

National Litter Study Highlights and Key Trends



KEEP AMERICA
BEAUTIFUL

Let's do beautiful things



Litter is Declining Across America, but the Work is Not
Done. Litter is Still a Major Problem

Litter Rates Did Not Drop By Accident
Americans Want to Make a Real Difference

Everyone Has a Role to Play in Sustaining this Progress
and Tackling the Challenges Ahead

Study Background



50 BILLION
pieces of litter are on the ground in America:



24 BILLION
pieces along **roadways**
(2,587 pieces per mile)



26 BILLION
pieces along **waterways**
(2,411 pieces per mile)

Litter is **significant** and **solvable**.



↓ 54%

Reduction in **visible litter**
along roadways since 2009.

Litter is **significant** and **solvable**.



90%

of Americans think **litter**
is a problem in their state.

Litter is **significant** and **solvable**.



#152andYou

Rigorous Longitudinal Study Methodology

Sampling Areas



700 National Samples Sites Across 3 Area Types
(Up from 429 in 2020)



*336 sites across 4 roadway types
(freeways, arterials, collectors, local)



*264 sites across 3 surface waterways types
(large perennial, small perennial, intermittent)



*100 across 5 coastal area types
(beaches, vegetated, armored, tidal flats, rocky/steep)

Longitudinal panel research design, where we tracked litter in the same roadway and waterway locations in 2020 and 2025 to assess change over time.

Coastal areas were sampled for the 1st time nationally

Data collection: Summer 2025, matching 2020

Research Design

National scope, stratified by four Census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, West) or coastline (Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf, Great Lakes)

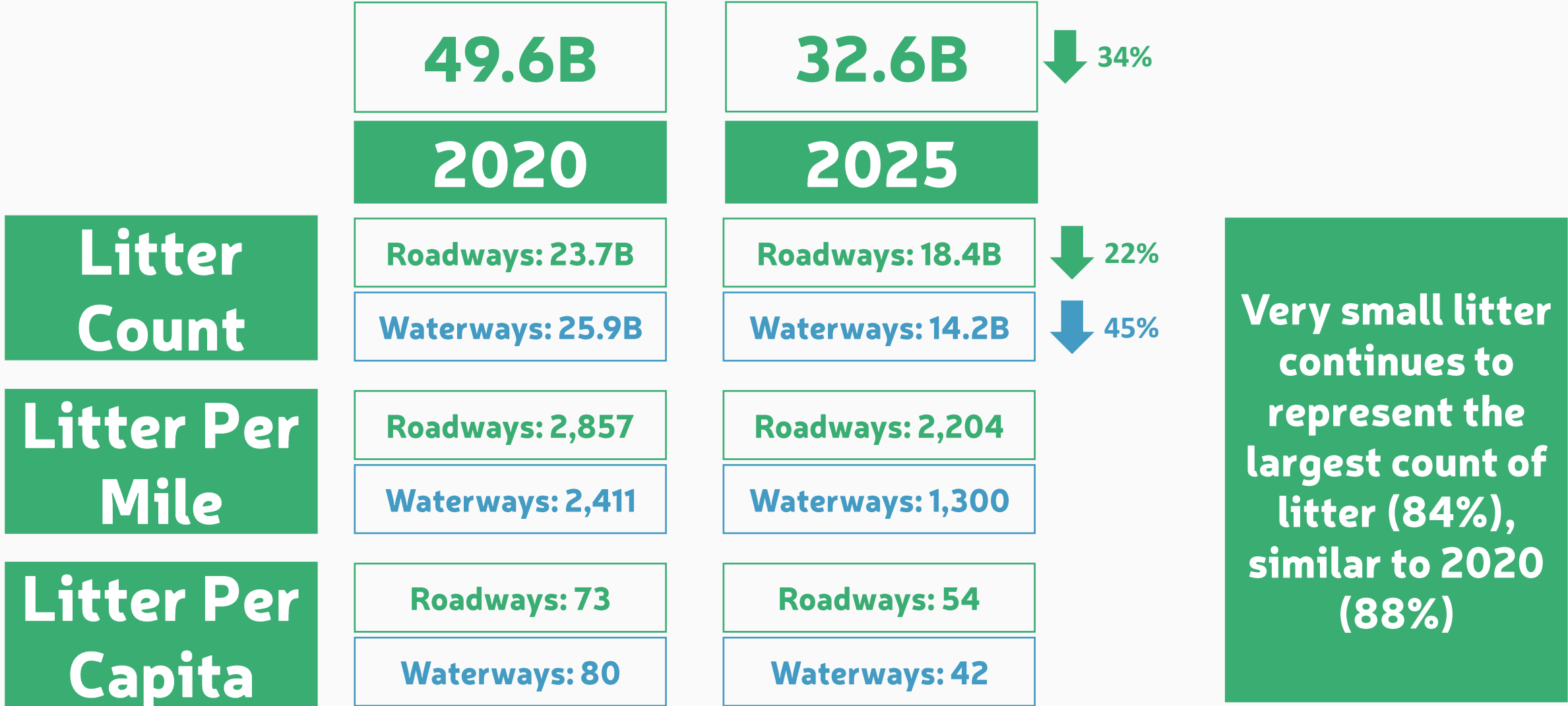
Partners hold deep litter study experience, including the 2009 and 2020 Keep America Beautiful national studies along with numerous state studies



Visible Litter Study Highlights & Key Trends



Litter is Declining Across America



Trend data represents roadway and waterway data only. Coastal data was estimated in 2025 for the first time.

Litter is down across almost all material categories

Paper

45% Reduction

Plastic

24% Reduction

Metal

30% Reduction

Glass

34% Reduction

Organics

77% Reduction

Smoking/Tobacco

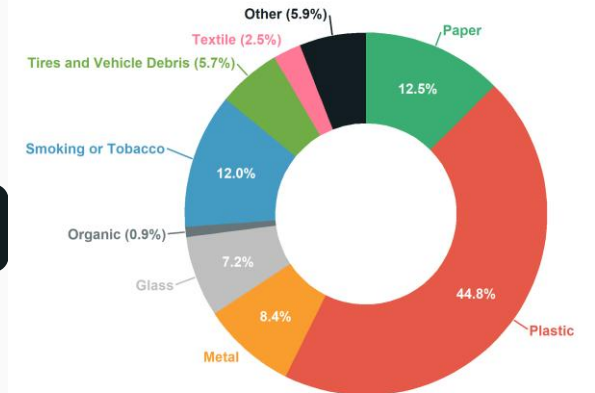
60% Reduction

Tires/Vehicle Debris

INCREASE 36%

Of the 17B piece reduction in litter along roadways and waterways, the largest contributors were Smoking or Tobacco (35%), Plastics (27%), and Paper (20%).

Litter Composition



The Work is Not Done. Litter is Still a Major Problem

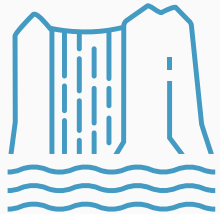
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Roadways: 18.4B pieces

