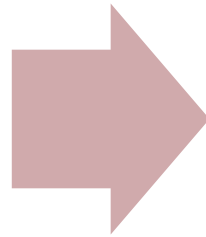


An aerial photograph of a two-lane asphalt road winding through a lush green landscape. The road is flanked by green fields, some with hay bales, and dense forests. In the background, a large body of water is visible, followed by a range of blue mountains under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Mapping the Road Ahead: Public Opinion in Vermont on Climate Action

Project Overview

Representative
Baseline Survey
(N=800)



9 Focus Groups &
Follow-up Survey
(N=69)

Baseline Survey

- Survey of 800 Vermont residents aged 18 or older, including oversamples of:
 - 100 residents of color; and
 - 100 rural low-income residents.
- Responses were collected from June 18-30, 2026, via live telephone interviews to landline and cell phones, and via text-to-web online surveying.
- Survey was offered in English (779 responses), French (10 responses), and Spanish (11 responses).
- Weighted by race and ethnicity, age and gender, county, education, and party identification.
- The margin of error for the entire sample, including the design effect, is +/- 3.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

Focus Groups and Follow-up Survey

- Focus group participants were recruited from the baseline survey, with supplemental recruiting for White River Junction and Newport.
- Participants received an informational packet on climate change in Vermont, which was recapped in slides during the groups.
- MPG moderated each group; CESA team members were present to answer technical questions.

Group	Date	# of participants
Brattleboro	July 28	7
White River Junction	July 29	7
Newport	July 30	5
Winooski	August 4	6
Rutland	August 5	8
Virtual 1 (non-Chittenden)	August 11	10
Virtual 2 (< 80% AMI)	August 12	9
Virtual 3 (all residents)	August 18	8
Virtual 4 (all residents)	August 19	9

Key Findings

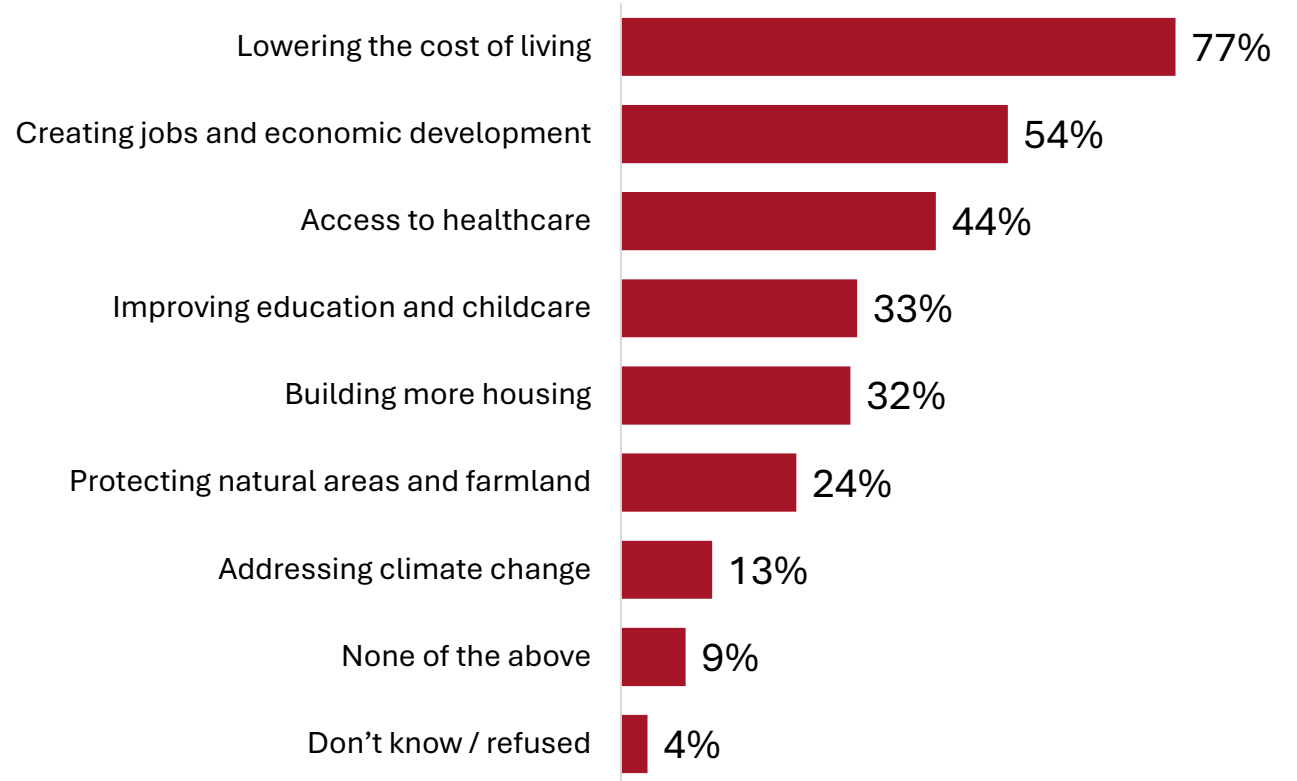
- Affordability is Vermonters' clear number one priority (77%); only 13% named climate as one of their top three issues for the state.
- Cost is also the top priority for energy policy (68%), with climate tied for second with reliability (34%).
- On climate, Vermonters want to see the state tackle both emissions and resiliency; very few want to tackle emissions alone. Either way, there is little appetite for more state spending.
- Among incentives tested, weatherization is most popular. EV incentives are divisive, due to concerns about cost, equity, charging, range, and safety.
- There is majority support for requiring emissions reductions from appliances and fuels, although those who are opposed are more likely to strongly oppose these policies.
- Most Vermonters try to balance upfront costs with long-term savings when making a major purchase, but many lower-income residents can only afford options with the lower upfront costs. These residents are already struggling with energy costs.

