

Gay and Lesbian Rights Issues

May 1997

Findings in Brief

- The California public appears to be sharply divided in their attitude toward homosexual relations. Almost one half (45%) believe that homosexual relations are wrong (40% saying always wrong and 5% almost always wrong). About the same percentage (47%) have an opposite view (38% feel that homosexual relations are not at all wrong and another 9% feel they are sometimes wrong).
- Californians are also divided over the pace of the gay rights agenda, with 41% reporting that gay rights leaders are pushing too fast, while 39% perceive the pace as about right.
- A majority (56%) of the California public disapproves of allowing two people of the same sex to marry and have regular marriage laws apply to them. The proportion who approves of same-sex marriages (38%) has increased over the past 20 years.
- Nearly half (49%) of Californians would favor a state law barring recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states.
- Legal recognition of family rights for domestic partners is favored by a large majority (67%) of Californians.
- A smaller majority (59%) also favors the extension of financial aid status to domestic partners.
- Nearly seven in ten (69%) Californians now favor granting child custody rights to a gay or lesbian parent if the courts find him or her fit to care for the child in all other ways. This marks a significant shift in public opinion over the last two decades.
- Most California adults (67%) report having no personal identification with the gay and lesbian community.
- One in five (19%) Californians say that someone close to them has either tested positive for HIV or is infected with the AIDS virus.
- Nearly one in seven (14%) report knowing someone close to them who has died from complications associated with AIDS.
- Six in ten (60%) Californians approve of needle exchange programs designed to prevent the spread of AIDS and the HIV virus.

Public sharply divided over homosexual relations

Californians are sharply divided on the issue of whether sexual relations between two adults of the same sex is wrong or not. Almost one half (45%) say such relations are wrong (40% always and 5% almost always). An equally large segment (47%) have an opposite view (38% not at all wrong and 9% only sometimes wrong). Another 8% have no opinion.

Table 1
Attitudes toward homosexual relations

	Always/almost always wrong	Sometimes/Not at all wrong	No opinion
Statewide	45%	47	8
Male	47%	45	8
Female	43%	48	9
18-29	41%	55	4
30-39	46%	42	12
40-49	48%	45	7
50-59	47%	44	9
60+	45%	44	11
Protestant	53%	39	8
Catholic	53%	36	11
Other	33%	64	3
No preference	17%	76	7
H.S. or less	55%	37	8
Some college	40%	50	10
College degree	32%	60	8
Post graduate	24%	68	8
Democrat	41%	52	7
Republican	54%	40	6
Other	35%	46	19
White	36%	57	7
Latino	64%	28	8
Black/Afr. Amer.	58%	25	17
Asian/other	45%	46	9
Identify with Gays/Lesbians*			
A lot	10%	85	5
Some	24%	72	4
Not at all	57%	32	11

** (It is difficult in general public opinion surveys such as this one to obtain accurate measures as to whether a respondent is heterosexual, gay, lesbian or bisexual. Typically, a straightforward question about the respondent's sexual orientation produces statistics which appear to understate the true incidence of homosexuals within the population.)*

A surrogate measure often used in surveys is to ask respondents to describe how much they personally identify with the gay or lesbian community — a lot, some or not at all. That portion which attests to a high degree of identification usually includes a large proportion of homosexuals.)

Sub-group differences

Segments of the population registering significantly higher than the average belief that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are wrong include Latinos (64%), Blacks (58%), Protestants and Catholics (53% each), those with a high school education or less (55%), and those who identify as Republicans (54%).

Those registering significantly lower than the average belief that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex are wrong include those with no religious preference (17%), those with post-graduate college education (24%), college graduates (32%), white non-Hispanics (36%), those not identified as Democrats or Republicans (35%), and people who identify a lot with gays/lesbians (10%).

Division over pace of gay rights agenda

When Californians are asked about the pace at which gay rights leaders are moving their agenda, near equal proportions say they are either pushing too fast (41%) or moving at about the right speed (39%). Another 6% feel they are going too slow, and 14% have no opinion.

