

February 8, 2018

## Project Plan for (Politician) Truth Ratings

### Definitions and content

A **project** is a collection of tasks to achieve a goal. A task is a unit of work done by one or more people. A **project plan** describes how the goal will be achieved. A **task** is a unit of work done by one or more people. Complex projects have **milestones**, which are sub-goals which need to be achieved to reach the main goal.

This project plan will be used by everyone working on the project. The project is innovative and not described in any one place on Thwink.org, so this document needs to include an introduction to all major aspects of the project. This puts everyone involved on the same page because we share the same project vision.

This version is still a little rough and incomplete, but is enough to get started.

### Goal – Make the mode change happen

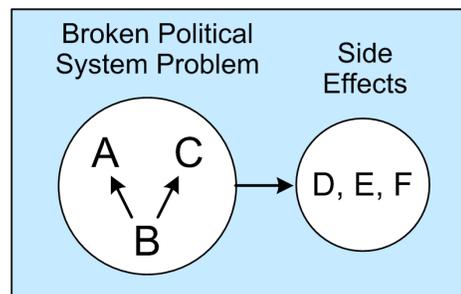
The Thwink.org research found there are three main root causes of the [Broken Political System Problem](#). The goal of the project is to significantly help resolve one of those root causes, which will lead to a favorable mode change in the human system.

The research decomposed the one big problem of how to solve the *complete* sustainability problem into four smaller subproblems, as shown in the diagram from the above link.

Subproblem B causes subproblem C. Subproblem C is *How to overcome change*

*resistance*. Briefly, we know what we *should* do, but we're not doing it. Democratic nations are not solving critical common good problems like climate change, avoidable large recessions, high income inequality, and systemic discrimination. Solving all of these problems is theoretically possible. But the solutions are being blocked by system change resistance.

The analysis found that the main root cause of change resistance is *low political truth literacy*. Because it's so low, voters are easily fooled into voting for politicians who are not working for the common good, but for special interests. Once in office they proceed to satisfy powerful special interests, notably large for-profit corporations and their owners, the rich. Their problems are solved, and common good problems like climate change are not.



The change resistance subproblem can be solved by resolving its root cause of low political truth literacy. If that's the root cause, the high leverage point follows logically. The high leverage point is *raise political truth literacy*.

Pushing on the high leverage point is so difficult and crucial that Thwink designed nine sample solution elements to push on the high leverage point. The one with the biggest bang for the buck, the smallest amount of effort for the largest impact, is *Politician Truth Ratings*. That solution element has the potential to resolve the root cause so well that the human system will undergo a **mode change**. As the solution spreads, one after another the world's political systems shift from a dominant *Race to the Bottom among Politicians* to a dominant *Race to the Top among Politicians*. In the Race to the Bottom, politicians compete on who can tell the best lies. In the Race to the Top, politicians compete to see who can tell the best truths about what's best for the common good. This behavior was studied with the [Dueling Loops of the Political Powerplace](#) simulation model.

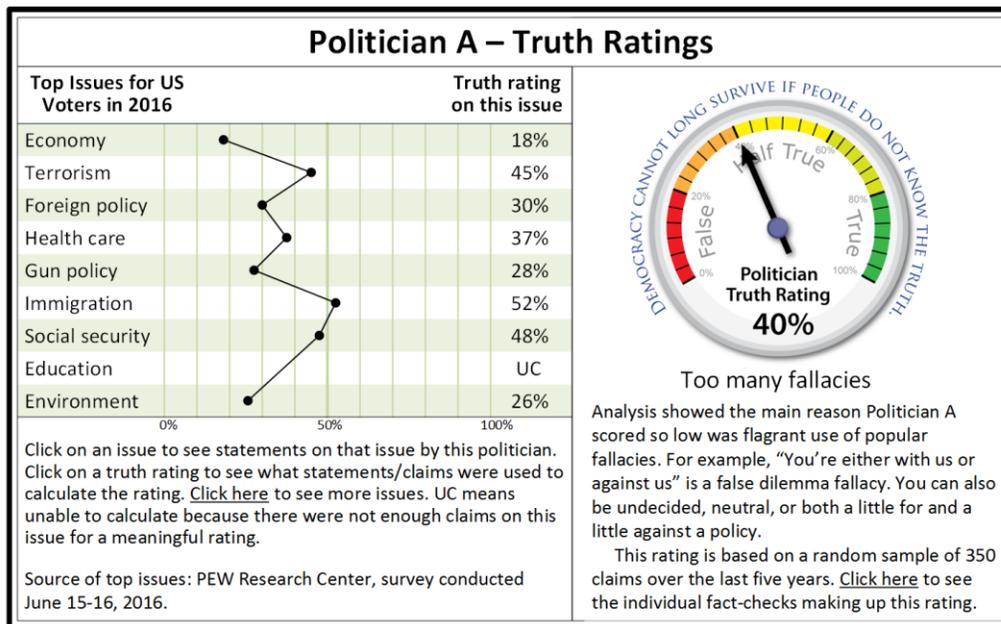
For example, it's clear that in the last United States presidential election campaign, one party was competing to see who could tell the best manipulative lies. The best liar won. The same thing has occurred in other countries.

