

Religion and LGBTQ Politics in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract. American attitudes toward LGBTQ persons and rights are increasingly favorable, but over the last four decades the status of LGBTQ persons has represented a profound cultural cleavage—a cleavage between progressives and traditionalists. This cleavage has been driven by limited social contact between cultural combatants, ideas about the attribution of homosexuality, and the work of elite opinion leaders. Underlying all of this, however, is religion. The lion's share of the scholarly literature finds that religion is a reliable predictor of LGBTQ tolerance and support for LGBTQ rights, and it is impossible to fully understand attitudes on LGBTQ issues without careful consideration of religion and religious mobilization. This paper discusses the development of the Christian Right, explores the empirical literature on religion and support for LGBTQ rights, and links religion with the literature on social contact, attribution and opinion leadership.

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Introduction

American attitudes toward LGBTQ persons and rights are increasingly favorable, but over the last four decades the status of LGBTQ persons has represented a profound cultural cleavage—a cleavage between progressives and traditionalists. This cleavage has been driven by limited social contact between cultural combatants, ideas about the attribution of homosexuality, and the work of elite opinion leaders. Underlying all of this, however, is religion. Herman (1997, 3) observes that much of the early opposition to homosexuality was rooted in the belief that homosexuality is a sin. From this perspective, “[l]esbian and gay rights were akin to ‘adulterer’s rights’ or ‘murderer’s rights.’” This theory is supported by empirical research. The lion’s share of the scholarly literature finds that religion is a reliable predictor of LGBTQ tolerance and support for LGBTQ rights. Indeed, it is impossible to fully understand attitudes on LGBTQ issues—and the LGBTQ movement in general—without careful consideration of religion and religious mobilization. This paper discusses the development of the Christian Right, explores the empirical literature on religion and support for LGBTQ rights, and links religion with the literature on social contact, attribution and opinion leadership.

The Christian Right and American Politics

When LGBTQ activists started to organize and make demands on the political system, they did not enter an empty field of play. The Christian Right—an array of organizations 1) comprised of Evangelical Christians and conservative Catholics 2) dedicated to preserving traditional morality—was part of a larger cultural of religious traditionalism animated by the belief that social relationships and governmental policy should be defined by Christian orthodoxy. It is a social movement in its own right (Wilcox 2000), and from the 1970s onward the Christian Right was the LGBTQ movement’s main rival. More than a rival, however, the Christian Right represented a different American cultural tradition, and much like the LGBTQ movement it entered the political arena to fight for its way of life.

If the Christian Right had not existed, the LGBTQ movement would have had to invent it. As competitive movements, the Christian Right and the LGBTQ movement characterized each other as a threat to their way of life, and they pushed each other to build resources, explore opportunities, and refine their messages (Bull & Gallagher 1996). As LGBTQ activists worked to legitimize their values and their way of life, Christian Right activists were engaged in similar efforts, especially on

issues related to homosexuality and reproductive policy (Liebman 1983, Moen 1989, Moen 1992). The LGBTQ movement was (and is) part of a larger progressive culture that values “individual autonomy, directed toward making private moral decisions pertaining to families, marriage, and sexuality” (Oldmixon 2005, 51). Pat Buchanan railed against this cultural tradition in his 1992 address to the Republican National Convention: “Friends, this election is about ...who we are. It is about what we believe and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America.” Buchanan then framed the 1992 election “as a choice between President George H.W. Bush, a ‘champion of Judeo-Christian values,’ and Governor Bill Clinton,” a champion of feminism, the anti-religious, and homosexuals (Oldmixon 2005, 83).

Why does the Christian Right oppose LGBTQ rights? Opposition is rooted in Sacred Scripture, which many interpret as a condemnation of homosexuality as a grave sin and a perversion. Ironically, this approach is rooted in part in the efforts of liberal, Mainline Protestant clergy to apply therapeutic techniques learned from psychiatry to the field of pastoral counseling. The effect was to problematize homosexuality in a new way (White 2015). What makes the sin of homosexuality especially problematic is that it has larger cultural repercussions and undermines traditional social norms in a way that other sins do not. The sin of adultery, for example, undermines the health of a particular marriage. That is serious, but it does not fundamentally change what marriage means or the importance of the marital commitment between husband and wife. Same-sex marriage, by contrast, changes the meaning and purpose of the institution of marriage more generally (Button, Rienzo & Wald 1997). It “challenges the preferred social relationships and the status of longstanding values of dominant culture” (Oldmixon 2005, 102). As a threat to established social relationships and norms, homosexuality threatened the very life of the nation. In the era post-war era of McCarthyism, it was considered a grave threat from within meant to undermine national security (White 2015).

Premillennarianism Christian theology also shapes the Christian Right perspective on homosexuality. This is the belief that Christ will return to earth and bring about a millennium of peace and prosperity, but only after the apocalyptic events described in the Book of Revelations. These include war, the rise of the Antichrist, and the rapture of true believers to heaven (Herman 1997). This understanding of the end times “informs many of the political positions adopted by the Christian Right in the United States” (Herman 2000, 142). From the premillennarian perspective,

societal affirmations of homosexuality evidence widespread cultural decay and rampant sinfulness. In other words, it evidences the tribulation, and it is a sign that the end of times is imminent. Thus, the LGBTQ rights movement is not simply a social movement, but also it is part of a larger conspiracy backed by Satan that has insinuated itself into the halls of social, economic, and political power (Herman 2000).

Even so, Evangelical Protestantism has been a long-standing, and sometimes progressive, force in American politics. Evangelicals were deeply involved in 19th and 20th century reform movements, including the abolition movement, the establishment of settlement houses, the temperance movement, corporate reform efforts, currency reform, and the womens' suffrage movement. "These reforms ...were advanced as a means to defend the economic interests and social values of traditional Protestantism" (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014, 208). In the early 20th century, however, the hold of traditional Protestantism on American social and cultural life became strained. High levels of immigration by non-Protestants with relatively high fertility rates created a demographic challenge to traditional Protestantism, and the rise of organized labor and international communism suggested a new set of values was coming to the fore. But more than that, there were challenges from within. Many Protestants accommodated themselves to modernism, embracing scientific advancements such as the theory of evolution, and some Protestant theologians started to employ more critical approaches to biblical interpretation (Fetner 2008). These developments led to a divide between modernist friendly Mainline Protestantism and traditional Evangelical Protestantism. The former dominated northern Protestantism, while the latter maintained a strong southern base.

Evangelicals entered the political realm in the wake of these developments to defend the social and cultural status of their values and way of life, and they were especially active in the temperance and anti-evolution movements (Gusfield 1963, Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014). These were efforts to "awaken rank-and-file Christians against the threat of 'modernism' and to gain control of various Protestant churches" (Bailey 1950, 473). In both areas, Evangelicals had mixed success. Their support for the Temperance movement culminated in ratification of the the 18th Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibited "the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all the territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof." The difficulty with moral reform, however, is that reformers sometimes try to proscribe something that is, well, fun. If the regulated behavior "were

the equivalent of poking one's eye, laws against it would be unnecessary" (Meier 1999, 682). "Sin" is hard to regulate because people enjoy it and will go to great lengths—including law breaking—to participate in it. The upshot of this is that Prohibition failed. It was repealed with ratification of the 21st Amendment in 1933.

