

An ornate, multi-layered gold frame with intricate scrollwork and floral patterns, surrounding the central text.

Reframing Climate Communications

Strategies for Building Bipartisan Narratives

AUG. 27TH | 2:00PM ET

Introduction

Kristen Soares



State Climate Policy
Network Manager

CLIMATE **X** CHANGE
[SCP_N]

State Climate Policy Network



Network of **15,000+**

- State and local elected officials
- NGO advocates
- Researchers
- State agency staffers
- Organizers and activists
- Business leaders

... working on state climate policy

www.climate-xchange.org/network

Pro Bono Policy Assistance

We specialize in state climate policy design and analysis.
Reach out to kristen@climate-xchange.org requesting nonpartisan research and analysis related to:

- **Example states** and **model rules** for a given policy
- **Gap analysis** of your state's climate policy landscape
- **Connections** to other actors working on similar issues

Reframing Climate Communications: Strategies for Building Bipartisan Narratives



Will Howard

*Head of Insights and Advisory
Services
Potential Energy Coalition*



Crystal Bernard

*State Initiatives Strategist Just
Solutions*

Agenda

1. Research Spotlight: Fixing Climate Communications
2. Nonpartisan Election Engagement: Reframing the Narrative
3. Q&A

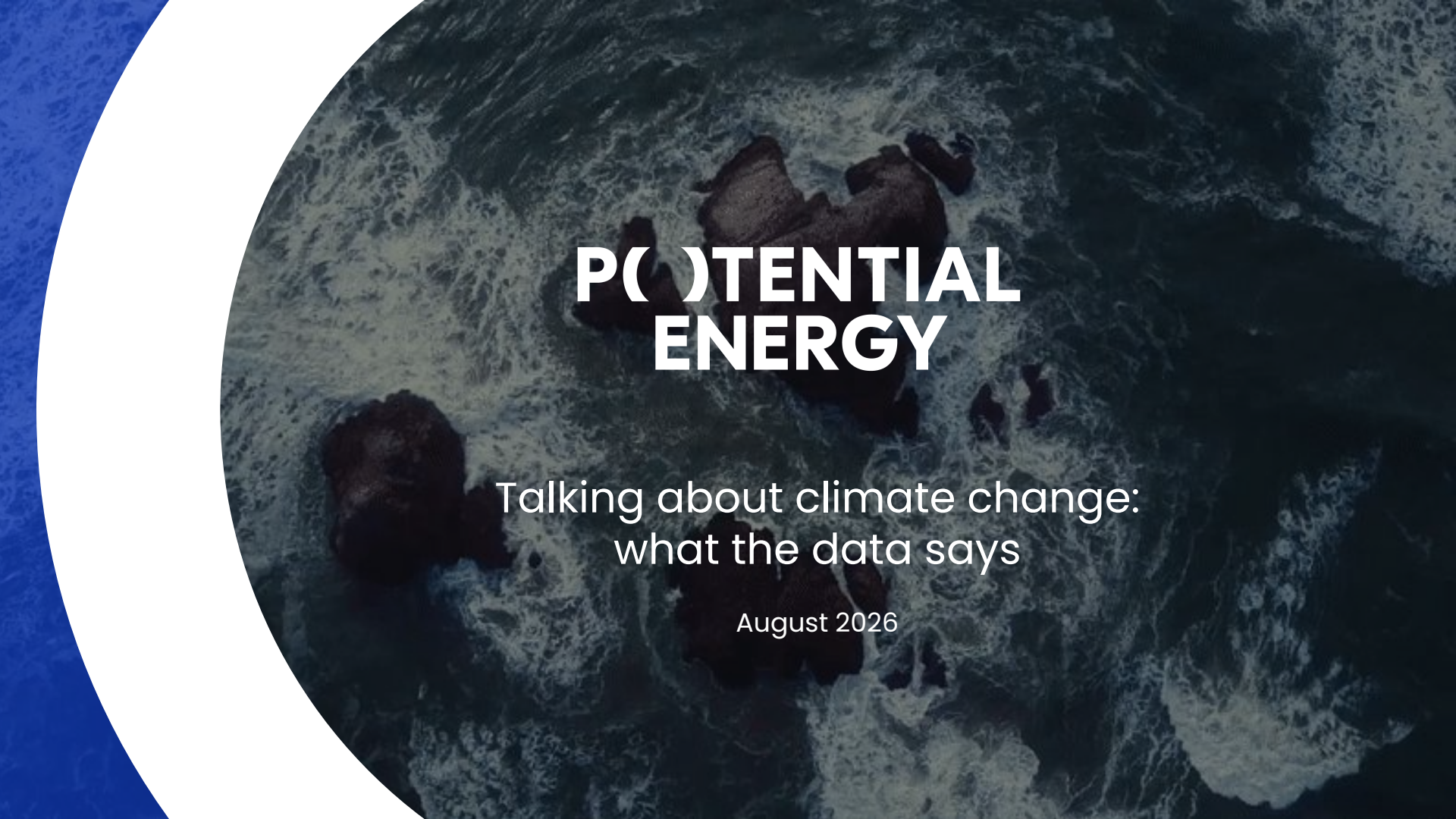
Speaker

Will Howard



Head of Insights and Advisory Services

Potential Energy Coalition



POTENTIAL ENERGY

Talking about climate change:
what the data says

August 2026

A note about our data

This presentation is published by Potential Energy Coalition, Inc. a 501(c)(3) charitable, nonpartisan organization for public education purposes only; please do not share this information with any candidates, campaigns, or political parties.

