

Report on the
2025 Gallatin County Voter Survey
for the
Gallatin County Local Government Study Commission

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Dr. Eric D. Raile, Director
Social Data Collection & Analysis Services
Montana State University Bozeman

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gallatin County Local Government Study Commission (Study Commission) contracted with Social Data Collection and Analysis Services (Social Data) at Montana State University Bozeman to conduct a survey of Gallatin County registered voters about the structure of government, service delivery, and potential changes. Social Data worked with the Study Commission to construct a questionnaire and then administered the hybrid survey mostly by mail but also over the web. The procedure produced a response rate of 15.7%. The major findings from the survey include the following.

General observations

- The overall response rate is sound for a survey of this nature, suggesting healthy interest in the topic and the mission of the Study Commission.
- The response rate is solid even with a high volume of "unsure" responses throughout the data; these responses give good information about voter knowledge and awareness and are preferable to respondents formulating answers on the spot.
- The "unsure" responses come mostly from people who have lived in Gallatin County for a shorter period of time, who do not pay property taxes in Gallatin County, and who have infrequent interactions with Gallatin County employees.
- Most respondents have relatively infrequent contact with Gallatin County government employees.
- As is standard in surveys about government, the results taken as a whole present some contradictions (for example, voters in the aggregate want more government services and resources but lower taxes).

Government performance characteristics

- Voters see government information and employees as relatively accessible but are less clear about whom to contact, channels for input, and government incorporation of that input. Voters are also less clear about who is responsible for government decisions and about decision-making processes themselves.
- Voters see Gallatin County government as generally effective but are less sure about its responsiveness and whether its employees have appropriate resources to do their jobs.
- Voters agree relatively more with statements about the provision of sufficient public notice, the accountability of elected officials, and whether the current government structure still functionally meets citizen needs.
- Conversely, voters are less certain about whether non-elected officials are appropriately accountable, whether checks and balances are appropriate, and whether the power balance between elected and non-elected offices is appropriate.
- Roughly half of voters agree with statements about preferential treatment by government, whether along general, economic, geographic, or political party lines. This could well be a typical result in a survey of this nature, though.

Leadership & change

- Voters overall prefer more nonpartisan leadership positions and more minimum professional qualifications for those positions but would like to retain elections (though are somewhat mixed on that last point).

- General voter suggestions about change feature a wide range of complaints about government characteristics and more specific services.
- More pointed suggestions about changes to government structure proposed by voters include increasing the number of County Commissioners and making representation based on geography.

Comparisons

- Comparing these voter results with the employee survey results, while not a direct exercise, reveals that employees are much more positive about government performance characteristics.
- While both voters and employees talk about increasing the number of County Commissioners, only employees talk about the County Administrator position. Conversely, only voters talk about city-county government consolidation.

BACKGROUND

The voters of Gallatin County initiated a 10-year review of the current government structure and operations of Gallatin County under the Montana Constitution. The Gallatin County Local Government Study Commission (Study Commission) includes seven individuals then elected to conduct this review. As stated on the [Study Commission's website](#), its purpose is to "examine the county's existing powers, form of government, and service delivery procedures, and to compare it with alternative structures allowed under state law." At the end of its two years of operation, the Study Commission would add any recommended changes to the November 2026 ballot for voter approval. The Study Commission is focusing its efforts on community engagement and input.

To this end, the Study Commission contracted with Social Data Collection and Analysis Services (Social Data) at Montana State University Bozeman (MSU) to conduct and report on two surveys. The first is a survey of Gallatin County employees and the second is a survey of Gallatin County registered voters. The present report deals with the voter survey. Social Data, previously the HELPS Lab, has been conducting similar surveys in Montana and beyond since 2015. Social Data personnel met with the Study Commission on multiple occasions to construct and refine the questionnaire and the corresponding survey procedures.

METHODS

After significant debate, the Study Commission decided that the population of interest for the survey would be registered voters in Gallatin County rather than all adults, full-time residents, or taxpayers. Focusing on registered voters had multiple benefits. The Study Commission could obtain a complete list of all registered voters from the County. With that full list (which also provides the number of registered voters per precinct), information from the U.S. Census Bureau, and previous election results, the aggregate characteristics of the population are known. Knowing these population characteristics allows for weighting results (see below) to ensure that results are statistically representative of the population. The registered voter population is also a middle ground. The group is narrower than all adults, as it excludes part-time residents who are ineligible to vote in the County and people who are not engaged politically. The group is broader than taxpayers, as it includes renters and others who may not be paying property taxes.

The Study Commission also decided to use a hybrid survey format that included both a paper-based mail questionnaire and a web-based version of the questionnaire. The hybrid format would maximize inclusiveness and response rate. In the first wave, Social Data mailed paper survey packets to 10,920 registered voters in Gallatin County based on random sampling from the full list of registered voters. Social Data had compared the randomly drawn sample against the size of voting precincts to ensure that no precinct was significantly under-represented by mere chance. This mailing went out from October 8-14, 2025. Each packet included a cover letter, questionnaire, and pre-paid business reply envelope. Reminder postcards went out around October 30, 2025. The postcards reminded people that sending in the paper questionnaire was still an option but also directed individuals to a web-based version of the questionnaire as an alternative. A slightly different set of 80 postcards went to Gallatin County registered voters presently living internationally (for example, active military). These postcards offered the opportunity to complete the questionnaire online, given the cost and time associated with regular mail for this subpopulation.

