

Support for Same-Sex Marriage: Trends and Patterns

Gregory B. Lewis
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Georgia State University

Overview

1. Public opinion on homosexuality and LGBT rights was pretty negative 25 years ago.
2. Public acceptance of homosexuality and support for LGBT rights have increased substantially on all fronts.
3. Support for same-sex marriage has increased among all sub-groups.
4. Cohort effects are very strong on same-sex marriage, among virtually all sub-groups

In 1990, Americans thought Gay sex was wrong

- ▶ 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	75%
▶ Almost always wrong	4
▶ Wrong only sometimes	7
▶ Not wrong at all	12

- ▶ Source: General Social Survey 1987, Feb, 1987

In 1990, Americans thought Gay sex was *morally* wrong

- ▶ Do you think homosexual relations between adults are morally wrong, or that they are O.K., or don't you care much either way?

▶ Morally wrong	55%
▶ O.K.	9
▶ Don't care much either way	33

- ▶ Source: CBS News/New York Times Poll, Feb, 1993

In 1990, Americans thought Gay sex should be illegal

- ▶ Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?

▶ Should be legal	36%
▶ Should not be legal	54

- ▶ Source: Gallup Poll, Aug, 1991

In 1990, same-sex marriage was unthinkable.

- ▶ (Do you agree or disagree?)... Homosexual couples should have the right to marry one another

▶ Strongly agree	3%
▶ Agree	9
▶ Neither agree nor disagree	14
▶ Disagree	24
▶ Strongly disagree	44

- ▶ (Source: General Social Survey 1988, Feb, 1988)

Most people believed homosexuals should have equal job opportunities

▶ As you know, there has been considerable discussion in the news lately regarding the rights of homosexual men and women. In general, do you think homosexuals should or should not have equal rights in terms of job opportunities?

- ▶ Yes, should 71%
- ▶ No, should not 18

▶ Source: Gallup Poll, Oct, 1989

But they shouldn't teach school

▶ Do you think homosexuals should or should not be hired for each of the following occupations... elementary-school teachers?

- ▶ Should 33%
- ▶ Should not 60

▶ Source: Gallup Poll (All), Mar, 1987

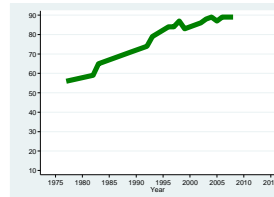
Unless it was college

▶ (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?

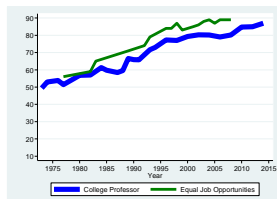
- ▶ Yes, allowed to teach 63%
- ▶ No, not allowed 32

▶ Source: General Social Survey 1990, Feb, 1990

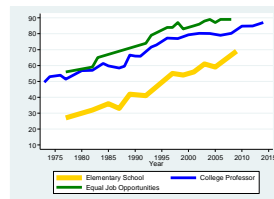
The good news was upward trends: Homosexuals should have equal job opportunities.



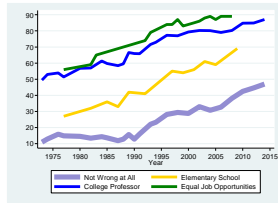
Admitted homosexuals should be able to teach college.



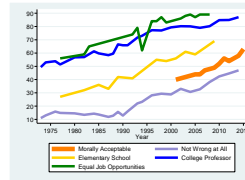
Should hire homosexuals as elementary school teachers



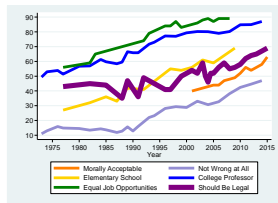
Homosexual sex is not wrong at all.



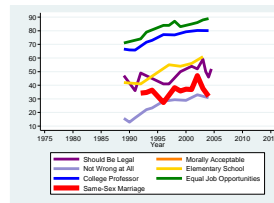
Homosexual (or gay or lesbian) relations are morally acceptable.



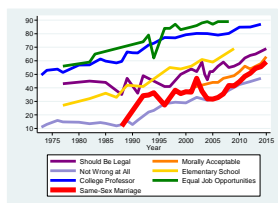
Homosexual sex should be legal.



From 1990-2005, it did not look like support for SSM was rising.



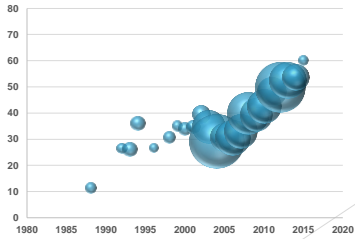
**Trend since 2004 is clear:
Rising more than 2 points per year**



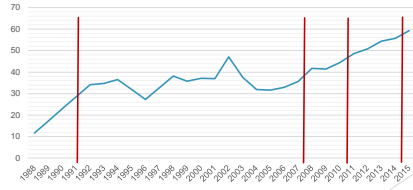
Data and Methods

- ▶ Individual-level data from the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research
- ▶ 208,000 respondents
- ▶ 155 surveys
- ▶ 1992 to 2014
- ▶ Many firms: Gallup, Pew Research Center, CBS News/New York Times, ABC News, NBC News, Time, Yankelevich, National Opinion Research Center, etc.

