

To: *MoveOn.org*

From: Celinda Lake, Daniel Gotoff, and Tracey Johnstone, *Lake Research Partners*

Re: Key Findings from New Poll of Likely Voters on Syrian Refugees

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A new nationwide survey of likely voters conducted on behalf of *MoveOn.org* reveals that Americans hold much more moderate views on how to address the refugees fleeing violence in Syria than certain elected leaders—and the echo chamber in the media—might suggest.<sup>1</sup> The notion of a population living in fear may make for good television—even good politics depending on one’s level of cynicism—but it is neither a fair nor accurate depiction of how the American people are approaching this issue. In contrast to the media’s depiction and the Right’s fearmongering, the truth is that a strong plurality of voters support the United States accepting a limited number of refugee families looking to escape the violence of civil war and ISIS in their country, provided of course that they have been rigorously vetted. Moreover, support for this position only expands once voters hear more about facts surrounding the debate. This is a pattern that holds true not only for Democrats—and those more weakly aligned with the Democratic Party, but also for independent voters as well. The reality is that the views of ordinary Americans’ on this issue run far more rational and moderate than the spectacle that has played out on television and in governmental bodies over the course of the past week.

This survey was fielded just eight days after the attacks in Paris, with images of the wanton violence—and the specter of imminent assaults on American soil—still suffusing the media coverage. Yet only 18% of respondents say they are “very worried” about themselves or members of their families being the victims of terrorism. Another 28% are “somewhat worried”, but a majority is either only “a little worried” or “not worried at all” about this hypothetical scenario (24% and 28%, respectively). In another sign that people are placing the events in France in a larger context is the fact that “Jobs and the economy” (21%) has already passed “Terrorism” (15% each) as the primary concerns voters cite when deciding how to vote.

When it comes to the issue of refugees fleeing the violence in Syria, fully 59% of respondents report having heard “a lot” and another 23% say they have heard “some” about the issue. And yet despite the coverage of this issue having been placed firmly against the backdrop of the attacks in Paris, Americans are not in a state of panic and still demonstrate a willingness and ability to think and behave as rational adults. In fact, a solid 59% majority of voters says the U.S. should do “more” to help refugees or that it should continue to offer its current level of help (33% and 26%, respectively). Only slightly more than one-third of voters (34%) believe the U.S. should do less in this regard.

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Tel: 202.776.9066 <sup>1</sup> Lake Research Partners designed and administered a national survey of 800 registered likely 2016 voters conducted by telephone from November 21<sup>st</sup> through 24<sup>th</sup>, including and oversample of weakly-aligned Democrats (n=100) and independents (n=100). The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 4.0%.  
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On the central question of U.S. policy regarding the refugee crisis, a 47% plurality of voters favors the U.S. “accepting a limited number of refugee families from the civil war and ISIS in Syria, provided they have been rigorously screened”. Just one-third (33%) of voters are opposed and another one-in-five are unsure. Support for accepting Syrian refugees under these circumstances includes a majority of Democrats, including roughly half of weakly-aligned Democrats<sup>2</sup> (49% favor/ 27% oppose), as well as a solid plurality of independents (43% favor/ 29% oppose).

Moreover, attitudes are far from calcified, with Americans quite open to additional information on this debate. After hearing arguments both in favor of—and *opposed to*—the U.S. accepting a limited number of refugee families, support grows to claim a majority of the electorate (52% favor/ 34% oppose). While Republicans grow more opposed in this scenario, the opposite is true for both independents and Democrats. A 56% majority of independents supports the U.S. accepting Syrian refugees after being read messages in support of that policy, with just 27% in opposition. Among weakly-aligned Democrats, nearly two-thirds support that position (64% favor/ 25% oppose).

The expansion in support for accepting Syrian refugees is a testament both to Americans’ innate desire to be helpful in such crisis situations, as well as to the persuasive nature of the facts surrounding this debate. Effective messages remind Americans who the refugees are: the overwhelming majority are women, children, and families. Just as important is noting that they are fleeing the very same people we are fighting; in other words, that ISIS is our common enemy. These messages also reinforce the reality that only a very limited number of refugees are being considered for acceptance into the U.S. Third, the arguments that resonate outline the highly rigorous vetting process—a multi-layered and intensive effort that involves multiple national security, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies. Last, the most convincing arguments appeal to American values—citing “the golden rule” of treating others as we want to be treated, sense of compassion, and the importance of acting out of knowledge and not fear in such circumstances. The text of the most persuasive messages is included below.

