

## *Arkansas: Still Swingin' in 2004*<sup>1</sup>

Jay Barth and Janine Parry

Arkansas—a state that George W. Bush won by just 50,000 votes in 2000—flirted in 2004 with joining Florida as a southern state with “battle-ground” potential. This status as a prospective swing state was driven, not just by the close 2000 presidential outcome, but also by the continued strength of Democratic candidates in Arkansas in recent election cycles. Mark Pryor, for example, was the sole Democrat to defeat an incumbent U.S. Senator in 2002, prevailing over Tim Hutchinson by eight percentage points. Moreover, Arkansas Republicanism continues to be geographically shackled to the fast growing communities of northwest Arkansas (from which the party gets its sole Arkansas U.S. Congressman) and the suburbs encircling Little Rock; the GOP only occasionally fields candidates, much less wins posts, elsewhere in the state. At a time then when Republicanism elsewhere in the South shows new strength with each election cycle, nearly three in four Arkansas state legislators continue to wear the Democratic label, and an even larger percentage of local officeholders remain in the Democratic fold.<sup>2</sup>

In the spring and summer of 2004, both the Kerry and Bush campaigns sent staffers into the state, and the campaigns and their allied 527 groups spent funds on television advertising in the Little Rock and northwest Arkansas markets. By Labor Day, however, advertising had come to a stop, the Bush team had departed for Colorado, and the Kerry staff remained tiny. Still, state Democrats hoped that a grassroots campaign focused on turnout and showcasing ex-President Bill Clinton could pull out a photo finish win in an electorate in which a cultural disconnect with John Kerry competed with doubts about the economic and foreign policy record of George Bush. Instead, voters were moved in a different direction, particularly in the crucially important “swing” counties of the state, awarding the incumbent a win margin that doubled that of four years earlier. While this outcome signals a further cementing of presidential Republicanism in Arkansas, our analysis suggests that a different Democratic candidate and the absence of a galvanizing ballot initiative could have led to a different result in what remains the region’s most reliably Democratic state.

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## **The Campaign**

### **The Primary Season: The National Press Returns (Briefly) to Little Rock**

As has become the norm, the state's late May primary meant that Arkansas's rank-and-file voters were irrelevant in determining the Democratic nominee. Still, Arkansas Democrats basked in nostalgia as an Arkansan with a campaign based in an historic downtown Little Rock building played a central role in the party's nomination battle. An Internet-fueled, months-long wooing (equal parts spontaneous and stage-managed) of retired Supreme Allied Commander and CNN analyst Wesley K. Clark, who had casually flirted with a race for Arkansas's governorship in 2002, culminated in his joining the large field of Democratic candidates on September 17 (Koon 2003, 25; Parker 2003; Vekshin 2003b; Rowett 2003b; Moritz 2003b). While Clark's announcement at the Little Rock Boys Club occurred almost at exactly the same time in the election cycle as had Clinton's 12 years previous, the increasing frontloading of the nomination process meant that it was decidedly "later." Consequently, despite considerable attention from the national press and millions of dollars in immediate fundraising, the lateness of the entry quickly showed itself as Clark made missteps on issues in the glare of attention and as his campaign was forced to make choices among the crucial first contests, including taking a pass on Iowa's caucuses.

Still, for six months, dozens of Arkansans became full time volunteers at Clark headquarters (Rosin 2003). Elected Democrats in the state—including the entire Democratic congressional delegation—endorsed the Arkansan and campaigned for him as dozens of Arkansans "maxed out" their campaign contributions to the cause (Vekshin 2003a). "Arkansans for Clark" yard signs soon populated Little Rock lawns, and state and national opinion polls tracking the candidate's standing appeared daily in the state's largest newspaper. While Bill and Hillary Clinton's support was never explicitly expressed (and, some contended, was not present at all), Clinton's key African-American operatives—the so-called "Buffalo Soldiers"—traveled to South Carolina and a version of the "Arkansas Travelers" hit the road for New Hampshire and states closer to home to stump for "the General" (Talhelm 2004; Moritz 2003a).

By January's close, however, the nomination momentum had swung to John Kerry. The Massachusetts Senator's Iowa victory zapped the energy out of the Clark campaign and led to a third-place showing in New Hampshire. While he eked out a single, narrow victory in Arkansas's neighboring state of Oklahoma, it was not enough to justify remaining in the race, and Clark returned to Little Rock to announce his departure from the race on

February 11. Unlike the Clinton “war room” that had become the stuff of Democratic lore and presidential library exhibits, the Clark campaign’s infrastructure was unceremoniously auctioned off. With the Arkansan out of the race, Kerry trounced his sole remaining primary opponent, Congressman Dennis Kucinich, on May 18.

### **A Real Campaign or Not?**

Around the time of the primary vote, all signs pointed to full-fledged battleground status for Arkansas. A combination of candidate and high-profile surrogate visits, television advertising, and preparations for large ground operations intimated that Arkansas would see its most intense presidential campaign ever.

President Bush had visited Little Rock for the third time in 2003 for a \$500,000 fundraiser in November and returned to the city in January 2004 for a health care event, but these looked to be just the beginning (Rowett 2003b). In early April, the President visited El Dorado, in the most reliably Republican county in south Arkansas, for a community-college-based event on economic revitalization (Blomeley 2004a). Then, Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney both visited northwest Arkansas in early May. Cheney gave a sharply partisan talk in a visit to the Wal-Mart headquarters in Bentonville, and the President touted his No Child Left Behind policy in a visit to a high school in Van Buren (Thompson 2004a; Sadler 2004a). The visits to spots in the state that are consistently Republican in their presidential voting suggested that the Bush campaign felt compelled to shore up the GOP base as the campaign began.

