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Majority of Illinois Voters Support Full Same-Sex Marriage Equality

There has been a significant increase in support in Illinois for legalizing gay marriage, according to a series of polls by the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University.

The issue is back in the news with the U.S. Supreme Court considering marriage equality issues, and Institute polls show a dramatic evolution of support in the state during the past six years.

The most recent Simon Poll, conducted Feb. 28 to March 10, shows 54.9 percent of registered Illinois voters in support of marriage equality; 20.0 percent favoring civil unions; 18.4 percent opposed to both, and 6.7 percent unsure. The survey of 1,000 voters has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

Opposition to gay marriage has faded across the board in the state, including among Republicans, conservatives and evangelicals.

The issue of gay marriage has appeared in nearly every statewide Simon Poll since 2009. In that time, opinion has gone from being almost equally divided between those favoring full-marriage rights or civil unions versus no legal recognition at all, also called “traditional marriage,” to a solid majority favoring full-marriage rights for the past three Simon Polls since February 2014.

When support for civil unions is incorporated, three-fourths of Illinoisans (74.9 percent) now see a place for legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

“Pundits and pollsters nationwide have commented on the extraordinary pace at which Americans have come to accept gay marriage, and our poll graphically documents that opinion shift in Illinois,” said Charlie Leonard, one of the Simon Institute visiting professors who supervises the poll. “In fact, that very speed is one of the things that may be making conservatives on the Supreme Court nervous about changing an age-old institution like traditional marriage. There’s no question, though, that the voting public, at least in Illinois, is ahead of where the courts are on marriage equality.”

The poll also found:

- Support for marriage rights for gay and lesbian couples is not limited to liberals and Democrats. Among Illinois Republicans, over two-thirds (67.8 percent) support some type of legal recognition with 38.0 percent of respondents in the latest Simon Poll (March 2015) favoring full-marriage

equality and with another 29.8 percent favoring civil unions. Just over a quarter (27.7 percent) of GOP supporters say there should be no legal recognition for same-sex couples.

The 2015 result is notable compared to its 2009 counterpart, in which nearly half (47.7 percent) of Republicans took the no-legal-rights stance and only one in ten favored full marriage rights.

- Opposition to legal recognition among evangelicals in Illinois has also faded. In 2009, 70.9 percent opposed any legal recognition for same-sex relationships. Today, that number is 45.7 percent. There are 49.1 percent of evangelicals who either support gay marriage or civil unions.

In 2009, only 4.1 percent of evangelicals favored full recognition. Today, that figure is 23.4 percent.

“Perhaps the most surprising development is the transforming views among evangelicals,” said Kent Dolezal, Simon Graduate Research Fellow. “Finding more in support of some legal recognition than not is a development which may have an impact going into the Republican presidential primaries.”

- Opinion among Independents also underwent a shift between the February 2013 and February 2014 Simon Poll. Although a clear majority of Independents favored some sort of legal recognition by 2013, February 2014 saw support for full legal rights reach nearly 60 percent. In the same time frame, those favoring civil unions dropped from 46 percent to 14 percent.
- Support is strongest among Democrats, with over 60 percent in favor of full rights since 2013, up from four in ten in 2009. From an ideological perspective, liberals currently favor marriage equality at a rate topping 75 percent. Moderates have seen their support go from just over one-third (33.6 percent) in 2009 to nearly two-thirds (65.9 percent) in the latest Simon Poll.
- From 2010 to 2015, conservative views shifted dramatically. In 2010, 15.6 percent of conservatives supported same-sex marriage. By, this year, that figure grew to 31.8 percent. Those who opposed any legal recognition of same-sex marriage dropped from 41.7 percent to 29.2 percent.
- At 66.5 percent, marriage equality sees its strongest support in Chicago, a nearly 30-point increase since 2009. The Chicago suburbs see majority support (55.6 percent), with Downstate residents nearing half at 46 percent. Downstate results also demonstrate the dramatic 2013-14 shift when support went from 27.8 percent to 42.5 percent.

The Simon Institute Poll interviewed 1,000 registered voters across Illinois. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. This means that if we were to conduct the survey 100 times, in 95 of those instances the results would vary by no more than plus or minus 3 points from the results obtained here.

Live telephone interviews were conducted by Customer Research International of San Marcos, Texas. Cell phone interviews accounted for 30 percent of the sample. A Spanish language version of the questionnaire and a Spanish-speaking interviewer were made available. Field work was conducted from February 28 – March 10. No auto-dial or “robo” polling is included. Customer Research International reports no Illinois political clients. The survey was paid for with non-tax dollars from the Institute’s endowment fund. Crosstabs for the referenced questions will be on the Institute’s web site, paulsimoninstitute.org.

