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The 2020 LGBT Vote: Preferences and Characteristics of LGBT Voters

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RESEARCH THAT MATTERS

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# THE 2020 LGBT VOTE

## Preferences and Characteristics of LGBT Voters

October 2019

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Christy Mallory

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly nine million LGBT adults are registered and eligible to vote in the 2020 general election.<sup>1</sup> Half of registered LGBT voters (50%) are Democrats, 15% are Republicans, 22% are Independents, and 13% said they identify with another party or did not know with which party they most identify.<sup>2</sup> LGBT voters are racially diverse, nearly half (47%) are under age 35, and one-third have at least a college education.

A 2019 national Williams Institute and Reuters/Ipsos poll asked LGBT and non-LGBT likely voters what they are looking for in a presidential candidate. In terms of political experience, LGBT voters were significantly more likely than non-LGBT voters to say that they would support a seasoned political candidate. The poll also found that LGBT voters were significantly more likely than non-LGBT voters to say they would support candidates who are black, Latino/a, or LGBT themselves. However, majorities of both LGBT and non-LGBT voters said that the race and sexual orientation of a candidate would not influence their vote.

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<sup>1</sup> Range 7,560,000 to 9,899,000. This figure was calculated by applying the percentage of LGBT adults who said they were registered to vote in response to the 2019 Williams Institute and Reuters/Ipsos poll (79%) to the number of LGBT adults in the U.S. (11,046,000) from WILLIAMS INSTITUTE, LGBT PEOPLE IN THE U.S. NOT PROTECTED BY STATE NONDISCRIMINATION STATES 2 (2019), <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Equality-Act-April-2019.pdf>. The estimate is based on the Voting Age Population (VAP). Estimates of registered voters generated by different questions and different samples may vary somewhat from the estimate generated from the 2019 Williams Institute and Reuters/Ipsos survey.

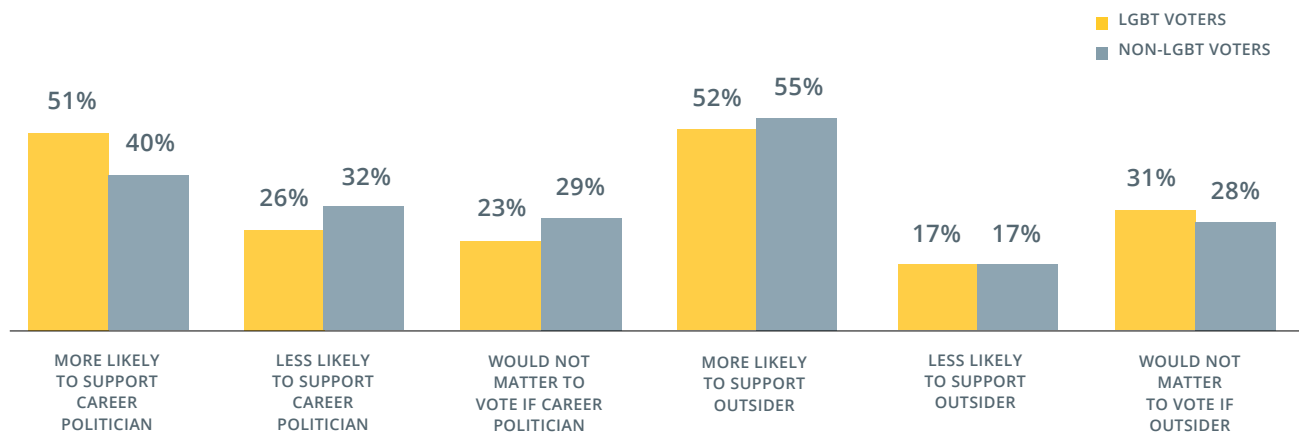
<sup>2</sup> Percentages are rounded throughout this report, so totals may not always add up to 100%.

