

ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Public Opinion Study Commissioned by the Congressional Institute

Fall 1996

Is environmentalism moving into a new phase? Is the public's vision toward the environment changing? These questions are surfacing as public opinion data regarding the environment has shifted over the last few years. The Congressional Institute recently commissioned Charlton Research Company to conduct a comprehensive research study exploring these issues. Through this research, we set out to identify the underlying values people associate with the environment, and, by using an innovative model to determine people's communication styles, to juxtapose people's responses with their perception and judgment styles. The following Executive Summary describes our results.

THE ENVIRONMENT REMAINS IMPORTANT TO THE PUBLIC

Yankelovich's 'Public Judgment Model' offers an excellent tool for framing an issue, such as the environment, in terms of its saliency to public opinion. As issues cycle through the national debate, the saliency of one issue declines while another gains popularity. However, just because an issue is not at the top of people's list of concerns does not negate its importance (See Fig 1). The environmental debate offers a good example. In the 1970's and 1980's, as news of toxic spills and air pollution filled the media, the majority of Americans felt the environment was in serious trouble and drastic solutions were needed immediately. This trend has shifted today as the environmental issue has matured into Yankelovich's Sixth Stage. After hearing the issues debated over the last thirty years, people have taken an intellectual stand on the environment and are paying more attention to social and economic issues. In fact, only about two percent of the population identifies the environment as the nation's most important problem.

Although many people do not think the environment is the nation's most important problem, it is still considered an important and positive issue. Nearly everyone considers themselves to be an environmentalist to some degree, and the public's desire for a clean and healthy environment remains strong (See Fig 2).

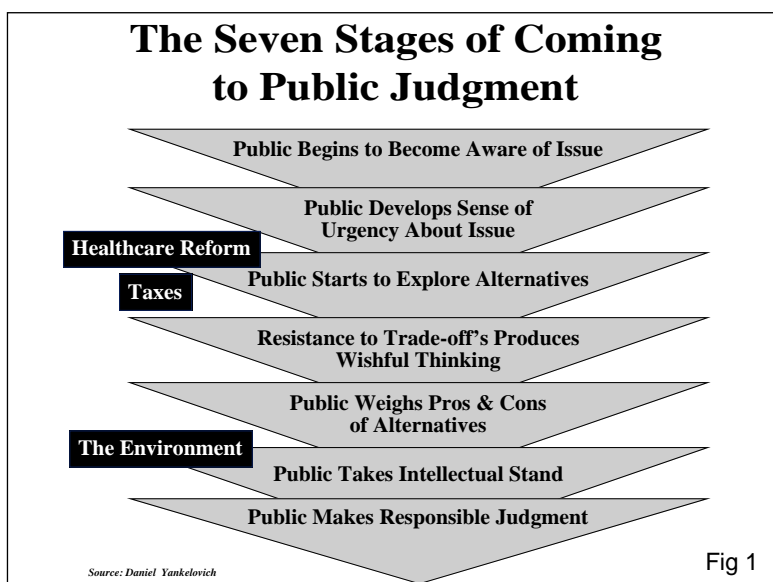
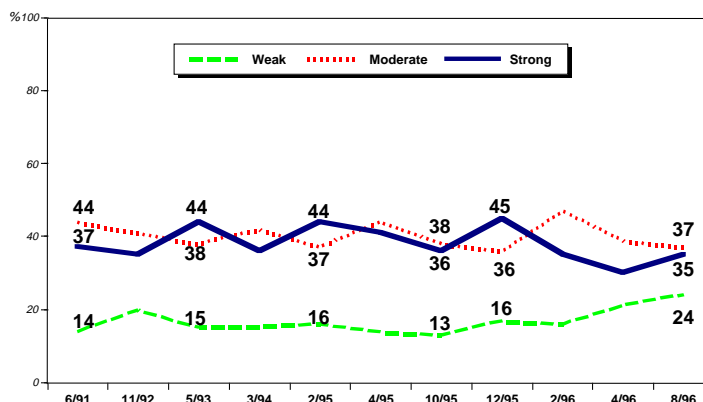


Fig 1

Everyone is an Environmentalist To Some Degree



Source: Charlton Research Company, n=800 or more adults nationwide, margin of error less than ± 3.5%.

