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THE ELECTION OF OPENLY GAY PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

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As a newly emergent political minority, lesbians and gay men have begun to seek representation in political office, particularly at the local level. Using a purposeful sample of 126 cities and counties, the authors explore openly gay candidacies for, and election to, public office in the early 1990s. They employed four theoretical models—urbanism/social diversity, resource mobilization, political opportunity structure, and communal protest—that have been useful in explaining African-American, Latino, and female electoral success. The nature and pattern of electoral activities of lesbians and gay men are similar to those of other disadvantaged minorities.

Since the early 1970s, an active gay and lesbian movement has contended for political influence in the United States. Although this activism has taken many forms, incorporating public education campaigns, cultural activity, legal initiatives, and direct action, a major focus of this effort has been conventional political activity. Arguing that gay people are an oppressed minority denied equal treatment and opportunity, this movement has worked to establish political organizations, lobby for legislation, elect sympathetic candidates to public office, and protest vigorously against discriminatory practices. As part of these efforts, gay activists have pressed for the election of openly gay and lesbian (as well as gay-supportive) candidates to political office. Although the number of lesbian and gay officeholders remains relatively small and limited primarily to the local political arena, the magnitude

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of what is sometimes called “lavender power” has increased throughout the 1990s (LeVay and Nonas 1995; Vaid 1995). In cities as dissimilar as New York and Minneapolis, Rochester and Berkeley, and Albany and Dallas, voters have elected openly lesbian and gay officials to local office (Bailey 1994). By the mid-1990s, in the face of stiff political resistance and outright hostility, an estimated 120 openly gay officials had been elected in the United States, mostly at the local level (Yeager 1999). The trend line suggests that gay and lesbian candidates are more willing to run for public office, and their fellow citizens are more comfortable supporting such candidates (Moss 1997; Shapiro 1993).

An interesting and important development in its own right, the election of a growing corps of gay-identified public officials presents intriguing questions for political science. Drawing on research about black, Hispanic, and female-elected officials, we explore whether the forces that promote the officeholding of other disadvantaged groups are similarly associated with the election of openly gay public officials. The assumptions are tested by a multivariate analysis of the factors associated with gay officeholding in 126 American communities. This approach differs from prior research that has taken a primarily social-psychological approach to the phenomenon of gay candidacies for public office. Using case studies, surveys, and experiments, scholars have identified the cognitive processes and social traits activated when individual voters are confronted with openly gay candidates for public office or public referendums on gay-related questions (Gibson and Tedin 1988; Golebiowska and Thomsen 1998; Herrick and Thomas 1998; Riggle and Ellis 1994; Thielemann and Stewart 1996). In this study, we attempt to complement these valuable laboratory and survey investigations by determining how variations in collective traits across communities enhance or retard gay electoral activity. Such an inquiry can help illuminate how small, disliked, and relatively powerless groups find ways to enhance the responsiveness of the local political system through electoral politics.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The process of gay political life in American cities may be modeled on the process of ethnic succession (Eisinger 1980). When members of minority groups first arrive in large numbers, they often encounter a political system dedicated to preserving the hegemony of dominant population groups and indifferent or hostile to the aspirations of immigrants or newly emergent groups. As they experience urbanization and slowly begin to adjust to the realities of the urban environment, members of these out-groups eventually

learn the ways of city politics and accumulate the resources necessary for political power. In time, a minority group may take its place among the shareholders in the political system, obtaining some forms of public recognition and policy changes that reflect the interests and concerns of group members. In the first stages of political transformation, such groups may rely on sympathetic outsiders who pursue minority interests in exchange for the promise of electoral support. Rather than rely indefinitely on sympathetic patrons, minority communities usually reach a point where they believe that their interests and aspirations can be truly represented only by a member of the group itself. Embracing what Pitkin (1967) described as the "like unto" mode of descriptive representation, group members may thus press for direct access to public office itself. Apart from the policy changes such a representative often produces (Karnig and Welch 1980; Meier, Stewart, and England 1989; Wald, Button, and Rienzo 1996), the mere fact that a member of the minority group attains public office is itself a powerful symbol of affirmation and inclusion for the other group members.

Even though we believe it is fruitful to approach gay elected officials through this minority politics framework, we are open to the possibility that it may not fit the political mobilization of gays because their situation is not entirely analogous to that of other racial and ethnic minorities. Unlike race, gender, and ethnicity, sexual orientation can be and often is hidden. Moreover, being gay is commonly viewed as a behavioral characteristic, a consistent pattern of sexual behavior rather than an immutable quality such as race or ethnicity. These differences could have significant consequences for gay politics. Many heterosexuals believe that the ability to "pass" insulates gays from the level of discrimination experienced by African-Americans and many other minorities. Moreover, unlike attitudes toward race, gender, and ethnicity, where equality is the norm if not always the practice, most Americans consider same-gender sex both immoral and a threat to traditional society (Yang 1997). Because support for civil rights often depends on underlying attitudes to the groups who benefit from such laws, this antipathy undermines public support for many gay political goals (Riggle and Ellis 1994; Sullivan 1995; Vaid 1995). As a further political disadvantage, gays often lack the dense organizational networks that promote the development, transmission, and politicization of social identity (Sherrill 1996). These conditions may retard gay electoral activity or render it inexplicable using the models developed from the black, Latino, and female experience.

