

From Wrongs to
Rights

1973 to 1999

PUBLIC OPINION ON
GAY AND LESBIAN AMERICANS
MOVES TOWARD EQUALITY

by Alan Yang
Introduction by Dr. Kenneth Sherrill

A Publication of the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force

Preface

INFORMATION IS POWER. So goes a popular axiom in this age of information. Yet, securing accurate, factual, well-researched data on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities remains one of the biggest challenges facing the advocacy movement and policy makers. This report marks an important step to deliver such data.

From Wrongs to Rights collects and analyzes data from a wide range of public opinion polls done over a more than twenty year period. Alan Yang offers a balanced perspective on trends in public opinion toward lesbians and gay men over time. His original analysis of publicly available data reveals what has been gained by the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement for equality and what aspects of public opinion still remain in flux.

The data in this report also point out the need for additional work in the field of public opinion research. A great number of polls on a wide variety of subjects still do not routinely incorporate demographic questions asking respondents about their sexual orientation. Data on attitudes towards bisexuals and transgender persons are not widely available, with most established polls not seeking information on these populations. In addition, private proprietary polls are routinely conducted by advocacy organizations, campaigns or other research institutions but results are neither available to researchers nor available for independent analysis. We believe that advocacy organizations ought to make their data available to the scholarly community. Release of the full results of such polls would contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the issues involved.

The Policy Institute of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) is a four year old think tank dedicated to research, policy analysis, strategy development and the promotion of greater understanding about gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. The Institute is indebted to the many scholars and advocates, of all different backgrounds and philosophies, who are part of its research circles. We look forward to the day when bias and homophobia are displaced by enlightened reason.

Urvashi Vaid

DIRECTOR, POLICY INSTITUTE, NGLTF

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Introduction

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ALAN YANG'S REPORT, *From Wrongs to Rights: Public Opinion on Gay and Lesbian Americans Moves Toward Equality, 1973-1999*, is an important contribution to our understanding of American political processes as well as an excellent guide to the American people's views on the civil rights of lesbian and gay people.

In this review of public opinion data, Yang demonstrates that Americans, on average, support equal treatment for gay and lesbian people even as gay people remain among the most disliked group of citizens in the nation. Over a generation ago, at the start of the modern gay rights movement, most Americans translated their moral disapproval of homosexuality into opposition to equal rights for lesbians and gay men. Yang's data demonstrate conclusively that, while still serious and widespread, moral censure of homosexuality is on the decline, and opposition to most specific cases of equal treatment has transformed into support.

Through the most extensive analysis of systematic survey data that we have yet to see on this subject, Alan Yang demonstrates that Americans support equal rights for gay people in areas such as employment, housing, inheritance rights, Social Security benefits, and military service. At the same time, Americans disapprove of homosexuality and feel coldly toward homosexuals. Over the past three decades, the public's distaste has declined while its support for equality has grown.

Yang's data also provide tantalizing hints that help us explain the continuing potency of anti-gay sentiment in electoral politics. Significantly, he finds increasing partisan polarization among the American people on issues related to lesbians and gay men. Democrats and Independents have moderated their views and Republicans have not. Researchers have argued that this

polarization contributed substantially to Bill Clinton's election as President. Some of this polarization is due to the shifting bases of the two parties and, in particular, the ideologies of their leadership.

As noted political scientist V. O. Key, Jr. argued, public opinion often resembles an echo chamber in which the words and arguments of political leaders are reflected in what pollsters hear from the people. The time period that Yang studies coincides with the takeover of the national leadership of the Republican Party by the religious right; it also is the time period during which the Democratic Party became more inclusive toward gay people. As a result, average Republicans may have learned that it is socially acceptable behavior to attack homosexuality and equal rights for lesbians and gay men. At the same time, average Democrats saw presidential candidates courting lesbian and gay voters and may have learned that it is socially acceptable to treat members of the gay community with the equality and dignity accorded all citizens. The Republican positions on lesbian and gay rights may have offended enough Americans to have cost the Republicans the presidency in 1992 and, to a lesser extent, in 1996. While this does not mean that the religious right's influence in the party will diminish, we see that leading contenders for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination are putting some distance between themselves and the most extreme positions of the merchants of hatred. No longer are many Republican candidates afraid to be seen in public with lesbian and gay Republicans. Some of these candidates are even willing to accept campaign contributions from organizations such as the Log Cabin Republicans, unlike Bob Dole, who felt compelled to return their contribution to his 1996 campaign.

“The majority of Americans not only increasingly favor the notion of equality for gay men and lesbians, but trends in public opinion toward lesbian and gay equality have liberalized on nearly every major issue over time.”

In fact, Yang's data help us to understand the recent anti-gay victories in legislative arenas and in referenda. As a minority diminishes in size, it often becomes more dedicated and impassioned. At the end, only the true believers are left. Intensity of belief is the best predictor of turning out to vote—particularly in referenda. In recent referenda battles it has become clear that opponents of gay rights turned out to vote in higher numbers than did supporters of these rights. The majorities and pluralities in support of equal rights that Yang's report details have proved to be relatively apathetic in contrast to the more passionate minorities of the electorate who endorse state-sanctioned inequality. We still live

in a country in which there is greater outrage over a gay, lesbian, or bisexual schoolteacher's being hired than there is over that teacher's being fired. The gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered movement now faces the challenge of transforming public opinion support for gay and lesbian equal rights into stronger electoral support.

We must exercise some caution in reading the data that Alan Yang presents in the following pages. While the data show that the distributions of policy preferences are shifting toward support for our rights on almost all issues, they do not measure the intensity of beliefs. We must recognize the strong chance that those who oppose our rights feel much more strongly about these issues than do our allies. As a result, our opponents are more likely to take action and to prevail in legislative arenas as well as in referenda because their numbers are effectively multiplied by the intensity of their hatred. Our task in the coming years is to get the heterosexual Americans who support our cause to feel as passionately outraged by the injustices we face and to be as strongly motivated to act in support of our rights as our adversaries are in their opposition to our rights.

Yang's data once again lead us to speculate on strategies for building support for gay and lesbian equality. Over and over again, Americans indicate support for specific and tangible equality while opposing the abstract and symbolic guarantees of equal treatment. Thus, they support nondiscrimination in certain job categories, while not especially liking gay people; they also support both domestic partner benefits and the Defense of Marriage Act. Such qualified support suggests that progress can be achieved more readily for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement on specific and tangible issues while it may remain slower on more abstract or symbolic issues.

Alan Yang's data show us that the American people are ready to support equal rights for lesbians and gay men. These results challenge gay and lesbian political leaders to adapt their goals and messages to the realities of public opinion. Further, Yang's data challenge the mainstream consensus among media and political elites that the American public is irrevocably anti-gay. Progress in public opinion may be slow and uneven, but it has clearly been steady.

From Wrongs to Rights:

PUBLIC OPINION ON
GAY & LESBIAN AMERICANS
MOVES TOWARD EQUALITY

By Alan Yang

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The Myth about Mainstream Opinion

AS THE AMERICAN PUBLIC continues to engage in an increasingly nuanced and public debate on homosexuality, the political and religious right has stood confidently behind the claim that it represents the values of “mainstream” Americans and that the values of the mainstream are firmly and empirically in opposition to gay men and lesbians, their lives, their civil rights, and their families.¹ The real emerging social consensus in America is, however, quite different from this abiding and narrow stereotype. In fact, empirical evidence strongly demonstrates that opposition to lesbian and gay equal rights is on the decline among most Americans.

This report shows the following trends in public opinion:

- The majority of Americans not only increasingly favor the notion of equality for gay men and lesbians, but trends in public opinion toward lesbian and gay equality have liberalized on nearly every major issue over time — from equality in employment (in general and in specific professions, e.g., teachers, the military, clergy, doctors, etc.), to housing, to disapproval of homosexual practices.
- One of the clearest areas of public support for lesbian and gay rights has traditionally been on the issues of employment and housing equality. Clear majorities have consistently and increasingly shown overwhelming support for equality in employment (from 56% support in 1977 to 84% in 1996; Gallup; Gallup's 1999 survey confirms this figure, with 83% supporting equality in job opportunities; three PSRA surveys done between 1996-1998 show support at 83-84% as well) and housing (over 75% public support in the surveys between 1994 and 1998; Princeton Survey Research Associates).
- In recent years, the gap between college graduates and those with lower levels of education has narrowed dramatically with respect to support for equality in employment. Support is widespread at all educational levels, suggesting that support for equality is not limited to a narrow, highly educated elite.
- After years of stable disapproval of homosexual behavior, the 1990's have seen a demonstrable dip in public disapproval. Consistent disapproval rates throughout the 1970's and 1980's, peaking at 75% in the late 1980's, have given way to a clear trend toward tolerance in the 1990's. By 1996, disapproval rates dropped by nearly 20% (to 56%; NORC-General Social Survey) from their peak less than a decade before. While those who disapprove of homosexual behavior are still in the majority, it is clear that the number of people who disapprove has also decreased in recent years.

Taken together, these developments, and others detailed in this report, provide strong evidence of greater tolerance and support for gay and lesbian equality.

Methodology

THIS REPORT EXAMINES public opinion survey data about a number of issues on the agenda of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender civil rights movement. Only those public opinion polls that measured opinion among systematically selected and representative samples of the U.S. adult population as a whole were analyzed in this report. A survey is representative when the sample being interviewed is chosen randomly from the population at large, with each individual having an equal chance of being chosen. The universe of possible respondents is the adult population of the United States. The proportion of people in the sample—young, old, college educated, African-American, rural, Catholic, Southerners, and so forth—are all about the same as their proportion in the U.S. population as a whole. Responses to identical survey questions asked by both academic and commercial polling organizations at repeated intervals over time are referred to in this report as public opinion trends.

By analyzing survey questions from representative national surveys, we are able to reliably make inferences about what Americans think about different issues of concern to gays and lesbians. A surprising number of opinion watchers make the mistake of drawing inferences about public opinion from the answers obtained from non-representative survey questions which are not identical or are asked just once and not repeatedly over time. While looking at survey questions at a single point in time is informative, it tells us nothing about changes in attitudes over time. Without a baseline to compare subsequent results, we cannot know what the responses from a single survey question mean in a comparative perspective. Changes in the wording of a question can alter people's interpretations of what is being asked and can alter their responses even while their opinions remain constant. In this report, we are interested only in identically worded survey questions that have been asked at different intervals over time (public opinion trends).

A final caveat is that this study only measures trends in public opinion towards lesbians and gay men. While bisexuals and transgender persons are also

part of the larger gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, public opinion data on attitudes towards these populations does not exist in a way that would allow inferences to be drawn.

