



# Canadian attitudes about the environment during COVID-19

Debrief on Quant survey results and  
Phase 2 focus groups

October 14, 2020

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**ENVIRONICS**  
RESEARCH



# Today's agenda

- The research approach
- Reminder: learnings from Round 1 focus groups
- New insights:
  - Quantitative survey
  - Round 2 focus groups
- Thoughts for consideration
- Q&A/discussion



# Objectives

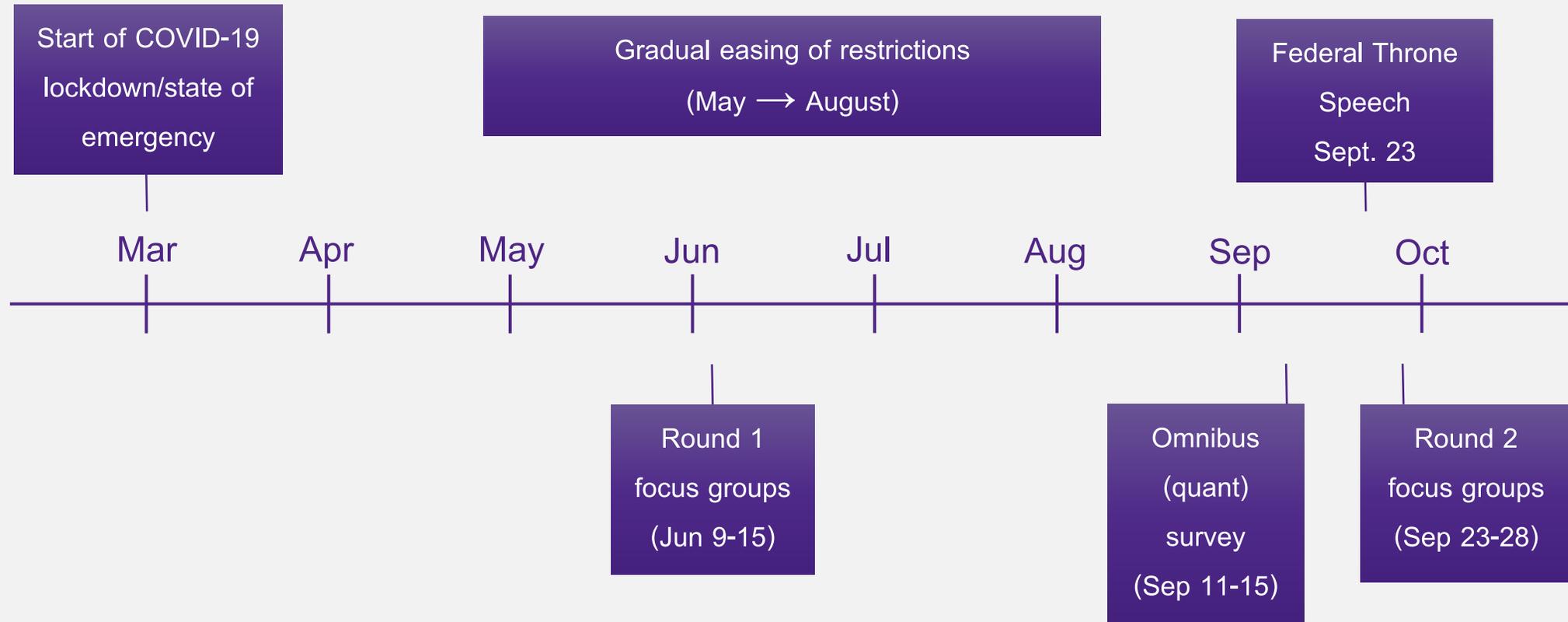
The COVID-19 pandemic is a disruptor:

- Drawn public focus away from the environment and climate change
- Also an **opportunity to do things differently** as we re-open

Research needed to :

- Understand **where Canadians stand on these issues and why**
- Understand **how views are evolving (or not)** during the pandemic
- **Inform development of strategies and communications efforts** that resonate with key audiences (whether public or government stakeholders).

