The Evolution of Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage in California

by

**R. Steven Daniels**

**Department of Public Policy and Administration**

**CSU Bakersfield**

# Abstract

This article focuses on four inter-related research questions: 1) Has the dominant issue frame in California shifted from the traditional issue frame rooted in morality politics to a more egalitarian issue frame? 2) Is the gradual shift in public opinion noted by the Pew Research Center at the national level also present among California voters? 3) Is the increase in support mirrored across all groups in California or is it limited to certain groups? 4) Have the factors that influenced voting on Proposition 8 in 2008 gained or lost influence in the post-Proposition 8 period in California? The data from this analysis come from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Research Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The current research suggests that, over time, the dominant frame used by the public to characterize the debate on same-sex marriage has shifted from a focus on morality and tradition (the morality politics frame) to a focus on equal rights and justice (the equality frame). The available survey data suggests that California voters shifted to the equality frame earlier than voters in most other states; however, their support for same-sex marriage remained at plurality levels and fairly static from 2003 to 2008. Only after the passage of Proposition 8 and its legal aftermath did support for same-sex marriage reach majority status. More importantly, the support for same-sex marriage in California increased for all groups except those with strong levels of religious commitment. Finally, the influence of demographic factors, partisanship, ideology, and religious affiliation all lost explanatory power after 2008; whereas, religious commitment increased its influence.

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# Introduction

On May 15, 2008, the California Supreme Court ruled that existing statutory and initiative measures that limited civil marriage to heterosexual couples violated the California Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection (In Re Marriage Cases, 2008). On November 4, 2008, California voters passed Proposition 8, a constitutional initiative invalidating *In re Marriage Cases* and stopping same-sex marriages in the state. The Proposition itself was ruled unconstitutional by a U.S. Federal District Court in 2010 (Perry v. Schwarzenegger, 2010). The U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, affirmed in 2012 that Proposition 8 was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution (Perry v. Brown, 2012). The U.S. Supreme Court accepted the appeal of Proposition 8 proponents and held oral arguments on March 26, 2013 (Hollingsworth v. Perry, 2013).

Research done in the aftermath of the election confirmed that voter partisanship, ideology, religiosity, and ethnicity played central roles in the final 52% to 48% vote (Abrajano, 2010) (Egan & Sherrill, 2009). However, surveys since the passage of Proposition 8 have suggested a sea change in public opinion on the issue of same-sex marriage across nearly all groups with a plurality now supporting same-sex marriage across the country (Pew Research Center, 2013, February 7); see also (Baunach, 2012). In California, support for same-sex marriage has risen to a 61% majority (Field Research Corporation, 2013).

This article focuses on four inter-related research questions: 1) Has the dominant issue frame in California shifted from the traditional issue frame rooted in morality politics to a more egalitarian issue frame? 2) Is the gradual shift in public opinion noted by the Pew Research Center at the national level also present among California voters? 3) Is the increase in support mirrored across all groups in California or is it limited to certain groups? 4) Have the factors that influenced voting on Proposition 8 in 2008 gained or lost influence in the post-Proposition 8 period in California? The data from this analysis come from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and the Pew Research Forum on Religion & Public Life.

The current research suggests that, over time, the dominant frame used by the public to characterize the debate on same-sex marriage has shifted from a focus on morality and tradition (the morality politics frame) to a focus on equal rights and justice (the equality frame). The available survey data suggests that California voters shifted to the equality frame earlier than voters in most other states; however, their support for same-sex marriage remained at plurality levels and fairly static from 2003 to 2008. Only after the passage of Proposition 8 and its legal aftermath did support for same-sex marriage reach majority status. More importantly, the support for same-sex marriage in California increased for all groups except those with strong levels of religious commitment. Finally, the influence of demographic factors, partisanship, ideology, and religious affiliation all lost explanatory power after 2008; whereas, religious commitment increased its influence.

