

Democratic candidates boosted by female voters.

Source: 🇺🇸 Dallas Morning News (Dallas, TX)

Publication Date: 30-OCT-07

Byline: Christy Hoppe

AUSTIN, Texas _ Soccer Moms have tilted elections, but it's always been Sugar Daddies who have underwritten the victories. Until now.

Campaign data and interviews show that women are opening up their pocketbooks in unprecedented numbers and their cash infusion has helped catapult leading Democratic candidates beyond the Republican frontrunners in money raised.

Experts say that it could be the presence of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton as the first viable female candidate for president, disillusionment over the Iraqi war or a powerful push by women for change.

Regardless, public numbers and the campaigns of Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama confirm that more than half of their contributions came from the checkbooks of women.

"This is unprecedented," said Debbie Walsh, director of Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics.

"I think the trend you're seeing is that clearly this election is engaging women, energizing women, and that they're digging down and giving," Walsh said.

Over the past decade, women have provided 28 percent of political donations _ including gifts to political action committees, candidates, political parties and presidential and congressional races, according to a study released in June by the Women's Campaign Forum.

In the 2004 presidential election, of those who gave \$200 or more, 41 percent of Democrat John Kerry's donors were women, compared with 30 percent of President Bush's contributors.

"There's a lot that has deterred women from being a part of the money game," said forum director Ilana Goldman. "It might be personal resources. Or that it seems a fairly distasteful financing system for campaigns."

Women have preferred to evoke change in their communities by giving to charities instead, she said.

"But for better or worse, money matters in politics," she said.

A study by the nonpartisan Center for Responsive Politics, based on contributions to presidential candidates as of Oct. 16, decided the gender of donors by splitting the donations based on first names.

Of contributions over \$200, half of the donors to Clinton and 46 percent of those to Obama were from those with common female first names. Comparatively, 30 percent and 28 percent of the donors to Republican frontrunners Mitt Romney and Rudy Giuliani, respectively, were women.

Because many women are smaller givers _ less than \$200 _ and those numbers were not part of the survey, the percentage of female donors for all campaigns is probably higher.

While the number of female donors has soared, men still are writing bigger checks. Even in the Clinton and Obama campaigns, men have given more money _ 56 percent of the money raised.

But the number of female donors is not lost on the Clinton and Obama campaigns, who have actively been courting female contributors.

"Women voters clearly provide a far higher ratio of our contributors," said Ann Lewis, senior adviser to the Clinton campaign.

"We know it is historically high for a presidential campaign. And we also know that the numbers will continue to grow," Lewis said.

(EDITORS: BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM)

A women's summit in Washington earlier this month drew 900 women and raised \$1.5 million _ a record in one-day fundraising for the Clinton campaign.

"We literally ran out of room in the hotel and wound up having to turn people away, which could really break a person's heart when they have checks," Lewis said.

Becky Carroll, a spokeswoman for Obama, said the campaign's female contributors outnumber men, about 180,000 to 155,000. The campaign counts all incoming money as a contribution, whether a campaign T-shirt sale or an event or a check for the maximum \$2,300.

"Clearly, the war is an issue that has motivated a lot of women to get involved," Carroll said. "They're organizing in a way that I haven't seen in a national way."

She said Obama's push to change the tone in Washington and bring an end to the war in Iraq have caused an upsurge of involvement by women.

"We don't have to go looking for people; people are coming to us. Clearly, women are ultimately going to decide the difference," Carroll said.

(END OPTIONAL TRIM)

Women might make the difference, but it will be for the Republican candidate, said Amber Wilkerson, a spokeswoman for the Republican National Committee.

"At the end of the day, voters of all walks of life are going to support candidates who stand with American taxpayers and hardworking families. So it really doesn't matter how much the Democratic candidates raise, we really believe their liberal values and their policies to raise taxes and increase the size of government are still completely out of touch with voters," Wilkerson said.

She pointed out that Election Day is still more than a year away and said it is too early in the process to see or analyze trends.

(EDITORS: BEGIN OPTIONAL TRIM)

"Women are just like the rest of the electorate in terms of the policies that are most important to them and their families," she said. "When it comes down to voters actually electing the next president, they're going to vote for the candidate who is going to keep their taxes lower, is going to protect the country and is going to keep Washington out of their hair. And the Democrats do not stand for those policies."

(END OPTIONAL TRIM)

Ramona Oliver of Emily's List _ the largest political action committee in the nation with 100,000 members, 90 percent of them women _ said all the numbers and indicators do show a trend, and she believes the purse strings are being loosened by women who are excited by the prospect of the first female president.

Emily's List drives donations to female candidates who favor abortion rights and is strongly supporting Clinton's campaign

"There are women out there who are supporting Obama or (John) Edwards, or a Republican candidate, who still get excited about the idea and think it would be a fabulous thing to have a woman president," Oliver said.

(EDITORS: STORY CAN END HERE)

During the midterm elections, Emily's List directed 116,000 contributions totaling \$11 million. The average individual gave \$98, she said.

So the records of donors of \$200 and above "is the tip of the iceberg," Oliver said.

This movement of women began two years ago and was a driving force behind Democrats taking control of Congress, she said. Gender gaps _ in which female voters came out in substantial numbers for Democratic candidates in a half-dozen key states _ made a large difference, she said.

And that involvement by women is only mounting. "There's a tremendous environment for change, and that environment has been driven by women voters," Oliver said.

—

(c) 2007, The Dallas Morning News.

Visit The Dallas Morning News on the World Wide Web at <http://www.dallasnews.com/>

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

For reprints, email tmsreprints@permissionsgroup.com, call 800-374-7985 or 847-635-6550, send a fax to 847-635-6968, or write to The Permissions Group Inc., 1247 Milwaukee Ave., Suite 303, Glenview, IL 60025, USA.