



TO: Interested Parties
 RE: The Rapid Increase in Support for Marriage Changes Political Equation: Emerging Majority Supports the Freedom to Marry
 DATE: Wednesday, July 27, 2011
 FR: Joel Benenson, Benenson Strategy Group, Jan van Lohuizen, Voter Consumer Research

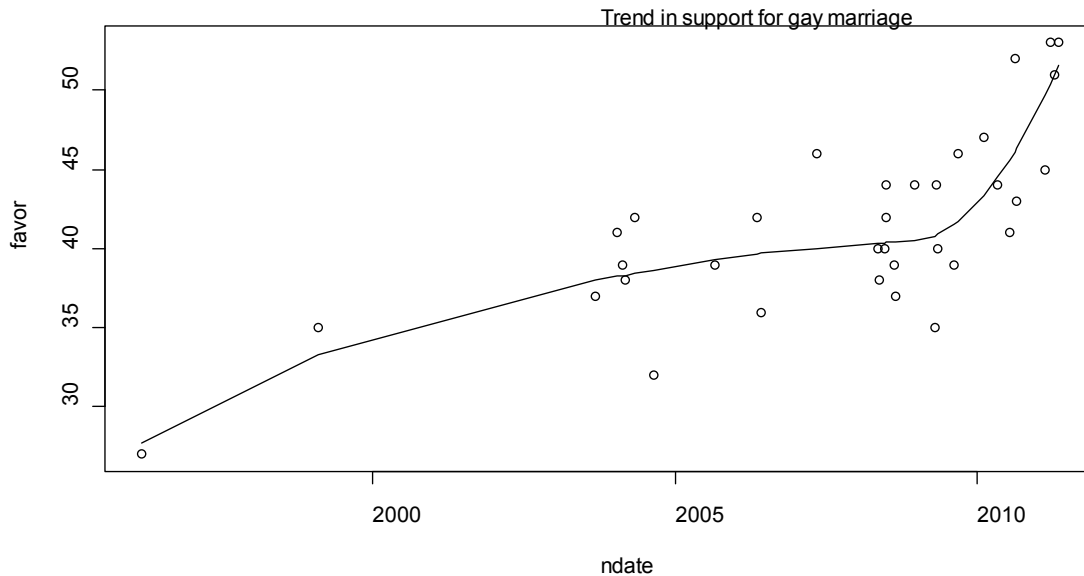
The recent passage of marriage for same-sex couples in New York comes at a crucial juncture in national public opinion on the issue: public support for the freedom to marry has increased, at an accelerating rate, with most polls showing that a majority of Americans now support full marriage rights for all Americans.¹

2011 Public Polling On Marriage

Poll	Date	Question Text	% Support	% Oppose
Gallup	May 5-8	<i>Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?</i>	53	45
PRRI	May 5-8	<i>Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally marry?</i>	51	43
CNN/ORC	April 9-10	<i>Do you think marriages between gay and lesbian couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?</i>	51	47
ABC/WaPo	March 10-13	<i>Do you think it should be legal or illegal for gay and lesbian couples to get married? Do you feel that way strongly or somewhat?</i>	53	44
Pew	Feb. 22-March 1	<i>Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?</i>	45	46

A secondary analysis of public polling on marriage shows support has increased over the years and that the rate of increase has accelerated dramatically in the last 2 years. A number of public polling organizations, including Gallup, Washington Post / ABC, AP, CNN and Pew have asked roughly similar questions about marriage equality over time. Although there is some measure of variation in the results, when combined they show a clear trend. The chart below reproduces these results and adds a smoothing trend-line, showing the averaged results.

¹ A Quinnipiac University survey showed 46 support / 48 oppose, but the wording focused on 'a law in your state': Quinnipiac / July 5-11, 2011: *Would you support or oppose a law in your state that would allow same-sex couples to get married?* This support is 8% higher than the result reported by Quinnipiac in '09. The same poll asked about the "Defense of Marriage Act," which treats married same-sex couples differently from the way other married couples are treated. *Under current federal law states can refuse to recognize same-sex marriages performed in other states. Do you think this law should remain in existence or not?* Yes: 44%; No: 49%



The trend-line indicates a fairly steady increase in support for marriage, which has accelerated since 2009. The average level of support of 5 surveys conducted in 2009 was 40.8%, while the average of 5 surveys conducted in to date 2011 is 50.6%. In the 15 years covered by the surveys in the chart, the rate of increase in support for the freedom to marry averaged slightly less than 1% a year (0.85%) between 1996 and 2009. The rate of increase in support accelerated to 5% per year in 2010 and 2011. The following table shows historic trends available for surveys released this year:

% Supporting Marriage, Over Time

Poll	'11	'10	'09	'08	'07	'06	'05	'04	'03	'01	'99	'96
Gallup	53	44	40	40	46	42	37	42	--	--	35	27
CNN/ORC	51	--	44	44	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
ABC/WaPo	53	47	49	--	--	36	39	38	37	--	--	--
Pew	45	43	39	39	36	35	36	32	30	35	--	27

(Note: when more than one poll was taken in the same year, most recent results for all adults are shown.)