As with Prohibition, Evangelical reformers met with mixed success in their efforts to protect the creation story from the Book of Genesis with replacement by the theory of evolution in schools. Groups were founded to fight this battle on a state by state basis. Wilcox (2000, 31) notes that "thirty-seven anti-evolution bills were introduced in twenty state legislatures, but most failed to pass." Tennessee was one state where the movement was successful, at least initially. Tennessee's anti-evolution bill was similar to other legislation passed in the South in the 1920s, but it led to a court case that garnered national attention (Bailey 1950). When Tennessee teacher John Scopes was accused of violating the anti-evolution statute, Democratic politician William Jennings Bryan argued for the prosecution and famed attorney Clarence Darrow argued for the defense.

Scopes was convicted, but he only received a small fine and the conviction was eventually overturned by the Tennessee Supreme Court. Moreover, Evangelicalism was very publicly mocked throughout the trial. "Baltimore Sun editorial writer H.L. Mencken famously covered the trial and derided opponents of evolution as 'morons' and 'hillbillies.' This characterization stuck for many years, and evangelicals were humiliated" (Oldmixon 2005, 87). Bryan was ridiculed by Darrow for his literalist understanding of the Bible, and he died shortly after the trial. It is worth noting, however, that Bryan was a progressive Evangelical—hardly a rock ribbed conservative; his concern with evolutionary theory was that it would lead to a kind of social Darwinism (Bull & Gallagher 1996).

Once again, Evangelicals lost even when they had ostensibly won. Disillusioned and disappointed, they largely withdrew from political life and secular life more generally after the Scopes trial. This was especially true of Fundamentalists, a subset of Evangelicals for whom doctrinal purity and separation from non-believers is especially important. Some Evangelical leaders gravitated to regressive political movements, such as the Ku Klux Klan; others gravitated towards anti-communist activism (Wilcox 2000, Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014). But in an organized sense, political expressions of Evangelical Christianity diminished precipitously after 1925.

By the early 1970s, however, Evangelical Protestantism re-engaged the political system. Wald (1987), 182 notes that “[o]f all the shifts and surprises in contemporary political life, perhaps none was so wholly unexpected as the political resurgence of Evangelical Protestantism in the 1970s.” The grievance that re-awakened political Evangelical Christianity was what they perceived to be widespread immorality and cultural decline. The Supreme Court’s decision in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) that removed officially sponsored prayer from public schools, the Stonewall Uprising, the emergence of the New Left, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973), efforts to amend the U.S. Constitution to include the Equal Rights Amendment—these developments were proof to many Evangelicals that their culture was under threat. They entered the public realm to defend their way of life (Bull & Gallagher 1996, Page & Clelland 1978).

Grievance, however, is only part of the story. From 1925 to the 1970s, the levels of education and income among Evangelicals in the aggregate improved tremendously. They joined the middle class, and as such had access to an array of resources associated with political participation, such as free time and exposure to social networks and information (Claassen & Povtak 2010, Roof & McKinney 1987, Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014). As the socio-economic status of Evangelicals improved, so too did the number and resources afforded Evangelical churches. Church growth has been especially rapid among so-called megachurches (Fitzgerald 1981). Megachurches are Protestant churches with attendance rates that top 2000 persons per week. Seventy-one percent of megachurches in the United States are Evangelical (Bird & Thumma 2011). More than centers for worship, these churches are a hub of community life, providing day care, job training, elder care, financial assistance, and counseling services. There are more than 1600 megachurches in the United States, and their numbers have nearly doubled each decade since the 1960s (Stetzer 2013). The growth and sophistication of clergy and church networks provided an organizational base on which the political movement of Evangelicals could be built.

When Evangelicals re-emerged as a political force, their party identification changed. Given their working class roots and strong Southern base, most Evangelicals had been loyal Yellow Dog Democrats and members of Roosevelt’s New Deal coalition. Democratic efforts on African American civil rights, however, strained Evangelical loyalties (Benzel 1984), as did the nomination of a Roman Catholic for president in 1960. After the New Deal, the Republican Party settled in as a perpetual minority party comprised largely of Northeastern and Midwestern white Protestants, defined by its foreign policy and economic profile. Republican elites had previously considered

Evangelicals a fringe element, but the party moved to the right on cultural issues, as a way to recruit Evangelicals into their ranks (Bull & Gallagher 1996). They were actively recruited into the Republican fold (Layman 2001, Fetner 2008, Oldfield 1996), and the improved socio-economic status of Evangelicals made for a good fit with Republican economic orthodoxy. Evangelicals strongly supported Democratic, born again presidential candidate Jimmy Carter in the 1976 election, but when a Carter aide held White House meetings with LGBTQ activists to discuss discrimination protections, Evangelicals abandoned Carter and the Democratic Party (Bull & Gallagher 1996).

The open, democratic political system provided a favorable opportunity to mobilize, and Evangelicals founded several key national organizations to coordinate political advocacy. Groups such as Moral Majority, Christian Voice, and Concerned Women for America (CWA) were among the Christian Right's first generation interest groups. The Rev. Jerry Falwell founded Moral Majority in 1979, building on his television ministry, the Old Time Gospel Hour. It coordinated among independent Baptist ministers and "was 'a kind of cultural symbol that [Evangelicals] were gaining a place in the American political scene,'" according to sociologist Nancy Ammerman. "The Rev. Richard Neuhaus, director of the Center for Religion and Society in New York, said the Moral Majority was 'the single most visible institutional expression' of the insurgency of religious conservatives" (Briggs 1989). Christian Voice was founded by the Revs. Robert Grant and Richard Zone founded in 1979 to help pass an anti-gay-rights measure in California. The organization had a broad agenda that included opposition to homosexuality, abortion, teaching evolution, and secular humanism (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2011, Liebman 1983). It gained notoriety because it published scorecards for Members of Congress and non-incumbent congressional candidates. Moral Majority and Christian Voice are defunct. CWA, however, is still politically active. Founded in 1979 by Beverly LaHaye, CWA reaches beyond the Evangelical ranks to include Catholics, in particular. It embraces biblical literalism and political conservatism, and its agenda is focused on moral issues, especially related to preserving traditional gender roles (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014).

The Family Research Council (FRC) and the Christian Coalition were and are among the most important second generation Christian Right groups. Christian Coalition was founded on the ashes of the Rev. Pat Robertson's 1988 presidential election campaign. Robertson founded the Christian Broadcasting Network in 1961 and is host of the weekday program, The 700 Club. This provided a vast communications network on which to launch his campaign. Robertson's bid for the

Republican nomination was unsuccessful, but he won four primary states running on a staunch creationist and anticommunist agenda (Wilcox 1988). The Robertson campaign gave Evangelicals direct experience with electoral politics and campaigning and built up an organizational network. Founded in 1989, Christian Coalition was built on that network. It crafted a broad cultural agenda that included feminism, sexuality, and education, and developed strong ties with non-Evangelical religious conservatives, including Catholics, Jews, and Black Protestants (Wilcox 2000). Under the leadership of Ralph Reed, the organization crafted its message using more inclusive, mainstream language (Moen 1992, Wilcox 2000). The organization maintains a grassroots and Washington, DC, presence, but its prominence diminished following the departure of Reed in 1997, several high profile Robertson gaffes, and the incursion of debt.

