

Polarization over Energy and Climate in Canada: Survey Results

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POSITIVE ENERGY

CANADA'S ENERGY FUTURE IN AN
AGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE



uOttawa

Outline

- Motivation and methodology
- Context
- Carbon pricing
- Pipelines
- Energy transition
- Energy mix
- Energy and climate change
- Role of nuclear
- Indigenous consent



Motivation

1. Energy Conflict as Unique

- Long-term decisions, regionalized, high up-front capital costs, linear projects, linchpin for broader economy, high environmental impacts, social acceptance, etc.

2. The Concern for Polarization in an Energy Context

- Polarization in general increasing; concerns for digital information (Hoberg 2018; Kevins & Soroka 2018; Johnson 2019).

3. Canadian Context – Public Opinion:

- Energy superpower, federalism, Indigenous rights (Olive, Eaton, & Besco 2018 [Winds of Change]; Lachapelle, Borick, & Rabe 2012; Mildemberger et al 2016).



Research Questions

1. **To what extent are attitudes – across a variety of different energy and climate issues – polarized in Canada?**
2. **Along what dimensions and in which sectors are Canadians most fragmented?**
3. **Are there energy and climate issues that Canadians agree on?**
4. **How does public opinion and energy conflict play with expectations for change in the energy sector?**



Methodology

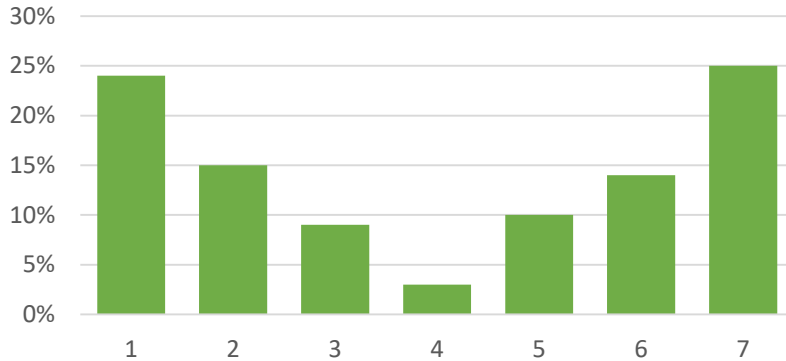
- **Online survey via Qualtrics**
- **Dates: Sept. 9-19 for about 90%, complete by Sept. 29**
 - Caveat 1: Election context
 - Caveat 2: Early analysis, simple cuts: much more to come, multivariate, etc.
- **n = 2679; n = 500+ for 5 regional subsamples**
- **Margin of error not applicable for this kind of panel survey**
- **“Net Support”**
 - (strongly agree + agree) – (strongly disagree + disagree)
- **Age groups**

• Silent	1928-45
• Boomers	1946-64
• Gen X	1965-80
• Millennials	1981-96
• Gen Z	1997 onwards

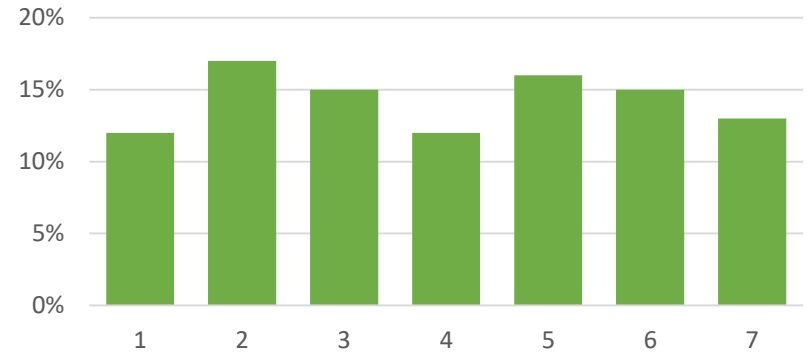


What Do We Mean by Polarized Opinion?

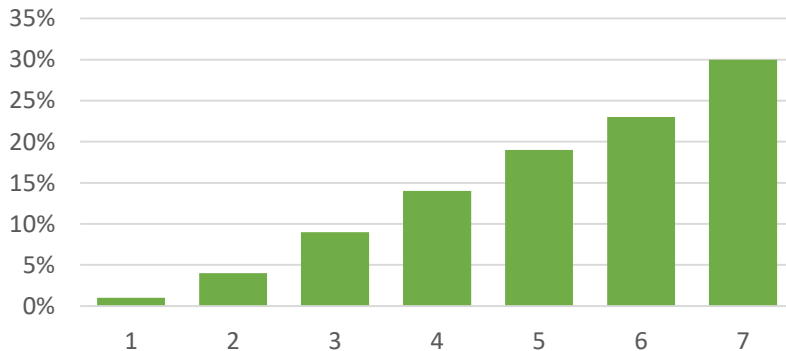
Polarized opinion



Fragmented opinion, not polarized



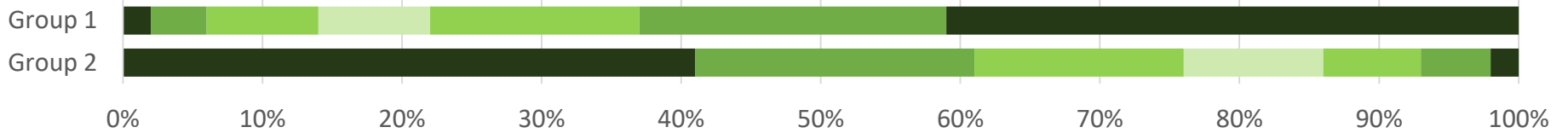
Opinion in agreement



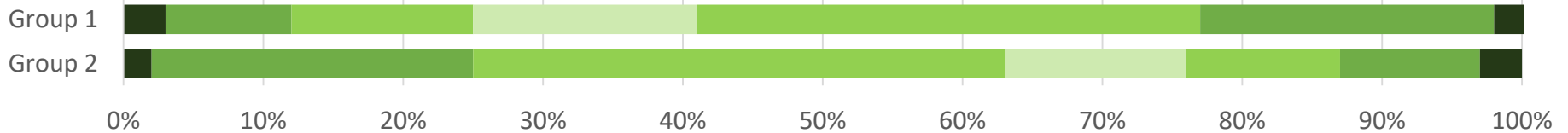
- Each example graph shows the % of respondents choosing a Likert Scale number from 1 to 7 (e.g., from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”).
- Ex. 1 shows high polarization (inverted U shape), with opinion concentrated at the extreme ends of the scale.
- Ex. 2 shows opinion that is fragmented, but relatively few take extreme positions; Ex 3. shows opinion that trends toward strong agreement.

Second Example of Polarized Opinion

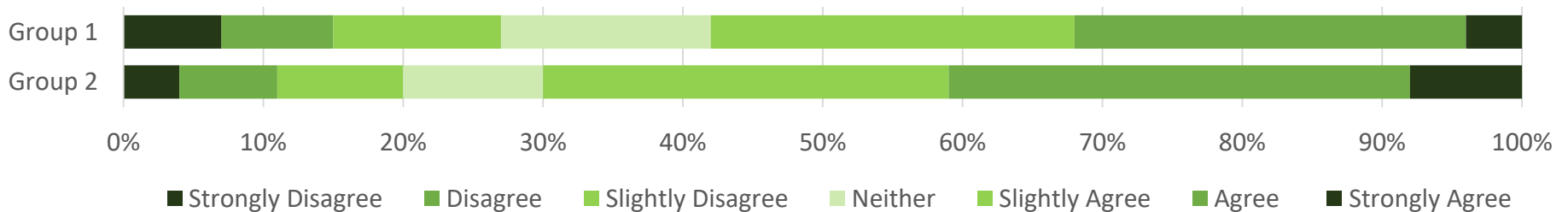
1. Polarized opinion



2. Fragmented opinion, not polarized



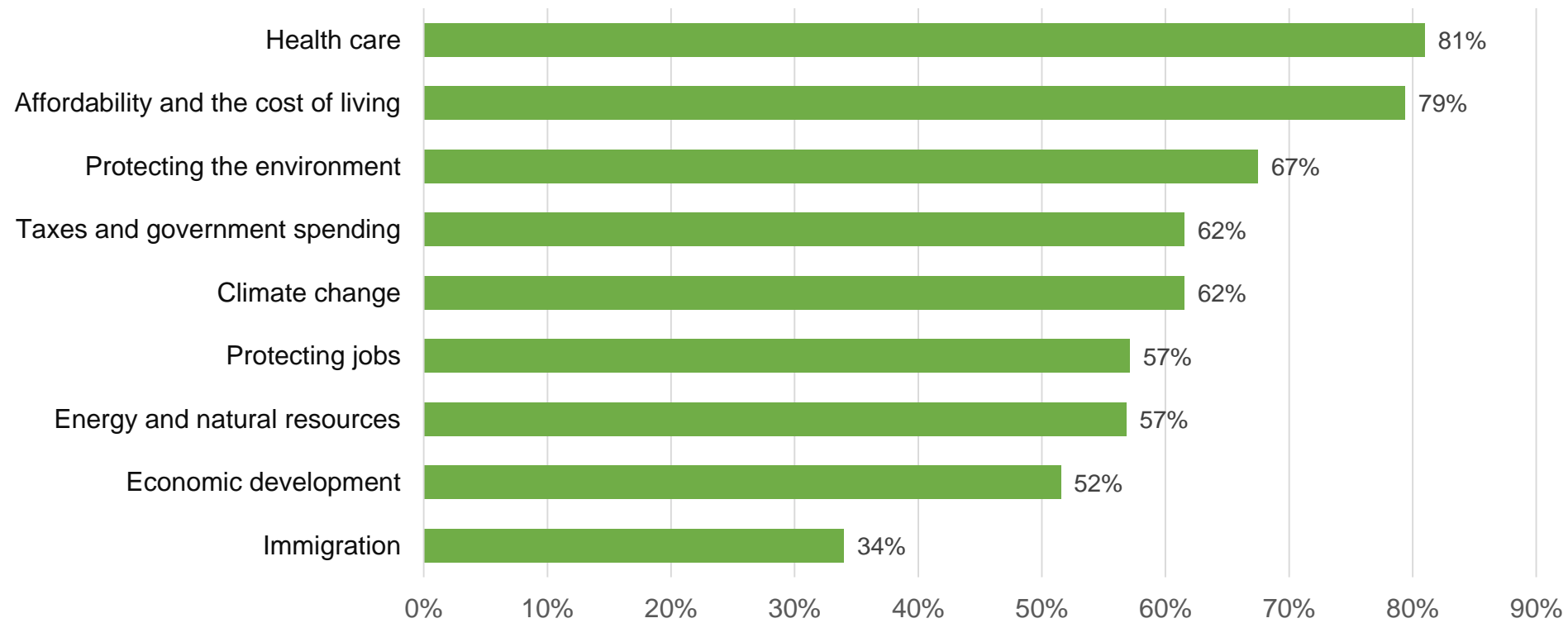
3. Opinion in agreement



- Each graph shows public opinion across groups; these could be regions, age groups, community type, or partisan affiliations.
- The first chart shows highly polarized opinion; The second and third show fragmentation and agreement, respectively.

Issue Importance

Percent "Quite Important" + "Extremely Important"

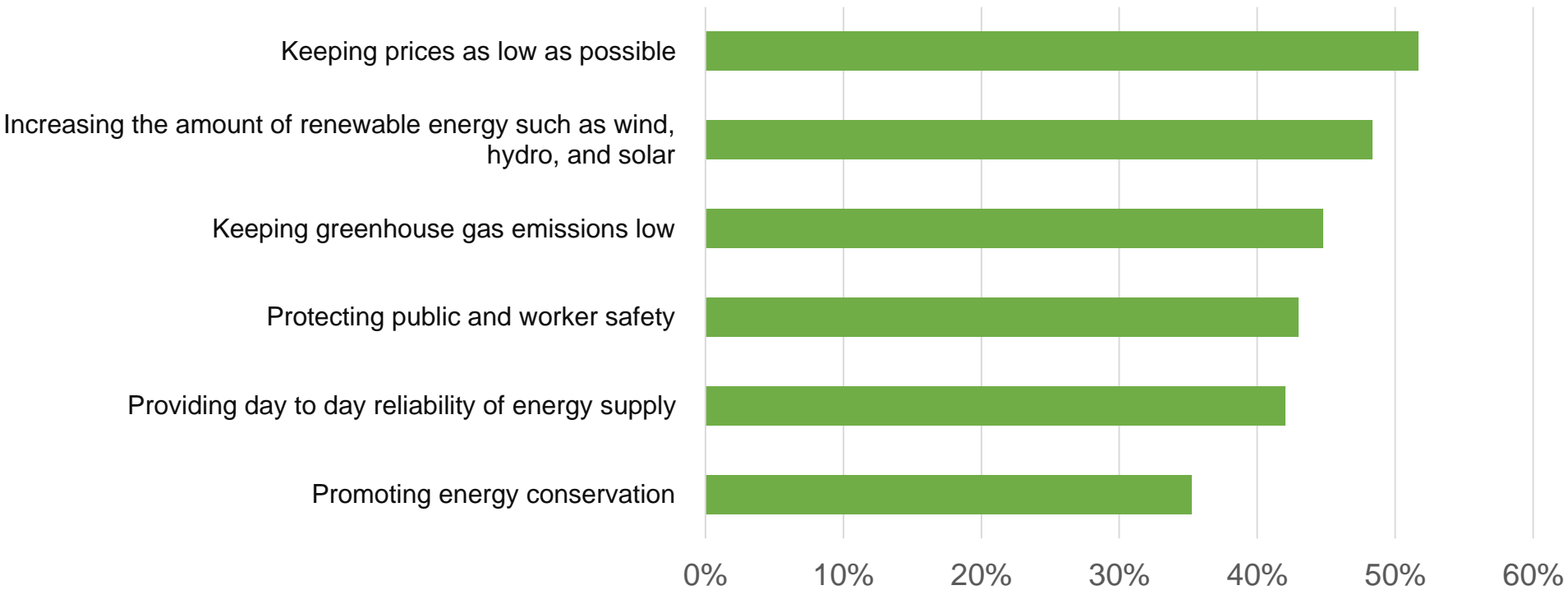


How important or unimportant are each of the following issues to you personally?