Simon Institute polling data are also archived by three academic institutions for use by scholars and the public. The three open source data repositories are: the University of Michigan’s Inter-university

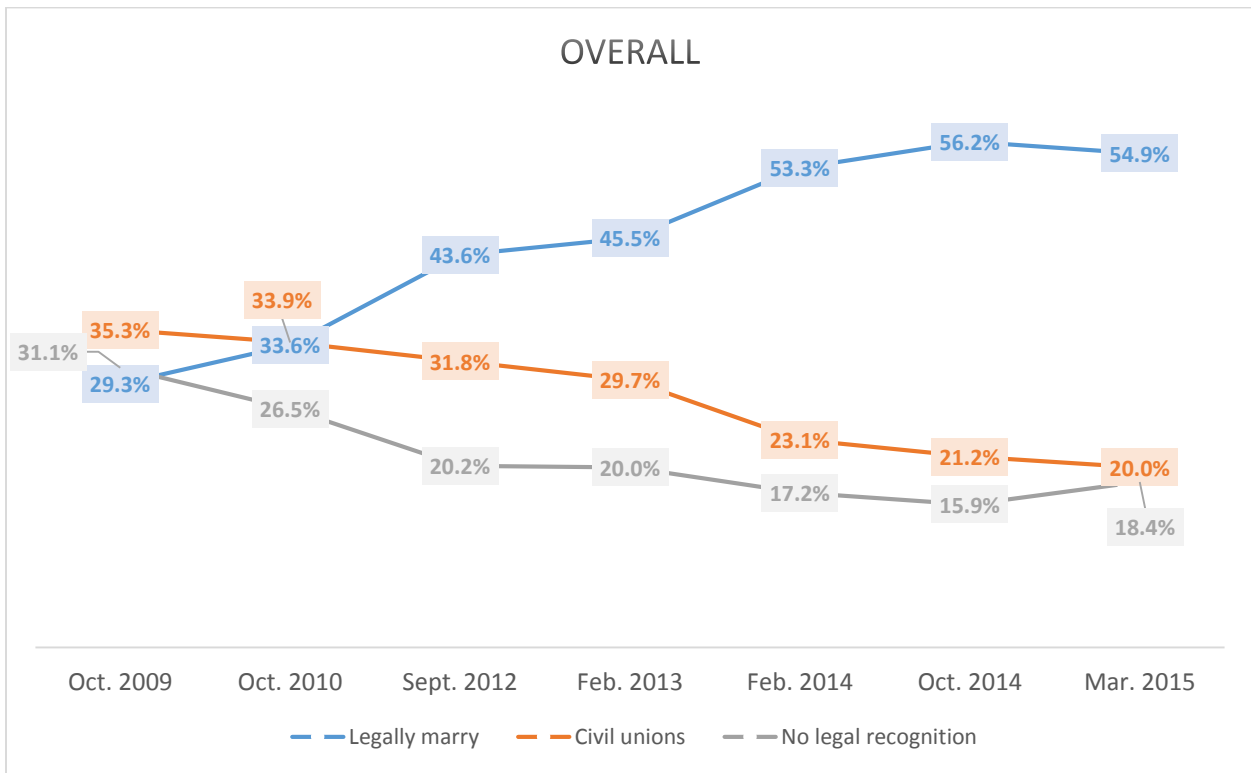
Consortium for Political and Social Research (OpenICPSR; <http://openicpsr.org/repoEntity/list>), the University of North Carolina's Odum Institute Dataverse Network (<http://arc.irss.unc.edu/dvn/dv/PSPPI>), and the Simon Institute Collection at OpenSIUC (<http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/ppi/>).

Note: The "Paul Simon Public Policy Institute Poll," the "Simon Poll" and the "Southern Illinois Poll" are the copyrighted trademarks of the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University. Use and publication of these polls is encouraged- but only with credit to the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at SIU Carbondale

Overall Trends

Which of the following three statements comes closest to your position on the legal rights of gay and lesbian couples in Illinois?: Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to legally marry; Gay and lesbian couples should be allowed to form civil unions, which would give them some legal rights; OR There should be no legal recognition of relationships between gay and lesbian couples?

