



# GREENBERG QUINLAN ROSNER RESEARCH

December 3, 2012

## A Cultural Sea Change

### Analysis of National Post-Election Survey and State Exit Surveys

**To:** Interested Parties

**From:** Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research  
The Human Rights Campaign

---

Leading into the 2012 election cycle, marriage equality advocates lost 29 straight marriage equality referenda in a row, discounting the temporary win in Arizona. And yet, we went four for four on November 6<sup>th</sup>, bringing the total number of states that enjoy marriage equality to nine plus the District of Columbia. An analysis of HRC's national post-election survey as well as state-level exit polling suggests several dynamics contributed to what is definitively a cultural sea change in this country.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, there was an energized progressive base in 2012. Barack Obama won in large measure because he garnered large margins among younger voters, people of color, unmarried women and, as we shall see, LGBT voters, enough to compensate for losing Independent voters by 6 points. Marriage equality prevailed in Minnesota, Maryland, Washington and Maine, in part, by rolling up huge margins among these same voters. Moreover, nationally, progressives attached much greater importance to the broader issue of gay rights than conservatives, a huge shift from prior election cycles.

This election also signals broader, cultural change in our country that foreshadow future success. HRC's national post-election survey, like so many other recent public surveys, shows majority support for marriage equality (50 percent favor, 39 percent oppose) and a higher margin (+11) for marriage than for the President (+2). At the state level, support for equality in Maine grew among conservative leaning groups, in Maryland, support was solid among African

---

<sup>1</sup> The following memo is based on a national survey of 1,001 voters in the 2012 election and exit polling in four key states where same-sex marriage was on the ballot: Maryland, Minnesota, Maine, and Washington. The NEP Exit Polls were conducted by Edison Research. As well as a survey of 1,001 voters nationally who participated in the 2012 election conducted between November 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 among those who had already voted or were almost certain they would vote in the 2012 election. The survey, commissioned by the Human Rights Campaign and conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, carries an overall margin of error of +/- 3.10

Americans, and in Washington, a near majority of Independents favored marriage equality up from 33 percent in 2009.

In short, the tide has turned. What was considered extreme is now mainstream. Conservatives no longer have incentive to put marriage referenda on the ballot to goose right-wing turnout or make “the protection of marriage” a core theme in their campaign. It is no accident that Romney remained quiet on this issue after securing the nomination. Moreover, American voters reelected Obama knowing full well his stance on marriage, without any negative blowback. This is not to say, of course, that future challenges do not remain, but the time for playing defense is over.

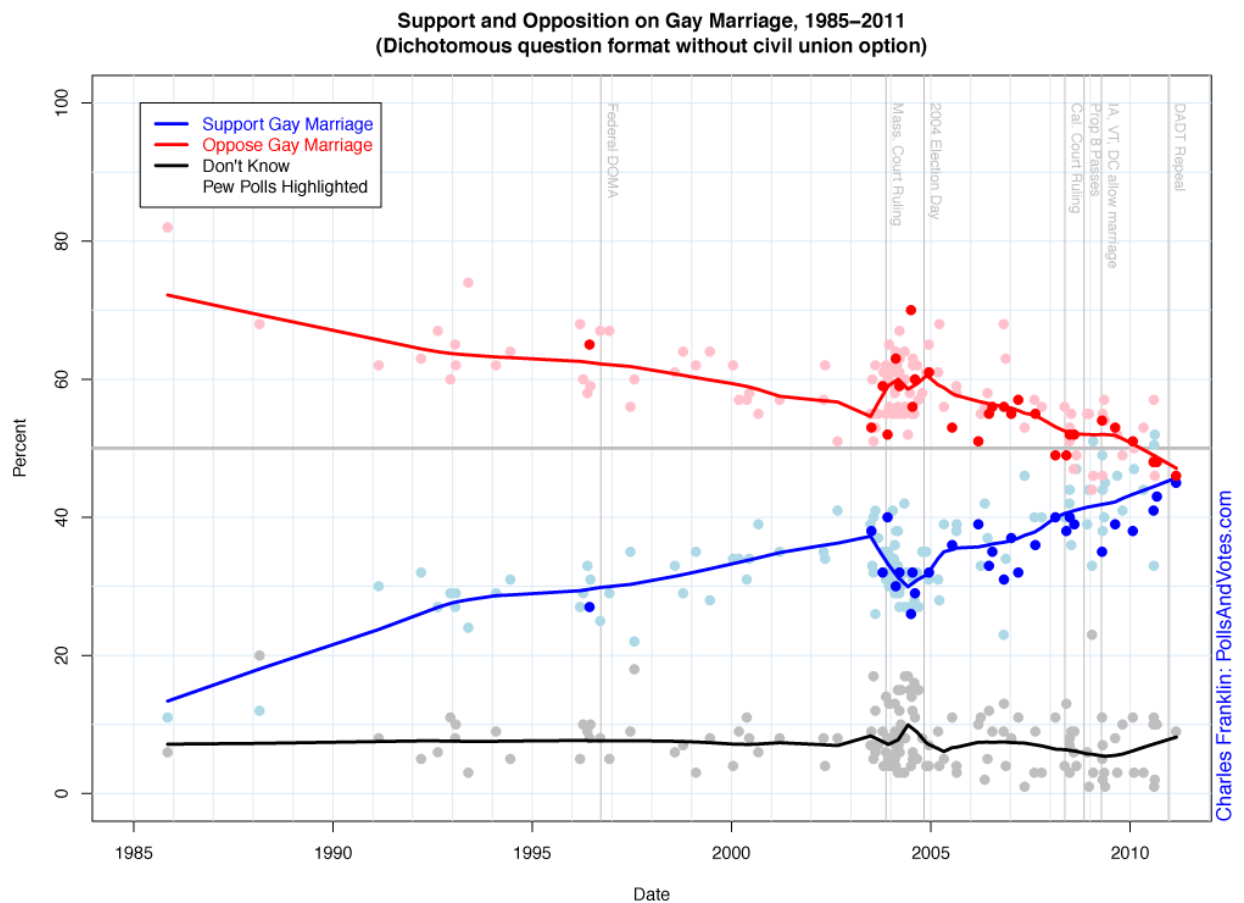
## Cultural Sea Change

In 2004, many commentators wrongly blamed the “gay marriage” issue on Kerry’s inability to hold Ohio and Iowa. In 2008, President Obama minimized the discussion of marriage equality and his position on the issue confused voters. The 2012 cycle was different; the President ran on a strong record of supporting LGBT rights, coming out in favor of same-sex marriage, repealing “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell,” signing a hate crimes law, and making administrative policy changes that, among other things, ensured hospital visitation rights to gay couples.

He recognized the country had changed.

The electorate that reelected Obama by a two point margin (50 to 48 percent), supports marriage equality by an 11 point margin (50 to 39 percent), though obviously some marriage opponents may be hiding in the undecided column. Nonetheless, current support for marriage reflects a long-term upward trend on this issue.