2,200 pieces/mi

88%



Waterways: 14.2B pieces

1,300/mi

78%



2.4B Coastal Areas

16,800 pieces/mi

91%

Over 120 Products Tracked

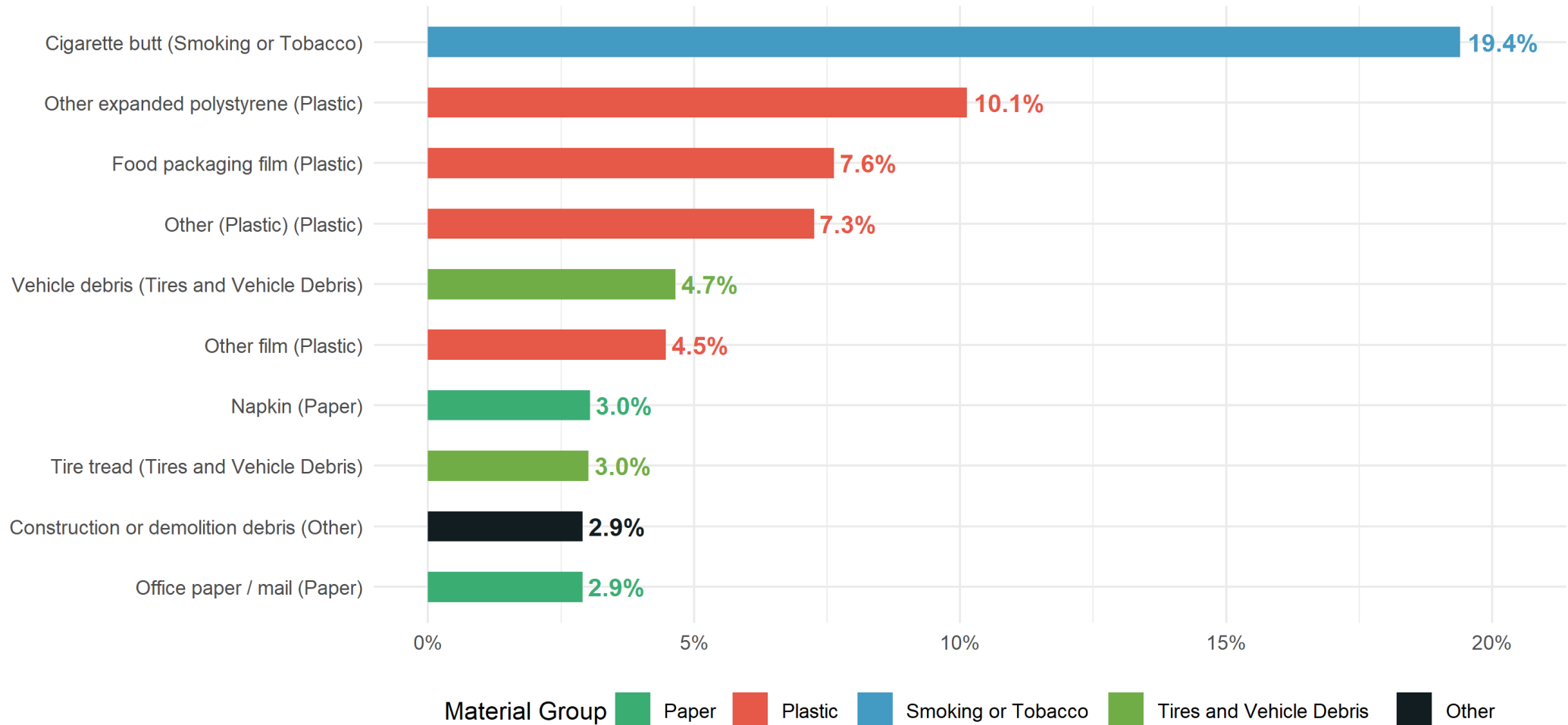
Table 3-4: Aggregate Count of Litter by Material Group, Roadway, Waterway, and Coastal

Litter Type	Litter Subtype	Roadway	Waterway	Coastal	Total	Percent Total
Paper	Fast food bag	66,101,200	19,602,100	214,800	85,918,100	0.2%
	Fast food cup (Paper)	22,952,400	13,803,300	618,600	37,374,300	0.1%
	Other fast food service item (Paper)	373,585,300	13,042,300	12,989,700	399,617,300	1.1%
	Cardboard	266,246,400	84,957,600	3,837,700	355,041,700	1.0%
	Kraft bag	21,682,400	383,200	3,205,300	25,270,900	0.1%
	Receipt	67,929,000	254,856,800	4,005,300	326,791,100	0.9%
	Political sign	601,100	0	0	601,100	0.0%
	Other advertising sign	9,043,200	13,591,100	1,519,700	24,154,000	0.1%
	Office paper / mail	507,684,200	287,420,600	3,019,900	798,124,700	2.3%
	Newspaper / insert	10,725,700	86,848,600	487,200	98,061,500	0.3%
	Magazine	2,060,800	211,300	0	2,272,100	0.0%
	Book	5,247,600	902,900	0	6,150,500	0.0%
	Aseptic / gable top container	2,375,600	10,644,700	105,500	13,125,800	0.0%
	Beverage carrier / carton	1,934,400	7,191,600	376,700	9,502,700	0.0%
	Home food packaging	266,652,900	113,653,700	6,213,900	386,520,500	1.1%
	Napkin	585,841,900	310,765,900	17,460,200	914,068,000	2.6%
	Other cup	8,036,700	32,259,000	0	40,295,700	0.1%
	Wine or liquor container	853,200	8,552,400	0	9,405,600	0.0%
	Other (Paper)	366,805,200	241,486,800	10,520,200	618,812,200	1.8%
	Subtotal	2,586,359,200	1,500,173,900	64,574,700	4,151,107,800	11.9%
Plastic	Soda (Plastic)	22,110,900	40,607,000	3,691,900	66,409,800	0.2%
Other	Other camping item	29,597,500	5,855,800	981,800	36,435,100	0.1%
Other	Subtotal	1,125,245,300	813,020,100	64,784,600	2,003,050,000	5.7%
Total		18,403,372,900	14,203,486,900	2,388,099,800	34,994,959,600	100.0%



Roadways Top 10 Most Littered Items

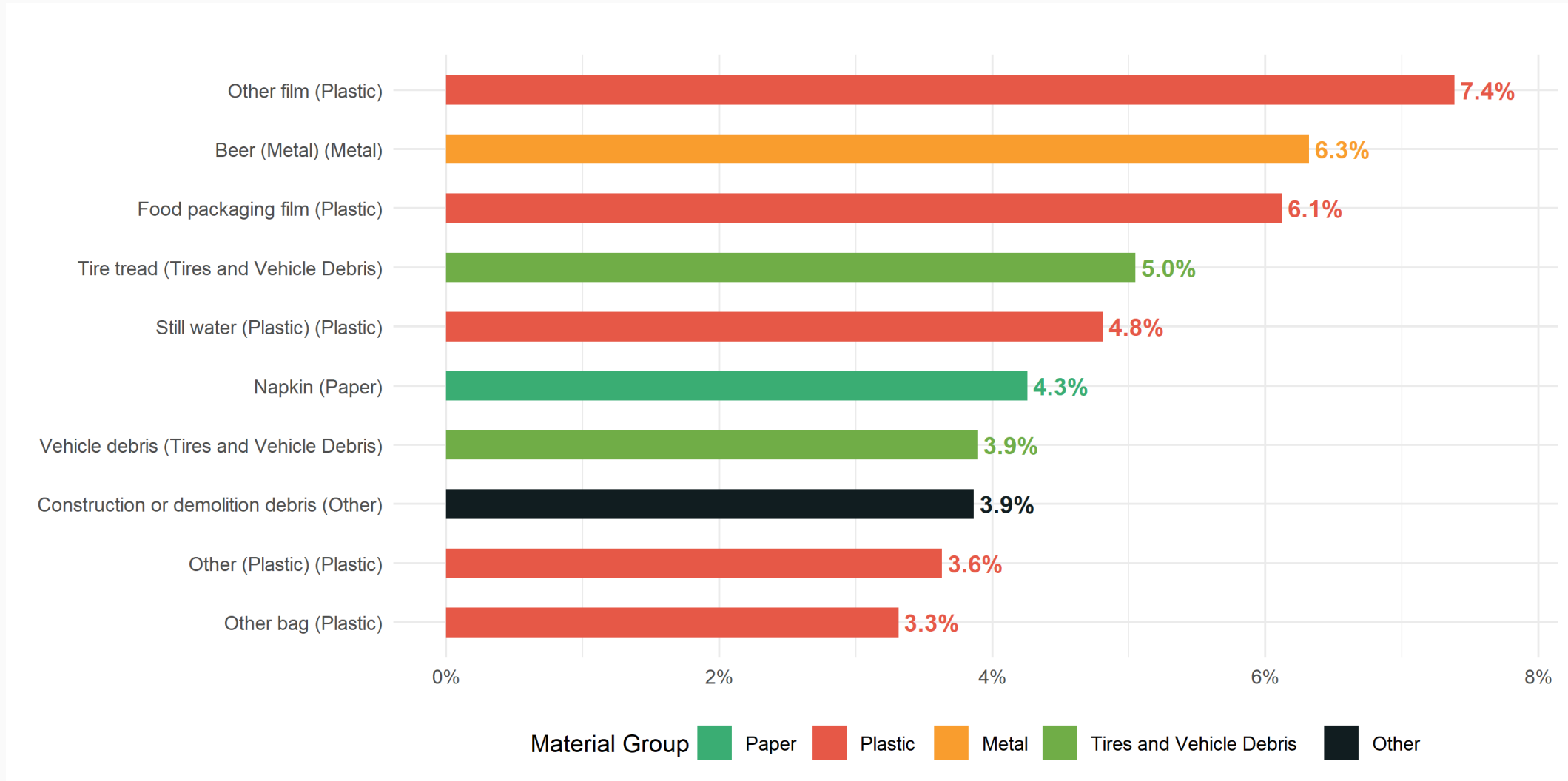
Smaller (<4")

