Which Evaluations Should We Believe?
Origins of Credibility and Legitimacy in Politicized Environments
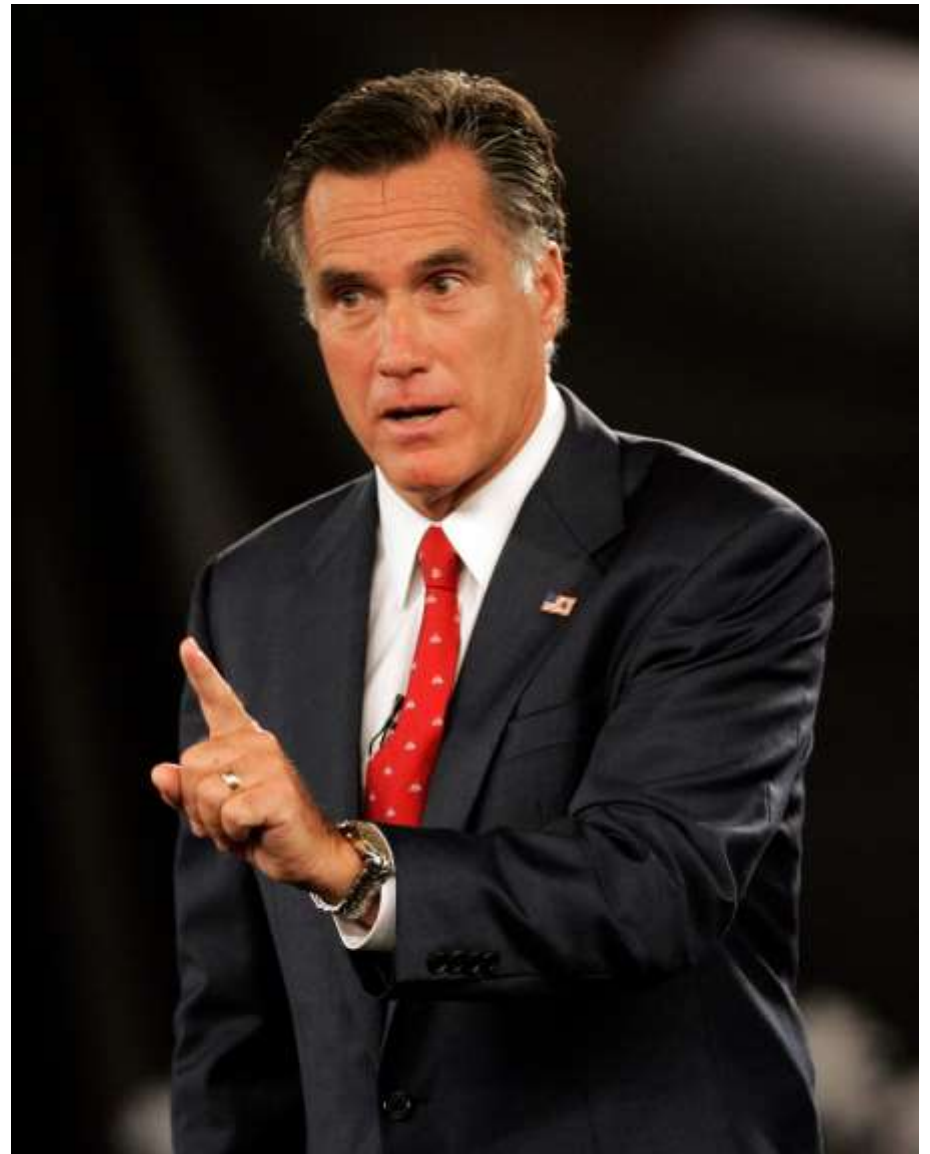
Arthur Lupia

