



**GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH**

TargetPoint 

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## Progress in Mississippi

**To:** Interested Parties

The Human Rights Campaign

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On June 26, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community won two great victories at the U.S. Supreme Court. The federal government will no longer be able to discriminate against same-sex couples married legally in their respective states, and marriage equality has returned to California. These judicial victories follow political wins last November, where voters in Maine, Maryland, Minnesota and Washington broke a streak of 29 straight electoral losses by supporting equality at the ballot box. Beyond marriage, patriotic gay and lesbian Americans are free to serve their country, proudly and openly in the military. Jason Collins opened up the world of professional sports to LGBT athletes, and the Boy Scouts will admit openly gay scouts. Our culture clearly is changing.

This great work remains incomplete. There are still 37 states in the country where marriage equality is not yet legal, representing 70 percent of the population. Also, in the majority of states, an LGBT person can be denied employment, housing or a hotel room based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

LGBT people live and work in all 50 states, including in Mississippi. A major study done in 2013 by the Williams Institute and Gallup organization involving over 200,000 interviews taken throughout 2012 shows that one third of LGBT people in the country live in the South and 23 percent live in the Midwest.

With this context in mind, the bi-partisan team of pollsters at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research (Democratic) and Target Point Consulting (Republican) explored attitudes toward the LGBT community in Mississippi immediately after the Supreme Court decisions. The results show real opportunities in the state - that views here are changing along with the rest of the country.

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A majority of Mississippians understand that the discrimination against LGBT people is a problem. Impressive majorities support state and federal laws protecting LGBT people from employment discrimination. And, importantly, 61 percent majority know at least one gay person and half of these describe their relationship with that person as “close.”

Reactions in Mississippi to marriage equality and to the LGBT community in general also pose challenges. A 55 percent majority oppose marriage for gay and lesbian couples. Mississippi residents are more likely to describe their feelings toward gay people as unfavorable (38 percent) than favorable (27 percent). Without question, there is still work to do in Mississippi.

This memorandum summarizes the results of a survey of 640 Mississippi adults taken between June 26 and July 9, 2013. The survey was commissioned by the Human Rights Campaign and executed by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Target Point Consulting. It carries a margin of error of +/- 3.87 at a 95 percent confidence level.

