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Survey Design for Politician Truth Ratings and Candle

What are Politician Truth Ratings?

The Thwink.org analysis found that the root cause of change resistance to solving common good problems is low general ability to detect political deception, also known as low political truth literacy. The high leverage point for resolving the root cause is **raise political truth literacy**.

Thwink has designed nine sample solution elements for pushing on the high leverage point. One is **Politician Truth Ratings**. This measures the average level of truth in a politician's important statements on a scale of zero to 100%. For example, a rating of 80% means that politician tells the truth about 80% of the time. It also means that a particular statement is probably 80% true, on the average.

What is the Political Persuasion Knowledge Base?

How do we efficiently and accurately calculate Politician Truth Ratings? That requires a sophisticated new tool, such as the **Political Persuasion Knowledge Base** (PPKB). The PPKB is a software tool for analyzing arguments and calculating the truth rating of each argument. The average rating of a politician's arguments is a Politician Truth Rating. If the arguments (claims) are randomly selected and objectively analyzed, then the rating is a reasonably accurate measure that can be used by citizens as they decide who to vote for.

The goals of the survey

A problem is we don't really know the details of what voters need *to raise their political truth literacy*. Rather than guess, we can measure what they need with a market research survey. This survey will not attempt to measure everything that could raise truth literacy, only those aspects related to Politician Truth Ratings (PTR).

The general goal is to collect information so we can design a better product. The particular goals are:

1. Learn more about how voters make their decisions.

2. Learn more about what voters would like to have available to help them make better voting decisions. In goals 1 and 2, by casting a broad net we may discover some surprises.

3. Measure the self-reported effect of fact-checks on voting decisions.

4. Measure the self-reported expected effect of PTR on voting decisions.

5. Measure self-reported expected use of Candle.

Goals 4 and 5 are the key data. Are PTR and Candle really an improvement? For all we know they may not be. We can't determine that for sure by self-reporting in a questionnaire. Only an experiment or observation of reality can. But if our audience feels they won't help much, then we have some serious questions to ask ourselves.

Survey sample and future surveys

After testing on ourselves and a few friends, the survey will be given to about 20 people, as selected by Wilma and George Turner. The sample will cover Republicans, Democrats, independents, and the young. The last two groups are those that we suspect are most susceptible to voter decision aids like Politician Truth Ratings. People will be emailed a short introduction to the project and a link to the online survey.

I also plan to run the survey on some online panels, some at $2 apiece and possibly some at $20 apiece. We can compare results to evaluate how to run future surveys. (An **online panel** is an audience recruited by an online company. Once recruited they take many surveys over time, though not so often as to cause survey fatigue.)

If the survey goes well and the results are useful, it's possible we may do further surveys in an attempt to refine the voter decision aids. This is how surveys can drive product design evolution, until the product has a high probability of market success.

If the surveys go extremely well, we may decide to run a survey experiment. For example, group A would be exposed to fact-checking, group B would be exposed to Politician Truth Ratings, group C to both, and group D (the control group) to a neutral topic, like an article about travel. This would be extremely valuable data. It requires a large sample size.

Survey design considerations

The actual survey will be online, probably with SurveyGizmo. The question format will look different from that shown here, but the wording and illustrations will be the same. The answer layout will be different. We're just roughing that in. The essay type questions will have a large textbox for entering sentences and paragraphs, not just one blank line.

Good questionnaires should usually not run over ten minutes or have more than about ten questions, or fatigue begins to set in. This causes quality of answers to fall. This effect can be reduced with a reward of some kind or breaks. We will be avoiding that option by keeping our questionnaire short.

The questionnaire begins with a short introduction. The age groups are designed to agree with those the US uses for voter studies.

Survey questions

Title: Quality of Information for Voters Survey 1

What we're trying to do is improve the quality of information available to voters so they can make better decisions about who to vote for.

We estimate this questionnaire will take 20 minutes. Thanks for helping out.

 (Not used) There are 13 questions, but 5 of them are open ended and require a thoughtful response which may take some time to compose.

