



Energy, Climate, and the American Public

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Research motivated by the following questions.

- What do we know about American's attitudes about energy?
- How do attitudes vary across energy sources?
- What are the determinants of energy choice preferences?
- How does this inform climate change policy?

Conceptual framework.

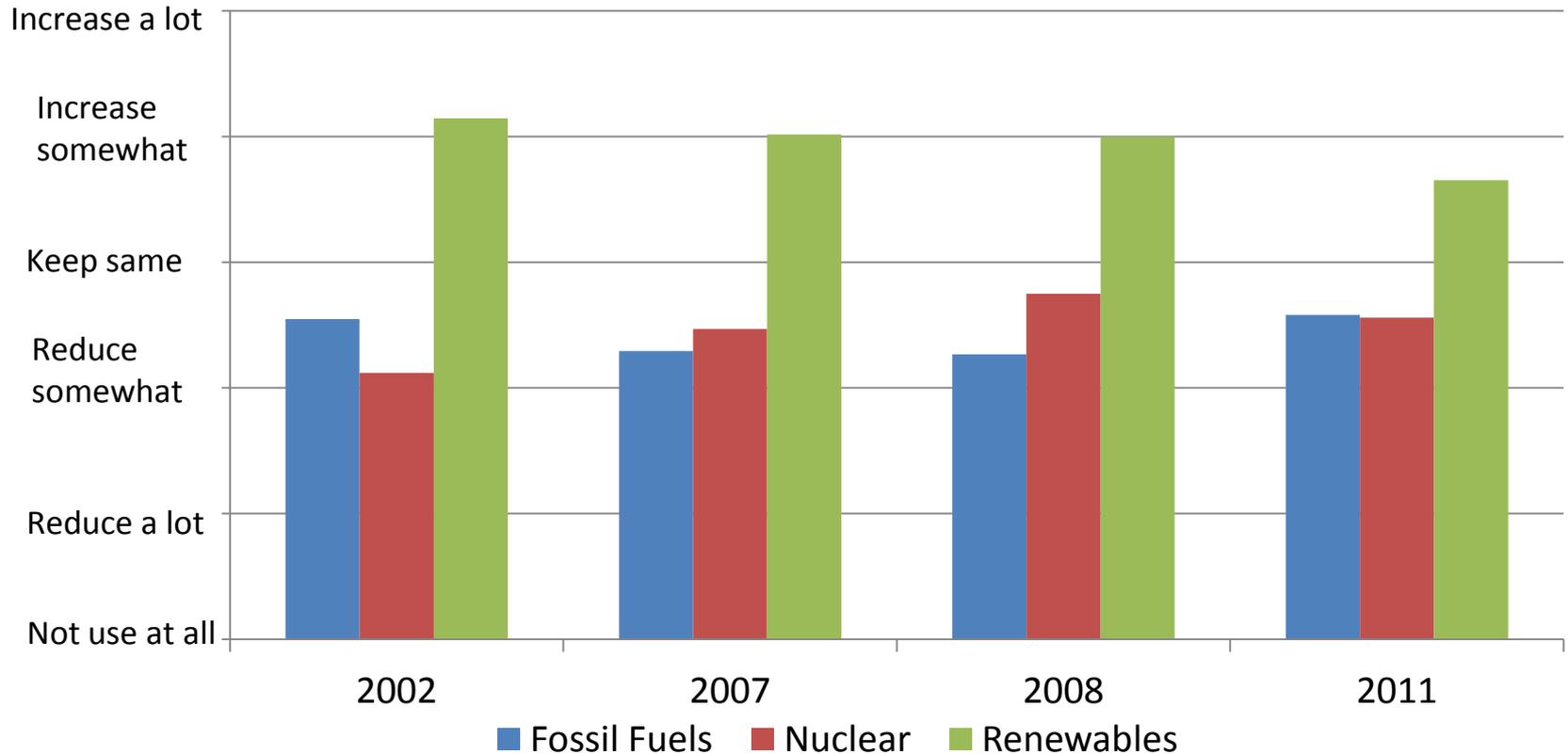
- People evaluate energy sources in terms of a common set of attributes, and then use them to formulate preferences about their future use.
- Attributes have different weights in people's thinking, which explains variation across public.
- Structuring energy choices in terms of attributes allows us to think about public opinion in general, rather than as unique to the source.

