

November 15, 2015

To: Interested Parties

From: Ben Tulchin; Tulchin Research

Re: **Headlines Miss the Mark; Recent Public Polling Finds Lots of Good News for Bernie Sanders, Raises Real Questions About Which Democratic Candidate Is Better Positioned for the General Election**

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A series of reputable public polls released recently – notably the ABC News/Washington Post poll and the New York Times/CBS poll – contained a lot of very encouraging news for Senator Bernie Sanders and his presidential campaign. Yet the articles discussing the results positioned Hillary Clinton as “dominating” or “sweeping” the Democratic primary. In response to this erroneous interpretation, we felt compelled to set the record straight and provide a more accurate analysis of this polling data and its implications for Sanders, Clinton and the Democratic presidential primary contest.

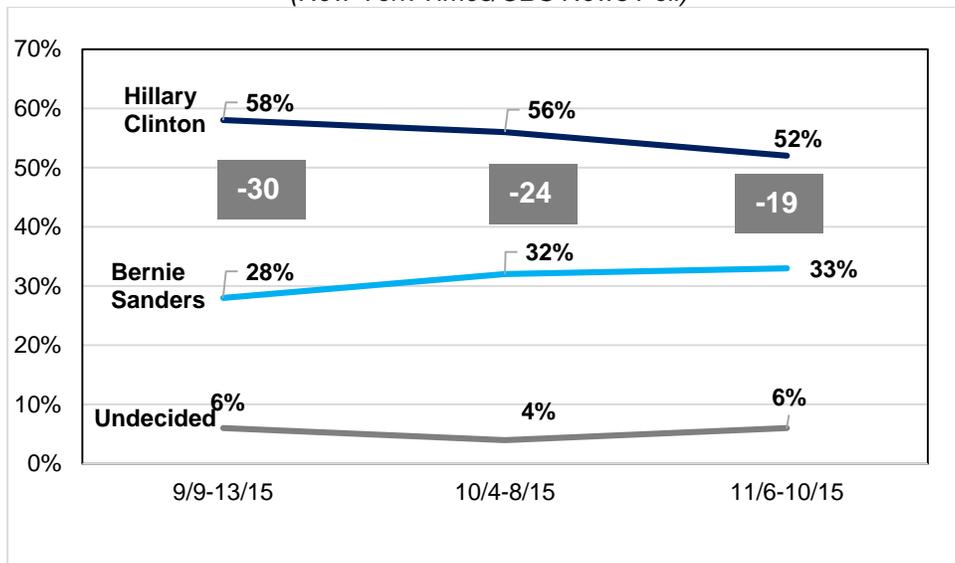
There are several key points we will address in this memo, focusing on the fact that:

- **Bernie Sanders continues to close the gap in the primary horserace with Hillary Clinton, even over the past month which pundits broadly declared a very good period for HRC**, even going so far as calling it her “best month ever”;
- **Sanders is steadily increasing his name ID and favorability ratings with Democrats, especially Democratic primary voters**;
- **Sanders’ message of income inequality and political corruption by special interests is driving the issue agenda within the Democratic primary**;
- **Hillary Clinton has real vulnerabilities within the Democratic primary electorate, particularly on “being too close to special interests and Wall Street,”** among other issues;
- **Sanders is much more popular with independents than HRC**, which has major implications for both the primary and the general election; and
- **Sanders is currently much better positioned with Republican voters than HRC**. When combined with his vastly superior standing with independents, **this helps explain why Sanders does at least as well if not better than Clinton in general election match-ups with leading Republican candidates**. These findings raise real questions as to which of these leading Democratic candidates is in fact the best positioned for the general election.

