



Democratic Party (United States)

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The Democratic Party was founded by Thomas Jefferson in 1792 as a congressional caucus, and officially became the Democratic-Republican Party in 1798. The Party's first President was Thomas Jefferson, who was elected in 1800, but the party became divided over the next 20 years and the divisions led to the emergence of one strong wing under President Andrew Jackson in 1828.

In 1844 the Party's official name became the Democratic Party. The Party's central themes have always been populist. It emphasizes that government should be used to improve the lives of citizens. Recent Party platforms have highlighted commitment to the rights of minorities and women, support for organized labor, and programs for the poor.

The glbtq Movement's Affiliation with the Party

Most modern political movements have involved themselves in party politics by forming party-related groups, serving as delegates to party conventions, forming caucuses within parties, and by working with the political campaigns of party candidates. The American glbtq political movement has followed a similar pattern and has largely affiliated itself with the Democratic Party.

As Democrats came to define glbtq issues as civil rights issues in the 1970s, glbtq support for the Party tended to follow. Furthermore, public opinion polls consistently demonstrate that Democrats tend to be less opposed to homosexuality and glbtq civil rights, and feel more positively toward glbtq people than do Republicans. Although Democratic elites are more supportive of gay civil rights than are Democratic citizens generally, clear majorities of Democratic elites and masses support glbtq civil rights.

Glbtq activists first became involved in party politics in major cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York during the 1960s and 1970s. However, activists soon became involved in state and national Democratic Party politics as well.

At the 1972 Democratic National Convention, two openly lesbian and gay delegates, Madeline Davis and Jim Foster, made history when they gave a televised address before the convention. In response to strong primary election support from glbtq activists in the party, 1972 Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern issued a civil rights plank that spoke directly to the demands of glbtq activists at the time.

During the 1976 presidential election, Democrat Jimmy Carter also actively sought the gay and lesbian vote. Even though he backtracked on campaign promises to the glbtq community after he gained office, in 1977 his Assistant for Public Liaison, Margaret (Midge) Costanza, invited fourteen gay and lesbian activists to the White House for the first-ever official White House meeting between presidential staff and lesbian and gay activists. Additionally, in 1979 President Carter appointed lesbian Jill Schropp to the National Advisory Council on Women in a White House ceremony.



President Jimmy Carter, a member of the Democratic Party, held the first official meeting between a U.S. president and lesbian and gay activists in 1977.

By 1980 it was increasingly clear to many in the Democratic Party that glbtq activists were willing to identify glbtq-friendly candidates, organize glbtq voters, and vote as a bloc. As such, the glbtq movement's ability to influence election outcomes, and thereby ensure the representation of their interests within the Democratic Party, increased as well.

In fact, based on exit polls that identify the sexual orientation of voters, it is quite clear that gay, lesbian, and bisexual voters tend to vote for Democratic candidates and liberals over Republicans and conservatives--often by margins of three to one. Glbtq voters supported Democratic congressional candidates by margins of 61 percent in 1990, 77 percent in 1992, 73 percent in 1994, 72 percent in 1996, 85 percent in 1998, and 71 percent in 2002.

Glbtc support for Democrats was strong even in years when most voters went Republican, such as 1994 and 2002. Indeed, in 2002, when glbtq Democratic support dropped to 71 percent, the shift only partially went to Republicans, at 19 percent. The remainder, almost 7 percent, went to Libertarian and Green Party candidates.

Similar patterns of higher support for Democrats have occurred in each presidential election since 1988. In fact, during the infamous 2000 election, exit polls suggest that 70 percent of gay and lesbian voters chose Democrat Al Gore, 25 percent Republican George W. Bush, and four percent Green Party candidate Ralph Nader.

Mobilizing the glbtq Vote

But such overwhelming support did not occur automatically. The first serious effort to mobilize the gay and lesbian vote nationally came during the 1980 election cycle. A nationwide drive to secure a gay-rights plank in the national Democratic Party platform, "Gay Vote 1980," resulted in about a dozen lesbian and gay delegates in the Iowa caucuses. Lesbian and gay activists were also well represented at the 1980 national convention, with 77 delegates. An openly lesbian delegate to the Democratic National Convention, Virginia Apuzzo, used her position to co-author the first gay civil rights party platform plank for a major political party in the United States.

