



TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: NEIL NEWHOUSE, PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES  
MARGIE OMER, PURPLE STRATEGIES

RE: WALMART MOM FOCUS GROUPS

DATE: APRIL 21, 2016

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*On behalf of Walmart, Public Opinion Strategies and Purple Strategies conducted two focus groups of Walmart Moms. (Walmart Moms are defined as voters with children age 18 or younger at home and who shopped at Walmart at least once in the past month.)*

*One group was conducted among GOP primary voters in Pittsburgh, PA with Walmart Moms who were evenly split between Trump supporters and those not supporting the businessman. The second focus group was conducted among likely swing voters in suburban Philadelphia, PA with Walmart Moms who were not strong partisans, were not primary voters, and who were evenly divided between supporting President Obama and Mitt Romney in the 2012 Presidential election. The focus groups were conducted on April 20, 2015. To view the focus groups in their entirety, please visit the Public Opinion Strategies website – [www.pos.org](http://www.pos.org).*

### **KEY FINDINGS**

**1. *The pessimism we've seen in previous groups of Walmart Moms continues.***

Using words like “chaos,” “horrific,” “terrible” and “vulnerable” these women are overwhelmingly pessimistic about the direction of the country. This time, however, the Presidential campaign’s tone is almost as worrying as the economy or their own financial situations.

**2. *The economy is still a front-burner issue for these Moms.***

Yet, as we’ve seen for years, there is a strong sense from these women that the recession is not over, as many are still struggling from the after-effects of the recession and having a difficult time making ends meet. They are “digging themselves out” from the mountain of debt they have accumulated over the past few years, with some specifically mentioning college loans and one woman lamenting, “why did I even go to college?”

The frustration of these Moms is heard in their comments and complaints that they are unable to get ahead in the current economy, dragged down by increases in bills, health care costs or taxes.

**3. *The Presidential Campaign is a “circus.”***

These Walmart Moms consider the current Presidential election to be as important or more important than previous elections, but they view this year’s race as more of a “circus,” “filled with lies” from the candidates and campaigns. One Mom likened it to an April Fool’s joke – except that the joke is on the voters. Others describe the campaign as “silly,” with the candidates getting into “Twitter wars” with each other instead of debating the real issues of concern in the country (national security, health care, the economy and education).

**4. *The Garland Supreme Court nomination battle has not captured much attention.***

While public polling may indicate voters are supportive of the US Senate considering President Obama’s nomination of Garland to the Supreme Court, the GOP voters were unanimous in their opposition to such a move, and swing voters seemed unenthusiastic and disinterested in the topic. There was little in the discussion among the swing Moms group to indicate that this could be a vote-driving issue, and not one said they were following it closely. Even among the GOP Moms, they did not seem passionate enough on this issue that it would drive their Senate vote.

**5. *Hillary Clinton is viewed as competent and qualified, but untrustworthy.***

First, the GOP group acted predictably when asked about Hillary Clinton, describing her with unflattering animal descriptors (weasel, rattlesnake, monkey at the zoo). But, more interestingly, many of the participants in the swing voter group echoed similar concerns about Clinton as untrustworthy and willing to do or say whatever is necessary to win the election. There was a sense even among the Democratic-leaning swing voters that Clinton had not been consistent on the issues they care about, with one woman commenting that she is trying to be one of them, reflecting “Buick” values, but in reality “she’s a Lexus,” and an African American woman wondering if she truly “carried hot sauce in her bag.”

These swing voters were generally unable to characterize Hillary Clinton’s message in this campaign, other than “woman,” while some Moms mentioned it would be “fashionable” to have a woman president, and that she’d fight for “equal pay.”

**6. *Bernie Sanders didn’t get much traction with these swing Walmart Moms.***

Sanders was described by one Mom as the “family Labrador that doesn’t do tricks anymore,” and several wondered if Sanders had the energy for the job. To some voters, Sanders was “the little engine that could” (experienced, reliable and consistent), and several used older, reliable cars as descriptors (“an Escort with 300,000 miles”). Interestingly, when asked what Bernie’s message was in this campaign, not a single Mom mentioned his fight against Wall Street, or to break up the banks. One Mom did note that Jane Sanders is “not done up,” which she saw as a sign of the family being down to earth.

