



Climate Debate 2024

A deep dive into climate politics

Thinks
— Insight & Strategy —

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01 What we did and why?

Climate policy has gone from cross-party consensus with impressive levels of public support, to a wedge issue that threatens to derail the UK's track record of leading the way in emissions reduction.

Or has it?

Beneath the hype the climate emergency continues, and we know from polling that the vast majority of citizens agree that something needs to be done, they're just not sure what. We set out to hear from real citizens about their climate politics right now.



- Monday 24th June
- 12 participants in each location
- Voting intentions reflective of English population (as per BBC voting poll w/c 17th June), climate concern reflective as per BEIS tracker
- Duration: 3 hours
- Format: Anonymised summaries of the main parties' climate pledges, stance on energy, transport and nature and farming + climate assembly synthesis as additional manifesto

02 If it's not a climate election what is it?

"The election continues to feel like theatrics, with politicians looking to score points against one another. Meanwhile [voters] are waiting for someone to tell them how they will address the issues that matter to them."

Thinks Election Diaries week 1

It's not a normal election.

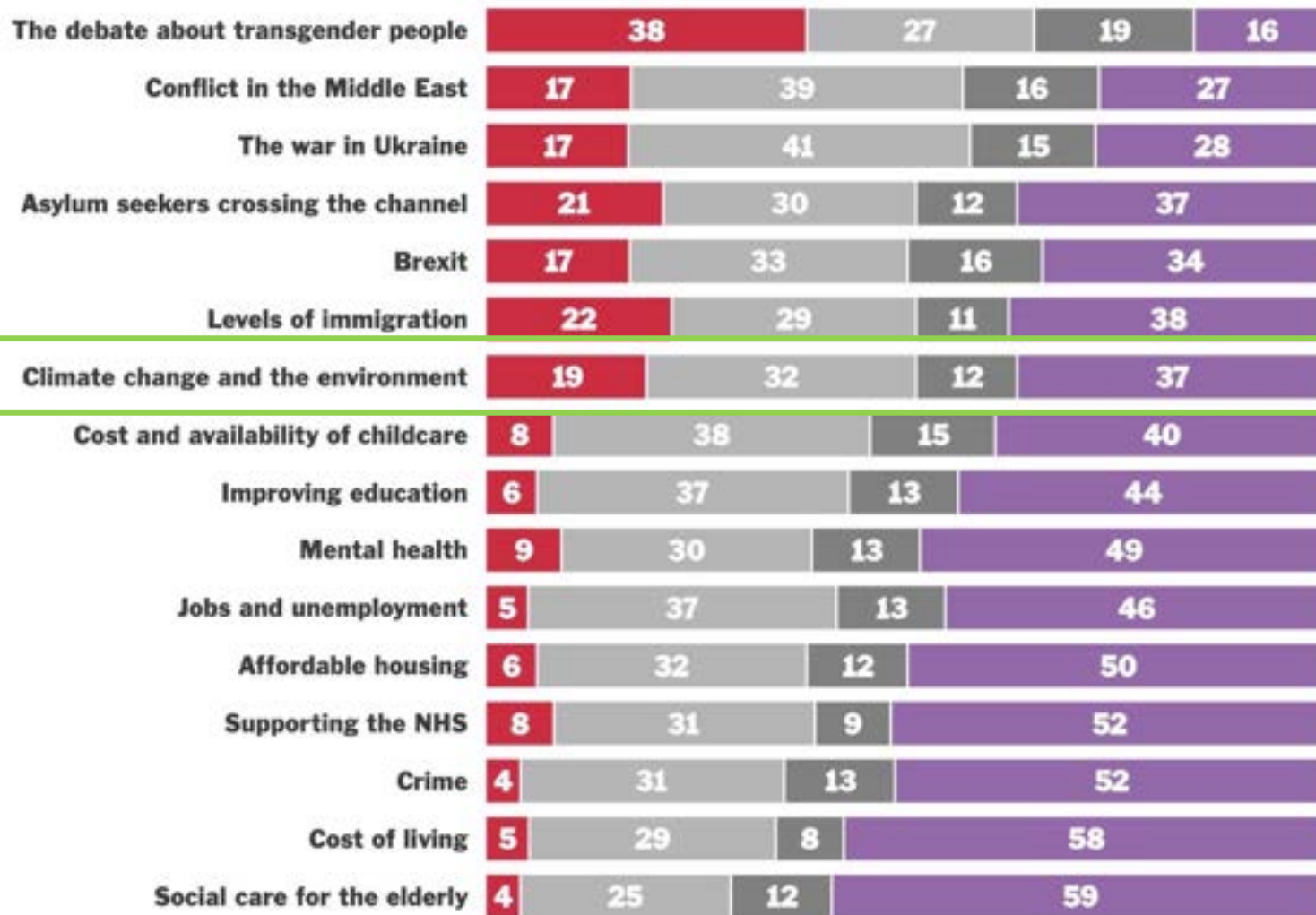
You've got a blue Tory or a red Tory.

