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Research Note: Same-Sex Marriages in California

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RESEARCH NOTE



SAME-SEX MARRIAGES IN CALIFORNIA

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We surveyed California counties in order estimate the number of same-sex couples who have married in the state in the first three months since these marriages were made legal in June, 2008. This estimate provides a context for the potential impact of the upcoming California voter initiative, Proposition 8, which would change California's Constitution to "eliminate the right of same-sex couples to marry."¹ Our analyses show that:

- More than 11,000 same-sex couples have married in California between June 17 and September 17, 2008.
- Comparing 2007 to 2008, California has seen a 17% increase in the number of marriage licenses issued.
- Five counties account for nearly 80% of the estimated 11,000 same-sex couples: Los Angeles (2,719), San Francisco (2,708), San Diego (1,689), Riverside (1,247), and Alameda (475). These are all counties known to have large and visible lesbian and gay populations and are also attractive tourist destinations for both in- and out-of-state weddings.
- Our estimate is likely conservative. We can compare estimated same-sex marriages to actual same-sex marriages in San Francisco, the only county to separately count same-sex and different-sex marriages. The difference in total marriages between summer 2007 and 2008 is 2,033. The actual number of same-sex marriages is 2,708 or 675 more than the estimate. If this same pattern holds in any other counties, then our overall estimate of same-sex marriages for the state may represent an underestimate.

County	Marriage licenses issued: June 17 – September 17 2007	Marriage licenses issued: June 17 – September 17 2008	Estimated marriages among same-sex couples
Los Angeles	16,079	18,798	2,719
San Francisco	2,459	4,492	2,708 ^a
San Diego	6,910	8,599	1,689
Riverside	2,764	4,011	1,247
Alameda	808	1,283	475
Other Counties	27,315	28,971	2,284 ^b
TOTAL	57,776	67,905	11,442

^aSan Francisco collected information on the sex of spouses and provided exact counts of the number of same-sex couples who married. That exact count is reported here.

^bNine counties (Alpine, Inyo, Glenn, Imperial, Yuba, Amador, El Dorado, Kings, San Bernardino) reported fewer total marriages in 2008 than in 2007. We count no same-sex marriages in those counties.

METHODOLOGY

California marriage licenses do not collect information about the sex of the spouses. So it is virtually impossible to ascertain exact counts of the number of same-sex couples who have married. Consideration of changes in the number of marriage license applications from 2007 to 2008 offers a way to estimate this figure. We calculate the change in number of licenses issued in the first three months since same-sex couples have been permitted to marry (June 17 through September 17, 2008) and compare that to figures from the same time period in 2007. We assume that any observed increases in the number of marriage licenses represent an estimate for the number of same-sex couples who are marrying. We surveyed all 58 California counties and received responses from 47 counties representing 95% of the state's population. Eight counties either had incomplete data or were not able to provide data, so final estimates are based on data from 38 counties. We were able to obtain complete data (meaning counts of marriage licenses from June 17-September 17 in both 2007 and 2008) from 34 counties: Alameda, Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado, Glenn, Imperial, Inyo, Kings, Lake, Lassen, Los Angeles, Merced, Monterey, Napa, Orange, Plumas, Riverside, San Benito, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sonoma, Yolo, and Yuba. In addition, data from the full months of June, July, and August from both 2007 and 2008 were provided by Mariposa, Placer, and Sacramento counties. These three counties are also included in the analyses.

¹ California Proposition 8, see <http://www.voterguide.sos.ca.gov/title-sum/prop8-title-sum.htm>.