



# Evidence to Influence

*Making a Pitch to Policymakers*

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# Downloads

[jaredwesley.ca/policy](http://jaredwesley.ca/policy)

# **Learning Objectives**

- 1. Gain practical perspective on the policymaking process.**
- 2. Understand the context shaping immigration policy.**
- 3. Develop skills in engaging policymakers with solutions.**

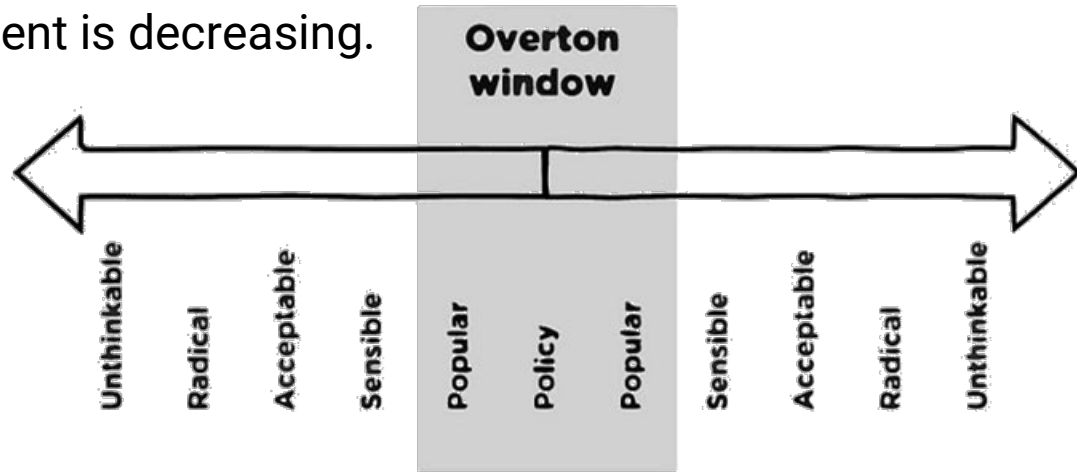
# A Primer on the Policy Environment

- **Canada is a liberal democracy.**
  - pluralism\*
  - responsible government
  - public service bargain
- **Canada is a federation.**
  - division of powers
  - fiscal federalism
  - functional federalism
- **At its best, policymaking is evidence-informed.**
  - not evidence-based decision-making
  - not decision-based evidence-making

Primers are available at:  
[jaredwesley.ca/policy](https://jaredwesley.ca/policy)

# Barriers to Effective Policymaking

- Political time horizons are short.
- Attention spans are short, and problems are plentiful.
- Bureaucracies are siloed.
- National policymaking requires intergovernmental collaboration.
- Fiscal constraints are real.
- Policy capacity within government is decreasing.
- The Overton Window is in flux.



# THE THREE THREADS



## PROBLEM

The public needs to recognize a problem exists.



## SOLUTION

The public has to believe there are viable solutions.



## POLITICS

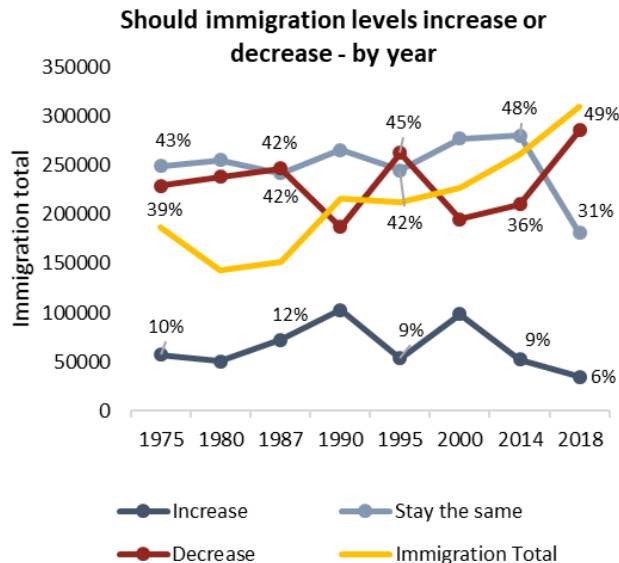
The public needs to be willing to act to cause change.

