

Environics Institute

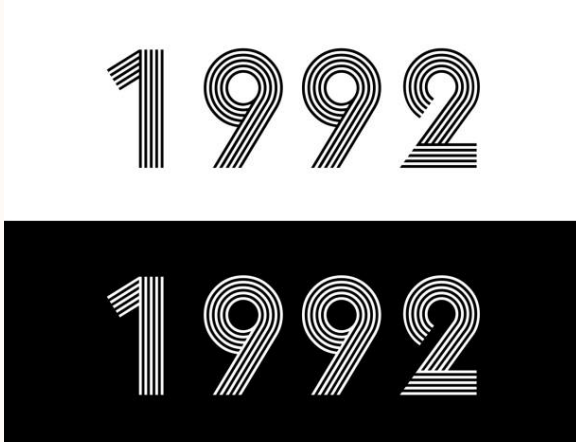
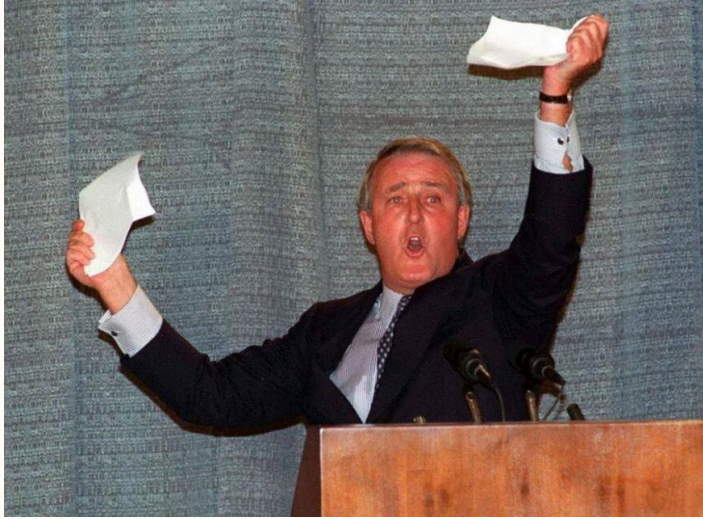
For Survey Research

More divided than ever? Exploring political polarization

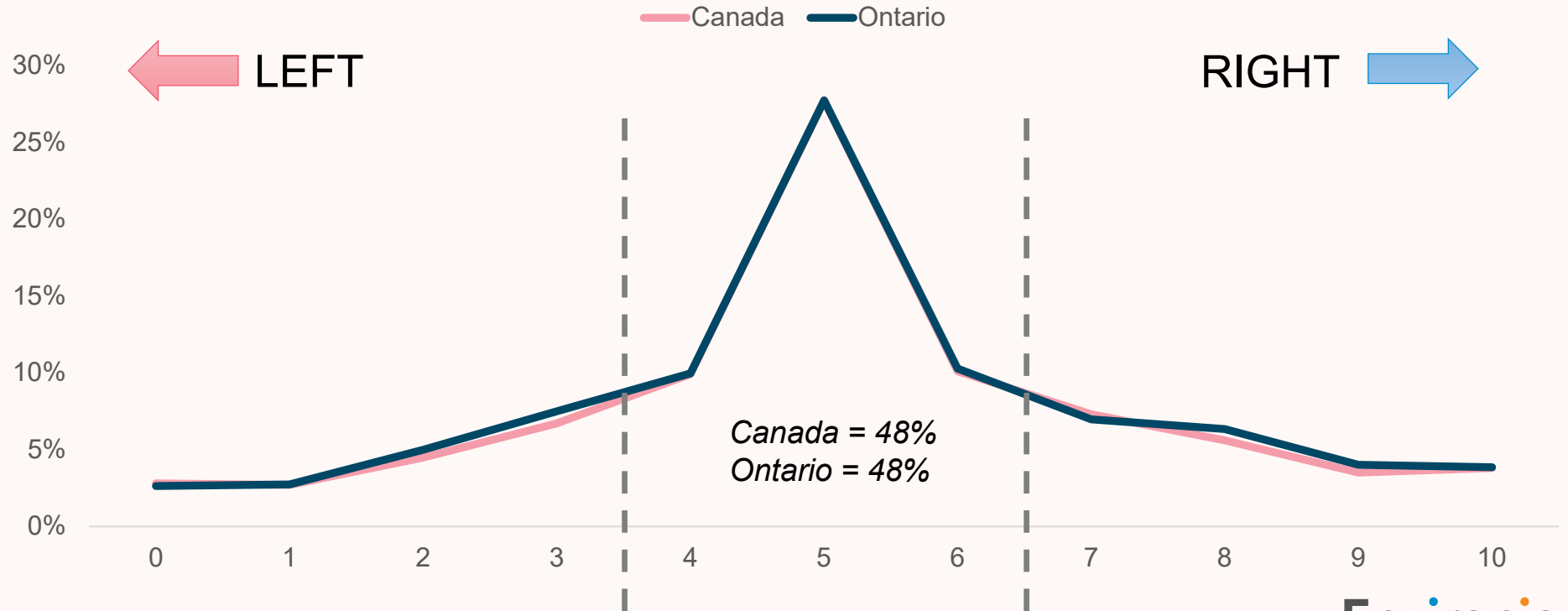
Presentation to the OSUM Annual Conference
May 3, 2024 – Orillia, ON