Kerry made his second visit of the campaign, the first in nearly a year, to Little Rock in early May. The two-day schedule included an airport rally, a major fundraiser, and a health care event (Blomeley 2004b). While Arkansas Democrats were thrilled to have the attention of the Democratic nominee and the signals that he planned to work hard for the state’s electoral votes, considerable second-guessing about Kerry’s personal style followed the visit (Sabin 2004a; Sabin 2004b). While there was no doubt that Kerry needed to connect culturally with Arkansans (Senator Mark Pryor would later invite his colleague to the state to go hunting), there was a real sense that the Massachusetts senator had forced the issue, appearing overly scripted in his numerous mentions of the Arkansas Razorbacks and his visit to the legendary political hangout Doe’s Eat Place.

Arkansas voters also saw a flurry of television advertisements during the spring as the Bush campaign spent just over \$1 million in the Little Rock and northwest Arkansas markets and the Kerry campaign spent over \$700,000 (Taulbee 2004). The principal Bush advertisement targeted

Kerry's votes against weapons programs while in the U.S. Senate, taking particular aim at those weapons systems such as Patriot missiles and Black Hawk helicopters with components built in the state. Kerry parried with 60 second biographical advertisements emphasizing his military record (Wickline 2004; Miller 2004).

It was that Vietnam heroism that provided the one potential cultural connection with the avidly patriotic white rural voters of Arkansas. It is for this reason that the questions raised by the later controversial advertisements of Swift Boat Veterans for Truth (and the subsequent national media coverage of them) were so effective in a state like Arkansas. Arkansan Fred Short, the Vietnam boat mate with whom Kerry had reconnected during a May 2003 visit to Little Rock, served as a key respondent to the Swift Boat charges for Kerry in the state, but his appearances—and firsthand account—were no match for the intense media attention given the ads (Robinson 2004a).

Still, the fact that Democrats were serious about contesting for Arkansas's electoral votes was made clear with consideration of an Arkansan for the number two spot on the national ticket. While Wesley Clark's performance as a presidential candidate had been shaky, his military credentials and his southern home kept him on the list of potential vice-presidential nominees and garnered him an interview (perfunctory or not) with Kerry. Much longer lists of prospective candidates also included the name of Arkansas Senator Blanche Lincoln (Barton 2004).

But, Clark's hopes of a place on the 2004 ticket ended with John Edwards' selection as Kerry's veep candidate. Soon after gaining the spot on the ticket, Edwards made two visits to the state to campaign. An Arkansas Riverbank rally in Little Rock and a Fort Smith appearance a few days later showed a greater comfort by Kerry's new number two in campaigning in the Arkansas context than his ticket mate had shown in May (Brown 2004b). The Edwards visits were matched by visits by Dick Cheney to Hot Springs and Fort Smith during the same period (Sadler 2004b; Romano 2004). These would be the final visits to the state in 2004 of any of the four presidential and vice-presidential nominees.

Although the Kerry national campaign committed again and again to adding Arkansas to the list of states that would receive television advertising dollars, as the weeks went by it became obvious that the official ticket would never make that investment (Vekshin 2004). Feeling that their opponents needed an air assault to shift the state in Kerry's direction, the Bush/Cheney campaign responded to the Democrats' media inaction by sending the bulk of their staffers in the Little Rock campaign office to more competitive states; six went to Colorado, and two to Florida (Sanders 2004).

Arkansas's Kerry campaign consisted of a handful of Kerry staffers and a relatively large (by Arkansas standards) field operation of the state Democratic Party. The Democrats' coordinated campaign opened a dozen field offices staffed with about 40 full-time staffers around the state. Along with allied groups, they focused on new voter registration (over 120,000 voters were added to the rolls between 2000 and 2004 in the state, primarily in Democratic counties) and developing a volunteer base that made nearly one million phone calls during the fall (Democratic Party of Arkansas 2005). Lawyers also played visible roles in the grassroots strategies of the parties as election day neared in an unprecedented effort to monitor precincts for voter intimidation or ballot shenanigans (Brown 2004c; Bleed 2004d). The left-leaning Election Protection Coalition placed Arkansas near the top of its list of targeted states, bringing in numerous out-of-state volunteers to assist in the monitoring and voter education efforts. The state parties focused on using home state attorneys to assist with their efforts. The Democrats recruited nearly 300 attorneys, and the Republicans recruited a smaller number of lawyers to serve as precinct monitors, particularly in heavily African-American precincts in the traditionally Democratic counties in the state (Democratic Party of Arkansas 2005).

A handful of public polls showing a tightened race around the time of the first fall presidential debate (Table 1) encouraged state Democrats, led by former U.S. Senators Dale Bumpers and David Pryor, to make their own advertising investment to win the state. The fundraising effort—dubbed the “Doe’s Eat Place Pact” because of where it was hatched—quickly raised about \$130,000 for the state Democratic Party (Democratic Party of Arkansas 2005, 21). Radio advertisements featuring Arkansas political celebrities Bill Clinton, failed presidential candidate Clark, and former Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater in support of the national ticket followed. A handful of other, relatively small investments were made by the Democratic National Committee and allied 527 groups in the last several days of the race.

The state Democratic Party also invested resources in removing Ralph Nader from the state ballot via court action in September. Their case, claiming fraud and irregularities in the gathering of the signatures that got his name on the ballot as the nominee of the defunct Arkansas Populist Party, enjoyed a brief victory when a Little Rock district court judge agreed with the Democratic lawyers and ordered Nader and his running mate removed from the ballot (Brown 2004a; Bleed 2004b). A month before the election, however, the state Supreme Court reinstated the ticket by a 4 to 3 vote (Bleed 2004a). Much more consequential was a separate ballot decision around the same time. Another divided Court rejected the ACLU of Arkansas's claims that the proposed state constitutional amendment (Amendment 3) defining marriage as between one woman and one man and barring state

recognition of same-sex marriages or other similar legal partnerships was improperly on the ballot because voters could not understand the scope of the measure; the amendment proceeded to a vote (Bleed 2004c).

