

Changing Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage in the United States – 1988 to 2014

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Introduction

Historical Background

Statement of the Problem

LA Times website

<http://graphics.latimes.com/usmap-gay-marriage-chronology/>

Research Problem

1. To what degree have attitudes toward same-sex marriage changed over time?
2. Is the rate of change increasing, i.e. is the degree of change in attitudes in more recent periods the same or greater than in earlier periods?
3. Are the changes in acceptance of same-sex marriage reflected in increased tolerance of homosexuals and acceptance of same-sex sexuality?
4. Birth cohorts are known to differ in attitudes toward same-sex marriage, with later-born cohorts more approving of it. What part of the change is due to cohort replacement (or turnover), and what part of the change represents intra-cohort change, that is, change within cohorts?
5. Are the patterns of secular change in same-sex marriage becoming more polarized with respect to birth cohort, and other subgroups of the population, particularly religious groups and political parties?

General Social Survey – Samples & Data

The General Social Survey (GSS) is a face-to-face interview survey measuring attitudinal and demographic change of a representative sample of households in the United States. Funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the GSS collected data annually between 1972 and 1994 (with the exception of 1979, 1981, and 1992) and biennially since 1994 through 2014 (Smith et al., 2013). The GSS samples approximately 2000 household per year, with response rates in the 70 percent range.

The present study uses data across this entire time period for some purposes, but our principal focus is on the GSS measure of attitude toward same-sex marriage obtained from the baseline year of 1988, and the 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014 GSS surveys.

General Social Survey – Measures

(MARHOMO) Homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another. Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree or disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree?

This question was initiated in the 1988 survey, and was repeated in 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014.

General Social Survey – Measures

- (HOMOSEX) What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex – do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?
- (SPKHOMO) And what about a man who admits he is a homosexual. Suppose this admitted homosexual wanted to make a speech in your community. Should he be allowed to speak? Allowed or not allowed?
- (COLHOMO) Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not? Allowed or not allowed?
- (LIBHOMO) If some people in your community suggested that a book he wrote in favor of homosexuality should be taken out of your public library, would you favor removing the book, or not? Remove or not remove?

Prior Research

Tolerance of Homosexuality

GSS measures of the “morality of homosexuality”: Glenn and Weaver (1979), Yang (1997), Smith (1992)

GSS data, 1973-1998, both the morality of homosexual sexuality and the civil liberties of homosexuals (Loftus, 2001)

World Values Study data – cohort differences in U.S. and Canada, 1982-2000 (Anderson & Fetner, 2008)

Civil liberties of Homosexuals

GSS measures of civil liberties of homosexuals: DeJowski (1992); Loftus (2001);

Policy issues – job discrimination and service in the U.S. Armed forces

NES data from 1992, 1996, 2000 (Brewer, 2003; Brewer and Wilcox, 2005; Hicks and Lee, 2006)

Policy issues – gays and lesbians legally adopting children

NES data (Hicks and Lee, 2006)

Policy issues – attitudes toward Same-sex marriage

Using GSS data through 2010, Baunach (2011, 2012); Brewer and Wilcox, 2005.

