The Lavender Vote
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On election night 1992, as Bill Clinton savored his victory, a minority of Americans long chastised and, until recent times, usually invisible savored a great victory as well. For the first time in their history, the American people had elected as their president a man who had openly and strongly campaigned for the support of homosexuals and bisexuals.

The new president's longtime friend David Mixner, a gay California businessman who had helped raise an estimated $2 million from the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community for Clinton (Gallagher 1992), proudly if erroneously claimed that one of every six Clinton voters was a lesbian or gay man—and thus provided the Democrats' five percentage point margin of victory. Leaving aside the statistical stretch, Robert Bray, a spokesman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, called the election "a rite of passage from the margins to the mainstream, from social pariah to political partner" (McAllister 1992).

In the quarter century since the Stonewall riots of June 1969 in New York City's Greenwich Village, which launched the national gay rights movement in earnest, the estimated 5 to 10 percent of the U.S. population that is gay\(^2\) or lesbian, and the additional, uncertain percentage that can be called bisexual (Kinsey et al. 1948; Institute for Sex Research 1953; Fay et al. 1989; Janus and Janus 1993; Laumann et al. 1994)\(^3\) has emerged from almost absolute invisibility to assume a significant place in the public consciousness, and to have its demands for legal and social equality considered seriously. The role of lesbian, gay, and bisexual voters also is becoming significant, especially in major coastal cities, and urban politicians increasingly are making direct appeals for these votes. Now, so has the president of the United States.
The pages that follow report the results of the first detailed examination of self-identified lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals as a factor in the electoral politics of the United States. This study assesses differences in demographics, attitudes, and voting behavior between self-identified bisexuals and homosexuals and the rest of the voting population, as well as those between gay and bisexual women and men, and the factors explaining those differences.

The greatest part of the hard number analysis is made possible by unprecedented data from 1990 and 1992 national and state general election exit polls. In these two elections, for the first time ever, lesbian and gay general election voters across the land (joined by bisexual voters in 1992) could identify themselves by their sexual orientation in national political surveys.4

This study will show that self-identified lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men in America (from here on often abbreviated “LGB” or “LGBs”)5 constitute a disherited social minority that has begun to acquire some electoral power; that they think and act differently politically from the majority; that sexual self-identification by itself has a measurable, independent effect on certain political attitudes and, often, on how people vote; and that self-identification as gay, lesbian, or bisexual correlates directly with youth, and that therefore the percentage of self-identifiers is likely to grow as time goes on.

The Importance of the LGB Vote

At first it may seem that, despite the controversy “gay rights” issues engender, this group of voters would be too small to care about. Before and after this study, random-sample surveys asking respondents’ sexual orientation found that only a small share of Americans, from 1 to 4 percent, would identify themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Harry 1990; Miller and Bukolt 1990; Edelman 1991; Edelman 1993; Janus and Janus 1993; Rensberger 1993; Laumann et al. 1994).

Yet even so, in the 1992 presidential election, self-identified LGB voters were as numerous as Latino voters, and outnumbered Asian voters two to one. Further, a disproportionate share of LGB self-identifiers, in various prior studies (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Jay and Young 1979; Harry 1986) and in the exit polls we shall examine here, were under the age of forty-five; and it is likely, therefore, that as the generations change the share of “out-of-the-closet” LGB voters will grow substantially in the next quarter century.

Beyond the question of raw numbers, within the past few years it has become increasingly clear that, while political science has paid little heed to LGBs as a political force, the politicians and the popular media have put great
stock in a “gay vote” and, in like manner, an “antigay vote” comprising mainly older voters and religious fundamentalists. Given all this attention, there should be a natural interest in learning about LGB voters—who they are, how many they are, where they stand, and how they vote.

In addition, LGB people increasingly are classed by politicians, the news media, and some courts of law as a discrete and insular minority (Arriola 1988), and the gay rights movement consciously has followed the models of the earlier movements for black civil rights and women’s rights (Marotta 1981; Schiller and Rosenberg 1985; Adam 1987). Given especially the context of LGBs as an “invisible” minority, most members of which cannot be identified by others unless they so identify themselves, it is particularly interesting to learn whether the models previously developed to measure political activation and cohesion among feminists, organized labor, and racial minorities hold up when applied to what increasing are called “sexual minorities.”