We're not actually happy with what's on the table.

We're voting for the wrong people because we have to.

From the list of issues below, do you think that politicians are...

● Talking too much about this
 ● Talking about the right amount about this
 ● Don't know
 ● Not talking enough about this



"Someone comes out with some ridiculous comment and then everyone piles on and then the next day they're trying to recover from what they've said and see if someone from another party comes out saying something just as ridiculous and everyone piles on." Conservative, London

03 The climate issues cutting through



03 So is climate policy important to people or not?

In the next week? Probably not.

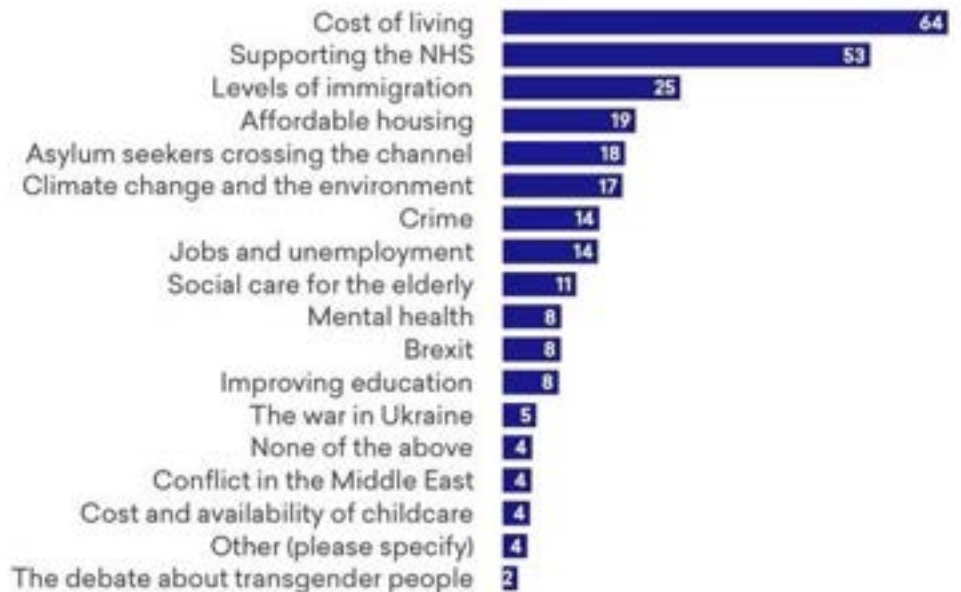
Afterwards? Yes, if anyone is willing to be bold.

"Yeah it's important, but it would have to be something **completely revolutionary** before I would vote for that party."
Labour, London

