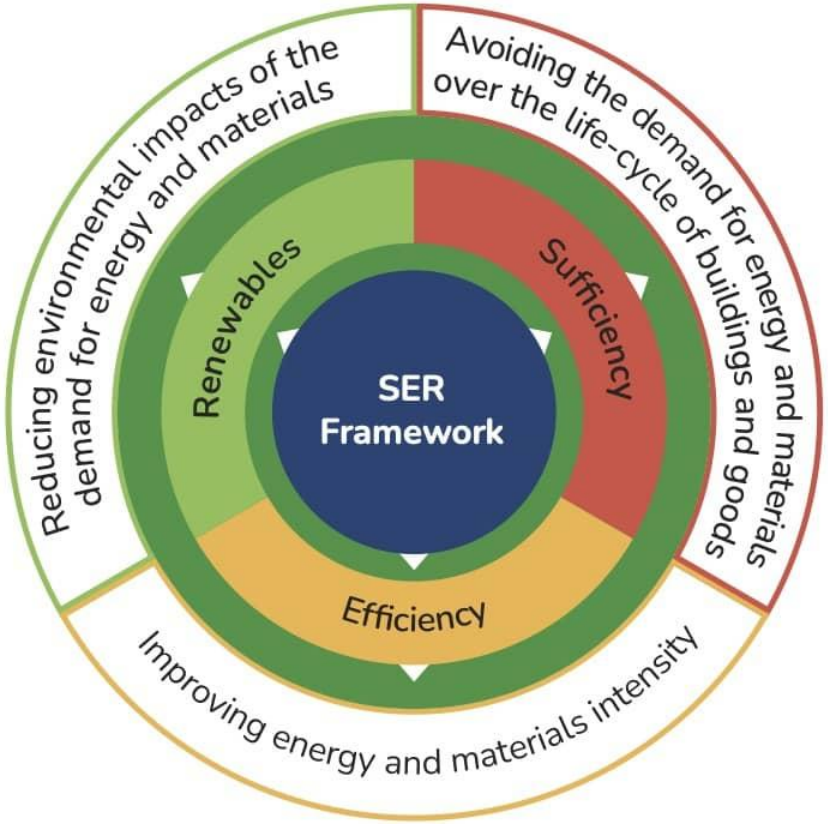
Public support for energy sufficiency policies in Ireland

Ciarán Lavin
Hannah Julienne
October 2026

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Background

– We need to complement efficiency & renewables with a focus on sufficiency policy



Saheb, Y. (2021). Buildings & Cities.

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Background

- Public support for climate policy is
- Support is underestimated
- And coverage of climate is negative

Article | Open access | Published: 19 August 2026

Perception gaps in the British Parliament reveal a possible pathway to stronger climate policy action

Lisa-Maria Tanase, Lucia A. Reisch, Malte Dewies & Lee de-Wit

Communicatic

Revealed: political and media narratives driving false "backlash" against net zero, says IPPR

20 Mar 2026

- Support for general action is high; lower for some specifics
  - Intrinsic aspects well studied
  - Framing matter?
  - Co-benefits

Increasing public support for climate policy proposals: a research agenda on governable acceptability factors

DA Heyen, M Wicki - Climate Policy, 2024 - Taylor & Francis

Addressing climate change demands a varied policy toolkit, ranging from supportive measures to more assertive interventions. However, the latter, especially when impacting …

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- How do findings relate to sufficiency policies?

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Research questions

1. Does the given rationale for policies (energy demand vs co-benefits vs a combination) make a difference to support?
    a) Does rationale interact with climate priority?

