Q&A with the author of Out and Running: Gay and Lesbian Candidates, Elections, and Policy Representation

Q: What made you want to write this book?
Haider-Markel: Most of my research on the policy process has been focused on the role of interest groups and public opinion. In the course of many different studies it became clear to me that I was downplaying the role of legislators and in particular legislators who had inordinate influence on the success of legislation. After an early attempt to understand the influence of openly gay and lesbian legislators on the adoption of domestic partner laws at the local level, I set out to not only examine the influence of gay and lesbian legislators in state policymaking, but to also understand the dynamics at play in the election of gay and lesbian state legislative candidates.

Q: Do you think we’ll see more LGBT candidates in the 2012 election cycle?
Haider-Markel: Yes. Fairly consistently, we’ve seen more LGBT candidates in a greater number of states, and for a greater diversity of offices, in each election cycle since 1998. Some of the bigger recent changes involve not just the number of candidates, but the increasing number of candidates for statewide and national office, and more candidates for local executive positions. One interesting trend is that we are seeing more candidates for state legislative office who have not held another elective office.

Q: Do you think LGBT candidates have a growing chance of being elected?
Haider-Markel: I think so and the evidence in the book suggests that pattern. More importantly for the LGBT community, LGBT candidates have an increasing chance of being elected in states where we have seen few or no LGBT candidates in the past. This includes states in the south (Arkansas, Texas), but also the mountain west (Montana, Utah), and Midwest (Indiana, Ohio). There is a core group of roughly 25% of voters who are unlikely to support a LGBT candidate even when they agree on issues. However, these voters are also a group that is unlikely to support Democratic candidates, and since most LGBT candidates are Democrats, this bloc of voters is typically not much of a factor in contests with an LGBT candidate. The real challenge is for Republican LGBT candidates who tend to have to run for office in Democrat-leaning districts. The success rates for these candidates have not increased significantly in the past 10 years.

Q: Is there more pro-LGBT rights legislation that goes through with an elected LGBT representative?
Haider-Markel: The evidence in my book on this point is pretty clear—the presence of LGBT legislators increases the amount of pro-LGBT legislation and the likelihood that those bills will be adopted. Partly this occurs because LGBT legislators are sponsoring and co-sponsoring pro-LGBT bills, but it also occurs because they advocate for pro-LGBT bills they did not sponsor. In addition, their presence, as advocates or not, appears to moderate of the rhetoric and behavior of other legislators over time.

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