Founded in 1981 by Dr. James Dobson, FRC was the political wing of Dobson's larger media group, Focus on the Family. FRC became a separate entity in 1992 and is currently led by Tony Perkins. It lobbies the government promoting culturally conservative policy. In addition to lobbying, FRC utilizes the media, litigation, and electoral politics to promote its agenda. The organization is especially active in opposition to LGBTQ rights. In 2004 Dobson and FRC urged Congress to propose a constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage. While several amendments were introduced in the subsequent legislative session, none received a sufficient number of votes from both chambers to be sent to the states for ratification (Oldmixon 2005). The Southern Poverty Law Center classified FRC as a hate group in 2010, given its inflammatory statements on LGBTQ persons and issues, such as the following statement by Tony Perkins: "While activists like to claim that pedophilia is a completely distinct orientation from homosexuality, evidence shows a disproportionate overlap between the two. ...It is a homosexual problem."¹ Even so, it maintains its presence "drawing upon the resources of a host of conservative Protestant denominations and the extensive network of nondenominational megachurches, local activist groups, alternative schools, Christian colleges parachurch organizations, broadcast ministries, and publishing houses" (Fowler, Hertzke, Olson & den Dulk 2010, 262).

The Christian Right is largely an Evangelical Protestant movement, but it has common cause with the Catholic Church on cultural issues such as LGBTQ rights. The Church's opposition to LGBTQ rights lacks the "fervor" of Evangelical opposition, but it is opposed nonetheless (Green

¹ See the Southern Poverty Law Center's online FRC file for their justification of the classification: <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/groups/family-research-council>.

2000, 122). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that homosexuals should not be subject to “unjust discrimination.”² But, the Church’s central teaching document on sexuality, *Persona Human*, notes that “homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no case be approved of.” While homosexuals “must certainly be treated with understanding,” pastoral efforts cannot “give moral justification” to homosexual acts (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1975). In the political realm, the Church has consistently opposed efforts to expand LGBTQ rights, including the expansion of marriage rights, adoption rights, and employment discrimination protections.

Key Early Engagements between Two Movements

Antigay activism is central to the Christian Right (Herman 1997), but orthodox believers in other traditions, including Catholics, Mormons, Jews, and Muslims, also reject the expansion of LGBTQ rights. Thus, much of the activism in opposition to LGBTQ rights comes from conservative churches (Green 2000, Button, Rienzo & Wald 1997). Green (2000) observes that organized religious opposition to LGBTQ rights comes in a variety of forms. Instrumental opposition entails the use of antigay rhetoric as a way to achieve larger political goals, such as political prestige, power, and organizational growth. Reactive opposition entails a response to a specific proposal to expand LGBTQ rights. If a community were to consider an LGBTQ rights ordinance, for example, the mobilization of religious resources against that particular ordinance would be an example of reactive opposition. Proactive opposition entails the preemption of LGBTQ efforts. This limits the opportunity structure for LGBTQ activists by organizing opposition before it becomes necessary.

Engagement between the Christian Right and LGBTQ activists became increasingly common in the 1970s, as both groups sought affirmation of their way of life. LGBTQ activists demanded legal protections and had some success at the local level. Christian Right activists demanded the preservation of traditional ways. “Six antigay referenda appeared in 1977 and 1978 alone” (Rimmerman 2002, 125). Existing LGBTQ ordinances were repealed, and both sides pushed for state-level affirmation of their preferred policies (Herman 2000).

Two early engagements merit special mention, as they set the tone for years to come—the Save Our Children campaign in Dade County Florida and the Briggs Initiative in California. On January

² See paragraphs 2357–2359 of the Catechism: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catechism/catechism-of-the-catholic-church/epub/index.cfm>.

18, 1977, the Dade County Commission passed an ordinance prohibiting discrimination against homosexuals in housing, employment, and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation by a 5 to 3 vote. Anita Bryant, a former Miss American who served as spokesperson for the Florida Citrus Commission at the time, organized and led an effort to repeal the ordinance. Bryant argued that, “The ordinance condones immorality and discriminates against my children’s rights to grow up in a healthy, decent community” (n.a. 1977). As a celebrity, her work garnered national attention.

According to Bryant, her pastor and members of her church community asked her to use the leverage of her public profile to convince the county commission to repeal the measure. When the commission refused, she founded the organization, Save Our Children, Inc., with the goal of forcing a repeal vote on to the ballot for the voters’ consideration (Fetner 2008). Repeal of the Dade County ordinance became a cause célèbre among Evangelicals. Bryant received support from the National Association of Evangelicals and appeared on Robertson’s The 700 Club and Falwell’s The Old Time Gospel Hour to raise the profile of the movement. The local Catholic archdiocese and Miami Beach and B’nai B’rith also lent their voices to the repeal movement (Rimmerman 2002).

Save Our Children successfully gathered the needed signatures to place a repeal referendum on the ballot. The election took place on June 7, 1977, and the repeal referendum passed with nearly 71 percent of the vote. The pro-repeal forces had a stronger organizational ground game than the anti-repeal forces. Moreover, Bryant’s rhetoric raised the cultural stakes of the vote, referring to gay men and lesbians as “human garbage,” suggesting that California’s drought was God’s punishment for gay tolerance, and accusing gay men and lesbians of trying to recruit children (Fetner 2008, Rimmerman 2002, Clendinen & Nagourney 1999). On the heels of this success, Bryant led efforts in other parts of the country to repeal gay and lesbian rights ordinances, and within a year voters in Eugene, Oregon; Saint Paul, Minnesota; and Wichita, Kansas had followed Dade County’s lead.

California State Senator John Briggs (R-Fullerton) was in Dade County on the night of the repeal vote and told a reporter that antigay activism would be key to boosting his long-shot run for governor of California (Clendinen & Nagourney 1999). Shortly thereafter he returned to California and launched a campaign for Proposition 6, also known as the Briggs Initiative. This was a statewide referendum that would have barred gay men and lesbians from teaching California public

schools. Briggs did not have the connections to the Christian Right that Bryant had, but he tried to mobilize voters sympathetic to her movement and even used her contributor list (Rimmerman 2002). Briggs argued that,

What Proposition 6 is really all about is the right of parents to determine who will be teaching their children. We don't allow people who believe in practicing bestiality to teach our children. We don't let prostitutes teach our children. And the reason we don't is because it's illegal to be a prostitute. But it's not illegal to be a homosexual in California. (Schmiechen 1984)

Briggs quickly collected the requisite 500,000 signature to get Proposition 6 on the ballot, but he met with staunch resistance. Organized labor opposed the measure. President Jimmy Carter and California Governor Jerry Brown opposed the measure. Even former Governor Ronald Reagan came out against Proposition 6 after anti-6 activists successfully argued that it would compromise school discipline by giving students a way to blackmail teachers. Reagan noted that an “overwrought youngster” upset about a bad grade might make a false accusation. This would open up California schools to chaos; given that the law already prohibited molestation, Proposition 6 was unnecessary (Faderman 2015, 383). Reagan’s public opposition to Proposition 6 turned the polls around. Poll data from early September 1978 found that 61 percent of voters supported Proposition Six. By the end of the month that number dropped to 45 percent. It was defeated by the voters on November 7, 1978, accruing only 42 percent of the vote. That same night, “Seattle voters defeated an initiative that would have repealed its gay rights law, by a margin of 67 percent to 37 percent” (Rimmerman 2002, 130–131).

