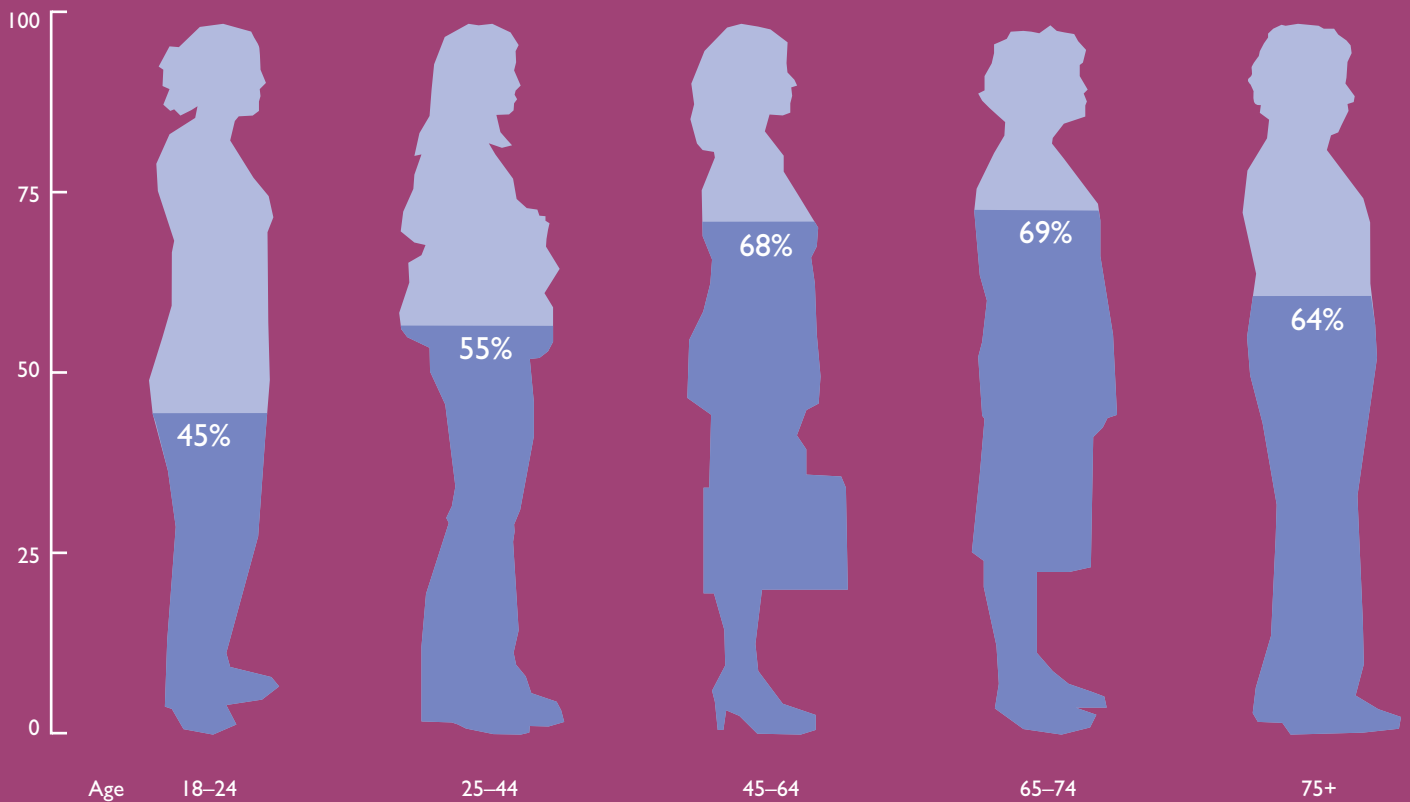


Percent of Eligible Women  
Who Reported Voting in 2004



# Voting MATTERS

AN NCJW SERIES

by SUSAN J. CARROLL and KATHERINE E. KLEEMAN

Of course you're going to vote in 2008. And there's still plenty of time to make sure the women in your life do, too. The stakes couldn't be higher. Whether the issue is war, education, health care, or climate change, life-altering decisions will be made by the people elected this year. And thanks to the gender gap, women hold the power to determine election outcomes — but only if we vote!

## The Gender Gap Deconstructed

Often when people talk about the gender gap, they're referring to wage

inequities. But when it comes to voter turnout, the term means something else entirely. Put simply, the voting gender gap is the difference between the percentage of women and the percentage of men voting for a given candidate.

The women's vote has grown gradually since 1920, when the long battle for women's suffrage finally culminated in the 19th Amendment. For six decades after winning the right to vote, the percentage of women who turned out was far lower than the percentage of men, according to US Census Bureau data. But in every presidential election since 1964, the number of women voting has exceeded the number of men voting. Moreover, since 1980, every presidential election has seen the proportion

of eligible women voting exceed the proportion of eligible men voting. In 2004, 67.3 million women (60.1 percent of those of voting age) went to the polls, compared with 58.5 million men (56.3 percent). And as of 2004, women outvoted men, regardless of whether they were white, Latina, black, or Asian-American.

Among the youngest voters, ages 18 to 24, women have outvoted men in recent presidential elections. In fact, it's only among older voters — 65 and up — that a greater proportion of men than women vote. But because women outnumber men in the population, the number of women voting has exceeded the number of men voting in every age group.

How do women vote? In most races in recent elections, a gender



Source: Center for American Women and Politics

gap has been evident, with a variety of polls suggesting that women and men hold different views on various policy issues and that even when they hold similar views, they tend to prioritize differently. A poll conducted by Lake Research Partners on the eve of the 2006 elections asked voters what the priorities should be for the incoming Congress. Women highlighted the war, health care, Social Security, the economy, and jobs, while men emphasized government corruption, the war, the economy, and jobs. A summary of the survey findings further noted that “Women’s domestic agenda is much broader than men’s and includes child care and early education, equality for women, raising the minimum wage, and rebuilding areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.”

One longstanding difference between women and men, particularly relevant in today’s political environment, is that women are more opposed to the use of military force to resolve international conflicts.

Another difference was shown in a 2006 survey by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life that created a “conservatism index” based on responses to several hot-button issues. In the end, women proved to be notably less conservative than men.

**Single & Silent: More than 20 Million Uncast Votes**

While women’s preferences tend to be different than men’s and could lead to policy changes, many women don’t vote. Unmarried women, in particular, have been largely absent from the polls. According to the non-partisan Women’s Voices, Women’s Vote (WVWV), single women constitute a significant bloc of potential voters, but they have been much less likely to go to the polls than their married counterparts. In 2004, 71 percent of married women, but only 59 percent of unmarried women voted. That’s 20 million unmarried women who could have voted but did not.

These unmarried female voters hold a variety of progressive views about national policies. By a 58–34 margin, they believe the US should pay less attention to international concerns and concentrate on problems at home, according to a WVWV survey. By a 71–23 margin, they say the war in Iraq was not worth the cost. And by a 62–29 margin, they want government to do more to help the needy, even at the cost of going deeper into debt.

**Promote the Vote!**

So it’s great that you’ll vote — but make sure other women do, too! And urge all of them to find candidates they care about. That way, you’ll be playing your part to fulfill the promise envisioned by the suffragists who struggled long ago to ensure that women have an equal opportunity to determine our country’s future. >

This article is the second in a series exploring voting in the United States, created to educate and mobilize readers in preparation for the 2008 elections.