

What should we do about women?

I'll admit the headline is provocative and maybe a little evocative, but I wanted to grab your attention before we go off into the Never Never Land of statistics. The women I really want to talk about are suburban White college-educated women or SWCEWs for short. You know, the ones that are supposed to be the ones that will help decide the upcoming Presidential election.

First, an admission. I have nothing against urban women, but they don't count as much (if you believe the pollsters and the political prognosticators) as suburban women when it comes to deciding elections. Before we take a deep dive into the suburban woman's stats, let me give you a few quotes from female activists (thanks to *girlboss.com* for these):

"Each and every one of us has the capacity to be an oppressor. I want to encourage each and every one of us to interrogate how we might be an oppressor and how we might be able to become liberators for ourselves and for each other." —Laverne Cox, American actress and LGBTIQ rights' advocate

"We do need women in civic life. We do need women to run for office, to be in political office. We need a feminist to be at the table when decisions are being made so that the right decisions will be made." — Dolores Huerta, American labor activist and co-founder of the National Farmworkers Association

"Inherently, having privilege isn't bad, but it's how you use it, and you have to use it in service of other people." —Tarana Burke, American civil rights activist

"It's not about supplication, it's about power. It's not about asking; it's about demanding. It's not about convincing those who are currently in power; it's about changing the very face of power itself." — Kimberlé Crenshaw, activist and professor at UCLA and Columbia University

"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair." —Shirley Chisholm, American politician, educator, and author

"Action is the antidote to despair." —Joan Baez, American folk singer and activist

I'm going to assume that of these women who are alive today, a few of them live in suburbia, but even if they don't they are talking with and to many who do. The suburban woman today is not June Cleaver or Harriet Nelson nor a 'Stepford Wife' though she might live behind a picket fence and occasionally bake a pan of chocolate chip cookies (sorry Hillary Clinton). If she's in her child-bearing years she probably has one or two, but she more than likely has a career or a job as well or at least she did before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. If she's a single mother she most certainly has a job...or two.

We've already established that we're talking about SWCEWs so we know she went to college. Whether she graduated or not is really not that material. The important thing is she went and got exposed to Liberal indoctrination at the feet of Progressive professors and probably had a brush with political activism before getting married and moving out to the 'burbs'. She's anywhere from her mid-twenties to her mid-to-late fifties. Older SWCEWs are not the key demographic here as they have a tendency to be somewhat Conservative in their views and are 'unreliable' to the Dems who are trolling for votes. The exception may be a healthy chunk of those females of the 'flower power' generation - baby boomers in their late sixties to their seventies - who never made the transition from idealist to realist. They are very much targets of the Left.

It's always dangerous to generalize about anything let alone people or the groups they comprise, but in order to lay down some baseline markers for hypotheses, it's necessary. In order to paint my data picture, I headed to the Pew Research Center. According to them, and to their 2017 study, "The balance of partisan affiliation – and the combined measure of partisan identification and leaning – has not changed substantially over the past two decades.

However, Democrats hold a slightly larger edge in leaned party identification over Republicans now than in 2016 or 2015." Without trying to be sexist, I found it easy to remember the stats by using the old measurement of a woman's figure: 37-26-33. Thirty-seven percent claimed to be Independents; twenty-six percent said they were Republicans and thirty-three percent were Democrats. The widest gap in the voters was in the gender demographic of registered voters. Women are significantly more likely to vote or lean Democrat than men (56% to 44%). Those with a college education have usually tended to lean Democrat. In 1994, 39% of those with a four-year college degree (no postgraduate experience) identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party and 54% associated with the Republican Party. In 2017, those figures were exactly reversed.

From that same 2017 study, 49% of White voters with a college degree (and no additional education) aligned with the Democratic Party, compared with 46% for the GOP. As recently as 2015, 51% of White voters with a college degree aligned with the Republican Party, compared with 43% for the Democratic Party.

The generational gender gap reveals that: 70% of Millennial women lean Democrat while 54% of GenX women do. Baby Boomer women are only one percentage point behind at 53%. Silent Generation women are the lowest with 48%. Voters in urban counties have consistently voted Democrat in larger numbers than their neighbors in suburbia, but there the number is almost evenly split with 47% leaning Democrat and 45% Republican. It's been that way for the last 20 years or so. However, among rural voters, there is a 16% advantage for the Republicans.

In the 2016 Presidential election, 47% of White women voted for Donald Trump while 45% voted for Hillary Clinton, and while this number is lower than the number the President gave after the election (he said 52% of women voted for him), it was still a plurality. However, when you dig deeper, Clinton beat Trump by women of all color voters who gave her 48% to his 46%. (Non-White women only accounted for 16% of vote for Trump). The bottom line is that the Dems feel they have the non-White female vote sewed up wherever it is, but since more White women tend to live in the suburbs, this provides a target-rich environment for Democrats to beat the bushes for new supporters for their candidate.

Going back to the Pew survey after the 2016 election, their voter portrait depicted a voting population that is older, 'Whiter' and less educated than the exit polls indicated. College graduates were just 37%, rather than half of voters. Voters over 65 made up 27% of the electorate - more than double the share of under-30 voters at 13%. While the exit polling showed Trump winning college-educated Whites by 3 percentage points, Pew found he actually lost them by 20.

According to the U.S. Census, About 46 million Americans live in the nation's rural counties; 175 million live in its suburbs and small metros; and about 98 million reside in its urban core counties. As a group, the population in rural counties grew 3% since 2000 (far less than their 8% growth in the 1990s). Urban county population rose 13% since 2000 and the population in suburban and small metro counties went up 16%, showing growth rates somewhat higher than in the 1990s. It's this suburban growth that interests political strategists.

For whatever reason (and there may be many) the suburbs are gaining population and that means voters, many of them women. This is not to say that urban America has lost its luster for Democrats. It hasn't. Births are up and the influx of new immigrant and migrants is also up, and that, too, means voters. The loser has been rural counties that have lost population.

And while the population is aging in all three county types, it is occurring more rapidly in U.S. suburban and small metro counties. The 65-and-older population grew 39% in the suburbs since 2000, compared with 26% in urban and 22% in rural counties. Once again, a target-rich environment. Last month, President Obama's former Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, wrote an Op Ed for the Washington Post in which he underscored the importance of the SWCEWs.

He said that the 59% Democratic victory of this voting group in 2018 was a positive sign for the Biden campaign in 2020, and that if Biden's people are smart they will focus on the hot-button issues of the suburban woman: their intense dislike for Trump, abortion (he calls it 'reproductive rights'), gun safety (read: gun control) and racial inequality.

As much as I hate to say it, Emanuel is probably right about the issues and the strategy, but I would raise a flag of caution. Treating all suburban women as if they are one monolithic group that thinks and votes in lock-step is foolish AND is demeaning and insulting to women who are just as complex in their psychological makeup as men. Pollsters should ask questions about those issues, but they should also be careful how they phrase them. Talking about gun control in the abstract, for example, is one thing, but relating it to escalating crime rates where gun laws are too restrictive for the average person may get some revealing and unexpected answers.

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