Priority Issues for State

- Cost of living dominates residents' to-do list for state government (77%), followed by jobs and growth (54%).
- Only 13% named climate as one of their top-three issues, the lowest of any issue tested.

Economic concerns dominate priorities for state government

% of Vermonters who name each issue as one of their top three priorities

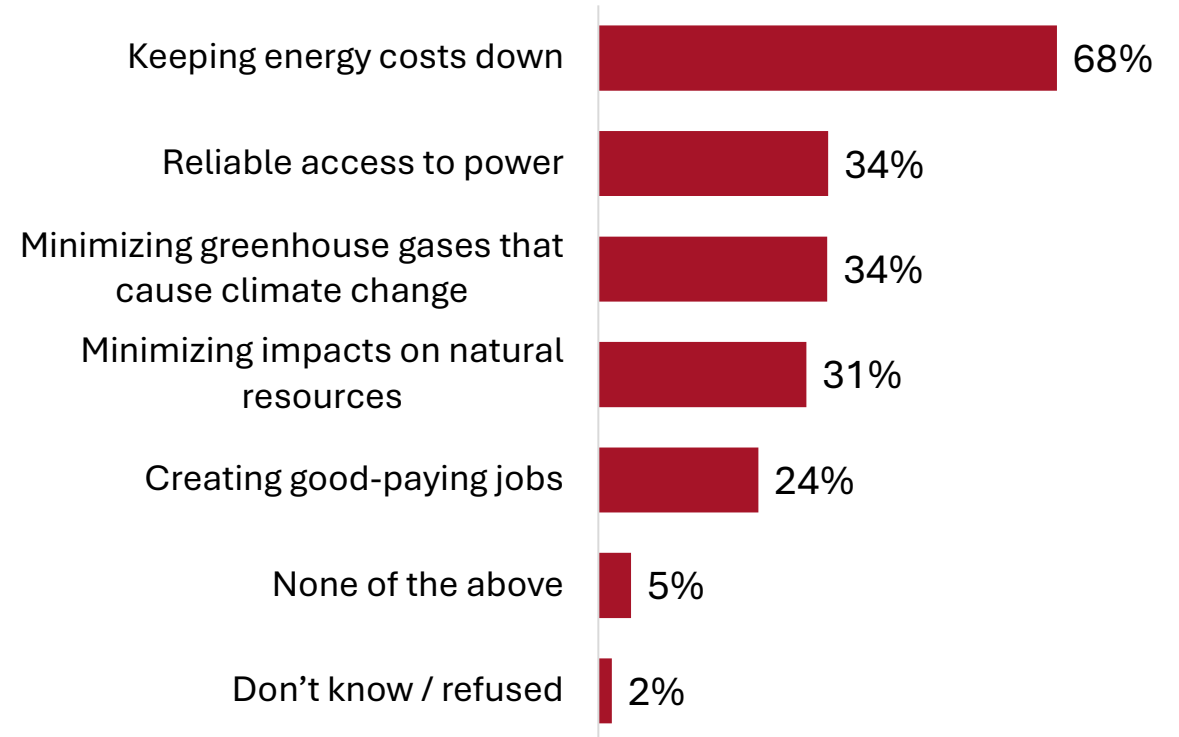


Priority Issues for Energy Policy

- Costs (68%) are also the clear top priority for energy policy.
- A third (34%) each named reliability and minimizing emissions as one of their top-two energy priorities.

Climate is tied for second-highest energy priority

