

# OUT & VOTING

*THE  
GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL VOTE  
IN CONGRESSIONAL HOUSE ELECTIONS,  
1990-1996*

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Introduction

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# Preface

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**S**EXUAL ORIENTATION IS NOT READILY APPARENT. It requires disclosure to be known. Because of the enormous stigma and persecution that continues to accompany such disclosure, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) people remain far more closeted than our actual representation in American society bears out. The past several decades have seen a dramatic change in this invisibility on a cultural level. But politically, for many decades, as the late-activist, and former head of Legal Services Corporation, Dan Bradley noted, the biggest closet in America has been the voting booth.

In an arena like electoral politics, where the ability to count — and to be known — matters a great deal, the invisibility of the GLBT electorate has hindered the development of gay, lesbian and bisexual political power. Research, like that found in this report, marks the end of the GLBT community's longstanding political invisibility.

Based on exit poll data gathered by independent news organizations during election cycles, this report offers a picture of the gay, lesbian and bisexual vote in America: 5% in 1996. Given the persistence of the closet, it is possible that the GLB vote is even larger. The report also points out that even higher rates of GLB self-identification are reported by voters under 40 (6% in 1996), suggesting that fear of disclosure is abating for new generations of GLB people. The data discussed in Robert Bailey's report dramatically suggest the vital role an energized GLB electorate can play for Democratic, Republican and Independent candidates.

The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) is a think tank dedicated to delivering factual, practical and effective information. In the months ahead, the Policy Institute will continue to release reports whose goal is to continue to develop a fuller, more precise and empirically based picture of GLBT communities.

*Urvashi Vaid*

DIRECTOR, POLICY INSTITUTE, NGLTF

# Introduction

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*By Rich Tafel*

*Executive Director, Log Cabin Republicans*

**R**OBERT BAILEY'S STUDY, *OUT & VOTING: The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote in Congressional House Elections, 1990-1996*, marks the first analysis of the impact of an emerging constituency in national congressional politics. As America continues to absorb the cultural impact of gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) people, gay rights issues play themselves out in a sharply politicized context. Bailey's report provides much needed data and analysis on a topic relatively unknown in American politics: the GLB vote.

Most importantly, this study helps to shatter one of the greatest obstacles to equal rights and non-discrimination based on sexual orientation in our society — invisibility. While we can argue as a matter of principle that numbers do not matter, that discrimination is wrong no matter what the size of a group of people, in politics numbers count for a great deal. The radical Right has argued that we make up only 1% or less of the population, a blatant untruth that Robert Bailey's thorough, objective numbers effectively debunk. Bailey brings together the most vital data and answers the burning question for political observers — how many gay, lesbian, and bisexual voters are out there?

Bailey's analysis of exit polls shows that while the gay, lesbian and bisexual (exit poll data has not yet asked voters about their gender identity) vote was recorded at 3% in 1990, voter self-identification increased to over 5% nationwide in 1996. That's a significant number and an important trend.

The GLB vote in national elections is as significant as other definable segments of the electorate. By comparison, African-Americans comprised 10.1% of those voting in 1996, Latinos comprised 4.5%, Jewish voters comprised 3.4% and Asian Americans comprised 1.1%. Marshalling an identifiable voting block is important in a democracy, and this report clearly shows that a numerous vote exists.

The increase in voter self-identification over the six years of data studied in this report reflects the steady coming out of gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Indeed, the 5% GLB vote figure disproportionately represents a young population, reflecting the

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“The fact that a number of GLB independents and GLB republicans will vote for the person or the issue, not the party, is an important lesson for both major parties to internalize.”

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truth that younger GLB people are more likely to be open to a pollster. As successive generations of GLB people come out and vote, self-identification rates are likely to rise even higher.

This study confirms some conventional wisdom, and contains some clear surprises. On one hand, the GLB voters identified through exit polls are more liberal on general issues than the average American voter, and tended to vote Democrat during the national elections studied. On the other hand, Bailey's analysis reveals that a Republican gay vote also exists, and that gay conservatives and moderates comprise a significant sector of the GLB vote. In fact, the GLB community is one of the more diverse electorates in America, comprising an

ideological spectrum that is wide and shifts its voting loyalty.

While this might be disturbing to some gay leaders who believe we will have our greatest impact by all voting Democrat, I believe this electoral diversity is truly our strength. Analysis of national elections reveals the overall message that the GLB vote is up for grabs. While there is a core group that always votes for Democrats, others in the community are more progressive than the Democratic party (the Independents) and more fiscally conservative (gay Republicans). GLB voters are paying close attention to all their options. However, the GLB community is in danger of being taken for granted by Democrats and written off by Republicans. The fact that a number of GLB Independents and GLB Republicans will vote for the person or the issue, not the party, is an important lesson for both major parties to internalize. This means that Democrats cannot take the entire GLB vote for granted. At the same time, the data in this study should send a loud message to the Republican Party that the GLB vote is not monolithic, and one in four gays usually vote Republican. That number can increase when Republican leaders reach out, as they have in New York and Los Angeles. This is a powerful and enduring message to a party that is sharply divided over the issue of GLB rights.

There is also a message here for the GLB community. First, though we often talk in terms of our electoral clout, and 5% of the electorate is impressive, we cannot win elections on our own. We must be a strategic minority in exercising our political influence. According to Bailey, after the 1994 elections, a majority of gay

men, lesbians and bisexuals are represented by a Republican member of Congress. They live in swing districts, going back and forth between the Republican and Democratic candidates based on national trends and local issues. In these districts, a GLB voting bloc that is diverse in its political leanings can have an influence disproportionate to its size. GLB voters in swing districts can more effectively lobby their Republican representatives to be part of the moderate wing of the party on GLB issues. The GLB Republicans, Independents and Democrats who cross party lines, mirror the all important heterosexual swing voters, and our vote should be treated with the same attention as the overall swing vote.

The dramatic GLB support for Bill Clinton in 1992 — among Republicans and Democrats — contains another important lesson for the Republican party, a lesson confirmed by Bailey's report. A variety of issues matter to gay, lesbian and bisexual voters, but the party and the candidate's stance on GLB rights matters a great deal to this important swing vote. In general, it would be fair to say that a candidate who supports non-discrimination laws, but would raise taxes and increase the size of government, would not likely get the vote of GLB Republicans. However, in the context of the deeply anti-gay campaign in 1992, when anti-gay rhetoric was made part of a candidate's strategy, GLB Republican voters joined Independents to overwhelmingly vote Democratic. On the other hand, when Democrats acted lukewarm on GLB issues and were perceived to be more liberal than the mainstream, as in the 1994 elections, GLB Republicans voted with the party.

Finally, by showing the impact that a gay, lesbian and bisexual vote can have, Bailey's study reminds us of the importance of coalitions. GLB Democrats have worked for years with traditionally liberal coalition partners with some success. GLB Republicans must also build better coalitions with socially moderate, pro-free trade and anti-big government Republicans to stem the rise of the religious right in the GOP. We cannot achieve our goals by standing alone in either party, nor can we achieve our goals by blindly aligning ourselves with either party.

Bailey's study makes the GLB vote objectively visible and sends a signal that in fact, we are becoming more visible where and when it matters most — on Election Day. This important study shatters widely held myths that all gays are Democrats, or that all Republicans are straight. And it gives us data to assert our growing political clout in a wider spectrum of politics. Our diversity and independence really are our strengths, and always will be.



# OUT & VOTING

THE GAY, LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL VOTE  
IN CONGRESSIONAL HOUSE ELECTIONS,  
1990-1996

*By Robert W. Bailey, Ph.D.*

## Report Summary: Invisible No More

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**I**N AMERICAN POLITICS, the vote is a measure of power and status. Each emerging constituency in America articulates its voice in the political process through the recognition of its power at the polls. For some communities, like African Americans and women, the struggle to achieve basic enfranchisement and voting rights has been harsh, bloody and bitter. For other constituencies, like young people age 18-21, the struggle to be heard came only after a period of mass agitation in the 1960's. To this resonant and varied history, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) Americans now add their own claim to a political voice. Not surprisingly, the emergence of a definable vote may be the vehicle that brings GLBT Americans political power and respect.

The study of a definable gay, lesbian, and bisexual<sup>1</sup> (GLB) vote is new among political scientists, dating only to the last ten years. In part, this is because GLB Americans are just now fully emerging as a national constituency; in part because

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“Data from 1990 to 1996 reveal the identifiable gay, lesbian and bisexual vote increased dramatically, from 1.3% in 1990, to 5.0% of the electorate in 1996.”

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data to track the GLB vote has not been gathered until very recently; and in part because American academic political science has traditionally been more interested in the “mainstream” of American voters than in devalued groups — whether defined by race, gender, class or sexual identity.

Most analysis of voting patterns of GLB voters has been done on Presidential elections or on municipal elections in large cities. Very little study has focused on the role of the GLB vote in congressional elections. This omission is especially glaring since issues important to GLBT communities are often fought out on the floor of the Congress — and especially in

the House of Representatives. Some of the most recent issues of concern to gay, lesbian, and bisexual voters — the incorporation of openly GLBT Americans into the armed forces, HIV funding levels, immigration policy toward GLBT people as well as HIV+ immigrants, and the national Employment Non-Discrimination Act — are all matters whose primary jurisdiction has been the Congress.

Using aggregate national data, from news media-sponsored election day exit polls, this report analyzes the impact and summary characteristics of the GLB vote in congressional House elections from 1990-1996. This report looks at the GLB vote in a critical period, an era in which power shifted from a Democratic majority that had dominated the House of Representatives since 1954 to a new, more conservative Republican-led coalition. The shift represented a new emphasis in national political ideology, brought a change in the leadership within the House on issues important to GLB voters, and marked the start of an era in which partisanship became more important.

Although much of the information presented is descriptive, four overall conclusions are found:

- First, in the 1992, 1994 and 1996 House elections, the GLB vote was coherent and numerically large enough to be statistically significant. Data from 1990 to 1996 reveal the overall proportion of the identifiable GLB vote increased dramatically through the elections studied, from 1.3% in 1990, to 2.2% in 1992, to 5.0% of the electorate in 1996 (and 6.0% of voters under 40 years old).

- Second, the GLB vote is an important and sizeable swing vote in urban and in medium sized city congressional districts.
- Third, the GLB vote is bipartisan. GLB voters have traditionally heavily favored Democrats, but have voted Republican in significant numbers during the election cycles studied. Large majorities of GLB voters supported Democratic congressional candidates (72% in 1996; 73% in 1994; 77% in 1992; and 61% in 1990). The GLB vote constitutes a clear and strong component of the remaining House Democratic voter base, indeed GLB voters identify and vote Democrat in far higher proportion than non-GLB voters. However, the report also found that more than one out of four GLB voters in the 1996 election (28%) voted Republican. The percentage of GLB voters supporting Republican candidates ranged from 39% in 1990; 23% in 1992; and 26% in 1994.
- Fourth, the data from the four election cycles can be seen as a time series, and this review confirms a steady growth in the self-identification rates of GLB voters.