# Mixed-mode research: timeline (2020)





**ROUND 1 INSIGHTS  
(JUNE)**

**THE WORLD IS  
TEMPORARILY CLOSED**

# Round 1 insights (June)

- Environment/climate change remain relevant topics despite change in focus
- The pandemic has not (so far) sensitized the public to the idea that:
  - Climate change is also an emergency requiring immediate action. “Emergency” is now defined as an immediate threat.
  - We need to prepare now to avoid a pandemic-like environmental crisis in the future – this is a complex argument that may resonate better with government stakeholders.
  - The solution lies in transformative or large-scale structural change – instead, need to connect with people through their personal lived experience

# Round 1 insights (June)(cont'd)

- Opportunity to leverage changing perspectives:
  - Increased importance of community, social responsibility and “solidarité” – champion a collective sense of efficacy
  - Proof that what we do matters/has an environmental impact – provides a sense of hopefulness/optimism
  - Increased value placed on nature/outdoors and “back to basics”

*For example: “Together, we can protect and care for what matters”*

- Be clear on what you are asking of the public. What is it you want people to do?



**QUANTITATIVE INSIGHTS  
(MID-SEPTEMBER)**

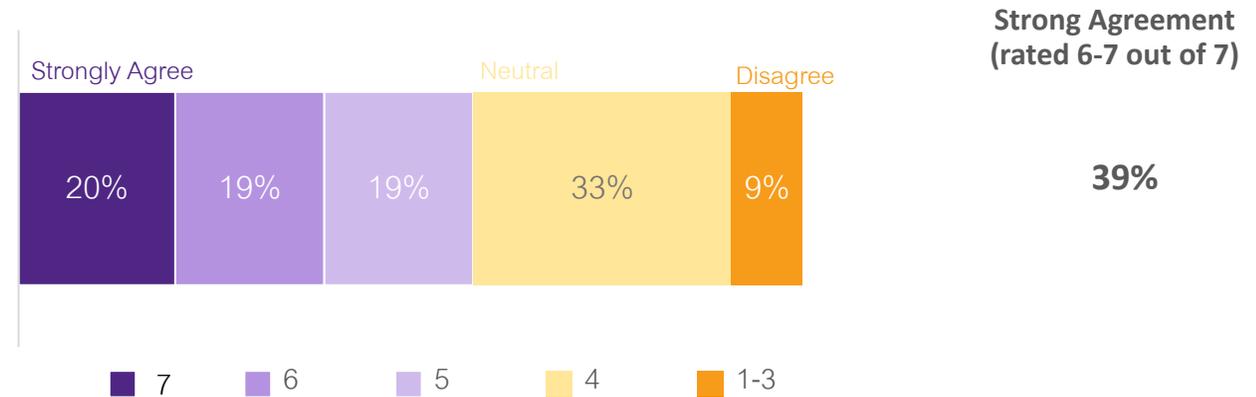
**THE WORLD IS  
TEMPORARILY CLOSED**

# Impact of pandemic on connection to nature

The survey confirmed that some Canadians have built a stronger personal connection to nature during the pandemic...

Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

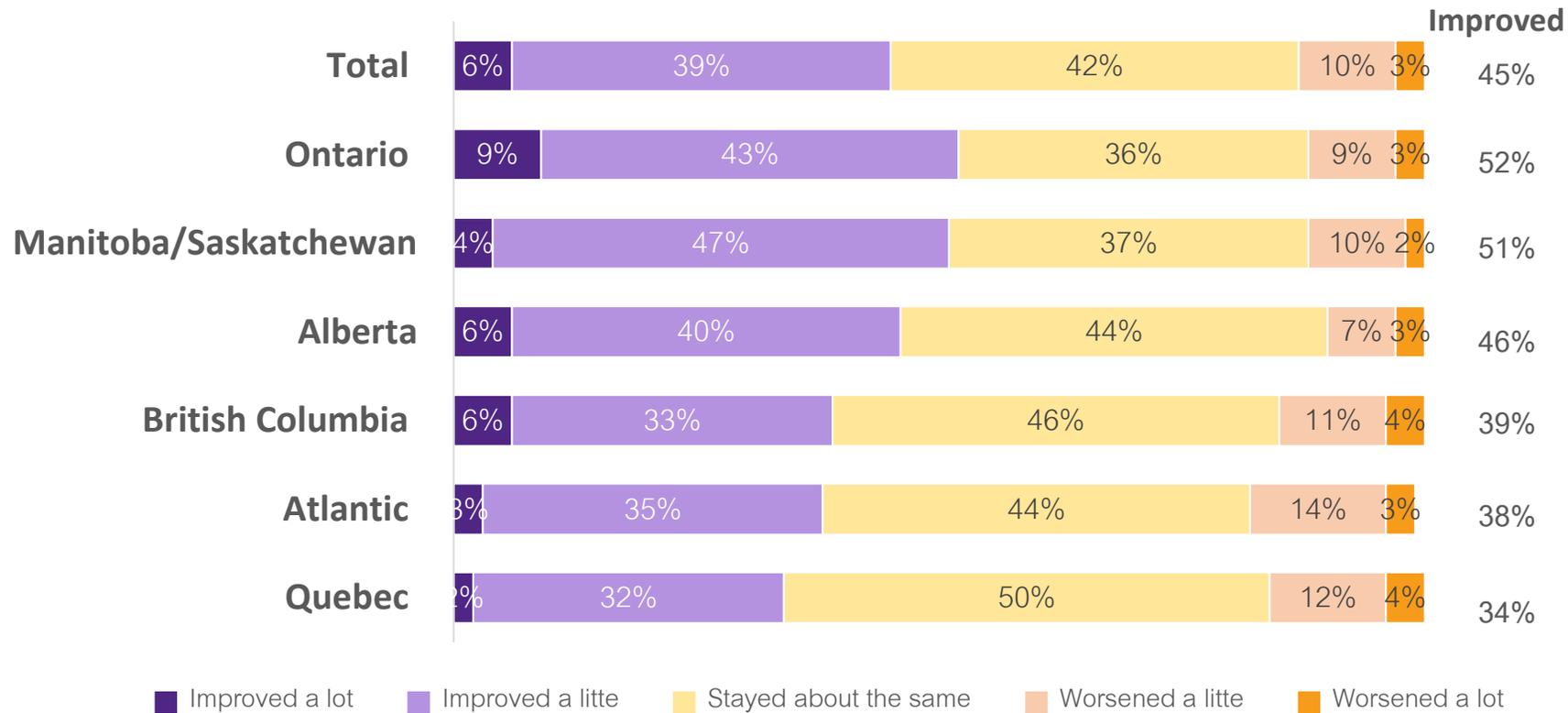
My appreciation of nature and the outdoors has increased during the pandemic.



