BRAND BIDEN VS. BRAND TRUMP

The power of empathy in a story of brand decline
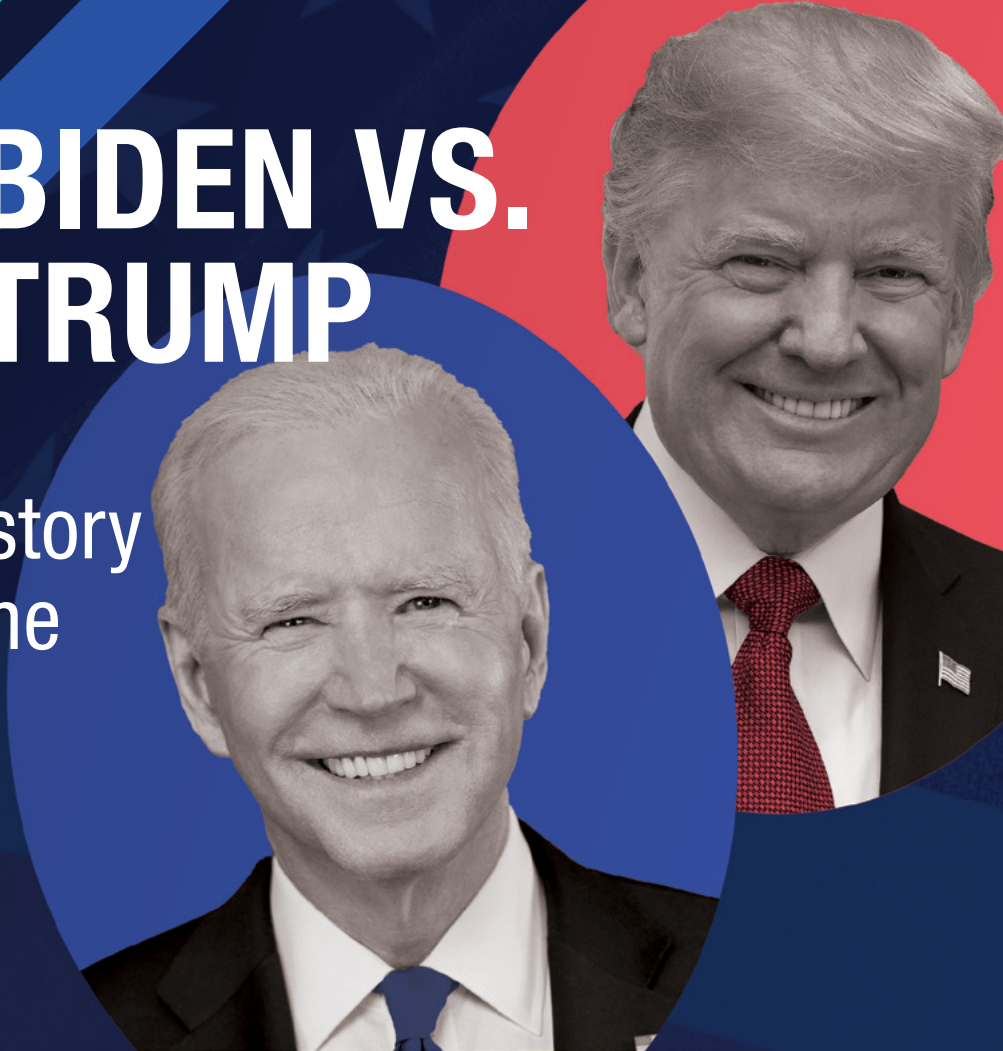
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Ipsos' Brand Success framework helps Fortune 500 companies build great brands. Our approach uses three proven factors to optimize brand success:

- **Expectations:** What people think and know about the brand
- **Context:** What's going on in people's lives and the world around them
- **Empathy:** A brand's ability to understand what's important to people

Leveraging Ipsos' Brand Success framework, we assessed the presidential candidates – President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump – as if they were commercial brands. Specifically, we measured these "candidate brands" on how successfully they shape voter **expectations**, in a relevant **context**, with **empathy**.