Our survey data.

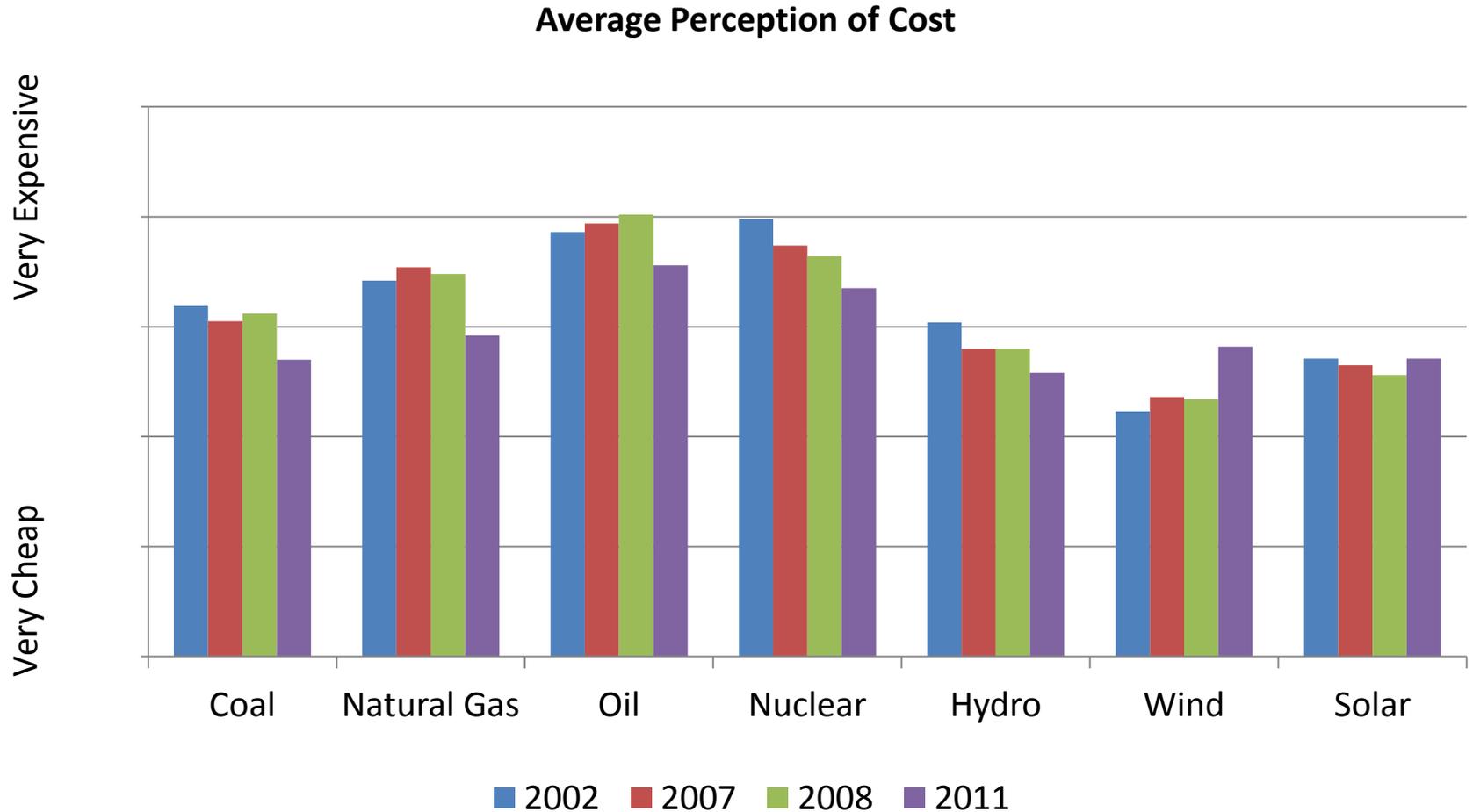
- Harvard/MIT Energy Surveys
 - Nationally-representative internet surveys.
 - Knowledge Networks: 2002, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008.
 - YouGov/Polimetrix: 2007, 2011a, 2011b.
 - Battery of questions repeated on 2002, 2007, 2008, and 2011 surveys, enabling some trend analysis.
 - Most surveys include experiments.

