

Targeted News Service

New Study Shows Party, Ideology and Age Drove Vote on Proposition 8

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An in-depth analysis of the Proposition 8 vote released today shows that party affiliation, political ideology, frequency of attending worship services and age were the driving forces behind the measure's passage on Nov. 4. The study finds that after taking into account the effect of religious service attendance, support for Proposition 8 among African Americans and Latinos was not significantly different than other groups. Through a precinct-by-precinct analysis and review of multiple other sources of data, the study also puts African-American support for Proposition 8 at no more than 59 percent, nowhere close to the 70 percent reported the night of the election. Finally, the study shows how support for marriage equality has grown substantially across almost all California demographic groups -- except Republicans.

The study was written by Patrick J. Egan, Ph.D., assistant professor of politics and public policy at New York University, and Kenneth Sherrill, Ph.D., professor of political science at Hunter College, CUNY. Egan and Sherrill reviewed pre- and post-election polls, and precinct-level voting data from five California counties with the highest number of African-American voters. **The study was commissioned by the Evelyn & Walter Haas, Jr. Fund in San Francisco, and released under the auspices of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.**

Party, ideology, religious service attendance and age drove "yes" vote

The study found that four factors -- party identification, ideology, frequency of religious service attendance and age -- drove the "yes" vote for Proposition 8. For example, more than 70 percent of voters who were Republican, identified themselves as conservative, or who attended religious services at least weekly supported Proposition 8. Conversely, 70 percent or more of voters who were Democrat, identified themselves as liberal, or who rarely attended religious services opposed the measure. More than two-thirds (67 percent) of voters 65 or older supported Proposition 8, while majorities under 65 opposed it.

"These figures point the way to winning marriage equality for same-sex couples sooner rather than later," said Jaime Grant, Ph.D., director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. "Convincing the Republican Party that continued gay bashing will cripple its future is one; another is accelerating the already strong surge in support among young voters."

African-American and Latino support for Proposition 8 not significantly higher when religious service attendance is factored out

Since the passage of Proposition 8, much has been said about the supposed dramatic opposition to marriage equality among African Americans, fueled by National Election Pool (NEP) figures based on sampling in only a few precincts that erroneously indicated 70 percent of California's African Americans supported Proposition 8. The study found that when religious service attendance was factored out, however, there was no significant difference between African Americans and other groups.

In other words, people of all races and ethnicities who worship at least once a week overwhelmingly supported Proposition 8, with support among white, Asian and Latino frequent churchgoers actually being greater than among African Americans.

"We clearly need to redouble our work with people of faith to overcome the notion that civil marriage for same-sex couples somehow threatens religious liberties and to convince them that protecting all families equally is the just and moral thing to do," said the Rev. Mark Wilson, coordinator of African-American minister outreach for And Marriage for All.

Moreover, the study found that the level of support for Proposition 8 among African Americans was nowhere close to the NEP exit poll 70 percent figure. The study looked at pre- and post-election polls and conducted a sophisticated analysis of precinct-level voting data from five California counties with the highest African-American populations (Alameda (Oakland), Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco).^{*} Based on this, it concludes that the level of African-American support for Proposition 8 was in the range of 57-59 percent. Its precinct-level analysis also found that many precincts with few black voters supported Proposition 8 at levels just as high or higher than those with many black voters.

As discussed earlier, the 57-59 percent figure -- while higher than white and Asian-American voters -- is largely explained by the higher rates of African-American religious service attendance: 57 percent of African Americans attend religious services at least once a week, compared to 42 percent of whites and 40 percent of Asian Americans.

"This study debunks the myth that African Americans overwhelmingly and disproportionately supported Proposition 8. But we clearly have work to do with, within and for African-American communities, particularly the black church," said Andrea Shorter, director of And Marriage for All.

Scott Davenport, managing director of Freedom to Marry, added, "The way forward is to ratchet up support for courageous pro-equality leaders like Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.), NAACP Board Chairman Julian Bond and California NAACP State Conference President Alice Huffman, and build up the visibility and voices of LGBT African-American families, leaders and organizations."

Support for marriage equality grows across all demographics except Republican

The study found that overall support for marriage equality has increased by 9 percent since 2000, with support increasing among every age group under age 65, across all racial and ethnic groups and among Protestants, Catholics and Jews. There are three "holdout" groups where voting patterns have not changed: Republicans, conservatives, and those 65 and older. The largest gain -- up 16 percent -- was among voters 45-64 years of age, followed by a 13 percent increase among voters 18-29.

"This shift in such a relatively short timeframe is nothing short of astonishing," said Jim Carroll, managing director of Let California Ring. "Clearly, time is on our side but we're going to have to fight even harder to reach the finish line."

Among Republicans, support for the freedom to marry fell slightly (1 percent) compared to 2000. Support for marriage equality among Democrats, on the other hand, increased 13 percent.

"For many years, the forces of religious and political intolerance inside the GOP have used the supposed threat of 'gay marriage' to divide the country and energize their base. But these figures show virtually everyone else moving in the opposite direction," said Carroll. "The Republican Party is clearly in crisis and the real question is whether it will realize that using the divide-and-conquer tactics of the past is harmful to the country and to the party's long-term interests."

^{*}Peter Frase and the Center for Urban Research at The Graduate Center, CUNY, developed and analyzed the precinct-level data.