# Perceived impact of pandemic on the environment

...and that Canadians noticed improvements to the environment.

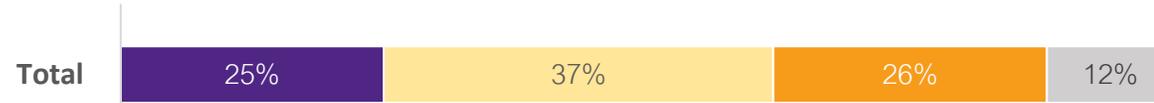
Q1. From what you know or have heard, has nature and the environment in Canada improved, stayed about the same or worsened compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic?



# Confidence in our environmental problem-solving

What impact has the pandemic had on confidence in society's ability to solve environmental conditions? One in four say they are more confident.

Q2. Has the pandemic's impact on nature and the environment made you more confident or less confident in our ability to solve environmental problems like air or water pollution or climate change, or has it had no impact on your views?

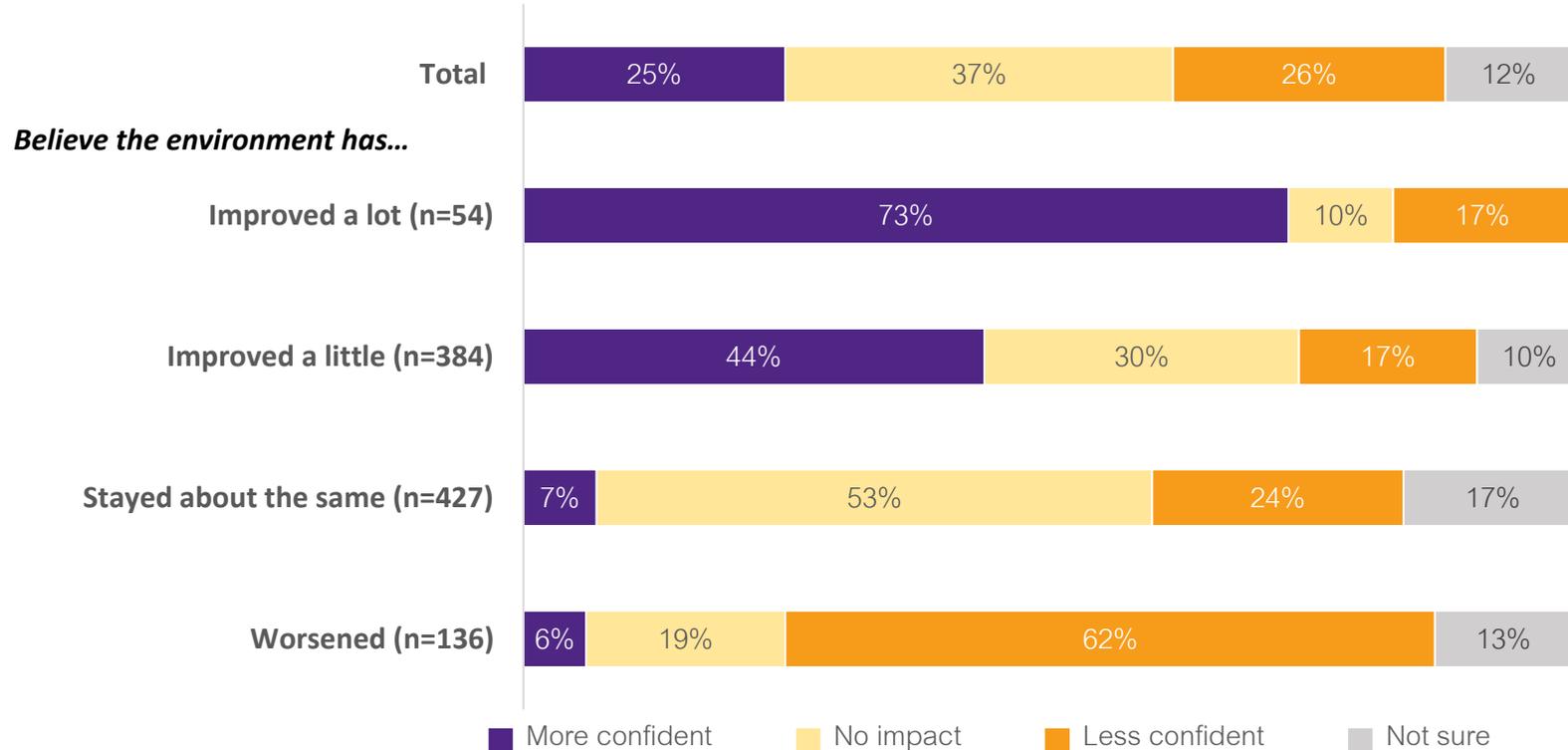