Much outstanding work has appeared on the gay rights movement that has arisen in America since World War II (e.g., Marotta 1981; D’Emilio 1983; Adam 1987; Timmons 1990; Marcus 1992), and the popular news media from time to time have given attention to LGB politics in certain cities, particularly New York, San Francisco, and the LGB enclave of West Hollywood, California. However, until 1993, no study of this group of voters had appeared in the published scholarly literature. The obvious questions that arise are, Why not? and Why are these people important anyway? The first question is answered better once we look at the second.

The years 1992 and 1993 proved to be banner years for attention, be it positive or negative, to LGB voters and their political aspirations.

Challenged from the right by commentator Pat Buchanan, and pressured by religious fundamentalists, President George Bush and the Republican Party took new and extraordinary steps to distance themselves from LGB people (Schmalz 1992a, 1992b). Representatives of LGB Republican organizations were forbidden to address the GOP platform committee (Schwartz 1992). An openly gay Bush campaign employee was demoted and later fired, he alleged, because of pressure on his superiors from the Religious Right (Brown 1992), and Moral Majority founder Jerry Falwell responded by saying flatly, “There is no room for homosexuals in the Republican Party” (ABC News Nightline, 22 July 1992). The Republican platform opposed all federal, state, or local gay rights legislation and supported the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces. President Bush, in published interviews, reiterated his support for the military ban and condemned parenthood by same-sex couples as “abnormal,” while Vice President Dan Quayle averred that homosexuality was “a choice, and a bad
choice" (De Witt 1992). The GOP convention, in the midst of a long economic recession, focused on "family values," which in the eyes of numerous commentators was a code phrase for attacking gay rights and single parents. Buchanan and evangelist-politician Pat Robertson used the convention podium to launch attacks on gays and lesbians in prime time (Schmalz 1992a). The Republicans backpedaled on all this only when postconvention surveys revealed that a significant percentage of middle-class heterosexual voters were turned off by the appearance of "gay-bashing" in their campaign (Turque et al. 1992; Rosenthal 1992). In the meantime, the Log Cabin Federation, a national organization of LGB Republicans, responded to all this by publicly refusing to endorse Bush for reelection (Clines 1992).

At the same time, the Democrats were making an unusually strong appeal to bisexuals, lesbians, and gay men. All five presidential primary candidates vied for LGB voters, with the strongest appeal from former Massachusetts senator Paul Tsongas, original Senate sponsor of the first federal gay civil rights bill in 1979. Even the consciously moderate nominee, Bill Clinton—governor of a conservative Southern state in which homosexual acts between consenting adults in private still are criminal offenses—promised to repeal the military ban, outlaw antigay discrimination in the federal workforce, appoint a cabinet-level "czar" to coordinate action on AIDS research, treatment, and education, and sign a federal gay rights law, provided religious organizations were exempted and clear rules of judicial interpretation were adopted in the statute (Clinton and Gore 1992). One hundred eight openly lesbian or gay delegates and alternates attended the Democratic convention, and numerous pro-gay rights signs and speakers were in evidence, including openly gay, HIV-positive Clinton environmental adviser Bob Hattoy (Bull 1992). This can be compared with the two openly gay alternates attending a Republican convention at which numerous signs proclaimed "Family Rights Forever, 'Gay' Rights Never" (Pugh 1992).

Shortly after taking office, the new president found himself on the receiving end of vociferous criticism from conservatives and military leaders over his intention to lift the fifty-one-year ban on LGBs in the military. In January 1993, after a week in which the issue was the top news story in the nation, Clinton agreed to delay lifting the ban for six months, during which final discharges would be stayed but servicepeople facing such discharge would be placed on "standby reserve" (unpaid administrative leave). After well-publicized hearings by the Senate and House Armed Services Committees and a long-planned march on Washington in April by hundreds of thousands of LGB
people and their supporters, Clinton agreed to a policy forbidding LGB servicepeople to be open about their sexuality, which later in the year was written into the statute books by Congress.

