

## **Survey Findings**

The purpose of this Lincoln County Government Study Commission research was to explore the philosophies and opinions of Lincoln County Montana residents as to the form, function, and power of their Lincoln County government. The participants of this study included residents of Lincoln County Montana (N=18,257) who were 18 years of age or older. The United States Census Bureau (2024) estimated the population of Lincoln County to be approximately 22,184 residents as of July 1, 2024. Of the 22,184 residents of Lincoln County, 17.7% (3,927) were under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Therefore, the population of Lincoln County aged 18 and older is approximately 18, 257 residents.

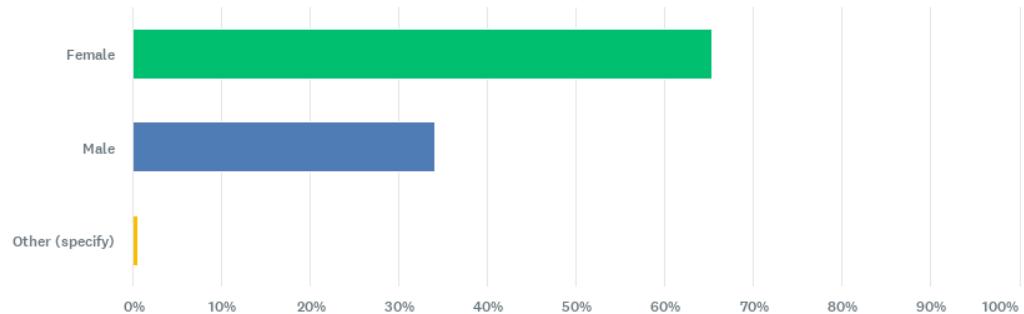
A random sample was created to understand the opinions of Lincoln County residents who were 18 years or older. The survey opened on September 2, 2025, and was closed on January 22, 2026. The sample (n=363) includes 363 participants who successfully completed the survey during this timeframe. A participant was disqualified from the research if they did not meet the requirements of the research and did not successfully complete the survey. To achieve a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of  $\pm 5\%$ , the goal of this research, the analysis of 362 successfully completed surveys were required. Therefore, this study's sample of 363 successfully completed surveys effectively drops the margin of error for this study to  $\pm 4.99\%$  at a 95% confidence level.

## **Descriptive Statistics**

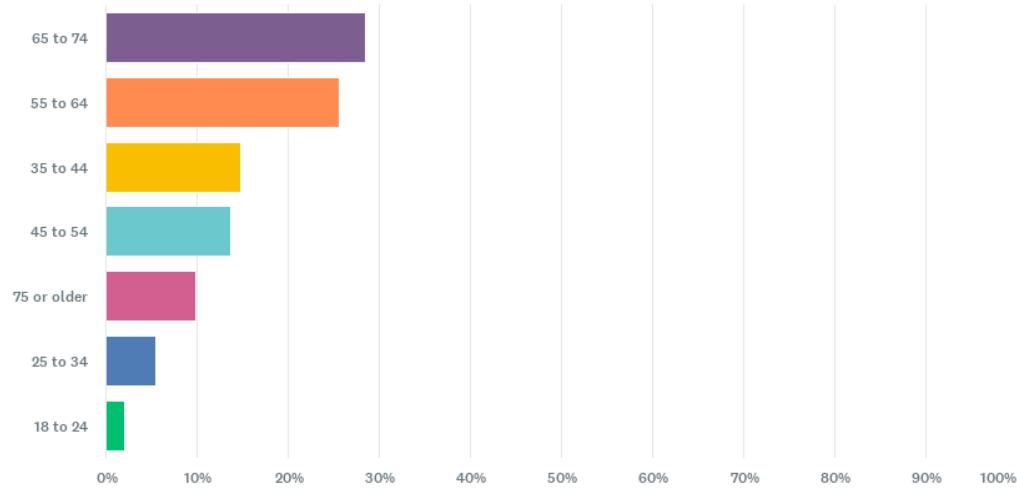
The first area of this descriptive statistics section analyzes the sample's demographics. Age, gender, approximate household income, residency, and voting status were captured by the survey. Of the 363 participants, 223 (65.4%) were female, and 116 (34%) were male with 22 participants choosing not to answer the question. See Q25 below. The ages of the participants

were widely distributed from the 18 to 24 age group to the 75 and over age group. A large majority (64%) of the participants were aged 55 or older. See Q24 below. The approximate average household income of the participants were also widely distributed from little or no income level to some participants reporting incomes of over \$200,000 per year. Half (49%) of all participants reported income in the range of \$25,000 and \$74,999. See Q26 below. The vast majority (92.8%) of the participants live in Lincoln County, with most (92.9%) registered to vote in the county. See Q17 below and Q19 below. The distribution of successfully completed surveys originated from the following areas within Lincoln County, Libby (49.3%), Troy (19.78%), Eureka (16.2%), Rexford (3.6%), Fortine (3.3%), Trego (2.5%), and Stryker (1.1%).

