

Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

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(New York media: Dr. Edelman is available for in-person interviews in Manhattan. New Jersey media: Dr. Vercellotti is available for in-person interviews in New Brunswick.)

NEW JERSEYANS NOW SUPPORT GAY CIVIL UNIONS BY 2-1

Majority supports gay marriage and opposes constitutional amendment

By a ratio of two to one, New Jersey adults support legalizing civil unions for gays and lesbians, while a majority supports gay marriage and opposes a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would define marriage as solely being between a man and a woman, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

Sixty-five percent of those surveyed supported civil unions that would give gays and lesbians “many of the same rights and benefits as a married man and woman,” while 30 percent were opposed. The percentage supporting civil unions has risen 13 points since September 2003, the last time the poll posed the question in a statewide survey. The latest poll was conducted June 14-19, and has a sample of 803 adults and a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.5 percent.

New Jerseyans, by a margin of 50 percent to 44 percent, also support allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally. This is a reversal from the last time Eagleton asked the question, in September 2003, when 43 percent favored legalizing marriage for gays and lesbians, while 50 percent were opposed.

Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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The poll found that New Jersey adults also oppose, by a margin of 52 percent to 40 percent, amending the U. S. Constitution to define marriage as being between a man and a woman, in effect barring marriages for gay or lesbian couples. Public opinion in New Jersey is diametrically opposed to views measured nationally. A Gallup Poll conducted in early May found 50 percent of Americans favor the amendment, while 47 percent are opposed.

“This poll has very good news for gays and lesbians as they prepare for Gay Pride parades this weekend in New York, San Francisco and other major cities,” said Murray Edelman, distinguished scholar at the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling. “The large increase in support for gay civil unions may be a result of the loud nationwide debate about gay marriage because it has brought attention to the lack of legal rights for gay and lesbian partnerships.”

Supporters and opponents of the constitutional amendment also break along political lines in their views on the candidates running for the U.S. Senate from New Jersey this year. Of the registered voters who favor the amendment, 49 percent back the Republican nominee, state Sen. Tom Kean Jr., and 35 percent support the Democratic nominee, U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez. Among registered voters who oppose the amendment, Menendez leads Kean 49 percent to 33 percent. Menendez was among those voting against the amendment when it was defeated in the Senate recently. According to media reports, Kean contends that while marriage should be between a man and a woman, he opposes the amendment because the matter is best left to the states.

There was also an interesting methodological effect in the survey that indicated that the support for gay marriage was soft while the support for gay civil unions was much more solid. In order to test whether one proposal made the other proposal more or less acceptable, the poll randomly assigned half of the sample to hear the gay marriage question first, followed by the

civil union question. The other half heard the civil union question first, and the gay marriage question second.

Support for legalizing gay marriage was higher, with 53 percent in favor and 40 percent opposed, when that question came first. When the gay marriage question came after the question about civil unions, survey respondents were evenly divided, with 48 percent in favor of gay marriage, and 47 percent opposed. Responses to the question about civil unions, however, did not vary by the order of the questions.

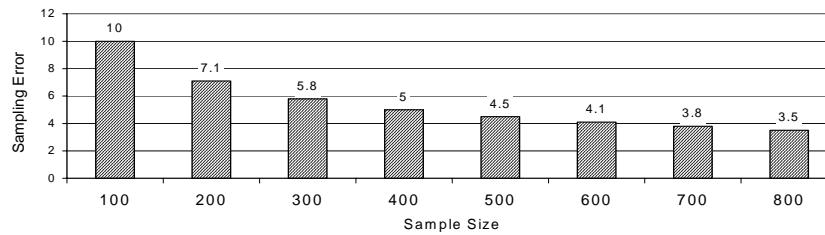
Edelman noted that this suggests “there is a general desire to give legal recognition to gay and lesbian relationships, but there needs to be more discussion of the specifics. The respondents who heard the civil union question first were reminded, or perhaps told for the first time, that there was a way other than marriage that could give gay and lesbian relationships legal recognition, and that may have made them less likely to support marriage.”

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 159-3) June 23, 2006

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted from June 14-19, 2006 with a scientifically selected random sample of 803 New Jersey adults. This sample yielded 699 adult residents registered to vote in New Jersey. Most of the figures in this release are based on the statewide sample of all adults. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Schulman, Ronca, & Bucuvalas, Inc (SRBI).

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for a sample of 803 adults is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adults were found to have a favorable opinion of a senatorial candidate, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 47.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) had all New Jersey adults been interviewed, rather than just a sample. The margin of sampling error for 699 registered voters is ± 3.7 percent. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. This release contains the verbatim wording of all questions featured in the release.

Sample Size and Sampling Error



Would you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally? (G1a)
 (Rotated with question G1b)

	All Adults			(n)
	Favor	Oppose	DK/RF	
June 2006 New Jersey Sample	50%	44%	6%	803
September 2003 New Jersey Sample	43%	50%	7%	802

Would you favor or oppose allowing gays and lesbians to form a civil union that would give them many of the same rights and benefits as a married man and woman? (G1b)
 (Rotated with question G1a.)

	All Adults			(n)
	Favor	Oppose	DK/RF	
June 2006 New Jersey Sample	65%	30%	5%	803
September 2003 New Jersey Sample	52%	40%	7%	802

Would you favor or oppose a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as being between a man and a woman, thus barring marriages between gay or lesbian couples? (G3)

	All Adults			(n)
	Favor	Oppose	DK/RF	
June 2006 New Jersey Sample	40%	52%	8%	803
May 2006 Gallup Poll National Sample	50%	47%	3% ¹	1,002

¹ Asked as “Unsure”

Registered Voters				
	Favor	Oppose	DK/RF	(n)
June 2006	39%	53%	8%	699

2006 Senate Horserace (Registered Voters)					
	Menendez	Kean, Jr.	Would Not Vote	DK/RF/ Undecided	(n)
Favor an amendment	35%	49%	0%	15%	279
Oppose an amendment	49%	33%	1%	16%	360