



MEMORANDUM

To: The Center for Democracy and Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government
The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement

From: Lake Snell Perry & Associates

Subject: Youth Attitudes Toward Issues of Tolerance and Equality¹

Date: February 5, 2004

SUMMARY:

- American youth strongly believe in tolerance and equality for gays and lesbians. Moreover, in many instances, American youth are more supportive of tolerance and equality for gays and lesbians than is the general public. Young people who are most supportive of gay rights issues include youth who know a gay or lesbian person, women – especially young women, Democrats and liberals, Independent women, college educated women, and African Americans. The few demographic groups who are less supportive include strong Republicans, strong conservatives, and Born-Again Christians.
- Most noteworthy, is that some of these issues – such as equality in housing and employment opportunities and protection from hate crimes – are core values for young people today and have become central to their outlook on what a fair and just America should look like. This support crosses partisan, ideological, and religious lines.

¹ Methodology: Lake Snell Perry & Associates designed and administered this survey, which was conducted by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached 1,000 people between the ages of 15 and 25. The survey was conducted from November 17th through the 24th, 2003. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-3.1%.

- American youth are less supportive of other gay rights issues, including marriage, civil unions, and adoption. While majorities of youth support these rights there is little intensity behind their responses. Most of the drop-off in support exists among conservative and Republican youth. The strongest supporters of these family issues tend to be women, liberals, Democrats, and youth who know a gay or lesbian person. The strongest opposition comes from conservatives, Republicans, and Born-Again Christians. Overall, the breadth of support on these family issues is not as wide as it is for protection from hate crimes and employment and housing discrimination.
- Very few young Americans volunteer for a candidate or organization that advocates on behalf of gay or lesbian people.
- One out of every two young people say they know someone who is gay,² and knowing a homosexual significantly impacts their attitude toward tolerance, equality, and gay rights.

EQUALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

American youth today firmly hold the belief that homosexuals should have equal protection when it comes to employment and housing opportunities and that homosexuals should be able to live their lives free from fear that they will be crime victims merely because of their sexual orientation. The intensity behind their responses and the breadth of overall support demonstrates that youth are doing more than showing simple support for fairness and tolerance toward homosexuals. Indeed, they have accepted as a value of theirs that people should be treated fairly regardless of their sexual orientation. For American youth these values transcend the realm of gay issues and have become part of their larger view of the way America should look. These rights are supported across ideological, partisan, and religious lines.

² Half of young people know someone who is gay (49 percent) and half do not (47 percent). Women are more likely than men to know a homosexual (53 percent compared to 45 percent) and Democrats (62 percent) are more likely than either Independents or Republicans (51 percent and 40 percent, respectively). Women ages 21-25 have the highest likelihood of knowing someone who is gay. Race plays only a small part in knowing a gay person as 56 percent of African Americans know a gay person compared to 47 percent of white youth and 52 percent of Latinos. Young people in the Pacific are the only regional group that is disproportionately likely to know a gay person.

<i>I am going to read you some different areas and for each one please tell me whether you think homosexuals SHOULD or SHOULD NOT be able to have that right...</i>	Strongly should	Not strongly should	TOTAL SHOULD	TOTAL SHOULD NOT	Not strongly should not	Strongly should not
*Have equal protection when it comes to housing opportunities	56%	30%	86%	10%	5%	5%
Be protected from hate crimes committed against them because they are gay or lesbian	61%	24%	85%	13%	5%	7%
*Have equal protection when it comes to employment	58%	27%	85%	14%	6%	8%
*Form a civil union or legal partnership	32%	31%	63%	30%	13%	18%
*Get legally married	31%	24%	56%	39%	14%	25%
Adopt children	30%	23%	53%	39%	14%	26%

*= Split sampled question

- As the table above shows, ***young Americans support protection from hate crimes most intensely*** (61 percent strongly should), as more than eight in ten believe homosexuals should have this right (85 percent). The breadth of support is extremely wide and falls below 70 percent only among strong conservatives (with a sample size caution), strong Republicans, and conservative Republicans – but majorities favor protection from hate crimes.
- ***Youth support equal protection in housing opportunities with as much breadth as they support protection from hate crimes*** (86 percent), but with slightly less intensity (56 percent strongly should). Again, support for this right falls below 70 percent only among strong Republicans and strong conservatives. Republican women drive the numbers on this issue as they also give less than 70 percent support to this right, although a majority of Republican women continue to favor the notion that homosexuals should have equal protection when it comes to housing opportunities.
- ***Equal protection in employment opportunities is also a core value***, with 85 percent believing homosexuals should have this right, including 58 percent who strongly say feel this way. Born-Again Christians, conservatives, conservative women, and conservative and strong Republicans are the only demographic groups who do not support this right with at least 70 percent, though in each case majorities favor this right.
- ***In each case above*** – protection from hate crimes and equal protection in housing and employment opportunities – support never drops below 50 percent across the demographic board. Women and men are equally progressive in extending equal housing rights to homosexuals, on each of the other tested issues women outpace men. Older women are slightly more likely than their younger counterpart to resemble youth overall, while younger women are more progressive in favoring homosexual rights. ***Support is intense in many cases – across the board, and is always broad on these core principles.***

