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## Unmarried Women Continue to Make Their Voices Heard

### Exit Surveys Show Unmarried Women Turnout Disproportionately High On Super Tuesday

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
Women's Voices, Women Vote Action Fund

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One trend many commentators have overlooked is the enormous contribution of unmarried women in both participating in the primaries and, at least on the Democratic side, in driving electoral outcomes. In the 2008 primaries so far, unmarried women have turned out in record numbers, accounting for 26 percent of the vote share in the Democratic primary on February 5<sup>th</sup>. Moreover, in looking at state-level results, their support—for either Obama or Clinton—has proven decisive in picking the winners.

This crucial segment of the electorate has earned a well established history in recent elections of changing political outcomes. In 2006, they supported Democrats running for Congress by a 66 to 32 point margin according to Edison/Mitofsky/CNN Network Exit Polls. In so doing, they made a huge—and indispensable —contribution to changing the leadership of the U.S. Congress. In contrast, married women, supported Republicans 50 – 48 percent.

While traditionally, they do not participate in the same numbers as their married sisters—in 2004, 20 million unmarried women did not vote—this is changing. In 2004, they were 22.4 percent of the electorate, while in 2000, they were 19 percent. Turnout in 2006 improved by 16 points, compared to 2002. As important, in looking at the results of early primary states<sup>1</sup> and on Super Tuesday, unmarried women have both turned out in record number – which is particularly important in the context of primary election where their turn out has historically been much less – and have changed political outcomes from state to state.

Overall, they made up 26 percent of the electorate in the February 5 Democratic primaries where marital status was asked, a number which exceeds their share of registered voters in these states. Indeed, in every state except three, unmarried women made up a larger

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<sup>1</sup> Please see: <http://www.wvvv.org/2008/2/1/early-state-elections-identify-importance-of-unmarried-women-in-electorate>

proportion of the Democratic primary electorate than suggested by their current registration. Marital status has not been asked in Republican primaries except in New Hampshire.

Unmarried women are the critical swing element in the 2008 Democratic primary. As expected, Hillary Clinton held her base among women on Super Tuesday, winning 53 – 43 percent. Among unmarried women, however, the margin was substantially closer in the 16 states where marital status was asked (51 – 46 percent Clinton, compared to 55 – 41 percent among married women). At the state level, the margin among unmarried women swings from a high of 43 points in favor of Clinton (Arkansas) to 40 points in favor of Obama in Georgia. In all, unmarried women picked the winner in 15 out of 16 states. Looking at some of the states outside of the South, Senator Obama dominated unmarried women in his home state of Illinois with a 37 point margin (compared to an 18 point margin among married women), as well as in Missouri where he won unmarried women 55-42 percent, allowing him a narrow win there. Clinton's strong support among unmarried women played a crucial role in her hard-fought wins in California, Massachusetts and New Mexico.

Unmarried women gave their first real signal that something has changed this year in Iowa, where they accounted for 26 percent of Democratic caucus-goers, while representing only 22 percent of all registered voters. In New Hampshire, in another indication for their determination to participate, one out of every nine unmarried woman in the Democratic primary was an unregistered voter the day before the event while one out of every 13 was an unregistered voter until the Republican primary.<sup>2</sup> On every primary election day since, they have continued to set records in turnout; we fully anticipate unmarried women to make sure their voices are heard in the primaries still to come and play a pivotal role in the general election to follow.

The data in this memo are drawn from the Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool of exit surveys in Super Tuesday primary and caucus states. Unfortunately, marital status was not asked consistently in these surveys. On the Democratic side, marital status was not asked in Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Minnesota and North Dakota. As indicated earlier, on the Republican side, marital status thus far has only been asked in New Hampshire and in none of the other primary states, making comparisons in Republican contests impossible. Marital status was not asked in 2004 primaries for Democrats or Republicans.

## Participation on Super Tuesday

Historically, unmarried women have not participated in our democracy to the same degree as other groups. In 2004, 41 percent of unmarried women (20 million in total) stayed home on Election Day. In 2006, however, things began to change and unmarried women's participation shot up by 16 points between 2002 and 2006. Greenberg Quinlan Rosner survey analysis has been monitoring huge and historic levels of interest among registered and (so far) unregistered women alike. Early primary states quantified this interest in the real world, and Super Tuesday provides convincing evidence that this interest and turnout has not abated.

