

Unmarried Americans Crucial to President's Victory

by Thomas F. Coleman

More unmarried Americans voted this year than ever before. Barack Obama benefitted from the ballots they cast, since most of them favored the President over his challenger.

[Exit polls from this election](#) showed that from a national perspective, 40 percent of voters were single or unmarried. This is up from [34 percent in 2008](#).

There were about 122 million votes cast in the presidential race. Obama received about 61 million and Romney about 58 million. So Obama won the popular vote by 3 million votes.

Some 48.8 million voters who cast votes in the 2012 presidential race were unmarried. Sixty percent of them, or 29.3 million voted for Obama.

If only 34 percent of the voters were unmarried in this election, as in 2008, then only 41.8 million unmarried voters would have cast ballots in the 2012 presidential race. With 60 percent voting for Obama, he would have received only 24.9 million unmarried votes. That would have been 4.4 million fewer votes for Obama.

Since Obama won by 3 million votes, it is easy to conclude that had unmarried voters not surged to the polls in 2012 in such large numbers, and had they turned out at the same rate as they did in 2008, Obama would not have won the popular vote.

Many news stories focused on the high level of support for Obama by single women – and that is true. But unmarried men also voted for Obama over Romney in disproportionate numbers. The marriage gap is not limited to single women versus married women but also applies to men, although to a lesser extent.

The [marriage gap transcends gender](#). As blogger Patricia Zengerle wrote on reuters.com, “married men backed Romney by 54-39 percent over Obama. Unmarried men backed Obama by 54-35 percent.”

As for women, Zengerle explained that unmarried women favored Obama over Romney by 61-30 percent, while married women backed Romney over Obama by 51-41 percent.

Obama may have lost some of the swing states if it were not for the high turnout by unmarried voters and their high level of support for the President. These are the [percentages of unmarried voters](#) who cast ballots for Obama: New Hampshire 58%; Wisconsin 61%; Iowa 63%; Nevada 64%; Pennsylvania 64%; Virginia 61%; Ohio 62%; Florida 61%; Colorado 60%.

In some states, the turnout by unmarried voters was considerably higher than the national figure of 40

percent. For example, in [New York](#) state, 45 percent of the voters were unmarried. In [California](#), 46 percent of the ballots were cast by unmarried people.

Ohio was a pivotal state, not only in the presidential race but also in the battle over who would gain control of a majority in the Senate. The “marriage gap” was evident on both counts.

In Ohio the marriage gap was 33 points. Unmarried women favored Obama by 28 points and married women went for Romney by 5 points. In the U.S. Senate race the gap was 28 points. Unmarried women voted for Brown by 26 points while married women split and supported Mandel by 2 points.

In [Michigan](#), the voting pattern of unmarried men was similar to that of unmarried women. Unmarried men went for Obama over Romney by 66-32, while unmarried women did so by a margin of 66 to 33.

In [Maine](#), backers of same-sex marriage can thank unmarried voters for contributing to their victory. While married voters split on whether to legalize gay marriage, nearly two-thirds of unmarried voters favored marriage equality.

So why do unmarried voters favor Democrats? One political commentator gives us some clues.

According to [New York Times](#) blogger Thomas B. Edsall:

“Single voters are more amenable than are their married counterparts to a government focused on social justice. Unmarried voters are substantially more vulnerable to economic downturns and the loss of a job; they look more favorably on such safety net programs as unemployment benefits, government-sponsored health insurance, and government initiatives to ensure food security. Married couples, on the other hand, are more focused on minimizing their tax burden.”

Marital status demographic trends suggest that politicians should pay more, not less, attention to unmarried voters. Unmarried adults now head up a majority of American households and are closely approaching a majority of the adult population.

Candidates who ignore the unmarried electorate do so at their own peril. ◇◇◇

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