POTENTIAL ENERGY

Global marketing
engine built to
accelerate solutions
to climate change

**Data-driven nonprofit marketing
firm, with two offerings:**

**1. Scale campaigns to create citizen
support**

Served and measured over 4 billion
pieces of content at key moments

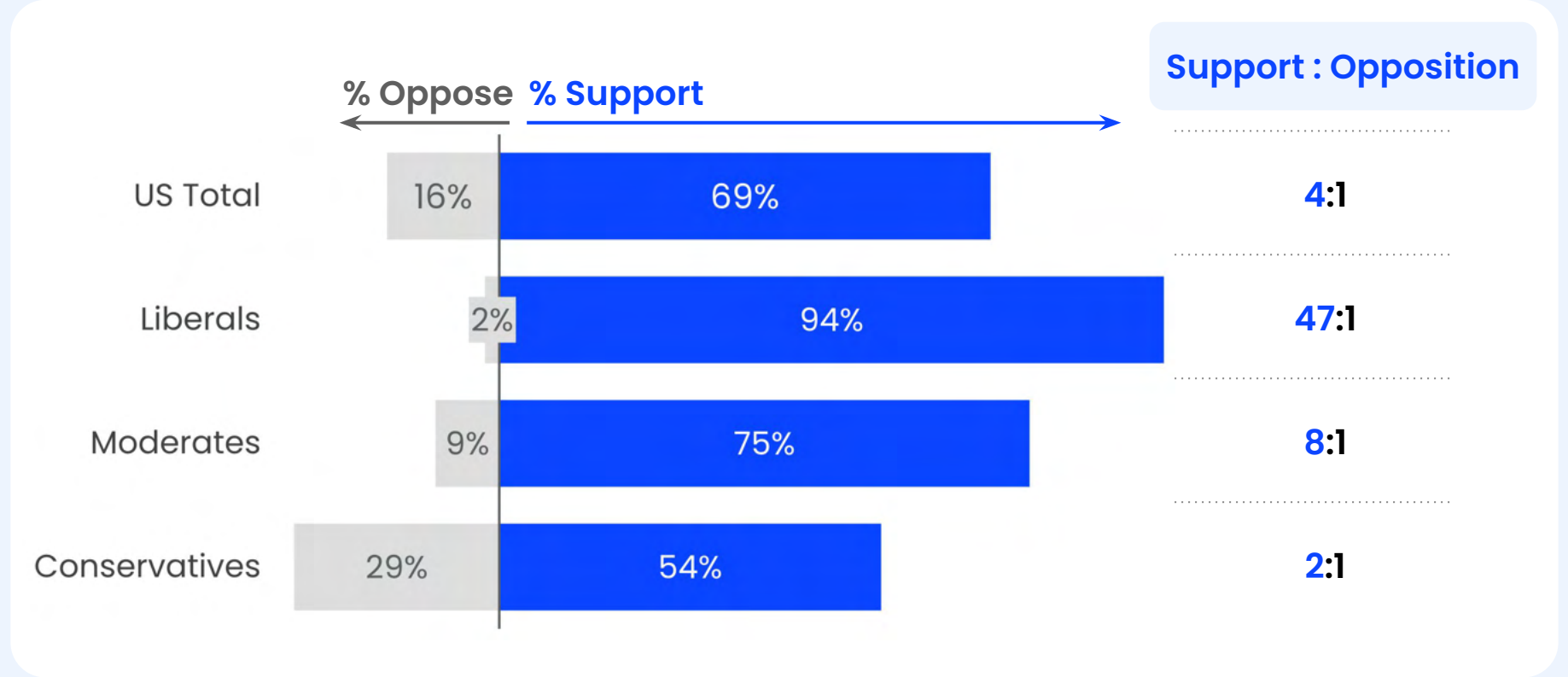
2. Data-drive insight to guide leaders

Massive test-and-learn machine that
finds and scales what works

THE CONTEXT

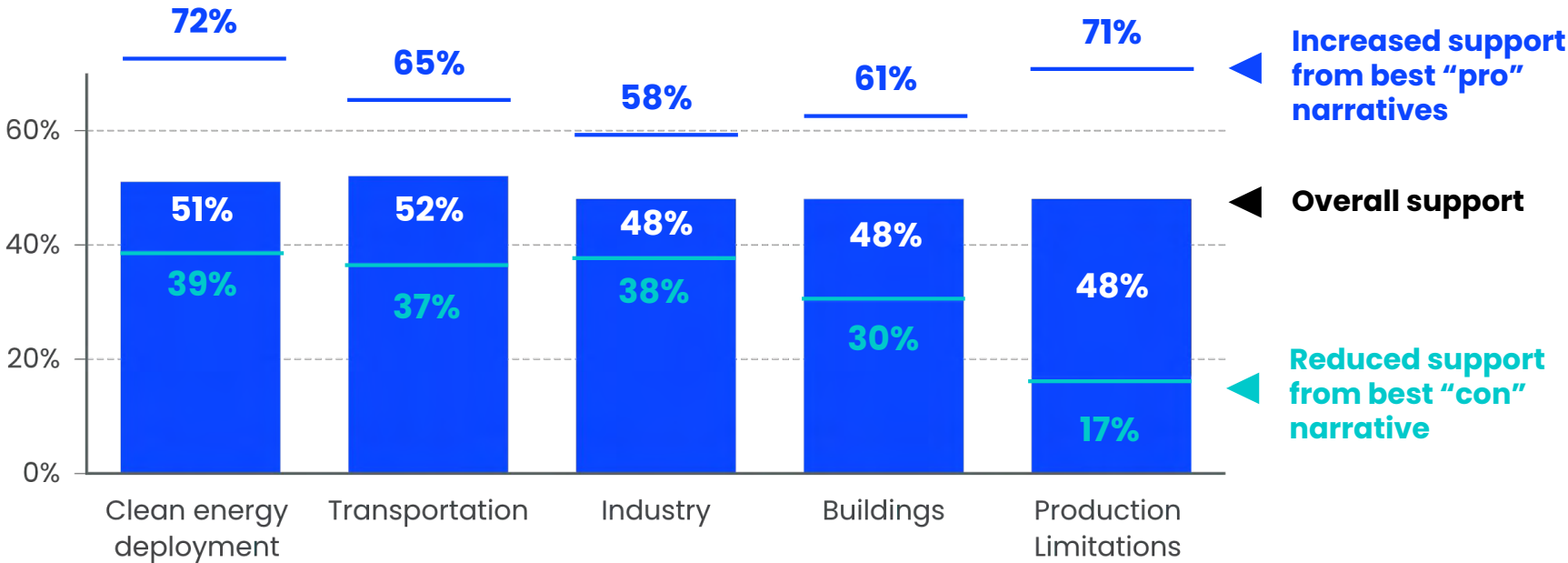
Setting the stage

Strong majorities still support government action on climate



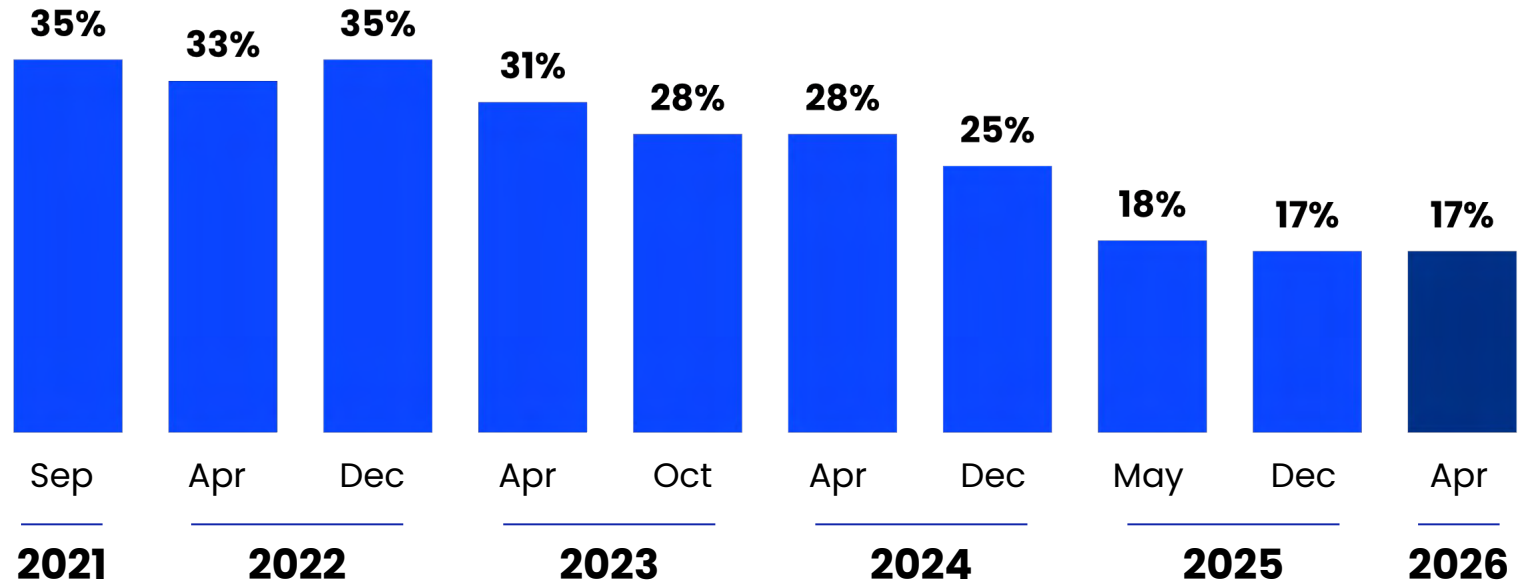
But ... this is a **contest**, where we only win if we **show up**

Support for key policies



Climate change has been **fading** from national conversation

Percent of US population hearing about climate in the media once a week



Confidential | Not for Distribution



What does the data say?

Five
message
frames
that lose
20+
points of
support

X Too complex.

Decarbonization, GHG, scope 3 = gibberish to regular people

X Too conceptual.

Green jobs, growth & innovation are bottom third in efficacy

X Too disruptive.

Bans, limits and phaseouts the least popular policies tested

X Too global.

People 3x as likely to say impact close to home is motivating

X Too ideological.