Religion and LGBTQ Attitudes

[FIGURE 1 AND TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE.]

As Figure 1 demonstrates, the percentage of Americans who believe that same-sex relations are “morally wrong” has dropped more than 30 points since 1973. Since the 1990s fewer and fewer Americans indicate that homosexuality is “always wrong,” while the proportion of Americans supporting an expansion of civil rights for homosexuals has increased (Loftus 2001). With respect to policy, Americans are increasingly supportive of employment protections, adoption rights, and marriage equality (Brewer 2008, Lewis & Gosset 2008). Table 1 breaks down support for same-

sex marriage by several demographic characteristics, including religion. Religious categories are partly divided by racial or ethnic identities, because within religious traditions, distinct communities often emerge based on shared racial or ethnic experiences (Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014). The data indicate that white Evangelicals and Black Protestants are the least supportive of same-sex marriage, while Jews and the unaffiliated are the most supportive. Considered with more rigor, scholars have found consistently that compared to Jews and persons with no religion affiliation, Catholics and Evangelical Protestants are more likely to believe that same-sex sex is wrong and more likely to support restrictions on the political and social rights of homosexuals. Religious attendance and the belief that the Bible is the literal word of God are also positively related to disapproval of homosexuality and opposition to LGBTQ rights (Loftus 2001, Whitley 2009, Baunach 2012, Finlay & Walther 2003). These findings are consistent with broader theories, which argue that religion's political and cultural significance is a function of religious belonging, belief, and behavior. The ethnoreligious approach emphasizes *belonging*. In belonging to a religious community, individuals interact with a self-selected network of believers and are exposed to shared religious teachings. These experiences shape the political responses of community members to the world around them. Crosscutting these traditional alignments, the religious restructuring approach emphasizes *believing* and *behaving*. Sometimes call the "New Gap," this approach notes the diversity within religious traditions, especially on the basis of traditionalism, which is the extent to which individuals internalize the authority of religion (Smidt, Kellstedt & Guth 2009, Wald & Calhoun-Brown 2014).

Among religious believers, Evangelical Protestants are often considered the least tolerant of homosexuality and LGBTQ rights (Whitley 2009, Sherkat, Powell-Williams, Maddox & de Vries 2011, Rowatt, Tsang, Kelly, LaMartina, McCullers & McKinley 2006, Schwartz & Lindley 2005, Haeberle 1999, McFarland 1989). Contrary to this general pattern, Olson, Cadge & Harrison (2006) find that white Evangelicals are indistinguishable from Mainline Protestants on the issue of same-sex marriage. Using a national survey of 1610 adults, they find that while sex, education, and age affect attitudes toward same-sex marriage in predictable ways, their influence is smaller than the influence of religion. Compared to Mainliners and Evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, and Black Protestants are more supportive of same-sex marriage. They also find that believing and behaving affect attitudes on same-sex marriage. Religious activity and the belief that society is becoming too

secular are negatively related to support for same-sex marriage and positively related to support for a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

There may be something unique to Protestantism that contributes to traditionalism on LGBTQ issues. One possibility is that Protestants are more likely to have internalized what famed German sociologist Max Weber (1992 [1930]) called the Protestant Work Ethic (PWE). Deeply rooted in Calvinist theology of salvation, the PWE refers to the idea that it is possible to discern whether someone is saved based on their level of material success. As a result, Protestants have developed the habits of hard work and frugality necessary to accrue wealth and demonstrate righteousness. The PWE eschews idleness, play, and indulgence. The upshot of this is that sex is understood in utilitarian terms. Its purpose is procreation in marriage, and this is obviously incompatible with same-sex attraction. It is no surprise, then, that the more people adhere to the PWE, the more likely they are to express negative attitudes on homosexuality. This relationship is especially strong among the highly religious (Malcomson, Christopher, Franzen & Keyes 2006).

To the extent that Evangelicals are the least tolerant of homosexuality and LGBTQ political and social rights, what explains this contrast with other religious communities? Some of this has to do with the belief in biblical literalism and attendance. Many religious traditions consider homosexuality and/or homosexual behavior to be a sin (Tygart 2000). Several passages from the Bible, such as these, are interpreted as a condemnation of homosexuality:

- “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Genesis 1:27
- “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; such a thing is an abomination.” Leviticus 18:22
- “If a man lies with a male as with a woman, they have committed an abomination; the two of them shall be put to death; their bloodguilt is upon them.” Leviticus 20:13
- “Their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the males likewise gave up natural relations with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with males and thus received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity.” Romans 1:26-27³

³ See also Genesis 19:1-8, I Corinthians 6:9, Timothy 1:10.

The interpretation of these passages is in dispute, and a proper exegesis is beyond the scope of this volume.⁴ The larger point is to provide some of the biblical evidence used to suggest that homosexuality is sinful. While many theologians have promoted a more critical approach to scriptural interpretation, Evangelicals are more likely to take a literalist approach. And because Evangelicals attend church at higher rates, because they are more religiously committed, they are more likely to internalize these teachings (Wilcox & Jelen 1990, Roof & McKinney 1987, Beatty & Walter 1984). Evangelicals are also much more likely so see larger social consequences for private moral decisions. As Burdette, Ellison & Hill (2005, 182) observe,

[Evangelicals] view the nuclear family as the central institution in society, supporting (a) social and moral stability, including the regulation of sexuality, a key site for the embodiment and reproduction of divinely ordained principles of hierarchy and patriarchy, and (b) procreation and the intergenerational transmission of religious faith, including the moral training of youth, character building, and the like.

From this perspective, tolerance of homosexuality has tremendously negative social consequences. Burdette, Ellison & Hill's (2005) analysis confirms that Evangelicals are less tolerant of homosexuality than Mainline Protestants, Catholics, and those with no affiliation, and they demonstrate that this is driven in part by attendance, concern for social consequences, and, above all, biblical literalism.

Three caveats are in order. First, these patterns are changing rapidly. As larger social norms become more tolerant of homosexuality, support for LGBTQ rights is increasing across religious groups. Over the last 15 years for example, every religious family has grown more accepting of same-sex marriage, including Evangelical Protestants⁵. Second, as mentioned above, differences based on religious believing and behaving crosscut traditional alignments based on religious affiliation. This means that within denominations, tremendous variation exists at the congregational level. In a Mainline Protestant denomination—take the United Methodist Church for example—one congregation might be theologically very conservative, meaning that members take a traditionalistic approach to religious authority and the Bible, while another congregation might approach religious authority and the Bible more critically. Theologically moderate or liberal churches are more likely to adopt modernist views on biblical interpretation, and they would

⁴ Although, see White's (2015) fascinating discussion.

⁵ See: <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/06/08/graphics-slideshow-changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>.

therefore be more likely than their conservative peers to accept homosexuality. Indeed, this issue is driving divisions across the Mainline Protestant landscape.

