

# Building Decarbonization Narratives



Jessie Sitnick, James Glave, and Lana Goldberg

April 17, 2024

# Agenda

1. What are narratives and why do they matter in transitions?
2. How are incumbents challenging the rise of building electrification?
3. How do Canadians feel about building decarbonization?
4. Table discussions



# Today's Panelists



**Jessie Sitnick**

Vice President, External  
The Natural Step



**James Glave**

President  
Bright Future Studio



**Lana Goldberg**

Climate Campaigner -  
Safe Cities  
Stand.earth

## Part 1

# What are narratives and why do they matter in transitions?

If I do a good job, at the end of this short section you'll agree that...

- Narratives are a normal part of our lives
- While they contain information, they are not about information
- Empathy is the most powerful tool we can bring to narrative work
- We can shift people's narratives, but we can't get them to believe what we believe "because it's true."

# Raise your hand if you are an expert in narratives



## Seriously. Raise'em!

# Let's prove it. Quiz time. Which of these is a narrative?

- A. Freedom of speech is fundamental to democracy
- B. Everyone has the right to feel safe from hate on campus
- C. People should be exposed to ideas that make them uncomfortable
- D. Language that justifies violence has no place in our schools
- E. All of the above

Which of them do you believe is true?

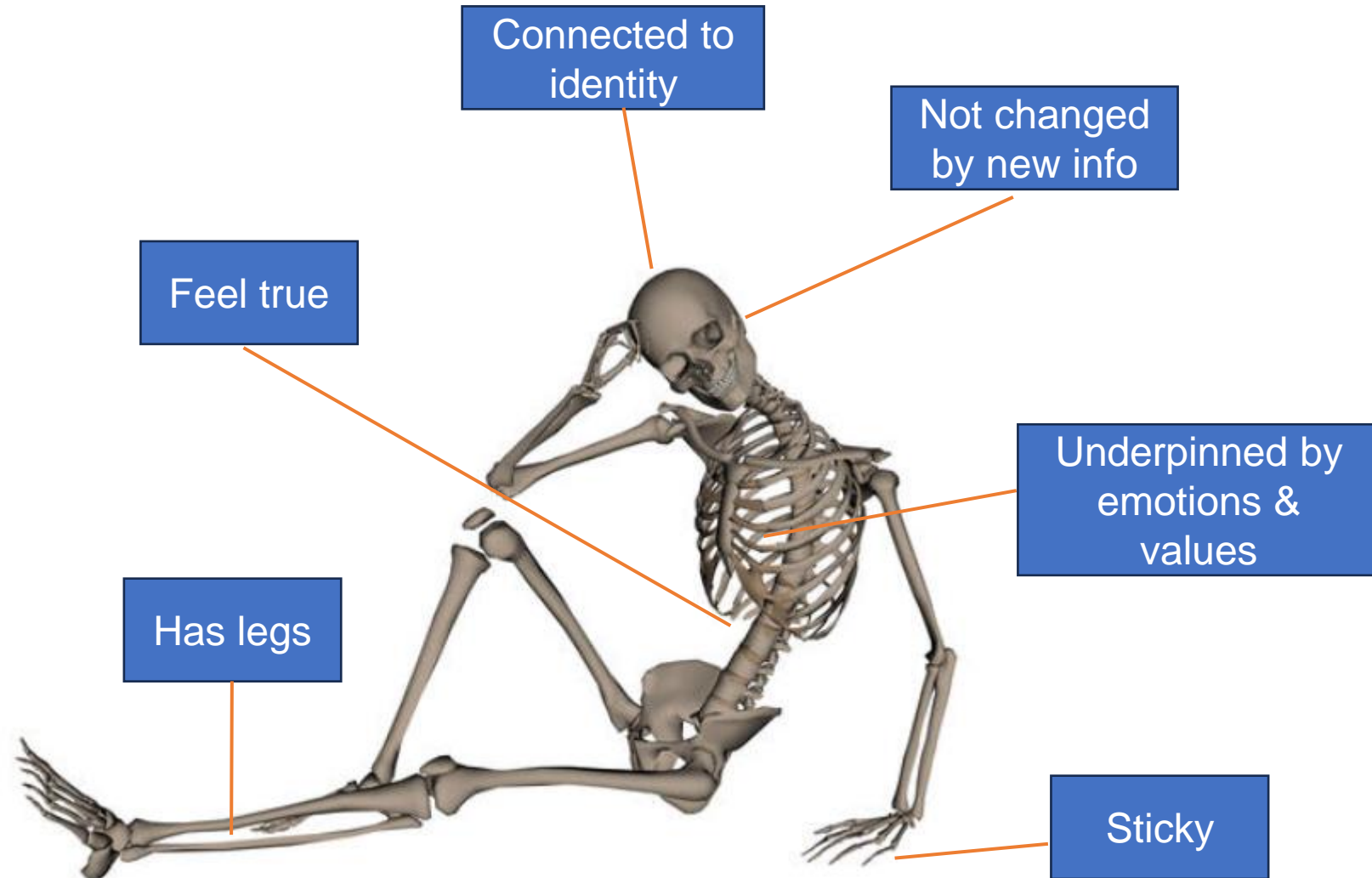
What would it take to change your mind?