Once the mode change occurs, democratic systems will now be working for the common good instead of powerful special interests. We have restored the health of democracy. Our project has the realistic potential to make this mode change happen. **Making this mode change happen is the high-level goal of this project.**

## How the product works

Politician Truth Ratings make the mode change happen by measuring the average amount of truth in important political statements by a politician. Ratings vary from zero to 100% and are created by trustworthy independent organizations. A rating is calculated by taking the average of many ratings of individual claims. The claims are selected at random from all important political statements made by a politician.

A mockup of how a rating might look is shown below. Voters use the ratings to supplement their knowledge about a politician.



The TruthRatings.org website will offer more than just ratings. People can find a politician, examine their rating, and study the list of issues involved in calculating the rating. Visitors can click on an issue and drill down to see what the politician actually said and the truth analysis for each statement. *In this manner people can easily and reliably educate themselves on what matters most to a healthy democracy: the ability of voters to make reasonably good decisions when deciding who to vote for.* Like today's fact-checks, the ratings are widely published, with a link to TruthRatings.org.

Once enough people are using Politician Truth Ratings regularly, politicians will take notice and begin competing to get better ratings. Once competition on Truth Ratings begins in earnest, it will kick off the mode change and thereby restore the health of democracy. That's the potential of the product, which to be honest is pretty exciting!

Note that not all voters need to use ratings. Most elections are close. When about 5% to 10% of voters begin voting more for truth telling politicians, that will be a high enough percentage to tip most political systems into a mode change.

## **Strategy – Install a feedback loop on real customers**

This is an ambitious project. We are treating the project as a typical business startup. We have a highly innovative, disruptive product. There will be resistance from entrenched interests. There will be stumbles because the product is so innovative.

To manage these risks, we will *install a feedback loop on real potential customers* as soon as possible in order to refine the product as it develops to meet the *actual needs of real customers*. If we do this well we will have a seamless product life cycle, one that eventually reaches our goal. This strategy has worked extraordinarily well for lean manufacturing startups. It can work just as well for us if the process is well managed.

Adroit management of the customer feedback loop will guide us through these treacherous waters, where no similar product has traveled before.

## We can expect attempted sabotage

The product is *disruptive* because it threatens to radically change the *control* that powerful special interests have over political systems. They will resist strongly. We can expect attempts at product sabotage. But that's part of the problem to solve.

The strength of that control in the United States is illustrated. Economic elites, who acquire their money from large for-profit corporations, find it easy to get policy changes they favor passed. The higher the percent of economic elites who favor a proposed policy change, the higher the probability it will be adopted. As the percent approaches 95%, 60% of proposed changes are adopted. In stark contrast, only 30% of policies that average income citizens prefer are adopted, regardless of what percentage support the change.

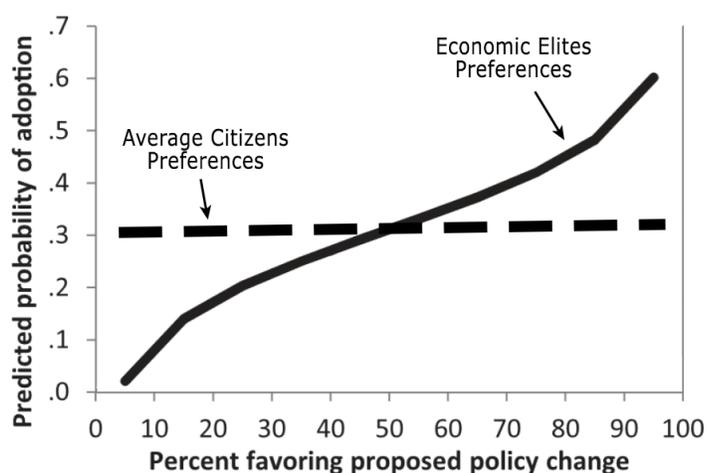
How many average citizens favor passing a particular policy has almost no discernable effect. The only opinion that matters is that of economic elites. This is strong proof we have a Broken Political System Problem.

