

# Refining Climate Change messaging

TRA X Ministry for the Environment  
April 2024

# TRA

# The need for message testing

## **Language matters.**

The wrong language can inhibit take-up or cause confusion.

Used badly it can also turn people off the message or the messenger.

What works for an internal or technical audience is unlikely to work for the general public.

## **Language takes on a life of its own.**

Once it is out there it is repeated and copied.

Great if the language is understood and relevant, not if it isn't.

**Check language before it becomes widespread**

# A reminder of how and what we tested

## A/B Testing with different groups of people.

N = 400 per set.

Nationally representative sample in age/region/gender/ethnicity.

Using the Ideally platform.

Each tested with two questions:

1. What does this mean to you?  
Open-ended verbatim responses.
2. How relevant is this to you? 5pt scale.

<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>
Climate mitigation	Reducing emissions
Climate adaptation	Preparing for the impacts of climate change
Net zero climate change targets	New Zealand's domestic and international climate targets
Gross emissions vs Net emissions	All the emissions we produce, minus what is absorbed by forests
Emissions reductions	Moving to a low-emissions economy
Emissions trading scheme	

- What have we learned?

# Knowledge of the terms we are talking about is shallow.

A significant number don't have any idea what the statements refer to (some statements in particular).

And in many cases, those who do know something only have a vague idea that it relates to climate change - but aren't exactly sure how.

**“I have no idea what this means, I gather it has to do with climate change.”  
Female 55+ on ‘Climate mitigation’**

**“I'm not totally sure what this means. But I assume it's along the lines of being carbon neutral.”  
Female 18-34 on ‘Net zero climate change targets’**

**“I do not have a clue other than it's a money-go-round to satisfy environmentalists.”  
Male 55+ on ‘Emissions trading schemes’**

- What have we learned?

**So technical terms  
come across as jargon  
or buzzwords.**

**This is not only  
confusing but can  
lead to negativity.**

**Don't shorthand – it turns people off**

If the terms aren't well-known, they are perceived as jargon or buzzwords. This only exacerbates the problem of shallow knowledge.

This creates two problems:

1. Not explaining what it is sufficiently, leads to confusion and turn-off.
2. Appearing as 'corporate speak', lacking in transparency and integrity.

**“Absolutely no clue bunch of jargon.”**

**Female 35-54 on 'Net zero climate change targets'**

**“Sounds like meaningless corporate buzzwords to me.”**

**Male 35-54 on 'Climate adaptation'**

**“Political jargon, just more garbage”**

**Female 55+ on 'Climate mitigation'**

- What have we learned?

# **Simple language and plain English works better – even if it means using more words.**

With shallow knowledge, we need more words to explain concepts. This builds comprehension and relevance.

Comprehension and relevance are strongest for the statements that use simple language and explicitly state what they are. This might mean more rather than fewer words (e.g. 'preparing for the impacts of climate change' landed better than 'climate adaptation').

**“Doing things like taking the bus, driving less, eating less red meat.”  
Male 35-55 on ‘Reducing emissions’**

**“Start preparing for extreme or difficult weather events.”  
Male, 55+ on ‘Preparing for the impacts of climate change’**

**“Using less carbon dioxide producing fuels, products and produce”  
Female 55+ on ‘Moving to a low-emissions economy’**

