

Election FOCUS



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FAST FACTS:

✓ **61 percent** of the eligible female population voted in the 2000 presidential election compared to only 58 percent of the eligible male population voted. This is a difference of about 8,000,000 votes.

-- US Census Bureau, Voting and Registration in the Election of 2000, February 2002

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Women Voters in the 2004 Election

By Darlisa Crawford
Washington File Staff Writer

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 61 percent of eligible women voters cast a ballot in the 2000 presidential election. That is higher than the 58 percent of men who voted. In 2000 women voters surpassed men voters in U.S. presidential elections for the first time.

The "gender gap"

In the 1960s American women were more likely to identify with the Republican Party than the Democratic Party. Richard Nixon narrowly carried the women's vote in 1960 after the first televised debate against Kennedy. Political analyst Rachel Alexander concluded that for the first time voters evaluated a presidential candidate's performance on television, which influenced how voters cast their ballots. By the 1980 election between Reagan and Carter, this partiality toward the Republican Party had changed. Carter won the women's vote.

The Gallup Organization, a major independent polling firm, concludes that in every presidential election since 1980 a gender gap has existed. Women have more often supported Democratic candidates while men have more often supported Republican candidates. In presidential elections the gap has ranged from 4 percent to 11 percent. In 1992 women voters supported Clinton in larger numbers than men by 4 percent. In the 2000 election, Al Gore won the women's vote by 11 percent.

Recent Gallup polls report that Republican incumbent President George W. Bush has received higher job approval ratings from men than from women in all but three polls conducted since he took office more than three years ago. In 2004, men have given Bush a job approval rating that is seven points higher than women have given him. Ballot tests this year also show that Bush receives greater support in his bid for re-election among men than among women, according to the Gallup Organization.

"Security moms"

On the other hand, women support the war on terrorism and military spending at the same level as men, according to recent polls. Some political analysts attribute the narrowed gender gap to the September 11 terrorist attacks. They suggest that women who have been reticent to support the use of military force now view it as essential for the protection of their families and communities. Women's support for higher defense budgets increased to 47 percent in October 2001 from 24 percent earlier in the year. The swing voters referred to as "soccer moms" of 2000 may be replaced with

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--Dr. Martha Burke

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“security moms” in 2004.

According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, women’s support for military spending remains at levels much higher now. “There is no gender gap on this point, because people are united behind the president,” says Linda Divall, a Republican pollster.

The Single Vote

An important disparity exists between married women voters and unmarried women voters. Women of voting age who have never been married, divorced or widowed comprise 42 percent of all registered women voters. In the 2000 presidential election, unmarried women voters represented the same percentage of the electorate as Jewish, African American, and Latino voters combined. For this group, the highest priority issues are health care, employment, education, job security, and retirement benefits.

Over 21 million unmarried women voters never cast a ballot on election day, according to data from Women’s Voices. Women Vote, a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing women’s voter registration.

“We have to help these women understand they can absolutely determine the outcome of the election,” says Christina Desser, co-founder of the organization.

In the 2002 mid-term elections, 56 percent of married women voted for Republican Party candidates, compared to 39 percent of unmarried women. Harvard University assistant professor of public policy Anna Greenberg associates “moral

traditionalism” that appeals to married women with the Republican Party.

Campaigning for the Women’s Vote Women’s concerns will be important topics of debate on the campaign trail this election season. The Republican National Committee has launched a program called Winning Women, designed to recruit and train female Republican candidates for public office and to reach out to female voters. The Democratic National Committee has created the DNC Women’s Vote Center that educates and mobilizes women voters about electing Democratic candidates for public office.

Both Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and President Bush have emphasized issues that resonate with women — job creation, healthcare and education — in recent campaign speeches. First Lady Laura Bush features prominently in her husband’s re-election advertisements. Kerry’s daughters, Alexandra and Vanessa, promote their father’s concerns with jobs and the environment on the campaign trail.

“The women’s vote will decide the next election, as it has since 1980,” stated political psychologist Dr. Martha Burke. “Candidates have an opportunity to showcase their views on the issues women care most about — violence, the pay gap, education, and economic security. Those who address women’s concerns directly are likely to strike a chord.” ■



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The U.S. Department of State is pleased to present its election coverage newsletter, **Election Focus 2004**. The newsletter will provide non-partisan coverage of the U.S. election process, featuring articles, interviews, public opinion polls, and other information on the presidential primaries, debates, conventions and campaign activities of the major presidential candidates.

Election Focus 2004 is produced by the Democracy and Human Rights team in the Bureau of International Information Programs.

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Campaign★Highlight

An Interview with Kay J. Maxwell

Women will play a significant role in the 2004 U.S. President election, according to political analysts. In a recent interview, Kay J. Maxwell, who is the 16th president of the League of Women Voters of the United States and chair of the League of Women Voters Education Fund, spoke with Washington File staff writer Darlisa Crawford about the participation of American women voters in this election season.

