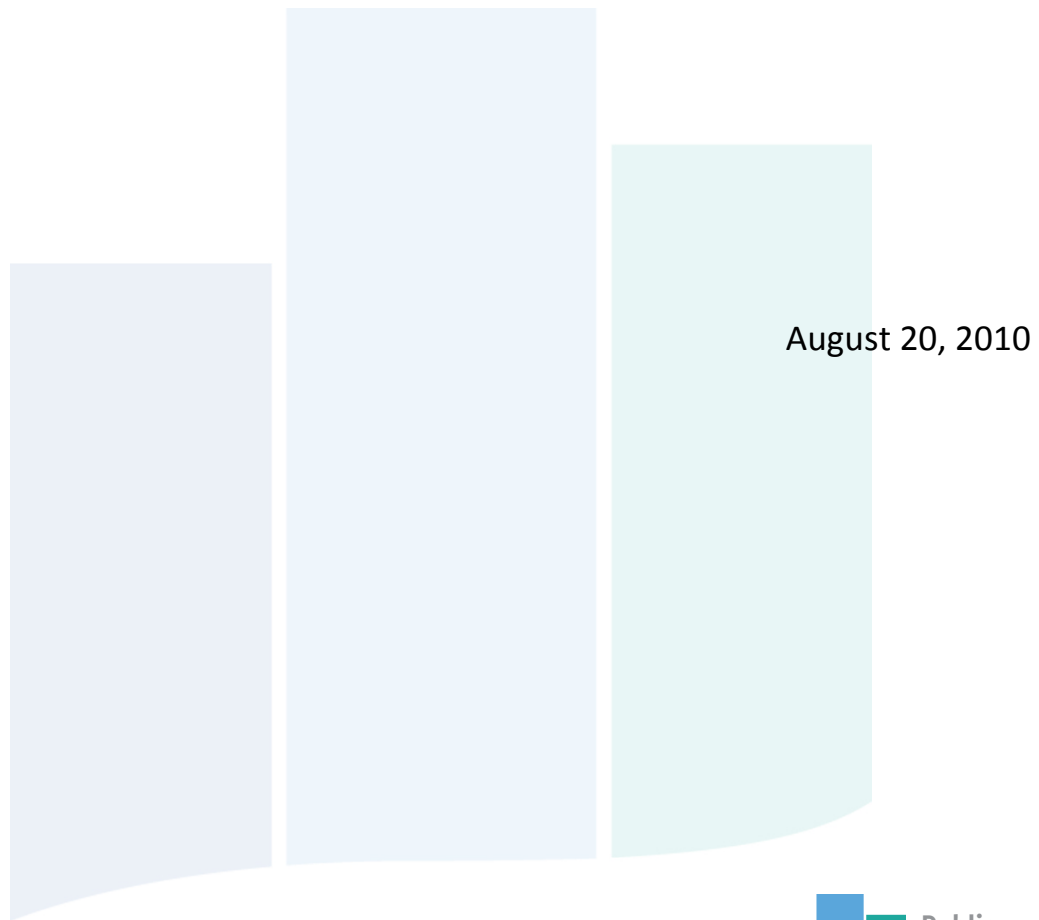


Two Decades of Polling on Gay & Lesbian Issues at Pew: An Overview and Assessment

Analysis by Robert P. Jones, Ph.D. and Daniel Cox



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Table of Contents

Introduction: Polling on Gay & Lesbian Issues at Pew	3
Frequency of Gay and Lesbian Questions	3
The October 2003 Homosexuality Study	4
Findings	5
Gay and Lesbian Policy Issues	5
Same-sex Marriage and Civil Unions.....	6
Gay and Lesbian People Serving in the Military.....	8
Views About Homosexuality and Gay Rights Activists	8
Homosexual Behavior.....	9
Nature of Homosexuality	9
Views of the Gay Rights Movement and Activists.....	9
Homosexuality and Institutions	10
The Political Parties.....	10
The Supreme Court.....	10
Public Schools	11
Religious Institutions and Clergy.....	11
Families.....	11
Culture and Society	12
Critical Assessment	13
Limitations	13
Trends and Question Wording	13
Other Issues in Question Wording	14
Measuring Support for Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Unions	14
Appendix A. About the Pew Research Center	16
Appendix B: Comprehensive Question Index	17
About Public Religion Research Institute	21

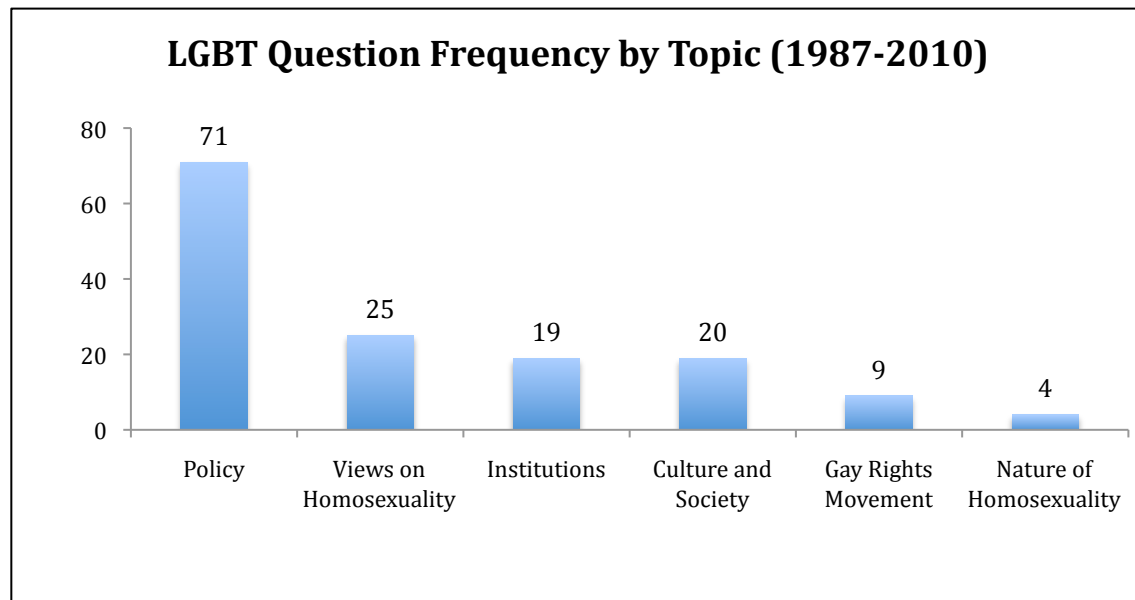
Introduction: Polling on Gay & Lesbian Issues at Pew

This 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.

