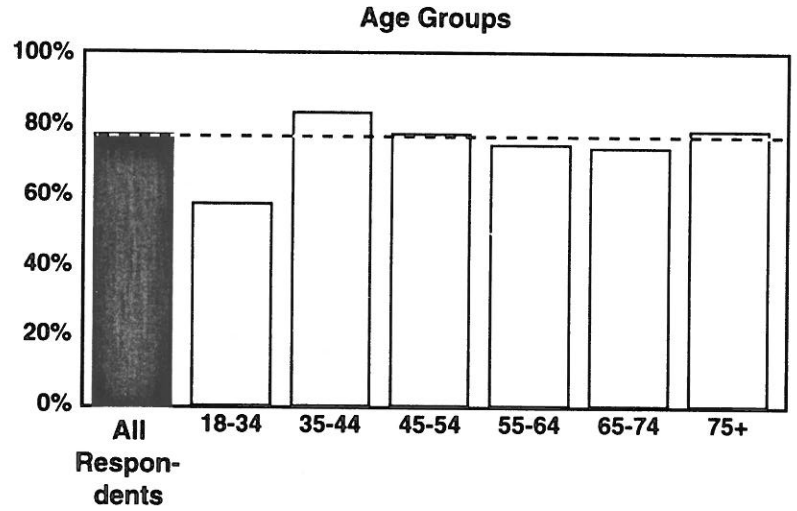
| Findings |
| --- |
| Most (78%) indicate that issues decided at the town meeting are important to them. |

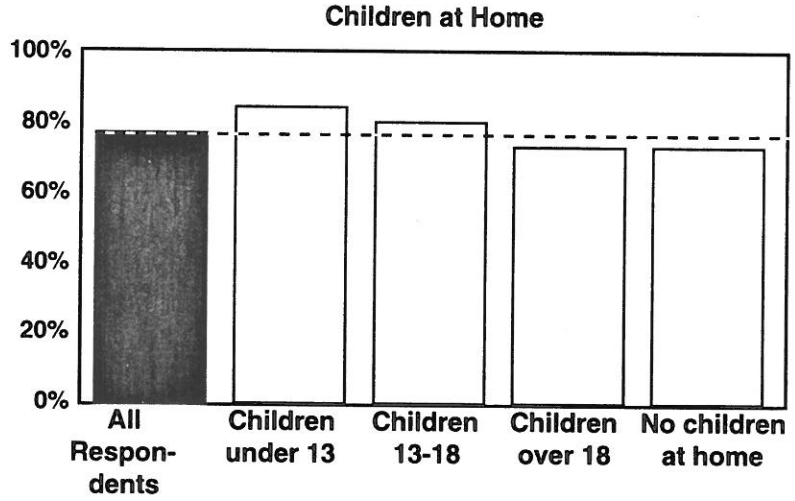
## Most respondents indicated that the issues decided at town meeting are important to them.

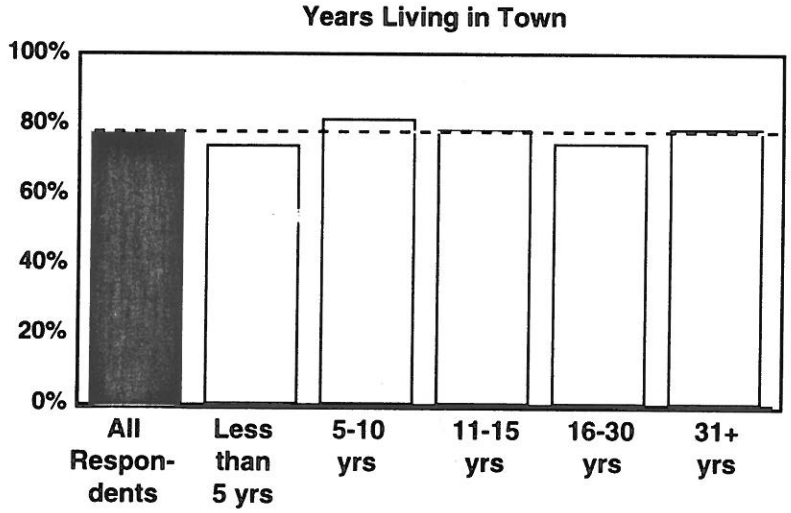


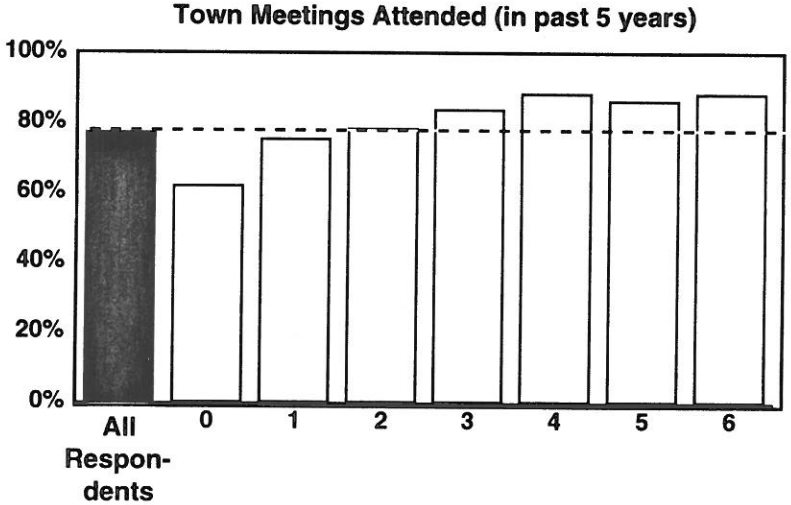

Preliminary Findings (Directional)

## Q16G. Issues Decided at Town Meeting Affect Me Significantly
(% indicating statement describes somewhat or very well)



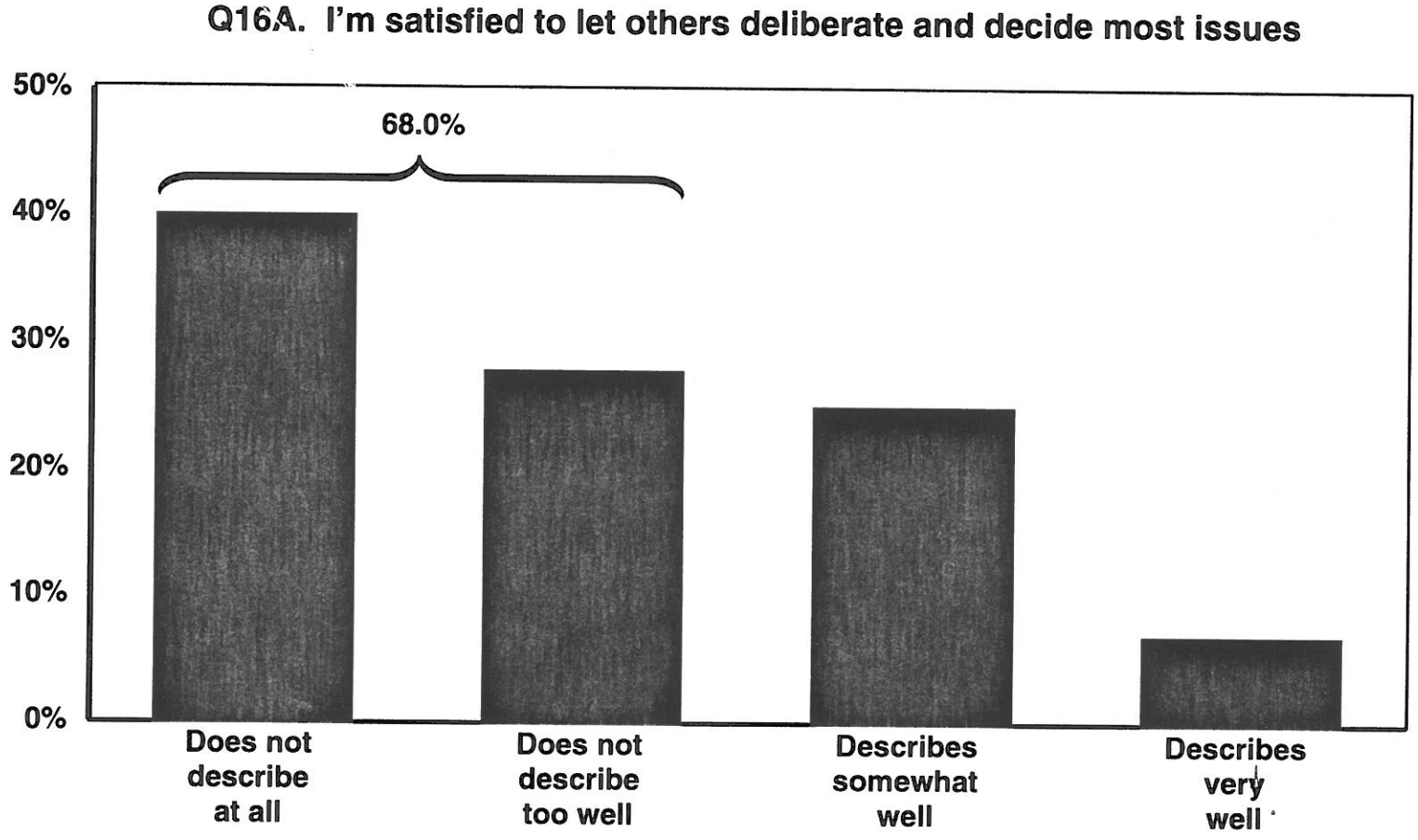

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 2. Many citizens are willing to let others deliberate and decide the issues |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| No |

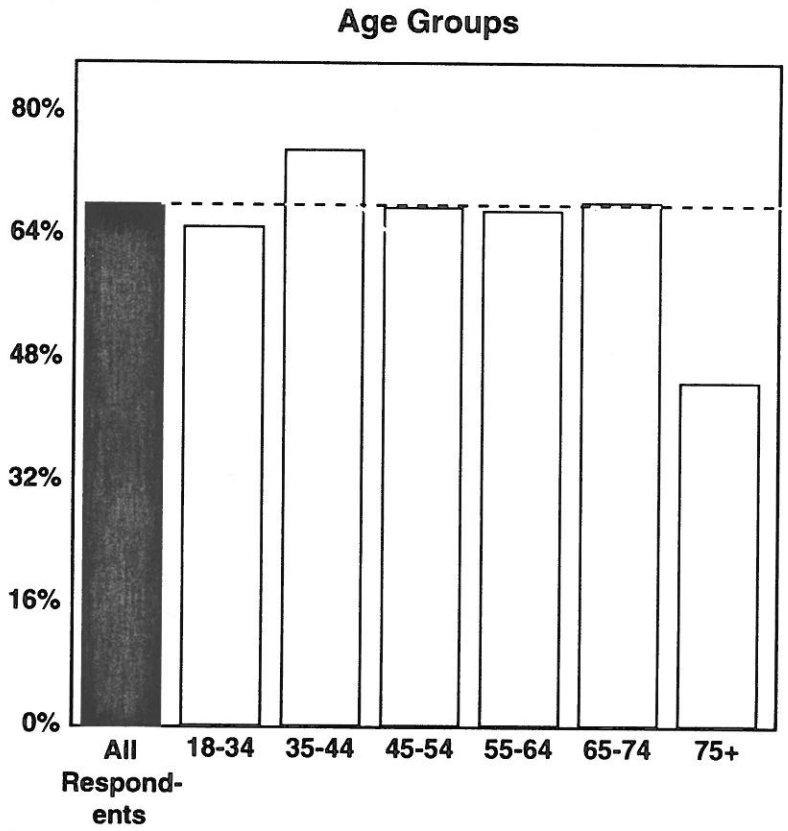
| Findings |
| --- |
| Most (68%) are <u>not</u> satisfied to let others deliberate and decide the issues<br><br>Many (47%) want to be more involved in deliberating and deciding the issues and many (43%) want to participate more in town meetings |

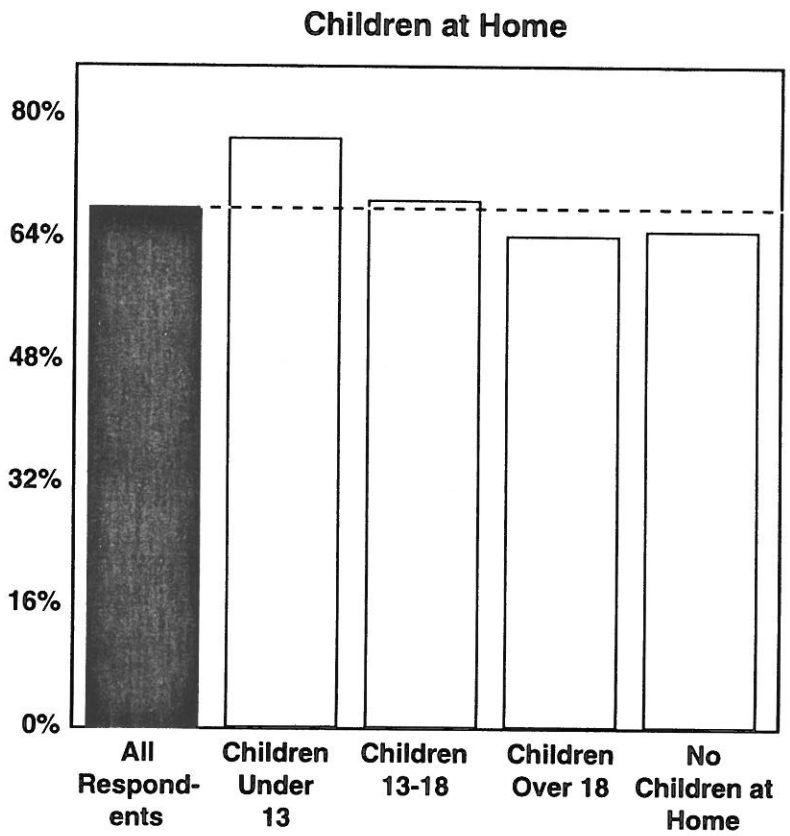
# Most are <u>not</u> satisfied to let others deliberate and decide most issues.




