



## Combat Communications for Controversial Situations: Rhetorical Techniques for Controversial and Contentious Situations

Eric Eckl



## Master of Controversy and Communications



## Communications and Controversy

- Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955
- First March on Washington, 1957
- NC Lunch Counter Sit Ins, 1960
- Freedom Ride throughout South, 1961
- Arrested in Georgia, 1962
- Second March on Washington, "I Have Dream Speech," 1963
- Civil Rights Act signed, 1964



## This Presentation

- Martin Luther King: Master of Controversy
- Environmental Attitudes and Controversy
- The Discipline of the Disabled Dog
- Message Discipline in Controversial Situations
- Environmental Jargon During Controversy
- Spin Doctor Secrets

## Environmental Attitudes and Controversy



## Similar But Different



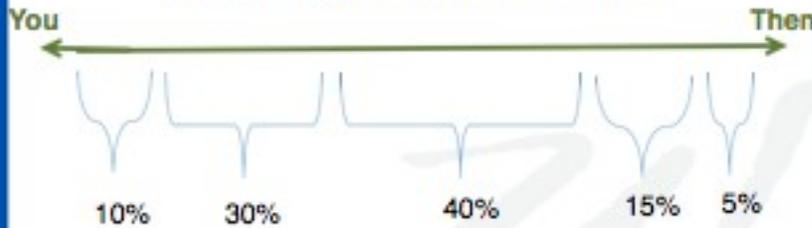
Three major studies that explored patterns of environmental attitudes, knowledge, and conviction among American citizens.

## Similar But Different



## Attitudes

Before the mud starts flying, public attitudes are most likely distributed about like this:



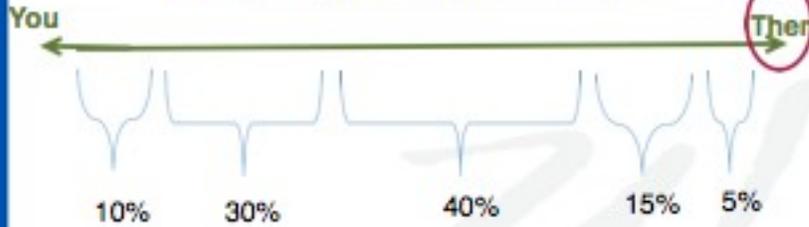
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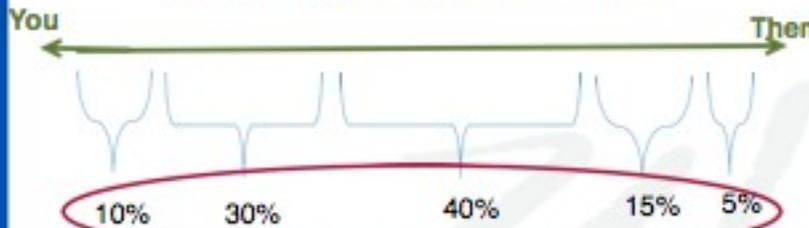
Before the mud starts flying, public attitudes are most likely distributed about like this:



*Their* lobbyists, flacks, consultants, etc.

## Attitudes

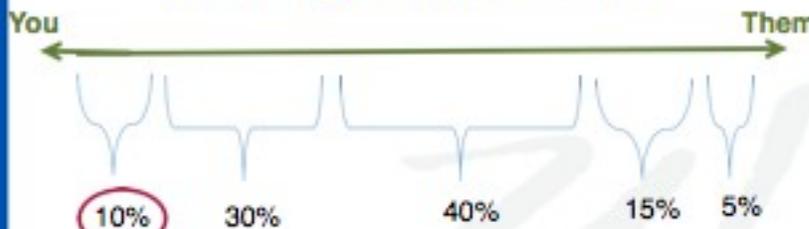
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Voters and Taxpayers

## Attitudes

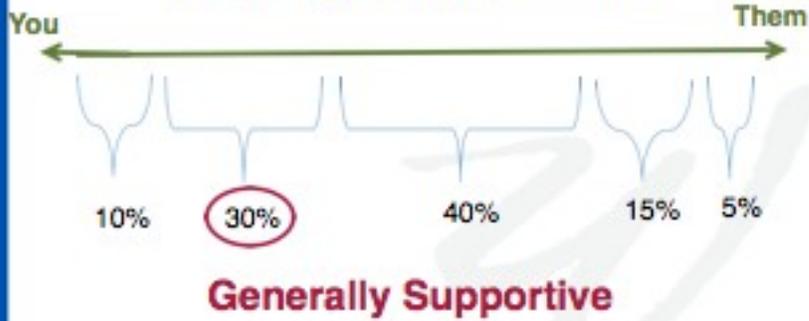
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Staunch Supporters

