

The Religion Card
Gay Marriage and the 2004 Presidential Election

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Abstract

In 2004, thirteen states had ballot initiatives on whether their state constitutions should include a ban on gay marriage. States with gay marriage ballot propositions, which included the linchpin of Ohio, afforded Republicans the opportunity to raise gay marriage as an issue with an important subset of their base, white evangelical Protestants. We find evidence that white evangelical Protestants had a higher level of mobilization for Bush in states with a gay marriage initiative. However, we also see that secularists were demobilized in these same states, having a lower rate of turnout but not a higher level of support for Kerry.

Following the 2004 presidential election, many pundits concluded that George W. Bush benefited from ballot initiatives in thirteen states on whether a gay marriage ban should be written into these states' constitutions, while other analysts have argued to the contrary (Cooperman and Edsall 2004; Greenberger 2004). We examine this question by focusing specifically on the voting behavior of a group expected to be especially motivated by the issue of gay marriage—white evangelical Protestants—while also considering the possibility that an emphasis on gay marriage triggered a backlash from secularists.

In addition to illuminating a debate over the impact of gay marriage in the 2004 presidential contest, this paper also informs our general understanding of American elections. For one, we are able to examine the role highly salient ballot measures can play in setting the agenda for a presidential campaign, building on the literature regarding direct democracy and candidate campaigns (Nicholson 2005; Smith and Tolbert 2004). Furthermore, we can explore in depth a contemporary case of the “politics of cultural differences” (Leege et al. 2002), thus adding to our understanding of how religion affects contemporary presidential elections. Scholars have increasingly recognized the salience of religion in American elections, but there is much more to learn about the effectiveness of political appeals on religious grounds. But perhaps the most significant theoretical contribution of our analysis is that it reveals the double-edged nature of targeted campaign messages about “morality politics”—mobilization around a charged issue like gay marriage attracts some voters and repels others. We find that gay marriage pulled some voters, specifically white evangelical Protestants, toward Bush while also pushing secularly-oriented voters away.

Previous Research

During 2004, events transpired to push gay marriage into the spotlight, pushing it to the top of the national agenda of social issues. On the east coast, the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts issued a ruling mandating same-sex marriages in that state, while on the west coast the city of San Francisco began issuing marriage licenses to homosexual couples. Gay marriage, which had simmered as an issue for the decade prior to the 2004 election, suddenly boiled over. This was the environment in 2004 when voters in thirteen states faced ballot propositions asking whether their state constitutions should explicitly limit marriage to between one man and one woman. For the purposes of this discussion, we will refer to these measures as gay marriage bans, or GMBs. Eleven of the GMBs were on the ballot simultaneously with the presidential election in November, while two others were held earlier in the year (MO and LA).¹ The specifics of the GMBs varied, as in some states they would prohibit civil unions while in others they would not. All of them passed; none were close.² In many of the GMB states, like North Dakota, Georgia, and Utah, Bush was destined to win handily. Had the GMBs been limited to heavily Republican states only, their role in the ultimate outcome of the election would be inconsequential. However, a few of the GMB states were bona fide toss-ups as the campaign season began, including Ohio—where, in the end, the election was decided.

There are two ways in which GMBs might have affected the vote for Bush: *persuasion* and *mobilization*. By persuasion, we mean convincing voters who would not otherwise have voted for Bush to do so, while mobilization refers to getting Bush supporters who would not otherwise have voted to the polls. Any analysis of the GMBs and the 2004 election must take

¹ The states were Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah. Missouri had a ballot initiative on gay marriage in August of 2004 (during the primary election), while Louisiana held one in October of 2004.

² The GMBs received, on average, 71 percent of the vote.

these two channels into account, as previous research suggests that ballot measures have the potential to affect other contests on the ballot through both persuasion and mobilization. For example, Smith and Tolbert (2004) present evidence that initiatives and referenda serve to educate, and thus persuade, voters by producing higher levels of interest, political knowledge, and political discussion. Similarly, Nicholson (2005) shows that initiatives and referenda serve a priming function, altering the criteria voters use to decide among candidates on the same ballot, and thus persuading them of the merits of one candidate over another. The gay marriage initiatives are a good test of and opportunity to extend Nicholson's theory. We hypothesize that the priming triggered by gay marriage served to mobilize voters who care deeply about this particular issue. Previous research has indeed found that ballot measures can also mobilize voters. Smith and Tolbert (2004) show that states with more frequent initiative use consistently have higher levels of voter turnout, perhaps due to the increased levels of voter interest and political discussion that they also produce. Likewise, at the individual level they show that voters who are exposed to more initiatives are more likely to turn out (Smith and Tolbert 2004). Similarly, Smith (2001) and Tolbert, Grummel, and Smith (2001) find that highly salient ballot measures boost turnout by bringing otherwise complacent voters to the polls.

While gay marriage was never the centerpiece of Bush's re-election campaign, he nonetheless clearly took a position against it. To the extent that gay marriage is an issue that either mobilizes the Republicans' socially conservative base or persuades fence-sitters that Bush upholds their values – or both – we should expect Bush's opposition to gay marriage to have been a vote-winner. On the other hand, the issue of gay marriage seemed to stymie the Kerry campaign, caught between not wanting to alienate the socially liberal base of the Democratic Party and recognizing that outright support for gay marriage is controversial among the general

public. Consequently, Kerry's position on the issue was nuanced. On a number of occasions, he and his spokespeople reiterated his opposition to gay marriage, while also noting his support for civil unions of homosexual couples.³