How do attitudes vary across energy sources?

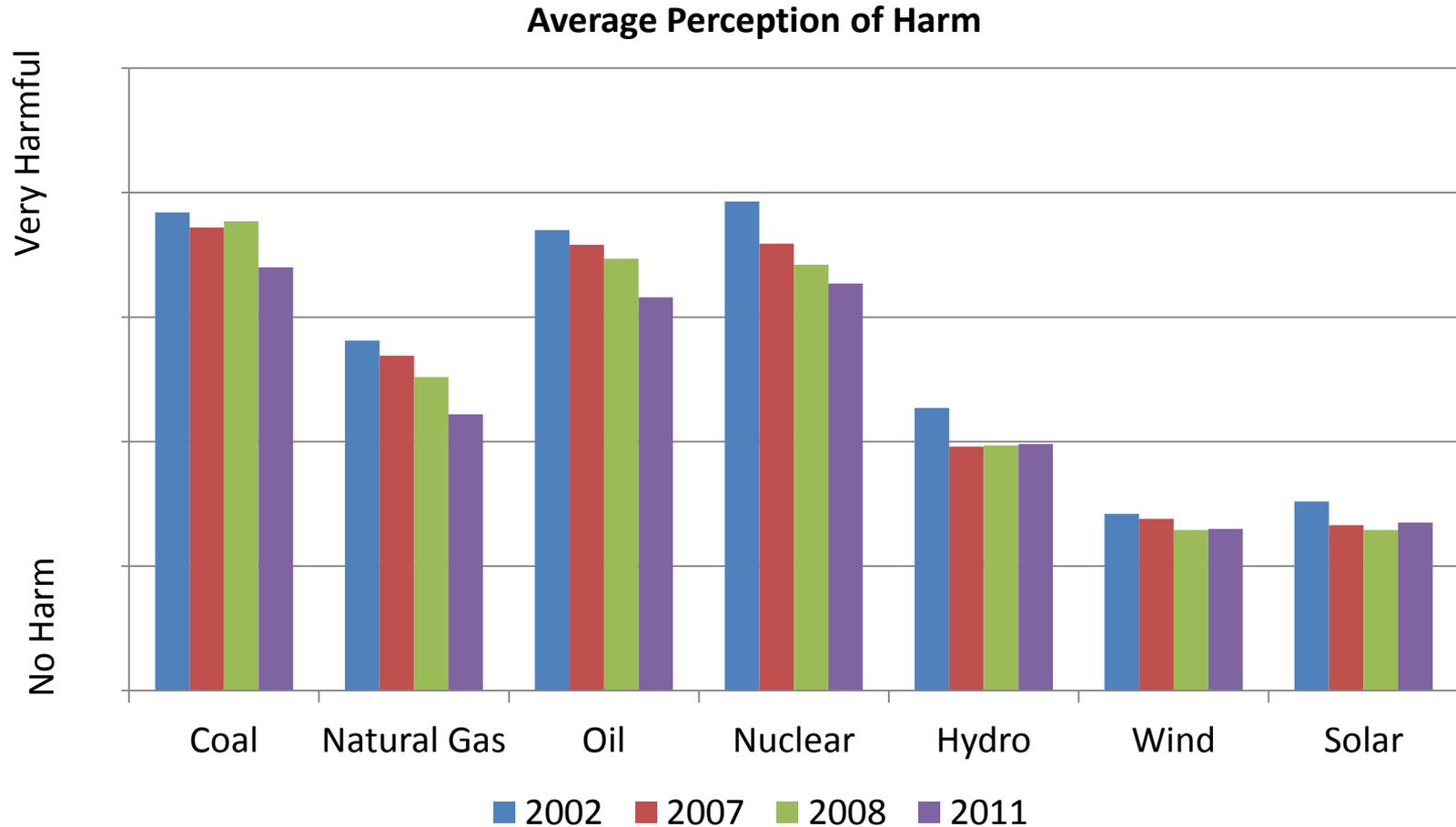
Average Across Fuel Type



What are the determinants of energy preferences?



What are the determinants of energy preferences?