Nonetheless, the model of racial and ethnic succession still provides a useful source of hypotheses about the process of gay political empowerment. If we are correct in assuming that the parallels outweigh the differences, then the theoretical approaches that have helped explain the achievement of local

electoral power by Latinos, blacks, and other oppressed minorities can also illuminate the process by which gays and lesbians have achieved a modicum of urban representation. We consider four such approaches.

URBANISM/SOCIAL DIVERSITY

The growth of minority political power owes much to the processes of modernization and urbanization. These processes have been linked to innovative public policies and political developments that benefited various minority interests (Skocpol et al. 1993). Studies of minorities in American politics have also suggested the importance of demographic shifts, urbanism, and large concentrations of minority populations in creating environments conducive to political activity (Karnig and Welch 1980; Meier and Stewart 1991). More specifically, urbanism is important for the contact between individuals with common interests; it has thus been a factor in political mobilization. The major movement of African-Americans and Latinos to central cities, a major demographic shift in the United States since the 1930s, has gone hand in hand with and facilitated the rise of African-American and Latino electoral power. In addition, urban areas proved to be more accepting and tolerant of minorities and therefore were more receptive to black and Hispanic politics. Although the urbanization of large segments of these minority populations was not sufficient in itself to produce political representation, it was a necessary precondition for the election of many minorities to office (Cole 1976).

Although defined by sexual orientation rather than race or place of origin, the experience of gay Americans may also benefit from the phenomenon of urban concentration. The social dislocation of the post-World War II era found lesbians and gay men migrating to American cities, which were perceived as far more accepting of homosexuality than the small towns and suburbs where many gays were raised (D'Emilio 1983). In this context, urbanism refers to far more than mere population density. As Boswell (1980) noted, urban and rural social settings differ in ways that directly facilitate the empowerment of gay people. Abetted by social changes, Clark (1996) has affirmed, cities in the postindustrial era have developed a political culture that is strikingly amenable to social movements oriented around quality-of-life issues. Although these urban environments were markedly less hostile than other settings, gays seldom found a political system that was open or affirming of their needs and interests. In time, however, the concentration of gay populations in urban enclaves engendered a sense of identity and a collective consciousness. Indeed, it was mainly in large cities that gays ultimately found the social diversity and permissive atmosphere that supported open

homosexuality (Bailey 1998; Wilson 1995).¹ We should thus expect to find that urbanism and other indicators of social diversity facilitate the emergence of gay elected officials.

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

As part of the scholarly literature focusing on social movements, resource mobilization emphasizes the significant role of political and organizational resources of aggrieved out-groups (Mayer 1991; McCarthy and Zald 1973). Although discontent is relatively constant and common among minority groups, the leadership and other resources necessary to launch an organized movement for change are not. Groups with concentrated populations, well-developed associational networks, effective leadership, and strong interpersonal ties have a distinct advantage in politicizing their grievances.

In terms of mobilization to elect minorities to local political office, the socioeconomic resources (measured in terms of relative income and education) of African-American and Latino populations have had a strong influence on their representation (Engstrom and McDonald 1981; Karnig and Welch 1980; Meier and Stewart 1991; Robinson and Dye 1978; Stewart and Sheffield 1987; Wolfinger 1965). Women, too, are more likely to be elected to city councils in higher-income cities (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1987). In addition, as an indicator of organizational resources, the mere size of the minority population is a key factor. Thus the election of blacks and Hispanics to local city offices is affected greatly by their relative proportions of the population (Bullock and McManus 1990; Karnig and Welch 1980; Stewart and Sheffield 1987; Welch 1990).

