

THE FIELD POLL

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

Field Research Corporation

601 California Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94108-2814
(415) 392-5763 FAX: (415) 434-2541
EMAIL: fieldpoll@field.com
www.field.com/fieldpollonline

FOR ADVANCE PUBLICATION BY SUBSCRIBERS ONLY.

COPYRIGHT 2009 BY FIELD RESEARCH CORPORATION.

Release #2301

Release Date and Time: **6:00 a.m., Tuesday, March 10, 2009**

VOTERS VERY SHARPLY DIVIDED IF ASKED TO DECIDE ON A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO ALLOW SAME-SEX MARRIAGES. BIG DIFFERENCES BY PARTY, IDEOLOGY, AGE, MARITAL STATUS, GENDER, REGION AND RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE.

IMPORTANT: Contract for this service is subject to revocation if publication or broadcast takes place before release date or if contents are divulged to persons outside of subscriber staff prior to release time. (ISSN 0195-4520)

By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

In last November's election voters approved Proposition 8 by a 52% to 48% margin, limiting marriage in California to opposite sex couples. The passage of Prop. 8 superseded a California Supreme Court decision earlier in the year that had legalized same-sex marriages.

Proponents of same-sex marriage have challenged the legality of Prop. 8. Last Thursday the California Supreme Court heard arguments from both sides, but a ruling is not expected for some time. Also last week both houses of the California legislature adopted a resolution in support of allowing gay marriages and challenging the legality of Prop. 8.

Same-sex marriage has been an issue that has been hotly debated in California and elsewhere for many years. *The Field Poll* first measured public opinion on this issue in 1977 and has updated Californians' views about same-sex marriages in subsequent surveys over the years.

The latest statewide *Field Poll* conducted February 20 – March 1 again updated this time-series, but also asked voters how they would react if a new constitutional amendment were placed on the ballot to allow same-sex marriages in the state.

The results reveal a voting public that remains sharply divided both overall and across political, demographic and regional lines. If a new constitutional amendment about same-sex marriage qualified for the ballot, 48% of the state's registered voters say they would vote Yes to permit such marriages, 47% would vote No to oppose them and 5% are undecided.

As was true with regard to the vote on Prop. 8 last year, there are large differences in voter preferences by party, political ideology, age, marital status, gender, religion and region of residence.

Sharp divisions characterize voter sentiment toward a possible new same-sex marriage constitutional amendment

Some supporters of same-sex marriage have indicated that they will attempt to sponsor a constitutional amendment that would overturn Prop. 8 and remove any legal barriers blocking the marriage of same-sex couples in California.

In its latest survey, *The Field Poll* asked voters how they would react to such an amendment. Overall the state's voters are about evenly split, with 48% in favor, 47% opposing and 5% undecided.

Democrats are very much in favor of such an amendment, 63% to 32%, while Republicans are very much against it (70% No vs. 24% Yes). Non-partisans divide 55% Yes and 42% No.

Los Angeles County voters would line up on the Yes side 55% to 40%. San Francisco Bay Area voters would favor the amendment by an even larger margin (64% to 31%). However, voters in Southern California outside of Los Angeles County, those in the Central Valley and Northern Californians outside the Bay Area would initially line up against such an amendment.

There are also differences by gender, with men opposed 52% to 43% and women in favor 53% to 42%.

Younger voters age 18 to 39 would support the amendment 55% to 41%, while voters in the 40 to 64 age group are narrowly in favor (49% to 46%). Voters age 65 or older are in opposition, 58% to 34%.

Just 10% of strongly conservative voters would be on the Yes side of the proposed amendment, and 25% of moderately conservative voters are in favor. The percentage in support increases to 49% among middle-of-the-road voters, to 77% among moderately liberal voters, and to 88% among those who describe themselves as strongly liberal.

Married voters would line up 50% on the No side and 45% in favor. Those who are separated or divorced are about evenly split – 47% in favor and 45% opposed. Among those who have never married, the division of preference is 63% Yes and 35% No.

Protestants divide 63% No vs. 31% Yes. Catholics would vote 53% No and 45% Yes. On the other hand, voters who are affiliated with religions other than Protestant or Catholic are strongly in favor, 63% to 33%, as are those who have no religious preference, 81% to 17%.

Voters who say they personally know or work with gay or lesbian individuals are in favor 56% to 41%. Those who do not are strongly against the proposed amendment, 66% to 27%.

Table 1
Voter preferences regarding a new constitutional amendment
to allow same-sex couples to legally marry in California
(among registered voters)

