

See How they Run: Voter Preferences and Candidate Experience with the Role of Sexual Orientation in State Elections

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Abstract: My research examines whether candidate sexual orientation influences the level of support for candidates for state offices. I explore this issue first through the context of public opinion towards gay and lesbian candidates by empirically examining individual level opinion towards openly gay and lesbian candidates. Data from several state polls are examined. Second, I provide a qualitative description of gay and lesbian candidates' experiences in running for state legislative seats using surveys and interviews with gay and lesbian candidates for state legislative office between 2003 and 2004. The results of both sets of analyses reveal that candidate sexual orientation can play a role in campaigns for state offices, but strategies employed by candidates appear to prevent gays and lesbians from paying a heavy electoral price for being public about their sexual orientation. I discuss the implications of my findings for theories of minority group representation.

In any democratic system a central concern is political representation.¹ Group representation can occur through the election of political candidates that belong to a particular racial, ethnic, religious, or gender group, through the election of candidates that don't belong to these groups, but support their interests, or through the appointment of group-affiliated or friendly officials. LGBT concerns over political representation in the policy process may be even more acute since gays are perhaps the most stigmatized minority group in the U.S., usually only falling behind illegal aliens (Sherrill 1996). Like other groups, LGBT people can try to achieve political representation by electing openly LGBT candidates to public office, ensuring that LGBT people are appointed to official positions, or by influencing the behavior of sympathetic heterosexual and closeted homosexual officials (Haider-Markel, Joslyn, and Kniss 2000).

However, as with any other career, LGBT persons seeking public office are often hesitant to be open about their sexual orientation. Openness or being "out" often means revealing one's sexual orientation to friends, family, co-workers, and the like. For public officials being out means publicly stating one's sexual or gender orientation. But being out for officials may mean discrimination, lack of public support, or even the threat of physical violence. Even so, the public appears to be increasingly less opposed to openly LGBT people holding public office.

My research examines the role that candidate sexual orientation plays in elections by focusing largely on public support for LGBT candidates in state elections. My analysis proceeds in two parts. First I provide an overview of public attitudes about LGBT candidates and explore the individual level characteristics associated with opposition to LGBT candidates for state office. Second, I shift to the perspective of LGBT candidates for state legislative office. I analyze the survey and interview responses of LGBT candidates who ran for state legislative

¹ This draft manuscript is written as a chapter for a book, not as an article for a journal. Comments are appreciated.

seats between 2003 and 2004. Finally, I summarize the results of my analysis and draw conclusions about the role of candidate sexual orientation.

Part I: Overview of LGBT Candidates and Public Opinion

To begin assessing the importance of candidate sexual orientation we need to start with the basic facts. Although currently there are more than 346 LGBT office holders throughout the country, from local sheriff to the U.S. Congress, this is still a tiny fraction of all officeholders in the country. Yet, following in 2007 elections only seven states had no LGBT elected official at any level and only 20 states had no LGBT state legislators. LGBT elected officials have certainly increased, from less than 50 prior to 1991, but there are clearly very few. Even if the low estimates of LGBT people in the population are correct (about three percent), the LGBT community would have to increase the number of LGBT officials by more than 500 percent simply to approach matching descriptive representation in offices with representation in the population.

However, this is not to say that the low numbers of LGBT officials simply reflects lack of public support for LGBT candidates. Indeed, women, African-Americans, and Hispanics are not represented in elected office to the same degree they are represented in the population anywhere in the country. The lack of representation for LGBT people, women, and ethnic and racial minorities likely reflects the limited pool of candidates from these communities as much as it reflects any aversion in the population towards these groups.

With that said, it is quite clear that as a group, LGBT Americans are not viewed in a positive manner by many. For example, one way to examine American attitudes about homosexuality and homosexuals is to use what is traditionally referred to as a feeling

thermometer. Survey respondents are asked to state their feelings towards a group using a 0 to 100 scale, where a score of 50 to 100 indicates favorable or warm feelings and a score from 0 to 50 suggests an unfavorable or cold feeling. The American National Election Study has used feeling thermometer questions to assess feelings or affect towards groups, such as homosexuals and environmentalists, for many years. Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of affect (average scores) toward gay men and lesbians on the feeling thermometer scale.

[Insert Figure 2.1 About Here: feeling thermometer]

Although affect toward gays and lesbians have “warmed” over time, the mean scores suggest that most Americans have unfavorable or cool affect towards gays and lesbians. Indeed, since 1984 gays and lesbians score lower than any other group except illegal immigrants (Yang 1999). Respondent affect toward homosexuals vary by individual characteristics, with those living in urban areas, those with higher levels of education, those with liberal and Democratic Party leanings, and women having higher affect toward homosexuals (Haeberle 1999; Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Yang 1999). Using the relatively low affect as a baseline we can expect that initial public response to LGBT candidates will not be very positive. However, certain groups in the population, such as liberals and the educated, should be more positive.

Nearly all previous research on the impact of candidate sexual orientation on voter evaluations, candidate success, or candidate electoral margins has been conducted through experiments in which voters (usually college students) evaluated fictional candidates (see Golebiowska 2001; Golebiowska and Thomsen 1999; Herrick and Thomas 1999). One exception is Golebiowska’s (2002) study of LGBT candidates and elected officials.

Golebiowska conducted a survey of these individuals and asked them to assess the impact sexual orientation had in their election contests. Her findings were consistent with experimental research, including Golebiowska (2001), Golebiowska and Thomsen (1999), and Herrick and Thomas (1999), which suggest that LGBT candidates receive lower evaluations than their heterosexual counterparts and that LGBT candidates are less likely to receive (fictional) votes. This pattern is especially true for gay male candidates who fit a gay male stereotype (Golebiowska 2001).

A study by Herrick and Thomas (1999) differs from Golebiowska's (2001) work in that their experimental research design involved creating hypothetical elections where respondents were asked more directly to state their voting preferences and their perceptions of candidates. Controlling for a variety of other factors, including gender and ideology, they find that a candidate's sexual orientation does have a slight influence on voting preference and on perceptions of a candidate's electoral viability (ability to win the election). Interestingly, lesbians were not viewed any more negatively than gay men, a finding that is consistent with women in politics literature that suggests voters only sometimes vote based on candidate gender (Fox 1997; Jewell and Morehouse 2001).

[Insert Table 2.1 About Here: president]

If we examine support for homosexuals across a variety of professions over time, we begin to see how negative affect towards gays and lesbians might translate into support or opposition to LGBT political candidates. Table 2.1 displays the percentage of American adults that responded affirmatively to the following question: "Do you think homosexuals should be

hired for the each of the following occupations?” Since 1977 this question has been asked in a variety of Gallup and *Newsweek* polls. Besides a drop in support since 2003, across most professions listed support has increased considerably since 1977. However, support for homosexual teachers and clergy is still fairly low. And about ten percent of the population opposing homosexuals from even being salespersons, suggesting there is a percentage of the population that opposes homosexuals from being employed in virtually any profession. The only political office listed is the president’s cabinet. Since 1999 at least 70 percent of adults have indicated that homosexuals should be able to serve in this position, and the most recent polls indicate that roughly one-quarter of the population remains opposed to homosexuals serving as political appointees in national office. This finding indicates that a significant portion of the population is opposed to gays and lesbians serving in high profile national offices.

[Insert Figure 2.2 About Here: generic]

Indeed, turning to Gallup Poll surveys on voting for a presidential candidate if the candidate is homosexual we see a similar pattern (see Figure 2.2). In 1978, 1983, and 1999 Gallup asked “Between now and the [year] political conventions, there will be discussion about the qualifications of presidential candidates--their education, age, religion, race, and so on. If your party nominated a generally well-qualified person for president who happened to be a homosexual, would you vote for that person?” In 1978 only 26 percent of respondents said yes, in 1983 29 percent said yes, but by 1999 59 percent said they would vote for a homosexual candidate for president (Newport 1999). The increase in support between 1983 and 1999 was

large and significant, but support for a homosexual candidate has increased at a much slower rate than for women, blacks, Catholics, and Jews (Newport 1999).

[Insert Table 2.2 About Here]

Likewise, the public does not perceive that Americans are ready to elect a gay or lesbian candidate for president. Table 2.2 displays the results of a Gallup September 2006 national poll of adults in which respondents were asked “do you think Americans are ready to elect a/an _____ as president, or not?” In the blank a variety of candidates were included from a woman, to an Asian to a gay or lesbian. Overall more respondents felt the country was ready to elect a woman (61 percent), but only seven percent believed that Americans were ready to elect a gay or lesbian candidate as president. Indeed, twice as many respondents believed that American’s would elect an atheist president over a gay or lesbian president. Furthermore, these perceptions differed little across partisan groups, with Independents be the most likely to think the country was ready to elect a gay or lesbian president.

Nevertheless, questions on lower level offices asked of national adults reveal a pattern of increased support for homosexual candidates over time. Table 2.3 displays the responses to a variety of poll questions conducted since 1991. Across each of these polls a core of 25 percent or more was opposed to supporting an openly homosexual candidate for elective office. In a 2000 Fox News/Opinion Dynamics poll the question respondents were asked refers to a candidate that had a homosexual relationship. A bare majority of registered voters indicated they would still vote for such a candidate, but fourteen and 26 percent respectively indicated they would probably or definitely vote against such a candidate. By comparison, more respondents

said they would definitely vote against a candidate who had a homosexual relationship than would vote against a candidate who abused alcohol (eleven percent), had an extramarital affair (thirteen percent), used marijuana (seventeen percent), or been treated for a mental illness (25 percent). However, fewer respondents would vote against a candidate who had a homosexual relationship than would vote against a candidate who lied on his resume (34 percent), used cocaine (37 percent), or cheated on his taxes (38 percent) (Bowman and Foster 2006).

