

Voters deal setbacks to gay marriage: California, Arizona and Florida

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In a narrow outcome, California voters overturned same-sex marriage rights in the nation's most populous state, as similar bans on gay marriage were approved in Arizona and Florida. The ballot verdicts in three large and growing states will likely put the brakes—at least temporarily—on gay groups' march toward civil marriage rights.

"We are grateful to have reclaimed for traditional marriage what activist judges took away from the people of California when they began allowing same-sex marriage back in May," said Jim Garlow, pastor of Skyline Church in San Diego and supporter of the grassroots "Protect Marriage" campaign.

However, same-sex marriage is legal in Massachusetts and now in Connecticut, following a favorable state high court ruling this year.

The California Supreme Court earlier this year overturned a 2000 voter referendum that defined marriage as between one man and one woman. That decision prompted as many as 17,000 same-sex couples to obtain marriage licenses before Election Day. It was uncertain whether those marriages will remain valid.

On November 5 a coalition of gay groups, led by the American Civil Liberties Union, asked the California Supreme Court to invalidate Proposition 8, saying it violates the "underlying principles" of the constitutional guarantees of equal protection.

Close to \$73 million in donations from both inside the state and across the country was spent by opponents and supporters of Proposition 8, which amends California's constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

The campaign pitted leaders of conservative churches and evangelical groups against civil rights activists, liberal religious leaders and even celebrities and

corporations. Apple Inc. and Google Inc. both donated at least \$100,000 to the “No on 8” campaign, while the Mormon Church was one of the biggest backers and fund-raisers for the proposition, pouring in millions of dollars.

Advocates for gay marriage called the issue a matter of equal rights, while opponents argued that same-sex couples already have domestic partnership rights in California.

“I believe in the long run that marriage will be recognized,” said Troy Perry, who founded the predominantly gay Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles in 1968. “I’m not pleased, but I’m not bitter about it; I’m a Christian.”

Episcopal bishop J. Jon Bruno of Los Angeles said the “no” vote was “a lamentable expression of fear-based discrimination.” Bruno called upon opponents of same-sex marriage to “remember that the Bible was once used to justify slavery, among other forms of oppression.”

In Florida, voters approved an amendment to the state’s constitution that bars same-sex marriage and defines marriage as only between a man and a woman. Gay marriage was already illegal in the state.

Arizona voters approved a state constitutional ban on gay marriage with 56.5 percent of the vote. While Arizona law already prohibits gay marriage, supporters wanted to amend the state’s constitution to prevent a judicial overturn of the law. The amendment that passed was a scaled-down version of an amendment rejected by voters in Arizona two years ago.

The Alliance Defense Fund, a pro- traditional-marriage group based in Scottsdale, Arizona, said the balloting in all three states demonstrated that voters wanted to preserve marriage as between a man and a woman.

On other polarized moral issues appearing on state ballots, conservative activists did not prevail on abortion, stem cell research and assisted suicide.

Californians, by a 52 percent majority, rejected a measure that would have required minors to get parental consent before having an abortion. The failed measure would have also required minors to wait two days before having an abortion. More than 30 other states have similar laws in place.

More than 70 percent of Colorado voters rejected an amendment to define human life as beginning at fertilization. This “personhood” amendment could have paved the way to a state abortion ban. Abortion-rights activists feared the amendment would have outlawed certain types of birth control.

South Dakota rejected by a 55 to 45 margin a measure that would have banned abortions except in cases of rape or incest. This is the second time in two consecutive elections that South Dakota voters rejected an abortion ban. This measure was less restrictive than the 2006 proposal.

On another issue, Michigan amended its constitution to allow more extensive embryonic stem cell research, passing its proposition by 53 percent. The amendment will allow people to donate embryos left over from fertility treatments that would otherwise be discarded. The state has allowed research on adult stem cells and stem cells harvested from umbilical cords.

A form of assisted suicide was approved by the state of Washington. Voters decided to allow competent adults who are medically predicted to have six months or less to live to receive lethal medication prescribed by a physician, with the stipulation that the patients must self-administer the medication. The measure was approved by 59 percent of the voters. Only Oregon has a similar law. *-Religion News Service*