Moreover, we expect overall support to continue to increase given that age differences show that younger adults are substantially more supportive of marriage than older adults; the ABC/WaPo poll shows that strong majorities of adults under 50 support legalizing marriage for gay and lesbian couples, for instance.

- 68% of 18-29 year olds (up 11 points since 2005)
- 65% of 30-39 year olds (up 23 points)
- 52% of 40-49 year olds (up 17 points)
- By contrast, 45% of 50-64 year olds and 33% of 65+ support legalizing gay marriage – though even those numbers are up 8 and 15 points, respectively.

Similarly, Gallup reports that 70% of 18-34 year olds and 53% of 35-54 year olds support legalizing same-sex marriage, compared to 39% of adults 55+.

As generational change occurs, we expect that the numbers will continue to shift in support.

Another noteworthy finding: the freedom to marry now has solid majority support from the critically important block of Independents.

% Supporting Same-Sex Marriage, By Party

Poll	Date	Dem	Ind	GOP
Gallup	May 5-8	69	59	28
PRRI	May 5-8	61	55	37
CNN/ORC	April 9-10	64	55	27
ABC/WaPo	March 10-13	64	58	31
Pew	Feb 22-March 1	57	51	23

Our analysis suggests opinion is shifting across the board, including among Republicans. Independents have been one of the catalysts of the recent surge, with double-digit increases in support in recent years. The following table shows shifts by party over various timeframes.

Change In % Supporting Marriage, By Party

Poll	Timeframe	Dem	Ind	GOP
Gallup	2010 to 2011	+13	+10	+0
ABC/WaPo	2006 to 2011	+17	+13	+8
Pew	1996 to 2011	+24	+18	+8

Ultimately, things are changing very quickly because support levels are up in all age and party categories. This allows one to conclude that many adults are rethinking their position, and it is taking place at all age levels and among all partisans, *including older Americans and Republicans*. Attitudes are changing at a slower pace among older adults and conservatives, but they're changing.

Our survey of historical data shows that intensity of opinion is shifting as well. Where previously opponents of marriage for same-sex couples held their views more strongly than marriage supporters, this is no longer the case. Support has not just grown it has intensified as well:

- ABC/WaPo reports that “strong” support for legalizing marriage for gay and lesbian couples increased by 12 points since 2004 while “strong” opposition dropped 13 points – leaving the two poles at relatively equal levels as of today.
- Similarly, Pew’s “strongly” favor numbers are up 12 points while “strongly” oppose is down 10 points since mid 2004.

To summarize, trends in public polls show the public’s views on marriage for gay and lesbian couples are changing and that the rate of change has accelerated in the last two years. Three specific points suggest that the political math on this question will change as well:

- First of all, it is clear that the public is in the process of rethinking its position on the issue, with all political groups – Democrats, Independents as well as Republicans – and all age groups more likely to support marriage for same-sex couples.
- Second, the intensity of opinion is changing at a rapid pace. As of today, supporters of marriage for gay couples feel as strongly about the issue as opponents do, something that was not the case in the recent past.
- Third, support strongly correlates with age. As Americans currently under the age of 40 make up a greater percentage of the electorate, their views will come to dominate.

Sources

Public polling originated from these most recent polls, plus their respective tracking data. Note all polls are national samples.

- Quinnipiac University; 2311 registered voters; July 5-11, 2011 (margin of error +/- 2.0%)
- Gallup; 1018 adults; May 5-8, 2011 (margin of error +/- 3.1%)
- Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI); 1007 adults; May 5-8, 2011 (margin of error +/- 3.1%)
- CNN/Opinion Research Corporation (CNN/ORC); 824 adults; April 9-10, 2011 (margin of error +/- 3.5%)
- ABC News/Washington Post (ABC/WaPo); 1005 adults; March 10-13, 2011 (margin of error +/- 3.1%)
- Pew Research Center (Pew); 1504 adults; February 22-March 1, 2011 (margin of error +/- 2.5%)

About the Authors

Dr. Jan van Lohuizen, President and one of the founding members of Voter Consumer Research, has directed public opinion research projects since 1977. His area of expertise is in public policy and elections research. He has conducted opinion research for hundreds of political campaigns. His principal emphasis today is on surveys for initiative and referendum campaigns and opinion research on public policy issues. Clients include prominent elected officials, major U.S. corporations, industry associations, and think tanks.

Joel Benenson is the President of the Benenson Strategy Group, which he co-founded in 2000. He has served as a strategic analyst and adviser to heads of state, senior members of Congress and other national political leaders, business leaders, and major advocacy and charitable institutions.

Mr. Benenson was the lead pollster and a senior strategist for President Barack Obama during the 2008 election, and he continues in that role today. He has also been a pollster and strategist for U.S. senators, governors and mayors from around the country. He played an integral role as a pollster for the DCCC in 2006, when the Democrats won back the majority in the House of Representatives.