### **The Democratic Primary Horserace – Sanders Closing the Gap**

When Senator Bernie Sanders first declared his candidacy for president, he began as an asterisk in the polls and no pundit gave him a chance. Yet, just six months later, Sanders has made tremendous progress and is now THE leading Democratic challenger to Hillary Clinton and within striking distance of her. The trend line in the national Democratic primary horserace reveals a particularly positive dynamic for the Vermont Senator. Sanders has been steadily closing the gap with Hillary Clinton, trailing by 30 points in the New York Times/CBS News poll in September (58% to 28%) to 24 points in October (56% to 32%) to now 19 points (52% to 33%). In fact, Sanders gained a net 5 points on Hillary over the past month – a period declared “the best month ever” for HRC.

**Democratic Primary Horserace**  
(New York Times/CBS News Poll)



To put this gap in historical context, Barack Obama trailed Hillary Clinton by 27 points at exactly this stage of the campaign. The Gallup Poll released on November 16, 2007, included the headline, "[Clinton Sustains Huge Lead in Democratic Nomination Race](#)" and found Hillary with 48% of the vote while Obama trailed with just 21%.

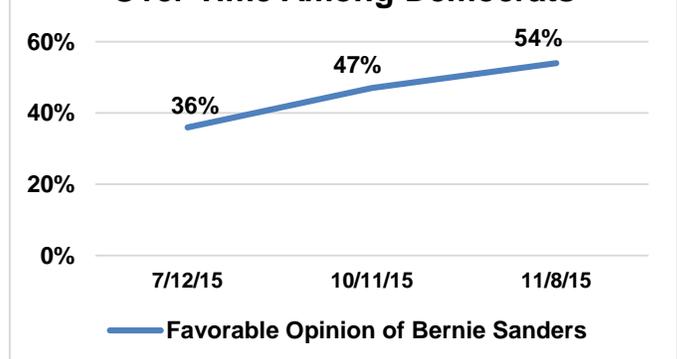
**Name ID Driving the Gap – Sanders Gaining Ground**

The driving force behind Hillary Clinton’s lead is her higher name recognition. She is universally known, having been in the public eye for a quarter century. In contrast, most voters only became aware of Sanders when he announced his presidential campaign just six months ago. While there is no denying that Clinton is popular with Democratic primary voters (72% favorable to 14% unfavorable according to the most recent New York Times/CBS News poll), Sanders is increasingly popular with these voters (53% favorable to 7% unfavorable in the latest New York Times/CBS News poll; going from 36% favorable in July to 54% favorable in November in the ABC News/Washington Post poll). In fact, the New York Times/CBS News poll found that there are half as many Democratic primary voters that hold a negative opinion of him than of Hillary (7% unfavorable for Bernie to 14% for Hillary).

**New York Times/CBS News Poll  
Favorability Ratings Over Time Among  
Democratic Primary Voters**

NYT/CBS POLL	Total Favorable	Total Unfavorable	Fav-Unfav Ratio
<b>11/6-10/15</b>			
Bernie Sanders	53%	7%	7.6
Hillary Clinton	72%	14%	5.1

**ABC News/Washington Post Poll  
- Bernie Sanders' Favorability  
Over Time Among Democrats**



This dynamic provides Bernie with a superior positive-to-negative ratio (7.6 for Sanders to 5.1 for HRC) among Democratic primary voters despite Clinton having a 25-year head start and the fact that she spent tens of millions of dollars on her 2008 presidential campaign and has already spent several million dollars on this cycle's presidential campaign while Bernie has just begun to air television ads in Iowa and New Hampshire.

This has significant implications in early voting states. Since the Democratic primary is not a national election where every state votes at the same time but rather a series of statewide battles, it is more telling to assess how this name ID dynamic plays out in early states. There is a lot of data indicating that as Bernie becomes better known in early voting states, he becomes even more competitive with Clinton. New Hampshire provides the best example of this as he is nearly as well-known as Clinton in this first-in-the-nation primary and is running neck-and-neck with her and even leading the erstwhile frontrunner in some polls. The bottom line is that as Democratic primary voters in key early voting states become more familiar with Sanders, they very much like what they hear and are much more likely to vote for him, thereby putting Sanders on a trajectory to make the Democratic primary horserace even more competitive as he campaigns aggressively and begins to advertise to get his message out more broadly.