Hal R Varian Collegiate Professor

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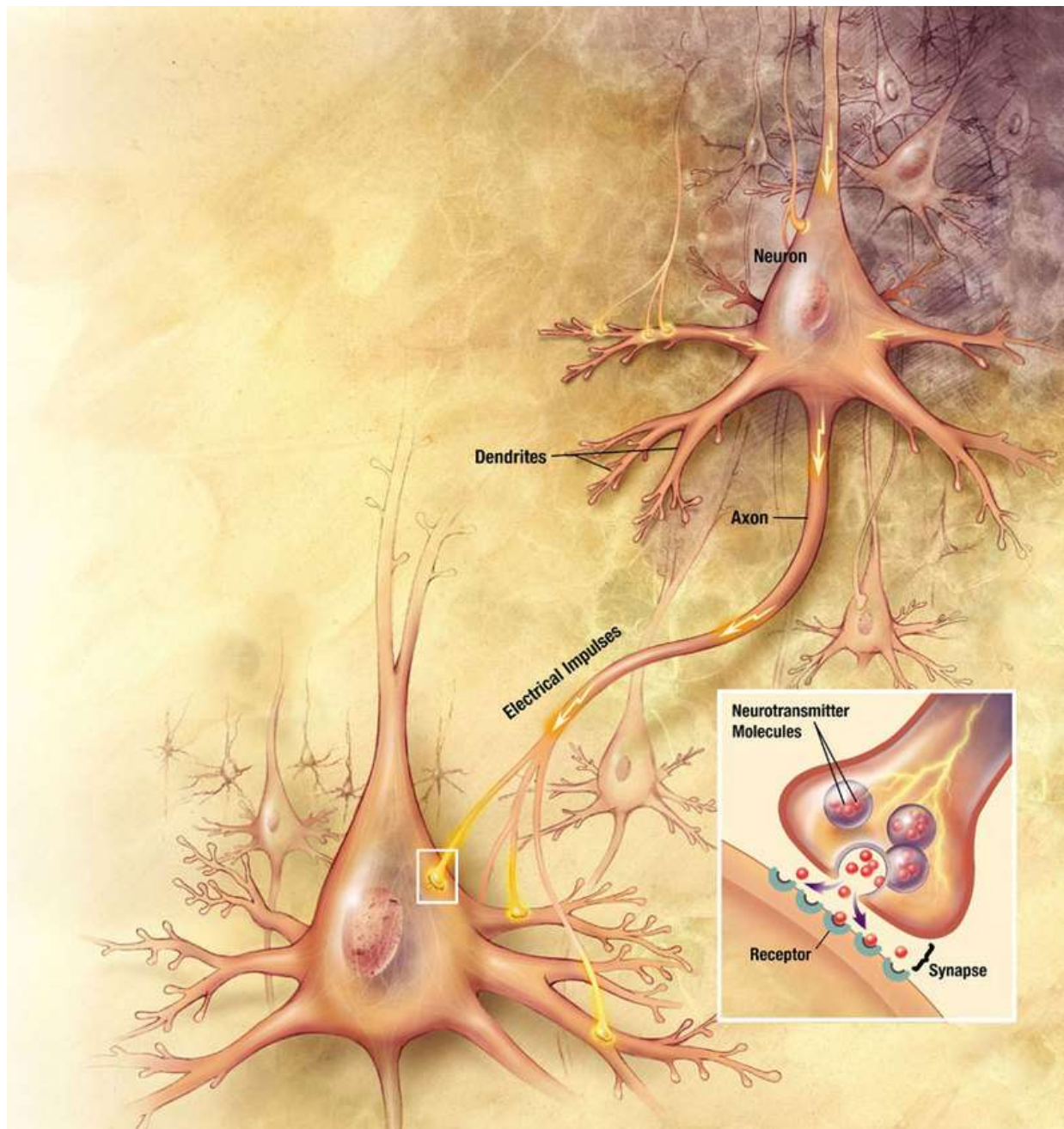Government decisions often rely on

evaluations

of past actions.

LEAN FORWARD

How do people choose what to believe?

The Battle for Attention

- WM has a very limited capacity (Miller 1956: 7±2)

- WM has a high decay rate (for most stimuli, <1ms).

How do people choose what to believe?

