

## Equality For All: Freedom is Nonnegotiable

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

If millennials had their way, we would just delete this chapter. The topics we highlight here are all of the issues that millennials believe go without saying—that women and African Americans should be treated equally, that homosexuality is not a crime against God but a personal choice, and that police violence against blacks needs to stop.

For young people, equality is reason to celebrate. For older generations, it is source of misgiving. On June 26—12 years to the day after the Supreme Court reversed a Texas ban on same-sex sodomy in *Lawrence v. Texas*—the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage.

While conservatives mourned the decision—and Kim Davis gained national notoriety for refusing to grant gay marriage licenses in Kentucky—young people started to party. In excitement that followed, millennials changed their Facebook profile pictures to show their solidarity with the marriage equality movement and hung up rainbow flags, a symbol of the movement, in the windows of their homes.

In this chapter, the final issue-based chapter in this book, we'll explore the “nonnegotiables”—social issues that unite millennials across the political spectrum. To this end, we make the last stop of our journey in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. We're here for a debate

tournament whose topic is the Voting Rights Act and civil rights in the 21 century. The city is an appropriate place to end our journey for two others reasons as well: first, it will host the Democratic National Convention in the summer of 2016 and second, it's the city where we now live and go to school.

### Socialized in a Culture of Tolerance

Justin Greenman, a millennial leader from New Jersey, knows no world other than one of tolerance. He's unquestionably comfortable as we sit and talk about marriage equality, which he attributes to his age. “My dad, he grew up in the '70s. My grandfather, he grew up in the 1930s. ... When my grandfather grew up he could be arrested for being a homosexual,” but today homosexuality is almost universally supported by our generation. And with these changing times, our leaders need to be able to adapt to fundamentally different social norms, he said.

Just down the hall, Kyle Walton, who hails from Spokane Valley, Washington, explains just how far we've come. “I think that this is one of the first generations that's really able to unify and kind of create a movement toward equality for just about everybody,” he said. “You see the rise of popularity of feminism, and the rise of respect for people with disabilities, and the rise of respect for people that suffer from depression; literally just about anything, people are a lot more accepted, and really, our generation preaches that.”

Walton recognizes that change is slow, but he says there is “overwhelming” support among millennials for the idea that equality wins out. “I don't think the generation before us would have ever been talking about taking gender labels off of toys, but that's something we're talking about right now,” he said. While millennials have nuanced and balanced political views regarding many of the issues that will shape America's future, Kyle says, this issue is certainly not one. Millennials will fight for social change with vigor and resilience,

so much so that social change has become the new third rail of American politics.

## Women's Rights

The fight for gender equality started decades before millennials were even born, but it has become a rallying cry for young men and women alike. While millennials may sometimes be overzealous in enforcing political correctness, politicians need to understand the underlying point—that millennials take equality for granted and will not vote for politicians who are overtly bigoted. Oddly enough, many politicians don't seem to have learned this lesson.

When asked how education in America became so mediocre, Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant, a Republican, responded: “I think both parents started working. And the mom is in the workplace.” Former Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO) notoriously said, “If it’s a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down.” These comments help solidify the impression that the Republican Party is behind the times. Republicans are losing votes from winnable demographics by nature of their offensive comments. It’s just not a rational strategy.

Even Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat, has made sexist remarks, calling Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) the Senate’s “hottest member” in a speech. The late Sen. Arlen Spectator (D-PA) made waves when he told Michelle Bachman (R-MN) in 2010, “I’m going to treat you like a lady … now act like one.” None of these comments are acceptable. Not only are millennials more tolerant than past generations—having grown up with diversity—but also we recognize more sharply than ever the perils of being labeled a bigot. Republicans call this political correctness. We call it common sense.

Millennials know that there is still a lot of work to be done to create a level playing field for men and women and we want our politicians to take the lead in eliminating structural inequality. Millennials

would start with equal pay. Today, women earn 80 cents on the dollar compared to men of similar backgrounds. While the wage gap is not entirely due to overt discrimination, studies have found that 19 percent of the wage gap cannot be explained by women’s choice of careers or decisions about how many hours to work. In other words, there is a glass ceiling.<sup>1</sup>

As a society, we need to simplify the “labyrinth” that is a woman’s career with good public policy. Christy Uffelman, a partner at consulting firm Align Leadership, explains that “women have specific obstacles and barriers that they have to overcome, and women of color have different obstacles than white women. It deepens and widens the further you go,” she said.