Whitehead (2013) studies the acceptance of gay men and lesbians at the congregational level. Comparing Evangelical and Mainline congregations, he finds that Mainline Protestant congregations seem more welcoming of gays and lesbians, but there is tremendous variation. Sixty-seven percent of Mainline congregations allow gays and lesbians to be full members. This means, however, that 33 percent of Mainline congregations do *not* allow full membership. Controlling for the effect of denomination, Whitehead finds theologically conservative and moderate congregations are less welcoming of gays and lesbians across the board than liberal congregations. The larger point is that just as there are unwelcoming, theologically conservative Mainline congregations, there are welcoming, theologically moderate Evangelical congregations. Fifteen percent of Evangelical congregations in the Whitehead study accept gays and lesbians as full members, 4 percent allow gays and lesbians to serve in positions of leaders, and 4 percent have issued a formal welcome statement targeting gays and lesbians.

Third, many Evangelicals are tremendously ambivalent on gay and lesbians issues (Bean & Martinez 2014). In recent decades many Americans—including many Evangelicals—have come to view gay and lesbian rights as more an issue of basic fairness than morality. It is not that Evangelicals have changed their mind on the morality question, but some have moved to a position of ambivalence—maintaining that homosexuality is immoral, while supporting some gay and lesbians political rights. This is seen in a changing rhetorical tone where Evangelicals leaders balance prophetic teaching with “loving outreach” (403), and at the congregational level where one “Southern Baptist Church trained its youth group to stand up to anti-gay bullying” (402). Moreover,

many Evangelicals see no conflict between their ‘love’ for individual gays and lesbians, and their political opposition to equal rights for gays and lesbians. Liberal Christians find it double-minded to ‘hate the sin and love the sinner.’ But Evangelicals believe that it is *loving* to confront people with their sin, because people can find God’s grace only if they recognize their sinfulness, repent, and have Christ’s righteousness imputed to them (402-403).

Well-known Evangelical pastor Rick Warren observes that tolerance does not require complete agreement. While he opposes same-sex marriage, he believes in treating people respectfully and is a “co-belligerent” with gay people in fighting HIV/AIDS. Warren notes that “Jesus accepted

everyone no matter who they were. He doesn't approve of everything I do, or you do, or anybody else does either. You can be accepting without being approving" (Zaimov 2012).⁶ Warren's response to HIV/AIDS emphasizes traditional biblical approaches to sexual morality, but is a far cry from Rev. Jerry Falwell's suggestion that "AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals. It is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals" (cited in Petro (2015, 24). About 41 percent of Evangelicals in the Bean & Martinez (2014) study oppose gay rights. However, 24 percent are ambivalent, meaning that they believe homosexuality is wrong but support civil unions. The remainder are progressive, meaning that they *do not* think homosexuality is wrong and they support civil unions.

Social Contact

In 1978 Harvey Milk encouraged lesbians and gay men to come out:

Gay brothers and sisters, you must come out. Come out to your parents. I know that it is hard and will hurt them, but think about how they will hurt you in the voting booth! Come out to your relatives. Come out to your friends, if indeed they are your friends. Come out to your neighbors, to your fellow workers, to the people who work where you eat and shop. Come out only to the people you know, and who know you, not to anyone else. But once and for all, break down the myths. Destroy the lies and distortions. For your sake. For their sake.

Implicit in Milk's plea was the idea that by shedding gay and lesbian invisibility, people would realize that they know and possibly care about gay men and lesbians. With that, homosexuality would cease to be an abstraction; stereotypes would be shattered and tolerance would replace homophobia.

If one did not know a gay man or lesbian personally, it would have been easy to internalize the images of homosexuality presented in the larger culture. In 1967, for example, CBS broadcast a documentary hosted by Mike Wallace called *The Homosexuals* that sought to explain homosexuality to polite society. It includes interviews with gay men and other experts on homosexuality. Wallace observed,

⁶ See Petro (2015) for a longer discussion of Pastor Rick Warren's AIDS activism, as well as the activism of his wife, Kay Warren.

The average homosexual, if there be such, is promiscuous. He is not interested or capable of a lasting relationship like that of a heterosexual marriage. His sex life, his love life, consists of a series of one-chance encounters at the clubs and bars he inhabits. And even on the streets of the city—the pick-up, the one night stand, these are characteristics of the homosexual relationship (quoted in Tropiana 2002, 11).

The Homosexuals presented a picture of gay men as self-loathing degenerates suffering from mental illness. Moreover, the documentary suggested that it could be cured. In a pre-internet environment where information about homosexuality was not widespread, treatments like the CBS documentary set the larger cultural tone.

Twenty-four years before Milk's admonition and thirteen years before the CBS documentary aired, Gordon Allport (1979 [1954], 6) argued that under certain circumstances, negative prejudice—"thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant"—could be ameliorated by contact among people of different races, ethnicities, and religions, because contact undermined stereotypes. Even so, not all contact diminishes prejudice; closeness, duration, and depth are key factors. Prejudice likely withstands casual contact, but may be more vulnerable to closer forms of contact among family, friends, and even acquaintances. The duration of contact matters too. Allport (267) reports findings on the attitudes of U.S. soldiers toward the German people after World War II. Soldiers who had even two hours of casual contact with German civilians reported much more favorable views of Germans than soldiers with no casual contact. Contact should also be meaningful and directed toward doing something in common. One might regularly encounter a someone of a different race at a store or at work, for example, but those interactions are likely too routine, too perfunctory, to cause reflection and attitude change. "The nub of the matter seems to be that contact must reach below the surface" (Allport 1979 [1954], 276). Thus, athletes on an integrated sports team or soldiers in an integrated combat unit who work closely to achieve a common goal are very likely to reassess their biases.

Many social psychologists used Allport's work to understand racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice, and in the last 30 years scholars have used Allport's contact thesis to explore attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, and then attitudes toward policies that expand gay and lesbians rights. Early research suggested that contact with gay men and lesbians is positively related to affect toward gay men and lesbians. In other words, the more contact one has with someone they believe to be homosexual, the more positively they feel about homosexuals. In a study of undergraduates,

Gentry (1987), 204 considers whether “[a]cquaintance with an individual suspected or known to be homosexual may dispel ...opinions that may have contributed to an initial discomfort” with homosexuals, and she finds having a homosexual friend or acquaintance is *negatively* related to discomfort with homosexuals. These findings hold even in rural areas, where homophobia may be more prevalent (Eldridge, Mack & Swank 2005). Thus, people with homosexual friends and acquaintances are less likely to experience discomfort around homosexuals.

