

November 5, 2007

A New America Unmarrieds Drive Change in Our Country

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

Single parent households have grown from under a quarter to over a third of American households over the past 25 years and a majority of households are now headed by unmarried Americans for the first time. From 1960 to 2006, the percentage of the voting age population that was unmarried grew from 27 to 47 percent. Between the 2002 and 2006 elections, the growth rate of unmarried Americans was double that of married Americans. If this trend continues, the unmarried will be a majority of the population within 15 years.

These changes have broad implications for the future of our country, its politics and the policy direction of the national government. Importantly, unmarrieds come to the table with a somewhat different agenda, even more focused on changing the direction of the country, more focused on basic issues of the economy and jobs, more focused on ending the war and, it should be noted, a bit more cynical about law-makers' willingness to listen to their concerns. For this and other reasons, the rising unmarried majority has so far remained relatively quiet in our national conversation. While improved in recent election cycles, unmarrieds, particularly unmarried women, still do not vote at the same levels as their married counter-parts. In total, there are over 53 million unmarried women of voting age, 20 million of whom stayed home in the last presidential election.

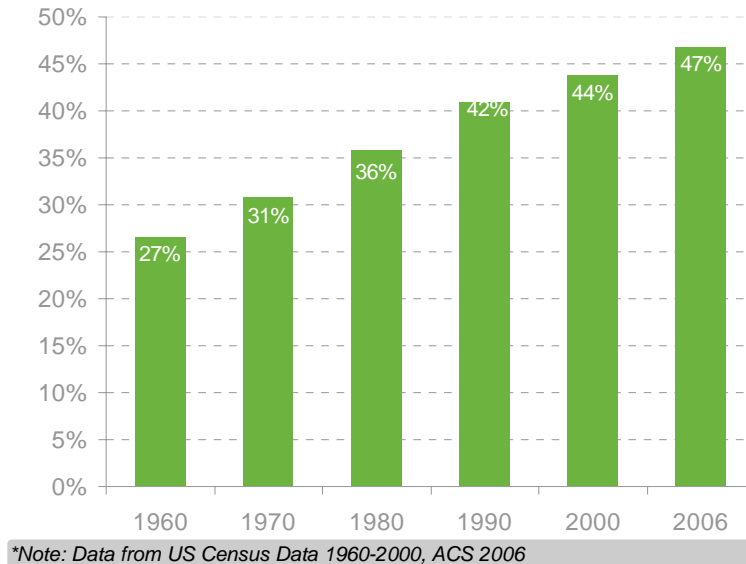
What is clear is that this cohort is changing America culturally and demographically and as it becomes increasingly involved in the democratic process, will continue to change America as well. Questions remain about the degree to which unmarrieds will increase their share of the national electorate and, related, the degree to which policy makers will listen.

The Emerging Unmarried Majority

The importance of unmarried Americans is clearly demonstrated by the demographic shift that this country has been (and is continuing to) undergo. Between the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections the proportion of unmarried voting age citizens grew at a rate that surpassed the married population. In fact, the rate of growth of the unmarried population was nearly double the growth rate among those who are married.

While the rapid growth of the unmarried population over the past four years is notable, it is merely the continuation of a long-term trend. Between 1960 and 2006, the percentage of the voting age population (as opposed to households) that was unmarried increased from 27 to 47 percent.¹ If the current growth trend continues, the unmarried population will become a majority in the next 15 years.

■ **Figure 1: Unmarrieds An Increasing Percentage Of Population**



And while the number of married Americans aged 21-54 years is dropping in absolute terms for the first time ever, the number of unmarried couples who cohabit and the number of women living without a spouse are on the rise.² The change is being driven in part by younger women. Since 1950, the percentage of women aged 15-to-34 who are married has dropped by about 25 percentage points.³ Meanwhile, the proportion of people who have never married continues to grow by double digits in every racial and ethnic group.⁴