1. Check the years you voted in United States national elections:

   2008 ___   2010 ___   2012 ___   2014 ___   2016 ___

2. What is your political orientation?

   Republican, Democrat, Independent, Libertarian, Tea Party, Other _____

3. What is your age?

   (Scale of 1 to 120 years)

4. How satisfied are you with the quality of information available about political candidates in United States national elections?

   Very unsatisfied, slightly unsatisfied, neutral, slightly satisfied, very satisfied

5. How do you personally go about deciding who to vote for?

   _____

6. What would you like to see that would help you make better voting decisions?

   _____

7. Fact-check articles like those from FactCheck.org, Politifact, and the Washington Post's Fact Checker have been published and

discussed in the news. How much influence have fact-checks had on your voting decisions?

No influence, small, medium, large, very large, not familiar with fact-checks

8. We have developed a new form of information to help voters make better decisions: *Politician Truth Ratings*. It works the same as credit ratings, restaurant ratings, wine ratings, and Consumer Reports' product ratings by measuring the quality of something so you don't have to do all that work yourself.

A Politician Truth Rating measures the average level of truth in a politician's important political statements. The ratings would be calculated by independent non-partisan organizations like the Congressional Budget Office or Consumer Reports. A rating can easily be explored to see how it was calculated, so that you could judge for yourself how trustworthy that politician would probably be.

The most important decision people make in their role as citizens is who to vote for. Up until now that decision has been difficult. Voters are showered with a confusing avalanche of biased news, fake news, false statements posing as the truth, countless attack ads, and politicians who will say nearly anything to get elected. How can anyone make a rational decision without spending exorbitant amounts of time investigating?

That's why so many large industries have ratings, so people can make rational decisions and can no longer be fooled so easily. But where is the rating that democratic societies need the most? It's nowhere to be found.

Politician Truth Ratings fills that gap by providing a reliable truth rating for politicians. One simple number says it all.

Suppose Politician Truth Ratings were available. Politician A rated 40% and politician B rated 70%, as shown below.

It's a Close Race. Here are the Ratings:

Politician A

DEMOCRACY CANNOT LONG SURVIVE IF PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW THE TRUTH.

False · Half True · True

Politician Truth Rating

40%

Too many fallacies

Analysis showed the main reason Politician A scored so low was flagrant use of popular fallacies. For example, "*You're either with us or against us*" is a false dilemma fallacy. You can also be undecided, neutral, or both a little for and a little against a policy.

Politician B

DEMOCRACY CANNOT LONG SURVIVE IF PEOPLE DO NOT KNOW THE TRUTH.

False · Half True · True

Politician Truth Rating

70%

Does her homework

The main reason Politician B scored so high was she and her staff prepared extensive position papers on the important issues. Most of her key statements were quotes from her own material, so they were carefully thought out positions with high truth ratings.

Analysis findings: Ratings were prepared using PPKB argument analysis. A total of 370 important arguments (claims) were randomly selected for each candidate for the last five years. Since each politician made no more than 10,000 important statements during that period this gives a margin of error of plus or minus five percent. This is smaller than the 30% gap between the two politicians, so the rating difference is significant at the 95% level of confidence.

How much influence do you expect these ratings would have on your decision if you had to choose between politician A and B?

No influence, small, medium, large, very large

9. What comments, concerns, or suggestions do you have about Politician Truth Ratings?

_____

10. Fact-checks and Politician Truth Ratings measure two very different things. A **fact-check** measures the truth about one particular claim, such as the two examples shown below:

DONALD TRUMP
Says top Clinton advisers "were pressing" birther movement stories "very hard."
— *PolitiFact National* on *Tuesday, September 27th, 2016*

FALSE
POLITIFACT
TRUTH-O-METER™
Despite repetition, still not true

HILLARY CLINTON
"The only years that anybody's ever seen" of Donald Trump's tax returns "showed he didn't pay any federal income tax."
— *PolitiFact National* on *Tuesday, September 27th, 2016*