# VOTER PREFERENCES

## CANDIDATE'S POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

LGBT voters were significantly more likely than non-LGBT voters to say that they would support a seasoned political candidate. Slightly over half of LGBT voters (51%) said that they were more likely to support “a career politician who knows his or her way around the political process”, compared to 40% of non-LGBT voters. Similar percentages of LGBT and non-LGBT voters said they were more likely to support “an outsider who could bring a fresh perspective to Washington.” The majorities of LGBT and non-LGBT voters said that level of political experience would influence their vote either for or against a candidate.

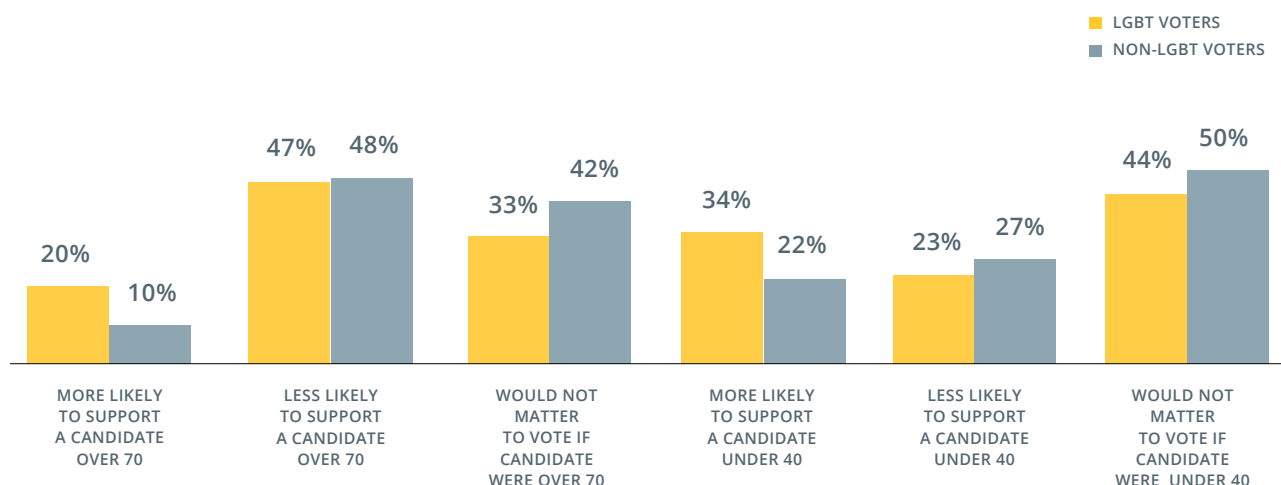
Support for career politicians and outsider candidates among LGBT and non-LGBT voters



## CANDIDATE'S AGE

Both LGBT voters and non-LGBT voters were more supportive of younger candidates. Thirty-four percent of LGBT voters and 22% of non-LGBT voters said they were more likely to support a candidate under the age of 40. Smaller percentages of both LGBT and non-LGBT voters said they would be more likely to support a candidate over the age of 70—20% of LGBT voters and 10% of non-LGBT voters. About half of LGBT and non-LGBT voters said that they would be less likely to support a candidate over age 70.

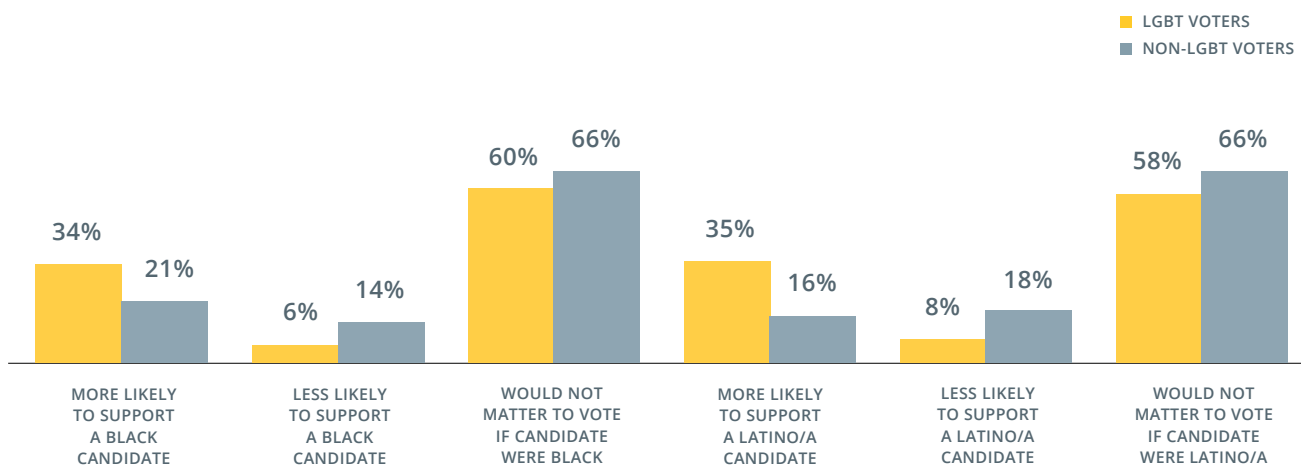
Support for candidates over age 70 and under age 40 among LGBT and non-LGBT voters



## CANDIDATE'S RACE

Most LGBT and non-LGBT voters said that a candidate's race would not matter to their vote. However, higher percentages of LGBT voters said they were more likely to support a candidate because the candidate was black or Latino/a than did non-LGBT voters. About a third of LGBT voters said they were more likely to support a candidate because they were black or Latino/a (34% and 35%, respectively). By comparison, 21% of non-LGBT voters said they were more likely to support a black candidate and 16% said they were more likely to support a Latino/a candidate. In contrast, a higher percentage of non-LGBT voters said they were less likely to vote for candidates who were black or Latino/a.

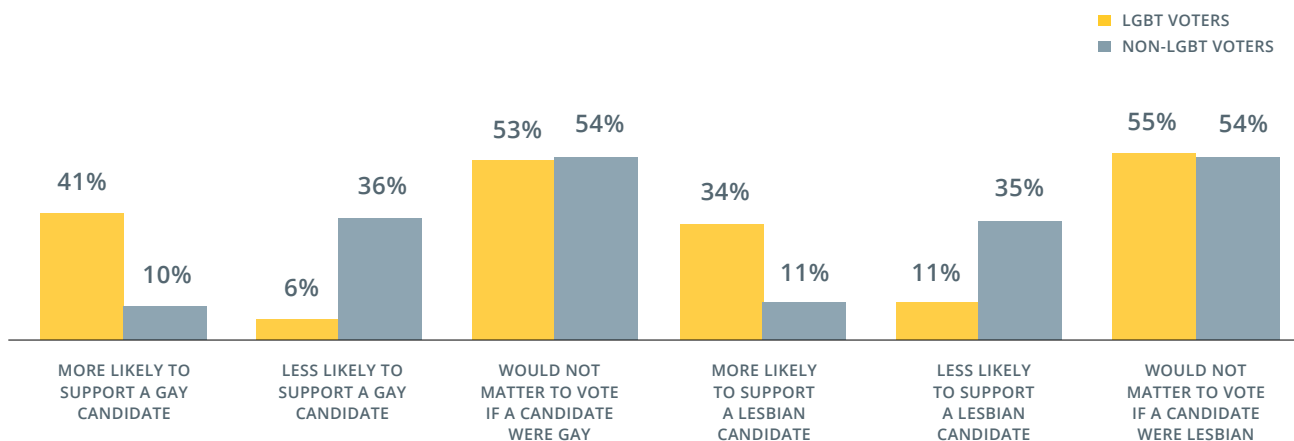
Support for black and Latino/a candidates among LGBT and non-LGBT voters