Andrew Parkin, Executive Director

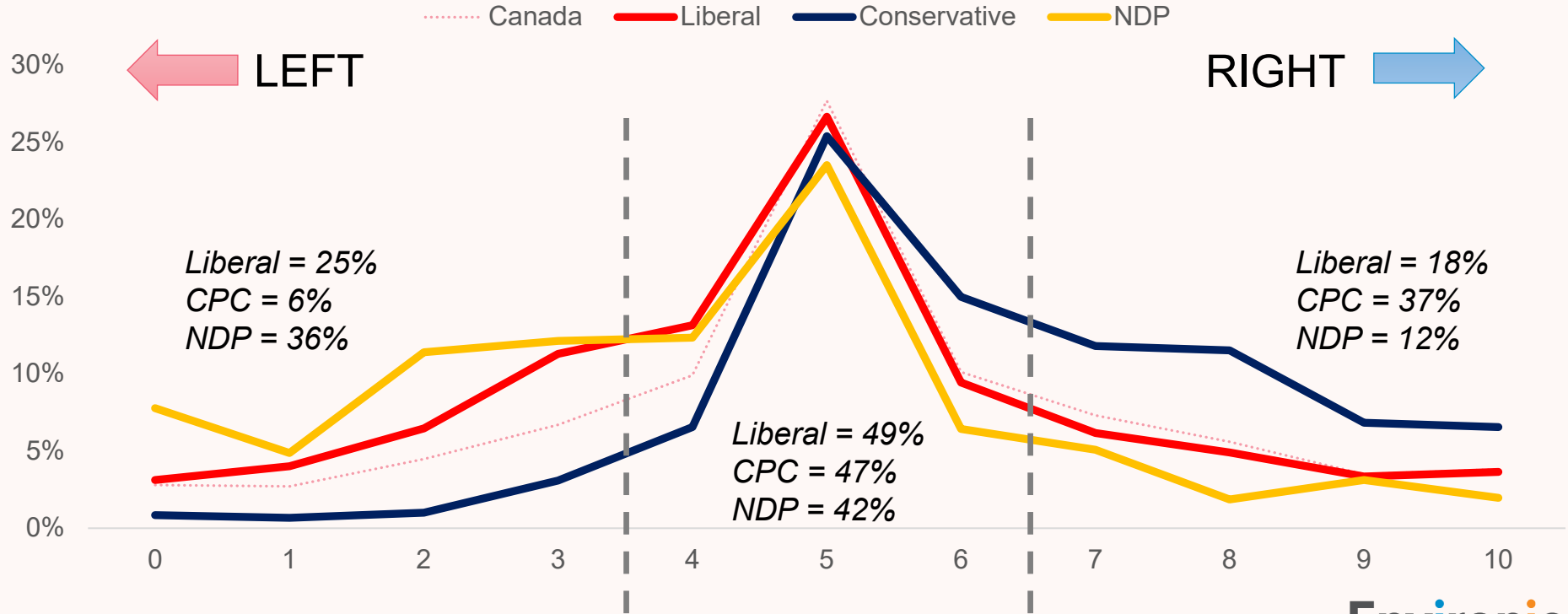




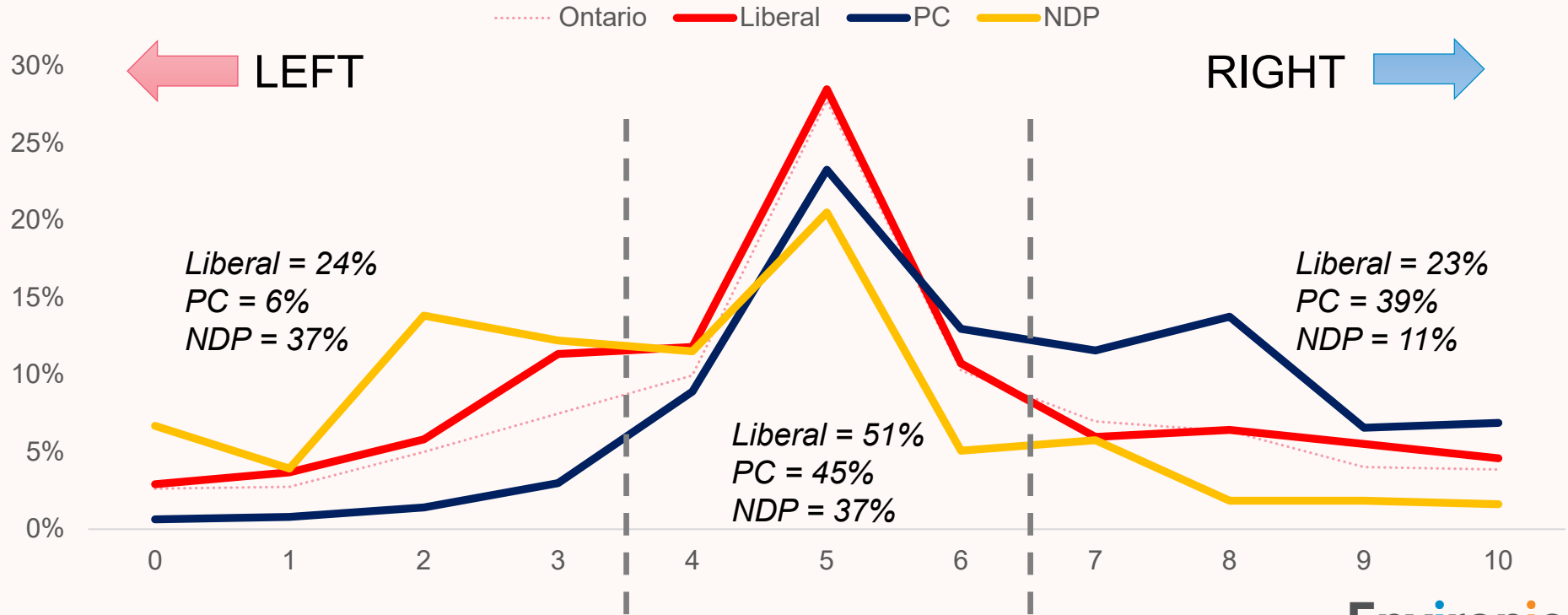
Canadians (Ontarians) on the left-right political spectrum



