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There's something to be said for woman power. Women are the majority gender in the U.S., represent over 50 percent of the electorate and show up to vote at a higher rate than do men. Thus, women wield a lot of power in this presidential election. For the past two decades, since 1992, polls indicate that women vote for Democratic presidential candidates at a much higher percentage than Republican candidates.

And according to a fact sheet issued by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), in the 2008 election, the female vote made a significant difference in Barack Obama winning the election over John McCain. In 2008, there was only a small percentage difference between the candidates for male voters, but there was a 13 percent difference in women voters favoring Obama over McCain.

According to polls last month, a similar pattern was emerging for the 2012 race between Obama and Gov. Mitt Romney. A study by Quinnipiac University indicated an 18-percentage point lead for Obama over Romney with women, and a 10 percentage point Romney lead for men.

While the majority of gender polls occurred prior to the first presidential debate held at the University of Denver, a few polls following the debate in important states have indicated that the voting trends are shifting. According to Public Policy Polling, in Wisconsin, Obama leads by 2 points with 52 percent of women favoring Obama, versus 50 percent of men favoring Romney; in Virginia, Obama leads by 3 points, with 52 percent of women favoring Obama and 49 percent of men favoring Romney. Polls by Rasmussen in the key states of Florida and Missouri show Romney leads in both states with women in Florida split evenly on the candidates and men favoring Romney by 6 points, while in Missouri, both men and women favor Romney. Pew Research Center for People & the Press conducted a new national poll following the first Presidential debate (October 4-7, 2012) among 1,511 adults, including 1,201 registered voters. The results indicate that women are evenly divided among the candidates (47 percent for Obama and 47 percent for Romney).

Clearly, numerous issues are currently driving votes. In a recent Newsweek article, the Republican platform took some hard hits from its own prominent female members on such polarizing issues as abortion, pay equity, contraception and rape. While many believe that women focus mainly on the social agenda, data from Quinnipiac University show that women care deeply about the economy, job creation and foreign affairs. According to Peter Hanson, an assistant professor of political science at the University of Denver, "Policies important to women such as equal pay and health care have been hotly debated this year and have energized female voters."

For the next month, both candidates will pay attention to a variety of issues as they woo the female voter. Denver pollster, Floyd Ciruli said, "In fact, the debate showed that the race remains very competitive and women's votes are still up for grabs." A national poll conducted by CNN of 430 voters immediately following the debate asked male and female voters who would better handle certain major issues. In this particular poll, women felt that Obama and Romney would handle the economy, taxes and federal budget deficit equally well. Women gave a slight edge to Obama over Romney on health care and the size and role of the federal government. Men, on the other hand, felt Romney would handle all issues better than Obama.

In other polls conducted shortly after the debate, discussion topics included that Romney improved his personal appeal and his standing as a leader. However, many women also mentioned that there was an absence of discussion of other major issues, such as education, that are important to them.

Overall, the majority of the polls indicate that men favor Romney.

Nevertheless, the power of the female vote looms large. Women have the opportunity to shape the election, based on the power of their votes particularly in the battleground states. While many polls do not break down the demographics among women, research by the Lake Research Partners indicates that unmarried women are the largest segment of the rising American electorate with a corresponding, significant influence in voting. Yet, in the 2010 elections, this segment of women showed up less frequently at the polls than in 2008, thus reducing their influence on the elections.

In 2012, women can exert an enormous influence by engaging with the issues, registering to vote and ultimately voting.

Will women choose to flex their political muscle at the ballot box?

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