

Hispanic Voting in Relation to Marriage Definition Amendments

This paper seeks to determine how Latinos vote on marriage definition amendments and what factors can predict and explain this attitude. Specifically, the focus will be on religious and secular factors that lead to a vote for marriage definition as male and female or to a vote against defining marriage whatsoever. Using data collected nationwide by the 2004 Election Day Exit Poll, I will use logistic regression models to identify the factors explaining the vote. Previous research, specifically *Race, Religion, and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage* by Sherkat, Mattias de Vries, and Creek at the Southern Illinois University Carbondale, it is known that African Americans tend to vote for marriage definition amendments due to strong ties to Protestant religious denominations. This paper will expand on the topic to include how Latinos vote on marriage definition amendments and why.

As state after state turns to their voters to determine whether marriage should be defined as man and woman, each person's vote becomes of utmost importance. The topic of homosexuality and same-sex marriage is of ever-increasing importance in today's society due to the increased visibility of many people in the LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender) community. This new aspect of the individual offers yet another quality that could help to determine how people will vote on specific issues. In this paper we do not focus on how sexuality determines the vote, but on how race and religion determine a vote on the definition of marriage. To be clear, a vote *for* marriage definition is a vote to define marriage as male and female, and could be summarized as a vote *against* gay marriage. A vote *against* marriage definition would mean that there is no definition of who can comprise a marriage, and could be summarized as a vote *for* gay marriage.

This paper is very similar to another article, *Religion and Attitudes Toward Same-Sex marriage Among U.S. Latinos* by Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada, but this paper seeks to determine how Latinos actually vote. Between these two papers we can also determine if Latinos vote how they feel. The data in this paper is potentially larger and of a different group.

The dependent variable in this paper is the actual vote on whether or not to define marriage while the independent variable is the religion of the Latino.¹

We predict that Latinos may not vote as strongly for marriage definition as African Americans, but more so than whites. These differences can be attributed to

¹ Latino will be used dominantly over Latino/Hispanic in this article as the surveys categorize them together.

powerful catholic and protestant attitudes, some of which lead to attitudes determined by the head of the church.

A similar paper, which discusses religion and attitudes towards same-sex marriage among Latinos, focuses on the “importance of religious cleavages in public opinion on social issues” (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada 35). The clash of religious ideals and new moral standards creates a burden not only on the people in them, but on the laws by which we are governed. American law is a forever-changing piece of work that must continuously adapt to the people’s needs and desires. Religion, on the other hand, generally stays concrete. This paper does not focus on religious ideals, though we do believe that there is a connection between race and religion that can help to explain some of the results that we find.

The judicial decision in *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* in November of 2003 legalized same-sex marriage and decreed that the state could not allow only heterosexual couples to marry (440 Mass. 309, 798 N.E.2d 941). This triggered a movement through out the United States regarding state decisions on the allowance of Same-sex marriage. As of April 7, 2011, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Vermont, New Hampshire and Washington, D.C. allow gay marriage, while New York and California recognize out-of-state marriages (Gay Law Report).²

The battle for equal rights for homosexual couples has been characterized as one of the greatest civil rights battles of the 21st century, but there are many reasons behind the struggle that are not readily apparent to many Americans. The battle is

² Only those marriages that occurred before the passage of Proposition 8 in California are recognized.

not necessarily whether or not same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, but whether they have the same rights through marriage that heterosexual couples enjoy. Civil Unions, which are similar to marriage, exist, but do not cross state boundaries (Belge 1). Civil Unions do not receive the same benefits that Marriage does, unfortunately; lacking are rights to joint tax filing, health insurance benefits as a family, federal benefits, social security benefits, tax breaks, and insurance breaks (Belge 1). Essentially, Civil Unions allow for the couple to be joined together in a relationship, but they lack the essential benefits that make marriage a more financially stable situation. Barbosa, et al. describes other concerns such as the right to adoption, and discrimination in the process of raising children (100).

