

## **How We Decide to Get Serious About Climate Solutions:** *Politics, Communication, and Framing*

# Psychology, Semantics, and Strategy: Accelerating Response to Climate Change

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# The Psychology of Responding to the Climate Crisis

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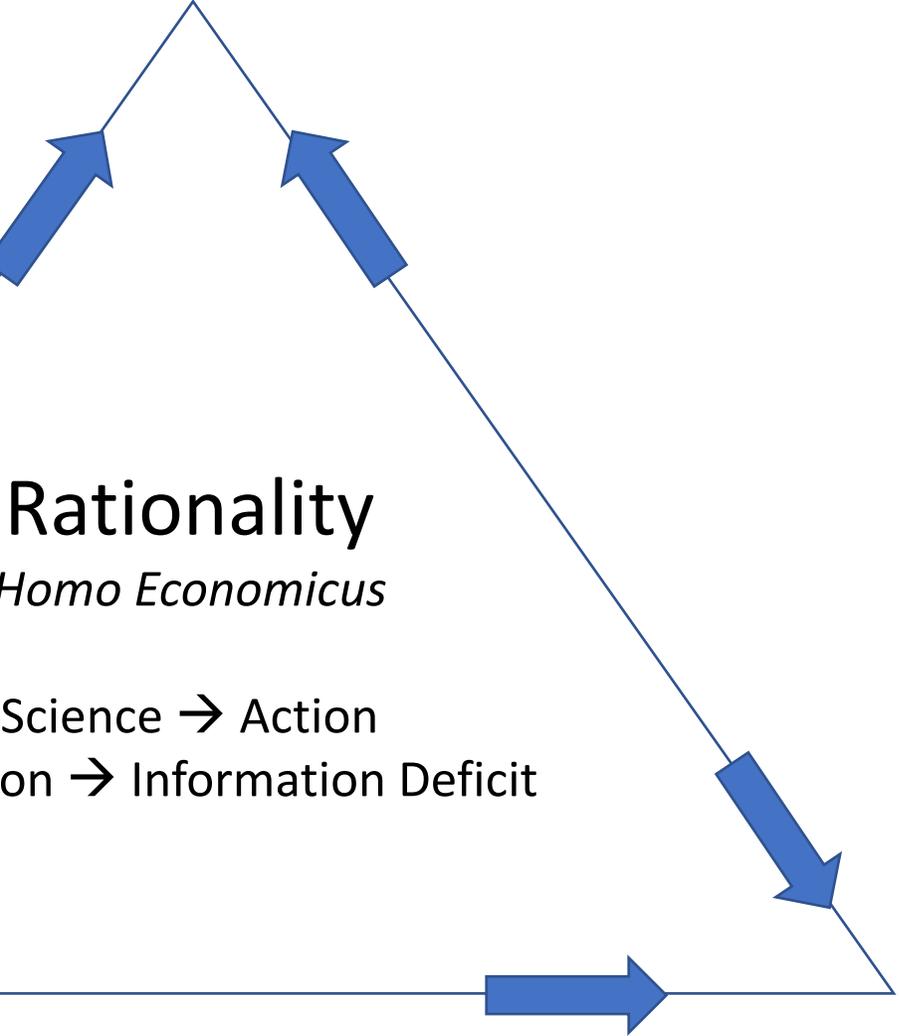
Professor of Psychology and Public Affairs

