



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
**February 27, 2004**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION**  
**Andrew Kohut, Director**  
**Carroll Doherty, Editor**

**Constitutional Amendment Rates as Low Priority**  
**GAY MARRIAGE A VOTING ISSUE, BUT MOSTLY FOR OPPONENTS**

Gay marriage has surpassed other major social issues like abortion and gun control in its influence on voters. Four-in-ten voters say they would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with them on gay marriage, even if they agree with the candidate on most other issues. By comparison, 34% say they would not support a candidate who disagrees with them on abortion and 32% expressed that opinion about a candidate’s stance on gun control.

Yet while gay marriage has a greater overall impact on voters than either abortion or gun control, the nature of its influence is quite different. For the most part, gay marriage is a make-or-break voting issue only to the opponents of that idea; supporters of gay marriage generally say a candidate’s stance would not affect their vote. Moreover, even among gay marriage opponents, the issue has a disproportionate impact on some groups – notably conservative Republicans, evangelical Christians and voters age 65 and older.

The latest Pew Research Center national survey shows that voters oppose gay marriage by more than two-to-one (65%-28%), a margin that has remained generally steady since October. (This survey was conducted Feb. 11-16, prior to President Bush’s Feb. 24 announcement that he would support a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage).<sup>1</sup>

<b>Power of Wedge Issues*</b>			
<i>Personal view on issues...</i>	<u>Abortion Rights</u>	<u>Gay Marriage</u>	<u>Gun Control</u>
	%	%	%
Favor	58	28	56
<i>Would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with you</i>	19	6	15
Oppose	37	65	39
<i>Would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with you</i>	15	34	17
Don't know	<u>5</u> 100	<u>7</u> 100	<u>5</u> 100

\*Based 1,149 on registered voters

<sup>1</sup> This analysis based on registered voters only; topline based on general public.

Other recent national surveys have found that, in spite of the broad opposition to gay marriage, the public is divided over a constitutional amendment to ban the practice. An ABC News/Washington Post poll conducted Feb. 18-22 showed that 46% support a constitutional amendment while 45% believe it should be up to each state to make its own laws regarding homosexual marriage.

Further, despite the current furor over gay marriage, the public generally does not view a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage as a top national priority. In the Pew Research Center's annual poll of priorities for the president and Congress, conducted in January before events in Massachusetts and San Francisco gave more prominence to the issue, just 22% of Americans said passing a constitutional amendment to prohibit gay marriages was a top priority. The issue ranked 21<sup>st</sup> out of 22 items tested.

***Gay Marriage and Voting***

Yet it is also the case that gay marriage evokes intense feelings – especially from staunch opponents of the practice. Nearly half of voters (45%) *strongly* oppose allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally. As a point of comparison, just three-in-ten voters strongly oppose making it more difficult to get an abortion, while 17% strongly favor tighter abortion restrictions.

<b>Wedge Issues and Voting Decisions</b>						
<i>Would NOT Vote for a candidate who disagrees with you on...</i>						
	<i>Abortion Rights</i>		<i>Gay Marriage</i>		<i>Gun Control</i>	
	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Registered Voters	19	15	6	34	15	17
Men	14	16	4	35	8	<b>25</b>
Women	23	15	7	33	21	10
White	18	16	6	34	13	18
Black	<b>26</b>	12	6	32	<b>25</b>	8
Republican	12	<b>26</b>	2	<b>50</b>	10	<b>29</b>
Democrat	<b>26</b>	6	6	25	19	8
Independent	18	15	9	24	16	14
18-29	25	18	8	23	21	18
30-49	16	16	8	30	14	15
50-64	17	16	5	36	14	18
65+	24	12	1	<b>45</b>	16	18
College Grad	19	13	9	26	13	12
Some College	22	18	5	32	16	19
HS Grad or Less	18	16	4	<b>40</b>	16	19
White Protestant	15	19	4	41	11	22
–Evangelical	10	<b>29</b>	1	<b>55</b>	9	<b>26</b>
–Non-Evang.	19	10	7	26	12	18
White Catholic	17	12	6	23	15	13
Secular	<b>29</b>	7	<b>15</b>	9	20	8
Northeast	<b>25</b>	10	8	26	18	13
Midwest	12	18	4	34	13	13
South	17	18	3	39	13	20
West	<b>26</b>	12	<b>11</b>	32	18	20

These intense sentiments are driving the voting decisions of many gay marriage opponents. About a third of voters (34%) say they would not support a candidate who favors gay marriage, even if they agree with the candidate on most other issues. By comparison, just 6% of voters say they would not back a candidate who opposes gay marriage, even if the candidate is otherwise acceptable. The impact of abortion and gun control on voting decisions is much more mixed: comparable percentages of voters who favor and oppose abortion rights, and gun control, say they would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with their position.

