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Public Perceptions of Next-Generation Geothermal Energy

Ann Garth, Clean Air Task Force

CLEAN AIR TASK FORCE

CATF MISSION:

Push the technology and policy changes needed to achieve a zero-emissions, high-energy planet at an affordable cost.

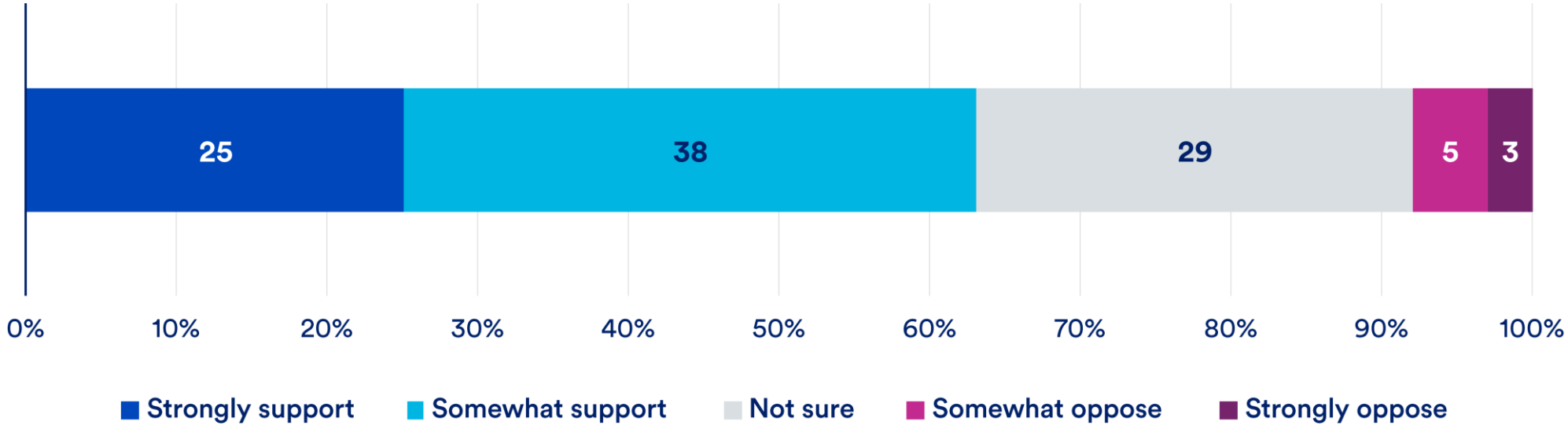
Mixed-Methods Approach

- Multiple research approaches
  - Two focus groups of people in the US west (January 2025)
  - Two surveys of registered US voters nationwide
    - Baseline survey: July 2025, n=2,504, 2.2% margin of error
    - Follow-up targeted survey: September 2025, n=1,019, 3.5% margin of error
- Focused on next-generation geothermal (tech-agnostic within that)

- Two quantitative approaches
  - A/B testing: comparing two versions of something to see which performs better, 6 sets of experimental groups, splitting the sample in half and leaving a margin of error ~4.4%
  - Maximum Difference Scaling (MaxDiff): ranking which of a few messages is best, across many different message options, to identify which options are most and least appealing to respondents across the full list of options
- Qualitative data as well