% of Vermonters naming each as one of their top two energy priorities

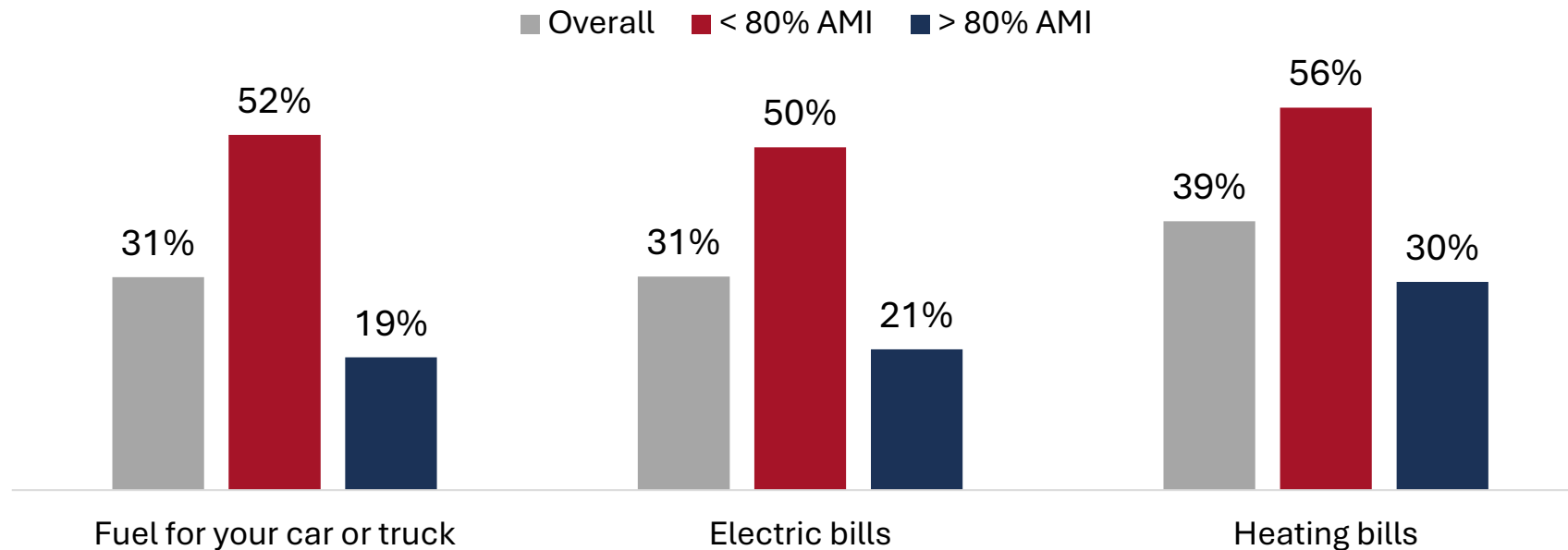


Ability to Afford Energy Costs

- Overall, between 31% and 39% of Vermonters who pay for energy are struggling to do so.
- Among Vermonters making less than 80% of Area Median Income (AMI), a half or more are struggling.

Lower-income Vermonters are much more likely to struggle with energy costs

% of Vermonters who pay for each expense who struggle to pay it, overall and by income



Focus Groups: Climate and Affordability

I think that it's [climate change] is a **privileged topic of concern**. You have either time or money to set aside to think about it.