Implications for national Democratic and Republican party organizations, as well as for local GLBT political organizations around the country, are drawn at the end of the paper.

This report clearly shows that — in the aggregate — there is a definable GLB vote in House races. In its conclusions, the report reinforces and builds on previous work that has shown an identifiable GLB vote in Presidential elections. Research in the past decade reveals that a definite GLB electorate exists.<sup>2</sup> This research shows an identifiable and statistically significant vote, linked to sexual orientation, at the local and national levels.<sup>3</sup>

Studies of exit poll data also reveal GLB voters to be typically “more liberal” than their education and income characteristics might predict; to be concentrated in urbanized areas, though not necessarily in the very largest cities;<sup>4</sup> and, to harbor a significant Independent streak. This is true even though a majority of the GLB vote is identified as Democrat and, regardless of affiliation, has shown a willingness to cast its ballots for Republican candidates (at a higher rate than choosing Republican registration). This recent research on GLB voters establishes that just as race, religion, income, education and geography have all been identified as factors influencing voter choice, analysts must now add sexual orientation to these categories.

# Methodology

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**T**HIS REPORT IS BASED ON election day exit poll data collected by the Voter News Service (VNS) on behalf of the commercial television networks, CNN, and the Associated Press. It analyzes the responses of voters who self-identified as "gay," "lesbian," or "bisexual" on confidential exit poll questionnaires. The analysis rests primarily on pure descriptive statistics, and if other techniques are used in the discussion of voter turnout or other matters, these techniques are explained as part of that analysis.

In every national election between 1990 and 1996, Voter News Service (VNS) and its predecessor, Voter Research and Surveys (VRS), has included a question that in some form allows voters who are gay, lesbian or bisexual to self-identify as such.<sup>5</sup> Because the VNS/VRS data are compatible year to year, they not only allow for an analysis of each election, they also present an opportunity to identify trends and changes in the GLB vote over time.

Still, differences do exist among the data sets from year to year, and these differences affect the size and quality of each data set. The GLB sample sizes among the four VNS/VRS data sets vary from election to election. This happens for several reasons: the number of questionnaires (surveys) on which the self-identifier question was placed differed from election to election; the total number of questionnaires distributed and used on election day analyses also varied; the exact wording of the question asked was changed in 1992 to include bisexuals; and the question was asked separately and with a different placement in 1996. These issues are detailed in Technical Addendum I. To these identifiable changes, we must add the ever present methodological issue of sample selection: the election precincts chosen by the polling agencies for the purpose of representing a specific portion of the American electorate affect how many GLB voters are reached.<sup>6</sup> These issues are dealt with at length in Technical Addendum II.

It should be noted that the availability of a check-box for GLB identification on survey forms invites voters to self-identify, but does not require them to. Therefore, the data may not represent the total number of voters who might otherwise identify as GLB. It could be assumed that earlier data in this analysis underreport the GLB constituency.

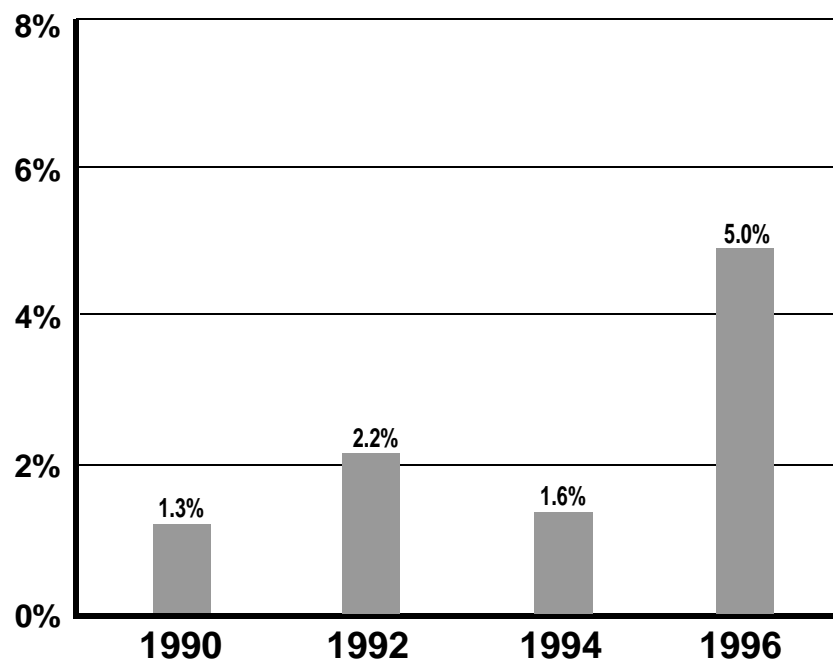
# Power At The Polls:

## Defining the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Vote in National Elections, 1990-1996

**T**HE PAST FOUR CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION CYCLES from 1990-1996 have marked a dramatic and well-chronicled change in the balance of power at the national level, and have seen the emergence of a powerful, conservative congressional majority. Ironically, these same years have witnessed another, far less noticed revolution: the emergence of a large, mobilized and definable GLB<sup>7</sup> vote.

Since the late 1980's, news organizations have attempted to capture data on voters' sexual identity. For example, in 1984, CBS News collected information on sexual identity in questionnaires distributed in the New York and California Democratic Presidential primaries. State election polls (in New York, New Jersey and California) and samples from mayoral elections (in New York City, Los Angeles, and San Francisco) have also gathered data on sexual identity. Since 1990, the Voter News Service (VNS) and its predecessor, Voter Research and Surveys (VRS), have collected information on sexual identity in a variety of questionnaires distributed nationally and at the state level, *see figure 1*. The specific statistical aspects of these four data sets and the differences between them are discussed in the Technical Addendum I to this report. Data from the four VNS/VRS surveys are sufficient in their national aggregate to allow for accurate statistical analysis and discussion.

**Figure 1** Percentage of GLB Self-Identified Voters



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE VOTERS WHO SELF-IDENTIFIED AS GAY, LESBIAN OR BISEXUAL (IN VRS/VNS QUESTIONNAIRES)

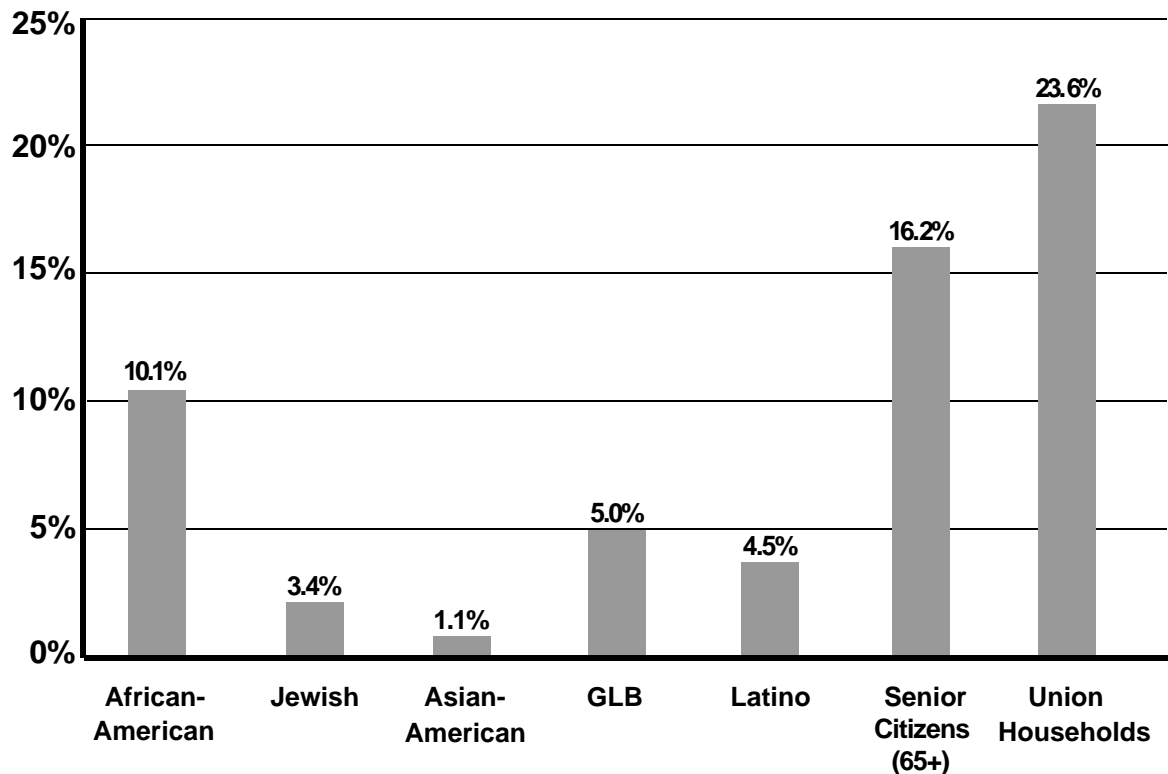
Source: VRS/VNS

# How Large is the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote?

**T**HE DATA REVEAL THAT THE IDENTIFIABLE GLB VOTE in national elections is large and growing, from 1.3% in 1990 to a high of 5% in 1996. This compares strikingly with the votes of other ethnic, religious and racial minorities, *see figure 2*. If the self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual vote remains at 5% in 1998, it will be larger than the national vote of those who identify as Jewish, Asian or Latino.

## A Social Profile of Gay,

**Figure 2** Voting Group Percentage of Total Vote in 1996



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE VOTERS WHO SELF-IDENTIFY AS A MEMBER OF EACH GROUP.