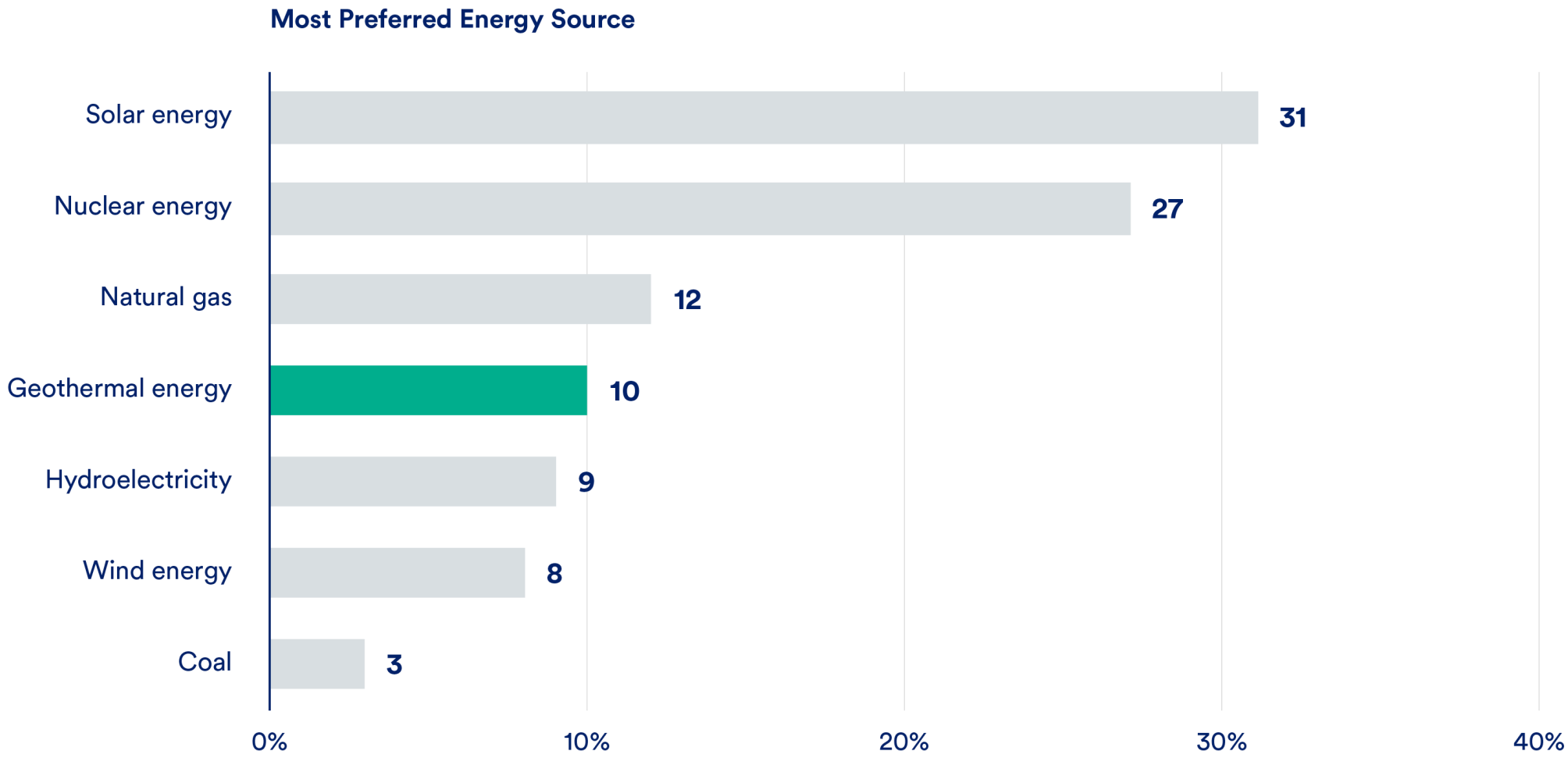
Research Findings

Most voters support next-generation geothermal energy, and very few oppose it



Q:

Support for geothermal is shallow



“messing with the earth is never good”

