

Voters in three states endorse gay marriage

by [Lauren Markoe](#) in the [November 28, 2012](#) issue

Voters made history on Election Day three times over by endorsing moves to allow gay marriage in Maine, Maryland and Washington State.

At the same time, Minnesota voters rejected a ballot measure that would have enshrined an antigay marriage law in their constitution, and neighboring Wisconsin elected Democrat Tammy Baldwin as the country's first openly gay U.S. senator.

Gay rights supporters are marking 2012 as a turning point in their quest for marriage equality. Opponents, however, deny that a cultural shift in attitudes is under way.

"This is a real sea change moment," said Episcopal bishop V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire, whose 2003 consecration as the church's first openly gay bishop set off a firestorm. "This is a real national moment. It shows that America is ready for the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian, bisexual and transgender people."

Though same-gender marriage is already legal in six states and the District of Columbia through legislation or court rulings, voters have repeatedly rejected same-sex marriage at the ballot box. Voting on November 6 brings the total number of states that allow gay marriage to nine, in addition to the three states that recognize marriages between two men or two women performed outside state lines.

It's a trend that flummoxes Jesse Lee Peterson, who preached against gay marriage on his national radio show and through the Los Angeles-based Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny, a nonprofit group that promotes traditional values, particularly to African-American men.

"I was saddened and stunned by the results," Peterson said the morning after the election. "I had not realized that there is a large population of our country that has lost the idea of the order of God and the order of God is the family. It's a dark day in America today."

Ralph Reed, onetime head of the Christian Coalition who now heads the evangelical Faith & Freedom Coalition, reminded reporters the day after the election that the antigay marriage record is still very lopsided and that the wins on November 6 were all in liberal-leaning states.

“They’ve won a few where they could win,” he said. “It’s still 32 victories on our side and four on theirs.” He and other foes of gay marriage vowed to fight on.

“We are disappointed, but we are not defeated! We are fighting for a true and just cause—God’s institution of marriage,” National Organization for Marriage president Brian S. Brown said in a statement. “This is a social compact that is not only ordained by the Almighty, it has served society very well. It’s a cause worth fighting and with your support we will continue to do just that.”

None of the amendments passed by large margins, and in every state the exit polls showed that younger voters were more likely to support gay marriage. And in all four states, proponents of gay marriage outspent opponents many times over.

Unlike four years ago, when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints worked mightily for California’s Proposition 8 to ban gay marriage, the Mormon church mostly sat out the 2012 battles.

In Maine, where voters rejected a gay marriage law in 2009 after it had passed the state house, the spread was widest: 54 to 46 percent in favor. Religious coalitions supported the ballot measure.

“Engaging countless faith leaders and people of all political affiliations who support the freedom to marry is part of this campaign’s legacy in this historic election,” said Jill Barkley, marriage project coordinator for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine.

In Maryland, where a significant contingent of socially conservative black voters made proponents of the ballot measure nervous about the outcome, voters approved the gay marriage law 51 to 49 percent, with the support of Catholic Gov. Martin O’Malley. In Washington State, where some priests had been reluctant to follow a call by the Catholic hierarchy to fight the measure, it passed 52 to 48 percent.

In Minnesota, gay and lesbian couples still can't get married, but voters narrowly beat back a ballot measure that would have amended the state constitution to declare that marriage is between a man and a woman; the measure fell short, with only 48 percent in favor.

Before these votes, gay marriage opponents enjoyed a 14-year, 32-state winning streak with voters.

Beginning in 2010 polls began to show that more Americans than not supported gay marriage. On May 9, President Obama spoke about his personal evolution on the issue and came out in support of it. Those who fought on either side of November ballot questions agreed that the president's endorsement was a factor in the outcome.

Peterson said Obama appealed to young, single people looking to act on antifamily impulses. "He proposed free condoms, abortion and more government support," said Peterson. "He was very cunning."

Robinson said the president's public support has "given cover" to many people to go public as he did with their own evolving views of gay marriage. That evolution is changing church after church in America, Robinson said, as congregants are confronted with gay people worshipping beside them and find themselves unable to reject them.

"That is a holy chaos that people find themselves in, and ultimately loves win out," Robinson said. —RNS