Within the scholarly community thus far the verdict on whether gay marriage tipped the balance toward Bush has been mixed. Burden (2004) questions whether the gay marriage bans persuaded people to vote for Bush by showing that Bush's share of the vote did not rise disproportionately in GMB states. Similarly, Hillygus and Shields (2005) use survey data to question the significance of gay marriage as a persuader. Neither account is definitive, however. The inferences Burden can draw are strictly limited, as his analysis relies on state-level data only. While Hillygus and Shields do have individual-level data, their analysis does not explicitly examine the impact of the state-level gay marriage bans. Instead, they model the vote for Bush by using attitudes regarding an amendment to the federal constitution banning gay marriage. They then compare a model of respondents across the whole country with one limited to people in the GMB states to test whether opposition to gay marriage was a stronger predictor of the Bush vote in GMB states. The Hillygus and Shields analysis is instructive, as their results suggest that if gay marriage did affect voting behavior, its influence was not broad-based. Yet this still leaves the possibility that gay marriage mattered for some groups in the population more than others, as Hillygus and Shields do not test whether gay marriage had an effect on voters with especially strong feelings on the subject, notably evangelical Protestants. Turning to turnout, Abramowitz (2004) has concluded that the gay marriage bans did not provide a boost to

³ Notwithstanding his avowed opposition to gay marriage in 2004, in the past Kerry had opposed an amendment to the federal constitution that would ban gay marriage, and was one of only fourteen senators to vote against the Defense of Marriage Act in 1996. In 2002, he signed a public letter indicating his opposition to efforts underway in Massachusetts to enact a state constitutional amendment outlawing gay marriage (Associated Press 2004; Toner 2004). The typical voter could be forgiven for finding Kerry's position on gay marriage unclear, or even assuming that he supported it.

voter mobilization, while McDonald (2004) suggests that they did, at least in those GMB states that were not also considered presidential battleground states.

There is a fine line between persuasion and mobilization, particularly in practical politics. You win elections by mobilizing more people to the polls who have been persuaded to vote for you. Accordingly, Donovan et al. (2005) suggest that in 2004 gay marriage led to both persuasion and mobilization. *Pace* Hillygus and Shields, they find that gay marriage was a more salient issue for voters in GMB states, which in turn helped Bush. Where people were thinking about gay marriage, Bush picked up more votes. In Ohio, the gay marriage ban also appears to have boosted turnout among Bush supporters. Similarly, Lewis (2005) uses both individual-level and state-level data to suggest that opposition to same-sex marriage “mattered in the 2004 election, less than some issues but more than most” (197), but does not test the impact of having a gay marriage ban on the ballot per se.

While previous research comes to varying conclusions about the impact of gay marriage in 2004, they all share a glaring omission. None of them have actually tested what Republican campaign operatives said they planned to do in 2004, namely shore up Bush’s support among evangelical Protestants.⁴ In the months leading up to the election, Bush’s chief campaign strategist, Karl Rove, frequently told Republican audiences that “four million evangelicals” did not turn out to vote in 2000, and that Bush’s re-election rested on getting them to the polls in 2004 (Cooperman and Edsall 2004). We take these statements at face value and proceed to test the impact of Republican efforts to boost support for Bush among evangelicals, specifically with the use of gay marriage as an issue. Consequently, we hypothesize that evangelicals were

⁴ Donovan et al. incorporate post-hoc religious measures, but are only able to use county-level estimates of religious group membership. Another paper by Smith, DeSantis, and Kassel (2005) takes up the question of whether evangelical Christians were mobilized to vote for Bush because of gay marriage, but is limited because it relies solely on aggregated data (county-level) for what is fundamentally an individual-level question.

mobilized behind Bush to a greater extent in states with a gay marriage ban on the ballot than states without a GMB. However, we also hypothesize that invoking gay marriage as an issue, especially by drawing on religious themes and imagery, alienates non-religious—that is, secularist—voters, drawing them away from Bush. We refer to this as the demobilization effect.

Demobilization

Admittedly, it may not seem that opposition to gay marriage has a downside, given the winning record of gay marriage referenda. However, as illustrated by the fact that, in 2006, Arizona became the first state to reject a gay marriage ban, public opinion is more divided on the issue of gay marriage than the 2004 referenda results suggest. While gay marriage does not command anywhere near a majority of support among the general public, neither does outright opposition to it. Thirty-eight percent of Americans oppose gay marriage, while 31 percent support it, and another 31 percent favor allowing civil unions for homosexual couples (see also Brewer and Wilcox 2005).⁵ In other words, opposition to gay marriage is merely the plurality, not majority, position, and homosexuals face an increasingly tolerant public, especially to the notion that they should enjoy equal rights (Loftus 2001; Wilcox and Norrandner 2002). Any candidate who places too much emphasis on opposition to gay marriage risks alienating the majority of the population who are open to some form of legal recognition for homosexual relationships. Opposing gay marriage too vociferously could also be perceived as a general intolerance of homosexuals, which runs counter to the norm of acceptance for gays and lesbians observed among a growing proportion of the electorate. In this way, perhaps homosexuality parallels race. Mendelberg (2001) shows that campaign ads employing racial messages and imagery are only effective when their racial content is not perceived as violating the norm of racial equality, and in the concluding chapter of her book even suggests that the same logic

⁵ These and subsequent figures in this section from the 2004 Election Panel Study, described below.

might be applied to homosexuality. It is thus conceivable that too strident a position against gay marriage would backfire, given the increasing tolerance toward homosexuals in mainstream American society.

Notwithstanding the trends toward tolerance, one should not exaggerate the acceptance of gays and lesbians within American society. Strong disapproval of homosexuality can be found within pockets of the population; one such pocket is the evangelical community (Green 2000). When compared to the general population, over twice the percentage of evangelical Protestants oppose any legal recognition of homosexual unions (65 percent). Strikingly, only 8 percent favor gay marriage.⁶ Given evangelicals' opposition to gay marriage and inclination to support a presidential candidate who shares their faith, it is perhaps not surprising that the Bush campaign targeted evangelical Protestants for campaign messages invoking gay marriage. By focusing on gay marriage in appeals made to evangelicals, Bush worked to minimize the collateral damage that highlighting such opposition might cause among more socially moderate voters.