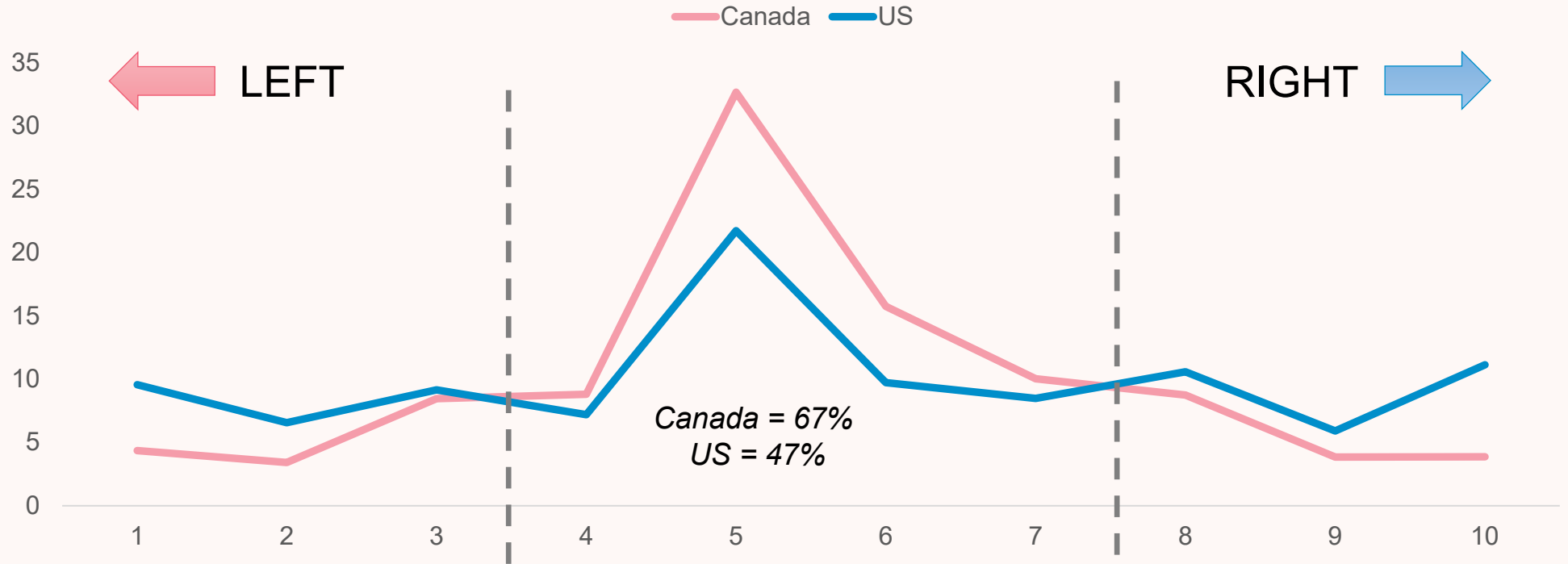
Canadians on the left-right political spectrum



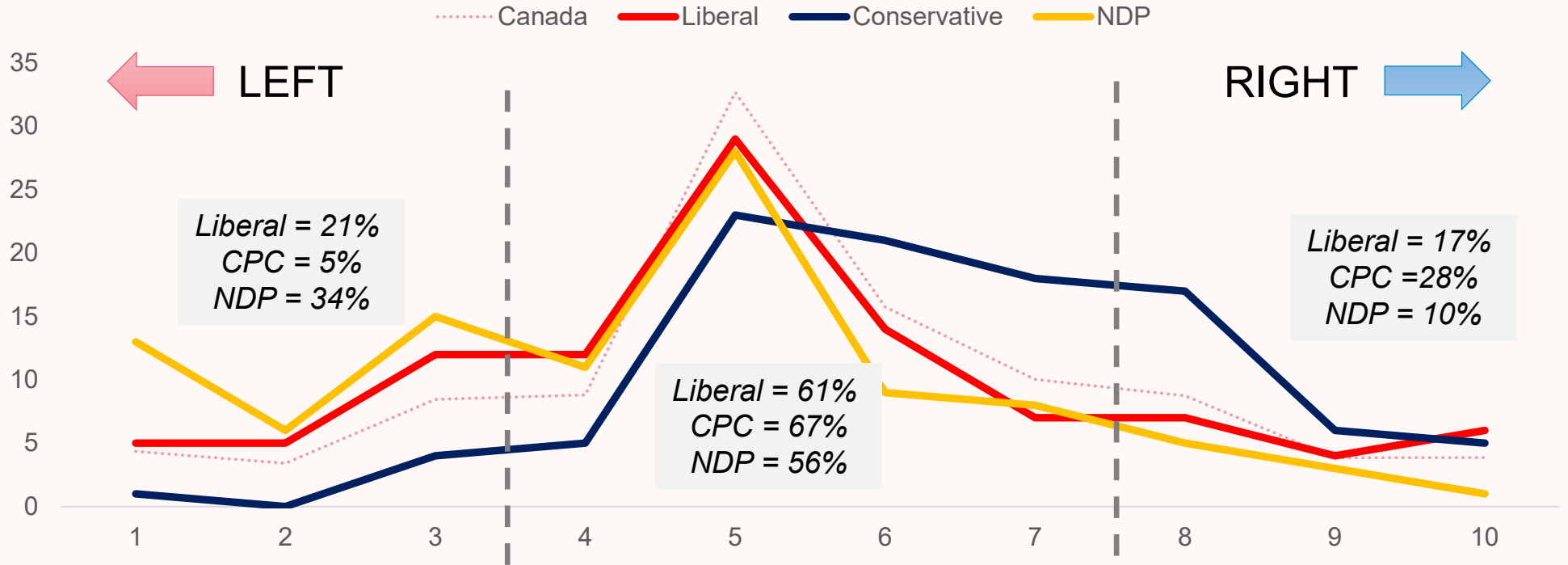
Ontarians on the left-right political spectrum



