

Gay marriage bans losing support

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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 this week.

The research by the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute** claims that 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 US 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.

"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."

Mr Sherrill said: "The days of winning national elections on the backs of gay people appear to be over, 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 indicates 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 non-discrimination and hate crimes protections."