



Same-Sex Marriage Initiatives and Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Voters in the 2006 Elections*

by
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In the November 2006 elections, a ballot measure banning same-sex marriage failed for the first time in Arizona. In addition, similar measures on the ballot in nine states in 2006 attracted substantially less support than in 2004. To what extent does this indicate that the national wave of enthusiasm for banning same-sex marriage has subsided? And how are lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) voters responding to a continued focus on issues that so clearly affect their lives?

In this report, we explore these questions using election returns and exit poll data compiled by the National Election Pool. In brief, our findings are:

- While the vote on the marriage initiatives is best explained by partisan and ideological variables, declining support for marriage bans can also be explained somewhat by the measures' diminishing appeal in states with fewer voters identifying as "born-again" or evangelical Christians.
- If current trends hold, marriage bans would fail—or just barely pass—in many of the states that have yet to hold such referenda.
- There is no evidence that the presence of marriage bans on the ballot in 2006 helped Republican Senate candidates.
- In 2006, LGB voters for the most part looked demographically like the rest of the electorate with two major exceptions—LGB voters were much younger and more urban than other voters.

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- As in previous elections, LGBs exhibited distinctive voting behavior. They continued to vote overwhelmingly for Democratic candidates and took liberal positions on the major issues of the day.

Support for same-sex marriage ballot measures dropped between 2004 and 2006.

As shown in the table below, the same-sex marriage measures on the ballot in nine states in 2006 attracted substantially less support—64 percent of votes, on average—than in 2004, when 13 similar measures were supported by an average of 71 percent of voters. A marriage initiative failed for the first time in 2006 in Arizona, where it was defeated 52 to 48 percent.

Performance of Same-Sex Marriage Initiatives,
2004 and 2006

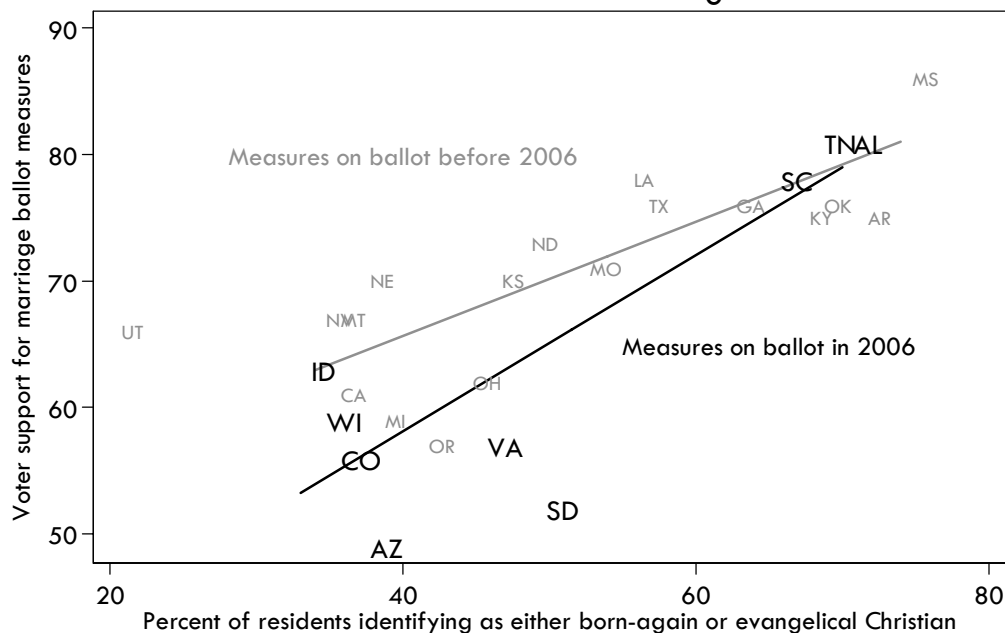
	2004	2006
Average state support for marriage measures	71%	64%
Average state opposition to marriage measures	29%	36%
States with initiatives on ballot	AR*, LA* GA, KY, MI, MS, MT, ND, OH, OK, OR, UT	AL* AZ, CO, ID, SC, SD, TN, VA, WI

**These states' ballot measures were voted upon in elections held separately from the November general elections.*

In determining whether these results indicate a true decline in voter support for these ballot measures, a question that naturally first arises is whether initiatives are now being held in states that are less inclined to support such measures than those states in which initiatives were held previously. To get a handle on this, we constructed the figure below. It plots the relationship between the proportion of a state's population identifying as born-again or evangelical Christian¹ and voter support for anti-gay marriage ballot measures. As shown in the graph, born-again Christianity is a very strong predictor of support for same-sex marriage bans: our statistical analysis (found in Appendix One to this report) indicates that, on average, for each additional two percent of a state's population that considers itself born again or evangelical, support for marriage measures increases by about one-and-a-half percentage points.

