

The Volans Survey

Exploring barriers to government response to the ecological crisis.

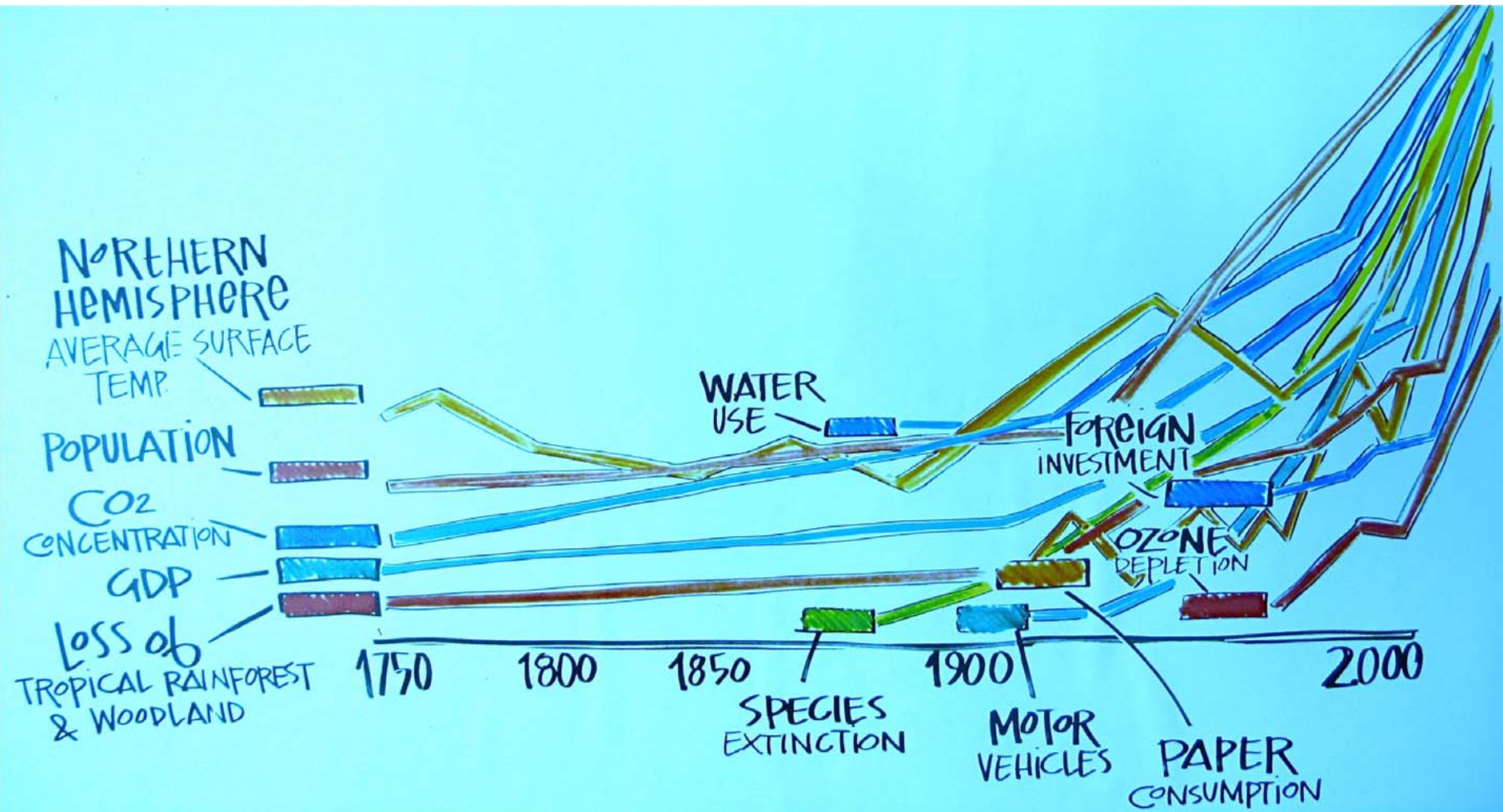
by Volans and Global Footprint Network

Alejandro Litovsky, Volans

Footprint Forum, Siena, June 2010



An inflection point: Planetary overshoot



Policy: Managing interdependency