Larger proportions of people who identify with the Republican Party (61%), men (47%), people 60 or older (49%), Protestants (49%), and those with no personal identification with the gay/lesbian community (49%) feel gay rights leaders are pushing to fast.

Table 2
Pace of gay rights agenda

	Pushing too fast	About right	Too slow	No opinion
Statewide	41%	39	6	14
Male	47%	36	5	12
Female	34%	42	7	17
18-29	31%	50	7	12
30-39	43%	31	5	21
40-49	40%	42	3	15
50-59	44%	31	9	16
60+	49%	35	5	11
Protestant	49%	36	4	11
Catholic	40%	33	6	21
Other	35%	52	5	8
No preference	25%	53	10	12
H.S. or less	42%	35	6	17
Some college	39%	40	7	14
College degree	38%	45	2	15
Post graduate	38%	48	4	10
Democrat	29%	48	8	15
Republican	61%	27	3	9
Other	26%	37	6	31
White	40%	43	5	12
Latino	44%	28	9	19
Black/Afr. Amer.	45%	26	7	22
Asian/other	29%	48	2	21
Identify with Gays/Lesbians				
A lot	18%	59	17	6
Some	26%	54	11	9
Not at all	49%	30	2	19

Majority opposed to same-sex marriages.

Currently, a majority of Californians (56%) disapproves and 38% approve of allowing homosexuals to marry members of their own sex and have regular marriage laws apply to them, while 6% have no opinion.

High disapproval levels of same sex marriages exist among men (61%), those 60 and older (69%), Protestants (65%), those who have a high school or less education (63%), Republicans (72%), Blacks (66%), Latinos (64%) and those who have no identification with the gay and lesbian community (65%).

Table 3
Allow same-sex marriages

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Statewide	38%	56	6
Male	35%	61	4
Female	40%	51	9
18-29	47%	48	5
30-39	39%	53	8
40-49	40%	55	5
50-59	35%	59	6
60+	22%	69	9
Protestant	29%	65	6
Catholic	29%	61	10
Other	50%	44	6
No preference	66%	31	3
H.S. or less	28%	63	9
Some college	45%	51	4
College degree	47%	45	8
Post graduate	51%	46	3
Democrat	47%	47	6
Republican	24%	72	4
Other	43%	44	13
White	43%	51	6
Latino	26%	64	10
Black/African American	28%	66	6
Asian/other	37%	56	7
Identify with Gays/Lesbians			
A lot	67%	30	3
Some	58%	38	4
Not at all	27%	65	8

Approval has increased over time

A review of three statewide surveys taken during the past twenty years show an increase (from 28% to 38%) in the proportion of Californians approving of same sex marriages.

Table 4
Trend of approval/disapproval of same sex marriages

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
1997	38%	56	6
1985	30%	62	8
1977	28%	59	13

Public almost evenly divided over barring recognition of same sex marriages performed in other states

With respect to whether Californians favor or oppose legislation to bar recognition of same sex marriages performed in other states, opinion is sharply divided. About one-half (49%) favor such legislation, and 43% are opposed to a law that would not allow the state to recognize same sex marriages performed in other states.

Majorities of people ages 50 or older (56% to 57%), those who identify with Republicans (62%), Protestants and Catholics (55% to 57%) and Latinos (59%) approve of barring recognition of same sex marriages performed out of state. Opposition to such legislation is highest among people under the age of 30 (51%), those with at least a college degree (52% to 56%), adults with no religious preference (69%) or a preference other than Protestant or Catholic (57%), and those who identify a lot (70%) or some (59%) with the gay/lesbian community.