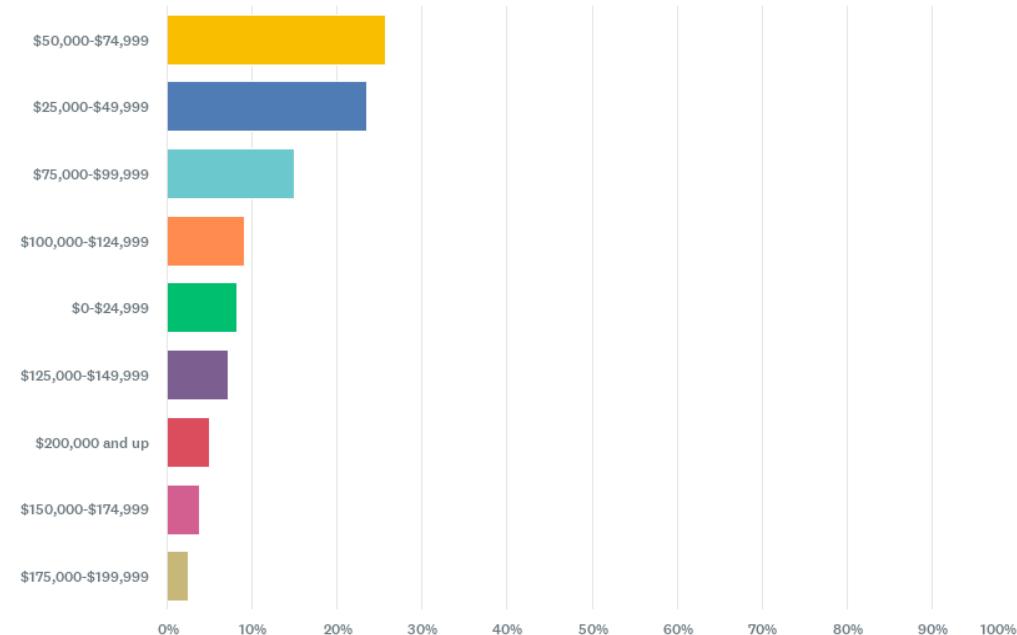
#### Q25 What is your gender?