Preliminary Findings
(Directional)

## Q16A. I'm satisfied to let others deliberate and decide most issues

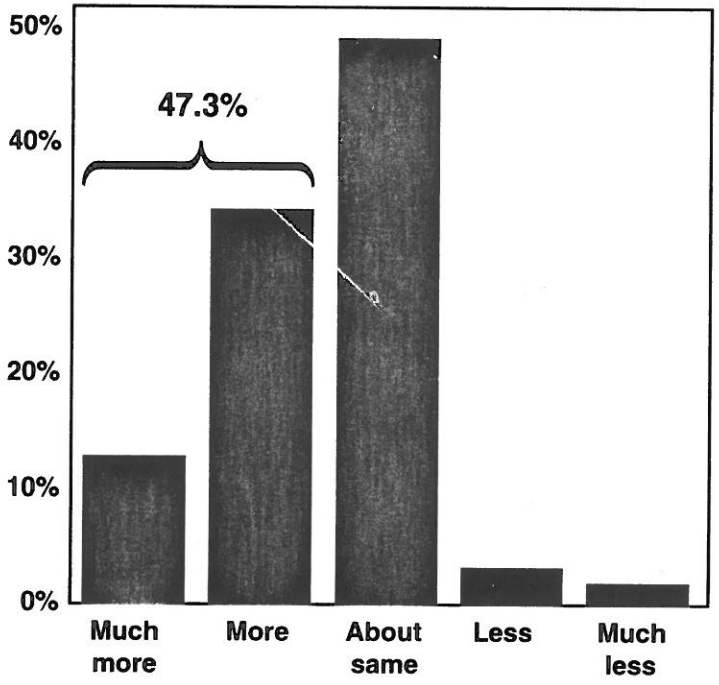



Preliminary Findings (Directional)

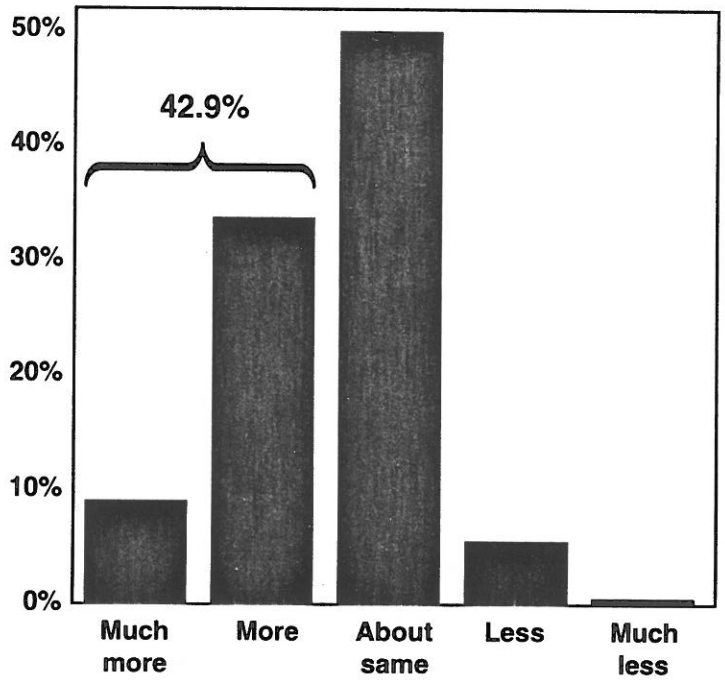
# Many respondents indicated they want to be more involved in deliberating and deciding issues and they want to participate more in town meeting.

**Q11. Do you want to be involved in deliberating and deciding town issues . . .**




n = 1812

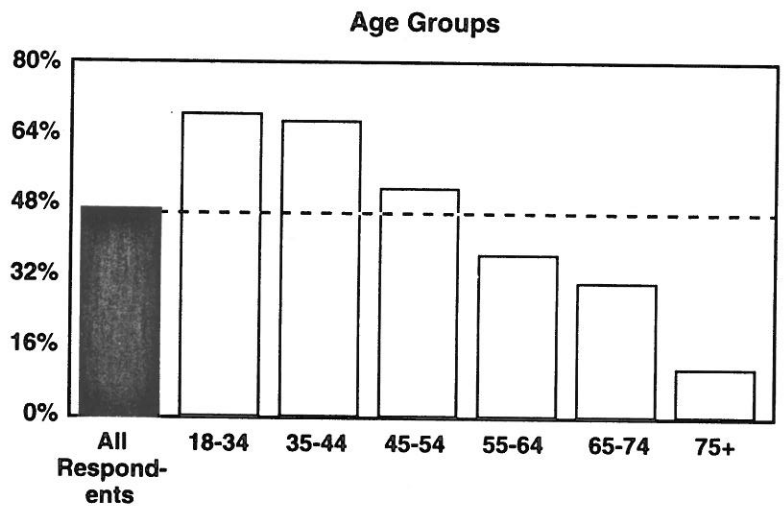
**Q12. Do you want to participate in town meeting . . .**

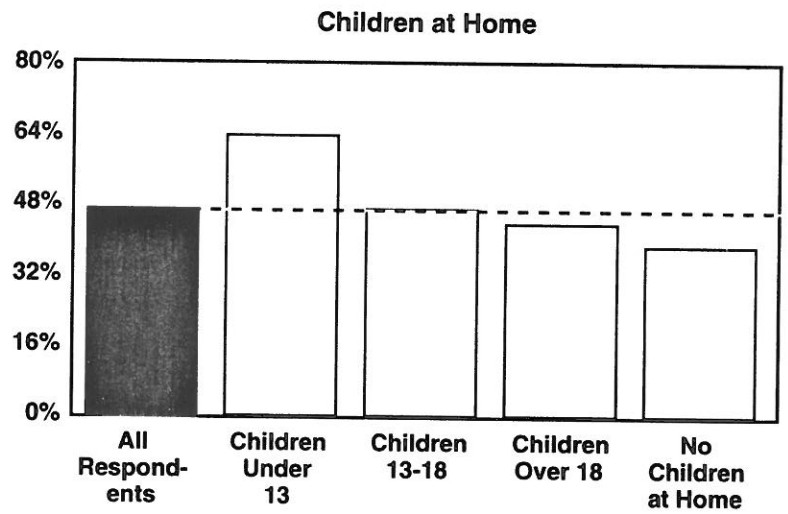


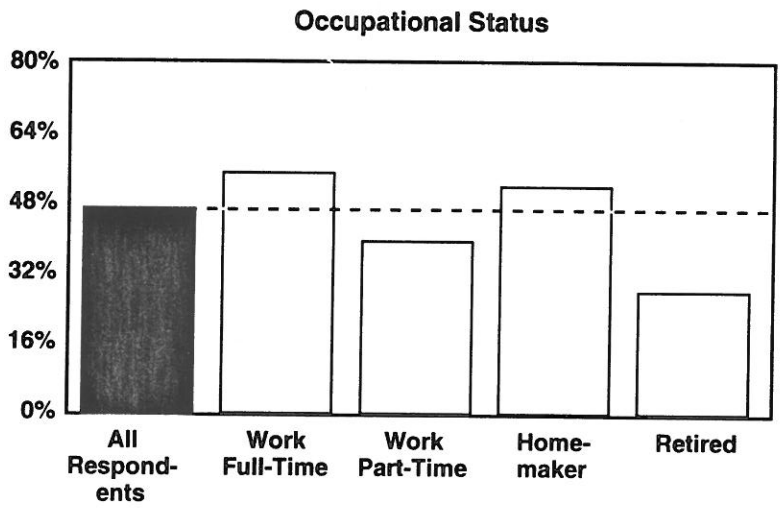

n = 1814

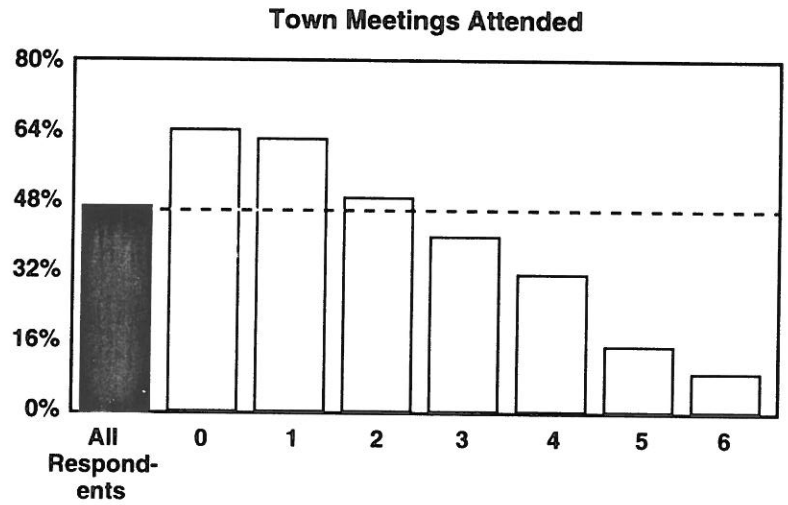
Preliminary Findings (Directional)

## Q11. Do you want to be involved in deliberating and deciding issues . . . *much more* or *more*?




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

## Hypothesis

3. Most people attend town meeting for the primary purpose of voting on the warrant articles.

## Supported?

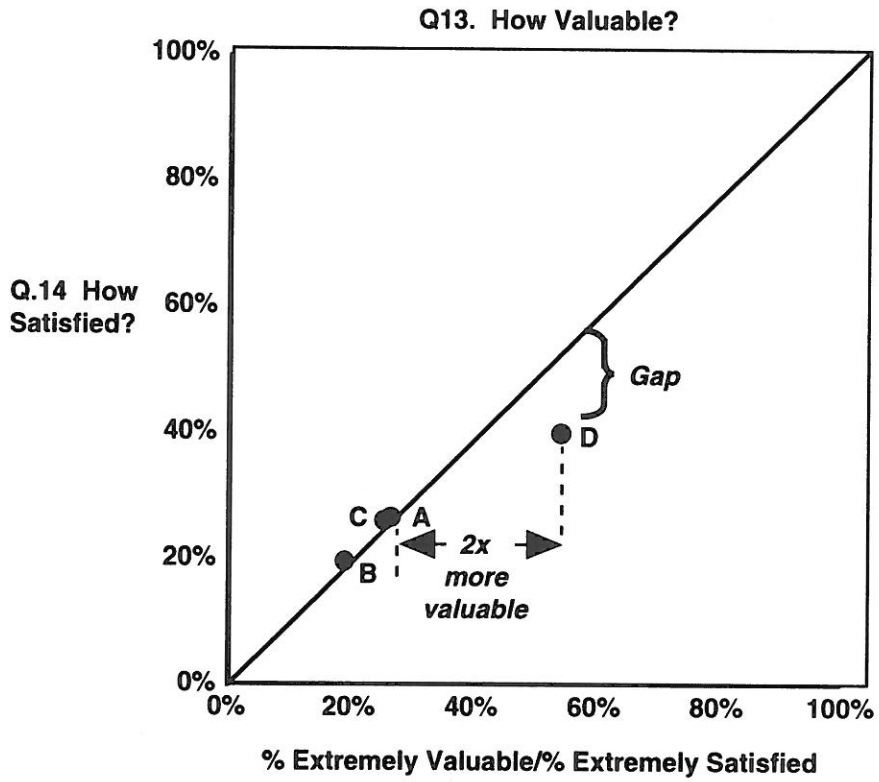
Yes

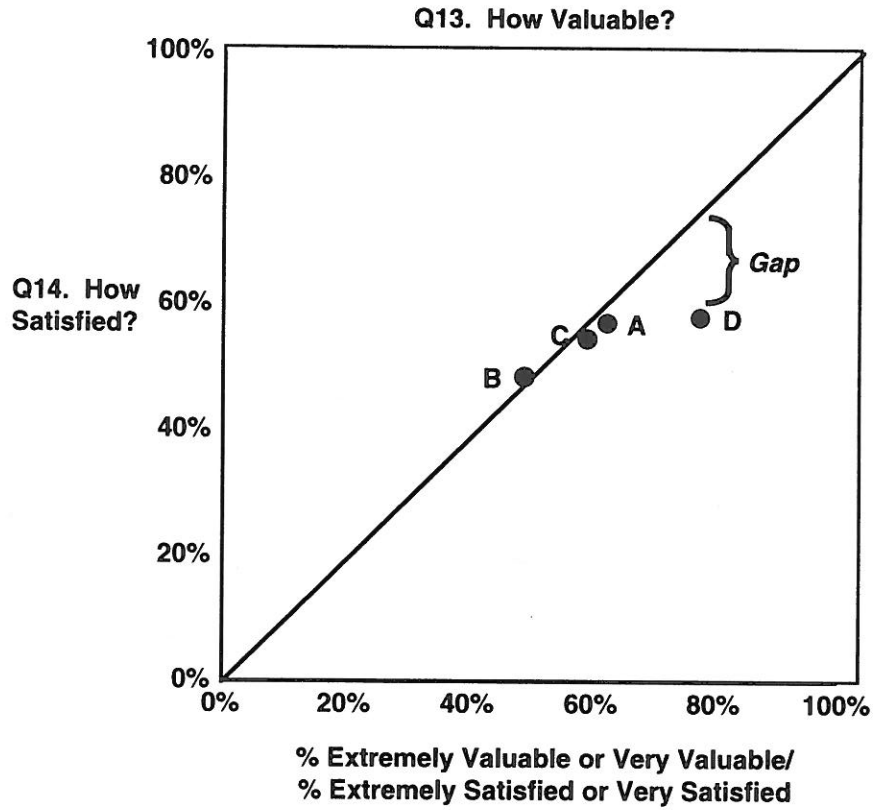
## Findings

All aspects of town meeting were viewed as important; voting, however, is viewed as the most important (2x more valuable than any other element) and is the area of the greatest gap in satisfaction levels.

- Most (83%) are attracted to attend to "exercise their civic rights and responsibilities."
- Most (82%) are attracted to attend to "vote on issues of special interest to me."
- Most (75%) are attracted to attend to "shape the future of the town."

# Voting is viewed as the most valuable aspect of town meeting . . . and is the area where the gap in satisfaction levels is greatest.

