



**Women's Voices. Women Vote.**

October 30, 2008

## Unmarried Women Driving New American Electorate Tracking Survey Results

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
Women's Voices. Women Vote

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On Tuesday, this nation will likely make history. It will make history in bringing a new American electorate to the polls. Evidence suggests those who show up on Election Day — or have already cast their ballot — will likely be more diverse racially, will be younger, more progressive and include a record number of unmarried women.

At 26 percent of the voting age population, unmarried women represent the largest progressive bloc in the country, outnumbering Hispanics and African Americans combined. Like some other groups, they have historically not participated in elections at the same level as others. This year, that might be changing. Based on evidence from the primary season, indications from early voting and long-standing tracking of commitment to vote in the tracking surveys, we should anticipate a record number of unmarried women making it to polls and contributing to a changing American electorate.

Far more certain than turnout, however, is the role marital status will play in electoral choices. Women's Voices. Women's Vote has tracked the impact of marital status on political decisions throughout the year. In tracking battleground survey results, we have never recorded a higher margin for Obama among unmarried women and have never recorded a bigger differential gap between how married women vote and how unmarried women vote ("the marriage gap").

This memorandum reflects data drawn from a October 26-28 tracking survey commissioned by Women's Voices. Women Vote of likely women voters in battleground states.<sup>1</sup> It also reflects data drawn from a concurrent Democracy Corps survey added to the WVVV survey to a total sample size of 1,030 cases with the overall margin of error for this survey at +/- 3 points.

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<sup>1</sup> These states include: CO, FL, IN, IA, MI, MN, MO, MT, NV, NH, NM, OH, PA, VA, and WI.

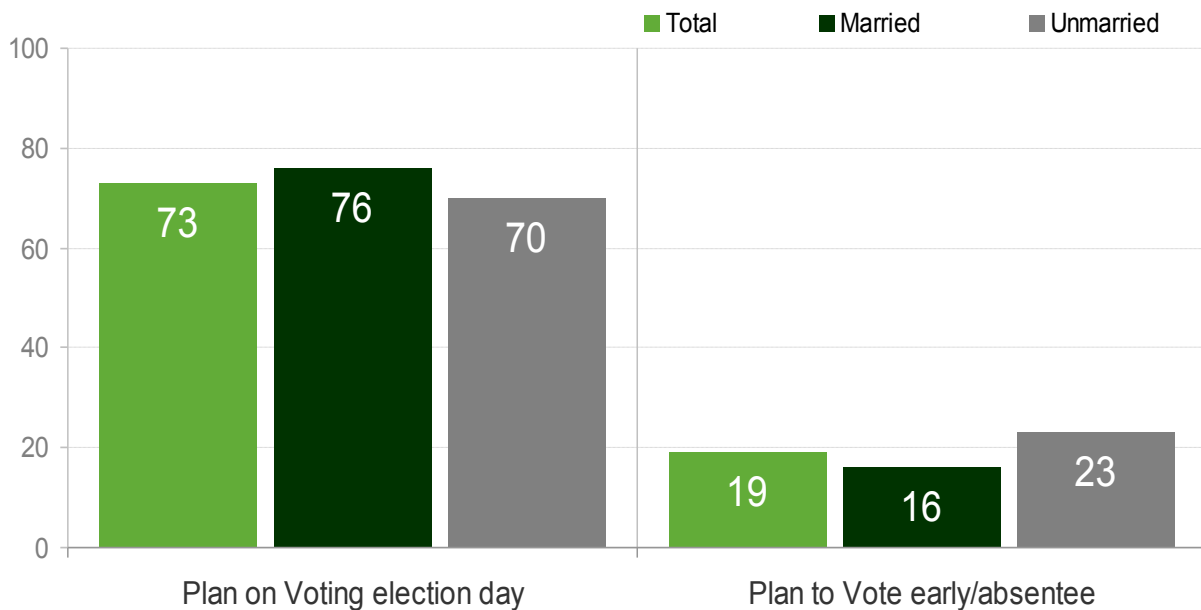
## Unmarried Women Voting Disproportionately Early

As of Wednesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, over 15 million votes have already been cast in the 31 states that allow early voting. This number almost certainly reflects an undercount, as polling stations throughout the country report long-lines and piles of so far unprocessed mail-in ballots. In North Carolina and Georgia, states that figure prominently in the outcome of the presidential race and the 60 votes in the U.S. Senate, fully 40 percent of the numerical 2004 electorate has already voted. One third (34 percent) of the 2004 electorate already voted in Florida.<sup>2</sup>

The early vote will play a key role in this election and certainly more voters will vote early than ever before. Unmarried women seem to be driving much of the early vote in this country. One in five women in our tracking survey have already voted (18 percent among married women, 19 percent among unmarried women). More unmarried women, however, intend to vote early. Moreover, among early voters, unmarried are far more likely to use the mail (46 percent) than married women (36 percent).

