



# OPPORTUNITIES TO ADAPT CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS IN CHANGING TIMES

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# Overview

- Sources for this presentation
- Quick recap of our communication challenges on climate change
- Review of carbon pricing research through political orientation lens
- Thoughts on what to do
- Discussion

# Sources

- Dan Kahan, Yale
- Erick Lachapelle, University of Montreal
- Matthew Baldwin, Joris Lammer, University of Cologne
- Andrew Hoffman, University of Michigan
- Simona Sacchi *et al* University of Milano-Bicocca
- George Lakoff
- George Marshall, Climate Outreach
- Louise Comeau, Conservation Council NB, University of New Brunswick

# Climate change: Tale of two stories

- Convinced about climate change:
  - *Talking about solutions to a scientific debate they see as concluded*
- Unconvinced about climate change:
  - *Talking about threats to freedom, scientific corruption, or distrust of government*
- We continue to talk past each other

# *Two stories on carbon pricing: Recent Ecofiscal Commission webinars on carbon pricing from the left and the right*

## ■ Focus of the Right was on:

- *Accountability*
- *Level the playing field*
- *Harness the profit motive*
- *Choice to pay or not pay*
- *Tax Reform*

## ■ Focus of the Left was on:

- *Fairness*
- *Protecting the vulnerable*
- *Just transition*
- *Job creation*
- *Redirecting revenue to investments*

# Communication challenges

- Climate change is polarized along political identity spectrum
- Climate deniers, industry opponents are building momentum in attacking federal commitments to climate action
  - *Carbon pricing policies key target*
- Proponents of climate action need to understand vulnerabilities and opportunities
- We need to shift our communications from the Elephant in the room (George Lakoff) –COST frame on carbon pricing firmly out of our control
  - *Need to find ways to “disentangle” frames-narratives we use on climate action so they don’t trigger identity defenses if we want to maintain and increase broad population support in the face of growing opposition tactics. Kahan, (2015), Science of science communication. Journal of Science Communication, Vol. 14, No. 3)*

# Opportunities to engage...

## ■ Survey research consistently shows:

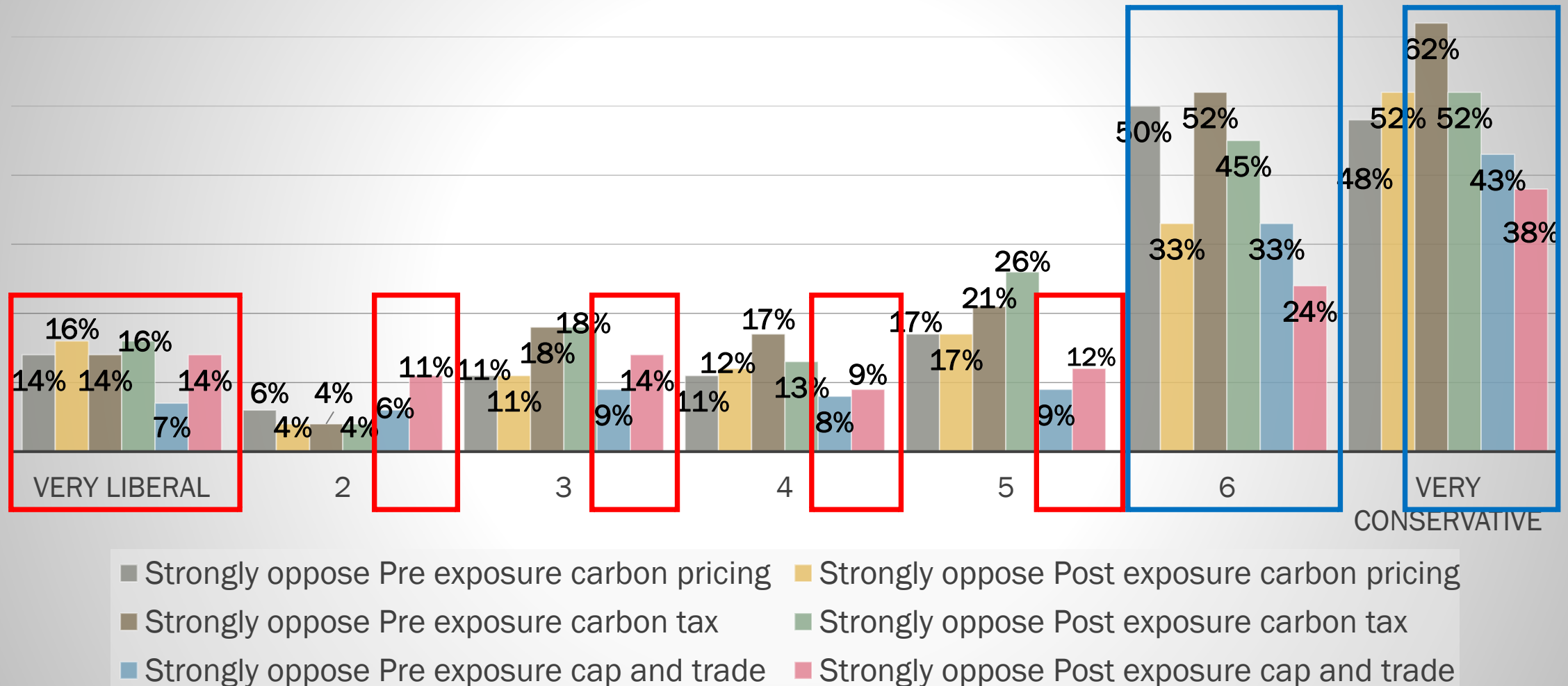
- *Strong belief that carbon pricing will raise cost of living (81%, NB 2017 and similar to results in Ontario and nationally in 2015, 2016): Crosses entire political spectrum: Animated by losses that feel more real than potential gains*
  - Only 44% “somewhat support” statement that pricing carbon can be effective
  - Willingness to pay questions consistently show weak willingness to pay
- *BUT strong agreement that pricing carbon is smart policy (77% “somewhat” or “strongly agree”): Crosses entire political spectrum*
  - More polarized about whether carbon pricing will benefit the environment, that it is the right thing to do now to protect future generations from climate change
- *Women and younger people more supportive; more influenced by positive priming; Women less aware of carbon pricing options, especially cap and trade*
- *NB Francophones support a stronger role for personal and corporate responsibility, as well as government role*