Our brand analysis of the candidates revealed a few headlines:

- The Biden and Trump brands are both weaker than they were just before the 2020 election.
- On the positive side: Brand Biden is expected to uphold democracy, while Brand Trump is more associated with economic prosperity.
- While more Democrats than Republicans believe *"the economy is rigged in favor of the wealthy",* Brand Trump is perceived as being better positioned to address this concern among his supporters.
- Trump is seen as being on the side of the people, while Biden is seen as being on the side of the system. **Brand Trump has built an empathetic bond with his target market,** giving voice to their concerns and making them feel valued.
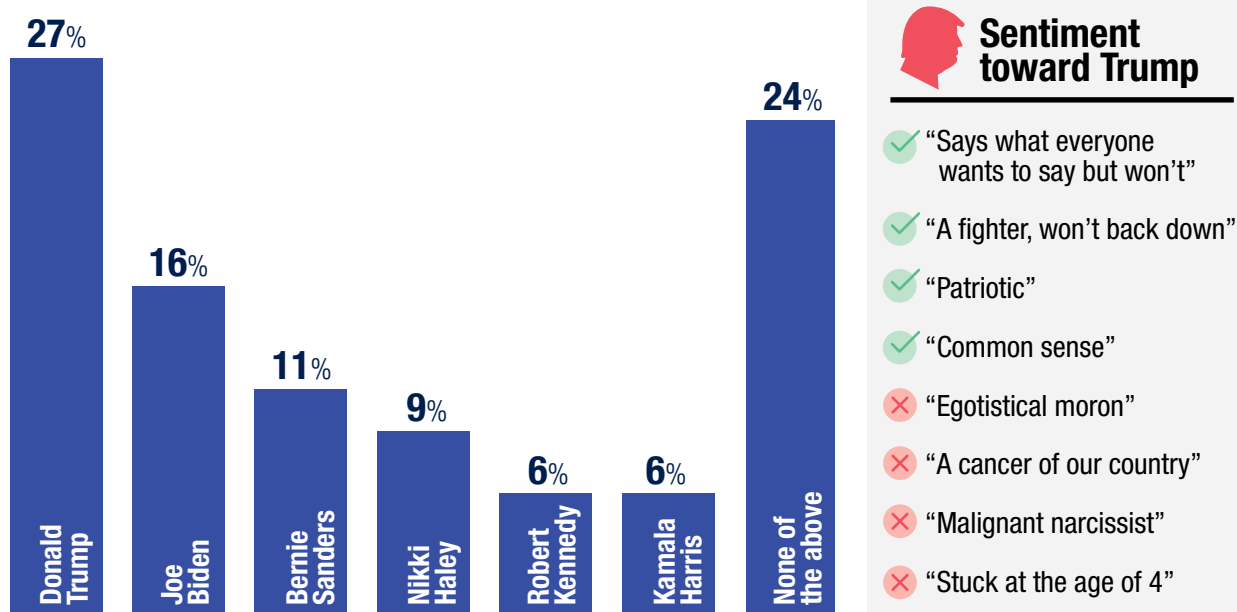
HOW DO BRAND BIDEN AND BRAND TRUMP SHAPE VOTER EXPECTATIONS?

The Biden and Trump brands **are much weaker compared to the 2020 election**, with fewer Americans feeling as close to each brand. When asked how close they feel to each candidate, 16% of Americans say they feel extremely close to Trump (a drop of 16 percentage points vs. 2020) and 11% say they feel extremely close to Biden (a drop of 17 percentage points vs. 2020). **This is an unprecedented drop in brand closeness compared to the commercial brands Ipsos has examined.**

Still, the Trump brand is more loved than the Biden brand. However, while Trump holds more "lovers" than Biden, he also draws the most criticism from the electorate as a whole (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Who is your favorite public figure?

Donald Trump	27%
Joe Biden	16%
Bernie Sanders	11%
Nikki Haley	9%
Robert Kennedy	6%
Kamala Harris	6%
None of the above	24%

Sentiment toward Trump

✓ "Says what everyone wants to say but won't"

✓ "A fighter, won't back down"

✓ "Patriotic"

✓ "Common sense"

✗ "Egotistical moron"

✗ "A cancer of our country"

✗ "Malignant narcissist"

✗ "Stuck at the age of 4"

