

## **Moral values and gay and lesbian rights issues low on the list of concerns to voters, polling shows**

Pundits from across the political spectrum and anti-gay activists are claiming that the gay marriage issue cost John Kerry the 2004 presidential election, particularly because of an antimarriage amendment on the ballot in Ohio. While the issue of marriage equality for same-sex couples was certainly an issue and 11 anti-family amendments were passed on Tuesday, there is no evidence that gay marriage played a decisive role in the outcome.

### ***In the 3 battleground states where an anti-marriage amendment was on the ballot, Kerry did better than Gore***

Three battleground states had anti-family amendments. Kerry won two of these—Michigan and Oregon—even as voters there approved anti-gay marriage amendments. Kerry won Oregon 51-47%, while Gore barely carried it 47-47%. Kerry matched Gore's share of the Michigan vote—51%—but won 288,513 more votes than Gore did there in 2000.

Despite losing Ohio to Bush, Kerry fared considerably better against him than Gore did in 2000. Kerry won 48.5% of the vote there, compared with Gore's 46.5%, increasing the number of votes in the Democratic column by 473,474. The closeness of the 2004 Presidential election in Ohio was remarkable, since Ohio is considered a battleground state that leans Republican. Since 1980 only Bill Clinton has been able to win the state for the Democrats, in 1992 and 1996, when Ross Perot siphoned conservative votes away from the Republicans.

### ***Lake, Snell, Perry election exit poll finds only 2% of voters rank gay rights as top concern***

In a national poll of voters in the 2004 presidential election conducted by Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, only 2% said that "gay and lesbian rights issues" was the most important issue to them in deciding whom to vote for. The top issue was "jobs and the economy" (23%), followed by "homeland security and terrorism" (19%), and "Iraq" (13%). Only 10% cited "moral values" as their chief concern.

### ***Eight of the 11 states would have gone Republican anyway***

Eight of the 11 states with anti-gay marriage amendments on the ballot have gone Republican in most or all of the recent presidential elections: Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Oklahoma, and Utah.

### ***In Michigan and Oregon, anti-gay marriage amendments were approved. Voters in those states also backed Kerry over Bush***

Michigan and Ohio are very similar states: industrial, with a struggling manufacturing sector, with high rates of union households and similar racial demographics (Michigan voters are 82% White, 13% Black, 2% Hispanic; Ohio voters are 86% White, 10% Black, 3% Hispanic). Both Michigan and Ohio had anti-marriage amendments that also targeted unmarried heterosexual

couples and domestic partner benefits. Both Michigan and Ohio approved their anti-family amendments, yet Michigan went for Kerry 51-48%. Blacks and Latinos voted overwhelmingly for Kerry in both Michigan and Ohio (Blacks were slightly more likely to back Kerry in Michigan than in Ohio, while Latinos were slightly more likely to back Kerry in Ohio than in Michigan.)

***Kerry increased the Democratic vote in Ohio over the 2000 Democratic vote by nearly half a million votes, some 30,000 more votes than Bush's increase over the 2000 election***

Kerry won 2,659,664 votes in Ohio, 473,474 more votes than Al Gore won in 2000 there. Bush won 2,796,147 votes in Ohio this year, some 444,938 more votes than he won there in 2000. In other words, Kerry won 28,536 more new votes over the 2000 Democratic vote than Bush won compared with *his* 2000 vote. But because Bush won the state in 2000 and was starting from a higher base of Republican votes, this 28,536 vote deficit didn't matter and he won the state. But the critical point is that Kerry increased the number of voters supporting the Democratic presidential candidate by nearly half a million votes, or 30,000 more than George W. Bush increased *his* vote by.

***The "moral values" vote***

According to the National Election Poll, 22% of voters said that their choice for president was motivated by a concern for "moral values" more than any other issue. Eighty percent of these voters broke overwhelmingly for Bush. Some 20% of voters said "the economy/jobs" was the deciding issue, 19% said "terrorism," 15% said "Iraq," and smaller percentages chose other issues.