Jillian Ivey understands this struggle. The 31-year-old communications strategist in Philadelphia told *The Citizens Voice* that she wants to have children, but is afraid that being pregnant and raising a child would stand in the way of a successful career. “I’ve seen clients walk away from my friends, saying things like, ‘No hard feelings, but we need someone who’s not about to pop a kid out,’ ” Ivey said. “Clients are contractors and vendors, not employers.”<sup>2</sup>

Without paid sick leave or maternity leave, women are put in unfair situations. Jesske Eiklenborg, 27, a single mother from Minnesota, was fired from her job at an Italian restaurant when she became ill and called in sick. Until then, her mother had been helping with child care and she had just finished six months of unpaid maternity leave. “I’ve been looking for a job all month, but January is slow,” she said. Relatives are helping pay her bills for now. “I’m applying for unemployment. And cash assistance.”

Like Ivey and Eiklenborg, 70 percent of Americans say that workforce laws are “out of sync with the changing realities of modern families, and with the changing roles of men and women at work and at home,” according to *The Washington Post*.<sup>3</sup> For millennials—who say their children and their spouses are their top priorities—this is a troubling.<sup>4</sup>

Eliminating the “motherhood penalty” that currently exists for women who give birth during their careers is a great issue for politicians because it is an achievable goal through public policy and because it has widespread, bipartisan support. First, the government should reform paid sick leave, and maternity and paternity leave. These policies will guarantee that men and women are given time to take care of their families and that low-income workers cannot be fired for being ill. Universal child care is the next battle ahead because 75 percent of women give birth while they are still working. Without access to high quality child care, many women are forced to leave the workforce to care for their children.<sup>5</sup>

There are a number of ways to make child care more affordable. The federal government, for instance, could use tax breaks, government-operated child-care facilities or subsidies to help mothers pay for private sector child care facilities.

President Obama has described the issue as “a national economic priority for all of us,” and Americans agree. A poll conducted by Lake Research Partners found that 81 percent of Americans, including 65 percent of Republicans, support equal pay, paid family leave, and affordable and accessible child care. Paternity leave had bipartisan approval, with 62 percent of Republicans and 92 percent of Democrats supporting the idea. Widespread support for such policies indicates that Congress has a strong mandate to implement these social reforms.<sup>6</sup>

Americans support policies that will help working women balance family responsibilities with their careers. “We’re at a tipping point, where it’s increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for a family to manage the challenges of work, putting food on the table, and being there for the family,” said Vivien Labaton, co-founder and co-executive director of the Make It Work campaign. “So there’s very strong support for these issues. And it’s worth noting that they’re not partisan issues. There are significant majorities supporting these issues

across party lines.” Millennial women hope to reap the benefits of these policies, balancing child care with their spouses and taking advantage of universal child care to get back into the workforce after their maternity leave expires.

As women increasingly earn a majority of college degrees in the United States, they will economically reclaim an equal role in our society. Millennials—male and female—will lead the way. Early indications show that millennial families will involve a more equal distribution of child-care responsibilities. After watching their mothers struggle to balance raising children with career progression, millennials are ready to take the next step and “Lean In” on behalf of themselves, their wives, their sisters, and their coworkers.

## **Abortion**

If gender equality is a clear-cut issue for millennial leaders, abortion is not. Ask the GOP and they’ll tell you millennials are the most pro-life generation ever. Ask Democrats, and they’ll say we’re pro-choice. What’s going on?

Abortion is deeply related with women’s rights, and millennials are conflicted on this issue. Polls show that 75 percent of millennials identify as being pro-choice and 65 percent identify as pro-life. The overlap demonstrates that millennials do not believe abortion is a black-and-white issue.<sup>7</sup> Instead, millennials believe the government must set reasonable limits around what circumstances justify an abortion, and which do not.

