



# Brands and Ballots:

## A Guide to Communications During the Election Season

The Greek orator Pericles once said, “Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn’t mean politics won’t take an interest in you.” Never is this more obvious than in a Presidential election year, when conversation is dominated by it and turnout will be high. Whether you like it or not, the election is going to affect your brand, which begs the question, are you prepared? Whether your brand has been part of similar conversations before or has never thrown its hat into the political arena, elections can pull it into the mix. The national conversation around politics is divisive, so many brands try to stay away. Your initial reaction may be, “We don’t get involved in politics,” which may be true on the surface. But, dig a little deeper to unveil potential items that could inject your brand into the debate. **Ask these questions to assess your brand’s VULNERABILITY:**

Are there broader social or political issues that have affected your brand, or people who work for your company, in recent years?

*If yes, then an election year can bring them back up.*

Have your people, namely your executives, personally given to political candidates in the past?

*If so, those are public record (which can be searched [here](#)) and can insert your brand into a debate.*

Is your product, service or brand a potential target for politicians or protestors because it is perceived as partisan?

*If so, expect people to insert your brand into the broader conversation.*

Is your industry one that has been part of the broader political narrative in recent years?

*The answer is most likely yes, whether it is national (i.e. executives testifying before Congress) or local (i.e. accepting tax incentives to relocate your business).*

So, how ready is your brand, both internally and externally, for weathering the upcoming election?

### Ask these questions to assess your brand’s PREPAREDNESS:

**Is your leadership up to date on local, state and national issues that could affect your business?**

**□ If yes, be sure to:**

- Check to see if they plan on communicating internally or externally about issues that are part of the current political narrative and prepare messaging to share with stakeholders.
- Make sure your employees know the key issues that are relevant to your business without pressuring their shared support.

**□ If no, consider:**

- Confer with your public affairs team or lobbyists to determine what ballot issues are relevant to your brand. There may be a time when employees, the media or social commentary may ask what your organization’s stance is on these issues.

**Has your brand been involved in politics in the past or communicated about recent political issues or social activism? Have company leaders, family-owners or board members been active in the political sphere, including making contributions to political campaigns?**

**□ If yes, be sure to:**

- Review if you need to separate a leader's commentary and/or contributions from your organization. This may be difficult to do as top leaders are seen as representatives of your brand.
- Anticipate where you might get pulled into the political conversation based on past comments and stances related to topics like diversity and equity, employee wages or environmentalism.
- Determine if your company can accept the risks that come along with any commentary and/or contributions you make related to the upcoming elections or broader social issues.

**□ If no, you'll want to consider the following:**

- Have responses ready to questions about why you aren't getting involved in this year's elections. You may receive requests from both employees and customers.
- Could your brand, product or service become a potential target for politicians or be included in political conversations about broader social issues?
- Is your business a gathering place people could use to protest political issues? Do you have protest guidelines?

**Do you have guidelines in place for political activity and communications at your workplace?**

**□ If yes, be sure to:**

- Review your company policies to ensure they cover topics, such as wearing political attire while in the workplace, providing time off on Election Day and campaigning on company property.
- Determine how and when to communicate these policies to your employees.

**□ If no, consider:**

- Will you give your employees time off to vote?
- Will you allow employees or candidates to host events or campaign in the workplace?
- Will you allow employees to wear political attire while at work?
- Have you previously set a precedent regarding these activities?

**Gone are the days when brands could shy away from political conversations.**

Jackson Spalding can [\*help you determine your best course of action\*](#) by:

- **Evaluating your possible areas of vulnerability.**
- **Developing messaging and content around potential issues.**
- **Scenario planning around upcoming marketing campaigns and communications.**
- **Monitoring for large-scale activism that may pertain to your brand.**