And where might that damage be sustained? A leading possibility is among secularly-oriented voters (hereafter, *secularists*), or those who report no religious affiliation. Secularists have a relatively high level of support for gay marriage: 59 percent support full-fledged marriage rights for gay couples, while another 29 percent favor civil unions. That only leaves 12 percent who are unequivocally opposed to marriage for homosexuals.⁷ Not only are secularists supportive of gay marriage they are also, almost by definition, far less likely to respond positively to campaign appeals using religious cues. Gay marriage and religion is thus a potentially off-putting combination for this group of voters who, while currently modest in numbers, are nonetheless growing within the population (Sherkat 1999). Evangelicals and

⁶ 2004 Election Panel Study.

⁷ 2004 Election Panel Study

secularists are likely to have sharply divergent responses to the exploitation of gay marriage as an issue by the Bush campaign, particularly to the extent that such campaign messages rely on religious themes and imagery. The same messages which work to mobilize evangelicals, conversely, have the potential to demobilize secularists.

In sum, we adapt Nicholson's (2005) argument regarding the priming triggered by ballot initiatives by hypothesizing that, in this case, priming on the issue of gay marriage led to mobilization on behalf of George W Bush. Evangelicals turned out to vote for a ban on gay marriage and, while there, also cast a ballot for the presidential candidate most associated with opposition to gay marriage, namely Bush. Furthermore, based on Mendelberg's work (2001), we further hypothesize that appeals which refer to gay marriage are a double-edged sword—turning evangelicals out while turning secularists away.

Gay Marriage in the 2004 Presidential Campaign

A *prima facie* case for the double-edged nature of gay marriage can be made by inference, based on the behavior of those who pushed the issue. If gay marriage was perceived as a double-edged issue, winning Bush support among evangelicals at the risk of losing ground among secularists, we should expect to see that campaign advertising invoking the subject was targeted narrowly to social conservatives, (many of whom are evangelicals), so as to bypass more secularly-oriented voters. Furthermore, the ripest targets of all would be evangelicals in states with both a GMB on the ballot and a close presidential race.

Evidence that gay marriage was not seen as a winning issue across the board is found in the fact that Bush himself rarely spoke in public about it during the 2004 campaign. By the same token, television advertising was largely avoided as a channel through which to signal Bush's support for a ban on gay marriage, presumably because television has the broadest reach of any

advertising medium and is generally avoided as conduit for advertising controversial or divisive enough to motivate the opposition as much as supporters. Mentions of gay marriage in television ads pertaining to the 2004 presidential election were few and far between. According to data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group (CMAG), of all the advertising pertaining to the presidential race, there were only nine unique ads from the campaigns, the parties, and their interest group allies that broached the subject of gay marriage—a mere drop in a large bucket. These nine unique advertisements, some of which opposed gay marriage and supported Bush while some supported Kerry and favored gay marriage, were sponsored by groups responsible for less than 1 percent of the presidential campaigns' total spots. There was equally scant television advertising on behalf of the ballot measures regarding gay marriage in the thirteen states with GMBs on the ballot. CMAG only detected television advertising pertaining to gay marriage initiatives in six of the GMB states.⁸ CMAG estimates total spending in those states to be less than \$1.3 million, with about half of that being spent in Oregon, largely because it was perceived as the only state in which the ballot measure's opponents had a chance to defeat it. The case of Ohio, a major theater for the "air war," is revealing. Compared to political ads for the presidential race in Ohio, advocates and opponents of Issue 1, the ballot initiative opposing gay marriage, spent virtually nothing. The total estimated expenditure for and against Issue 1 was a paltry \$158,112 compared to \$100,399,921 combined spending on the presidential race. The Bush and Kerry campaigns alone spent more than \$50,000,000 in Ohio. Having been responsible for less than 0.2 percent of the total money poured into the presidential race, it is fair to say that gay marriage--as least as far as Issue 1 is concerned--was not a substantial part of political advertising on television in Ohio.

⁸ Montana and North Dakota may have had some advertising, but their media markets are too small (not in the top 100) to be included in the CMAG data.

None of this is to say, however, that gay marriage was ignored by the presidential campaigns, particularly on the Bush side. Rather than broadcasting, campaign advertising invoking gay marriage was delivered through *narrowcasting* such as telephone calls and direct mail, which can be steered toward the intended audience by geography, demographic variables, or by using membership lists of allied organizations (including churches). Interviews with key players in the Republican mobilization efforts confirm that the Republican National Committee (RNC) and Ohio Republican Party (ORP) mail was carefully directed toward religious conservatives, evangelicals especially, highlighting issues most likely to spark their interest. In their efforts to target religious conservatives, the RNC and the Bush campaign identified volunteer coordinators within congregations, collected thousands of church membership directories and cross matched the names within their registered voter database, all to deliver customized persuasion and mobilization messages steeped in religious and moral themes.⁹ In addition to using church membership directories to seek out likely social conservatives, Republicans also made extensive use of “microtargeting” techniques in which large N sample surveys are used in conjunction with consumer marketing data to identify likely Bush supporters (Gertner 2004; citation omitted). For example, the consultants coordinating much of the RNC’s microtargeting effort indicated that one of the most fruitful consumer variables enabling them to identify religious conservatives was whether or not a respondent subscribed to a religious magazine like *Christianity Today*.¹⁰

In competitive, high-profile elections, the sheer volume of campaign communication can be enormous, although its targeted nature makes it difficult to track. We were able to monitor

⁹ Author’s interview with Terry Nelson, political director, Bush/Cheney ‘04, January 5, 2005.

¹⁰ Author’s interview with Alexander Gage, Brent Seaborn, and Michael Myers; president, vice president, and vice president, respectively; TargetPoint Consulting, December 15, 2004.

the highly-targeted medium of direct mail during the 2004 campaign through the Campaign Communications Survey (CCS).¹¹ The CCS relied on a nationally representative sample of voters, oversampling in the battleground states of Ohio and Florida, to collect their political mail during the last three weeks of the presidential campaign. This material was then sorted to identify each unique piece of mail.

