

THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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WHILE INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDE CHANGES ARE PARTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RISE IN SUPPORT FOR SAME- SEX MARRIAGE IN CALIFORNIA OVER THE PAST 20 YEARS, MOST OF THE CHANGE DERIVES FROM GENERATIONAL REPLACEMENT.

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Californians stand out from other Americans for both their level of support for same-sex marriage and the rate at which it is growing. In most of the country today, and in California in 1977, opponents of same-sex marriage outnumber supporters two to one. Yet, today Californians are more evenly split when asked about same-sex marriage, with about half disapproving and slightly fewer (43%) approving. When asked to choose between three options – allowing same-sex couples to legally marry, allowing them to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, or granting them no legal recognition – opinions in California split almost perfectly into thirds.

An analysis of statewide *Field Poll* surveys over the past twenty years by political scientists Gregory B. Lewis of Georgia State University and Charles W. Gossett of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona finds that Californians' growing support for same-sex unions is due partly to individual attitude change, but mostly to generational replacement.

Age is one of the strongest predictors of opposition to same-sex marriage in California, but not because people are becoming more homophobic or sexually more conservative as they age. In every age group, people were at least four times as likely to say that they had become more accepting as that they had become more condemning of homosexual relations since they turned 18. Generational replacement is the key. Californians born in each decade tend to be more accepting of gay relationships and more willing to grant them legal recognition than those born the decade before.

California's faster pace of generational replacement helps explain its high and rising support for same-sex marriage. Its population is very young compared to the rest of the nation, as it ranks 45th in the percentage of the population over age 64 and 6th in the percentage of the population under age 18 in 2003. In addition, it has seen a more rapid increase in the percentage under age 18 than in the percentage over 65 (3.9% versus 0.8% between 1990 and 2000).

According to Lewis's and Gossett's analysis which looked at *Field Poll* surveys conducted between the period 1985-2006, cohort replacement explains about two-thirds of the increased support for same-sex marriage in California since 1985 and all the increased support since 1997. Most of the rest is derived from changes in Californians' own personal attitudes toward homosexuality. For example, a 2006 Field Poll found that nearly half (45%) of Californians say they have become more accepting of homosexual relations since they were a young adult, while 9% say they have become less accepting.

While every population sub-group in California has shown a net increase in acceptance of same-sex relationships and gay marriage in general over the past twenty years, they have done so at different rates, with politics and religion playing the strongest roles. For example:

- Attitudes toward gay relationships have become increasingly ideological and partisan issue in California over time. The gap between conservatives and liberals in their levels of support for same-sex marriage jumped from 23 percentage points in 1985 to 61 percentage points in recent years. A somewhat smaller gap is observed when conservatives and liberals are asking whether they've become more or less accepting of homosexual relations between consenting adults since they were 18. Statewide 38% of conservatives testify to now being more accepting of homosexual relations, while 11% have become less accepting, a difference of 27 percentage points. In contrast, liberals reporting being more rather than less accepting of homosexual relations by 43 percentage points, with 48% testifying to being more accepting and just 5% less accepting.
- A similar pattern is observed across party lines. Democrats were 44 percentage points more inclined to report greater than less acceptance of homosexual relations since they were a young adult, compared to just 26 points among Republicans. With regard to their stated levels of support for same-sex marriage, the partisan divide grew from a mere 8 percentage point difference in 1985 to a 36 point difference in recent years.
- Religious differences have also grown over time, especially with regard to support for same-sex marriage. Jewish respondents and those with no religious affiliations were 27 and 22 percentage points more likely than Protestants to favor same-sex marriage in 1985. In recent years, those differences have nearly doubled to 42 and 43 percentage points. While California public opinion has become more accepting of homosexual relations between consenting adults across all religious groups, the net difference in acceptance of homosexual relations was 21 percentage points higher among secularists (i.e., those who say religion was not very important in their own lives) than among the very religious (those who say it is extremely important) (46 points vs. 25 points).
- Racial and ethnic factors also appear to play a role. Although Latinos are more likely to oppose same-sex marriage than non-Hispanic whites, even when other variables are controlled, they are among the ethnic subgroups most likely to have become more accepting of homosexual relations since they were young adults. In addition, differences between blacks and non-Hispanic whites on same-sex marriage have grown significantly over time, as support for marriage rights has increased among non-Hispanic whites and remained the same among African-Americans.

