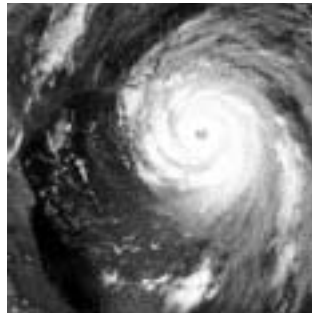




POST-HURRICANE KATRINA SURVEY



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Summary of Comments from OMB Watch's Post-Katrina Survey

OMB Watch conducted an informal online survey from September 21 to October 7 to assess whether now, following the troubling events surrounding Hurricane Katrina, is the time to launch a national investment agenda. The survey also explored the substantive elements of such an investment agenda. Approximately 800 people from nearly every state responded.

While respondents to our survey were overwhelmingly supportive of the idea of an investment agenda and many of the suggested elements such an agenda might contain, there are a number of interesting and important findings of the survey that only become clear after reading the voluminous comments¹ we received.

Respondents to the survey went to extraordinary lengths to convey their thoughts, concerns, and preferences to us through the open comments sections of the survey, generating 25 - 30 pages of comments for each of seven questions. A review of these comments captures not only their frustration and disillusionment in the aftermath of a horrible natural and human disaster, but also more nuanced themes important to informing the investment agenda we are trying to define post-Katrina and Rita.

This report summarizes statistical results from the survey, presents an overview of comments and suggestions received through the open answer sections, and lays out broader themes uncovered and found to be important for an investment agenda.

BROADER ISSUE THEMES

Activities that 70% or more ***Strongly Agreed*** are Important

| Activity | Strongly Agrees |
|--|-----------------|
| Reducing our dependence on oil | 83.7 |
| Health care for all | 81.4 |
| Establishing decent, livable wages | 79.0 |
| Strengthening public education | 78.2 |
| Improving Public Transit Systems | 75.4 |
| Strengthening enforcement of [environmental] laws and regulations | 74.7 |
| Enacting mandatory limits on pollution to fight global warming and more | 73.6 |

NOTE: Activities highlighted in blue are not included in the next list

Activities that 90% or more ***Agreed*** are Important

| Activity | Agrees |
|--|-------------|
| Cleaning up existing environmental hazards | 92.2 |
| Reducing our dependence on oil | 92.0 |
| Strengthening public education | 91.8 |
| Improving Public Transit Systems | 91.1 |
| Strengthening enforcement of [environmental] laws and regulations | 91.1 |
| Health care for all | 90.9 |
| Establishing decent, livable wages | 90.8 |
| Oversight, testing and coordination of emergency response plans, which include chemical, nuclear, and border security | 90.3 |

NOTE: Activities highlighted in blue are not included in the table above

¹ Nearly all questions allowed respondent to provide additional comments and thoughts. The number of comments provided per question by respondents ranged from 145 on the low end to 490 on the high end.

Environmental Issues Receive Exceptionally Strong Response

While this survey was circulated to our list of policy analysts, advocates, and partners (as well as the networks of many human service and nonprofit organizations), it was somewhat surprising that environmental issues received a great deal of support, particularly those relating to oil independence. While not a topic covered or promoted by OMB Watch, it represented 3 out of the top 7 activities respondents agreed were “strongly important” and 3 out of the top 5 activities respondents agreed were “important.”

In addition, environmental issues, especially oil independence and issues relating to gas conversation and pricing were repeatedly mentioned throughout the survey comments, beyond just the section dedicated to environmental issues.

Iraq and Military Buildup Central Focus of Financial Problems

Reaction to the war in Iraq, particularly to the amount of money being spent there, was an overwhelmingly common response for other ways (beyond rolling back tax cuts for the wealthy) to pay for post-Katrina reconstruction and a broader investment agenda. Given this was not an option supplied in questions about possible ways to pay for the agenda, it demonstrated the strong feelings people have on the subject. Surprisingly, dissatisfaction with military spending was not limited to the war in Iraq, but extended to military spending in general. Particularly worrisome for many were the special breaks and lucrative contracts defense companies receive from the federal government. This theme will be discussed more in the section below.