The design of the CCS permits us to gauge the prevalence of gay marriage as an issue in direct mail during the 2004 campaign, and to compare the incidence of gay marriage-related mail in Ohio--a hotly-contested battleground state with a GMB on the ballot--with the mail in Florida, which was also home to a tight presidential race but did not have a GMB before the voters. The unique pieces of mail were examined for content and the pieces that mentioned gay marriage or a gay marriage ballot proposition were identified and linked to survey respondents in Ohio and Florida, allowing us to test whether gay marriage was mentioned more frequently in Ohio, and the extent to which ads mentioning gay marriage were directed toward religious conservatives.

In Ohio there were 42 unique pieces of mail on the subject of gay marriage, 25 in opposition to it sent by 23 different organizations. In Florida there were 23 unique pieces of mail, with 16 against it sent by 12 different organizations. While gay marriage was clearly an issue in both states, more groups sent more unique pieces of mail on the issue in Ohio--suggesting that the presence of the ballot initiative led to the difference. Much of this mail was channeled toward religious conservatives, a group that overlaps with the evangelical community. To identify religious conservatives, the CCS asked respondents "Do you consider yourself part of the Conservative Christian political movement, also known as the Religious Right?" Admittedly, this question does not match up precisely with evangelical Protestants, as many

¹¹ See the reviewers' appendix for study details including response rates.

evangelicals do not explicitly identify with what is a religious/political movement rather than a formal organization, and some self-identified members of the Religious Right may not be evangelicals. Nonetheless, it provides a rough sense of whether direct mail about gay marriage was being directed toward religious conservatives, many of whom are evangelicals. Within Ohio, we find that Religious Right members received, on average, 1.4 pieces, versus 0.9 for everyone else ($p < 0.05$, one-tailed test). Nor is this higher volume of mail simply because they are social conservatives, as self-described members of the Religious Right in Florida also received, on average, only 0.9 pieces of mail mentioning gay marriage (in comparison with Religious Right members in Ohio the difference is statistically significant at $p < 0.10$, one-tailed test).

We acknowledge that our focus on direct mail is perhaps a case of looking where the light is good, for mail is not the only important form of targeted campaign communication. Other avenues of mobilization, like phone calls, door-step conversations, and church sermons, were also employed in the 2004 campaign. Nonetheless, attention to direct mail provides a sense of how gay marriage was used in campaign communication, and to whom that communication was directed. Our results consistently point to the conclusion that the Republicans explicitly sought out religious conservatives, many of whom were evangelicals, for campaign appeals and regularly invoked gay marriage as they did so. They played the religion card.

Playing the religion card, however, is playing with fire. At the risk of mixing metaphors, politics is often a matter of hydraulics; a rise in one place corresponds to a drop elsewhere. Targeting is far from an exact science, and so direct mail can end up in the “wrong” hands, as when ads meant for religious voters are instead sent to secularists. However, the risk of collateral damage caused by an emphasis on gay marriage is not limited to targeted campaign appeals, as our discussion of direct mail is meant only to illustrate that the Bush campaign was apparently

conscious of the need to concentrate their gay marriage-related campaign advertising on the most receptive audience. Even without any direct mail, secularists would still have been aware of Bush's opposition to gay marriage, through news stories, conversations with neighbors, etc.

Modeling the 2004 Vote

Our analysis of gay marriage and the 2004 presidential vote draws on data from the 2004 Election Panel Study (EPS).¹² The analysis itself is complicated by the fact that persuasion and mobilization are two sides of the same coin. In a hotly contested presidential race, the decision to cast a ballot is inextricably bound up with deciding for whom to cast that ballot, which is why campaign operatives consider turnout and vote choice simultaneously (Leege et al. 2002). Simply modeling turnout would not tell us who was voting for whom; simply modeling vote choice would obscure who was voting. The solution, therefore, is to model turnout and vote choice in a single equation. To do so, we follow the example of Lacy and Burden (1999), who model the 1992 presidential vote using four choices: Bush, Clinton, Perot, and abstention (see also Lacy and Monson 2002). By including abstention alongside the three candidates in this race they explicitly acknowledge that, in 1992, many Americans were choosing between not voting at all and voting for Perot. That is, many Perot voters would not have come to the polls had he not been in the race.

We are testing a similar phenomenon in 2004, as the Republicans' self-described strategy was to spur evangelicals to the polls who would not otherwise have voted. Like Lacy and Burden we employ multinomial probit as an estimator, which allows multiple response options in the dependent variable, and does not suffer from the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA)

¹² See the reviewers' appendix for study details including response rates.

restriction.¹³ We model a three-part choice-set: one can vote for Kerry, vote for Bush, or abstain all together. Abstention is the baseline category, which means the coefficients in the columns reflecting a vote for Bush or Kerry are interpreted as relative to not voting at all.

It is important to note that the choice of baseline category does not affect the substantive results; they would be identical if a different baseline category were used.¹⁴

The first step in modeling the impact of playing the religion card is to operationalize voters' religious affiliation, particularly evangelical Protestants. Because American evangelicalism spans multiple denominations and includes many people with no denominational affiliation at all, previous research has developed different analytical strategies to identify evangelicals. Our method relies on respondents' self report of whether they consider themselves to be a born again or evangelical Christian, similar to the technique employed by Smith in his seminal book *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (1998).¹⁵ Because of sharp social and political differences between white and African American Protestants, we combine this question about being born-again and one about racial identification to isolate white evangelical Protestants.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the EPS did not ask respondents about their frequency of church attendance (or any other measure of religious participation, devotion, or orthodoxy). Owing to the "devotional divide" within the American electorate, this is lamentable (Kohut et al. 2000; Layman 2001). However, the imprecision of our religious measures only serves to bias the

¹³ Multinomial logit (MNL) and multinomial probit (MNP) are both designed for models with multiple response options. However, the IIA restriction is built into MNL and is relaxed in MNP. In this case, multinomial logit and probit both produce substantively similar results. See Reviewers' Appendix II for more details.