Energy Consideration Priorities (Ranking)

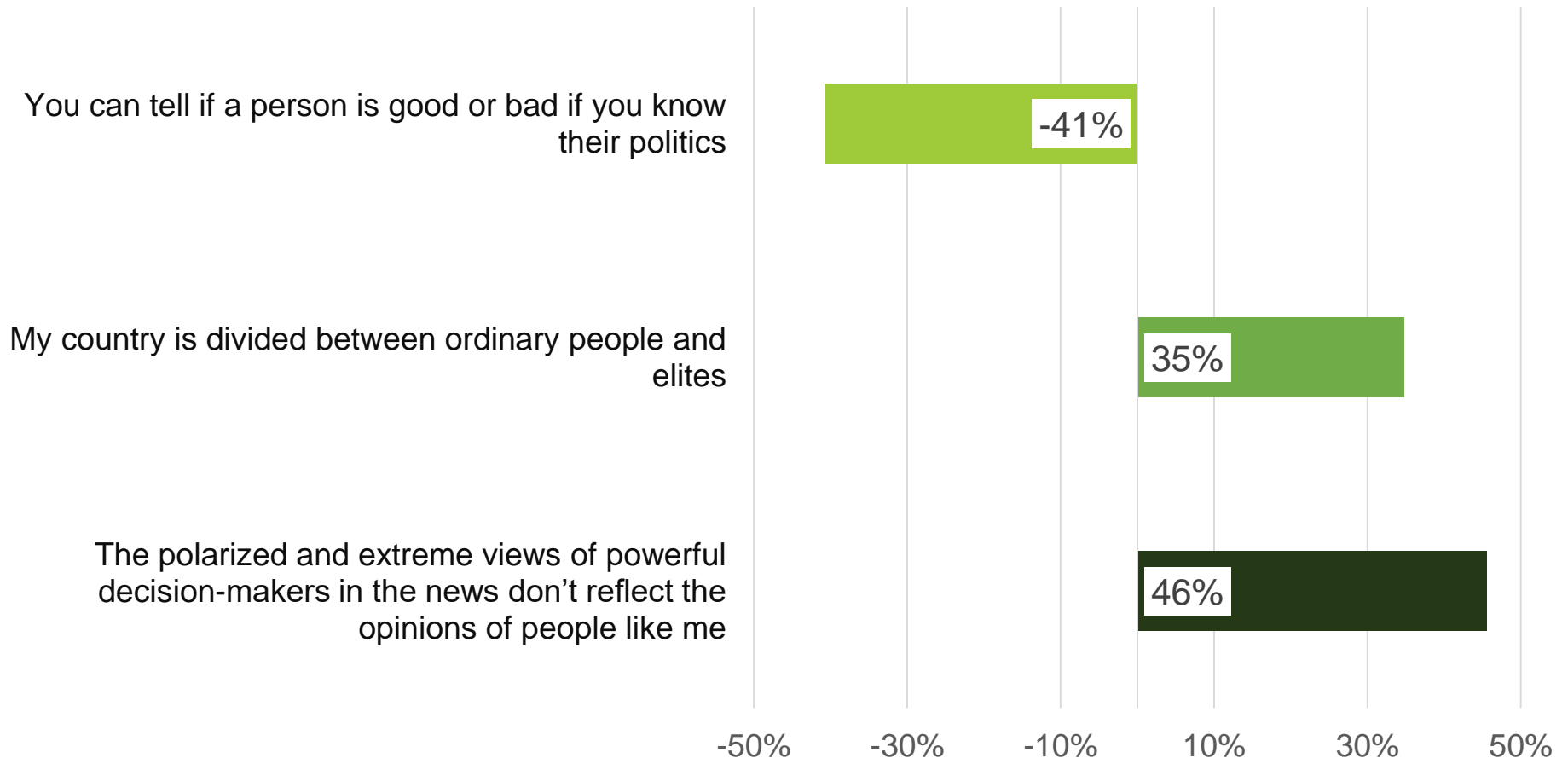
Sum of Choice 1+2+3 (out of 6)



**When it comes to energy, which of these considerations is the most important to you?
(Rank the items by dragging, most important first)**



General Beliefs about Polarization (Net Support)

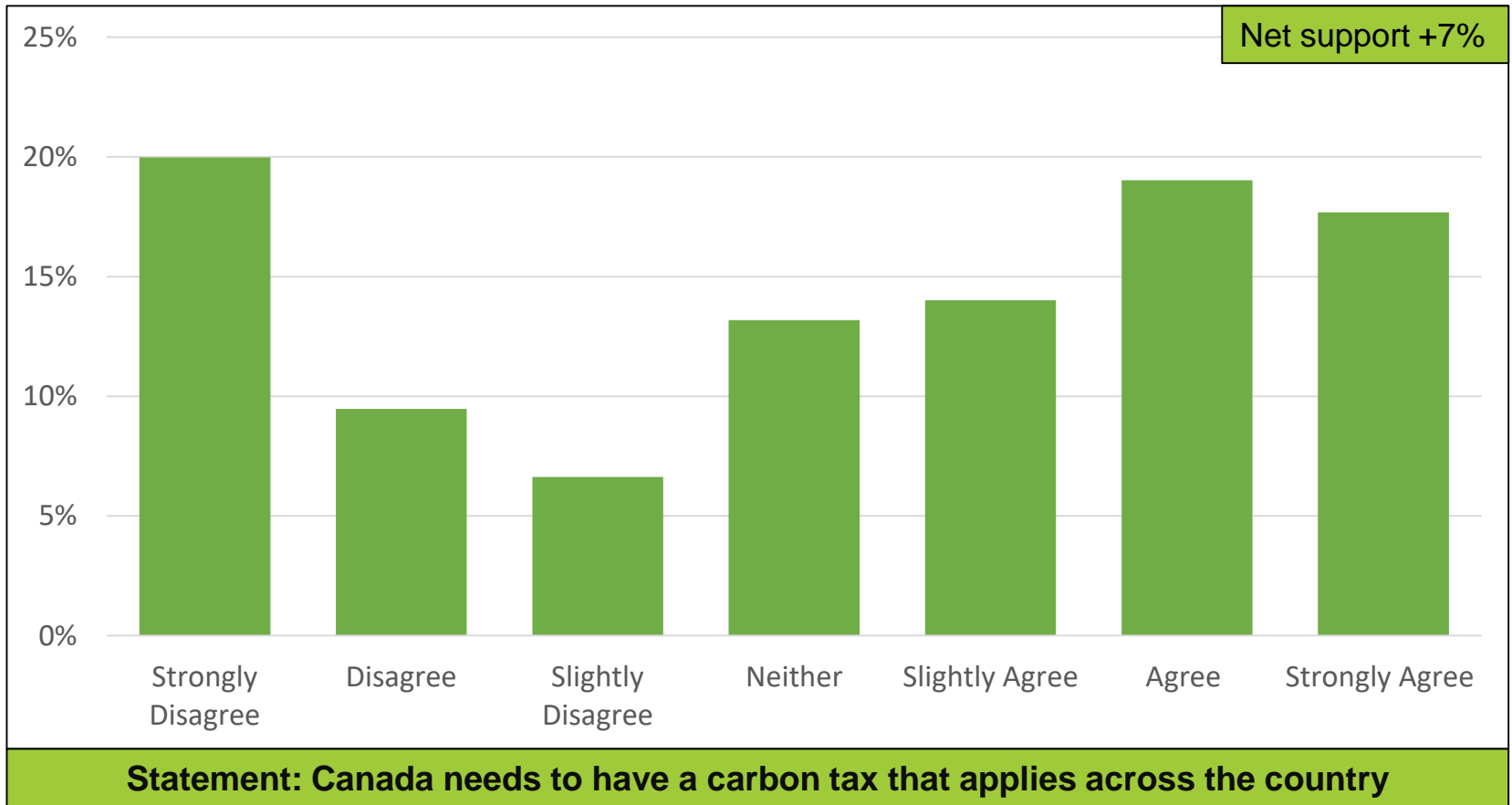


Take Note

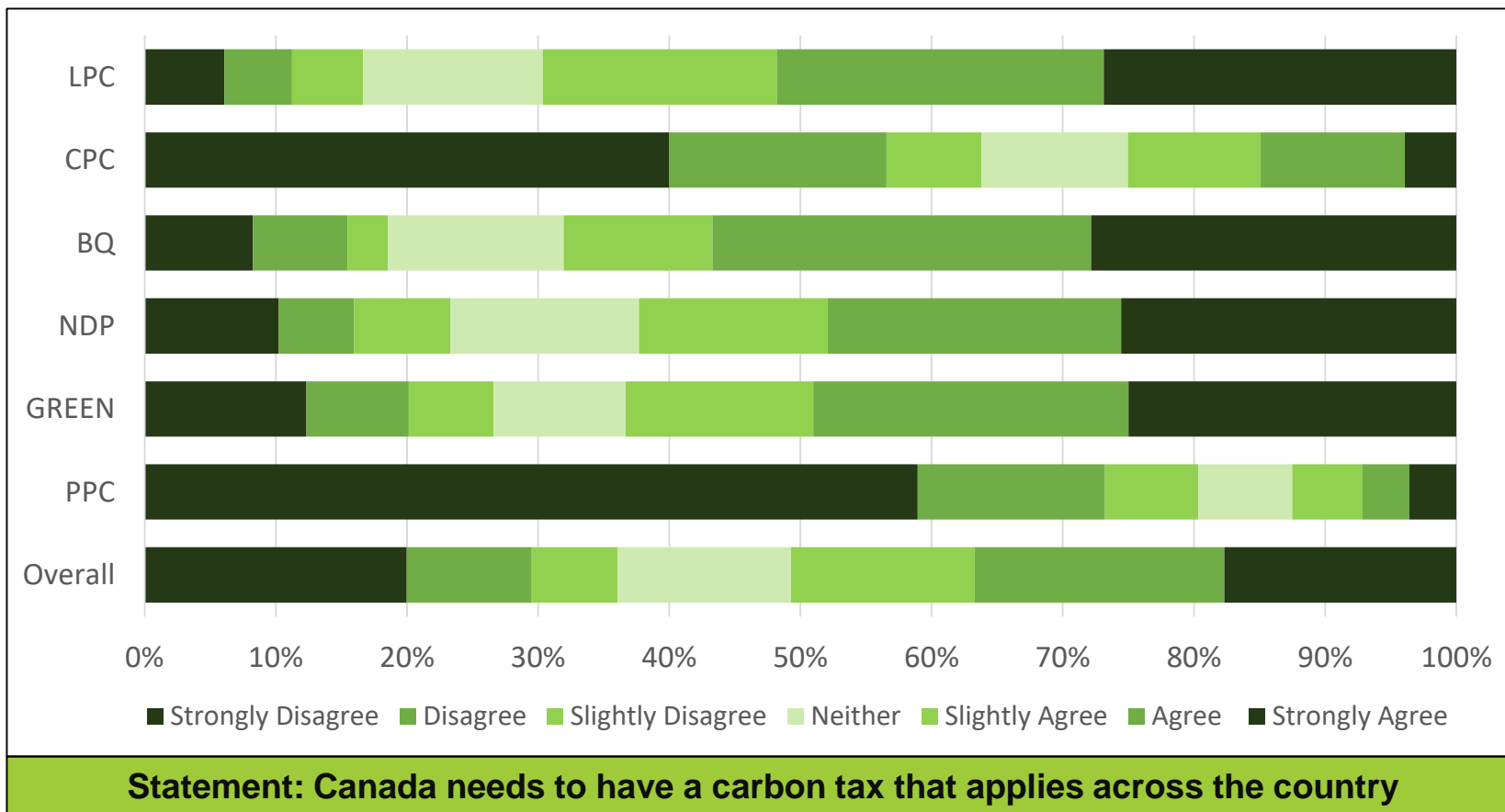
- **At time of survey, energy and natural resources not as salient for public as health and affordability.**
- **When prompted, strong support for things like renewables and less emissions-intensive energy, but desire to keep prices low is a priority.**
- **Relatively high levels of political tolerance, but perception of rift between public and elites.**



