

Women's Vote

Vital Voices

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

New Women Voters in 1996 and Beyond

Presentation of findings from focus
groups and a national survey

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Research Methodology: Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted on June 30 and July 1, 1997. Participants were women who public records indicated had voted in 1996, but had not voted in either 1992 or 1994.

Group 1: Denver, white women

Groups 2: Denver, Latina women

Group 3: Atlanta, white women

Group 4: Atlanta, African American women

Each group included 8-10 participants, recruited at random and offered an incentive for their participation, and was led by a professional moderator.

Focus groups are a form of qualitative research that help us to understand the "why" behind people's opinions. They are open-ended discussions which permit us to explore people's thoughts and opinions at a much deeper level than survey research allows. They are idea-generators, helping us to understand the language that people use to describe their own opinions. By making groups demographically homogeneous, we maximize respondents' willingness to be as candid as possible in discussing their views and perceptions.

Research Methodology: Survey

620 interviews were conducted among women who did not vote in either 1992 or 1994, but who were registered to vote by October 1996. This sample included a base sample of 500 divided in 100 interviews from each of five states in which the Women's Vote Project had coalition partners: Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, Missouri and North Carolina. An additional 50 interviews were conducted among African American women in the five states, and an additional 70 interviews were conducted among Latina women in Colorado and Massachusetts.

The survey was conducted August 20 to August 28, 1997. The margin of error for the full sample is +/- 3.9 percent.

Summary

- ✓ The goal of this project was to better understand both the obstacles and motivations facing new women voters in 1996.
- ✓ With both focus groups and a national survey, we interviewed women in five states who had not voted in either 1992 or 1994, but who joined (or rejoined) the electorate in 1996.
- ✓ We found that three things were critical in bringing these women to the voting booth:
 - Information -- about the issues, about the candidates, and about the process.
 - Relevance -- a personal link between the elections and their own lives.
 - Time -- a process that made voting easy, requiring a minimum amount of time.

Information

- ✓ Providing information is one of the most effective tools in encouraging more women to register and vote.
 - Information on the candidates and issues: The biggest problems women said they faced in voting were getting enough information -- both about the issues on the ballots, and about the candidates. Two-thirds said that getting a non-partisan voter guide in the mail, before election day, would make a difference in whether or not they voted.
 - Information on the process: One in five said that knowing how to use a voting machine was a problem in voting, including one in three women who registered at a DMV.
- ✓ Because of the role of basic information about the process, mobilizing women to vote the first time is different than mobilizing them to vote once they have voted before. Voters worry about not having a say; non-voters worry about making a mistake.

Relevance

- ✓ Messages that draw a connection between the political process and women's lives -- that is, their day to day concerns -- are most effective in motivating these women to vote.
 - Issues that are close to home: References to children, to education, and to immediate economic issues, such as pay and health care, elicit the strongest response.
 - A personal link: Women in our focus groups described being motivated to vote when a change in their own lives -- having a child, buying a house, facing retirement -- prompted them to make a link to the political process.
 - Voting for others: Women respond more to messages asking them to vote for their children, families, and community than for themselves.

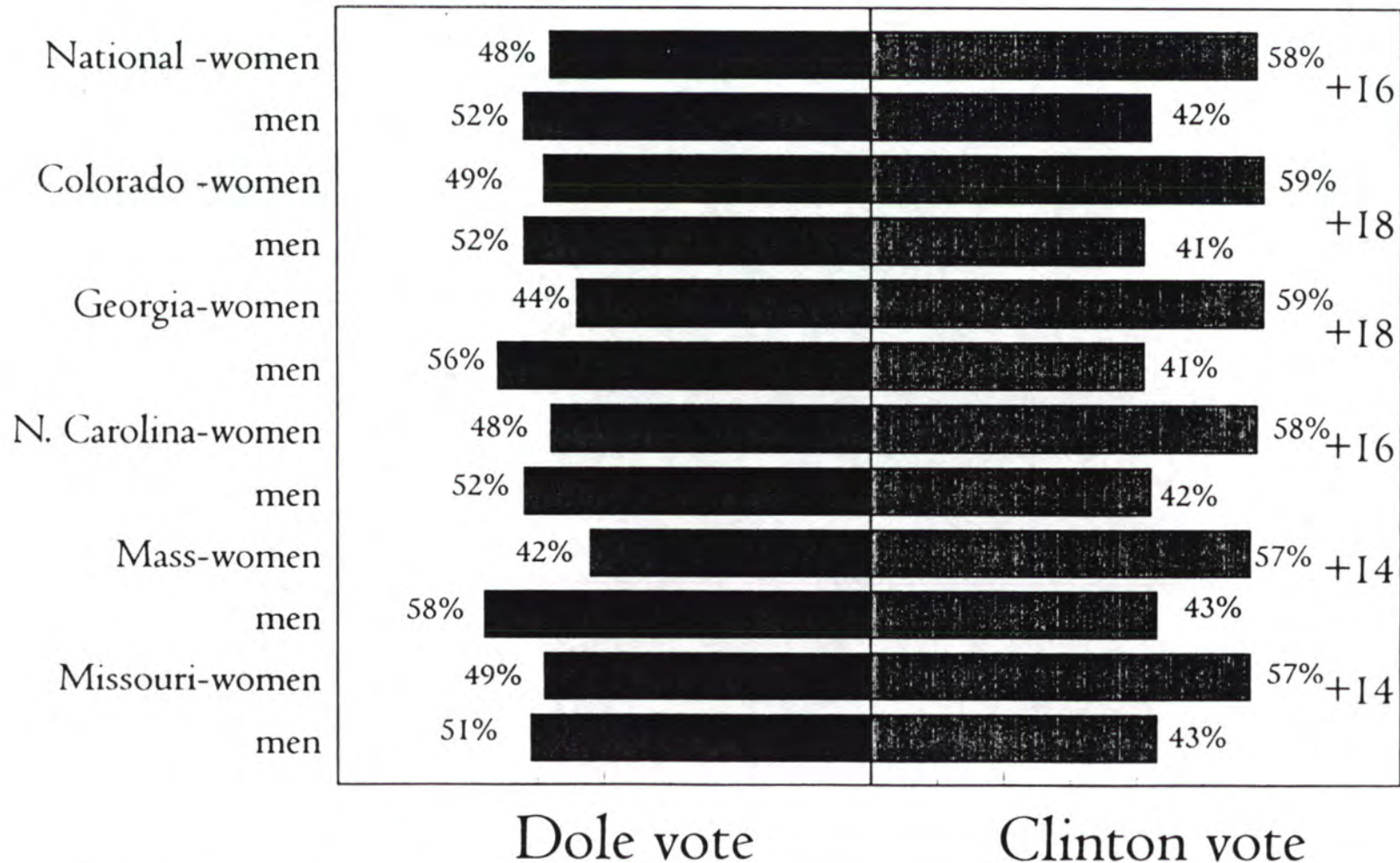
Time

- ✓ In an environment where voters are cynical about the probability of election results changing anything, where they lack information, and where their lives are already busy and hectic, time is a significant obstacle to voting. Moreover, surveys show that women feel even shorter of time than men. Thus, many of the election day reforms with the highest support from the women surveyed diminish the amount of time required to vote.
 - Hours in the day: When time is scarce, the prospect of long lines at the polls is daunting. Extending election day hours is one good remedy to this.
 - Voting by mail: The option to vote through the mail makes a lot of sense to many women.

Messages that Mobilize

- ✓ Messages that draw on concerns about children are strongest -- particularly with younger women, women with children, and women of color.
- ✓ Women respond to the issues of education and economic security. Explicit references to equal pay also boost responses.
- ✓ Older women in particular respond to messages of personal responsibility.

In 1996, women cast the deciding vote in the Presidential election.



In these five states, who were the new women voters in 1996?

Family: Three in four had lived at their current address for more than five years (75%), and two-thirds (61%) are married. Three in four have children (75%), and half of these have children under age 18.

Age & education: They are of all ages & education levels: 57% are under age 50, 41% over age 50; 30% are college graduates, an additional 29% have some education beyond high school.

Income: The average reported household income is \$30,000 to \$40,000. A third have household incomes under \$30,000 a year (32%), one in five have incomes over \$50,000 (21%).

Employment: Most work (59%), and one in ten (11%) belong to a labor union. Ten percent consider themselves homemakers, and one in four (23%) are retired.

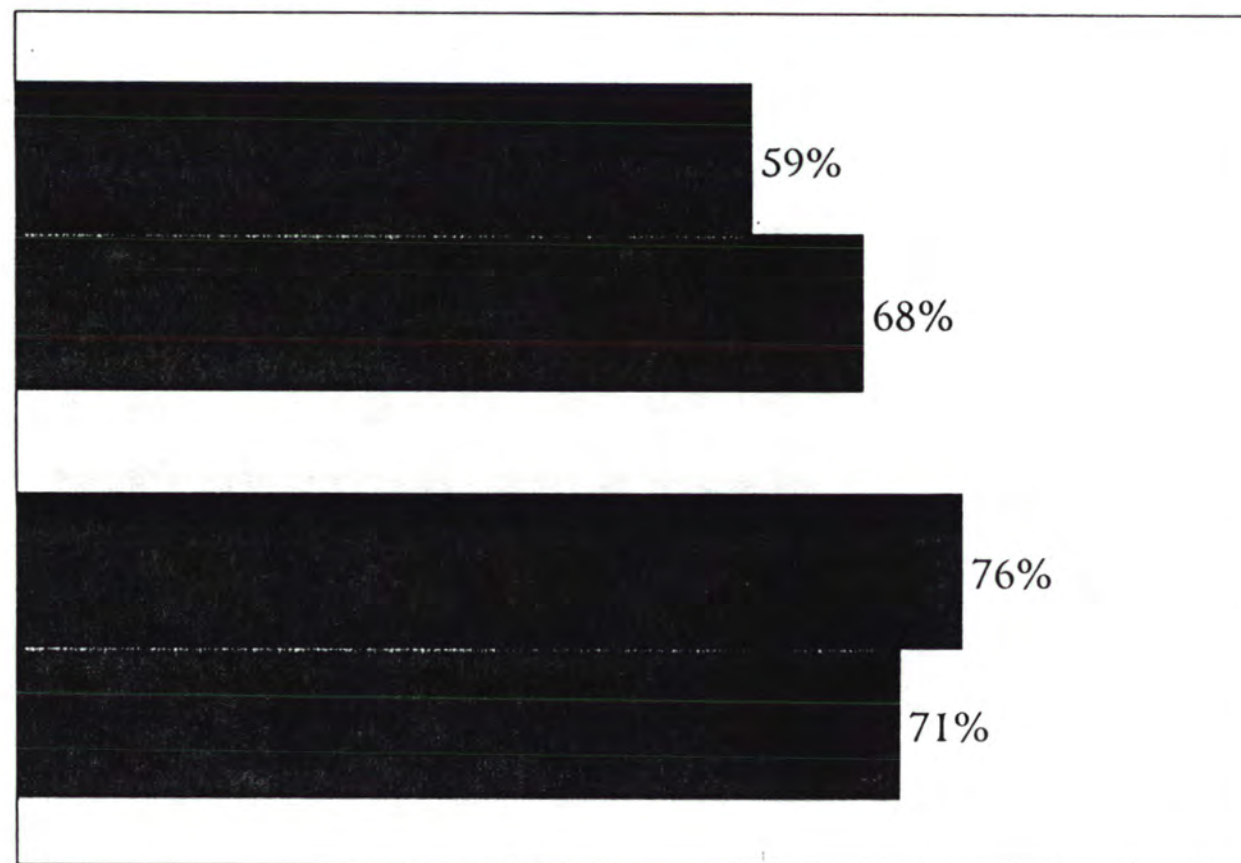
Partisanship: They lean Democratic: 46% call themselves Democrats, 26% say they are Republican, 27% lean toward neither party. Half (52%) voted for Clinton.

