



# Like Asking A Dog To Climb A Tree: *Pursuing Hope in Chaotic Times*

*A Presentation to:*  
Mountain Town Planners

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# What I'd Like To Share With You

- I. This Presentation's Origin Story
- II. My Basic Hypothesis
- III. The Need for Hope
- IV. Two Foundational Questions
- V. Resident Survey
- VI. Conclusions
- VII. Encouraging Hope
- VIII. Next Steps

# This Presentation's Origin Story

- 22 Years Ago
  - Same problems; no answers
  - Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?
- Last Year – I
  - MRTPS speech
- Last Year – II
  - Running for re-election; so much despair
- This Past Spring
  - Funding for a survey
- Wednesday Night
  - Corrie DiManno
- Yesterday
  - Jordan Katcher

# My Basic Hypothesis

## *What distinguishes our communities?*

- Few folks move to mountain towns for the work
  - Instead, it's because something speaks to us about the place
- High school with a ton of money
  - Hormonal – great passion
- The upside: The extraordinary feeling of being in *THE* place you were meant to be
- The downside: Bad things still happen in paradise
  - We're still humans, even at elevation
  - Imperfections → High angst → high rates of suicide, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc.
  - All this and more compounded by the rapid growth and change sweeping over our communities

# My Basic Hypothesis (cont.)

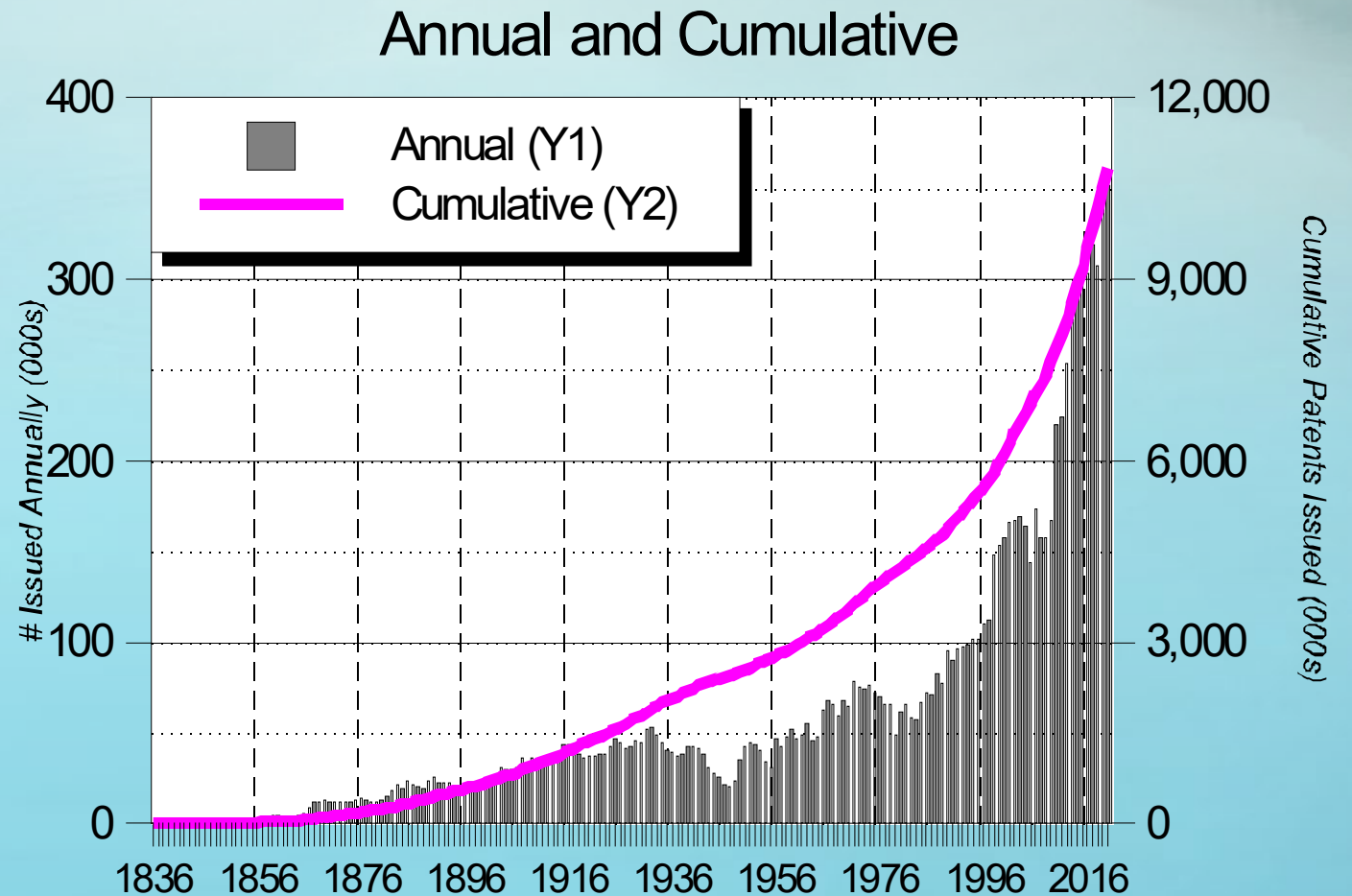
- Historically, geographic isolation has been the seminal quality shaping our communities
  - Economically
  - Culturally
  - Character
- Technology is rendering that isolation increasingly less relevant, and doing so at an increasingly rapid pace
- We sense this, but don't understand it. Nor do we have the tools to deal with it
- As a result, the ground is rapidly shifting under our feet, and we feel helpless in its wake

# My Basic Hypothesis (cont.)

## *The pace of technologic progress*

- 1980s – PCs & faxes
- 1990s – Internet & cell phones
- 2000s – Smartphones & high-speed internet
- 2010s – AirBnB; remote working stretches, frays, and increasingly cuts the umbilical cord connecting work and home

### US Patents Issued: 1836-2020



# My Basic Hypothesis (cont.)

- 2020 – COVID pours gasoline on a fire already burning hot
  - COVID migrants, rising real estate prices, massive displacements of all sorts, social isolation. And endless wave of pressures and no ready relief
- 2022 – All this comes to a head at the same time I'm up for re-election
- My impression: My friends, neighbors, constituents are in a bad way
  - A feeling of helplessness, of deep angst and despair about the community they love and their role in it

# The Need For Hope





# Hope – What Is It?

- “A feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen” – *Oxford English Dictionary*
- “To cherish a desire with anticipation” – *Merriam-Webster*
- Two components:
  - Feeling; i.e., desire
  - Temporal; i.e., looking to future
- “Hope” is not “optimism”
  - “Optimism” = “the belief one’s circumstances will get better”
  - “Hope” = “the belief an individual can make things better”
- “Hope” is the opposite of “despair”
  - “The complete loss or absence of hope..” – *OED*



# Hope – Why Does It Matter?

- “Hope is an important scientific concept... and just might just be the most important emotion in the equation of broader economic, social, and political consequences...” – *Carol Graham, Brookings Institute*
- “Hope can be an opportunity for us to process events that seem insurmountable.” – *Adam Stern, Harvard Medical School*
- Dunno about you, but in my Mountain Town we face a number of issues that seem insurmountable...



# Hope – Do We Have It?



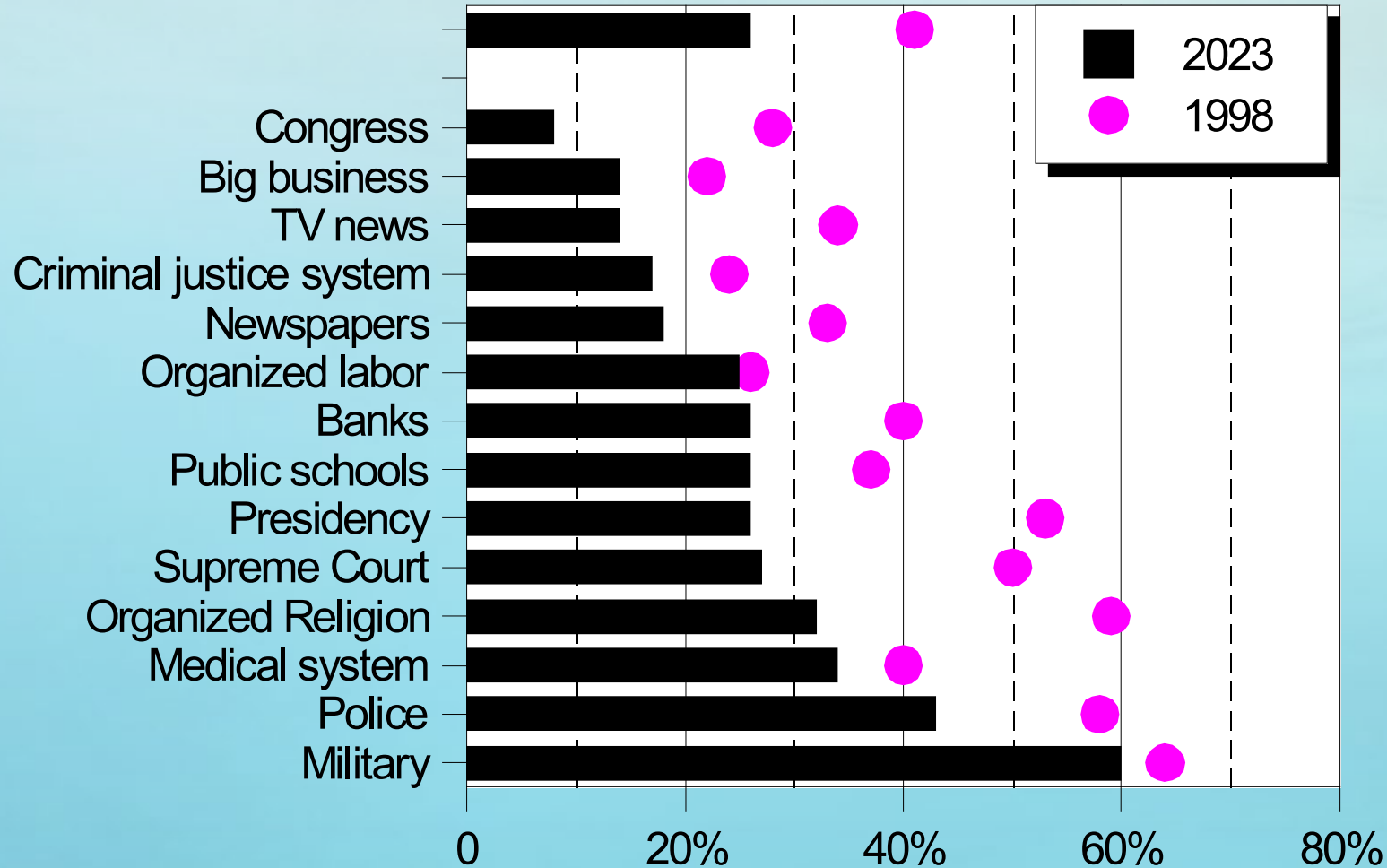
**Americans' Satisfaction With the Way Things Are Going in the U.S.**



GALLUP®

# Hope – Do We Have It? (cont.)

## Gallup Survey of Confidence in Institutions Percent Responding "A Great Deal" or "Quite a Lot"



# Two Foundational Questions

- Signal or noise?
  - Are the people I encountered during my campaign really that discombobulated, or is it just the usual whining?
- If something is going on, what can/should be done? By whom?
  - Equally critical, what should we NOT do?

# Survey Context

## *Vision Statement of Jackson/Teton County Comp Plan*

- 21 well-chosen words laying out where we want our community to be
  - First adopted in 2012; affirmed in 2020
- “Preserve and protect the area’s ecosystem...”
  - The first six words are the Vision’s essence
- “...in order to ensure a healthy environment, community and economy for current and future generations.”
  - The final 15 words are the Vision’s rationale

# Survey Background

## *Two goals*

- Better understand how residents feel about our region
  - One community; two states; three counties
- Create a baseline of understanding to measure progress & change over time
  - Best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago
  - The survey will be repeated in coming years

# Survey Background

## *Two framing concepts*

- #1. Three foci of Comp Plan Vision
  - Healthy environment
  - Healthy community
  - Healthy economy
- #2. Three basic questions of strategic planning
  - Where are we?
  - Where do we want to be?
  - How do we get there?
- The survey focused on Question #1: **“Where are we?”**
  - Develop a baseline of information about our community/region
  - If we don't know where we are, we can't judge progress towards where we want to be
    - Per the Comp Plan Vision, we're doing this for both current and future generations...



# Survey Background

## *One survey; two survey methods*

- Random phone calls to residents of the three county region
  - Mix of land lines, cell phones, & text responses
  - 350 total respondents
  - The focus of this presentation
- Open-to-all on-line survey
  - ~900 total responses
  - Suggestive, but not scientific
  - Chance for everyone interested to participate; curious about how on-line results compare to telephone
- All told, >1,200 responses from a region with ~38,000 residents aged 18 or older (~3%)

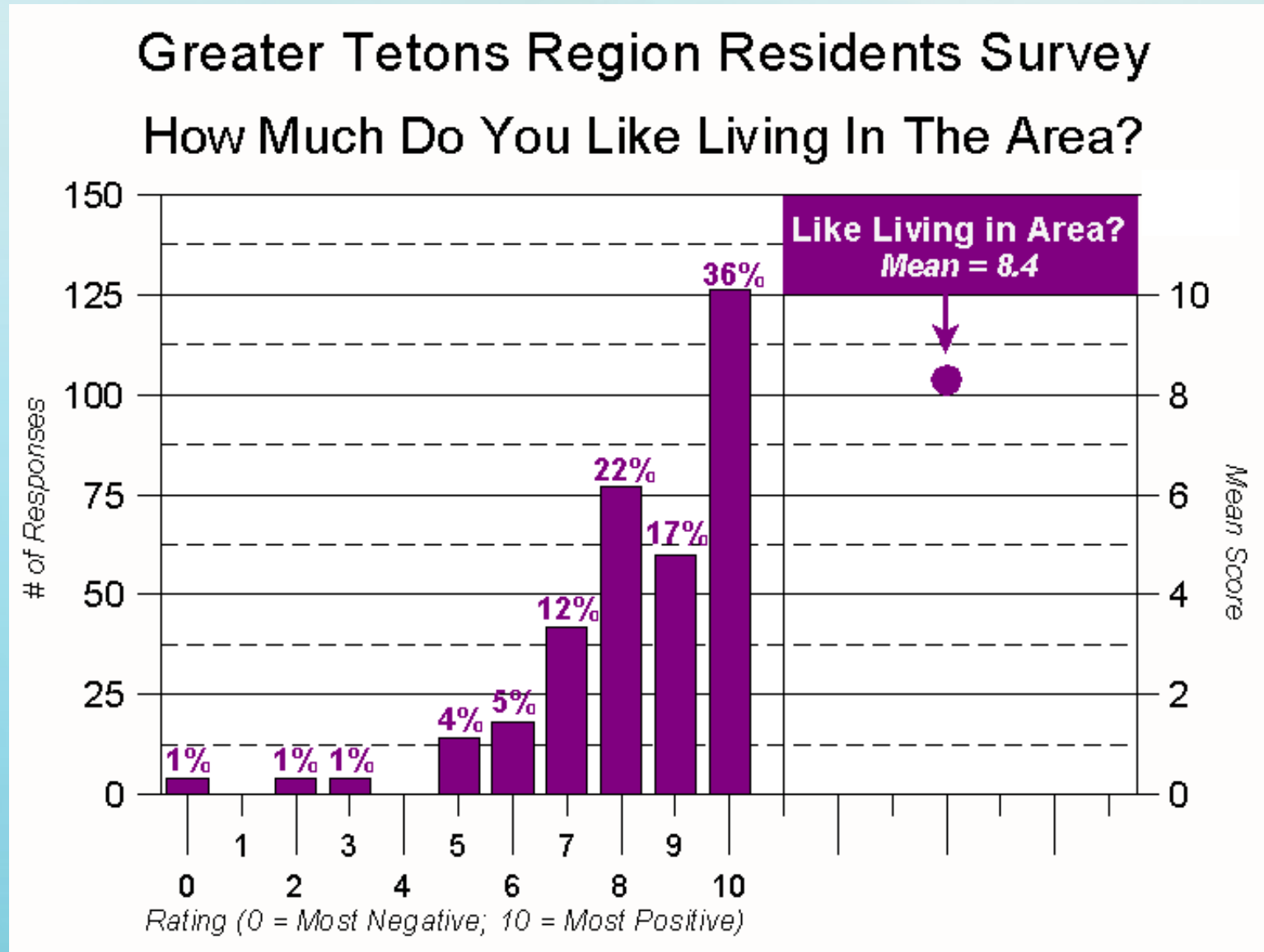
# Phone Survey Basics: Demographics

- A decent match to Census data
  - Post-collection, the responses were weighted to better reflect the make-up of the region
- Two clear disconnects (to be addressed in future surveys)
  - Fewer younger people (ages 18-34) than total population
  - Fewer Latinos
- Phone survey margin of error = 5.2%
- With a sample size of 350, results are statistically valid for region; suggestive for sub-groups

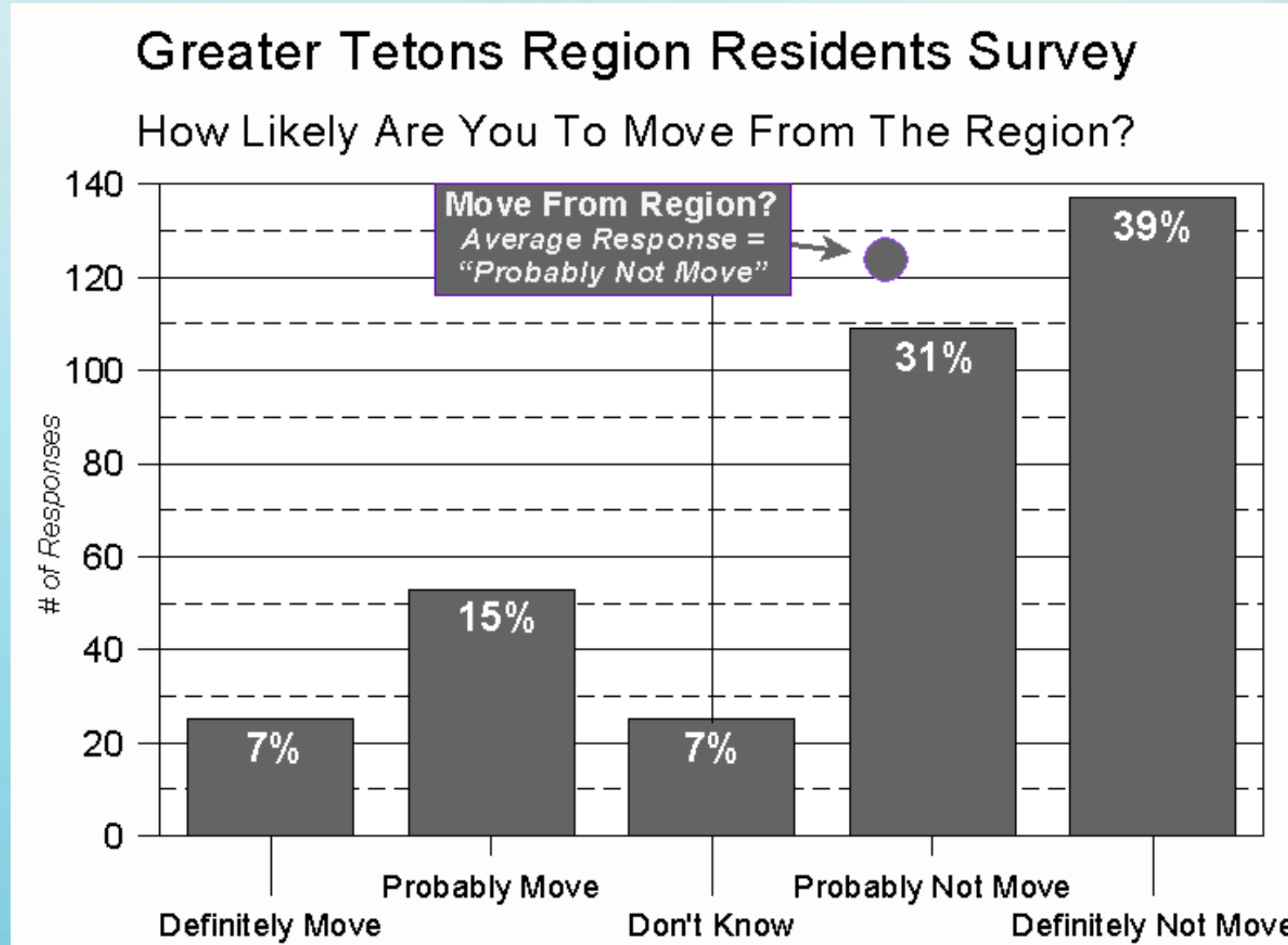
# The Findings: Four Key Takeaways

*(Note: the following findings are exclusively from the randomized telephone survey)*

# Key Takeaway 1a: The Region *Residents love living in the Greater Tetons Region...*



# Key Takeaway 1b: The Region *...and most can't imagine moving away*

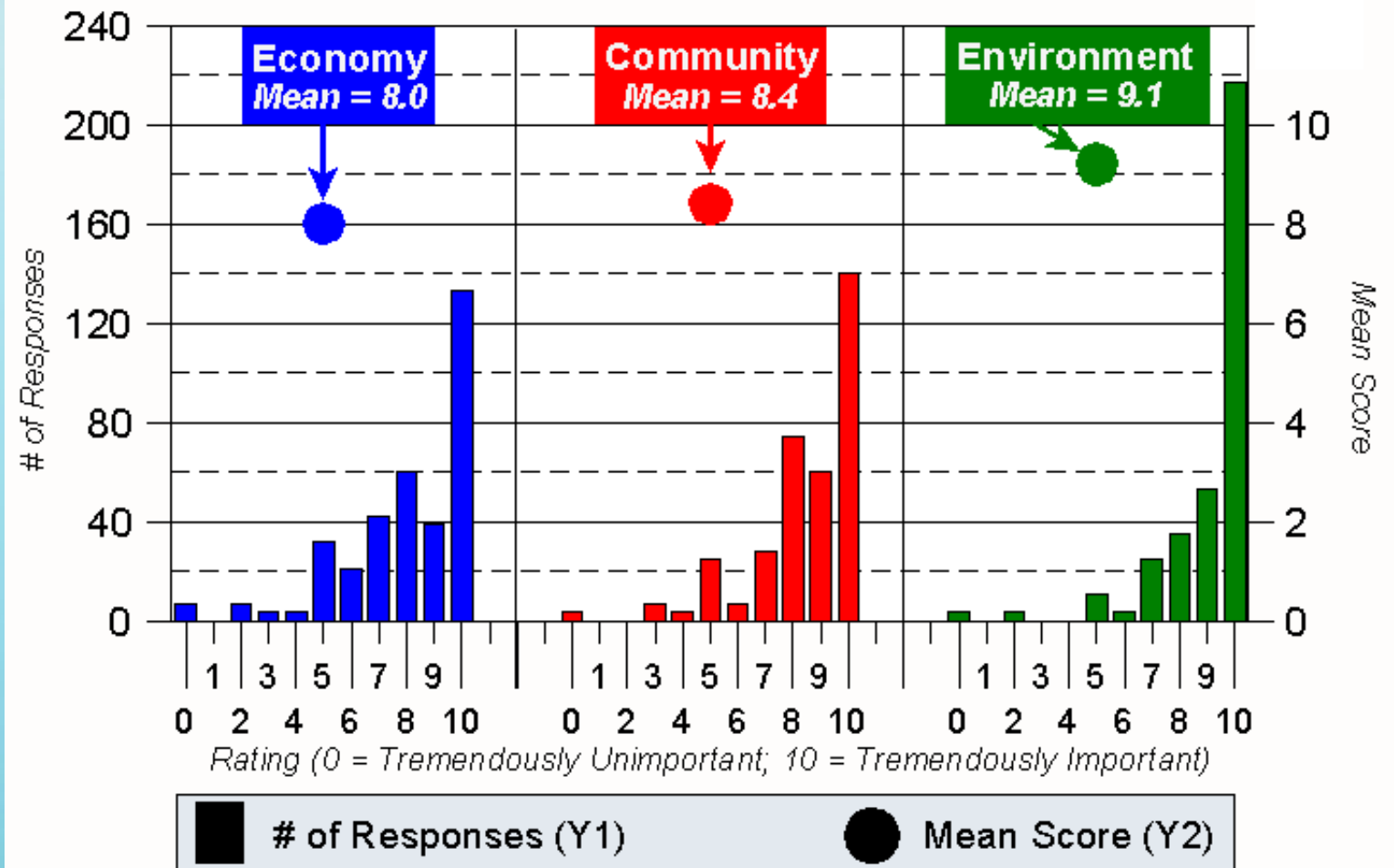


# Key Takeaway 2a: Our “Why?” Is Our Environment

*Environment, community, and economy – in that order*

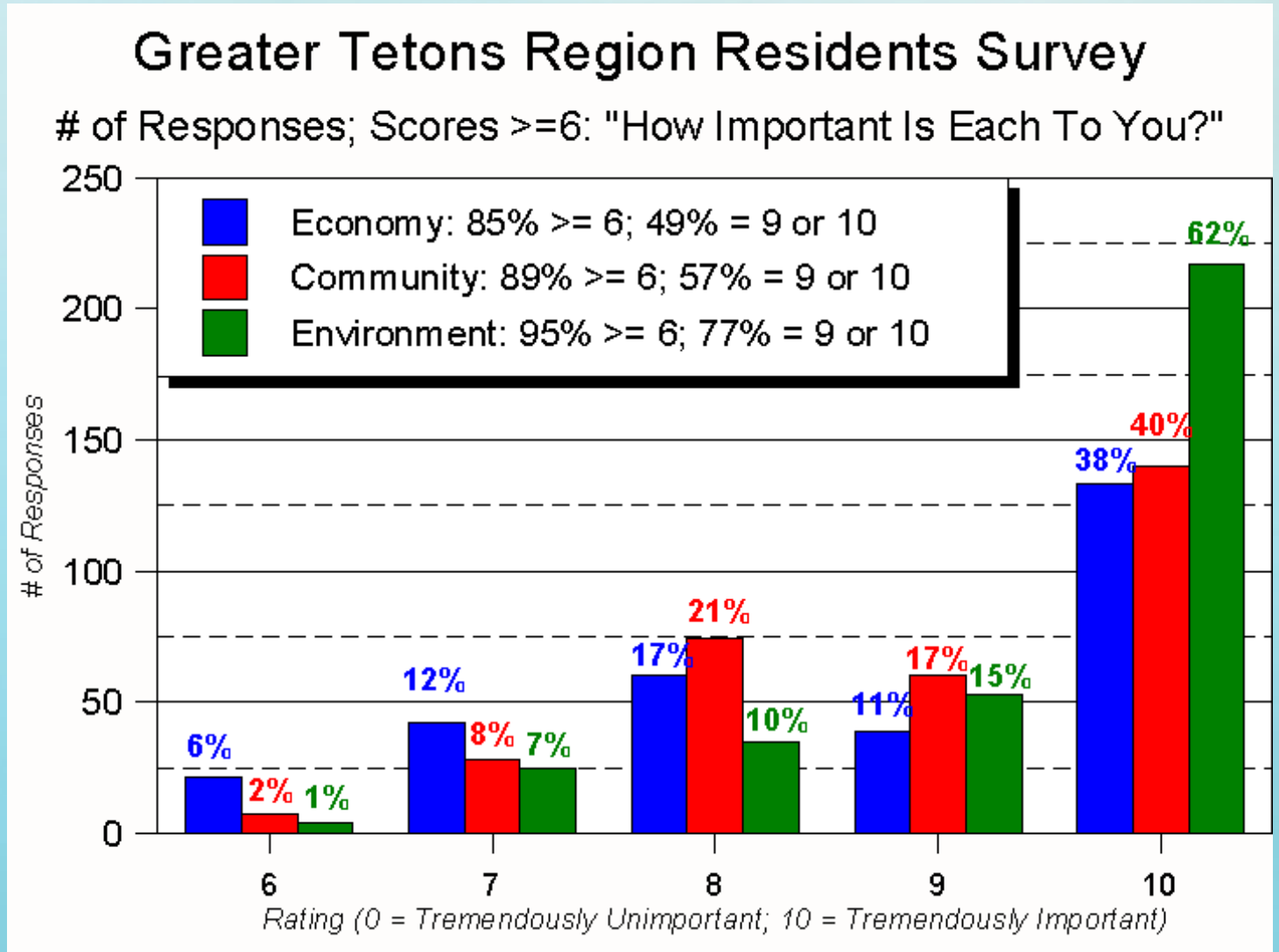
## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

### How Important Is Each To You?



# Key Takeaway 2b: Our “Why?” Is Our Environment

*The environment is residents’ passion & priority.  
A validation of Comp Plan’s Vision Statement*

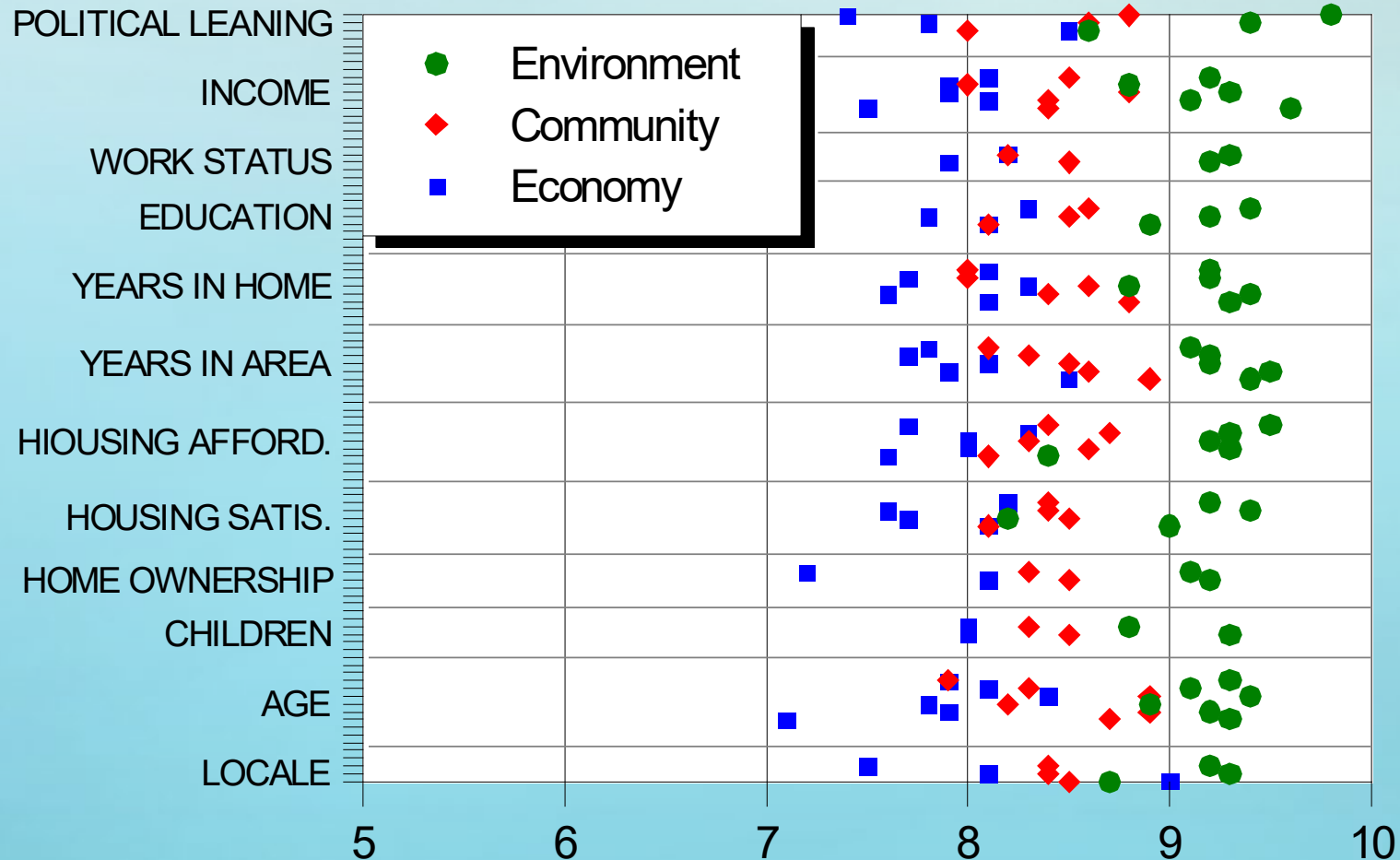


# Key Takeaway 2c: Environment is Everyone's "Why?"

*Outscores Economy & Community among 46 of 47 groups*

## Greater Tetons Area Resident Survey 2023

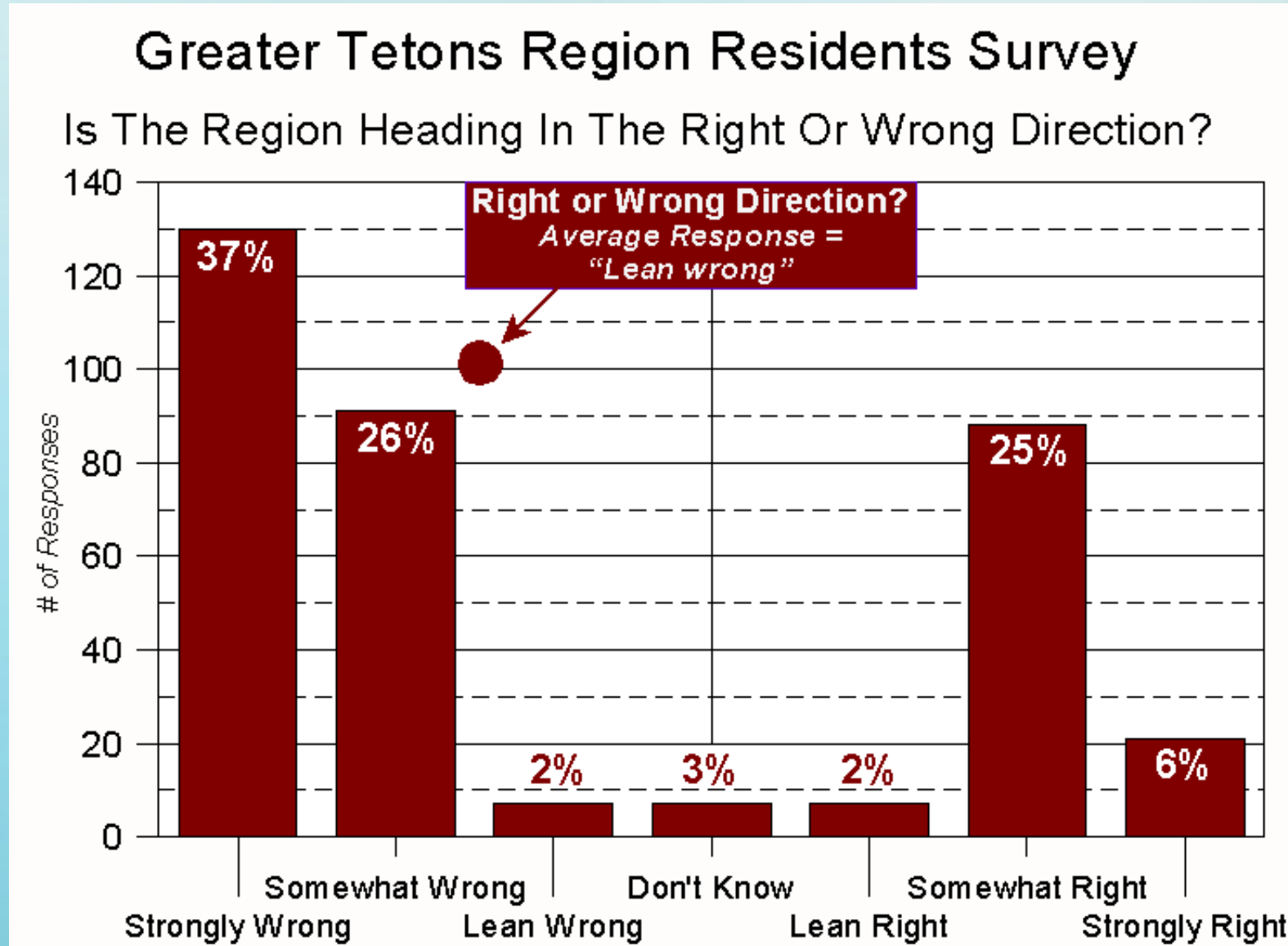
"How Important Is It To You?" Scores, by Demographic





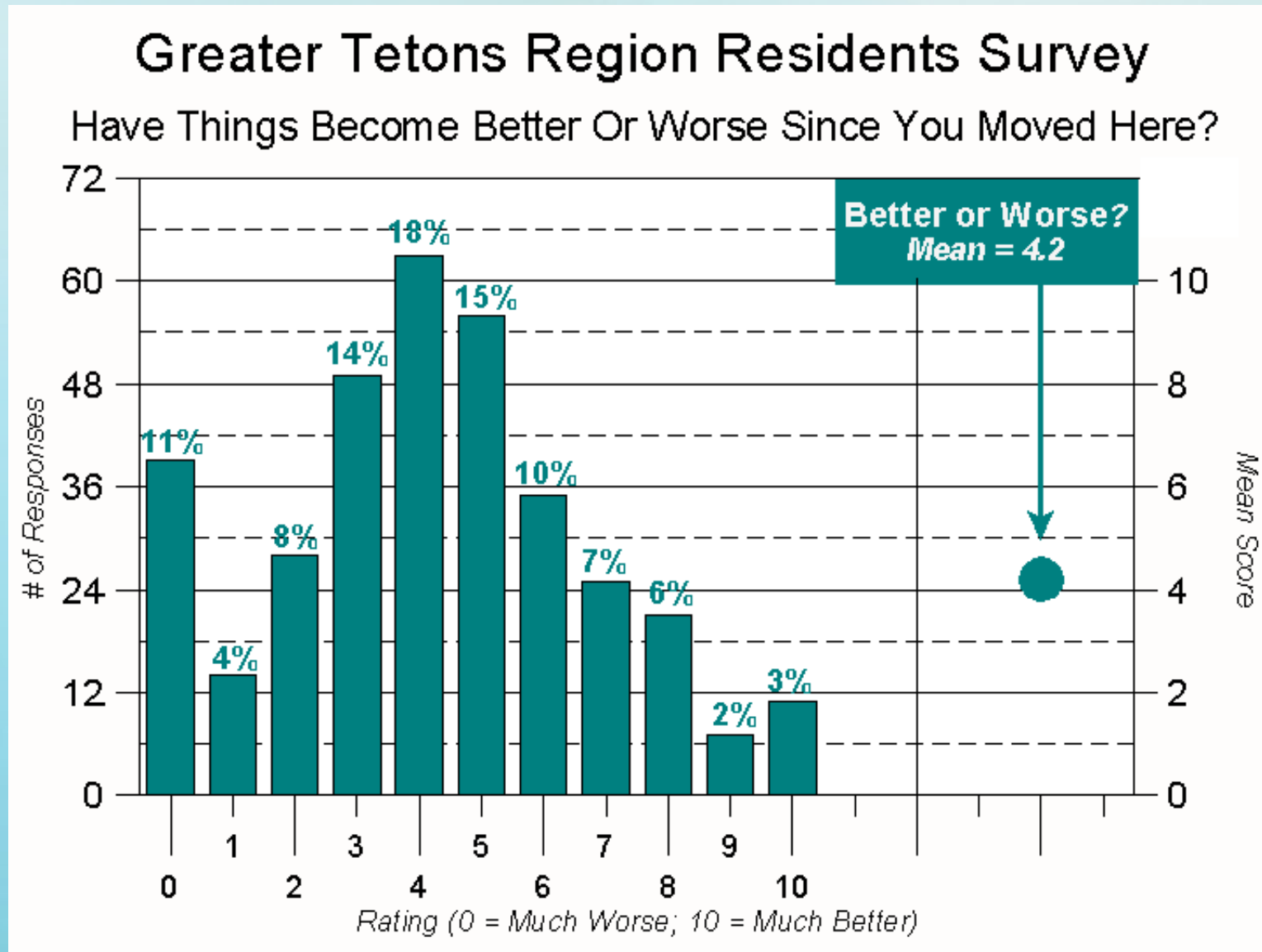
# Key Takeaway 3a: Where Are We?