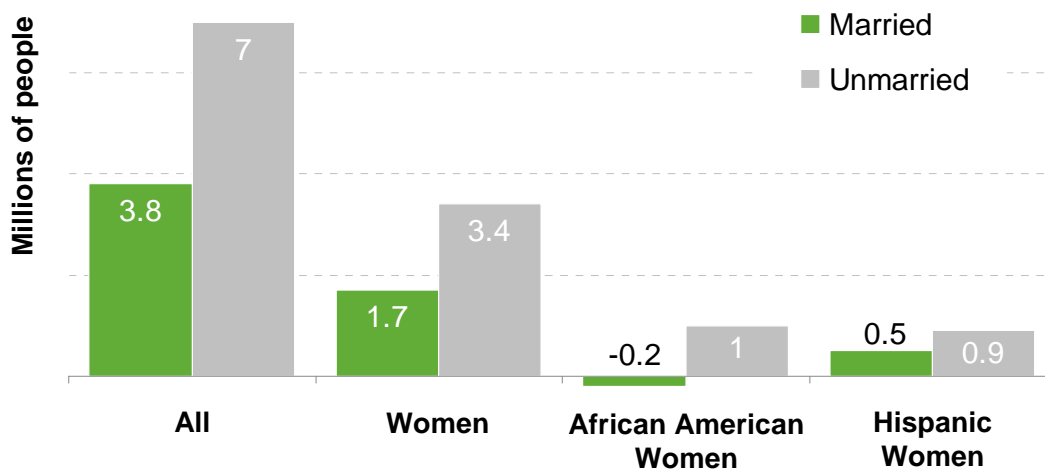
¹ US Census Data 1960-2000, American Community Survey, 2006

² *New York Times*, 10/15/06

³ *New York Times*, 1/16/07

⁴ *New York Times*, 7/1/07

Figure 2 : Growth in Voting Age Population 2002 - 2006



**Note: Data from 2006 Current Population Survey, 11/06.*

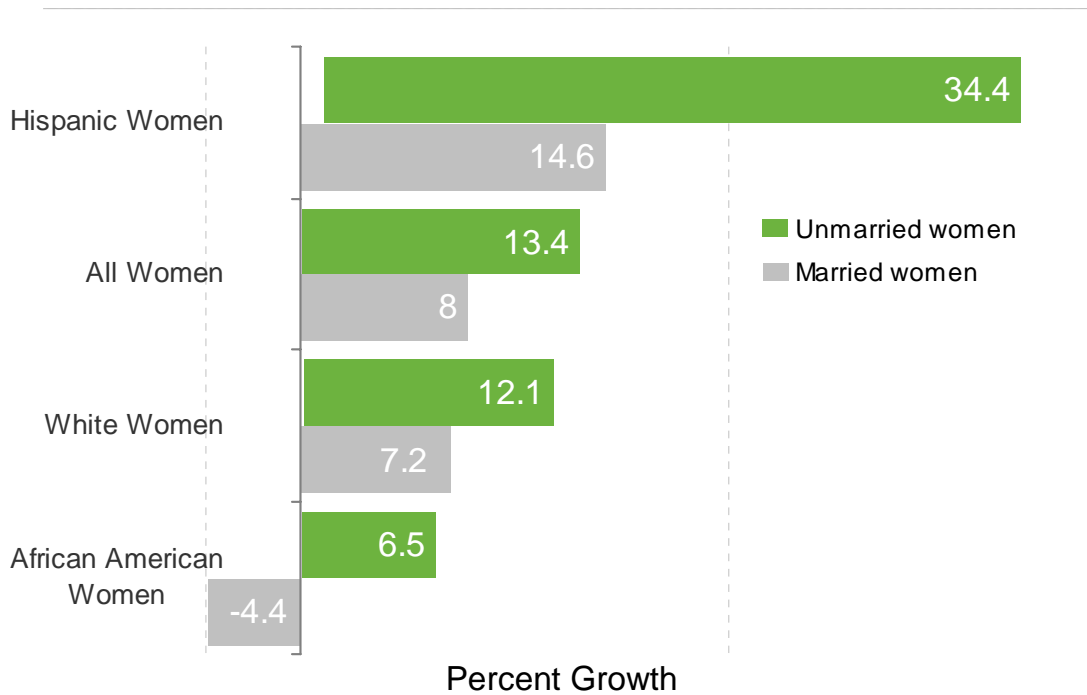
Overall, the trends illustrate a generational change that has the potential to alter the fundamental social, and therefore political, structure of the country. As William Frey of the Brookings Institution notes, the numbers demonstrate “a clear tipping point, reflecting the culmination of post-1960 trends associated with greater independence and more flexible lifestyles for women. For better or worse, women are less dependent on men or the institution of marriage.”⁵

Changing Participation: Unmarrieds Could Turnout in Historic Numbers

The unmarried population has not voted at the same levels as the married but we are seeing some important change. While the number of married voters increased a respectable 6 percent between 2002 and 2006, the number of unmarried voters jumped by nearly 16 percent in just one four-year cycle. Among women, we see an 8 percent increase in the number of married voters, but a 13.4 percent increase in the number of unmarried voters. This increase in voters was driven in almost equal parts by a rise in the voting aged population of unmarried women (which grew by 7.4 percent) and a boost in turnout among this cohort (which rose 2 points, from 38 to 40 percent). The increase in unmarried women voters can be seen across all racial groups but, at 34.4 percent, the growth among Hispanic unmarried women voters is particularly striking.

