

Civility (or lack thereof)

MACAO 2023 Conference



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One of my favorite questions:

**Are you a citizen or do you just
live here?**

**“Only the guy who isn’t rowing has time to rock
the boat.” – Jean-Paul Sartre**



We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

2nd sentence – Declaration of Independence

WHY POLICY DISCOURSE IS DIFFICULT

Limited understanding of governance / government

- 67% of Americans have a favorable opinion of their local government
- 67% of Americans say that their side is losing, more often than winning, in matters of politics
- 75% of Americans say an elected official should heed the will of the majority, even if that elected official (and their supporters) disagree with the majority

WHY POLICY DISCOURSE IS DIFFICULT

Limited understanding of governance / government

- Democracy - common understanding of “majority rule”
- Republic - limits the latitude and authority of the majority via a constitution, therefore liberty is protected for all, even those in the minority
- Delegate - elected officials serve as a direct instrument of the people who elected them
- Representative - elected to utilize their judgment in order to make decisions in the best interest of the country and their constituents

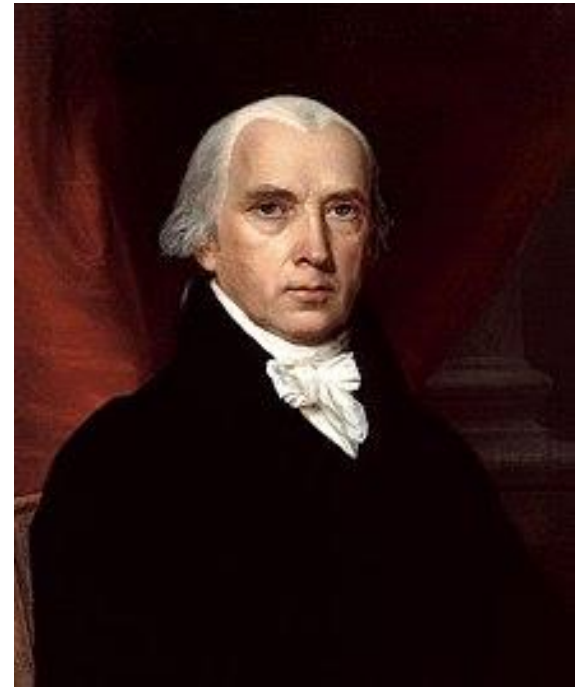
Edmund Burke, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol,” Nov. 3, 1774
(considered the philosophical founder of modern conservatism)

Your Representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

POLARIZATION

Factions: James Madison – Federalist 10

- a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole
- who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adversed to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community

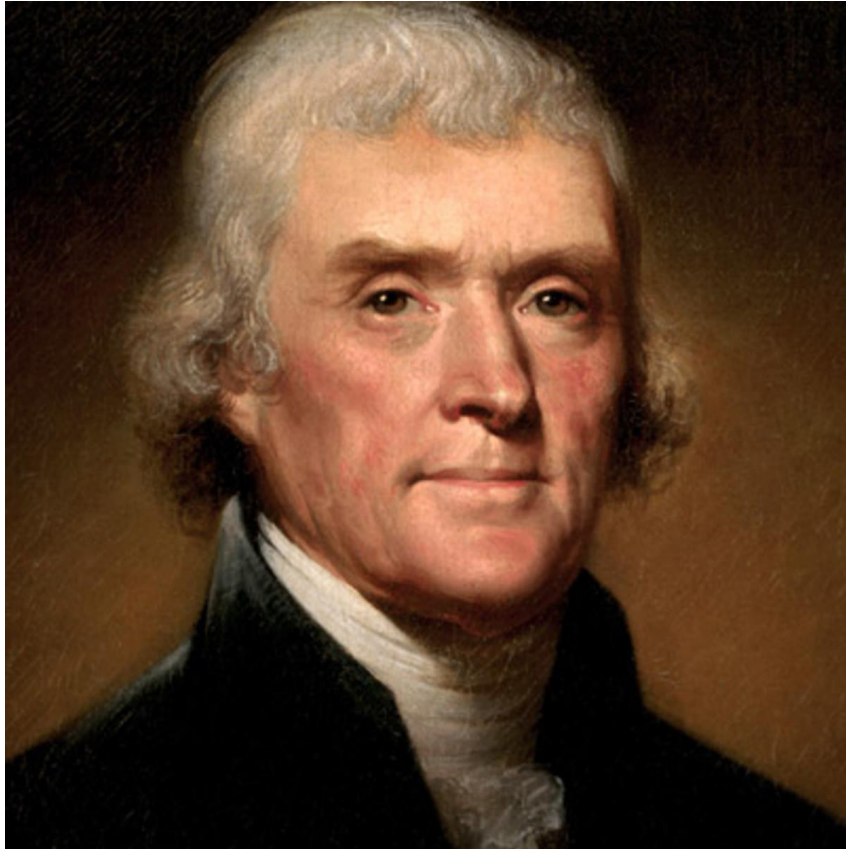


POLARIZATION

Factions

- so strong is this propensity of mankind to fall into mutual animosities, that where no substantial occasion presents itself, the most frivolous and fanciful distinctions have been sufficient to kindle their unfriendly passions and excite their most violent conflicts
- It may clog the administration, it may convulse the society; but it will be unable to execute and mask its violence under the forms of the Constitution.

INFORMED CITIZENRY



Thomas Jefferson:

“Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.”

INFORMED CITIZENRY

- The framers themselves believed that the fate of the republic depended on an educated citizenry
- Based on his studies of ancient republics, Madison concluded that broad education of citizens was the best security against “crafty and dangerous encroachments on public liberty”
- Preservation of our republic urgently requires imparting constitutional education to a new generation and reviving Madisonian reason in an impetuous world.

INFORMED CITIZENRY?

WSJ Print Edition



Eighth-Grade Scores in History, Civics Hit Record Low

By Ben Chapman

Eighth-graders' test scores in U.S. history and civics fell to the lowest levels on record last year, according to Education Department data released Wednesday.

In the first release of U.S. history and civics scores since the start of the pandemic, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation's Report Card, showed a decline in students' knowledge that reversed gains made since the 1990s.