To accomplish this study, we first targeted six kinds of questions which have been asked of representative samples over time: 1) support for employment non-discrimination; 2) support for hiring gay and lesbian teachers; 3) support for gays in the military; 4) disapproval of homosexual behavior; 5) sympathy toward gays and lesbians; and 6) support for gay and lesbian adoption rights.²

“In this report, we are interested only in identically worded survey questions that have been asked at different intervals over time (public opinion trends).”

Second, we examined each of these questions through the prism of various sociodemographic factors (gender, race, region, political ideology, party identification, religiosity, level of urbanization where respondent resides, educational attainment, and age)³ to determine how and when levels of support or opposition rose.⁴

Third, we used multiple regression analysis to examine the effect of these sociodemographic factors on the targeted public opinion trends when holding all other factors statistically constant by controlling for them. With such analysis we can, for example, determine if the apparent variance between men’s and women’s positions on an issue reflects gender-based differences or the impact of an altogether different set of factors. To determine the impact of gender on a particular issue of concern to gay men and lesbians (e.g., support for gays in the military) we tested for the impact of gender when controlling for the effect of all other sociodemographic factors simultaneously. The results of these analyses guided us in determining how strongly the sociodemographic factors studied affected support on a particular question.

How Public Opinion Is Measured

WITH THE ADVENT of modern survey sampling techniques, public opinion has become a measurable phenomenon that can help us assess how the public evaluates social and political issues at a particular moment in time. But it is not a perfect science. Inferring levels of support for a particular social or political issue from a single survey is naturally not without problems; matters such as question placement and wording, for example, can alter results. In addition, most Americans are not only poorly informed on the facts and figures of the issues they are debating, but tend to hold inconsistent positions on the same set of civil rights issues. For example, Americans support the principle of racial equality at far higher levels than they support concrete policies designed to achieve that goal.⁵

That said, public opinion in this country has shown impressive stability across a range of social and political issues over time. When mass opinion does change, the change is generally gradual rather than fluctuating or wildly inconsistent, and can generally be linked to a discernible change in the political environment. Of the forces that can impact such change, the mass media, in particular, holds enormous sway in altering prevalent and long-held beliefs, whether by fostering debate or by introducing the testimony of “experts,” who may help guide discussion and opinion. The content and tone of mass media coverage on gay and lesbian issues has changed radically over the last twenty-five years. This is in no small part due to the emergence of a vital and vocal lesbian and gay community as well as a vocal antigay right wing. These voices have added more information and new perceptions to old debates and mythologies, and moved the discussion of homosexuality from the realm of “not acceptable for polite society” into a public, contentious discourse around the role of lesbians and gays in contemporary American society. Such changes cannot help but have an impact on the public’s ability to form intelligible and interpretable opinions about lesbian and gay equality.

Mainstream America Supports Specific Gay & Lesbian Rights

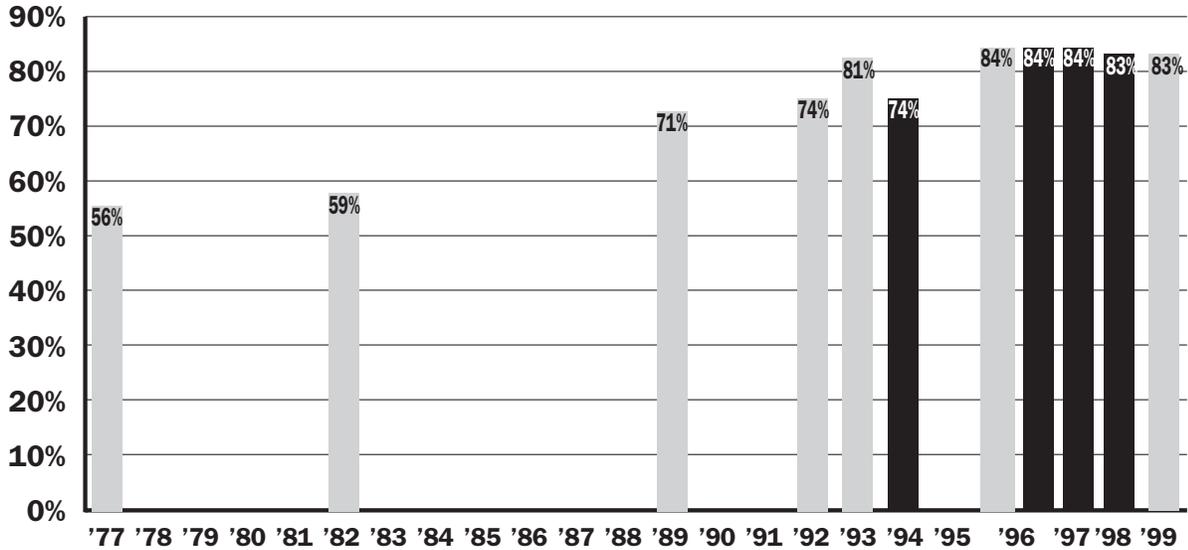
A Consensus on Equality in Housing and Employment

ONE OF THE clearest areas of public support for lesbian and gay rights has traditionally been on the issues of employment and housing equality. As early as 1978, a Roper trend showed 2-1 support for the view that “homosexuals should be guaranteed equal treatment under the law in jobs and housing,”⁶ and a NBC/AP trend for the years 1977 to 1981 showed that either a plurality or a majority of Americans (ranging from 46% to 51%) believed that “fair housing and fair employment laws should be extended to cover homosexuals.”

More recent trends show continued strong support on these issues, as well as dramatic increases in support for employment and housing equality over time. A Gallup trend measuring support for “equal rights in terms of job opportunities” not only indicates a 28-point increase from 56% to 84% between 1977 and 1996 (83% in 1999), but also reveals that almost half of this change emerged between October 1989 and November 1996. A Princeton Survey Research Associates (PSRA) survey question asked between 1994 and 1998 testifies to continued acceptance among the public on the issue of gay and lesbian employment non-discrimination (a 10% increase in support between 1994-6), *see figure 1*. The same PSRA survey shows evidence that three-quarters or more of Americans endorse equality in housing, *see figure 2*.

But as support on employment and housing rights for gay men and lesbians grows, clear gaps remain in who is leading — and who is lagging — in the movement toward equality. To assess levels of support or censure across political, educational, gender, and race lines we examined a trend from 1988 to 1996 in response to the National Election Study (NES) question asking whether a respondent favored or opposed “laws to protect homosexuals against job

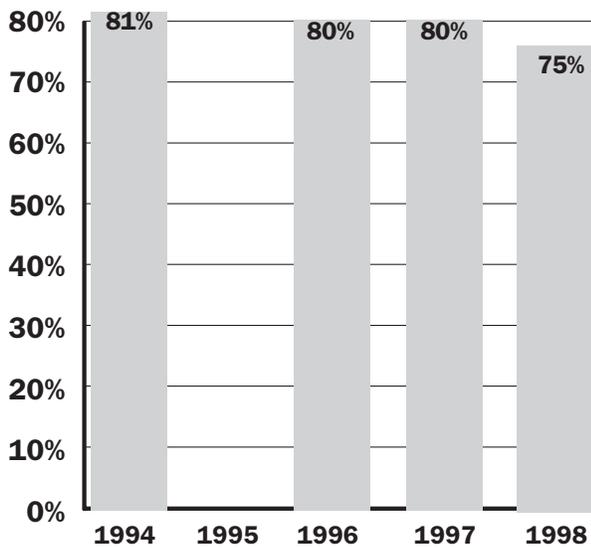
Figure 1 Support for Equal Rights in Employment



GALLUP "In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?"
 PSRA "Do you think there should or should not be . . . equal rights for gays in terms of job opportunities?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS IN FAVOR OF EQUAL RIGHTS IN EMPLOYMENT.

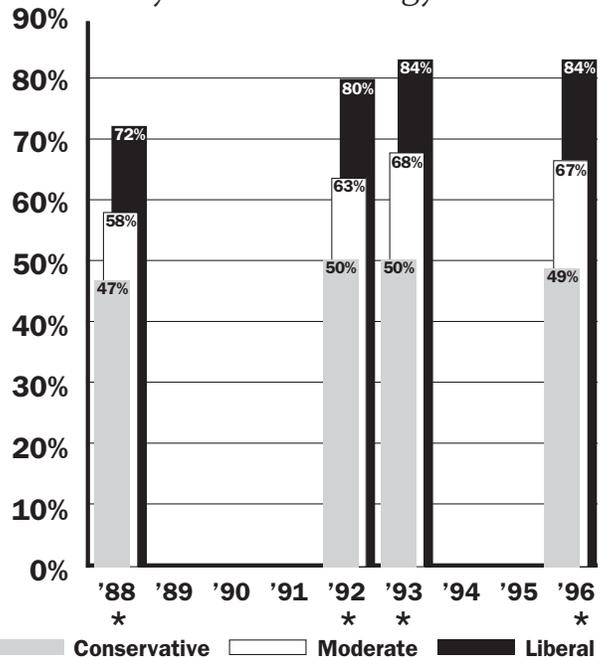
Figure 2 Support for Housing Rights for Gays



PSRA "Do you think there should or should not be . . . equal rights for gays in terms of housing?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS IN FAVOR OF HOUSING RIGHTS FOR GAYS.

Figure 3 Support for Job Protections by Political Ideology



NES "Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS IN FAVOR OF JOB PROTECTIONS FOR HOMOSEXUALS BY CATEGORIES OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

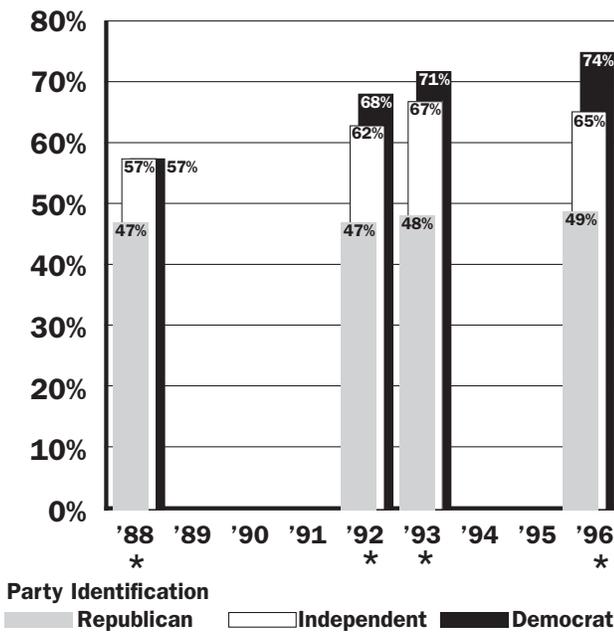
discrimination.” Analyzing this trend, we see that political ideology has by far the largest effect on this issue for respondents: moderates and liberals have been more supportive over time while conservative opinion has remained stagnant, *see figure 3*. This schism is reflected in the nation’s two major political parties. Citizens who identify with Republicans have not shown much of a change in attitude toward gay and lesbian equality, while those who identify as Democrats (and, to a lesser extent, Independent) have become more

supportive over time. These differences between Democrats and Republicans have grown increasingly important. Republicans remain flat in their support on employment, while Democrats and Independents have become more supportive, *see figure 4*. This suggests that the issue of employment equality has become more polarized in partisan terms over the last decade.