¹⁴ In the absence of theory to the contrary, we include the same variables in the equations for all three options, and assume that the error terms are independent, standard normal, random variables.

¹⁵ For more details about the variables from the EPS, consult the reviewers' appendix.

¹⁶ An alternative method of identifying evangelicals entails classifying people on the basis of their denominational affiliation (Kellstedt et al. 1996; Steensland et al. 2000). The denominational affiliation method has much to recommend it, but is unavailable for the EPS since the survey did not include a detailed set of denominations. Since previous research has generally found the denominational system to have more analytical leverage than a question about being a born again or evangelical Christian, we assume that any inferences we draw about evangelicals would be stronger if we could identify evangelicals by their denominational affiliation.

results *against* uncovering either persuasion or mobilization owing to gay marriage among evangelical Protestants or Catholics.

We interact White Evangelical with living in a state that had a GMB on the ballot in 2004 (White Evangelical X GMB state) and also include the two main effects of the interaction in the model (White Evangelical and GMB state).¹⁷ We also interact Catholic and GMB state, owing to Republican efforts to court Catholic voters. The Catholic Church is formally opposed to gay marriage, although among individual Catholics attitudes on gay marriage resemble the population in general.¹⁸ Unfortunately, we have no way of differentiating between “traditionalist” and “progressive” Catholics, which other evidence suggests is the faultline on issues like gay marriage within American Catholicism (Wuthnow 1998; Hunter 1991). We operationalize secularists as those who decline to specify a religious identification when asked, a group that constitutes roughly 15 percent of the population.¹⁹ As with Evangelical and Catholic, Secularist is interacted with living in a GMB state. The coefficients for Evangelical, Catholic, and Secularist, as well as their interactions with GMB State, are interpreted relative to Mainline Protestant, which is the omitted category. The model also controls for the catch-all category of “other religion”--people who are neither Evangelical, Catholic, Mainline Protestant, nor Secularist.

The model contains a number of other control variables, to ensure that the impact of gay marriage opposition is not conflated with other factors influencing the vote. Our choice of

¹⁷ The GMB states include Missouri and Louisiana. Results are substantively unchanged when they are excluded. See the conclusion for more discussion of this fact.

¹⁸ 30 percent of Catholics support the legal recognition of homosexual marriages, while 42 percent support civil unions (2004 Election Panel Study).

¹⁹ The term secularist is admittedly imprecise, as the more technically accurate label would be religious non-adherents, or non-identifiers. To minimize awkward phrasing, we opt to use the term secularist. Note that the percentage of secularists in the EPS is comparable to the percentage derived using other methods. The National Election Study, for example, first asks respondents about their frequency of church attendance. Non-attenders are then asked if they have a religious affiliation. When the two questions are combined in the 2000 NES, secularists constitute 14 percent of the population, remarkably close to the 15 percent in the EPS.

specification is driven by the fact that we are modeling both turnout and vote choice simultaneously. Some variables are expected to have an impact on both, while some are hypothesized to affect only one or the other. At the state level, we account for whether the respondent lives in a presidential battleground state, since that is where presidential campaigns concentrate their resources and, thus, we would expect higher turnout. The model also accounts for whether the respondent lives in a southern state, because that is the region with the greatest concentration of evangelicals—a factor which might affect both turnout and vote choice. At the individual level, we control for education level, age, gender, race (African American), and Hispanic ethnicity.

We also include a mobilization index that records the intensity of campaign appeals received by the respondent through various channels, including face-to-face, direct mail, telephone, and e-mail. Because we do not know the content of these appeals, their purpose is simply to account for mobilization, a major factor affecting the likelihood of turning out to vote (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). We concede that the direction of causality is unclear as it could be that people who are already the most likely to turn out get contacted more, but either way it is an important control variable as we attempt to isolate the effect of gay marriage.

Additionally, we include a measure of whether the respondent indicates that George W. Bush “shares my values,” as a control for the respondent’s general affinity for Bush, rather than the issue of same-sex marriage itself. We control for party identification with the standard seven-point scale, and also include a tripartite measure of ideology, based on respondents’ self-identification (conservative, moderate, liberal). We estimate robust standard errors and allow for clustering by state, as intra-state variance is likely less than that between states. The data have

also been weighted to reflect U.S. population demographics, and to account for the complex sample design.

<TABLE 1>

The first panel of Table 1 displays two sets of coefficients; recall that each coefficient is interpreted relative to abstention. Column 1 predicts turnout to vote for Bush vote, column 2 turnout for Kerry. Thus, a positive coefficient in column 1 means that variable is a positive predictor of turning out for Bush. In the interest of saving space, we note that the control variables contain no surprises and forgo discussing them at any length. Turning to our substantive concerns, we see support for both of our hypotheses: evangelicals were mobilized to vote for Bush, secularists were demobilized. In column 1 we see that the interaction of Evangelical and GMB is positive with a p value of 0.05 (one-tailed)²⁰: white evangelical Protestants were more likely to vote, and to vote for Bush, in states with a gay marriage ban on the ballot. Conversely, the positive coefficient for evangelicals in GMB states in the first model is complemented by a negative one for Secularist X GMB ($p= 0.006$, one-tailed).²¹ In examining the equation in column 2, evangelicals were not more likely to turn out for Kerry in GMB states (neither were Catholics). Likewise, the coefficient for Secularist X GMB is also far from statistical significance.²²

The interpretation of interaction terms is best done with graphics. Figures 1 and 2 simulate the impact of having a GMB on the ballot for both evangelicals and secularists in a battleground state, with every other control variable set to its mean or modal value. For the

²⁰ Since we have a directional hypothesis, we report a one-tailed test for statistical significance.