Race & ethnicity: Eight in ten say they are white (81%), 12% are African American, and 4% are Hispanic.

These new women voters were somewhat younger and less educated than women voters overall.

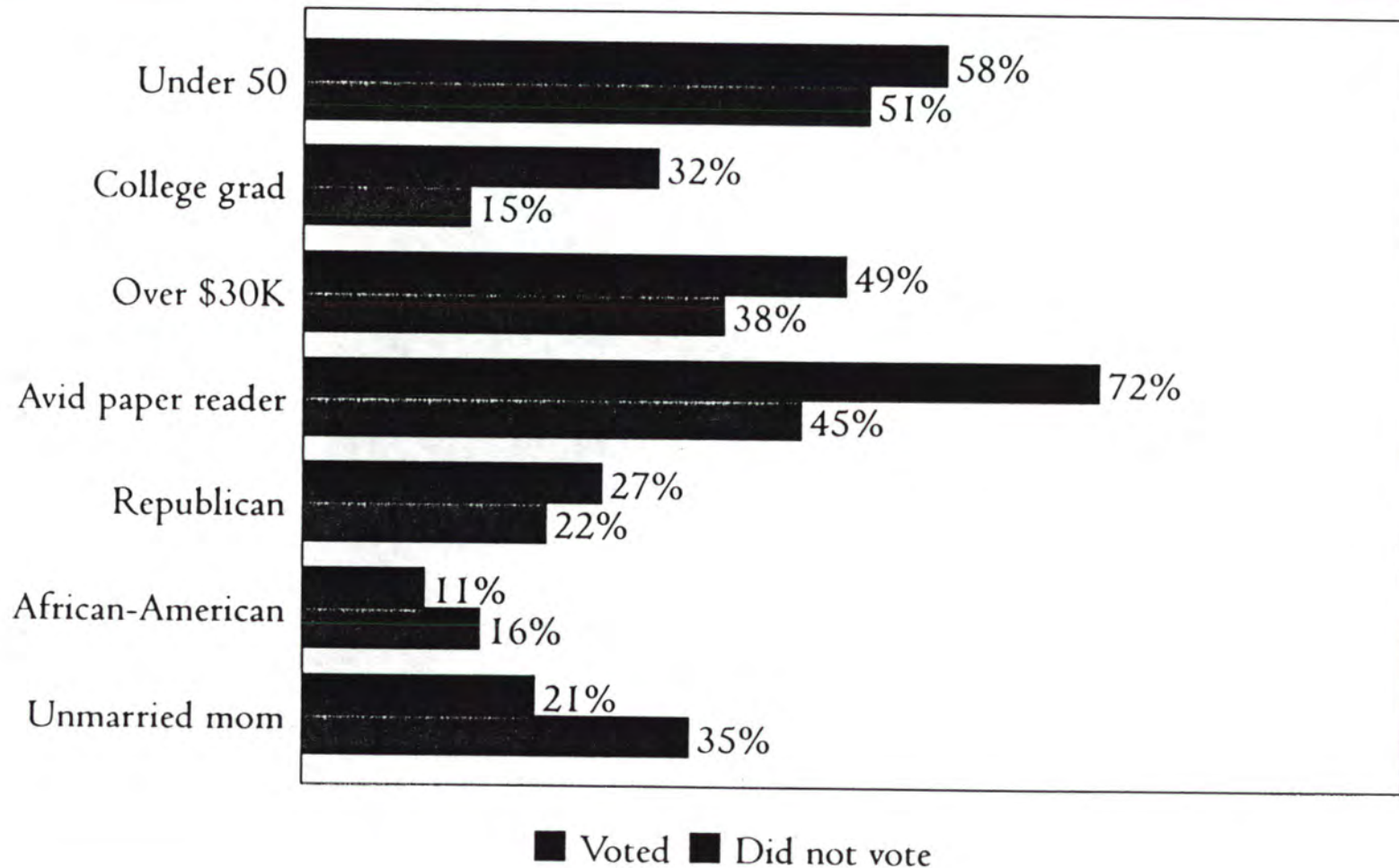
Not a college graduate

Under 60



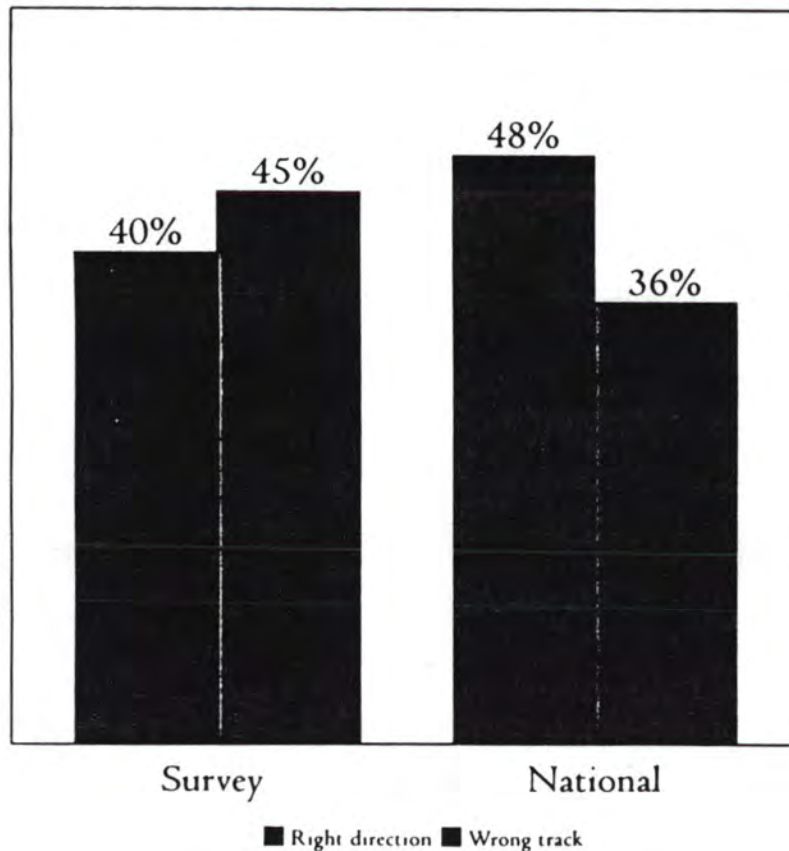
■ All Women ■ New Women

Women who voted on election day were younger, better educated, had higher incomes, and read the newspaper more frequently than non-voters.



These new women voters are anxious and frustrated, and they are less certain than voters nationally that the country is on the right track.

Generally speaking, do you think that things in this country are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off the wrong track?



I'm feeling _____ about the way the country is going...

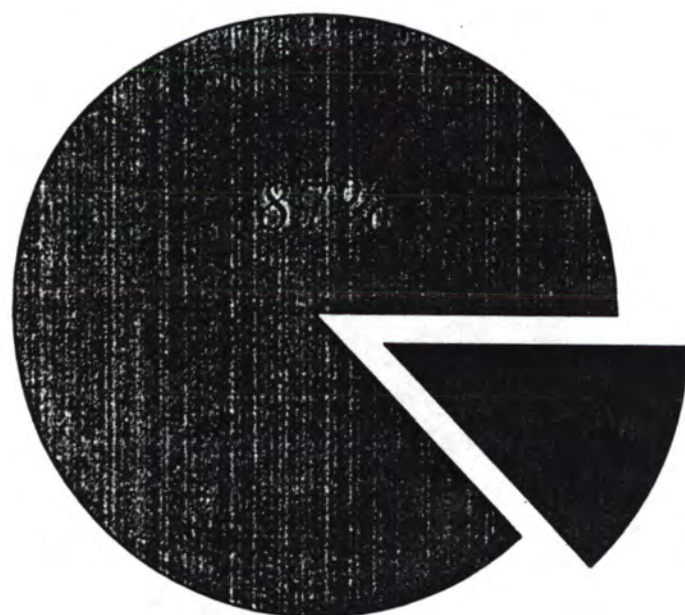
White women in Denver:
Melancholy, overwhelmed, concerned, frustrated.

Latina women in Denver:
Depressed, worried, mad, scared.

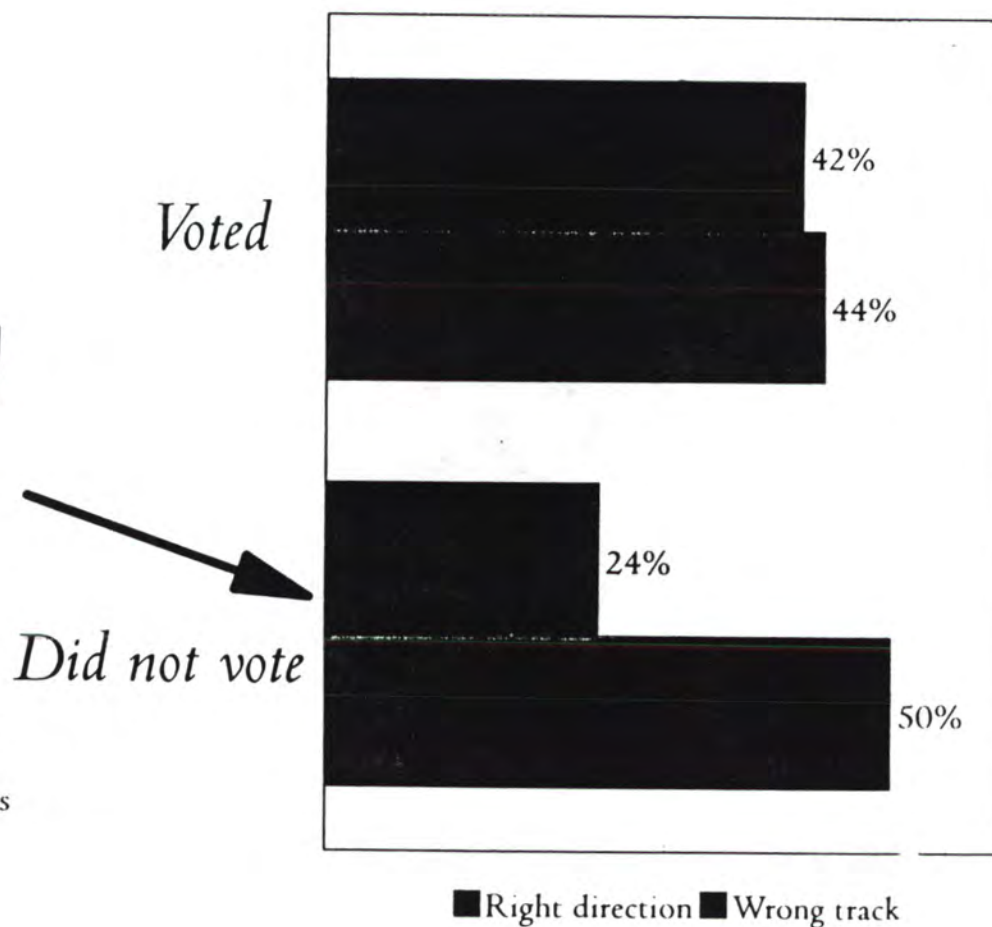
White women in Georgia:
Disgusted, uneasy, pessimistic, annoyed.

