



Kim Davis is just a lonely gay marriage warrior

David Boaz
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Kim Davis, the Rowan County, Kentucky, clerk who refuses to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, is out of jail now but still in a legal battle over whether she can be required to issue licenses that offend her religion.

Although her case has been generating angry debates for a month now, the good news is how rare Kim Davis is.

In late June, the Supreme Court struck down state bans on gay marriage, at one stroke legalizing same-sex marriage across the country. Before the ruling there had been many predictions of widespread resistance and long-term cultural warfare. Even strong advocates of marriage equality had [worried](#) that a nationwide court decision could set off a long culture war, as the court's 1973 decision legalizing abortion did.

But that isn't happening. Kim Davis is not a symbol of massive resistance. Mostly she's just a lonely warrior.

Yes, it's been [reported](#) that "many other local officials across the country are not giving up the fight." That depends on what the meaning of "many" is. In Kentucky two other county clerks – out of 120 – have said they won't issue licenses to same-sex couples, though neither has yet faced an actual request.

Who else? A judge in Marion County, Oregon. A county clerk in Granbury, Texas, who did accede to a court order. Three employees in a county clerk's office in Tennessee. A firestorm of opposition this is not.

Religious right activists aren't giving up. After the court's decision, Iowa activist Bob Vander Plaats warned, "When the Supreme Court handed down the Dred Scott decision, it didn't end the debate about slavery, but only intensified it. Roe v. Wade didn't end the debate over abortion, for we're still working through it today. Likewise, Obergefell v. Hodges doesn't end the debate, but only stirs it."

Presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, a Baptist minister, held a rally for Davis Tuesday outside the jail where she spent the weekend. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, the son of an evangelist, met with Davis the same afternoon.

Those activists misunderstand the mood of the nation. Unlike the continuing divide over abortion, public opinion has been moving rapidly toward support of same-sex marriage. The experienced Republican pollster Glen Bolger [told](#) Chris Cillizza of the Washington Post recently,

"This is an unprecedented shift in public opinion. In 20 years it won't even be an issue." In the [Gallup poll](#), support rose from 27 to 60 percent in only 19 years.

Abortion is very different. Since 1975, [Gallup shows](#) almost no change in its basic question about abortion. Close to 30 percent want abortion to be legal under any circumstances, around 20 percent want it illegal in all circumstances, and 50 percent are in the middle. The percentage calling themselves pro-choice has ranged between 41 and 50 percent for the past 20 years.

The obvious difference is that abortion involves the termination of a life. Many Americans regard that as murder, while others think it is at best morally troubling. Gay marriage, on the other hand, means people promising to love and support another person. It's a lot harder to organize a campaign against that, or even to sustain people's original opposition once they learn that some of their friends and family are gay and want to get married.

A major part of the American story is the progressive extension of the promises of the Declaration of Independence – life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness – to people to whom they were long denied. Gay marriage is the latest example of this. Now that we have moved into that bright sunshine of marriage equality, we're not likely to move back to the closet and the shadows. Indeed, the mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, recently told *Variety*, "When you hear senators say, 'I have never had a gay person in my family,' or people running on a platform that ... marriage is just between a man and a woman, it almost feels like we are watching black-and-white television."

That's the challenge that candidates like Huckabee and Cruz are facing. Kim Davis stands almost alone – devout and courageous, perhaps, but not part of a rising tide of local officials determined to roll back marriage equality.

We should thank Kim Davis for helping us to see just how tolerant and welcoming America has become in just a few short years.

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