# A/B in detail

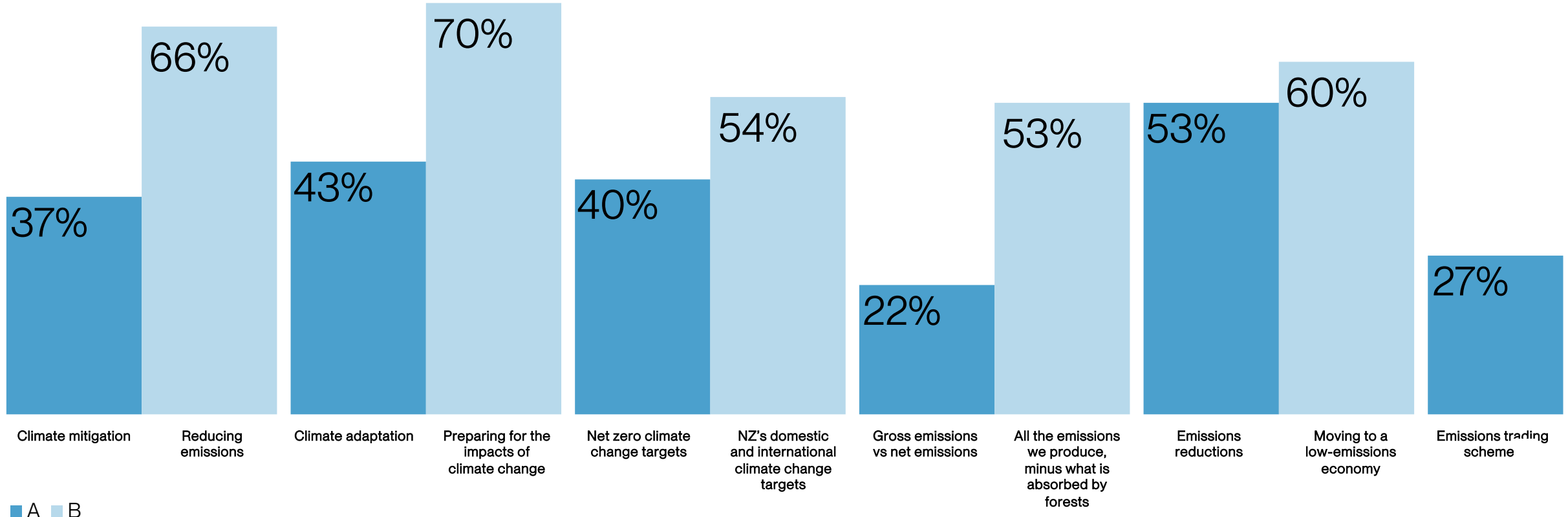
TRA X ???