Six-in-ten Republican voters (61%) strongly oppose gay marriage, and half would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with them on the issue, even if they agree with the candidate's positions on most other matters. Similarly, two-thirds of white evangelical Protestant voters (67%) strongly oppose gay marriage; more than half (55%) say they would not back a candidate who does not share that opinion, even if the candidate's other positions are acceptable. Opposition to gay marriage is far less of a factor in the voting decisions of white Catholics and non-evangelical Protestants.

A solid majority of voters age 65 and older also express strong opposition to gay marriage (60%). In fact, opposition to gay marriage is nearly as important for these voters as it is for Republicans (45% vs. 50%). There are major differences among age groups over this issue. Just 23% of voters under age 30 say they would not for a candidate who supports gay marriage, even if they agree with the candidate on other issues.

### ***Abortion, Gun Control Have Mixed Effect***

Public opinion on abortion and gun control has changed little in recent years. In the current poll, a 58% majority of voters oppose making it more difficult for women to obtain abortions, while 37% support tighter restrictions on abortion. By a comparable margin (56%-39%), voters believe it is more important to control gun ownership than to protect the right of Americans to own guns.

Yet those who base their vote primarily on a candidate's position on these issues are fairly evenly split between proponents and opponents. About one-in-five voters (19%) say they would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with their position in support of continued access to abortion; 15% say they would not vote for a candidate who takes the opposite view. The impact of gun control on voting decisions is similarly mixed.

On abortion, roughly a quarter of Democrats (26%) say they would not vote for a candidate who supported efforts to make abortions more difficult to obtain; the same percentage of

Republicans (26%) would not vote for a candidate who took the opposite position. Women are generally supportive of continued access to abortion (61% vs. 54% of men), and more women than men would not vote for a candidate who favors making abortions more difficult to obtain (23% vs. 14% of men).

Roughly three-in-ten Republicans (29%) say they would not vote for a candidate who believes it is more important to control gun ownership than protect the rights of gun owners. A sizable minority of men also take that position (25%).

While the vast majority of Democratic voters (68%) believe it is more important to control gun ownership than protect the right of Americans to own guns, relatively few Democrats (19%) say they would not vote for a candidate who disagrees with them on this issue. Fully 44% of Democrats say they would vote for a candidate even if they differed with him or her on that particular issue.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **ABOUT THIS SURVEY**

Results for the survey are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among a nationwide sample of 1,500 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period February 11-16, 2004. Based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. For results based on either Form 1 (N=785) or Form 2 (N=715), the sampling error is plus or minus 4 percentage points. For results based on Registered Voters (N=1149), the sampling error is plus or minus 3.5 percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER FOR THE PEOPLE & THE PRESS**  
**FEBRUARY 2004 NEWS INTEREST INDEX**  
**FINAL TOPLINE**  
**February 11 - 16, 2004**  
**N=1500**

**NOTE: All TOPLINE percentages are presented based on the TOTAL POPULATION.**  
**In the report, all analysis is based on REGISTERED VOTERS.**

**ASK ALL:**

Q.39 I'd like your opinion of some programs and proposals being discussed in this country today. Please tell me if you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose each one. The first one is... **[INSERT ITEM; ITEM a ALWAYS APPEARS FIRST, FOLLOWED BY ITEMS b AND c ROTATED] ITEM b AND c FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY Q61b AND Q61c, RESPECTIVELY**

		----- FAVOR -----			---- OPPOSE ----			
		Strongly			Strongly			Don't
		<u>Net</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Net</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>know</u>
a.	Allowing churches and other houses of worship to apply, along with other organizations, for government funding to provide social services such as job training or drug treatment counseling to people who need them	69	28	41	29	10	19	2=100
	March, 2002	70	26	44	27	9	18	3=100
	June, 2001	72	30	42	25	10	15	3=100
	March, 2001	75	30	45	21	8	13	4=100
	February, 2001	64	28	36	30	11	19	6=100
	September, 2000 <sup>2</sup> (RVs)	67	32	35	29	12	17	4=100
b.	Making it more DIFFICULT for a woman to get an abortion	36	17	19	58	30	28	6=100
	November, 2003	35	19	16	57	29	28	8=100
	August, 2003 <sup>3</sup>	36	17	19	57	30	27	7=100
	May, 1993	32	15	17	60	35	25	8=100
	May, 1992	30	--	--	62	--	--	8=100
	May, 1990	38	21	17	55	29	26	7=100
	May, 1987	41	18	23	51	33	18	8=100
	May, 1985	47	--	--	49	--	--	4=100
c.	Allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally	30	9	21	63	42	21	7=100
	November, 2003	30	10	20	62	41	21	8=100
	October, 2003	32	9	23	59	35	24	9=100
	Mid-July, 2003	38	10	28	53	30	23	9=100
	March, 2001	35	8	27	57	34	23	8=100
	June, 1996	27	6	21	65	41	24	8=100