At the state level, Colorado adopted an amendment to its state constitution in November 1992 repealing all gay rights legislation or regulations at the state and local levels and forbidding the passage of new ones. A similar, simultaneous measure in Oregon, which additionally declared homosexuality "abnormal, wrong, unnatural, and perverse" and lumped it together with bestiality, failed to pass but won the support of 43 percent of the state's voters; local versions of that initiative measure were adopted in several Oregon counties and municipalities the following year. Although the Colorado amendment was declared by a Denver court, and later by the Colorado Supreme Court, to violate the U.S. Constitution, and although the local-level Oregon initiatives were invalidated by a state statute overriding them, campaigns for antigay initiative measures were undertaken in at least eight states in 1993 and 1994. Voters in certain localities, most notably Cincinnati, Ohio, Lewiston, Maine, and Gainesville, Florida, repealed gay rights ordinances passed by their city or county councils.

Were this past activity not enough, a compelling reason to study LGB voters is that LGB-related issues are certain to play a considerable role in the 1996 presidential election.

First, emotionally charged litigation will force LGB rights onto the national agenda. The U.S. Supreme Court will rule during its 1995–96 term on the constitutionality of Colorado's antigay Amendment 2. (The previous term it ruled unanimously that LGB marchers may be excluded from municipal holiday parades sponsored by private groups.) Several conflicting federal district and circuit court rulings on gays in the military will have to be sifted through by the high court in short order. And, unless the state's constitution is amended in the meantime, Hawaii's Supreme Court may rule in the midst of the 1996 campaign that the state's ban on same-sex marriage violates the Hawaiian constitution (a preliminary ruling to that effect was handed down by the Hawaiian justices in 1994). At that point, the other forty-nine states will be faced with recognition of Hawaiian same-sex marriages under the U.S. Constitution's "full faith and credit" clause; this volatile question eventually will be resolved in the U.S. Supreme Court.

Second, religious conservatives again will try to place antigay initiatives on numerous state and local ballots in 1996, worded as broadly as permitted both by the need to gain majority support and by the eventual Supreme Court
decision on Amendment 2. President Bush managed to ignore these initiatives in 1992, but the eventual Republican nominee will be pressured to take a stand on them in 1996. President Clinton already has come out against them.

Third, any Supreme Court rulings favorable to the LGB cause may lead social conservatives to demand their rescission through one or more federal constitutional amendments. A ruling requiring states to recognize Hawaii's same-sex marriages is the most likely to engender such a response (Rotello 1994).

Finally, President Clinton's record (discussed further in Chapter 7) of seeking to allow open LGBs into the military and appointing open lesbians and gay men to high government positions is certain to be attacked by, at the very least, the farthest right of the GOP candidates and spokespeople.

More than in any prior election in our history, then, candidates for president, Congress, and state governorships and legislative seats in 1996 will have their opinions on same-sex relations demanded of them.

Despite all this attention to LGB people and LGB issues from national political leaders, until Edelman's article on LGB voters in the Clinton election (1993) there was no published scholarly work on lesbian, gay, or bisexual voters as a factor in electoral politics. The first research papers presented on this group of voters only have appeared within the last half-dozen years (Bailey 1989; Sherrill et al. 1990; Edelman 1991; Hertzog 1992). It is necessary, therefore, that a baseline study be done to assess who these voters are, what attitudes they hold, and—most important for practical politicians—how numerous they are and how they vote.

Whatever the actual number of homosexual and bisexual voters in America may be, they likely would not be a significant factor in American politics worthy of mention were it not for the unique disabilities imposed on them by the heterosexual majority (Editors of the Harvard Law Review 1990; Sherrill 1991). These disabilities, and the visceral fear that underlies them (Sherrill 1991; Challandes 1992) may seem irrelevant at first blush to the scholar of politics. They explain, however, why this fertile field of research remains unfurrowed, and why someone must break the ground. Thus I think it appropriate to devote a few pages to this subject.

As discussed in chapter 2, no other group of persons in American society today, having been convicted of no crime, is subject to the number and severity of legally imposed disabilities as are persons of same-sex orientation (detailed in Editors of the Harvard Law Review 1990). They are forbidden to serve in the armed forces, reserves, National Guard, or even in the ROTC. They are forbidden to teach in most public school districts. They are forbidden in most
places, by statute or policy, to adopt children or even to provide foster care. They are forbidden to protect their relationships through marriage. If fired from their jobs, evicted from their homes, expelled from their schools, denied credit, refused service in public businesses or restaurants or refused public lodging, solely on the ground of their actual or perceived affection for members of the same sex, in most of the United States they have no recourse in law or equity. They are legally assumed in most states to be unfit to keep custody of their own children, unless they prove their fitness, and one state, Missouri, concludes they are unfit automatically as a matter of law. Homosexuality is not permitted to be discussed in many public school systems, even in high school sex education courses, and objective written material about the subject is forbidden in numerous public school libraries.