¹ This figure was calculated by the authors from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey. It is the proportion of respondents in each state who answered "yes" to the question "Do you consider yourself an evangelical or born-again Christian?"

Support for marriage ballot measures declines in states with fewer born-again Christians



The figure also shows that the strength of this relationship appears to be increasing over time. In 2006 born-again Christianity was a stronger predictor of a state’s support for marriage ballot measures than it had been in the past. This can be seen by comparing the line that best fits the plots of the states that held such referenda in 2006 (the black line) to a similar line drawn from the plots of the states that held referenda before 2006 (the gray line). While support for marriage ballot measures has risen a bit in states with more born-again Christians, it has declined in those with fewer. Our analysis (found in Appendix One) finds this over-time change to be statistically significant.²

The table below presents another demonstration of how support for banning same-sex marriage is declining in states with fewer evangelical Christians. In states where those identifying themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians made up a minority of residents, voter support for such bans has fallen, from 65 percent before 2006 to 56 percent in 2006. Meanwhile, in states where born-again Christians are in the majority, voters have become *more* favorable toward bans over the same period.

² This finding holds in analyses that exclude Idaho and Utah, two states with many Mormon religious conservatives who do not identify as born again, as well as two states—Arizona and South Dakota—that might arguably be considered “outliers” in 2006. Arizona may be a special case because of the unusually successful effort to rally seniors against the measure in that state. In South Dakota, the presence of an abortion ban on the ballot appears to have resulted in an unusually high turnout of liberal voters.

Voter support
for same-sex marriage initiatives, 1998-2006

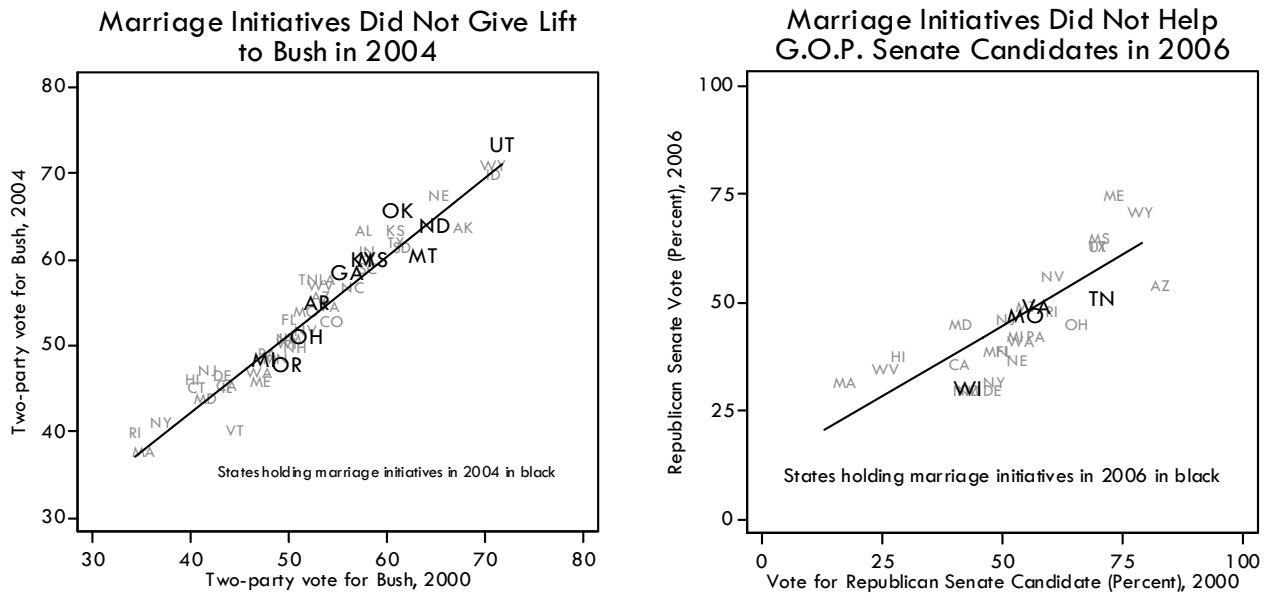
		same-sex marriage initiative held...	
		...before 2006	...in 2006
Percent of state residents identifying as born-again or evangelical Christians ⁺	less than 50 %	65 % (N = 10)	56 % (N = 6)
	50 % or more	75 % (N = 10)	80 % (N = 3)

*Table entries indicate average state margin of support for same-sex ballot measures.
⁺calculated by authors from 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey.*

What this means in practical terms is that—if current patterns hold—we expect such measures to continue to fare less well in states with fewer born-again or evangelical Christians. For example, our statistical model predicts that same-sex marriage measures would fail in most of New England, as well as in New Jersey and New York—and that they would barely pass in most of the Midwestern and Mid-Atlantic states that have yet to hold such referenda.

