



# **Politicians in Ad Land: Do campaign ads jeopardize your brand's chance of breaking through?**

An Ipsos Point of View



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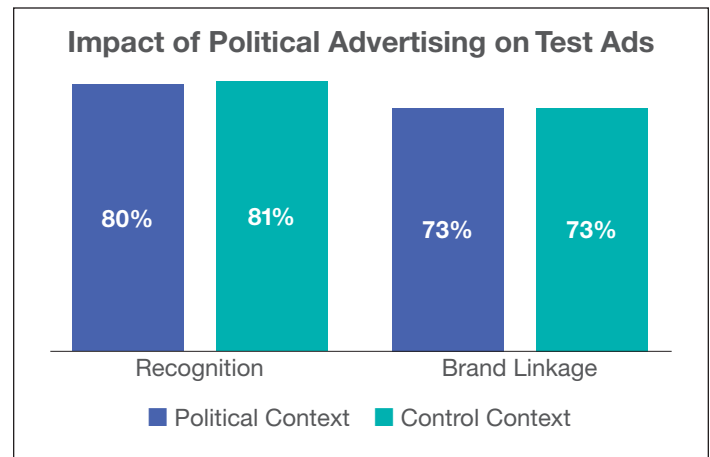
In the next few weeks \$4.4B will be spent in the 2019–2020 election cycle on broadcast media alone (not to mention another \$1.6B on digital video)! By Politico's estimates this equates to roughly eight million broadcast airings of political ads.<sup>1</sup>

What does this mean for marketers? In this paper, we'll discuss how competition for consumers' attention tenor of the surrounding ads markedly shift. The nation is unsettled by a pandemic and economic, political, and social unrest. That leaves a lot of questions for advertisers developing their plans for the second half of the year. One is how much to "take a stand" on all of the above.

We'll help give you the tools you need to answer those questions. And best of all, there's good news.

Recently, we conducted research among 1,600 respondents in which we exposed test ads in two sets of contexts. The first was a standard grouping of ads in a distracted environment, similar to how our core creative evaluations are conducted in Creative|Spark, a creative assessment solution that helps advertisers and agencies power brand growth by quickly evaluating and optimizing creative. We then exposed a similar set of consumers to the same ads, only this time, the environment was composed of a variety of political ads from both sides of the ideological spectrum.

## Is it safe to go out and play?



What we found overall can be reassuring to marketers. The barrage of political advertising surrounding brand ads did not have any deleterious effect on how those ads were noticed, remembered or linked with their respective brands. The average response for each of these metrics was quite similar when comparing across the two contextual environments.

That good news needs a little bit of a caveat. While on average, the ads get similar responses, there are specific differences that are driven by the *type* of creative. One example of this is a positively emotional, uplifting piece that is tied to the brand in its benefits but does not get into the product specifics. This creative, in turn, shows the ability to work better in the political context (+7% branded impressions) as a contrast in mood and style.

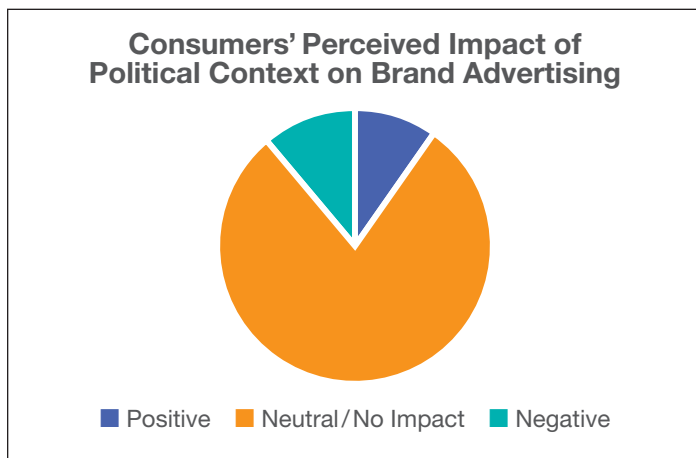
Conversely, an ad that had a much weaker performance in the political context (–13%) is a much more workmanlike ad. The creative was high on information, but low on entertainment value. While it has shown to be an effective ad, it does not see the same level of performance here. Marketers will do well to keep in mind the overall mood of the advertising environment when constructing standout creative. Perhaps the negative tone of political advertising allows more positive, uplifting ads to better stand out from the crowd.