Only 13% of eighth-graders met proficiency standards for U.S. history, meaning they could explain major themes, periods, events, people, ideas, and turning points in the county's history. About a fifth of students scored at or above the proficient level in civics.

Prepandemic declines in students' understanding of U.S. history continued, while long-standing gaps in student achievement across specific groups persisted, data show. Low-performing eighth-grade students saw worse drops in both civics and U.S. history scores, compared with high-performing ones.

The falling federal test scores in U.S. history and civics compound the downward spiral

Sample Questions Over the Years

1. (2001) At the time Columbus arrived in the Americas, most of the area that is now called Mexico was controlled by people called the

- A. Aztecs
- B. Inuit
- C. Apache
- D. Iroquois

2. (2006) Which of the following is an example of people using power without having the right to do so?

- A. A police officer arrests someone because the person looks suspicious.
- B. A governor vetoes a bill passed by the state legislature.
- C. A group of people against nuclear power march outside a nuclear power plant.
- D. The owner of a newspaper prints her own opinions in the newspaper.

seen in other subjects. Federal test results released in October revealed the largest drop in math scores ever and a nationwide drop in reading that wiped out three decades of gains.

3. (2006) What do all constitutional governments have?

- A. Legal limits on political power
- B. A bill of rights
- C. A president as the head of government
- D. Separation of church and state

4. (1994) Susan B. Anthony was a leader who helped

- A. women win the right to vote
- B. children win the right to an education
- C. older people win the right to get social security
- D. immigrants win the right to come to the United States

5. (2006) The Constitution requires that the president's nominations to the Supreme Court be approved by the Senate. This is an example of

- A. checks and balances
- B. legislative supremacy
- C. judicial review
- D. federalism

But the scores released this week are different: U.S. History had the lowest proportion of eighth-grade students reaching proficiency levels out of any subject assessed by the

NAEP program, with civics being the second lowest. Federal tests show scores in U.S. history and civics have consistently lagged behind those of reading and math.

National Center for Education Statistics Commissioner Peggy Carr said in a briefing with reporters Tuesday that she was shocked by U.S. eighth-graders' U.S. history and civics scores, which she called "woefully low in comparison to other subjects."

"These data are a national concern," Dr. Carr said. "The health of our democracy depends on informed and engaged citizens."

The average score in 2022 for eighth-grade students in U.S. history was 258 out of a possible 500, five points lower than in 2018, and one point lower than the average U.S. history score in 1994, the first year the test was given.

The average civics score for eighth-grade students in 2022 was 150 out of a possible 300, two points lower than in 2018 and identical to the average score in 1998, the first year that test was given.

The 2022 declines in U.S. history and civics echoed previously reported drops in reading and math, Dr. Carr said. Average math scores for eighth-

graders in 2022 dropped to 274 out of a possible 500, falling 8 points from 2019. Reading scores declined 3 points, to 260.

Test scores are categorized as either below basic, basic, proficient or advanced. The percentages of students in 2022 who performed below basic levels worsened in both U.S. history and civics, with 4 in 10 eighth-graders scoring below basic levels in U.S. history, according to federal data. Those students were unable to correctly identify basics like the difference between indentured servants and slaves.

According to the data, 31% of eighth-graders performed below basic level in civics in 2022, indicating those students were unable to correctly answer questions asking them to identify tenets like common characteristics shared by all constitutional governments.

American Historical Association Executive Director James Grossman said the dropping scores reflect the falling quality of history and civics lessons taught in American schools, which has been fueled by political acrimony.

Fights over what should be taught in classrooms have in recent years played out in school board races and state legislatures across the country. At

least 40 states have since 2021 adopted or introduced laws or policies that restrict teaching about "divisive concepts," such as racism, leading to less robust lessons than in years past, Dr. Grossman said. Such "interference has a chilling effect on teachers," he said.

Teachers have said controversies over the content of lessons have damped morale. These subjects are considered hard to staff in many districts, according to teachers union officials.

The heated debates coupled with declines in reading and writing skills in the pandemic have created headwinds for history and civics instruction, teachers said.

Sheila Edwards, who teaches eighth-grade history at Sierra Vista Middle School in Covina, Calif., said her students' interest in civics and history was piqued by recent events, such as the indictment of former President Donald Trump and his two impeachments while in office.

But despite her students' engagement in current events, Ms. Edwards said, many have fallen behind in literacy as well as their ability to comprehend course materials and communicate what they have learned—skills that are critical to success in social studies.



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WHAT IS CIVILITY?

George Washington's "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation"

Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present.

Merriam-Webster defines civility as "polite, reasonable and respectful behavior."

WHAT IS CIVILITY?

- **Civility as Manners**
- **Civility as Disposition**
- **Civility as a Value**



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Manners

- Politeness
- A shared understanding of practices in certain situations
- A shared ritual which we expect others to recognize and follow

Disposition

- A commitment to political or intellectual engagement with others
- Not support of what others think but a bare tolerance for their ideas
- Even in disagreement, treating others respectfully
- Willingness to allow our convictions to be tested in conversation

Value

- A relational concept as to how we interact with others, like dignity or humility
- We are not guaranteed collective results when we commit to civility
- Once civility is gone, there is no obvious way to reconstruct it



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WHAT IS INCIVILITY?



WHAT IS INCIVILITY?

- **Incivility as a Primary Freedom**
- **Incivility as Strategic Choice**
- **Incivility as Moral Equivocation**



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Primary Freedom

- An expression of free speech
- Say what we mean to make conversations less complicated
- The laws of civility and etiquette can become so numerous that they interfere with people's liberty



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Strategic Choice

- Acting in civil ways to pursue self-interested ends
- A more democratic approach in that incivility is not bound by rules that preserve status
 - Not being silenced by rules that favor an “in group”
- Signaling that the goals are so important that that they override rules of civility for that instance



Moral Equivocation

- Precommitting ourselves to support speech or action with which we disagree
- A certain level of conviction is required to inspire people to action, but excessive conviction seeks to avoid being tested
- Abandonment of the rules usually signals that other things of higher moral importance are happening