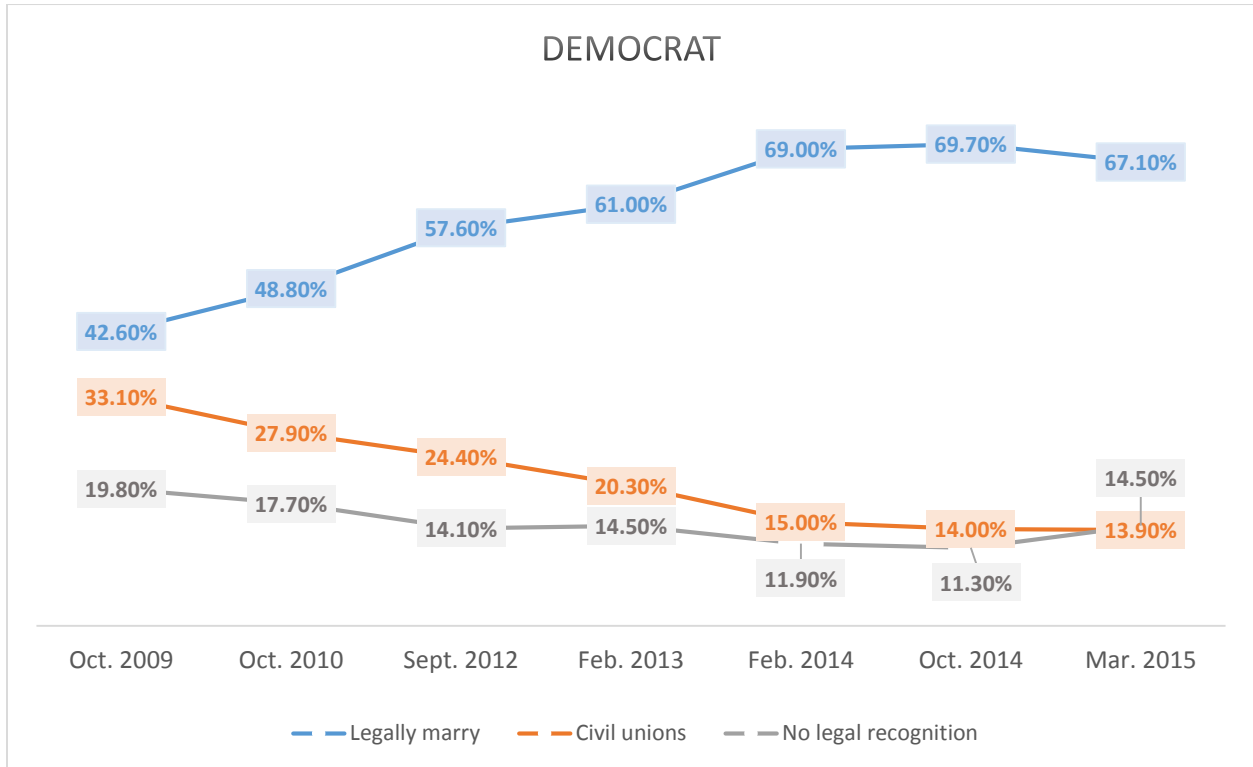
	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	29.30%	33.60%	43.60%	45.50%	53.30%	56.20%	54.90%
Civil unions	35.30%	33.90%	31.80%	29.70%	23.10%	21.20%	20.00%
No legal recognition	31.10%	26.50%	20.20%	20.00%	17.20%	15.90%	18.40%



Party Affiliation

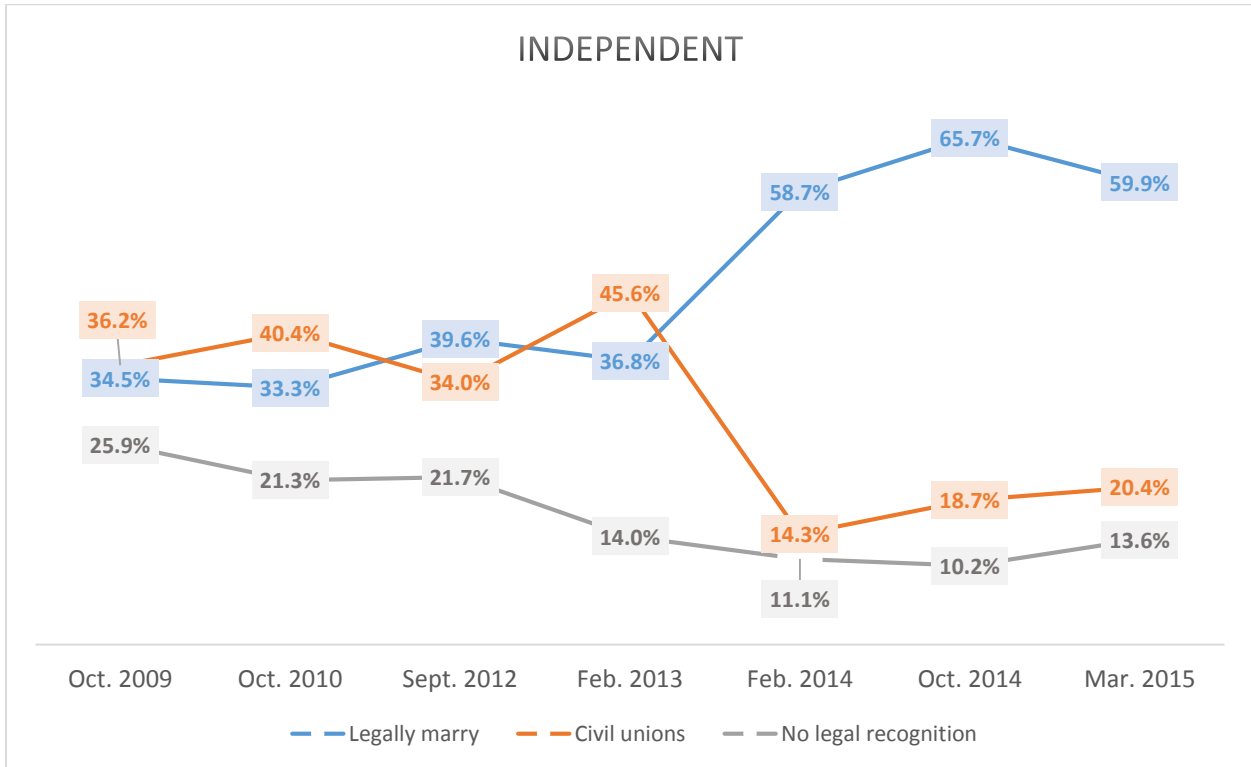
Democrat

	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	42.6%	48.8%	57.6%	61.0%	69.0%	69.7%	67.1%
Civil unions	33.1%	27.9%	24.4%	20.3%	15.0%	14.0%	13.9%
No legal recognition	19.8%	17.7%	14.1%	14.5%	11.9%	11.3%	14.5%