# Opportunities to engage at risk from polarization

- Overcoming skepticism on pricing carbon:
  - *Support for carbon pricing, carbon tax and cap and trade was higher after exposure to 9 positive frames-narratives on carbon pricing (each with a different frame): Mostly shift from “not sure” and “I have not heard of this” to “somewhat support”*
- Support for cap and trade increased most, followed by support for carbon pricing; least gains for carbon tax
- Liberals were more opposed to cap and trade after exposure to narratives; conservatives more supportive
  - *For liberals may relate to deontological, or principled positions regarding respect for nature. Cap and trade most opposed and most oriented to commodifying nature (Sacchi et al (2014). Moral reasoning and climate change: The deontological reaction to a market-based approach. Journal of Environmental Psychology, Vol. 38, p. 251-262)*
  - *For conservatives may relate to higher comfort with markets and market-based solutions*



# Political Orientation Pre-and-Post Exposure: Oppose



# Risk losing “openness”

- UNB 2017 research appears to demonstrate the “polarization” process through politically motivated reasoning and motivated reasoning
- Motivated reasoning reinforces existing beliefs
  - *Unconsciously fitting new information to conclusions that suit an end or goal*
    - Perceptive filters; no one is immune from these biases (though we can try to be reflexive)
  - *Biased assimilation: Crediting or discrediting evidence/experts selectively to promote or frustrate that goal*
    - One of several mechanisms underlying motivated reasoning
      - Erick Lachapelle, UdM; Dan Kahan, Yale
- Politically motivated reasoning informs beliefs prior to having knowledge of an issue
  - *Example is cap and trade*
    - Dan Kahan, (2016), The politically motivated reasoning paradigm, *Emerging Trends in Social & Behavioral Sciences*, Preprint

# Communication challenges: The process

- Experience and knowledge polarize attitudes:
  - *We give more weight to evidence and arguments that support our pre-existing beliefs (confirmation bias)*
  - *Expend energy to refute evidence and arguments from people whose values contrary to our own beliefs (disconfirmation bias)*
  - *We accept information from people who represent our cultural community; dismiss information from people not from our cultural community*
  - *We don't debate IDEAS, we question MOTIVES*
  - *We determine "tribe" and that determines "trust"*
  - *Facts less important than political and ideological affiliation of the source*
  - *Partisanship and group identity replaces the greater good as motivators for political action*
    - Andrew Hoffman, *How Culture Shapes the Climate Change Debate*, 2015

# Values and Attitude Filters Influence Beliefs about...and Trust in...

- The nature of scientific method and knowledge
- Perceptions of the ecosystem and our place within it
- The scope of human responsibility
- Our perception of threats
- Our approaches to risk mitigation
- The relative priority of development and the environment
- The role of government in the market

– Mike Hulme (2009), *Why we Disagree About Climate Change*

# “How concerned are you about climate change?” Also a pattern

- Responses to research on carbon pricing narratives show:
  - People “somewhat concerned” about climate change (34%) tend to “somewhat agree” with a narrative
  - People “concerned” (32%) straddle “somewhat agree/strongly agree”
  - People “very concerned” (25%) tend to “strongly agree”
- These results mirror political orientation:
  - More liberal = more concerned about climate change
  - More conservative = less concerned
  - Centre-left and Centre-right = somewhat concerned