The illustration shows why we can expect strong resistance to introduction of Politician Truth Ratings. It threatens to eliminate the control economic elites have over the political system.

When we see attempts at sabotage it means our solution is beginning to work. We're seeing change resistance to our solution. The analysis shows we can expect the sabotage to come from *Corporatis profits*, better known as large for-profit corporations. Such sabotage will end once our solution changes the structure of the system in a fundamental manner, by resolving one of the main root causes of the Broken Political System Problem.

We do not have an exact solution to the sabotage problem. There will be outside auditors of organization's work. Strict protocols must be followed to produce ratings, which includes reviews by organization staff. If, for example, a saboteur joined a rating organization and tried to introduce significant bias, hopefully that would be detected as a violation of the protocol. There are other forms of sabotage, such as a biased organization and biased Truth Ratings websites. We have not seen successful sabotage in other industries using ratings. We will have to be especially wary here.

**Effect of income on probability of adoption of proposed policy changes**



Source: *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*, by Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page, 2014, *Perspectives on Politics*, American Political Science Association. Economic elites are those in the top 10% income percentile. Image created from article by Thwink.org.

## **Project Status – Prototype ready**

This is a software product. The first generation was developed two years ago. We have begun work on the second generation. Presently the two hardest parts of the application, the text editor and argument diagram, have their basic functionality complete. The [prototype](#) is running on the Thwink website. This is our starting point for the software. But there's much more to this project than the software.

Early reviews of the prototype are positive and usability looks adequate. But these are friends, so we cannot assume that real customers will react the same.

We have a small team. Ben Davis is the Kickstarter campaign manager. Jack Harich is our inhouse software developer. Scott Booher is an advisor and helps out in various areas. Ben and Jack are overall project co-managers, with Ben in training to possibly pick up the project manager role. These three are the core team and meet weekly. We are looking for people to fill in various other roles.

We have some potential initial funding in the form of loans, to be paid back when the Kickstarter campaign completes successfully. The initial funding allows acceleration of the project.

Please note the status can quickly get out of date.

## **Major Project Milestones**

Next are the major project milestones. There are probably more milestones than those listed so far. It's hard to figure out what they are without putting the milestones and tasks into a Gantt chart, which we will be doing soon.

By describing the milestones in some detail, we will be better able to manage the tasks it will take to achieve the milestones in a high-quality manner. *The milestones are not in chronological sequence.*

## **Milestone**

### **Begin getting feedback from real potential customers**

We are targeting a subset of journalism, the fact-check industry. If they like the product we expect they will begin using it for their own fact-checks, will want to advance to producing ratings, and will therefore want to see it ramped up as quickly as possible. If so, they will help in a big manner. A natural evolution here would be for the fact-check industry to absorb the product, which is what we want.

The prototype is good enough to start contacting local journalism departments, if we are present and can guide people through using it and giving us feedback. We may be able to work with the Atlanta Journal Constitutions' branch of FactCheck.org. A basic prototype is all we need to convince open-minded fact-checkers that there's a better way.

If these contacts go well, we can consider contacting large fact-check organizations like [PolitiFact.org](http://PolitiFact.org), [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org), and the [International Fact-Checking Network](http://International Fact-Checking Network). By the time this occurs we should have version 1.

The key point is that once we begin getting *regular* feedback from *real* potential customers, the all-important feedback loop is installed.

## **Milestone (the only fixed date milestone)**

### **Presentation at the July 20-22, 2018 conference in Rome**

If the above higher-level contacts go well, the next step is to present at the Global Fact-Checking Summit in Rome, Italy, on July 20-22, 2018. If we do a good presentation, interest, feedback, and support will explode. Hitting that date with a stunning presentation requires quite a bit of project acceleration and conference preparation, but is possible. Note that if we can train others within the fact-check industry to present, we don't have to go.

## Milestone (version 1 from Applied Intelligence)

### Product can produce rated claim-checks in a basic manner

This is what we need for more extensive early testing with real potential customers. It will probably be version one from Applied Imagination. The milestone below will probably be version two.

This version will have enough functionality to begin showing the product to the fact-check industry.

## Milestone (version 2 from Applied Intelligence)

### Product can produce and show Politician Truth Ratings in a basic manner

At this point we have the basic product running online and it's tested and ready for actual use. Further improvement will occur to enhance the product's features and usability.