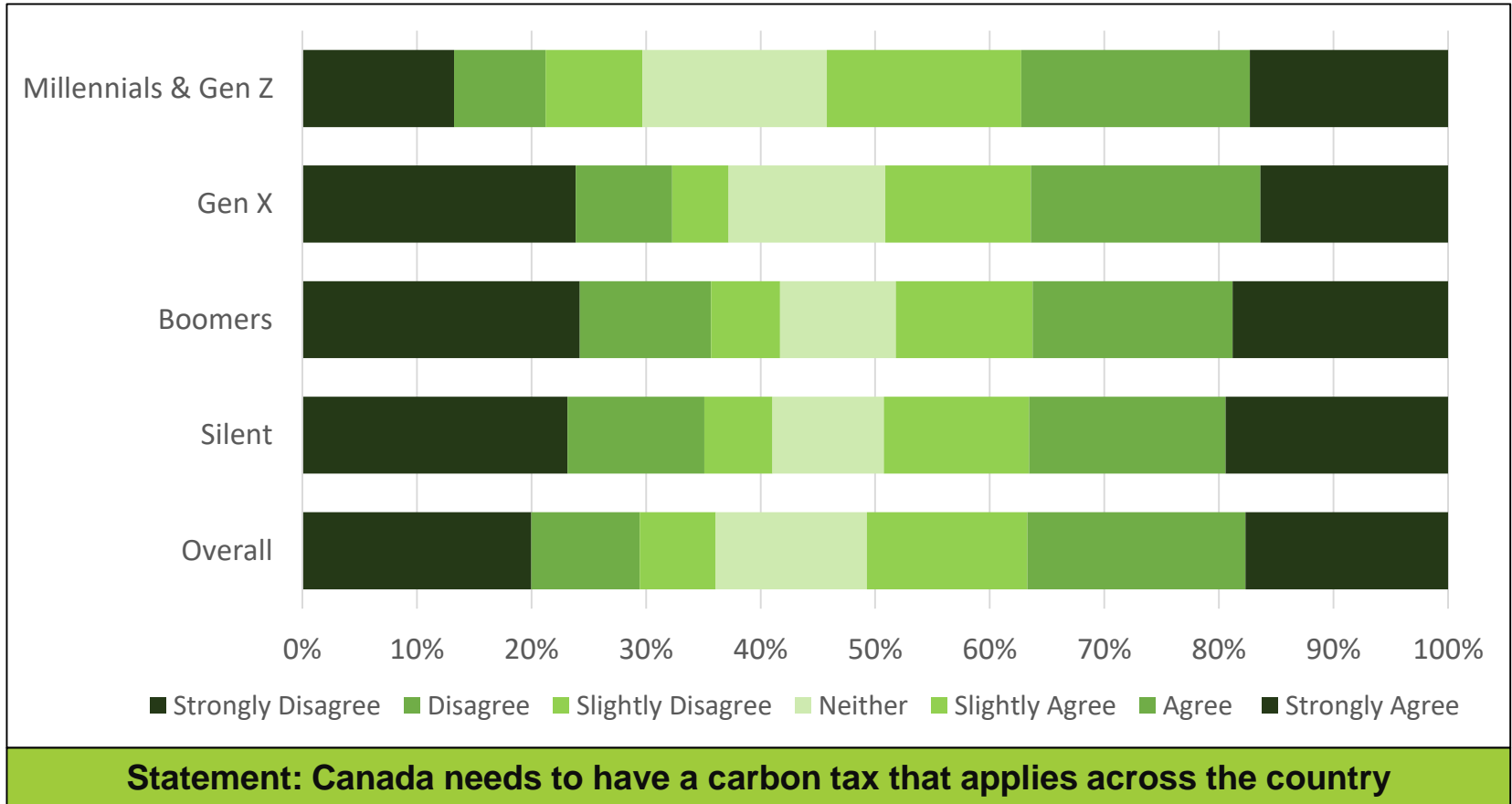
Carbon Tax: Support Overall



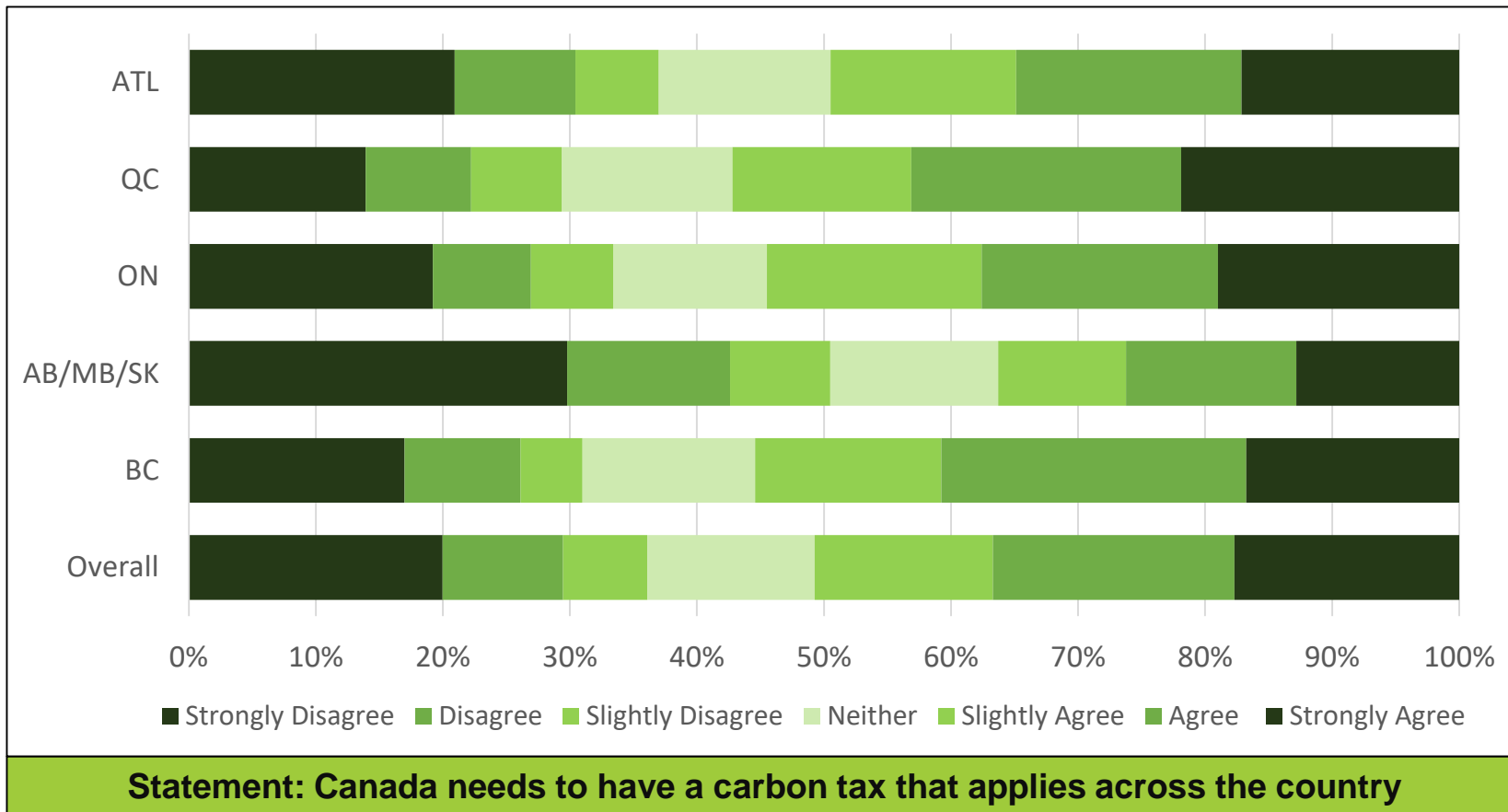
Carbon Tax: Support by Party



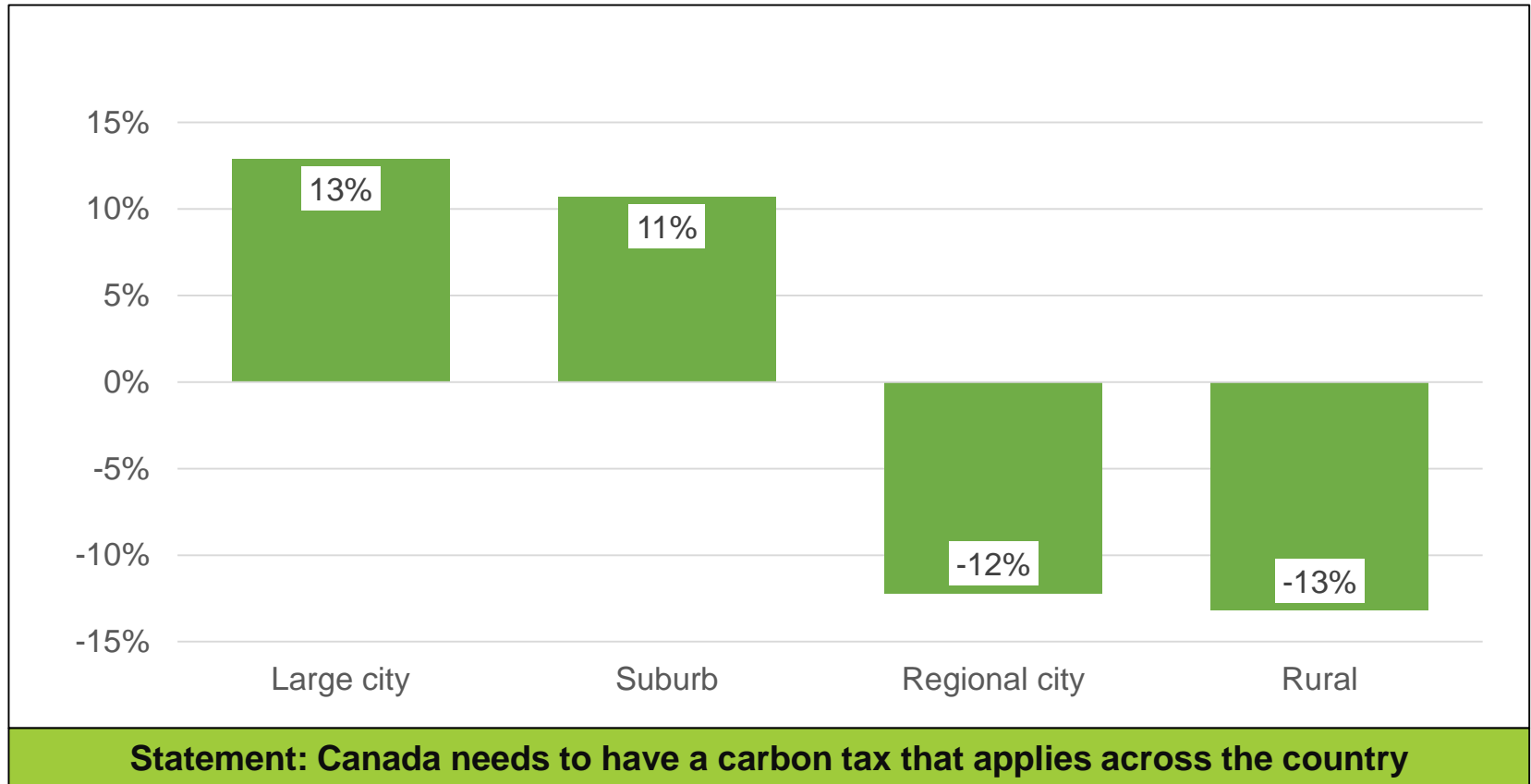
Carbon Tax: Support by Age



Carbon Tax: Support by Region



Carbon Tax: Net Support by Community Type

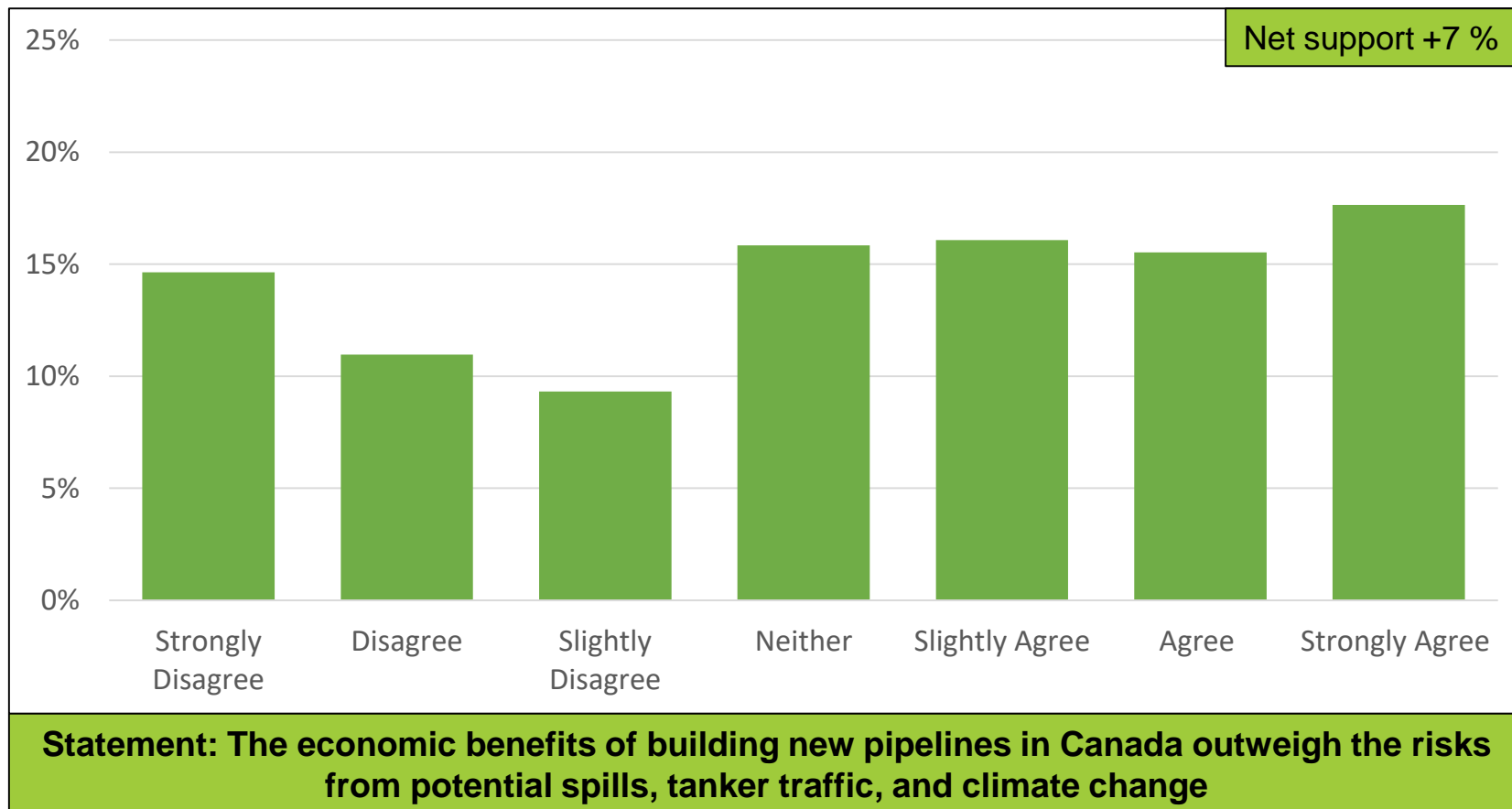


Take Note

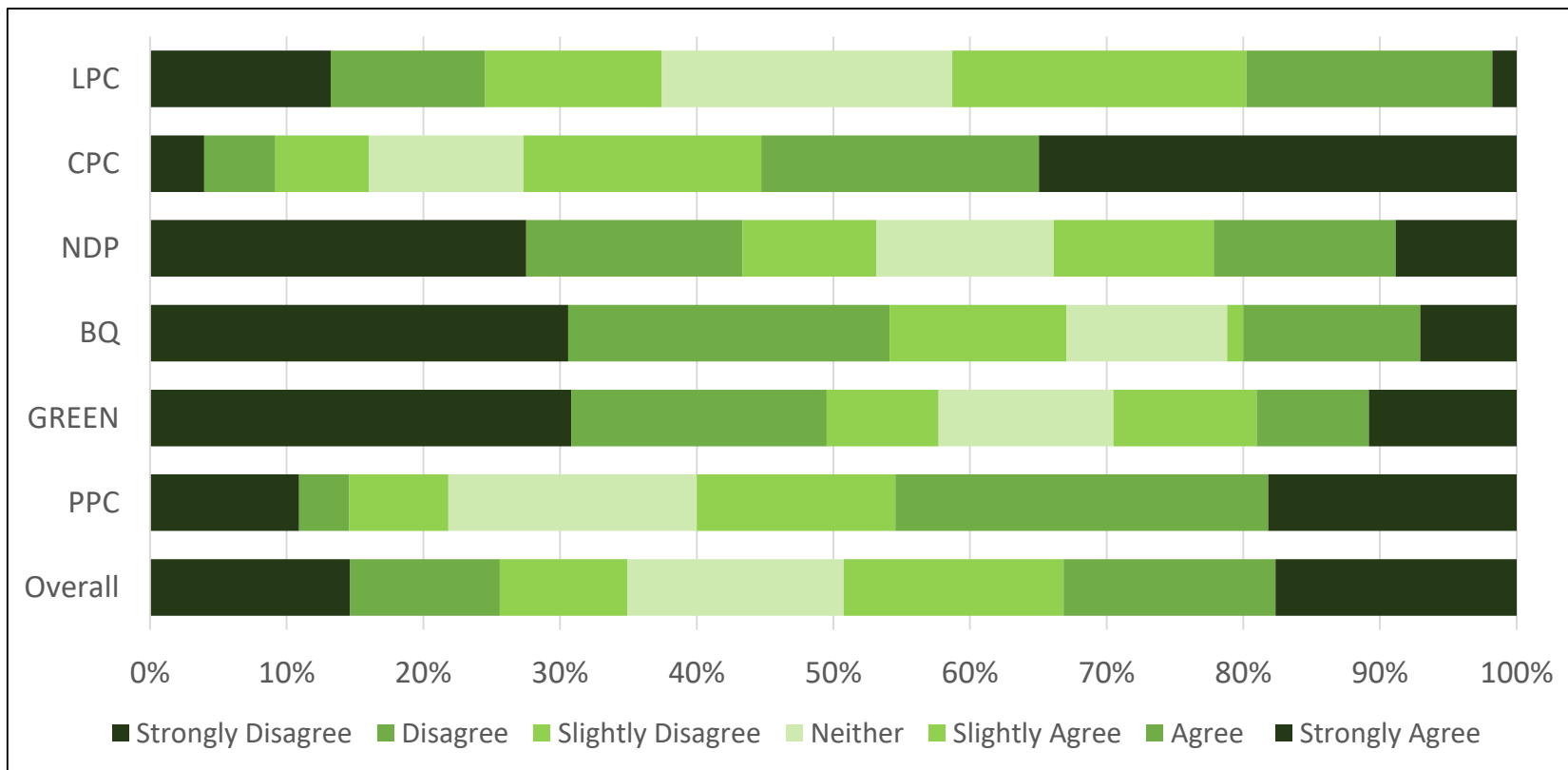
- **More support than opposition for a carbon tax overall, yet opinion is polarized along partisan lines and tends more towards fragmentation along regional lines (except Prairies and to some extent Quebec).**
- **Millennials/Gen Z are less polarized than other generations.**
- **More support than opposition (i.e., positive net support) in large cities and suburbs, more opposition than support in regional cities and rural areas.**
- **7 percent of respondents did not express an opinion (“don’t know”).**