The total number of respondents contacted, then, was 11,000. However, 868 addresses were no longer deliverable, meaning people had moved since registering to vote (including moves within the county). That left 10,132 valid mailings. The closing date for both versions of the questionnaire (paper and web) was November 30, 2025. The total number of responses was 1,589, with 1,401 completed via paper and 188 online. The overall response rate for the survey was **15.7%** (1,589 out of 10,132). The response rate varied from 5-23% across precincts, though the bulk of precincts (33 of 46) had response rates in the 10-18% range. The 4 precincts with the lowest response rates (5-6%) were not in rural areas (i.e., MSU campus area, northwestern Bozeman, and western Belgrade).

The Study Commission strongly emphasized the importance of confidentiality in the survey process. Social Data used authorization codes unique to individuals to: (1) control access to the questionnaire and help ensure responses were likely coming from intended individuals; (2) curtail the ability of bots to take the survey (an increasingly vexing problem); (3) prevent duplicate responses from individuals; (4) reduce spending on reminder postcards; and (5) allow for weighting responses based on respondent voting precincts. However, no files shared with the Study Commission or the public contain information that would allow linking any responses to individuals. As such, all data and results are anonymous at that stage.

The questionnaire itself asked for responses to 37 items across multiple sections, as discussed in the results below. Some of these items exactly mirrored those from the employee survey, some were similar, and some were entirely new or different. The questionnaire needed to be appropriate to the general level of knowledge of the population of interest. As such, the questions posed to voters were often more general or summary in nature than those posed to employees. The instructions asked voters to think about their own views and experiences with Gallatin County government. Voters needed to average their responses across experiences or government entities, as relevant. The cover letter that accompanied the questionnaire included the following graphic, which describes Gallatin County government functions – split across non-elected and elected offices.

*There's a time and place
to have an opinion:*

RIGHT HERE. RIGHT NOW.

The Gallatin County Local Government Study is underway. Now is the time to share your voice about Gallatin County government.

FUNCTIONS THAT GALLATIN COUNTY PROVIDES INCLUDE:

NON-ELECTED OFFICES

- Weed management
- Compliance
- Fairgrounds
- Solid waste/landfill
- Court services
- Engineering
- Road and bridge
- 911
- Emergency services
- Land use planning
- Health department

ELECTED OFFICES

- County Commissioners
- Clerk of Court
- Auditor
- County Attorney
- Superintendent of Schools
- Clerk and Recorder
- Sheriff
- Justice Court
- Treasurer/Motor Vehicle Department



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COMMISSION

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Data entry proceeded in real time as paper questionnaires came back via business reply mail. Student employees at Social Data scanned the questionnaires into optical mark recognition software and typed in any remaining text. Though these students have appropriate training in dealing with human subjects data, they did not have access to any identifying information. Social Data implemented the web version of the questionnaire in Qualtrics software. Respondents could access the web-based questionnaire either through a QR code on the postcard or through a portal on Social Data's website. In either case, a respondent needed to enter an authorization code to access the questionnaire. Social Data staff eventually merged the data from the two versions (paper and web). Upon closing the survey, Social Data produced a codebook and summary of the data for the Study Commission. These documents will be made publicly available.

To ensure the sample of respondents reflects the population of registered voters in Gallatin County, Social Data weighted the sample using iterative proportional fitting. Also known as "raking," this procedure forces sample margins to approximate population margins for key demographic traits. These traits include 2024 presidential vote (based on county-level results); population size of registered voters (at the precinct level); and age, gender, and highest level of education attained (county-level characteristics). Each respondent has a weight based on these characteristics. The most meaningful effect of this weighting is making sure under-sampled groups are accurately represented in the final results. In recent years, including in Montana, groups responding to surveys at proportionally lower rates include Republicans (though particularly Donald Trump supporters); younger adults; individuals with lower levels of education; and people from rural areas. The weights typically make responses from these individuals count for "more" than they would otherwise, as relatively fewer people with such characteristics have responded. See the expanded discussion under Respondent Characteristics below for more information.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This summary of findings includes eight subsections that correspond to portions of the questionnaire. The first describes respondent characteristics. The second covers government accessibility, and the third considers government responsiveness and effectiveness. A fourth subsection investigates government transparency and accountability, while a fifth covers fairness. A sixth subsection looks at views about leadership positions. A seventh subsection analyzes open-ended responses to a question about what one thing voters would change about Gallatin County government. The eighth subsection examines the potential for more complex relationships in the data. Unless otherwise noted, all results presented are the more representative weighted results.

Respondent Characteristics

Considering both the unweighted and weighted respondent characteristics gives a sense of who responded and what the weights are doing. Therefore, this subsection discusses both. The unweighted data include 37 individuals who either indicate they are not registered voters in Gallatin County (23) or who did not respond to that question (14). The standard reasons for the former would be that the individuals have recently moved (and are still receiving forwarded mail) or forgot they are registered to vote in Gallatin County. Only 1% (unweighted) of respondents say they no longer live in Gallatin County. After dropping respondents who do not affirm their registered voter status and after applying weights, that number of non-residents drops to a total of 3 individuals (0.19%). These are likely people who recently moved but may still have useful views on Gallatin County government. The vast majority of respondents interact with Gallatin County employees relatively infrequently – monthly or less frequently (72%) or never (18%). The unweighted percentage of respondents saying they live within town or city limits in Gallatin County is 60%, which bumps up to 67% with weighting. Conversely, the unweighted percentage of respondents saying they pay property taxes in Gallatin County is 84%, with that number dropping to 64% after application of weights. Respondents saying they are not property taxpayers – either accurately because they are renters (for example) or inaccurately because they do not know that property taxes go to the County – become better represented after applying weights.