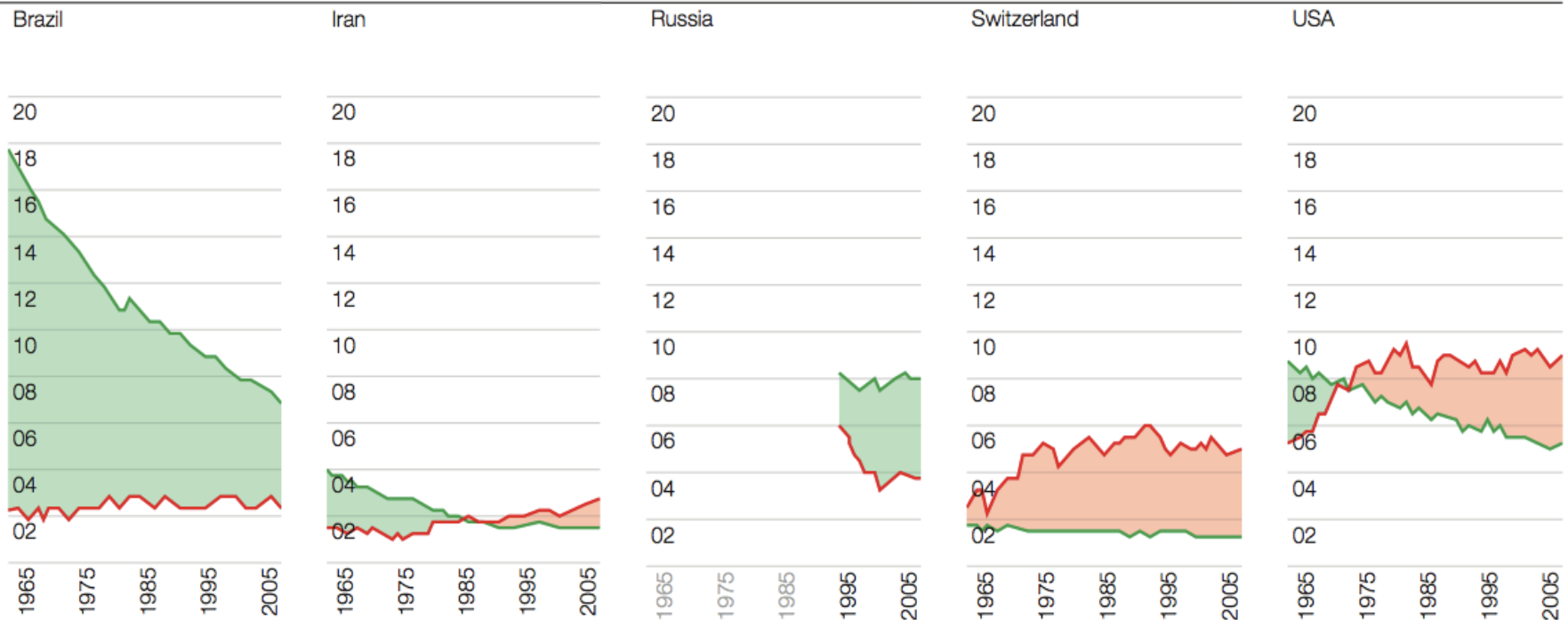
- **Yangtze Basin floods, China 1998**
- **\$24 billion** in losses.
- **250 million** people affected.
- Chinese government forbids land degradation in upper basin.

Infrastructure policy...

The Amazon pumps **8 trillion litres** of water
a year into the atmosphere



What policy vision?



