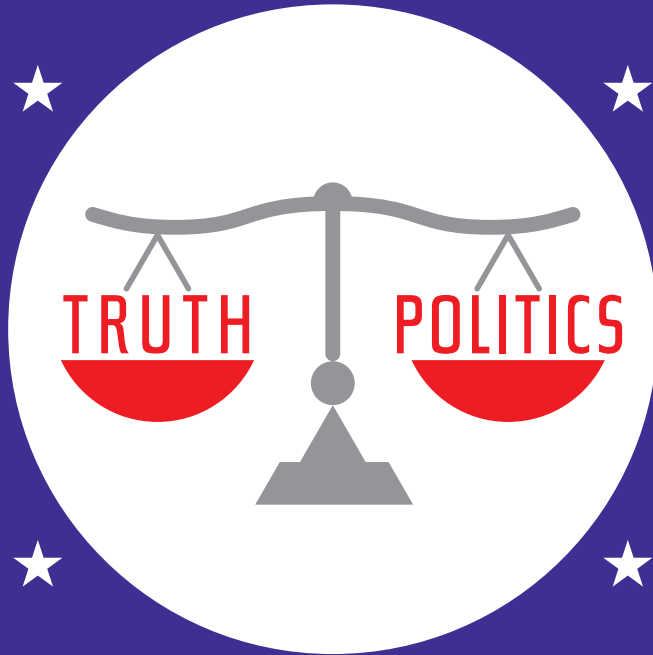


# The TRUTH About POLITICS

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ *Executive Summary* ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



**McCANN**  
TRUTH CENTRAL

# The Truth About Politics ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

In the run-up to the U.S. Presidential election, the issue of truth has become a huge part of the national discourse. As the 'Truth Well Told' Agency for over 100 years, we set out to discover the connection between truth and politics and what brands stand to learn from it today.

The relationship between truth and politics —two words rarely if ever used in the same sentence— has become even more complex in today's intensive political communications environment.

The Internet is bringing an entirely new degree of transparency to politics, making it harder for politicians to lie, or at least making us better at uncovering those lies according to consumers. Our research revealed that the Internet is driving significant political re-imagination. The majority (53%) of people surveyed agreed with the statement, "when it comes to politics, the Internet changes everything." And the majority (70%) found that Facebook was a great place to find both sides of the political debate.

When it comes to marketing, people say they value truthfulness both from politicians and from consumer brands. However, they said they were even less tolerant of brands that veered from truthful marketing.

These are among the findings in a new "Truth About Politics" study released by McCann Truth Central, the global intelligence unit of the McCann Erickson advertising agency. The study was based on an online quantitative survey of 3,000 respondents in the United States, the United Kingdom, and India, supplemented by focus groups with U.S. voters identified across the political spectrum from conservative to liberal.



The findings are revealed in five chapters:

Whatever Happened to Truth in Politics?

Truth and Opinion in Media

How Much Truth is Too Much?

Hitting the Reset Button: Light on the horizon

Everyday is Election Day for Brands

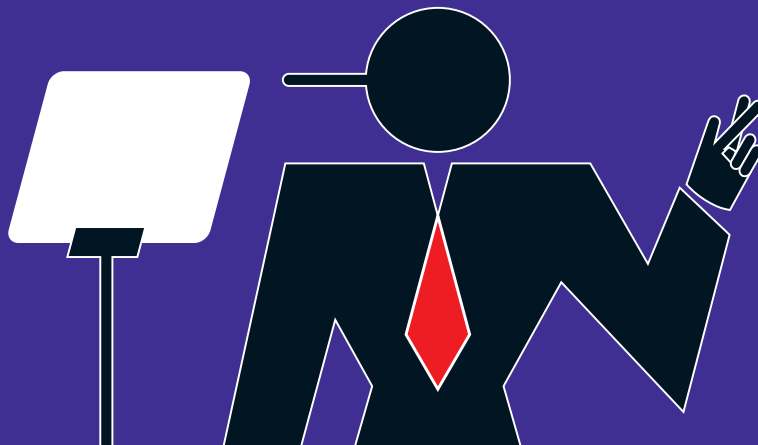
Whatever Happened to Truth in Politics?

