

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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**GREATER ACCEPTANCE OF
HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONS AND
SUPPORT FOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY
POLICIES TOWARD GAYS AND
LESBIANS. BUT, CALIFORNIANS REMAIN
NARROWLY OPPOSED TO ALLOWING
SAME-SEX COUPLES TO MARRY.**

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by Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

Public attitudes toward homosexuality and gay and lesbian rights continue to evolve in California. A major new *Field Poll* survey about these topics updates and expands upon a number of previous statewide polls on the topic. The main findings include the following:

- 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 than they were when they were younger. 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.

These results come from a telephone survey of 1,000 California adults, including 680 registered voters, conducted by *The Field Poll* February 12-26, 2006 in English and Spanish.

Note to Editor: See attached California Opinion Index report for a more detailed accounting of the data referenced in this report.

Information About The Survey

Sample Details

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

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, a random sample of telephone numbers are created by adding random digits to the selected telephone exchange. This method gives each phone listing an equal chance of being elected 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, while findings from the registered voter sample have a sampling error of +/- 4.0 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, sampling, or sequencing or through undetected omission or errors in interviewing or data processing. Extensive efforts were made to minimize such potential errors.

Questions Asked

Do you think that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?

Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should be legal or not?

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?

I'd like to get your feelings about gays and lesbians using something we call a feeling thermometer from 0 to 100. The more favorable or warm you feel toward gays and lesbians, the higher the number you would give, while the less favorable or cold you feel, the lower the number you would give. Of course you could choose any number between 0 and 100 for your answer. On a scale of 0 to 100, how would you rate your feelings toward gays and lesbians?

(ASKED OF SUBSAMPLE A RESPONDENTS) 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?

(ASKED OF SUBSAMPLE B RESPONDENTS) 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?

Do you favor or oppose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would define marriage as between a man and a woman, thus barring marriage between gay and lesbian couples?

Do you approve or disapprove of allowing openly homosexual men and women to serve in the armed forces of the United States?

Do you approve or disapprove of a state law that would prohibit employers from discriminating against homosexual men and women in employment?

Do you approve or disapprove of a state law that would allow a gay or lesbian couple to adopt a child if the court found them fit to be adoptive parents in all other ways?

Some people say that gay rights leaders have been trying to push too fast. Others feel they are going too slowly. How about you? Do you think gay rights leaders are trying to push too fast, are going too slowly, or are they moving at about the right speed?

Do you personally know or work with anyone who is gay or lesbian? Are the gays or lesbians that you know members of your family? Close friends? Colleagues or acquaintances?