SOURCE: VNS DATA

Note: The voting groups represented here are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

# Lesbian, and Bisexual Voters, 1990-1996:

## Age, Gender, Race, Income, Geography

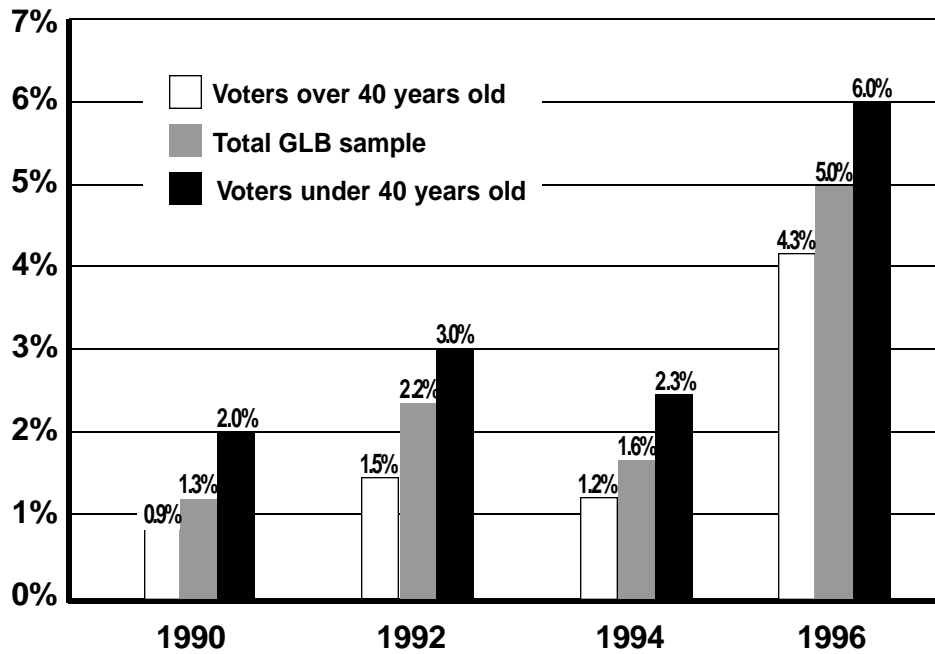
PREVIOUS STUDIES AT THE NATIONAL AND LARGE CITY LEVELS have shown that there is a coherent vote organized around sexual identity that possesses a socio-demographic profile, an agenda of specific policy priorities, and a set of predispositions toward party and government. By even the severest of standards, these are characteristics of a stable voting group.

Even when the location, election, sampling techniques, and data collection methods differ,<sup>8</sup> exit poll samples reveal a clear picture of the social characteristics of GLB voters. The GLB vote in national elections is young, male and female, racially mixed and appears to exhibit the same income distribution as found among non-GLB voters.

AGE. Age has been a consistent and potent descriptor of GLB self-identification in all exit poll data. A generational shift in values, the influence of the women's movement, the civil rights movement, the gay rights movement, and the political effects of AIDS all contribute to the relationship between age and GLB self-identification. The data show that younger men and women are more likely to identify as GLB when compared to older samples. The 1996 national data reveal that 6% of those under 40 self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Overall, 5% of voters in 1996 self-identified as GLB. The data confirm earlier results from the 1992 Voter Research and Surveys national exit poll sample which show the GLB sample to be concentrated in the group below 40 years of age and under-represented in the group above 40 years of age, *see figure 3*.

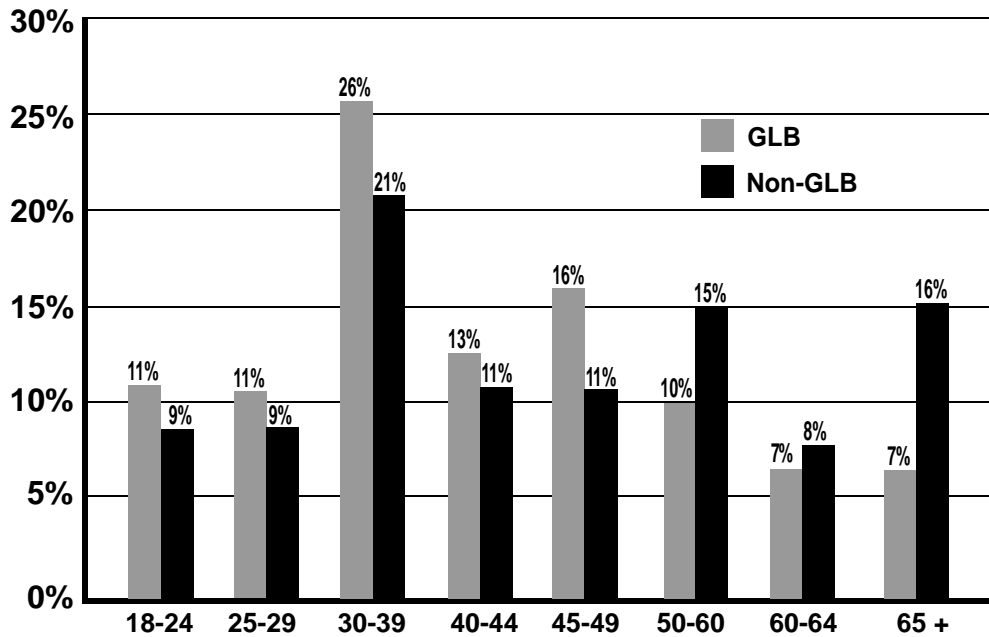
Taking into account differing voting patterns among age cohorts — seniors tend to “out-vote” their younger counterparts — there are important differences between age and self-identification among GLB voters. Both the 1992 VRS national exit poll and the 1992 *Los Angeles Times* exit poll show the GLB samples to be concentrated in the under-forty age group. This is consistent with data collected in the 1993 New York City and Los Angeles mayoral samples.

**Figure 3** Age Concentrations Within the GLB Vote



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE VOTERS IN EACH AGE GROUPING WHO SELF-IDENTIFY AS GLB  
 Source: VRS/VNS national exit polls

**Figure 4** Age Distribution of GLB and Non-GLB Voters



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE VOTERS IN EACH AGE GROUP WHO DO OR DO NOT SELF-IDENTIFY AS GLB  
 Source: VNS 1996 National Exit Poll

These patterns are also reflected in the data on congressional elections. When the 1996 national exit poll samples are broken down into eight age categories, the GLB sample skews toward the younger groupings while the non-GLB sample tends to be older, *see figure 4*.

**GENDER.** Gender had also been an important factor in defining GLB voter groups, though its importance has declined in recent years. Males initially composed a much larger portion of the self-identified GLB vote than females. In more recent samples, where the sample sizes of both males and females are greater and where the total sample size is greater, the differences in the representation of gender have not been as pronounced. In the 1990 congressional elections sample, women represented 41% of the total GLB vote. By 1992, women composed 47% of the GLB sample. In the 1993 New York City General Election sample, women were 42% of the vote. One factor that contributed to an increase in female representation in the overall samples was inclusion of the word "bisexual" in the self-identification indicator. Some studies have shown that when offered the option, women choose the label bisexual in higher numbers than do men.<sup>9</sup>

**RACE.** On the other hand, race has not been a factor in who self-identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, especially after 1992. Early data from the 1980's did generate a concern that racial minorities were being under-represented within the population that self-identified as GLB voters. More recent data, however, display less skewing toward or away from any one racial grouping. Percentages of African-Americans self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, at least in medium and large cities, have begun to mirror the percentage of African-American voters in the overall voting population. A sample of urban voters drawn from sample precincts of the 1992 VRS exit poll in cities of 50,000 or greater, for example, showed that 17% of self-identified GLB voters were African-American. This rate was comparable to the 16% overall African-American voter representation in the entire sample in those precincts. Similarly, Latino, Mexican, and Hispanic voters comprised 5% of the GLB subset in 1996, comparable to their 5.6% proportion of the total 1996 electorate. As is the case with women, changes in data instruments and social context has brought the GLB sample among people of color closer to their proportion in exit polls in general. However, this fact does not mean that people of color are voting in proportion to their general demographics or even their registration rates.

**INCOME.** A review of the exit poll data on GLB voters from 1990-1996 reveals little difference between the overall sample of voters and GLB voters in particular with

respect to income.<sup>10</sup> For example, in 1990, 5% of voters reported income of \$100,000 or more; 3% of the GLB voters reported that level of income. By comparison, 38% of all voters reported income \$29,999 or under in 1990; while 43% of GLB voters reported income under \$29,999. In 1992, 12% of all voters reported income greater than \$75,000, while 7% of GLB voters reports such levels of income. And while 38% of voters in 1992 exit polls reported income under \$29,999, 51% of GLB voters reported such income.<sup>11</sup> These income patterns were virtually the same in the 1996 data. Slightly over half of the GLB voters compared to 35% of voters overall reported income under \$30,000. Meanwhile, 13% of the 1996 GLB sample reported incomes above \$75,000, while 18% of the overall sample reported the same earnings.

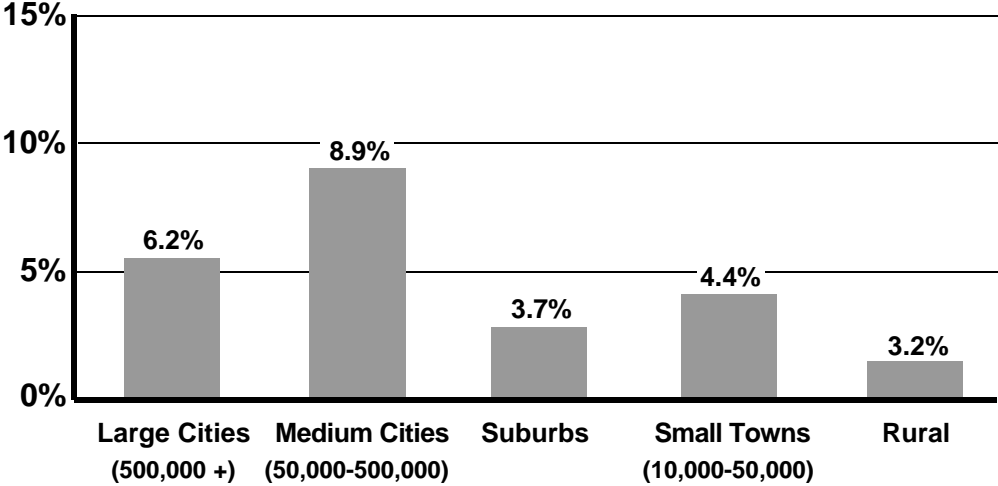
**GEOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS.** Over each of these four election cycles, the GLB vote has shown itself to not be evenly distributed geographically, but rather to be a largely urban vote, *see figure 5*. The self-identified GLB voters captured in the national 1990-1996 exit polls show a residential patterning toward metropolitan areas. These national exit polls provided a mechanism to study voting patterns against a measure of “urbanization.”

When self-identification rates are linked to the population, certain patterns immediately emerge. Overall, in each year, the largest cities tend to have high rates of self-identification. Yet it is in medium-sized cities that the GLB self-

identification rates are at the highest, at 8.2% in 1992 and 8.9% in 1996. Towns and rural areas have the lowest rates of self-identification.

# A Political

**Figure 5** The Distribution of the GLB Vote in Cities and Towns, 1996



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION GIB VOTER DISTRIBUTION ACCORDING TO REGION POPULATION.

Note: When analyzed, the data for 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1996 reveal similar distributions.

Source: 1996 VNS National Exit Poll (n=196). US Census Bureau MSAs provided the scale.

# Profile of Gay , Lesbian, and Bisexual Voters:

## Party Affiliation and Ideology

**A**S THERE IS A SOCIAL PROHIBITION AMONG GLB VOTERS, there is also a political profile. As a group, these voters were two and a half times more likely to be registered Democrat rather than Republican — 50% to 18% in 1992, and 56% to 26% in 1996 — a discrepancy far larger than would be expected given other social characteristics such as income and education, *see figure 6*. Only African American (72%) and Jewish (58%) voters and those at the bottom of the income and education scales had higher Democratic identification rates in 1996.