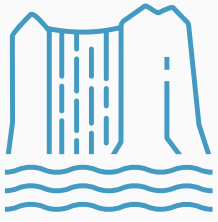




Roadways Top 10 Most Littered Items

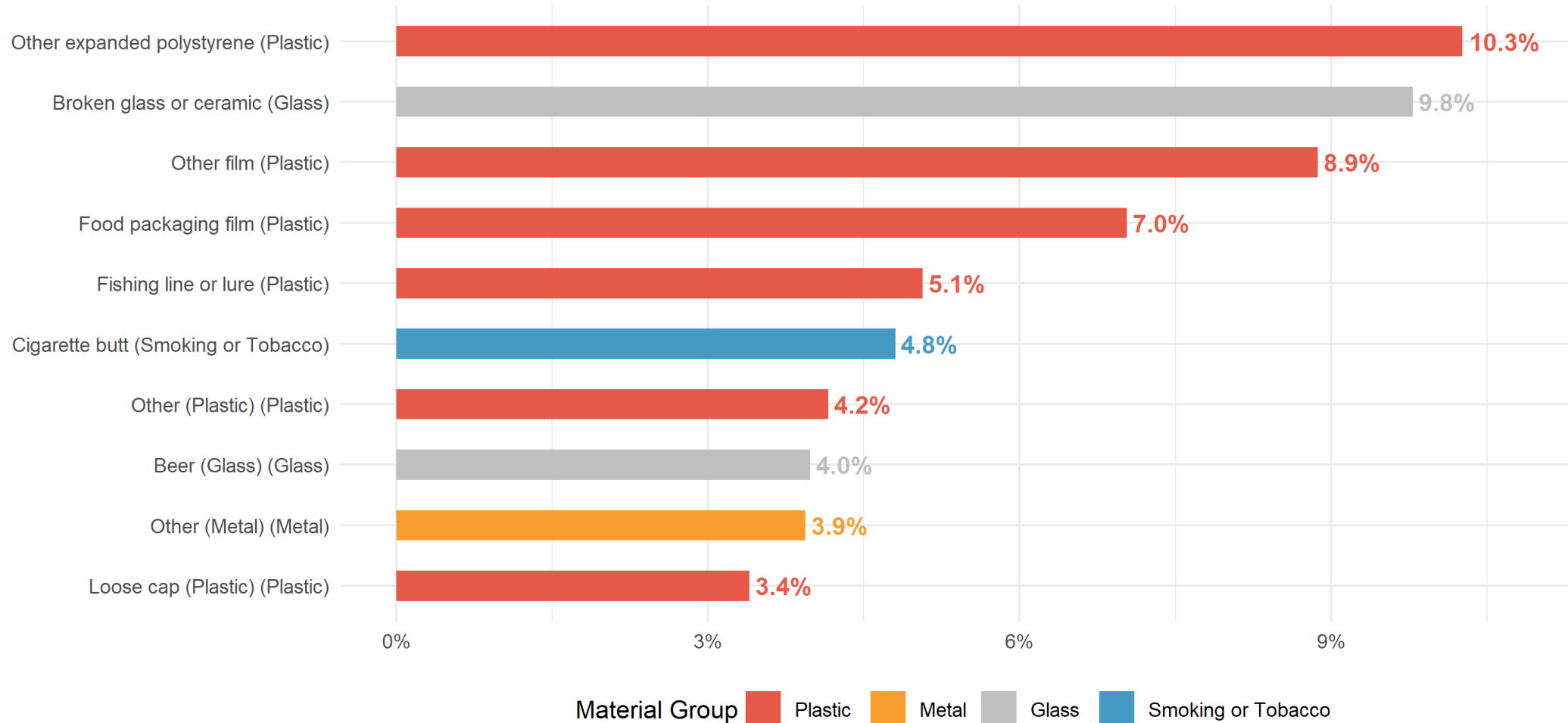
Larger (4"+)

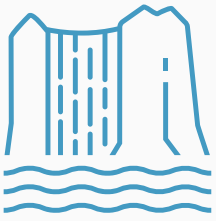




Waterways Top 10 Most Littered Items

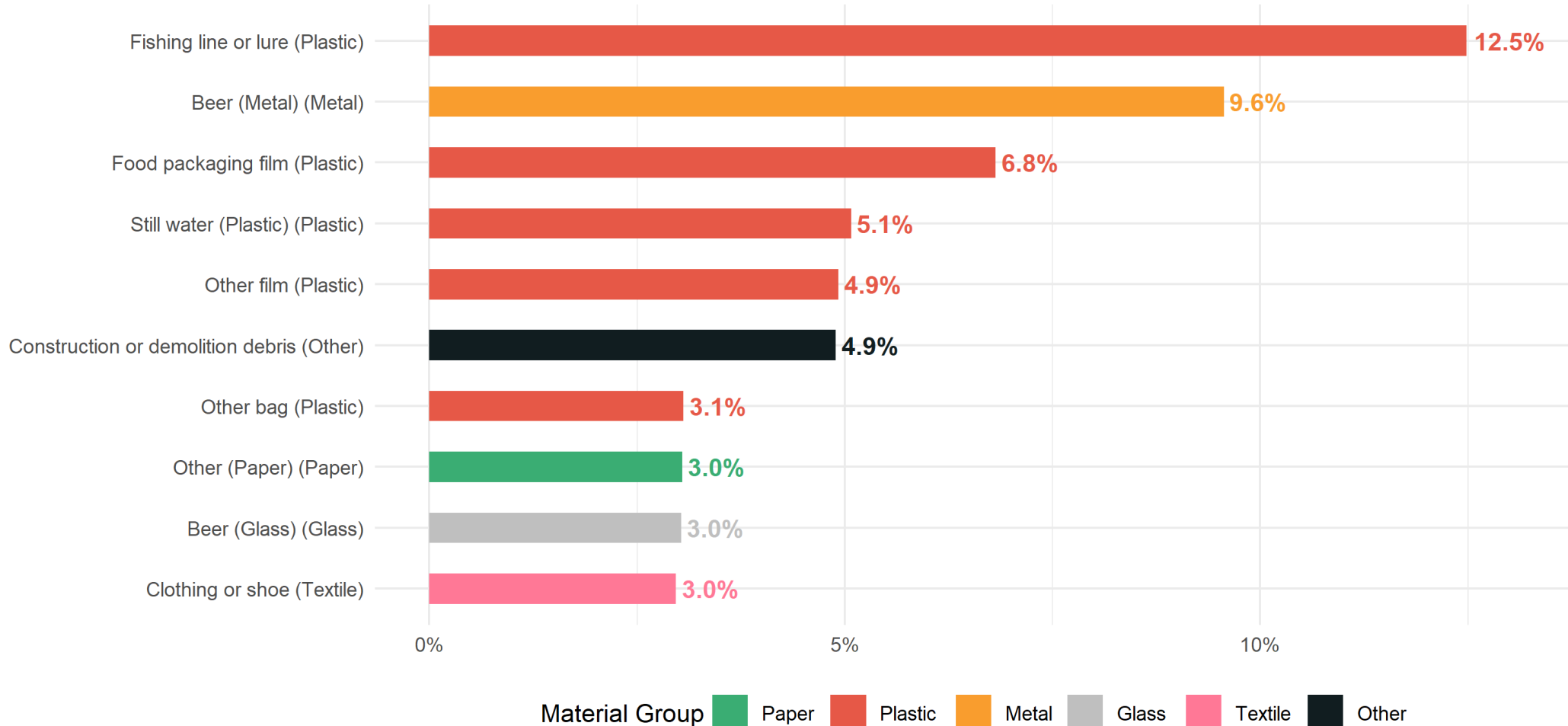
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Waterways Top 10 Most Littered Items