Put simply, millennials believe in the availability, but not the morality, of abortion. They have effectively separated their personal views from their political views on the issue. The Public Religion Research Institute found that millennials are 1.5 times more likely to say that at least some health-care providers should provide legal abortions in their community but also 1.3 times more likely to be opposed

to abortion in most or all cases. This nuance in millennial views indicates that millennials believe women have the right to choose their own destiny. In a sense, this is a vote for not forcing one's own view on others, which squares well with the idea that millennials are tolerant of diverse opinions.<sup>8</sup>

Generally, millennials believe that a woman should have the right to choose what she wants to do in the case of a pregnancy. Pew Research indicates that 56 percent of millennials believe that abortion should be legal in most circumstances.<sup>9</sup> 68 percent believe abortion should be available in their community.<sup>10</sup> Just 27 percent of millennials would overturn *Roe vs. Wade*.<sup>11</sup> Millennials are the least likely generation to identify as pro-life, and the most likely to identify as pro-choice.

In their personal lives, however, millennials disapprove of abortion. A 2010 poll commissioned by the Knights of Columbus, a pro-life organization, and conducted by the Marist Institute for Public Opinion, found that 58 percent of millennials felt abortion was morally wrong, compared with 51 percent of boomers and 62 percent of seniors.<sup>12</sup>

No matter their views, we know that fewer and fewer women are choosing to get abortions. In 2015, the Associated Press reported that abortions were declining in almost every state, with the rate declining by more than a fifth in some states as of 2010. "Abortions have declined in states where new laws make it harder to have them," the AP's David Crary wrote, "but they've also waned in states where abortion rights are protected." Declining abortion rates seem to be caused by cultural factors, not just legal roadblocks. Historically, we know that one-third of women will abort a pregnancy in their lifetime.<sup>13</sup>

Pro-life advocates take credit for this change. "There's an increased awareness of the humanity of the baby before it is born," United for Life President and CEO Charmaine Yoest said. "There's an entire generation of women who saw a sonogram as their first

baby picture," she said. But Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice groups say that abortion is declining for a different reason: millennials are taking advantage of widely available birth control and sex education, reducing the need for abortions. "When birth control is affordable, women are more likely to choose the most effective method," said Judy Tabar, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Southern New England.<sup>14</sup>

For all the discussion of abortion, its salience appears to be exaggerated by Democrats and Republicans. Just 29 percent of voters say it is one of the most important issues facing our country.<sup>15</sup>

The debate to defund Planned Parenthood—which has recently resurfaced—is a less divisive one. Planned Parenthood is not an abortion organization; it is a women's health organization. That's why, despite uproar about Planned Parenthood transporting fetal organs across state lines, just 63 percent of Americans oppose defunding the organization. Nonetheless, Republicans in Congress threatened to shut down the government over this issue, much to the chagrin of Democratic leadership.

"It's going to be just like the shutdown over ACA. It's clear that Republicans are saying 'shut down the government unless I get my way' on an extraneous issue. And the American people are wise to that," Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) told *Politico*. "It's all on their shoulders."<sup>16</sup>

The abortion debate won't end with millennials. Our generation is just as split as our parents were. But how we engage with the issue has changed. Millennials may choose either political camp but will still support the ability of women to use their own judgment. The religious right will always describe abortion as murder, and the Left will always disagree. The culture wars are not over. Still, if millennials shift the dialogue then at least they will have changed the conversation and brought our country forward.

## #BlackLivesMatter and Police Violence

If June 26, 2015, was a monumental day for marriage equality, Nov. 25, 2014, was equally important for advocates of racial equality. As Jack walked toward the bus station in Philadelphia on his way to New York, he watched young Philadelphia residents of all colors gather in shock and anger when a grand jury in Ferguson, Missouri, chose not to indict police officer Darren Wilson in the shooting of Michael Brown. As he arrived into New York, Jack watched similar protests take place in New York. Friends in both cities slowly joined in, expressing their anger over what they felt was an injustice rooted in discrimination toward African Americans. Following the Michael Brown shooting, Americans across the country rallied and protested—mostly nonviolently, but occasionally with violence. At protests, young people were on the front lines pushing for change.