Evaluative Criteria

- **LEGITIMATE**
  - in accordance with recognized or accepted standards or principles

- **CREDIBLE**
  - the quality of being believable or trustworthy

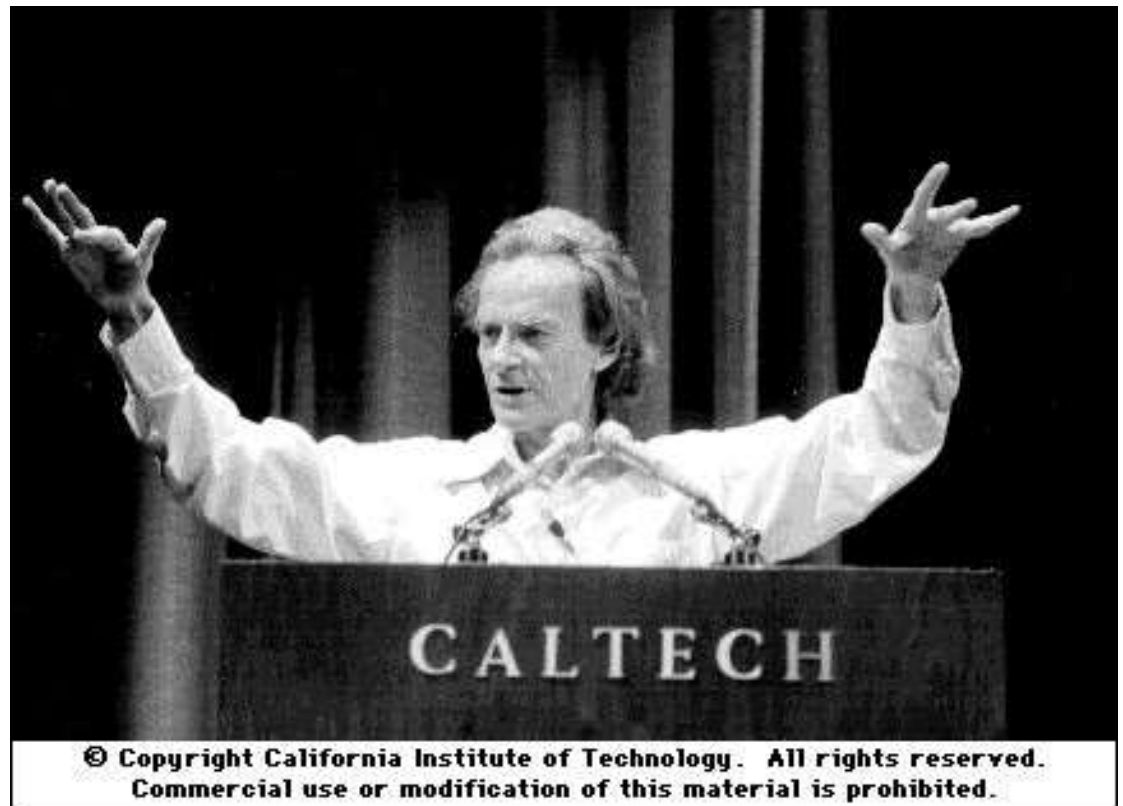What makes a claim:

1. Legitimate?

2. Credible?

1. Legitmacy

Social Science Principles

(Lupia and Elman 2014)

- Analytic communities develop norms and rules about how to draw inferences from the past.

- A conclusion is "valid" if it is conducted in accordance with accepted rules.

- Richard Feynman (1974 – Caltech Commencement Address)

