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.

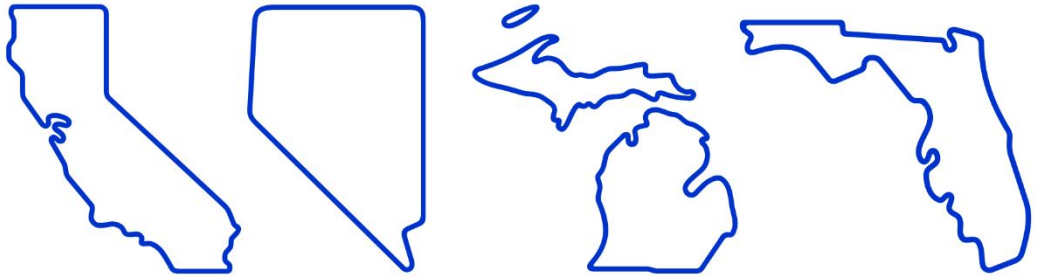
Quote from Anonymous Clean Energy Developer:

"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



Insights to Explore:

Section 1: Climate and Clean Energy Attitudes

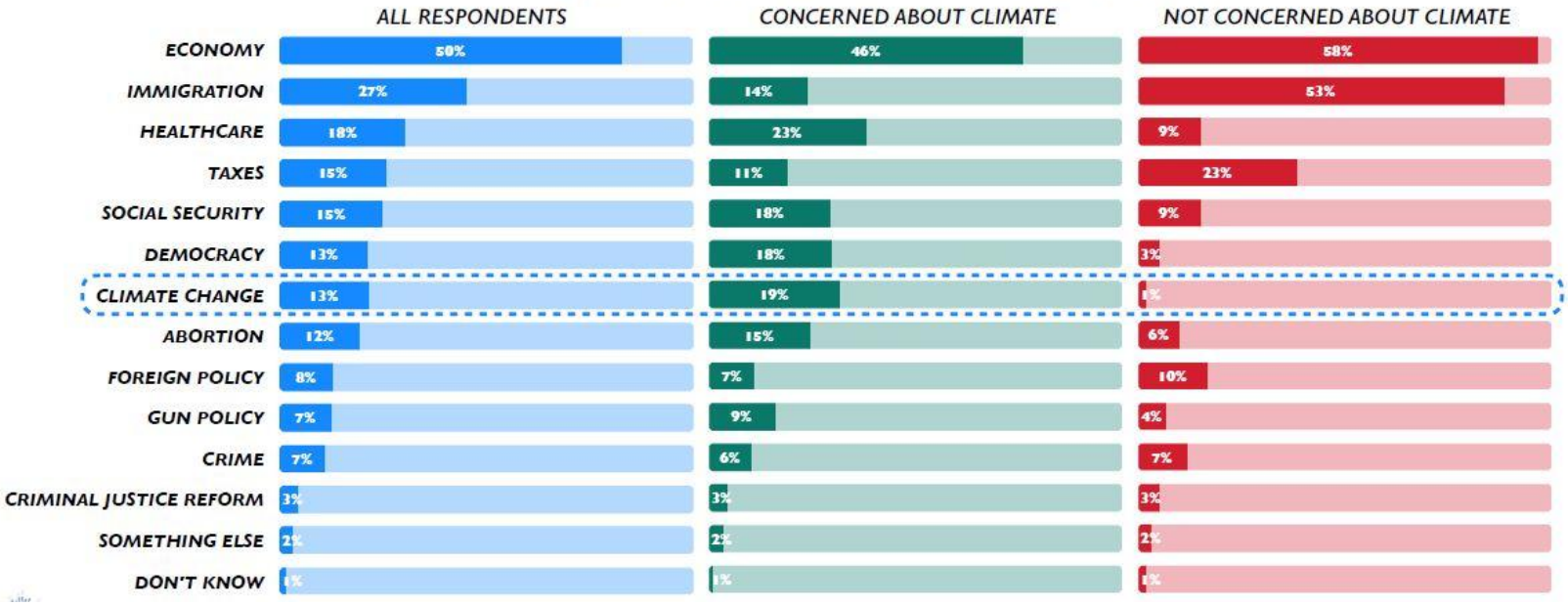
- What are voters hearing on clean energy?
- Where are voters getting their news?
- Who do voters trust on clean energy?