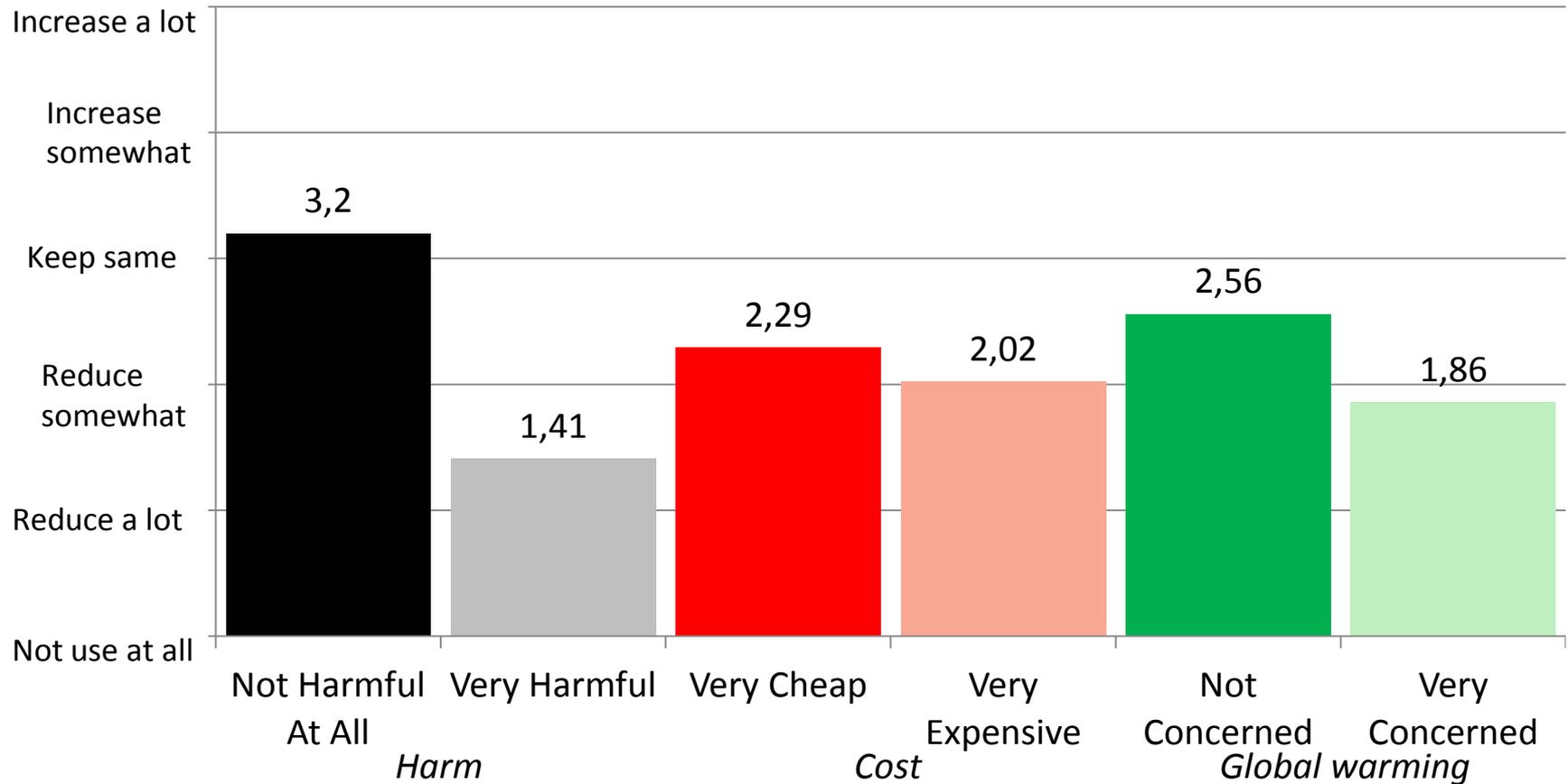


Summary of regression analysis.

- Strongest correlates of energy use preferences are energy attributes.
 - Perceptions of environmental harms and costs, but not climate change attitudes.
- Individual characteristics not important.
 - Demographics and party identification.