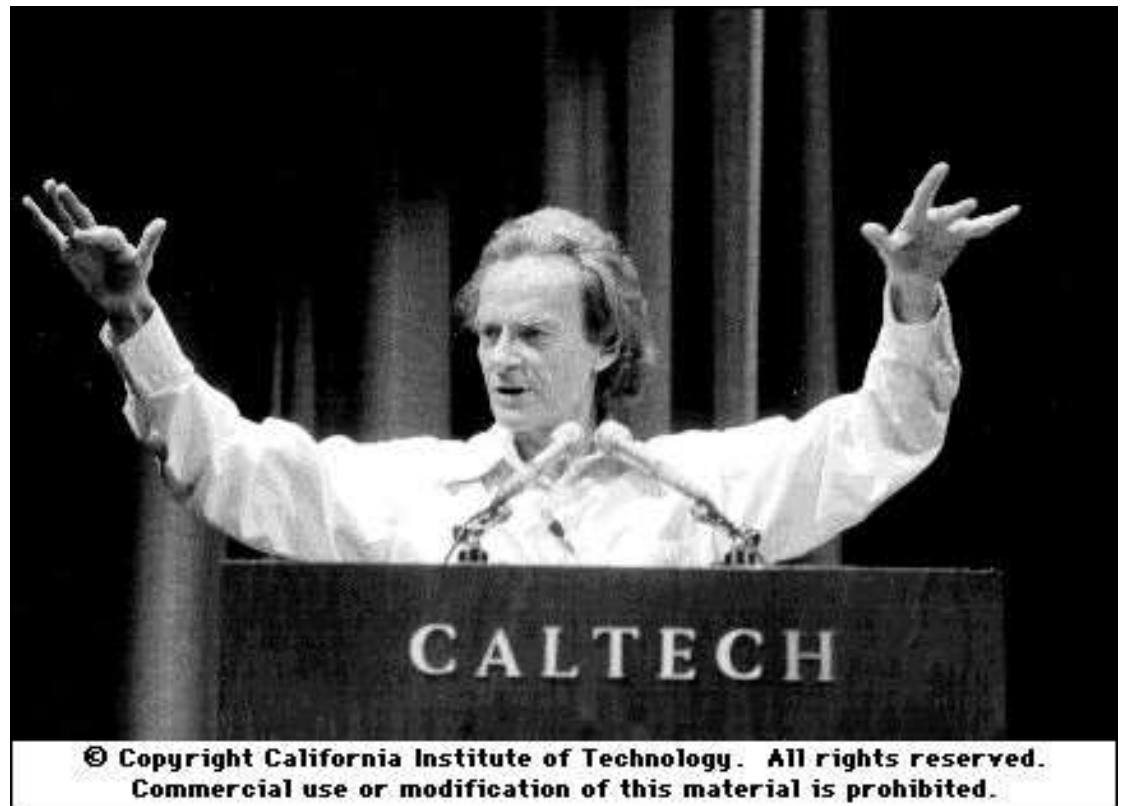"[Scientific integrity] corresponds to a kind of utter honesty—a kind of leaning over backwards….

- Richard Feynman (1974 – Caltech Commencement Address)

"...the idea is to give all of the information to help others judge the value of your contribution;

not just the information that leads to judgment in one particular direction..."

Baghdad

Did the surge work?

- Baghdad, 2003-2008
  - A spike in conflict
  - A surge
  - Violence declines

Why less violence?

