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NEW JERSEY DIVIDED ON SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Attitudes unchanged since Civil Union law enacted

Today marks the second anniversary of New Jersey's same-sex Civil Union law going into effect. Two months ago, a state review commission issued a report calling for full marriage equality. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* found that public attitudes on same-sex marriage remain divided, more are in favor but significant numbers still oppose this change in the marriage laws. On the other hand, there is no broad-based support for amending the constitution to specifically prohibit same-sex marriage.

Currently, New Jersey residents who favor allowing same-sex marriage outnumber those who oppose it by a 48% to 43% margin. Opinion among registered voters is slightly more supportive of same-sex marriage – 50% of voters favor it to 40% who are opposed.

Opinion on this issue breaks down along party lines: most Democrats support same-sex marriage (58% favor to 35% oppose), most Republicans are against it (37% favor to 54% oppose), and independents are split (46% favor to 43% oppose).

New Jersey polls conducted by Eagleton-Rutgers both before and after the state's civil union law went into effect found similar levels of overall support among the general public – 50% to 44% in June 2006 and 48% to 45% in October 2007. However, all these polls mark a significant change from September 2003, when only 43% favored allowing same-sex marriage compared to 50% who opposed it. Prior polls have also shown strong (65%) support for the state's current civil union laws.

“New Jersey public opinion seems to favor the status quo as far as same-sex unions are concerned. Most don’t want to extend marriage to same-sex couples at this time, but they also shy away from constitutionally ruling it out,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

The poll found that half (50%) of New Jerseyans oppose amending the state’s constitution to define marriage as being between a man and a women. Another 41% favor a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage. Among registered voters, 52% oppose such an amendment while only 38% support it.

This marks a decrease in support for a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage from October 2007 when more residents supported (47%) than opposed (44%) it. It is a return to June 2006 levels when just 40% were in favor and 52% were opposed.

The poll also found some interesting cultural differences in the results. Most white, non-Hispanic New Jerseyans would allow same-sex marriage (51% favor to 39% oppose) and oppose a constitutional definition of marriage (50% oppose to 40% favor). On the other hand, African-Americans, Latinos and other racial groups tend to oppose same-sex marriage (49% oppose to 42% favor) but also oppose constitutionally banning it (52% oppose to 41% favor).

“One of the interesting things to come out of the California experience is that non-white Democrats with traditional cultural values provided the margin of victory for last November’s ballot measure banning same-sex marriage in that state,” said Murray. “In New Jersey, while black and Latino residents as a group do not favor same-sex marriage, they are hesitant to use the state constitution to deny it.”

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 402 New Jersey adults February 2-8, 2009. This sample has a margin of error of ± 4.9 percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published by the Gannett New Jersey newspaper group (Asbury Park Press, Courier-Post, Courier News, Daily Journal, Daily Record, and Home News Tribune).

DATA TABLES

The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

(* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)

1. Do you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally? [Do you favor/oppose it strongly or somewhat?]

	TOTAL	Reg. Voter	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE	
			Dem	Ind	Rep	White, non-Hispanic	Other race	18-49	50+
Strongly favor	25%	26%	29%	27%	16%	28%	20%	28%	22%
Somewhat favor	23%	24%	29%	19%	21%	23%	22%	22%	25%
Somewhat oppose	13%	13%	14%	9%	17%	9%	20%	14%	11%
Strongly oppose	30%	27%	21%	34%	37%	30%	29%	29%	31%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	10%	8%	12%	9%	10%	9%	8%	11%
Unwtd N	402	358	130	152	91	318	72	163	232

TREND:	Feb. 2009	Oct. 2007 *	June 2006 *	Sept. 2003 *
Favor	48%	48%	50%	43%
Oppose	43%	45%	44%	50%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	8%	6%	7%
Unwtd N	402	1002	803	802

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

2. Would you favor or oppose a state constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman and would bar same-sex couples from being legally married?

	TOTAL	Reg. Voter	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE	
			Dem	Ind	Rep	White, non-Hispanic	Other race	18-49	50+
Favor	41%	38%	33%	40%	51%	40%	41%	42%	37%
Oppose	50%	52%	59%	51%	37%	50%	52%	49%	53%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	10%	8%	9%	12%	10%	7%	9%	9%
Unwtd N	402	358	130	152	91	318	72	163	232

TREND:	Feb. 2009	Oct. 2007 *	June 2006 *
Favor	41%	47%	40%
Oppose	50%	44%	52%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	9%	8%
Unwtd N	402	1002	803

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll was conducted and analyzed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute research staff. The telephone interviews were collected by Braun Research on February 2-8, 2009 with a statewide random sample of 402 New Jersey adults. For results based on this voter sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 4.9 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

It is the Monmouth University Polling Institute's policy to conduct surveys of all adult New Jersey residents, including voters and non-voters, on issues which affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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