



March 28, 2016

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Ben Tulchin, Ben Krompak, and Kiel Brunner; Tulchin Research  
**Re:** **Sanders is Best Candidate to Lead Democrats to Victory in 2016; Offers Real Strengths While Clinton Has Major Vulnerabilities**

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With the second half of the 2016 presidential primary season upon us, Democrats must now more than ever seriously consider which prospective nominee – Bernie Sanders or Hillary Clinton – is best positioned to lead Democrats to victory in November. Public polling has produced an overwhelming body of evidence that Bernie Sanders is that candidate. Data has consistently proved this point over the past six months and recent polling data re-affirms this finding at an unprecedented level.

Furthermore – and a point we ask Democratic voters, leaders, super-delegates, and activists to strongly heed – a slew of fresh polls find Secretary Clinton entering the second half of the delegate-selection process with major vulnerabilities at the same time Bernie Sanders is increasing his support and even leading Clinton in a recent national poll. Were Clinton to become the nominee, her liabilities could put Democrats' chances to win the White House and make gains in the House and Senate in peril and even make possible the unthinkable – a President Donald Trump.

Here are the key data points providing a preponderance of evidence that Bernie Sanders is by far the stronger Democratic candidate in the general election and demonstrating just how vulnerable Hillary Clinton would be as the party's nominee.

- **Sanders runs markedly better than Clinton in a general election with Donald Trump;**
- **Sanders leads decisively in a race against Ted Cruz and John Kasich while Clinton struggles,** tying Cruz and trailing Kasich;
- **Sanders is viewed favorably by Americans and much more favorably than Clinton, who is viewed negatively by a majority of Americans and whose negatives have reached a historic high;**
- **Sanders is seen as uniquely honest and trustworthy among presidential candidates and enjoys a huge “trust gap” with Trump and Clinton,** as Clinton is distrusted by a majority of voters and nearly as distrusted as Trump;
- **Sanders is popular with independent voters and leads with independents by wide margins in all general election match-ups against the three remaining Republican candidates,** while Clinton is viewed very unfavorably by independents and trails badly among them in a race against Cruz or Kasich.

- **Sanders has a unique ability to attract and energize the youth vote and wins voters age 18-54 by a decisive margin,** while Clinton struggles with younger voters and even trails Cruz and Kasich among voters age 18-54; and
- **There is a wide and growing enthusiasm gap between Sanders and Clinton among Democratic voters and Democratic-leaning independents,** with serious ramifications for Democrats in down-ballot races.

That these trends have been relatively consistent over the past six months demonstrates that they are becoming deeply ingrained into the political landscape. Bernie Sanders is the Democrat best positioned to win a general election against any of the leading Republicans and he has the potential to help elect down-ballot Democrats in swing states and swing districts by leading a broader coalition than Hillary Clinton could. Conversely, Clinton’s record high negatives and weakness in general election polling suggest that she could become a drag on the ticket, jeopardizing Democrats’ ability to both retain the White House and win back the House and Senate as well as state legislative races, thereby missing out on an historic opportunity for Democrats to make up ground the party has lost over the past few mid-term elections.

**Sanders Proves the Much Stronger Democratic Nominee in General Election Polling**

**Sanders Runs Better Than Clinton Against Republican Frontrunner Donald Trump**

Real Clear Politics (RCP) reports that Sanders leads Trump by an average of 17.5 points (54.7% to 37.2%) in recent polling while Clinton leads Trump by an average of just 11.2 points (50%-38.8%). The CNN/ORC International poll conducted March 17-20, 2016, finds Sanders leading Trump by 20 points (58%-38%) while Clinton leads Trump by 12 points (53%-41%). The CBS News/New York Times poll conducted over the same period finds Sanders similarly outperforming Clinton, leading Trump by 15 points (53%-38%) while Clinton leads him by 10 points (50%-40%). And the most recent Bloomberg Politics poll conducted March 19-22 finds Sanders leading Trump by 24 points (58%-24%) while Clinton leads by 18 points (54%-36%).