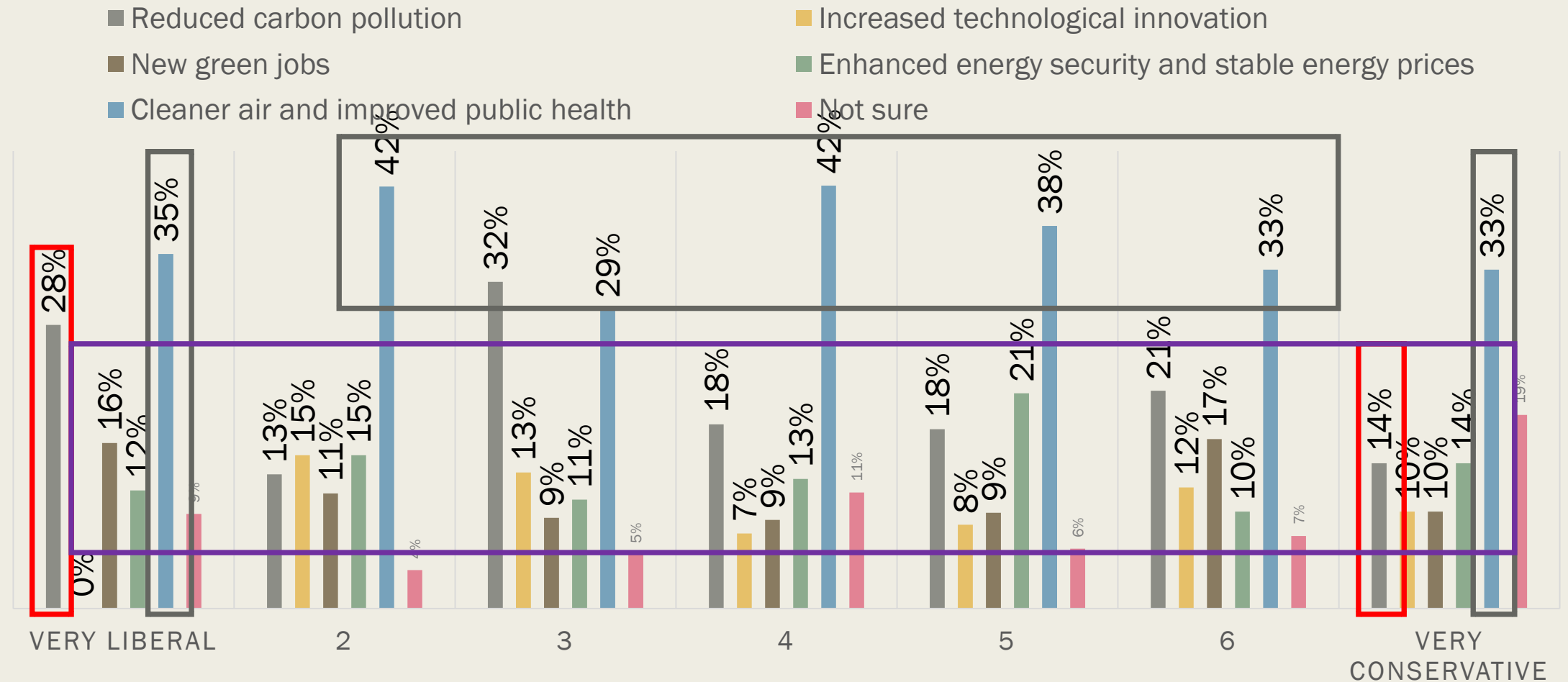
# Political orientation not the only influence

- With exposure to carbon pricing narratives, women shifted position more than did men in pre-exposure and post-exposure measures of support-opposition
  - *Movement toward “somewhat agree” from “not sure” and “have not heard”*
  - *Men more inclined to hold their position*
- Younger respondents shifted position more than older respondents

# Primary benefit of investing in clean energy

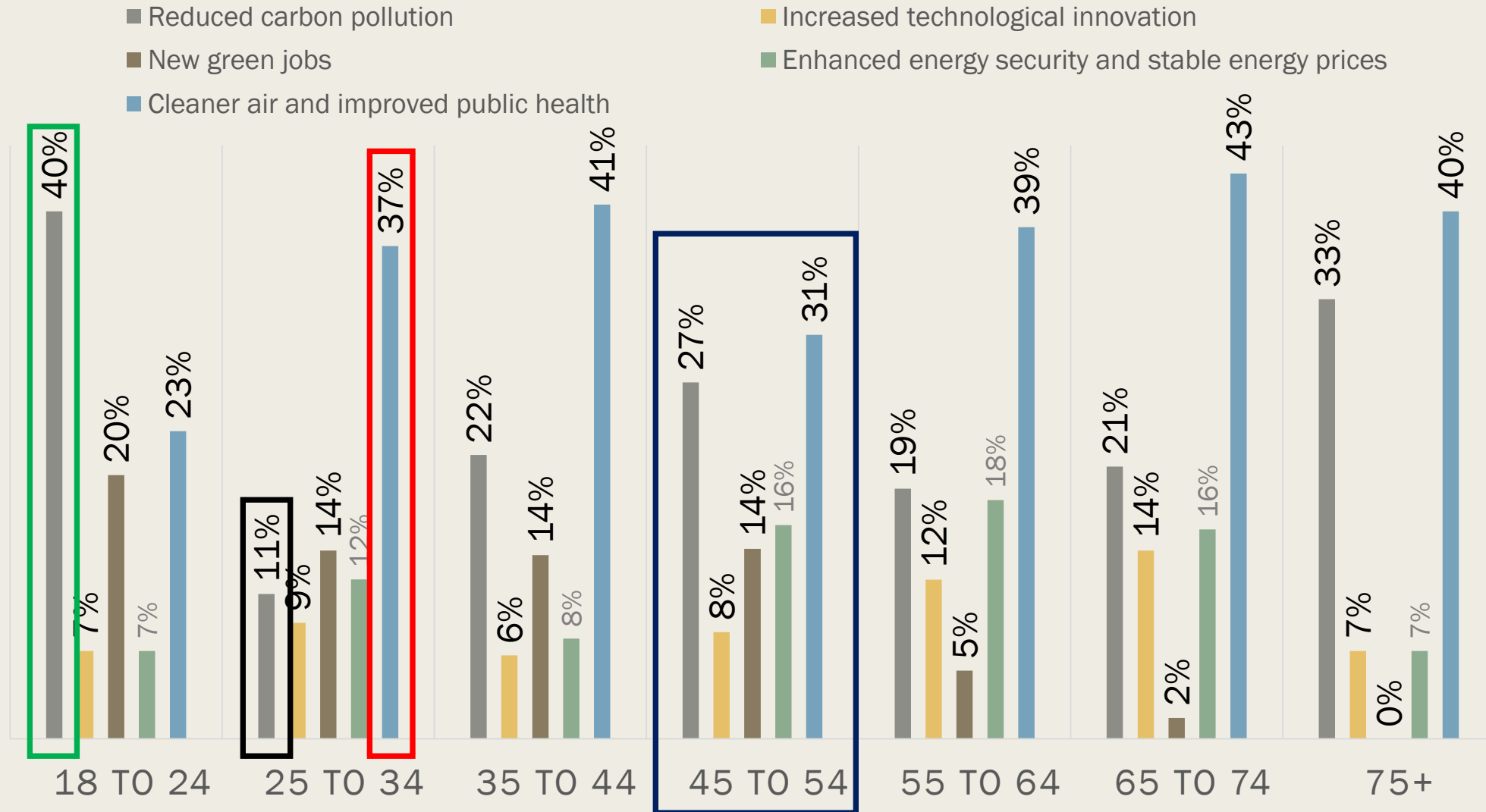
- UNB 2017 survey asked questions also asked in a national survey by Erick Lachapelle for EcoAnalytics: National surveys provide too small a sample to be predictive
- On question about the primary benefit of investing in clean energy
- Consistent with national results: Cleaner air and improved public health:
  - Consistent across political spectrum and highest for centre-left and centre-right
- Reduced carbon pollution highest only for youngest (18 to 24 year-olds, 40%); almost equal to cleaner air and improved health for 45 to 54-year-olds
- NOT about green jobs, energy security or technological innovation