Section 2: Detecting Disinformation

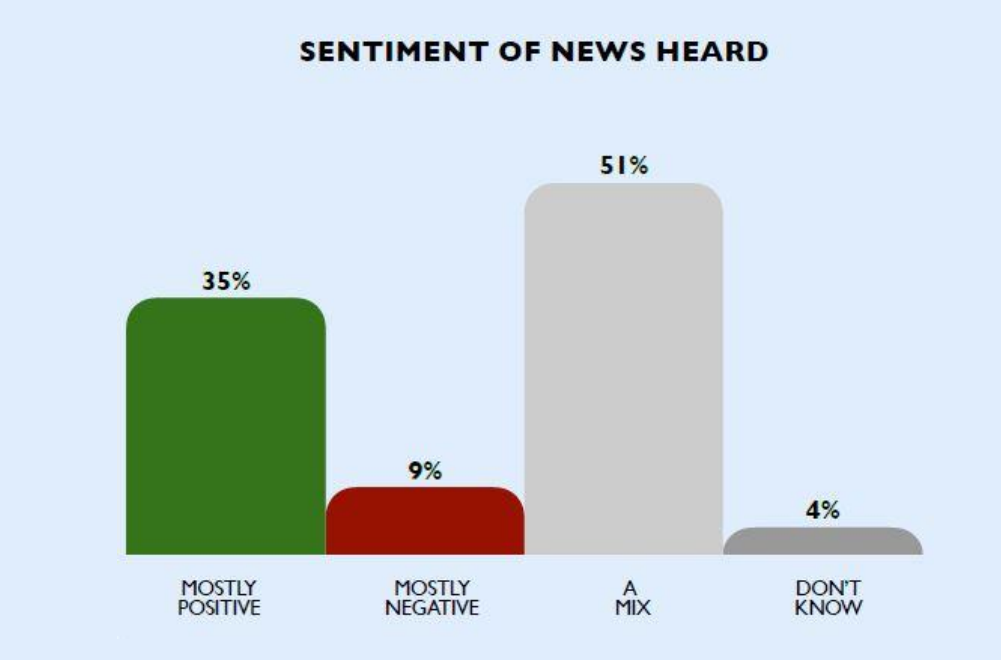
- Which kinds of clean energy disinformation messages resonate the most?
- Which groups are *the most* susceptible to these messages – and who is the least?

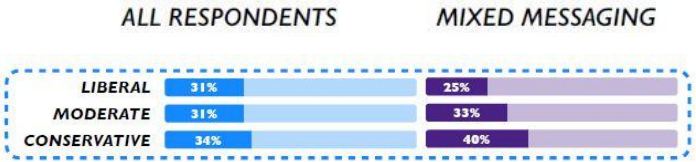
Section 1: Climate & Clean Energy Attitudes

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.

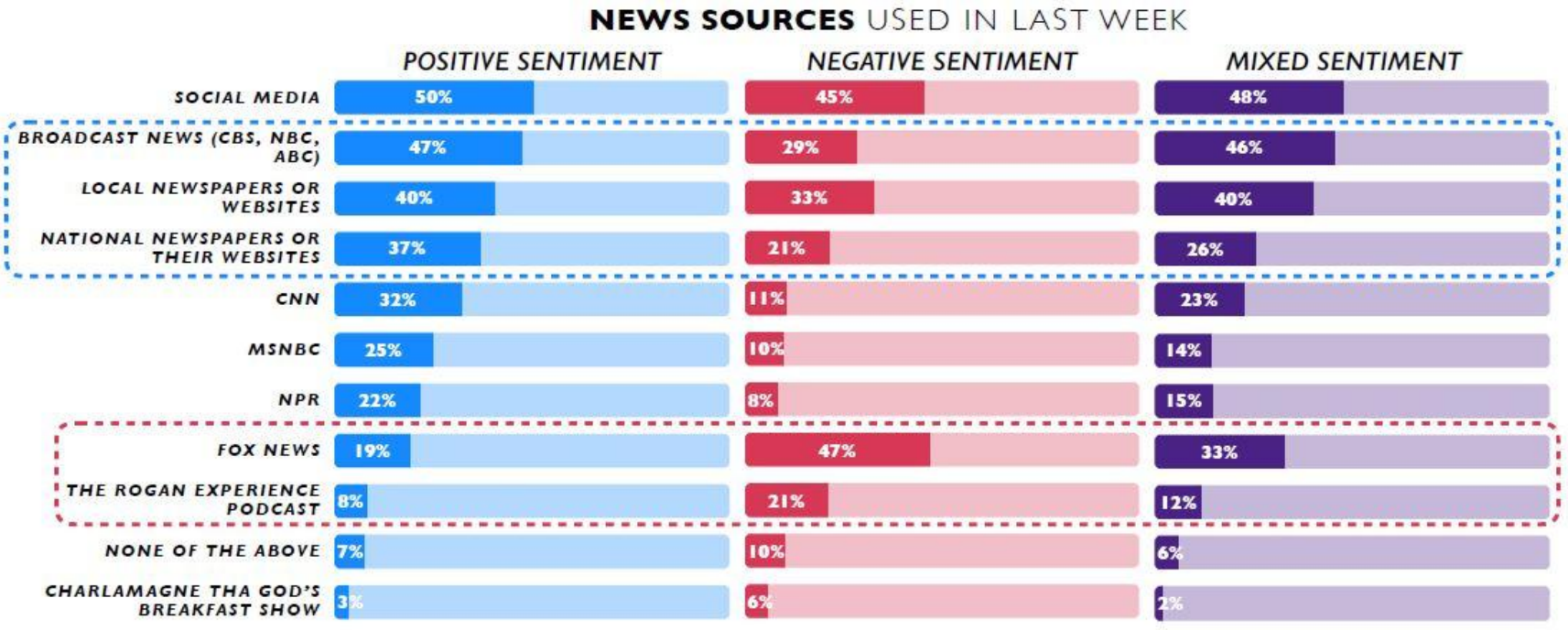
What positives have you heard about clean energy?