# Issue Framing in the Same-Sex Marriage Debate in California

Issue framing has played a critical role in the debate on same-sex marriage. The literature on issue framing suggests that elite framing of policy issues is a major tool for shaping the political debate on policy issues in the U.S. “Invented by elites and carried by mass media, frames influence public opinion by circumscribing the considerations citizens take seriously” (Nelson & Kinder, 1996, p. 1074). Much of the debate on same-sex marriage, and gay rights generally, has turned on a fundamental conflict in values between traditional morality and equality. Drawing from the Supreme Court decision in *Romer v. Evans* that struck down a Colorado constitutional initiative banning government action to protect sexual orientation (Romer v. Evans, 1996), Brewer (Brewer, 2008) has identified three issue frames that have consistently dominated the discussion of gay rights generally and same-sex marriage specifically: traditional morality, equal rights, or special rights. The equality frame appears in the majority opinion by Justice Anthony Kennedy:

One century ago, the first Justice Harlan admonished this Court that the Constitution “neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens.” Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U. S. 537,

559 (1896) (dissenting opinion). Unheeded then, those words now are understood to state a commitment to the law’s neutrality where the rights of persons are at stake. The Equal

Protection Clause enforces this principle and today requires us to hold invalid a provision of Colorado’s Constitution (Romer v. Evans, 1996, p. 623).

Both the traditional morality frame and the special rights frame appear in the dissenting opinion by Justice Antonin Scalia:

The constitutional amendment before us here is not the manifestation of a “‘bare . . . desire to harm’ ” homosexuals, ante, at 634, but is rather a modest attempt by seemingly tolerant

Coloradans to preserve traditional sexual mores against the efforts of a politically powerful minority to revise those mores through use of the laws [Traditional morality] (p. 636). . .

The amendment prohibits special treatment of homosexuals, and nothing more [Special rights] (p. 638).

As a result, the debate on same-sex marriage falls squarely in the area of morality politics. Unlike other policy arenas characterized by high information costs and limited access, morality politics features conflict over fundamental values. Gusfield has argued that debates over morality are really about the redistribution of values (Gusfield, 1963); see also (Meier, 1999). The competing sides attempt to replace one set of values in society with another. Because morality policies concern fundamental values, they are also marked by simplicity, low information requirements, and high salience to the public. The ease of access and importance to individual citizens generates high levels of citizen participation (Mooney, 1999). Since morality politics focuses on fundamental notions of right and wrong, everyone can act as an expert on the issue and genuine expertise (if such a thing exists in morality policy) has little impact on the outcome.

The key to morality policy is issue framing. All “bad” human behaviors (“sins”) are multidimensional in practice (Meier, 1999). However, if one side of the debate can successfully characterize the behavior under examination as sin, the development of a counter-balancing political opposition becomes much less likely. As Meier notes, “Legislators do not rise and recite the joys of drunk driving, the pleasures of prostitution, or the thrill they get from serial killings” (Meier, 1999, p. 683). On the other hand, if opponents of regulating the behavior can frame the issue in a constructive way, the debate begins to resemble the classic political model of redistributive politics, an arena where the most important explanatory factors are “the distribution of citizen values, the competitiveness of parties, and the party affiliations of politicians” (Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996).

The available evidence clearly suggests that gay rights as an issue has made the transition from the politics of sin to the politics of redistribution. Like many other issues initially defined as traditional morality issues such as miscegenation (Novkov, 2008), abortion (Norrander & Wilcox, 1999), and gambling (Pierce & Miller, 1999); gay rights as an issue has shifted from an overall condemnation of homosexuality to an increasing acceptance of gay rights on equality grounds. Brewer reported major support for protections against job discrimination and service in the military as early as 1977 (Brewer, 2008, p. 22). Even more controversial issues have reached majority or plurality approval. A Gallup/USA Today poll reported support for gay adoption reached major status nationally in 2008 (Princeton Survey Research Associates International/Newsweek, 2008). The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press identified plurality support for same-sex marriage in late 2011 (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2011).

