

## **Same-Sex Marriage Opponents More Apt to Call it a Voting Issue**

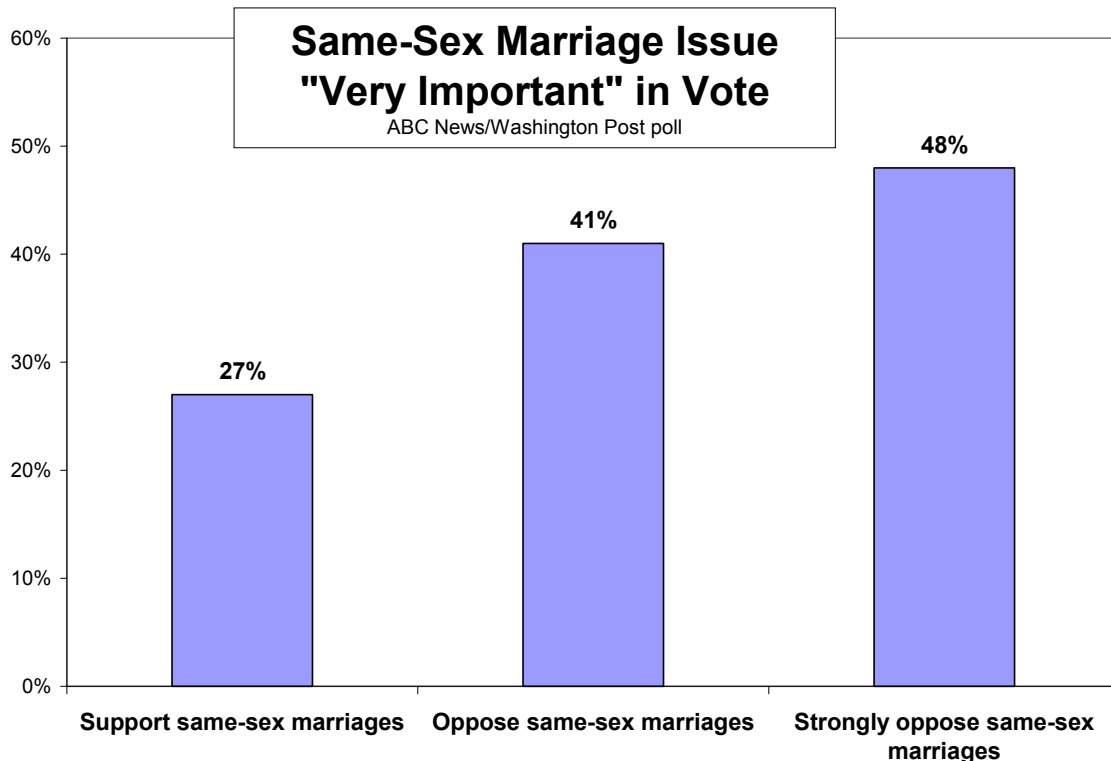
There may be a political bonus in George W. Bush's position on same-sex marriages: Voters who call it a make-or-break issue disproportionately take his side.

Twenty-two percent of Americans both support a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages and say they would only back a presidential candidate who shares their position on such marriages. It's a decisive issue for fewer, 13 percent, who want states to settle the question rather than amending the constitution.

The division is greater on the issue of same-sex marriage more generally: Twenty-eight percent say they'd only vote for a candidate who opposes same-sex marriages, while just eight percent would only vote for one who supports such marriages.

Bush and John Kerry both oppose same-sex marriages, though Bush has done so much more prominently. And Bush supports amending the Constitution, while Kerry does not.

Overall, there's greater opposition to same-sex marriages than there is support for them, and there's also much greater intensity of sentiment among opponents. And while more people oppose than support a constitutional amendment, political equations sometimes follow the intensity of views and salience of issues, not just the majority sentiment.



The issue is not a compelling one for most Americans. Same-sex marriage finishes last in importance among 12 issues measured in this ABC News/Washington Post poll, with 36 percent saying it's very important in deciding their vote. That lags top issues like the economy, jobs and terrorism by more than 40 percentage points.

However, among opponents of same sex-marriages, 41 percent call it "very important" in their choice of candidate, and among "strong" opponents, 48 percent call it "very important." Among same-sex marriage supporters, by contrast, just 27 percent call it a "very important" issue.