Frequency of Gay and Lesbian Questions

Relative to the volume of polling Pew conducts, it does not regularly include questions on gay and lesbian issues in its monthly political surveys.¹ In all, Pew has included a total of one hundred forty-eight questions on subjects related to gay and lesbian issues since 1987, representing under 3% of the total questions asked during that time period (See Appendix B for complete question index). The most frequently asked questions, appearing seventy-one times, focus on public policy. In the policy realm, same-sex marriage is the dominant question, which has been asked twenty times since 2003. Policy questions on other gay and lesbian issues appear much less frequently. For example, questions about civil unions have appeared in ten surveys since 2003, and questions about adoption by gay and lesbian people and gay and lesbian persons serving in the military have each appeared four times over the same time period. Pew has never asked a question about bisexual or transgender people.

¹ Here and below, we use the shorthand “Pew” to refer specifically to the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. We have focused here on attitudes and have excluded questions that only measured awareness of gay and lesbian issues. We have also excluded questions appearing only on Pew’s weekly News Interest Index polls.



The October 2003 Homosexuality Study

Pew has only conducted one in-depth survey on gay and lesbian issues. Shortly before the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage, Pew conducted the October 2003 News Interest Index/Homosexuality Study. The survey included relatively few measures on gay and lesbian public policy issues (same-sex marriage, civil unions, a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage).

The bulk of questions in the Homosexuality Study focused on gauging underlying attitudes about homosexuality in general as well as personal experience with and cultural influence of gay and lesbian people. For example, the survey covered the following general areas:

- perceptions of and social relationships with gay or lesbian people;
- opinions about the cause and nature of homosexuality;
- opinions about gay and lesbian relationships and families;
- moral and religious objections to homosexuality, including what respondents were hearing in churches.

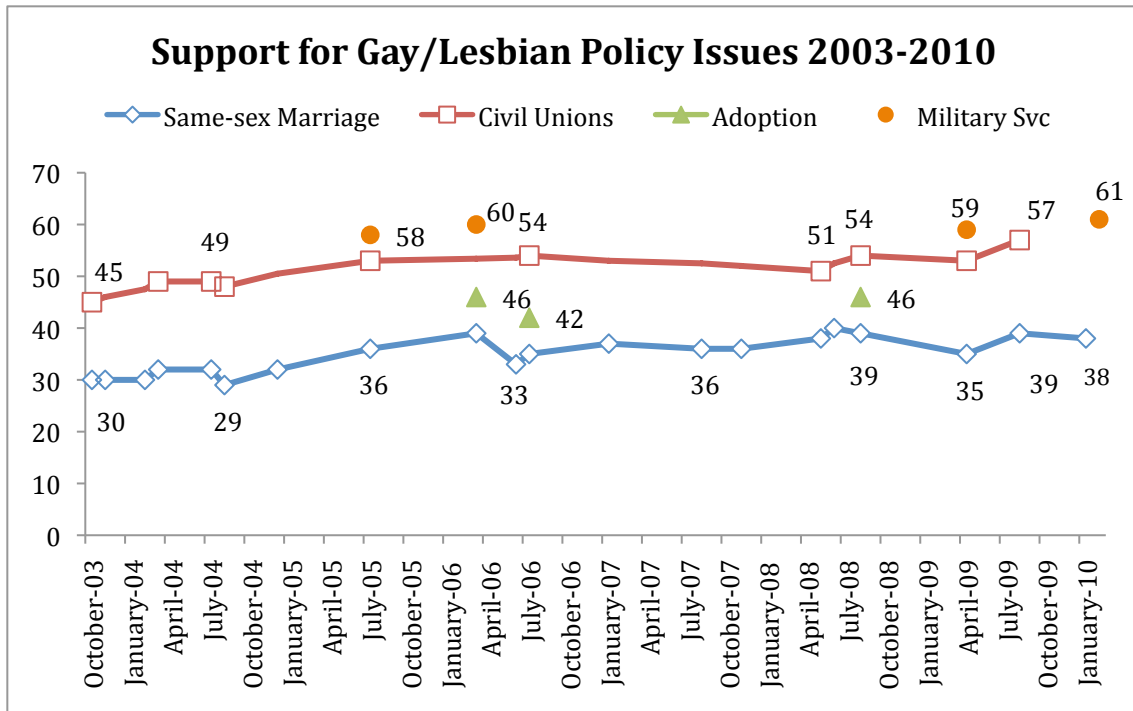
The only other survey that included a significant number of questions about gay and lesbian issues was the 2006 Summer Religion & Politics Survey conducted jointly by the Pew Forum and the People & the Press. This survey included some of the same measures as the October 2003 study but contained many fewer questions on gay and lesbian issues overall.

Findings

Gay and Lesbian Policy Issues

There are four basic policy issues that Pew has asked over the last decade: same-sex marriage, civil unions, adoption by gay and lesbian people, and gay and lesbian people serving openly in the military. Each policy question is asked in the same basic format. Respondents are given a policy statement and asked whether they strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose such a policy.