*Residents are concerned about the region's future...*



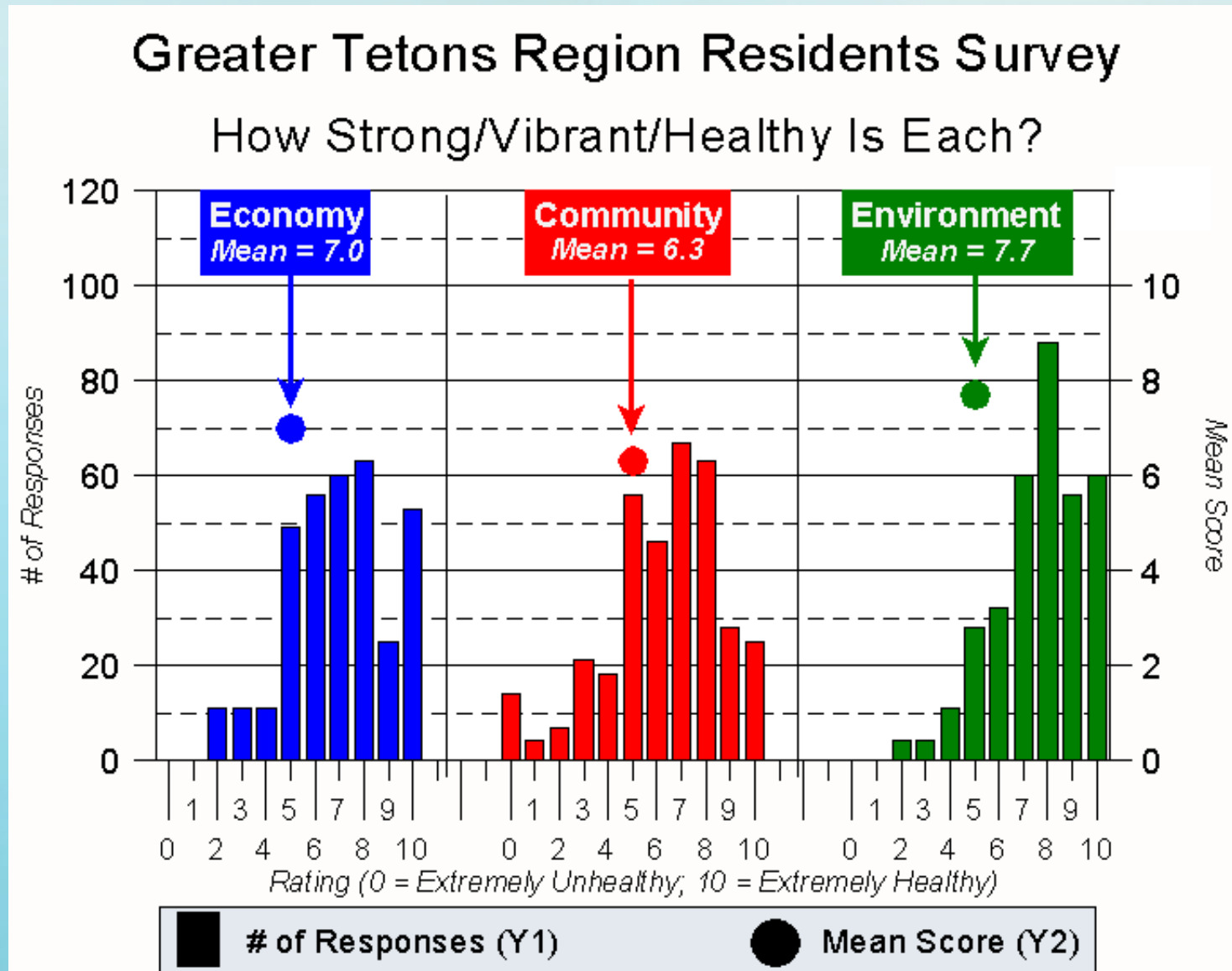
# Key Takeaway 3b: Where Are We?

*...because they feel things have gotten worse over time*



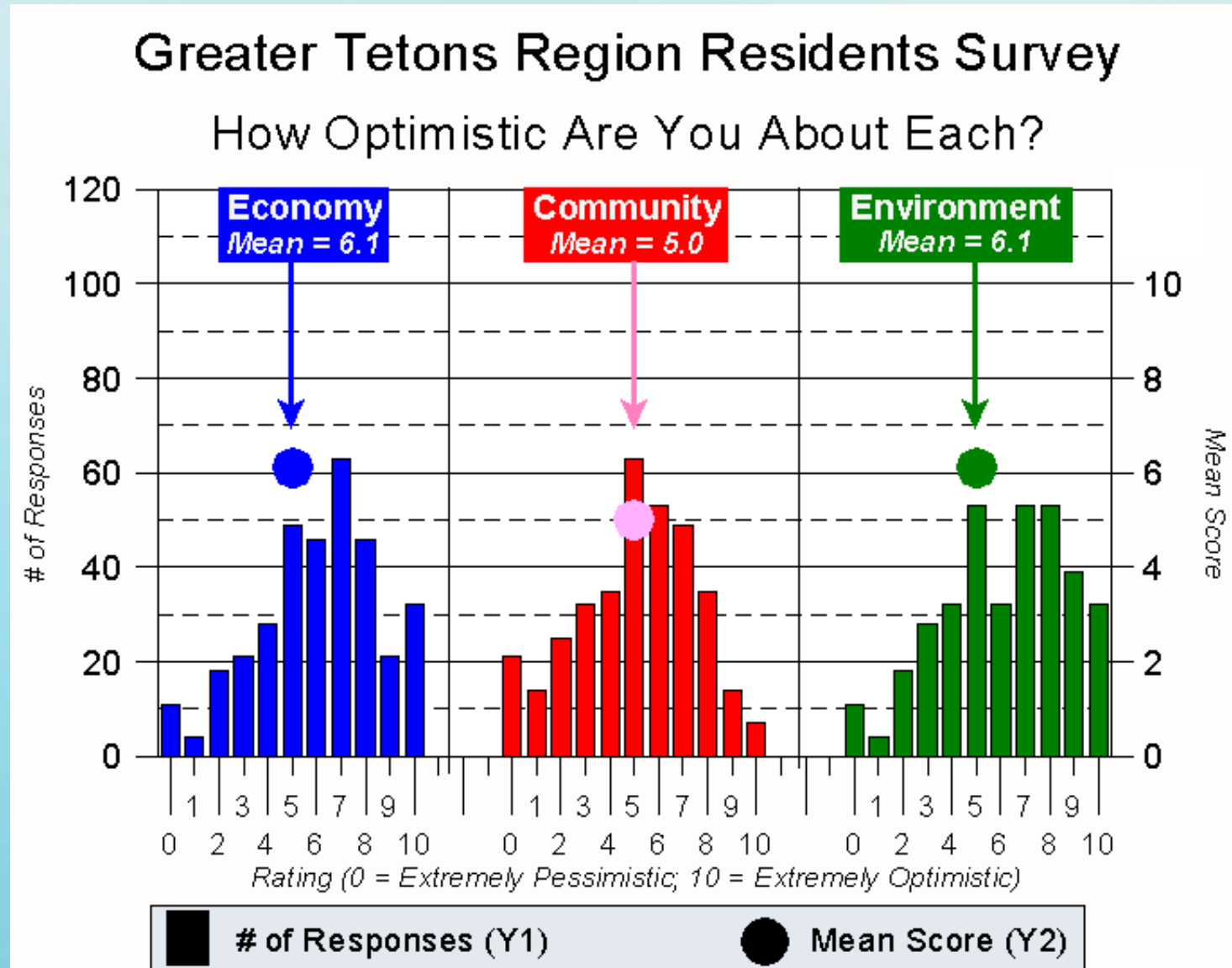
# Key Takeaway 4a: Our Trajectory

*While residents feel things are reasonably healthy now...*



# Key Takeaway 4b: Our Trajectory

*...they're less optimistic about where things are heading*



# Why We Feel The Way We Do

## *Open-ended responses*

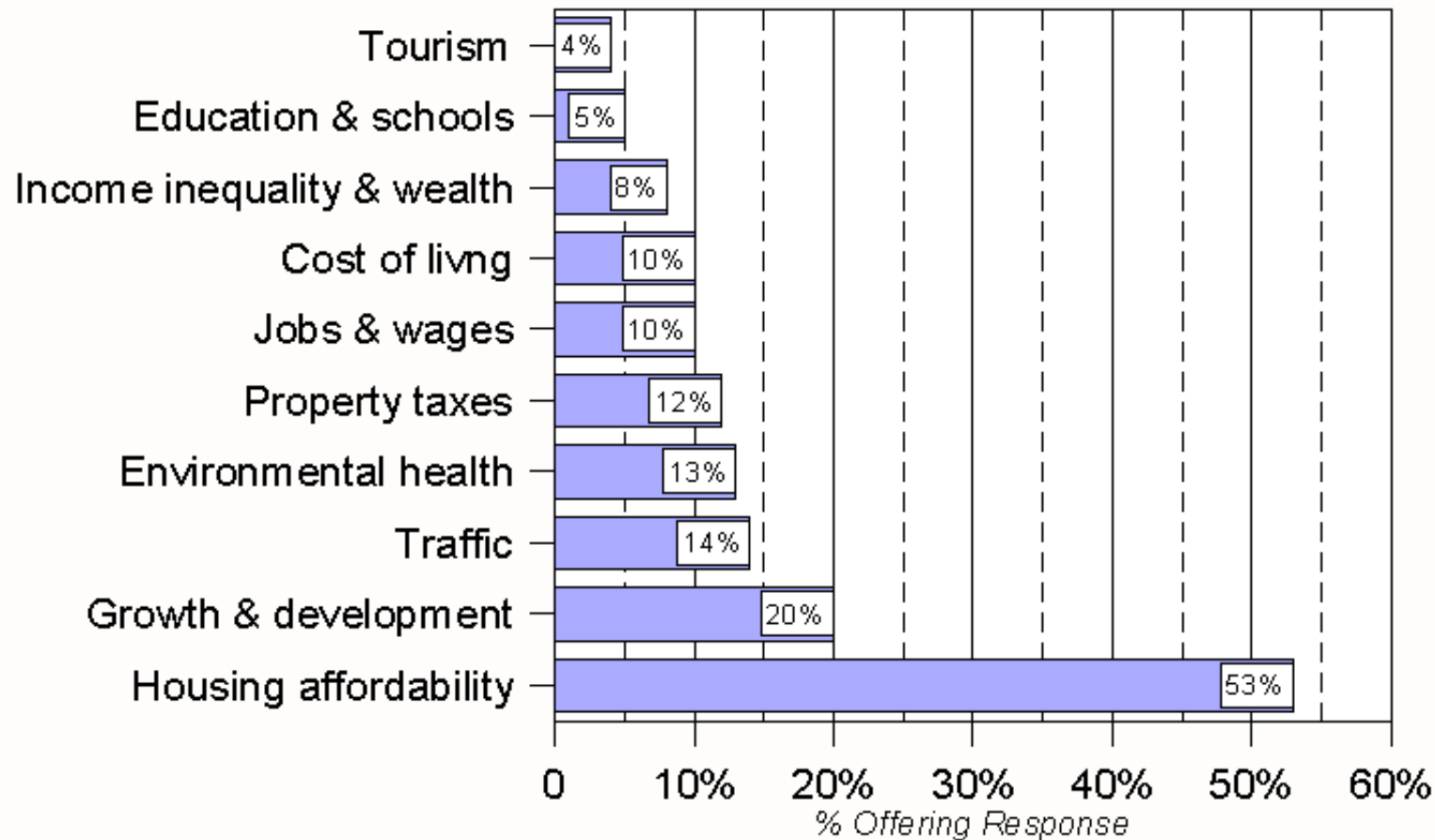
- Each survey had 8 open-ended questions:
  - Most important issues/opportunities/challenges facing region
  - Things you like about living in region
  - Things you dislike about living in region
  - Why you might move away from region
  - How has region become better since you moved here?
  - How has region become worse since you moved here?
  - What's one thing you would do to ensure best possible future for region?
  - Anything else you'd like to share?
- Over 2,500 total responses

# Comments 1: Most Important Issues

*Housing affordability easily topped the list*

## Greater Tetons Area Residents Survey 2023

### Respondents' Top 10 Major Issues

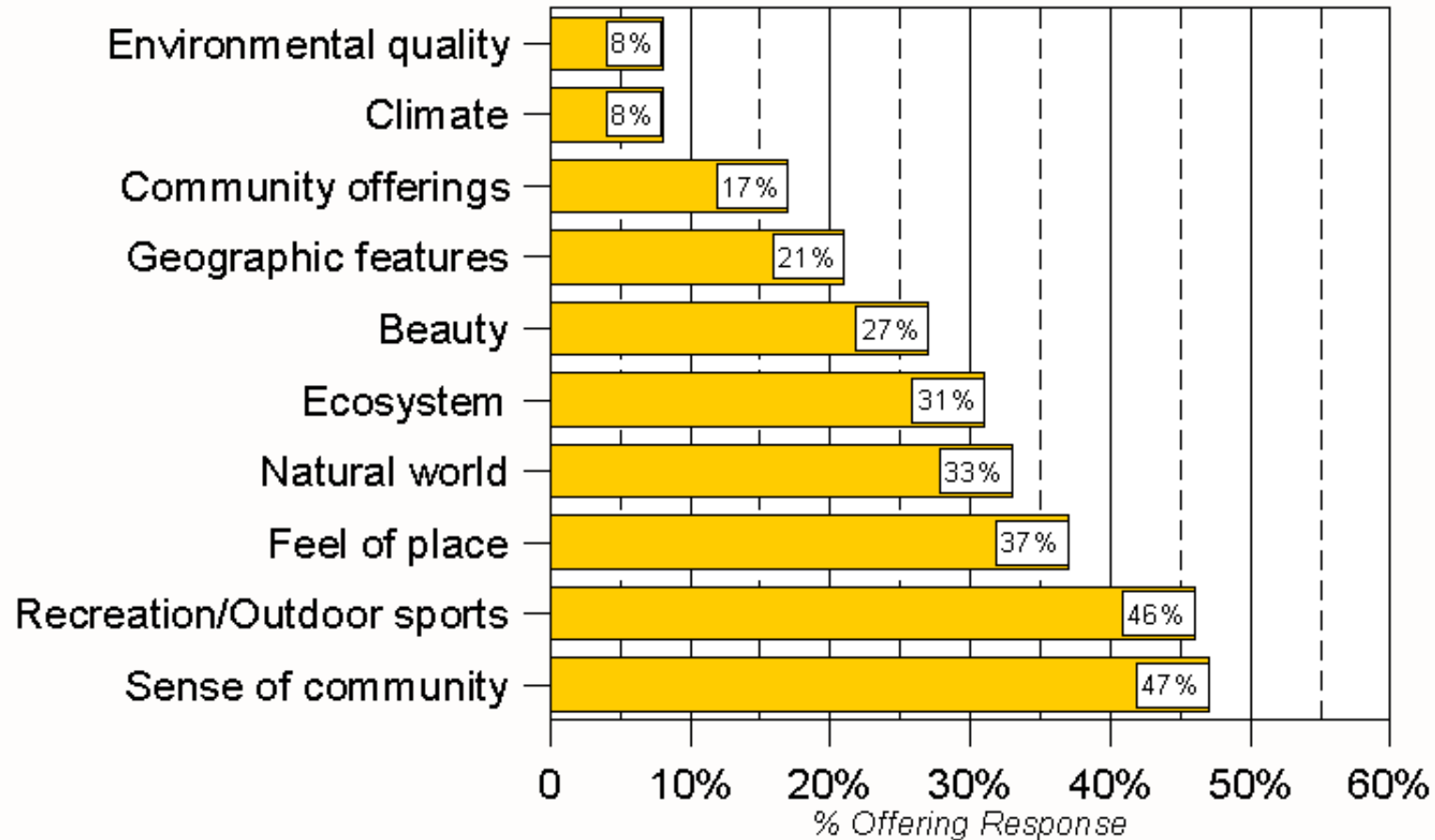


# Comments 2: Like About Living In Region

## *Environment and sense of community*

### Greater Tetons Area Residents Survey 2023

#### Respondents' Top 10 Things They Like About Area

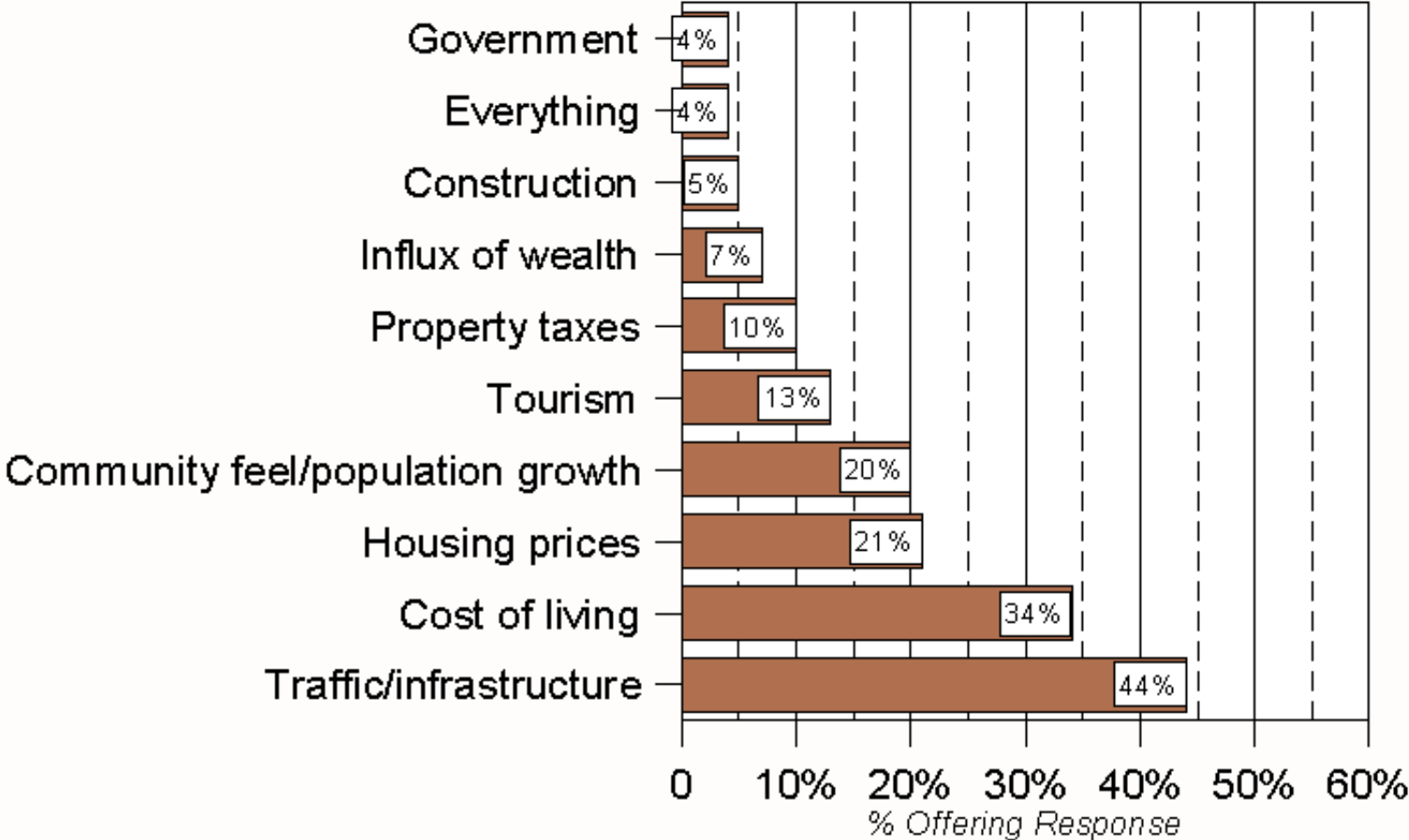


# Comments 3: Dislike About Living In Region

*Traffic; growth; cost of living in all its flavors*

## Greater Tetons Area Residents Survey 2023

Respondents' Top 10 Things They Dislike About Area





# The On-Line Survey

*The results are suggestive, not scientific*

- The on-line survey had two goals:
  - Let anyone interested in the region's future express their views
  - See how results compared to random telephone survey

