

February 11, 2009

Agenda and Advocacy Survey Keeping Obama Surge Voters Engaged

To: Women's Voices. Women Vote

From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

America is changing. Between 1960 and 2006, the percentage of the voting age population that was unmarried increased from 27 to 47 percent. In 2008, young people (ages 18-29) numbered more than the baby boom generation. This is the most diverse generation in our history and, by 2040, a majority of Americans will likely be non-white. If the current trend continues, the unmarried population will become a majority in the next 15 years.¹ Unmarried women now account for 26 percent of the population, a larger group than seniors and equal in size to their married counterparts.

Collectively, this new America – unmarried women, African Americans, young people and Latinos -- accounted for 46 percent of the 2008 electorate according to exit surveys and account for 52 percent of the voting age population; unmarried women, at 21 percent (according to exit polls) of the electorate and fully 26 percent of the voting eligible population are the largest group.

All of the groups mentioned above—younger voters, people of color, unmarried women—have been politically marginalized in some fashion or other. But collectively, they constitute a growing majority of the American population.

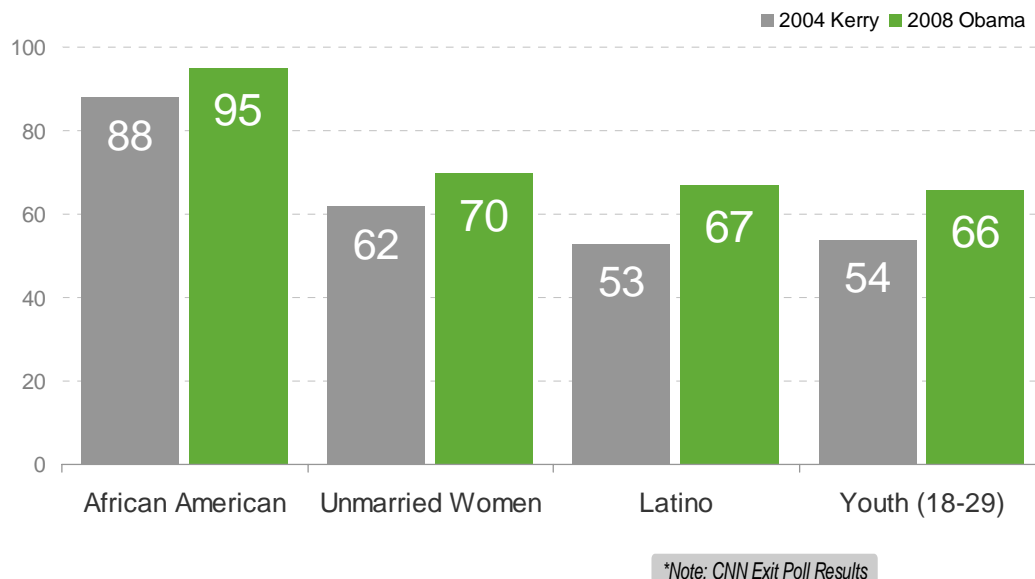
The groups that are changing America demographically, changed America politically in 2008. By virtue of higher turnout or higher margins, four key groups spearheaded the progressive victory in November: unmarried women, African Americans, younger voters and Latinos. Each group delivered better than a 2:1 margin for Barack Obama, a substantially higher Democratic margin than in 2004. While African Americans represent a slowly declining population in relative terms, these voters turned out in higher numbers than in 2004, increasing their contribution to the total electorate from 11 percent to 13 percent.² Overall, this Rising American Electorate supported Obama by a 69 to 30 percent margin. The rest of the country supported McCain (58 to 41 percent).

These voters, this “Rising American Electorate,” define and drive change in our country.

¹ US Census data 1960-200, American Community Survey, 2006.

² Estimate based on National Election Poll conducted by Edison/Mitofsky.

■ **Figure 1: Increased Obama Support Among Rising Voters**



This progressive groundswell is by no means permanent. Both historical evidence and this research project suggest that these groups are likely to “drop off” in 2010 in disproportionate numbers. These groups historically have been less likely to participate in non-presidential elections and, depending on the success of the Obama Administration in meeting their needs, may well drop out in critical congressional and gubernatorial races.

In 2004, turnout of unmarried women improved, yet 20 million did not vote. Turnout among younger Americans also improved in 2004, but these voters still voted in numbers well below other generations. Similarly, turnout among African Americans was 60 percent in 2004, compared to 67 among whites. Unfortunately, this pattern may not have ended in 2008, despite higher turnout levels. This survey, in fact, reveals signs of a disproportionate number of these voters dropping out of the next election. Indeed, fully 40 percent among voters in the Rising American Electorate indicate some risk of not voting in 2010; for everyone else, the number drops to just 25 percent. It is this tendency to be relatively underrepresented in our political system that drives Women’s Voices. Women Vote and similar groups to educate and inform these constituencies and help them stay involved.