# A narrative by any other name...

- **Frames** (George Lakoff) - mental structure that shapes how we see the world.
- **Metaphors / archetypes** - make the unfamiliar familiar
- **Conventional wisdom** - unquestioned assumptions often based on “they say..”



# Anatomy of narrative



# Why do narratives matter in times of change or transition?

- Narratives help us navigate and simplify our complex realities and relationships
- Our realities and relationships are never more complex – more in question, more uncertain – than in times of change.



# But it is possible to shift narratives...

So, my hairdresser wanted to have a chat about trans people and bathrooms...



## What worked?

- Adapting a core tenet of his narrative
- Reinforced his positive self-identity as a caring person
- Removed the threat
- Talked to him like a friend and loyal customer who has known him for 15 years

Question:

What emotions and values are underpinning the building decarbonization narratives in Canada today?

## Part 2

# How are incumbents challenging the rise of building electrification?

As you review these images and statements....

Which emotions, values, and identities are energy incumbents tapping into?

“We might not have enough electricity...”



“British Columbians should not be restricted to just one energy source—electricity—when we **do not have enough electricity supply** to meet future needs or know how much new electricity supply will **cost.**”

—BC Coalition for Affordable Dependable Energy



“We’re easier on your wallet...”



“British Columbians need **affordable** sources of energy that meet their budgets...”

—BC Coalition for Affordable Dependable Energy



“We’ll get you through the long cold winter...”



“Natural gas is **dependable at all times of the day** in all **weather conditions**, so it ensures Canadians have a reliable source of energy.”

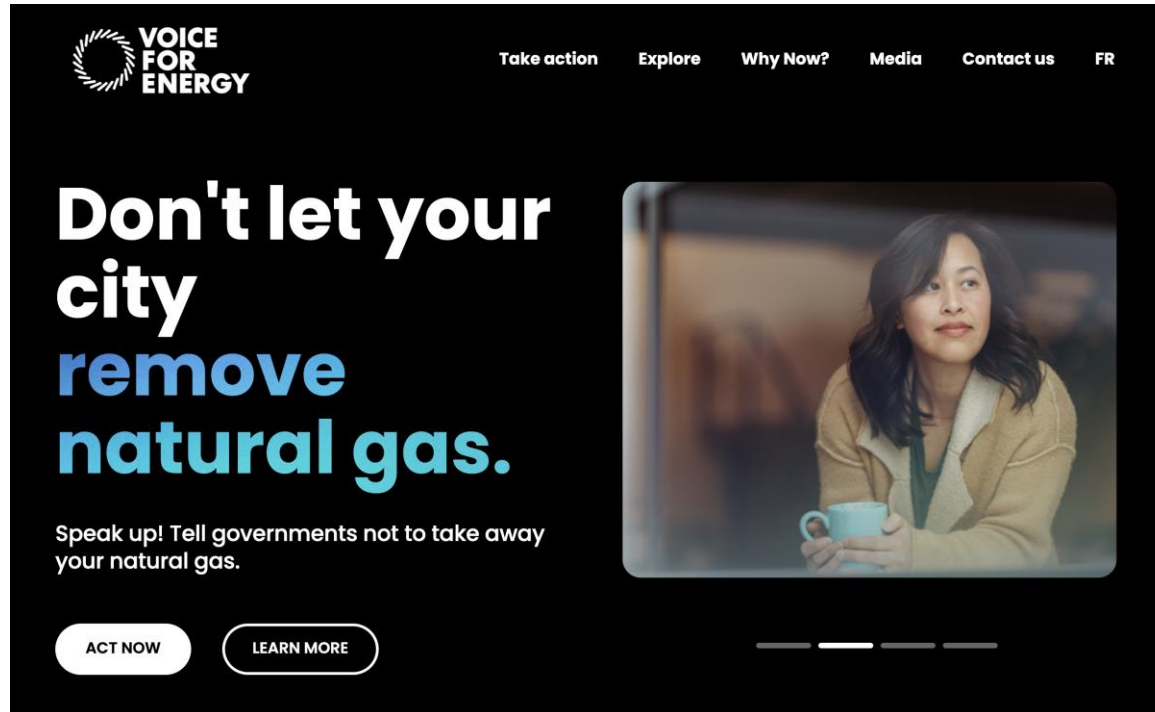
—Fuelling Canada

“We’re part of the solution...”





# “Don’t let them tell you what to do...”



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Voice for Energy website. The header features the organization's logo on the left and a navigation menu with links for 'Take action', 'Explore', 'Why Now?', 'Media', 'Contact us', and 'FR' on the right. The main content area has a dark background. On the left, the headline 'Don't let your city remove natural gas.' is displayed in white and blue text. Below it, a sub-headline reads 'Speak up! Tell governments not to take away your natural gas.' At the bottom left are two buttons: 'ACT NOW' and 'LEARN MORE'. On the right is a video player showing a woman holding a mug. Below the video player are four horizontal lines, with the second one from the left being white, indicating the current slide in a sequence.

“How you cook, heat your home, and run your business should be up to you. So why are governments trying to ban natural gas and **take away your choice?**”

—Voice for Energy

# Gas heat defensive narrative?

“Natural gas is the most affordable energy source for Canadian homes.

You can rely on natural gas. It will keep your loved ones warm and safe throughout our long winters. It will be there for you, whatever might come our way.

Natural gas is also a clean-burning green fuel.

Don't let governments take away your freedom to choose the energy source that is right for you, your home, and your family.”

