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Fusion 2016 Issues Poll: First Spouses

Young adults overwhelmingly prefer Bill Clinton to Melania Trump for first spouse – but they also divide over whether the person filling those shoes should play a more traditional role or be more involved in developing policy.

Being satisfied with choosing the White House china sounds out of character for Clinton, a confirmed policy wonk who’d not only be the nation’s first first gentleman, but also the first former president in the position of first spouse.

That said, the latest Fusion 2016 Issues Poll, based on telephone interviews with a random national sample of 910 18- to 35-year-olds, finds that 46 percent of young adults want the next first spouse to play a traditional role like many past first ladies, compared with 44 percent who would prefer more involvement in policy.

At the same time, 61 percent say they’d vote for Clinton in a hypothetical first-spouse ballot, vs. just 16 percent for Melania Trump, a former model.

There’s significant pushback against the idea of a policy-oriented spouse even among Democratic-leaning groups. Even those who see Clinton as the better potential policy adviser split on whether they want traditional or a policy-focused first spouse, 45-47 percent.

Further, only about half of those who prefer the former president for first spouse prefer more policy involvement, similar to the levels among Democrats, liberals and nonwhites, and peaking at just 55 percent of very liberal young adults. Anywhere from 36 to 42 percent of these groups say they’d rather have the next first spouse play a traditional role. But they also overwhelmingly back Clinton over Trump for first spouse.

	Traditional role	More policy involvement	- First spouse vote -	
			M. Trump	B. Clinton
All 18-35s	46%	44%	16	61
Democrats	38	54	8	85
Republicans	65	27	46	28
Independents	47	45	13	61
Liberals NET	42	48	7	75
Very	36	55	6	75
Somewhat	47	43	7	75
Moderates	45	46	17	61

Conservatives	55	36	29	46
Prefer:				
B. Clinton	41	51		
M. Trump	61	34		

The opposite is the case for more Republican-leaning groups. Those who prefer Trump for first lady more decisively prefer a traditional role to policy involvement, 61-34 percent. The margins are similar among Republicans and slightly narrower among conservatives. Regardless, Trump is preferred as first lady by fewer than half of young Republicans (46-28 percent), and young conservatives actually prefer Clinton (46-29 percent).

The poll also finds majorities siding with Clinton over Trump across a number of attributes – not a surprising result given the Democratic lean of this population. Clinton does best on who would be a better policy adviser to the president, 77-10 percent, and who better understands problems of “people like you,” 65-13. Clinton prevails by narrower margins on the two other attributes tested – who would be a better role model for young people, 57-21 percent and who is more honest and trustworthy, 51-27 percent. The rest, in each case, volunteered “neither” or had no opinion.

Even a majority of young Republicans say Clinton would be a better policy adviser (56-28 percent) and only slightly lean toward Trump on empathy (40-34 percent). By contrast, they’re strongly in Trump’s corner on honesty (70-19 percent) and on who would be a better role model (58-20 percent).

Independents and moderates side with Democrats and liberals in preferring Clinton on all the attributes tested, and they’re joined by conservatives on empathy, role model and policy advice.

	Policy adviser		Understanding		Role model		Honesty	
	Trump	Clinton	Trump	Clinton	Trump	Clinton	Trump	Clinton
Democrats	4%	93%	4%	88%	9%	81%	13%	74%
Republicans	28	56	40	34	58	20	70	19
Independents	10	77	13	64	19	56	23	48
Liberals	5	86	6	78	12	71	14	64
Moderates	12	77	14	63	23	54	29	49
Conservatives	17	70	24	54	34	46	45	38

GROUPS – Beyond politics and ideology, the results are marked by demographic differences, gender and race chief among them.

Young white men are comparatively the most pro-Melania Trump group among young adults. They only prefer Clinton to Trump as first spouse by an 18-point margin, vs. a 45-point margin among white women and a 64-point margin among nonwhites. They also say Trump’s more honest and trustworthy than Clinton and split over who’s a better role model. Others side broadly with Clinton on all the attributes, though a bit more narrowly on trustworthiness than others.

More whites (53 percent) want a more traditional vs. a policy role for the first spouse compared with blacks (39 percent) and Hispanics (35 percent). The difference among whites is driven by young white men; white women split about evenly on the question.

Gender differences among young nonwhites are nonexistent or more muted. In one gap, nonwhite women are 14 points more likely than nonwhite men to say that Clinton's more honest and trustworthy than Trump, similar to the difference among white men and women.

	---- Role ---		- Vote -		Adviser		Empathy		Role model		Honesty	
	Trad.	Policy	Tr.	Cl.	Tr.	Cl.	Tr.	Cl.	Tr.	Cl.	Tr.	Cl.
All	46%	44%	16%	61%	10%	77%	13%	65%	21%	57%	27%	51%
Men	50	41	22	56	13	77	17	63	28	53	35	44
Women	42	47	10	67	8	77	9	68	15	61	19	58
Whites NET	53	38	23	53	14	72	19	56	30	46	36	42
Men	58	33	31	49	18	71	24	53	39	41	45	36
Women	46	45	13	58	11	73	13	60	20	50	26	49
Nonwhites NET	38	50	8	72	6	84	7	77	11	72	16	62
Men	37	53	10	66	6	86	8	76	13	70	21	54
Women	39	48	7	77	5	82	5	77	9	73	12	68
Black	39	50	4	82	2	92	3	83	7	78	12	73
Hispanic	35	54	9	71	7	84	7	78	11	74	16	60

METHODOLOGY – This Fusion 2016 Issues Poll was conducted by landline and cell phone interviews August 3-16, 2016, among a random national sample of 910 adults age 18 to 35. Results have a margin of [sampling error](#) of 3.5 points for the full sample, including the survey's design effect. This survey was produced for Fusion by [Langer Research Associates](#) of New York, N.Y., with sampling, data collection and tabulation by SSRS/Social Science Research Solutions of Media, Pa. See methodological details [here](#).

Full results follow.

* in data columns = less than 0.5 percent

1. Thinking about the presidential election, if voters were allowed to cast a separate ballot for (first lady) or (first husband), would you vote for (Melania Trump) or (Bill Clinton)?

	Melania Trump	Bill Clinton	Other (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No opinion
08/16/16	16	61	1	17	5

2. Regardless of whom you'd support, who do you think [ITEM] – (Melania Trump) or (Bill Clinton)?

08/16/16 - Summary Table

	Melania Trump	Bill Clinton	Neither (vol.)	Both (vol.)	No opinion
a. Is more honest and trustworthy	27	51	13	*	9
b. Better understands the problems of people like you	13	65	14	*	6
c. Would be a better role model for					

young people	21	57	15	*	7
d. Would be a better policy adviser to the president	10	77	7	*	5

3. Would you prefer to see the next president's spouse (play a traditional role as many first ladies have done in the past) or (be more involved in policy making)?

	Traditional	Involved	Depends (vol.)	No opinion
08/16/16	46	44	3	7

*** END ***