Pipelines: Support Overall

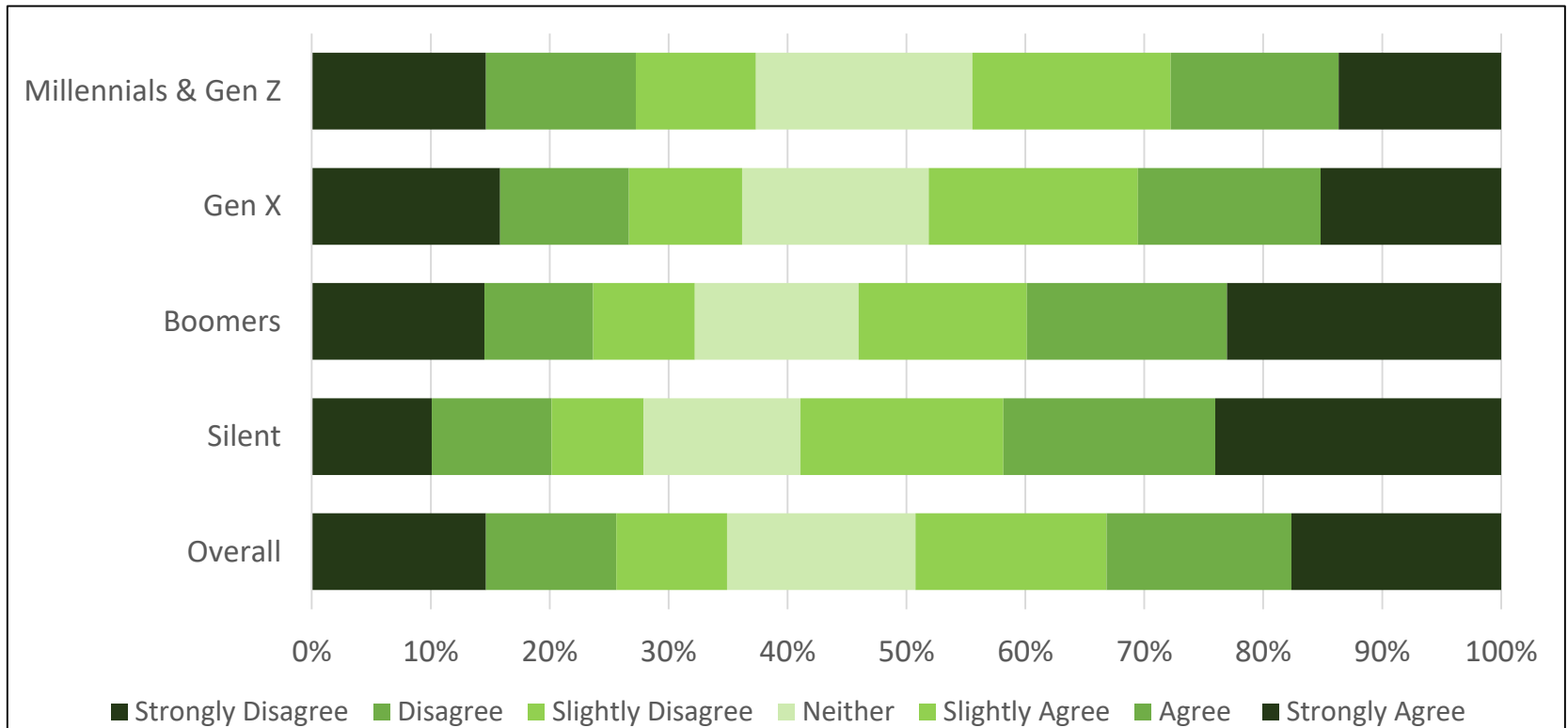


Pipelines: Support by Party



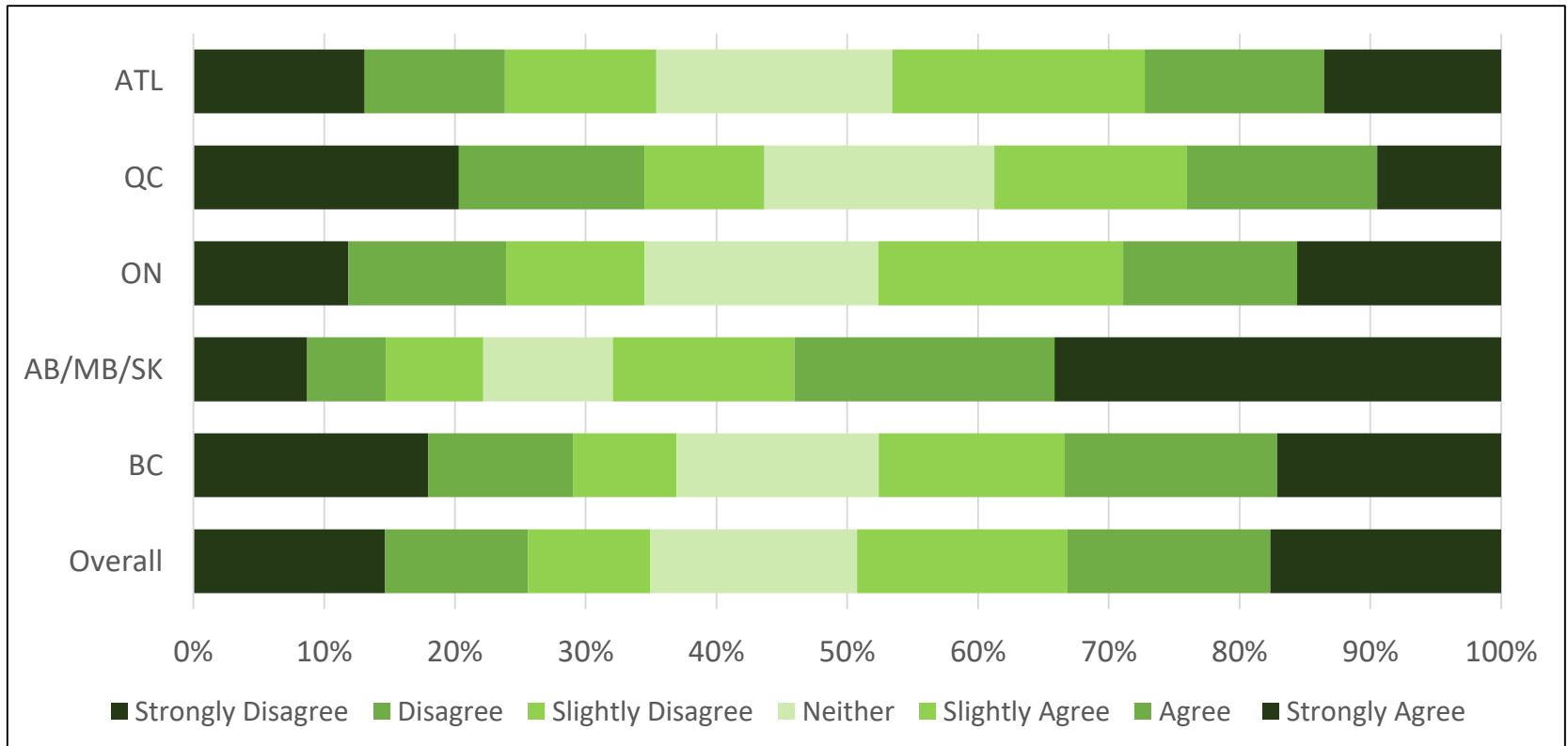
Statement: The economic benefits of building new pipelines in Canada outweigh the risks from potential spills, tanker traffic, and climate change

Pipelines: Support by Age



Statement: The economic benefits of building new pipelines in Canada outweigh the risks from potential spills, tanker traffic, and climate change

Pipelines: Support by Region



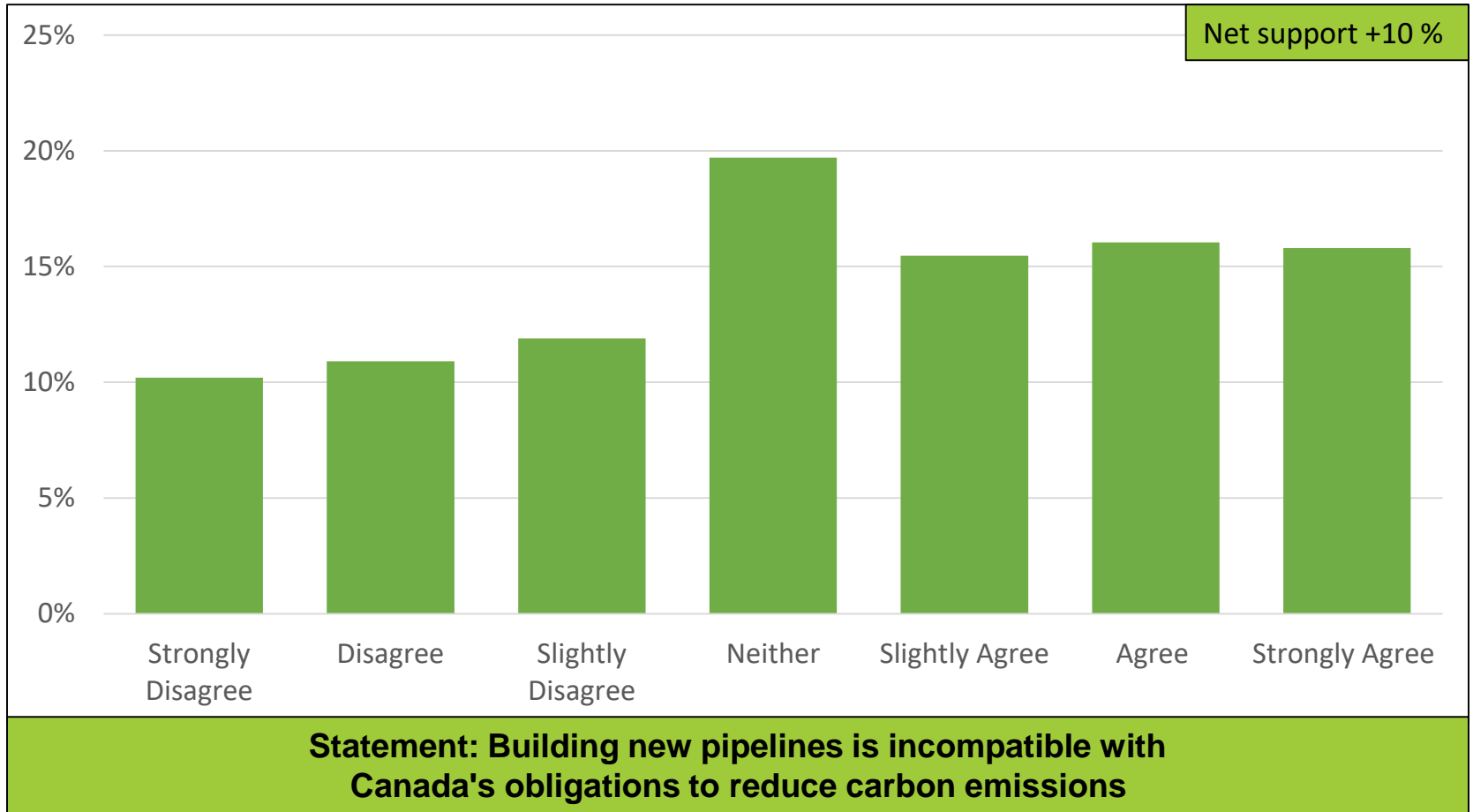
Statement: The economic benefits of building new pipelines in Canada outweigh the risks from potential spills, tanker traffic, and climate change

Take Note

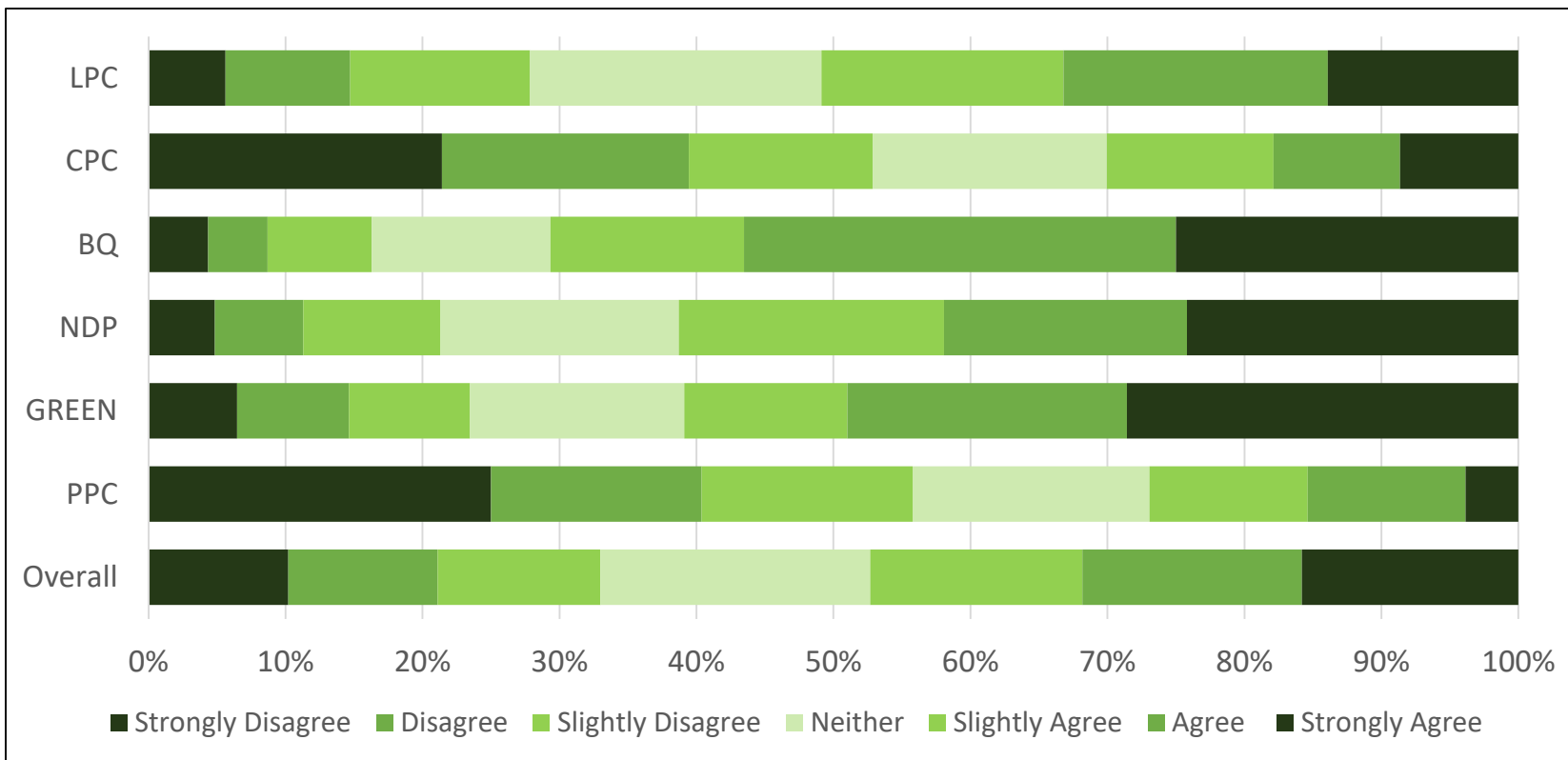
- **Even spread of opinion on pipeline risks and benefits, though overall, more support than opposition for the view that benefits outweigh risks.**
- **Polarized views evident along partisan lines, but tend more towards fragmented along regional lines (except Prairies and Quebec).**
- **7 percent of respondents did not express an opinion (“don’t know”).**



