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## 'Roe, Roe, Roe your vote' High number of college-age women at abortion-rights rally could have political implications

## By Steven Thomma KRT CAMPUS

WASHINGTON — Though the pictures of unday's abortion-rights march in Washington ocused on the size of the crowd, the truer story of political impact could be measured by the age the demonstrators.

More college-age women showed up than usully attend abortion-rights rallies, which tend to e dominated by older women. If that translates increased voting in November by young omen — a group that usually doesn't vote in igh numbers — it could help Democrats in a lose election.

If not, the march probably had no lasting politcal significance, for it reflected a longstanding artisan divide over issues related to abortion ights and is unlikely to change the political equaon or affect the outcome of the election.

The march attracted hundreds of thousands of omen to the National Mall in downtown Washington, where they rallied for abortion ights and protested against President Bush. A ev complaint was Bush's signature on two new aws: the Unborn Victims of Violence Act, which rants a fetus legal rights, and the Partial-Birth bortion Ban Act, which criminalizes a medical rocedure sometimes used to terminate late-term regnancies.

In the short term, the march could serve as a aution to Congress, said one senior Republican enator, who spoke on condition that he not be dentified lest he draw criticism from his peers: That was a very impressive showing by any fair tandard. I think it will discourage any more votes is year on abortion."

But Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who attendd the event, said the march's impact on voter mout was what mattered: "I don't know if the harch changes anything (in Washington). It was eally aimed at the whole country and what they lo at the ballot box.'

The key question is whether the large turnout gnals a more widely held passion for abortion

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impact on the election. Aides to Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry distributed voterregistration forms at the march, and tables were set up along the Mall for people to sign up.

"I can vote now," an excited Anne Vetter, 20, of Charlottesville, Va., said after she registered.

"Roe, Roe, Roe your vote," said Lindsay Morris, 22, a college student from Haddonfield, N.J., in a reference to the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision by the U.S. Supreme Court that legalized abortion.

Vetter and Morris could signal a boost for the Democrats if they represent a larger trend of voters who otherwise would avoid the polls. That would be a shift on an issue that never has been pivotal in presidential politics, and would herald a deeper level of involvement by an age group that traditionally tunes out politics.

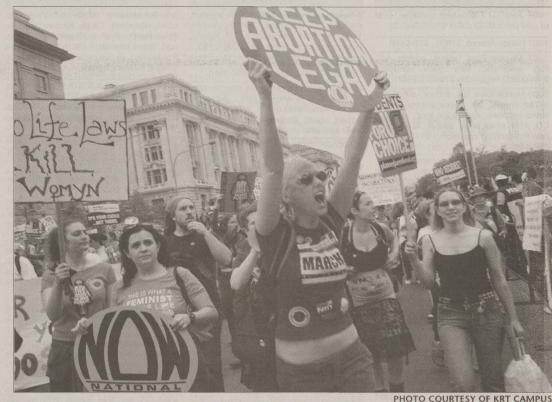
Despite media hype about marches in Washington both for and against abortion rights, the issue consistently ranks low on the list of priorities cited by most voters. In a February Gallup poll, for example, abortion ranked 13th, below such issues as education, the economy, the war in Iraq, health care and immigration.

'The public is no more concerned today about the abortion issue than it was in the last two presidential elections," Gallup analyst Lydia Saad concluded in an article written last week.

Moreover, a slight majority of those who've been motivated to vote on the single issue of abortion in the past opposed it; single-issue abortion voters favored Bush by a small margin over Democrat Al Gore in 2000.

The most intriguing aspect of Sunday's march that could signal a noteworthy change was the turnout of women in their late teens and 20s. Americans aged 18 to 29 vote less than any other age group, according to polling-place exit surveys. But young women favor abortion rights by 54 to 39 percent, according to Gallup — the biggest margin of any age group — and they could vote Democratic if persuaded to vote at all.

There were a ton of young women," said Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster. "It speaks to ghts that will change U.S. politics and have an the ability to mobilize young people. That could



Tina Welke, 28, of Minneapolis, Minn., joins thousands of fellow protesters as they parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, in Washington, D.C., Sunday, April 25, during the "March for Women's Lives," a pro-choice rally

change the margin in battleground states," where and (protecting) unborn victims is going to be the presidential race is expected to be close.

Stephanie Cutter, a spokeswoman for Kerry, said abortion rights was a winning issue for Kerry in such swing states as Arizona, Colorado, Florida and Nevada, as well as in California and New York, where the Massachusetts senator is airing ads appealing for contributions on the basis of his stance supporting abortion rights.

Republicans refuse to concede women's votes to Democrats, however, saying many women support the president's opposition to abortion and that more women will vote for him for reasons that have nothing to do with abortion.

popular and resonate with people," said Terry Holt, a spokesman for Bush's campaign, who said the president's stance reflected mainstream views.

A majority of Americans support at least some restrictions on abortion. A Gallup poll last October showed that 17 percent thought abortion should be illegal in all circumstances, and 40 percent thought it should be legal in only a few circumstances.

Moreover, Holt said, Bush hopes that women will endorse his record on the economy, education, health care and national security, as well as for appointing women such as National Security "The record on banning partial-birth abortion Adviser Condoleezza Rice to his senior staff.

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