# Benefits of investing in clean energy





# Primary benefit of producing clean energy in New Brunswick



# Ways Forward: Don't

- Spend NO time talking policy detail
- Stay out of the cost frame: We simply help activate and animate the self-interest frame (selfish, individualistic rather than altruistic, collective values). Erick Lachapelle and Louise Comeau research:
  - *Everyone believes carbon pricing will raise their cost of living*
  - *Counter cost-based arguments in other ways*
    - Think of George Lakoff's "Don't Think of an Elephant"
      - *As long as we are talking costs we are in the opponents sand box*
      - *People are thinking about what they lose not what they gain*
        - Climate change too distant to feel urgent, not worthy of paying now
- Almost everyone doubts the effectiveness of carbon pricing
  - *Talking about carbon neutrality does not help*
    - Left is talking about "budget neutrality" and what to do with the money
    - Right is talking about "revenue neutrality" to households and businesses via tax cuts
      - *Triggers "just a government tax grab"*

# Ways Forward: Do

- To straddle the broadest political spectrum talk about: Polluter Pay-Accountability-Responsibility (Ethical and Collective frame)
  - *Common sense: If you pollute more you need to do more to clean it up.*
  - *Smart policy: We need to send clear signals that reward businesses that find solutions and pollute the least.*
  - *A fair way to share responsibility and be accountable for the pollution going into the air we all breathe*
  - *A way take to take responsibility today to lessen the environmental burden for our grandchildren*

# Ways Forward: Do

- *Think about communications from the perspective of polarization and need to “disentangle” communications from identities*
  - *Think about how to reach the centre-right and centre-left or at least try to avoid triggering defense mechanisms for the left AND right*
- *Question the motives of industry: “Trying to avoid responsibility”; “Not being accountable”*
  - *Don’t think this is the time to question motives about government as much as it is about creating doubt about trustworthiness of industry lobbying to weaken regulations, climate action*
- *On climate change let’s get back to basics: Impacts in places we love*
  - *Emphasize protection, conservation, restoration, stability to reach centre-right*
    - *Matthew Baldwin, Joris Lammers (2016) <https://arstechnica.com/science/2016/12/wouldnt-it-be-great-if-the-planet-went-back-to-how-it-used-to-be/>*

# Ways Forward: Do

- Make stronger links between cause and effect:

- *“When we shrink our energy use we benefit from cleaner air, a safer climate, and better health for us and our grandchildren”*
  - This sentence used causative language (“shrinks”), that makes direct links between cause, effect and benefits that research shows is most meaningful to people.
- *“Solving climate change makes cleaner energy from solar and wind more affordable”*
  - Focus groups highlighted a concern about the links between actions and outcomes. People want to know that their efforts are meaningful (efficacy).
- *“When we save energy and switch to renewable energy we help solve climate change”*
  - Again, this sentence makes the direct link to the solution and the problem and aims to reinforce the connections between energy use and climate change and energy use and solutions.

# Ways Forward: Do

- Talk MORE about how climate change is affecting us now through warmer temperatures and extreme weather
  - *“We experience a changing climate through extreme weather like post-tropical storm Arthur, flooding, and ice storms making us less safe, displacing us from our homes, risking our health.”*
  - Comeau (2017) showed New Brunswickers, like most Canadians (Erick Lachapelle (2016), Climate of Change. EcoAnalytics), believe climate change is an issue for future generations, rather than an issue affecting them today.
- We need to speak to current climate change effects and immediate benefits from action
  - *Cleaner air, Improved public health*
  - *Lower risk of power outages (i.e., solar energy = resiliency)*
  - *Less waste; lower bills (note not “savings” but focus on “losses”)*

# Way Forward: Do

- Say less about greenhouse gas emissions and more about the direct causes:
  - *“We unbalance the climate mostly when we burn coal, oil and natural gas because we trap heat at the Earth’s surface”*
    - CCNB survey research shows very low levels of understanding that carbon dioxide and greenhouse gases are the cause of climate change (9%). Recent UNB research found, however, that 56% correctly identify that burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and natural gas are the culprit (Comeau, 2017).

