

July 26, 2011

A Giant Step Forward on the Road to Equality, but Still Progress to be Made

To: Interested Parties

From: The Human Rights Campaign
Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research

A recent national survey of 900 adults shows a nation moving inexorably toward equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. On basic civil rights issues such as employment and housing, huge majorities support protections for this community. Moreover, a majority of Americans support marriage for same-sex couples, a sea of change from just a few years ago. Perhaps most notable is the rising social equality for LGBT people. A 77 percent majority of men say they “could be close friends with a gay man” and 57 percent say it would not bother them if their child or grandchild was gay.

Young people lead this change, but the evolution is not limited to this generation. A third of seniors describe themselves as more accepting of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The movement is also national in character, not limited to the coasts. To be sure, there some parts of the country are more conservative than others, and while people in the South and the Midwest support rights for the LGBT community on a range of issues, they lag other regions of the country.

While the country is moving toward equality, it is not there yet. Nearly half the country still opposes marriage equality. The nation divides evenly on whether people are “born gay,” is conflicted on whether or not they have things in common with gay people, and an alarming number of people still find anti-gay jokes acceptable.

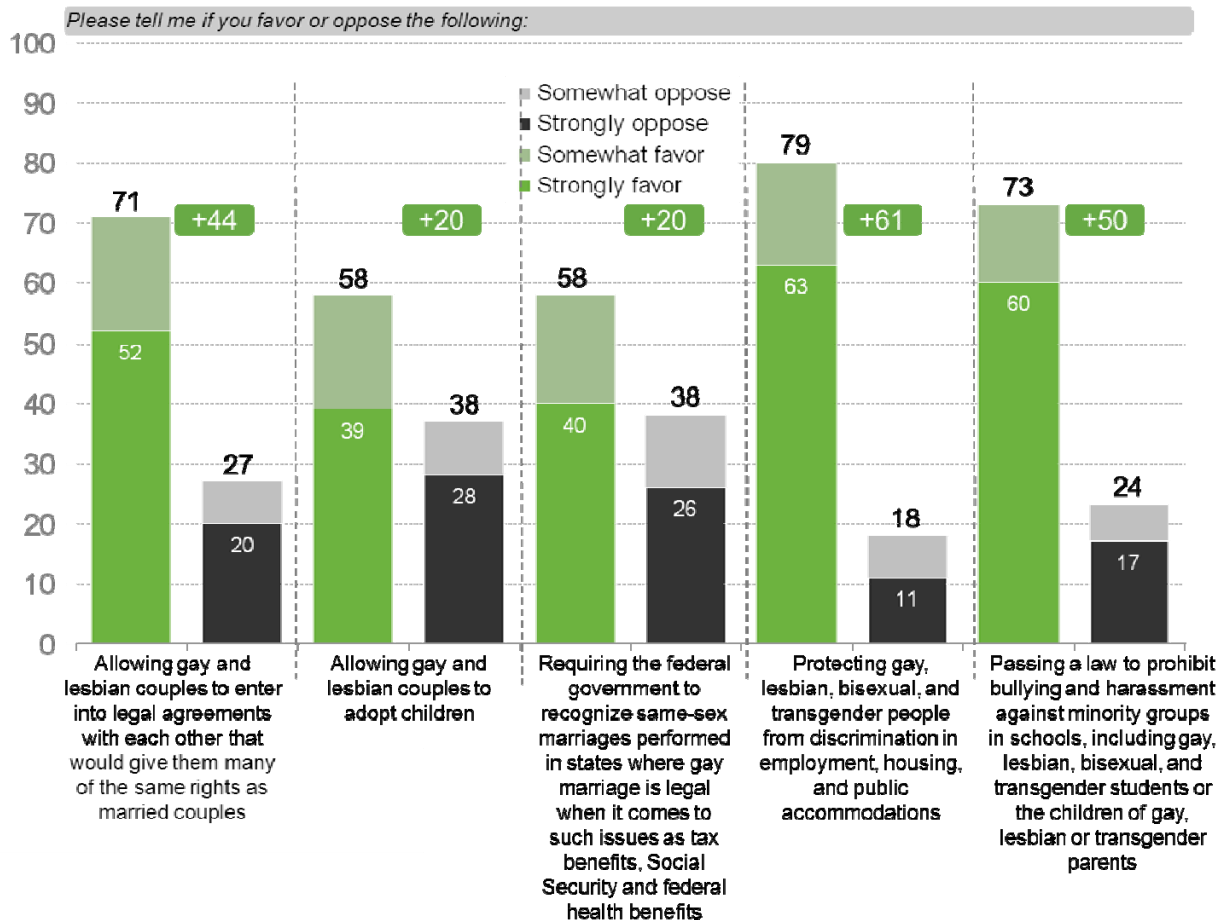
There is more work to do.