On our college campus, the reaction to the Michael Brown shooting was visceral. Students staged die-ins and even “took over” our university president’s party, causing controversy. On Facebook, while millennials disputed the circumstances of the Ferguson case, they united in opposition to the racism that minorities of our generation are still experiencing. Later in the year, our friends marched through campus with a red hand around their neck and the caption “I Can’t Breathe.” Our West Philadelphia-based community was not alone. In St. Louis, the LOST VOICES! movement sprouted up in opposition to police brutality against black Americans and the Millennial Activists United (MAU) marched through St. Louis and made meals for protesters.

To say race is a hot topic in American politics today, especially for young people, would be an understatement. Racial tensions have come to the forefront of the national political debate, and millennials of all political leanings expect politicians to forcefully combat racial discrimination. For millennials, “equality for all” means that we do not judge others based on the color of their skin. We may be the closest generation to achieving true color blindness.

But there is still a long way to go. When we caught up with Jenna Wong, a millennial leader from Somerville, Massachusetts, she told us that despite popular notions, even her neighborhood is not that accepting. “Well, being from the Northeast, I think there is this big misconception that the Northeast is so accepting and that there is less racial tension than the South. But in reality, the Northeast is so divided by race,” she told us.

“I come from a town that is really predominantly white, and all the African American kids come from the suburbs of Boston. And there is a huge cultural divide and a lack of understanding between African Americans, and whites and Asians.”

Wong says that it is this misconception that is at the root of our country’s racial tensions. “I think that is a huge problem that is obviously dividing the country right now with incidents of murder and police brutality. The problem is that everyone is convinced that we live in a post-racial society and that race is not something we need to be debating anymore. The burden needs to be placed more on white people to step up and say this isn’t right. And as fellow members of this nation, we have an interest in advocating for equality and stopping this from happening in the future,” she said.

“There needs to be more cultural mixing so that people understand the perspectives of groups other than their own and understand the experiences of these marginalized groups, who for hundreds of years faced discrimination—and there’s no one really advocating for them. And it’s kind of absurd that we’re in the 21st century and these vestiges of the 19th century are still sticking around,” Wong concluded.

Recent polls indicate that millennials distrust the criminal justice system and oppose racism at unprecedented levels. Forty-nine percent of millennials say they have little to no confidence that the judicial system can fairly judge people without bias for race and ethnicity, and a full 80 percent believe that requiring police officers to wear body cameras can be effective in curbing racial inequalities in the criminal justice system. As race tensions escalate, those who

fail to acknowledge and root out deep-seated racism in the criminal justice system will find themselves on the wrong side of history. Judicial reform has been identified as the next civil rights challenge of our generation.<sup>17</sup>

"I think body cameras are important. People say okay, it's an invasion of privacy. But when your job involves carrying a gun around and enforcing rules, that's how we can keep you accountable," said Abhay Ram, a millennial leader from Illinois. "Because you're all over the place. You're not sitting in a desk office, you're out on the streets, and you're dealing with citizens. And with such an important job, with such honor, you should have no problem being watched. Body cameras have been key in solving cases because you can record everything that's going on. It provides accountability and will greatly reduce the number of bad cops."

Ram says that the hesitancy with which police departments are acting on the claims put forth by the #BlackLivesMatter movement will leave scars that may take years to heal. By not recognizing a need for reform and joining the movement, police departments and their officers are creating an "us vs. them" mentality that divides communities.

But millennials also think that police brutality is the symptom, not cause, of racial problems. "There is this total lack of understanding of African Americans and stereotyping because there is so much segregation ... especially in public education. We need a school system where people of all races learn together so that from an early age kids understand individual members of each race and understand there are no differences there. It's kind of cynical but I think it's too late to change the perspectives of people who are 20 or 30," Wong said.