## Attitudes

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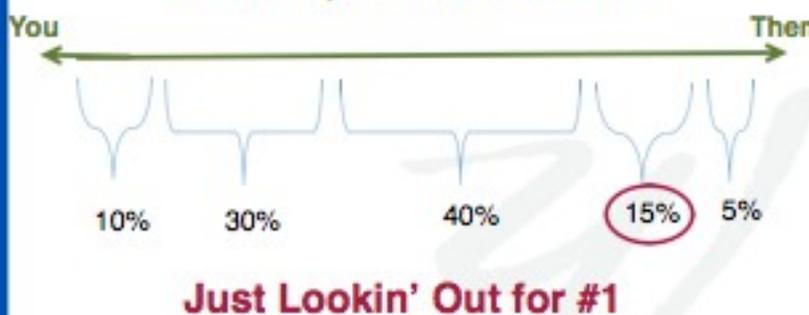
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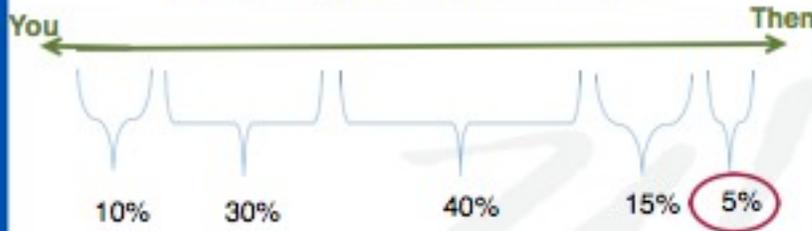
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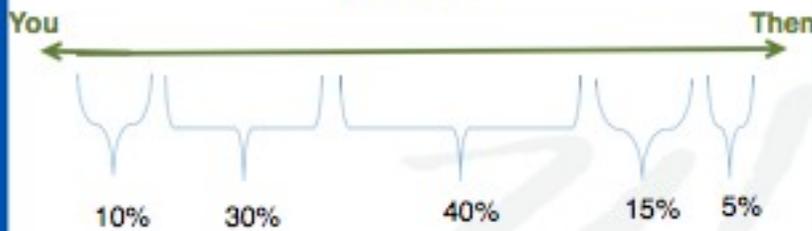
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**Crackpots and Special Interests**

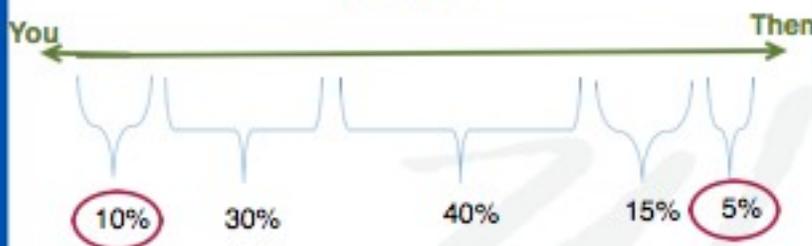
## Knowledge & Attention

Before the mud starts flying, some know more than others



## Knowledge & Attention

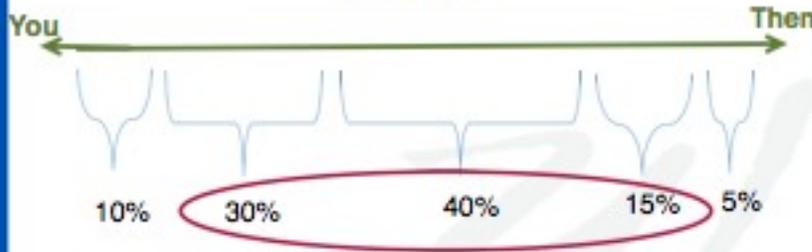
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**Pay attention to the issue  
before it becomes controversial**

## Knowledge & Attention

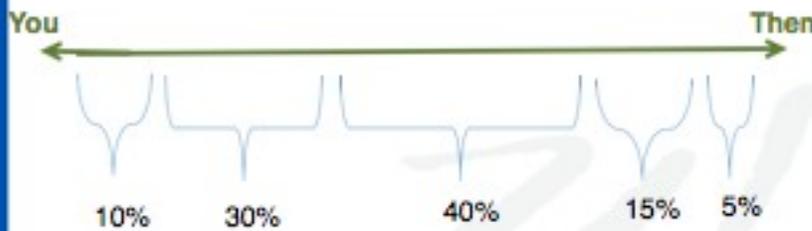
Before the mud starts flying, some know more than others