| | <u>Would vote...</u> | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| | <u>Yes,</u> <u>to allow</u> | <u>No, marriage</u> <u>only between</u> <u>man and woman</u> | <u>No</u> <u>opinion</u> |
| Total | 48% | 47 | 5 |
| <u>Party</u> | | | |
| Democrats | 63% | 32 | 5 |
| Republicans | 24% | 70 | 6 |
| Non-partisans/others | 55% | 42 | 3 |
| <u>Region</u> | | | |
| Los Angeles County | 55% | 40 | 5 |
| Other Southern California | 40% | 53 | 7 |
| Central Valley | 36% | 60 | 4 |
| San Francisco Bay Area | 64% | 31 | 5 |
| Other Northern California* | 43% | 53 | 4 |
| <u>Age</u> | | | |
| 18 – 39 | 55% | 41 | 4 |
| 40 – 64 | 49% | 46 | 5 |
| 65 or older | 34% | 58 | 8 |
| <u>Gender</u> | | | |
| Male | 43% | 52 | 5 |
| Female | 53% | 42 | 5 |
| <u>Political ideology</u> | | | |
| Strongly conservative | 10% | 86 | 4 |
| Moderately conservative | 25% | 69 | 6 |
| Middle-of-the-road | 49% | 45 | 6 |
| Moderately liberal | 77% | 17 | 6 |
| Strongly liberal | 88% | 10 | 2 |
| <u>Marital status</u> | | | |
| Married | 45% | 50 | 5 |
| Separated/divorced | 47% | 45 | 8 |
| Never married | 63% | 35 | 2 |
| <u>Religion</u> | | | |
| Protestant | 31% | 63 | 6 |
| Catholic | 45% | 53 | 2 |
| Other religion | 63% | 33 | 4 |
| No religious preference | 81% | 17 | 2 |
| <u>Personally know gays/lesbians</u> | | | |
| Yes | 56% | 41 | 3 |
| No | 27% | 66 | 7 |

* Small sample base.

Historical trend

In *The Field Poll's* first survey measuring Californians views about same-sex marriage in 1977 Californians disapproved of the idea a wide 59% to 28% margin. Subsequent surveys spanning more than thirty years consistently found sentiment against same-sex marriage, but by diminishing margins.

However in May 2008 for the first time *The Field Poll* revealed a narrow majority of voters in favor of having regular marriage laws apply to same-sex couples (51% to 42%).

In this latest survey a cross-section of all registered voters continues to favor allowing same-sex couples to marry, but by a slightly smaller 49% to 44% margin.

| | Approve | Disapprove | No opinion |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| March 2009 | 49% | 44 | 7 |
| 2008 (May) | 51% | 42 | 7 |
| 2006 | 44% | 50 | 6 |
| 2004 | 44% | 50 | 6 |
| 2003 | 42% | 50 | 8 |
| 1997 | 38% | 46 | 6 |
| 1985 | 30% | 62 | 8 |
| 1977 | 28% | 59 | 13 |

Note: Surveys conducted prior to 2003 were among all California adults, not just registered voters.

Trend offering voters three options

Beginning in February 2006 *The Field Poll* introduced a different question designed to get another measure about voter views with regard to same-sex marriages. That question was repeated in May 2008 and was again included in the current survey.

The question offered voters three possible options and was posed as follows: “*Which of the following most closely resembles your own view about state laws regarding the relationships of two people of the same sex? (a.) gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry; (b.) gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not legally marry; (c.) there should be no legal recognition of gay or lesbian couples’ relationships.*”

In the 2006 survey 36% of registered voters chose the first alternative to allow same-sex couples to marry. Another 33% preferred allowing civil unions but not marriage, while 27% believed that there should be no legal recognition.

When the question was repeated in May 2008, the proportion of voters choosing the first alternative to allow same sex couples to marry increased to 45%. The proportion choosing civil unions but not marriage remained about the same at 32%. The “no legal recognition” response, however, dropped to 19%.

The current survey finds a distribution of voter opinions almost identical to those found last year. At present 45% prefer allowing same-sex couples to marry in this context, 34% would rather allow civil unions but not marriage, while 19% support no legal recognition of same-sex couples.

Table 3
Three option trends of California voter opinion about what
state laws should be regarding same-sex relationships
(among registered voters)

| | Allow to marry | Allow civil unions but not marriage | No legal recognition | No opinion |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| March 2009 | 45% | 34 | 19 | 2 |
| May 2008 | 45% | 32 | 19 | 4 |
| February 2006 | 36% | 33 | 27 | 4 |

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 761 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish between the period February 20 and March 1, 2009. Up to six attempts were made to reach and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

The sample was developed from telephone listings of individual voters selected at random from a statewide list of registered voters in California. Once a voter's name and telephone number has been selected, interviews are attempted only with the specified voter. Interviews can be conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. The overall sample was stratified so as to yield interviews with approximately equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans. After the completion of interviewing, the results were weighted to return this sample allocation of voters to the actual distribution of registered voters by party and by various other demographic and regional characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depends on the sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the overall sample of registered voters is +/- 3.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error is based on percentages in the middle of the sampling distribution (percentages around 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (percentages around 10% or around 90%) have a smaller margin of error. While there are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error, the overall design and execution of the survey minimized the potential for these other sources of error. The maximum sampling error will be larger for subgroups of the overall sample.

Questions Asked

Do you approve or disapprove of California allowing homosexuals to marry members of their own sex and have regular marriage laws apply to them?

Which of the following most closely resembles your own view about state laws regarding the relationships of two people of the same sex?

- a. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry;
- b. Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not legally marry;
- c. There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple's relationship

Suppose in the next statewide general election a constitutional amendment qualified for the ballot which asked voters to allow same-sex couples to legally marry in California. If a constitutional amendment like this were on the ballot and the election were being held today, would you vote Yes to allow same-sex couples to marry or No to continue to apply marriage laws only to a man and a woman?