This memorandum summarizes the results of a survey of 900 adults taken between July 16 and 19, 2011. The survey was commissioned by the Human Rights Campaign and executed by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research. It carries on margin of error of +/- 3.27 at a 95 percent confidence level.

Main Findings

Americans support a broad range of rights and protections for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. These rights include everything from basic employment and housing protections, to adopting children, to legislation protecting young LGBT people from bullying in public schools.

Figure 1: Core Values



- A huge majority of Americans describe discrimination against gays and lesbians as a problem in this country (79 percent)
- A near unanimous 79 percent support employment protections; in 1977, only 56 percent supported providing discrimination protections for gay and lesbian individuals.¹

¹ Americans Acceptance of Gay Relationships Crosses 50% Threshold. (2010). Gallup Poll [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/135764/americans-acceptance-gay-relations-crosses-threshold/default.aspx>

- A 73 percent majority of people in the South support employment protections for LGBT people, as do 78 percent in the Midwest.
- Support for domestic partnerships has grown from just 45 percent favor, 47 oppose in a survey taken seven years ago to 71 percent favor currently.² In the South, 61 percent support domestic partnerships.
- While a slim majority support marriage equality (see below), fully 58 percent support requiring the federal government to recognize same-sex marriages performed in states where marriage is legal when it comes to tax benefits, Social Security and federal health benefits.
- Support for transgender people is not substantially different than support for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. A 79 percent majority describe discrimination against gays and lesbians as a major or minor problem in this country; 74 percent describe discrimination against transgender people as a major or minor problem.

Like a number of recent surveys, this research shows majority supporting marriage equality.

- A whopping 84 percent Americans believe marriage equality is inevitable and 61 percent believe it will happen within 10 years. Even among opponents of same sex marriage, 74 percent believe same-sex marriage will eventually be legal.
- This survey is one of several this year showing a pro-marriage majority (51 percent favor, 46 percent oppose in this survey). The overall trend is trend is inescapable.³

² Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Poll (2008). Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <http://people-press.org/files/legacy-questionnaires/445.pdf>