## Enfranchising African American Voters

With the resurgence of racial tensions and the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 2015, ensuring equality of the vote for

African Americans has gained significance as a civil rights issue for millennial voters. In 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act was unconstitutional. Now, millennials believe that states are targeting African American voters to reduce turnout by implementing voter identification laws, eliminating same-day registration, and implementing laws to prevent voter fraud. New roadblocks, millennials argue, are just discreet attempts to disenfranchise black voters.

The VRA, when it was law, required that all new voting laws in southern states be precleared by the Justice Department, which allowed the federal government to prevent such abuse. But this clear breach of states' rights, the Court argued, was only justified based on "current needs." In 1965, "flagrant," "rampant," and "pervasive" discrimination was uniquely concentrated in southern states, where 44 percent of African Americans voted, compared with 72 percent in the West, Midwest, and Northeast. In 2013, however, African American voter turnout in covered jurisdictions in the south exceeded turnout in the rest of the country, as did the number of African American representatives as a proportion of the population.

U.S. Solicitor General Donald Verrilli agreed that racism was no longer more prevalent in the South than in the North. Absent uniquely "local evils," Congress could not impose stricter burdens on covered states solely on the basis of historical discrimination.<sup>18</sup> Hence, Section 4 of the VRA was repealed.

As the Philadelphia tournament neared its end—and teams made constitutional arguments about the old VRA and whether it should have been overturned—everyone seemed to agree on the next step. Now that the VRA has been overturned, millennials want it to be replaced. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the majority in the court's *Shelby v. Holder* decision that "the Fifteenth Amendment is not designed to punish for the past; its purpose is to ensure a better future." The new act will need to modify the formula to more precisely determine where abuse is most flagrant and where preclearance

is necessary. As opposed to basing preclearance requirements on the facts on the ground from 1965, policies will be based on abuse in 2016. And hopefully the new law will help increase voter turnout among African Americans.

This happened in 2014. The Voting Rights Amendment Act of 2014 would have updated the formula and identified new jurisdictions for VRA coverage. Local jurisdictions that had committed five violations in the last 15 years or one egregious violation that created “persistent and extremely low minority voter turnout” would have been covered by the act—and would have been required to preclear voting regulations.

Such a new bill seemed like a logical next step given that just one-third of Americans actually agreed with the Court’s initial decision to overturn the act. Not only would reinstating the VRA placate the majority of Americans, but it would also galvanize African American and millennial voters.<sup>19</sup> Much to the chagrin of young people, however, Republicans in Congress voted against the bill. The Grand Old Party didn’t do itself any favors by opposing a bill with strong support among must-win demographics.

## Voter ID Laws

One of the foremost reasons these young people so strongly support a new Voting Rights Act is to stem the tide of voter ID laws, which many young people believe are anathema to justice. Since 2010, more than 15 states have passed such laws, whose stated purpose is to prevent fraud. Ironically, voter ID laws don’t address the most common source of fraud—mail-in absentee ballots. Even so, voter fraud is uncommon. In fact, according to Arizona State University, there have been just 28 cases of voter fraud convictions since 2000—hardly an epidemic. Of those, half were for absentee ballots. So the laws would prevent only a handful of fraudulent votes every year,

which doesn’t seem worth all the effort. That’s why many millennials believe that the laws are just not-so-subtle attempts to reduce voter turnout among minorities and young people.<sup>20</sup>

Voter ID laws sound trivial—they simply require that citizens have valid government ID to vote. But the Brennan Center found that more than 10 percent of voters don’t have the necessary ID, including one in four African Americans. Student identification is also invalid, so millennials are the next most likely group to be excluded from voting as a result of the new laws. In Texas, an African American grandmother—who could not afford to spend \$25 on buying a birth certificate—was denied voter registration. Every day, African American voters were turned away because none of their IDs met the specifications of the new law.<sup>21</sup>

Judge Richard Posner, of the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, has said that the laws “appear to be aimed at limiting voting by minorities, particularly blacks.” The conservative judge described claims that the bill would combat voter fraud as “a mere fig leaf.” “There is only one motivation for imposing burdens on voting that are ostensibly designed to discourage voter impersonation fraud and that is to discourage voting by persons likely to vote against the party responsible for imposing the burdens,” Posner said. Not everyone agrees. In a study, Nielson found that “there is little evidence that racial minorities are less likely than whites to vote when states institute voter identification requirements.”<sup>22</sup>

Voter ID laws target young people too. In a recent article, *Washington Post* columnist Catherine Rampell, who is a millennial, wrote about the discrimination. “First they came for blacks, and we said nothing. Then they came for Latinos, poor people, and married women, and we again ignored the warning signs,” she wrote. “Now, after our years of apathy, they’re coming for us: the nation’s millennials.”