Britons' top issues this month

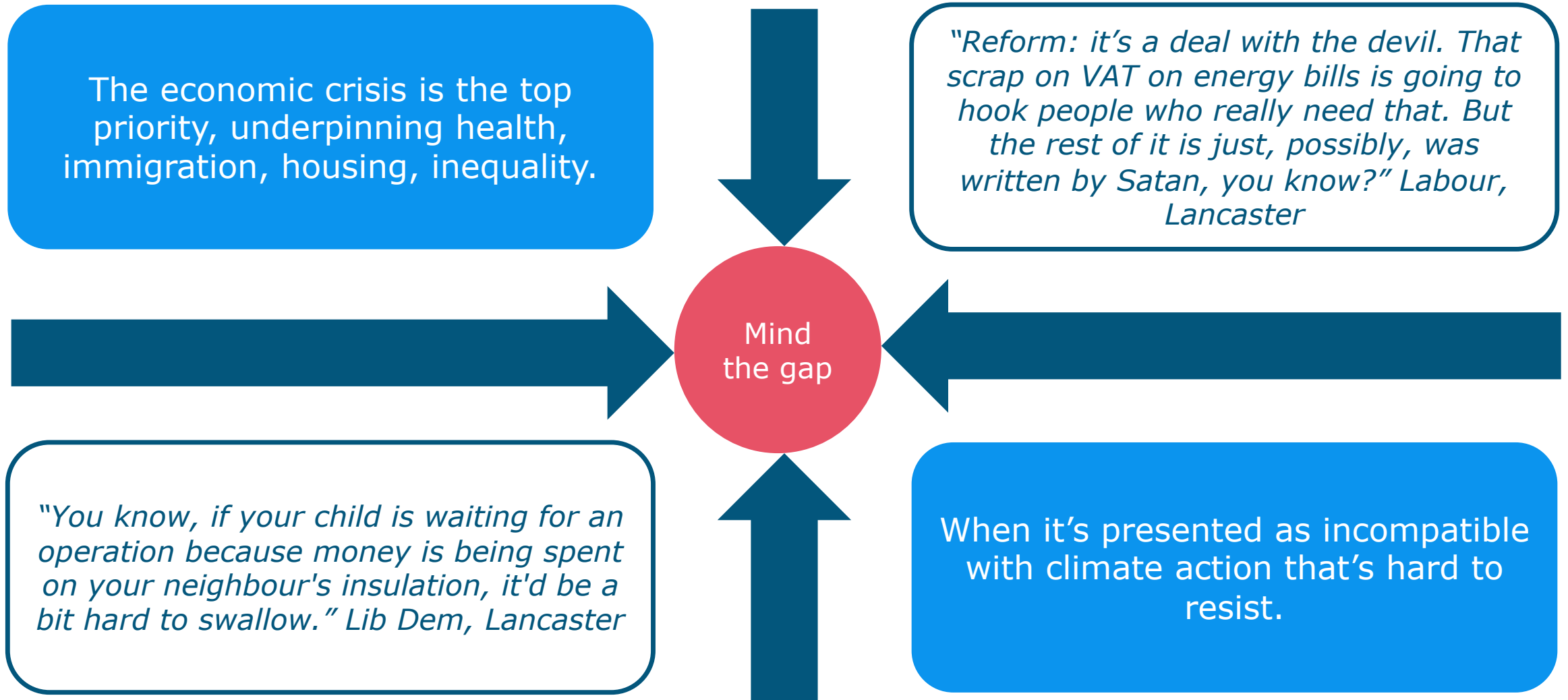
Thinking about the next General Election, which of the following issues are most likely to impact your vote? Please select up to three.

Voting intention: All



More in Common Source: More in Common • Last fieldwork: 24-26 Jun 2024

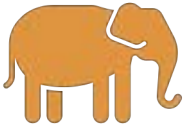
The elephant in the room: can we afford it?



03 Reactions to the manifesto topline



03 Manifesto headlines



Climate change is an existential threat, we will take bold, urgent action.

(Lib Dem)



Scrap Net Zero to cut bills and restore growth.

(Reform)



Make Britain a clean energy superpower.

(Labour)



An affordable and pragmatic transition to net zero.

(Conservative)



A just transition to a zero carbon society by 2039 at the latest.

(Green)



Net zero 2050, a solid plan to get there.

(Climate Assembly)

