

In Search of Female Voters

Women Are More Likely Than Men Not to Vote in Non-Presidential Elections.

By Meghan Kissell

I just didn't have time to go to the polling center. I didn't think it was that important to vote this year. The polling center was really inconvenient to get to. My vote doesn't matter.

While women turned up to vote in record numbers in the 2004 presidential election, historical voting patterns show that many of these women will not make it to the ballot box in this year's midterm elections—whether for their local primary election or November's general election.

So what's the harm in not voting? Our fore-mothers fought hard to secure this right. When we turn our backs on it, we remove ourselves from the political process. When this happens, we lose our voice. This is not the legacy we should be leaving to future generations.

What Makes Women Vote

When a woman feels that the political process does not affect her daily life, she is less likely to vote. On the flip side, when she recognizes that the issues important to her are significantly affected

by the elections—whether it is equity in education, workplace fairness, reproductive rights, or retirement security—she is much more likely to vote.

Education is also a contributing factor to whether she votes or not. A college degree can have a positive impact on women's economic security, but did you know it's also a factor when it comes to voting? In 2004, the voter-turnout rate for people with a bachelor's degree or higher was greater than the rate for people whose highest level of education was a high school diploma (80 percent vs. 56 percent).

Reaching Out to Women

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more women than men (74 percent vs. 71 percent) are now registered to vote, and voter turnout is higher among women than men (65 percent vs. 62 percent). As we enter this election year, these facts should be great news. However a staggering percentage of women who vote in presidential elections do not vote in midterm elections. On average there is a 14 percent drop-off rate between presidential and midterm elections, but when you look at registered women voters that number jumps to almost 17 percent.

One of the best ways to get people to vote is through personal contact, according to research on effective voter-turnout techniques. This is where AAUW members play an important role in the community. Since 1995, AAUW members have conducted voter education and get-out-the-vote activities in almost every state. Activities ranging from sponsoring candidate debates to educating voters on the critical issues at stake have reached over 2 million drop-off women voters.

today by talking informally about voting or holding a forum on issues important to women. As the election nears, invite friends to go watch a debate. Also, talk to your branch about taking part in AAUW's voter education campaign. (See "Rallying Female Voters," page 26.) This is a great time of year to start raising awareness about the importance of elections, especially their effects on women's issues. Getting involved early allows you to get involved in primaries and reach the women who may not be planning to vote this year. Some steps you can take now:

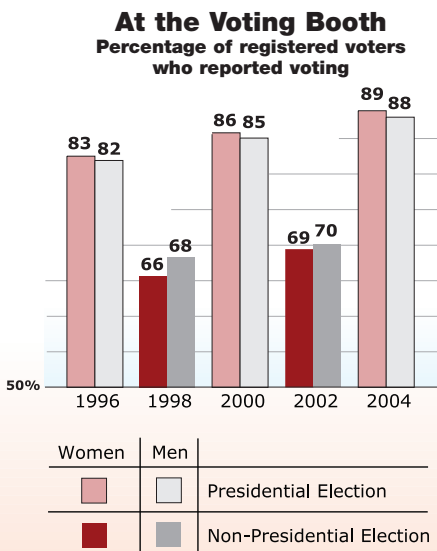
- Sign up for AAUW's Action Network and stay informed about how the issues in Congress affect your life (www.aauw.org/issue_advocacy).
- Start a letter-writing campaign to editors of local media outlets. Let them know which issues are important to women.
- Partner with organizations to hold issue forums or candidate nights.
- Hang The Power of One Vote poster in your community.

The Power of One Vote poster (pages 14-15) is designed to be pulled out of the magazine. Be creative! Hang the poster in your office, the library, or other public places in your community.

You can also download copies at www.aauw.org/onevote. Make it a branch project to blanket the community with this important message. By taking this simple step you will help encourage people to vote by raising awareness of the upcoming November elections.

Remember: Every vote counts, and there is **power in one vote.** 

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Source: U.S. Census Bureau