

# Out and Voting II

THE GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL VOTE  
IN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS, 1990-1998

by Robert W. Bailey, Ph.D.

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**Policy  
Institute**  
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**National  
Gay and  
Lesbian  
Task  
Force**

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# Preface

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The gay, lesbian and bisexual vote is sizable, bipartisan, and can be a swing vote in a close election. Five percent of voters in the 1996 Congressional House elections self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual (GLB)<sup>1</sup>, according to this analysis of exit polling data by Rutgers University Political Scientist Robert Bailey. Although this figure dropped slightly in 1998, the overall trend in the past decade is up. And the GLB vote is growing as more and more young people come out of the closet: in 1998 6.4% of voters under 40 self-identified as GLB.

In urban areas during the last two Congressional elections (1996-98) the GLB vote is particularly strong: nearly 9% in cities larger than half a million inhabitants, and 7.2% in medium-sized cities (50,000-500,000 population). What this means is that the national GLB vote is as critical a part of any winning campaign as the Latino vote (about 5%) or the Jewish vote (about 3%).

The gay vote is increasingly bipartisan. In 1998, one-third of GLB voters supported Republican candidates, further evidence that the GLB vote is independent, open to overtures from GOP moderates, and a key swing vote in a close election. Despite this trend, the GLB vote is still among the most loyal to the Democratic Party. Only African American (89%) and Jewish voters (79%) were more likely to vote Democratic in the 1998 Congressional House elections than GLB voters (67%). Many Democratic candidates, and an increasing number of Republican candidates, are demonstrating—through their search for gay support—the power embodied by a mobilized GLB voting block.

This revised edition of *Out and Voting* includes results from the 1998 Congressional House elections, as well as an analysis of the GLB vote in

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The GLB vote is nearly 9% in large cities and over 7% in medium-sized cities.

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1. Voter exit polls do not ask about gender identity and therefore do not capture data on transgendered voters.

California in 1998. California gay voters are even more likely to be independent than GLB voters in other states. With the anti-gay Knight Initiative and the California presidential primaries just around the corner, Bailey's examination of the California data is particularly timely.

The growing size of the self-identified GLB vote is not the only good news. The American public is increasingly supportive of equal treatment regardless of sexual orientation. In another Policy Institute publication released in fall 1999, Alan Yang of Columbia University demonstrates that opposition to lesbian and gay equality is on the decline. More than 80% of Americans consistently support equality in employment and housing, regardless of sexual orientation. And support for openly gay, lesbian and bisexual people serving in the military has climbed from 57% in 1992 to 70% of the population in 1999.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the anti-gay rhetoric of some politicians is not resonating with mainstream American voters and is increasingly out of touch with their views and aspirations.

The electoral potential of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community is real. More and more candidates are supporting equal rights and reaching out for the support of GLBT voters and activists. This potential can grow into political muscle as more and more people are emboldened to come out of the closet in voter exit polls and in the daily experience of their lives.

The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) is a think tank dedicated to delivering useful information on GLBT people and the policy issues we face. In the years ahead, the Policy Institute will continue to release reports which provide a fuller, more precise and empirically based picture of GLBT communities.



Urvashi Vaid

Director, Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

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2. Alan Yang, *From Wrongs to Rights: Public Opinion on Gay and Lesbian Americans Moves Toward Equality 1973-1999* (New York: NGLTF Policy Institute, 1999).

# Introduction

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**BY RICH TAFEL**

**Executive Director, Log Cabin Republicans**

Robert Bailey's study, *Out & Voting II: The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote in Congressional House Elections, 1990-1998*, 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 vote was recorded at 1.3% in 1990, voter self-identification increased to over 5% nationwide in 1996, dropping slightly to 4.2% in 1998. 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 numerically significant 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 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. Over the course of four Congressional elections in the 1990s, the GLB vote became increasingly more Republican, shifting from a 3-1 split between GLB Democrats and Republicans in 1992 to a 2-1 split in the 1998 Congressional House elections.

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.

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"We cannot achieve our goals by standing alone in either party, nor can we achieve our goals by blindly aligning ourselves with either party."  
—Rich Tafel,  
Log Cabin Republicans

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.

# Report Summary

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**BY ROBERT W. BAILEY, PH.D.**

**Graduate Faculty of Public Policy and Administration,  
Rutgers University, Camden**

## **Invisible No More**

In 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, long 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.

This is the second report issued by the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force on the role of gay, lesbian and bisexual voters in the national Congressional elections.<sup>1</sup> The study of a definable gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB)<sup>2</sup> vote is new among political scientists, arising only within the last ten years. In part, this is because GLB Americans are just now fully emerging as a national constituency; in part because data to track the GLB vote have 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 groups defined by race, gender, class or sexual identity.

Before the first edition of this report, most analyses of voting patterns of GLB voters had 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 GLB Americans into the armed forces, federal hate crimes legislation, 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 arena of contestation has been the Congress. We hope this series of reports—and the additional studies that other scholars are doing—will provide the data from which analyses can be made.

Using aggregate national data from news media-sponsored election day exit polls, this study analyzes summary characteristics and impacts of the GLB vote in Congressional House elections from 1990-1998. Like the first edition, this revised report looks at the GLB vote in a critical period, an era in which power shifted from a Democratic majority that dominated the House of Representatives since 1954 to a new, more conservative, Republican-led coalition. The shift effected a dramatic change in the House leadership, rendering it markedly more hostile to GLB issues, and launched the start of an era in which partisanship and ideological struggle became more intense and explicit.

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In 1998 6.4% of voters under 40 self-identified as GLB.

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Parallel to these national trends, the 1990's marked the large-scale cultural emergence of a visible, national and extremely diverse GLBT community. This report clearly documents the existence of 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<sup>3</sup> as well as an identifiable and statistically significant vote at the local, state and national levels.<sup>4</sup>

This study of the GLB vote in national elections yields six major findings:

- First, in the 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998 House elections, the GLB vote was coherent and numerically large enough to be statistically significant. In the 1990 House elections the GLB was more divided than in any other election cycle studied.
- Second, as data from 1990 to 1998 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% in 1996, and then dropped slightly to 4.2% of the electorate in 1998. (However, self-identification rates for voters under 40 years old continued to grow in 1998, to 6.4%.) This increase can be attributed to many causes, but at least one is the politicization of issues associated with sexual identity in national politics by both the movement for lesbian and gay rights and by social conservatives.
- Third, the GLB vote is an important and sizeable swing vote in Congressional Districts located in large cities as well as in medium-sized cities.
- Fourth, these data again establish that the GLB vote is bipartisan, but that it favors Democrats. Large majorities of GLB voters supported Democratic

Congressional candidates (65.1% in 1998; 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 as and vote Democratic in far higher proportion than non-GLB voters.

- Fifth, since 1992, more and more self-identified GLB voters have chosen Republican House candidates. In the 1992 election 23% of GLB voters cast their ballots for Republican House candidates. In 1994, 26% voted Republican and in 1996 28% cast their ballots for Republicans. This trend continued in 1998 with 32% of GLB voters voting Republican—approaching the documented high mark of GLB voter support for Republicans of 39% in 1990. In other words, in 1992 three GLB voters supported Democrats for every one GLB voter supporting Republicans; in 1998, the ratio of Democratic supporters to Republican supporters among GLB voters had dropped from 3:1 to 2:1.
- Sixth, the analysis of GLB Independents indicates that while they avoid being identified with a specific political party, they are much more likely to vote Democratic than their non-GLB Independent counterparts. Across the five election cycles studied, GLB voters identified as Independents approximately 22% of the time, a rate that is consistent with non-GLB Independents who averaged 24% of voters

The implications of these trends for national party organizations, as well as for local GLBT political organizations around the country, are drawn at the end of the report.

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>5</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 alongside race, religion, income, education and geography, analysts must now add sexual orientation as a factor in analyzing voter choice.

A new analysis contained in this report of California exit poll data from the 1998 US Senate and Governor's races provides similar findings: the GLB vote in California is sizable, progressive, and independent. In recent years, it has been a key constituency in the victorious campaigns of its two US Senators and its new Governor, helping to shift the balance of power in the Golden State from Republicans to Democrats. GLB voters in California will continue to play a pivotal role in the 2000 elections, helping decide who will represent California in Congress, who will reside in the White House, and whether or not California will become the 32nd state to outlaw same-sex marriage.<sup>6</sup>

# Methodology

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This 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 1998, 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>7</sup> Because the VNS/VRS data are compatible year to year, they not only allow for an analysis of each election, but 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 five VNS/VRS data sets vary from election to election. This happens for several reasons: the number of national questionnaires 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 and 1998. 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>8</sup> These issues are dealt with at length in *Technical Addendum II*. For these and other reasons, care should

be taken in analyzing results from a single year. As more and more data years are added to this series of reports, and trends emerge as consistent, the degree of error introduced by sampling will recede.

Readers should also be aware that the very nature of survey research can never do justice to the nuances of "identity." 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 under-report the GLB constituency. This assumed under-reporting led researchers to experiment with how a GLB identifier should be worded and placed on exit-poll questionnaires. Nor does self-identification specifically define what it means to be "gay," "lesbian" or "bisexual." The nuances of these identities belong to the voters surveyed and should not be imposed by the survey researcher.

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The data may not represent the total number of voters who might otherwise identify as GLB.