⁵ *New York Times*, 1/16/07

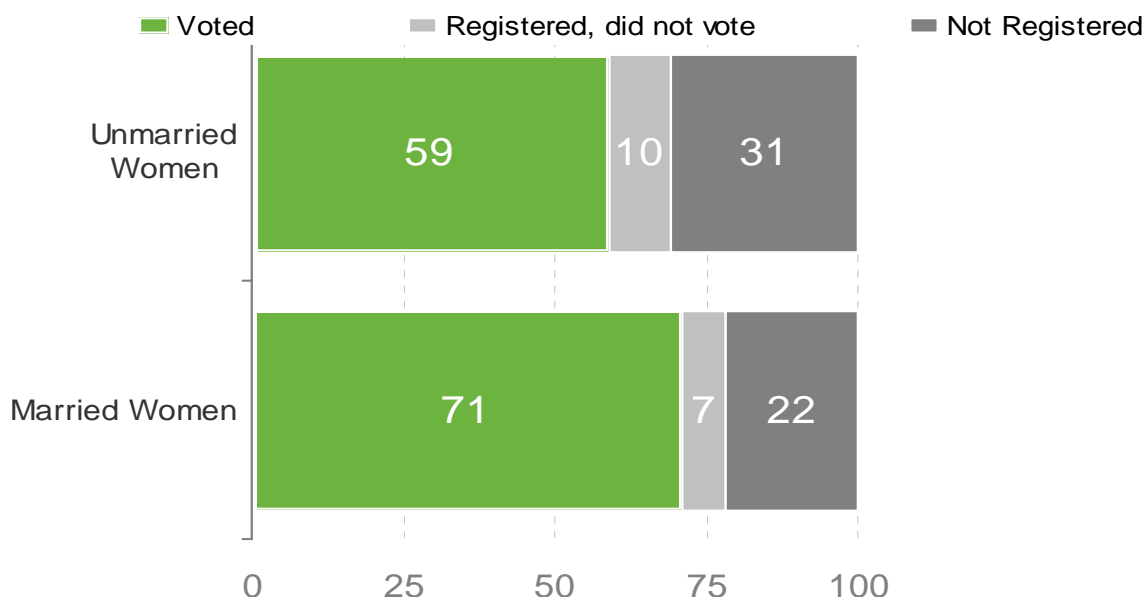
Figure 3: Growth Rate of Women Voters 2002 to 2006



**Note: Data from 2002 and 2006 Current Population Surveys*

Despite these positive trends, it also clear that among major demographics groups in American, unmarried voters and unmarried women in particular are among the least inclined to exercise their franchise.

Figure 4: Turnout and Registration Among Married and Unmarried Women



**Note: Data from Current Population Survey, 11/04*

Newly released polling data from Democracy Corps shows that unmarried women could improve their participation in 2008 to record levels. A survey of low-propensity unmarried women voters (those who, while eligible and registered to vote, missed at least one of the last two presidential elections) in 11 important swing states shows that 64 percent of these usually unlikely voters now say they are “absolutely certain” to vote in 2008.⁶ Though different metrics and measures were used, making a direct comparison impossible, a sample of low-propensity voters in 2003 found only 44 percent who said they were “almost certain” to vote.⁷ Moreover, unmarried women express a high level of interest in the election, greater even than married women show. Seventy-seven percent of unmarried likely women voters express the highest level of interest in the election, compared to only 74 percent of married women.⁸ Taken together, this seems to suggest that unmarried women, even those who don’t normally vote, are primed for this election and are open to politicians willing to engage them on the issues important to them.

⁶ Respondents were asked to rate the chances they would vote in 2008 on a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 meaning “absolutely certain.” Based on a Democracy Corps survey of 158 low propensity unmarried women voters in 11 states and 29 low propensity unmarried women voters nationwide conducted October 21-24, 2007.