Princeton University

Climate Adaptation Forum

September 25, 2020

Behavior



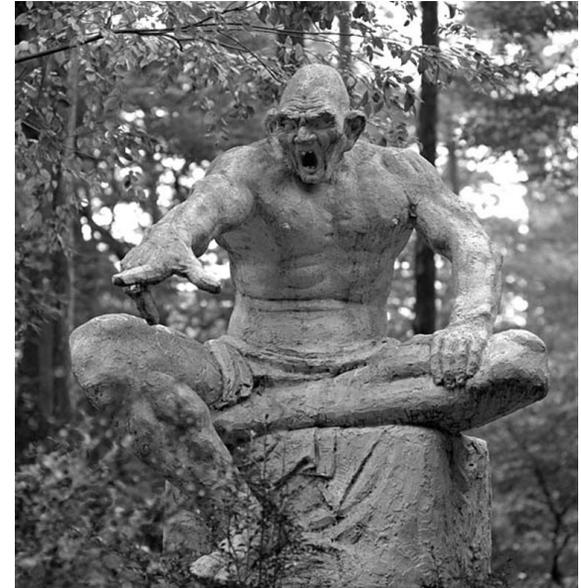
Energy

Environment



# Homo sapiens

- Not primarily a creature of rational deliberation
  - Instead, a creature of habit
- 
- Learn best from personal experience
  - Use associations, emotions, and rules to guide actions
  - Many, often conflicting goals



# Response to Climate Change

- **Risk** of negative consequences is abstract, statistical, in the future
- **Solution** requires sustained attention on many fronts and cooperation
  - No silver bullet, only silver buckshot



- **Cost** of action upfront, tangible, and certain
- **Benefits** of action uncertain and disputed, in the future

# Recipe for status-quo bias



Business as usual

- typically a conservative/safe option
- *not* true for climate change (and Covid-19)

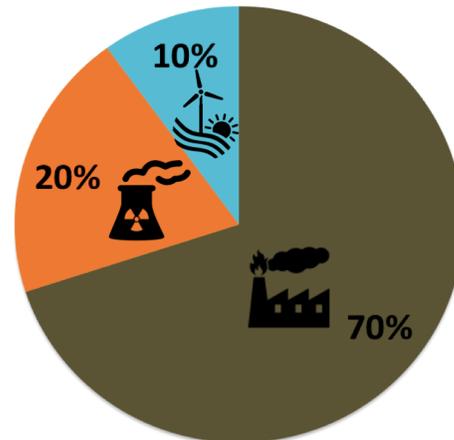
# Take Away 1: Communicate with *homo sapiens*

- Perceived norms matter!
  - “what is everyone else doing?”
    - Utilize social networks and identify influential nodes
- Utilize **full set of decision modes**
  - Calculation-based
  - Affect-based
  - Rule- and role-based

# Green Power Consumer Decision

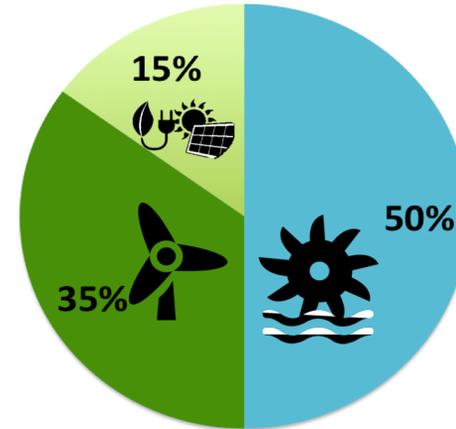
Reeck, Gamma, & Weber (2020)