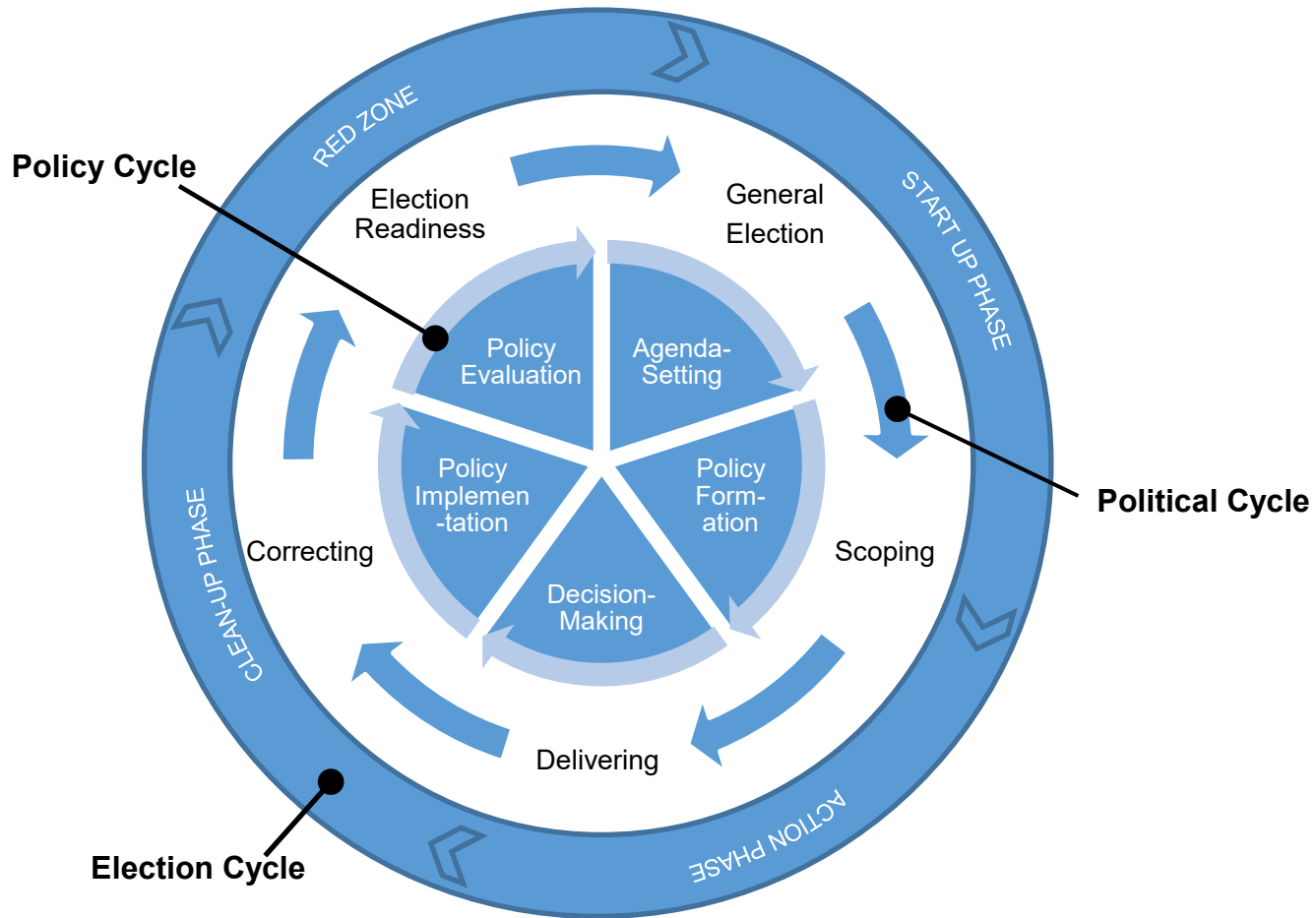
## POLICY CHANGE

When the three  
streams come  
together

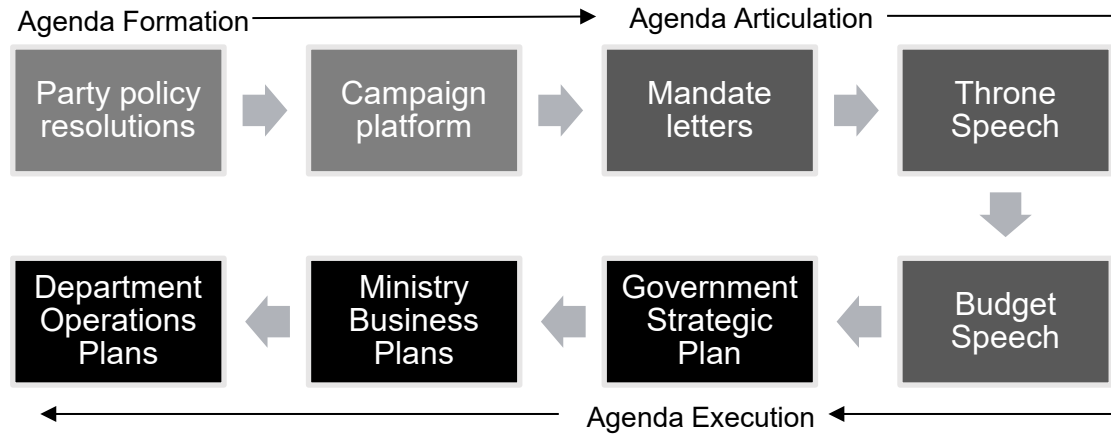
# Scoping The Problem

- Issues are not problems. (At least not to everyone.)
- Distinguish between causes, correlates, and consequences.
- Remember: whose problem is it?