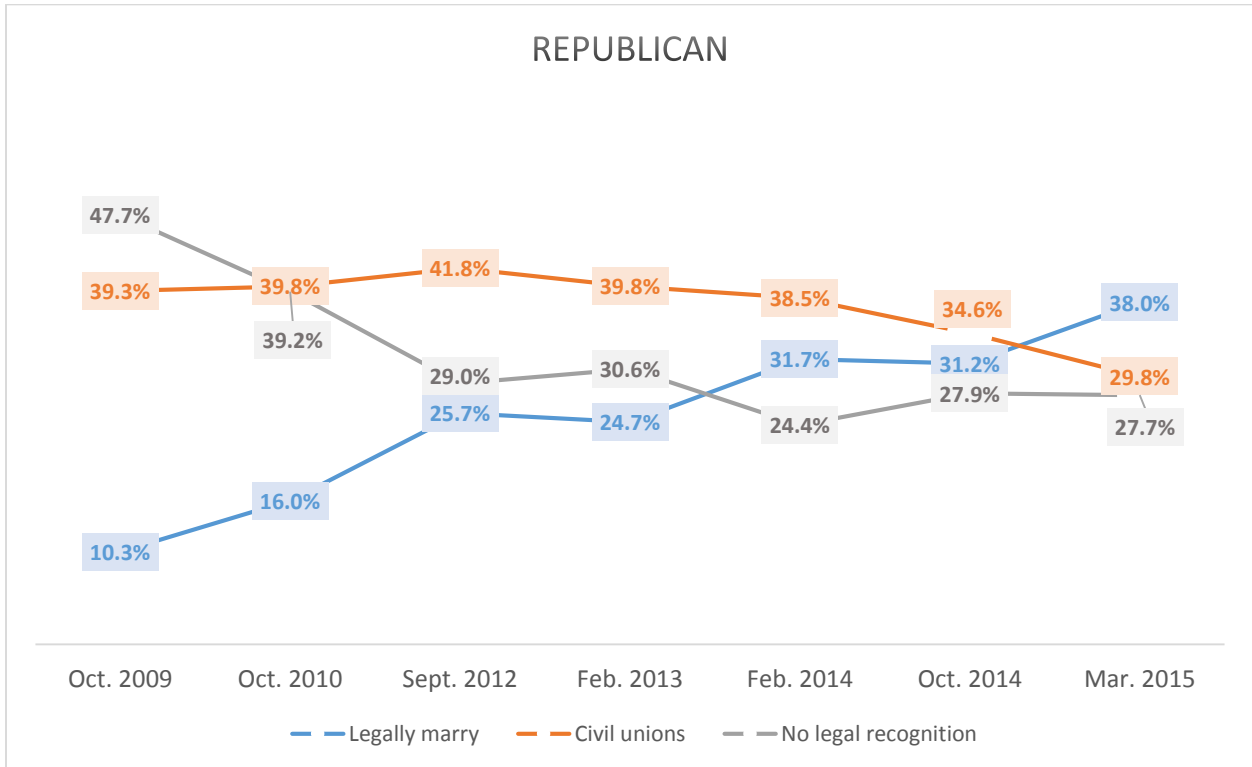
Independent

	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	34.5%	33.3%	39.6%	36.8%	58.7%	65.7%	59.9%
Civil unions	36.2%	40.4%	34.0%	45.6%	14.3%	18.7%	20.4%
No legal recognition	25.9%	21.3%	21.7%	14.0%	11.1%	10.2%	13.6%