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?

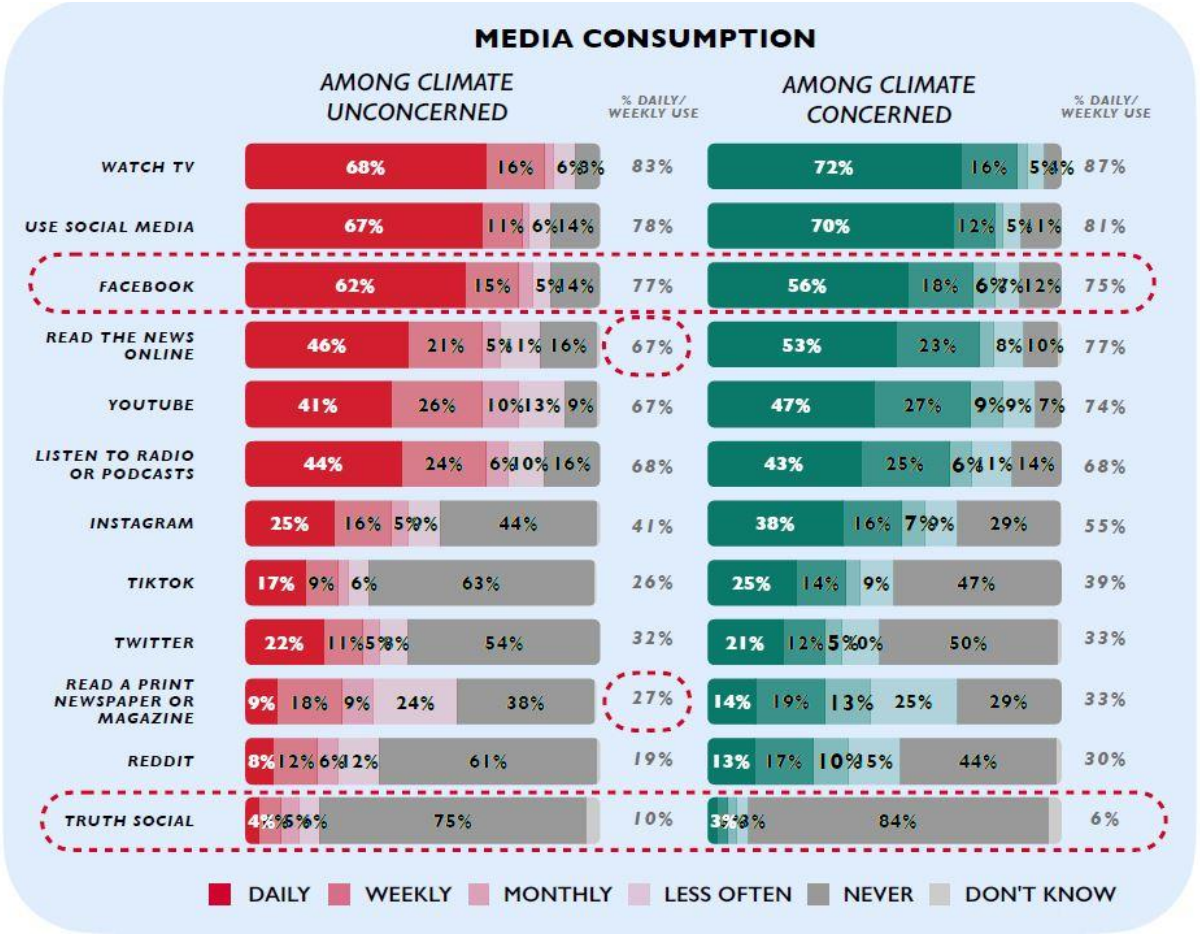
Phrase	Count
clean energy	195
solar panels	108
wind turbines	84
kill birds	**42**
electric cars	40
fossil fuels	40
climate change	33
kills birds	**32**
wind mills	30
wind power	30
wind farms	27
wind energy	23
solar farms	21
electric vehicles	19
energy sources	19
killing birds	**18**
fossil fuel	17
renewable 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.**

