



**SWEETWATER AUTHORITY
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

AGENDA

DATE: Monday, June 7, 2021

TIME: 2:00 p.m.

Notice: Pursuant to Governor Newsom's Executive Orders N-29-20 and 33-20, which in part, provide waivers to certain Brown Act provisions, meetings of the Citizens Advisory Committee will be held by teleconference. There will be no physical location from which members of the public may participate. Instead, the public may listen and/or view the meeting proceedings and provide public comment and comments on agenda items by following these instructions:

**To join via Zoom Webinar from a computer, tablet, or smartphone,
click on the link below:**

<https://zoom.us/j/91458023440>

To join this meeting via telephone, please dial:

1-669-900-6833 or 1-253-215-8782

Meeting ID: 914 5802 3440

If you are unable to access the meeting using this call-in information, please contact the Committee Secretary at (619) 409-6704 for assistance.

To provide public comment on non-agenda items or to provide public comment on any item of the agenda:

Before the meeting:

- Go to www.sweetwater.org; click on the "HOW DO I..." at the top of the page; and then click on the "Public Comment" link in the Contact section.

OR

- Physically deposit your public comment in the Authority's payment drop box located in the public parking lot at the Authority's Administrative Office at 505 Garrett Avenue, Chula Vista.

OR

- Mail your comments to 505 Garrett Avenue, Chula Vista, CA 91910 [Attention: Public Comment].

All written public comment submissions must be received 1 hour in advance of the meeting and will be read aloud to the Committee during the appropriate portion of the meeting with a reading limit of 3 minutes for each comment.

During the meeting:

The Chair will inquire prior to Committee discussion if there are any comments from the public on each item.

- Via Zoom Webinar go to Participants List, hover over your name and click on “Raise Hand.” This will notify the moderator that you wish to speak during Oral Communication or during a specific item on the agenda.
- Via phone, you can raise your hand by pressing *9 to notify the moderator that you wish to speak during the current item.

Any person with a disability who requires a modification or accommodation in order to participate in a meeting should direct such request to the Board Secretary at (619) 409-6703 at least forty-eight (48) hours before the meeting, if possible. The above public comment procedures supersede any Authority standard public comment policies and procedures to the contrary.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

2. ITEMS TO BE ADDED, WITHDRAWN, OR REORDERED IN THE AGENDA

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Opportunity for members of the public to address the Committee. (Government Code Section 54954.3).

4. ACTION AGENDA

The following items on the Action Agenda call for discussion and action by the Committee. All items are placed on the Agenda so that the Committee may discuss and take action on the item if the Committee is so inclined, including items listed for information.

- A. “Water Efficiency and Rebate Program Review” Presentation by Doug Roberts, Program Specialist (Information Item)
- B. “Customer Survey Results” Presentation by Leslie Payne, Public Affairs Manager (Information Item)

5. NEXT MEETING DATE: Tuesday, July 6 at 2:00 p.m.

6. MEMBER COMMENTS

Opportunity for Members of the committee to briefly respond to statements and questions from public; ask clarifying questions; make a brief announcement; or report on activities. Comments should not revisit items previously discussed as part of the agenda. (Government Code Section 54954.2(a))

7. ADJOURNMENT

This agenda was posted at least seventy-two (72) hours before the meeting in a location freely accessible to the Public on the exterior bulletin board at the main entrance to the Authority’s office and it is also posted on the Authority’s website at www.sweetwater.org. No action may be taken on any item not appearing on the posted agenda, except as provided by California Government Code Section 54954.2. Any writings or documents provided to a majority of the members of the Sweetwater Authority Governing Board or a majority of the members of the Citizens Advisory Committee regarding any item on this agenda will be made available for public inspection at the Authority Administration Office, located at 505 Garrett Avenue, Chula Vista, CA 91910, during normal business hours. Upon request, this agenda will be made available in appropriate alternative formats to persons with disabilities, as required by Section 202 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Any person with a disability who requires a modification or accommodation in order to participate in a meeting should direct such request to the Board Secretary at (619) 409-6703 at least forty-eight (48) hours before the meeting, if possible.



June 2021

Conservation Program

Doug Roberts
Program Specialist

Conservation and our Customers

- Historical water usage is very low
- Customers appreciate the one on one
- Customers like the variety of the rebates
- More than rebates (Site Visits/ Audits)
- Conservation Saturation



Historical Snap Shot

- July 2018 Local Ranking 1, State Level 29, GPCD 65
- July 2019 Local Ranking 1, State Level 28, GPCD 68
- July 2020 Local Ranking 1, State Level 34, GPCD 69

- Neighboring Agencies 90-100 GPCD (Same Period)

Appreciation of how frugal as a whole our customers have been historically seems to work better than constantly asking for conservation. (Keep up the good work).



Rebates

- Customers provide positive feedback on the leak repair and carwash rebates. They appreciate the simplicity of the local program vs the regional.
 - Carwash
 - Leak repair
 - PRV
 - Living Coast Discovery Center
- The number 1 rebate question is do you have a senior rate program or low income.
- Most Popular Regional is the Landscape Transformation Program (Turf Replacement)



Site Visit-Water Audit

Customer receives a high bill which will typically trigger a request for a site visit.

A visit includes:

- Leak check at meter
- Listening to their concerns (Venting)
- Reviewing account history
- Review irrigation controller settings
- Evaluating irrigation system
- Evaluating their landscape and property design
- Dye tab test
- Review of rebates



Drought and Conservation

Currently Drought Emergency declared in Sonoma and Mendocino County's. (4/17/21)

Customers are tired of calls for conservation, term change from Conservation to Water Efficiency.

Use what you need and be as efficient as possible when using it.

California seems to be in a continuous drought some years are more severe. The local agencies depend on SDCWA for a unified message. Do to infrastructure improvements and a host of other measures San Diego and SWA typically weathers the drought storm with minimal impacts.



Sweetwater Authority 2021 Ratepayers Survey

Submitted March 5, 2021
n=403



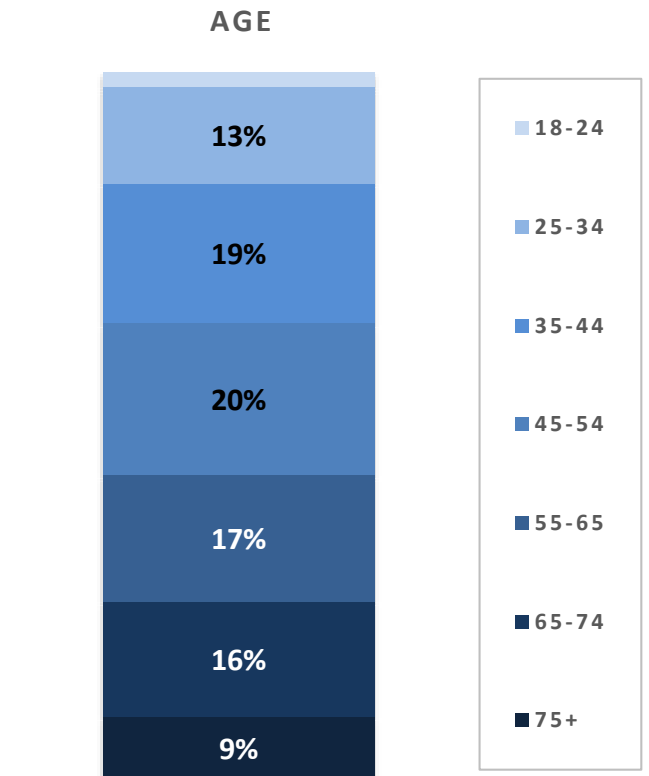
Summary

Research Objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Measure ratepayer satisfaction with Sweetwater Authority2) Understand why ratepayers are satisfied or dissatisfied3) Compare current results to select 2015 results4) Advise on SWA communication modes
Sample Size:	n=403
Margin of Sampling Error:	± 4.9%
Confidence Level:	95%
Sample Methodology:	Simple random sample from client supplied list
Jurisdiction:	Sweetwater Authority service area
Interview Methods:	Telephone (landline/cell phones), on-line (email invite)
Average Total Duration:	11 minutes, 16 seconds
Field Dates:	January 26-February 3, 2021
Field Facility:	Competitive Edge Research, El Paso TX
Project Director:	John Nienstedt, Sr.
Research Analyst:	Rachel Lawler
Research Manager:	Simone Aldern
Research Assistant:	James Iwu

