

# 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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Release #2349

## VOTER SENTIMENT REMAINS ON THE SIDE OF ALLOWING SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN CALIFORNIA.

Release Date: **Tuesday, July 20, 2010**

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(ISSN 0195-4520)

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

In recent years the issue of same-sex marriage has become a major social policy issue and has stirred contentious debates and political fights within the California state legislature, among voters at the ballot box and in the courts.

In November 2008, this state's voters approved by a narrow 52% to 48% margin Proposition 8, which restricted marriage to opposite sex couples, thereby prohibiting same-sex couples from marrying in California.

U.S. District Court Chief Judge Vaughn R. Walker in San Francisco is shortly expected to issue a long-awaited ruling as to whether Proposition 8 violates the U.S. Constitution. The court case has received considerable national attention and involved some of the country's most prominent legal litigators.

In a statewide survey completed earlier this month, *The Field Poll* updated its trend measurements of how California viewed the issue of same-sex marriage. The results show that by a 51% to 42% margin, the overall California electorate supports allowing same-sex couples to marry and having regular marriage laws apply to them.

However, when voters are offered three alternatives – allowing same-sex couples to marry, allowing civil unions but not same-sex marriage or granting no legal recognition to same-sex relationships – slightly less than half of voters (44%) favor the marriage alternative. In this setting, a significant portion (34%) of California voters opt for allowing civil unions but not marriage for same-sex couples. Just 19% believe that there should be no legal recognition of gay couples. These results also mirror those found in previous *Field Poll* surveys conducted over the past two years.

### **Voters have become more accepting of same-sex marriage over the years**

*The Field Poll* has been gauging public sentiment on the issue of same-sex marriage in California for over thirty years. In an initial measure conducted in 1977 voters disapproved of extending marriage laws to same-sex couples by a greater than two-to-one margin (59% to 28%).

However, over time California public opinion has trended in the direction of permitting same-sex couples to marry. By 2003 the plurality opposed was reduced to just an eight-point margin (50% disapprove vs. 42% approve).

The lines crossed in 2008, when for the first time *The Field Poll* found more California voters approving rather than disapproving of allowing same-sex marriage.

In the current survey, by a 51% to 42% margin voters approve of allowing same-sex marriage. These results are similar to those observed over the past two years.

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

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	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
<b>July 2010</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>7</b>
2009	49%	44	7
2008	51%	42	7
2006	44%	50	6
2004	44%	50	6
2003	42%	50	8
1997	38%	56	6
1985	30%	62	8
1977	28%	59	13

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

### **Big differences across voter sub-groups**

Sixty-eight percent of Democrats approve of allowing same-sex marriages, while an almost equivalent proportion of Republicans (66%) disapprove. Non-partisans generally mirror the views of the overall electorate, with 52% approving and 38% disapproving.

Voters in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area support allowing same-sex couples to marry by a 63% to 29% margin. Los Angeles County voters, as well as those living in other parts of Southern California, approve but by smaller margins. However, in the Central Valley, in San Diego and Orange counties and those living in Northern California outside the Bay Area, more voters disapprove than approve.

There are also big differences of opinion in respect to age. Majorities of voters under age 40 approve of allowing same-sex couples to marry, with those in the 18-29 age group strongly in favor (68% to 27%). Opposition increases with each successively older age group, and is greatest among voters 65 or older, who divide 51% to 42% against.

Women are also more likely than men to approve of allowing same-sex couples to marry. The current poll finds women in favor by a fifteen-point margin (54% to 39%), while men are about evenly (47% approving and 45% disapproving).

White non-Hispanic and Latino voters are in favor while all other race and ethnic groups, including African-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans are opposed.

Voters who are married, as well as those who are separated or divorced, are about evenly split on the issue. However, those who have never married approve of allowing same-sex marriage by a two and one half to one margin, 67% to 25%.

Among religious groups, Protestants are very much against the idea, opposing it by 57% to 34%. Catholics are about evenly divided, with 47% approving and 46% disapproving. By contrast, voters affiliated with other religions or who have no religious preference are overwhelmingly in favor.

Likely voters in the November general election approve of allowing same-sex marriage 50% to 43%. Voters supporting Democrats Jerry Brown and Barbara Boxer in this year's Governor and U.S. Senate races favor same-sex marriage three-and-one-half to one. By contrast, voters backing Republican Meg Whitman for Governor and Carly Fiorina for U.S. Senate are opposed by similar 66% to 26% margins.

**Table 2**  
**California voter preferences regarding allowing same-sex couples to**  
**marry and have regular marriage laws apply to them – by subgroup**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total – July 2010</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>7</b>
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	68%	27	5
Republicans	26%	66	8
Non-partisans/others	52%	38	10
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	51%	38	11
San Diego/Orange	45%	51	4
Other Southern California	49%	43	8
Central Valley	42%	51	7
San Francisco Bay Area	63%	29	8
Other Northern California*	42%	51	7
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 29	68%	27	5
30 – 39	53%	38	9
40 – 49	47%	41	12
50 – 64	46%	48	6
65 or older	42%	51	7
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	47%	45	8
Female	54%	39	7
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	53%	39	8
Latino	50%	41	9
African-American	38%	49	13
Chinese-American	41%	54	5
Korean-American	25%	70	5
Vietnamese-American	32%	64	4
<u>Marital status</u>			
Married	46%	47	7
Separated/divorced	46%	44	10
Never married	67%	25	8
<u>Religion</u>			
Protestant	34%	57	9
Catholic	47%	46	7
Other religion	75%	20	5
No religious preference	77%	16	7
<u>Likely voters in November (total)</u>			
Brown supporters for Governor	50%	43	7
Whitman supporters for Governor	74%	20	6
Whitman supporters for Governor	26%	66	8
Boxer supporters for U.S. Senate	73%	21	6
Fiorina supporters for U.S. Senate	26%	66	8

• Small sample base.