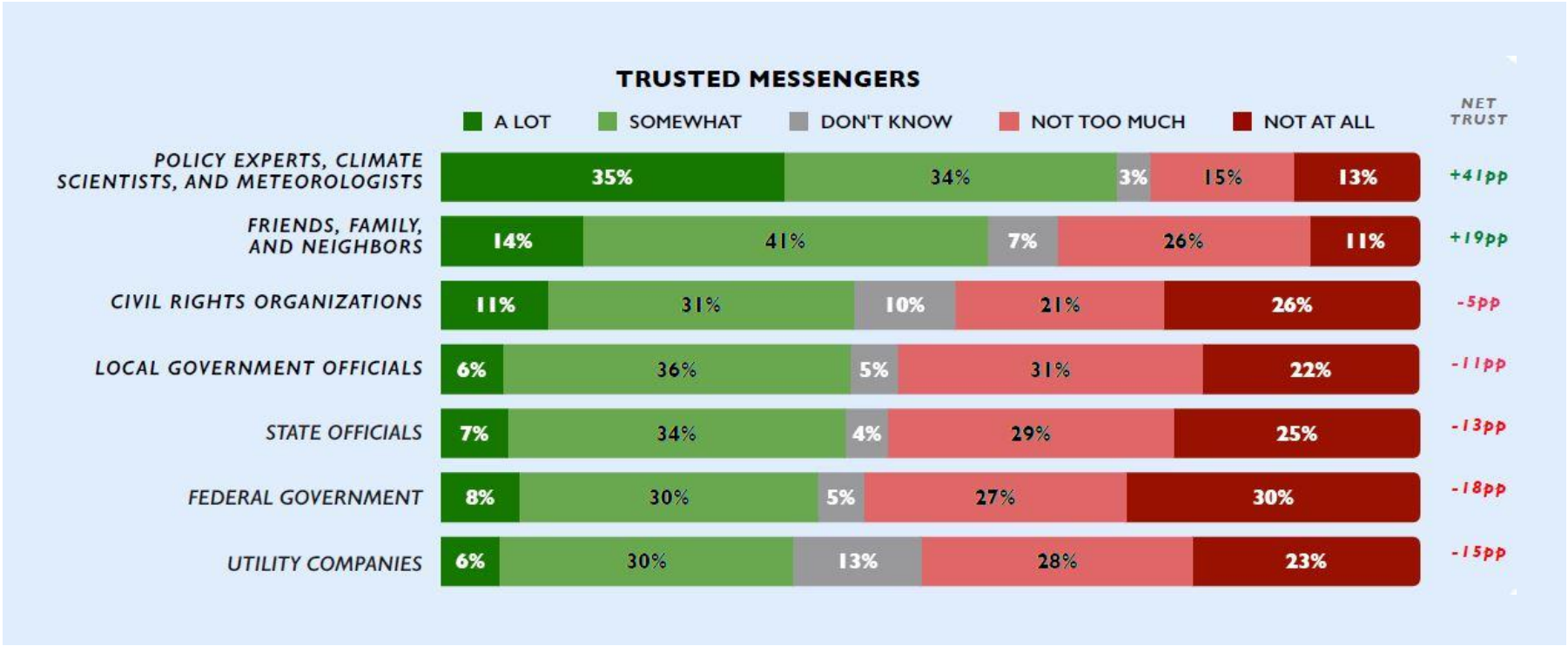


Traditional media:
Climate Unconcerned are **much less likely** to seek news through traditional sources such as online news sites or printed newspapers.