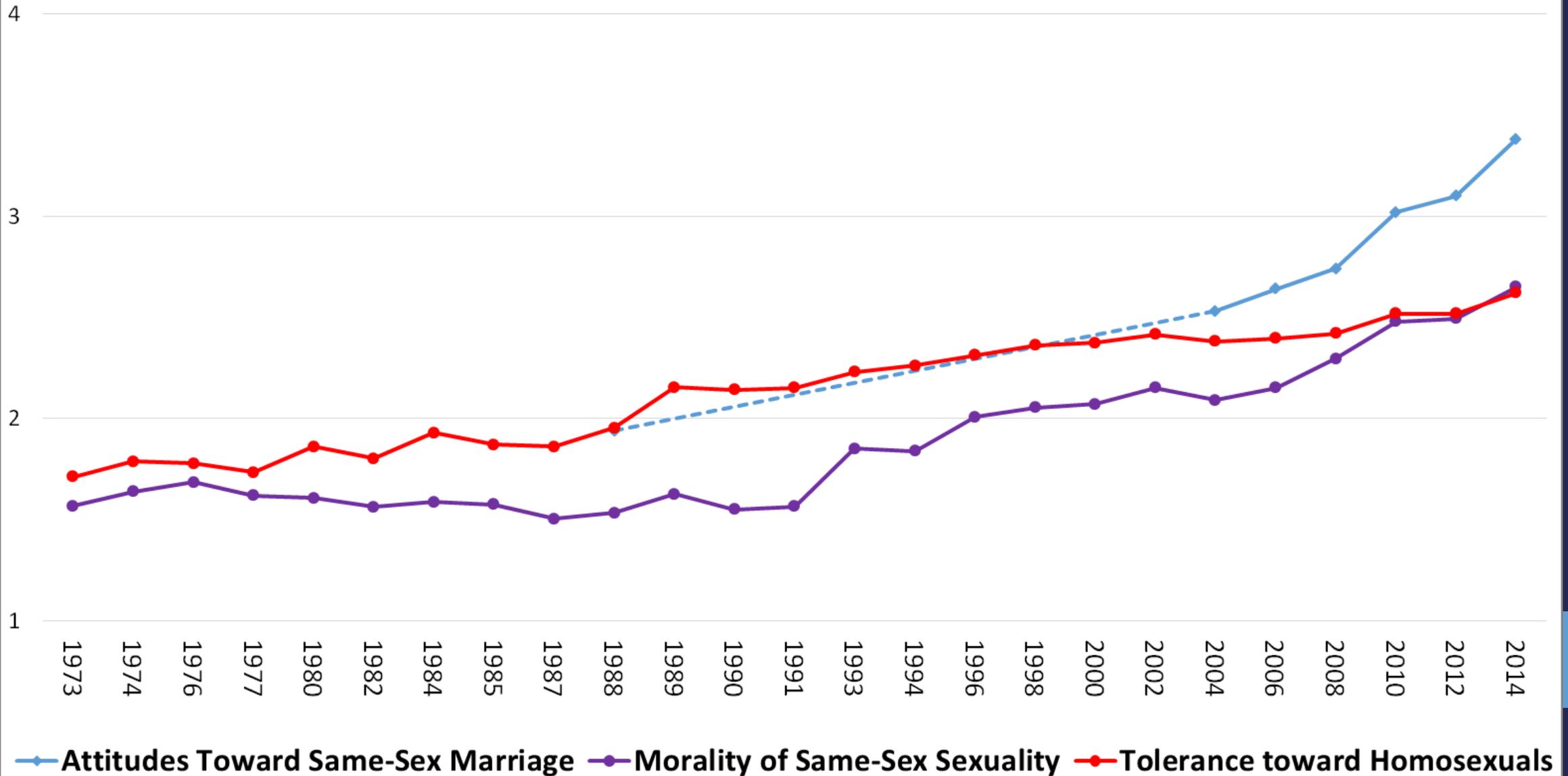
Results

Trends in Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage – 1988 to 2014

Table 1. Percentage of Respondents by Approval of Same-Sex Marriage and Year. "Do you agree or disagree... Homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another." (Source. General Social Survey)

Approval of Same-Sex Marriage	Year of Survey						
	1988 (n=1,305)	2004 (n=1,183)	2006 (n=1,977)	2008 (n=1,333)	2010 (n=1,260)	2012 (n=1,282)	2014 (n=1,683)
Strongly Disagree (1)	47.3%	34.9%	35.3%	32.2%	25.1%	24.9%	18.9%
Disagree (2)	26.0%	20.4%	15.8%	15.6%	15.6%	14.1%	13.0%
Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	15.1%	13.9%	13.4%	13.1%	12.8%	12.0%	11.3%
Agree (4)	8.8%	18.9%	20.3%	23.8%	25.4%	23.7%	24.8%
Strongly Agree (5)	2.8%	11.9%	15.2%	15.3%	21.1%	25.3%	31.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Mean Score (1-5 scale)	1.94	2.53	2.64	2.74	3.02	3.10	3.38

FIGURE 1. TRENDS IN ACCEPTANCE OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE, SAME-SEX SEXUALITY, AND TOLERANCE TOWARD HOMOSEXUALS, GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY 1973-2014



Results

Decomposition of Trends into Change due to (1) Cohort replacement and (2) Intra-cohort change – across three time periods: Period I (1973-1988), Period II (1988-2004), and Period III (2004-2014).