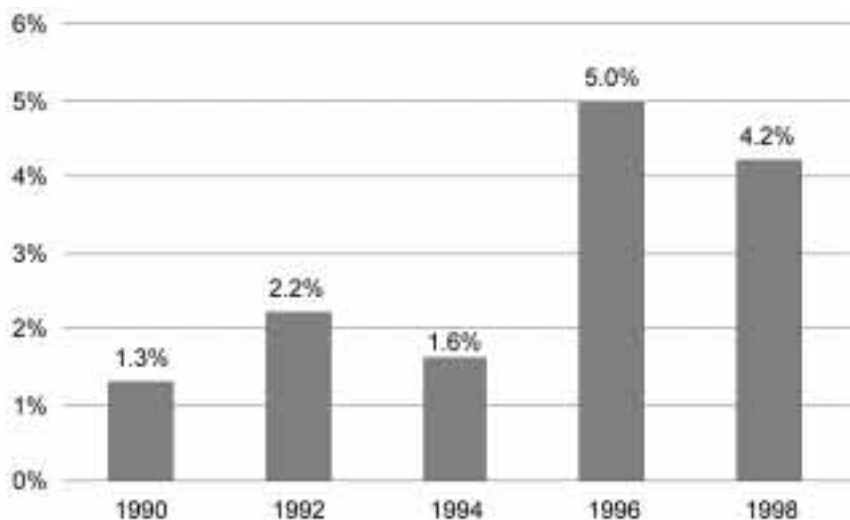
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# Power at the Polls

## DEFINING THE GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL VOTE IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS, 1990-1998

The past five Congressional election cycles from 1990-1998 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 yet unstable conservative Congressional majority. Ironically, these same years have witnessed another, far less noticed revolution: the emergence of a large, mobilized and definable GLB vote.<sup>9</sup>

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

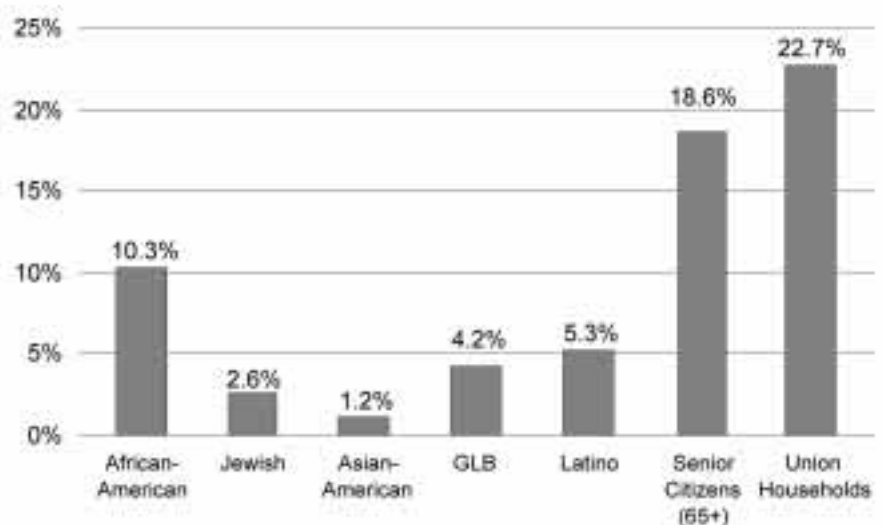


Percentages represent those voters who self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual (in VRS/VNS questionnaires).

Source: VRS/VNS National Exit Polls

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, in some cases, at the state level, *see figure 1*. The specific statistical aspects of these five data sets and the differences between them are discussed in *Technical Addendum I* to this report. Data from the five VNS/VRS surveys are sufficient in their national aggregate to allow for accurate statistical analysis and discussion.

**Figure 2: Voting Group Percentage of Total Vote in 1998**



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.

## HOW LARGE IS THE GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL VOTE?

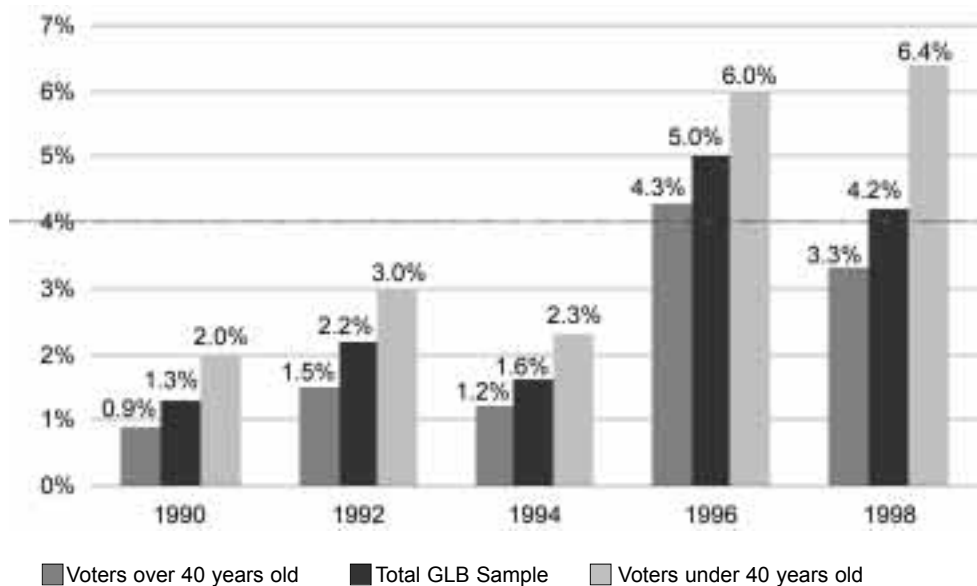
The data reveal that the identifiable GLB vote in national elections is large and growing, from 1.3% in 1990 to a high of 5% in 1996. In 1998, the GLB vote was 4.2% of the total electorate (and 6.4% of voters under 40). This compared strikingly with the votes of other ethnic, religious and racial minorities, see figure 2. If the self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual vote remains at approximately 5% in the future, it will be as large or larger than the average national vote of those who identify as Latino (5%), Jewish (3%) or Asian (1%).

## A SOCIAL PROFILE OF GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL VOTERS, 1990-1998

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>10</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 diverse and appears to exhibit the same income distribution as found among non-GLB voters.

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



Percentages represent those voters in each age grouping who self-identified as GLB.

Source: VRS/VNS National Exit Polls

### 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 politicizing 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 1998 national data reveal that 6.4% of those under 40 self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual, while overall, 4.2% of voters self-identified. In 1996, 5% of voters self-identified as GLB, while 6% of voters under 40 did so. These data from 1996 and 1998 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*.

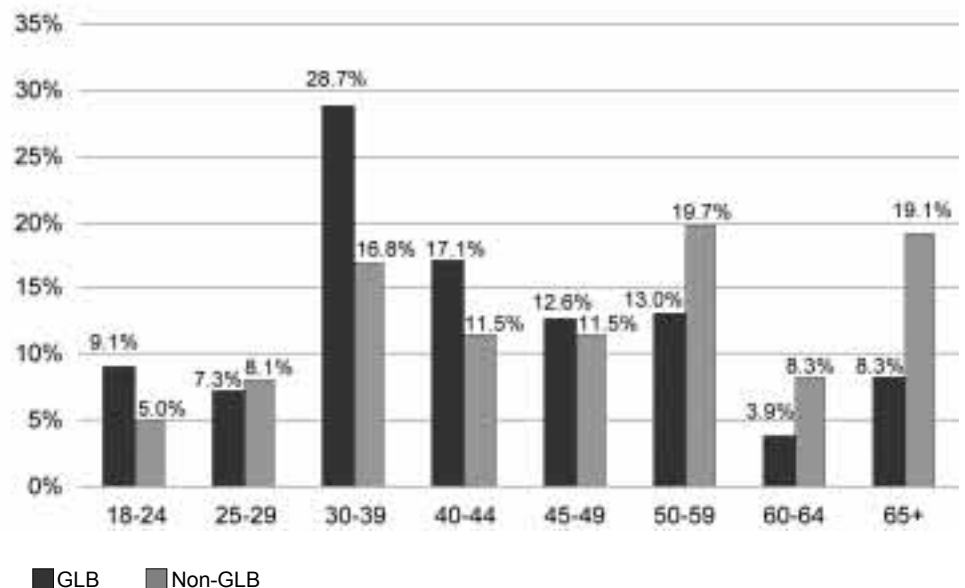
Taking into account differing voting patterns among age cohorts—seniors tend to out-vote their younger counterparts—there are important differences between age and rates of self-identification among GLB voters. Both the 1992 VRS national exit poll and the 1992 Los Angeles Times exit poll show the GLB samples to be concentrated in the under 40 age group. This is consistent with data collected in the 1993 New York City and Los Angeles mayoral samples.

These patterns are also reflected in the data on Congressional elections. When the 1992, 1996 and 1998 national exit poll samples are broken down into eight age categories, the GLB sample is disproportionately young 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 exit poll samples, where the sample sizes of both males and females are greater and where the total sample size is larger, 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

**Figure 4: Age Distribution of GLB and Non-GLB Voters, 1998**



Percentages represent those voters in each age group who do or do not self-identify as GLB.

Source: VNS 1998 National Exit Poll

General Election sample, women were 42% of the GLB 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>11</sup>) From 1992 on, "bisexual" has been included in the VNS self-identifier question.

## **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 American, 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 have 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 in general are voting in proportion to their share of the population or even in proportion to their registration rates.

## **INCOME:**

A review of the exit poll data on GLB voters from 1990-1998 reveals little difference between the overall sample of voters and GLB voters with respect to income.<sup>12</sup> However, there are consistent indications that GLB voters earn, on average, slightly less than other voters. 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>13</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.

The 1998 data also show that approximately two thirds of GLB voters report incomes in the lowest three categories (i.e. below \$50,000) while only 53% of non-GLB voters fall into the lower and lower middle categories. In 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998, the GLB sample reported household income lower than the

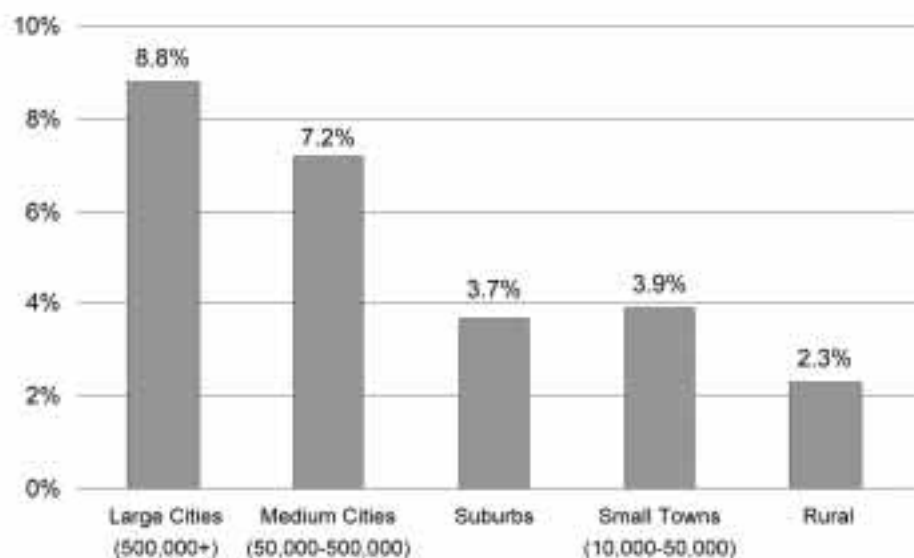
non-GLB sample to a *statistically significant degree*. A portion of this difference may be due to the fact that gay men and lesbians are more likely to live in single households—and thus only one income is included in "household income." It may also be related to the preponderance of GLB voters among younger age cohorts. Still, these data do not support the claim that gay men and lesbians earn higher incomes than do other Americans.<sup>14</sup>

## GEOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

Over each of these five election cycles, the GLB vote has shown itself to be unevenly distributed geographically, *see figure 5*. Surprisingly, this geographic distribution is not regional. In 1998, the regional distribution of the GLB sample is almost evenly divided between the West, South, East and Midwest. But the self-identified GLB samples captured in the national 1990-1998 exit polls do show a consistent residential pattern: toward urban and metropolitan areas as opposed to suburbs or rural areas.