■ **Figure 1:** Support for Marriage Equality Grows

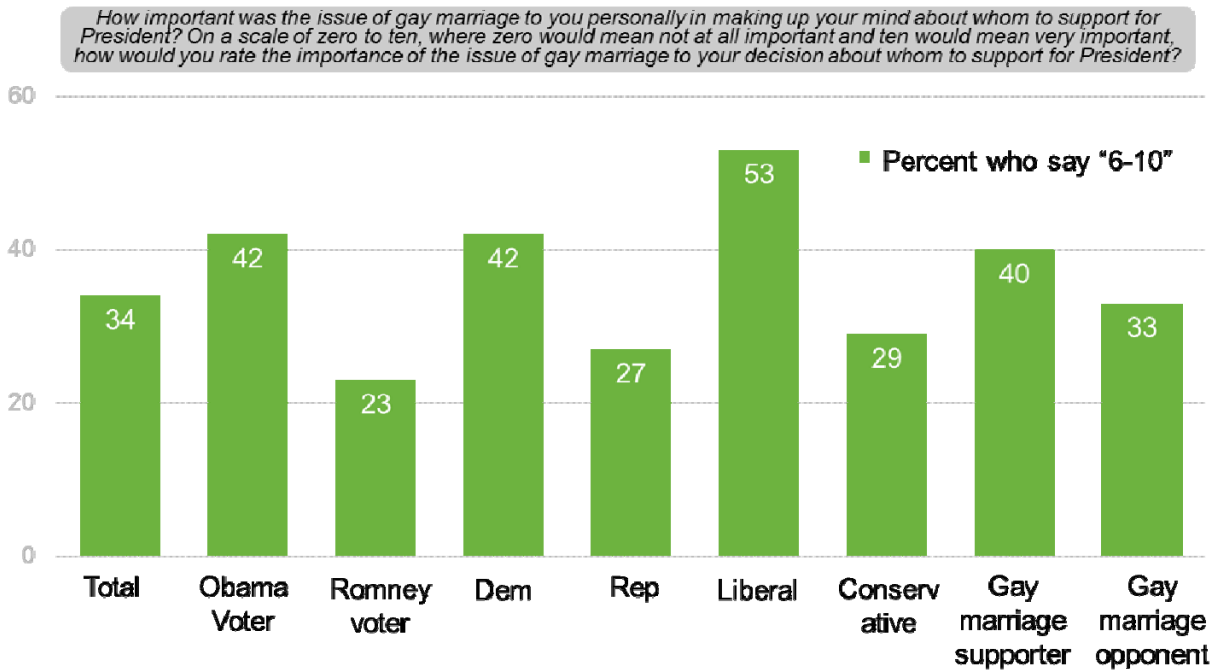


A majority of voters (63 percent) in the country knew Obama supported marriage equality. In open-ended reasons to vote against Barack Obama, only 2 percent volunteer gay marriage. As striking, 2 percent mention gay marriage as a reason to vote against Mitt Romney.

Not only did the President's advocacy of LGBT issues not hurt the President, there is evidence that it helped him. Obama supporters were twice as likely to say gay rights were important to their vote (42 percent 6-10 on 0-10 scale) than Romney voters (23 percent 6-10 on a 0-10 scale). President Obama's supporters were also more coalesced around supporting marriage equality (71 percent in favor) than Romney supporters were around the opposition (61 percent opposed).

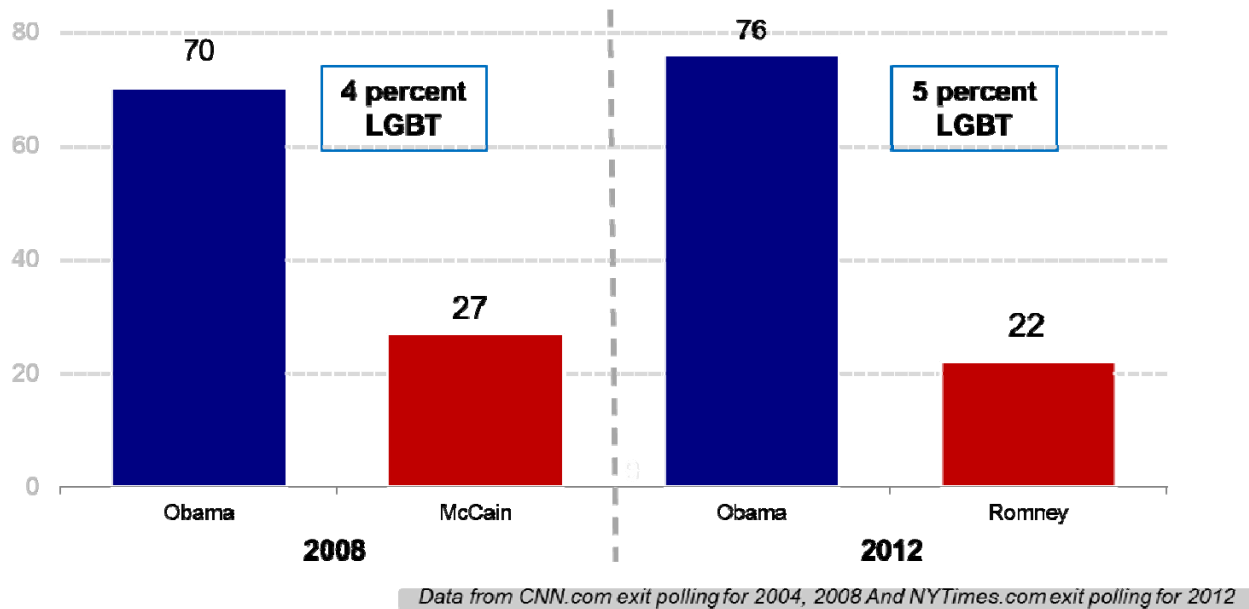
Similarly, only 29 percent of conservatives describe the issue of gay rights as important to their vote (compared to 53 percent among liberals). Just 27 percent to Republicans describe the issue as important to their vote, compared to 42 percent among Democrats. At least in 2012, this was not an issue that energized political conservatives and, revealingly, few conservative candidates at any level of politics stressed opposition to marriage or other LGBT issues as part of their message.