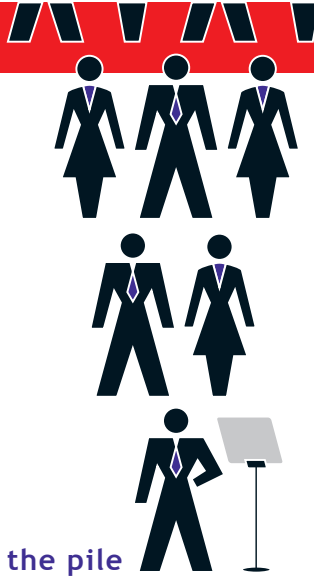


As every election season rolls around, we're bombarded with information about candidates, policies, parties, and platforms. With all this information flowing around, and more polling done than ever before, people are left with a lot more fodder for debate. In this information-rich era, we wondered if it is easier or harder to find the truth in politics.

### Truth is a rare find

Despite the ever-expanding dialogue around politics and elections (or perhaps, because of it) people everywhere feel like finding the truth is a challenge. Across the three countries we surveyed, 72% of people today agreed with the statement "When it comes to politics, it is impossible to find the truth these days." In the US, 70% agreed with this statement.





### Politicians at the bottom of the pile

The belief that there is little or no truth in politics has lead many consumers to hold politicians in rather low regard. When asked to sort different professions in order from least to most truthful, all three countries placed politicians at the bottom rung, even below car salesmen.

MOST TRUTHFUL



LEAST TRUTHFUL

UNITED STATES	UNITED KINGDOM	INDIA
DOCTORS	DOCTORS	DOCTORS
RELIGIOUS LEADERS	MILITARY/ POLICE LEADERS	JOURNALISTS
POLICE / MILITARY LEADERS	LAWYERS	BANKERS
JOURNALISTS	RELIGIOUS LEADERS	MILITARY/ POLICE LEADERS
BANKERS	CEOS	CEOS
CEOS AND LAWYERS (TIE)	JOURNALISTS	RELIGIOUS LEADERS
ADVERTISING EXECUTIVES	ADVERTISING EXECUTIVES	ADVERTISING EXECUTIVES
CAR SALESMAN	BANKERS	LAWYERS AND CAR SALESMEN (TIE)
POLITICIANS	CAR SALESMEN	POLITICIANS
	POLITICIANS	

For the 62% of consumers in our global survey who said politicians are less truthful today than they were twenty years ago (67% in US), the top reasons for politicians' lack of truth are:

- They think they can get away with it / there are no penalties
- They will do/say anything to get elected
- They have personal financial interests that affect their policies

Only 14% said politicians are less truthful because they are fed misinformation, or don't have access to the facts.

In the United States this sentiment that politicians will do / say anything to get elected is highest, with fully 2/3 of US consumers saying that's why politicians are less truthful today.

## A truth deficit on the key issues

It seems that the more an issue is fundamental to a campaign, the less consumers believe politicians are telling the truth about that issue. Some of the key issues in this most recent US presidential campaign have been: government spending, taxes, budgets and deficits, healthcare, and pension plans like social security. Globally, and particularly for US consumers, these are the areas where people are least likely to agree with the statement, "Politicians in your country [tell] people the truth about [these] issues."

