



Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund



To: Interested Parties

**From: Page Gardner, Women's Voices. Women Vote Action Fund
Lake Research Partners**

**Re: Portrait of Young Unmarried Women and their Potential Impact on
the 2008 Elections**

The American electorate is undergoing a revolutionary change. Unmarried voters have emerged as a real force in politics like never before with unmarried women leading the way. Young unmarried women¹ are key to understanding this emerging voting bloc. Young unmarried women, however, are under-represented at the ballot box. They remain even less likely to be registered to vote and less likely to turn out and vote on Election Day compared to their older unmarried or younger married counterparts.

Why they Matter:

Unmarried women, in general, are the most change oriented demographic group in the country today. When they vote that has meant punching the ballot for progressive candidates and causes. Despite lower levels of turnout leading up to the last Presidential Election, today's cohort of young voters – especially young women – turned out in record numbers in both 2004 and 2006. Importantly, they represent an opportunity for realigning politics. Many academic studies show that if a voter votes for the same party in three consecutive elections they disproportionately carry that political identification with them for the rest of their lives. In 2004, young unmarried women voted for Senator John Kerry against President George Bush, and in 2006, they voted for Democrats in important races for Congress and the Senate. ***Republicans and Democrats alike have reason to pay attention to this demographic. Democrats, because this could be the key-third election in a row that young unmarried women support Democratic candidates and lock themselves into part of the Democratic base. Republicans, because they have a real interest in preventing that from happening and targeting their own base within this group of voters.***

Their Growing Political Impact:

Census data shows unmarried women under age 30 comprise eight percent of all adult citizens. Young unmarried women outnumber married women in the same age group by just over three-to-one: 16.4 million women under age 30 are unmarried and 5.4 million are married.² Even over the past few years it is remarkable how the marriage rate for young women has dropped. In 1994

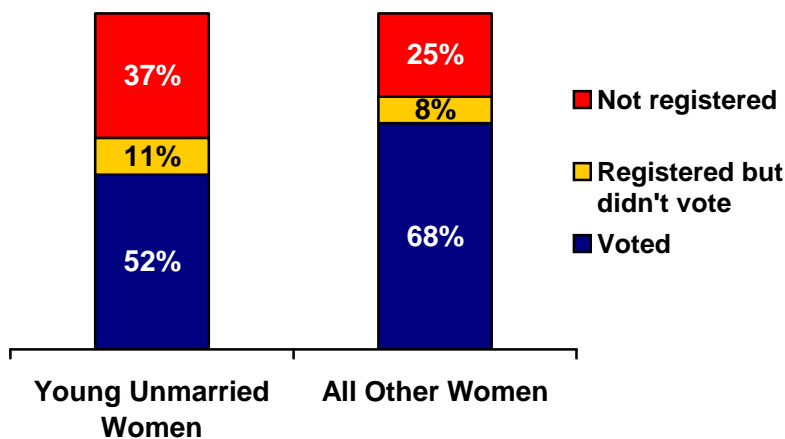
¹ For the purposes of this report, “young unmarried women” are female American citizens between the ages of 18 and 29.

² American Community Survey, 2006.

one in three women under age 30 (35 percent) were married. Today, only one in four women under age 30 are married (25 percent) – a ten point drop in thirteen years.³

The electoral strength of young unmarried women has grown tremendously. Almost four million unmarried young women voted in the 2006 general elections – an increase of almost seven hundred thousand voters over the 2002 general elections.⁴ The same held true comparing the last two presidential elections. In 2004, there were over 2.6 million more unmarried women under age 30 who voted compared to 2000.⁵ Millennial voters (or Generation Y) rival Baby Boomers in size and by 2015 this generation will make up over one third of the entire electorate. And Millennials are also the most diverse generation ever. Four in ten (40%) young unmarried women identify themselves as something other than white, including 17% who are African Americans, 16% who are Latinas, and 5% who are Asian Americans. More than two-thirds (69%) of young unmarried women are under 25 years old.⁶

Unmarried women, though, are still considerably less likely to register and to go to the polls than their older, married sisters. In 2004, almost half (48%) of young women on their own said they did not participate in the general election; nearly four in ten (37%) said they were not even registered to vote while one in ten (11%) said they were registered but did not vote. Among all



other women, less than a third (32%) said they did not vote in 2004, including only 25% who said they were not registered and 8% who said they were registered but did not vote.

Unmarried women under age 30 are a vital component to a progressive voting-majority in America. Unmarried young women supported John Kerry by a 29-point

margin over George Bush in 2004 (64 percent for Kerry to 35 percent for Bush),⁷ and while Vice-President Al Gore lost married women under age 30 to Bush (52 percent Bush to 45 percent Gore) he overwhelmed Bush by nearly a two-to-one margin among unmarried women in that age cohort (61 percent Gore to 33 percent Bush) – a 35-point marriage gap.⁸ ***Clearly, marital status is the defining demographic difference even among younger women.***

What do Young Women Want?

Young unmarried women are very concerned about pocketbook issues (including the economy, wages and salaries, health care costs, and other like issue) because many struggle to make ends meet. While only 26 percent of all adult citizens have annual household incomes under \$30

³ Current Population Survey, October 1994/2007.

⁴ Current Population Survey, November 2002/2006.

⁵ Current Population Survey, November 2000/2004.

⁶ American Community Survey, 2006.

⁷ General Social Survey, 2006.

⁸ Voter News Service, National Election Polls, November 2000.

thousand, the rate is 29 percent for women under 30 without spouses.⁹ And while married women age 30 and over are more likely to be raising a child, one in five younger unmarried women are mothers (19 percent).¹⁰ Conventional wisdom has it that young voters are only concerned about Iraq or social issues – and they certainly are concerned about those issues. But, as Pew and other studies have shown, for the last four years young voters' top issue focus has also included economic concerns. In 2006, more than a quarter (28%) of adults under age 30 cited financial issues, including debt and the cost of living, as the most important problem facing them in their lives.¹¹

On average, young unmarried women have lived in their current homes for less time than their married and older counterparts. While only 14 percent of all adults have resided in their current home for less than one year, the rate is twice that for unmarried women under age 30 (28 percent).¹² ***If political campaigns, parties, and organizations reached a younger unmarried woman in the 2006 elections, one in four of them have since moved.*** This is vital information for organizations to understand if they want to bring more unmarried women into the electoral system.

Another key lifestyle trend is the growing preference for cell phones over landlines. The latest data shows that 8 percent of adult Americans live in a household that has at least one cell phone but no landline. Young unmarried women are far more likely to be in this category than older adults. While they only comprise 8 percent of the adult citizen population, they account for 18 percent of Americans who only have a cell phone. Over three quarters (76 percent) of young unmarried women have a cell phone, compared to only 65 percent of adults age 30 and over.¹³

Conclusions:

Young unmarried women have tremendous potential to shift the political landscape if they are mobilized. ***They are a major force for positive change in America, but they are underrepresented in the political system. Older women and married women are far more likely to register to vote and to turn out on Election Day. Organizations, candidates, and political parties can either ignore these trends and risk failure on November 4, 2008, or they can acknowledge the data and develop strategies for persuading and turning them out.*** Younger unmarried women need early attention and vigorous targeting schemes if they are to come off of the sidelines and participate in our democracy. Mobilizing these voters has the potential for long term realignment as well.

⁹ American Community Survey, 2006.

¹⁰ Current Population Survey, November 2006.

¹¹ Pew Research Center For The People & The Press, Generation Next Survey, September 2006.

¹² Current Population Survey, November 2006.

¹³ National Health Interview Survey, July-December 2006.