

# 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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**GROWING TREND IN SUPPORT OF  
ALLOWING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN  
CALIFORNIA. BIG GENERATIONAL AND  
REGIONAL DIVIDE. VOTERS LEERY OF  
CHANGING STATE CONSTITUTION TO  
PROHIBIT SUCH MARRIAGES.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

For the first time in over three decades of polling on the issue of same-sex marriage laws, *The Field Poll* finds more California voters approving than disapproving of allowing same-sex couples the right to marry and having regular marriage laws apply to them. In a survey completed May 17-26 among a random sample of 1,052 registered voters the idea of allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry is now approved by a 51% to 42% margin statewide.

These findings compare with the results of six previous *Field Polls* taken over the past three decades in which those supporting same-sex marriage were in the minority. For example, thirty-one years ago in 1977, more than twice as many Californians disapproved as approved allowing of same-sex marriages (59% to 28%). Over the years opposition for having regular marriage laws apply to gay and lesbian couples has decreased steadily to where a minority of voters now holds this position.

The survey also finds voters leery of a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would define marriage as only between a man and a woman, with more voters currently opposed than supportive of making such a change. These findings are consistent with four previous measures conducted between 2003 and 2006 in which California voters opposed changing the U.S. Constitution (as opposed to the state constitution) to define marriage as only between a man and a woman.

**Table 1**  
**Trend of opinion about allowing same-sex couples to marry**  
**and having regular marriage laws apply to them**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>May 2008</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>7</b>
2006	44%	50	6
2004	44%	50	6
2003	42%	50	8
1997	38%	56	6
1985	30%	62	8
1977	28%	59	13

*Note: Surveys prior to 2003 conducted among all California adults.*

### **Big differences in opinion by age, region, party, political ideology and religion**

The current plurality in support of allowing same-sex marriage masks sharp divisions of opinion based a voter's age and where voters live.

Californians age 18-29 favor the idea of allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry by a greater than two to one margin (68% to 25%). Those in the 30-39 age group also approve of such marriages by 24 percentage points. However voters age 65 or older disapprove by a wide margin (55% to 36%).

There are also big differences in opinion relating to a voter's region of residence. There is now strong approval of permitting same-sex marriage by voters in the state's two largest metropolitan areas, Los Angeles County and the San Francisco Bay Area. However, among voters in the Central Valley and in the nine Southern California counties outside of Los Angeles County, more voters disapprove than approve.

Big differences are also seen when the state is divided between its coastal counties and its inland counties. Voters living on the coast favor allowing same-sex marriages 55% to 37%. By contrast, voters living in inland counties oppose permitting such marriages 52% to 40%.

The opinions of Democrats and Republicans also differ sharply on this issue. While Democrats approve of allowing same-sex couples to marry more than two to one (65% to 29%), the situation is reversed among Republicans, with 69% disapproving and 25% approving. The position of non-partisans more closely aligns with Democrats (61% in favor and 27% opposed).

In addition, views about the issue are highly consonant with where voters place themselves on the political spectrum. Strong conservatives disapprove of allowing same-sex marriage 85% to 11%, while the opinions of strong liberals are completely opposite, with 85% approving and 11% disapproving. Similarly, moderate conservatives oppose permitting gay and lesbian couples to marry 62% to 31%, while moderate liberals are in favor 73% to 23%. Voters who describe themselves as middle-of-the-road in politics approve of allowing same-sex marriage 53% to 35%.

There are also big differences in opinions by religion. While more Protestants and Catholics disapprove than approve of allowing gays and lesbians to marry, large majorities of those affiliated with other religions (61%) and especially those who have no religious preference (81%) approve. Voters describing themselves as born again Christians are decidedly against allowing same-sex marriage, 68% to 24%. This contrasts with the opinions of all other voters, who are supportive 58% to 35%.

While men are about evenly divided on the issue, women favor permitting gay and lesbian couples to marry by 14 percentage points. In addition, white non-Hispanics approve of allowing same-sex marriage by 12 percentage points, but the views of Latinos and other racial/ethnic voters are more divided.

