

Clean Energy Disinformation: What Sticks and Who It Sticks To

Survey Results

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Background

We're seeing growing opposition to clean energy projects at the local level:

- A 2024 report by Columbia University found **nearly 400 local and state restrictions on clean energy severe enough to block projects across 41 states.**
- Renewable energy developers report community opposition and local restrictions as the **leading causes of project delays and cancellations.**
- **Mis- and dis-information about clean energy plays a key role in driving opposition,** alongside “NIMBY” (not in my backyard) pushback and legitimate community concerns.



Quote from Anonymous Clean Energy Developer:

*“While communities often have legitimate questions and concerns that can be addressed through good-faith community engagement, **organized opposition towards a project always—literally, 100 % of the time—spreads misinformation** to drum up support and create controversy.”*

Source: Energy Research & Social Science (Nov 2024) [Halfway up the ladder: Developer practices and perspectives on community engagement for utility-scale renewable energy in the United States](#)

Research: National and State-level Survey with Voters

- Main Goals: Understand what disinformation messages are most believable (**what sticks**) and who is most susceptible (**who it sticks to**)
- Worked with 270 Strategies & Lincoln Room Strategies to conduct a national survey of **4,000+ voters**, with oversamples in Florida, Michigan, Nevada and California.
- Fielding Period: November 12 - 20, 2024



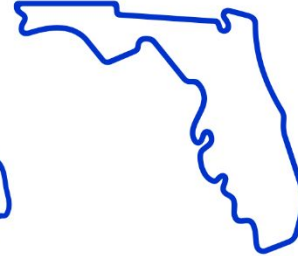
California



Nevada



Michigan



Florida

Insights to Explore:

Section 1: Climate and Clean Energy Attitudes

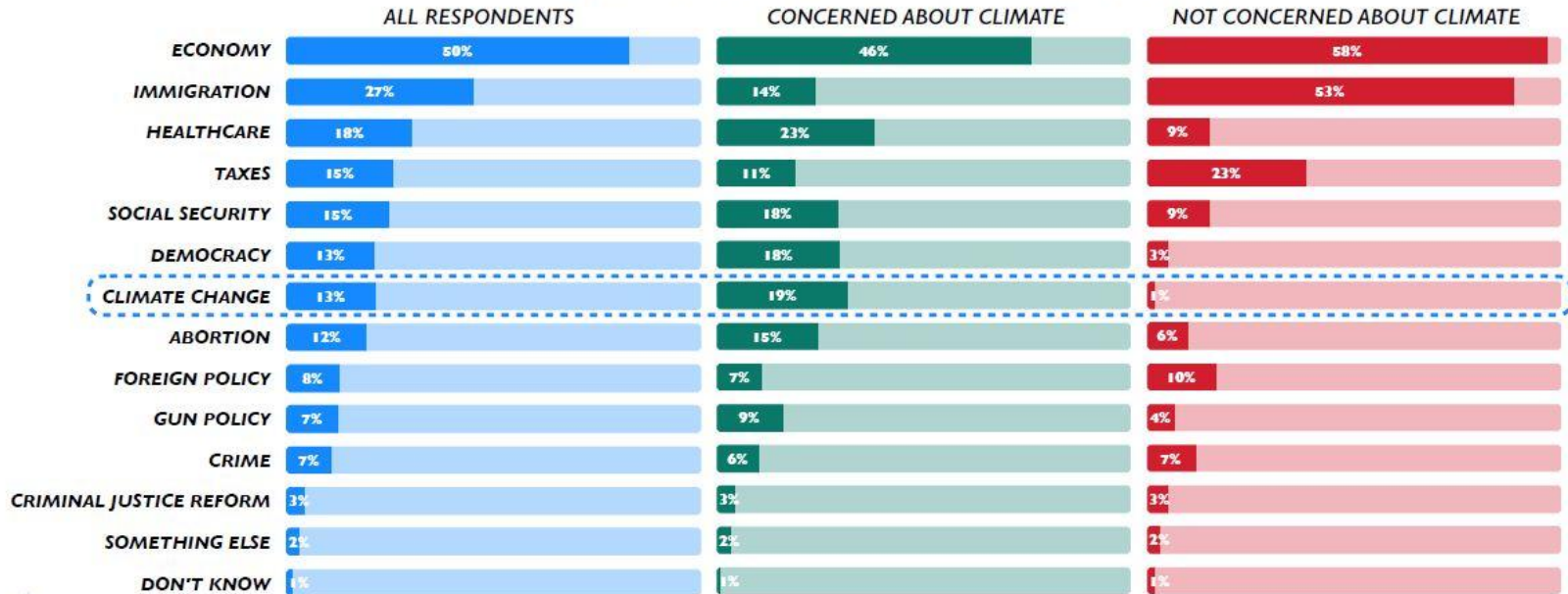
- What are voters hearing on clean energy?
 - Where are voters getting their news?
 - Who do voters trust on clean energy?
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Section 2: Detecting Disinformation