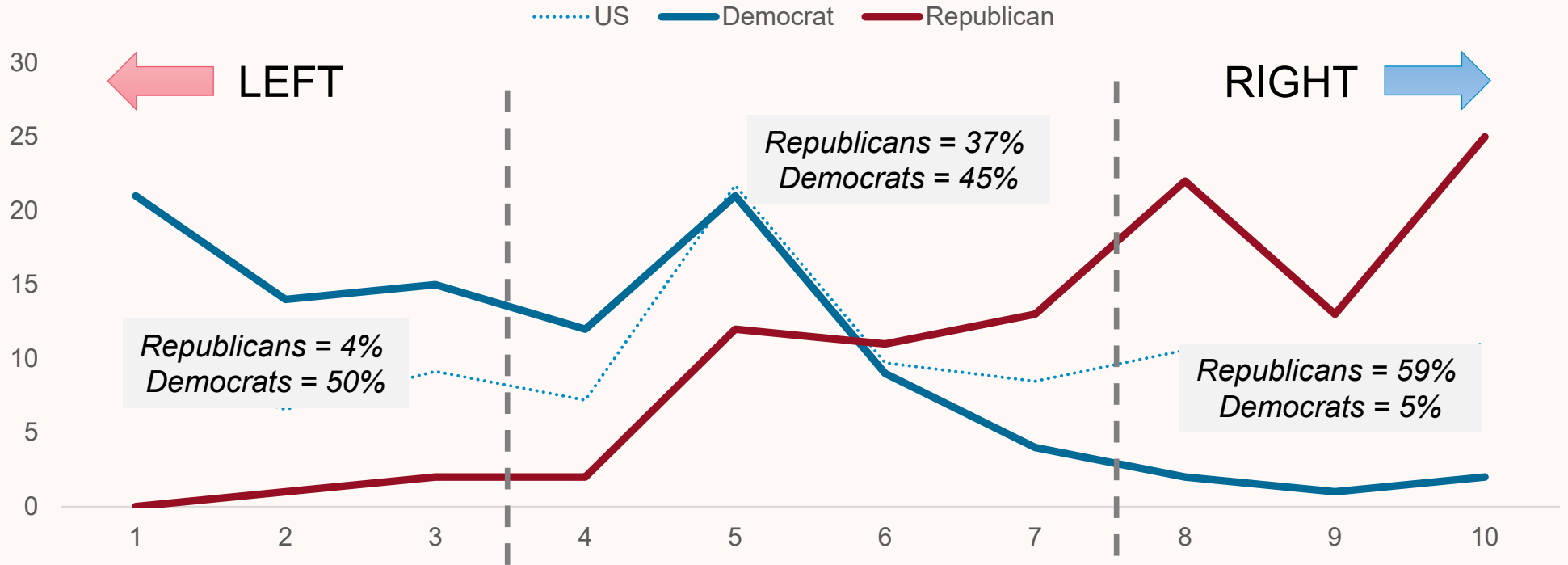
Canadians and Americans on the left-right political spectrum



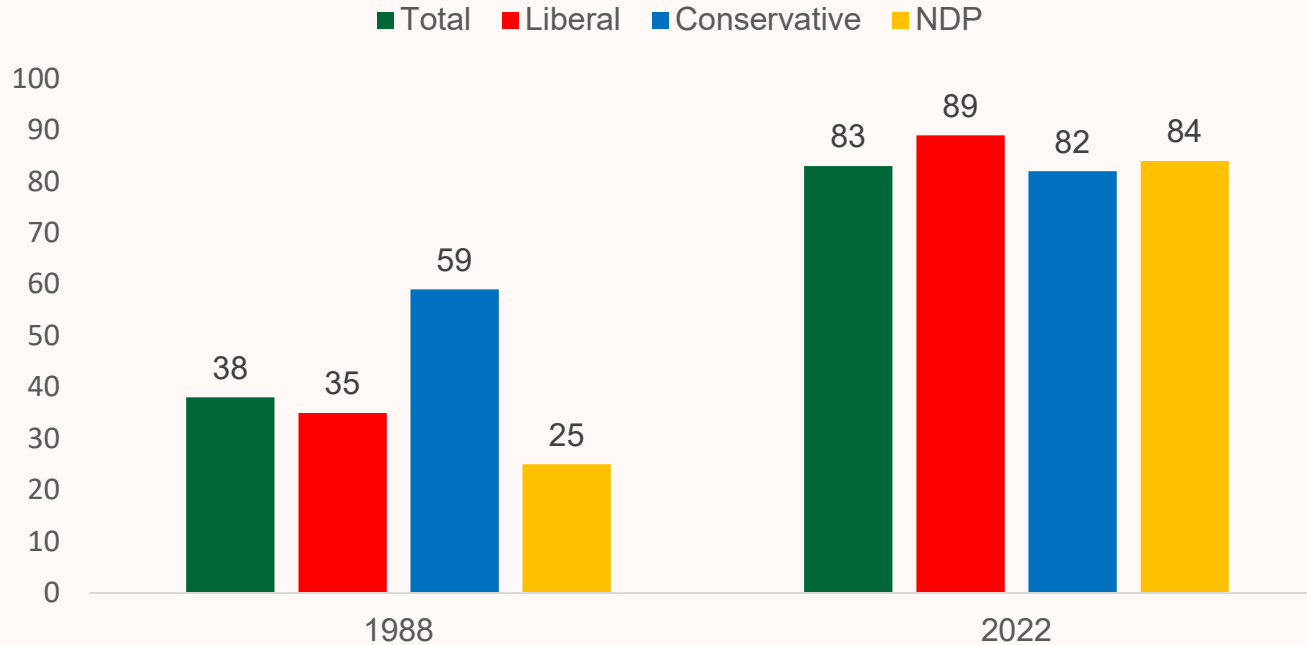
Canadians on the left-right political spectrum



Americans on the left-right political spectrum



Support for free trade



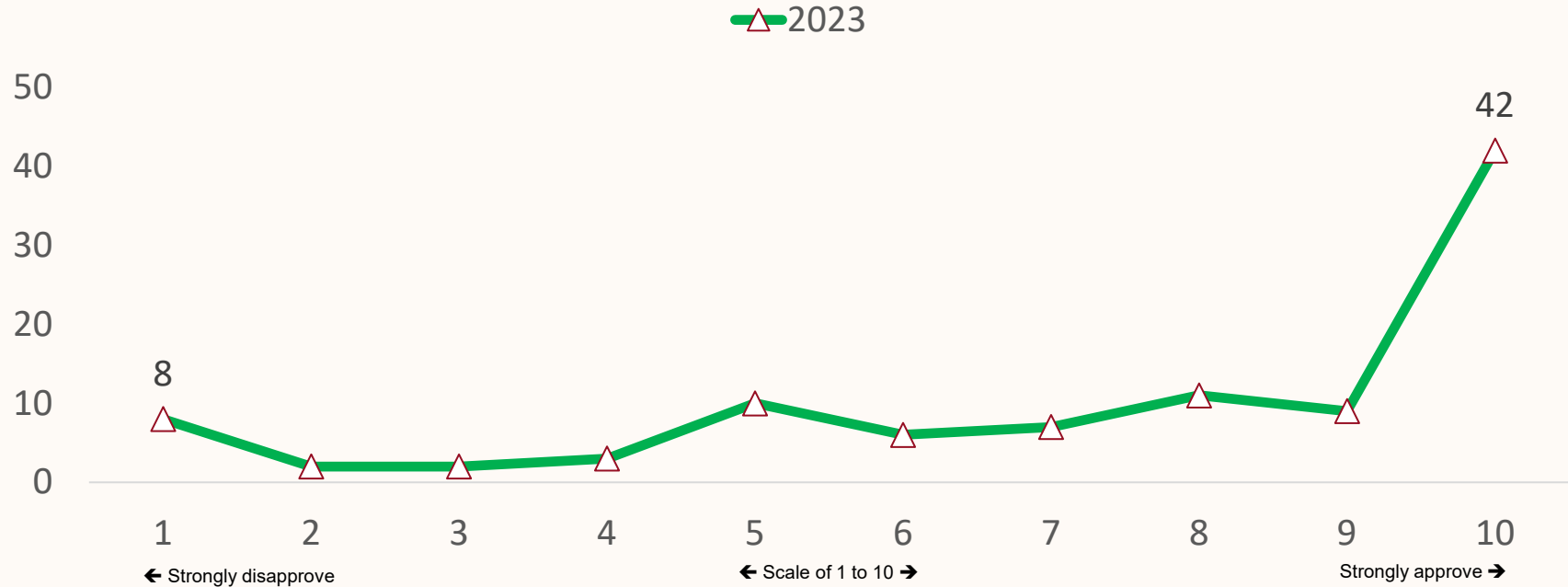
Do you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the free trade agreement that has been negotiated between Canada and the United States?

