

Views on Social Issues and Their Potential Impact on the Presidential Election

Opinions on Eight Issues Vary, Could Influence the Way U.S. Adults Vote in 2008

ROCHESTER, N.Y.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--U.S. adults' views on eight different social issues are somewhat mixed. On some issues, such as the death penalty, embryonic stem cell research, and separation of church and state, majorities of the public indicate their strong support, but on other issues, including gay rights, physician assisted suicide and affirmative action, the level of support is much less. Only on one of the issues, same sex marriage, do more of the public oppose the issue than support it. Significant numbers further acknowledge that these issues might influence their vote in next year's presidential election.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll*[®], a nationwide survey of 2,694 adults conducted online between August 7 and 13, 2007 by Harris Interactive[®].

Specifically, the survey finds the U.S. adult public views on eight social issues as follows:

- Almost two-thirds (64%) support the **death penalty** with 19 percent opposing and 12 percent saying that they neither support nor oppose;
- Fifty-seven percent of U.S. adults support **research into embryonic stem cells** with 19 percent opposing and 15 percent indicating neither support nor opposition;
- Fifty-six percent support **separation of church and state**. Again, one in five (19 percent) oppose and 17 percent are neutral; and
- Just over half (52%) support **abortion rights** with almost three in ten (29%) saying they oppose and 15 percent mentioning that they neither support nor oppose.

For a few other issues the level of support (or opposition) is not as clear-cut:

- **Gay rights** are supported by 40 percent with one-third (33%) opposing and 22 percent saying neither;
- **Physician assisted suicide** is supported by 39 percent and opposed by 31 percent. One in five (21%) neither supports nor opposes; and
- Thirty-six percent support **affirmative action** though three in ten (29%) oppose the issue. A significant quarter (24%) doesn't oppose or support.

Same sex marriage is the only issue where the opposition is higher than support. A plurality (46%) says they oppose and 31 percent indicate support. Another one in five (19%) neither oppose nor support.

Analysis by Political Party

Not surprisingly, there are substantial differences in the attitudes of Republicans, Democrats and Independents. Majorities of Republicans overwhelmingly support the death penalty (78%) and oppose same-sex marriages (71%), gay rights (56%), and abortion rights (53%). However, Democratic majorities support embryonic stem cell research (68%), abortion rights (66%), gay rights (54%) and interestingly death penalty (54%).

Finally, among Independents, majorities support embryonic stem cell research (64%), the death penalty (63%), separation of church and state (60%) and abortion rights (59%).

Influencing Vote in 2008 Presidential Election?

In addition to asking whether adults support or oppose the various issues, *The Harris Poll* also wanted to find out if a candidate's position on these issues might influence the vote for president next year:

- Topping the list, over four in ten (43%) say that abortion rights would influence their vote. Following this issue significant numbers say that same sex marriage (39%), embryonic stem cell research (35%), gay rights (34%) and separation of church and state (33%) would influence their vote.
- Other issues – death penalty (24%), affirmative action (21%) and physician assisted suicide (19%) – garner smaller numbers.

Only 21 percent say that none of these issues might influence the adult public's vote. When looking at this by party, only one issue garners majority support. Half (51%) of Republicans say same sex marriage is so important to them that a candidate's position on it might influence their vote.

So What?

Obviously, it is far too soon to determine exactly which issues will have the most impact. However, these findings suggest that these issues might have some role especially in a close election.

TABLE 1

VIEWS ON SOCIAL ISSUES

"On another topic, for each of the following issues, please indicate how you feel?"

Base: All U.S. Adults

	SUPPORT (NET)	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Neither Support Nor Oppose	OPPOSE (NET)	Somewhat Oppose	Strongly Oppose	Decline to Answer
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Death Penalty	64	39	24	12	19	8	11	2
Embryonic Stem Cell Research	57	36	21	15	19	6	13	2
Separation of Church and State	56	41	15	17	19	7	12	4
Abortion Rights	52	32	20	15	29	6	22	2
Gay Rights	40	24	17	22	33	7	26	2
Physician Assisted Suicide	39	15	24	21	31	9	23	2
Affirmative Action	36	17	19	24	29	12	17	3

Same Sex Marriage 31 19 12 19 46 7 39 2

TABLE 2

VIEWS ON SOCIAL ISSUES – SUMMARY OF SUPPORT BY POLITICAL PARTY, GENERATION

"On another topic, for each of the following issues, please indicate how you feel?"

Base: All U.S. adults

	Support (NET)	Political Party			Generation			
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Echo Boomers (18-30)	Gen X (31-42)	Baby Boomers (43-61)	Matures (62+)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Death Penalty	64	78	54	63	51	72	63	72
Embryonic Stem Cell Research	57	42	68	64	47	61	57	65
Separation of Church and State	56	49	63	60	51	57	55	64
Abortion Rights	52	31	66	59	45	55	54	53
Gay Rights	40	20	54	48	49	47	37	31
Physician Assisted Suicide	39	31	40	45	32	42	42	39
Affirmative Action	36	21	52	36	29	38	41	34
Same Sex Marriage	31	12	43	36	43	36	27	16

TABLE 3

VIEWS ON SOCIAL ISSUES – SUMMARY OF OPPOSITION BY POLITICAL PARTY, GENERATION

"On another topic, for each of the following issues, please indicate how you feel?"

Base: All U.S. adults

	Oppose (NET)	Political Party			Generation			
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Echo Boomers (18-30)	Gen X (31-42)	Baby Boomers (43-61)	Matures (62+)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Same Sex Marriage	46	71	33	44	35	37	51	63
Gay Rights	33	56	21	28	26	25	35	45
Physician Assisted Suicide	31	43	29	26	35	26	31	33
Abortion Rights	29	53	17	22	30	26	28	30
Affirmative Action	29	44	17	32	27	29	28	32
Death Penalty	19	10	27	20	21	12	23	16

Embryonic Stem Cell Research	19	35	11	15	21	16	20	18
Separation of Church and State	19	29	15	17	17	20	19	18

TABLE 4

POTENTIAL INFLUENCE OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' POSITION ON SOCIAL ISSUES

"Which of these issues are so important to you that a candidate's position on the issue might influence your vote in next year's presidential election?"

Base: All U.S. adults

	Total	Political Party			Generation			
		Rep.	Dem.	Ind.	Echo Boomers (18-30)	Gen X (31-42)	Baby Boomers (43-61)	Matures (62+)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Abortion Rights	43	45	44	43	48	37	40	47
Same Sex Marriage	39	51	35	35	46	33	36	41
Embryonic Stem Cell Research	35	31	42	35	35	31	34	43
Gay Rights	34	43	34	30	41	28	31	40
Separation of Church and State	33	30	36	37	31	29	33	40
Death Penalty	24	25	22	24	20	17	26	32
Affirmative Action	21	19	26	22	18	16	22	31
Physician Assisted Suicide	19	21	18	17	17	10	20	28
None of these	21	22	17	22	18	27	22	17
Decline to answer	5	3	5	5	7	5	4	6

Methodology

This Harris Poll[®] was conducted online within the United States between August 7 and 13, 2007 among 2,694 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

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