**Figure 1:** The Early Vote

*In the election for President this year, do you plan on voting on election day next November 4th, do you plan to vote early or absentee prior to election day, or have you already voted by absentee ballot or by early voting?*



Looking at registration figures among early voters in states that have both early voting and party registration, the early vote skews dramatically Democratic. In Iowa, for example, 49 percent of the early vote comes from registered Democrats, just 29 percent comes from registered Republicans. The WVWV survey bears this result. Obama leads 52 – 42 percent among all

<sup>2</sup> [http://elections.gmu.edu/early\\_vote\\_2008.html](http://elections.gmu.edu/early_vote_2008.html)

women in the survey; among early voters, he stretches his lead to 62 – 31 percent. Among early voters who are also unmarried, he generates a 70 – 23 percent lead over John McCain.

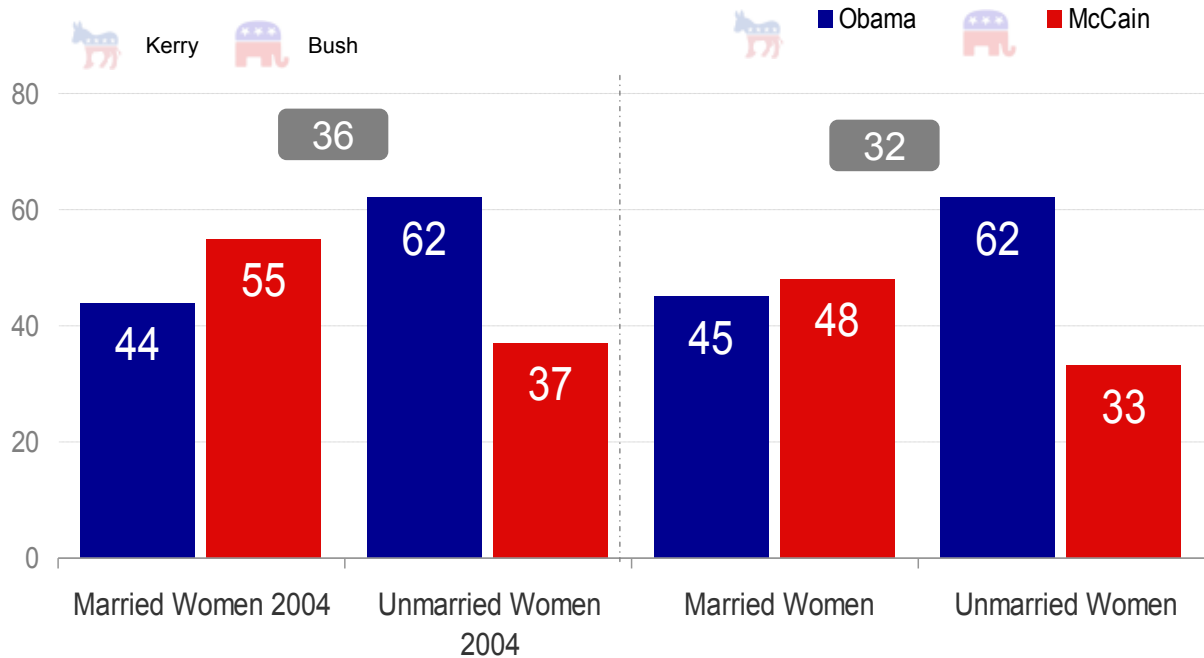
This election has already made history in early voting. If present trends continue, a majority of the votes will already be cast in a significant number of states before Tuesday. Unmarried women are playing a disproportionate role in that process.