- Hypothesis 1:
  - The surge detects and defeats insurgents

- Hypothesis 2:
  - Ethnic unmixing reduced contact

Data

- **Ethnic** composition of neighborhoods

- **Changes** in settlement patterns over time

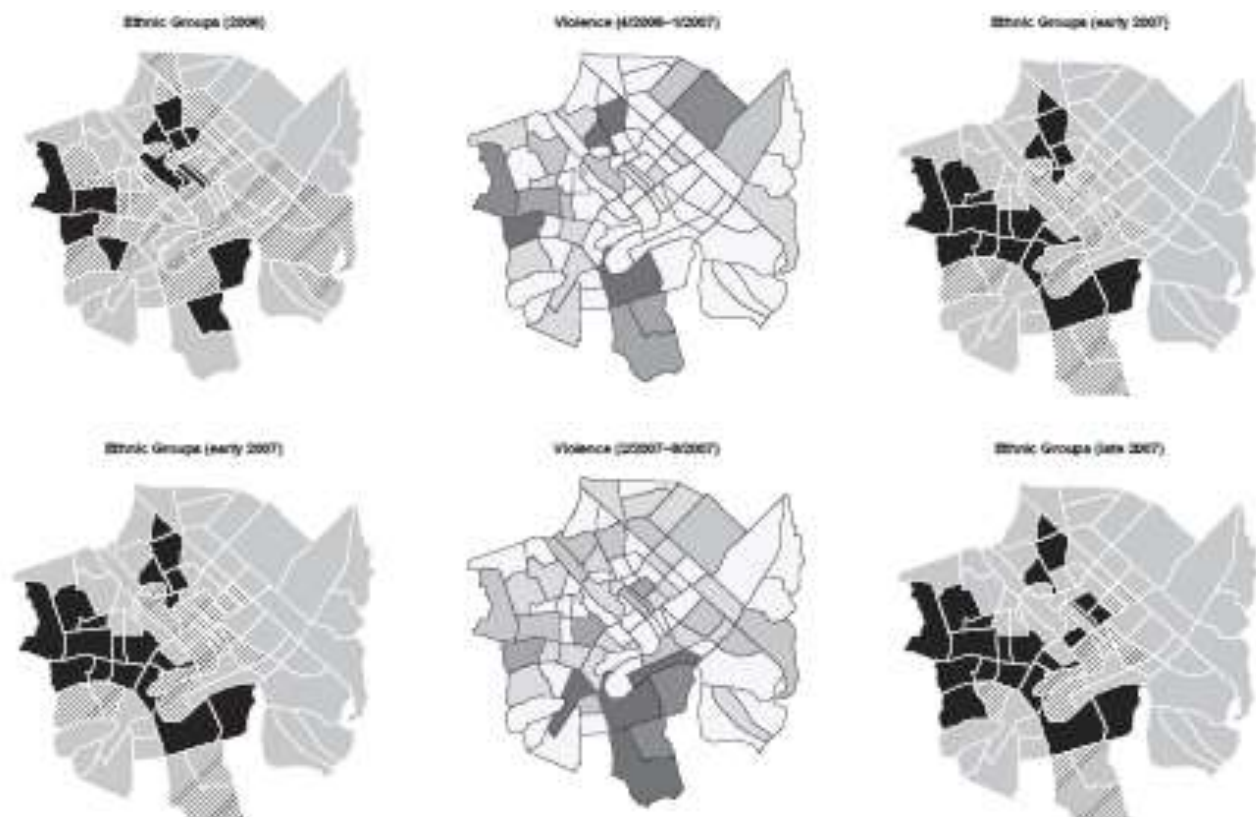- **Location** of violence

- **Date** of violence

FIG 1. Empirical data used for seeding and validation of the model. Ethnic maps show Shia (grey), Sunni (black) and mixed neighborhoods (striped). The level of violence by neighborhood is displayed in different grey shades (center map)

Weidmann-Salehyan Method

- All data geocoded

- Ethnic-geo-temporal patterns identified

- Patterns provide estimates of how different policing policies would work

Findings

- Most attacks against nearby ethnic rivals
  - Attackers need "local" support.

