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55% of public support gay marriage, but Tory voters divided: poll

A majority (55%) of the British public support changing the law to allow same-sex marriage, but Conservative voters are divided on the issue with 46% in favour, 48% opposed and the rest who say they don't know. The poll comes amidst a declaration by Ukip leader Nigel Farage that the Prime Minister's decision to legalise gay marriage would "rip apart" the Conservative Party.

Meanwhile, 60% of Labour voters support same-sex marriage, and an overwhelming 77% of Liberal Democrats are in favour of the change. There was also a considerable divide between men and women on the issue, with only 48% of men in support of same-sex marriage (43% are opposed) compared to 62% support amongst women (28% are opposed).

The government recently announced a proposal to legalise same-sex marriage, but the Church of England and Church in Wales will be exempted from performing same-sex wedding ceremonies. Other religious institutions will be able to "opt-in" to holding same-sex weddings if they so choose.

According to the poll, 45% of the public support changing the law to allow same-sex couples to marry in registry offices and licenced venues, but keep religious weddings in churches to those between a man and a woman, while 41% oppose this approach and 14% say they don't know.

Meanwhile, 53% say they support giving churches the choice of whether or not to offer same-sex marriages, while 37% oppose this and 10% don't know.

When asked what is more important, the right of same-sex couples to get married or the right of churches to keep religious marriages to those between men and women, a plurality say that the right of churches should take priority, but a substantial proportion are unsure.

- 27% say the right of same-sex couples to get married is most important
- 46% say the right of churches to keep religious marriages to those between men and women is most important
- 27% say they are either unsure or don't know

Commenting on the poll, YouGov Director of Political and Social Research Joe Twyman said:

"All of the recent polling we have done on this issue has found that a majority of the British public support the right of same-sex couples to have full equal marriage. However, dig a little deeper and we can see that Conservative voters remain more divided on this issue, with a slightly higher proportion who are opposed.

Ukip has already pledged to seek the votes of those who abandon the Conservatives over the issue, and so the government's decision to plough ahead with same-sex marriage legislation could very well intensify divisions within the party over the coming weeks."

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Notes to editors:

Total sample size was 1,729 GB Adults aged 18+. Fieldwork was undertaken 9th – 10th December, 2012. The survey was carried out online. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc.

Enquiries:

Harris MacLeod, PR Executive

T: +44(0) 758 530 0676

E: harris.macleod@yougov.com

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