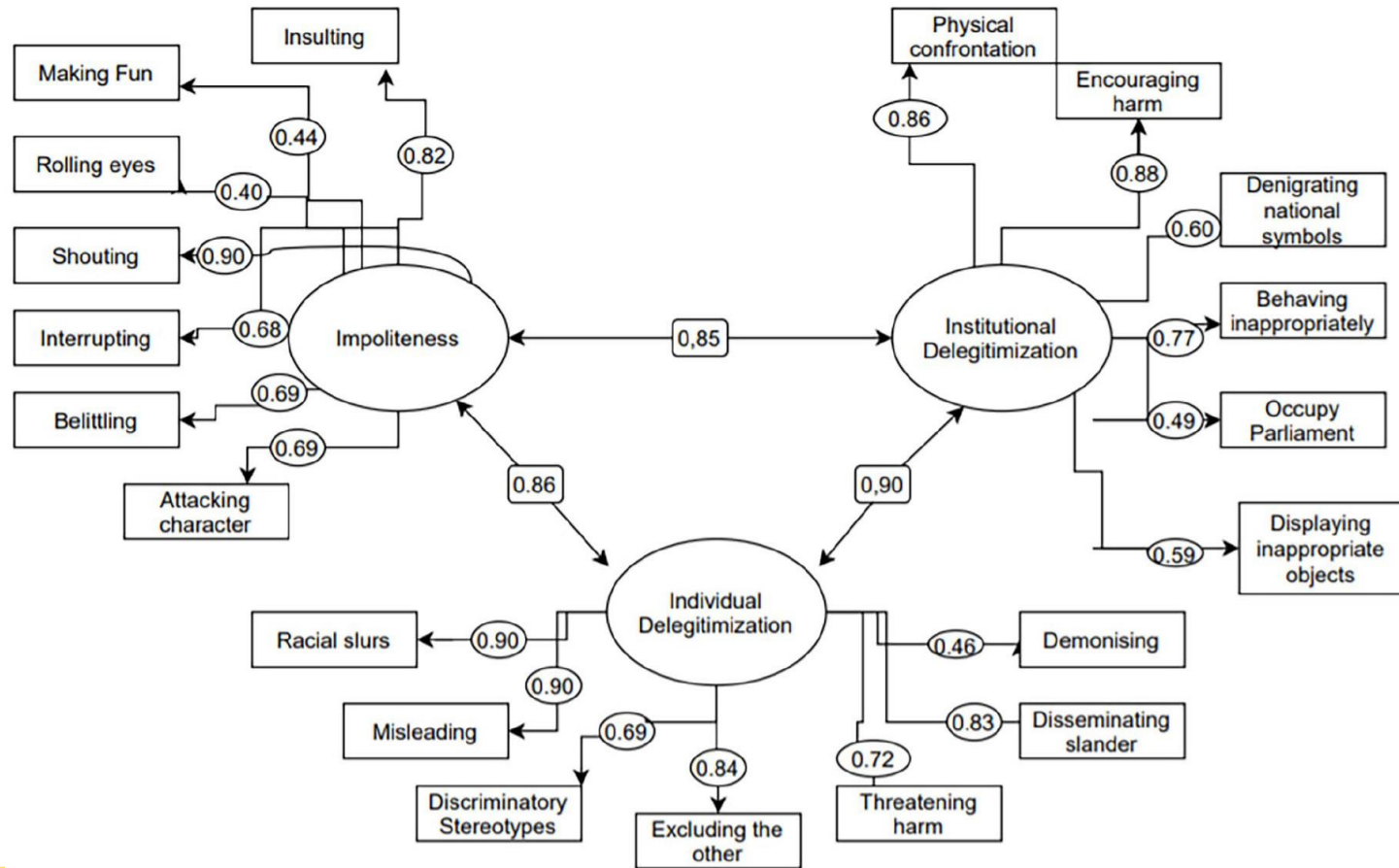
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WHAT IS CIVIL DISCOURSE?

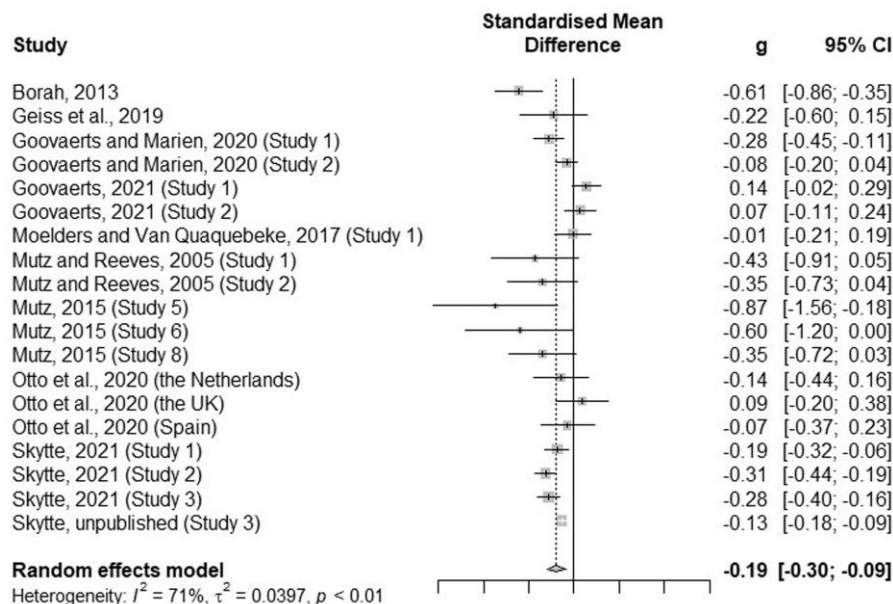
- Civil discourse is the free and respectful exchange of different ideas. It entails questioning and disputing, but doing so in a way that respects and affirms all persons, even while critiquing their arguments.
- It's important, when practicing civility and civil discourse, to share our viewpoints and to listen to others. It doesn't mean we have to agree, but it means we can disagree respectfully.