Inclusion of the next four items in the questionnaire, as described to potential respondents in the instructions, was for purposes of weighting. As is typical, individuals who have completed less education were much less likely to return the questionnaire. For example, the unweighted percentage of those with high school diplomas or GEDs as their highest level completed is 18%. That figure jumps to 41% after weighting. Similarly, only 25% of respondents are between 18 and 44 years old (inclusive). After weighting, that figure is 57%. The gender distribution is roughly equal both before and after weighting. Finally, 35.6% of respondents report voting for Donald Trump for president in 2024 prior to application of weights. That figure increases to 41.5% after weighting, closer to the true value of 46.8%. These values do not quite match because the questionnaire allows for responses that the election did not (for example, "did not vote" and "don't recall"). After removing such options, the weighted vote for Donald Trump in the data is 45.2%.

Accessibility

Voters responded to six items about Gallatin County government accessibility. The response options for these items were: strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, strongly agree, and unsure. These were also the response options for all other subsequent questions posed except the final one. The "unsure" responses are notably high here and throughout the remainder of the data. They range from 21% to 31% across this set of six statements. Such responses are preferable to respondents formulating answers on the spot. As shown in Table 1, voters are more likely to agree with assertions about accessibility of Gallatin County government information and employees. The shaded cells indicate noteworthy values when compared to others. A relatively low percentage (39%) of respondents think Gallatin County government provides clear channels for input from the public (with 30% actively disagreeing with this statement). Further, 30% disagree that it is clear whom to contact in Gallatin County government when they need something. Figure 1, following the table, provides a visual representation of this information.

Table 1. Responses to Accessibility Statements

Agree %	Unsure %	Disagree %	Statement
65	22	13	Information provided by Gallatin County government is accessible.
64	24	12	The employees of Gallatin County government departments and offices are accessible.
57	27	17	Technologies used by Gallatin County government are user friendly.
53	25	22	I can get answers from Gallatin County government when I need them.
50	21	30	It is clear whom to contact in Gallatin County government when I need something.
39	31	30	Gallatin County government provides clear channels for input from the public.

Notes: The reported number for "agree" is the combined percentage of respondents saying they "slightly agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" with each statement. The report for the employee survey typically excludes "slightly agree" responses as doing so is more useful for comparative purposes within that report. The same is true for the "disagree" percentage. Statements are sorted in descending order from highest to lowest agreement percentage. Rows may not add to 100% exactly due to rounding.