# Way Forward: Do

- Avoid binary science discussion of whether climate change is or is not real or is or is not happening: that puts us in the denialist sandbox
- Casually make the link that climate change is human-caused as part of, but not the focus of, narratives because:
  - *The link to human activities is required for people to take responsibility and is associated with higher levels of support for policies to respond to climate change (Hornsey, Harris, Bain, & Fielding, 2016)*
  - “Science communication professionals must protect citizens from having to choose between *knowing what’s known by science* and *being who they are* as members of diverse cultural communities,” (Kahan, 2015, The Science of science communication, *Journal of Science Communication*, Vol. 14, No. 3 , p. 8).
- Emphasize what we can do with what we know, rather than belief



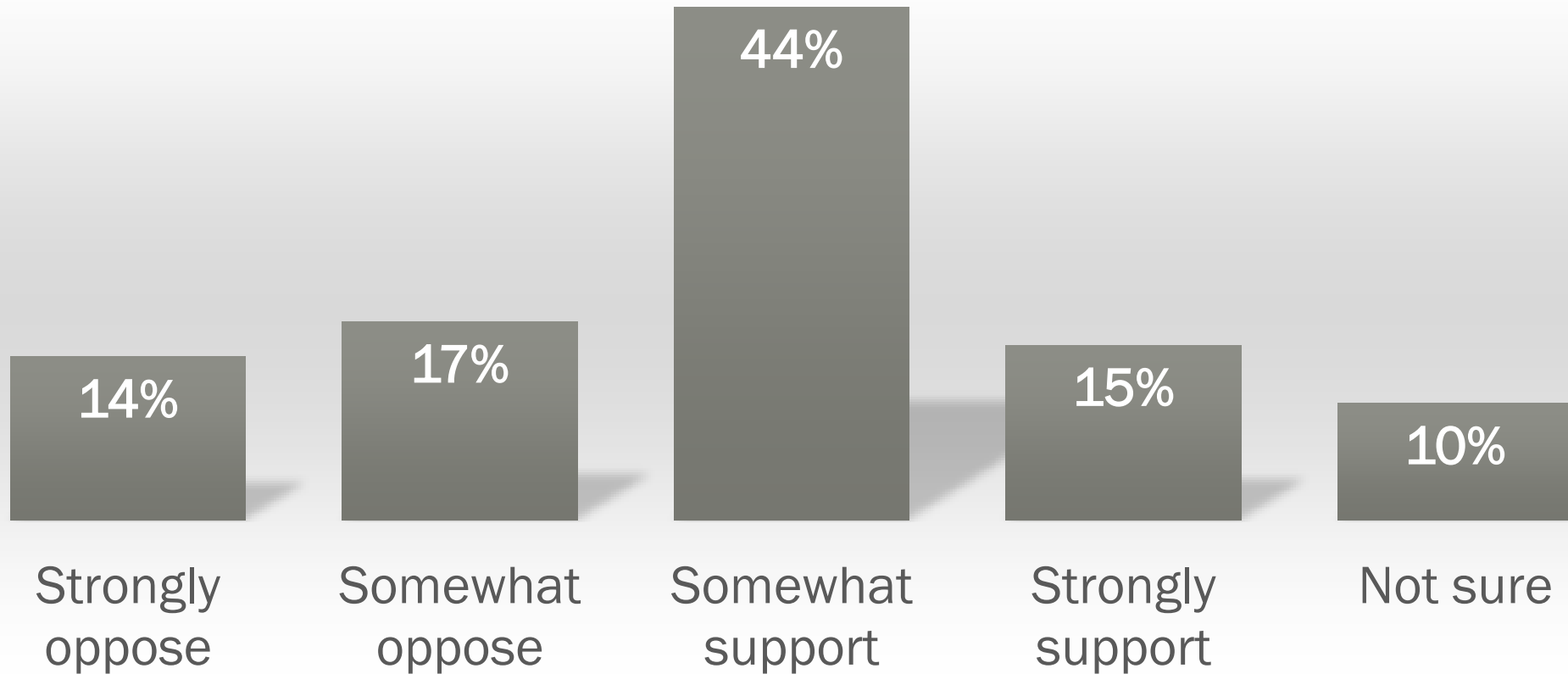
# Conclusion

- Public concern about climate change and support for action on climate change is strong
  - *But we are vulnerable to frames about cost*
  - *AND we are often promoting solutions and benefits the public is less concerned about or are not sure they believe*
- We can frame our messages in ways that avoid identity defenses but we need to be disciplined, to practice and to do more research to test options that polarize less
  - *Political orientation results for NB show that people who are unsure or unaware of carbon pricing are for grabs: we will lose some left to centre-left based on principle, but we could gain more centre-right and right conservatives: we need to think about this and do additional research to see if patterns are the same or different nationally/in other provinces*
- We need to go back to basics on climate change
  - *Focus on minimizing risks that we make vivid in terms of personal experience about climate change effects impacting us now like power outages, disruption from storms in winter and summer, and forest fires*
  - *Use values-based frames rather than policy talk or details: Polluter Pay: Fair-Accountable-Responsible*
  - *Target the middle ground politically, women, younger Canadians, and maturing families (44 to 54-year-olds)*
- We need to do more research on benefits to learn more about what animates people and why, particularly as it relates to jobs, innovation and security, which all fared relatively poorly across the entire political spectrum