Fig 2

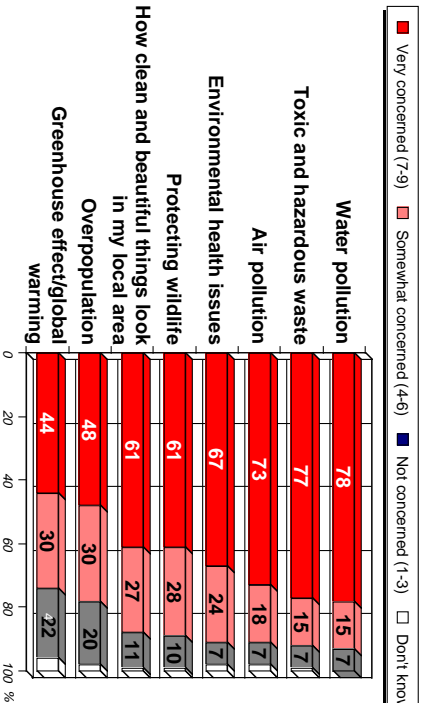


Fig 3

Respondents to the study indicated that water pollution, toxic/hazardous waste issues, and air pollution are the top environmental problems facing the nation. Environmental health issues, protecting wildlife and maintaining clean beautiful local surroundings were also seen as important. Global problems such as overpopulation and global warming were not considered as pressing. (See Fig 3).

UNDERLYING VALUES MUST BE EXPLICIT WITH THE MESSAGE

Some people respond best to factual arguments, while others respond to emotional arguments. Therefore, with any public policy issue, it is important to understand the underlying values which are driving people's attitudes and opinions (See Fig 4). Values are things people consider important in life. Because these values remain relatively constant throughout a person's life, they become the dominant prism through which the individual judges public issues.

Modeling Values

Values become particularly relevant when an issue, like the environment, is in a mature stage of public judgment. Such values influence the weight people give to each argument. Consequently, it is useful to communicate in a manner that reflects the values people hold. The research identified three values people find most important when thinking about the environment: individual responsibility, beauty, and honesty.

The most important value the public links to the environment is *individual responsibility*. People feel the individual closest to the problem should solve the problem, whether it be the manufacturing plant in the next town, the forklift driver at a construction site, or the child at school recycling a soda can. In other words, individual citizens and individuals working in government and business are equally responsible for protecting the environment (See Fig 5). Actions such as littering, smoking, or failing to carpool and recycle are seen as having an effect on the environment. In order to establish effective environmental policy, then, it is essential to include individuals from the public, business, and government in the process.