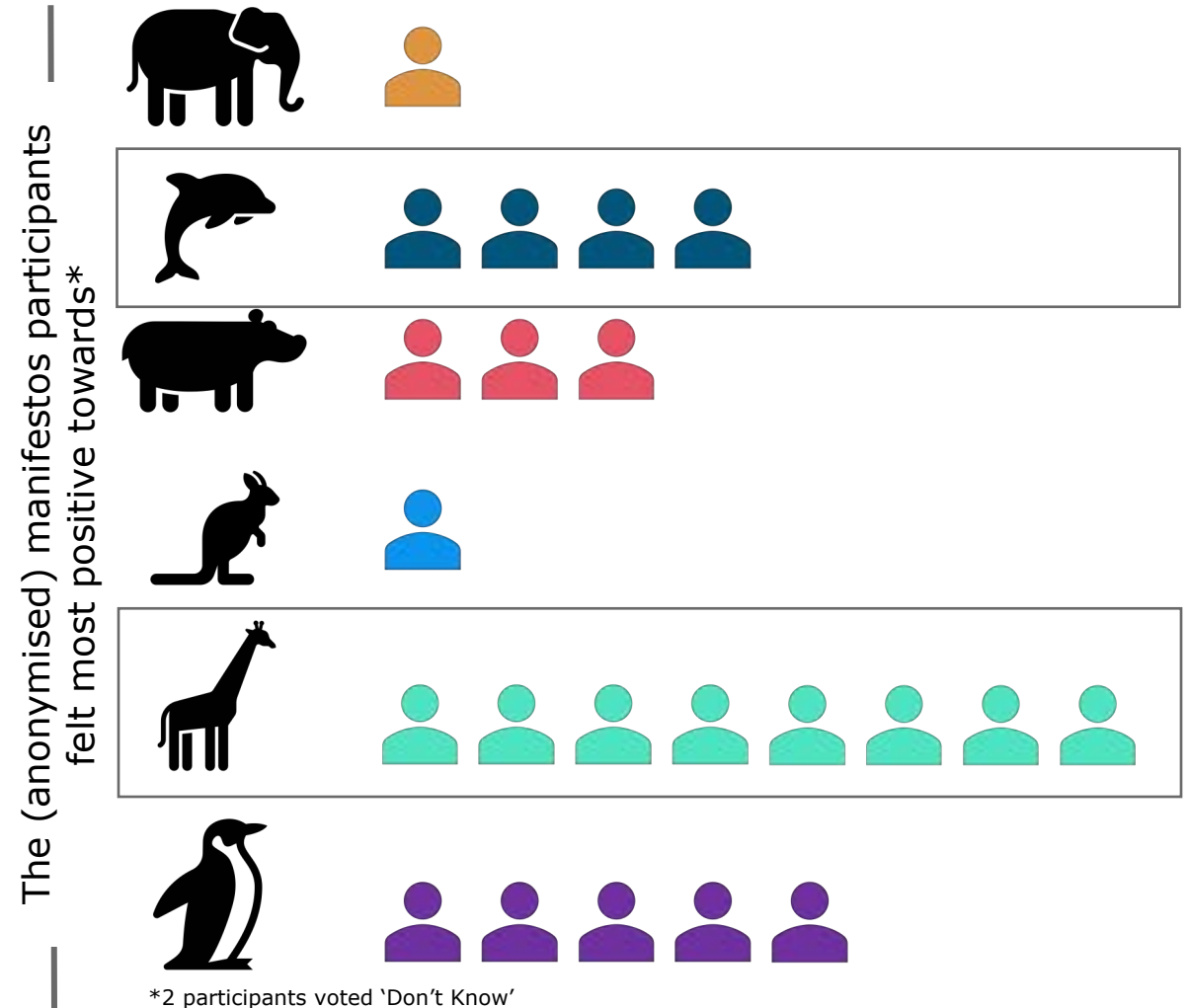
In the context of a climate debate citizens value parties taking a bold stance

The **Green party's** manifesto is seen as honest, genuine and the most impactful in addressing climate change (even if not necessarily achievable).

"They're saying we're green, this is what we do, this is how we're going to do it. Whereas you dip over to the others and they're trying to be green whilst not actually turning off their target audiences, like the Conservatives." – Lancaster, Labour

The **Reform party's** manifesto is rejected by the majority, but a minority is drawn to the boldness of its pledges and how it plots a completely different route to the other parties.

"It says focus on adapting to climate change rather than mitigating it. So they're admitting basically, we can't stop it, but we can try to mitigate it to make it a bit better." – London, Reform



The two main parties' climate pledges are underwhelming in their blandness

Whilst the Conservatives' promise of an 'affordable and pragmatic transition to Net Zero' is well liked, the policies underpinning it fail to convince

The only policy that stands out is the pledge to make the UK a 'net exporter of electricity' since energy security is top of mind (as linked to the price of energy).

"It doesn't really spell it out, but I quite liked the kangaroo [conservative] one because it refers more to strategic home generated energy, which I think is energy security." – Lancaster, Lib Dem

Labour's policies also fail to convince, primarily giving rise to scepticism re how achievable the pledges are as opposed to any enthusiasm

Not even the promise of 'a new publicly-owned company, Great British Energy' has any significant cut-through.

"But anyway, yeah, this is still quite beige. A green prosperity plan and the Warm Homes Plan." – London, Labour

"Pledges, how much of these things are realistic? Maybe some of the big parties, they're not saying much, maybe they can't afford it anyway. So what's the point of pledging? I'm underwhelmed by a lot of it." – Lancaster, Labour

Whilst the Lib Dems are slightly less bland than the two main parties the Greens and Reform stand out – but for very different reasons

The Green party's manifesto is seen as honest and bold but there is strong scepticism re how achievable the pledges are

Lib Dem's manifesto is deemed 'bland' with only the promise of a 10-year home improvement programme cutting through

Reform's focus on adaptation as opposed to mitigation is seen as preposterous by the majority, as is their desire to 'scrap' a whole range of targets/ measures