Same-sex marriage initiatives did not help Republican Senate candidates in 2006.

Evidence continues to indicate that the presence of same-sex marriage ballot measures does not appreciably help Republican candidates. As previous analysis by political scientists has shown, President Bush did no better than expected in states that held marriage referenda in 2004 than in states that did not. This is seen in the left-hand graph in the figure below, which plots the share of the two-party vote received by Bush in 2000 against the share he received in 2004. As can be seen by comparing the states that held marriage referenda (plotted in black) with those that did not (plotted in gray), Bush’s performance in states with ballot measures was virtually no different than in states without such measures. (If Bush had performed better in states holding referenda, these states would generally fall above the black “linear fit” line in the graph.)



We performed a similar analysis for the Senate elections held in 2006, and found similar results. As shown in the right-hand graph above, Republican Senate candidates did not perform any better than expected in states holding marriage referenda in 2006 than in states that did not.³ We note that, by contrast, Republican Senate candidates in states holding minimum wage initiatives performed about eight percentage points worse than they did in other states, holding other factors constant (see Appendix One). All of these results hold in statistical analyses that include reasonable control variables.

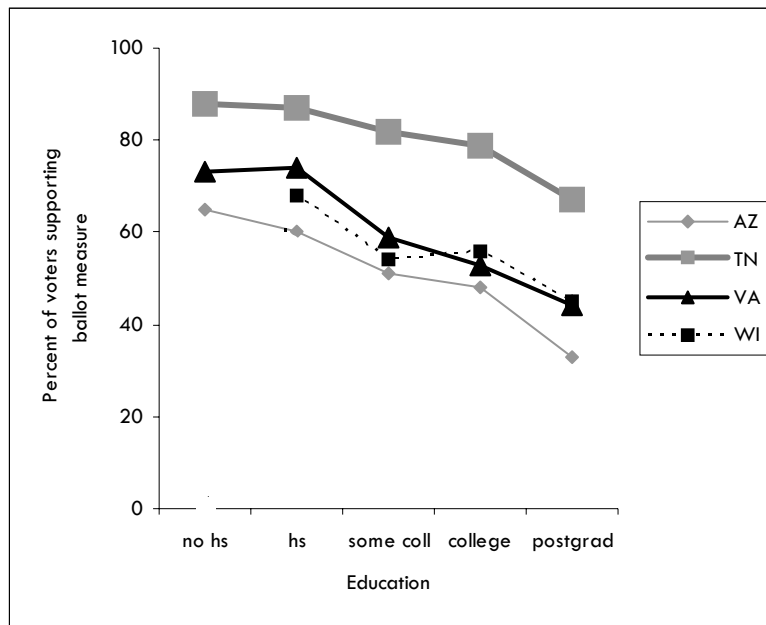
³ We note here that only four Senate races took place in states holding marriage initiatives in 2006, which leads our analysis to have low statistical power to detect effects.

Religiosity, party identification, age, and education remained strong predictors of voting on same-sex marriage initiatives in 2006.

Previous research has found that a handful of characteristics—education, religiosity, party identification/political ideology, and age—do well in determining how individual voters feel about policies regarding gays and lesbians. Our analysis of exit polls conducted in four states with same-sex marriage bans on the ballot in 2006—Arizona, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wisconsin—found similar patterns holding in this election.⁴

- ***Voters with more education were less likely to support bans on same-sex marriage.***

As shown in the figure below, a majority of voters who had post-graduate study voted against their state’s marriage referendum in Arizona, Virginia, and Wisconsin. In Arizona and Virginia, those with post-graduate education were about twice as likely as those who did not complete high school to oppose the referendum. In Tennessee, they were almost three times as likely to oppose it (but in Tennessee, where 80% of all voters supported the referendum, only one-third of the best-educated opposed it). If only college graduates had voted, marriage initiatives would have been defeated in Virginia as well as in Arizona—but would have passed in Wisconsin and Tennessee -- and in a landslide in Tennessee.

