

# Trust, motivated reasoning and public confidence

Positive Energy – Trust in Transition

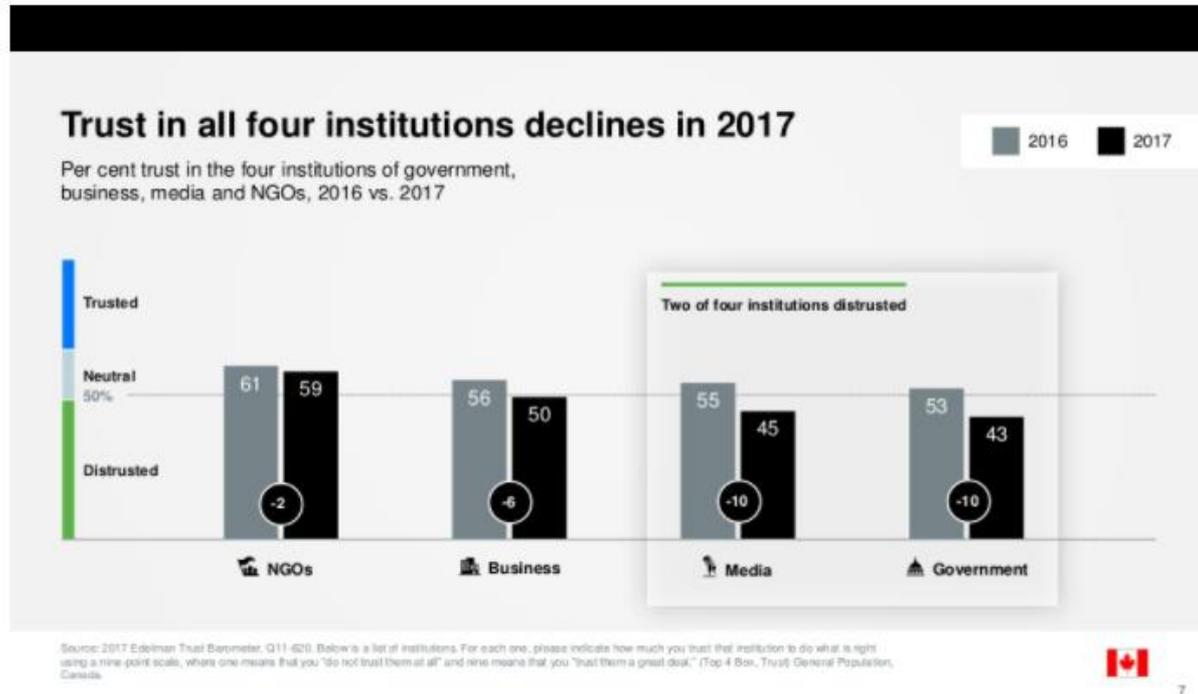
Planning workshop January 24, 2018, uOttawa

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## Why focus on trust and public confidence?

- Scale and scope of energy transition will be disruptive
- Trust and public confidence will be required
- Policies will have unintended trust and public confidence consequences
- And...levels of trust in the organizations and institutions responsible for transition are in decline (in crisis?)
- Trust rests on expectations being fulfilled. But...
  - Are decision makers clear on what public(s) can expect?
  - Impact of echo chamber and “motivated reasoning”?
- Issues and opportunities for the project

# “...trust is in crisis around the world...” (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2017)



- Trust is an asymmetric social asset

Source: <https://www.edelman.com/trust2017/trust-in-canada/> . Online survey Oct 17 – Nov 13 2016 (n = 1150)

[www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy](http://www.uottawa.ca/positive-energy)

# Trust in authorities at project level

Cleland M, Bird S, Fast S, Sajid S, and L Simard. (2016) A Matter of Trust: The Role of Communities in Energy Decision-Making. Positive Energy. 49 p

	Kitimat – Haisla Nation (Northern Gateway Pipeline)	Eckville - Rimbey (Western Alberta Transmission Line)	Oakville (Gas plant)	King Township (Gas plant)	Kent County – Elsipogtog Nation (Shale gas exploration)
Agree or somewhat agree	45%	39%	29%	27%	33%
Disagree or somewhat disagree	54%	60%	69%	66%	65%

Question: Do you agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or disagree with the following statements?