Following is a transcript of the interview:

Q: How critical is the women's vote in the 2004 election?

Maxwell: Well certainly the women's vote can be quite critical because as you probably know women register and then vote in larger numbers than men. So for example, if every woman who's eligible to register did register and if every female who was registered to vote went out and voted, they could have a significant impact.

Q: What are the most important issues for women?

Maxwell: There are a number of organizations that have done research on this. I think just as with men there is no single set of issues on which all women agree. The League of Women Voters focuses on issues that are of importance to all citizens, not just some that many call women's issues.

However, some of the research has shown that, for example, the economy and jobs are of considerable importance to women today as more women are working outside the home. It's been determined, for example, that the subset group of unmarried women has a particular interest in jobs and the economy.

Q: How does your organization mobilize women to vote?

Maxwell: We don't specifically focus on mobilizing women as I said. Our mission is to mobilize all citizens to vote, male and female. Our basic mission is to encourage everyone, every citizen, to become engaged in his or her community and in this country. So we encourage everyone to vote, but there are lots of different ways we do that. Mostly, it happens in our local communities. We do coalition work with other partners. We're doing a couple of interesting different ones this year. For example we are in a coalition, called Smackdown Your Vote that is led by World Wrestling Entertainment. It is focused particularly on young people; trying to find young people, get them registered and get out the vote. So as I say, we look at all kinds of ways to do it, but this year we're placing a particular emphasis on young people.

Q: Are there special voter education programs

and voter registration drives for women this election season?

Maxwell: Our local leagues across the country certainly all are engaged in their communities in doing voter registration drives. With the Internet you can go to the League of Women Voters' website, <http://www.lwv.org>. If you are not registered to vote, you can download a registration form. So it has become much easier to register. The League of Women Voters was instrumental in passing the Motor Voter law (The law requires states to provide uniform registration services through drivers' license agencies, through public assistance and disability agencies and through mail-in registration.) a few years ago. Our goal is to make it as easy as possible for citizens to register and then to vote.

Q: What are some of the differences in the way men and women vote? Will those differences hold true in 2004?

Maxwell: I think that most of the research shows that a lot of the issues are similar. But women in particular may be perhaps focused a little bit more on health care, education, their children, jobs and the economy. Certainly, for everyone this year security issues are important. Civil liberties issues are important. So there may be slightly different areas of emphasis between men and women, but broadly speaking I think that sense of which issues are important covers both genders. In addition, the research that has been done on young people

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this year concerning their key issues indicates that jobs and the economy, security and the war in Iraq, and the cost of education are most important to them. So broadly speaking, there are similar issues with different emphases.

Q: Does your organization have programs aimed at particular sectors of the women's community?

Maxwell: We don't have a specific project focused on that. Although I know of at least one. It's called Women's Voices. Women Vote. It is an organization that is specifically focused this year on trying to encourage unmarried women to register and then of course to vote. So there are lots of different organizations that focus on different segments of the population to try to encourage them. We also are working this year especially with the Latino community. For example in Washington, DC we are working jointly with Telemundo to broadcast some public service announcements in Spanish, encouraging that community to register and vote.

Q: Can you identify voting patterns among women in terms of ethnicity, religion or geography?

Maxwell: Because we are a non-partisan organization we don't focus or do basic research on those types of questions. The Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University has some of that kind of research. Lifetime television also has done research on the issues that are important to women. They found that

issues of childcare, equal pay and violence against women were important. I think many different groups decide whether or not to vote based on whether or not they feel that candidates are speaking to the issues that matter to them. Whether it is young people, or women or men, if they find candidates that are speaking to the issues that matter to them, they will get involved and they will register and vote. If they don't feel the candidates of whatever party it is are concerned and addressing the issues they care about, then they won't.

Q: In a recent poll conducted by Lifetime, 50 percent of the women said that the presidential hopefuls weren't talking enough about women's issues. Can you offer any suggestions to the candidates about engaging women this election season?

Maxwell: I think that all parties recognize the significance of the women's vote and they understand that women do vote in larger numbers than men. I believe we are seeing candidates pay a little bit more attention to that, but I think it's important that the candidates talk about many different issues. We get so much focus on the horse race, if you will, that sometimes the issues get lost. One of things that the League has operated for several years is another website called dnet.org. It stands for democracy network. That's a site you can go to and find out where the presidential candidates, as well as congressional and statewide candidates, stand on the issues. You can go there and you can ask a question of a candidate about a particular issue. We

have long felt that broad civic engagement is essential. And people get engaged, and pay attention to candidates and elections when candidates speak to the issues. So my advice to any of the candidates is to speak to the issues. That is what is going to resonate with American women and men as well.

READ MORE ABOUT IT:

League of Women Voters
<http://www.lwv.org/index.html>
 The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Democratic Voices—Women's Vote Center:
<http://www.democrats.org/wvc/democraticvoices/index.html>
 Founded in 2001 under the leadership of Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe, and led by National Chair Ann Lewis, the DNC Women's Vote Center is dedicated to educating, engaging, and mobilizing women voters across the nation to help elect more Democrats to office at all levels of government.

