

Gay and Lesbian Rights Issues

March 2006

Findings in Brief

- In 1997 45% of adults described homosexual relations as always wrong and 38% said they were not wrong at all. In the current survey, the proportion saying such relations are always wrong has declined to 32%, while those who feel they are not wrong at all has grown to 43%.
- Many residents say their own opinions about homosexual relations between adults has become more accepting over time. Greater than four in ten (41%) say they are now more accepting of such relations than they were when they were 18 years old, while just 8% are now less accepting. Another 46% say their views have not changed.
- Most state residents support anti-discrimination policies toward gays and lesbians. This includes allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military (67% approval), prohibiting employers from discriminating against gays and lesbians in employment (59%), and allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt a child if the courts find them to be fit as parents in all other ways (55%).
- Nearly two in three Californians (64%) personally know someone who is gay or lesbian, up from 49% who reported this in 1977.
- Californians believe that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. This view prevails by a 57% to 33% margin among all adults, and by an even larger 64% to 27% margin among registered voters.
- Californians remain narrowly opposed to the idea of allowing same-sex couples to marry. At present, 51% of this state's residents disapprove of having regular marriage laws apply to these couples, while 43% approve. These findings are unchanged from two previous *Field Poll* surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004, but represent a greater acceptance of the idea of same-sex marriage than what was observed in past decades.
- State residents divide into three equal-sized camps when asked which of three possible public policies they most favored with regard to same-sex couples. One-third (32%) favor no legal recognition at all for such couples, one-third (32%) back the idea of allowing civil unions but not marriage, while another third (32%) support allowing gay and lesbian couples the right to marry.
- Californians continue to oppose the idea of amending the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as being only between a man and a woman. Statewide, 50% oppose this idea, while 40% favor it.
- When asked to assess their own personal feelings toward gays and lesbians on a 0-100 "feeling thermometer," 43% place themselves toward the warm or favorable half of the scale (51-100), while 25% put themselves on the cool or unfavorable half of the scale (0-49). Another 22% are ambivalent and select the exact mid-point of the scale (50).
- There are significant differences in public attitudes toward gays and lesbians across subgroups of the population. More likely to describe themselves as having positive feelings toward gays and lesbians include residents who personally know others who are gay or lesbian, liberals, Democrats, those affiliated with non-Christian religions, residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, non-partisans, and people with either a college degree or a post graduate degree. Subgroups in which larger proportions have unfavorable or cool attitudes toward gays and lesbians include conservatives, those with no more than a high school education, born-again Christians and people who do not personally know any gays or lesbians. Republicans, males, blacks and seniors age 65 or older are about evenly divided in their assessments.

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a statewide survey of 1,000 California adults, including 680 registered voters, completed by The Field Poll. The survey was conducted by telephone in English or Spanish February 12-26, 2006.

Telephone households were sampled using a random digit dial methodology, which randomly selects operating landline telephone exchanges within all area codes serving California households in proportion to population. Within each exchange, random samples of telephone numbers were created by adding random digits to the selected telephone exchange. This method gives each home listing an equal chance of being selected and permits access to all landline telephone numbers, both listed and unlisted.

According to statistical theory, 95% of the time results from the overall adult sample have a sampling error of +/- 3.2 percentage points. There are other possible sources of error in any survey other than sampling variability. Different results could occur because of differences in question wording, sequencing or through undetected omissions or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such errors.

The questions included in this survey were developed in consultation with Professor Charles W. Gossett, Chair of the Department of Political Science, at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, as part of the CSU-Field Faculty Fellowship Program.

Fewer believe homosexual relations between consenting adults are wrong

The current survey updated measures first included in a 1997 *Field Poll*, which asked Californians whether they believe homosexual relations between consenting adults are always wrong, almost always wrong, only sometimes wrong or not wrong at all. The results show that over the past nine years the proportion of residents who feel adult homosexual relations are not wrong at all has increased, while the proportion thinking such relations are always wrong has declined.

In 1997 38% of adults described homosexual relations between consenting adults as not wrong at all, while a larger proportion (45%) felt they were always wrong. The distributions now are reversed, with 43% of Californians maintaining that such relationships are not wrong at all and 32% saying they are always wrong.