2. Does knowing that a policy has already been implemented elsewhere matter to support?

3. Does perceived support match up to actual support for energy sufficiency policies?

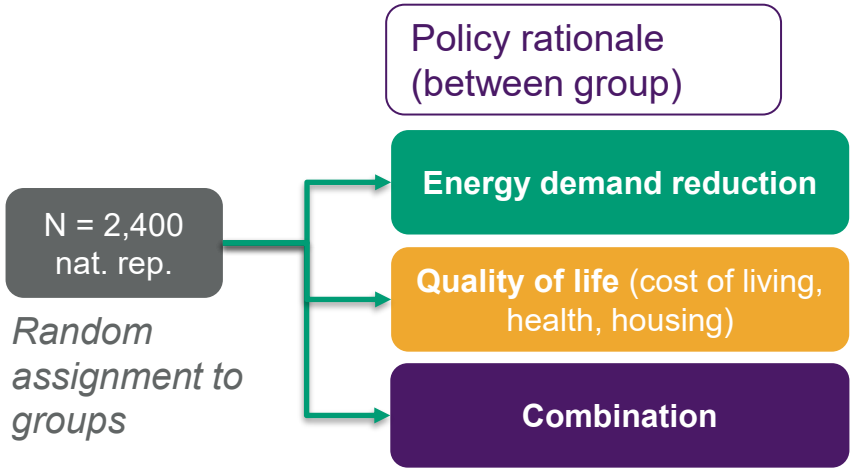
4. Are people willing to express their support/opposition – and who is?

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Methods



$N\ per\ policy \approx 900$



Random 3 of each per participant = 6

- Policy 1
- Policy 2
- Policy 3
- Policy 4
- Policy 5
- Policy 6

Stated existence (within-subject)

Outcomes

For each policy: **Support** (1 Fully oppose – 7 Full support)
Others' support (Most people oppose; most are unsure/don't care; most support)
Willingness to express support (Keep to self; share with like-minded; share with anyone)
Fairness & effectiveness

Other measures: **Appropriate climate policy priority rating** (Low, medium, high, very high)
Knowledge
Sociodemographic, household, mobility variables &c.

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Policies – manipulation examples

Vehicle mass tax

Policy: A tax on private vehicles based on weight, size and emissions they produce, such that petrol and diesel SUVs pay more.

Policy rationale

Energy demand reduction [Energy]: Compared to regular cars, SUVs produce a lot more emissions (if they were a country, SUVs alone would be the world's fifth-largest CO2 emitter).

Quality of Life [QoL]: Compared to regular cars, SUVs cause a lot more air pollution, are much deadlier to pedestrians and more likely to roll over and harm their passengers.

Combination of both [Combination]: [merging of above]

Stated existence

Pre-existing example: France has introduced a tax on cars according to weight, due to increase in 2026.