These only cover the formal legal disabilities. The extralegal oppression is far greater (for overview, see Herek 1984; Adam 1987; Sherrill 1991; Blumenfeld 1992). The U.S. Department of Justice reported in 1993 that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals—gay and bisexual men especially—often are subject to random violent attack, sometimes lethal. If they choose to report such attacks, they face the likelihood that their status will become known to unsympathetic employers, family members, and neighbors, subjecting them to additional punishments. If a case is brought to trial, a jury, or even a judge, often will mitigate the offense or the penalty because of the victim’s sexuality alone. Most Christian churches condemn them, many expel them from membership, and nearly all forbid them to serve in the ordained ministry (Alyson Almanac 1990).

Positive, or even neutral, news stories about LGB people remain rare in much of the country. Hundreds of daily newspapers and local television stations refuse to publish advertisements or announcements by support groups for gay people, or for their heterosexual family members and friends. As young people they are ostracized, subject to being beaten, chased, and spat upon, and exposed to various forms of degradation, including sexual assault. Worst, perhaps, is that a significant percentage of parents of homosexual and bisexual children physically or verbally abuse them, seek to force them into religious or psychological counseling in order to “change” their orientation, or disown them, cutting off all emotional and financial support and sometimes forcing them onto the streets—simply because they are attracted to persons of the same sex as themselves.

This combination of laws and social practices have made the status and rights of LGB people a cutting issue in U.S. politics. It also makes it likely that those persons who do self-identify as bisexual, gay, or lesbian would find such conditions intolerable, and would be expected to band together in order
to change these conditions through unified action employing, among other means, the electoral process.

Relevance to the Study of Minority Politics

It may seem to the impartial observer that no group of persons could tolerate such oppression as described above, and that, if that group in fact constitutes a tenth of the population, it would rise up in righteous rebellion. That this has happened only to a very limited extent among American lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, therefore, must seem curious indeed. This brings us to the second essential reason for the study: to look at this group in light of existing theories about minority group politics. These theories, which I shall test in the bulk of the study, will be set forth more thoroughly in chapter 2, but warrant brief introduction here.

Group identification and cohesion. Campbell et al. (1960) defined the terms in which later scholars have studied group voting behavior in America. In their schema, the foundation stone of distinctive group voting is "group identification." Particularly in the case of objectively working-class voters who identify with the middle class, mere objective status as a member of a deprived (or dominant) group is not sufficient to bring about cohesive political action for the group's benefit; members also must express a psychological sense of belonging to the group. In the case of LGBs, the absence of legal protection, the positive legal and extralegal sanctions against them described above, and—perhaps most important—the ability to hide their homosexuality or bisexuality at most times and to "pass" for heterosexual would appear to militate in favor of extremely low levels of group identification, and therefore a very small "lavender vote" in comparison to the estimated share of "lavender" voters.

Strength of identification and group consciousness. A secondary consideration will be whether self-identifiers are possessed of "group consciousness" (Verba and Nie 1972; Shingles 1981; Miller et al. 1981), meaning identification with the group plus a positive assessment of it, an understanding of its relative political power, a belief that the system rather than the individual or group members is responsible for unfavorable disparities, and (Shingles adds) a strong sense of personal political efficacy. Among the LGB population, the impediments to group identification are so great that group identification may possibly be treated as synonymous with group consciousness. If true, we should expect that those who do self-identify would tend to be much more politically liberal and partisan than those
who do not, and that self-identifiers could be mobilized with relative ease for the common cause.

Organizational and activist influence. Research indicates that the ability of community organizations, such as black churches, to motivate and activate group members varies from group to group. Among working-class people, union membership contributes greatly to levels of group identification and consciousness. Similar levels of consciousness are found among self-identified feminists. In each case, however, the number of union members and feminists is small compared with the total number of working people and women, respectively.¹⁰

In the case of the LGB community, such community as exists has been built from scratch and must be discovered and explored independently by each person who comes out of the closet. In this context, we shall wish to determine the extent to which organizational activity, and especially LGB political organizations or media, influence group consciousness and cohesiveness. We should expect, as above, that self-identified LGBs would vote cohesively, and in line with the wishes expressed by activist groups.