Ecological Footprint
Biocapacity

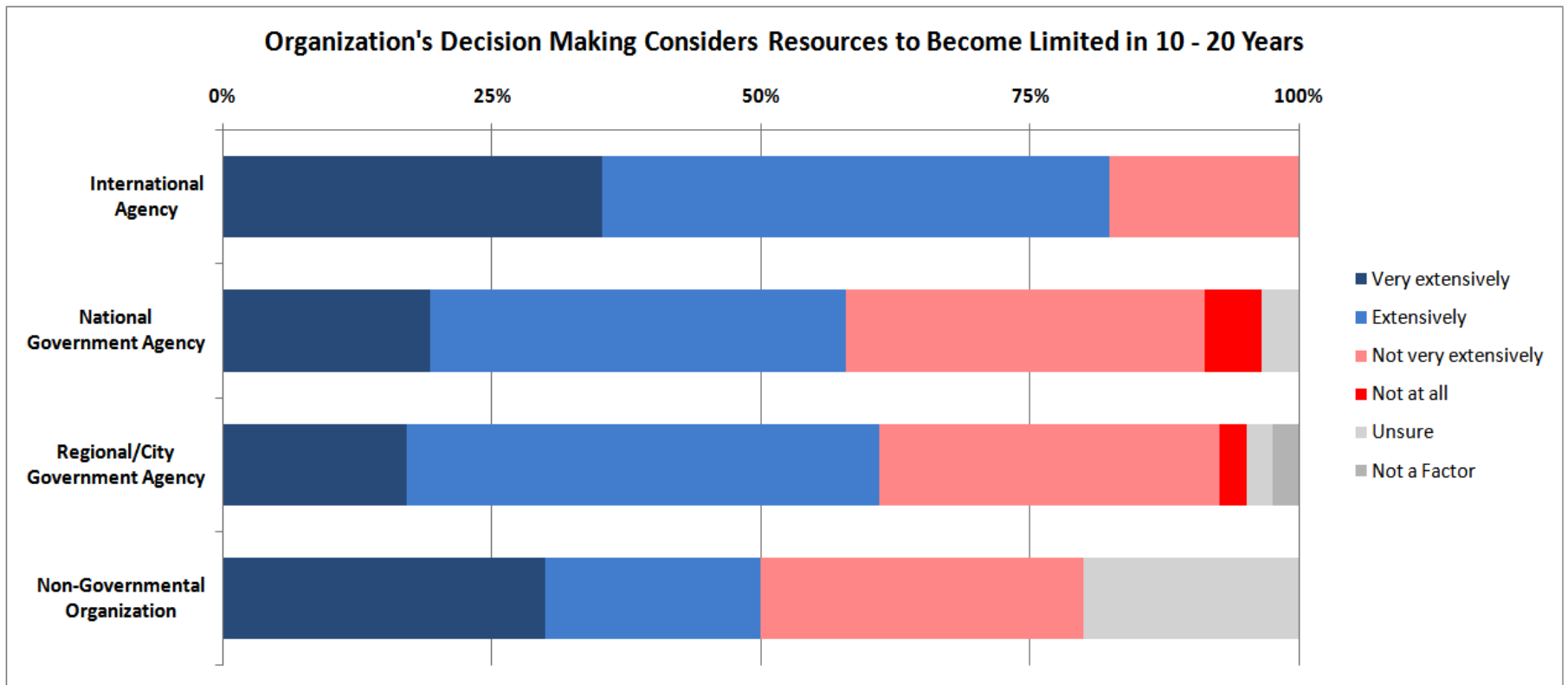
Survey



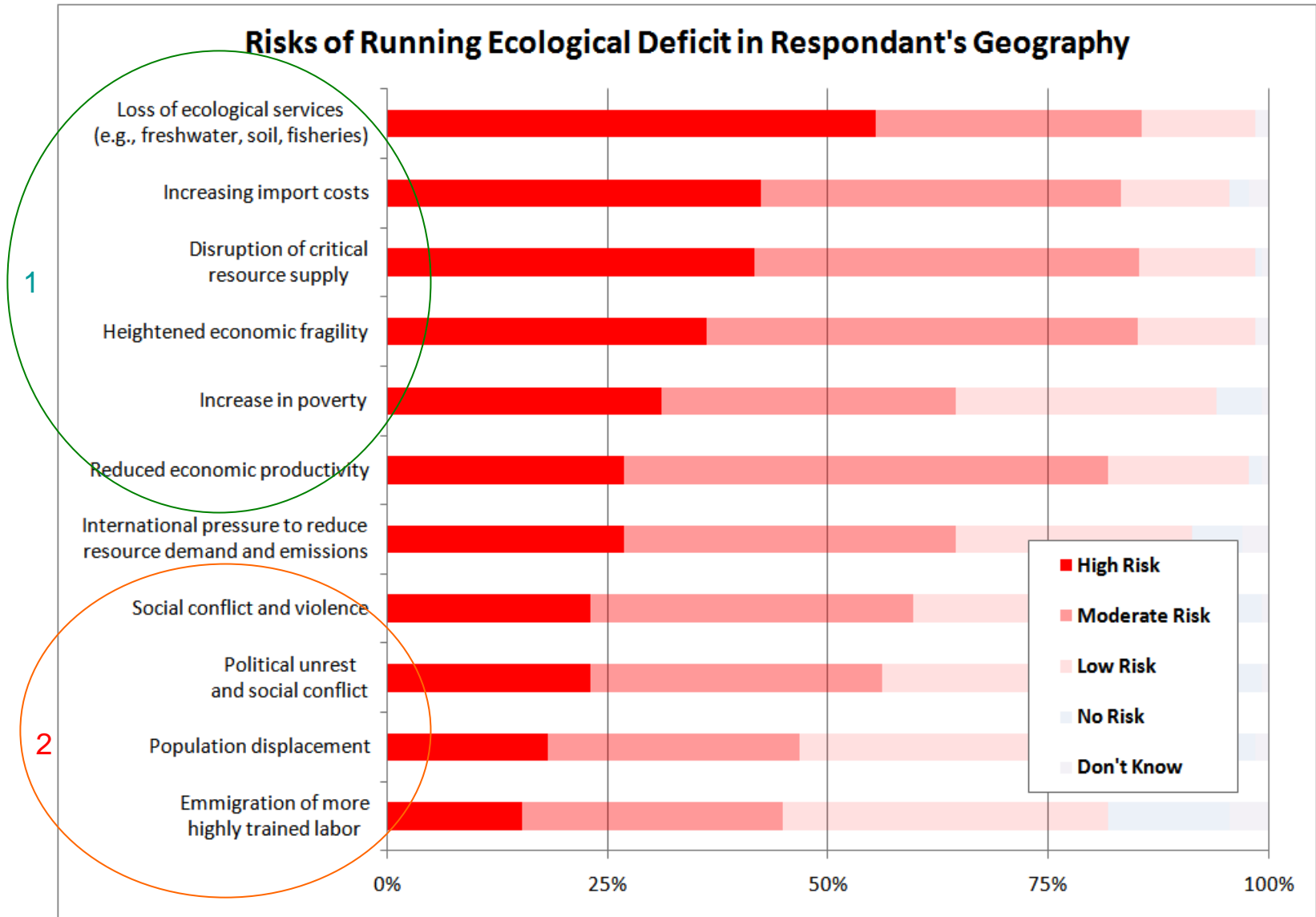
- 200 government-related respondents
 - International institutions
 - National and sub-national levels
 - NGOs

- Civil servants (30%), program management (30%), policy advisors (28%). Elected officials, political appointees and executive management minority.

Global actors more alert?

