

Eagleton poll shows rise in NJ support for gay marriage

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The latest Eagleton Poll shows New Jersey voters are marginally more supportive of legalizing gay marriage compared to past years, with more than half of those polled in support of gay marriage.

Polled voters showed their stance on gay marriage with 52 percent in support, 32 percent in opposition and 16 percent unsure, said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and a professor of political science. But given the choice of civil union or gay marriage, 58 percent of those polled prefer the alternative.

"Polling doesn't tend to tell why attitudes have changed over time, but New Jersey is a revealing ripple state — despite its Republican government, attitudes have been relatively moderate," Redlawsk said.

The percentage of voters who support gay marriage has slightly risen, but the number of voters who opposed gay marriage has dropped significantly, he said. At the same time those who either refused to answer or are unsure increased.

There seemed to be consistency among young adult and older voters with 77 percent of voters under 30 in favor, while 35 percent of seniors aged 65 and older supported gay marriage, he said.

"Younger people, in general, grow up in a world that tends to be more accepting of gay marriage and racial issues, yet people 65 and older clearly oppose gay marriage more than the younger generation does," Redlawsk said.

A trend seen among all age groups is the support of same-sex civil unions as an alternative to gay marriage with 57 percent of 18 to 29 years-olds, 56 percent of 30 to 49 year-olds, 61 percent of 50 to 64 year-olds and 52 percent of those 65 and over, he said.

"Civil union is the halfway point to same-sex marriages," he said. "To many, marriage has a religious meaning behind it, so civil union fits the bill just fine as an alternative to gay marriages."

Redlawsk said the type of religion someone practiced was not a large deciding factor.

Instead, how often a person attended religious service served as a stronger indicator than affiliation.

"We asked what religion they practice and how often they attend service and focused on how often they attend service," he said.

"Those who attended service were least willing to support gay marriage."

Knowing of someone who is gay or lesbian increases support for gay marriage, but those with a gay family member were less supportive of civil unions than they were of same-sex marriages, Redlawsk said.

"About two-thirds of people know of someone who is gay or lesbian while one-third of people do not. That is up from previous years, but few feel that same-sex marriage is a top issue for the state," he said.

Redlawsk said people do not see gay marriage as an important issue but those who have a gay or lesbian friend are a little more willing.

"People are fine with civil unions, which are legal in New Jersey — not so much gay marriages, but there seems to be little

likelihood of immediate change in New Jersey," he said.

Norman Rogers, 47, of Tuckerton, N.J., said that he is glad there is a larger percent of people supporting same-sex marriage.

"My brother is homosexual, and he and his partner went out of state in order to get married," he said. "The fact that they couldn't do that in New Jersey is sad."

Rogers said despite his Roman Catholic background's leanings toward being unsupportive of gay males, his brother holds a position of leadership in the church.

"I support my brother wholeheartedly and I wish he could some day walk down the aisle in the church. But as for now he is content lecturing and he receives a lot of support in the church community," he said.

Josephine Gonzalez, 32, of New Brunswick said both her parents frown upon civil unions and same-sex marriages. But she freely supports it.

"It has a lot to due with age. My grandfather or even my father would be very disappointed if either my sister or I were gay," she said. "Meanwhile, I teach my kids acceptance by all standards."

Neha Desai, a School of Engineering first-year student, said she supports civil unions but thinks marriage is a significant religious event.

"Marriage holds a religious sanctity between men and women, and civil unions are still important but not religious," she said.

The Eagleton Institute poll sampled 615 registered voters from both landline and cell phone households from August 9 until August 15 and collected a sample with a margin of error of +/- 3.9 percent for the full sample.