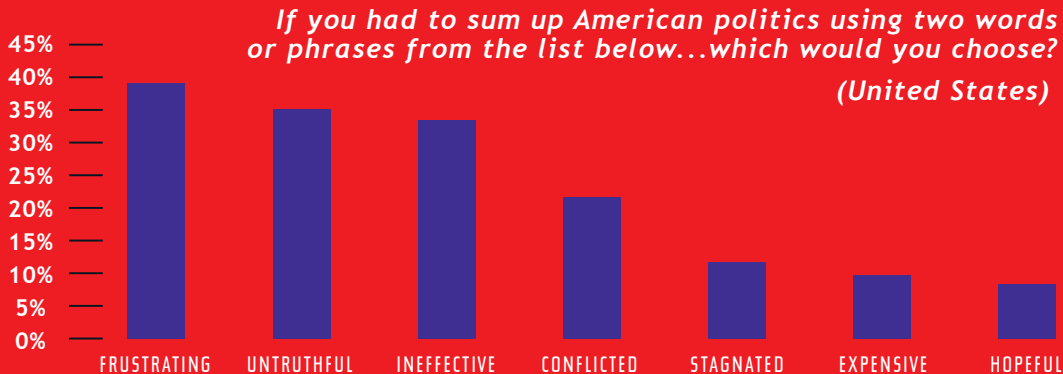
### *Issues where less truth is being told by politicians*

UNITED STATES	UNITED KINGDOM	INDIA
GOVERNMENT SPENDING	GOVERNMENT SPENDING	POLITICIANS' CREDENTIALS
TAXES	TAXES	GOVERNMENT SPENDING
BUDGETS AND DEFICITS	BUDGETS AND DEFICITS	UNEMPLOYMENT LEVELS
HEALTHCARE	PENSIONS	TAXES

## Is this the new normal?

On the surface, it seems that there's a hunger among consumers to bring back more truth to politics. 75% of consumers globally said they'd even give up some personal pleasure (chocolate, sex, alcohol, magazines, or reality tv) for a month if it meant making politicians in their country more honest. Despite this hunger for change, we also detected a sense of resignation amongst some consumers, almost as if getting the truth from politicians was simply too much to expect these days. Many felt that even if politicians embarked on their career with the best of intentions there would eventually be a dwindling commitment to the truth as an inevitable consequence of appeasing voters and political parties.

The top word consumers in the US chose to describe politics were 'Frustrating' (39%) and 'Ineffective' (34%). In our groups, we heard many other words and phrases which point to the polarized nature of politics in America today.



## From the outside, it's not as bad

But when we look at how the rest of the world views US politics, the situation doesn't seem as bad. Perhaps because they're not subject to the fray of the daily campaign Americans are hearing right now, people in the UK are more inclined to view US politics as 'Expensive' (23%) or 'Conflicted' (18%), which, while negative, could be deemed much more temporary in nature. In India consumers painted the most optimistic picture, describing US politics as 'Dynamic' (32%) and 'Open.' (22%).

As the air clears on Wednesday, November 7th, we believe Americans will find plenty of reasons to be hopeful that truth isn't completely gone from politics. A small but vocal contingent of Americans already holds this view: 1 in 10 choose 'Hopeful' as one of their two words to describe American politics.

# Truth Versus Opinion in Media ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The public today is blessed with a wealth of resources in the pursuit of truth. The Internet provides a new system of checks and balances, as well as access that prior generations didn't even consider a possibility. With the amount of news resources continually expanding, we sought to understand the ways in which Americans think that today's mainstream media reports the news and how they sift through all the additional news outlets available to them.

## Following the hourly news cycle

Most Americans plug into news outlets (traditional or otherwise) multiple times per day. In fact, when asked about their news consumption, 53% say that they have read news about American politics in the previous few hours, more than double the number of people from the UK and India who've done the same.

Yet, 62% of Americans say the news they read is mostly negative, more than twice the amount of British and more than six times that of Indians. With such differences among the countries, we wonder if the news surrounding American politics is legitimately bleak or whether a constant connection to political news is making Americans feel worse about the state of US politics.