Background

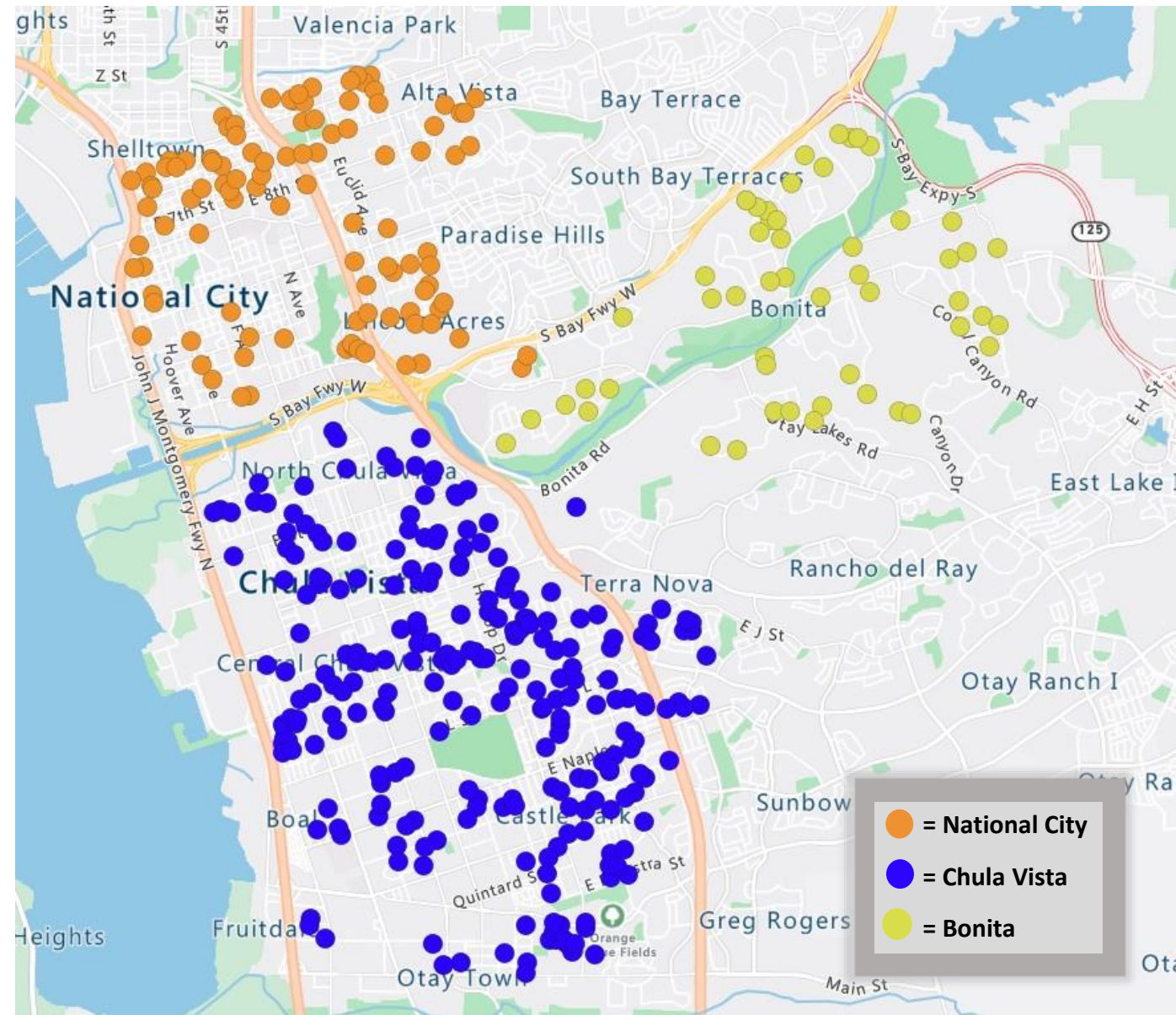
83% are Entirely Responsible for Water Actions and Decisions

- Average age of 52.5, older than general population
- 46% Hispanic
 - Another 11% are mixed-race which typically means they are Latino
- 14% took the survey in Spanish
- 55% are in HHs earning < \$80,000
 - More often Hispanic and less often middle-aged
 - One-quarter earn > \$100,000
- 45% are in HHs of 4+ residents
- Nearly all have a yard or garden
- Seven-in-ten are staying home more now than they were 2 years ago
 - Ratepayers with incomes of > \$80,000 are staying home more.



3 Distinct Communities in the Authority's Territory

- **Chula Vista** (58%): Fewer Asian-Americans; fewer men > 55; 10% live alone; incomes are about 15% higher than the median HH income of the entire service area; 75% stay home more now than 2 years ago
- **National City** (27%): Substantial Latino population with more Spanish-speaking ratepayers; fewer high-income earners; HHs here have the lowest incomes; fewer are staying home more often
- **Bonita** (15%): Older; more women; heavily white; more affluent, as 62% here earn > \$80,000; 71% have decreased water use since 2018.



Name Identification

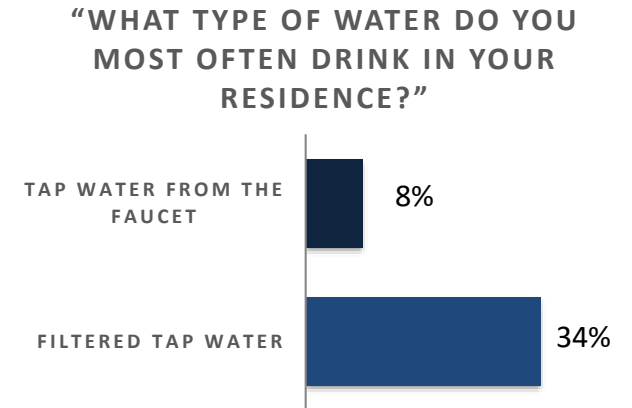
SWA Enjoys Very High Name Recognition

- 88% of ratepayers spontaneously recall SWA as their water provider
 - +4% from 2015
- 8% could not name any agency
 - Down slightly from 2015 (11%).

