

Women's vote is a big factor in 2008.

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Jun. 11--They are mothers, daughters, sisters and wives.

And in the 2008 presidential campaign, women are expected to be an increasingly valuable political commodity.

Women outnumber and outvote men, and candidates are already creating campaigns to woo the female vote and strategists are tailoring campaign issues to focus on women's concerns, including health care and education.

They will do whatever is needed to gain support with the one demographic large enough to swing the election, political observers say.

"Women will have a critical role in the upcoming election," said Michael Dimock, associate director of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. "They are a huge segment of the public."

This comes as U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton of New York vies for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, and women are being seriously mentioned as possible vice-presidential candidates in both parties.

Clinton, who is scheduled to be in Fort Worth on Saturday for private fundraisers, is drawing attention and accolades from men and women for her campaign, and many see her as a leading contender to win the primary.

"Women could be the deciding vote in the 2008 election," said Rebecca Deen, associate political science professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. "If candidates can craft a message to target them, they are more likely to be successful."

Why women?

Women constitute more than half the population, which makes them highly sought-after voters, political observers say.

They register and vote in larger numbers than men. But candidates must be vigilant, because many don't choose their candidate until close to the election.

Although some may be influenced by their sex and thus likely to vote for a woman on the ballot, others are just as likely to vote for a man, observers say.

"Women are going to be an important bloc for any candidate," Deen said.

In wake of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, presidential candidates George W. Bush and John Kerry targeted a specific group of women -- "security moms," worried about the safety of their children and families.

But in last year's midterm election, exit polls indicated that proportionally more women than men voted for Democrats, and they were credited with helping Democrats regain control of Congress.

"Candidates have to pay attention to women voters, particularly when they seem to have certain kinds of concerns," said Susan Carroll, a senior scholar at the New Jersey-based Center for American Women and Politics. "Candidates have to be responsive."

A woman's world

Political observers will be watching both married and unmarried women in the next election. Married, suburban women historically are more likely to vote than their younger, unmarried counterparts, observers say.

In the 2004 election, 50 percent of women ages 18-24 voted, compared with 44 percent of the men that age, according to the Center for Information & Research on Civil Learning & Engagement.

One thing that could prompt more voters to turn out in 2008 is a backlash against President Bush, said Latifa Lyles, vice president for membership with the National Organization for Women.

"Everyone is at a point, because of the past eight years of administration, that this election is about our families, our lives, our issues," Lyles said. "A lot of issues are seriously affecting us."

"In order to turn this around, we'll have to engage people -- women -- like never before."

Female representation

Worldwide, more than 40 countries -- but not the United States -- have had women in charge of their government.

England has had Margaret Thatcher, Ireland has President Mary McAleese and Germany has Chancellor Angela Merkel, to name a few.

The United States also lags far behind others in female legislative leadership, ranking 70th out of 139 countries, according to data from Women in National Parliaments.

Top on the list was Rwanda, with 48.8 percent women in their House and 34.6 percent women in their Senate. In the U.S. Congress, women are 16.3 percent of U.S. House members and 16 percent of the Senate.

But this year, the U.S. House did swear in its first female speaker -- Nancy Pelosi -- and Condoleezza Rice is Secretary of State.

In Texas, voters have long supported and elected female leaders, such as former Gov. Ann Richards, former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan and U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison.

"But women don't necessarily fall into line just because of gender," said Bruce Buchanan, a government professor at the University of Texas at Austin. "Women will split between the parties."

"It would be a mistake to assume the female vote will be monolithic," he said. "It could make a difference for a candidate, depending on the lay of the land at the final vote."

The Clinton factor

Some say Clinton, whether she wins or not, is laying the groundwork for other women, just as Victoria Claflin Woodhull did in 1872, when she became the first woman to run for president.

"It takes a pioneer to get the ball rolling," said Anne Smith of Dallas. "It's good to see people out there running and opening doors so we can achieve more."

Karen Hostetler of Joshua said she has seen many advancements for women in the past several decades and can't wait to see what lies ahead.