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<sup>2</sup> Weakly-aligned Democrats includes voters who identify as Democrats, but not so strongly, as well as voters with partisan support scores of 70-90 from the Catalist voter file.

## ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF THE UNITED STATES ACCEPTING A LIMITED NUMBER OF SYRIAN REFUGEES INTO THE COUNTRY

(% Convincing)

	Total	Weakly-Aligned Democrats	Independents
<p><b>*[Golden Rule] Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us feared for our life or for our family, we'd like to know that others would help us to safety. Throughout history, people have risked everything for the hope of a better life. As Americans, we should keep our minds, our hearts, and our borders open to people in need who just want to come here and start a new life.</b></p>	61% convincing	76% convincing	70% convincing
<p><b>*[Refugees Fleeing ISIS/Holocaust Comparison] These refugee families are the same people that we've seen dying in an effort to escape the civil war and violence in their country. They're fleeing people that chop off heads, torture and burn people alive, and force children to become soldiers. They risk starvation, disease, rape, and being sold into slavery to get to freedom. We should not make the same mistake we did in 1938, when we turned away refugees from Europe who later became victims of Hitler's Holocaust.</b></p>	60% convincing	67% convincing	51% convincing

<p><b>*[SSA Smart but Humane/Pope] Most refugees are families that are fleeing horrific violence, persecution, and repression in the hope of making a better life for themselves and their children. While we should be careful, smart, and vigilant with everyone who wants to come to our country, religious leaders of all denominations, including the Pope, have said we should not lose our humanity by judging our fellow human beings guilty simply because of where they're from. We can do this and still protect American security.</b></p>	63% convincing	77% convincing	69% convincing
<p><b>*[Refugees are Fleeing ISIS] These refugee families are the same people that we've seen dying in an effort to escape the civil war and violence in their country. They're fleeing ISIS, the people who chop off heads, torture and burn people alive, and force children to become soldiers. They risk starvation, disease, rape, and being sold into slavery to get to freedom. As a caring country, we've always admitted people fleeing violence and tyranny. We can and must maintain our values and our safety.</b></p>	64% convincing	70% convincing	73% convincing
<p><b>*[Since 9-11 with 1500] Since 9-11, the United States has accepted over one and a half million people seeking refuge. That includes 1,500 refugees from Syria since the war began. Still, there has never been a terrorist attack committed in the U.S. by someone who entered as a refugee. People seeking refuge in America go through the most rigorous screening process in the world to ensure they present no risk to national security. This is a process that combines law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and the military.</b></p>	57% convincing	59% convincing	64% convincing

<p><b>*[What ISIS Wants] Being against helping refugees is exactly what ISIS wants. Their goal is to make us so afraid that we abandon the principles that make us Americans, and in doing so, feed the ISIS narrative that America is hostile to Muslims, which bolsters their recruitment efforts. This actually endangers our security. We should do what we do best and that is to be American – take the lead in fighting violence, hate, and fear.</b></p>	57% convincing	69% convincing	59% convincing
<p><b>*[American Tradition/ Statue of Liberty] "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" is engraved on the statue of liberty for a reason. Throughout history the U.S. has offered refuge to people fleeing persecution, torture, and terror. We are talking about a limited number of refugee families and children who seek the American values of safety and freedom. Our nation is strong and secure enough to live up to our best traditions and safely welcome these refugees.</b></p>	63% convincing	78% convincing	58% convincing

- Indicates split sampled question.

The results of this study suggest that this is an issue where the debate needs to be defined and engaged. American voters' perspectives on this issue have been badly mischaracterized by some in the media and on the Right. Moreover, speaking—and acting—out of knowledge and strength, rather than fear, is a winning posture for progressive leaders, including those who occupy office on “red” turf and rely on the votes of weakly-aligned Democrats and independents. Last, this is an issue that can serve to remind progressives of the core values that animate the progressive movement.