■ **Figure 2:** Importance of Gay Marriage to Voting Decisions



In a two point race, the LGBT community played a more direct role in the President's winning margin as well. In total, 5 percent of the electorate identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Not only did these voters support the President overwhelmingly, but support grew sharply even compared to 2008.

**Figure 3:** Increase in LGBT Support for the President in Exit Polling



## Victory in the States

After a long winless streak and several heartbreaking losses, marriage equality broke through in 2012. Some lessons are obvious; it is better to run in a presidential election year with high youth turnout than off-year elections. Some lessons are less obvious. In large measure these initiatives won because they rolled up huge margins among progressive-oriented voters—the same model that elected Obama—but they also won because they made inroads among swing voters, moderates and even voting groups traditionally hostile to LGBT rights, groups like older voters and church-goers.

### Maine

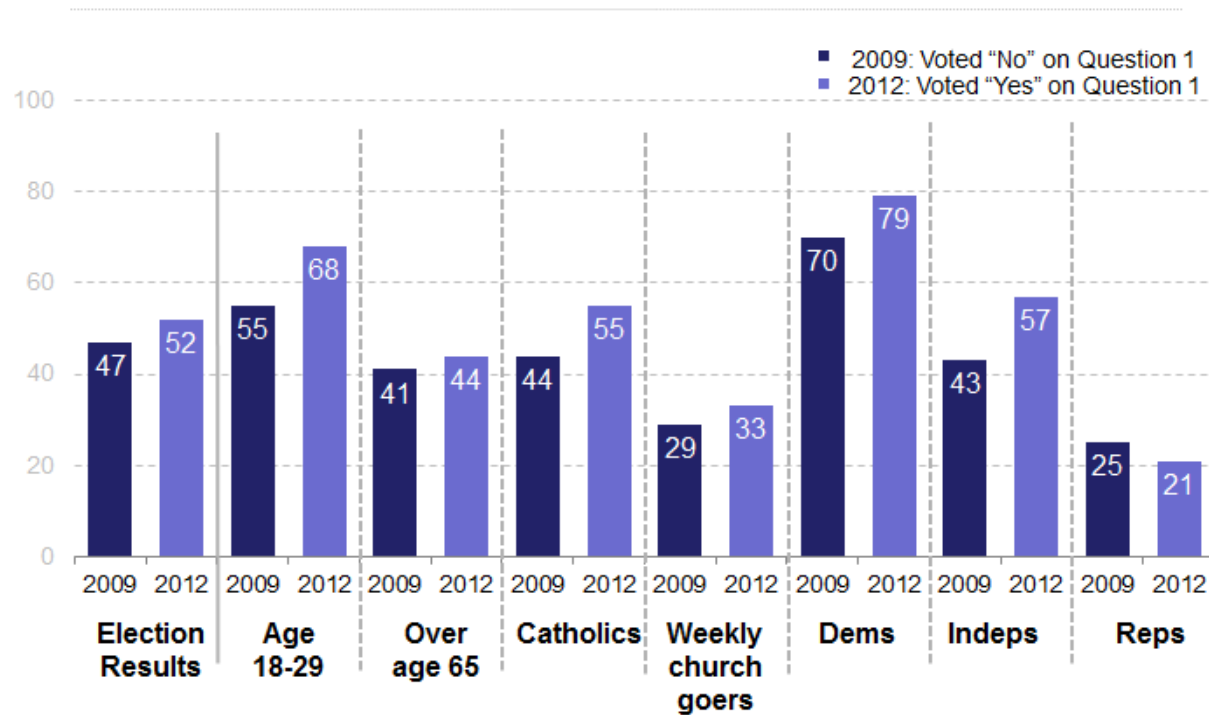
In Maine, voters passed Question 1, allowing same-sex couples to marry, with 53 percent of the vote. This victory was the result of a long and hard-fought battle, reversing the 2009 Question 1 vote (53 to 47 percent). In net terms, this reflects a full 12 point swing in three short years.

