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Gender Gap Persists in the 2004 Election

Women 7 Points Less Likely than Men to Support Bush; But Percentage of Women's Votes for Kerry Lower than for Gore in 2000

New Brunswick, NJ—The gender gap remained a notable factor in the 2004 presidential election, according to an analysis of exit poll data by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

Defined as the difference between the proportion of women and the proportion of men voting for the winning candidate, the gender gap was 7 percentage points in 2004, with 48 percent of women versus 55 percent of men voting to re-elect President Bush.

The gender gap this year is consistent with other presidential elections, with an average gender gap of 7.7 percentage points from 1980 to 2000. However, the 2004 gender gap is smaller than the 10-point gap in the 2000 election, when 43 percent of women versus 53 percent of men voted for George W. Bush.

Despite the gender gap, President Bush succeeded in increasing his overall share of the women's vote this year. Senator John Kerry did win a slight majority of women's votes (51 percent), but he lost ground from 2000, when 54 percent of women voted for Al Gore. President Bush's ability to increase his share of the women's vote to 48 percent this year (up from 43 percent in 2000) is a major reason why he took the popular vote this time around.

Further, John Kerry did not do as well with working women or white women as Al Gore did in 2000. Kerry won a smaller majority of employed women this year than Gore won in 2000 (51 percent of employed women voted for Kerry vs. 58 percent who voted for Gore). Similarly, Kerry won the support of 44 percent of white women in 2004, compared with the 48 percent of white women who voted for Gore in 2000.

Contrary to some media reports, the gender gap was apparent across demographic groups this year, even among traditional Republican-leaning supporters. For example, a gender gap was apparent among white voters. Fewer white women than white men voted for Bush (55 percent vs. 62 percent). Similarly, non-white women voted for Bush at lower rates than non-white men (24 percent vs. 30 percent).

Data cited in this release are from Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International Exit Polls. More information on women's voting and gender gap trends is available on the Center for American Women and Politics web site at www.cawp.rutgers.edu.

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