Black women in Georgia:
Concerned, discouraged, worried, uneasy.

Among these newly mobilized women, those who did not end up voting were far more pessimistic about the direction of the country than those who voted.



The women in the survey did not vote in either 1992 or 1994, but were registered to vote by October 1996. Among these women, 87% told us that they voted in 1996.



These women are even more cynical than voters nationally and they respond particularly negatively to the personal bickering that seems to dominate campaigns.

I'm feeling _____ about politics and elections these days.

White women in Denver:

Cynical, concerned, turned off, discouraged, indifferent.

Latina women in Denver:

Bad, let down.

White women in Atlanta:

Disgusted, annoyed.

Black women in Atlanta:

Disappointed, confused, distrusting.

They spend more time fighting amongst themselves than they do for us.

(Denver, white)

They never come through with anything they say.

(Denver, Latina)

They don't fulfill half of the promises that they say they would.

(Atlanta, black)

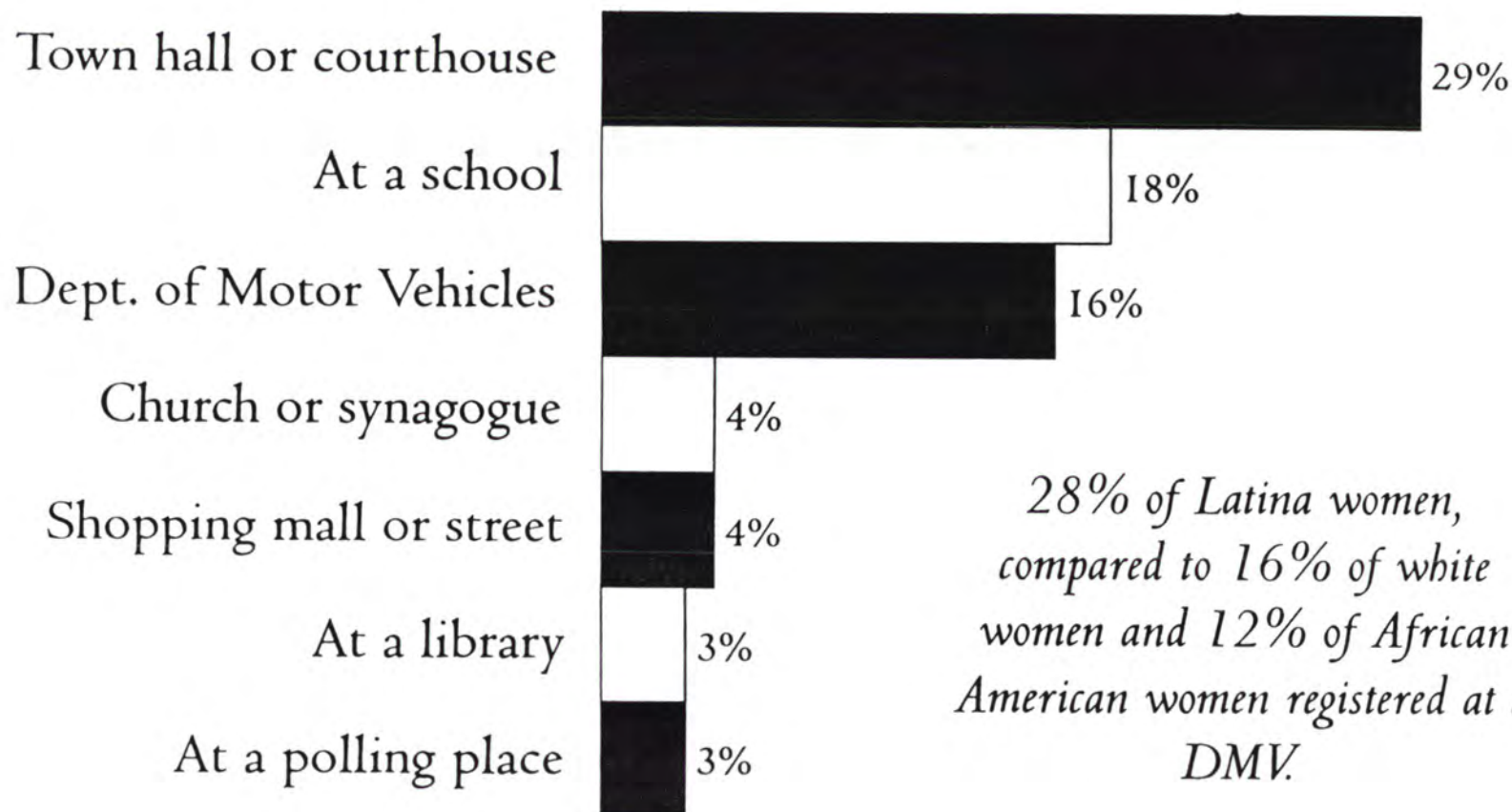
Although they found that registering turned out to be easy, many were initially nervous about the process.

- ✓ It's intimidating... I never voted because I didn't know the process. I didn't know walking in how to vote. (Denver, white)
- ✓ It was much easier than I anticipated. (Denver, white)
- ✓ When you are 18 and right out of high school, it's a scary proposition, but it wasn't hard. It was one of those heart-thumping things. (Denver, white)
- ✓ I thought it was too complicated to get registered... Then when I found out it was easy, I did register, but that was only last year. (Denver, Latina)
- ✓ I think a lot of times people are embarrassed to admit... You are embarrassed to say that you are not registered to vote because somehow that has a connotation of being a moron. (Atlanta, white)
- ✓ I think that if they made it easier for the young people to see how easy it is to register -- I didn't know. I asked my mom. I asked her to go with me when I voted because I did not know what to expect. If I would have done it when I was 18, I probably would have voted all these years. (Atlanta, white)

Providing basic information and how-to examples about the ease of the process can counter nervousness, and make it easier for women to register.

Women were most likely to register at a local government office, at the DMV, or at a school.

Now, think about the last time you registered to vote. The last time you registered, where did you register? In other words, at what location or office?



Most women made a special trip to register.

When you registered to vote, did you make a special trip, OR did you register in the course of doing something else, such as getting a driver's license, going to the library, or shopping in a store, OR did you register by mail, OR did you register when someone came to your home?

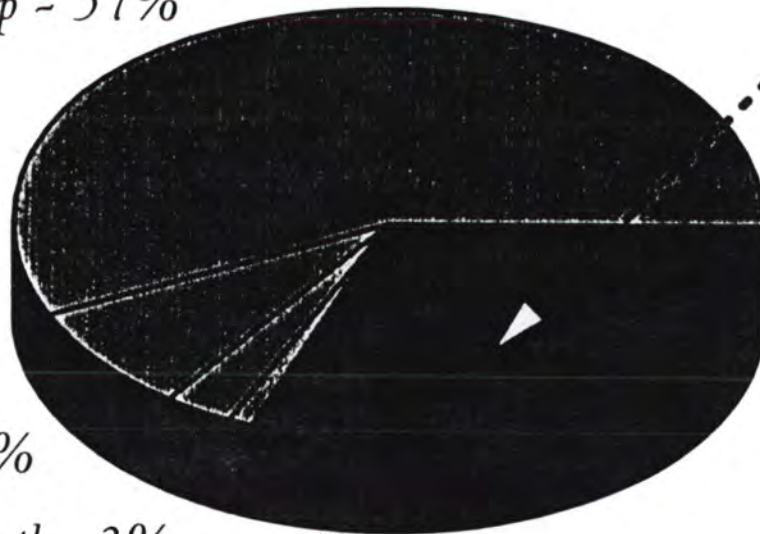
Special trip - 57%

Don't know - 8%

By mail - 3%

At home - 1%

Doing something else - 31%



Younger women, single women, and women of color were most likely to have registered in the course of doing something else:

Under age 35 - 50%

New residents- 47%

African American (under 50) - 44%

Single - 43%

Moms of young children - 43%

Non-college (under 50) - 40%

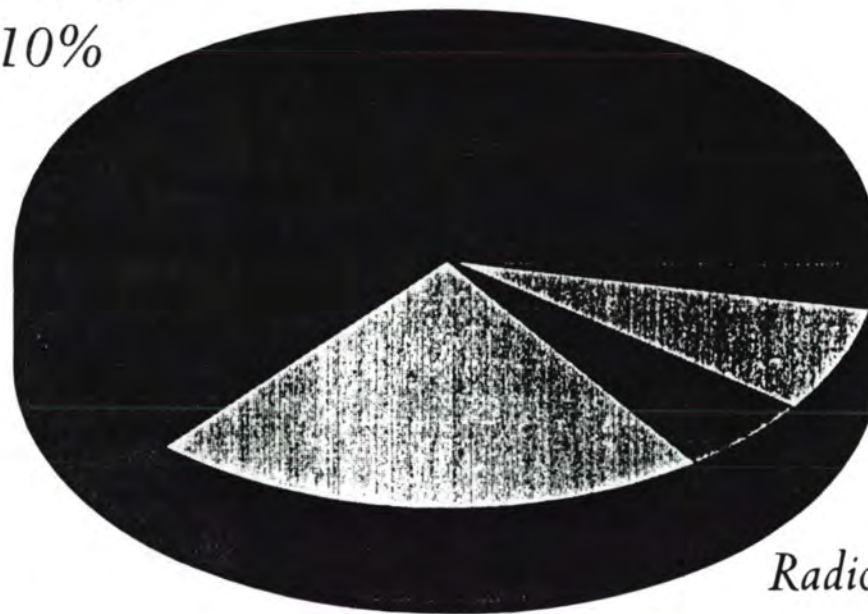
Latina (under 50) - 39%

Like most Americans, these women get most of their information from television, and they rely most on local television.

I am going to read you a list of places where some people get information about government and politics. Listen carefully, and tell me where you PERSONALLY get most of your news and information about government and politics.

Local TV news - 38%
National TV news - 15%
Cable TV news - 10%

Television - 63%



Internet - 3%

Friends - 7%

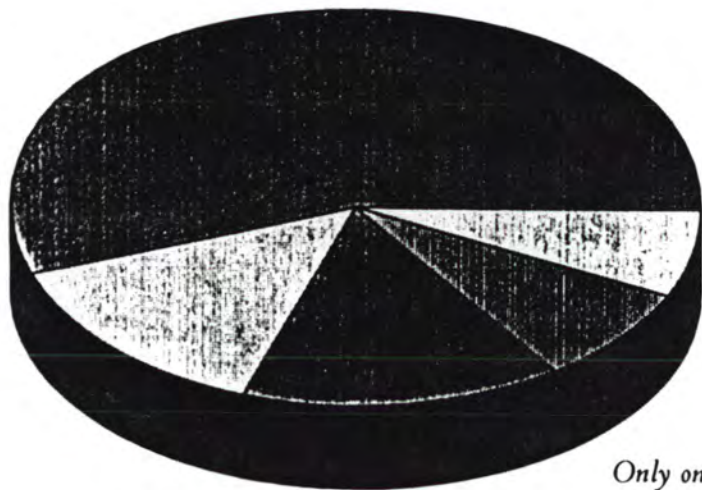
Radio - 5%

Newspapers - 21%

Although television is the primary source of news, half say they read a newspaper each day.