---

<sup>2</sup> Based on registered voters. Item was worded: "Allowing religious organizations to apply, along with other organizations, for government funding to provide social services such as job training or drug treatment counseling to people who need them."

<sup>3</sup> In August 2003 and earlier the question was worded: "Changing the laws to make it more difficult for a woman to get an abortion."

**ASK IMMEDIATELY AFTER Q.39b OF THOSE WHO GAVE AN OPINION:**

Q.39b/40b Would you vote for a candidate who DISAGREES with you about abortion, if they AGREE with you on most OTHER issues?

36	Favor making abortion more difficult to get
17	Yes, would vote for candidate
15	No, would not vote for candidate
4	Depends/Don't know/Refused
58	Oppose making abortion more difficult to get
31	Yes, would vote for candidate
21	No, would not vote for candidate
6	Depends/Don't know/Refused
<u>6</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

Q.40b Would you vote for a candidate who DISAGREES with you about abortion, if they AGREE with you on most OTHER issues?

49	Yes, would
35	No, would not
6	Depends (VOL.)
4	Don't know/Refused
<u>6</u>	No opinion on abortion (FROM Q.39b)
100	

**ASK IMMEDIATELY AFTER Q.39c OF THOSE WHO GAVE AN OPINION:**

Q.39c/40c Would you vote for a candidate who DISAGREES with you about gay marriage, if they AGREE with you on most OTHER issues?

30	Favor gay marriage
22	Yes, would vote for candidate
6	No, would not vote for candidate
2	Depends/Don't know/Refused
63	Oppose gay marriage
25	Yes, would vote for candidate
32	No, would not vote for candidate
6	Depends/Don't know/Refused
<u>7</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**ASK ALL:**

Q.41 What do you think is more important – to protect the right of Americans to own guns, OR to control gun ownership?

**IF OPINION GIVEN (1,2) IN Q.41 ASK:**

Q.41a Do you feel strongly about that, or not?

		<u>June</u> <u>2003</u>	<u>May</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>March</u> <u>2000</u>	<u>June</u> <u>1999</u>	<u>May</u> <u>1999</u>	<u>Dec</u> <u>1993</u>
37	Protect right of Americans to own guns	42	38	29	33	30	34
31	Yes, feel strongly						
6	No, don't feel strongly						
*	Don't know/Refused						
58	Control gun ownership	54	57	66	62	65	57
46	Yes, feel strongly						
11	No, don't feel strongly						
1	Don't know/Refused						
<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>9</u>
100		100	100	100	100	100	100

**IF OPINION GIVEN (1,2) IN Q.41 ASK:**

Q.41b Would you vote for a candidate who DISAGREES with you about gun ownership, if they AGREE with you on most OTHER issues?

54	Yes, would
33	No, would not
5	Depends (VOL.)
3	Don't know/Refused
<u>5</u>	No opinion on gun ownership (FROM Q.41)
100	

Q.41/41b Would you vote for a candidate who DISAGREES with you about gun ownership, if they AGREE with you on most OTHER issues?

37	Protect right of Americans to own guns
18	Yes, would vote for candidate
16	No, would not vote for candidate
3	Depends/Don't know/Refused
58	Control gun ownership
36	Yes, would vote for candidate
17	No, would not vote for candidate
5	Depends/Don't know/Refused
<u>5</u>	Don't know/Refused
100	

**ASK FORM 1 ONLY [N=785]:**

Q.42F1 In your view, should the GOVERNMENT start up programs that encourage people to get and stay married, or should the GOVERNMENT stay out of this?

		<u>March 2002</u>
20	The government should start up programs that encourage marriage	18
77	The government should stay out	79
<u>3</u>	Don't know/Refused	<u>3</u>
100		100

**ASK FORM 2 ONLY [N=715]:**

Q.43F2 In your view, should the GOVERNMENT start up programs that encourage people to get and stay married, or not?

42	Yes, the government should start up programs that encourage marriage
54	No, the government should not
<u>4</u>	Don't know/Refused [ <b>VOL.</b> ]
100	