## CANDIDATE'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY

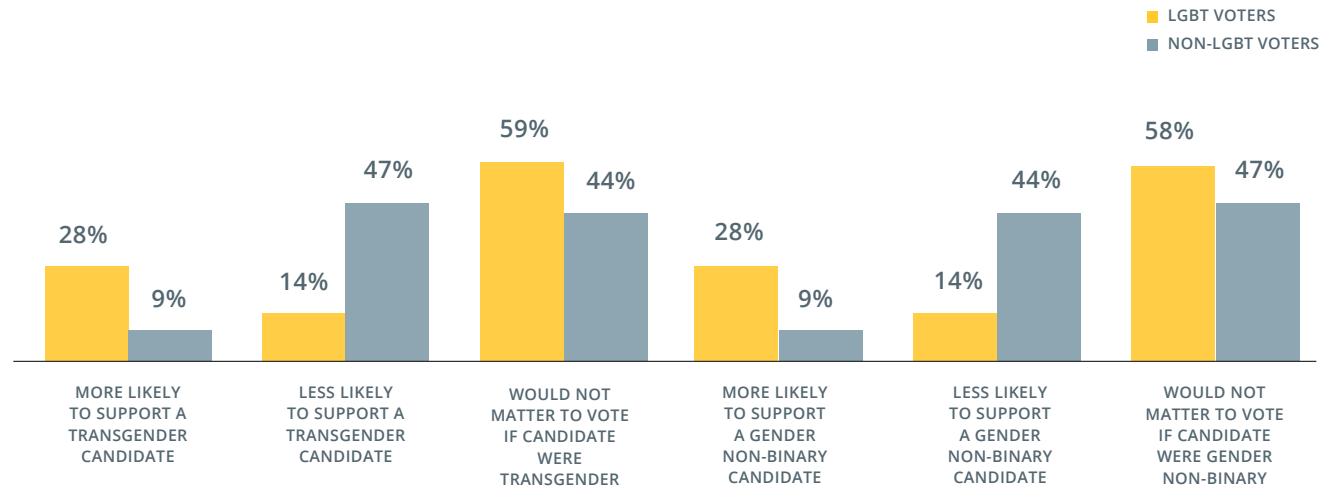
Most LGBT and non-LGBT voters said that a candidate's being gay or lesbian would not matter to their vote. However, LGBT voters were much more likely than non-LGBT voters to say that they would support a gay or lesbian candidate. Forty-one percent of LGBT voters said they would be more likely to vote for a gay candidate and 34% said they would be more likely to vote for a lesbian candidate, compared to 10% and 11%, respectively, of non-LGBT voters.

Support for gay and lesbian candidates among LGBT and non-LGBT voters



LGBT voters were also more supportive of transgender and gender non-binary candidates than non-LGBT voters. Among LGBT voters, over one-quarter (28%) said they were more likely to support a candidate because they were transgender or gender non-binary. By comparison, 9% of non-LGBT voters said they were more likely to support a transgender or gender non-binary candidate.

### Support for transgender and gender non-binary candidates among LGBT and non-LGBT voters

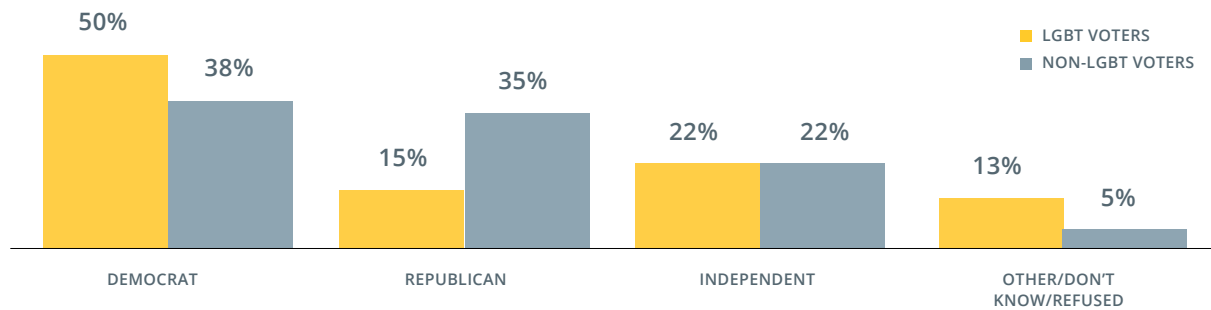


# CHARACTERISTICS OF LGBT VOTERS

## PARTY AFFILIATION

Half LGBT registered voters (50%) say they identify most with the Democratic party, compared to 38% of non-LGBT voters. LGBT voters are less likely to say they identify with the Republican party than non-LGBT voters (15% compared to 35%). The same percentage of LGBT and non-LGBT voters (22%) say they identify most with the Independent party. Thirteen percent of LGBT voters and 5% of non-LGBT voters said they most identify with another party, did not know with which party they most identify, or refused to answer the question. One-fifth of LGBT adults (21%) and 17% of non-LGBT adults are not registered to vote.

