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Reaching Unmarried Women in 2006 Strategies for Turning Out Unmarried Women

To: Women's Voices. Women's Vote. Action Fund

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

Executive Summary

Despite record turnout in the 2004 presidential election, unmarried women remain underrepresented in the electorate. The challenge for 2006 remains how to continue to expand the presence of unmarried women in the electorate.

From our previous research, we know that unmarried women turn out to vote in proportionally lower numbers in part because they lack information about the issues and candidates. In our July, 2006 focus groups and a recent web survey of unmarried women, we learned that unmarried women respond best to political information that is simple, objective, balanced, and verifiable, using images that these women can connect with emotionally. We also learned that unmarried women trust information that comes from non-partisan organizations, particularly when it is accompanied by a disclaimer stipulating that the organization does not endorse parties or candidates.

From this earlier research, we learned how unmarried women want information presented to them; the goal of the current research is to identify the political agenda for unmarried women and how this relates to election interest. We also want to determine which messages are most motivating for reaching unmarried women, and determine the best framing for each message.

In a groundbreaking study, focusing only on the most competitive congressional districts in the country, we find that unmarried women are extremely discontented with the Bush Administration and the direction of the country. But there is a question as to whether this discontent and anger will translate into increased enthusiasm or interest in the election. Unmarried women exhibit somewhat lower levels of enthusiasm than their married and male counterparts. This lack of enthusiasm may be partly attributable to generally lower levels of political interest among them compared to the rest of the electorate. It also may be attributable to unmarried women's lack of political information, which makes them less likely to see how to harness their anger to affect change. Regardless, it speaks to a real opportunity for WVVV Action Fund and others to make a difference in this election – by providing the information and motivation for unmarried women to get out to vote.

Our research suggests a GOTV campaign aimed at unmarried women under 50 should be particularly effective, because they exhibit a shift in propensity to vote by the end of our survey, with women under 30 exhibiting the greatest shift. Because large numbers of unmarried women – particularly those under 30 – are drop-off voters, they are less likely to be contacted by the parties or campaigns, and our previous research suggests that policy information has its largest impact for women who rarely receive political communication.

For all single women, the GOTV campaigns should focus heavily on Iraq and the economy, as these issues dominate their agenda. Unmarried women strongly oppose the war in Iraq, but they also have deep economic concerns that have been largely unaddressed over the past five years. For younger women, jobs and wages dominate while older unmarried women are more focused on the issues of retirement security and health care.

Key Findings

- A strong majority of unmarried women are upset about the current course of the country and with the president. More so than the average voter, unmarried women overwhelmingly believe the country is headed in the wrong direction.
- Unmarried women under 50 exhibit a substantial shift in turnout from the beginning of the survey to the end, suggesting that a GOTV campaign aimed at drop-off women under 50 ought to be effective.
- Topping the agenda for unmarried women is the war in Iraq, closely followed by the economy – especially jobs, wages, and gas prices. For younger unmarried women, other important issues include education, while Medicare, Social Security, immigration, and terrorism stand out for older unmarried women.
- The best overall message for reaching unmarried women is one centered on Iraq and the economy. Education also tests well with younger unmarried women, and Medicare messages prove effective with seniors.

Unmarried Women: Not Happy with the Status Quo

Unmarried women hold progressive attitudes about most political issues. In keeping with these political tendencies, only 33 percent of unmarried women approve of the job Bush is doing as president, only 24 percent feel warmly towards Republicans in Congress, and 72 percent think that the country is on the wrong track.

We can see how unmarried women differ from the rest of the electorate by comparing our sample of unmarried registered women to likely voters in the same 50 competitive congressional districts.¹ For instance, 62 percent of unmarried women disapprove of the job the Bush Administration is doing, compared to 55 percent of voters overall in these same districts;

¹ Survey jointly conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Democracy Corps and Public Opinion Strategies for National Public Radio. Survey was of 1000 likely voters, and was conducted July 19-23, 2006.

72 percent of unmarried women think we're on the wrong track compared to 61 percent of voters in these same districts; and only 28 percent of unmarried women register warm feelings towards Bush, compared to 40 percent of likely voters in these same districts.