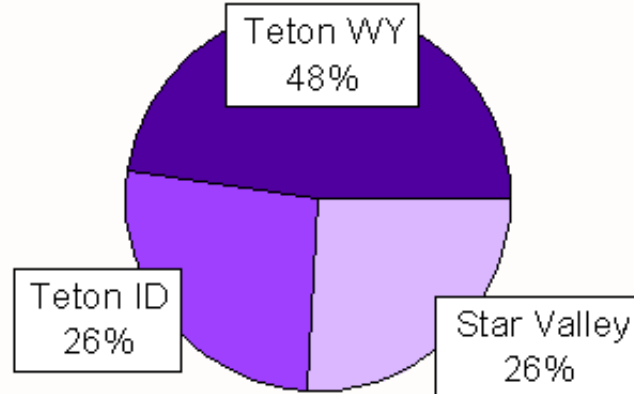
# The On-Line Survey

*It captured a different audience*

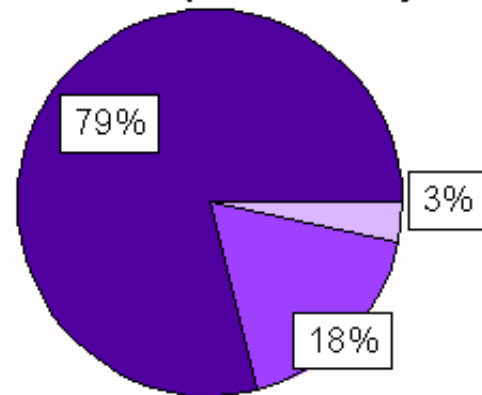
## Greater Tetons Area Resident Survey 2023

### Where Do You Live?

**Phone (350 total)**

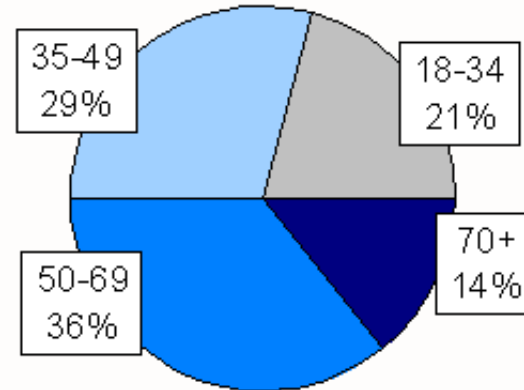


**On-Line (~900 total)**

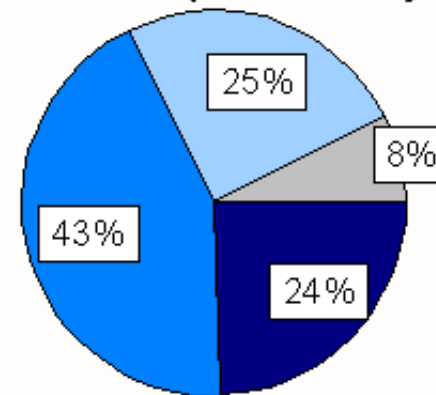


### How Old Are You?

**Phone (350 total)**



**On-Line (~900 total)**

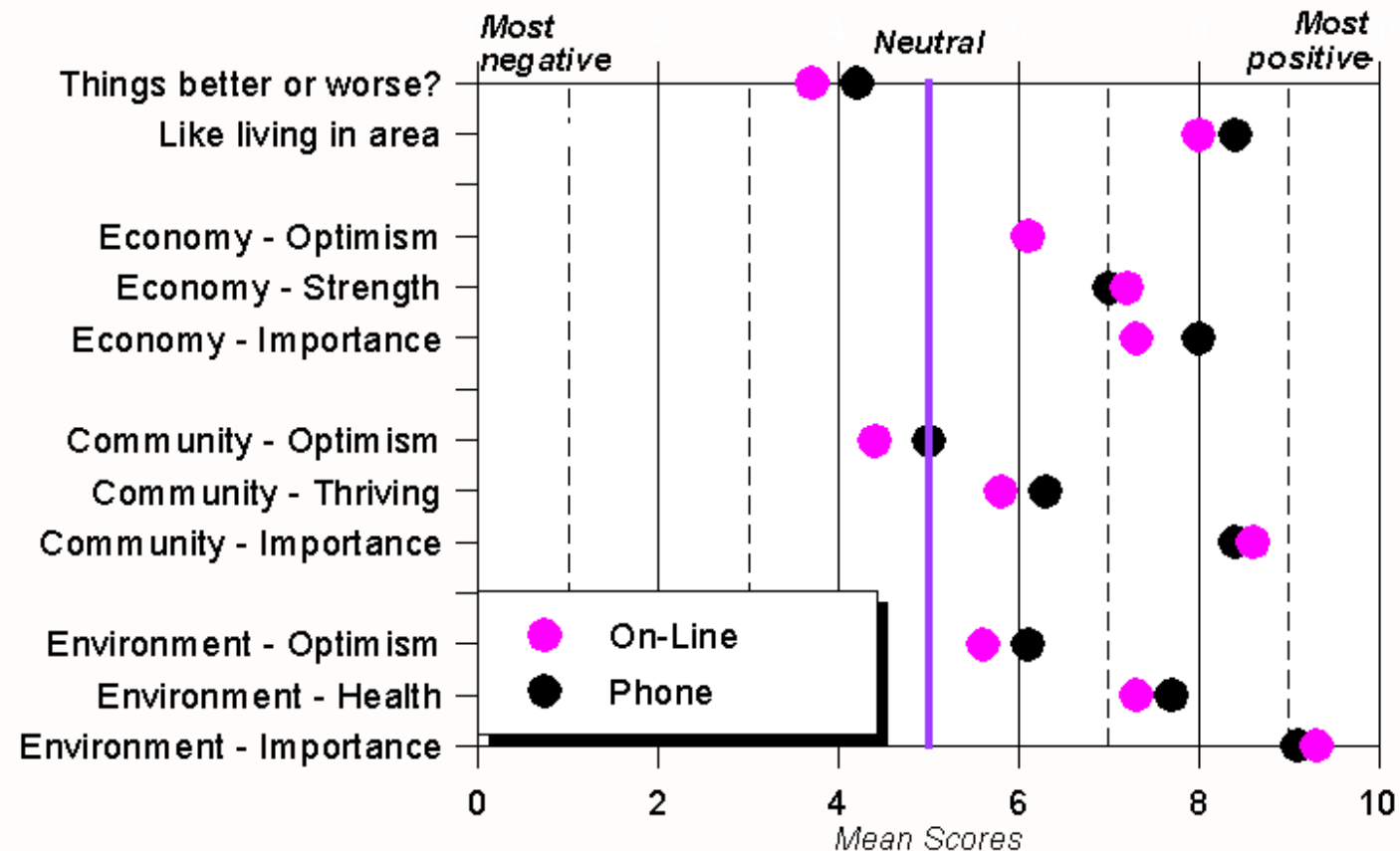


# The On-Line Survey

*On-line respondents even more adamant about environment, community. More pessimistic, too*

## Greater Tetons Area Residents Survey 2023

Mean Scores of 0-10 Questions: Phone v. On-Line Results



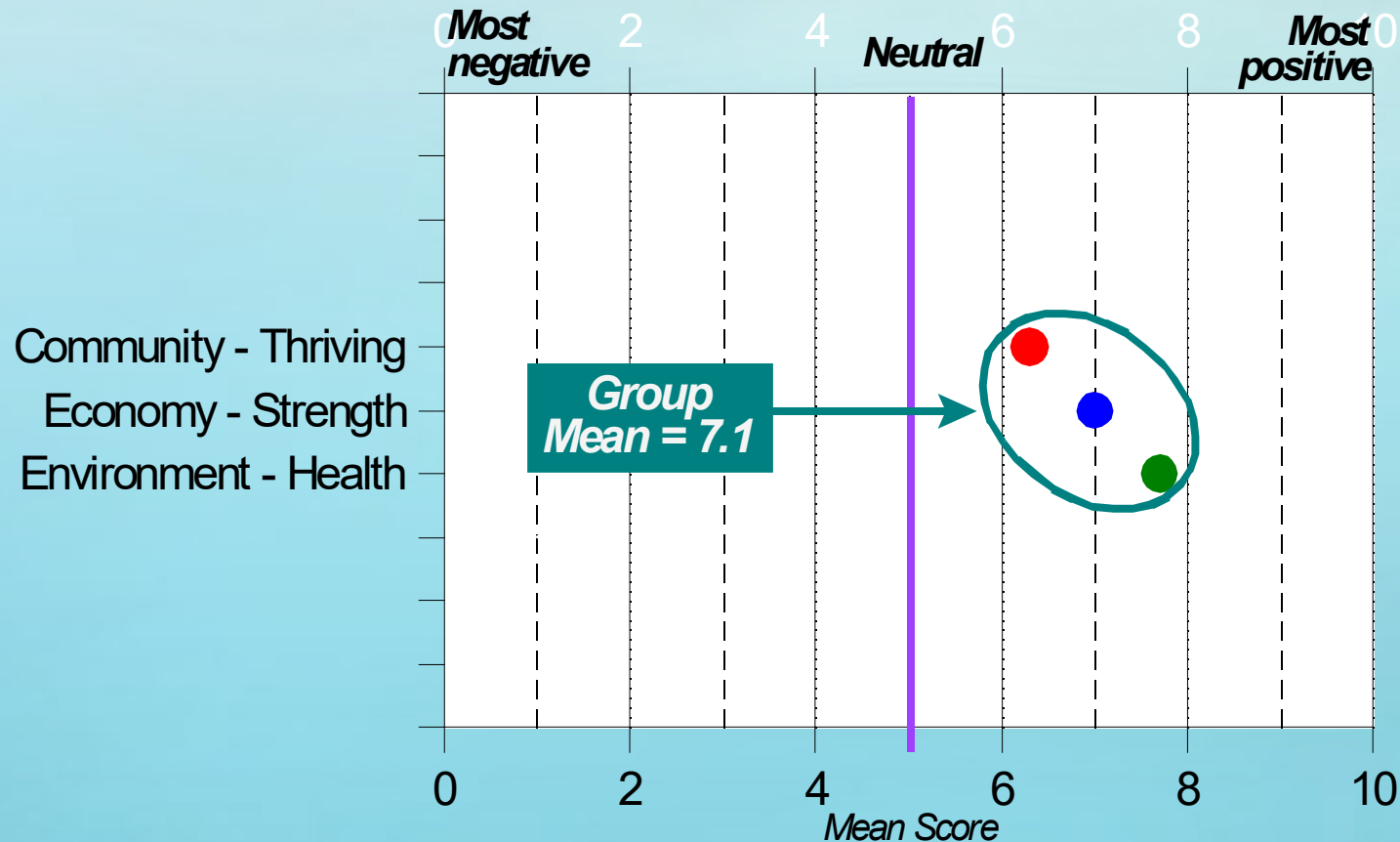
# The Survey & Our Quest For Hope

- “To cherish a desire with anticipation” – *Merriam-Webster*
- Two components:
  - Feeling; i.e., desire
  - Temporal; i.e., looking to future
- “Hope” is not “optimism”
  - “Optimism” = “the belief one’s circumstances will get better”
  - “Hope” = “the belief an individual can make things better”

# The Survey & Hope's Temporal Quality

- The survey asked “How do you feel about the health of the economy/community, environment?”; i.e., “Where are we?”

## Greater Tetons Area Resident Survey 2023 Mean Scores of Questions Scored 0-10

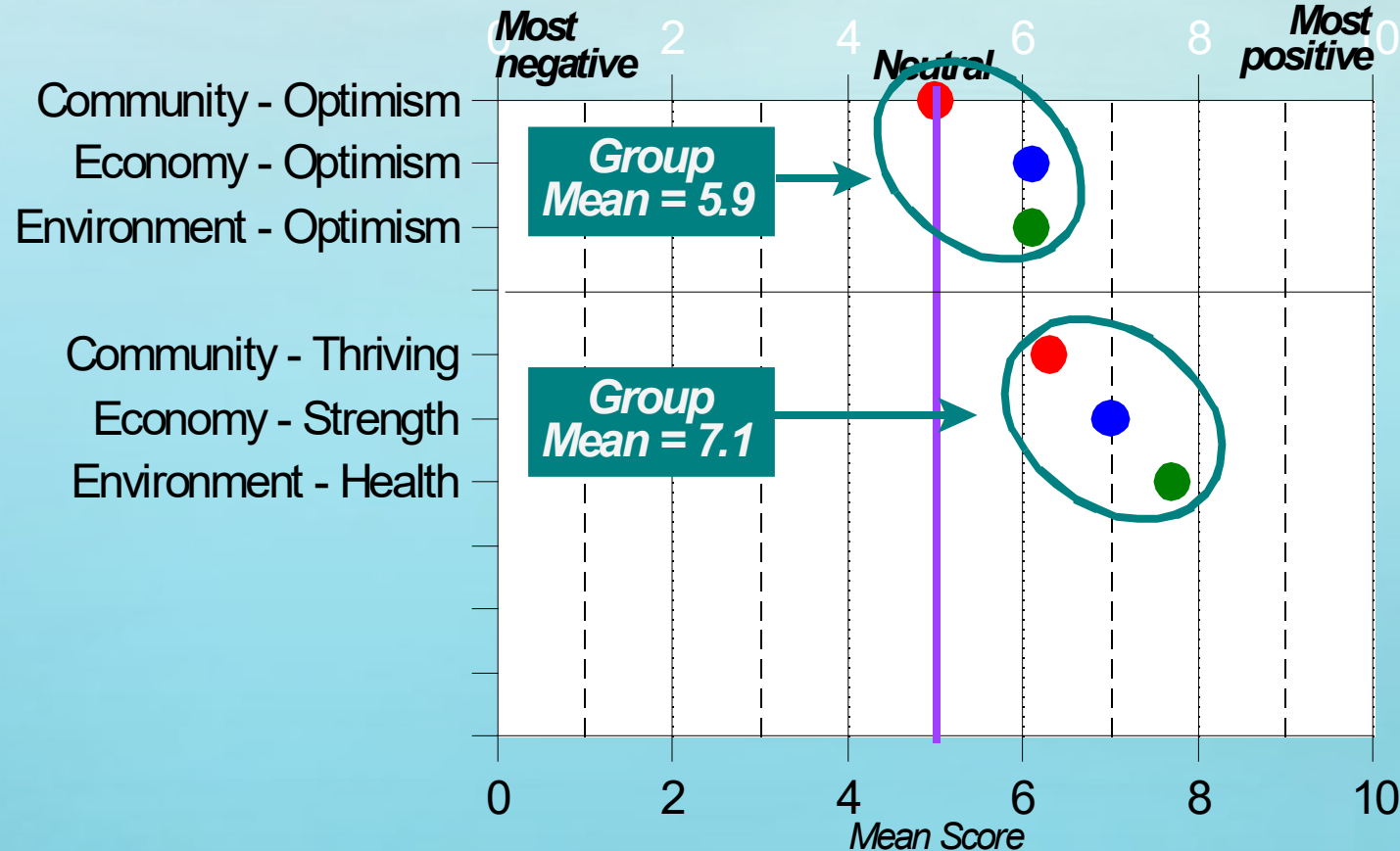


# The Survey & Hope's Temporal Quality (cont.)

- The survey also asked “How optimistic do you feel about the future of the economy/community, environment?”; i.e. “Where we’re heading”

## Greater Tetons Area Resident Survey 2023

Mean Scores of Questions Scored 0-10



# The Survey & Hope's Temporal Quality (cont.)

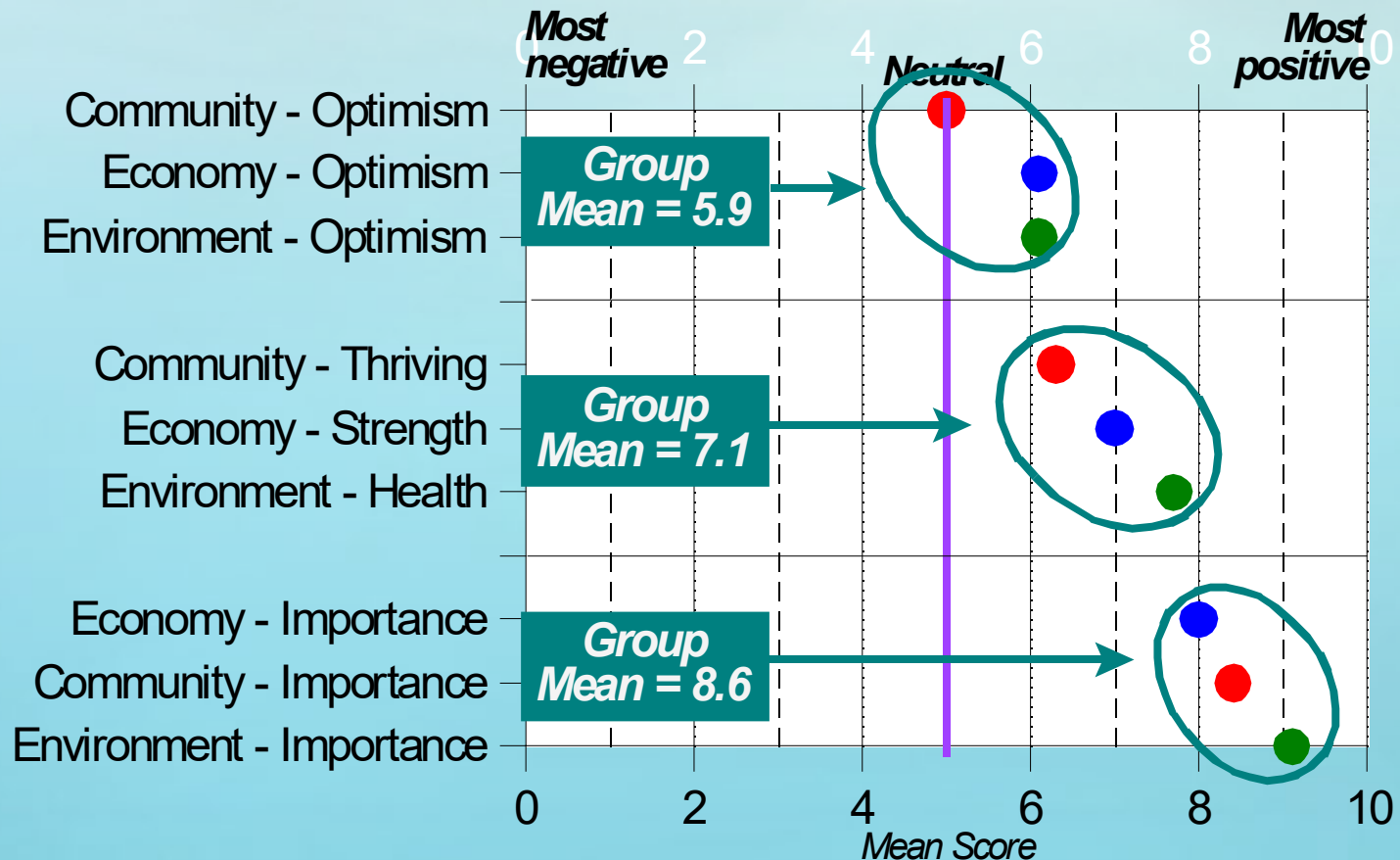
- The “Trajectory Quotient” – i.e. a sense of how we see things going compared to where they are
- (Optimism-Health)/Health
  - (“Where we’re heading” minus “Where we are”) divided by “Where we are” equals “Trajectory Arc”
- In the case of survey respondents,  $(5.9-7.1)/7.1 = -16\%$

# The Survey & Hope's Emotional Quality

- The survey asked “How important is the economy/community, environment to you?”