■ More confident    ■ No impact    ■ Less confident    ■ Not sure

# Confidence in our environmental problem-solving

If you saw positive change in environmental conditions, you are also more likely to report increased confidence in our environmental-problem solving; what is unclear is whether these individuals are more optimistic as a rule.

Q2. Has the pandemic's impact on nature and the environment made you more confident or less confident in our ability to solve environmental problems like air or water pollution or climate change, or has it had no impact on your views?

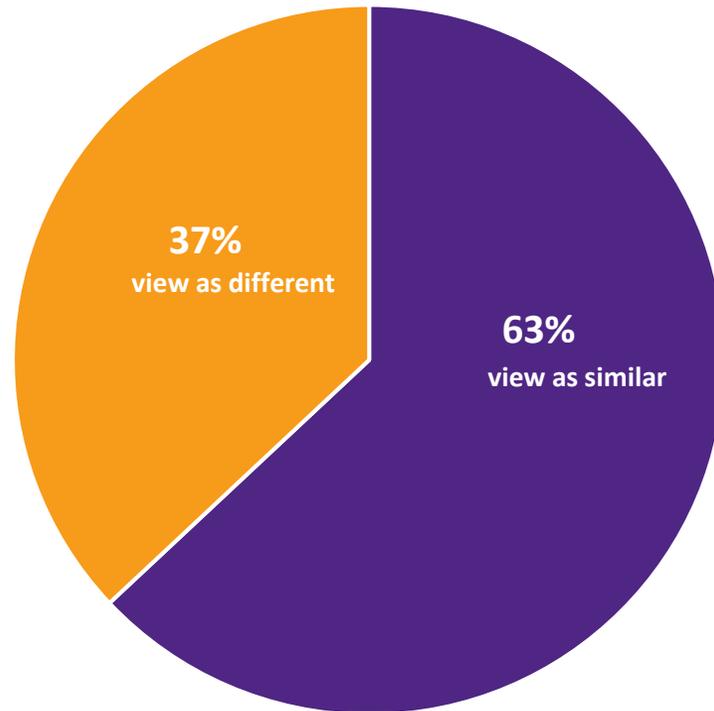


# Comparing COVID-19 and climate change

In a forced choice scenario, Canadians tend to equate the pandemic and climate change as problems that require(d) better preparation.

Q5. Which of the following is closest to your own view?

