

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – April 11, 2013



Same-Sex Marriage in Uruguay: A New Law in Line with Citizens' Preferences

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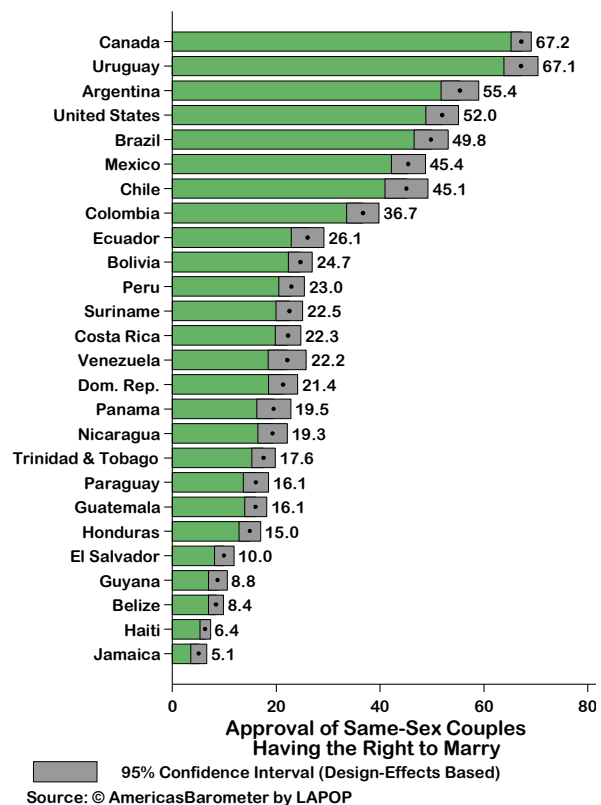
On April 10, the Parliament of Uruguay approved a law that recognizes the right to marry people of the same sex.¹ Uruguay, where homosexual relations have been “legal” since the 30s, became the twelfth country in the world to guarantee the right to same-sex marriage.

The law was passed by the Senate with 23 votes in favor (and 8 against). In the Chamber of Deputies, the law was passed with 71 votes of the 92 members present. The law received support from representatives of all political parties. The Uruguayan press reports expressions of appreciation from rights activists for sexual minorities, however, the passage of this law satisfies many more people than those who will directly benefit from it or who were fiercely committed to the cause. At least that is what the data from the 2012 AmericasBarometer suggests.²

¹ A preliminary version of this report appeared in the Razones y Personas Blog, in December 2012: <http://razonesypersonas.blogspot.com/2012/12/matrimonio-igualitario-en-uruguay-logro.html>

² Funding for the 2012 AmericasBarometer round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University. Prior issues in the *Insights* series can be found at: <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>

Figure 1. Approval of Same-Sex Couples Having the Right to Marry in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2012



Uruguayans rank second in the Americas in expressing support for gay marriage, just one tenth of a point below Canada (67.1 and 67.2, respectively). Argentina, the third-ranked country with high support for marriage

between same sex individuals, falls more than 10 points lower (55.4) than Uruguay. This support is based on responses to the question: “How strongly do you approve or disapprove of same-sex couples having the right to marry?” Figure 1 shows the averages for each country, expressed on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates “strongly disapproves” and 100 “strongly approves.”

In Uruguay, not surprisingly, those who are more in favor of marriage between homosexuals are younger, more educated, and place themselves toward the left of the ideological spectrum.³

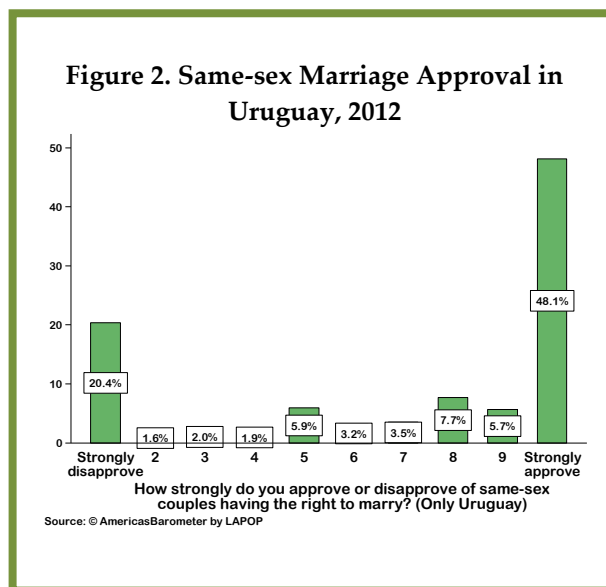
Despite these nuances, support is widespread: 48.1% of respondents in Uruguay indicated that they “strongly approve” of gay marriage, while only 20.4%, were at the extreme opposite, strongly disapproving. Figure 2 shows the distribution of preferences regarding the approval of the right for homosexuals to marry, now expressed in the original scale of 1 to 10, which was used in the questionnaire. This figure shows the percentage of respondents corresponding to each of the categories.⁴

According to the data, then, unlike opinions on many other controversial issues, such as the legalization of abortion, for example, we do not find a sharply divided or polarized public opinion, but one clearly inclined to support the legislation that will take effect as soon as the Executive Power fulfills the formal requirement of enacting it.

The AmericasBarometer data suggest that the new legislation represents an historical

³ According to the results of the multivariate analysis not shown here, but available to the interested readers by contacting the author.

⁴ When these categories are recoded to the scale of 0 to 100 and averaged for Uruguay, we obtain the average of 67.1 shown in Figure 1. That is, then, the same information analyzed in two different ways. Figure 1 allows for a regional comparison, while Figure 2 helps visualize the distribution of the preferences in Uruguay.



achievement for gay rights activists and sexual minorities, but is also a law that is congruent with the opinion of the majority of Uruguayans, namely, that they feel that same-sex couples should be granted the right to marry. The passage of the law shows that the actions of the representatives are closely in line with the preferences of their constituents, which is often not the case. It is notable, however, that in the vast majority of the countries in the Americas, the public expresses far less support for the right to marry for same-sex couples.

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Full results of the 2012 AmericasBarometer - Uruguay survey and the AmericasBarometer 2012 comparative study can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.