## Record Marriage Gap

In the most recent (October 26-28) Democracy Corps survey, men support Obama by a 50 – 44 percent margin and women support Obama by a 52 – 42 percent margin. The gender gap here stands at five points. Other surveys show a bigger gender gap and whether that holds through election day we will find out in a week. However, this tracking survey shows a 32-point gap in how married and unmarried women are voting, the highest marriage gap we have recorded this year. Unmarried women back Obama 63 – 33 percent. This is, obviously, a very strong showing for the Democratic candidate, but it is also consistent with the 2006 national congressional elections (65 – 32 percent Democratic) and 2004 presidential election results in the battleground. Married women now divide fairly evenly in the battleground, also showing an improved Democratic performance from 2004.

**Figure 2: Married and Unmarried Women 2004 and 2008 Vote**

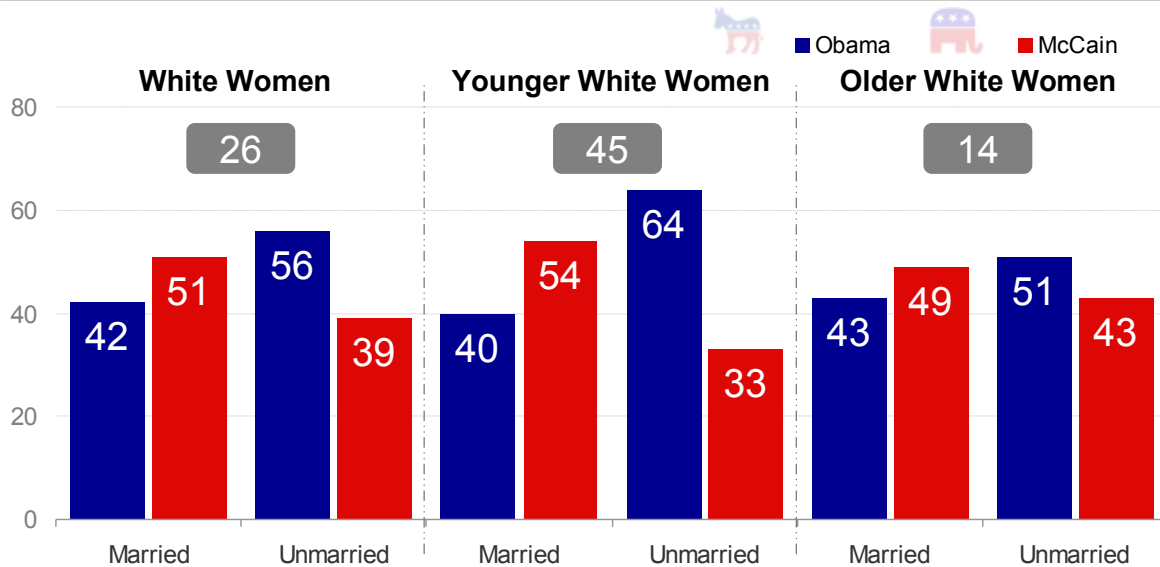
*If the election for president were held today and the candidates were – Democrat Barack Obama, Republican John McCain, Libertarian Party candidate Bob Barr or Independent candidate Ralph Nader, for whom would you vote?*



This marriage gap extends throughout the electorate. The youth vote, of course, will be a big story next Tuesday, but looking only at women, Obama enjoys a 64 – 33 percent margin among younger (under 50) unmarried white women; among younger married white women he falls behind with 40 – 54 percent, a 45-point marriage gap. Similarly McCain leads 50 – 40 percent among white senior women who are married; among unmarried white senior women, Obama leads 49 – 45 percent. White unmarried college graduates vote essentially like white unmarried non-college graduates (Obama leads 58 – 37 and 55 – 41 percent respectively). Among married voters, Obama leads among college educated white women, but trails among non-college married white women.