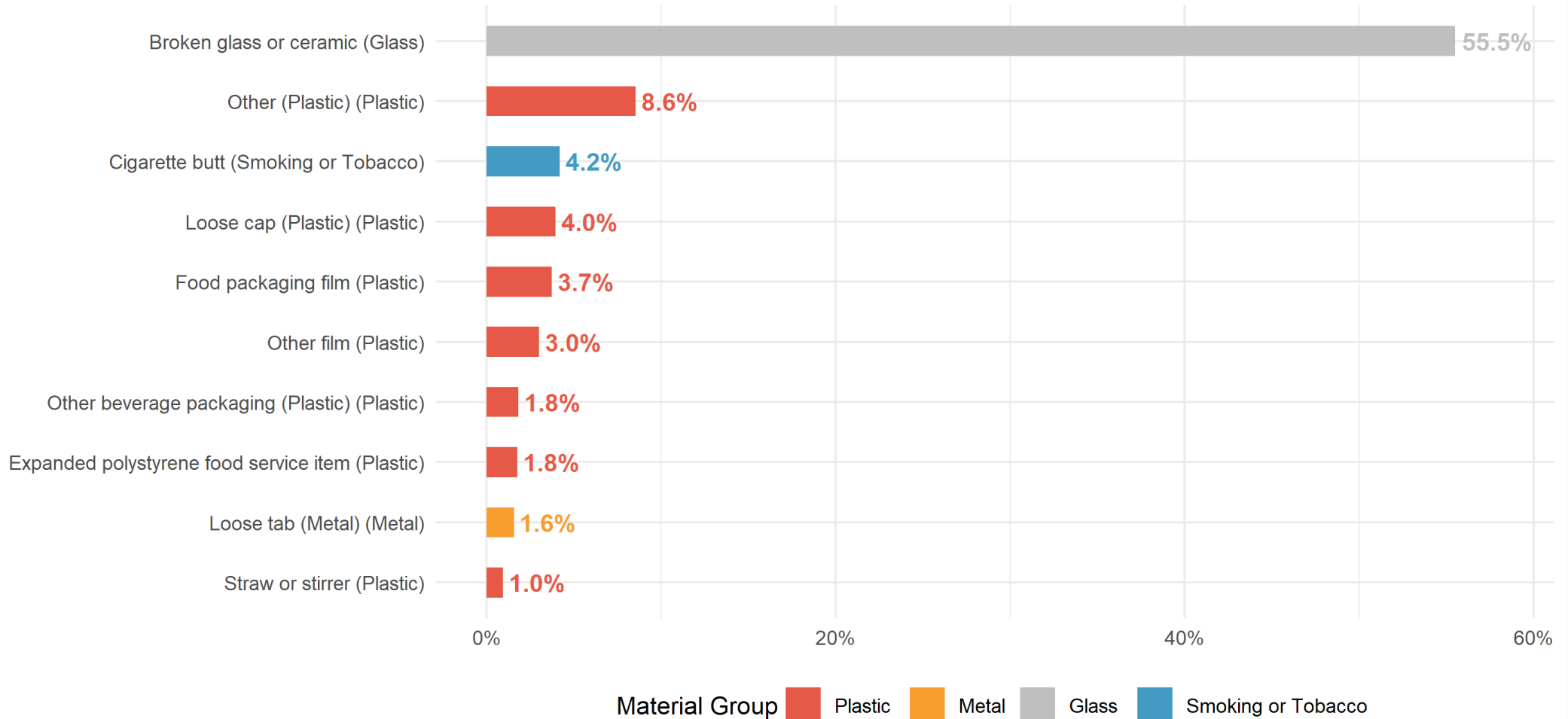
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Coastal Top 10 Most Littered Items

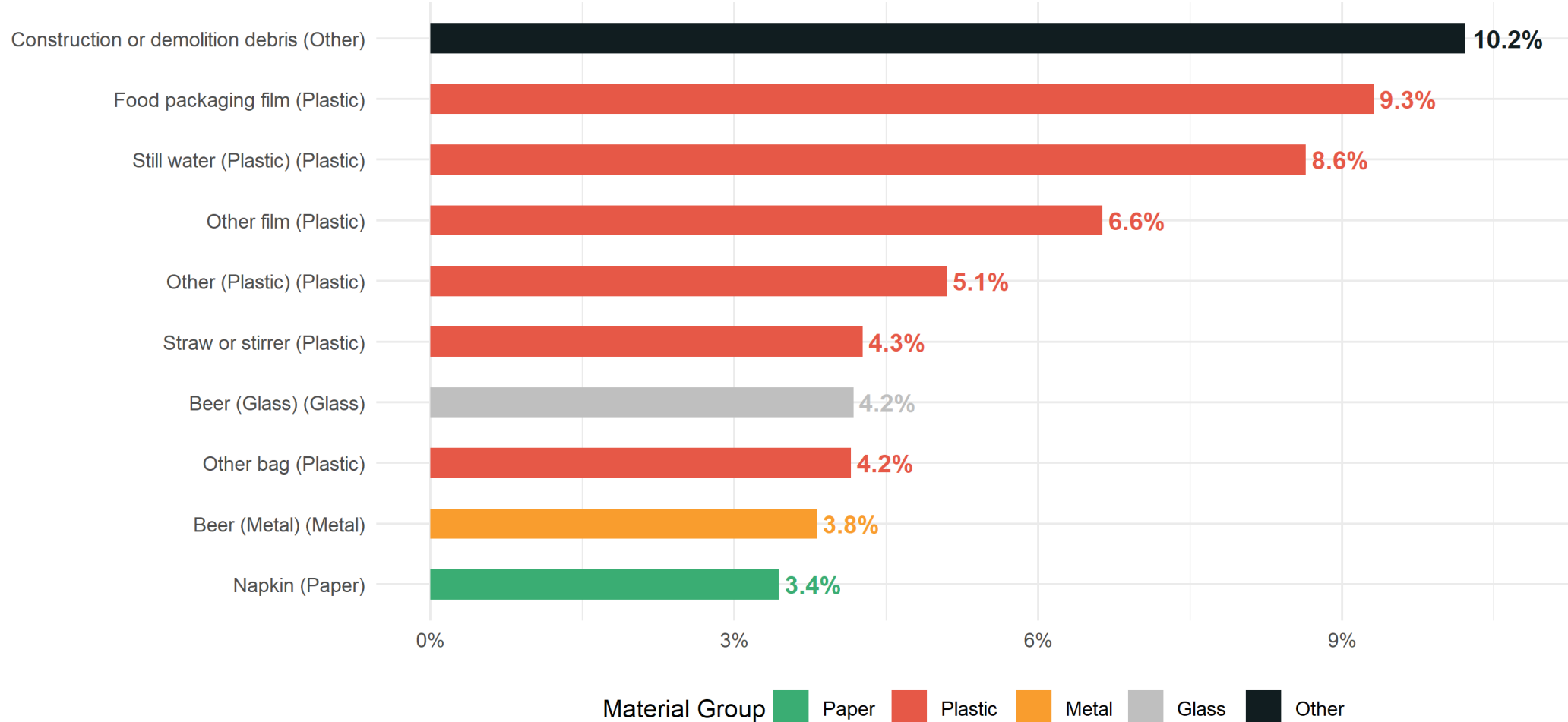
Smaller (<4")