Drinking Water

Most Don't Drink their Tap Water

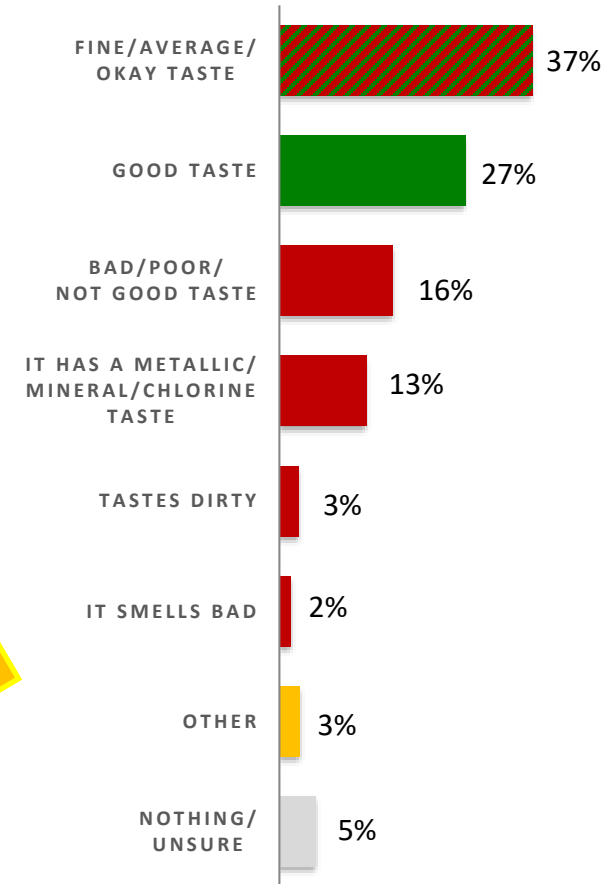
- 36% have *never even tried* their tap water
- Only 8% drink it directly from the tap
- Another 34% drink it, but filter it first
 - Mainly done by mid-to-upper income non-Hispanics
- Most buy drinking water separately
- Bottled water consumption has declined from 2015
 - But the 2015 survey did not include “filtered tap water,” “water from a vending machine,” or “water from a water store.”



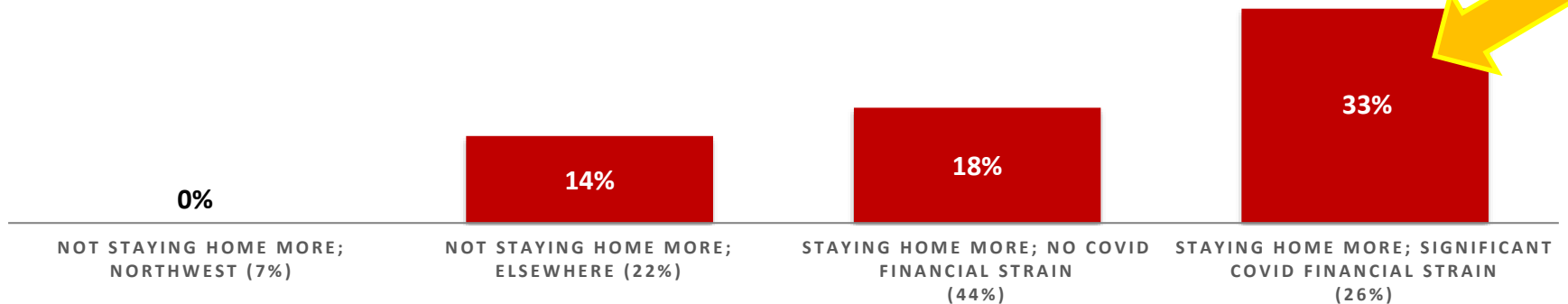
Of the 60% Who Tried Their Water, Taste is Generally OK

- 37% who have drunk their home’s water say it tastes “fine,” “average,” or “ok”
- Another 27% like it more, describing it as “good”
 - They do drink it more frequently than others
- But 36% do not like the taste
 - 13% specifically mention a “metallic,” “mineral,” or “chlorine” taste
 - 3% say it tastes “dirty” and 2% reference a bad smell
- Increased home life has worsened these sensory problems
 - One-quarter who are staying home more report a bad/metallic taste
 - Increases to one-third if they experience financial strains from COVID
 - COVID may be altering taste for some.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE TASTE AND QUALITY OF YOUR TAP WATER? (N=258)

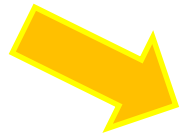


BAD METALLIC TASTE BY TREND IN STAYING HOME/AREA/FINANCIAL STRAIN CAUSED BY COVID

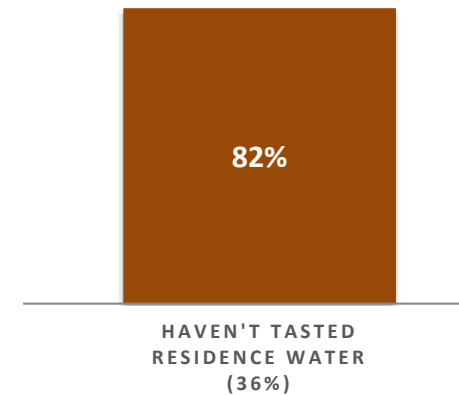


Purchasing Drinking Water is Largely Due to Prejudice

- A whopping 82% of those who haven't tried their tap water buy non-SWA water
- **Half** of bottled water drinkers have not tasted water from their own faucet
 - The taste has not driven them away
- The most prejudiced -- water purchasers who have *not* tried their tap water -- are more often...
 - Hispanic or live south Chula Vista



PURCHASED WATER BY WATER CONSUMPTION/ETHNICITY/ZIP CODE



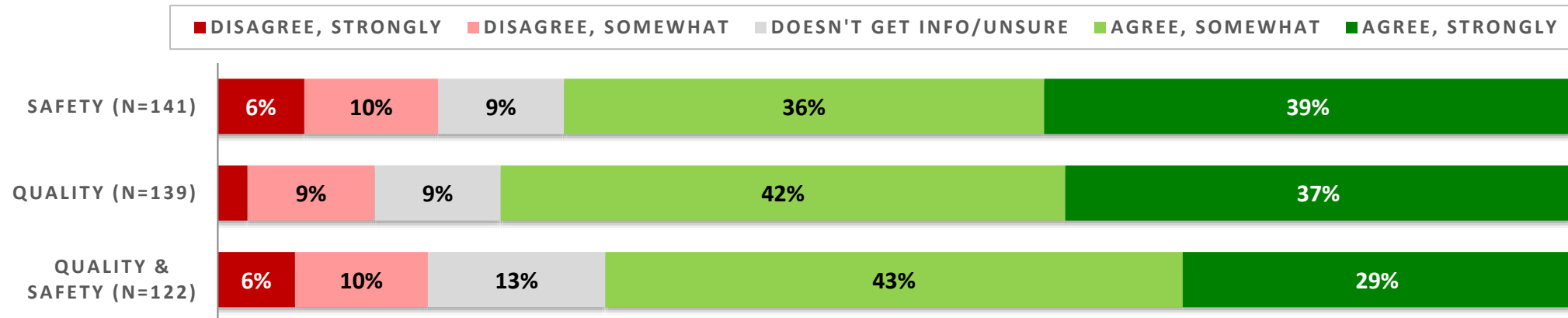
- But even 36% of Latinos who *have* tasted their tap water, still buy bottles
 - And 82% in South Chula Vista purchase water, so these are “hard cases”
- Purchasing water from a vending machine is common among lower-income earners
 - One-quarter of them buy this expensive water
 - Also popular among Hispanics earning > \$100,000, suggesting culture influences their water purchases.

