

# **California's Proposition 8 and America's Racial and Ethnic Divides on Same-Sex Marriage**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Black and Latino support for California's Proposition 8—which eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry in November 2008—sparked a nationwide debate about racial and ethnic differences in support for same-sex marriage. Using survey data and precinct-level analysis of the vote, we examine these differences in detail and demonstrate that the widely reported exit poll finding that 70 percent of African Americans voted in favor of California's Proposition 8 was almost certainly an overestimate. But we show that Proposition 8 did indeed split California's liberal and Democratic coalitions on the basis of race and ethnicity, and that it reflects a quite substantial divide in the Democratic Party throughout the U.S. With national survey data, we show that party identification influences attitudes on same-sex marriage only among whites—while blacks are unique in that egalitarian beliefs play no role in influencing their opinions on the issue.

The news that Californians had narrowly approved Proposition 8 and eliminated the right of same-sex couples to marry in the November 2008 general election was accompanied by another well-publicized story: exit polling indicated that black and Latino Californians had backed the measure at rates higher than whites, helping to provide the margin of victory. The results gave pause to liberal activists hoping that the election of Barack Obama to the White House presaged a new era of advances on gay rights, and gave cheer to conservatives who believed that same-sex marriage had been revealed to be a potent issue dividing Democrats on the basis of race and ethnicity. Although surveys have long shown important differences in attitudes among racial and ethnic groups on gay rights, never before had the gap appeared to be so stark—or so relevant to a dramatic change in public policy.

Most of the discussion about differences among the support of whites, blacks and Latinos for Proposition 8 has been based on the Edison/Mitofsky National Election Pool (NEP) exit poll of California voters. In this article, we use a range of data sources—including publicly available surveys and precinct-level election returns—to assess the accuracy of the NEP poll and better understand the nature of racial and ethnic differences in Californians' votes on Proposition 8. Our analysis concurs that blacks and Latinos supported the measure at rates higher than whites, but it suggests that the widely reported NEP result that 70 percent of African Americans voted “yes” on Proposition 8 was almost certainly an overestimate—an error that is likely due to the limitations inherent in the exit poll's multistage cluster sampling design.

We take the fact that Proposition 8 split California’s liberals and Democrats sharply on the basis of race and ethnicity as a point of departure for an exploration of a similar gap on same-sex marriage that has existed among all Americans since polling began on the issue in the late 1980s and has expanded dramatically since 2003. In that year, the United State Supreme Court’s *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling catalyzed a nationwide debate on same-sex marriage that galvanized white Democrats in support of the policy but did little to move black and Latino Democrats in the same direction. The result is that same-sex marriage has now joined an array of other social issues—such as abortion, the death penalty, and immigration—that split Democrats on the basis of race and ethnicity in contemporary American politics. In this polarized environment, a stark difference has emerged in how whites, blacks and Latinos construct their attitudes on same-sex marriage: African Americans do not appear to view the issue through the lens of egalitarianism, which by contrast strongly shapes the attitudes of whites and Latinos.

### **Proposition 8: California’s Battle over Same-Sex Marriage**

In May 2008, a ruling by the California Supreme Court made that state the second in the nation (following Massachusetts) to give same-sex couples the right to marry. Within a month, same-sex couples were being legally wed at county clerks offices across the state. In advance of the Supreme Court’s ruling, opponents of same-sex marriage had been preparing by collecting signatures to place a state constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage before the voters. The measure qualified for the ballot as Proposition 8 in early June 2008, and the ensuing battle was of epic

proportions. Advocates for and against the measure raised \$83 million, more than any ballot measure on a social issue in California history (Initiative and Referendum Institute, 2008). In the end, Proposition 8 passed by a margin of about 600,000 votes out of 13.4 million cast. The 52 to 48 percent split largely reflected California opinion on same-sex marriage before the campaign began, and analyses of polling data indicate that shifts in reported voting intention over the course of the summer and fall were due not to change in preferences but rather to voters gradually learning the correct meaning of a “no” and “yes” vote on the measure (Lewis & Gossett 2009). Despite record turnout in the presidential race in California, the number of voters casting ballots on Proposition 8 nearly equaled the number voting for president. In fact, more votes were cast on Proposition 8 than on any previous ballot measure in American history.<sup>1</sup> The issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples came to a halt across the state as soon as the result of the vote became known. In May 2009, the California Supreme Court upheld Proposition 8, but ruled that the state must continue to recognize the estimated 18,000 same-sex marriages performed in California during 2008.

As pundits, politicians, and advocates reacted to Proposition 8, attention turned to the role of racial and ethnic differences in the vote. Discussion focused on the National Election Pool (NEP)’s finding that Latinos and African Americans had supported Proposition 8 at rates greater than whites. Results reported by the NEP

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<sup>1</sup> More votes (13.4 million) were cast on Proposition 8 than for any other California ballot measure in 2008, and this number exceeds the number of votes cast in any California election before 2008 (California Secretary of State 2008). To date, in no other state has turnout in any election ever exceeded California’s in 2008.

may be found in the first row of figures in Table 1. As shown in the table, the NEP reported that 70 percent of African Americans voted “yes” on Proposition 8, as did 53 percent of Latinos, compared to 49 percent of whites. What ensued was a particularly vivid illustration of how polling can shape popular interpretations of the meanings of elections. The media seized upon a split in the liberal coalition which had, after all, just elected the first African-American president in U.S. history (e.g., Ferriss & Reese 2008, Vick & Surdin, 2008). While gay advocates blamed one another for failing to conduct enough outreach in minority communities (e.g., Kolbert 2008), Proposition 8’s proponents spoke heartily of the contributions of religious Latino and black groups to the measure’s victory (McKinley & Goodstein 2008).

Historically, exit polls from statewide ballot measures on same-sex marriage bans have found no significant differences in the votes of blacks and Latinos compared to whites. This can be seen in Figure 1, a display of two scattergrams incorporating exit poll data from each statewide ballot measure since 2004 for which data are available. The left-hand figure plots white support for marriage bans against black support; the right-hand figure does the same for Latino support. The figures indicate that all groups have tended to vote for the measures at similar rates. Putting aside the California result, white support for the measures has exceeded non-white support: the average white-black difference is .18 percentage points; the average white-Latino difference is 2.8 points.