²¹ Catholic X GMB is also positive, but misses the conventional threshold for statistical significance, suggesting that we might find a stronger relationship if we could isolate traditionalist Catholics.

²² Note that the main effect for Evangelical non-significant in the Bush equation. This suggests that, upon controlling for all of these other influences on both turnout and vote choice, evangelicals were neither less nor more likely to turn out for Bush in non-GMB states. Similarly, the coefficient for Secularist is also non-significant in this equation.

purposes of illustration, we show results for evangelicals and secularists who are “Republican leaners”; respondents who when first asked their party identification indicate they are independent but in a follow up question indicate that they lean toward the Republicans. Weak partisans and leaners are typically reliable supporters of their preferred party, but they do not turn out to vote as reliably as strong partisans (Keith et al. 1992). They are of interest since this is the type of voter targeted by Republican mobilization efforts—people who lean toward Bush, but whose partisanship is not fervent enough to ensure that they will vote.²³

<FIGURES 1 and 2>

These results show a clear pattern. In GMB states Bush turned out more evangelicals, thus adding to his share of the vote. Conversely, in those same states secularists were more likely to abstain. Importantly, we find no evidence that Kerry picked up votes among secularists in GMB states. For example, Figure 1 shows that Republican-leaning evangelicals increased their probability of voting for Bush from 0.49 in a non-GMB state to 0.64 in a state with a GMB on the ballot. Secularist GOP leaners, meanwhile, went from a probability of voting for Bush of 0.63 in a state without a GMB, to only 0.27 in a GMB state (Figure 2). The figures also make clear that both Bush’s evangelical gains and the secularist losses came at the expense of abstainers, with Kerry’s vote total unaffected. As displayed in Figure 1, the probability that a Republican-leaning evangelical abstained was 0.13 in a non-GMB state, dropping to 0.04 where gay marriage was on the ballot. On the other hand, abstention among GOP-leaning secularists rose from 0.06 in a non-GMB state to 0.39 in states with a GMB (Figure 2). In neither case do we observe much of a change in Kerry’s vote share. For evangelicals, it drops from 0.38 to 0.32, whereas for secularists it goes from 0.30 to 0.34.

²³ The model and predicted probabilities presented Figures 1 and 2 do not substantively change whether weak Republicans and Republican leaners are grouped together or separately.

When taken together, the figures suggest that in spite of GOP efforts to keep the issue of gay marriage contained to the segment of electorate where it would benefit Bush the most, he nonetheless suffered some collateral damage. Bush gained from pulling in support from evangelicals in GMB states, but at the expense of pushing away secularists. The key question, however, is whether on balance he pulled in more than he pushed away. At first blush, it might appear as though it were a wash, as the electorate contains roughly the same percentage of secularists as white evangelicals: the EPS shows each as having a share of about 15 percent. Furthermore, there is a non-negligible number of secularist Republicans. According to the EPS, secularists comprise roughly 7 percent of all Republicans, and 8 percent of Republican-leaners. These numbers, however, are dwarfed by Republican evangelicals, which suggest that Bush gained more than he lost. Evangelicals are 25 percent of all Republicans (including leaners) and 16 percent of those who lean Republican. We also stress that the demobilization among Republican secularists does not appear to have increased Kerry's vote share—those Republican secularists turned off by religious-themed appeals tied to gay marriage were apparently not persuaded to vote for Kerry, but simply stayed home and did not vote for anyone. Bush's loss was not Kerry's gain.

Conclusion

Soon after every presidential election, political pundits settle on a story line that becomes the standard explanation, and thus interpretation, of the results. Reagan won in 1980 because of the Reagan Democrats; Clinton won in 1992 because “it was the economy, stupid.” In the aftermath of the 2004 election, the story line that quickly became conventional wisdom among the pundits is that Bush won because of moral values: a majority of Americans believed that he shares their values on so-called cultural issues, such as abortion and, especially, gay marriage.

Exit polls showed a plurality of Bush voters citing “moral values” as an explanation for why they supported him, although pollsters quickly demonstrated a more nuanced interpretation with variations in question wording (Broder 2004; Dionne 2004).

Our analysis reveals that there is something to the moral values interpretation of the 2004 election after all, which given the recent history of presidential elections should not be surprising. As ably documented by Legee et al. (2002), Republicans have long been adept at mobilizing supporters around cultural politics. Gay marriage might have been new in 2004, but the general strategy of appealing to fundamental values is old hat. In this case, the Bush campaign capitalized on the strong feelings of many religious conservatives regarding homosexual marriage. The boost in Bush’s vote share in GMB states, though, was not spread evenly across the voting population. Rather, it came primarily from white evangelicals.

However, Bush’s gains from evangelicals were counter-balanced by losses among secularists, a wrinkle missed in the popular accounts of the 2004 election. Because this is not a group inclined to support Bush anyway, losses among secularists were likely outweighed by the gains among evangelicals—an important component of the Republican base. While in this case the demobilization from Bush’s use of gay marriage caused only moderate collateral damage, there is perhaps a warning here for the future. Acceptance of homosexuality has an upward trajectory within the American public, especially since young people are far more likely to show tolerance for homosexuals than their elders. Even without any attitude change among older segments of the population, the inexorable process of generational replacement is leading toward a greater level of acceptance for homosexuals within American society. In 2004, it was secularists who appear to have been demobilized by the issue of gay marriage and/or the use of religious imagery by the Bush campaign and its allies. As acceptance of homosexuality grows it

is probable that resistance to a stance opposing gay marriage, or similar efforts to increase homosexual rights, will diffuse even farther through the population. Opposition to the expansion of gay rights would then become a much riskier political strategy, potentially engendering an even wider counter-reaction.

