

The 2004 Election

DNC Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Outreach

A Report from Eric J. Stern, Director

The Bush-Cheney campaign turned the 2004 election into a “fear election.” They used images and memories of 9/11, the war on terror and the war in Iraq to convince voters that only President Bush could keep them safe. The dominance of these issues resulted in high turnout among the fiercely Republican base and peeled away voters who tend to vote with the Democratic Party on social and economic issues. The GOP also used wedge issues like same-sex marriage and abortion to suppress and peel off a small slice of voters.

Voter turnout was high on both sides. In 2000, Democrats did a better job of turning out their voters than Republicans did. Thus, in 2004, Republicans had more room to grow in terms of their turnout programs. The GOP wisely used the war on terror and issues like same-sex marriage and abortion to energize party loyalists.

While ballot measures banning same-sex marriage passed in eleven states, national exit polling revealed that 60% of the electorate believes that legal recognition, rights and benefits should be extended to gay and lesbian families. According to a recent study of data collected from national exit polls, majority opposition to recognition of same-sex couples was limited to members of a relatively small number of overlapping analytic categories and virtually all of those are among the core supporters of the Republican Party—*people who are not likely to vote Democratic under almost any condition.*¹

Senator John Kerry won two of the three battleground states (Oregon and Michigan) in which there were ballot measures. Republican columnist David Brooks concluded that Bush did not gain significantly in the eleven states with anti-gay ballot measures.² A lot has been made about the impact the anti-gay ballot measure had on the outcome in the critical state of Ohio. However, Election Day interviews with voters offered evidence that Bush's strategy of mixing cultural, security and economic messages resonated more strongly with Ohio voters than Kerry's message, which was largely focused on the economy. According to America Coming Together CEO Steve Rosenthal, it was not the Republican's use of issues like same-sex marriage and abortion that put Ohio in their column. Instead, Kerry's loss in Ohio had much more to do with Iraq and the war on terrorism, issues that ultimately trumped “moral values” at the polls.³ A national Gallup post-election panel survey shows that Iraq, terrorism and Bush's job performance were key reasons why voters voted the way they did this year.⁴

Overlooked Facts

The passage of eleven anti-gay constitutional amendments in this election was a significant setback for GLBT and allied activists. However, this election also provided the community with hope for the future.

- 1) Six out of ten voters—60% of the electorate—believe that legal recognition, rights and benefits should be afforded to gay and lesbian families.

¹ National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Report: “*Same-Sex Marriage, Civil Unions, and the 2004 Presidential Election*,” Dr. Kenneth Sherrill, Professor and Chair, Department of Political Science, Hunter College, Dec. 10, 2004.

² David Brooks, “*The Values-Vote Myth*,” *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 2004.

³ Steve Rosenthal, “*Okay, We Lost Ohio. The Question is Why?*,” *Washington Post*, Dec. 5, 2004.

⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, “*Different Influences Found for Bush, Kerry Voters*,” *The Gallup Organization*, Dec. 16, 2004.

The 2004 Election

DNC Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Outreach

A Report from Eric J. Stern, Director

- 2) Despite a threatened backlash, none of the Massachusetts legislators who supported equal treatment for gay and lesbian families was voted out of office.
- 3) In Idaho and North Carolina, voters elected their first openly gay legislators.
- 4) An openly gay Hispanic woman was elected county sheriff in Dallas.

About the GLBT Vote in the 2004 Election

According to exit polling, more than 4.6 million self-identified GLBT voters cast ballots in the presidential race.⁵ Exit polling showed that between 77%-81% of these voters cast a vote for the Kerry-Edwards ticket, delivering more than 3.5 million votes for the Democrats and more than 6% of the Kerry-Edwards total.⁶ The Kerry-Edwards ticket received roughly 400,000 more GLBT votes than the Gore-Lieberman ticket did in 2000. *The GLBT community is now second only to the African-American community (88%) in Democratic base vote loyalty.*

One piece of promising news is that Democrats actually went in and “picked off” 3-5% of the GLBT votes Bush won in 2000. Somewhere between 20-23% of GLBT voters cast a ballot for President Bush. This represents a decline from 2000, when Bush captured 25% of the GLBT vote.