There are few more important projects right now than maintaining the energy and engagement of these Rising voters. In 2010, there will be 38 gubernatorial elections and 28 competitive congressional elections. Before then, there will be big fights over healthcare, union organizing, education, energy policy and even foreign policy. For their own benefit, these voters need to remain active participants in our democracy, not only in 2010, but right now. Real change requires real people to get involved, not only to become voters, but to become vocal advocates. The stakes could not be higher. Much of the energy coming out of the 2008 election springs from the grassroots, but the key is thinking through how to harness this in between elections. The work WVVV will do over the next few months is critical to that learning.

This research begins exploring how to build a permanent activist base among groups in the Rising American Electorate. It starts with the premise that these voters did not simply support a

candidate or party in 2008, but an agenda that could improve their lives. Passing legislation that has a direct impact on their lives is the best way to engage them politically. This survey also looks at the mechanics of advocacy—how these voters have been politically involved in the past, how they might be politically involved in the future and what issues motivate them more than others.

This is one of only a few national surveys providing representative samples of four key elements of the Rising American Electorate. This is one of the only surveys exploring in depth their agenda and the differences between the Rising voters and the rest of the electorate. It provides a crucial early warning that their participation in 2010 can not be assumed. And it also suggests means of converting some of these voters into a core activist group as means of improving their participation rates in 2010.

This survey was commissioned by Women's Voices, Women Vote. Between January 22nd and February 3, 2009, Greenberg Quinlan Rosner interviewed 1,659 2008 voters, including oversamples of unmarried women (645 total interviews), African Americans (292 total interviews), Latinos (263 interviews) and youth (337 total interviews). As the youth population has become increasingly inaccessible using traditional land-line interviewing, this segment employed a multi-modal research design using land-lines, cell phone and web interviewing. The total margin of error for this survey is +/- 2.41 points at a 95 percent confidence level.

Main Findings

- **These voters remain hopeful.** The last three months have not cooled their enthusiasm for and confidence in Barack Obama. Perhaps the most telling numbers to emerge, while 56 percent of unmarried women believe the country is headed off on the wrong track now, 73 percent believe the country will be heading in the right direction in two or three years. The Rising American Electorate believes they will see real change in the country.
- **Critically, the Rising American Electorate betrays signs of dropping out of 2010 electorate.** Asked to describe their likelihood of voting in the 2010 election, three out of four of these groups—African Americans excepted—report a lower probability of voting than voters overall. Overall, just 60 percent commit strongly to voting in 2010, compared to 75 percent for the rest of the electorate.
- **The Rising American Electorate defines the economic vulnerability of the rest of the country.** In our tracking of unmarried women throughout the 2008 cycle, we found that unmarried women signaled that something was seriously wrong with the economy well before the rest of the electorate “caught up.” Similarly, while relatively few American voters these days are satisfied with the economic situation, the problem grows substantially worse among these voters. In total, 18 percent describe their personal economic situation as poor; this jumps to 26 percent among unmarried women.
- **Support for the recovery package is strong throughout the country.** Importantly, at a time when conservatives are noting—and overstating—declining support for the

stimulus, this survey shows a 66 percent majority of Americans in support of the bill.³ Given both their progressive politics and their economic exposure, it is not surprising to see stronger support among the Rising American Electorate.

- **Their agenda does not end with the stimulus package.** In a country in the midst of economic recession, unmarried women, African Americans, Latinos and younger voters face disproportionate economic struggles. These economic struggles create an agenda that is in some ways distinct from the rest of the country. It is critical to make the policy agenda as accessible as possible, bringing down big policy issues to the household level. A “jobs bill,” to cite just one example, will enjoy more support than an “economic stimulus package” among these voters. They need to understand the impact any agenda will have on their lives. Things like raising the minimum wage or pay equity among unmarried women prove very popular in the Rising American Electorate because their impact is so immediate and obvious.
- **These groups could become willing activists and advocates.** One third (32 percent) of unmarried women say they are very likely to write a hand-written letter to their Congressman in support of an issue important to them. Twenty-seven percent (27 percent) are very likely to allow an organization to connect them with an elected official’s office on the phone (“a patch through”).
- **Civic engagement groups need to consider the *means of advocacy*.** While survey respondents often overstate their participation in a socially desirable activity—such as voting—what matters here are two things. First, a voter’s willingness to get involved is contingent on what precisely is asked of her. African American women, for example, seem more receptive to a patch through call than other unmarried women. Younger voters are more receptive to on-line activism. The issue, of course, matters a great deal and unmarried women in general seem well positioned to engage in the healthcare fight in a major way.