Cronyism and Incompetence Erode Base of Support for Government Solutions

A large number of comments on a variety of issues seemed to center around cronyism and incompetence. Whether it be antagonism for Halliburton and other extremely large multi-national companies working in Iraq or appointments of political friends -- without the necessary qualifications and experience -- to important agency posts, the negative perception people shared surrounding these issues made them hesitant and perhaps unwilling to believe government spending could fix the problems unearthed by Katrina -- even with a proactive investment agenda. People disassociated themselves from government, viewing it as a "them" instead of "us." Many accepted the problem and even expressed willingness to personally sacrifice more (whether through increased taxes, greater funding for public programs, or giving of their time), but believed whatever sacrifices they made would end up benefiting the wrong people and/or entities due to corruption and inefficiency endemic to our government system.

An interesting trend emerged in the comments as respondents entangled their beliefs and views about “pork” spending in the government with these other themes. Understandings of the definition, breadth, and causes of “pork” spending varied widely, were at times confused, and were often tainted by emotional responses. Many comments suggested cutting all the pork from the budget to pay for Katrina relief and invest, alluding to an exaggerated notion of pork spending. (Even by its most liberal definition, eliminating pork spending alone would cover only a fraction of the cost of the recovery effort, and would be far too small to cover an investment agenda.) Nearly all respondents stressed the need to spend money wisely and demand performance from the programs and services being prioritized in recovery and reconstruction.

All of these concerns pointed to a general consensus on the need to address poverty and investments, but less belief in government, even a reconfigured or corrected government, as the right mechanism.

Federalism Issues

Surprisingly, even those who saw a prominent role for government in rebuilding the Gulf Coast and in a broader investment agenda were unsure of which government was most suited for the job. Consensus was lacking around whether state and local governments should shoulder the largest share of the responsibility for both disaster preparedness and response and a proactive investment campaign -- or whether the federal government should take the lead. The distrust of government expressed throughout the comments appeared to cause a preference for state and local governments over federal initiatives. It is also possible, however, that people see and feel -- and therefore understand -- the impact of state and local services more than those that come from the federal level. It is also possible many respondents perceive corruption, wastefulness, and inefficiency to be more rampant at the federal level than at the state and local levels.

Wealth Gap Dominates Economic Concerns

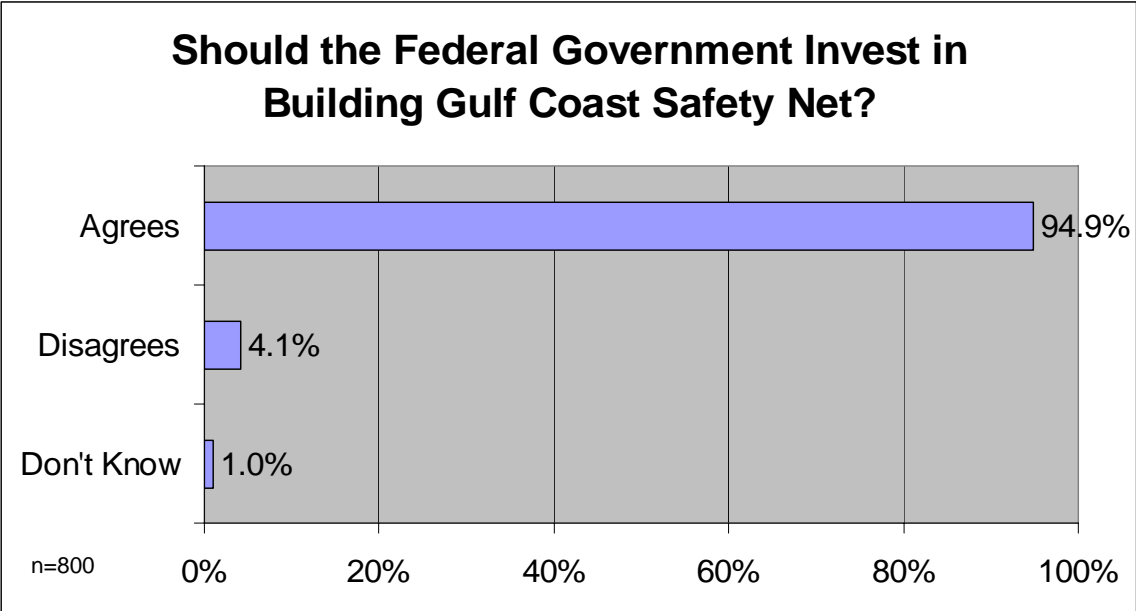
While economic issues rate lower as priorities than some other categories in the survey, there was general dismay at the large and ever-growing wealth gap in the country and a strong preference for establishing living wages for everyone as the top economic priority. Respondents seemed to believe the government was either passively or actively working to support policies that would widen the wealth gap and that we need a new path for economic policies that elevate the living conditions and quality of life of the majority of Americans rather than giving preference for the small number of wealthy and powerful.

