

Polls: Gay marriage not a decisive issue: But more than half support constitutional amendment

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Gay marriage is not a decisive issue for American voters in the 2004 presidential election, despite national debate over gay rights, according to recent polls.

A CBS News poll found that more than half (52 percent) of all voters would support a candidate who doesn't share their views on gay marriage. Only 4 percent of voters said gay marriage is the main issue they want to hear about in the election. Nevertheless, the CBS poll said nearly 60 percent of adults say they favor a constitutional amendment limiting marriage to a man and a woman, up from 55 percent in December.

Senator John Kerry (D., Mass.), who clinched the Democratic nomination as he won nine of ten presidential primary elections on March 2, says he opposes legalization of gay marriage but adds that the matter should be handled by state laws rather than a constitutional amendment endorsed by President Bush.

The proposed constitutional route was also rejected by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger on NBC's *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* March 1. The former actor said he sought state action against gay weddings in San Francisco because they violated current state law. But he also said that "it would be fine with me" if California law was changed to allow same-sex marriages. "Let the court decide. Let the people decide," said the Republican governor.

A national survey limited to two questions, and sponsored by the Alliance to End Hunger, said that candidate positions on issues such as poverty and hunger are more important than their stances on gay marriage. A majority of voters (78 percent) said a candidate's plan for fighting poverty would affect their voting decision, while only 15 percent said a position on gay marriage would matter. That finding was "very significant," said Jim Wallis of Call to Renewal, a survey backer, "in

a campaign year increasingly dominated by talk of moral values.”

In addition, a Pew Research Center study found that a national bar to gay marriage is not crucial for voters even if it did rank higher in voter concerns than the perennial issues of abortion and gun control. The Pew poll, which surveyed 1,500 U.S. adults, found that U.S. voters oppose gay marriage by more than two-to-one. But the opposition shows up disproportionately among conservative Republicans, evangelical Christians and voters age 65 and older, the report said. Catholics and mainline Protestants are less likely to count gay marriage as an important factor in their voting decision.