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Issue Voting in Gubernatorial Elections: Abortion and Post-Webster Politics

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Nearly all studies of gubernatorial voting focus on the role of state economic conditions and incumbency on vote choice. Yet gubernatorial campaigns frequently focus on social issues such as abortion, the death penalty, and gun control. Using data from 1989 and 1990 exit polls in 10 states, we find that abortion was a significant predictor of vote choice in all but one. Our logistic regression analysis suggests that abortion position had a greater impact on vote choice than state economic conditions in eight of the 10 states in our analysis, and that abortion was a stronger predictor than even partisanship in Pennsylvania. This suggests the need to consider noneconomic issues in gubernatorial voting studies.

Most studies of gubernatorial elections have used aggregate analysis to investigate the role of economic issues and incumbency on candidate success. Chubb (1988) reported that institutionalization has partially insulated incumbent governors from state economic conditions, but that state and especially national economic conditions still affect the outcome of gubernatorial elections. Holbrook-Provow (1987) also found that national economic conditions are important predictors of electoral outcomes, and added that presidential popularity and incumbency are also significant factors. The latter finding supports Piereson's (1977) report that incumbency has become a more important predictor of gubernatorial voting while party has declined in significance.

Although these and other studies focus on the role of the economy in gubernatorial elections, there has been much less work on the impact of noneconomic issues. Indeed, Chubb argued that the "unpredictable" portion of the variation in gubernatorial outcomes must be due to candidate characteristics, not noneconomic issues. We argue, however, that noneconomic issues can play a major role in state

The data were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. We alone are responsible for all interpretations.

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gubernatorial elections. Gubernatorial candidates frequently stress noneconomic issues in their campaigns. In 1988 and 1990, candidates touted their positions on education, environment, death penalty, gun control, and abortion.

Moreover, although governors can have some influence on the economic fortunes of their state, national economic conditions have a profound impact on state economies. Voters may be aware that governors are more likely to have an important impact on the other issues listed here. For some voters, such issues may have a bigger influence on their gubernatorial vote than state economic fortunes.

The *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* decision in 1989 seemed to invite state governments to regulate access to abortion. Although prochoice voters had previously believed that the abortion right created in *Roe v. Wade* was immune to interference by state legislatures and governors, in the aftermath of *Webster* a number of states moved to restrict legal abortion. Prochoice citizens became aware of the political consequences of electing prolife officials, and prolife citizens saw the opportunity to enact at least some restrictions on legal abortion in many states.

Gubernatorial candidates in 1989 and 1990 stressed the abortion issue in their campaigns (Donovon 1990; Idelson 1990). Some scholarly studies have shown that the abortion issue was a significant factor in the outcome of governors elections in 1989 in Virginia and New Jersey (Dodson and Burnbauer 1990; Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1991), and in Louisiana in 1991 (Howell and Sims 1993). Other research suggests that abortion may have played a role in electoral outcomes in 1990 as well (Cook, Jelen, and Wilcox 1992).

Previous research may have ignored the role of noneconomic issues because it is difficult to incorporate such variables into aggregate models. Data on state economic conditions are relatively easy to obtain, and in longitudinal analysis information on incumbency and presidential popularity is readily available. Yet to study the impact of noneconomic issues requires individual data from random samples of state voters. Until recently, such data were rare. In this paper, we examine the role of the abortion issue in gubernatorial elections in 1989 and 1990. Using data from exit polls, we focus on elections in a number of key states that produced prochoice and prolife victors for each party.

In 1989, in the immediate aftermath of *Webster*, Virginia and New Jersey elected prochoice Democratic governors over prolife Republican candidates.¹ In 1990, prochoice Democrats beat Republicans who took prolife stands in Texas and Florida. Prochoice Republicans were elected in California, Massachusetts, and

¹For this paper, we use the term prochoice to describe the views of candidates who favor generally unlimited access to abortion, and prolife to describe candidates who favor sharp restrictions on legal abortion. Some prolife activists might object to the use of this label for a candidate who would allow abortion under a few limited circumstances, but we have adopted the term because of its widespread use in the popular media and because candidates who take a strictly prolife position are very rare.

Illinois. In Illinois, the Democratic candidate had advocated restrictions on abortion, and in Massachusetts the Republican candidate took a stronger position in support of abortion rights,² but in California the Democratic candidate argued that her gender made her even more committed to abortion rights. Republicans who favored restrictions on abortion were elected in Ohio and Michigan; the Ohio contest featured a formerly prolife Democrat who had recently changed his position. A largely prolife Democrat was elected in Pennsylvania over a prochoice Republican. Thus these states provide examples of victory by Democrats and Republicans who took prochoice and prolife stands.