### **Re-examining Californians’ Support for Proposition 8**

Given the importance of the NEP exit poll to the interpretation of the Proposition 8 result—and in particular the fact that the 21-point difference between blacks and whites reported by the NEP in California is nearly twice as large as the gap identified in any other state—here we examine additional available sources of data on the support for the measure among California’s blacks and Latinos in an attempt to confirm the exit poll’s findings. Table 1 summarizes the data.

We first examine surveys of California voters conducted just before and just after Election Day to see if they corroborate the NEP estimates. Six such surveys (including a private survey conducted by David Binder Research discussed further below) are shown in Table 1. Taken together, they suggest that the NEP estimate of black support for Proposition 8 was quite off the mark (at 12 points higher than any other estimate), while the exit poll estimate of Latino support falls in the middle of the range of polling results. We next turn to ecological analysis precinct-level voting data on Proposition 8 obtained from five California counties—Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego, and San Francisco—that together comprise 62.4 percent of the state’s African American population and 48.0 percent of its Latino population.<sup>2</sup> We note that Proposition 8 fared less well in the five counties analyzed (where the measure was approved by 48.3% of voters) than in California as a whole—although this partially reflects the fact that African Americans and Latinos are simply more likely to reside in liberal counties than conservative ones. By merging these voting

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<sup>2</sup> Calculated by dividing the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey’s 2005-2007 estimates of the “Black or African American alone” population in the five counties (1.42 million) by its statewide estimate of the African American population (2.27 million). For Latinos: 6.22 million reside in the five counties out of a statewide population 12.95 million (U.S. Census Bureau 2009).

data with estimates of the precincts' racial and ethnic makeup, we were able to assess the precinct-level relationship between black and Latino population and support for the ballot measure.<sup>3</sup> Figure 2 depicts these relationships with scattergrams in which each precinct is represented by a point. The plots include a best-fit regression line as well as connected series of points indicating the mean "yes" vote on Proposition 8 for each decile of the share of precinct voters who are African American or Latino. As shown, an unmistakable relationship exists between the proportion of a precinct's voters who are African American or Latino and support for Proposition 8. Analysis of these data provided three estimates each of the percentage of blacks and Latinos supporting the measure. The *EzI* software program (Benoit & King 1999) produced estimates of 57 percent support among blacks and 63 percent among Latinos.<sup>4</sup> Estimates yielded by Goodman's ecological regression—in which precinct vote for Proposition 8 is regressed on the percentage of blacks or Latinos in the precinct—were 59 percent support among blacks and 68 percent support among Latinos. Finally, a rudimentary but nevertheless often-employed approach—calculating mean support in precincts that are nearly (90 percent or more) ethnically or racially homogeneous—yielded estimates of 59 percent support among both groups. Reliable estimates about individual voters from aggregate data are notoriously difficult and often heavily dependent upon

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<sup>3</sup> We acknowledge Peter Frase and the Center for Urban Research at The Graduate Center, CUNY, for assistance in developing and analyzing the precinct-level data. Voting data on Proposition 8 were obtained from county clerks and boards of elections. Estimates of the percent of precinct voters who are African American and Latino were obtained from the California Statewide Database at the Institute of Governmental Studies, UC Berkeley. We note that Proposition 8 fared less well in the five counties analyzed (where the measure was approved by 48.3% of voters) than in California as a whole—although this partially reflects the fact that African Americans and Latinos are more likely to reside in liberal counties than conservative ones.

<sup>4</sup> The *EzI* analysis of black support included a control for the percentage of each precinct estimated to be Latino; the converse was true for the *EzI* analysis of Latino support.

untestable assumptions (Tam Cho & Manski, 2008). Rather than being treated as definitive, these estimates should thus be considered as helping to corroborate the individual-level data.<sup>5</sup>

The full range of polling and voting returns data shown in Table 1 leads to two conclusions: blacks and Latinos supported Proposition 8 at higher rates than whites, but the NEP exit poll overestimated black support for the measure. The variety of estimation strategies we employ and their varying sources of error make it unwise to offer precise point estimates, but the sum of the evidence indicates that actual support among African Americans for Proposition 8 fell far short of the NEP estimate that drew so much attention.

Exit polling is a complex, immense, and in some ways heroic undertaking. Exit pollsters face the dual challenge of collecting vast amounts of data from about 100,000 American voters and then instantaneously analyzing these data to make election projections and help news media interpret the results. To accomplish this Herculean task, the NEP employs a multistage cluster sampling design, in which voters are interviewed at a representative sample of voting precincts as they leave the polls (for details see Mitofsky & Edelman 2002). The sampling methodology and the analytical procedures employed by NEP yield election projections that are remarkably accurate in statewide races. But a drawback of the clustered sampling

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<sup>5</sup> The estimated standard errors of the *EzI* estimates are .39 and .26 percentage points (for blacks and Latinos, respectively); for Goodman's regression: .97 and .61 percentage points. The standard errors for the homogeneous precinct means are 1.8 and .31 percentage points. These figures certainly understate the true error, as they do not incorporate measurement error associated with voting returns or the estimates of black and Latino population by voting precinct. All estimations weighted precincts by their total number of voters.

design is that sampling error is higher than in a typical RDD telephone poll. In recent years, the error associated with national exit polls has been estimated to be about one-third higher than it would be under simple random sampling (Weisberg 2005). Sampling error in the exit poll is even more of a concern regarding its estimates of votes among geographically clustered populations (such as racial minorities). For example, an Edison/Mitofsky evaluation of the 2004 exit polling operation stated that national estimates were most uncertain for groups that were “highly clustered in a few precincts” sampled by the NEP, including Hispanics, Asians, Jews, and Muslims (Edison Media Research 2005, 59). Indeed, a controversy similar to that surrounding the Proposition 8 result arose in 2004 after the NEP reported that a higher-than-expected 44 percent of Latinos voted to reelect George W. Bush (Leal et al 2005). A further complication can arise when voting behavior differs markedly between group members who live in homogeneous precincts and those residing in more diverse areas. In these cases, the group members falling into a cluster sample will fail to be representative unless precincts are sampled accordingly (Barreto et al 2006). For all of these reasons, it is not unlikely that an unrepresentative sample of African Americans was interviewed by the NEP’s California survey in 2008.