Glbtc activism in the Party led Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart to take additional steps in courting the gay and lesbian vote in 1983 by speaking to the main gay Political Action Committee in Los Angeles. The event was the first time a presidential candidate from a major party addressed a glbtq interest group. Other candidates soon followed. In 1984, Democratic candidate Jesse Jackson attended a meeting at New York City's Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center.

Democratic contenders for the presidential nomination in 1988 largely ignored most glbtq issues, with the exception of AIDS. Even so, gay activists, such as Julian Potter, played key roles in the campaigns of Democratic presidential candidates, including those of Richard Gephardt and Michael Dukakis. Long-shot candidate Jesse Jackson did attempt to appeal to glbtq voters, as he had done in 1984. Indeed, Jackson appears to have won a majority of the lesbian and gay vote in urban areas. In 1988 there were 98 openly lesbian, gay, or bisexual delegates at the Democratic National Convention.

The Clinton-Gore Years

By 1992 the situation for activists had changed dramatically within the Democratic Party. Democrats in Congress had orchestrated a series of policy victories for the glbtq community and activists had a proven track record of delivering votes and campaign funds. Furthermore, Republican President George H. W. Bush had alienated many gay and lesbian fiscal conservatives.

Democratic presidential candidate Bill Clinton capitalized on the situation in a number of ways, including his October 1991 promise to drop the ban on gays in the military. Clinton's promises led many activists to

work for his campaign in volunteer and paid positions. In addition, activists such as David Mixner helped to raise over \$3.4 million for Clinton's campaign and the national Democratic Party. At the 1992 Democratic National Convention, 133 delegates were gay or lesbian.

Throughout the early and mid-1990s glbtq activists increased their presence in local and state Democratic Party politics as well. More gay men and lesbians were elected or appointed to party positions and increasing numbers of gay and lesbian candidates were running, and winning, as Democrats in local and state elections. In fact, over 90 percent of all glbtq candidates for public office in the 1990s ran as Democrats.

By the 1996 presidential election, activists clearly understood that they had a friend in the White House, even if President Clinton's role was often limited to blocking hostile actions by a Republican-controlled Congress. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) estimates that it received \$3 million in donations from glbtq contributors during the 1996 election cycle.

After the election, activists continued to support the Party, raising money for the 1998 congressional elections and the 2000 presidential campaign. Indeed, between December 1997 and February 1999, President Clinton attended three DNC fund-raising events targeted at glbtq contributors, which raised \$1.2 million. During October 1999 glbtq events raised about \$2.5 million for the DNC, including about \$850,000 for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee.

Hillary Clinton's New York Senate campaign took in \$125,000 at a December 1999 glbtq event. Later that month activists raised a record-breaking \$900,000 for the DNC at a luncheon where President Clinton was the guest of honor. Activists estimate that glbtq contributors and fund-raisers provided more than \$10 million to Democratic candidates and the DNC in the 1999-2000 election cycle.

Glbq influence in the Democratic Party was also made clear when his openly gay advisor, Richard Socarides, convinced President Clinton to become the first President to address a glbtq group in November 1997. President Clinton gave the keynote address at a Human Rights Campaign (HRC) meeting. Some observers have suggested that his speech before the HRC was as historic as Harry Truman's address before a black civil rights group 50 years earlier. In addition, Vice-President Al Gore became the first vice-president ever to address a glbtq group in 1998 when he spoke to an HRC meeting.

National Stonewall Democratic Federation

In 1998, glbtq Democratic Party activists further institutionalized their local party organizations by creating the National Stonewall Democratic Federation (NSDF). A federation of 45 local clubs with a total of 10,000 members, it has proven to be an important group within the national party.

Most of the local clubs were previously independent local glbtq Democratic Clubs involved in local and state party politics. One of these, the California Stonewall Democrats (CSD), strongly made its presence felt in the 1998 gubernatorial race. When the group sponsored a candidate debate, all three Democratic gubernatorial candidates attended.

CSD eventually endorsed Gray Davis and glbtq voters overwhelmingly supported his candidacy, providing him with 73 percent of their vote. Davis became the most glbtq-friendly governor in California's history, signing key civil rights legislation addressing discrimination and benefits for same-sex couples, and appointing gay men and lesbians to more than 37 government positions.

