Revenge of the Walmart Moms

A new focus group finds that moderate, suburban white women—a key swing demographic in several battleground states—are reeling from high gas prices, frustrated with their grocery bills, worried about A.I., pissed off by the corruption in Washington, and ready to throw the bums out.

Self-identified moderate white women constitute 30 percent of the electorate in Iowa and New Hampshire, 28 percent in Maine, 26 percent in Pennsylvania, 24 percent in Michigan, and 25 percent in Ohio—all states that will help determine who controls the Senate. *Photo: Emmanuel Dunand/AFP/Getty Images*

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They have been called soccer moms, security moms, Walmart moms, and, less colorfully, suburban women. Whatever the moniker of the moment, these moderate, mostly white women remain among the nation's most crucial voting blocs—not simply because they are attuned to the political moment, but because they are very much *living it*.

For the most part, these women are economic voters, not culture warriors. They care for their families, often work, and almost always shoulder the brunt of childcare. They know *intimately* the cost of groceries, gas, and each month's bills. They shop at Costco and Ross more often than at Whole Foods or Lululemon. And they are a *critical* swing group: Self-identified moderate white women constitute 30 percent of the electorate in Iowa and New Hampshire, 28 percent in Maine, 26 percent in Pennsylvania, 24 percent in Michigan, and 25 percent in Ohio—all states that will help determine who controls the Senate.

It's nearly impossible to find polling specifically on this narrow group of white, moderate, mid-to-low-income women, though some estimates suggest there are nearly 50 million such voters. The closest sample groups usually comprise white women without a college degree, and they've been skeptical of the economic and political environment for several years. According to Pew, white women supported Trump by eight points in 2020, but only by four points in 2024—the only cohort that did *not* move to the right in the last election. In some ways, these enigmatic, hard-to-reach Walmart moms are the most effective measure of the electorate.

Galvanize Action, an organization that studies women's concerns and political motivations, gave me exclusive access to the **first two** sessions in a series of small focus groups with these moderate women. The 14 participants, interviewed during the past two weeks, all had incomes below $150,000. Ten called themselves moderate, three somewhat conservative, and one somewhat liberal. Naturally, their individual circumstances—health challenges, family dynamics, employment obstacles, etcetera—all differed. But, perhaps unsurprisingly, the same themes kept surfacing.

The Affordability Hoax

Economic stress was a constant topic in both sessions. When moderator **Jackie Payne**, Galvanize's founder and executive director, asked the women to describe their economic situation in one word, they answered with "bad," "paycheck to paycheck," "unpredictable," "overwhelming," and "dire." When one said "bleak," several others murmured their agreement, as though wishing they had uttered it first.

Jennifer, who owns an online sales business, called the economy "unpredictable." Tariffs have made the components for her business unaffordable. "It's put a strain on my lifestyle," she said. **Julie**, who lives in Phoenix with her two children, called the economy "bad" and inflation "terrible." Gas had risen 50 cents in a week, she said, while grocery stores grew steadily more expensive. **Taylor**, who lives in Georgia with her two children, said the cost of living keeps her awake at night. "Gas prices are ridiculous," she lamented. Raising kids is expensive, she added, and beyond that, the "food is not safe"—a growing concern that has fractured the MAHA coalition.

None of this is new. Polls have long shown the cost of living and gasoline weighing heavily on voters—especially after **Donald Trump** built his 2024 campaign around economic prosperity and lower inflation. But hearing directly from voters, especially such critical voters, offers renewed understanding of why Trump's approval rating has hovered below 40 percent since April, an all-time low, according to the *New York Times* polling average. Meanwhile, the president continues to describe affordability issues as a "hoax" and has encouraged Americans to shrug off higher prices as a result of his war in Iran. At a rally in New York earlier this month, he argued that paying "a tiny little bit more for your gasoline"—the national average is still above $4 a gallon—is worth ensuring "a very evil country" can't get a nuclear weapon.