Dimensions of Political Incivility



WHY IT MATTERS

- Political incivility is corrosive and reduces trust of political figures and institutions
- Political incivility neither erodes nor improves political participation



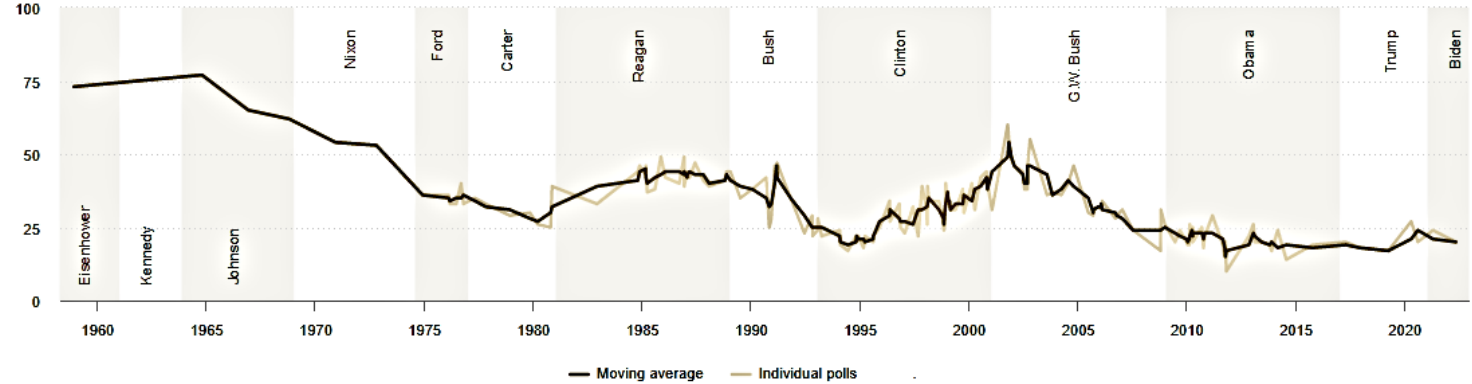
WHY IT MATTERS

Public trust in government near historic lows

[Chart](#) [Data](#) [Share](#)

CLICK AND DRAG IN THE PLOT AREA TO ZOOM IN

% who say they trust the government to do what is right just about always/most of the time



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

CLICK LEGEND ITEMS TO REMOVE THEM FROM CHART

WHY POLICY DISCOURSE IS DIFFICULT

We Resist Persuasion

- It hurts to be wrong... literally
- Anterior cingulate cortex, monitor of physical pain
- Brain is wired to reject facts inconsistent with our beliefs

WHY POLICY DISCOURSE IS DIFFICULT

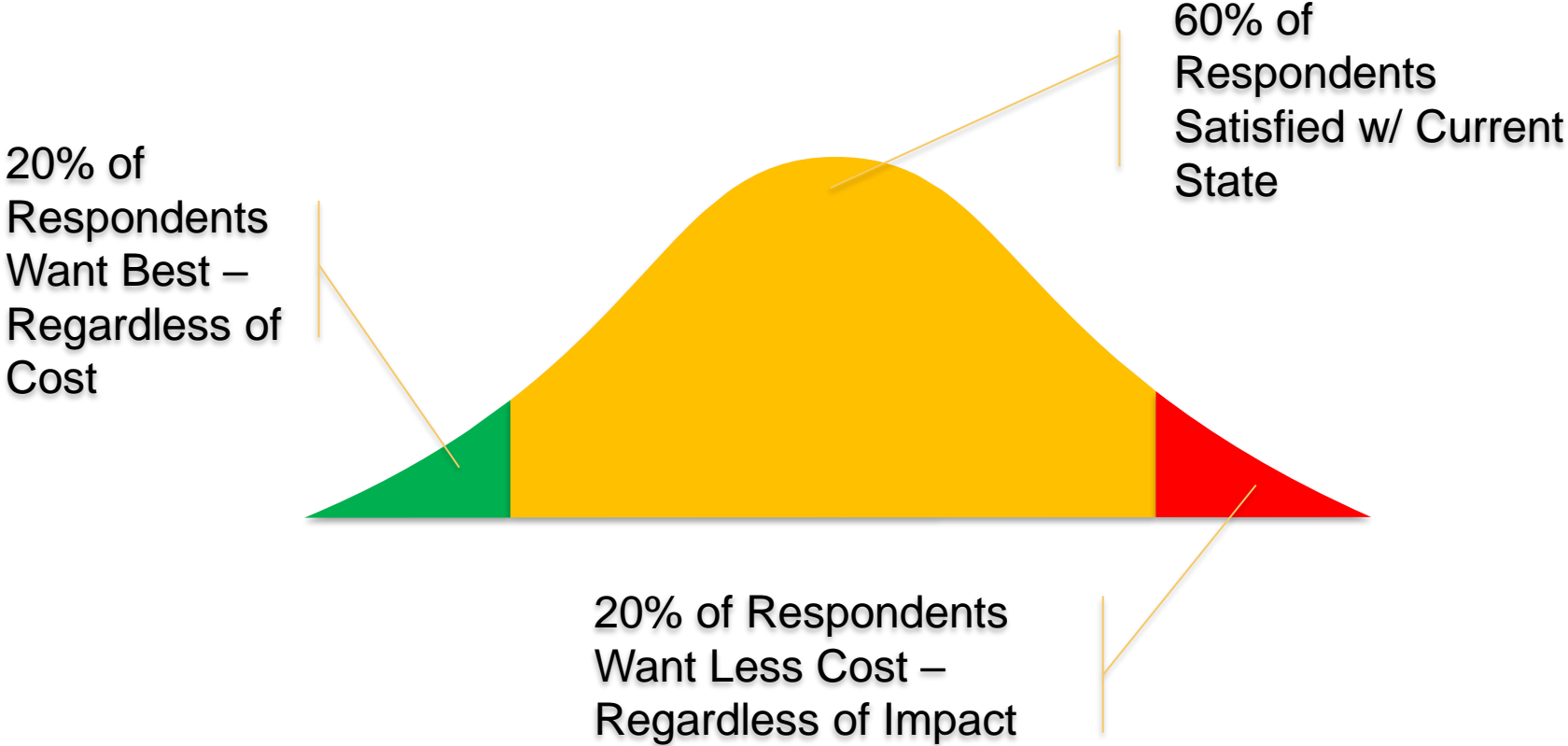
We Resist Persuasion

- In 2005 and 2006 researchers at the University of Michigan found that when the misinformed are exposed to corrected facts they rarely changed their minds.
- Political partisans particularly became more strongly set in their beliefs.
- Facts, it was found, did not cure misinformation but rather actually made it stronger.