**7. *Donald Trump is “larger than life,” yet with significant flaws.***

Characterizing Donald Trump as a type of car or animal resulted in some fascinating descriptions – from the GOP group, women depicted him as a Porsche, a Ferrari, a muscle car, a boxer who stands his ground, a bulldog, an Escalade, a lion (fierce and King of the Jungle) and as an unpredictable cat. These Moms praised him as someone who speaks his mind, stands his ground, and is refreshingly politically incorrect. At the same time though, some also believe he tends to go too far – that he belittles people and engages in silly battles for no purpose. These Moms express concern that Trump can be a loose cannon and believe that he needs to be a better candidate in the Fall to beat Clinton.

When these GOP Moms were pushed about Trump's gender issues, there was some acknowledgement that he may be a "sexist," but general agreement among these women that "I don't really care, I've seen worse."

The swing voter Moms predictably had a bit different take on Donald Trump, describing him in the car/animal exercise as a cheetah, a clown car, a hyena, a Porsche, roadkill, and as an anaconda. These voters generally viewed Trump as a "divider, not a uniter," as someone whose policies would benefit just a small segment of the electorate. These women seemed more turned off by Trump's personality than his issue positions, with eight of the ten women agreeing. They view him as "abrasive" and find his rhetoric unbecoming of a President. But even here, there was a grudging acceptance of his strengths, and less of the sense of urgency one sees among political insiders or the #NeverTrump movement.

**8. *Ted Cruz and John Kasich are considered "also rans" by these voters.***

After months of campaigning by the leading candidates and with the Pennsylvania primary election less than a week away, one would have assumed that the non-Trump candidates would be pretty well-known among these GOP primary voting Moms. That's clearly not the case. Voters were generally unable to tell us much about either Cruz or Kasich, Republican primary voters seemed to dislike Cruz perhaps more than the swing Moms; he was generally described in both groups as "religious," "gorilla—almost human," or "like a neighbor's dog—you don't know if they're going to bite." Kasich's image was even thinner, "I think they like him in Ohio," said one, "too sane," or "Mild, like a kitten," said others.

This lack of knowledge about Cruz and Kasich in the Republican primary group reinforces the argument that this campaign has turned into a referendum on Donald Trump, and that voters' support for another candidate has less to do with the attributes or issue positions that candidate brings to the race, and more to do with how the voter feels about Donald Trump.

**9. *Moms aren't paying much attention to delegate math and are confused by it.***

Many find the conversation about delegate math, super delegates, pledged delegates and convention rules to be confusing, and Walmart Moms are no exception. Few could understand how a candidate with more delegates than the pack could still be denied the nomination at the convention. "Maybe the system IS rigged," said one. This sentiment was particularly strong in the GOP group; some said they would feel cheated if the candidate going in with the most delegates didn't win the nomination. Compared to Washington insiders, these women seem to feel far less urgency and express significantly less concern about a Trump candidacy. In this context, there is no need for a so-called White Knight ("what, start from scratch?" said one about Speaker Paul Ryan.)

**10. *Walmart Moms view a Clinton/Trump match-up as a heavyweight fight.***

When asked how they might describe a general election match-up between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, they likened it to something that would occur on a battlefield: "Batman vs. Superman," "a boxing match," "loud," "ugly" and "about even." There was no hesitation among the GOP women that Trump could beat Clinton and that they would support the GOP nominee – even if he hadn't been their first choice.

The swing voters had a more difficult time deciding their vote in this general election, and while most ended up in Clinton's camp, it seemed as if they were doing so not because of their support for Clinton, but rather because of their dislike for Trump. But, don't mistake "dislike" for "lack of respect," as four of the swing women still believed that Trump CAN defeat Clinton in the Fall.