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Legislator Beliefs, Perceptions, and Voting Influences regarding Carbon Pricing: Implications for Climate Change and Health Advocacy

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Introduction

Carbon pricing was proposed to reduce carbon emissions which has been linked with negative health effects such as:

- Increased incidence of heat stroke
- Food poisoning
- Malnutrition via food shortages
- Vector-borne illnesses
- Asthma
- Allergies

Purpose: To understand factors that affect legislators' carbon pricing voting, guiding future health educators and advocates.

Methods

Respondents: 17 out of 180 legislators responded (9.4%).

- Democrat (n=12)
- Progressive (n=1)
- Republican (n=4)

Survey: Carbon pricing beliefs, perceptions, and voting influences were assessed with:

- Twenty-seven Likert Scale questions (ranked from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5).)
- Four open-ended questions to provide context to responses.

Analysis:

- Responses were pooled into:
 - "Supporters" (n=6)
 - "Non-supporters" (n=11).
- Between-groups comparisons with Welch's analysis using SPSS.

Likert-Scale Response Analysis

Gantt Percent shows proportion of respondents in bars, Likert Score shows average group responses in circles, and asterisks (*) indicate significant between-group differences (p<0.05).

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Somewhat Disagree 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree 4 Somewhat Agree 5 Strongly Agree

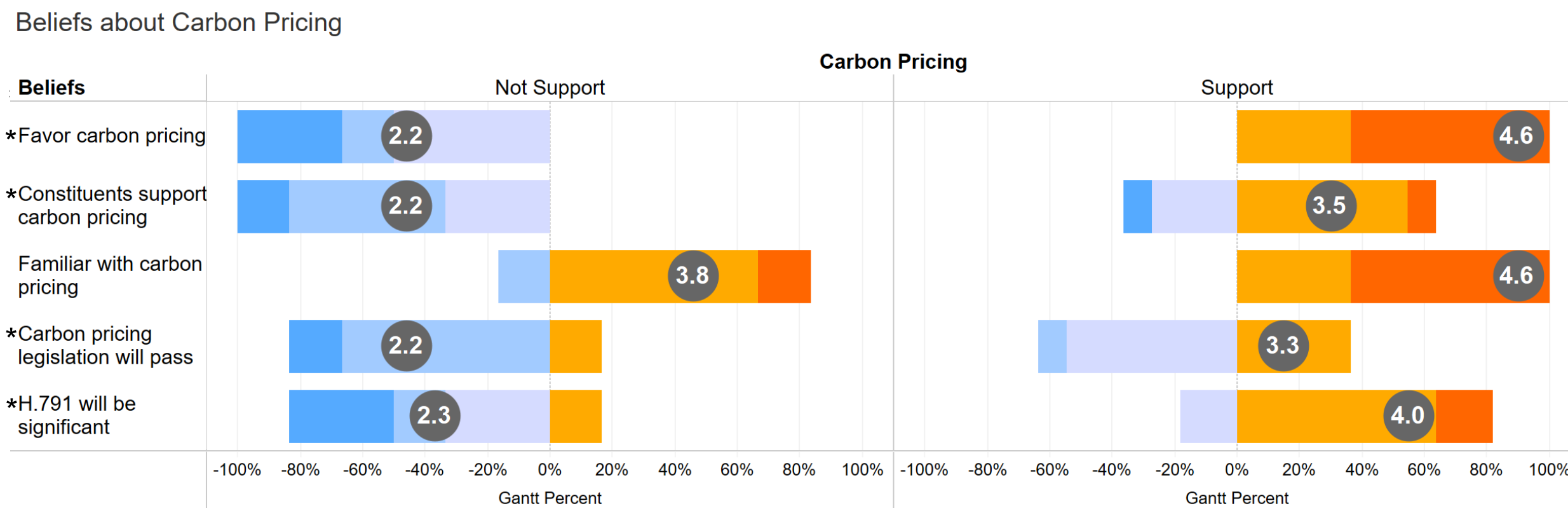


Figure 1. Comparisons on carbon pricing beliefs. Group beliefs significantly differ on carbon pricing support, constituent support, legislation's passage, and H.791's significance.