This seems great and I'd like to help, but **I'm not gonna put myself and my family in a bunch of debt**. I want to make sure we're okay, and we can afford the things we need. To get through the day first.

I'm 30, so I'm mostly talking to people who are 25 to 35 range. And I think for us, **it's a pretty tough pill to swallow**. When we're trying to get done with our education, start our careers, start families, maybe buy a house, to also be faced with the prospect of retrofitting whatever house we can afford with renewable energies [or] getting rid of our 15-year-old cars.

I think there's still a vast majority of people that still haven't done much, and they don't even think that it's important for them to do anything.[...] If you can't afford it, that's one thing. There's a lot of people who can't afford it. They *can* afford an awful lot, and that's not where they're putting their money.

Focus Groups: Impacts of climate change

One of the other things we are noticing in Vermont this year are tornadoes. We had **multiple tornado warnings**, and we had one in East Burke just the other day.

The ticks have gone absolutely wild. I walked out of the woods one day and I had eight on me, and one was embedded in me.

You didn't have to worry about air conditioning in Vermont, and I feel like heat wave after heat wave comes. And that's really hard if you don't have air conditioning, which **a lot of houses I don't think have air conditioning.**

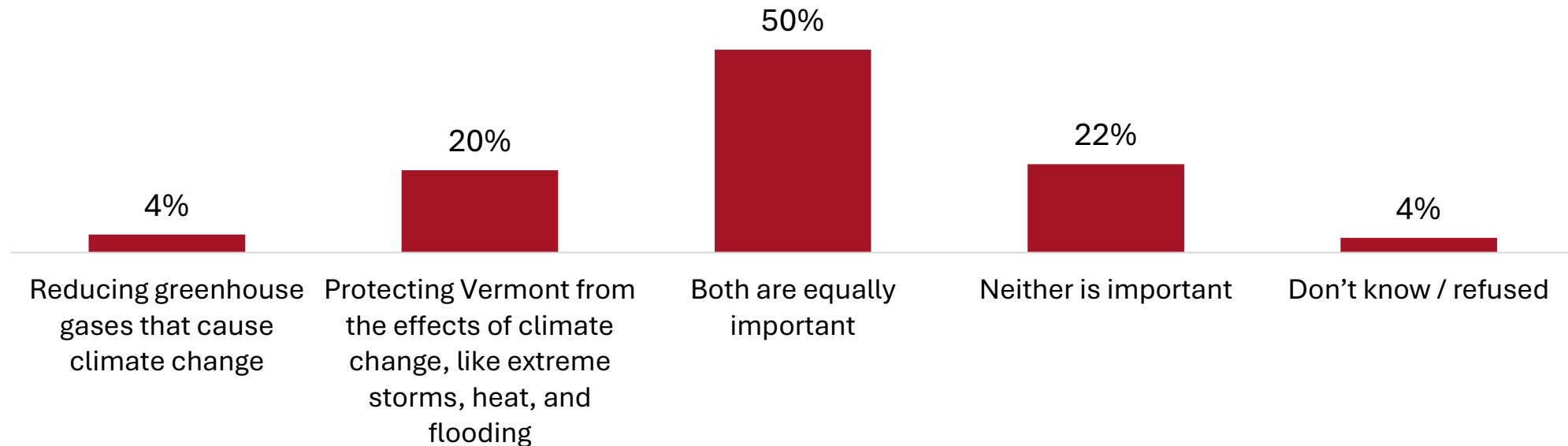
I grew up **making maple syrup.** And in the final years of our operation, we saw the season become far more volatile and really, really hard to manage. And we started losing money and ultimately just stopped. And I've been worried, like, **if that section of Vermont's economy dies, what happens?**

Adaptation versus Mitigation

- Half (50%) think both reducing emissions and protecting the state from climate effects are equally important.
- Only 4% want to focus on GHG reductions exclusively, while 20% would rather focus on resiliency alone.
- The 22% who say neither is important is a good proxy for firm opponents for climate action.