Standard Power Option A



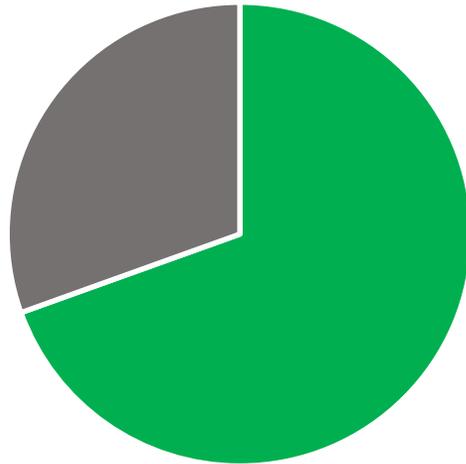
\$110 / CHF 110  
per month

Green Power Option B



\$130 / CHF 130  
per month

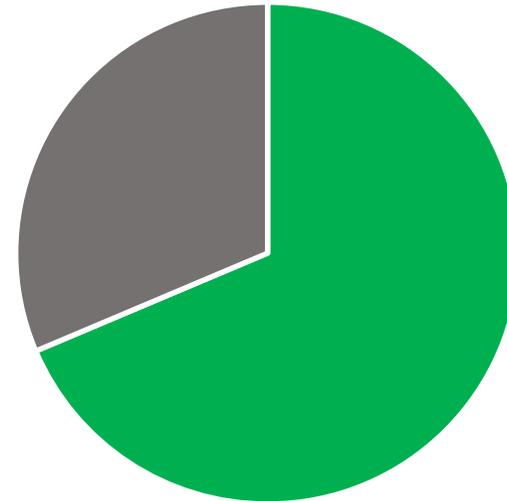
# Results – Choice



N =  
226



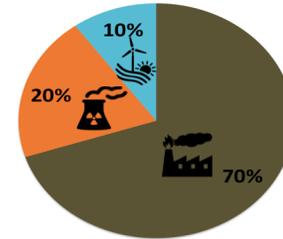
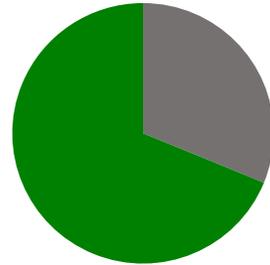
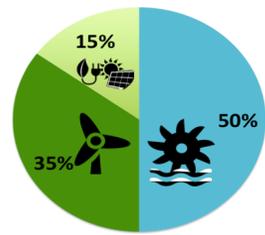
■ Green  
Power