Terms like “justice”, “crisis”, or “green” increase polarization

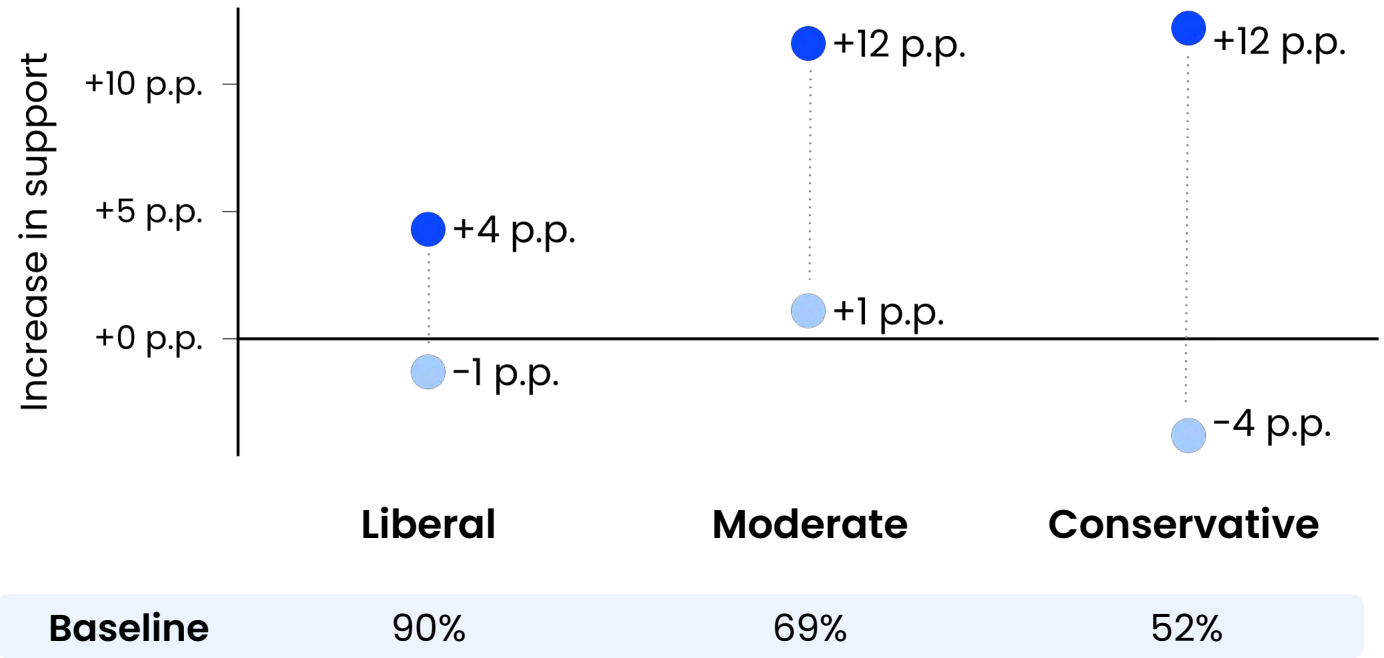


WHAT THE DATA SAYS

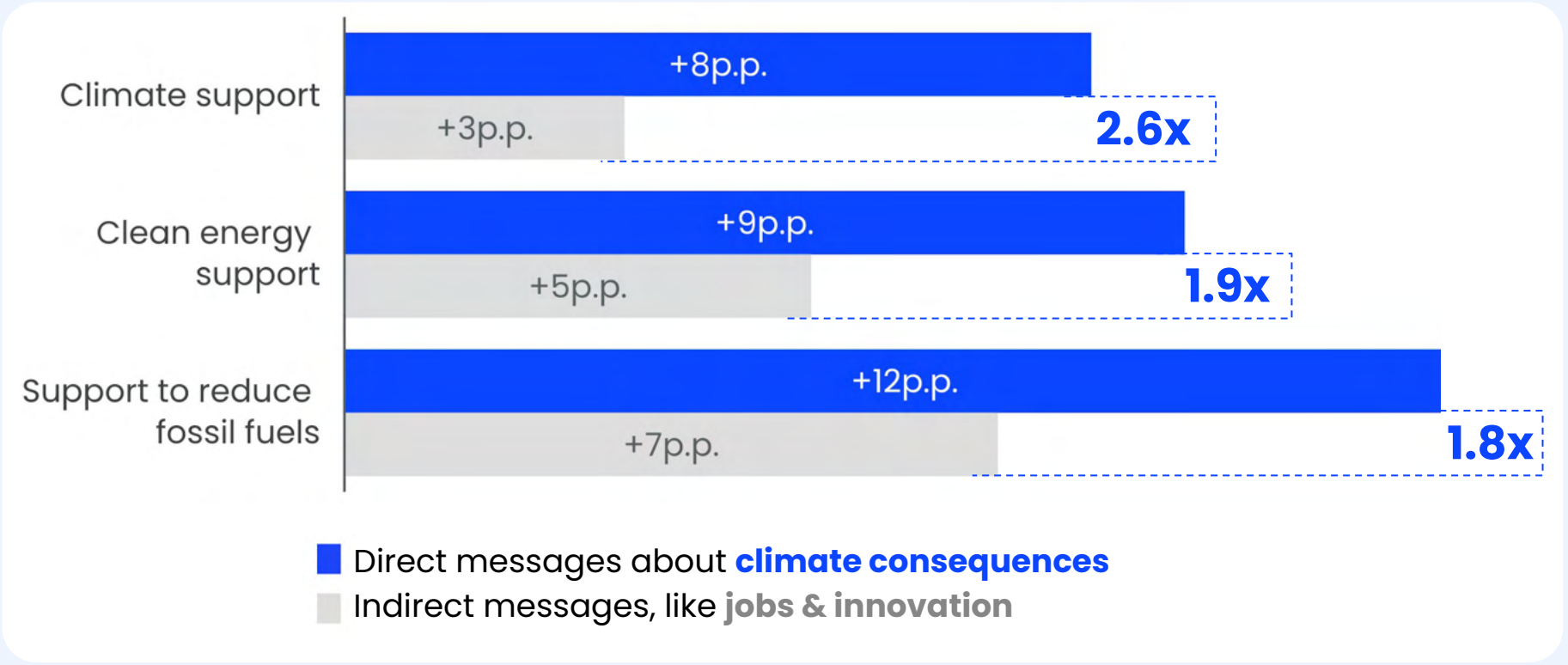
Three critical facts

Fact #1: With the right message, everybody moves

Best and worst message performance



Fact #2: Direct messages about climate consequences outperform “side-door” messages