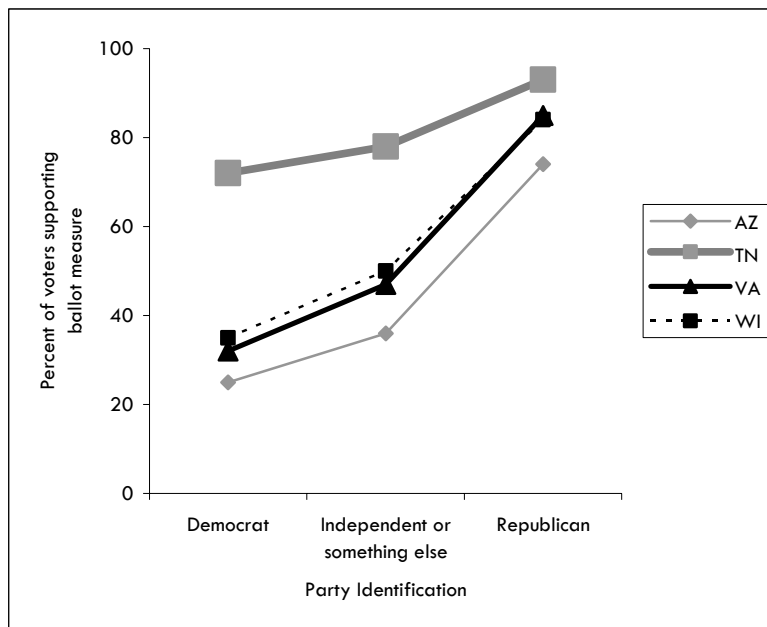


**There were insufficient voters without a high school education in Wisconsin to make valid inferences about their votes.*

⁴ Exit poll data were obtained from the National Election Pool (NEP), a media consortium that fields the exit polls used by news organizations to predict and analyze election outcomes. The NEP did not field polls in the remainder of the states holding same-sex marriage initiatives in 2006.

- ***Republicans were much more likely to support banning same-sex marriage than Democrats, and displayed remarkable unity in doing so.***

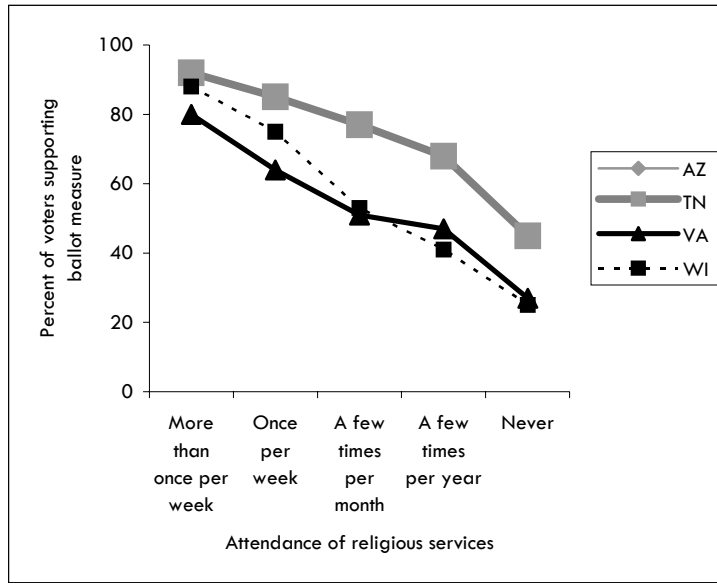
The vote on the marriage initiatives sharply reflected the nation’s partisan divide. In Arizona, 75% of Democrats opposed the referendum and 74% of Republicans supported it. Notably, in Arizona—the only state where a ballot measure was defeated—almost two-thirds of Independents opposed it. In the remaining states, Republicans were more unified in their support for these amendments than Democrats were in opposition. In Virginia and Wisconsin, about 85% of Republicans supported the amendment while about two-thirds of Democrats opposed it. No doubt, this was partially a consequence of the lack of clear partisan cues on the Democratic side while Republican leaders clearly and frequently articulated their support for these referenda. In both states, independents split about evenly. In Tennessee, Democrats were four times as likely as Republicans to oppose the amendment and independents were about three times as likely as Republicans to oppose the amendment, but this must be read in the context of there being virtually no opposition to the amendment in Tennessee.