Coalition building: The Adam hypothesis. Finally, the LGB example can be instructive in assessing the building of electoral coalitions with other "oppressed" groups, and with segments of the white heterosexual majority. Adam (1987) states categorically that the gay and lesbian movement is one with, and an essential component of, the "new social movements" of the left that have gained great influence in the Democratic Party in this country since the 1960s. One of my aims will be to test this hypothesis.

Constructing an LGB Voter Profile

The aim of this study is to take the available evidence and construct an initial profile of self-identified LGB voters, and of what may be an LGB voting bloc. To do this we will need to carry out the following tasks:

- Determine the approximate number of self-identified gay, lesbian, and bisexual voters, and present as complete and accurate a demographic, attitudinal, and voting behavior profile of these voters in the United States as the data allow;
- Compare LGB voters to non-LGB voters and determine significant differences, particularly the extent of bloc voting, if any;
- Formulate and test theories as to the causes of any significant differences;
- Assess the relative success of lesbian and gay organizations active in electoral politics, in a locality (Manhattan) in which such organizations are relatively quite strong, in influencing the voters they claim to represent.
These tasks imply a number of essential questions that must be answered if we are to construct an LGB voter profile.

1. **How many LGB voters are there?** As discussed in chapter 2, the very definition of “lesbian,” “gay,” or “bisexual” is a matter of considerable dispute. The only usable demarcation available to us is self-identification; clearly we cannot measure respondents who will not say they are gay or lesbian or bisexual on survey forms. I shall seek to determine whether a consistent percentage of self-identifiers can be established, and whether the rates of identification vary from place to place.

   It is important to state, and to restate occasionally, that this study does not encompass the attitudes and voting behavior of all Americans with a same-sex orientation. It is possible that those who remain “in the closet” think and vote exactly like their heterosexual friends and neighbors, and even if not, it is at any rate impossible to say that those homosexual and bisexual Americans who will not identify themselves as such are in any way similar to those who do self-identify. Indeed, it is possible that those who self-identify will be those already more inclined to break with conventional norms in their political thinking. Looking at the LGB self-identifiers remains important because they constitute the immediate constituency of the LGB political leadership.

2. **Who are LGB voters?** I next consider whether these voters differ in their demographic characteristics from the rest of the population, and whether these demographic differences tell us anything about the likelihood of self-identification. Thus, special attention will be paid to self-identification by age and education level, two correlates of group consciousness, and by sex, as women have been found in the sex surveys noted previously to self-identify at about half the rate of men.

3. **Do they think and vote differently from the rest of the public?** From there I look at the distinctiveness of the LGB respondents in attitudes on issues, party affiliation, and voting behavior. Special attention will be paid to the rate and consistency of liberalism and whether liberal attitudes translate into votes for Democratic nominees.

4. **What political divisions exist among self-identified LGB voters?** It is unlikely that a minority group encompassing members of all racial, religious, and ethnic groups and both sexes will be monolithic in its attitudes and vote choice. Particular attention will be paid to finding the sources of partisan divisions within the community, and to determining the existence and extent of a “gender
"Virgin Ground"

gap," divisions based on race, and distinctions within the group caused by identification with feminism.

5. Is there a “sexuality gap” in American politics? It may be that, after accounting for demographic differences between “gay” and “straight” voters, we will find no real difference in attitudes and voting behavior between the sexual orientations at all. If LGBs are disproportionately urban baby boomers, then, even if they are strongly liberal as a group, they may be no more liberal than their heterosexual neighbors; and the self-identifiers in the suburbs, who are fewer in number, may vote like their suburban neighbors.

If this is not true, however, there may in fact be an LGB vote, as opposed merely to LGB voters. If we do detect clear differences between LGB and non-LGB voters, what explains these variations? Are these factors similar to those found among other groups with high levels of internal cohesion and/or distinctive voting behavior? Further, is there a certain degree of difference that, it appears, we cannot explain for demographic reasons other than that of sexual self-identification?

6. Does local leadership affect cohesion? Finally, does the extent to which local LGB political organizations take part in a given election campaign influence the extent of distinctive voting? If so, we would expect that regions in which organizations are active and united around particular candidates would demonstrate higher levels of LGB voter cohesion, whereas those with weak or bickering organizations would show fragmented voting.