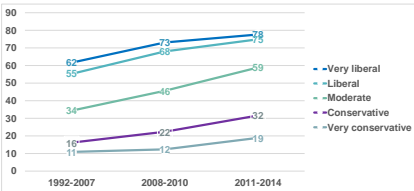
Sample sizes vary widely by year.



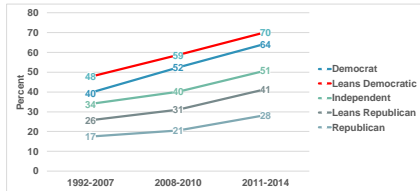
Divide data into three periods: 1992-2007, 2008-10, 2011-14



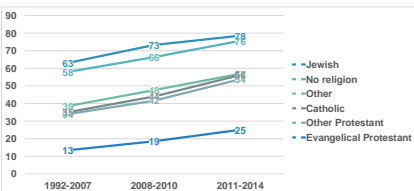
Strong ideological differences, but support rising everywhere



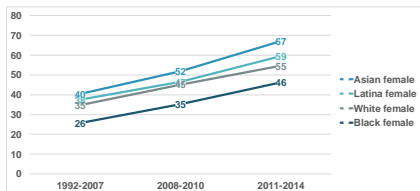
Strong partisan differences, but support rising everywhere



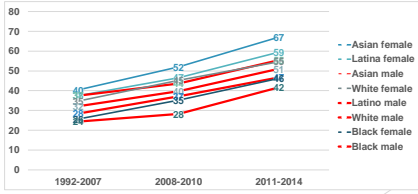
Strong religious differences, but support rising everywhere



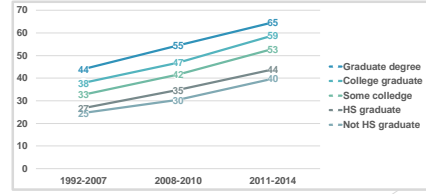
Race/ethnicity differences for women, but support rising for all



Race/ethnicity differences for men are smaller, support rising for all



Moderate educational differences, but support rising everywhere



Support for SSM in 2004



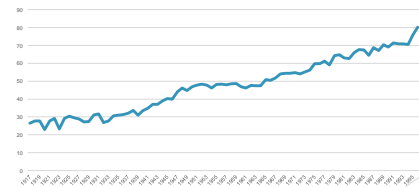
Support for SSM in 2009



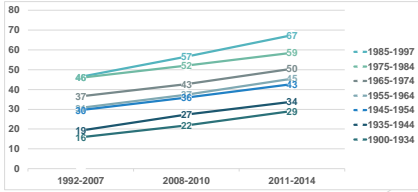
Support for SSM in 2014



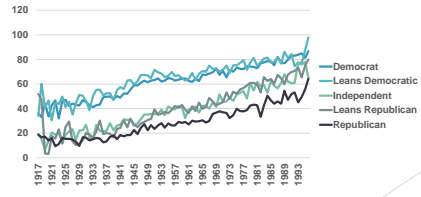
Strong cohort effects: Those born in the 1980s are 40 percentage points more likely to favor SSM than those born in the 1920s.



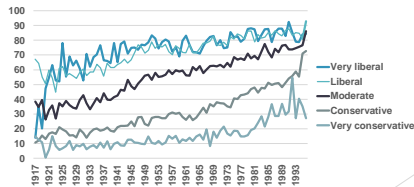
**But cohort change is less than half the story:
Every birth cohort is 13+ percentage points more
likely to favor now than in 1992-2007**



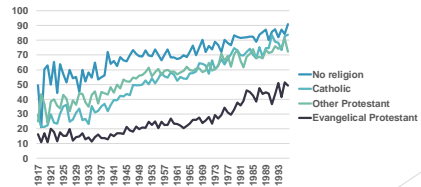
**Cohort effects exist in all parties:
Fastest for I's & LR's, slowest for R's**



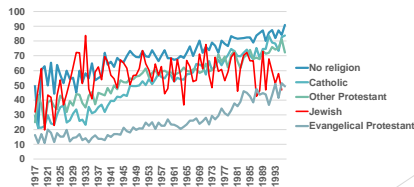
**Cohort effects for all ideologies:
Fastest for moderates**



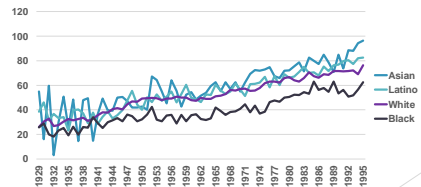
**Cohort effects for all religions: Strongest
for Catholics (and evangelicals since 1960)**



**Cohort effects for all religions:
But weakest for Jews**



**Cohort effects for each race/ethnicity:
Slowest for blacks and whites**



Conclusion

- ▶ Rises of 25 to 40 percentage points on all LGBT-related questions.
- ▶ Every group supports SSM more now than a decade ago.
- ▶ Every group shows strong age effects, with no sign of slowing.