Even when highly concentrated, gays and lesbians are nowhere near as numerous as the other minority groups that have converted their size into a political resource. Nonetheless, there are indications that the organizational and political resources available to the lesbian and gay community are an important component of gay electoral politics. Gays face a disadvantage in the development of cohesion and a collective consciousness because of the necessity of hiding their identity and thus often denying themselves the use of family, neighborhoods, or workplaces as a means of formulating group identity. Nevertheless, gays have developed alternative institutions that have frequently provided a supportive environment. These institutions include gay bars and gay-oriented services (Sherrill 1996, 1998). In addition, many larger cities have partisan gay and lesbian political clubs and other local gay associations that are strongly supportive of openly gay candidates for office (LeVay and Nonas 1995; Vaid 1995). In turn, gay office seekers themselves help to

focus and mobilize segments of the lesbian and gay community (Hertzog 1996; Vaid 1995). Based on these patterns, we anticipate a positive relationship between the level of gay organizational encapsulation and the attainment of public office by openly gay candidates.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE

Politically disadvantaged groups depend on more than their own resources and capabilities to succeed. Of great importance as well is the responsiveness of the political system to new demands (McAdam 1982). Tarrow (1991, 406) defined political opportunity structure as a cluster of factors that includes “the presence or absence of influential allies” and the “openness of access to political institutions.” The political empowerment of women in the 1970s was perhaps the classic case that demonstrated the significance of such factors (Costain 1992).

Most scholarly research related to political opportunity and minority electoral representation has focused on the nature of local government structure. Lineberry and Fowler's (1967, 716) classic work identified a syndrome of structural features, known collectively as “reformism,” that had the collective effect of “minimizing the role which social conflicts play in [government] decision-making.” The factors that inhibited minority representation were at-large election systems, nonpartisan elections, and the city manager–commission form of government. Of the three components of reformism, subsequent research has conclusively demonstrated that at-large election systems severely diminish the electoral representation of residentially segregated groups (Engstrom and McDonald 1981; Karnig and Welch 1980; Welch 1990). For groups less geographically segregated than blacks, such as Hispanics (Bullock and McManus 1990; Welch 1990) and white women (Darcy, Welch, and Clark 1987), at-large elections have less impact or may even enhance minority representation. Because gays are not always found in neighborhoods with a large number of lesbian and gay residents, particularly outside large cities (Sherrill 1996), we should not necessarily assume that district elections, by themselves, will enhance their quest for elective office. We thus consider all three components of reformism as a source of antiminority bias with the potential to diminish gay representation in local office.

Because of their limited numbers, gay voters must often depend on the support of gay-friendly or tolerant heterosexual allies to win elections. Indeed, there is some evidence that openly gay candidates have won office on platforms that combine the concerns of racial minorities, feminists, students, tenants, neighborhood activists, labor union members, and environmentalists

(Adam 1995). In Los Angeles and New York, for example, gay men and lesbians have become components of liberal biracial coalitions that are influential in local elections, often supporting gay candidates for office (Bailey 1994).

COMMUNAL PROTEST

Any attempts by out-groups to achieve electoral power will almost always be met by forces that oppose and resist such political actions (Tarrow 1992). Although such countermovements have often been overlooked by scholars of social movement theory, threats to the status quo commonly produce resistance to change. Lo's (1992) term *communal protest* emphasizes the significance of reactive groups that mobilize against threats to their perception of tradition, security, and community. When Catholics and Jews first began to make inroads upon the political system in many urban areas early in the twentieth century, they faced formidable opposition from the Ku Klux Klan in many communities. The Klan drew support from nativist whites whose cultural hegemony was threatened by the new waves of "foreign" immigrants (Jackson 1967). Years later, the black civil rights movement in the South was often confronted by powerful white countermovements that attempted to thwart the black quest for greater political and economic opportunities (Button 1992; Colby 1985). Such movements of white racial protest—from the Klan to the Wallace movement of the 1960s—often drew particular sustenance from the well of fundamentalist Christianity (Wilcox 1988).

Similarly, the most significant challenge to gay electoral activists in the current era comes from those who are deeply rooted in fundamentalist religious organizations that condemn homosexuality as sinful and a threat to the traditional family (Bull and Gallagher 1996; Herman 1997). Religious conservatives perceive gay activism as a serious challenge to a social order based on patriarchal norms. Such religious groups have often mobilized effectively against gay and lesbian attempts to gain greater public power.

METHODOLOGY

SAMPLE

The set of communities for exploring this political phenomenon is a purposeful one. It consists of the 101 U.S. cities and 25 counties that had in place antidiscrimination legislation protective of gays in mid-1993. By virtue of having given legal protection based on sexual orientation, through law or policy, the communities represented a mere 1% of American local governments.

They were different from the statistically “typical” locality in their greater size, social diversity, religious composition, regional distribution, and demographic patterns (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997, 76-82). The restriction of analysis to these communities is based on the simple reality that openly gay elected officials remain a rarity in American public life.² Both in absolute and proportional terms, the approximately 120 openly gay officials compared unfavorably to the more than 5,000 Latinos and 8,000 African-Americans who held elected government positions at the time of our study (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998, 294). Faced with such a skewed dependent variable, it makes sense to focus on communities that have demonstrated at least some responsiveness to the perceived needs of gays and lesbians. Even among this rather rarified group of localities, only one in five reported that such an official held office at the time of our survey.