In Ohio, Republicans proposed a bill that would have prevented state colleges from distributing voter registration paperwork to

out-of-state students. In North Carolina, the state stopped allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to fill out early voter registration forms to be automatically registered at 18. Meanwhile, out-of-state drivers' licenses will no longer be valid voter identification.<sup>23</sup>

The result? North Carolina is now facing an age-discrimination lawsuit. Texas, Pennsylvania, and other states have seen their laws challenged under the 14th Amendment. Of course, there's nothing foul at play, counter Republicans. "While some will try to make this seem to be controversial, the simple reality is that requiring voters to provide a photo ID when they vote is a common-sense idea," Governor Pat McCrory (R-NC) said after signing the law.

Apparently, most Americans ostensibly buy into this rhetoric. A *Washington Post* poll found 74 percent of Americans say proof of citizenship should be required to vote. But this is limited to actual proof of citizenship, not restrictive voter ID laws that exclude common forms of identification like drivers' licenses. Indeed, millennials are twice as concerned about eligible voters being denied the right to vote as they are about voter fraud. (For Americans overall, these are equal concerns.)<sup>24</sup>

Probably the worst part about restrictive new laws is the lack of transparency. So while millennials might oppose the imposition of new restrictions on youth and minority turnout, few of us even understand the extent to which these laws affect our states.

## LGBT Equality: Our Movement

While race and gender are hot-button issues, they are movements launched by our parents' and grandparents' generations that we have championed as our own. Marriage equality, by contrast, is an issue that in many ways has been fought primarily by millennial advocates. For young people, homophobia is a dirty word, and as more and more Americans come out as openly gay, support for the movement has snowballed. Today, more than three-quarters of millennials support

gay marriage, which was recently legalized by the U.S. Supreme Court, and an even higher number believe that people who identify as LGBT should be accepted by society.

Older generations tend not to understand why the issue is so important. In 2010, for example, when we marched in the Gay Pride Parade for the first time, our mom asked why nice Jewish boys would be marching in the parade. She didn't oppose gay marriage—she just didn't understand why it's so important to our generation. The answer is that for us, marriage is an issue of tolerance, diversity, and acceptance. Everyone has a right to love and marriage.<sup>25</sup>

Our discussions with millennials, conservative and liberal, homosexual and heterosexual, highlighted two important sources of the dramatic support for LGBT rights among millennials. The first is that we are young and therefore less likely to be biased by preconceived notions. Just as our parents were the first generation to accept blacks as equal members of our society (formally, at least), millennials are open to respecting the rights of homosexuals. We are also the most likely people to have gay friends. It's hard not to be sympathetic to the cause when your friends and peers say this is their way of finding love. That's why millennials cheered on the U.S. Supreme Court decision to legalize gay marriage, sharing the hashtag LoveHasWon.

For Allie Shears, a millennial from Michigan, her perspective and that of her mom on LGBT issues are different because of their different experiences. Her mom, she said, worries that two women would not be able to raise their child in the same way that a heterosexual couple would, because children need parents of both genders. "I disagree," she said. "I don't think it's better to have both sexes. It's okay to not have both," she said. "You are growing up in a world full of people, you can meet everyone, you don't need to have that upbringing necessarily."

Many millennials, like Shears, say they can't even imagine where the notion that homosexual parents would be ineffective comes from. "There's this stigma that we shouldn't be allowing homosexual couples

to have kids because ‘it’s unfair that the children don’t get to choose.’ But do you ever get to choose your parents? Do you choose if you have a mother and a father who are alcoholics, who take meth? That’s not your choice either,” Katherine Hu, a millennial from Plano, Texas, said.