## Part 3

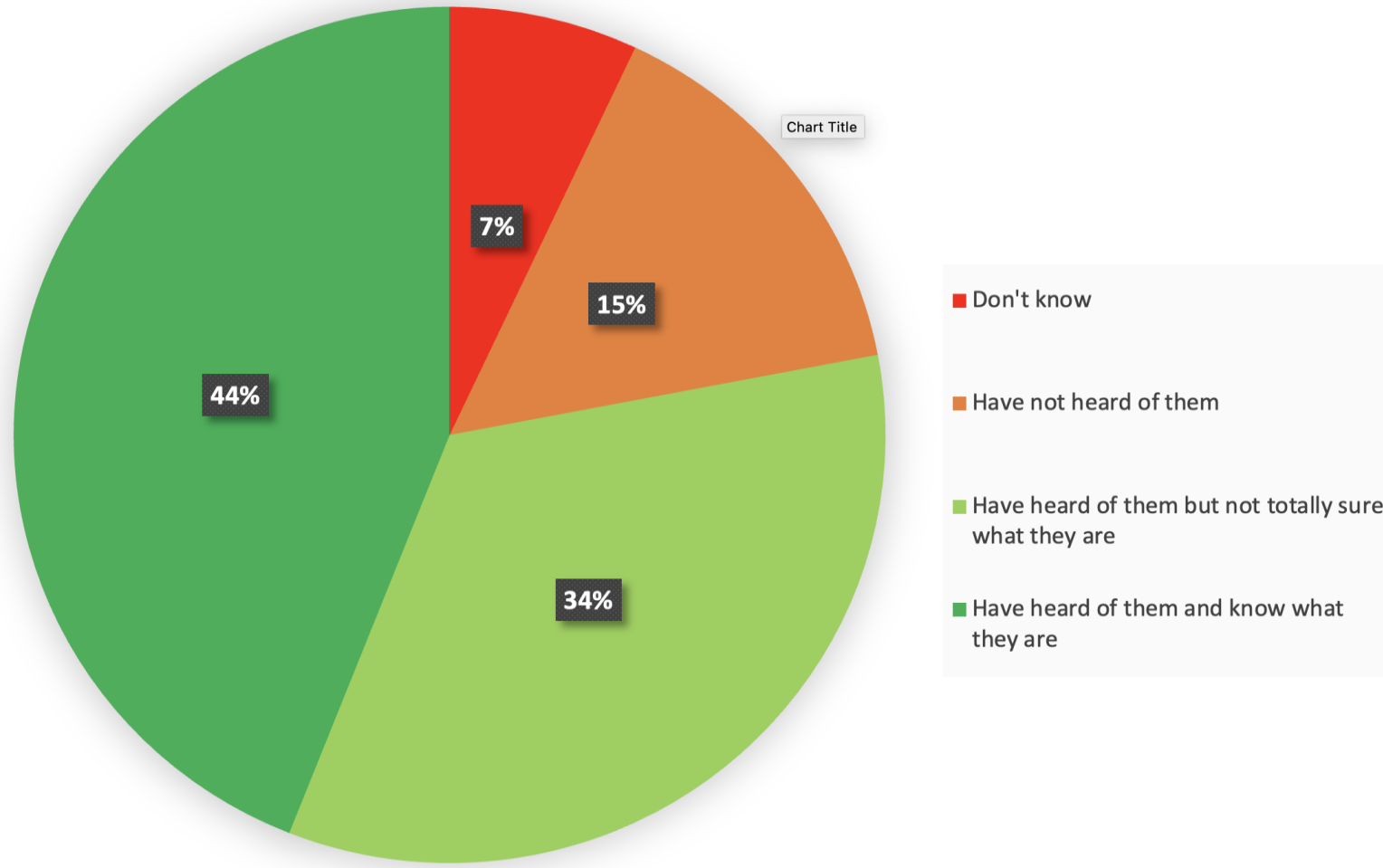
# Public attitudes on heat pumps and building electrification

# Stand.earth / Abacus poll: Methodology

- Canada representative survey data fielded by Abacus
  - Sample size: 2000 Canadian adults
  - Fieldwork dates: June 22- June 26, 2023
  - Weighted by age, sex, and region
  - Margin of error  $\pm 2.19\%$  overall, but changes substantially when looking at smaller groups in the population