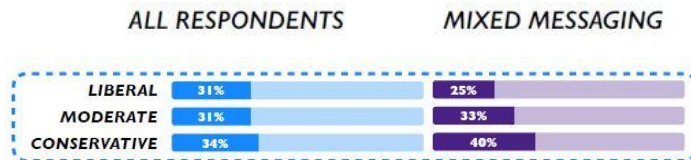
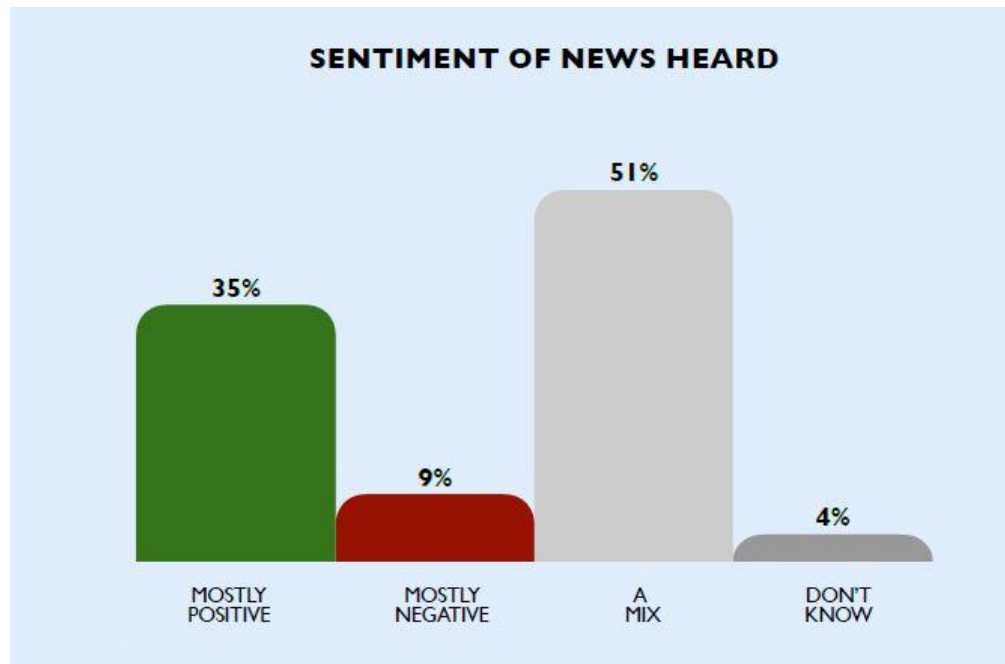
- Which kinds of clean energy disinformation messages resonate the most?
- Which groups are *the most* susceptible to these messages – and who is the least?