By 1996, the percent of GLB voters caught in the exit polls who identified with the Democratic party had risen to 56%, a rate of identification higher than that of union members or Latinos.<sup>12</sup> Identification with the Republican Party had also increased between 1992 and 1996 among GLB voters with over 25% choosing Republican as their party identification. That year, the "independent" label drew relatively little response, demonstrating the GLB vote's overall shift toward

**Figure 6** Party Identification by Sexual Identity  
1990-1996 Congressional Elections

		1990	1992	1994	1996
GLB VOTERS	Democrat	48%	50%	67%	56%
	Republican	23%	18%	6%	26%
	Independent	30%	22%	22%	15%
	Other	0%	9%	5%	4%
NON-GLB VOTERS	Democrat	37%	38%	35%	41%
	Republican	34%	35%	36%	33%
	Independent	28%	23%	25%	21%
	Other	0%	4%	4%	4%

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE GIB OR NON-GIB VOTERS WHO IDENTIFY WITH EACH POLITICAL PARTY

Source: VNS National Exit Polls Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to round off error.

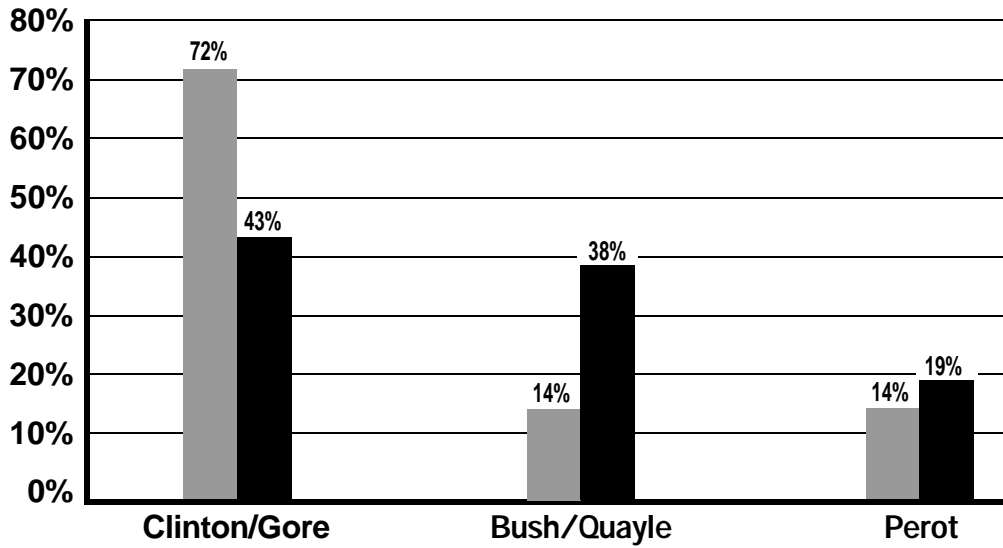
partisan politics. As a rule, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals are more likely to chose “liberal” or “moderate” as their ideological designation rather than “conservative”. In fact, about half of the total VRS 1992 GLB sample nationally identified as liberal, with another 42% terming themselves moderate, and only 8% identifying as conservative. In 1996, the self assessment among GLB voters was 47% as liberal, 37.0% as moderate and 16% as conservative. Within cities of populations sized 50,000 or more, about 43% of GLB voters identify as liberal and half as moderate, while only 20% of non-GLB voters identify as liberal.

Given the party and ideological identities of GLB voters, it is not surprising that they supported Clinton in both the 1992 and 1996 presidential elections — and by substantial margins, *see figure 7*. In 1992, 72% of GLB voters chose Bill Clinton; 14% voted for former President Bush; and 14% voted for Ross Perot.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the combination of numbers and coherence of the GLB vote made for an important ingredient in President Clinton’s electoral coalition.

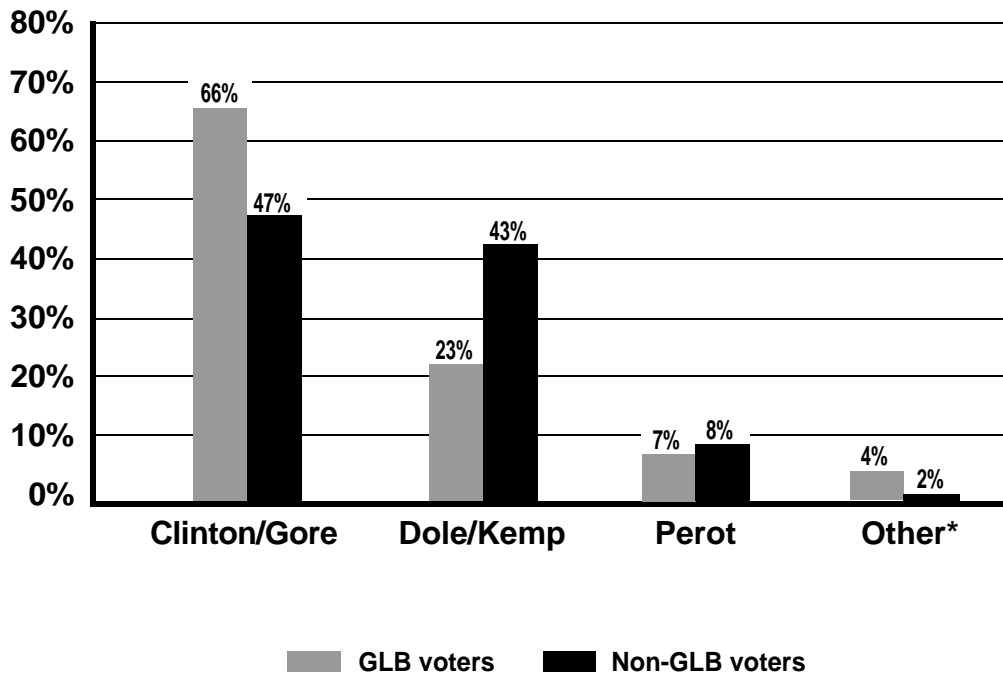
Similarly, in 1996, the overwhelming majority of self-identified gay men, lesbians and bisexuals voted to re-elect President Clinton and Vice-President Al Gore. With a national self-identification rate of about 5%, a majority of the GLB vote in 1996 (66%) went to Bill Clinton and Al Gore, and 23% went to former Senator Robert Dole and his running mate Jack Kemp. This pattern of the sexual identity vote being linked to the Democratic Party (or distanced from the Republican Party) carried through from the presidential level in 1996 and 1992 to the House district races.

**Figure 7** The Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Vote in Presidential Elections

**1992**



**1996**



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE GLB OR NON-GLB RESPONDENTS WHO VOTED FOR EACH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

\*Other includes, most importantly in the West, the Green Party.

Source: VRS 1992 National Exit Poll and VNS 1996 National Exit Polls.

# Tracking An Electorate:

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## A Chronology of the Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Vote in Congressional Election Cycles, 1990-1996

**B**ETWEEN 1990 AND 1996, the majority of self-identified gay, lesbian and bisexual voters cast their ballots for Democratic House candidates in all four national elections, *see figure 8*. This is not surprising. As noted above, and at least since national exit poll data on a GLB vote has been collected, GLB voters have tended to register as Democrats and vote for Democratic candidates in Senate, mayoral and presidential elections. This pattern is strong enough to be statistically significant in at least three of the last four national congressional elections and can be understood most clearly by contrasting GLB voters to non-GLB voters in each congressional election. In addition, Democratic congressional candidates have actively sought the GLB vote in many districts; the Democratic Party nationally has welcomed GLB participation and incorporated support for GLB rights into its national presidential platforms; and the party apparatus at the national and state levels has also opened wide to involve GLB Democrats.

What is equally noteworthy is the significant percentage of GLB voters who vote Republican even though they do not register as such. In 1990, 39% of the GLB voters in congressional elections voted Republican; in 1992, the percentage was 23% and in 1996, the percentage was 28%, *see figure 8*. Unlike their heterosexual counterparts, GLB voters vote Republican with far less intensity. Yet, the pattern of voting from 1990 to 1996 shows that the GLB vote does move and shift and is likely to respond to what each party is doing on issues of importance to the GLBT community.

In addition, prior to the rebalancing in Congress which the 1994 elections achieved, GLB voters tended to live in House Districts represented by Democratic members, *see figure 9*. Again, this is not surprising since self-identification rates for GLB voters tend to be higher in urbanized areas, and urbanized areas tend to send Democratic representatives to the House. The fact that a majority of GLB voters lived in Democratic districts also meant that their member of Congress was more likely to support both the 1990 budget bill (which so annoyed more

**Figure 8** Sexual Identity and House District Elections: 1990-1996

Party of House Candidate Selected by Voters<sup>a</sup>

	Party of Candidates	1990 <sup>b</sup>	1992 <sup>**</sup>	1994 <sup>**</sup>	1996 <sup>**</sup>
GLB VOTERS	Democratic	61%	77%	73%	72%
	Republican	39%	23%	26%	28%
NON-GLB VOTERS	Democratic	54%	53%	46%	50%
	Republican	46%	47%	52%	50%

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE GLB OR NON-GLB VOTERS SELECTING DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN CANDIDATES

Differences between GLB and Non-GLB voting patterns significant at: \*\* = <.001 \* = <.01.

<sup>a</sup> Independent and third party candidates excluded. <sup>b</sup> "Bisexual" category not accounted for in 1990 surveys.

Source: VRS/New York Times National Election Exit Poll, 1990; VRS National Exit Poll, 1992; VNS National Election Poll, 1994, 1996

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to round off error.

conservative members of the Republican Party) and the 1993 Clinton budget which raised taxes on upper income groups. After 1994, a growing number of GLB voters resided in districts with Republican members of Congress.

The different electoral preferences between GLB and non-GLB voters can be seen in *figure 8*. Perhaps the most interesting of the cycles was the 1990 House race. While sexual orientation described important differences in voting patterns in the 1992, 1994, and 1996 House district races, the difference between GLB and non-GLB voters in 1990 House election was not statistically significant, *see figure 8*. In part, this lack of intense difference between GLB and non-GLB voters in 1990 may be a result of continuing patterns from the past. Overall voting patterns in House district elections had not yet broken with the past Democratic dominance of the Congress — especially the House. Latinos, independents, union households, and Jewish voters, while often moving between the parties in presidential elections had nevertheless stayed with the Democratic congressional coalition. This changed in 1994 among those who turned out to vote, *see figure 11*.