Pipelines and Climate: Support Overall

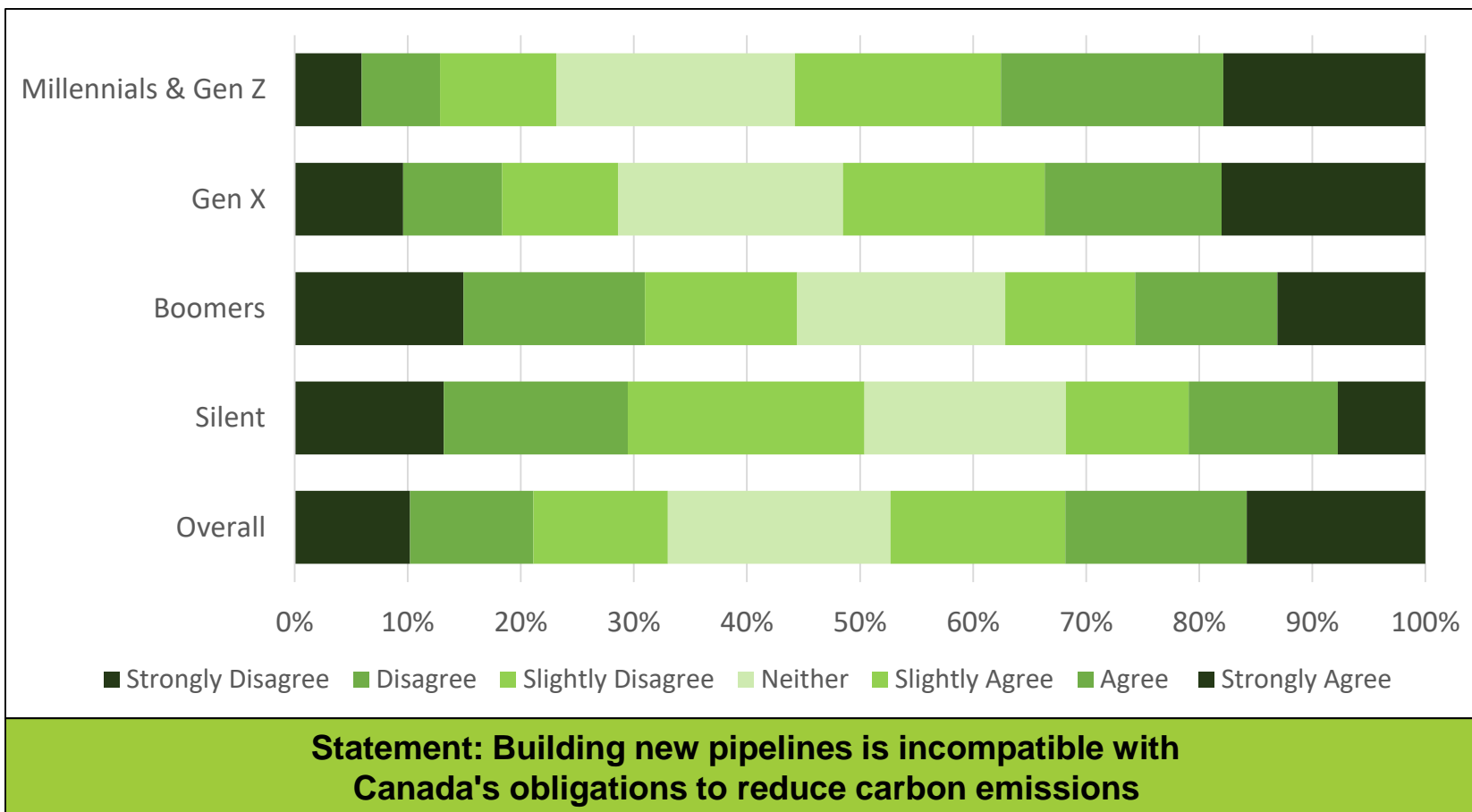


Pipelines and Climate: Support by Party

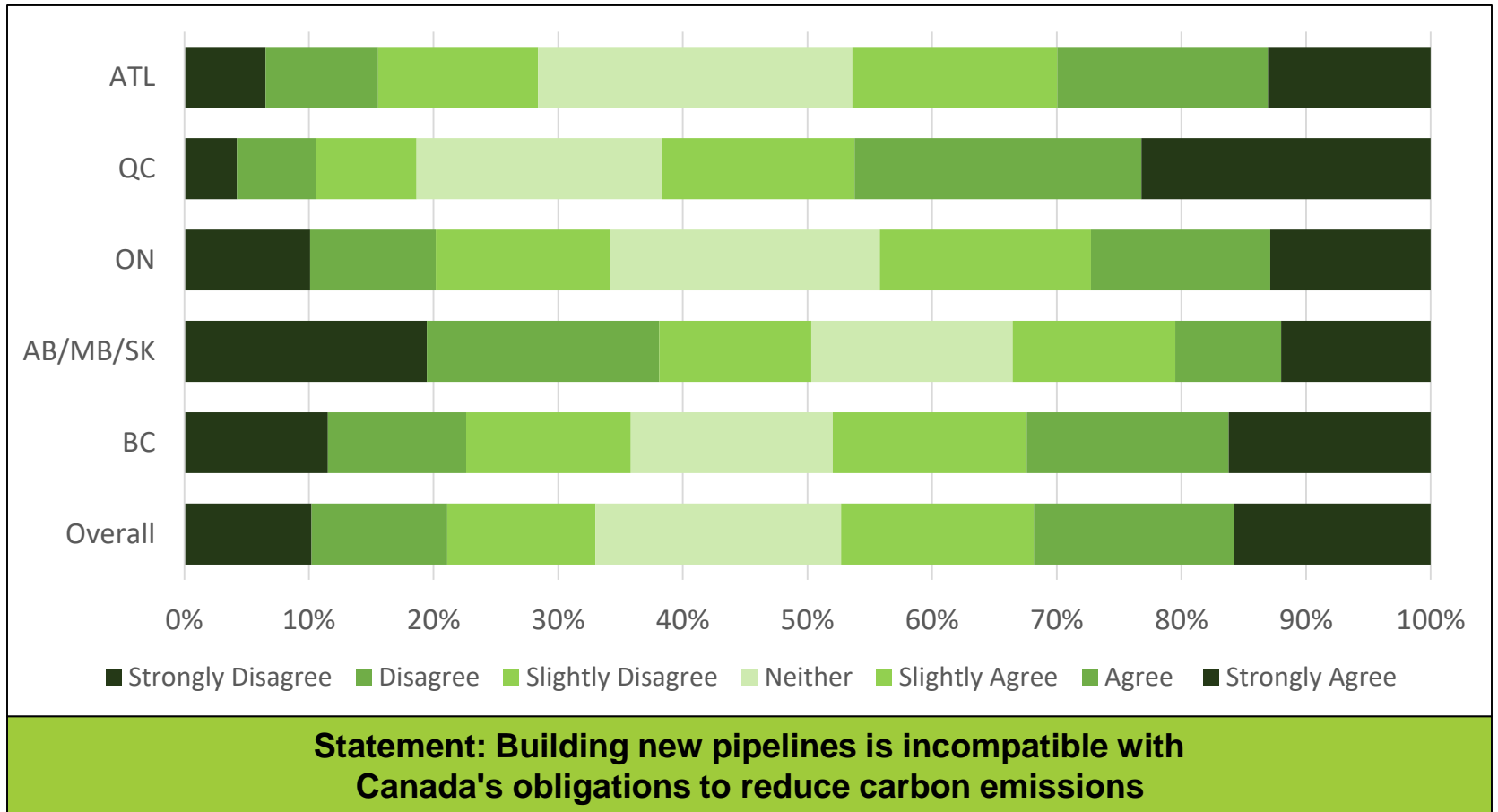


Statement: Building new pipelines is incompatible with Canada's obligations to reduce carbon emissions

Pipelines and Climate: Support by Age



Pipelines and Climate: Support by Region

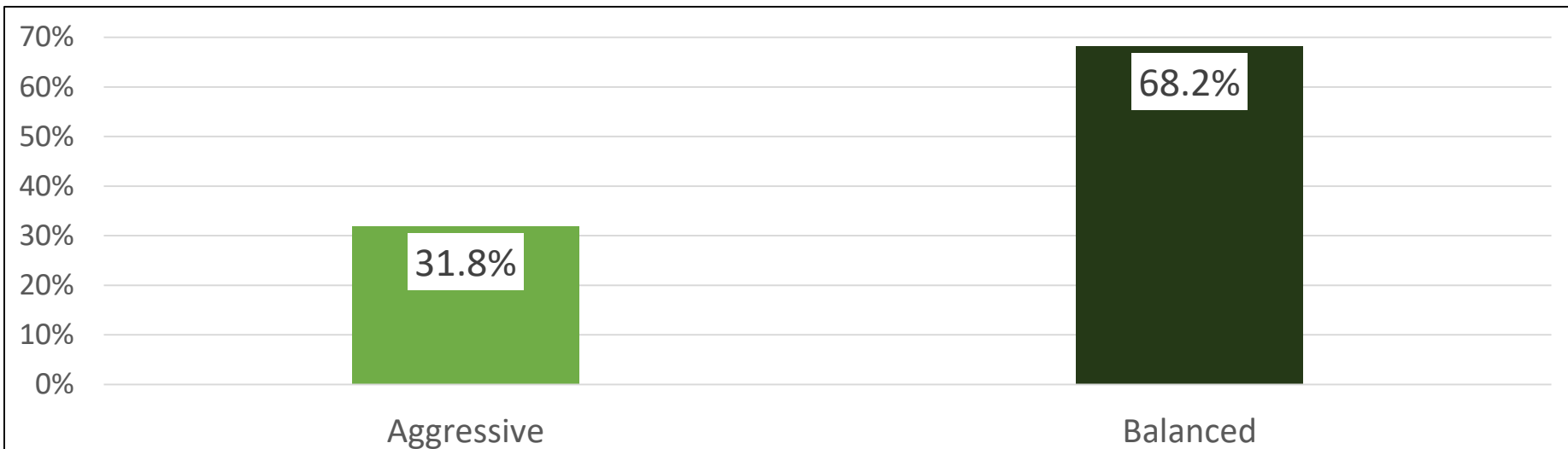


Take Note

- **Overall, fragmented opinion on compatibility of pipelines and climate change commitments.**
- **Notably, modal category is “Neither agree nor disagree,” with an additional 11 percent indicating “don’t know.”**
- **Among those with an opinion, some evidence of polarized views across partisans and regions.**



Speed of Transition



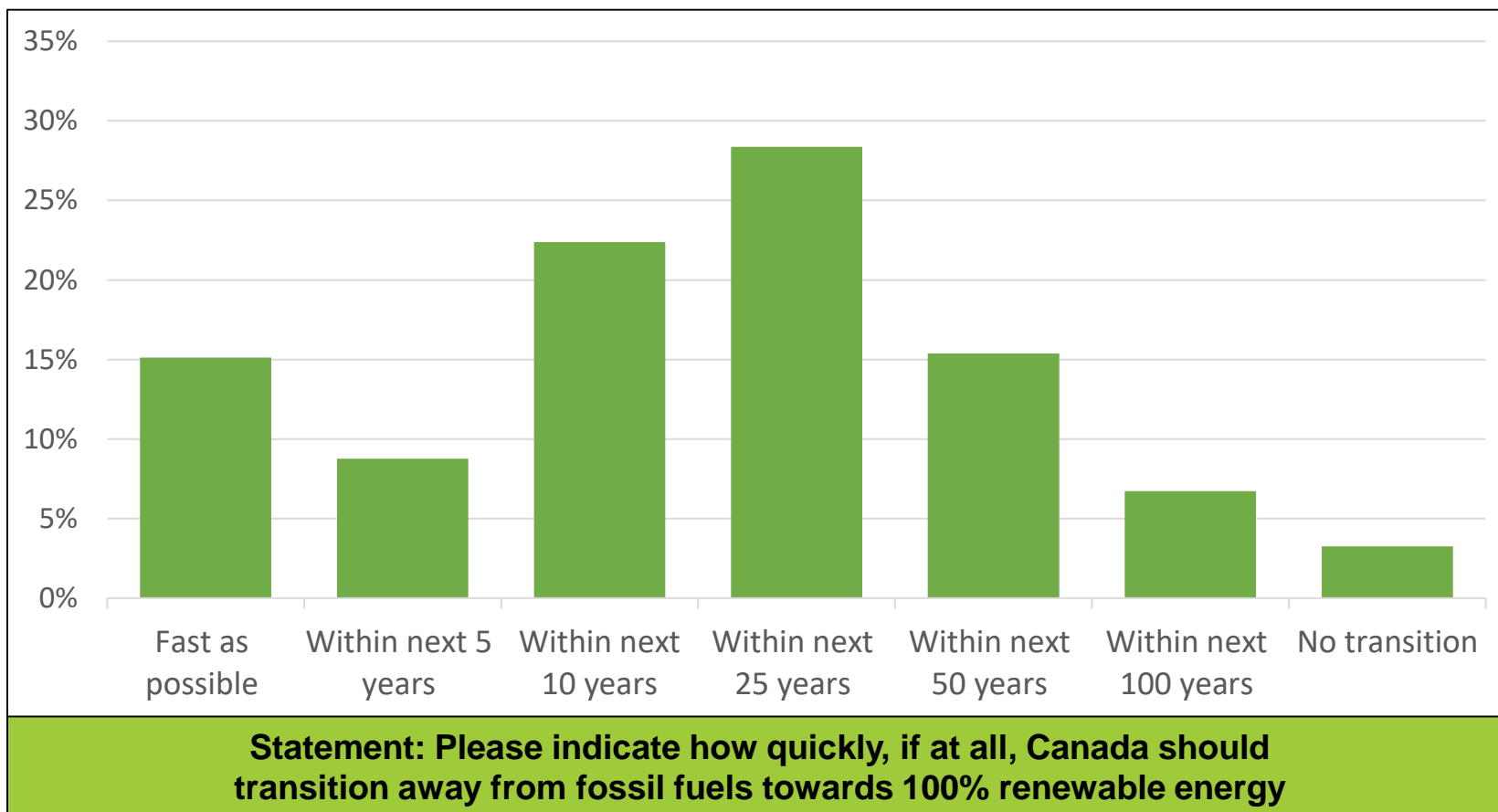
Statement: Which of the following is closer to your view, even if neither captures exactly how you feel?

“Some people say Canada should aggressively phase out fossil fuels and transition quickly toward lower emitting forms of energy.”

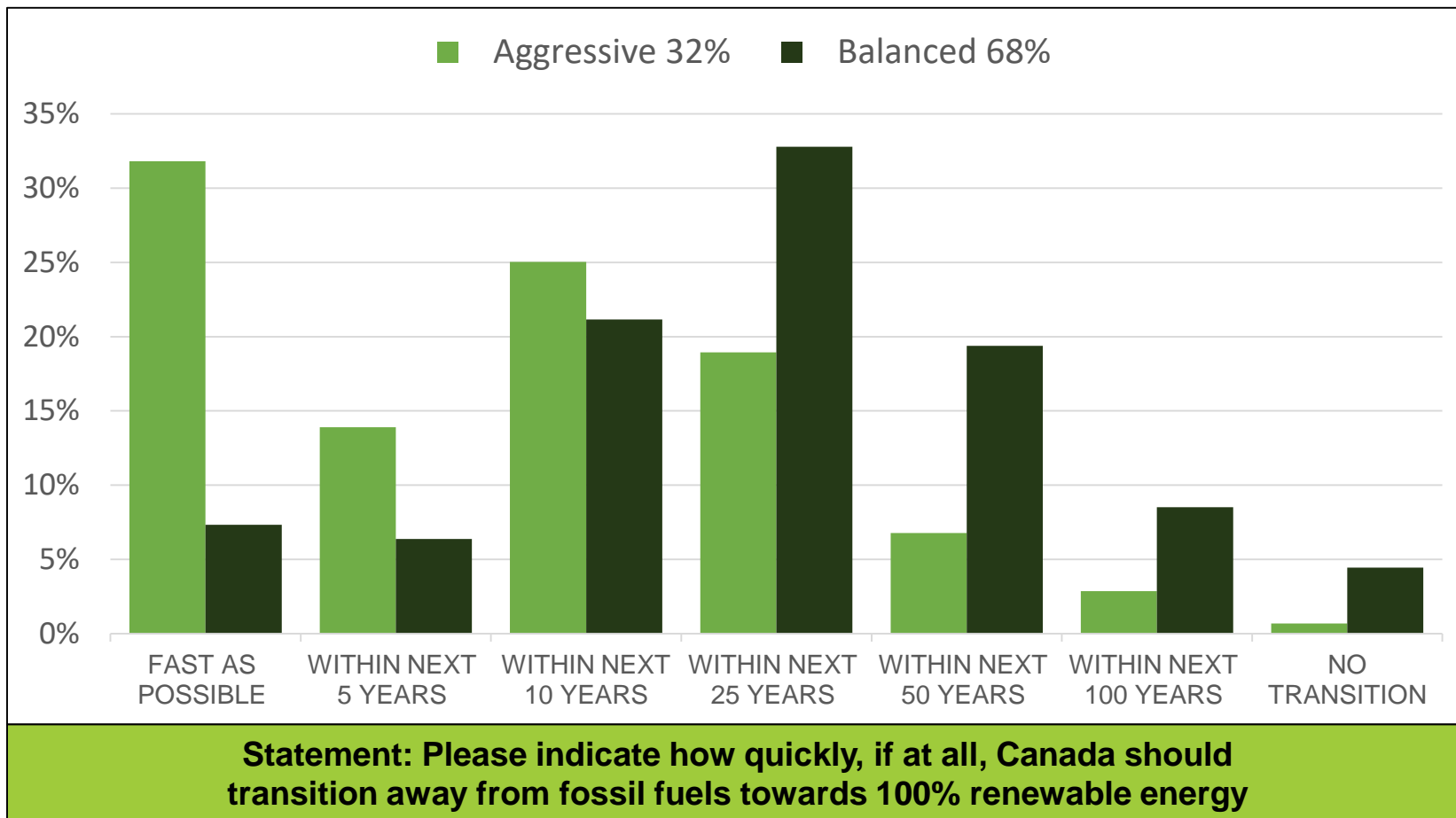
“Others say Canada should take a balanced and steady approach that allows for the continued production of oil and gas while the country gradually moves toward lower emitting energy.”