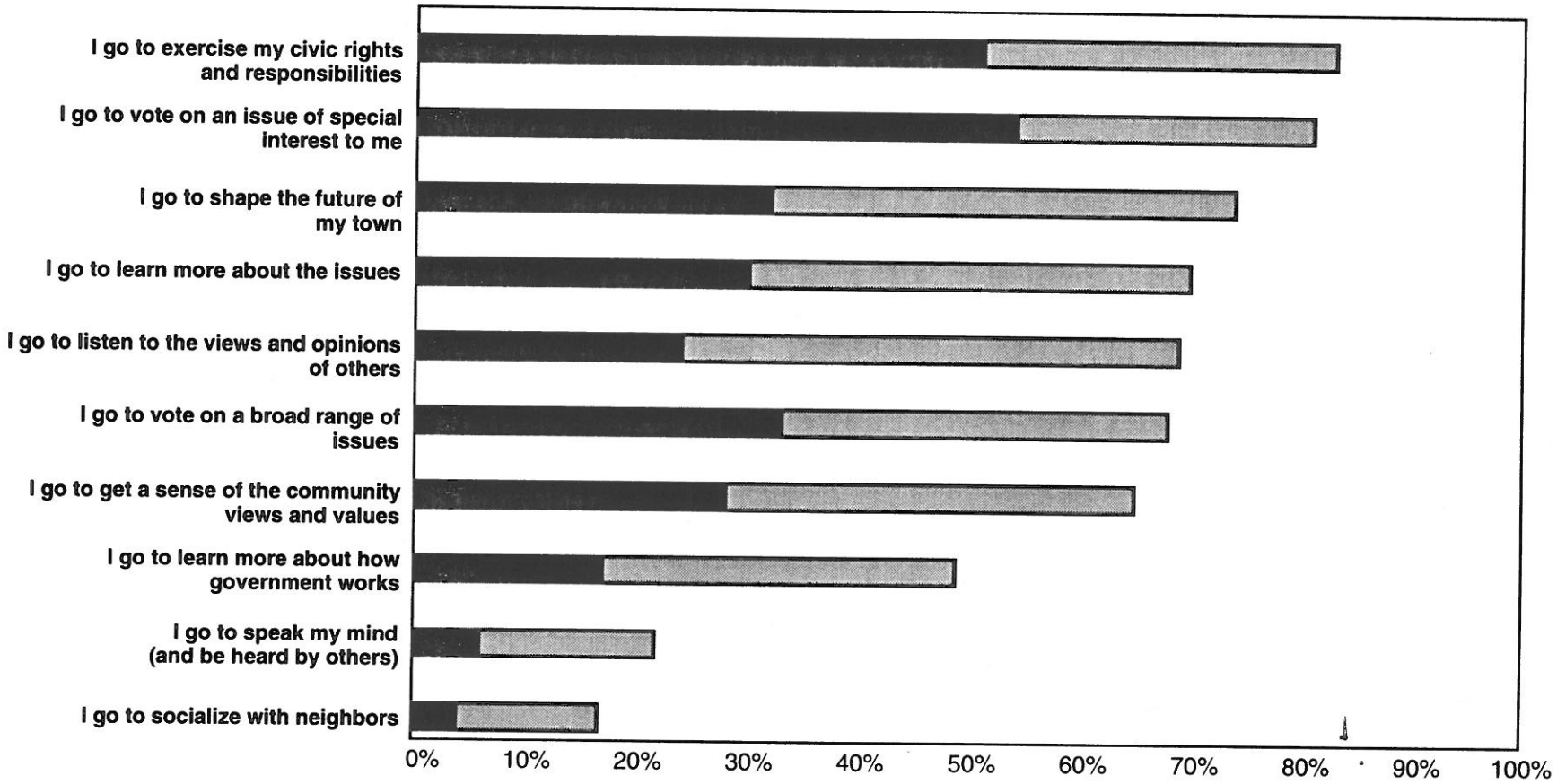



| Key: | A = Listen to presentation about the motion (i.e., receive information) | B = Share my views/hear other views (i.e., discussion) | C = Make up my mind (i.e., reflect and consider my decision) | D = Declare my decision (i.e., vote) |
|---|---|---|---|---|

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

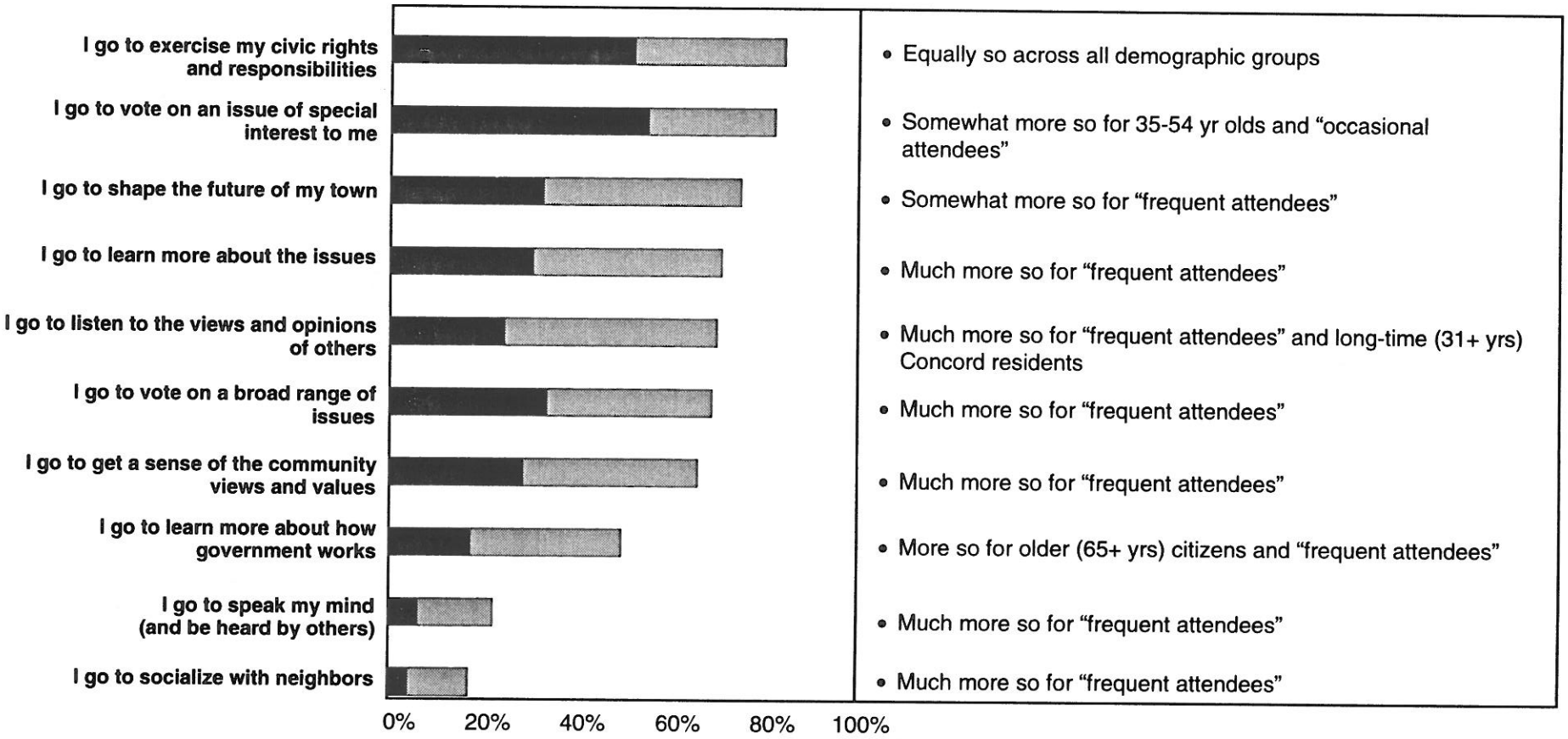
## Q17 Reasons That Might Attract People to a Town Meeting




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

**Key** Describes "Very Well" Describes "Somewhat Well"

## Q17. Reasons That Might Attract People to a Town Meeting




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

**Key** Describes "Very Well" Describes "Somewhat Well"

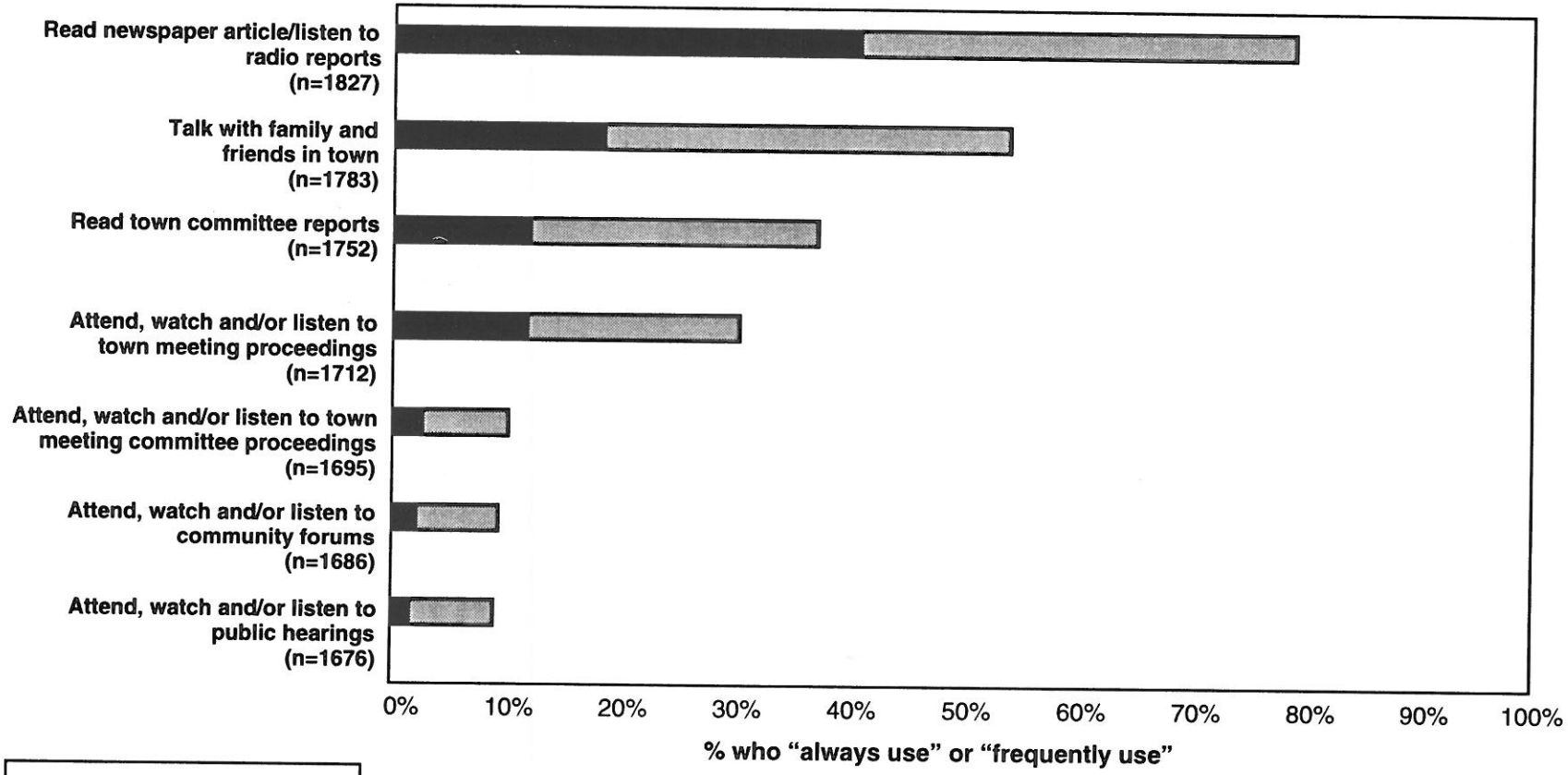
| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 4. Town meeting is a primary source for information about warrant articles. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| No |

| Findings |
| --- |
| Many sources of information are used to become informed about warrant articles at town meeting; attendance at town meeting is the fourth most used source of information. |

# Respondents report using many different sources of information to become informed about town meeting warrant articles; attending town meeting is the fourth most used source of information

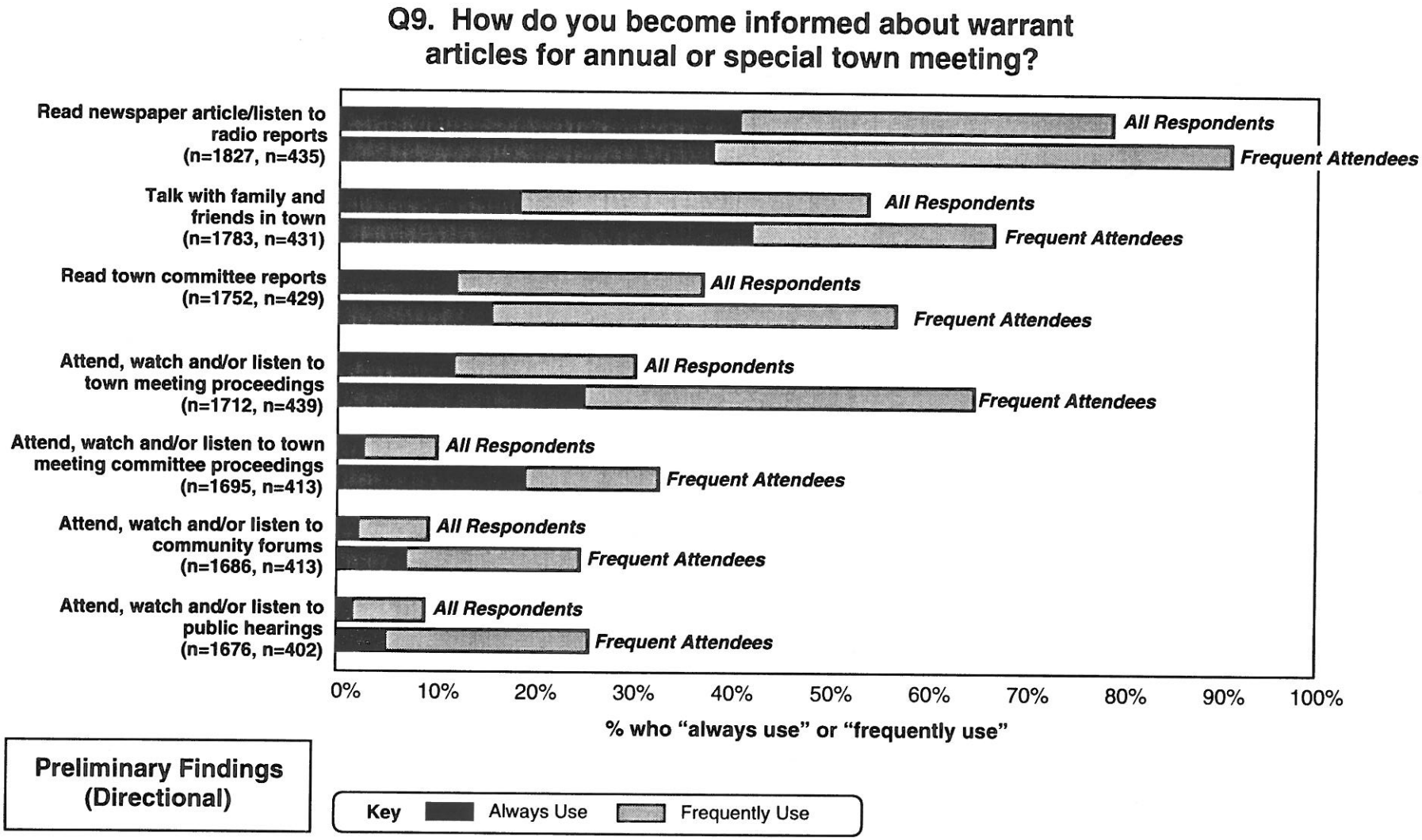
## Q9. How do you become informed about warrant articles for annual or special town meeting?