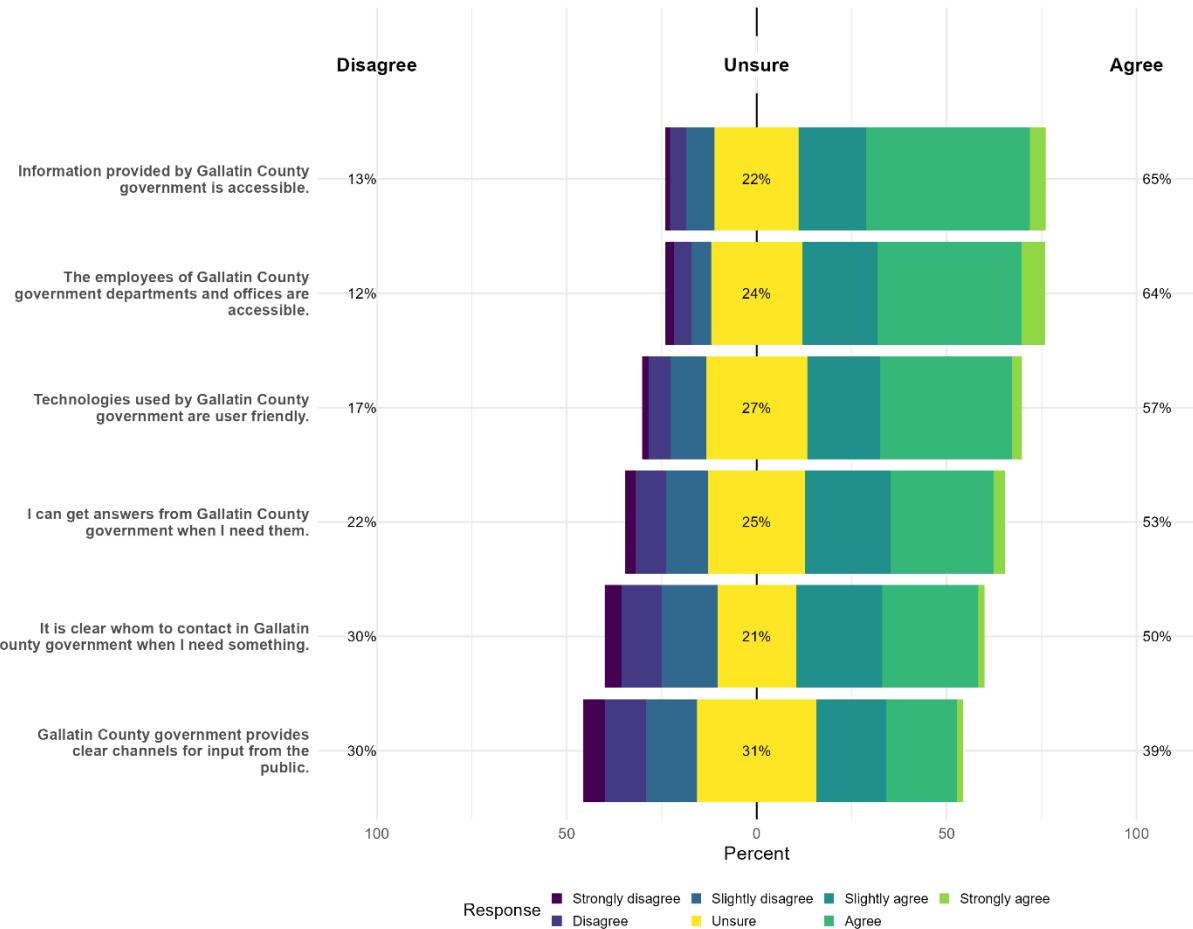


Figure 1. Responses to Accessibility Statements

Responsiveness & Effectiveness

Registered voters responded to six items about government responsiveness and effectiveness. Results for agreement with these statements appear in Table 2. "Unsure" responses are even higher here, ranging from 25% to 50% across items. Voters think Gallatin County government is generally effective in carrying out its responsibilities (57% agree). Many of them do not appear to have enough information to make judgments about responsiveness, however. Half of respondents are not sure whether employees have appropriate resources. A relatively large percentage (31%) think Gallatin County government does not meaningfully incorporate public input into its decisions. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of these results.

Table 2. Responses to Responsiveness & Effectiveness Statements

Agree %	Unsure %	Disagree %	Statement
57	25	17	Gallatin County government is generally effective in carrying out its responsibilities.
47	39	14	Gallatin County government departments and offices are responsive to initial contacts.
43	35	22	Gallatin County government deals with concerns in a satisfactory manner.
40	36	24	Gallatin County government deals with concerns in a timely manner.
34	35	31	Gallatin County government meaningfully incorporates public input into its decisions.
33	50	17	Gallatin County employees have appropriate resources to carry out their jobs.

Notes: The reported number for "agree" is the combined percentage of respondents saying they "slightly agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" with each statement. The report for the employee survey typically excludes "slightly agree" responses as doing so is more useful for comparative purposes within that report. The same is true for the "disagree" percentage. Statements are sorted in descending order from highest to lowest agreement percentage. Rows may not add to 100% exactly due to rounding.