The Data

The data come from CBS News/New York Times exit polls in Virginia and New Jersey in 1989, and the Voter Research and Surveys General Election Exit Poll in 42 states in 1990. The 1989 CBS surveys included this abortion item:

Which of these comes closest to your view?

1. Abortion should be generally available to those who want it.
2. Abortion should be available, but under more strict limits than now.
3. Abortion should be strictly prohibited.

The 1990 exit polls contained a somewhat different question:

Which of these statements comes closest to your view about abortion?

1. It should be legal under all circumstances.
2. It should be legal only in some circumstances.
3. It should not be legal in any circumstances.

In addition, each survey contained a measure of general ideology and of partisanship. The Virginia and New Jersey surveys also included an item that tapped previous vote history and approval of the outgoing governor. In Virginia, the outgoing governor was a Democrat, while in New Jersey he was a Republican. The 1990 surveys contained items that measured the respondents' evaluation of the condition of the state economy, the national economy, and of her or his personal finances.

All surveys contained measures of race, sex, age, education, income, and religious denomination. We have created two dummy variables from this latter item to identify Catholics and those with no religious affiliation. Unfortunately, we are unable to distinguish between evangelical and mainline Protestants with these data. In the multivariate analysis, the effects of these variables are assessed relative to Protestants. In all states except New Jersey the surveys also included an item that tapped frequency of church attendance, and in all surveys except Virginia an item identified those in union households. Virginia voters were asked whether they grew up in the South or the North.

²William Weld ran a strong prochoice campaign during his primary election campaign in which he defeated a prolife Republican for the nomination.

Although it is possible to have a somewhat more narrow list of independent variables common across all surveys, we have elected to include every relevant independent variable included in the survey in a particular state in our multivariate analysis. We have also estimated equations that include only the common independent variables, and the results are not substantively different.

Abortion Attitudes and Vote Choice

In table 1 we present the distribution of attitudes toward abortion, and the salience of abortion in each state electorate. Recall that the wording of the abortion item differed somewhat in Virginia and New Jersey compared to the other eight states. The wording in those states most likely resulted in somewhat more prochoice respondents than the 1990 item would have identified.³ In addition, however, the Virginia and New Jersey surveys were held immediately after the *Webster* decision, and featured strong efforts by prochoice groups. In Virginia, for example, NARAL ran independently funded advertisements on behalf of the Democratic candidate, and the Democratic candidate for Lt. Governor also stressed the abortion issue in his advertising (Cook, Hartwig, and Wilcox 1992). For all of these reasons, it is important to compare the attitudes of Virginia and New Jersey voters only to those in the other state and not in the eight states surveyed in 1990.

In each state, there are more prochoice than prolife respondents, but in most states a plurality of respondents favor some restrictions on abortion. In Virginia and New Jersey in 1989, an absolute majority favored legal abortion. In California in 1990, a majority of respondents favored keeping abortion legal, while in Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois the prochoice contingent comprised fewer than 40% of the electorate.⁴

Respondents were asked which issues were the most important in deciding their vote and which issues were the second-most important. In table 1, we see that abor-

³ The 1990 surveys included a sample in New Jersey, where 40% took a consistent prochoice position, 44% a middle, or situational position, and 16% a prolife position. Elsewhere we have shown that respondents to general abortion items tend to select the closest possible category. If the middle category is relatively liberal, those who favor abortion under only a very few circumstances (e.g., woman's health and rape) will choose a prolife response rather than agree to a far more liberal response; if the middle category is relatively conservative then those who approve of abortion in most but not all circumstances will choose a prochoice position. The 1989 item mentioned "strict" restrictions, while the 1990 question merely noted that it should be legal in some circumstances. Respondents may have perceived that the middle option in the 1989 item was somewhat more conservative. In fact, general items usually overestimate support for a prochoice and a prolife position. Of course, the difference in responses between 1989 and 1990 may also have been due to the different context. The 1989 survey was conducted immediately after *Webster* and after a campaign that focused on abortion.

⁴ General three-point items such as this overstates the support for both the prochoice and prolife position. In addition, many of those who take prochoice positions on these types of items favor some restrictions such as parental notification or consent.

