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## Unmarried Women Active in Early Contests Exit Surveys Show Unmarried Women Crucial Vote in Early Presidential Primaries

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

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Nearly a month into the actual voting, and the primary season so far has been marked both by on-going uncertainty about the outcome of either party's nomination and also a certain demographic balkanization in the vote. Barak Obama has found support among younger voters, better educated Democrats and African Americans. Hillary Clinton has drawn from an older, more blue collar base, women, union voters and Hispanics in Nevada. John McCain also pulls support from older voters as well as Independents, Mike Huckabee has not been able to break out of his evangelical base and Mitt Romney, at least in Michigan, won among upper income voters and very conservative voters suspicious of McCain.

And yet there is one other group that not only has participated in record numbers in the early decision-making, but also, at least on the Democratic side, has proven decisive in outcomes. In every early contest so far, unmarried women participated in numbers that match or, often, exceed their population. Unmarried women have made up at least one in five, often one in four, of Democratic decision-makers in every contest so far. For a group that historically has been underrepresented in electoral politics, that is an auspicious trend. Moreover, unlike say, younger voters who have been consistent and stable supporters of Obama, unmarried women have swung dramatically.

Clinton lost the women's vote in the Iowa caucus because she lost unmarried women. The biggest demographic swing in her New Hampshire comeback occurred among unmarried women, when she won a 51 percent majority of single women. This weekend, Obama won 57 percent of unmarried women in South Carolina on his way to a very convincing win.

Unmarried women tend to be younger than average, are more likely to be women of color and lower income. These demographic trends naturally drive some of the voting patterns we see; but even controlling for age and race, we see critical differences emerge between married and unmarried women, differences that have played a huge role in political outcomes. More to the point, unmarried women have emerged as one of the true swing groups in the Democratic primary for President.

The lessons are clear. Unmarried women are engaged in the nomination process for President and voting in record numbers. They further comprise one of the few true swing groups in the Democratic primary. As we look ahead to the critical contests on February 5<sup>th</sup> and the general election to follow, we can only expect unmarried women to continue to increase their participation in the electoral process and help drive political outcomes.

The data in this memo are drawn from the Edison/ Mitofsky National Election Pool of exist surveys in early primary and caucus states. Unfortunately, marital status was not asked consistently in these surveys. On the Democratic side, marital status was not asked in Nevada. On the Republican side, marital status thus far has only been asked in New Hampshire, making comparisons in Republican contests impossible. Marital status was not asked in 2004 primaries for Democrats or Republicans.

## Participation in 2008

In the 2004 presidential elections, 20 million unmarried women stayed home in 2004, representing 41 percent of this demographic group. By comparison just 29 percent of married women failed to vote four years ago. And yet, there is convincing evidence that things are improving. Between 2002 and 2006 the number of unmarried women voters in the electorate shot up over 16 percent. In WVWV tracking surveys, we have found unmarried women extremely interested in the 2008 elections, more interested, in fact, than married women.<sup>1</sup>

The most convincing evidence that unmarried women are poised to break participation records in 2008, however, emerges in the early primary states. Based on estimates from the exit surveys, in every meaningful contest held to date, unmarried women either matched or exceeded their proportion of the population and, more notably, their proportion of registered voters.

■ **Figure 1: Unmarried Women Participating in 2008 Primaries<sup>2</sup>**

	Iowa	New Hampshire	South Carolina
Proportion of total Population	22	21	24
Proportion of registered voters	20	19	23
Proportion of 2004 general election turnout	21	20	22
Proportion of 2006 general election turnout	19	17	21

<sup>1</sup> In an October, 2007 on Democracy Corps survey of 994 likely voters that included an oversample of 435 unmarried women, 77 percent of unmarried women voters expressed the highest level of interest in the election, compared to only 78 percent of married women.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers showing proportion of total electorate and turnout in the 2004 and 2006 general election and the registration figures are from the 2006 Current Population Study.

## Unmarried Women in Early Presidential Contests

Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus <sup>3</sup>	26	22	30
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Moreover, proportionately, unmarried women exceeded their proportion of registered voters in early Democratic contests; married women and married voters did not. Naturally, much of this reflects a stronger Democratic bias among unmarried women, but it also adds to growing evidence of higher rates of participation among unmarried women in the 2008 cycle.

■ **Figure 2: Proportion of Married and Unmarried Participating in 2008 Primaries<sup>4</sup>**

	Unmarried Women	Married Women	Total Married
<b>Iowa</b>			
Proportion of registered voters	20	32	66
Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus <sup>5</sup>	26	31	57
<b>New Hampshire</b>			
Proportion of registered voters	19	34	68
Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus	22	33	61
<b>South Carolina</b>			
Proportion of registered voters	23	32	62
Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus	30	32	58

The first-of-the-nation Iowa Caucus, in particular, serves as a bell weather. Overall, 347,000 people turned out for the Iowa caucuses, a 45 percent increase for the Democrats and a 30 percent increase for the Republicans. Unmarried women more than contributed to this record, contributing 26 percent of the vote share among Democratic Caucus goers. Unmarried women account for 22 percent of the total population in Iowa.

Even in less meaningful contests, we see sizable turnout among unmarried women. In Michigan, where, among major candidates, only Hillary Clinton's name appeared on the ballot, unmarried women made up 26 percent of the vote share. This compares to 24 percent of the population.

<sup>3</sup> Again, marital status was not asked in Iowa and South Carolina among Republican caucus/primary goers.