- ***Religiosity was strongly associated with support for the ballot measures.***

Religiosity rivals the power of political beliefs in explaining the vote on the marriage amendments. In fact, it serves to identify one of the few groups of voters in Tennessee who opposed the ballot measure: those who never attend religious services. At the other extreme, 80% of the Virginia voters who attended services more than once per week voted in favor of that state’s ballot measure, as did 88% in Wisconsin and 92% in Tennessee. As in much of the South, those who identify as born-again Christians made up a very large proportion of the electorate in Tennessee: two-thirds of Tennessee voters this

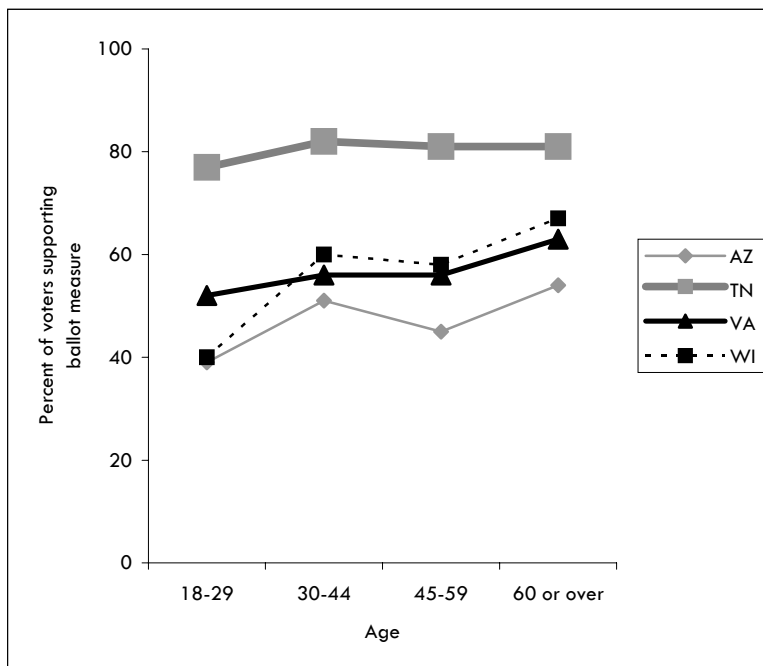
November were born-again Christians, and 91 percent of them voted in favor of their state’s same-sex marriage ballot measure.



*Questions about voters’ attendance of religious services were not asked on exit polls in Arizona.

- **Younger voters were less supportive of banning same-sex marriage than older voters.**

In each of the four states polled on Election Day, voters aged 18 to 29 were those least likely to vote for banning same-sex marriage. Had voting been limited to those aged less than 30 years old, marriage initiatives would have failed in Wisconsin and just barely passed in Virginia. In Tennessee, age differences were minimal compared to other states.



One reason why the Arizona measure failed was that only 55 percent of those over 65 years old voted in favor of that state's referendum. This is no doubt due to the referendum's opponents' adopting a strategy that focused on the measure's impact on the property rights and living arrangements of unmarried senior citizens. While the data currently available to us do not permit our taking a more nuanced look at the over-65 population in Arizona, one might speculate that it includes more migrants from out of state than the over-65 population in the other three states, where seniors may be residents by necessity as opposed to residents by choice. We speculate that Arizona's senior citizens are also a better-educated and more secular cohort than the over-65 population in the other three states.

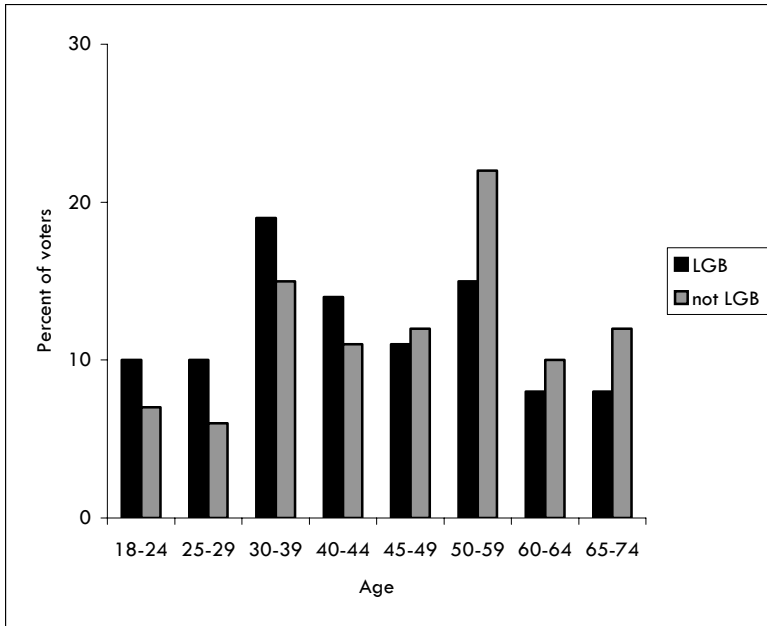
- **Demographically, LGB voters look remarkably like the rest of the electorate with two notable exceptions—they are younger and more urban.**

The 2006 national exit poll found LGB voters to be three percent of all voters—a figure generally in line with turnout in previous elections.⁵ The exit poll's sample is about 6,000 voters, yielding an LGB sample of only about 200. We must therefore be cautious about interpreting (and not over-interpreting) these data. Fortunately, the general patterns revealed in the 2006 sample are consistent with those found in previous elections and we can therefore view the general outlines of the LGB electorate with some confidence.