### **Race, Ethnicity and Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage**

In Table 2, we take a closer look at the vote on Proposition 8 by race and ethnicity. The data in the table come from a post-election telephone poll of California voters conducted by David Binder Research (DBR) for the pro-gay group Equality California. The survey included 1,067 respondents selected at random from state

voter registration lists, including oversamples of African American and Latino voters. The sample was limited to those who reported voting in the November 4 general election. Table 2 displays support for Proposition 8 by party identification and ideology among California's whites, blacks, and Latinos. Among whites in California, identifying as a Democrat or a liberal was virtually tantamount to supporting same-sex marriage in 2008: more than 80 percent of white Democrats and white liberals voted against Prop. 8. The same was not true for blacks and Latinos, creating a sharp racial divide among Democrats and liberals regarding Proposition 8. There is no evidence that a similar racial divide exists among other partisan or ideological groups (although in some cells sample sizes are too small to draw firm conclusions). These data are all the more striking because scholars have shown that partisanship is the most—and perhaps only—consistent predictor of individual vote choice on ballot initiatives across a wide range of issues, including social and moral controversies (Branton 2003, 2004). But on Proposition 8, partisanship played a weak role at best in shaping the votes of California's blacks and Latinos on same-sex marriage.

We take this result as a point of departure for a broader exploration of how the nation's attitudes on same-sex marriage differ on the basis of race and ethnicity. Proposition 8 was held after a decades-long transformation of opinion toward support for gay rights in California (Lewis & Gossett 2008) and nationwide (Bowman & Foster 2008; Brewer 2008; Brewer & Wilcox 2005; Egan & Sherrill 2005; Loftus 2001; Yang 1997). The literature on racial and ethnic differences amidst this trend has focused on dissimilarities between blacks and whites. Gregory

B. Lewis' exhaustive analysis of polling data extending back to the 1970s shows that, historically, African Americans have been both more likely than whites to disapprove of homosexuality *and* more likely to support laws prohibiting anti-gay discrimination (Lewis 2003). However, polls have found blacks significantly less supportive of extending legal marriage rights to gay couples than whites (Egan, Persily & Wallsten 2008; Sherkat 2009). Findings are mixed regarding whether black-white differences on gay issues can be explained by individual characteristics (such as lower educational attainment and religiosity) that are correlated positively with race and with opposition to gay rights.

To trace the over-time dynamics of racial and ethnic differences in support for same-sex marriage, we assembled a dataset of 49 difference polls conducted on the topic by four survey houses over the period from 1988 through 2009. Figure 3 displays support for same-sex marriage in each poll among those identifying as Latino, white and black. The left-hand panel includes all Americans; the right-hand panel is limited to those identifying as Democrats.<sup>6</sup> The figures show that substantial differences have existed among the opinions of blacks, Latinos and whites on same-sex marriage since the late 1980s: Latinos have generally been the most supportive, followed by whites and then blacks.<sup>7</sup> However, the controversy that followed the U.S. Supreme Court's 2003 ruling in *Lawrence v. Texas* (which struck down sodomy laws and was believed by liberals and conservatives alike to be

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<sup>6</sup> The figures include running-mean smoothers drawn with a bandwidth of .4.

<sup>7</sup> Previous research has shown that differences in support for same-sex marriage between Latinos and whites can be explained by the fact that Latinos are younger than Americans as a whole, and younger people are more likely to support gay rights (Egan, Persily & Wallsten 2008). We confirmed this finding with the present data (in analysis not shown here).

a harbinger of an eventual legalization of same-sex marriage by courts) and the subsequent nationwide debate over same-sex marriage throughout 2004 had quite different consequences for the opinions of blacks, whites and Latinos on same-sex marriage. Support among all three groups declined after *Lawrence*, but opinion among whites rebounded much more quickly and decisively than among blacks or Latinos. The result is that for the first time in twenty years, no significant difference currently exists between white and Latino opinion on same-sex marriage—while the gap in support between these two groups and that of African Americans is larger than it has even been. A glance at the right-hand panel of Figure 3 shows that these dynamics have been particularly striking among Democrats. Between 2003 and 2009, support for same-sex marriage among white Democrats increased by some 15 percentage points. By contrast, the opinions of black and Latino Democrats in 2009 stood just barely above where they did before *Lawrence*. The effect of these dynamics has been to produce a substantial racial and ethnic divide among Democrats on the issue of same-sex marriage. In the past, the nation's liberal and conservative elites have played strong roles in shaping public opinion on many emerging social issues (e.g. Adams 1997; Carmines & Stimson 1990, Zaller 1992), although not necessarily all of them (Lindaman & Haider-Markel 2002). It appears that in the post-*Lawrence* period white Democrats are more likely than blacks and Latinos to take cues from liberal elites who have become increasingly more supportive of same-sex marriage.

The white-black gap in public opinion on same-sex marriage is particularly of interest because (as shown in Figure 1) this gap has not tended to manifest itself at

the ballot box, where white and black voters have supported measures banning same-sex marriage at the same rates. One reason for this may be that as victims of discrimination, African Americans are more reluctant than others to translate their personal discomfort with same-sex marriage into votes to restrict another group's rights (Stewart-Winter 2008). An additional explanation is that few such votes have been held since the racial divide reached its present historic level, and that most measures for which data on African Americans' votes are available have been held in states where the white population is relatively conservative and Republican. California is a notable exception, with a white electorate that is relatively moderate on social issues compared to other states.

The racial and ethnic divide among Democrats on same-sex marriage is particularly large compared to other salient issues in American politics. Figure 4 displays the mean responses of whites, blacks and Latino Democrats to a selection of eight issue questions included in the 2008 American National Election Studies ANES Time Series study (2008 ANES TS). The survey is particularly valuable for the exploration of racial and ethnic differences in Americans' attitudes because it included oversamples of African Americans and Latinos. The percentage of each group taking the conservative position on each issue is indicated by the group's placement on the left-right scale. The issues are arranged vertically by the extent of the differences between whites on the one hand and blacks and Latinos on the other. At the top of the figure are issues on which black and Latino Democrats tend to take more conservative positions than do white Democrats. At the bottom of the figure are issues on which black and Latino Democrats tend to be more liberal than whites.

Figure 4 shows that social issues are those on which the Democratic Party's coalition is most likely to be split by race and ethnicity. On abortion and same-sex marriage, blacks and Latino Democrats take more conservative positions than do white Democrats. The opposite is true for the death penalty and gun control. And on a final social issue—immigration—a considerable split emerges, with blacks and Latinos on opposite sides of white Democrats' opinions. By contrast, issues such as the Iraq war, universal healthcare, and government services are ones around which Democrats of different racial and ethnic groups share opinions that are quite similar. A final takeaway from the figure is that same-sex marriage is the issue on which white Democrats are the most significantly more liberal than black and Latino Democrats—and that most of this gap is driven by the conservatism of black Democrats on this issue. Thus, same-sex marriage is not unusual in being a social issue that can split the Democratic coalition on the basis of race. But it is a particularly potent one, and on no other issue in the present analysis is the gap between white Democrats and black Democrats currently more stark.