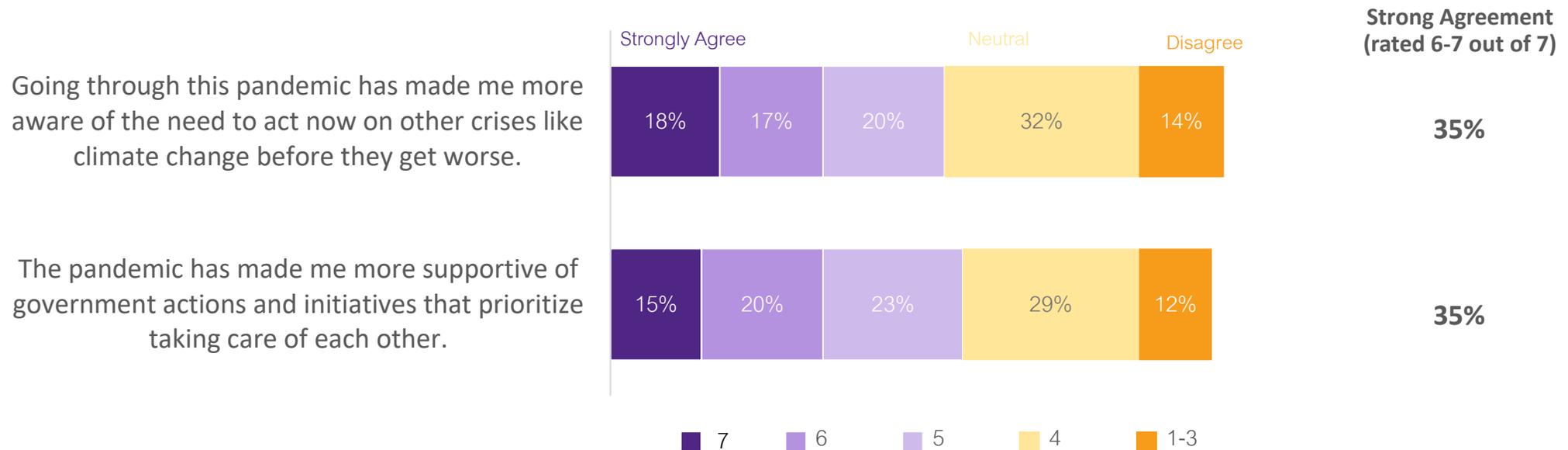
- Similar examples of how society needs to better prepare for problems, to prevent negative consequences.
- Different issues and the lessons learned from one don't really apply to the other.



# Impact of pandemic on environmental views

Despite general acknowledgement of the similarities, just one in three say the pandemic increased their awareness of the need for immediate climate action and their support for prioritizing the social good.

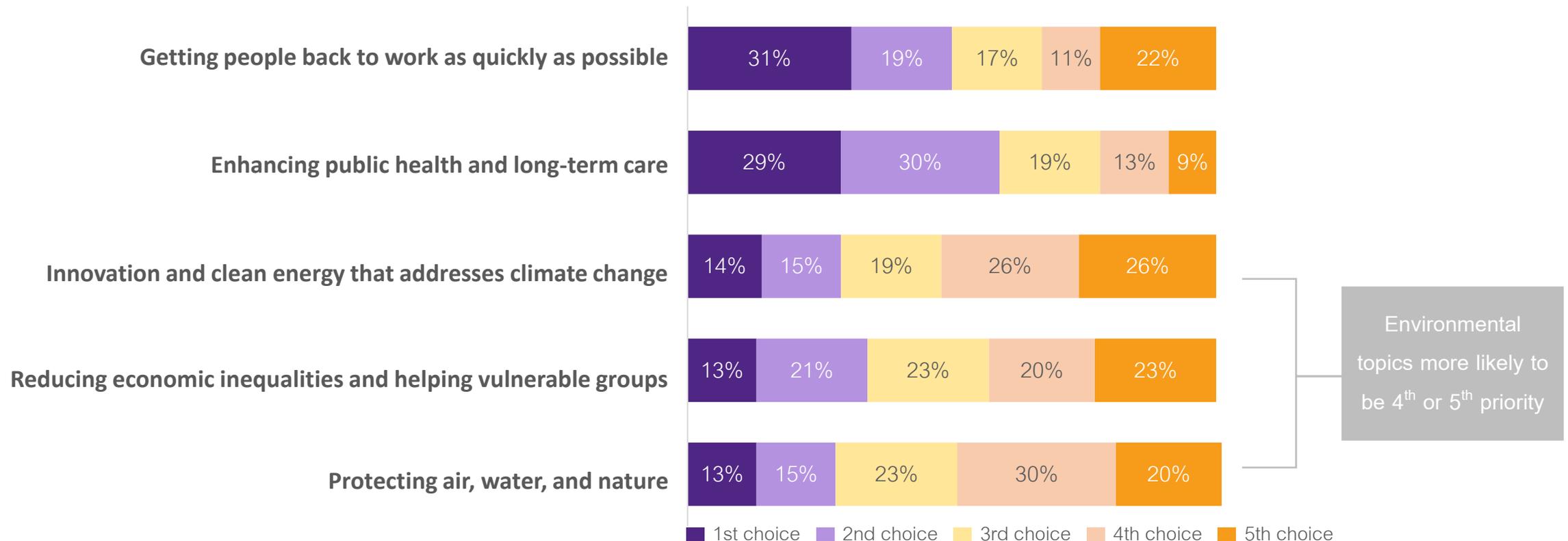
Q3. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:



# Priority for federal investments

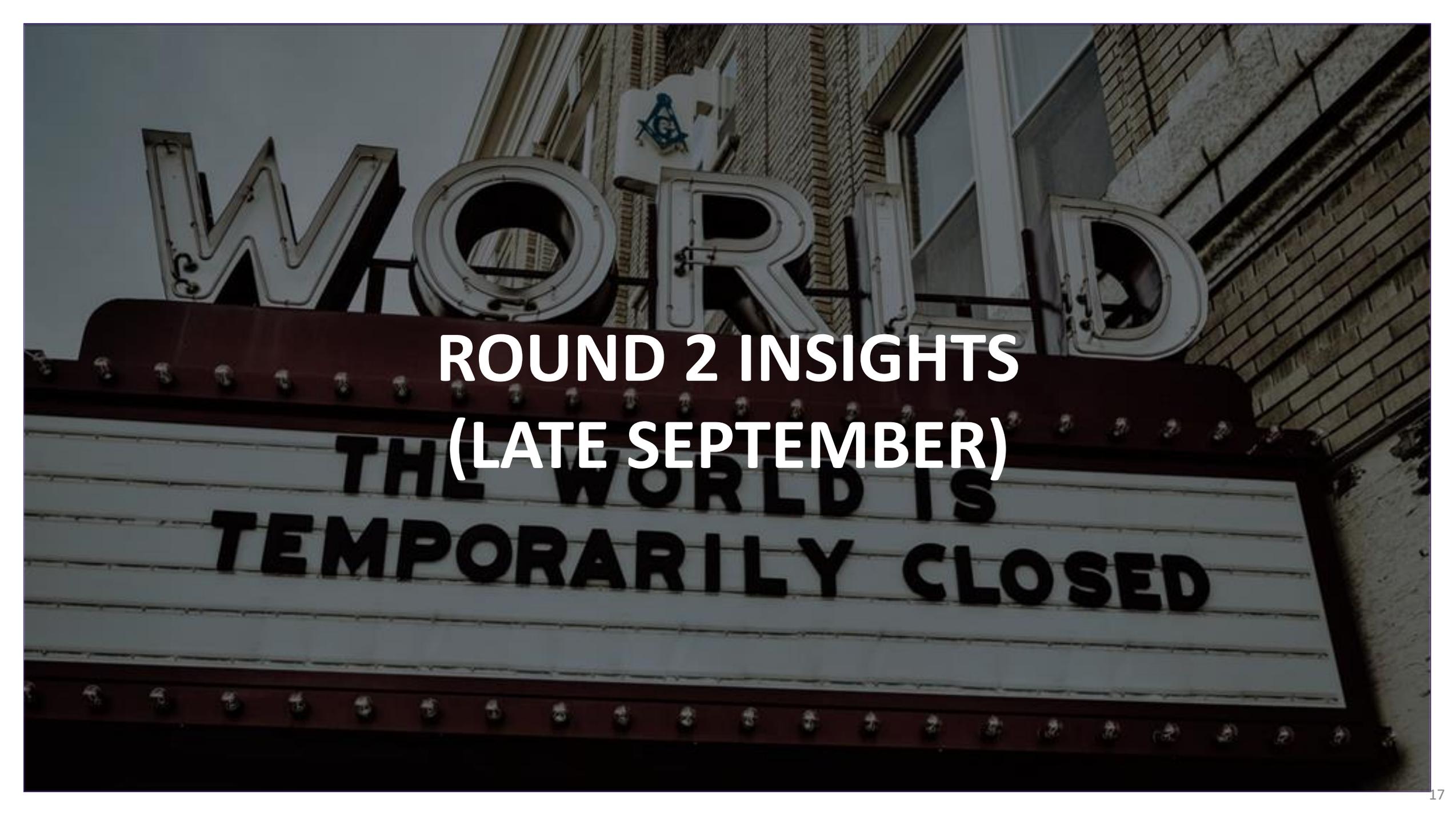
Moreover, Canadians prioritize jobs and public health ahead of environmental initiatives when it comes to upcoming federal investments.