On the whole, unmarried women in these 50 competitive congressional districts prefer the named Democratic candidate to the named Republican candidate by 51 to 30. But there are important differences by age: 18-29 year olds prefer the named Democratic candidate by 27 points, 30-39 year olds by 49 points; 40-49 year olds by 26 points, while unmarried women aged between 50-64 favor the named Democratic candidate by 19 points and senior unmarried women by 7 points.

Election Interest Moderate Despite Discontent

By a 55-point margin, unmarried women overwhelmingly think the country's on the wrong track, with only 17 percent believing that the country is headed in the right direction.

But the discontent unmarried women feel with the direction of the country has failed to translate into differential rates of excitement about the election or enthusiasm about voting: only 43 percent of unmarried women likely voters are more enthusiastic about this election than usual, which makes unmarried women no more enthusiastic about this election than either the general public² or the average voter in these same competitive congressional districts.³

Moreover, despite their high levels of discontent, unmarried women actually harbor *less* anti-incumbent sentiment than the population in general: while 57 percent of the public hopes most members of Congress will not be re-elected this year, only 45 percent of unmarried women likely voters hope that most members of Congress will not be re-elected.⁴

This finding is commensurate with our previous research: unmarried women have lower levels of political information than the average voter, and therefore, absent the necessary and relevant political information, they experience some difficulty connecting their negative feelings about the direction of the country to the desire to vote incumbents out of office. Being more cynical about politics also makes them less likely to believe that their vote can affect change.

This relative lack of enthusiasm actually offers an opportunity for WVVV Action Fund and others: by providing unmarried women with the political information necessary to translate their dissatisfaction with the state of the country into interest in the election and enthusiasm for voting, WVVV Action Fund and others can potentially turn out unmarried women in greater numbers. From our July research, we learned that unmarried women trust information from non-partisan organizations, and that when presented in a simple, objective, verifiable, and balanced way, unmarried women make use of the information provided when they make political decisions.⁵ Unmarried women are incredibly angry about the current state of the country, and with the right information can be persuaded to turn out to vote.

² Same question was asked in a Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Survey of 1501 adults, June 14-19, 2006.

³ Democracy Corps poll conducted 50 most competitive Congressional districts, September 12-14, 2006.

⁴ Pew Research Center for the People and the Press Survey, June 14-19, 2006.

⁵ Focus Groups and WVVV web survey of 1000 unmarried women registered voters conducted July 24-26, 2006.

The Agenda for Unmarried Women

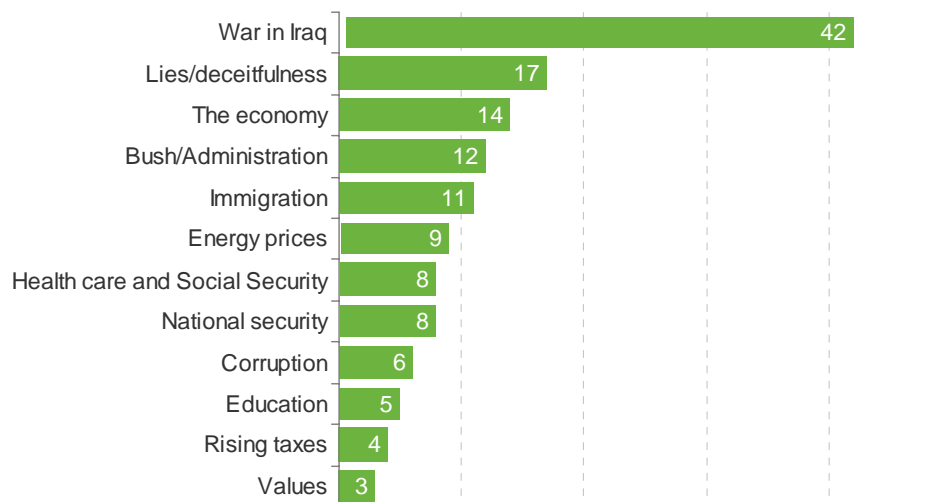
We know that WVWV Action Fund and others have the potential to move unmarried women to the polls with a discussion of the issues, as they relate to the candidates and the elections overall. Currently, the agenda of unmarried women is dominated by two issues: Iraq and the economy.