## Greater Teton Area Resident Survey 2023

Mean Scores of Questions Scored 0-10





# The Survey & Hope's Emotional Quality (cont.)

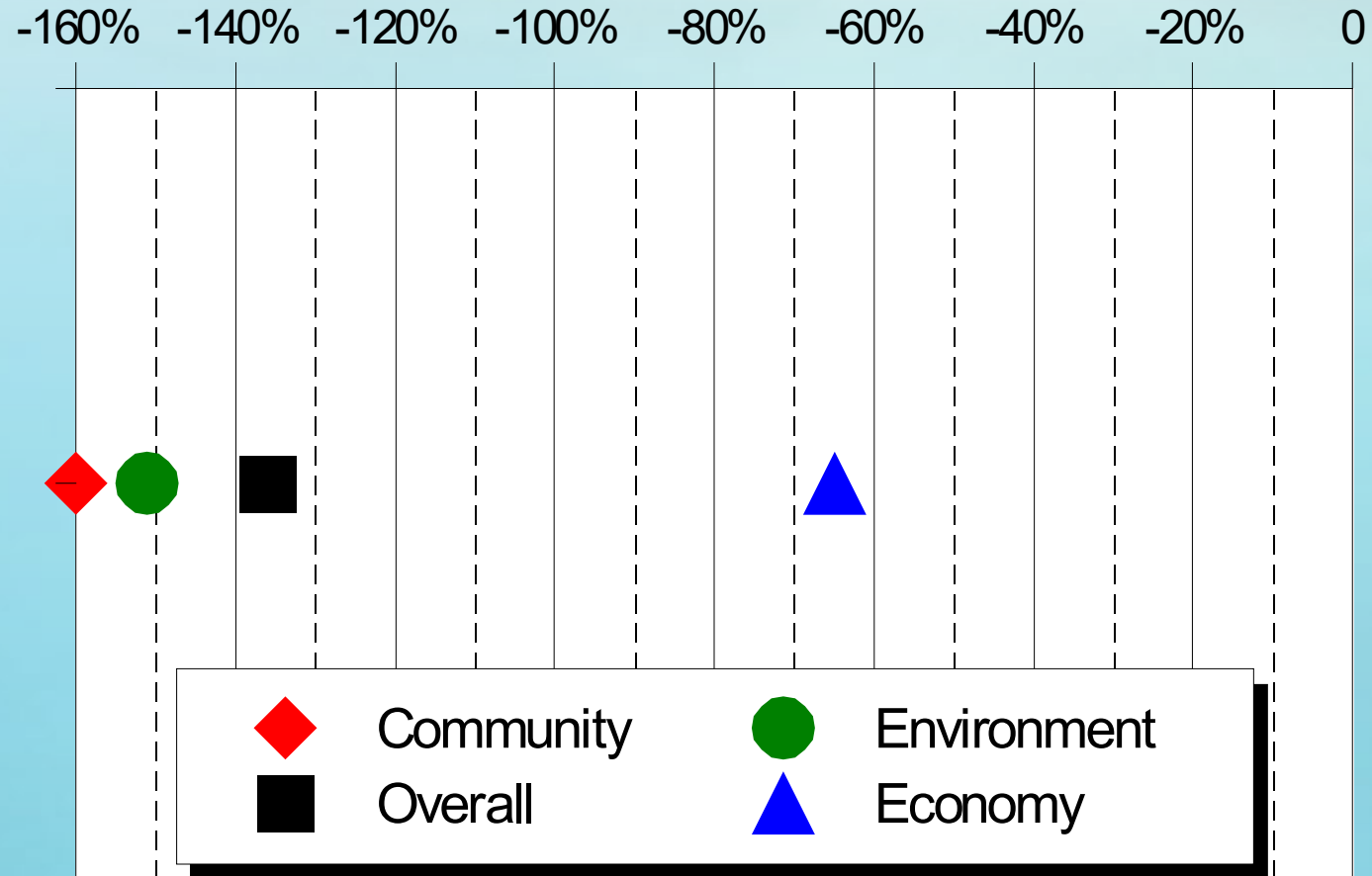
- The “Hope Index” – i.e. a sense of how we see the trajectory AND how important things are to us
- Trajectory Quotient x Importance
- In the case of survey respondents,  $-16\% \times 8.5 = -136\%$
- The result? A Hope Gap of  $-136\%$

# The Hope Gap: Differences Between Topics/Groups

- People feel differently about different aspects of their lives...

## Greater Tetons Area Residents Survey 2023

### Hope Gap, by Basic Categories

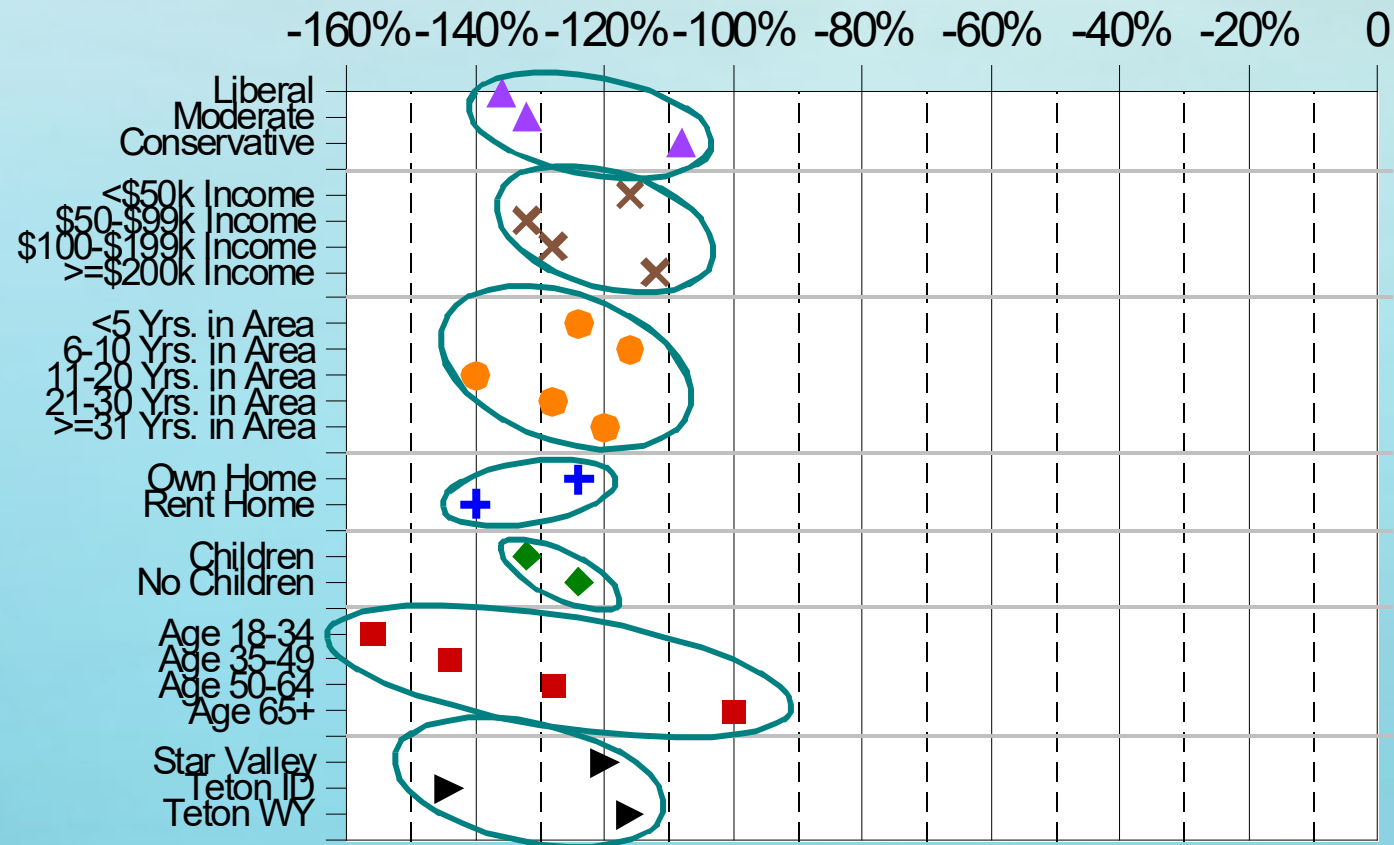


# The Hope Gap: Differences Between Topics/Groups

- And different groups feel differently about different aspects of their lives

## Greater Teton Area Residents Survey 2023

### Hope Gap, by Various Demographic Groups



# Five Major Conclusions: #s 1-2

1. Tetons residents love the region, but are deeply concerned about its future
  - Both the love and the concern are shared across our entire region and by all demographic sectors
    - Variation between specific groups
  - The concerns I heard when running for office aren't just the complaints of a few
2. The Jackson/Teton County Vision Statement got it right: Our region's connective tissue is our shared desire to preserve and protect the area's ecosystem
  - What resources do we put into that effort?

# Five Major Conclusions: #s 3-5

## 3. Housing is a critical concern

- But ecosystem health is more important; i.e., in our desire to build housing, we will make a huge mistake if we harm the ecosystem in the process
- Similar concerns exist about the feel of the community, because the concern about housing is not shared equally by all demographic groups

## 4. The fabric of the community

- Those who are least optimistic & express greatest likelihood of leaving are those in the middle income & 35-49 years age groups; i.e., the people building their careers and raising their families
- How well are our housing efforts aligned with their needs?

## 5. The Hope Gap

- Respondents are far more concerned about the health of the ecosystem and vitality of the community than the future of the region's economy

# Encouraging Hope

- My campaign experience seems to be validated. Now what?

# Encouraging Hope (cont.)

*The raw materials of our communities*

- Three main sectors; three main facets

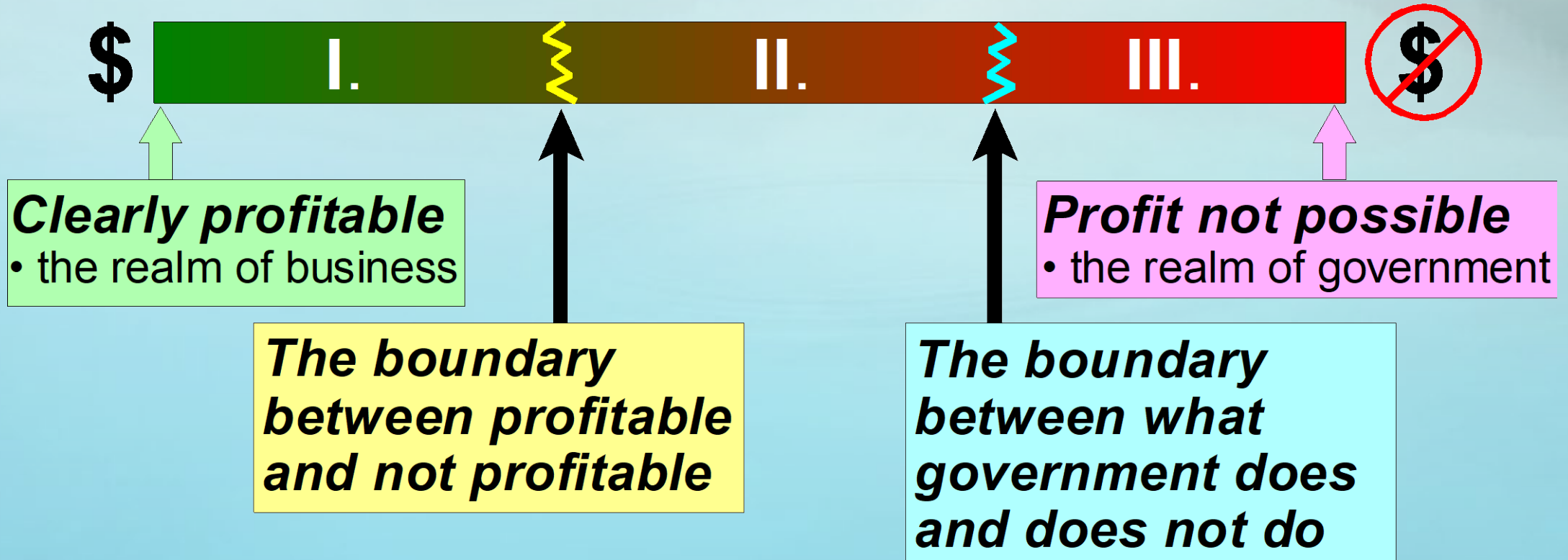
	Economy	Community	Environment
Private			
Non-profit			
Public			

# The Spectrum of Economic Activities

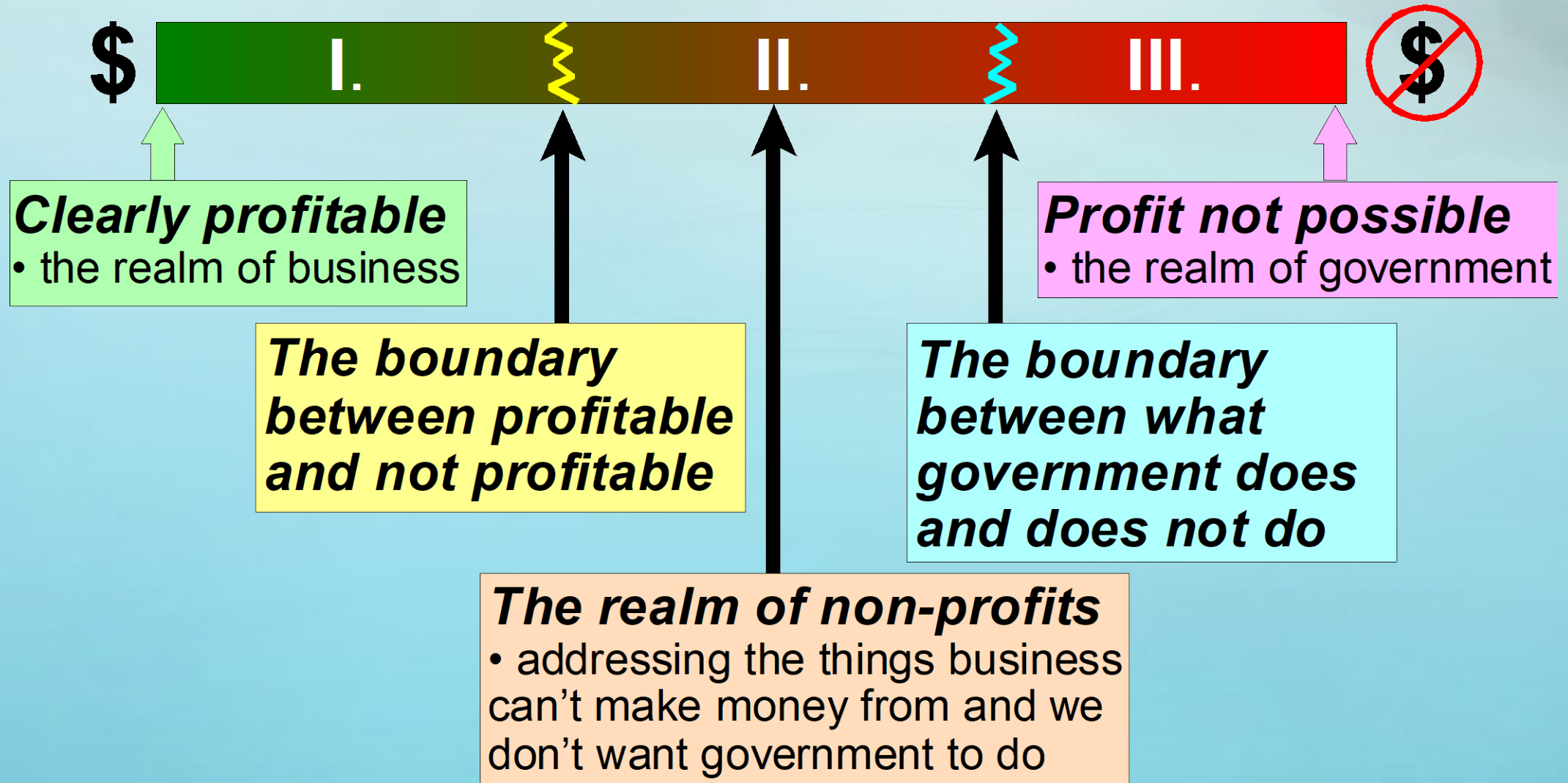




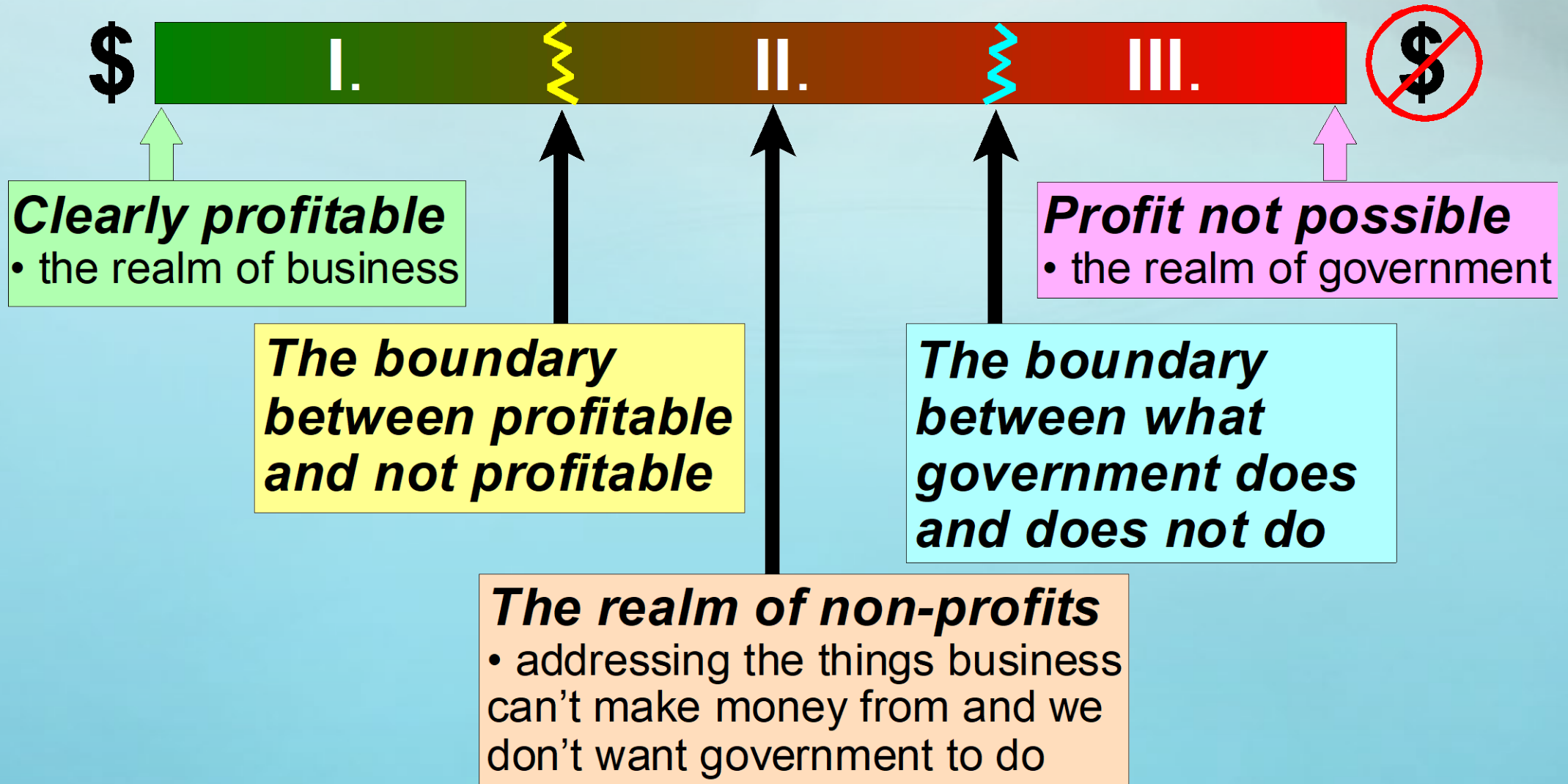
# The Spectrum of Economic Activities (cont.)



