

## **Electoral Prospects for Women and Gays and Evangelical Strength**

Jean Schroedel, Jennifer Merolla and Scott Waller  
Claremont Graduate University

One of the most significant political developments of the past thirty years has been the growing influence of socially conservative Christians in the political arena. Most scholars (Luker, 1984; Tribe, 1990; Schroedel, 2000) consider the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* (1973) decision legalizing abortion to be the catalyst. At that point, large numbers of socially conservative Christians (both evangelical Protestants and traditionalist Catholics) became convinced that the nation was heading in the wrong direction. Appalled at what they considered to be assaults on traditional morality and family values, they mobilized at both the national level through groups, such as the Moral Majority and Christian Voice, and at the grassroots level through church based anti-abortion activities. According to Ingersoll (2004), right-to-life activities often served as a gateway into support for other Christian Right actions, with opposition to the "homosexual agenda" being the most prominent secondary involvement.

It is not surprising that opposition to abortion and gay rights would become major areas of conflict in the "culture war." Both can be characterized as assaults on the traditional family (i.e., heterosexual family units headed by a male breadwinner with a stay at home wife and minor biologically related children.) Legalized abortion by providing women with control over their reproductive lives clearly undercuts patriarchal values, while homosexuality by its very nature violated the notion of a reproductive based family.

If Ingersoll is correct in positing a linkage between these two arenas of conflict in the culture wars, one would expect it to be evident in the degree of support given to female and gay candidates for electoral office. One would predict that states with large numbers of politically mobilized conservative Christians would be less likely to elect female and gay candidates to political office. In this paper, we use state level data from the 2002 and 2004 elections and survey data on church membership to test: 1. whether there is an inverse relationship between socially conservative Protestants in a state and the proportion of women in elected office, 2. whether there is an inverse relationship between socially conservative Protestants in a state and the proportion of gays in elected office and 3. whether there is a relationship between the propensity to elect women and the propensity to elect gays in a state.

Our measure of politically mobilized conservative Protestants in a state is the percentage of a state's population belonging to National Association of Evangelical member churches. The N.A.E. is comprised of 49 socially conservative churches and is an activist organization that lobbies government on a wide range of social and political issues. Our measure of a state's propensity to elect women to political office is derived from data provided by the Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Center for American Women and Politics. Our measure on gays in elected office is constructed using data compiled by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund.