



**POLITICS**

"A SINISTER CABAL OF SUPERIOR WRITERS"

## California Gay Rights Activists Show Us Intolerance Works Both Ways

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Published March 08, 2009

In what is considered one of the more liberal and progressive states in the country, California seemingly took one giant step backward as its citizens narrowly passed an initiative to ban same-sex marriages on the November 4, 2008 ballot. The California Supreme Court went to session earlier this week to decide whether Proposition 8 is valid or invalid.

Proposition 8 amended the state constitution to define a marriage as being between a man and a woman, effectually taking away the right for same-sex couples to marry.

Proposition 8 became the most heated political debate in state history outside of presidential elections and easily the most expensive social issue campaign in U.S. history. Contributions totaled \$39.9 million to the pro-Prop 8 campaign and \$43.3 million to the against-Prop 8 campaign.

California voters passed the initiative 52.3% to 47.7% (7,001,084 to 6,401,482 votes). The voting pattern highlights the geographical divide of California. The more densely populated coastal areas, like the San Francisco Bay Area, tend to be and vote liberal while the central valley and inland areas, like Fresno and Bakersfield, tend to be and vote conservative.

Los Angeles tends to more often than not be the deciding factor in polarizing issues, and the *Los Angeles Times* has a great county-by-county breakdown of the voting results. L.A. County surprisingly supported Proposition 8 (50.4% to 49.6%), a fairly slim margin, but still a contradiction of its progressive Hollywood image.

Within the past decade, gay marriage has become a hot topic in California. Voters passed Proposition 22 on March 7, 2000 that defined marriage as being between a man and a woman. The initiative passed overwhelmingly 61.4% to 38.6%. Years later, state legislators would pass Assembly Bill 849 to make California the first state in the country to approve gay marriages without pressure from the state supreme court. Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger vetoed that bill, eventually making way for Proposition 8 to make its way onto a ballot.

### The Fallout

Even after all of the ballots were counted and Proposition 8 passed, the issue of gay marriage in California did not go away. Had the initiative been defeated, the issue still would not have gone away.

Exit polls found that black and Latino voters largely supported Proposition 8, which drew much ire from activists confused that historically discriminated against ethnicities could be so unsympathetic to another often group which is often discriminated against. Barak Obama didn't help.

It took a while, but separate studies by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) and the **National Gay and Lesbian Task Force** contradicted the exit polls and stated that religious affiliation proved more an indicator as to how the person would vote on Prop 8. The PPIC's report (PDF) indicated that Evangelical Christians were 85% likely to vote for the initiative while non-whites who were only 57% likely to vote for it as a group. Research by Patrick J. Egan and Kenneth Sherrill ("California's Proposition 8: What Happened, and What Does the Future Hold?") for the Task Force's Policy Institute explained that while black and Latino voters largely supported the initiative, the exit poll figures were overestimates.

Gay marriage activists turned their anger on religious groups that supported the measure, chiefly Mormons. Unfortunately, that attention came in the form of protests, violence, and vandalism. Targeting of Mormons was made easier by transparency laws that made donor lists public information. Bad. Very bad. Gay marriage supporters did not help themselves and seemingly gave themselves free passes to run amok in the name of progressivism.

How come those actions weren't considered hate crimes? If not, they came awfully close. I can't understand how even the most politically correct people found that behavior acceptable. Imagine if the roles were reversed. Do you know how much outcry there would have been had people vandalized the buildings of gay and lesbian organizations?

I support gay rights, but in no way did I support the attempt to humiliate and out Proposition 8 supporters simply because they donated money, in this economy no less, to a cause they believed in. Public participation is democracy at its best.

While I can't blame the entire gay rights movement for the actions of a few individuals, those bad apples nonetheless made progressives look like (1) crybabies, (2) thugs, and (3) idiots. It even rekindled the constant privacy debate in our transparency laws.

How come no one praises Proposition 8 supporters for using legal means to attain their goals? While I don't support their goals, I will always admire their efforts (if legal and proper), although the school misinformation tactics were shameful.

## **The Future**

I have no doubt that gay marriage will eventually be legal not just in California but in the entire country as well. It is inevitable. Egan and Sherrill's research shows the change in Californians' votes on marriage equality from 2000's Proposition 22 to 2008's Proposition 8 was a 9% total decline of "yes" votes, as well as percentage declines in every measure except Republican votes.

The battle for marriage equality will be a lengthy one, as many individual states take baby steps in the wording of their respective laws from same-sex marriages to civil unions to complete bans.

Ultimately, one side will simply have to suck it up and accept the result. Unfortunately for the religious right, all signs point to victory for gay marriage supporters. For California's part in all of this, the issue has fallen into the hands of the state Supreme Court. I will refrain from predicting the court's verdict because the issue will soon go back to the voters via the initiative process and will probably return for judicial review.

The true consequence of this whole Proposition 8 ordeal is that few people really understand tolerance and what it is meant for. Tolerance works both ways and, while I hate to generalize about the entire against-Prop 8 group, a few bad apples ruined the message and fight for gay rights. There was immediate prejudice against religious groups, with the Church of Latter-Day Saints in particular. Correct me if I'm wrong but isn't prejudice the chief enemy of tolerance?