America Is Ready For a Change

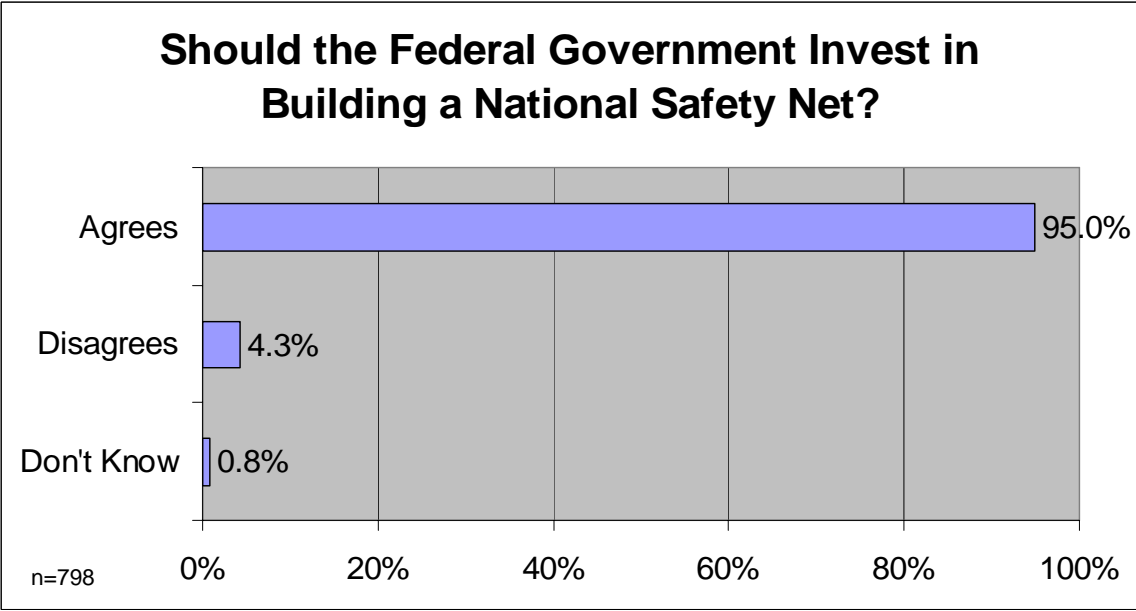
Overall, the comments expressed anger, frustration, and dismay over the direction the country is currently headed and a definitive need to change course. Corporate influence over government, cronyism and incompetence within the government, and politicians working for the benefit of the few instead of the many were consistent themes throughout the comments and point to the need for a new set of national priorities and a renewed commitment to building a better America together. Shared sacrifice, belief in our ability to solve large problems together (through government), and having the experts and leaders in the right places to generate and implement new and successful ideas (for energy independence, public transit, empowerment of citizens, stronger communities, etc.) were the most often expressed keys to moving America forward.

