

## Historic Obama victory

By Lisa Keen  
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More than any other presidential candidate before, Barack Obama included gays as part of his stump speeches to voters, despite decades of conventional wisdom that has held that the mere acknowledgement of gays could imperil a campaign. Obama acknowledged gays when he announced his run for the presidency. He did so before national television audiences and before church audiences that were considered by some to be reluctant to associate with gays. He did so in accepting the Democratic nomination in Colorado, and he did so in his final campaign stops in Jacksonville, Florida; Columbus, Ohio; and Raleigh, North Carolina.

And he still won.

With a message that included gay people both when he needed the votes and when he had cinched victory, Illinois Senator Barack Obama won the White House Tuesday night. The triumph not only marked a historic moment in American history – with his election as the first African American as president – but a dramatic improvement in the political climate in Washington, D.C., for LGBT people.

In the third line of his speech before more than 100,000 people gathered in Grant Park in his adopted hometown of Chicago, Obama said his election is testament to the power of democracy "spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, gay, straight, disabled and not disabled."

Winning 338 electoral votes to Republican Senator John McCain's 163, Obama did not require the support of gays to secure his win. However, voting appears to have been very close in some states that were important to his success. In Florida, where a typical distribution of the gay votes historically (70 percent) would have provided the Democrat with about 275,000 votes, Obama won by only 199,000 votes. And while the Sunshine State overall gave Obama 51 percent of the vote, heavily gay Miami-Dade – home of gay popular resort South Beach – gave him 58 percent.

Human Rights Campaign President Joe Solmonese characterized Obama's win Tuesday night as a "paradigm shift" for LGBT people.

"The pendulum has swung away from the anti-gay forces that dominated the political landscape for too long and toward new leadership that acknowledges our equality," Solmonese said.

**Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, called Obama's election "the dawn of a new political era of hope" that "brings a promise for a sea change in the tenor of the national dialogue on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues."**

San Francisco

San Francisco's LGBT community was dancing on Castro Street Tuesday night as upwards of 5,000 people flocked to the gay neighborhood to celebrate Obama's win. Local DJs had set up a flatbed truck in front of the Castro Theatre with turntables and speakers to play dance music for the crowd.

An image of Sean Penn as the late openly gay San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk peered down from a movie poster for the new biopic *Milk* adorned to the theater's marquee, leftover from last week's premiere of the film.

"I think its great. I am much happier having to deal with Obama," said queer activist Tommi Avicolti Mecca. "I don't expect him to be a savior, but he is much better than the alternative."

He said it is now up to Obama's supporters to see that he ends the Iraq war, pushes for affordable housing, and provides universal health care.

"The battle is not over," said Avicolli Mecca. "We got him into the White House now we got to keep him to our agenda."

Ralfka Gonzalez, a local artist who is HIV-positive, was with Avicolli Mecca taking in the festive atmosphere.

"I am really glad to see a change," he said. "I am hoping Obama will be more like Jimmy Carter and not like Ronald Reagan. I want him to be a left-wing liberal."

Jimmer Cassiol, a former aide to Mayor Gavin Newsom, said he was ecstatic with the presidential election results and that they bode well for the LGBT community.

"I feel like this is a whole different world," said Cassiol. "Considering what we have been through the last eight years, I don't think we will be disappointed at all."

Someone in the crowd burned an effigy of President Bush in the street, which police quickly extinguished. Standing nearby was Randy Allgaier with his husband, Lee Hawn, and their 10-year-old Beagle Darwin. The joyous occasion was bittersweet for the couple as a gay marriage ban on the ballot was heading to passage Tuesday night.

"I am speechless, thrilled," said Allgaier, who is HIV-positive and serves on several HIV oversight bodies. "I couldn't be happier. The only thing that would make me happier is if Proposition 8 loses."

Ev Briere, a 26-year-old from Quebec, Canada now living in the city, said it was too soon to say what Obama's win will mean in terms of America's standing in the world.

"As a resident of the world, I am not sure quite yet. It is reassuring to see people can adapt when it is needed," she said. "I am still holding my breath. There is still a lot of work to be done."

Her friend Phoenix, who identifies as queer and goes by one name, was speechless at seeing Obama claim the White House.

"I feel so good. It is really hard to put into words," said the Glen Park resident.

Many in the crowd said they expect Obama to steer the country into a better direction on a whole host of issues, from energy and economic policies to international affairs.

"With Barack winning, I feel this country will go in a better direction," said Sergio Cardenas, 29, a gay man living in the Castro. "Not only will the country get better but our lives will be better. We can be proud of being Americans and like the country we are living in."

Openly gay Supervisor Bevan Dufty said both his godmother, the singer Billie Holiday, and his former boss, Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman elected to Congress who ran for president in 1972, were smiling down from heaven now that the country has elected its first black president.