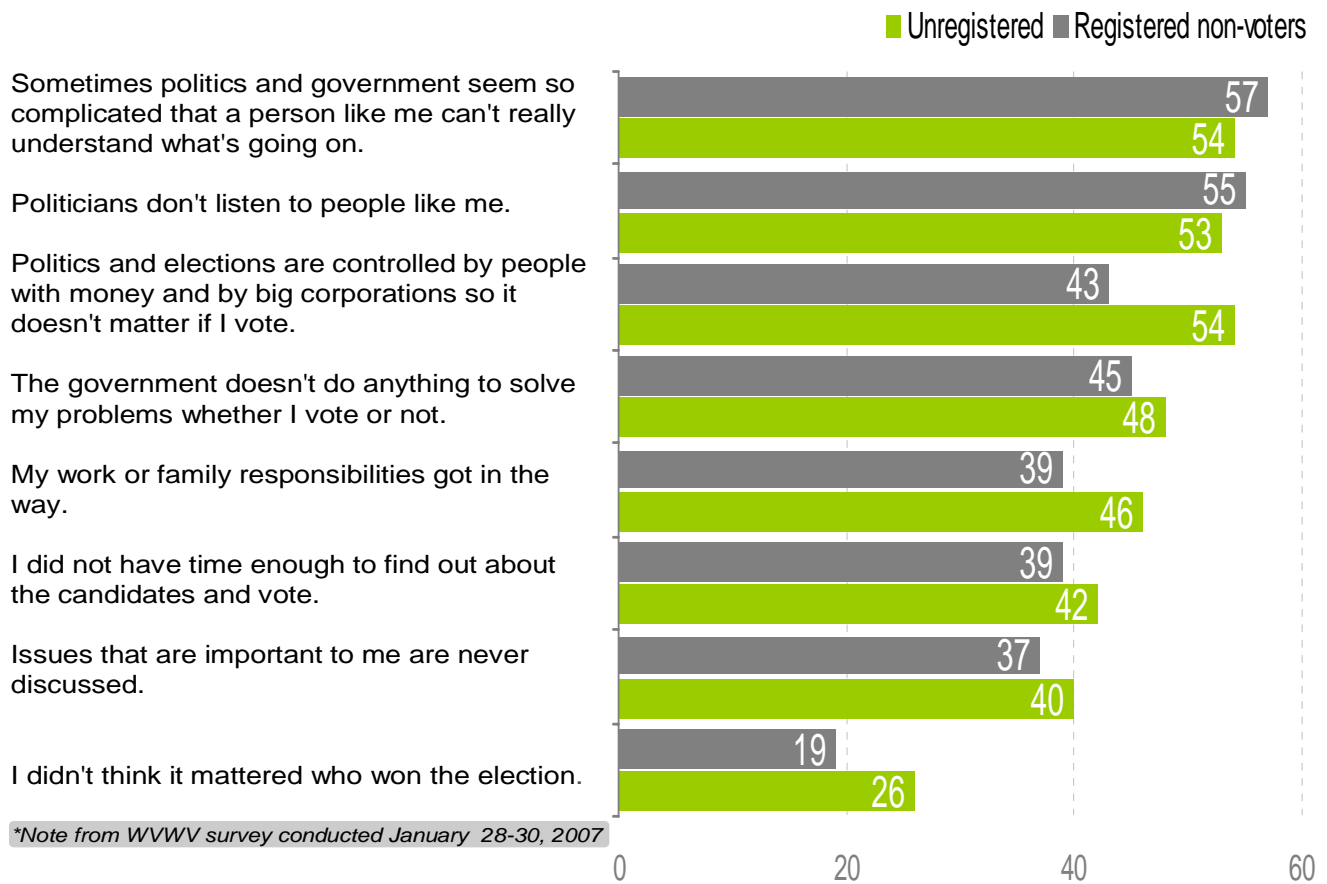
⁷ Based on a WVWV survey of 933 unmarried women under 65 conducted October 23 – November 19 2003, including 288 unlikely voters

⁸ Based on a Democracy Corps survey of 158 low propensity unmarried women voters in 11 states and 29 low propensity unmarried women voters nationwide conducted October 21-24, 2007.

Reasons for Not Voting

Unregistered and low-propensity women fail to vote for a diverse set of reasons, many of which overlap and reinforce each other. A fair number are cynical about the politicians willingness to listen, about the impact of their vote or even the integrity of the process itself. But others are very candid about their own competence at making an informed choice. For them, “not voting” is not about sending a message or making some silent protest. It is about not having the time or confidence to learn about the issues and candidates—and about the political community’s failure to reach out to them.