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

Key: Always Use / Frequently Use

# "Frequent attendees" - - those who report attending 4 or more town meetings in the past 5 years - - are more likely to use town meeting as a source of information




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

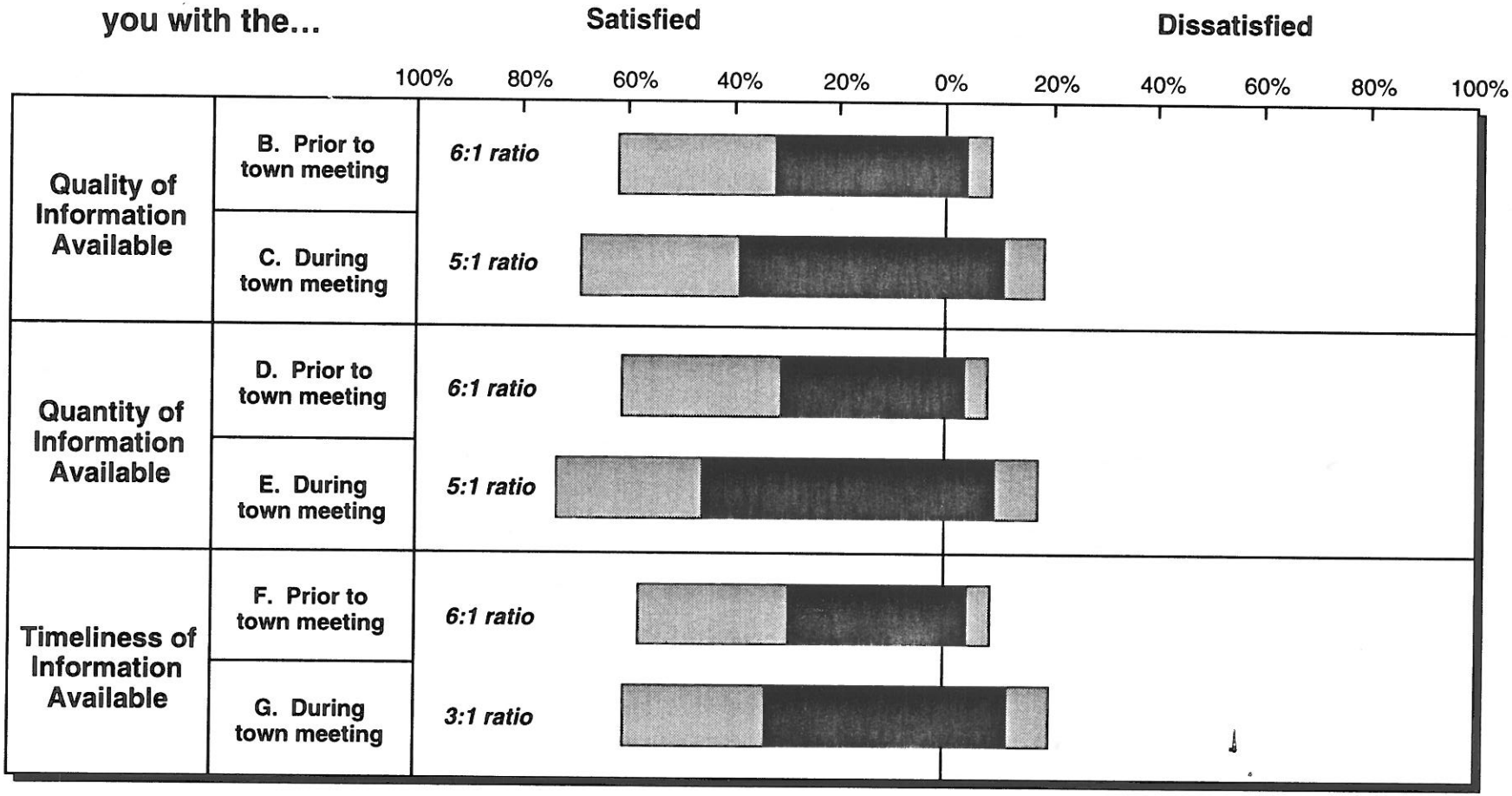
| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 5. There are significant shortcomings with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of information that is available about town meeting warrant articles. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| No |

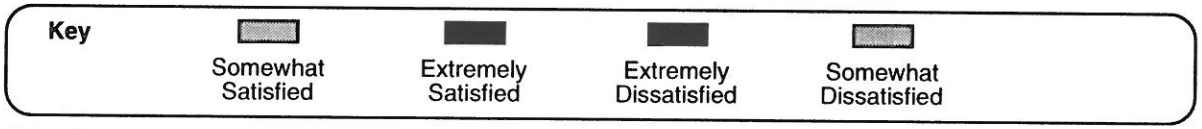
| Findings |
| --- |
| Most (5-6:1 satisfied/dissatisfied) are satisfied with the quality, quantity, and timeliness of information that is available about warrant articles at town meeting. |

# Most respondents report satisfaction with the quality, quantity and timeliness of information that is available prior to and during town meeting

**Q15. How satisfied are you with the...**




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**




Note: Percentages of respondents who were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" are not shown

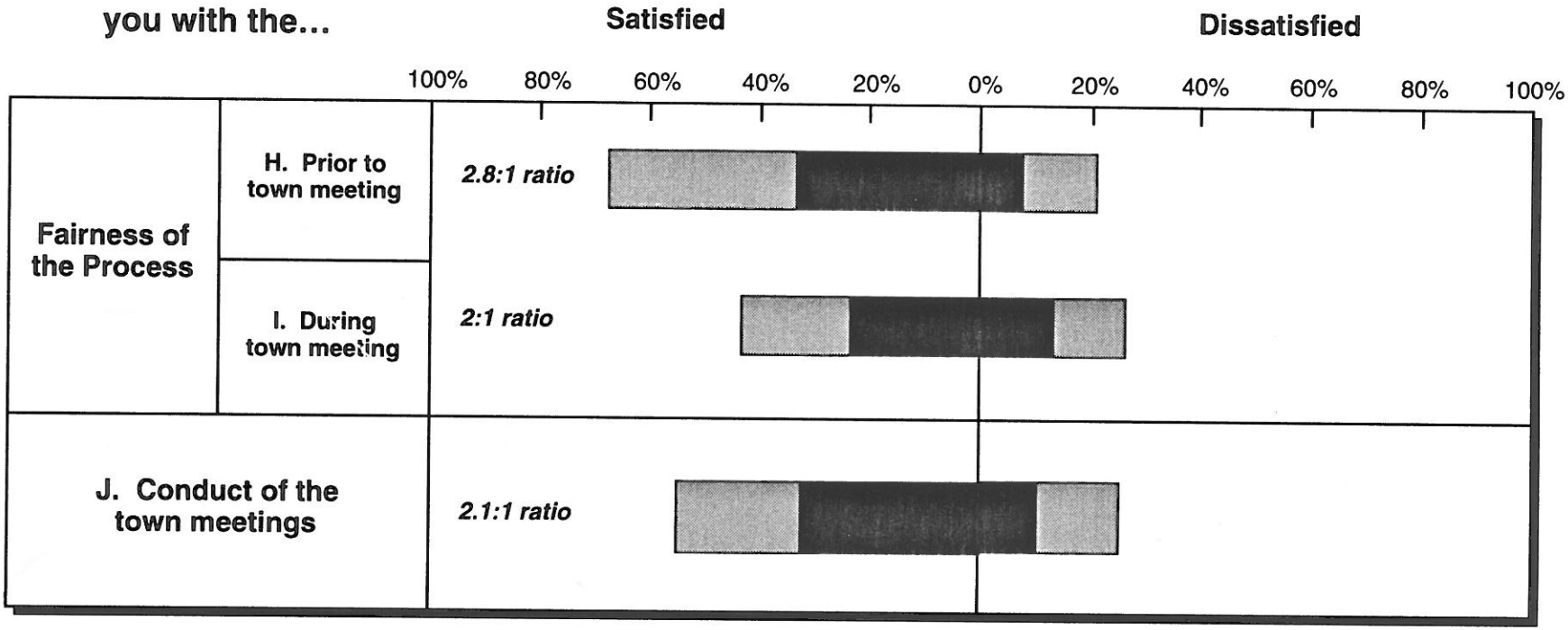
| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 6. There are significant shortcomings with the fairness of the process and the conduct of town meeting. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| No |

| Findings |
| --- |
| Most (2-3:1 satisfied/dissatisfied) are satisfied with the fairness of the process and the conduct of town meeting; a significant minority, however, appears to be dissatisfied. |

# Most respondents report satisfaction with the fairness and conduct of town meeting.

**Q15. How satisfied are you with the...**




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

Key: Somewhat Satisfied; Extremely Satisfied; Extremely Dissatisfied; Somewhat Dissatisfied

Note: Percentages of respondents who were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" are not shown

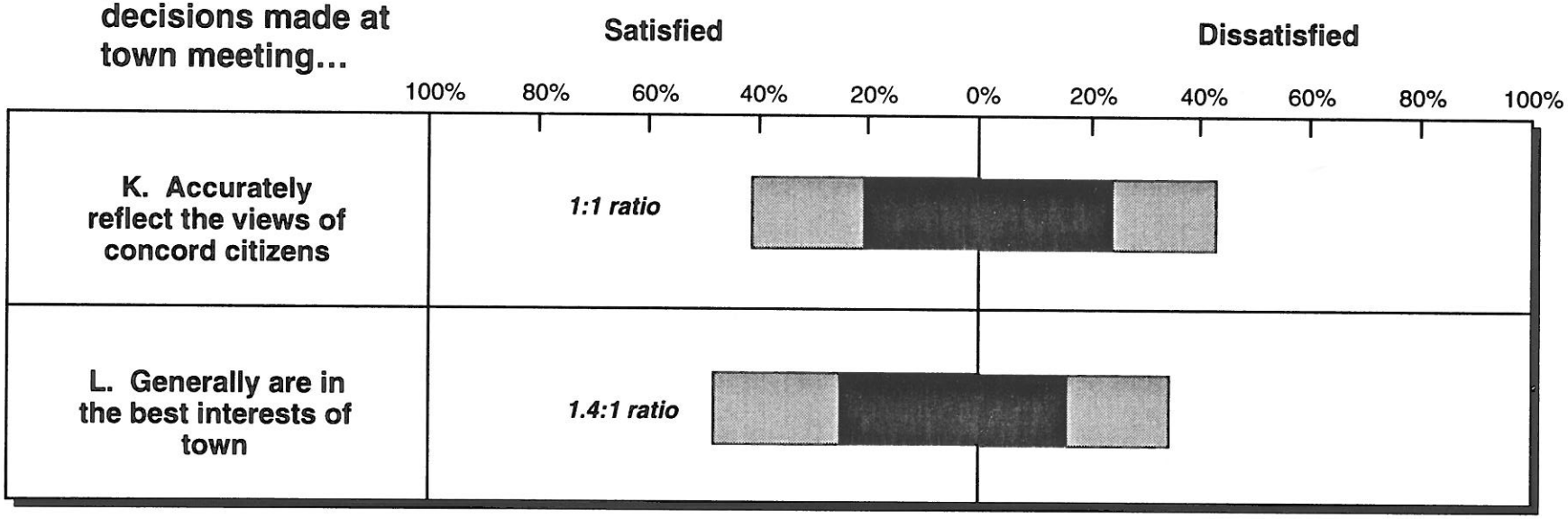
| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 7. Town meeting produces good outcomes. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| Yes and No |

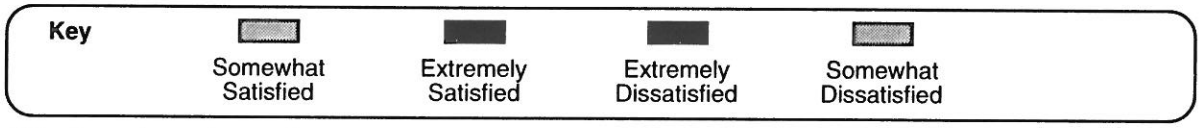
| Findings |
| --- |
| Respondents were divided in their levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Respondents evenly split (42% to 42%) on the question of whether the decisions made at town meeting accurately reflect views of Concord citizens. A modest majority (by a 49-35% margin) believe that town meeting decisions are generally in the best interests of the town. |

# Respondents were divided in their levels of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with town meeting outcomes.

**Q15. How satisfied are you that the decisions made at town meeting...**




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**




Note: Percentages of respondents who were "neither satisfied nor dissatisfied" are not shown

## Hypothesis

8. The level of attendance at town meeting is related closely to the stages of adult life; adults with young children and those early in their careers are less likely to attend.

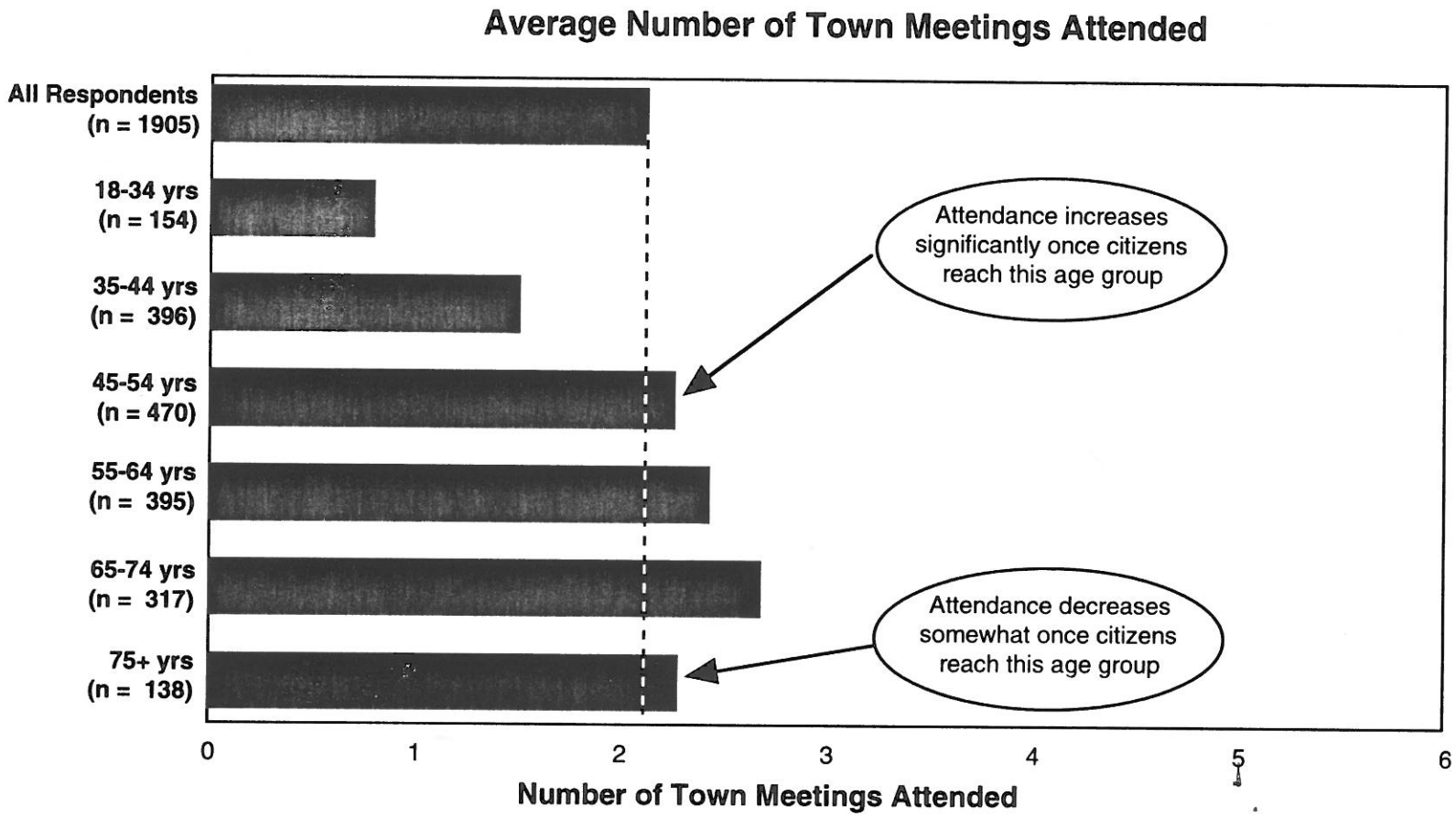
## Supported?