Overall, young people support the ideals of protecting homosexuals' rights to equality in housing and employment opportunities and in protection from hate crimes. These values extend across the political, geographic, and ideological spectrum. From this breadth of support, however, also comes a depth of support among youth who know a gay or lesbian person, women – especially young women, Democrats and liberals, Independent women, college educated women, and African Americans. This kinship among young people who support gay issues is similar in composition to the alliance of older voters who support gay rights, but it is also differs in that support for homosexual rights is higher among all youth than it is among all adults and because intensity is higher among the core group of young people who support gay rights issues.

CIVIL UNIONS AND FAMILY

American youth are less supportive of extending traditional family rights to homosexuals. Overall, a majority of youth favor the rights of homosexuals to form a civil union (63 percent believe homosexuals should have this right), get legally married (56 percent), and adopt children (53 percent), but as shown in the table on page 4, less than a third of youth strongly support these rights. The majority of youth support these rights, but these issues have not become part of their core value system in the same way as equal protection in housing and employment and protection from hate crimes.

Most demographic groups hold similarly strong viewpoints on issues that are part of their core values such as protections in housing and employment opportunities³. The strongest differences emerge on family issues such as adoption and marriage. Democrats (especially women), moderate women, youth in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions, and youth who know a gay or lesbian person are the most likely to support extending family rights to homosexuals with similar levels of support in which they approve of other core values. On the other hand, conservative Republicans, strong Republicans, white men, and Born-Again Christians are among the most likely youth to support the core values (though less intensely) while opposing the extension of family rights to homosexuals.

- Ideology and partisanship matter as well. For liberals and Democrats, civil unions have emerged as a core value (87 percent and 85 percent say homosexuals should have these rights), while support for marriage is less strong (77 percent and 66 percent, respectively). Less than half of Republicans and under a third of conservatives support civil unions or gay marriage. Likewise, majorities of liberals and Democrats support adoption rights, while conservatives and Republicans are opposed. On the other hand, slight majorities of Independents support marriage, civil unions, and adoption – but Independent women who are more progressive on these issues than Independent men almost exclusively drive these numbers.

³ Please see Appendix.

- African American youth and Latino youth are slightly more likely than white youth to say homosexuals should have these rights. Contrary to conventional wisdom, these include adoption and civil unions, though with less intensity. African Americans by far are more likely to favor tolerance on civil unions and are also strongly supportive of hate-crimes protection.
- The Northeast region is consistently the most progressive on these issues with 70 percent of youth in this region supporting gay marriage along with 67 percent who support civil unions. Against popular opinion, youth in the South are not much more conservative on these issues than youth overall.
- Finally, knowing a gay or lesbian person makes a large difference in how youth view these issues. Youth who know a gay person are nearly unanimous in believing gays and lesbians should have equal protection in housing and employment opportunities and protection from hate crimes; while at least seven in ten believe homosexuals should be able to adopt, marry, or form a civil union. Conversely, fewer than half of youth who do not know a gay or lesbian person support the right to marry, adopt, or form a civil union.

Overall, young people who know a gay or lesbian person, liberals, Democrats, women, Independent women, youth in the Northeast, and African American and Latinos are core supporters in extending these traditional family rights to homosexuals. Republicans and conservatives (especially women), white men, and Born-Again Christians are core opponents.

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APPENDIX

As the table below demonstrates, most demographic groups hold similar viewpoints among the core values (housing, employment, hate crimes). The strongest differences emerge on family issues that have majority support but lack intensity (civil unions, marriage, adoption).

	Housing	Hate crimes	Employ	Civil unions	Marriage	Adoption
TOTAL SHOULD	86	85	85	63	56	53
Men	86	82	82	57	49	46
Women	86	88	88	70	63	61
White	84	82	82	58	54	49
African American	96	95	99	84	58	60
Latino	82	88	91	66	53	56
Age 15-17	79	83	85	62	46	54
18-20	90	85	84	63	60	51
21-22	87	88	89	72	62	55
23-25	87	85	84	59	57	53
Non-college men	90	85	85	59	52	48
College-men	68	76	81	60	38	44
Non-college women	88	88	89	70	65	61
College-women	86	89	90	72	55	63
All Democrats	95	94	94	85	66	63
Independents	87	85	82	56	60	59
All Republicans	78	75	75	44	45	36
Liberals	96	96	98	87	77	70
Moderates	89	91	91	67	50	59
Conservatives	76	71	67	35	35	28
Northeast	90	88	85	67	70	56
Midwest	88	82	82	59	53	52
South	82	85	85	63	51	51
West	86	85	87	64	55	55
Knows a gay person	95	93	94	80	73	69
Does not know	79	76	74	45	41	37