Example: Human stories significantly beat economic concepts

Real people facing real harms



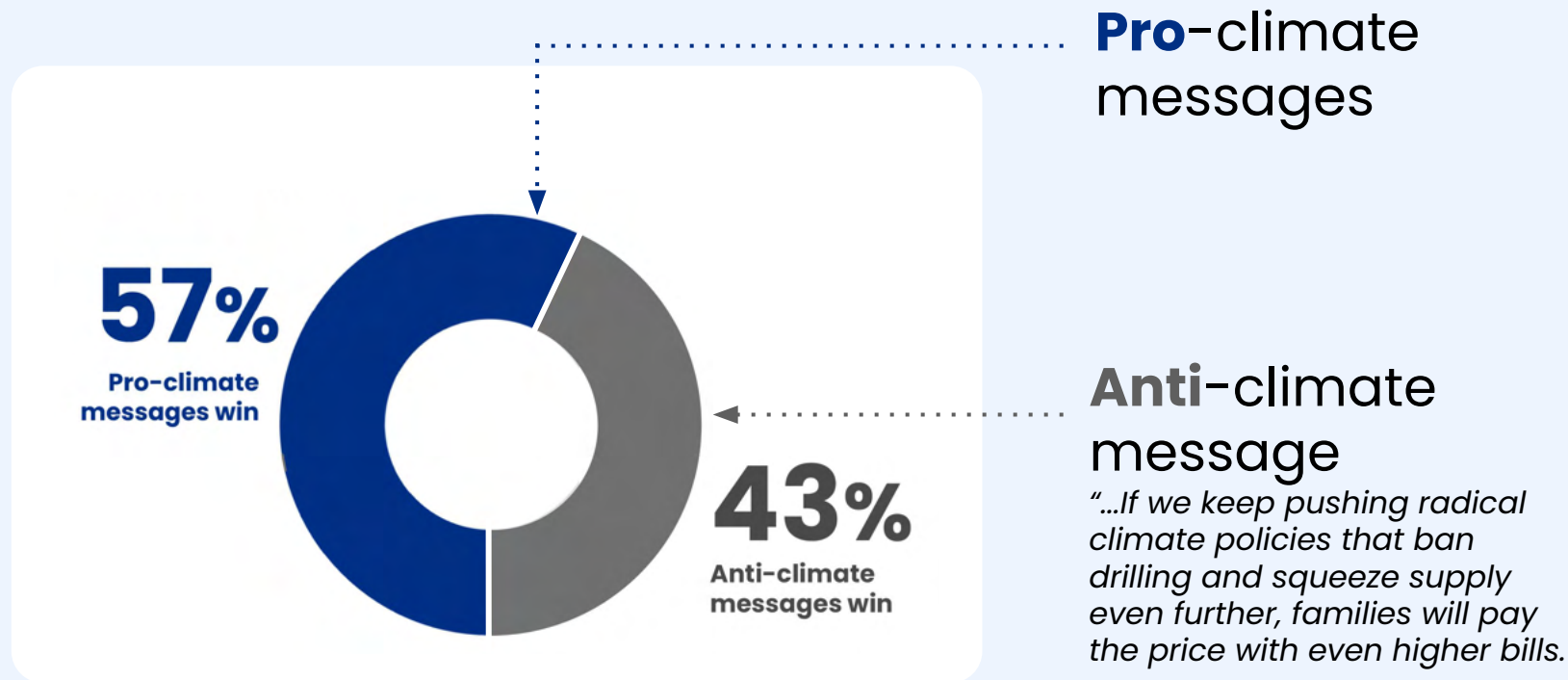
+15 p.p.
lift in strong
support for
immediate
climate
action

High tech-fueled “growth”



+2 p.p.
lift in strong
support for
immediate
climate
action

Fact #3: Head-to-head, pro-climate messages handily beat the most effective opposition messaging



A person stands on a dark, jagged rocky peak, looking out over a vast expanse of white clouds that fill the lower half of the frame. The sky above is a deep, clear blue with a few wispy clouds. The overall mood is one of contemplation and looking forward.

A PATH FORWARD

Not *if* we should talk about
climate, but *how*

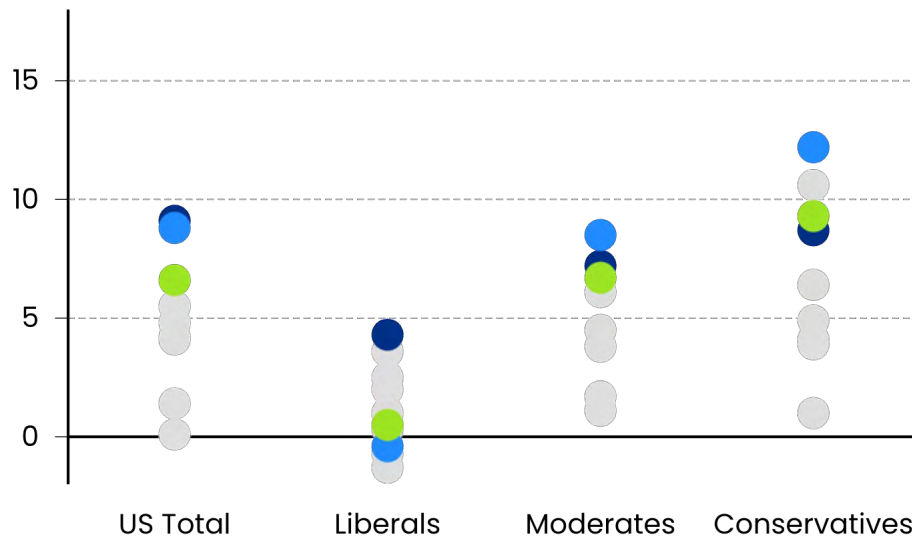
1

Make it about human, material **consequences**: my finances, my health, and the people I love

Across the political spectrum,
the **same three** consequence
messages consistently
over-perform.

Money**Health****Love**

Increase in support across policies, by country



1 | The three best messages are all about **consequences**

1. Money

"It's not **fair** that everyday people pay the **high cost** of climate change."

2. Health

"The less we rely on **chemicals** like oil, gas, & methane, the better."