Yes

## Findings

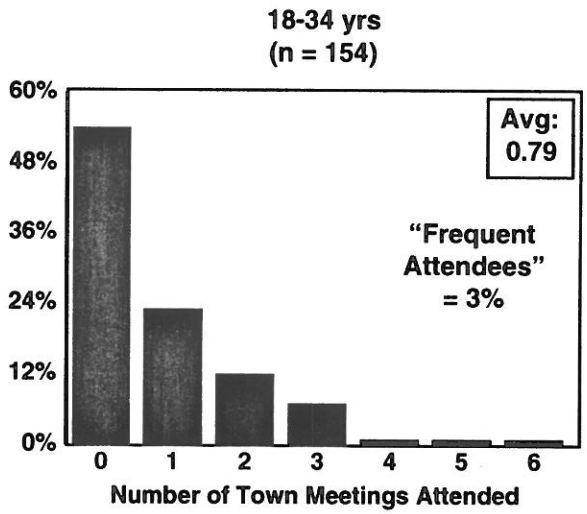
Younger citizens (35-44 yrs old) with full-time jobs, young children at home and those who travel are much less likely to attend town meeting.

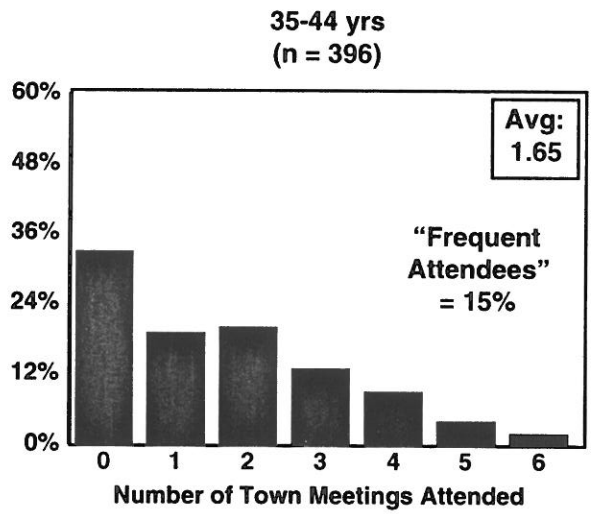
## Age appears to relate closely to attendance at town meeting. Older citizens are much more likely to attend town meeting than younger citizens.

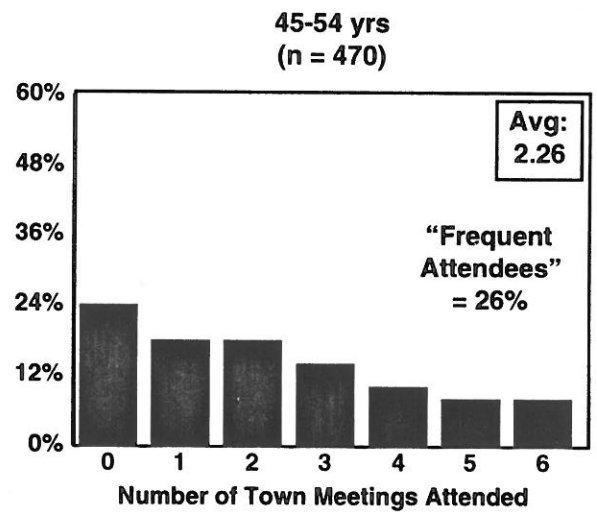


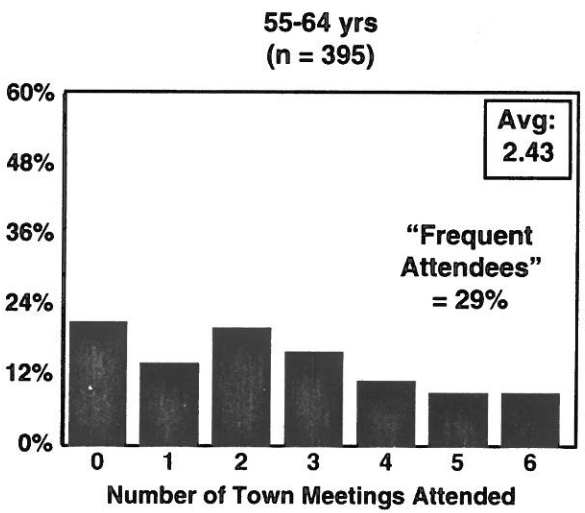

Note: 39 respondents did not report their age group.

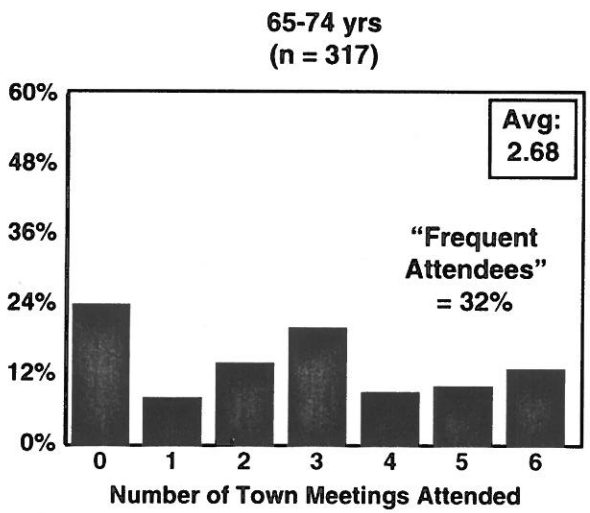
**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

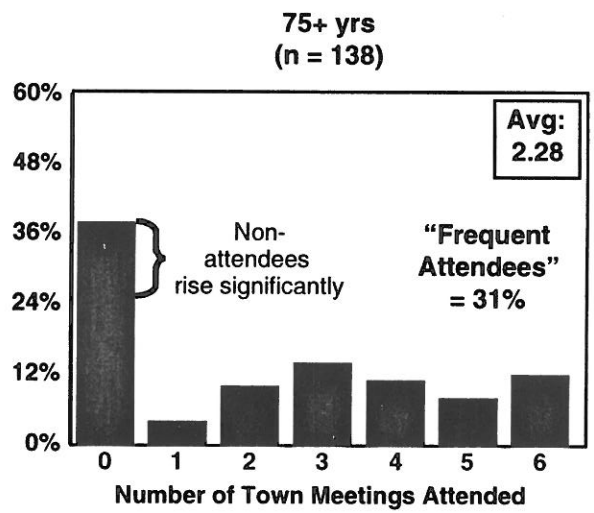


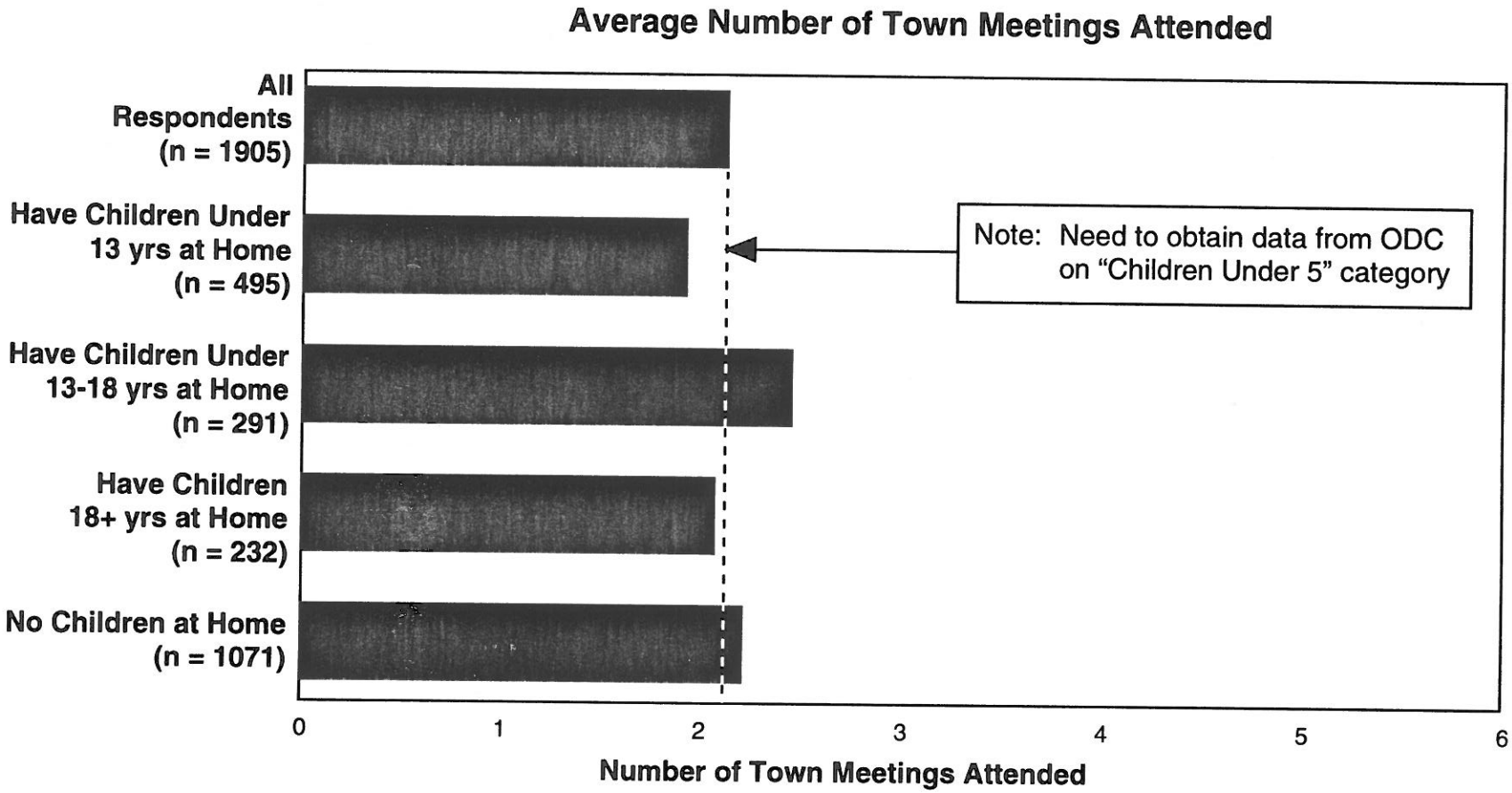




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

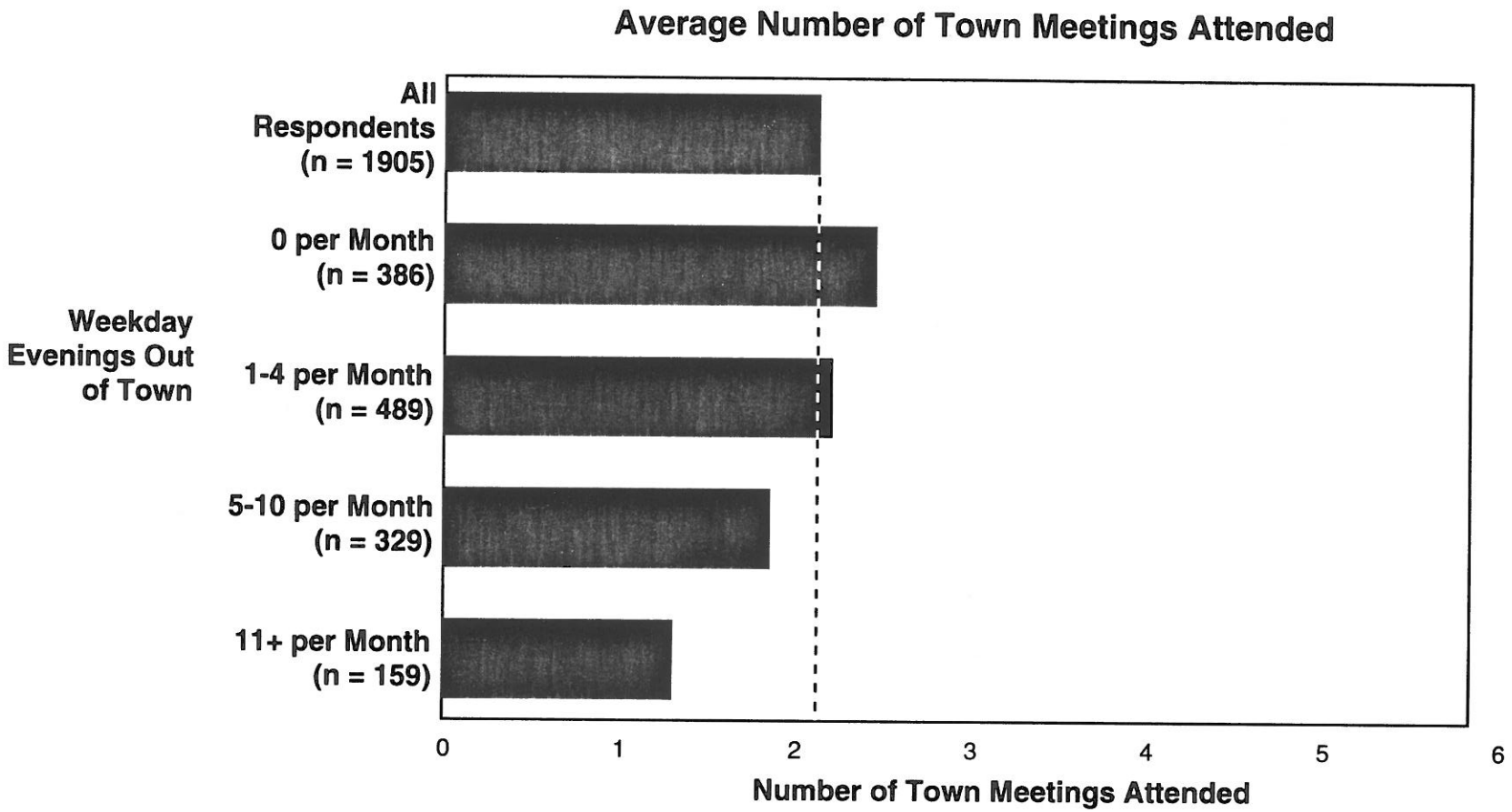
## Age of children living at home relates to town meeting attendance. Those with children under 13 are less likely to attend than those with older children living at home.