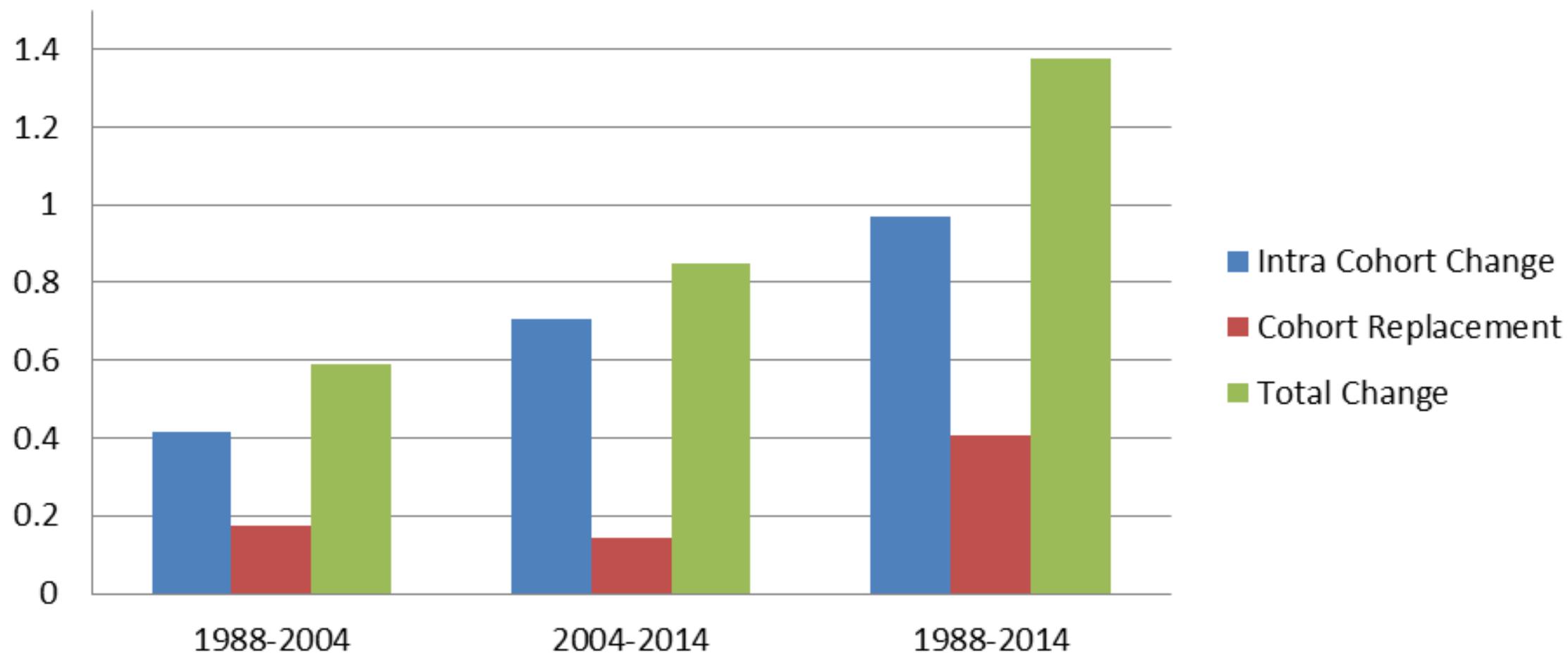
Note: the analysis for MARHOMO is possible in Periods II and III only.

Table 2. Firebaugh Decomposition of Social Change in American Views Toward Homosexuals. (Source. General Social Survey)

	<u>Period I: 1973-1988</u>			<u>Period II: 1988-2004</u>			<u>Period III: 2004-2014</u>			<u>Total^a</u>		
	SC	IC	CR	SC	IC	CR	SC	IC	CR	SC	IC	CR
MARHOMO	---	---	---	0.589	0.415	0.174	0.849	0.705	0.144	1.374	0.968	0.406
HOMOSEX	-0.104	-0.288	0.184	0.679	0.475	0.204	0.583	0.464	0.119	0.642	0.334	0.309
PROHOMO	0.178	-0.134	0.312	0.382	0.185	0.197	0.247	0.185	0.062	0.574	0.230	0.344