**Figure 3: Marriage Gap Extends Throughout Electorate**

*If the election for president were held today and the candidates were – Democrat Barack Obama, Republican John McCain, Libertarian Party candidate Bob Barr or Independent candidate Ralph Nader, for whom would you vote?*

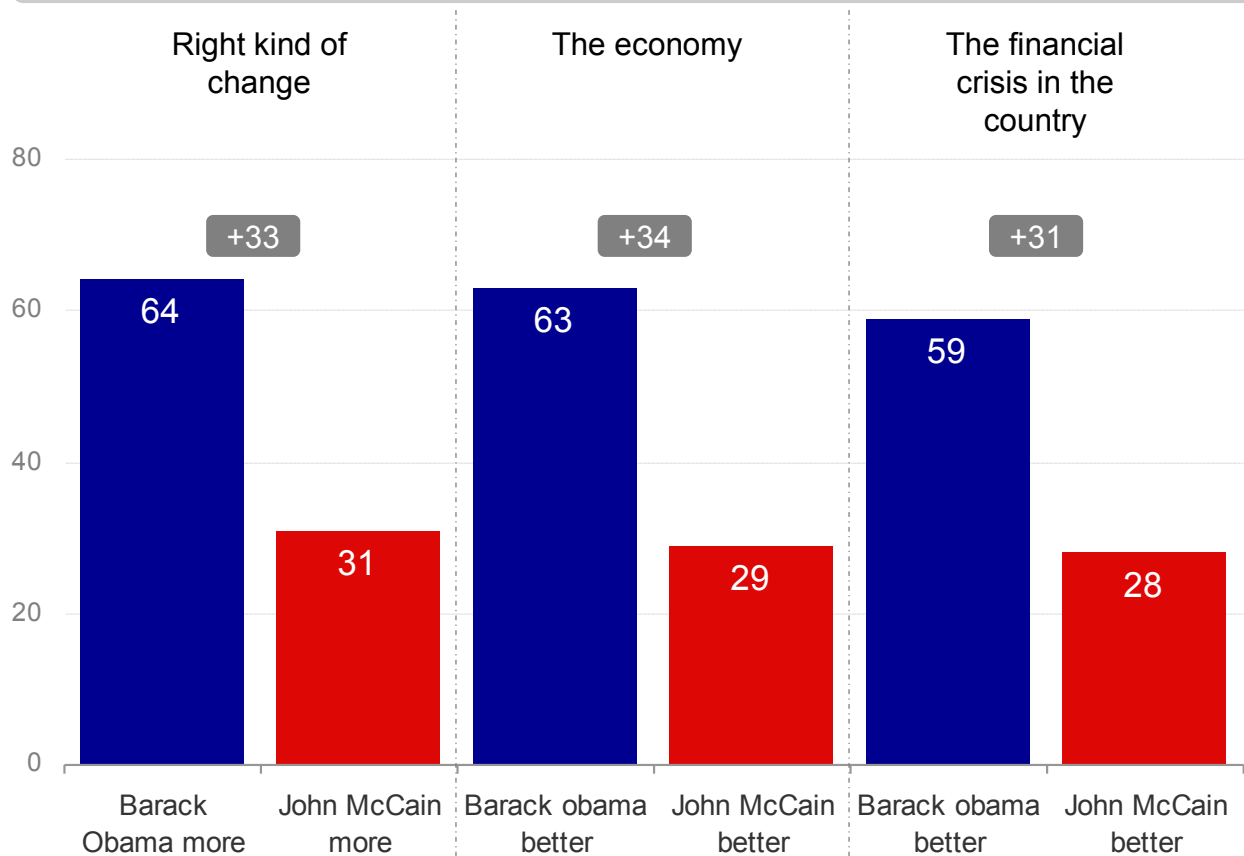


### The Economy and the Marriage Gap

To understand the dynamics behind the marriage gap one begins, at least, with an understanding of basic economics. By definition, most unmarried women live on a single-income. Not only that, but according to Census data, unmarried women earn roughly half of what married men earn. One dynamic that likely drives the marriage gap is economic self-interest. Indeed, one thing that many base Obama groups share—from younger voters to people of color—is a core economic vulnerability. Therefore, it is not entirely surprising to see unmarried women’s strong preference for the Democratic candidate on core economic issues.

**Figure 4:** Unmarried Women Point to Obama on Change, the Future, and the Economy

*Now I'd like to ask you which presidential candidate you associate more/do a better job with these terms, Barack Obama or John McCain.*



### Conclusion

America will likely be a different country on November 5<sup>th</sup>. It will be a different country because so many chose a different way to cast their ballot to make sure their voices are heard. It will be a different country because people will have made different choices about our nation's leadership. Unmarried women have driven both of these fundamental changes.