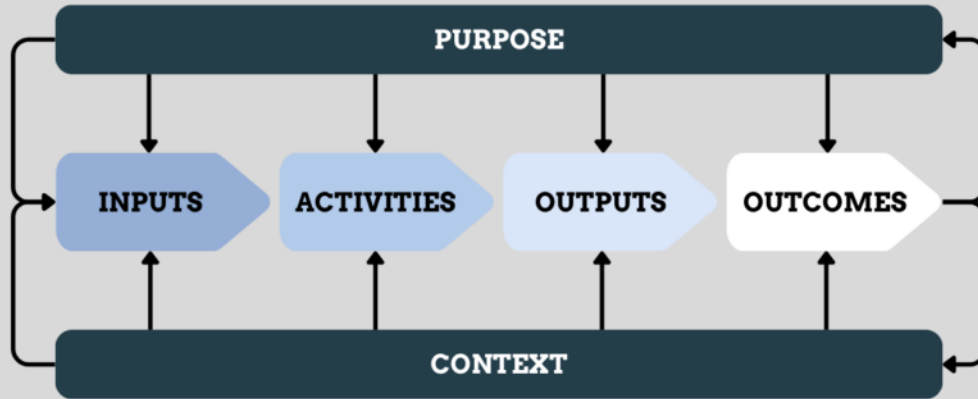


# Agenda Setting



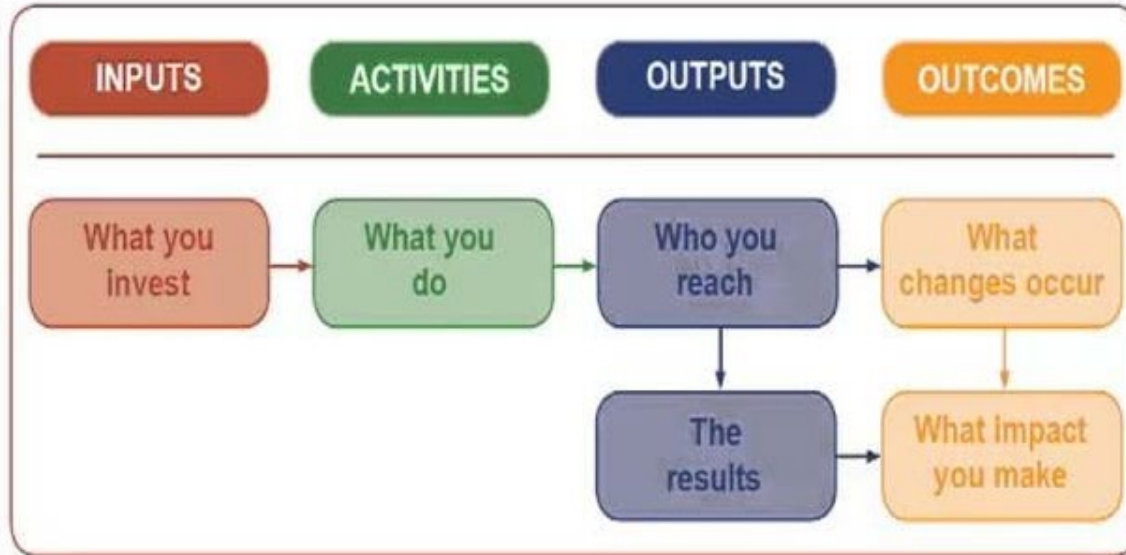
# Generating Solutions

- Current state → Transformation → Future State



# Generating Solutions

- Current state → Transformation → Future State



# Policy Levels

Central  
Authority