The Rising American Electorate At Real Risk of Dropping Out in 2010

Nationally, slightly more than one in ten (11 percent) of 2008 voters, voted for the first time according to the National Election Pool. Many of these voters were younger, but 2008 also saw a disproportionate number of unmarried women (22 percent), Latinos (29 percent) and African Americans (19 percent) voting for the first time for President in the 2008 cycle.

Not all of these voters will make it to the polls in 2010. Those least likely to commit to showing up to vote in 2010 include lower income voters, less educated voters, as well as younger voters, Latinos and unmarried women. Of the group of Rising voters, only African Americans seem as engaged as the rest of the electorate in the 2010 elections.

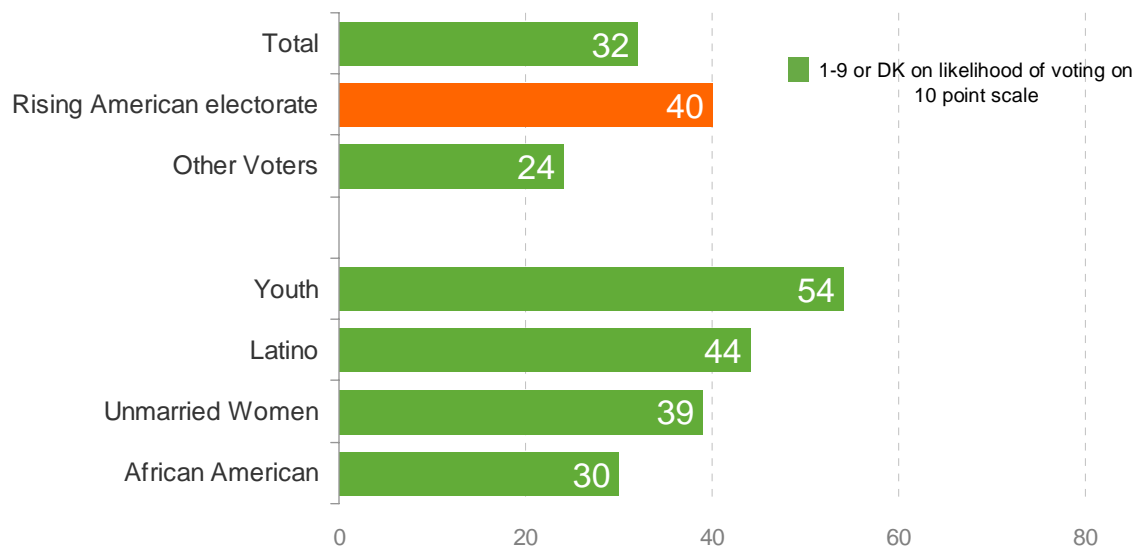
We asked voters to rate their likelihood of voting in 2010 on a 10-point scale. As is always the case with stated behavior, we need to be mindful that voters often provide socially desirable responses. Nearly seven in ten (68 percent) describe their likelihood of voting as a 10; typically, off-year elections see turnout at around 50 percent of eligible voters. What matters is

³ Question wording drives much of the variation in publicly reported support for this bill; this survey explained the bill in some depth.

the *relative* response and here is where Rising voters expose the risk of disproportionate drop-off. Among these voters, we see compelling evidence that many will not turn out for 2010 races, particularly when compared to the rest of the electorate. The only exception is African American voters.

Figure 2: Potential Drop-off Much Higher Among Most Rising Voters

What are the chances that you will vote in the elections in 2010 for Congress and other offices, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 means you are absolutely certain to vote and 1 means you are certain not to vote.



In sum, the voters who gave Barack Obama 69 percent of the vote share state they are substantially less likely to vote than the voters who gave McCain 58 percent.⁴

They Still Believe

The 2008 election was marked by a suspension of cynicism, a belief that voting mattered and that average people could make a difference. The result was that unmarried women, Latinos, African Americans and youth—groups that have historically been under-engaged in politics – participated in our democracy, many for the first time. There is no evidence in this survey that the last three months sapped this optimism. In fact, while voters remain sobered by unalloyed bad economic news, they are confident about the ability of the new leadership in Washington to turn things around. This is particularly true of the Rising American Electorate, voters who have the most to lose in the current economy, and, poignantly, the most to gain from a recovery.