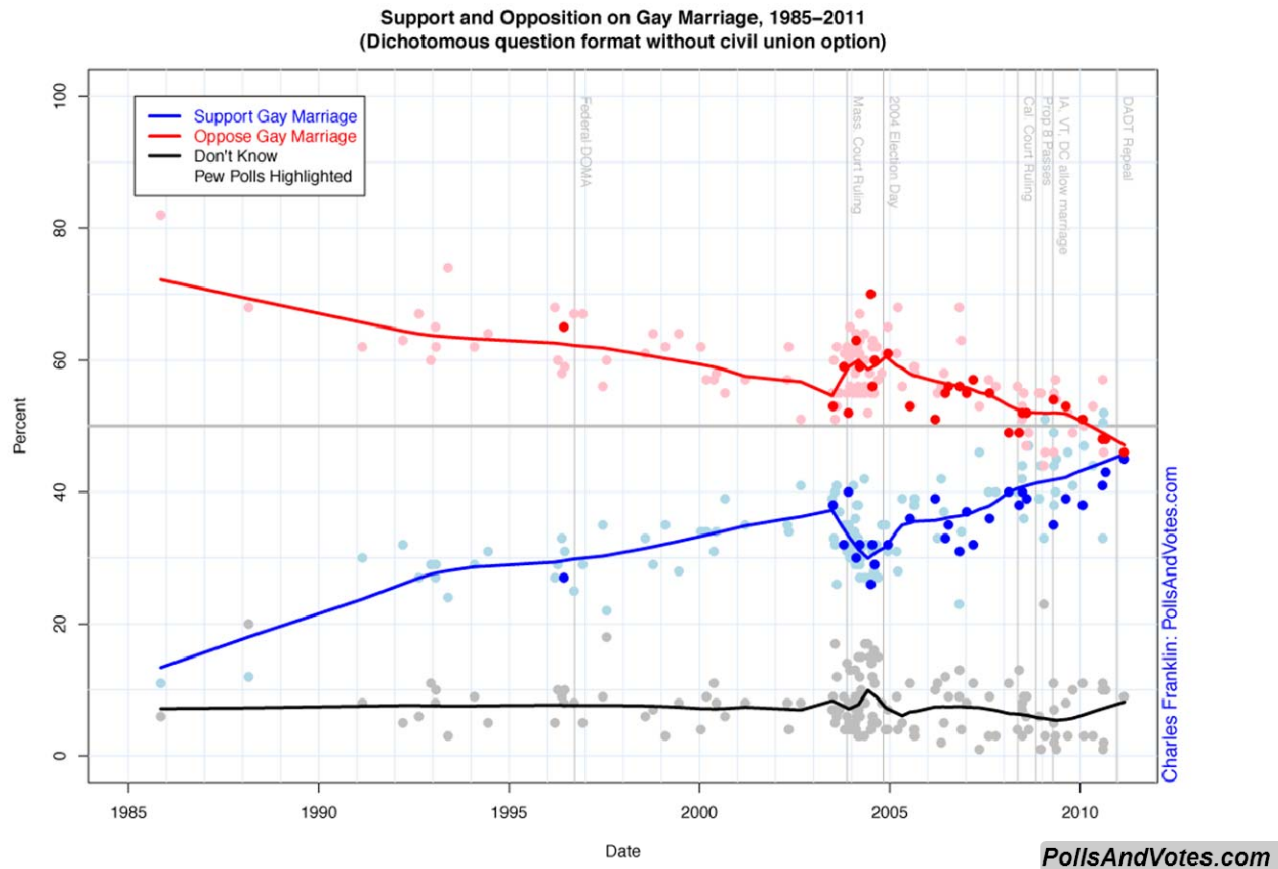
³The following three polls reported pro-marriage majorities in 2011:

For First Time, Majority of Americans Favor Legal Gay Marriage. (2011). Gallup Poll [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/147662/first-time-majority-americans-favor-legal-gay-marriage.aspx>

Washington Post-ABC News Poll. (2011). [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/polls/postpoll_03142011.html

CNN-Opinion Research Poll. (2011). [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://i2.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2011/images/04/19/rel6h.pdf>

Figure 2: Moving to Majority Support in Marriage



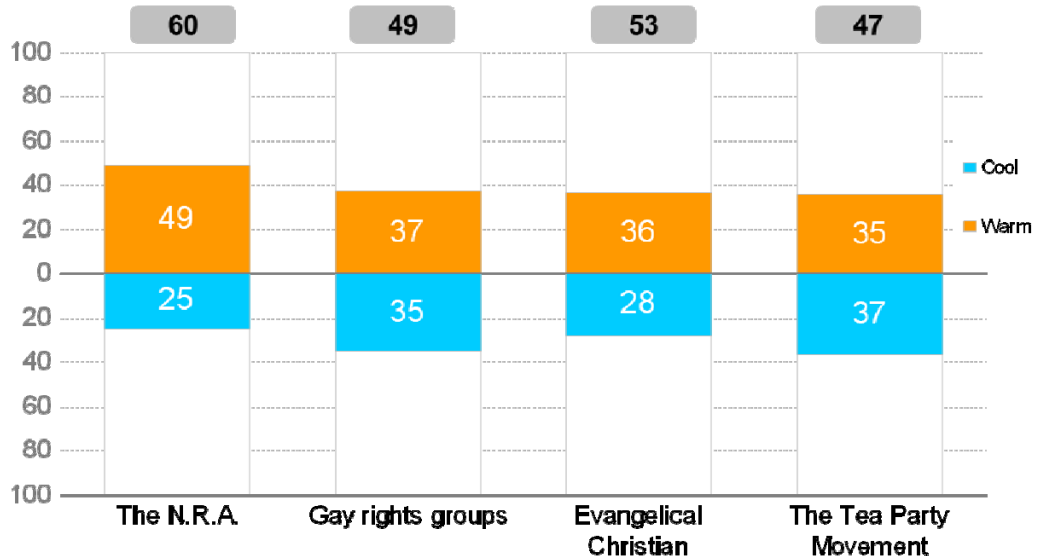
- Younger people, who will soon dictate the social and political direction of this country, support marriage equality by a 67 to 31 percent margin.