Delegated  
Authority

## Normative

- outcomes, objectives
- constitutional or legal reform

High-level,  
Long-term



Low-level,  
Short-term

## Strategic

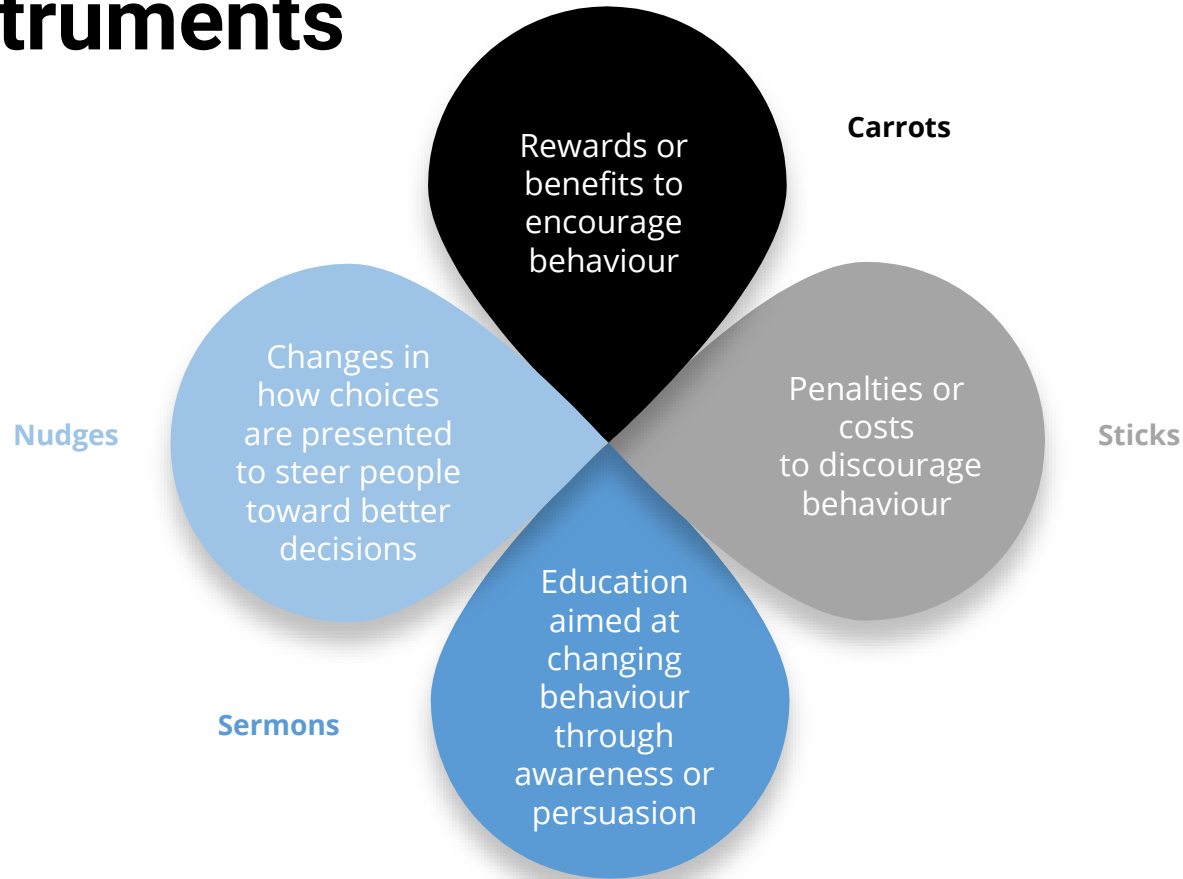
- priorities, resources
- policy (re)design:  
new/different/removed instrument