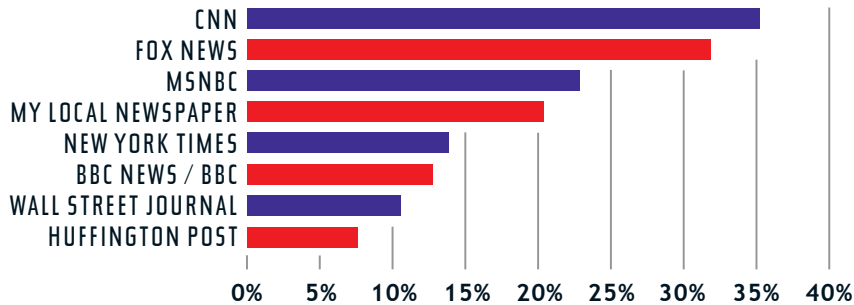
## Broadcast networks remain key

The proliferation of all different types of media sources - networks, print, online publications, blogs, and social media - ensures that Americans are never at a loss for coverage of any news story and can reserve plenty of resources strictly for fact checking and gaining secondary opinions. In fact, 70% of Americans say that they would want to consult at least 3 different news sources before they are confident that they have uncovered the truth about any issue.

Despite the influx of new and social media sources, Americans still say they turn to network news more than any other medium. Three decades after the launch of CNN, the desire for 24 hour news coverage yielded offerings from nearly all the major broadcast networks. According to the data from our survey, leading the way is stalwart CNN, which 38% of Americans tune to most frequently. Just behind CNN are Fox News (32%) and MSNBC News (28%).

Even though social media has become a new source of finding out about breaking news, such as the death of Osama Bin Laden, people profess that they then immediately flip on the networks for more robust coverage.

When it comes to finding the truth about a news story or issue, which of the following sources do you trust the most?  
(United States)



Though networks are still the kings of the news world, there are indications of frustrations with the 24-hour news cycle. People pointed to an increasing emphasis on pop-culture and the amplification of crossfire discourse that deliver more drama than data.

## Distinguishing fact from fiction

In a crowded news landscape, particularly one that's driven by round-the-clock coverage and hourly updates, it's becoming harder to distinguish fact from fiction.

From a series of true/false questions, we learned that many misconceptions about American politics exist both within the US and from outside.

All the statements below are *FALSE*.

PERCENT ANSWERING "TRUE"

	U.S.	U.K.	INDIA
THE BUDGET DEFICIT IN 2011 WAS 5 TRILLION DOLLARS	62%	68%	69%
OVER 70% OF CONGRESSMEN HAVE A PERSONAL NET WORTH OF 15 MILLION DOLLARS OR MORE	50%	60%	73%
ALMOST HALF OF ELECTED OFFICIALS IN AMERICA HAVE WORKED FOR AN INVESTMENT BANK (i.e. GOLDMAN SACHS OR JP MORGAN)	41%	60%	72%



When these exaggerations are perceived as the truth, it's no wonder that 68% of Americans believe that "politicians don't understand my life."

## Presenting the news editorially

Editorials are an old convention in news media. Emblazoned with large headings that read "OPINION", it was not difficult to tell when a publication shifted from straight news reporting to commentary. In today's news media, consumers believe that the line between fact and opinion is becoming increasingly fluid.

Consumers point to devices that range from the music with which networks introduce a story coming out of a commercial break to the choice of words shown on the news crawl on the bottom of the screen infuse a sense of editorial bias to otherwise 'truthful' news stories.

The majority of consumers in the focus groups agreed that the problem here is not that network news channels have editorial features, it is that they find it difficult to distinguish opinion from news. As a woman in our conservative group pointed out "it's not so much what they say, it's also what they don't say. A slight difference of a word - what they choose to introduce a story will automatically sway the listener to their point of view. If they say [a politician] was 'caught' instead of 'accused' it makes people automatically assume he did something."