How often do you personally get a chance to read the newspaper?

Every day - 56%



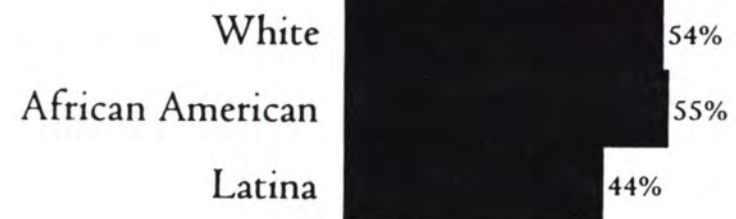
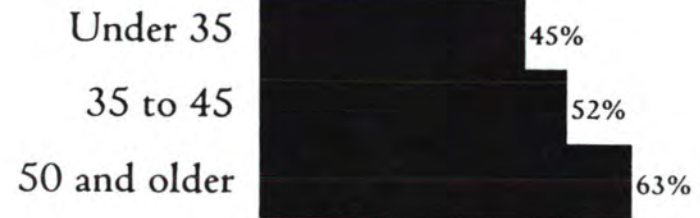
Never - 7%

Only on weekends - 8%

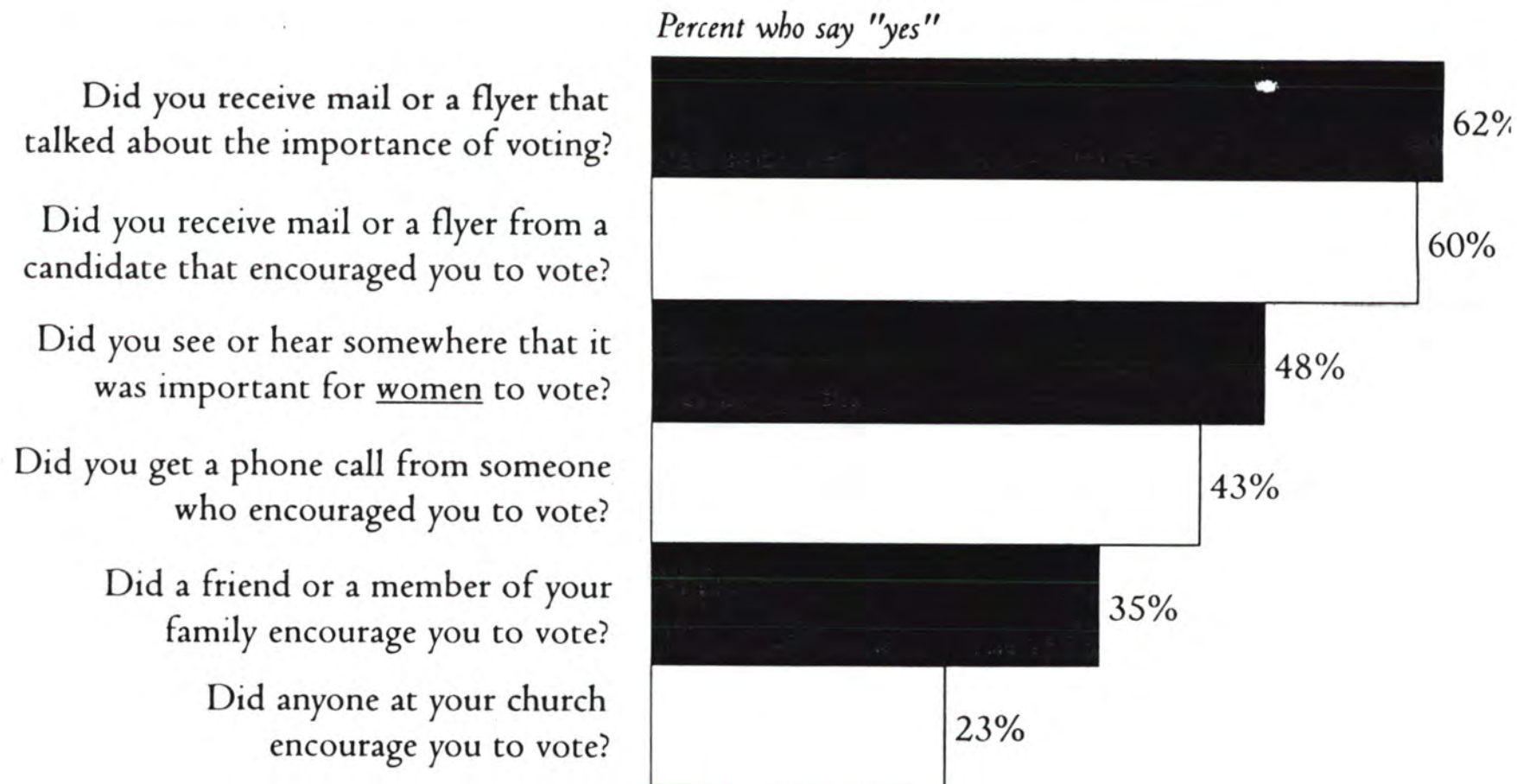
Several times a week - 14%

Once or twice a week - 15%

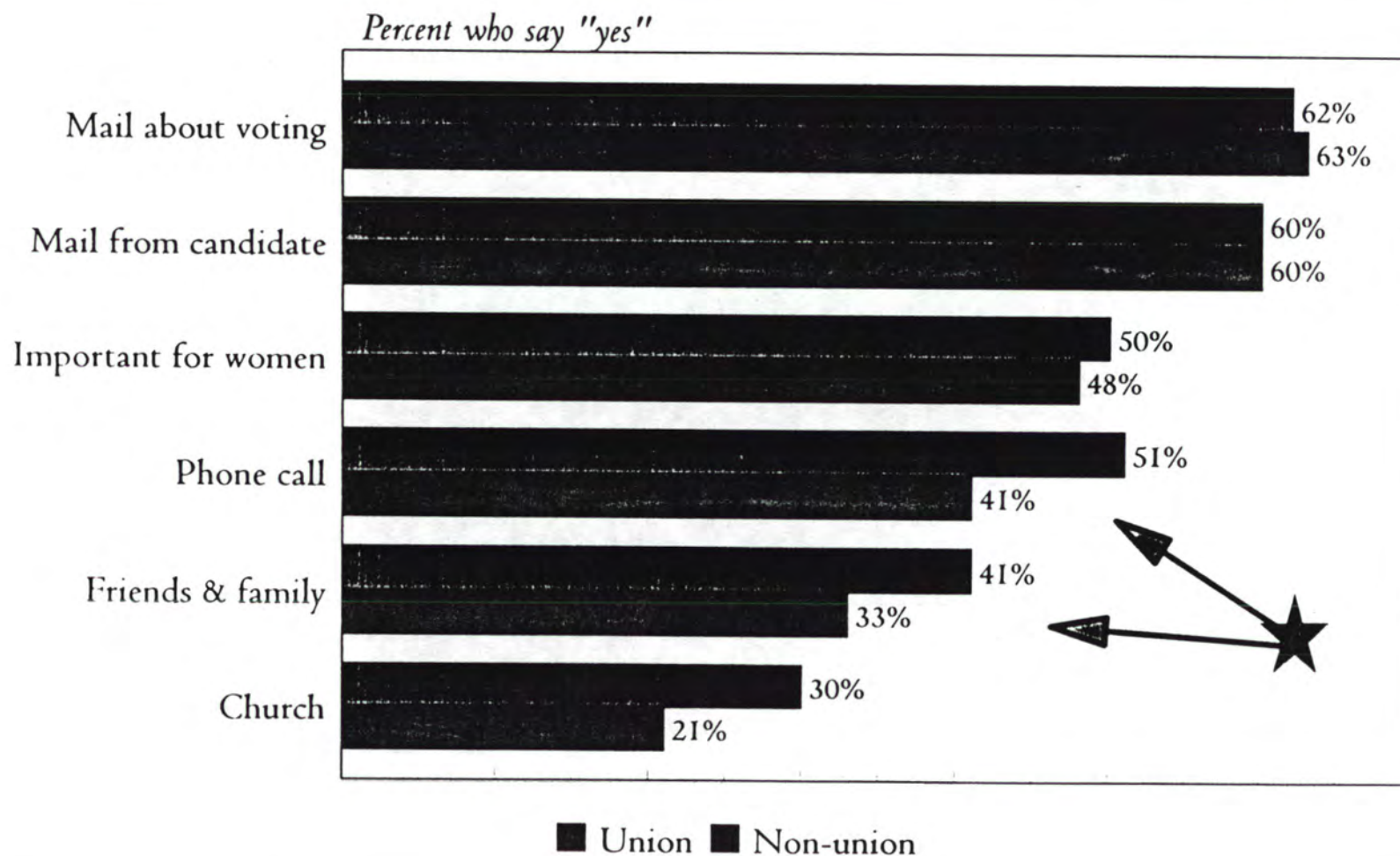
Percent who say they read a newspaper daily