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

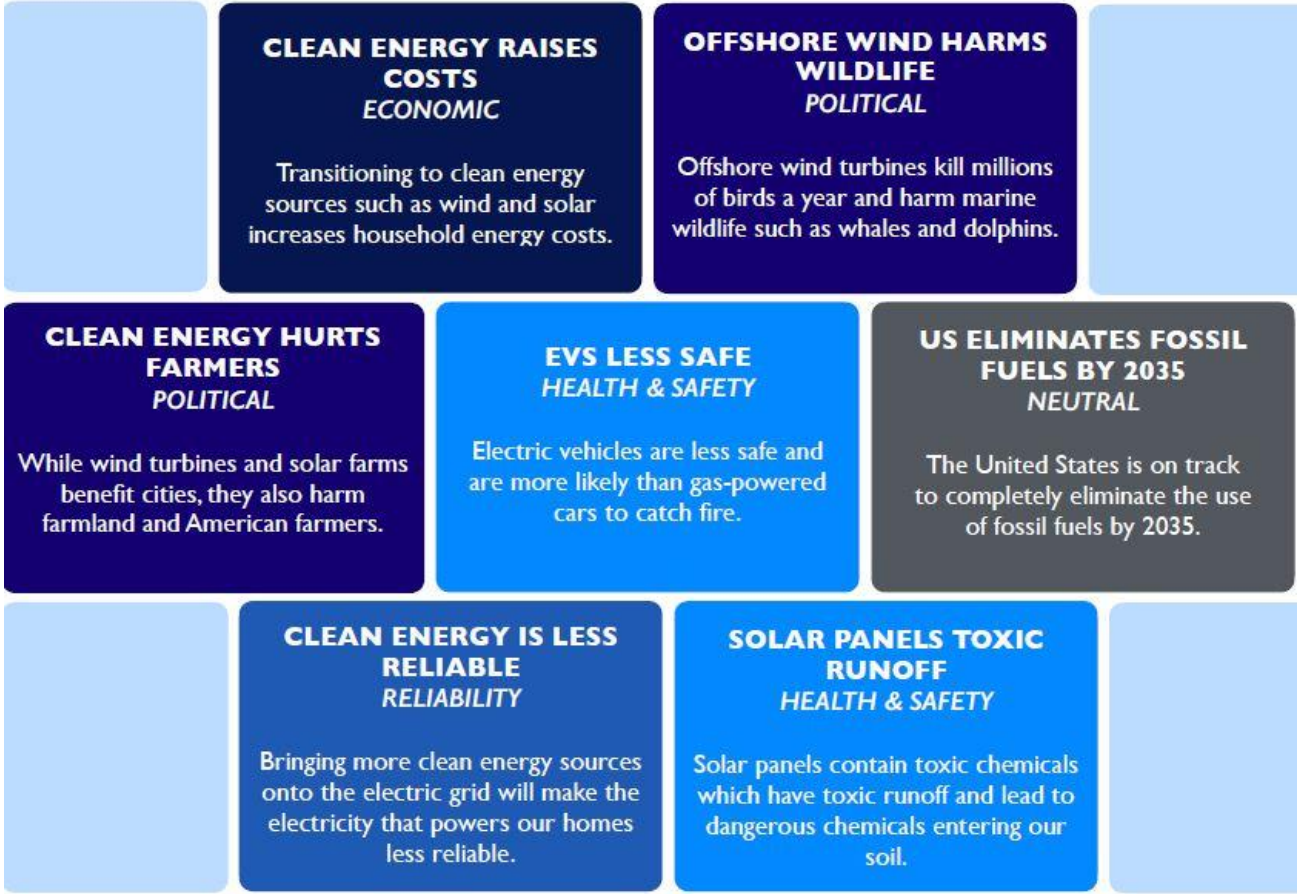


Majority of voters are most trusting of **experts** and **friends & family** on clean energy; government figures fall lower.