Selected Results from Katrina Investment Survey

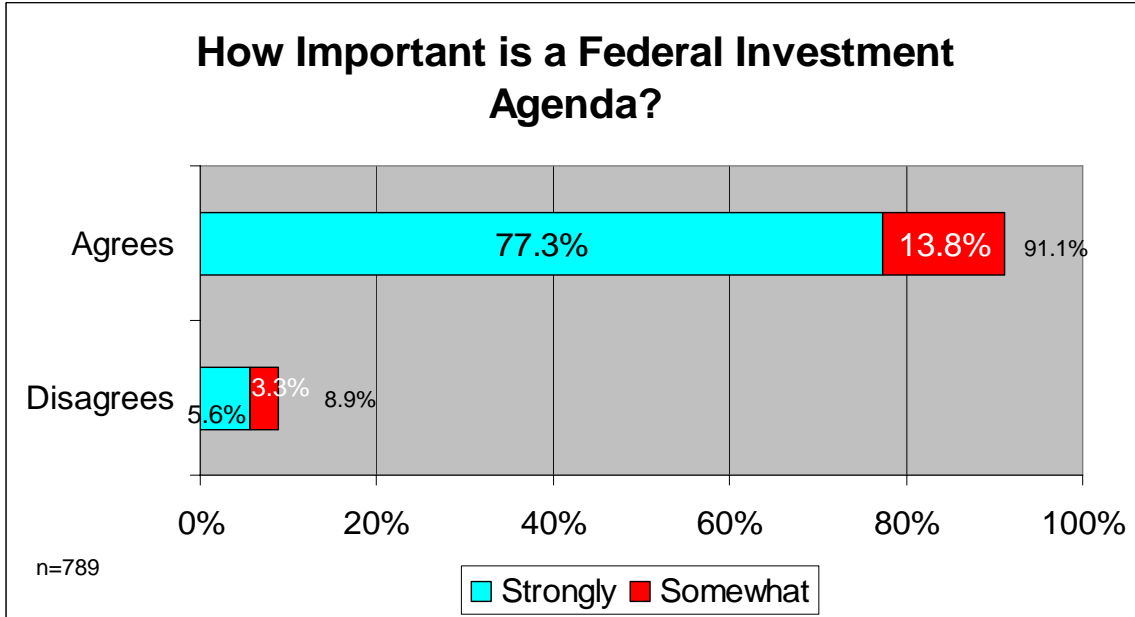
Q1. Some argue that Hurricane Katrina exposed challenges facing the nation, including poverty, hunger and a lack of a safety net. Do you agree or disagree that the federal government needs to make sure that these problems are addressed in the Gulf Coast?



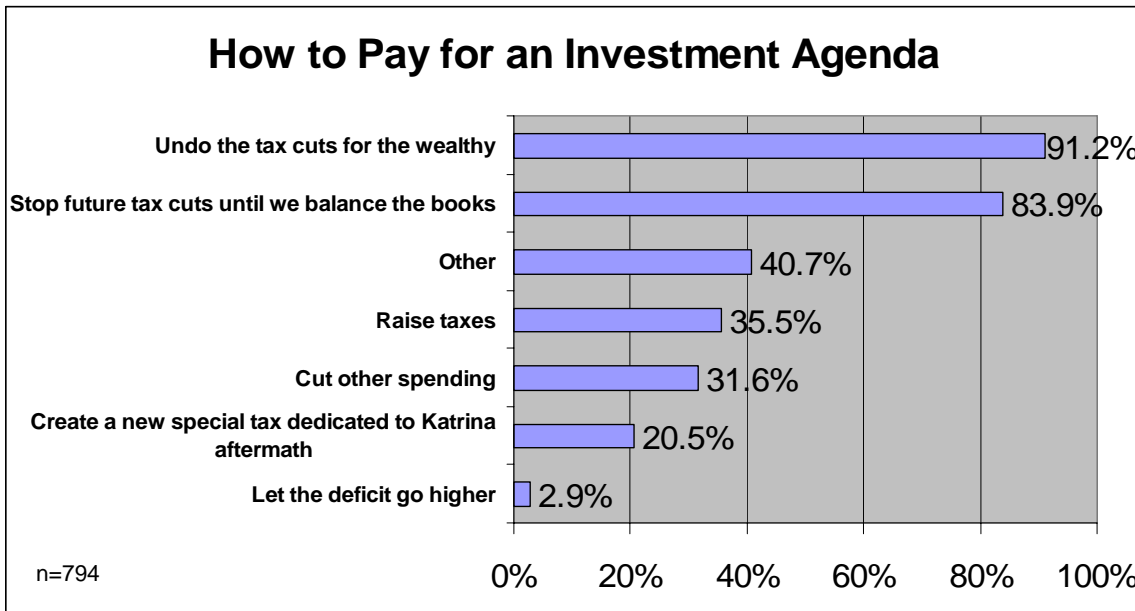
Q3. Do you agree or disagree that the federal government should also address these types of problems -- poverty, hunger, and a lack of a safety net -- throughout the rest of the country?