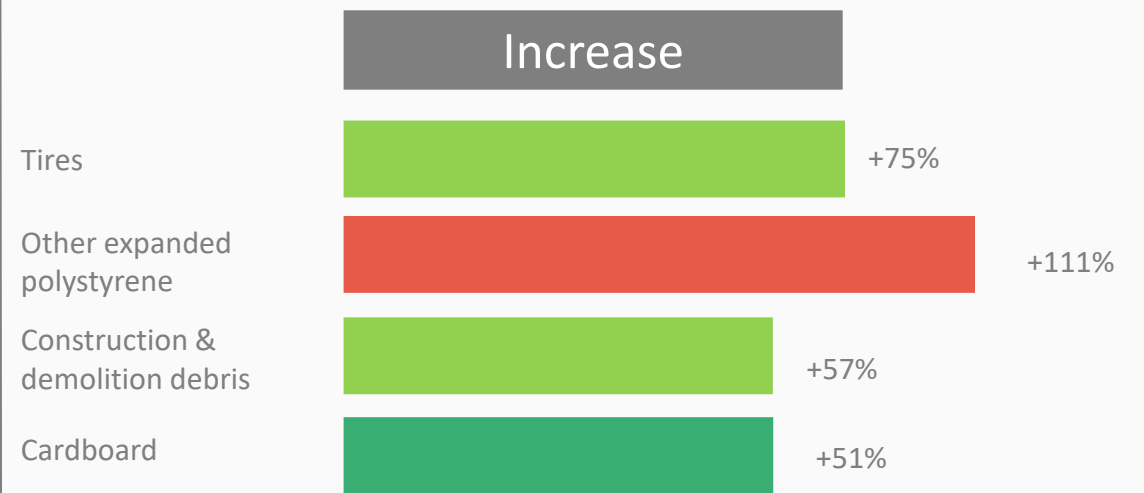
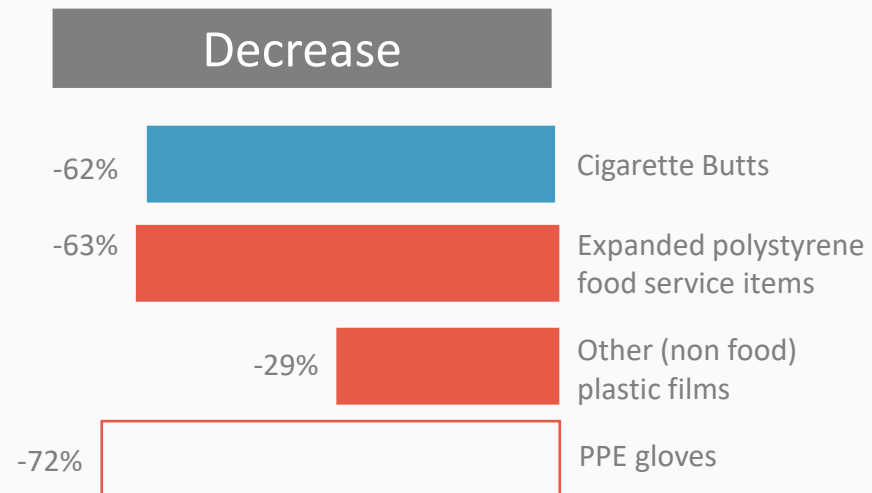


Coastal Top 10 Most Littered Items

Larger (4" +)



Notable Product Changes 2020-2025



Coastal Litter Problem Presents Different Challenges

Coastal environments are far more varied than roadways & waterways & present more diverse litter problems & patterns.

US Coastal Areas	16,804 pcs/mi
Percent U.S. Coastline	Litter Pieces Per Mile
Beaches 9%	7,359 pcs/mi
Vegetated 74%	20,265 pcs/mi
Armored 11%	7,761 pcs/mi
Tidal Flats 0.2%	55,703 pcs/mi
Rocky/Steep 6%	2,649

Public Attitudes Survey Review



Public Attitudes Toward Litter

- Harris Poll conducted a large national survey to determine what Americans think about litter today
- What do we find? The work of Keep America Beautiful is meeting the moment in many ways