In the current survey a slightly larger proportion of the state's registered voters than its adults views homosexual relations between consenting adults as not wrong at all.

Table 1					
Are homosexual relations between consenting adults wrong?					
	Not wrong at all	Only sometimes wrong	Almost always wrong	Always wrong	No opinion
February 2006					
Total adults	43%	8	4	32	13
Registered voters	47%	7	3	30	13
2003*	45%	8	2	36	9
1997	38%	9	5	45	8

* Survey conducted among registered voters only.

Many say their own opinions about homosexual relations have become more accepting over time

Californians were asked to compare their current opinions about homosexual relations between adults to what they were when they were 18 years old. A much larger proportion (41%) say they are now more accepting of such relations than are less accepting of these relationships (8%). Another 46% say their opinions about homosexual relations between adults have not changed compared to when they were younger.

The differences between subgroups of the population on this issue are not large, with the proportions saying they are now more accepting than they used to be ranging between one-third and one-half of the public, while relatively small proportions reporting that they are now less accepting.

Table 2
Have your own opinions of homosexual relations between consenting adults become more or less accepting since you were age 18?

	More accepting	No change	Less accepting	No opinion
Total adults	41%	46	8	5
<u>Registered voters</u>	41%	48	7	4
Democrats	46%	45	4	5
Republicans	34%	52	9	5
Non-partisans/others	40%	46	8	6
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	41%	46	9	4
Other Southern CA	40%	46	10	4
Central Valley	37%	48	10	5
San Francisco Bay Area	45%	44	3	8
Other Northern CA*	36%	45	8	11
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	40%	46	9	5
Female	41%	46	7	6
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	29%	60	6	5
30-39	52%	36	8	4
40-49	44%	41	10	5
50-64	42%	44	9	5
65 or older	34%	45	8	13
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	37%	52	6	5
Latino	47%	39	10	4
Black/African-American*	36%	55	8	1
Asian/other*	41%	34	18	7
<u>Education</u>				
High school grad or less	41%	41	12	6
Some college/trade school	40%	47	8	5
College degree	37%	52	4	7
Post graduate work	49%	46	2	3
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Conservative	34%	49	11	6
Middle-of-the-road	47%	42	7	4
Liberal	40%	51	5	4
<u>Religion</u>				
Protestant	35%	50	10	5
Catholic	44%	40	9	7
Other	39%	49	7	5
No preference	45%	48	3	4
<u>Born-again Christian</u>				
Yes	37%	42	15	6
No	42%	47	6	5
<u>Personally know gays/lesbians</u>				
Yes	41%	51	5	3
No	37%	41	13	9

*Small sample base.

Most Californians support anti-discrimination policies toward gays and lesbians

Three public policy issues relating to gays and lesbians were included in the current survey and respondents were asked whether they approved or disapproved of each policy. The results show that majorities of Californians support an anti-discrimination policy toward gays and lesbians in each case. The issues posed and the distribution of replies are as follows:

- Allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military (67% approve and 22% disapprove)
- Prohibiting employers from discriminating against gays and lesbians in employment (59% approve and 37% disapprove)
- Allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt a child if the courts find them to be fit as parents in all other ways (55% approve and 40% disapprove)

Attitudes toward the first two policies were measured in previous *Field Poll* surveys. When comparing the current results to these previous measures, in both cases a larger majority now approves of each anti-discrimination policy than did so in past surveys.

	2006	1997	1977
Allow gays or lesbians to serve in the military			
Approve	67%	58%	N/A
Disapprove	22	34	N/A
No opinion	11	8	N/A
Prohibit employers from discriminating against gays/lesbians in employment			
Approve	59%	N/A	52%
Disapprove	37	N/A	42
No opinion	4	N/A	6
Allow gay and lesbian couples to adopt a child if the courts find them to be fit as parents in all other ways			
Approve	55%	N/A	N/A
Disapprove	40	N/A	N/A
No opinion	5	N/A	N/A

N/A: Not asked.