The A.I. Hurdle

Of course, the stock market is near all-time highs, thanks largely to the investor euphoria surrounding artificial intelligence. In districts far from Silicon Valley, however, the technology is generating more anxiety than excitement. The women in Galvanize's focus groups acknowledged the potential benefits of A.I. but also expressed alarm about the future of work. **Edwina**, a freelance editor in Houston, said that during the past year, her corporate clients have decided they "don't need me anymore" because of A.I. She uses it herself, sometimes for work, but fears it may eliminate her livelihood completely. "I do like A.I., but I don't like what it's doing to my job," she said. (Perhaps a bit ironically, she was the only person to give a positive readout of the country, calling it "prosperous," pointing to the health of the stock market.)

Three women were looking for jobs. **Andrea**, 59, has struggled to find steady employment since losing her job during the pandemic. **Maureen** called entering the job search "one of the most daunting and terrible things ever." Alas, as A.I. chatbots have become the first point of contact with H.R. departments, she said, interviews and callbacks have become almost impossible to book. "You have to learn how to get past ChatGPT scanners," she said. "You have to learn how to enter the right keywords. You have to learn how to make sure you don't look redundant." Now, she added, "It's like, *Hey, go ahead and take 10 courses on A.I. certification*. Just so you can figure out how to get a recruiter to actually look at your résumé. It's insane."

"Corruption and Wealth"

Women in both focus groups also brought up the issue of corruption, mostly unprompted. Their anger mirrored polling that ranks dirty politicians among voters' foremost concerns as faith in institutions collapses. The women agreed unanimously with the notion that politicians enrich and empower themselves before even thinking about people like them. "No one is on my side," said **Karley**, who lives in Texas. **Megan**, in Indiana, described politicians and corporations as "holding hands."

Taylor, the Georgia mom with two kids, said she wants to support visionary leaders, but "corruption and wealth" has destroyed any hope of altruism. "I think at the end of the day, it should be illegal for people in Congress to own stock in anything," said Maureen. **Bobbi**, from Texas, said "a lot of corruption" now occurs openly—whereas before, "people were ashamed to do it publicly." (There is a reason why Republicans, after opposing any congressional stock trading ban, passed a half-measure aimed only at insider trading.)

The women also expressed intense anger toward the medical system, particularly health insurers. "When they cut health insurance programs or other programs like that, when we start wars—when those kinds of things occur, the rich benefit, and then everybody else, essentially, are the ones that suffer," said Maureen. Julie, the Phoenix mom, complained that insurance companies now require preauthorization for medication, so her prescriptions have been delayed. Andrea said that when she lost part of her tooth, the insurance company would allow her to get a new one only after a certain amount of time. Jennifer said she "fired" her doctor because she was getting "kickbacks" from pharma companies to prescribe more-expensive medicine. And Bobbi specifically brought up the cuts to Medicaid in Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill. Looking for a job while pregnant, and with a 2-year-old, Bobbi is terrified that she could lose access to the Women, Infant, and Children food assistance program, which helps her to buy food for her family.

The Elephant in the Room

The groups spoke relatively little about Trump, in part because Payne steered the women toward deeper concerns. (We all know from our own families and friends that conversations often go haywire when the topic turns to the president.) Trump still came up, however, on several occasions. Julie blamed him for both the chaos in Washington and rising costs at home. "I don't know his thinking process," she said. "What he's done has not helped people. It's making our lives harder."

Even when Trump didn't come up, the tenor of the conversations was largely negative for Republicans. The answers the women gave when Payne asked for one word to describe the country should rattle every incumbent: "depressing," "bewildered," "divided," "laughingstock," "unbelievable," "chaotic," "divided," and "confused."

Of course, Republicans are hoping that voters don't carry their anger into the ballot box in November—and that if they do, they're picturing **Joe Biden** or **Zohran Mamdani**, not the current president or party in power. That's why Energy Secretary **Chris Wright** continues to blame Biden for the economy, despite the fact that gas and grocery prices have only risen. Meanwhile, Speaker **Mike Johnson** and other Republicans tie every Democratic candidate to the D.S.A.

All but two of the women in the focus groups said they plan to vote in the midterms. But the other two, disappointed by the system, were still considering it. None disclosed whom they're voting for, or whom they've voted for in the past. But if the focus groups' sentiments carry into the voting booth, it does not bode well for Republicans.

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