Trust in SWA Information

> 7 in 10 Trust SWA on Safety/Quality of Tap Water

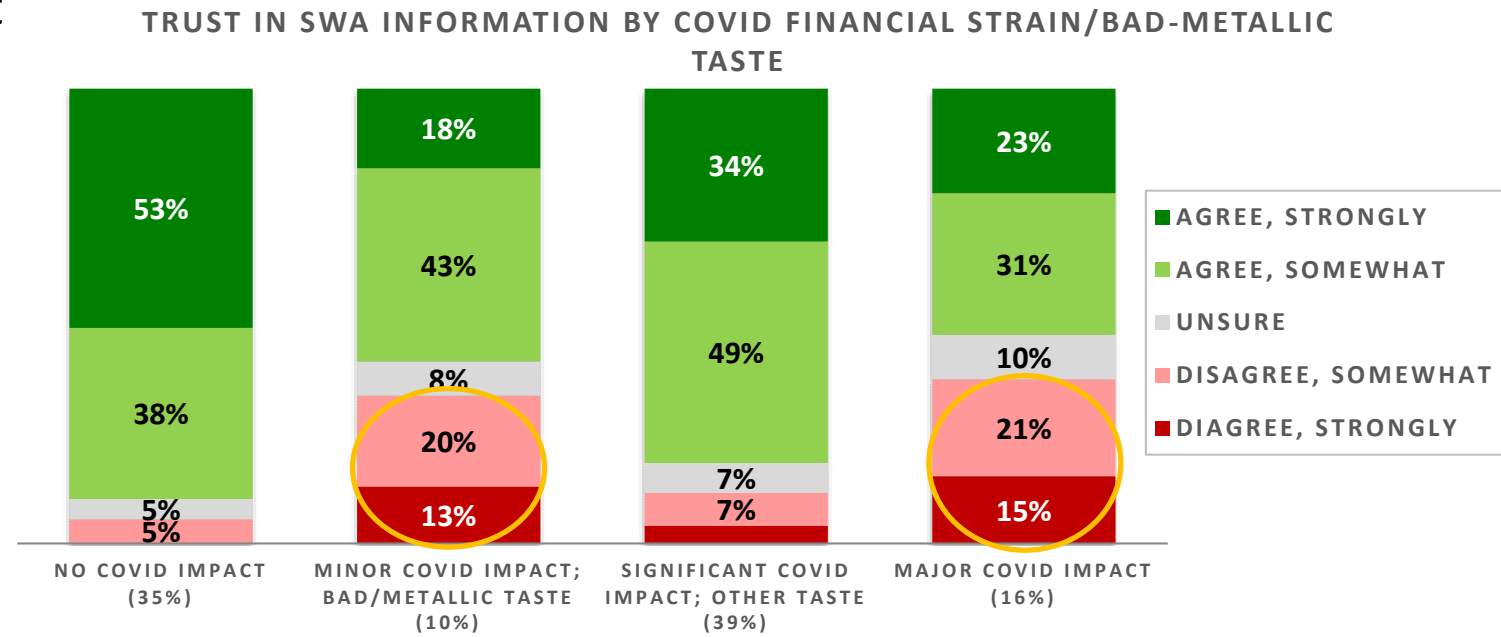
- Trust is marginally stronger among those who heard the separate “quality” and “safety” versions
- Throughput is not a significant problem
 - Only 4% don’t get the information at all.

“I TRUST THE INFORMATION I GET FROM SWEETWATER AUTHORITY ABOUT THE QUALITY AND SAFETY/QUALITY/SAFETY OF THE TAP WATER”



Taste and Covid are Key Trust Factors

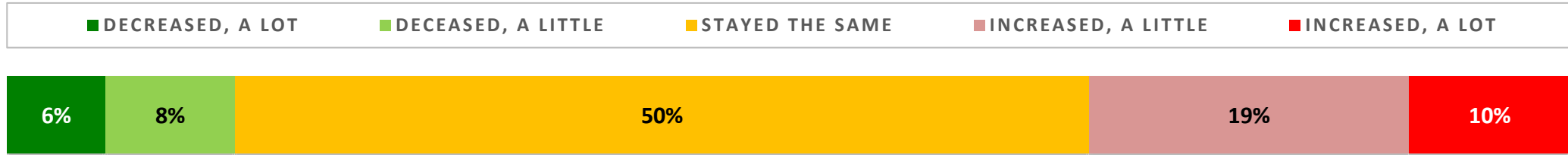
- For those who received the “quality” version, good tasting water is their proof of SWA’s truthfulness
- Taste is also a deciding factor when it comes to “safety”
 - If the water tastes metallic, SWA’s info can’t be trusted
 - 45% seriously question SWA's information on safety if they get a bad or metallic taste from their tap water
- Alongside taste, COVID-19 harms trust
 - 36% experiencing serious financial strain distrust SWA’s info
 - For those under mild financial stress, it comes down to their own experience with taste
 - Those not experiencing any COVID-induced stress overwhelmingly trust SWA.



Water Consumption

Water Usage has Remained the Same for Half of Ratepayers

SELF-REPORTED 2-YEAR TREND IN HOUSEHOLD WATER USAGE

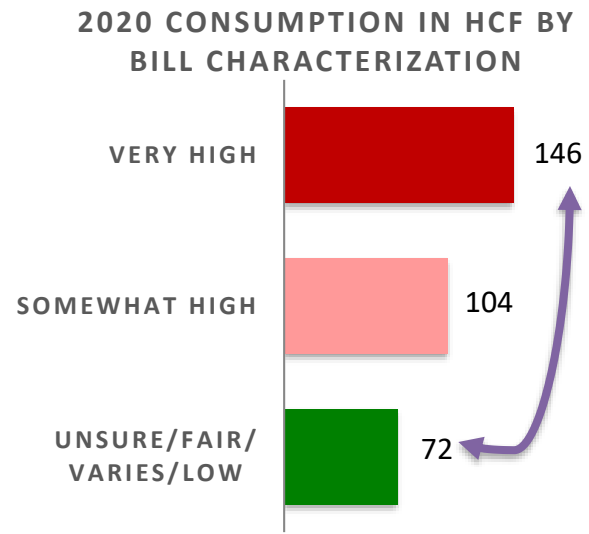
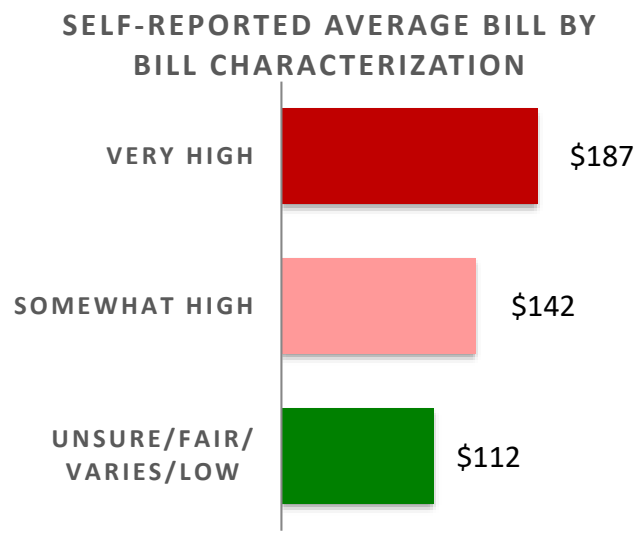
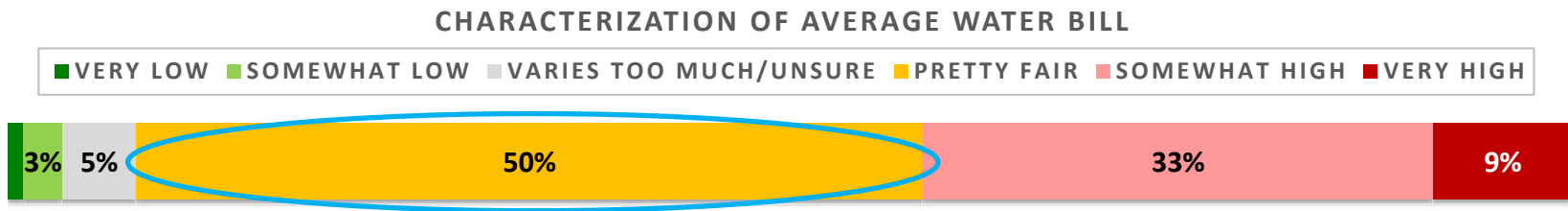