Fig 4

Everyone Has a Stake in the Environment

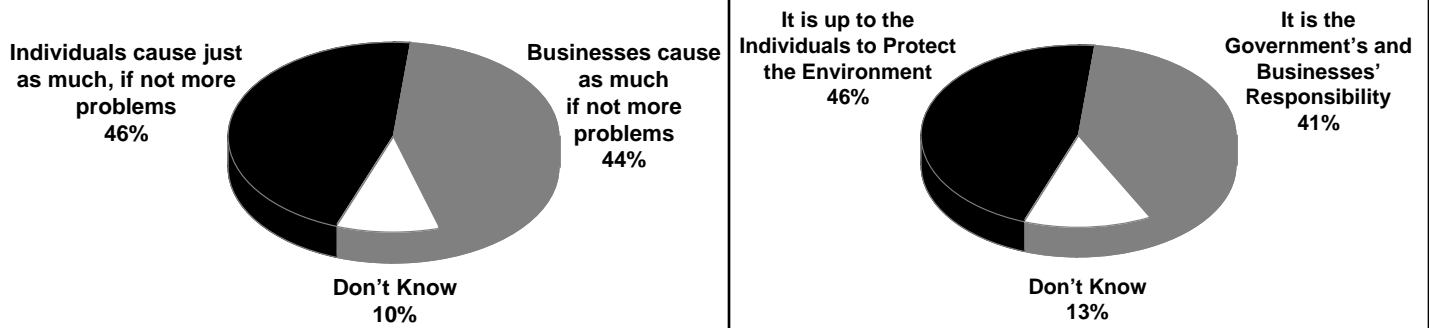


Fig 5

Beauty is the second most important environmental value. The public believes the government's role in maintaining the environment's beauty has been very positive. For example, the government provides local, state and national parks where people can find tranquillity and peace.

People have more ambivalent feelings toward *honesty*, the third most important value. Because of its close connection with nature, the environment is seen as a symbol for honesty. However, because government and business are seen on opposite sides of the issue, many people do not feel there has been honesty in the environmental debate. The public would like government, business, and individuals to cooperate in solving environmental problems, and want to feel confident they are hearing the truth.

CHARLTON RESEARCH PERCEPTION AND JUDGMENT ANALYZER

It is also important to determine the most effective method of communicating to the public and its various demographic segments. To analyze a deeper level of what holds Americans together, Charlton Research developed a model using proven academic theories that segments people according to communication styles. The Perception-Judgment Analyzer recognizes the fact that people use different styles to communicate with one another and, therefore, synthesize information in different ways. The basic communication styles include: Thinker, Intuitor, Sensor and Feeler (See Fig 6).

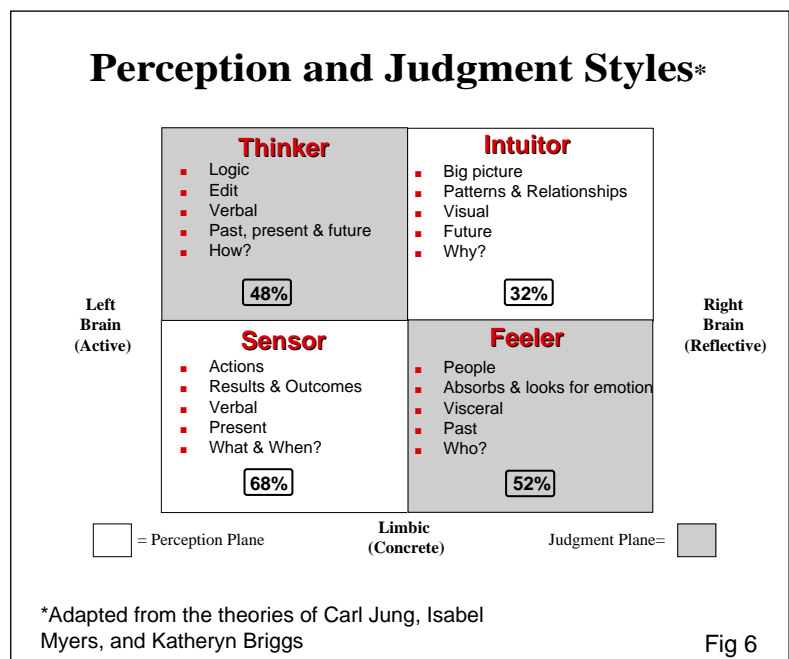
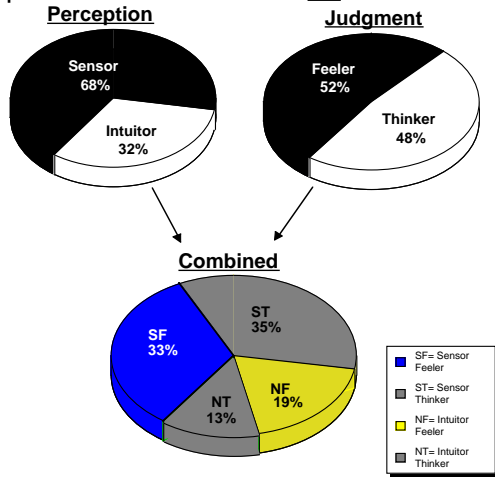


Fig 6

Perception and Judgment Analyzer Combinations

A person can be a Sensor or Intuitor **and** a Feeler or Thinker.