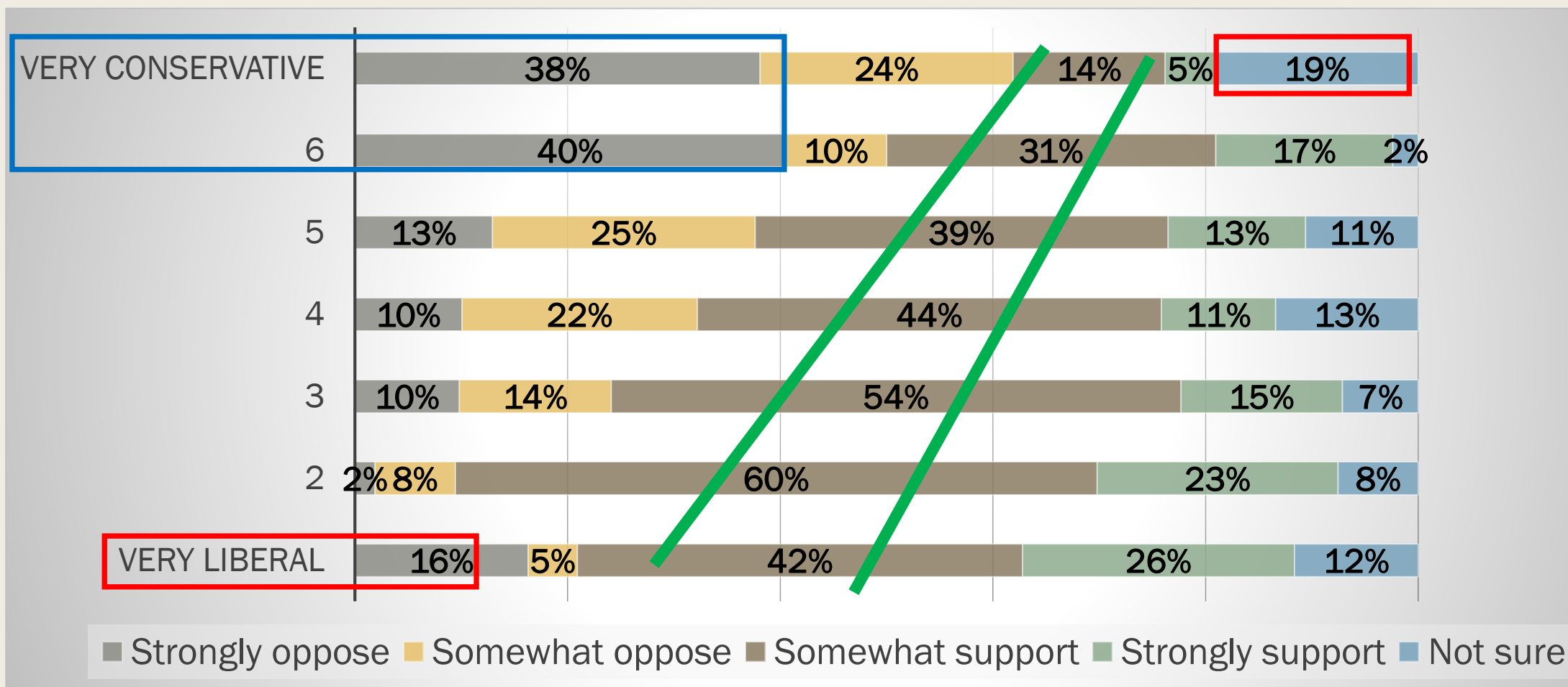
# Discussion

- Questions
- Additional slides follow if you want more detail
  - Louise Comeau
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  - [louise27comeau@gmail.com](mailto:louise27comeau@gmail.com)

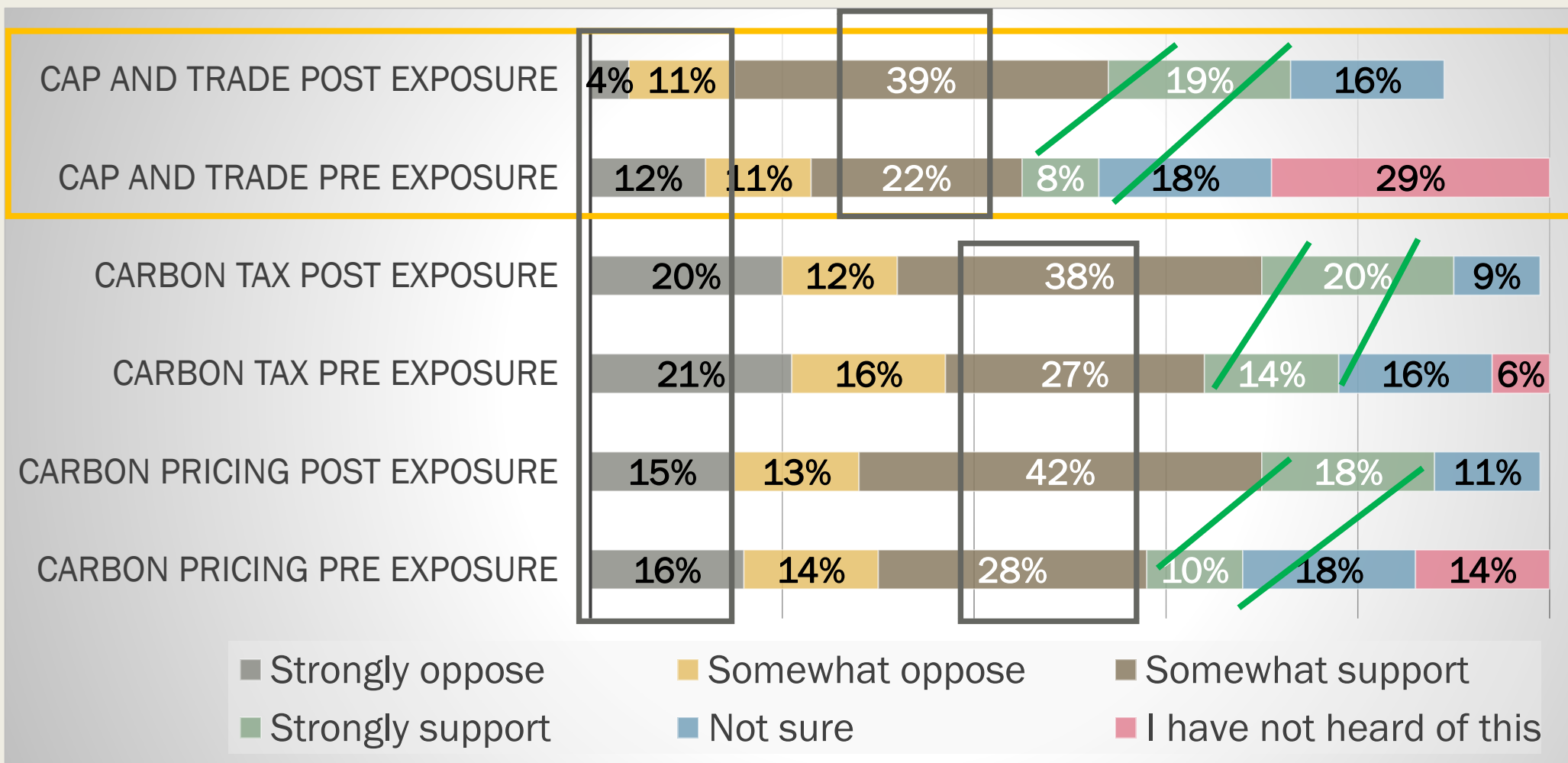
Support is Soft: UNB 2017 survey: “A way to lower the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change is to put a price on pollution from fuels such as coal, oil, gasoline and natural gas.”