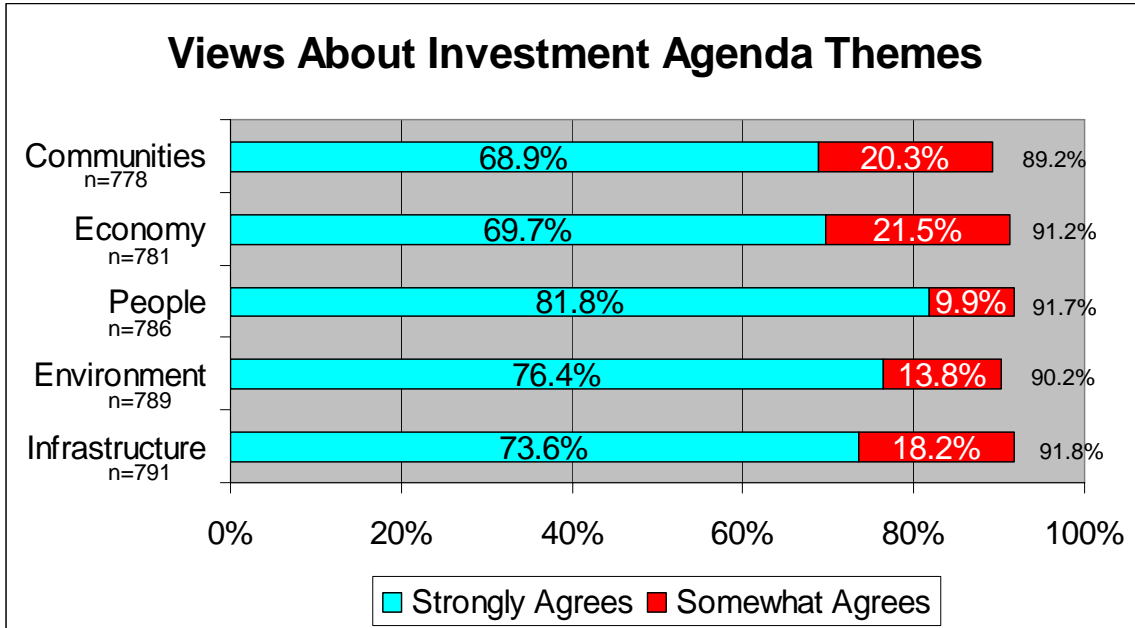
Q5. Preventing catastrophes like Katrina from occurring in your community requires large investments by the federal government in infrastructure and support for Americans. How strongly do you agree or disagree that we need a long-term federal commitment to support infrastructure and services for all Americans?