While political ideology has become more significant when measuring opinion on employment and housing rights, educational differences seem to mean increasingly less.⁷ Between 1988 and 1996, education’s effect on support for employment nondiscrimination declined, with those not completing high school looking ever more like college graduates with respect to this issue, *see figure 5*. In 1988, college graduates were more than 20 points more likely to support equal rights in employment than were high school graduates and those with some high

school education; today, the gap between the two groups is only five points. Support for gay and lesbian equality in employment is widespread at all educational levels, clearly not limited to a narrow highly educated elite. The gender and race gaps on employment are comparable to each other,⁸ with women and blacks showing greater levels of support than men and whites, but with increased support evident overall and over time by everyone, *see figures 6 and 7*.⁹

Figure 4 Support for Job Protections by Party ID

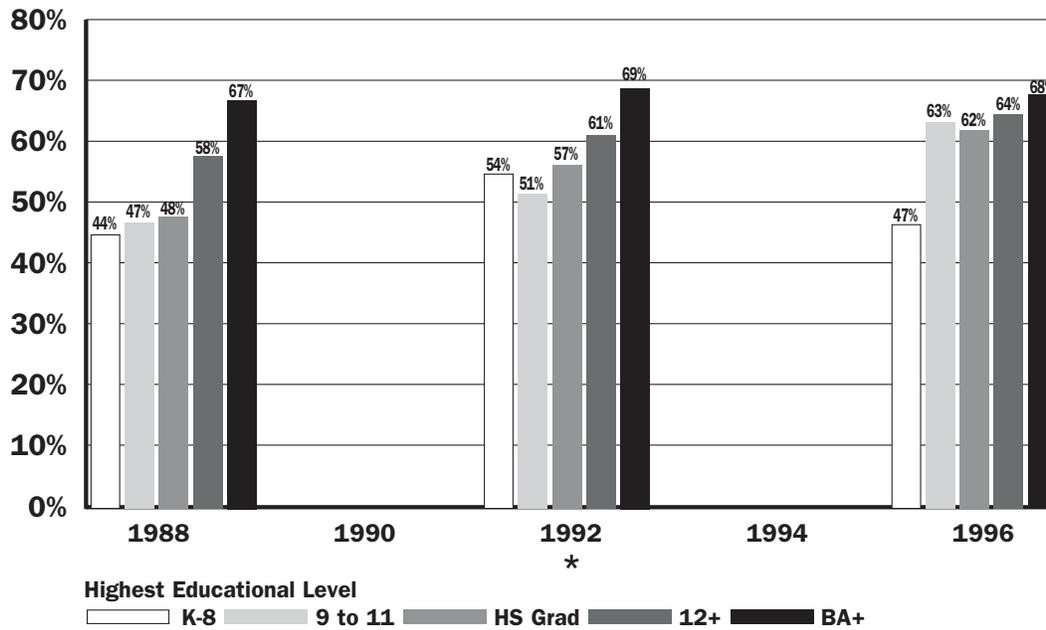


NES “Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS IN FAVOR OF JOB PROTECTIONS FOR HOMOSEXUALS BY CATEGORIES OF POLITICAL PARTY IDENTIFICATION.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 5 Support for Job Protection by Education

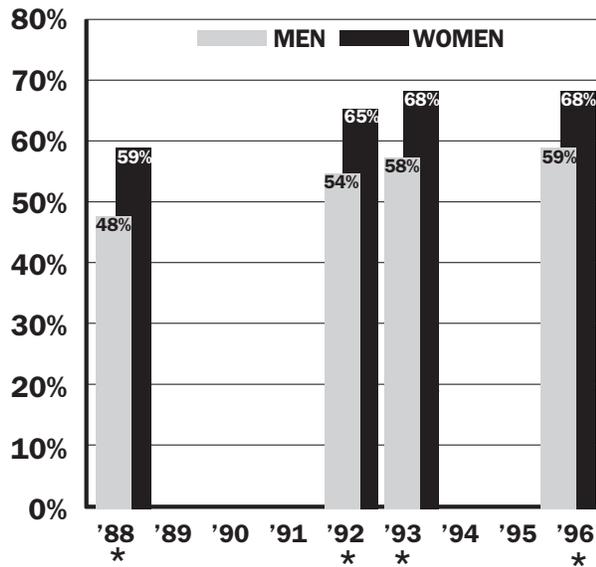


NES "Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR JOB PROTECTIONS BY CATEGORIES OF HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 6 Support for Job Protections by Gender

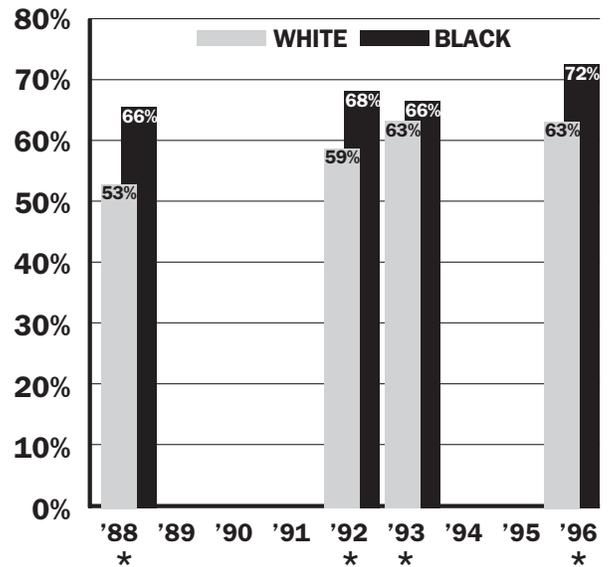


NES "Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR JOB PROTECTIONS BY CATEGORIES OF GENDER.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 7 Support for Job Protections by Race



NES "Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR JOB PROTECTIONS BY CATEGORIES OF RACE.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

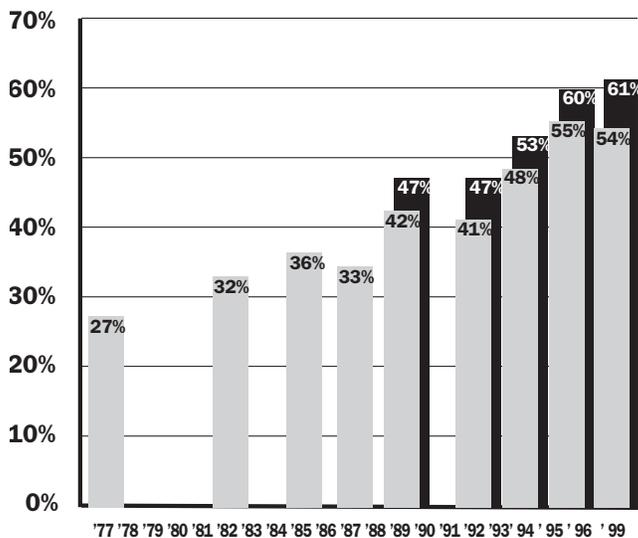
Acceptance in Widening Job Roles for Gay & Lesbian Americans

AS OPINION ON EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS has moved toward acceptance, so too has public support for lesbians and gay men in certain occupations undergone a pronounced change. One of the most highly contested areas of employment for gay men and lesbians has been in the schools, but here there has been movement toward acceptance. In fact, there is clear evidence that the majority of Americans oppose the exclusion of teachers at all educational levels based solely on their lesbian or gay status.

The change in opinion here is marked and traceable. While support for “allowing homosexuals to teach in the public schools” did not exceed 34% during the

early 1980’s (Gallup), another Gallup trend for the period between 1977 and 1999 shows that support for hiring “homosexuals” as elementary school teachers doubled during this period. By 1999, a clear majority — 54% — supported hiring or retaining homosexuals as elementary school teachers, *see figure 8*. Similarly, support for hiring gays as high school teachers increased from a plurality to 61% — a clean majority — between 1989 and 1999. In 1973, National Opinion Research Center (NORC) data showed that a majority did not support hiring lesbians and gays as college teachers. By 1996 and 1998, the NORC data showed that three in four Americans supported the right of lesbians and gays to be college teachers. Finally, according to a Gallup/PSRA trend (1987-97), increasing majorities have disagreed that “school boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals,” with a nearly 2-1 majority disapproving by 1997 (63% vs. 33%), *see figure 9*.

Figure 8 Favor Hiring Lesbian and Gay Teachers



GAL (K-8) “Do you think homosexuals should or should not be hired for the following occupations: Elementary school teachers?”

GAL (9-12) “Do you think homosexuals should or should not be hired for the following occupations: High school teachers?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR HIRING GAY TEACHERS.

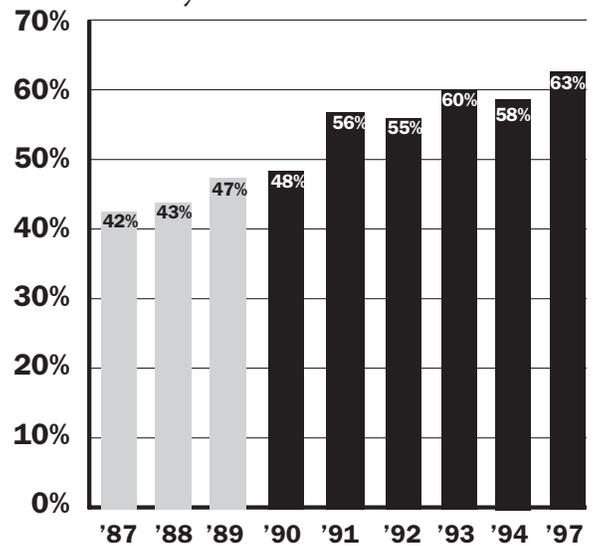
A closer look at a NORC General Social Survey trend (1974-98) illuminates this relaxation of

attitudes towards gay men and lesbians in the workplace. Differences in levels of education have the largest effect over time on support for gay college teachers; the greater the respondent's level of education, the higher the level of support, although support has increased across all education levels over time. Age, religious practice, and political ideology also significantly influenced opinion. Levels of approval increased across all categories over time, even among the more devout, the older, and the more conservative. There has been a marked growth in tolerance the last two decades among seniors (from 28% to 61%), as well as among moderates (from 50% to 78%) and conservatives (from 47% to 72%).¹⁰

While overwhelming majorities have long supported the hiring of lesbians and gay men in occupations such as salespersons (from 68% to 90% between 1977-99; Gallup), public support for lesbian and gay clergy or doctors has not reached quite the same level. Nonetheless, between 1977 and 1999, support for employment rights of lesbian and gay doctors increased dramatically from 44% to 75% (see figure 10), while support for employment rights of lesbian and gay clergy increased by 18 points from 36% to 54% during this same period, finally attaining majority approval by 1996.