Section 1: Climate & Clean Energy Attitudes

Although **two in three voters** are concerned about climate change, **just 13% believe** that it should be prioritized by the federal government.



Most of what voters are hearing about clean energy is mixed.



In open ended responses about clean energy, “**killing birds**” was frequently cited, along with EVs, as negatives.

Cost effectiveness, saving money, jobs, clean air were cited as positives.

What positives have you heard about clean energy?

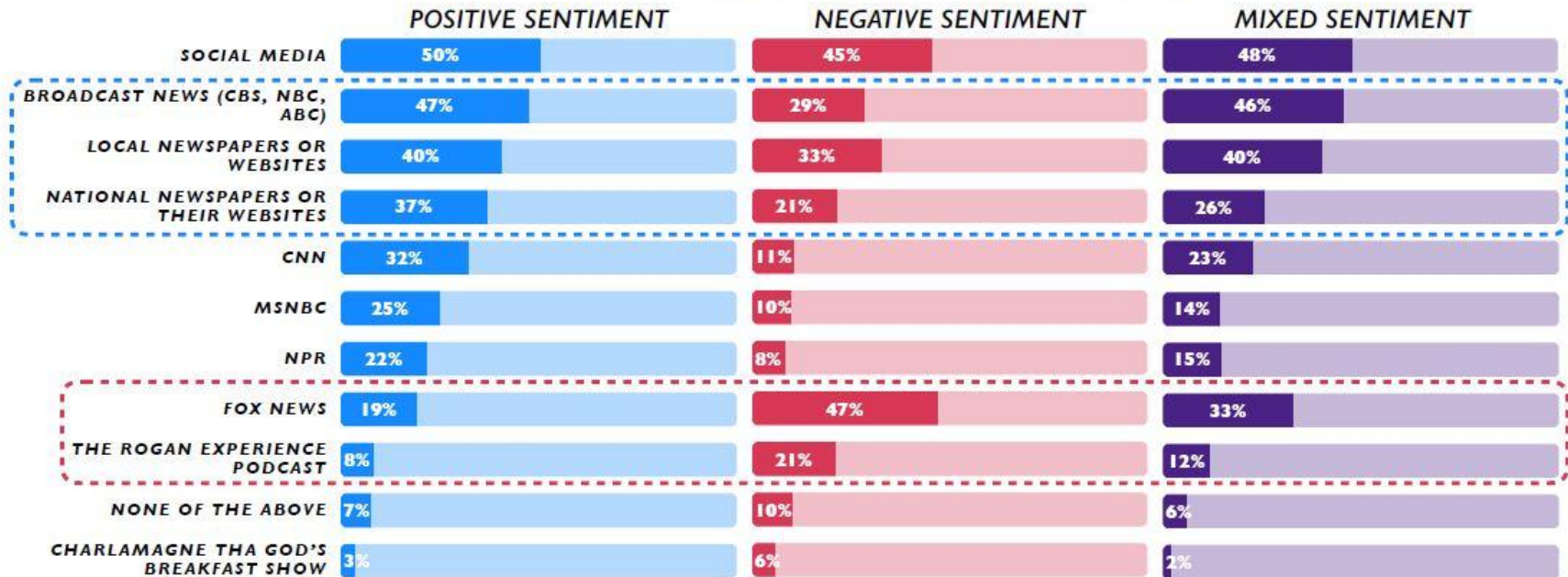
Phrase	Count
clean energy	389
climate change	158
fossil fuels	118
carbon emissions	66
solar panels	54
global warming	50
carbon footprint	45
renewable energy	45
cost effective	42
energy sources	42
fossil fuel	41
saves money	37
solar energy	36
solar power	36
cleaner air	32
air quality	29
clean air	29
air pollution	28
natural resources	28
greenhouse gas	26
creates jobs	25
reduces carbon	25
save money	25
greenhouse gases	23
gas emissions	22

What negatives have you heard about clean energy?