## Operational

- throughputs, outputs
- policy instrument recalibration

Model adapted from Calopietro (nd), Fontaine, Cordovea, and Velasco (2016), Bennet (1991), Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 349-50), Hall (1993), Howlett and Cashore (2009), Howlett (2009)

# Policy Instruments



# Approaches to Policy Change

|            | APPROACH A:<br>Recalibrating an<br>Instrument           | APPROACH B:<br>Creating or<br>Replacing an<br>Instrument | APPROACH C:<br>Removing an<br>Instrument<br>(without<br>replacement) |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Question 1 | Which type of instrument is currently in place and why? |                                                          |                                                                      |
| Question 2 | Why is this instrument better than the alternatives?    | Why is the instrument ineffective?                       | Why is the instrument not only ineffective but harmful?              |
| Question 3 | What specific adjustments are required?                 | What type of instrument is best and why?                 | Why does the instrument remain in place, despite this?               |
| Question 4 | Why not swap or remove instruments?                     | Why not recalibrate or remove it?                        | Why not recalibrate or replace it?                                   |

# Key Questions in Policy Change

What is the main reason government has chosen its current policy instrument(s)?

What is the biggest challenge you'll have convincing government of the need to remove, replace, or recalibrate its instrument?

How would removing, replacing, or recalibrating its instruments affect key stakeholders?

# Discussion

- What resonates for you from this discussion of the policy environment?
- What doesn't sit quite right?
- What questions do you have?
- What would you add from your own perspective?

# Communicating Effectively

- The 3-30-3 Approach:
  - 3 seconds/words: capture attention
  - 30 seconds: provide value
  - 3 minutes: drive change

3-30-3



# 3-30-3 Approach: An Example

- **Issue:** Expanding access to mental health supports for youth in Alberta
- **3 seconds (hook):** “1 in 5 Alberta teens is struggling with mental health, and most aren’t getting help.”
- **30 seconds (pitch):** “Mental health is the foundation for learning, working, and thriving. Right now, too many young people fall through the cracks. Our plan expands school-based supports and community clinics so youth can get care when and where they need it. This isn’t just health policy—it’s about stronger families, safer communities, and a more resilient workforce.”
- **3 minutes (one-pager outline):**
  - **Context:** Rising rates of anxiety and depression among youth.
  - **Problem:** Long wait times and uneven access to care.
  - **Proposal:** Expand school-based mental health teams and rural tele-health.
  - **Evidence:** Every dollar spent saves \$4 in justice and health costs.
  - **Ask:** Commit \$50M over 3 years to scale up programs province-wide.
- **30 minutes (depth):** Provide detailed funding breakdown, staffing models, and evaluation measures.

# The 3 Second Hook



# The 30 Second Pitch

- Your message should fit on a sticky note.
- Answer: **what, so what, now what.**
- Consider it a 30s bus-stop version.



# Discussion

- What resonates for you from this exercise?
- What surprised you?
- What questions do you have?



## Dealing with Data

Numbers don't tell the story. You do.