MOSTLY FALSE
POLITIFACT
TRUTH-O-METER™
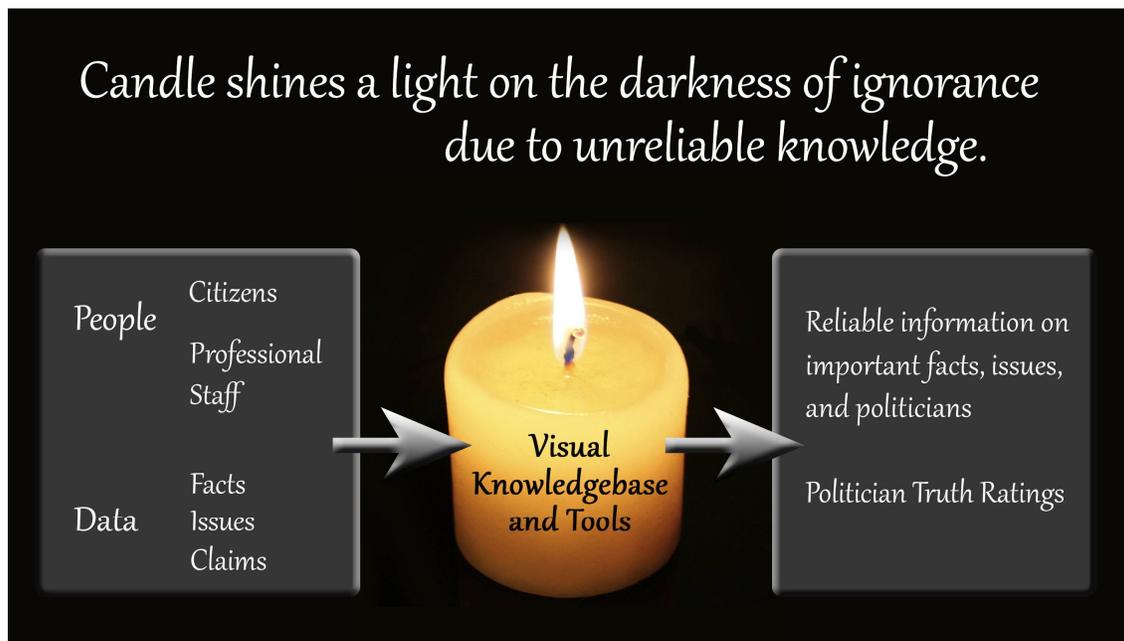What about the three years when he did?

By contrast, a **Politician Truth Rating** measures the average truth of the important political claims a politician has made over a period of time by taking a random sample of those claims. Earlier we gave an example, where Politician A had a Politician Truth Rating of 40% and Politician B had a Politician Truth Rating of 70%.

Which do you expect would influence your voting decision the most?

A. Fact-checks, B. Politician Truth Ratings, C. About the same, D. Not sure

11. Please explain why you feel this way:

_____

12. Politician Truth Ratings would be backed up by an online environment called *Candle*. The whole idea is that:

Candle shines a light on the darkness of ignorance due to unreliable knowledge.

People
Citizens
Professional Staff

Data
Facts
Issues
Claims

Visual Knowledgebase and Tools

Reliable information on important facts, issues, and politicians

Politician Truth Ratings

Candle will be an online visual knowledgebase of the information citizens need to make reliable political and issue decisions. It would include the facts and claims used to calculate Politician Truth Ratings, as well as information on important facts and issues. *All information would be rated for its level of truthfulness in an unbiased manner.* The data in Candle would be created by both citizens and a professional staff in a manner similar to Wikipedia.

Once Candle is built, an entirely new form of personal decision making becomes possible. Instead of relying on the news, candidates, and ads, citizens can come to Candle to explore the facts, arguments, issues, and politicians themselves—in a reliable manner, free from spin, deception, and partisanship.

"Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government." Thomas Jefferson

If Candle was available, how much do you expect you would use it when critical decisions arose, like elections and new issues?

None, a small amount, medium amount, large amount, very large amount

13. What comments, concerns, or suggestions do you have about Candle?

_____

Thank you for taking the time to help.

If you would like to see the results of this study, please send an email to info@thwink.org and ask for the results on the *Quality of Information for Voters Survey Number 1*.