## Q24 What is your age?

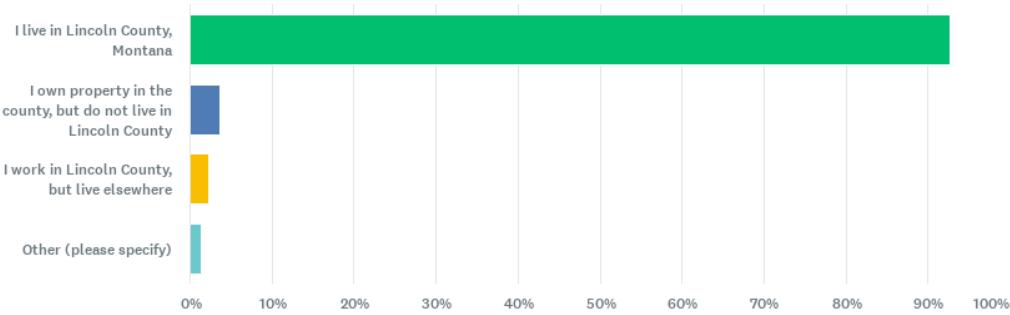


## Q26 What is your approximate average household income?

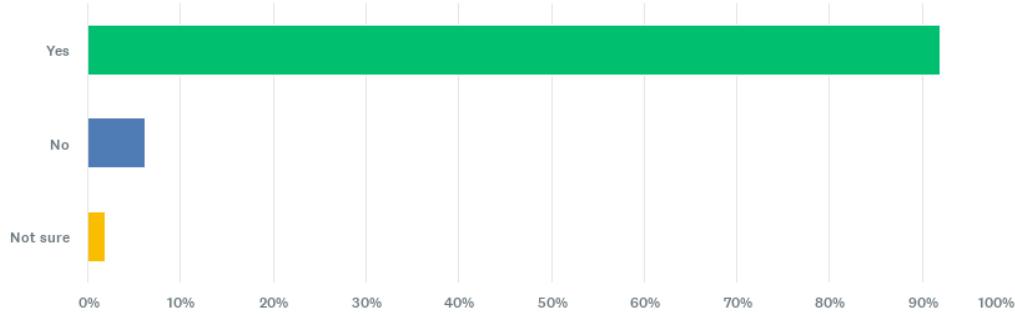


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## Q17 Residency

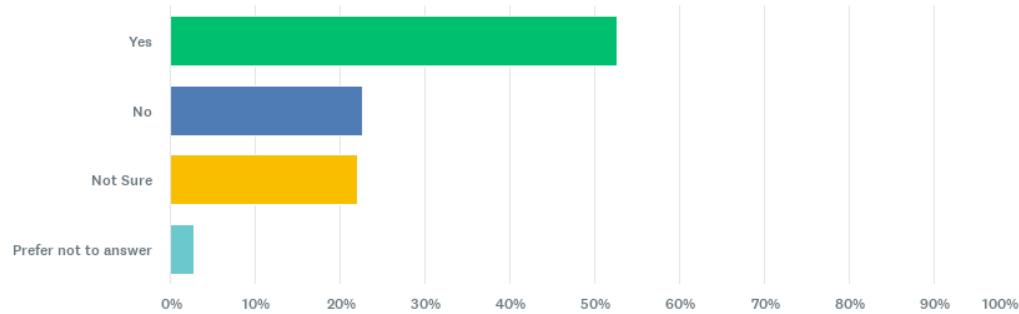


## Q19 Are you a registered voter in Lincoln County?



In the first section of the survey, the Lincoln County Government Study Commission examined whether the participants of the survey were in favor of creating the commission during the 2024 primary election. A majority (52.6%) of the participants reported that they were in favor, with 22.6% being averse to the creation of the commission. See Q1 below.

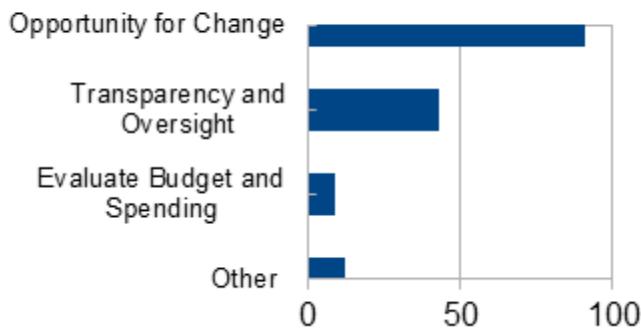
Q1 In the 2024 primary election, did you vote in favor of creating the Lincoln County Government Study Commission?



Respondents who answered positively to Q1, “Did you vote for the Study Commission,” were directed to Q2, “Why did you vote for the Study Commission?” Most responded within the framework of the study itself, offering that the government form should be evaluated to ensure it is keeping changing needs and county demographics. Others touted that the study offered the opportunity for citizen involvement with the government review process, living up to Montana’s Constitutional ideals. More specifically, some pointed to the need for non-partisan elections and better representation while a few opined that the review was, in essence, “a good idea.”

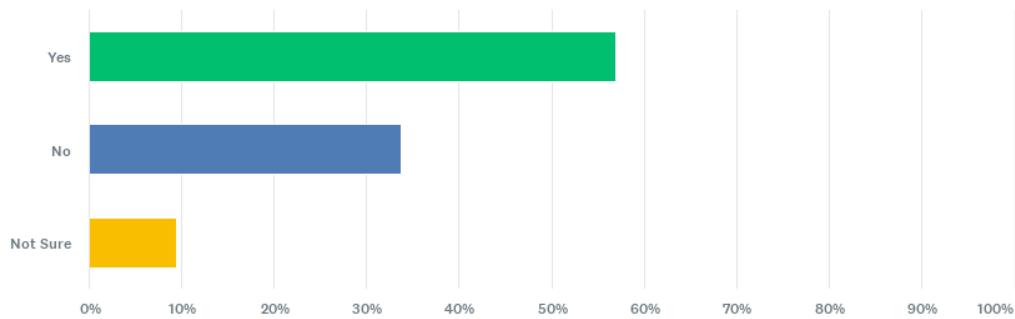
Furthermore, approximately half of survey takers claimed that they voted for the study for reasons not necessarily within the Commission’s scope. The most frequent reason given was due to a lack of government “transparency” and the need for accountability to ensure government officials are complying with applicable laws. Some also indicated that the Commission gave county citizens the opportunity to conduct a budget and/or spending audit, in the hopes that light would be shed on any irregularities. See Q2 below.