When self-identification rates are linked to the population, certain patterns immediately emerge. Overall, in each year, the largest cities tend to have the highest rates of GLB self-identification. In 1998, 11.4% of voters in cities of 500,000 or more residents self-identified as GLB, compared to 5.4% of residents of medium-sized cities and 3.5% of small towns. Yet in some years it is in medium-sized cities (50,000 to 500,000 population) that the GLB self-identification rates are at the highest: at 8.2% in 1992 and 8.9% in 1996. Not surprisingly, towns and rural areas have the lowest rates of self-identification.

**Figure 5: Distribution of the GLB Vote in Cities and Towns 1996 and 1998 Average**



Percentages represent self-identified GLB voter distribution as a percentage of municipal population, averaged for 1996 and 1998.

Source: 1998 VNS National Exit Poll (n=218). 1996 VNS National Exit Poll (n=196). US Census Bureau MSAs provided the scale.

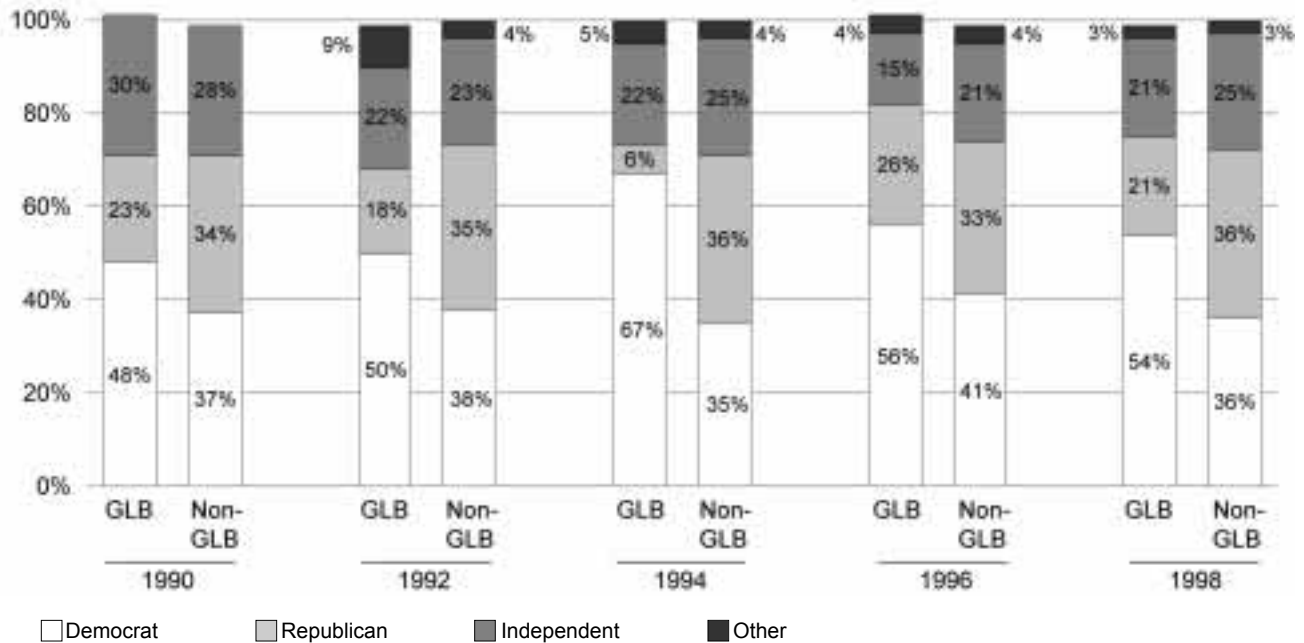
Note: When analyzed, the data for 1990, 1992, 1994, 1996, and 1998 reveal similar distributions.

# A POLITICAL PROFILE OF GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL VOTERS

## Party Affiliation and Ideology

Just as there is a demographic profile 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 Democratic rather than Republican—50% to 18% in 1992, 56% to 26% in 1996 and 54% to 21% in 1998—a discrepancy far larger than would be expected given other characteristics such as income and education, *see figure 6*. Only African American (74%), Latino (57%), and Jewish (56%) voters had higher Democratic identification rates in 1998. By 1996, the percentage of GLB voters interviewed who identified with the Democratic party had risen to 56%. This rate was even higher than households with a union member.<sup>15</sup> But identification with the Republican Party also increased between 1992 and 1998 among GLB voters, from 18% in 1992 to 26% in 1996 (though it declined somewhat to 21% in 1998).

**Figure 6: Party Identification by Sexual Identity**  
1990-1998 Congressional Elections



Percentages represent those GLB or Non-GLB voters who identify with each political party.

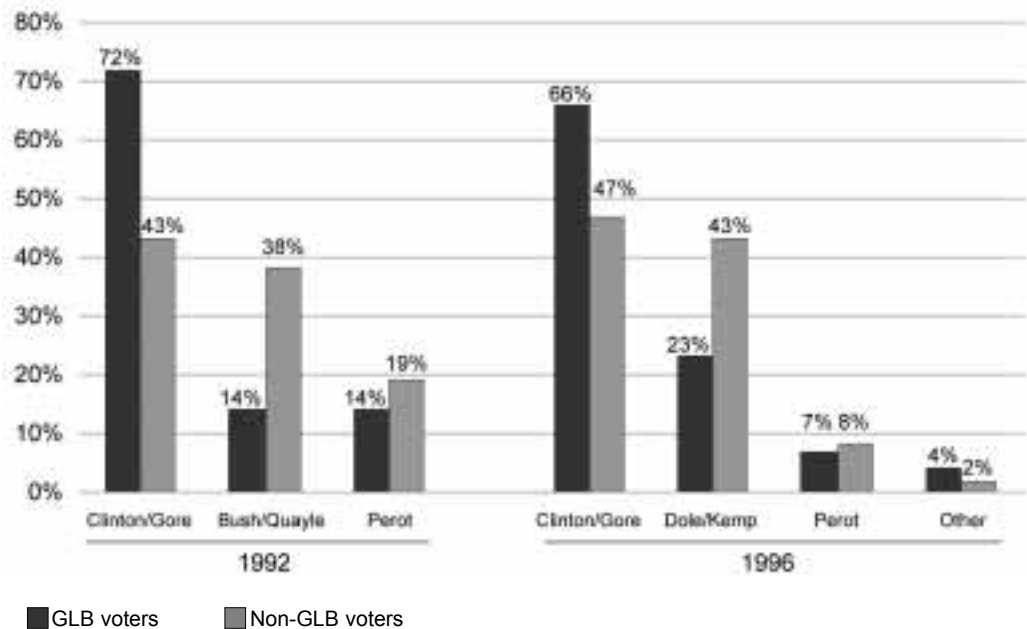
Source: VNS National Exit Polls

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

As a rule, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals are more likely to describe themselves as "liberal" or "moderate" than "conservative." In fact, about half of the total VRS 1992 GLB sample nationally identified as liberal; another 42% termed

themselves moderate, while only 8% identified as conservative. In 1996, 47% self-assessed as liberal, 37% as moderate and 16% as conservative. In 1998, the self-assessment among GLB voters was 47% liberal, 39% moderate and 14% conservative. Within cities of populations sized 50,000 or more, about 43% of GLB voters identify as liberal and 50% as moderate, while only 20% of non-GLB voters identify as liberal.

**Figure 7: The GLB Vote in Presidential Elections**



Percentages represent those GLB or Non-GLB respondents who voted for each presidential candidate.

Source: VNS 1998 National Exit Poll

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

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>16</sup> In fact, the size 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. Among the 5% of the national electorate that identified as GLB in 1996, a substantial majority (66%) went to Bill Clinton and Al Gore, with only 23% 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 1992 and 1996 to the House district races.

# Tracking an Electorate

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## A CHRONOLOGY OF THE GAY, LESBIAN, AND BISEXUAL VOTE IN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION CYCLES, 1990–1998

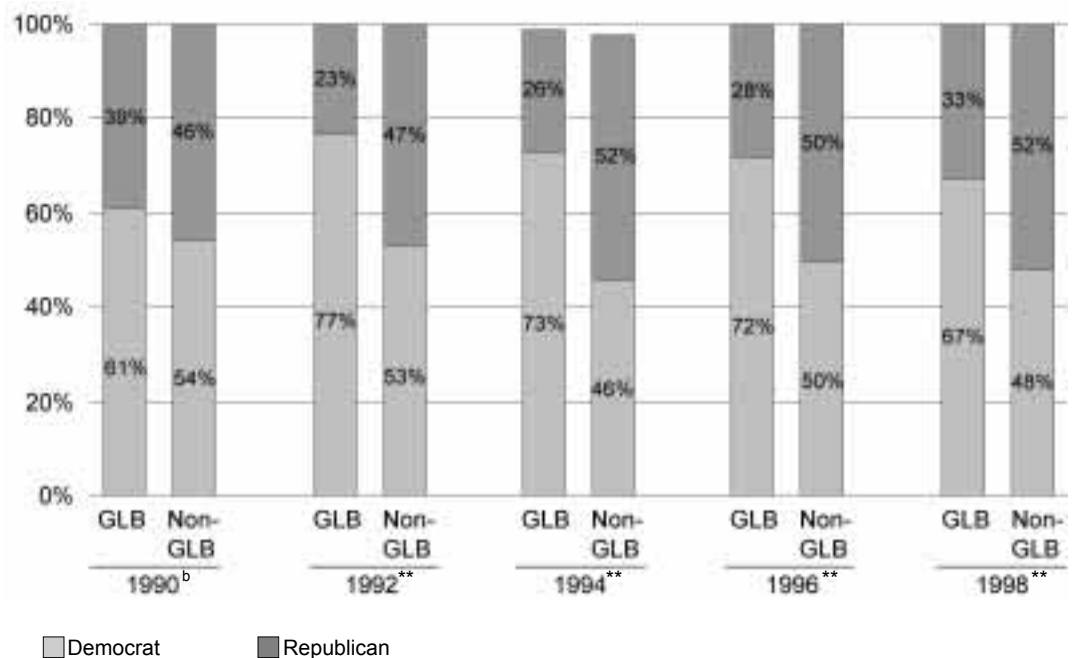
Between 1990 and 1998, the majority of self-identified gay, lesbian and bisexual voters cast their ballots for Democratic House candidates in all five national elections, *see figure 8*. This is not surprising. As noted above, and at least since national exit poll data on the GLB vote has been collected, 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 four of the last five 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.