Note: Respondents were asked to indicate whether they had children across each age group. Accordingly, respondents may have answered affirmatively in multiple categories.

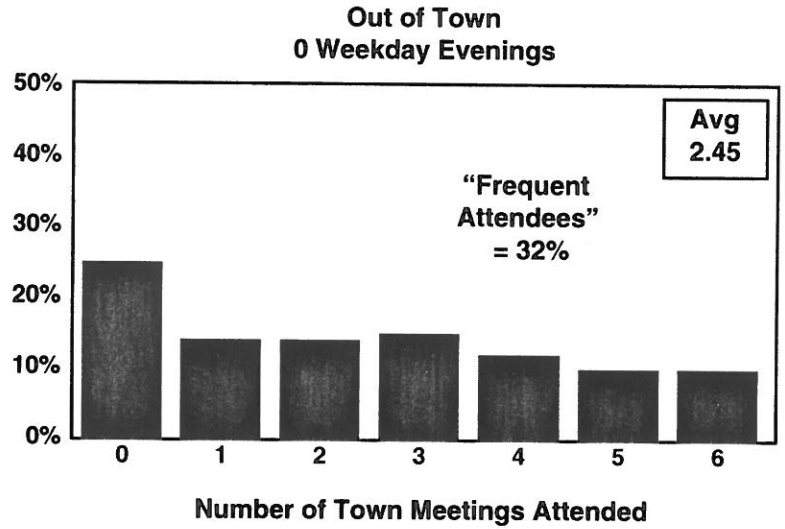
**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

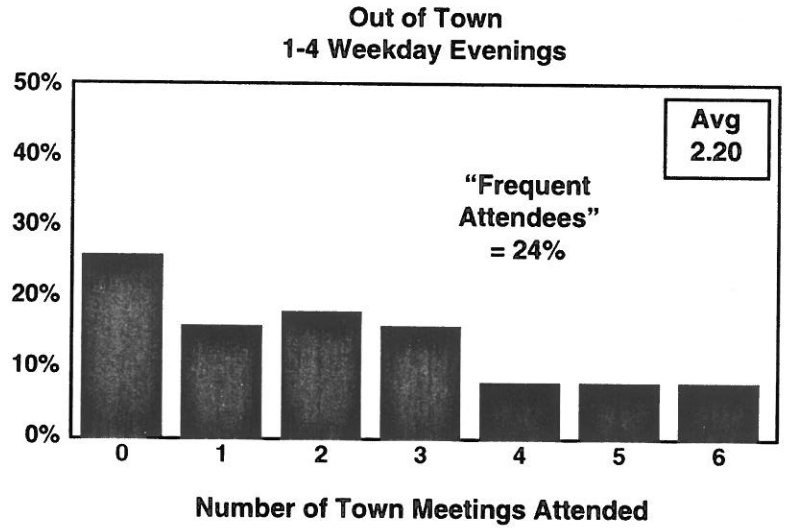
## Weekday travel schedules relate closely to town meeting attendance. Those who are out of town 5+ weekday nights each month are less likely to attend than those rarely out of town.

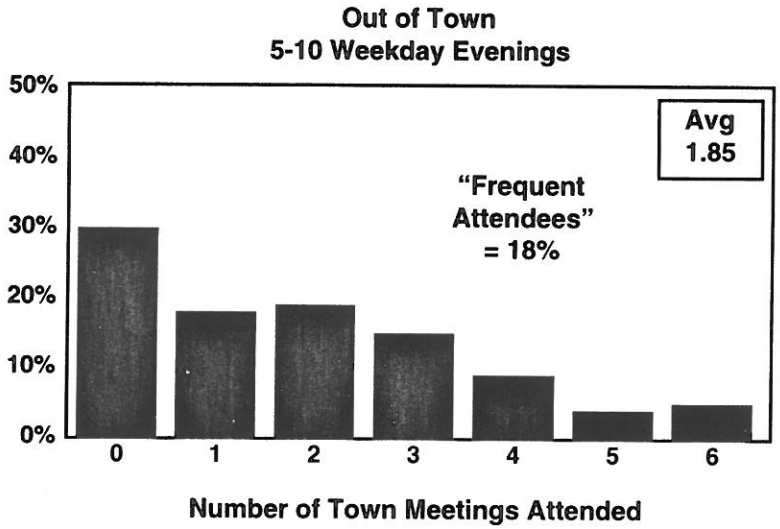


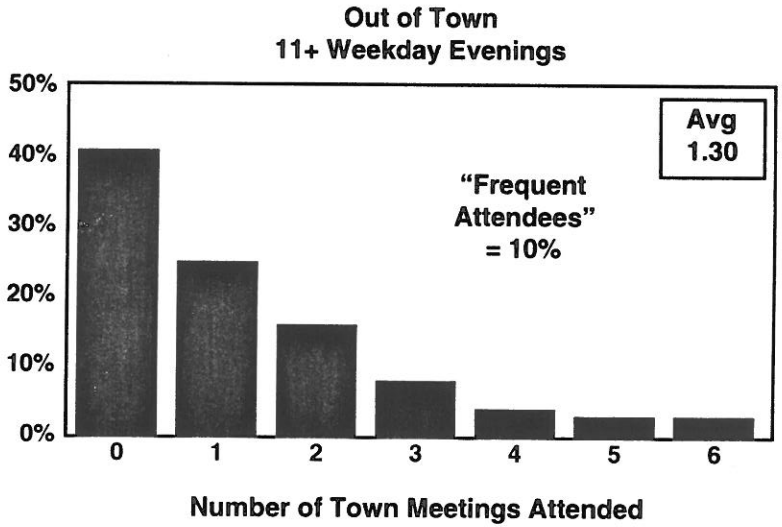

Note: 542 respondents did report their typical travel schedule for weekly evenings.

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**



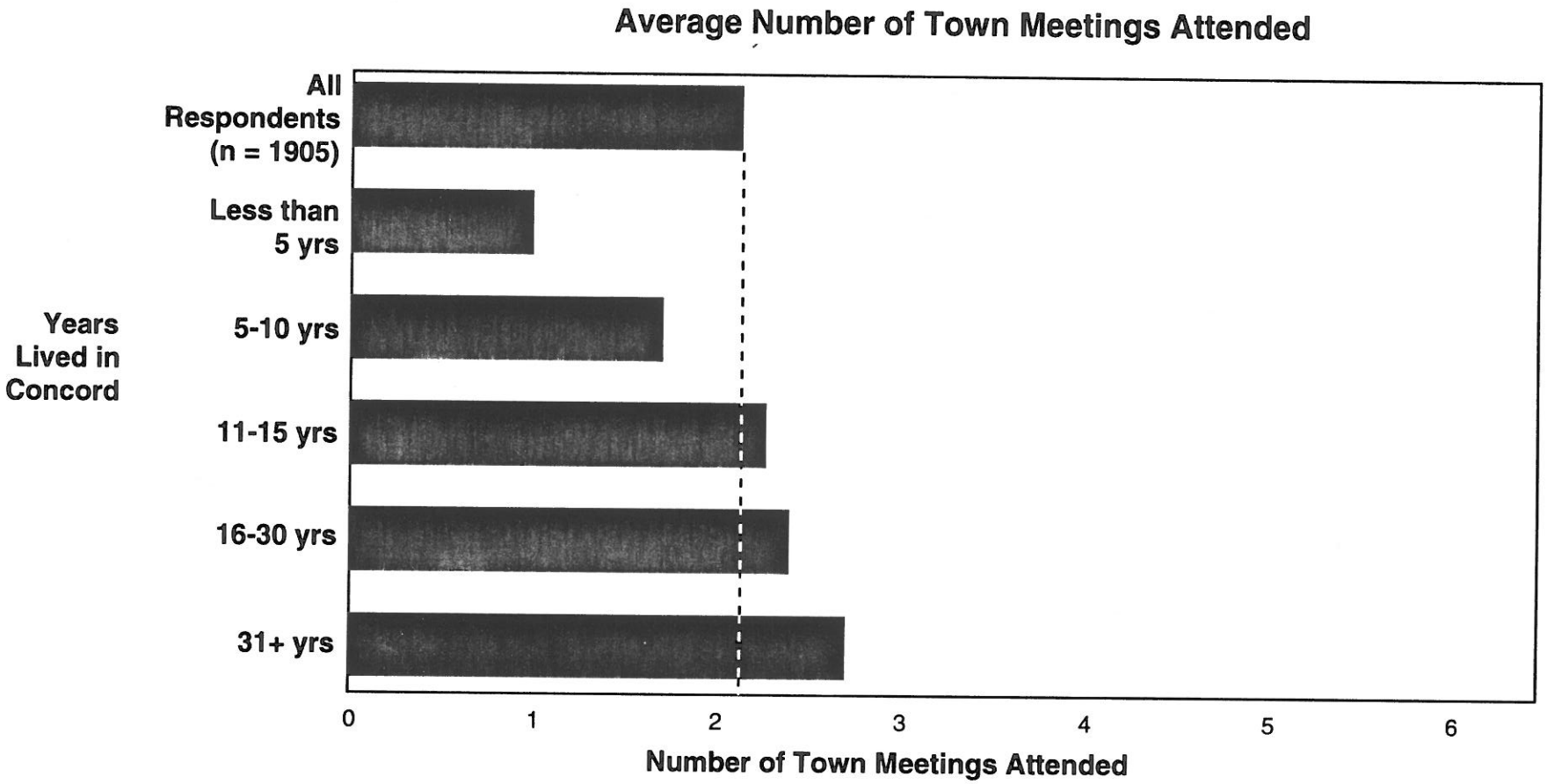



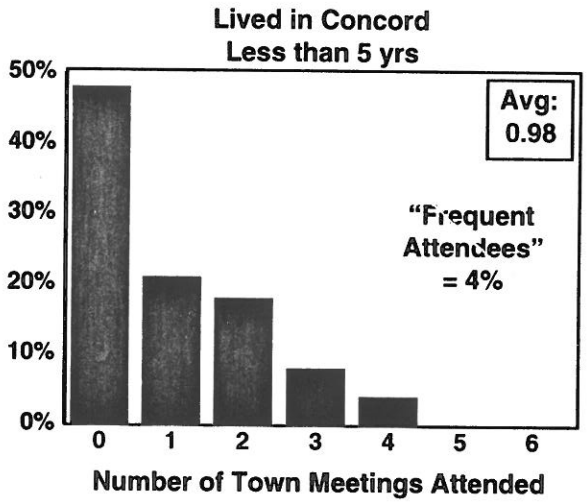



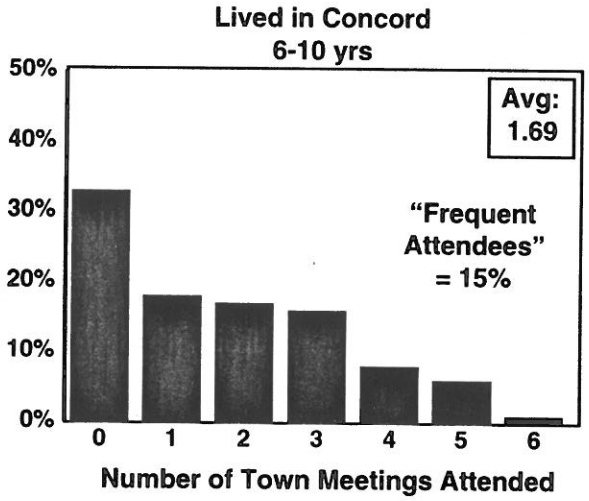

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

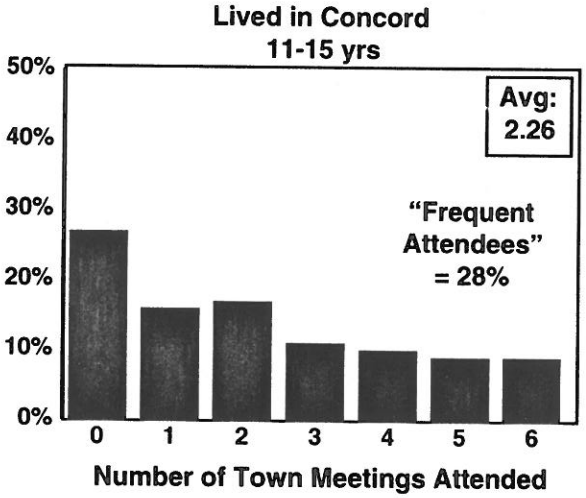
**There appears to be a relationship between the number of years lived in Concord and attendance at town meeting. Those who have lived in town longest attend much more frequently than newcomers.**



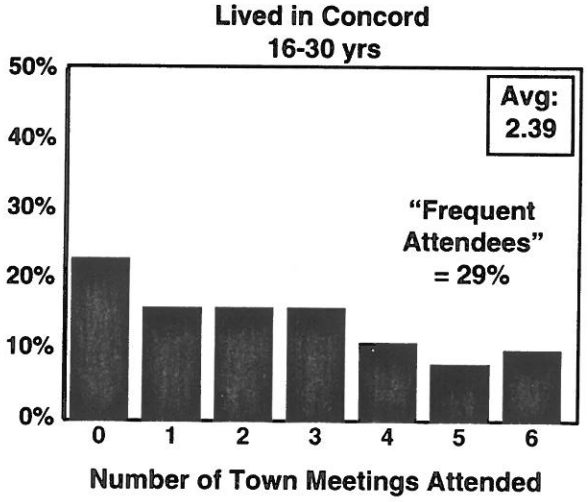

Preliminary Findings (Directional)