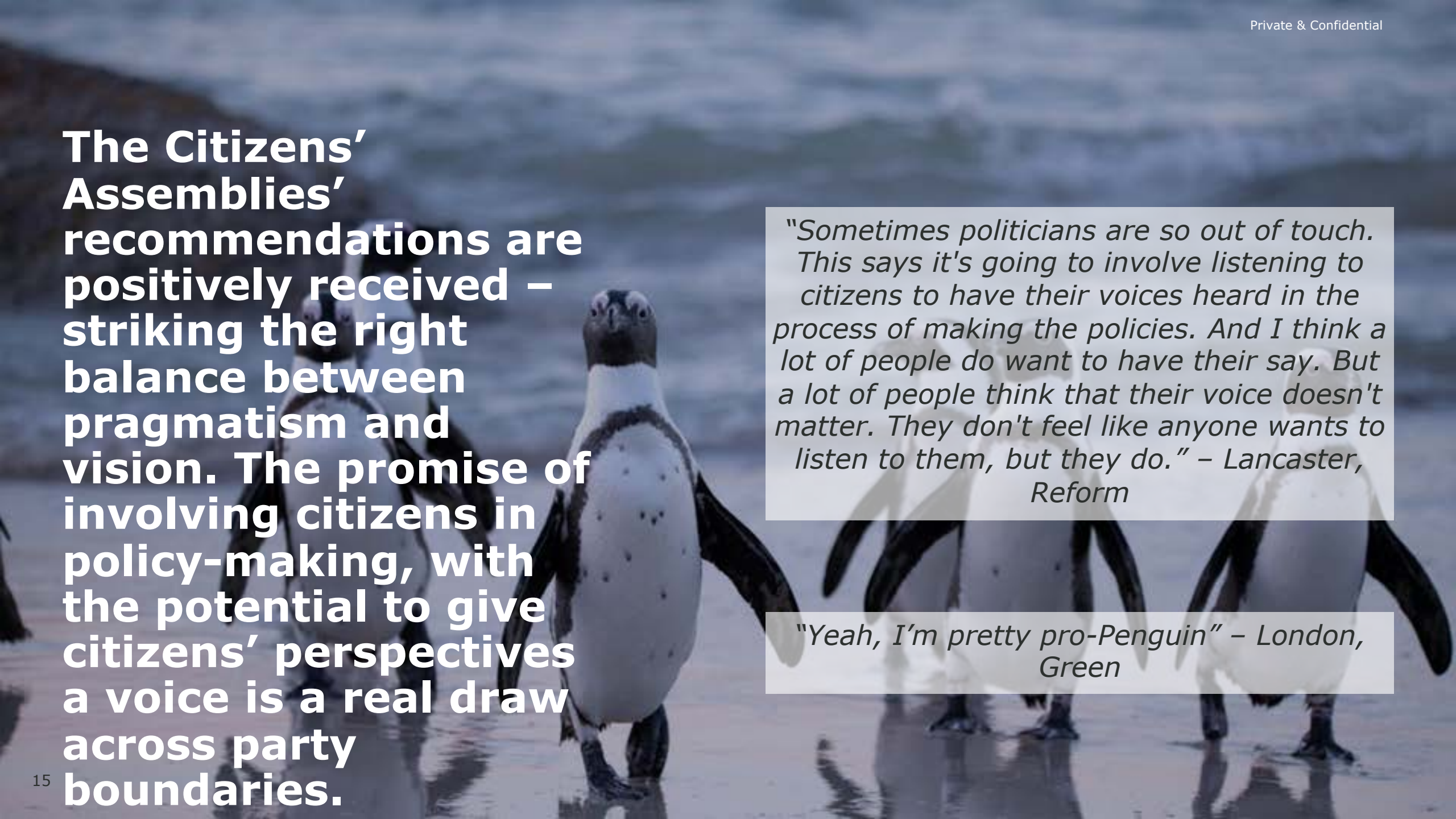
"The Green Party, it's not realistic. We're not going to do that in 14 years, are we?" – London, Conservative

"I like this idea of a 10-year home improvement programme with free insulation and heatpumps for people on low incomes. I liked how specific and targeted it was. I feel like someone, somewhere, is going to benefit if they did that." – Lancaster, Conservative

"Reform is more about how to deal with the issue. It seems to be more of a relaxed kind of view of the issue here." – London, Labour

04 Vote penguin! How do citizens assembly recommendations fare as a manifesto?





The Citizens' Assemblies' recommendations are positively received – striking the right balance between pragmatism and vision. The promise of involving citizens in policy-making, with the potential to give citizens' perspectives a voice is a real draw across party boundaries.