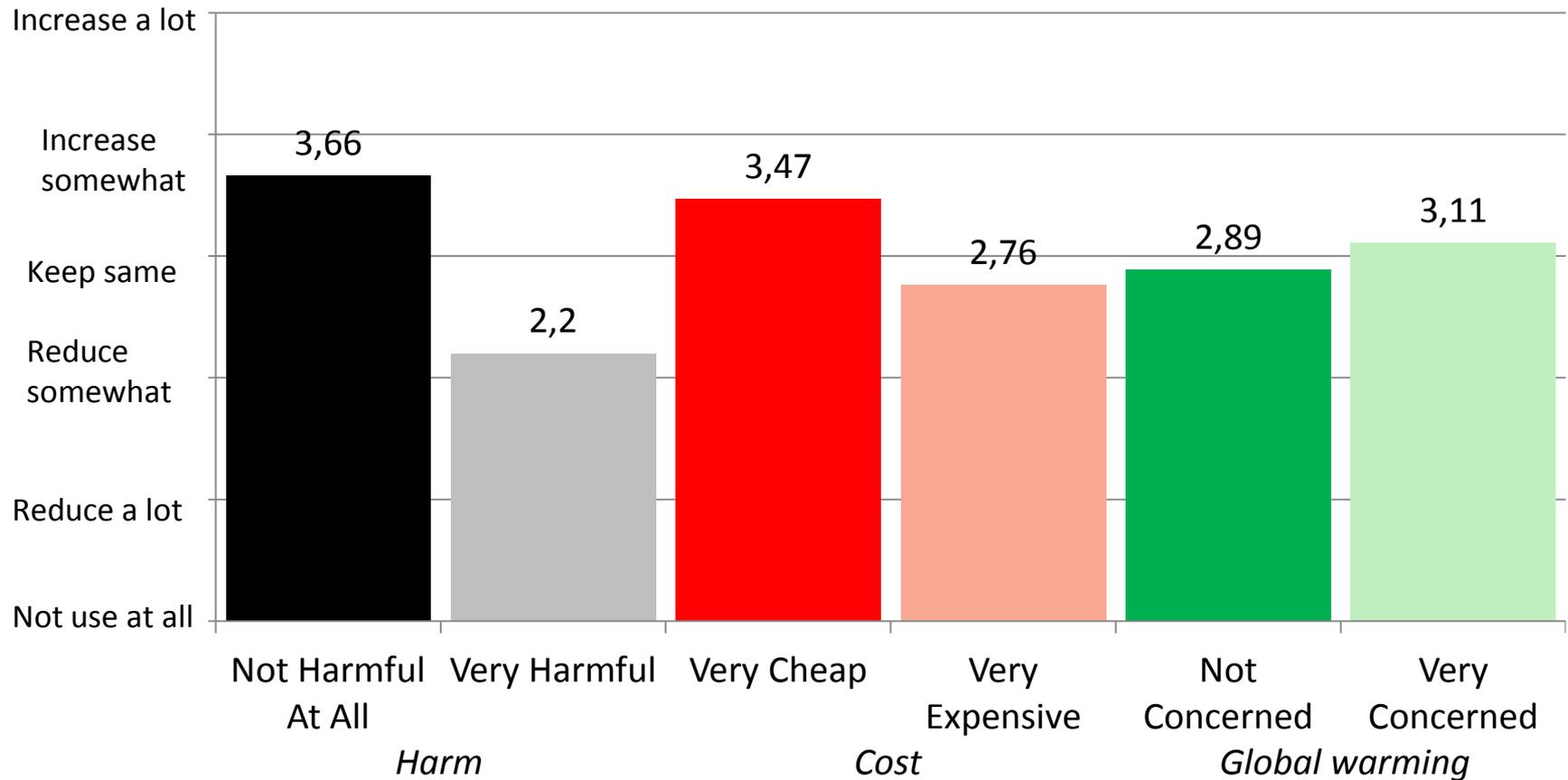
Simulated effects of attributes.