A significant percentage of GLB voters vote Republican even though they are not registered 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%. In 1998 Republican support among GLB voters increased further, with 33% of self-identified GLB voters voted Republican, *see figure 8*. Compared to heterosexual voters, GLB voters vote Republican with far less intensity. Yet, the pattern of voting from 1990 to 1998 shows that more and more GLB voters are choosing the GOP over the Democratic candidate. 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.

Prior to the realignment of Congress that followed the 1994 elections, GLB voters tended to live in House Districts represented by Democratic members.

Again, this is not surprising since self-identification rates for GLB voters tend to be higher in urbanized areas, and urbanized areas traditionally send Democratic representatives to the House. But after the critical 1994 election, a growing number of GLB voters resided in districts with Republican members of Congress.

**Figure 8: Sexual Identity and House District Elections: 1990-1998**  
**Party of House Candidate Selected by Voters<sup>a</sup>**



Percentages represent those GLB or Non-GLB voters selecting Democratic or Republican Candidates.

Source: VRS/New York Times National Election 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.

<sup>a</sup> Independent and third party candidates excluded.

<sup>b</sup> "Bisexual" category not accounted for in 1990 surveys.

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

### The 1990 Congressional House Election

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 correlated with important differences in voting patterns in the 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998 House district races, the difference between GLB and non-GLB voters in the 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 nev-

ertheless stayed with the Democratic Congressional coalition. This changed in 1994 among those who turned out to vote, *see figure 10*.

Another factor in the 1990 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 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 preference for Democrats among GLB voters was less pronounced in 1990 than it was in the four subsequent Congressional elections examined, the underlying policy values of GLB voters still showed a strong predisposition toward positions traditionally associated with the Democratic House candidates. GLB voters favored increased spending on education and health programs, and 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 more with budget decisions, but by a smaller margin.<sup>17</sup>

Whether these 1990 voting characteristics can all be attributed to sexual orientation is thrown into doubt when the balloting of GLB and non-GLB voters is broken down against a scale of urbanization. In 1990, there was 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.

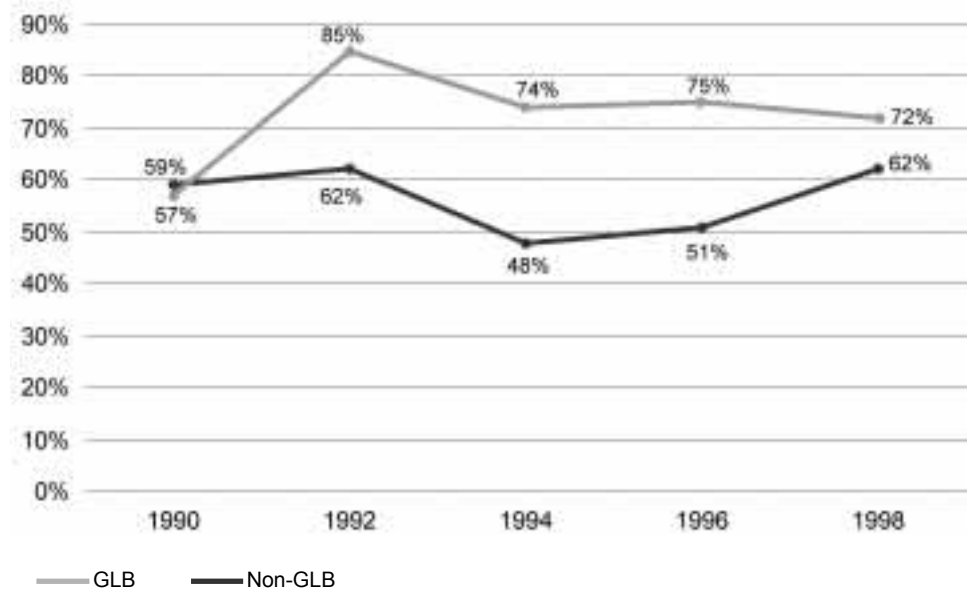
### **A Shift in 1992**

The 1992 election polarized the GLB vote at both the presidential and Congressional levels, making it heavily Democratic. Indeed, of the five Congressional elections reviewed between 1990 and 1998, the most significant differences appear between GLB and non-GLB voters in the 1992 elections. 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 sup-

ported 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 9*. 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 elections.

**Figure 9: The GLB and Non-GLB Democratic House Vote in Cities 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

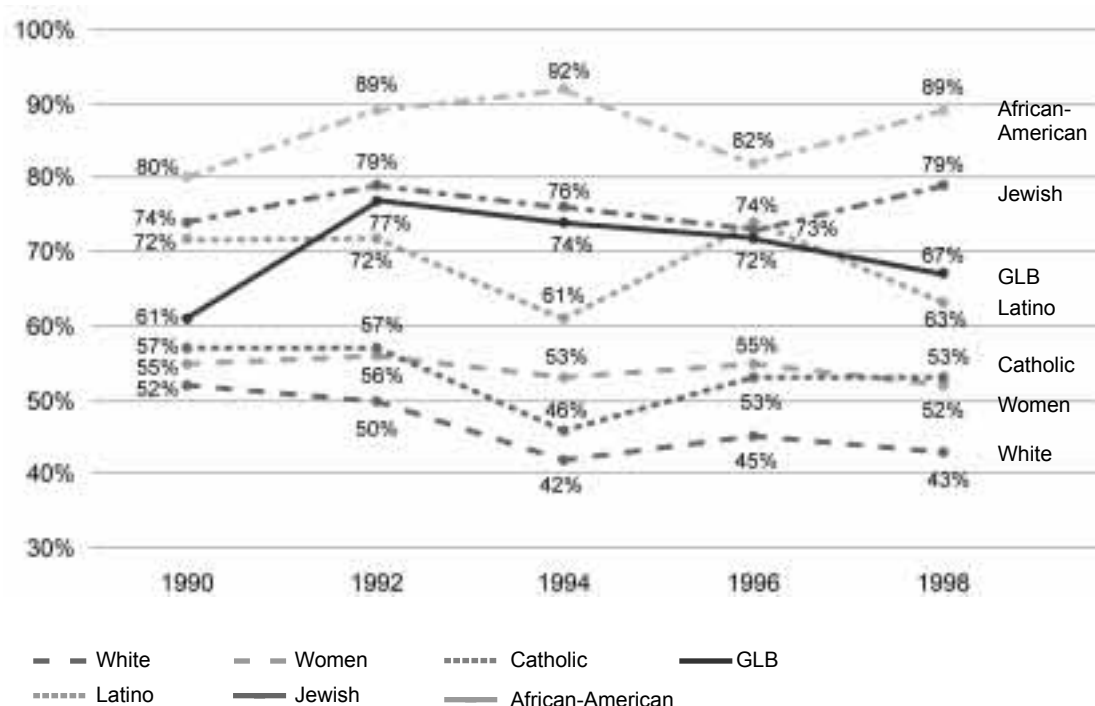
Among GLB voters, Bill Clinton had coat-tails and his candidacy had an identifiable effect on the GLB vote in House elections. This dramatic increase in support for House candidates among GLB voters in 1992 was reflected in only two other identifiable voter groups: African American and Jewish voters, *see figure 10*.<sup>18</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 had become from the Reagan and Bush Administrations. The politicization of sexuality at the 1992 Republican National Convention may also have 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 during

the 12 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.

**Figure 10: Group Support for Democrats in House Elections**



Percentages represent those who voted for Democrats.

Source: VRS/VNS Data

Note: Group categories are not mutually exclusive.

### 1994 Elections: The Republican Realignment

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 (including the Contract with America) 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.

Both GLB and non-GLB voters who cast their ballots that year understood that the Congressional election was an important referendum not only on Bill 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>19</sup> The non-GLB sample was much less optimistic: 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 40 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 1992 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 interestingly, 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.

## 1996

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 more 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 dis-

trict" 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 in which sexual politics count, but all cities and urban regions with 50,000 residents or more—voted 74% for Democratic House candidates in 1994, 75% in 1996, and 85% in 1998, further expressing a growing disparity between GLB and non-GLB voters in House elections, see figure 9. 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.

## 1998

Many of these patterns were again evident in the 1998 results. GLB voters continued to believe that the country was "on the right track" in numbers greater than non-GLB voters (69% to 61%), continued to have positive feelings toward Clinton despite the Lewinsky affair, and approved of his performance in office by a substantial margin (69%). The strong support for Democratic House candidates among urban GLB voters also continued in 1998 with 85% voting for Democratic House candidates—about 8 points higher than non-gay urban voters.

While the national survey questionnaires on which the GLB self-identifier was placed did not ask voters what issues most motivated them to vote for their House candidates in 1998, a separate VNS exit poll in California did ask both questions in regard to the state's Senate race. Again, the two most important issues for GLB voters were the economy and education. The biggest difference between gay and non-gay voters was over gun control, which was cited by GLB voters 15% of the time as important to them, while only 8% of non-GLB voters considered it important to them. Further analysis of the 1998 California data is found below.

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

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## **GROWTH IN SELF-IDENTIFICATION, TURNOUT, AND DIFFERENCES AMONG GLB VOTERS**

Why 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-identified 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% in New York City. By 1993 the rate of self-identification was about 5% in Los Angeles city—not including the city of West Hollywood, the core of the Los Angeles area's GLBT communities.

These increases in the numbers of GLB voters who acknowledged their sexual identities at the voting booth are not reflective of actual demographic changes in the population. Self-identification increases are more 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) several important methodological improvements initiated by survey strategists; and (4) differences among generational cohorts.

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 more often raises issues of sexual identity, the actual rates of self-identification as gay, lesbian, or bisexual have increased. While some in the large city press began reporting on issues of concern to GLBT people in the early 1980s, except for HIV/AIDS the national media did not confront these issues until the 1992 election. The nationalizing of policy issues such as "gays in the military," non-discrimination codes in federal regulations, and public recognition of same-sex relationships contributed to creating a national GLB political constituency. Also, as the culture became rich with conflict over sexual identity and voters became more familiar with the exit-polling process, they became less fearful of identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual on the confidential exit poll data collection sheets.