TABLE 1
THE SALIENCE AND DIRECTION OF ABORTION
IN GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS—1989 AND 1990

	VA	NJ	FL	TX	CA	MA	IL	MI	OH	PA
Importance of Abortion										
1st	27%	30%	10%	12%	12%	7%	NA	23%	16%	16%
2nd	23%	3%	17%	15%	17%	7%	NA	15%	13%	15%
Abortion Should Be:										
Legal	50%	57%	47%	33%	54%	47%	37%	43%	36%	31%
Limited	33%	28%	41%	52%	34%	40%	47%	44%	49%	50%
Not Legal	18%	16%	12%	16%	12%	14%	16%	14%	16%	20%

Percentage of respondents in each state who listed abortion as the most important or second most important issue in their vote decision, and who took each position on the legality of abortion.

tion was highly salient to voters in 1989 and 1990. Fully half of Virginia voters cited the abortion issue as important in their vote, as did nearly 40% of voters in Michigan and nearly one-third of voters in Pennsylvania. Only in Massachusetts was the issue relatively unimportant to the electorate.

In table 2, we show the bivariate relationship between abortion attitudes and vote choice, and provide comparable information on partisanship. Although the relationship between abortion attitude and vote is not surprisingly weaker than the effects of partisanship, abortion appears to be a source of vote choice in each state except Michigan. Note that abortion attitudes matter in states such as Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Massachusetts, where the candidates took positions that deviated from those of the national parties. The voters seem to have sorted out these positions, for prolife voters were more likely in those states to support the Democratic candidate and prochoice voters the Republican candidate.

Also in table 2 we compare the effects of abortion attitudes, holding constant partisanship. These data show that the abortion issue influences vote choice among partisans but has a somewhat stronger impact among independents. Note the strong impact of the abortion issue among voters in Virginia and Pennsylvania after controls for partisanship.

Finally, in table 2 we show the percentage of all voters in each state who mentioned abortion as a salient issue and who took a prochoice or prolife position. This is one measure of the size of the prolife and prochoice voting blocs in each state.⁵ The figure is a result of the size and intensity of the prolife and prochoice

⁵Of course, many of those who favored abortion in some but not all circumstances also mentioned abortion. These situational voters may lean toward one candidate or another depending on the positions of the candidates and the frame of the issue.

TABLE 2
 ABORTION ATTITUDES AND VOTE CHOICE
 IN GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS—1989 AND 1990

	Percentage Voting for Democratic Candidate									
	VA	NJ	FL	TX	CA	MA	IL	MI	OH	PA
Abortion Should Be:										
Legal	70%	70%	69%	67%	58%	44%	53%	56%	58%	45%
Limited	37%	56%	46%	48%	40%	50%	42%	58%	40%	73%
Not Legal	18%	48%	43%	36%	37%	59%	53%	50%	29%	88%
Democrats	85%	88%	87%	84%	83%	67%	76%	79%	76%	80%
Independents	50%	69%	59%	49%	51%	44%	46%	43%	38%	66%
Republicans	18%	27%	26%	19%	13%	24%	16%	22%	15%	50%
Democrats										
Legal	92%	90%	95%	91%	87%	60%	78%	80%	84%	62%
Limited	81%	87%	79%	82%	78%	71%	71%	79%	70%	85%
Not Legal	51%	84%	79%	73%	74%	78%	85%	76%	74%	92%
Independents										
Legal	68%	76%	67%	68%	62%	39%	51%	42%	53%	41%
Limited	38%	63%	52%	40%	40%	48%	41%	45%	33%	75%
Not Legal	21%	48%	40%	23%	29%	48%	45%	37%	17%	97%
Republicans										
Legal	35%	35%	40%	31%	17%	21%	20%	17%	20%	27%
Limited	13%	22%	18%	15%	11%	21%	14%	27%	15%	51%
Not Legal	2%	13%	16%	12%	4%	42%	16%	23%	5%	77%
% of Voters Who Mention Abortion as a Key Issue and Want Abortion:										
Legal	21%	23%	5%	8%	13%	7%	NA	15%	9%	9%
Not Legal	12%	15%	1%	5%	4%	2%	NA	4%	6%	7%
N	1,085	1,559	1,625	2,404	2,766	1,931	2,864	1,565	1,666	1,539

Note: In Virginia, New Jersey, Florida, Texas, California, Michigan, and Ohio, the Democratic candidates took prochoice stands. In California, Massachusetts, Illinois, and Pennsylvania, the Republican candidate took a prochoice position.

blocs. The prochoice forces enjoy a numerical advantage in all states, but the prolife contingent viewed abortion as more salient in all states. Nonetheless, in all 10 states there were more prochoice voters who mentioned the abortion issue as salient than prolife voters. The prochoice advantage was large in Virginia, California, and Michigan, and small in Texas, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.⁶

⁶It should be noted that a number of voters who favored allowing abortion under some but not all circumstances also listed abortion as a salient issue.