Activists in Party Positions

President Clinton rewarded the support of glbtq activists with many positions within his administration, and by 1999, rewards began to flow in terms of national Party positions. In 1999 President Clinton nominated

gay financial writer Andrew Tobias to be treasurer of the Democratic National Committee (DNC). The nomination placed Tobias in the highest-ranking position ever attained by an openly gay person in a major U.S. party.

Glbtc people also served on the Democratic National Committee's site search committee for the 2000 national convention. And in 2001 four openly glbtq people took positions in the DNC. Mark Spengler became Base Vote Director, Campbell Spencer became National Gay and Lesbian Base Vote Director, Clay Doherty became the Executive Director of the Gay and Lesbian Leadership Council of the DNC, and Christine Kenngott took the position of Deputy Director of Marketing.

Glbtc involvement in the Party during the 2000 elections was also clear from candidate positions on issues and staff memberships. Democratic Vice President Al Gore's 2000 presidential campaign had glbtq persons in key posts and gained the support of many national glbtq leaders. For example, lesbian Donna Brazile served as Gore's campaign manager and lesbian Julian Potter campaigned for Gore in key primary states, while openly gay Jeffrey Trammell served as Gore's chief adviser on gay issues.

As Gore faced primary battles in early 2000, he met with 20 leaders of the NSDF; Gore's Democratic opponent, Bill Bradley, also met with the group. Gore became the first candidate for president of any major party to take direct questions from glbtq people when he fielded questions on a gay online network called Gay.com in January 2000, and Gore was the first candidate to argue that glbtq foreigners who are in a domestic partnership with U.S. citizens should have the same immigration rights as married heterosexuals.

Although the 1992 Democratic convention was clearly a milestone for glbtq inclusion within the Party, the 2000 convention demonstrated just how integrated queer activists have become within the Democratic Party. A number of activists addressed the convention in prime time spots, including a keynote speech by the president of the largest glbtq political group, the Human Rights Campaign. Furthermore, the 2000 Democratic platform stated unambiguously that the Party supports "the full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of the nation," including fair and equitable benefits for same-sex couples.

By the 2000 election cycle, it was also clear that glbtq activists had embedded themselves within the Democratic Party at the state and local level. Even in conservative states such as Utah, activists had been appointed to state Party posts as early as 1997. In Iowa, 14 activists were included on the state's 2000 platform committee, and seven other glbtq persons won election to the Iowa Democratic Party Central Committee.

In Ohio, the state Party adopted an affirmative action policy stating that at least five of its allotted 170 seats for the nominating convention must be filled by gay or lesbian delegates. The Iowa Party has a similar policy, but requires only two delegates. Steps to recruit more glbtq delegates for the 2000 Democratic convention also moved forward in New York, California, Rhode Island, and Georgia.

The situation in local party organizations in most major cities was similar by 2000. For example, in Philadelphia the 1998 Democratic City Committee elected 33 open glbtq people, more than doubling the number of glbtq persons on previous Committees. The power of activists in the Philadelphia Democratic organization was enhanced by a strong local group, the Liberty City Lesbian & Gay Democratic Club, which had assisted in the election of Philadelphia Mayor John Street in 1999.

2004

During the 2004 race for the Democratic presidential nomination, nearly all of the Democratic contenders have appealed to glbtq voters and their concerns. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force has even suggested that the field of Democratic candidates was the strongest ever on gay rights issues.

In just one example, Rep. Dick Gephardt's (D-MO) lesbian daughter, Chrissy Gephardt, campaigned heavily

for his nomination in the summer of 2003, and in October 2003, Rep. Gephardt named party activist and campaign fundraiser David Mixner to be a co-chair of his 2004 presidential campaign. Mixner, an openly gay man, has worked on more than 75 political campaigns, and raised more than \$15 million for Democratic candidates since the late 1980s.

Finally, although it is clear that the glbtq movement has mainstreamed itself within the Democratic Party, its influence is not all encompassing. Indeed, although the glbtq community has clearly supported the DNC and been supported by key figures in the Party, as of 2003 the DNC had still not designated the DNC Gay and Lesbian Caucus as an official "operating caucus," which would give it a seat on the DNC executive committee. Other caucuses, such as the African American, Asian Pacific, Hispanic, and Women's caucuses, do have official status.

Moreover, in some parts of the country, especially the South, Democratic candidates tend to distance themselves from the national party's position on glbtq issues, sometimes even refusing to meet with or accept the endorsement of state and local glbtq organizations.

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