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Support Grows For Gay Marriage In Illinois

As state lawmakers consider legalizing gay marriage in Illinois, a new poll shows increasing support for the idea.

The poll, taken by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, shows that in the past three years, support has grown sharply, from 33.6 percent in 2010 to 45.5 percent today.

The poll also shows support for medical use of marijuana and abortion rights while voters are closely divided over expanding gambling in the state.

“I think it is widely believed that Illinois is a fairly liberal state on the social issues front and these results certainly provide some empirical support for that perception,” said John S. Jackson, visiting professor at the Institute.

“The additional perception is that Chicago and the suburban collar counties are more liberal than downstate and our results also tend to support that view although even downstate provided a plurality or a majority in favor of the liberal position on all of these issues except gay marriage, where the most popular response downstate was in favor of civil unions,” he said.

The poll of 600 registered voters in Illinois was taken Jan 27 to Feb 8. The statewide sample has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

The survey found:

- Those who said gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry were a plurality of all respondents at 45.5 percent. Also this year, 29.7 percent supported civil unions. When combined, 79.2 percent of registered Illinois voters favor some sort of legal recognition of the relationship between gay and lesbian couples. There are 20 percent who want no legal recognition of the relationship.

“People are moving their support for civil unions to support for full marriage,” said Charles Leonard, a visiting professor at the Institute and the director of the poll.

- On abortion, 42.3 percent said it “should be legal under certain circumstances and 37 percent said it should be “legal under any circumstances.” That means 79.3 percent of registered voters are

supporting pro-choice options while only 16.7 percent were found in the pure pro-life position of saying that abortions should be illegal under all circumstances.

- A total of 63.3 percent either strongly favored or favored making medical use of marijuana legal. There were 40.0 percent in the “strongly favor” and 23.3 percent in the “favor” category. This contrasted with a combined total of 32.1 percent who were opposed or strongly opposed, with 25.3 percent strongly opposed and 6.8 percent opposed.
- Registered voters are closely divided over the issue of expanded gambling in the state. The topic is on the table as a budget issue in Springfield during the spring legislative term. Some voters have moral objections to it. According to the poll, there are 49.8 percent of respondents who either favor or strongly favor expanded gambling while 44.1 percent opposed or strongly opposed it.

“There’s a reason lawmakers are having a tough time dealing with gambling issues,” Jackson said. “Voters back home are so evenly divided.”

The questionnaire was available in both English and Spanish, and a Spanish-speaking interviewer was made available. The sample also included two-thirds land-line phones and one-third cell phones. The Simon Institute developed the questionnaire, and live phone interviews were administered by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas, which reports no Illinois political clients. The Institute paid for the project out of non-state funds from its endowment.

The director of the poll is Dr. Charles Leonard, visiting professor at the Institute.

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**Appendix:
The Simon Poll Spring 2013
Response Frequencies**

1. Which of the following three statements comes closest to your position on the legal rights of gay and lesbian couples in Illinois?

	2010	2012	2013
Should be allowed to legally marry	33.6%	43.6%	45.5%
Should be allowed to form civil unions but not to legally marry	33.9%	31.8%	29.7%
There should be no legal recognition of relationships between gay and lesbian couples.	26.5%	20.2%	20.0%
Other/Don’t know	6.0%	4.8%	4.8%

2. Do you favor or oppose a proposal expanding legalized gambling in the state?

	2010	2011	2013
Strongly favor	--	--	27.0%
Favor	38.3%	49.9%	22.8%
Oppose	53.6%	46.3%	10.8%
Strongly oppose	--	--	33.3%
Other/Don't know	8.1%	3.8%	6.0%

3. Some in Springfield have proposed that the state should make it legal for people with certain health issues to be prescribed small amounts of marijuana. Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose legalized medical marijuana in Illinois?

Strongly favor	40.0%
Favor	23.3%
Oppose	6.8%
Strongly oppose	25.3%
Other/Don't know	4.5%

4. Do you think abortions should be legal under all circumstances, legal only under certain circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances?

	2010	2012	2013
Legal under any	31.5%	37.0%	37.0%
Legal under certain	45.0%	44.3%	42.3%
Illegal under all	19.1%	15.9%	16.7%
Other/Don't know	4.4%	2.9%	4.0%