Despite their collective differences from American communities in general, the 126 cities and counties in the sample still vary appreciably from one another on the factors likely to promote the election of gay public officials. The cities formed four distinct clusters: large industrial centers in the Northeast and Midwest, university towns and small cities, cities in the South and border states, and a class of affluent coastal communities. Even the commonality of size can be exaggerated. Although there is a strong monotonic relationship between size and passage of gay rights legislation, a majority of the sample consists of localities with populations of less than 200,000 (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997). The use of a censored sample limits our ability to generalize from these findings to all American cities but does not inhibit analysis due to restrained variance on the key independent variables.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

We obtained local election information on lesbians and gays by mail and/or telephone surveys of knowledgeable government officials in each community.³ Based on prior work about the adoption of protective legislation, we had more confidence in data gained from a systematic survey of local officials than from any of the lists of gay candidates and officials compiled informally by gay advocacy groups. Nonetheless, we compared our list with the data collected by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund (GLVF), the only organization known to have compiled such information (DeBold 1994). As expected, our survey of local officials generated a larger pool of cases from the 126 communities—28 rather than the 17 reported by the GLVF.⁴ Further giving us confidence in our data collection process, we found no cases in the GLVF list for these communities that had not been turned up by our survey.

TABLE 1: Openly Gay Elected Officials in 1993: Two Measures

	N	%
Is there currently an openly gay elected member of the city or county legislature?		
Yes	28	22
No	98	78
Total	126	100
Aside from officeholders, within the past five years, have there been any other openly gay men or lesbians who have been candidates for public office in your city/county?		
Neither officials nor candidates	62	49
Candidate but no official	16	13
Two or more candidates but no official	20	16
Official but not other candidates	11	9
Official and other candidates	17	14
Total	126	101 ^a

a. Exceeds 100% due to rounding.

Table 1 presents two different ways of conceptualizing the electoral fortunes of openly gay public officials.⁵ The first measure, based on the question—“Is there currently an openly gay member of the city or county legislature?”—produced a simple dichotomy with approximately one-fifth of the cases reporting an elected official and the other four-fifths indicating that no such official held office at the time of the survey.⁶ We will refer to this first variable as “gay official.” The second measure expands on the first by factoring in the history of efforts to elect gay officials. Respondents were asked whether they recalled “any other openly gay men or lesbians who have been candidates for public office” in the city or county within the past five years.⁷ Responses to the two questions were combined to yield an ordinal measure with five categories. Attesting to the paucity of gay representation, a large plurality of communities reported neither a gay elected official at the time of the survey nor a prior gay candidate for elective office. The remaining 64 cases were divided relatively equally among communities with a single unsuccessful gay candidate, two or more unsuccessful gay candidates, a single gay official and no other gay candidates, and, finally, those localities with a gay official and other gay candidates in the past. In the analysis that follows, this second variable is labeled “gay electoral activity.”

To further validate these measures, we explored their relationship to another survey item. Before encountering the questions summarized in

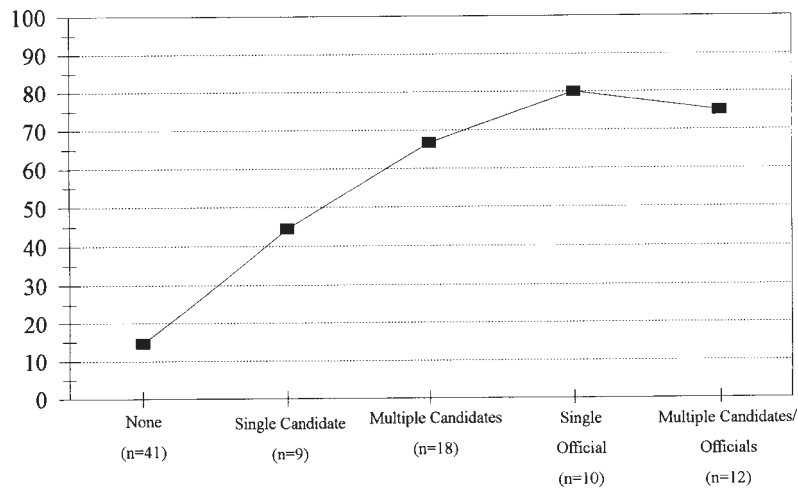


Figure 1: Percentage of Communities Where Gay Voters Have Made a Difference in Local Elections by Level of Gay Representation