# The Spectrum of Economic Activities (cont.)



# What is Success for Each? How Is It Measured?



# Measuring Success (cont.)

- “If you can't measure it, you can't manage it.” – *Peter Drucker*
- “What gets measured gets managed — even when it's pointless to measure and manage it, and even if it harms the purpose of the organisation to do so.” – *Simon Caulkin*
- Schechter's variation: “What we measure is what we pay attention to.”



# Measuring Success (cont.)

- $P(f) = R - E$ 
  - The most powerful equation in the world
- Financial Profit = Revenue minus Expenses
  - Used by every business in the world
  - Is the focus of America's 900+ business schools (10,000+ worldwide)
  - Is the focus of industries such as accounting (\$600 billion worldwide)

# Measuring Success (cont.)

- So foundational we don't think twice about it.
- So foundational we take apply it (and the concepts flowing from it) to pretty much every aspect of our lives

	Economy	Community	Environment
Private	Green	Pink	Pink
Non-profit	Yellow	Pink	Pink
Public	Yellow	Pink	Pink

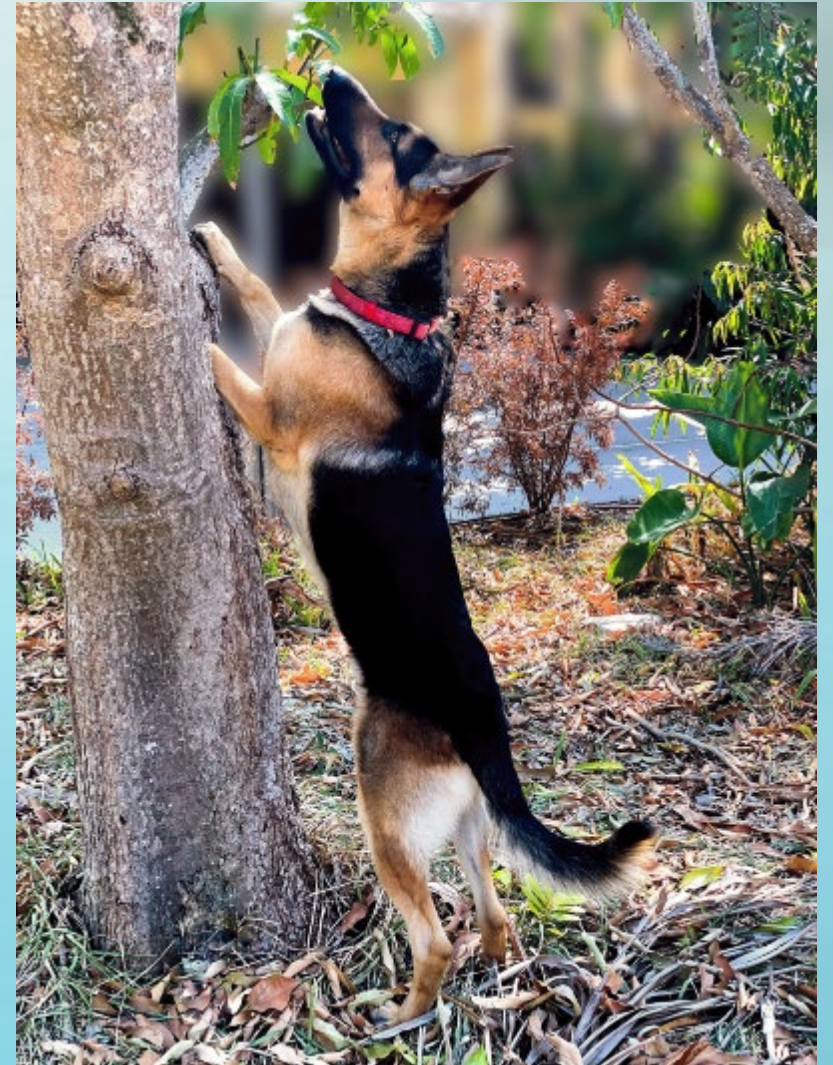
# The Humongous Challenge

## *Whose job is it?*

- We don't ask the private sector to do anything but make money
  - If it doesn't stand a chance of making a profit, it falls to the public sector or, barring that, the non-profit
  - Bonus reality: The private sector is incented to maximize externalities
- The public sector is severely constrained
  - Constricted legal, financial, human resources
  - 21<sup>st</sup> century communities with 20<sup>th</sup> century operating systems
- The non-profit sector relies on the kindness of strangers
- A lot falls between the resulting cracks

# The Dog Climbing The Tree

- As much as dogs may want to, they don't have the physical ability to climb a tree
- As much as we may look to government and/or non-profits to address our problems, they rarely have the resources or abilities to do so
  - Complicating matters further, this is true even though government often really wants to address problems (if for no other reason than there's no one else to do it)







What To Do?

*The Frame & The Chamber*

# What To Do? *The Frame*



# What To Do? *The Frame*



Seurat - Sunday on the Island of La Grande Jatte 1884-86

# What To Do? *The Frame*



Seurat - Sunday on the Island of La Grande Jatte 1884-86

## *The Frame*



Seurat - Sunday on the Island of La Grande Jatte 1884-86

# What To Do?

## *The Chamber*

- We embrace  $P(f) = R-E$  in every facet of our lives
  - Chamber of Commerce

	Economy	Community	Environment
Private			
Non-profit			
Public			

# What To Do?

## *The Chamber*

- We embrace  $P(f) = R-E$  in every facet of our lives
- I'm guessing we all have a Chamber of Commerce

	Economy	Community	Environment
Private			
Non-profit			
Public			

# What To Do?

## *A Complementary Chamber or Two?*

- Who has a Chamber of Community, an organization out there advocating for the community?
- Who has a Chamber of the Environment?

	Economy	Community	Environment
Private			
Non-profit			
Public			



# My Next Steps

- The Vision of the Jackson/Teton County Comp Plan
- “Preserve and protect the area’s ecosystem...”
  - Addressed that in my first term
- “...in order to ensure a healthy environment, community and economy for current and future generations.”
  - Herein lies the next challenge

# My Next Steps (cont.)

## *Define the Undefined; Measure the Unmeasured*

- “...in order to ensure a healthy environment, community and economy for current and future generations.”
- What is a healthy environment? How healthy is ours? How do we know?
  - Define the term. Develop metrics. Assess. Act accordingly. Repeat
- Do the same for a “healthy community” and a “healthy economy.”

# My Next Steps (cont.)

## *Hope is the Hope*

- The goal: To instill not only “the belief one’s circumstances will get better,” but also “the belief an individual can make things better”
- The means:
  - To understand what people care about
  - To develop tools for assessing progress in those areas
  - To develop means for people to contribute towards that progress

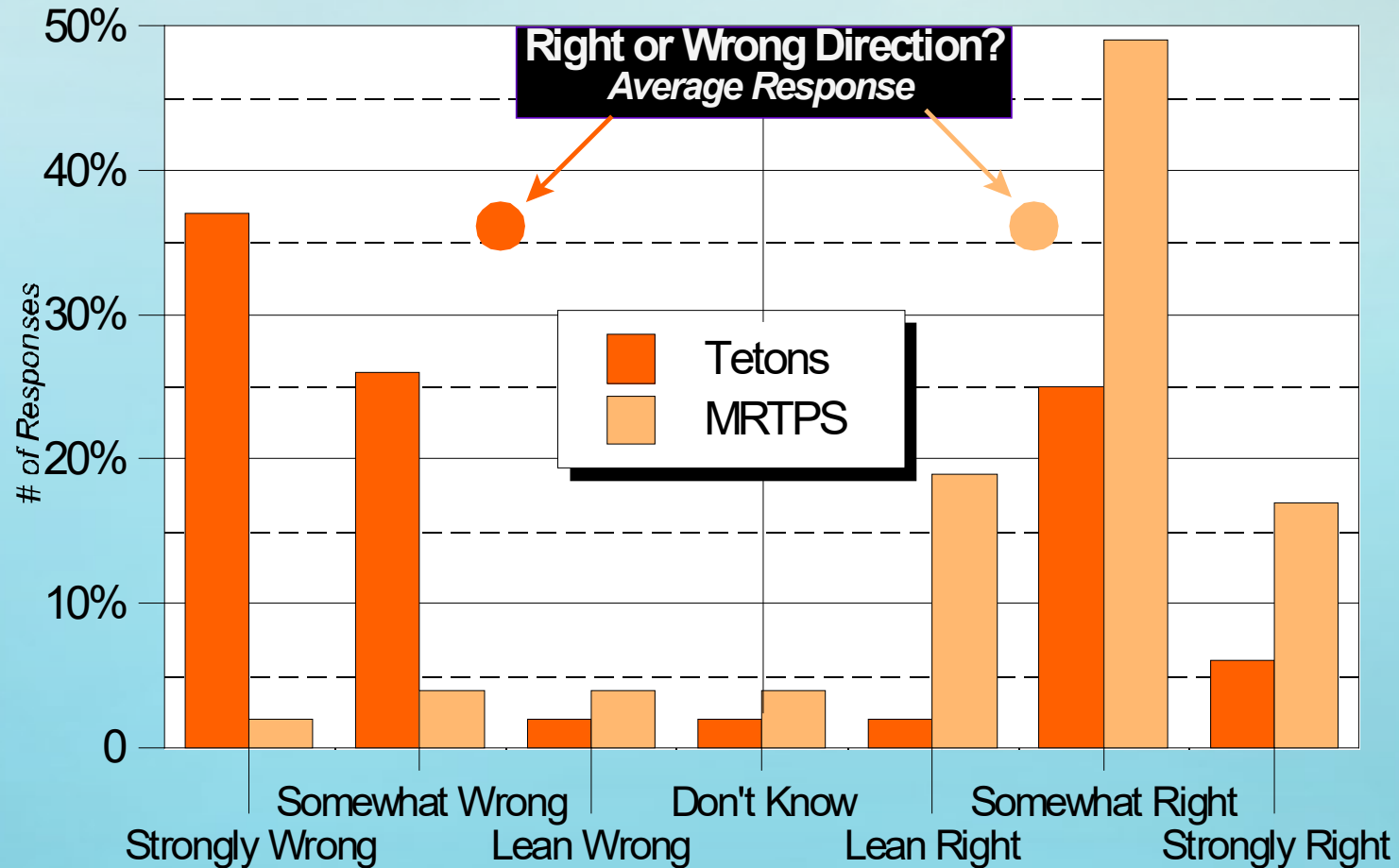
# Encore



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: I (47 respondents; ~2/3 from Canada)

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

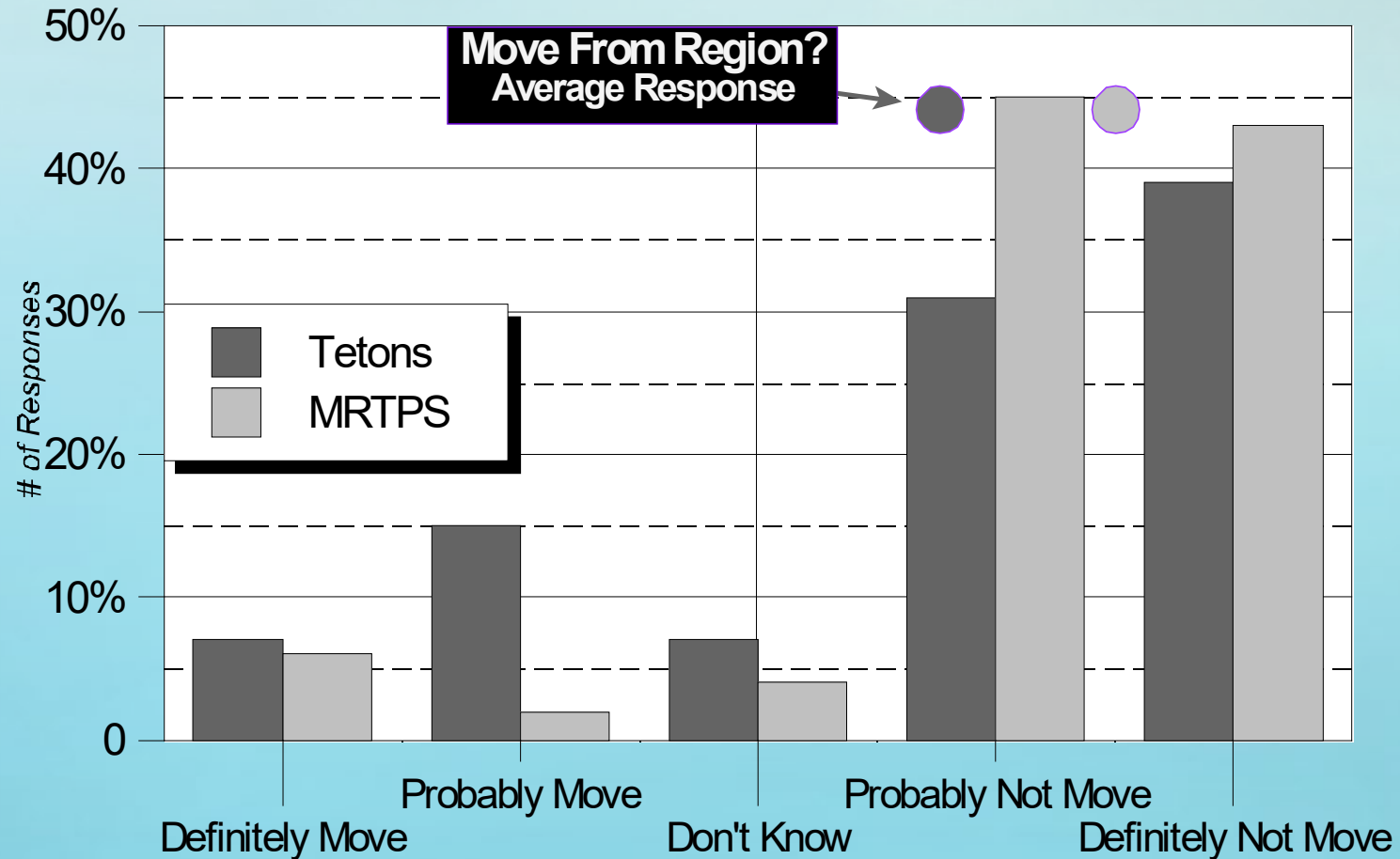
Is The Region Heading In The Right Or Wrong Direction?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: II

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

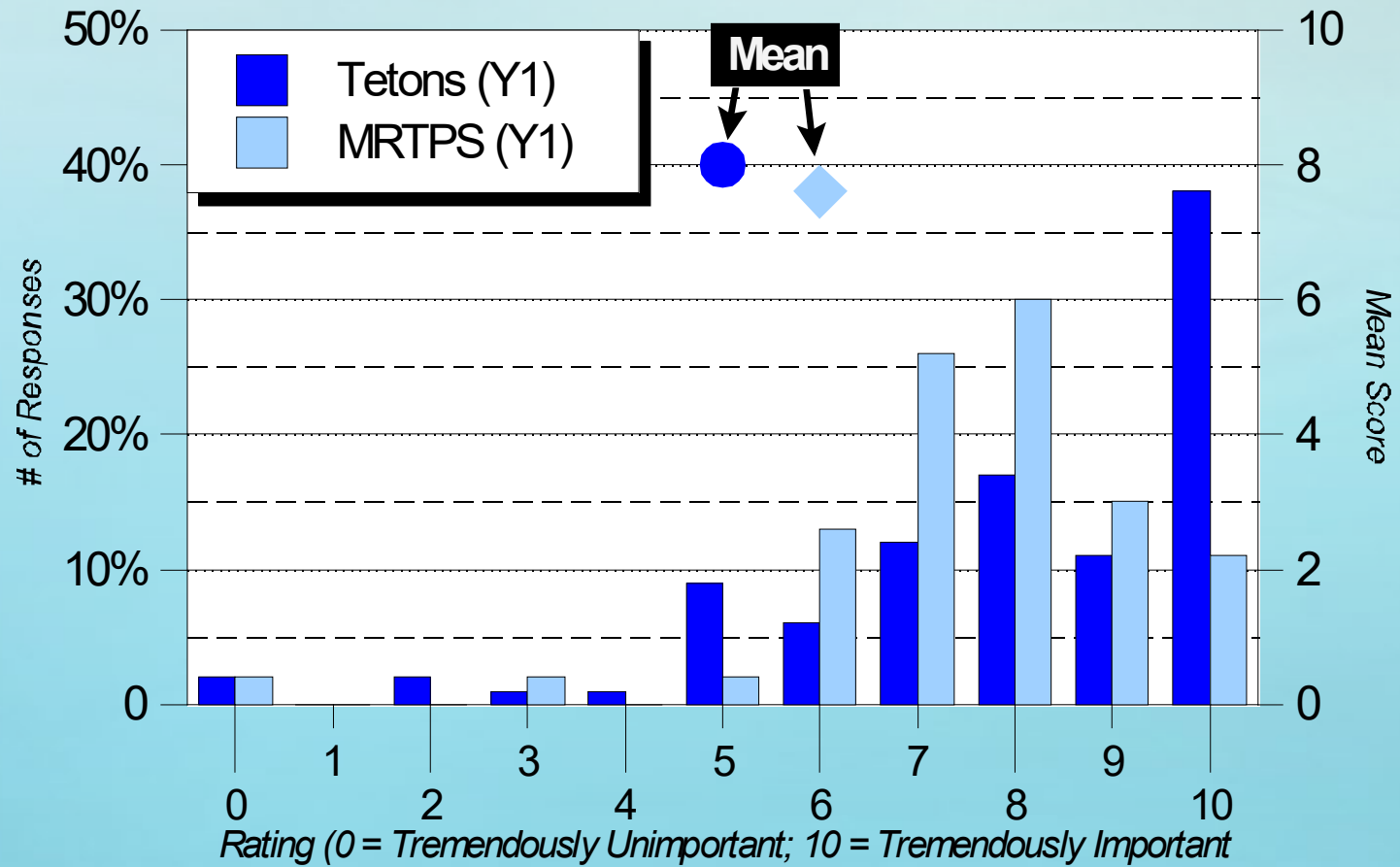
How Likely Are You To Move From The Region?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: III

