

Women Voters: The Base of the New Populism

Jiao Lan

October 2014

What Women Believe

Across a broad range of polls this year, women, especially unmarried women and women of color, have expressed strong populist views.

Women believe that our country is on the wrong track and look to government to create opportunity in the economy through progressive reforms and regulations.

Regardless of party identification, overwhelming majorities of women support Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, America's core shared public security programs. They believe these programs are essential and strongly oppose any legislation that undermines them. Women also strongly support increasing government spending on the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("food stamps"), and early education and child care programs.

Broad majorities of women are also worried about the effects global warming, and for that reason support government regulation of greenhouse gases and investment in clean energy alternatives.

What Women Experience

Women's political beliefs, especially about the American economy, are grounded in the day-to-day economic struggles they uniquely face.

More so than at any time in our history, women play the role of breadwinner in the family. Currently, in 40 percent of all households with children under the age 18, mothers are either the sole or primary source of income for the family¹; that was true of only 11 percent of families in the 1960s. Of the current 13.7 million "breadwinner moms", almost two out of three – or 8.6 million – are single mothers.² Their increasingly important financial role in the family structure coincides with an economic environment that is much harsher than it was five decades ago. Worse, they often do not have the essential supports of affordable child care, paid family leave, or paid sick days.

The more than 56 million unmarried women in America today (up from approximately 53 million women in 2010)³ are particularly burdened by unequal pay: For every dollar that a married man makes, an

¹ Pew Research Center, "[Breadwinner Moms](#)", 05/29/2013

² Ibid.

³ [US Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 03/2013

The Populist Majority is a project of the Campaign for America's Future that compiles the most recent public opinion research on economic and political issues, exposing the gulf between American opinion and conventional wisdom.

unmarried white woman makes 69 cents, an unmarried African-American woman makes 57 cents, and an unmarried Latino woman makes 46 cents.⁴ Unmarried women need to work 19 to 23 months just to earn what a married man earns in only 12 months.⁵ What's worse, 53 percent of women were paying a greater percentage of their earnings toward student loan debt than what a typical person would reasonably afford to pay in 2009.⁶

Such economic policies as increasing the minimum wage will have a proportionately larger impact on women because women comprise a higher percentage of low-wage workers. Of the 3.3 million Americans earning at or below minimum wage, 62.4 percent are women and 48.7 percent are unmarried women.⁷ Increasing the minimum wage will affect 4.8 million working mothers, leading to additional income and greater benefits after retirement.⁸

Women's support for federal programs also stem from their real-world experience. Statistics show that women live longer; that's one reason women are more than 60 percent of all seniors relying on Social Security.⁹ More women than men rely on Social Security as their only source of income: for age groups 65-69, 18 percent of women, compared to 14 percent of men; for elders 80 years and older, 35 percent of women and 23 percent of men. In 2009, Social Security helped lift a total of 8.5 million women above the age 65 out of poverty¹⁰.

Pay discrimination against women not only hurts their current well-being but their future security. Social Security benefits are based on lifetime earnings, so women are penalized in retirement because they were not compensated equally during their working years. For Americans over 65 today, women receive only \$12,000 annually on average from Social Security, while men receive more than \$16,000.¹¹ Women depend on Social Security more, but still do not receive the support they need to retire comfortably.

These realities make the economy and jobs central to women, and make a progressive populist economic agenda their most appealing policy choice.

⁴ [US Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 03/2013

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 03/2013

⁶ Washington Post, 06/11/2014

⁷ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 03/2013

⁸ Social Security Works, 07/2014

⁹ U.S. Social Security Administration, Income of the Population 55 or Older for 2008, 04/2010

¹⁰ National Women's Law Center, "Women and Social Security", 01/2011

¹¹ U.S. Social Security Administration, Income of the Population 55 or Older for 2008, 04/2010

Women believe that the country is going in the wrong direction, and are unhappy with the performance of Congress—particularly the Republicans.