Table 1, respondents were asked if there was “any evidence that gays and lesbians had made a difference in the results of any local election (including school board elections) in the past 10 years.” This question inquired about the general electoral mobilization of the gay and lesbian population, not the election of openly gay officials or the frequency of openly gay candidates. Nonetheless, we would certainly expect to find a positive relationship between the incidence of gay officials and candidates and evidence that gay voters were a potent force in local elections. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the predicted relationship emerged from the data. The proportion of positive responses to the gay vote question rose nearly monotonically across the five categories of the gay mobilization item. At the extremes, for example, only 15% of respondents reported a significant gay electoral presence in the communities with no gay candidates or officials, whereas the corresponding figure was 75% in communities with a gay official and other gay candidates. On the basis of these results, we can have some confidence in the validity of the dependent measures.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

The model will include predictors associated with the four theoretical perspectives introduced earlier. To assess the impact of urbanism/social diversity on the election of openly gay public officials, we incorporated four

indicators: population size (in thousands), black population share, median income (in thousands), and the proportion of nonfamily households (defined by the U.S. census as households composed of individuals unrelated by marriage or biology). Population size is the core measure, and the other three tap the racial, economic, and social structure of the community.

The resource mobilization approach was operationalized by a pair of variables. The first, gay-related services, was based on a per capita count of gay businesses and services listed in the *Damron Address Book* (Damron Company 1994), a popular reference guide for gays and lesbians. The measure taps the degree to which gays have access to associational networks, a crucial component of gay mobilization (Sherrill 1996, 1998). We also included a census measure of the percentage of households occupied by unmarried partners of the same sex. Although falling far short of a comprehensive indicator of gay population size, this variable seems to work well as an indicator of gay concentration across communities and powerfully predicts the passage of gay rights ordinances (Wald, Button, and Rienzo 1996).

For the political opportunity approach, we used four variables that tap the hospitality of the political system to gay residents. The first three index, respectively, the local, state, and national political environments that characterize a federal system. For the local system, we replicated Lineberry and Fowler's (1967, 713-14) composite measure of political structure calculated so that communities received the maximum scores if they maintained an "unreformed" political system with partisan elections, district representation, and an elected mayor. The state political culture was indexed by the number of institutions (if any) covered by a state gay rights law.⁸ The sympathy of the relevant national elites was gauged by determining whether any of the congressional representatives representing a part of the community had cosponsored the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, the major gay-related civil rights legislation introduced during the 1991 session of Congress. To get at another set of allies who are part of the political opportunity structure, the model also included the percentage of residents enrolled in institutions of higher learning.

The communal protest model, an approach that focuses attention on the power of social traditionalism, was tested by two measures of religious composition—the percentage of residents adhering to any religious tradition and the proportion of that total represented by conservative Protestants. These measures will tell us whether religious commitment and/or the specific presence of doctrinal traditionalists affects the electoral prospects of gays and lesbians.⁹

FINDINGS

Because of the dichotomous nature of the first dependent measure, the presence or absence of a gay official, we employed logistic regression. To cope with the large number of predictors relative to cases, only coefficients significant at .05 were retained in the analysis.¹⁰ The results of that procedure, reported in Table 2, show the standardized logistic coefficients for the five variables that satisfied the entry criteria, the mean and standard deviation for each predictor, and both the probability and change in probability of a gay official if the specified variable is increased by one standard deviation while all other predictors are held constant at their mean values. The change in probability in the final column is commonly interpreted as a standardized measure of the relative impact of each predictor in a logistic model.

The findings suggest that only two of the four perspectives that guided the analysis are helpful in accounting for the presence or absence of openly gay public officials at the time of the survey. Five predictors from those perspectives entered the equation, and all seem to have exerted roughly equal impact on the dependent variable. Consistent with the urbanism/social diversity approach, population size and percentage of nonfamily households were significantly and positively associated with the presence of an openly gay elected official. The proportion of blacks in the community was negatively related to the dependent variable. The community's political opportunity structure also mattered, as indicated by the significant and positive coefficients for variables representing the degree of coverage of the state gay rights law and the degree to which the formal structure of local government was "unreformed." These results tell us that openly gay public officials are more likely to be elected in communities with a high level of state antidiscrimination protection for gays and where local governments use partisan, district elections for the local legislature and the popular vote to select the chief executive officer. None of the variables from the resource mobilization or the communal protest perspective satisfied the entry criteria.

How well did the parsimonious model perform in the aggregate? The classification table provides an answer. Based solely on the highly skewed distribution of the dependent variable, we would have correctly classified 78% of the cases by simply assigning them the modal value. In fact, the prediction equation for the parsimonious model correctly classified 84% of the cases, a significant improvement despite the somewhat anemic value of the pseudo- R^2 statistic. As the classification table reveals, we erred in predicting only four false positives among the 98 communities without an openly gay

