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## **New Poll: Only One-in-Five Californians Say Proposition 8 ‘Good Thing’** Comprehensive New Poll Examining Religious Based Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage

**LOS ANGELES** – As the state of California awaits U.S. District Court Chief Judge Vaughn R. Walker’s decision on whether Proposition 8 violates the U.S. Constitution, a new survey released today by Public Religion Research Institute examines the role religion plays in structuring attitudes toward same-sex marriage and a range of other issues related to rights for gay and lesbian people.

In 2008, pundits pointed to the influential role churches and religious groups played in Proposition 8’s outcome. The bilingual (Spanish and English) poll of 3,351 adults in California, including oversamples of 350 African Americans and 200 Latino Protestants, represents the most comprehensive portrait of religion and attitudes on same sex marriage and other gay and lesbian issues since Proposition 8 was approved.

“Our research shows a significant percentage of Californians, including people of faith across the California religious landscape, say they have become increasingly supportive of gay rights over the last five years,” said **Dr. Robert P. Jones, CEO of Public Religion Research Institute**. “Only one-in-five Californians now believe passage of Proposition 8 was a good thing for the state, and if another vote similar to Proposition 8 were held tomorrow, a majority (51%) of Californians say they would vote to allow gay and lesbian couples to marry.”

### **Highlights of the PRRI report include:**

- Only one-in-five (22%) Californians believe the passage of Proposition 8 was a “good thing” for the state. Most Californians believe Proposition 8 was either a bad thing for California (29%) or believe it has not made any difference (45%).
- One-in-four Californians report that their views on rights for gay and lesbian people has become more supportive over the last five years, compared to only 8% who say they have become more opposed. Among religious groups, ethnic minority groups showed slightly more overall movement than white religious groups. Among black Protestants, twice as many report becoming more supportive as report becoming more opposed (27% vs. 13%); among Latino Catholics, that ratio is 3-to-1 (31% more supportive vs. 9% more opposed) over this period.
- If another vote similar to Proposition 8 were held tomorrow, a majority (51%) say they would vote to allow gay and lesbian couples to marry, compared to 45% who say they would vote to keep same-sex marriage illegal.
- There are major religious groups on both sides of the debate over same-sex marriage in California. Solid majorities of Latino Catholics and white mainline Protestants say they would vote to allow gay and lesbian couples to marry, while solid majorities of white evangelical Protestants, Latino Protestants, and African American Protestants say they would vote to keep same-sex marriage illegal.



- An overwhelming majority of Californians, and majorities of all major religious groups except Latino Protestants, say they both favor laws that would protect gay and lesbian people from job discrimination and favor allowing gay and lesbian people to serve openly in the military (75% and 69% respectively). A majority (56%) of Californians favor adoption rights for same-sex couples.
- There is a striking Catholic-Protestant divide within the California Latino community on public policy issues related to gay and lesbian rights. A majority of Latino Catholics (57%) say they would vote to allow gay and lesbian couple to marry, compared to just 22% of Latino Protestants. The Catholic-Protestant divide in the Latino community is evident across a wide range of public policy issues related to gay and lesbian rights.
- In the wider California religious community, there are also significant Catholic-Protestant differences in the frequency with which each group hears about the issue of homosexuality from their clergy. Protestants are significantly more likely to hear about the issue than Catholics; this is true both for white Catholics and Latino Catholics. Mainline Protestants are the only major religious group that is more likely to hear positive than negative messages about homosexuality from their clergy.
- The messages about homosexuality that Californians hear at their place of worship are correlated with their views on same-sex marriage. Among Californians who report hearing negative messages from their clergy, few (19%) support same-sex marriage. In striking contrast, among Californians who report hearing positive messages from their clergy, fully 6-in-10 say gay and lesbian people should be allowed to marry, an additional 22% support civil unions, and less than 1-in-5 (18%) say there should be no legal recognition for same-sex relationships.

“Although it should come as no surprise, our research confirms clergy and religious groups continue to play an influential role in policy debates about the rights of gay and lesbian people,” said **Daniel Cox, Director of Research for Public Religion Research Institute**. “But one of the most interesting dynamics uncovered in this survey was the significant number of respondents who report they would support marriage equality if the laws offer reassurances about their religious freedom concerns and clarify the distinction between civil and religious marriage.”

The survey was conducted among a random sample of Californians by telephone between June 14 and June 30, 2010, by Public Religion Research Institute and was funded by the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund with additional support provided by the Ford Foundation.

The full survey report and topline questionnaire, along with audio and transcript of the press conference, is available from the Public Religion Research Institute website at <http://www.publicreligion.org/research>.

*Public Religion Research Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent research and education organization specializing in work at the intersection of religion, values, and public life.*

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