Policy Type	Question Wording	Response Options
Same-sex Marriage	Allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally	Favor/oppose
Civil Unions	Allowing gay and lesbian couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples	Favor/oppose
Adoption	Allowing gays and lesbians to adopt children	Favor/oppose
Military Service	Allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military	Favor/oppose



Same-sex Marriage and Civil Unions

Over the last six years, support for civil unions has steadily increased, moving up 12 points from 45% in 2003 to a solid majority (57%) in 2009.

Public support for same-sex marriage has also generally increased, but it has been much more volatile, with spikes of opposition correlating with major national election cycles in 2004 and 2006. In October 2003, 30% of Americans favored same-sex marriage. By March 2006, support for same-sex marriage had climbed to nearly 39%, but it fell to 33% in the summer before the 2006 election. The most recent Pew data on same-sex marriage (January 2010) found that support has rebounded to 38%, but it remains nearly 20 points lower than support for civil unions.

In 2009, Pew switched the wording of its same-sex marriage question slightly from “gays and lesbians” to “gay and lesbian couples”. The shift in wording does not seem to have affected responses to this question. Support for same-sex marriage in August 2008 with the old question wording was identical to support in August 2009 with the new wording.

Reasons for Opposition to Same-sex Marriage

In October 2003, Pew asked those who opposed same-sex marriage an open-ended question about the main reason they objected to “allowing gays and lesbians to marry.” Nearly half of respondents (45%) indicated that they had primarily religious or moral objections, 16% said it violated the definition of marriage, 12% said they just disagreed with it, 9% said it was not “normal” or “natural,” and 8% cited concerns about children or traditional families. Pew has not asked a question about underlying reasons for opposition to same-sex marriage since 2003.

Electoral Salience of Same-sex Marriage

During the last few national election cycles (2004, 2008, 2010) Pew has asked how important “gay marriage” was in deciding for whom the respondent would vote. The question was asked twice during the 2004 campaign, 4 times during the 2008 primary and general election campaign seasons, and once in early 2010. In 2004, roughly one-third said it would be very important (34% in August and 32% in October). In 2008, the salience of the issue was somewhat lower throughout the campaign. Less than 3-in-10 (28%) Americans said the issue would be very important to them. Roughly half said it would not be too important or not at all important to them. These numbers have not significantly changed over the last two years; in January 2010, only 29% said “gay marriage” was very important to them in the context of the upcoming midterm elections.

General Salience of Same-sex Marriage

In 2006, Pew asked a question about the general importance of the issue of same-sex marriage outside of the electoral context. The question asked whether respondents felt that “gay marriage” was very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important to them. About one-third (34%) of Americans reported that the issue was very important. Nearly half (45%) said it was not too important or not at all important.

In the run-up and aftermath of the 2003 Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling, Pew attempted to gauge how closely the public was following the news story about the issue of “gay and lesbian marriage.” The question was asked 4 times between August 2003 and May 2004. Public attention to the story fluctuated somewhat during this time and dropped by the end of the period. In March 2004, more than 6-in-10 said they were following the story very closely (29%) or fairly closely (33%). One month later, less than half said they were following the story very closely (20%) or fairly closely (27%).

Finally, in one survey (September 2006) Pew asked about how often the public was talking about the issue of “gay marriage.” They found that roughly one-third talked about it frequently (14%) or occasionally (20%), while nearly two-thirds talked about it hardly ever (31%) or never (33%).

Constitutional Amendment

Pew has asked about support for a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage six times between 2004 and 2006 when the issue was live in the public debate, and asked a significantly different question previously in 2003. The 2004-2006 question asked respondents whether “amending the Constitution to ban gay marriage is a good idea or a bad idea.” Support for a Constitutional amendment never reached above 36% (July 2005), and the question has not been asked again since. The 2003 question asked respondents whether the U.S. Constitution should be amended to ban gay marriage or whether laws prohibiting gay marriage would suffice.

Pew also measured the relative salience of this issue twice, in January 2004 and again one year later. Only 22% said they thought passing a constitutional amendment should be a top priority in 2004, while 27% said it should be a top priority in 2005. A plurality in each year (37% and 35% respectively) said it should not be done at all.

Federalism

In July 2006 Pew asked about whether the legality of “gay marriage” should be decided on the national level or on the state level. Americans were evenly split, with 48% saying it should be a national decision and 46% saying it should be left up to the states.

Adoption by Gay and Lesbian People

Pew has asked about adoption rights for gay and lesbian people 4 times in the history of its polling. The most recent survey (August 2008) found that Americans are divided on the issue of adoption, with 46% supporting and 48% opposing adoption rights. These numbers have been relatively stable over the last few years but represent a significant increase in support since September 1999 (the first time the question was asked) when just 38% of the public supported adoption rights for gays and lesbians.

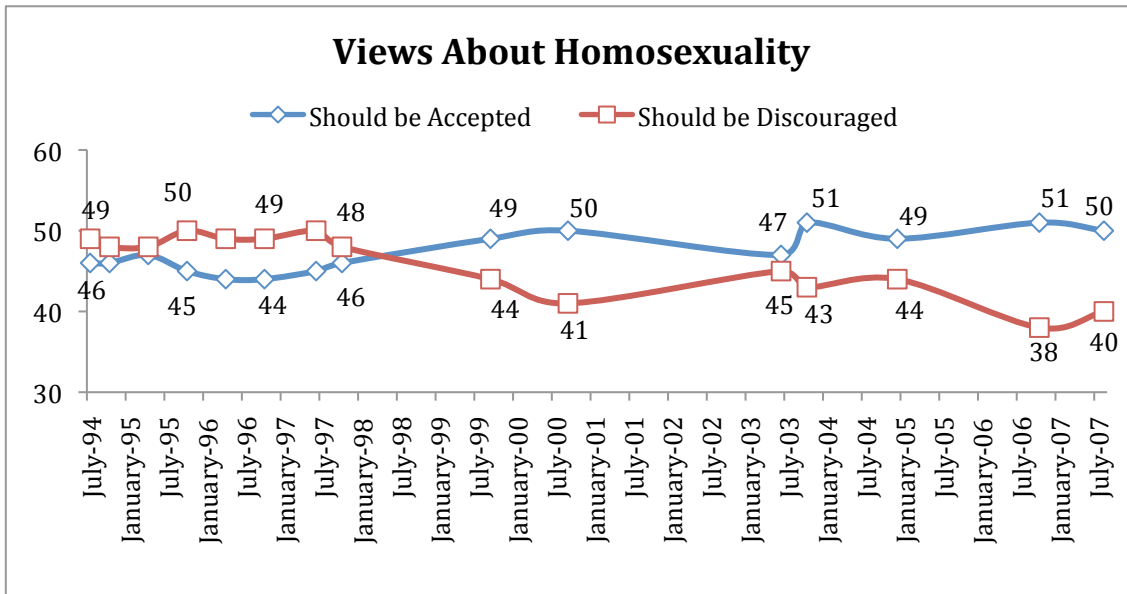
Gay and Lesbian People Serving in the Military