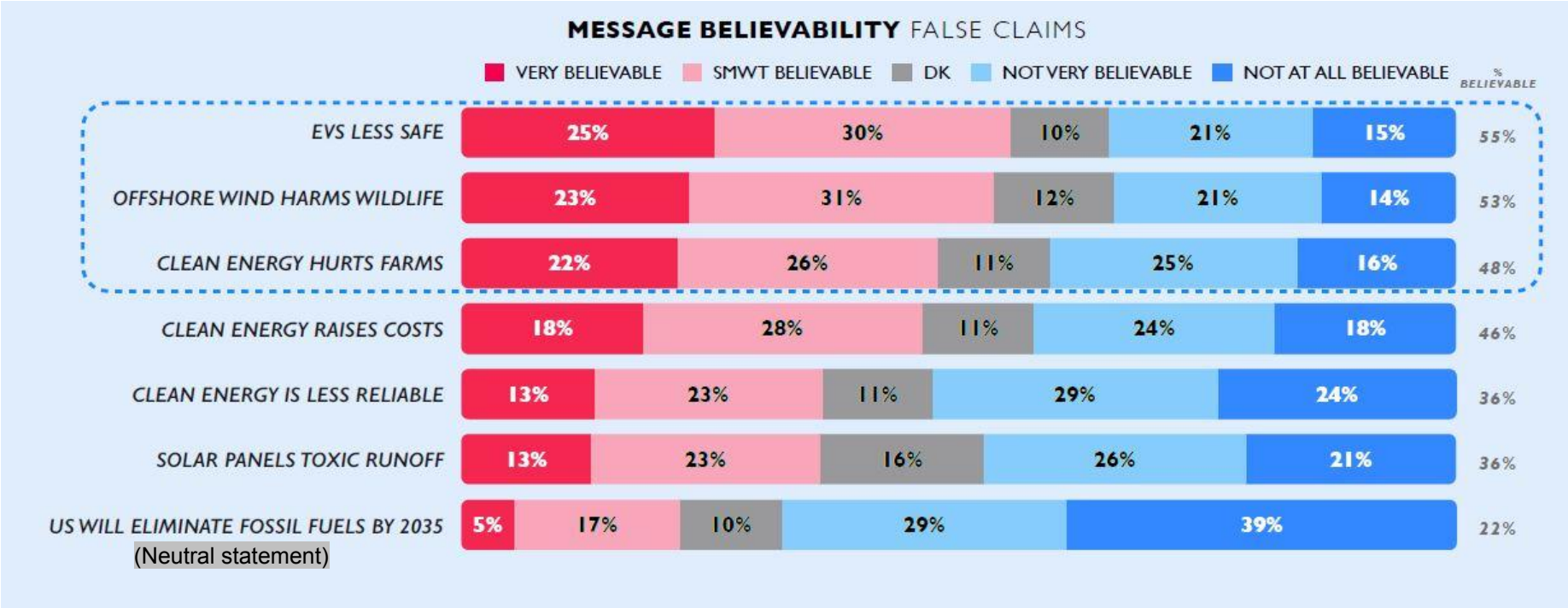


Section 2: Detecting Disinformation

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.**



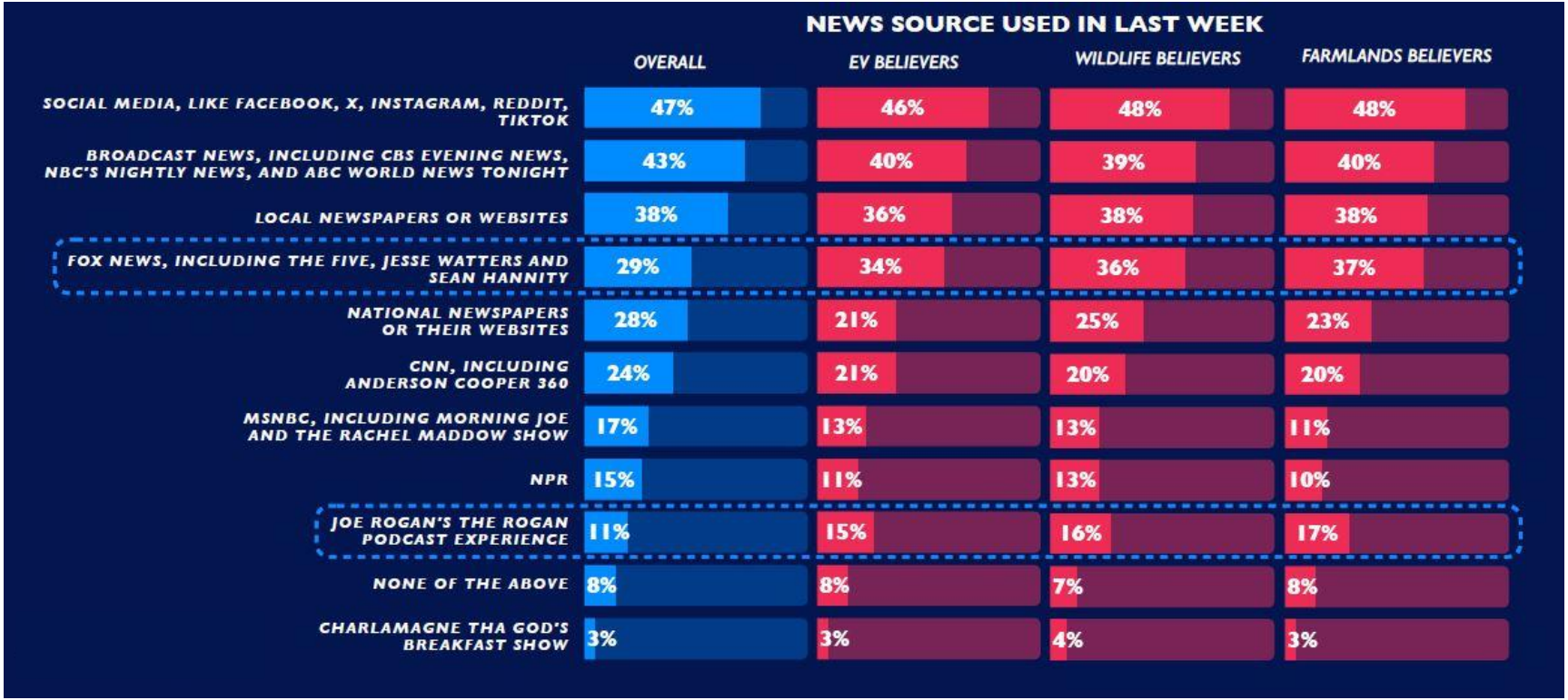
EVs being less safe, offshore wind harming wildlife and **clean