### ***Sanders' Income Inequality Message Has Struck a Powerful Chord with Voters and Is Driving the Agenda***

***A major reason for Bernie Sanders' success is that his core message focusing on income inequality has struck a very powerful chord with Democratic primary voters.*** In fact, it is so powerful that he is driving voters' issue agenda as Democrats rank this issue as a top concern and prioritize income inequality over any other economic topic. When the New York Times/CBS News poll asked voters which is the most important economic problem facing the country today, a plurality of Democratic voters chose "income inequality" (37%) as the top concern, leading "jobs and unemployment" by a wide margin (27%) and much higher than "the federal budget and government spending" (20%).

<b>Democrats Rank Income Inequality as Top Economic Concern</b>	
<b><i>"What do you think is the most important economic problem facing this country today?"</i></b>	
<b>Income inequality</b>	37%
<b>Jobs and unemployment</b>	27%
<b>Federal budget and government spending</b>	20%
<b>Taxes</b>	6%
<b>Other</b>	9%
<b>Don't Know</b>	1%

*New York Times / CBS News Poll, 11/6-11/10/2015*

### ***Bernie Sanders Is Much More In Sync with Democratic Primary Voters on Key Issues than HRC***

We have to keep in mind that today's Democratic Party is more progressive than when Bill Clinton first ran for President back in 1992. This is even more the case among Democratic primary voters. As a result, Bernie Sanders and his positions on high-profile issues are a much better fit within the Democratic primary electorate than Hillary Clinton. Whether it is addressing income inequality and advocating for a higher minimum wage, taking on climate change and opposing the Keystone Pipeline, opposing the TPP trade deal, or opposing the Iraq War, Bernie has taken a consistent stand that puts him squarely in the majority of opinion among Democratic primary voters. While Clinton may have changed her position on some of these issues to more closely match Bernie, she remains out of step on several other issues such as legalizing marijuana and opposing the death penalty, as the table below detailing New York Times/CBS News polling data demonstrates.

<b>Sanders More In Sync with Democratic Primary Voters on Key Issues</b>			
<i>“If a candidate for president supports (ITEM), would that make you more likely to vote for the candidate, would it make you less likely to vote for the candidate, or would the candidate’s support of (ITEM) not make much difference in your vote?”</i>			
	More Likely	Less Likely	More – Less Likely
Legalizing the use of marijuana	29%	17%	+12
The death penalty	13%	33%	-20

New York Times / CBS News Poll, 11/6-11/10/2015

**Hillary Clinton Has Real Vulnerabilities within the Democratic Primary Electorate**

Beyond simply being out of step on a few issues, Hillary Clinton has potential vulnerabilities with Democratic primary voters, as evidenced by their current perceptions of her. Most notably, **a vast majority of Democratic primary voters (84%) believes special interests have either “a lot” (34%) or “some” (50%) influence over Hillary Clinton.** This stands in sharp contrast to Democratic primary voters’ perceptions of Bernie Sanders as a plurality (47%) affirms this does NOT describe him.

<b>Democratic Primary Voters See Hillary Clinton As Influenced by Special Interests</b>						
<i>“How much influence do you think special interests have on [Candidate Name] – a lot, some, not much, or none at all?”</i>						
	A Lot	Some	Not Much	None at all	A lot / some	Not much / not at all
Hillary Clinton	34%	50%	11%	2%	84%	13%
Bernie Sanders	13%	32%	29%	18%	45%	47%

New York Times / CBS News Poll, 11/6-11/10/2015

The first two debates reveal just how vulnerable Clinton can be on this front. In the first debate, she declared, “I represented Wall Street,” while in the second she tried to defend her large Wall Street contributions by invoking 9/11, leading to a major backlash (<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/16/opinion/hillary-clinton-botches-wall-street-questions.html>). The fact that she badly mishandled the issue in each debate - resulting in quotable sound bites and memorable video clips that are being used against her in the media - indicates the potential resonance and staying power of these vulnerabilities within the Democratic primary electorate.