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Policies

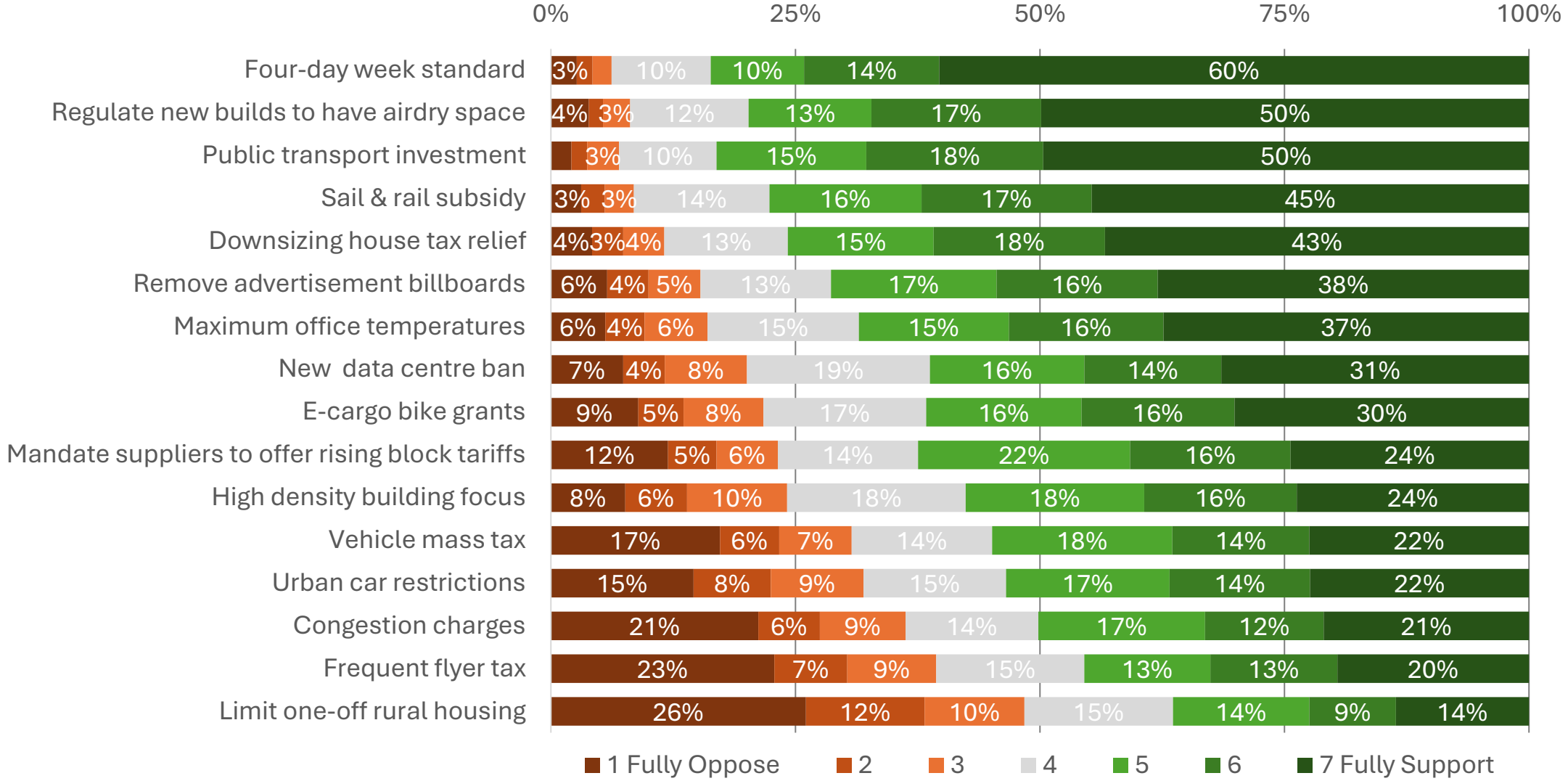
	Enabling	Restricting
Aviation	Sail & Rail subsidy	“Frequent flyer tax” (beginning 3rd flight)
Transport	Four day working week	More pedestrianisation + fewer parking spaces
	E-cargo bike grants	Vehicle mass tax
	Public transport strong investment	Congestion charges
Built environment	Prioritise high-density housing units	Limit one-off rural housing
	Waive stamp duty for downsizing	Max. heating temperatures in offices
Electricity	Mandate “rising block tariffs” provision	Ban new data centres until at least 2030
	Mandate air-drying clothes space	Remove all lit advertising billboards and reduce other public lighting