Another factor in this outcome may have been a perception that the Bush Administration was less hostile toward issues important to gay men, lesbians and bisexuals than the Reagan Administration had been. After all, Bush had signed the Hate Crime Statistics Act, which required national data collection on bias crimes including those based on sexual orientation. He had supported and signed the Ryan

**Figure 9**

**Party of Incumbent House Member  
and Sexual Identity  
of Constituent**

		GLB			
Party of Incumbent		1990	1992	1994	1996
Democratic		61%	61%**	71%	49%**
Republican		39%	38%	30%	51%

		NON-GLB			
Party of Incumbent		1990	1992	1994	1996
Democratic		54%	50%**	59%	36%**
Republican		46%	49%	41%	64%

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE GLB AND NON-GLB VOTERS WITH EITHER DEMOCRATIC OR REPUBLICAN INCUMBENT HOUSE MEMBERS

Note: The 1992 results may not add up to 100% because redistricting merged many congressional districts in the East resulting in two incumbents, possibly of different parties.

Chi Square test of whether the difference between the GLB and Non-GLB samples is significant

\* significant at .01

\*\* significant at .001

Source: VNS/VRS data

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to round off error.

White AIDS Care Act, despite resistance from more conservative members of his party, and he had signed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which covered people with HIV. Indeed, in 1990, the difference between GLB and non-GLB voters' approval rating for President Bush was only 9%.

Although the partisan leaning toward the Democrats among GLB voters was less potent in 1990 than it was in any of the other three congressional elections we examined, the underlying policy values of GLB voters still showed a strong predisposition toward the Democratic Party. GLB voters favored increased spending on education and health programs — issues typically associated with Democratic House candidates. In addition, voters were less interested than the overall sample in measures to control the budget deficit. GLB voters in 1990 also indicated by wide margins their belief that the Congress would make better decisions on the federal budget than would President Bush. Non-GLB voters in 1990 also tended to trust

Congress with budget decisions, but by a smaller margin.<sup>14</sup>

Whether these 1990 voting characteristics can all be attributed to sexual identity or other factors is thrown into doubt when the balloting of GLB and non-GLB voters is broken down against a scale of urbanization. In 1990, there is virtually no difference in voting patterns in House district elections between GLB and non-GLB voters in cities of 50,000 or more. In fact, it appears that non-GLB voters cast their ballots for Democrats at slightly higher rates than did GLB voters, though the margins of error are greater than the difference. Given other differences, the high rate of support for the Democratic Congress among the GLB vote in cities can be most persuasively ascribed to an "urban vote" in 1990, a portion of which included GLB voters.

When the four congressional elections between 1990 and 1996 are reviewed, however, one of the important differences that appears between GLB and non-GLB voters is the significance of the 1992 elections. Although the 1994 congressional election marked more of a "critical" ballot for most of the country, it was the 1992 election that polarized the GLB vote, at both the presidential and congressional levels, making it heavily democratic.

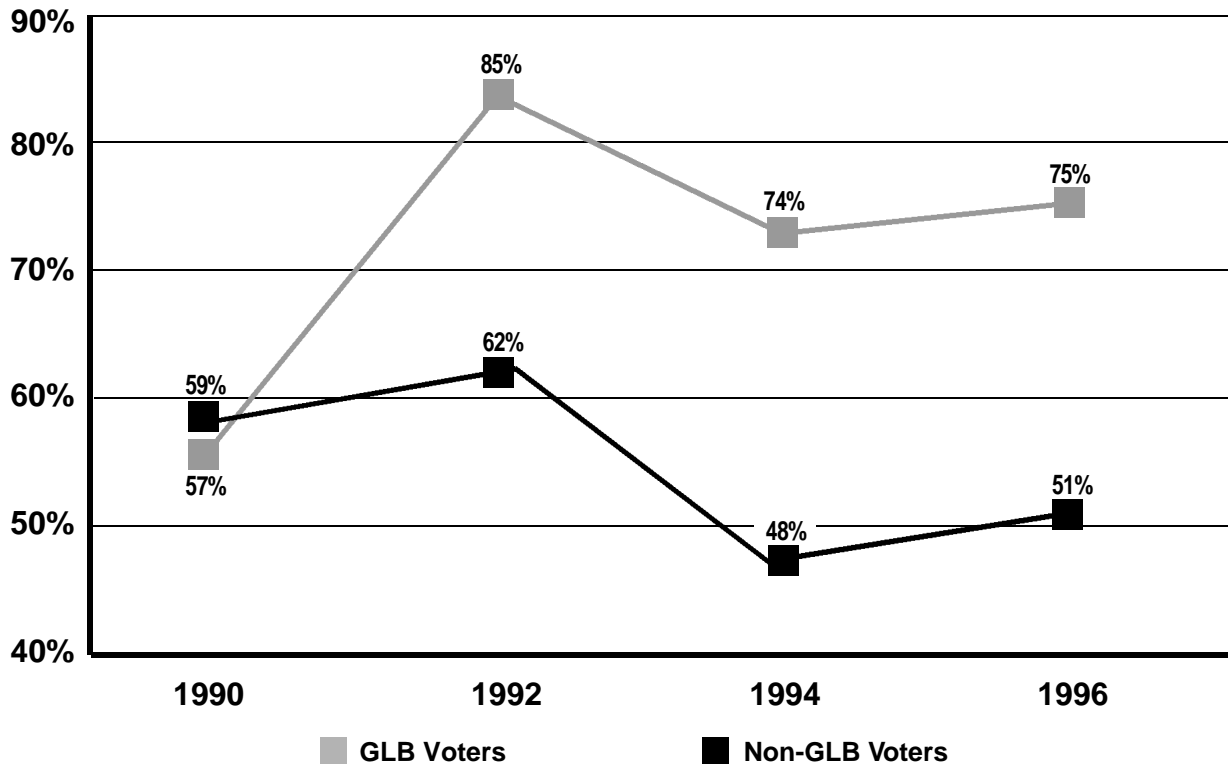
In the 1992 House races, non-GLB voters cast their ballots in almost the exact same proportion by party as they had in 1990: approximately 53% for Democratic candidates and 47% for Republicans, *see figure 8*. By comparison, in 1992, GLB voters cast their ballots for House Democrats by a margin of 77% to 23% — substantially beyond their margin of 61% Democrat to 39% Republican in 1990. This is a far stronger margin than GLB voters exhibited in either the 1992 or 1996 presidential elections.

In cities, this pattern was even stronger. A full 85% of urban GLB voters supported Democratic House candidates in 1992, an increase of over 25 points from the 1990 base of support in urban GLB communities. Their non-GLB counterparts jumped only 3.4 points over the 1990 Democratic urban base, *see figure 10*. A portion of this change in the GLB vote may have resulted from an overall increase in voter turnout — especially among younger voters. All voters are more likely to participate in presidential elections than in "off-year" congressional votes.

Among GLB voters, Bill Clinton had coat-tails and his candidacy had an identifiable effect on the GLB vote in House elections. This dramatic increase in support for House candidates among GLB voters in 1992 was reflected in only two other identifiable voter groups: African-American and Jewish voters, *see figure 11*.<sup>15</sup> That only GLB, Jewish and African-American voters increased their support for House Democratic candidates in 1992 indicates how alienated these traditional liberal voting groups were from the Reagan-Bush Administration. Clearly the deliberate politicization of sexuality at the 1992 Republican National Convention also had an impact.

Increased GLB support for Democratic candidates in 1992 may also reflect the Clinton-Gore campaign's cultivation of the GLB community, a first in national politics; and the Democrats' election year emphasis on health care. On election day in 1992, 34% of GLB voters indicated that "health care" was an important issue in making their voting decisions — over twice the rate of non-GLB voters. The widespread perception of indifference toward HIV

**Figure 10** The GLB and Non-GLB House Vote in Urbanized Areas  
Population 50,000 or greater



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE GLB AND NON-GLB VOTERS WHO VOTED FOR DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES IN HOUSE ELECTIONS  
Source: VRS/VNS Data

during the twelve years of the Reagan-Bush Administrations had taken its toll; only the performance of the economy was as significant an issue to GLB voters (27%) that year.

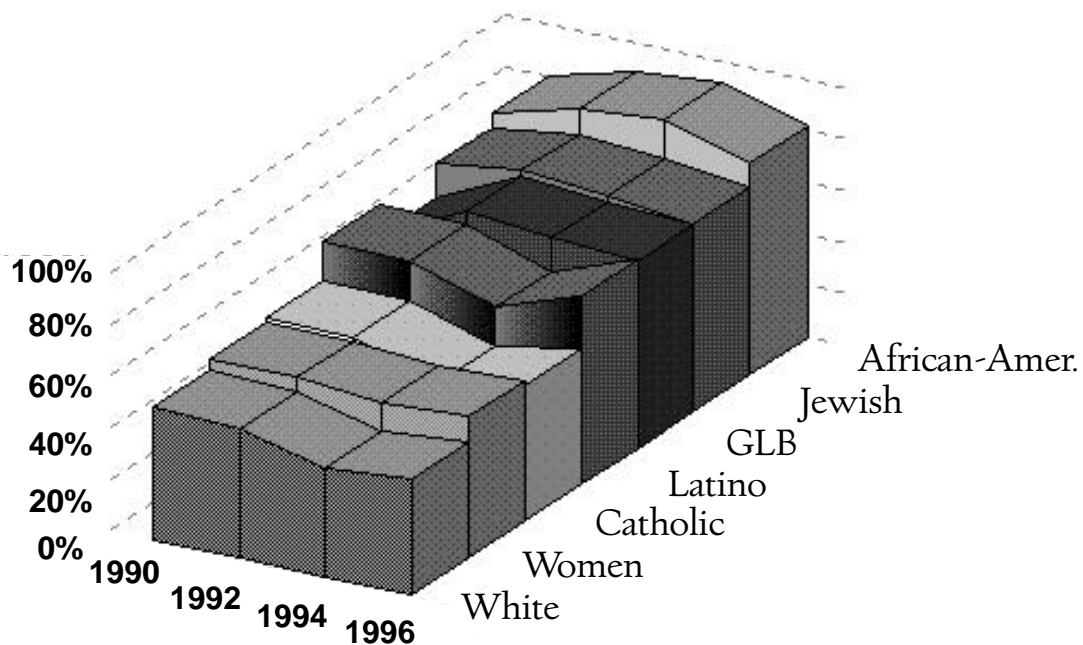
The political and policy issues that polarized (and mobilized) the GLB vote in 1992 for both Clinton and Democratic House candidates did not have the same effect on most other voters. Latinos, Catholics, women, men, and white voters all either sustained their rate of support for Democratic House candidates in 1992 or moved slightly toward Republican candidates.

The “off-year” congressional elections in 1994 were a watershed in American politics. The concerted effort of Republicans to seize on subtle underlying trends in House district voting patterns and push for a clear majority in the Congress succeeded in changing House leadership from Democrat to Republican. The victory was in part a result of a precipitous decline in

turnout among groups that traditionally vote for Democratic House candidates. GLB voters were not immune to this trend.