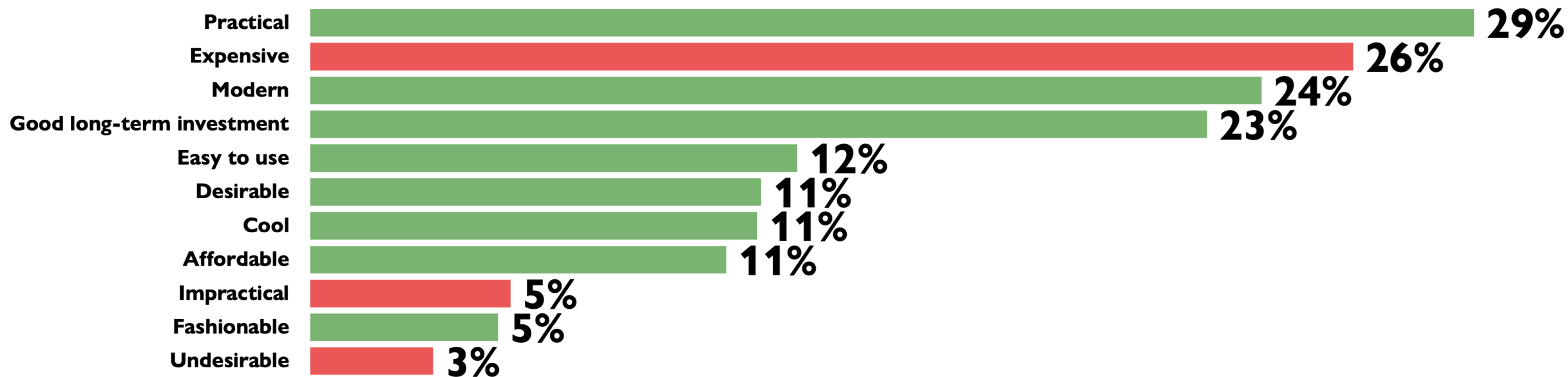
# Canada Poll: Stand.earth / Abacus

## AWARENESS OF HEAT PUMPS AND WHAT THEY DO



Source: Canada poll 2023 (Stand.earth / Abacus)

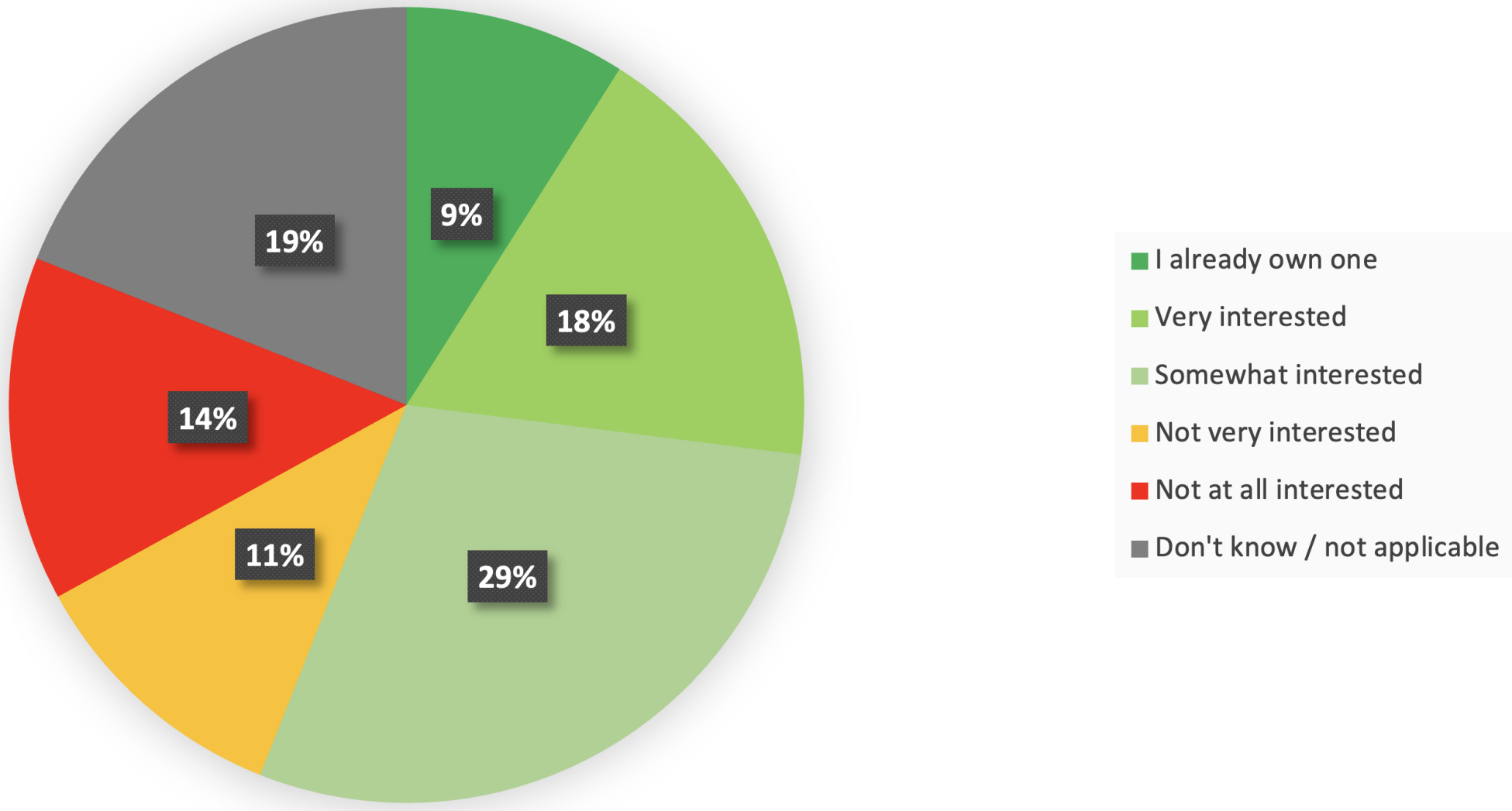
# FEELINGS ASSOCIATED WITH ELECTRIC HEAT PUMPS



Source: Canada poll 2023 (Stand.earth / Abacus)