Multivariate Results

To see if abortion attitudes predict vote choice after controls for other variables, we have estimated separate logistic regression equations for each state. In table 3, we show the results for Virginia and New Jersey in 1989. The coefficients are unstandardized and cannot be directly compared within equations to determine the relative impact of each variable on vote choice. The -2 Log LR (log likelihood) is

TABLE 3
MULTIVARIATE RESULTS: VOTE CHOICE
IN VA AND NJ GOVERNORS' RACES IN 1989

	Virginia MLE	-2 Log LR	New Jersey MLE	-2 Log LR
Partisanship	1.03***	43.81	1.44***	192.10
Party Vote History	1.05***	34.07	.75***	22.17
Ideology	.60***	11.72	.73***	36.76
Approval of Incumbent Governor	.72***	7.32	-1.32***	50.56
Race	2.79***	42.63	.38	1.66
Sex	.27	0.90	.03	.01
Age	.22*	2.80	-.05	.45
Education	-.19*	3.15	-.02	.06
Income	-.01	0.19	.05	.59
Raised in South	1.01***	14.82		
Union Household			-.04	.04
Catholic	.15	.19	.07	.00
No Denomination	-.42	.54	-.71*	3.17
Church Attendance	-.09	.80		
Abortion position	1.06***	37.13	.62***	30.14
Prochoice	.95***	18.22	.60***	10.75
Prolife	-1.21***	10.94	-.63***	6.18
Percentage Predicted Correctly:				
Democrat	84%		86%	
Republican	87%		72%	
Overall	86%		81%	
Modal value	62%		50%	
Goodman & Kruskal's Tau	.37		.28	
Model Chi-Square	539***		545***	
Unweighted N	823		1,130	

* $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$. Coefficients for prochoice and prolife dummy variables are from a separate model, which included the two dummy variables instead of the single abortion item.

similar to a T-value in regression and is preferable to the Wald test for the statistical significance of the coefficients (Hosmer and Lemeshow 1989; Hauck and Donner 1977; Jennings 1986).⁷

To assess the substantive importance of abortion, we have estimated separate equations in which we entered abortion attitudes as two dummy variables identifying those who took a prochoice and prolife position, leaving those who supported legal abortion under some but not all circumstances as the excluded category.⁸ These coefficients are denoted by two asterisks and appear below the coefficient for the single abortion item. We have converted these coefficients into probabilities, which we will discuss later.⁹

In both Virginia and New Jersey, abortion is a significant predictor of gubernatorial vote. Note that we control for both partisanship and past party vote, so that the effects of party loyalty is shared between these two variables. Abortion was a strong predictor of vote choice in each state, and the analysis with the two dummy variables shows that both prolife and prochoice citizens were likely to vote their abortion preferences. In New Jersey, after holding constant demographic characteristics, ideology and partisanship, prolife voters had a .47 probability of voting for the Democratic candidate compared with a .61 probability for prochoice voters. In Virginia, prolife voters had a .39 probability of casting a Democratic ballot while prochoice respondents had a .64 probability of doing so.

In table 4, we show the equations for the 1990 gubernatorial contests. Abortion is a statistically significant predictor in each of the states except Michigan and is a strong predictor in six of the eight states. We experimented with other specifications, including removing the item on the respondent's personal finances to include only evaluations of the state economy, substituting the respondents evaluations of the national economy in those states in which the item was asked, and including all three measures of economic attitudes. The results were substantially identical to those presented here: abortion attitudes remain a strong, statistically significant predictor of vote choice. In Pennsylvania, abortion attitudes were especially powerful predictors of vote: after multivariate controls the probability of a Democratic vote by a prolife citizen was .81 compared with only .42 for a prochoice voter.

Because the logistic regression coefficients are unstandardized, it is difficult to compare the impact of variables within an equation. Moreover, there is no widely

⁷We used the SPSS-X mainframe version of logistic regression.

⁸See Howell and Sims (1993) for a discussion of this procedure.

