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tré martinez-kukowski
Augsburg College

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h o n o r s r e v i e w

New Perspectives on Catholic and Democratic
Voting Behavior Regarding Constitutional Same-
Sex Marriage Bans

tré martínez-kukowski, Augsburg Colleg

Abstract

In the United States, constitutional same-sex marriage bans were a prominent political phenomenon in state and national politics for most of the 2000s, and were ballot items as recently as 2012. Traditionally, this has been addressed as it correlates to Republican party politics and the evangelical Protestant voting bloc, with some attention paid to the opposition to these measures by Democrats. In addition, Catholic voting is viewed as essentially a barometer of the general electorate, not only on this issue but on all issues other than reproductive rights.

However, most of this research came out in response to the wave of amendments passed in 2006 and before multiple votes on these amendments in the following years. In addition, while researchers and media outlets pay great attention to the role of Protestant and Republican voters in these elections, there is little discussion of Catholic or Democratic voters' activity regarding constitutional same-sex marriage bans.

Reviewing data on religiosity, party affiliation, and voting on such amendments reveals unexpected and unusual connections between Catholic voters and the outcomes of these votes and that Democratic voting on same sex marriage was not unified until the amendments had become a somewhat common practice.

In addition, it is a regularly held belief that acceptance of gay marriage by the general populous has been a steady, gradual process over the course of

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three decades. However, data from these elections suggests there has been at least one point of notable shift in voter behavior.

Introduction

From 1998 until the time of this writing, 31 states have voted on amendments which would ban any laws that allow same-sex marriage. All but one of these have passed (Human Rights Campaign). body paragraph.

A few notions can be considered the “conventional wisdom,” so to speak, regarding the role of religion in marriage amendments, and general politics. It is often contended that the bulk of these amendments’ successes can be correlated with high turnout among rural voters, which contains conservative/Republican voters, and Evangelical Protestant voters, who list moral or family values as their reasoning for their ballots (Rausch 2006) (Smith, DeSantis & Kassel 2006) (Campbell 2007).

In addition, the general perspective regarding the overall Catholic vote since the 1970s has been that it serves as a barometer of the general populace: look at the Catholic vote on most measures or candidates, and it should match up rather cleanly with the results of the election (Silk & Walsh 2008).¹

The Pew Research Institute (2013) expresses the view of many who look at gay and lesbian issues in American politics in writing, “[t]he public has gradually become more supportive of granting legal recognition to same-sex marriages over the past 15 years.” This idea fits nicely into a larger narrative where gay and lesbian people have slowly and steadily become more accepted within American society.

Combining data about the religious and political demographics of states which have voted on constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage with the results of those elections offers insights as to the validity of these ideas. It appears that the Catholic vote is less predictable than popularly imagined and the wider acceptance of same-sex marriage has not been as gradual as some purport.

Methodology

For this analysis, data regarding the religious make up, presidential voting behavior, and voting behavior regarding a state constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages was collected from 30 states. For results of amendment elections, data collected by the Human Resources Campaign was used. Data on the religious demographics of each state came from Gallup. The results of presidential elections nearest the amendment votes were gathered from the New York Times’ election websites. For states in which a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex

marriage was on the ballot between presidential elections, the results of the two nearest presidential elections were averaged. The same was done for some of these states regarding their religious demographics, as there are gaps in available data regarding state-by-state religious populations.

In its entirety, the data hides certain patterns. To elucidate these patterns, certain, slightly unorthodox filters were applied to the data. The filtering change depending on the pattern studied, but it essentially consists of establishing the difference between two data points for each state and truncating the data to leave the median third. For example, to determine the ten states exhibiting the average relationship between Catholics as a percentage of the population and the percentage of the population who voted against these amendments, first the difference of those two variables was taken for each state. Then, those ten states with the highest resulting difference and those ten with the lowest difference were removed. This leaves an approximation of the median relationship between those two variables in a given state, allowing clearer analysis of how they tend to interact. The data was then organized chronologically by year, and alphabetically by state within years. It was then graphed on a scatter plot with a sextic polynomial trendline.

Data

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between voters who voted against these amendments (that is, voted not to constitutionally ban same-sex marriage) and the Catholic population of a state. The percentages of citizens who identified as Catholic, votes against marriage amendments, and Democratic presidential votes are graphed for those states with the average relationship between these two numbers.

The trendlines of no votes (blue) and Catholics (yellow) seem to align somewhat; their shapes match one another, though they are separated due to the generally low population of Catholics in most of these states. The trendline of Democratic presidential votes (green) seems, largely, to not reflect either line. The states rendered by the filter are largely southern states, and most voted on these amendments between 2004 and 2006. The other filtered data sets examined here tend to span various regions and time frames, though this one, examining the relationship between “no” votes and Catholics, is rather specific.