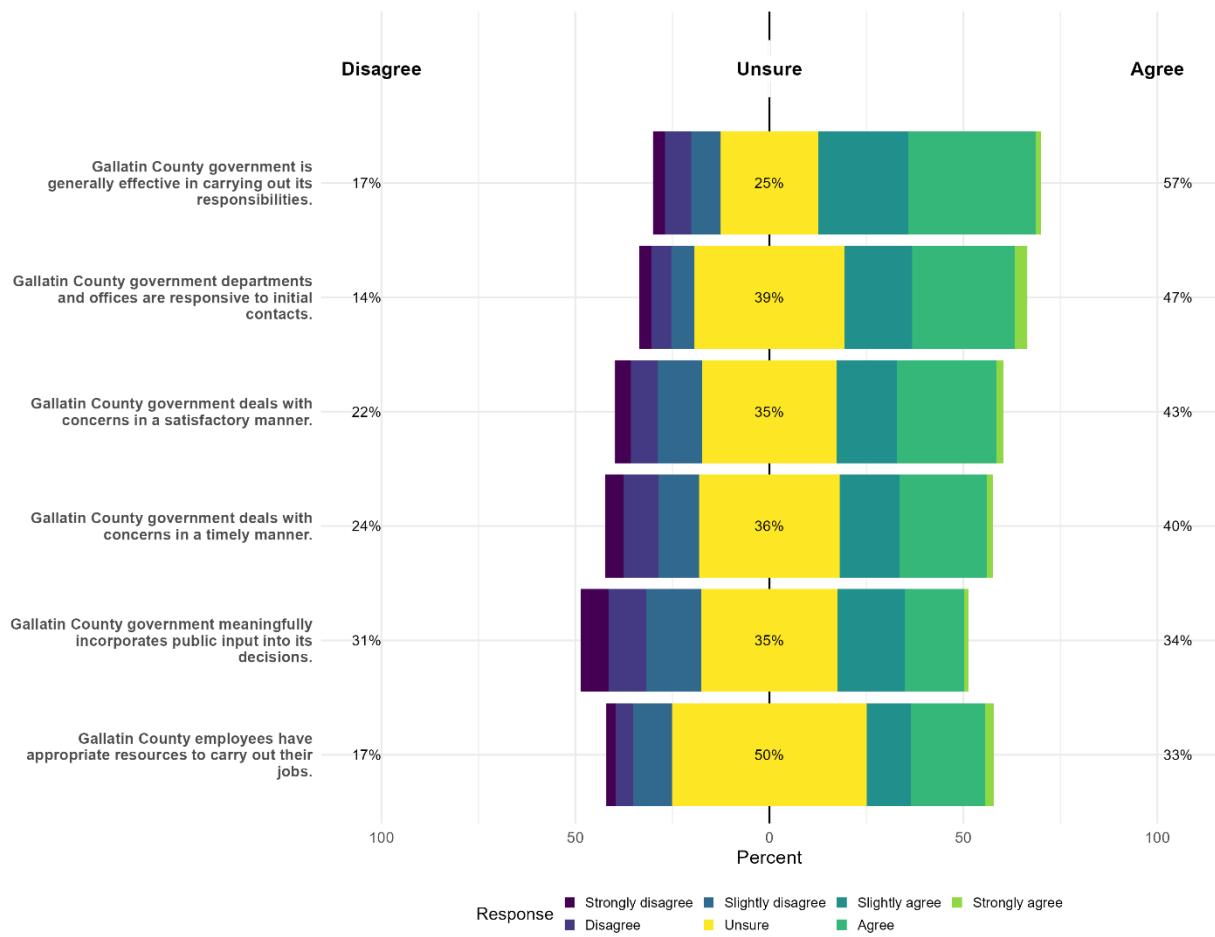


Figure 2. Responses to Responsiveness & Effectiveness Statements

Transparency & Accountability

Registered voters responded to eight items about government transparency and accountability (see Table 3). Among these statements, respondents were more likely to agree that Gallatin County government provides sufficient public notice and that elected officials are appropriately accountable. Further, 39% of respondents think the current structure of the government still functionally meets citizen needs. That is not a large absolute number, however. Relatively large numbers of respondents are unsure about the accountability of non-elected officials (41%), the adequacy of checks and balance in government (48%), and the power balance between elected and non-elected offices (53%). On the negative side, relatively large numbers of respondents disagree that Gallatin County government makes decisions in transparent ways (36%) or that responsibility for decisions is clear (40%). Figure 3 again provides a visual representation of these results.

Table 3. Responses to Transparency & Accountability Statements

Agree %	Unsure %	Disagree %	Statement
47	30	23	The departments and offices of Gallatin County government provide sufficient public notice.
39	30	31	The current structure of Gallatin County government still functionally meets the needs of Gallatin County citizens.
37	33	29	Gallatin County elected officials are appropriately accountable to the public.
32	32	36	The departments and offices of Gallatin County government make decisions in transparent ways.
31	41	29	Gallatin County non-elected officials are appropriately accountable to the public.
29	31	40	It is clear who is responsible for decisions in Gallatin County government.
26	48	25	The checks and balances in Gallatin County government are adequate.
25	53	22	The power balance between elected and non-elected offices in Gallatin County government is appropriate.

Notes: The reported number for "agree" is the combined percentage of respondents saying they "slightly agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" with each statement. The report for the employee survey typically excludes "slightly agree" responses as doing so is more useful for comparative purposes within that report. The same is true for the "disagree" percentage. Statements are sorted in descending order from highest to lowest agreement percentage. Rows may not add to 100% exactly due to rounding.

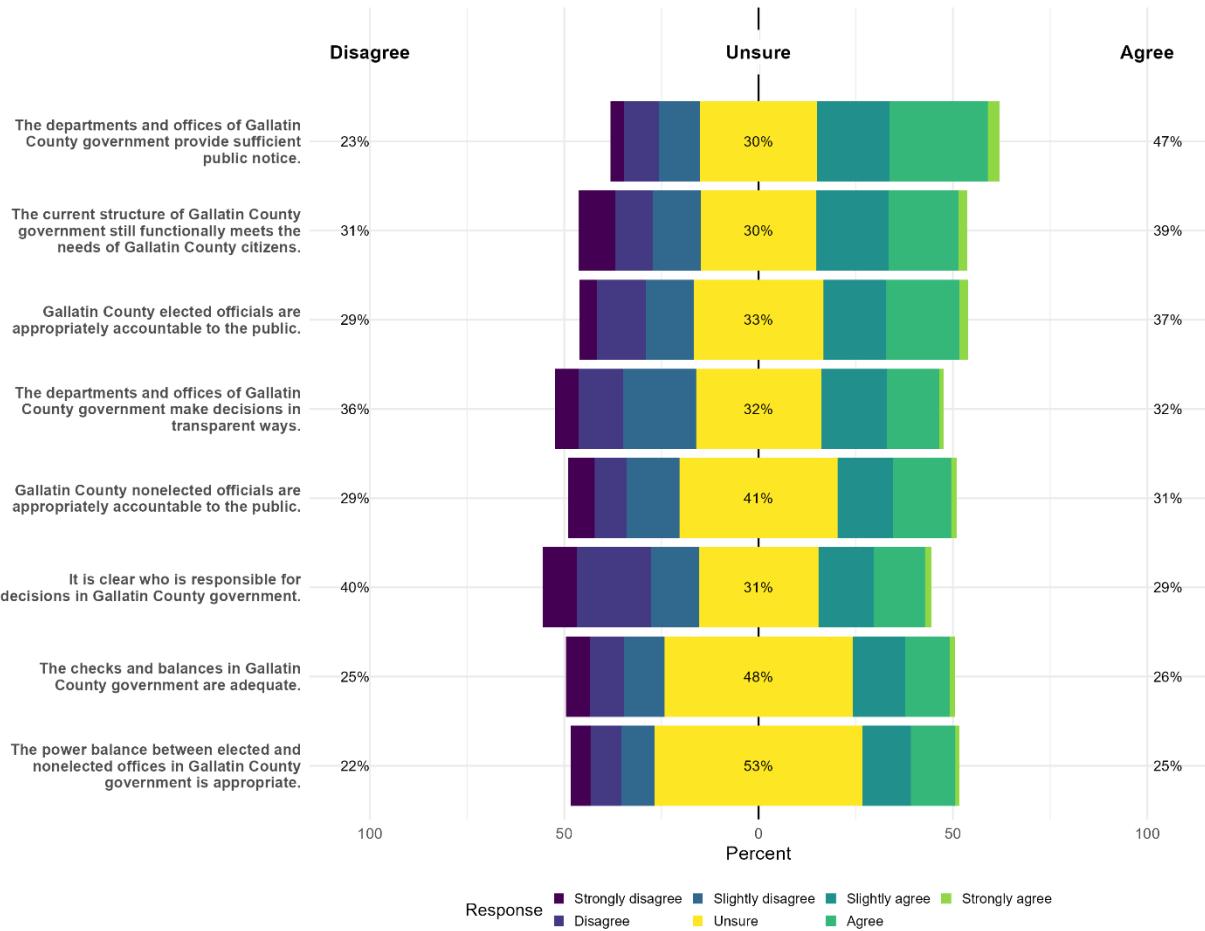


Figure 3. Responses to Transparency & Accountability Statements

Fairness

Registered voters responded to four items about fairness in how Gallatin County government treats certain groups or people (see Table 4). The phrasing with these items is about preferential treatment, so agreement is undesirable. Majorities agree that Gallatin County government gives preferential treatment generally (55%) or economically (56%). Numbers related to preferential treatment based on geography and political party affiliation are not far behind, though more respondents are unsure about preferential treatment in these cases. Figure 4 supplies the visual representation.