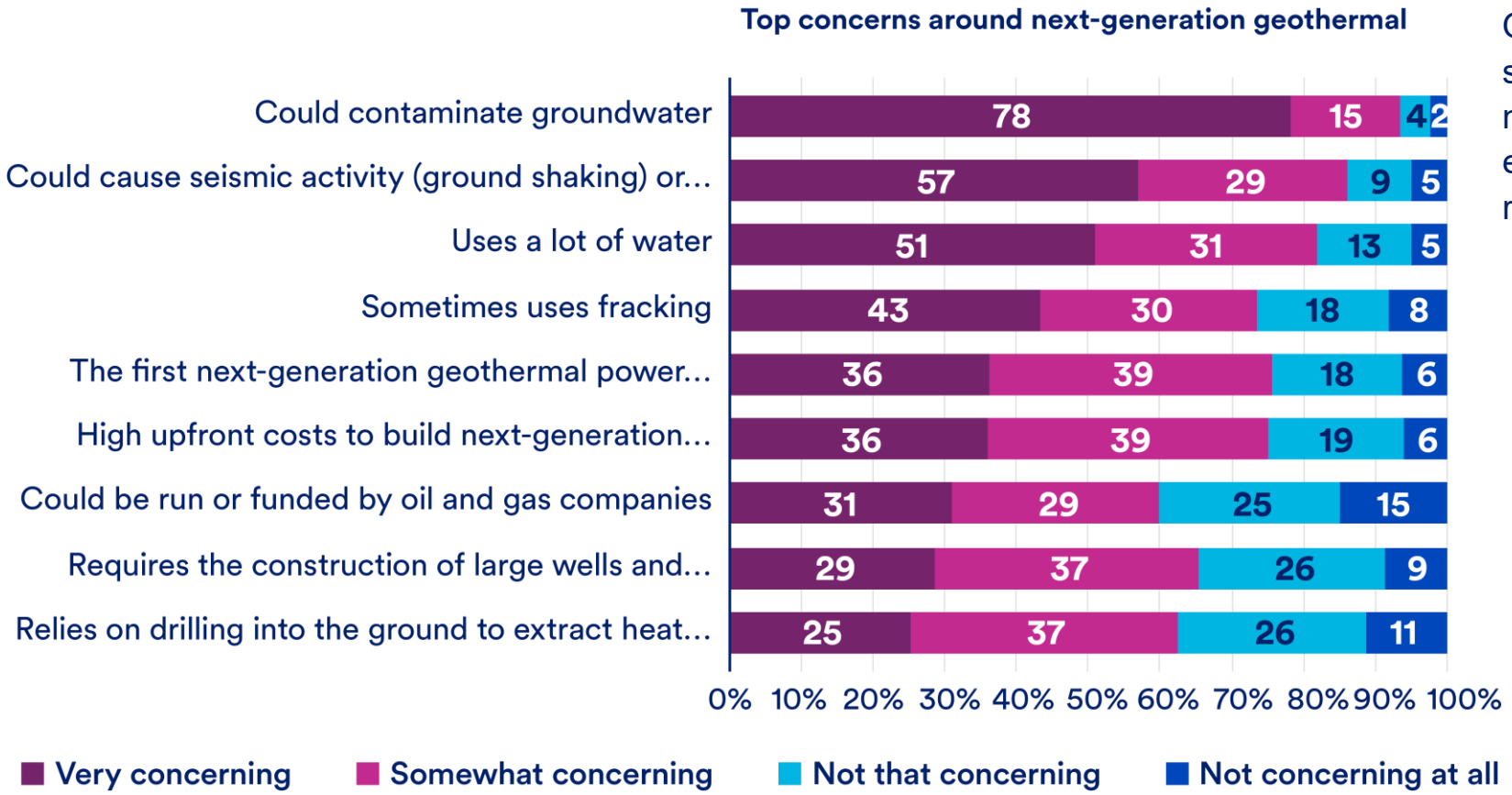
“It feels invasive to the earth”

“There has to be consequences not considered or ignored to do that kind of drilling”

“who knows the long term effect on the earth”

“Isn't it dangerous to take heat at this depth?”

Groundwater contamination and seismicity are the biggest concerns for voters



Q: Here is a list of concerns that some people may have about next-generation geothermal energy. For each one, please rate how concerning it is to you.

We tested different options to respond to seismicity concerns

Message Group	Full Text
Technical risk reduction	Project Developers map local geology and model the area underground before starting to make sure it's safe for the community to do a project there.
	Project Developers keep underground pressures low, helping to avoid ground shaking that might cause damage to the community.
	Project Developers track activity underground in real time, with an automatic shut-off if shaking goes above safe levels.
Context	In the U.S., no one's home or property has ever been damaged by ground shaking from next-generation geothermal.
	There are lots of things in everyday life that cause ground shaking, like football games and concerts. Most ground shaking from geothermal projects is smaller than those shakes and is too tiny to be felt by humans.
Outside monitoring	Many project developers create real-time online dashboards that show ground shaking, so anyone who wants can monitor the project.
	Many project developers create detailed, publicly available plans to manage and reduce the risk of ground shaking.
Developer incentives	A geothermal project that creates serious ground shaking would be shut down, costing the Project Developers millions of dollars.
Other	Geothermal drilling is like drilling into just the skin of an apple - it only goes a few miles into the earth.