Interestingly, 50% of the Bush voters support some form of legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples. 12% of Bush’s voters supported marriage equality and 38% favored civil unions, which, combined with Bush’s narrow margin of victory, demonstrates there is no national mandate for denying all forms of legal recognition to same-sex couples.⁷ Some have speculated that Bush gained these votes when, shortly before the election, he came out on *Good Morning America* in favor of civil unions and the right of states to extend rights to same-sex couples. Others believe that John Kerry’s mention of Mary Cheney during the second presidential debate moved some pro-GLBT voters away from Kerry and towards Bush.

The 2004 DNC GLBT Outreach and Turnout Program

The program’s primary goal was to increase the Democratic base vote loyalty of the GLBT community from 70% to 85%. Due to the aggressive outreach efforts of the DNC and Kerry-Edwards campaign, coupled with President Bush’s strident support for an anti-gay constitutional amendment and Kerry’s strong pro-GLBT voting record, GLBT turnout grew by more than 400,000 votes and the Kerry-Edwards ticket won 7-11% more of the GLBT vote than Gore and Lieberman did in 2000. Exit polls show that the Kerry-Edwards ticket received between 77% and 81% of the GLBT vote in 2004.

⁵ Exit polls did not ask voters to self-identify as transgender. However, for purposes of this memorandum, we will use “GLBT” to refer to those voters who self-identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

⁶ The National Election Pool’s exit polling showed that 77% of GLBT voters cast ballots for Kerry, with 23% for Bush. The *L.A. Times* exit polls, though, showed stronger GLBT support for Kerry (81%), with only 17% GLBT support for Bush.

⁷ David S. Broder, “Darkness? Hardly.” *Washington Post*, November 14, 2004.

The 2004 Election

DNC Office of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Outreach

A Report from Eric J. Stern, Director

The GLBT community contributed to the DNC and the campaign more than \$5 million dollars, \$1.8 of which was raised at a New York dinner with Senator Kerry. The program also successfully advocated for the hiring of GLBT coordinated campaign staff in 15 of the 21 original battleground states, nine of whom were GLBT field organizers, with the rest in various other roles. The program had GLBT steering committees in all 21 of the battleground states, comprised of elected officials, party leaders and grassroots activists.

Through the *Pride at the Polls* program, activists were mobilized to staff tables at more than 80 gay pride events across the battleground states, including for the first time Latino and African-American prides, and on college campuses to mobilize GLBT and allied youth voters on National Coming Out Day. The program's canvassing efforts at these prides and on college campuses, coupled with an aggressive on-line petition opposing the Federal Marriage Amendment, resulted in the identification of more than 200,000 GLBT and allied voters on the DNC's voter file. Working in concert with the DNC's Technology Department, the program also built an e-mail list of 80,000 GLBT activists, many of whom were the DNC's most active on-line and off-line activists.

Recommendations

- 1) **Use GOP intolerance to "pick off" pro-GLBT Bush voters.** The exit polls show that 60% of American voters favor legal recognition for gay and lesbian couples. 12% of Bush's voters supported marriage equality and 38% favored civil unions. Using micro-targeting, the Party must develop a strategy for "picking off" these socially moderate and liberal voters. The Party must deliver a targeted message to these voters that leaves no doubt that it is the party of inclusiveness and tolerance. For example, many commentators have pointed out that working women may have voted to re-elect Bush because they trusted him with homeland security. It's possible that over the next four years Democrats could neutralize the security issue and craft a message of individual freedom and responsibility that would appeal to such voters.
- 2) **Continue to "pick-off" GLBT voters who voted for Bush.** Democrats pulled hundreds of thousands of votes from Bush's base of 2000 GLBT supporters. This is an area where the Party can continue to win over new voters. There is no reason why the Party cannot achieve 90% Democratic base vote loyalty in the GLBT community in 2008.
- 3) **Stand proudly behind the pro-family, pro-equality principles articulated in the 2004 DNC Platform.** The Party's strong support for the legal recognition of GLBT families helped it win the votes of as much as 80% of the GLBT community (more than 3.5 million votes), millions of dollars in financial contributions and countless hours of volunteer and paid labor from members of the community who devoted their lives to the Kerry-Edwards campaign. It is the Party's values of inclusiveness and support for all families that will help it win over the millions of pro-GLBT voters who favored Bush in this election.