Table 5
Barring recognition of same-sex marriages performed in other states

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Statewide	49%	43	8
Male	50%	43	7
Female	48%	44	8
18-29	39%	51	10
30-39	51%	44	5
40-49	48%	46	6
50-59	56%	38	6
60+	57%	33	10
Protestant	57%	36	7
Catholic	55%	35	10
Other	32%	57	11
No preference	27%	69	4
H.S. or less	56%	35	9
Some college	44%	49	7
College degree	41%	52	7
Post graduate	40%	56	4
Democrat	41%	52	7
Republican	62%	31	7
Other	41%	44	15
White	46%	46	8
Latino	59%	32	9
Black/African American	28%	65	7
Asian/other	51%	43	6
Identify with Gays/Lesbians			
A lot	19%	70	11
Some	35%	59	6
Not at all	58%	34	8

Legal recognition of family rights supported for domestic partners

While a majority of Californians opposes same sex marriages, most take a much different view on the issue of granting family rights to domestic partners. Two-thirds (67%) of the California public favor granting domestic partners legal recognition of family rights such as hospital visitation, medical power of attorney and conservatorship. This view cuts across all major population sub-groups identified in this survey.

Table 6
Legal recognition of family rights to domestic partners

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Statewide	67%	24	9
Male	67%	25	8
Female	68%	22	10
18-29	78%	18	4
30-39	76%	14	10
40-49	59%	37	4
50-59	61%	32	7
60+	53%	28	19
Protestant	65%	28	7
Catholic	62%	23	15
Other	80%	14	6
No preference	81%	16	3
H.S. or less	65%	23	12
Some college	70%	23	7
College degree	70%	27	3
Post graduate	70%	25	5
Democrat	72%	19	9
Republican	64%	29	7
Other	61%	24	15
White	69%	24	7
Latino	65%	20	15
Black/African American	65%	25	10
Asian/other	63%	32	5
Identify with Gays/Lesbians			
A lot	90%	6	4
Some	77%	16	7
Not at all	62%	28	10

Californians more divided but still favorable toward domestic partners receiving financial dependence status

By a 59% to 35% margin Californians favor extending domestic partners benefits such as family leave, pensions, health insurance and death benefits. No single sub-group identified in the survey has a majority in opposition to this question. However, people ages 60 and older and Republicans appear evenly divided.

Table 7**Granting financial dependence status to domestic partners**

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Statewide	59%	35	6
Male	53%	41	6
Female	64%	30	6
18-29	68%	29	3
30-39	65%	25	10
40-49	50%	45	5
50-59	55%	40	5
60+	46%	47	7
Protestant	50%	46	4
Catholic	65%	28	7
Other	67%	28	5
No preference	67%	24	9
H.S. or less	63%	31	6
Some college	55%	38	7
College degree	51%	45	4
Post graduate	58%	39	3
Democrat	68%	27	5
Republican	47%	48	5
Other	58%	29	13
White	56%	40	4
Latino	62%	27	11
Black/African American	62%	33	5
Asian/other	61%	33	6
Identify with Gays/Lesbians			
A lot	81%	14	5
Some	71%	24	5
Not at all	52%	42	6

Most Californians approve of granting child custody rights to a gay or lesbian parent

About seven in ten (69%) Californians favor granting child custody rights to a homosexual mother or father in a divorce if the parent is deemed fit to care for the child in all other ways. About a quarter (26%) do not approve of such a custody law, and 5% are undecided.

Majorities of all sub-groups approve of granting custody to a gay or lesbian parent if they are deemed fit in all other ways. Approval of such a law is substantially higher among those identified with the Democratic Party (75%), women (72%), people who are neither Protestant or Catholic (83% to 88%), and those with at least some identification with the gay/lesbian community (87%).

Opposition is higher among Californians who are Catholic (35%), have a high school education or less (33%), or have no identification with the gay/lesbian community (34%).

