

Subject: New Report: 20 Years of Polling on Gay & Lesbian Issues from Pew

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**New Analysis and Report: 20 Years of Polling on Gay & Lesbian Issues from Pew
With Same-Sex Marriage Debate at Full Boil,
New Report Evaluate Shifts in Attitudes on Homosexuality**

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In the wake of the recent federal court ruling on same-sex marriage, a new report <<http://www.publicreligion.org/research/?id=354>> released today by Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) contains new analysis and assessment of more than two decades of polling on attitudes about lesbian and gay people and issues.

The PRRI report reviews the entire history of polling on attitudes about homosexuality and gay rights since 1987 by The Pew Research Center, one of the most important sources of nonpartisan public polling information on American cultural and political attitudes. The report examines shifting public attitudes on gay and lesbian issues, assesses question design, and offers suggestions for future best practices.

“One of the most prominent findings of the report is the long, general increase in support for the public acceptance of homosexuality and for rights of gay and lesbian Americans, although there are still significant divides on the issues of adoption and same-sex marriage,” said **Dr. Robert P. Jones, co-author of the study and CEO of Public Religion Research Institute.**

Trend Highlights:

The report includes an index of every question Pew has asked since 1987, which include questions about the nature of homosexuality, attitudes toward gay and lesbian people, and policy questions. Among the trends:

- Support for civil unions has steadily increased, moving up 12 points from 45% in 2003 to a solid majority 57% in 2009.
- Support for same-sex marriage has also increased, though less steadily. Support for same-sex marriage has increased from 30% in 2003 to 38% in January 2010.
- Support for adoption by gay and lesbian couples grew from 38% in 1999 to 46% in 2008,

with 48% opposed. Over the last thirteen years, the percentage of Americans who agreed that more gay and lesbian couples raising children was “a bad thing” for society fell by 14 points, from a solid majority (56%) in 1997 to only 42% in January 2010.

- Support for allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly in the military has risen from 52% in 1994 to 58% in 2005, and 59% in March 2009.
- In July 1994, 46% of the public said homosexuality is “a way of life” that should be accepted by society, while 49% said it should be discouraged. By 2007 the numbers had reversed: half said homosexuality should be accepted, and 4-in-10 said it should be discouraged.
- The percentage of regular church attenders who say their clergy talk about “laws regarding homosexuals” increased from 36% in 1996, to 41% in 2003, and to 52% in 2006. In 2003, nearly three-quarters of those who had heard their clergy speak about “issues related to homosexuality” reported that their clergy said homosexuality should be discouraged.
 - Between 2003 and 2006, the percentage of people who believe sexual orientation could not be changed rose from 42% to 49%.

PRRI’s assessment of Pew research on Gay and Lesbian issues:

- Strengths: As the report attests, the data from the Pew Research Center remains one of the most important sources of trend data on gay and lesbian and other issues. Moreover, for those with an interest in religion, Pew research reliably includes solid religious demographic measures.
- Limitations and areas for improvement:
 - o Beyond the question of same-sex marriage, Pew polling on gay and lesbian issues is more occasional than systematic.
 - o On a few questions, the wording could be more neutral and descriptive. For example, one of Pew’s longest running trend questions features the controversial declarative phrase “homosexuality is a way of life” on both sides of a forced-choice question about whether it should be accepted or discouraged by society. This wording embeds an assertion that is part of the debate into the question. Pew has asked this question 15 times but has not included it in a survey since 2007.
- An issue of interpretation on attitudes toward same-sex marriage and civil unions: Pew asks separate questions about support or opposition to same-sex marriage and civil unions. While this approach is perfectly legitimate, these results are open to misinterpretation when evaluating solid support for same-sex marriage. In 2008 Pew found 39% favored same-sex

marriage with 52% opposed in a question that did not include civil unions. But a three-part question by PRRI from the same period found 29% support of marriage, 28% support of civil unions, and 37% opposed to any legal recognition. The PRRI analysis shows that if one is interested in the levels of *solid* support for same-sex marriage, Pew's two-part question results should be interpreted with some caution, since binary question formulations may overestimate solid support for same-sex marriage by as much as 10 percentage points.

“This new PRRI report will provide a lens for journalists and the public to understand the implications of these long-term trends. We are indebted to Pew for this significant body of work over the last two decades,” said **Daniel Cox, co-author of the study and Director of Research at PRRI.**

The report was produced by Public Religion Research Institute with funding from the Arcus Foundation and the Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Public Religion Research Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent research and education organization specializing in work at the intersection of religion, values, and public life.

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