Methodological improvements in surveys of GLB voters 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 at least 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 allowed the respondent to voluntarily self-identify, but did not require the respondent to choose "Yes" or "No," increasing the possibility of a false response.<sup>20</sup> A second methodological innovation allowed for "bisexual" to be included in the "Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual" response. Incorporating the word "bisexual" has been shown to increase the sample size, especially among women.<sup>21</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 and 1998 used this method. In both 1996 and 1998, VNS adopted this phrasing as a separate and better-placed question on their data sheets. Some survey experts believe this innovation contributed to the high 1996 self-identification rate. In combination, these factors have contributed to a gradual increase in self-identification rates among GLB citizens on urban and national exit polls.

Finally, 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 3.0% in 1992, 6.0% in 1996 and 6.4% in 1998. 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.

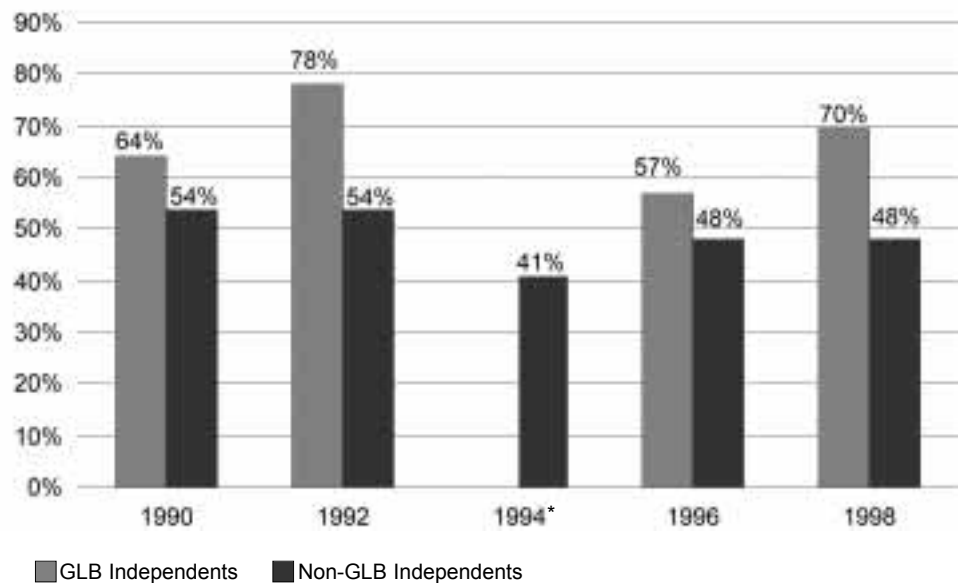
### **Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Independents:**

Since the 1960s, the number of American voters who have chosen not to identify with one of the two major parties has grown consistently. It is now a significant portion of voters, regardless of sexual identity. In fact, in looking at party *identification* from the VNS exit polls (which is not necessarily an indicator of party *registration*) the rate of reported "Independent" voting is remarkably similar among gay and non-gay voters. Among non-gay voters

it averaged about 24% in the five elections of the 1990s. Among GLB voters it has averaged 22%.

Nevertheless, on closer examination there is a marked difference in how gay voters who identify as Independent actually vote. Except for the 1994 election, non-GLB Independents have divided their votes in a fairly consistent pattern: their vote for Democratic House candidates ranged from a high of 54% in 1992 to a low of 48% in 1996, *see figure 11*. GLB Independents, however, have been much more likely to vote for Democratic candidates—or at least to reject Republican ones—despite accepting the label "Independent." The 1994 election aside (due to a small sample size) GLB identified Independents voted for Democratic House candidates from a low of 57% to a high of 78%—only slightly less than did GLB voters who identified with the Democratic Party.

**Figure 11: GLB Independents More Likely to Vote for Democratic House Candidates**



Percentages represent those respondents who voted for Democrats.

Source: VRS/VNS data

\* Insufficient GLB sample in 1994

At least for 1992, this pattern of Independent GLB voting in House District elections was reflected in the GLB presidential vote for the national Reform party. Overall, 14% of GLB voters supported Ross Perot in 1992 (approximately the same as voted for incumbent President Bush). While 27% of self-described GLB Independents voted for Perot—a rate higher than gay voters in general and about the same as their non-gay Independent counterparts—a more substantial 64% voted for Clinton. Only 9% of GLB Independents voted for President Bush while 32% of non-gay Independents voted for Bush. Again, while many GLB voters choose "Independent" as their party label, they in fact

vote Democratic. (The sample size for 1996 was too small to conduct a similar analysis for that presidential election year.)

In searching for common socioeconomic characteristics among GLB Independents, there is surprisingly little that separates them from other GLB voters. Education and income variables, which usually describe differences between partisan and Independent voters, do not describe GLB Independent voters. There are some hints that age is a contributing factor—younger GLB voters may be more likely to identify as Independent—but the measures do not meet any test of statistical significance. One common factor is ideology: GLB Independent voters disproportionately choose "moderate" as their ideological label.

That GLB Independents vote Democratic in substantial numbers and yet reject the Democratic Party label suggests two possibilities. The first is that these voters have been sufficiently uncomfortable with past policy positions of many leaders of the national Democratic Party that they refuse to formally identify with the party. During the 1990s, a substantial number of Democratic House members—as well as President Clinton—supported both DOMA legislation (the so-called "Defense of Marriage Act") and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy which bans openly GLB people from serving in the military. Nevertheless, when they vote, they may choose Democratic House candidates as "the lesser of two evils." The second possibility is that these voters simply reject party identification of any kind and vote for House candidates on issues of importance to them, such as a candidate's stand on gay rights. Obviously, these two explanations are not mutually exclusive.

### **Gender Differences Among Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Voters**

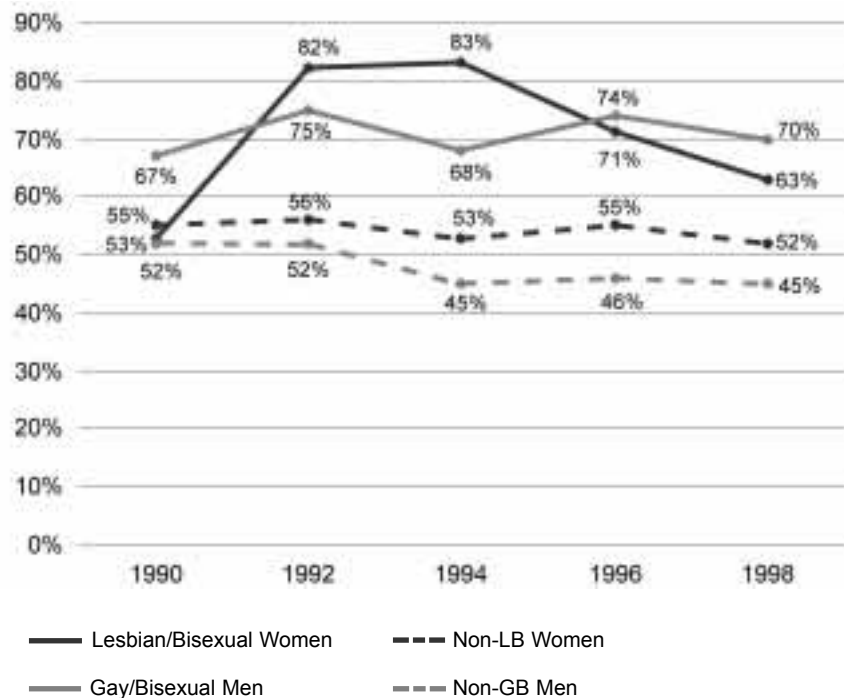
Because the available data on voting behavior of GLB voters have been so meager in the past, there is a tendency to look at the group as singular, as if there are no defining differences among voters based on a variety of demographic variables. Some research has indicated differences in political values and self-identification rates between lesbian/bisexual women and gay/bisexual men, but it has not received much attention.<sup>22</sup> Although the sample sizes are small, especially in 1994, an effort to do such gender analysis was made with the VNS/VRS data.

When the results of the five Congressional elections are examined by both gender and sexual identity, differences emerge between the genders. As *figure 12* shows, the gay and bisexual male vote ranged between 67% to 75% for Democratic House candidates, while the swing in support for Democratic House candidates among lesbians and bisexual women was much greater—from 53% in 1990 to a high of 82% in 1994 and again down to 63% in 1998. This is in contrast to the heterosexual sample of women in each of the five national elections, in which women voters maintained a relatively consistent level of support for the Democratic candidates during the 1990–1998 period. Even in 1994, heterosexual women overall voted 53% for Democratic House candidates.

The decline of support among self-identified lesbian and bisexual women for

the Democrats in 1998 is telling. One possible explanation for this change could be stronger disapproval among lesbian and bisexual women of President Clinton's behavior during the "Lewinsky" matter than among non-GLB women. There is some evidence of this. While the 1998 approval rate of Clinton overall is high among GLB female voters (about 67%) and higher than among non-GLB women (at 59%), it is lower than among male GLB voters (72%). This gender pattern within the gay sample is in contrast to that among the non-gay sample. Among heterosexual voters, the approval rate for

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



Percentages represent those group members who voted for Democrat candidates.

Source: VRS/VNS Data

Clinton is higher among women than men (52%). Bisexual and lesbian women were also slightly more concerned about the President's personal behavior than were gay men. In terms of actual voting in the 1998 House races, the gender gap among the GLB and non-GLB vote was about the same, but the impact of that gap was different. Whereas gay and bisexual men were more likely to vote for the Democratic House candidate than were lesbian and bisexual women, straight women were more likely to vote for Democrats than were straight men—and to a *statistically significant degree*. But for whatever reason, lesbian and bisexual women continued to stake out a political terrain in House elections that cannot be fully explained by their identities as "women" or as "gay."

## Turnout or Turnoff

In 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 baseline, 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, that is, compared against the total electoral turnout.

Nevertheless, the data that we do have seem to indicate that GLB voters display the same pattern of a decline in voter turnout in off-year Congressional elections, but to a stronger degree. At first glance, the data in *figure 1* seem to show that GLB voters had fairly high turnout rates in 1992 and 1996 and lower turnout rates in 1990, 1994 and 1998. 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 decline in the GLB self-identification rates in 1994 and 1998 suggests that turnout among gay men, lesbians and bisexuals was even lower than it was for the electorate at large.

A few other factors remain to be understood. Although the politicization of GLB 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 the limited data available today.

The gay, lesbian and bisexual turnout in 1998 continued the patterns established in the 1990-1996 period. The self-identification rate—which itself is composed of both a growing base identity dimension and a cyclical "turnout" dimension—fell from the 1996 high but was above the rate of the 1994 Congressional elections.

# A Focus on the GLB Vote in California Elections, 1998

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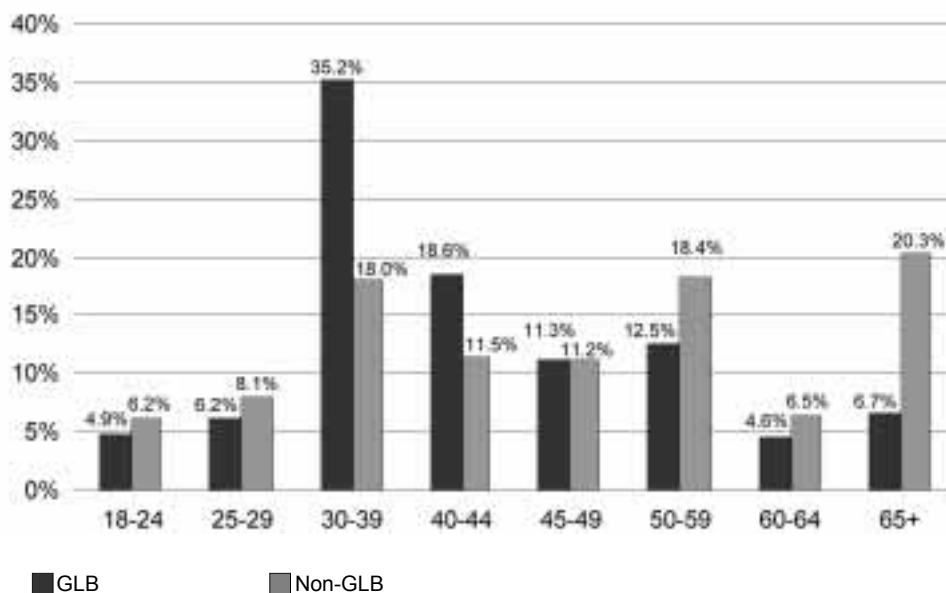
The California presidential primary election scheduled for March 2000 has taken on added significance as Bill Bradley has emerged as a formidable challenger to Vice President Al Gore for the Democratic nomination. In addition, the Knight Initiative, which would ban same-sex marriages in California, is on the ballot in the primary election, a factor that may affect gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) voter turnout. Both anti-gay voters and pro-gay and GLBT voters are expected to turn out in greater numbers than usual. In the November 2000 election, the Golden State's huge number of electoral votes will also play a key role in determining the next President of the United States. For these reasons, we examined the size and voting behavior of self-identified GLB voters in the most recent statewide and national elections in California, the 1998 gubernatorial and US Senate races.

In addition to the national exit polls conducted by Voter News Service, 51 additional state exit polls (including the District of Columbia) are also organized by VNS during Congressional election years. In most cases voters are not asked about sexual orientation, or if they are the sample size is too low for sustained analysis. But the 1998 VNS exit poll for the State of California contained the self-identifier for GLB voters and the resultant sample size ("n"=119) was sufficient to conduct analysis at the aggregate level.<sup>23</sup> As expected, the self-identification rate within California was slightly higher than for the nation as a whole. In California in 1998 the rate was about 4.9%; nationwide it was 4.2%.

The results of the 1998 California exit poll are less surprising in a political sense than in a social one. As with the national GLB voter sample, California GLB voters are more likely to support Democrats over Republicans in the California elections. If anything, this predisposition is even stronger in California. Today the Governor's office, State Legislature and both United States Senate seats are controlled by Democrats. The GLB voter has been an

important component of the changing political landscape of California, which over the past thirty years has shifted from Republican to Democratic dominance. Demographically, however, the differences between GLB voters and non-GLB voters are less striking within California than they are at the national level.

**Figure 13: Age Distribution of California GLB and Non-GLB Voters**



Percentages represent those voters in each age group who do or do not self-identify as GLB.  
Source: VNS 1998 California Exit Poll

### Demographic and Political Dimensions

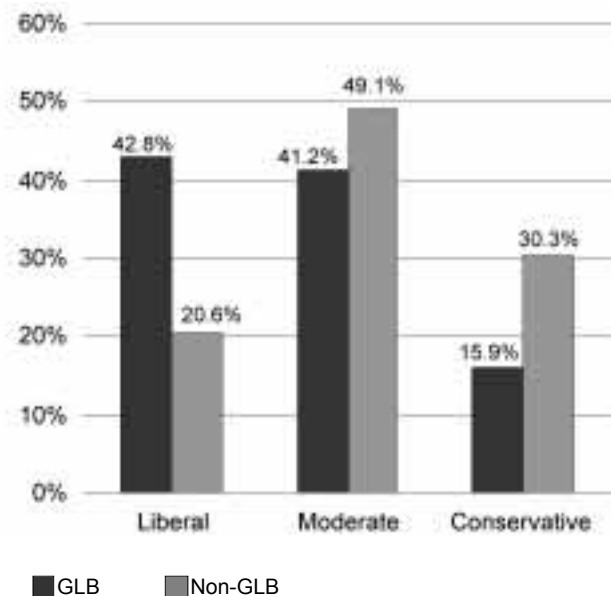
Like the national data, the 1998 California data show that voters who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual are likely to be younger than non-gay voters. Just under 65% of the GLB California sample reports being under 45 years old while only 44% of non-GLB voters do, *see figure 13*.

Almost 61% of the California GLB sample reports being a college graduate or having some post-graduate education while only 51% of non-GLB identified voters report similar higher levels of education. But as is the case with other exit poll data, income levels for California GLB voters are equal to or slightly lower than non-GLB voters. In the case of California, 50% of 1998 GLB voters reported household incomes below \$50,000 while only 46% on non-GLB voters did. The difference was especially glaring in the \$75,000 to \$100,000 category. Almost three times as many non-GLB voters as GLB voters fell into this income category. This could stem, in part, from the fact that GLB voters fall disproportionately into lower age cohorts. But it again refutes the stereotype put forward by anti-gay activists that holds that GLBT people are economically privileged. Finally, no differences could be found between the "gay" and non-"gay" samples when viewed through the standard racial categories.

National patterns are again reflected in California when looking to ideology and party identification. California GLB voters are substantially more likely to accept the label "liberal" (43%) and to reject the label "conservative" (16%) than are non-GLB voters, *see figure 14*. Surprisingly though, when compared to the national 1998 GLB data, the California gay sample was slightly more moderate overall than the national sample. While California GLB voters are most likely to identify with the Democratic party (47%)—slightly less than the national GLB mean (54%)—one remarkable characteristic of the California gay vote is how many GLB voters reject both parties, *see figure 15*. Over 31% of all self-identified GLB voters in California see themselves as either "Independents" or associated with another, smaller party (such as the Green Party). This rate is significantly higher than the national GLB vote, of which 21% identifies as "Independent" and 3% as "Other." This disproportionate support for third parties by GLB California voters is shared with non-GLB California voters. Only 22% of California GLB voters identify with the Republican Party, about the same as the national GLB sample.

Although there are some differences in social and political outlook between gay and non-gay voters in California, perspectives overlap in many areas. For example, there was virtually no difference in how the GLB sample and the non-GLB sample assessed the California economy. Both were moderately optimistic for their own future financial situations and for the future of the

**Figure 14: Ideological Self-Identification of 1998 California Voters**



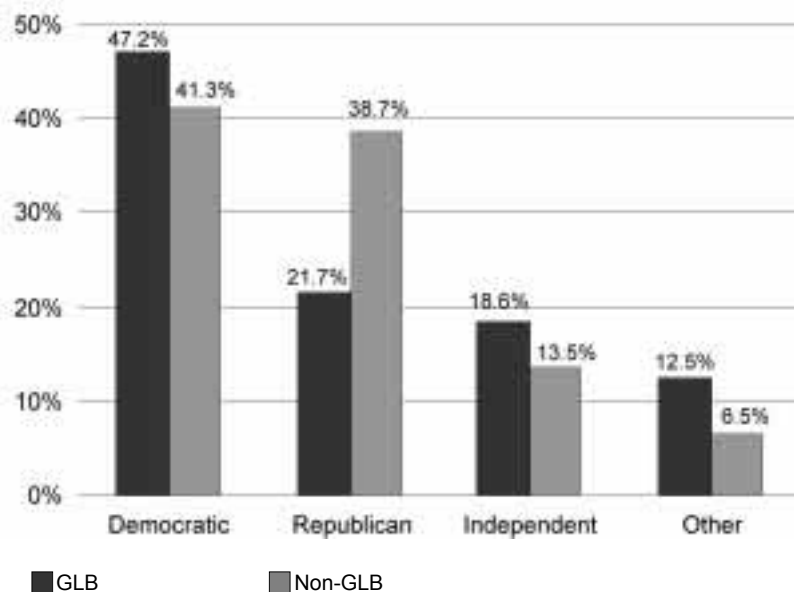
Percentages represent ideological self-identification of 1998 California voters who identified as GLB and who didn't identify as GLB.

Source: VNS California Exit Poll 1998.

Note: This chart shows that GLB voters were twice as likely to self-identify as liberal, while heterosexual voters were twice as likely to self-identify as conservative.

state's economy; and no difference could be found in the likelihood of a gay or lesbian household having a union member in it. Another point of similarity among Californians—gay or straight—was evident in support for President Clinton. While Clinton's approval rate among the GLB California sample was high—67%—it was only slightly higher than the 58% among the non-GLB sample, a statistically insignificant difference. Similarly, the assessment of Clinton as a person was also virtually the same regardless of sexual identity. Overall, voters in California opposed the impeachment of Clinton, though the GLB sample did so to a much greater degree by an overwhelming 83%. And only 23% of the GLB sample wanted Clinton to resign, while 40% of the non-GLB sample did. Finally, while the GLB sample was less approving of the Congress' performance than the non-GLB sample, the majority of all Californian voters gave the Congress a negative assessment.

**Figure 15: Party Identification by Sexual Identity  
1998 California Elections**



Percentages represent those GLB or Non-GLB voters who identify with each party.

Source: VNS California Exit Polls 1998.

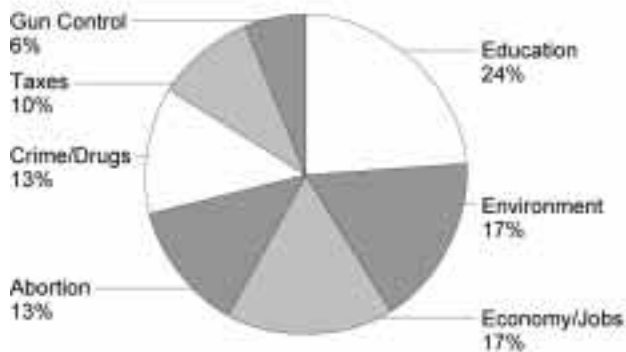
### The 1998 California Gubernatorial Election

The election of Gray Davis as California's new governor was an important event for the California Democratic party. Except for the two terms of former Governor Jerry Brown, California's government has been overseen by a Republican since the mid-1960s. One aspect of this Republican dominance of the Governor's mansion has been a tepid approach to the aspirations of gay men and lesbians in California.