Note: Total refers to the years 1988 and 2004-2014 in which the MARHOMO item was administered

Figure 2. Firebaugh Decomposition of Total Change in Attitudes toward Same-Sex Marriage



Results

Polarization of trends in attitudes toward same-sex marriage (MARHOMO) with respect to three covariates: (1) birth cohort (COHORT), (2) religious tradition (RELTRAD), and (3) political party affiliation (PARTYID) across two periods: Period II (1988-2004) and Period III (2004-2014)

FIGURE 3. TRENDS IN AGREEMENT WITH SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BY 10 YEAR BIRTH COHORT; GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY 1988 & 2004-2014

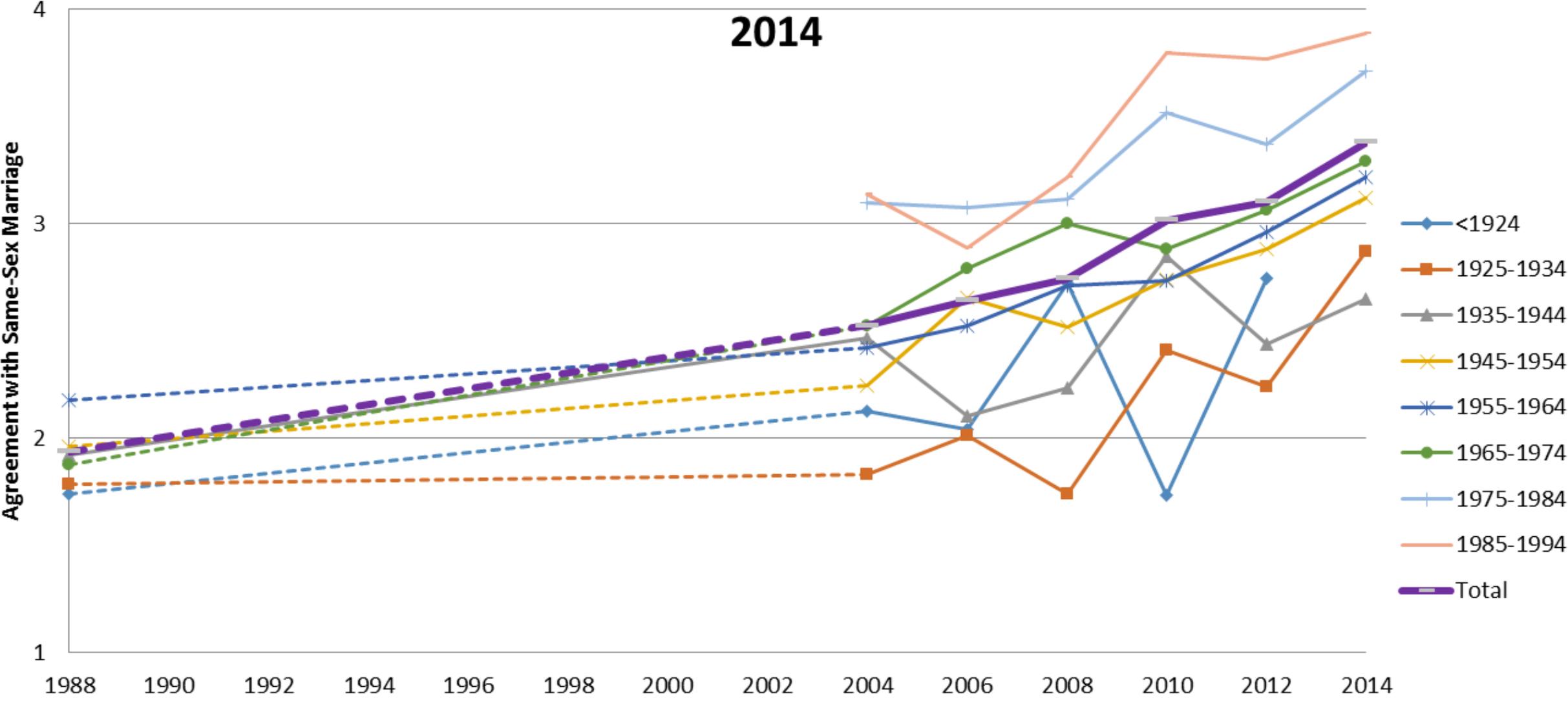


FIGURE 4. TRENDS IN AGREEMENT WITH SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BY RELIGIOUS GROUP; GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY 1998 & 2004-2014