### **Some differences in support seen when three options are offered to voters**

Since 2006 the *Field Poll* has also posed a second question about same-sex marriage to voters in its statewide surveys. This alternative version offered voters three possible options on the subject rather than two – (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, and (3) there should be no legal recognition of a gay and lesbian couple’s relationship.

When this question was first posed four years ago, slightly more than one-third of California voters (36%) chose the “allow to marry” option. Another one-third (33%) endorsed the idea of allowing civil unions but not marriage, while 27% percent believed that same-sex relationships should have no legal recognition.

Two years later, a May 2008 survey showed an increase to 45% in the proportion of voters allowing same-sex couples to marry and a corresponding decline to 19% in the proportion favoring no legal recognition. The proportion who favored allowing civil unions but not marriage was about the same at 32%.

Since then there has been little change in the percentage distribution of the three alternatives when this question was repeated in a March 2009 survey and again in July of this year.

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

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	<b>Allow to marry</b>	<b>Allow civil unions but not marriage</b>	<b>No legal recognition</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>July 2010</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>
March 2009	45%	34	19	2
May 2008	45%	32	19	4
February 2006	36%	33	27	4

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### **Subgroup differences relating to the three-option preference question**

The table on the following page reports the subgroup variations on this question from the July 2010 survey.

**Table 4**  
**California voter preferences offering three options about what should**  
**be done about same-sex marriage laws – by subgroup**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Allow to marry</b>	<b>Allow civil unions/not marriage</b>	<b>No legal recognition</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>Total – July 2010</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>
<u>Party</u>				
Democrats	59%	23	15	3
Republicans	19%	49	29	3
Non-partisans/others	46%	35	16	3
<u>Region</u>				
Los Angeles County	44%	30	21	5
San Diego/Orange	38%	37	21	4
Other Southern California	42%	32	23	3
Central Valley	36%	37	24	3
San Francisco Bay Area	53%	35	11	1
Other Northern California*	49%	34	10	7
<u>Age</u>				
18 – 29	65%	23	9	3
30 – 39	46%	37	16	1
40 – 49	42%	34	21	4
50 – 64	34%	39	23	4
65 or older	35%	35	25	5
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	42%	35	20	3
Female	45%	33	18	4
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>				
White non-Hispanic	47%	35	16	2
Latino	40%	32	22	6
African-American	32%	33	27	8
Chinese-American	33%	32	31	4
Korean-American	24%	32	43	1
Vietnamese-American	24%	19	55	2
<u>Likely voters in November (total)</u>				
Brown supporters for Governor	65%	20	10	5
Whitman supporters for Governor	21%	51	27	1
Boxer supporters for U.S. Senate	64%	21	11	4
Fiorina supporters for U.S. Senate	20%	51	26	3
<u>Marital status</u>				
Married	39%	36	22	3
Separated/divorced	38%	34	22	6
Never married	62%	27	9	2
<u>Religion</u>				
Protestant	27%	43	24	6
Catholic	35%	39	24	2
Other religion	69%	19	10	2
No religious preference	75%	14	8	3

\* Small sample base.

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Methodological Details**

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed June 22 – July 5, 2010 among a representative sample of 1,390 registered voters in California. Interviewing was conducted by telephone using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation’s central location telephone interviewing facilities. To enable the survey to more closely examine the preferences of California’s growing ethnic voter populations, the survey was conducted in six languages and dialects – English, Spanish, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese. In addition, the main statewide sample was supplemented with additional interviews among Chinese Americans, Korean-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans.

Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period. The overall registered voter sample was drawn from a listing of all registered voters, while the ethnic sample augments were drawn from listings of ethnic surnames of voters targeting Chinese-American, Korean-American and Vietnamese-American voters. All samples were provided by Voter Contact Services, a leading provider of registered voter samples to the survey research industry.

Interviewing was completed on either a voter’s landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, results from the ethnic sample augments were weighted down to bring them into alignment with their proper shares of the state’s registered voter population. In addition, the overall registered voter sample was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the characteristics of the registered voter population in California by region, age, gender and party registration.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size as well as the percentage distribution being examined. The maximum sampling error estimates for results based on the overall registered voter sample is +/- 2.8 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The maximum sampling error is based on results in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., percentages at or near 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (those closer to 10% or 90%) have a smaller margin of error. Findings from subgroups of the overall sample have somewhat larger sampling error levels. There are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of the survey sought to minimize these other sources of error.

*The Field Poll* was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field and has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The poll receives annual funding from media subscribers of *The Field Poll*, from several California foundations, and from the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the raw data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes.

### **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: (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) There should be no legal recognition of a gay or lesbian couple’s relationship?