- 2020 consumption averaged 89.4 HCF per ratepayer
- More ratepayers are staying home
 - But only 29% say their water usage has increased
- Staying home more has not led to using more water.

Water Bills

42% Think of their Bill as “High”

- But this sentiment isn’t extreme
- Half think they are pretty fair
- Few regard them as low
- Ratepayer characterizations are reasonably accurate
- Bill characterizations also align with actual usage
 - Those saying “very high” use 2x as many HCF as those who feel their bills are fair
- 111 HCF is the threshold
 - Most using > that say their bills are “high”
- For low water users, it comes down to trust
 - < 28 HCF usage + high trust in SWA = bills are A-OK
 - < 28 HCF usage + some skepticism in SWA = some discontentment.

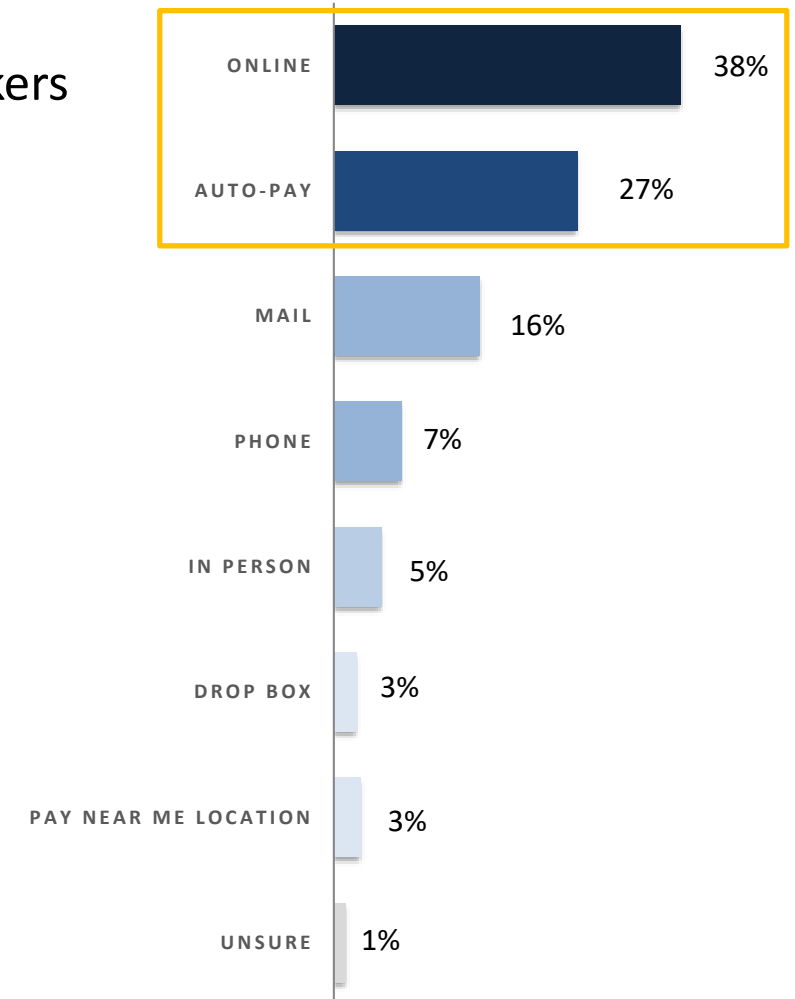


Water Bill Payment

Online Payments are Most Popular

- Two-in-three either pay their bill online or via autopay
 - Substantial increase since 2015 (41%)
 - Commonplace, except among those > 74 and younger Spanish speakers
 - English-speaking men are far more likely than women to pay online
- Mail payments have decreased from 26%
- Slight increase of +4% in phone payments since 2015
 - COVID fears are likely culprit
- In-person and drop box payments are minor
 - But somewhat important for Spanish speakers
- Pay-near-me locations are unused overall
 - But remain important for 16% of very low-income ratepayers.

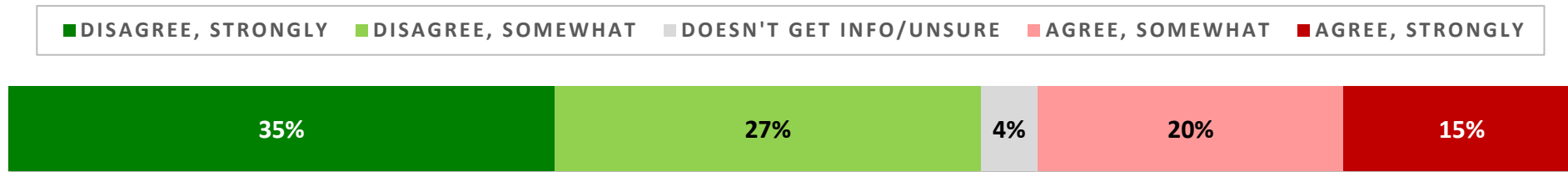
WATER BILL PAYMENT METHOD



Cost of Water and COVID-19

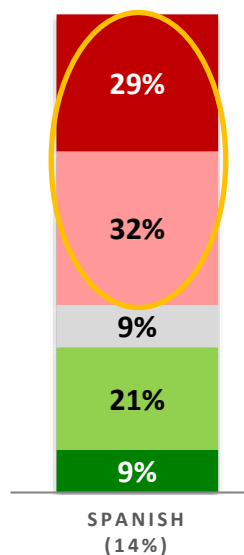
Water Costs Cause Financial Strain for 35%

“THE COST OF WATER HAS CAUSED ME FINANCIAL STRAIN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC”



- 61% of Spanish speakers say water costs cause them financial strain during COVID
 - Only 31% of English speakers report the same
- But English-speaking women with higher water bills are also highly impacted
- Pandemic is not generally creating more financial stress for:
 - Men with high water bills
 - Ratepayers – regardless of gender – who pay < \$140.

COVID FINANCIAL STRAIN BY LANGUAGE/AVERAGE BILL/GENDER



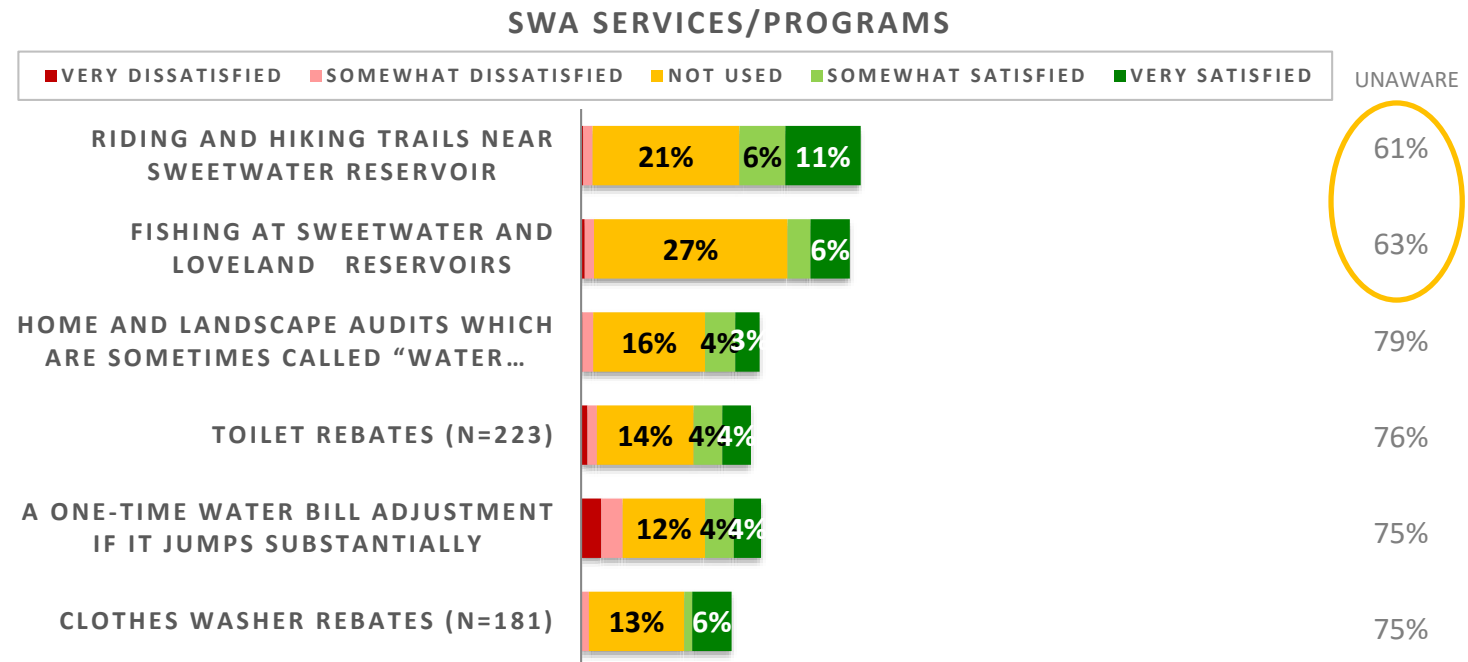
SWA Programs and Services

Most are Unaware

- Unsurprising, especially for programs promoted infrequently or not at all
- Average ratepayer knows about 1.5 of the 5 services and programs we asked about
 - Upper-income earners not in the northwest: 2
 - Partly due to Bonita residents being especially cognizant of the trails
 - English speakers: 1.6
 - Spanish-speaking men: 0.8
 - Spanish-speaking women: 0.3!

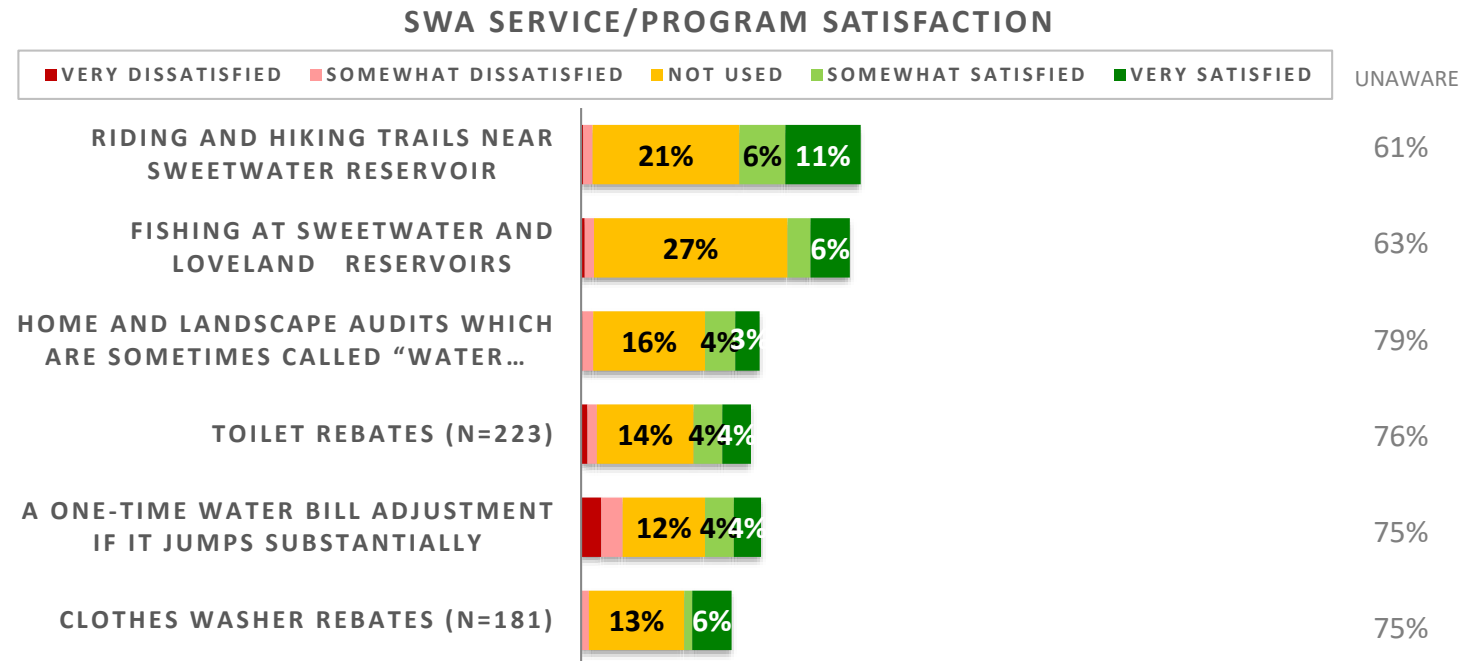
Only Active Programs are Somewhat Known

- Fishing and trails are flying less under the radar
 - Non-Hispanic Bonita residents know about the fishing
- Landscape audit awareness has *slightly* declined
- Rebates, landscape audit, and bill adjustment are unknown to 3-in-4
- Awareness of rebates has declined since 2015
 - Unsurprising given less focus on drought conditions
- Knowledge of the bill adjustment is tied to location and ethnicity
 - Non-white ratepayers in National City are almost all unaware
 - Only 9% know about it compared to 35% of whites in the area.