**Only pay attention to the issue after it becomes controversial**

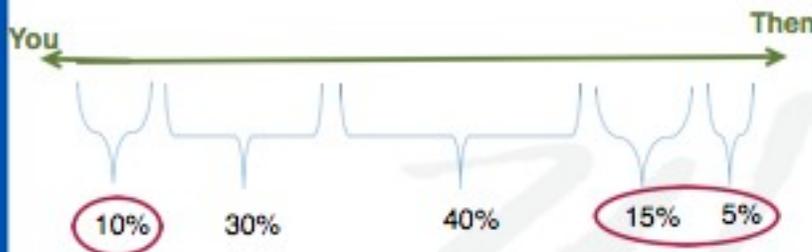
## Conviction

Who can be persuaded -- and who can't



## Conviction

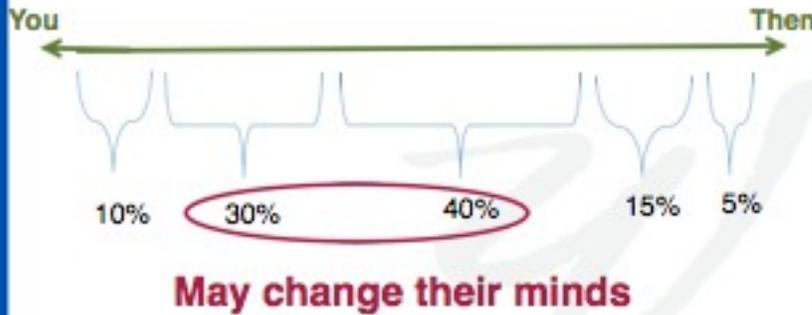
Who can be persuaded -- and who can't



**Hold views firmly**

## Conviction

Who can be persuaded -- and who can't



## Pop Quiz

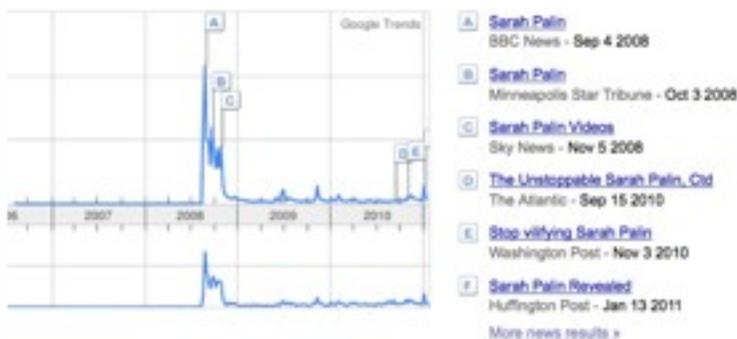


Are voters and taxpayers paying more or less attention to her since the 2008 election?

## Answer

Google trends sarah palin

Tip: Use commas to compare multiple search terms.





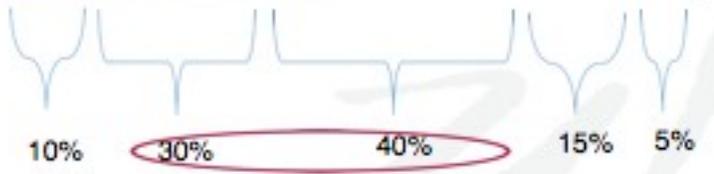
You Them



They use fighting words to stir these people up!



You Them



They used confrontational behavior --  
and conciliatory language  
to win these people over

## Discipline of the Disabled Dog





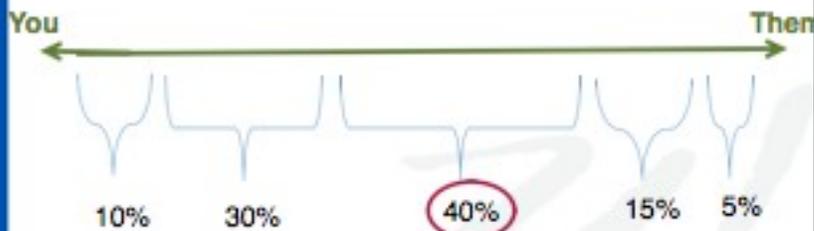
## Exercise #1

**Leader:** Read members of your group the questions on the page labeled "Disabled Dog."

**Participants:** Take turns responding -- you must include the words "Disabled Dog" in your answer somehow



## Sample Questions from This Group



**Well-meaning – but faint hearted**



## Exercise #2

**Leader:** Read members of your group the questions or statements on the page labeled "Well Meaning but Faint Hearted."

**Participants:** Take turns responding to the question or statement -- you must include the Water Words That Work that are on the screen.