Developing the full product will require *contracting with a software development company* that can meet our requirements. Jack's programming skills do not include data flow from the front end (on the browser) to the back end (on the server), where the database lies.

The key focus is product quality. The product has two types of users: argument producers and ratings consumers.

The user experience for **producers** must be something like "Oh, this is so easy and intuitive, and much more accurate. I'm a fact-checker. Where have you been all my life?"

The user experience for **consumers** must be something like "Oh, this is the information I've always wanted! At a glance I can find out how much I can trust a politician. Even better, I can see where they stand on the issues that matter to me and how trustworthy they are on those issues. Not only that, but there's so much extra information about those issues that I can educate myself quickly and fill in my knowledge gaps. Wow. This is where I'm going to hang out when the next election comes."

## **Milestone**

### **Completion of experiment on validity of ratings**

If successful, this will be proof that Politician Truth Ratings are scientifically sound. The experiment will test the hypothesis that two or more people using the tool and following the same protocol will arrive at approximately the same rating for a single claim. Perhaps we will be surprised and the experiment will fail. But if it succeeds it will be big news and generate lots of interest. If the product works for single claims, then it will work for the several hundred claims whose average is a Politician Truth Rating.

There's a light wrinkle here. Some claims are easier to analyze than others. A simple fact like "Politician A said so-and-so" is easy to analyze. But "The Keystone Pipeline will help our economy" is much more difficult, especially when the long-term impact of encouraging more fossil fuel burning is considered. Thus, the experiment needs to test complex claims as well as simple ones.

*If the hypothesis is proven true, with 95% certainty, and the experiment can be replicated, then our project will succeed.* We have established a scientific foundation for the further "advance" of civilization, in terms of optimizing the common good. Everything that follows now has a rock-solid foundation on which to build, and a firm hand (the concept behind the experiment) pointing the way.

## **Milestone**

### **Completion of experiment on fact-checks versus ratings**

Another experiment is comparison of effectiveness of fact-checks to ratings. Surveys show ratings are preferred. Our hypothesis is ratings will have greater effectiveness on quality of voting decisions than fact-checks.

## Milestone

### Production of first bona fide Politician Truth Rating

This will be a historic event, as it signals the beginning of a new form of democracy: **predictive accountability**. Presently we have only **performance accountability**. If voters don't like how a politician performs, they vote them out and put in someone (hopefully) better.

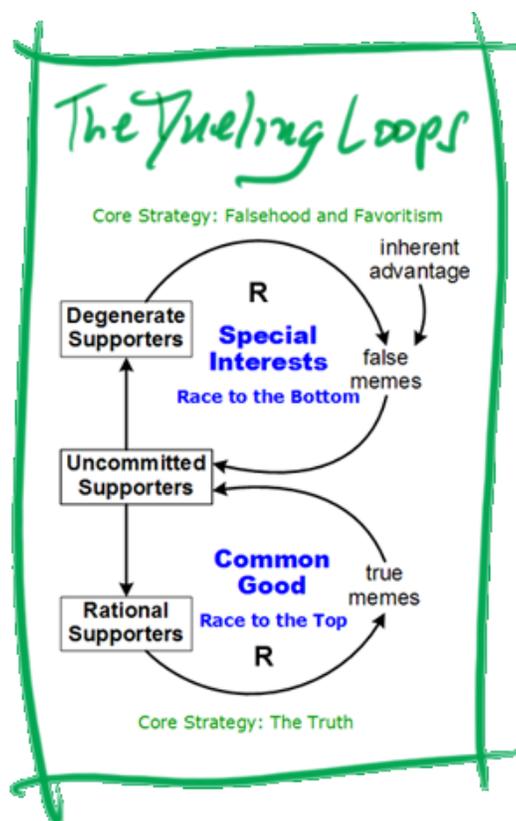
The founding fathers of modern democracy only designed in performance accountability, by creating the voter mechanism. *Our product takes the next step in the evolution of democracy by providing predictive accountability.* A Politician Truth Rating predicts how a politician will behave once in office, in terms of what they will probably do to promote the common good. This is possible because what ratings measure, in addition to the truth of basic facts, is the truth about what's best for optimizing long term quality of life for all, also known as the common good. That's what an important political statement promises. The higher the truth rating on a promise, the more likely it will be achieved.

For example, when a politician says "What's best for our country is a balanced budget, except when stimulus is necessary to recover from a recession," that would receive a high truth rating. By contrast, if another politician says "Balanced budgets don't matter. Constant stimulus (where the government spend more than it receives to hopefully stimulate economic growth) is what we need," that would receive a low rating.