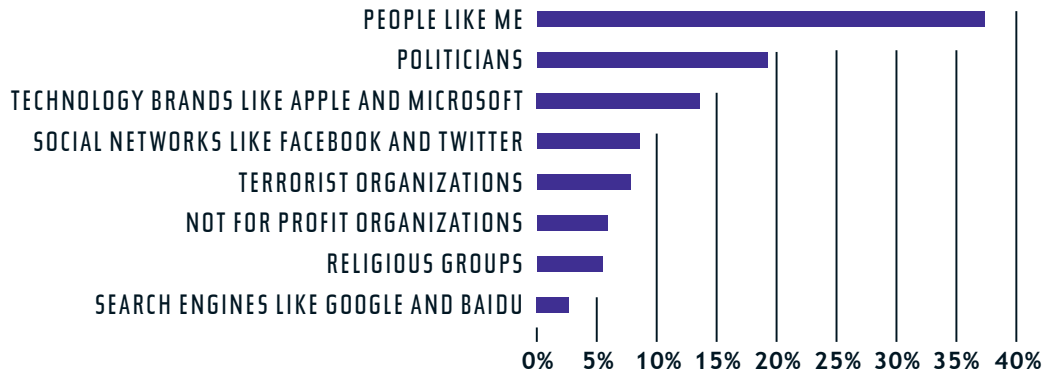


## People power

When it comes to finding the truth, the good news is that many Americans feel that they can and will take it upon themselves to seek out and ascertain the truth. One of our group members talked about how it was up to him to find the truth, saying, "I will go back and look on Youtube... I listen to the whole speech. I don't really need you to tell me what I think about what something is... I can look at it and hear it with my own ears and make my own informed decision."

This self-motivated desire to find the truth is likely why the top answer to the question "who or what has the power to change the world today" is "people like me."

*Looking at this list, who or what has the most power to change the world today?*



## People crave an independent voice

Ever in search of the truth, Americans yearn for sources presenting the news without any agenda. This leads them to look for “outsider” media sources - publications, networks and even radio stations not among the primary sources Americans visit on a given day.

Though only 8% of Americans frequently tune to the BBC or BBC News, 13% regard it as the most trusted news source - ranking it ahead of The Wall Street Journal and The Huffington Post. The consumers we spoke to appreciate the channel’s “broader, global view”.

NPR, by virtue of being a non-profit media source funded through federal money and grants from the private sector, is seen as the most objective source available. “I think they’re very independent because they get money from the government, the public, and not from Corporate America,” said one participant in our liberal group.

Interestingly enough, when asked which institution they would select to run the country in place of a political party, 21% of American said they would select Consumer Reports. The British lend similar value to Which? magazine, with 14% selecting this publication. Consumers believe that these publications seek to serve the public and champion the consumer by presenting honest information about products, without any bias. These are the values that consumers would hope to find in both their national political system and the media that covers it.

# How Much Truth is Too Much?



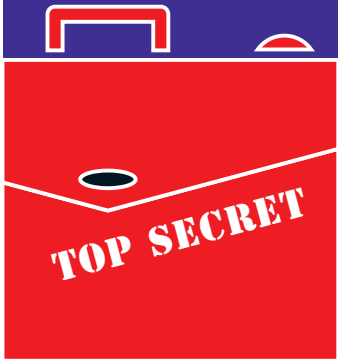
## Things we shouldn't know

Despite Americans' constant pursuit of the truth, the majority feels that certain things are best left shrouded. Convincingly, 43% of Americans have a negative perception of Wikileaks for exposing things they felt were not for public consumption. Interestingly enough, 81% and 43% of Indians and British, respectively, think the people have a right to know everything the government does, whereas only 32% of Americans think we have a right to this information.

Two-thirds of Americans trust the information in an official press release over information leaked on Wikileaks or Twitter.

Overall, which of the following best describes how you feel about Wikileaks?

*Overall, which of the following best describes how you feel about Wikileaks? (% of people who have some or total understanding of Wikileaks)*



# Hitting the reset button: Light on the horizon



Given the chance to reimagine American politics, consumers have high hopes that changes to the system or politicians can bring about a more truthful political dialogue.

## The best intentions

With political tracking polls showing Congressional approvals at all time lows,<sup>1</sup> it's not a surprise that some consumers believe that elected officials are the problem more so than the system itself.