When it comes to Iraq, 32 percent of unmarried women cite Iraq as one of their top two concerns influencing their congressional vote, with 18 percent citing it as their single most important concern. Moreover, when asked what they would most like the next Congress to achieve, 34 percent cited 'getting out of Iraq' as one of their top two priorities.

But more tellingly, when asked – in an open-ended format – if there is anything that angers them about the way things are going in the country today, 42 percent mentioned the war in Iraq, far outpacing mentions of the second most important issue, which received mention by a mere 14 percent of the sample.

Unmarried women most angry about Iraq

Would you say you are generally content with the way things are going in the country today, or is there something you would say you are angry about? (IF SAY ANGRY) What is that? (OPEN END)



Moreover, unmarried women harbor nearly monolithic opinions about the war in Iraq: they agree – by a 2-to-1 margin – that America ought to get out of the war.

For women on their own, the economy is also a critically important issue, and in fact is the most important issue for unmarried women aged 30 to 50; Generation Y and younger (under 50) non-college women rate the economy as a particularly important priority. By large majorities, unmarried women believe the economy is heading in the wrong direction, and they overwhelmingly favor an increase in the minimum wage. Non-college women under 50 are most supportive of an increase in the minimum wage, with 91 percent feeling positive about an

increase. Because they are on their own, economic concerns take center stage for unmarried women.

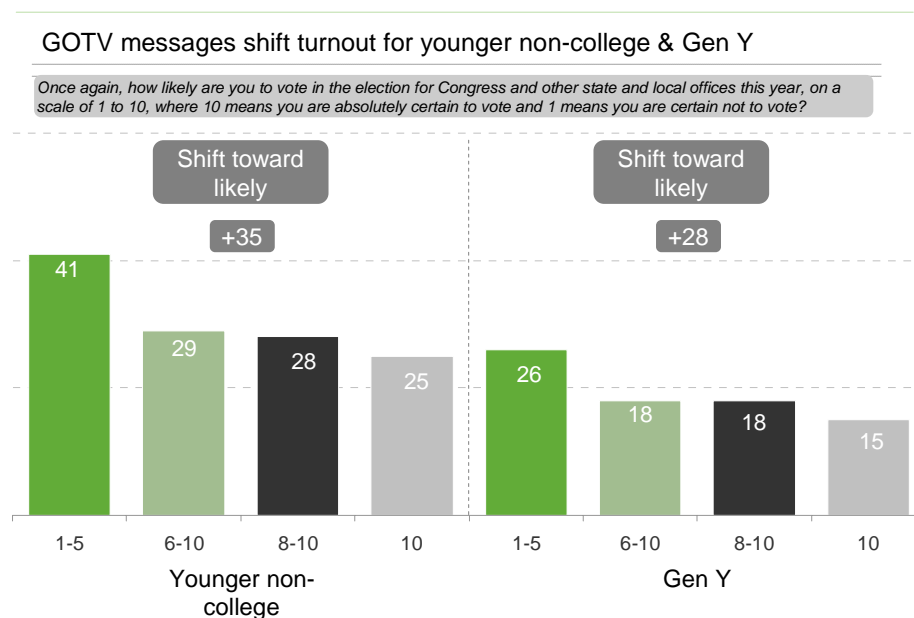
Aside from Iraq and the economy, the other political priorities for unmarried women vary by age. Younger women, particularly those under 40, and those with children, consider education a top concern. This is not surprising as younger voters are usually more concerned about educational issues than older voters. In this case, the quality of public school dominates.

Outside of Iraq, Medicare and Social Security are older women's most important priorities. These women are truly on their own for the rest of their lives and they want to be assured that they will be taken care of financially and medically until the end of their days.