In order to achieve a progressive, pro-equality outcome this November, an unlikely coalition of supporters came together. Since 2009, support jumped appreciably among youth and Democrats.<sup>2</sup> However, we also see growth in less obvious groups such as Catholics, whose 55 percent support of Question 1 increased by 11 percent (44 percent in 2009), and those who attend religious services weekly or more (33 percent support, up from 29 percent in 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Based on results from a post-election poll in Maine conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner on behalf of Third Way among 602 voters in the 2009 special election between November 4-8, 2009.

Question 1 also saw increased support among seniors (41 percent in 2009, 44 percent in 2012), and a 14-point increase among Independents (43 percent in 2009, 58 percent in 2012).

■ **Figure 4:** Maine Exit Polling Shows Increased Support for Progressive Outcome Among Key Subgroups

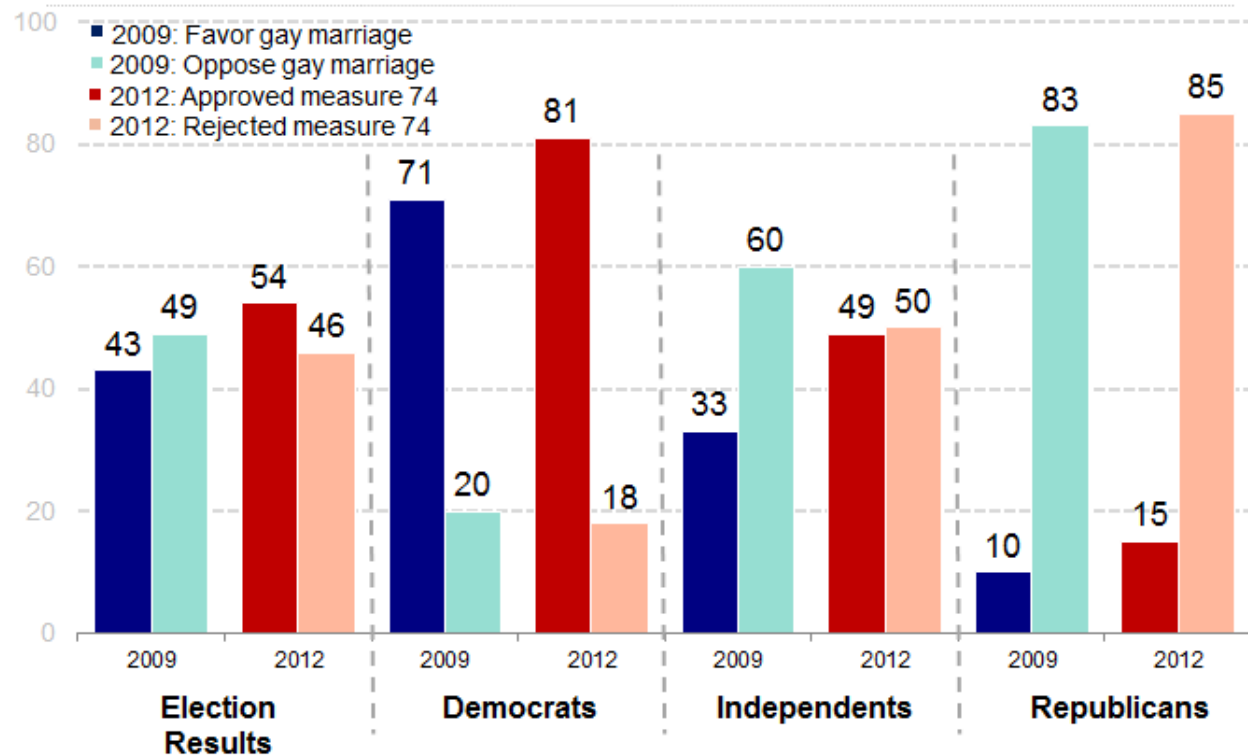


### Washington

In 2009, Washington state approved by 52 percent – 48 percent Referendum 71, which would extend a number of rights to same-sex couples while maintaining that a domestic partnership is not a marriage. Research after the 2009 election found<sup>3</sup> that only 43 percent of voters in Washington State supported full marriage equality while 49 percent opposed. In 2012 voters, voters here took the final step and approved marriage equality, 54 percent to 46 percent. As seen in other states, the coalition was led by younger voters (65 percent yes) and Democrats (81 percent). However, this referendum also won nearly four-in-ten (38 percent) of seniors and jumped half of Independents (49 percent). Indeed, compared to 2009, the biggest gains in support come not among Democratic voters, but among Independents.