The deeper reason there's a high correlation between truth ratings and performance is that politicians with low Truth Ratings are using fallacies, spin, clever deception, and outright lies to deceive people into voting for them. The [Dueling Loops of the Political Powerplace](#) model shows that politicians beholden to special interests in the Race to the Bottom among Politicians loop rely on deception (false memes on the model) to gain supporters. Opposed to that loop is The Race to the Top among Politicians, where politicians tell the truth (true memes) to gain supporters. The truth tellers are working for the common good.

Another way to look at this is democracy depends on two key assumptions:

1. Citizens need the right to choose their leaders.
2. Citizens will be wise enough to make a reasonably good choice.

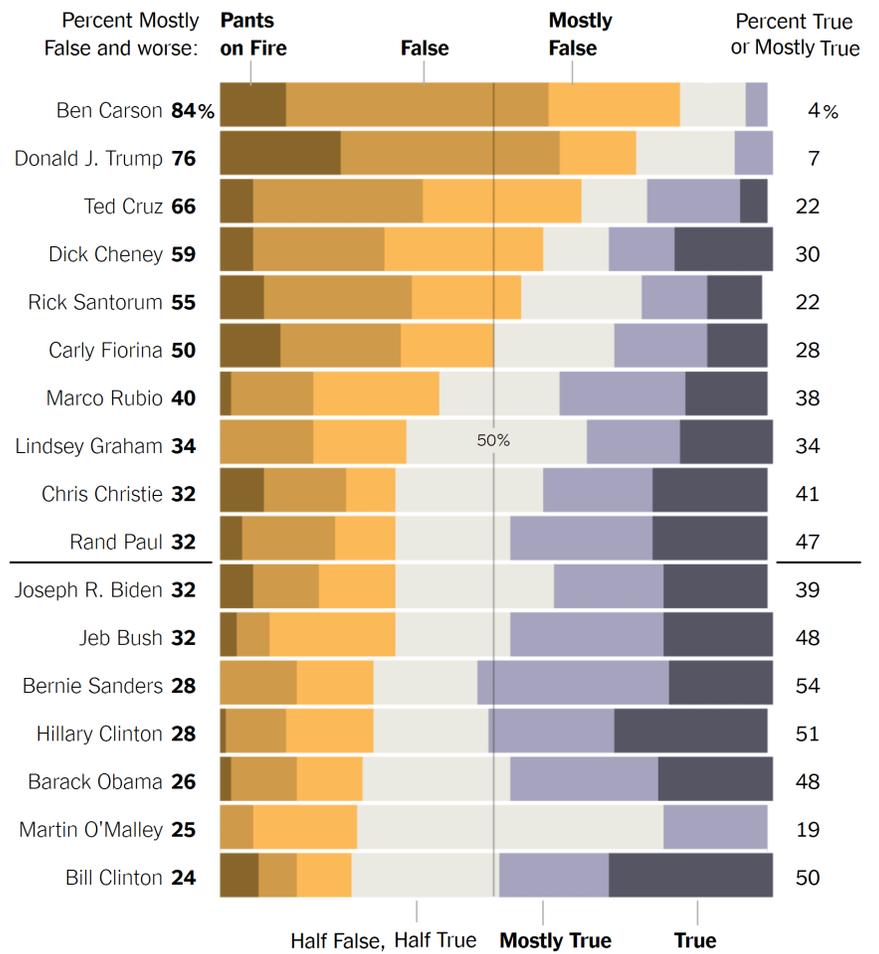


Democratic constitutions clearly describe how the first assumption will be achieved, by voting. But they say absolutely nothing about the second assumption. Politician Truth Ratings fill that gap.

Politician Truth Ratings allow voters to determine who's working for powerful special interests and who's working for the common good. This can be for the individual politicians or parties.

There are frequently large differences in the level of truth in parties. For example, this is the pattern found in the United States, where the two main parties have substantially different fact-check ratings as illustrated. We expect Politician Truth Ratings will find the same large difference and provide further detail and accuracy.

The illustration shows the result we can expect to find in our first bona fide rating. Except for Republican Jeb Bush, all the politicians below the line are Democrats and all those above the line are Republicans. This very strong pattern says so much. The image is from [this article](#) and has been improved by adding the line and modifying the top and bottom text slightly for readability.



## **Milestone**

### **Funding from Kickstarter campaign**

We have initial funding by loans. These will be paid back when the Kickstarter campaign completes successfully. The loans will cover short term funding. The campaign will cover funding for the next 12 months, as determined by a budget.