Aside from the presidential race in the state, the Arkansas ballot item that received the greatest attention during the year was Amendment 3. The proposition flexed its muscles through a church-based petition campaign which gathered 200,000 signatures, a number more than twice that needed for placement on the ballot. The campaign for passage of the amendment did not invest in major media buys, relying instead on a grassroots campaign that evidenced itself mainly in the form of supportive bumper stickers that popped up around the state. The issue also received an exceptional amount of coverage in the statewide media, elevating its place in the campaign in the state (Davis 2005). While recognizing that President Bush might well benefit from the amendment's presence on the ballot, Amendment 3's primary backers said they only cared about running up a large margin on the amendment vote. But Bush's surrogates in the state, such as his Arkansas campaign chair Governor Mike Huckabee and wife Janet Huckabee, centered on attitudes towards same-sex marriage as a "clear difference" between Kerry and Bush, thereby unmistakably linking the amendment vote to the presidential campaign (Thompson 2004b). Moreover, Arkansas was one of two states where the Republican National Committee distributed mailers focused on the partisan division on the issue of same-sex marriage (and merging that issue with other moral issues) (Wickline 2004). The most striking visuals on a flyer portraying the evils of the "liberal agenda" showed a Bible emblazoned with the word "BANNED" next to a kneeling man slipping a ring onto another man's finger under the word "ALLOWED."

When Bill Clinton, still recovering from heart surgery, was able to return to his home state for a large Halloween evening rally just blocks from his nearly completed presidential library, he showed deep awareness that the issue of same-sex marriage had gained traction in Arkansas as a symbol of John Kerry's cultural disconnect from Arkansans. In his speech, Clinton emphasized that "[t]his election is not about guns and gay marriage," which he called "bull issues" (Cardwell 2004). He also tried to turn the emphasis away from emotion-laden cultural issues to bread-and-butter economics. In referring to the large-scale construction project he had brought to Little Rock, Clinton said sharply: "In the last four years as a private citizen I created more jobs in Arkansas than the Bush administration ever did" (Robinson 2004b). While Clinton may have helped further energize the Democratic base, it was a newer Arkansas political star, GOP Governor Mike Huckabee, who proved more accurate in summing up the tough chore that the "great campaigner" ultimately had: "[S]elling John Kerry in . . . Arkansas is tougher than selling Red Sox fans souvenirs in Manhattan" (Moreno 2004).

### The Outcome

All but a handful of public opinion polls gave Bush a relatively robust lead during the final months of the campaign (Table 1). Expenditures and activities by candidates, parties, and interlopers during the final stretch of 2004 consequently paled in comparison to the attention lavished on the state in 2000. It is curious then that turnout bounced back to native-son-Bill-Clinton-era levels. Sixty-four percent of registered Arkansans cast a ballot in the Bush-Kerry contest as compared with 59 percent in the Bush-Gore race four years earlier (Table 2). We suspect the boost was mainly a product of the highly-polarized nature of Election 2004 nationwide; whether their own state was in play was far less important to Arkansans than the charged partisan environment nationally. We should add that while we argue later in

**Table 1. Selected Polls in Arkansas, Presidential Race 2004**

Poll and Polling Dates	Bush	Kerry	Spread
Survey USA, April 14-15	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>Bush +2</b>
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, May 18-23	<b>49</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>Bush +4</b>
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, June 1-6	51	44	Bush +7
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, June 15-20	<b>45</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>Kerry +2</b>
Rasmussen, July 1-31	<b>46</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>tie</b>
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, July 6-10	<b>47</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>Bush +2</b>
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, July 26-30	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>Bush +2</b>
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, August 16-21	<b>46</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>Kerry +2</b>
Rasmussen, August 1-26	49	43	Bush +6
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, August 16-21	<b>46</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>Kerry +2</b>
Zogby/Wall Street Journal, August 30-September 3	<b>48</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>Bush +2</b>
Rasmussen, September 12-25	51	44	Bush +7
Survey USA, September 27-29	53	44	Bush +9
Arkansas News Bureau/Opinion Research, October 4-6	52	43	Bush +9
Zogby, October 10-11	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>Bush +1</b>
Arkansas Poll (Blair Center, University of Arkansas), October 5-20	53	44	Bush +9
Arkansas News Bureau/Opinion Research, October 18-20	<b>48</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>tie</b>
Survey USA, October 23-25	51	45	Bush +6
Mason-Dixon, October 27-29	51	43	Bush +8
Survey USA, October 31-November 1	51	46	Bush +5

Key: Bolded results are within the reported margin of error.

Source: Polling results compiled by RealClear Politics.com throughout the election cycle; accessed at [www.realclearpolitics.com/Presidential\\_04/ar\\_polls.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/Presidential_04/ar_polls.html) on December 2, 2004.

**Table 2. General Election Voter Turnout in Arkansas, Registered Voters, 1972-2004**

Year	Percent Turnout
1972	69 (g)
1976	71 (g)
1980	77 (g)
1984	76 (g)
1988	69 (p)
1992	72 (p)
1996	65 (p)
2000	59 (p)
2004	64 (p)

Key: Voter turnout figures are based on gubernatorial voting (g) or presidential voting (p) depending on the highest turnout race of the year.

Source: Data compiled from the official website of the Arkansas Secretary of State at [www.arelections.org](http://www.arelections.org) accessed January 24, 2005, and from various volumes of *America Votes* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly).

this section that the anti-gay-marriage amendment influenced candidate preference among many Arkansas voters, there is limited evidence that the issue had a substantial mobilizing effect on the electorate. When vote likelihood was regressed on the standard battery of turnout predictors plus respondent's position on Amendment 3 using pre-election survey data, the anti-gay position had a significant, but negligible, effect (Arkansas Poll).