"Women in the last 40 years have gone forward and that will continue," she said. "I think it's fabulous to see" a woman making a strong bid for president. "It's about time."

Looking to the future

Presidential candidates are creating special groups to try to draw women to their camp.

Women for Giuliani. Women for Hillary. Women for McCain. Women for Richardson. Women for Romney. And so on.

Candidates are touting what they have done for women -- or what they will do. Among them:

In Sen. John McCain's camp, Michigan Sen. Michelle McManus is heading a Women for McCain effort. "I look forward to helping build a team that will focus on communicating the senator's conservative values," she said.

New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson is touting the fact that his 30-member cabinet includes 12 women and that as U.S. energy secretary his appointments were two-thirds women and minorities. And he has worked to improve access to education and health services.

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama has drawn the backing of Oprah Winfrey. And his wife, Michelle, is leading a Women for Obama Today effort, saying their campaign supports women.

"My husband is a man who understands the struggles of women and families," Michelle Obama has said. "This campaign believes in the women of this country and envisions a government that doesn't just encourage women to dream big, but to know they have the support and the resources to pursue those dreams."

"I want that for my daughters. I want that for your daughters. And I want that for this country."

Clinton has drawn endorsements and support from women's groups such as Emily's List, the National

Organization for Women Political Action Committee and the National Women's Political Caucus.

"Hillary will win this election from women 18-35 years old," her campaign director, Terry McAuliffe, has told the Star-Telegram. "I think people in that age group will come out to vote, and they want to see a woman president in this country."

Shortly after she announced her presidential bid, Clinton told a crowd in Iowa that it is time for a woman to be elected.

"You go girl," a woman in the crowd called out.

"You go with me!" Clinton said.

Female leadership, by the numbers

9 Governors

11 Lieutenant governors

4 Attorneys general

12 Secretaries of state

11 State treasurers and chief financial officers

6 State auditors

4 State comptrollers+

8 Chief state education officials

2 Commissioners of insurance

1 Commissioner of labor

2 Corporation commissioners

5 Public service commissioners

1 Public regulation commissioners

+Including Texas

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Clinton to Cowtown

Presidential candidate Sen. Hillary Clinton will be in Texas for several fundraisers this week. On Saturday, she is scheduled to attend two Fort Worth fundraisers -- for which a few seats still remain -- at Joe T. Garcia's Mexican Restaurant. A VIP event will be for those who donate \$1,000-\$2,300 per person. A second, general reception will be for those who donate \$250.

Organizers say the goal is to raise \$100,000 or more in Fort Worth.

"She's excited about coming to Fort Worth, and she specifically mentioned that she wants to eat some enchiladas," said Tarrant County Constable Sergio de Leon, a volunteer with Clinton's campaign.

To sign up for the event, or for more information about Clinton's visit, call 817-737-2008 or 512-440-8791.

Online: www.hillaryclinton.com.

Female leaders in Texas

U.S. Congress

U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison; U.S. Reps. Kay Granger, R-Fort Worth,

Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Houston, and Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Dallas. All currently in office. Former female

members include Reps. Barbara Jordan, D-Houston; Lera M. Thomas, D-Houston; and Shelley Sekula Gibbs, R-Houston.

Elected posts in Texas

State Comptroller Susan Combs, Railroad Commissioner Elizabeth Ames Jones. Former leaders include Combs as agriculture commissioner, Carole Keeton Strayhorn as state comptroller and railroad commissioner, Martha Whitehead as state treasurer, Ann Richards as governor and state treasurer, Hutchison as state treasurer, and Miriam Ferguson as governor.

Texas Legislature

Of the 181 lawmakers elected in 2007, 37 were women, compared with 35 in 2005 and 2003, 34 in 2001 and 32 in 1999.

Source: Center for American Women and Politics

Women in parliaments, Congress

Ranking Country Percent in House Percent in Senate

1 Rwanda 48.8 34.6

2 Sweden 47.3 --

3 Finland 43 --

70 United States 16.3 16

137 Papua New Guinea 0.9 --

138 Yemen 0.3 1.8

139 Kyrgyzstan 0.0 --

Source: Women in National Parliaments

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