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

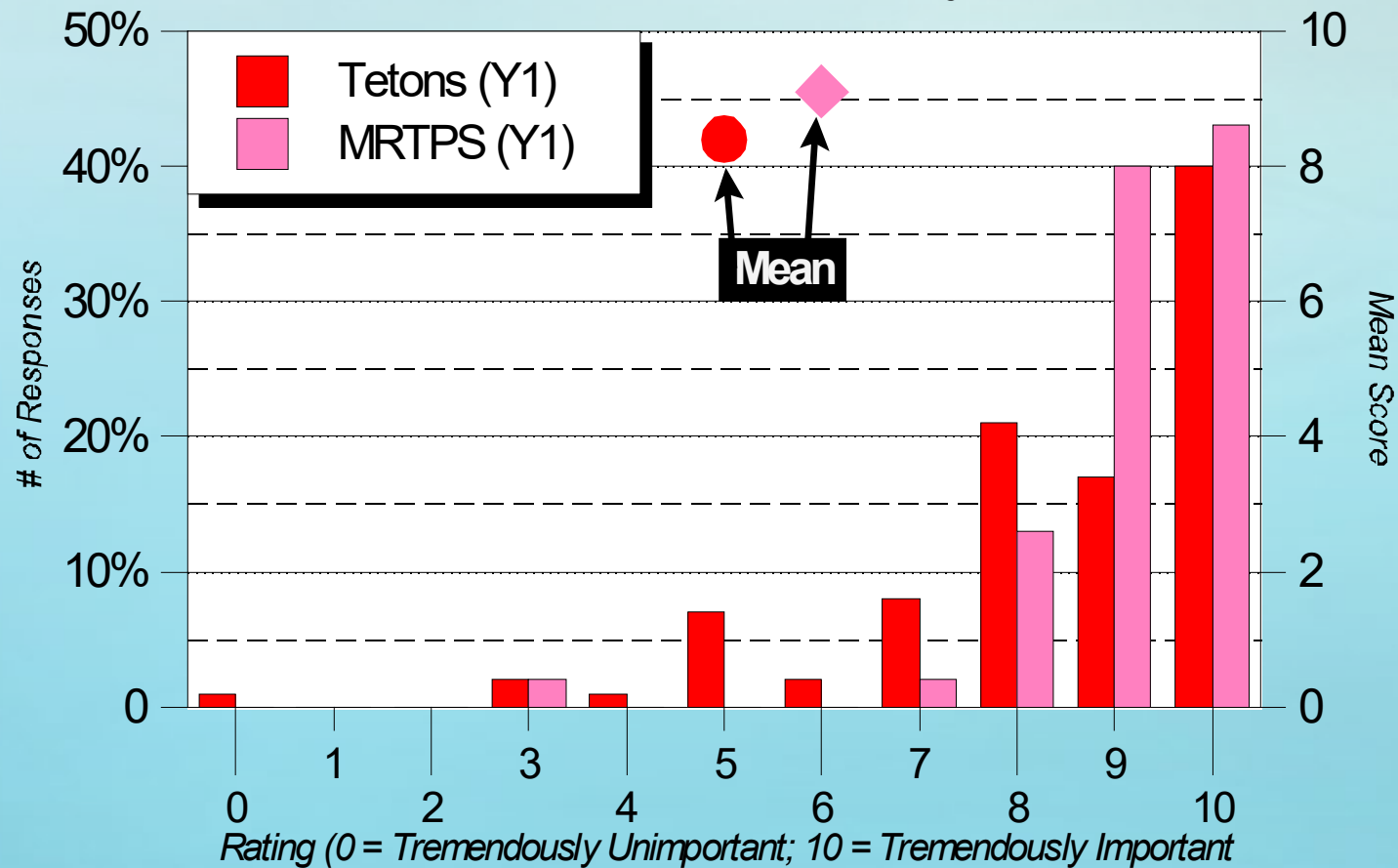
### How Important Is The Economy To You?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: IV

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

### How Important Is Community To You?

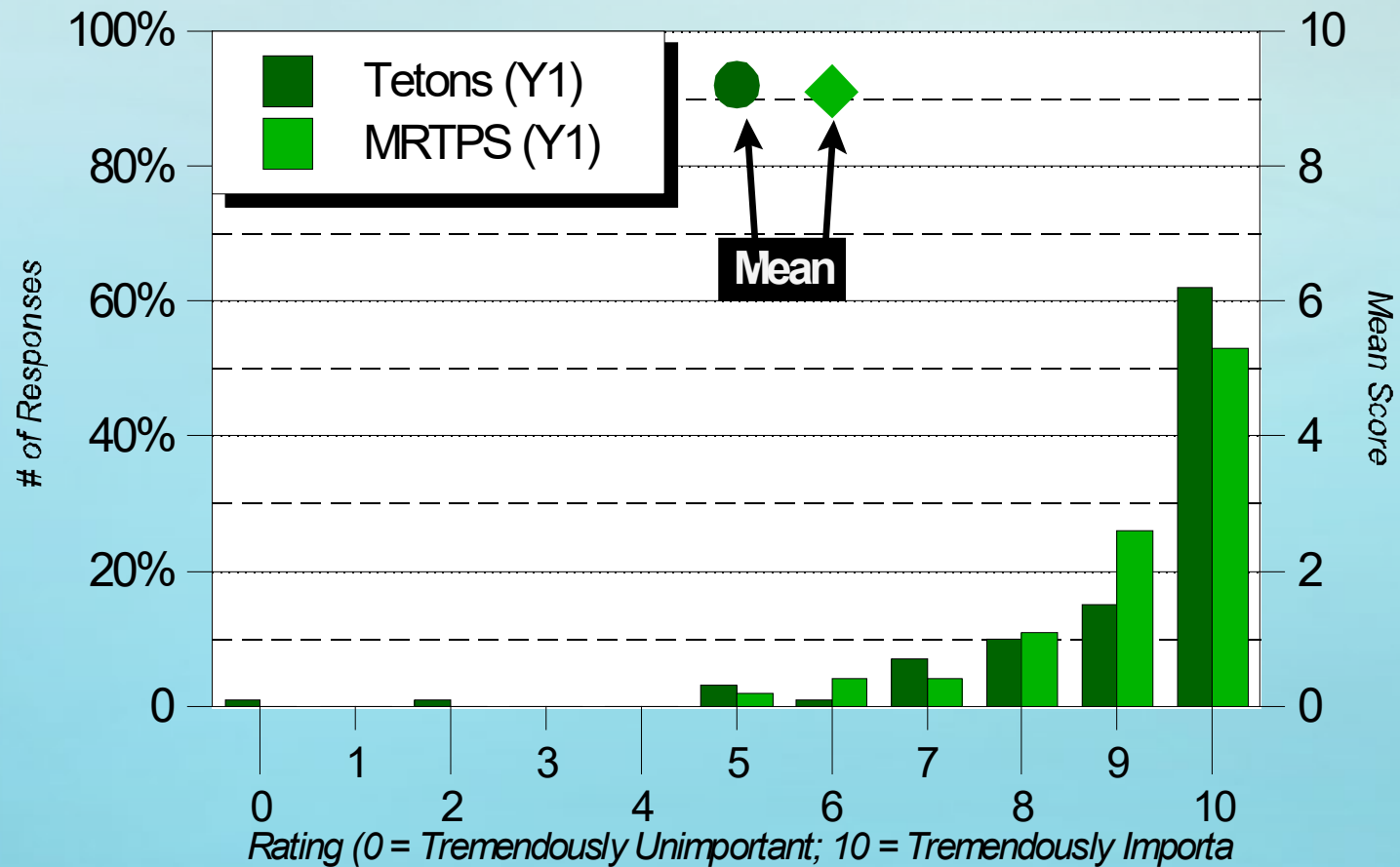




# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: V

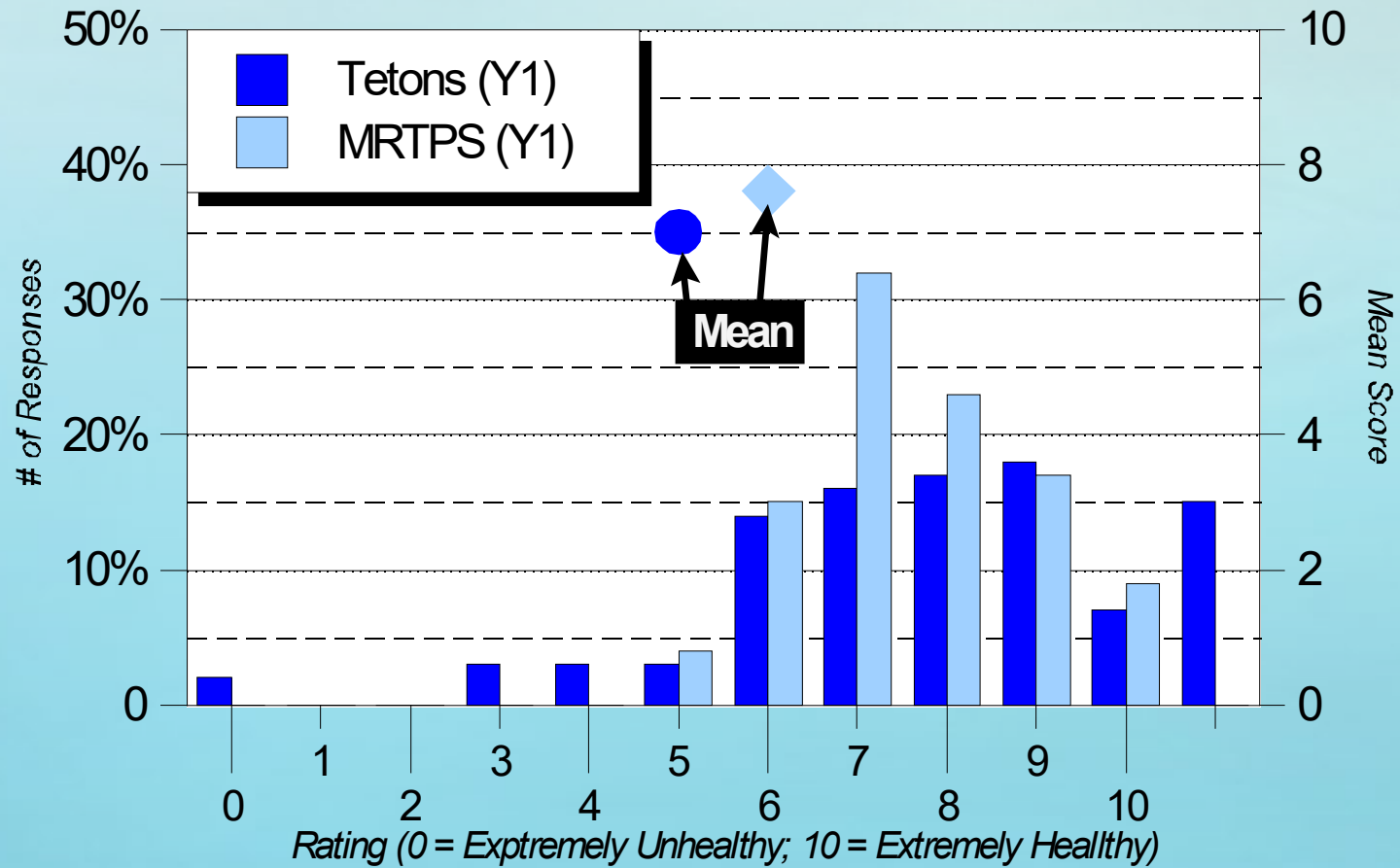
## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

### How Important Is The Environment To You?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: VI

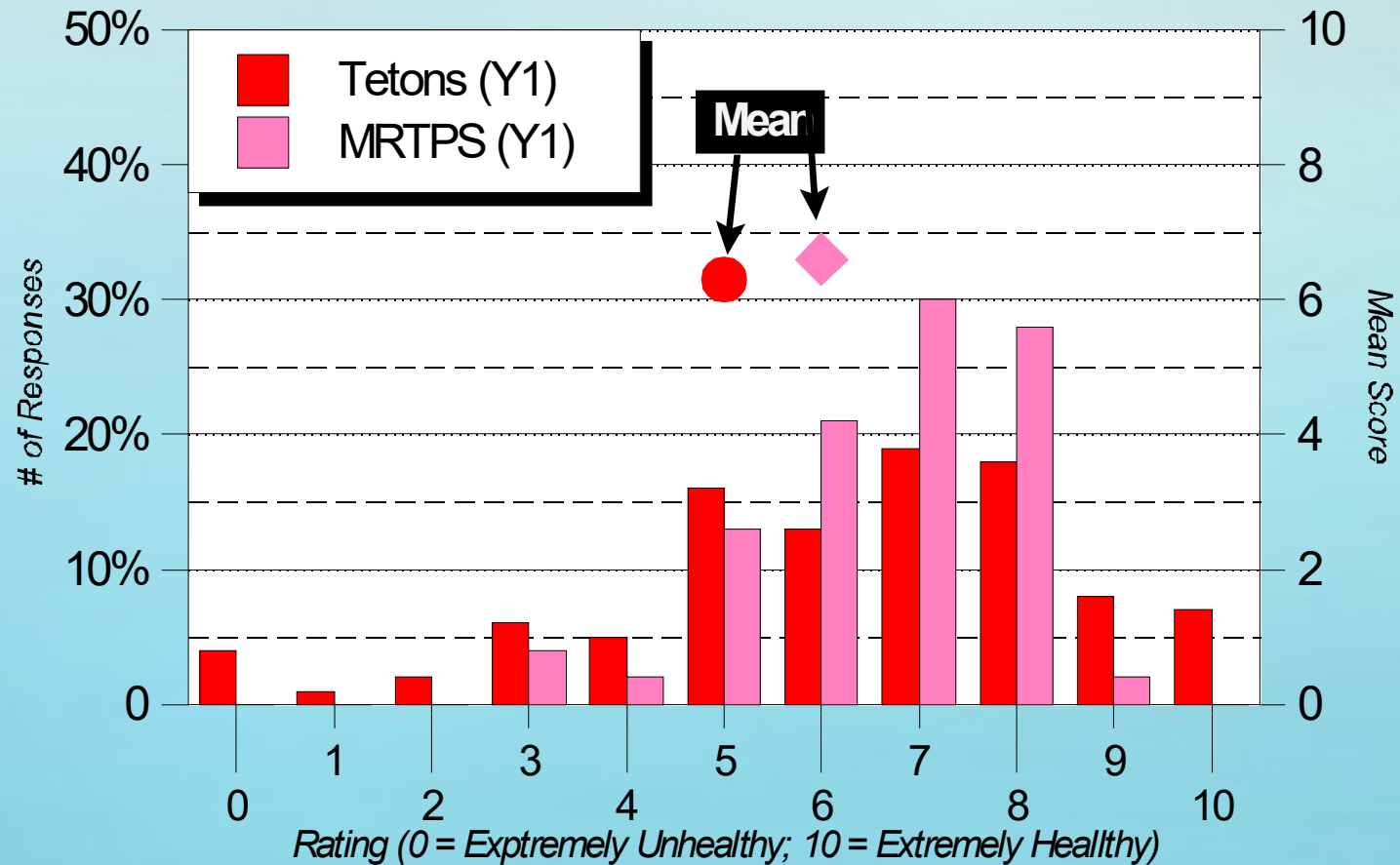
## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey How Healthy Do You Feel The Economy Is?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: VII

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

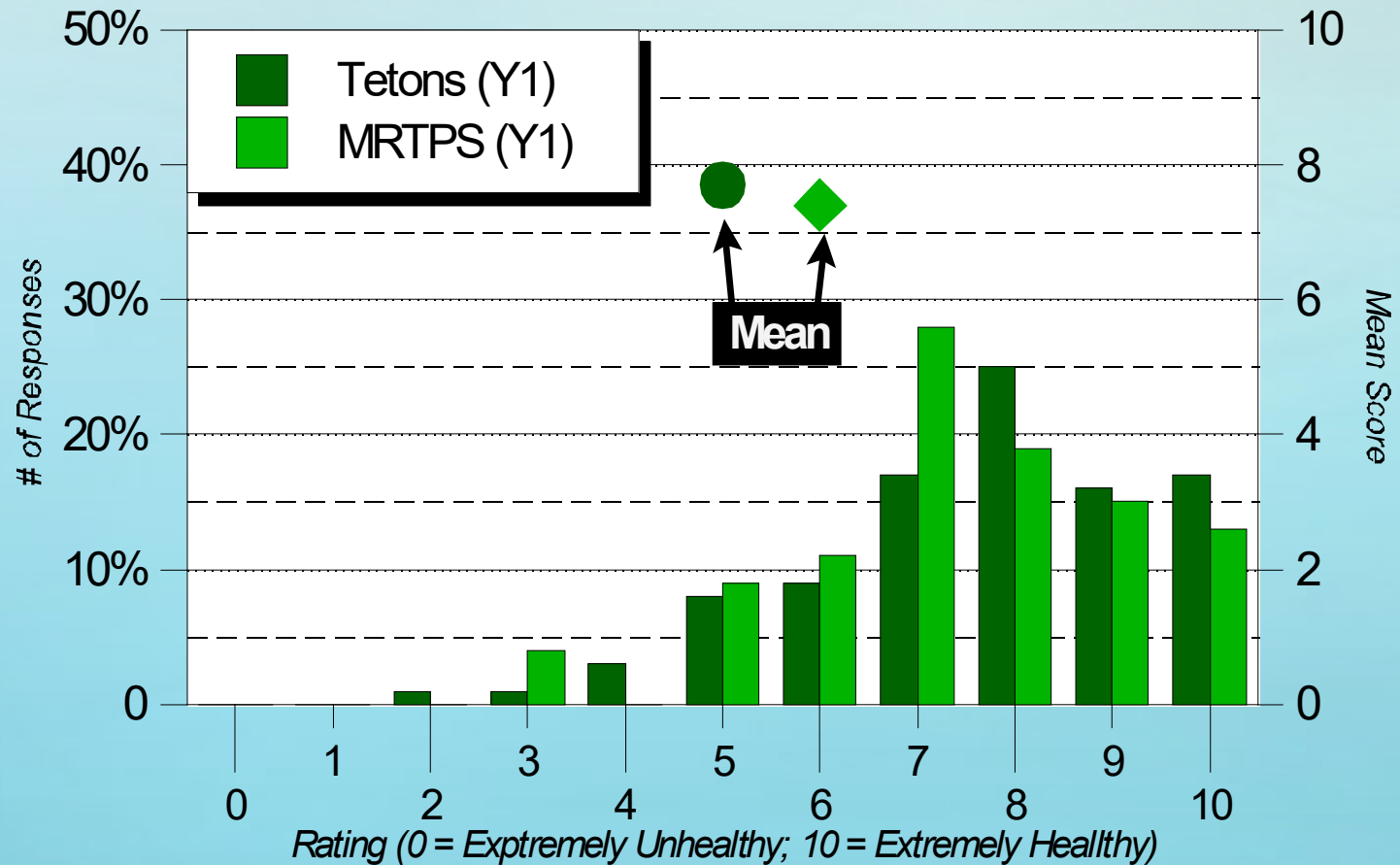
### How Healthy Do You Feel The Community Is?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: VIII