Table 8**Child custody rights for homosexuals**

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Statewide	69%	26	5
Male	67%	28	5
Female	72%	23	5
18-29	70%	29	1
30-39	72%	23	5
40-49	71%	23	6
50-59	71%	24	5
60+	63%	28	9
Protestant	68%	27	5
Catholic	59%	35	6
Other	88%	11	1
No preference	83%	13	4
H.S. or less	61%	33	6
Some college	72%	23	5
College degree	86%	11	3
Post graduate	85%	13	2
Democrat	75%	21	4
Republican	66%	28	6
Other	57%	37	6
White	77%	19	4
Latino	52%	41	7
Black/African American	60%	29	11
Asian/other	77%	20	3
Identify with Gays/Lesbian			
A lot	87%	9	4
Some	87%	8	5
Not at all	61%	34	5

Approval of granting child custody rights to homosexuals has increased over past two decades

There has been an increase in the proportion who approve of granting child custody rights to homosexual parents over the past 20 years. When the question was first posed in 1977, only half of the public (50%) approved, while 37% disapproved. Today the proportion in favor has increased to 69%, while the percentage who disapprove has declined to 26%.

Table 9**Child custody rights for homosexuals**

	Approve	Disapprove	Undecided
1997	69%	26	5
1985	63%	29	8
1977	50%	37	13

* Nov. 1985 and June 1977 Field Institute surveys asked respondents about custody rights for gay fathers and lesbian mothers in two separate questions. Percentages shown are the combined percentages for those years.

Most would allow openly gays/lesbians in the military

A majority (58%) of Californians approves of allowing openly gay people to serve in the military. Women are much more approving (65%) than men (51%) on this issue. Large majorities of those with no religious preference (77%) or a preference other than Protestant or Catholic (73%), people with at least some college education (65% to 69%), whites (68%), and those with a lot (86%) or some (81%) identification with the gay/lesbian community also approve.

Groups in which less than a majority approves of allowing openly homosexual people to serve include Latinos (37%), Blacks (43%), Catholics (44%), those with a high school education or less (49%) and those with no personal identification with the gay/lesbian community (46%).

Table 10

Allowing an openly gay or lesbian to serve in the military

	Approve	Disapprove	No opinion
Statewide	58%	34	8
Male	51%	43	6
Female	65%	25	10
18-29	61%	31	8
30-39	56%	35	9
40-49	61%	35	4
50-59	54%	32	14
60+	56%	37	7
Protestant	58%	38	4
Catholic	44%	39	17
Other	73%	22	5
No preference	77%	19	4
H.S. or less	49%	39	12
Some college	66%	30	4
College degree	65%	29	6
Post graduate	69%	29	2
Democrat	63%	28	9
Republican	52%	43	5
Other	55%	30	15
White	68%	27	5
Latino	37%	47	16
Black/African American	43%	50	7
Asian/other	55%	32	13
Identify with Gays/Lesbian			
A lot	86%	14	*
Some	81%	16	3
Not at all	46%	43	11

* Less than 1/2 of 1%

Voting for openly gay/lesbian political candidate

Most (64%) California adults say it would make no difference in their voting behavior if a candidate running for public office was open about his/her homosexuality.

About a third (31%) say they would be less likely and just 3% would be more likely to vote for an openly homosexual candidate.

No single sub-group identified in this survey would be significantly more likely to vote for a candidate who was openly homosexual. However, larger proportions of Californians who identify with Republicans (42%), people 60 years and older (42%) and those who have no personal identification with gay/lesbian community (40%) would be less likely to vote for an openly homosexual candidate.

Table 11

Likelihood of voting for an openly gay/lesbian candidate

	Less likely	No difference	More likely	No opinion
Statewide	31%	64	3	2
Male	36%	60	3	1
Female	26%	68	2	4
18-29	25%	69	4	2
30-39	25%	67	3	5
40-49	26%	71	1	2
50-59	41%	58	1	*
60+	42%	53	2	3
Protestant	33%	64	1	2
Catholic	33%	58	5	4
Other	25%	72	3	*
No preference	22%	75	2	1
H.S. or less	35%	58	3	4
Some college	27%	69	2	2
College degree	25%	72	3	*
Post graduate	26%	71	2	1
Democrat	25%	70	2	3
Republican	42%	53	3	2
Other	19%	74	2	5
White	30%	68	1	1
Latino	34%	54	6	6
Black/Afr. Amer.	26%	74	*	*
Asian/other	31%	67	1	1
Identify with Gays/Lesbians				
A lot	4%	89	3	4
Some	14%	84	2	*
Not at all	40%	54	3	3

* Less than 1/2 of 1%

Identification with gay/lesbian community

Six percent of the statewide population report personally identifying “a lot” with the gay or lesbian community, and about one in four (27%) say they have “some” personal identification. Most (67%) Californians report having no personal identification with the gay/lesbian community.