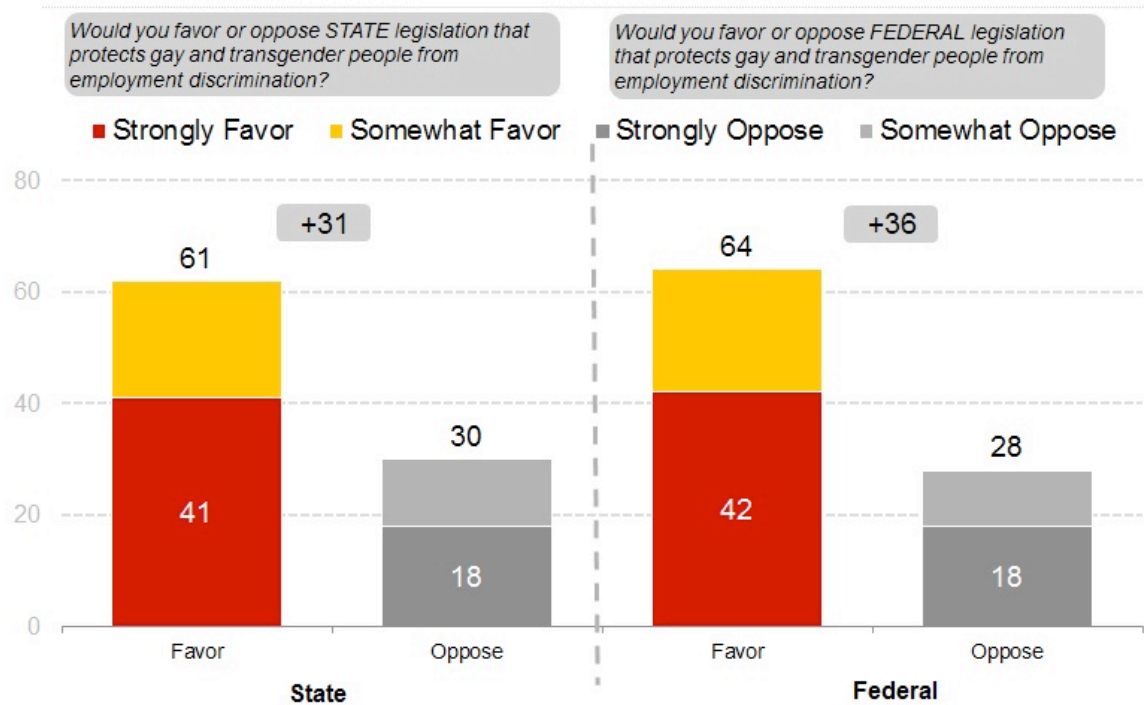
## Main Findings

### Knowing LGBT people is always a harbinger of good things to come.

- A 62 percent majority of residents in Mississippi know at least one gay person. This includes 71 percent of people under age 50, as well as 58 percent of observant Christians and 57 percent of self-identified, born again Christians.
- Fully four in ten knows at least seven gay or lesbian individuals and half the residents who know at least one gay person describes their relationship as “close.”
- Knowing gay individuals changes attitudes. One in three (33 percent) describe their feelings toward LGBT people as growing more accepting; just 12 percent are less accepting. Among African Americans, 42 percent describe their feelings growing more accepting.
- Mississippi also recognizes the problem of anti-gay discrimination. A 53 percent majority describe discrimination against LGBT people as a problem, including 53 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of observant Christians.

### Mississippi strongly supports anti-discrimination laws.

- As is the case throughout the country, most people in Mississippi do not understand that it is perfectly legal under federal and state law to fire someone for being gay. An 80 percent majority mistakenly believe it is illegal under federal law to fire someone for being gay; 72 percent believe it is illegal under state law.
- A convincing majority support federal and state legislation that protects LGBT employees from employment discrimination: 61 percent support a state law, 64 percent support a federal law.

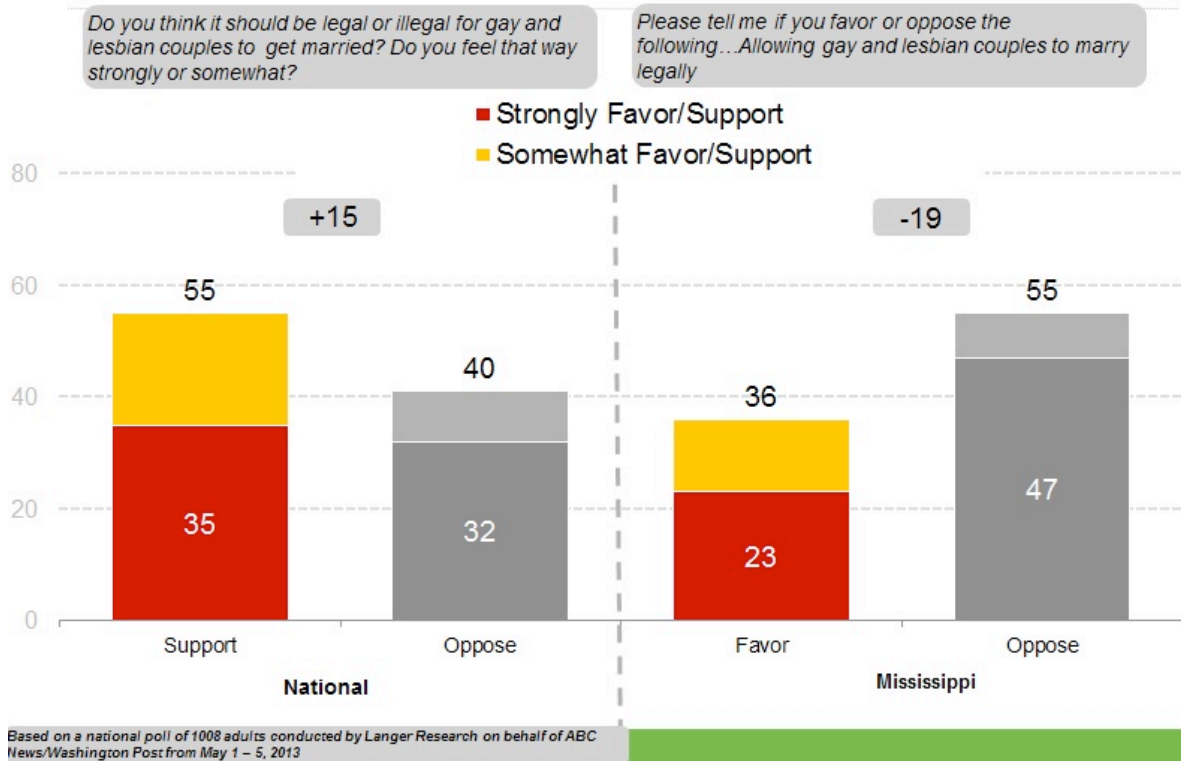


- Support increases to 67 percent favor among African Americans for state laws protecting LGBT people from employment discrimination, 72 percent favor for a federal law.