Likewise in a March 2004 poll of national adults the *Los Angeles Times* found that 32 percent would not be willing to vote for an openly gay candidate running for an unspecified elective office. The gender of a homosexual candidate seems to matter little to Americans. A November 2003 poll of national adults conducted by Scripps suggests that 27 percent of respondents would oppose a gay congressional candidate, while 28 percent would oppose a lesbian congressional candidate.

[Insert Table 2.3 About Here:]

In the same 2003 Scripps poll respondents were asked a number of questions regarding the personal attributes of gay and lesbian candidates as well as how competent gay and lesbian candidates would be on specific issues. The distribution of responses to these questions is displayed in Table 2.4. In terms of the honesty, morality, and strength of gay and lesbian candidates for Congress, the great majority of respondents indicate there would be no difference compared to the typical congressional candidate. However, at least nine percent suggested that gay and lesbian candidates would be at least somewhat less honest, at least seventeen percent indicated that gay and lesbian candidates would be at least somewhat less moral, and at least

thirteen percent suggested that lesbian and gay candidates would be at least somewhat less strong than the typical candidate for Congress. In terms of negative attributes, such as being less strong, respondents ranked gay and lesbian candidates nearly the same, but did attribute slightly more negative candidates to gay male candidates.

[Insert Table 2.4 About Here: Scripps attitudes]

The lower half of Table 2.4 displays attitudes concerning the competency of gay and lesbian candidates on education, military, and tax issues. Across all three issues, at least 76 percent of respondents believed gay and lesbian candidates would be at least as competent as the typical candidate for Congress. About five percent of respondents thought gay and lesbian candidates would be more competent, while at least eight percent thought gay and lesbian candidates would be less competent than the typical congressional candidate. Between gay and lesbian candidates there are some small differences. Gay male candidates were seen as less competent on education and military issues than were lesbians.

Predicting Attitudes about Homosexual Congressional Candidates

To better understand who opposes gay and lesbian congressional candidates and who attributes negative characteristics to gay and lesbian candidates requires multivariate analysis of individual level responses. The Scripps Survey Research Center data from 2003 allows for such an analysis.

Although this analysis is largely exploratory, research on attitudes towards gays and lesbians as well as support for gay and lesbian civil rights can readily inform models of attitudes

towards homosexual candidates. Analysis of attitudes towards gays and lesbians, gay civil rights, and same-sex marriage reveals that women, the educated, Democrats, liberals, youth, and non-religious infrequent churchgoers tend to be more supportive (Brewer 2003a, 2003b; Egan and Sherrill 2005; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2005; Herek 2002). As such, in my multivariate model predicting opposition to gay and candidates and attitudes about candidate attributes by including variables to account for living in the South, gender, being born again, protestant, church attendance, education, race, ideology, partisanship, age, and city size.

[Insert Table 2.5 About Here: predict vote]

The first dependent variables employ the last two questions in Table 2.2. Respondents were asked: “If a candidate for Congress said publicly that he is gay, would that make you more likely to vote for him, more likely to vote against him or would it have no effect on your vote?” The same question was asked regarding a lesbian candidate for candidate. Since respondents were allowed three scaled responses, from more likely to vote for, to no difference, to more likely to vote against, predicting responses requires use of ordered logit.

The results are displayed in Table 2.5. The fit statistics suggest that the models reasonably predict the likelihood of voting against a gay or lesbian congressional candidate. Voting against a gay male congressional candidate is significantly shaped by gender, religion, religiosity, education, ideology, partisanship, and age. Consistent with more general research on gay issues, respondents who are male, born again, attend church frequently, less educated, conservative, Republican and older are more likely to vote against a gay congressional candidate. With the exception of education, respondents with these same characteristics are more likely to

oppose a lesbian candidate for Congress. Educational differences among respondents are not statistically significant predictors of voting against a lesbian candidate. However, the coefficient is in the expected negative direction and the standard error is smaller than the coefficient. Thus, for the most part there is little substantive difference between predicting voting against a gay versus lesbian congressional candidate.

Table 2.5 also contains columns titled mfx. Each of these coefficients are marginal effects coefficients which are estimated following the estimation of the original model with the value of the dependent variable set to (3) “More likely to vote against.” Marginal effects coefficients allow for the direct comparison of the relative influence of each variable on the probably of voting against the candidate. Thus, since the coefficient for church attendance twice as large as the coefficient for gender, this indicates that the relative influence of church attendance in this model is greater (actual twice as large) than that of gender. In the first model we can also conclude that although ideology and partisanship are important predictors, the religion (born again) and church attendance variables are considerably more important predictors of vote choice. We can also compare the relative role of variables across the model for a gay candidate versus a lesbian candidate. By comparing the relative size of the coefficients across the models we can see that there is little difference in the importance of variables across the models. Thus, these models clearly indicate that religion, gender, ideology, and partisanship strongly shape the likelihood of supporting a gay or lesbian congressional candidate.

[Insert Table 2.6 About Here: predict attitudes on candidates]

Turning to respondent attitudes regarding the attributes of gay and lesbian candidates we can also develop a multivariate model to predict opinion. However, recall that the questions displayed in Table 2.3 had five possible responses. Given the small percentage of responses in each category that is positive, these responses were combined with the “no difference” response and coded as zero. The responses for the negative attributes were combined and coded as one. For example, regarding whether or not gay candidates are less honest, responses for “much more honest,” “somewhat more honest,” and “no difference” were all coded as zero. Affirmative responses for “somewhat less honest,” and much less honest” were coded as one. Given the binary nature of each dependent variable, models were estimated using logistic regression. In each model all of the variables from Table 2.5 were included.

The results are reported in Tables 2.6 and 2.7. Overall the models predicting attitudes towards lesbian candidates have more robust fit statistics than do the models predicting attitudes towards gay candidates. In addition, all the variables perform inconsistently, we see much the same pattern as we saw in Table 2.4; gender, religion, religiosity, education, partisanship, ideology, and age are relatively consistent predictors of opinion. However, there are some interesting variations. For example, gender and urbanism are more often significant predictors of opinions about a lesbian candidate than a gay male candidate. Additionally, the coefficient sizes indicate, religion and partisanship are somewhat more important in the models predicting attitudes toward lesbian candidates.

[Insert Table 2.7 About Here: predict attitudes on candidates]

Opinion on State and Local Candidates

Although national polls that focus specifically on gay and lesbian candidates for state or local office find similar levels of opposition as those found in polls regarding generic offices or congressional offices, there does seem to be more acceptance of homosexual candidates for subnational offices. For example, a 1999 poll asked respondents if they would support gay candidates for local or state offices. Over 77 percent said they would (Cassels 1999). Likewise, support for LGBT candidates varies by state. A 1989 New Jersey poll by *The Record* found that only 23 percent of respondents in that state said that whether or not a person is gay or lesbian, should be considered when the person is a gay man running for political office, and 65 percent said it should not be considered (Smith and Haider-Markel 2002).² A more direct 1994 poll of California adults conducted by Political Media Research found that two percent of respondents would be more likely to vote for a lesbian or gay candidate, 41 percent would be less likely, and 55 percent said it would have no effect on their vote (Smith and Haider-Markel 2002).

[Insert Table 2.8 About Here: NY State Poll descriptive statistics]

Although dated, a 1994 Harris poll conducted in New York provides an interesting perspective. Table 2.8 displays the questions and frequency of responses for this poll. Respondents were asked to assess how candidate characteristics and issue positions influence the way people in their communities vote. About 61 percent suggested that a gay or lesbian candidate would influence the way people in the community vote with no indication of if this

² In 1994 Staten Island, New York borough President Guy Molinari said that someone who is gay or lesbian is not fit for public office. During a *New York Times/CBS News* state poll following the comment, respondents who knew about Molinari's statement were asked if the statement bothered them. Over 60 percent of respondents said the comments bothered them, but 38 percent said the comments did not bother them (Smith and Haider-Markel 2002).

characteristic would make people vote for or against such a candidate. By comparison, 76 percent of respondents thought candidate race would influence voting in their community at least quite a lot, while about 63 percent felt that way about abortion. As such, respondents perceived that candidate sexual orientation was on par with abortion positions, but somewhat less important for their community than was race. Interestingly, however, for these three questions the largest percentage of respondents indicating that it would make no difference at all (18 percent) was for a gay or lesbian candidate.

Respondents were also asked the following question: “Do you personally agree or disagree that if a candidate says they are gay or lesbian then you should not vote for that candidate?” Compared to perceptions of how the community might vote, here a far smaller percentage of respondents appear to have been will to indicate that they would vote against a candidate for being gay or lesbian (12 percent). Given the national polls discussed above, where an average of one-quarter of respondents would oppose a gay or lesbian candidate, New Yorkers are significantly less likely to reject candidates based on sexual orientation.

The poll, conducted on October 14, 1994, was fielded in the middle of an election season where the Democratic candidate for Attorney General, Karen Burstein, publicly stated that she was a lesbian. Burstein’s sexual orientation became an issue in the race and although she won her party’s nomination, she lost in the general election. Three specific questions were asked regarding knowledge of a gay candidate, identification of that candidate, and whether the fact that the candidate was a lesbian would influence the likelihood of voting against her (see Table 2.8). Interestingly, less than 40 percent of respondents had heard anything about a gay candidate and of those who had heard, less than half could identify Karen Burstein as the lesbian candidate.

Of this small (174) group of respondents, 18 percent indicated that Burstein’s sexual orientation would make it less likely that they would vote for her.