N =  
132



# Predicting Green Choice from Decision Mode Use



N=226 -0.97\*\*\*

1.25\*\*\*

0.48\*

N=132 -0.94\*\*

1.24\*\*\*

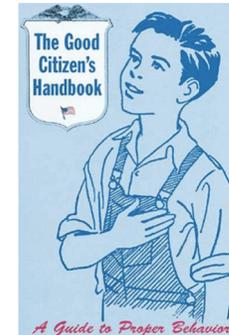
0.84\*\*



# Implications



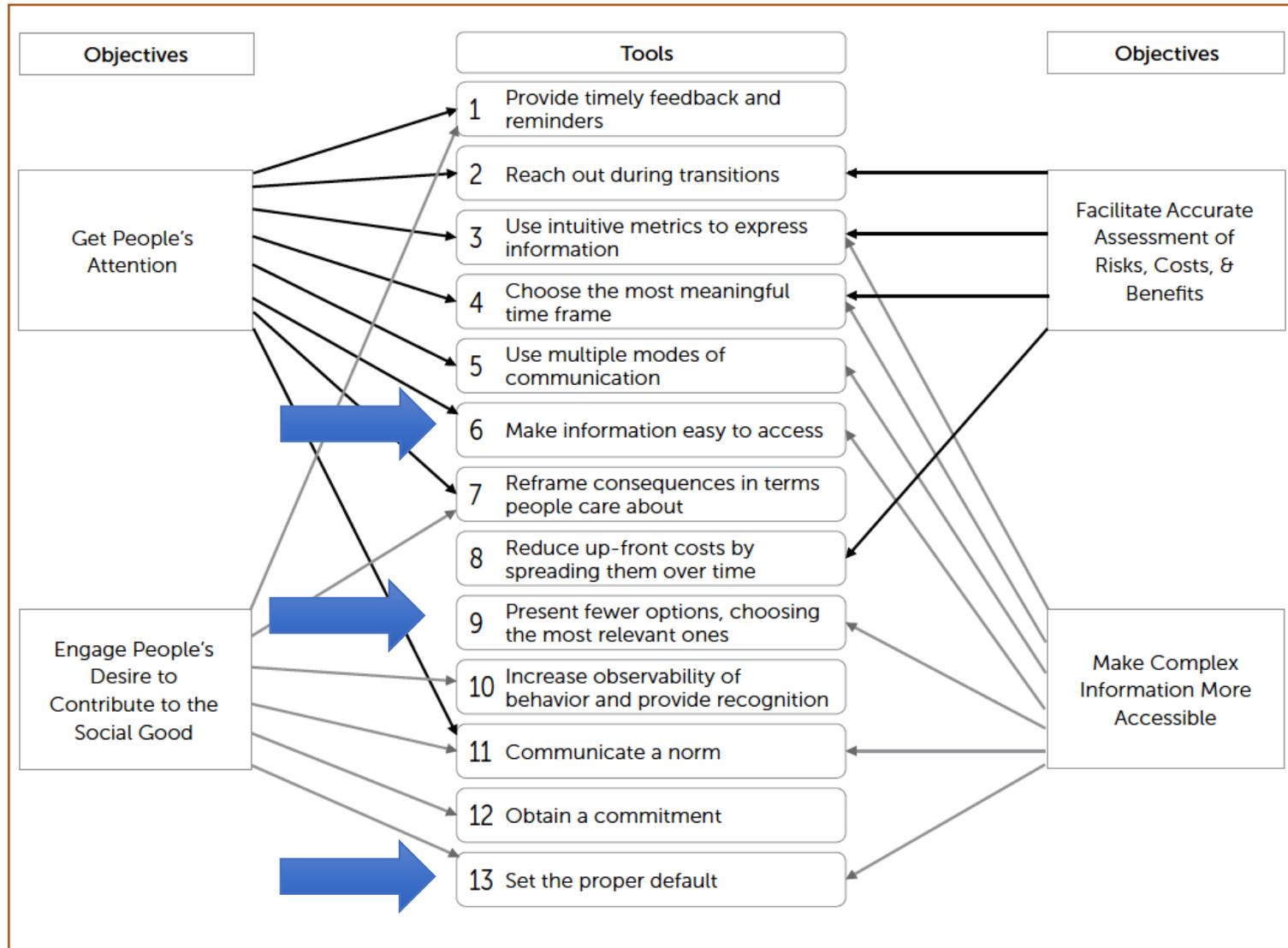
Davon ~~...~~ Include images/video that prime affect- and rule-based decision modes to promote green tariffs, not just a PDF informing about relative costs



# Take Away 2

- Make change simple
  - Set wise defaults
    - Operational settings, procurement systems

# Yoeli et al., Behavioural Science and Policy, 2017



# Take Away 3: Attract (scarce) attention

- Positive messaging!
  - Opportunities and gain, not duty and gloom
- Labels matter; metrics matter
  - “Carbon dividend” beats “carbon tax”; “carbon user-fee” has connotations of “polluter pays”
  - Climate actions have broad range of “co-benefits” to be emphasized instead or in addition
  - Measuring something brings attention and option to improve

*Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders  
November 2018 Open Letter*

Climate change is a major threat to our environment, societies and economy, endangering our well-being and prosperity.

But a prosperous, inclusive and low-carbon world is possible.