## I trust public authorities making decisions about energy projects

Nanos conducted an RDD dual frame (land- and cell- lines) telephone random survey of 1795 adult residents in the four communities between July 26<sup>th</sup> and Sept 7<sup>th</sup> 2016

# Trust and energy policy – a few markers from social science literature

- Role of trust in energy policy underappreciated (Greenberg 2014) and valuable topic for an energy and social science research agenda (Sovocool 2014)
- Parkins *et al* (2016) has observed that distrust can have the positive effect of motivating citizen involvement in energy governance (“critical trust”)

Greenberg, M. R. (2014). Energy policy and research: the underappreciation of trust. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 1,152-160

Parkins, John R., Thomas Beckley, Louise Comeau, Richard C. Stedman, Curtis L. Rollins & Anna Kessler (2017). Can Distrust Enhance Public Engagement? Insights From a National Survey on Energy Issues in Canada, *Society & Natural Resources*, 30(8): 934-948.

Sovacool, B. K. (2014). What are we doing here? Analyzing fifteen years of energy scholarship and proposing a social science research agenda. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 1, 1-29

# Echo chamber, motivated reasoning and critical trust

- 55% of Canadians do not regularly listen to people or organizations with whom disagree
- Canadians 3.5 x more likely to ignore information that supports a position they do not believe in
- 49% never or rarely ever change their position on important social issues
  - All from Edelman 2017
- “motivated reasoning” (e.g. Kahan 2016)
- What does it mean for trust and public confidence?

Kahan, D. M. (2016). The politically motivated reasoning paradigm, part 1: What politically motivated reasoning is and how to measure it. *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences: An Interdisciplinary, Searchable, and Linkable Resource*.

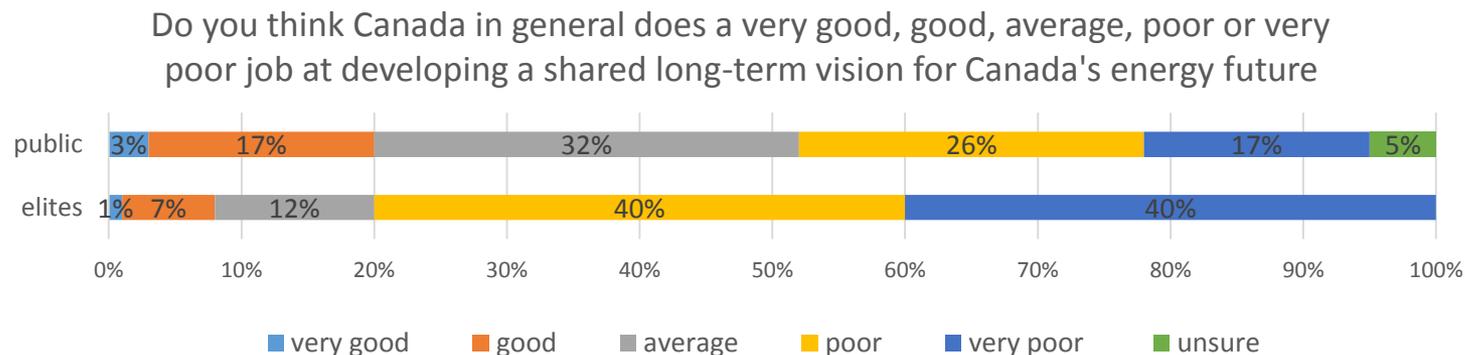
## Motivated reasoning : 3 interpretations and implications

- Problem
  - People interpret new information in ways that protect and validate pre-existing cultural worldviews and cultural identities
  - Response : recognize and adopt strategies to present evidence/messages/policies in ways that resonate with different cultural groups
- Fact of life
  - All reasoning is motivated (prior attitude effect, confirmation bias, disconfirmation bias)
  - Response : similar to above
- Rational skepticism
  - Giving more weight to one's carefully constructed prior attitudes is sensible and it is rational to be more skeptical of information that doesn't fit with one's understanding of issues
  - Response: motivated reasoning brings forward attitudes based on values that should be part of energy transition discussion



# Reason for optimism

- Public more confident than elites



Source: Public: Nanos Research, RDD dual frame hybrid telephone and online random survey, September 23rd to 26th, 2017, n=1000, accurate 3.1 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20 / Elites online survey of 88 environmental and energy leaders in Canada, from September 26th to November 27th, 2017. No margin of error applies from small sample.

# Opportunities and issues to consider

- Trust is about fulfilled expectations - What are public expectations for low-carbon transition?
- Are decision makers clear on what public can expect? (role of modelling and foresight)
- How are new low-carbon technologies perceived? Is information processed in culturally specific ways?
- Trust and energy policy is understudied