Coal



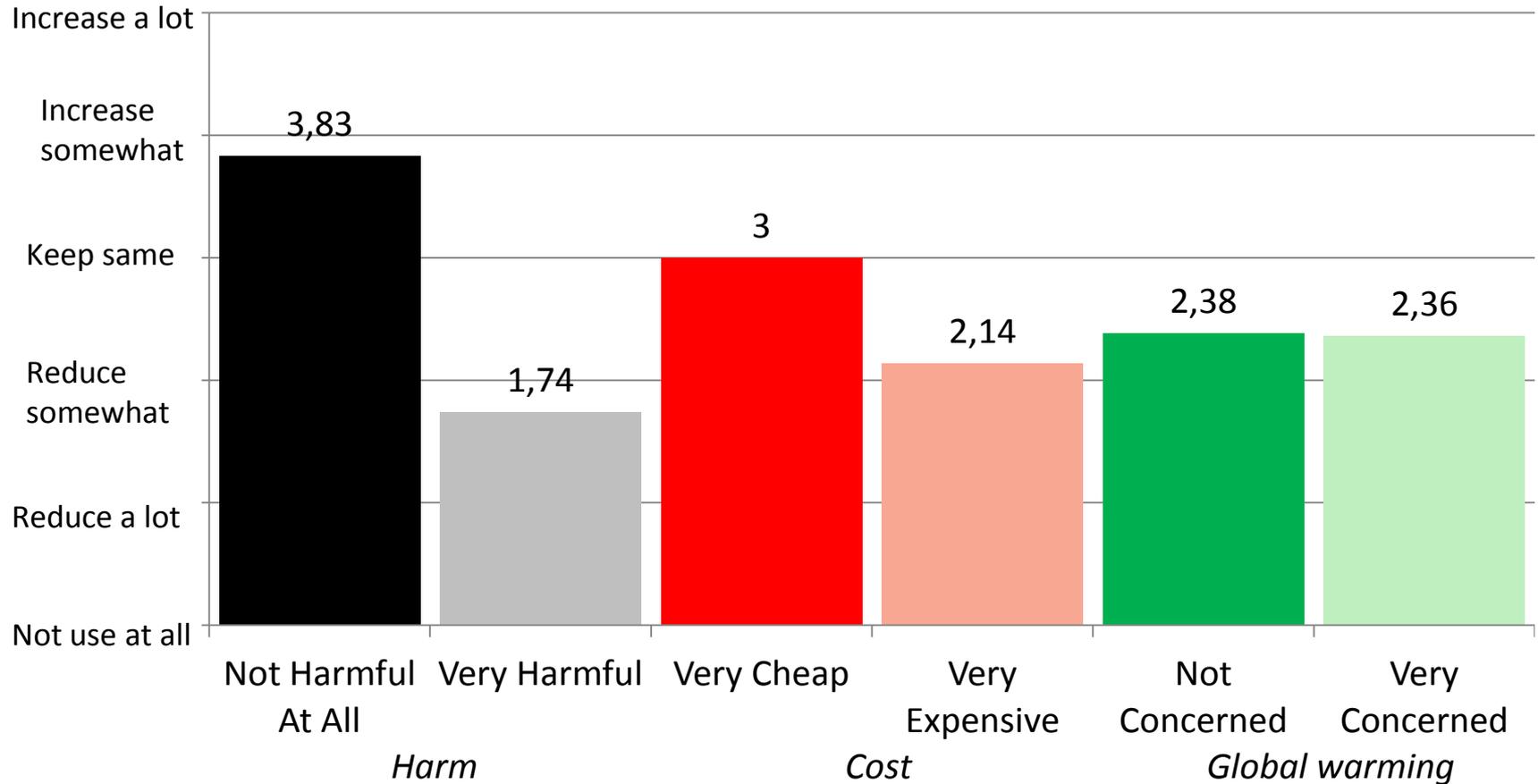
Simulated effects of attributes.