While we hope that this analysis sheds some light on the role played by gay marriage in the 2004 election, questions remain. Perhaps most importantly, more can be learned about the process by which evangelicals were mobilized. One explanation for evangelical mobilization for Bush is that it was the result of a “reverse coat-tail” effect—evangelicals were primed to come to the polls to vote against gay marriage and, while there, also cast a vote for Bush. By this account, a gay marriage ban on the ballot set the agenda for the presidential contest, priming voters (or at least some voters) to evaluate the presidential candidates in relation to their stand on gay marriage. Evangelicals, many of whom oppose gay marriage, were thus spurred to the polls to vote for Bush—the presidential candidate unequivocally against gay marriage. In this respect, our results are consistent with Nicholson (2005), who also shows that initiatives and referenda affect the vote in other races on the *same* ballot. However, the 2004 presidential election also provides suggestive evidence that such priming has staying power, and persists into subsequent balloting as well. It appears that Louisiana and Missouri saw the same type of evangelical mobilization as the other GMB states, even though both states held votes on gay marriage prior to the presidential election in November. Having a gay marriage initiative on the ballot close to the date of the presidential election was enough to boost support for Bush (accompanied by mobilization efforts on Bush’s behalf). Without more data from Louisiana and Missouri than are available in the EPS we cannot trace precisely how the GMBs affected voters in these two states, and so we must leave further exploration to future research.

In conclusion, we stress that this paper does not claim to provide a complete model of all the factors influencing the 2004 presidential vote. Instead, we are interested in determining whether gay marriage affected turnout and voting behavior. Notwithstanding our focus on gay marriage, it is important to note that for most voters gay marriage was not a primary concern, as terrorism and the war in Iraq were the dominant issues. But while gay marriage may not have mattered much to many, it mattered a lot to a few. And those few are concentrated within an increasingly salient group in the American electorate—evangelical Protestants.

For the 2004 presidential election the widely-repeated tale is that moral values, aided and abetted by gay marriage, brought Bush victory. This is far from the whole story, but is nonetheless an important plot line in the 2004 election. Whether there will be a sequel remains to be seen.

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Table 1. 2004 Presidential VoteResults from 3-choice multinomial probit model. Abstention is 3rd choice.

	<i>Bush</i>	<i>Kerry</i>
White Evangelical X GMB	1.272** (0.795)	0.944 (0.817)
White Evangelical	-0.655 (0.339)	-0.880** (0.422)
Secular X GMB	-1.688** (0.720)	-0.817 (1.000)
Secular	0.073 (0.499)	-0.594** (0.402)
Catholic X GMB	1.203 (1.216)	0.948 (0.799)
Catholic	-0.389 (0.399)	-0.639** (0.348)
Other religion	-1.596*** (0.283)	-1.354*** (0.333)
GMB	-0.290 (0.488)	-0.353 (0.468)
Age	0.297 (0.165)**	0.462** (0.191)
Education	0.107 (0.097)	0.114 (0.073)
Female	-0.273 (0.338)	-.804*** (0.254)
African American	-0.540 (0.611)	0.941*** (0.406)
Hispanic	-0.845 (0.557)	-0.865** (0.382)
Party identification	-0.248 (0.077)***	0.278 *** (0.070)
Ideology	0.265 (0.184)	0.007 (0.181)

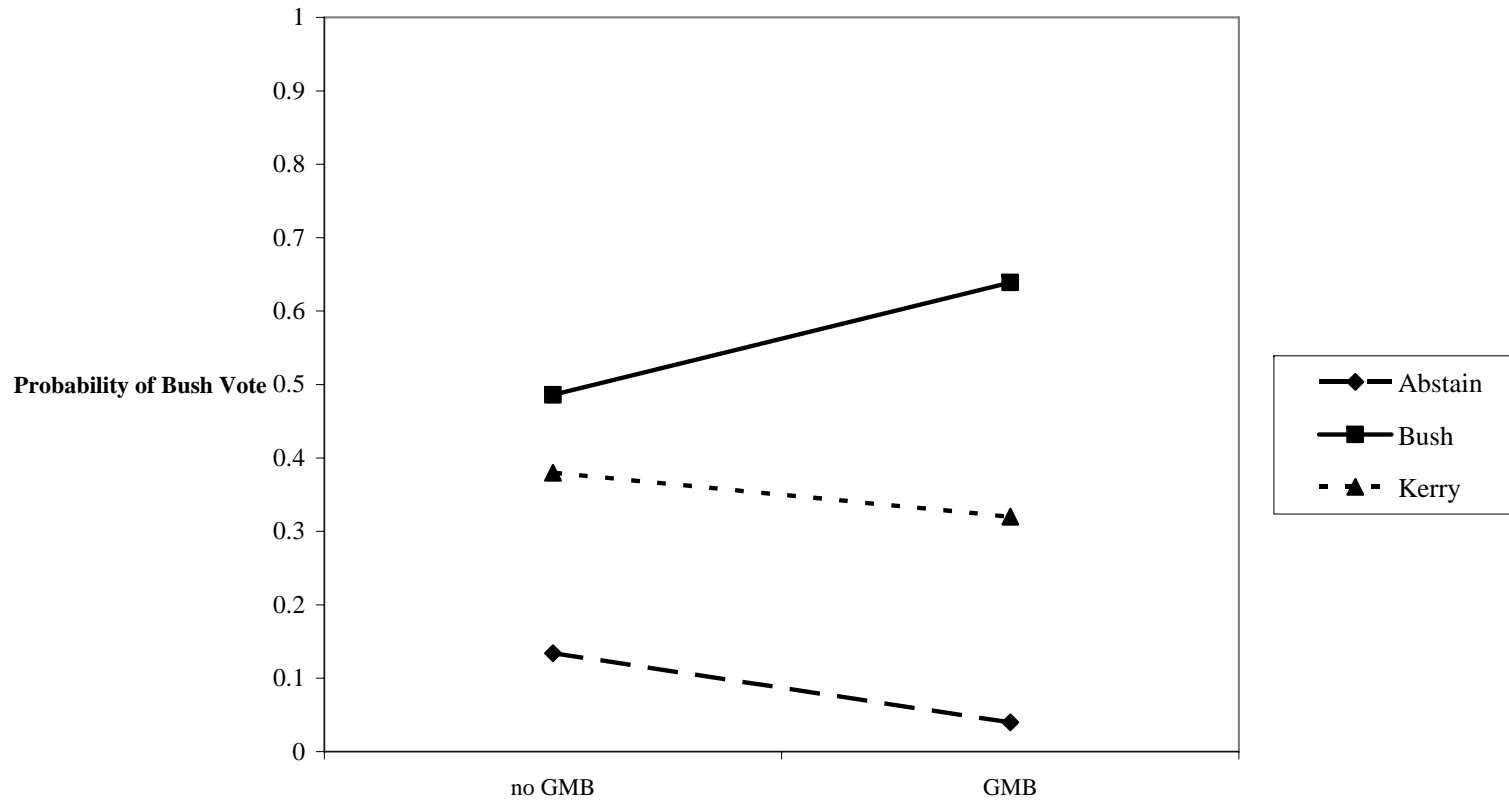
Mobilization Index	0.572*** (0.091)	0.520*** (0.092)
“George W. Bush shares my values”	1.067*** (0.132)	-0.245 (0.168)
Presidential battleground state	-0.250 (0.244)	-0.016 (0.225)
South	0.386** (0.223)	0.252** (0.200)
Constant	-2.849*** (1.386)	-1.111 (1.033)
	N	1339
	Wald Chi-squared	6810.36
	Prob > Chi-squared	0.000