1

# Plain English with more explanation will make the same concept more relevant

Very or somewhat relevant

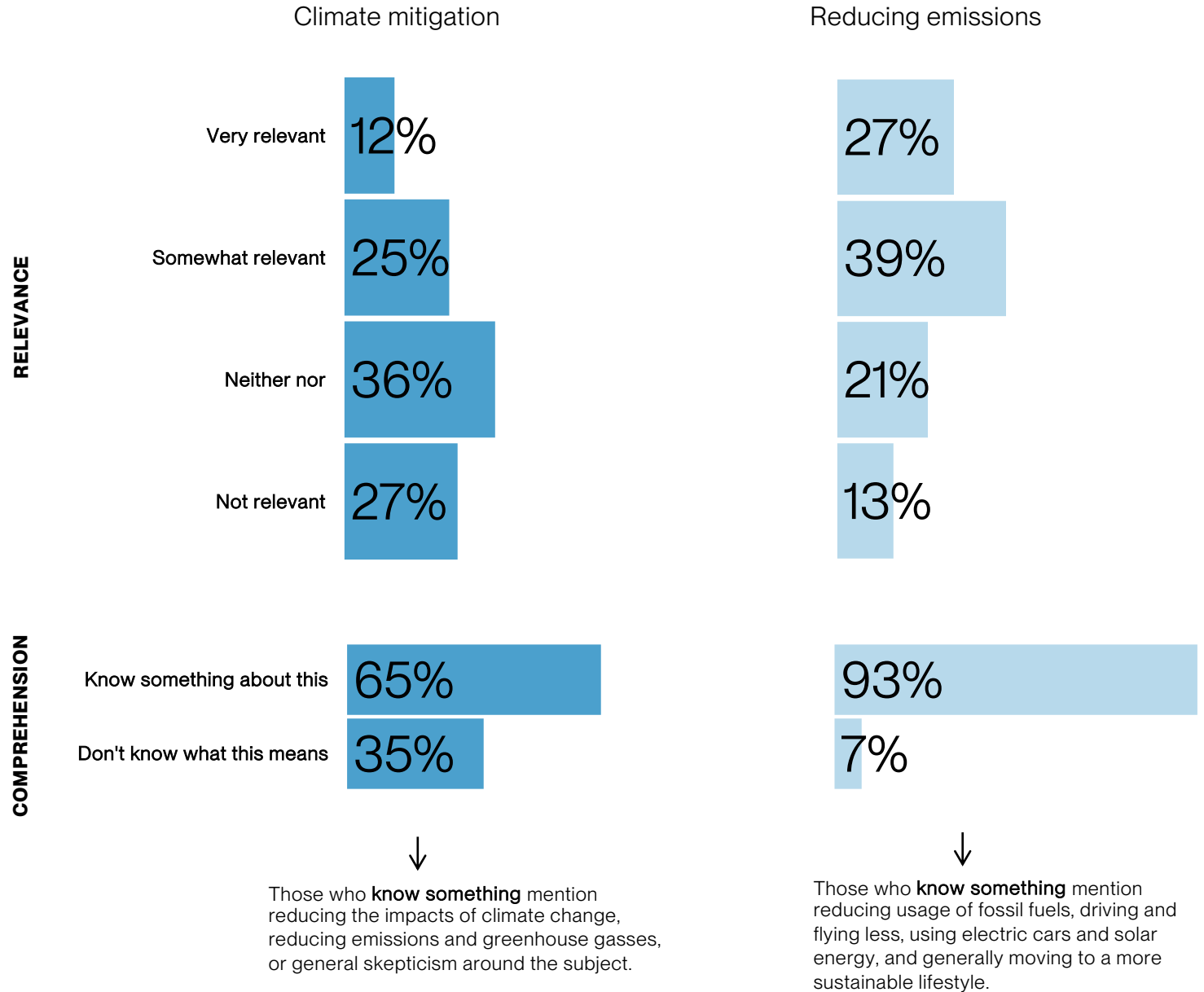


■ A ■ B

# ‘Reducing Emissions’ has stronger relevance and comprehension compared to ‘Climate Mitigation’

Reducing Emissions is particularly relevant to males and younger people.

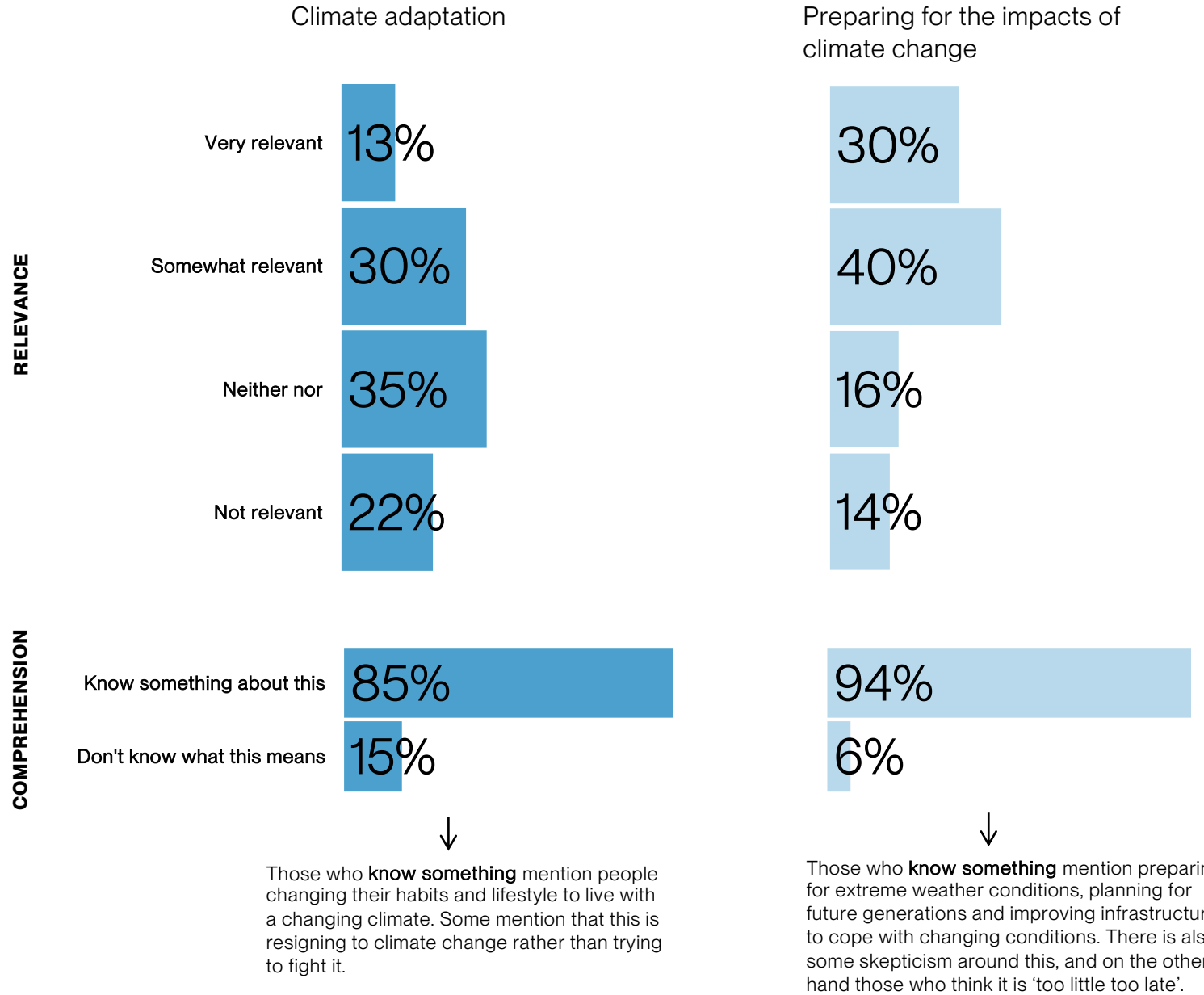
Q. How relevant is this statement to you?  
 What does this statement mean to you?  
 Base: Climate mitigation n=404  
 Reducing emissions n=411