Phrase	Count
clean energy	195
solar panels	108
wind turbines	84
kill birds	42
electric cars	40
fossil fuels	40
climate change	33
kills birds	32
wind mills	30
wind power	30
wind farms	27
wind energy	23
solar farms	21
electric vehicles	19
energy sources	19
killing birds	18
fossil fuel	17
renewable energy	17
windmills kill	17
cost effective	16
solar energy	14
natural gas	12
solar power	11
turbines kill	11
electric car	10

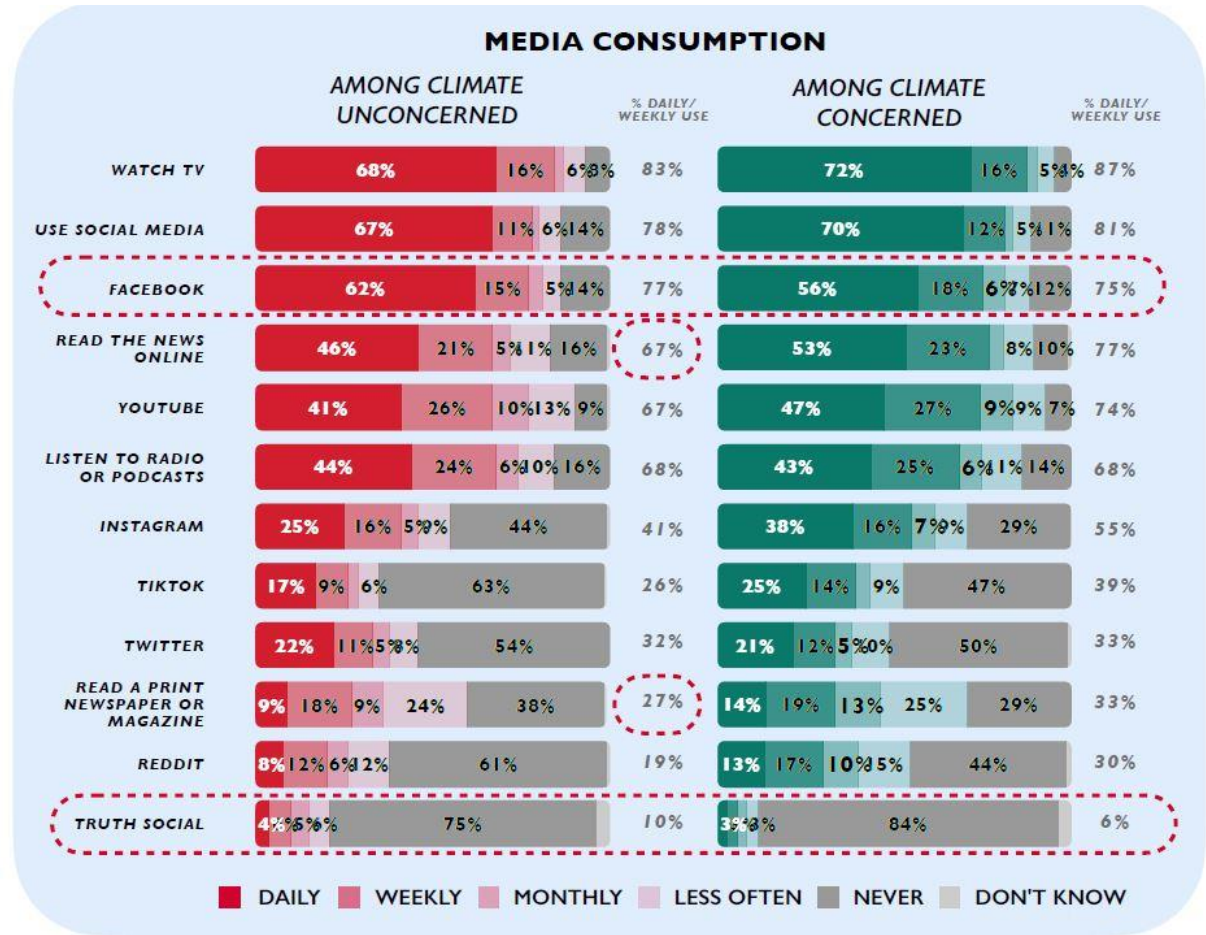
Those who have heard negative things about clean energy are more likely to **watch Fox News**, and **one in five listen to Joe Rogan's podcast**.