<sup>3</sup> Based on results from a post-election poll in Washington conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner on behalf of Third Way among 617 voters in the 2009 special election between November 3-5, 2009.

**Figure 5:** Washington Exit Polls Show Increased Support Among Independents



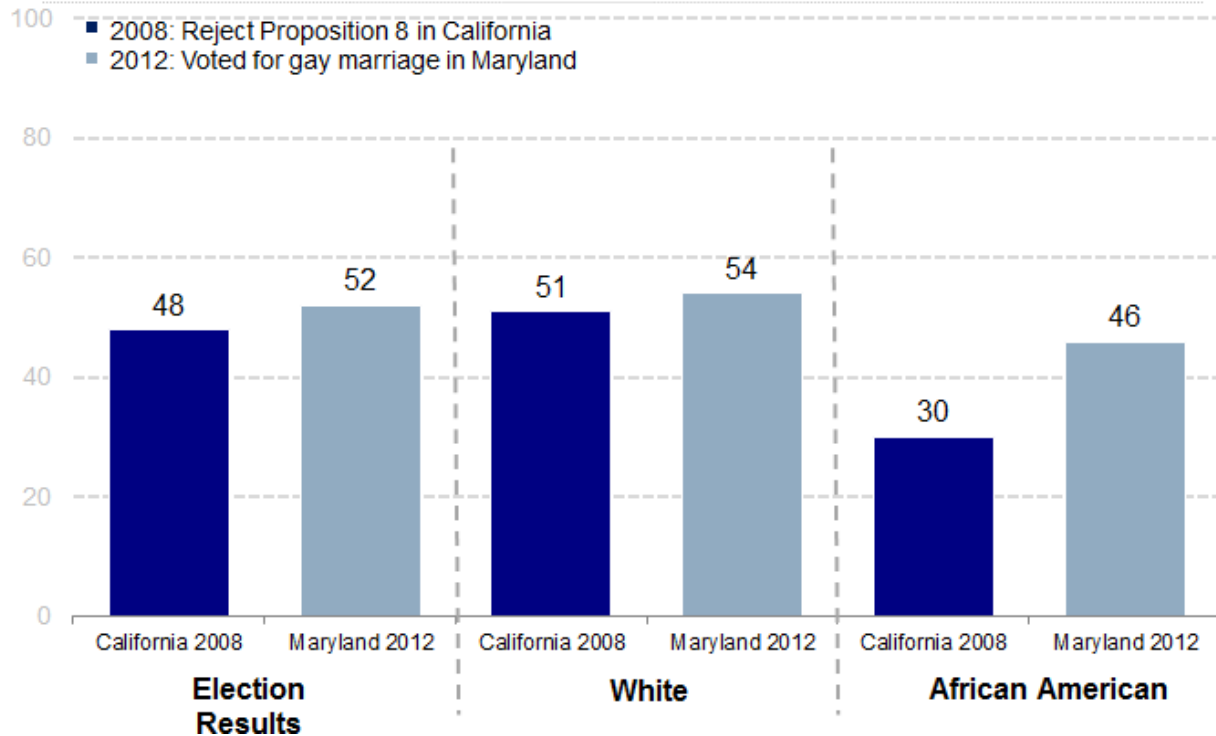
### Maryland

Maryland passed equality 52 to 48 percent by rolling up a 70 percent margin among younger voters, a 63 percent margin among post-graduates and a 65 percent margin among voters in Montgomery County. As is the case in each of these states, however, the referendum was also at least competitive among seniors (36 percent), non-college voters (45 percent) and voters outside of the Washington-Baltimore orbit (45 percent).<sup>4</sup>

However, the most interesting finding is support among African Americans. Exit polls in 2008 showed African American voters in California opposing Proposition 8 by a 70 to 30 percent margin. While this survey may have overstated resistance in the African American community, it was clear African American support for change was significantly lower than support elsewhere. In Maryland in 2012, however, nearly half (46 percent) supported equality and the referenda won a majority (51 percent) of African American women. Support for equality in majority-African American Prince George's County (nearly 50 percent) and Baltimore City (57 percent) further attest to the change in the African American community.

<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, the Maryland exit poll did not include questions about religion, so we do not have numbers for Catholic voters.