Half of Vermonters think mitigation and adaptation are equally important

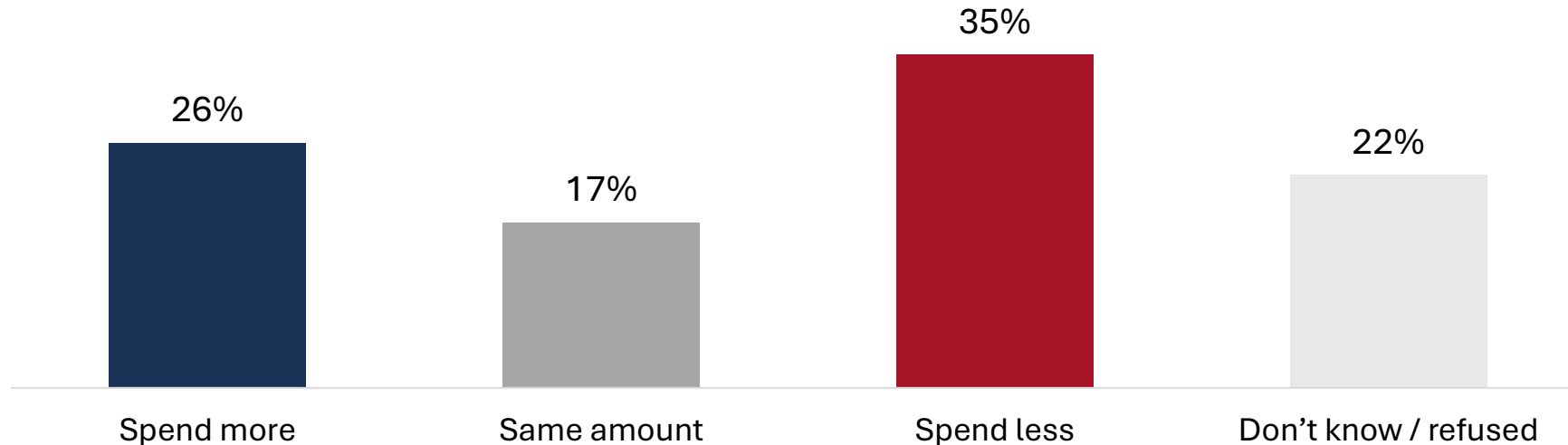
% of Vermonters who say each should be the priority the state



Spending on Climate Change

- There is little appetite for more spending on climate: only 26% want to spend more; 35% want to spend less.
- Many are unsure; our survey pretest revealed many do not know what the state spends on climate.

Vermonters are split on climate spending levels, with many unsure
% who favor state spending more, less, or the same on climate change