| <b>2016 U.S. Presidential General Election: Democratic Candidates vs. Trump</b> |  |   |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|---|
|   | <b>Real Clear Politics (RCP) Poll Average March 25, 2016</b> | <b>CNN/ORC International March 17-20, 2016 925 Registered Voters Nationwide</b> | <b>CBS News / New York Times March 17-20, 2016 1,058 Registered Voters Nationwide</b> | <b>Bloomberg Politics March 19-22, 2016 1,000 Adults Nationwide</b> |
| <b>Bernie Sanders</b>   | <b>54.7%</b>   | <b>58%</b>  | <b>53%</b>  | <b>58%</b>  |
| <b>Donald Trump</b>   | <b>37.2%</b>   | <b>38%</b>  | <b>38%</b>  | <b>34%</b>  |
| <b>Sanders – Trump</b>  | <b>+17.5</b>   | <b>+20</b>  | <b>+15</b>  | <b>+24</b>  |
| <b>Hillary Clinton</b>  | <b>50%</b>   | <b>53%</b>  | <b>50%</b>  | <b>54%</b>  |
| <b>Donald Trump</b>   | <b>38.8%</b>   | <b>41%</b>  | <b>40%</b>  | <b>36%</b>  |
| <b>Clinton – Trump</b>  | <b>+11.2</b>   | <b>+12</b>  | <b>+10</b>  | <b>+18</b>  |

**Sanders’s strength in a general election compared with Clinton is a reflection of his substantially better performance with independent voters and younger voters** – two key groups in the Obama coalition that helped elect the President in 2008 and re-elect him in 2012.

- **CNN/ORC International finds Sanders leading Trump among independents by a 19-point margin (57%-38%) while Clinton leads Trump among independents by just 7 points (49%-42%).**
- **Among voters age 18-54, Sanders leads Trump 63 percent to 34 percent (+29) while Clinton leads Trump 55%-38% (+17).** Sanders also runs a net 3 points better against Trump than Clinton among voters age 55 and older (Sanders 51%-Trump 44% vs. Clinton 49%-Trump 45%).

That Sanders runs much better with these groups than does Clinton demonstrates that he is not only the stronger general election candidate, but he also has the potential to bolster the whole Democratic ticket by leading the way with these key groups.

**Sanders Defeats Cruz and Kasich Decisively while Clinton Struggles**

While Trump has emerged as the clear frontrunner in the Republican race, he could still be dislodged and denied the nomination. **Should either Ted Cruz or John Kasich ultimately emerge as the Republican nominee, Bernie Sanders is much better positioned to win the general election than Hillary Clinton.** Alarming, the CNN/ORC International poll finds Clinton tied with Cruz in a head-to-head match-up (48%-48%) and trailing Kasich by a 6-point margin (45%-51%). In sharp contrast, Sanders leads both of them well outside the margin of error. Sanders leads Cruz by a commanding 13 points (55%-42% - a net 13 points better than Clinton) and leads Kasich by 6 points (51%-45% - a net 12 points better than Clinton).

| <b>2016 U.S. Presidential General Elections: Democratic Candidates vs. Cruz, Kasich</b> |  |   |
|---|--|---|
|   | <b>Real Clear Politics (RCP)<br/>Poll Average<br/>March 25, 2016</b> | <b>CNN/ORC International<br/>March 17-20, 2016<br/>925 Registered Voters Nationwide</b> |
| <b>Bernie Sanders</b>   | <b>49.6%</b>   | <b>55%</b>  |
| <b>Ted Cruz</b>   | <b>41.2%</b>   | <b>42%</b>  |
| <b>Sanders – Cruz</b>   | <b>+8.4</b>  | <b>+13</b>  |
| <b>Hillary Clinton</b>  | <b>46.7%</b>   | <b>48%</b>  |
| <b>Ted Cruz</b>   | <b>43.8%</b>   | <b>48%</b>  |
| <b>Clinton – Cruz</b>   | <b>+2.9</b>  | <b>+0</b>   |
| <b>Bernie Sanders</b>   | <b>45%</b>   | <b>51%</b>  |
| <b>John Kasich</b>  | <b>44%</b>   | <b>45%</b>  |
| <b>Sanders – Kasich</b>   | <b>+1</b>  | <b>+6</b>   |
| <b>Hillary Clinton</b>  | <b>41.5%</b>   | <b>45%</b>  |
| <b>John Kasich</b>  | <b>48%</b>   | <b>51%</b>  |
| <b>Clinton – Kasich</b>   | <b>-6.5</b>  | <b>-6</b>   |

