



## **UNMARRIED WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS: AN OVERVIEW FOR THE 2008 ELECTION**

Unmarried women – women who are single, divorced, or widowed – are an increasingly large portion of the population and, while historically underrepresented at the polls, are participating in the electoral process at growing rates. It is impossible to understand the women's vote without examining the impact of marital status and differences in political outcomes between married women and unmarried women, the marriage gap. In November 2008, these women are poised to have an enormous impact in determining our next President, Congress, and more – if they indeed register and vote.

Women's Voices Women Vote Action Fund regularly commissions polls to identify what issues these women care about, whether they're hearing their concerns addressed by politicians, and what can be done to motivate them to be more heavily involved in our democracy. What follows is a summary of what we know about how electorally significant these women could be and what can inspire them to vote. The numbers are principally drawn from polls commissioned by WVVAF and conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, with some additional information from US Census data and other publicly available reporting.

### **IF UNMARRIED WOMEN TURN OUT TO VOTE, WILL IT MATTER?**

**Unmarried women, historically underrepresented in elections, have grown as a demographic and are increasingly politically engaged. They've already had a major influence in the primaries, and are poised to do so in the general – if they come out to vote.**

- **UNMARRIED WOMEN ARE 26% OF THE ELECTORATE, OR 53 MILLION PEOPLE.** Unmarried women currently make up 26% of the electorate – the same portion as married women and growing at twice the rate. Their role has risen consistently over the last few decades – in 1960, unmarried women made up 16% of the electorate. There are more than 53 million single, divorced, or widowed women who are adult US citizens.
- **2.3 MILLION MORE IN 2006, 4.4 MILLION MORE IN 2004:** From 2002 to 2006, unmarried women voters grew in absolute number more than either unmarried men, whose numbers also rose, or married men or women, both of whose numbers actually shrank. In 2006, there were 2.3 million more unmarried women voters than there had been in 2002. In 2004, there were 4.4 million more unmarried women voters than there had been in 2000.

- **RISING VOTER PARTICIPATION:** The number of unmarried women who are both registered and showing up to vote has been rising consistently in the past few elections. In 2004, 41 percent of eligible unmarried women failed to make it to the polls, compared to 29 percent among married women – and this difference in turnout arguably cost John Kerry the White House. But the 59% who did show up included 4.4 million unmarried women who had not voted in 2000. So far this season, we've seen unmarried women participate at markedly higher rates in the primaries.
- **DEMONSTRATED POWER IN 2004, 2006:** In recent years, unmarried women have consistently delivered powerful margins to candidates – when they came out. They tend to support the more progressive candidates. They supported Kerry over Bush by 62-37 percent in 2004 and went for Democratic candidates by an average margin of 65-32 percent in 2006 Congressional and Gubernatorial elections. In 2006 in particular, unmarried women supported Democratic candidates for the US Senate, 65-29; US House, 66-32; and Governor, 63-30.
- **3% INCREASE IN PARTICIPATION MEANS 2% MORE FOR MORE PROGRESSIVE CANDIDATE (OBAMA) OVERALL:** Given rising absolute size, rising size as a portion of the electorate, and rising participation rates, unmarried women will have significant power in November. If their participation rises by three percent, and their current support for Obama stays the same, that three percent would translate to at least another two percent of the total electorate in his column.

**Unmarried women have their own agenda. If and when they vote, they have the power to change election results. They've demonstrated clear preferences for progressive candidates in 2004 and 2006, and were a powerful force for electing Democratic majorities in the midterm elections.**

- **82 TO 9 SAY AMERICA IS ON 'WRONG TRACK':** Unmarried women describe America as "on the wrong track," rather than "going in the right direction," 82 to 9. That compares to 78 to 15 for the voting population overall.
- **CASE IN POINT – CLAIRE McCASKILL BEATS JIM TALENT:** The power of unmarried women at the polls can be seen clearly in the example of the Missouri Senate race between incumbent Jim Talent and challenger Claire McCaskill, which McCaskill won by a 3 point margin. However, among married men and married women, she polled worse than Talent, by 16 points and seven points respectively. What let her win was her support from unmarried people, particularly women: unmarried men preferred her to Talent by 21 points, and with unmarried women she had a 26 point margin.