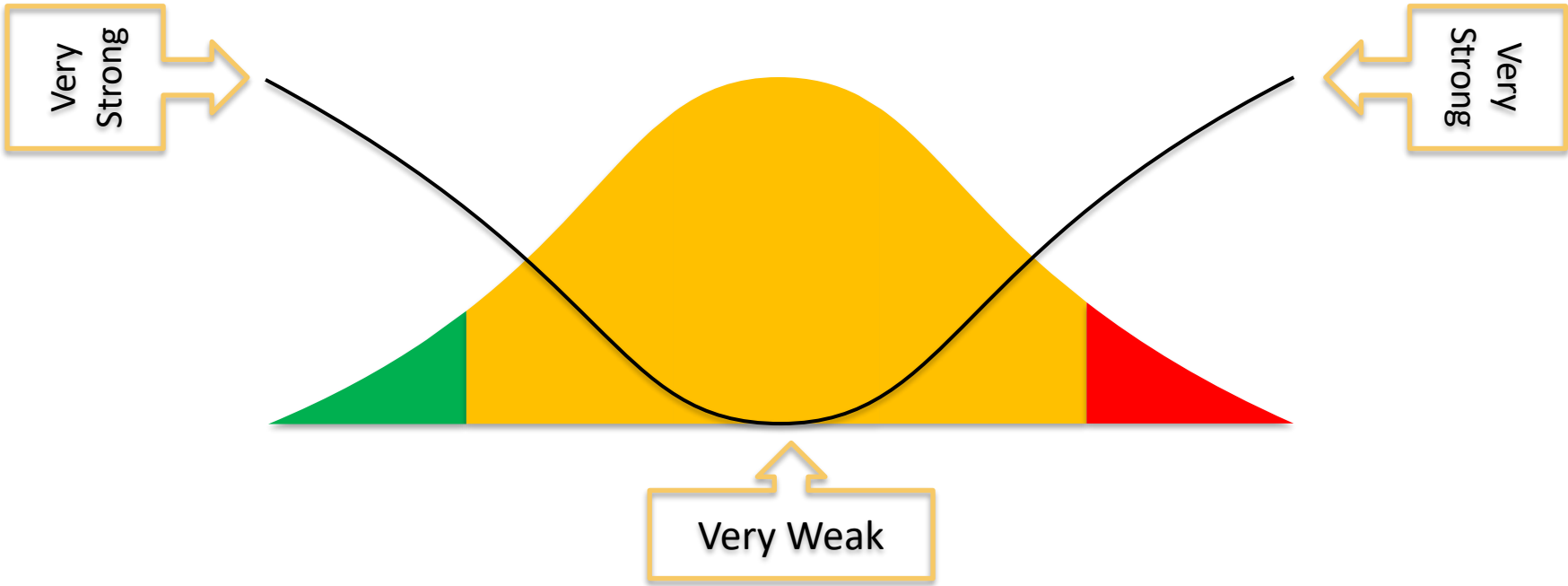
Persuasion Dilemma In Public Policy



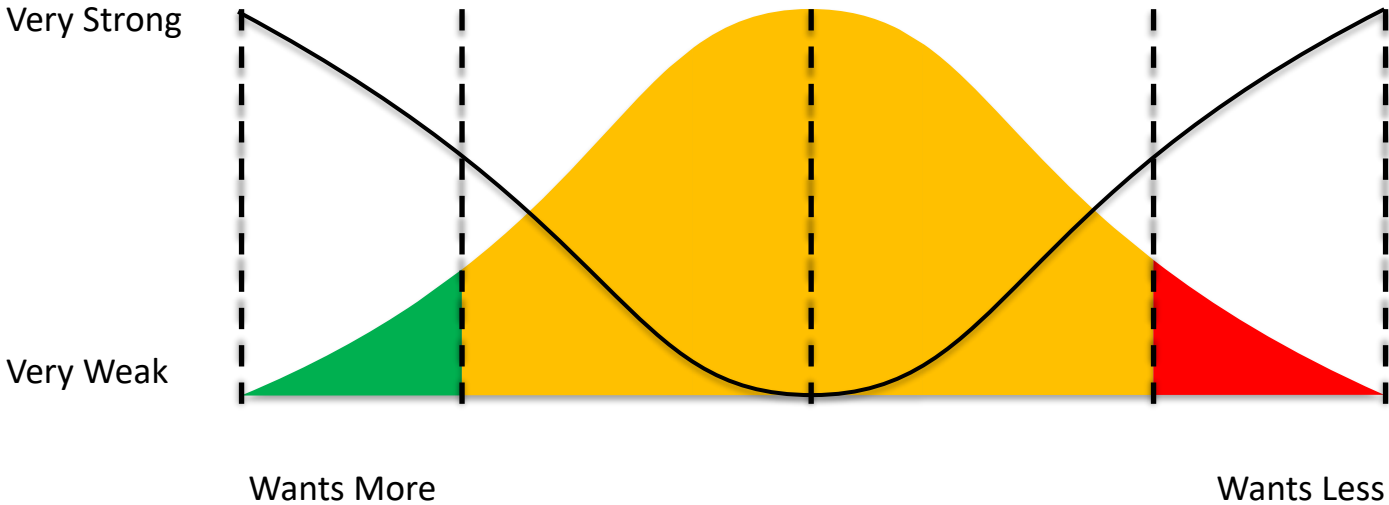
Residents asked if they support higher taxes for enhanced services...