3. Love

"Pollution and polluters are threatening the **people and places we love**"

2

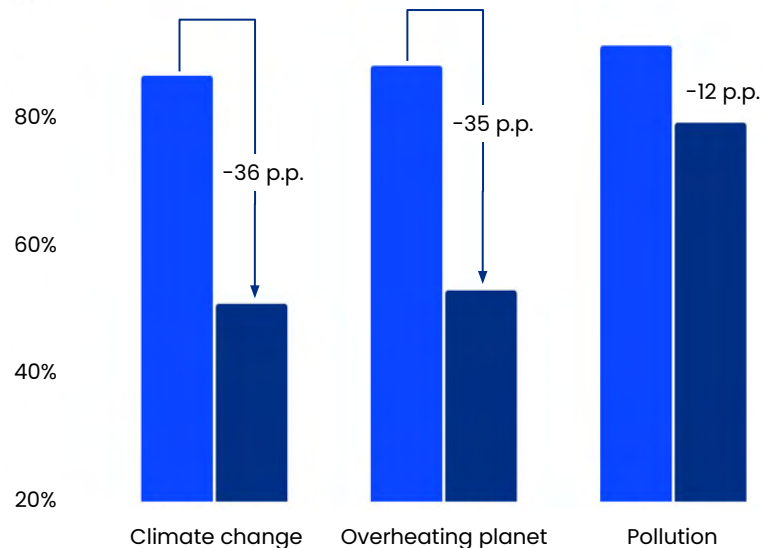
Make the culprit concrete: focusing on "polluters" and "pollution" makes it more solvable and less polarizing

US Dems

US Reps

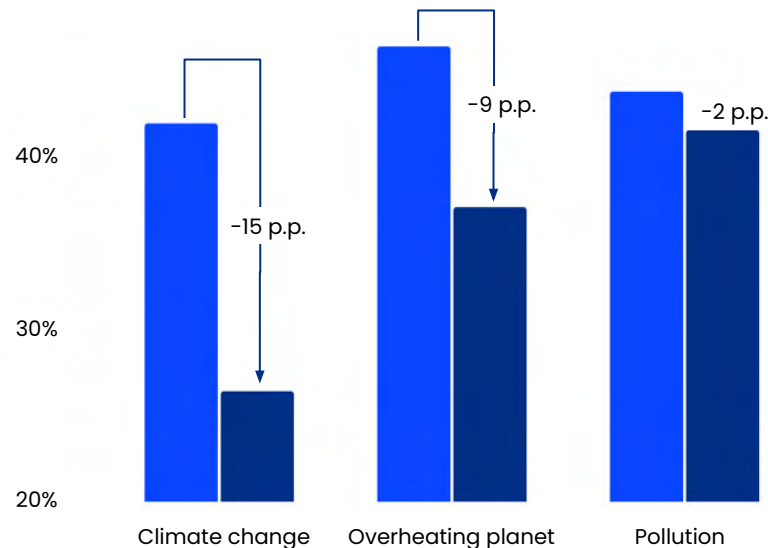
"I support immediate action by the government to address..."

% total "Strongly agree" or "Somewhat agree"



Realistically, do you think it will be possible to solve ... in your lifetime?

% total "Definitely yes" or "Probably yes"



2

These shifts to **pollution framing** strongly raise salience

Incomprehensible	to	Simple
Emissions	→	Pollution
Greenhouse gases	→	Pollution
Natural gas	→	The super pollutant methane
Anthropogenic	→	The pollution we're creating
Scope 3 emissions	→	Customer and suppliers' pollution
Planetary boundaries	→	Unsafe levels of pollution
1.5 degrees	→	Stop overheating
Decarbonization	→	Eliminate pollution
Net Zero	→	No pollution
CDR	→	Pollution removal
ZEVs	→	Clean cars
Heat pumps	→	Clean heat

**More
immediate
problems...**

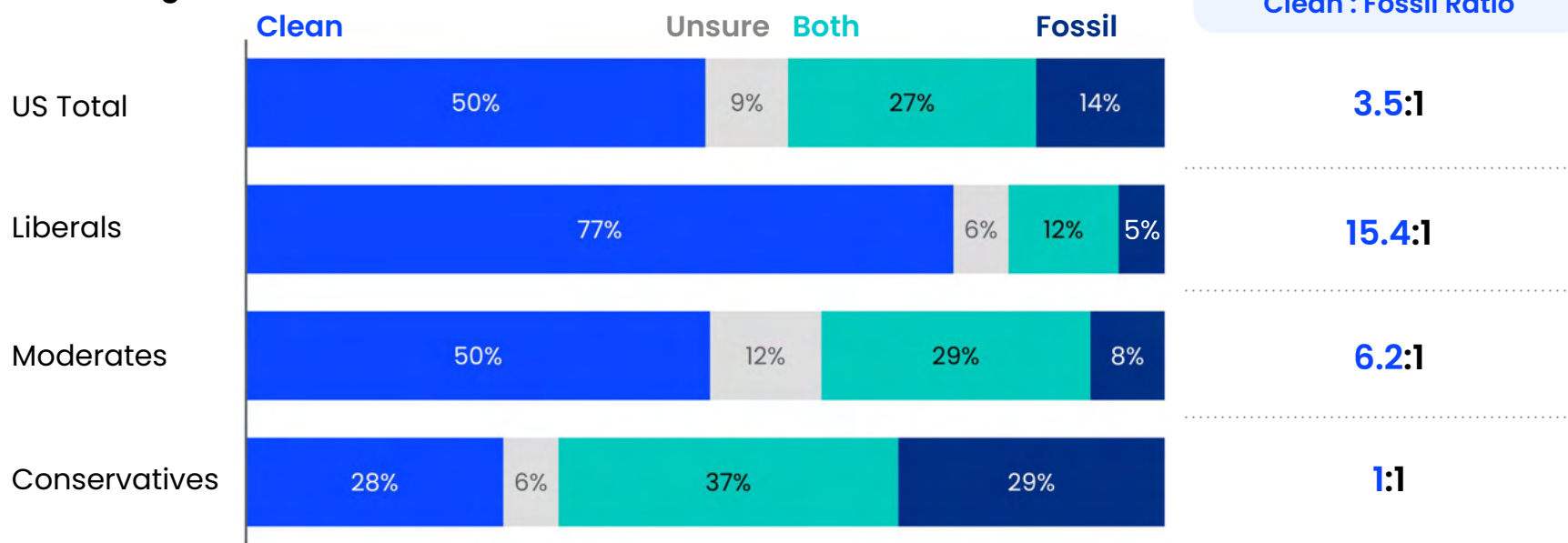
**...more
immediate
solutions**

3

Make the **cure** exciting: **unlimited power** sets people free from limited supply, limited choice, and high prices

Which of the following is a better path to energy affordability?

