



# Americans Support Repeal of “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell”

## CAP Poll Shows Stable Majority Support for Ending Ban on Openly Gay Men and Lesbians Serving in the Military

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A new poll from the Center for American Progress shows that a majority of American voters support the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” the U.S. military’s policy that bans openly gay men and lesbians from serving in the armed forces. The poll is the most extensive of a number of recent surveys tracking public opinions on this issue and undeniably shows that the American public has become increasingly supportive of open service. Voters recognize as our country fights two different wars that it is critical for the military to make recruiting decisions based on a soldier’s skills—not his or her sexual orientation. This finding is echoed by other polls on the issue conducted over the past year.

### Key findings

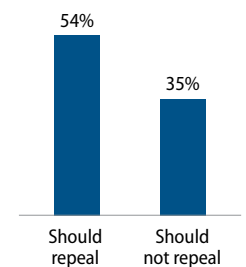
CAP’s poll, fielded by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research, finds that a solid majority of likely voters support allowing openly gay men and lesbians to serve in the U.S. military: 54 percent of those surveyed support repealing the current ban on open service, with just 35 percent opposed to repeal. These numbers demonstrate a massive change in public opinion on this issue since 1994, when polls showed that majorities of Americans opposed gay men and lesbians serving in the military.

The poll also shows that:

- **Voters value skills over sexual orientation:** Sixty percent believe that with the United States in the middle of two wars, the military needs every talented woman and man it can get regardless of a person’s sexual orientation. Similar numbers say that they do not think gays and lesbians will harm unit cohesion or morale.

### Stable majority for change

Federal law currently prohibits openly gay men and women from serving in the military. Do you think this law should be repealed or not?



Source: Center for American Progress poll fielded by Greenberg, Quinlan, Rosner Research.

- **DADT repeal is not a politically polarizing issue:** Among likely voters, 68 percent of Democrats, 55 percent of independents, and 41 percent of Republicans support repeal. What's more, 56 percent of voters in House of Representatives battleground districts and 56 percent in Senate battleground states support repeal.
- **Voters do not want to defer to the military on DADT:** A clear majority—63 percent—would not change their opinion on DADT repeal even if the U.S. military was opposed to open service by gays and lesbians.
- **Voters are becoming more accepting of gays and lesbians overall:** Nearly 30 percent said that they have become more accepting of gays and lesbians in the past 5 to 10 years. Only 11 percent became less accepting.

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## CAP poll echoes recent studies and shows stable majority support

A Quinnipiac University Poll released earlier this month found that 57 percent of voters support repeal, while 36 percent oppose. These numbers are statistically identical to a Democracy Corps poll from November 2009 and Quinnipiac's April 2009 poll. These polls, taken with CAP's new poll, show that there is clearly a stable majority of Americans who support repealing DADT. And other polls, as discussed in the next section, show even greater levels of support for allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the U.S. military.

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## How you ask the question matters

CAP's poll intentionally phrased its question using the most conservative language possible in order to avoid any suggestion of bias. It specifically points out that the current law bans service by openly gay men and lesbians, and asks voters if they think this law should be repealed. The Quinnipiac poll also used this conservative language and generated statistically identical results to the CAP poll.

Other surveys asking a more general question without referencing the current law banning service—for example, "Should gays and lesbians be allowed to serve in the military?"—received an even higher percentage of support for gay and lesbian service:

- A February 2010 *Washington Post*-ABC News poll found that 75 percent of Americans "think homosexuals who do publicly disclose their sexual orientation should be allowed to serve in the military." This number was just 44 percent in May 1993.
- A Gallup poll in May 2009 found that 69 percent of American adults "favor allowing openly gay men and lesbian women to serve in the military."

Questions using “gay and lesbian” also sometimes generate different responses than those using “homosexual.” Whether survey questions reference “open” service is also a factor in how people respond:

- A February 2010 CBS News/*New York Times* poll found that 59 percent of Americans favor “homosexuals” serving in the military (up from 42 percent in February 1993), but 70 percent favor “gay men and lesbians” serving in the military.
- The same poll found that 44 percent of Americans favor allowing “homosexuals to serve openly” and that 58 percent favor allowing “gay men and lesbians to serve openly.”

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## The military is moving toward support of open service

*The Military Times* annually polls its readers on their feelings toward gay men and lesbians serving in the military and released its latest survey findings this month. Thirty percent of respondents currently on active duty support open service by gays and lesbians, while 51 percent oppose, compared to in 2003 when 24 percent supported open service and 63 percent opposed. What’s more, nearly 60 percent of active duty respondents said that they think gay men and lesbians are already serving in their units.

Some experts have expressed methodological concerns about *The Military Times* poll, suggesting it could underrepresent the number of servicemembers who support open service. Based on these concerns, it is likely that at most 51 percent of active duty servicemembers oppose open service by gays and lesbians and at the very least 30 percent are supportive.

A 2009 Defense Department survey of 1,100 active duty battalion troops provides additional insight into how the military feels about open service. This survey found that two-thirds of troops do not think that knowing there are openly gay and lesbian soldiers in their unit would negatively affect their ability to carry out a mission. A similar number of troops did not think that openly gay or lesbian servicemembers would harm their unit’s ability to effectively work together as a team.

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## Conclusion

It is clear that, regardless of the exact phrasing of the question, Americans solidly support repealing the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” ban on military service by openly gay men and lesbians. Opinions have changed dramatically in favor of open service since 1994 when the ban was first put into place, even within the military itself.

Nearly 14,000 otherwise qualified men and women have been discharged from the military under DADT, and many thousands more have chosen to not re-enlist because of the policy. Enforcing and implementing the policy has cost U.S. taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. The American public rightly believes that now—with the country engaged in two wars—is the time to repeal DADT and make military service contingent on skills and abilities, and not factors immaterial to the job at hand.