energy hurting farmland** are the most believable, with more than half or nearly half of respondents reporting them to be at least somewhat believable.



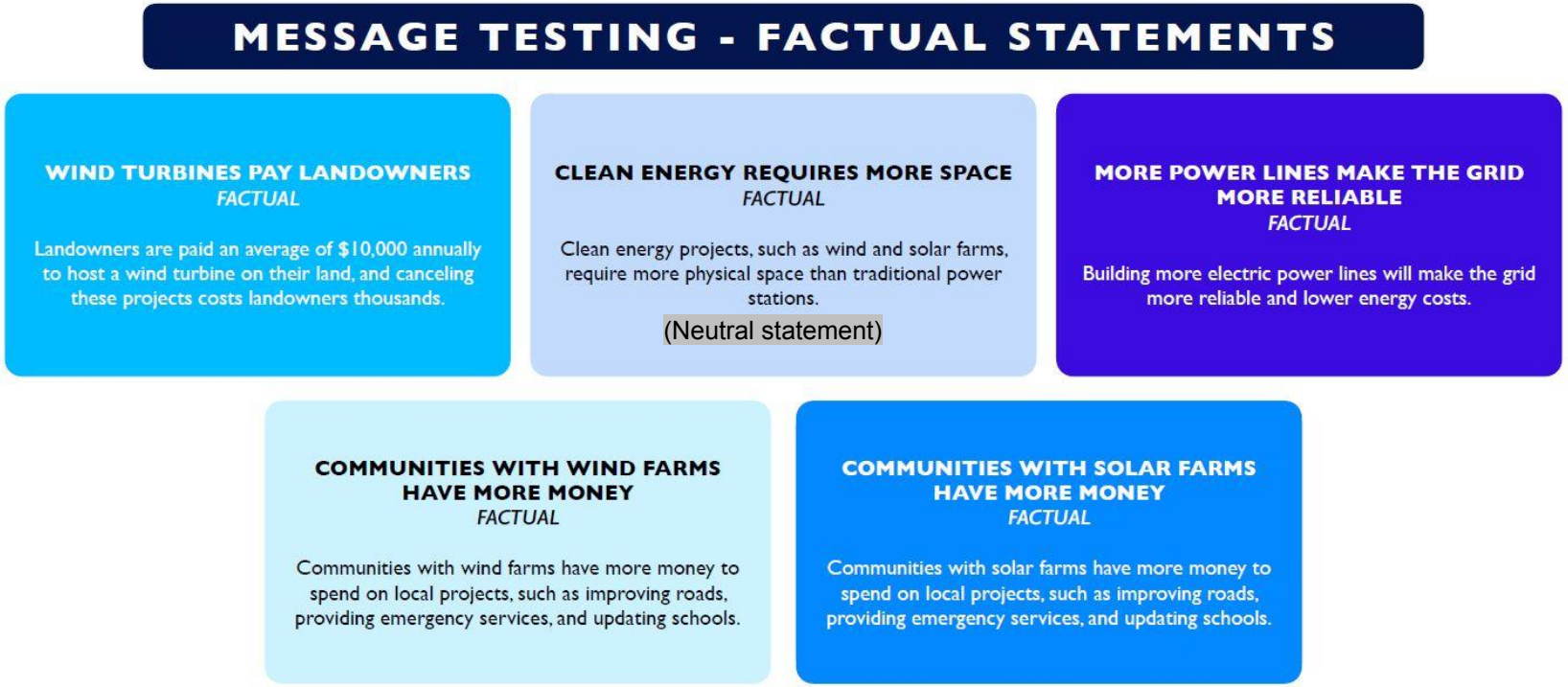
Who believes these disinformation messages?