- Civilians search for safety
  - Ethnic enclaves emerge & prepare

- Ethnic segregation limits violence

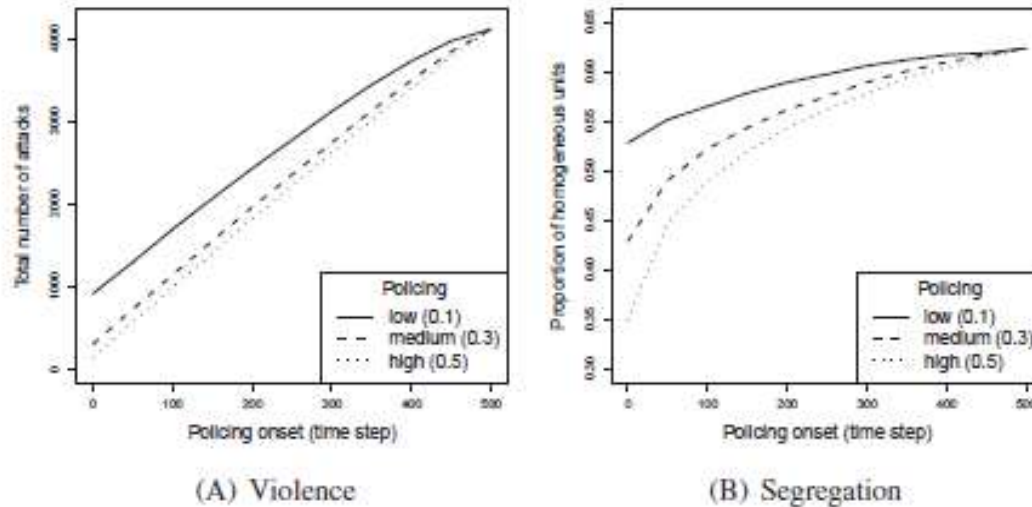# Early Surge More Effective

(A) Violence   (B) Segregation

Fig 7. Effect of the onset of policing on the reduction of violence (left) and segregation (right)

What is the value of a scientific approach?

It can be a source of

legitimate conclusions.

2. Credibility

How audiences process information

What does this image represent?

…in the Political Context

- Politics entails conflicts not easily resolved.

- It yields language indeterminacy with a nasty edge.
  - Conflict brings incentives to manipulate context and meaning.

- Result: "communication games" with unusual incentives.

Language and Leverage

- Political entrepreneurs seek leverage by
  - elevating favored arguments
  - and undermining others.

- If one political entrepreneur can reinterpret a statement for his own benefit, he will.

©

"Lipstick on a Pig"

- A phrase that dates back to the 18th century.

- Controversial in 2008, but not in 2004.

- Why?

VP Cheney (2004)

- "…Now, in the closing days of this campaign, John Kerry is running around talking tough. He's trying every which way to cover up his record of weakness on national defense. But he can't do it. It won't work.

- As we like to say in Wyoming, you can put all the lipstick you want on that pig, but at the end of the day it's still a pig. (Applause.)

- That's my favorite line. (Laughter.)" (19)

Senator Obama (2008)

- "John McCain says he's about change too, and so I guess his whole angle is, 'Watch out George Bush -- except for economic policy, health care policy, tax policy, education policy, foreign policy and Karl Rove-style politics -- we're really going to shake things up in Washington. That's not change. That's just calling something the same thing something different.

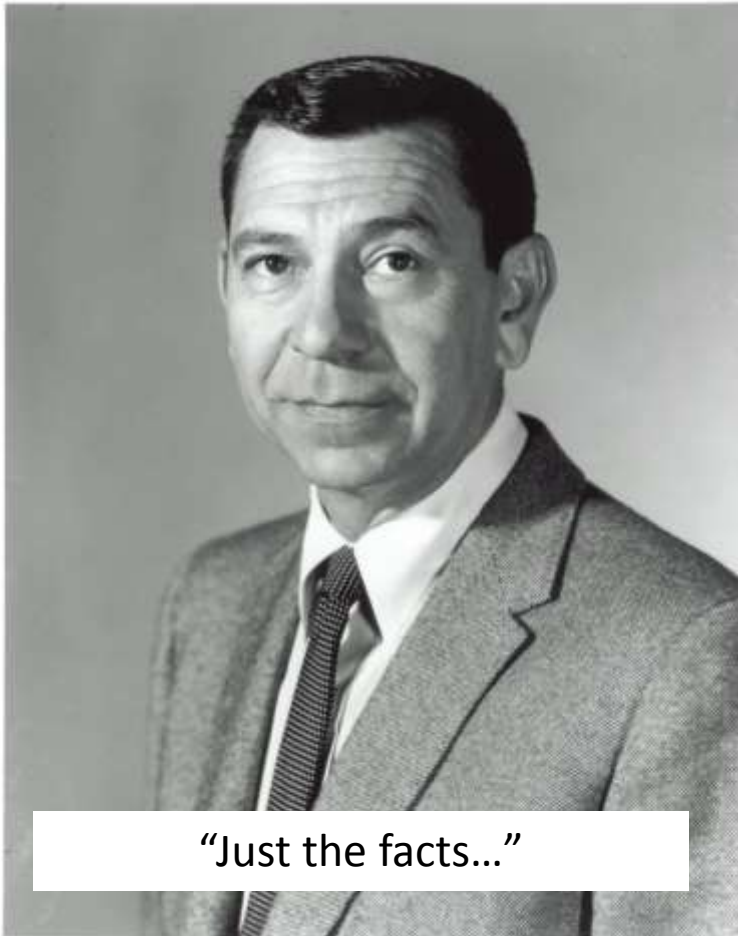- You know you can put lipstick on a pig, but it's still a pig"

Governor Palin (three days earlier)

- "You know the difference between a hockey mom and a pit bull?…

- Lipstick"

Congressperson Drake (R-VA) (same day)

- "Barack Obama sunk to a new low today with his remarks today regarding Governor Sarah Palin….