Speed of Transition



Speed of Transition

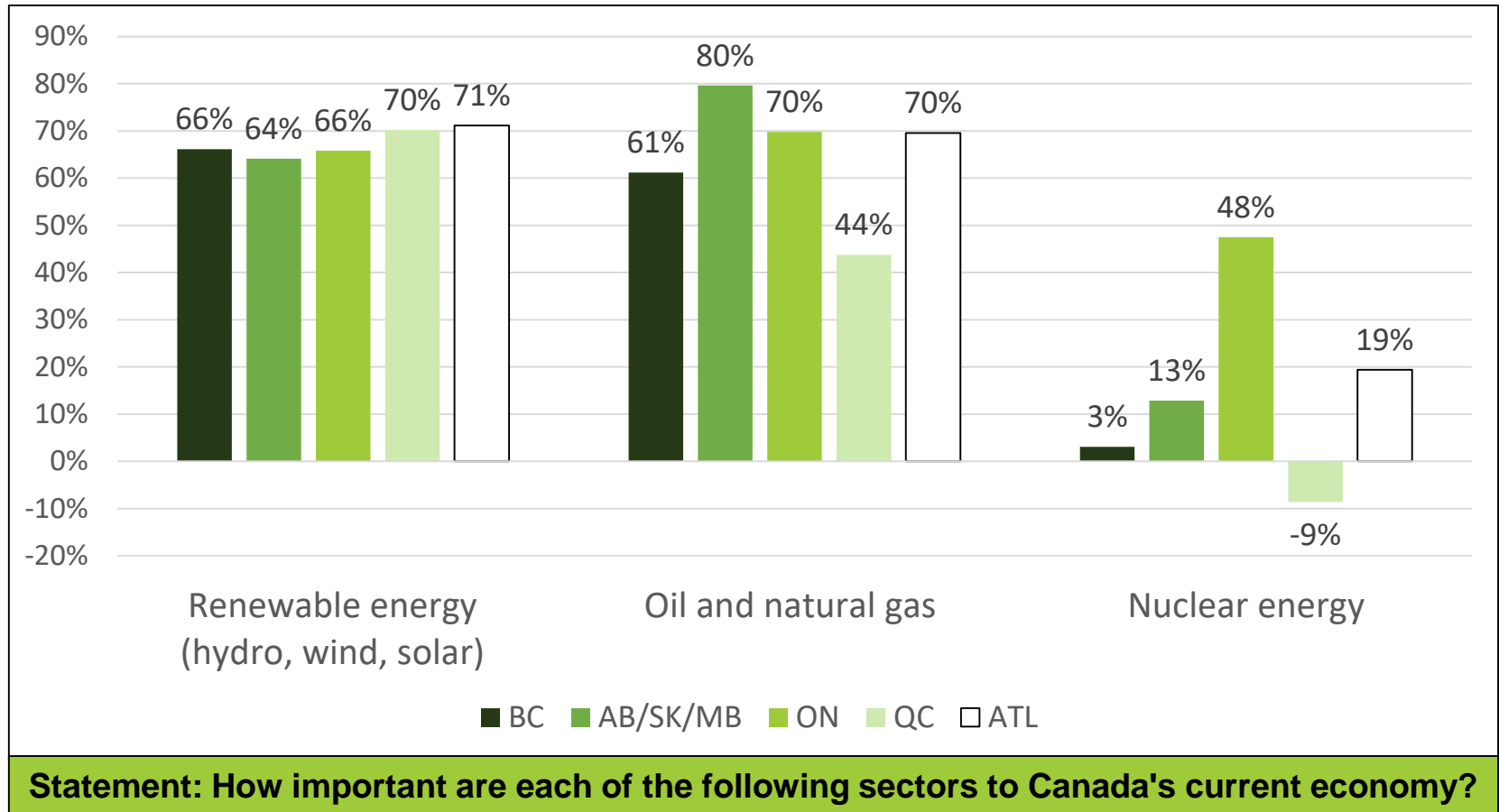


Take Note

- **Majority prefer balanced transition, but one in three support “aggressive” action.**
- **Fragmented opinion has implications for preferred timing of transition.**
 - Window of 10 years for majority of “aggressive” supporters.
Window of 25 years for majority of “balanced” supporters.
- **Overall, close to a majority want transition to 100% renewable within next decade.**
- **Canadians aware of the need to transition and the challenge ahead; there is agreement here.**



Energy Sector Importance by Region (Net Support)

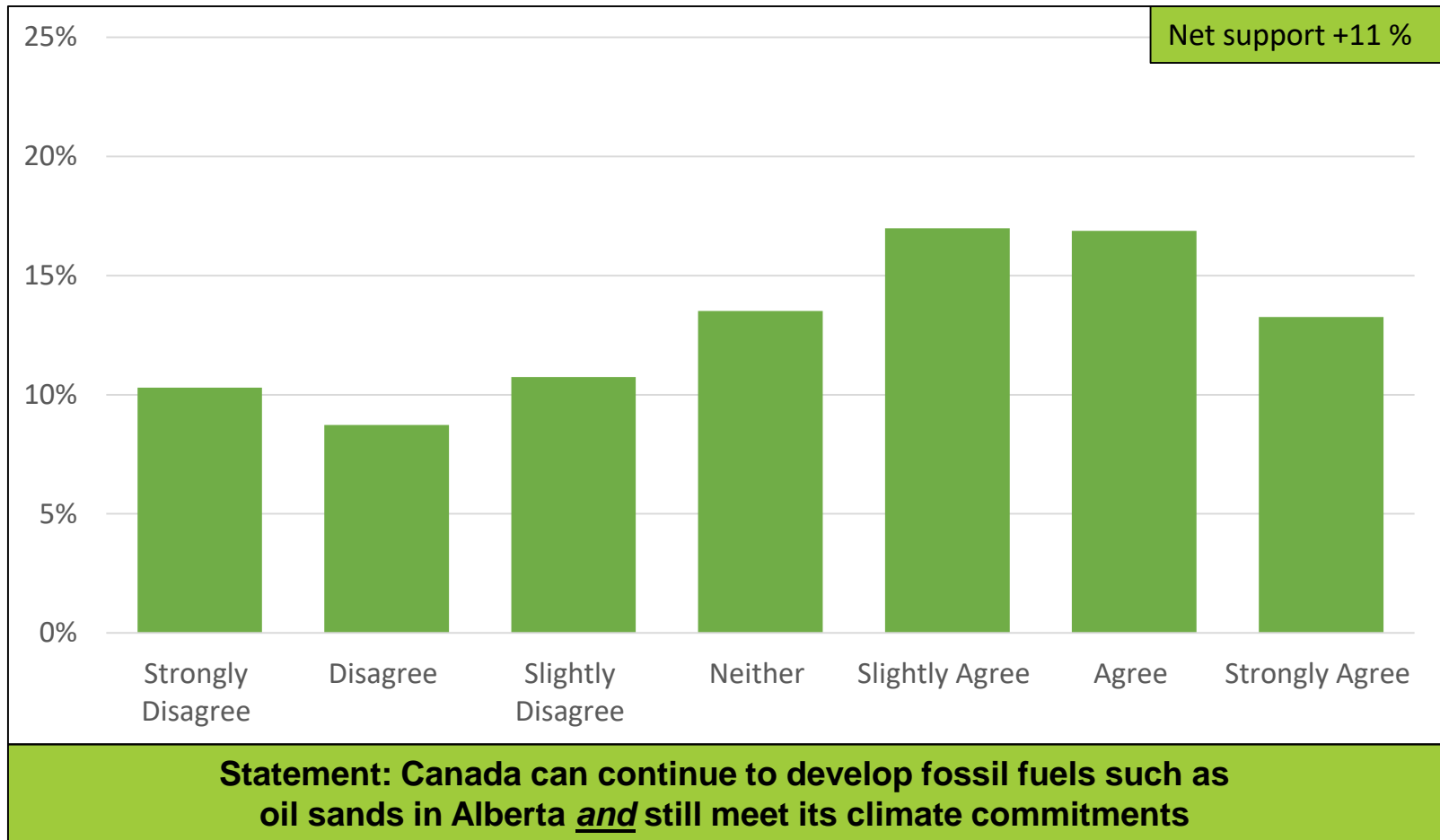


Take Note

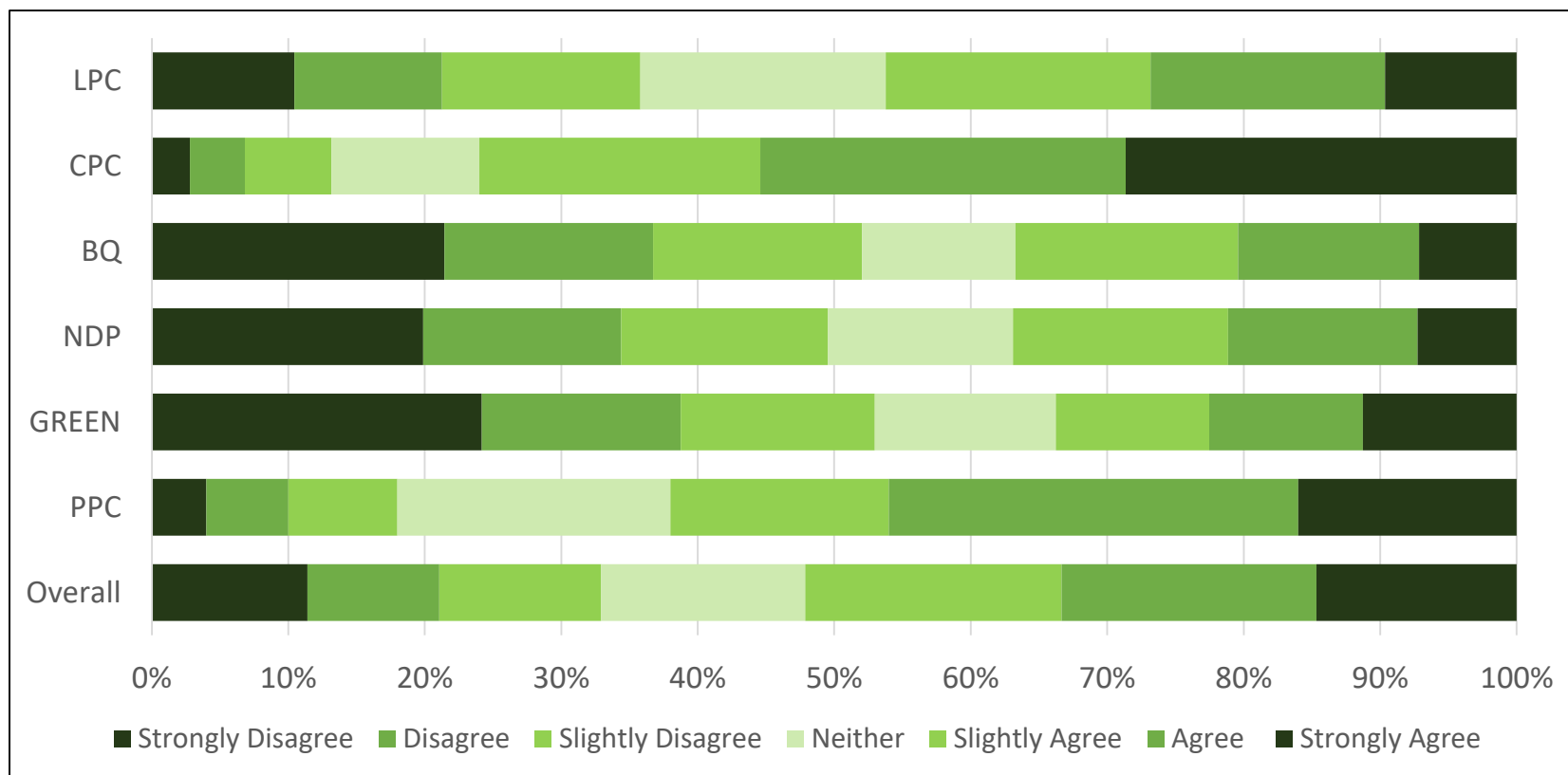
- **Majority attribute value & importance of renewables across all regions of the country.**
- **Less consensus on importance of oil and gas across regions, but generally, most perceive this sector to be important to the current economy.**
- **Fragmented opinion across the country on importance of nuclear to Canada's current economy.**



Fossil Fuels and Climate: Support Overall

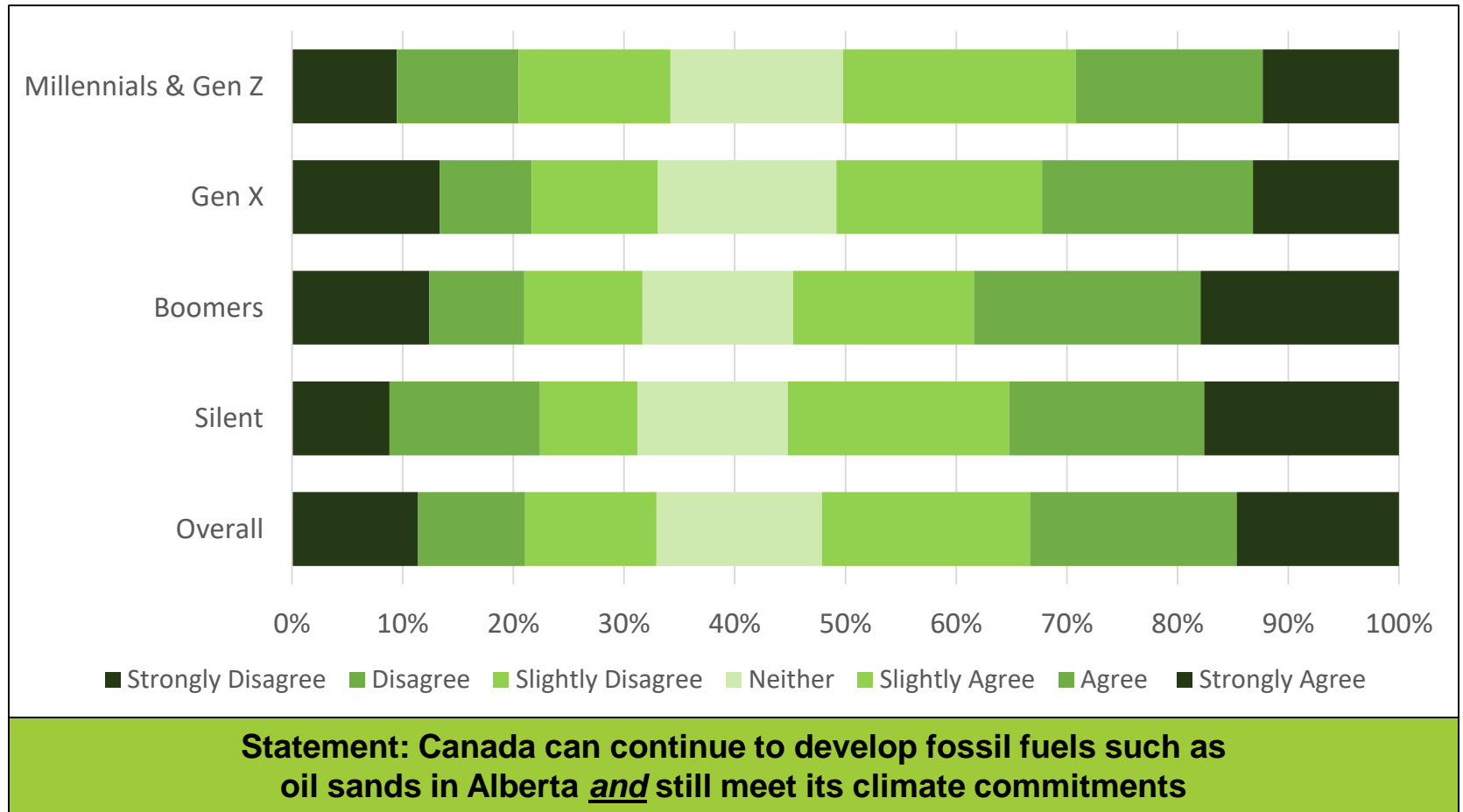


Fossil Fuels and Climate: Support by Party

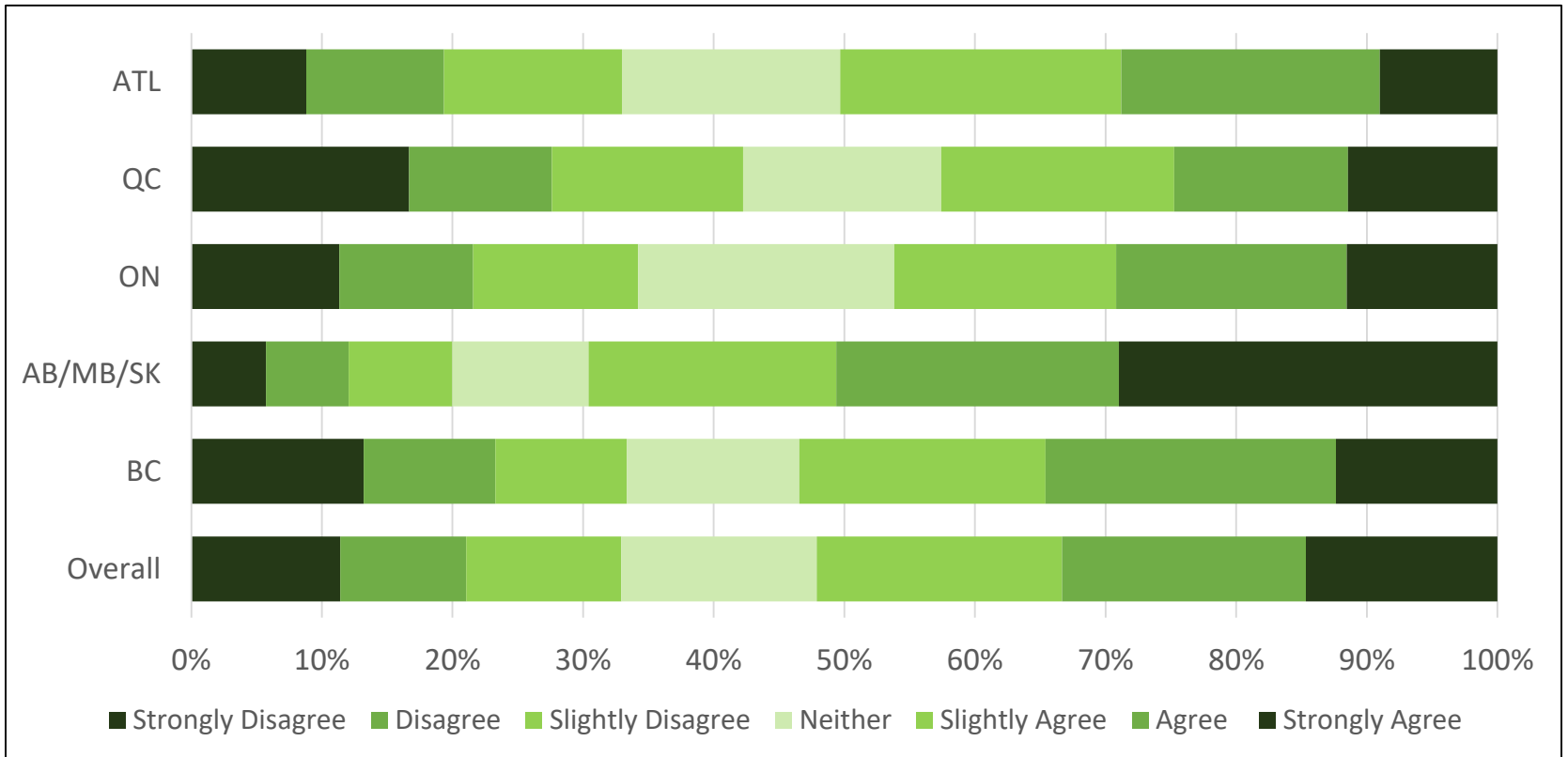


Statement: Canada can continue to develop fossil fuels such as oil sands in Alberta and still meet its climate commitments