Table 4. Responses to Fairness Statements

Agree %	Unsure %	Disagree %	Statement
56	33	12	Certain groups or people get preferential economic treatment from Gallatin County government.
55	31	13	Certain groups or people get preferential treatment from Gallatin County government.
47	41	12	Certain groups or people get preferential treatment from Gallatin County government based on geography (for example, based on zoning or incorporation).
40	40	20	Certain groups or people get preferential treatment from Gallatin County government based on political party affiliation .

Notes: The reported number for "agree" is the combined percentage of respondents saying they "slightly agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" with each statement. The report for the employee survey typically excludes "slightly agree" responses as doing so is more useful for comparative purposes within that report. The same is true for the "disagree" percentage. Statements are sorted in descending order from highest to lowest agreement percentage. Rows may not add to 100% exactly due to rounding.

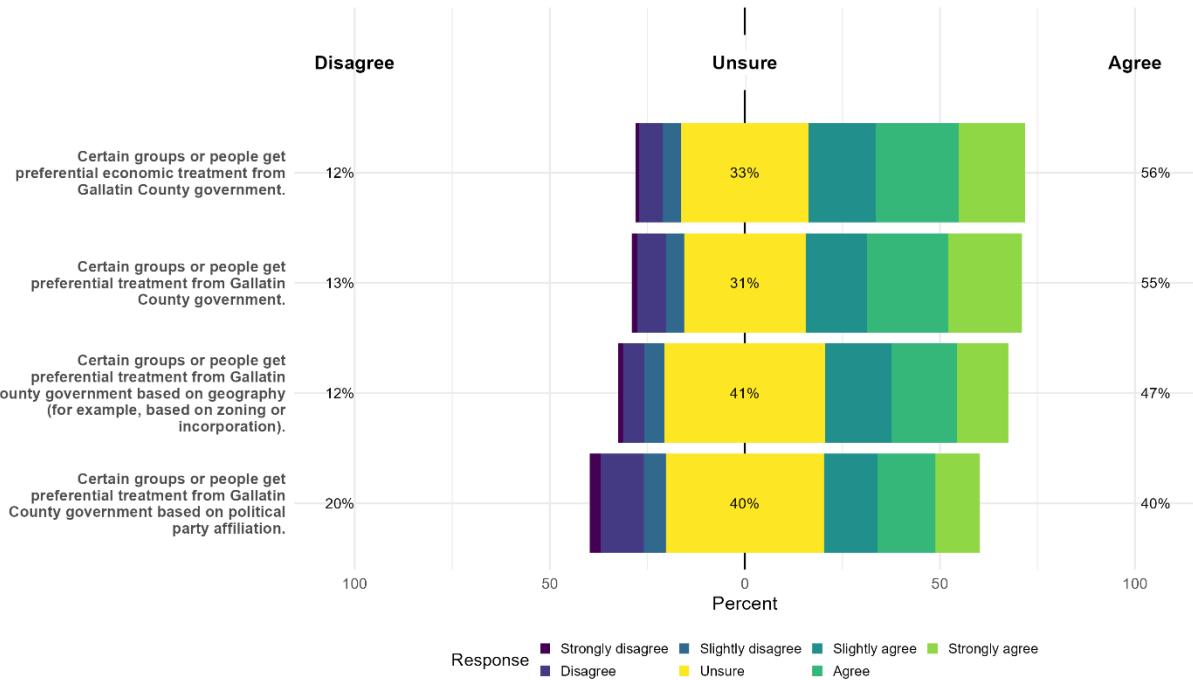


Figure 4. Responses to Fairness Statements

Leadership Positions

Registered voters responded to three items about the selection of individuals for Gallatin County government leadership positions and qualifications for those positions (see Table 5). Relatively large majorities of voters think more leadership positions should be nonpartisan (72%) and should have minimum professional qualifications (65%). On the other hand, a majority *disagree* that more leadership positions should be appointed rather than elected (61%). In the aggregate, these preferences are difficult to square. Voters mostly prefer elected leadership positions but would like for them to be nonpartisan and would like for them to include minimum professional qualifications.

Table 5. Responses to Leadership Statements

Agree %	Unsure %	Disagree %	Statement
72	16	12	More Gallatin County government leadership positions should be nonpartisan (i.e., not affiliated with political parties).
65	19	16	More Gallatin County government leadership positions should have minimum professional qualifications.
14	25	61	More Gallatin County government leadership positions should be appointed rather than elected positions.

Notes: The reported number for "agree" is the combined percentage of respondents saying they "slightly agree," "agree," or "strongly agree" with each statement. The same is true for the "disagree" percentage. Statements are sorted in descending order from highest to lowest agreement percentage. Rows may not add to 100% exactly due to rounding.