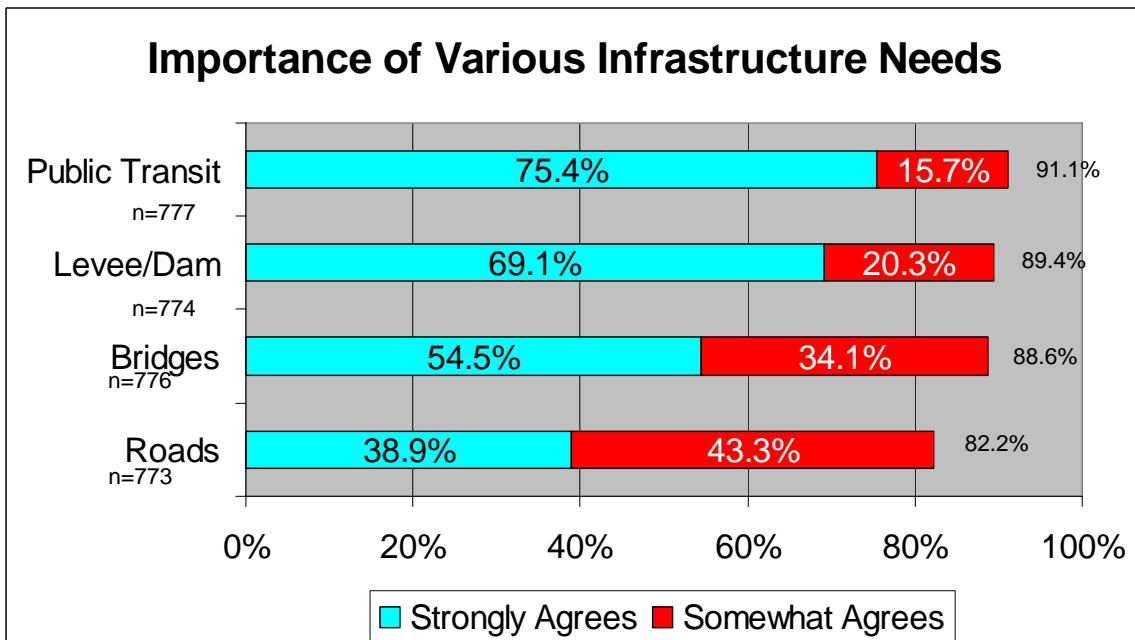
Q6. How should we pay for this investment?



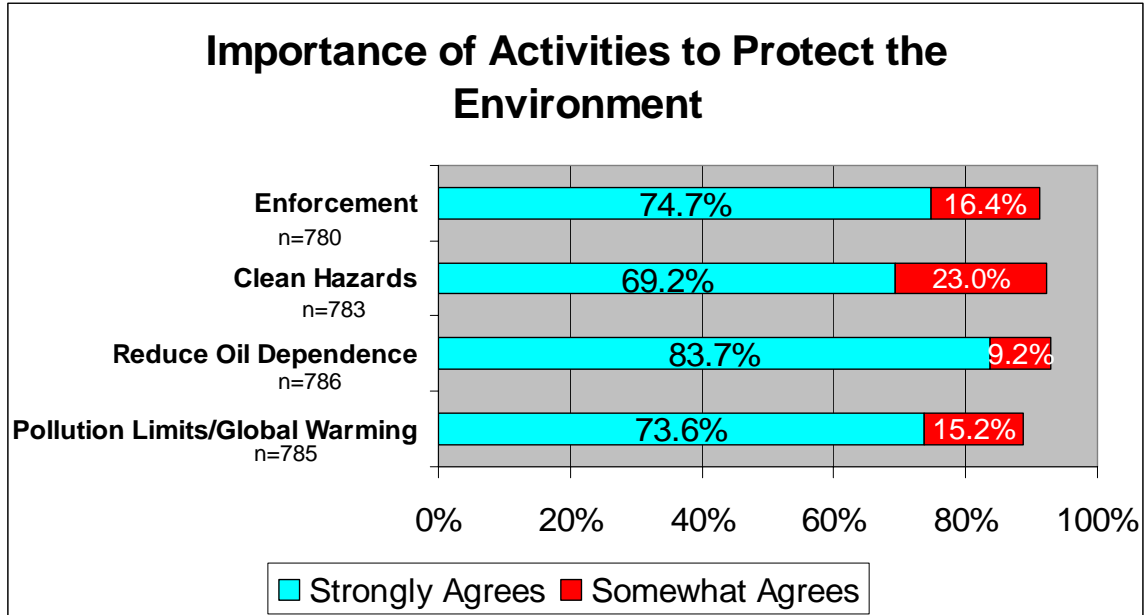
Q7. Do you agree or disagree that each of the following elements should be part of a federal investment initiative:



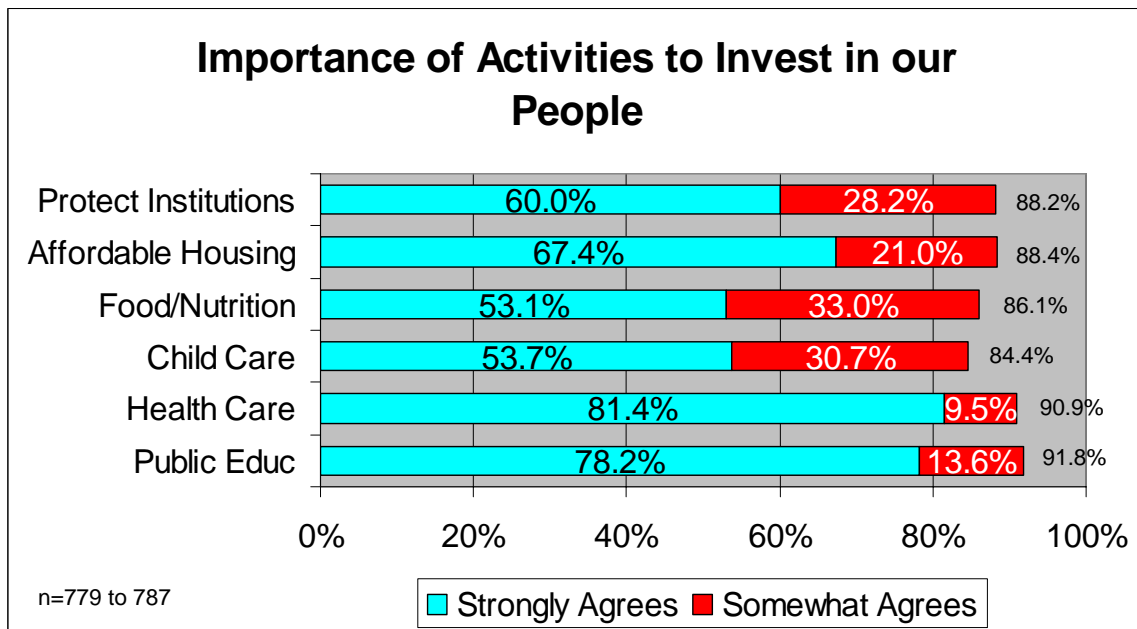
Q9. How important is it to undertake the items below to address our infrastructure needs?