<sup>4</sup> Numbers showing proportion of total electorate and turnout in the 2004 and 2006 general election are from the 2006 Current Population Study.

<sup>5</sup> Again, marital status was not asked in Iowa and South Carolina among Republican caucus/primary goers.

## Swinging Singles

Major candidates have each carved out distinctive demographic bases and, at least in early contests, these bases have proven fairly stable. One of the few major groups that has emerged as a major swing part of the electorate, at least in the Democratic primary, has been unmarried women.

Obama beat Clinton in Iowa, in large part, because he successfully raided her base among women and ultimately carried women by five points. Among unmarried women, however, Obama won by 13 points. In New Hampshire, Clinton regained her footing among women overall with a 15-point margin. But her greatest improvement came among unmarried women (51 – 32 percent Clinton over Obama). The total swing among unmarried women—in five days—from Iowa to New Hampshire was 32 points, representing the biggest swing of any major demographic group.

Given the unique circumstances there, we should not invest too much significance to the findings in Michigan and Florida, though these states do not see any real difference between married and unmarried women. But in South Carolina, Obama regained his footing and unmarried women led the way (57 – 30 percent Obama among unmarried women). Among unmarried women, the swing from New Hampshire to South Carolina was 46 points.

■ **Figure 3: Role of Women in the 2008 Primary Season**

<b>Iowa</b>				
	Clinton	Obama	Other	Clinton/Obama Margin
<b>Women</b>	30	35	35	<b>+5 Obama</b>
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	27	40	33	<b>+13 Obama</b>
<b>Married Women</b>	32	30	38	<b>+2 Clinton</b>
<b>New Hampshire</b>				
	Clinton	Obama	Other	Clinton/Obama margin
<b>Women</b>	47	32	19	<b>+15 Clinton</b>
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	51	32	14	<b>+19 Clinton</b>
<b>Married Women</b>	45	32	23	<b>+13 Clinton</b>
<b>South Carolina</b>				
	Clinton	Obama	Other	Clinton/Obama margin
<b>Women</b>	30	54	16	<b>+24 Obama</b>
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	30	57	13	<b>+27 Obama</b>
<b>Married Women</b>	30	49	21	<b>+19 Obama</b>

■ **Figure 4: Swings Among Women**

<b>Clinton/Obama</b>		
	<b>New Hampshire– Iowa</b>	<b>South Carolina– New Hampshire</b>
<b>Women</b>	+20 toward Clinton	+39 toward Obama
<b>Unmarried Women</b>	+32 toward Clinton	+46 toward Obama
<b>Married women</b>	+11 toward Clinton	+32 toward Obama

### Inside the Numbers

Without question, the patterns we see emerging in the primary among unmarried women, both in terms of their preference and in terms of participation vote, reflect who these women are demographically. Marital status has served to amplify other demographic trends. Obama's victory in South Carolina, of course, owes a lot more to his support among African Americans than his support among unmarried women and, his victory in Iowa also owes much to his support among younger voters. The fact that unmarried women are both more likely to be young and women of color naturally affects his overall margin among unmarried women.

However, looking “inside the numbers” we see marital status playing an important role, even accounting for age and race. First, in terms of turnout, we see impressive results among younger unmarried women and older unmarried women alike. Both groups turned out in higher proportions in the Democratic primary than their percentage of registered voters would otherwise suggest.

■ **Figure 5: Proportion of Married and Unmarried Participating in 2008 Primaries<sup>6</sup>**

	Younger Unmarried Women (under 45)	Older Unmarried Women (45 and older)
<b>Iowa</b>		
Proportion of registered voters	8	12
Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus <sup>7</sup>	14	13
<b>New Hampshire</b>		
Proportion of registered voters	8	11
Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus	11	11
<b>South Carolina</b>		
Proportion of registered voters	12	12
Proportion of 2008 Democratic primary/caucus	15	14

In preference, looking exclusively at younger women (under 45) in Iowa, we see Obama winning unmarried women by a 49 – 16 percent margin, while posting a more narrow 51 – 27 percent margin among younger married women. In other words, marital status amplified the generation gap in the Obama-Clinton vote. Among older married women, John Edwards did fairly well, less so among older unmarried women. Marital status created more of a swing.

The transcendent variable in South Carolina, of course, was race and Obama’s support in the African American community is consistent among married and unmarried African American women. However, in the white community, married white women embraced the most historically conventional candidate in the field, John Edwards. Clinton owes much of her white margin to her support among white unmarried women. This group of women still proved they could swing.

<sup>6</sup> Numbers showing proportion of total electorate and turnout in the 2004 and 2006 general election are from the 2006 Current Population Study.

<sup>7</sup> Again, marital status was not asked in Iowa and South Carolina among Republican caucus/primary goers.

■ **Figure 5: Vote of White Women in South Carolina**

<b>South Carolina</b>			
	Clinton	Obama	Edwards
White Married Women	39	21	40
White Unmarried Women	48	20	32

### Conclusion

Census figures confirm that unmarried women continue to grow as a demographic group and they already outnumber Hispanic Americans and African Americans, combined. While historically underrepresented in our electoral process, unmarried women seem intent on participating in record numbers and having a real say in the critical decision facing this country in 2008. This ambition, so far, has had a real impact on the Democratic contest for President, will likely have an impact in primaries to come and almost certainly will have an impact in the general election in November.