More residents now say they personally know someone who is gay or lesbian

Many more California residents now report knowing someone who is gay or lesbian than said this thirty years ago. Currently, about two in three residents (64%) say they know or work with someone who is gay or lesbian, up from 49% who reported this in 1977. Of those who know gays and lesbians, about half (33%) are described as close friends, 15% as family members, while 55% say they are other acquaintances.

	2006	1977
No/not sure	36%	51%
Yes	64*	49
Close friends	33	N/A
Family members	15	N/A
Other acquaintances	55	N/A

Percentages add to more than subtotal due to multiple mentions.

N/A: Not asked in 1977.

* Includes 3% of respondents in the 2006 survey who reported that they themselves were gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Californians believe homosexual relations between adults should be legal

By a 57% to 33% margin, Californians believe that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. This increases to a 64% to 27% ratio among the state's registered voters.

Majorities across most subgroups of the state's population support the view that homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal. The subgroups with the largest majorities in favor of keeping homosexual relations between adults legal are those with no religious preference (79%), adults who have a post-graduate education (78%), liberals (77%), Democrats (72%), persons affiliated with non-Christian religions (72%), non-partisans (71%), residents of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area (71%) and those who personally know others who are gay or lesbian (69%).

By contrast, subgroups of the population in which pluralities of the public feel homosexual relations should be illegal include born-again Christians (54%), conservatives (51%), people who do not personally know any gays or lesbians (50%), Latinos (48%) and those with no more than a high school education (47%).

Residents of the Central Valley and blacks are about evenly divided on this issue.

Table 5
Should homosexual relations between adults be legal?

	Legal	Not legal	No opinion
Total adults	57%	33	10
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>64%</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>9</u>
Democrats	72%	19	9
Republicans	50%	40	10
Non-partisans/others	71%	21	8
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	53%	36	11
Other Southern CA	57%	34	9
Central Valley	49%	46	5
San Francisco Bay Area	71%	17	12
Other Northern CA*	60%	32	8
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	54%	38	8
Female	61%	29	10
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	61%	29	10
30-39	58%	35	7
40-49	59%	31	10
50-64	58%	31	11
65 or older	48%	43	9
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	69%	23	8
Latino	43%	48	9
Black/African-American*	45%	45	10
Asian/other*	53%	39	8
<u>Education</u>			
High school grad or less	43%	47	10
Some college/trade school	61%	31	8
College degree	69%	20	11
Post graduate work	78%	17	5
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	41%	51	8
Middle-of-the-road	61%	31	8
Liberal	77%	17	6
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	52%	39	9
Catholic	48%	42	10
Other	72%	22	6
No preference	79%	14	7
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	36%	54	10
No	65%	26	9
<u>Personally know gays/lesbians</u>			
Yes	69%	23	8
No	36%	50	14

*Small sample base.

Public remains narrowly opposed to allowing same-sex marriages in California

The *Field Poll* has been tracking California public opinion with respect to the issue of same-sex marriages for nearly thirty years. Back in 1977, the public disapproved of allowing same-sex couples to marry by a greater than two to one margin (59% to 28%). Opinions were similar when the poll next updated this measure again in 1985. Support for the idea of allowing same-sex marriage increased some in a 1997 survey, when 38% supported the idea, and again in 2003 when 42% favored it.

Over the past three years, opinions have remained fairly stable. The most recent *Field Poll* shows that both the overall adult public and the registered voting public disapprove of allowing same-sex couples to marry by roughly five to four margins.

Table 6
Trend of opinion about allowing same-sex marriages where regular marriage laws apply (among California adults)

	Disapprove	Approve	Undecided
February 2006			
Total adults	51%	43	6
Registered voters	50%	44	6
2004*	50%	44	6
2003*	50%	42	8
1997	56%	38	6
1985	62%	30	8
1977	59%	28	13

*Survey conducted among registered voters only.

Note: 2006 survey question asked of a random subsample of 500 California adults.

Public divided over the most appropriate public policy for same-sex couples

When California adults were asked which of three possible public policies they most favored with regard to same-sex couples, residents split into three equal-sized camps. One-third (32%) favor no legal recognition at all for such couples, one-third (32%) back the idea of allowing civil unions for these couples, but not marriage, while another third (32%) support allowing gay and lesbian couples the right to marry.