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

**Your goal is not to show everything you found.**

Your goal is to help decision-makers quickly understand:

- the core problem (**what**),
- why it matters (**so what**),
- and what should be done next (**now what**).

**Good policy communication turns analysis into action.**

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

## **Start with the takeaway, not the spreadsheet or figure.**

Before showing a table, graph, or percentage, tell your audience what they should notice.

### **Try this:**

- “The key pattern in our data is...”
- “The biggest change we found was...”
- “This suggests that current policy may be...”

### **Avoid this:**

- “Here is all of our data.”
- “This chart has a lot going on, but...”
- “We ran several tests and got these numbers...”

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

**Translate statistics into plain language.**

**Policymakers are not grading your methods.**

**They need to understand the meaning of your findings.**

- Explain what the number means in everyday terms.
- Replace jargon with clear language.
- Define technical concepts briefly and only when needed.

Instead of:

“Respondents in Category A exhibited a 12.4 percentage-point differential.”

Say:

“People in this group were about 12 points more likely to experience this barrier.”

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

**Always answer: “So what?”**

For every number you present, explain:

- **Why does this matter?**
- **Who is affected?**
- **What are the consequences?**
- **Why should policymakers care now?**

***Finding -> Meaning -> Policy relevance***

**Example:**

“Processing times were longest for this category of applicants. That matters because delays can disrupt employment, schooling, and family reunification. This points to a need for targeted administrative reform.”

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

## **Use fewer numbers, not more.**

Choose only the statistics that directly support your recommendation.

### **Focus on:**

- the most important trend,
- the clearest comparison,
- the most policy-relevant difference,
- and the evidence that best supports action.

1

memorable number is  
more powerful than  
ten crowded slides.

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

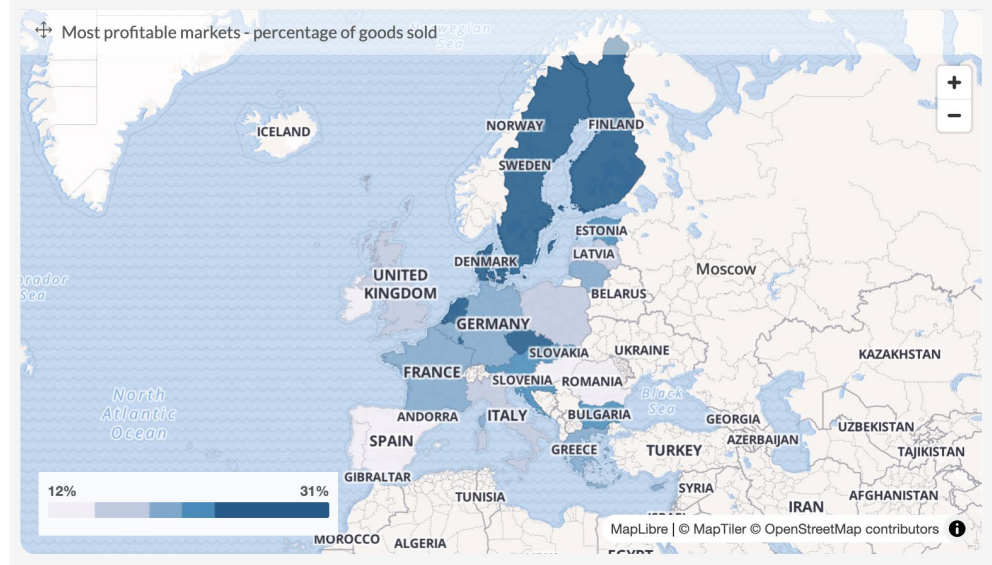
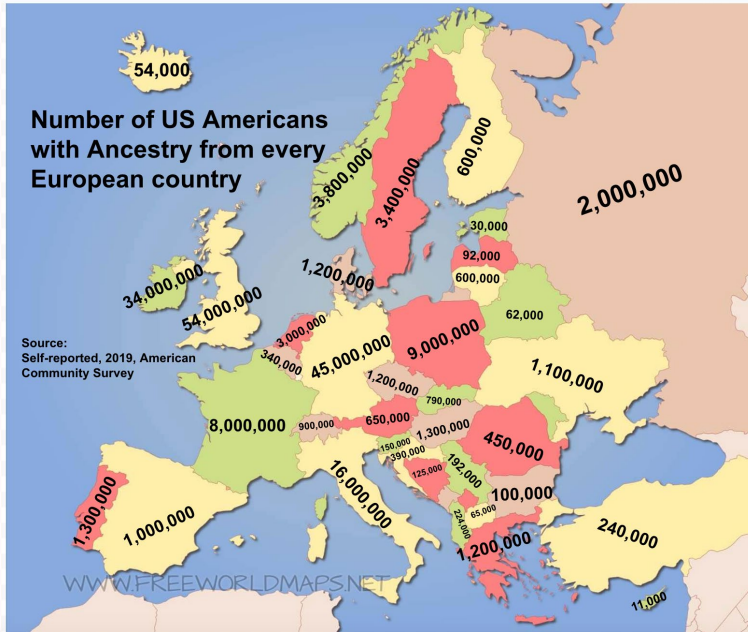
## **Make figures easy to read in seconds**