■ **Figure 5: Reasons for not voting**



Similarly, 54 percent of unregistered, unmarried women and 57 percent of registered, but low propensity women agree with the statement, "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on."⁹

For many in this cohort, improving participation is not about overcoming some deep-felt resistance to voting, but about having enough information to make a confident choice, making voting easier and more convenient for a single-income breadwinner and, it is about speaking to an agenda that meets them where they are in their own lives.

Politicians Must Heed Unmarried Women's New Priorities

Unmarried women are hungry for change. In the most recent Democracy Corps survey, 78 percent describe the country as headed off on the wrong track, compared to 70 percent for voters overall.

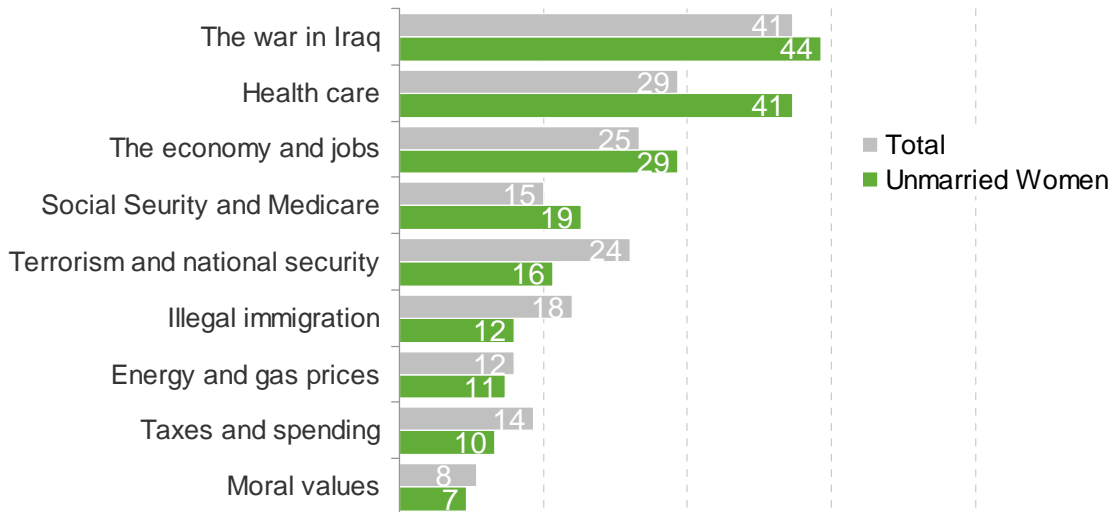
More specifically, their focus has three main thrusts: the war in Iraq, health care, and the economy. September's Democracy Corps survey shows that Iraq remains unmarried women's top concern, with 44 percent naming it one of their top two choices. Unmarried women's focus is beginning to shift somewhat, however, to domestic issues. Health care is a close second to Iraq, with 41 percent naming it as one of their top two concerns. The economy and jobs follows in third at 29 percent. Comparing unmarried women with the overall population, we see that this cohort has a stronger interest in health care, the economy and Social Security and Medicare (their fourth most important concern at 19 percent), and a weaker interest in terrorism, immigration and taxes and spending. It is clear that, along with Iraq, this cohort is most interested in issues that directly effect their economic security, which is not surprising considering the relatively insecure economic realities most unmarried women face.¹⁰

⁹ Based on a January, 2007 WVWV survey of 1,000 unmarried women, including 282 unregistered unmarried women and 210 low propensity women.

¹⁰ Based on s Democracy Corps survey of 1000 likely voters conducted September 16-18, 2007, including 201 unmarried women.

Figure 6: Iraq, Health Care, Economy Top Concerns Of Unmarried Women

Now, I am going to read you a list of concerns that people have. Please tell me which TWO of these you think the President and Congress should be paying the most attention to?



**Note: Data from Democracy corps poll of 1,000 likely voters nationwide from September 16-18, 2007.*

Politically, unmarried women are defined by, as much as anything else, their economic circumstances. Unmarried women, as a whole, face enormous economic stress, ranging from the cost of health care and gasoline to jobs with fewer benefits and wages that do not keep pace with the cost of living. These are mostly single-income households. They want and need government to help make their lives just a bit easier.

This reflects some basic economic facts about the unmarried population. Unmarried women earn less and are less likely to have jobs with good benefits than married men or women. Compared to married women, married men, and unmarried men, unmarried women have the lowest mean personal earnings at \$37,264 and only make 56 cents for every dollar a married man earns.¹¹ A Democracy Corps survey released last month reiterated just how much economic pressure unmarried women are facing. Respondents were asked to rate the severity of a series of economic issues including health care costs, gas prices, home foreclosures, the gap between the rich and poor and stagnant wages. On each, over half of unmarried women called the issue a “very serious problem,” with a full 77 percent applying that label to health care costs, which was the top response. For each issue, the percent of unmarried women rating the problems “very serious” was significantly higher than that of the overall population.¹²

¹¹ Based on 2006 Current Population survey from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Department of Labor

¹² Based on Democracy Corps Survey of 1000 likely voters conducted September 16-18, 2007, including 201 unmarried women.

