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## Poll Shows Decline in Wal-Mart's Public Image

**By Bob Allen - EthicsDaily.com**  
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Nearly four in 10 Americans hold a negative view of Wal-Mart, and its public image is worse now than it was a year ago, according to poll released Thursday, encouraging groups seeking to organize workers and improve labor conditions inside the nation's largest retailer that their message is getting through.

"Despite two high-priced image makeovers, Wal-Mart's public image is in a tailspin," said Paul Blank, campaign director for WakeUpWalMart.com. "Over the last year, Wal-Mart's image has declined at an alarming rate with the American people. Unless Wal-Mart addresses these growing concerns, the company will face a mounting public backlash."

The Zogby Poll, commissioned by WakeUp Wal-Mart, a campaign launched in April by the United Food and Commercial Workers union, found 55 percent of 1,012 adults surveyed have a less favorable opinion of the retail giant as a result of things they have seen, read or heard in the last few months.

The poll showed that a majority, 58 percent, still viewed Wal-Mart favorably, but that figure was down from 76 percent in January, a drop of 18 percentage points.

Wal-Mart downplayed the survey, noting that November sales were up 4.3 percent. That is ahead of Target, a main competitor, which saw its business increase by just 2.6 percent.

"It would be hard for anyone to believe that a poll paid for by the UFCW was more accurate than the fact that our estimated November store sales were up 4.3 percent and that 10 million people shopped at our stores during the first six hours of sales last Friday," Wal-Mart spokeswoman Sarah Clark said, quoted by the Associated Press.

Wake Up Wal-Mart, meanwhile, said increased sales do not necessarily mean more people are shopping at Wal-Mart but could indicate those who do are simply spending more. The Zogby poll found an 18 percent decline in high-frequency Wal-Mart shoppers--weekly and once or twice a month--and a 12 percent increase in respondents who say they shop at Wal-Mart less frequently than in the past.

Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) held a favorable view of Target, compared to 58 percent viewing Wal-Mart with favor. Thirty-eight percent said they have an unfavorable view of Wal-Mart, compared to 13 percent having a negative image of Target.

Fifty-six percent of Americans said Wal-Mart is bad for America, agreeing with a statement, "It may provide low prices, but the prices come with a high moral and economic cost for consumers."

Thirty-nine percent agreed with the other side that Wal-Mart is good for America, because "it provides low prices and saves consumers money every day."

Other results include that six in 10 Americans view Wal-Mart as a retail monopoly that threatens the American economy and 61 percent are concerned that Wal-Mart is too powerful an economic force in America. Sixty-three percent said elected leaders should investigate the impact of Wal-Mart's business model.

"Americans are waking up to the truth about Wal-Mart," said Chris Sanders, political counsel for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union in Kentucky. A graduate of both law school and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Sanders is a member of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, who has been working in religion and labor advocacy since the 1980s.

"In Baptist life, we are mission-minded people who care about human misery," Sanders said. "The million people who work for Wal-Mart in poverty-level jobs without health insurance are feeling the pain and hurt that we are out there trying to heal. The millions who work in sweatshops around the world that supply Wal-Mart are the same people who we help with our humanitarian mission efforts in those countries."

"I'm glad to see Christian people are understanding the need for living-wage jobs here and abroad and how Wal-Mart affects that," he said.

With 1.4 million employees and more than \$10 billion in profits, Wal-Mart is America's largest employer.

Critics say Wal-Mart is letting America down by lowering wages and cutting costs by moving manufacturing jobs overseas, where labor is cheaper, thus eliminating good-paying jobs for Americans.

Wal-Mart is also charged with exploiting illegal immigrants, paying women less than men, violating fair-labor standards and failing to provide workers with health insurance.

According to a "facts" page on Wake Up Wal-Mart.com, a substantial number of Wal-Mart associates earn less than the poverty line and don't earn enough money to support a family. Many, they say, end up on public assistance, costing money to taxpayers.

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