<sup>1</sup> Politico.com -2020 Political Spending Projections  
<https://www.politico.com/f/?id=0000016b-b029-d027-a97f-f6a95aca0000>



## Politics impact how we view political content

To add another layer to this, we also asked consumers to state how the inclusion of political ads affected their response to brand advertising. Their answers confirmed our findings, though in different ways. The majority of consumers (roughly three-quarters) say they are indifferent to the impact of this context.



This is one area where we see political affiliation make a difference. Those who identify themselves as moderate or centrist, are less likely to recognize and remember the ads in the political context when they are packed together with ads for parties and political causes. The polarization created by the partisan system and its advertising, is likely turning these consumers off the advertising altogether. That contributes to the stronger recognition in the typical brand ad environment.

Apart from these important outliers, the majority expressing a lack of impact from political advertising, coupled with smaller but equal degrees of positive and negative influence, begins to explain the largely comparable metrics we see across both the political and apolitical contexts.

## Taking a stand, or sitting one out?

The last question is “to what extent can, and should a marketer take a stand?” Our study shows, there are certainly consumers who view ‘normal’ advertising as a respite from the heaviness that can be so all-encompassing in today’s world.

However, if a brand’s DNA aligns with the issues currently at play, there can be great benefit to communicating that—as long as it is in an authentic, relevant-to-brand way. An Ipsos Public Affairs study has found that 80% of Democrats, and 50% of Republicans claim they will support brands that “take a stand”—reason enough for some brands to think hard about their purpose.

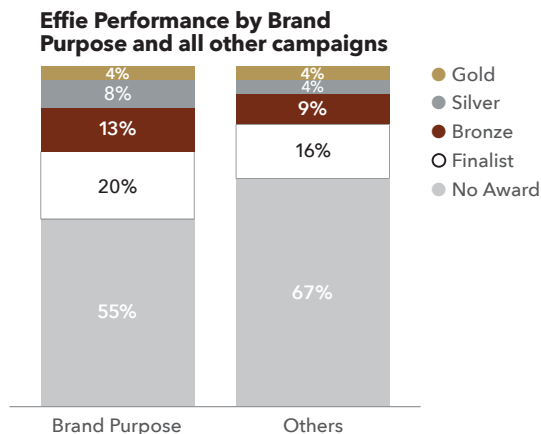
A recent analysis of 2019 Effies entries shows that campaigns that contained a ‘brand purpose’ were much more [likely to be award winners, and they were able to deliver on the same things that non-purpose-oriented campaigns did.](#)

The keys to a successful brand purpose campaign are authenticity to the brand, and grounding in a true consumer insight. When these two are married, the effectiveness of the campaign can be unparalleled. If a campaign is missing one of these however, brands run the risk of falling flat, or potentially experiencing real backlash from engaged consumers.

## Can Brand Purpose Campaigns be Effective? YES!

Out of all of the campaigns entered for an Effie award this year, about a quarter were considered a ‘Brand Purpose’ campaign by way of looking at the claimed objective, the claimed result, the category entered, or just the content of the creative work by itself. This excludes all non-profit entries.

Nearly half of the Brand Purpose campaigns qualified as finalists, compared to one third of non-purpose entries.



Data from all Effie 2019 Entries, identified by Ipsos as containing a ‘Brand Purpose’ or not



## The big takeaways

**Don't fear the changed environment.** There's no inherent bias to performance in the highly polarized, political context of an election. Brands can expect advertising success, on average, at the same level as any other time on the calendar.

**Know the affiliation of your target.** Independents are most likely to "tune out," while Democrats are most supportive of brands taking a stance on "hot topics."

**Great creative always matters.** In our study, the ads that were proven to be strong performers (>100 index on our Retained Branded Recognition in a separate Creative|Spark evaluation) were also the strongest performers on average when placed in the context of political ads.

**A positive, uplifting message could stand out more.** In a potentially negative and toxic campaign, a style that contrasts this could see amplified success. This may point towards brand-building as a better opportunity, compared to sales-focused promotional campaigns.

**If you do take a stand, stay the course.** Plan for a potential negative backlash, either at the time of airing or even after the election. If you believe in the brand purpose, and it's strategically sound, don't be intimidated into reversing based on a few loud voices.

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GAME CHANGERS