TABLE 2: Logistic Analysis of the Election of Gay Officials

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p Gay Elected Official^a</i>	<i>Mean Value</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>p Gay Elected Official^b</i>
Urbanism/social diversity					
Black population	-.0426*	.0828	15.4	16.7	-.0724
Population (in thousands)	.0008**	.2663	434	90	.1110
Nonfamily households	7.6434**	.2776	0.42	0.09	.1223
Political opportunity structure					
State gay rights law	.3068**	.2711	2.25	2.30	.1158
Unreformed government system	.8839**	.2698	1.2	0.8	.1146
Intercept	-6.298293***				
PRE	.29				
Pseudo- R^2	.23				
Model χ^2	30.46**				

Classification Table

<i>Classified</i>	<i>True</i>		
	<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>	<i>Total</i>
Positive	12	4	16
Negative	16	94	110
Total	28	98	126

NOTE: Dependent variable is coded 1 if jurisdiction had an elected gay public official and 0 if no such officials were reported.

a. Probability of a gay elected official if other predictors are set to mean values and specified variable is increased by one standard deviation. Probability with all variables set to mean values = .1553.

b. Change in probability of a gay elected official if other predictors are set to mean values and specified variable is increased by one standard deviation.

* $p = .05$. ** $p = .01$. *** $p < .001$.

elected official, an accuracy rate of 96%. On the other hand, the model successfully accounted for only 12 of the 28 communities with a gay official for a prediction rate of just 43%. This pattern suggests that we were only partially successful in identifying the forces that promoted gay political representation.

The relatively poor rate of positive predictions may be due to inadequate theory, but it could be influenced by the nature of the dependent variable.

TABLE 3: Ordinary Least Squares Analysis of Gay Electoral Mobilization

<i>Theory and Variable</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>F Change</i>
Urbanism/social diversity			
Population (in thousands)	.0004**	.28	10.38**
Resource mobilization			
Same-sex partner households	195.41**	.29	13.28**
Political opportunity structure			
State gay rights law	.14**	.21	7.15**
Unreformed government system	.34*	.18	5.33*
Intercept	.97**		

NOTE: Model $R = .496$, model $R^2 = .246$, adjusted $R^2 = .221$, SEE = 1.3.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Recall that the measure in Table 2 determined whether an openly gay official served at the time of the survey. The companion measure of gay electoral activity, by contrast, asked respondents to expand the time frame to five years and to report unsuccessful gay candidacies as well as victories. With a fuller record of gay electoral activity, the predictor variables may do better in accounting for the dependent variable. That possibility will be tested with an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model to take advantage of the ordinal nature of the expanded dependent variable. In the OLS regression reported in Table 3, the predictors were retained only if they satisfied the same decision rule used for the logistic analysis.

Looking at the model in Table 3, we find support for three of the four theoretical perspectives borrowed from studies of minority representation. Gay electoral mobilization was significantly influenced by urbanism in the form of a strong positive effect associated with population size. Even among this rather select group of communities, size does seem to matter. Resource mobilization has also played a role in gay political activity. The key resource appears to be numbers: the larger the proportion of same-sex partner households, our surrogate for gay population, the higher the level of gay political activity. A large gay community does produce a high level of political activity, although it does not necessarily translate into gay elected officials to judge from the analysis in Table 2. The political opportunity structure is also an important influence on the electoral prospects of gays and lesbians in these communities. The state's political culture regarding gay rights and the maintenance of an unreformed local governmental system both facilitated the electoral prominence of gay candidates. In the analysis of gay electoral activity, as in the case of successful gay representation examined earlier,

communal protest failed to exert any significant influence. Neither the overall level of religious affiliation nor the concentration of conservative Protestants affected the level of gay electoral activity.

The beta coefficients in Table 3 indicate no dramatic difference among the four significant predictors from the OLS run. The strongest of the four predictors were the census-based estimates of the gay population and the size of the community. The remaining predictors, the number of institutions covered by the state gay rights ordinance, and the unreformed government structure were slightly less powerful. However, these variations might well reflect the distributions of the variables. The lowest two betas reflect the impact of variables with nonnormal distributions and restricted ranges, qualities that might suppress the beta relative to the other predictors. The safest conclusion from Table 3 is that resource mobilization, political opportunity structure, and urbanism contributed about equally to the level of gay electoral mobilization.

Although the analysis has suggested some important patterns, we must not refrain from noting the failure of the communal protest perspective and the lack of impact for variables representing the black population, college students, income, gay organizational resources, congressional representatives, and nonfamily households. Moreover, the modest R^2 value of .25 reminds us of how undeveloped is our understanding of the forces that promote or retard gay electoral mobilization.

PATTERNS OF GAY AND LESBIAN CANDIDATES ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF OTHER OPPRESSED MINORITIES

Before elaborating on the findings, it is important to reiterate their limitations. Our sample selection was biased to include only communities that had taken some steps to forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation. Although that category of communities has grown steadily throughout the 1990s, now exceeding 150, it still represents a small subset of all American localities. The findings should not be generalized to all American cities and counties. They hold only for jurisdictions that have crossed the threshold of extending civil rights protection to the gay and lesbian population.