Republican

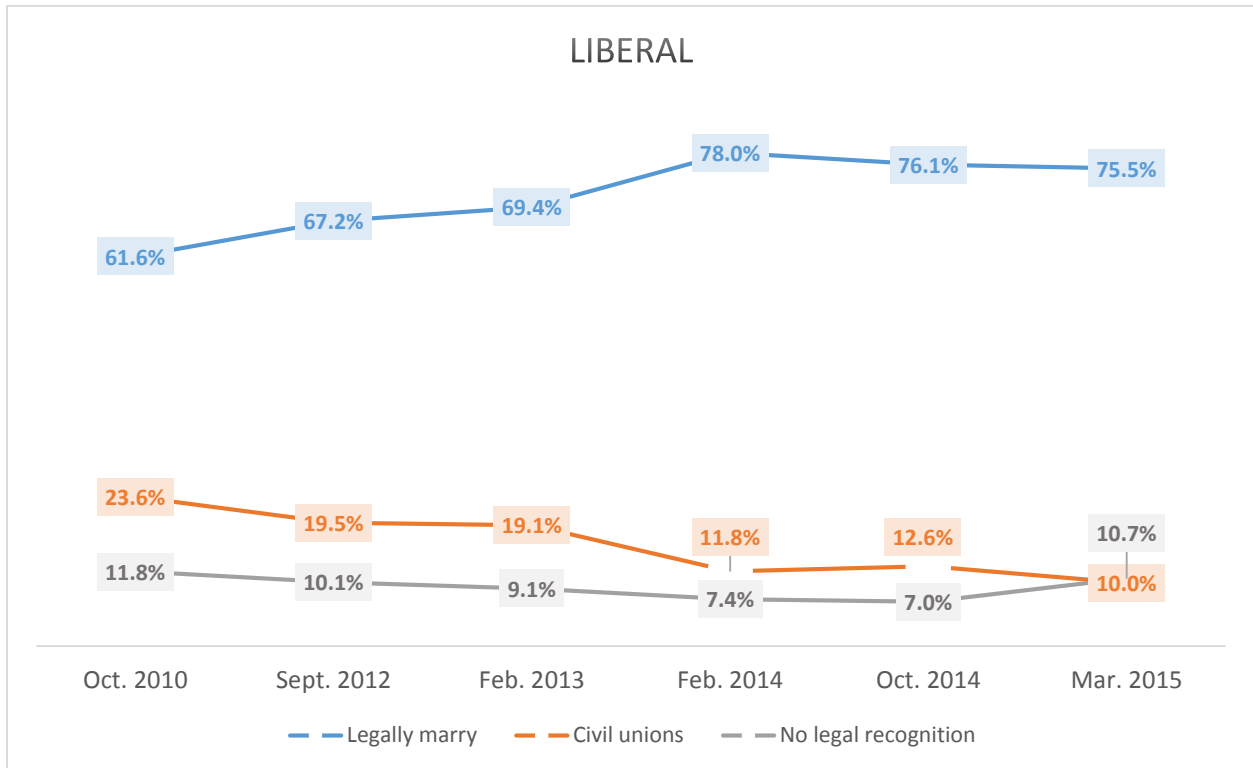
	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	10.3%	16.0%	25.7%	24.7%	31.7%	31.2%	38.0%
Civil unions	39.3%	39.8%	41.8%	39.8%	38.5%	34.6%	29.8%
No legal recognition	47.7%	39.2%	29.0%	30.6%	24.4%	27.9%	27.7%



Political Ideology

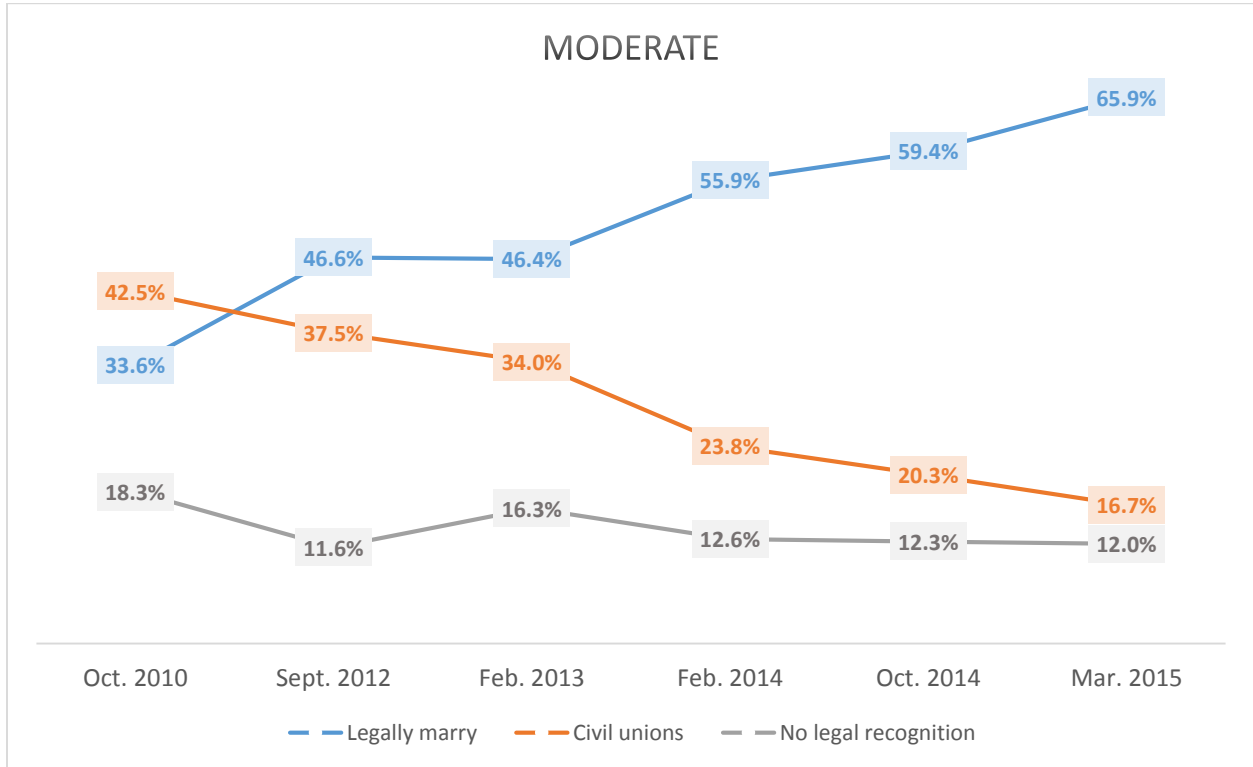
Liberal

	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	61.6%	67.2%	69.4%	78.0%	76.1%	75.5%
Civil unions	23.6%	19.5%	19.1%	11.8%	12.6%	10.0%
No legal recognition	11.8%	10.1%	9.1%	7.4%	7.0%	10.7%



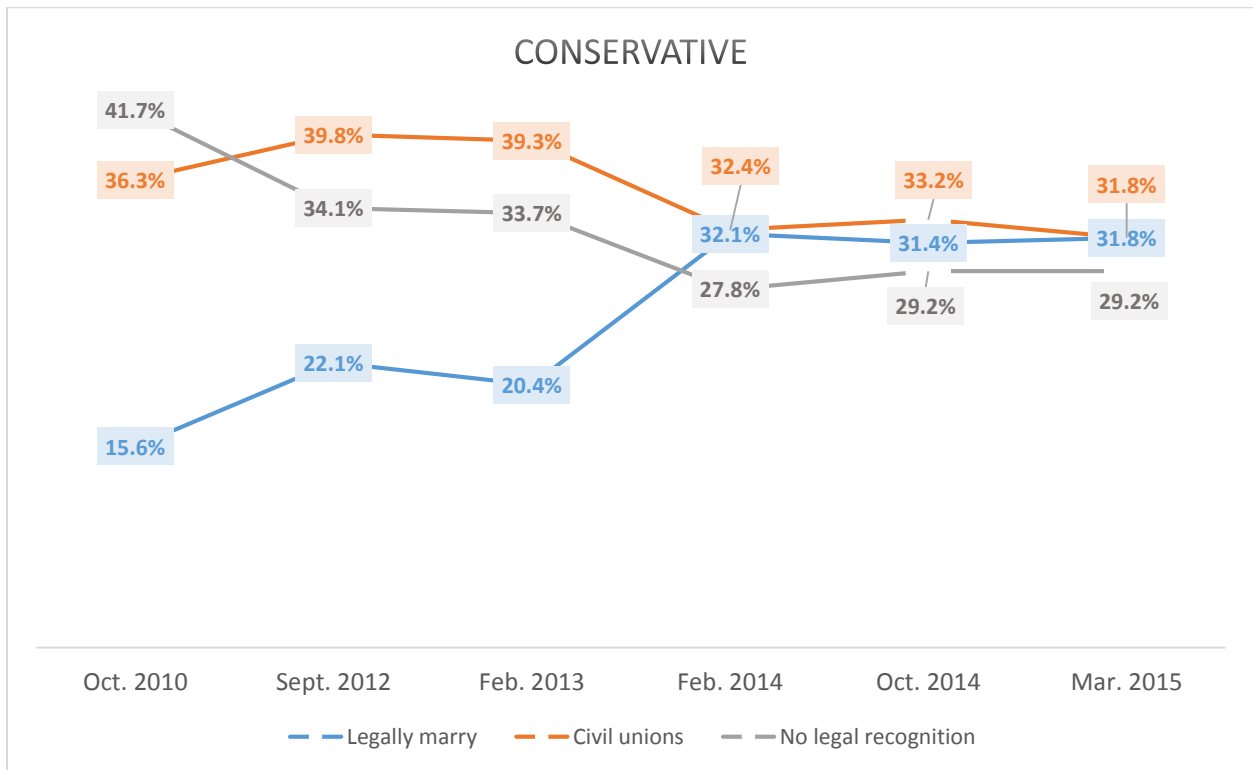
Moderate

	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	33.6%	46.6%	46.4%	55.9%	59.4%	65.9%
Civil unions	42.5%	37.5%	34.0%	23.8%	20.3%	16.7%
No legal recognition	18.3%	11.6%	16.3%	12.6%	12.3%	12.0%