#### **“W” Stands for Wide Margin**

The outcome in the presidential contest was clearer even than most expected. Fifty-four percent of Arkansas voters cast their ballots for the Republican incumbent; his Democratic challenger garnered the support of 45% (Table 3). The resulting 9-point gap nearly doubled Bush's margin of victory in 2000; while Gore fell short by about 50,000 votes, Kerry lost by more than twice that number. There was greater stability in the performance of minor party candidates. Ralph Nader, running on the state's rejuvenated Populist Party ticket (only after the bare-knuckled court challenge by Democrats), took in barely 6,000 votes, or .06 percent of those cast. The Libertarian, Constitutional, and Green Party candidates collectively scooped up the remaining .05 percent.

Within-state variation played an important role in 2004, though in ways more nuanced than in elections past. Arkansas politics long have had a regional quality, reflected, roughly, in the state's four congressional districts



**Table 3. Results of the 2004 Arkansas  
Presidential and Congressional Elections**

Candidate (Party)	Percent of Vote	Vote Totals
<b>President</b>		
George W. Bush / Dick Cheney (R)	54.3	572,898
John F. Kerry / John Edwards (D)	44.6	469,953
Ralph Nader / Peter Miguel Camejo (P)	0.6	6,171
Michael Badnarik / Richard V. Campagna (L)	0.2	2,352
Michael Anthony Peroutka / Chuck Baldwin (C)	0.2	2,083
David Cobb / Patricia LaMarche (G)	0.1	1,488
<b>U.S. Senate</b>		
Blanche Lincoln (D)*	55.9	580,973
Jim Holt (R)	44.1	458,036
Glen A. Schwarz (Write-In)	0.0	212
Gene Mason (Write-In)	0.0	128
<b>U.S. House of Representatives</b>		
<b>First District</b>		
Marion Berry (D)*	66.6	162,388
Vernon Humphrey (R)	33.4	81,556
<b>Second District</b>		
Vic Snyder (D)*	58.2	160,834
Marvin Parks (R)	41.8	115,655
<b>Third District</b>		
John Boozman (R)*	59.3	160,629
Jan Judy (D)	38.1	103,158
Dale Morfey (I)	2.6	7,016
<b>Fourth District</b>		
Mike Ross (D)	Unopposed	

Key: \* denotes incumbent; R = Republican; D = Democrat; P = Populist; L = Libertarian; C = Constitutional; G = Green; I = independent

Source: Data compiled from [www.arelections.org](http://www.arelections.org), the official website of the Arkansas Secretary of State, accessed January 24, 2005.

(Parry and Schreckhise 2001). The first and fourth in the eastern and southern portions of the state, respectively, are poor, rural regions that remain—for the most part—Democratic strongholds despite residents' social conservatism. Portions of the second and most of the third districts of central and northwest Arkansas are high-growth areas of relative prosperity that are, or are becoming, dependably Republican (see Shaffer and Johnston 2005). But the regional differences in presidential party preference many have come to expect did not materialize in 2004. Though Gore won majority support in the first and fourth districts in 2000 only to lose statewide, President

**Table 4. Presidential Contest by Congressional District, 2004**

Congressional District	Bush		Kerry	
	Percent	Votes	Percent	Votes
First (Eastern and North Central)	51.7	127,179	47.1	115,994
Second (Central)	51.5	145,392	47.6	134,478
Third (Northwest)	62.3	171,853	36.5	100,656
Fourth (South and South East)	51.4	128,474	47.5	118,825

Source: Data compiled by the authors from the official website of the Arkansas Secretary of State at [www.arelections.org](http://www.arelections.org), accessed January 25, 2005.

Note: Candidate percentages were calculated as a portion of all votes cast minus over- and under-votes.

Bush swept all four regions in his reelection bid, stretching his lead over Kerry to 25 points in the third (Table 4).<sup>3</sup>

To begin to understand the causes and consequences of this shift, consider the data in Table 5. The ten most populous Arkansas counties together contain about 1.2 million people, nearly half the state's total population. The fastest growing of these counties—those topping a 30 percent population increase between 1990 and 2000—are in the second (Faulkner and Saline) and third (Washington and Benton) congressional districts. All four counties produced clear victories for the incumbent Republican, with the home of global retail giant Wal-Mart (Benton County) giving Bush nearly 70 percent of the vote. Kerry, in contrast, managed to win only two of Arkansas's biggest prizes, one of which (Jefferson) is actually losing population. The importance of the state's political map is compounded further by the equally regional nature of turnout rates. Voters in the high-growth, Republican counties featured in the table substantially outperform their peers, a pattern also evident in 2000 (Barth, Parry, and Shields 2002). While nearly 73 percent of Washington County residents cast ballots in 2004 (56 percent of them for the Republican incumbent), for example, just 53 percent of those in Jefferson County did.