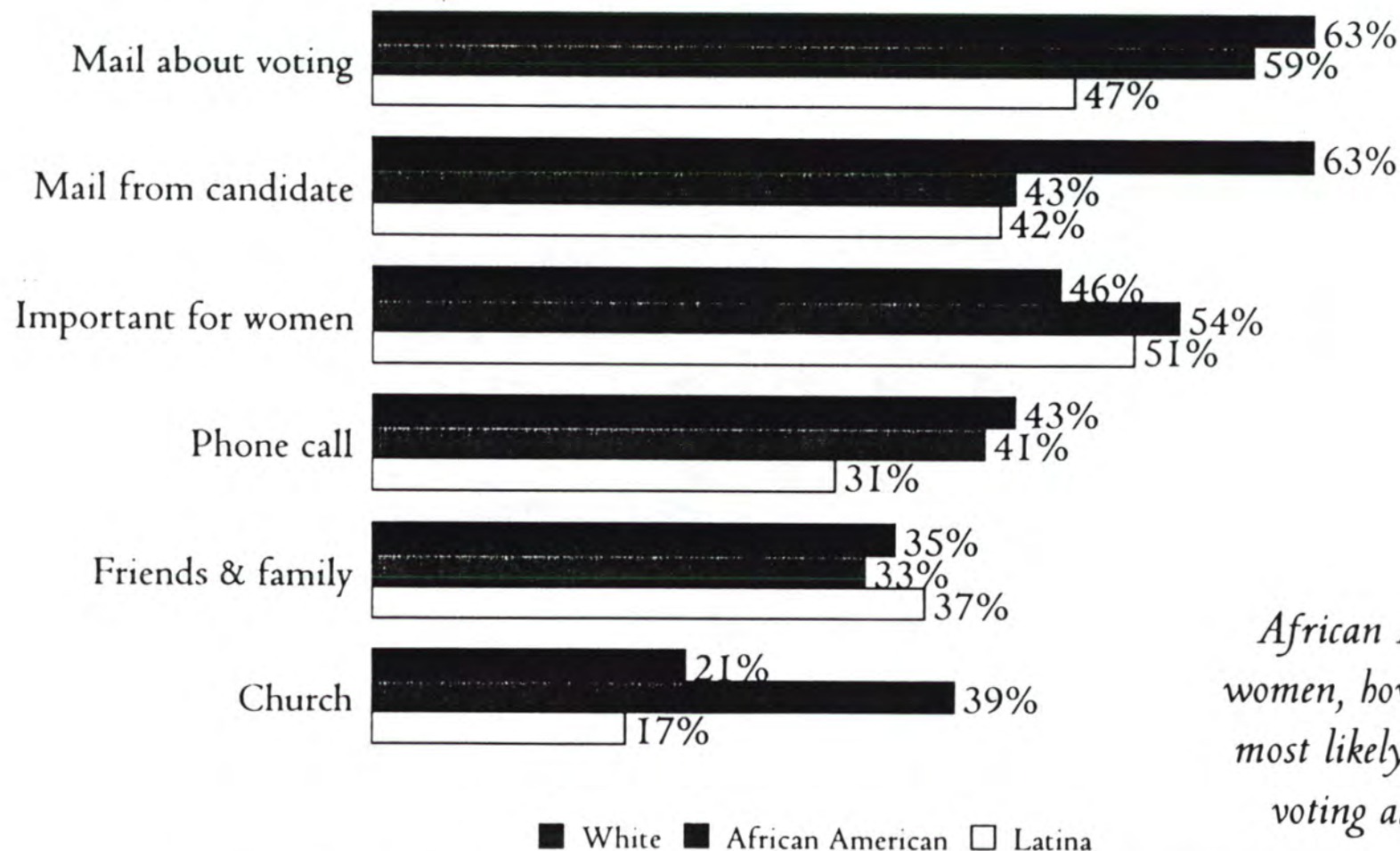
Two in three women remember receiving mail about voting.



Women in union households were more likely than others to remember getting phone calls or talking with friends and family about voting.



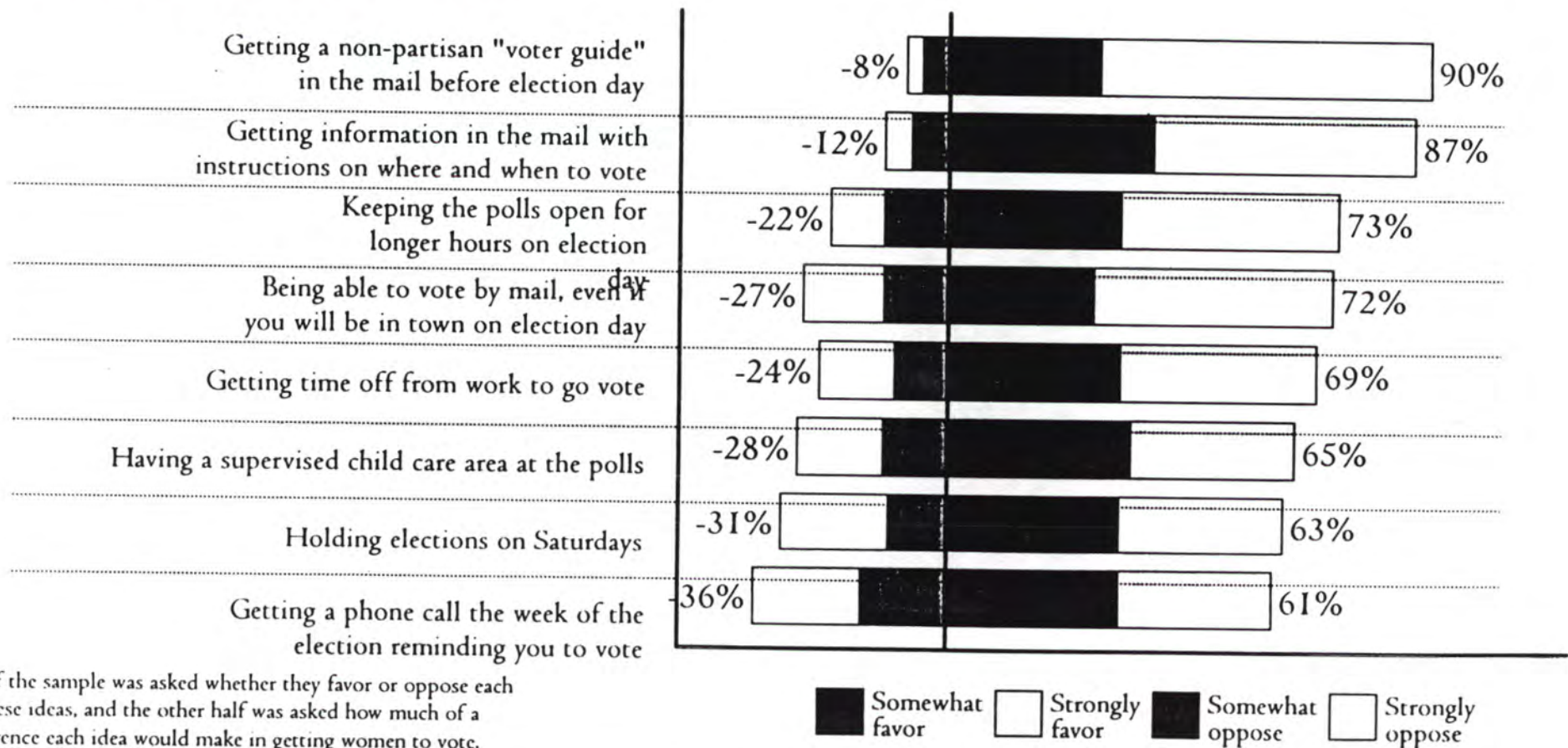
In general, white women were more likely to be contacted than women of color, and Latina women were contacted the least.



African American women, however, were most likely to discuss voting at church.

The best way to encourage voting is to provide more information.

Now, I am going to read you a list of things that might encourage people to go out and vote on election day. Please tell me whether you favor or oppose each of the following ideas....*



*Half the sample was asked whether they favor or oppose each of these ideas, and the other half was asked how much of a difference each idea would make in getting women to vote.

Not having enough information about candidates and issues is a big deterrent to voting.

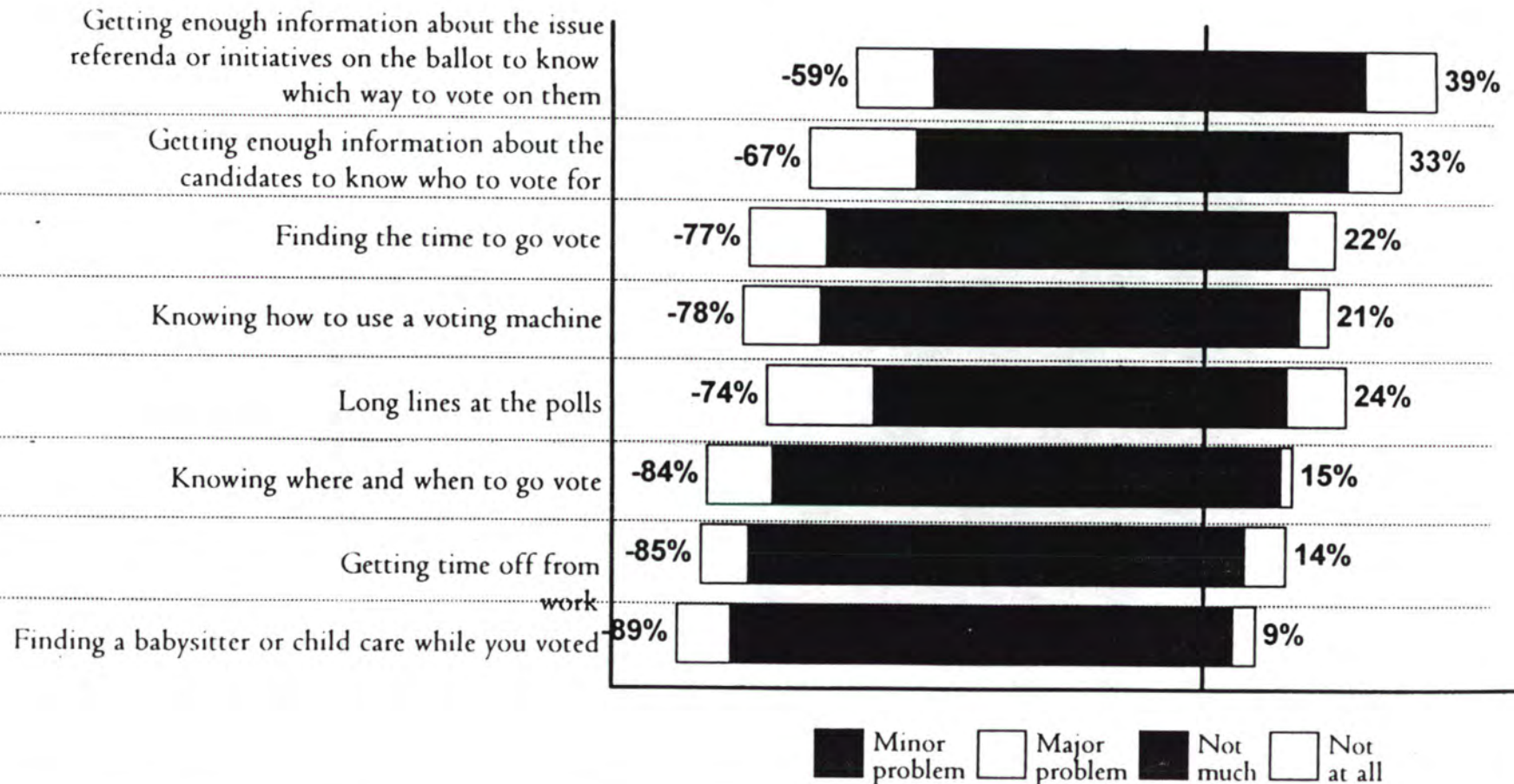
- ✓ I don't know who to vote for... I'm not educated on it. I'm not knowledgeable about it. I guess I could go out to the libraries and get more information... (Denver, white)
- ✓ I didn't feel comfortable going in and voting for someone that I didn't really know anything about. (Denver, white)
- ✓ I think it's really confusing for a lot of people. Unless they know more about it..., sometimes I think it's really overwhelming... I haven't voted [until] last year, either. But the only reason I did, even though I think it's really important, is my husband is really into politics. And I made him sit down and kind of... explain things in my terms. I'm not stupid, but I don't know politics. And I think it can be very intimidating. (Denver, white)
- ✓ I never voted until the last presidential. I'll tell you I'm 28 years old. I never voted until the last presidential election because I was one of those people who thought that I don't know enough and I can't make a wise decision. (Atlanta, white)

Ballot initiatives can be particularly intimidating.