There is a strong belief among some consumers that politicians generally start from a place of honesty. "I believe they start with good intentions," was a sentiment stated early in our liberal group and echoed in subsequent groups. "However, over time they start to lie or not tell the truth because of the pressure from their party leaders and donors," the participant went on to say.

To bring back more people with good intentions, a common change that people suggested to bring about more truth in politics was term limits.

## Changing the system

Beyond changing the people, there is a hunger among many for systemic changes. 57% of consumers said they hoped "a new political system is invented in my lifetime." For young consumers, this hope for a reimagined system was most pronounced, with 64% of those aged 18-34 saying they desired a new system.

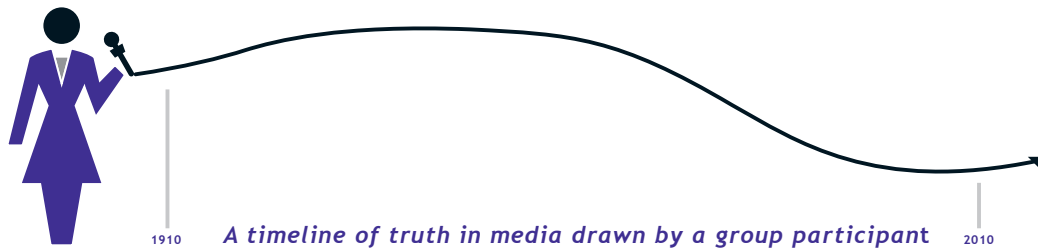
CONGRESSIONAL  
APPROVAL

<sup>1</sup>In August 2012, Gallup reported that the congressional approval score tied the previous record, set in February 2011, for the lowest score in Gallup's 38 year-history. Only 10% of Americans approved of the job Congress was doing. By September 14, approval was still very low at 13%  
<http://www.gallup.com/poll/156662/Congress-Approval-Ties-Time-Low.aspx>

## Technology is powering a re-imagination

The Internet is already driving significant political re-imagination according to most consumers. 89% of consumers say that the Internet has had “a lot of impact” or “some impact” on politics in general. The majority (53%) of consumers agree with the statement “when it comes to politics, the Internet changes everything.”

When charting out a ‘truth in media’ and ‘truth in politics’ timeline, some consumers charted a gradual uptick in truth starting in recent years. When asked the reasons for this trend reversal, people invariably cited the Internet.

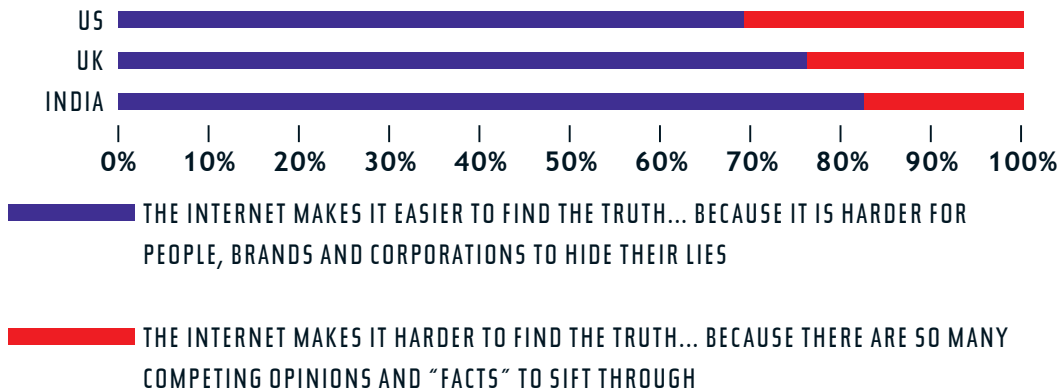


The Internet is bringing an entirely new degree of transparency to politics, making it harder for politicians to lie, or at least making us better at uncovering those lies. 59% of consumers agreed that “the internet makes it harder for politicians to lie.” The proliferation of fact-checking sites and resources creates a society of citizen-journalists who can research and verify information before deciding whether to accept it as truth.