The campaign of Lt. Governor Gray Davis sought out California's lesbian and gay community as a natural constituency. And the effort paid off. Davis was

**Figure 16: Issue Priorities in 1998 California Gubernatorial Race**

**GLB Voters**



**Non-GLB Voters**



Percentages represent the most important issue motivating GLB or Non-GLB voters in the 1998 California Governor's race.

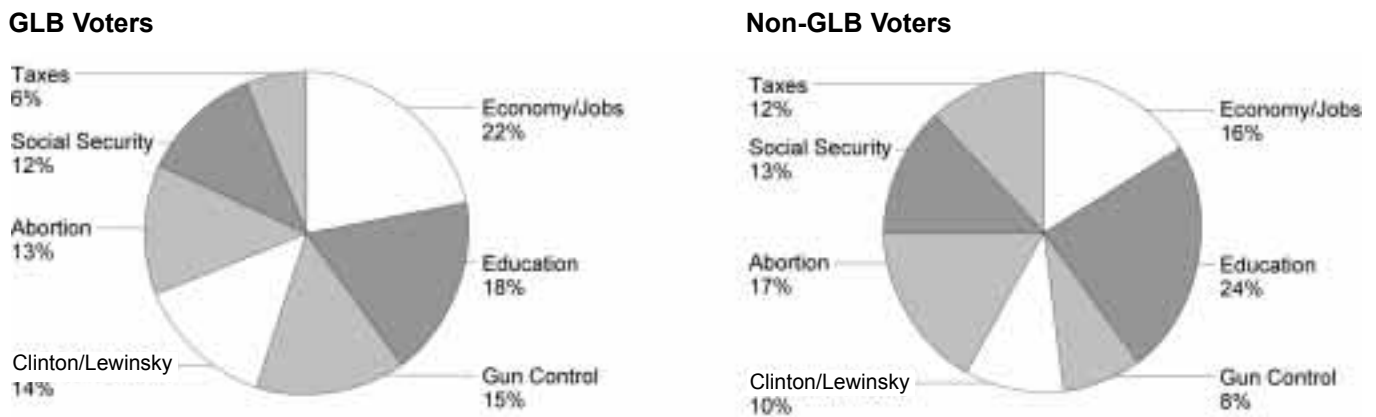
Source: VNS California Exit Polls 1998.

clearly the candidate of choice among California GLB voters—whether Democrats or Independents. Even the Republican GLB vote split almost evenly. In all, 73% of GLB voters in the 1998 gubernatorial race chose Davis over State Attorney General Dan Lungren. Among the overall electorate, only 58% chose Davis. More interestingly, GLB support for Davis was substantially higher than GLB support for Democratic gubernatorial candidates across the country in 1998. The national GLB vote for Democratic gubernatorial candidates was 60%. When viewed as an aspect of the California results, GLB voters fit into patterns similar to those we have seen in both presidential and House elections. Those voting blocks which gave the highest percentages for Davis in 1998 were, in order: African American voters, Latino voters, Jewish voters and GLB voters. These groups remain the core of the voting coalition of the Democratic Party; Davis was weakest among straight white male voters.

The only issue that defined GLB voters differently from the general California voter was their concern for environmental issues.

While GLB voters clearly stand out as part of the core of the Democratic coalition, one surprising factor is that the issues that drove them to choose their candidates were not statistically different from those of non-GLB voters, *see figure 16*. In both cases education and the economy were the most important issues. The only issue that defined GLB voters differently from the general California voter was their concern for environmental issues (though it should be noted that a substantial portion of the California GLB sample was from the Bay area—a region of California known for its environmental awareness.) Still, the differences in issues chosen by gay and non-gay voters to describe why they voted for the candidates they did was not statistically significant.

**Figure 17: Issue Priorities in 1998 California U.S. Senate Race**



Percentages represent the most important issue motivating GLB or Non-GLB voters in the 1998 California U.S. Senate race.

Source: VNS California Exit Polls 1998.

### The 1998 California Senate Election

The other major state-wide election in California in 1998 was the Senate election between incumbent Barbara Boxer and Secretary of State Matt Fong. Senator Boxer had been considered vulnerable by many in the years leading up to her 1998 re-election campaign, and her seat had been targeted by the Republican National Committee as a winnable one. The perception of weakness was largely due to her sustained liberal voting record (including strong support for issues of importance to gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals) and the closeness of her initial 1992 election—at least when compared to Senator Dianne Feinstein’s margin of victory in her 1992 election.<sup>24</sup> Boxer won in her run for a full six-year term with 47% of the vote over 43% for conservative Bruce Herschensohn, with the remaining votes going to other candidates. Feinstein, running to fill out a vacated term, won her race 53% to 37%—a much stronger showing. The difference in the margins of the Boxer and Feinstein victories was also reflected in the GLB vote that year. In 1992 VNS/VRS included a GLB self-identifier on the California exit poll questionnaires.<sup>25</sup> Though the sample size was not large, it did show a statistically significant difference. About 66% of the self-identified GLB voters supported Boxer in 1992. But 77% supported Diane Feinstein.

When contrasted with initial expectations the margin of Senator Boxer’s 1998 re-election victory could be termed a surprise. The final vote was 54% for Boxer and 46% for Fong—a margin greater than her 1992 victory. About 71% of the self-identified GLB vote went to Boxer; only 29% went to Fong. This margin was only slightly lower than the national gay, lesbian and bisexual margin for Democratic candidates (76% to 24%) in the US Senate races of 1998. Support for Boxer again reflected the core coalition of groups we have seen in other Democratic party victories: 87% of African American voters supported her, as did 81% of Jewish voters, 76% of Latino voters, 71% of GLB vot-

ers, and 65% of voters living in households with at least one union member. And while one might have expected Senator Boxer to do well among women, in fact there was a smaller gender gap between herself and Fong among women, though there was large gender gap—about 19%—among men in favor of Matt Fong.

### **Conclusion: The California GLB Vote in the 2000 Elections**

Gay, lesbian and bisexual voters are poised to play a critical role in the 2000 elections. Roughly 1 in 20 California voters openly identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, about the same proportion that identified as GLB in national exit polls in 1996 and 1998. Although they vote disproportionately for Democrats—as a voting block, the GLB vote offered Governor Davis the fourth highest degree of support in 1998, after the black, Latino, and Jewish voting blocks—California GLB voters are more likely to identify as "Independent" than are GLB voters nationally, and therefore have a greater potential to play the role of a swing vote in a close election.

The fact that in California's primary, registered Republicans can cross over and vote Democratic and vice versa, could mean that GLB voters may play a role not only in determining who will emerge victorious in the Democratic primary; GLB voters may also vote in the Republican primary to reject candidates who have taken stances opposed to GLB equality and to support candidates perceived as more moderate on gay issues. And California's mother lode of electoral votes makes it likely that, in the November 2000 election, it will be the crown jewel in a victorious candidate's road to the White House.

The GLB vote in California is sizable, progressive, and independent. In recent years, it has been a key constituency in the victorious campaigns of its two US Senators and its new Democratic Governor, helping to shift the balance of power in the Golden State from Republicans to Democrats. GLB voters will continue to play a pivotal role in the 2000 elections, helping decide who will represent California in Congress, who will reside in the White House, and whether or not California will become the 32nd state to outlaw same-sex marriage, or whether California will beat back this right-wing initiative.

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California GLB voters are more likely to identify as "Independent" than are GLB voters nationally, and therefore have a greater potential to play the role of a swing vote in a close election.

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# Conclusion: Previewing 2000

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## LESSONS OF NATIONAL EXIT POLLS RESULTS FOR THREE NATIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE GLBT COMMUNITY

The implications of these national findings are different for the major political parties than they are for national and local GLBT political organizations.

For the Democratic National Committee and 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 for candidates whose politics are socially and economically progressive.

It is often assumed that the GLB vote is concentrated in America's largest cities: New York City, Chicago, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Los Angeles. Sometimes the GLB vote is written off by the national parties because it is labeled an urban vote. While it is true that self-identified gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals tend to be urban dwellers, self-identification rates are also high in medium sized cities whose populations are between 50,000 and 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 has been 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 watershed 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 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. By 1998 this pattern had already reversed, with 53% of non-gay voters living in freshman House

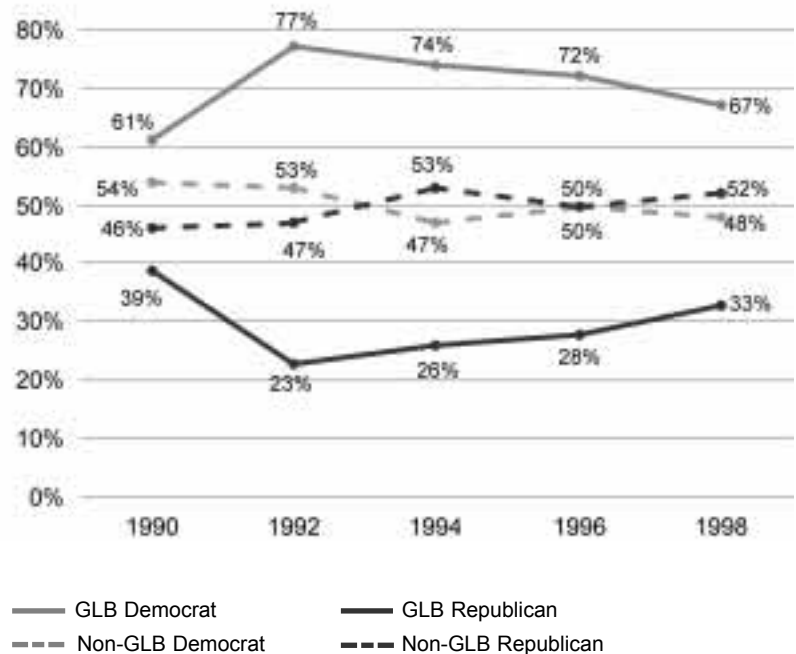
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GLB voters are a stable, although skeptical, part of the dwindling Democratic Congressional voting coalition.