The policy of allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly in the military has also been asked relatively infrequently. Support has risen steadily from 52% in 1994 to 58% in July 2005. Public opinion has been static since this time. When Pew last asked the question in February 2010, 61% of Americans supported allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly in the military.

Views About Homosexuality and Gay Rights Activists

Pew has only asked one question with any regularity to measure general public attitudes about homosexuality. This question is a forced choice question that requires respondents to chose between two statements: “Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society, OR Homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society.” The Pew Research Center has asked this question 14 times between July 1994 and October 2006. In 2007, the question was also included in the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life’s large Religious Landscape Survey.

Public opinion has shifted modestly since the mid 1990s when this question was first asked. In July 1994, 46% of the public said homosexuality should be accepted by society, compared to 49% who said it should be discouraged. By 2007, the numbers had reversed; half of the public said that homosexuality should be accepted, and only 4-in-10 said it should be discouraged.



Homosexual Behavior

Pew has asked about the morality of homosexual behavior twice in the last few years, most recently in its Summer 2009 Religion & Politics Survey. The August 2009 survey found that nearly 1-in-10 (9%) Americans said that homosexual behavior is morally acceptable, nearly half (49%) said it was morally wrong and about one-third (35%) said it was not a moral issue. Public attitudes on the morality of homosexual behavior have been relatively stable since Pew first asked the question in February 2006.

In the October 2003 survey respondents were asked different type of question that attempted to measure the moral dimensions of views on homosexual behavior. The question asked specifically whether or not it was a sin to engage in homosexual behavior. Fifty-five percent of Americans agreed that it was a sin.

Despite these indications of some moral concerns about homosexuality in the general population, when Pew asked whether society should put restrictions on sex between consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes, the vast majority (80%) of the public said that it should not (October 2003).

Nature of Homosexuality

Pew has asked 2 questions about the nature of homosexuality. These questions have been asked only twice, in the October 2003 survey and again in July 2006. In July 2006, Pew found that a plurality (38%) of the public thought homosexuality was just the way some people prefer to live, 36% thought it was something people were born with, and 13% said it was something that develops as a result of how people are brought up. More than one-in-ten (13%) said they did not know. In 2003, fewer Americans thought homosexuality was something people were born with (30%), and significantly more believed it was a lifestyle choice (42%).

The second question asked respondents whether they thought sexual orientation could be changed or not. In July 2006, nearly half (49%) of the public said it could not be changed, compared to nearly 4-in-10 (39%) who said sexual orientation could be changed. In 2003, only 42% said it could not be changed.

Views of the Gay Rights Movement and Activists

Pew has asked relatively few questions about the gay rights movement or gay rights activists. In July 1994, the only time Pew asked the question, Pew found most Americans viewed the gay rights movement unfavorably (61%). In April 1999 Pew asked whether the gay rights movement has been a change for the better, a change for the worse, or hasn't made much difference. A plurality (39%) of the public said the movement represented a change for the better.

On 3 occasions, Pew has asked Americans whether they were supporters of “the gay rights movement” (April 1987, March 1994 and April 1999). The percent of the public who identified as a supporter of the gay rights movement nearly doubled from 9% in 1987 to 17% in 1999, the last time the question was asked.

Each time a newly elected Democratic President was sworn into office (January 1993 and January 2009) Pew asked whether gay activists would gain influence, lose influence or not be affected by the change. Interestingly a majority (53%) of the public thought gay activists would gain influence under Clinton, while just 40% said they would gain influence under Obama. Nearly as many Americans (39%) said gay activists’ influence would not be affected under an Obama administration.

In the last few years Pew has asked whether supporters of “gay marriage” should not push too hard to make it legal right away because it might create “bad feelings against homosexuals” or whether they should push hard to make it legal as soon as possible, despite the attendant risk. When this question was asked most recently in August 2009, the public was evenly divided between the two strategies (42% to 45% respectively). This is a significant shift from 2006, when a majority (51%) said supporters should push hard to make it legal as soon as possible.

Homosexuality and Institutions

The Political Parties

Three times over the last decade Pew has asked the public which political party comes closest to their views on homosexuality. The question was first introduced in September 1998 and most recently asked in September 2006. The 2006 survey found that about one-third (32%) of the public reported that the Republican Party came closest to their views, roughly one-third (35%) reported the Democratic Party came closest to their views, about one-quarter said they did not know, and nearly 1-in-10 said both or neither did. Attitudes on this measure have been remarkably stable over the 8-year period in which they were asked.

The Supreme Court

Pew has asked two different questions about the importance of court decisions on homosexuality and gay rights. Twice in the last few years Pew has asked the public whether court decisions on “issues related to homosexuality” are very important, fairly important, not too important, or not at all important. In June 2009, the last time the question was asked, one-third of the public said court decisions were very important and 18% said they were fairly important. Public views on the importance of court decisions on homosexuality have remained relatively static since November 2005, the first time the question was asked.