### **Factors Influencing Black, Latino and White Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage**

To account for the differences in opinion on same-sex marriage among blacks, Latinos and whites, we turn to an examination of the factors most strongly associated with attitudes within the three groups. With its oversamples of blacks and Latinos, the 2008 ANES TS is again advantageous for this purpose. The ANES also employs several series of questions that form reliable scales regarding respondents' beliefs in egalitarianism and moral traditionalism and the importance

of religion in their lives, all of which have been shown to strongly influence Americans' attitudes on gay rights (Brewer 2003).<sup>8</sup> In Table 3, we estimate how these three variables—as well as party identification, ideology, age, gender and education—influence Americans' attitudes about same-sex marriage with separate probit regressions for black, Latino and white ANES respondents. These estimates—shown on the left-hand side of the table—find that the structure of Americans' opinions bear important similarities among the three groups. Moral traditionalism, the importance of religion, and age are consistent, statistically significant predictors of opposition to same-sex marriage. Education—usually considered to have an important effect on attitudes regarding gay rights—is shown to be an insignificant predictor of opinion on same-sex marriage among all three groups once other variables are taken into account.

Three important differences do arise among the factors influencing the opinions of blacks, Latinos and whites.<sup>9</sup> First, as we might expect from the discussion above, party identification is a significant predictor of attitudes only for whites—and the size of this effect is substantially larger than the effects estimated for blacks and Latinos. Second, white and Latina women appear more likely to support same-sex marriage than black women, although this difference falls short of standard statistical significance levels ( $p < .14$ ). Finally, and most notably, there are strong,

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<sup>8</sup> See Appendix Table A2 for question wording, coding and reliability coefficients associated with these three scales.

<sup>9</sup> To assess whether there are inter-group differences in the effects of variables, we first calculated the first difference associated with each variable for each group, holding all other variables at their means or medians. Statistical significance of inter-group differences in effects was determined by constructing bootstrapped confidence intervals about inter-group differences in first differences.

statistically significant differences in how blacks, Latinos and whites apply egalitarian values to the issue of same-sex marriage, with egalitarianism having the strongest effect on Latino opinion, followed by that of whites. Egalitarianism's effect on black opinion is insignificant, and—against expectations—negative. These effects are depicted in Figure 5, which displays predicted probabilities of supporting same-sex marriage (and employment protection for gays, which we discuss further below). For comparability purposes, the probabilities are calculated holding all other variables at their typical values for the entire dataset. The left-hand panel of Figure 5 shows vividly how egalitarianism is associated positively with white and Latino support for same-sex marriage and negatively with African American support. A shift from the 25<sup>th</sup> to 75<sup>th</sup> percentile on the egalitarianism scale is associated with an increase in predicted probability of support for same-sex marriage of eight points for whites and 17 points for Latinos, holding other variables at their typical values. By contrast, a similar shift is associated with a five-point decrease in predicted support among African Americans.

Figure 5 also includes a similar display of the effect of egalitarianism on support for employment protection for gays (derived from estimates shown on the right-hand panel of Table 3). The relationship found among blacks between egalitarianism and support for employment protection helps to rule out concerns that the lack of a similar relationship for blacks regarding marriage is due to either lack of variance on the egalitarianism scale for blacks, or that blacks interpret the egalitarianism measures differently than do whites and Latinos. If either of these rival explanations were the case, we would expect to see a flat relationship between

egalitarianism and black support for employment protection as well. Gay rights' groups efforts to cast the cause of same-sex marriage in the language of equality (and in some cases invoke the imagery of the civil rights movement) are not resonating with African Americans.

A final way to assess the extent of the differences in the opinions of blacks, Latinos and whites on these issues is to ask the following: are there significant differences in support for same-sex marriage after accounting for differences in the distributions of predictors (such as education levels, importance of religion, or age) among the three groups? To the extent that such differences exist, we can be more sure that inter-group cultural differences are contributing to variation in levels of support for same-sex marriage seen among blacks, Latinos and whites. One method to assess these questions is to determine if the average predicted probabilities of support under the three counterfactuals that *all* respondents in the analysis were black, Latino, or white differ in any significant fashion. The differences in these predicted probabilities are called “average predictive differences”—estimates of how the dependent variable changes as race and ethnicity changes (Gelman & Hill 2007, 101-104). For details on their calculation, see the Appendix.

The final four rows of Table 3 display the average levels of predicted support for same-sex marriage and employment protection under the three counterfactuals that all respondents were black, Latino or white. The table shows that these scenarios yield quite similar predictions with regard to same-sex marriage: under all three scenarios, predicted support would fall just below 40 percent. The calculated

average predictive differences reflect this similarity: although white-black and Latino-black differences are statistically significant, in no case are inter-group differences more than two percentage points. In other words, once we account for inter-group variation in the distribution of predictors of support for same-sex marriage, white-black-Latino differences are relatively insubstantial. By contrast, differences in the three groups' support for employment protection for gays is large and significant: after accounting for other factors, whites support protections more than blacks by 10 percentage points, while white-black and Latino-black differences are five and four percentage points, respectively. In sum, the *ceteris paribus* differences on attitudes on same-sex marriage among blacks, Latinos and whites are relatively small compared to those on employment protection.

## **Conclusion**

The passage of Proposition 8 put racial and ethnic differences in attitudes toward same-sex marriage into the nationwide spotlight. The analysis here confirms that California's blacks and Latinos did approval the measure at rates higher than whites, but that African-American support was likely substantially lower than the 70 percent reported by the NEP exit poll. Pundits and other observers asserted that black and Latino support—in conjunction with increased turnout of black voters inspired by Barack Obama's historic candidacy—put Proposition 8 over the top (Sullivan 2008; Walters 2008). We demur from adjudicating those claims here: given the measure's narrow margin of victory, a shift in any number of factors could have changed the outcome. Furthermore, as shown in Table 3, estimated levels of

support among white voters are so close to 50 percent that we cannot say with certainty that even a majority of whites voted against Proposition 8.

Nevertheless, the analysis here indicates that those hoping to advance the cause of same-sex marriage must contend with a substantial gap in support between Latinos and whites on one hand and African Americans on the other—a divide that has only increased since the nation’s attention turned in earnest to the issue in 2003. The gap is particularly pronounced within the Democratic party, where only whites have moved rapidly toward approval of same-sex marriage, making it an issue on which one of the party’s largest inter-group differences in opinion can now be found.