Q8. The federal government will be investing billions in the post-COVID economic recovery. Which of the following types of projects do you think the federal government should prioritize when choosing where to invest?



## Thoughts going into Round 2

- How “sticky” are the changes people have made (working from home, travel, consumption)?
  - What are the implications for people’s willingness to do more?
- How do people think about the linkages between health, the economy, climate change and nature protection?
  - Do they see connections or only trade-offs?
- Do people believe the federal government can deliver on environmental priorities?



**ROUND 2 INSIGHTS  
(LATE SEPTEMBER)**



## Context has changed since June

Some aspects remain positive:

- Adapting to pandemic & COVID-19 measures
- Continued appreciation for nature and Canadian/local outings
- Not feeling financial stress (in these groups)

“There are things you have to remind yourself, like putting a mask on...but for the most part, life as a whole is somewhat normal. No, I guess it’s a new normal.”

“As far as our summer, it’s been busy...We’re an outside family anyway...We spent a lot more time as a family just camping and hiking.”



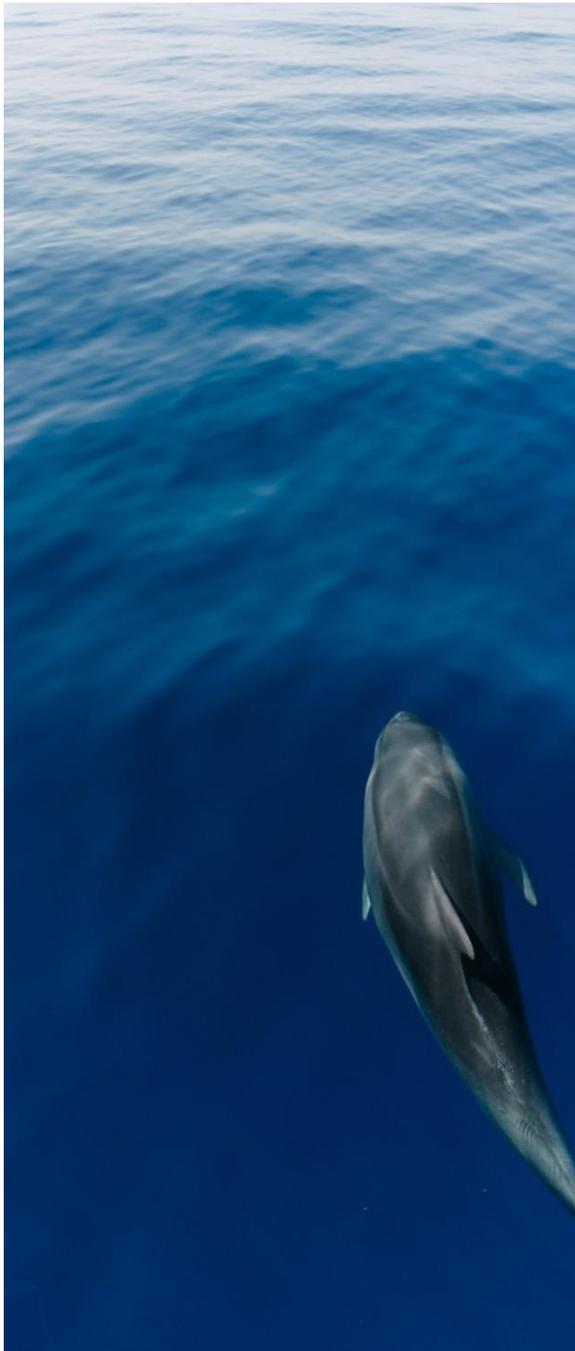
## Context has changed since June

But in other ways, there is fair amount of pessimism:

- Pandemic fatigue & weight of continued uncertainty
- Concern about economic impact & burden on future generations

“I think I’ve put myself in a bubble...to not get upset and frustrated...There’s too many things going too many different ways [right now]. And I don’t understand the logic behind a lot of it any more.”