NEWS SOURCES USED IN LAST WEEK

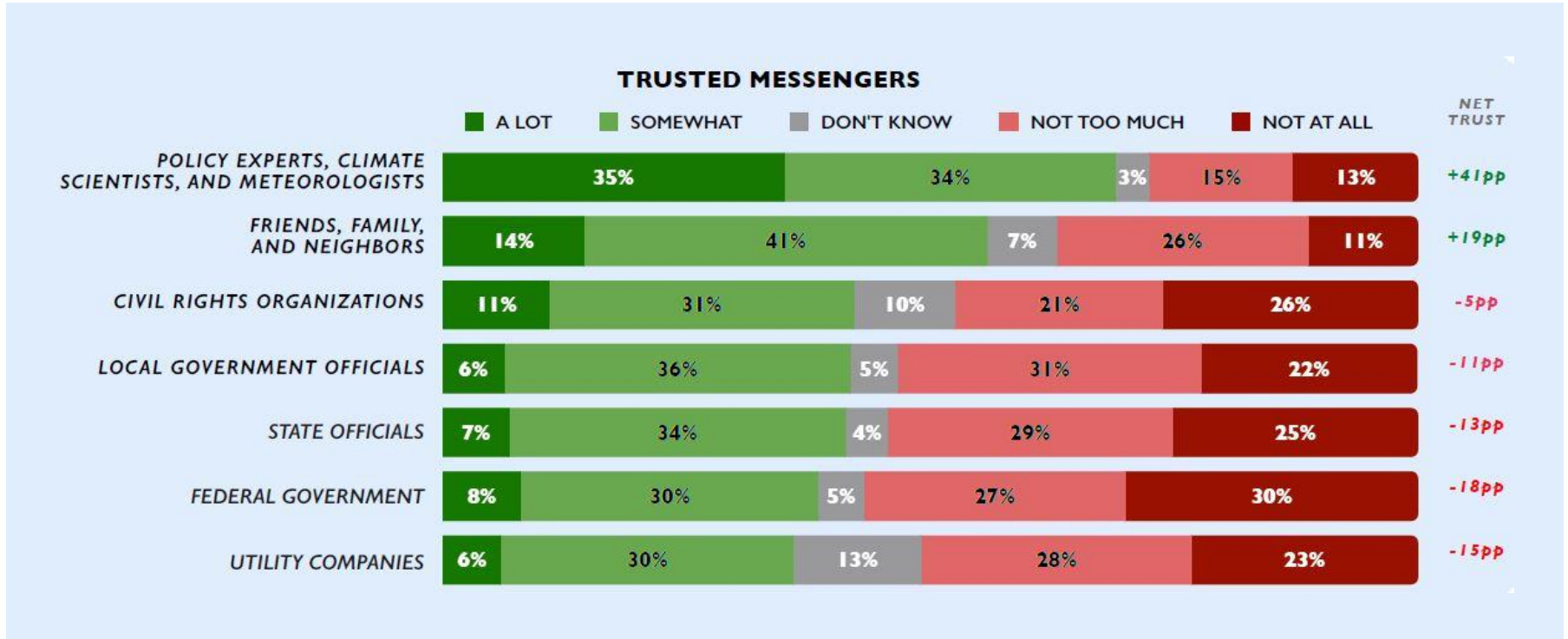


Traditional media:
Climate Unconcerned are **much less likely** to seek news through traditional sources such as online news sites or printed newspapers.