Methodology

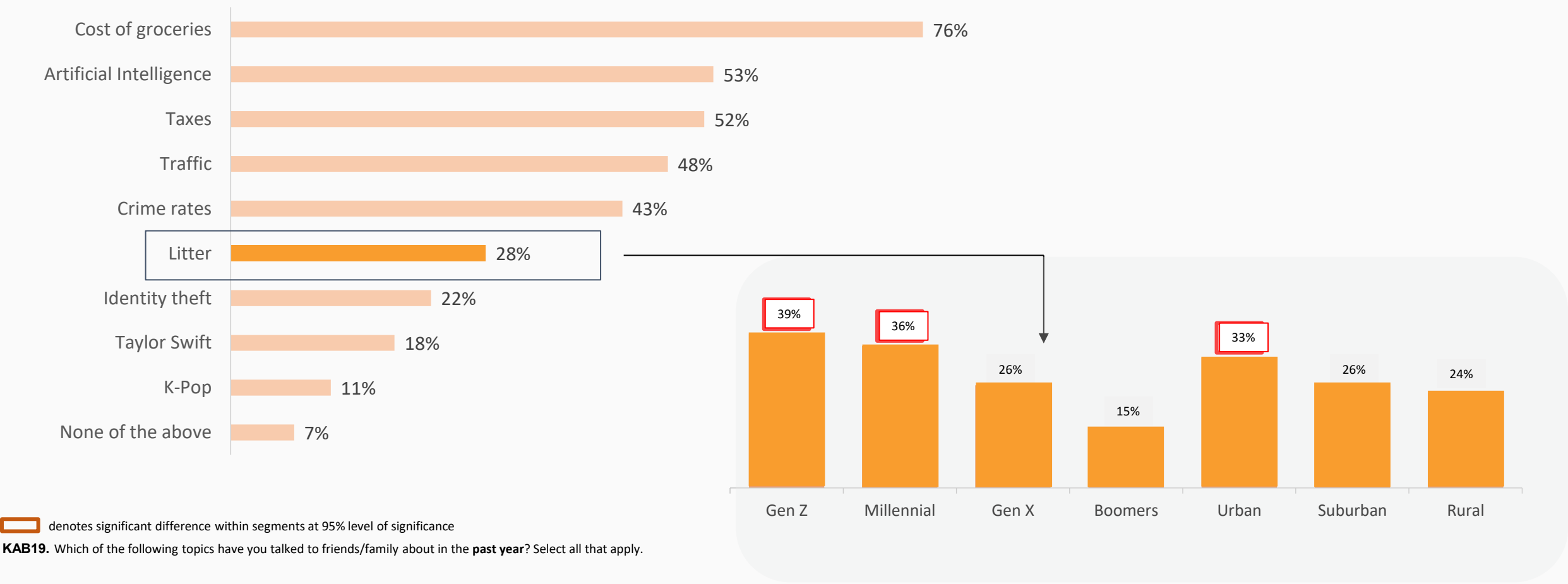


2025 National Litter Study
Public Attitudes Component

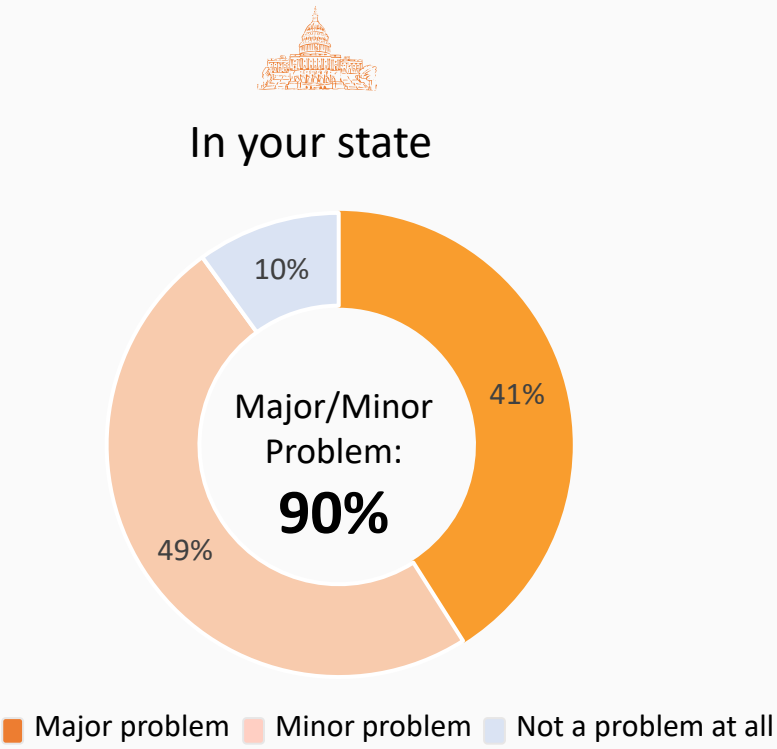
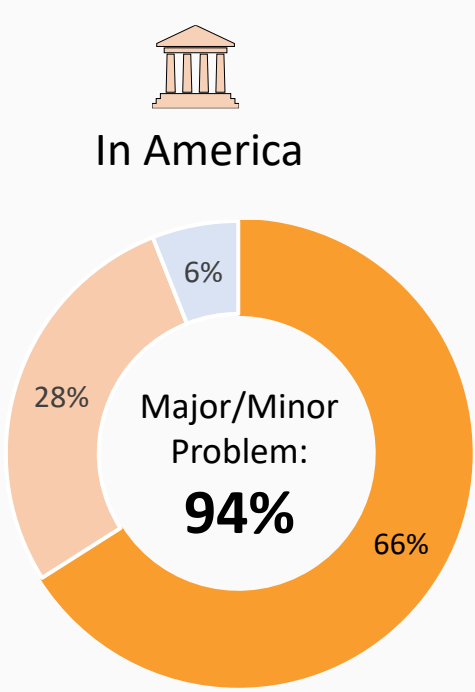
- Sample Size 3,000 residents
- Nov 26 – Dec 11, 2025
- US General Population

Though inflation tops the list, many Americans are talking about litter; Litter buzz are loudest among younger and urban audiences

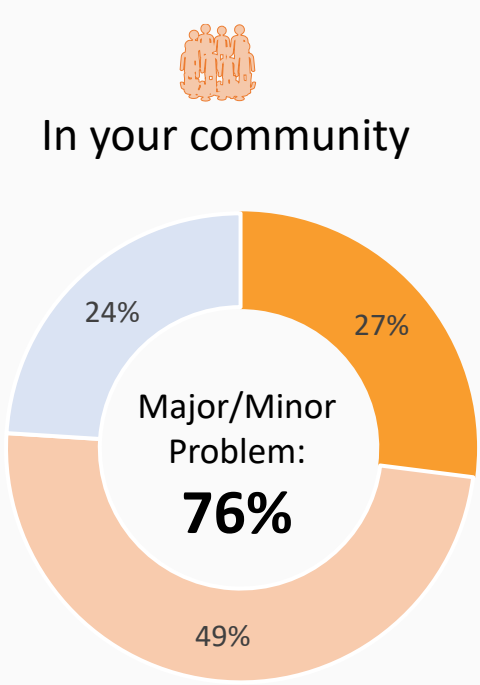
Conversations around Litter



Vast majorities of Americans believe that litter is a problem across the country – yet the problem is perceived as greater ‘further from home’

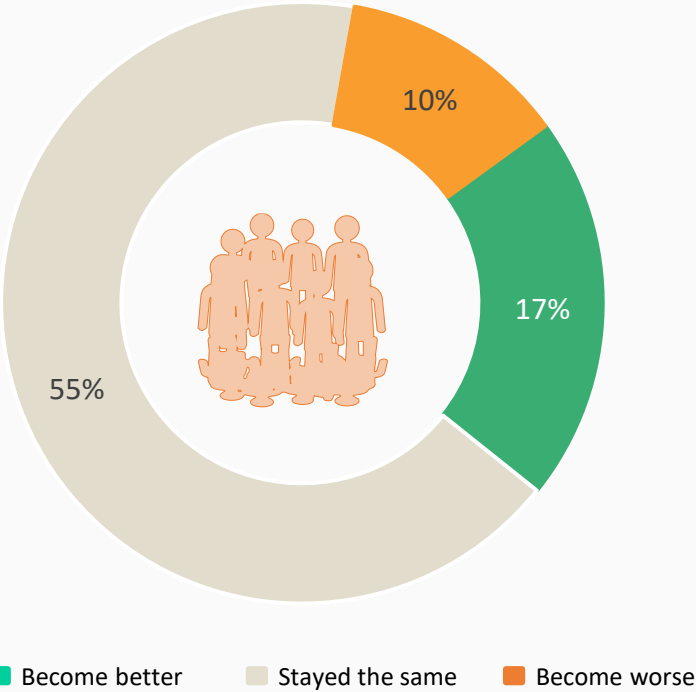


No change from 2020:
The same proportion of Americans (90%)
considered litter a problem in their state in 2020.

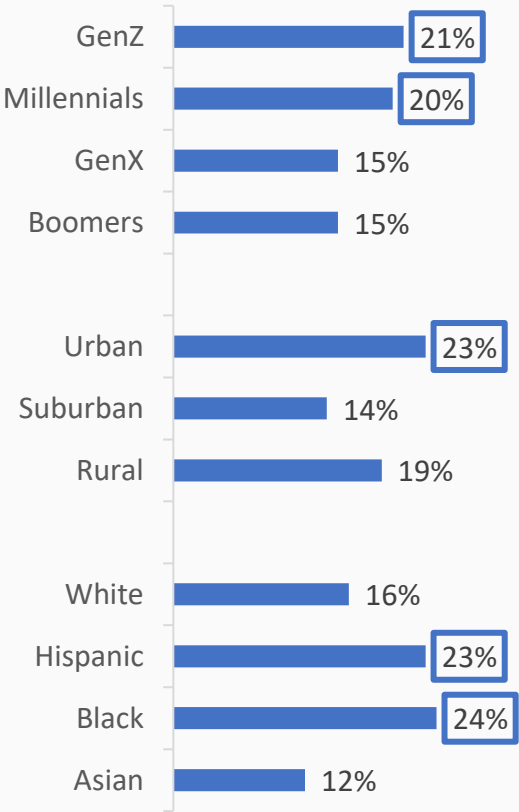


Little has changed over the past 5 years. Among those who feel it has become better are younger, urban and some POC

Perceived Change in Community's Litter Problem

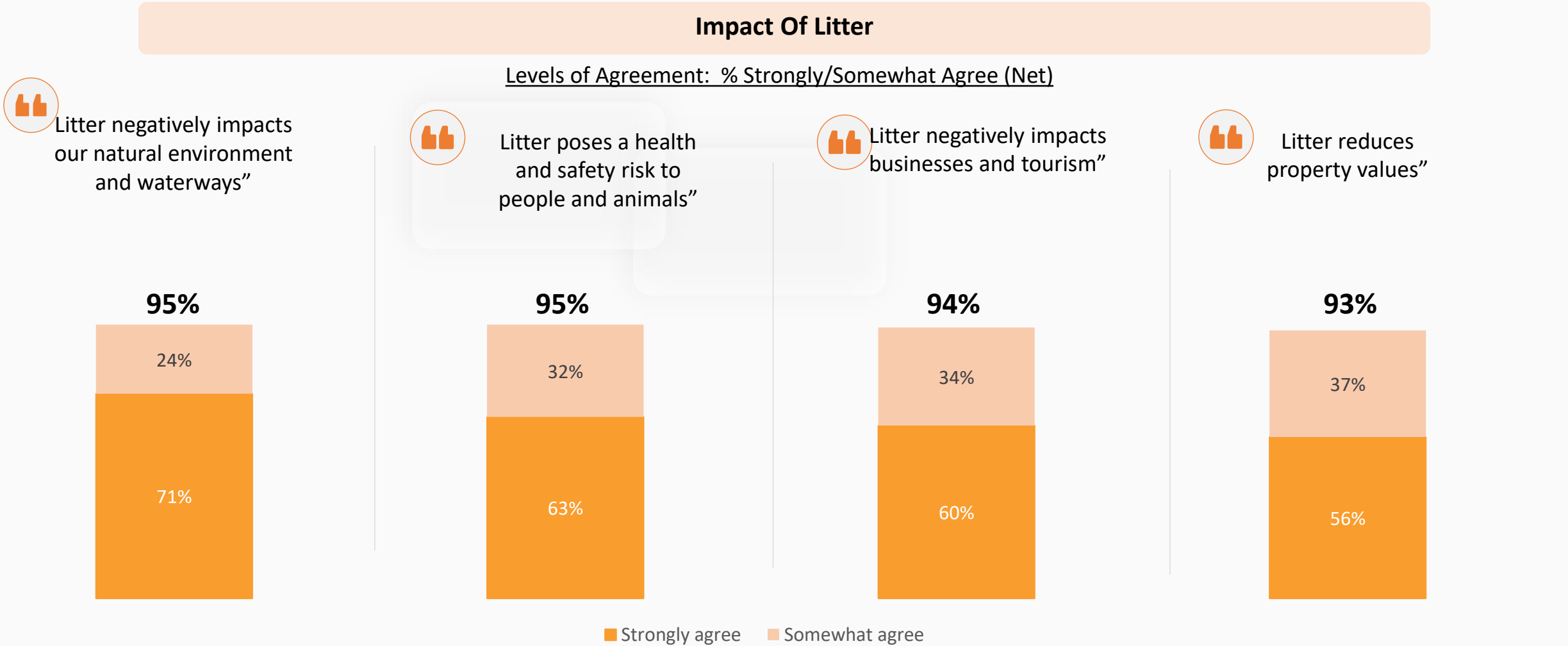


Among those who say Litter has become better

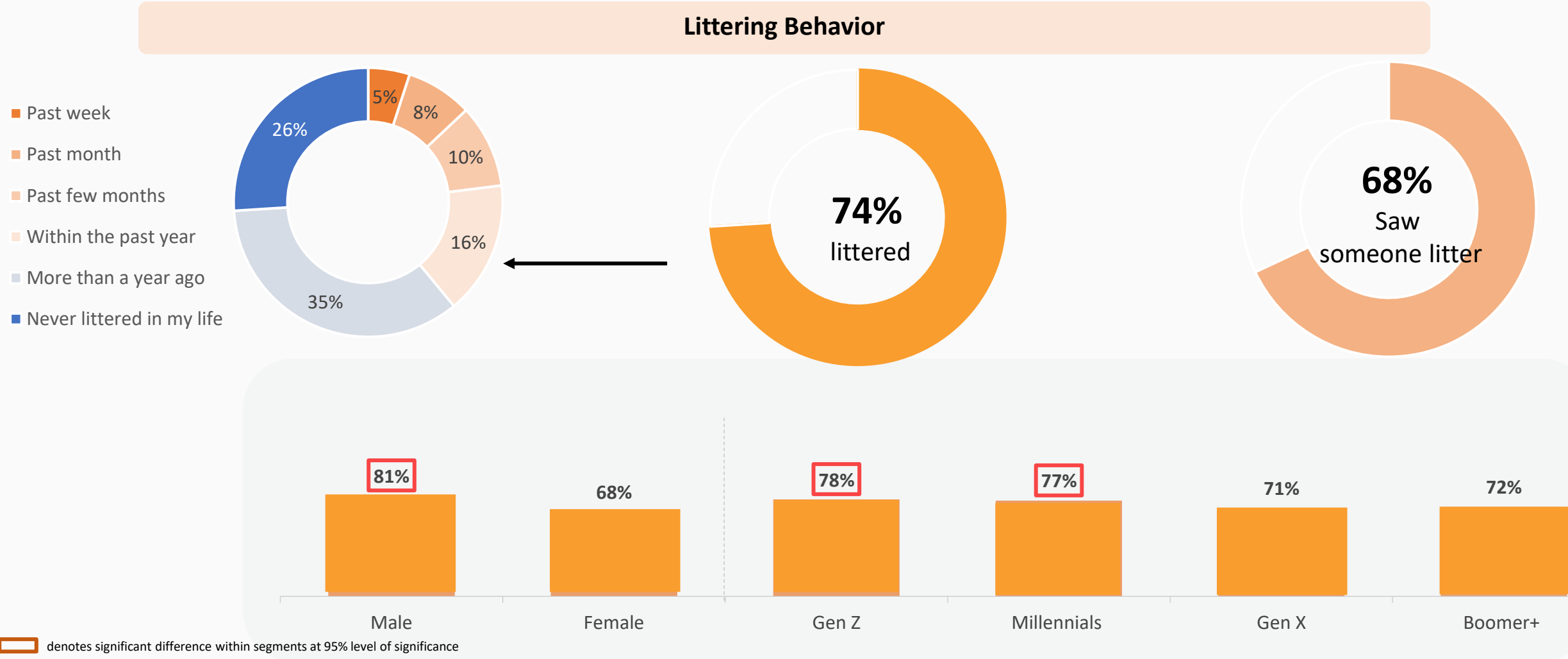


denotes significant difference within segments at 95% level of significance

Moreover, Americans near-universally understand the negative impact of litter on the environment, health, business and property values



Despite recognition of the negative impact of litter, the vast majority of Americans confess they have contributed to the problem



KAB10. In the past year, how often did you litter either intentionally or unintentionally? Which best describes you?
KAB9. Have you seen someone litter in the past year?

Americans across party lines believe that keeping America clean and green is a top priority and shared responsibility; most are willing to step up

Community involvement (% Strongly/Somewhat Agree)

93%

“All community residents have a shared responsibility to help reduce litter”

92%

A significant increase from 78% in Feb'25

“Republican, Democrat, or somewhere in-between, cleaning and greening America should be a top priority for everyone.”

90%

“It is my personal responsibility to help reduce litter”

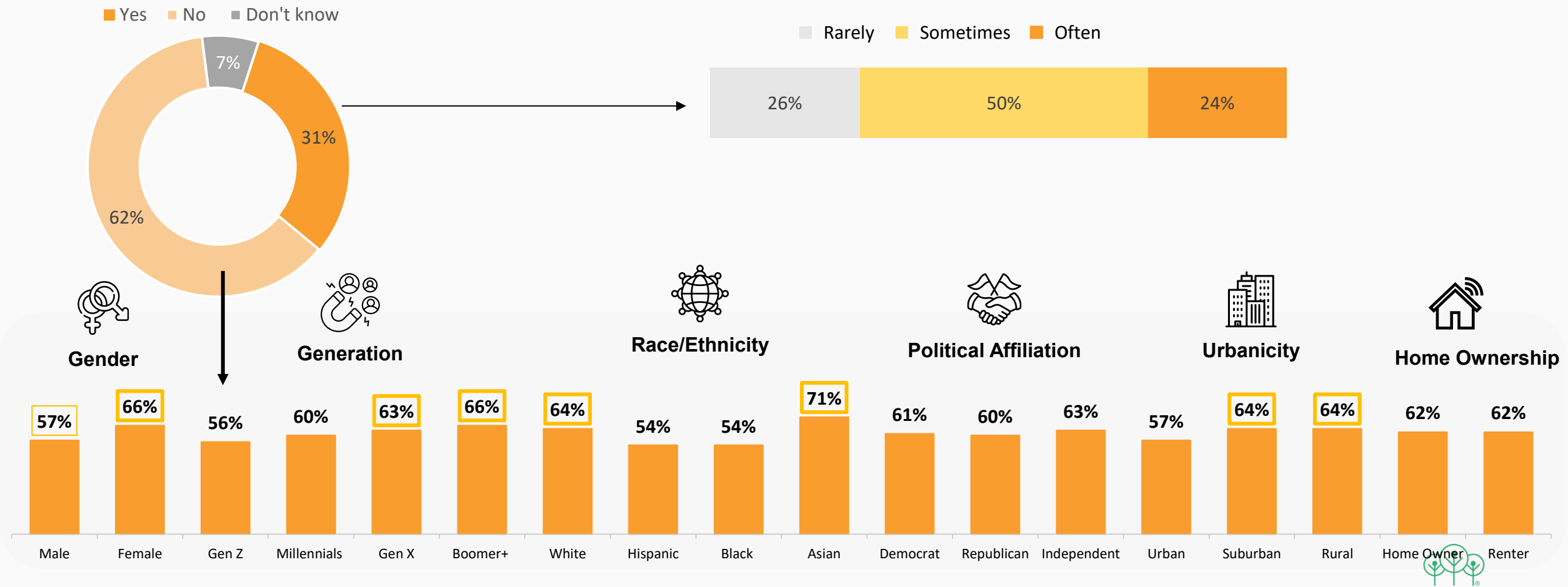
84%

A significant increase from 75% in Feb'25

“I'd love to accomplish something with my community (e.g., planting trees, improving recycling, organizing a cleanup) and bring people together in the process”

More work to be done on broad-based education. Most Americans (62%) do not recall seeing any ads for litter prevention in the past

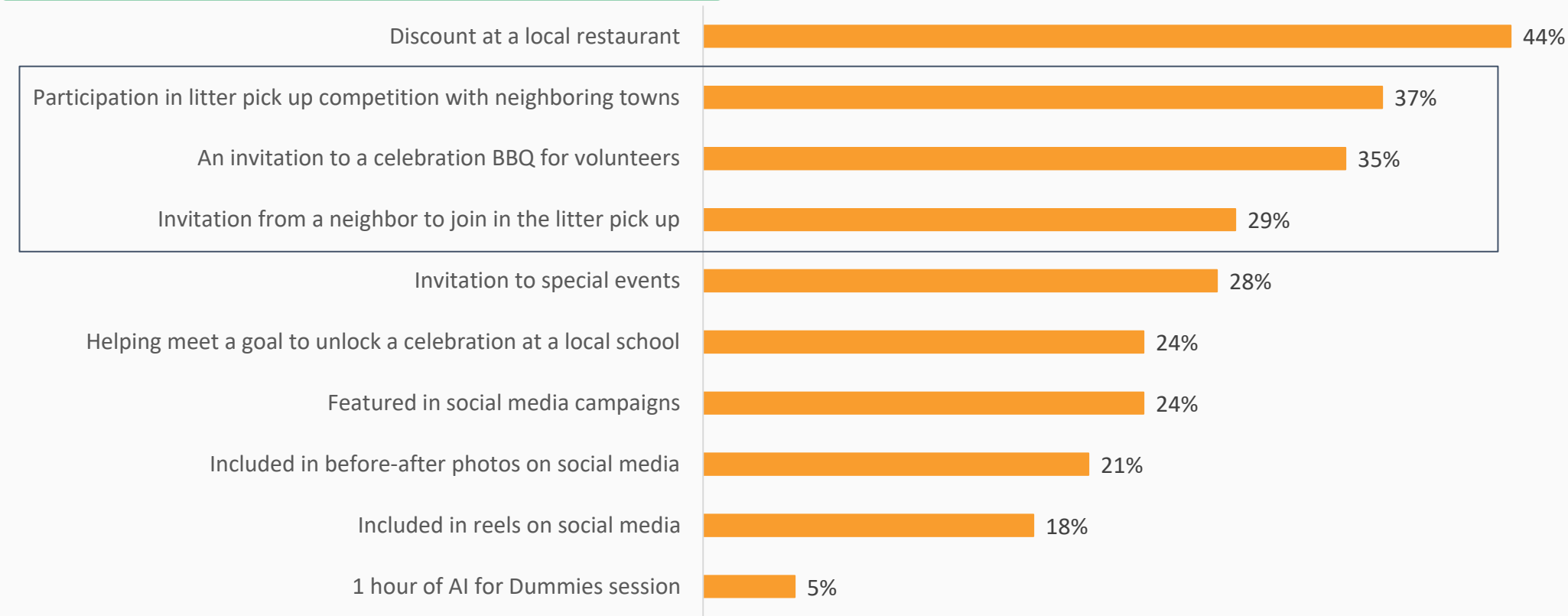
Recall of litter prevention commercials



KAB14. Have you seen or heard any ads or commercials in [your state] about preventing litter or how it is bad to throw trash into the environment, waterways, and roadways?

Beyond financial incentive, solving litter problems together as a community has the potential to motivate

Motivation to pick-up litter



KAB18. The following are a few things that could motivate someone to get off the couch and pick up litter or other community beautification activities. Please select 3 that you think would work the best.

Litter is socially relevant and part of the conversation – particularly among younger and urban audiences



Americans believe litter is a major problem, and one that isn't getting any better



There is almost unanimous agreement on the negative impacts of litter



Despite that, the vast majority confess they have contributed to the problem



What We Hope You Heard



Importantly, Americans across party lines believe keeping America clean is a shared responsibility, and there's a willingness to step up



Volunteers are expected to play a role in litter pick-up – more than the government



Trash receptacle access/convenience key excuse for littering; many believe clean-up is someone else's job

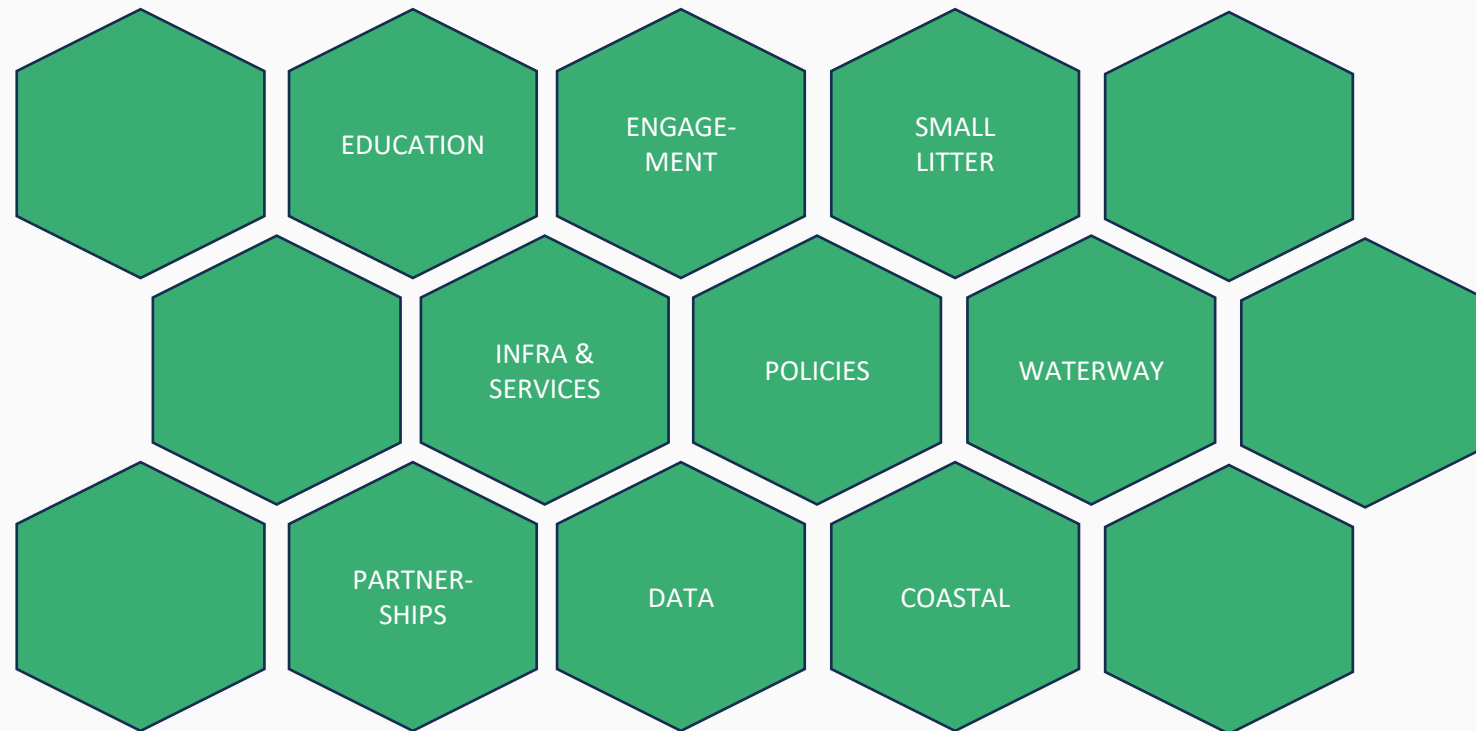


Significantly more Americans than earlier this year believe cleaning & greening America should be a top priority.

What is Working?



What Strategies, Policies, & Action Are Working Where You Are?



Q&A