In California, available evidence suggests that the shifts occurred earlier and more broadly, despite the final vote in Proposition 8. Support for Proposition 21 in 2000, a statutory initiative that limited marriage to a man and a woman was 61.4%, passing in 52 of 58 counties (California Secretary of State, 2000). Support for Proposition 8 in 2008 was 52.3%, passing in 41 of 58 counties (California Secretary of State, 2008). This represented a nine percentage point and 11 county shift in eight years. The poll results reported earlier from the Field Poll suggest an additional nine percentage point increase in support for same-sex marriage in less than five years.

The polling data clearly suggest that elites, the media, and the public had clearly identified the competing frames of traditional morality and equality as early as the 1970s on workplace discrimination against gays and lesbians and that these frames have become increasingly representative of the nationwide and California debate over gay rights. The public debate on the passage of Proposition 8 certainly used all of these frames to promote or oppose the proposition. The official campaign sign of ProtectMarriage.com, the official sponsor of Proposition 8 stated simply, “Yes on 8: Restore Marriage”. The official sign of No on Proposition 8 just as bluntly argued, “Vote No on Prop 8: Unfair & Wrong”.

The rise of competitive issue frames suggests that political conflict and public attitudes toward same-sex marriage should reflect, at least in part, the factors noted by Haider and Markel: ideology, party competitiveness, and partisanship (Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996). I examine these and other influences in the next section.

# Factors Influencing Opinion on Same-Sex Marriage

Stacey Horn has argued that attitudes about sexual orientation are more multidimensional and complex than is frequently given credit in the literature on the subject (Horn, 2013). After examining the available literature, she concludes that these attitudes reflect a complex interaction among demographic and situational factors, personality traits, and target characteristics affecting specific attitude issues within a particular social, cultural, or situation context. The mix of relevant factors changes depending on the specific attitude under examination. The same individual may have negative attitudes toward homosexuality but may also believe that individuals should not be legally discriminated against because of those behaviors. The specific attitudes may reflect the influences of different factors. To prevent inconsistent interpretations, this article focuses on a single issue focus: attitudes toward same-sex marriage.

A range of demographic and situational factors have been used to explain attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Across the literature, gender, age, religious affiliation, education, income, marital status, ethnicity, and contact with gay people have all been suggested as significant sources of variation in attitudes on gay rights issues. In most studies, males, older respondents, Protestants, those with less education, lower income respondents, African-Americans, Latinos, married respondents, those from rural areas, Southerners, and those with limited contact with gays and lesbians all demonstrated lower support for same-sex marriage and were more likely to vote for bans on same-sex marriage . Several of these studies reported inconsistent results for some variables including gender, age, income, ethnicity, and marital status.

In California, Egan and Sherrill identified age and gender as the dominant demographic factors in their study of voting on Proposition 8 . Older voters were less supportive of same-sex marriage than younger voters; men were more likely to support Proposition 8 than women. They also found that African-American voters and Latino voters were less supportive of same-sex marriage than other voters when controlling for religiosity, partisanship, and ideology. In their study of attitude change in California on same-sex marriage, Lewis and Gossett reached similar conclusions, noting that Protestants, younger age cohorts, less educated, and male respondents showed lower levels of support for same-sex marriage. In addition, however, they also concluded that African-Americans and Latinos also demonstrated lower support, whereas Catholics did not. In an earlier article, Sherkat and others noted that affiliation with Sectarian Protestant faiths and religiosity accounted for lower levels of support among African-Americans . Egan and Sherrill noted a similar effect for African-Americans in California on Proposition 8, but additional controls for partisanship and ideology reestablished the lower levels of support.

Several authors have found significant effects for religious affiliation with the greatest opposition to same-sex marriage coming from Protestants, especially evangelical Protestants, and those identifying themselves as born again . The religious variable with the greatest impact across most of these studies was religious commitment or religiosity. Frequently measured by church attendance, the greater the level of religious commitment, the greater was opposition to same-sex marriage.

