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Independent Women and the 2016 Elections Findings from a National Survey of Voters

To: Interested Parties

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

A recent poll of voters commissioned by American Women¹ shows that politically independent women — viewed as key “swing” voters in the 2016 electorate — express strong preferences for policies and candidates that promote an economic agenda that supports women and families.

Economic concerns are at the forefront for independent women, outpacing security concerns on both personal and national levels. These women say economic security is a primary factor in their voting decisions, while priorities like building a wall along the Mexican border and banning Muslims from entering the country are among the three least important issues. Independent women strongly favor policies that will grow their economic security, including equal pay for women, access to reproductive health care, job training, college affordability, and paid medical and family leave.

This is not to say that these women do not express concerns about security; they worry about gun violence and terrorism as much as other voters in the electorate. However, they worry just as much about security issues in their community as larger national security concerns, and they express clear preferences for progressive approaches on these issues.

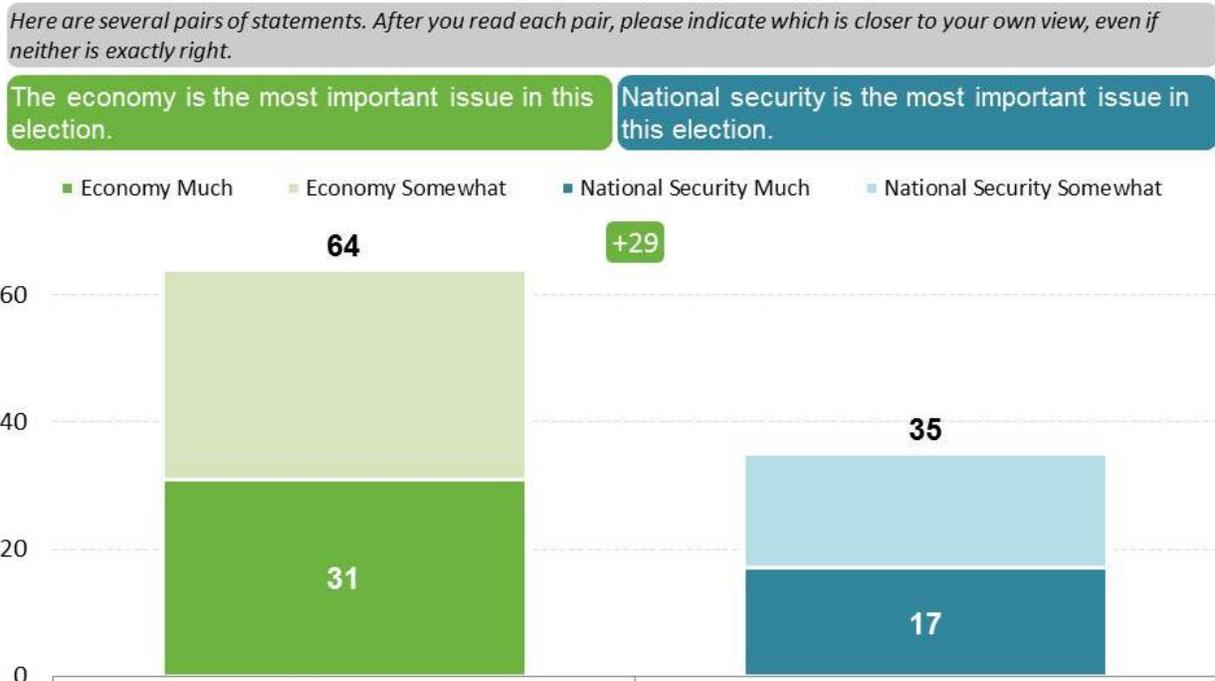
The following memo is based on a national online survey of 800 registered voters, with an oversample of 200 self-identified independent women voters and independent women voters who have voted for both Republicans and Democratic candidates in the past, for a total sample size of 1,000 registered voters and 255 independent women, weighted to be representative of registered voters nationally. The survey was conducted from August 19-25, 2016.

Independent women view the economy as their central concern

The state of the economy is driving the concerns and voting decisions of independent women in this election year. Sixty-four percent of independent women say that the economy is the most important issue in this election.

¹ Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research conducted a national online survey of 800 registered voters, with an oversample of 200 self-identified independent women voters for a total sample size of 1,000. The survey was conducted from August 19-25, 2016.

Figure 1: Economy versus National Security concerns, by Independent Women



When asked to use their own words, independent women cite economic concerns as the biggest problem facing both the country and their own families personally, well above national security and safety in both instances. When it comes to the top problems facing the country, independent women, more than half (51 percent) provide a response related to the economy, ranging from jobs and the cost of living to health care and education costs, to income inequality and taxes. Just one quarter of these women offer responses related to security. In their own daily life, more than 6 out of 10 (63 percent) describe worries over finances, jobs, retirement, and costs of health care, education, and childcare as a top problem.