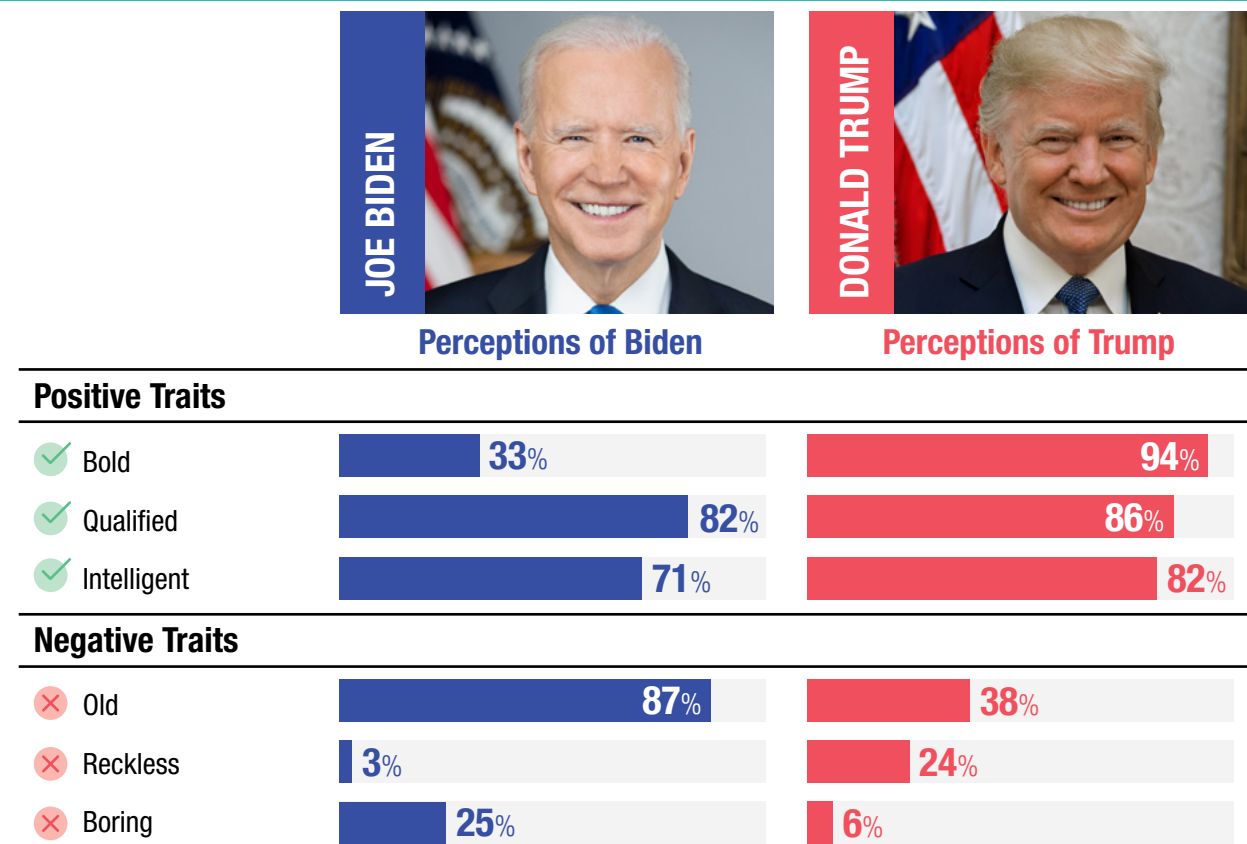*Source: Ipsos. Base: US residents aware of candidates (n=1076)*

In terms of brand perceptions, **supporters of Biden expect him to uphold democracy and law and order.** This is a shift from brand perceptions in the 2020 election – where Trump was considered more the *"law and order"* candidate. For the upcoming election, **Brand Trump stands for the economy,** with supporters expecting him to support economic growth and business interests more than Biden. Despite some positive expectations for both candidates, nearly half of Americans believe the election of Biden or Trump will be a "bad thing for people like them" – with more Americans expecting Trump to impact them personally than Biden.

The brand image of each candidate is very different, with it being a case of *"bolder versus older"*. Brand Trump's supporters overwhelmingly see him as bold. On the other hand, Biden is perceived by most Americans – including his supporters – as old.

> Brand Trump's supporters overwhelmingly see him as bold. On the other hand, Biden is perceived by most Americans – including his supporters – as old. **"**

Figure 2: Perceptions of Biden and Trump among supporters

JOE BIDEN

DONALD TRUMP

Perceptions of Biden

Perceptions of Trump

Positive Traits

	Biden	Trump
✅ Bold	33%	94%
✅ Qualified	82%	86%
✅ Intelligent	71%	82%

Negative Traits

	Biden	Trump
❌ Old	87%	38%
❌ Reckless	3%	24%
❌ Boring	25%	6%

Source: Ipsos. Base: Perceptions of Biden are among his supporters (n=421); perceptions of Trump are among his supporters (n=394)

