

Voter Support for Same-Sex Marriage Bans Declining, Study Finds

Ballot measures' appeal diminishes in states with fewer evangelical Christians; marriage initiatives did not help Republican Senate candidates in 2006

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Bans on same-sex marriage performed more poorly in the November 2006 elections than in the past, in part due to their declining appeal in states with smaller "born-again" Christian populations, according to a study released today by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. If current trends hold, such bans would fail at the ballot box in many of the states that have not yet considered same-sex marriage initiatives.

Same-sex marriage bans passed with an average of 64 percent of voter support in all states in 2006, down from a similar figure of 71 percent in 2004. But support has fallen even more dramatically in states where those identifying themselves as born-again or evangelical Christians make up an identifiable minority of residents, according to the report.

Same-sex marriage ballot questions did not help Republican Senate candidates, even though minimum wage initiatives appeared to help Democratic Senate candidates, the study found. Three in four lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) voters backed a Democrat for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2006, about the same as the 77 percent of LGB voters who backed John Kerry in 2004.

The study, *Same-sex marriage initiatives and lesbian, gay and bisexual voters in the 2006 elections*, was written by Patrick Egan of Princeton University and Kenneth Sherrill of Hunter College.

Egan and Sherrill's analysis of 2006 election returns and data from the National Election Pool exit poll, which asks voters if they are "gay, lesbian or bisexual" but does not ask about gender identity, found that:

- While the vote on the marriage initiatives is best explained by partisan and ideological variables, declining support for marriage bans can also be explained somewhat by the measures' diminishing appeal in states with fewer voters identifying as "born-again" Christians.
- If current trends hold, marriage bans would fail — or just barely pass — in many of the states that have yet to hold such referenda.
- There is no evidence that the presence of marriage bans on the ballot in 2006 helped Republican Senate candidates.
- In 2006, lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) voters for the most part looked demographically like the rest of the electorate, with two major exceptions — LGB voters were much younger and more urban than other voters.
- As in previous elections, LGB voters exhibited distinctive voting behavior. They continued to vote overwhelmingly (75 percent) for Democratic candidates and took liberal positions

on the major issues of the day. Only Jewish voters (87 percent) and black voters (89 percent) voted for Democrats at higher rates than LGB voters.

“While banning same-sex marriage remains popular in states with many religious conservatives, support is waning in places with more tolerant religious traditions,” said study co-author Patrick Egan, a visiting scholar at Princeton University. “It may be that these states have political environments in which gay rights advocates have become better able to get their messages across to voters.”

“The days of winning national elections on the backs of gay people appear to be over,” said Kenneth Sherrill of Hunter College’s political science department and an author of the study. “Contrary to conventional wisdom, marriage initiatives did not give President Bush a lift in 2004. They were of no more help to Republicans running for Senate in 2006.”

The data also indicate that, in terms of family heritage and other demographic variables, we should expect LGB Americans to be as Republican as anyone else. But as in previous elections, LGB voters overwhelmingly identified as Democrats (52 percent) and as liberals (43 percent). Almost half of LGB voters said that the Bush administration made them feel “angry.”

“This study demonstrates — yet again — that gay voters are a loyal, core and essential part of the Democratic base,” said Matt Foreman, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. “We look forward to working with the new Congress to move forward on long-stalled priorities for our community, including nondiscrimination and hate crimes protections.”