Among this set of localities, our study clearly indicates that the factors influencing the local electoral mobilization of lesbians and gays are similar to the patterns of other oppressed minorities, particularly blacks and Hispanics. Population size and, to a lesser extent, the proportion of nonfamily households are strong predictors of gay electoral candidacies and success. Both variables are components of the urbanism/social diversity model. Large

cities have proven to be relatively tolerant environments that nurture minority growth and political development. Nonfamily households, although a marker of social diversity, are also highly correlated with educational level and college enrollment. As such, this factor is an indicator of politically liberal college communities with gay candidates or officials, such as Austin (Texas), Berkeley (California), Iowa City (Iowa), Madison (Wisconsin), East Lansing (Michigan), and Chapel Hill (North Carolina). Universities add to the diversity of these communities, creating a more accepting atmosphere for openly gay politicians. In this sense, nonfamily households may also be conceptualized as a marker of the political opportunity structure.

This finding reinforces what turned out to be the most important theoretical model in explaining lesbian and gay urban electoral activities. The political opportunity structure, or openness of the political system to new demands, facilitates gay mobilization and election both through the state's political culture supportive of gay rights and a nonreformed local government system. A political atmosphere at the state level that endorses inclusive nondiscrimination legislation, a prime goal of the gay movement, seems to encourage openly gay candidates to compete for public office. Unreformed local government systems, particularly district elections, promote minority representation by enabling residentially segregated minorities to reduce direct competition with nonminorities and therefore have a greater chance of electoral success (Karnig and Welch 1980). To the extent that lesbians and gays are likewise segregated by neighborhood, district elections should also spur greater numbers of gay candidates and greater success in election to office. To the extent that gays and lesbians are geographically dispersed, they benefit from other aspects of the antireform syndrome, partisan elections, and the mayor-council form of government that encourage governmental responsiveness to minority concerns.

The resources that gays themselves bring to the electoral arena are important but not decisive. Recall that the size of the gay community, as approximated by same-sex households, was a strong predictor of gay electoral activity (see Table 3) but not a significant predictor of gay electoral success (see Table 2). We interpret this to mean that the gay constituency is a necessary but not sufficient condition for gay representation. As resource mobilization theory suggests, a vital gay constituency promotes electoral mobilization, but the translation of this impulse into electoral success apparently hinges on factors beyond the gay community's resource base.

Finally, and somewhat surprisingly, the communal protest model has no measurable influence on gay electoral activity. There is no evidence in any of our analyses that political opposition in the form of religious traditionalists had an impact. Although this could be a function of the religious demography

of communities with gay rights ordinances, it might also have a substantive interpretation. This does not mean, however, that there was no opposition at all to openly gay electoral mobilization but that perhaps such gay candidacies for local office were so rare, and their chances of success considered so remote, as to merit little attention from obvious adversaries. As more gay candidates have emerged, there is some evidence more recently of mobilization against them by the religious right and other conservatives (Moss 1996). Interestingly, our analysis of gay elected officials in Table 2 did suggest antagonism from African-Americans. Evidence shows that some blacks perceive gays as more affluent and less disadvantaged than many in the African-American community and therefore are thought to be less deserving of minority status. More religious blacks, particularly black evangelicals, emphasize moral traditionalism, which is a basis for antigay attitudes (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997, 184-86).

The trend of the 1990s is for increased numbers of openly lesbian and gay citizens to compete for public office. To the extent such candidacies are put forward in cities and counties that have taken the controversial step of implementing gay rights policies, our analysis indicates that their chances for success are greatest in large, diverse communities with sizable gay populations and electoral structures that are hospitable to minority candidates. A state political culture that is protective of cultural diversity is also helpful. As of the mid-1990s, traditional religious groups had not yet appeared in noticeable numbers in these communities to confront openly gay politicians.

These findings also speak to the ongoing debate among gay activists over the wisdom of political strategies as a means of emancipation. Because of the small size of the gay community and the opprobrium that society still attaches to homosexuality, gay initiatives often fall victim to the "majority tyranny" syndrome that Alexis de Tocqueville identified in the American polity (Gamble 1997).¹¹ In the eyes of some commentators, differences between gays and racial and ethnic minorities make the gay situation *sui generis* and, correspondingly, render the electoral process a dead end for gay and lesbian aspirants (Sullivan 1995; Vaid 1995). The implication is either that gays should seek other venues—such as the courts—where the playing field is leveled by the absence of populism or forgo politics entirely in favor of culturally based activity. Given the right combination of circumstances, our results suggest, gay and lesbian candidates can contest successfully for public office via the electoral process. Although the magnitude of gay political success is significantly below that attained by other minorities, no doubt reflecting the greater barriers faced by homosexuals, the evidence suggests that the nature and pattern of gay electoral activity are strikingly similar to the mobilizing efforts of other minority groups.