[Insert Table 2.9 About Here: NY State Poll analysis]

Multivariate analysis of responses to the candidate questions in the New York poll reveals that respondent preferences are somewhat less predictable than in national polls. Table 2.9 displayed the results of models predicting perceptions of community attitudes, the likelihood of voting against a gay candidate, and voting against the lesbian Attorney General candidate; each model controls for respondent gender, age, education, race, religion, partisanship, ideology, and rural versus urban context. Educated male respondents were somewhat more likely to indicate that it would matter to their community if a gay or lesbian candidate was running for office. However, religion, partisanship, and ideology apparently play little role in shaping this perception.

Individual preferences on voting for gay and lesbian candidates in New York are more predictable. Liberals, Democrats, whites, the educated, youth, and women were more likely to indicate they would vote for a gay or lesbian candidate. Meanwhile, the model predicting opposition to lesbian candidate Burstein are similar; women, youth, the educated and Democrats were more likely to indicate they would vote for Burstein. Religion and ideology did not play a statistically significant role. However, this analysis was conducted with only those respondents who were aware that Burstein was a lesbian--a very small sub-set of the survey sample.

Additional analysis (not shown) of this data reveals that gender, race, and ideology had the strongest relative role in predicting opinions for each model. In addition, if we reestimate the

model predicting voting against any gay or lesbian candidate and control for the respondent's belief about her community would vote for such a candidate, the results indicate that belief that the community would oppose such a candidate strongly increases the likelihood of the individual voting against a gay or lesbian candidate. Indeed, the relative influence of this factor is greater than gender, race, or ideology in predicting voting preference.

[Insert Table 2.10 About Here: Zogby 3/06 Poll]

One final poll is especially relevant to our discussion of LGBT candidates for state office. In March 2006 Zogby America conducted a national random sample telephone survey of likely voters. For this poll the Victory Fund commissioned a series of questions related to gay and lesbian candidates for state legislative seats. The full question wording and descriptive statistics are displayed in Table 2.10. On the first question regarding an openly gay or lesbian candidate running for the state legislature, respondents were asked if that would vote for this candidate if the candidate was the one that most shared their views. Consistent with virtually all of the polls we have discussed, just over 26 percent of respondents indicated they would probably or definitely vote for someone else. When the same respondents were asked a similar question, but this time regarding an incumbent state legislator who is later found out to be gay or lesbian, slightly fewer (22 percent) said they would probably or definitely vote against this candidate. Thus, for LGBT state legislative candidates the data suggest that the levels of opposition from voters will be similar to that faced by LGBT congressional candidates or hypothetical LGBT candidates for generic offices. At its base, about one-quarter of the general public, as well as

likely voters, appear ready to oppose LGBT candidates for virtually any office, but the public may be slightly more supportive of LGBT candidates who come out as incumbents.

In addition, the Zogby poll also separated the sample in half. One half of the sample was asked about a gay candidate (question 3) and the other half was asked about a lesbian candidate (question 4). Over 72 percent of respondents at least somewhat agreed that the sexual orientation of a candidate is not important. However, for a lesbian candidate somewhat fewer (less than 68 percent) felt the same way. Although the difference is small, voters may provide somewhat more support to a gay candidate versus a lesbian candidate, all other factors considered.

For the final question on candidates likely voters were presented with two hypothetical candidates. Candidate A was gay and had consistently been public about his sexual orientation; candidate B was also gay, but had never been public about his sexual orientation until he was outed by the media. Respondents were asked which candidate they preferred. Respondents who indicated both or neither were unfortunately grouped in a third category. Respondents had an almost six percentage point preference for the candidate who was outed versus the candidate who was open about his sexual orientation, but 19 percent said it made no difference or preferred neither candidate. Another nine percent were unsure. The results suggest that voters do have a slight preference for gay candidates who are more private about their sexual orientation, but overall are accepting of openly gay candidates as well as those who are outed.

[Insert Table 2.11 About Here: Zogby 3/06 Poll Analysis]

To disentangle attitudes about the candidates referred to in the Zogby poll I estimated multivariate models to predict responses to each question. Based on the demographic questions

asked in the poll, the models control for gender, age, size of place, race, education, ideology, partisanship, living in the South and East, being a born-again Christian, and having children under age 18. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 2.11. Overall the models predict vote preferences and attitudes fairly well. Likely voters were more likely to say they would vote against an openly gay or lesbian state legislative candidate if they were male, older, lived in a rural area, less educated, conservative, Republican, not from the East, born-again, and had children under 18. For an incumbent state legislative candidate the results were slightly different. Here gender was a slightly more important predictor while age and size of place were less important. In this model whites were somewhat more likely to support the candidate while those from the South were less likely to support the candidate. And having children had no significant influence.

The models predicting belief that the sexual of a gay candidate is not important in half the sample versus a lesbian candidate in the other half of the sample are similar, but differ in some interesting ways. In the model for the gay candidate women, liberals, those living in the East, and those who are not born again were more likely to say that candidate sexual orientation does not matter. For the lesbian candidate, these same characteristics predicted attitudes, but education and partisanship were also important, with the educated Democrats being more likely to say that candidate sexual orientation is not important. It is not clear as to why partisanship and education matter more when the hypothetical candidate is a lesbian, especially since the aggregate attitudes towards a gay versus lesbian candidate differed little. The results may simply indicate that female candidates, regardless of their sexual orientation, face a slightly more hostile electorate than do male candidates. And attitudes towards female candidates generally are more strongly shaped by partisanship and education (Fox 1997).

Finally, recall that the final question on gay and lesbian candidate presented with two candidates: Candidate A was gay and had consistently been public about his sexual orientation; candidate B was also gay, but had never been public about his sexual orientation until he was outed by the media. Respondents who indicated both or neither were unfortunately grouped in a third category. Since a choice of one candidate or the neither category precludes choosing another candidate or category, I modeled preferences on this question using multinomial logit. Here a single equation was estimated with the choice of Candidate A, the openly gay candidate, as the baseline or reference category. Thus the model predicts the likelihood of choosing Candidate B or Neither/No difference instead of (or relative to) Candidate A. Because it was not clear which candidate would be most attractive to voters who are less supportive of gay candidates overall, I included responses to the question about voting against an openly gay state legislative candidate as an independent variable. Older, more conservative, republicans, and those who indicated they would vote against a gay state legislative candidate were more likely to prefer the candidate who was outed versus the candidate who was openly gay. Likely voters who indicated neither candidate or said no difference were somewhat more likely to be from the South and white than those who supported Candidate A. These voters were also more likely to have said they would vote against a gay state legislative candidate. Overall this final set of results indicates that a strong preference for a candidate who is private about his or her sexual orientation is greatest amongst older, conservative, republicans, and those who would prefer not to vote for a gay candidate at all. This also means that an openly gay or lesbian candidate, versus being private about it, is preferred by liberals, Democrats, and youth. Given that the characteristics of voters who prefer the more closeted candidate are the same as those voters who are unlikely to vote for gay and lesbian candidates in the first place, there does not appear to be

an electoral advantage for a candidate who attempts to keep his or her sexual orientation private, especially if it is likely that the candidate will be outed at some point.

Part II: The View of Candidates and Officials

Now that we have a solid understanding of the preferences of the electorate faced by LGBT state legislative candidate, we can turn to exploring how LGBT candidates view this electorate and the role of sexual orientation in their campaigns. Analysis of individual vote preferences above clearly demonstrates that segments of the population are unlikely to vote for gay and lesbian candidates. However, some segments of the electorate may actually be more supportive of openly gay and lesbian candidates than candidates who are less open about their sexual orientation. In other words, being openly gay or lesbian may sometimes provide an electoral advantage.

Take an example from Rhode Island. When Rep. Michael S. Pisaturo ran for office in 1994, he was public about his sexual orientation from the start. He discovered that, even in Cranston, Rhode Island, being openly gay worked in his favor. Pisaturo recalled: “People would say, ‘I don’t agree with gay rights, but you’re honest and I like that’” (Freyer 1999). Pisaturo has even come to believe that being out can be an asset for politicians. Even so, Pisaturo says he knows of at least six Rhode Island legislators who are secretly gay. Although being gay is only part of Pisaturo’s political life, he has been involved in trying to restore AIDS funding, sponsored bills on gay civil rights and same-sex marriage, and publicly supports LGBT organizations. Alan Spear, Minnesota’s Senate president, largely agrees with Pisaturo’s comments. Spear was elected to the Minnesota Senate in 1972, and came out in 1974. During his three decades in office he has seen little of the backlash reported by some LGBT candidates

(Freyer 1999). Furthermore, as noted by Annisa Parker, an open lesbian on the Houston City Council, being open may have helped her win by providing considerable free media attention to her candidacy. However, she says, “There aren’t many city issues that are gay issues. City government is concerned with potholes and sewers and such, not social and sexual matters” (Freyer 1999). In sum, as we consider how being gay may hurt a candidate’s electoral chances, we must also consider that there may be benefits to being openly gay as well.

To assess the role of sexual orientation in state legislative elections I attempted to contact all LGBT candidates for state legislative offices who ran in primary and/or general elections across 30 states during the 2003-2004 election cycle. Candidates were identified through *Lexus Nexus* newspaper database searches, contact with national gay and lesbian groups, such as the Log Cabin Republicans, the Victory Fund, Human Rights Campaign, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Forces, as well as contact with state-level gay and lesbian interest groups. Given the newspaper search and group contact it is fairly certain that all openly LGBT candidates for state legislative office in 2003 to 2004 were identified.

Each candidate was contacted and asked to complete a questionnaire and asked permission for follow-up questions. Candidates were promised anonymity. In the 2003 to 2004 cycle there were 95 LGBT candidates running for state legislative offices. In 24 (25 percent) of these races candidates were running for the upper legislative chamber, typically called the state senate. Most candidates (73) ran as Democrats or for the Democratic nomination, but seventeen of the candidates ran for the Republican nomination or ran on the Republican ticket, and five candidates ran on the Green Party ticket. In total, 21 (22 percent) of the candidates lost in the primary election, withdrew, or failed to file enough signatures to obtain a spot on the general election ballot.