**Figure 6:** African American Voters in Maryland Support Marriage Equality

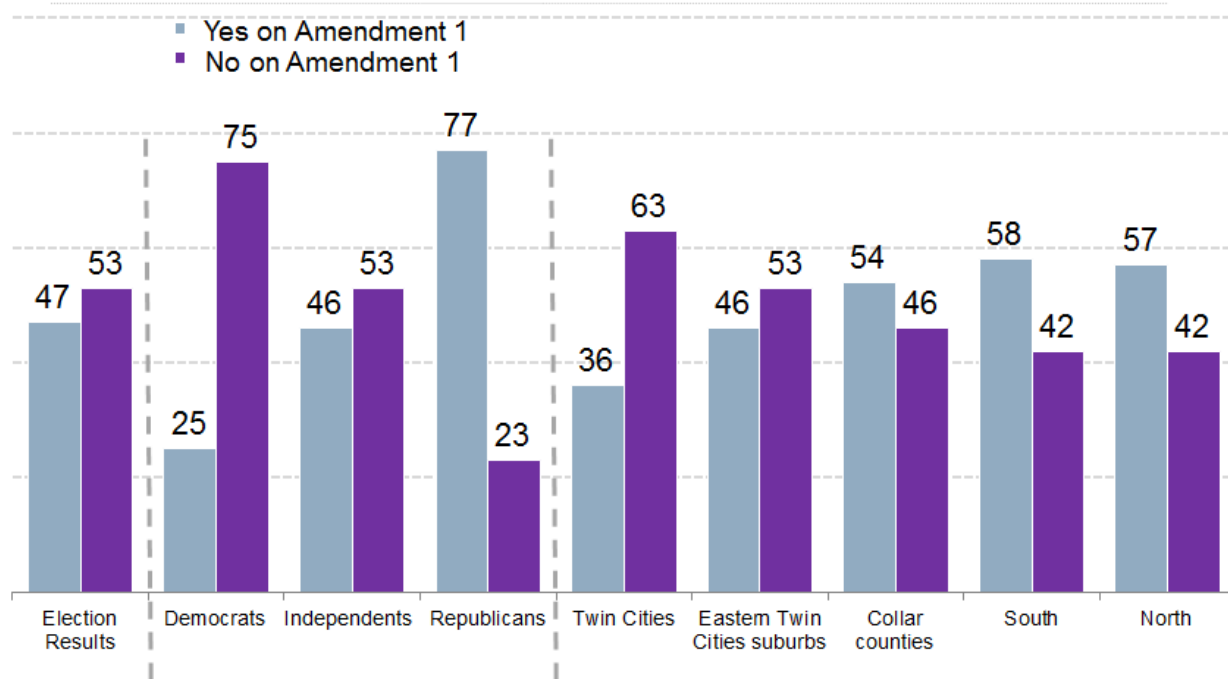


### Minnesota

In Minnesota, voters were asked to vote on a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage. Of the four, this was also the state with the narrowest margin for Obama (52 to 44 percent) and state with the thinnest history on this issue. Nonetheless, we see the same patterns emerge. Overall, the equality won 53 to 47 percent. As is the case elsewhere, this victory was spearheaded by youth (67 percent no) and Democrats (75 percent), but here too, the exit survey shows how broadly support for equality has spread. Nearly four in ten (44 percent) of voters 50-64 voted in favor of equality, as did as did 45 percent of non-college voters, 23 percent of Romney voters, 46 percent in the swing Collar Counties and, most important, 52 percent of Independent voters.



**Figure 7:** Gay Marriage Ban in Minnesota Defeated by Strong Showing In Cities, Among Democrats and Independents



## Conclusion

Nationally, an electorate knowingly supported a pro-equality U.S. President, a progressive base energized behind LGBT issues and a conservative base proved, at best, uninterested in making opposition to gay rights an important piece of their campaign narrative. Since a majority started supporting equality in survey results in the last few years, conservatives could rationalize growing support for marriage equality by noting its failure to pass in a referendum. That excuse died on Tuesday. Equality won four elections in large measure because of intense support among Democrats and youth, but also by making important inroads among other, more conservative voting blocs. This swing in Maine, 15-points net over three years, clearly shows opinion changing, not simply from the vagaries of different election cycles or generational replacement, but in the hearts and minds of the electorate.