Increasing...



A person is standing on the peak of a dark, jagged mountain. Below the mountain, a vast expanse of white clouds stretches to the horizon. The sky above is a deep, clear blue with a few wispy clouds. The overall scene conveys a sense of achievement and looking down on a vast world.

The winning sentence starts with ...

It's not **fair** that ...

A **simple message roadmap** for fixing climate communications

ONE rule

The consequences of climate change are fundamentally **UNFAIR**.
The best message directly shows how everyday people are bearing the cost.

THREE steps

1

Make **consequences**
material: *finances,*
health, family.

2

Make the **culprit** real:
pollution and
polluters.

3

Make the **cure**
exciting: *unlimited*
clean energy.

FOUR stories

Money

"It's not fair that
everyday people
pay the high
price of climate
change."

Health

"The less we rely
on chemicals
like oil, gas, &
methane, the
better."

Love

"Later is too late
to protect the
people & places
you love."

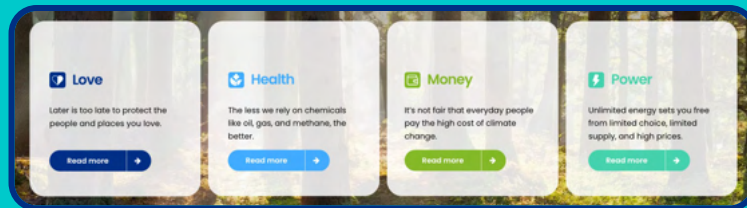
Power

"Clean energy
sets you free
from limited
choice, supply,
and high prices."

Use the **QR code** to visit our website
& see the insights **come to life**



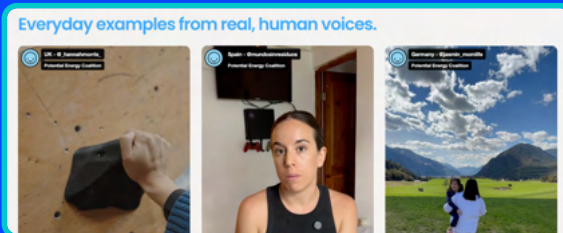
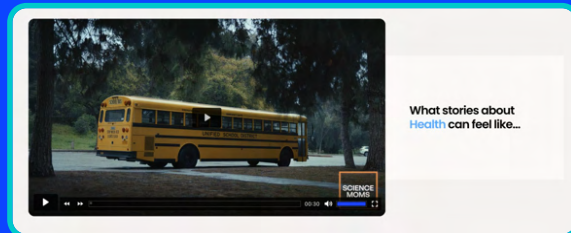
Explore the **data**



Key
language
to use

- Toxins, chemicals, pollutants
- Flames and fumes
- Petroleum-based
- Petrochemicals
- Microplastics
- Cleaner water, soil, and air

See example
creative & creator content



...and download the report at potentialenergycoalition.org/fixingclimatecomms

Speaker

Crystal Bernard



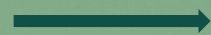
State Initiatives Strategist

Just Solutions

THE CALL TO CLIMATE JUSTICE

*Lessons from the Field Guide for Nonpartisan Voter &
Candidate Engagement*

August 27, 2026



fieldguide.climatemax.org

AGENDA



What We Saw



Narrative Strategy



Nonpartisan Engagement



Michigan Lessons



Closing Takeaways

About the Field Guide

- ➔ Convened by Just Solutions through ClimateMAX
- ➔ Shaped by 20+ policy, legal, research, and advocacy partners
- ➔ Built for nonpartisan voter + candidate engagement

The Field Guide was created to help organizations bring community priorities into climate and energy conversations in ways that are strategic, nonpartisan, and locally relevant.