Fossil Fuels and Climate: Support by Age



Fossil Fuels and Climate: Support by Region



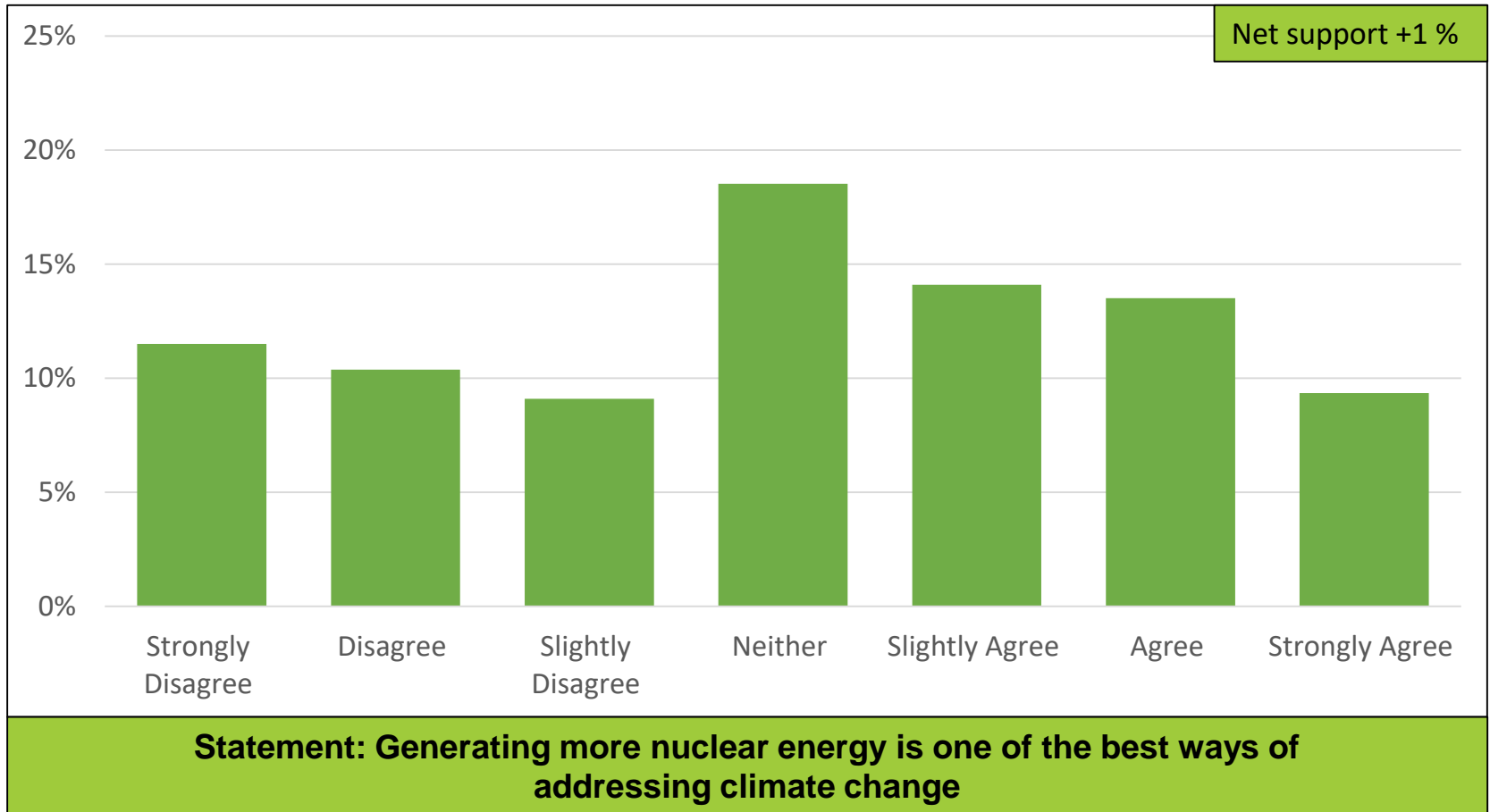
Statement: Canada can continue to develop fossil fuels such as oil sands in Alberta and still meet its climate commitments

Take Note

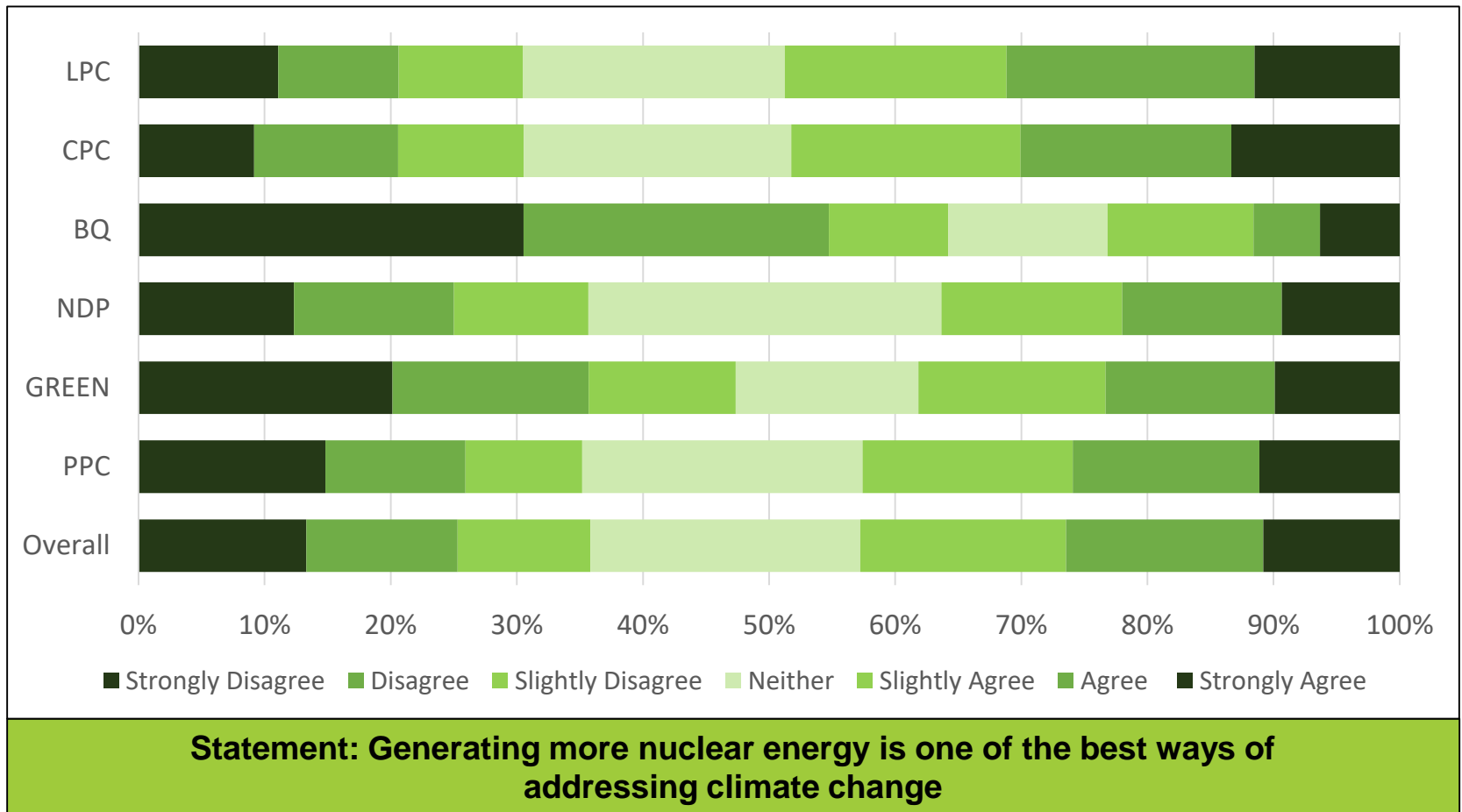
- **Overall, moderate support for ability to develop fossil fuels like the oil sands and still meet climate commitments.**
- **Regional and especially partisan differentiation on this issue is more polarized.**
- **9.6 percent of respondents did not express an opinion (“don’t know”).**



