



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** INTERESTED PARTIES  
**FROM:** NEIL NEWHOUSE & ROBERT BLIZZARD – PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES  
**DATE:** MARCH 16, 2015  
**RE:** RECENT POLLING ON THE U.S. REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SYSTEM

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## METHODOLOGY

*Public Opinion Strategies recently completed three surveys on behalf of Human Rights First:*

- **We conducted a “national” survey of N=600 registered voters in the 25 congressional districts designated as “toss-up” or “lean” by the Cook Political Report.** The survey was conducted February 10-12, 2015 and has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.0\%$ . Districts included in this survey are: Lean DEM: AZ-1, CA-7, FL-2, MN-7, MN-8; Toss-Ups: IA-1, IL-10, ME-2, NE-2, NH-1, NV-4, NY-19, PA-8, TX-23; Lean GOP: AZ-2, CA-10, CA-21, CO-6, FL-26, IA-3, NJ-3, NV-3, NY-1, NY-24, VA-4.
- **We conducted a New Hampshire statewide survey among N=424 registered voters.** The survey was conducted February 17-18, 2015 and has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.8\%$ .
- **We conducted a South Carolina statewide survey among N=400 registered voters.** The survey was conducted February 21-23, 2015 and has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.9\%$ .

*The purpose of this memo is to review the key findings from these surveys.*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Few voters in targeted congressional districts and in both New Hampshire and South Carolina believe the country’s asylum and refugee system is “working well” as it is, instead, voters view the system as in need of reform to better protect refugees and those seeking asylum. Voters across nearly every major demographic, including party and ideological lines, believe the asylum and refugee system needs to be improved and strengthened.

Further, there’s deep support from voters in targeted congressional districts and these two states for policy proposals to improve and strengthen the nation’s asylum and refugee system – including increasing the number of judges who serve on immigration courts, increasing funding for resettlement programs, increasing funding and resources to conduct more timely interviews, and increasing the use of alternatives to jails and detention facilities for asylum seekers.

Finally, a Member of Congress stands to benefit electorally from being viewed as an advocate for improving and strengthening the country’s asylum and refugee system – especially among the key target demographic of Independent women in the upcoming 2016 elections.

# KEY FINDINGS

## THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

- **Voters are pessimistic about the direction of the country.**

Just about one-third (34%) of voters in targeted congressional districts believe the country is moving “in the right direction,” while 59% say the country has pretty seriously “gotten off on the wrong track.”

While Republicans (11% right direction-86% wrong track) and Independents (30% right direction-61% wrong track) are the most negative, nearly one-third of Democrats (64% right direction-29% wrong track) in these competitive congressional districts are downbeat about the direction of the country.

Further, majorities of voters in both the early presidential primary states of New Hampshire (38% right direction-57% wrong track) and South Carolina (27% right direction-64% wrong track) believe the country is moving in the wrong direction.

- **The President’s job approval is inverted.**

In targeted congressional districts, President Obama’s approval rating is just 43% approve-56% disapprove, which is a notch worse than it was nationally during this time period (46%-50% in February 10-12 Real Clear Politics Average).

In New Hampshire, a state which Obama won in both 2008 and 2012, the President’s approval rating is underwater (46%-53%) and in South Carolina, Obama’s approval rating is even worse (40%-58%).

- **Republican candidates for Congress have an early advantage in ’16 target races.**

In targeted congressional districts, the generic Republican candidate holds a 39%-33% lead over the generic Democratic candidate. As expected, Independent voters will likely hold the key in 2016, as they are largely uncommitted this early on, giving the generic Republican candidate a modest 26%-20% advantage.

Independent men are currently supporting the generic Republican by 16 points (32%-16%), while Independent women are backing the generic Democratic candidate by eight points (18%-26%).

## ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ASYLUM AND REFUGEE SYSTEM

- **Few voters believe the country’s asylum and refugee system is “working well”; many believe it’s broken.**

Voters were provided with a brief overview of the U.S. asylum and refugee system:

*Around the world, more than 11 million men, women, and children have become refugees as they fled their home countries as a result of war or persecution, such as practicing the faith of their choosing, their social group or race, or even due to their political expression. Only a very small portion of these refugees are put into a refugee resettlement process to reach a country of safe harbor. Another small portion of these refugees who fear persecution in their home country come to the United States and ask for a form of legal protection known as asylum.*

After hearing that short synopsis, just 10% of voters in targeted congressional districts believe the system is “working well the way it is,” nearly one third (37%) say it is “in need of minor modifications to improve it,” and a plurality (41%) say it is “broken and in need of a major overhaul.”