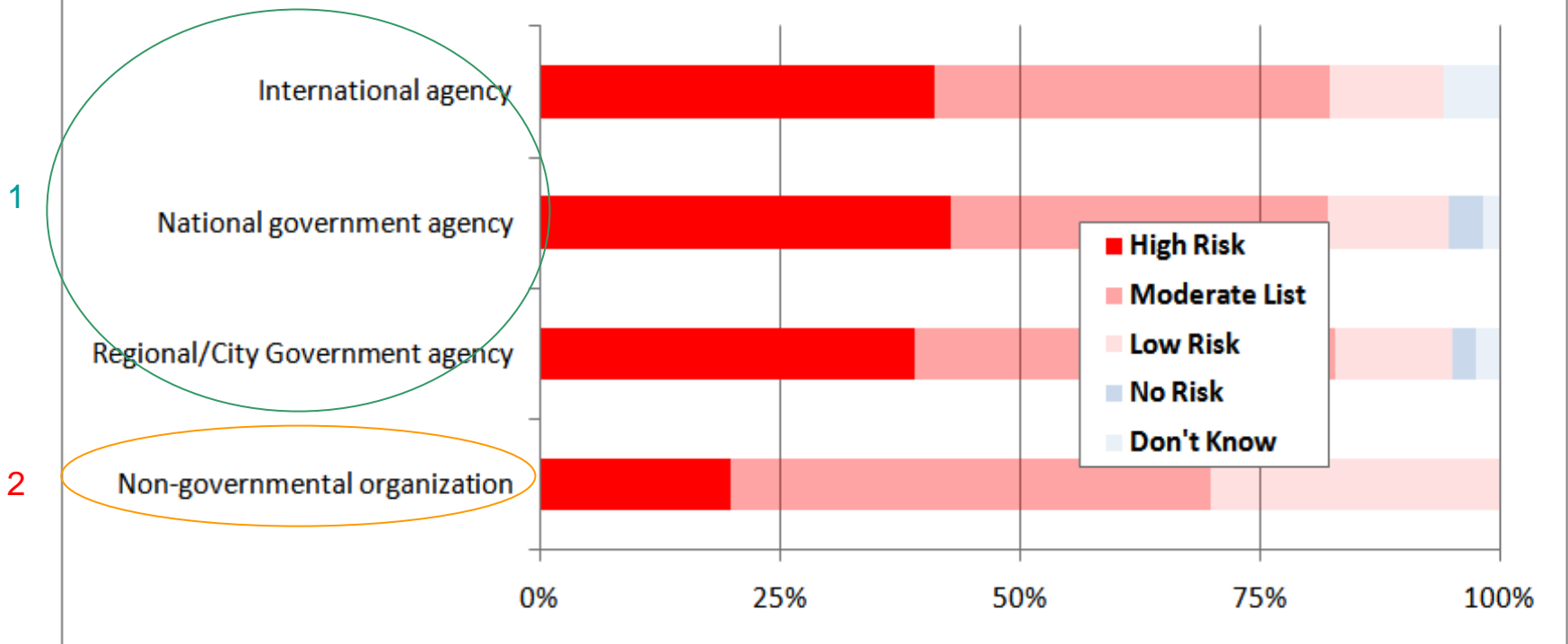


'Economic implications' are top concerns

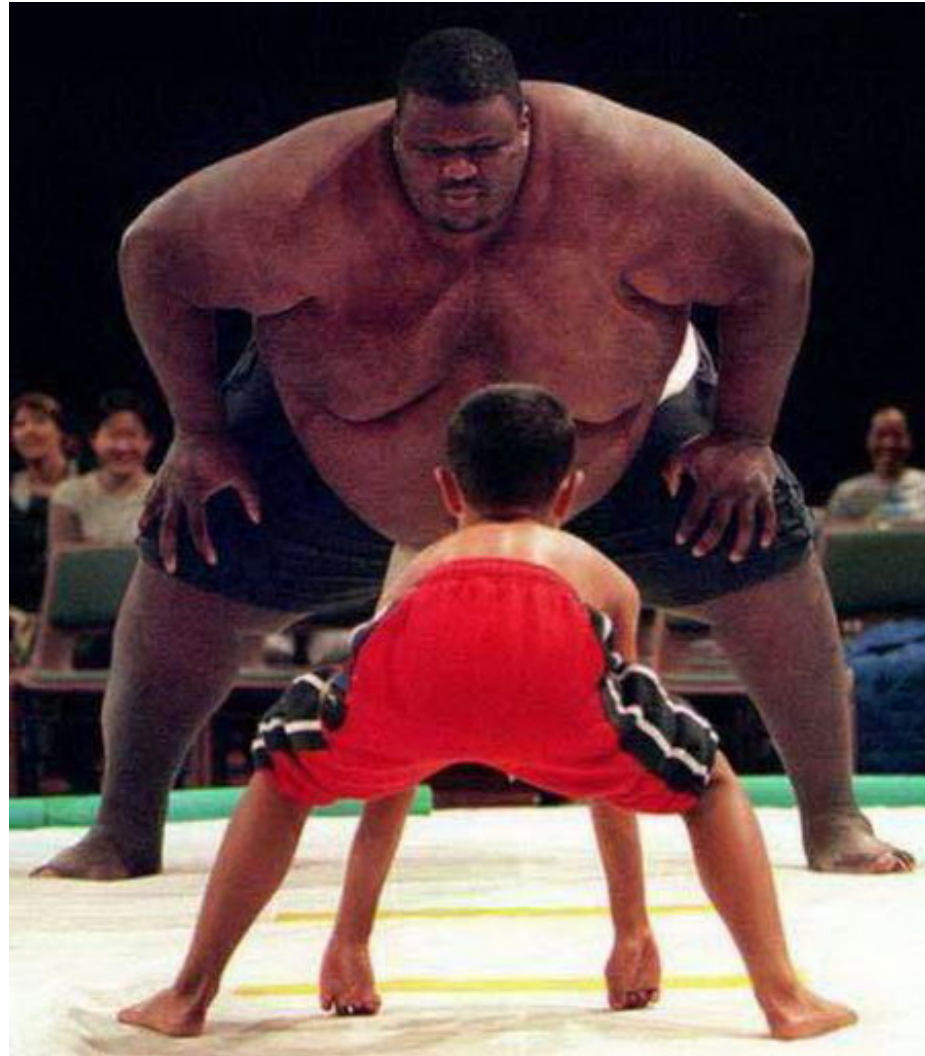


Are NGO's playing out the 'economy' story effectively?

Risk of Running Ecological Deficit:
Increasing Import Costs,
by type of organization surveyed



Which are the barriers?



The Political Economy of Limits