Candidates were contacted by mail, with follow up contact via email and telephone. Only nine candidates had no reliable contact information (i.e. mailings returned by postal service). Of the remaining 86 candidates, 38 provided at least partial responses on the survey questionnaire. Although the response rate was 44 percent and but the respondents were generally representative of the population of candidates.

Follow-up emails, phone calls, and visits were made to some of the candidates who responded to the survey. In part the follow-up interviews were conducted for those candidates who completed the survey prior to Election Day, November 2004, but some respondents were questioned in greater detail about their responses to the survey. The discussion below summarizes responses to the questionnaire, but is also informed by the unstructured follow-up interviews. Because all of the questions were open-ended, below I summarize the responses rather than provide descriptive statistics (see Appendix for listing of questions).

Most respondents to the survey ran in districts that favored Democrats in voting registration numbers, past voting, or both. In fact, all of the Democratic candidates ran in Districts that favored their party and only Republican candidates ran in districts that were not favorable to their party. Interviews with candidates helped to confirm that this pattern was not an accident. Most openly LGBT candidates tend to run as Democrats and select districts where they believe their sexual orientation will be less of an issue. Many candidates had prior political experience in the district, through activism, staff position, or holding lower level offices, so they were familiar with the ideological and partisan orientations of the district. Even Republican candidates ran in districts that were socially liberal and potentially favorable only to moderate Republican candidates. Indeed, the notion that LGBT candidates select districts carefully is

highlighted by the fact that several races saw openly LGBT candidates facing off in either the primary or general election.

In terms of how candidates came to decide to run for a state legislative seat many describe a process of being recruited or encouraged by others, including sitting legislators, party activists, and party leaders. Indeed, about 60 percent of candidates indicated they were recruited or encouraged to run by others. In roughly half the cases candidates were encouraged to run because they had either held a lower level office previously or established their viability in a previous race or in internal party elections. For most of the candidates the decision to run was based in part on a seat coming open through retirement, term limits, or the pursuit of a higher office by an incumbent.

Candidates were asked to assess the support of the gay and lesbian community for their candidacy and the extent to which they participated in any gay and lesbian social or political events. About 50 percent suggested that the LGBT community was very supportive and they had participated in community events during the campaign. One respondent even indicated that 50 percent of her volunteers were from the LGBT community and more than 50 percent of her contributions were from the LGBT community. Another 26 percent indicated that they had the support of the LGBT community, but either did not attend events or the community's support was less than vocal. The remaining candidates received little support from the community. In some cases the community supported another LGBT candidate, while in others the community supported a heterosexual Democrat over the openly LGBT Republican candidate. In at least one case the candidate suggested that some lesbians preferred the heterosexual female candidate to his own candidacy.

Because LGBT candidates often *appear* to face organized opposition from conservative religious groups, candidates were asked about the appearance of such campaigns. Surprisingly, only about 20 percent of respondents indicated there was any active opposition by religious conservatives against them, and only about half of these candidates described significant efforts by religious conservatives to defeat them. For example, one candidate described the formation of a new group whose sole purpose was to oppose her candidacy. Most opposition campaigns were lead by local chapters of the Christian Coalition, the Eagle Forum, and Right to Life groups.

When asked about media coverage of their races, not surprisingly most candidates indicated that the media did not print or air more than a few reports on their race. However, a few candidates did report a considerable amount of coverage and in most of these cases the coverage tended to focus on the fact that one or more candidates in the race were openly gay or lesbian. Virtually all of the candidates reported that coverage was fair and tended to be accurate. And although sexual orientation was mentioned in media reports in virtually all of the races, it was not usually the main focus of coverage. Indeed, for many candidates the only news media stories that focused heavily on sexual orientation were those in the LGBT press. In one case a candidate indicated her sexual orientation was highlighted by the national news media; but even here the candidate suggested that the attention my have helped rather than hurt. Overall, the candidate responses suggest that the news media did not hype their sexual orientation and coverage did portray openly LGBT candidates in a negative light.

Respondents were quite mixed in response to questions regarding their ability to finance their campaigns, size of contributions, and ability to raise money from Political Action Committees (PACs). Over 60 percent of respondents indicated they had no problems raising

money and nearly all candidates received at least some money from PACs. Most candidates received individual donations that averaged about \$35. Over a third of the candidates received bundled contributions the Victory Fund, a national group that is focused on electing LGBT candidates to office. Most of the Democratic candidates received contributions from labor, environmental, and pro-choice organizations, but some also received contributions from a variety of business and development organizations. Several candidates indicated that it is either “very easy for a gay candidate to raise money in my state” or that close to half of their contributions came from the LGBT community or LGBT organizations. The view that raising money is easy as a LGBT candidate was especially prevalent among incumbents in the sample, with challengers being less likely to espouse such a view. At the same time, many challengers still indicated that raising money for their campaigns was not too difficult.

Respondents in the sample also found group endorsements relatively easy to obtain. Over 90 percent of the respondents received some endorsements; groups affiliated with the Democratic Party, such as environmental, pro-choice, and labor organizations, endorsed most Democrats. Often these endorsements came through local and state groups, but some endorsements came through chapters of national organizations, such as the National Organization for Women, as well as strictly national groups, such as Democracy for America. Openly LGBT Republican candidates had far more difficulty obtaining endorsements. These candidates likely faced this problem because they were running as long-shot challengers in Democratic districts.

About 80 percent of respondents indicated that their Party supported their candidacy following the primary election, if one was held. Only about 35 percent of candidates received direct support from legislative leadership or funds from legislative leadership PACs. About 75

percent of candidates who ran in states that had public funding received some amount of public funding for their campaigns. Other candidates did not receive financial support or endorsements from leaders, but did receive non-monetary support, such as campaign workers.

In terms of incumbency and previous political experience, about 40 percent of respondents were incumbents running for reelection for their current office, 38 percent had held previous office but were running for a higher office, and 22 percent had never before been elected to office. In addition, nearly all incumbents had previously served in a lower office, including state assemblies, city councils, and county positions. A few respondents who had not been elected previously had run for local or state office in the past. The pattern and experience of these candidates is fairly consistent with that of most state legislative candidates. However, it does appear that the average LGBT state legislative candidate is somewhat more likely to have served in public office previously.

Respondents to asked to list the four central issues in their campaign. Over 90 percent of candidates listed education, or support for public schools. About 50 percent listed environmental issues—about the same percentage listed health care issues. Others mentioned job creation or economic issues and a few focused on government overspending or state budget problems. Only four percent of candidates listed equality or civil rights issues as being primary to their campaign. This suggests that the average LGBT candidate for state office campaigns one staple Party issues and does not emphasize issues that are directly related to gay civil rights.

However, we asked directly if gay civil rights were important to their campaign, only twelve percent of respondents said the issue was not important at all. In fact, 48 percent of respondents indicated in one way or another that the issue was very important to their campaign. For some this meant their literature and campaign speeches discussed the issue, while for others

it was because their voting record on LGBT issues was raised during the campaign. An additional 30 percent of respondents indicated that the issue played some role in the campaign. For these respondents the issue was often couched in broader terms of protecting the civil rights of all citizens or in opposing measures that would ban same-sex marriage. Thus, although some candidates indicated that the issue was important, very few actively campaigned on the issue, and for some candidates the issue became important either because opponents raised the issue or external events, such as ballot measures to ban same-sex marriage, forced the issue into the spotlight. One candidate even indicated that the issue had to be addressed because opponents accused him of being a single-issue candidate because of his sexual orientation.

The candidates were asked to assess the campaign, spending levels, and tactics of their opponents during the primary election. About half of the respondents either had no primary or were unopposed in the primary, which is a little higher than normal for state legislative elections. In other races the primary is the key race simply because the district is so partisan in one direction (Democratic). Only a few respondents described the primary race as fairly nasty in terms of attacks, and a small number of candidates even faced opponents who were also gay or lesbian. One candidate even indicated that her opponent said she “wasn’t gay enough.” A very small percentage of respondents indicated that their opponents tried to make an issue of their sexual orientation.

In terms of general election campaigns, only a few candidates faced no opposition, but about 45 percent of respondents indicated that their main opponent mustered little in the way of campaigning. Thus, in about 45 percent of the races all candidates actively campaigned and raised a reasonable amount of money for a race. Less than five percent of respondents described activity by their opponent to make sexual orientation and issue in the campaign. None of these

candidates lost their races. As such it does appear that candidate sexual orientation played little role in the outcome of these elections. At minimum, respondents in describing the general election did not flag it.

Candidates were also asked to name one issue or event that had the most influence on the outcome of the campaign. About 30 percent indicated that campaign resources, including money, determined the outcome. Another 40 indicated the their incumbency, or that of their opponents, or the partisan leaning of the district determined the outcome. A few candidates mentioned key endorsements by elected officials or newspapers, or their previous political experience in the district or state as being central factors.

Respondents were also asked directly if sexual orientation played any role in the campaign. Over 35 percent indicated that sexual orientation played no role in the campaign. Another 45 percent indicated sexual orientation played a small, negative role in the campaign. In most of these cases sexual orientation became important because opponents raised the issue of same-sex marriage or the issue was raised because a ban was being considered in the state. In only ten percent of races did respondents indicate the issue became significant in a negative way. One respondent said: “my opponent made it a central part of her campaign—it backfired on her. I had Republicans donating to my campaign to defeat her.” In another race the respondent said that the state Republican Party had funded telephone push-polls that scared voters to believe they might elect a lesbian who could become a legislative leader in their state. One respondent also indicated that his opponent attempted to argue that LGBT candidates might have policy interests that are different from heterosexuals, making it difficult for a LGBT candidate to represent the interests of the heterosexual majority. At the same time, many incumbent legislators indicated that the issue had been significant in past campaigns, but no longer was an issue. But even for

these legislators, the role played by sexual orientation in the past was not a deciding factor in the election outcome. And no single respondent indicated that they had ever lost any race because of their sexual orientation.