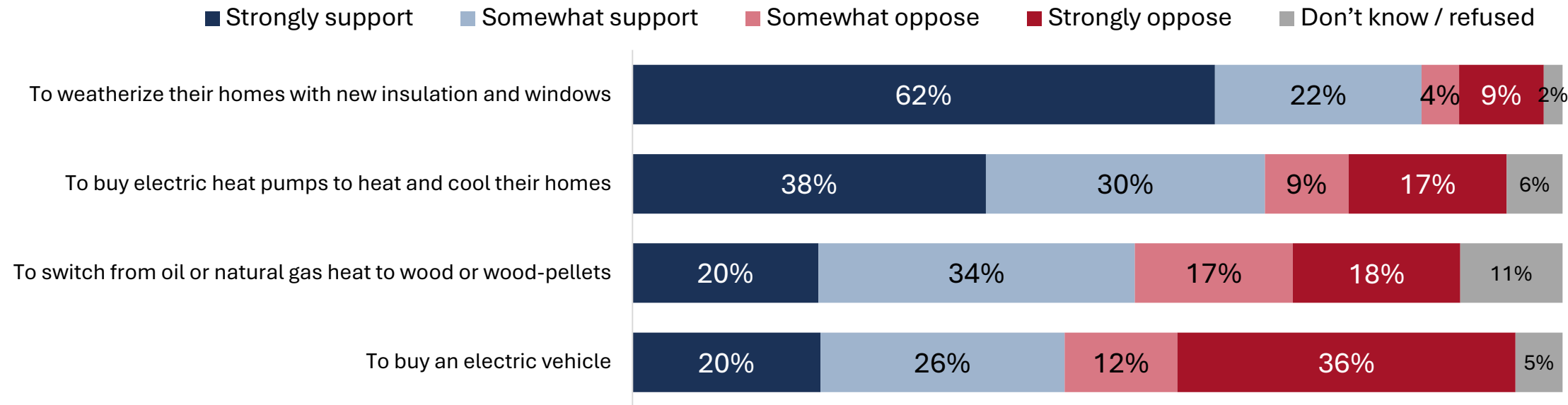


Support for State Incentives

- Weatherization is far and away the most popular incentive tested, with majority “strongly support”.
- Two-thirds support heat pump incentives.
- EV incentives are divisive, with 46% support and 48% opposed, including 36% strongly opposed.

Weatherization leads the way on incentives; EVs are divisive

% who support or oppose a state rebate to do each of the following



Follow-up Survey: Digging in on EVs

I own two BEVs. **Let the market handle this.** We don't need the hand of govt at this point in the EV story. We are wasting taxpayer money.

In the NEK, the mindset isn't here. The money required to purchase a new EV isn't here. We're still expanding the infrastructure. **It's a program we're paying into, but this area isn't using.**

Somewhat support because I don't think the popular opinion would be in support of that. I recently purchased a plugin hybrid with a \$1000 incentive, which was helpful, but **I don't think \$1000 would be enough for most people.**

I support them because many people struggle to afford a new vehicle and **if they have an affordable EV option that would be best.**

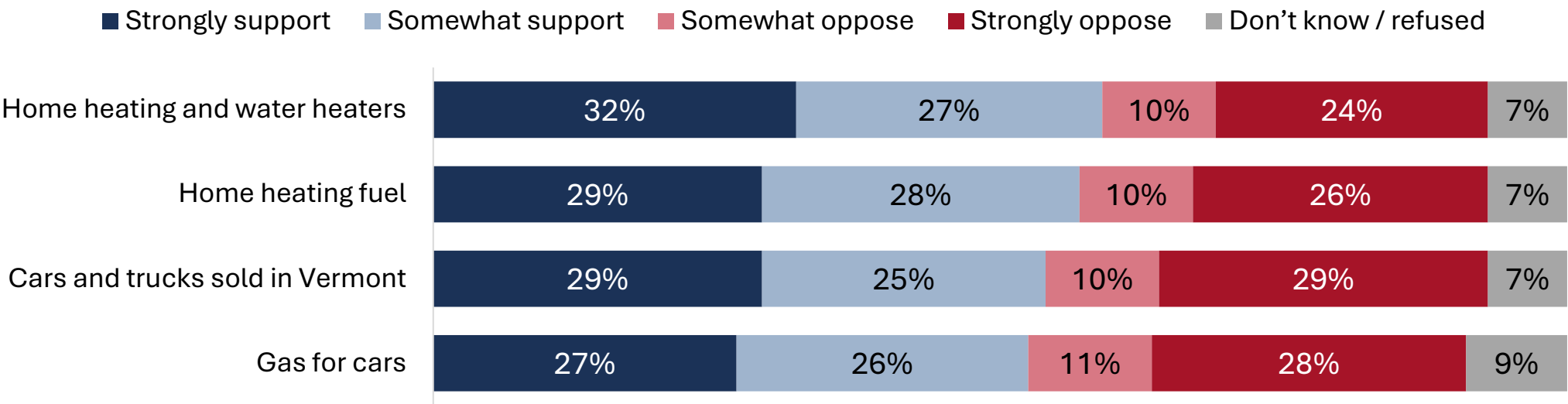
Because federal or state 'incentives' are tax dollars paid into the system already. **No such thing as free money.**

Support for GHG reduction requirements

- There is majority support for regulations to reduce emissions, ranging from 52% to 60%.
- Those opposed are more likely to “strongly oppose” these policies.
- Focus group participants wanted more information on how cleaner fuel blends impact performance and cost.
- There was also discussion in the groups about how these regulations would impact consumers.