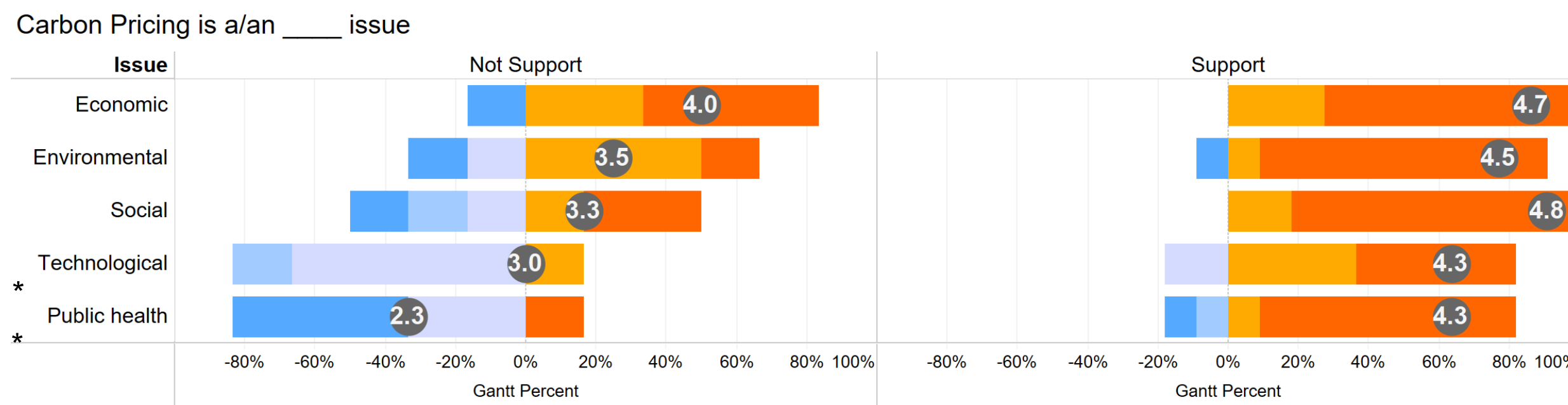


Figure 2. Comparisons on beliefs about relevance of carbon pricing to categorical issues. Group beliefs significantly differ on relevance of carbon pricing to technological and public health issues.

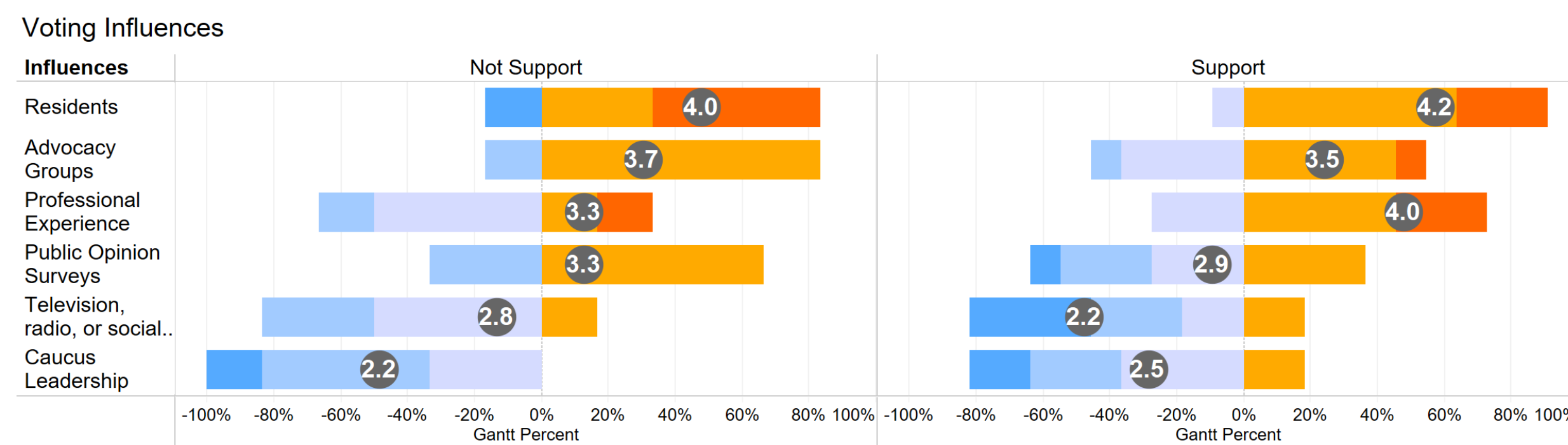


Figure 3. Comparisons on voting influences. No significant group differences were observed, with residents being most influential and caucus leadership being least influential.

Results

Beliefs and perceptions about Carbon Pricing

Compared to Supporters, Non-supporters disagree that:

- Carbon pricing is a public health issue (Figure 2)
- Legislation will pass or be significant (Figure 1)

Both groups agree on:

- Their familiarity with carbon pricing (Figure 1)
- Carbon Pricing being an economic issue (Figure 2)

Voting influences

- Residents were most influential to voting while caucus leadership was least influential (Figure 3).
- Non-supporters disagree that their constituents will be in favour of Carbon Pricing while Supporters agree that their constituents support it (Figure 1).

Positive impacts for constituents?

"Reducing greenhouse gas emissions, transitioning to renewable energy, mitigating impacts of climate change on health and environment."

-Supporter

"Some of the collected revenue will be used to subsidies home efficiency improvements for lower income people..."

-Non-supporter

Negative impacts for constituents?

"It will likely affect small merchants if the gasoline prices goes up enough; it will make a big difference on who drops into the mom and pop to pick stuff up. Who pays? People with less money verses people with more money? It could be regressive."

-Supporter

"Many people in Vermont are living on subsistence wages, and any increase in their costs of heating, transportation, etc. will be devastating."

-Non-supporter

Personal influences on voting?

"... my daughter's neighborhood in Queens was affected by Hurricane Sandy, and my niece in Texas was affected by Hurricane Harvey, both of which were intensified by the increased energy and water vapor in the atmosphere."

-Supporter

"When I see people buying gas in \$10 increments so that it appears they are struggling financially, and then I consider an additional tax of 10-30% on that purchase, I wonder why any legislators would vote to do that given the very limited positive outcomes."

-Non-supporter

Recommendations

Public Health Advocacy:

To reach out to non-supporters, advocates should:

- Encourage and educate constituent to communicate with legislators.
- Consider an economic message to legislators despite carbon pricing's health implications.

Future directions:

Limitations to our study include:

- Unequal party affiliation distribution
 - Small sample sizes
- Our recommendations are as follows:
- Sample other states
 - Explore constituent's response (i.e. rural vs non-rural populations).