### Arkansas's Swingers

The significance of the state's shifting regionalism for 2004's headliner contest is illustrated further by Table 6. In 1988, Blair identified 26 "rural swing" counties that have remained stalwartly Democratic even when attractive Republican candidates at the top of the ticket persuaded many of their peers to take a walk on the wild side. The few aberrations in this pattern are telling. Predominantly white, sparsely populated, and "dry" (i.e., liquor sales

**Table 5. Registered Voter Turnout and Presidential Vote  
in the 10 Most Populous Arkansas Counties, 2004**

County and Population	Percent Pop. Change 1990-2000	Turnout (%) Voters (#)	Total Votes (percentages)	
			Total Votes (raw numbers) Bush (R)	Kerry (D)
Pulaski (361,474)	3.4	59.6 257,589	44.2 67,903	55.0 84,532
Washington (157,715)	39.1	72.5 88,380	55.7 35,726	43.1 27,597
Benton (153,406)	57.3	70.5 96,612	68.4 46,571	30.5 20,756
Sebastian (115,071)	15.5	69.0 64,111	61.7 27,303	37.3 16,479
Garland (88,068)	20.0	57.0 70,393	54.1 21,734	44.9 18,040
Craighead (82,148)	19.1	58.2 51,202	53.1 15,818	45.9 13,665
Faulkner (86,014)	43.3	62.3 58,882	58.6 21,514	39.6 14,538
Jefferson (84,278)	-1.4	53.1 57,407	33.5 10,218	64.5 19,675
Saline (83,529)	30.1	66.1 59,585	63.2 24,864	35.9 14,153
Pope (54,469)	18.7	60.5 34,557	65.1 13,614	34.0 7,100

Source: Data compiled from the U.S. Bureau of the Census and the official website of the Arkansas Secretary of State at [www.arelections.org](http://www.arelections.org), accessed January 24, 2005.

are illegal), this collection of counties swung hard for the “states’ rights” campaign of George Wallace in 1968, against George McGovern in 1972, and back again for Jimmy Carter in 1976. Though they remained in the Democratic fold in 1980, they swung wildly again for Ronald Reagan’s reelection in 1984 and George Bush’s in 1988, then back again to Arkansas’s own Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. Their role in close state-level contests has been even more decisive, often delivering wins to Democratic and Republican candidates in the same year (Blair and Barth 2005). Most important for the purposes of this analysis, while George Bush fell short of mustering a majority of their votes in 2000, his support in these counties grew to nearly 54 percent in 2004, nearly even with his statewide average.

**Table 6. Bush Vote in Arkansas, 2000 and 2004, by County**

County	Bush Vote %		R Senate Vote %		Bush Gain '00-'04 (Number)	R Gain '98-'04 (Number)	Percent Amend 3
	2000	2004	1998	2004			
Arkansas	52.6	54.6	30.8	35.2	203	809	76.5
Ashley	46.9	53.7	33.8	42.8	1063	1390	81.6
Baxter	57.1	60.1	53.2	52.8	977	2129	75.4
Benton	64.9	68.4	66.5	58.3	8254	13589	74.6
Boone	62.8	66.3	53.5	55.6	1077	2429	80.4
Bradley	45.1	47.3	33.0	63.4	134	1661	79.2
<b>Calhoun</b>	<b>51.6</b>	<b>58.2</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>79.9</b>
Carroll	57.9	59.0	52.7	51.7	62	1461	71.9
Chicot	35.1	36.3	24.5	28.1	-12	350	72.6
Clark	43.8	44.9	32.0	35.5	27	1216	73.3
<b>Clay</b>	<b>38.2</b>	<b>45.3</b>	<b>23.7</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>768</b>	<b>769</b>	<b>81.2</b>
Cleburne	56.1	59.2	46.5	50.2	689	2395	78.6
<b>Cleveland</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>57.5</b>	<b>35.3</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>748</b>	<b>81.4</b>
Columbia	53.9	57.8	42.8	44.2	606	1340	80.1
<b>Conway</b>	<b>49.0</b>	<b>49.6</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>-15</b>	<b>1026</b>	<b>73.4</b>
Craighead	48.3	53.1	36.9	42.1	2371	5213	78.1
Crawford	61.3	65.6	53.0	56.9	2111	4956	80.1
Crittenden	44.3	45.3	28.7	34.2	20	2640	80.3
Cross	48.8	54.6	30.0	43.6	792	1470	79.4
<b>Dallas</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>32.4</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>78.3</b>
Desha	35.7	37.2	26.4	26.0	51	282	65.6
Drew	46.5	52.2	33.1	39.5	614	926	77.5
Faulkner	55.0	58.6	46.4	48.5	2871	7848	74.0
Franklin	53.4	57.4	45.2	48.2	570	1122	77.0
Fulton	49.6	50.9	35.4	38.2	92	778	81.3
Garland	53.1	54.1	46.0	44.3	436	5250	72.6
<b>Grant</b>	<b>54.6</b>	<b>62.1</b>	<b>38.7</b>	<b>49.9</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>1746</b>	<b>82.6</b>
<b>Greene</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>51.9</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>1259</b>	<b>3016</b>	<b>83.0</b>
Hempstead	44.7	48.0	33.8	36.1	443	891	77.2
<b>Hot Spring</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>49.4</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>2102</b>	<b>76.9</b>
<b>Howard</b>	<b>52.2</b>	<b>55.4</b>	<b>36.7</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>931</b>	<b>83.2</b>
<b>Independence</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>57.1</b>	<b>39.1</b>	<b>42.8</b>	<b>988</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>81.6</b>
<b>Izard</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>51.8</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>77.7</b>
<b>Jackson</b>	<b>37.5</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>26.1</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>680</b>	<b>76.8</b>
Jefferson	32.2	33.5	28.4	26.7	-506	1763	71.5
<b>Johnson</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>53.6</b>	<b>41.5</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>302</b>	<b>1314</b>	<b>77.7</b>
<b>Lafayette</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>50.3</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>80.3</b>
<b>Lawrence</b>	<b>43.5</b>	<b>44.6</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>36.5</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>1004</b>	<b>82.0</b>
Lee	32.8	36.6	20.3	20.8	820	116	74.6
Lincoln	43.0	46.8	26.4	32.0	203	507	81.5
Little River	43.4	48.6	31.7	37.2	498	788	80.3
Logan	55.4	59.4	42.3	49.6	511	1287	81.5

Table 6 (continued)