On a similar topic, by a 9-to-1 margin **Democratic primary voters indicate they would be less likely to vote for a candidate who is backed by a SuperPAC that takes unlimited contributions.** This stands in sharp contrast to Bernie Sanders’ rejection of SuperPACs and how he is funding his campaign with over a million small dollar contributions.

<b>Democratic Primary Voters Less Likely to Back a Candidate Supported by a SuperPAC</b>	
<i>“If a candidate is supported by one of these groups that accepts contributions of any amount to spend on campaigns, would that make you less likely to vote for the candidate, or wouldn’t it affect your vote?”</i>	
More likely	4%
Less likely	36%
More likely – less likely	-32

New York Times / CBS News Poll, 11/6-11/10/2015

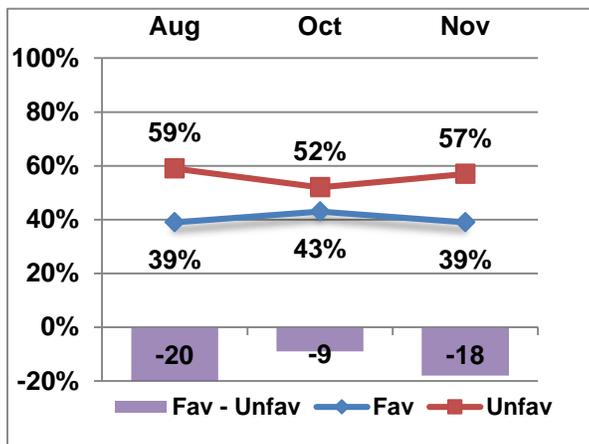
The net effect of these vulnerabilities is that it presents an excellent opportunity within the Democratic primary for Bernie Sanders and his message of taking on Wall Street and about how he is funding his campaign with many small contributions from ordinary Americans.

**Independents Strongly Favor Sanders**

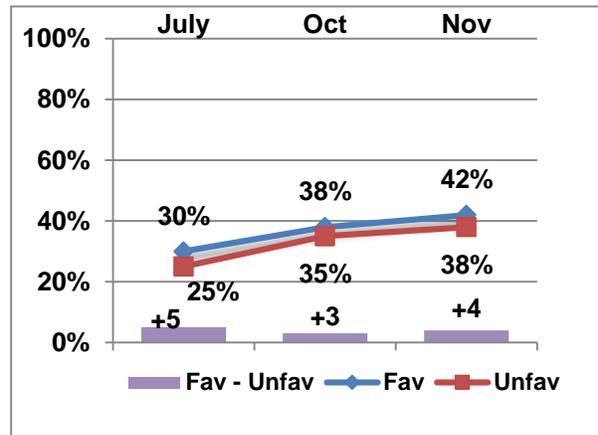
One point where all of the polling data are overwhelmingly clear and in agreement (a truly rare occurrence) is the fact that **Bernie Sanders does much better than Hillary Clinton among independents generally and especially with independents inclined to vote in a Democratic primary or caucus.** Bernie is widely popular with left-leaning independents whereas opinions of Clinton are decidedly more mixed. This advantage in favorability ratings translates into electoral support as Bernie has a commanding lead over Clinton among independents in early states.

According to the latest ABC News/Washington Post poll, Sanders has a net 22-point advantage over Clinton among all independents (+4 net favorability rating for Sanders vs. -18 for Clinton). Specifically, he has steadily improved his standing with independents since this summer, going from 30% favorable in July to 42% favorable in November with a +4 net positive rating. In contrast, Clinton has struggled with all independents in the past few months and is presently underwater by 18 points as nearly three out of five independents (57%) hold an unfavorable opinion of her compared to 39% who have a favorable opinion of the former Secretary of State.

