

Focus Groups and Interviews

Ethnography was a good place to get a basis of public opinion, but it's possible to go more in-depth with focus groups and in-depth interviews. Many times, when people think of political focus groups, their mind jumps to Frank Luntz and the focus groups he conducts for different news outlets. However, my focus group setting would be much different from Mr. Luntz's. I would have 8 to 10 people so there is not the uncomfortable pressure to talk with fewer participants and participants feel like they can go into more detail without having to fight for "airtime." Also, having more than 10 people would take up too much time.

The setting would be an open lounge area with soft lighting and a round table setup. This will allow the moderator and the participants to see each other, which is more conducive for the flow of conversation. Have comfortable chairs and so participants can feel more comfortable. The comfort of the participants is imperative because a comfortable environment will make them more willing to share their opinions. The focus group would last for about an hour to an hour and a half. This will allow us to gather the information we want and allow the participants to go into a good amount of detail without them getting bored or repetitive.

The Cruz campaign can use these focus groups to understand more about their constituents. In this series of focus groups, it is not really pertinent to conduct a focus group with Democrats because they are not going to be voting in the Republican primary. Later on, if Cruz became the Republican nominee, it might be more important to gauge where Democrat's stand on the Republican nominee. That being said, the campaign needs to conduct about 5 groups with: young voters (age 18-24), middle-aged voters (age 25-49) older voters (age 50 and

over), male voters and female voters. Each of these groups would be made up of Republicans and Independents/Undecided voters (it should be noted who is who). Each of these focus groups represents a major demographic in the U.S. political system. This allows the Cruz campaign to see in which groups his messages resonate most with as well as which groups find him to be a favorable candidate. For example, if middle-aged voters seem to respond very well to Cruz, the moderator can ask questions that get to the point of why. Is it because he has a strong focus on religion, or his insistence on helping our allies by showing leadership? This breakdown will allow a better understanding of the issues supported by demographics within the party. In the groups with male and female voters, the ages should be representative of the population, so there is an accurate distribution of what young male voters or middle-aged women think of Cruz.

I would set-up an interview in a similar way: an open, comfortable space that would encourage the interviewee to speak their mind. Possibly have a refreshment like coffee, or some sort of dessert, something to give the appearance that the interview is simply having a conversation about politics. Everything boils down to making the participant feel as comfortable as possible because the best insights are going to come from someone who isn't afraid to share their opinions. An interview will probably be shorter, 45 minutes to an hour. The questions would be almost the same as in the focus group, and the participant will be able to go into details with their answers, but with no one to compete with, this probably won't take as much time as a focus group.

In an interview setting, I think it would be most beneficial to gain a deeper knowledge of the groups that might be voting for Cruz. This means the 5 factions of the Republican Party

(Moderates, Libertarians, Establishment, Christian Conservatives and Tea Party Conservatives) and Independent or Undecided voters. This means an In-Depth Interview project would consist of 6 interviews. An IDI is not a generalizable form of research because one person can't be representative of a whole group, but these interviews could give the campaign an in-depth view into what each faction stands for. This is a huge opportunity because while Cruz is moving toward a Christian Conservative, he's considered to be a member of the Tea Party. Interviews with members of these factions could provide him with a solution of how to bridge the gap between the two without alienating either side.

While a moderator would be asking mostly the same questions in a focus group, there is a potential for different answers to the questions for a few reasons. First, in a focus group, sometimes an alpha will rise in the group. This means that there is one person who is leading the conversation. Whenever a new question is asked, they set the tone for what people are going to talk about. In an interview, the interviewee is the focus. They set the topic of conversation because there is no one else to do it for them. Second, focus group moderators sometimes encounter groupthink during the focus group. This means that the group comes to a collective decision on how they feel about a certain issue or question. This curbs an individual's opinion to fit the group's consensus. In an interview, this collaborative aspect is gone, and a moderator can get an unfiltered view of how the interviewee feels about issues. Lastly, along the same line, a moderator might be able to get deeper insights to more sensitive questions that might get glossed over in a focus group setting. For example, in an interview it's possible to get to the core of the participant's platform, and more fully understand why they are a Christian Conservative or a Libertarian or an Independent. In a focus group, a participant might

not feel comfortable to share much information about why they have that ideology around so many people, and will give a superficial answer. IDI's can provide us with a fuller picture of a voter's thought process. But again, it's important to remember that interview are not generalizable, so this information give us an idea of where the campaign can go from here.

Question Map (2 batteries of questions):

1. Describe your level of interest in politics.
 - a. Why?
 - b. (If not interested) What could pique your interest in politics?
 - c. (If interested) What interests you about politics?
2. Have you watched any of the presidential debates that have aired?
 - a. What made you decide to tune in?
 - i. What did you think?
 - ii. Did any candidates stand out? Who?
 1. What made them stand out?
 - b. Do you plan to watch the next one?
3. How would you describe your ideal political candidate?
 - a. What does he/she look like?
 - b. *[What about age?]*
 - i. *So you said you gravitate towards older candidates, what makes you feel this way?*
 - ii. *You gravitate towards toward younger candidates, why?*
 - c. What about his/her public persona?
 - i. (If they say poor, bad, etc.) What is your definition of a "bad" public appearance?