Conservative

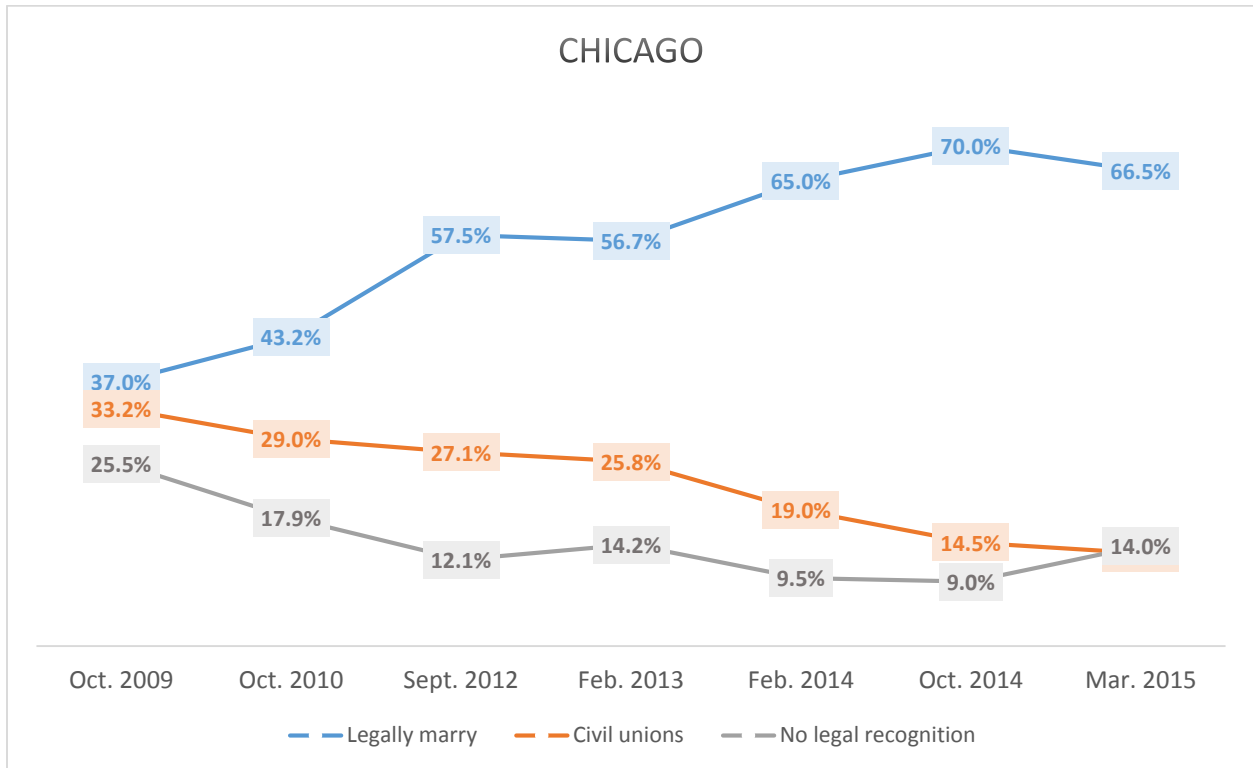
	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	15.6%	22.1%	20.4%	32.1%	31.4%	31.8%
Civil unions	36.3%	39.8%	39.3%	32.4%	33.2%	31.8%
No legal recognition	41.7%	34.1%	33.7%	27.8%	29.2%	29.2%