In Figure 2, the same demographics are graphed for those states with the average relationship between votes against these amendments and votes for a Democratic presidential candidate. The three lines start out

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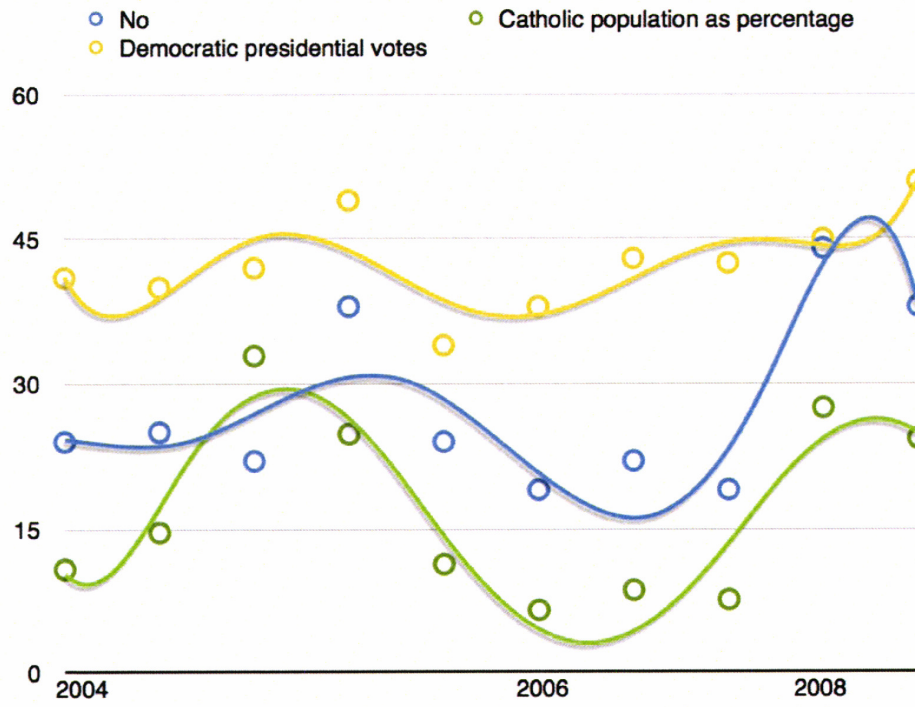


Fig 1

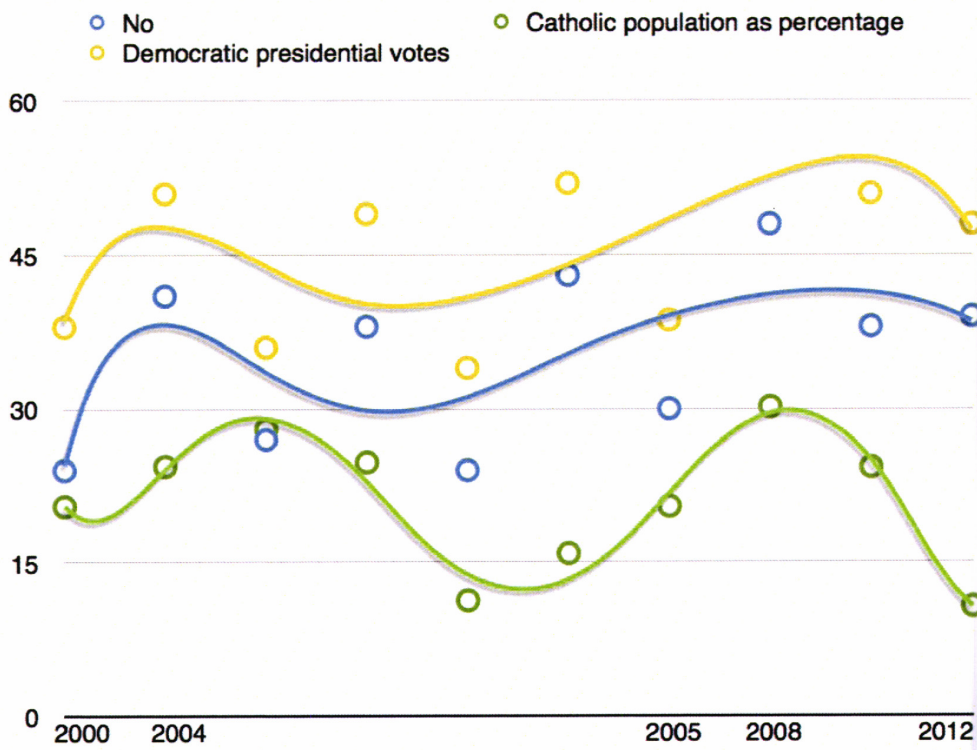


Fig 2

mimicking one another, but as time goes on, the trendline for Catholics diverges from the lines signifying “no” votes and Democratic votes, while the others remain consistently following each other. This downturn in the Catholic trendline begins around 2005, which will prove an important point in time when looking at the data as a whole.