Among registered voters, a slightly larger proportion (36%) favors allowing same-sex couples the right to marry, while a slightly smaller proportion wants no legal recognition of same-sex couples (27%).

There are big partisan differences on the issue. Half of registered Democrats (50%) favor allowing regular marriage laws to apply to gay and lesbian couples, and another 28% back the idea of civil unions. Just 19% advocate no legal recognition of such couples. Among Republicans, the reverse is true. The largest proportion (44%) supports no legal recognition of same-sex couples, 33% side with the idea of

allowing civil unions for these couples, while just 18% favor allowing regular marriage laws to apply.

There are other differences across subgroups of the population. Most supportive of allowing gays and lesbians to marry are liberals, college graduates, residents of the San Francisco Bay Area, those who are not born-again Christians, and people who personally know gays or lesbians. The subgroups least likely to support same-sex marriage and most likely to favor no legal recognition for these couples are conservatives, adults with no more than a high school education, born-again Christians, seniors age 65 or older, Latinos and those who do not personally know gays or lesbians.

	Allow to marry	Allow civil unions but not marry	Grant no legal recognition
Total adults	32%	32	32
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>36%</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>27</u>
Democrats	50%	28	19
Republicans	18%	33	44
Non-partisans/others*	33%	43	19
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	31%	30	35
Other Southern CA	29%	34	33
Central Valley*	24%	34	36
San Francisco Bay Area	43%	31	23
Other Northern CA*	27%	35	27
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	24%	36	35
Female	39%	29	29
<u>Age</u>			
18-39	36%	30	31
40-64	32%	35	28
65 or older*	16%	30	44
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	35%	36	26
Latino	26%	27	42
Other*	34%	32	28
<u>Education</u>			
High school grad or less	23%	27	46
Some college/trade school	34%	37	27
College degree	41%	35	19
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	12%	35	50
Middle-of-the-road	30%	41	25
Liberal	58%	19	21
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
Yes	13%	35	45
No	39%	31	26
<u>Personally know gays/lesbians</u>			
Yes	39%	37	21
No	20%	25	50

Note: Question asked of a random subsample of 500 adults. Differences between 100% and the sum of the percentages for each category represent the proportion with no opinion. * Small sample base.

Opposition to amending the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman

Since 2003 *The Field Poll* has tracked the opinions of registered voters in this state about a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution defining marriage as being only between a man and a woman. In each measure, including the current one, Californians have opposed the idea of amending the U.S. Constitution for this purpose by five to four margins.

	Oppose	Favor	No opinion
February 2006			
Total adults	50%	40	10
Registered voters	52%	40	8
2004*	54%	41	5
2003*	50%	42	8

* Survey conducted among registered voters only.

More describe their personal feelings toward gays and lesbians as “warm” than “cool”

Residents in the survey were asked to assess their personal feelings about gays and lesbians on a 0-100 “feeling thermometer.” The more favorable or warm they felt toward gays and lesbians, the higher the number they were asked to give, while the less favorable or cool they felt, the lower the number they were asked to give.

The results indicate that 43% of residents place themselves toward the warm half of the feeling thermometer (scores between 51 and 100), while 25% place themselves toward the cool half of the scale (scores between 0 and 49). Another 22% place themselves at 50, the midpoint on the scale, while 10% offer no opinion.

Subgroups of the population more likely to place themselves at the warm end of the scale include liberals (60%), Democrats (57%), those affiliated with non-Christian religions (55%), residents of the San Francisco Bay Area (54%), non-partisan voters (53%), those who personally know others who are gay or lesbian (52%) and people with either a college degree (51%) or a post-graduate degree (52%).

Subgroups in which a larger proportion places themselves on the cool rather than the warm side of the scale include conservatives, those with no more than a high school education, born-again Christians and residents who do not personally know any gays or lesbians.

Republicans, males, blacks and seniors age 65 or older are about evenly divided in their assessments.

