



DEMOCRACY REMIXED:

BLACK YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN POLITICS

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Moving Beyond Marriage: What Young People of Color Think about the LGBT Agenda

National public opinion toward same-sex marriage has shifted dramatically over the last decade. Much of the reporting on this shift has focused on the overwhelming support for LGBT rights among young people, often called the millennial generation. Interestingly, rarely is the racial breakdown among young people reported. Do different groups of young people feel differently about LGBT issues and the agenda of the LGBT movement?

In this report, we study the attitudes of young people, particularly young people of color, about marriage equality and LGBT rights more broadly using a nationally representative survey of 1,500 young people between the ages of 18 and 30 conducted during June 2014. We want to be clear that our sample includes young people from all sexual identities. Our main findings are as follows:

- More Black (80.2%) and Latino (74.9%) youth believe the marriage equality movement has taken too much attention away from other important LGBT issues compared to white youth (64.0%).
- More Black youth (58.0%) believe that LGBT issues in communities of color are not well-represented by mainstream LGBT organizations than Latino (45.9%) and white youth (42.7%).
- More than a third (35.0%) of Black youth reported that HIV/AIDS is the single most important issue for LGBT organizations to address. Latino youth reported that bullying (20.1%) is the most important issue, while white youth (21.3%) reported that same-sex marriage is the most important issue.
- More Black and Latino youth support policies that would provide sensitivity training for police around transgender issues (77.8% and 73.2%, respectively) and require health insurers to provide coverage for transgender health issues (64.5% and 65.8%, respectively) than white youth (66.2% and 56.3%, respectively).

Marriage Equality: Young People Support a Different LGBT Agenda

We began by asking young people for their beliefs about the marriage equality movement. Overall, as Table 1 shows, a large majority of young people (68.8%) believe that the push for same-sex marriage has taken too much focus away from other issues important to LGBT people. In particular, young people of color do not believe that same-sex marriage should be the top priority for LGBT people. **Just 19.8% of Black youth, and 25.1% of Latino youth, believe that same-sex marriage should be the main focus for LGBT organizations at the exclusion of other important issues.** In contrast, more than a third (36.0%) of white youth believes that same-sex marriage should be the top priority. Thus, young people, and especially young people of color, do not support an LGBT agenda organized around marriage equality without also addressing other important issues.

Table 1: Marriage Equality and the LGBT Agenda

	Black (% agree)	White (% agree)	Latino (% agree)	All (% agree)
The push for same-sex marriage has taken too much focus away from other issues important to LGBT people.	80.2	64.0	74.9	68.8
Same-sex marriage should be the top priority for LGBT people right now, even if this means other issues do not get much attention.	19.8	36.0	25.1	31.2

Source: 2014 Black Youth Project survey.

We find that young people have similar attitudes toward LGBT organizations, as Table 2 shows below. We asked our respondents whether they believe mainstream LGBT organizations are promoting issues that are important to LGBT people of color. **More than half of Black youth—58.0%—believe that LGBT issues in communities of color differ from the issues that are promoted by mainstream LGBT organizations.** While majorities of white (57.3%) and Latino (54.1%) youth believe that all LGBT individuals benefit when mainstream LGBT organizations fight for their basic rights, they too seem to believe that mainstream LGBT organizations do not advance LGBT rights as effectively as they could. These results suggest that many young people, especially Black youth, perceive a disconnect between the priorities for advancing LGBT rights and the organizations that seek to do so.

Table 2: Evaluations of Mainstream LGBT Organizations

	Black (% agree)	White (% agree)	Latino (% agree)	All (% agree)
All LGBT individuals benefit when mainstream LGBT organizations fight for their basic rights.	42.0	57.3	54.1	54.3
The issues confronting LGBT individuals in communities of color are very different than the issues promoted by mainstream LGBT organizations.	58.0	42.7	45.9	45.7

Source: 2014 Black Youth Project survey.

What Young People Want from the LGBT Movement

We wanted to know what young people from different racial and ethnic groups thought about what the LGBT agenda should look like and what policies LGBT organizations should prioritize. Table 3 below shows the percentages of young people who support various LGBT policies. **While we find relatively consistent levels of support across groups for same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption, we also find substantially greater support among all groups for policies focused on equal employment rights and increased prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS.**

Large majorities of young people—84.6% of Black youth, 83.6% of white youth, and 81.5% of Latino youth—support policies that guarantee equal employment rights for LGBTs. Similarly high percentages of young people—86.3% of Black youth, 85.9% of white youth, and 84.7% of Latino youth—support increased efforts to prevent and treat individuals with HIV/AIDS. Compare these figures with the slightly more than two-thirds (68.5%) of young people that support same-sex marriage (65.6% of Black youth, 69.0% of white youth, and 68.8% of Latino youth). Likewise, 63.7%, 68.9%, and 65.4% of Black, white, and Latino youth, respectively, agree that gays and lesbians should be allowed to legally adopt children.

For several other policies, however, we find differences of opinion between white youth and young people of color. For instance, Black (77.8%) and Latino (76.6%) youth favor increasing support for organizations that provide services to LGBT youth at slightly higher rates than white youth (70.5%). Black and Latino youth are also more supportive of policies related to transgender individuals than white and Latino youth. **Black (77.8%) and Latino youth (73.2%) support sensitivity training for police around transgender issues to a greater degree than white youth (66.2%). Young people of color are also somewhat more supportive of requiring health insurers to provide coverage for transgender health issues (Black youth: 64.5%; Latino youth: 65.8%) than white youth (56.3%).**

Table 3: Youth Support for LGBT Policies

	Black (% support)	White (% support)	Latino (% support)	All (% support)
Allow gays and lesbians to marry legally.	65.6	69.0	68.8	68.5
Allow gays and lesbians to legally adopt children.	63.7	68.9	65.4	67.4
Equal employment rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals.	84.6	83.6	81.5	83.3
More efforts aimed at prevention and treatment of HIV and AIDS.	86.3	85.9	84.7	85.7
Sensitivity training of police around the issues of transgender individuals.	77.8	66.2	73.2	69.4
Support for organizations that provide services to LGBT youth.	77.8	70.5	76.6	72.9
Require health insurers to provide coverage for transgender health issues.	64.5	56.3	65.8	59.5

Sources: 2014 Black Youth Project survey.

We then asked young people to indicate which *one* issue was the *most* important for LGBT organizations to address. As the results in Table 4 show, young people see the fight for LGBT equality very differently. Not only do Black youth prioritize different issues from white and Latino youth, but Black youth also consistently point to the *same* priorities, while white and Latino youth are more divided over which issue is the most important. **More than a third (35.0%) of Black youth identified HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment as the single most important issue for LGBT organizations to address**, followed by violence against LGBTs (17.0%) and equal employment rights (13.1%).

White youth believe that same-sex marriage (21.3%) is the most important issue for LGBT organizations to address, while large percentages of white youth also believe it is important to address violence against LGBTs (18.0%), bullying (15.7%), and HIV/AIDS (15.6%). Latino youth, however, say that bullying (20.1%) is the most important issue for organizations to address, followed by HIV/AIDS (17.8%), violence against LGBTs (13.3%), equal employment protections (13.2%), poverty (12.7%), and same-sex marriage (12.0%).

Table 4: Issue Priorities for LGBT Organizations

	Black (%)	White (%)	Latino (%)	All (%)
HIV/AIDS	35.0	15.6	17.8	19.0
Violence against LGBTs	17.0	18.0	13.3	16.9
Bullying	11.1	15.7	20.1	15.9
Same-sex marriage	10.6	21.3	12.0	17.7
Poverty	7.3	5.3	12.7	7.2
Equal employment rights	13.1	16.1	13.2	15.0
Legal adoption	1.0	2.1	2.1	1.9
Services for homeless youth	1.4	2.1	2.3	2.1
Decriminalization of LGBT youth	3.5	3.8	6.5	4.3

Sources: 2014 Black Youth Project survey. All columns sum to 100 percent.