They want a government that takes an active role to improve the economic prospects of all Americans. This cohort's outlook was summed up well by a February Democracy Corps survey which asked respondents if America is most successful when "our government helps create conditions so that many can prosper, not just a few," or if we are most successful when "we have a limited government that keeps taxes low so that business and individuals can prosper." While the general population was split about evenly, unmarried women agreed with the first statement by a 24-point margin, 58 – 34 percent.¹³

■ **Figure 7: Economic Concerns of Unmarried Women**

*I am going to read you a list of issues relating to the economy. For each issue I want you to tell me whether you think it is or is not a problem in the current economy (percent responding "very serious problem"):*¹⁴

Issue	Unmarried Women	Total
Rising health care costs	77	62
Rising gasoline prices	55	45
The growing gap between the rich and everybody else	53	44
Home sales and foreclosures	51	38
Stagnant wages	50	33

Unmarried women's desire for a government that is on their side is nowhere more true than when it comes to health care. Despite their lower income, unmarried women report paying *double* what married women do for their health care. Unmarried Americans not only report paying more for health insurance, but are also more likely to struggle without coverage.¹⁵

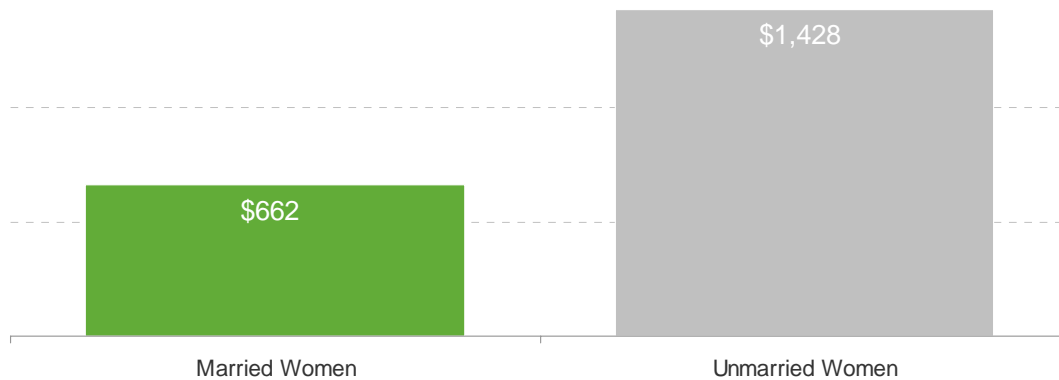
¹³ Based on Democracy Corps survey of 1014 likely voters conducted February 14-19, 2007, including 200 unmarried women.

¹⁴ Based on Democracy Corps Survey of 1000 likely voters conducted September 16-18, 2007, including 201 unmarried women.

¹⁵ Based on Scarborough USA, 2006, showing 14.8 percent of unmarried voters lacking coverage compared to just 7.6 percent of the married population as a whole voters