Table 9
Personal feelings about gays and lesbians
on a 0 to 100 feeling thermometer scale

	51-100 (warm/ favorable)	22	0-49 (cool/ unfavorable)	25	No opin
Total adults	43%	22	25	10	
<u>Registered voters</u>	<u>47%</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>10</u>	
Democrats	57%	17	16	10	
Republicans	30%	27	31	12	
Non-partisans/others	53%	22	19	6	
<u>Region</u>					
Los Angeles County	41%	19	30	10	
Other Southern CA	37%	27	25	11	
Central Valley	38%	23	32	7	
San Francisco Bay Area	54%	21	13	12	
Other Northern CA*	43%	16	32	9	
<u>Gender</u>					
Male	35%	24	32	9	
Female	49%	21	19	11	
<u>Age</u>					
18-29	43%	22	30	5	
30-39	47%	22	21	10	
40-49	41%	29	20	10	
50-64	44%	21	23	12	
65 or older	33%	15	35	17	
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>					
White non-Hispanic	46%	22	21	11	
Latino	37%	22	31	10	
Black/African-American*	38%	20	34	8	
Asian/other*	49%	22	21	8	
<u>Education</u>					
High school grad or less	31%	22	37	10	
Some college/trade school	46%	23	20	11	
College graduate	51%	23	17	9	
Post graduate work	52%	21	18	9	
<u>Political ideology</u>					
Conservative	28%	21	38	13	
Middle-of-the-road	45%	26	22	7	
Liberal	60%	17	15	8	
<u>Religion</u>					
Protestant	35%	25	30	10	
Catholic	40%	22	26	12	
Other	55%	18	19	8	
No preference	48%	24	18	10	
<u>Born-again Christian</u>					
Yes	28%	27	33	12	
No	48%	20	23	9	
<u>Personally know gays/lesbians</u>					
Yes	52%	21	18	9	
No	28%	21	39	12	

*Small sample base.

About one in three think the perceived pace of the gay rights agenda is moving too fast

The public is divided over whether the pace of the gay rights agenda is moving too fast (37%) or proceeding at about the right pace (39%). Relatively few (10%) feel it is too slow. These findings are similar to those found in two previous Field Poll surveys.

Subgroups of the state's population who are more likely than others to feel the pace of the gay rights agenda is proceeding too fast include conservatives (60%), Republicans (57%), born-again Christians (50%), Protestants (49%), and seniors age 65 or older (48%).

Table 10
Attitudes toward the pace of the gay rights agenda

	Too fast	About right	Too slow	No opinion
February 2006				
Total adults	37%	39	10	14
Registered voters	39%	39	9	13
2003**	40%	44	5	11
1997	41%	39	6	14
<u>Party</u>				
Democrats	28%	48	13	11
Republicans	57%	27	2	14
Non-partisans/others	35%	40	11	14
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	35%	42	11	12
Other Southern CA	40%	35	10	15
Central Valley	39%	40	6	15
San Francisco Bay Area	32%	43	11	14
Other Northern CA*	41%	28	15	16
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	38%	37	10	15
Female	36%	41	10	13
<u>Age</u>				
18-29	31%	42	14	13
30-39	29%	42	14	15
40-49	39%	39	9	13
50-64	40%	43	7	10
65 or older	48%	27	5	20
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	39%	40	8	13
Latino	34%	37	14	15
Black/African-American*	36%	44	6	14
Asian/other*	37%	40	8	15
<u>Education</u>				
High school grad or less	38%	36	12	14
Some college/trade school	39%	40	8	13
College graduate	36%	38	10	16
Post graduate work	32%	48	9	11
<u>Political ideology</u>				
Conservative	60%	20	5	15
Middle-of-the-road	32%	47	9	12
Liberal	21%	52	19	8
<u>Religion</u>				
Protestant	49%	31	6	14
Catholic	37%	38	12	13
Other	27%	44	13	16
No preference	19%	55	13	13
<u>Born-again Christian</u>				
Yes	50%	28	8	14
No	32%	43	11	14
<u>Personally know gays/lesbians</u>				
Yes	36%	43	10	11
No	38%	34	9	19

* Small sample base.

** Survey conducted among registered voters only.