**Q2: Why did you vote for the Study Commission?**



The next section of the survey explored whether the participants felt that they had access to county leaders or decision makers, and whether the Lincoln County government was responsive to their individual needs. The majority (57%) of the participants agreed that they did have access to county leaders, while a third (33.7%) mentioned that they did not. A small portion (9.4%) of the respondents were unsure. See Q3 below.

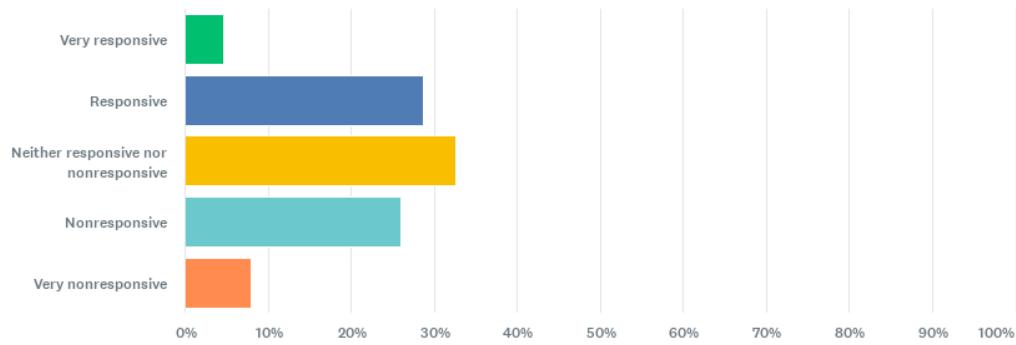
**Q3 Do you feel that you have access to county leaders or decision makers?**



When asked about the responsiveness of the county government, the participants responses were evenly distributed. One third (33.4%) of respondents felt the Lincoln County government was responsive or very responsive, one third (34%) felt the Lincoln County

government was nonresponsive or very nonresponsive, while one third felt the county government was neither responsive nor nonresponsive. See Q4 below.

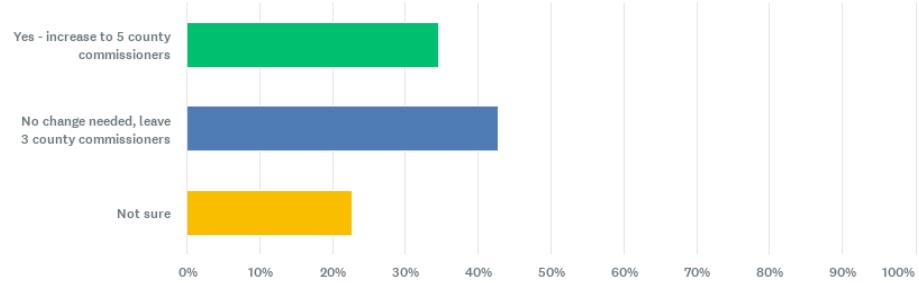
**Q4 How responsive do you feel the county government is to public input?**



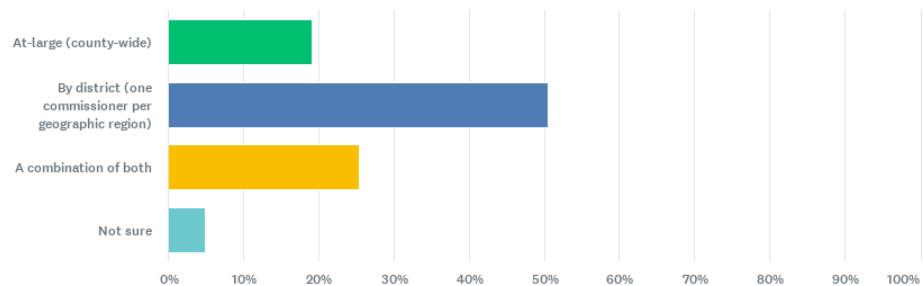
The next section of the survey addressed the considerations of the participants in regard to the county commissioners. When given the option to choose the optimal number of county commissioners, nearly half (42.8%) reported the current number of commissioners (3) was sufficient, while a third (34.5%) of the respondents expounded that the number of county commissioners should be increased to five. A quarter (22.6%) of the respondents were unsure. See Q5 below. A majority (50.6%) of the participants believe that the county commissioners should be elected by district, a minority (19%) preferred election at-large, and one in four recommended a combination of both methods, See Q6 below.

When asked if the county commissioners' elections should be partisan or non-partisan, a decisive majority (57.2%) preferred a non-partisan election, one third preferred partisan, and a small fraction (10.8%) of the participants were unsure.

