

# Same-Sex Marriage

August 2003

## Findings in Brief

- Opinions about allowing same-sex marriages increasingly divides the California public. At present, 50% of voters disapprove of extending marriage laws to gay and lesbian couple, while 42% approve. Nevertheless, the proportion who approve of allowing such unions is up from the levels found in three previous Field Poll measures. For example, in 1977 just 28% supported same-sex marriage. This increased to 30% in 1985, 39% in 1997 and now stands at 42%.
- There are large subgroup differences of opinion about same-sex marriage. For example, while Democrats approve 57% to 33%, Republicans disapprove 74% to 21%. While liberals approve 67% to 28%, conservatives disapprove 80% to 16%. Opinions of younger and middle age voters are about evenly divided. Voters age 65 or older disapprove 75% to 19%. A large majority of Protestants and a somewhat smaller majority of Catholics disapprove. Majorities of voters affiliated with other religions or who have no religious preference approve of allowing such unions.
- Voters are also divided when asked about the idea of amending the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman. Currently, 50% of voters oppose making such a change to the Constitution, while 42% are supportive.
- A two to one majority of Californians (60% to 30%) believe that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. Majorities across most of the state's major demographic subgroups hold to this point of view – with the exception of Republicans, conservative voters age 65 or older and those with a high school education or less, who are divided on this matter.
- On the issue of whether sexual relations between adults of the same sex are wrong or not, a plurality (45%) describes them as “not at all wrong,” and 36% take the opposite view and feel they are “always wrong.”
- There is widespread support for domestic partnership laws applicable to unmarried people living together in a loving relationship. For example, 72% support granting legal recognition to such couples in the areas of family rights, such as hospital visitation rights, medical powers of attorney and conservatorship. Another 61% favor granting financial dependence status to such couples, whereby partners receive benefits such as pensions, health and dental care coverage, family leave and death benefits. A 54% majority also favors government registries where domestic partners could legally declare their partnership.
- Californians are about evenly divided when asked about the pace of the gay rights agenda, with 44% saying gay rights leaders are moving at about the right pace and 40% holding that they are pushing this agenda too fast.

## Support for same-sex marriages growing in California, but plurality still opposed

The issue of allowing same sex marriages in California, where homosexuals would be allowed to marry and have regular marriage laws apply to them, divides the public. Currently, 50% of voters disapprove of extending marriage laws to gay and lesbian couples, but 42% approve.

In 1977 when *The Field Poll* first measured attitudes of Californians on this issue, just 28% approved, while 59% disapproved. The proportion favoring same-sex marriage has increased in subsequent polls, to 30% in 1985, 39% in 1997 and 42% in the current survey.

	Disapprove	Approve	Undecided
2003	50%	42	8
1997	55%	39	6
1985*	62%	30	8
1977*	59%	28	13

\* Survey conducted among all California adults, not just registered voters

## Wide differences in voter opinions by subgroup

The issue of allowing same-sex marriages appeals to some segments of the state's voters but is rejected by others. For example...

- Democrats approve of allowing same-sex marriages by a 57% to 33% margin, and non-partisans also are supportive five to four (50% to 39%). However, this contrasts with the views of California Republicans who disapprove of allowing same-sex marriage 74% to 21%.
- Liberals approve of same-sex views by a greater than two to one margin (67% to 28%). Those who consider themselves middle-of-the-road in politics also are supportive five to four (49% to 38%). However, conservatives overwhelmingly disapprove of this idea (80% to 16%).
- Opinions of younger and middle-age Californians are about evenly divided on this issue. However, voters age 65 or older disapprove of same-sex marriage four to one (75% to 19%).
- There are also large differences of opinion by religious affiliation. Protestants and members of other non-Catholic Christian denominations disapprove of allowing regular marriage laws apply to same sex couples three to one (71% to 23%). Catholics also disapprove, but by a narrower 53%

to 40% margin. By contrast, large majorities of voters affiliated with other religions and those with no religious preference approve of allowing same-sex marriage.

- There are also differences of opinion by gender, with males tending to disapprove of allowing same-sex marriage (55% to 39%), while females are more evenly divided (46% disapprove vs. 44% approve).
- While college graduates are about evenly divided on this issue, voters with less than a college degree tend to disapprove of allowing marriage laws apply to same-sex couples.