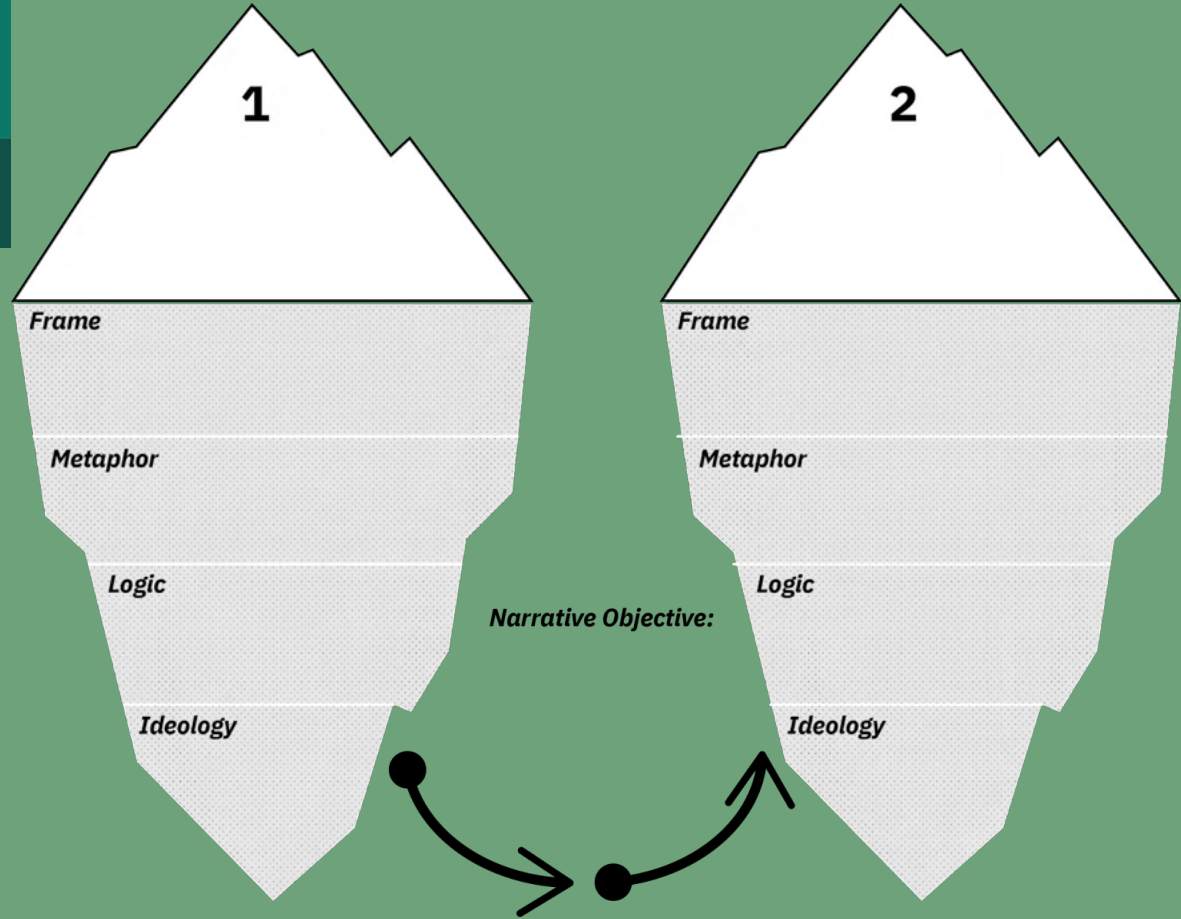
What We Saw

Climate issues already shape voters' lives, but the connections are often missing.

- **Everyday concerns:** Energy bills, housing, insurance, disasters, and new technologies are already shaping people's lives.
- **Fragmented conversations:** These issues are often discussed separately rather than as connected policy choices.
- **Narrative gap:** Communications often begin with technology or emissions rather than lived experience.
- **Nonpartisan engagement:** 501(c)(3) organizations want to engage voters and candidates but need clarity on their legal lane.

The Field Guide aims to help organizations make those connections and bring community priorities into voter and candidate engagement.

Narrative Strategy



Narrative Strategy

An effective narrative strategy starts with four intentional choices:

- **Objective:** What do you want people to understand or see differently?
- **Audience:** Who are you trying to reach, and what do they already care about?
- **Method:** How will you frame the problem and solution in a way that connects to those values?
- **Messenger:** Who can credibly and authentically deliver the message?

The Field Guide moves audiences toward more constructive narratives:

Personal needs, personal responsibility → **Universal needs require shared responsibility**

Corporate power & corruption is inevitable → **Self-determination & accountability**

The problem is too big, I'm on my own → **We do the biggest things, together**

What Changes When We Reframe?

Example: Disaster Preparedness

Current Narrative

“When disaster hits, you do what you can to protect your family and hope for the best.”



Reframe

“We can make communities safer by building the infrastructure, resources, and support people can rely on when disaster strikes.”

Problem: Something we each have to weather → **A challenge communities can prepare for**

Responsibility: Each of us on our own → **Shared responsibility**

Possibility: Hope we make it through → **Build greater resilience together**

Nonpartisan Engagement

Know Your Legal Lane

501(c)(3) organizations can educate candidates and voters - the key is staying nonpartisan.

- ➔ Never tell people who to vote for, directly or indirectly.
- ➔ Educate all candidates equally, same questions and opportunity to respond.
- ➔ Ask open-ended questions that don't hint at a correct answer.
- ➔ Keep questions free of your organization's agenda or stated positions.

Connecting Narrative to Questions

Every model question follows the same three-part structure:

- **Setup**: name the shared experience in plain terms
- **Question**: open-ended, can't be answered yes/no, reveals how they'd actually take the issue on if elected.
- **Customize**: localize with a real story or local data

Example (energy affordability):

- **Setup**: We all pay utilities, but bills hit people differently depending on income.
- **Question**: How do we give everyone the dignity of being able to afford their energy bills?
- **Customize**: Local energy burden data or story.

Case Study: Michigan Solutions for All

A coalition driven messaging campaign 2024-2025

The Setup

About the Campaign:

Partnership: Just Solutions & Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition

15+ community organizations across Detroit, Saginaw, and Flint

Goal: making IRA & IIJA investments feel real and defensible to the people they're meant to help.

Year 1 to Year 2 Pivot

From “here’s what’s available” → “here’s what’s at stake.”

Michigan Lessons

Three lessons from our Michigan work

Lead with Tangible Outcomes

Lead with outcomes people can see and feel: affordability, health, and job stability.

Localize the entry point

Ground the message in the issues and experiences that matter in each community.

Center Trusted Messengers

Put frontline leaders and local partners in the messenger role, not just institutions.

Impact by the numbers

714K+ reached | 2.3M+ impressions | 9,172 actions

Closing Takeaways

The Field Guide can support more than candidate questions.

Partners are using or exploring it for:

- Nonpartisan election engagement
- Candidate forums + voter education
- Adapting messages to local issues and audiences

Keep learning across states

Join the ClimateMAX State
Network



THANK YOU

Crystal Bernard, State Initiatives Strategist

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 [justsolutions_org](https://www.instagram.com/justsolutions_org)

 [JustSolutionsOrg](https://www.facebook.com/JustSolutionsOrg)

 [justsolutions.bsky.social](https://twitter.com/justsolutions.bsky.social)

 [just-solutions-collective](https://www.linkedin.com/company/just-solutions-collective)

Stay up to date with our work at justsolutionscollective.org

EXPLORE THE GUIDE

fieldguide.climatemax.org

 **CLIMATE MAX**



Q&A

Thank you for joining!

**Reach out to
kristen@climate-xchange.org with any
additional questions!**

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[SCPN]