Do you strongly favour, somewhat favour, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose the free trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico?

Source: Environics, Focus Canada

How strongly do you approve or disapprove of same-sex couples having the right to marry? 2023

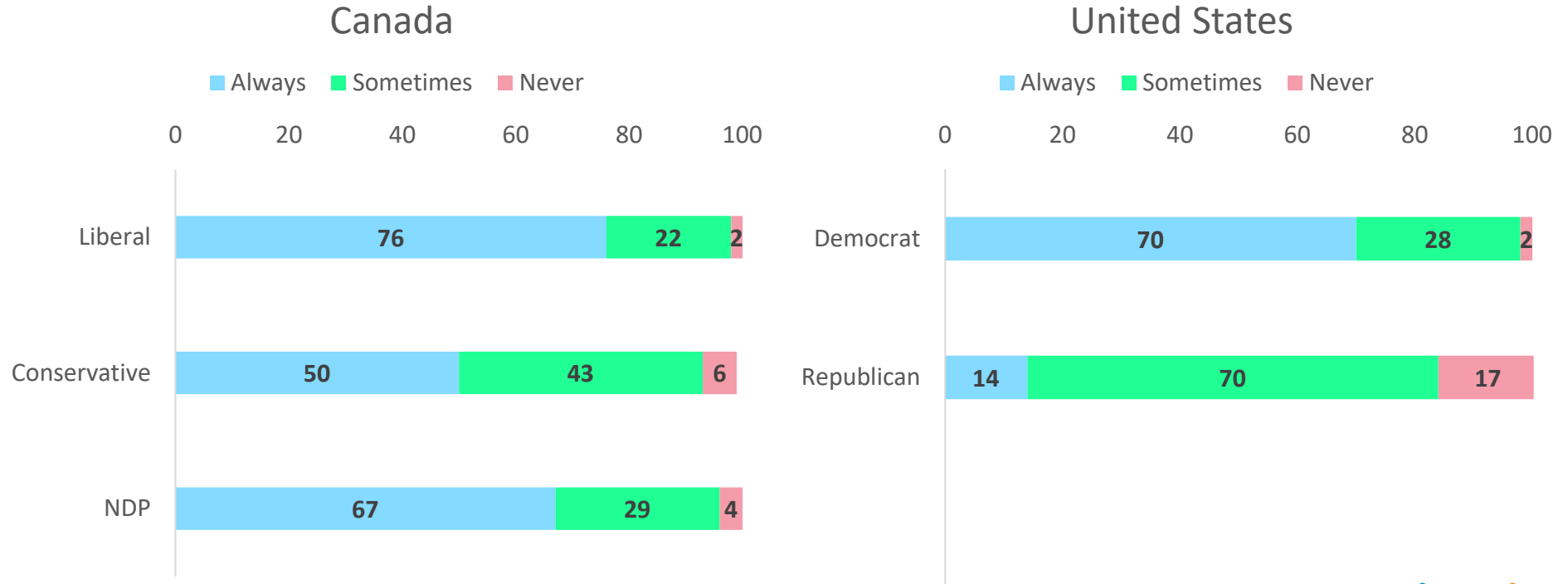
(Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means that you strongly disapprove and 10 means that you strongly approve)