Surveys of LGBs

We return to the question raised earlier: why no one has studied LGB voters before. The singular difficulty in examining the LGB vote was the complete lack until 1988 of random-sample political surveys in which respondents were allowed to indicate their sexual orientation. That impediment is now gone.

The first surveys to include a lesbian and gay self-identification question were exit polls taken in certain Democratic presidential primaries in 1988 (Bailey 1989). In the 1990 general election, for the first time, two large national samples and separate polls in twenty-one states were taken, again as exit polls, which included a self-identification question for gays and lesbians (Edelman 1991). Then, in 1992, the self-identification question was first posed to voters in a presidential election—and self-identified bisexuals were included for the first time (Edelman 1993).
Before the Exit Polls

Prior to the exit polls of 1988, 1990, and 1992, information on LGB political behavior was culled from anecdotal evidence and surveys that did not use random sampling.

Anecdotal evidence has long suggested that there exist in many cities gay enclaves or "ghettos" large enough to encompass one or more voting precincts (Levine 1979; Weekes 1989). San Francisco drew a supervisorial district with a substantial lesbian and gay population in 1977 based on such evidence. By the mid-1980s, sufficient demographic indicators had been assembled to identify such precincts readily in San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Houston, Philadelphia, Boston, Washington, and perhaps other cities; based on this information, a portion of the city of Los Angeles was carved out in 1984 to become the city of West Hollywood, with a population estimated in the popular press to be at least 40 percent gay and lesbian. The new city promptly elected an openly homosexual majority to its city council and a lesbian as its first mayor. In 1991, New York state carved out an assembly district in lower Manhattan to protect the lesbian incumbent elected the preceding year by including predominantly LGB precincts, and New York City included many of these precincts in a new city council district expressly designed to elect an open lesbian or gay man. The identification of such areas, and the extent of the LGB population, has been made somewhat easier since the U.S. Census Bureau released its 1990 data on household composition, reporting the number of self-identified unmarried couples of the same sex living within a given census tract.

The anecdotal evidence has been supplemented by some surveys of LGB political attitudes and behavior. Jay and Young (1979) compiled a ground-breaking study of the demographics and attitudes of several thousand LGBs. This sample, however, cannot be used as a valid baseline. Not only was the sample self-selected, but the venues of exposure to the mail survey were largely limited to gay bars and bookstores, feminist and gay liberation organizations, and Blueboy, a popular gay men's pornographic magazine of the day. (Half of the more than five thousand male respondents answered the survey in the magazine.)

The unreliability of self-selected sampling with respect to political behavior was seen graphically in the presidential election of 1992. Overlooked Opinions, a Chicago market research firm that concentrates on LGB consumers, found that 90 percent of self-identified homosexuals planned to vote for Bill Clinton, and LGB activists touted this figure. The sample, however, was culled from
lists of patrons of LGB bookstores and subscribers to LGB-oriented magazines and catalogs, necessarily involving considerable indirect self-selection. As discussed below, the election day exit poll conducted jointly for the four major broadcast news organizations found that a smaller, although still very substantial, percentage of self-identified LGBs supported Clinton.

In contrast to nonrandom sampling, probability sampling of the sexual-minority population was in its infancy. Fay et al. (1989) report the first such sex study employing a random sample, which included only men and used data from 1970. Janus and Janus reported the first quota sample study to incorporate both sexes only in 1993; and the first reliable, national random-sample sex survey in the United States was not published until 1994 (Laumann et al. 1994). Beyond the realm of sex research, only one random-sample study in which (male) respondents could identify themselves as gay or bisexual appeared in the published literature (Harry 1990).

The CBS and VRS Data Sets

A joint exit poll by CBS News and the New York Times of voters in the 1988 New York Democratic presidential primary included the first known use of a gay/lesbian self-identification question in the history of scientific political polling, and that survey has served as a model for subsequent polls asking the respondent’s sexual orientation. The question was asked to assess the effectiveness of candidate Jesse Jackson’s direct appeal for the votes of lesbians and gay men in a state with a relatively well-organized LGB political community. The New York survey revealed that 4 percent of Democratic primary voters checked the “gay or lesbian” box, and that a large majority of these, black, brown, and white alike, had voted for Jackson (Bailey 1989).¹⁴

CBS and the Times, therefore, asked the question in each subsequent Democratic primary survey for the rest of the campaign. The question was not asked, however, in the 1988 general election exit polls. Each network conducted its own separate poll, and none appeared to believe either that the question was particularly relevant in that year or that the response rate would justify asking the question.