Still, progress has been made in how the people of America view same sex marriage. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) removed homosexuality as a diagnosis from the DSM-II in 1973 (Barbosa, et al. 100); not only did this removal contribute to awareness and tolerance of homosexuality, it made it less of a social taboo since it was no longer considered a disorder that needed treatment. Avery, Chase, Johansson, Litvak, Montero and Wydra found in their study about American Attitudes towards Same-sex marriage that opposition has dropped from 68% in 1996 to 61% in 2004 (75). A table within said article shows a general upward trend in the percentage of people who believe that some sort of legal provisions should be made for same-sex couples, specifically, job opportunities (Avery, Chase, Johansson, Litvak, Montero & Wydra 77).

The progress of equal rights for same-sex couples is strictly interrelated to opinions on moral values and homophobia. Barbosa, et. Al defines homophobia as

“any negative attitudes, feelings, and behaviors toward those who identify as LGB” (99). This controversial term directly describes the feelings and attitudes that lead people to vote for the definition of marriage as between a man and a woman.

Progress can only go so far with deeply engrained attitudes of homophobia present.

Ironically, some of the progress that American’s have seen in the change of traditional attitudes may have actually hurt the progression of Same-sex marriage in one state. To summarize Abrajano’s argument in an article about Proposition 8 in California, the influx of minority voters in the 2008 election, which can be attributed to Barack Obama’s Presidential Campaign, led to a larger minority vote than usual that was also more opposed to Same-sex marriage (922). Still, advancements are being made and the issue has come to the center stage of American civil rights politics.

This paper focuses exclusively on the vote of Latinos in relation to marriage definition amendments. Few studies have focused specifically on Latinos due to low voter turnout; why study a minority group who has little effect on the outcome of a vote? Nonetheless, Latinos are a fast growing minority that will soon be the largest minority in the United States, making their voting stances increasingly important (Witt 1). Akin to the article on African Americans, Latinos have a diverse cultural background that we believe will directly affect their vote. Anderson and Fetner describe Social Determinants of Socially Conservative attitudes in their article on the Tolerance of Homosexuality; one of their hypotheses states that “low education, economic and social insecurity, and resulting family tensions that are found disproportionately in the working class encourages out-group hostility and moral

conservatism” (313). A 2002 report by the University of California, San Francisco, indicated that, although poverty is dropping among minority races, Latinos experienced the highest rate of poverty as of 2000 with 47% below the poverty level (Fact Sheet on Latino Youth). The same report links poverty with low education attainment, a key indicator of moral conservatism in Anderson and Fetner’s hypothesis.

A key factor in looking at Latino voters is religious background. A study of Roman Catholic behaviors showed a move towards more personal responsibility in making decisions (D’Antonio 14). This trend could indicate a movement away from the say of the Vatican and the Pope and towards a more individualized opinion towards moral issues. Also, D’Antonio mentions that church attendance is the strongest indicator of the acceptance of the churches opinion (14). Further research on this side topic may include church attendance in relation to religion and how it affects the vote. Hertel and Hughes attribute “the pattern of attendance being positively related to conservative values” being strongest for Catholics and Protestants (873). This information will become more pertinent once we look at the makeup of the voters surveyed in 2004. A 2005 study found that “approximately 70 percent of U.S. Latinos identify with Catholicism,” with 23 percent identifying as Protestant (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada 37). In 2003, the Vatican made a strict statement that marriage “exists solely between a man and a woman” (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada 37).

Religion is being looked at so closely in this article because it usually manifests people’s beliefs on issues. “Religion encompasses one’s personal

relationship with a higher power, shared beliefs, and organized rituals associated with the practice of the relationship” (Barbosa, et al 100). One cannot understand a person’s reason for voting how they do without understanding why that person thinks the way that they do.

Another indicator of vote is family. “The family plays a critical role in Latino culture, and familism stands as the one core cultural value that transcends all others” (Barbosa et. Al 103). The ties within the Latino family act as a buffer against outside attitudes. The more sheltered one is, the less likely he or she can be expected to accept things other than the norm.

Ahrold and Meston believe that “ethnic groups differ in sexual values, considering the disparate cultural, political, historical, and socioeconomic factors that influence sexuality in each group” (190). They note that African Americans are generally more conservative than Latinos and Whites, but note that Latinos may not follow that standard in every case. This article will test those generalizations and hypothesis of many before and give legitimate numbers and data that show where exactly Latinos fall in the vote for or against Same-sex marriage.