**Table 2**  
**Views of allowing same-sex couples to marry across**  
**voter subgroups – May 2008**

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>7</b>
<u>Region</u>			
(.25) Los Angeles County	55%	38	7
(.33) Other Southern California	41%	51	8
(.21) San Francisco Bay Area	68%	24	8
(.16) Central Valley	38%	55	7
(.05) Other Northern California*	60%	33	7
<u>Area</u>			
(.71) Coastal	55%	37	8
(.29) Inland	40%	52	8
<u>Age</u>			
(.16) 18-29	68%	25	7
(.15) 30-39	58%	34	8
(.20) 40-49	51%	42	7
(.29) 50-64	47%	46	7
(.20) 65 or older	36%	55	9
<u>Gender</u>			
(.47) Male	48%	44	8
(.53) Female	53%	39	8
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
(.65) White non-Hispanic	53%	41	6
(.20) Latino	49%	42	9
(.15) All others	43%	47	10
<u>Party registration</u>			
(.43) Democrats	65%	29	6
(.33) Republican	25%	69	6
(.24) Non-partisan/other	61%	27	12
<u>Political ideology</u>			
(.18) Strongly conservative	11%	85	4
(.12) Moderately conservative	31%	62	7
(.42) Middle-of-the-road	53%	35	12
(.12) Moderately liberal	73%	23	4
(.16) Strongly liberal	85%	11	4
<u>Religion</u>			
(.33) Protestant	34%	57	9
(.28) Catholic	45%	48	7
(.23) Other	61%	33	6
(.16) No preference	81%	12	7
<u>Born-again Christian</u>			
(.21) Yes	24%	68	8
(.79) No	58%	35	7

\* Small sample base.

### **Divided reaction to the recent State Supreme Court decision**

Just before interviewing began on this latest survey, the California Supreme Court struck down existing state laws that had limited marriages to unions between a man and a woman. This decision now makes California only the second state in the nation, after Massachusetts, to allow same-sex marriages.

When voters in the survey were asked about the High Court's ruling, opinions are about evenly split, with 48% approving and 46% disapproving.

There is a big partisan and ideological cast to the ruling's reaction, with Democrats, non-partisans and political liberals approving by wide margins. By contrast, Republicans and political conservatives overwhelmingly disapprove of the ruling.

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Party</b>			
Democrats	59%	35	6
Republican	23%	74	3
Non-partisan/other	63%	29	8
<b>Political ideology</b>			
Strongly conservative	10%	86	4
Moderately conservative	28%	69	3
Middle-of-the-road	52%	39	9
Moderately liberal	67%	31	2
Strongly liberal	79%	16	5

### **Broader measure of same-sex laws also shows shift**

A second trend measurement, first asked by *The Field Poll* in February 2006, explored public opinion on this issue in somewhat broader terms. Instead of posing the issue as a dichotomy, this question offered voters three alternatives to choose from: (1) gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry, (2) gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions or domestic partnerships, but not legally marry, or (3) gay and lesbian couples should be granted no legal recognition.

Results from the 2006 survey showed 36% supporting the right of same-sex couples to marry in this setting, 33% preferred granting these couples civil unions but not marriage, while another 27% opted for no legal recognition in any form.

The current survey finds a marked shift in opinion toward the more permissive side, with 45% now saying they would allow such couples to marry, compared to 32% choosing civil unions but not marriage. The proportion advocating no legal recognition has dropped from 27% to 19% over the past two years.

**Table 4**  
**Which best represents your views about what state laws should be regarding same-sex relationships? (among California registered voters)**

	<b>May 2008</b>	<b>February 2006</b>
Allow to marry	45%	36%
Allow civil unions but not marry	32	33
No legal recognition	19	27
No opinion	4	4

**Voters leery of a state constitutional amendment to prohibit same-sex marriage**

Groups opposed to allowing marriage laws to be applied to gay and lesbian couples are in the midst of an initiative drive to amend the state Constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. The Secretary of State is expected to report before the end of June whether sponsors have gathered enough signatures to put this measure on the November general election ballot. If the proposed constitutional amendment does make it to the ballot and a majority of voters approves, this would effectively re-impose the previous ban on same-sex marriages in California.

