

In Houston, A Proposition They Did Refuse

The city that launched a hundred missions pulled off one of its biggest Tuesday, when Houston downed anti-freedom Proposition 1. The measure that sparked millions of dollars in ads, rallies, and public outcry was soundly rejected, blindsiding liberals who wrongly believed the country was on board with their social extremism. Now, barely 48 hours after the 61-39% drubbing, the mainstream media is still scratching its head over how conservatives pulled off such a mammoth victory.

The answer, many will tell you, lies as far back as 2014. That's when Mayor Annise Parker's crusade for the city's bathroom bill turned personal. Angry that churches were openly challenging the ordinance, Parker stunned Houston by subpoenaing the pastors' sermons, emails, and private communications. Not surprisingly, the five targets of her wrath—all multicultural pastors—battled back in court. By then, the country's eyes were on the mayor, whose campaign of political intimidation drew the attention of Congress and voters everywhere. Reluctantly, she withdrew the subpoenas to dodge the PR controversy—but quietly continued her legal suit.

Before long, area churches were not just awake, but fired up over the measure—which not only made public bathroom selection a matter of multiple choice, but set religious liberty on a collision course with sexual expression. Tens of thousands of citizens worked around the clock to put the ordinance on the ballot—only to watch the mayor invalidate them without cause. Finally, in a battle that went all the way to the Texas Supreme Court, Parker was forced to give citizens their constitutional right: to vote.

And vote they did, streaming into polling places Tuesday at

rates more than double the last three elections. It was the culmination, experts pointed out, of months of “speeches, yard signs, T-shirts, banners, ads on TV, ads on radio,” more than 30,000 door-to-door visits, and 100,000 volunteer calls. And for conservatives, the victory meant just as much to the broader debate as it did to Houston. For the first time since the Supreme Court struck down marriage laws, Americans were able to push back on the Left’s narrative of social change. In most expert’s minds, the city’s 160,286 votes against Proposition 1 said a lot more about the state of the country than the Supreme Court’s five votes against marriage.

This morning, the shockwaves were still rippling through liberal circles, which can’t seem to fathom a world where men aren’t allowed to use the women’s restroom—or a government that couldn’t punish people for believing about marriage what our own president did three years ago. Even better, the message from Houston seems to be resonating with corporate heavyweights like the NFL and NCAA.

Despite Annise Parker’s threats that the vote would have a crushing effect on local business, major sports leagues saw the 23-point margin and thought twice about overreacting to Prop 1’s defeat. “This will not affect our plans for Super Bowl LI in 2017,” NFL spokesman Brian McCarthy reassured locals. College basketball followed suit, insisting that it wouldn’t find a new host city for the Final Four next year.

Both announcements seemed to bolster the notion that liberals were not only wrong about the culture wars—but losing them. That was the headline in yesterday’s *Atlantic*, where editors pushed back on the idea that abortion, same-sex marriage, legalized pot, and gun control were the pathway to a Democratic majority. In many ways, they write, “the Left has misread the electorate’s enthusiasm for social change, inviting a backlash from mainstream voters invested in the status quo.”

The magazine cited the Kentucky Governor's race, where underdog Steve Bevin told the *Washington Post* on the eve of the vote that he'd initially planned to stress economic issues, but found that social values are "what moves people." To be sure, they said, "Tuesday was an off-year election with dismally low voter turnout, waged in just a handful of locales. But liberals who cite this as an explanation often fail to take the next step and ask why the most consistent voters are consistently hostile to their views, or why liberal social positions don't mobilize infrequent voters."

Democrats, they argue, "want to believe Americans are on board with their vision of social change—but they might win more elections if they meet voters where they really are." And where they are, as Houston showed, is increasingly determined not to lose their fundamental freedoms.