Interestingly, several candidates suggested that being a LGBT candidate was actually an asset. One respondent said that her candidacy rallied political progressives and the LGBT community in her district, and this made have made opponents afraid of attacking her sexual orientation. Two candidates said that being openly LGBT gave them a volunteer network and staff who they would not have otherwise had. Both candidates indicated that the volunteers were important in their election victories. And one incumbent candidate indicated that although the issue had been important for her in past campaigns, at this point being an openly lesbian legislator seems to help her maintain her seat.

Candidates were also asked how their race might have been different if it had occurred in another district or state. Nearly all of the candidates who won their races suggested that their sexual orientation would have played a larger role in races outside of their district. They indicated that most other districts in their state, as well as other states, would have been more difficult to run in as an LGBT candidate. Although the evidence is limited, the comments are suggestive towards a notion that LGBT candidates target the districts that they will be willing to run in. For some candidates these were clearly their home districts, for others it was simply a function of knowing the district and having a sense of how being a gay or lesbian candidate would play. This is not to suggest that potential LGBT candidates move to new districts and establish residency to run in a “friendly” district. Instead candidate comments suggest that potential LGBT candidates may simply choose not to run in districts where they believe sexual

orientation may play a role. In addition, the resumes of the respondents in the sample suggests that most are well prepared for a political race prior to their run.

Finally, candidates were asked to explain any lessons they had learned from being an openly LGBT candidate for state office. About 45 percent of respondents said something along the lines of “be who you are; don’t listen to political advisors about this issue; just acknowledge and move on (then it becomes a non-issue). One candidate phrased it this way: “don’t limit yourself. I almost didn’t run because I was convinced that sexual orientation would be a huge deal and that I would never win.” Another 20 percent of respondents suggested that you cannot be “the gay candidate” or the “single-issue candidate.” These respondents suggested that LGBT candidates had to focus representing all of their constituents and spend considerable time meeting people in person. Some candidates suggested that this face-to-face contact was key to eliminating notions that LGBT people are different—“it makes you more ‘real.’” Still others suggested that LGBT candidates have to be smarter and more qualified, with a proven track record, than the average state candidate. And one candidate emphasized a need to capitalize on the LGBT community to raise funds and obtain volunteer campaign workers. Indeed, at one point or another on the survey nearly all of the candidates made reference to reliance on the LGBT community and/or LGBT political organizations for volunteers and financial support.

Summary of Surveys and Interviews

The results of the surveys and interviews of LGBT state legislative candidates from the 2003-2004 elections suggests a number of interesting findings. First, LGBT candidates do tend to be somewhat more experienced and better prepared than the average state legislative candidate. They are just as likely to be self-motivated to run as they are to be recruited, but

either way most of them have previous experience in elected positions. And if they obtain a legislative seat, like most incumbents they are reelected. Second, based on candidate comments and other evidence concerning where candidates run, it seems as though LGBT candidates are quite selective in choosing to run. The average LGBT candidate runs as a Democrat in a left-leaning district. These candidates appear to be quite aware that their district is likely to be accepting of an LGBT candidate, whereas many other districts may not be. Combined with the political experience of most of these candidates, the average Democratic LGBT candidate may actually be more successful than the average Democrat running for state office. LGBT Republicans, on the other hand, are likely to face uphill battles as Republicans in Democratic districts, or as Republicans in Republican districts where voters may not be so accepting of an openly LGBT candidate.

Finally, the surveys and interviews also make it clear that sexual orientation is not a deciding factor in most races. Even in the few races where LGBT candidates faced a mobilized campaign by religious conservatives or a candidate who tried to make sexual orientation a focus of the campaign, candidates did not suggest that these efforts did or could have defeated them. In fact, some candidates indicated that they had somehow capitalized on being LGBT to win their elections. This is not to say that sexual orientation does not matter for state legislative candidates, only that given that it could be a factor, as indicated by the polling data above, potential LGBT candidates are strategic in choosing when and where they run. These strategic maneuvers tend to downplay or eliminate the potential negative role that sexual orientation could play in a state legislative campaign.

Conclusion

In an effort to better understand the political representation of the LGBT community my research examines whether candidate sexual orientation influences the level of support for candidates for state offices. I explore this issue first through the context of public opinion towards gay and lesbian candidates by empirically examining individual level opinion towards openly gay and lesbian candidates. Data from several state polls are examined. Second, I provide a qualitative description of gay and lesbian candidates' experiences in running for state legislative seats using surveys and interviews with gay and lesbian candidates for state legislative office between 2003 and 2004. The results of both sets of analyses reveal several important conclusions.

First, analysis of national and state level surveys reveals that in most parts of the country a core of 20 to 25 percent of adults are unlikely to support a gay or lesbian candidate for state or national office. In addition, this opposition has changed little over the past 15 years even as support for gay civil rights has increased.

Second, analysis of individual level preferences reveals that, regardless of the office, older, Republican, conservative, religious, males with less education are more likely to oppose an openly gay or lesbian candidate. The evidence indicates that these individuals likely constitute the consistent 25 percent of the population that would not vote for a gay or lesbian candidate.

Third, potential LGBT state legislative candidates are strategic in their pursuit of office. They tend to have greater experience and resources than the average candidate and appear to typically run in districts where voters are less likely to oppose an openly gay candidate. Indeed,

candidates suggest that being openly LGBT can even be an electoral advantage, at least for those running as Democrats.

Finally, analysis of candidate surveys and interviews suggests that the political strategies employed by LGBT candidates makes it relatively rare for candidate sexual orientation to play a significant role in state legislative elections. Those candidates who have political experience extending back a decade or so indicate that sexual orientation was often a campaign issue in the past, but it has become less so. In addition, none of the candidates surveyed or interviewed indicated that sexual orientation cost them the election. These observations support the notion that candidate sexual orientation may play a role in some campaigns, but potential LGBT candidates are strategic enough to ensure that they run in districts where the issue will not doom their candidacy. As more LGBT candidates run for state offices, the ability to be strategic might decrease and we could see an increase in races where sexual orientation is a significant issue.

Appendix: Survey of 2003-2004 State Legislative Candidates

1. Please assess the level of support for candidates from your political party in your district (for example, what percentage of voters typically votes for your party).

2. How did you decide to run for a state legislative seat? Did you decide on your own? Did a group or political party approach you about running? More generally, what were the circumstances surrounding your decision to run for office?

3. How supportive was the gay and lesbian community of your candidacy? Did you speak at any gay or lesbian events or before any gay or lesbian organizations? Did you face any opposition from the political left in the gay community?

4. Have any religious based or conservative groups actively campaigned against you? If so, were these organizations based in your district? Where any of these groups state-level or national groups?

5. Assess the treatment you have received in the media. Do you think the media's coverage of your campaign has been fair and accurate? Do you believe the race received much attention compared to other election campaigns? Do you believe media coverage of your sexual orientation was 1) excessive, and 2) influential in the campaign?

6. Did you have problems raising money for your campaign? If yes, to what do you attribute these problems? What was the major source of funding for your campaign? Did you receive any funding from Political Action Committees? If so, which ones? What was the average dollar amount of contributions to your campaign?
7. Were you publicly endorsed by any local, state, or national organizations? If so, which ones?
8. Was your party supportive of your candidacy? Were leaders in the legislature supportive of your candidacy? Did you receive any campaign funds from legislative leadership PACs? Did you receive any public funding for you campaign?
9. Have you held public office previously? If so what positions and for how long?
10. What are or were the four central issues in your campaign?
11. Are gay civil rights issues important to your campaign? Please describe.
12. During the primary election, please assess the campaign, spending levels, and tactics of your opponent(s).
13. During the general election, please assess the campaign, spending levels, and tactics of your opponent(s).

14. If you could name one issue or event that had the most influence on the outcome of the election, what would it be?

15. What role (if any) do you think candidate sexual orientation is playing or played in the campaign?

16. As an openly LGBT candidate for state office, what lessons have you learned that would be valuable to other LGBT people considering campaigns for state office?

17. How do you think the campaign may have been different if you ran in another district or another state?

18. How have you been influenced (if at all) by other LGBT candidates running for public office?

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Table 2.1: Support for Homosexuals in Different Professions, 1977 to 2005

| Do you think homosexuals should be hired for the each of the following occupations? (percent responding should) | | | | | | | |
|---|---------|---------------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------|
| | Doctors | President's cabinet | Armed forces | H.S. teachers | Elem. teachers | Sales-persons | Clergy |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Change since 2003 | -4 | -4 | -4 | -5 | -7 | -2 | -7 |
| 2005 May 2-5 | 78 | 75 | 76 | 62 | 54 | 90 | 49 |
| 2003 May 19-21 | 82 | 79 | 80 | 67 | 61 | 92 | 56 |
| 2002 Apr 25-26 | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- | 40 |
| 2001 May 10-14 | 78 | 75 | 72 | 63 | 56 | 91 | 54 |
| 1999 Feb 8-9 | 75 | 74 | 70 | 61 | 54 | 90 | 54 |
| 1998 Jul 28-30 | 70 | -- | 66 | 60 | 55 | 88 | 51 |
| 1996 Nov 21-24 | 69 | 71 | 65 | 60 | 55 | 90 | 53 |
| 1992 Jun 4-8 | 53 | 54 | 57 | 47 | 41 | 82 | 43 |
| 1989 Oct 12-13 | -- | -- | 60 | 47 | 42 | 79 | 44 |
| 1977 Jun 17-20 | 44 | -- | 51 | -- | 27 | 68 | 36 |

Notes: Compiled by the author based on national survey data of adults reported in Bowman and Foster (2006) and Saad (2005).