Our analysis of the structure of black, Latino and white attitudes on same-sex marriage finds that after accounting for differences in demographics, partisanship, and core values, inter-group differences in opinion are unsubstantial. But we identify important variation in the factors affecting blacks, Latino, and white attitudes—most notably, the effect of egalitarianism, which has a strong impact on whites’ and Latinos’ support for same-sex marriage but has no (or perhaps even a negative) impact on that of African Americans.

The extent to which the divide identified and analyzed here will persist is, of course, unforeseeable with any certainty. But the fact (as shown in Table 3) that younger Americans are more supportive of same-sex marriage than their elders among blacks, Latinos and whites is an indicator that generational replacement is slowly changing aggregate opinion in all three groups, as it has been for the past two decades. For now, however, same-sex marriage is an issue on which important

differences in opinion along the lines of race and ethnicity remain—differences that will continue to have important consequences for the nationwide debate in the years to come.

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## TABLES

**Table 1. Estimates of Support for Proposition 8 among African-Americans, Latinos and Whites**

Estimation Strategy	Estimated % Supporting Proposition 8		
	Blacks	Latinos	Whites
<b>Exit poll</b>			
National Election Pool (NEP)	70	53	49
<b>Telephone survey*</b>			
PPIC (Oct. 12-19)	n/a	45	46
Field (Oct. 18-28)	53	49	47
SurveyUSA (Oct. 29-31)	50	52	48
PPIC (Nov. 5-16)	n/a	61	50
DBR for Equality California (Nov. 6-16)	58	59	49
SurveyUSA (Nov. 19)	41	44	51
<b>Ecological analysis</b>			
<i>EzI</i>	57	63	
Goodman's regression	59	68	n/a
Homogeneous precincts	59	59	

\*Survey sample sizes, percent of respondents who were African American or Latino, and sources:

PPIC (Oct. 12-19, *N* = 1,186, no estimates provided for African Americans; percent of respondents Latino not specified):  
[http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_1008MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_1008MBS.pdf)

Field (Oct. 18-28, *N* = 966, 6% African American, 19% Latino):  
<http://www.field.com/fieldpollonline/subscribers/RIs2292.pdf>

SurveyUSA (Oct. 29-31, *N*=637, 7% African American, 22% Latino):  
<http://www.surveyusa.com/client/PollReport.aspx?g=1c4eccc-7c3c-490c-8f35-13341be85e1e>

NEP Exit Poll (Nov. 4, *N* = 2,240, 10% African American, 18% Latino):  
<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#CAI01>

PPIC (Nov. 5-16, *N* = 2,003, no estimates provided for African Americans; percent of respondents Latino not specified):  
[http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S\\_1208MBS.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/survey/S_1208MBS.pdf)

DBR for Equality California (Nov. 6-16, *N* = 1,067, with oversamples of 149 African Americans and 149 Latinos) (not publicly available)

SurveyUSA (Nov. 19, *N* = 500, 7% African American, 28% Latino):  
<http://www.surveyusa.com/client/PollReport.aspx?g=3bd31dd5-a7a8-4f40-82d3-4fa16f43de97>

**Table 2. Support for Proposition 8 by Race/Ethnicity,  
Party Identification and Ideology**

PARTY ID	% voting for Prop. 8 (N)			IDEOLOGY	% voting for Prop. 8 (N)		
	Whites	Blacks	Latinos		Whites	Blacks	Latinos
Democrat	<b>19.2</b> 242	<b>58.6</b> 117	<b>51.1</b> 96	Liberal	<b>14.7</b> 212	<b>47.9</b> 58	<b>42.7</b> 64
Other party/none	<b>52.0</b> 220	<b>56.6</b> 27	<b>51.1</b> 24	Moderate	<b>50.3</b> 146	<b>58.6</b> 51	<b>59.9</b> 42
Republican	<b>79.7</b> 128	<b>64.5</b> 5	<b>88.5</b> 29	Conservative	<b>81.0</b> 202	<b>75.2</b> 35	<b>86.5</b> 37

*Source: DBR Survey of California Voters for Equality California, November 6-16, 2008.  
Data are weighted.*

**Table 3. Determinants of Support for Same-Sex Marriage and Employment Protection for Gays by Race and Ethnicity, 2008**

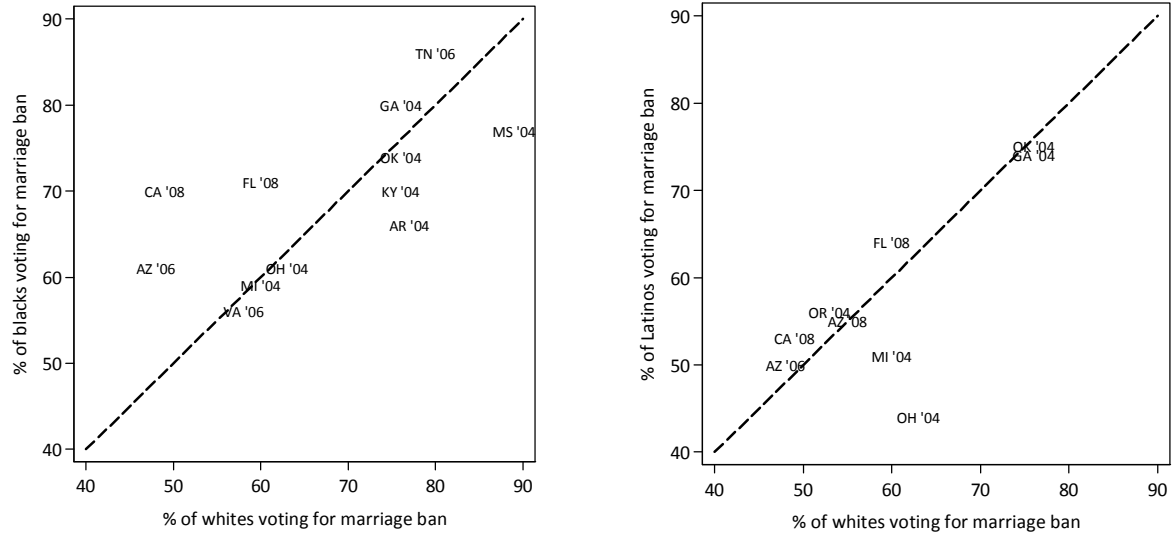
variable	support same-sex marriage			support employment protection for gays		
	whites	blacks	Latinos	whites	blacks	Latinos
moral traditionalism	-.52*** (.09)	-.55*** (.12)	-.35** (.13)	-.33*** (.08)	-.08 (.13)	-.41** (.13)
importance of religion	-.35*** (.07)	-.33** (.12)	-.36*** (.11)	-.12 (.07)	-.10 (.12)	-.13 (.11)
party identification (Dem to Rep) <sup>+</sup>	-.12*** (.03)	.00 (.06)	-.01 (.04)	-.08** (.03)	.03 (.06)	-.03 (.04)
egalitarianism <sup>+</sup>	.20** (.08)	-.12 (.10)	.40*** (.11)	.10 (.08)	.27** (.10)	.27* (.12)
age	-.01*** (.00)	-.01** (.01)	-.02*** (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)
ideology (liberal to conservative)	-.14 (.07)	-.08 (.08)	-.09 (.08)	-.12 (.07)	-.13 (.08)	-.07 (.09)
female	.24* (.12)	-.04 (.15)	.21 (.15)	.34** (.11)	.19 (.15)	.13 (.16)
education	.01 (.03)	.00 (.03)	-.03 (.03)	.07** (.03)	.05 (.03)	.02 (.02)
intercept	.52 (.44)	.42 (.60)	1.06* (.48)	.17 (.43)	-.14 (.56)	.31 (.48)
N	932	450	391	924	446	387
pseudo R-squared	.31	.12	.15	.13	.05	.07
Average predicted support if all respondents in analysis were members of group	38.6%	37.6%	39.1%	75.5%	65.6%	70.0%
Average predictive differences:						
(support   white) – (support   black)		1.1%* [.3, 1.9]			9.9%* [9.4, 10.3]	
(support   white) – (support   Latino)		-.4% [-.9, .2]			5.4%* [5.0, 5.8]	
(support   Latino) – (support   black)		1.5%* [.7, 2.4]			4.4%* [3.9, 5.0]	

