

Winning Over the Aspirational Independent

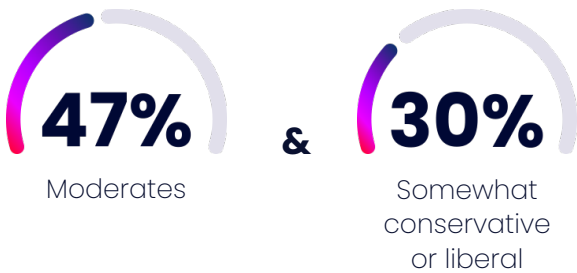
Why they are important to retailers and crucial to upcoming political campaigns

We've all heard of Soccer Moms, a key swing voter segment in the 1996 presidential election with a clear sense of identity. Now it's time to switch our attention to **Aspirational Independents**. They represent **15% of the voting population** and have a unique set of overlapping attitudes toward shopping and important policy issues that makes them highly valued to retailers and politicians alike. They are sophisticated and complex retail consumers and more importantly, they are **politically unaligned**. This makes them a key swing voting bloc, up for grabs for both the '22 midterms and the '24 presidential election.

NRF partnered with SKDK on a large-scale study to help retailers and politicians better understand this segment and the key values that drive their decision making with respect to shopping and voting.

Overview of Aspirational Independents

Politically they describe themselves as:



They are more likely to identify as Independent voters



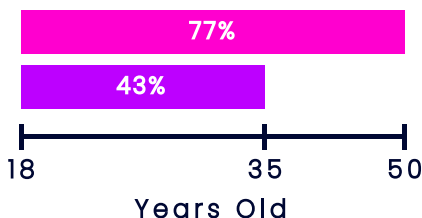
They are more optimistic – 53% believe the country is headed in the right direction compared with 41% of the nation at large



They are the ignored middle who could find their home with either party this fall – or just stay at home – making a key difference in elections either way



Demographically, they tend to be younger and more diverse (only 51% white) and a significant number are parents



They are disproportionately middle-class and upper middle-class households with discretionary income

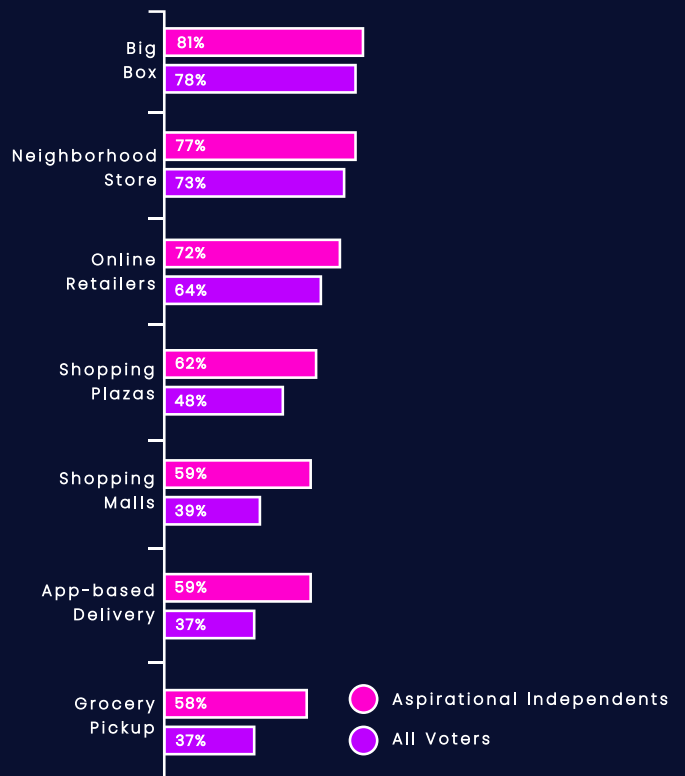
Key Takeaways

Ready to spend just about everywhere



- Nearly half (47%) are looking to increase spending this year – and at a rate far greater than the average voter.
- Unlike most shoppers, Aspirational Independents enjoy a wide variety of shopping venues: stores, online and new ways of shopping are all popular.

Percent of respondents who shop at least monthly in the following ways



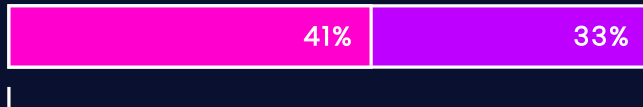
Key Takeaways on Aspirational Independents

Fun is their No. 1 attribute in shopping. They care about getting a good deal; about quality; about trends; about speed; about friendliness. But they care the *most* about fun. Shopping is something to experience with others, a hunt for “that thing I want.” They enjoy it, and they want a retailer to share that sense of fun.

- They are independent voters, and they are independent shoppers.
- Aspirational Independents are looking for that right mix of price, selection and customer service/employees – but all those factors feel very dynamic to them. Their loyalty to brands and retailers shifts depending on which is offering them the best experience or value.

They like retailers – 69% believe big retailers improve their quality of life, 68% believe retailers pay their fair share in taxes and 71% like politicians who make it easier for retailers to locate in their community, including warehouses.

“I often research things online before I go shopping.”