Proposed Changes to Gallatin County Government

Finally, registered voters responded to a question asking them what one thing they would change about Gallatin County government. Of the 1,552 confirmed registered voters retained here, 729 (47%) offer an open-ended comment. Social Data coded the open-ended comments into thematic categories using generative artificial intelligence, following removal of identifying information and employing appropriate enterprise data security protections. The hybrid deductive-inductive content analysis approach utilized keyword-based pattern matching. Table 6 summarizes the open-ended comments based on the coding procedure. Many of the comments are more complaints than constructive ideas for change, but identifying problems is crucial for change efforts. The table also includes the number of times each category of comment appeared in the entire body of comments. One comment could count toward multiple categories if relevant. The shaded categories are the ones most directly relevant to the Study Commission's charge. The table includes examples for the first ten categories.

Table 6. Categories of Proposed Changes (and Complaints)

Count	Category & Examples
141	Communication, transparency, & public input <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for clearer communication, earlier notice of decisions, better outreach, easier ways to understand who does what, and how to participate • Requests for posting decisions and rationales, for audits and performance indicators, for newsletters and townhalls, and for more accessible records
138	Growth, development, & zoning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns about rapid growth, sprawl, and approvals perceived as pro-developer • Calls to limit or better manage development; to require stronger planning and impact fees; and to protect neighborhoods, farmland, and community character
123	Government structure & representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests to add County Commissioners (often 2 more) • Requests to shift some offices to nonpartisan roles (and occasionally appointed roles) • Suggestions to introduce district or ward representation • Suggestions to modernize or clarify county governance (for example, through charter government form)
104	Roads, traffic, snow, & transportation (including Motor Vehicle Dept.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better traffic enforcement (particularly red lights and speeding) • Improve road maintenance and snow plowing • Concerns about specific roads • Calls for more or better transit, including bike lanes and parking requirements • Improving Motor Vehicle Department efficiency (though some mixed experiences)
95	Property taxes & assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls to lower property taxes, as well as concerns about property value assessments and appeal processes • Suggestions about alternative revenue sources (for example, resort or tourist taxes)
92	Digital services & online access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions to improve websites or offer processes fully online (for example, jury duty, asking questions, making requests) • Requests for clearer navigation on websites, more e-government tools, and posting of more hours and information online
78	City-county coordination & regional representation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for better cooperation with Bozeman and Belgrade and for combined city-county ideas • Requests to pay stronger attention to West Yellowstone, Manhattan, Logan, and Big Sky • Concerns about Big Sky's unique issues and tax allocation
70	Housing affordability <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for more affordable or middle-income housing and for limits on luxury apartments • Requests for rent relief or freezes • Suggestions about mobile or manufactured homes and workforce housing
62	Law enforcement, courts, & County Attorney <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calls for more deputies or patrol; for improved prosecution performance and accountability; for increased court capacity and timeliness; and for nonpartisan election of Sheriff and County Attorney

Table 6. Categories of Proposed Changes (and Complaints)

Count	Category & Examples
60	Ideology, DEI, wokeness, pride flag, & political culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requests to reduce perceived ideological signaling (for example, DEI, pride flag) • Calls for a different political balance (typically more conservative representation) or for more "common sense" or nonpartisanship
46	Environment, water, open space, & agriculture
38	Fire & emergency services
33	Elections & voting processes
18	Public health department & services
9	Weed control & enforcement

Given the Study Commission's charge, a second round coded only for comments about government structure. The process was the same except the prompt included an explicit instruction about coding for government structure and its sub-categories. Table 7 includes these more specific suggestions about government structure. The number of occurrences is much smaller due to the narrower scope.

Table 7. Categories of Proposed Changes: Government Structure Only

Count	Category & Examples
17	Convert elected offices to appointed (including 5 for Treasurer)
15	Make leadership or elections nonpartisan
13	Increase the number of County Commissioners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 people did not specify a number; 4 people specified an increase to 5 Commissioners
5	Geographic district- or ward-based representation (rather than at-large)
5	City-county consolidation (i.e., unified government) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combine or better coordinate city and county governments (though also some opposition)
3	Change electoral/voting system <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate suggestions for ranked-choice voting, in-person only, hand counting only
3	Reduce or eliminate unnecessary county government functions
3	Increase judicial capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add more judges, a standing master, and/or more capacity generally
2	Charter form of government
2	Convert appointed offices to elected
2	Term limits or shorter terms
2	Performance audits/oversight bodies (including ethics and accountability)
2	Residency tenure requirements for officeholders (20 years)

The most common category in Table 7 runs contrary to the closed-ended responses about appointed offices rather than elected ones. These open-ended comments favor more appointed offices. Other suggestions from Table 6 reappear here, though sometimes with greater explanation or a better sense of how widespread the comments are.

Relationships in the Data

This section summarizes the results of more complex analyses looking for relationships between respondent characteristics and views. These analyses generally reveal little in the way of differences. For example, the views of city dwellers do not differ from the views of non-city dwellers across the full range of statements. The only way respondent characteristics seem to matter is through their influence on "unsure" responses. Respondents who have lived 10 years or more in Gallatin County are less likely to say they are unsure across all statements, typically by 8-15 percentage points. Similarly, respondents who pay property taxes in Gallatin County are less likely to respond that they are unsure across the full range of statements, by comparable margins. Finally, the frequency of respondent interactions with Gallatin County employees strongly influences the likelihood of answering unsure across the range of statements. The highest likelihood is for those who say they "never" interact with employees, with a declining likelihood as interactions increase. In short, people who have lived in Gallatin County for a shorter period of time, who do not pay property taxes in Gallatin County, and/or who have infrequent interactions with Gallatin County employees are responsible for the bulk of unsure responses across all statements.