Population sub-groups reporting to have high levels of no personal identification at all with the gay/lesbian community are people in the older age brackets (74% to 76%), Catholics (73%), those with high school education or less (70%), Republicans (72%), Blacks (77%), Latinos (75%) and Asians (74%).

Larger proportions of Californians who report at least some personal identification with the gay/lesbian community include people under 30 (48%), those who are not Protestant or Catholic (36% to 40%), Democrats (39%) and whites (39%).

Table 12

Personal identification with the gay/lesbian community

	A lot	Some	Not at all
Statewide	6%	27	67
Male	5%	26	69
Female	7%	27	66
18-29	10%	38	52
30-39	7%	25	68
40-49	8%	16	76
50-59	4%	22	74
60+	2%	24	74
Protestant	6%	30	64
Catholic	5%	22	73
Other	16%	20	64
No preference	6%	34	60
H.S. or less	5%	25	70
Some college	8%	29	63
College degree	4%	30	66
Post graduate	9%	28	63
Democrat	7%	32	61
Republican	6%	22	72
Other	4%	21	75
White	7%	32	61
Latino	6%	19	75
Black/African Amer.	4%	19	77
Asian/other	7%	19	74

Knowledge of someone close infected with HIV or AIDS crosses social and demographic lines

About one in five (19%) Californians report knowing someone close to them who has tested positive for HIV or has the AIDS virus.

Those who said they knew someone close to them with AIDS or HIV were asked how many people they knew who had this condition. Seven percent report one person, and 10% know two or more. Among those who identify with the gay/lesbian community one-half (49%) report knowing someone who is HIV positive or has AIDS, with most knowing two or more who have this condition. Other population sub-groups with a higher incidence of knowing someone with AIDS or HIV positive include people age 30 to 49 (25% to 30%), those who are not Protestant or Catholic (26% to 30%), and adults with a post graduate education (26%).

Table 13

Know someone close who is HIV positive or has AIDS

	Know someone	(one)	(two+)	Do not know someone
Statewide	19%	7	12	81
Male	17%	6	11	83
Female	20%	7	13	80
18-29	16%	4	12	84
30-39	25%	10	15	75
40-49	30%	12	18	70
50-59	15%	4	11	85
60+	10%	5	5	90
Protestant	19%	9	10	81
Catholic	10%	4	6	90
Other	26%	6	20	74
No preference	30%	8	22	70
H.S. or less	15%	5	10	85
Some college	22%	9	13	78
College degree	22%	7	15	78
Post graduate	26%	7	19	74
Democrat	22%	7	15	78
Republican	15%	7	8	85
Other	18%	6	12	82
White	22%	8	14	78
Latino	12%	4	8	88
Black/Afr. Amer.	21%	12	9	79
Asian/other	13%	2	11	87
Identify with Gays/Lesbians				
A lot	49%	9	40	51
Some	27%	7	20	73
Not at all	12%	5	7	88

Death from AIDS complications touches one in seven Californians

Nearly one in seven (14%) Californians say that someone close to them has died from complications associated with AIDS.

Among those who identify a lot with the gay/lesbian community 41% report knowing someone who died from AIDS.