"Sometimes politicians are so out of touch. This says it's going to involve listening to citizens to have their voices heard in the process of making the policies. And I think a lot of people do want to have their say. But a lot of people think that their voice doesn't matter. They don't feel like anyone wants to listen to them, but they do." – Lancaster, Reform

"Yeah, I'm pretty pro-Penguin" – London, Green

But people know that elections aren't where policy is made

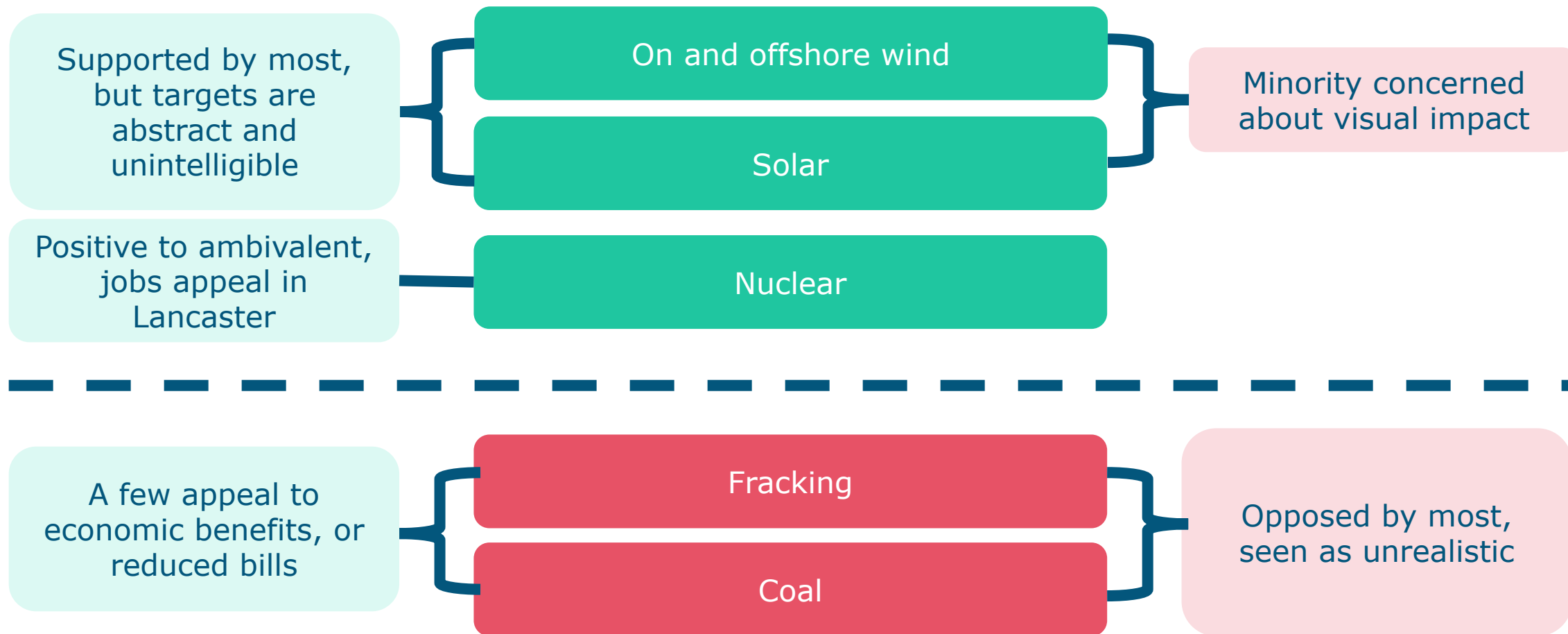
"You said two different things. You said, is there anything you'd really like to see in the manifesto? And then you said, anything that would win votes." Labour, London.

"What people on the street think and what the political parties are offering us are two completely different things. And perhaps maybe the parties want to start taking notice of these people's assemblies and start listening to what people say." – London, Labour