County	Bush Vote %		R Senate Vote %		Bush Gain '00-'04 (Number)	R Gain '98-'04 (Number)	Percent Amend 3
	2000	2004	1998	2004			
Lonoke	59.1	65.4	44.2	51.4	3189	5327	80.0
Madison	60.2	60.7	52.5	52.8	120	406	79.1
Marion	56.6	60.1	49.9	53.1	356	1187	77.7
Miller	52.9	57.6	41.4	44.3	311	2307	80.7
Mississippi	41.3	43.3	27.2	34.0	436	1882	75.7
Monroe	40.4	43.3	27.5	29.7	118	252	79.4
<b>Montgomery</b>	<b>56.9</b>	<b>59.8</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>51.2</b>	<b>153</b>	<b>765</b>	<b>78.5</b>
Nevada	48.0	50.4	31.5	35.0	129	388	72.7
Newton	64.4	63.5	45.2	57.1	-101	1020	78.6
<b>Ouachita</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>32.3</b>	<b>36.3</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>842</b>	<b>74.9</b>
<b>Perry</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>55.0</b>	<b>40.1</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>72.6</b>
Phillips	33.9	35.6	18.3	23.9	383	672	72.8
<b>Pike</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>59.8</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>52.6</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>81.8</b>
<b>Poinsett</b>	<b>41.3</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>1112</b>	<b>80.6</b>
Polk	64.0	66.6	50.4	57.2	434	1554	81.1
Pope	61.0	65.1	46.6	51.9	1939	4394	79.7
<b>Prairie</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>56.0</b>	<b>31.7</b>	<b>40.7</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>497</b>	<b>80.0</b>
Pulaski	43.9	44.6	39.1	34.2	-2684	14894	63.8
<b>Randolph</b>	<b>45.5</b>	<b>47.4</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>37.9</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>1139</b>	<b>84.3</b>
Saline	57.5	63.2	47.9	51.3	4792	8588	76.3
<b>Scott</b>	<b>60.3</b>	<b>62.3</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>50.2</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>547</b>	<b>80.7</b>
Searcy	64.3	64.3	51.7	51.9	-186	283	82.0
Sebastian	58.5	61.8	54.1	52.7	2896	6958	76.7
Sevier	49.2	54.7	34.0	42.7	465	786	82.2
Sharp	51.9	54.9	43.3	45.3	370	966	82.1
St. Francis	40.2	39.8	25.1	37.8	-297	2124	74.9
<b>Stone</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>57.5</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>48.6</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>1283</b>	<b>77.4</b>
Union	55.4	58.9	48.7	45.7	-939	2783	79.0
Van Buren	49.9	54.1	41.2	45.9	395	1164	74.9
Washington	54.9	55.7	54.7	47.6	1323	9258	66.2
<b>White</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>53.0</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>3044</b>	<b>5586</b>	<b>80.5</b>
Woodruff	33.9	33.7	20.9	24.8	-150	260	73.9
<b>Yell</b>	<b>49.7</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>40.3</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>804</b>	<b>76.6</b>
Avg. (all counties)	50.1	53.3	37.9	43.0	na	na	77.7
Avg. (RSC)	49.6	53.6	35.3	42.7	na	na	79.4
Statewide Vote	51.3	54.3	42.2	44.1	99958	162166	75.0

Key: Bolded counties denote Blair (1988)'s "rural swing counties." RSC = Rural Swing Counties.

Source: Data compiled by the authors from the official website of the Arkansas Secretary of State at [www.arelelections.org](http://www.arelelections.org), accessed January 27, 2005, and from Richard M. Scammon, Alice V. McGillivray, and Rhodes Cook. 1999. *America Votes 23* (1998). Washington, DC: CQ Press, 34-35.

It is worth noting that Arkansas's rural swingers played a key role in the 2004 election in two additional—and, we believe—related ways. The first lies in the performance of Jim Holt, a state legislator and the Republican nominee for the U.S. Senate against the incumbent Democrat, Blanche Lincoln. We use 1998 as a baseline for Holt's expected support because his background was remarkably similar to the Republican candidate that year, Fay Boozman. Boozman, like Holt, was in just his first term as a state senator when he made a bid for the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by Democratic giant Dale Bumpers; he garnered 42 percent of the vote statewide. It was a respectable showing in an off-year election against a conservative Democrat, Blanche Lincoln, who already had served three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives and outspent him nearly 3 to 1. The seat was open that year, however, and Lincoln's approval rating climbed steadily throughout her first term (Arkansas Poll).<sup>4</sup> Consequently, few observers of the 2004 cycle expected Holt to break 40 percent (Table 7), and even that projection may have been generous in light of the fact that he raised only \$154,000 compared to Lincoln's \$5.5 million. In the end, however, 44 percent of the vote went to Holt, an outcome that seemed to earn more press coverage in the state than Bush's reelection. Tellingly, rural swing voters contributed disproportionately to his surprise showing. As the bottom of Table 6 reveals, Holt bested Boozman's 1998 performance by 5.1 percentage points across the state. In rural swing counties, however, the margin increased to 7.4 percent.