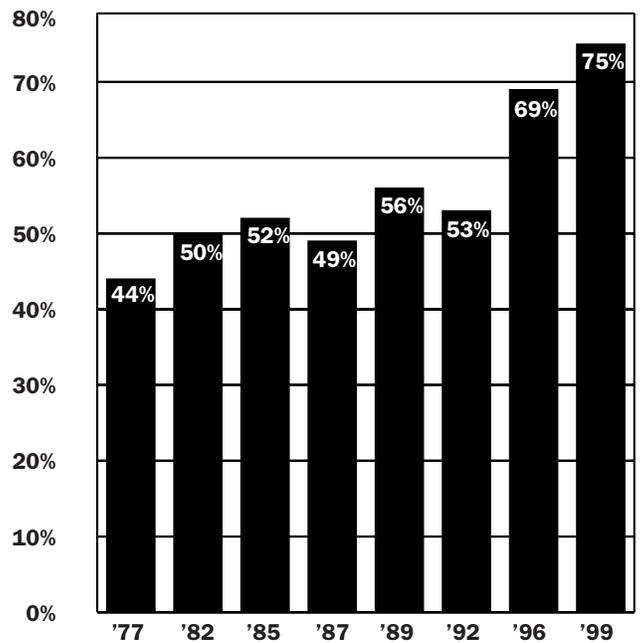
In the realm of electoral politics, opinion has moved as well. A Hart et al. trend for 1991 to 1992 shows that between 47-53% of the American public believed that being lesbian or gay should not disqualify someone from being President. The proportion of Americans who would vote for a generally well-qualified Presidential nominee of their party who happened to be homosexual more than doubled between 1978 and 1999 (from 26% to 59%, Gallup). More recently, approval for the notion of naming lesbian and gay Cabinet members rose 20 points from 54% to 74% between the years 1992 and 1999.

Figure 9 Disapprove of Firing Gay Teachers



GALLUP **PSRA** "Please tell me how much you agree or disagree with each of these statements . . . School boards ought to have the right to fire teachers who are known homosexuals."
PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO OPPOSE FIRING GAY TEACHERS.

Figure 10 Support for Employment Rights of Lesbian and Gay Doctors



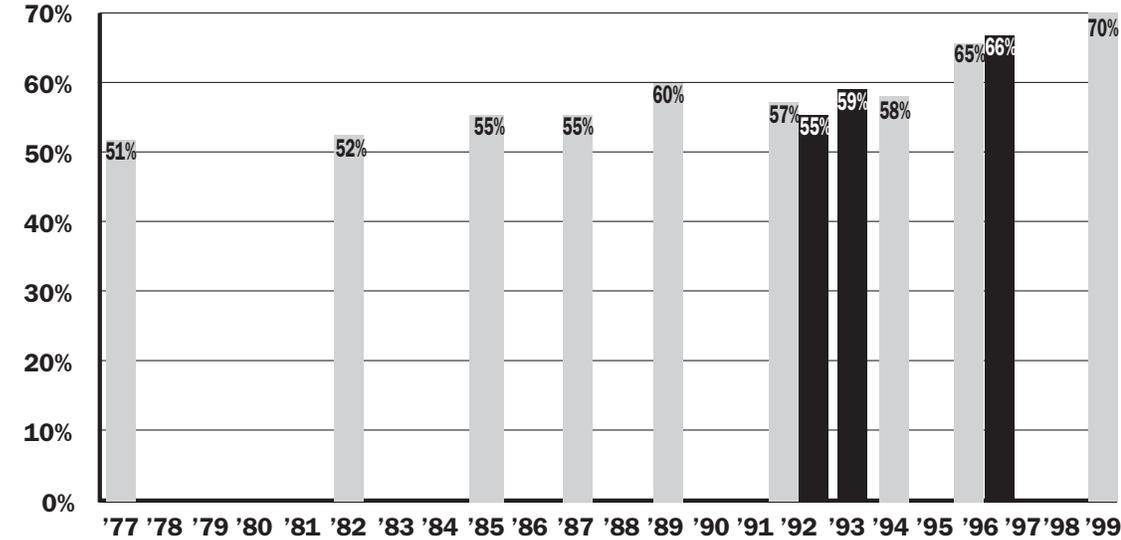
GALLUP "Do you think homosexuals should or should not be hired for the following occupations: Doctors?"
PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR HIRING GAY DOCTORS.

The Special Case of the Military

ALTHOUGH THE MILITARY CONTINUES to ban lesbians and gay men from military service to this day, the controversial debate over President Clinton’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” policy in 1993 appears to have contributed to a greater level of support among Americans for allowing gay and lesbian people to serve. There is strong evidence that the public has all along been supportive of allowing lesbians and gay men to serve in the armed forces.

A Gallup poll conducted between 1977 and 1999 shows that there has been at least majority support for hiring “homosexuals...for the armed forces” for the past two decades, with supporters outnumbering opponents of gays in the military by 2 to 1 in 1989 and 1996, *see figure 11*. By 1999 support had climbed to 70% (vs. 26% against)— a 19 point increase from 1977. Six different survey items covering the period 1992 to 1993 showed at least plurality or majority support for allowing lesbians and

Figure 11 Support for Gays in the Military

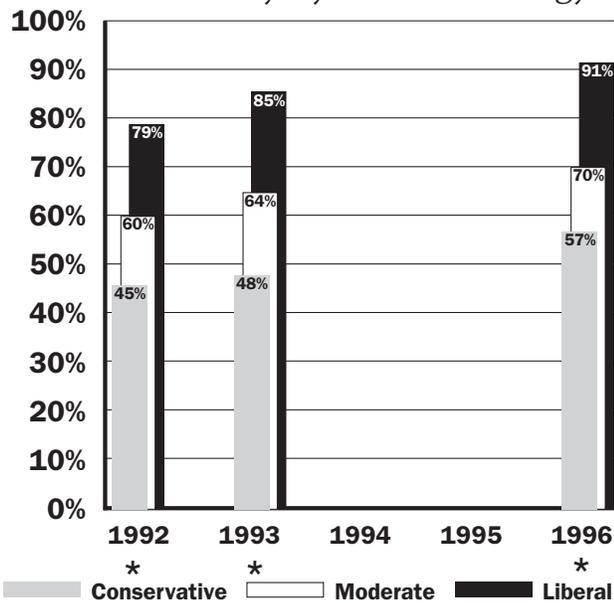


GALLUP “Now, I’d like to ask you about the hiring of homosexuals in specific occupations. Do you think homosexuals should or should not be hired for the following occupations: The armed forces.” (1994 from **PSRA**)

NES “Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces, or don’t you think so?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MILITARY.
 NES HAS NOT ASKED QUESTIONS SINCE 1996.

Figure 12 Support for Gays in the Military by Political Ideology

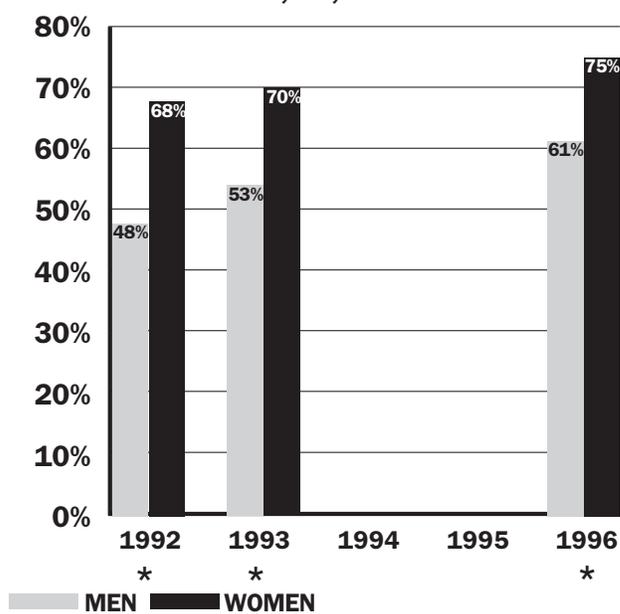


NES “Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces or don’t you think so?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MILITARY BY CATEGORIES OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 13 Support for Gays in the Military by Gender



NES: “Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces or don’t you think so?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO FAVOR HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MILITARY BY CATEGORIES OF GENDER.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

gays to serve in the military, even when some trends showed a short-term dip in support in the immediate aftermath (early to mid-1993) of the highly publicized debate around “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Pursue” (Harris, *LA Times*, *ABC/Washington Post*, Gallup [three different trend questions]). A NES trend (see figure 11) shows an increase of 11 points (from 55% to 66%) in public support in this heated area of employment between the fall of 1992 and the fall of 1996.

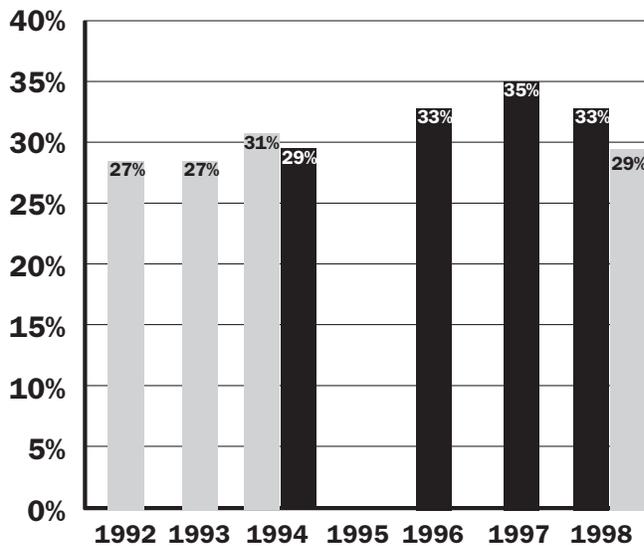
A close look at the National Election Studies (NES) data suggests that ideology and gender differences by far have the greatest impact on support for gays in the military. Differences between support from liberals and conservatives are dramatic, see figure 12. Women are substantially more generous than men in their support for gays in the military (between 14% and 20% higher), see figure 13. Nevertheless, support for inclusion increased substantially in all categories between 1992 and 1996, with a majority of conservatives approving by 1996, and men showing a strong increase in support.