- ✓ They couch the ballot. It's not in real everyday language... I feel that it's contrived to try to get people to vote a certain way. I think that's why a lot of people don't vote. (Denver, white)
- ✓ You almost had to take a four-hour class to decipher [the initiatives]. (Denver, white)
- ✓ I wasn't sure... if I voted the right way. And I felt kind of weird about that. (Denver, white)
- ✓ I thought the ballot issues were written in such a way to confuse you. So you couldn't really vote the position you wanted to vote. (Denver, white)
- ✓ I think it was harder, because of the amendments. Some of them weren't very clear.... I had to really get more information to understand... if I was understanding what was for, what was against. Because I was really worried about voting for something that I thought I was voting against. (Denver, Latina)

In the survey as well, getting enough information was the biggest problem women say they faced, followed by having enough time.

Voting and elections can often be inconvenient for people. How much of a problem were each of the following for you personally -- a MAJOR problem, a MINOR problem, not much of a problem, or not a problem AT ALL?

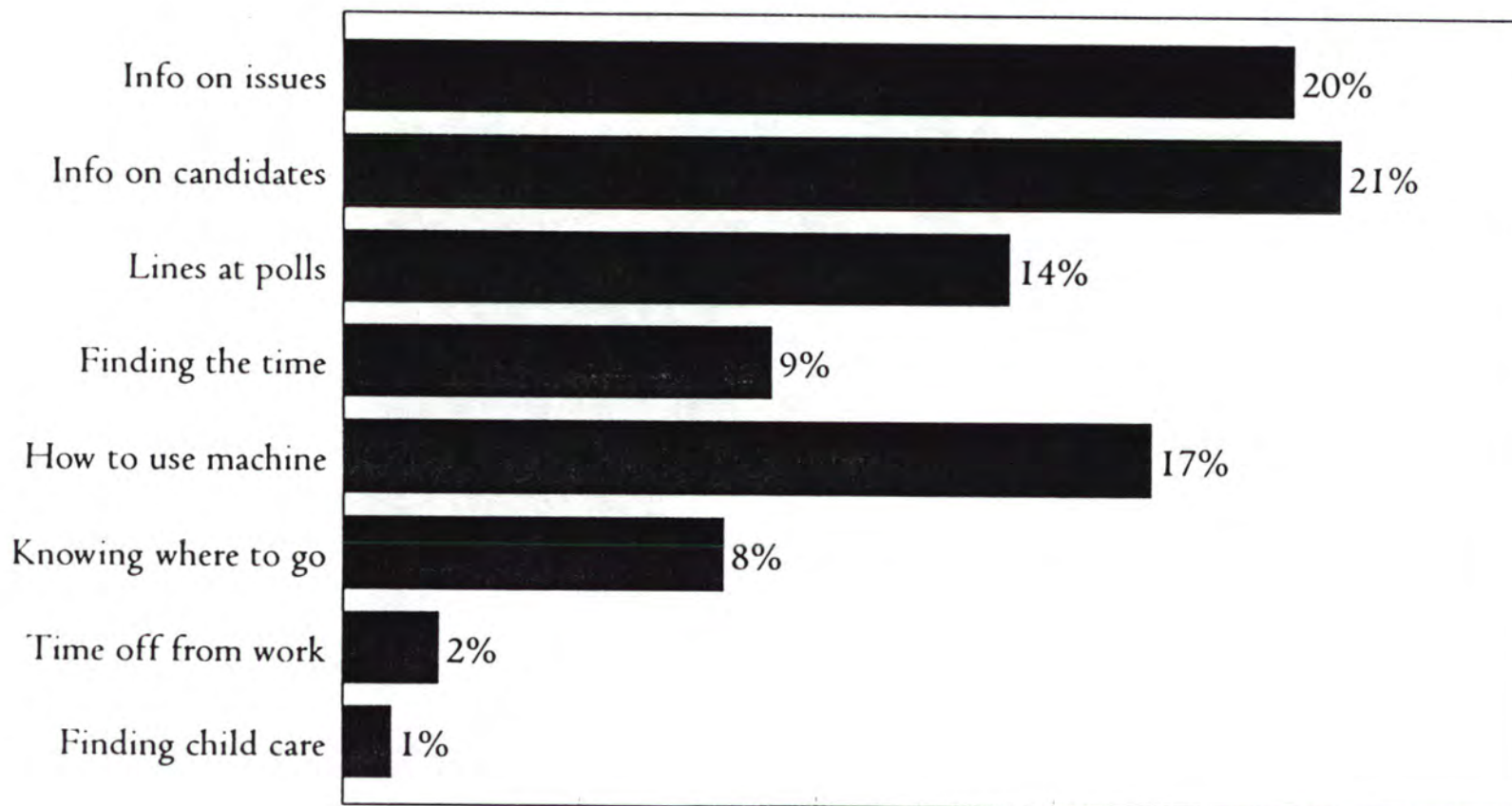


Time is also an obstacle, and many had the perception that voting would be time consuming.

- ✓ I walked in there and I go, oh God, this is going to be a long time. And I was going to walk out, but then I stayed. And it was a long time, though. (Denver, white)
- ✓ When I was 18, I did try to go to vote, but the line was -- they said it would take about an hour and a half. And so when I went in '96 to vote, my mother-in-law said, go in the morning and I'll watch the kids for you. And I went in. I was in and out. So now I know. (Denver, white)
- ✓ Do you know how long I waited to vote? Like almost three hours. (Denver, Latina)
- ✓ Voting has become a thing where it takes a very large chunk of your day. You practically have to take half a day off from work. (Atlanta, white)
- ✓ When you are looking at long lines, the last thing I want to do is have two-year-old hanging on me when I go to the polls. (Atlanta, white)

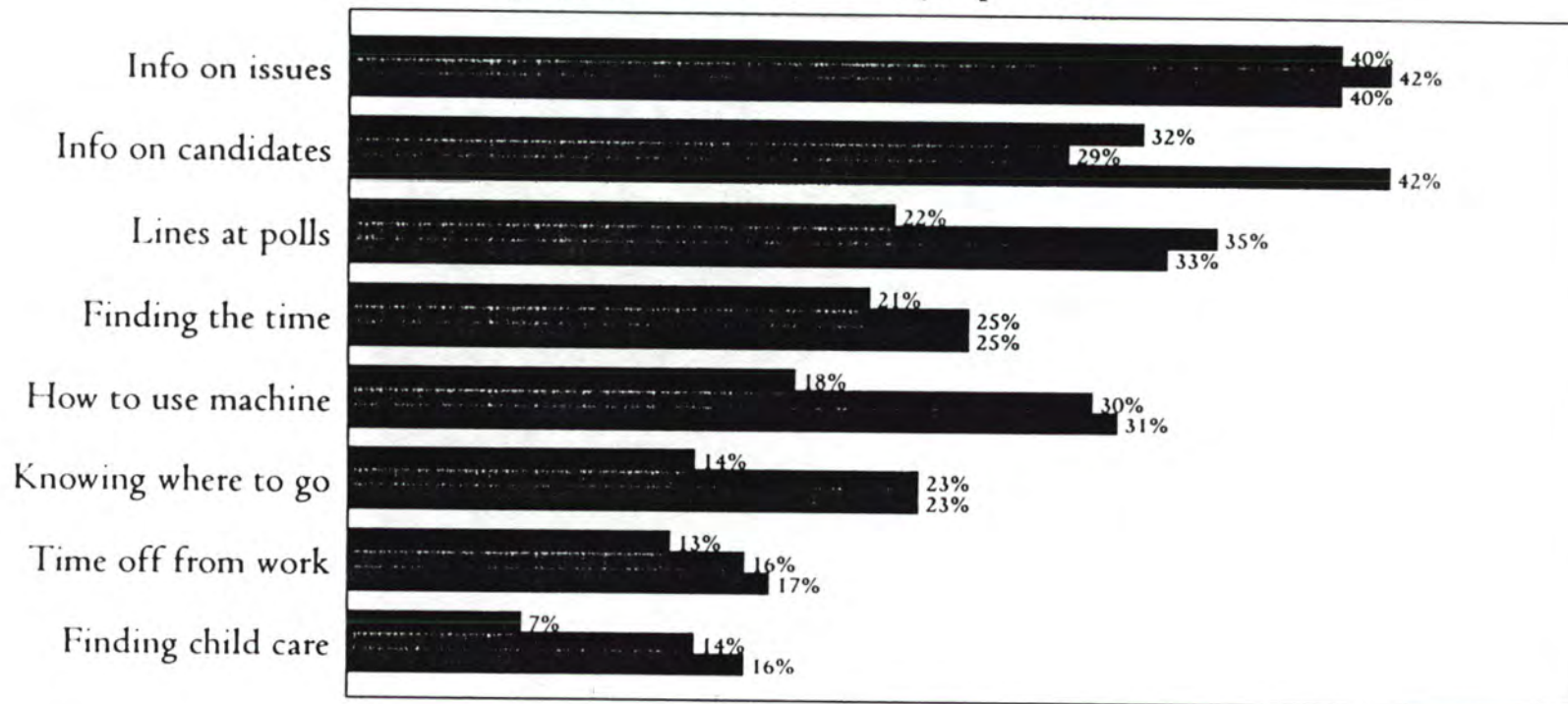
Seniors report fewer problems with voting overall, but knowing how to use a voting machine is nearly as much a problem as having information on the candidates and issues.

Percent saying each is a minor or major problem:



Women of color are more likely than white women to say that lines at the polls; child care; knowing how to use the machine; and knowing where to go are obstacles.

Percent saying each is a minor or major problem:

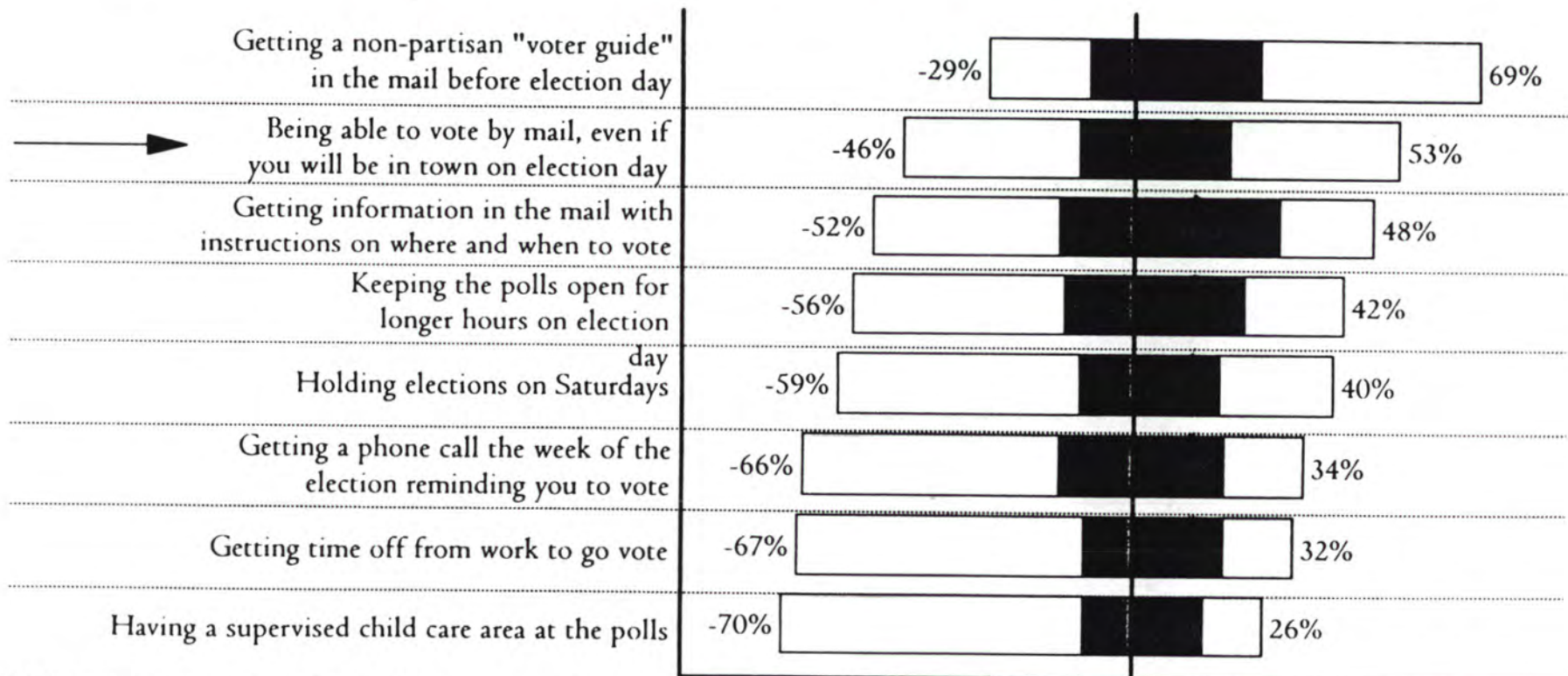


■ White ■ African American ■ Latina

Latina women are most likely to say they lack information about the candidates

In addition to having more information, being able to vote by mail would also make a difference.

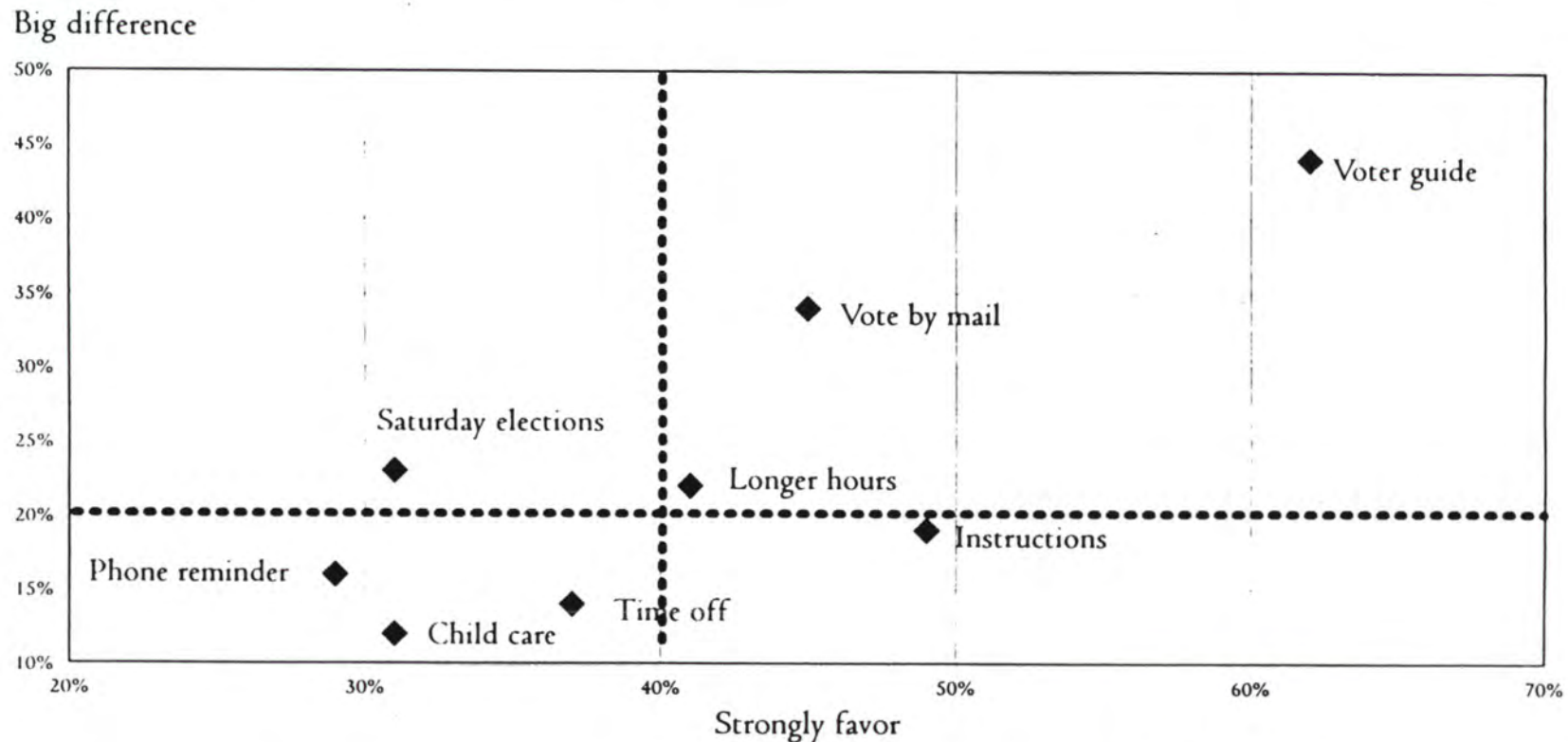
Now, I am going to read you a list of things that might encourage people to go out and vote on election day. Please tell me whether each of these ideas would make a difference to you PERSONALLY in whether or not you would go and vote.*



*Half the sample was asked whether they favor or oppose each of these ideas, and the other half was asked how much of a difference each idea would make in getting women to vote.

Some difference Big difference Little difference No difference

Getting a voter guide and being able to vote by mail are the two things women favor the most and think would make the biggest difference.*



*Having the polls open for longer hours also ranks higher than average.
Saturday elections has less support, but could make a difference.*

Split Sample - Strongly
Favor/Big Difference

In the survey, messages about children and economic issues are the most convincing reasons to vote.

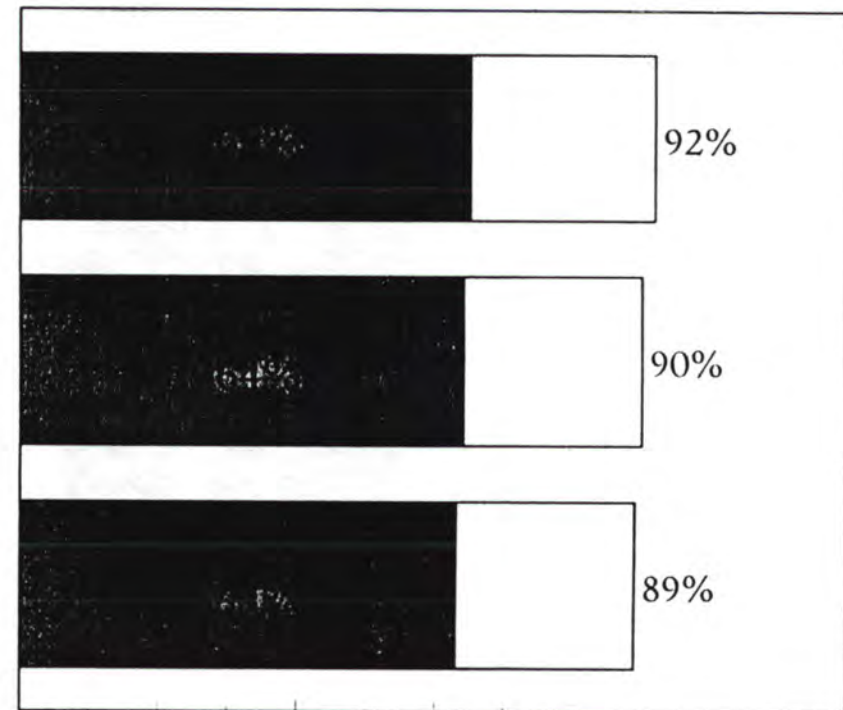
*Now, I am going to read you some reasons people have given for voting. Please tell me how convincing each is as a reason to vote -- is it VERY convincing, SOMEWHAT convincing, NOT too convincing, or not AT ALL convincing?**

It is important for women to vote to make sure their issues are heard. For example, it is important for women to vote so that things important to our economic security, like equal pay, education, jobs and health care are priorities for elected officials.*

The most important investment we can make in the future is in our children. We all need to vote to make sure our children are put first as we head into the 21st century.*

Our children have a lot at stake in the outcome of elections. Elections affect the future of our schools, our job opportunities, and the availability of health care and child care. Women need to vote to stand up for children.*

* Each message was asked of half the sample. The other half heard messages with slightly different language.



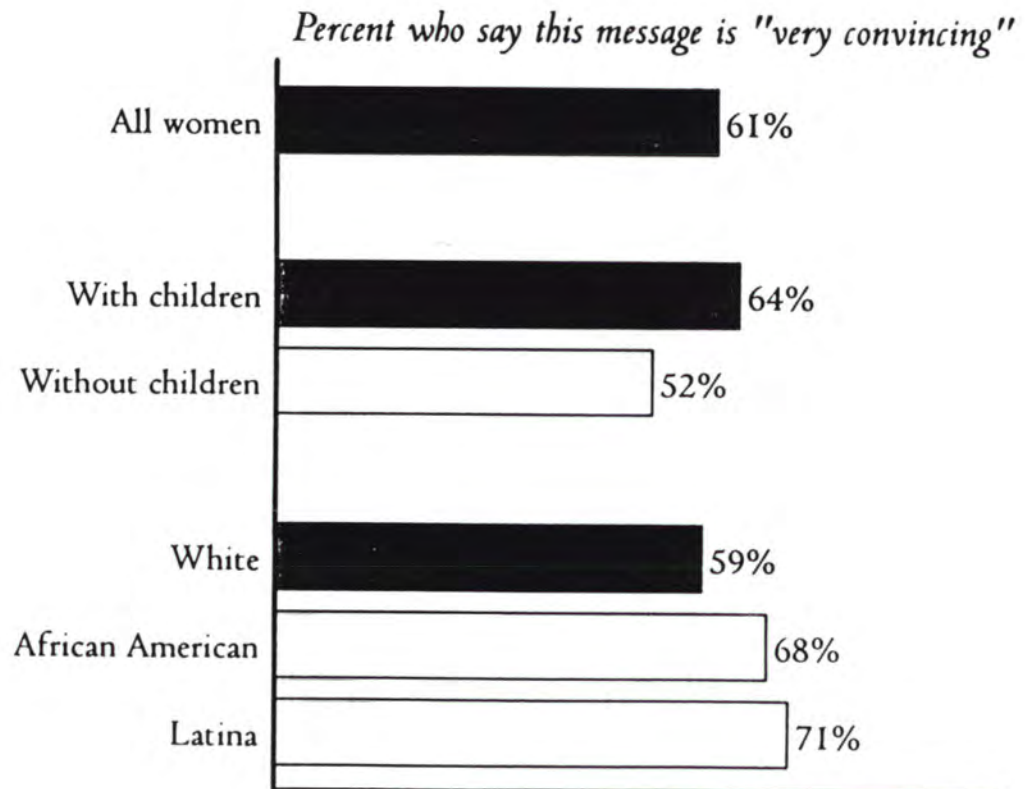
Very convincing Somewhat convincing

Messages about children have the most power for women with children -- and thus younger women -- and for women of color.