# ‘Preparing for the impacts of climate change’ resonates more strongly than ‘climate adaptation’

‘Preparing for the impacts of climate change’ is less relevant for those aged 55+.

Q. How relevant is this statement to you?  
 What does this statement mean to you?  
 Base: Climate adaptation n=404  
 Preparing for the impacts of climate change n=411

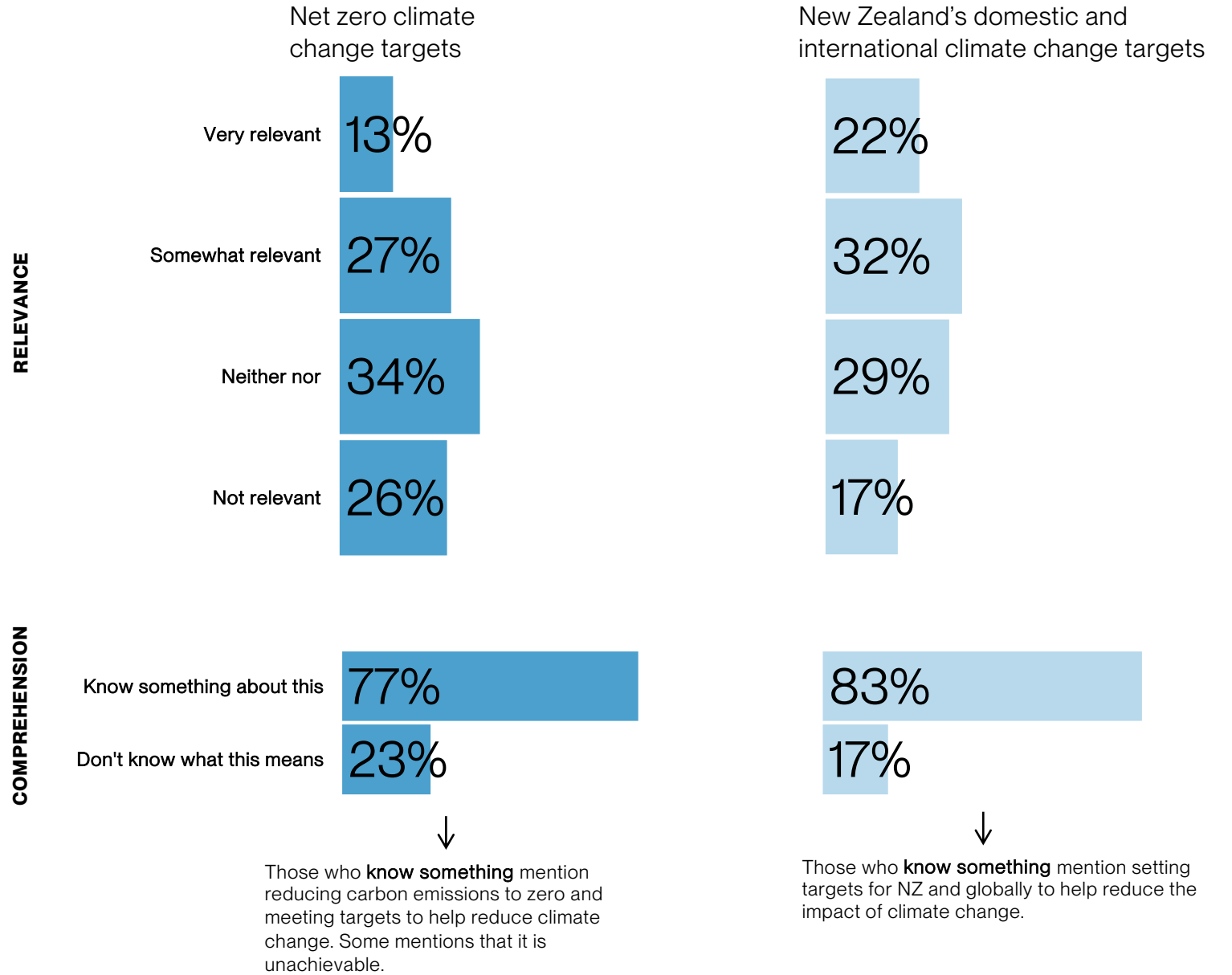