Cell entries contain probit coefficients and their estimated standard errors in parentheses. Quantities are estimated to be statistically significantly different from zero at \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests). Estimations employ post-election stratification weights supplied by ANES.

<sup>+</sup>Variables whose effects on same-sex marriage attitudes (as measured by first differences, holding all other variables at their means or medians) are significantly different among racial/ethnic groups ( $p < .05$ ). Statistical significance assessed with bootstrapped confidence intervals about differences in first differences.  
*Source for data: 2008 ANES Time Series study (May 11, 2009 release).*

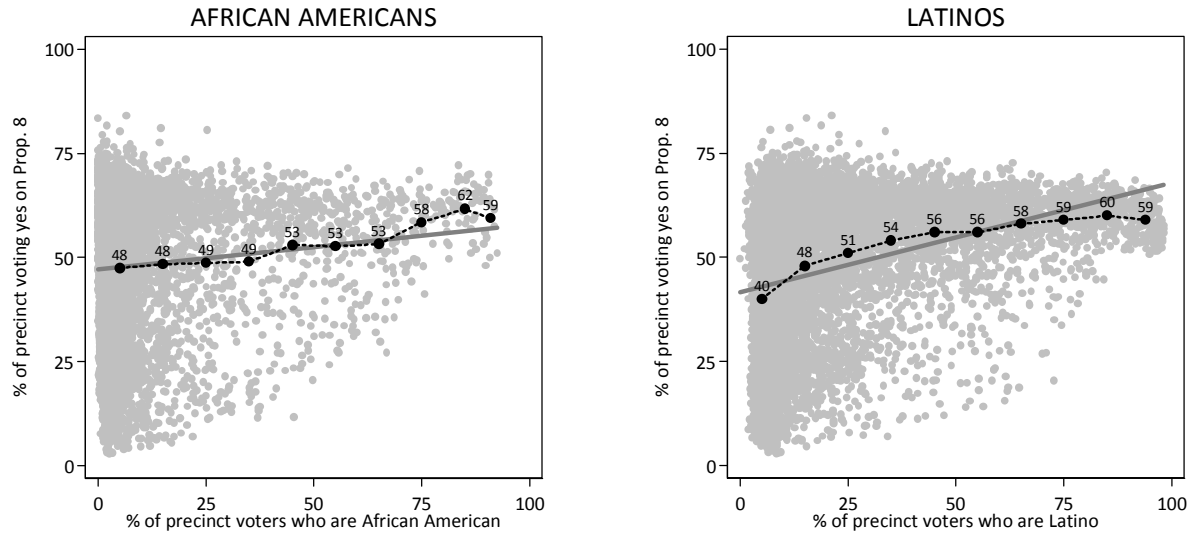