Usage is Low but Satisfaction is High

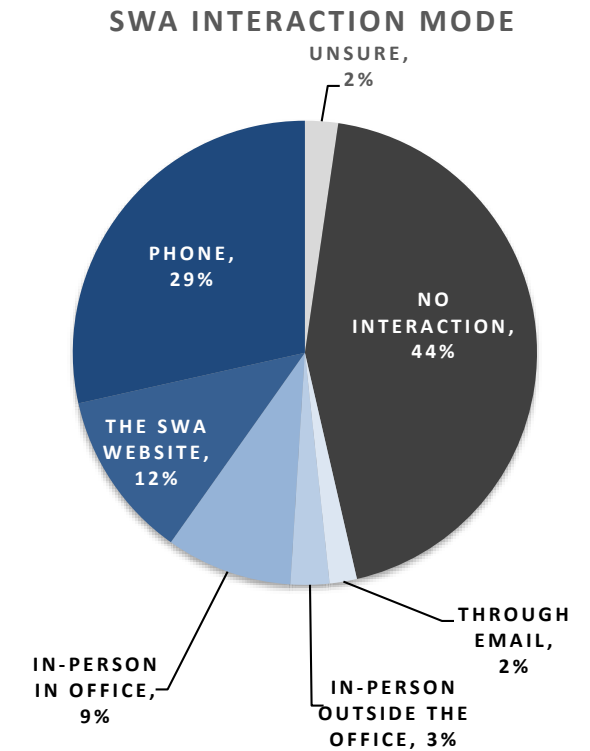
- Average ratepayer uses only 0.6 services/programs
- More English speakers are users, especially of outdoor programs
- Hiking and fishing are most popular, with 19% using them
- Smart check-up usage has increased +16%
- Rebate usage is on par with 2015
 - There’s a lot of uncertainty when aware ratepayers are asked why they haven’t used rebates
 - “Lack of need” is the top reason given
 - “Haven’t purchased a washer/toilet” is also significant
- Only bill adjustments engender significant dissatisfaction
 - Ratepayer expectations could play a role.



Interaction with SWA

54% Have Interacted with SWA

- Older men are least likely demographic group to have contact
- Phone interaction is most common
 - Avoided by Hispanic ratepayers but **not** Spanish speakers
 - Suggests the phone call is a cultural preference not a language barrier
- 12% contact SWA through the website
 - Popular among mid-to-upper income earners in 91911
 - But big deficit among low-income ratepayers
- Few have had in-person interaction with SWA personnel
 - But low-income ratepayers visit the office **6x** more often
 - In-person interaction outside the office is only common for those using the trails
- Very few contact SWA through email.



Overwhelmingly Satisfaction with Last Contact

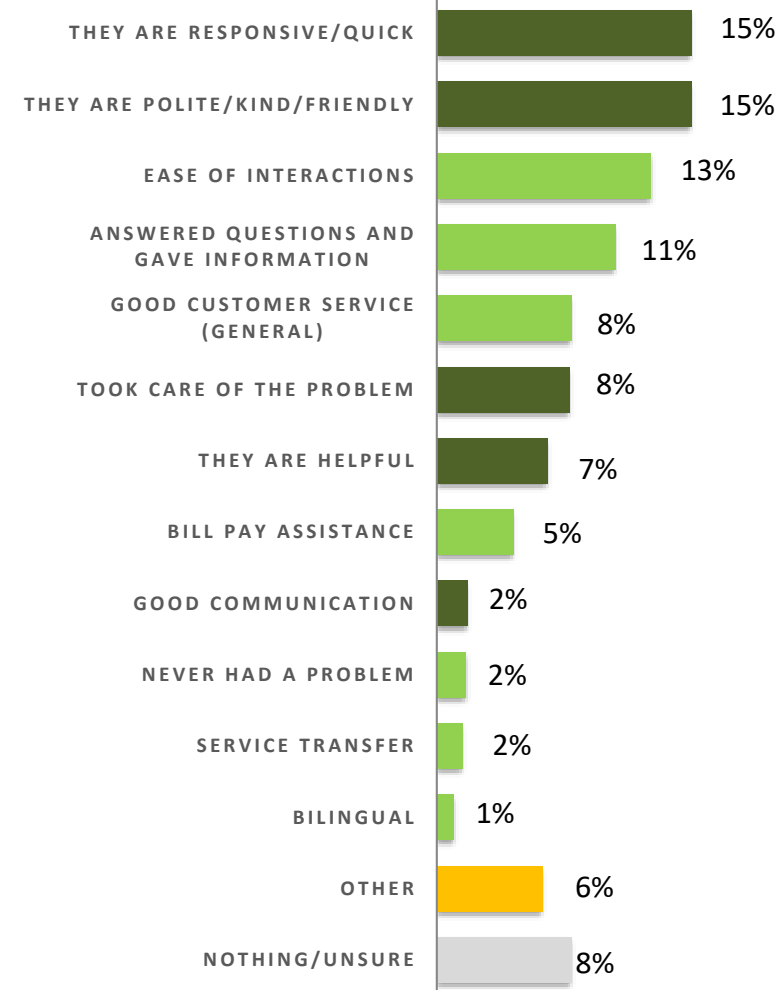
- More ratepayers like their interaction now than in 2015
- An enormous 9-in-10 are satisfied
 - And 67% are *very* satisfied!

SATISFACTION WITH MOST RECENT SWA INTERACTION (N=225)



- It's about excellent customer service
 - 47% point to some element of outstanding personnel
 - *Friendly* and *helpful* stand out
- Another 37% cite tangible resolutions to their problems
- All methods of interaction prove satisfactory
 - Contact with SWA field workers is extremely valuable
 - 91% are *very* satisfied with that communication!
- Poor customer service, bill errors, and SWA's automated system are what upset the *very few* who were dissatisfied.

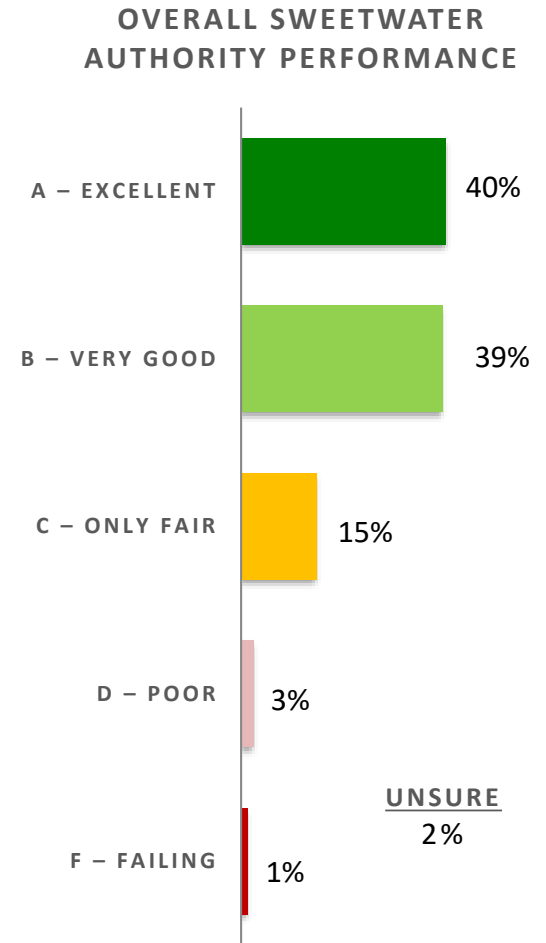
REASON FOR SATISFACTORY INTERACTION (N=201)