Among GLB voters who went to the polls, the assertive Republican campaign of 1994 had the effect of sustaining a pro-Democrat voting pattern. Meanwhile, support for Democratic House candidates dropped by over 10% among Latino voters, male voters, and Catholics, and nearly 8% among white voters. Indeed, "angry white males," as the media framed these voters, cast their ballot for Republicans at a 62% rate. Even white women voted Republican at a 53% rate in 1994.

**Figure 11** Group Support in House Elections



VOTER C ATEGOR Y	1990	1992	1994	1996
White	52%	50%	42%	45%
Women	55%	56%	53%	55%
Catholic	57%	57%	46%	53%
Latino	72%	72%	61%	74%
GLB	61%	77%	74%	72%
Jewish	74%	79%	76%	73%
African-American	80%	89%	92%	82%

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE WHO V OTED FOR DEM OCR AIS

Note: Group categories are not mutually exclusive Source: VRS/VNS data

Both GLB and non-GLB voters who cast their ballots that year understood that the congressional election was an important referendum not only on Clinton's performance in office, but on the general direction of the country. In response to the standard question "Is the country going in the right direction?", GLB respondents said "yes" at a margin of 58% to 42%.<sup>16</sup> The non-GLB sample was much less sanguine: only 40% thought the country was on track. These attitudes were reflected in the vote. GLB voters who went to the polls maintained their support for Democratic House candidates at almost the same rate as in 1992, and GLB voters under forty years of age gave even stronger support to Democratic House candidates.

This margin of GLB support for the Democrats illustrates the strength of the link between GLB voters and the Democratic party. Despite a wide perception in the GLBT community that Clinton had abandoned them in matters such as the armed forces' "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Pursue" policy toward homosexual members of the services, GLB voters still expressed general support for Clinton. Nearly one-third of the GLB sample reported casting their ballot to "support Clinton" while only 17% of non-GLB voters answered this question in the same manner. Indeed, 28% of non-GLB voters in 1994 said they cast their vote "to oppose Clinton" — a question which garnered a negligible reaction from GLB voters. Most interesting, when voters leaving polls on election day in 1994 were asked whether they wanted a President and a Congress of the same party, there was again a stark difference between GLB and non-GLB voters. By a margin of 82% to 18%, the GLB sample indicated that they wanted both the executive and legislative branches to be of the same party. The non-GLB sample agreed, but at a margin of only 61% to 39%. Both the presidential and House district campaigns of 1992 had introduced an important change in the expectations GLB voters had for political inclusion, and sealed their strong commitment to Democratic candidates in House district elections. If the 1994 election was viewed as a repudiation of Clinton by many in the media, it was not so for GLB voters.

The changes in policy and national direction that followed the 1994 congressional elections were not lost on GLB voters in 1996. They switched from an optimistic pattern of balloting in 1992 and 1994 to a defensive mode in 1996. When asked if they wanted the Congress and the President to be of the same party, 63% of the GLB sample responded "Yes," down nearly 20 points from the 1994 level. There was virtually no change in the non-GLB sample. Moreover, when asked "Which Most Mattered in Your House Vote Today," both GLB and non-GLB respondents listed

“Ability to Help the District” and the “Candidates Positions on Issues” as important. Nevertheless 19% of the GLB sample said that the “Party of the Candidate” was the primary basis for their House vote. Only 12% of the non-GLB sample said the same.

The shift to a defensive mode among GLB voters was apparent in attitudes toward policy issues as well. Although reforming health care was still an important issue for gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, it ranked much lower on the 1996 issues preference scale, behind “Keeping the Economy Healthy” and “Improving Education.”

Strong support for Democratic House candidates was sustained in 1994 and 1996 among urban GLB voters. GLB voters in urbanized areas — not just the nation’s larger cities that are sometimes seen as the exclusive venue of sexual politics, but all cities and urban regions with 50,000 residents or more — voted 74% for Democratic House candidates in 1994 and 75% in 1996, further expressing a growing disparity between GLB and non-GLB voters in House elections, *see figure 10*. Nevertheless, the strong support among GLB voters for House Democratic candidates could not buck the wider trends of the 1994 and 1996 congressional elections. After the dramatic 1994 change in the total number of Republican House seats, a small majority of self-identified GLB voters were being represented by a Republican in Congress, *see figure 8*, a fact that makes GLB voters even more important in these swing districts.

# Assessing Some Trends in the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote:

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## Growth in Self-Identification, Turnout, and Differences Among GLB Voters

**W**HY HAS GLB VOTER SELF-IDENTIFICATION INCREASED? The rise in GLB voter self-identification was first suggested by local exit polls from around the country. Data from exit polls conducted during municipal elections in larger cities and some presidential primaries in the 1980's show a clear increase in the number of voters caught in exit poll surveys who self-identify as "gay," "lesbian," or "bisexual." For example, of all New York and California state voters going to the polls in the 1984 Reagan-Mondale election, only 1.2% self-identified as gay or lesbian. In 1988, 3% of New York State and 4% of California voters surveyed by ABC News in the Democratic presidential primaries self-identified as gay or lesbian. In the 1989 New York City Democratic Mayoral primary, the rate of self-identification in all races was 4% according to CBS News polls. In the same election cycle, however, VNS captured a self-identified sample of approximately 7.8%. By 1993 the rate of self-identification was about 5% in Los Angeles city — excluding the city of West Hollywood, the core of the Los Angeles area's GLBT communities.

These increases in the numbers of GLB voters who claim their sexual identities at the voting booth are not reflective of actual demographic changes in the population. Self-identification increases are likely a function of four factors: (1) the mobilization of a GLBT rights movement and the politicization of GLBT people by social conservatives; (2) a greater comfort level about sexual and gender identities among growing numbers of individual GLBT people; (3) differences among generational cohorts; and (4) several methodological improvements initiated by survey technicians.

In bringing sexual identity issues to the national agenda — and engendering widespread resistance to those policy initiatives by social conservatives — the GLBT

rights movement has created an interactive process that influences individual identity formation as well as the overall fabric of society. Thus, as the general political dialogue becomes more resonant to issues of sexual identity, the actual rates of self-identification as gay, lesbian, or bisexual have increased. Also, as voters become more familiar with exit-polling process, they become less fearful of identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual on the confidential exit poll data collection sheets.

Generational influences are also important. The first set of self-identifiers who were willing to accept the label “gay” or “lesbian” in the mid-to-late 1980’s are now approaching middle age, *see figure 4*. Behind them are younger voters for whom self-identification is a less frightening leap or who understand disclosure of their sexuality as a political tool rather than just an aspect of their private lives. Indeed, national GLB self-identification rates among voters under 40 years of age were 3% in 1992 and 6% in 1996. With no information besides simple demographics, we can expect the observed trend of a gradual increase in GLB self-identification to be sustained in the near future as the post-Stonewall and Generation-X cohorts age.

Methodological improvements have also had important effects. One example is the phrasing of the self-identifier question. The question has been asked in large scale exit polls in three ways. The earliest method involved a check-off, grab-bag option, where the voter could simply check “Yes” after a list of attributes including “Gay/Lesbian” that may apply to the voter. This allows the respondent to voluntarily self-identify, but does not require the respondent to choose “Yes” or “No,” increasing the possibility of a false response.<sup>17</sup> A second methodological change allowed for “bisexual” to be included in the “Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual” response. Just incorporating the word “bisexual” has been shown to increase the sample size — especially among women.<sup>18</sup> A third method involves posing a simple “Yes/No” dichotomy in which the respondent must choose between the two. The *Los Angeles Times* in 1993 and VNS in 1996 used this method. In 1996, VNS adopted this phrasing as a separate and better-placed question on their data sheets which some survey experts believe contributed to the high 1996 self-identification rates. In combination, these factors have contributed to a gradual increase in self-identification rates among GLB citizens on urban and national exit polls.

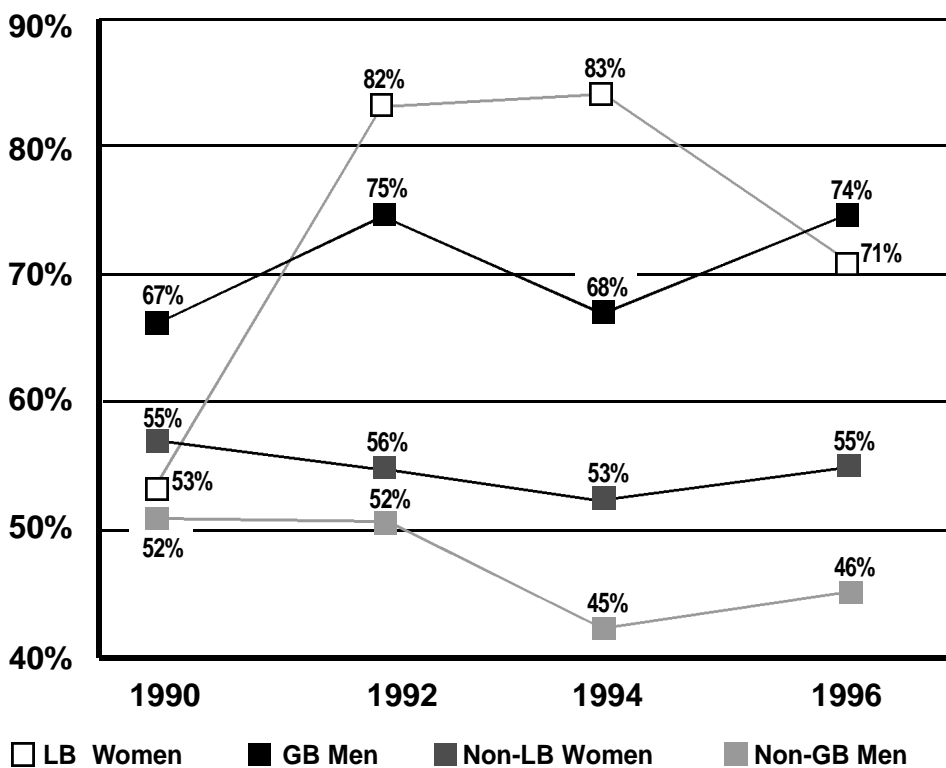
# Differences Among GLB Voters

**B**ECAUSE THE AVAILABLE DATA ON VOTING BEHAVIOR of GLB voters have been so meager in the past, there is a tendency to look at the group as singular, as if there are no defining differences based on gender. There has been some research in the past indicating differences in political values and self-identification rates between lesbian/bisexual women and gay/bisexual men, but it has not received much attention.<sup>19</sup> Although the sample sizes are small — especially in 1994 — an effort to do such analysis was made with the VNS/VRS data with respect to sex.