Ipsos

HOW WELL DO BRAND BIDEN AND BRAND TRUMP POSITION THEMSELVES IN THE CONTEXT OF PEOPLE'S LIVES?
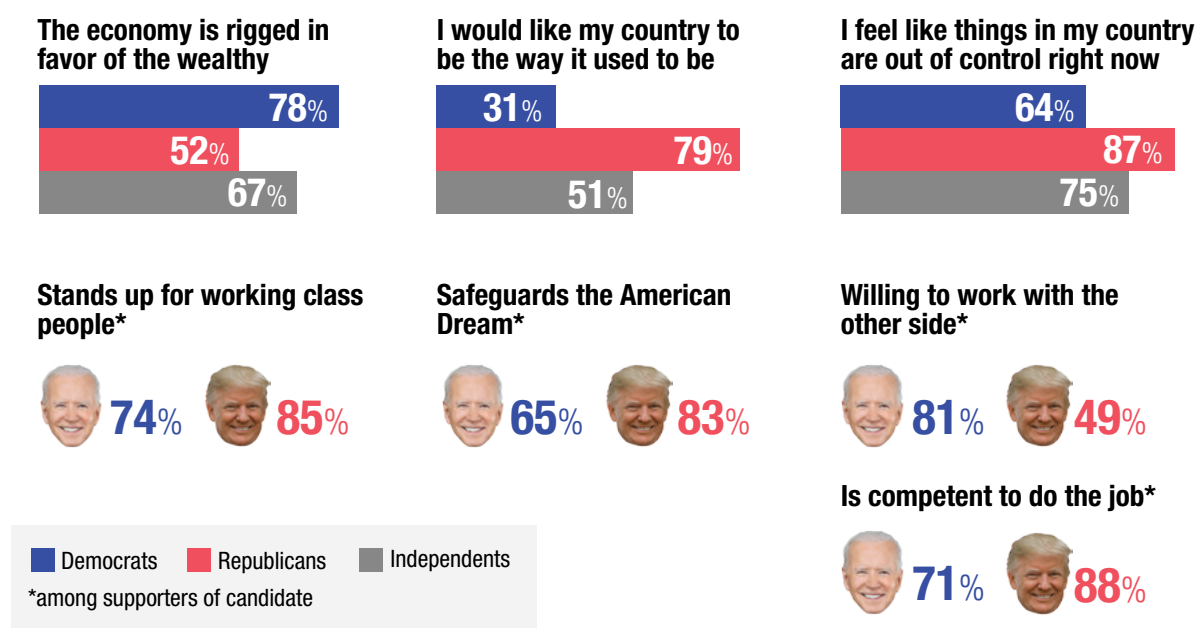
Democrats and Republicans have vastly different views of the world around them. For example, over three-quarters of Democrats believe that *"the economy is rigged in favor of the wealthy"*, compared to only about half of Republicans. Even so, among supporters, Brand Trump is better positioned than Brand Biden at addressing this concern (see Figure 3).

Democrats and Republicans also have very different views about the direction of our country. Most Republicans would like the country to be *"the way it used to be"*, while far fewer Democrats feel this way. The Trump Brand is adept at understanding this sentiment and is well-perceived as a candidate who will safeguard the American Dream.

There is some alignment with how the two parties feel about the state of the nation. The majority of both Democrats and Republicans feel like things are *"out of control"*. People have different expectations as to how Brand Biden and Brand Trump would solve this. Those who support Biden see him as the candidate who can bring both sides together, while those who support Trump see him as the more competent candidate.

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Figure 3: How Americans view the country and the candidates

The economy is rigged in favor of the wealthy
- Democrats: 78%
- Republicans: 52%
- Independents: 67%

I would like my country to be the way it used to be
- Democrats: 31%
- Republicans: 79%
- Independents: 51%

I feel like things in my country are out of control right now
- Democrats: 64%
- Republicans: 87%
- Independents: 75%

Stands up for working class people*
- Biden: 74%
- Trump: 85%

Safeguards the American Dream*
- Biden: 65%
- Trump: 83%

Willing to work with the other side*
- Biden: 81%
- Trump: 49%

Is competent to do the job*
- Biden: 71%
- Trump: 88%

■ Democrats ■ Republicans ■ Independents
*among supporters of candidate

Source: Ipsos. Base: Identify as Democrat (n=270) or Republican (n=313) or Independent (n=315)