Family



Future Generations



Fair



Responsibility



Do Your Part



Make a Difference



Before it's too late



Message Discipline  
in Controversial Situations



What Did You Think?



"I wouldn't lie to you"

“I am not  
a crook”



“I did not  
have sex  
with that  
woman”



“I won't raise your taxes!”



The More *You* Deny It,  
The More *They* Believe it



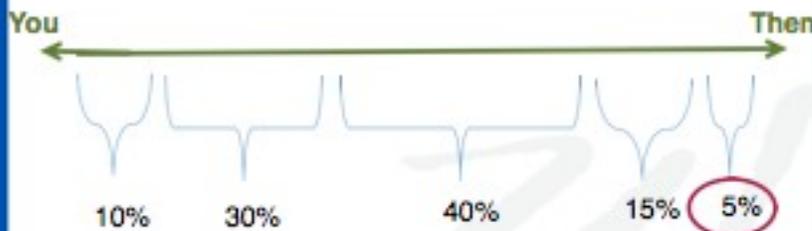
“We do not have black  
helicopters and we are not  
going to put you in  
concentration camps.”



"We will make you a **fair** offer for your land if you make the **choice** to sell it."



## Sample Questions from This Group



**Crackpots and Special Interests**



## Exercise #3

**Leader:** Read members of your group the questions and statements on the page labeled "Hostile Questions."

**Participants:** Take turns responding -- *do not repeat the accusation* -- and use at least one word from the Words That Work list.

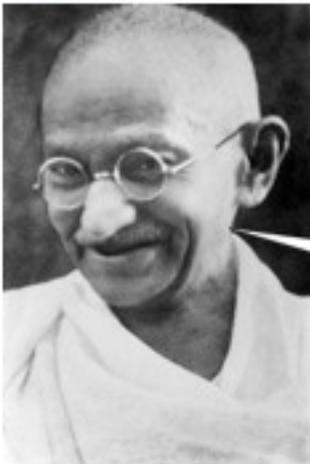


## Why Don't We Remember...

White people will not get diseases if they share water fountains with black people...



## Why Don't We Remember...



Indian people are not an inferior race unable to govern themselves



## Environmental Jargon & Controversy





### Knowledge

Before the mud starts flying, some know more than others

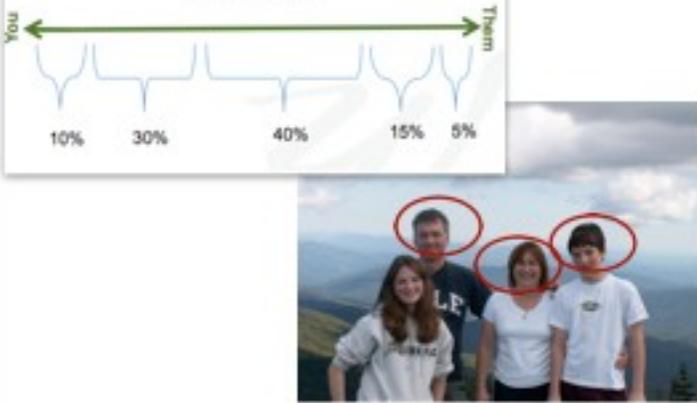


Photo: Flickr, Redacted



# "Biodiversity"



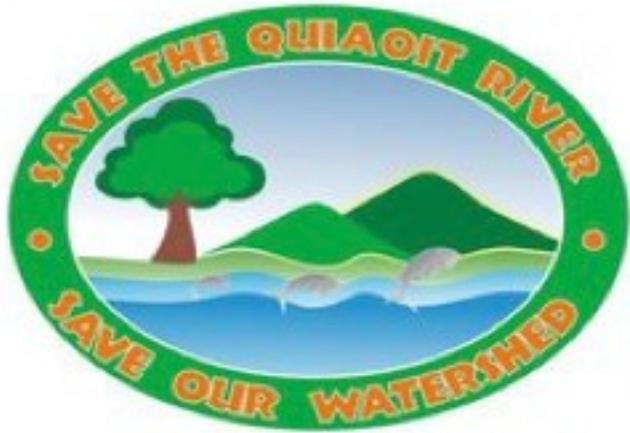
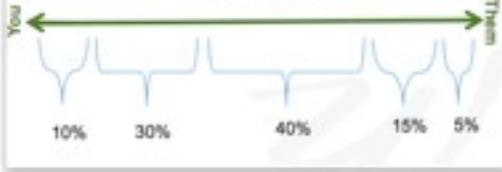
The 2004 Survey of Knowledge,  
Attitudes and Behaviors