	Working Well	Minor Modifications	Broken/ Major Overhaul
Targeted CDs	10%	37%	41%
Republicans	9%	29%	50%
Independents	7%	38%	42%
Democrats	14%	46%	29%
Independent Men	8%	33%	53%
Independent Women	3%	51%	42%
White Voters	6%	37%	53%
African-American Voters	10%	63%	23%
Hispanic Voters	3%	45%	46%
New Hampshire Statewide	8%	39%	38%
South Carolina Statewide	11%	34%	41%

- ***A Member of Congress’ support for improving and strengthening the system to better protect refugees and those seeking asylum can make voters more likely to support them in the next election.***

If voters learn their Member of Congress was an advocate for improving and strengthening the U.S. asylum and refugee system, fully 42% say that information would make them more likely to vote for their Member of Congress, with just 12% who say it would make them less likely.

Support of the nation’s asylum and refugee system could potentially provide a boost with Independent women – a key target demographic in any congressional campaign in 2016. By a 50%-9% margin, Independent women would be more likely to vote for a Member of Congress who was an advocate for improving and strengthening the U.S. asylum and refugee system to better protect those who are persecuted.

Further, supporting these issues does little harm for an incumbent, as a plurality (43%) indicate that their Member of Congress’ stance on the U.S. asylum and refugee system would make no difference in their vote.

## POLICY PROPOSALS

- ***Generally, there’s strong and across-the-board support for proposals to reform the system to better protect refugees and those seeking asylum.***

Voters in targeted congressional districts, as well as in both New Hampshire and South Carolina, support several different policy proposals to improve and strengthen the U.S. asylum and refugee system.

- By a 78%-21% margin, voters in targeted congressional districts agree that Congress should increase the number of judges who serve on immigration courts in order to help ensure fair and timely immigration hearings for those who are fleeing persecution from other countries.

Republicans (75%-23%), Independents (71%-29%) and Democrats (89%-10%) all support this proposal by a wide margin. The key target demographic of Independent women supports this proposal by an overwhelming 80%-18%.

This proposal is also supported in New Hampshire (77%-21%) and in South Carolina (76%-21%).

- By a 62%-33% margin, voters in targeted congressional districts agree that rather than holding asylum seekers in jails and detention facilities for months while they await the outcome of their immigration cases, the United States should increase the use of alternatives to detention for non-harmful people such as supervised release and electronic monitoring.

A majority of Republicans (50%-44%), Independents (58%-37%) and Democrats (78%-17%) all support this proposal by a wide margin. The key target demographic of Independent women supports this proposal by an overwhelming 71%-27%.

This proposal is also supported in New Hampshire (65%-28%) and in South Carolina (66%-30%).

- By a 69%-30% margin, voters in targeted congressional districts agree that Congress should increase funding for resettlement programs in the United States that help refugees across the world, including Christians and other religious minorities, victims of political persecution, and vulnerable women at risk of rape or other violence.

Republicans (56%-42%), Independents (65%-33%) and Democrats (87%-13%) all support this proposal by a wide margin. The key target demographic of Independent women supports this proposal by an overwhelming 76%-22%.

This proposal is also supported in New Hampshire (70%-25%) and in South Carolina (72%-26%).

- And, by a 58%-40% margin, voters in targeted congressional districts agree Congress should increase the amount of money and resources spent on the asylum and refugee system to conduct more timely interviews of potential asylum seekers.

While Republicans (49%-48%) and Independents (51%-46%) are a bit more mixed on this proposal, Democrats (76%-24%) support this proposal by a wide margin. Nearly two-thirds of the key target demographic of Independent women supports this proposal (62%-35%).

This proposal is also supported in New Hampshire (61%-33%) and in South Carolina (63%-35%).

## **BOTTOM LINE**

An overwhelming majority of voters in targeted congressional districts and in both New Hampshire and South Carolina believe the country's asylum and refugee system is in need of reform to better protect refugees and those seeking asylum. And, support of policy proposals to improve and strengthen the nation's asylum and refugee system runs wide and deep among voters across party lines.

Importantly, this survey data indicates a Republican Member of Congress will do no harm among the GOP base by supporting these proposals, and even stands to benefit electorally from being viewed as an

advocate for improving and strengthening the country's asylum and refugee system – especially among the key target demographic of Independent women in the upcoming 2016 elections.