Table 2.2: Perception of Public Support for Female or Minority President

Generally speaking, do you think Americans are ready to elect a/an _____ as president, or not? (Gallup national poll of adults, Sep 21-24, 2006)

| | Yes, ready % | No, not ready % | No opinion % |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Woman | 61 | 38 | 1 |
| African American or black | 58 | 40 | 2 |
| Jew | 55 | 42 | 3 |
| Hispanic | 41 | 58 | 1 |
| Asian | 33 | 64 | 2 |
| Latter-Day Saint or Mormon | 29 | 66 | 5 |
| Atheist | 14 | 84 | 2 |
| Gay or lesbian | 7 | 91 | 2 |

Perceptions That Americans Are Ready to Elect a President With Following Characteristic, by Party Affiliation

| | Democrat % | Independent % | Republican % |
|----------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Woman | 64 | 65 | 54 |
| Black | 49 | 59 | 67 |
| Jew | 48 | 59 | 58 |
| Hispanic | 34 | 42 | 46 |
| Asian | 26 | 39 | 35 |
| Mormon | 21 | 29 | 37 |
| Atheist | 8 | 21 | 14 |
| Gay | 7 | 10 | 4 |

Table 2.3: Opposition to Gays and Lesbians in Political Office

| | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Please tell me whether you would or would not do each of the following: Vote for a political candidate who is homosexual | | | |
| | Yes | No | |
| Jun. 15-16, 1994 Yankelovich/CNN/Time | 48% | 45% | |
| Oct. 14-15, 1998 Yankelovich/CNN/Time | 58% | 36% | |
| Let me mention several things you might learn about a candidate running for president. For each one, please tell me whether this should or should not disqualify them from becoming president of the United States. If someone is gay or lesbian, do you think this should or should not disqualify this person from becoming president of the United States? | | | |
| | Should Disqualify | Should Not Disqualify | |
| Oct. 25-29, 1991 NBC/WSJ | 47% | 47% | |
| Feb. 28-Mar. 2, 1992 NBC/WSJ | 42% | 53% | |
| I'd like to ask whether certain information about a candidate for political office would cause you to vote against him, regardless of other factors. What if you found out that the candidate was a homosexual...would that alone cause you to vote against him? | | | |
| | Yes | No | |
| Sept. 19-20, 1996 PSRA/Newsweek | 37% | 58% | |
| Do you think homosexuals should or should not be hired for each of the following occupations? (MAJOR POLITICAL OFFICEHOLDERS) | | | |
| | Should | Should Not | |
| Jul. 30-31, 1998 PSRA/Newsweek | 68% | 27% | |
| Mar. 9-10, 2000 PSRA/Newsweek | 71% | 24% | |
| Let's go through this list again, this time please tell me if you were considering a candidate whom you would otherwise support, and you discovered that they had had a homosexual relationship, would you still vote for them, probably vote against them, or definitely vote against them (asked of registered voters)? | | | |
| | Still Vote For | Probably Vote Against | Definitely Vote Against |
| May 10-11, 2000 Fox News/Opinion Dynamics | 53% | 14% | 26% |
| Would you be willing or not willing to vote for a well-qualified candidate running for an elected office if that person was openly gay? | | | |
| | Willing | Not Willing | Don't Know |
| March 27-30, 2004, Los Angeles Times | 59% | 32% | 9% |
| If a candidate for Congress said publicly that she is lesbian, would that make you more likely to vote for her, more likely to vote against her or would it have no effect on your vote? (Scripps Survey Research Center, Ohio University, Oct. 20 to Nov. 4, 2003). | | | |
| More likely to vote for | 3% | | |
| No difference | 66% | | |
| More likely to vote against | 28% | | |
| Don't Know | 3% | | |
| If a candidate for Congress said publicly that he is gay, would that make you more likely to vote for him, more likely to vote against him or would it have no effect on your vote? (Scripps Survey Research Center, Ohio University, Oct. 20 to Nov. 4, 2003). | | | |
| More likely to vote for | 2% | | |
| No difference | 67% | | |
| More likely to vote against | 27% | | |
| Don't Know | 4% | | |

Notes: Compiled by the author based on Bowman and Foster (2006) and Hargrove and Stempel (2003).

Table 2.4: Attitudes Concerning Gay and Lesbian Political Candidates

Think about how honest the typical candidate for Congress is. By comparison, how honest would a _____ candidate likely be?

| <u>Gay Male</u> | | <u>Lesbian Woman</u> | |
|----------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| Much more honest | 4% | Much more honest | 3% |
| Somewhat more honest | 7% | Somewhat more honest | 5% |
| No Difference | 81% | No Difference | 82% |
| Somewhat less honest | 5% | Somewhat less honest | 5% |
| Much less honest | 4% | Much less honest | 5% |

What about moral? How moral would a _____ candidate be compared to the typical candidate for Congress?

| <u>Gay Male</u> | | <u>Lesbian Woman</u> | |
|----------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| Much more moral | 2% | Much more moral | 3% |
| Somewhat more moral | 6% | Somewhat more moral | 4% |
| No difference | 73% | No difference | 76% |
| Somewhat less moral, | 9% | Somewhat less moral, | 9% |
| Much less moral | 10% | Much less moral | 8% |

What about strong? How strong would a _____ candidate be compared to the typical candidate for Congress?

| <u>Gay Male</u> | | <u>Lesbian Woman</u> | |
|----------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|
| Much more strong | 3% | Much more strong | 3% |
| Somewhat more strong | 5% | Somewhat more strong | 4% |
| No Difference | 73% | No Difference | 80% |
| Somewhat less strong | 11% | Somewhat less strong | 7% |
| Much less strong | 8% | Much less strong | 6% |

Think about how competent the typical candidate for Congress is on the following issues. By comparison, how competent would a _____ candidate likely be on education?

| <u>Gay Male</u> | | <u>Lesbian Woman</u> | |
|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| Much more competent | 4% | Much more competent | 4% |
| Somewhat more competent | 4% | Somewhat more competent | 2% |
| No difference | 83% | No difference | 86% |
| Somewhat less competent | 5% | Somewhat less competent | 3% |
| Much less competent | 4% | Much less competent | 5% |

What about military issues? How competent would a _____ candidate be compared to the typical candidate for congress?

| <u>Gay Male</u> | | <u>Lesbian Woman</u> | |
|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| Much more competent | 3% | Much more competent | 2% |
| Somewhat more competent | 2% | Somewhat more competent | 3% |
| No difference | 76% | No difference | 80% |
| Somewhat less competent | 10% | Somewhat less competent | 8% |
| Much less competent | 9% | Much less competent | 7% |

What about on taxes? How competent would a _____ candidate be compared to the typical candidate for congress?

| <u>Gay Male</u> | | <u>Lesbian Woman</u> | |
|-------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| Much more competent | 1% | Much more competent | 2% |
| Somewhat more competent | 3% | Somewhat more competent | 2% |
| No Difference | 88% | No difference | 88% |
| Somewhat less competent | 4% | Somewhat less competent | 4% |
| Much less competent | 4% | Much less competent | 4% |

Notes: Compiled by the author based on a Scripps Survey Research Center, Ohio University, Oct. 20 to Nov. 4 national survey of approximately 950 adults as reported in Hargrove and Stempel (2003).

Table 2.5: Predicting Opposition to Gay and Lesbian Candidates, National Polls

| Independent Variables | Vote Against Gay Candidate | | Vote Against Lesbian Candidate | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| | | <u>mfx</u> | | <u>mfx</u> |
| South | .205 (.186) | | .261 (.184) | |
| Female | -.432* (.180) | -.081 | -.417* (.177) | -.079 |
| Born Again | .637** (.199) | .123 | .756** (.196) | .149 |
| Protestant | .222 (.189) | | .241 (.186) | |
| Church Attendance | .880** (.193) | .165 | .834** (.189) | .159 |
| Education | -.164* (.078) | -.031 | -.123 (.077) | |
| White | -.214 (.254) | | -.255 (.250) | |
| Ideology > Liberal | -.396** (.087) | -.074 | -.404** (.085) | -.077 |
| Party > Democrat | -.275** (.071) | -.051 | -.279** (.070) | -.053 |
| Age | .023** (.006) | .004 | .021** (.006) | .004 |
| Place Size > Urban | -.085 (.082) | | -.068 (.081) | |
| /cut 1 | -6.120 | | -5.835 | |
| /cut 2 | -.709 | | -.578 | |
| Log Likelihood | -440.662 | | -456.293 | |
| Pseudo R-square | .18 | | .18 | |
| Chi Square | 188.02** | | 203.06** | |
| N | 743 | | 757 | |

Notes: Coefficients are ordered logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. ** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10. Marginal effects (mfx) estimated following ordered logit model estimation with the value of the dependent variable set to "More likely to vote against" (3); marginal effects for dichotomous variables capture the discrete change from 0 to 1. The data are from a Scripps Survey Research Center, Ohio University, Oct. 20 to Nov. 4, national poll of adults.

