

GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

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To: Interested Parties

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Unmarried Women React to State of the Union Speech

President Takes Important First Step Towards Re-Engaging Critical Block of Voters

Democrats will struggle to reclaim the country without reclaiming a core and growing constituency – unmarried women. Last night, President Obama took a major step toward recapturing these voters. He owes this success largely to the major theme of the speech, the economy.

In 2006 and 2008 it was unmarried women who led a broad coalition of change voters who drove progressive victories. Other members of this coalition include people of color and younger voters, voters we call the Rising American Electorate (RAE), who collectively comprise a growing majority – 53 percent – of the voting eligible population. Their numbers are increasing dramatically and account for 81 percent of the growth in the voting eligible population over the last decade, 95 percent since 2008. The 2010 election represented a significant pull back by some elements in the RAE. A 70 percent majority of unmarried women supported President Obama in 2008; in 2010, the Democratic percentage fell to 57 percent.

In partnership with Democracy Corps, Women's Voices, Women Vote Action Fund conducted dial testing of the speech with 30 unmarried women in Denver; half of these women were independent and weak partisan voters, half were voters with more progressive values, but who are disengaged from politics generally. In addition to dials, which tracked positive and negative reactions to the speech, all participants took pre- and post-speech surveys. Be advised that this is qualitative research and the results are not statistically significant, however, they are potentially indicative of larger trends. The participants also took part in post-speech interviews that allowed us to zero in on themes of the speech that worked well and worked not-so-well.

Overall, unmarried women reacted strongly to the speech, lifting the number of unmarried women who *strongly* approve of President Obama's work by 13 points. But it is on core economic measures where the President most impressed the participants of this group. The President saw a 30 point jump on "has good plans for the economy," the second strongest improvement recorded that night. This speech registered some of the highest approval on the dials when President Obama took the time to relate macro-economic themes to the individual lives of voters.



The speech also worked very well when the President connected education to the economy. Unmarried women are among the most likely to have lost a job, are generally less educated, and are more likely to lack health insurance; the President’s ability to connect broader economic themes to the individual lives and struggles of these voters will play a key role his progress among unmarried women moving forward.

■ **Table 1: Shifts in Measures**

Measures	Pre-Speech	Post-Speech	Shift (Post – Pre-Speech)
Obama on Has Good Plans for the Economy: Total describes well	50	80	+30
Obama on Creating New Jobs: Total confident	60	74	+16
Obama on Has Realistic Solutions to the Country’s Problems: Total describes well	60	86	+26

There were parts of the speech that did less to impress. The President’s description of economic progress did not always meet the day-to-day reality of these voters. As one woman put it in a post-speech focus group, “Wall Street is doing well, but that is Wall Street.” Moreover, not all the recommendations for economic renewal matched the career path of these women, “not one of us (in the room) works on a road crew.”

But broadly speaking, Obama set out a vision for a new economy, one built on change, innovation and competition. Despite some significant economic stress and liabilities, most of these women embraced this vision once they understood their role in it.

Health care played a modest role in the speech, but made a significant impression on the unmarried women participants. While conceding some fixes are in order, most unmarried women oppose repealing the health care law. More important, they strongly believe, as the President noted, it is time to “fix what needs fixing and move on.”

In watching the President Obama’s theme of bi-partisanship and cooperation for the good of the country, unmarried women saw the President at his best in their eyes. Dial ratings consistently went up when the President spoke of bringing the parties together and getting things done. Indeed, some the biggest movement we see in the survey, 24 points, is on “bridging the partisan divide and bringing the country together.” One woman in the groups noted, “I like how he makes me feel that America is still America. No matter how bad it is, I am still an American. *There is still hope.*”



Democrats and President Obama, of course, still have a long road back. The managing of both deficit reduction and economic growth will not be easy. A number of cuts suggested by the President did not sit particularly well with this group, until he brought them back by insisting the deficit will not be balanced on the backs of the “most vulnerable.” However, based on the reactions of these women, the President made real progress.

Unmarried women’s reactions to the speech were measured by Perception Analyzer technology provided by Dialsmith.