With these examinations in mind, the graph of the total data can be better interpreted. Figure 3 graphs the data for votes against amendments, votes for Democratic presidential candidates, and Catholic populations. At the start of the graph, there is a clear relationship between the trendlines for Catholics and “no” votes. However, around 2005, this relationship begins to drift. At around the same time, the relationship between “no” votes and votes for a Democratic presidential candidate becomes closer.

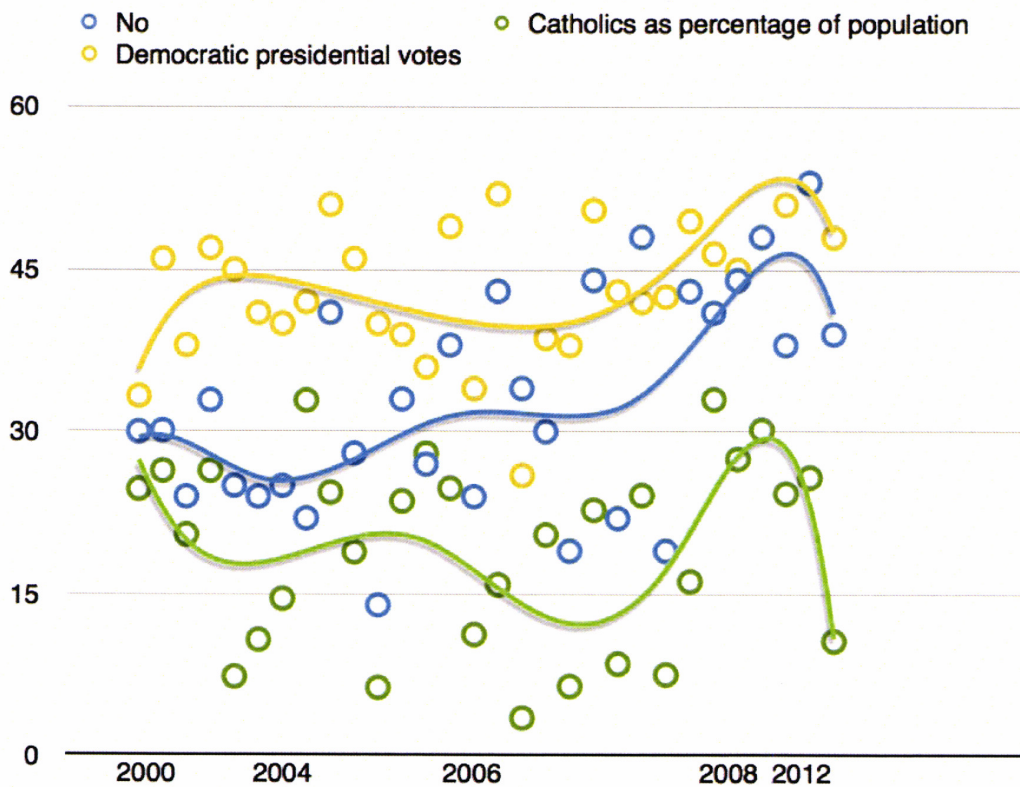


Fig 3

Analysis and Conclusions

The analysis that this data suggest breaks from traditional understandings of Catholic and Democratic voting behavior. While Catholics are normally seen as indicative of the rest of the country, on these amendments their populations are correlated with “no” votes until around 2005. While Democrats are normally seen as supportive of same-sex marriage, this data suggests that this only became true around 2005.

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And while support for same-sex marriage is seen as a position that has been gradually growing in the United States, this data suggests that there was a significant, rapid change around 2005.

The correlation between Catholics and voting no on these amendments defies conventional ideas about Catholic voting. The shift away from this trend appears to take place around 2005. Incidentally, this is around the time that Pope John Paul II died and was replaced by Pope Benedict XVI. John Paul II, while preaching against same-sex marriage, only mentioned sexuality in 3% of his speeches (Weigel 2001). By contrast, his successor spent much of his career prior to his papacy publishing anti-gay materials. In his time as Pope, he focused regularly on the topic of homosexuality (Stoltz 2013). While this does not fully explain the shift, it is a detail of significant timing.