The rapid pace of change in public opinion on gay marriage has been dramatic. Just a few decades ago in the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was illegal to ban same-sex sodomy. Today, states are adopting laws to prevent workplace discrimination against gays. There’s no way a police officer could walk in on two gay men having sex and arrest them, as was the case for Lawrence. Our generation played no small part in this change. With the advent of social media and open communication, millennials have been at the forefront of calling for liberalization of policies that relate with the LGBT community. We also created a cultural taboo against homophobic expression. Most importantly, gay Americans have had the courage to come out and risk discrimination for the sake of their cause.

There is still much left to be done. Millennials say that the next step in the movement for LGBT equality is to pass antidiscrimination laws that prevent businesses from denying service or firing a person because of his/her sexual orientation. Today, just 22 states have passed laws that protect people from discrimination on the basis of either their sexual orientation or gender identity. Unfortunately, this didn’t stop Indiana and Arkansas from passing laws to “protect religious freedom” in their states, and by extension, legitimize discrimination against members of the LGBT community. The backlash against these laws, however, has created a momentum for other states to pass antidiscrimination laws.

“I think right now gay marriage was legalized but there are a lot more things we can do to eliminate inequality. For example, a lot of states have discrimination laws in which employers can just fire employees for being gay. I think the next big fight is going to be for

antidiscrimination laws,” Ajay Singh explained. To combat perceived employer discrimination, many firms have launched diversity programs to target and hire employees who identify as homosexual.

There is widespread support for new laws to protect LGBT rights. Reuters found that 54 percent of Americans and 56 percent of millennials believe that businesses should not be able to refuse services to a member of the LGBT community on the basis of religious beliefs.<sup>26</sup> A similar ABC/*Washington Post* poll estimated that 65 percent of Americans support antidiscrimination laws that conflict with owners’ religious beliefs, compared with 70 percent of millennials.<sup>27</sup>

Millennials are also the most likely generation to support comprehensive, federal reform on the issue, with 65 percent of millennials saying they support or strongly support such reform, and 15 percent saying that they are neutral on the issue, according to Generation Progress.<sup>28</sup> Among all political issues in the poll, comprehensive LGBT antidiscrimination reform ranked the highest in terms of the number of young people who said they “strongly support” the issue.

## CONCLUSION

Social issues are paramount to elections because they are easily accessible to all voters and merely constitute value judgments. They govern how we live and regulate our basic freedoms. They do not require a college degree or advanced economic training to understand; they are basic ways to approach the world. For millennials, it is crucial that all people, regardless of gender, race, or sexual orientation, should be treated equally. Our generation will not stop until we achieve a fairer society that is more tolerant of divergent lifestyles and open to diversity. There is no balance to be achieved here, or compromise to be made; there is just a fight to be won.

Millennials leaders all across the country agree that our generation’s support for equality is a defining characteristic. Still, young

people hope that someday our views won't be so surprising. The dream is that someday, issues of equality will be less politically important—not because we forget about them, but rather because we've solved them. When millennials rule, equality issues will transcend political lines. They will be a universal truth accepted across the political spectrum.

## Radical Realism: A Philosophy for the Next Generation

**A**t each step of our journey through millennial America we peeled back a layer of the millennial platform. We started in New Haven, where we learned that millennials want reasonable restrictions placed on gun ownership, stopped in Lexington, where we discovered that millennials are free-market environmentalists and ended in Philadelphia, where we found that young people are champions of equal rights. Throughout this journey, we discovered a unique political philosophy that governs the millennial worldview: radical realism.

Radicalism is the belief that the future holds promise and—as its guarantors—young people must take action. By taking to the streets, voting, running for office, and volunteering in our communities, we can make a difference in the world. Realism, by contrast, is the understanding that policy making is difficult, and we must therefore accept pragmatic compromises to succeed.

Taken together, radical realism is a worldview, not an ideology. Over the next two decades, it will infuse into the platforms, stump speeches, and agendas of successful Democratic and Republican candidates. To understand what the future entails, we need to take a deeper dive into this philosophy and flesh out its implications.