### Party affiliation of LGBT and non-LGBT voters



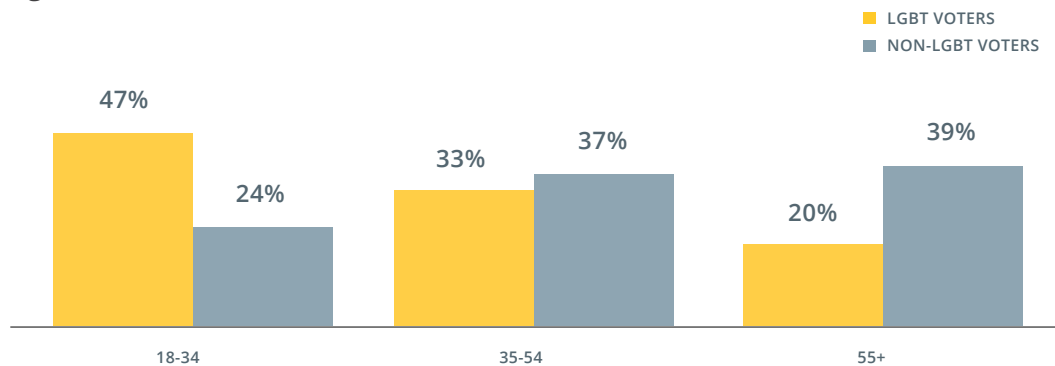
## RACE AND ETHNICITY

LGBT voters are racially and ethnically diverse. Twenty-two percent are Latino/a, 13% are black, 61% are white, and 4% are other races or multiracial. Lower percentages of non-LGBT voters are Latino/a (14%), black (11%), or other races or multiracial (4%), while a higher percentage (67%) are white.

## AGE

LGBT voters, like the LGBT adult population overall, skew younger than non-LGBT voters. Nearly half (47%) of LGBT voters are ages 18-34, compared to only 21% of non-LGBT voters. One-fifth (20%) of LGBT voters are age 55 and older compared to 40% of non-LGBT voters.

### Age distribution of LGBT and non-LGBT voters



## SEX

Nearly three-fifths of LGBT voters are men (57%) and 43% are women. About half of non-LGBT voters are women (51%).

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

The majority of LGBT and non-LGBT voters (61 and 63%, respectively) have completed high school or have some college education. One-third (34%) of LGBT voters and 29% of non-LGBT voters have a four-year college or an advanced degree.