74% Agree

- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

“Doing some homework” is a core part of how they shop and vote

- Nearly three in four are often researching what they want online before they go shopping

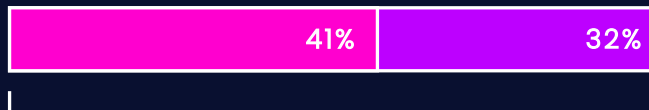


Part of the reason for this frequent research is that Aspirational Independents think of the world as dynamic and ever-changing; what feels true today might not be true tomorrow. As such, they talked about relying on their own research skills and ability to “do their homework” to see if the assumptions they hold about a store, brand or politician hold up. They are also willing to occasionally re-verify any assumptions they hold about brand loyalties.

Recommendations — getting and giving — are core to their identity

- This group is not only comfortable sharing their recommendations but is also searching for opinions and insights through discussions with those closest to them or even from complete strangers on social media. This audience is looking to get and share ideas — an ideal “word-of-mouth” target.
- They shared how important it is for them to discover new things and ideas they have not considered, and they are agnostic about the source.
- On a similar note, politically they spoke of compromise — a key goal for them — as also something that felt relatively new. Many in this group are younger and have a hard time even recalling any political leader who was well-known for compromise.

“I often recommend products and services to my friends and family.”



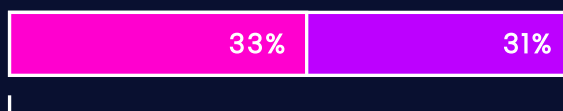
73% Agree

“I get a lot of shopping ideas from social media.”



68% Agree

“I talk a lot to family and friends about what I should buy.”



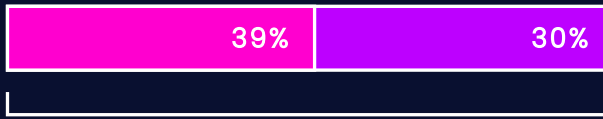
64% Agree

- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

With a growing sense of isolation in a partisan world, they are calling for compromise and peace

They embrace common-sense and centrist rhetoric over partisan rhetoric. And the large majority of Aspirational Independents feel left out of a political process that caters to extremes.

"No one in politics is really looking out for people like me."



69% Agree

"Politicians listen more to the extreme partisans than people like me."



68% Agree

- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

- Their hunger for policies that appeal to all is so strong that it registers as one of the top qualities they look for in political candidates. In other words, just the concept of compromise is nearly as powerful as stances on issues like the economy and health care.

Percent more likely to vote for a candidate who ...



- They feel a deeply personal toll from hyper-partisan politics, actively disengaging from friends and family members on political or current events-based discussions for fear of getting a partisan reaction. They find political conversations increasingly more frustrating and exhausting.
- This cohort rebels against what they see as corporations becoming too political and appeasing extremes. They also seek out and respond negatively to hypocrisy. If a brand or retailer does take a stance on an issue, they should expect to be held accountable.
- Aspirational Independents like action over policy. In theory, a retail company showing some interest in the community and a responsibility to society is a good thing, but doing so in an overly aggressive manner raises flags for them. They would rather companies highlight actions already taken rather than rhetorical promises. Doing the latter feels like bringing partisan politics into the store and, once again, ignoring the moderates for the partisans.

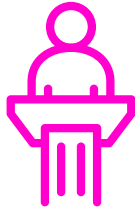
The Intersection of Shoppers and Politics

Why they are important to retailers and crucial to upcoming political campaigns

- Impart a sense of fun – optimism, excitement, discovery, newness and variety
- Talk in a way that is original, honest, free of jargon and empty promises
- Connect to the feeling of wanting to be a leader of a cohort, not a follower of trends
- Understand their independent spirit and their desire to be unanchored
- Engage their exploratory mindset – let them discover things and invite them into things/experiences
- Communicate to them across mediums
- Allow them to show off who they are with you
- Understand that they crave action over policies and action over promises – authenticity and follow-through are key to retaining their trust

The Bottom Line For Politicians

This cohort needs to be motivated to vote and they need to be enticed to vote for a particular party candidate. This is achieved by connecting to them through values that speak to their independence and their desire for fun, exploration and authenticity.



The Bottom Line For Retailers

Don't become a politician in terms of how you communicate to this cohort. Understand that the experience is more important than attributes around cost and quality – those matter, but having a fun, honest, meaningful relationship is paramount.



SKDK is a top national communications and political consulting firm bringing unparalleled strategic communications experience to Fortune 500 companies, nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, and labor unions, as well as political committees and candidates. With offices in Washington, New York, Los Angeles, and Albany, SKDK offers strategic support to managing a crisis, protecting a brand, advocating an issue, or winning an election.



The National Retail Federation, the world's largest retail trade association, passionately advocates for the people, brands, policies and ideas that help retail thrive. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NRF empowers the industry that powers the economy. Retail is the nation's largest private-sector employer, contributing \$3.9 trillion to annual GDP and supporting one in four U.S. jobs – 52 million working Americans. For over a century, NRF has been a voice for every retailer and every retail job, educating, inspiring and communicating the powerful impact retail has on local communities and global economies.