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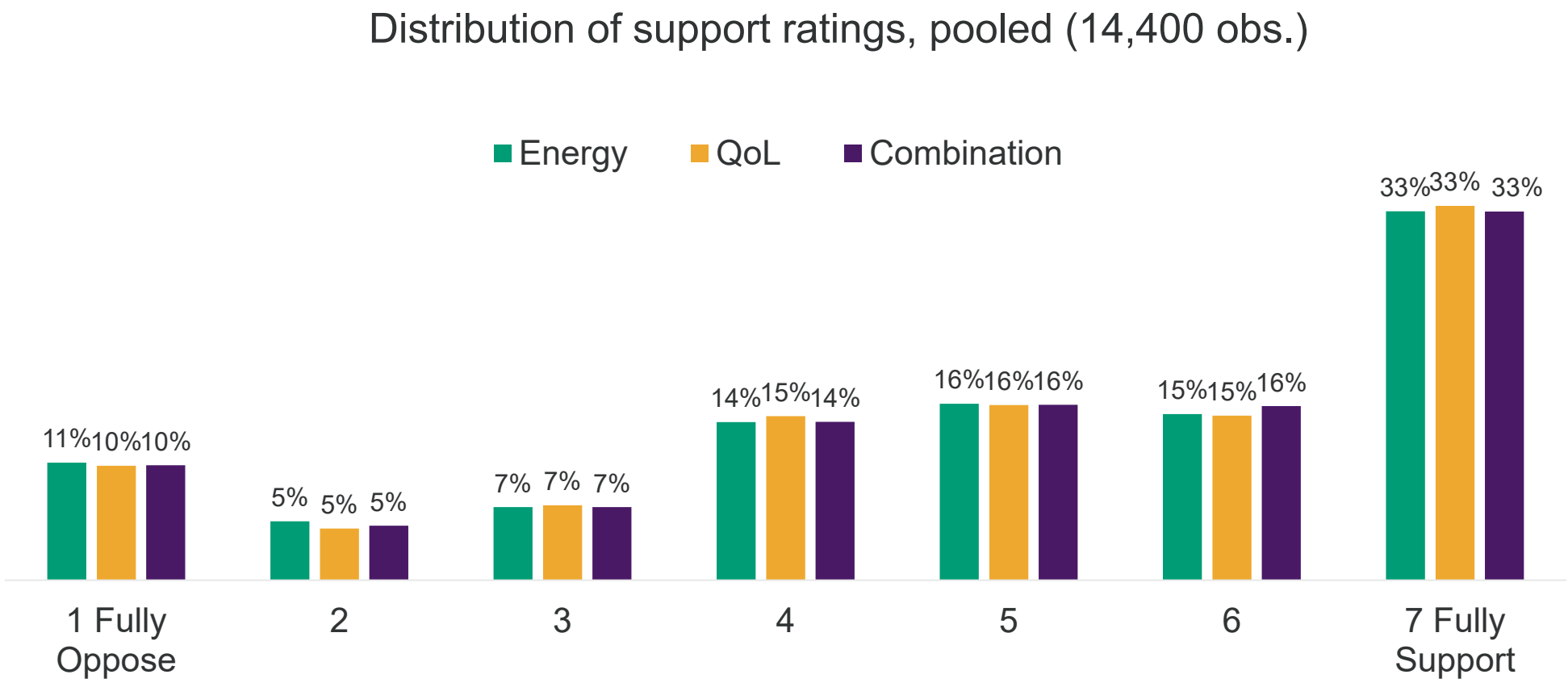
Results