Table 1
The Growth in Support of Same-Sex Marriage in California
Over the Past 22 years

	% approving		
	<u>1985</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>2003-6**</u>
Statewide	30%	38%	43%
<u>Decade of Birth</u>			
Before 1940	20	23	25
1940s	35	40	40
1950s	39	39	46
1960s	33	42	41
1970s	--	45	51
1980s	--	--	58
<u>Political Ideology</u>			
Liberal	43	66	76
Moderate	31	39	44
Conservative	20	21	15
<u>Party Identification</u>			
Democrat	34	47	59
Independent	29	41	41
Republican	26	24	23
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>			
Protestant	24	29	28
Catholic	25	29	38
Jewish*	51	61	70
Other religion	35	47	55
No religion	46	66	71
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	32	43	46
Latino	24	26	35
Black*	24	27	23
Asian	25	52	55
<u>Gender</u>			
Female	33	40	47
Male	27	35	39
<u>Level of Education</u>			
High school or less	24	28	34
Some college	33	45	41
College graduate	43	61	64

* Small sample bases.

** Survey data from 2003-2006 surveys combined.

Table 2
Change in Personal Attitudes toward Homosexuality Relations
between Consenting Adults Since Age 18

	<u>More Accepting</u>	<u>No Change</u>	<u>Less Accepting</u>
Statewide	45%	47	9
<u>Political Ideology</u>			
Liberal	48%	48	5
Moderate	43%	46	11
Conservative	38%	50	11
<u>Party Identification</u>			
Democrat	49%	45	5
Independent	43%	46	11
Republican	39%	49	13
<u>Religious Affiliation</u>			
Born-again Christian	42%	43	15
Other Protestant	45%	51	4
Other Catholic	46%	46	8
Jewish*	45%	51	4
Other religion	44%	46	11
No religion	47%	50	3
<u>Importance of Religion</u>			
Not very important	49%	47	3
Fairly important	45%	48	7
Very important	49%	41	10
Extremely important	38%	49	13
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	40%	54	6
Latino	54%	33	13
Black*	37%	58	6
Asian	45%	41	14
<u>Gender</u>			
Female	44%	49	7
Male	46%	44	10
<u>Age</u>			
Under 40	49%	43	9
40 – 54	44%	46	10
55 and over	40%	53	8
<u>Education</u>			
High school or less	48%	36	15
Some college	42%	50	8
College graduate	43%	54	4

Notes: Percentage may add to slightly more or slightly less than 100% due to rounding.

* Small samples.

Source: February 2006 Field Poll.

This analysis is based on a paper “Explaining Rising Support for Same-Sex Marriage in California,” presented March 8, 2007 by Professors Gregory B. Lewis of Georgia State University and Charles W. Gossett of California State Polytechnic University, Pomona at the Western Political Science Association’s annual meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada. Copies of the complete paper are available upon request.

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Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on independent random-sample surveys of the California adult public conducted over a twenty-two year period (1985 to 2006) by *The Field Poll*. Trend analyses are based on an aggregate of 4,300 telephone interviews completed over this period among Californians who offered their opinions on the issue of same-sex marriage by the authors. The 2006 *Field Poll* survey included interviews with a random sample of 1,000 California adults and was conducted February 12-26, 2006. Interviewing on all surveys was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish using random digit dial survey methods.

Questions Asked

(ALL YEARS) Do you approve or disapprove of a state law that would permit homosexuals to marry members of their own sex and have regular marriage laws apply to them?

(2006 ONLY) Which of the following most closely resembles your own view about state laws regarding the relationships of two people of the same sex... Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry, Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not legally marry, or There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple’s relationship?

(2006 ONLY) Looking back, have your opinions about homosexual relations between consenting adults changed a lot, a little or not at all from the opinions you held when you were 18 years old? (IF CHANGED, ASK:) Have your opinions become more accepting or less accepting of homosexual relations between consenting adults since you were 18?