	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
Statewide – 2003	50%	42	8
<b>Party registration</b>			
Democrats	33%	57	10
Republicans	74%	21	5
Non-partisans/others	39%	50	11
<b>Political ideology</b>			
Conservative	80%	16	4
Middle-of-the-road	38%	49	13
Liberal	28%	67	5
<b>Age</b>			
18-39	46%	47	7
40-64	44%	45	11
65 or older	75%	19	6
<b>Religion</b>			
Protestant/other Christian	71%	23	6
Catholic	53%	40	7
Other religions	28%	55	17
No preference	25%	68	7
<b>Education</b>			
H.S. or less	55%	34	11
Some college/trade school	51%	41	8
College graduate	48%	46	6
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	55%	39	6
Female	46%	44	10

***Plurality opposes amending the U.S. Constitution to bar same-sex marriage***

By a 50% to 42% margin voters oppose the idea of amending the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as between a man and woman, and thereby barring same-sex marriages in this country.

There are significant differences in opinion by subgroup, with generally the same constituencies who favor allowing same-sex marriage opposed to the idea of amending the Constitution to bar such marriages. For example...

- Democrats oppose the idea of amending the Constitution to bar same-sex marriage by a greater than two to one margin (60% to 25%). Non-partisans are also opposed but by a narrower 51% to

45% margin. On the other hand, Republicans support such a constitutional amendment more than two to one (64% to 30%).

- Liberals oppose amending the Constitution for this purpose three to one (64% to 21%). Political moderates are also opposed (53% to 40%). By contrast, conservatives favor this approach two to one (61% to 32%).
- While majorities of younger and middle age voters are opposed to amending the Constitution to bar same-sex marriages, voters age 65 or older are evenly divided.
- A small plurality of Protestants and members of other non-Catholic Christian religions favor amending the Constitution for this purpose (49% to 44%). On the other hand, Catholics are opposed 50% to 40%. In addition, those affiliated with other religions as well as voters with no religious preference oppose this approach by roughly two to one margins.
- There are no large differences between men and women, with about half opposed to the idea of a constitutional amendment to define marriage as only between a man and woman, and about four in ten favoring this idea.
- While small pluralities of voters who have not graduated from college favor the passage of a constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriage, college graduates are opposed nearly two to one (60% to 34%).

	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Undecided</b>
Statewide – 2003	50%	42	8
<b>Party registration</b>			
Democrats	62%	25	13
Republicans	30%	64	6
Non-partisans/others	51%	45	4
<b>Political ideology</b>			
Conservative	32%	61	7
Middle-of-the-road	53%	40	7
Liberal	64%	21	15
<b>Age</b>			
18-39	55%	41	4
40-64	48%	41	11
65 or older	40%	42	18
<b>Religion</b>			
Protestant/other Christian	44%	49	7
Catholic	50%	40	10
Other religions	67%	31	2
No preference	58%	33	9
<b>Education</b>			
H.S. or less	40%	46	14
Some college/trade school	44%	48	8
College graduate	60%	34	6
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	52%	40	8
Female	49%	43	8

**Two to one majority believe homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal**

By a two to one margin (60% to 30%), Californians believe that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. This follows a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in which the court ruled that such relations are protected under our nation’s privacy laws.

Majorities of voters across most of the major demographic subgroups of the state’s electorate agree with this point of view. The only exceptions are Republicans, conservatives, voters age 65 or older and those with a high school education or less, who are divided on this issue.

	<b>Yes, legal</b>	<b>No, illegal</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
Statewide – 2003	60%	30	10
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	69%	21	10
Republicans	44%	44	12
Non-partisans/others	62%	26	12
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	44%	42	14
Middle-of-the-road	56%	34	10
Liberal	85%	9	6
<u>Age</u>			
18-39	67%	28	5
40-64	59%	25	16
65 or older	44%	42	14
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant/other Christian	53%	36	11
Catholic	51%	40	9
Other religions	78%	14	8
No preference	81%	5	14
<u>Education</u>			
H.S. or less	42%	35	23
Some college/trade school	61%	32	7
College graduate	67%	25	8
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	62%	28	10
Female	58%	31	11

**Plurality views homosexual relations between adults as not wrong**

When Californians are asked whether they feel sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are wrong or not, a plurality (45%) say such relations are “not at all wrong,” while 36% describe them as “always wrong.” These findings are similar to those found six years ago when an identical question was posed.

By a greater than two to one margin, Democrats are more likely to describe homosexual as not at all wrong (58%) as feel they are always wrong (25%). Republicans are more likely to take the opposite view, with 51% holding that such relations are always

wrong, and 31% saying they are not at all wrong. Non-partisans are closer to the Democratic than Republican viewpoint, with 47% feeling such relations are not at all wrong and 27% saying they are always wrong.