Several authors have highlighted the importance of sustained contact with gays and lesbians as a moderating influence on attitudes toward same-sex marriage. Barth, Overby, and Huffmon examined the impact of personal contact and community context on voting for a South Carolina referendum to ban same-sex marriages . They concluded that close personal contact reduced support for the referendum whereas community context had little or no consistent effect. These results were reinforced by Becker in 2012 using a national sample done by the Pew Research Center . However, Bramlett has noted that while most religious affiliates increased their support for same-sex marriage with greater personal contact with gays and lesbians, the effect did not hold for white Protestants, who remained opposed regardless of the level of contact. Skipworth, Garner, and Dettrey found the effects of contact on attitudes toward same-sex marriage varied across ideological and cultural contexts as well .

Finally, nearly all authors have noted that importance of ideological orientation and partisanship on support and opposition to same-sex marriage. As of 2012, Republicans and conservatives generally oppose same-sex marriage by large margins (60 to 80% opposition); Democrats and liberals support same-sex marriage by equally large margins (see, for example, .

Most of these conclusions have been based on single, cross-sectional surveys or exit polls. Several authors, however, have examined the changes in attitudes over time. Using surveys by the Pew Research Center, Brewer and Wilcox noted small but consistent reductions in opposition to same-sex marriage and civil unions from 1988 to 2005 . Crehan and Rickenbacker analyzed the issue frames used by liberal and conservative news magazines noting a significant decline in the use of religious and morality arguments by both types of magazines and an increasing use of social scientific arguments and rights-based arguments by both between 1996 and 2006 . Significantly, Baunach concluded from a cross-sectional, time-series analysis of General Social Survey data from 1988 to 2010 that opposition to same-sex marriage declined from 1988 to 2010 . More significantly, in 1988, opposition to same-sex marriage was broadly based with support isolated to a few subgroups in the population. By 2010, support for same-sex marriage was more broadly based with opposition isolated to a few subgroups. These changes reflected a “cultural shift” in public attitudes .

# Research Design and Methodology

Most of the research on California attitudes is cross-sectional, focusing on a single survey or a single election. The few longitudinal studies have a national focus. To expand our knowledge of changing attitudes in California, I examined four inter-related research questions: 1) Has the dominant issue frame in California shifted from the traditional issue frame rooted in morality politics to a more egalitarian issue frame? 2) Is the gradual shift in public opinion noted by the Pew Research Center at the national level also present among California voters? 3) Is the increase in support mirrored across all groups in California or is it limited to certain groups? 4) Have the factors that influenced voting on Proposition 8 in 2008 gained or lost influence in the post-Proposition 8 period in California?

## Data Set

To examine these questions, I have drawn data from 23 surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center between 2003 and 2012.[[1]](#footnote-1) I selected these surveys because Pew has used a fairly consistent question wording and response categories on the key dependent variable throughout the period of study: “Now, I’d like to get your views on some issues that are being discussed in this country today. All in all, do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose . . . Allowing gays and lesbians to marry legally?” From this dataset, I have extracted all California voters, which typically made by 10 – 15% of the total samples drawn for each survey. The total California sample size for the period 2003-2012 was 3,724, roughly 162 respondents per survey.

## Measurement

### Dependent Variables

To examine the first research question on the change in issue framing, I focused on changing attitudes toward the controllability or inheritability of homosexuality. Haider-Markel and Joslyn have argued that attitudes toward the controllability of homosexuality profoundly affect support for same-sex marriage . In general, those who believe that homosexuality is situational and controllable are more likely to oppose same-sex marriage; whereas, those who believe that homosexuality is genetic are far more likely support same-sex marriage. Moreover, the attribution of controllability or inheritability is strongly linked to religiosity, partisanship, and ideology. Religious traditionalists, conservatives, and Republicans, who tend to believe that the weaknesses of American society are produced by individual behavior, tend to argue that homosexuality is controllable. Religious progressives, liberals, and Democrats, who tend to believe that the weaknesses of American society are situational and societal in nature, argue that homosexuality is inheritable. Therefore, to examine the change in issue framing in the U.S. and California, this analysis examines the percentage of the U.S. and California population who believe that homosexuality is something you are born with.