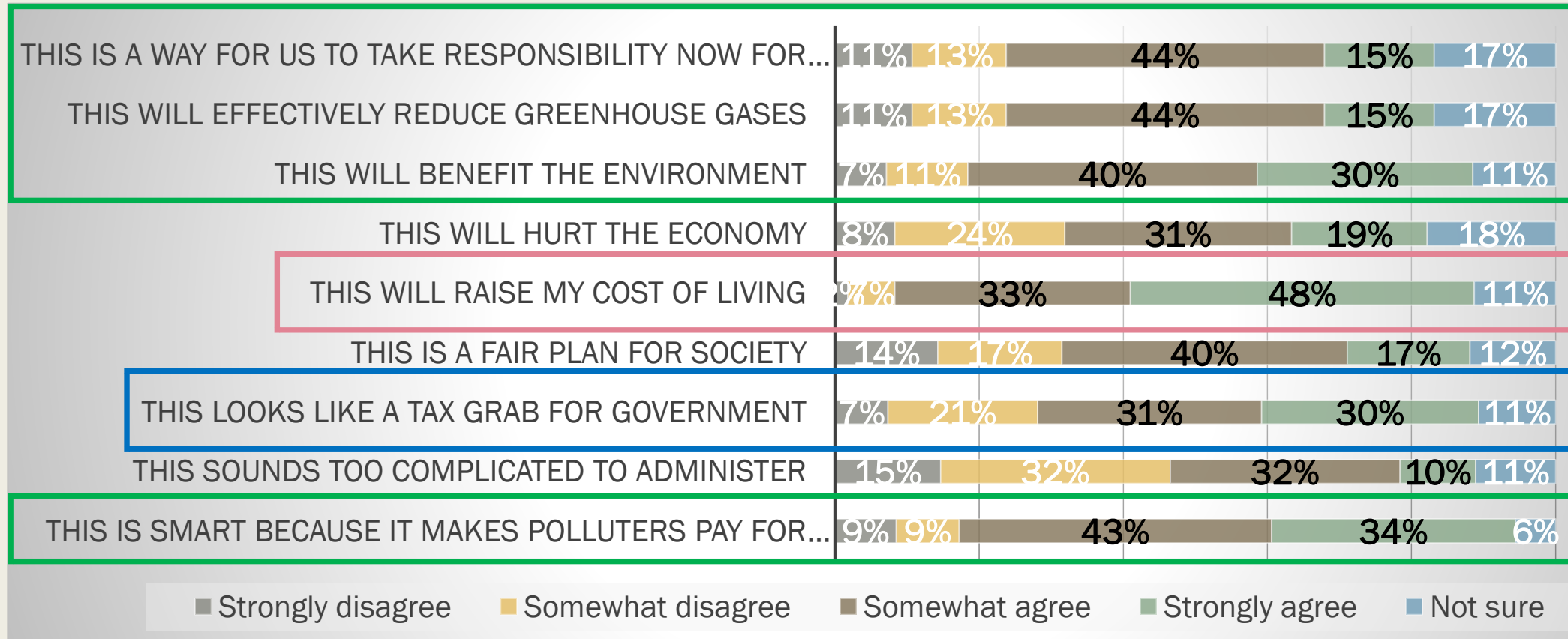
*Right to Left Support: “A way to lower the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change is to put a price on pollution from fuels such as coal, oil, gasoline and natural gas.”*