While support for same-sex marriage is largely seen as a Democratic or liberal position, this data suggests that it was not until around 2005 that Democrats as a group began to vote against these amendments⁵ and that this shift happened over a short period of time.

The former suggestion could be evidence for the liberal inclination to support same-sex marriage as a recent development. It also points to these amendments as a point of party politics around this time and Democratic opposition to them as an issue of backlash against Republican alliance on the measures, as opposed to a development based in Democratic ideals.

The shifts in voting behavior for both of these groups in 2005 throws into question the narrative that public opinion on same-sex marriage has been gradually changing, and suggests at least one point in time when this change happened suddenly.

Ultimately, this data raises questions about the ideas that Catholics vote in ways that reflect the general electorate, that Democrats and liberals support same-sex marriage due to essentially liberal ideals, or that acceptance of same-sex marriage has been a gradual process.

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Tables

| Date | State | Percentage of votes "no" | Catholic as % of population | D Pres. percent |
|------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 2004 | GA | 24 | 10.8 | 41 |
| 2004 | KY | 25 | 14.6 | 40 |
| 2004 | LA | 22 | 32.9 | 42 |
| 2004 | OH | 38 | 24.8 | 49 |
| 2004 | OK | 24 | 11.3 | 34 |
| 2006 | AL | 19 | 6.53 | 38 |
| 2006 | SC | 22 | 8.6 | 43 |
| 2006 | TN | 19 | 7.6 | 42.5 |
| 2008 | AZ | 44 | 27.5 | 45 |
| 2008 | FL | 38 | 24.3 | 51 |

Data for Fig 1

| Date | State | Percentage of votes "no" | Catholic as % of population | D Pres. percent |
|------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 2000 | TX | 24 | 20.5 | 38 |
| 2004 | MI | 41 | 24.4 | 51 |
| 2004 | ND | 27 | 28 | 36 |
| 2004 | OH | 38 | 24.8 | 49 |
| 2004 | OK | 24 | 11.3 | 34 |
| 2004 | OR | 43 | 15.9 | 52 |
| 2005 | KA | 30 | 20.5 | 38.66 |
| 2008 | CA | 48 | 30.2 | 61 |
| 2008 | FL | 38 | 24.3 | 51 |
| 2012 | NC | 39 | 10.7 | 48 |

Data for Fig 2

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| Date | State | Percentage of votes "no" | Catholic as % of population | D Pres. percent |
|------|-------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 2000 | NE | 30 | 24.7 | 33.3 |
| 2000 | NV | 30.1 | 26.4 | 46 |
| 2000 | TX | 24 | 20.5 | 38 |
| 2002 | NV | 32.9 | 26.4 | 47 |
| 2004 | AR | 25 | 7.4 | 45 |
| 2004 | GA | 24 | 10.8 | 41 |
| 2004 | KY | 25 | 14.6 | 40 |
| 2004 | LA | 22 | 32.9 | 42 |
| 2004 | MI | 41 | 24.4 | 51 |
| 2004 | MO | 28 | 18.9 | 46 |
| 2004 | MS | 14 | 6.4 | 40 |
| 2004 | MT | 33 | 23.6 | 39 |
| 2004 | ND | 27 | 28 | 36 |
| 2004 | OH | 38 | 24.8 | 49 |
| 2004 | OK | 24 | 11.3 | 34 |
| 2004 | OR | 43 | 15.9 | 52 |
| 2004 | UT | 34 | 3.6 | 26 |
| 2005 | KA | 30 | 20.5 | 38.66 |
| 2006 | AL | 19 | 6.53 | 38 |
| 2006 | CO | 44 | 22.8 | 50.5 |
| 2006 | SC | 22 | 8.6 | 43 |
| 2006 | SD | 48 | 24.15 | 42 |
| 2006 | TN | 19 | 7.6 | 42.5 |
| 2006 | VA | 43 | 16.2 | 49.5 |
| 2006 | WI | 41 | 33 | 46.5 |
| 2008 | AZ | 44 | 27.5 | 45 |
| 2008 | CA | 48 | 30.2 | 61 |
| 2008 | FL | 38 | 24.3 | 51 |
| 2012 | MN | 53 | 25.8 | 53 |
| 2012 | NC | 39 | 10.7 | 48 |

Data for Fig 3

Endnotes

1. According to Silk and Walsh, this is often not the case when the issue of abortion is prominently in play. This is not significant for the purposes of this analysis.

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