

University of Iowa News Release

April 2, 2009

Hawkeye Poll: Majority of Iowans support recognition of same-sex relationships

On the eve of an expected ruling by the Iowa Supreme Court on whether the Iowa Constitution requires legalizing gay marriage in the state, a new University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll shows that only about one-third of Iowans oppose both gay marriage and civil unions.

The random statewide telephone poll of 978 registered voters found that 36.7 percent of Iowans oppose recognition of gay marriage and civil unions. Overall, 26.2 percent of respondents support gay marriage and 27.9 percent oppose gay marriage but support civil unions. The poll was conducted March 23 through March 31. The margin of error is +/-3.1 percent for the full sample.

Nearly 60 percent of Iowans under age 30 support gay marriage, and three-fourths of Iowans under 30 favor some formal recognition of gay relationships. Across ages, support for gay marriage increases slightly if the Iowa Supreme Court sanctions it.

Iowans' opinions on the issue have remained consistent since an October Big 10 Battleground Poll. Results of that poll are available at [http://news-releases.uiowa.edu/2008/november/112508gay\\_marriage.html](http://news-releases.uiowa.edu/2008/november/112508gay_marriage.html).

"Iowans may not be quite ready to support gay marriage completely, but they are ready to recognize same-sex relationships in some legal form," said Hawkeye Poll Director David Redlawsk.

Redlawsk conducts the poll with Hawkeye Poll Co-director Caroline Tolbert; both are associate professors of political science in the UI College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

Young adults, Democrats and women more likely to support gay marriage

Gay marriage is supported by 57.8 percent of Iowans under age 30. Another 17.2 percent oppose gay marriage but support civil unions. Only 15.6 percent oppose legal recognition of same-sex relationships, while 9.4 percent reported no preference.

"The results parallel our October findings, when over half of young voters supported gay marriage," Redlawsk said. "Less than a third of Iowans over age 30 support gay marriage, but it seems to be a non-issue for younger people."

Support for gay marriage is substantially higher among Democrats at 44.4 percent compared to 27.9 percent for independents and only 7.7 percent for Republicans. Self-identified "liberal" respondents were the strongest supporters, with a majority (56.3 percent) favoring gay marriage. Only about 1 in 10 conservative Iowans support gay marriage. Women (27.9 percent) are slightly more supportive of gay marriage than men (23.8 percent).

Ruling in favor of gay marriage would increase support slightly

Because of the pending Iowa Supreme Court case (Varnum v. Brien), the poll asked Iowans what the state should do if the Supreme Court upholds a Constitutional right to marriage for same-sex couples.

The question provided three options: amend the Iowa constitution to ban same-sex relationships, amend it to ban same-sex marriage but allow civil unions, or accept the decision to allow gay marriage in Iowa. (The order of the question was randomized to ensure that the order did not drive results.)

Across the entire sample, 30.4 percent of Iowans favor accepting a ruling to allow gay marriage. One-fourth support the creation of civil unions as an acceptable alternative. One-third believe the state's constitution should be amended to ban any same-sex relationship, and 9 percent responded "don't know."

"This represents a very small increase in support for marriage following a court ruling, drawing mostly from respondents who generally prefer civil unions," Redlawsk said.

Larger shifts in support toward allowing gay marriage come from independents, ideological moderates, and moderate church attendees. Support for gay marriage would increase 6 to 9 percent for these groups if the court rules in favor of it. Support from liberals would also rise, from 56.3 percent to 65.9 percent.

"While overall support for gay marriage remains below 50 percent even if the court rules that the Iowa Constitution requires it, those in the political middle -- swing voters, we might say -- become more likely to support it," Redlawsk said. "Voters who are adamantly opposed to gay marriage said their position wouldn't change, regardless of the ruling."

#### Sample characteristics

Of the 978 poll participants, 30.6 percent were Republican, 30.7 percent Democrat and 33 percent independent. The remainder did not provide a party. About two-thirds of respondents were married. Women made up 57.9 percent of the sample, while men made up 42.1 percent. Reported results are unweighted.

#### About the University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll

The University of Iowa Hawkeye Poll is a teaching, research and service project of the Department of Political Science and is housed at the UI's Social Science Research Center. The university's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the Office of the Provost provided funding for the poll.

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