# Effects of Priming...Pre and Post Narrative Exposure

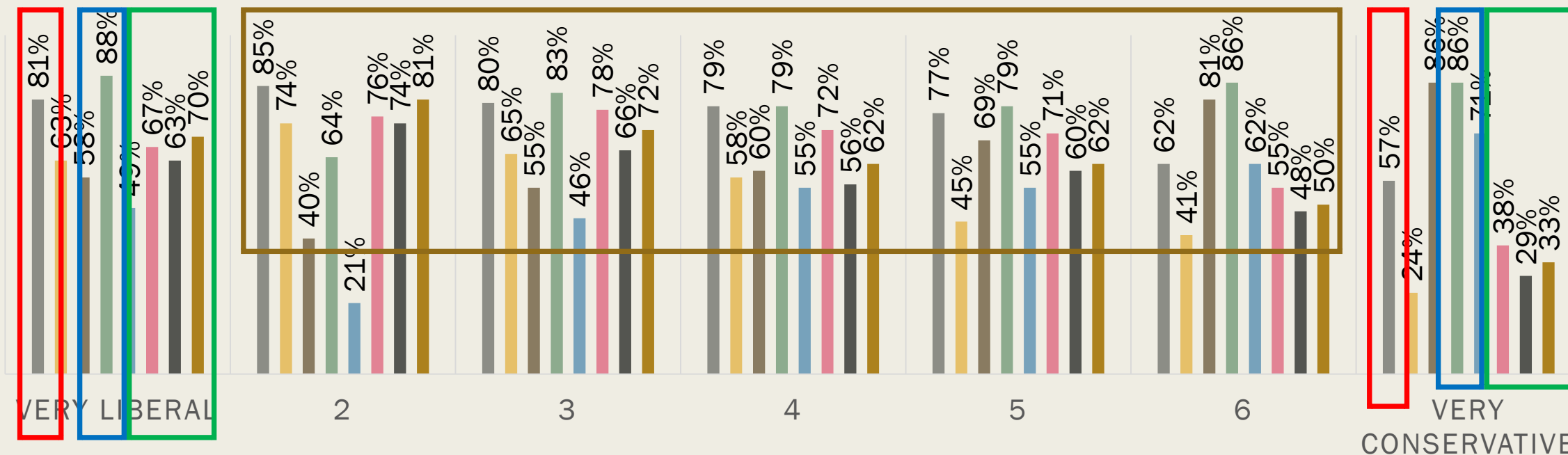


# Reasons for Oppose-Support Frames-Narratives

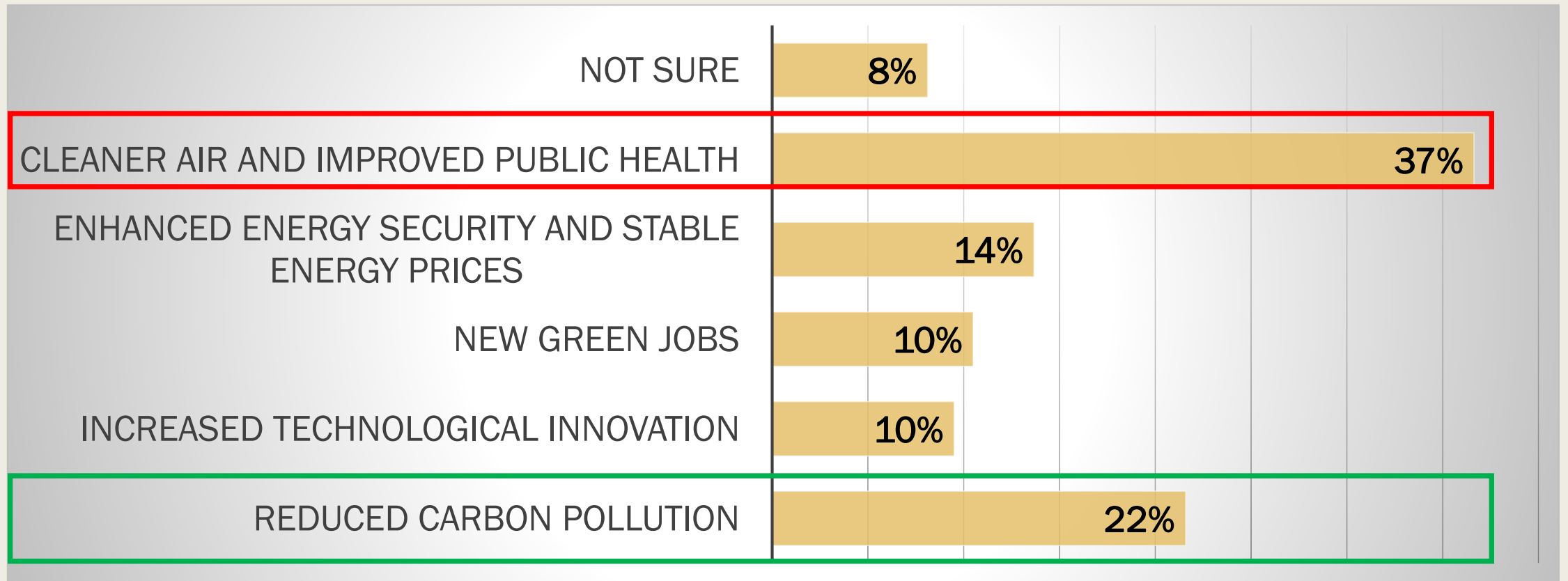


# Reasons: Carbon Pricing Frames-Narratives: Political Orientation, Somewhat; Strongly Agree

- This is smart because it makes polluters pay for their contribution to climate change
- This is a fair plan for society
- This looks like a tax grab for government
- This will raise my cost of living
- This will hurt the economy
- This will benefit the environment
- This will effectively reduce greenhouse gases
- This is a way for us to take responsibility now for our carbon pollution so our grandchildren won't have to



# Primary benefit of investing in clean energy







# AN OPTIMAL NARRATIVE

## FAIR

It's not **fair** that heavy energy users can **dump** their waste carbon pollution in the air we all breathe, damaging our health and environment.

## COMMON SENSE

Cap and trade makes **sense**. It is common sense. It is fair. It **rewards** businesses that are efficient and use energy well by paying less. It makes the biggest polluters accountable and responsible

## CAUSALITY AND CLARITY

Here is how it works...  
And here is what happens to the money

## BALANCED SHARED CONTRACT

It rewards and punishes.  
The system is flexible so that it can "unleash the creativity of business to develop new technologies."  
There is a balance of responsibility between business, government and consumer.  
We all play a role make a contribution in proportion to our size.