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## **Young Americans Support Civil Unions, Marriage, and Protections for Gays and Lesbians**

### ***New Survey Finds Youth Overwhelmingly Support Equal Protection on Housing, Employment, and Hate Crimes***

Young Americans show strong levels of support for tolerance and equality toward homosexuals, and majorities say gays and lesbians should be able to form legal civil unions and get legally married, according to a new national survey of 15-25 year olds. And young people overwhelmingly support equal protection when it comes to housing, employment, and hate crimes.

By six-to-one margins, American youth support gay rights and protections related to housing, employment, and hate crimes and those sentiments are held by all ideological, partisan, racial, geographic, and religious groups. One out of two respondents said they know someone who is gay; knowing a gay person has a significant impact on attitudes.

“The breadth of overall support demonstrates that young adults are doing more than showing simple support for fairness and tolerance toward homosexuals,” according to a report on the survey issued by Lake Snell Perry, which conducted the survey. “For them, these values transcend the realm of gay issues and have become part of their larger view of the way America should look.”

The survey was sponsored by the Center for Democracy & Citizenship at The Council for Excellence in Government and CIRCLE (the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement). It is the largest survey of young people on gay rights issues since last November’s Massachusetts Supreme Court ruling on gay marriage, when the debate became more prominent in Washington, state houses, and across the country.

The percentage of young people who support and oppose rights for gays and lesbians are:

	Support	Oppose
• equal protection in housing	86%	10%
• equal protection in employment	85%	14 %
• protection from hate crimes	85%	13 %
• civil unions or legal partnerships	63%	30 %
• ability to legally marry	56%	39 %
• ability to adopt children	53%	39 %

Contrary to conventional wisdom, African American and Latino youth are more supportive of extending equal protections to gays on housing, employment, and hate crimes than whites. And majorities of these young people, although less intense, support civil unions, marriage, and adoption.

Majorities of Republican, conservative, and Born-Again Christian youth also support protections on housing, employment, and hate crimes, although they oppose gay civil unions, marriage, and adoption.

“These findings compliment other research we’ve done showing that young people are more socially tolerant than older generations,” said Peter Levine, CIRCLE’s Deputy Director. “This survey adds clear and detailed evidence that the DotNet Generation is the most tolerant and respectful of diversity in American history.”

Among the most intense supporters of housing, employment, and hate crimes protections are those who know a gay or lesbian person, women, Democrats and liberals, moderates, and African Americans. Among the strongest supporters for family rights, such as civil unions, gay marriages, and adoptions, are young people who say they know a gay person, women, and young African Americans.

“We know that an issue-based appeal is an excellent way to get the attention of young adults,” said David Skaggs, Executive Director of the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Democracy & Citizenship at the Council for Excellence in Government. “This important data suggests an additional way for candidates and political organizations to reach this critical voting bloc.”

“These results confirm what we’ve sensed: that America’s youth – the undeniable leaders of tomorrow – are increasingly more supportive of some of the most important issues facing the gay community,” said John O’Connor, national director of the Gill Foundation, a funder of the survey. “We commend CIRCLE and the Council for Excellence in Government for their leadership in including gay issues for the first time in a public policy survey of young people.”

The survey of 1,000 people between the ages of 15 and 25 was conducted November 17-24, 2003, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percent. It was supported by CIRCLE, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Gill Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the W.T. Grant Foundation.

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**The Council for Excellence in Government** is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to improve the performance of government and to enhance American citizens’ understanding of and participation in their democracy. Visit the Campaign for Young Voters Toolkit at [www.campaignyoungvoters.org](http://www.campaignyoungvoters.org).

Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts and Carnegie Corporation of New York, and housed at the University of Maryland’s School of Public Affairs, **CIRCLE** ([www.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org)) is a premier source of impartial, nonpartisan, and comprehensive data, research, and analysis on the civic engagement of young people.

Founded by software entrepreneur Tim Gill, the Gill Foundation’s mission is to secure equal opportunity for all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Founded in 1994, it is the nation’s largest funder of lesbian gay bisexual and transgender organizations.