Natural Gas

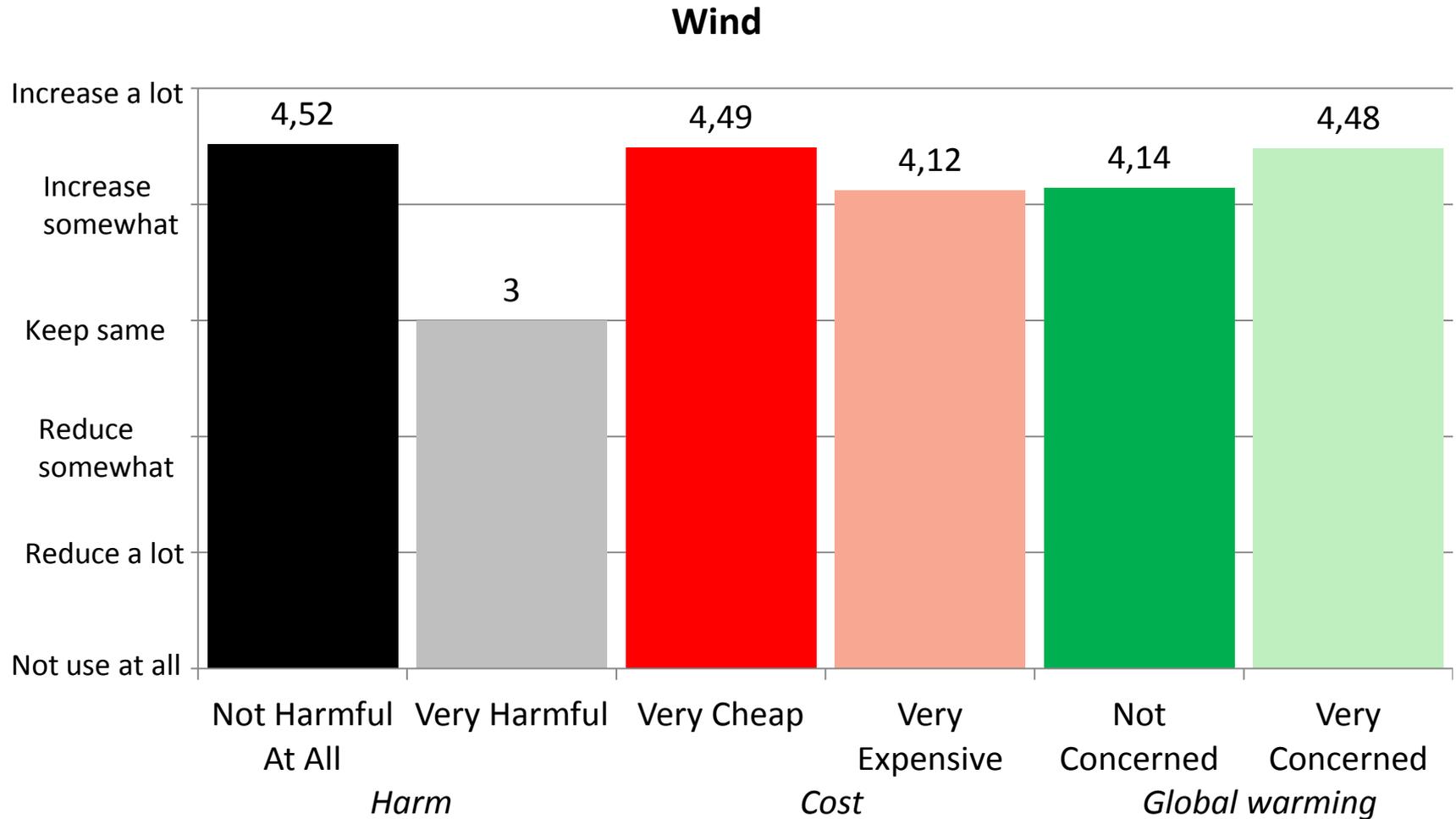


Simulated effects of attributes.

Nuclear



Simulated effects of attributes.



Summary of experiments.

- Information about the costs of electricity generation:
 - Increases support for future use of fossil fuels, especially coal and natural gas.
 - Decreases support for future use of renewables.
- Information about local environmental harms:
 - Reduces support for future use of coal and natural gas, and increases support for future use of nuclear.
- Information about climate change:
 - No additional effect.

Implications for climate change policy?

- Global warming is weakly correlated with energy choice attitudes.
 - Public education is unlikely to lead to demands for change.
 - Americans express lukewarm support for climate change policy interventions.
- Our findings suggest another approach:
 - Americans are more willing to support changes in the mix of energy source when based on local environmental harms.
 - These harms disproportionately arise with the use of coal; policies aimed at coal will also result in reduced carbon emissions.
 - And, these policies should garner more public support.

Thanks.