Because elections are not conducted in laboratories, it is of course impossible to pin down the reason for Holt's unexpected performance. The

**Table 7. Selected Polls in Arkansas, Presidential Race 2004**

Poll and Polling Dates	Holt (R)	Lincoln (D)	Spread
Survey USA, August 20-22	34	58	Lincoln +24
Survey USA, September 27-29	40	54	Lincoln +14
Arkansas News Bureau/Opinion Research, October 4-6	32	60	Lincoln +28
Zogby, October 10-11	32	60	Lincoln +28
Arkansas News Bureau/Opinion Research, October 18-20	32	60	Lincoln +28
Survey USA, October 23-25	38	57	Lincoln +19
Survey USA, October 29-31	42	55	Lincoln +13
Survey USA, October 31-November 1	43	53	Lincoln +10

Source: Polling results compiled by RealClear Politics.com throughout the election cycle; accessed at [www.realclearpolitics.com/Presidential\\_04/ar\\_polls.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/Presidential_04/ar_polls.html) on December 2, 2004.

pains he took to hitch his wagon to the state's anti-gay-marriage vote, however, are instructive. A conservative evangelical who employed the "Christian fish" symbol on his campaign materials, Holt said in September that voter support for the proposed state constitutional amendment to prohibit gay marriages and civil unions would boost his popularity against an incumbent who, while favoring an existing state statute that defined marriage as a male-female union, said she opposed amending the federal constitution (Jefferson 2004; Hammer 2004). Holt hammered away at this distinction, pairing 700 bright red "Protect Marriage" placards with his larger campaign signs just a few weeks before the election and initiating a last-minute non-targeted "robocall" campaign declaring his commitment to prohibiting gay and lesbian marriages (Blomeley 2004c). It seems likely these efforts were especially influential in Arkansas's rural swing counties. As Table 6 demonstrates, more than 79 percent of voters in these areas supported Amendment 3, exceeding by four percentage points the measure's statewide support.

Table 8 (last column) presents additional information about Amendment 3's support among various segments of the Arkansas electorate. Though the measure garnered the approval of three in four voters, it clearly held special appeal for Republicans, conservatives, white evangelicals, frequent churchgoers, high wage-earners, suburbanites, "moral values" voters, those not enamored of Senator Lincoln's job performance, and Bush supporters. In light of these findings, it is no wonder many observers concluded that the measure sprouted coattails in Arkansas, boosting the performance of both a long-shot challenger in the state's U.S. Senate race and an incumbent president who pressed publicly for a national "marriage protection" amendment throughout the campaign. These coattails appear to have been especially significant in the "rural swing counties." A January 2005 analysis by *USA Today* identified 153 counties that switched to Bush after voting Democratic the previous two presidential elections (only a handful switched for Kerry). Of the 11 such counties identified in Arkansas, six of them belong to the "swingin" category. And all but one surpassed the state average for Amendment 3 support (Lawrence and Page 2005). It is important to emphasize here that vote choice, not voter mobilization, is the dynamic for which we find evidence in these counties. Turnout was up four points in the state's rural swing regions from 2000, virtually the same as the statewide increase.

### **"Survey Says"—Arkansas's Exit Polls**

Other factors—including partisanship, ideology, sex, income, ethnicity, and age—certainly joined population shifts and the gay marriage debate in influencing the 2004 presidential vote in Arkansas. The polling data presented in Table 8 not only reflect the key sources of support for both major

**Table 8. Vote Choice by Various Characteristics,  
Presidential/Amendment 3 Vote (in percent)**

Characteristic	All	Bush	Bush'00	Kerry	Amend 3
Party Identification					
Democrat	41	18	+3	82	65
Republican	31	97	+3	3	89
Independent	29	60	-2	38	72
Ideology					
Liberal	13	19	+1	79	47
Moderate	45	40	-2	58	68
Conservative	42	82	+4	18	89
White Conservative Protestant?					
Yes	31	88	na	12	92
No	69	39	na	60	67
White Evangelical/Born Again?					
Yes	53	71	na	29	87
No	47	35	na	63	62
Church Attendance					
Weekly-plus	na	na	na	na	93
Weekly	na	na	na	na	87
Monthly	na	na	na	na	62
Once a Year	na	na	na	na	60
Never	na	na	na	na	54
Sex					
Male	44	59	+6	40	76
Female	56	50	+1	49	73
White Males	38	67	+9	32	79
White Females	46	60	+6	40	75
Racial/Ethnic Identity					
White	83	63	+7	36	77
Black	15	6	-6	94	66
Latino	1	*	*	*	*
Asian	0	*	*	*	*
Other	1	*	*	*	*
Age					
18-29	16	47	-6	51	69
30-44	29	60	+5	39	79
45-59	29	57	+10	42	75
60 or older	26	48	-1	52	74
65 or older	16	46	-1	54	73
Income					
Under \$15,000	10	23	-11	74	63
\$15-30,000	22	44	-1	55	71
\$30-50,000	27	59	+5	41	76



**Table 8** (continued)

Characteristic	All	Bush	Bush'00	Kerry	Amend 3
Income (continued)					
\$50-75,000	22	63	+12	37	77
\$75-100,000	10	64	+4	36	82
\$100-150,000	5	79	n/a	18	83
\$150-200,000	2	*	na	*	*
\$200,000 or more	2	*	na	*	*
Married					
Yes	53	71	na	38	78
No	47	35	na	63	66
Size of Community					
Urban	20	47	na	52	63
Suburban	7	61	na	38	82
Rural	73	55	na	44	77
Anti-Gay-Marriage Vote					
Yes (to ban gay marriage)	75	88	na	58	na
No (to ban gay marriage)	25	12	na	42	na
Most Important Issue					
Taxes	5	35	na	65	71
Education	4	30	na	67	58
Iraq	13	26	na	74	65
Terrorism	12	83	na	17	74
Economy/Jobs	20	13	na	86	66
Moral Values	33	92	na	8	90
Health Care	5	17		81	56
Decision to Go to War in Iraq					
Strongly Approve	30	95	na	5	89
Somewhat Approve	25	82	na	18	86
Somewhat Disapprove	14	21	na	77	68
Strongly Disapprove	29	6	na	93	56
Vote for U.S. Senate					
Lincoln (D)	56	22	na	77	na
Holt (R)	44	94	na	5	na
Approve of Senator Lincoln					
Yes	na	na	na	na	72
No	na	na	na	na	91

Key: \*denotes a statistically insignificant number of respondents; "na" = not available or, in some cases, not applicable.