"Like most Americans, never in my lifetime could I imagine this could happen. I think it is really a turning point in our country's history," said Dufty. "But right now it is bittersweet because of the uncertainty over Prop 8."

Organizers of the street party said they were aware of the uncertainty over Prop 8.

"We knew there was a chance that [Prop] 8 might lose, but we thought it was important to have a community celebration of the Obama victory and a brighter future," said event organizer John Wood, political director of the San Francisco Late Night Coalition. "We've been fighting for equality for a long time, and we'll keep fighting. Each time we get closer."

"I'm elated," said Gilbert Pickett. "[When I watched his speech,] I bawled my eyes out."

"I wanted Prop 8 to [fail], but it doesn't matter," Pickett added. "We've been fighting for years for equality, but now we have Obama and the majority of the House, so if a bill like this comes up, we may prevail. That will supercede the states. We also get the Supreme Court."

"I'm proud to be an American," said Lia Lewis. "Finally, my voice is heard."

#### National results

The voting results reported this week are definitive but not official. They are based on a combination of data, including surveys collected from voters at the polls on November 4, actual results from selected precincts, and surveys conducted by phone prior to Tuesday.

The data was gathered on behalf of the National Election Pool, a coalition of ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, NBC and the Associated Press. The polling firm of Edison Media Research collected the data at 1,300 precincts around the country, involving every state; but more sampling was done in the most competitive states. While most of the data was gathered at polling places, some was gathered by phone to include samples from Washington and Oregon – which vote exclusively by mail – and to account for people who were able to cast their votes before November 4. The telephone surveys collected data only from landlines, but the exit polls gathered information about cell phones from exit poll voters to use in assessing their projections.

Data available thus far on voting in heavily gay precincts suggest the gay vote for Obama was at an unprecedented high. In the last several presidential elections, the percentage of LGB voters supporting the Democrat has hovered around 70 to 75 percent. But Tuesday's voting was much stronger:

In heavily gay Provincetown, Massachusetts, 87 percent of voters supported Obama, compared to only 11 percent for McCain, and 2 percent for others or no votes. Massachusetts overall voted 62 percent for Obama, 36 percent for McCain.

While 61 percent of Californians supported Obama over 37 percent for McCain, 85 percent of heavily gay San Francisco supported Obama versus 13 percent for McCain and two percent for others.

Fifty-five percent of voters in Pennsylvania supported Obama over 45 percent for McCain, but in heavily gay Wards 2 and 5 of Philadelphia, 83 percent of voters supported Obama.

In heavily gay Dupont Circle precinct 15 in Washington, D.C., Obama won 89 percent of the vote.

In the heavily gay precinct 1233 in Dallas, 63 percent of the vote supported Obama while 57 percent of the city did so and 55 percent of the state supported McCain.

Chicago's heavily gay Ward 44 went 86 percent for Obama over 13 percent for McCain.

A Harris poll web-survey conducted October 20-27 with 231 self-identified LGBT "likely voters" predicted 81 percent of LGBT voters favored Obama while 16 percent favored McCain. A similar poll in August had shown 68 percent favored Obama, 10 percent McCain.

Patrick Sammon, president of Log Cabin Republicans, a national gay Republican group, said he puts more trust in data from the overall exit poll data nationally, which said once again that 4 percent of voters were GLB and that 70 percent voted for Obama, 27 percent for McCain, and 3 percent for others.

"LGBT voters don't live in just Dupont Circle and Chelsea," said Sammon in a telephone interview Wednesday morning.

But Representative Tammy Baldwin (D-Wisconsin) said both sets of data may be right. The results from precincts that are heavily gay, she said, reflect a demographic that has significant access to information about each candidate's stand on LGBT issues, while the national exit poll is capturing LGB voters in places that may not have that kind of information at the ready. And in those places, she said, LGBT people are "making their minds up on a larger array of issues."

Hilary Rosen, a longtime Democratic gay activist and political director for the Huffingtonpost.com, wrote Monday that she believes McCain lost the election in May 2006 when he "went to kiss the ring of Jerry Falwell."

"He began to support every anti-gay initiative he could find," wrote Rosen. "On those and so many other issues, he merged into the George Bush and right wing clone that in these closing days of the campaign have choked him beyond breath."

In a stump speech on countless campaign stops in the final days of his campaign, Obama repeatedly urged Americans to stay true to the name "United States of America."

"Yes, we can argue and debate our positions passionately," said Obama, "but all of us must summon the strength and grace to bridge our differences and unite in common effort – black, white, Hispanic, Asian, Native American; Democrat and Republican, young and old, rich and poor, gay and straight, disabled or not."

*Matthew S. Bajko and Liz Highleyman contributed to this report.*