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Survey: Lack of Trust in Politicians and Business is a Bipartisan Issue

Companies Try to Sway Washington, but Face the Same Reputation Problems as Those They Lobby

(Washington, D.C.) While stocks soar, trust in corporate America and elected officials in Washington, D.C., continues to drop — and America's discontent with politics and business is not party-specific.

A new survey conducted by the Public Affairs Council, in conjunction with Morning Consult, finds that Clinton and Trump voters have more in common than you might think: neither group trusts Washington politicians nor America's CEOs.

The online survey polled 2,201 adults on their attitudes and expectations for major companies and elected officials. The surprising findings show bipartisan agreement on sentiment:

- **Clinton and Trump voters agree:** Washington can't be trusted. 58 percent of Trump voters, 59 percent of Clinton voters and 63 percent of conservatives say elected officials in Washington have low honesty and ethical standards, despite Republican control of Congress and the White House.
- **Only 47 percent of Americans trust major companies to behave ethically,** and only nine percent of Trump voters and eight percent of Clinton voters give CEOs high scores for honesty.

"Businesses are worried about core issues like trade and tax reform, and they're also jumping into public debates on immigration, racism, LGBT rights and climate change," said Doug Pinkham, president of the Public Affairs Council. "But with all the political turmoil in Washington, their world feels riskier. Many firms are having a difficult time finding their footing at the intersection of business and modern American politics."

The poll also revealed mixed opinions about CEO participation in presidential advisory committees, government regulation and corporate lobbying.

- **CEOs should think carefully before serving on a presidential committee.** Twenty-eight (28) percent of Americans believe serving on these committees is an active endorsement of the president, 32 percent believe CEOs serve to increase their profits,

and only 39 percent believe CEOs are able to hold independent political views while serving.

- **There's a correlation between the most untrusted industries and perceived under-regulation.** When compared to other industries, technology companies are considered the most trustworthy and least in need of new regulations. Conversely, pharmaceutical and health insurance firms are considered the least trustworthy and the most under-regulated.
- **Not all lobbying is bad.** The public largely approves of corporate lobbying as long as companies have a good reason such as protecting jobs (61 percent), leveling the playing field (54 percent) and supporting social causes (53 percent).

The survey also measured the impact of traditional and digital media in shaping public perception about corporate behavior.

- **Business news = bad news:** Americans are more than twice as likely to assume a media story about a major company is negative rather than positive.
- **Social media not a major driver in shaping views about business.** Most Americans form their opinions of major companies through work experience or knowing others employed by major companies. Only 14 percent (mostly young adults) say social media has a lot of influence on their views about Corporate America.

View the full [survey results](#).

In its seventh year, the Pulse Survey has identified trends and measured public opinion on business, politics and policy to help companies better understand the American state of mind as they look to create impactful public affairs strategies.

The 2017 poll was conducted by Morning Consult on behalf of the Public Affairs Council from September 12-15, among a national sample of 2,201 adults. The interviews were conducted online, and the data were weighted to approximate a target sample of adults based on age, race/ethnicity, and gender. Results from the full survey have a margin of error of +/- 2 percentage points.

About the Public Affairs Council

Both nonpartisan and nonpolitical, the Public Affairs Council is the leading association for public affairs professionals worldwide. The Council's mission is to advance the field of public affairs and to provide its 700 member companies and associations with the executive education and expertise they need to succeed while maintaining the highest ethical standards. Learn more about the Council at pac.org.

