



## Poll: Michigan voters wary of gay marriage legislation, ballot measure

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LANSING, MI -- A slim majority of likely Michigan voters would oppose legislation or a ballot measure seeking to allow same-sex marriage in the state, according to results of a new statewide poll that seem to contradict other recent surveys.

Denno Research, in a poll conducted for and **released Thursday by** the Lambert Edwards & Associates public relations firm, asked 600 likely voters whether they would support or oppose attempts to legalize gay marriage through legislation or the ballot box.

All told, more than 51 percent of respondents said they would oppose such efforts, including 34 percent who said they would be strongly opposed. Roughly 42 percent of likely voters said they would support legislation or a ballot issue to allow same-sex marriage, including 18 percent who said they would be strongly supportive.

Most Democrats said they would support the efforts, while an overwhelming majority of Republicans voiced opposition. A small majority of independents -- 52 percent -- said they were opposed.

"Those numbers will need to seriously change if the pro same sex marriage side hopes to win a ballot amendment," pollster Dennis Denno wrote in a brief analysis accompanying the results.

The poll, conducted July 23-24, has a margin of error of 4 percentage points. Denno formerly worked for Democratic leadership in the state legislature, while LE&A bills itself as Michigan's largest bipartisan PR firm.

Other recent surveys have suggested that Michigan, like the rest of the nation, is warming up to gay marriage. A May poll conducted by the **Glengariff Group** showed 56 percent support for same-sex marriage in Michigan. A statewide poll conducted last year by **Michigan State University** also indicated majority support.

Those numbers, along with anticipation that the Supreme Court would overturn a key provision of the federal Defense of Marriage Act, prompted Lansing Democrats to introduce **a series of bills** seeking to repeal Michigan's ban on same-sex marriage, which was approved by nearly 59 percent of voters in 2004.

The legislation is unlikely to advance in Michigan's Republican-led Legislature, however, and same-sex marriage advocates are looking at 2016 for a potential statewide ballot proposal.

Emily Dievendorf of Equality Michigan, who is helping plan a possible ballot initiative, questioned the timeliness of the poll results, suggesting that older, conservative voters were over-represented in the survey.

"The numbers aren't terrible, but I don't think they reflect the support of voters today," she said. "Michigan is really coming together. Everybody is very excited to get to work. It's just a matter of what happens when. It does seem inevitable that we will repeal this ban."

Asked about the latest polling numbers, David Maluchnik of the Michigan Catholic Conference said it "appears the brakes should be placed on the 'inevitable' framing of the issue."

"The defeat of marriage redefinition in Illinois amplifies this point," he continued, referring to legislation that stalled in that state last session but may still be revisited this fall.

In addition to legislation and a potential ballot proposal, Michigan's same-sex marriage ban is being challenged in federal court. U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman is expected to hear arguments this October in a lawsuit filed on behalf of a gay couple from Hazel Park.

The couple, who have independently adopted three special-needs children, initially sued the state to win joint custody of their kids, which current Michigan law does not allow for unmarried parents. They eventually expanded their suit to challenge the constitutionality of Michigan's gay marriage ban.

## THE WORDING

MLive waited to publish the results of the poll, released Thursday, until learning the exact wording of the question, which you can read below, along with a brief analysis by pollster Dennis Denno.

7. If legislation or a ballot issue was introduced to allow same-sex marriage in Michigan, would you be very supportive, supportive, opposed or strongly opposed?

- 1) Very supportive 106 17.7%
- 2) Supportive 144 24%
- 3) Opposed 106 17.7%
- 4) Strongly opposed 202 33.7%
- 5) Other/Unsure/ Do Not Know/ Refused (DO NOT OFFER) 42 7%

Brief Analysis: Question 7 Same Sex Marriage

When asked if they would be supportive of legislation to support same-sex marriage, a small majority, at 51% were total opposed, and 42% were total supportive. If there is a ballot initiative in the next few years to attempt to legalize same sex marriage, the total support numbers need to become much stronger.

While 64% of Democrats were total support and 22% of Republicans were total support, it is interesting to note that only 38% of Indie voters were total support and a majority, at 52%, were total opposed. Those numbers will need to seriously change if the pro same sex marriage side hopes to win a ballot amendment.

Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette's office asked to have the case dismissed. But Friedman, citing the **Supreme Court DOMA ruling**, said last month that the plaintiffs "are entitled to their day in court and they shall have it."

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