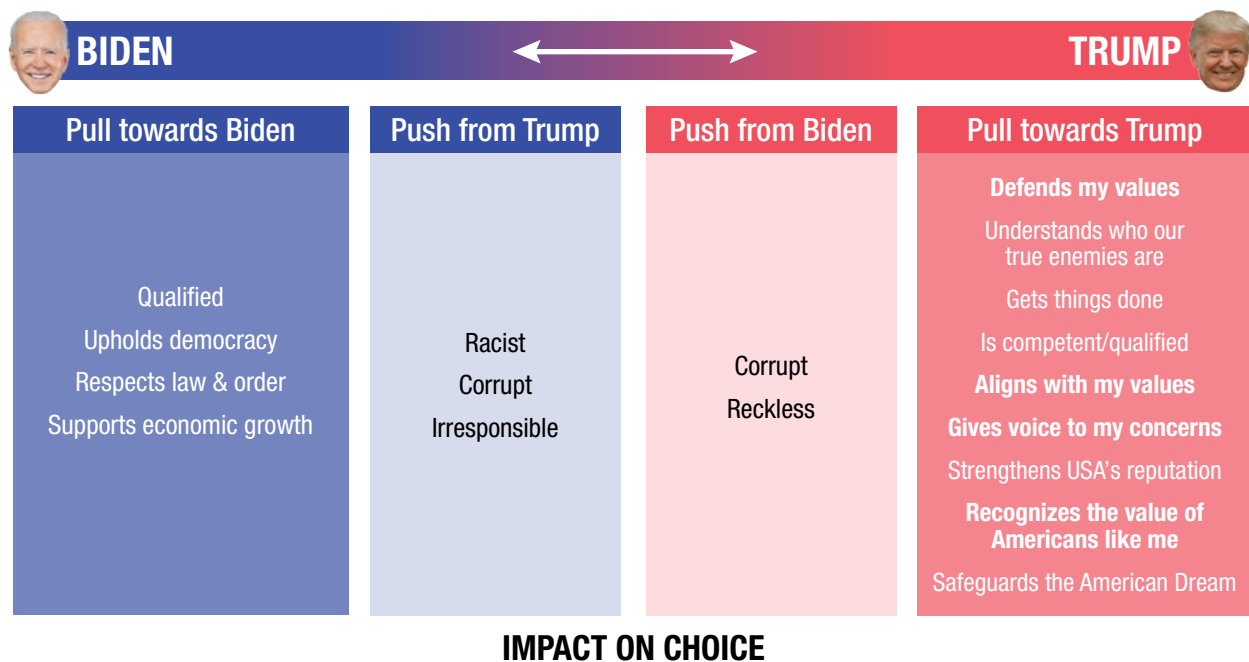# HOW WELL DOES EACH BRAND MASTER THE ART OF EMPATHY?

Brand Trump is more adept at delivering empathy to his supporters than Brand Biden. While neither candidate has broad appeal, Brand Trump is seen as being on the side of the people, while Brand Biden is seen as being on the side of the system. As illustrated in Figure 4, those Americans who are drawn to Trump feel that he *"defends my values"* and *"aligns with my values",* while those who are drawn to Biden feel like he *"upholds democracy"* and *"respects law and order".*

Understanding that effective branding can boil down to "what message to what audience?", Trump has achieved a unique empathetic bond with his core target. He resonates with Americans who are looking for a candidate who will give voice to their concerns and recognize their worth. Society at large no longer gives that recognition

– the media for instance hardly ever portrays working class Americans in a positive way. But many people do get this much wanted recognition from Donald Trump. More than any other candidate he is seen as standing up for working class people, and as a safeguard for the American dream. This illustrates what sociologist Michèle Lamont calls the need for recognition: *"seeing others, and acknowledging people's existence and positive worth, actively making them visible and valued, reducing their marginalization, and openly integrating them into the group".*[1] This confirms that Brand Biden may have overlooked what was once the core target of Democrats.

Like other successful brands, Brand Trump leverages empathy for the changing context of many people, to shape expectations that only he can currently deliver.

Figure 4: Brand Biden is on the side of the system, Brand Trump is on the side of the people

BIDEN			TRUMP
Pull towards Biden	**Push from Trump**	**Push from Biden**	**Pull towards Trump**
Qualified	Racist	Corrupt	Defends my values
Upholds democracy	Corrupt	Reckless	Understands who our true enemies are
Respects law & order	Irresponsible		Gets things done
Supports economic growth			Is competent/qualified
			Aligns with my values
			Gives voice to my concerns
			Strengthens USA's reputation
			Recognizes the value of Americans like me
			Safeguards the American Dream

IMPACT ON CHOICE

Source: Ipsos. Base: Pull to Biden/Push from Trump among Biden supporters (n=421); Pull to Trump/Push from Biden among Trump supporters (n=394)

1 *Seeing Others, How Recognition Works—and How It Can Heal a Divided World, Michèle Lamont, Atria/One Signal Publishers (2023)*

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To find out more about Ipsos' framework to build successful brands, visit www.ipsos.com/en/brand-success