Consumers like how the Internet allows them to further pick apart a news article’s potential biases. For this, they often turn to online comments to get reactions and other perspectives. One moderate participant said, “It’s great because Internet sites have comments [which means] we’re not always hearing [news] filtered through the reporter and editor.”

On balance, consumers felt that technology and the Internet were bringing more truth to politics, but they cautioned that it is not without risk. Thanks to the speed of the Internet and sites like Twitter, the Internet is also a ground for fast-moving misinformation at times. Said one group participant, “There’s a lot of pressure to get it out first, but that’s not always fully fact checked. It’s almost like ‘Say first, apologize later’.”

*When it comes to finding the truth...  
has the internet made things easier or harder?*



## Facebook: the power to civilize?

Social media is also a driving force for more truth in politics. In the wake of the Arab Spring, it's no surprise that 46% of consumers globally agreed that "social media is making every country a democracy, whether they like it or not." Indians hold the most hope for social media's impact, with 69% of the online population agreeing with this statement.

On a smaller scale, consumers believe that social media is changing the politics closer to home. 61% say that they feel they have the power to influence other people's political views through social media.

The consumers we spoke with were mostly enthusiastic about expressions of political opinion via social networks. They enjoyed the debate and article sharing among friends. Even if they disagreed with their friends, they valued the interaction.

The ability to "know the source" is a key reason why people liked political discourse on social networks. One respondent said, "I think the point of it is that you have these people that you trust, respect, and think highly of. When they post something, that's something I could read because I respect their opinions."

We found very few instances of people going out of their way to block or ignore dissenting views from their social media feeds. A young conservative said she never blocked anyone for a political view on Facebook “unless it came from a position of hate.” For the most part, in an increasingly polarized media landscape, it seems that one of the few places consumers are getting a balanced point of view is via social media. An impressive 74% of consumers globally felt their social media feed was balanced. The trend was the same in all three countries.

*When it comes to politics, how balanced do you think your social media feed is?*

- WELL BALANCED. I SEE BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE. 
- NOT VERY BALANCED. MOST OF MY FRIENDS POST LEFT WING ARTICLES AND OPINIONS. 
- NOT VERY BALANCED. MOST OF MY FRIENDS POST RIGHT WING ARTICLES AND OPINIONS. 



Every Day is Election Day for Brands



As we examine the role of truth in politics we uncover important truths for brands and businesses as well. Politicians and their strategists spend considerable effort and thought shaping a politician’s brand, but consumer brands are very distinct from politicians in one key way: politicians are managing their brand to earn your vote on one day, while brands are seeking election every time a consumer must make a purchase.

## A higher burden of truth

Asked to draw a timeline of truth for brands, we saw much more variation when compared to truth in politics or truth in media. Some consumers felt that regulations have forced brands to become more truthful. Others showed dips and peaks, coincident with their memory of particular events in a recalled brand's history. Overall, however, consumers felt that brands were on the same trend as the rest of society. 45% of global consumers felt that brands were less truthful than 20 years ago. 24% thought brands are more truthful. A bit better than politicians and the media - but still room for improvement.

The consumers we spoke with felt that brands had to be truthful every single day. Brands "are part of our daily lives," said one focus group member. "If I don't like the guy I voted for, I can change my vote in four years. But what happens with my brands can affect me tomorrow."

Brand need to commit to telling the truth if they want to be elected each time a consumer goes up to a shelf, clicks through a page, or passes along a recommendation to a friend. 87.5% of consumers say that the truthfulness of a brand or company plays a part in their decision to buy a product or service.

## A different POV than politicians

Consumers are looking for brands to have a point of view on the world. 74% globally agree that "brands must stand up for what they believe in." However, brands should be careful not to mistake this burden of truth as a political pulpit.

Brands have been in the news lately for communications that may indicate a position on controversial issues such as same-sex marriage. The quick service restaurant chain Chick-Fil-A was widely portrayed as opposed to same-sex marriage after comments from the company's founder were made public. Meanwhile, Oreo was perceived to have taken the opposite stance, creating an image of a rainbow "pride" cookie for Gay Pride on June 25th.