Technical risk and outside monitoring messages are most reassuring

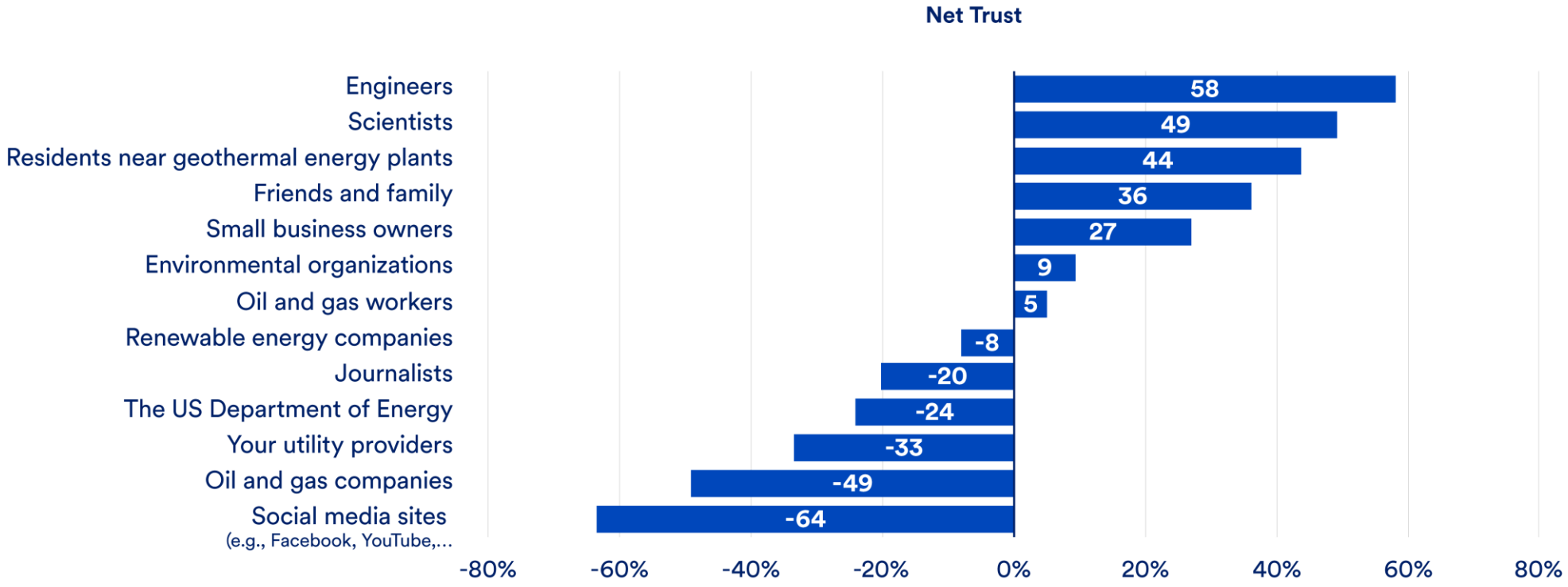
Rank	Message Group	Statement	Preference Share (%)
1	Technical risk reduction	Project Developers track activity underground in real time, with an automatic shut-off if shaking goes above safe levels.	29
2	Technical risk reduction	Project Developers map local geology and model the area underground before starting to make sure it's safe for the community to do a project there.	25
3	Outside monitoring	Many project developers create real-time online dashboards that show ground shaking, so anyone who wants can monitor the project.	14
4	Technical risk reduction	Project Developers keep underground pressures low, helping to avoid ground shaking that might cause damage to the community.	10
5	Outside monitoring	Many project developers create detailed, publicly available plans to manage and reduce the risk of ground shaking.	9
6	Developer incentives	A geothermal project that creates serious ground shaking would be shut down, costing the Project Developers millions of dollars.	4
7	Context	In the U.S., no one's home or property has ever been damaged by ground shaking from next-generation geothermal.	4
8	Context	There are lots of things in everyday life that cause ground shaking, like football games and concerts. Most ground shaking from geothermal projects is smaller than those shakes and is too tiny to be felt by humans.	3
9	Other	Geothermal drilling is like drilling into just the skin of an apple - it only goes a few miles into the earth.	2

Safety protocols informed by technical data are most reassuring

- People want to know that geothermal is safe
- Data-informed safety precautions make people feel safe
- Key message: **We have safeguards in place to minimize risk, informed by scientific and technical knowledge**
- Full adoption of this message may require regulatory changes

Majorities of voters say they trust engineers, scientists, and residents living near geothermal plans for information

Q: How much do you trust each of the following when it comes to information about the seismicity (ground shaking) and earthquake risks of next-generation geothermal energy?



Thank you

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