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## Election shows what women want

By **Susan Carroll**, Special to CNN  
updated 6:12 AM EST, Fri November 9, 2012

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#### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Susan Carroll: Obama, Christie working together after Sandy resonated for women voters
- She says it's because women motivated by different things -- like cooperation -- than men
- She says women voters sent message. First, they want strong social safety net
- Carroll: Women reject extremism, particularly on reproduction, want problem-solving leaders

**Editor's note:** Susan J. Carroll is professor of political science and senior scholar at the Center for American Women and Politics of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University. She is co-editor of "Gender and Elections: Shaping the Future of American Politics, Second Edition."

**(CNN)** -- I recently watched images of President Obama and Gov. Christie of New Jersey pledging to work together to get emergency aid to Hurricane Sandy's victims as quickly as possible. Gov. Christie, you'll recall, gave the keynote address at the Republican National Convention and spent a fair amount of time lambasting Obama during the campaign.

But as they toured the damaged coastline together, I thought that many women watching across the country would be moved by the leadership of these two men and their willingness to transcend their partisan differences. A Washington Post Tracking Poll [seemed to confirm this](#): 26% of women nationally -- more than men, at 18% -- reported that Obama's handling of the hurricane response would be a major factor in determining their vote for president.

Politicians take note: Women are often motivated by different things than men.

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And with their votes in Tuesday's election, women sent important

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updated 11:59 AM EST, Thu November 8, 2012



CNN contributors weigh in. Opinions from Paul Begala, LZ Granderson, Anne-Marie Slaughter, William Bennett, Donna Brazile, Bob Greene and others.



Susan Carroll

messages to President Obama and to leaders of both parties. A majority of women voted to re-elect the president, while a slightly smaller majority of men voted for Romney, according to exit polls. Obama also won a majority of women's votes, with Romney winning a majority of men's, in critical battleground states such as Ohio, Florida, Virginia, Wisconsin, Iowa, Nevada, and New Hampshire.

Why did women and men vote this way? The answer lies in part in their different views about government and the role it should play in our lives.

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First, women were voting for a more affirmative role on the part of the federal government. Men, more than women, [have long said](#) they favor dramatic cutbacks in the size of government. Women, more than men, worry that cutbacks will go too far; they are concerned with preserving America's social safety net for those in need—programs such as Medicaid, school lunches and child nutrition programs, and Supplemental Security Income for elderly and disabled individuals.

This will be particularly important as President Obama and Congress work on a deal to save the country from falling off the fiscal cliff. Women will be watching to make sure that the basic social infrastructure is not threatened.

Second, women care about their own health and welfare, and that of their families and other Americans. Consequently, they denied their votes to candidates that showed extremism on issues such as abortion and contraception and backed those who supported women's right to control their reproductive decisions.

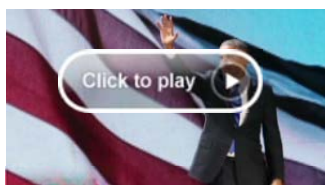
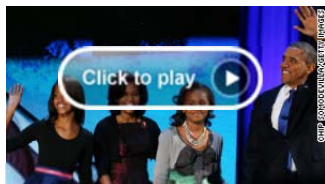
Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Senate contests in Missouri and Indiana, two conservative states where voters strongly preferred Romney in the presidential race. But in the Senate race the majority of women voted for Democrat Claire McCaskill, while only about a third voted for Republican Todd Akin, who in a discussion of his no-exceptions policy on abortion, said in a televised interview in August that "if it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down."

Similarly, in Indiana, a majority of women voted for Democrat Joe Donnelly, helping him defeat Republican Richard Mourdock, who said in a U.S. Senate debate that "even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that is something that God intended to happen."

Women's personal views on abortion may vary, but few are not offended by extreme statements like these. Women voters, in general, would prefer that lawmakers devote their energy to solving the nation's economic problems rather than regulating and restricting women's access to contraception and their ability to make reproductive choices.

Finally, women want strong leaders who can work across party lines to solve problems -- which brings us back to Christie and Obama. Women who were moved by Obama's actions along the Jersey Shore would likely be pleased if he showed the same kind of unifying leadership in Washington. That may in part be why they helped reelect him. And they would be equally pleased to see Congress set aside its petty bickering and partisan gamesmanship and work with the president to solve the very grave problems our country confronts.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Susan Carroll.



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