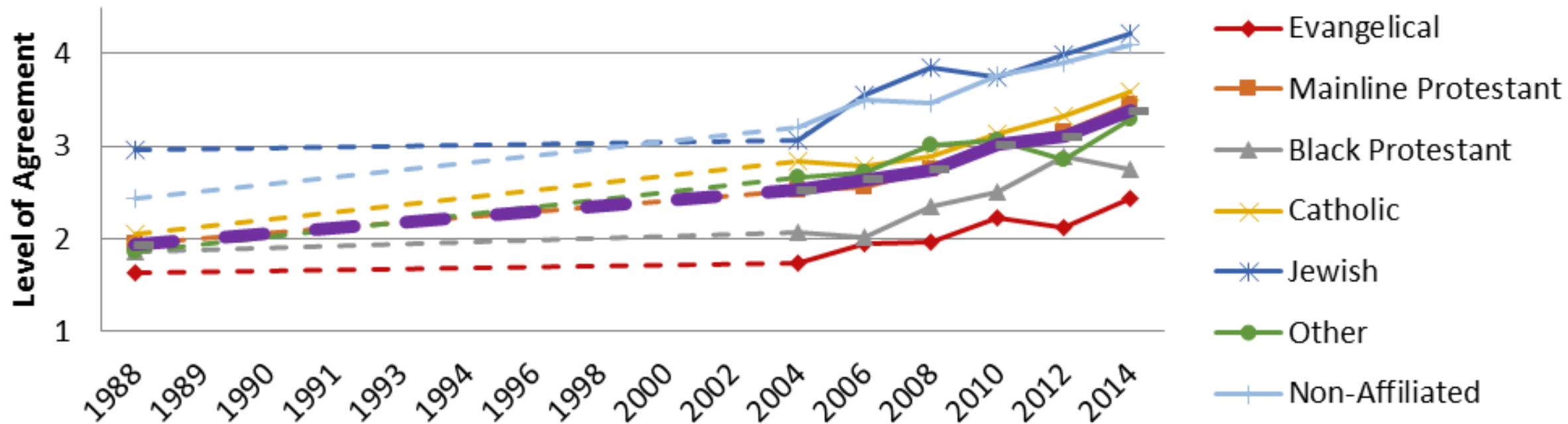


FIGURE 5. TRENDS IN AGREEMENT WITH SAME-SEX MARRIAGE BY POLITICAL PARTY; GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY 1988 & 2004-2014