Source: Most data are based on 1,459 respondents and are compiled from 2004 National Election Pool data reported at CNN.com (Arkansas), accessed at [www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/resulsts/states/AR/P/00/epolls.0.html](http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/resulsts/states/AR/P/00/epolls.0.html) on November 4, 2004. Some comparative data was taken from the Voter News Service Exit Poll (Arkansas), November 7, 2000. Some data in the final column are taken from the 2004 Arkansas Poll conducted between October 5th and October 20th and accessible at: <http://plsc.uark.edu/arkpoll>.

party candidates but also afford an opportunity to compare Bush's 2004 base with that in 2000. Though most Democrats and liberals (82 and 79 percent, respectively) dutifully cast their ballots for the Democratic nominee as they had in the previous election, they proved far less cohesive than Republicans who gave fully 97 percent of their support to the party's choice. And while Kerry gained a sound victory among self-identified moderates in the state, independents (who constitute as much as 40 percent of the Arkansas electorate) threw their support behind the Republican nominee just as they had in 2000.

With respect to demographic characteristics, Arkansas saw its gender gap double between the two elections, with men—particularly white men—significantly more likely than women to support President Bush. Both groups, however, preferred the Republican (if barely among women), with white male support for the incumbent ballooning by nine points from four years previous. (Unless otherwise indicated, data on various demographic and other voter groups are drawn from the exit poll data from the 2004 National Election Pool, conducted by Edison Media Research and Mitofsky International.)

An income gap also is evident with Arkansans in the lowest and highest income categories voting overwhelmingly for Kerry and Bush, respectively. The latter's 12-point increase over his 2000 performance among voters with household incomes of \$50-75,000 is particularly noteworthy. Arkansas's relatively small black population (16 percent) registered its disapproval of the administration by halving the support Bush received in 2000; only six percent of the state's African American voters backed the Republican. White voters more than made up the difference, however, by throwing nearly two-thirds of their support to the President; they delivered a paltry 36 percent of their votes to John Kerry. Finally, while many of the state's current demographic patterns favor Republicans, exit polls reveal that Kerry won the support of the youngest Arkansans, reversing their preference from the last two presidential election cycles.<sup>5</sup>

Issues, too, left their mark on Election 2004 in Arkansas, much as they did nationwide. Nearly a third of exit poll respondents selected "moral values" as the most important issue, an enigmatic category, to be sure, but one indisputably caught up in the "marriage protection" juggernaut. A quarter cited either "Iraq" or "terrorism," terms that as neatly sorted Kerry from Bush supporters in Arkansas as elsewhere. One in five voters, overwhelmingly Kerry voters, reported being most concerned with the economy. Taxes, education, and healthcare failed to light many fires within the state's electorate, despite a fair amount of attention to each during the campaign.

## **Conclusion**

Early on, there was every indication that Arkansas's dance card would be even more full in 2004 than it had been in 2000. It was, after all, a battleground state in the Bush-Gore contest, and many believed the latter could have engineered a victory had he more vigorously and publicly aligned his campaign with native son Bill Clinton. General Wesley Clark's declaration of candidacy sparked the kind of excitement among Arkansans that many projected would return the state to the Democratic column in the race for the presidency. Mark Pryor's upset of the Republican incumbent in the U.S. Senate race just two years earlier, as well as the continued dominance of the Democratic Party among state and local officeholders, likewise signaled that Arkansas would be in play in 2004. By Labor Day, however, the momentum was with the Bush campaign. Visits by candidates and surrogates slowed, and ad buys were canceled. The radio spots purchased by the states' leading Democrats in response to the suggestion of a tightened race in late October and a grassroots effort from the left came to naught. Instead, the Bush campaign, propelled by massive growth in the state's Republican strongholds, plus the one-two punch of a cultural disconnect with the Democratic nominee and a "protect marriage" crusade among the state's rural, white "swing-ers," carried Arkansas by a wide margin.

The party balance in Arkansas is likely to deliver future surprises in terms of both election outcomes and, as in 2004, win magnitudes. The relatively easy reelection of George W. Bush, the unexpected popularity of Holt's social conservatism, and the combination of rapid population growth and high voter turnout in the state's few Republican strongholds, bode well for the future of the GOP. Yet, Lincoln's victory leaves Arkansas as the only state in the South with two Democratic U.S. Senators. The continued service of the three Democratic House members—after a surprisingly decisive victory by the Second District's Vic Snyder—means that five of the state's six representatives in Washington, D.C., are Democrats. Moreover, the Democratic Party made marginal gains in the state legislature, a first since the implementation of the state's stringent term limits law in the mid-1990s. So, despite an outcome at the presidential level which moves Arkansas closer to its southern peers, the state remains unpredictable as it moves into 2006, an election cycle in which a battle royale already is brewing in the race for governor, an office held by Arkansas's traditional "out" party since 1996.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The authors wish to thank a host of readers, but especially Hal Bass and Ann Clemmer, for their helpful suggestions. All errors in fact or interpretation rest with the authors.

<sup>2</sup>For overviews and analysis of contemporary Arkansas political patterns, see Barth, Blair, and Dumas (1999), Wekkin (2002), and Blair and Barth (2005).

<sup>3</sup>For a comprehensive look at the 2000 election in Arkansas, see Barth, Parry, and Shields (2002).

<sup>4</sup>The prospect of presidential coattails did not look promising either, with Bush's statewide—and rural swing county—approval rating hovering stubbornly at 50 percent (Arkansas Poll).

<sup>5</sup>The overwhelming African-American support for Kerry is particularly striking considering some evidence of diminished enthusiasm for his candidacy among this crucial voting group during the year (see Younge 2004).

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