**FIGURES**

**Figure 1. Black, Latino and White Votes on Same-Sex Marriage Bans, 2004-2008**



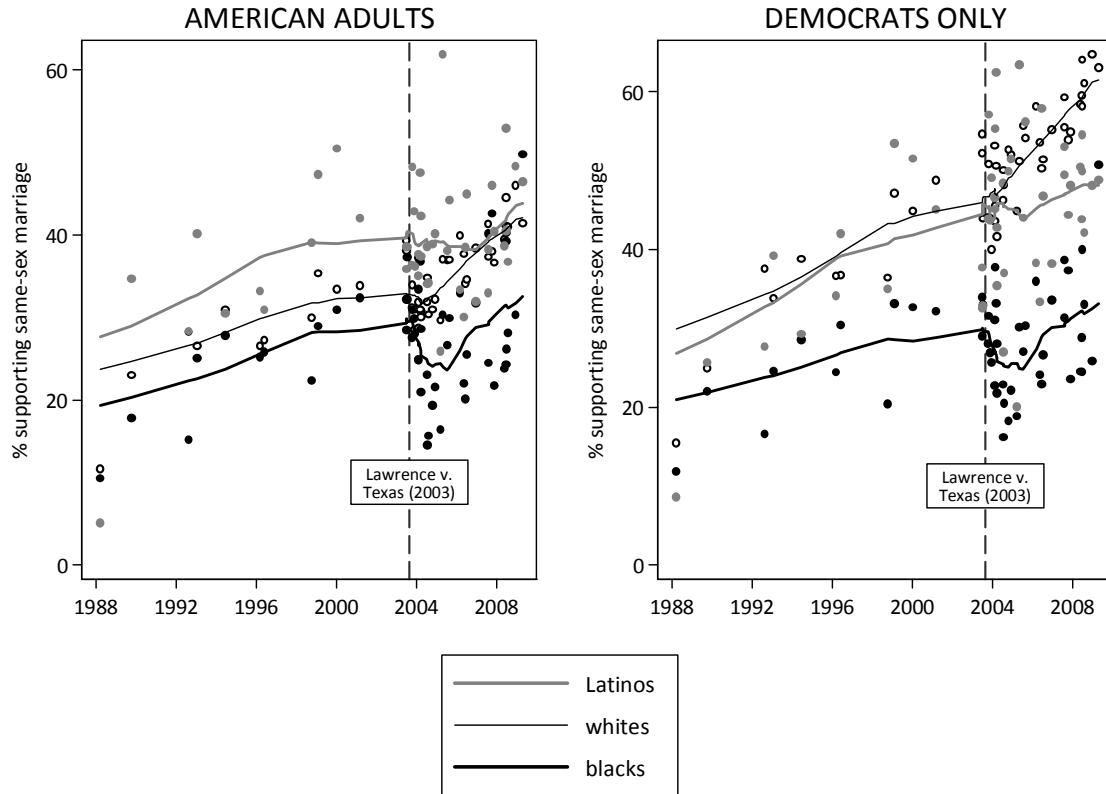
source: NEP exit polls

**Figure 2. Precinct Vote for Proposition 8 and African-American and Latino Populations in Five California Counties**



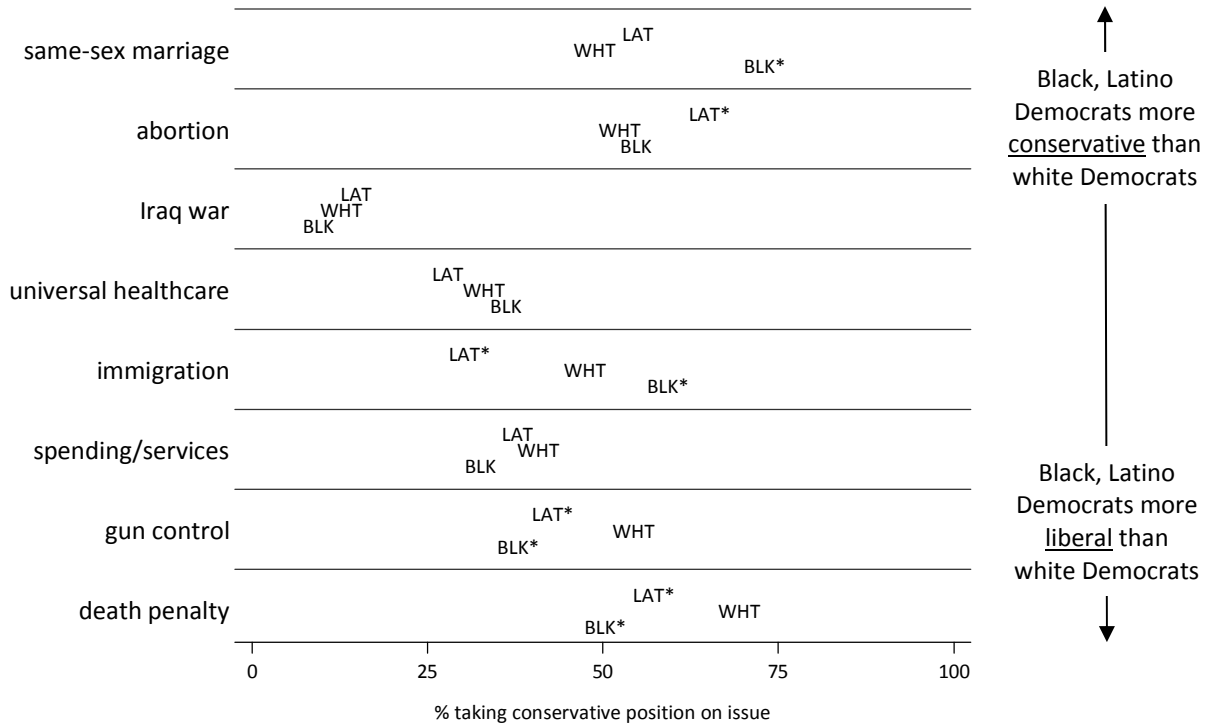
*sources: voting returns: county clerks and boards of elections  
 race/ethnicity of precinct voters: Statewide Database, UC Berkeley*

**Figure 3. Americans' Support for Same-Sex Marriage by Race and Ethnicity, 1998-2009**



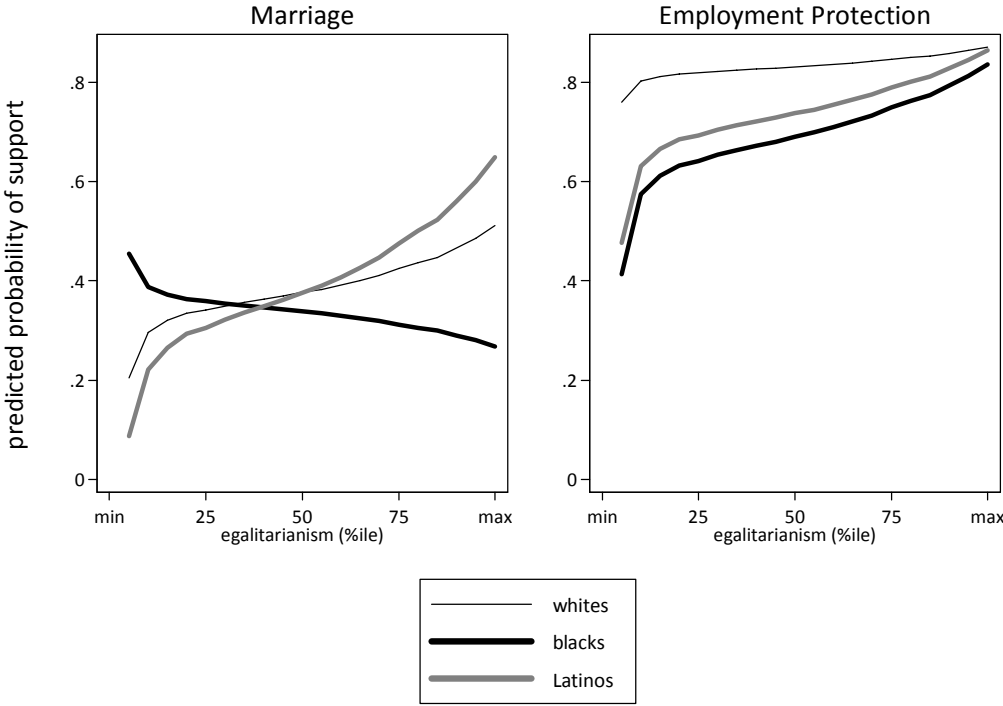
source: data from surveys by CNN, the General Social Survey, the Pew Research Center, and Time magazine, archived and distributed by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Archives, University of Connecticut.