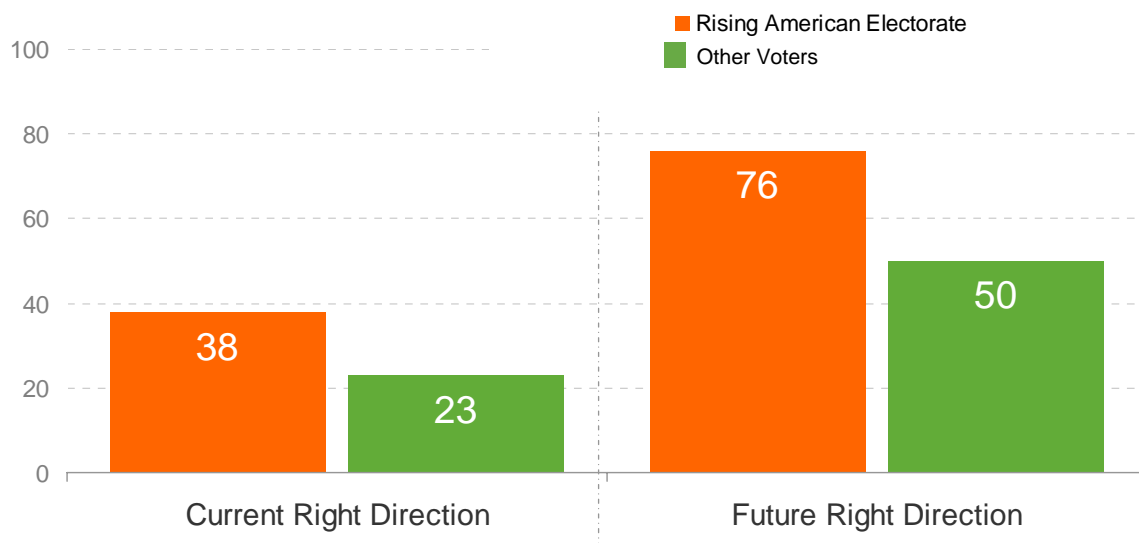
⁴ Election results based on the Democracy Corps/Campaign for America's Future post-election survey of 2,000 2008 voters.

However, if nothing happens on their issues, we will likely see a return to the kind of cynicism that undermined electoral participation in the past. This is why we need to keep them educated and involved early in the process.

A 60 percent majority of American voters believe the country is off on the wrong track, just 30 percent argue it is headed in the right direction. These results, while hardly effusive, reflect a surge of optimism from the pre-election period, when national wrong track numbers hovered in the high 70's. The Rising American Electorate is somewhat more sanguine than average, but remains realistic about the near-term challenges this country faces. More interesting, when we ask voters to project ahead a few years, a 62 percent majority of voters believe things will be heading in the right direction; this vote of confidence rings much louder among unmarried women, younger voters, African Americans and Latinos.

■ Figure 3: Rising Electorate Optimistic About the Future

(Current Direction: Do you think that things in this country are going in the right direction or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track? (Future Direction:) Looking ahead two or three years, do you think things in this country will be going in the right direction, or do you feel things will be off on the wrong track?)



In a post-election survey taken November 3-5, 84 percent of unmarried women agreed with the statement, “I am hopeful this election will bring real change in the direction of the country.” Currently, 83 percent of unmarried women agree with the statement, “I am hopeful we will see real change in the direction of the country.” We see similar optimism, not only among Rising voters (78 percent of younger voters agree with this statement), but among all voters (75 percent agree). Similarly, 75 percent of unmarried women believed at the time of the election that “average people can help change the country;” 70 percent of unmarried women currently agree. Even voters who proved less amenable to Obama, such as white seniors (64 percent) and white blue collars (73 percent) now see reason to hope.

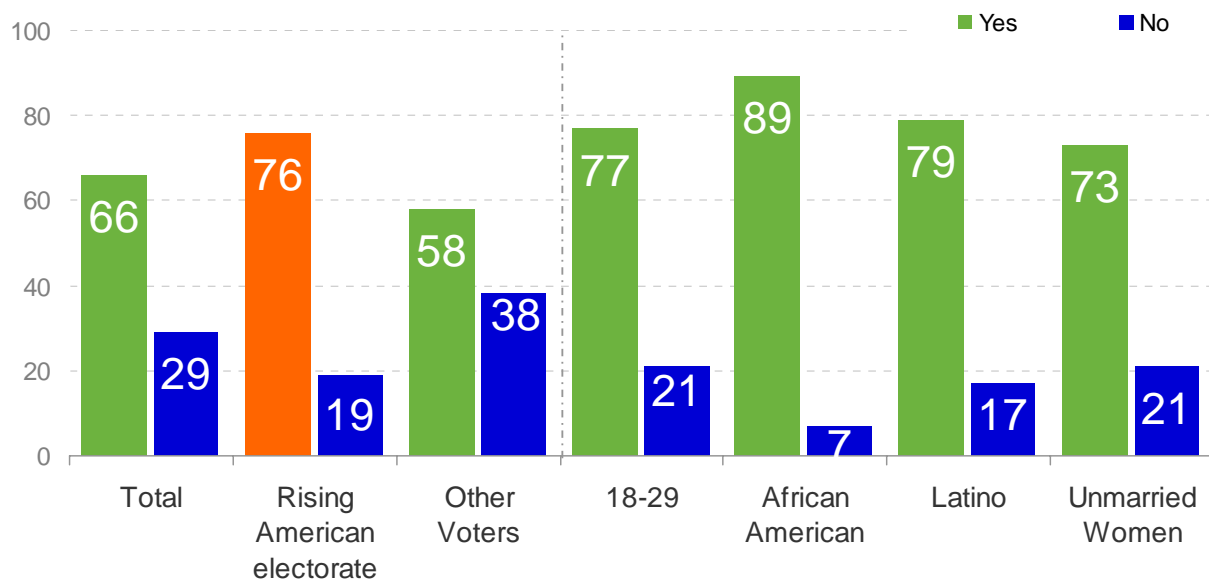
“Change” elections are supposed to be about anger. For Rising voters—voters who economically had the most to be angry about—this one was about hope. That has not changed