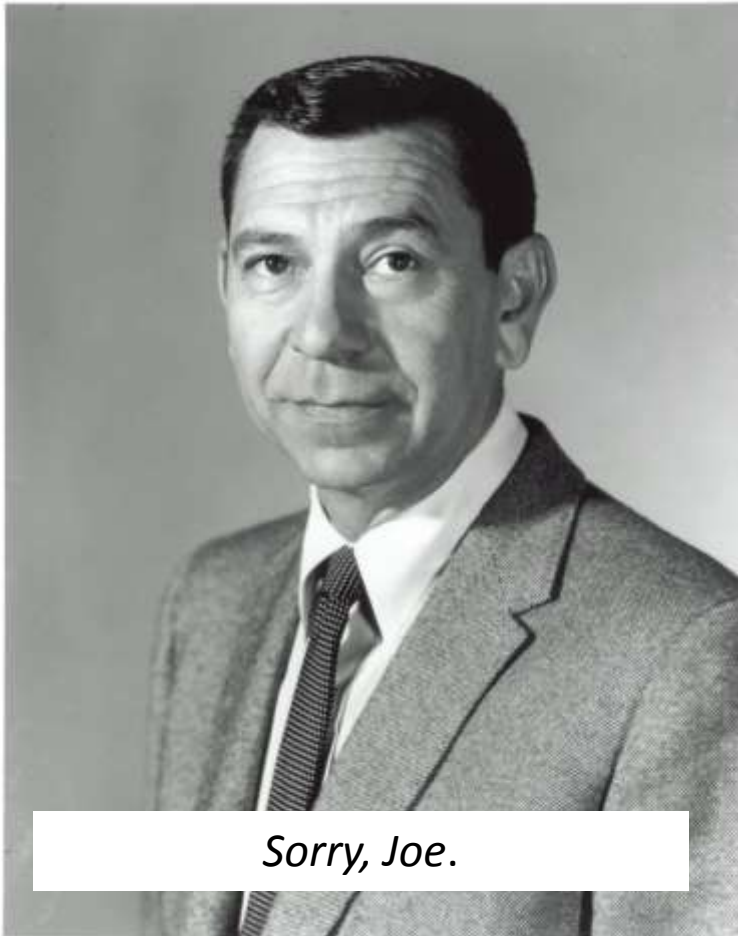- It is offensive not only to women, but anybody that cares about having a substantive debate on the issues."

implication

"Just the facts…"

- Most political competence criteria include non-trivial assumptions about the intersection of facts and values.

implication

Sorry, Joe.

- Most political competence criteria include non-trivial assumptions about the intersection of facts and values.

Credibility

✖ For contested issues, high credibility is a must.

✖ Credibility is domain-specific and is bestowed by the audience.

✖ Credibility is a function of
  ➕ Source attributes*
  ➕ Message attributes
  ➕ Contextual attributes*
  ➕ Audience effects*

Credibility Formula

(Lupia & McCubbins 1998, Lupia & Menning 2009)

Source Credibility is a non-decreasing function of

- Perceived interest proximity,

- Perceived relative expertise,

- and their interaction

Richard Alley
Earth: The Operators Manual

*
*   "I'm a registered Republican, play soccer on Saturday, and go to church on Sundays. I'm a parent and a professor…

*   the sooner we move forward, the better."

For more information, read Arthur Lupia "Communicating Science in Politicized Environments" *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, 2013.

Valuable Criteria

- **LEGITIMATE**
  - in accordance with recognized or accepted standards or principles

- **CREDIBLE**
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Thank You!

@ArthurLupia