The priorities of independent women in this election year reflect these concerns. Like the overall electorate, independent women see the next Congress' priorities like protecting retirement benefits and addressing the federal deficit as its biggest priorities, followed afterward by protecting threats from terrorism and Zika. These independent women are more likely than voters overall to see economic issues like college affordability and equal pay as the next Congress' biggest priorities.

Figure 2: Top 4 most important things for Congress or the government to focus on in the next two years, by Total Registered Voters and Independent Women

	RVs	Ind Women (ID)
Protecting retirement benefits, like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security	35	32
Reducing the federal deficit and government spending	33	30
Protect the country from terrorism and threats like Zika	26	27
Prevent gun violence by requiring mandatory background checks	20	18

When asked to rank specific issues relative to their importance in making a voting decision, independent women again place economic issues at the top. Sixty percent rank making women and families more economically secure among their top three priorities, while 49 percent place supporting parents via paid medical and family leave, and affordable childcare in the top three. Independent women see addressing gun violence and public health issues as important as well, though more extreme proposals like building a wall on the Mexican border and banning Muslims from entering the country fall to the bottom tier of independent women's voting issues.

Figure 3: Most important issue when it comes to making decisions about voting, by Independent Women

	Ind Women (ID) % ranking #1-#3
Making women and families more economically secure by ensuring equal pay for equal work	60
Requiring background checks to purchase guns and passing a ban on assault weapons	59
Increase funding to combat Zika and other public health epidemics	52
Supporting parents who work by providing paid sick days, paid family and medical leave, and affordable childcare	49
Maintaining the U.S. commitment to our NATO allies in Europe	34
Building a wall along the Mexico border to stop illegal immigrants from entering this country	23
Preventing Muslims from entering the United States	20
Strengthening laws to protect employees from sexual harassment and violence in the workplace	18

Independent women strongly support an economic agenda that helps women and families

Given the financial concerns facing independent women and the issues they are considering in making their voting choices, it is not surprising that these women strongly favor policies that will address these economic concerns. These include equal pay for women and access to

reproductive health care, job training, college affordability, paid medical and paid family leave, and affordable long-term care. While these policies are also popular among the overall electorate, independent women express a greater intensity of support for this agenda.

Figure 4: Policies favored by Independent Women and Total Registered Voters

	% Ind women (ID) Strongly favor	% Ind women (ID) Total favor	% RVs Strongly favor	% RVs Total favor
Ensure that women get equal pay for equal work in order to make women and families economically secure, protect workers from retaliation, hold employers accountable, and provide salary negotiation training for women and girls.	72	93	57	89
Stop insurance companies from charging women more for the same health care coverage as men, and fight efforts to end free coverage for mammograms and birth control.	65	83	54	80
Ensure access to reproductive health care, including birth control.	63	86	50	76
Provide more skills training and apprenticeship opportunities for good, available jobs that pay.	56	90	52	91
Lower student loan interest rates and rising college tuition costs.	55	88	51	84
Establish paid family and medical leave for workers who have new babies, are caring for aging parents, or have ill family members.	51	85	42	77
Require businesses to provide 7 paid sick days each year for all of their employees.	47	81	40	76
Invest in home care workers, who are caring for seniors and people with disabilities in their homes so they can live with dignity and independence.	44	91	41	87

Security concerns among independent women center on issues like gun violence and profiling, with a preference for progressive solutions

While economic concerns dominate the landscape for independent women, these women do also express real concerns about threats at both local and national levels. They report the most concerns about gun violence and mass shootings (60 percent very concerned), followed by terrorist attacks from groups like ISIS (54 percent) and racial profiling and mistreatment of people of color by law enforcement (42 percent very concerned).

Figure 5: Level of concern about issues by Independent Women

	% Ind women (ID) Very Concerned	% Ind women (ID) Total Concerned
Gun violence and mass shootings	60	89
Terrorist attacks from groups like ISIS on American soil	54	85
Racial profiling and mistreatment of people of color by law enforcement	42	74
Abuse of opioids and prescription drugs in communities	33	72
Illegal immigration and refugees coming into this country.	31	63
Zika or other public health issues	25	72
Physical violence from a romantic partner or loved one	24	49
Sexual harassment in the workplace	18	52

These independent women express strong preferences for aggressive action to address their concerns over gun violence. Sixty-one percent want to see gun laws made stronger compared to just 39 percent who want to keep gun laws as they are. When independent women are asked about including mandatory background checks and preventing people on the terror watch list from buying guns, an overwhelming 81 percent of independent women prefer that over keeping gun laws as they currently are (17 percent).

A telling trend emerges on the fight against terrorism. Millennial women trust Democrats over Republicans to keep us safe at home and abroad in the fight against terrorism, and unmarried women trust Democrats more by 8 points. Women of color are more likely to trust Democrats by 59 points. At the top of the ticket, independent women clearly push back on the foreign policy proposals of Donald Trump. When asked who they trust more to keep us safe at home and abroad, independent women overwhelmingly choose Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump, with 63 to 33 percent.