Table 14

Know someone close who has died of complications from AIDS

	Know someone		Do not know someone
	(one)	(two+)	
Statewide	14%	7	86
Male	12%	6	88
Female	15%	8	85
18-29	10%	6	90
30-39	17%	10	83
40-49	22%	9	78
50-59	12%	5	88
60+	8%	5	92
Protestant	13%	7	87
Catholic	9%	4	91
Other	23%	13	77
No preference	22%	12	78
H.S. or less	10%	5	90
Some college	16%	7	84
College degree	16%	8	84
Post graduate	24%	13	76
Democrat	17%	8	83
Republican	10%	6	90
Other	11%	6	89
White	16%	9	84
Latino	10%	5	90
Black/Afr. Amer.	17%	6	83
Asian/other	10%	3	90
Identify with Gays/Lesbians			
A lot	41%	13	59
Some	20%	10	80
Not at all	9%	6	91

Needle exchange programs favored

Six in ten adults (60%) favor needle exchange programs designed to prevent the spread of AIDS and the HIV virus.

Most sub-groups favor the programs, with the strongest support coming from Californians under the age of 30 (66%), those with post graduate education (79%), Democrats (65%), whites (65%) and people with at least some identification with the gay/lesbian community (66% to 69%). Opinion is

more divided among those who identify with the GOP (52% to 43%), Latinos (51% to 46%), Blacks (48% to 48%) people 60 or older (47% to 43%) and Catholics (51% to 45%).

Table 15

Approval/disapproval of needle exchange programs

	Favor	Oppose	No opinion
Statewide	60%	36	4
Male	59%	38	3
Female	60%	33	7
18-29	66%	33	1
30-39	62%	33	5
40-49	61%	33	6
50-59	58%	38	4
60+	47%	43	10
Protestant	55%	38	7
Catholic	51%	45	4
Other	73%	25	2
No preference	83%	15	2
H.S. or less	52%	41	7
Some college	64%	32	4
College degree	61%	35	4
Post graduate	79%	21	*
Democrat	65%	31	4
Republican	52%	43	5
Other	61%	33	6
White	65%	29	6
Latino	51%	46	3
Black/African American	48%	48	4
Asian/other	53%	46	1
Identify with Gays/Lesbians			
A lot	66%	32	2
Some	69%	28	3
Not at all	55%	39	6

* Less than 1/2 of 1%.

About The Survey

The findings in this report are based on a survey conducted February 11-17, 1997 among a representative statewide sample of 1,045 adult Californians. The survey was completed by telephone in either English or Spanish using random digit dialing methods. The sample was selected according to probability principles and reflects an accurate and reliable representation of the California adult public. Percentages based on the total sample have a sampling error of $\pm 3.3\%$ at the 95% confidence level, while those based on sub-groups have a larger sampling tolerance. Professor Nadine Koch of CSU – Los Angeles assisted in the development of the survey questions as part of The Field Institute's Academic Fellowship Program.

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A variety of individuals and organizations pay an annual fee of \$250 to receive all copies of *The Field Poll* and *California Opinion Index* reports. This fee covers mailing and postage allowing for a portion of the proceeds to go into the Institute's operating fund.

The Field Poll

The Field Poll was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field and has operated continuously since that time. It is a unique, state-wide public opinion news feature service covering a wide range of political and social topics. Surveys are made at frequent intervals throughout the year. Continuing measures are made of voter support for leading political figures vying for major state and federal elected offices, job ratings of important political figures, and reactions to significant political events. Voter awareness, understanding and predispositions for major campaign issues and controversial ballot propositions are also tracked over time.

The Field Poll issues from forty to sixty reports per year to its media subscribers. Each *Field Poll* release consists of three to ten double-spaced 8 1/2" x 11" pages of text and statistical data, plus a background sheet showing the details about the interviewing method, sample size, question wording, and other special technical data.

The California Opinion Index

The California Opinion Index regularly charts public attitudes on such issues as taxes and government spending, economic well-being, crime, immigration, education and the schools, political demography, the initiative process and other important state issues.

Each *California Opinion Index* report is printed in a four to eight page newsletter format.

Officers

Officers of The Field Institute are Mervin Field and Mark DiCamillo.