Source: Environics Institute / AmericasBarometer

Votes are counted correctly and fairly, by federal vote intention

2023

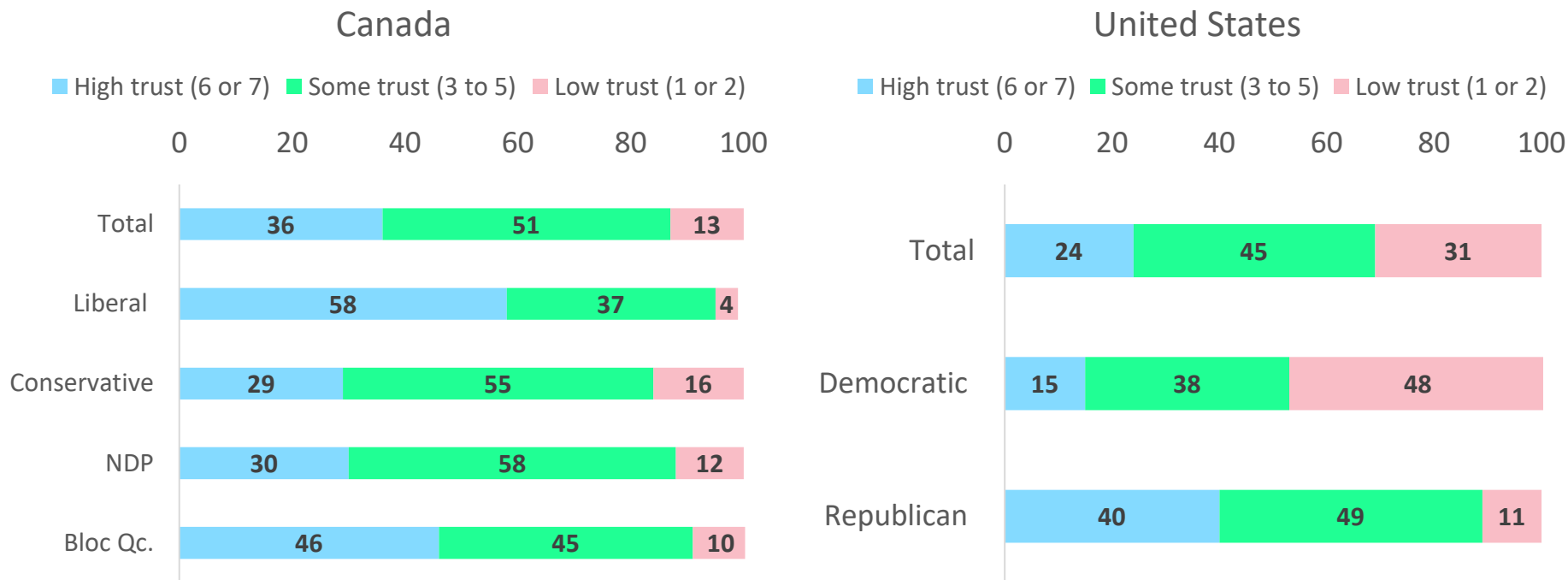


Here are some things that can happen during elections. Would you say the following happen always, sometimes or never in Canada? Votes are counted correctly and fairly.

Source: Environics Institute / AmericasBarometer

To what extent do you trust the Supreme Court?

2023 Canada and the United States, by federal vote intention



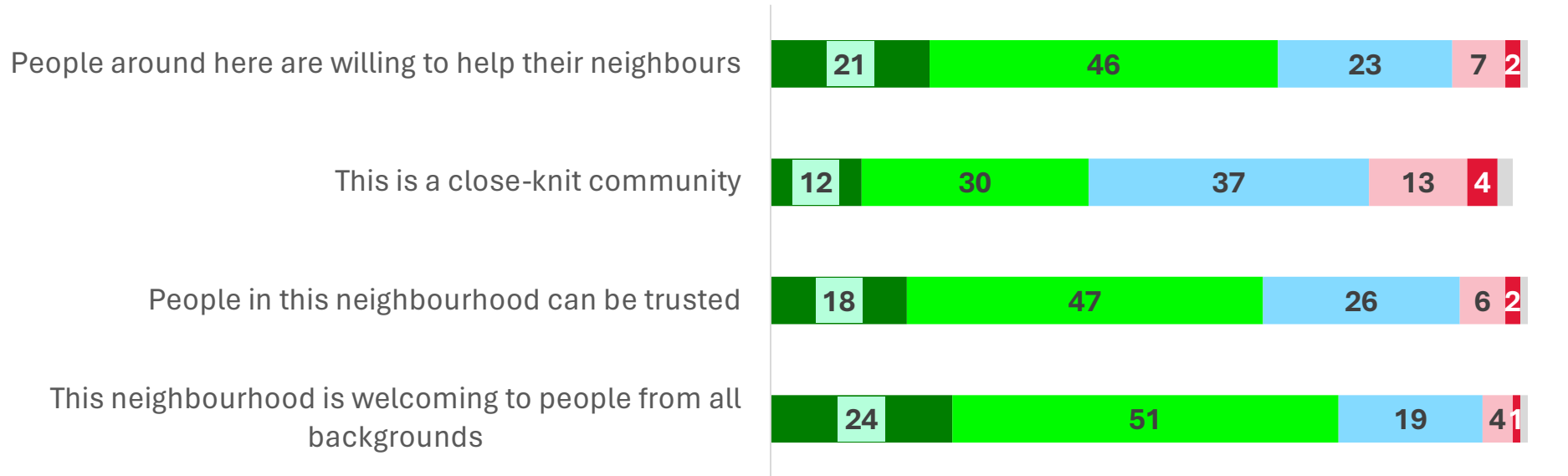
To what extent do you trust the Supreme Court? (Using a scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 means “not at all” and 7 means “a lot.”)

Source: Environics Institute / AmericasBarometer

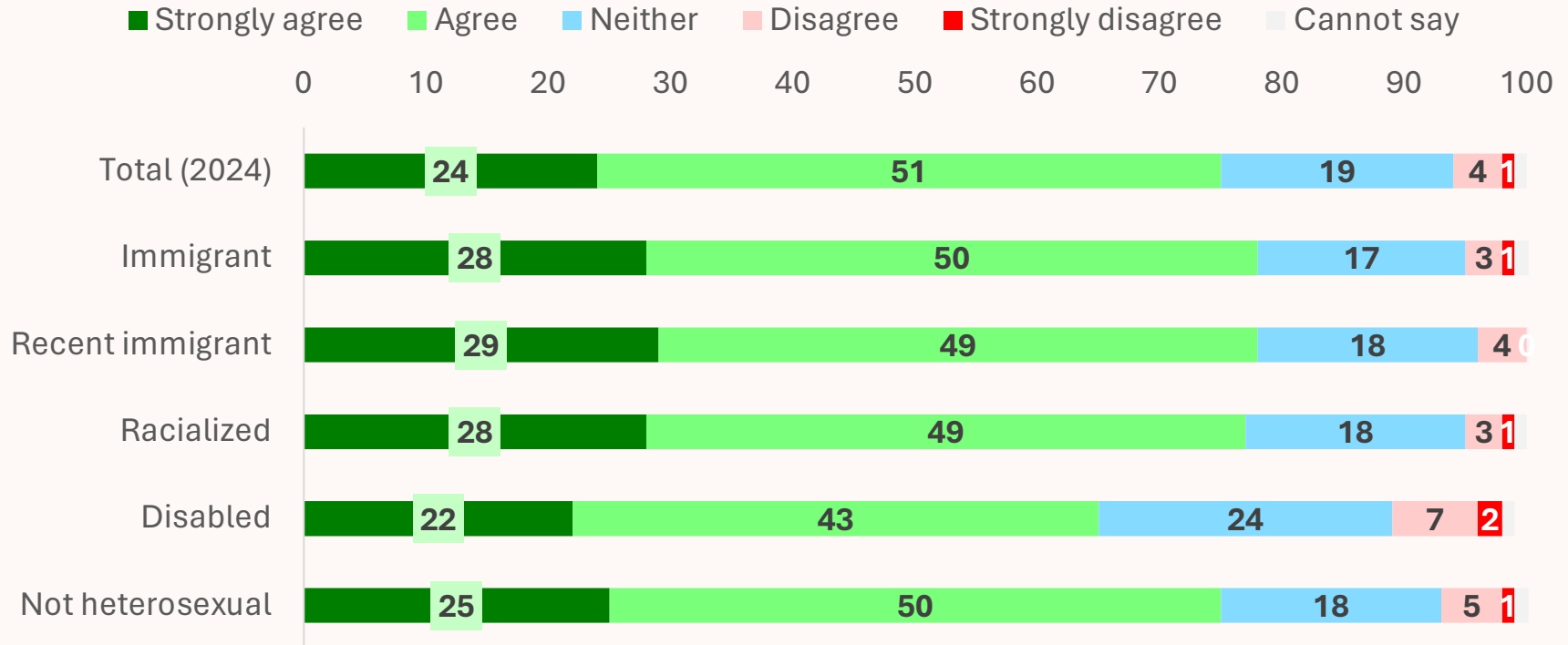
Canadians, their neighbourhoods and neighbours