Demographic Profile

Sensor Feeler (SF)	Sensor Thinker (ST)	Intuitor Feeler (NF)	Intuitor Thinker (NT)
Females	Males	Females	Males
Older (45-54, 65+)	Older (65+)	Younger (18-24)	Younger (18-44)
Republican	Republican	Democrat	Democrat
Conservative	Conservative	Liberal	Liberal
Less Educated		Well Educated	Well Educated
Low Income (under \$15K)		Mid to High Income (\$50-\$80K)	Mid to High Income (\$50-\$150K)
Uninformed		Informed	
Protestant			Other Religions
		Strong Environ.	

Fig 7

While everyone has the capability to communicate using all of these styles, people exhibit tendencies toward using two specific styles. A person tends to *judge* the world (i.e. make decisions) as a Thinker or Feeler, **and** *perceive* the world (i.e. become aware) as an Intuitor or Sensor. Sensor-Thinkers and Sensor-Feelers tend to outnumber Intuitor-Thinkers and Intuitor-Feelers by approximately two-to-one (See Fig 7). When it comes to the environment, Intuitor-Feelers are clearly the strongest environmentalists. This group was consistently more concerned with environmental issues than the other three groups (See Fig 8).

By applying this model to public policy issues, Charlton Research can segment target audiences, determine what types of people are included in those groups, and identify how they perceive and judge the world. We can then determine how communications messages affect each group and the public as a whole.

Intuitor Feelers are Most Concerned About the Environment

Percentage who are *very concerned* about...