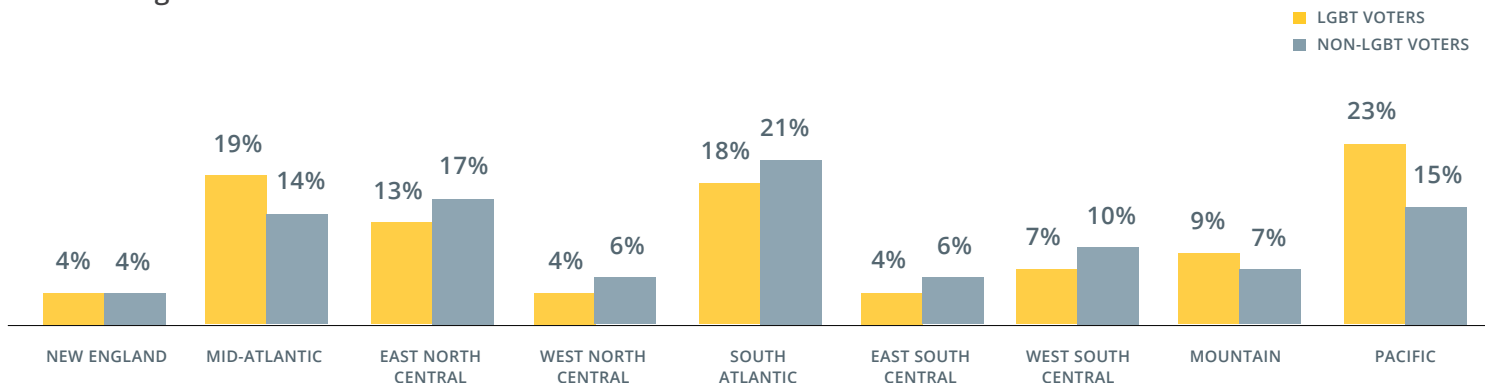
## RESIDENCE

LGBT voters are more likely than non-LGBT voters to live in urban environments. Forty-six percent of LGBT voters live in urban environments compared to 25% of non-LGBT voters. Non-LGBT voters are more likely to live in rural environments than LGBT voters (25% compared to 14%). Half of non-LGBT voters and 41% of LGBT voters live in suburban environments.

## REGION

LGBT and non-LGBT voters are distributed similarly throughout the country. Large percentages of LGBT voters live in the Pacific (23%), Mid-Atlantic (19%), and South Atlantic (18%) regions, as defined by the US Census.<sup>3</sup>

Region of LGBT and non-LGBT voters



<sup>3</sup>U.S. Census Bureau, Census Regions and Divisions of the United States, [https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us\\_regdiv.pdf](https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf) (last visited Oct. 4, 2019).



## CONCLUSION

LGBT voters are racially and ethnically diverse, many are young, and nearly half of them live in urban areas. Most LGBT voters are registered as Democrats.

Political experience and age matter to both LGBT and non-LGBT voters. LGBT voters were significantly more likely than non-LGBT voters to say they would support a career politician. LGBT and non-LGBT voters were about equally likely to say that they would support an outsider who could bring a fresh perspective to Washington.

In general, the majority of both LGBT and non-LGBT voters said that the race or sexual orientation of a candidate would not influence their vote. Among those voters who said these characteristics would matter, however, LGBT voters were significantly more likely than non-LGBT voters to say they would support candidates who are black, Latino/a, or LGBT themselves. By contrast, non-LGBT voters reported lower levels of support for minority candidates.

## METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from 2,237 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii late May and early June 2019 by Ipsos in collaboration with Thomson Reuters and the Williams Institute. Surveys were completed on-line and in English. The sample includes 1,972 registered voters, 815 Democratic registered voters, 659 Republican registered voters, and 400 Independent registered voters. There were 136 LGBT registered voters and 1,836 non-LGBT registered voters who completed the survey.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel, partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing the sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2016 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were created based upon gender, age, region, race/ethnicity and income. For more information, see [Ipsos Poll Conducted for Reuters](#). Descriptive analyses reported in this brief were conducted by the Williams Institute using SASv9.4 survey procedures and sampling weights provided by Ipsos.

Survey respondents were able to select one of five options in response to the questions about what characteristics they would prefer in a presidential candidate: much more likely [to support], somewhat more likely [to support], somewhat less likely [to support], much less likely [to support], and would not matter. For purposes of this report, responses in the categories "much more likely" and "somewhat more likely" were collapsed into the category "more likely" and "somewhat less likely" and "much less likely" were collapsed into the category "less likely." Breakdowns in responses by each of the five categories are available in Tables 1 and 2.

## APPENDIX

Table 1. Voter Preferences, by LGBT Identity: Williams Institute and Reuters/Ipsos Stonewall Anniversary Poll, 2019