Differences in party identification were marked, with the line between Democrats and Republicans varying each year, although by 1996, there was majority support even among Republicans. On this issue, differences in age and education and frequency of religious attendance had discernible, yet smaller, impact.¹¹

Growing Support on Family Issues and Personal Freedom

WITH HEADLINE-GRABBING EVENTS such as the same-sex marriage battles in Hawaii's courts and an expanding body of legislation at the state level on spousal benefits and parental rights for lesbians and gays, marriage and family are particularly salient issues to lesbian and gay people. Public opinion trend evidence in these areas is limited.¹² Until recently, few opinion polls have asked these questions regularly.

Figure 14 Support for Gay Marriage



YANKELOVICH "Do you think marriages between homosexual men and between homosexual women should be recognized as legal by the law?"

PSRA "Do you think there should or should not be . . . equal rights for gays in terms of legally-sanctioned gay marriages?"

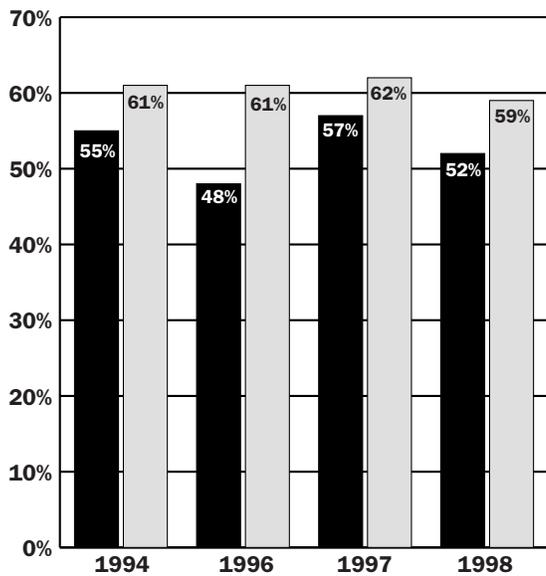
PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO ARE IN FAVOR OF GAY MARRIAGE.

The most recent data that are available (such as a 1992-98 Yankelovich trend and a 1994-98 PSRA trend) suggest that Americans are opposed by a two-thirds majority to extending recognition of civil marriage to same-sex couples, *see figure 14*. Still, majorities of the public support extending certain tangible benefits associated with marriage, *see figure 15*.

In the area of support for spousal benefits, a recent PSRA trend (1994-98) shows clear support (around 60%) for "equal rights for gays in terms of inheritance rights for gay spouses." A 1994-1998 PSRA trend shows clear majority support for equal rights "in terms of Social Security benefits for gay spouses" (with the exception of 1996, where there is plurality support), *see figure 15 for both*.

On same-sex parenting rights, there has traditionally been strong public opposition to permitting same-sex couples to legally adopt children. A NES trend from 1992 to 1994 places public disapproval in the two-thirds range. However, a more recent PSRA trend (1994-98) shows comparatively higher levels of support for “equal rights for gays in terms of adoption rights of gay spouses,” with a discernable rise in support between 1994 and 1998, *see figure 16 for both*.¹³ The NES trend illuminated some interesting diversity of opinion across the American public when it asked whether “homosexual couples” ought to be able to legally adopt children. Differences in political ideology appear to be the most important factor by far when it comes to public support for adoption rights, with liberals more than three times as supportive as conservatives on the issue and twice as supportive as moderates. In fact, liberals support gay adoption rights outright and are the only group who show clear majority support on this issue, *see figure 17*.

Figure 15 Support for Benefits for Gay Spouses

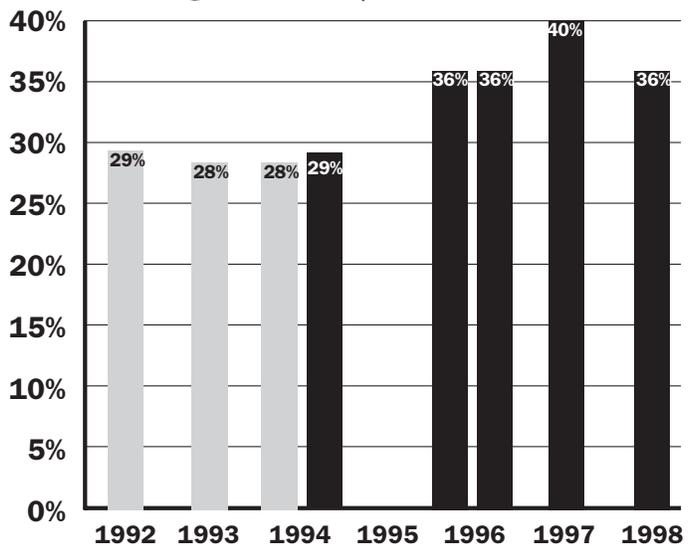


PSRA-1 “Do you think there should or should not be . . . equal rights for gays in terms of Social Security benefits for gay spouses?”

PSRA-2 “Do you think there should or should not be . . . equal rights for gays in terms of inheritance rights for gay spouses?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO ARE IN FAVOR OF BENEFITS FOR GAYS.

Figure 16 Support for Adoption Rights for Gays

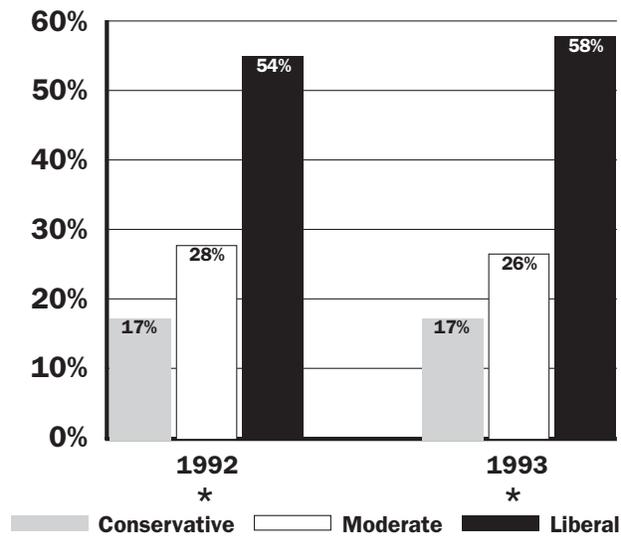


NES “Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?” (1994 from **Yankelovich** “Do you think that homosexual couples should be legally permitted to adopt children?”)

PSRA “Do you think there should or should not be . . . equal rights for gays in terms of adoption rights for gay spouses?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO ARE IN FAVOR OF ADOPTION RIGHTS FOR GAYS.

Figure 17 Support for Gay Adoption by Political Ideology

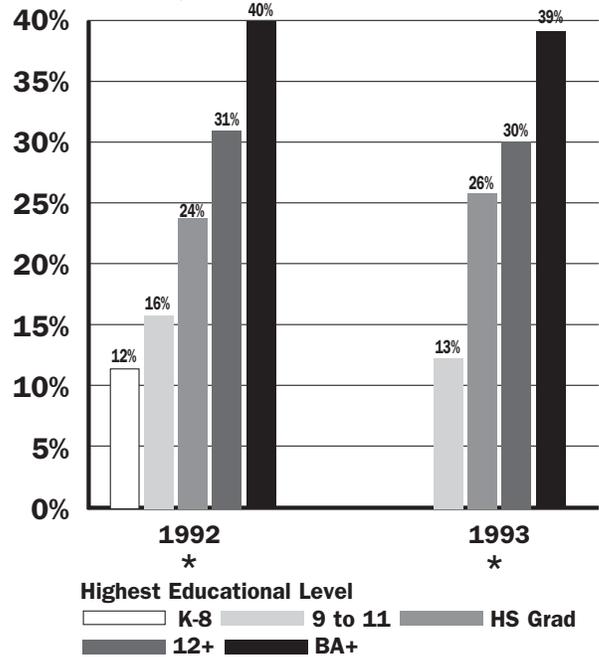


NES “Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO ARE IN FAVOR OF ADOPTION RIGHTS FOR GAYS BY CATEGORIES OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

Figure 18 Support for Gay Adoption by Education



NES “Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT RESPONDENTS WHO ARE IN FAVOR OF ADOPTION RIGHTS FOR GAYS BY CATEGORIES OF HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Note: No K-8 measure for 1993 due to insufficient “n” to report.

* Differences are statistically significant at .05 level.

After political ideology, differences in education and frequency of religious attendance have the largest effect on attitudes towards adoption rights. Respondents with higher levels of education express greater support (see figure 18) and respondents who attend religious services frequently are more than twice as likely to oppose lesbian and gay adoption rights.¹⁴ On the whole while the American people are not supportive of adoption rights for lesbians and gays, there are clearly allies (e.g. liberals, college graduates) who already support or are evenly divided on the issue.

Less Censure for Same-Sex Sexual Relations

SAME-SEX SEXUAL BEHAVIOR has been criminalized at the state and federal level for decades. Modernization of criminal codes in the early 1970's decriminalized consensual, adult, same-sex behavior in many states, with state court challenges and legislative repeal of antigay "sodomy" laws resulting in the removal of other sodomy statutes.

Nonetheless, 5 states still criminalize same-sex sodomy and 15 states criminalize same-sex and opposite-sex sodomy. A Gallup trend (1977-99) indicates that attitudes on whether "homosexual relations between consenting adults" should be legal have been evenly divided since the late 1970's, with the exception of a period in the mid to late 1980's, when majorities believed such relations should not be legal. However, the most recent survey (February, 1999) shows a clear plurality of 50% in support of homosexual relations being legal, with 43% opposed. A *Los Angeles Times* trend from 1986 to 1987 showed, however, that up to 53% of Americans believed that "homosexual relations between consenting adults in the privacy of their own homes" should be legal, and a Harris trend from 1978 to 1990 indicated substantial support (63-70%) for the view that "homosexual relations in private between consenting adults" should be "left to the individuals." This evidence suggests that the American public supports privacy and public opinion evidence lends support to the effort to further de-criminalize private, adult, consensual gay sexual activity.

"[A] Harris trend from 1978 to 1990 indicated substantial support (63-70%) for the view that homosexual relations in private between consenting adults should be 'left to the individuals.'"