Using a national survey, Herek & Glunt (1993) investigated the relationship between interpersonal contact and attitudes toward gay men. They found that more than half of the people in their survey harbored negative attitudes about gay men, while only 29.2 percent agreed that homosexuality is natural. Respondents with a gay friend, however, were much less likely to have negative attitudes about gay men. There are two important things to note about this study. First, the authors also find that educated, female, and liberal respondents were more likely to report having a gay friend. Second, the bar for measuring “contact” was higher in this study than in the Gentry study. Gentry simply asked respondents whether they had friend or acquaintance that they “were fairly sure was homosexual,” while Herek and Glunt asked whether a friend, relative or acquaintance had actually come out to them. This raises an interesting empirical dilemma. Does contact lead to positive feelings? Or, do positive feelings lead to contact? The importance of the other demographic variables in the Herek and Glunt study, coupled with their contact measure make it difficult to disentangle the direction of the causal relationship. We can say that contact and affect are *correlated*, but we cannot necessarily say contact *causes* affect.⁷

Several studies attempt to overcome this problem. Overby & Barth (2002), 441 argue that contact is a function of “(1) a predisposition to tolerance toward and the (2) opportunity to interact with homosexuals.” If the predisposition to tolerance is owed to demographic and political factors such as age, sex, education, and ideology, as Herek and Glunt suggest, then these can be controlled for in a multivariate statistical model. This means that in the analysis, the values associated with age, sex, etc., can be held constant, while the value of contact varies. This allows social scientists to statistically isolate the effect of contact. Overby & Barth (2002) address the second issue—the opportunity to interact with homosexuals—by asking survey respondents how many homosexuals they perceive in their local community. This was used as a measure of contact. These two fixes—controlling for a predisposition to tolerance and community context—do not provide a perfect fix,

⁷ See also Skipworth, Garner & Dettrey (2010) on this point.

but put Overby & Barth on much surer footing. They find that the larger the perceived population of homosexuals, the more warmly people felt about homosexuals. In subsequent analysis, Barth & Overby (2003) find that contact does not influence attitudes toward homosexuals in the South, but the relationship holds in the rest of the country. They attribute this to the South's more traditionalist political culture and prevalence of anti-gay campaign appeals among persons running for office.

From a political perspective, these findings are important because if attitudes toward homosexuality affect support for pro-gay policies, then the increased socio-cultural visibility of homosexuality in the last two decades likely has had a positive impact on support for gay and lesbian rights. Strategically, activists should continue to encourage LGBTQ persons to “come out,” as this changes the opportunity structure. Studies have repeatedly established that contact with homosexuals is positively related to support for expanding LGBTQ rights. Knowing same-sex couples increases support for same-sex marriage and adoption, while knowing a gay or lesbian person increases support for open service in the military and adoption rights (Barth & Parry 2009). Moreover, knowing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person in any capacity—as a friend, family member, or acquaintance—is associated with increased support for employment rights and legal recognition for same-sex relationships and decreases homophobia (Lewis 2011, Finlay & Walther 2003, Lewis & Rogers 1999).

“[T]he effect of interpersonal contact,” however, “could be highly contextual, facing limitations based on the context and prior beliefs or stereotypes of the contact situation” (Skipworth, Garner & Dettrey 2010, 889). Returning to the importance of religion, this means that individuals with religiously rooted predispositions on homosexuality may be less responsive to social contact. And yet, a survey of Houston-area residents finds that 76 percent of Protestants *lacking a close gay or lesbian friend* oppose same-sex marriage. That number drops 26 points for Protestants *with a close gay or lesbian friend*. The social contact finding holds across religious groups, but the effect varies (Bramlett 2012). Latino Catholics, Black Protestants, and the unaffiliated *with a close gay or lesbian friend or family member* are less likely to support a constitutional marriage ban than those *lacking a close gay or lesbian friend or family member*. But among Evangelical and Mainline Protestants, the effect is almost imperceptible.

Attribution

Is homosexuality a choice? Is it something people are born with due to genetic or hormonal traits? The science on this is still unclear, though it seems likely that homosexuality is innate. A reasonable person might argue, however, that the debate over the homosexual origin story is entirely beside the point. Supporters of LGBTQ rights are likely to argue that if homosexuality is chosen, then so too is heterosexuality, and in that case there is no reason for the state to affirm one orientation as preferred over another. Moreover, the finding that sexuality is somehow innate—biological—does not necessarily advance the LGBTQ rights cause, because there tends to be a heteronormative subtext to this line of thought. That is, these arguments tend to portray heterosexuality as the norm, while homosexuality is explained as a biological deviation from that (Hegarty 2002). For their part, opponents of LGBTQ rights are likely to argue that even if homosexuality is innate, that does not mean that it should be affirmed by society. Alcoholism likely has a genetic component, but society still recognizes it as a disease that needs treatment.

For many, however, beliefs about whether homosexuality is innate or a choice affect their attitudes on LGBTQ rights, tolerance, and their general feelings toward LGBTQ persons (Whitley 1984, Worthen 2012, Ernulf, Innala & Whitam 1989, Haslam & Levy 2006, Sakalli 2002, Lewis & Rogers 1999).⁸ Of course, this goes beyond LGBTQ issues (e.g. Iyengar (1990)). In a more general sense, attribution theory suggests that attitudes on a given issue, such as poverty or climate change, are structured by how people understand the root causes of the issue (Heider 1944). If you are a student, think for a minute about your GPA. Are you satisfied with it? If so, congratulations! If not, why is your GPA not to you liking? To what do you attribute your GPA? Is it the result of poor and/or unfair instruction? If so, then there is not much you can do. It is up to your university to consider how it can do better and implement changes. Or, is it because you did not have sufficient opportunity to study and attend class? If so, then it is incumbent upon you to make different choices. Maybe you need to revise your work schedule; maybe you need to change to a more engaging major; maybe you need to seek academic help; or, maybe you need to curtail your social schedule.

The same logic applies on LGBTQ issues. LGBTQ persons suffer social stigma and discrimination. If one believes that homosexuality is simply a lifestyle choice, if it is something controllable, then society is under no obligation to carve out tolerant social space. LGBTQ persons

⁸ Although, see Mucciaroni & Killian (2008). Attribution may structure mass attitudes, but it does not seem salient in the legislative battles over gay rights.

are experiencing a stigma they have chosen. If, however, homosexuality is innate, if it cannot be controlled, then it would be unfair to discriminate against someone for something beyond their control, and society would be obligated to recognize LGBTQ rights. Compared to those who believe that homosexuality is a lifestyle choice, people who believe that homosexuality is innate are less likely to embrace homosexual stereotypes, such as that they are perverted and promiscuous, and more likely to support gay rights (Wood & Bartkowski 2004). In a national study of attribution theory and LGBTQ attitudes, Haider-Markel & Joslyn (2008) find that people who believe that homosexuality is attributable to genetics have a more positive affect to gay men and lesbians, and are more supportive of same-sex marriage and partner rights (see also Haider-Markel & Joslyn (2005), Tygart (2000), and Herek & Capitanio (1995)).

Attribution theory provides a powerful lens through which to consider opinion on LGBTQ issues. Indeed, some of the research that explores social contact takes attribution into account and provides support for this line of research (Barth & Overby 2003, Overby & Barth 2002). But as with social contact theory, sometimes it can be difficult to disentangle causality. Model A in Figure 3.1 displays the logic of attribution theory: demographic characteristics and core values influence opinions on attribution, and this in turn influences attitudes on LGBTQ rights. Wood & Bartkowski (2004), 63 articulate this causal process: “our study assumes that the causal direction flows from sociodemographic factors to attribution style to both gay stereotyping and homophobia, and finally to support for gay rights.” Haider-Markel & Joslyn’s (2008) work demonstrates both stages in the causal chain: education, age, being a woman, and having a gay friend contribute the likelihood that one believes in genetic attribution, and belief in genetic attribution enhances support for LGBTQ rights.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE.]