	LGBT		NON-LGBT		P-VALUE
	%	CI*	%	CI	
Regardless of the specific candidates who may run for president, how would you feel generally about candidates with some different traits? Would you be more or less likely to support a candidate for president who is...	n=136		n=1,972		
<b>A career politician who knows his/her way around the political process</b>					
Much more likely	21.3	12.9, 29.8	12.9	10.6, 15.2	0.006
Somewhat more likely	29.8	20.9, 38.7	26.7	24.2, 29.2	
Somewhat less likely	14.3	7.7, 21.0	17.1	14.9, 19.4	
Much less likely	11.9	2.8, 21.1	14.4	12.5, 16.4	
Would not matter	22.6	14.5, 30.7	28.8	25.9, 31.8	
<b>An outsider who could bring a fresh perspective to Washington</b>					
Much more likely	22.3	14.4, 30.2	17.0	14.6, 19.4	<.001
Somewhat more likely	29.9	20.7, 39.1	38.2	35.2, 41.1	
Somewhat less likely	10.9	4.4, 17.4	11.3	9.3, 13.2	
Much less likely	5.8	1.8, 9.8	5.3	4.2, 6.4	
Would not matter	31.1	20.9, 41.4	28.2	25.4, 31.1	
<b>Over age 70</b>					
Much more likely	4.7	0.9, 8.5	2.3	1.4, 3.2	0.031
Somewhat more likely	15.0	7.7, 22.3	7.5	5.6, 9.5	
Somewhat less likely	23.4	14.7, 32.1	29.0	26.3, 31.8	
Much less likely	24.0	16.1, 31.8	19.3	16.9, 21.8	
Would not matter	32.9	22.6, 43.3	41.7	38.7, 44.8	
<b>Under age 40</b>					
Much more likely	11.9	4.9, 18.8	6.2	4.6, 7.8	0.452
Somewhat more likely	21.9	14.1, 29.6	16.2	13.8, 18.6	
Somewhat less likely	19.3	9.7, 28.8	17.8	15.7, 19.9	
Much less likely	3.3	0.4, 6.2	9.5	7.8, 11.2	
Would not matter	43.7	33.6, 53.8	50.4	47.3, 53.5	

**Table 1. Voter Preferences, by LGBT Identity: Williams Institute and Reuters/Ipsos Stonewall Anniversary Poll, 2019 (continued)**

	LGBT		NON-LGBT		P-VALUE
	%	CI*	%	CI	
<b>African American</b>					
Much more likely	14.2	7.4, 21.0	7.1	5.8, 8.4	0.039
Somewhat more likely	19.6	11.9, 27.2	13.5	11.1, 16.0	
Somewhat less likely	5.1	1.4, 8.8	7.3	5.8, 8.8	
Much less likely	0.8	0.0, 1.9	6.4	4.3, 8.5	
Would not matter	60.4	50.6, 70.1	65.8	62.7, 68.9	
<b>Hispanic</b>					
Much more likely	17.1	9.3, 24.8	4.2	3.1, 5.3	<.001
Somewhat more likely	17.6	10.4, 24.7	11.8	9.7, 13.8	
Somewhat less likely	2.8	0.0, 5.9	9.3	7.7, 10.8	
Much less likely	4.7	0.8, 8.6	9.2	6.9, 11.6	
Would not matter	57.8	47.9, 67.8	65.5	62.5, 68.5	
<b>Gay</b>					
Much more likely	18.4	10.6, 26.2	2.4	1.7, 3.2	<.001
Somewhat more likely	22.4	14.6, 30.2	7.4	5.8, 9.1	
Somewhat less likely	3.2	0.1, 6.2	14.5	12.5, 16.6	
Much less likely	3.3	0.3, 6.3	21.1	18.4, 23.9	
Would not matter	52.7	42.5, 62.9	54.5	51.4, 57.5	
<b>Lesbian</b>					
Much more likely	20.1	12.0, 28.1	2.5	1.7, 3.3	<.001
Somewhat more likely	14.4	7.9, 20.8	8.5	6.8, 10.2	
Somewhat less likely	7.6	3.0, 12.3	14.0	11.7, 16.2	
Much less likely	2.9	0.0, 5.8	21.5	18.8, 24.2	
Would not matter	55.0	44.9, 65.1	53.5	50.4, 56.6	
<b>Transgender</b>					
Much more likely	11.9	5.4, 18.4	2.6	1.8, 3.5	<.001
Somewhat more likely	15.7	8.7, 22.8	6.8	5.2, 8.4	
Somewhat less likely	7.6	3.1, 12.0	18.0	15.6, 20.4	
Much less likely	6.0	2.1, 9.9	28.7	25.8, 31.6	
Would not matter	58.8	48.9, 68.6	43.9	40.9, 46.9	
<b>Gender non-binary</b>					
Much more likely	13.4	6.7, 20.2	2.5	1.6, 3.4	<.001
Somewhat more likely	14.6	8.0, 21.2	6.4	4.9, 7.9	
Somewhat less likely	7.5	2.9, 12.2	16.7	14.7, 18.8	
Much less likely	6.8	2.4, 11.3	27.2	24.2, 30.3	
Would not matter	57.6	47.7, 67.5	47.1	44.1, 50.2	