To examine the second research question on changes in attitudes toward same-sex marriage over time, the analysis will focus on the key research question noted above concerning strength of support or opposition to same-sex marriage. I will examine the percentage supporting or strongly supporting same-sex marriage in the U.S. and California from 2003 to 2013. To evaluate the third and fourth research questions, I will reformat the four-category responses to the same-sex marriage question to develop a measure of intensity of support for same-sex marriage. Strong support will receive a score of 100%, support a score of 75%, neutral or don’t know a score of 50%, opposition a score of 25%, and strong opposition a score of zero.

### Independent Variables

For research questions three and four, I used the standard set of demographics factors identified in the research reviewed above. I included gender (male dummy variable), age (65 and over dummy variable), education (coded in years completed), Latino (dummy variable); African-American (dummy variable), marital status (married dummy variable), income in $1,000s (measured at the midpoint of the range), partisanship (as % Democratic), and ideology (as % liberal). I used Protestant and Catholic dummy variables to measure religious affiliation. I identified Evangelical and fundamentalist respondents using the question: Would you describe yourself as a 'born again' or evangelical Christian, or not? I converted the ordinal measure of church attendance into an interval scale by assigning average values for the ordinal categories.[[2]](#footnote-2) The Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) code from the Pew surveys was used to identify rural respondents. I used the number of months from July 2003 (zero months) to measure changes in attitude over time. I will also use a split analysis for the data before and after the passage of Proposition 8, which appears to have served as an opinion watershed in California. Finally, I could not develop a measure of contact or direct attitudes toward gays and lesbians because, although the Pew Research Center asked those questions several times, they did not ask them in the same surveys that they asked the questions on attitudes toward same-sex marriage. In only two of the 23 surveys did the questions coexist.

## Analysis

The first question compared U.S. and California respondents on the question of the inheritability or controllability of homosexuality in 2003, 2006, and 2012, when the Pew survey asked the question. U.S. responses are available for all three dates; however, the California responses are only available for 2003 and 2006; the July 2012 survey dataset has not been released yet, although Pew has reported the U.S. total. The second question evaluated graphic trend lines for the United States and California from 2003 to 2013. For California in 2013, I added the survey response from the Field Research Center to compare to a Pew national survey report in March 2013. The third research question used t-tests to compare changes in key group attitudes (with interval variables collapsed) before and after the passage of Proposition 8 in 2008. The fourth research question examined the effect of the demographic, religious, political, regional, and time variables on attitudes toward same-sex marriage for the period from 2003-2012. I also ran separate analyses for the period before and after the passage of Proposition 8 to test whether the effects of the variables changed for the two periods.

## Limitations

The research literature has emphasized the importance of contact with gays and lesbians as a moderating influence on attitudes toward gay rights. In addition, Haider-Markel and Josyln have highlighted the powerful relationship between religiosity and ideology, on the one hand, and the selection of issue frames used to characterize homosexuality. The inconsistency with which the Pew researchers deployed their questions across the 23 surveys made it impossible to directly assess the influence of either contact or attitudes toward homosexuality on opinions about same-sex marriage. However, the close relationship between those attitudes and religiosity and ideology suggests that, at least, some of the influence will appear in the coefficients for those variables.

# Results

## Has the Issue Frame of the Same-Sex Marriage Debate Shifted?

In October 2003, 56% of the sample in the Pew News Interest Index/Homosexuality Poll believed that homosexuality was either a way people preferred to live or was the result of upbringing . Only 30% believed that it was something that people were born with. By July 2006, only 51% of the sample in the July 2006 Religion and Public Life survey believed that homosexuality was a preference or the result of upbringing; whereas 36% believed that it was something inherited . By July 2012, the corresponding percentages had shifted to 48% for preference and upbringing and 41% for genetic inheritance .