Effective figures:

- have a clear title with the main point,
- highlight the most important result,
- use simple labels,
- avoid clutter,
- and remove anything that distracts from the message.

**A figure should answer a question, not create one.**

Good Chart, Bad Chart by Luzmo.com



# Good Chart, Bad Chart by Luzmo.com

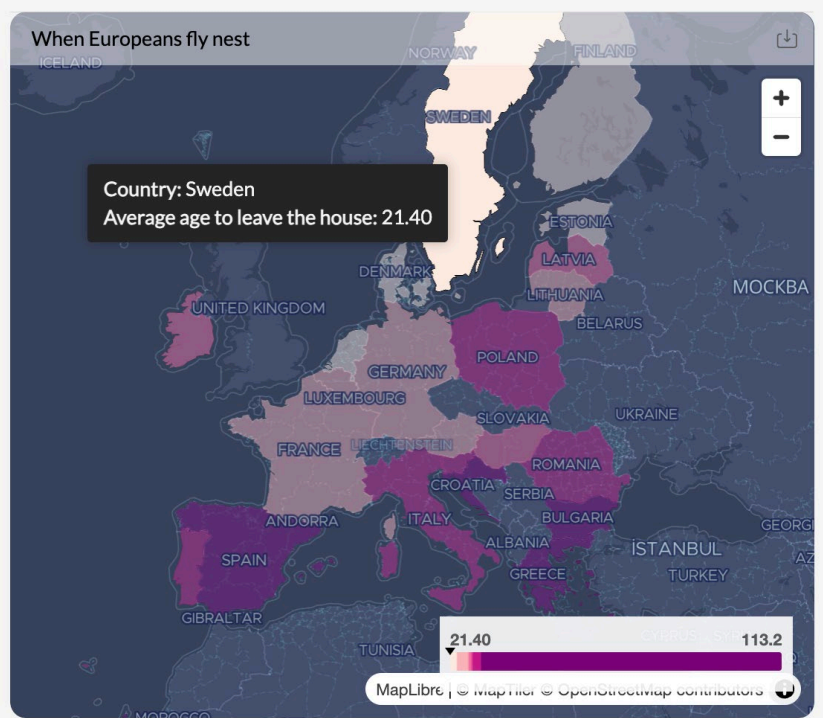
## When Europeans fly nest

Average age at which young people leave the parantel household, 2022

■ below 23 ■ 23-25 ■ 25-27 ■ 27-29 ■ 29-31 ■ over 31



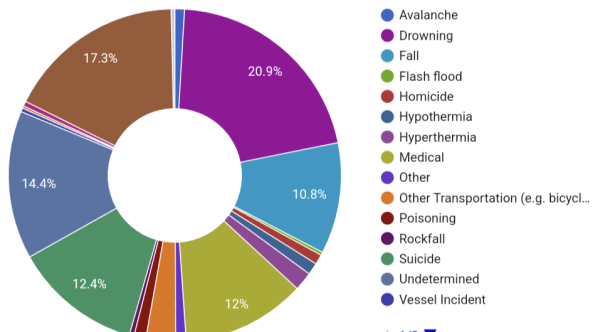
Source: Eurostat



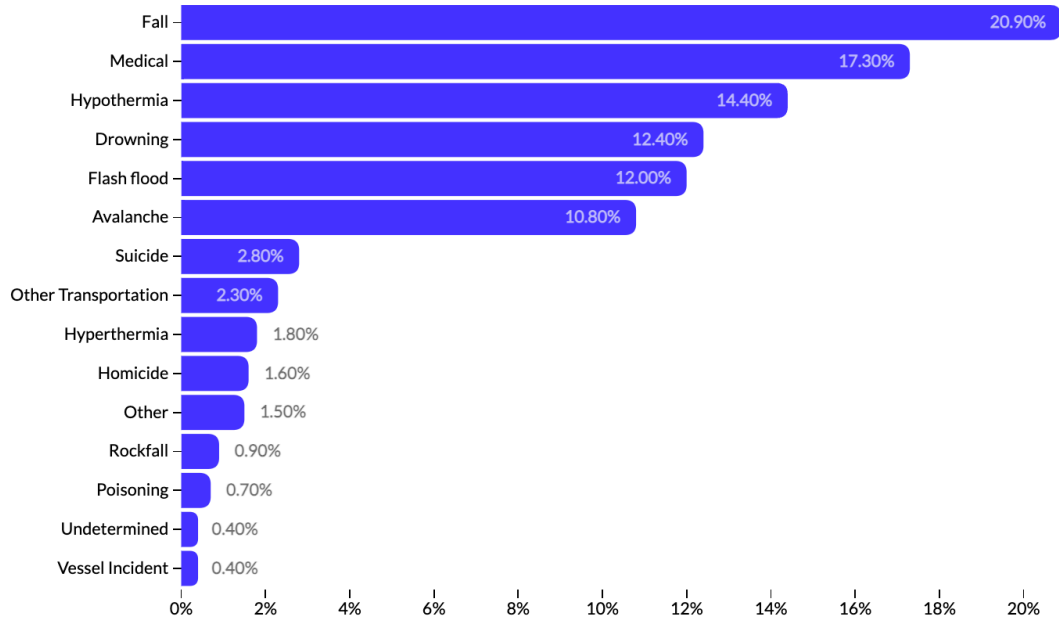
# Good Chart, Bad Chart by Luzmo.com

## What Are the Top Causes of Death in the National Parks?

Fatalities in National Parks (2007-2023) by Cause of Death



## Top Causes Of Death In National Parks



# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

## Be accurate without overstating

Policymakers value confidence, but they also value honesty.

- state clearly what your data shows,
- acknowledge limits,
- distinguish correlation from causation,
- avoid making claims the evidence cannot support.

### Try:

- “Our analysis suggests...”
- “The data indicates...”
- “Based on this evidence, a reasonable policy response would be...”

### Avoid:

- “This proves...”
- “This guarantees...”
- “There is only one possible solution...”

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

## **Show comparisons that help people decide**

Policymakers often think in terms of trade-offs and benchmarks.

A number alone can feel abstract.

A comparison gives it meaning.

Make your numbers useful by comparing:

- before vs. after,
- one group vs. another,
- your jurisdiction vs. others,
- current outcomes vs. desired outcomes.

# Tips on Telling Stories with Data

## **Put people back into the data**

Quantitative analysis is nice, but policy decisions affect real people. Use statistics to show scale, then connect them to lived consequences.

### **Example:**

“A 15% drop in approvals is not just a number. It means more families facing uncertainty and longer waits for stability.”



**Good policy communication combines evidence with human impact.**

**Human-centred advocacy:**  
prioritizing people's needs and perspectives in inclusive policy solutions

# Discussion

- What sticks with you from our discussions today?
- What's one thing you'll be thinking about differently as you approach your pitch?

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