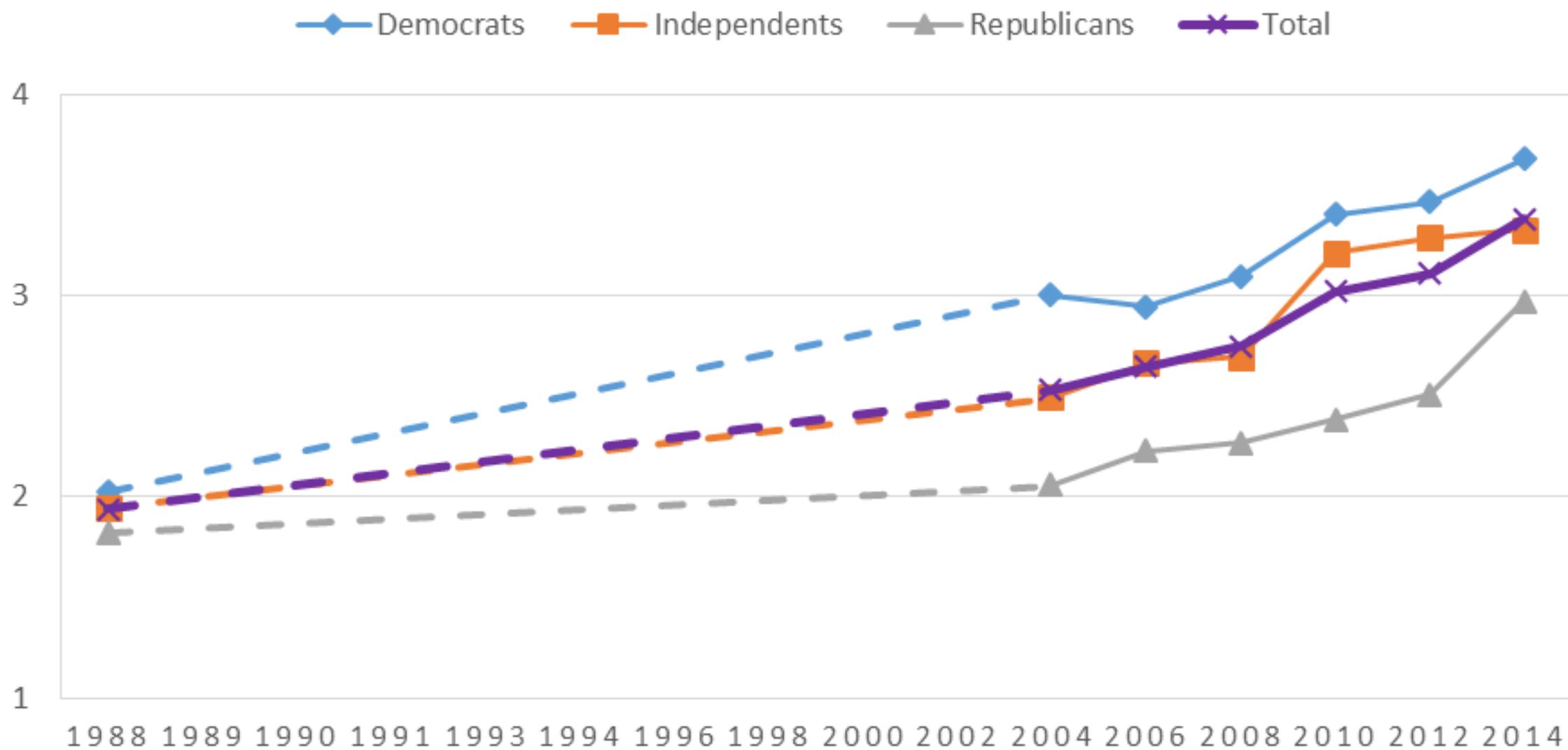


Table 3. Incremental R^2 Test for Polarization in Attitudes Toward Same Sex Marriage.
 (Source. General Social Survey)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
	$R^2_{\text{survey year}}$	$\Delta R^2_{\text{covariate}}$	$\Delta R^2_{\text{interaction}}$
Period II: 1988-2004			
Survey Year	0.051	---	---
Cohort	---	0.014***	0.027***
RELTRAD	---	0.076***	0.012***
Political Party	---	0.041***	0.017***
Period III: 2004-2014			
Survey Year	0.038	---	---
Cohort	---	0.055***	0.001
RELTRAD	---	0.111***	0.001
Political Party	---	0.061***	0.001

Conclusions

1. There has been a positive change in the support of same-sex marriage from 1988, which appears to have increased in the rate of change since 2004
2. This change can be seen against the backdrop of changes in general attitudes toward homosexuality and the endorsement of the civil rights of homosexuals, both of which have seen positive changes since 1988.
3. The decomposition of the secular change in support for same-sex marriage indicates that, while cohort replacement represents an important mechanism of change – a slow engine of social change – the most dramatic component of secular change is that which is located within cohorts, reflecting period (or historical) influences on the trend, i.e. individual change.
4. The intra-cohort portion of change is growing, reflecting the increased importance of historical influences on individual change.
5. There is evidence of growing polarization of attitudes toward same sex marriage, suggesting that earlier born cohorts, conservative religious groups and political parties are slower to change, but only in the 1988-2004 period.
6. As far as can be detected, polarization in the more recent period, 2004-2014, is minimal.

Future Work

1. We expect that the legality of same-sex marriage will become the norm, and future research will focus on the factors that are involved in the acceptance of change.
2. As for the historical analysis of the trends in same-sex attitudes up until this point, we expect that it will be a fruitful exercise to examine the question of polarization more thoroughly, using a more comprehensive approach to the definition of polarization.
3. The historical changes that have been observed in legislation and court decisions have occurred at the state level, and future work on this issue may profitably examine attitudes within a multi-level framework that takes into account the state of residence of GSS respondents.