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THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF GEORGIA III: LESBIAN AND GAY COUPLES

Using 2000 Census data, this paper examines same-sex couples as Georgia voters, taxpayers, parents, and citizens. This is one of a series of FRC reports focusing on the demographics of various subpopulations in Georgia.

Same-sex couples head 0.7 percent of Georgia households and lesbian, gay and bisexuals (LGBs) comprise less than 3 percent of Georgia, making them a small voting bloc. The state legislature has not prohibited anti-gay discrimination, was among the last to pass hate crimes legislation, and was among the first to explicitly ban same-sex marriage, both by law and by constitutional amendment. LGBs create stronger voting blocs by living in the most liberal and gay-friendly portions of the state. Nearly half live in just five counties (compared to only one-fifth of the state's married couples). LGBs' residential concentration in Atlanta, Decatur, Athens, parts of Augusta and Savannah, and Fulton and DeKalb counties generally (especially inside the Perimeter and east of the downtown connector) has created enclaves that have elected a few openly gay officials and many gay-friendly ones, prohibited employment and housing discrimination, and recognized same-sex relationships in limited ways.

Socio-economic status makes male couples highly desirable as taxpayers. They have higher average household incomes than married couples (primarily because they typically have two full-time male workers). The mean household income of male couples was 4 percent higher than that of married couples in 1999 (\$74,200 versus \$71,700), while household incomes for lesbians and unmarried heterosexual couples lagged well behind (\$60,700 and \$47,300, respectively). Nearly half of male couples had two full-time, full-year workers, compared to 37-39 percent for other couple types. They pay high property taxes and above-average state income taxes. The mean value of homes owned by male couples is one-quarter higher than home values for married couples. Gay men's greater likelihood of living in Fulton-DeKalb, where home values are highest, explains much of the difference in property value. On average, gay male couples pay 29 percent more than married couples in property taxes, due both to the higher values of their homes and the higher property tax rates in Fulton-DeKalb. They tend not to have children in public schools. Female couples are less obvious net gains for governments, though they probably pay more in taxes than unmarried male-female couples.

These high household incomes do not prove the absence of anti-gay employment discrimination, however. Men in male couples earn 16 percent less than equally educated married men of the same age and race working the same number of hours and weeks in the same occupations and the same locations, though only slightly less than comparable unmarried men with female partners. The 16 percent pay difference is smaller than that between apparently comparable black and white men, but at least as large as that between white and other minority men. Women in female couples earn more than apparently comparable wives and women in male-female couples, though discrimination in favor of lesbians seems an unlikely explanation.

Most same-sex couples do not have children, but a substantial minority do. Same-sex and different-sex couples with children tend to make similar sacrifices. One partner works longer hours to pay the bills. The other takes more time off to raise the kids. They move to the suburbs. They accept lower household incomes than couples without children. Indeed, same-sex couples with children typically face larger financial sacrifices than do married couples, both because income differences between couples with and without children are larger and because unmarried partners and their children typically do not qualify for health insurance and other benefits from the fully employed partner. Although same-sex couples are not as stable as married couples, differences are smaller among couples with children.

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