Robust standard errors in parentheses, with clustering by state.

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$ (one-tailed test)

Figure 1. Evangelical Mobilization

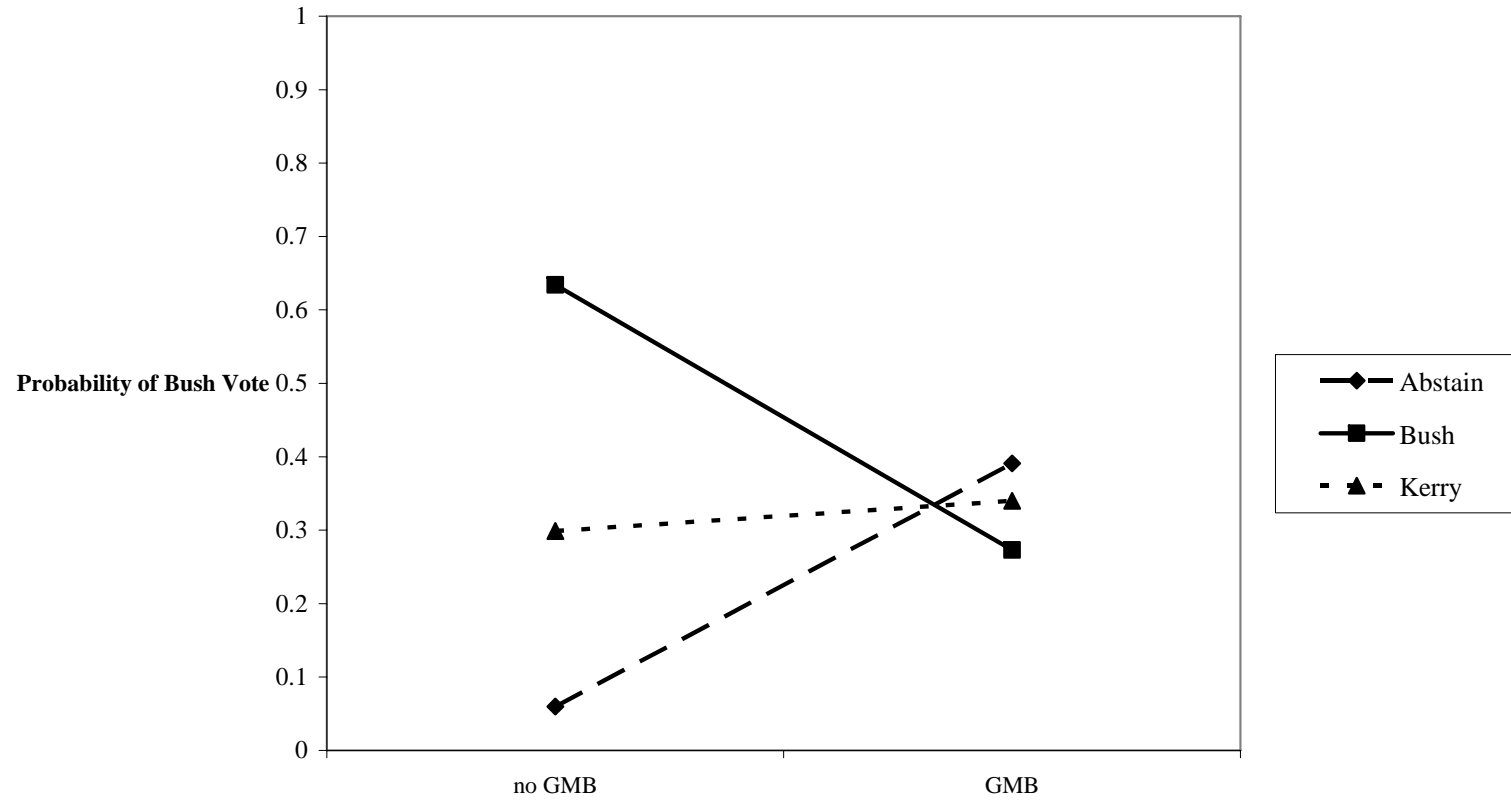
Evangelicals/Republican Leanners



All control variables set to their means

Figure 2. Secularist Demobilization

Secularists/Republican Leaners



All control variables set to their means