Photo: Flickr, marlen

## Knowledge

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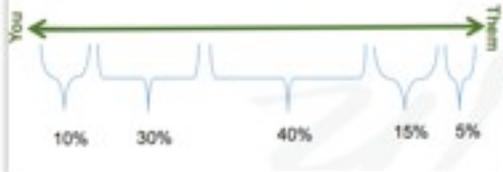
# "Watershed"



Photo: Dal D'acqua

## Knowledge

Before the mud starts flying, some know more than others



## Spin Doctor Secrets



## Punch #1: They Hit You This Way

"...we believe your methodology overestimates the amount impervious surface our project will produce in the riparian area, and underestimates existing hydrological alterations in the watershed due to the cumulative impact of 404(b) permit waivers..."



## It's a Trap!

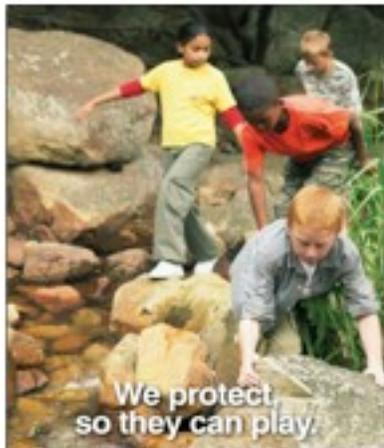




## Punch #2: They Hit You This Way



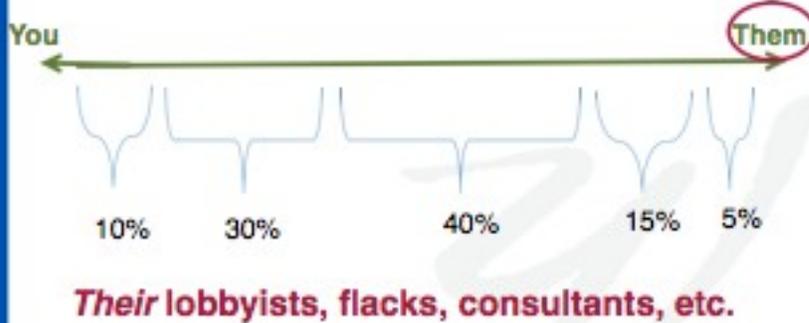
## Punch #2: Then They Hit You This Way



## Punch #2: They Hit You This Way



## Sample Questions from This Group



## Exercise #4

**Leaders:** Challenge your table mates with the statements on the page labeled "Avoid Jargon."

**Table Mates:** Defend yourself from these challenges *without repeating the professional jargon.*

## Spin Doctors in the Ring



Al Gore



Frank Luntz

## The Backstory

- **The Year:** 2006, Inconvenient Truth is causing a stir! The United States inches towards action on “global warming!”
- **The Firm:** Maslansky, Luntz & Partners
- **Their Slogan:** “We are a research driven communications strategy firm with a twist”
- **Their Clients:** Big Polluters
- **Their Assignment:** Stop the U.S. from regulating carbon dioxide!

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## Luntz's Recommendations

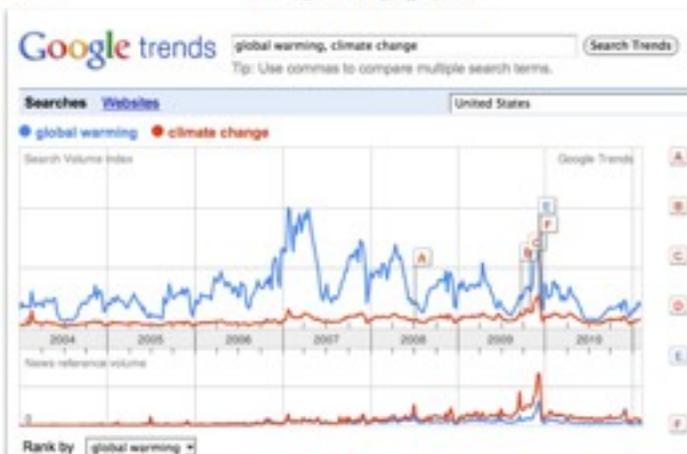


“...Climate change’ is less frightening than ‘global warming’... It’s time for us to start talking about ‘climate change’ rather than ‘global warming’...”

Source: The Environment & Consumer Safety, Healthier America, Frank Luntz, circa 2008

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## The Result



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## Luntz's Recommendations



"[T]he environmental community hasn't figured out how to communicate effectively... they keep losing and losing... But you understand, I'm not in the business of trying to explain this to them."

Source: Frank Luntz interview with GWL.org, 2007

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## And Now It's the Leaders' Turn...