NOTES

1. Although large cities were the fulcrum of the gay consciousness movement, the gay rights campaign also had striking early successes in smaller cities that were home to large universities and high concentrations of public employees (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997). Both large cities and postindustrial communities seem to have developed a culture that facilitated political mobilization by gays and lesbians.

2. In a randomly selected comparison sample of 125 cities and counties with no such protective ordinances based on sexual orientation, we found no gay elected officials and almost no gay electoral activity.

3. To survey these communities, a telephone inquiry elicited the name of the public official who implemented the local gay rights policy or ordinance. We typically were referred to a high-level official, most often the director of personnel or director of the human rights agency. Absent someone formally charged with enforcement, we asked for the official most knowledgeable about local gay rights and politics. Using Dillman's (1978) total design method, questionnaires were mailed to designated officials in July 1993. Two follow-up mailings and then telephone calls were made to all nonrespondents, thus enabling us to achieve a 100% return rate from the 126 cities and counties with gay rights legislation. Personal interviews with public officials in several cities that had gay candidates or elected officials indicated that such phenomena were considered unique and noteworthy events and were thus consistently and accurately reported by local officials (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997).

4. Two other major gay advocacy organizations, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and *The Washington Blade* newspaper, have not compiled listings of gay political candidates or elected officials. Even the data provided by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund (GLVF) were unsystematically gathered, consisting largely of gay candidates the organization has supported. Using a different search strategy, Yeager (1999) also identified several openly gay elected officials who did not appear on the GLVF list.

5. On the assumption that the election of openly gay public officials was likely to be a noteworthy event, we assumed that the three "don't know" responses to both questions constituted negative answers and treated these cases accordingly.

6. There are wide differences among communities in how many local government officials are selected by means of the electoral process. Some localities use elections to fill a wide range of executive offices, including a mayor, whereas others typically confine elections to the council and appoint all other officials. Because the election of executive officers is a component of one of our predictors (unreformed electoral structure) and is also correlated with community size, another potential predictor, we confined the dependent variable to a common base of the elected legislative body only. The positive impact of population size undoubtedly reflects to some degree the fact that larger communities provide more opportunities to run for office.

7. Although it is possible that some respondents may have answered this question with reference to state- or national-level office, we think it is unlikely. The second question was only slightly separated from the first, with its explicit reference to local office, and the entire context of the survey focused on local-level politics. Moreover, gay representation is primarily confined to local office.

8. Because we selected the sample based on the operation of a local gay rights ordinance or policy that may itself be constrained by state law, the state-level measure may not be truly exogenous. However, Gossett (1996) found only a single case in which a state law inhibited a locality from passing a gay rights ordinance. (Colorado's referendum attempt to preempt local ordinances, which occurred outside the time frame of this study, was subsequently enjoined by the

U.S. Supreme Court.) The studies reported in Button, Rienzo, and Wald (1997) suggest that local ordinances were not systematically related to state policy. Localities sometimes passed gay rights ordinances in the absence of a state statute, either to stimulate state action or in response to state inaction. To further complicate the situation, some localities passed local ordinances seemingly to reaffirm state action. We can thus use state policy as an exogenous predictor of gay electoral mobilization.

9. The sole source of authoritative religious data in the United States, the decennial report of the Glenmary Research Center, reports data at the county level. For the 25 counties in the data set and those cities that dominate their counties, the religious data and political data are aggregated at the same level. For the other jurisdictions with borders that do not match county lines, we also allocated county data to the cities. Although this undoubtedly introduces some measurement error, it is a reasonable strategy. In the first place, American religious affiliation tends to follow a regional pattern. Second, there is no reason to assume that individuals take account of legal boundaries when deciding on a place of worship. Churches located in cities undoubtedly draw many of their adherents from outlying counties and vice versa. Using this same decision rule on a larger data set, Wald, Button, and Rienzo (1996) found county religious affiliation to be a powerful predictor of the adoption of gay rights ordinances.

10. In the logistic analysis, variables were judged for inclusion on the significance of their score statistic, another name for the Lagrange multiplier test. In a sample of this size, all three tests of significance for MLE coefficients yielded the same results. For the ordinary least squares (OLS) analysis, the standard for inclusion was the significance of the *t*-ratio. Whether we used simultaneous entry of all predictors, forward stepwise entry, or backward stepwise entry, the same set of predictors emerged as substantial influences on the dependent variable in both the OLS and logistic analyses.

11. In an important qualification, Donovan and Bowler (1998) have demonstrated that the nature of the referendum does not make populist politics inevitably hostile to gay and lesbian aspiration, but the outcome depends on the size of constituency. At the local level, the process usually works to undermine gay rights legislation.

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