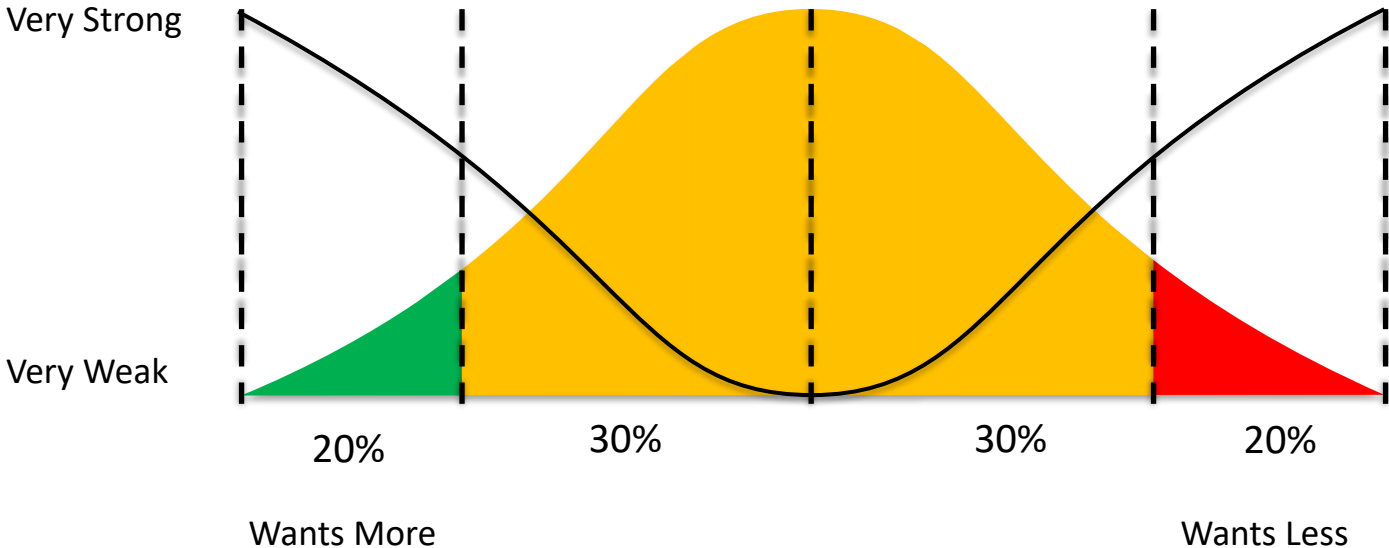
Strength of Opinion



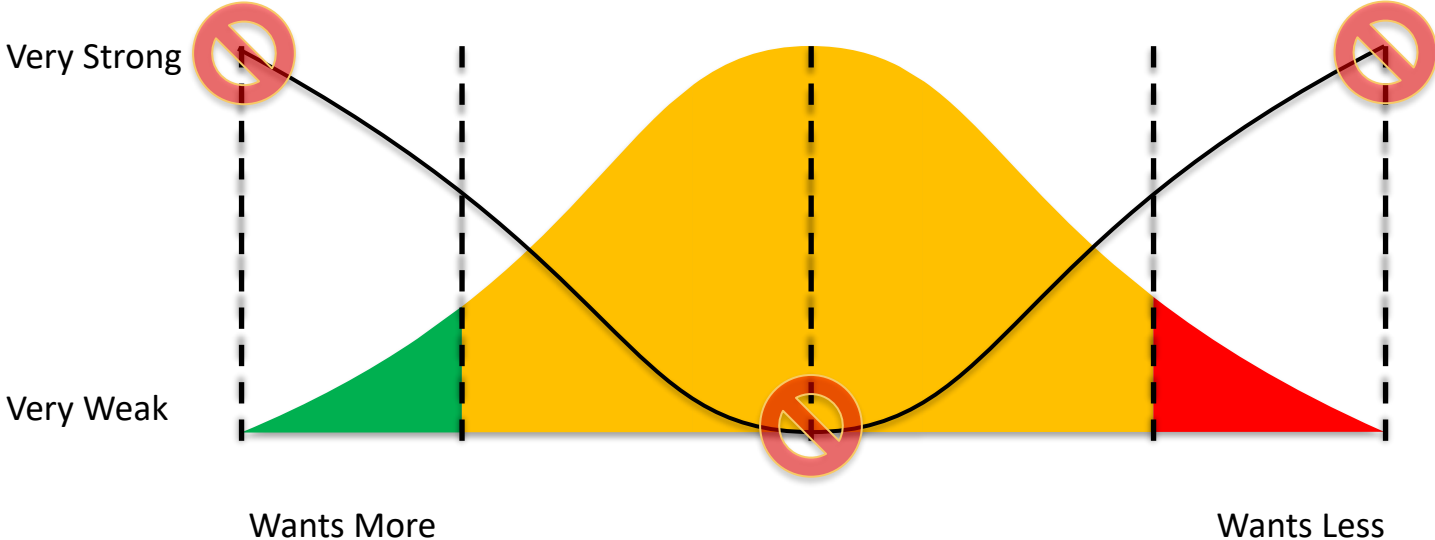
Persuasion Potential



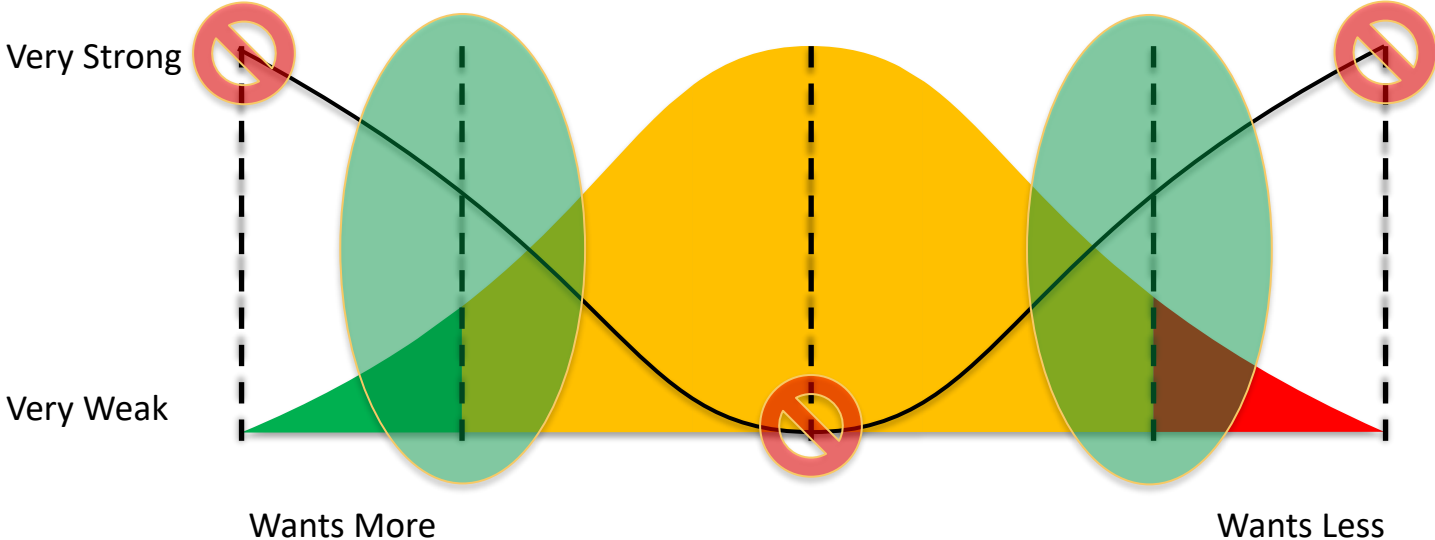
Persuasion Potential



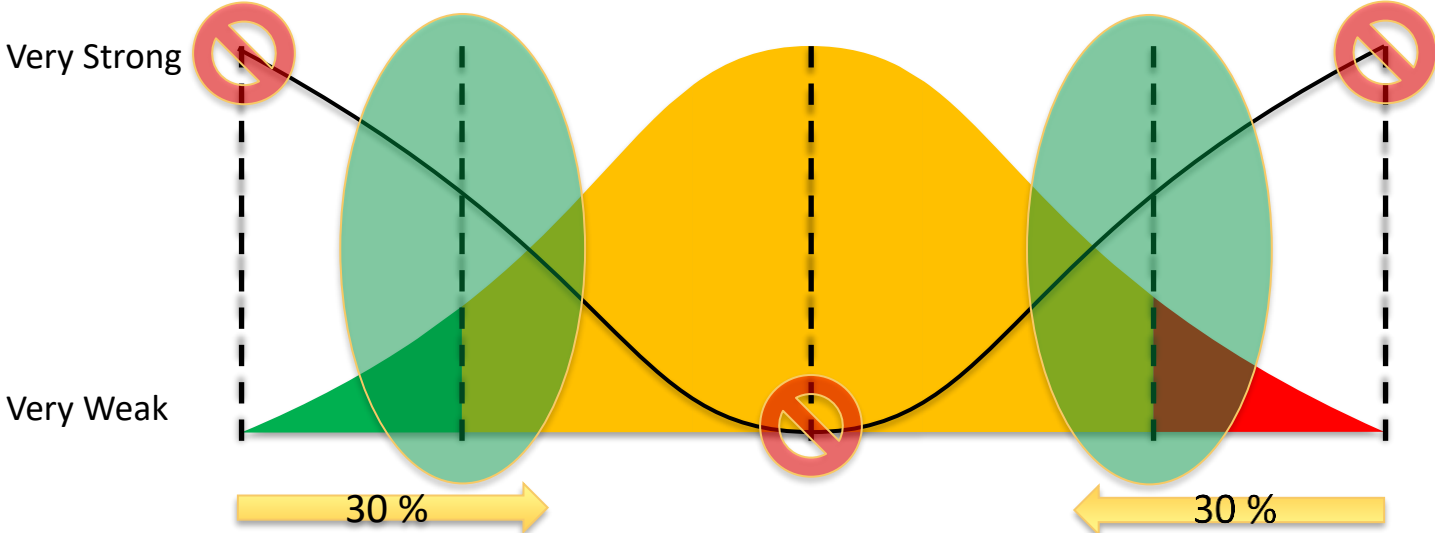
Persuasion Potential



Persuasion Potential



Persuasion Potential



OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNING

- Conflicting political values
- Absence of hierarchy
- Elected official vs staff perspectives



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OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNING

Conflicting political values

- Accountability and representation
 - Acknowledgement of public expression of their preferences
- Effectiveness and professionalism
 - Responsiveness and good stewards of public resources
- Social equity and diversity
 - Treat all citizens equally in policy making and program implementation
- Justice and individual rights
 - Respect for property rights, civil rights, and due process



OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNING

Absence of hierarchy

- Chairman of the commission is not the boss
- Everyone is in charge...
 - So nobody is in charge
 - But the majority carries the day
- Searching for “correct” policy answers
 - Creates frustration when such choices are values based
 - Political philosophy is expressed as placing one value over another

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNING

Elected official vs staff perspectives

- Use the same words but speak a different language

Political Acceptability ← → Administrative Sustainability

CHARACTERISTICS	POLITICS		ADMINISTRATION
Activity	Game/allocation of values	CAO and Senior Staff in the GAP ← → Elected*	Problem solving
Players	Representatives/trustees		Experts/trustees
