

PRESS RELEASE

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Study finds that ballot questions on gay marriage rights will be harmful to communities

This fall voters in a number of states, including Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Utah, will go to the polls to vote on whether same-sex couples should be denied equal marriage rights. A new report shows that these elections may carry significant negative psychological and social consequences for local residents and for the community at large. Research compiled by the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS) finds that referenda can affect the lives of both gay/lesbian/bisexual and heterosexual people in several ways.

The report finds that referenda on same-sex marriage can lead to serious negative psychological consequences for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals. According to Glenda Russell, the author of the report and the Acting Executive Director of IGLSS, "These elections create high levels of psychological and social stress for many LGBT individuals as well as for the children of lesbian and gay families." Studies have demonstrated that these elections can lead to increased anxiety, depression, alienation, and isolation in LGBT people.

Earlier ballot measures on same-sex marriage and other gay-related issues frequently resulted in divided communities, with hostile rhetoric a mainstay of such campaigns. The political fight often reinvigorated old stereotypes and led to deep divisions within families and communities. Lee Badgett, research director of IGLSS, notes, "These research findings indicate that states may pay a heavy social price for putting the rights of any group up for a vote."

In addition to the states already scheduling votes for the fall, legislators in some other states (such as Arkansas, Kansas, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, and Oregon) are still considering a referendum on marriage. "Legislators should look at the big picture. While a referendum sounds democratic, putting marriage rights to a vote runs some big risks," concluded Russell.

In addition, political science research indicates that voting on rights for minority groups tends to increase prejudices that divide members of the community. These elections also allow majority rule to make decisions that have a significant impact on the day-to-day lives of people who are not the majority.

Data for the report were drawn gathered from a variety of sources including surveys, interviews, analyses of campaign materials, mental health indices, and other research strategies. The report, "The Dangers of a Same-Sex Marriage Referendum for Community and Individual Well-Being," compiles and analyzes results of roughly 30

studies and accounts of referenda on gay issues in eight states. Dr. Russell was lead investigator on several of these studies.

The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies is a nonprofit, independent think tank based in Amherst, Massachusetts. IGLSS provides policy-oriented research on issues of importance to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. All IGLSS publications are available at www.igloss.org

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