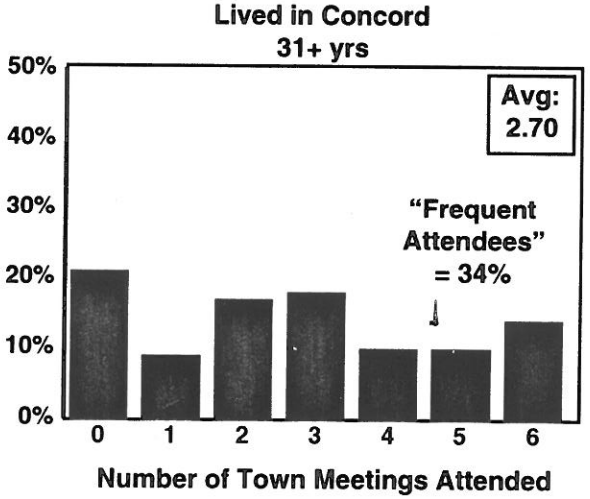


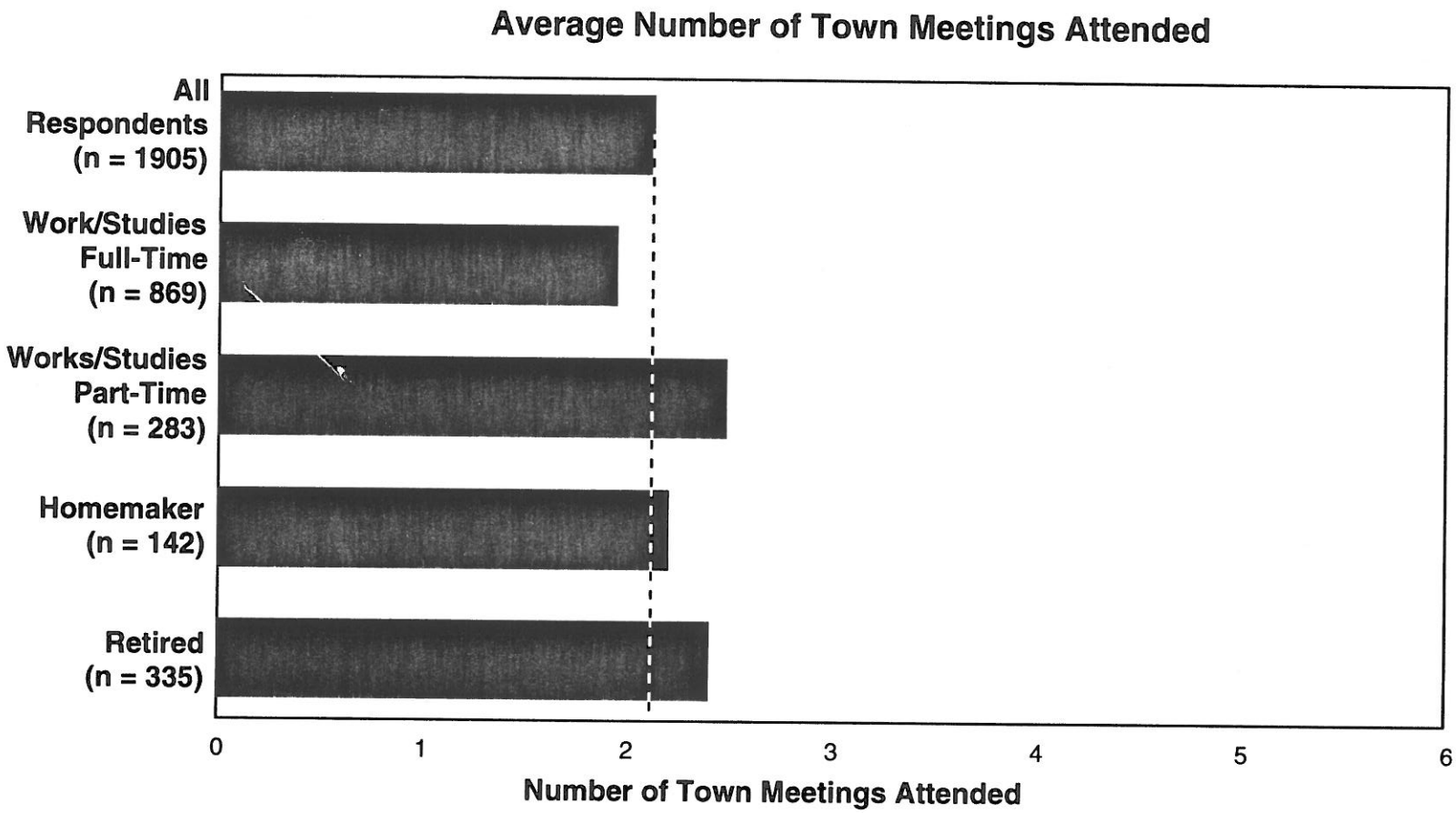

Avg: 0.98




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

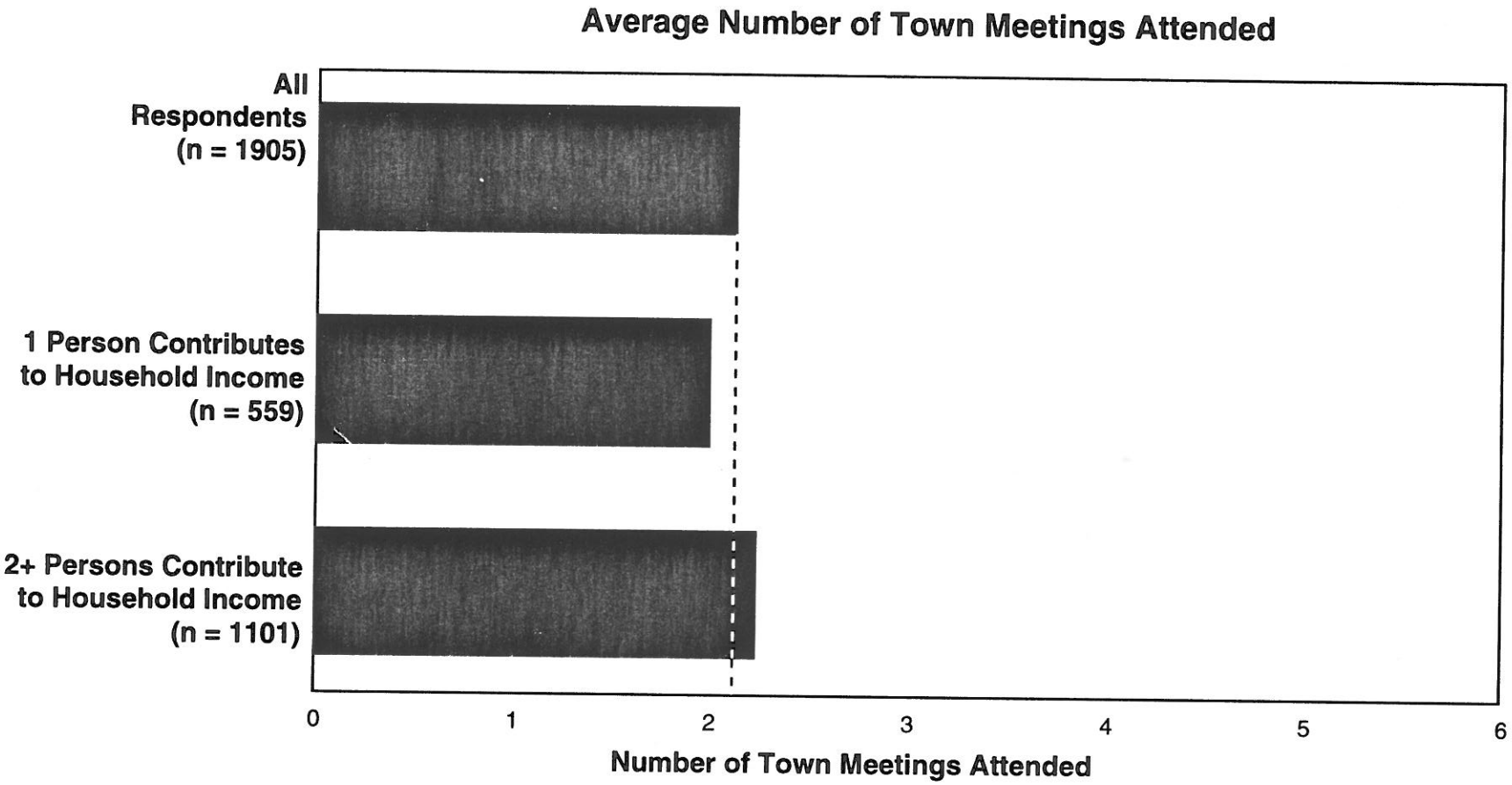
## Occupational status relates somewhat to attendance levels. Those who work or study full-time attend less than those who are retired and work or study part-time.




Note: 276 respondents did not report their occupational status.

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

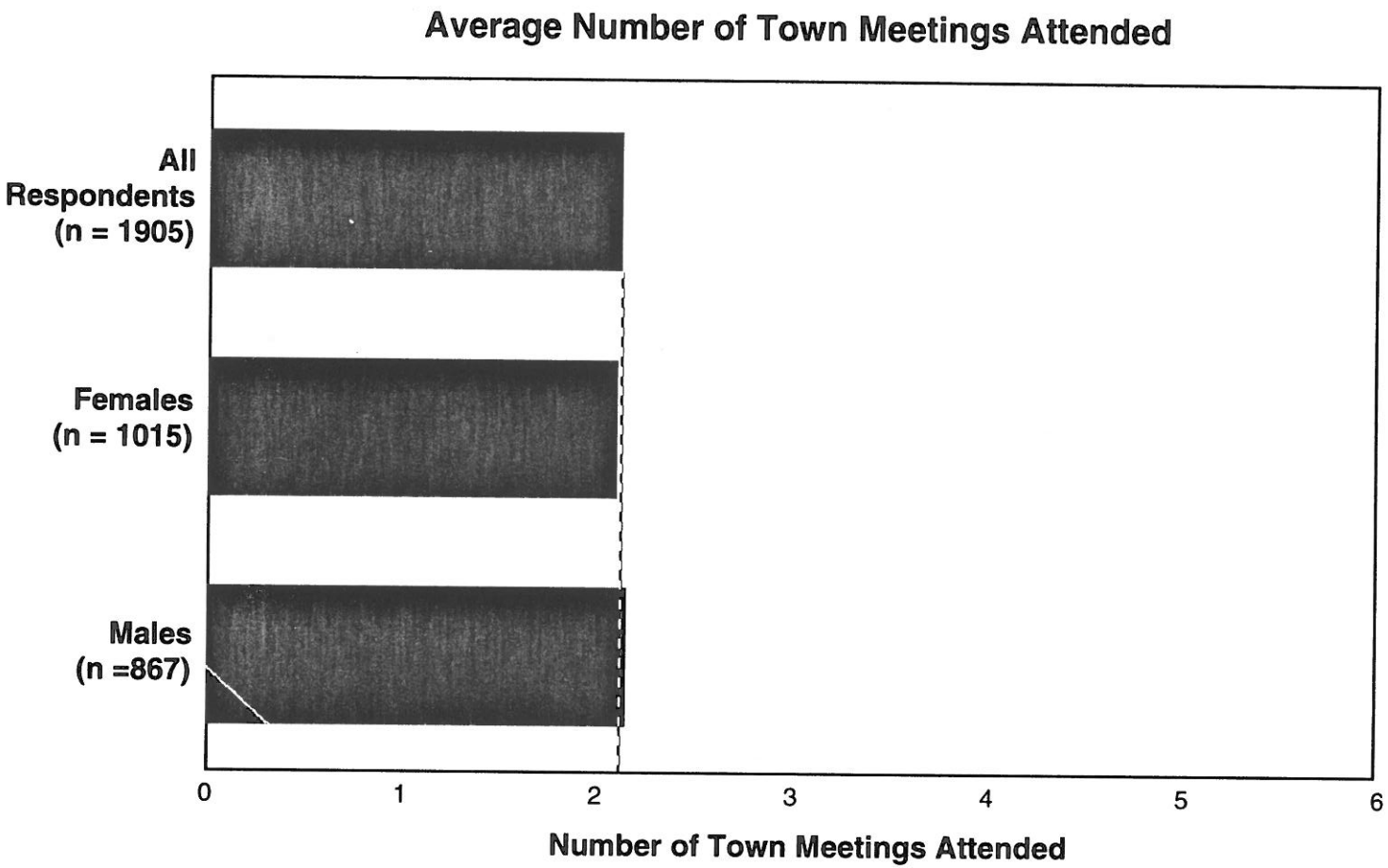
# The number of wage earners in a household does not appear to relate to attendance levels at town meeting.




Note: 245 respondents did not report wage earnings per household.

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

# Gender does not appear to relate to town meeting attendance.




Note: 23 respondents did not report their gender.

**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

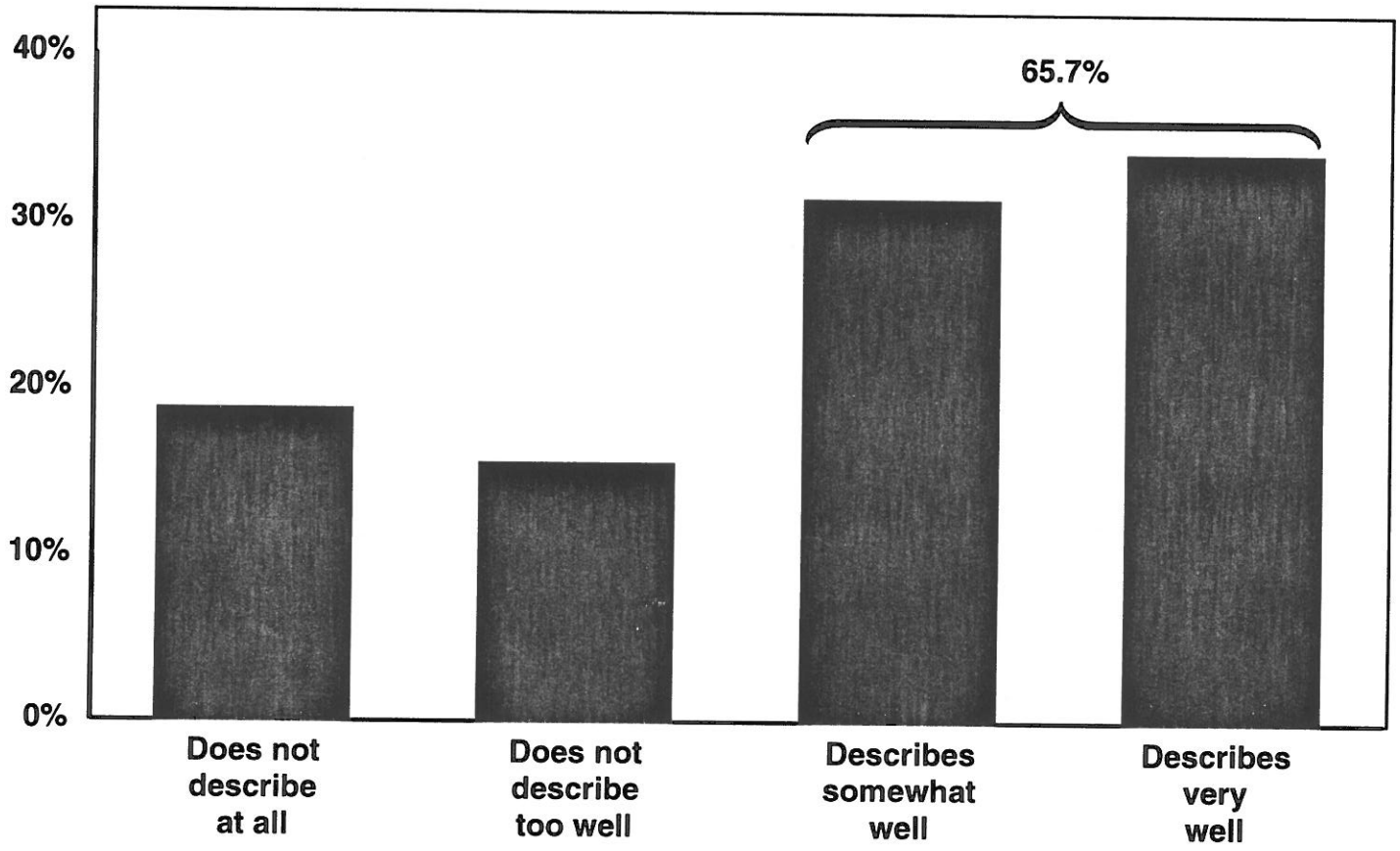
| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 9. Some citizens are prevented from attending town meeting because of their livelihood or lifestyle. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| Yes |

| Findings |
| --- |
| Most respondents (65.7%) indicated that there are a lot of things in their daily life that prevent them from attending town meeting. |

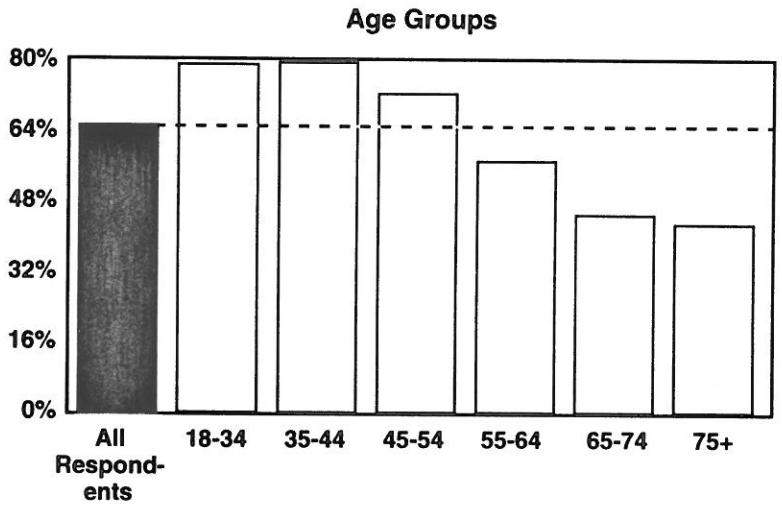
## Most respondents indicated there are a lot of things in their daily life that prevent them from attending town meeting.