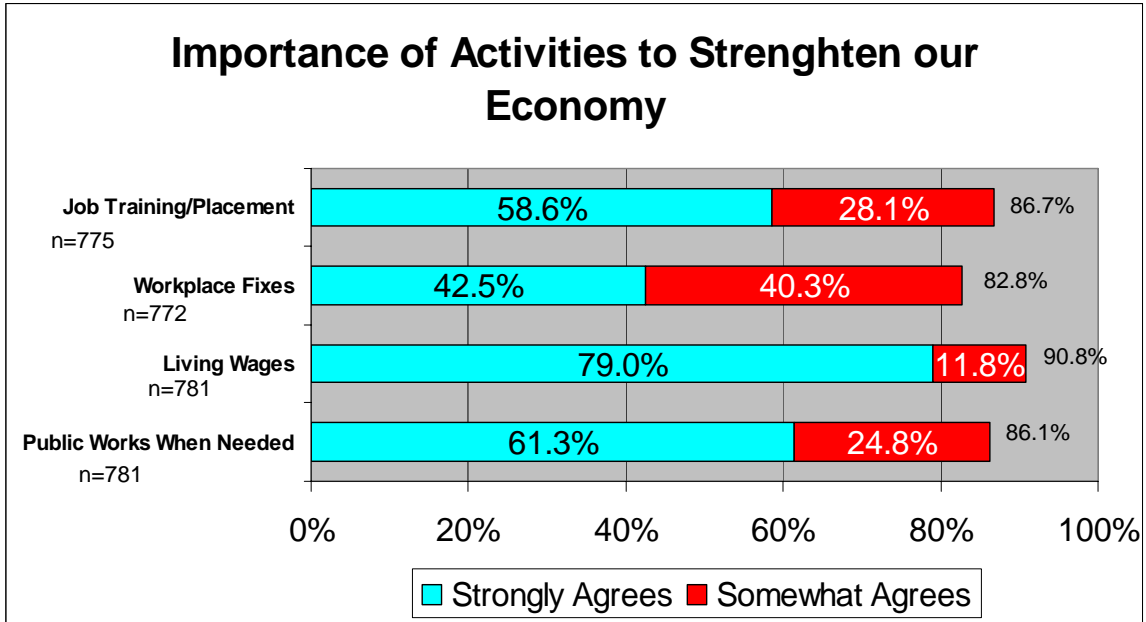
Q11. How important is it to undertake the items below to protect our environment?



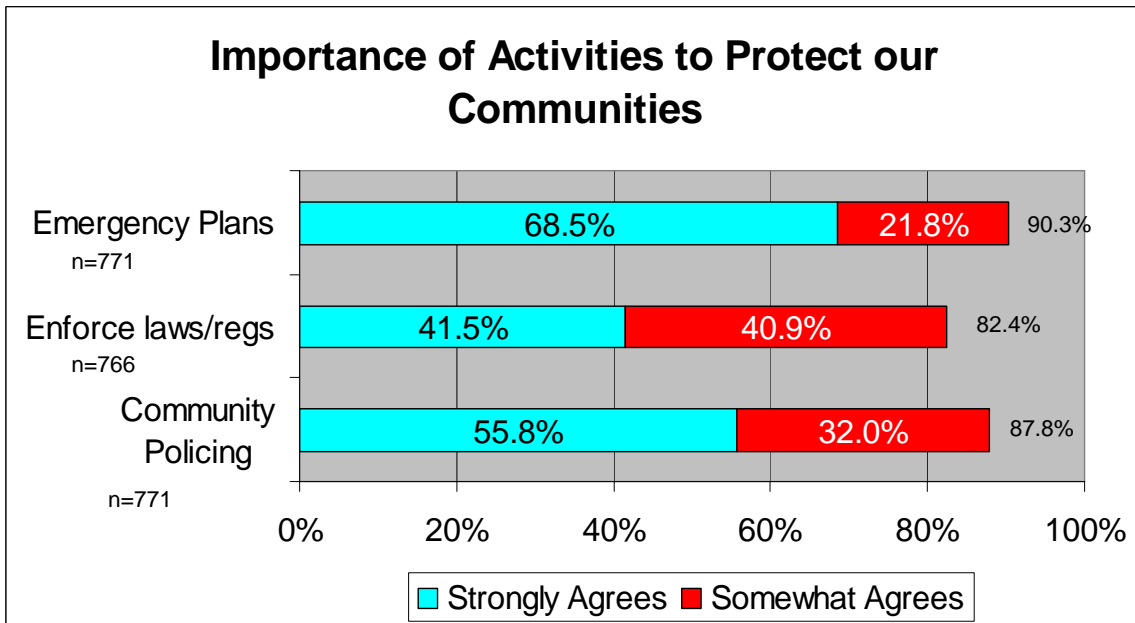
Q13. How important is it to undertake the items below to invest in our people?



Q15. How important is it to undertake the items below to strengthen our economy?



Q17. How important is it to undertake the items below to protect our communities?



Q19. We have called this investment agenda the Domestic Security Initiative. Do you like or dislike this name?