When the results of the four congressional elections are examined by both gender and sexual identity, differences emerge between the genders within the sexual identity cohort.

As figure 12 shows, the gay and bisexual male vote varied between 67% to 74% for Democratic House candidates, while the changes in the votes of lesbians and bisexual women were much greater — from 53% in 1990 to 71% in 1996. This is in contrast to the heterosexual sample of women in each of the four national elections which showed that women voters maintained a relatively consistent level of support for the Democrats during the 1990-1996 period. Even in 1994, heterosexual women voted no less than 53% for Democratic House candidates.

**Figure 12** Gender, Sexual Identity and House Vote



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE GROUP MEMBERS WHO VOTED FOR DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES.

Source: VNS/VRS data

# Turnout or Turnoff

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**I**N RESEARCH ON GLB VOTING BEHAVIOR, the issue of turnout has been given little attention. This is because so much energy has been expended to establish basic information in the field and because little data on GLB voter turnout exists. Without base-line, census-quality indicators of GLB residents in any specific election precinct, it has been nearly impossible to establish whether gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals “over-vote” or “under-vote” in proportion to their actual representation in the electorate. The only measures are relational, measures against the total electoral turnout.

Nevertheless, the data that we do have seem to indicate that GLB voters display the same, but more extreme, pattern of voter downturn in off-year, congressional elections. At first glance, the data in figure 1 seem to show that GLB voters had fairly high turnout rates in 1992 and 1996 and low turnout rates in 1990 and 1994. However, two factors complicate the analysis. The first is the underlying upward trend in self-identification — a trend that was described earlier, see Technical Addendum II. The second complicating factor is that self-identification rates are not objective observations but relational observations — that is, the GLB self-identification rate is a proportion of that year’s total exit poll sample. If GLB voters had the same turnout rates as all other groups over the years, then even taking into account the underlying increase in identification, there would be no downturn in the rates. The fact that there was a downturn in the GLB self-identification rate in 1994 suggests that turnout among gay men, lesbians and bisexuals was even lower than for the electorate at large.

A few other factors remain to be understood. Although the politicization of GLBT people by the social movement around sexual identity has mobilized GLB voters to identify in growing numbers, those who are willing to self-identify on voter exit polls also tend to be better educated than the national mean for their age groupings, a factor that among other portions of the population would contribute to a higher rate of voter participation. But we also know that those who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual tend to be younger, of lesser income for their years of education, and more likely to have left home than their non-GLB counterparts; these are all characteristics that would generally contribute to a lower rate of voter participation. How these factors work out is a question that is tantalizing, but difficult to analyze given data available today.

# Previewing 1998 and 2000:

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## Lessons for Democrats, Republicans, and the GLBT Community

**T**HE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS we have discussed here are different for the national Democratic and Republican parties than they are for national and local GLBT political organizations.

For the Democratic National Committee and the Democrats involved in House elections, these findings are important. GLB voters are a stable, although skeptical, part of the dwindling Democratic congressional voting coalition. As voters who are disproportionately urban and who self-identify as liberal in large numbers, they are already natural prospects for outreach by a national Democratic party whose politics are socially and economically progressive.

It is often assumed that the GLB vote — sometimes not given special attention by the national parties because it is labeled an urban vote — is concentrated in the America's largest cities: New York City, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area, or Los Angeles. While it is true that self-identified gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals tend to be urban dwellers, the self-identification rates are actually much higher in medium sized cities than in cities whose populations are greater than 500,000. In medium-sized cities, cities which may in fact have slightly more conservative voting majorities than the nation's largest cities, the GLB vote is an important swing vote in congressional districts which are either urban or which have a large portion of the district cutting into urban areas.

In addition, after the 1994 election, GLB voters were much more likely to live in House districts where a freshman Member of Congress was a Democrat. Of those voters who lived in congressional districts represented by a first-term Member of Congress, 84% of non-GLB voters had a Republican first-term member, while only 54% of GLB voters had a Republican freshman. This means that a large number of GLB voters live in swing districts that Democrats will need to preserve, even if the general vote continues to become more conservative. Identifying competitive congressional House districts where there are substantial

GLB voters and then mobilizing these voters for Democratic candidates could be a crucial factor in recapturing a Democratic majority in the House.

For the Republican National Committee, these findings again show the existence of a significant GLB Republican voting bloc. In the four congressional elections examined here, the GLB vote has averaged about 29% Republican since 1990. It is clear, however, that Republican House candidates are getting a smaller and smaller percentage of an apparently increasing vote. A portion of self-identified gay men, lesbians and bisexuals vote Republican primarily on the basis of economic and fiscal issues. For GLB Republicans, the conflict between voting on economic grounds versus identity grounds was likely most intense in the 1994 congressional elections. A Republican controlled House might have led to lower taxes and a slower growth in the federal government, but it might also have meant a greatly enhanced role for those anti-gay religious and social conservatives who have now become identified with the national Republican Party. The drop in GLB voter turnout in 1994 was actually greater among those registered as Republicans than as Democrats. It appears that self-identified GLB voters are more likely to select moderate Republicans in a campaign dominated by local district issues than to vote impersonally for Republican congressional candidates who are merely playing a local role in a nationalized congressional campaign.

For leaders of the GLBT communities, the lessons here are clear. The amount of resources and time expended on presidential races needs to be matched with similar attention to congressional election cycles. The importance of the Congress, and especially the House leadership, is now apparent to all engaged in the movement for GLBT rights. During the Reagan and Bush administrations, it was the Congress and especially the House staff that opened channels of communication to the GLBT community in Washington. The advantage of the House leadership and many committee chairs being Democratic and more GLBT friendly ensured greater response to GLBT interests. In those years, the openness of Democratic and moderate Republican leadership meant that proposals introduced by conservative Republicans (and Democrats) could be killed at committee level without the expenditure of precious political resources. It also meant that many minor policy initiatives beneficial to GLB interests could be included in omnibus bills without taking on political overtones far beyond the actual import of the policies.

The victory of a Republican House majority in 1994, and its consolidation (though weak) in 1996 has altered the avenues of influence in Washington for the

GLBT community. GLBT political organizations have been able to work with allies in Congress to make minimal legislative progress, but for the most part, the struggle has been to defeat negative legislation. It has become much more difficult to stop or attenuate anti-gay measures offered by extremely conservative members of Congress. However, the Log Cabin Republicans, for example, working with moderate Republican Committee Chairs and staff have been able to attenuate some of the more extreme measures offered by forcefully conservative Republican House members. Still, the moderate wing of the Republican party has been weakened by the Congressional leadership's moves to appease social conservatives. Given the drop in GLB voter turnout in the 1994 off-year, Congressional elections, it will take coordinated voter mobilization at the national, state and district levels to increase GLBT political participation.

For the most part, however, the change in House leadership has pushed the White House and the Executive branch to the fore as the principal institutional channel of influence for GLBT people in Washington. Despite senior appointments and advances in the policies of individual departments during the past five years, the opportunities lost when the congressional leadership and staff changed are telling. Trying to balance multiple interests from within the Democratic party and reaching out toward the center of the national electorate, the White House is sometimes perceived to have forsaken its GLBT constituents in ways that a single member of Congress could not if she or he expected to be re-elected. Nevertheless, all the data examined here show that typical GLB voters still support President Clinton in quite high numbers up until 1996.

The final conclusion must be that mid-term congressional elections can no longer be treated as secondary to other elections. The transfer of a few seats in the House — only 11 in 1998 — will result in a change in congressional leadership away from members who have publicly identified themselves as unsupportive of the lives of GLBT Americans. A systematic strategy of voter mobilization in key districts could give the emerging GLB electorate the clout that its numbers suggest it deserves.

# Technical Addendum I:

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## Quality of Data on the Sexual Identity Vote

**T**HE SOURCES AND QUALITY OF DATA on the sexual identity vote have increased significantly in the past ten years. As mentioned in the text, data generated by the election day national exit polls conducted by Voter News Service and its predecessor, Voter Research and Surveys, are now sufficient to engage in some descriptive time series analysis. Still, despite this new wealth of data, there are problems — problems not unique to the study of GLB voters. For example, the number of questionnaires on which the GLB self-identifier was placed has varied significantly between 1990 and 1996. *Table A* shows the total number of questionnaires processed in each of the four

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**Table A** Characteristics of Voter News Service Data Sets

ELECTION	1990	1992	1994	1996
Total number of questionnaires processed	19,397	15,490	11,303	16,637
Number of national questionnaires	2	3	2	4
Number of national questionnaires containing the GLB self-identifier	1	3	1	1
Total number of sheets containing GLB self-identifier	9,084	15,490	5,732	3,733
GLB “n”*	120	420	92	196
GLB vote as percentage of total [self-ID rate]**	1.3%	2.2%	1.6%	5.0%

\* Unweighted

\*\* Using VRS/VNS weighting formulae

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national exit polls, the number of national questionnaires distributed in each of the four elections and the total number of data sheets on which the GLB self-identifier question was placed. The resultant number of cases and the overall self-identification rate is also shown for each of the four national elections. Because the GLB self-identifier was placed on each of the three national questionnaires in 1992 (and thus each data collection sheet had the self-identifying questions on it) the gay and lesbian sample that year has been the largest and most reliable ever generated. On the other hand, because two different national questionnaires were distributed in 1994, and only one contained the self-identifying question, the overall number of voters polled with the GLB question was relatively low. Moreover, the 1994 exit poll relied on a base of only 11,303 processed data collection sheets. Combined, these factors produced a comparatively small GLB sample for 1994. Given the import of the 1994 congressional election, this is especially disappointing.