Getting to Know (and Like) Gay Men & Lesbians

PUBLIC OPINION data provide strong evidence that simply knowing a lesbian or gay acquaintance, friend, co-worker or family member is associated with increased tolerance toward lesbians and gays, in general, and support for equal rights, in particular. Although a 1983 to 1986 Gallup poll showed that only one-quarter of Americans thought they had a “friend or acquaintance who was homosexual,” between 1996 and 1998, in a PSRA trend, a clear majority of the public acknowledged having a gay friend or acquaintance, *see figure 19*. Similarly, Americans and increasingly familiar with gay or

Figure 19 Have Gay Friend or Acquaintance

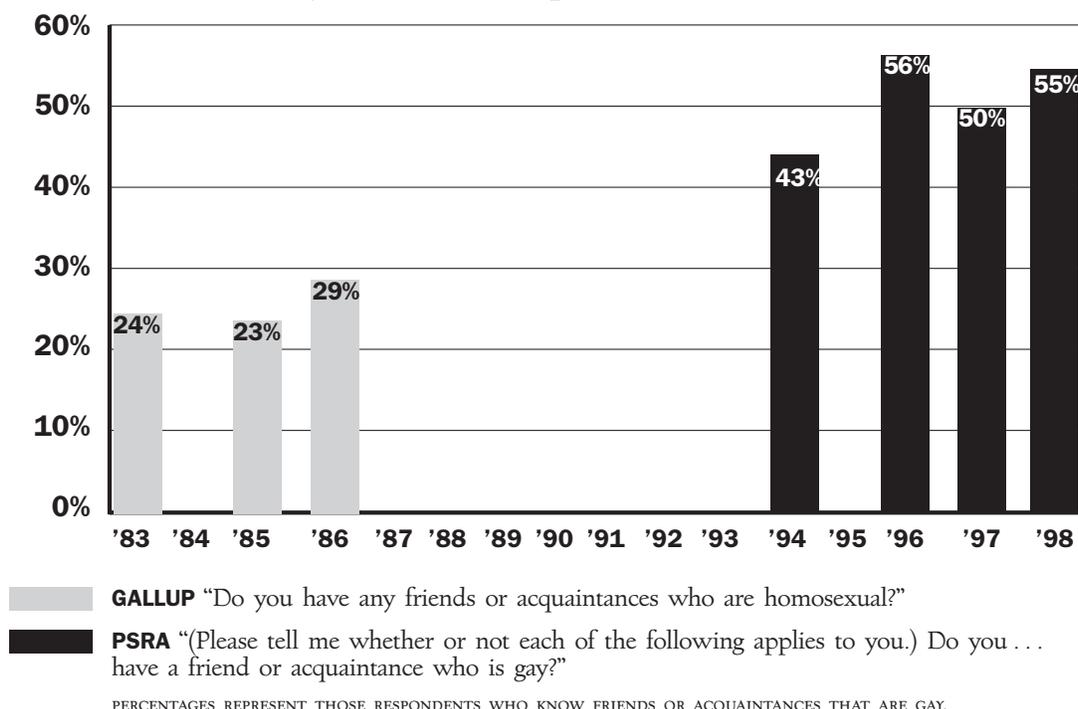
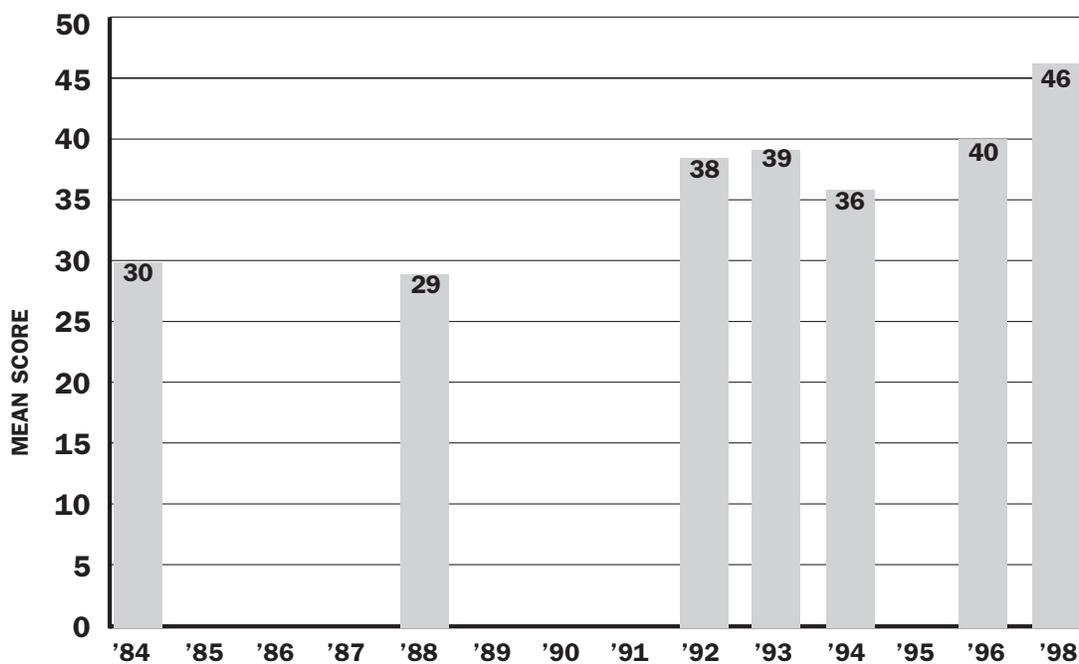


Figure 20 Mean Feeling Thermometer Rating (0-100)



NES “Still using the feeling thermometer (where 50-100 means you feel favorable and warm, between 0-50 mean you don’t feel favorable and don’t care too much for), how would you rate the following groups . . . gay men and lesbians. i.e. . . . homosexuals?”

MEAN OF TOTAL SCORES OF ALL RESPONDENTS BY YEAR.

lesbian “family member(s) or close friends(s)” (from 32% to 41% between 1994 and 1998; Yankelovich Partners).¹⁵ This important development speaks both to the growing ability of the American public to recognize gay men and lesbians in their midst and the greater cultural openness among gay men and lesbians.

As gayness increasingly comes out of the closet, the origin of sexual orientation has become the subject of heated scientific and cultural debate. Interestingly, evidence shows that the belief that homosexuality is something one is born with is associated with increased tolerance and support for lesbian and gay equal rights.¹⁶ Those who believe that homosexuality is something that people “are born with” doubled from 16% to 31% between 1983 and 1993 according to a Gallup trend. By 1993, the public was evenly divided between those who believed that homosexuality was inborn and those who believed it was a “preference.”¹⁷

Additional polling shows that the American people’s sympathy toward lesbians and gays has increased. A *LA Times* trend conducted between 1983 and 1994 shows that the proportion of respondents who were “very unsympathetic” to the “homosexual community” declined substantially during this period (from

46% in 1983 to 16% in 1994). In perhaps the most direct test of affective response to lesbians and gays, a NES trend measuring the public's feelings towards gays and lesbians revealed that the mean rating for lesbians and gays increased 16 points between 1984 and 1998, *see figure 20*. Still, when compared to other social groups, lesbians and gays consistently receive among the lowest mean ratings on the so-called "feeling thermometer."¹⁸

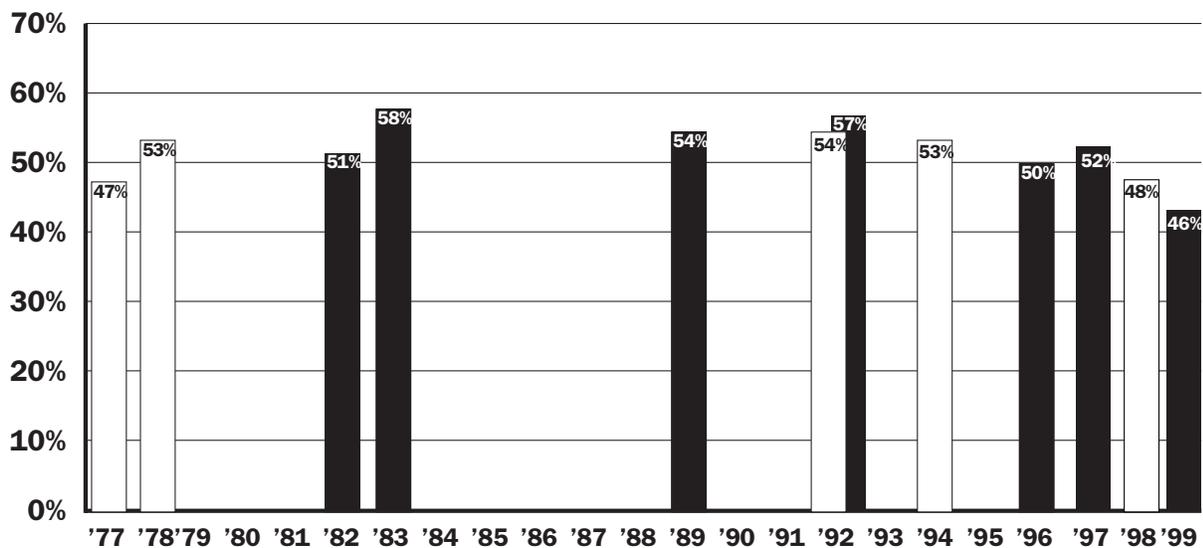
Here, as on other issues, political ideology and education are strong factors in sympathy towards gay men and lesbians, with conservatives far more likely than liberals to rate gays at zero. Gender, religious devotion, region,¹⁹ and level of urbanization are also indicators, but here the disparities are less dramatic and the trend has been towards less disapproval over the course of the period between 1984 and 1998.²⁰

Fewer Questions More Acceptance

IN CONTRAST TO INCREASING SUPPORT for specific aspects of gay and lesbian civil equality, public attitudes on the issue of the moral rightness or immorality of homosexual behavior remain generally stable over time, with majorities still disapproving of homosexuality. A plurality or narrow majority in a Yankelovich trend (1977-98), for example, consistently agrees that “homosexual relations between consenting adults” are “morally wrong,” see figure 21. A Gallup trend covering 1982-1999 shows an increase in American willingness to acknowledge homosexuality as an “acceptable alternative lifestyle.” Whereas 34% believed gayness was “acceptable” in 1982 by 1999 the figure had risen to 50% (vs. 46% “not acceptable”).

The small thaw in public disapproval of same-sex behavior continues in this decade. The NORC trend provides the longest-running measure of public attitudes

Figure 21 Disapproval of Homosexuality



YANKELOVICH “Do you personally think that homosexual relationships between consenting adults are morally wrong or not a moral issue?”
 ('77: “Which of the following activities do you feel are morally wrong from your own personal point of view—and which do you feel are not a moral issue? Homosexual relations between consenting adults.”
 94: Introduction to question: “Now I’d like to ask you some questions about homosexuals—or gays and lesbians as they are sometimes called . . .) ”

GALLUP “Do you feel that homosexuality should be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle or not?”