- 66% of women (compared to 63% of men) think the country is going in the wrong direction. [[McClatchy-Marist](#), 8/12/2014]
- 75% of women disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is doing its job. [Washington Post/ABC News, 09/09/2014]
- 68% of women disapprove of the job the Republicans in Congress are doing. [McClatchy-Marist, 8/12/2014]

Most women agree that they face discrimination in the workplace, and continue to shoulder greater financial and family burdens than men. Women are unhappy with the current American economy, and prioritize the issue when considering political candidates.

- 62% of women believe that women have a harder time getting ahead in the workplace than men. [The Feldman Group, 2/7/2014]
- 60% of millennial women (compared to 48% of millennial men) believe men generally earn more than women for doing the same work. [Pew Research Center, 11/13/2013]
- 66% of women, including 65% of white women, say that their income is falling behind the cost of living. [AFL-CIO/Hart Research, 2/14/2014]
- 59% of millennial women (compared to 19% of millennial men) believe being a working parent makes it harder to advance in a job or career. [Pew Research Center, 11/13/2013]
- 64% of women and 68% of unmarried women are dissatisfied with the economic situation in their state. [AFL-CIO/Hart Research, 2/14/2014]

Women want the government to help them in the workplace to become more empowered as working mothers.

- 75% of millennial women (compared to 57% of millennial men) believe more changes are needed to give men and women equality in the workplace. [[Pew Research Center](#), 04/08/2014]
- 90% of unmarried women (compared to 83% of likely voters) favor the government helping working mothers by protecting them from job discrimination and ensuring access to paid leave and childcare. [[Democracy Corps](#), 04/09/2014]
- 76% of unmarried women (compared to 72% total) favor Democratic Party proposals to expand paid family, maternity, and sick leave for working families. [[Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research](#), 07/22/2014]
- 59% of unmarried women favor the Democratic proposal to help small businesses succeed by providing more access to capital and incentives for women-owned small businesses. [[Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research](#), 07/22/2014]

Raising the minimum wage and extending unemployment benefits are top priorities for working women.

- 68% of women support the proposed increase the minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour. [[The Feldman Group](#), 2/7/2014]
- 94% of unmarried women are in favor of helping women succeed with equal pay and equal health insurance. [[Democracy Corps](#), 04/09/2014]
- 63% of women think Congress should approve another extension of unemployment benefits. [[Washington Post/ABC News](#), 01/27/2014]
- 71% of women support unemployment benefits, with 31% believing the federal government should increase spending on the program. [[YouGov](#), 01/28/2014]

Women strongly oppose “big money” in the American government, and also oppose trade pacts that may hurt American domestic workers.

- 67% of unmarried women (compared to 55% of likely voters) believe that when big money gets its way, “more working men and women will be drowning.” [[Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research](#), 06/25/2014]
- 59% of women (as well as 56% of men) think the federal government should pursue policies that try to reduce the gap between wealthy and less well-off Americans. [[Washington Post-ABC News Poll](#), 12/13/2013]
- 67% of women think federal government policies currently do more to favor the wealthy rather than the less well-off Americans. [[Washington Post-ABC News Poll](#), 12/13/2013]

Women believe that the federal government must take an active role in supporting their citizens—especially children and those facing financial challenges—through federal programs such as SNAP and Head Start.

- 56% of women have a favorable opinion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, best known as “food stamps”) (with 28% stating very favorable). [YouGov, 6/2/2014]
- 70% of unmarried women favor expanding access to public preschool and Head Start programs to help working families and children. [Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, 7/15/2013]

Women overwhelmingly support Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security.

- 77% of women (compared to 73% of men) have a favorable opinion of Medicare (with 44% stating very favorable). [[YouGov](#), 6/2/2014]
- 67% of women (compared to 63% of men) have a favorable opinion of Medicaid (with 35% stating very favorable). [[YouGov](#), 6/2/2014]
- 94% of unmarried women oppose cutting Social Security and Medicare. [[Voter Participation Center](#), 4/8/2014]
- 74% of unmarried women believe that we must protect Medicare benefits and premiums for seniors and future retirees. [[Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research](#), 07/22/2014]

Women believe that climate change is a problem, and strongly support green energy solutions to combat global warming.