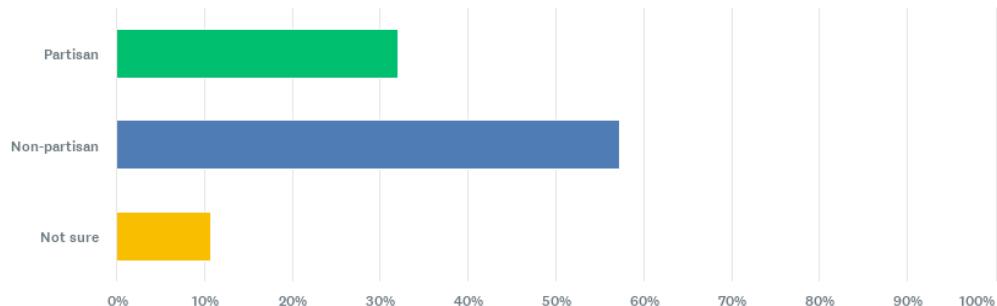
Q5 Should the number of county commissioners be changed? (There are currently 3 county commissioners)



Q6 How should the Lincoln County Commissioners be elected?

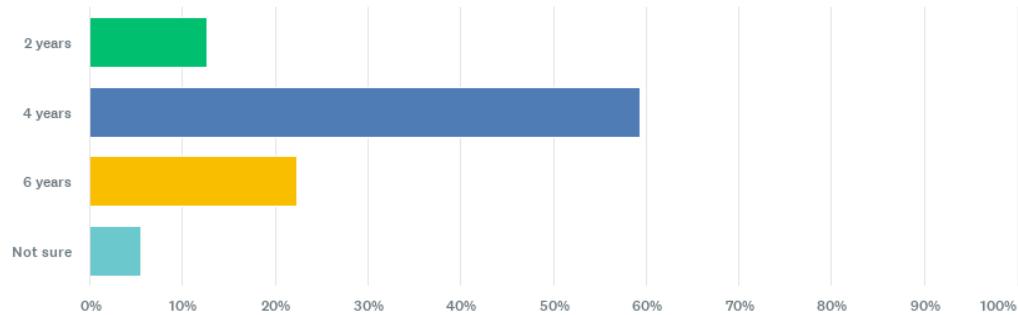


Q7 Lincoln County Commissioner elections should be (elections are currently partisan):

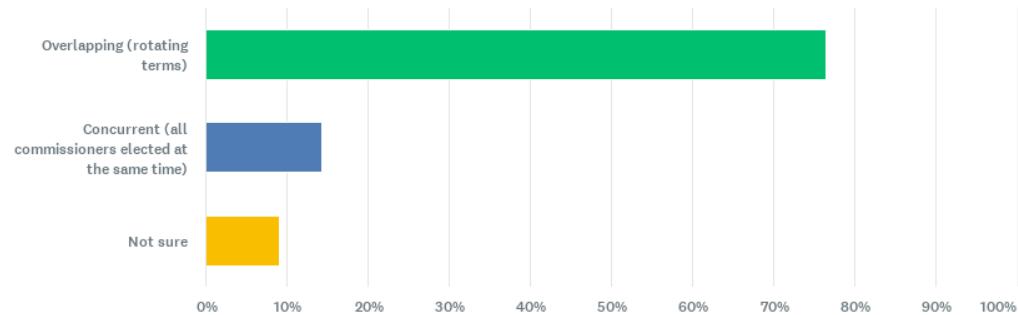


When examining the term length of the county commissioners, an overwhelming majority (72.1%) of the participants expressed that the current six-year term was excessive. A clear majority (59.4%) of the participants preferred a four-year term, a significant minority (12.7%) preferred a two-year term, while one in four preferred to leave the term at six years. See Q8 below. Furthermore, a vast majority (76.5%) of the respondents recommended that the county commission terms remain overlapping. See Q9 below.