since the election. As groups in the civic engagement community consider basic messaging over the next few weeks and years, even confronting the raw politics of conservative opposition, this should be kept in mind. These voters need to believe that things are changing, that they are part of this change; this process cannot start in 2010, but needs to start in 2009.

Barack Obama starts with a lot of good will among the Rising American Electorate and also among voters who did not support him overwhelmingly last November. Barack Obama enjoys a 64 percent approve, 22 percent disapprove score for his work as President and leading up to the Inauguration.⁵ Rising voters account for much of the President’s popularity. He does particularly well among African Americans and carries most of his support from other groups into this period as well.

Figure 4: Obama Approval Higher Among Rising Voters

Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about what you are hearing from President Obama. Since the election, do you feel like he is speaking directly to you and the issues you care about?



As impressive, however, is his support among voters who did not constitute the Obama base last November. Obama reaches 67 percent positive among married women, 63 percent positive among white blue collar voters, 57 percent positive among white Independents, and 67 percent positive among white non-south rural voters. Even white seniors (51 percent positive), show some progress for the President.⁶

⁵ Recall, this survey started shortly after the Inauguration.

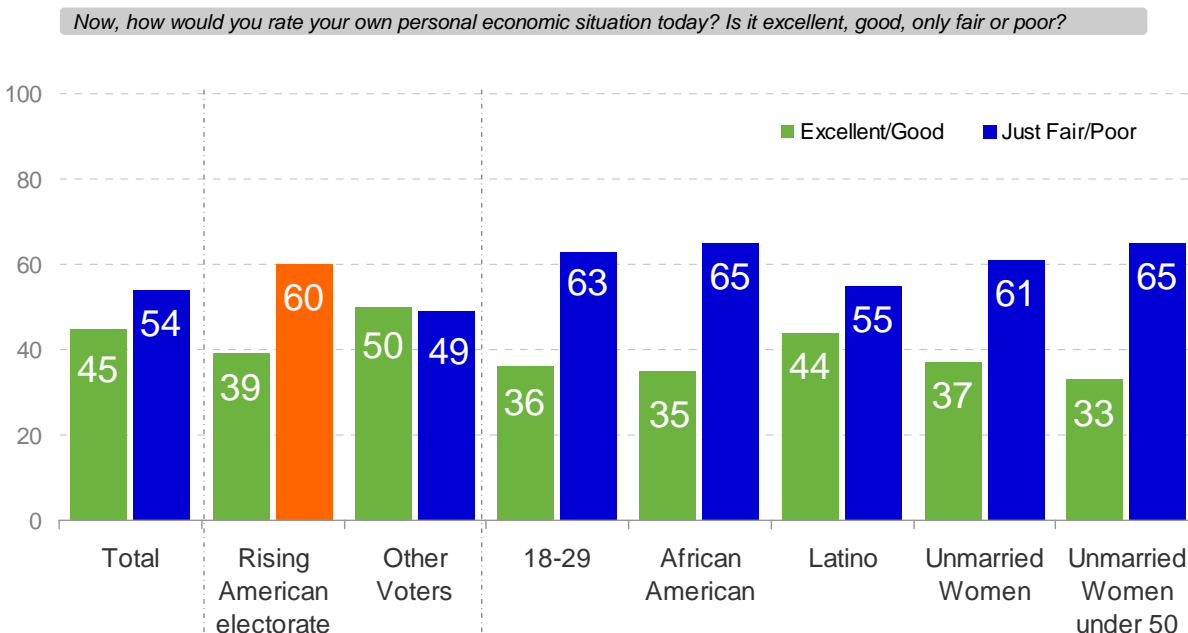
⁶ Just 40 percent of white seniors supported Obama according to the National Election Poll conducted by Edison/Mitofsky.

The Economic Standing of the Rising American Electorate

Unmarried women, African Americans, Latinos and younger voters share something in common beyond delivering a huge margin to Obama in 2008; they share an economic vulnerability that sets them apart even in a country where economic anxiety is more the rule than the exception. Of course, their economic condition going into the election and their support for Obama coming out of the election are related. As we shall see, economic self-interest continues to play a role in these voters' political and policy choices.

We asked voters to rate their own personal economic situation: excellent, good, only fair or poor. A 54 percent majority describe their economic situation as “only fair” or “poor.” Three years ago, this number stood at only 47 percent.⁷ Of these, 18 percent describe their situation as “poor.” Just 45 percent say they are doing well. This reaction is highly correlated with age, as 60 percent of younger whites describe their economic situation as only fair or poor, compared to 49 percent of whites aged 50-64 and 45 percent of white seniors. Other groups expose similar economic difficulty as younger voters; at least 60 percent describe their economic condition as only fair or poor (Latinos excepted). All told, 60 percent of Rising American voters describe their economic situation in negative terms; the rest of the electorate divides fairly evenly (50 percent excellent/good; 49 percent only fair/poor).

Figure 6: Economic Vulnerability High Among Rising Voters



Nine percent of voters describe themselves as unemployed, 11 percent working part time. Again, these numbers rise sharply among groups in the Rising American Electorate: 27 percent

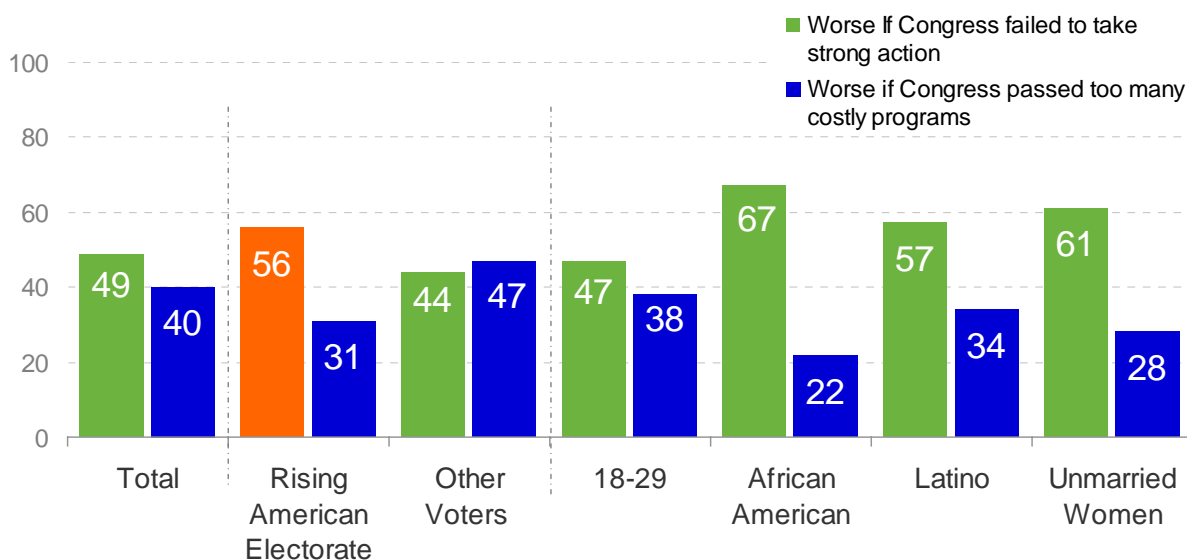
⁷ Reflects a March, 2006 survey of likely 1,044 adults by the Economic Policy Institute.

unemployed/work part-time among unmarried women, 22 percent among African Americans, 33 percent among young people, and 28 percent among Latinos. Obviously, some of these voters work part-time by choice, but it is also likely there is a higher under-employed population among these voters, as well as a higher unemployed population.

Little wonder Rising voters are far more impatient with congressional stalling over taking action than the rest of the electorate. At least in terms of this issue, unmarried women nearly match the intensity of African American voters in the need for Congress to take strong action.

Figure 7: Rising Voters Want Action

*Which do you think would be worse for the country in the coming year:
If the Congress failed to take strong and aggressive action to increase the number of jobs
OR
If the Congress passed too many costly new government programs that increased the budget deficit?*