Conversation	"What do you hear?" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passion • Dreams • Stories 		"What do you know?" <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data • Plans • Reports
Pieces	Intangible: interests and symbols		Tangible: information; money, people, equipment
Currency	Power (stories), loyalty, and trust		Knowledge (deeds)
Dynamic	Constructive conflict, compromise, and change		Predictability, cooperation, and continuity

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE GOVERNING

The governing body must manage its own behavior and seek compliance from its members



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BE CIVIL

How We Speak - Victory Conversations

- Goal is to gain support for a comprehensive, unitary, oversimplified view
- Makes the case that not thinking about the issue critically is the correct path
- Winning makes the speaker right and further validates the simplified view

BE CIVIL

How We Speak - Victory Conversations

Speaker Intentions

- Denigrate or ridicule anyone holding an opposing view
- Using selective evidence while doing so
- Impress listeners with validity of assertions
 - many of whom may already align with the speaker's ideology

BE CIVIL

How We Listen

- We generally don't listen, we evaluate
- Listening is dangerous because genuine listening can transform the listener
- If you understand, you might see the issue from the other side and be influenced in your attitude on the subject

BE CIVIL

How We Listen

Asymmetric Insight

- Believing you understand opponents motives, or secret motives, better than they do.
 - Conservatives and liberals each thought they knew more about the other than either conservatives or liberals knew about themselves