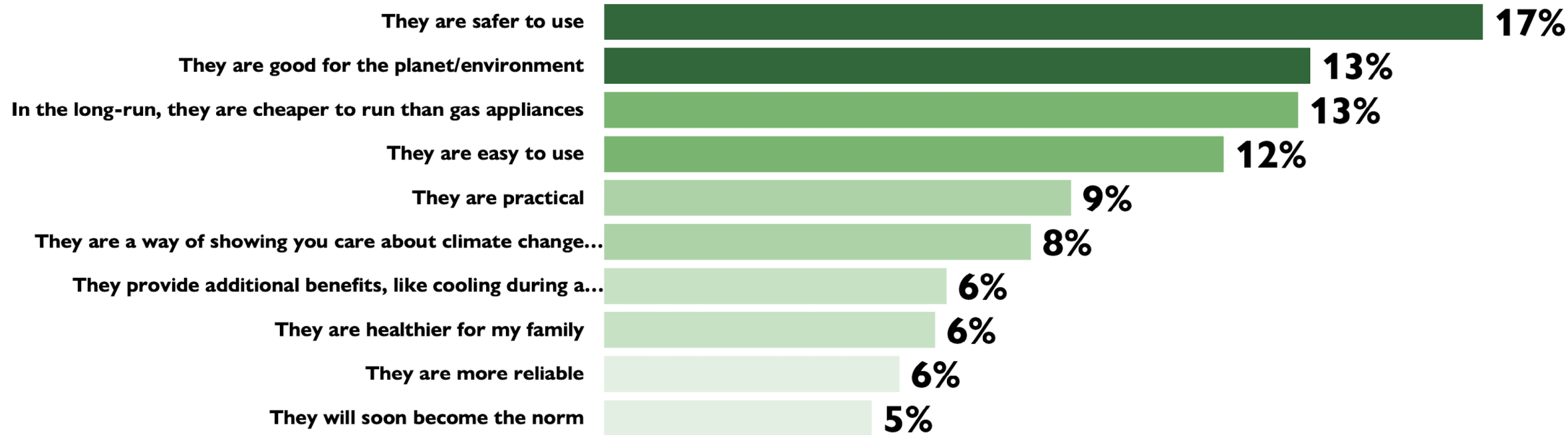


# INTEREST IN PURCHASING A HEAT PUMP



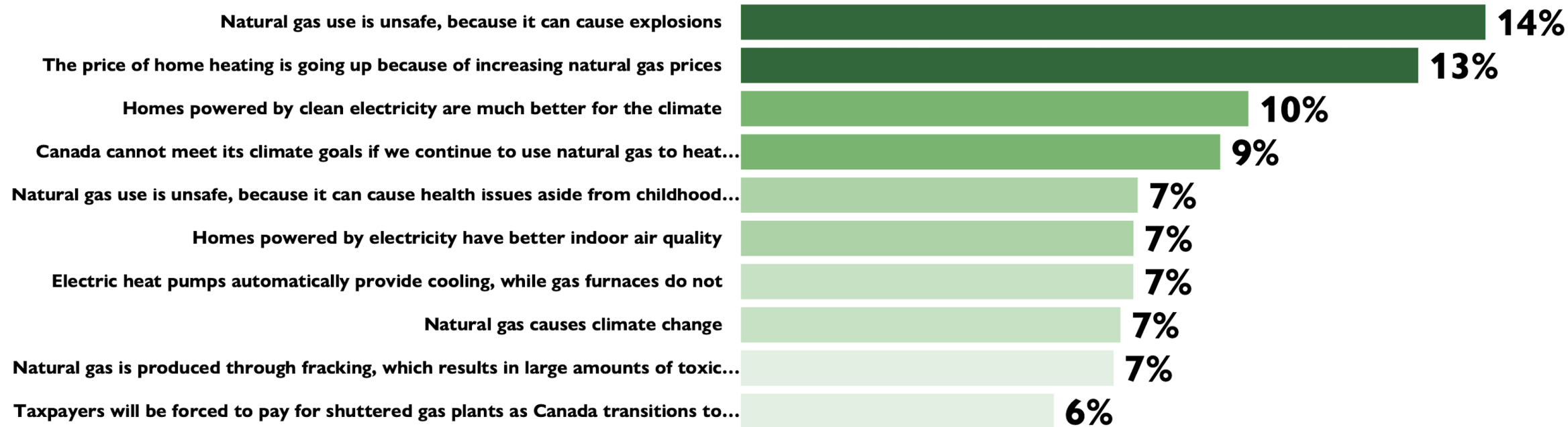
Source: Canada poll 2023 (Stand.earth / Abacus)

# MOST CONVINCING ARGUMENTS FOR PURCHASING GAS REPLACEMENT ITEMS



Source: Canada poll 2023 (Stand.earth / Abacus)

# MOST CONVINCING REASON FOR STOPPING THE USE OF NATURAL GAS



Source: Canada poll (Stand.earth / Abacus)

# SUPPORT FOR POLICIES

[DON'T KNOW REMOVED]

Updating building codes to discourage natural gas connections in new buildings.



% Support

**67%**

Updating building codes to require new buildings to only use electricity.