Table 2.6: Predicting Beliefs about Gay and Lesbian Candidate Attributes (Honesty, Morality, and Strength)

| Independent Variables | Gay Cand. | Lesbian Cand. | Gay Cand. | Lesbian Cand. | Gay Cand. | Lesbian Cand. |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Less Honest | Less Honest | Less Moral | Less Moral | Less Strong | Less Strong |
| South | .268 (.294) | .612* (.285) | .087 (.208) | .143 (.219) | .379# (.209) | .321 (.236) |
| Female | -.147 (.291) | -.534# (.286) | -.306 (.203) | -.551* (.214) | -.309 (.207) | -.383# (.232) |
| Born Again | 1.199** (.349) | 1.157** (.338) | .977** (.229) | .900** (.239) | .548* (.235) | .569* (.262) |
| Protestant | -.161 (.313) | -.037 (.305) | -.136 (.217) | -.108 (.229) | -.146 (.222) | -.122 (.249) |
| Church Attendance | -.252 (.319) | .327 (.320) | .416# (.221) | .670** (.235) | .240 (.225) | .620* (.257) |
| Education | -.310* (.124) | -.451** (.126) | -.265** (.089) | -.382** (.095) | -.223* (.090) | -.325** (.100) |
| White | -.095 (.432) | -.860* (.396) | -.205 (.291) | -.558# (.296) | -.139 (.301) | -.168 (.342) |
| Ideology > Liberal | -.256# (.139) | -.099 (.135) | -.276** (.098) | -.150 (.102) | -.172# (.099) | -.123 (.111) |
| Party > Democrat | -.100 (.111) | -.436** (.115) | -.170* (.080) | -.292** (.085) | -.168* (.082) | -.219* (.092) |
| Age | .035** (.009) | .033** (.009) | .017** (.006) | .016* (.007) | .021** (.006) | .024** (.007) |
| Place Size > Urban | -.118 (.133) | -.232# (.132) | -.224* (.093) | -.126 (.098) | -.090 (.094) | -.150 (.107) |
| Constant | -1.905# (1.043) | .380 (1.001) | .657 (.711) | 1.363# (.743) | -.310 (.756) | -.269 (.815) |
| Log Likelihood | -179.839 | -179.401 | -322.342 | -293.279 | -316.616 | -259.288 |
| Pseudo R-square | .14 | .21 | .14 | .16 | .09 | .12 |
| Chi Square | 59.55** | 95.59** | 105.97** | 108.11** | 59.60** | 70.08** |
| N | 728 | 741 | 744 | 734 | 737 | 736 |

Notes: Coefficients are logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. ** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10. The data are from a Scripps Survey Research Center, Ohio University, Oct. 20 to Nov. 4 national survey of adults.

Table 2.7: Predicting Beliefs about Gay and Lesbian Candidate Lack of Competency on Issues

| Independent Variables | Gay Cand. Less Comp. on Education | Lesbian Cand. Less Comp. on Education | Gay Cand. Less Comp. on Military | Lesbian Cand. Less Comp. on Military | Gay Cand. Less Comp. on Taxes | Lesbian Cand. Less Comp. on Taxes |
|-----------------------|---|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| South | .584* (.273) | .903** (.304) | .261 (.206) | .263 (.222) | .771* (.291) | .779* (.290) |
| Female | -.384 (.276) | -.760* (.310) | -.555* (.203) | -.788** (.219) | -.645* (.296) | -.505# (.293) |
| Born Again | .638* (.313) | 1.277** (.367) | .537* (.227) | .847** (.247) | .349 (.330) | .982** (.340) |
| Protestant | .271 (.293) | .181 (.324) | .112 (.214) | -.201 (.233) | .610# (.315) | .173 (.310) |
| Church Attendance | -.076 (.301) | .133 (.344) | .396# (.222) | .298 (.240) | .118 (.325) | .368 (.328) |
| Education | -.386** (.119) | -.493** (.138) | -.206* (.089) | -.300** (.096) | -.514** (.130) | -.412** (.128) |
| White | -.379 (.401) | -.116 (.480) | -.006 (.298) | -.214 (.316) | -.233 (.440) | -.506 (.427) |
| Ideology > Liberal | -.342* (.134) | -.277# (.148) | -.295** (.099) | -.175# (.106) | -.515** (.149) | -.242# (.139) |
| Party > Democrat | -.225* (.108) | -.321** (.121) | -.116 (.079) | -.229* (.087) | -.204# (.113) | -.279* (.114) |
| Age | .030** (.009) | .034** (.010) | .012* (.006) | .017* (.007) | .028** (.009) | .033** (.009) |
| Place Size > Urban | -.193 (.126) | -.409** (.142) | -.090 (.093) | -.261* (.099) | -.178 (.134) | -.297* (.135) |
| Constant | .052 (.964) | .391 (1.120) | .400 (.709) | 1.407# (.762) | -.858 (1.034) | -.164 (1.035) |
| Log Likelihood | -196.332 | -156.897 | -324.915 | -285.769 | -172.494 | -173.000 |
| Pseudo R-square | .15 | .25 | .10 | .13 | .20 | .20 |
| Chi Square | 70.44** | 107.00** | 70.09** | 86.30** | 84.64** | 88.70** |
| N | 739 | 737 | 738 | 736 | 733 | 735 |

Notes: Coefficients are logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. ** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10. The data are from a Scripps Survey Research Center, Ohio University, Oct. 20 to Nov. 4 national survey of adults.

Table 2.8: New York State Poll on Gay Candidates (1994)

| How much difference do you think each of the following makes to the way people in your community vote? | A Great Deal | Quite A lot | Not Much | No Difference at All |
|--|--------------|-------------|----------|----------------------|
| The candidate is gay or lesbian | 35% | 26% | 21% | 18% |
| The Candidate's Race | 45% | 31% | 15% | 9% |
| The candidate's stand on abortion | 28% | 35% | 25% | 12% |

Do you personally agree or disagree that if a candidate says they are gay or lesbian then you should not vote for that candidate?

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Agree | 12% |
| Disagree | 88% |

Specific questions regarding Karen Burstein, a lesbian candidate for New York Attorney General.

Have you seen, read, or heard anything about voters not voting for a candidate who says they are gay or lesbian, or not? (962 respondents)

| | |
|----------|-----|
| Have | 38% |
| Have Not | 62% |

Which candidates have said they are gay or lesbian? (365 respondents)

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Karen Burstein | 47% |
| Don't Know | 53% |

Does the fact that Karen Burstein says she is a lesbian mean that you are more likely to vote for her for Attorney General, less likely, or does it not make a difference to you on how you will vote? (174 respondents)

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| More likely | 4% |
| Less likely | 18% |
| No difference | 78% |

Notes: Data compiled by the author from a October 14, 1994 Louis Harris and Associates random sample survey of New York adults.

Table 2.9: Predicting Attitudes on Gay in Lesbian Candidates, New York 1994 Harris Poll

| Independent Variables | Matters to Community if Candidate is Gay | Should Not Vote for Gay Candidate | Vote Against Lesbian AG Candidate |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Female | -.334* (.124) | -.834** (.232) | -1.830** (.624) |
| Age | -.008* (.004) | .015* (.007) | .037* (.019) |
| Education | .092# (.057) | -.177# (.101) | -.768** (.265) |
| White | .189 (.197) | -.680* (.339) | 1.587 (1.229) |
| Protestant | .180 (.147) | -.021 (.248) | .161 (.715) |
| No religion | -.198 (.245) | -.620 (.625) | -.231 (.999) |
| Party > Democrat | .004 (.077) | -.340* (.138) | -.803* (.383) |
| Ideology > Liberal | -.106 (.094) | -.494** (.172) | -.732 (.493) |
| Place Size > rural | .204 (.083) | .152 (.150) | .282 (.417) |
| Constant | | .763 (.779) | 2.506 (1.985) |
| /cut 1 | -.785 | | |
| /cut 2 | .305 | | |
| /cut 3 | 1.385 | | |
| Log Likelihood | -1163.098 | -287.127 | -50.350 |
| Pseudo R-square | .01 | .09 | .34 |
| Chi Square | 29.69** | 57.29** | 51.15** |
| N | 870 | 881 | 161 |

Notes: Coefficients in first column are ordered logit coefficients; Coefficients in second and third columns are logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. ** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10. The data are from a October 14, 1994 Louis Harris and Associates random sample survey of New York adults.

Table 2.10: Attitudes on Gay and Lesbian Candidates: Zogby Poll, March 2006

1. If an openly gay or lesbian candidate were to run for state legislature in your district and they were the candidate that most shared your views on political issues would you. . . ?

| | |
|--|-------|
| Definitely vote for the gay or lesbian candidate | 45.2% |
| Probably vote for the gay or lesbian candidate | 25.6% |
| Probably vote for someone else | 11.5% |
| Definitely vote for someone else | 14.9% |
| Not sure | 2.9% |

2. Let's say there's a candidate who ran successfully for state legislature in the last election and you supported them because he or she shares your views on most political issues. What if you later found out this candidate is gay or lesbian? Would you...?

| | |
|--|-------|
| Definitely still vote for this person, | 51.2% |
| Probably still vote for this person, | 23.2% |
| Probably vote for someone else, | 10.7% |
| Definitely vote for someone else, | 11.2% |
| Or are you not sure? | 3.7% |

3. Let me read you the opinions of two people. One person says that a gay candidate does not share our values and would focus too much on gay issues. Another says sexual orientation is not important to the job as long as the candidate has a strong record getting things done for everyone in the community. Do you. . . ?

| | |
|---|-------|
| Strongly agree that gay candidate does not share our values | 13.2% |
| Somewhat agree that gay candidate does not share our values | 8.6% |
| Somewhat agree that sexual orientation is not Important | 24.7% |
| Strongly agree that sexual orientation is not Important | 47.4% |
| Neither/not sure | 6.0% |

4. Let me read you the opinions of two people. One person says that a lesbian candidate does not share our values and would focus too much on gay issues. Another says sexual orientation is not important to the job as long as the candidate has a strong record getting things done for everyone in the community. Do you. . . ?

| | |
|---|-------|
| Strongly agree that lesbian candidate does not share our values | 16.1% |
| Somewhat agree that lesbian candidate does not share our values | 8.2% |
| Somewhat agree that sexual orientation is not Important | 21.0% |
| Strongly agree that sexual orientation is not Important | 46.5% |
| Neither/not sure | 8.2% |

5. I am going to read you the description of two candidates for office. Please tell me which candidate you would be more likely to vote for - A or B?