\* Confidence interval

**Table 2. Voter Characteristics, by LGBT Identity: Williams Institute and Reuters/Ipsos Stonewall Anniversary Poll, 2019**

	LGBT		NON-LGBT		P-VALUE
	%	CI*	%	CI	
	n=136		n=1,972		
<b>Party Affiliation</b>					
Democratic Party	50.3	40.0, 60.7	38.1	35.2, 41.0	0.004
Republican Party	14.9	8.1, 21.7	35.2	32.2, 38.2	
Independent Party	22.1	14.0, 30.3	21.5	18.9, 24.1	
Other/Don't know/Refused	12.6	2.8, 22.4	5.2	3.8, 6.6	
<b>Race and Ethnicity</b>					
Latino/a	21.8	10.9, 32.6	14.2	11.6, 16.8	<.001
Black, non-Hispanic	12.9	6.9, 18.8	11.4	9.6, 13.1	
White, non-Hispanic	61.2	50.5, 71.8	67.2	64.1, 70.3	
Other Race or Multiracial	4.2	1.2, 7.2	7.3	5.3, 9.2	
<b>Age</b>					
18-34	47.1	36.7, 57.5	23.7	20.7, 26.7	<.001
35-54	32.9	23.5, 42.3	37.0	34.1, 40.0	
55+	20.0	13.1, 26.9	39.3	36.4, 42.1	
<b>Sex</b>					
Male	57.2	47.0, 67.4	49.2	46.1, 52.3	0.50
Female	42.8	32.6, 53.0	50.8	47.7, 53.9	
<b>Educational Attainment</b>					
Less than high school	4.5	0.0, 13.1	7.6	4.3, 11.0	<.001
High school or some college	61.1	51.1, 71.0	63.2	60.1, 66.4	
College degree	17.7	11.8, 23.5	16.8	15.2, 18.4	
Post graduate degree	16.7	10.3, 23.2	12.3	10.7, 14.0	
<b>Residence</b>					
Urban	45.7	35.4, 56.1	25.2	22.3, 28.2	0.002
Suburban	40.6	30.6, 50.6	49.5	46.4, 52.6	
Rural	13.7	7.3, 20.1	25.3	22.6, 27.9	
<b>Region</b>					
New England	4.0	0.9, 7.1	4.2	3.1, 5.3	0.333
Mid-Atlantic	18.6	9.3, 28.0	14.1	11.8, 16.3	
East North Central	12.8	6.8, 18.7	16.5	14.1, 18.8	
West North Central	4.3	0.5, 8.1	5.9	4.7, 7.0	
South Atlantic	18.0	10.4, 25.6	20.9	18.6, 23.1	
East South Central	3.8	0.0, 7.5	5.7	4.4, 7.0	
West South Central	6.5	2.4, 10.7	10.4	8.4, 12.4	
Mountain	9.3	3.6, 15.0	7.2	5.5, 8.9	
Pacific	22.7	13.6, 31.7	15.2	12.8, 17.6	

\* Confidence interval

## AUTHORS

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The Director of State Policy & Education Initiatives, Christy oversees state law and policy work at the Williams Institute, focusing on a variety of topics, including sexual orientation and gender identity non-discrimination protections, bans on the use of gay and trans panic defenses, and laws prohibiting conversion therapy on youth.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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### ABOUT THE WILLIAMS INSTITUTE

The Williams Institute is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy. A think tank at UCLA Law, the Williams Institute produces high-quality research with real-world relevance and disseminates it to judges, legislators, policymakers, media and the public. These studies can be accessed at the Williams Institute website.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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