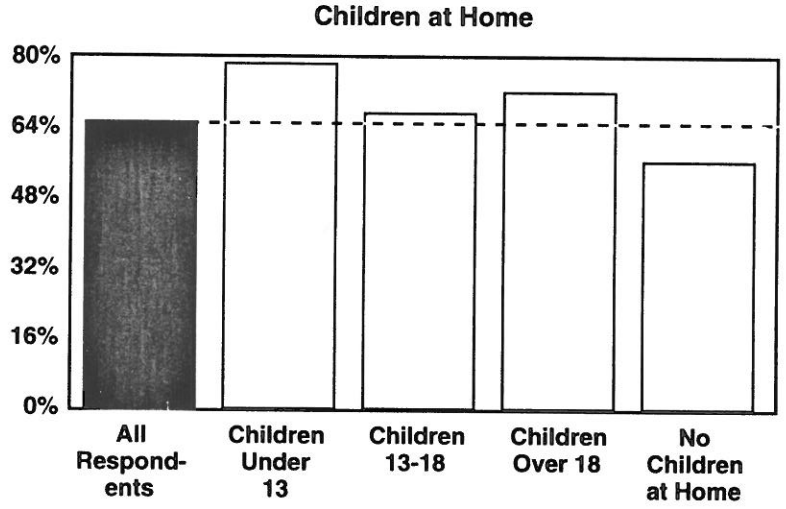
Q16c. There are a lot of things that come up in my daily life that prevent me from attending town meeting.

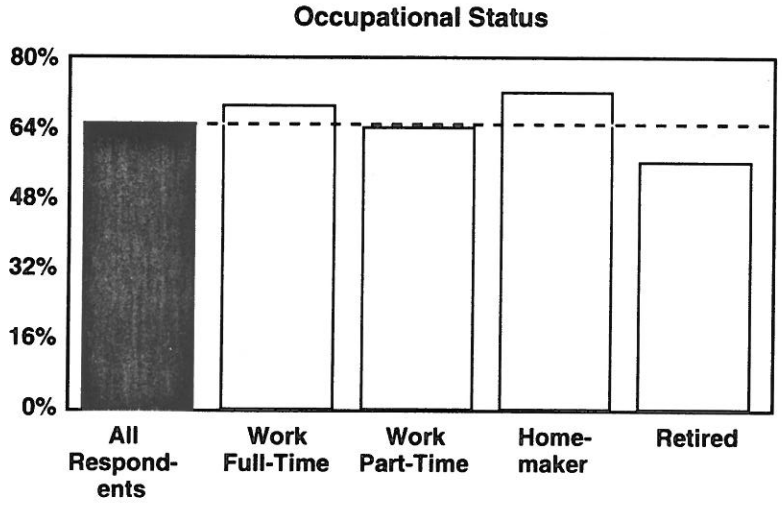


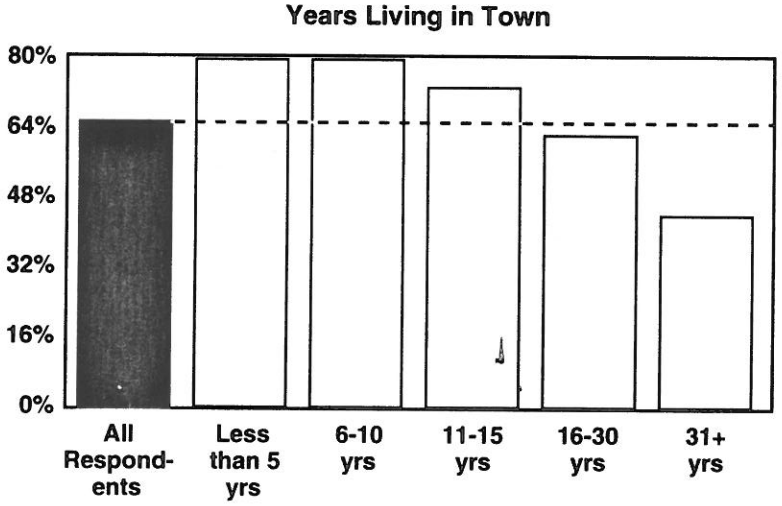

Preliminary Findings (Directional)

## Q16c. There are a lot of things that come up in my daily life that prevent me from attending town meeting.



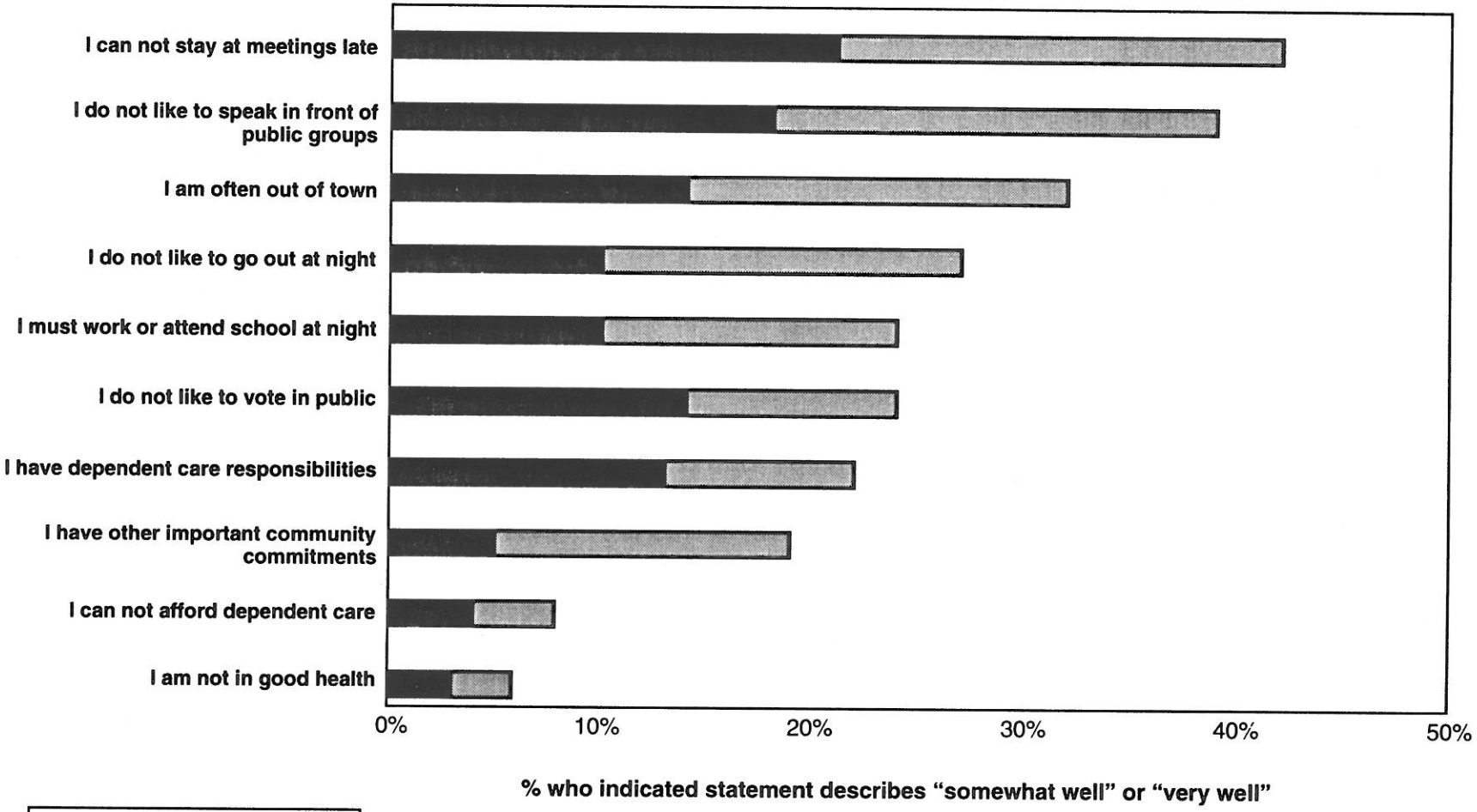




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

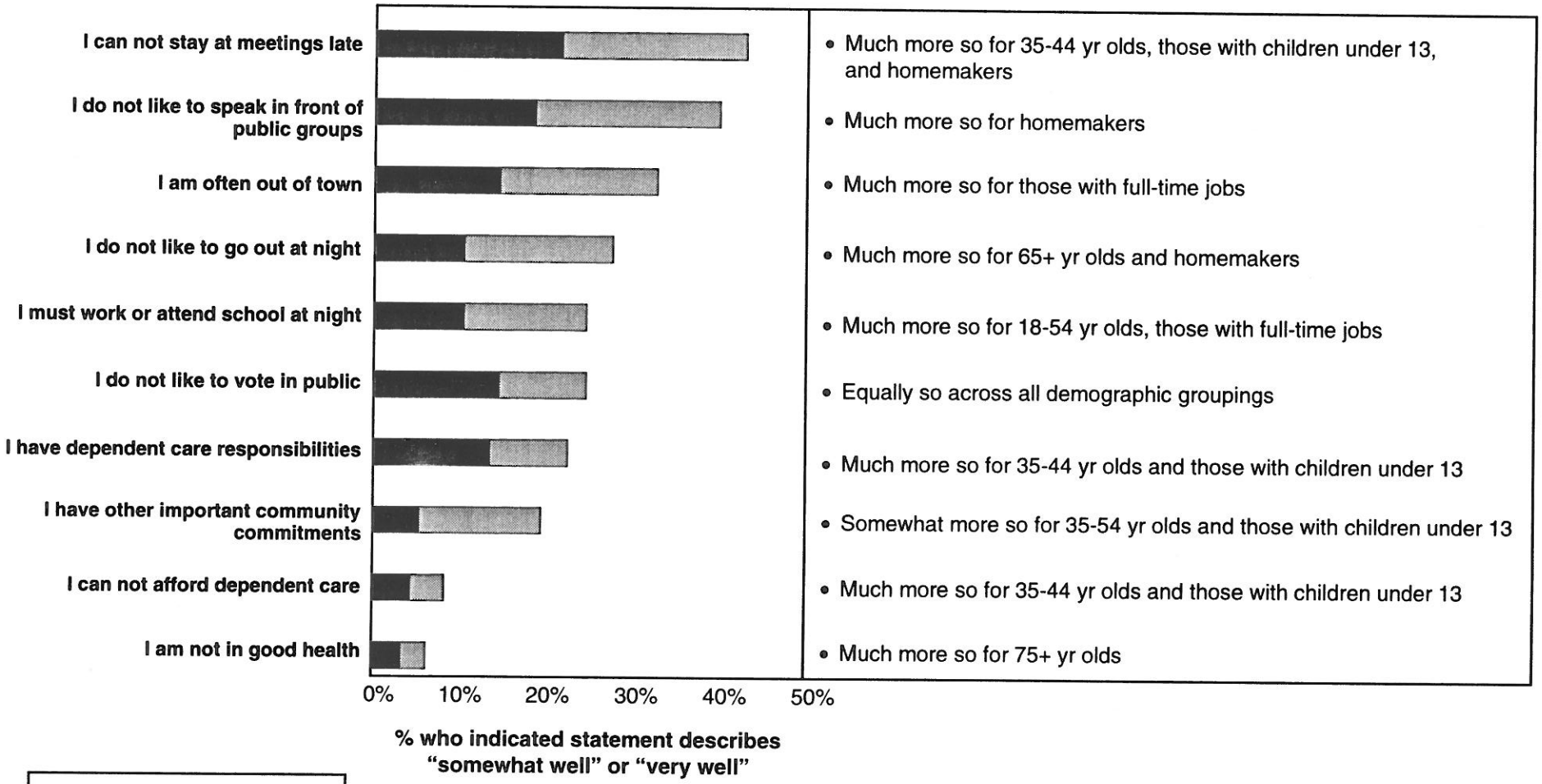
## Q18. Reasons That Might Prevent People from Attending Town Meeting




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

**Key** Describes "Very Well" Describes "Somewhat Well"

## Q18. Reasons That Might Prevent People from Attending Town Meeting




**Preliminary Findings (Directional)**

**Key** Describes "Very Well" Describes "Somewhat Well"

| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 10. Voting in public is a problem or concern for a broad number of citizens. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| No |

| Findings |
| --- |
| Some respondents (10-25%) indicated that they did not like voting in public. |

| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 11. Individuals from dual income households are less likely to attend town meeting than those from households with only on wage earner. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| No |

| Findings |
| --- |
| There was no apparent difference in the attendance levels, attitudes, behaviors of those from a single or dual income household. |

| Hypothesis |
| --- |
| 12. The town meeting, as a form of local governance, is a positive tradition. |

| Supported? |
| --- |
| Yes |

| Findings |
| --- |
| Most (61%) respondents indicated that "the town meeting makes me proud to be from Concord." |