VIEWS – Overall, 59 percent say same-sex marriages should be illegal, up slightly from a steady 55 percent in three previous polls since last fall. At the same time, 51 percent now support civil unions for homosexual couples, also up slightly, from 45 percent last month. The changes – more opposed to marriages, more supporting unions – are too slight to be definitive, but could, if they continue, reflect a desire to split the difference.

Forty-four percent favor a constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriages, while more, 53 percent, say states should make their own laws on the issue. Support for an amendment has held about steady after rising in February; preference for state control has risen by eight points after declining in February. It's still not back to its level in January – before Bush announced his support for an amendment and before San Francisco started allowing same-sex marriages.

As noted, intensity is stronger among opponents of same-sex marriages: Forty-eight percent of Americans feel "strongly" that such marriages should be illegal, while half as many, 24 percent, "strongly" favor them. Pro and con intensity is more evenly matched, though, on the issues of civil unions and a constitutional amendment.

FRIEND/RELATIVE – Nearly half of Americans, 46 percent, say they have a close friend or relative who's homosexual, or that they themselves are. This group is 16 points more likely to say same-sex civil unions should be legal (60 percent compared with 44 percent); 11 points more likely to say same-sex marriage should be legal (44 percent compared with 33 percent); and seven points more likely to favor state laws rather than a constitutional amendment, 57 percent compared with 50 percent.

PARTISAN POLITICS – Bush's views on this issue provide a natural fit with his base. Eighty-five percent of evangelical white Protestants and 80 percent of conservatives say same-sex marriages should be illegal. Majorities of these groups, albeit smaller ones, also favor a constitutional amendment to ban such marriages – 64 percent of evangelical white Protestants and 62 percent of conservatives.

There's a partisan divide as well. About six in 10 independents and Democrats favor state laws over a constitutional amendment, and they are twice as likely to Republicans to say same-sex marriages should be legal.

	Same-sex marriage:		Amend Constitution	Leave to states
	Legal	Illegal		
All	38%	59	44	53

Republicans	22	74	55	43
Democrats	45	51	36	59
Independents	43	54	40	58

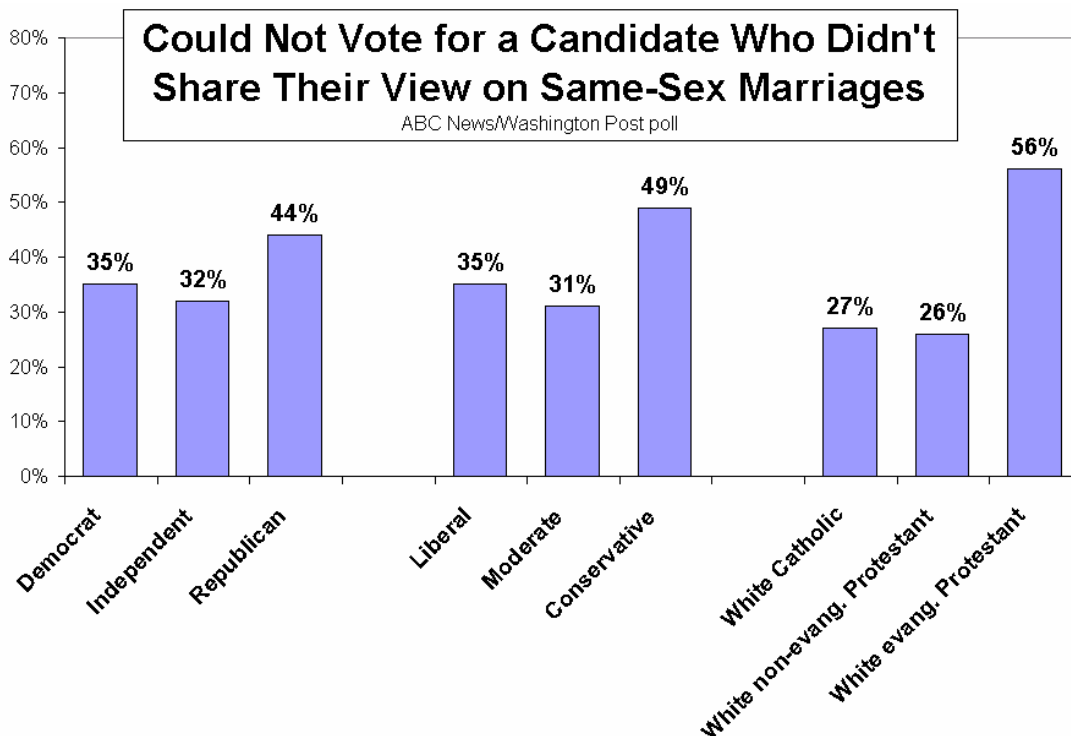
While he's shoring up his base, there are some potential soft spots here for Bush. More Americans disapprove than approve of his handling of the same-sex marriage issue, by 52 to 44 percent. In another measure, people divide evenly on which candidate they trust more to handle the issue, 44 percent for Bush, 43 percent for Kerry.