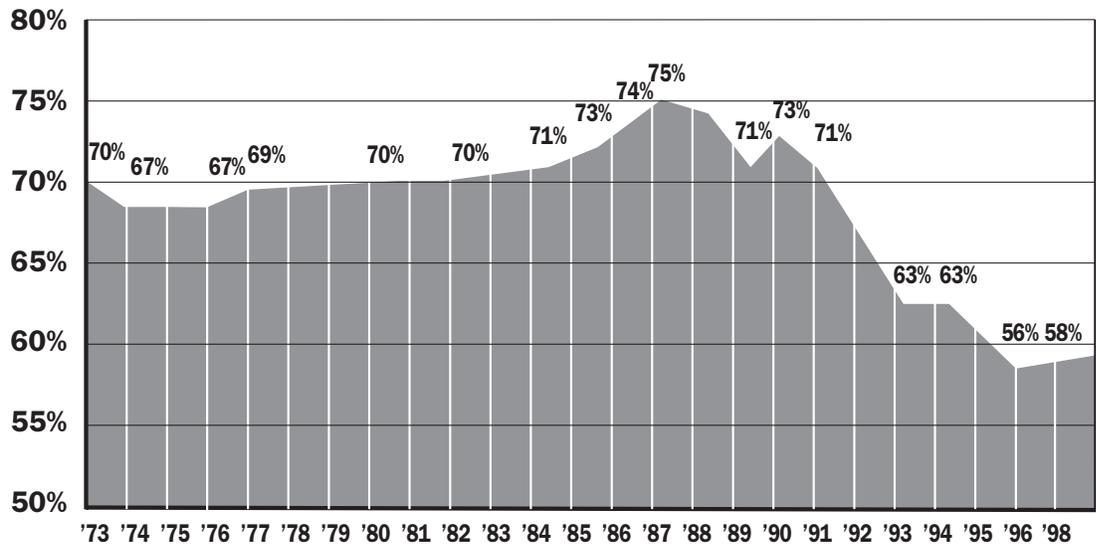
PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS WHO DISAPPROVE OF HOMOSEXUALITY.

towards the moral rightness or immorality of homosexual behavior, *see figure 22*. It shows that since the question was first asked in 1973, a clearly discernible drop in “always wrong” responses appeared twice: in the 1993-4 surveys, and again in 1996. The drop in disapproval of over 15% (moving from 70-73% disapproval in 1980 to 1989 to 56% by 1996) is especially dramatic in light of the emergence in the 1980’s and 1990’s of a vigorous antigay right wing.

Again, education and frequency of religious attendance have the strongest impact on levels of support or disapproval for gay men and lesbians. Since the late 1980’s, education far more than religiosity, affects public attitudes toward the morality of gay behavior. Political ideology continues to have a strong impact on disapproval of homosexuality, with marked differences appearing between liberals and conservatives on this issue: by 1996, the gap between them grew to 34 points. Prior to 1989, Democratic and Republican supporters were virtually indistinguishable in their disapproval.²¹

Between 1973 and 1988, the gap between Democrats and Republicans was never more than 4 points; between 1989 and 1998, the gap grew to between 7-15%, *see figure 23*. During the 1990’s differences in party affiliation became increasingly important suggesting that disapproval of homosexual behavior has become increasingly polarized in partisan terms. This reflects the Republican party leadership’s increasing identification with its socially conservative anti-gay right wing and the Democratic party leadership’s increasing, though limited, inclusiveness toward gays and lesbians.²²

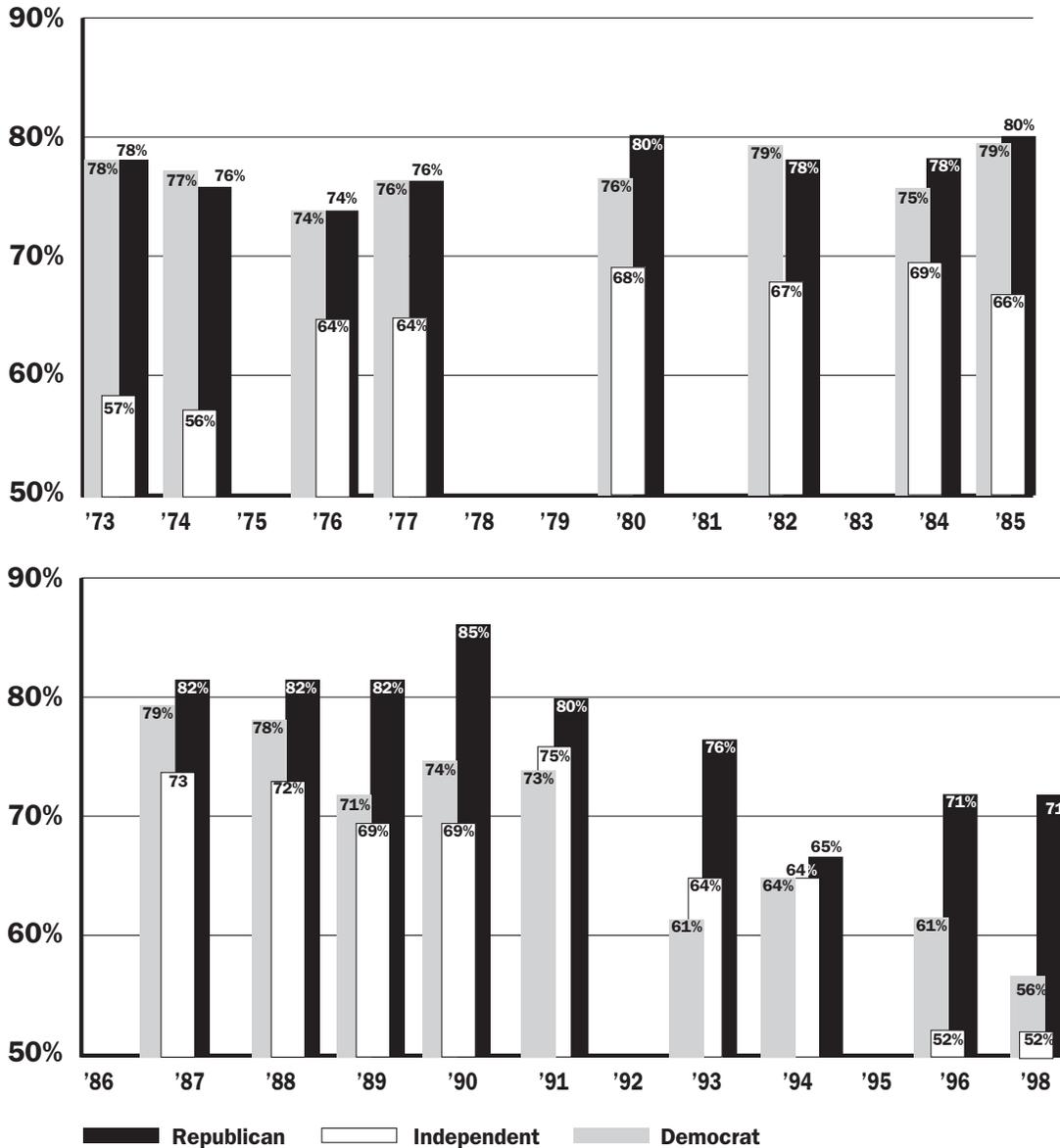
Figure 22 Disapproval of Same-Sex Relations



NORC: “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?”

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS CHOOSING “ALWAYS WRONG.”

Figure 23 Always Disapprove of Same-Sex Sexual Relations by Party ID



NORC: "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?"

PERCENTAGES REPRESENT THOSE RESPONDENTS CHOSING "ALWAYS WRONG" BY PARTY IDENTIFICATION.

The striking trend in public opinion during the 1990's is that all groups became more accepting of homosexuality. Differences by race, age, and level of urbanization have had less consistent impact over time, but there are a few matters to note. African-Americans show higher rates of disapproval of homosexual behavior compared to whites. In 11 of the 17 years in which data is available, African-Americans are on average 10% more disapproving than whites. Yet when the question is framed as a matter of civil rights (equality in employment) African-Americans are demonstrably more supportive than whites.

Conclusion: A Consensus for Tolerance Emerges

A REVIEW OF TRENDS in American public opinion from representative national sample survey questions demonstrates that over time public opinion has become increasingly supportive of specific kinds of lesbian and gay equality during the past two decades, particularly during the 1990's. Clear majority support exists for a whole range of equal rights issues, such as employment and housing non-discrimination, gays in the military and tangible benefits that accrue to married couples. Majorities still oppose gay and lesbian equality in the arenas of same-sex marriage and adoption. Even in the case of same-sex marriage, however, there is evidence that public opposition has begun to change.

While the trends in legal equality have been toward acceptance and majority support, cultural and moral attitudes toward homosexual behavior have historically shown less change. The most recent trends in these areas show a noticeable shift toward greater tolerance. Without question, the decade of the 1990's has seen a decline in public disapproval of homosexual behavior.

To speak of a "decline" in the first place presupposes an analysis of trends in public attitudes done over time. Indeed, to speak intelligently about public opinion, we must study questions asked repeatedly over time. Individual polls are like snapshots — they capture a unique moment, but they do not tell us about patterns of change. A single snapshot might suggest that full equality would be difficult to achieve today because a majority of the public opposes a particular issue on the gay and lesbian civil rights agenda. Analysis of public opinion trends over time, however, shows that public disapproval of gays and lesbians has dramatically declined, while support for specific equal rights has increased.

Further, the trends analyzed in this report are representative of all American adults. Studies that rely on interview methods that are not based on random/systematic sampling of sufficient sample size cannot claim to be representative of *all* American adults. Such studies may provide more details about

the opposition to gay and lesbian equality or the depth of support among *certain* segments of the public. However, care should be taken in interpreting the results of interviews based on non-random selection and small sample size. It would be misleading to make inferences about the views of the entire American adult population based on a small, non-randomly selected sample of respondents. In such cases, it is crucial to specify the universe of possible respondents and sampling procedures to speak to questions of the study's representativeness. Only then can we know what the sample purports to be representative of (all adult Americans, middle class whites in general, moderate to conservative middle-class suburbanites in certain geographic locations, etc). Opinion watchers or media who make inferences based on small non-random samples that inflate a study's representativeness of one group in society (claiming that a focus group of working class suburban white men represents the attitudes of white men in general) seriously misrepresent a study's findings when they claim that this group is representative of all Americans.

By focusing our analysis on trends in national representative surveys, we can make inferences about the attitudes of the American people (all adult Americans) and changes in these attitudes over time. This report shows that while the public still, on the whole, disapproves of homosexual behavior, the recent trend (during the 1990's) has been one of pronounced liberalization. Just as important as the absolute level of public disapproval of homosexuality (that existed throughout the 1970's and 1980's) is the pattern of change over time. With this change, an important foundation for opposition to gay and lesbian equal rights is clearly on the wane. The data from public opinion polls show that a growing and clear majority of the American public supports lesbian and gay equal rights. The data suggest that mainstream America can be an ally, not a foe, to the lesbian and gay civil rights movement. Indeed, the data analyzed in this report suggest that in their blanket opposition to all forms of equality for lesbians and gay men, it is the antigay right-wing that is out of step with mainstream American sentiment on lesbian and gay equality.