Perceptions of Discrimination against LGBTs

Some people argue that recent advances in same-sex marriage equality are an indicator of the end of discrimination against LGBT individuals. We asked young people a series of questions about how much discrimination they believe members of the LGBT community experience. We also asked them to indicate how much discrimination is faced by other groups based upon race, ethnicity, gender, and religion.

Table 5 below reports the percentages of young people who reported that members of each group experience “A lot” or “Some” discrimination. Greater proportions of Black youth than Latino and white youth believe that LGBT individuals experience discrimination. More than 80 percent of Black youth report that gay men and lesbians (82.3 percent) and transgender individuals (85.7 percent) experience high levels of discrimination. These rates are somewhat lower for both white (77.7 and 80.1 percent, respectively) and Latino (78.4 and 76.9 percent, respectively) youth.

Black youth believe that LGBT individuals experience discrimination to a similar degree as African Americans, while white and Latino youth believe that LGBT individuals experience discrimination at higher rates than other groups based on gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. For instance, 88.5 percent of young Blacks believe that African Americans experience “a lot” or “some” discrimination, compared with 60.8 percent of white and 71.2 percent of Latino youth. Interestingly, greater numbers of Black youth (78.5 percent) than Latino youth (70.2 percent) believe that Hispanic Americans experience high levels of discrimination. And consistent with other data we have presented, more Black and Latino youth believe that Hispanics experience

high levels of discrimination compared to white youth (64.8 percent). Larger numbers of Black (82.3 percent) and white (82.6 percent) youth believe that Muslim Americans experience high levels of discrimination, compared with 72.7 percent of Latino youth. Black youth also believed that women experience discrimination (67.8 percent) than either white (51.0 percent) or Latino (59.1 percent) youth.

Table 5: Young People’s Perceptions of Discrimination across Groups

	Black (%)	White (%)	Latino (%)	All (%)
African Americans	88.5	60.8	71.2	67.1
Hispanic Americans	78.5	64.8	70.2	67.9
Gay men and lesbians	82.3	77.7	78.4	78.5
Transgender individuals	85.7	80.1	76.9	80.2
Women	67.8	51.0	59.1	55.2
Muslim Americans	83.2	82.6	72.7	80.6

Source: 2014 Black Youth Project survey. Entries are the percentage of respondents who agree that there is “a lot” or “some” discrimination against the group listed in the first column.

The Marriage Movement and the Future of LGBT Youth

For the last decade, many LGBT organizations have worked tirelessly to expand marriage rights to same-sex couples. During this same time period, the public has become considerably more acceptant of same-sex marriage. And over the last several years, LGBT communities around the country have witnessed a string of victories in securing the right to marry.

This report demonstrates that while young people grant strong support to same-sex marriage, young people—especially young people of color—also believe that several other policies should have greater priority in the fight for LGBT equality. For instance, more than 80 percent of Black, white, and Latino youth support policies to guarantee employment rights, while 65 to 70 percent of young people support same-sex marriage. The broad support for employment rights is especially relevant as politicians and LGBT organizations grapple with the proposed Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which now seems unlikely to pass the current 113th Congress.

Our findings also indicate that young people of color are skeptical about whether mainstream LGBT organizations advocate policies that are important for LGBT individuals in communities of color. Young people of color are perhaps uniquely situated to identify what policies are most likely to have the greatest impact on their communities.

We hope that our findings will be of use to organizations that serve young people, and especially young people of color, whose priorities may not always be reflected by mainstream LGBT organizations. The data in this report also provide some guidance about how LGBT organizations may branch out beyond same-sex marriage in advocating on behalf of LGBT youth.

Much has been accomplished over the last decade, especially through the marriage equality movement. But, as young people of color have reminded us, the fight is far from over.