**Hillary Clinton  
Among Independents**



**Bernie Sanders  
Among Independents**



This difference is even more pronounced among independent voters in early states who plan on voting in the Democratic caucus or primary. For example, in New Hampshire – where independents have made up as much as half of the Democratic presidential primary electorate – Sanders leads by 24 points (59% to 35%) according to the latest Monmouth University poll.

New Hampshire Democratic Primary-Voting Independents Strongly Favor Sanders Over Clinton	
<i>“Who would you support if the presidential primary was being held today?”</i>	
Bernie Sanders	59%
Hillary Clinton	35%
Sanders – Clinton	+24

Monmouth University Poll, 10/29-11/1/2015

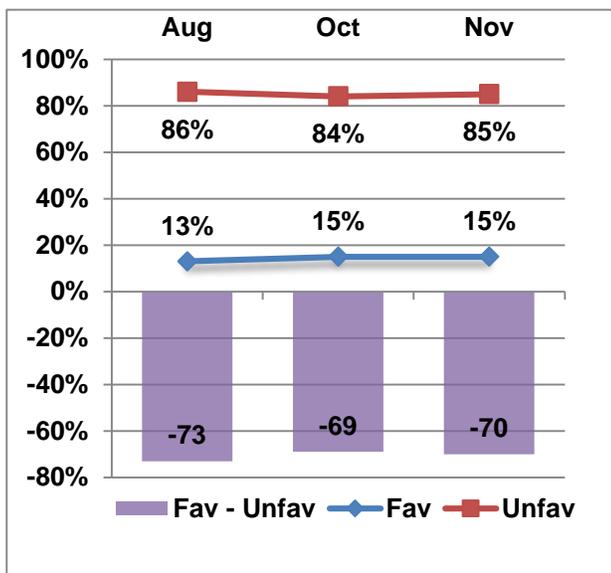
The fact that Bernie is much more popular with independents than Clinton has major implications for both the primary and general election.

- According to the primary election calendar, nearly every state that votes through Super Tuesday allows independents to participate in their Democratic primary. This means Bernie will have a potential groundswell of support from these voters who are often underrepresented in the public polls covering the horserace in these early states.
- In the context of the fall campaign, the reality that Bernie performs much better with independents overall than Hillary indicates he is better positioned in the general election than she is with this key swing voting bloc.

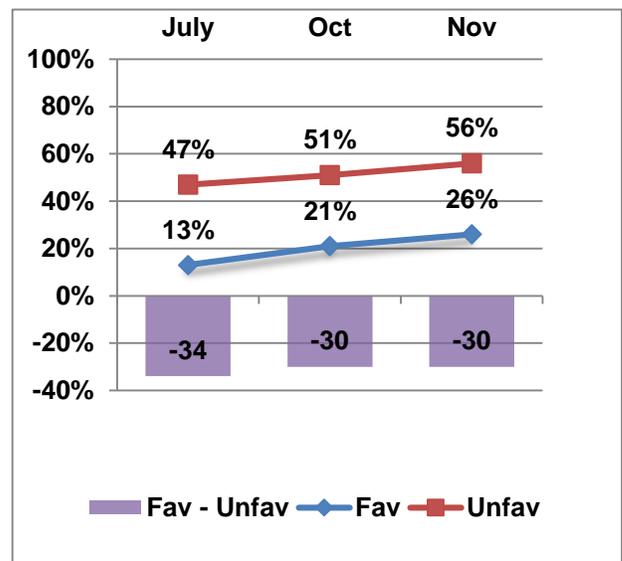
**Among Republicans, Sanders Draws More Support than Clinton and Is Not Nearly as Polarizing**

In an intriguing development, Bernie Sanders is much better received among Republicans than Hillary Clinton. The Vermont Senator’s favorables have increased twofold among Republicans since this summer, rising from 13% in July to 26% in the most recent ABC News/Washington Post poll. His net favorability rating (-30, 26% favorable to 56% unfavorable) is 40 points better than Hillary Clinton’s net favorability ratings as her negatives with GOP voters are extremely high (15% favorable to 85% unfavorable) and have been for a long time. The fact that Sanders is seen in such a different light by Republicans indicates he has more potential to win a larger share of Republican voters in a general election than does Clinton.

