

New study revisits African-Americans' effect on passage of Proposition 8

January 6, 2009

A new study released Tuesday points to lower support for California's constitutional gay marriage ban among African-Americans than a much publicized NEP exit poll indicated in November. Furthermore, support for marriage equality in California has risen among all major races.

While African-Americans did vote in larger numbers than whites and Asians for Proposition 8, partly due to stronger religious convictions within the community, the numbers were not comparable to the exit poll, which suggested that 70% of voting African-Americans supported the measure.

That poll number helped fuel ideological battles in the mainstream media and blogosphere in the aftermath of the measure's passage (pending the ruling of the California Supreme Court) 52%-48% in the November election.

The new study, conducted by political scientists Ken Sherrill of CUNY-Hunter College and Patrick Egan of NYU, suggests that other factors than race played a larger role in a voter's stance on the measure, such as party identification, ideology, age and religious inclinations. These factors also dwarfed gender and personal knowledge of gays and lesbians.

According to data from a poll conducted in March by David Binder Research, conservatives and Republicans were the most likely to support Proposition 8. African-American and Latino voters were most likely, as well, coming in at 58% and 59% respectively. A mere 5.5% of votes were influenced by ethnicity, compared to 15.2% by party identification, 14.6% by ideology and 11.8% by religiosity.

The study also highlights a trend towards future support for marriage equality in how public opinion has changed between the passage of California's 2000 statutory gay marriage ban, ruled unconstitutional in May 2008, and that of Proposition 8. 61% voted for Amendment 22, also known as the Knight Initiative, compared to the 52% for Proposition 8, marking a 9% gain in support for marriage equality. Gains were made across the board along racial lines, particularly among whites (9%) and Asians (11%), with Democrats (13%) and independents (5%) joining in. The cause lost 1% among Republicans.

Marriage equality in California also gained support among liberals (7%), moderates (6%) and conservatives (2%). Gains among those polled were pronounced in age brackets 18-29 (13%) and 45-64 (16%) as well.