“...[the agency] operates with internal knowledge of resource constraints, but is managed by political appointees who do not want to acknowledge reality of resource constraints.”

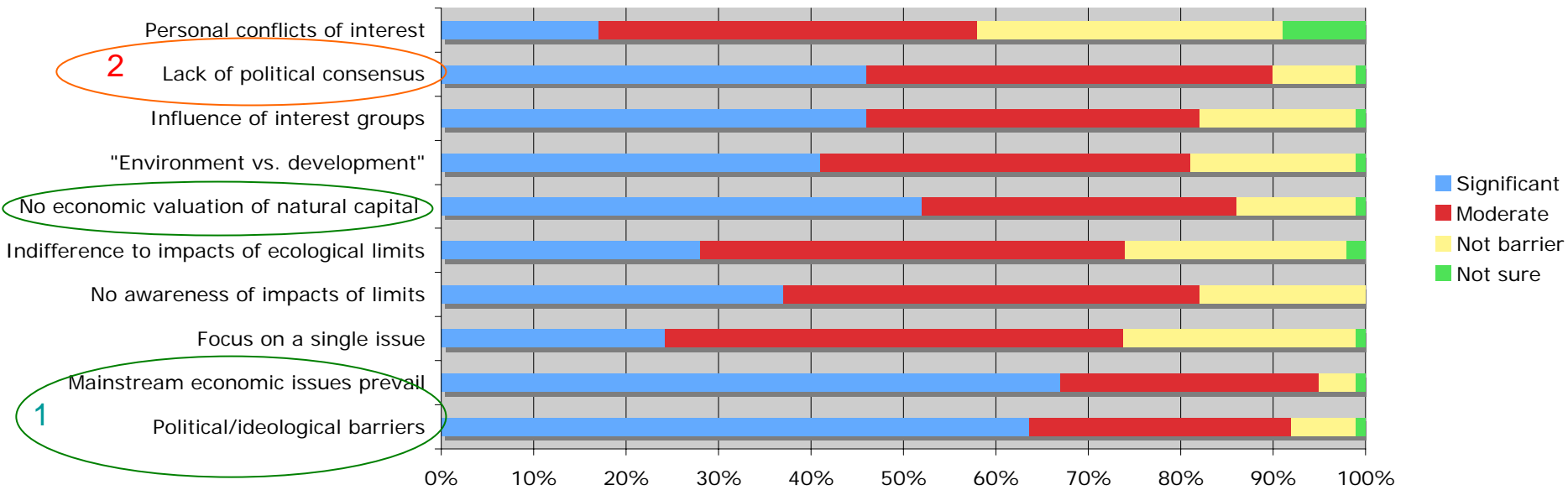
“Focus is on short term and politically expedient concerns. Those elected will lead on these issues only when a majority of the electorate demands it.”