**Q8 The term of office for Lincoln County Commissioners should be (current term is 6 years):**

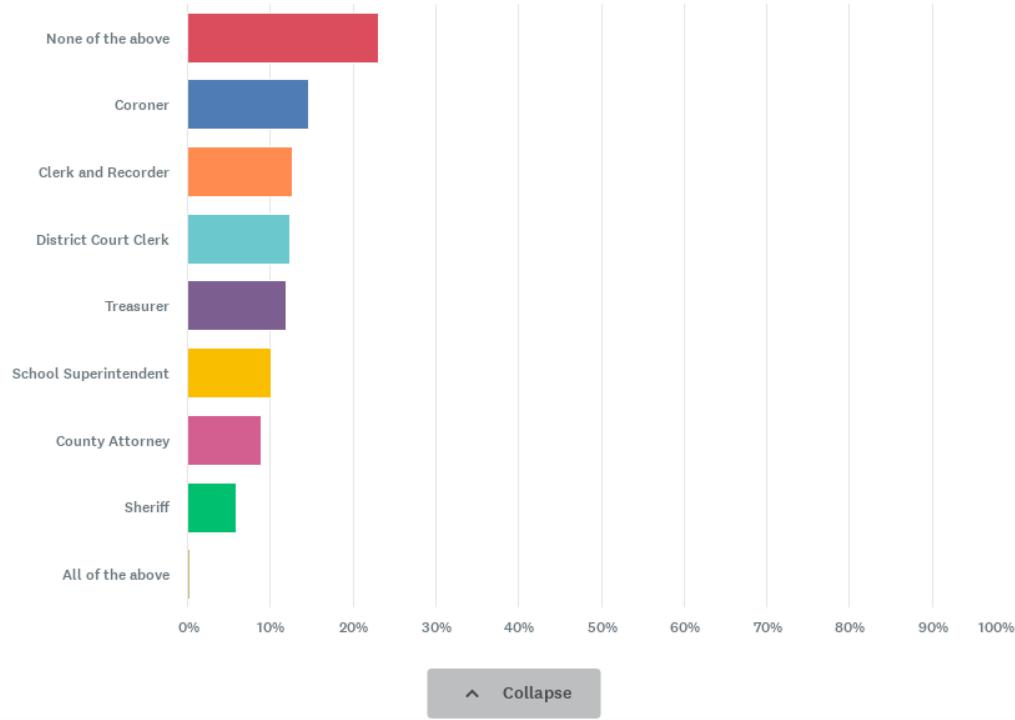


**Q9 Lincoln County Commissioner terms should be:**



The next section of the survey considered elected positions other than the commissioners within the county. Respondents were probed as to whether other positions in Lincoln County should be appointed rather than elected. A quarter (23.4%) of the participants in the survey answered that none of the positions should be appointed. A moderate portion believed the coroner (14.6%), the clerk and recorder (12.7%), the district court clerk (12.3%), the treasurer (12%), the school superintendent (10.3%), and/or the sheriff (5.9%) should indeed be appointed. See Q10 below.

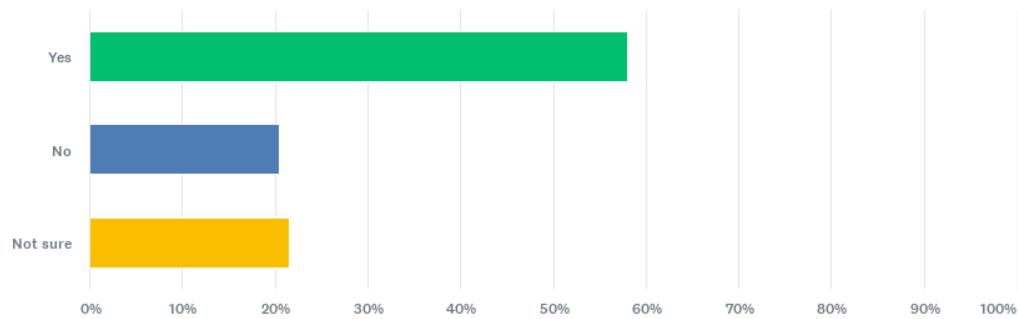
**Q10 The county would benefit if the following positions were appointed rather than elected.  
(Check all that apply)**



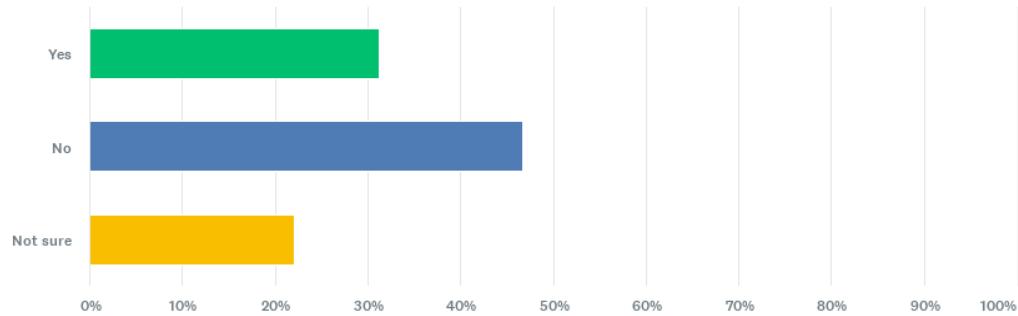
The survey then queried whether Lincoln County would benefit from hiring a professional to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and prepare budget recommendations. A significant proportion (58%) recommended the county add the position in

question, a minority (20.4%) were opposed, while others (21.6%) remained unsure. See Q11 below. When asked if Lincoln County would benefit from electing an executive to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and hold veto power over the commissioners, nearly half (46.7%) were opposed, a third (31.2%) were in favor, while others (22.1%) remained unsure. See Q12 below.