LGB voters were not significantly different from straight voters in terms of their race, income, or education. They were more likely to live in urban areas (44 percent lived in “extremely high” or “high density” urban areas; only 25 percent of straight voters did). LGB voters were slightly less likely than straight voters to have children under 18 living in their homes: 36 percent of straight voters and (a notable) 22 percent of LGB voters fit this category.

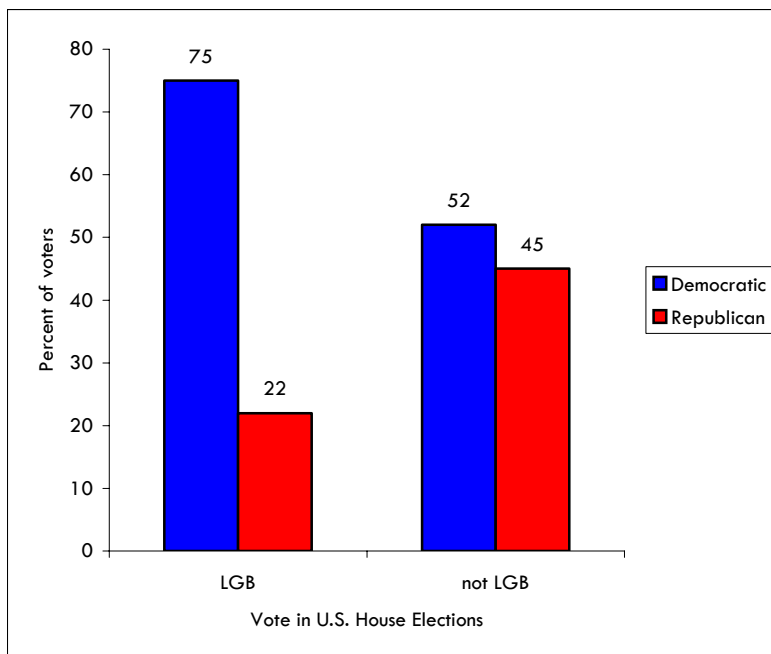
But the biggest difference between LGB voters and straight voters was age (see figure below). Fully 20% of all LGB-identified respondents were under 30, compared to 13% of all other respondents. Only 20% of LGB voters were over 60, compared to 27% of all others. These differences are consistent with past findings and makes intuitive sense: gays and lesbians who were 18 at the time of Stonewall in 1969 would be 55 today. The pre-Stonewall cohort may well remain relatively reluctant to self-disclose while younger cohorts are increasingly willing to be open. This also means that as generational replacement occurs, we might expect LGB voters to become a more numerous and more visible group of voters in the American electorate. (For more details about the demographics of LGB voters in the 2006 election, see Appendix Two.)

⁵ In exit polls conducted by the NEP since 1996, LGB voters have made up between three and five percent of the electorate.



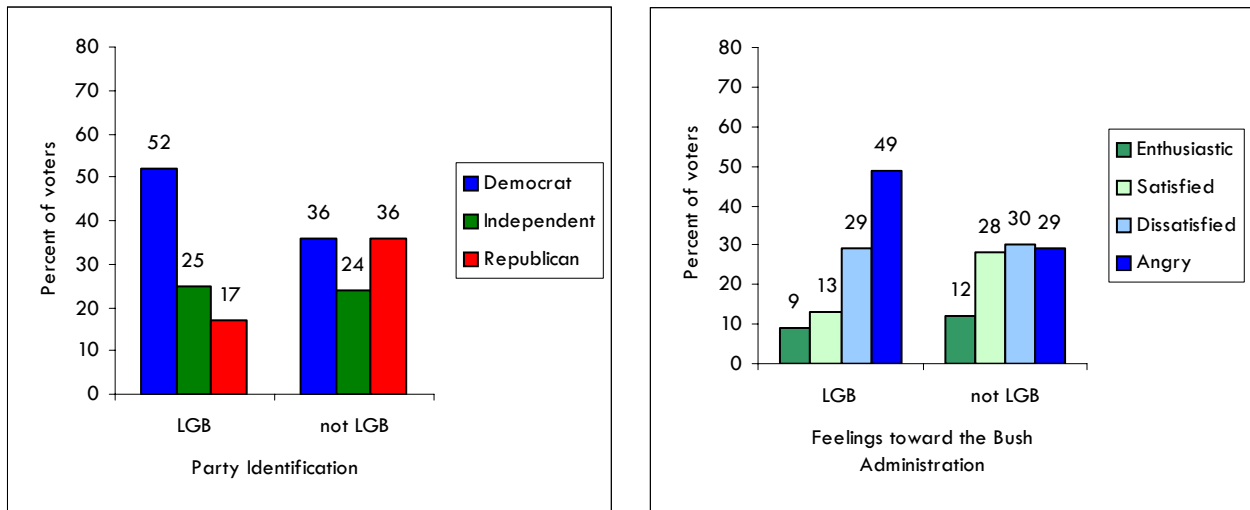
- **Despite their demographic similarities with straight voters, LGB voters remain a distinctively Democratic, liberal group of voters.**