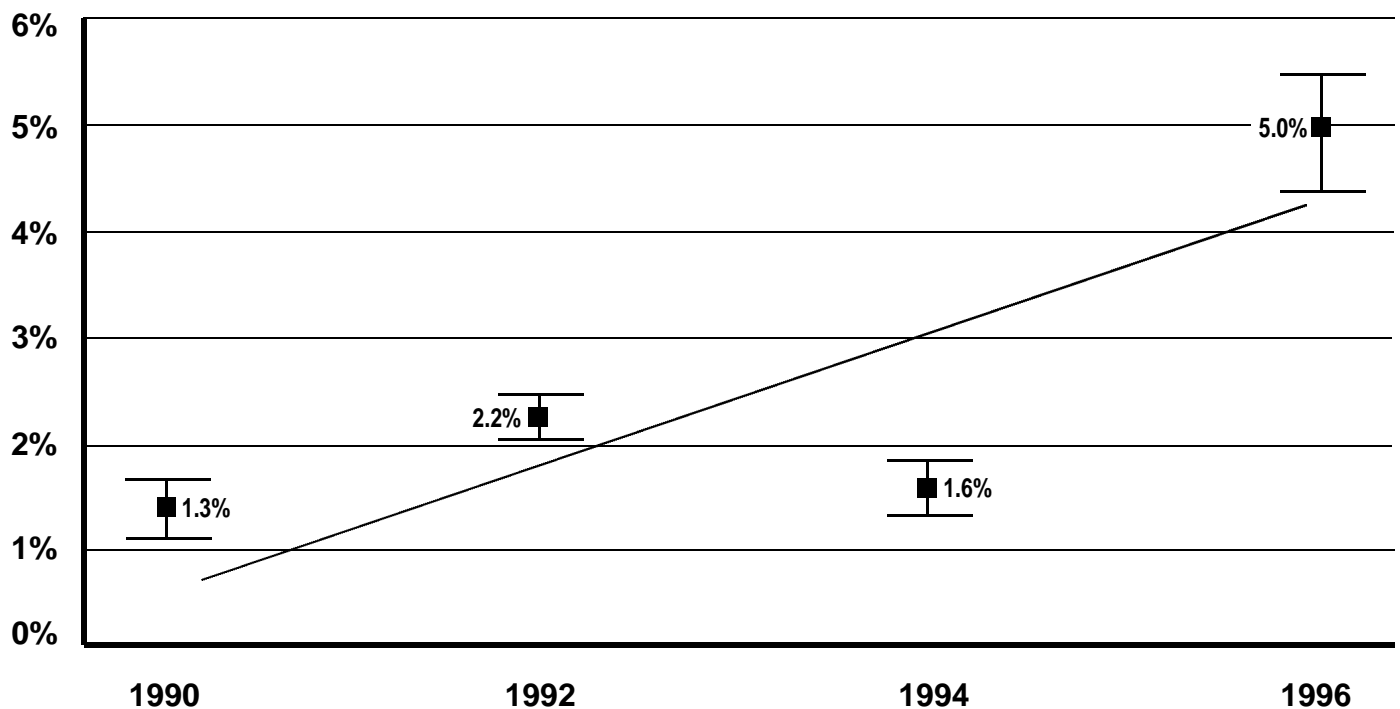
More important than the raw numbers, however, is the quality of the GLB samples gathered in each polling exercise. The sample election districts selected by Voter News Service are not chosen for a sample of differing sexualities, but for other indicators proven in the past to be potent in predicting electoral outcomes on short notice. The VRS/VNS stratification process uses known and proper statistical sampling techniques and offers weighting corrections for anomalies in geography and past voter behavior. Statistical efforts are made to control for clustering of racial minorities that may lead to incorrect voter projections. In this stratification process, the GLB sample is captured randomly. Given VNS/VRS sampling techniques and the wide swings in sample sizes, special care is required in interpreting these data. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the VNS/VRS data remain the most reliable source of randomly generated data on sexual identity and voting behavior available.

# Technical Addendum II:

## Sampling and Turn-out of GLB Voters

**T**HERE MAY BE SOME HINTS in the relative contribution of sampling and turnout to the wide swings of self-identification evidenced in the 1990-1996 VNS national election data sets. While the underlying trend over the four national elections of the 1990's shows an increase in self-identification rates — a portion of which can be ascribed to methodological improvements — the data also show a wide variance in the rate of self-identification from election to election. In the four data sets used here there is a wide variation in the self-identification rates: 1.3% in 1990; 2.2% in 1992; 1.6% in 1994; and 5.0% in 1996. A simple (OLS) regression line shows the underlying upward trend despite specific variations from year to year, see table B

**Table B** Self-ID Rates and Margins of Error



PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE VOTERS WHO SELF-IDENTIFIED AS GLB (AS PORTION OF TOTAL VOTE)

LINE IS LINEAR FIT REPRESENTING GROWING BASELINE OF THE GLB VOTE WHEN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT VARIATIONS DUE TO SAMPLING ERROR OR TURNOUT

I-BARS REPRESENT MARGIN OF ERROR

Source: VRS/VNS data

It has been assumed that an important portion of this variation is due to expected error associated with sampling. As noted above, “sexual identity” is not a category used in the stratification of the national electorate. It is the formal process of choosing sample precincts that results in a sample of sexual identity voters. It is these data that have been used in the analysis of GLB voting patterns.

It should be stated that there may be more variability in the concentration of GLB voters when compared to all voters. Given the relative concentration of GLB voters in urban areas, sampling techniques might exaggerate swings in apparent self-identification rates from election to election. Ironically, if the GLB population were uniformly dispersed throughout the United States, there would be little or no error in self-identification rates introduced by this sampling issue.

A second type of error introduced by sampling is the purely mathematical issue of the number of cases available for the analysis in each data set. *Table A* shows the number of cases available for analysis in each national election year of the 1990s. The 1992 data set has the largest sample of gay and lesbians voters (“n”=420). It remains the best single data set available to study national gay and lesbian voting behavior. The 1994 data set is the worst of the four. *Table B* indicates the range of the individual self-identification rates when the standard error associated with the “n” is incorporated. The graphic shows how much of an “outlier” the 1994 data for lesbians and gay men is, even when one type of error is accounted for. (The spread in 1996 is the greatest because the base — 5% — is the highest of the four). The figure also suggests that, were all error to be accounted for, there would still be some variance against the base trend line that could be associated with a lower rate of turnout among GLB voters in 1994 when compared to the total sample.

# Endnotes

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1. No exit poll data ask voters to self-identify as transgender. The self-identifier bisexual was added to national exit polls for the first time in 1992. References to data throughout this report are therefore made only to gay, lesbian or bisexual persons. It is important for researchers, policy makers, and journalists to note that transgender persons comprise a key part of the broader gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) communities, and that issues of gender identity at once overlap with and sometimes differ from issues of sexual orientation.
2. Kenneth S. Sherrill and Robert W. Bailey, "Poll Shows Jackson Attracted a Majority of the Gay Vote," *Washington Blade*, June 24, 1988; Murray Edelman, "Understanding the Gay and Lesbian Vote in 92," *Public Perspectives*, 4(1), 32-33; Mark Hertzog, *The Lavender Vote: Lesbians, Men and Bisexuals in American Electoral Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); John D'Emilio, *Power at the Polls: The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote* (Washington, DC: NGLTF, 1996); Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban North* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
3. Mark Hertzog, *The Lavender Vote: Lesbians, Men and Bisexuals in American Electoral Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
4. Hertzog, *ibid.*
5. Like the study of Latino/a voters and African-American voters, there is limited data on GLB voting behavior. The National Election Study, which is in depth, sometimes generating subgroup over-samples and having pre- and post-election interviews, in the end generates a small sample too small to allow for reliable generalizations to many subsectors of the electorate. Despite some change, especially among marketing firms and in the Field Poll in California, the managers of most academic and commercial survey and phone poll operations have not yet incorporated sexual identity into their standard set of socio-demographic predictors. Indeed, in most cases they have not yet begun experimenting with how the question can be posed in a sensitive, and most importantly, effective manner. As a result, most analysts have relied on the national exit-poll samples, generated by Voter News Service (and its predecessor, Voter Research and Surveys), the *Los Angeles Times* Exit Poll and the polling units of CBS and ABC News. The national VRS/VNS samples which are typically between 15,000 and 19,000 and often contain a GLB self-identifier are the most useful.  
  
Specifically, the present analysis rests on: (1) the 1990 National Elections Exit Poll data sets (Voter Research and Surveys/CBS News. These are in fact two data sets: the National data set are drawn from national sampling techniques [VRS], and the state by state data are drawn through State based sampling techniques [CBS in most cases]); (2) the 1992 Presidential and National Election Exit Poll data sets (VRS); (3) the 1994 VNS National Election Exit Poll; and (4) the 1996 VNS Presidential Exit Poll. The 1990, 1992, and 1994 VRS/VNS data sets are available through ICPSR, University of Michigan. The VNS 1996 are available through either ICPSR or the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut.
6. It is the last of these several factors that is the most troublesome methodologically. Because the samples are drawn against criteria useful to the VRS/VNS predictive models, they do not necessarily compensate for accidental over- or under-sampling of GLB voters as they do for population, party, race or urbanization. Minority precincts, for example, are deliberately over-sampled in the hope of obtaining a more reliable data set for extracted analysis but down weighted in the context of the overall national sample. Thus concentrations of GLB voters are usually hit inadvertently, if sample precincts that contain large numbers of GLB voters are chosen as representative of another socio-demographic category. There have, as a result, been anomalies in samples of GLB voters introduced at the precinct level. For example, in 1992, sampling in both Washington DC and Missouri generated unusually high self-identification rates. (In DC, for example, the self-identification rate was higher than the 16% rate in San Francisco largely because precincts in northwest Washington and St. Louis introduced unintended over-samples.) On the other hand, New York State has shown a low self-identification rate — lower than most familiar with its population and politics would expect. For this reason the integrity of the samples for the analysis of GLB voting patterns can only be assured at the national level even though the data is collected by state. There are some exceptions to this rule, as when a self-identifier is placed on state questionnaires and not national ones, as it was several times in California's state data sheets.

7. See footnote 1.
8. Mark W. Hertzog, *The Lavender Vote: Lesbians, Men and Bisexuals in American Electoral Politics*, New York: New York University Press, 1996; John D'Emilio, *Power at the Polls: Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Voters*, Washington, DC: NGLTF, 1996.
9. Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban North*, Columbia University Press, 1998, chapter 5.
10. These income data and questions about similarities and differences in income between GLB and non-GLB people are the subject of a forthcoming report to be issued by the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in November of 1998. The report is being written by Dr. Lee Badgett, a professor of Economics, University of Massachusetts, Amherst and will be released at the NGLTF Creating Change Conference in Pittsburgh, PA, November 11-15, 1998.
11. Hertzog, *op cit*, p. 82 for 1990 data; and p. 197 for 1992 data.
12. VRS 1992 National Presidential Exit-Poll, weighted
13. D'Emilio, *op cit*.
14. The question as stated:
- Who Would Make Better Budget Decisions?: (1990)
- |                    |               |     |
|--------------------|---------------|-----|
| GLB-Lesbian Voters | The President | 25% |
|                    | The Congress  | 75% |
| Non-GLB Voters     | The President | 45% |
|                    | The Congress  | 55% |
- Source: VNS 1990 National Election Poll
15. Again, it should be understood that these groups overlap at many points — that there are lesbian Latinas and gay male African-Americans — and thus juxtaposing an African-American voting block against a GLB voting block is purely an analytical exercise.
16. The difference between the GLB and non-GLB sample is statistically significant, despite the small GLB sample in 1994
17. This introduces another methodological issue regarding the actual keying-in of the data under the intense pressure of election night analysis. Though the quality control is high, and frequently cleaned up after the election, the actual keying remains an issue. Even if the question is phrased YES or NO, sometimes only the YES answer is encoded, as a market for a sample. Though this usually presents no problem, it does limit the chances of catching some error in keying.
18. Bailey, *op cit*,
19. On political values see Hertzog, *op cit*.

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