Right-wingers have frequently used LGBT issues to attack opponents and boost conservative turnout. However, it is losing its traction as more Americans see the LGBT community as part of the mainstream.

- Half the country (47 percent) believe, “politicians who campaign against gay marriage and condemn gay rights are more concerned with cheap politics than real issues.” This includes one in five (23 percent) of voters who oppose marriage equality.
- Although feelings toward gay rights groups are mixed, gay rights groups generate roughly the same overall favorability numbers as labor unions, the Tea Party and the Evangelical Christians.

Figure 3: Favorability

Now, I'd like to rate your feelings toward some people and organizations, with one hundred meaning a VERY WARM, FAVORABLE feeling; zero meaning a VERY COLD, UNFAVORABLE feeling; and fifty meaning not particularly warm or cold. You can use any number from zero to one hundred, the higher the number the more favorable your feelings are toward that person or organization. If you have no opinion or never heard of that person or organization, please say so.



- A 54 percent majority believe lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are part of the mainstream in this country, including conservative voters such as observant Christians (54 percent) and people in the South (56 percent).

Socially and culturally, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community is in a far different place.

- Four in ten (40 percent) Americans describe themselves as more accepting of the LGBT community over last five to ten years; this includes 36 percent of the South, 39 percent of devout Catholics, 37 percent of born again Christians and 35 percent of seniors. Just 6 percent nationally describe themselves as less accepting.
- Both men and women say they could be close friends with gay or lesbian individuals. Perhaps most remarkably, a 57 percent majority say it “would not bother them” if their children or their grandchildren turned out to be gay.” This rises to 69 percent in the Northeast, but reaches 60 percent in the Midwest.
- Even American churches seem to be evolving. A notable four in ten (37 percent) describe their religion as supportive of the LGBT community. Another 28 percent (43 percent among Catholics) prefer their religion would be more supportive of the LGBT community.

The country has some miles still to travel.

- Only half (50 percent) believe gay jokes are “never acceptable.” Recent rants from both comedians and sports stars make plain the reality of this finding.
- Nearly half (48 percent) believe they have “nothing in common with gay people.”
- The nation divides evenly on whether people are “born gay” (45 percent believe people are born gay, 42 percent believe people choose to be gay). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that in 1977 just 13 percent believed being gay or lesbian is something a person is born with.⁴
- Only 24 percent of Americans and no less than 1 candidate for the presidency believes gay people can be made straight through intensive psychological therapy or prayer.

Conclusion

The lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community has come a long way and in a relatively short period of time. Less than 20 years after the issue nearly derailed the Clinton presidency, the nation accepted—and broadly supported—allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military in the middle of two wars; not a single Republican candidate for President has made reversing this policy a significant issue in their campaign. As President Obama announced his opposition to DOMA, 58 percent support federal benefits to legally married same sex couples. Politically, moreover, the LGBT community occupies a legitimate space in our nation’s politics. Basic civil rights protections are not even controversial and have not been for some time. Socially, more than a third of the nation has a “close” relationship with a gay or lesbian person and a huge majority have no problem having a gay or lesbian person as close friends. A plurality regard this community as part of the American mainstream and a majority support marriage equality.

This is not to say that the journey has ended. Resistance to marriage equality is fading, but remains considerable in many states. Too many people struggle to find a common humanity with regard lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Anti-gay slurs fill the airwaves and pollute office water-cooler conversation. And while there is broad support for civil rights protections, this support has not always translated into actual laws. There is work to do and there are likely obstacles ahead, but the results of this and many other surveys leave no question that this country, the entire country, is in a far different place.

⁴ Tolerance for Gay Rights at High-Water Mark. (2007). Gallup Poll [Data file]. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/27694/tolerance-gay-rights-highwater-mark.aspx>