“We have a management that is very "old school" and do not consider innovation a good or necessary risk. So, we keep doing things the same way.”

survey respondents

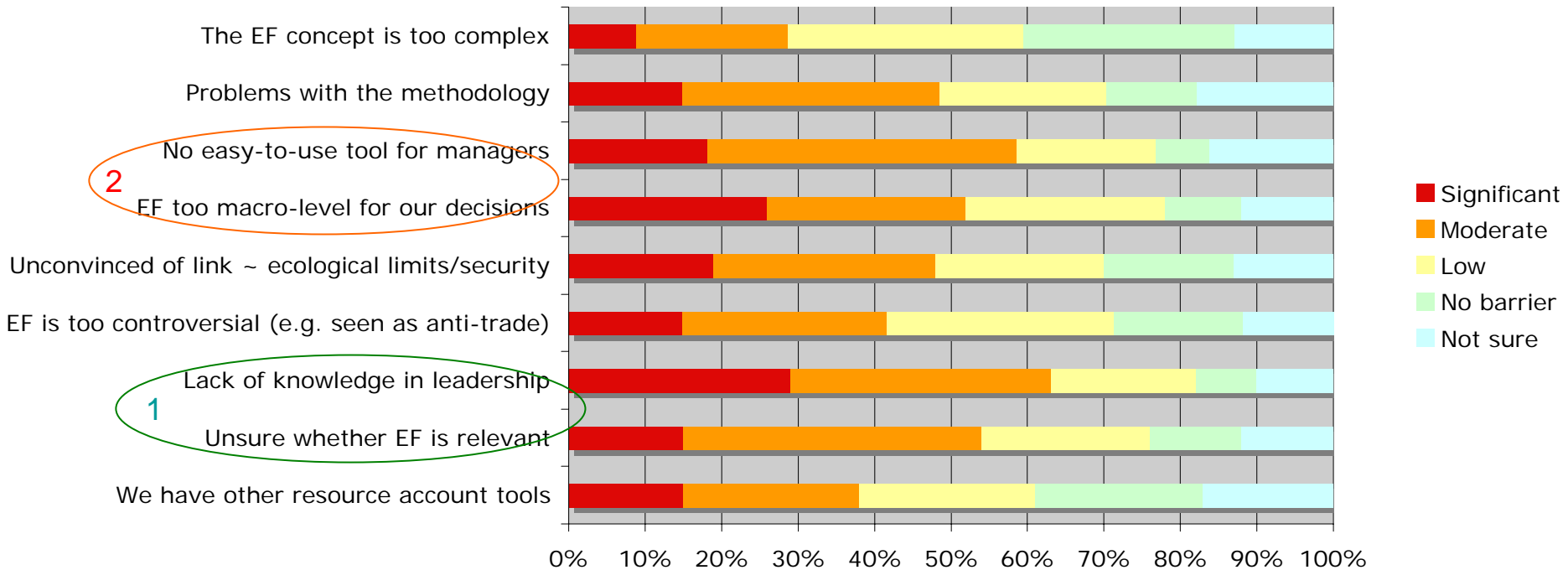
Redefine 'economic' and politics will follow

Barriers to embedding ecological limits in policy-making



Why gov'ts not using it?

Barriers to use by governments



Barriers for the Ecological Footprint

“We’ve brought forward an EF plan for the *town*”. “We need targeted data and relevance for towns and regions.”

“The methodology is problematic.”

“The anti-trade and anti-growth perception is an issue.”

“How much does it cost to implement?”

