

Voters Most Influenced by Debates and TV/Print News Reporting



By Dottie Enrico, Director of Content Development, [4A's](#)

Do negative political ads affect how voters view the whole [advertising industry](#)? A new survey fielded exclusively for the [4A's](#) by research firm SSRS in late January found the debates are neck and neck with television and radio reporting as the two most influential factors on voting decisions. Newspapers/print media and social media follow. Despite all of the buzz about social media, it still lags behind print media as a decision-shaper, though not by a huge margin. When asked what the most influential form of media is, the survey found that debates are more influential among Millennials (41 percent) while television (one-third) and radio reporting (one-quarter) are more influential among Baby Boomers and those older. Predictably, [social media](#) has more influence over younger people (19 percent).

Fewer than 10 percent of the 1,000 voting age adults surveyed believe political ads influence how they vote. But that's not to say ads don't help voters shape opinions of candidates and competitors during a presidential battle. Further, two in ten feel that political ads are too negative and 15 percent believe they mostly present false messages.



The venues that most influence voters also differ along party lines. Democrats put more stock in newspaper/print coverage (23 percent) than Republicans (11 percent). Members of both parties are heavily influenced by the debates, while Republicans tend to be more influenced by TV or radio news coverage (36 percent) compared to Democrats (24 percent) and Independents (23 percent). Independents (16 percent) rely more heavily on social media compared to Republicans (7 percent) or Democrats (12 percent).

When it comes to how political advertising affects people's perception of the ad industry in general: close to half (45 percent) of respondents think less of advertising in general because of political ad content. And only 25 percent of respondents say their opinion of mainstream consumer ads is lowered as a result of political ads.

This differential in how consumers perceive political versus product ads may be due, in part, to the fact only 19 percent of people believe political ads are held to the same regulatory standards as product ads. Four in ten respondents believe there are different agencies producing advertising for

political and product-related purposes. Compared to younger respondents (Millennials at 12 percent, Gen X at 18 percent), older respondents are more likely to say they don't know if the same advertising agencies that create political ads also create product-related ads (Baby Boomers at 31 percent).

"It's encouraging to see voters understand that ads for products and services are held to a different standard than political advertising," said Nancy Hill, president and CEO of the 4A's. "It's also good to see so many people are savvy enough to know the agencies who create most consumer advertising are not the same agencies creating political ads."

About the Author: *Dottie Enrico is the director of content development for the 4A's. Previously she covered the advertising industry for 15+ years for Adweek, USA Today, Newsday and TV Guide.*