Given the fact that LGB voters are increasingly looking more like straight voters, we might expect LGB voters to start acting more like them, too. After all, party identification and political values are transmitted from generation to generation with remarkable efficiency within the home. Partisan attitudes and other political views also reflect socio-economic status.



A group becomes politically distinctive when, holding all other factors constant, the group behaves in a unique fashion. Here, LGB voters rank as among the most distinctive groups in the American electorate. As shown in the figure above, 75% of LGB voters said they voted for the Democratic candidate for House in 2006. Only blacks (89%) and Jews (87%) were more likely to vote Democratic. Notably, race and religion are transmitted within the family. Sexual orientation is not. As a rule, young people are raised by their parents who make the assumption that their children are heterosexuals.

Recognizing that one is different—in this case, coming out to oneself as lesbian, gay, or bisexual—can lead to a more general reconsideration of identity and to a reconsideration of one’s general relationship to society. The data from this year’s exit polls, not unlike earlier data, show that LGB voters move more toward the Democratic Party and toward dramatically more liberal attitudes than one would expect on the basis of demographic variables alone.



Nationally, 52% of LGB voters think of themselves as Democrats, only 17% as Republicans, and 32% as independents. The great political scientist, V. O. Key, Jr., declared audaciously that “voters are not fools.” While we might not go that far, the data certainly indicate that LGB voters strongly consider the positions of the two major parties on gay rights when determining their partisan affiliations.

More provocative to us as academic political scientists is that LGB voters are significantly to the left of all voters on a wide range of issues. Political beliefs, like all ideas, come in packages and membership in political groupings often provides the sinew that binds these packages together. But unlike those belonging to ethnic and religious minority groups, LGB voters do not learn to ask the question “But what does this mean for the gay people?” while seated at their parents’ knees.

As shown in Appendix Three, 62% of LGB voters—as opposed to 40% of all other voters—strongly disapproved of the US war in Iraq. This may be a rude question, but what does being gay have to do with the war in Iraq? Moreover, only 21% of LGB voters

think the country is on the right track, while 41% of other voters think so. And nearly half of LGB voters told exit pollsters that the Bush Administration makes them feel “angry.” Compared to the war, of course, these patterns may have a closer relationship to the gay experience in the U.S. today. After all, not many other social groupings have to confront repeated ballot initiatives designed to either limit or take away their rights—much less to hear the President of the United States make public statements that support those initiatives.

A question that naturally emerges after analyzing these data is the direction of causality. Does being LGB lead voters to become liberal Democrats, and then adopt wholesale the liberal Democratic criticisms of the Bush Administration and the liberal Democratic perspective on public affairs? Or does something about the shared LGB experience result in a distinctive view of the political world? Political scientists, armed with ever more sophisticated survey data, are just beginning to answer these questions.

We conclude with a note of caution. While it is easiest to notice how many LGB voters are liberals and how few are conservatives, we should note that LGB voters are about as likely to say that they are moderates as is the rest of the electorate. LGB voters also are slightly more likely than all other voters to say they are Independents. This combination means that the electoral capture of the LGB vote by the Democratic Party is not complete. At the moment, the data indicate revulsion by LGB voters to the hostility toward gay people that has been manifested by some of the most visible members of the Republican Party’s leadership. The data also indicate that, in terms of family heritage and other demographic variables, we should expect LGB Americans to be just about as Republican as anyone else. The Democratic Party, when in power, will have to take actions to reinforce the loyalty of LGB voters by providing them with tangible benefits. If they do not, the Democrats give an opening to the Republicans—who, in the wake of a solid defeat for the strategy of relying on mobilizing religious conservatives, may be looking for ways to make amends with LGB voters and their allies.

Appendix One: Statistical Analyses

This appendix contains the statistical analyses described in the text.

