

Race overstated in Prop 8 passage, report says

By Seth Hemmelgarn
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In an effort to debunk an Election Day exit poll that found 70 percent of African Americans voted for Proposition 8, a new report shows that more than race, attendance at religious services, political views, and age influenced voters.

Two months after the passage of Prop 8, reports released this week highlight how it happened and offer indications of what can be done to eventually win marriage equality.

Shortly after the election, the National Election Pool, a consortium of news organizations, including CNN, released exit poll data that indicated 70 percent of black voters supported Prop 8. The data immediately sparked controversy within the community, as many felt that blacks were being blamed for the measure's passage.

However, the new report, authored by Patrick Egan of New York University and Kenneth Sherrill of Hunter College-City University of New York, estimates that black support for Prop 8 was actually in the range of 57 to 59 percent.

That finding was based on merging precinct-level voting data from five counties – including San Francisco – that comprise 66 percent of the state's black population, with estimates of precincts' racial and ethnic makeup.

"The analysis shows that African Americans and Latinos were stronger supporters of Proposition 8 than other groups - but not to a significant degree after controlling for religiosity," the report states.

A survey connected with the report found that Latino support for Prop 8 was 59 percent. Whites favored the measure by 49 percent.

The report found that overall, 43 percent of Californians attend religious services at least once a week, while 57 percent of African Americans attend services that frequently.

"Among those who attend worship less than weekly, majorities of every racial and ethnic group voted 'no' on Proposition 8," the report stated.

During a conference call with reporters held for the report's release Tuesday, January 6, Jamie Grant, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute, said the statistics on religion should be a "wake-up call" to the LGBT community.

"We must do a better job of organizing in faith-based communities," said Grant.

Other findings

When comparing Prop 8 to Prop 22, the 2000 initiative that inserted a ban on same-sex marriages into the state's family code, the report found increased support for marriage equality among most race, party, and religious demographics.

However, voting patterns among Republicans, conservatives, and people 65 and over "all remain staunchly opposed to legalization," the report says.

The report noted that 81 percent of Republicans voted for Prop 8, and 67 percent of people over 65 supported the measure.

But Jim Carroll, managing director of Equality California's Let California Ring education campaign, said during the call that Republicans are "out of step" with the rest of the state, and he and others feel the party is losing power in California.

Egan, one of the report's authors, said Tuesday there has been "significant and substantial movement" among baby boomers – people born between 1940 and 1960 – in the past eight years. The report found that since 2000, support for same-sex marriage grew among this population by 13 percentage points, and a slim majority of boomers voted against Prop 8.

Egan also noted that younger voters are much more supportive of same-sex marriage than older voters, echoing sentiments that older, more conservative voters will eventually be replaced with voters who are more likely to favor marriage equality.

Another statistic in the report seems to belie the notion that when people have connections with the LGBT community, they'll support same-sex marriages.

According to the report, 74 percent of respondents had lesbian or gay family or friends. The report found that almost one out of every two of those voters – 49 percent – supported Prop 8.

Those on the conference call Tuesday suggested it's still important for LGBTs to reach out to friends and family and have deeper conversations with them.

The survey was conducted by David Binder Research from November 6-16 and included 1,066 California voters. The overall margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

The report, which was commissioned by the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, can be found at www.nglftf.org.

Marriage Equality USA

After holding open forums with community members across the state and analyzing an online survey that more than 3,100 people responded to, Marriage Equality USA has released a detailed report reflecting people's feelings about how the No on 8 campaign was run and what should be done in the future.

Among the report's findings were that clergy leaders, identified as the most effective messengers for marriage equality, were underused and some were blocked from participating more in the campaign and that people of color also were largely excluded, including in No on 8's messaging.

One survey respondent stated, "I feel that some of the language used in the ads, particularly 'unfair and wrong,' was very Caucasian-centric. Most people of color live in a world that is unfair and wrong, so this washed right over."

There was also a lack of advertising in Spanish and Asian languages, the report found.

Community members also felt that No on 8's TV ads lacked heart and same-sex couples and their families were "inexcusably" left out.

"The absence of gay and lesbian faces, voices and stories was preposterous! It makes me disinclined to want to contribute money to future campaigns!" wrote one respondent.

The report also stated that many potential volunteers were ignored when they offered to help, and instead were constantly asked for money.

Aside from TV ads, phone banking was the campaign's preferred mode of communicating with voters, but many survey respondents felt door-to-door canvassing would have been more effective.

The abandonment of the Central Valley, where support for Prop 8 was strong, was another issue.

One resident said, "We donated all our wedding money to this campaign and got nothing out of it. I feel sold up the river by this campaign."

Geoff Kors, executive director of Equality California and a member of the No on 8 executive committee, told the *Bay Area Reporter* that the MEUSA report "contains information from people

who were active with the campaign effort as well as many who were not involved," including people from other states and countries.

According to the report, about 26 percent of respondents were from other states or countries.

"It is useful to have feedback from everyone, including some of the strongest supporters of marriage equality and there is a great deal of interesting information in here that I forwarded to the firm doing the assessment," Kors wrote in an e-mail.

He said EQCA has retained Woodward and McDowell to do an assessment.

Ted Green with Woodward and McDowell said that the company would be doing a report for EQCA that looks at EQCA's role in the No on Prop 8 campaign.

"That's a very separate and different animal from an overall analysis of the campaign," Green said.

Kors said specific questions about topics such as the ads, field work, and use of political leaders would be better answered by other campaign officials.

In its report, MEUSA offered New Year's resolutions such as not hiding same-sex couples and their families and doing more face-to-face outreach; including communities of color, straight allies, and people of faith in the marriage equality movement; doing more to support other social justice movements; and committing to a national grassroots infrastructure and strategy.