A is gay, and has openly and frankly discussed his sexual orientation in the media on multiple occasions. B is gay, but retained his sexual orientation as a private matter, until he was outed by the media.

| | |
|-----------------------|-------|
| Candidate A | 32.9% |
| Candidate B | 38.8% |
| Neither/No difference | 19.0% |
| Not sure | 9.3% |

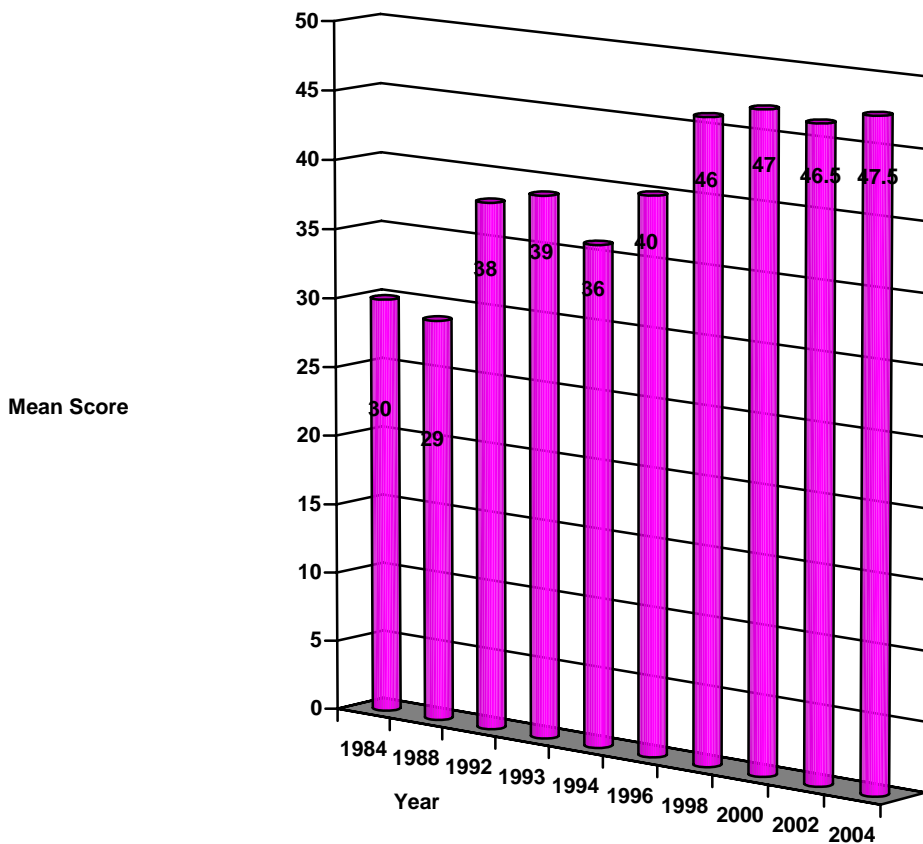
Notes: Compiled by the author from a national poll of likely voters conducted by Zogby America (March 14-16, 2006) for the Victory Fund.

Table 2.11: Predicting Attitudes about Gay and Lesbian State Legislative Candidates

| Independent Variables | Vote | Vote Against | Fact | Fact | Multinomial Logit | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Against Out Candidate | Outed Incumbent | Candidate is Gay Not Import. | Candidate is Lesbian Not Import. | Prefer Outed Candidate | Prefer Neither/ No Difference |
| Female | -.351* (.136) | -.567** (.140) | .623** (.197) | .513* (.205) | .102 (.177) | -.016 (.210) |
| Age | .009# (.005) | .002 (.005) | -.011 (.007) | -.002 (.007) | .010# (.006) | .005 (.007) |
| Place Size > Rural | .216* (.092) | .103 (.096) | -.011 (.138) | .032 (.136) | -.111 (.120) | .016 (.144) |
| White | -.318 (.211) | -.428* (.217) | -.350 (.323) | .173 (.302) | .213 (.255) | .557# (.324) |
| Education | -.368** (.078) | -.416** (.080) | .149 (.121) | .343** (.116) | .072 (.102) | .153 (.123) |
| Ideology > Conservative | .645** (.079) | .616** (.082) | -.591** (.113) | -.507** (.113) | .322** (.095) | .066 (.113) |
| Party > Republican | .159# (.085) | .170# (.089) | -.189 (.125) | -.268* (.127) | .343** (.111) | .190 (.133) |
| South | .137 (.156) | .309# (.160) | -.027 (.223) | .110 (.237) | .118 (.213) | .517* (.245) |
| East | -.471* (.172) | -.320# (.181) | .760* (.283) | .507* (.241) | -.084 (.213) | .168 (.258) |
| Born Again | .801** (.154) | .705** (.158) | -.531* (.230) | -.607* (.232) | .023 (.214) | -.092 (.253) |
| Children < 18 | .372* (.176) | .068 (.183) | -.417 (.262) | .062 (.257) | -.077 (.222) | -.279 (.269) |
| Vote against gay | ----- | ----- | ----- | ----- | .188* (.095) | .579** (.109) |
| /Cut point 1 | 1.631 | .925 | -4.453 | -2.494 | -2.496** | -3.441** |
| /Cut point 2 | 3.161 | 2.387 | -3.664 | -1.843 | (.672) | (.811) |
| /Cut point 3 | 4.040 | 3.202 | -2.393 | -.581 | | |
| Log Likelihood | -979.177 | -915.848 | -477.096 | -453.061 | | -259.288 |
| Pseudo R-square | .12 | .12 | .10 | .09 | | .06 |
| Chi Square | 277.20** | 245.15** | 107.72** | 90.07** | | 103.33** |
| N | 886 | 883 | 431 | 409 | | 806 |

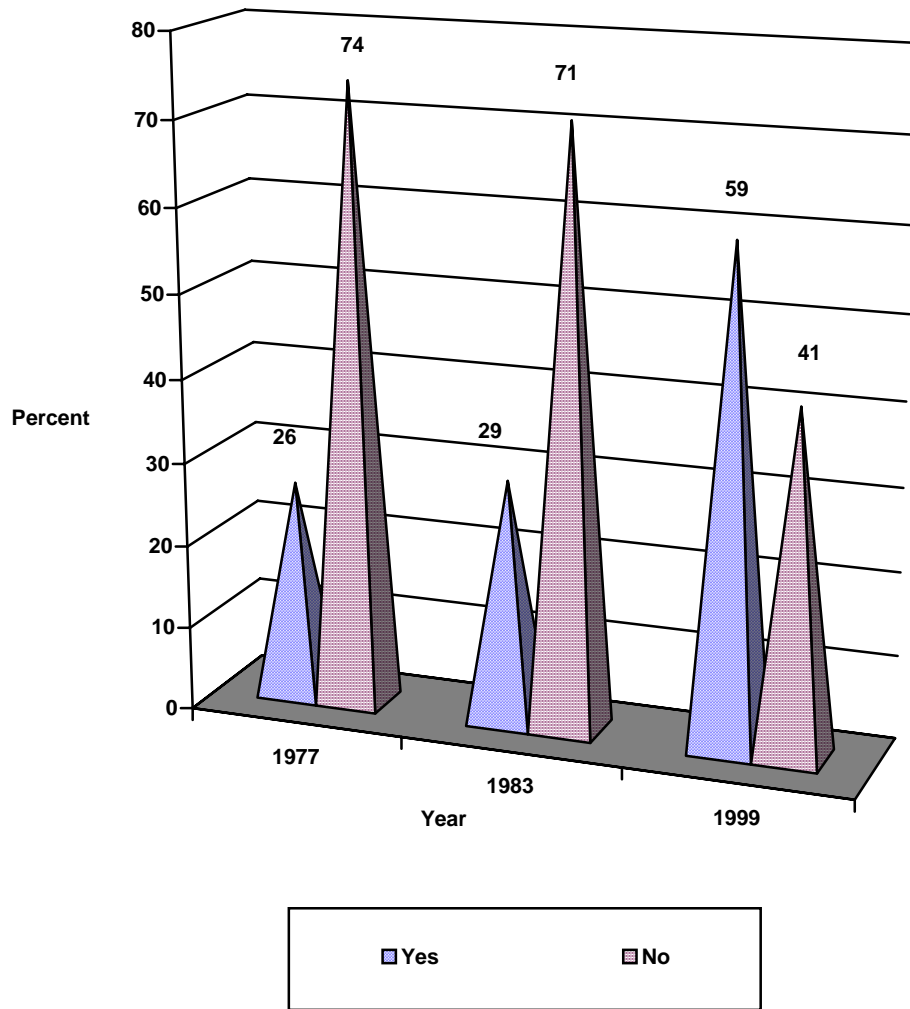
Notes: Except final two columns, coefficients are ordered logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. ** p < .01, * p < .05, # p < .10. The data are from a Zogby America Omnibus national random sample telephone survey of adults conducted March 14-16, 2006.

Figure 1: Public Feelings (Affect) Toward Gay Men and Lesbians, Mean Score on 0 to 100 Feeling Thermometer



Notes: Data are compiled by the author from the American National Election Study (ANES). Respondents were asked to state their feelings towards the group using a 0 to 100 scale, where a score of 50 to 100 indicates favorable or warm feelings and a score from 0 to 50 suggests an unfavorable or cold feeling with the following question: “how would you rate the following groups...gay men and lesbians, i.e. homosexuals?”

Figure 2.2: Percentage that would support their party's nominee for president if the party nominated a well-qualified person who happened to be a homosexual



Note: compiled by the author based on Newport (1999)

No