Figure 8 : Self Reported Monthly Healthcare Expenses

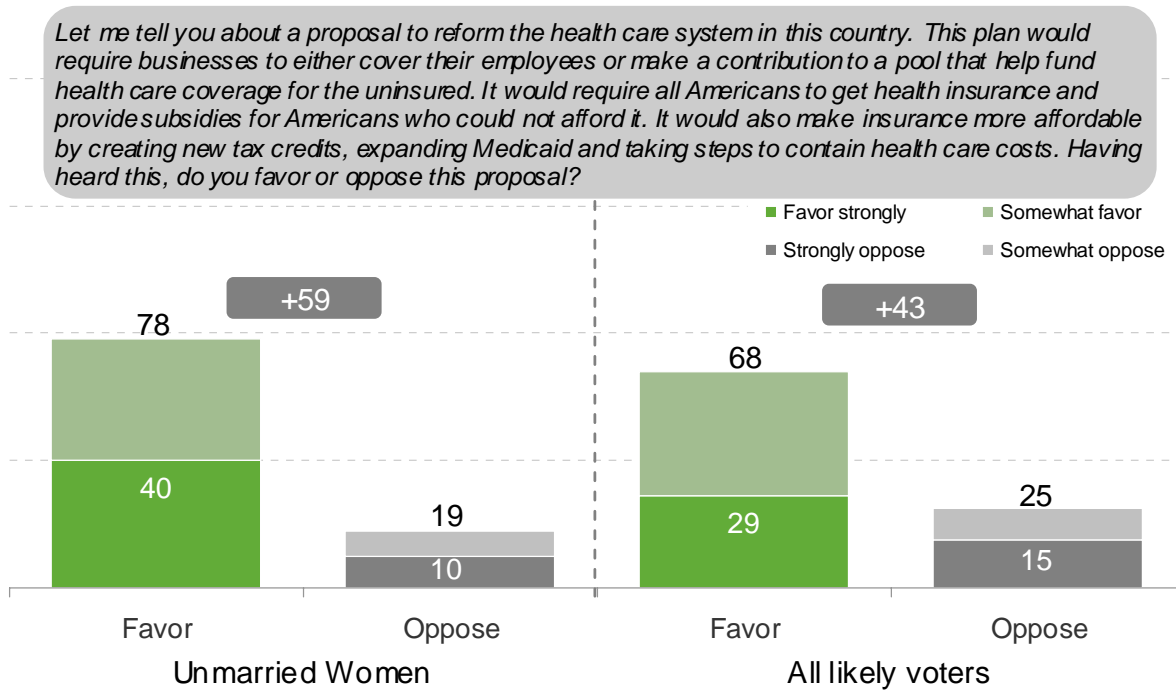
About how much do you pay each month on health care expenses? This would include the cost of insurance and out-of-pocket costs for things like doctors visits, treatments and prescription drugs.



**Note: From Democracy Corps national survey conducted May 29-31, 2007 of 1000 likely voters.*

As a result, unmarried women are leading the charge for fundamental change in health care. Unsatisfied and impatient with tinkering around the margins of a system that, to them, is broken, unmarried women push the envelope for sweeping change, in numbers that well exceed other voters. American voters in general may shy away from “radical” steps such as importing a Canadian-style system. Unmarried women, however, embrace such a powerful step. A Canadian system may not be the ideal reform among unmarried women or the best political step for energizing their vote, but their support for such a system testifies to their fundamental desire for change. More relevant for 2008, unmarried women also embrace the “play or pay” reform approach that all three major Democratic presidential candidates are proposing. Seventy-eight percent of unmarried women support such an approach, ten points higher support than the population as a whole. Also telling, when asked who should bear the responsibility of providing health insurance, only 9 percent of this cohort thought that it should be left to the individual, less than half the percentage of the population as a whole. Clearly, unmarried women are wary of a system where they would be left shouldering most of the risk.

Figure 9 : Support For “Play Or Pay” Reform



Perhaps more important to understand is what, specifically, unmarried women look for in health care reform. Naturally, unmarried women struggle with the rising costs of health care. Unmarried women also insist on high quality and share the goal of universal coverage. But it is health care security, more than any other change, that drives the issue among unmarried women.¹⁶ What unmarried women most want is health care that can never be taken away from them. Having such security trumps nearly all other personal health care priorities, not only among unmarried women, but among the broader electorate as well. In head-to-head match-ups, health care security bested lowering costs (by 33 points), improving quality (by 31 points) and maintaining choices (by 22 points) among unmarried women.¹⁷

Taking all of this data together, we can paint a coherent picture of the kind of health care agenda that will appeal to unmarried women in 2008. Without question, unmarried women believe no one should be priced out of health care and support universal health care as a normative value. But what they really insist on is fundamental reform of the system that will ensure that their own health care can never be taken away and that they won't be left on their own, at the mercy of the health insurance industry.