Social media:
Unconcerned are more likely to use **Facebook and Truth Social**; whereas Climate Concerned use **TikTok and Instagram** more.



Majority of voters are most trusting of **experts** and **friends & family** on clean energy; government figures fall lower.



Section 2: Detecting Disinformation

We tested statements with four disinfo message themes that EDF frequently encounters in our U.S. advocacy work: **economic, political, health & safety** and **energy reliability**.

CLEAN ENERGY RAISES COSTS
ECONOMIC

Transitioning to clean energy sources such as wind and solar increases household energy costs.

OFFSHORE WIND HARMS WILDLIFE
POLITICAL

Offshore wind turbines kill millions of birds a year and harm marine wildlife such as whales and dolphins.

CLEAN ENERGY HURTS FARMERS
POLITICAL

While wind turbines and solar farms benefit cities, they also harm farmland and American farmers.

EVS LESS SAFE
HEALTH & SAFETY

Electric vehicles are less safe and are more likely than gas-powered cars to catch fire.

US ELIMINATES FOSSIL FUELS BY 2035
NEUTRAL

The United States is on track to completely eliminate the use of fossil fuels by 2035.

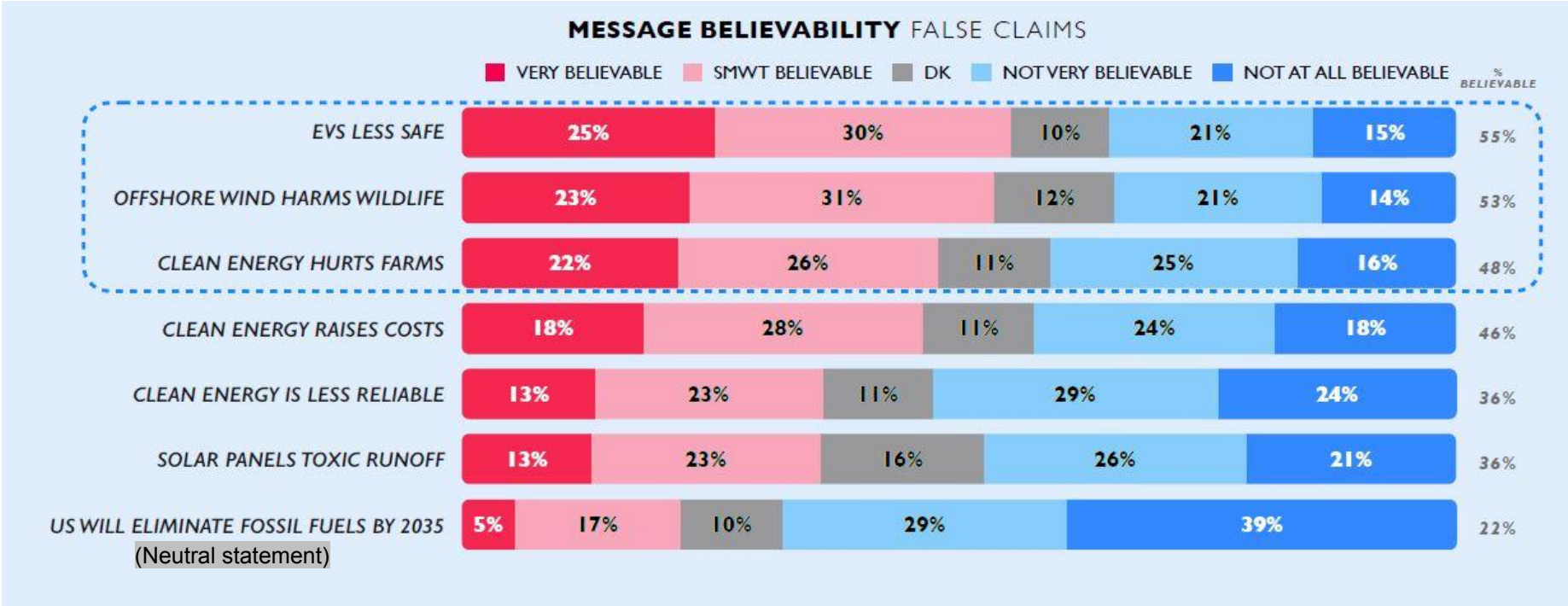
CLEAN ENERGY IS LESS RELIABLE
RELIABILITY