However, the causal model could just as easily look like Models B or C. If attribution theory holds, then Model B seems apt: demographics and values shape 1) opinions on attribution *and* 2) attitudes on LGBTQ rights, while opinions on attribution also affect attitudes on LGBTQ rights. As Lewis (2009), 670 observes, “anything that causes Americans to believe that some people are born homosexual should also increase their sympathy for LGBs and support for LGB rights.” Model C provides an alternative theory. Perhaps attitudes on LGBTQ rights drives attribution—not the other way around. This would be an example of motivated reasoning. Among American college students, for example, Hegarty (2002, 162-3) finds that the connection between believing

homosexuality is immutable—unchanged and unchangeable—and tolerance is contingent on believing that immutability is a pro-gay and lesbian position. Thus, “people may be constructing their beliefs about brain nuclei, genes and hormones to fit their sexual politics rather than the reverse.”

What are the religious implications of attribution? Quite simply, sin is chosen. It requires a kind of theological *mens rea*. “Therefore, as a sin, homosexuality could hardly be genetically based or deterministic. Instead, viewing homosexuality as a sin presumes that it is a controllable choice” (Haider-Markel & Joslyn 2008, 295). As compared to Evangelicals, Catholics and Mainline Protestants are far less likely to think homosexuality is chosen. Across denominations, people who attend services more frequently and who believe in biblical literalism are more likely to think that homosexuality is chosen (Whitehead 2010). This would be an example of how Model C. might work: religious predispositions influence attitudes on homosexuality, and this in turn structures opinions on attribution.

Lewis (2009) works to disentangle these ideas. He argues that if Model B holds, then people exposed to evidence establishing innate attribution are more likely to believe in innate attribution and adopt pro-LGB positions. Who is more likely to be exposed to evidence of innate attribution? By virtue of their exposure to information, younger, more educated persons are likely to have seen media and scientific accounts of attribution. By virtue of their increased likelihood of knowing an LGB person, women, less religious, more educated, and younger persons are more likely to be familiar with personal accounts of attribution. But if beliefs about attribution and LGB rights are driven by religious or political beliefs, then that gives support to Model C. It suggests core values influence LGB beliefs, and beliefs about attribution simply conform accordingly.

With an analysis of national survey data, Lewis establishes and affirms the empirical link between beliefs about attribution and attitudes on LGB rights. However, the aggregate shift in beliefs in favor of innate attribution started to occur well before scientific information became widely publicized, so exposure to scientific findings in the media, for example, do not appear to be driving beliefs about attribution. “Belief that people are born homosexual increased by 11 percentage points between 1977 and early 1991” (683). The evidence strongly supports the idea that core values and personal contact drive beliefs about attribution. “Those who say homosexual conduct is morally wrong or sinful are 22-48 percentage points less likely than those who say it is not to say that homosexuality is something one is born with” (683), while those with LGB contacts

are “8-14 percentage points more likely to think homosexuals are born that way” (686). Women are also more likely believe in innate attribution and support LGB rights, whereas frequent church attenders are less likely to believe in innate attribution. All of this suggests that value judgements drive attitudes on LGB rights, and beliefs about attribution conform to that. This lends credibility to Model C.

Opinion Leadership

Opinions are also subject to influence from trusted persons in a position of authority. This occurs in several ways (Brewer 2008, Popkin 1994). The public at large is not always attentive to politics. They have jobs, mortgages, children, and hobbies, so they cannot or do not want to take the time to learn the ins and outs of policy. As a shortcut, people tend to adopt the opinions of trusted leaders. It saves them the trouble of having to study the issues. This happens as politicians, clergy, or celebrities articulate opinions; these opinions influence activists and socially connected persons, and these persons influence the public at large. This is not to suggest that the public simply accepts the opinions fed to them by elites. Citizens are predisposed by partisanship and ideology to internalize the messages of some elites while disregarding others. Elites also have the capacity to frame issues. This means that they give the public a way to think about an issue. Consider the issue of abortion. Pro-abortion rights advocates call themselves pro-choice and talk about this as an issue of womens’ rights and autonomy. Anti-abortion rights activists call themselves pro-life and talk about it as an issue of morality and the rights of the unborn (Rohlinger 2002). These are strategic choices by elites to frame the issue in a way that shapes opinion to their preferences.

Political and religious elites routinely attempt to shape public opinion on LGBTQ issues. Political elites on the whole are more tolerant of homosexuality than the general public. Among these elites, differences of opinion on the morality and legality of homosexuality are often driven by partisanship, ideology, and religion. Liberals and public officials with no religious affiliation or who identify as Jewish tend to be the most gay and lesbian friendly (Schroedel 1999). On the issue of marriage, Republican and Evangelical elites emphasize the sacredness of the marital union, while Democratic and non-Evangelical elites emphasize the importance of civil rights for LGBTQ persons. Given the elite divergence of messages on marriage equality, the theory of opinion leadership suggests that those who are the most attentive—those who are the most likely to pick up on those messages—are likely to have polarized opinions. This is precisely what Brewer (2008,

74) finds in an analysis of national survey data. “Among the least educated respondents, conservatives were significantly less supportive of same-sex marriage than were liberals.” The ideological polarization is much greater, however, among the most educated respondents. Highly educated conservatives are far less likely to support marriage equality than highly educated liberals. A similar pattern emerges comparing Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. The gap between these two groups is much greater among the highly educated.

Campaign elites routinely gin up the cultural stakes of elections by raising the salience of key issues such as sexuality and framing them to win electoral support (Leege, Wald, Krueger & Mueller 2002). But clergy are in an especially strong position to act as opinion leaders, if they choose. They tend to be highly educated, and their job is to provide moral guidance. Moreover, their guidance is provided to self-selected persons predisposed to view it credibly. Mainline Protestant clergy have been especially enmeshed in debates over homosexuality as their larger denominations have considered whether to ordain gay men and lesbians and whether to bless same-sex unions. Many are trepidatious about raising the issue with congregants for fear of their reaction, but the larger denominational conflicts make it unavoidable (Cadge & Wildeman 2008, Olson & Cadge 2002). The issue is divisive, and the attitudes of rank and file church members do not always align with their clergy. This makes it difficult for clergy to balance their prophetic and pastoral responsibilities.

Majorities of Evangelical Lutheran (ELCA)⁹ and Episcopal clergy believe that homosexuals should have equal rights (Djupe, Olson & Gilbert 2006), while clergy in other denominations—including the Catholic Church and the Southern Baptist Convention are deeply ambivalent (Cadge, Girouard, Olson & Lylerohr 2012). Irrespective of their personal stance on this issue, clergy tend to understand conflicts over homosexuality as rooted in fear (Cadge & Wildeman 2008). People on both sides of this issue are afraid—afraid of sexuality, afraid of misinterpreting scripture, and/or afraid of gay men and lesbians. As a result, many act as facilitators, encouraging study and mutual understanding among congregants, while others adopt an advocacy role. This can be very influential. When church-goers perceive that their minister or pastor supports homosexuality, they are much more likely to support marriage equality (Brewer 2008). Among clergy who support

⁹ The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America is actually a Mainline Protestant denomination, notwithstanding its name.

LGBTQ rights, women are more likely to publicly speak out on the issue (Deckman, Crawford & Olson 2008).