- **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.

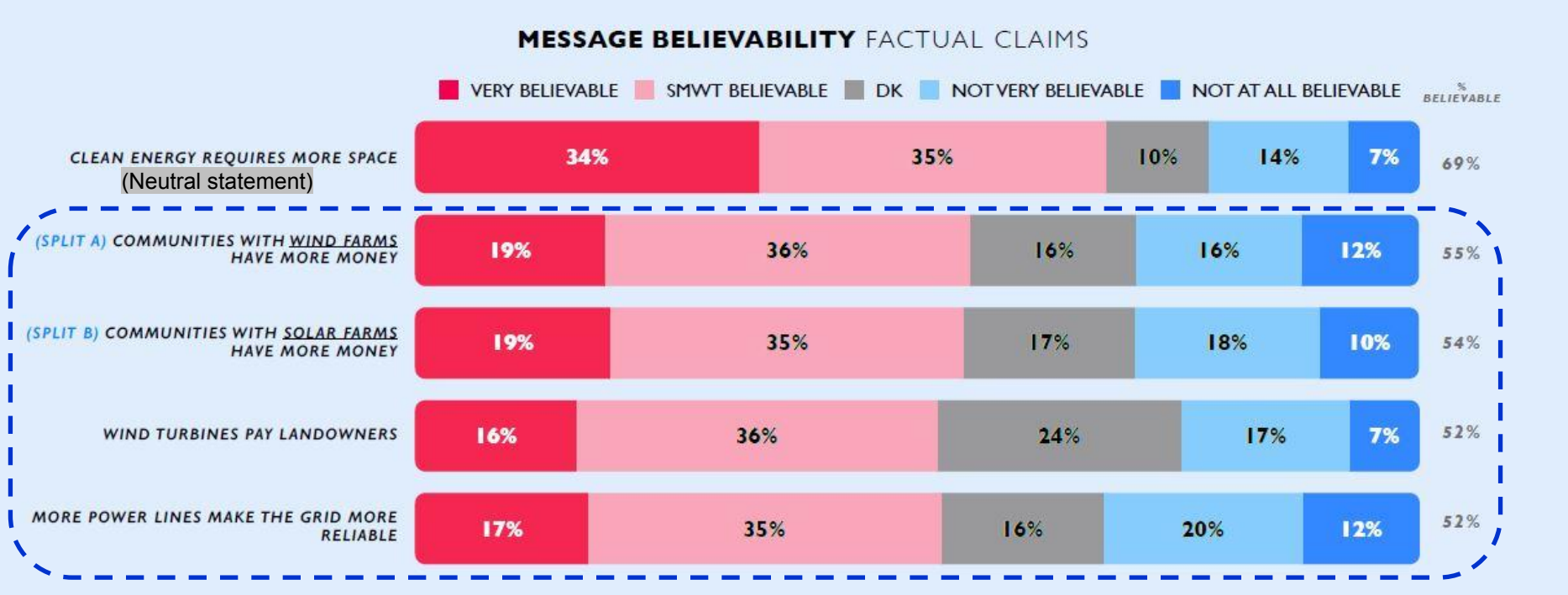
Those susceptible to disinfo claims about the harm or safety concerns of clean energy self-report getting news from **Fox News and Joe Rogan more** than overall voters.



Factual clean energy statements we tested alongside the disinformation statements.



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



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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