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districts now with Democratic first-term Members of Congress and 61% of GLB voters now in districts with Republican freshmen and -women. Not only is this a vote that can help Democrats recapture seats, but GLB voters in general live in swing districts that Democrats will need to preserve. 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.

**Figure 18: GLB Vote in House District Elections  
1992 Polarization is Softening**



Percentages represent those GLB and Non-GLB voters backing Democratic and Republican Congressional candidates in House elections.

Source: VRS/VNS National Exit Polls.

For the Republican National Committee, these findings again show the existence of a significant GLB Republican voting bloc. In the five Congressional elections examined here, the GLB Republican vote averaged about 29%. This vote has been increasing gradually since 1994 and by 1998 had almost returned to its high point of 39% in 1990, *see figure 18*. Republican performance among gay and lesbian voters was lowest in 1992, the year when the Republican Party was seen as most politicizing sexual identity and mocking the aspirations of gay people. Religious, fundamentalist and social conservatives, initially mobilized by the presidential campaign of Jimmy Carter, had become part of the social base of the Republican Party since the Reagan victory in 1980. But it was at the 1992 convention that a full-fledged marriage between party and religion seemed to have occurred. For lesbian, gay and bisexual Republicans,

the conflict between the conservative religious priorities being advanced by this new alliance and their own libertarian social agenda was likely most intense in the 1994 Congressional elections. A Republican-controlled House might have led to lower taxes, less regulation of small business and a slower rate of growth in the federal government, but it also meant a greatly enhanced role for those anti-GLBT religious and social conservatives who had 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 the fledgling national Reform Party there is also a message. In 1992, the presidential campaign of Ross Perot initially pursued the GLB vote. Its incipient populism, streak of libertarianism, and promises of fiscal and campaign finance responsibility were attractive to many gay and lesbian voters—especially west of the Mississippi where allegiance to party is not highly valued. But an ambivalence emerged. The Perot/Stockwell campaign was equivocal on domestic partnership legislation and opposed the full elimination of discrimination within the armed services. Still, the Reform party received a strong first endorsement by gay voters in 1992—about 15%, the same as that for incumbent President George Bush. Nevertheless, this was below the Reform vote among non-GLB voters of 19%. By 1996 the Reform Party margin among gay voters had fallen as it had among all voters to about 7%. Approximately 25% of lesbian, bisexual and gay male voters identify as Independent—a constituency that would be attracted to a party that values campaign finance reform, national fiscal responsibility and a restrained foreign policy. But nothing is more likely to assure the final abandonment of the Reform party by GLB voters—5% of the nation’s total vote—than its transformation into a second platform for social conservatives in the United States through the nomination of an anti-gay candidate.

Rather than rejecting GLB voters, the Reform party should look to Independent and Republican-voting gay men and lesbians as targets for a new and broad-based coalition to govern America. 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 the Congressional election cycles. The importance of the US 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 fact that the House leadership and many committee chairs were 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

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Approximately 25% of lesbian, bisexual and gay male voters identify as Independent.

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the committee level without the expenditure of precious political resources. It also meant that many minor policy initiatives beneficial to GLBT 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 altered the avenues of influence in Washington for the GLBT community. GLBT political organizations worked with allies in Congress to make minimal legislative progress, but for the most part, the struggle was to defeat negative legislation. It became much more difficult to stop or attenuate anti-gay measures offered by extremely conservative members of Congress. However, the Log Cabin Republicans, and legislative organizations like the Human Rights Campaign and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 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, and many gay Republicans now look to the many Republican governors around the country for more moderate party leadership. Given the drop in GLB voter turnout in the 1994 and 1998 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 turn to the right in House leadership 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 seven 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 supported President Clinton in quite high numbers up until 1998.

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 in the 2000 elections would 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 Addenda

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## I: QUALITY OF DATA ON THE SEXUAL IDENTITY VOTE

The 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 analyses. Still, despite this new wealth of data, there remain 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 1998. *Table A* shows the total number of questionnaires processed in each of the five national exit polls, the number of national questionnaires distributed in each of the five 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 five 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 general 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 geographic clustering of racial minorities and urban dwellers that may lead to incorrect voter projections; however, no such corrections are made for the possible clustering of GLB voters. In this stratification process, the GLB sample is captured randomly—as are most other demographic groups. Given VNS/VRS sampling techniques and the wide swings in sample sizes, appropriate care should be used 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.

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

<b>Election</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1998</b>
Total number of completed voter surveys	19,397	15,490	11,303	16,637	11,381
Number of national questionnaires	2	3	2	4	2
Number of national questionnaires containing the GLB self-identifier	1	3	1	1	1
Total number of sheets containing the GLB self-identifier	9,084	15,490	5,732	3,733	4,925
GLB *n**	120	420	92	196	218
GLB vote as a percentage of total [self-ID rate]**	1.3%	2.2%	1.6%	5.0%	4.2%

\* Unweighted

\*\*Using VRS/VNS weighting formula

## **II: SAMPLING AND TURN-OUT OF GLB VOTERS**

There may be some hints in the relative contribution of sampling and turnout to the wide swings of self-identification evidenced in the 1990-1998 VNS national election data sets. While the underlying trend over the five national elections of the 1990's shows an increase in self-identification rates—an important 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 five 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; 5.0% in 1996 and 4.2% in 1998. A simple (OLS) regression line shows the underlying upward trend despite specific variations from year to year. (*See Table B.*)

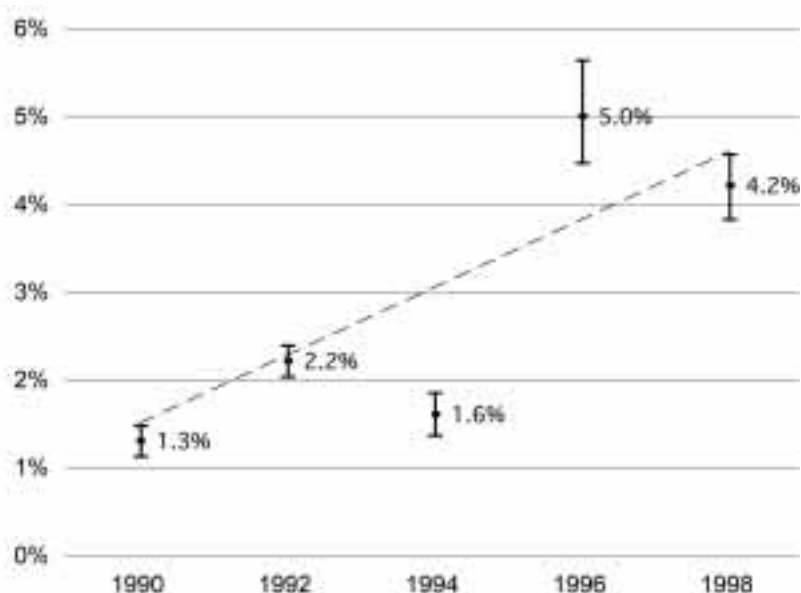
It has been assumed that an important portion of this variation is due to expected error associated with how samples are selected by VNS. As noted

above, "sexual identity" is not a category used in the stratification of the national electorate. Sample precincts are chosen and only incidentally do they result in a sample who self identify as GLB. It is these data that have been used in the analysis of GLB voting patterns.

There may be more variability in the concentration of GLB voters when compared to all voters. Given the relative higher 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 five. 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 represent, 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 five). Table B 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.

**Table B: Self-Identification Rates and Margins of Error**  
**VRS/VNS Data: 1990-1998**



# Endnotes

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1. John D'Emilio, *Power at the Polls: The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote*, Washington, DC: NGLTF, 1996; Robert W. Bailey, *Out & Voting: The Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Vote in Congressional House Elections, 1990-1996*, New York: NGLTF Policy Institute, 1998.
2. 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 transgendered persons comprise a key part of the broader gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) communities, and that issues of gender identity at once may overlap with and differ from issues of sexual orientation.
3. 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 (3), 32-33; Mark Hertzog, *The Lavender Vote: Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals in American Electoral Politics*, New York: New York University Press, 1996; Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban Setting*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.
4. Mark Hertzog, *The Lavender Vote: Lesbians, Gay Men and Bisexuals in American Electoral Politics*, New York: New York University Press, 1996.
5. Hertzog, *ibid*.
6. National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, 1998 *Capital Gains and Losses: A State by State Review of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and HIV/AIDS-Related Legislation in 1998*, Washington, DC, 1998, p. 13.

7. 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.

8. 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 state data sheets.

9. See footnote 1.
10. Mark W. Hertzog, *The Lavender Vote: Lesbians, Gay 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.
11. Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban Setting*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, chapter 5.
12. Lee Badgett, *Income Inflation: The Myth of Affluence Among Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Americans*, New York: NGLTF Policy Institute and Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies, 1998.
13. Hertzog, *op.cit.*, p. 82 for 1990 data; and p. 197 for 1992 data.
14. For more information on income data on gay, lesbian and bisexual Americans, see Badgett, *op.cit.*
15. VRS 1992 National Presidential Exit-Poll, weighted.
16. D'Emilio, *op.cit.*
17. The question as stated:  
Who Would Make Better Budget Decisions?: (1990)

GLB Voters	The President	25%
	The Congress	75%
Non-GLB Voters	The President	45%
	The Congress	55%

Source: VNS 1990 National Election Poll
18. 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.
19. The difference between the GLB and non-GLB sample is statistically significant, despite the small GLB sample in 1994.
20. 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.
21. Bailey, *op.cit.*
22. On political values see Hertzog, *op.cit.*
23. The total number of respondents in the 1998 Voter News Survey

California exit poll was 2,882. The GLB sample was 119.

24. Dianne Feinstein and John Seymour were the principal candidates running to fill out the last two years of the term of
25. Voter Research and Surveys, General Exit Polls, 1992 (ICPSR 6102); State of California. Total sample size, 2,296; gay/lesbian/bisexual sample size, 66. The GLB identifier was part of a "grab bag" question.

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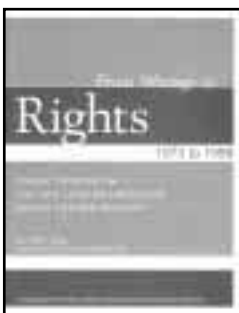
The major candidates' statements and votes on 6 key issues—hate violence, discrimination, parenting, partnerships and marriage, health care, and military service—are presented along with data and research to contextualize these policy debates. Although in the past decade the US has become much more supportive of equality for GLBT people, many presidential candidates are acting as if the country hasn't changed a bit. (January 2000; 56pp; \$10.00; [www.nglhf.org/pub.html](http://www.nglhf.org/pub.html))



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