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POLS:W3245.001 Race and Ethnicity in American Politics

### Issue Brief: Women and Voting Behavior

#### **Key Words:**

- Women
- Party affiliation
- Voting Frequency
- Welfare agenda
- Women's issues
- Security Moms

#### **Description:**

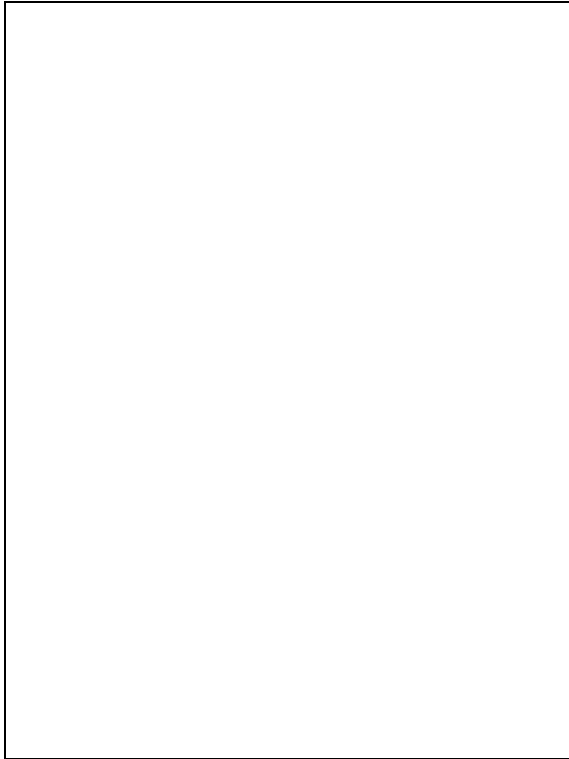
This issue brief aims to look at women and their emergence as a cohesive voting block. It tries to look at what issues have traditionally united women and what issues interest women today.

#### **Key Points:**

- Women vote in higher frequencies than men.
- Women of all demographics tend to be more democratic.
- The social welfare agenda of women has traditionally drawn women to the democratic party, especially the issues of civil rights, domestic violence, welfare of children, and women reproductive rights.
- Women's issues is a particularly strong factor in determining a woman's vote, which is best demonstrated in Republican women voting patterns.
- After 9-11 there has been a small shift in women voting allegiance highlighted through the phenomenon of the "security moms"

**Images:**

Party Affiliation of Women:



**Figure One:** This graph from *The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press* highlights the party affiliation of women. Women tend to be more democratic than men and are more democratic in every age group. <<http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=750>>

Women Issues:



**Figure Two:** This image from *The American* highlights the perception that women are likely to be swayed by women's issues when voting. <<http://www.american.com/archive/2009/november/delayed-childbearing-and-voting-behavior>>

**Brief:**

The idea that women are a cohesive voting group did not begin to emerge until the 1970's with the women's rights and empowerment campaign. The movement aimed to empower women in the political, economic, and legal fields, and it is on the heels of this movement that women start to coalesce into a separate voting block. Although women had gained the right to vote in 1920, for the next 60 years they had voted at a lower rate than men. Many attribute this to the fact that voting may not have been a habituated women activity, as women were not expected to vote or sometimes discouraged from voting. With the women's rights movement, however, that drastically changed to the point that in 1980 women equaled men in voter turn out. In every subsequent election women have outnumbered men voting at higher percentages. In the 2000 elections 56.2 percent of women voted compared to only 53.1 percent of men. This difference translates to 7.8 million more women voting than men, solidly identifying them as one of the larger demographics.

The 1980 election was also important in that it established women as an incredibly strong Democratic leaning demographic. In the 1980 election between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan women preferred Jimmy Carter by more than 7 percent. The preference that women showed for Jimmy Carter is not isolated, but more representative of a general trend among women as they have become an increasingly more democratic voting group. A Pew Research Center poll showed that women tended to affiliate with the Democratic party by a margin of 36 percent to 29 percent in comparison to men who were 32 percent to 27 percent more likely to identify as Republican. This poll further showed that women tended to be more Democratic than men across every age group (Figure 1).

This may result from the fact that women tend to be drawn to the ideology of the Democratic party. Women tend to galvanize around issues of civil rights, domestic violence, welfare of children, and women's issues, and many see the Democratic party as the traditional party of the middle class and the oppressed. Women's issues, particularly those of abortion and reproductive rights, has traditionally been seen as one of the strongest factors in unifying the woman vote. This is clearly seen in Michele L.

Swers' study "Are Women More Likely to Vote for Women's Issue Bills Than Their Male Colleagues?". According to Swers, women are more likely to vote for women's issue bills as they are directly affected by the issue. The powerful impetus of ideology in determining a woman's vote is best shown by Republican women in comparison to their male Republican colleagues. Moderately conservative women were more likely to vote for women's issue bills than moderately conservative men voting at a right of 47% more for the FACE Act, 47% more likely to vote for the Family Planning Amendments Act, and 38% more likely to vote against the Hyde Amendment.

In looking to how women will vote in the future one interesting phenomenon has been emergence the "security moms". The issues that interest women have changed as a result of 9/11 and women are increasingly concerned with security issues. For example, a 1991 Gallup poll showed that men were 22 percent more likely to support sending troops to Iraq. Today, security has become an issue of greater priority; 43 percent of women versus 11 percent of men believe that a member of their family could be a victim of a terrorist attack. Joe Klein in his *Time* article titled "How Soccer Moms Became Security Moms" argues that "the war on terrorism is two wars, one for men and one for women" with women being more concerned with the "protection of hearth and home against the next terrorist attack." These "security moms" demonstrate a changing political ideology amongst women, one that is not so dominated by the social agenda. This has caused women to lean farther right, and this is especially true amongst married women who are more likely to be Republican.

Women have traditionally been a solidly democratic voting group as their interests have revolved around social issues such as welfare and women's reproductive rights. Women across all age groups tend to be more democratic and tend to have a more liberal agenda than men. This is demonstrated by Republican women voting across party lines in support of women's issues legislation. Nevertheless, new issues have recently risen to garner the attention of women perhaps weakening the draw that women's issues and the social agenda have on determining a woman's vote. In that respect issues like security have become an increasingly important issue for women changing the manner in

which they vote.

### **Works Cited:**

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Klein, Joe. "How Soccer Moms Became Security Moms." *TIME.com*. Time Magazine, 10 Feb. 2003. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.time.com/time/columnist/klein/article/0,9565,421149,00.html>>.

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### **Relevant Websites:**

- **Center for American Women and Politics**  
[http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/research/topics/voting\\_behavior.php](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/research/topics/voting_behavior.php)
- **The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press**  
<http://people-press.org/>
- **National Abortion Federation**  
<http://www.prochoice.org/default.htm>