Overall, unmarried women accounted for 26 percent of the Democratic primary electorate in the 16 states where marital status was asked.<sup>3</sup> This compares favorably to the 24 percent that unmarried women represent of registered voters in these states. Moreover, in 12 out of 16

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<sup>2</sup> New Hampshire allows same-day registrants to participate in the primary.

<sup>3</sup> Proportions of unmarried electorate represents an estimate from Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool of exit survey results in Super Tuesday primary and caucus states where they asked marital status.

states, unmarried women participated in greater numbers than registration figures would suggest.

Looking more specifically at the states, turnout for unmarried women in Georgia and New York state was particularly impressive, and in states which delivered decidedly different outcomes to the two major nominees.

■ **Figure 1: Unmarried Women Participating in 2008 Super Tuesday Primaries<sup>4</sup>**

#### Unmarried Women

	Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary	Proportion of registered voters	Proportion of 2006 vote
Georgia	34	24	23
New York	29	25	24
Delaware	29	23	24
Illinois	28	25	23
Alabama	28	24	21
California	25	24	23
New Jersey	25	24	21
Arizona	25	21	19
Missouri	25	22	19
Tennessee	24	25	23
Massachusetts	24	24	23
New Mexico	23	22	21
Arkansas	21	20	18
Connecticut	20	23	21
Utah	20	16	14
Oklahoma	15	20	16

Without question, participation in Democratic primaries is amplified by the overall Democratic-leaning of this cohort, but the consistency of this turnout across the country geographically, in states with large minority percentages and low minority percentages, in primary states and caucus states, strongly suggest a broad trend of record participation.

Much has been made, about the turnout among both young people and women in the 2008 primaries, and rightly so. But this focus obscures the crucial role unmarried women have played in driving turnout for both women and young people.. Women accounted for 58 percent of the turnout in on February 5; unmarried women accounted for fully 26 percent. Although young people's interest in this contest has been truly historic, young people overall (ages 18-29) accounted for 15 percent of the total vote on February 5, compared to 26 percent among unmarried women.

Moreover, looking specifically at the youth vote itself, unmarried women accounted for 46 percent of voters under 30 last Tuesday, and they also accounted for 45 percent of all women.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers showing proportion of registered voters and 2006 general election are from the 2006 Current Population Study.

## Still Swinging Singles

The Obama-Clinton contest has divided the party, at least to some degree, along lines of class, race and, of course, gender. However, looking at unmarried women, we see Clinton rolling up impressive margins in some states, with Obama countering in other states. Part of this reflects, of course, demographic variables within the unmarried women cohort. Unmarried women are disproportionately minority, and Barack Obama did much better among unmarried women in states with more women of color. Still, the results show huge swings among unmarried women, ranging from an Obama margin of 40 points in Georgia to a Clinton margin of 43 points in Arkansas.<sup>5</sup> In Illinois, unmarried women supported their Senator with 68 percent of vote. Unmarried women in New York returned the favor for their Senator with 59 percent of the vote.

In fact, unmarried women supported the winner in 15 out of 16 states and proved crucial in Obama's narrow win in Missouri, as well as Clinton's hard-fought victories in California, Massachusetts and New Mexico.

■ **Figure 2: Unmarried Vote in 2008 Democratic Primaries**

### Unmarried Vote – Super Tuesday

	Clinton	Obama	Margin
Alabama	37	61	Obama by 24 points
Arizona	52	40	Clinton by 12 points
Arkansas	70	27	Clinton by 43 points
California	58	37	Clinton by 21 points
Connecticut	55	43	Clinton by 12 points
Delaware	43	50	Obama by 7 points
Georgia	29	69	Obama by 40 points
Illinois	31	68	Obama by 37 points
Massachusetts	62	36	Clinton by 26 points
Missouri	42	55	Obama by 13 points
New Jersey	54	44	Clinton by 10 points
New Mexico	55	43	Clinton by 12 points
New York	59	39	Clinton by 20 points
Oklahoma	64	32	Clinton by 32 points
Tennessee	52	44	Clinton by 8 points
Utah	48	49	Obama by 1 point

## Conclusion

While this group may have been slow to take part in electoral politics in the past, so far in 2008 they are making their voices heard, and the available data points toward increased participation.

<sup>5</sup> Exit surveys, like any other, are subject to error and these figures may be overstated, even if the difference in these states is likely substantial.