Also, white Catholics – a key swing-voter group – and non-evangelical white Protestants – usually pro-Republican – are much less likely than evangelical white Protestants to oppose gay marriage or support an amendment.

In a two-way contest, Bush leads Kerry by 54-41 percent among same-sex marriage opponents, compared with a 70-25 percent Kerry advantage among the smaller group of supporters of such marriages.

Further on single-issue voting, only half of conservatives and 44 percent of evangelical white Protestants say they could support a candidate who disagreed with them on same-sex marriage. By contrast, 67 percent of moderates, 62 percent of liberals and about seven in 10 non-evangelical white Protestants and white Catholics alike say they could still vote for a candidate who disagreed with them.

Overall, six in 10 voters say they could vote for a presidential candidate if they agreed with him on other issues but disagreed on same-sex marriage. The result is the same for abortion, while more say they could vote for a candidate who disagreed with them on gun control (75 percent) or the death penalty (80 percent).



GROUPS – Strong opposition to same-sex marriage peaks at 76 percent of evangelical white Protestants and 71 percent of conservatives. Strong support is highest among non-religious Americans (52 percent) and liberals (44 percent).

There's a marked age gap, with younger Americans far more accepting of same-sex marriages. Sixty-three percent of 18-29 year olds say they should be legal (44 percent strongly), while about three in four senior citizens say they should be illegal (two in three strongly). Similarly, 68 percent of younger Americans, compared with 30 percent of senior citizens, favor civil unions.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone March 4-7, 2004, among a random national sample of 1,202 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Sampling, data collection and tabulation by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, Pa.

Analysis by David Morris.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Results follow:

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling (ITEM)?

	Approve	Disapprove	No op.
j. The issue of same-sex marriage	44	52	4

8. For each item I name, please tell me how important it will be in your vote for president this year. Will it be one of the single most important issues, very important, somewhat important or less important than that?

	-----Important-----			-Not as important-			No op.
	NET	1 of most	Very	NET	Somewhat	Less	
j. The issue of same-sex marriage	36	5	30	64	28	35	1

10. Who do you trust to do a better job handling (ITEM), (Bush) or (Kerry)?

	Bush	Kerry	Both (vol.)	Neither (vol.)	No op.
j. The issue of same-sex marriage	44	43	1	6	6

12. If you agreed with a presidential candidate on other issues, but not on the issue of (ITEM), could you still vote for him, or not?

3/7/04 - Summary Table\*

	Could still vote	Could not still vote	No opinion
a. Abortion	60	38	2

b. Same-sex marriage	61	37	3
c. Gun control	75	23	3
d. The death penalty	80	16	5

35. On another subject, do you think homosexual couples should or should not be allowed to form legally recognized civil unions, giving them the legal rights of married couples in areas such as health insurance, inheritance and pension coverage?

	-----Should-----			-----Should not-----			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/7/04	51	32	19	46	9	37	3
2/22/04	45	30	16	48	7	41	7
1/18/04	46	NA	NA	51	NA	NA	4
9/7/03	40	NA	NA	51	NA	NA	9

36. Do you think it should be legal or illegal for homosexual couples to get married?

	-----Legal-----			-----Illegal-----			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/7/04	38	24	14	59	11	48	3
2/22/04	39	25	13	55	6	49	6
1/18/04	41	NA	NA	55	NA	NA	4
9/7/03	37	NA	NA	55	NA	NA	7

37. (Would you support amending the U.S. Constitution to make it illegal for homosexual couples to get married anywhere in the U.S.), or (should each state make its own laws on homosexual marriage)?

	---Support amendment--			-----State laws-----			No op.
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly	
3/7/04*	44	39	5	53	18	35	3
2/22/04	46	38	8	45	15	31	9
1/18/04	38	NA	NA	58	NA	NA	3

\*Half sample test, against law/make illegal

39. Are you - or do you have a close friend or relative - who is homosexual, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
3/7/04	46	53	*

\*\*\*END\*\*\*