Most Still Oppose Gay Marriage, but Support for Civil Unions Continues to Rise

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By Darren Krueler

The 39% of Americans who favor allowing gay couples to marry legally is the same percentage as in an October 2007 survey, according to a Pew Research Center for the People & the Press survey. Overall support for gay marriage has been relatively stable over the past few years. In August 2009, 36% were in favor of gay marriage, while 60% opposed it.

Most Americans say it is morally wrong for gay people to have sexual relations with one another (70%). Among those who have no moral qualms about homosexuality, about one-fourth (24%) favor gay marriage. In the August 2009 survey, 11% of those who have no qualms about homosexual behavior favored gay marriage.

At the same time, there has been a slight increase in support for civil unions, from 57% in August 2009 to 61% in the current survey. There is a strong correlation between support for civil unions and opposition to gay marriage. Among those who oppose gay marriage, nearly all favor civil unions (94%). Overall support for civil unions has grown over time, from 41% in August 2009 to 45% in the current survey.

Compared with views on same-sex marriage, support for civil unions is much stronger among blacks and Hispanics. While 43% of whites favor civil unions, 57% of blacks and 59% of Hispanics do. Among other religious groups, 76% of white evangelical Protestants favor civil unions, while 65% of blacks favor them.

Support for civil unions is also higher among those under age 30 than among older age groups. Among those under age 30, 71% favor civil unions, compared with 54% of those ages 50 to 64 and just over half those age 65 and older (54%).

Attitudes on civil unions are also related to education. About four-in-ten (38%) of those with a college degree favor civil unions, while 49% of those with some college and 57% of those with a high school degree favor them. Overall, support for civil unions has grown over time, from 41% in August 2009 to 45%.

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