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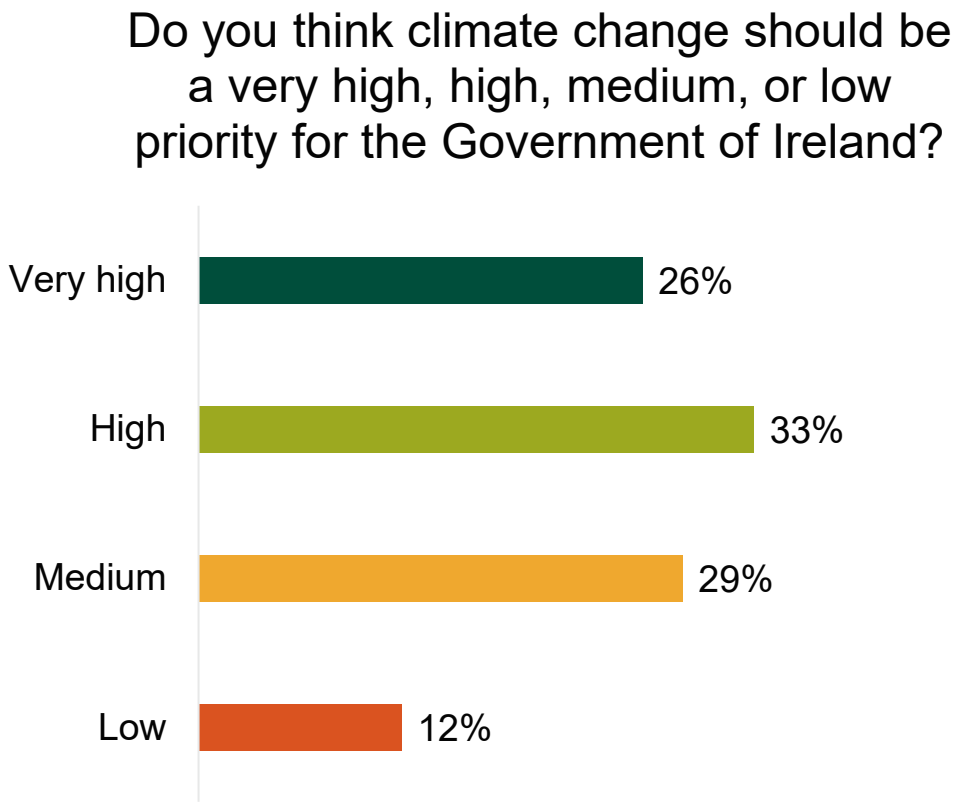
Ratings of support for each policy