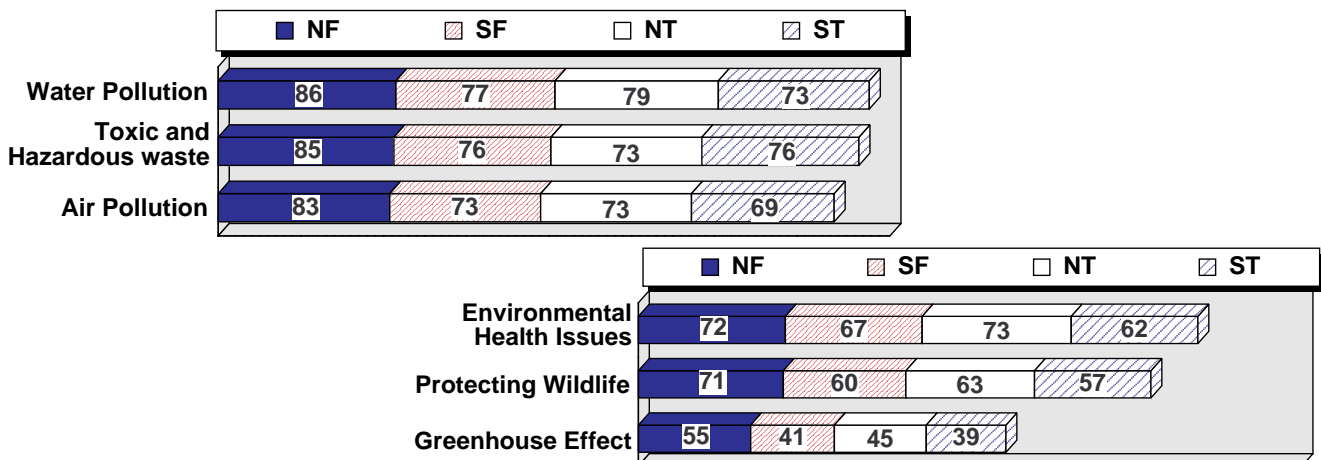


Fig 8

IMAGES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

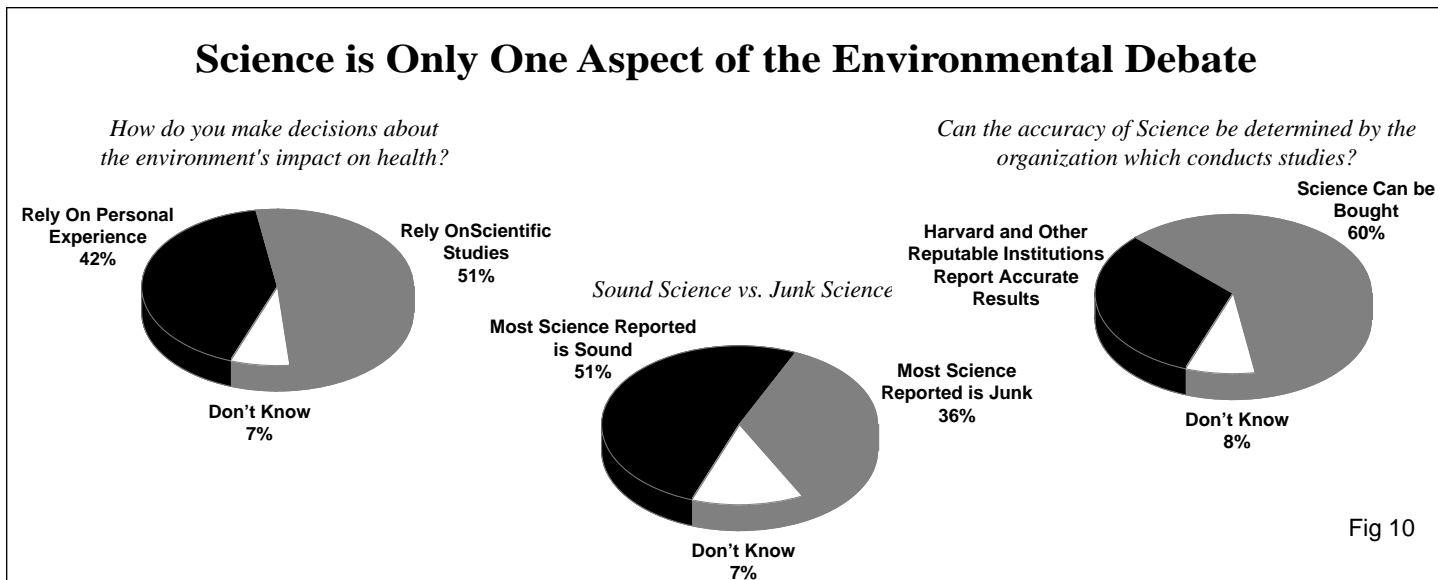
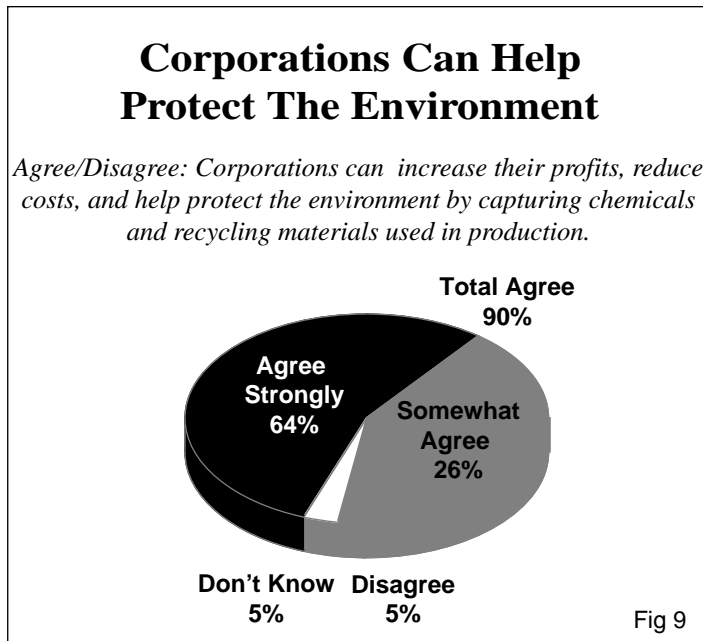
Americans have historically held mixed feelings toward business and government. Consistently since 1973, only one-quarter of Americans said they have a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in big business or Congress, according to studies conducted by the Gallup Organization. Comparatively, despite heavy negative media coverage toward other groups such as the military, police and organized religion, majorities of the public said they have confidence in these institutions. In terms of the environment, the public often perceives business as being driven by profitability rather than protection.