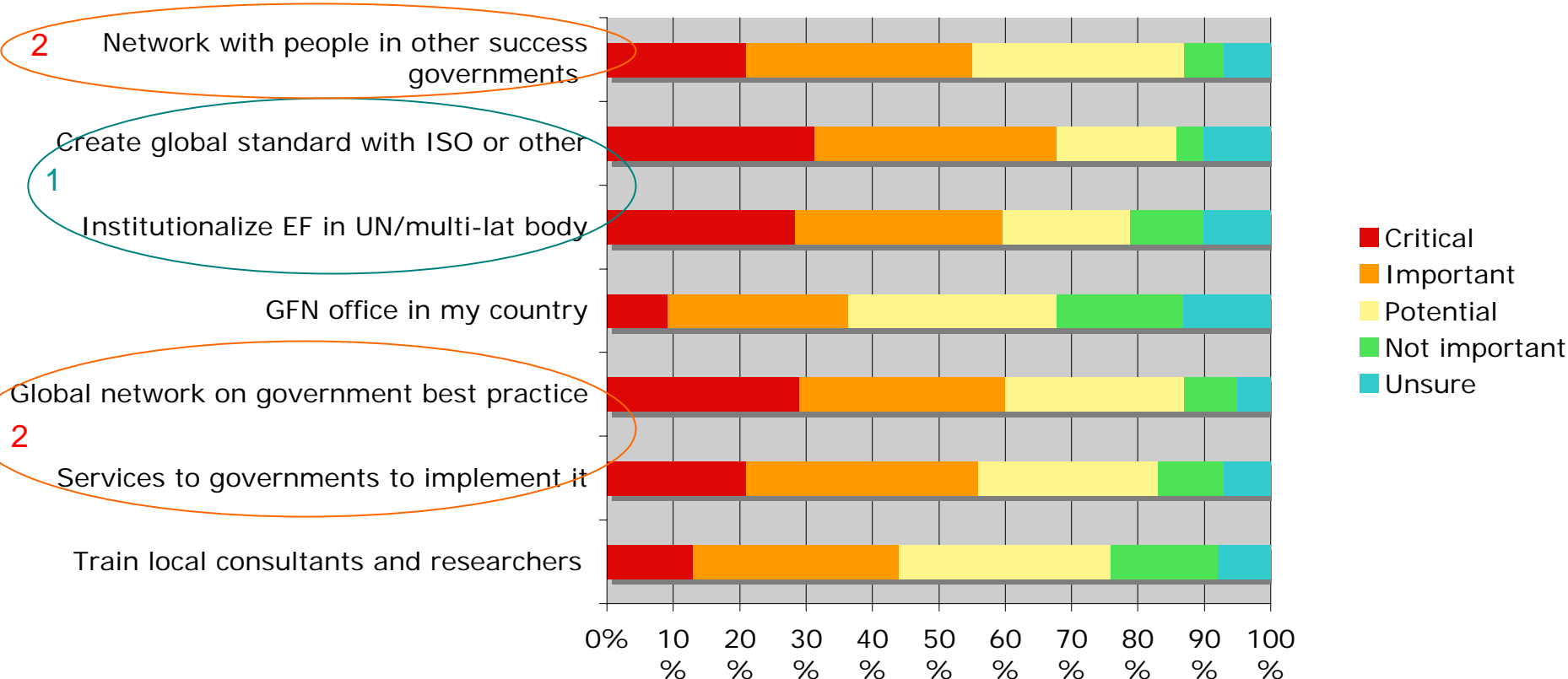
“Growth is priority and GDP is sufficient measure of progress”

“Decision-makers can’t bother. Few stay in their position long enough to see the consequences of their short-term thinking.”

survey respondents

Possible actions?

What actions are needed?



Scaling government involvement



- **Analysis:** Economy as central issue -- economics can lead politics. (e.g. Stern Review, TEEB 2010)
- **Spin:** How can civil society best spin the ‘economic story’?
- **Unit:** Relevance of local-level focus on EF. Advance footprint applications (and political processes) of cities and regions.
- **Multilateral finance:** Role of multilateral economic actors in mainstreaming new metrics (e.g. the GDP story)
- **Standards:** Pressure of standards (e.g. ISO) and the power of standard-setting institutions providing incentives.
- **Networks:** Role of networks that connect people in government to work through some of the take-up issues (e.g. web 2.0)



Thank you

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