**Whether or not you are married is a factor that cuts across other demographic dimensions: it's more important than whether you're young, educated, raising children, a union member, white, and more. The preference for more progressive candidates (Democrats) is fairly pronounced.**

- **36 POINT 'MARRIAGE GAP' AMONG YOUNG WOMEN:** Much has been made of young voters in this election, but whether or not they're married actually determines which party young women pick. Married women under 30 (and over 18) favor Republicans by 11 percent. Unmarried women under 30 favor Democrats by 25 points – a 36 point marriage gap.
- **40 POINT 'MARRIAGE GAP' AMONG EDUCATED WOMEN:** Married college graduate women favor Republicans by 6 percent; unmarried college educated women favor Democrats by 34 points, a 40 point difference.
- **30 POINT 'MARRIAGE GAP' AMONG UNION WOMEN:** Married women in union households favor Democrats by 13 points, whereas unmarried women in union households favor Democrats by 43 points, a 30 point gap. Adding race, the numbers change but the "marriage gap" remains: white married women in union households favor Republicans by one point, while white unmarried women in union households pick Democrats by 31, a 32 point gap.
- **46 POINT 'MARRIAGE GAP' AMONG WORKING WOMEN:** Married working women favor Republicans over Democrats by 16 percent; unmarried working women favor Democrats over Republicans, in contrast, by 30 percent – a 46 point difference. Adding race, this doesn't change very much: white married working women favor Republicans by 32 percent; white unmarried working women pick Democrats by 11 percent, a difference of 43 points.
- **47 POINT 'MARRIAGE GAP' AMONG WOMEN WITH CHILDREN AT HOME:** Married women with children in their household favor Republicans by 14 percent; unmarried women raising children favor Democrats by 33 percent, a 47 percent marriage gap. Limiting to white women, those who are married with children favor Republicans by 31 percent; white unmarried women with children favor Democrats by 6 points, a 37 point marriage gap.

## **WHAT CAN MOTIVATE UNMARRIED WOMEN TO VOTE?**

**Unmarried women are issue voters, and the more confident they are that a candidate will make real change on the issues that directly affect them, the more likely they are to vote. So what's on their agenda? Unmarried women are hard-pressed economically, unhappy about Iraq, and think the country is going in the wrong direction in even larger percentages than the general population or women more broadly.**

- **AS NOTED ABOVE, 82 TO 9 SAY AMERICA IS ON 'WRONG TRACK':** Unmarried women describe America as "on the wrong track," rather than "going in the right direction," 82 to 9. That compares to 78 to 15 for the voting population overall.
- **22% BELOW THE POVERTY LINE:** Unmarried women are struggling economically. Twenty-two percent of unmarried women live below the poverty line, as opposed to seven percent of married women. Of children younger than 6 who live in poverty, one

half live in a household headed by an unmarried woman. Forty-four percent of unmarried women have household incomes under \$30,000, while 43 percent of married women have household incomes of at least \$75,000.

- **1 IN 5 LACKS HEALTH INSURANCE:** Unmarried women are also less likely to have health insurance than married Americans. One in every five unmarried women is without healthcare, as opposed to one in seven Americans overall. Twenty-eight percent are on Medicare, as opposed to 20 percent of married Americans, and 11 percent are on Medicaid, as opposed 2 percent of married Americans.
- **GAS, HEALTHCARE TOP ECONOMIC PRIORITIES:** Unmarried women rank the rising price of gas and the high cost of healthcare as their top economic concerns (47% pick gas prices, 23% health care costs).
- **STRONG DOUBTS ABOUT MCCAIN:** At least two-thirds of unmarried women express serious doubts about John McCain because of his positions on Iraq, the economy, and health care. Sixty-nine percent express serious doubts or very serious doubts about him because of his health care policies; 67 percent because of his economic and equal pay policies; and 65 percent because of his support for continuing the war in Iraq. Clearly, he will have to change his policies to attract support of unmarried women.

**Neither candidate is fully utilizing his opportunity with unmarried women.**

- **MANY STILL NEED TO BE MOTIVATED TO VOTE:** There are significant numbers of unmarried women who are eligible to vote but do not. In 2004, 20 million unmarried women were eligible but did not vote; 15 million of those were unregistered, and 5 million were registered but did not go to the polls.
- **OBAMA IS FAVORED, BUT COULD DO BETTER:** While unmarried women overall are leaning to Obama, if you look at specific subgroups of unmarried women, there are some that lean Democratic at higher percentages than they lean to Obama. Among unmarried women, Obama is weakest with white seniors and white women without a college education. While 56 percent of white senior unmarried women are Democrats or lean Democrat, only 48 percent are backing Obama, a 12 point margin. Among unmarried white women with no college education, 54 percent are or lean Democratic, but 44 percent back Obama, a 10 point margin. Both candidates will have to work with these statistical realities in order to build support among unmarried women.