In the current survey, *The Field Poll* split the overall sample of voters interviewed into two representative subsamples. One group was asked about the idea of changing the state constitution in a generic way, as follows:

*“Do you favor or oppose changing the California State Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman, thus barring marriage between gay and lesbian couples?”*

The second subsample was asked about the proposed constitutional amendment in a more direct way:

*“There may be a vote on this issue in the November election. Would you favor or oppose having the state constitution prohibit same-sex marriage, by defining marriage as only between a man and a woman?”*

In both settings more voters oppose than favor amending the state Constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. In each case large majorities of Democrats and political liberals are joined by political moderates to oppose the change. This contrasts with the views of Republicans and conservatives who are strongly supportive of the proposed constitutional amendment.

**Table 5a**  
**“Do you favor or oppose changing the California State Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman, thus barring marriage between gay and lesbian couples?”**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>6</b>
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	32%	62	6
Republican	57%	37	6
Non-partisan/other	29%	63	8
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	61%	34	5
Middle-of-the-road	35%	55	10
Liberal	24%	71	5

**Table 5b**  
**“There may be a vote on this issue in the November election. Would you favor or oppose having the state constitution prohibit same-sex marriage, by defining marriage as only between a man and a woman?”** (among California registered voters)

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total statewide</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>6</b>
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	31%	64	5
Republican	64%	28	8
Non-partisan/other	34%	58	8
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Conservative	78%	17	5
Middle-of-the-road	37%	55	8
Liberal	13%	79	9

**Opposition to changing the Constitution on this issue consistent with previous measures**

These findings are consistent with four recent *Field Poll* measures in which California voters were asked whether they favored or opposed changing the U.S. Constitution (as opposed to the state Constitution) to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. In each of these prior measures, pluralities of between 8 and 13 percentage points opposed the idea of amending the U.S. Constitution for this purpose.

**Table 6**  
**Trend of voter opinion of amending the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Favor</b>	<b>Oppose</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
February 2006	40%	52	8
May 2004	41%	54	5
February 2004	41%	54	5
August 2003	42%	50	8

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Sample Details**

The findings in this report are based on a random sample survey of 1,052 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish May 17-26, 2008. The overall sample was divided into two random subsamples on the survey's final question, with 667 voters asked one version and 385 voters asked the other. 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 were conducted on either the voter's landline or cell phone, depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the results were weighted to align the overall sample to characteristics of the state's registered voter population.

Sampling error estimates applicable to any probability-based survey depend on sample size. The maximum sampling error for results based on the overall sample of 1,052 registered voters is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error for results from the survey's final question (Version A) is +/- 4.0 percentage points, while the maximum sampling error for Version B is +/- 5.0 percentage points.

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. The maximum sampling error will be larger for analyses based on subgroups of the overall sample. 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.

### **Questions Asked**

As you know, there has been a lot of news lately about gays and lesbians, that is, men and women who are homosexuals.

Do you approve or disapprove of California allowing homosexuals to marry members of their own sex and have regular marriage laws apply to them? (WORDING IDENTICAL TO PREVIOUS FIELD POLLS CONDUCTED SINCE 1977)

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?

Do you approve or disapprove of the recent California State Supreme Court ruling declaring the state's ban on same-sex marriage as being unconstitutional, thus allowing same-sex couples to marry?

(VERSION A: ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS) Do you favor or oppose changing the California State Constitution to define marriage as between a man and a woman, thus barring marriage between gay and lesbian couples?

(VERSION B: ASKED OF RANDOM SUBSAMPLE OF VOTERS) There may be a vote on this issue in the November election. Would you favor or oppose having the State Constitution prohibit same-sex marriage, by defining marriage as only between a man and a woman?