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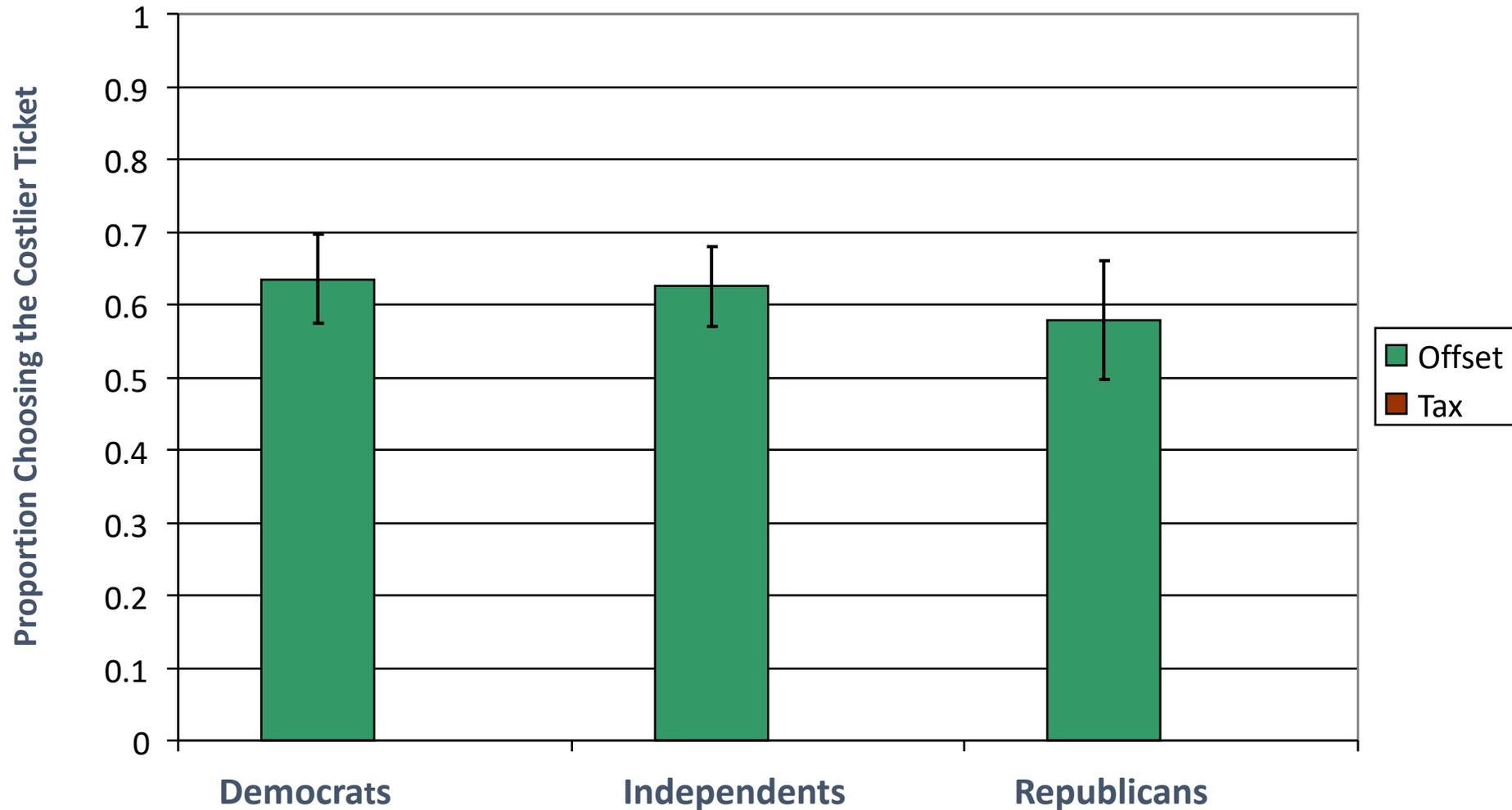
# Choice

Suppose you are purchasing a round trip flight from Los Angeles to New York city, and you are debating between two tickets, one of which includes a carbon tax [offset]. You are debating between the following two tickets, which are otherwise identical. Which would you choose?

| <b>Ticket A</b>   | <b>Ticket B</b>            |
|---|----------------------------|
| \$392.70 round trip ticket includes a carbon tax [offset] | \$385.00 round trip ticket |