BE CIVIL

How We Listen

Try This

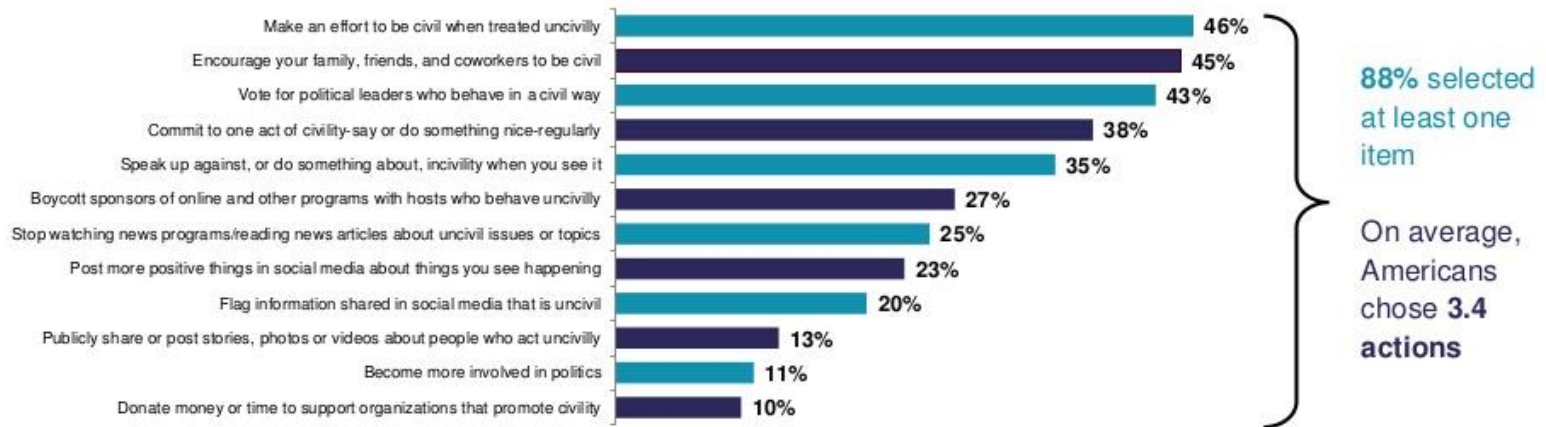
- In a dispute the speaker can only proceed after summarizing the opposing view to the satisfaction of that party
- You may end up articulating the matter better than the other party is capable of
- You may come to understand in a clear-eyed manner what the other person is saying

BE CIVIL

Americans Also Make Solutions Personal

The vast majority of Americans – 88% – selected at least one action they would be willing to take, and they chose 3.4 actions on average. Topping the list are: making an effort to be civil when treated uncivilly (46%), encouraging family, friends and coworkers to be civil (45%) and voting for political leaders who behave in a civil way (43%).

Personal Actions to Improve Civility (among Total Americans)



BE CIVIL

Utah Governors Race - 2020

R Spencer Cox

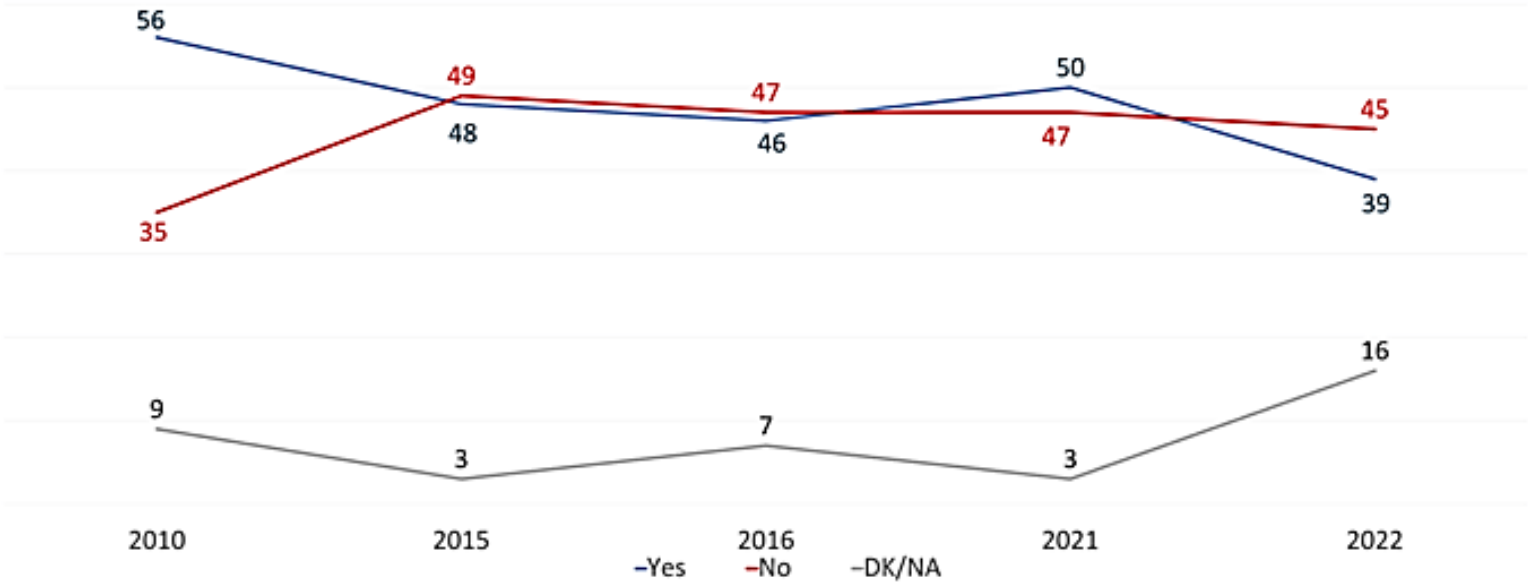
D Chris Peterson



- “We can debate issues without degrading each other’s character,” says Peterson.
- “We can disagree without hating each other,” says Cox.
- “And win or lose, in Utah we work together,” says Peterson.
- “So let’s show the country there’s a better way,” says Cox

Working in the Fishbowl

Would recommend a career in government to a son or daughter, 1997-2021



SSRS and Maguire Research Services, Inc., surveys conducted in June and October 2021 and April 2022



And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

last sentence – Declaration of Independence

In summary...

- Educate the willing about our republic and how it works
- Recognize that incivility is sometimes a strategic choice
- Know that delegitimization is the most powerful form of political incivility
- Heed the gap between political acceptability and administrative sustainability
- Speak and listen with the intention of seeking the truth about what you think, versus telling the world what you think is the truth

A Question for You:

**Are you a citizen, or do you just
live here?**