Bringing more clean energy sources onto the electric grid will make the electricity that powers our homes less reliable.

SOLAR PANELS TOXIC RUNOFF
HEALTH & SAFETY

Solar panels contain toxic chemicals which have toxic runoff and lead to dangerous chemicals entering our soil.

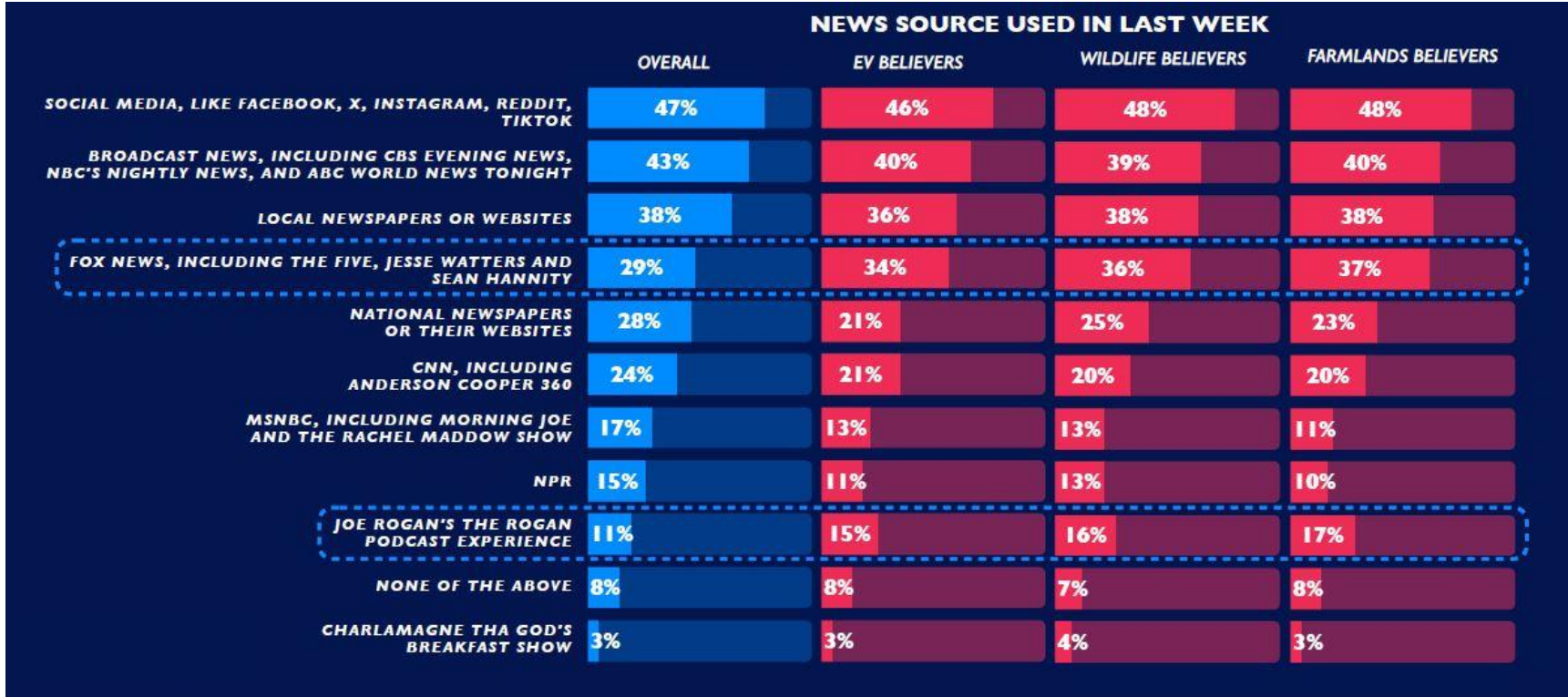
EVs being less safe, offshore wind harming wildlife and clean energy hurting farmland are the most believable, with more than half or nearly half of respondents reporting them to be at least somewhat believable.