The comparable figures for California in 2003 show that the belief that homosexuality was something that a person was born with was 44%, 14% higher than the U.S. average. The figure for 2006 was also 44%, 8% higher than the national average, suggesting that U.S. public opinion was moving closer to the California average. The figure for 2012 was not yet available.

In general, the U.S. trend suggests that the issue frame was moving from the morality frame toward the equality frame. The frame shifted earlier in California but the 2003 and 2006 data suggest a period of stable (and mixed) attitudes in the run-up to Proposition 8. More importantly, the shifts reflect two distinct trends noted by the Pew Research Center on March 20, 2013 . First, the Millennial Generation (born since 1980) overwhelmingly supports same-sex marriage (70%) and that generation has increased from 9% of the adult population in 2003 to 27% in 2013. Second, nearly all generations have increased support for same-sex marriage. The Millennial generation support grew from 51% to 70% in 10 years. The Silent Generation, the most conservative generation on the question (born between 1928 and 1945), increased their support from 17% to 31%. In fact, among current supporters of same-sex marriage, fully 28% (14% of the total population) report that they changed their mind on same-sex marriage. One-third of these changes have arisen from personal contact, one-quarter from thinking about the issue or growing older, one-fifth from a belief that the world has changed and we should change with it, and one-fifth from a belief that people should live in ways that make them happy without government interference.

## Is the Increase in Support for Same-Sex Marriage Apparent in California?

The change in issue framing is also apparent in the comparison between changes in U.S. attitudes toward same-sex marriage and the earlier and stronger shifts in California. Figure 1 summarizes the trends in the United States and California between 2003 and 2013. The percentages are those favoring or strongly favoring same-sex marriage.

 The most interesting finding from Figure 1 is the clear evidence that U.S. and California public opinion on the issue have grown closer over the last 10 years. California support for same-sex marriage peaked at in the low 40 percent range (except for the 2005 anomaly, which results from a small California sample size) from 2003 to 2010. In the meantime, attitudes in the rest of the United States grew gradually more supportive. The gap between U.S. and California opinion averaged about 14 percentage points from 2003 to 2006 but dropped to eight percentage points between 2007 and 2013. Hence, while increase in support for same-sex marriage was apparent throughout the period, California experienced a fairly long period of stable minority support just prior to the passage of Proposition 8.

Figure 1. Increasing U.S. and California Support for Same-Sex Marriage, 2003-2013

**Note:** All data from Pew Research Center surveys except California data in 2013(Field Research Corporation, 2013)

## Have the Influences on Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage Changed Over Time Making Support More Broadly Based?

The answers to research questions three and four can be determined from a common analysis. The conclusions from the previous section provide a preliminary answer to this question. The increases in support appear across all generations in the Pew Research Center report including the Silent Generation. However, are these changes present across other segments of the California population? Are these changes isolated to a few groups or spread over the entire adult population? I first performed a simple t-test to determine if attitudes before and after the passage of Proposition 8 were significantly different among the California adult population. Prior to the passage of Prop 8, using the zero, 25, 50, 75, 100 scoring scale outlined in the measurement section, the mean support score for same-sex marriage was 47.8%, which was fairly constant from 2003 to 2008. After the passage of Prop 8, the mean score was 52.2%, a significant increase in support. To test whether this increase was broadly based, I performed an analysis of covariance with mean substitution testing for an interaction between attitudes before and after the passage of Proposition 8 and each of the independent variables. Only three of the variables showed significant interaction: church attendance, Democratic intensity, and the time variable. I also ran separate regressions for the periods before and after Prop 8. The results of these analyses appear in Table 1.