In July 2005 Pew used the term “gay rights” in its question about the importance of court decisions. Americans registered somewhat higher levels of concern in July 2005 when the question was about court cases dealing with “gay rights” than in November 2005 when the question was about “issues related to homosexuality”.

Public Schools

In July 2005 Pew asked two questions about how the issue of homosexuality was being dealt with in public schools. First, Pew asked how well the public schools were doing “dealing with homosexuality.” Slightly more than one-third said schools were doing an excellent (2%), good (12%) or fair job (21%), compared to 29% who said schools were doing a poor job. More than one-third said that they did not know (36%). Pew followed up with a question to all parents inquiring whether their child had ever mentioned feeling uncomfortable when the subject of homosexuality came up at school. The vast majority (80%) of parents said their child had not mentioned feeling uncomfortable.

Religious Institutions and Clergy

Questions about homosexuality and places of worship have appeared in three Pew surveys (June 1996, October 2003, and July 2006). In all three surveys Pew asked Americans who attended religious services at least once or twice a month whether their clergy talked about “laws regarding homosexuals.” In 1996, only 36% of Americans who regularly attend worship services said their clergy discussed laws about gays and lesbians, compared to 41% in 2003 and 52% in July 2006, a 16-point increase across this period.

In 2003, Pew included an alternative version of this question, which asked the regular worship attendees whether their clergy spoke about “issues related to homosexuality.” Among those who reported hearing about the issue, Pew asked whether their clergy said it was something that should be accepted or something that should be discouraged. A majority (55%) of Americans who regularly attend worship services said their clergy discussed the issue of homosexuality. And nearly three-quarters of those who heard about the issue reported that their clergy said homosexuality should be discouraged.

Families

Pew has asked two questions about gay and lesbian couples and parenting. In March 1997, Pew first asked about whether more gay and lesbian couples raising children was a good thing for society, a bad thing for society, or whether it didn’t make much difference. A majority (56%) of the public in 1997 said the trend represented a bad thing for society. By January 2010, however, only 42% of Americans said more gay and lesbian couples raising children was “a bad thing” for society—a decline of 14 points.

In the October 2003 Homosexuality Study, Pew asked whether gay and lesbian couples could be as good parents as heterosexual couples. A majority (54%) of the public agreed that they could.

Culture and Society

In August 2009, for the first time, Pew asked the public about their perceptions of discrimination against gay and lesbian people. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the public agreed that there was “a lot” of discrimination against gays and lesbians. In fact, more people believed that gays and lesbians face discrimination than any other minority group in the United States.

The October 2003 survey included a question that asked whether more acceptance of gays and lesbians would be a good thing for the country, a bad thing for the country or whether it wouldn’t make much difference either way. Less than one-quarter (23%) said it would be a good thing, 31% said it would be a bad thing, and a plurality (42%) said it wouldn’t make any difference.

On seven surveys over the last decade Pew has asked questions to determine the social relationships people have with gay and lesbian people. Pew has asked this question in two different ways. On five surveys from September 1999 to March 2005 Pew asked respondents if they had a friend, colleague or family member who was gay. Beginning with two surveys conducted in 2009, Pew limited the relationship to a close friend or family member. The last time the question was asked in January 2010, Pew found that 43% of Americans said they had a close friend or family member who is gay, compared to 56% who said they did not.

In March 2005 and October 2003 Pew also asked a few questions about cultural influences of gay and lesbian people. These questions asked the public whether the entertainment media included too many gay themes and characters, whether gay men have a better sense of style than heterosexual men, and whether gays and lesbians are unhappier than other people. In March 2005, Pew found that one-third of Americans said that homosexual characters and themes on TV bothered them a lot, 21% said some, and 45% said not too much or not at all. Pew also asked respondents to name the first “homosexual person” that came to mind. Nearly half (48%) of the public thought there were too many gay themes and characters. A plurality (44%) disagreed that gay men have a better sense of style. Nearly 6-in-10 disagreed that gays and lesbians were unhappier than other people. Finally, the public was more than twice as likely to think of men as women (50% to 23%) when thinking about a “homosexual person,” and slightly more likely to think of a personal acquaintance than a public figure (39% to 36%).

Critical Assessment

Limitations

Pew is an important source of trend data on the questions it asks on gay and lesbian issues, but there are a few limitations to the data Pew provides:

- Pew fields a limited set of questions with irregular frequency.
- Pew focuses on basic attitude benchmarks, but does not often focus on the nuances of policy provisions or the shifting contours of contemporary debates. For example, Pew has not asked about the inclusion of transgender persons in policy proposals or about attitudes on religious exemptions in policies such as workplace nondiscrimination.
- Pew focuses on national, not state-level data. Pew focuses almost exclusively on polling about national issues, events, and trends. For example, Pew has not asked questions about state ballot initiatives to ban same-sex marriage despite the prominent role they played in the 2004 and 2006 elections.²

Trends and Question Wording

Pew concentrates its polling efforts on topics of current interest, especially those of interest to journalists and public policy makers. Frequently, Pew will ask questions around significant events like a federal court ruling, the passage of important federal legislation, or the anniversaries of important events. Overall, Pew tends to focus primarily on questions that are prominent in the national public dialogue.

Given the importance that Pew places on tracking changes in public opinion over time, Pew rarely alters question wording because doing so destroys the trend. However, on some occasions Pew has modified questions. In most cases, these shifts are made to improve the accuracy or validity of the measure. For example, statistical analysis has shown that having a close friend or family member who is gay or lesbian, but not more casual relationships, is highly predictive of views on gay and lesbian issues. In recognition of this finding, Pew changed the reference groups from “friend, colleague or family member” in its earlier questions to “close friend or family member” in later questions.

