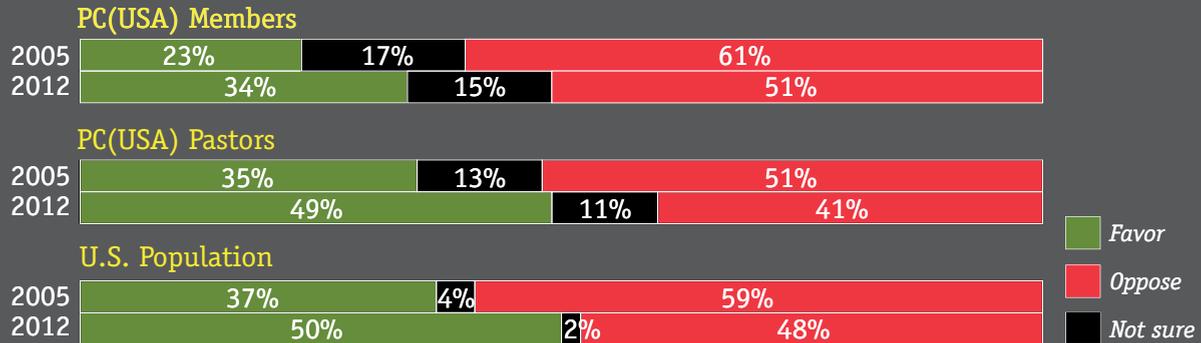
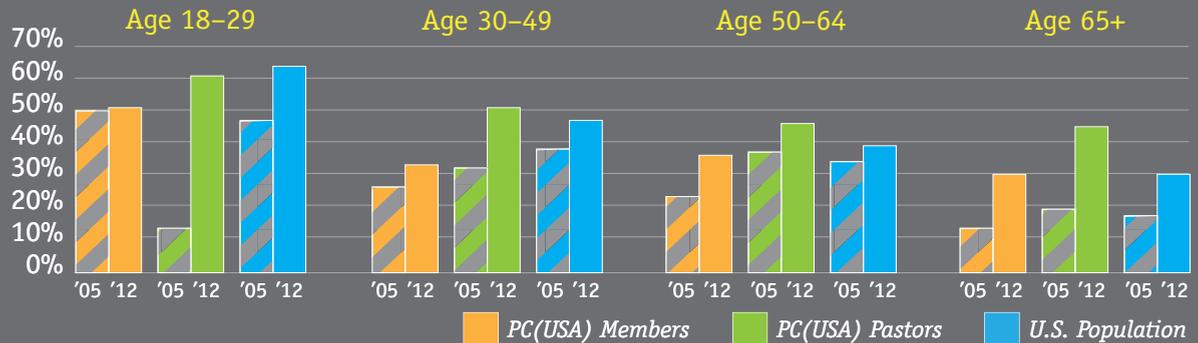


Same-sex marriage

Support is growing among Presbyterians to legalize same-sex marriage



Support is greatest among younger adults



Note: Data for the U.S. population is from surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

This year’s General Assembly narrowly rejected a proposal to change the PC(USA)’s definition of marriage from a “civil contract between a woman and a man” to a “covenant between two people.” The vote was 338 to 308.

This outcome is not surprising, given results from a survey conducted earlier this year. Only one-third of PC(USA) members (34 percent) favor legalization of same-sex marriage, and a small majority (51 percent) opposes it. While opinion is more balanced among pastors, fewer than half (49 percent) favor legalization, and almost as many (41 percent) oppose it.

Nevertheless, the percentages supporting same-sex marriage are noticeably greater among members and pastors overall, and in every age category, than those obtained in 2005. This result indicates a broad-based shift in opinions across the church in only a few years. Longer term, the effect of generational change will be felt: 75 percent of young adult advisory delegates at the General Assembly supported the redefinition of marriage.

Hence, the next effort to change the marriage definition might well succeed. Indeed, it’s possible that this year’s effort would have succeeded, save for arguments that

such a radical redefinition was too much change in the denomination, too soon. The PC(USA) removed its constitutional prohibition against ordaining sexually active gays and lesbians only in 2011.

Whether maintaining the traditional marriage definition is enough to slow the small but growing trickle of congregations leaving for other denominations is hard to know. (Around 150 congregations have left the PC[USA] since 2006.) But it’s easy to argue that approving a redefinition might appreciably increase the flow.

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