Consumer reactions to the brand communications were naturally as mixed as their views on the issue. Which begs the question: is this the type of issue on which a brand should have a position?

If we look at consumer opinion, the answer is a definitive no. When asked to think about the previous examples of Chick-Fil-A and Oreo, a plurality of consumers said that had no strong opinion about brands making political statements. However, 31% said they generally felt "bad" and "brands should not get involved in these kinds of issues." Only 20% felt positive about this type of brand involvement in politics. Consumers were 1.5 times as likely to feel negatively about brand involvement in highly politically charged issues.



## Thinking about these types of examples, how do you feel generally about brands making political statements?

BASE: Respondents who are residents of the U.S.



In our groups, consumers overwhelmingly felt such positions were risky for brands. Our most liberal consumers said they would “never eat at Chick-Fil-A again.” Our more conservative consumers were not inclined to change their behaviors one way or the other, but felt that brands had the right to get involved. However, they reaffirmed their right to vote with their wallet as a consequence.

### Relevance is key for a brand POV

So how do we reconcile the fact that consumers want brands to have a point of view and their seeming desire to keep brands out of the most political issues? It turns out consumers do want brands to discover and uphold truths. However, those truths should be less polarizing and relevant to a brand's category.

When asked what subjects brands should have point of view about, 2/3 of US consumers and 77% of our global respondents said there were some issues where brands should get involved. However, these issues were much more likely to be in areas where brands could have more impact, such as bullying, animal rights, and organic farming.

### Top issues where consumers want brands to have a POV

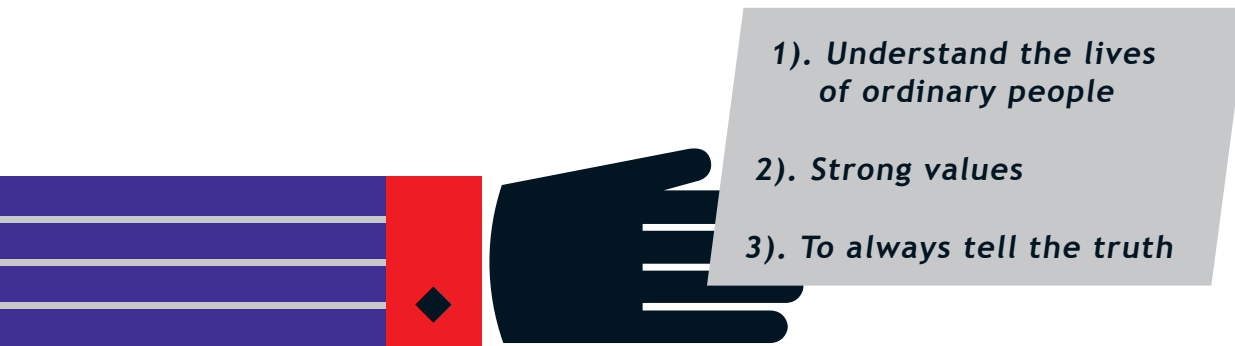


## Winning the election

When the moment of decision comes, voting and choosing brands have a lot in common. At the most basic level, there are certain criteria that political and consumer brands must meet to win affections.

When asked “what are the most important qualities / attributes in a good politician?” American consumers selected options that reflected a personal connection, underpinned by values. #1, with 61%, was a “A good understanding of how real people live.” #2 was “strong personal values” with 47.9%. #3, “They always tell the truth” was very close behind with 47.3%.

*The top things people say they want from politicians...*



*...are the same things they want from brands*

Brands must exhibit these same qualities to win with consumers. Consumers expect brands to offer relevance and utility for their daily lives. But we've seen that they're also expecting strong values (within a category) and the resounding majority says truthfulness will play a role in purchase decisions.

Brands must meet this standard with consumers every day.