Unmarried Women Demand Change In Iraq

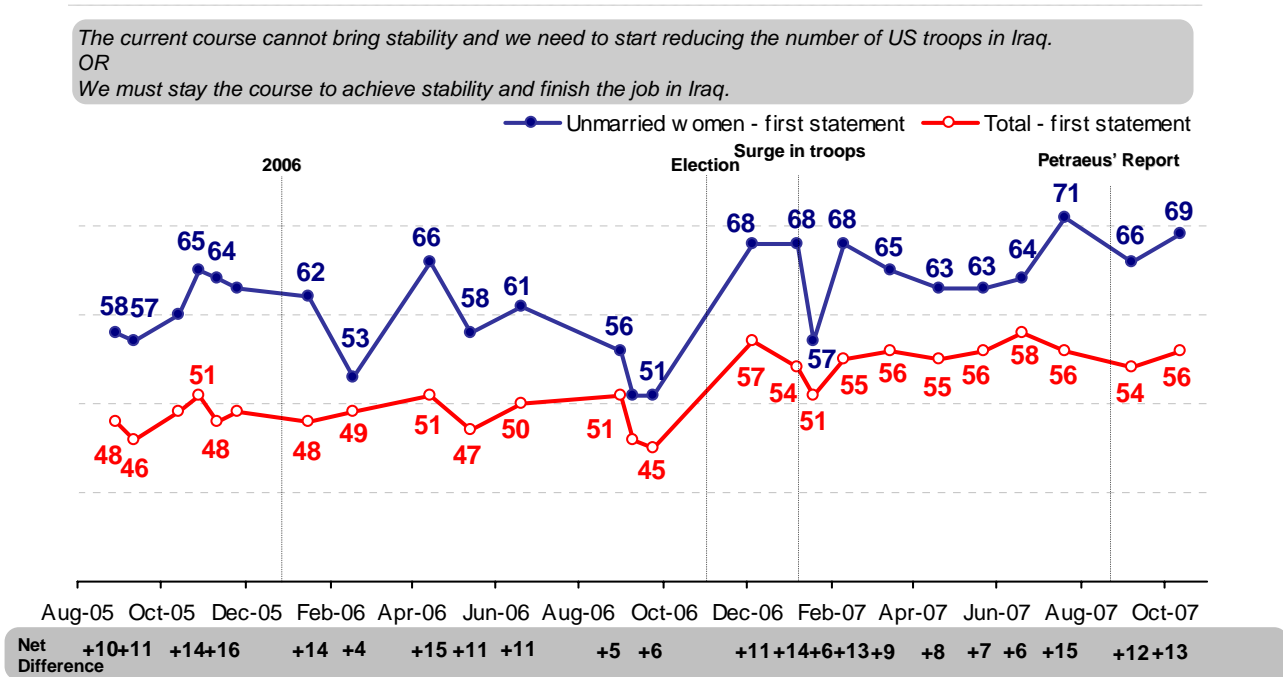
¹⁶ This is true among the rest of the electorate as well.

¹⁷ Based on a Democracy Corp Survey of 1000 likely voters conducted May 29-31, 2007.

Overall, voters' reactions to the war have been complex and remain so today. While voters condemned the President's conduct of the war early on—along with dozens of Republican congressmen and senators—they generally believed in the mission or, at least, believed the cost of withdrawal too high. In fact, Democracy Corps tracking surveys did not show convincing and stable majorities supporting troop withdrawal until after the 2006 elections.

In contrast, there was never a moment since Democracy Corps started tracking this question when unmarried women failed to support troop withdrawal. As early as September 2005 unmarried women supported a reduction in troops by a 23-point margin. In contrast, all voters at that time divided evenly on this question. Since the election, and even after the intense coverage of General Petraeus' testimony, support for troop reduction among unmarried women has remained in the mid-sixties to low-seventies.

Figure 10: Unmarried Women Stronger In Call For Troop Reduction



*Note: Based on Democracy Corps surveys 9/05 – 10/07

Americans have drawn important conclusions about the war and come to some consensus not only about its conduct but also about its need for an end. Where they sometimes diverge is the means to that end, as some voters stop short of aggressive congressional efforts—requiring withdrawal, cutting off funding, setting time-tables, etc.—that may infringe on the Commander's Constitutional authority or the conduct of generals on the ground. Unmarried women oppose this war and with less ambiguity about how it ends.

Perhaps most striking, according to last month's survey, by a 71 – 22 point margin unmarried women believe the war has made us less secure. The population as a whole is evenly split on this

question and, by a slight margin (44 – 47), married women actually think the war has made us more secure – this represents a 51 point marriage gap among women.¹⁸

Clearly, the Iraq War helped drive these women's choice for change in the 2006 election and remains critical to energizing this population looking forward.

Conclusion

The unmarried have grown as a share of the population for the past 50 years, and the latest data shows that this trend is not abating. The growth of the unmarried population is outpacing the growth of the married population two and a half to one. The sheer size of this population is already changing the face of America, demographically and socially. However, their relative lack of participation in our democracy precludes them from fully realizing the kind of change they demand and the kind of responsiveness from the policy makers they deserve.

¹⁸ Based on a Democracy Corps survey of 1000 likely voters conducted September 16-18, 2007, including 201 unmarried women.