

Issue Brief- LGBT Voting Behavior

Key Words

LGBTQ, voting behavior, Democratic Party, issue-based voting

Description

This issue brief will focus on voting behavior within the Gay and Lesbian community. The data provided will prove that members of the LGBT community usually vote strongly Democratic and typically perceive their ideological preferences as more aligned with the Democratic Party and progressive candidates. In addition, there is a discussion what LGBT voters may use as their criteria for choosing candidates, and what that criteria may show about the evolution of Gay and Lesbian voting in the U.S.

Key Points:

1. Gay and Lesbian voters compose a greater portion of the electorate in the U.S. than in years and decades past.
2. Data shows that Gay voters increasingly identify with the Democratic Party, and that more and more Democrats associate their party agenda and platform with Gay Rights and issues of equality.
3. Surveys and polls also show that being LGB significantly influences an individual's vote choice and partisan identification
4. Gay and Lesbian voters often have very different views from non-LGB voters on other political issues including the role of government in society, social issues like abortion, and the economy.
5. The political divide on gay rights issues is still very significant, and can be broken down based on other factors like race, religiosity, and education.



Issue Brief

As the LGBT community plays an increasingly significant role in the American electoral process, it is important to analyze the voting behavior of self-identified Gays and Lesbians and determine the partisan leanings and issues of importance for this voting bloc. Data shows that Gays and Lesbians have comprised about 4-5 percent of the electorate in recent presidential elections. 92.5% of gay men reported that they voted in the 2004 presidential race, and almost 84% said they cast ballots in the 2006 midterm election. Among Lesbians, these numbers were 91% and 78% respectively. This “gay gap,” which refers to the difference in vote choice among LGBT and non-LGBT citizens, has grown tremendously in recent years and is about twice as large as the “gender gap” in U.S. elections. This gap is still dwarfed by the race gap between Black and White voters, but signifies a real and established divergence in vote choice and preferences among Gay and Lesbian voters and those not affiliated with the LGBT community.

Recent studies have also shown that most LGBT voters identify with the Democratic Party, and tend to vote for Democratic presidential and congressional candidates. In 2000, Democratic presidential nominee Al Gore won nearly 70% of LGBT votes, while only winning 47% of non-LGBT votes. In 2004 John Kerry won 70% of votes in the LGBT community, and in 2008 Obama surpassed his count, winning over 77% of Gay and Lesbian voters. While these surveys may be somewhat flawed, in that Gay voters could also be Democrats for various ethno-racial or regional factors, it is still undeniable that Gay and Lesbian voters identify more than ever with the Democrats, their agenda, and their candidates. It has been proven that all other factors equal, being gay makes a bigger impact on vote choice than other factors such as age, income, or religion.

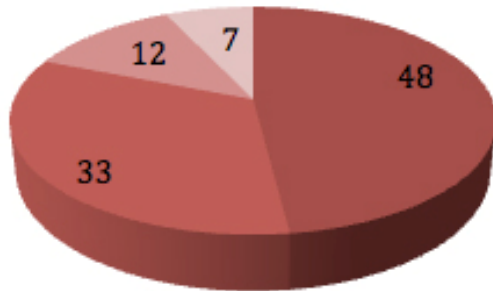
The great numbers of LGBT voters flocking towards the Democratic Party can also be attributed to the ideological positions of the party on other social and economic factors relevant in American elections. In the 2000 election, LGBT voters were more concerned about health care and less concerned about taxes, than non-LGBT voters. LGBT voters believed more strongly in the government’s ability to solve problems and work effectively for the people. They were more likely to be liberal and pro-choice

than non-LGBT voters, and were often less religious and more educated than straight voters. It is evident that Gays and Lesbians are more closely aligned with the Democrats on issues that go beyond Gay marriage and equal rights. Members of the LGBT community fit in with many of the typical Democratic qualities and ideological views. Thus, it seems logical that they have voted in greater numbers for Democratic candidates and organized much of their equal rights and issue advocacy through the Democratic Party and its vast base of supporters and community groups.

It is also imperative to note the influence that elites in government have on the general public, specifically on core issues like LGBT rights. Public officials and party leaders have grown increasingly divided along party lines on the issue of Gay rights. The most politically salient and controversial issues have been Gay marriage, equal rights and civil unions, and the repeal of the military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell," policy. The Human Rights Campaign studied both Republican and Democratic Senators and their votes on these LGBT-related issues. HRC assigned the Senators scores based on their support of LGBT issues, with anti- Gay officials getting a zero and pro-Gay legislators receiving 100. In three separate sessions of Congress, they found that Democrats on average scored between 80 and 90, while Republicans were assigned scores between 15 and 30. This statistic alone shows that elites in the two major political parties have vastly divergent views on the issues relevant to the LGBT community, and thus explains in some ways the outspoken support for Democrats among Gays and Lesbians over the last 15-20 years.

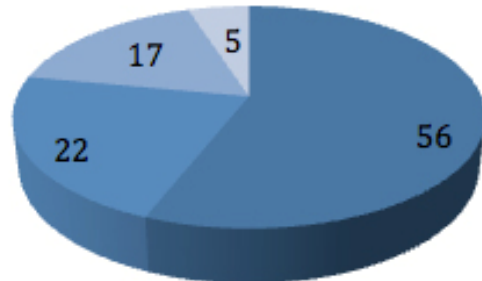
Overall, Gay and Lesbian voters have seemed to announce their arrival on the American political scene in a very bold fashion. LGBT voters have voted repeatedly in favor of Democrats, proving not only the Democratic Party's affinity towards pro-Gay positions but also the strong identification of Gays and Lesbians with the party's various progressive views on other issues. It seems clear that LGBT voters will continue to vote Democratic, until they find a reason not to do so. Currently, the political alternative is not much of an alternative at all. Barring any major shift in party ideological positions, Gays and Lesbians will most likely remain strong proponents of the Democratic Party and its candidates.

Reasons Voting 'Yes' on Prop 8



- Preserve traditional marriage & values
- Against my religious beliefs
- Protect children from being taught homosexuality acceptable
- Something else/Don't know

Reasons Voting 'No' on Prop 8



- Discriminates against gays and lesbians
- Government shouldn't be involved in personal relationships
- Does not affect me
- Something else/Don't know

This figure gives the primary reasons why supporters of Prop. 8 reported that they voted yes, and similarly why opponents voted no.

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