

Gay marriage ruling unlikely to cause anti-gay backlash

June 19 2013, by Bettye Miller

Concerns that a U.S. Supreme Court ruling favorable to gay marriage might produce a backlash that would impede efforts to achieve equality are unfounded, according to a study by researchers at University of California campuses in Riverside and Irvine, University of Connecticut and Princeton University.

The paper—"Patience or Progress: Should We Fear Opinion Backlash on [Gay Marriage](#)?"—published today on The Monkey Cage [blog](#), a politics and policy website.

"For decades, those invoking backlash have told traditionally disadvantaged groups that they should not press their claims," among them women, African-Americans and Latinos, wrote co-authors Benjamin G. Bishin, associate professor of political science at UC Riverside; Charles Anthony Smith, associate professor of political science at UC Irvine; Thomas J. Hayes, assistant professor of [political science](#) at University of Connecticut; and Matthew B. Incantalupo, a Ph.D. candidate in politics and social policy at Princeton University.

Although [conventional wisdom](#) holds that threats or changes to the status quo result in opinion backlash, empirical evidence of that has been lacking, the [political scientists](#) said.

The researchers conducted online experiments in which people were asked to react to a [state supreme court](#) ruling allowing gay marriage and assigned the participants to read articles about the legalization of gay

rights in Oregon, a gay pride parade and gun-control policy. A second experiment compared subjects' reactions before and after U.S. [Supreme Court](#) hearings on California's Proposition 8 and on restrictions on marriage recognition and benefits contained in the federal Defense of Marriage Act.

There was no evidence of opinion backlash on the issue of gay marriage in either experiment.

In fact, contrary to theories of backlash, experiment participants viewed gays and lesbians more warmly after the Supreme Court hearings than participants did before, the researchers found.

Although pushing for equal rights for gays and lesbians may produce some negative results—such as court rulings that go against gay rights—public opinion backlash is not likely to be one of them.

"It is ironic that almost exactly 50 years after Martin Luther King's 'Letter from Birmingham Jail'—a response to Alabama clergy who exhorted blacks to wait for the courts to grant them civil rights—some today suggest the courts themselves should take it slow," the researchers concluded. "While it is possible that other forms of backlash may occur, our evidence suggests that opinion backlash—the primary basis for many of these claims—is not a good reason to do so."

Provided by University of California - Riverside

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