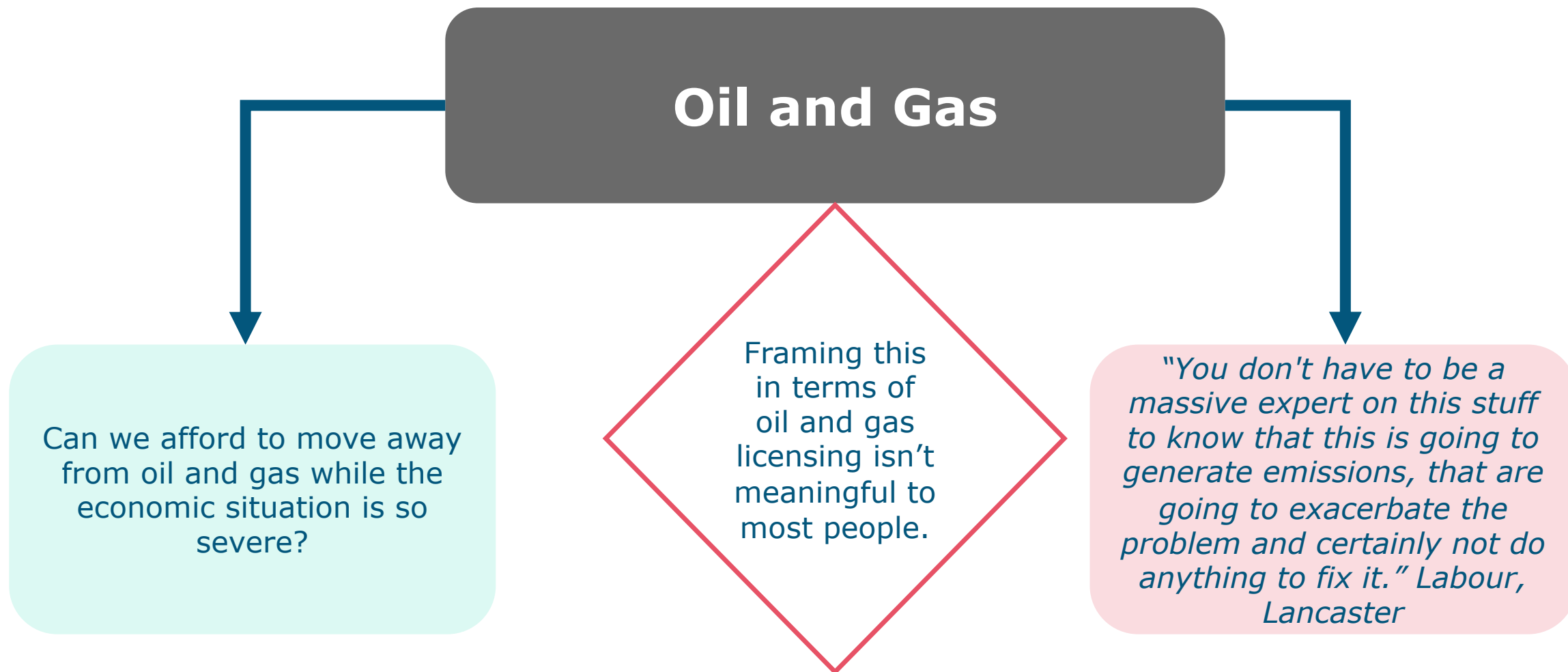
Policy deep dives: Energy, transport, nature



05 Renewables are in, coal and fracking are out



05 But there's uncertainty opening up around oil and gas



05 Public ownership and windfall taxes are seen as positive

Public?

- **GB Energy is eye catching**, benefits from the sewage parallel, and the unpopularity of energy companies.
- **But the devil is in the detail**, how will it actually fix the problems with the energy market? And can it be efficiently run? Is it quango? Or actual ownership of the resources?

Community?

- **Lib Dem focus on community ownership is popular and feels new**, seen as genuinely disruptive of the status quo.

Private?

- **Nobody standing up for the energy companies**, beyond questioning whether the public sector can do better.
- Windfall taxes are welcomed, questions are usually about whether they can be made permanent.

Benefits from the comparison with the water industry.

05 Back to the elephant: energy prices

“If somebody could say, here is our plan for getting energy prices down and here is how the things that we will now do, the things that we propose, will get us there.” Labour, London

05 Transport is a more salient, but locally specific, issue

Context

- Easier to understand than energy, less jargon and more direct impact
- As with energy, more state control isn't causing the polarisation you might expect, although the details (e.g. bus franchises) aren't well understood
- But it's not seen as the big ticket item for climate



London

- Public transport reliability is key (what's the £2 fare?), improving it is a no-brainer
- Driving is important to a few, totally irrelevant to others



Lancaster

- £2 fare is a winner, but more availability is the priority for public transport
- Everyone drives, so pragmatic about that, LTNs and ULEZ debates don't feel relevant

05 The “war on drivers” is one of very few real dividing lines for Reform

- Accept that driving isn't as sustainable, and open to change
- Accept (sometimes reluctantly) measures like ULEZ as driving positive change
- Some support quicker change

"The thing about public transport is, no matter which end of the spectrum, I speak to people who are Tory and people who are Green and everything in between, and they all roughly agree that more should be invested in public transport." – London, Labour

"I don't like the idea of having an electric vehicle myself, I've heard quite bad things about them." – Lancaster, Reform

- Resistance to enforced change, particularly bans, reject reported benefits
- Appeal to problems with electric vehicles
- Connecting transport with wider issues of equality and class

"People are saying it might be a bit of a classist issue... people that vote for this kind of stuff are homeowners, people with mortgages, whereas the working class person whose vans and stuff are their livelihood..." – London, Reform

05 But it isn't 50/50, and there is a sense of inevitability

Comparisons with phasing in natural gas heating.