**Sanders's far-superior performance with independents and young voters makes a critical difference in a competitive general election.** While support from these voters gives Sanders a significant edge over Clinton in a general election against Donald Trump, **polling finds that against the other prospective Republican nominees it is the difference between winning and losing.**

- **The CNN/ORC poll finds Sanders leads with independent voters and runs a net 22 points better than Clinton against Cruz and a net 24 points better than Clinton against Kasich among independents.**
  - Sanders leads Cruz with independents 54 percent to 41 percent (+13) and leads Kasich 48 percent to 45 percent (+3).
  - Clinton trails Cruz among independents 42 percent to 51 percent (-9) and trails Kasich 36 percent to 57 percent (-21).
- **Sanders wins voters age 18-54 decisively in match-ups with both Cruz and Kasich while Clinton trails both Republicans with younger voters. Sanders runs a net 20 points better than Clinton against Cruz and a net 21 points better than Clinton against Kasich among voters age 18-54.**
  - These voters back Sanders over Cruz (58%-40%) or Kasich (57%-39%) by an 18-point margin.
  - In contrast, Clinton trails both Cruz (46%-48%) and Kasich (46%-49%).

### **Sanders Has Positive Reputation in Contrast to Clinton's Alarmingly High Negatives**

#### ***Sanders Viewed Much More Favorably Than Clinton Among All Voters and Key Subgroups***

**Over many months, polling has consistently found Sanders to be viewed favorably by voters.** The RCP Average of polling between March 10-22, 2016 finds Sanders with a +7.4 net favorability rating (48.7% favorable to 41.3% unfavorable). This represents a 40.2-point favorability gap between Sanders and Donald Trump based on Trump's RCP Average (30.4% favorable to 63.2% unfavorable, -32.8 net favorable) in polling between February 2-March 12, 2016.

While Sanders has maintained a positive profile over the course of the campaign, **the new CBS News/New York Times poll finds Clinton's unfavorable rating has reached a historic high,** at 52 percent unfavorable to 31 percent favorable (-21 net favorable). ***This is the low water mark for Clinton since the poll began tracking her favorability in March of 1992.***

Sanders's popularity with younger voters and strength with independents put him in a much stronger position than Clinton in a general election. A CNN/ORC International poll of 1,001 adults nationwide conducted last month (February 24-27, 2016) found Sanders with a net favorability rating of +24 (57% favorable to 33% unfavorable) and Clinton with a net favorability rating of -13 (42% to 55%). But among younger voters and independents, the poll finds that the favorability gap between the two Democrats is enormous.

- **Sanders is viewed a net 44 points more favorably than Clinton among voters age 18-54 and a net 76 points more favorably among voters age 18-34.** Sanders is viewed favorably by 59 percent of voters age 18-54 (to 30% unfavorable, +29 net favorable) and by 69 percent of voters age 18-34 (to 17% unfavorable, +52 net favorable). Clinton is viewed unfavorably by 56 percent of voters age 18-54 (to 41% favorable, -15 net favorable) and by 51 percent of voters age 18-34 (to 44% favorable, -7 net favorable).

- **Sanders is viewed favorably by a majority of independent voters while Clinton is viewed unfavorably by nearly two-thirds of independents.** Sanders is viewed favorably by independent voters by a 23-point margin (54% favorable to 31% unfavorable) while Clinton is viewed unfavorably by a 30-point margin (33% favorable to 63% unfavorable).

**Sanders Seen as Most Honest and Trustworthy While Clinton Distrusted Comparably to Trump**

Sanders continues to be seen as the most honest and trustworthy candidate for president of either party. The Economist/YouGov Poll conducted March 10-12, 2016 finds that while Americans view Hillary Clinton (57% not honest and trustworthy) and Donald Trump (61% not honest and trustworthy) with comparable skepticism, Sanders is viewed as honest and trustworthy by a majority of Americans (51% honest and trustworthy to 25% not honest and trustworthy, +26 net honest and trustworthy).