In 1990, for the first time, the four networks collaborated in a single national exit poll, administered by Voter Research and Surveys, Inc. (VRS),¹⁵ during the congressional midterm elections; and an additional version of the poll for CBS alone also was administered by VRS. In both versions of the national survey, the gay/lesbian self-identifier question was included. The same was true in twenty-one of the forty-two separate state-level exit polls conducted on behalf of the four networks by VRS.
The self-identification question, now amended to read "gay, lesbian or bisexual," was included in selected 1992 Democratic primary exit polls, and, for the first time, in the joint four-network exit polls on the general election. Since the 1992 election, VRS exit polls on the mayoral elections in Los Angeles and New York City in 1993 also have been conducted in which the LGB self-identifier question is asked. To date, however, no known random-sample national or state-level political survey, other than an exit poll, has included an LGB self-identifier question.

Other Data Sources

In addition to the VRS exit polls, the San Francisco Examiner in 1990 included a gay/lesbian self-identification question in its preelection survey of voters. This proved to be prescient, for in that election, two lesbians were among the six at-large members elected to the city’s governing Board of Supervisors, an openly gay teacher won first place in the election for the city’s school board, and a referendum measure granting benefits to unmarried "domestic partners," including lesbian and gay couples in long-term relationships, was adopted. (These electoral victories were labeled "the Lavender Sweep.")

A couple of months earlier, a survey was taken that has an important role in our study. In September 1990, Democrats in a downtown Manhattan district nominated (and the district later elected) an open lesbian, Deborah Glick, to the New York State Assembly, making her the first open homosexual in a state legislative body in the mid-Atlantic region. Presuming that a large gay and lesbian population inhabited the district, researchers at Columbia University and CUNY’s Hunter College, working with VRS staff, conducted an exit poll in randomly selected precincts in the district. This survey asked two forms of a self-identifier question, one of the VRS "grab bag" variety and a second specifically asking voters to identify their sexual orientation on a five-point modification of Kinsey’s (1948) seven-point scale. As discussed in chapter 5, this “Glick poll” data base is particularly useful in that it also asks which of several endorsements, if any, were important in the voter’s decision.

Reading the Results: A Caveat

The reader will find the data sets used here thoroughly described, and occasional cautions regarding them set forth, in chapters 3 through 6 and in the appendix; but I should advance one initial note of caution here. It will be noted periodically in the pages that follow that some of the samples or subsamples discussed in this study are rather small. This is particularly true of
the state-level exit polls. Of the 21 states in which the self-identifier question was asked in the 1990 exit polls, in only three states was the self-identified gay and lesbian sample size in excess of 30 respondents—the minimum acceptable for analysis in political science and sociology.

My analysis of the state polls in chapter 4, save for a pair of simple descriptive tables at the beginning, has been confined to those three states. In addition, when dealing with relatively small subsamples in the national exit polls (self-identified LGB Republicans, for example), I generally state actual numbers of respondents when reporting data in the text, in addition to (or in lieu of) weighted percentages.

I trust that any conclusions I draw here from these smaller samples will be the subject of further study. Nonetheless, even the small samples, read conservatively, have yielded some valuable information helpful in drawing our picture of the LGB American voter.

Americans with same-sex orientations are reputed to cast anywhere from 1 to 10 percent of the nation's votes. At the same time, these voters also are subjected to severe legal and social disadvantages and have organized, in the past quarter century, a far-reaching movement to eradicate these disabilities and change society's hostile attitudes toward them. One important aspect has been to attempt to organize LGB voters into a cohesive and decisive voting bloc. The time has come to see whether, and to what extent, the movement to weld together a "lavender vote" has succeeded.

The hostile and fearful attitudes we have noted, together with the homosexual person's ability to "pass" for heterosexual, have retarded research on this potentially important topic, and until recently prevented the gathering of information on the demographics, attitudes, and voting behavior even of self-identified LGB voters. Fortunately, however, within the past few years, we have obtained the sound data necessary to begin work on this topic. That being the case, let us delay no further.