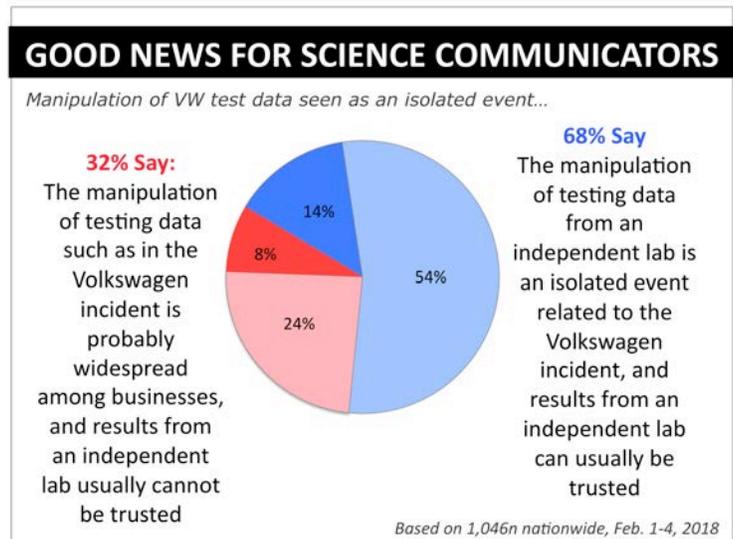


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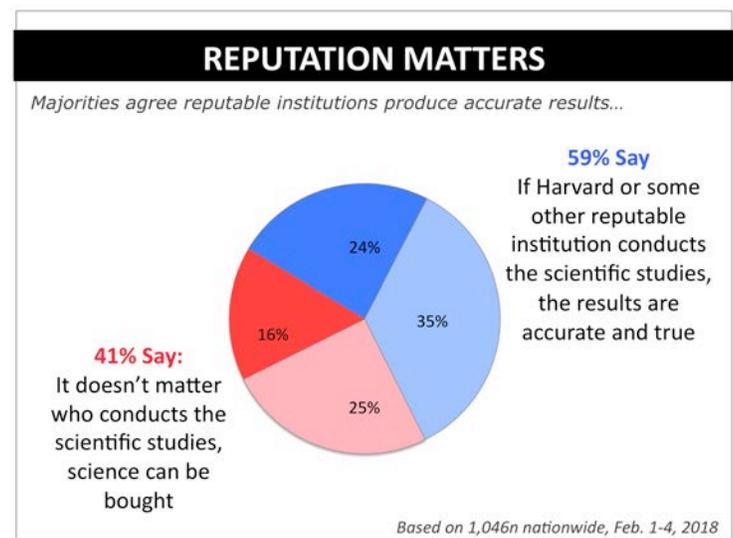
What do recent reports about manipulated test data mean for science communicators?

The recent New York Times article [10 Monkeys and a Beetle: Inside VW's Campaign for 'Clean Diesel'](#) which reported on the manipulation of testing data from an independent scientific laboratory, caught the attention of several of our clients who rely on science-based communications. So naturally, we asked a few key questions about it on our latest national omnibus survey, fielded February 1-4, 2018.

Nearly half (48%) of the national sample of 1,046 adults nationwide reported hearing about this latest news of VW manipulating data without the lab's knowledge, while 41% were not aware of it. Yet the public remains fairly confident in testing data from independent labs, with 68% agreeing this was an isolated event, and therefore results from an independent lab can usually be trusted. This confidence is a bit soft however with a majority (54%) agreeing only *somewhat* and just 14% agreeing *strongly* with this position. About one-third (32%) take the opposing view that this sort of manipulation of data is probably widespread among businesses and therefore the results from an independent lab usually cannot be trusted.



This data is consistent among those who had versus those who had not previously heard reports of the VW testing manipulation, further indicating that this particular event has not significantly impacted confidence in independent labs. Additionally, public confidence in the data produced by reputable scientific institutions is particularly high in general. Currently, 59% agree that if Harvard or some other reputable institution conducts the scientific studies, the results are accurate and true (16% strongly agree, 25% somewhat). However, four-in-ten agree that it doesn't matter who conducts the scientific studies, because science can be bought. While this suggests a fair amount of skepticism among the American public, these results reflect increasingly positive views over the last few decades. In 1998, 69% agreed that science can be bought regardless of the reputation of the institution, while just 35% felt that the results are accurate and true when produced by a reputable institution such as Harvard.