Sweetwater Authority Overall Performance

A Very Good 3.17 GPA

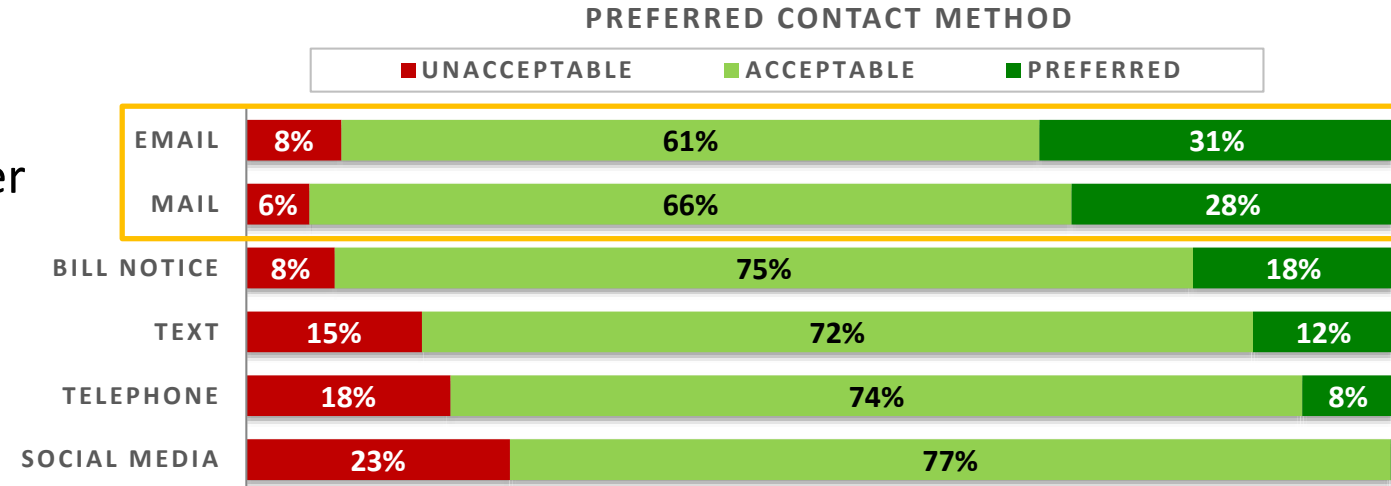
- A huge 8-in-10 award the Authority an “A” or “B” grade
- Only 15% grade it a “C”
- A small 4% gave it a “D” or marked it as Failing
- Results in a “very good” B+ grade
- SWA is well on its way to providing excellent service to ratepayers.



Contacting Ratepayers

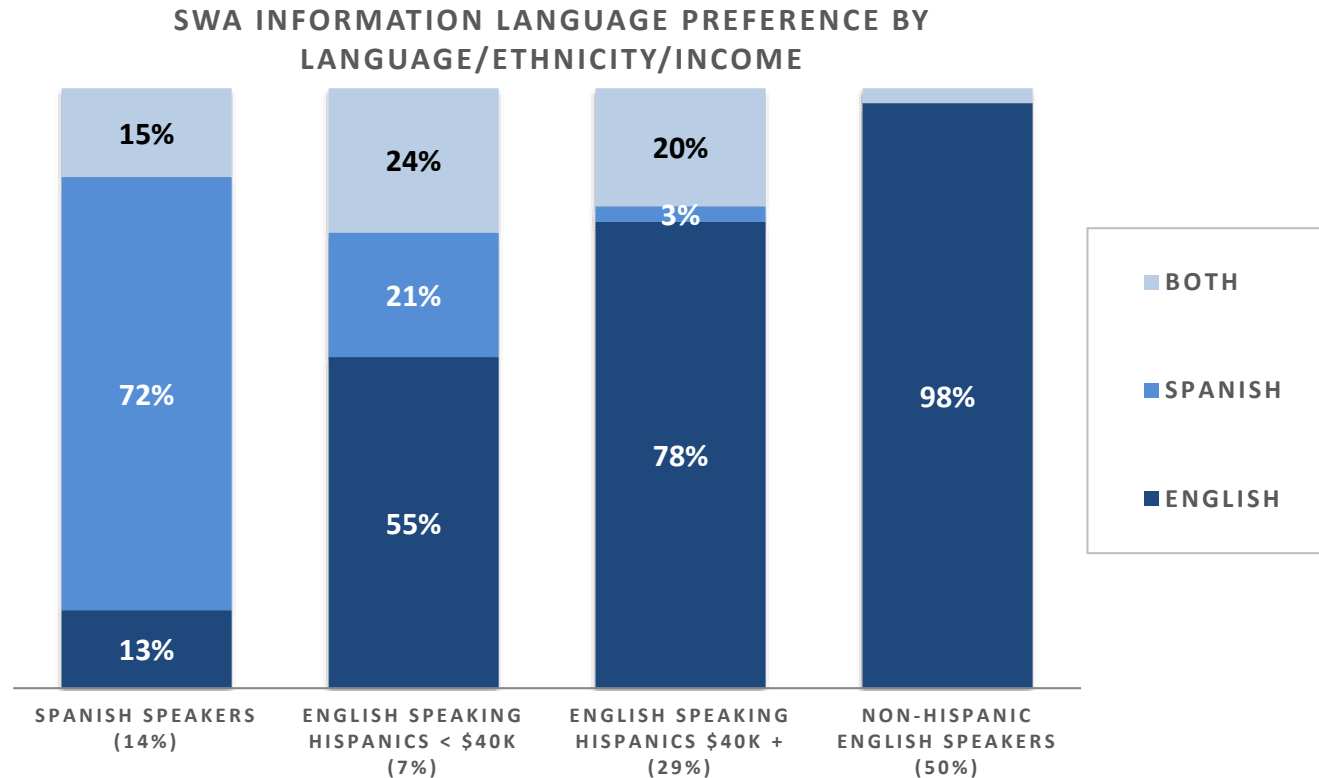
Ratepayers are Open to SWA Contact

- But 59% prefer contact by email or mail
 - Not a good solution for the elderly, however
- Email preference has increased since 2015
 - Mail is still preferred by 36% of ratepayers > 61
- Preference for mail has decreased
 - Mail is still preferred by 36% of ratepayers > 61
- Bill inserts are generally fine
- Text communication has few fans
 - Tolerated only by those < 55
- Phone contact has also decreased
 - Yet 22% of Spanish speakers prefer phone calls
- Social media is an across-the-board dud.



Providing Information in Ratepayer's Language is Important

- 12% prefer Spanish
 - Overwhelmingly preferred by those who took the survey in Spanish
- But the preference for Spanish ends there
 - Even most low-income Hispanics who took the survey in English want English language communication
- 11% would like SWA info provided in both languages.



Recommendations

1. SWA is doing great... let's remember that... but there's always room for improvement
2. Avoid the dreaded "high bill" label
 - ✓ It's not the actual bill, it's what the ratepayer *thinks* of the bill that matters
 - ✓ Those with "high" bills use more water, so get them to reduce consumption
 - ✓ Another solution is to do all the other things better for them
3. Strengthening trust in water quality and safety and avoiding water-related scandals are very important
4. Improve tap water taste among the one-in-six ratepayers who dislike it
 - ✓ But data suggest fewer taste problems post-COVID
5. Encourage the staff – if they are well-trained – to interact with ratepayers
6. "Bottle" the phone-paying interaction and sprinkle that into the other payment methods
7. Drop "pay near me" locations if cost is significant; but then accommodate some low-income earners
8. The bill adjustment program deals with \$ so it's important
 - ✓ Correct the problems or reset expectations
9. Get more ratepayers, especially Latinos, to try the water*
10. Raise program awareness generally and improve program communication with Spanish speakers
11. E-mail, mail and bill notices are fine, but don't try socials, ease off calling, experiment with targeted texts
12. Target Spanish-language communications to Spanish speakers; no broad brush
13. Examine the online system and outreach through the language lens.

Thank You!