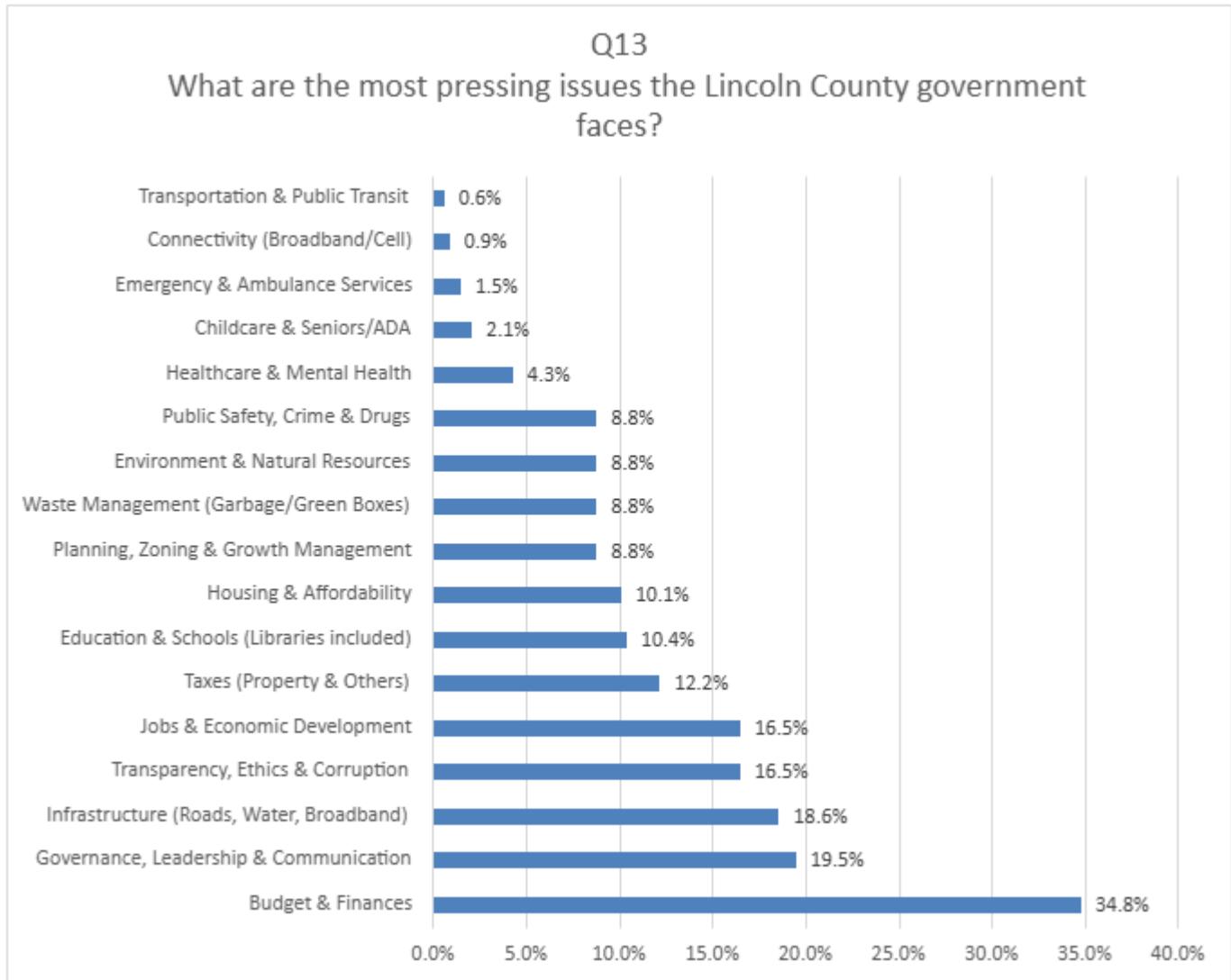
**Q11 Lincoln County would benefit by hiring a professional to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and prepare budget recommendations.**



**Q12 Lincoln County would benefit from electing an executive to administer daily operations, hire personnel, and hold veto power over the commissioners.**