# Comprehension is light across both statements, but 'New Zealand's domestic and international climate change targets' feels more relevant

'Net zero climate change targets' has stronger relevance for those aged 35 to 54.

Q. How relevant is this statement to you? What does this statement mean to you?

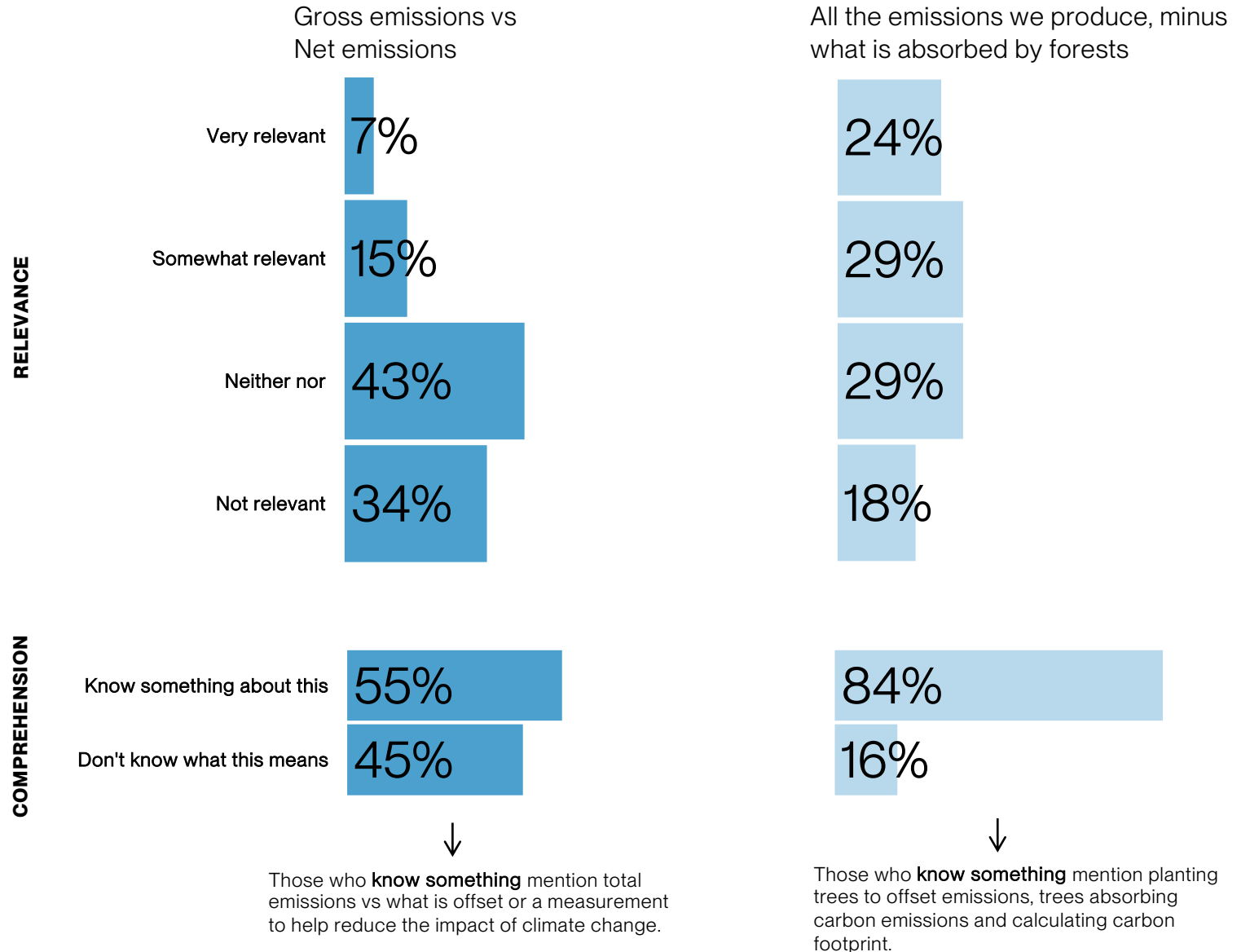
Base: Net zero climate change targets n=404  
New Zealand's domestic and international climate change targets n=411



