

successfully unless the widespread negative judgments are reversed.

Polling data identifies the power of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community's ongoing encouragement and organizing of individuals to come out. Coming out lets more of the public know that they are acquainted with a lesbian, gay or bisexual person and polling shows that this personal knowledge makes people feel more positively toward gay people. Campaigns fighting discriminatory ballot measures are counterproductive if they accept the public's stated distaste for gay visibility and discourage openness about the community.

In both the short and the long-term, organizers must educate about equal rights and civil rights. The concept of "special rights" is the strongest weapon of opponents of equal rights. The discussion of equality and rights takes place in the language of scarcity, in which assistance to one group means diminished opportunities for another. The public objects to discrimination but also rejects granting preference to others.

In the short run, organizers must clarify that protection against discrimination is not a "special right." In the long run, the larger questions must be addressed. Why do so many people confuse the concepts of protection against discrimination, affirmative action, quotas, preferential treatment, special rights, and minority status? Perhaps lesbian, gay and bisexual organizers should join with other minorities to launch an education project that will untangle the concepts of civil rights and tackle the fears and prejudices related to race, class, gender and sexual orientation embedded in the confusion.

The major findings of the survey include the following:

Lesbians, gay men and bisexuals face a US. public that mainly sees them, or their "lifestyle," as unacceptable or immoral. The high level of national disapproval chronicled by polling data ranges from 50% to 77%, probably depending on the poll question's terminology.

The high level of national disapproval is accompanied by an equally strong or even stronger belief that discrimination is wrong. Approximately three-quarters of the U.S. public believes that gay men and lesbians should have equal rights in terms of employment opportunities.

Much of the public holds conflicting beliefs about gay people in terms of legality and morality. (i.e.: "Homosexuality is wrong, but it should be legal.")

Opinion is split nationally about whether protective legislation for lesbians, gay men and bisexuals is necessary or desirable.

Gender, age, education level, and acquaintance with lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are all linked to attitudes about discrimination and protective legislation. Women, younger adults, people with higher levels of education, and those who know they have gay friends or family members all tend to oppose discrimination more strongly and to be more likely to support protective legislation.


People are confused about the relationship between anti-discrimination, protective legislation, affirmative action, employment quotas, preferential treatment, special rights, and minority status.

Messages about discrimination have been cited most often by voters as the primary reason for opposing anti-gay measures.

Messages about special rights, government intrusion, and the perceived absence of gay disadvantage have been cited most often by voters as critical in their reason for supporting anti-gay measures. ▼

For copies of the full 17-page report, contact Karen Bullock-Jordan, NGLTF Fight the Right Associate, at 202-332-6483 ext. 3206

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