People who have made the switch reluctantly and now wouldn't want to go back.

Perception that the issues are being made 'bigger' than they need to be.

05 Water is the big issue across locations, and parties aren't going far enough

- Water frustrates people, how hard can it be to stop leaks and sewage spills?
- Why should public bodies have to pick up the bill for badly performing private companies (e.g. polluting water companies).
- Manifestos seen as not going far enough.
- Stronger laws for environmental protection are welcome, and there is appetite for Government and regulators to have 'more teeth'.

"Why do we have to have a manifesto pledge that says you can't do all this terrible pollution? Why do we need to have a manifesto pledge that says if you break the law and pollute water there will be consequences? Why isn't that already happening?" – Lancaster, Labour

06 Where's the hope? Four opportunities and challenges for the new government.

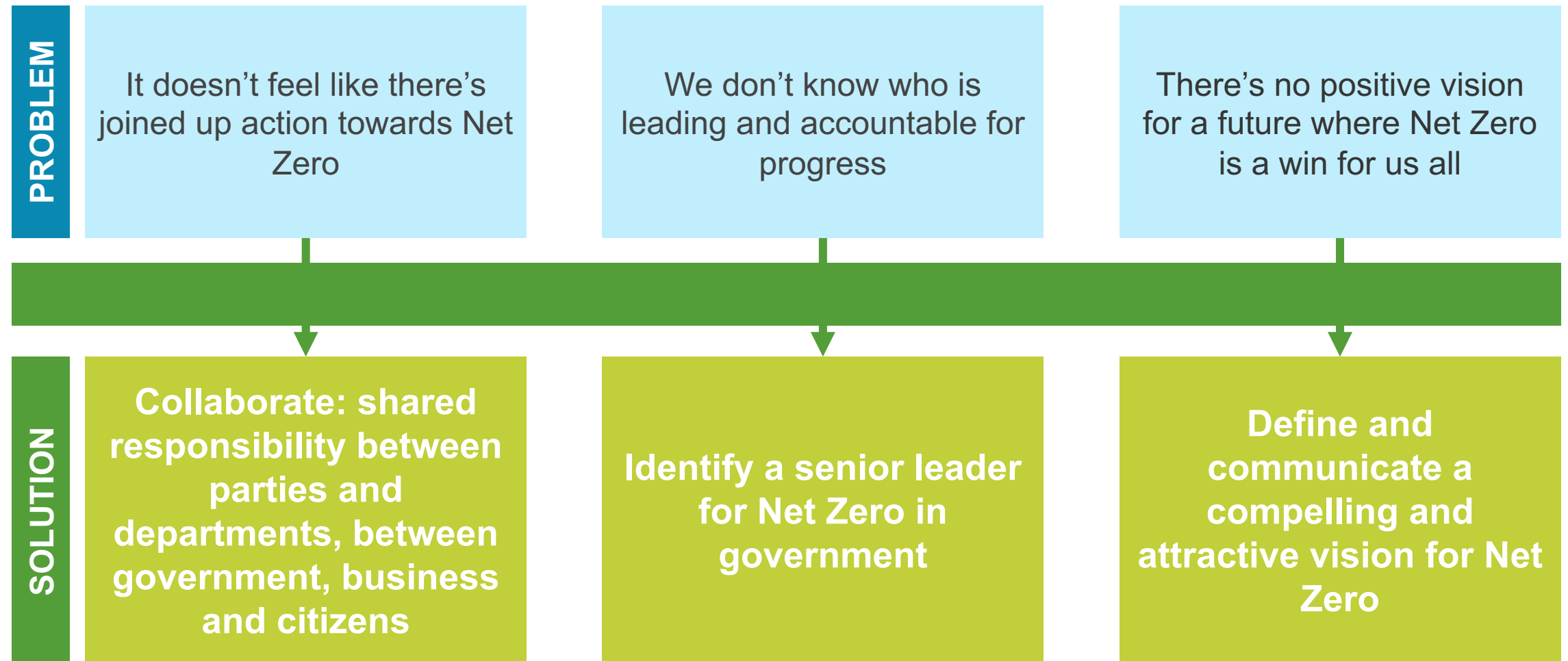
1. Making the economic benefits of climate action clear, and demonstrating them as they happen. Particularly on energy and cost of living.

2. Fronting up to the dividing lines, and getting through the pain of implementation. Particularly on transport.

3. Involving people in decision making, especially at local level.

4. Establish clear leadership on climate.

Which echo the findings of our 2021 Net Zero Diaries work





Questions? Coffee?

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