# Very low understanding and relevance for 'Gross emissions vs net emissions'.

Q. How relevant is this statement to you? What does this statement mean to you?

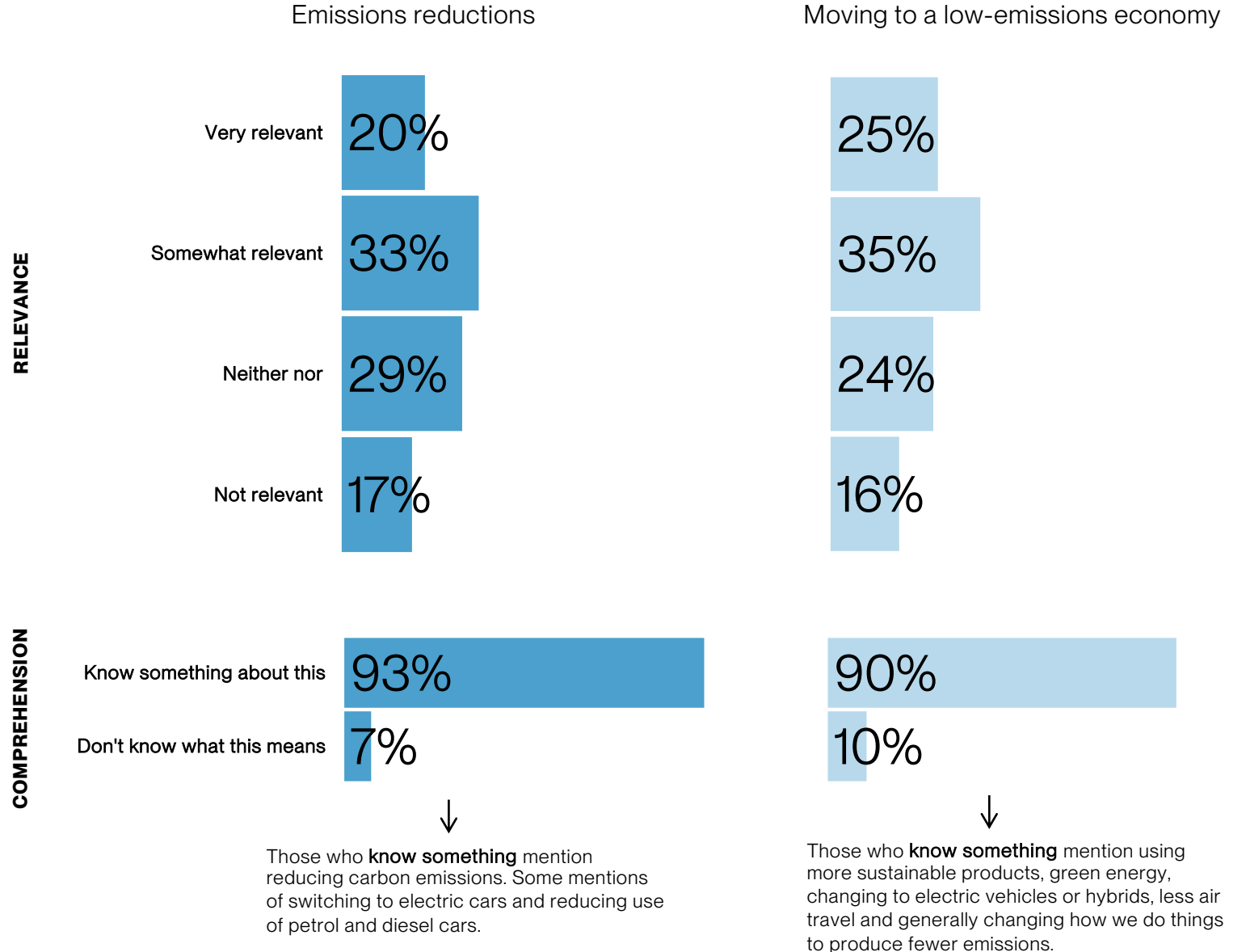
Base: Gross emissions vs net emissions n=404  
 All the emissions we produce, minus what is absorbed by forests n=411