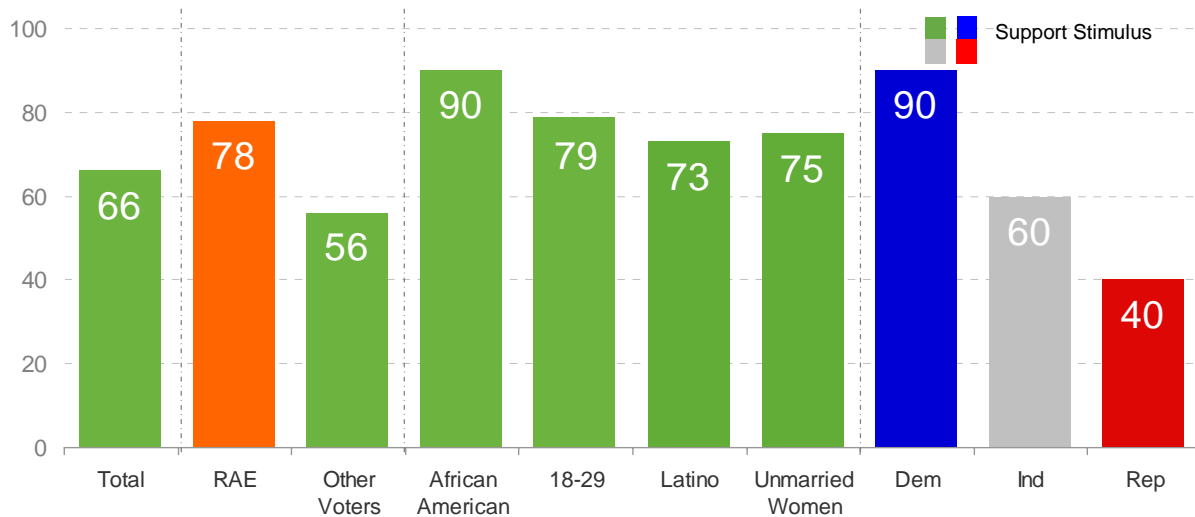


The Rising American Voter Agenda

At a time when conservatives argued public support for the recovery package is eroding, this survey shows a broad swath of voters supporting the President’s program. Even among Republicans, four in ten support the program as described in this survey. This issue should not be perceived as a polarizing issue, at least among voters. Not surprisingly, the voters who delivered huge margins for Obama last November, and who remain the most economically marginalized in the country support the package in even greater numbers.

Figure 8: Broad Support for Stimulus Package

As you may have heard, the Obama administration and the Congress are likely to introduce a major recovery package to create four million new jobs and jump start the economy. It is likely that this package will cost as much as \$850 billion dollars over two years. From what you have heard, do you favor or oppose this plan?



Even among these voters, however, the stimulus faces some problems, some of which may recur as Congress considers future spending and “bailouts.” When we raise the issue of the potential gender imbalance in the stimulus, the fact that construction jobs are more likely to employ men than women, a fair number of voters (30 percent, 34 percent among unmarried women) see major problems. But when we link this package to TARP and raise the issue of the deficit, fully 73 percent of voters see a major problem. Most groups in the Rising American Electorate, African Americans excepted, share this concern with other voters.

The agenda of Rising voters did not end with the passage of the stimulus package. Most of these voters energized around “change” well before this package was even considered.

The agenda of the Rising American Electorate shares some commonalities with other voters. All voters are concerned about the economy. The leading agenda item for unmarried women, youth, Latinos and voters overall is renewable energy and green jobs. This is also the leading agenda item among white Independents, married women and other swing groups like white blue collar workers.

But the severity of their economic conditions sets the agenda of the Rising Electorate apart. Because this economy is something they feel and live more so than other voters, Rising voters tend to advocate issues that a more tangible impact on their everyday lives.

As a result, unmarried women are far more interested in affordable healthcare, raising the minimum wage and pay equity than we see among voters overall. African Americans are 21 points more likely to identify SCHIP as extremely important and 25 percent more likely to identify affordable education as extremely important. The youth agenda looks the most like the

agenda of the rest of the electorate, but even here, 39 percent identify increased access to student loans and cutting interest rates as extremely important, compared to 29 percent overall. More broadly speaking, these voters seem clearly primed to engage on the healthcare issue in a serious way.

Figure 9: Rising Voters Focus On Household Issues

	RAE	Other Voters	Difference
Invest in renewable energy, like solar, wind and bio-fuels, to create 2.5 million new green jobs and make America energy independent.	52	42	+10
Expand the State Children's Health Insurance Plan to cover all children in America.	45	27	+18
Make it easier to challenge pay discrimination in the workplace to make sure women are paid the same as men who perform the same job.	43	28	+15
Enhance the Lifelong Learning Tax Credit and Hope Scholarships so that training and college are more affordable to anyone who wants to go.	42	28	+14
Provide a universal health care system, so that every American has health care coverage.	43	26	+17
Increase access to student loans and cut interest rates.	36	23	+13
Cut taxes for the middle class and pay for it by increasing taxes on those earning over \$250,000 a year.	33	24	+9
Increase access to affordable health care by requiring all businesses to provide health care for their employees or contribute to a fund to help pay for their coverage.	37	20	+17
Increase access to quality, affordable child care.	35	19	+16
Increase the minimum wage to \$10 per hour to provide a living wage.	34	20	+14

**Rated "extremely important"*

Advocacy

Rising voters show a relatively strong willingness in getting involved in issues they care about in between elections, particularly given their history of political disengagement. More important, their willingness to become active is conditioned at least in part on what specifically is asked of them (i.e., writing a letter, signing a petition, writing an e-mail, etc.). E-mail, for example, is more inviting among voters under 50. Upper income unmarried women are more likely to do more "work" and, of course, donate money. Unmarried women of color are the most likely to attend a town hall meeting, and African American unmarried women are the most receptive to a patch through call.