| <b>Presidential Candidates: Honest and Trustworthy</b>   |                                 |  |                                     |
|--|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>The Economist/YouGov Poll; March 10-12, 2016; 2,000 Adults Nationwide</b>                           |                                 |  |                                     |
| <b><i>“Do you think the following presidential candidates are honest and trustworthy, or not?”</i></b> | <b>Honest &amp; Trustworthy</b> | <b><u>Not</u> Honest &amp; Trustworthy</b> | <b>Net Honest &amp; Trustworthy</b> |
| <b>Bernie Sanders</b>  | <b>51%</b>                      | <b>25%</b>                                 | <b>+26</b>                          |
| <b>Hillary Clinton</b>   | <b>30%</b>                      | <b>57%</b>                                 | <b>-27</b>                          |
| <b>Donald Trump</b>  | <b>27%</b>                      | <b>61%</b>                                 | <b>-34</b>                          |
| <b>Ted Cruz</b>  | <b>25%</b>                      | <b>46%</b>                                 | <b>-21</b>                          |
| <b>John Kasich</b>   | <b>37%</b>                      | <b>24%</b>                                 | <b>+13</b>                          |

This “trust gap” has huge implications for Democrats in the general election, as Sanders is viewed positively and has a net 60-point advantage on honesty and trustworthiness over Trump (+26 net honest and trustworthy vs. -34 net honest and trustworthy) while Clinton is nearly as distrusted as Trump. The trust gap is particularly noteworthy among independent voters as Sanders is viewed as honest and trustworthy by a 21-point margin (47% honest and trustworthy to 26% not honest and trustworthy) while Clinton (61% not honest and trustworthy, -37 net honest and trustworthy) and Trump (62% not honest and trustworthy, -39 net honest and trustworthy) are distrusted by nearly identical margins.

**Wide Enthusiasm Gap Separates Sanders and Clinton**

The latest CBS News/New York Times poll finds that a strong majority of Democrats (56%) would “enthusiastically support” Sanders were he to become the party’s nominee while just 4 in 10 (40%) say they would enthusiastically support Clinton. And the most recent CNN poll found that nearly twice as many Democratic-leaning independents (38%) say they would enthusiastically support Sanders as would enthusiastically support Clinton (21%).

The trend line for the two Democratic candidates could not be starker. While enthusiasm for Clinton’s candidacy has been consistently dropping since she announced her campaign last April, excitement for Sanders’s campaign has been steadily rising. According to the latest CNN poll of Democratic primary voters, Clinton’s enthusiastic support has fallen from 58 percent last April to 43 percent in September to 37 percent in January to 34 percent today. In contrast, enthusiastic

support for Sanders has increased during that same period from 11 percent in April to 31 percent in September to 33 percent in January to 40 percent today.

As it is difficult for Democrats to win when the base is not motivated – just look at the last two mid-term elections when Democrats experienced record losses as many Democratic voters stayed home – this enthusiasm gap has significant ramifications not only for the presidential election but for down-ballot races as well. Democrats have an opportunity this year to win back the Senate, gain seats and perhaps even take back the House, and recover ground in state legislatures across the country – where the party has lost hundreds of seats in recent cycles. This data demonstrates that Bernie Sanders is much better able to energize, motivate, and grow the Democratic base in a general election than is Hillary Clinton.

### Conclusion

Based on this preponderance of data that clearly demonstrates Bernie Sanders runs markedly better than Hillary Clinton in a general election against any leading Republican, we ask Democrats to pause and weigh their options very carefully as the primary nominating process moves forward into the second half of states and a map that now favors the Senator from Vermont.

In sum, Sanders has a positive reputation and is viewed much more favorably by voters than Clinton, whose negatives have reached a career high. He is viewed as uniquely “honest and trustworthy” among presidential candidates while Clinton is distrusted by Americans comparably to Donald Trump. Sanders has a far greater ability to attract swing voters and to attract and motivate young voters, while Clinton struggles with these critical constituencies. And Sanders’ nomination would elicit the enthusiasm of a strong majority of Democratic voters while Hillary Clinton simply fails to generate the kind of excitement Democrats need in order to win. All of this polling data demonstrates that Sanders would be the strongest Democratic nominee and would do more to bolster the entire Democratic ticket due to his ability to marshal and excite a stronger and broader coalition than could Clinton given her far narrower appeal and major vulnerabilities.