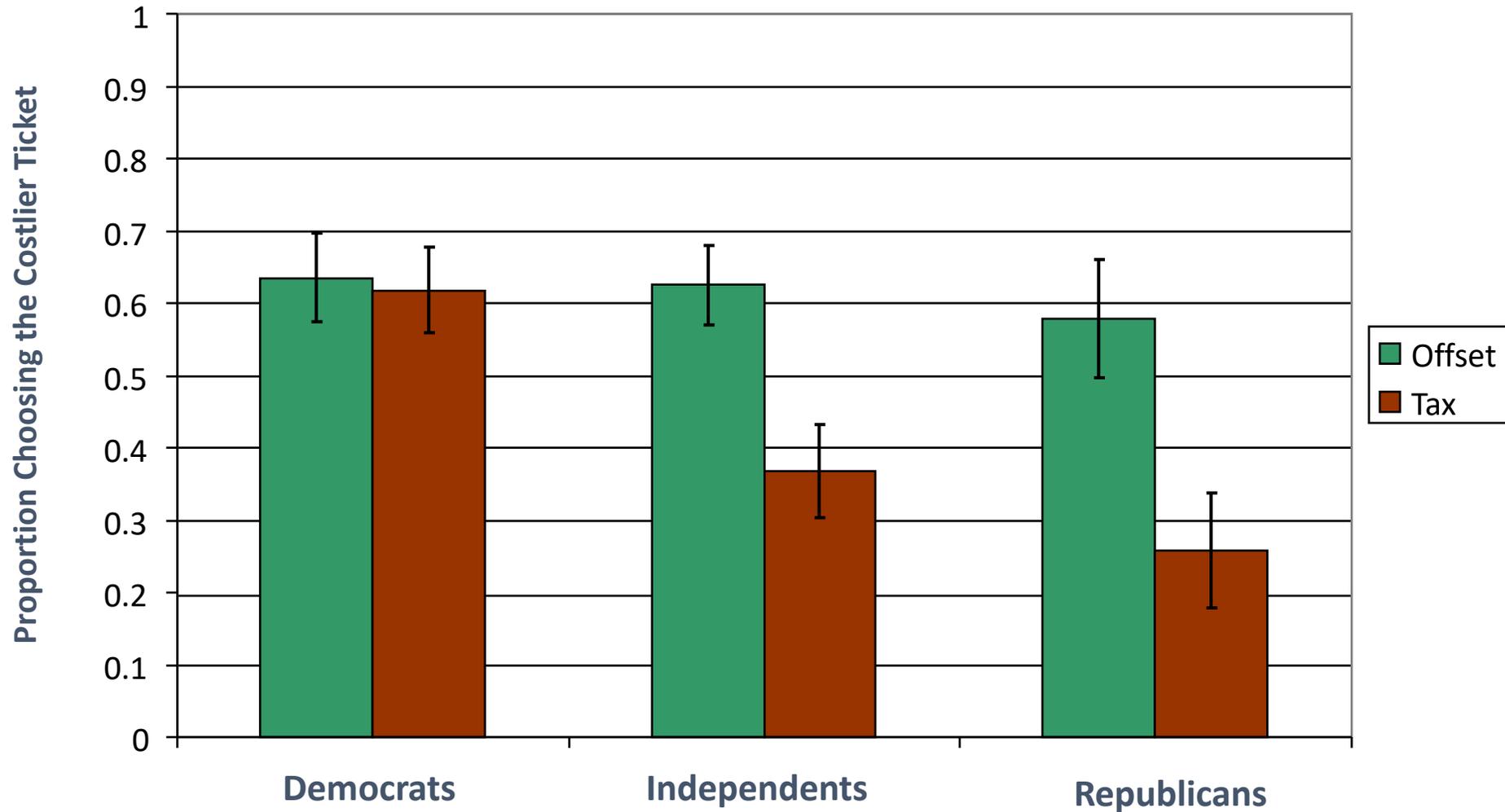
# Dirty Word or Dirty World study

(Hardisty, Johnson, Weber, *Psychological Science*, 2010)