Now, I am going to read you some reasons people have given for voting. Please tell me how convincing each is as a reason to vote -- is it VERY convincing, SOMEWHAT convincing, NOT too convincing, or not AT ALL convincing?

The most important investment we can make in the future is in our children. We all need to vote to make sure our children are put first as we head into the 21st century.*

*Half the sample heard a message saying "we all" need to vote; half heard a message saying "women" need to vote. These results combine responses to both versions.



Mentioning equal pay makes an economic security message even stronger.

Now, I am going to read you some reasons people have given for voting. Please tell me how convincing each is as a reason to vote -- is it *VERY* convincing, *SOMEWHAT* convincing, *NOT* too convincing, or not *AT ALL* convincing?*

It is important for women to vote to make sure their issues are heard. For example, it is important for women to vote so that things important to our economic security, like equal pay, education, jobs and health care are priorities for elected officials.

It is important for women to vote to make sure their issues are heard. For example, it is important for women to vote so that things important to our economic security, like education, jobs and health care are priorities for elected officials.



Very convincing Somewhat convincing

* Split sample - half the sample heard the version of the message that includes "equal pay" as an example of an economic security issue and half heard a message that mentions only equal pay.

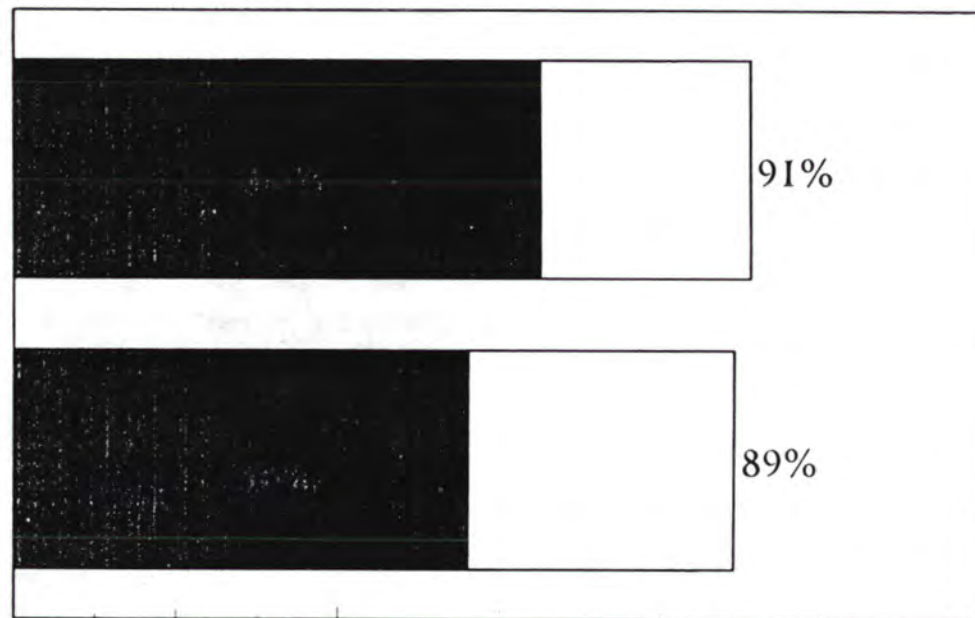
Mentioning equal pay adds 10 points to those who find an economic security message very convincing.

These are values-oriented voters and a message about taking personal responsibility is also convincing.

Now, I am going to read you some reasons people have given for voting. Please tell me how convincing each is as a reason to vote -- is it VERY convincing, SOMEWHAT convincing, NOT too convincing, or not AT ALL convincing?

Voting is an important part of being an American citizen. It is important for women to vote because voting is a way to take personal responsibility for the direction of our lives and our country.*

We want our children to know right from wrong, to have confidence in their opinions, and to take responsibility for their actions. It is important for women to vote so that we set the right example for our children and teach them responsibility.*



Very convincing Somewhat convincing

* Split sample - half the sample heard the personal responsibility message and the other half heard the message about teaching children right from wrong.

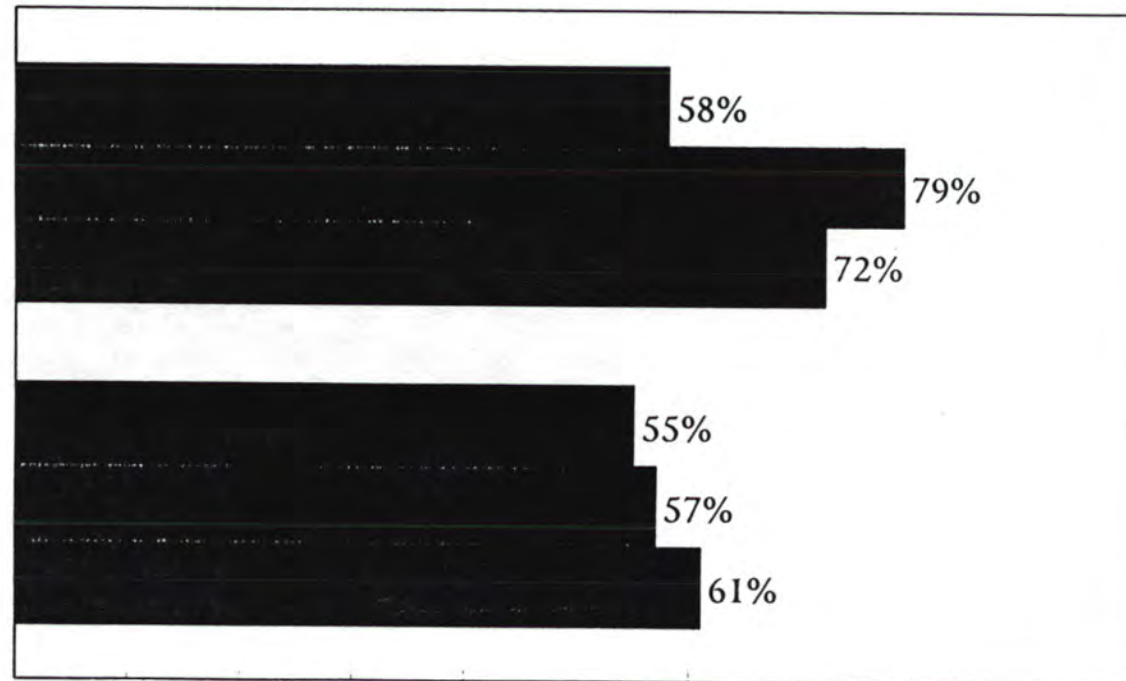
Taking PERSONAL responsibility is more convincing than teaching one's CHILDREN responsibility.

Messages about "personal responsibility" were particularly convincing to older women.*

Percent very convincing:

Take personal responsibility

Teach children responsibility



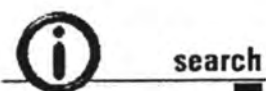
* Split sample - half the sample heard the personal responsibility message and the other half heard the message about teaching children right from wrong.

■ Under 50 ■ 50 to 64 ■ 65+



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Poll: GOP Faces 'Gender Canyon'

By **DAVID ESPO**
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) Republicans face a "gender canyon" among middle-aged voters, according to polling data counseling prospective GOP House challengers that many women favor government action in education, health care security and environmental protection.

"Too often we are intent on 'teaching (President) Clinton a lesson' and ultimately boxed in by policy and process and lose the rhetorical debate," said the briefing provided at a candidates' school for potential GOP contenders in next year's congressional elections.

"Too often we seem intent upon putting ideological purity above political reality," added the analysis, presented by Republican pollster Linda DiVall.

DiVall reviewed her polling data with Republican hopefuls gathered at the National Republican Congressional Committee two blocks from the Capitol. "We had about 50 candidates from all over the country," said Mary Crawford, a spokeswoman for the committee, the political organization for House Republicans.

In a telephone interview, DiVall said her presentation was designed to make Republican contenders aware that "the gender gap is a significant electoral problem," yet it can be addressed without wavering from Republican principles if GOP candidates "understand how women react to some of our policies."

As a difference in views between men and women, she cited a question about the potential uses for a budget surplus. A majority of men believe the surplus should go to deficit reduction, while a majority of women believe it should go for tax relief for working families, she said.

The polling was conducted roughly midway between the 1996 elections and next year's balloting, when Republicans will be defending a narrow majority in the House of Representatives.

The GOP currently holds a 227-206 edge in the House, with one independent lawmaker and one vacancy. The vacancy will be filled by special election next week in New York City in a race in which the Republican candidate has pulled ahead in private polling.

At the same time, Republicans have privately begun to

What do these
men
have in common?



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edge away from earlier predictions of gains in the range of 25 seats in 1998.

Asked about GOP prospects on Tuesday, Majority Leader Dick Armey of Texas offered no specific prediction. "We will probably have some gain in our majority unless some high drama unfolds," he said.

A smaller-than-expected number of Democratic retirements means fewer opportunities for gains for the GOP, particularly in the fertile South. And a private survey of the political landscape last month by the Tarrance Group, a GOP polling firm, said Republicans "can win and/or should compete" in only 12 of 19 seats where incumbents of either party had announced plans to retire meaning the other seven were likely out of reach.

"The fact is that a number of the Republican open seats ... will probably be more difficult to defend than many of the open Democratic seats" added this analysis.

The polling data presented to GOP hopefuls last week indicates that little has changed since the 1996 election in terms of Republican support among men and women. Among all voters, the survey indicated men favor Republicans over Democrats by a margin of 47-37; among women it's almost the opposite, 38-47.

Among men between the ages of 35 and 59, Republicans enjoy a 51-33 edge when voters are asked whether they support a Republican or Democratic candidate for Congress.

Among women in the same age group, "the GOP trails 33-53; a gender canyon not a gender gap," the presentation added.

The findings reported that women favor government action for education, provision of health care security and protection of the environment. Roughly a quarter of women voters polled said environmental issues were the cause of their greatest reservations about continuing GOP control of Congress.

On the other hand, women "are opposed to government action when it comes to gay rights and school prayer," the survey said.

As for education, the candidates were counseled: "We cannot simplistically talk about eliminating the Department of Education and dismantling the education bureaucracy. This is a non-starter." At the same time, the polling reported that 73 percent of all women favor vouchers to allow public school children to attend private school an idea the House Republicans are aggressively pushing in Congress this fall over opposition from Democrats and Clinton.

There is also advice on how to discuss crime with the voters: "If we define the crime issue as the war on drugs, we win if we allow Democrats to define crime on a debate about gun control, we will likely lose."

And: "We should not allow the Democrats' framing of the tobacco issue to replace a discussion about the dangers of increased illegal drug use."

(28 Oct 1997 19:19 EST)

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