Obviously, not every respondent who says she will vote on election day will necessarily make it to the polls and not every respondent who commits to writing a letter to her Congressman will post a stamp.

Figure 10: Advocacy Among Rising American Electorate

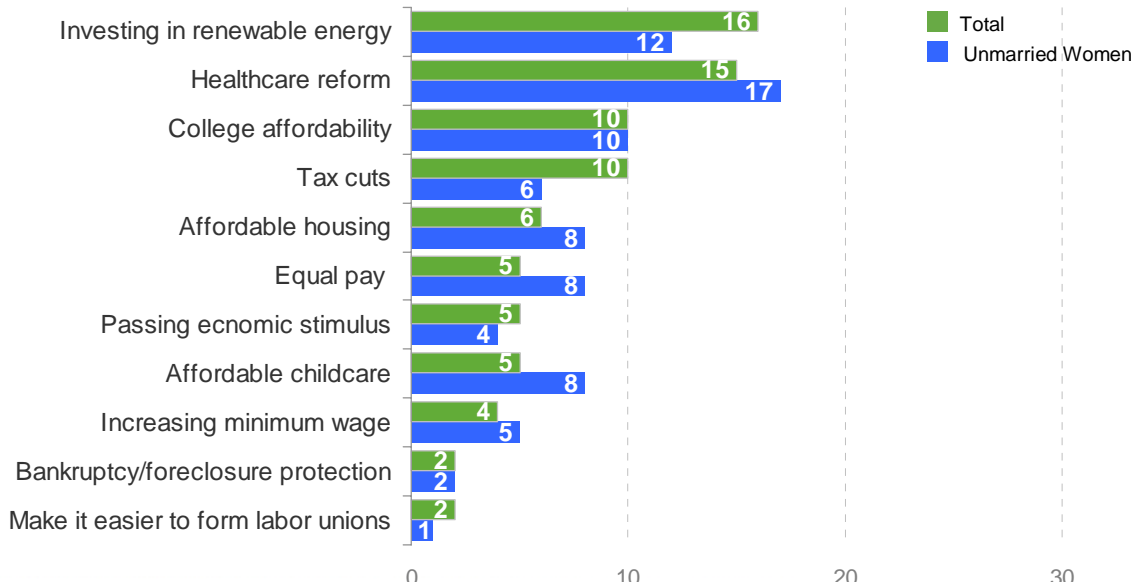
Unmarried Women Very likely	Total Unmarried	18-49	50 and over	White	Black	Latino	College	Non College
Sign petition	47	53	39	46	52	45	53	43
Send form letter	36	36	35	33	42	36	40	33
Forward email	35	43	24	32	47	30	36	34
Volunteer time	34	38	28	32	41	28	38	31
Call elected official	32	28	36	33	29	14	32	32
Send hand-written letter	32	28	37	29	39	39	32	32
Attend town meeting	31	31	31	29	40	31	31	29
Connect phone call	27	28	25	27	30	14	33	23
Donate money	22	23	20	20	28	22	26	20
Join online group	22	29	13	21	25	21	25	21

The specific issue advocated on, of course, matters a great deal as well. When asked which issue they find important enough to get involved, unmarried women seem very interested in the next big fight, healthcare. This means unmarried women are lined up to engage in what will arguably, be the most important fight of the new Administration.

African Americans and Latinos identify college affordability as one of their leading issues.

Figure 11: Unmarried Women Most Interested in Healthcare Advocacy

Even if you are not likely to get involved right now, which one of the following issues are important enough to you personally that you could imagine yourself getting involved in some way in the future.



Conclusion

The Rising American Electorate voters who drove the historic election in 2008 remain hopeful and confident. They believed they could make a difference in November and continue to believe that now. Moreover, they can make a major difference in the fight to change the country. They have, arguably for the first time, real political power in this country as they now comprise a majority of the voting eligible population. It would be a grave mistake to assume their current level of engagement is a permanent feature of politics in America. To maintain their energy, these groups need to be educated and courted in 2009. Their issues need to be addressed; they need to maintain their belief that the new leadership is speaking to their concerns, and they need to be activated in 2009.