An in-depth analysis of responses to this question conducted by political scientist Ken Sherrill of Hunter College finds that "moral values" is less of an explanation or a cause of voting behavior, and more a correlate or consequence of liking President Bush and supporting his policies. Sherrill found that those who said "moral values" drove their choice of a presidential candidate were also much more likely to attend religious services once a week or more, much more likely to describe themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians, more likely to approve of Bush's handling of the presidency, more likely to approve the decision to invade Iraq, and more likely to think things are going very well or somewhat well in Iraq. Of those who said the Iraq war was going "very well," 35% said they chose their presidential candidate because of "moral values." Of those who said the war was going "somewhat well," 32% said "moral values" motivated their vote. But of those who said the war was going "very badly," only 10% said they voted based on concerns about "moral values."

Those who pointed to "moral values" to explain their vote were also much more likely to report that their family's financial situation is better today than four years ago. Of those who said they were "better today" financially, 31% said "moral values" determined their vote for president, but only 11% said "the economy/jobs" was the decisive factor. Of those who said they were "worse off" today financially, 33% cast their presidential vote based on "the economy/jobs," while only 12% cast their vote based on "moral values."

Only 10% of those voting for Democratic Congressional candidates said they voted for president based on “moral values,” but 34% of those voting for Republican Congressional candidates said “moral values” drove their presidential choice.

What this all means is that those likely to say they voted for president based on “moral values” also share a general constellation of values and political beliefs that aligns closely with those of the Republican Party and President Bush. “Moral values” may be their top choice as an explanation of their general political perspective from among the seven choices offered on the National Election Poll; but this does not mean that “moral values” *caused* them to vote for Bush.

Another important caveat was offered by Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center last night on the News Hour with Jim Lehrer: for many religious conservatives, who usually vote Republican, there is a “social desirability” factor involved. If “moral values” is on a list of seven possible choices, many religious conservatives—who think of themselves as moral people with values—feel compelled to choose that option.

Further analysis will also be needed to pinpoint what "moral values" were of concern to these voters -- including divorce rates, teen sexuality, profanity in the media, etc. The *Lake, Snell, Perry* poll cited above suggests that gay and lesbian issues were only a small factor in the range of what might have been considered "moral values."

### **Conclusion**

To say that the anti-family amendments on the ballots in 11 states cost Senator Kerry the election is simplistic and not warranted by the exit poll data. The anti-gay/anti-family amendments—which will strip health coverage from thousands of American families, gay and straight, many with children—was a factor in the outcome in Ohio, but not in Oregon, Michigan or the other eight states. Even in Ohio, it was only one of many factors in a close election.

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*Founded in 1973, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Foundation (the Task Force) was the first national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) civil rights and advocacy organization and remains the movement's leading voice for freedom, justice, and equality. We work to build the grassroots political strength of our community by training state and local activists and leaders, working to strengthen the infrastructure of state and local allies, and organizing broad-based campaigns to build public support for complete equality for LGBT people. Our Policy Institute, the community's premiere think tank, provides research and policy analysis to support the struggle for complete equality. As part of a broader social justice movement, we work to create a world that respects and makes visible the diversity of human expression and identity where all people may fully participate in society. Headquartered in Washington, DC, we also have offices in New York City, Los Angeles, and Cambridge. The Task Force is a 501(c)(3) corporation incorporated in Washington, DC. Contributions to the Task Force are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. <http://www.TheTaskForce.org>*

*The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Inc. ("NGLTF, Inc."), founded in 1974, works to build the grassroots political power of the LGBT community to win complete equality. We do this through direct and grassroots lobbying to defeat anti-LGBT ballot initiatives and legislation and pass pro-LGBT legislation and other measures. We also analyze and report on the positions of candidates for public office on issues of importance to the LGBT community. NGLTF, Inc. is a 501(c)(4) non-profit corporation incorporated in New York. Contributions to NGLTF, Inc. are not tax-deductible.*