COMPARISONS WITH EMPLOYEE VIEWS

Though the employee and voter surveys aimed at slightly different purposes, and therefore typically featured slightly different questions, limited comparison is possible. Employees did not have "unsure" response options for their statements or questions, which is an important constraint on making direct comparisons. However, the discussion that follows draws comparisons when possible.

Common complaints. The common complaints that employees report hearing from citizens and the types of complaints that appear in open-ended comments from voters align well. Communication issues are at the top of both lists. Complaints about web services and staffing are also prominent in both places. Legal issues, taxation, and infrastructure are also frequent complaint categories in both locations.

Accessibility, responsiveness, & effectiveness. Not surprisingly, Gallatin County government employees are much more likely to think the government is accessible, responsive, and effective. Employees have considerably more information about their organizations, processes, and work products. They also have ego involvement in performance evaluations. Table 8 displays the comparisons. The ability of voters to say "unsure" certainly affects these numbers, as well. A forced choice between agree or disagree likely would have increased the percentage of agree responses for voters significantly due to acquiescence bias. As such, Table 8 also shows the percentage of unsure responses from voters for each statement (in parentheses).

Table 8. Comparisons between Employee & Voter Views: Accessibility, Responsiveness, & Effectiveness (% Agreeing w/Statements, with Unsure % in Parentheses)

Statement	Employees	Voters
Office is easily accessible / employees are accessible	92	64 (24)
Clear channels for public input	85	39 (31)
Responsive to public / responsive to initial contacts	97	47 (39)
Sufficient resources / appropriate resources	82	33 (50)
Effective in achieving mission / generally effective with responsibilities	91	57 (25)
Meaningfully incorporates public input into decisions	75	34 (35)

Notes: The main reported numbers are the percent of respondents agreeing with a statement (slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree). Minor differences in wording were sometimes necessary across the two questionnaires due to differing contexts and objectives. Voters had an "unsure" response option that employees did not. Those unsure response percentages appear in parentheses for voters. If forced, the majority of the unsure responses likely would have ended up in the agree column.

Transparency & accountability. The same observations apply for statements about transparency and accountability, as shown in Table 9. However, the numbers for employees here are lower than they are for views on accessibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness.

Table 9. Comparisons between Employee & Voter Views: Transparency & Accountability (% Agreeing w/Statements, with Unsure % in Parentheses)

Statement	Employees	Voters
Government makes decisions in transparent ways	63	32 (32)
Checks and balances are adequate	64	26 (48)
Power balance between elected and non-elected offices is appropriate	60	25 (53)
Elected officials are appropriately accountable to public	69	37 (33)
Non-elected officials are appropriately accountable to public	72	31 (41)
Current structure still functionally meets citizen needs	69	39 (30)

Notes: The main reported numbers are the percent of respondents agreeing with a statement (slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree). Minor differences in wording were sometimes necessary across the two questionnaires due to differing contexts and objectives. Voters had an "unsure" response option that employees did not. Those unsure response percentages appear in parentheses for voters. If forced, the majority of the unsure responses likely would have ended up in the agree column.

Fairness. Views on fairness and preferential treatment come much closer to aligning when comparing employees and voters. Employees are less likely to agree with statements about preferential treatment being given to certain people or groups than are voters, but the gaps are considerably smaller (see Table 10).

Table 10. Comparisons between Employee & Voter Views: Fairness (% Agreeing w/Statements, with Unsure % in Parentheses)

Statement	Employees	Voters
Preferential treatment generally	48	55 (31)
Economic advantages / preferential economic treatment	45	56 (33)
Preferential treatment based on geography	33	47 (41)
Preferential treatment based on political party affiliation	34	40 (40)

Notes: The main reported numbers are the percent of respondents agreeing with a statement (slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree). Minor differences in wording were sometimes necessary across the two questionnaires due to differing contexts and objectives. Voters had an "unsure" response option that employees did not. Those unsure response percentages appear in parentheses for voters. If forced, the majority of the unsure responses likely would have ended up in the agree column.

Leadership positions. Comparing views about leadership positions is not an apples-to-apples exercise given the differing approaches to measurement across the two surveys. The Study Commission thought employees generally would have much better-defined views on leadership characteristics and requirements. As such, the employee questionnaire asked about each role

specifically. The voter questionnaire instead asked generically about "leadership positions." Table 11 compares to the extent possible. The results are similar but with stronger tendencies among employees.

Table 11. Comparisons between Employee & Voter Views about Leadership Positions

Characteristic	Employees	Voters
Nonpartisan leadership positions	72 (14)	72 (16)
Minimum professional qualifications for leadership positions	86 (5)	65 (19)
Appointed rather than elected leadership positions	29 (16)	14 (25)

Notes: Minor differences in wording were sometimes necessary across the two questionnaires due to differing contexts and objectives. The main reported numbers for voters are the percent of respondents agreeing with a statement (slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree), while the main numbers for employees are the average percent answering "yes" for a characteristic across all leadership roles. Unsure response percentages appear in parentheses for both employees and voters (again with an average for employees).

Proposed government structure changes. Comparing voter and employee suggestions about changes to Gallatin County government structure is informative. Preferences for **nonpartisan** leadership positions show up prominently in both places, as does a preference for **appointing** certain offices (despite less support in closed-ended responses). The same types of comments about **County Commissioners** appear in both places. Voters and employees would like to see more County Commissioner positions, more political diversity among them, and better geographic representation. However, while changes to the role of **County Administrator** feature prominently in employee comments, the role does not appear even once in comments from voters. Greater **leadership accountability** appears in both places, though infrequently. Finally, while some voters talk about **city-county consolidation**, this is not a theme among employees.