Winning Women:
<http://www.winningwomen.org/>
 "Winning Women: Leadership for the New Century" is an initiative of the Republican National Committee to work with and for women. "Winning Women" is an attempt to build on the Republican National Committee's outreach efforts and win increased support from the nation's women. ■

The History of the Women's Vote

Today every U.S. citizen who is 18 years of age by election day and a resident of the local precinct at least 30 days is eligible to cast a ballot. However, women, African Americans, Native American Indians and members of certain religious groups were not allowed to vote during the colonial period and the early years of the country's history. In 1774 the U.S. Constitution granted each state government the power to determine who could vote. Individual states wrote their own suffrage laws. Early voting qualifications required that an eligible voter be a white man, twenty-one years of age, Protestant, and a landowner. Many brave citizens who recognized the importance of the right to vote led the suffrage movement. Read the timeline for some specific events in the history of the women's voting movement.

One Hundred Years toward the Women's Vote

Compiled by E. Susan Barber

1776

Abigail Adams writes to her husband, John, who is attending the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, asking that he and the other men — who were at work on the Declaration of Independence — “Remember the Ladies.” The Declaration's wording specifies that “all men are created equal.”

1848

The first women's rights convention in the United States is held in Seneca Falls, New York. Many participants sign a “Declaration of Sentiments and

Resolutions” that outlines the main issues and goals for the emerging women's movement. Thereafter, women's rights meetings are held on a regular basis.

1861 to 1865

The American Civil War disrupts suffrage activity as women, North and South, divert their energies to “war work.” The War itself, however, serves as a “training ground,” as women gain important organizational and occupational skills they will later use in postbellum organizational activity.

1866

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony form the American Equal Rights Association, an organization for white and black women and men dedicated to the goal of universal suffrage.

1868

The Fourteenth Amendment is ratified, which extends to all citizens the protections of the Constitution against unjust state laws. This Amendment was the first to define “citizens” and “voters” as “male.”

1870

The Fifteenth Amendment enfranchises black men.

1870 to 1875

Several women — including Virginia Louisa Minor, Victoria Woodhull, and Myra Bradwell — attempt to use the Fourteenth Amendment in the courts to secure the vote (Minor and Woodhull) or the right to practice law (Bradwell). They all are unsuccessful.

1872

Susan B. Anthony is arrested and brought to trial in Rochester, New York, for attempting to vote for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election. At the same time, Sojourner Truth appears at a polling booth in Grand Rapids, Michigan, demanding a ballot; she is turned away.

1874

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) is founded by Annie Wittenmyer. With Frances Willard at its head (1876), the WCTU became an important force in the fight for woman suffrage. Not surprisingly, one of the most vehement opponents to women's enfranchisement was the liquor lobby, which feared women might use the franchise to prohibit the sale of liquor.

1878

A Woman Suffrage Amendment is introduced in the United States Congress. The wording is unchanged in 1919, when the amendment finally passes both houses.

1893

Colorado becomes the first state to adopt a state amendment enfranchising women.

1896

Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Margaret Murray Washington, Fanny Jackson Coppin, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Charlotte Forten Grimké, and former slave Harriet Tubman meet in Washington, D.C. to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).

1903

Mary Dreier, Rheta Childe Dorr, Leonora O'Reilly, and others form the

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Women's Trade Union League of New York, an organization of middle- and working-class women dedicated to unionization for working women and to women's suffrage. This group later became a nucleus of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU).

1911

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NAOWS) is organized. Led by Mrs. Arthur Dodge, its members included wealthy, influential women and some Catholic clergymen — including Cardinal Gibbons who, in 1916, sent an address to NAOWS's convention in Washington, D.C. In addition to the distillers and brewers, who worked largely behind the scenes, the “antis” also drew support from urban political machines, Southern congressmen, and corporate capitalists

— like railroad magnates and meat-packers — who supported the “antis” by contributing to their “war chests.”

1912

Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive (Bull Moose/Republican) Party becomes the first national political party to adopt a woman suffrage plank.

1913

Alice Paul and Lucy Burns organize the Congressional Union, later known as the National Women's Party (1916). Borrowing the tactics of the radical, militant Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in England, members of the Woman's Party participate in hunger strikes, picket the White House, and engage in other forms of civil disobedience to publicize the suffrage cause.

1914

The National Federation of Women's Clubs — which by this time included more than two million white women and women of color throughout the United States — formally endorses the suffrage campaign.

1916

Jeannette Rankin of Montana becomes the first American woman elected to represent her state in the U.S. House of Representatives.

August 26, 1920

The Nineteenth Amendment is ratified. Its victory accomplished, NAWSA ceases to exist, but its organization becomes the nucleus of the League of Women Voters. ■