The analysis confirms the influences identified in previous studies. Across the entire period from 2003 to 2012, both Protestants and Catholics demonstrated lower support for same-sex marriage than the non-religious or other faiths. Born-again or evangelical Christians demonstrate even greater opposition (the combined effect of Protestantism and evangelicalism produced a 23% drop in support). Surprisingly, in the combined analysis, church attendance had only a small negative influence on support for same-sex marriage.



Table 1. The Influence of Sociodemographic, Religious, and Political Factors on Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage in California, 2003-2012

Men were less supportive, as were those 65 and over. Each year of education increased support by one percentage point. Contrary to expectations, neither Latino nor African-American respondents had significantly different attitudes than other ethnicities, although they did have slightly lower support. Married individuals had less support for same-sex marriage (5%) than non-married people. As was the case with education, each $10,000 increase in income improved support by about 0.45%. The political variables proved strongest: Each additional 10% increase in Democratic intensity increased support for same-sex marriage by 2%; each additional 10% increase in liberalism increased support by nearly 4%.

What is most interesting, however, was the comparison between responses before the passage of Proposition 8 and after the passage. First, only two of the group independent variables demonstrated significant interactions. After the passage of Proposition 8, those with high levels of religious commitment became even more opposed to same-sex marriage. In fact, they were the only group whose opposition to same-sex marriage grew. In addition, the differences in attitudes among Democrats, Independents, and Republicans declined. In fact, support for same-sex marriage increased for all three categories of partisans, with support increasing most among Republicans.

The third significant interaction was with time. Before Proposition 8, attitudes in California changed little from 2003 to 2008. Even though same-sex marriage lost in 2008, the events surrounding the court cases arising from the Proposition appear to have prompted California residents to reconsider their positions.[[3]](#footnote-3) After voters overturned same-sex marriage, support for it increased by about 0.3 percentage points per year.

A close examination of the separate regression equations for before and after passage in Table 1 revealed other interesting, although not always statistically significant findings. The differences across religious affiliation, evangelical identification, age, ethnicity, partisanship, and ideology all declined; whereas the differences across religious commitment, gender, education, marital status, and income all increased. Although interpretation of these differences may be problematic, the direct examination of support levels suggested that women, more highly educated respondents, non-married respondents, and higher income individuals all increased support more than their counterparts; however, the differences were not large enough to be significant. In fact, except for those with high levels of church attendance, all groups increased in their support for same-sex marriage, even if only slightly.

# Conclusion

This article asked four initial research questions about the evolution of the attitudes of California citizens toward same-sex marriage: 1) Have California voters moved from a traditional morality frame to an equality issue frame? 2) Have attitudes toward same-sex marriage in California matched the U.S. trends? 3) Is the change in support broadly based or focused on specific groups? 4) Have the influences that affect attitudes toward same-sex marriage changed over time? The answer to the first question is a tentative yes. Belief that homosexuality is something that people are born with have increased from about 30% across the United States to about 41%. Individuals with this belief tend to adopt the equality frame. Support for that belief is higher in California, although significant support remained for the beliefs that it is a result of choice or upbringing, which increased opposition to same-sex marriage. The answer to the second question is yes, especially after the passage of Proposition 8. Support for same-sex marriage increased by 0.3 points per year after 2008. More importantly, with regard to the third question, the changes in attitude across California appear to be broadly based rather than focused in a few groups. All groups except those with high levels of religious commitment increased their support for same-sex marriage. Only among those with high levels of church attendance, low levels of income, and low levels of education did support decline or not increase at all.

More generally, I conclude that Dawn Baunach’s conclusions about the shifting nature of support for same-sex marriage apply to California as well as across the country . Support for same-sex marriage has shifted from a small set of isolated support groups to a more broadly-based coalition in California. Opposition to same-sex marriage now appears to be increasingly isolated across a handful of groups.

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1. The surveys include ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; ; and . [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The coding for attendance was: Never = 0, Seldom = 1, A few times a year = 5, Once or twice a month = 18, Once a week = 52, and More than once a week = 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See the discussion of the March 20, 2013, Pew Research Center survey noted in an earlier section. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)