**64%**

■ Strongly support   ■ Support   ■ Oppose   ■ Strongly oppose

# Potential Energy: Later is too Late (global report)

**Table 5. Relative effectiveness of different narratives**

Tested frame about gas stoves & buildings	Support
Research shows that homes using gas have high indoor air pollution. We should <b>ban</b> the use of gas-powered appliances and heating/cooling systems in buildings.	<b>54%</b>
Research shows that homes using gas have high indoor air pollution. We should <b>mandate</b> that new buildings use the latest clean technology to ensure our health and safety.	<b>70%</b>
As better technologies come onto the market, we should require their use in all new buildings and construction. These smart upgrades ultimately save us in energy and money.	<b>74%</b>

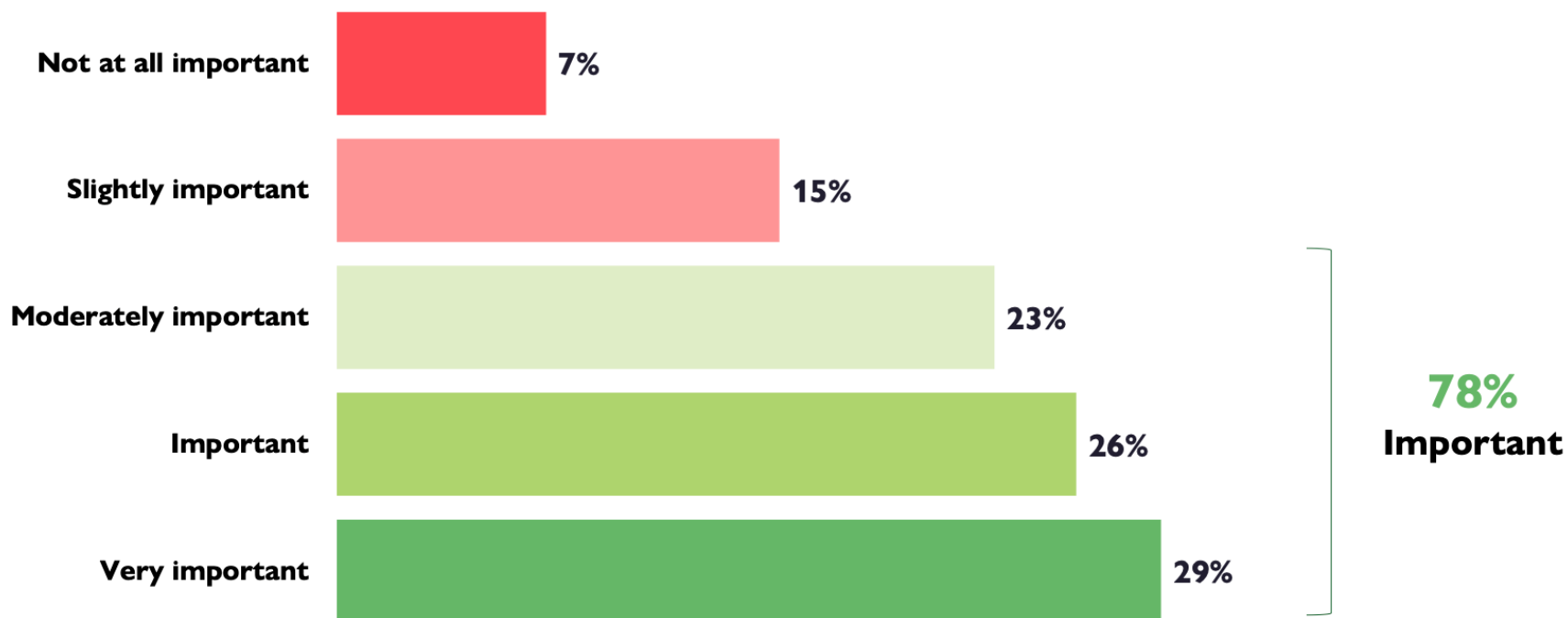
Source: Potential Energy, Later is Too Late, 2023

# Clean Economy Fund / Abacus poll



How important is it to you that new housing is built in a way that minimizes the pollution that causes climate change?

**Over 3 in 4 Canadians (78%) believe it is important that housing is built in a way that minimizes the pollution that causes climate change**



