

Background Report

Prepared by

TNS Canadian Facts

Richard W. Jenkins, Ph.D.

Corporate Director of Public Opinion Research

(613) 230-4799

(fax) (613) 232-7102

Richard.Jenkins@tns-cf.com

I. Findings

A. Overview

A year ago TNS Canadian Facts conducted a survey on Canadian attitudes about same sex marriage. The survey found that Canadians were deeply divided about how to deal with the issue, and supporters almost equaled opponents of the definition that the Government of Canada had introduced and referred to the Supreme Court. The survey revealed, however, that most Canadians support the idea that same sex couples be treated equally and that there is nothing wrong with homosexuality. In fact, few Canadians would go as far as to *not* recognize gay and lesbian unions in law. Since the survey, debate has continued and, with the Supreme Court set to rule on the matter this fall, TNS Canadian Facts conducted a follow up survey.

The survey found two main things:

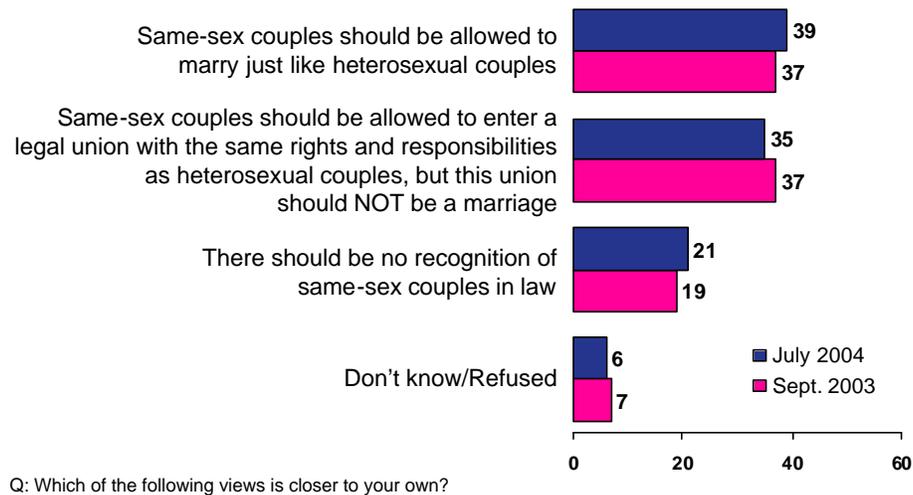
- A. Attitudes are virtually unchanged since 2003. The public is divided into three groups, two of which hold strong, polar opposite views and a third centrist group. Importantly, there are almost twice as many unconditional supporters of same-sex marriage as there are vigorous opponents (39% compared with 21%).

- B. That the Supreme Court decision, expected this fall, on the definition of marriage is likely to disappoint many Canadians. While a minority expects the Supreme Court to uphold the traditional definition, one's opinion about same-sex marriage is related to one's expectation. A majority of both the two polar opposite groups expect the decision to be consistent with their position. That said, given public support for the Charter and positive attitudes about the Court, the decision may have considerable influence on those who are ambivalent.

B. Support for Same-Sex Marriage

The debate about how Canada should deal with same-sex marriage has divided Canadians into three groups. As the figure below illustrates, there exists a minority (one in five) that is completely opposed to same-sex marriage and a plurality (two in five) that is fully supportive of allowing these couples to marry. These two groups define the polar opposites of the debate, which leaves a centrist group that is somewhat ambivalent and could be considered either conditional supporters or conditional opponents of same-sex marriage.

Preferred Course Of Action



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Unconditional Supporters (39%): This group endorses the view that same-sex couples should be able to marry just like opposite-sex couples. For supporters of same-sex marriage, homosexuality is neither viewed as morally wrong nor as a threat to the institution of marriage. Almost two thirds (64%) strongly agree that there is nothing morally wrong.

Conditional Supporters/Opponents (Ambivalent, 35%): Depending on how one looks at this group, they are either conditionally in favour or conditionally opposed to same-sex marriage. This group endorses the concept of a “legal union” but does not want it to be called a “marriage.”

Vigorous Opponents (21%): Though the smallest of the three groups, the unconditional opponents are likely to be vocal in their opposition to any recognition of same-sex unions. Opposition is driven by the intense belief among these people that homosexuality is morally wrong (69% strongly and 12% somewhat disagree that there is nothing morally wrong) as well as the belief that it is a threat to the institution of marriage.

C. Drivers: Age, Morals and Traditionalism

The Morality of Same-Sex Relations

One of the key drivers of support for same-sex marriage is one's moral position. Almost none (11%) of those who unconditionally support same-sex marriage believe that there is something wrong with homosexuality compared with almost all (81%) of those who are opposed to marriage of these Canadians.

This is not to say that all of those who believe that homosexuality is morally wrong are opposed to some sort of legal recognition. In fact, some of the ambivalence in the conditional supporter/conditional opponent group is their moral beliefs. For four in ten of these Canadians, there is a willingness to recognize legal unions of same-sex couples with the same rights as opposite sex couple, in spite of their beliefs.