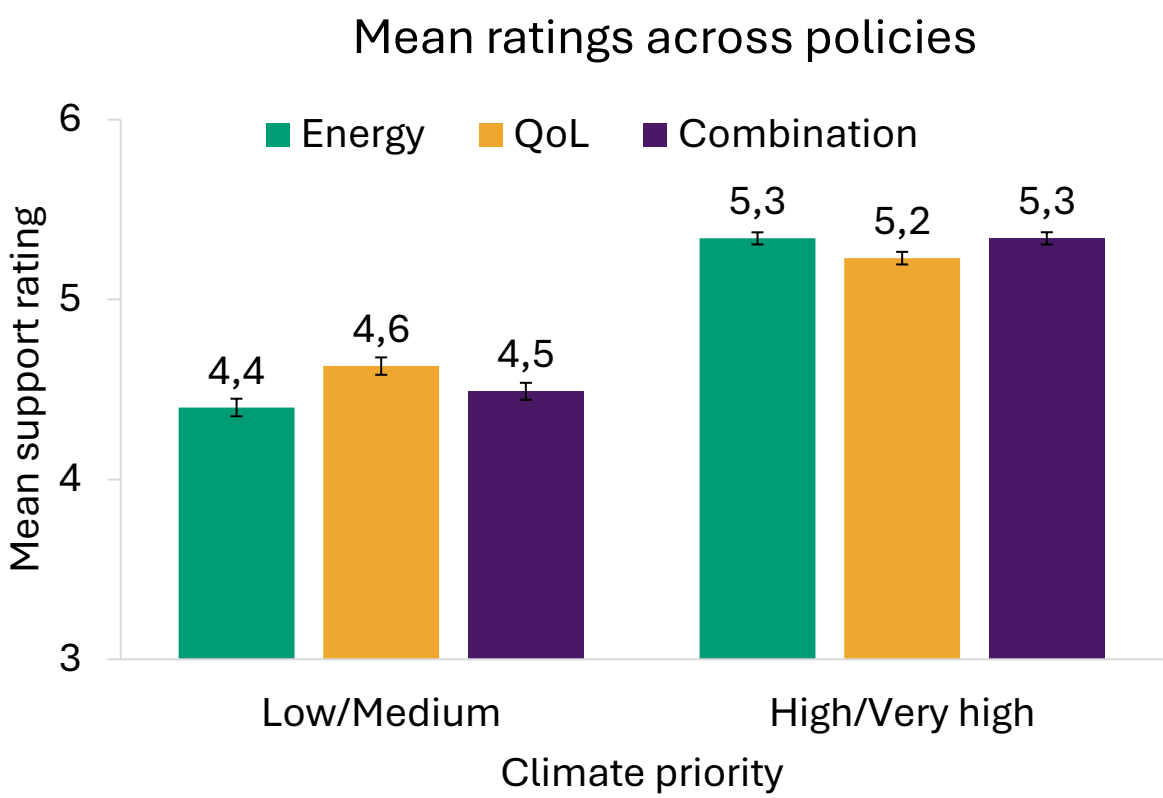


Support ratings - policy rationale framing

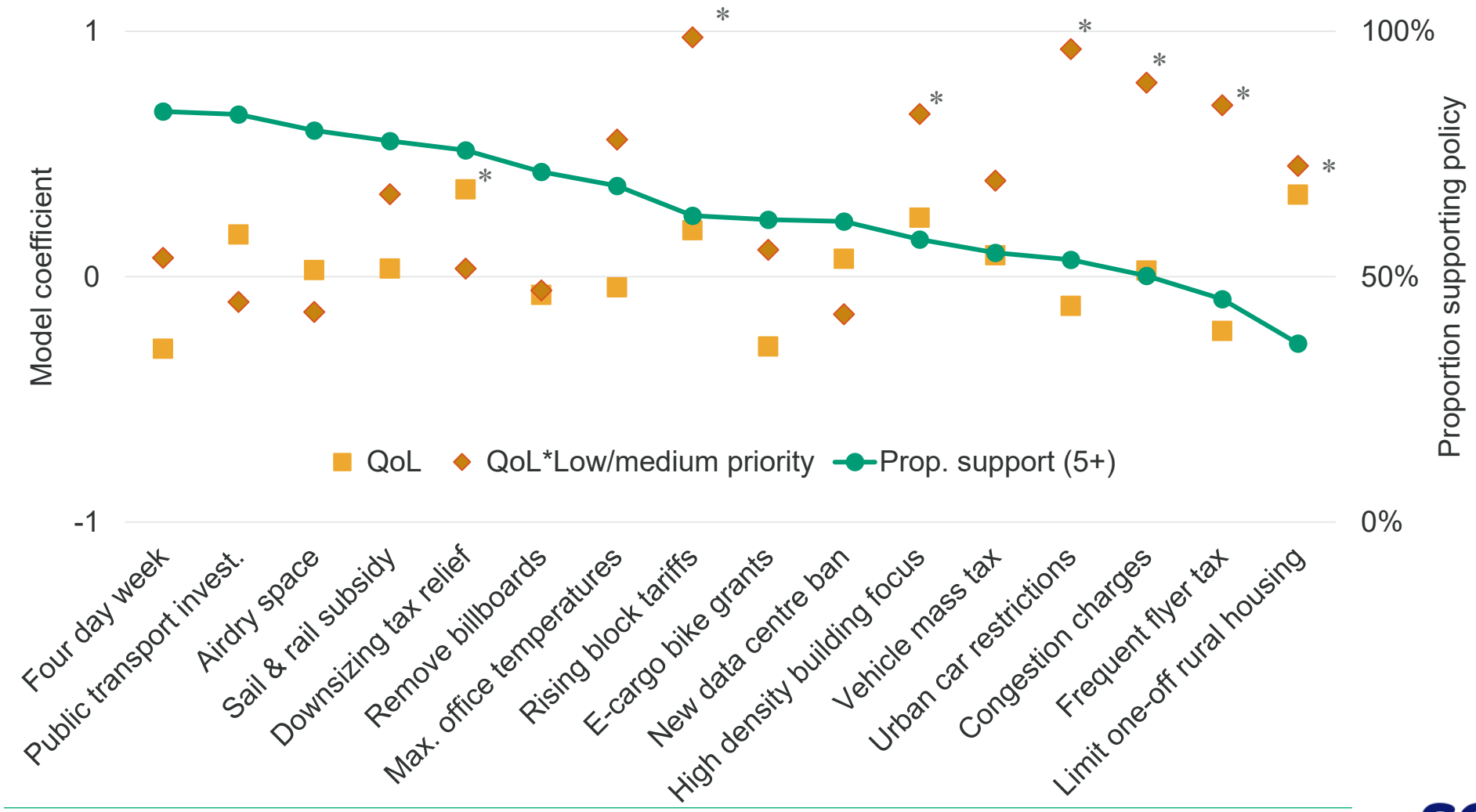


Policy rationale framing & climate priority level

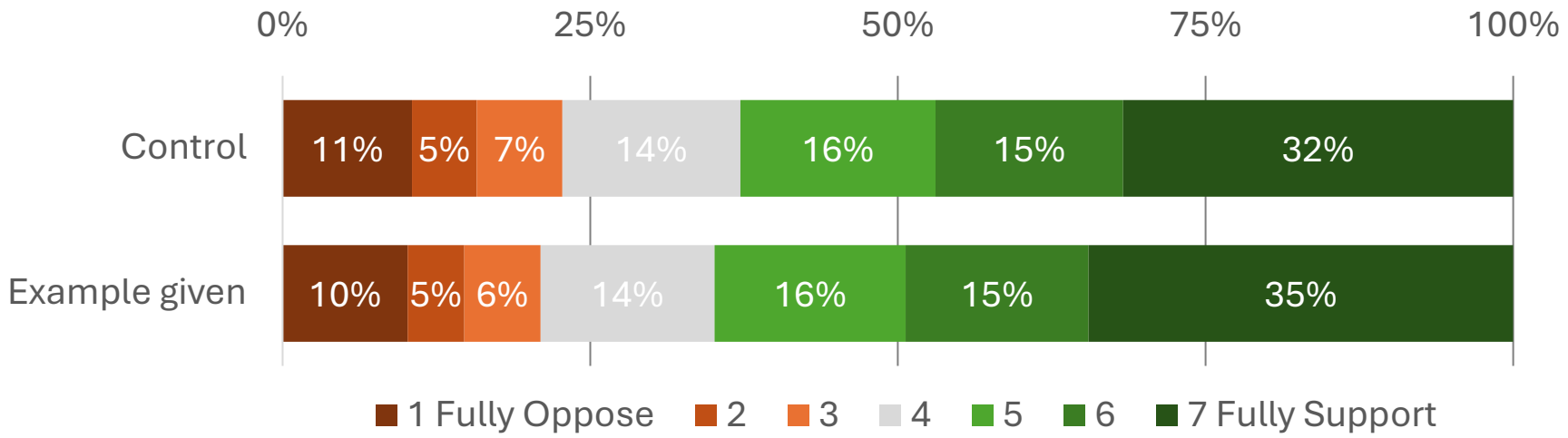




Rationale effect by policy

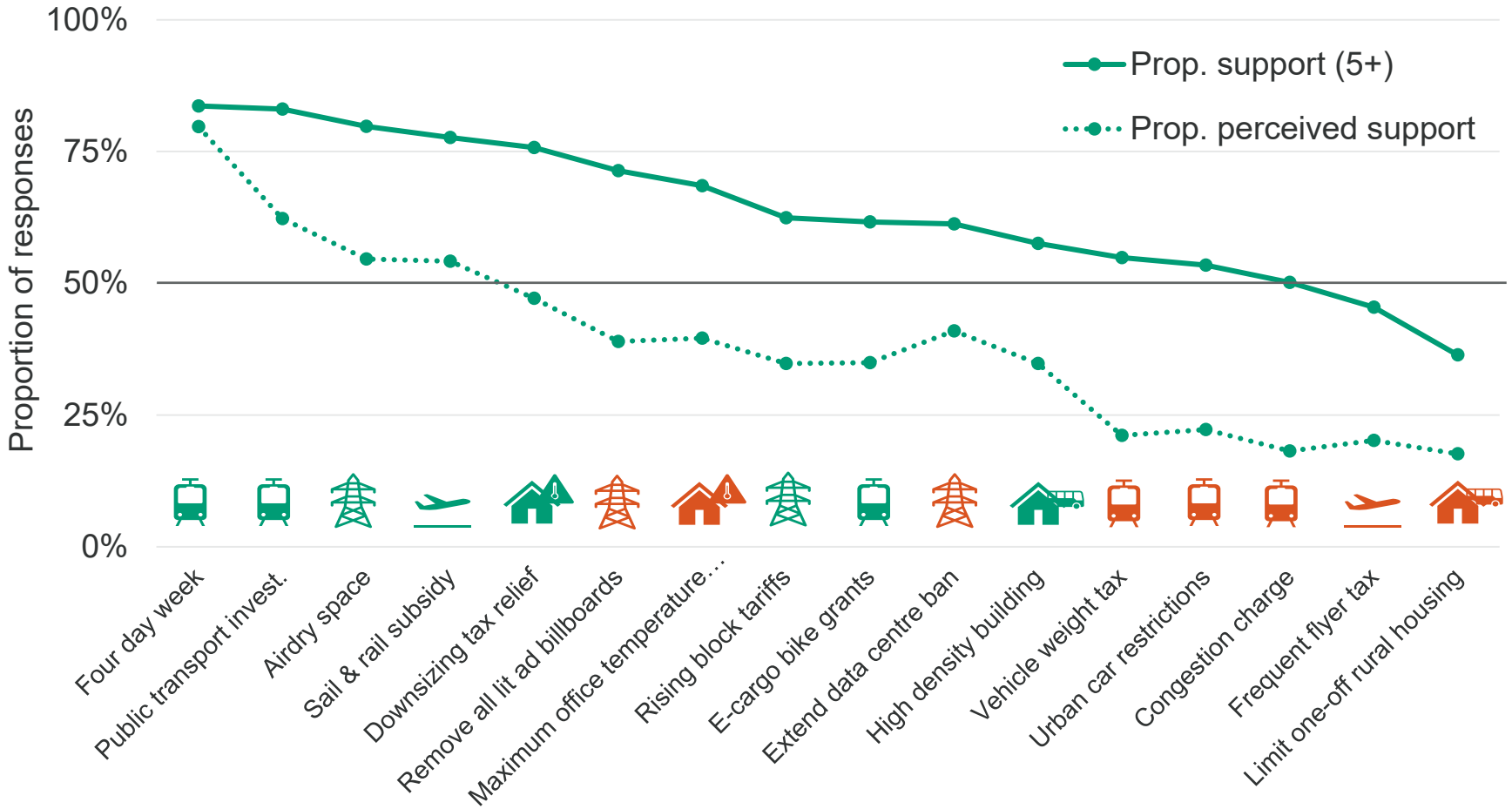


Effect of stating example



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Actual vs perceived support

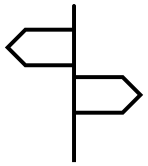


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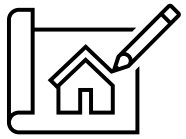
Conclusions



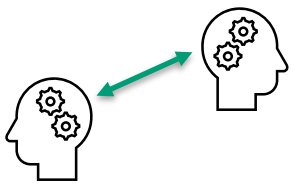
- Most policies supported



- Rationale matters for *some policies* for *some people*



- Providing examples does not make generally make a difference



- Large perception gaps

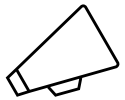
Implications



- Pretesting communications is important



- Coverage & politics increasingly negative
  - Effect is on **perceptions** of opinion, not opinion



- Perceptions of public discourse matter for groundswell & political decision making
  - Research, document, publicise
  - More fora for discussion might help