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Neither ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ Cannot say

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



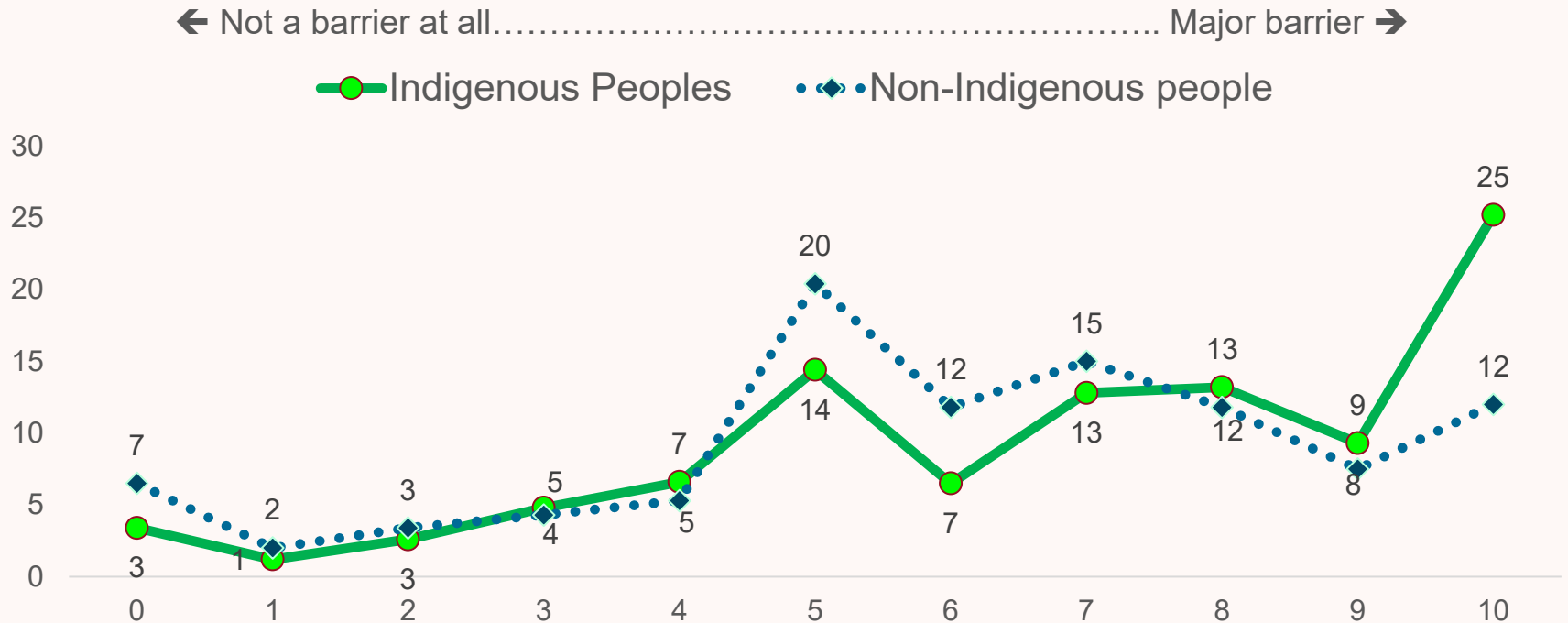
Is your neighbourhood is welcoming to people from all backgrounds?



Agree/disagree: This neighbourhood is welcoming to people from all backgrounds. ("Disabled" = has disability that always or often limits activity)

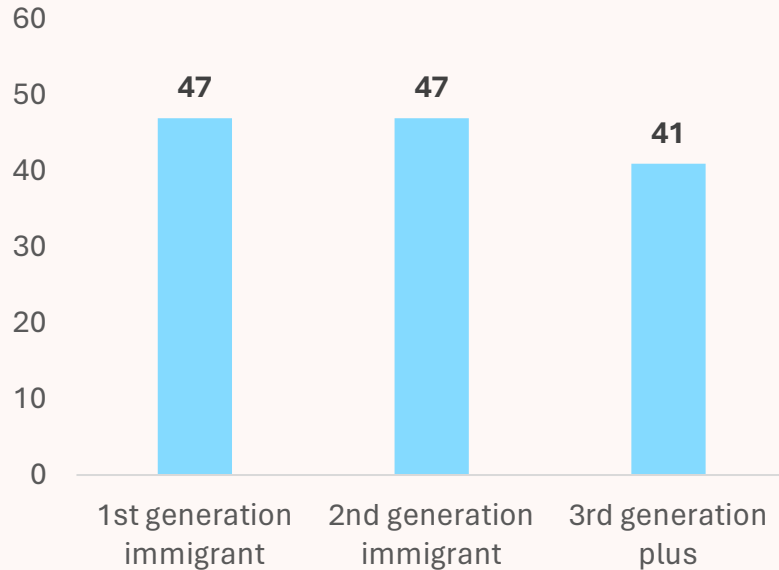
Source: Environics Institute / YMCA in Canada 2024

Barrier to reconciliation: “Non-indigenous People’s lack of knowledge about Indigenous culture and history”