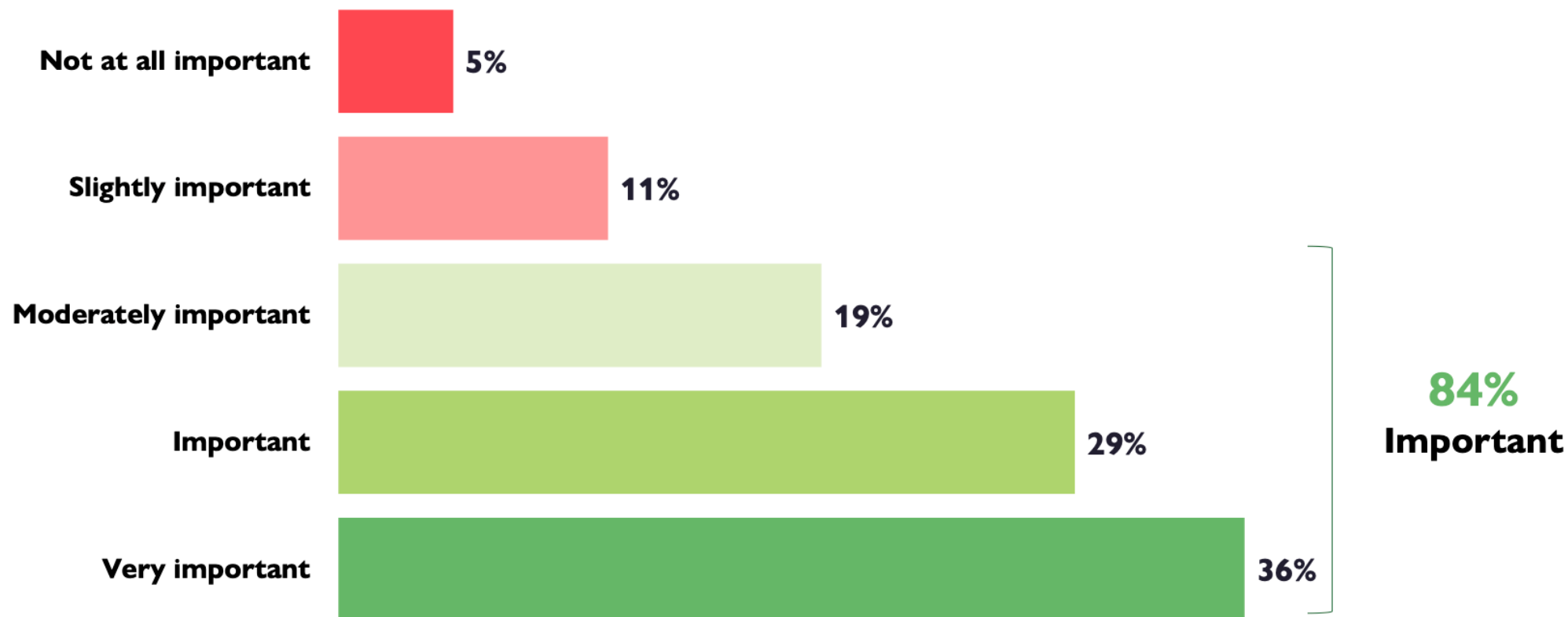
Base: All (n=3959)

Source: Abacus Data for the Clean Economy Fund, August 29 to September 4, 2023.



How important is it to you that new housing is developed in a way that is resilient to climate change impacts (e.g., extreme weather events such as wildfires, flooding, extreme heat, etc.)?

## 84% of Canadians believe it is important to develop new housing in a way that is resilient to climate change impacts



Base: All (n=3959)

Source: Abacus Data for the Clean Economy Fund, August 29 to September 4, 2023.

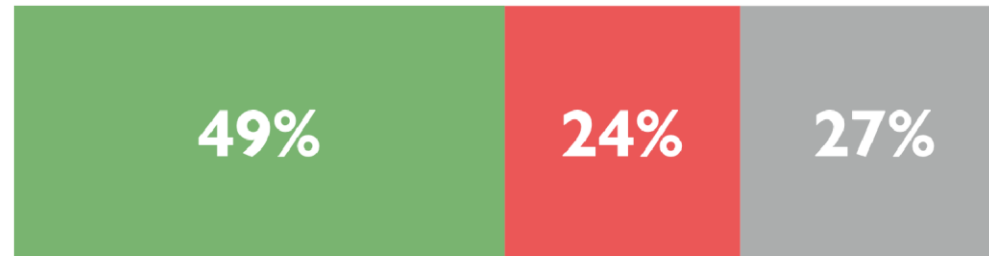
# BC poll: Understanding of "natural" gas role



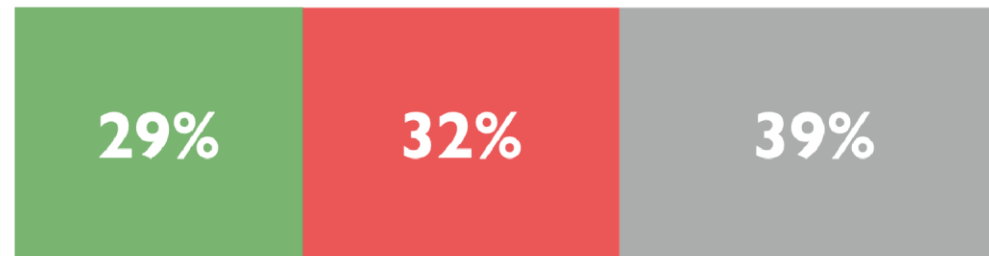
Are the following statements true or false

## UNDERSTANDING OF CLIMATE CHANGE REALITIES IS LIMITED, SUPPORT FOR HEAT PUMPS IS IN THE CONTEXT OF LIMITED PERCEPTION OF THE PROBLEM

**The largest cause of climate change is the burning of fossil fuels, such as the gas we use to heat our homes and buildings, and the gas or diesel we use in our cars and other vehicles**



**The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in most cities is the burning of methane gas in homes and buildings**