⁹Logistic regression coefficients provide an estimate of the log odds after adjusting for other independent variables. The log odds is the log of the odds ratio for $x = 1$ (e.g., prochoice) and $x = 0$ (e.g., not prochoice). The log odds can be transformed into probabilities which assume that the other independent variables in the model assume the value of the sample mean. The procedure involves computing a variable x for each case that represents a linear combination of the unstandardized logistic regression coefficients. The calculation involves raising e to the X power, and dividing by $1 + e$ to the X .

accepted procedure for producing standardized coefficients. We transformed the coefficients for partisanship and for evaluations of the state economic conditions into probabilities (now shown), and compared the impact of these variables on vote choice. In almost all states, the differences in probabilities of Democratic voting between Democrats and Republicans were far greater than those between prolife and prochoice voters, although in Pennsylvania abortion appears to have swayed slightly more votes.¹⁰ In eight states the probabilities associated with abortion suggested a greater impact on vote choice than evaluations of the state economy.¹¹

Not surprisingly, abortion was an especially strong predictor in those states in which at least one candidate chose to focus on the issue. In Florida, the Republican incumbent had called a special legislative session in an unsuccessful effort to limit abortion, although the Democratic candidate did not emphasize the issue. Yet prochoice voters responded negatively to the position of the Republican incumbent while prolife voters were not significantly different from those who took a moderate position on abortion. In Pennsylvania, the incumbent Democratic governor had signed a restrictive measure in 1989, and his prochoice Republican opponent tried to make abortion a central issue in her campaign. In Ohio, the Democratic candidate had changed from a prolife to a prochoice position before the election, and the Republican candidate sought to capitalize on that change.

Dodson and Birnbauer (1991) reported that abortion was more salient for women than men in Virginia and New Jersey in 1989. We estimated equations with interactions between sex and abortion attitudes for each state. In only one state, Michigan, was there a significant interaction with women more likely to vote the abortion issue. We also tested for the interaction between religion and abortion positions and found significant interactions in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Texas, and New Jersey. Catholics were more likely to cast a vote based on abortion than either Protestants or those without religious attachments.¹²

¹⁰The probability of a Republican voting for the Democratic incumbent was 49%, and the Democratic odds were 73%.

¹¹For example, the odds of voting for the Democratic candidate in Ohio by about 10% between those who thought the state economy was excellent or poor, but the spread on the abortion issue was 18%. The spread of probabilities across party was 43%. Interestingly, our analysis suggests that the abortion issue helped the Democratic candidate, although a good deal of attention was paid to his recent conversion to pro-choice politics. We estimate that the abortion issue produced about a 1.5% vote swing to the Democratic candidate, after all other variables were controlled.

¹²With one significant interaction in 10 equations for gender, we are not especially confident that the result is not due to chance. At the .05 level of significance, we have a 50% chance of getting a false positive in 10 equations. The interactions for religion are more persuasive, and they are found in states where there is some religious pluralism, and in generally in states where the Catholic church has been active on this issue.

TABLE 4

ABORTION IN GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS—1990

	Florida		Texas		Illinois		Massachusetts	
	MLE	-2Log LR	MLE	-2Log LR	MLE	-2Log LR	MLE	-2Log LR
Partisanship	1.25***	202.36	1.46***	301.40	1.18***	237.52	.95***	111.91
Ideology	.48***	15.90	.68***	38.86	.09	.93	.13	1.89
Race	1.19***	11.07	1.59***	35.30	.51**	5.71	.38	1.09
Sex	-.04	.06	.55***	14.24	-.24**	-3.66	.03	.07
Age	-.06	1.60	.08**	3.51	-.10***	8.73	.08**	5.67
Education	.11	2.23	.23***	10.48	-.11**	-3.34	-.00	.01
Income	-.09	1.41	-.09	1.36	.24**	4.26	.12**	3.57
Union Household	.39	1.85	.68**	3.95	-.04	-.05	.70***	16.52
Urban	.11**	5.98	.14**	4.74	-.03	.57	.08**	4.02
Catholic	-.08	.22	.33**	3.73	.04	.08	.37***	8.82
No Denomination	1.24**	4.32	.04	.01	-.06	-.02	-.32	.75
Church Attendance	-.33**	4.41	-.38**	6.50	-.09	-.48	.02	.04
State Economy Good	-.45***	13.86	.08	.63 (-)	-.29***	-11.04	.13	1.51
Personal Finances Better Today	-.07	.38	-.24**	5.88 (+)	-.24***	6.55	.11	1.86
Abortion Position	.57***	22.72	.60***	27.46 (+)	-.15**	-2.32	-.23**	5.88
Prochoice	.97***	54.69	.67***	24.21	-.47***	18.66	-.43***	13.50
Prolife	-.23	1.28	-.69***	13.37	.30**	3.95	.26	2.36
Percentage Predicted Correctly:								
Democrat	79%		83%		75%		59%	
Republican	77%		79%		72%		70%	
Overall	78%		81%		73%		65%	
Modal Category	57%		52%		52%		52%	
Model Chi-Square	473***		1,159***		795***		230***	
Goodman & Kruskal's Tau	.27		.40		.28		.16	
Unweighted N	1,172		1,772		1,811		1,454	

