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Black support for Prop. 8 called exaggeration

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Reports of overwhelming African American support for Proposition 8's ban on same-sex marriage were exaggerated in exit polls, a new look at the November election results has found.

"Party identification, age, religiosity and political view had much bigger effects than race, gender or having gay and lesbian family and friends," said Patrick Egan of New York University, who wrote the report with Kenneth Sherrill of Hunter College of New York for the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force**.

Exit polls found that 70 percent of black voters backed Prop. 8 on Nov. 4, even as they overwhelmingly supported Democratic Sen. Barack Obama, who opposed the same-sex marriage ban.

But an analysis of precinct-level voting data on Prop. 8 from Alameda, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco counties, which are home to nearly two-thirds of California's black voters, suggested that African American support for Prop. 8 was more likely about 58 percent.

That support among blacks is still well above the 52 percent Prop. 8 received from all voters in the Nov. 4 election. Much of that can be attributed to the strong religious tradition in the black community, where 57 percent of African American voters attend church at least once a week, compared with 42 percent of Californians overall.

"The study debunks the myth that African Americans overwhelmingly and disproportionately supported Proposition 8," Andrea Shorter, director of And Marriage for All, said in a statement. "But we clearly have work to do with, within and for African American communities, particularly the black church."

Religious voters were among the leaders in the pro-Prop. 8 efforts, with 70 percent of weekly churchgoers backing the same-sex marriage ban. Among voters who hardly ever attended religious services, only 30 percent voted for Prop. 8.

"This is a wake-up call to the (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community," said Jaime Grant, director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute. "We must do a better job of organizing in the faith-based community, using LGBT people who are themselves part of that community."

But Frank Schubert, political consultant for the Prop. 8 campaign, doesn't believe that more outreach to minority communities or religious groups would have changed the election result.

"The problem is not that they didn't reach out to those communities, but that those communities didn't agree with them," he said.

The report included a post-election survey done for Equality California by David Binder Research of San Francisco. That poll of 800 voters, with margin of error of plus or minus 3.5 percent, also

showed that Republicans, conservatives and older voters made up a major chunk of Prop. 8's support.

While only 30 percent of Democrats and 22 percent of liberal voters backed the same-sex marriage ban, more than 80 percent of Republicans and conservatives cast ballots in favor.

Two-thirds of voters 65 and older backed Prop. 8, compared with 45 percent of those 18 to 29.

Meanwhile, a report released this week by Marriage Equality USA, a nationwide grassroots group with chapters in 32 California counties, slammed the official campaign run against Prop. 8 and called for major changes in any new effort.

More than 3,000 people participated in an online survey and hundreds more came to community forums to air their dissatisfaction with the "No on 8" effort, which they called careful, tightly controlled - and losing.

Any future campaign for same-sex marriage has to make better use of supporters in the clergy, improve outreach to minority communities, feature LGBT couples in the advertising and push for support in more conservative parts of California, including the Central Valley, the report concluded.

"The lessons we learned were so painful," said Molly McKay, a spokeswoman for the group. "But there's no way to run any future campaign without a massive grassroots component to harness the tremendous passion in the state."