² In October 2004 and October 2006 Pew included a general, open-ended question about ballot initiatives asking respondents to identify specific issues on the ballot. The question read: “Can you think of any particular issue on the ballot that are up for a vote in your state?”

In other cases, however, the rationale for wording shifts is less clear, and the changes may have a significant affect. For example, Pew has shifted the language in its question about the importance of court decisions on gay and lesbian issues. The original question read: “Are court decisions on *gay rights* very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important to you?” The question wording was changed to read: “Are court decisions on *issues related to homosexuality* very important, fairly important, not too important or not at all important to you?” The new wording, which emphasizes “issues” and “homosexuality” rather than “gay rights,” elicits less concern about court decisions from the general public.

Other Issues in Question Wording

There are several standard Pew question formulations that contain language that is either not neutral or somewhat dated:

- Pew’s use of the declarative phrase “homosexuality is a way of life...” on both sides of a forced-choice question, rather than more neutral language that refers to “sexual orientation,” embeds an assumption that is part of the debate in the question rather than measuring opinion about that assumption. That is, debates about whether sexual orientation is a choice or way of life or innate are one of the most important fault lines in the public discussion. Pew has asked this question fifteen times but has not included it on a survey since 2007.
- In some questions, Pew uses the somewhat dated term “gay marriage” rather than more neutral terms such as “same-sex marriage” or more descriptive terms such as “marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples;”
- Pew often uses the terms “homosexuals” and “gays and lesbians”—terms that use shortcut adjectival descriptors to describe a person—rather than terms like “gay and lesbian people.” On occasion, however, Pew has used more neutral formulations in some questions. In 2006, for example, Pew asked about the nature of homosexuality by asking respondents whether a “gay or lesbian person’s sexual orientation can be changed.”
- Prior to 2009, Pew used inconsistent terms in their basic questions gauging same-sex marriage and civil unions. Up until 2009, Pew’s same-sex marriage question used the phrase “allowing gays and lesbians,” while Pew’s civil unions question used the phrase “allowing gay and lesbian couples.” The use of the term “couples” in the civil unions question may have unknown effects on results. In more recent surveys that have included items on same-sex marriage and civil unions, Pew has corrected this inconsistency.

Measuring Support for Same-Sex Marriage and Civil Unions

Finally, it is important to note that Pew’s approach to measuring support for same-sex marriage and civil unions may lead to overestimating solid support for same-sex

marriage if this method is not properly understood. There are two leading approaches to public opinion polling on the issues of same-sex marriage and civil unions. One approach, used by Pew, gauges support for same-sex marriage and civil unions in separate questions. That is, the respondent first gets one question, then the other, without knowing that the other question will be offered. The second approach, used by Public Religion Research and other media outlets such as CBS, uses a single, 3-part question (same-sex marriage, civil unions, no legal recognition of gay couple's relationships) that asks respondents to identify the option that best reflects their views.

While each of these approaches is widely used, failing to appreciate their differences can lead to overestimating levels of solid support for same-sex marriage. Using its separate question approach in August 2008, Pew found that 39% of Americans favored same-sex marriage, while 52% opposed it, and about 1-in-10 gave no opinion. During the same time period, Public Religion Research asked its single three-part question and found that 29% of the public supported same-sex marriage, 28% supported civil unions but not marriage, and 37% said there should be no legal recognition of a gay couple's relationship.

By analytically combining Pew's separate same-sex marriage and civil union questions, we can attempt to compare in a more direct way the results of using two sequential questions versus a single three-part question. The combined Pew questions show that 39% support same-sex marriage, 16% support civil unions but not same-sex marriage, and 4-in-10 do not support either. The PRR question finds significantly less support for same-sex marriage (29%), more support for civil unions (28%), and approximately the same support for no legal recognition (37%).

Because the two-question approach forces the respondent to choose support and opposition on each issue separately, it is likely that Pew's approach overestimates *solid* support for same-sex marriage by as much as 10 points.³

Same-sex Marriage Question Differences

	Pew*	PRR
Same-sex Marriage*	39	29
Civil Unions Only	16	28
No legal recognition	40	37
DK	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>
Total	100	100

*Note: Pew questions analytically combined above to approximate a 3-part question. 2% support same-sex marriage but not civil unions

Sources: Pew, August 2008; Public Religion Research, August 2008.

³ It is notable that if the same-sex marriage and civil unions categories are combined, the Pew and PRR questions find nearly identical numbers of Americans who support both types of legal rights (55% and 57% respectively), and also similar numbers of Americans who do not support either (40% and 37% respectively).

Appendix A. About the Pew Research Center

The Pew Research Center is a consortium of five autonomous projects that conduct research on a variety of subjects: politics and current events, religion and politics, Hispanics, internet and information technology trends, global attitudes and the news media. The projects include: the Pew Research Center for People & the Press, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, the Pew Hispanic Center, the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, and the Pew Internet & American Life Project. These projects have their own independent research agendas, but on occasion they will conduct joint research projects on topics of mutual interest. The Pew Research Center is a non-partisan, non-ideological “fact-tank” serving as one of the most important sources of publicly available national public opinion polling. Pew Research Center reports are used widely by journalists, policy-makers, and academics.

The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press is the main survey shop within the Pew Research Center. In addition to conducting large (n=1,500) monthly public opinion surveys on American attitudes covering a wide range of subjects, the People & the Press also conducts international surveys and smaller weekly surveys that measure the public’s knowledge and awareness of current events. The News Interest Index is a weekly omnibus survey that People & the Press began conducting in 2007 in conjunction with the Pew Project for the Excellence in Journalism. Most of the other projects conduct polls much less frequently, and they tend to be based on specific topics.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life initially functioned to convene and host meetings for journalists and scholars on the subject religion and politics. In addition, the project partnered with People & the Press to conduct the annual Religion & Politics Survey each summer. In 2006, the Pew Forum began conducting its own surveys. To date the Pew Forum has conducted four major surveys in addition to the annual religion and politics surveys: the 2006 Pentecostal Survey of Latin America, the 2007 U.S. Hispanic Survey, the 2007 American Muslim Survey, and the 2007 American Religious Landscape Survey.