Conclusion

This paper discusses the public opinion on homosexuality and LGBTQ related public policy, with the goal of understanding why some people support LGBTQ rights while others do not. Acceptance of homosexuality and support for LGBTQ rights have both increased over the last several decades, but what explains patterns of support? Knowing an LGBTQ person and believing that sexuality is innate are strongly related to pro-LGBTQ opinions. People on both sides of this issue are also responsive to elite cues. When a trusted figure publicly articulates an opinion, many people will take that to heart. Finally, the chapter gave significant attention to the influence of religion on LGBTQ attitudes. Just as the LGBTQ rights movement was mobilizing and bringing pressure to bear on the policy process, so too were Evangelical Protestants and other religious conservatives. Political competition over LGBTQ rights has been and, to a certain extent, continues to be a competition between two well-established social movements. It is important not to oversimplify the relationship between religion and LGBTQ attitudes, but several clear patterns emerge. Evangelical Protestants are the least supportive of LGBTQ rights. Across denominations, people with higher rates of attendance and people who believe in biblical literalism are also among the least supportive of LGBTQ rights. We are speaking probabilistically, however. Just as there are Mainline Protestants who opposed LGBTQ rights, there are Evangelicals who are strongly affirming. Moreover, supporters of LGBTQ rights and religiously motivated opponents of LGBTQ rights are more likely to have meaningful engagement now than in recent decades. They may have fundamental disagreements, but they are able to come together on common issues, such as fighting HIV/AIDS.

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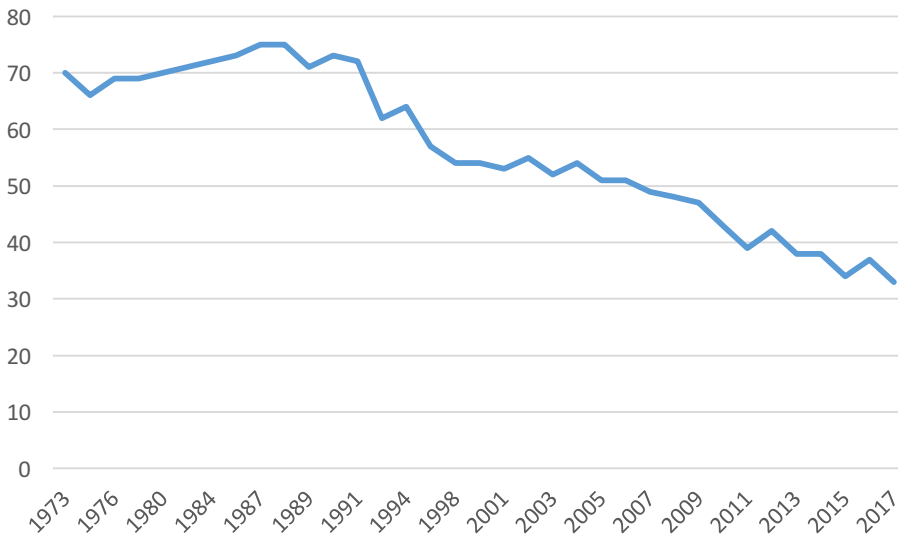
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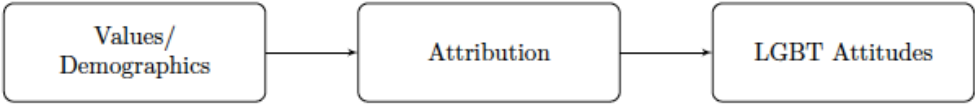
Figure 1. Americans Believing that Gay and Lesbian Relations Are “Morally Wrong”



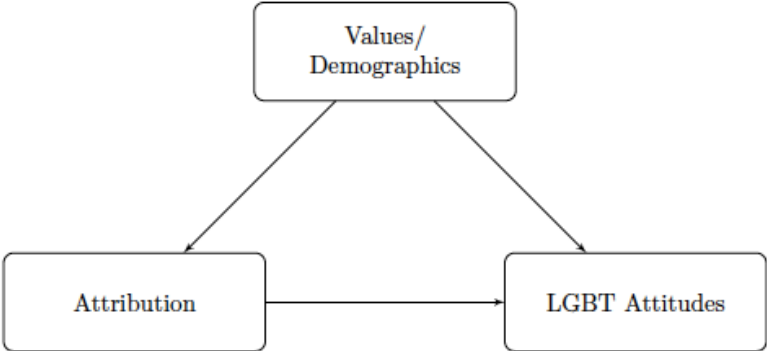
Note: 2001-2017 observations are Gallup data based on the following question: “Next I am going to read you a list of issues. Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong. How about gay and lesbian relations?” Data are available here: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1651/gay-lesbian-rights.aspx>. 1973-2000 observations are NORC data based on the following question: "What about sexual relations between two adults of the same sex—do you think it is always wrong, almost always wrong, wrong only sometimes, or not wrong at all?" Data are available here: http://www.norc.org/PDFs/2011%20GSS%20Reports/GSS_Public%20Attitudes%20Toward%20Homosexuality_Sept2011.pdf.

Figure 2. Models of Attribution

Model A.



Model B.



Model C.

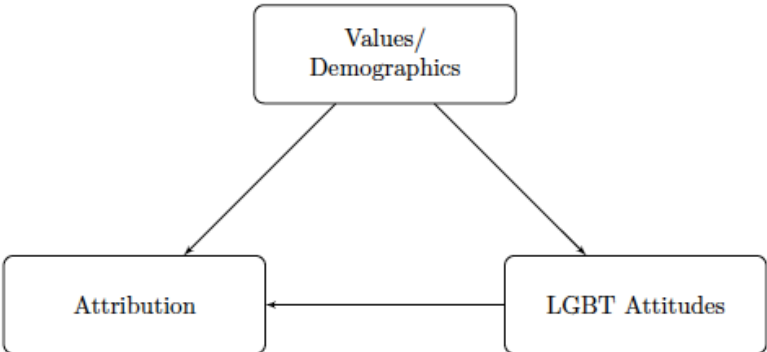


Table 1. Attitudes on Same-Sex Marriage

Trait	Percent favoring same-sex marriage
Overall	57
Sex	
<i>Men</i>	53
<i>Women</i>	60
Race	
<i>White</i>	58
<i>Black</i>	44
<i>Hispanic</i>	54
<i>Asian</i>	57
Religion	
<i>Unaffiliated</i>	73
<i>Jewish</i>	83
<i>White Mainline Protestant</i>	62
<i>Hispanic Protestant</i>	46
<i>Catholic</i>	57
<i>White Catholic</i>	58
<i>Hispanic Catholic</i>	56
<i>Black Protestant</i>	35
<i>White Evangelical Protestants</i>	27
Age Groups	
<i>Millennials (1981 and after)</i>	73
<i>Generation X (1965-1980)</i>	59
<i>Baby Boomers (1946-1964)</i>	45
<i>Silent Generation (1928-1945)</i>	39
Education	
<i>High school or less</i>	46
<i>Some college</i>	52
<i>College graduate</i>	65
<i>Post-Graduate</i>	66

Sources: Public Religion Research Institute, LGBT Issues and Trends Survey, February 2014 (N=4,509); Pew Research Center, Support for Same-Sex Marriage at Record High, but Key Segments Remain Opposed, May 2015 (2,002).