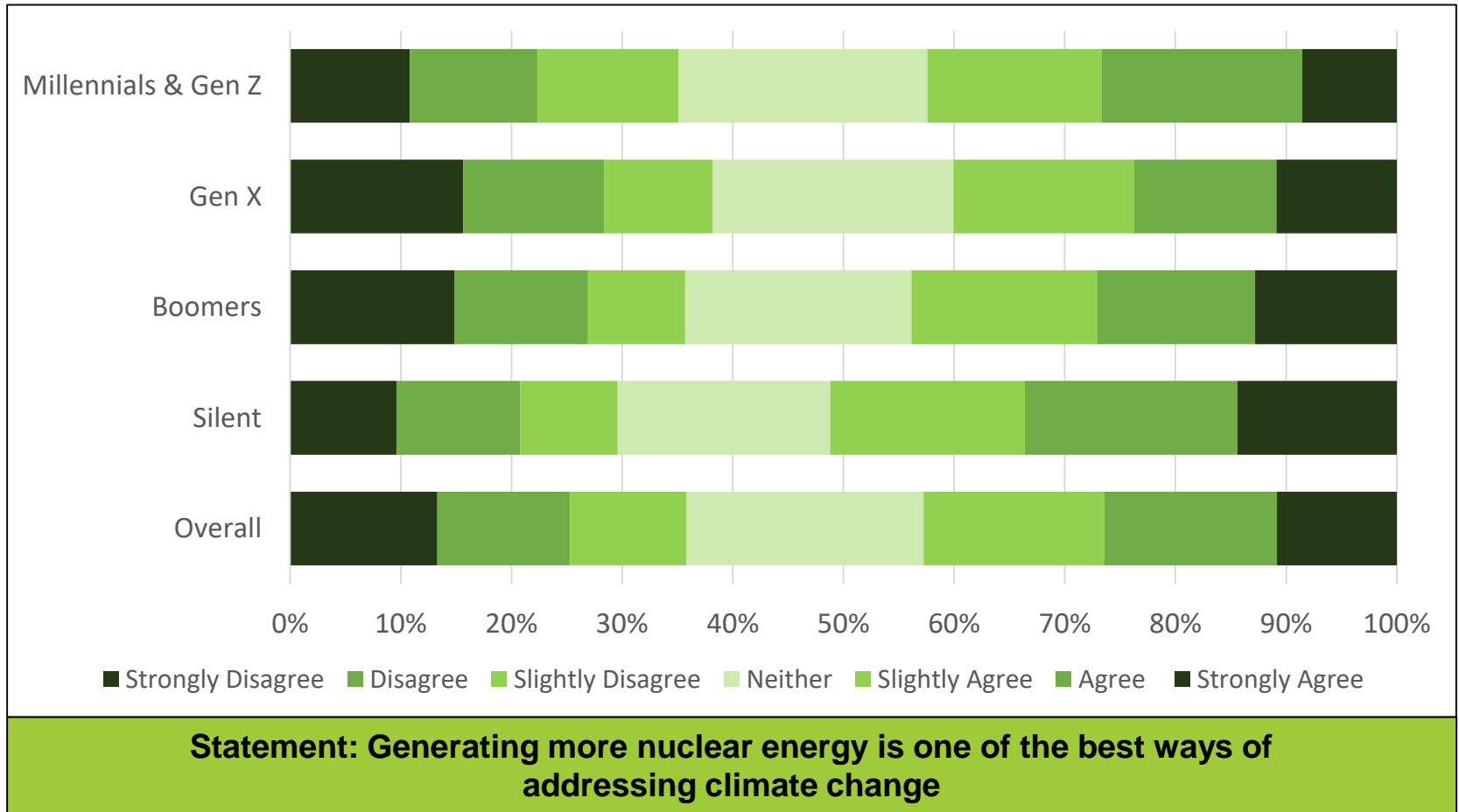
Nuclear Energy: Support Overall



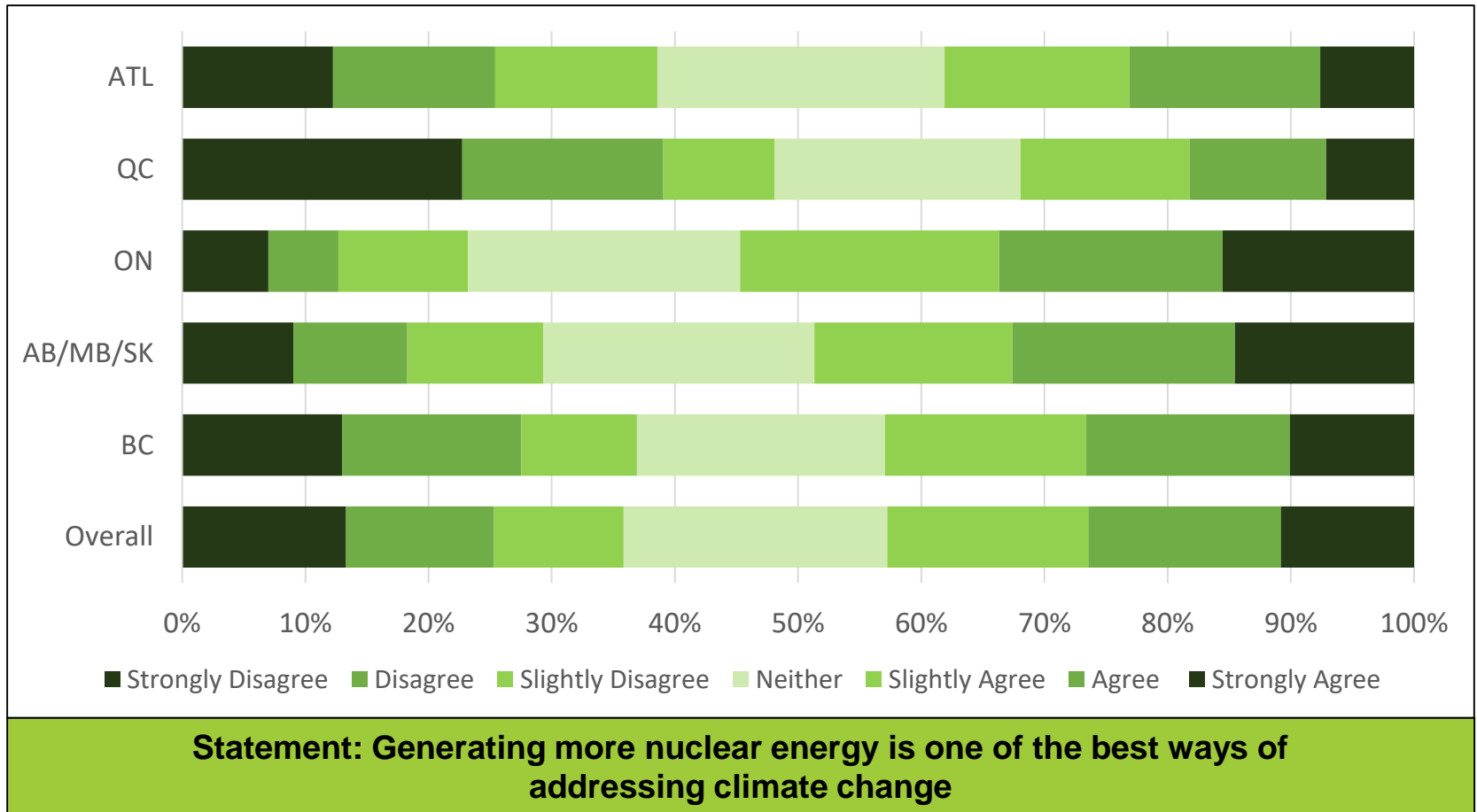
Nuclear Energy: Support by Party



Nuclear Energy: Support by Age



Nuclear Energy: Support by Region

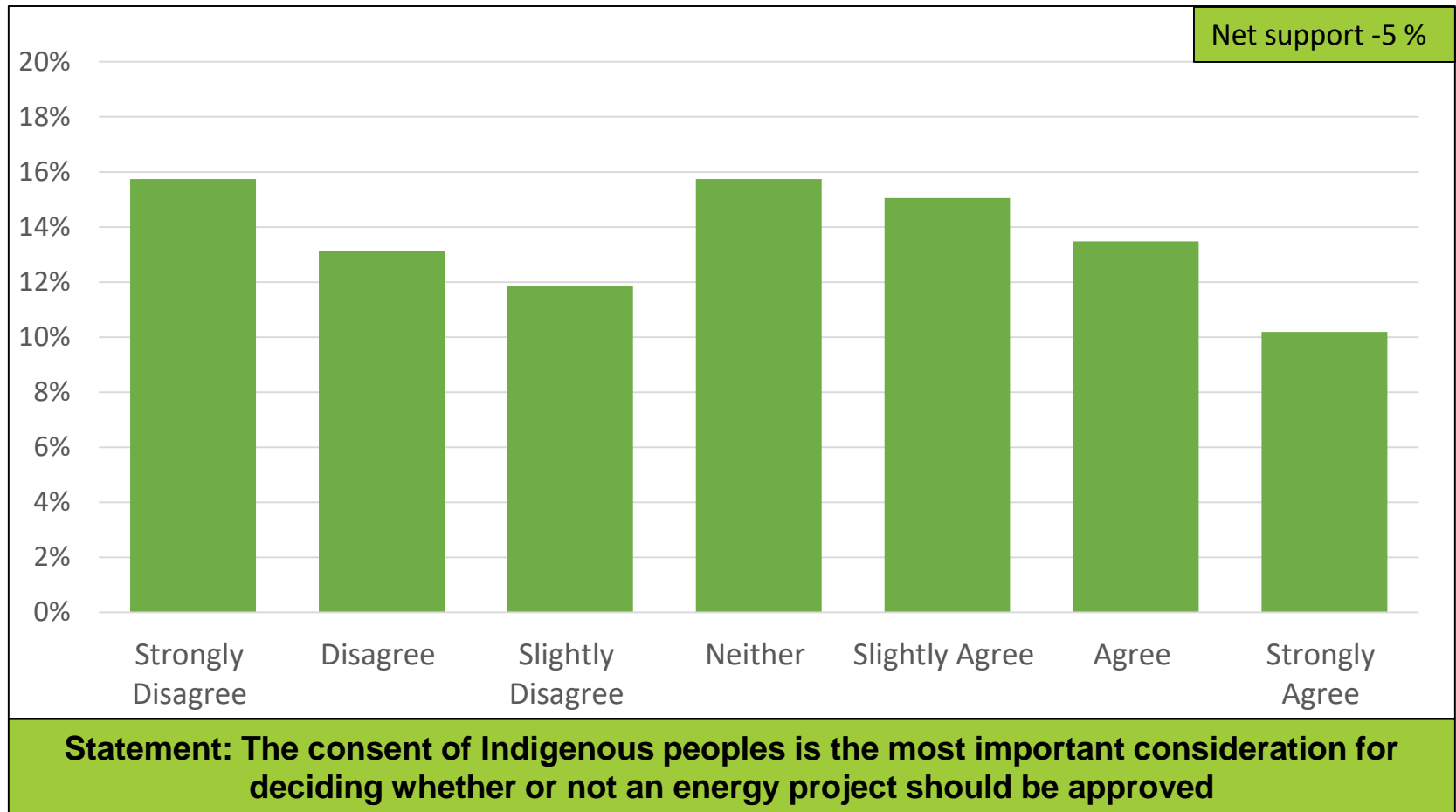


Take Note

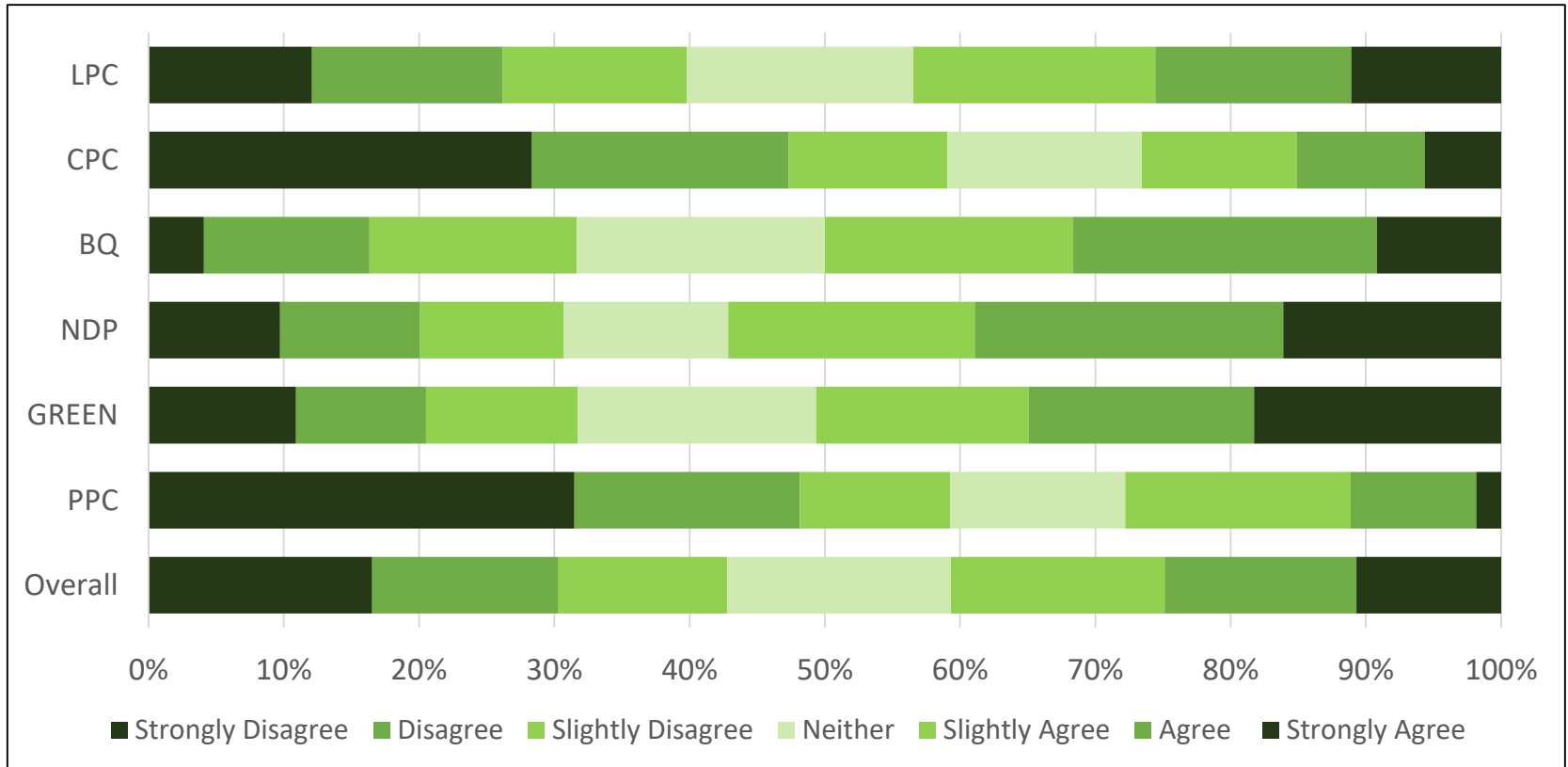
- **Overall opinion on nuclear as a climate solution is fragmented.**
- **Views on nuclear solution to climate change are somewhat polarized along partisan and regional lines.**
- **Quebec stands out on this issue.**
- **13.6 percent of respondents did not express an opinion (“don’t know”).**



Indigenous Consent: Support Overall

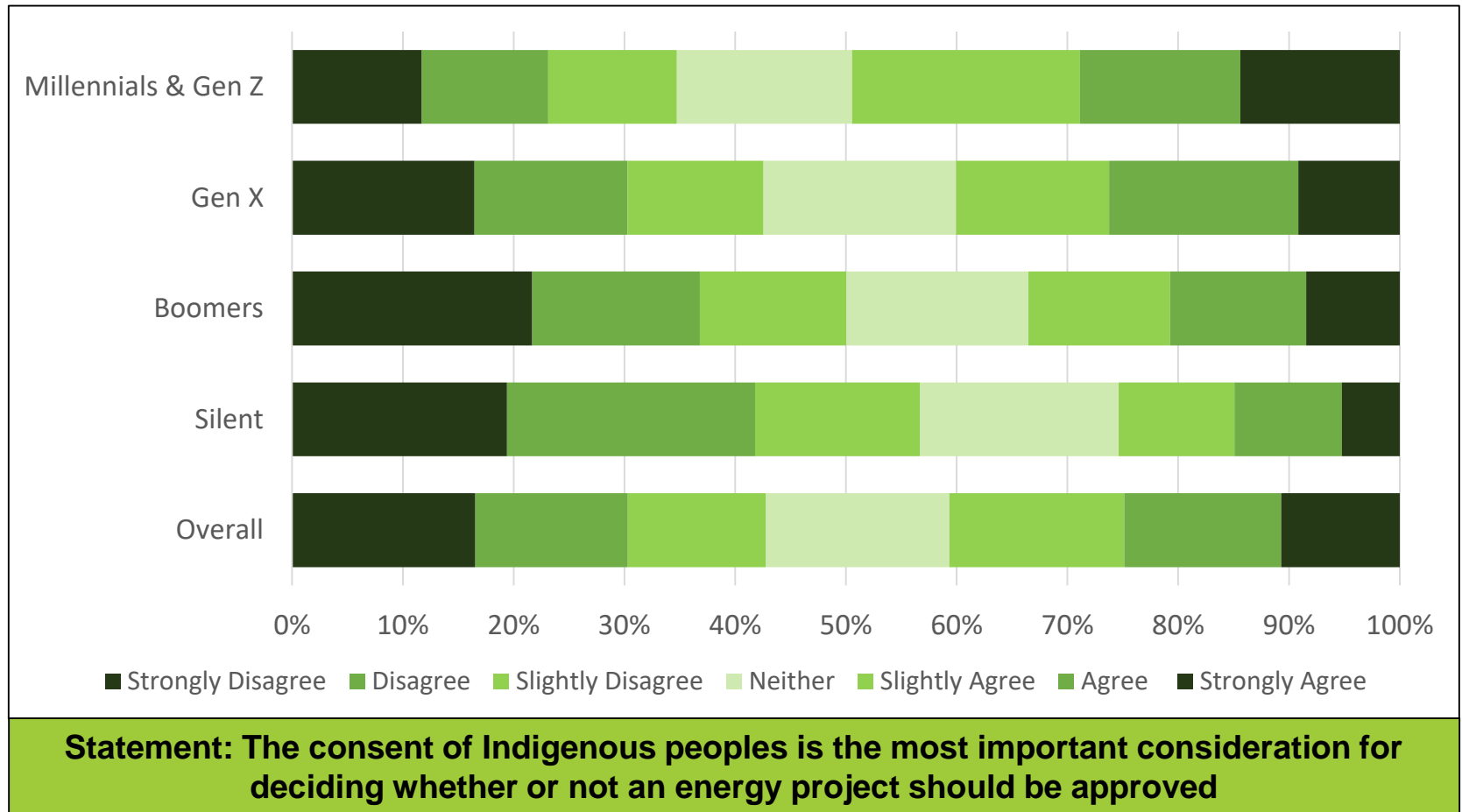


Indigenous Consent: Support by Party

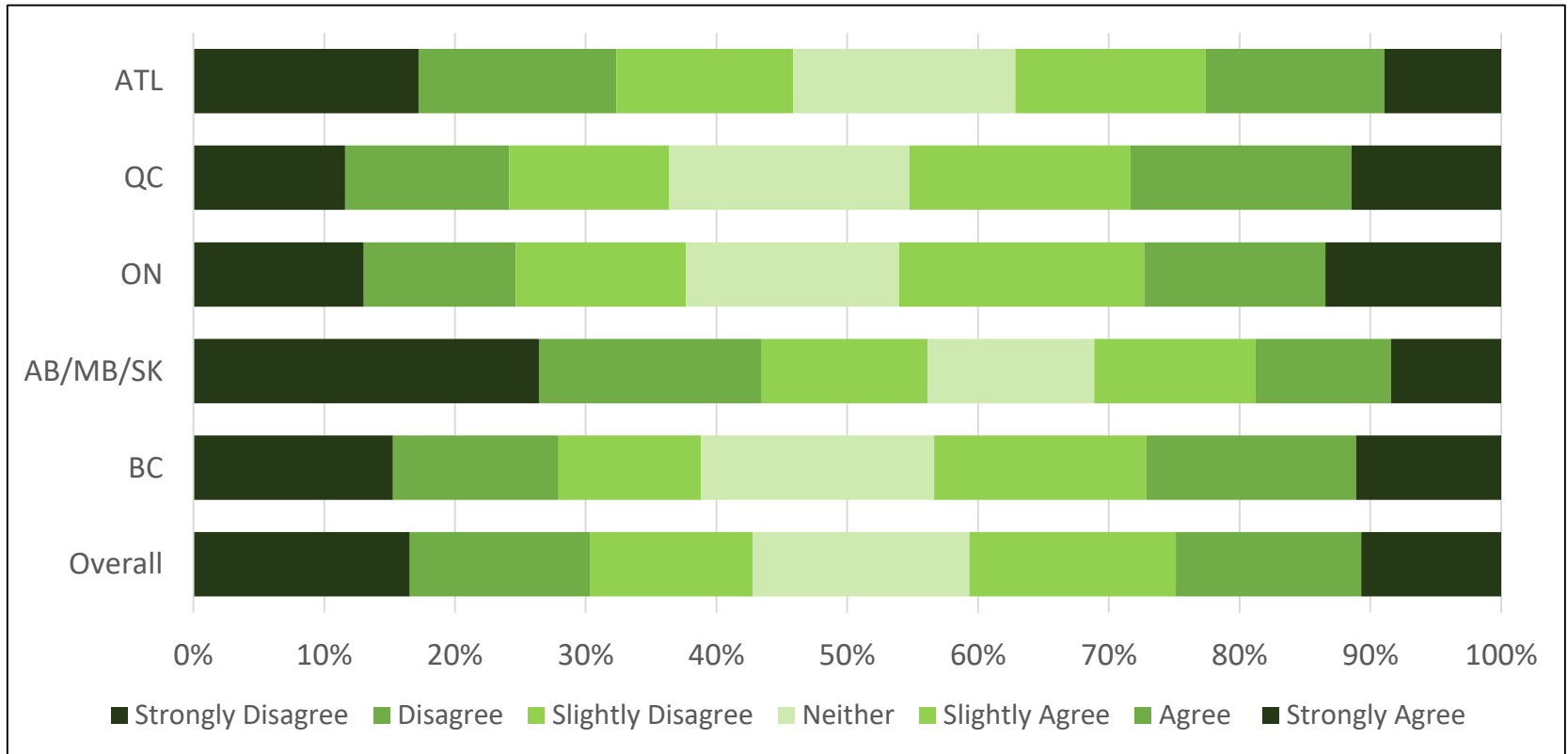


Statement: The consent of Indigenous peoples is the most important consideration for deciding whether or not an energy project should be approved

Indigenous Consent: Support by Age



Indigenous Consent: Support by Region



Statement: The consent of Indigenous peoples is the most important consideration for deciding whether or not an energy project should be approved

Take Note

- **Overall opinion on Indigenous consent is fragmented.**
- **Indigenous consent is polarized by region, generation, and partisan lines.**
- **5 percent of respondents did not express an opinion (“don’t know”).**



Future Work

- More surveys to assess polarization over time
- Extensive analysis of drivers of polarization
- Analysis of
 - Values
 - Ideology
 - Tolerance & trust
 - Political sophistication & education
- Multivariate analysis

Feedback or comments

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