Data

The data used in this study is derived from 2004 Election Day Exit Polls. The states surveyed include Georgia, Kentucky, Oregon, Ohio, Montana, Michigan, Arkansas, Utah, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and North Dakota. There are very few differences in the surveys, but those present include the racial option of American Indian, whether the method of survey was by phone or self-administered³, whether

³ Oregon voters were the only state with a phone survey due to an all mail-in election style.

there was a question about being a 'born-again' Christian, and how often they attended church, if at all. Overall, the surveys were nearly identical. Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International were the organizations conducting the survey, with sponsorships from assorted news stations. The survey was completed with 95% confidence, which statistically means that such sample groups will have results within four points of what a poll of all voters would show.

The writer of this research understands that not everyone is completely adept or knowledgeable on the topic of statistics. Therefore, laymen's terms will be used as often as possible in hopes of providing a more complete understanding of the methods used to create our results.

Two separate questions were asked about race and Latino descent to ensure that all Hispanics and Latinos were separated into the same variable. The focus in this survey was on race and marriage definition. Specifically, the question asked, "How did you vote on Amendment 1, defining marriage as a union only of a man and a woman?" Yes or No.

To ensure that the results were accurate and precise, those who skipped the question or did not vote were removed. This removed about 60 voters and left us with a total of 14,550 surveys. By using statistical frequencies we were able to easily learn more about what types of voters we were looking at. Across 11 states the largest participators in the survey were in Michigan, with 17.9%, and Ohio, with 14%. The lowest participation was found in Montana and North Dakota with 4.6% and 4.8% respectively. 46.8% of those surveyed were male and 53.2% was female. 83% of the group was White, 11.7% were Black, and 2.4% were Hispanic/Latino. In

further studies we would like to have more Latino participation, but this survey was not created specifically for studying issues of race. 36.7% of those surveyed were protestant, 17.2% were Catholic, 24.6% were Other Christian, and 5.2% were Mormon/LDS.

INSERT TABLE 1,2, AND 3.

To find the answer to our questions about how Latinos vote on marriage definition amendments we used Chi Square Analysis. Our independent variable was Race, while our dependent variable was voting yes or no.

Analysis and Findings

Chi-square Analysis showed that 59.3% of Latino voters voted yes, they wanted marriage definition. 70.3% of Black voters voted yes, and 68.6% of white voters said yes. Asians had very similar voting results with the Latinos with 57.6% voting for marriage definition. In Chi Square the statistician wants the probability of these results happening by chance to be below .05. Our results are statistically significant because our probability is .000; therefore it is not a random statistic.

INSERT TABLE 4 AND 5

The table shows the results quite plainly; although Latinos still support marriage definition, they are less opposed to gay marriage than Whites and Blacks. In order to determine why Latinos are less opposed to gay marriage, we can look at religion. In a similar statistical analysis we looked solely at Latinos, their vote of Yes or No, and what religion they observed.

The results showed that 76.9% of Latinos who voted for marriage definition were Protestant. 54.2% of Latinos who voted Yes were Catholic, 60.9% Mormon,

and 63.1% Other Christian. There were no Jewish or Muslim Latinos surveyed.

Protestant lines stayed the same, as the general trend is around 75% appears that Catholic Latinos are almost evenly split on whether they would like marriage to be defined as between a man and a woman.

INSERT TABLE 6, 7 AND 8.

This result is interesting, and helps to answer the questions raised when the results were not quite what we expected. As it turns out, Latinos are less opposed to gay marriage and Catholicism is the leading religion representing acceptance. This may be attributed to the aforementioned trend towards personal responsibility in the areas of sexuality and marriage (D'Antonio 14).

In further research we believe it would be helpful to find a larger population of Latinos to survey, and make the questions more specific to this topic. Specifically, we would like to look more closely at income, the urban or rural makeup of the living situation, whether or not the person knows a homosexual, whether or not they are related to a homosexual, how often they attend church, and possibly a scale of how closely they follow their respective religions. The research presented here is solid and statistically significant, but more questions need to be asked on a larger scale in order to ascertain why Latinos vote as they do and how that vote changes over time.

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