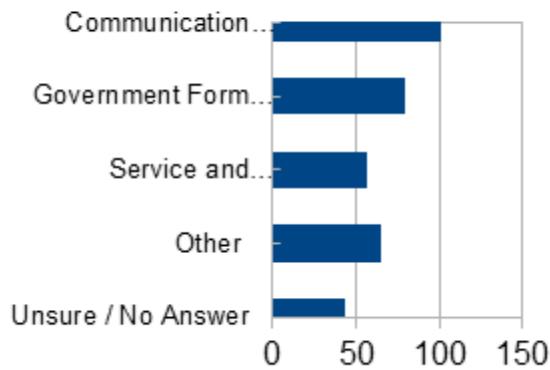
The next section of the survey offered the participants an opportunity to answer several open-ended questions. Numerous responses were verbosely offered when queried as to what they perceived was the most pressing issues the Lincoln County Government faces. See Q13 below for common themes.



Question 14 asked respondents to identify a single government function that they would like to see changed. Perhaps the most broad category is Communication and Accountability. This category covers, in addition to what is stated, a perceived lack of transparency and, in some cases, the need for more oversight to minimize alleged ethical misconduct by governing officials.

Other respondents suggested specific changes to form and plan would benefit the county as well. The hiring of a County Administrator and reinstating non-partisan elections proved the most common responses. (NOTE: Due to the open-ended nature of the question, answers fell into any number of categories; however, the chart below attempted to compile answers into a more limited amount.)

**Q14: What is the one thing you would change about the county government?**



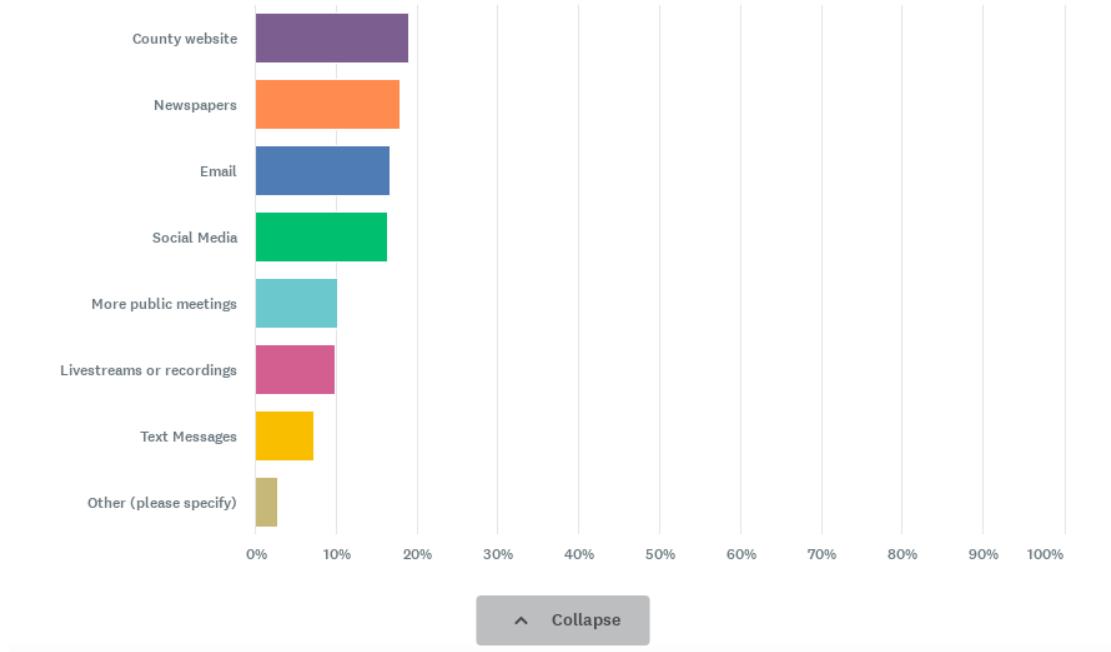
The final open-ended question queries whether the participants had anything else to add to the Lincoln County Government Study Commission's scope. The themes of the responses can be seen in Q15 below.

**Q15 Regarding the Lincoln County Government Study Commission's scope (government form, power, and plan), is there anything else you wish to add?**



And finally, the survey participants were urged to convey their preferred mode or medium in which to receive updates from the Lincoln County government. These modes/mediums included the county website (19%), newspapers (17.9%), email (16.7%), social media (16.3%), more public meetings (10.2%), live streams or recordings (9.8%), text messages (7.2%), and others (2.8%). See Q16 below.

Q16 Given multiple options, how would you prefer to receive Lincoln County updates?  
(Select all that apply)



**References**

U.S. Census Bureau (2024). *QuickFacts Lincoln County Montana*.

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/lincolncountymontana/PST045224>