**Hillary Clinton  
Among Republicans**



**Bernie Sanders  
Among Republicans**



### ***Sanders Does Better Than Clinton in General Election Match-ups with Leading Republicans***

The totality of this data begins to raise real questions about the conventional wisdom's assumptions regarding which Democratic candidate would fare better in the general election. That Bernie outperforms Clinton with independents and Republicans by wide margins (by net 22 point and 40 points, respectively) should suggest that he is actually *better* positioned in the general election than is Clinton. The head-to-head match-ups bear this out as Bernie does comparably well if not better than Clinton in essentially every general election match-up with leading Republicans.

According to the most recent NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, ***Sanders does better than Clinton in head-to-head horseraces against Donald Trump and Marco Rubio***. The Vermont Senator leads Trump by 9 points (50%-41%) while Clinton holds an 8-point lead (50% to 42%). The same dynamic is true when the two Democrats are pitted against Senator Marco Rubio as Sanders leads by 5 points (46% to 41%) while Clinton has a smaller 3-point lead (47% to 44%).

General Election Head to Head Match-ups: Comparing How Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton Do Against Donald Trump							Bernie Sanders Advantage
NBC News/Wall Street Journal Survey: October 25-29, 2015	Bernie Sanders	Donald Trump	Difference	Hillary Clinton	Donald Trump	Difference	+1
	50	41	+9	50	42	+8	
	Bernie Sanders	Marco Rubio	Difference	Hillary Clinton	Marco Rubio	Difference	+2
	46	41	+5	47	44	+3	

***This dynamic is not an isolated event within a single survey but rather a consistent pattern that emerges throughout multiple surveys over the past several weeks involving thousands of interviews of voters.***

- ***Sanders does better against Trump*** – In examining the past four public polls taken since the first Democratic debate, Sanders leads Trump by an average of 8 points (50.5% to 42.5%) while Hillary's lead is slightly smaller (50.5% to 42.75% = +7.75).
- ***Sanders bests Jeb Bush by a wider margin than Clinton*** – Sanders holds a 5-point lead over Jeb Bush (47.5% to 42.5%) compared to a narrower 3-point margin for Clinton (47% to 44%) when looking at the last two polls that have asked these match-ups.

General Election Head to Head Match-ups Over Time: Comparing How Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton Do Against Donald Trump and Jeb Bush Over Multiple Surveys							Bernie Sanders Advantage
2016 General Election Match-ups (last 4 polls*)	Bernie Sanders	Donald Trump	Difference	Hillary Clinton	Donald Trump	Difference	+.25
	50.5	42.5	+8	50.5	42.75	+7.75	
2016 General Election Match-ups (last 2 polls*)	Bernie Sanders	Jeb Bush	Difference	Hillary Clinton	Jeb Bush	Difference	+2
	47.5	42.5	+5	47	44	+3	

\* [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/sanders\\_vs\\_republicans.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/sanders_vs_republicans.html).

\* [http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/2016\\_Clinton\\_vs\\_Republicans.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2016/president/2016_Clinton_vs_Republicans.html).

\* Last 4 polls includes McClatchy/ Marist, Quinnipiac, NBC/WSJ, and CNN/ORC.

\* Last 2 polls includes McClatchy/ Marist and Quinnipiac.

These findings are all the more remarkable as Sanders currently underperforms among Democratic voters due to some of them not being familiar with him. As the campaign progresses and Sanders becomes better known among Democrats, he will only improve his standing among Democrats in general election match-ups against any Republican. And if Bernie wins the nomination, then he will surely consolidate Democrats, giving him a further boost over Clinton in head-to-head match-ups against Republicans due to the drag resulting from her being viewed in such a hyper-partisan light.