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WASHINGTON (RNS)-A majority of Americans oppose same-sex marriages, but six in 10 believe consensual gay sex should not be illegal.

The data on same-sex marriages came from a new USA Today/CNN/Gallup poll.

The poll found opposition to gay marriage, while significant, is eroding. Fifty-five percent of Americans oppose gay marriage-down from 68 percent in 1996. Thirty-nine percent of respondents said they favored the right of gay men and lesbians to marry.

In May, another Gallup poll found Americans were evenly split at 49 percent in supporting or opposing “civil union” laws that give gay couples some of the same legal rights as married couples.

Younger people seem to be more accepting of gay marriage-61 percent of people between ages 18 and 29 support gay marriage, while only 37 percent of those ages 30-49 support it.

After the U.S. Supreme Court struck down state sodomy laws June 26, more than six in 10 Americans polled said consensual gay sex should be legal, while 37 percent said sodomy should be criminalized. In 1977, when

Gallup first asked about legalized sodomy, only 43 percent of Americans said it should be legal.

Fewer Americans, however, believe homosexuality is morally acceptable. A slight majority—54 percent—said “homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle.” Forty-three percent said it was not acceptable.

A Gallup poll conducted in May asked Americans to rate whether certain activities were “morally acceptable.” Forty-four percent said homosexual acts were morally acceptable, ahead of abortion (37 percent) and human cloning (8 percent) but behind divorce (66 percent) and having a child out of wedlock (51 percent).

Americans were evenly split on whether gay couples should be able to adopt children—49 percent said they should have adoption rights, while 48 percent were opposed. Respondents also were evenly split at 46 percent on whether newspapers should publish announcements for same-sex unions.

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