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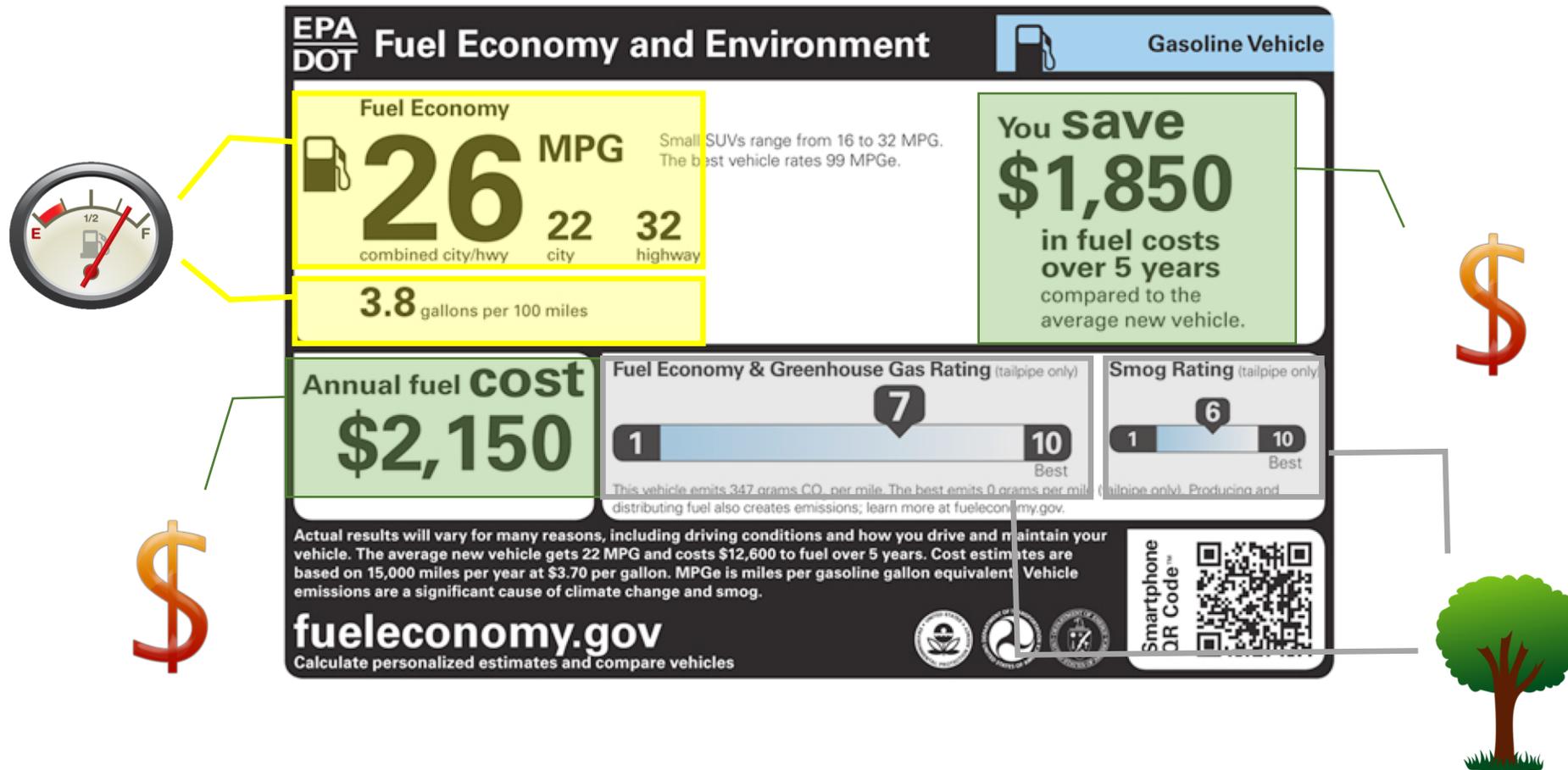


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# 2012 Redesign of EPA Fuel Economy Label

- Highly correlated attributes → bad idea?
- No! (Ungemach et al., Management Science, 2017)



# Take Away 4: Timing matters

- Utilize transitions (in leadership or job tenure, in physical location, in IT systems, etc.)
- Utilize crises to implement change
  - “Build Back Better”

# Can Behavioral Economics Save the World?

- Not single-handedly!
- Instead, need action on all fronts
  - Supply side innovation
  - Economic incentives
    - Price on carbon
    - Subsidies for renewable energy
  - Legal mandates
    - Efficiency standards
    - Renewable mandates
  - Demand side behavior change
    - Choice architecture
    - Social movements
    - Norm change
- Coordination and policy packages!



# THANK YOU for your (scarce) attention!

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