There is nothing morally wrong with homosexuality.	Attitude toward Same-Sex Marriage			
	Total	Unconditional supporters	Ambivalent (Conditional Supporters/Opponents)	Vigorous Opponents
	%	%	%	%
Strongly agree	36	64	26	6
Somewhat agree	22	24	30	9
Somewhat disagree	12	6	18	12
Strongly disagree	25	5	20	69

Traditional Institution of Marriage

The other driver of attitudes is one's view about the impact of allowing gays and lesbians to marry on the institution of marriage. Not surprisingly, those who support gay marriage reject the statement (91%) and those vigorously opposed endorse it (66%). The interesting group are those who are ambivalent. Some of this group endorses the statement while others reject it.

Allowing gays and lesbians to marry is a threat to the institution of marriage.	Attitude toward Same-Sex Marriage			
	Total	Unconditional supporters	Ambivalent	Vigorous Opponents
	%	%	%	%
Strongly agree	23	2	25	61
Somewhat agree	10	5	20	5
Somewhat disagree	20	19	28	11
Strongly disagree	42	72	25	20

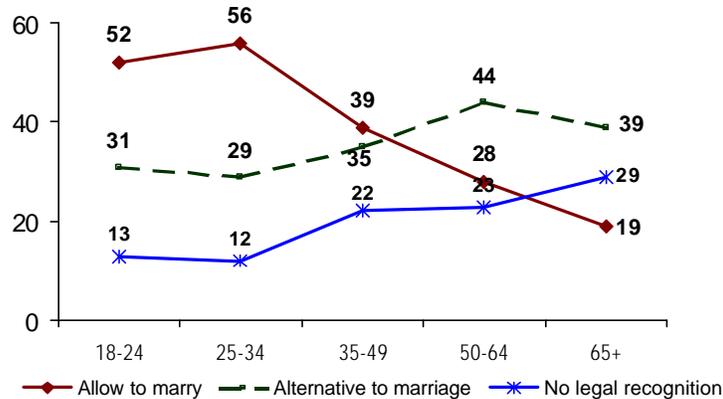
Together the two statements capture much of the variation in how Canadians think about same-sex marriage. More than four in five (82%) of those who are unconditional supporters reject both arguments against same-sex marriage. In contrast, three in five (60%) of those who are vigorous opponents accept both of the anti-same-sex marriage arguments.

The ambivalent group is interesting because almost four in ten reject both arguments but would still prefer that the legal union not be called a marriage; their choice is not consistent with their expressed positions. Similarly, one in four say that same-sex marriage is a threat and that homosexuality is morally wrong but are still willing to allow a legal union.

The Generational Divide

Underlying the overall split in public opinion on the issue are significant divisions along generational lines. In fact, age is a proxy for the two drivers discussed above. Consider the figure below which shows support for the three positions by age. Among the youngest two age groups, same-sex marriage is a non-issue; only one in ten are opposed to any legal recognition and more than half are fully supportive. With age comes less willingness to support the marriage alternative and more opposition to any legal recognition.

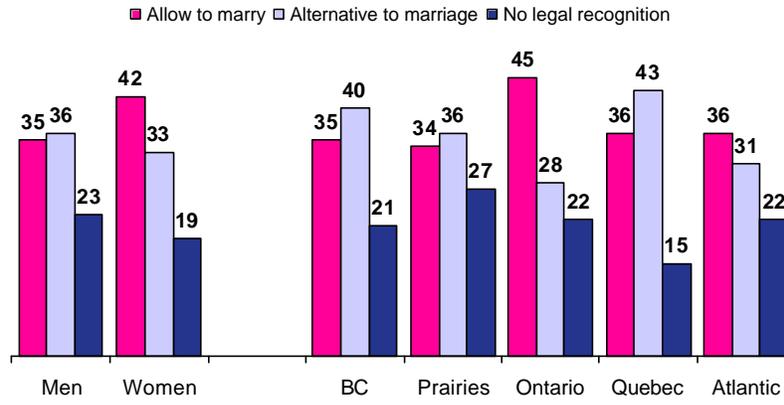
Support for Alternatives by Age



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Age is not the only demographic driver of one's view about same-sex marriage, but it is the most important. Consider the chart below that shows the impact of gender and region on support for same-sex marriage. Women are more likely than men to support the marriage alternative. Regionally, residents of the prairies are the most opposed to legal recognition (27%) but even here one in three support the marriage alternative.

Position on Same-Sex Marriage by Gender & Region



D. Expectations of Supreme Court

Just under half (44%) of Canadians agree (51% disagree) with the statement that the Supreme Court will uphold the traditional definition of marriage as one man and one woman.

The Supreme Court will uphold the traditional definition of marriage as one man and one woman.	Total	Attitude toward Same-Sex Marriage		
		Unconditional supporters	Ambivalent	Vigorous Opponents
Strongly agree	23	9	23	46
Somewhat agree	21	17	26	19
Somewhat disagree	26	35	25	10
Strongly disagree	25	34	21	19

While it is a minority of the public that expects the traditional definition to be upheld, almost two thirds (65%) of those who are unconditionally opposed to same-sex marriage expect the traditional definition to be upheld. Seven in ten of those unconditionally supportive of same-sex marriage disagree that the traditional definition will be upheld.

Methodology

For the poll, 1014 Canadian adults were interviewed by telephone between July 19 and 25, 2004 using our TNS Express Telephone survey. The survey results are nationally representative of the Canadian adult population and are considered accurate to within 3.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The poll was not commissioned by a third party and was conducted by TNS Canadian Facts for public release.

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