“It’s been an endless stream of [government] money...So I’ve heard a lot of people talk about how worried they are and how they feel as though the middle class will suffer.”



# What about the environment?

- Round 1 discussion led to reflection on environment for some
- Already doing everything I can
- I do, but others don't ("I am environmentalist, but our society is not")
- Don't believe positive environmental impact of pandemic will be lasting
  - People going back to normal routines (e.g., traffic)
  - Increased waste from PPE
- Busy living my life, not interested in the environmental details

"I caught myself...putting more effort into trying to be more mindful [about the environment]...and having more conversation with my husband about it."

"I'm actually a little bit disappointed in humans in general... They had all this time off to go and be outside. And then it was almost like a disrespect, just taken for granted and then move on..."



# Looking to the post-COVID future

- Great optimism expressed for Canada's post-pandemic future: themes of unity/equality, growth, balance

GROUP	HOPE FOR THE FUTURE
Females 18-34 (East)	Less division, equality, more appreciation, a tourist attraction
Females 35-74 (West)	Cohesive, pro-active, aware, reactive
Males 18-34 (West)	Health, growth, adaption
Males 35-74 (East)	Polite, balanced, self-sustaining, focused
Montreal	Une direction franche, santé économique et environnementale, redéfinir les priorités concrètement, plus de sincérité, être transparent
Quebec (Ex-Montreal)	Stabilité, long terme, durable, comment géré ce déficit, la transparence, bonne santé financière, un équilibre en tout



# Priorities & the environment

- Hearing discussions focused on government spending, jobs, health
- Perception that environment has been pushed to back-burner (by government and in media)

“I just don’t hear that conversation. [The environment] is in the back of my mind....But the conversations we have right now with my friends or in the media, I don’t see that conversation going on anymore.”

“I feel like the [federal government] is more focusing on helping the economy...more than focusing on the environment.”

PARTICIPANTS WERE ASKED TO CHOOSE WHICH OF TWO STATEMENTS THEY AGREED WITH MORE.

**A**

Now is the time for major steps to transform our economy into one that is environmentally-sustainable, so our economy will be resilient and ready for the post-pandemic future.

Of those that answered, 14 participants chose “A”

**B**

Before we take major steps to transform our economy to be environmentally-sustainable, we need to get past the pandemic, bring back jobs and restore living standards.

Of those that answered, 11 participants chose “B”

“

*B indicates to me if we waited for the jobs and restoring living standards to what they were prior to the pandemic, we could be waiting a very long time. Since we've had such a huge shift in how people do things [...] that to incorporate that into an environmentally sustainable future, now's a good time because people are already having to make this huge adjustment..*

”

## Favour A: Environmentally conscious recovery

Two main camps:

- “**If not now-ers**” – governments’ plans to rebuild the economy present best opportunity to integrate environmental policies, otherwise it will never happen
- “**Green pessimists**” – support a green recovery themselves, but suspect other Canadians favour more pressing matters like health care and jobs

“

*We need to plan for the future, but then we also need to deal with the present, because what are we going to do with the future if the present is currently in shambles? ...I went with B just because you have to take care of what you currently have and nurse it back to health before you can transform it into something else.*

”

## Favour B: Health and economy first

- Those who favour health and economic recovery do so because they consider those the most pressing problems facing Canadians
- By comparison, the environment is not as urgent a crisis.



## Green recovery & structural change

- Green recovery was difficult for participants to conceptualize or articulate
- Government needs to lead and “set the rules”
  - Individuals won’t act on their own

“Well I don’t know exactly what [a green recovery] would look like, but I imagine industry would have to put their energy or ideas into producing something that’s more environmentally friendly.”

“People wear masks when they are mandated to, but the minute they are not in the hospital, then it’s just free for all. So if the government does something like mandating limited use of vehicles, then people are going to start carpooling more and walking more and figuring out other ways to get to a place.”

# WRAP-UP



## Thoughts for consideration

- Participants want to “choose green” but constantly stumbled over jobs/economy trade-off.
- How to make it easier for them? Combination of carrots (provide better options) and sticks (set rules). Remember their frame is personal/incremental not longer-term/transformational
- Potential frames:
  - **Change is possible:** Canadians are adaptable (look at what we’ve done!)
  - **Change makes a difference:** Show evidence of success, build momentum
  - **Change is worthwhile:** Build upon people’s hopes for a post-COVID future (balanced, focused, team, polite, health, adaptation, growth, evolution, solidarity, equality, appreciative, more prepared)

# QUESTIONS?



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