	California		Michigan		Ohio		Pennsylvania	
	MLE	-2Log LR	MLE	-2Log LR	MLE	-2Log LR	MLE	-2Log LR
Partisanship	1.55***	514.95	1.37***	273.19	1.30***	251.95	.72***	52.86
Ideology	.60***	35.83	.10	.96	.26**	6.45	-.22	3.18
Race	1.23***	23.73	.28	.19	1.01***	15.56	1.03**	5.79
Sex	.44***	11.02	.10	.60	.25	2.95	.17	.98
Age	.02	.36	.02	.22	-.02	.23	.03	.38
Education	.19***	8.78	-.19***	9.36	-.11	2.30	-.06	.62
Income	-.19***	8.73	-.02	.07	-.24***	10.63	-.20**	5.15
Union Household	.60***	8.68	.64***	12.99	.57***	8.91	-.03	.01
Urban	.27***	29.24	.02	.42	.03	.31	-.05	.92
Catholic	-.09	.38	-.18	-1.53	-.04	.06	.44***	6.34
No Denomination	.39	2.27	-.13	.27	.51	1.58	-.57	.48
Church Attendance	.06	.19	-.13	-.79	-.42***	8.29	-.03	.03
State Economy Good	-.26***	7.18	.33***	13.88	.15	1.89	.62***	29.85
Personal Finances Better Today	-.18**	3.89	.03	.12	-.13	1.65	-.01	.01
Abortion Position	.40***	14.37	.04	.18	.54***	22.27	-1.16***	76.00
Prochoice	.47***	13.50	.36***	7.53	.71***	24.45	-1.22***	70.91
Prolife	-.61***	8.78	-.49	5.17	-.51***	6.58	1.02***	22.80
Percentage Predicted Correctly:								
Democrat	83%		80%		75%		89%	
Republican	82%		64%		78%		49%	
Overall	82%		73%		77%		76%	
Modal Category	50%		52%		56%		68%	
Model Chi-Square	1,317***		576***		638***		296***	
Goodman & Kruskal's Tau	.33		.25		.28		.10	
Unweighted N	2,128		1,328		1,278		1,092	

* $p \leq .10$; ** $p \leq .05$; *** $p \leq .01$. Coefficients for prochoice and prolife dummy variables are from a separate model, which included the two dummy variables instead of the single abortion item.

CONCLUSIONS

We draw three broad conclusions from this study. First, abortion has become an important issue in state elections. In the aftermath of *Webster*, voters considered the positions of gubernatorial candidates on abortion and were willing to cross party lines to support the candidates who supported their positions. Should the Court reverse *Roe* in the near future, it is likely that abortion will become an even stronger predictor of gubernatorial vote choice. As state legislatures in many states move to restrict abortion rights, the issue will prove significant in other state elections as well.

Second, studies of gubernatorial elections would benefit from a consideration of noneconomic issues. In six of the eight states in the 1990 study and both states in 1989, abortion attitudes were more important than attitudes toward the state (and national) economy. Of course, the recession was still young in 1990, and we do not suggest that abortion or any other social issue would be more salient than economic conditions in the depths of an economic downturn. Yet voters may be aware that governors can do more concretely to affect legal abortion than they can do to improve the state or especially the national economy. Other noneconomic issues, such as gun control and capital punishment, may also be important predictors of gubernatorial votes.

Finally, although aggregate studies remain the only way to study a number of governors' races in longitudinal perspective, the recent availability of state exit polls by national media provide the possibility to examine individual vote choice in a number of gubernatorial elections. These data may alter our understanding of the determinants of such elections. For example, studies of congressional voting have shown a wide disjuncture between the impact of economic variables at the aggregate and individual level, an anomaly that has been explained by sociotropic voting (Kinder and Kiewiet 1981) and by strategic politicians (Jacobson and Kernell 1983). Our results hint at a similar disjuncture in gubernatorial elections, although we find no evidence for sociotropic voting. It may well be that the importance of economic issues is more evident in the results of aggregate analyses than in the study of individual-level data. More research is needed to resolve the question.

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