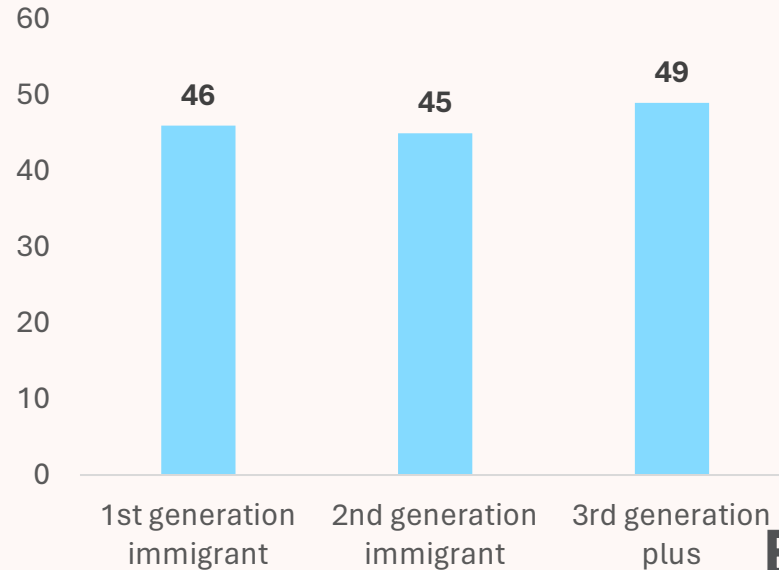


Attitudes towards immigration in Canada, by generation in Canada (2023)

Agree: there is too much immigration to Canada

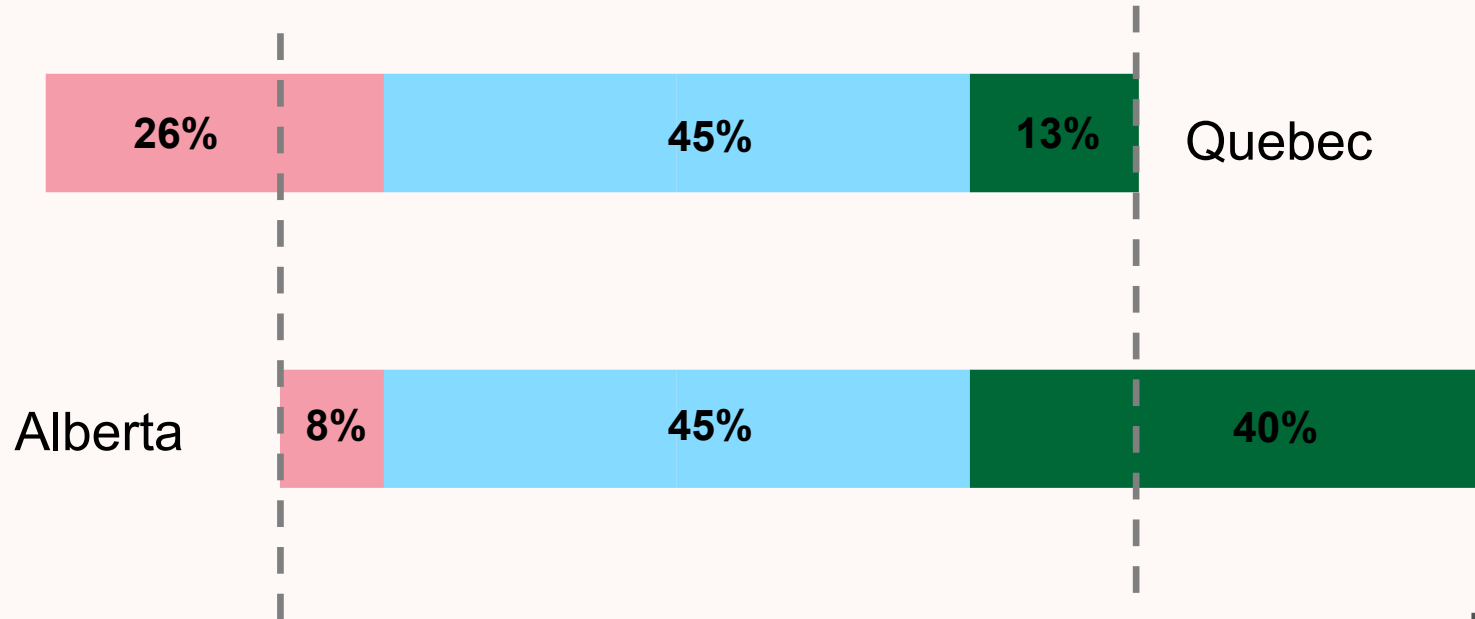


Agree: too many immigrants not adopting “Canadian values”



How quickly to phase out fossil fuels to fight climate change?

Phase out quickly ---- phase out gradually ---- focus on jobs



On the one hand...

- There are disagreements among Canadians on countless issues – as there should be in a democracy – but at the same time:
 - Politically, Canadians tend to cluster in the middle rather than on the extremes
 - While some new divisions have emerged (e.g. climate change), others have faded away
 - Disagreements tend to be within demographic groups, rather than between groups (pitting groups against one another)
 - Dissatisfaction (anger) today is relatively high, but it is not higher than ever
 - The United States is a warning but not a mirror

Political polarization in Canada?

On the other hand...

- If Canadians in general are not that polarized (or are not in the process of *polarizing*), why does the political sphere appear so polarized?
- There might be many reasons – other than changes in the opinions or values of most Canadians
 - Decline of the traditional media and advent of social media
 - Amplification of voices
 - Connections, funding and mobilization
 - Normalization (among some) of transgressive behaviour
 - Foreign agitators
 - Changes in the ways political parties are organized (membership and funding)
 - Choices of political leaders and strategists
 - Decline of traditional connecting & mediating organizations (churches, unions, etc.)

Political polarization: a paradox?

Why does the distinction matter?

- Key point: Canadian “society” itself is not more divided than ever, even if the political sphere itself seems “hyper polarized”
- Does this distinction really matter?
- Being precise about what has and has not changed is an important step forward in the search for solutions
- Thinking that polarization stems from broader and widening divisions within society can be discouraging and disempowering (if everyone is to blame, no one is to blame)
- Zeroing in on more specific problems can lead to more effective responses

Final
question



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For Survey Research

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Substack:

Canadian Survey Stuff

<https://cdnsurveystuff.substack.com/>