Appendix B: Comprehensive Question Index

Comprehensive Question Index of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Pew Surveys

Question Subject	Question Wording	Freq.	Last Asked
Policy			
Same-sex Marriage ¹	Allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally	23	Jan. 2010
Civil Unions	Allowing gay and lesbian couples to enter into legal agreements with each other that would give them many of the same rights as married couples	10	Aug. 2009
Military Service	Allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military	5	Feb. 2010
Electoral Salience of SSM	In making your decision about who to vote for this fall, will the issue of gay marriage be very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important?	7	Jan. 2010
Adoption	Allowing gays and lesbians to adopt children	4	Aug. 2008
SSM Topic of Conversation	How often do you talk about the issue of gay marriage, frequently, occasionally, hardly ever or never?	1	Sept. 2006
Constitutional amendment	Do you think amending the Constitution to ban gay marriage is a good idea or a bad idea?	6	July 2006
Federalism & SSM	Do you think the question of whether gay marriage should be legal is something that should be decided at the national level or is it something that each state should decide for itself?	1	July 2006
General Salience of SSM	Is gay marriage an issue that is very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important to you?	1	June 2006
Importance of Constitutional Amendment	Should passing a constitutional amendment that would prohibit gay marriages be a top priority, important but lower priority or should it not be done?	2	Jan. 2005
News About SSM	As I read each item tell me if you happened to follow this news story very closely, fairly closely, not too closely, or not at all closely... the issue of gay and lesbian marriage	4	May 2004
Single Issue	Would you vote for a candidate who disagrees with you about gay marriage if they agree with you on most other issues?	1	Feb. 2004
Religious Beliefs & SSM	Do you completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or completely disagree with the following statement... Gay marriage would go against my religious beliefs?	1	Oct. 2003
Objection to SSM	Earlier you said you were opposed to allowing gays and lesbians to marry. What would you say is the main reason you object to allowing gays and lesbians to marry?	1	Oct. 2003
Constitutional Amendment	Should the U.S. Constitution be amended to ban gay marriage or is it enough to prohibit gay marriage by law without changing the Constitution?	1	Oct. 2003
Military Service	Do you approve or disapprove of Bill Clinton's decision to ease the ban on homosexuals in the armed forces?	1	Aug. 1993

Question Subject	Question Wording	Freq.	Last Asked
Knowledge about Military Service	In what way did President Clinton ease the ban on homosexuals in the military... Did he allow them to serve openly, or allow them to serve in the military as long as they kept their homosexuality a secret?	1	Aug. 1993
Clinton & Homosexuality	How do you think Bill Clinton feels about homosexuality, does he think that homosexuality is a lifestyle that should be accepted by society or do you think that he feels that homosexuality should be discouraged by society?	1	Aug. 1993
Views on Homosexuality, Gays and Lesbians			
Morality of Homosexuality	Do you personally believe homosexual behavior is morally acceptable, morally wrong or is it not a moral issue?	2	Aug. 2009
Way of Life	Tell me whether the first statement or second statement comes closer to your own views ... Homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society OR homosexuality is a way of life that should be discouraged by society?	15	Aug. 2007 ²
Sin	Do you think it is a sin or not to engage in homosexual behavior?	1	Oct. 2003
Sin (Follow-up)	In your mind, is homosexual behavior more or less sinful than adultery, or are they about the same?	1	Oct. 2003
View of Gay men	Would you say your overall opinion of gay men is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable?	1	Oct. 2003
View of Lesbian women	Would you say your overall opinion of lesbian women is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable?	1	Oct. 2003
Comfort with Gays/Lesbians	Would you say it doesn't bother you to be around homosexuals or it makes you uncomfortable to be around homosexuals?	1	Oct. 2003
Restrictions on Sex	Do you completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or completely disagree with the following statement... Society should not put any restrictions on sex between consenting adults in the privacy of their own home?	1	Oct. 2003
Relationships	Compared with people in general, are gays and lesbians less likely to have stable long-term relationships, or don't you think so?	1	Oct. 2003
Lifestyle	Some people feel that homosexuality is a lifestyle that should be accepted by society. Others feel that homosexuality is a lifestyle that should be discouraged by society. Which comes closer to your viewpoint, the first position or the second?	1	Aug. 1993
Nature of Homosexuality			
Choice	In your opinion, do you think homosexuality is something people are born with, is it something that develops because of the way people are brought up or is it just the way some people prefer to live?	2	July 2006
Change	Do you think a gay or lesbian person's sexual orientation can be changed or cannot be changed?	2	July 2006

