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Calif. Gay-Marriage Ban Appears to Lose Support

By Ashley Surdin
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, October 2, 2008

LOS ANGELES -- Backers of a referendum to ban same-sex marriage in California are winning the fundraising race, but analysts and public polls suggest that voter sentiment appears to be turning against them.

The main backer of Proposition 8, which would amend California's constitution by defining marriage as a union "between a man and a woman," has raised close to \$18 million, said campaign manager Frank Schubert. By comparison, the main group opposing the ban has raised just over \$14 million, said Geoff Kors, spokesman for the No on 8 campaign.

But according to a Field Poll released Sept. 18, 38 percent of likely voters backed the initiative, while 55 percent opposed it. Polls released shortly after the California Supreme Court ruled in May that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry found that voters were nearly equally divided on the issue at that point, polls showed.

Political analysts who earlier considered the outcome uncertain now say the foes of the ban are taking the lead, bolstered by overwhelming support from young voters, effective television ads and history -- most initiatives lose.

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"The polling we've seen and the demographics certainly seem to show there is an advantage to the 'no' side," said Bill Carrick, a Democratic strategist and media consultant. "And the voters, as is often the case in California, take a look at an initiative and find flaws in it. That's why 75 percent of initiatives in the state fail."

Schubert said the Yes on 8 campaign is aware of the polling numbers but not deterred. He said the polling reflected efforts to bias voters, citing the wording of Attorney General Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown Jr.'s ballot summary, which says that passage of the referendum

"eliminates the rights of same-sex couples to marry." He also cited a six-week-long TV ad buy -- not sponsored by the No on 8 campaign -- showing a bride being tripped as she tries to walk down the aisle.

"We feel it's been a one-sided conversation with voters, but that's about to change," Schubert said. The Yes on 8 campaign released its first TV ad last week, showing footage of Gavin Newsom saying: "This door's wide open now. It's wide open, whether you like it or not." The commercial will compete with a current No on 8 commercial featuring a heterosexual couple

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with three children, one of whom is a lesbian.

Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics at the University of Southern California, who also has served as a Republican strategist, said the slipping poll numbers can be attributed in large part to young voters.

"It's become clear that younger voters have lined up overwhelmingly against it at this point," Schnur said. He added that [Sen. Barack Obama's](#) presidential campaign may have helped No on 8 by galvanizing young people, who typically do not turn out to vote in large numbers.

"Even though Obama himself does not support same-sex marriage, his campaign's voter mobilization efforts could end up playing an important part in the outcome of the initiative," Schnur said.

But Schubert said that just because young people show up at the polls does not mean they will vote against the proposition.

Some of Yes on 8's most fervent supporters -- churches and religious organizations -- are targeting their young members in the hope of shifting their attitudes. In addition to calling on congregation members to fast and to pray for passage of the measure in November, many pastors throughout the state are organizing youth rallies.

Miles McPherson, a pastor at the Rock Church in San Diego, said he plans to educate younger congregation members. He characterized them as a generation that has grown up around images of same-sex couples and that tends to see them as underdogs for whom they should fight.

"That's all they know. They see it on TV. They see in the movies. Teenagers today, they see nothing wrong with it," McPherson said. They "have been trained since they were small, in the school system and culture, to live in a world of tolerance and under a banner of tolerance. They have been trained not to speak against anyone's lifestyle.

"They have to understand that heterosexual marriage and gay marriage, especially from a biblical perspective, are not the same thing," McPherson said. "There's a spiritual component to marriage that the secular world doesn't understand, and it's the church's job to protect it."

Schubert said the Yes on 8 campaign garners support from most blacks, Latinos and socially conservative voters, who lately have been energized by the addition of Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to the GOP ticket.

No on 8 campaign manager Steve Smith downplayed the role of demographics in the campaign. "It is psychographic more than demographic," Smith said. People who have gay family members, co-workers or friends are more likely to oppose the ban, regardless of their age, gender or race, he said.

Analysts have said voters tend not to favor changing the state constitution, overturning laws or eliminating individual rights. They also noted that time is on the side of the opposition; the longer same-sex couples are allowed to marry, the less voters will think it is a problem.

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