# ‘Emissions reductions’ and ‘Moving to a low-emissions economy’ land with a similar impact. ‘Moving to a low-emissions economy’ has a broader interpretation.

Moving to a low-emissions economy has greater relevance for males and those aged 35 to 54.

Q. How relevant is this statement to you? What does this statement mean to you?  
 Base: Emissions reductions vs net emissions n=404  
 Moving to a low-emissions economy n=411



# Low comprehension and relevance for emissions trading scheme.

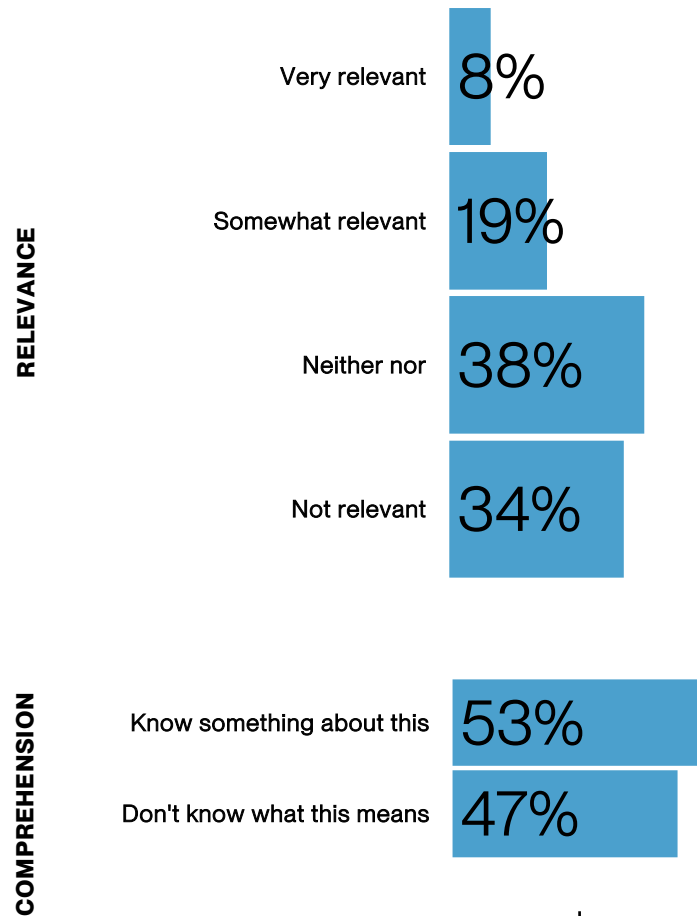
“Buying carbon credits for companies that produce a lot of emissions.”  
Female, 18-34 years

“This scheme helps organisations manage their emissions.”  
Female 35 -54 years

“Not too sure maybe offset emissions by planting trees.”  
Male 35-54 years

Q. How relevant is this statement to you?  
What does this statement mean to you?  
Base: Emissions trading schemes n=404

Emissions trading scheme



↓  
Those who **know something** mention buying credits to offset emissions, or generally helping companies to manage their emissions. Some interpreted it as a reward scheme for lowering emissions.

[Click here](#) for the full detail

**TRA**

New Zealand

Level 4, Quay Building,  
106-108 Quay Street,  
Britomart, Auckland 1010

+64 9 377 8129

Melbourne

The Commons,  
54 Wellington St,  
Collingwood VIC 3066

+61 406 482 715

Sydney

The Commons,  
285A Crown St,  
Surry Hills NSW 2010

+61 405 604 226