Who believes these disinformation messages?

- **White, conservative, non-college educated, or rural voters** are generally the most susceptible to all tested disinformation statements.
- **Women and younger voters** are also more susceptible to the top tested claims (EV fires, harming wildlife, harming farmers) — **messages that hit on themes of political or physical harm.**
- Differences in our four key states:
 - Michigan and Nevada voters are slightly *more likely* to believe the false statement about clean energy harming farmlands.
 - Voters in California are slightly *less likely* to believe the false statement about EVs than average.

Those susceptible to disinfo claims about the harm or safety concerns of clean energy self-report getting news from **Fox News** and **Joe Rogan** more than overall voters.



Factual clean energy statements we tested alongside the disinformation statements.

MESSAGE TESTING - FACTUAL STATEMENTS

WIND TURBINES PAY LANDOWNERS *FACTUAL*

Landowners are paid an average of \$10,000 annually to host a wind turbine on their land, and canceling these projects costs landowners thousands.

CLEAN ENERGY REQUIRES MORE SPACE *FACTUAL*

Clean energy projects, such as wind and solar farms, require more physical space than traditional power stations.

(Neutral statement)

MORE POWER LINES MAKE THE GRID MORE RELIABLE *FACTUAL*

Building more electric power lines will make the grid more reliable and lower energy costs.

COMMUNITIES WITH WIND FARMS HAVE MORE MONEY *FACTUAL*

Communities with wind farms have more money to spend on local projects, such as improving roads, providing emergency services, and updating schools.

COMMUNITIES WITH SOLAR FARMS HAVE MORE MONEY *FACTUAL*

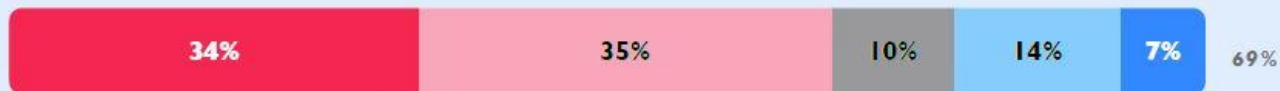
Communities with solar farms have more money to spend on local projects, such as improving roads, providing emergency services, and updating schools.

The majority of respondents found all of the factual statements **believable**, including how wind and solar projects generate revenue for landowners and for communities.

MESSAGE BELIEVABILITY FACTUAL CLAIMS

■ VERY BELIEVABLE
 ■ SMWT BELIEVABLE
 ■ DK
 ■ NOT VERY BELIEVABLE
 ■ NOT AT ALL BELIEVABLE
 % BELIEVABLE

CLEAN ENERGY REQUIRES MORE SPACE
(Neutral statement)



(SPLIT A) COMMUNITIES WITH WIND FARMS
HAVE MORE MONEY



(SPLIT B) COMMUNITIES WITH SOLAR FARMS
HAVE MORE MONEY



WIND TURBINES PAY LANDOWNERS



MORE POWER LINES MAKE THE GRID MORE
RELIABLE





Summary

- Media consumption plays a role in shaping perceptions of clean energy.
- Social media is a top source of news.
- Clean energy disinformation claims that hit on physical & political harm resonate widely.
- Opportunities to message about the money that clean energy projects generate for communities.

Questions?

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