Majority support for climate requirements, but also strong opposition

% who support or oppose Vermont requiring fewer GHG emissions from each

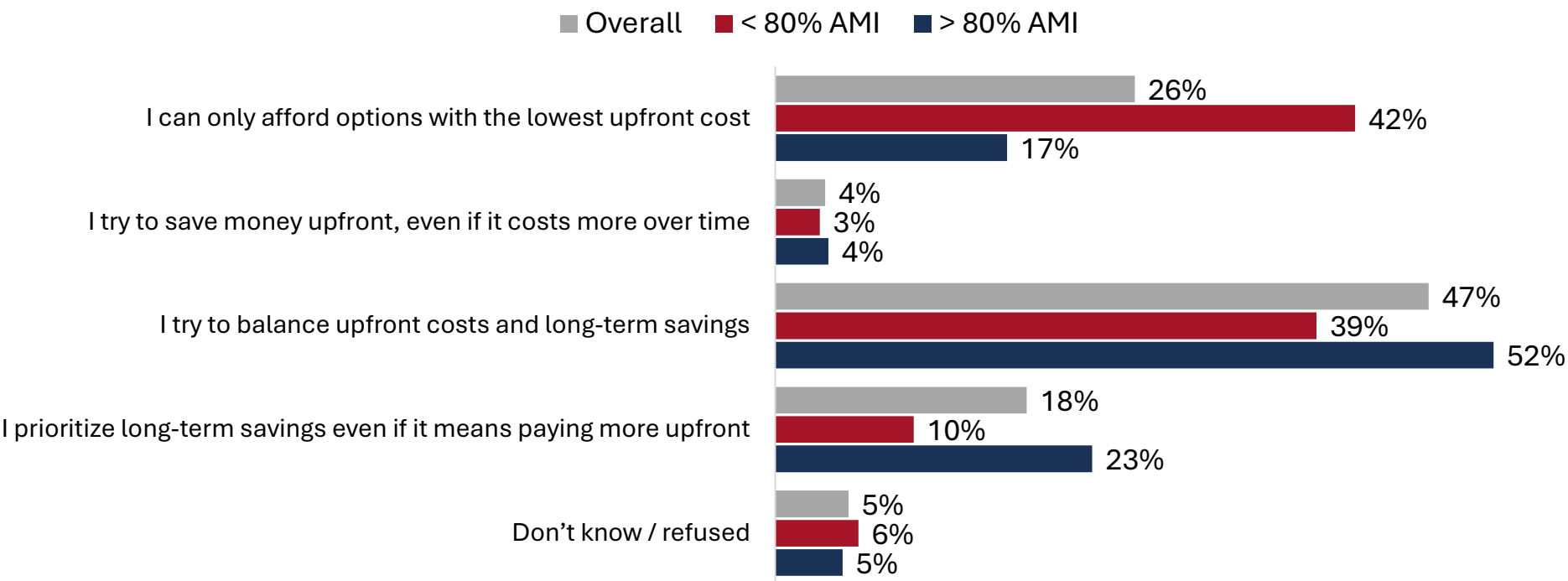


How Vermonters approach major purchases

- Nearly half (47%) try to balance upfront costs and long-term savings when making major purchases.
- But 42% of lower-income Vermonters can only afford options with the lower upfront cost.

Lower-income Vermonters are more sensitive to the upfront cost of major purchases