GOTV Messages for Reaching Younger Unmarried Women

Unmarried women under 50 vote in disproportionately lower numbers than their older counterparts. They also exhibit a large shift in turnout propensity from the beginning of the survey to the end, suggesting a GOTV campaign aimed at them is likely to be quite effective.

Moreover, because they are drop-off voters, they are less likely to be contacted by the parties or campaigns because they are presumed to have a low probability of turning out – particularly in an off-year election – making the communication likely to have a large impact.



The greatest impact of a GOTV campaign ought to be one aimed at the women above who are between '3' and '7' on the 10-point turnout scale; WVWV Action Fund and others will have some chance of moving these moderate propensity voters because they are not already committed to vote and they have some interest in the election.

Iraq, the economy and education

We find that messages focused on Iraq are effective in reaching unmarried women under 50. Not only does this issue top the agenda for unmarried women, but also reveals that unmarried women are strongly anti-war: 70 percent think the war in Iraq was not worth the cost in lives or dollars. And unlike the electorate *writ large* - which is divided about whether or not to begin reducing troops - unmarried women favor reducing troops by nearly a 2-to-1 margin.

In addition to Iraq, economic messages prove particularly effective at reaching unmarried women, particularly younger drop-off voters. They were especially motivated by hearing that Congress refused to raise the minimum wage but voted themselves a pay raise. Our economic framing should emphasize the following;

The should be no pay raise for members of Congress until Congress raises the minimum wage and the incomes of average Americans are rising again.

We need to raise the minimum wage, invest in worker training and... encourage companies to create jobs in America.

Finally, GOTV messages centered on education test very well with unmarried women under 50, particularly those under 30: 99 percent of 18-29 year olds say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate after hearing a message about investing more so all families have access to first-rate public schools with quality preschool, all-day kindergarten and smaller class sizes.. Education messages are most effective when pitched to 18-29 year olds, but have a strong impact on 30-39 year olds as well. Unsurprisingly, these messages also test better with unmarried moms than with unmarried women without children.

Despite the effectiveness of these messages, only 24 percent of 18-29 year olds cite improving education as their top priority, and this number drops to 16 percent among 30-39 year olds and 14 percent among 40-49 year olds. Thus education messages remain of third-order importance in formulating GOTV strategy.

Summary: Reaching Unmarried Women in 2006

We find that unmarried women are particularly angry about the direction of the country, but not particularly apt to channel that anger into increased enthusiasm for the election or higher levels of anti-incumbent sentiment. Whether due to their lower levels of political information or their lower levels of political efficacy, unmarried women are not exceptionally motivated this year and will require additional impetus to get them to the polls.

In a world of limited resources, we believe GOTV efforts targeted toward younger unmarried women are likely to be most effective. Our research shows that these women shift their likelihood of voting based on motivational messages about the issues that matter to them – Iraq and the economy – and because they rarely receive political communication, campaigns targeted at these women ought to be effective.

Appendix A: Methodology

This memo is based on a telephone survey of unmarried women over the age of 18 who are registered to vote. The survey was conducted in the 50 most competitive congressional districts as of August 14, 2006, according to a compilation of rankings from a variety of non-partisan professional political researchers and publications. The survey was designed by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, Inc. and the survey was administered by professional interviewers. Respondents were selected using Random Digit Dialing (RDD). The survey reached 753 unmarried registered women, and was conducted August 17-31, 2006. The data were weighted by age, race, education, region to ensure a more accurate reflection of the population. The sample size with these weights applied is 753.

Respondents were asked a series of open and closed-ended questions designed to gauge their political attitudes. We also assessed their reaction to several different messages that Democratic and Republican candidates might use in a campaign, and we asked at the beginning and end about motivation to vote and vote choice to gauge the impact of these messages on increasing the likelihood of voting and the probability of voting for a particular candidate. We also examine how unmarried women differ from the rest of the electorate by comparing our sample of unmarried registered women to likely voters in the same 50 competitive congressional districts.⁶

⁶ Survey jointly conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Public Opinion Strategies for National Public Radio. Survey was of 1000 likely voters, and was conducted July 19-23, 2006.