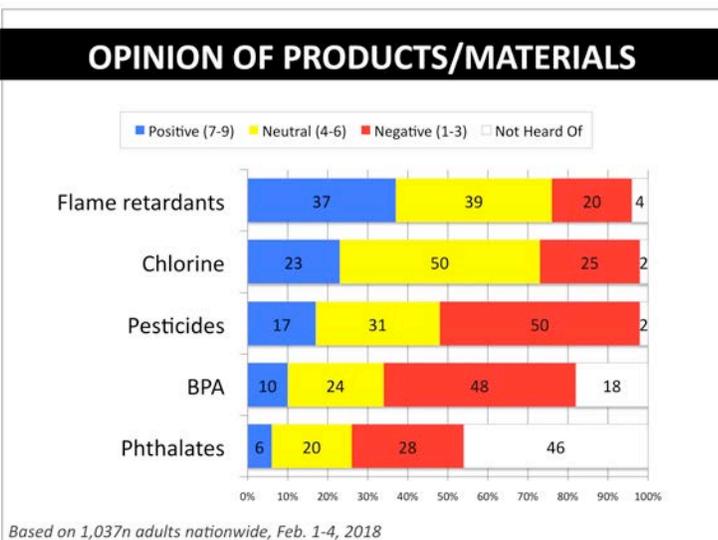
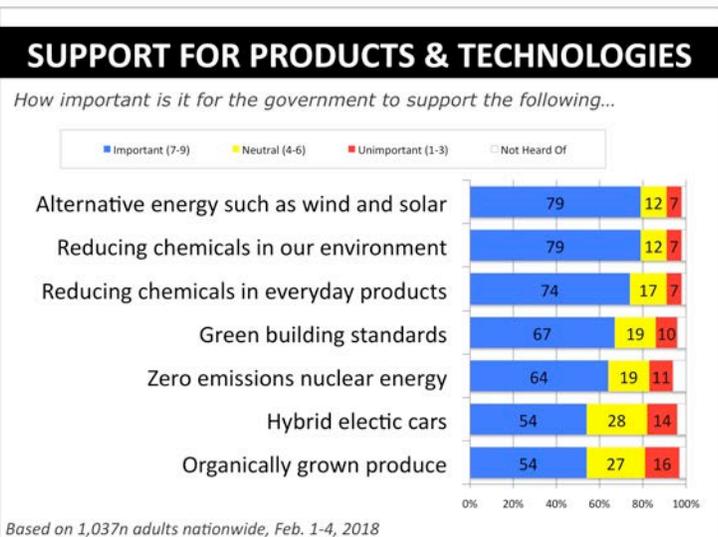
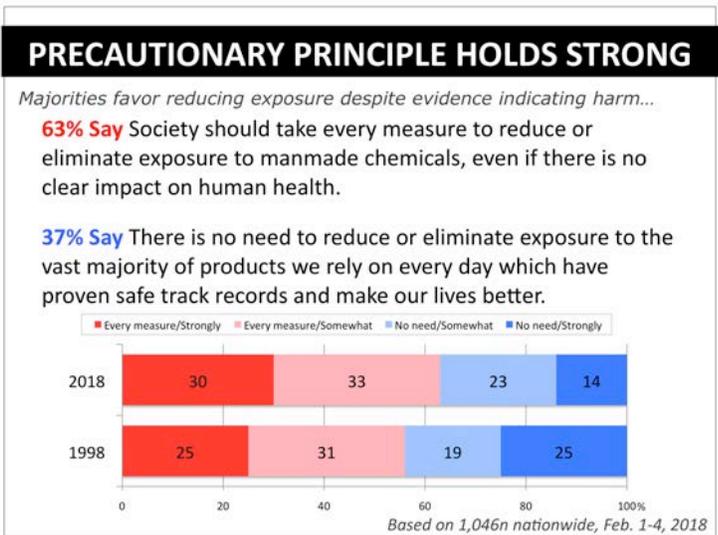


This confidence in reputable scientific studies is consistent with recent Pew Research Center findings that scientists are more trusted than almost any other institution tested, with only the military receiving higher ratings. However, while the public expresses buoyant confidence in scientific institutions, they nevertheless agree in increasing numbers that society should take every measure to reduce or eliminate exposure to manmade chemicals, even if there is no clear impact on human health. Nearly two-thirds (63%) now agree with this position, compared to 56% in 1998. Thirty-seven percent take the opposing view that there is no need to reduce or eliminate exposure to the vast majority of products with safe track records.

While the VW study tested diesel exhaust emissions, support for technological approaches to cleaner energy vary. Nearly eight-in-ten Americans say it is important for the government to support alternative energy such as wind and solar, compared with just 54% who feel it is important for the government to support hybrid electric cars.

In keeping with the public's views on the precautionary principle, 79% agree that it is important for the government to support reducing chemicals in our environment – tied for strongest support on this list, followed by another 74% who feel it is important for government to support reducing chemicals in everyday products. Green building standards are seen as important by two-thirds, while 64% feel it is important for the government to support “zero emissions nuclear energy.” Organically-grown produce ranked lowest on the list, with a majority of 54% saying this is important for the government to support, and 16% saying it is unimportant.

In terms of the chemicals the public may be most concerned about avoiding, pesticides receive the most negative ratings of those tested (50% negative), followed by BPA (48%). Phthalates are not very well known (46% never heard of) and therefore garner very low positive ratings (6%), while flame retardants and chlorine fare better with majorities neutral to favorable.



With two decades of experience helping clients identify credible messages on complex issues, the team at LRC are experts at testing science-based communications. For more information about this study or how we can help your organization, contact Sarah Long at sarah.long@longrc.com or 301.530.5257.