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

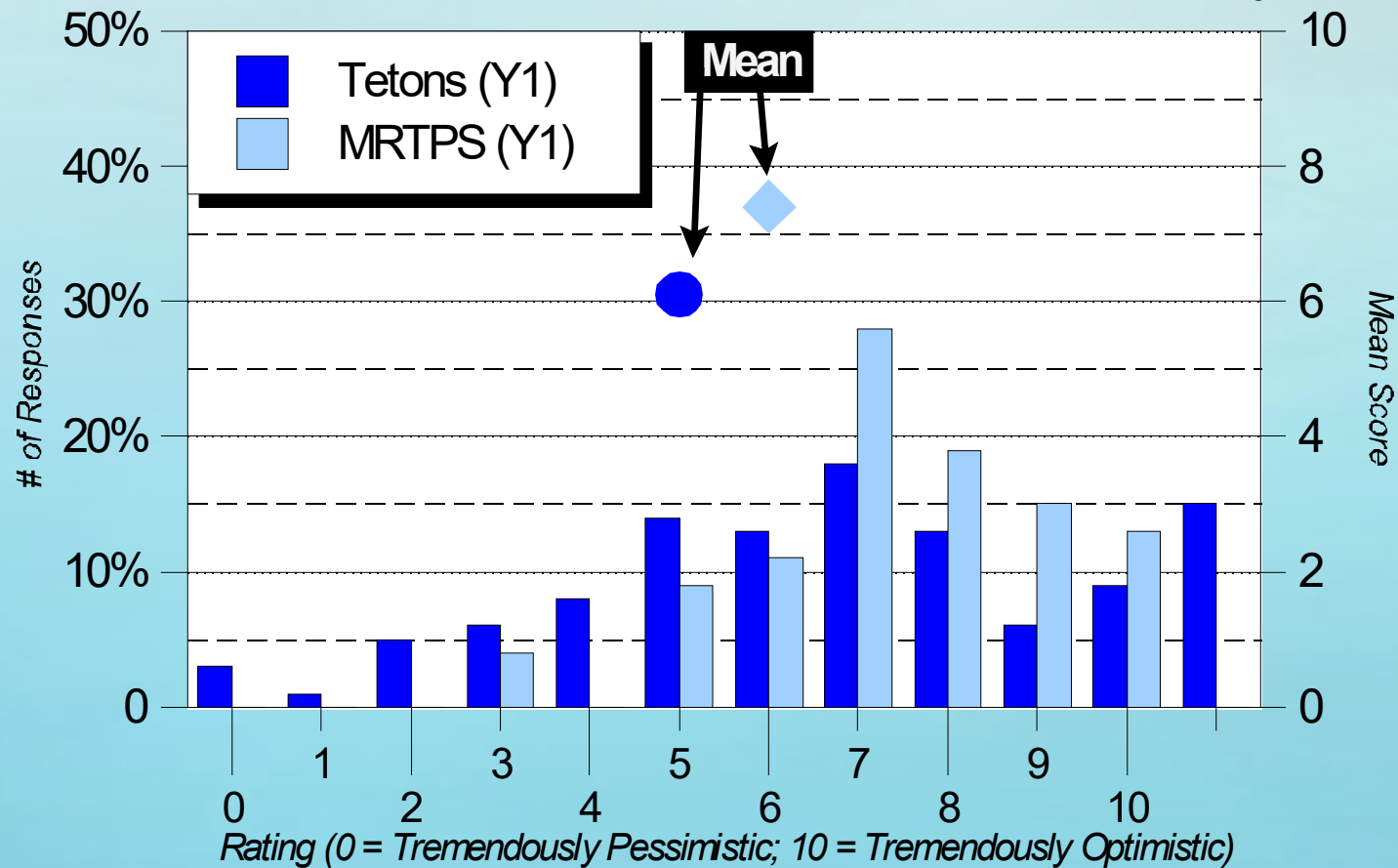
How Healthy Do You Feel The Environment Is?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: IX

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

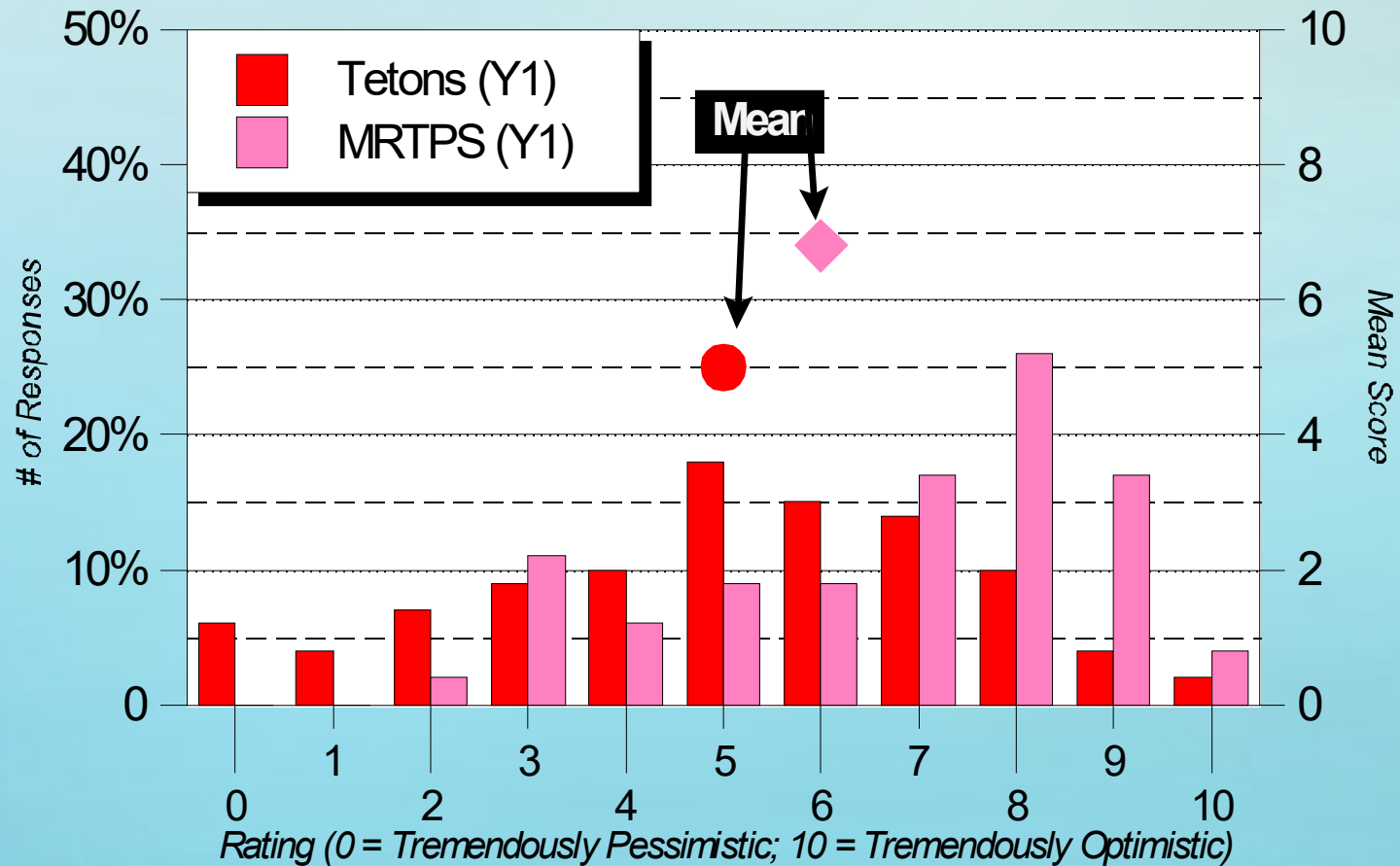
### How Optimistic Are You About The Economy?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: X

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

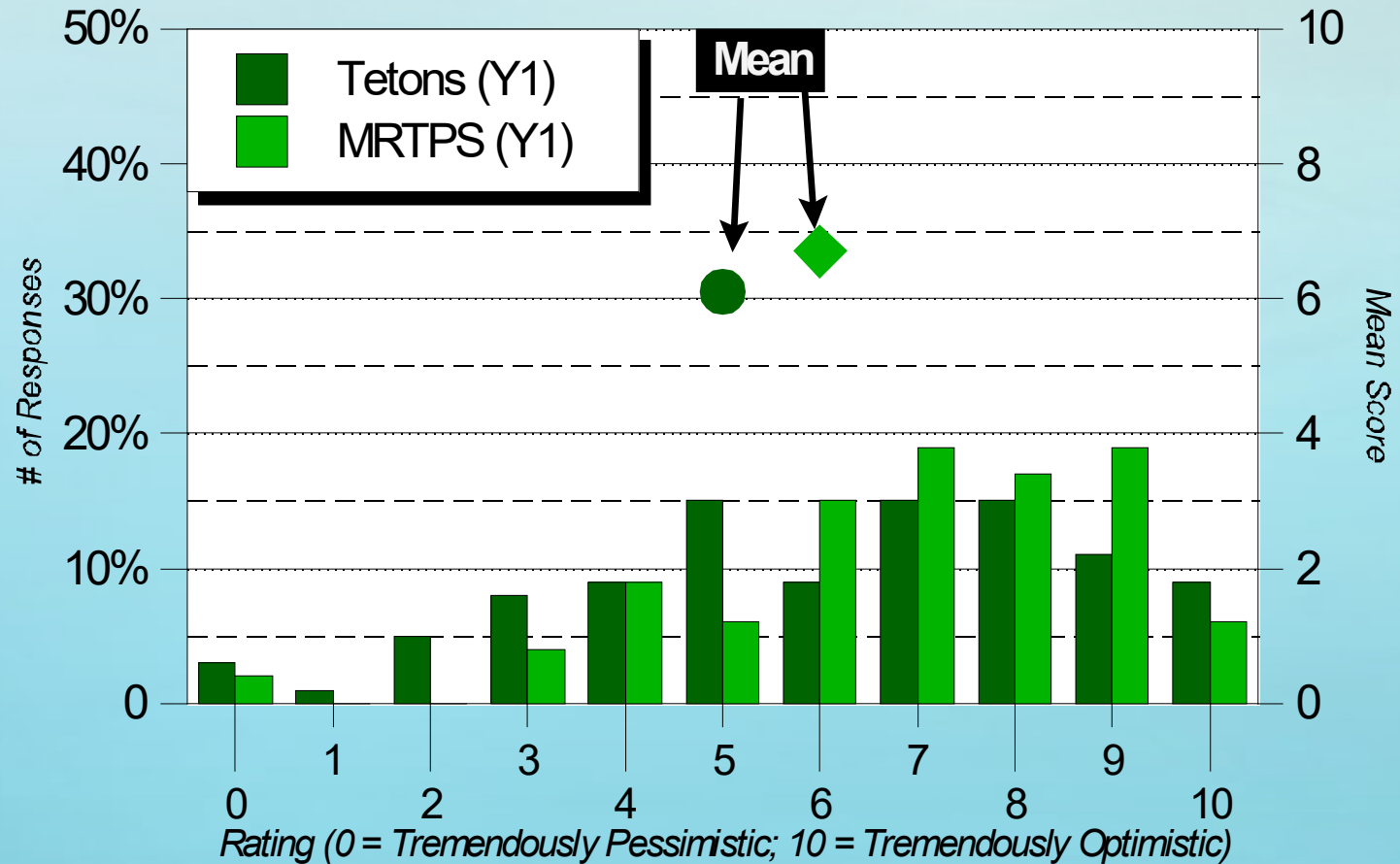
How Optimistic Are You About The Community?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: XI

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

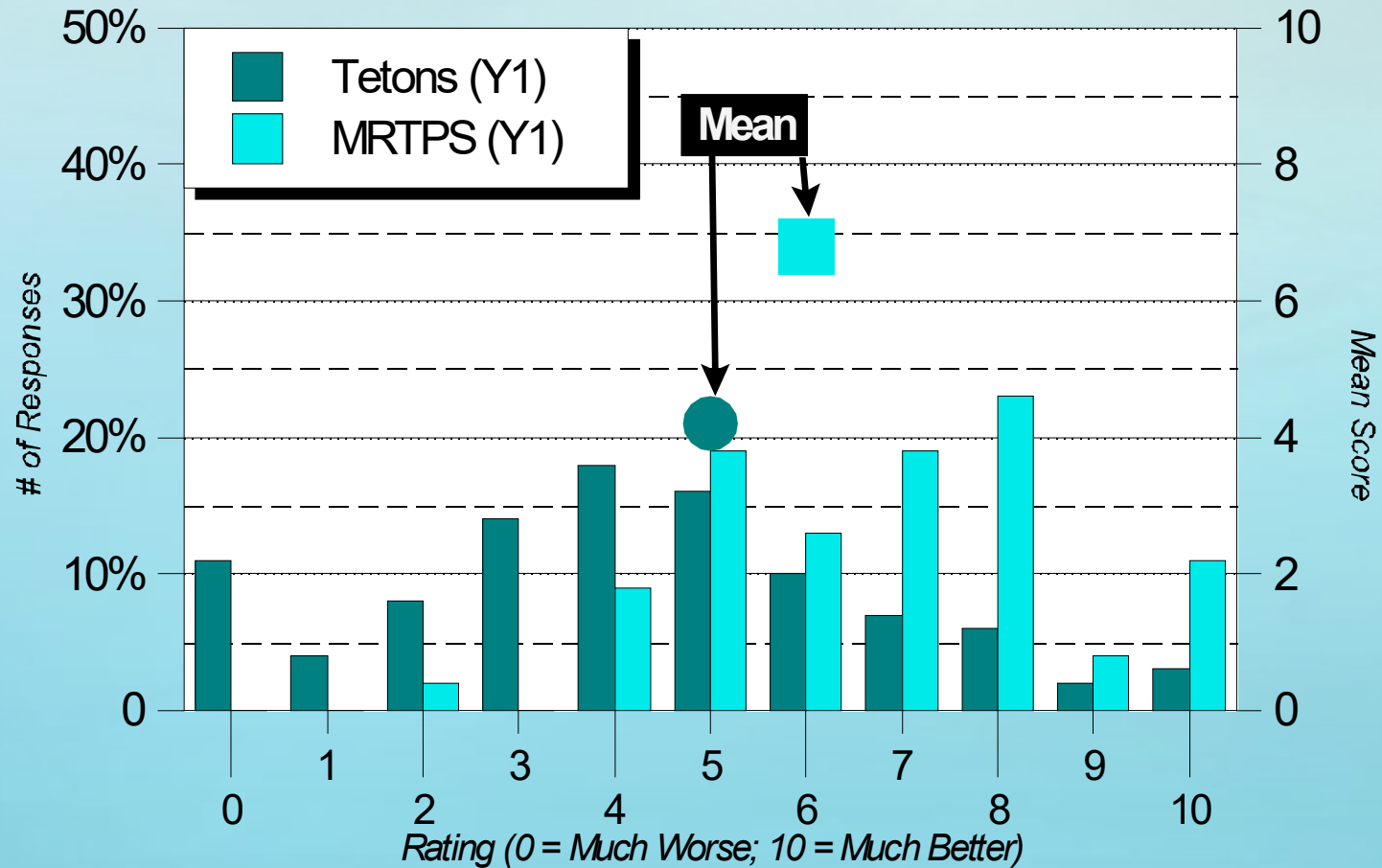
How Optimistic Are You About The Environment?



# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: XII

## Greater Tetons Region Residents Survey

Have Things Become Better Or Worse Since You Moved Here?

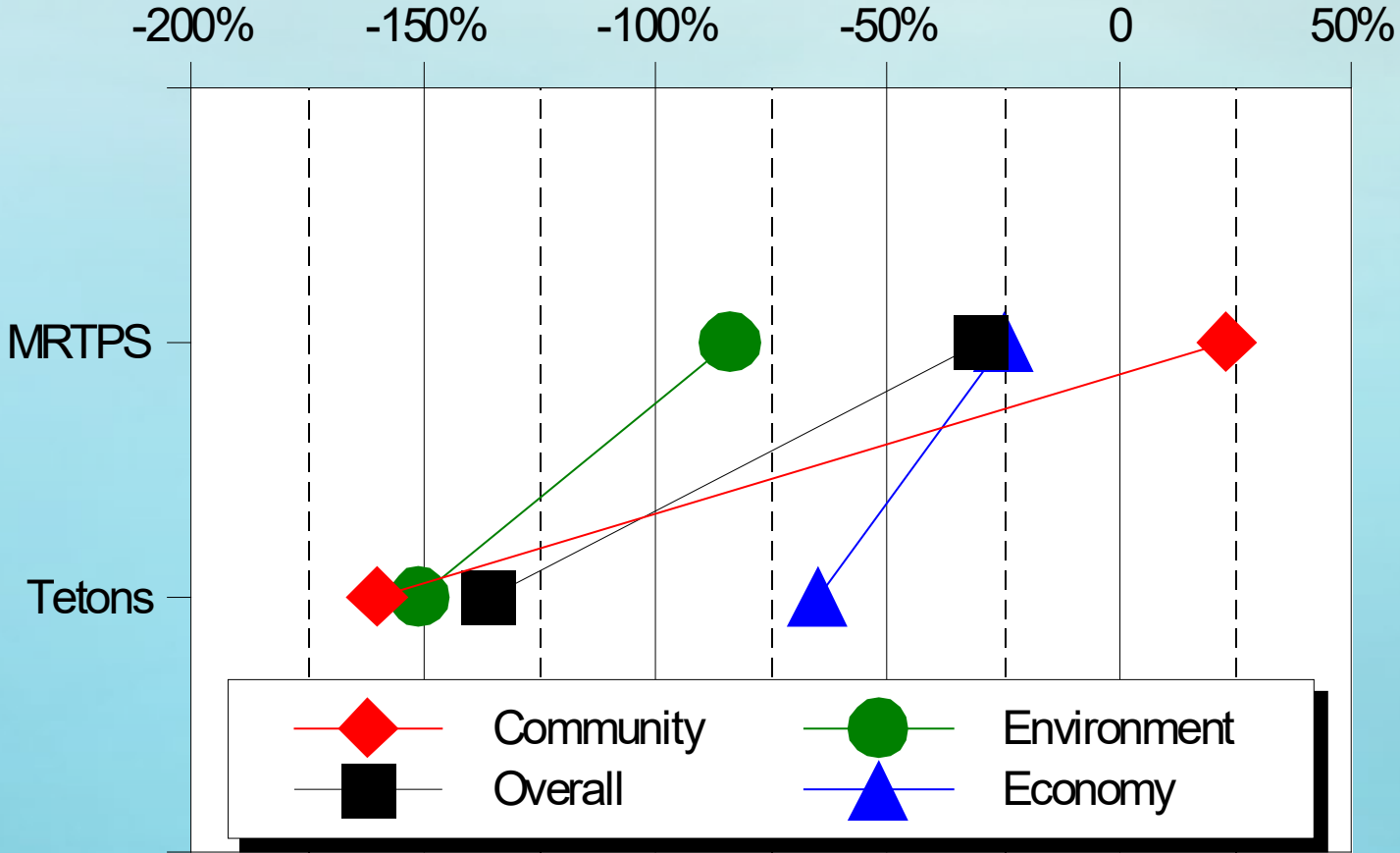




# Respondents: Tetons v. MRTPS Attendees: XIII


## Greater Tetons Residents v MRTPS Attendees

### Hope Gap, by Basic Categories



The Big Question (and perhaps the Big Disconnect):

- *How Well Do You Understand Your Constituents?*
- *How Well Do They Understand You?*



Thank you, Rossland!