However, people do believe business can effectively protect the environment and manage risks. In fact, ninety percent of respondents indicated corporations could increase their profits, reduce costs and help protect the environment by capturing chemicals and recycling materials used in production. (See Fig 9).

Furthermore, respondents' definitions of the environment focused on nature, health and safety. A majority also indicated they were more concerned about public health and social, rather than ecological, concerns.

SCIENCE: A CAVEAT

Scientific evidence is often used in the environmental debate. Such evidence, however, is not always considered concrete proof. In fact, many respondents said they rely on personal experience, rather than scientific studies, to determine whether the environment is affecting people's health. Furthermore, while a majority of respondents agreed most science is sound, a relatively large portion (36%) believed the science reported in the news is junk science. In addition, 60% of respondents said scientific results can be influenced by the organization paying for the research (See Fig 10). These results indicate that, while important in the environmental debate, scientific evidence is not the sole factor considered in public policy decisions.



CONCLUSIONS

- Nearly every American considers themselves an environmentalist to some degree, and no one would consciously advocate harming the environment. As one of the only positive public issues remaining, it is important to articulate a pro-environment position.
- Americans have taken an intellectual stand on the environment. After being publicly debated for the last thirty years, the environment has become a mature issue.
- One reason people do not include environmental issues at the top of their list of national concerns is that many citizens have some confidence that environmental problems are being solved while other problems, like crime and welfare, have become worse. However, even though the immediacy of the issue has ebbed, the public's desire for a clean and healthy environment remains strong.
- It is important to understand the underlying values driving people's attitudes and opinions with any public issue. Individual responsibility, beauty and honesty are the values people use to judge environmental policies.
 - **Individual Responsibility**—People believe every individual, whether in business, government or the community, should do their part to protect the environment.
 - **Beauty**—People expect beauty in their national parks and their neighborhoods.
 - **Honesty**—People want business and government to be honest about the impact their actions have on the environment.

These values should be reflected in policy alternatives and communications which make sense to the public.

- The environment's impact on family, finances and health is also seen as important. The public believes:
 - Every family member should learn to respect and protect the environment.
 - Financial prosperity should be balanced with environmental protection
 - The environment (including clean air and clean water) can affect health
- People use different styles to communicate (perceive) with one another and, therefore, synthesize (judge) information in different ways. It is important to determine how people become *aware of issues* and how they *make decisions* to effectively communicate a position. For example, not everyone is concerned about immediate action; many people are more concerned with the long term. Furthermore, some respond to factual arguments, while others respond to emotional arguments.
- When it comes to the environment people act locally and think globally. While people define the environment in terms of their immediate surroundings, individual actions in business, government, and the local community have consequences on all levels.
- Scientific evidence is not always considered concrete proof. While important to the environmental debate, such evidence is not considered the sole factor in public policy decisions.

Methodology--A series of four focus groups took place in various cities around the nation. A telephone survey of 800 adults nationwide (margin of error of +/- 3.5%) was also conducted in July 1996. The sample was proportionate to the country's demographics, including geography, gender, voter registration and ethnicity.



® CHARLTON RESEARCH COMPANY

2300 M Street, N.W., Suite 800 • Washington D.C. 20037 • 202/973-2849 phone • 202/452-8832 fax