- 75% of women (compared to 61% of men) think the issue of global warming, also known as climate change, is a serious problem facing this country. [[Washington Post-ABC News Poll](#), 06/08/2014].
- 60% of women (compared to 40% of men) are “concerned believers of global warming.” [[Gallup](#), 3/9/2014]
- 71% of women think the federal government should limit the release of greenhouse gases from existing power plants in an effort to reduce global warming. [[Washington Post-ABC News Poll](#), 06/08/2014].

Sources

AFL-CIO/Hart Research, “Economic Discontent in Gubernatorial Battlegrounds.” February 14, 2014. Retrieved at: https://docs.google.com/file/d/OB1GF_14XMVZ_a2NkZTNTanBIbEE/edit

Democracy Corps, “Framing the Women’s Economic Agenda for Greatest 2014 Effect.” April 9, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.democracycorps.com/attachments/article/972/dcor%20wv%20wea%20memo%20v3.pdf>

Gallup, “Americans most likely to say Global Warming is Exaggerated.” March 9, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.gallup.com>

gallup.com/poll/167960/americans-likely-say-global-warming-exaggerated.aspx

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, "Women's Economic Agenda: Powerful impact on vote and turnout in 2014." June 25, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.wvvaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/dcor-wv-graphs-062414-v3.pdf>

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, "Senate battleground survey: Working women and men's agenda tilts the races." July 22, 2014. Retrieved at: http://www.wvvaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/dcorps-bg-graphs_Web-Version_7212014.pdf

Hart Research, "Survey on Federal Unemployment Benefits." December 26, 2013. Retrieved from: <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/2013/Hart-Memo-NELP-UI-Survey-12-26-2013.pdf?nocdn=1>

Lake Research Partners, "Unmarried Women: The Economy and Reaching Them." June 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.voterparticipation.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/VPC-post-election-report-Final.pdf>

Lake Research Partners, The Voter Participation Center, "Equal Pay Day for Unmarried Women." April 8, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://origin.library.constantcontact.com/download/get/file/1109104170502-33/VPCEqualPayDayMemoApril2014Final.pdf>

McClatchy-Marist Poll, "Majority Consider Ukraine in US Interest, but Most Oppose Use of Force." August 12, 2014. Retrieved at: http://maristpoll.marist.edu/wp-content/misc/usapolls/us140804/Obama_Congress/Complete%20August%2012,%202014%20McClatchy_Marist%20Poll%20Release%20and%20Tables.pdf

Pew Research Center, "Most Say There is Solid Evidence for Global Warming." October 15, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.people-press.org/2012/10/15/more-say-there-is-solid-evidence-of-global-warming/>

Pew Research Center, "On Equal Pay Day, key facts about the gender gap." April 8, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/08/on-equal-pay-day-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

Pew Research Center, "Support in Principle for U.S.-E.U. Trade Pact." April 9, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/2014/04/09/support-in-principle-for-u-s-eu-trade-pact/>

Pew Research Center, "The Gender Gap: Three Decades Old, as Wide as Ever." March 29, 2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.people-press.org/2012/03/29/the-gender-gap-three-decades-old-as-wide-as-ever/>

Voter Participation Center, "The Gender and Marriage Gap in Earnings." April 8, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.voterparticipation.org/research/the-gender-and-marriage-gap-in-earnings/>

Washington Post-ABC News Poll, June 8, 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/polling/june-2014-washington-postabc-news-poll/2014/06/03/5a8b391c-ea77-11e3-b10e-5090cf3b5958_page.html

Washington Post-ABC News Poll, September 9, 2014. Retrieved from: http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/polling/september-2014-washington-postabc-news-poll/2014/09/09/e09e1da2-37d5-11e4-a023-1d61f7f31a05_page.html

YouGov Poll, January 27-28, 2014. Retrieved from: http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/m7yby31h-qd/tabs_OPI_farm_bill_20140129.pdf

YouGov Poll, May 30-June 2, 2014. Retrieved from: http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/8r4l1gvzgr/tabs_OPI_programs_20140602.pdf

CAMPAIGN^{FOR}**AMERICA'S FUTURE**
OurFuture.org

1825 K Street NW • Suite 400 • Washington DC 20006 • 202 955-5665