Attitudes about this vary on ideological lines, with majorities of liberals and moderates holding that homosexual relations between adults are not at all wrong, while two in three conservatives feel they are always wrong.

While a majority of younger voters under age 40 (52%) thinks homosexual relations are not at all wrong, among voters age 65 or older just 38% hold to this view.

Similarly, college graduates are more apt to feel homosexual relations are not wrong while most of those who have only a high school education or less take the opposite view and describe them as always wrong.

By a two to one margin more Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians describe homosexual relations as always wrong (55%) as feel they are not at all wrong (27%). Catholics, on the other hand, are evenly split about this, while majorities of those affiliated with other religions and those with no religious preference maintain that they are not at all wrong.

	<b>Not at all wrong</b>	<b>Sometimes/ almost always wrong</b>	<b>Always wrong</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
Statewide – 2003	45%	10	36	9
1997	43%	14	35	8
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	58%	8	25	10
Republicans	31%	10	51	8
Non-partisans/others	47%	13	27	13
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Conservative	20%	9	64	7
Middle-of-the-road	54%	11	24	11
Liberal	68%	9	17	6
<u>Age</u>				
18-39	52%	8	34	6
40-64	43%	10	34	13
65 or older	38%	12	45	5
<u>Religion</u>				
Protestant/other Christian	27%	9	55	10
Catholic	43%	9	40	8
Other religions	58%	12	18	12
No preference	71%	12	9	8
<u>Education</u>				
H.S. or less	30%	11	55	4
Some college/trade school	41%	11	38	10
College graduate	56%	8	25	11
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	43%	11	36	10
Female	47%	9	36	8

### Majority support for domestic partnership laws

Three questions in the survey asked voters whether they favored or opposed various aspects of domestic partnership laws, applicable to unmarried people living together in a loving relationship.

Most widely supported are laws that grant legal recognition to such couples in the areas of family rights, such as hospital visitation rights, medical powers of attorney and conservatorship. Statewide, 72% of voters favor such rights, while 24% are opposed. This represents a slight increase in support for such laws from 67% support found 1997, the last time *The Field Poll* measured voter attitudes on the subject.

Greater than six in ten voters (61%) favor granting financial dependence status to such couples, whereby partners receive benefits such as pensions, health and dental care coverage, family leave and death benefits. About one in three (34%) are opposed. These findings also indicate somewhat greater support for this aspect of domestic partnership rights from 1997, when they were favored by a narrower 55% to 40% margin.

The idea of establishing a government registry where domestic partners could legally declare their partnership is supported by a 54% top 39% margin in the current poll. This is very similar to the opinions of voters in 1997 about this.

**Table 5**

**Opinion of domestic partnership laws applicable to unmarried people living together in a loving relationship (among California voters)**

		Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Grant legal recognition in areas of family rights, such as hospital visitation rights, medical power of attorney and conservatorship	2003	72%	24	4
	1997	67%	25	8
	2003	61%	34	5
	1997	55%	40	5
Establish a government registry where domestic partnerships could legally declare their partnership	2003	54%	36	10
	1997	53%	38	9

### Opinions divided about the pace of the gay right agenda

Californians are about evenly divided when asked about the pace of the gay rights agenda, with 44% saying gay rights leaders are moving at about the right pace and 40% holding they are pushing too fast. In 1997 when this question was last asked, opinions about this were similarly divided (40% about right pace vs. 41% pushing too fast).

Opinions about this differ by party affiliation, with Democrats and non-partisans more likely to view the pace of the gay rights agenda as about right, while Republicans more apt to feel they are moving at too fast a pace.

**Table 6**

**Opinions about the pace of gay rights agenda (among California voters)**

	Pushing too fast	About right	Pushing too slowly	No opinion
Statewide – 2003	40%	44	5	11
1997	41%	40	6	13
<u>Party registration</u>				
Democrats	29%	50	8	13
Republicans	64%	28	1	7
Non-partisans/others	25%	54	3	18

### About the Survey

*The findings in this report are based on a statewide random sampling of 629 registered voters in California by The Field Poll. The survey was administered by telephone in English and Spanish during the period August 10-13, 2003. In order to cover a broad range of issues and still minimize possible voter fatigue, the overall sample was divided into two random subsamples of 317 and 312 voters on some questions.*

*According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall sample would have a sampling error of +/- 5.8 percentage points. Findings based on subgroups of the state would have somewhat larger sampling tolerances. There are many possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sampling or sequencing or through undetected errors or omissions in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.*

*Results from previous years' surveys were conducted in a comparable manner.*