**But there is a ways to go on marriage equality.**

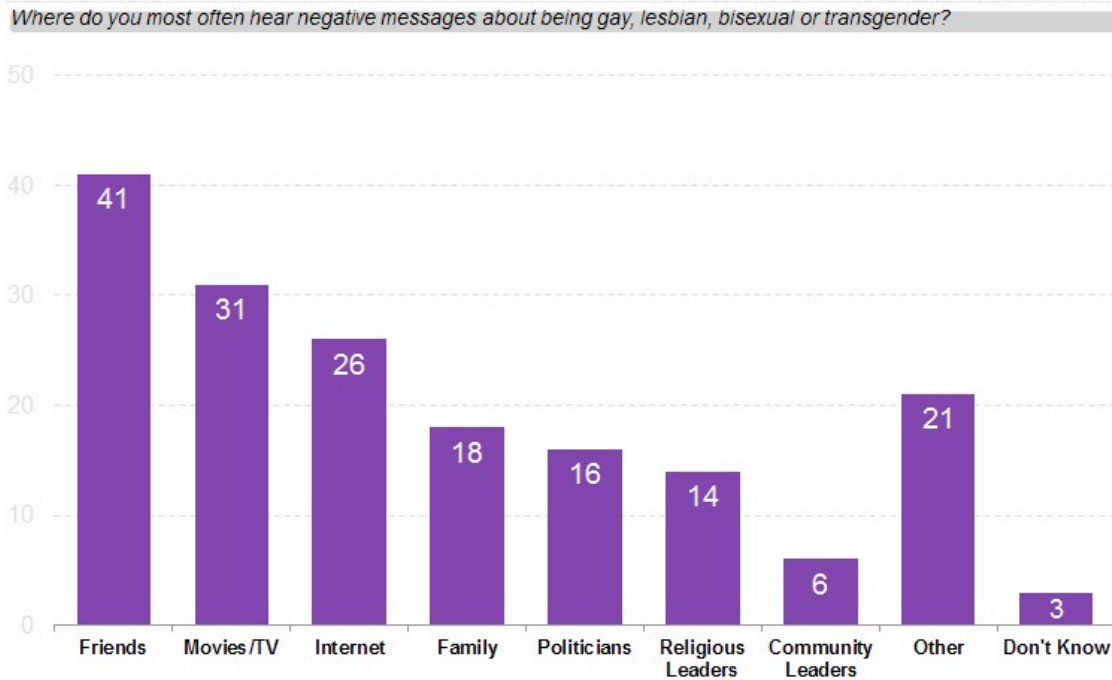
- Mississippi is a far different place when it comes to the issue of marriage. A 55 percent majority oppose marriage, just 36 percent favor. Republicans (68 percent oppose) and observant Christians (71 percent oppose) drive opposition. There is more support among African Americans (43 percent favor, 50 percent oppose) than among white residents (30 percent, 60 percent), but this issue is not competitive in either community.
- This will change. National polls show support for gay marriage at 81 percent among adults under age 30.<sup>1</sup> Among Mississippi residents under age 30, a 58 percent majority support marriage equality.

<sup>1</sup> Washington Post/ABC News survey of 1,001 adults nationwide March 7 – 10, 2013.



**The culture in Mississippi can be hostile to the LGBT community.**

- Mississippians hold negative views outside of the context of marriage. A 38 percent plurality describe their reaction to “gay and lesbian” people as unfavorable (just 27 percent favorable). Nearly half, 48 percent, describe their reaction to gay rights groups as unfavorable.
- No one is born with homophobic attitudes. Prejudice is a learned behavior. A 61 percent majority of residents hear negative messages about LGBT people.
- These messages are, for the most part, not institutional in their origin. Much of this comes from friends and acquaintances (41 percent), but it also comes from popular culture and the Internet. Sixteen percent (16 percent) have heard negative messages through elected leaders and 14 percent through clergy.



### Religion plays a mixed role in Mississippi.

- Nearly one in three (30 percent) Mississippi residents heard their pastor, priest, rabbi or other religious leader deliver an anti-gay sermon. This grows to 36 percent among observant Christians and born again Christians.
- However, religious people draw other lessons from their faith as well. A 79 percent majority agree (72 percent among observant Christians), “My faith leads me to the conclusion that the law should treat all people equally, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people” and 91 percent agree (89 percent among observant Christians) with the statement, “We should all follow the golden rule and treat others as we would like to be treated including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.”
- In addition, some resistance to anti-gay homilies also emerge. A 64 percent majority (54 percent among observant Christians) agree with the statement, “when religious leaders condemn gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people it does more harm than good.” Among African Americans who are also born again Christians, 60 percent agree.

## Conclusion

There is a lot of work to do in Mississippi and in the 29 states without employment protections and the 37 states without marriage equality. These results highlight that the challenges are not simply about changing law, but about changing attitudes as well. But the survey also makes clear that Mississippi is changing with the rest of the country.