% overall and by income who take each approach to major purchases

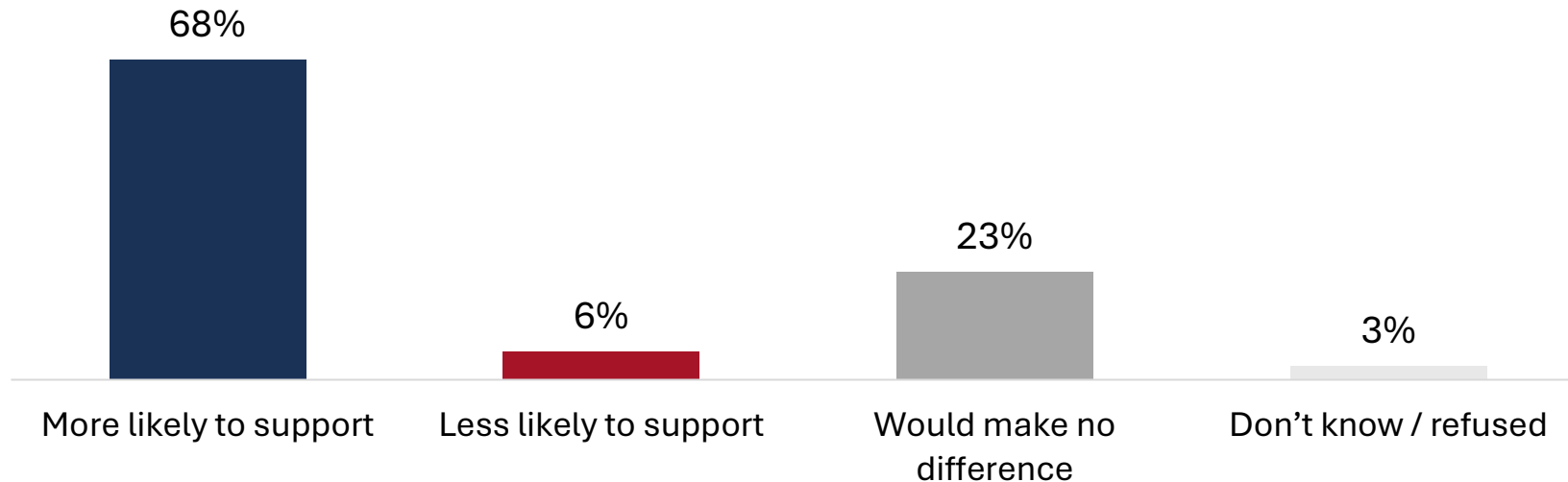


Income-based Incentives

- Two-thirds (68%) of focus group participants say directing incentives at lower-income Vermonters would make them more likely to support them.
- But some in the groups worried that setting income limits too low would shut out middle class consumers.

Focus Group participants favor income-targeted incentives

% who say directing incentives at lower-income Vermonters would make them more like to support them



Appendix slides

Demographics: Baseline v Focus Groups

- Compared to the baseline survey, focus group participants were:
 - Older
 - More racially diverse
 - Have higher education
 - More likely to identify or lean as a Democratic or Progressive supporter
- Focus group participants were also more likely to prioritize climate and to own solar panels and electric vehicles.

	Baseline Survey	Focus Groups
Woman	50%	45%
Man	48%	48%
18-44	42%	36%
45-64	31%	29%
65+	26%	35%
White	89%	79%
Non-white	9%	19%
No BA	60%	30%
BA +	40%	70%
Democrat / Progressive	53%	67%
Republican	28%	16%
Independent	14%	13%

Priority Shift after Focus Groups

Climate priority increases in follow-up, still lags economic concerns

% ranking each a top-3 issue in each sample

- Focus group participants were more likely to prioritize climate in the original survey (24% v 13%).
- Priority rose to 43% in the post-group follow-up survey.
- Nonetheless, climate still falls behind costs, growth and healthcare.

	Baseline Survey Overall	Baseline Survey Focus Groups	Follow-up Survey
Lowering the cost of living	77%	75%	64%
Creating jobs and economic development	54%	56%	52%
Access to healthcare	44%	41%	45%
Addressing climate change	13%	24%	43%
Improving education and childcare	33%	32%	36%
Building more housing	32%	38%	28%
Protecting natural areas and farmland	24%	21%	19%
None of the above	9%	3%	4%
Don't know / refused	4%	3%	3%

Focus Groups: Adaptation versus Mitigation

You know, **China emits a Vermont every two weeks.** [...] Even if we turned everything off tomorrow, in Vermont we're still gonna have floods, there's still gonna be not-good snow, there's still gonna be not-good maple seasons and crop yields and all that kind of stuff.

If you want to talk about climate change and its impact on storms, why are we investing to manage that 1/10 of 1% [of global emissions] when every nickel that's spent to lower our own state's emissions could be used to bolster the infrastructure that's impacted by the storms? That's the classic argument of, **you're going to have to pay for mitigation or adaptation. You can't do both.**

Well, what bothers me is the focus is on emissions. And again, what about resiliency, incentivizing the houses to, you know, build better weatherization efforts, or building better roads that are resilient to flooding? Again, great that we're doing good on the emissions, but I think when we reach those tipping points and the weather is even more extreme than we can even imagine now, **we have to be prepared for the worst-case scenario.**