Question Subject	Question Wording	Freq.	Last Asked
Gay Rights Movement			
Tactics	Which of these statements comes closer to your view? Supporters of gay marriage should not push too hard to make it legal right away because doing so could create bad feelings against homosexuals OR supporters of gay marriage should push hard to make it legal as soon as possible, despite the risk of creating bad feelings against homosexuals.	2	Aug. 2009
Political Influence	Usually when there is a new President certain groups gain influence in Washington while other groups lose influence. As I read from a list, tell me if you think these groups will gain influence, lose influence or not be affected by (Obama/Clinton) taking office... Gay Activists	2	Jan. 2009
Supporter of the Movement	(Please use a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 represents a description that is perfect for you, and 1 represents a description that is totally wrong for you.) On a scale of 1 to 10 how well does... supporter of the gay rights movement... describe you?	3	Sept. 1999
Positive Influence	Has the gay rights movement been a change for the better a change for the worse or hasn't this made much difference?	1	May 1999
View of the Movement	Would you say your overall opinion of the gay rights movement is very favorable, mostly favorable, mostly unfavorable or very unfavorable?	1	July 1994
Institutions			
Courts (Version 1)	Are court decisions on <i>issues related to homosexuality</i> very important, fairly important, not too important or not at all important to you?	2	June 2009
Political Parties	Which party comes closest to your views on homosexuality?	3	Sept. 2006
Courts (Version 2)	Are court decisions on <i>gay rights</i> very important, somewhat important, not too important or not at all important to you?	1	July 2005
Public School	Do the public schools in your area do an excellent job, a good job, only a fair job or a poor job dealing with homosexuality?	1	July 2005
Public School (Follow-up)	Has your child ever mentioned feeling uncomfortable when the subject of homosexuality came up at school or not?	1	July 2005
Place of Worship (Version 1)	As I read a list of issues please tell me whether or not the clergy at your place of worship speaks out on this issue... issues related to homosexuality.	1	Oct. 2003
Place of Worship (Version 2)	As I read a list of issues please tell me whether or not the clergy at your place of worship speaks out on this issue... laws regarding homosexuals.	3	Oct. 2003
Place of Worship (Follow-up)	When your clergy has spoken about homosexuality, do they say it is something that should be accepted or something that should be discouraged, or don't they take a position on the issue?	2	Oct. 2003
Family/Parenting	Do you completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or completely disagree with the following statement... Gay and lesbian couples can be as good parents as heterosexual couples.	1	Oct. 2003
Traditional Family	Do you completely agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or completely disagree with the following statement... Allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally marry would undermine the traditional American family	1	Oct. 2003

Question Subject	Question Wording	Freq.	Last Asked
Family/Parenting	Please tell me if you think each of the following trends is generally a good thing for our society, a bad thing for our society or doesn't make much difference... More gay and lesbian couples raising children	2	Jan. 2010
Place of Worship (Follow-up)	Do you think it is a good thing or a bad thing that your clergy speaks out on this issue?	1	June 1996
Culture & Society			
Social Relation (Version 1)	Do you have a close friend or family member who is gay?	3	Jan. 2010
Society Acceptance (Vers. 1)	Has increasing acceptance of gays and lesbians been a change for the better, a change for the worse, or hasn't this made much difference?	1	Dec. 2009
Society (Discrimination)	In the United States today, is there a lot of discrimination against gays and lesbians, or not?	1	Aug. 2009
Elections and Candidates	Regardless of the specific candidates who are running for president, we'd like to know how you generally feel about some different traits. Would you be more likely or less likely to support a candidate for president who...is homosexual, or wouldn't this matter?	1	Feb. 2007
Social Relation (Version 2)	Do you have a friend, colleague or family member who is gay?	5	Mar. 2005
Entertainment Media (Vers. 1)	Now thinking about your own feelings about the kinds of things you see on TV (television)...do homosexual characters and themes on TV shows bother you, personally, a lot, some, not too much, or not at all?	1	Mar. 2005
Entertainment Media (Vers. 2)	How concerned are you that your child is/children are being exposed to too much/many...homosexual characters and themes in the TV (television) shows he or she watches/they watch...a great deal, somewhat, not too much, or not at all?	1	Mar. 2005
Society Acceptance (Vers. 2)	Do you think more acceptance of gays and lesbians would be a good thing or a bad thing for the country, or that it would not make much difference either way?	1	Oct. 2003
Entertainment Media (Vers. 3)	Do you think the entertainment media are including too many gay themes and characters these days, not enough gay themes and characters or about the right amount?	1	Oct. 2003
Style	Do you think gay men have a better sense of style than heterosexual men, or don't you think so?	1	Oct. 2003
Happiness	Do you think most gays and lesbians are unhappier than most other people, or don't you think so?	1	Oct. 2003
Culture reference	There is a lot more discussion about homosexuality these days. Who is the first homosexual person that comes to your mind?	1	Oct. 2003
Media & Homosexuality	For each of the following stories about presidential candidates, please tell me whether you feel it should almost always be reported, whether it should sometimes be reported depending on the particular circumstances, or whether it should almost never be reported... A candidate is homosexual	2	Sep. 1999

¹ Prior to 2009 Pew asked whether people favored "allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally."

² Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, Religious Landscape Survey (2007)

About Public Religion Research Institute

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

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The Public Religion Research Institute management team brings deep expertise and experience to their work on issues at the intersection of religion, values, and public life.

Robert P. Jones, Ph.D.

CEO and founder of PRRI, Dr. Jones is a leading scholar and pollster in both the academy and in public policy circles. The author of two books—*Progressive & Religious* (2008) and *Liberalism's Troubled Search for Equality* (2007)—and numerous articles on religion and public policy, Dr. Jones brings to each PRRI project a deep knowledge of religion and expertise in both qualitative and quantitative research. Dr. Jones is one of six members of the national steering committee for the Religion and Politics Section at the American Academy of Religion and is an active member of the Society of Christian Ethics and the American Association of Public Opinion Research. He holds a Ph.D. in religion from Emory University, where he specialized in sociology of religion, politics, and religious ethics. He also holds a M.Div. from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Prior to his work in Washington, he served as assistant professor of religious studies at Missouri State University.

Dr. Jones is a sought after speaker, and he is frequently featured in major national media, including CBS News, CNN, NPR, Newsweek, USA Today, The Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, The Chicago Tribune, and others.

Daniel Cox

Director of Research and co-founder of PRRI, Mr. Cox also brings a wealth of expertise to PRRI projects. Prior to joining PRRI, he served as Research Associate at the

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, where he worked on the core research team for dozens of polls, including the groundbreaking Religious Landscape Survey, one of the largest public opinion surveys on religion ever conducted. Mr. Cox specializes in youth politics and religion, and his work has appeared in numerous national news and religious publications including the New York Times, ABC News, CNN, Newsweek, World Magazine, and others.

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