“The data from public opinion polls show that a growing and clear majority of the American public support lesbian and gay equal rights.”

Endnotes

- 1 Public opinion polls done over time and the specific polls analyzed in this report have not measured public opinion on bisexual and transgender persons. It is important to note that bisexual and transgender persons are critical members of the broader gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender movement, and that trends in opinion towards these populations may differ.
- 2 The verbatim question wordings for the six trends analyzed through the prism of selected sociodemographic factors are as follows:

Employment question from National Election Studies (NES) for the period 1988-1996. Question wording: "Do you favor or oppose laws to protect homosexuals against job discrimination" (Yes/No).

Support for gay college teachers question from NORC General Social Survey (GSS) for the period 1973-1996. Question wording: "There are always some people whose ideas are considered dangerous by other people. And what about a man who admits that he is a homosexual? Should such a person be allowed to teach in a college or university, or not?" (Yes/No).

Support for gays in the military from NES for period 1992-1996. Question wording: "Do you think homosexuals should be allowed to serve in the United States Armed Forces, or don't you think so?" (Should/Should not).

Support for gay adoption question from NES for the period 1992-1993. Question wording: "Do you think gay or lesbian couples, in other words, homosexual couples, should be legally permitted to adopt children?" (Should/Should not).

Sympathy for lesbians and gays question from NES for the period 1984-1996. Question wording: "I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward that person. Ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward that person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50-degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate that person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one...Gay men and lesbians; that is, homosexuals" (Scale from 0-100).

Disapprove of homosexual behavior question from GSS for the period 1973-1996. Question wording: "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?" (Always wrong/Almost Always Wrong/Sometimes Wrong/Not Wrong at all).

- 3 All of the trends from the National Election Studies (NES) from endnote 2 are examined through the prism of the following sociodemographic factors. The verbatim question wordings are:

Political Ideology: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a 7-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative...Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you thought much about this?" (Extremely liberal-liberal+slightly liberal/Moderate/Slightly conservative+conservative+extremely conservative).

Education: "What is the highest grade of school or year of college you have completed?" (8 grades or less/9-11 grades/HS Diploma/More than 12 yrs./BA or more).

Gender: Respondent's sex. (Male/Female).

Race: Respondent's race. (White non-Hispanic/Black).

Party Identification: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican,

a Democrat, an Independent, or what...Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/ Democrat) or not a very strong (Republican/Democrat)...Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican party or to the Democratic party?" (Strong and Weak Democrat/ Independent, lean (Democrat/Republican)+Pure Independent/Strong and Weak Republican).

Religiosity: "Do you go to religious services every week, almost every week, once or twice a month, a few times a year, or never?" (Never+few times a year/Once or twice a month/Almost every week/Every week).

Region: Region of Interview. (New England+Middle Atlantic/East North Central+West North Central/South Atlantic/E. South Central+W. South Central/Mountain+Pacific; coded North/Midwest/South/West, respectively following census state classifications). Level of urbanization where Respondent Resides: "Beltcode—acc. to 1990 Census and 1990 OMN definitions" (Outlying Area+Adjacent areas/Suburbs of all other CMSA's/Suburbs of the six largest CMSA's and 12 of the 15 next largest CMSA's/Central Cities of CMSA's with fewer than 2 million/Central cities of six largest CMSA's plus 12 of the 15 next largest CMSA's with more than 2 million). CMSA, Consolidated metropolitan statistical area: Metropolitan areas with populations greater than 1 million.

All of the trends on the GSS from endnote 2 are examined through the prism of the following sociodemographic factors. The verbatim question wordings are:

Education: "What is the highest grade in elementary school or high school that you finished and got credit for...Did you ever get a high school diploma or a GED certificate...Did you complete one or more years of college for credit...Do you have any college degrees...?" (8 years or less/9-11 grade/HS grad or GED/1-3 year of college/BA and above).

Age: Date of birth recoded into actual age (18-29/30-39/40-49/50-65/66-89).

Race: "What race do you consider yourself?" (White/Black).

Religiosity: "How often do you attend religious services?" (Never+Less than once a year/About once or twice a year+Several times a year/About once a month+2 or 3 times a month+Nearly every week/Every week+Several times a week).

Political Ideology: "We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. I'm going to show you a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal—point 1—to extremely conservative—point 7. Where would you place yourself on this scale?" (Extremely liberal+liberal+Slightly Liberal/Moderate/Extremely conservative+Conservative+Slightly conservative).

Level of urbanization where Respondent Resides: Size of place in thousands (less than 9,999/10,000-99,999/100,000-999,999/1 million-9 million).

Data for the General Social Survey (GSS-NORC; 1973-96) and the American National Election Studies (NES; 1984-96) were obtained through the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR, University of Michigan).

- 4 Trends examined through the prism of our sociodemographic factors are reported with "Don't Know" responses excluded. This allows us to compare trends in support levels over time more cleanly in terms of "support" vs. "oppose" responses (see Schuman, et al. and Page, Benjamin, and Robert Y. Shapiro. *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans' Policy Preferences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992). This means that both support and oppose response levels will be inflated beyond actual values. When we examine aggregate trends, however, we report actual response levels without readjusting for "Don't Know" responses.
- 5 For more information see, Harold Schuman, Charlotte Steeh and Lawrence Bobo. *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- 6 The full marginals for national sample trends referred to in this report can be examined in more detail in Alan S. Yang, "Attitudes Toward Homosexuality" in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Fall 1997, Vol. 61 No. 3, pp. 477-507. See page 483 for source note: "the survey date reported here were compiled from searches of survey archives and published and unpublished sources, including the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research's on-line Public Opinion Location Library, the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR, University

of Michigan), and the Gallup Poll Monthly. Further information about these data and other related data can be obtained from the Roper Center, ICPSR and other specific survey organizations” referenced in the body of the paper (e.g. the *LA Times*, *ABC/Washington Post*).

- 7 Based on multiple regression analyses for the years in question. Standardized betas in 1988 were virtually identical for ideology and education; by 1996, the effect of education was one-third of the effect of ideology.
- 8 Though the effect of gender has declined since 1988, (in 1988, the effect of gender, education and ideology were roughly identical) by 1996, gender’s effect was roughly a third of ideology’s and roughly equivalent to the effect of education and race based on standardized betas.
- 9 Differences between religiosity, level of urbanization, region and age were not found to be consistent or significant predictors of support when controlling for all other factors.
- 10 Differences by gender, race and party identification are not consistent predictors when controlling for all other factors.
- 11 Differences by level of urbanization, region and race were not strong or consistent predictors when controlling for all other factors.
- 12 A PSRA question (May 1996) shows a plurality disagree that “gay marriage would undermine traditional marriage between heterosexuals.” A Melman question (June 1996) shows that 27% agreed that “gay marriage is a real threat to the American family” and that it was important to pass a federal law banning gay marriages, with 32% saying it was not important (the remainder not sure). Another Melman question (June 1996) shows that 37% favored a federal law to ban gay marriages, with 29% opposed (the remainder having no opinion.)
- 13 Interestingly, an October 1996 survey from PSRA showed that a clear 2 to 1 majority agree that “gay people can be as good parents as straight people” (57% agree vs. 31% disagree).
- 14 Differences by party identification and race are not significant predictors of support when controlling for all other factors, with much of Party ID’s effect mediated by political ideology.
- 15 Further, a PSRA trend (1994-7) shows an increase in those acknowledging a “gay person in your family” (up to 18%), while another PSRA trend (1996-7) shows that 31% “worked with someone you know is gay.”
- 16 For more information see, Herek, G.M., & Capitanio, J.P. (1995). Black heterosexuals’ attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in the United States. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 32, 95-105. Whitley, B.E. Jr. (1990). The relationship of heterosexuals’ attributions for the causes of homosexuality to attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 16, 369-377.
- 17 “No opinion” responses declined significantly between 1983-93. This even division is confirmed in a CBS/NYT trend (1993-4).
- 18 Only the mean ratings for “illegal immigrants” is lower.
- 19 Southerners are similar to Midwesterners in their conservatism with the exception of 1988, where nearly half of Southerners rated lesbians and gays at zero.
- 20 Differences by age, party identification (with much of its effect mediated by political ideology) and race were not statistically significant when controlling for all other factors.
- 21 This may well be related to the demographic bases of the Democratic party; historically, the national Democratic party relied upon the support of huge majorities of white Southerners in the mass electorate and in Congress. In short, Democratic identification has historically included a prominent strain of social conservatism (i.e., Southern Democrats).
- 22 Differences by region were not consistent, though Northerners and Westerners are clearly similar in terms of disapproval and change over time. Southerners are by far the least approving. Differences by gender were statistically negligible once controlling for all other factors.

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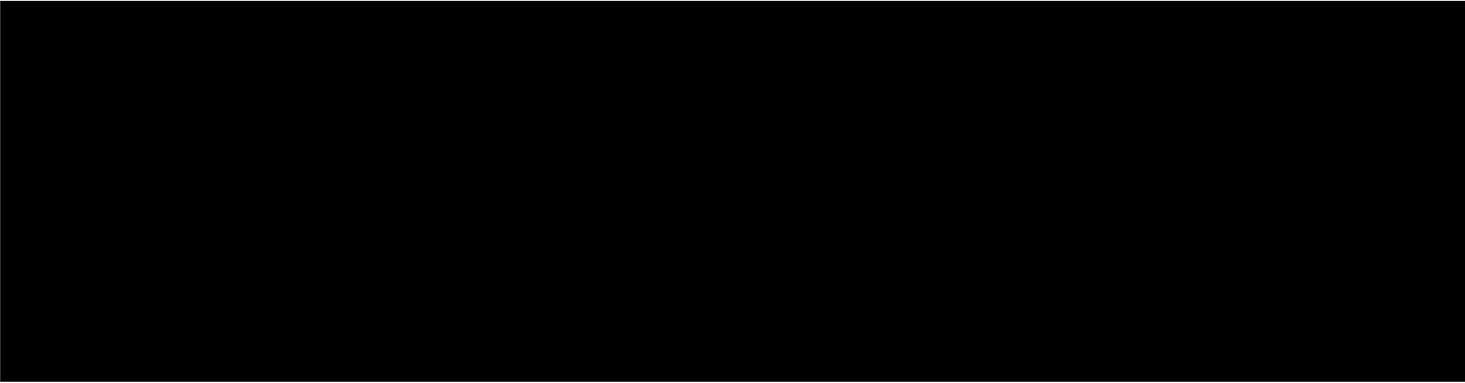
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The Policy Institute of the National Gay & Lesbian Task Force is a think tank dedicated to research, policy analysis and strategic projects to advance greater understanding and the equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

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