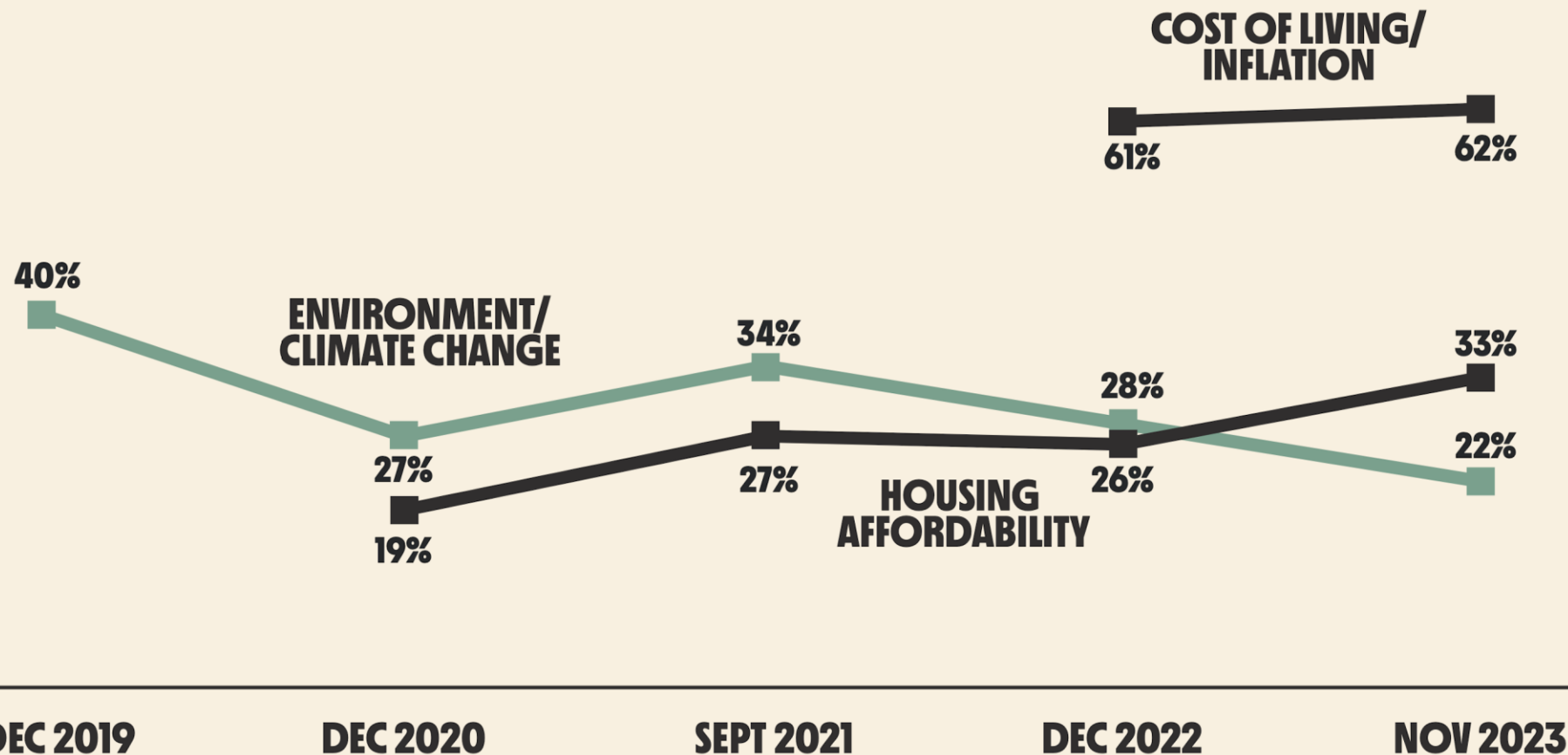
■ True ■ False ■ Not sure

Source: Climate Emergency Unit with Abacus, BC, November 2023



# Re.Climate's Canada poll aggregation study

“Thinking of the various issues and challenges facing Canada, which ones do you personally care about the most?”



Angus Reid Institute 2023e

# Summary of best messages:

- Good and updated information about heat pumps
- Heat pumps as practical, modern technology
- Electrification/improvement rather than banning/limiting/mandating
- “Natural” gas is a fossil fuel that causes climate change
- Better results with methane gas or fossil gas over “natural” gas

# Top messages now: Affordability, Health, Housing

- **Affordability**

- Lower monthly energy bills (including for air conditioning)
- Stable costs (versus volatile oil/gas prices)

- **Health / Equity**

- Proper cooling in summer (esp important for lower income population impacted by heat waves)
- Fossil gas leaks toxic gasses and is bad for health
- Air filtration to address wildfire smoke

- **Housing**

- Faster and cheaper to build without gas hookups

## Part 4

# Table discussions



# Table Discussions

## Step 1: Select a Narrative. (10 min)

- At your table discuss the various narratives related to building decarbonization and select one you would like to work on at our table. (This could be a positive narrative that we can grow and expand or a negative narrative that we can counter)

## Step 2: Identify the Audience: (10-15 min)

- Who believes this narrative? (audience or group)
- Who and where are they getting their information from? (person or channel e.g. political party, ads, influencer, government, water cooler, friends, news media)

## Step 3: Assumptions (15)

- What values and emotions underpin this narrative? (appeal to fairness, fear, compassion etc.)
- What assumptions trigger those emotions and values? (e.g. without gas, my kid could freeze)

## Step 4: Solutions (20 min)

- What will it take to either change this narrative for the better (if it's negative) OR make this narrative broader and stickier (if it's positive)?
- What would help people believe in it?
- Who should this message come from?
- What would impede its success?
- What role can BDA play?

## Step 5: Respond to the Menti questions



# Summary

## Menti Questions:

- Based on your discussion, what Narrative did you select?
- What solution are you most excited for?

Ask for 2-3 tables to share a quick summary of their posters.





# Thank you!

Please move to a breakout room