Predicting support for same-sex marriage initiatives

Variable	I (all states holding initiatives, 1998 - 2006)	II (no AZ, ID, SD, or UT)
% of state population identifying as born-again or evangelical Christian ¹	.38*** (.09)	.45*** (.08)
Marriage initiative held in 2006 dummy	-21.2*** (8.2)	-17.0** (7.9)
% born again x 2006 dummy	.31* (.16)	.27* (.15)
intercept	51.6*** (4.7)	47.7*** (4.3)
R-squared statistic	.69	.78
Standard error of the estimate (SEE)	5.8	4.5
N	27	23

¹Compiled by authors from the 2000 National Annenberg Election Survey.
Coefficients significantly different from zero at * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed test).

Marriage initiatives and electoral performance of G.O.P. candidates,
2004 and 2006

Variable	Model I	Model II
	DV: % of vote for Bush, 2004	DV: % of vote for G.O.P Senate candidate, 2006
% of vote for Bush (model I) or G.O.P. Senate candidate (model II) in 2000	.90*** (.04)	.37*** (.12)
State held marriage initiative in 2004 (model I) or 2006 (model II) dummy	.23 (.84)	-1.1 (3.7)
State held minimum wage initiative in 2006 dummy		-7.7* (3.9)
G.O.P. Senate incumbent in 2006 dummy		13.0*** (3.9)
Bush approval rating in state, October 2006 ⁺		.19 (.19)
intercept	5.9*** (2.0)	14.2* (7.9)
Adjusted R-squared statistic	.93	.71
Standard error of the estimate (SEE)	2.3	6.8
N	50	30

Model II includes all states holding Senate elections in 2006, except CT, IN, and VT.

⁺Obtained by authors from Survey USA website.

Coefficients significantly different from zero at *p<.10, **p<.05, ***p<.01 (two-tailed test).

Appendix Two: Demographic Characteristics of LGB and non-LGB Voters in 2006

	LGB Voters	Other Voters
Race/ethnicity:		
White	74	80
Black	10	10
Hispanic/Latino	13	7
Asian	1	2
Other	3	2
Age		
18-24	10	7
25-29	10	6
30-39	19	15
40-44	14	11
45-49	11	12
50-59	15	22
60-64	8	10
65-74	8	12
75 and over	5	5
Education		
No HS Degree	3	3
High School Grad	16	20
Some College or Associate's degree	34	31
College Graduate	29	27
Postgraduate Study	18	19
Children under 18 in household		
Yes	22	36
No	78	64
Family income		
Under \$15,000	9	6
\$15,000-29,999	11	12
\$30,000-49,000	28	20
\$50,000-74,999	20	23
\$75,000-99,000	16	16
\$100,000-149,999	10	13
\$150,000-199,999	2	5
\$200,000 or more	3	5
Current financial situation		
Getting ahead financially	27	32
Have just enough money to maintain standard of living	48	51
Falling behind financially	22	17

	LGB Voters	Other Voters
Region		
East	26	21
Midwest	24	27
South	22	30
West	27	22
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Population of Area		
City over 50,000	41	30
Suburbs	41	47
Small city and rural	18	23
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Population density of area		
Extremely high density	16	8
High density urban	28	17
Suburb	32	42
Town	1	4
Low density rural	14	16
Extremely low density	9	14
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Appendix Three: Opinions of LGB and non-LGB Voters in 2006

	LGB voters	Other voters
Party affiliation		
Democrat	52	36
Republican	17	36
Independent	25	24
Something else	6	4
Political views		
Liberal	43	19
Moderate	41	48
Conservative	16	33
Vote for House		
Democratic	75	52
Republican	22	45
Other	1	2
Didn't vote	2	1
Vote for Senate		
Democratic	68	52
Republican	25	42
Other	4	4
Did not vote	2	1
Vote for Governor		
Democratic	67	50
Republican	26	43
Other	5	6
Did not vote	1	1
Vote for President in 2004		
Kerry	65	43
Bush	23	50
Someone else	7	4
Did not vote	6	4
Feelings towards Bush administration		
Enthusiastic	9	12
Satisfied	13	28
Dissatisfied	29	30
Angry	49	29

	LGB voters	Other voters
Are things in the country today...		
Generally in right direction	21	41
Seriously on wrong track	75	55
Was one reason for your Congress vote today...		
To express support for Bush	14	22
To express opposition to Bush	59	35
Bush was not a factor	25	41
How do you feel about the US war in Iraq?		
Strongly approve	12	19
Somewhat approve	12	23
Somewhat disapprove	13	17
Strongly disapprove	62	40
Omit	1	1
Do you expect life for the next generation of Americans to be:		
Better than today	23	30
Worse than today	50	40
About the same	24	29
Omit	2	2
What mattered more in your vote for the House?		
Local issues	29	35
National issues	66	60
Omit	5	5

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