Geographic Region

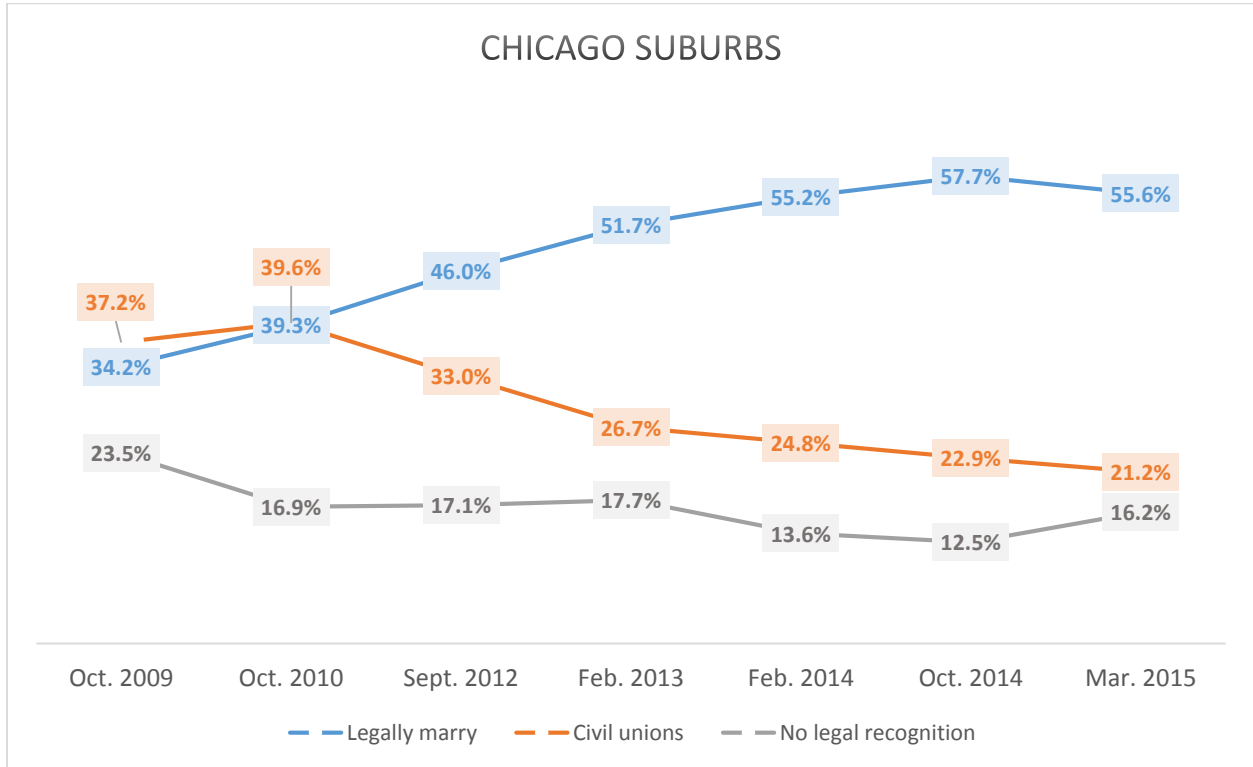
Chicago

	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	37.0%	43.2%	57.5%	56.7%	65.0%	70.0%	66.5%
Civil unions	33.2%	29.0%	27.1%	25.8%	19.0%	14.5%	13.0%
No legal recognition	25.5%	17.9%	12.1%	14.2%	9.5%	9.0%	14.0%



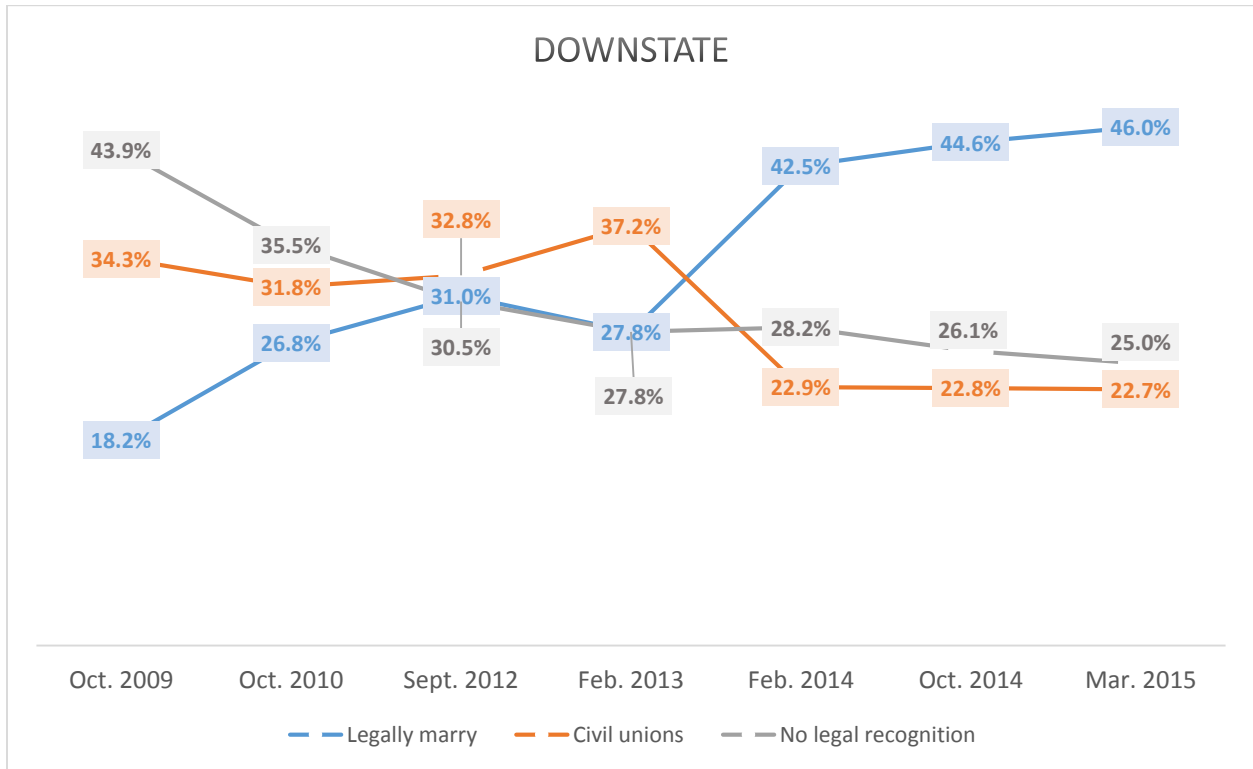
Chicago suburbs

	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	34.2%	39.3%	46.0%	51.7%	55.2%	57.7%	55.6%
Civil unions	37.2%	39.6%	33.0%	26.7%	24.8%	22.9%	21.2%
No legal recognition	23.5%	16.9%	17.1%	17.7%	13.6%	12.5%	16.2%



Downstate

	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	18.2%	26.8%	31.0%	27.8%	42.5%	44.6%	46.0%
Civil unions	34.3%	31.8%	32.8%	37.2%	22.9%	22.8%	22.7%
No legal recognition	43.9%	35.5%	30.5%	27.8%	28.2%	26.1%	25.0%



Religious Views

Born again and/or evangelical Christian

	Oct. 2009	Oct. 2010	Sept. 2012	Feb. 2013	Feb. 2014	Oct. 2014	Mar. 2015
Legally marry	4.1%	17.9%	22.9%	14.8%	28.0%	12.2%	23.4%
Civil unions	23.0%	31.8%	28.6%	38.9%	29.3%	29.4%	25.7%
No legal recognition	70.9%	45.1%	45.2%	44.4%	35.0%	45.2%	45.7%