**Figure 4. Democrats' Attitudes on Eight Issues by Race and Ethnicity, 2008**



source: American National Election Studies 2008 Time Series study (May 11, 2009 release).  
 Data are weighted with post post-election stratification weights supplied by ANES.  
 For question wording and coding, see Appendix Table A1.

**Figure 5. The Effects of Egalitarianism on Support for Same-Sex Marriage and Employment Protection for Gays, 2008**



*Source: predictions generated by models shown in Table 3 with other variables in models held at typical values.*

## APPENDIX

**Table A1. Question wording and coding of 2008 ANES TS issue items**

Issue (ANES variable #)	Question wording *Responses coded as conservative
same-sex marriage V083214	Should same-sex couples be ALLOWED to marry, or do you think they should NOT BE ALLOWED to marry? 1. Should be allowed 3. Should not be allowed* 5. Should not be allowed to marry but should be allowed to legally form a civil union* 7. Other {SPECIFY}*
abortion V085086	There has been some discussion about abortion during recent years. Which one of the opinions on this page best agrees with your view? 1. By law, abortion should never be permitted.* 2. The law should permit abortion only in case of rape, incest, or when the woman's life is in danger.* 3. The law should permit abortion for reasons other than rape, incest, or danger to the woman's life, but only after the need for the abortion has been clearly established.* 4. By law, a woman should always be able to obtain an abortion as a matter of personal choice.
Iraq war V083103	Taking everything into account, do you think the war in Iraq has been WORTH THE COST or NOT? 1. Worth it* 5. Not worth it
universal healthcare V083124	Do you FAVOR, OPPOSE, or NEITHER FAVOR NOR OPPOSE the U.S. government paying for all necessary medical care for all Americans? 1. Favor 2. Oppose* 3. Neither favor nor oppose*
immigration V083133	Do you FAVOR, OPPOSE, or NEITHER FAVOR NOR OPPOSE the U.S. government making it possible for illegal immigrants to become U.S. citizens? 1. Favor 2. Oppose* 3. Neither favor nor oppose*
spending/services V083105	Some people think the government should provide fewer services even in areas such as health and education in order to reduce spending. Suppose these people are at one end of a scale, at point 1. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Suppose these people are at the other end, at point 7. And, of course, some other people have opinions somewhere in between, at points 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this? 1-4 * 5-7
gun control V083164	Do you think the federal government should make it MORE DIFFICULT for people to buy a gun than it is now, make it EASIER for people to buy a gun, or keep these rules ABOUT THE SAME as they are now? 1. More difficult 3. Make it easier* 5. Keep these rules about the same*
death penalty V083163	Do you FAVOR or OPPOSE the death penalty for persons convicted of murder? 1. Favor* 5. Oppose

**Table A2. Question wording and coding of 2008 ANES TS egalitarianism, moral traditionalism and importance of religion scales**

<b>Scale</b> (ANES variable #)	<b>Question wording</b> *Responses are reverse coded
Egalitarianism (V085162-V085167)  (reliability = .66)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Our society should do whatever is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.'</li> <li>• 'We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.'*</li> <li>• 'One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance.'</li> <li>• 'This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are.'*</li> <li>• 'It is not really that big a problem if some people have more of a chance in life than others.'*</li> <li>• 'If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.'</li> </ul> <p>Respondents indicated whether they strongly agree (scored 5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2) or strongly disagree (1) with each statement.</p>
Moral traditionalism (V085139-V085142)  (reliability = .55)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The world is always changing and we should adjust our view of moral behavior to those changes.'*</li> <li>• 'The newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society.'</li> <li>• 'We should be more tolerant of people who choose to live according to their own moral standards, even if they are very different from our own.'*</li> <li>• 'This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family ties.'</li> </ul> <p>Respondents indicated whether they strongly agree (scored 5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2) or strongly disagree (1) with each statement.</p>
Importance of religion (V083181- V083184)  (reliability = .69)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you consider religion to be an IMPORTANT part of your life, or NOT (scored -1)?                          IF R SAYS THAT RELIGION IS IMPORTANT:                          Would you say your religion provides SOME guidance in your day-to-day living (scored 1), QUITE A BIT of guidance (scored 3), or a GREAT DEAL of guidance (scored 5) in your day-to-day life?</li> <li>• People practice their religion in different ways. Outside of attending religious services, do you pray SEVERAL TIMES A DAY(scored 1), ONCE A DAY (2), A FEW TIMES A WEEK (3), ONCE A WEEK OR LESS (4), or NEVER (5)?*</li> <li>• Which of these statements comes closest to describing your feelings about the Bible? You can just give me the number of your choice.*                         <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word (scored 1).</li> <li>2. The Bible is the word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally, word for word (2).</li> <li>3. The Bible is a book written by men and is not the word of God (3)</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

### Details on calculations of average predictive differences

To calculate average predictive differences associated with black, Latino and white opinion, first use probit coefficients to generate predicted probabilities for every observation in the dataset as only one variable is changed: whether the respondent is white, black or Latino. That is, for each observation  $i$ , calculate the three quantities

$$\overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | white)}, \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | black)}, \text{ and } \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | Latino)}.$$

(Note that these calculations incorporate the variation in coefficients among groups shown in Table 3.)

Second, for each observation  $i$  calculate the predictive differences

$$\begin{aligned} & \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | white)} - \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | black)}, \\ & \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | white)} - \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | Latino)}, \text{ and} \\ & \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | Latino)} - \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | black)}. \end{aligned}$$

Finally, calculate the average of each of these predictive differences for the entire dataset. That is, calculate

$$\begin{aligned} & \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | white)} - \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | black)}, \\ & \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | white)} - \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | Latino)}, \text{ and} \\ & \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | Latino)} - \overline{\Pr(y_i = 1 | black)}. \end{aligned}$$

These quantities are the average predictive differences associated with race and ethnicity, and are estimates of *ceteris paribus* inter-group comparisons. They are reported in the final rows of Table 3.