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The Influence of Religious Affiliation on the Political Views of LGBT Americans

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## Abstract

With a nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional sample of over 250,000 Americans from 2016-2019, we investigate the role that religious and LGBT identities play in influencing Americans' political attitudes, centering the narratives of religious LGBT Americans. We find that nearly half of LGBT Americans affiliate religiously. Logistic regressions show that identifying as religious is related to more conservative views on LGBT rights and abortion while identifying as LGBT is related to more liberal views on both of these issues. We failed to observe interaction effects, suggesting that religious affiliation influences LGBT individuals' political views in a manner similar to the way it influences cisgender, heterosexual individuals' views. Comparisons of the variation accounted for by religious or LGBT identities show that religious affiliation more frequently accounted for more variation in political views.

*Keywords:* LGBT, religion, same-gender marriage, LGBT rights, service refusals

### **The Influence of Religious Affiliation on the Political Views of LGBT Americans**

Much more is known about Americans' beliefs about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people than is known about the beliefs of LGBT people themselves (Jones 2021). This disparity is likely because of prejudice among social scientists that considers the experiences of cisgender (i.e., individuals whose gender expression matches expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth) and heterosexual (i.e., individuals who are primarily attracted to other-gender individuals and who engage sexually primarily with other-gender individuals) individuals to be both normative and of heightened importance relative to the experiences of LGBT people, i.e., cisheteronormativity (Cragun and Sumerau 2015).<sup>1</sup>

One outgrowth of this cisheteronormativity is that when researchers study religion, gender, and sexuality, they most commonly focus on the influence of religion on attitudes toward LGBT people, largely finding that religious affiliation is associated with negative attitudes toward LGBT people and LGBT rights (Haider-Markel et al. 2019; Kazyak, Burke, and Stange 2021; Lewis et al. 2017). Only relatively recently have large-scale surveys begun to incorporate adequate questions about sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) that would enable researchers to study religious affiliation *among* LGBT people (Burke 2022; Herman, Flores, and O'Neill 2022), highlighting that the default assumption of researchers has been that survey respondents are heterosexual and cisgender (Scott et al. 2022). In large part because of this focus and these findings, both researchers and policymakers have concluded that religious affiliation dampens support for LGBT rights (Burke 2022).

This conclusion, although it may be based on carefully conducted research, obviates the very people at the center of study: LGBT individuals. By its very framing, it suggests that LGBT

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<sup>1</sup> There are also other explanations for this disparity, including not considering sexual orientation or gender identity because they would comprise a small sample size in, for example, a survey of 1,000 people.

individuals are not religious because affiliating religiously is antithetical to LGBT rights in a culture war. Indeed, the most recent political debates about LGBT individuals are most frequently framed as tension between “religious freedom” and “LGBT rights” (Corvino, Anderson, and Girgis 2017; Guth 2022; Kazyak, Burke, and Stange 2018), decentering the experiences of LGBT individuals who may be religious.

This cisheteronormativity and decentering is particularly problematic because it is clear that religious, sexual, and gender identities are crucial to understanding individuals’ political views (Cravens 2022; Jones 2021; Vegter and Haider-Markel, 2020). Although LGBT Americans tend to be less religious than cisgender/heterosexual Americans (Pew Research Center 2013a; Scott et al. 2022; Woodell and Schwadell 2020), many LGBT people have rich and varied relationships with religious traditions and communities (Lefevor, Davis et al 2021). However, because most research assumes that LGBT individuals are not religious, it is less clear *whether* and *how* religion influences LGBT individuals’ political views (but see Cravens 2018).

The present study addresses this gap left by cisheteronormativity by centering the experiences of LGBT people vis-à-vis religion. We present data from over 10,000 LGBT individuals to investigate a) how religious LGBT Americans differ from their nonreligious LGBT counterparts as well as from their cisgender/heterosexual counterparts and b) whether religious affiliation influences the political views of LGBT individuals similarly to how it influences the views of cisgender/heterosexual individuals. Our hope is that by doing so, we may better understand the varied experiences of LGBT people and highlight a potentially unnoticed political “block” of LGBT people.

### **The Influence of Sexual and Gender Identities on Political Views**

LGBT individuals report much more liberal political views than cisgender/heterosexual individuals (Jones 2021). LGBT individuals report more politically liberal views on political

issues that specifically implicate LGBT individuals, such as same-gender marriage and non-discrimination policies (Cravens 2020; Lewis et al. 2011) but also tend to report more politically liberal views on issues that do not directly implicate LGBT individuals, such as attitudes towards abortion (Grollman 2017) and immigration reform (Swank 2019). Because of their own experiences with marginalization, some LGBT individuals may be more empathic towards the challenges faced by other marginalized groups and may thus be more likely to align themselves with progressive social movements (Grollman 2017; Swank and Fahs 2016). LGBT individuals may also be more aware of how stigmatizing portrayals of immigrants influence conservative political policies regarding immigration because of their own experiences with social stigma.

Environmental factors associated with SOGI may also play a role in LGBT individuals' tendency to report more liberal attitudes towards LGBT rights, abortion, and immigration reform. For instance, LGBT individuals are often younger, highly educated, and from more politically liberal families, which may predispose them to developing more politically liberal views (Egan 2012; Fine 2015). Additionally, LGBT individuals may be more likely to be politically liberal due to their embeddedness in the LGBT community and social contact with individuals who are politically liberal (Lewis et al. 2017; Reilly 2017; Strode and Flores 2021). Demographic factors like age and education as well as social embeddedness in the LGBT community have both shown to be powerful predictors of LGBT individuals' political behaviors – above and beyond LGBT identity itself (Swank 2019).

### **The Influence of Religious Affiliation on Political Views**

Individuals who identify as religious tend to report much more conservative political views than those who do not. There is substantial evidence suggesting that religious affiliation is related to more conservative political beliefs on a variety of issues including LGBT rights (Coley 2017; Perry and Whitehead 2016; van der Toorn et al. 2017), abortion (Barringer, Sumerau and

Gay 2020; Adamczyk, Kim, and Dillon 2020; Adamczyk and Valdimarsdóttir 2018), and immigration reform (Ben-nun Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015; Jones et al. 2014; Sherkat and Lehman, 2018).

Affiliating religiously is associated with more negative attitudes towards LGBT rights such as same-gender marriage or nondiscrimination ordinances (Etengoff and Lefevor 2021). Religious individuals are more likely than nonreligious individuals to hold conservative political ideologies and a worldview organized around moral principles (Etengoff and Lefevor 2021; Schnabel 2021), making it more likely that conservative religious moral principles about gender/sexuality are internalized by adherents. By enshrining conservative moral values in religious rhetoric—for example by teaching that God only recognizes unions between two cisgender, heterosexual individuals of differing genders (Sorrell et al. 2023)—religious individuals' support for social change surrounding issues like same-gender marriage could be seen as challenging 'eternally true' principles (Schnabel et al 2022). For example, many religious traditions teach congregants to interact with LGBT people by “loving the sinner and hating the sin,” implicitly assuming LGBT people are sinners (Lomash, Brown, and Galupo 2019; Stokes and Schewe 2016).

In some ways, the relationship between religion and conservative political attitudes towards LGBT-related policies may be better understood as resulting from a desire to maintain the moral status quo as opposed to an opposition to equality, per se (van der Toorn et al. 2017). The moral link between religious affiliation and conservative political attitudes towards LGBT individuals is further supported by the tendency for people from individualist religious traditions (e.g., Evangelical Protestants) that highly value personal piety and morality to show less support for LGBT-related policies compared to individuals from communal religious traditions (Coley 2017; Perry and Whitehead 2016; Schnabel 2016).

Religion appears to be one of the most influential factors shaping Americans' attitudes towards abortion (Adameczk, Kim, and Dillon 2020; Jelen and Wilcox 2003). Most religious traditions in the United States explicitly disapprove of abortion (Pew Research Center 2013a), and religious individuals are far more likely to view abortion as morally wrong than nonreligious individuals (Pew Research Center 2013b). Religious beliefs about the moral implications of abortion (i.e., abortion as a violation of the sanctity of life) are widely considered to be the mechanism underlying the relationship between religion and political opposition to abortion (Kelley, Evans, and Headey 1993). Additionally, religious values regarding gender roles may also be related to opposition to abortion. Religious individuals may wish to protect the traditional role of women as caregivers and may view abortion as a threat to women's divine purpose.

The relationship between religious affiliation and attitudes towards immigration seems to be the least clear. Some research suggests that religion is associated with anti-immigrant attitudes while other research finds religious beliefs are related to compassion towards immigrants (Ben-nun Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015). There appears to be drastic differences in the relationship between religion and attitudes towards immigration policies based on religious tradition. Broadly, religious individuals from more conservative religious traditions (e.g., Evangelical Christians) tend to be less likely to support liberal immigration policies (Jones et al. 2014), perhaps because of the prevalence of Christian nationalist ideologies among these religious groups (Kang 2017; McDaniel, Nooruddin, and Shortle 2010). Wariness toward immigration from religious individuals may also be related to in-group favoritism, as religious individuals tend to hold more positive attitudes towards immigrants of the same race and religion (Ben-nun Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015).

### **How Sexual, Gender, and Religious Identities Interact to Influence Political Views**



Although LGBT people are less likely to describe themselves as religious than cisgender and heterosexual people, most LGBT people affiliate religiously (Sherkat 2016). Religious LGBT people are consequently influenced both by religious institutions, communities, and leaders as well as by LGBT people, communities, and leaders. Unlike secular LGBT organizations, religious organizations offer distinctive socializing experiences that locate LGBT people within an explicitly religious cosmology.

Religious cosmologies may promote civic duty, political efficacy, and other cognitive and behavioral skills that shape political attitudes (Schwadel et al. 2016; Cravens 2018). Those cosmologies generally value fundamentally conservative ideologies like the preservation of the status quo, the continuation of tradition, and hierarchical authority (Burge 2020). Although, participating in LGBT-affirming religious traditions is associated with liberal attitudes toward LGBT rights, the overall effect of religious affiliation on political attitudes is largely conservative (Cravens 2022). Non-religious LGBT people exhibit higher levels of group consciousness and tend to be more ‘out’ to more people than religiously affiliated LGBT people (Cravens 2018). This finding suggest religious socialization may impart values, beliefs, and behaviors that limit LGBT people from embedding within LGBT communities after coming out or offer competing socializing experiences that influence LGBT political attitudes.

Consequently, it is possible that LGBT and religious identities interact in such a way that results in more moderate views on political issues among religious LGBT individuals (Cravens 2018; 2020). That is, religious LGBT individuals may on average hold more progressive views towards LGBT rights, abortion, and immigration than non-LGBT religious individuals, but more conservative attitudes towards these issues than their non-religious LGBT counterparts. Furthermore, it is also possible that either LGBT identity or religious affiliation bear more influence on attitudes than the other. For example, considering the tendency for LGBT

individuals to prioritize social justice issues in part due to their own experiences with marginalization (Cravens 2020; Lewis et al. 2011), it is possible that LGBT identity bears more influence than religion on these specific political attitudes because of the social justice nature of LGBT rights, abortion, and immigration issues. On the other hand, as seen with religious LGBT individuals who oppose same-gender marriage due to religious beliefs, it is possible that religion may bear more influence than LGBT identity, particularly among LGBT individuals who belong to more conservative religious traditions. It could also be that LGBT identity and religion interact in a way that differentially influences beliefs for different political issues. For example, LGBT religious individuals may only report views more similar to non-religious LGBT individuals towards issues that directly implicate LGBT individuals (Lewis et al., 2011), while reporting views more similar to non-LGBT religious individuals towards abortion and immigration.

### **Current Study**

One of the central goals of this manuscript is to center the narratives and experiences of religious LGBT individuals, examining how they differ from their nonreligious and cisgender/heterosexual peers. By centering their narratives, we examine whether religious LGBT individuals may be a discrete demographic/voting bloc, with views that depart from both religious and cisgender/heterosexual peers. Given these aims, we organize our analyses around two research questions: (a) *how do religious LGBT individuals differ from their nonreligious LGBT counterparts and religious cisgender/heterosexual counterparts?* This research question is demographic/exploratory and as such, we do not make specific hypotheses for this question. (b) *how do religious and sexual/gender identities influence Americans' political views?* We make two directional hypotheses based on our review of the literature (H1; H2). Because there is so

little literature about religious LGBT people, we frame two hypotheses (H3; H4) as null hypotheses as it is not clear what results to expect:

H1: In general, reporting a religious identity will be related to espousing more conservative political affiliations (i.e., Republican Party) and views (e.g., opposing LGBT rights and immigration reform).

H2: In general, reporting an LGBT identity will be related to espousing more liberal political affiliations (i.e., Democratic Party) and views (e.g., favoring LGBT rights and immigration reform).

H3 (null hypothesis): There will be no interaction between religious and sexual/gender identities in influencing political views

H4 (null hypothesis): Religious and sexual/gender identities will exert a similar magnitude of influence on individuals' political views

## **Method**

### **Data**

We rely on pooled analyses of surveys of adults in the United States commissioned by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) between January 2016 and December 2019, which were supported by various foundations. We use PRRI data because it (a) is nationally representative, (b) has one of the largest available samples of LGBT people, and (c) contains measures of religion. These data were gathered by SSRS<sup>2</sup> from January 2016 to December 2019, through interviews in English and Spanish to participants sampled via stratified, single-stage, random-digit-dialing of telephone households and randomly generated cell phone numbers provided by the Marketing Systems Group. Approximately, 1,000 interviews were conducted

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<sup>2</sup> SSRS is a survey research firm that conducts reputable surveys of public opinion and is a member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative. SSRS maintains a standard for providing representative data of adults in the United States.

each week ( $n_{2016} = 101,438; n_{2017} = 71,197; n_{2018} = 54,357; n_{2019} = 53,474$ ).<sup>3</sup> These data were weighted in two stages; in the first, the probability of selection is adjusted for considering household size and phone usage, and in the second, to adjust sample characteristics to population targets. Weighting was performed relying on iterative proportional fitting (IPF), and weights were trimmed at 0.25 and 4.0. Completion rates of the surveys range from 0.55 to 0.62 (COOP3).

### Participants

The pooled sample consisted of 266,046 participants. We report the distribution of participants in Table 1 separately by our four LGBT and religious groups (LGBT Not Religious, LGBT Religious, Cis/Het Not Religious, Cis/Het Religious) as well as in total (see Measures section; see results section for analyses about whether demographics varied according to sexual/gender or religious identity). In general, participants largely identified as White, Non-Hispanic (67.2%), though a substantial minority reported a minoritized racial/ethnic identity (32.8%). Participants largely identified as heterosexual/cisgender (95.6%), though 4.4% of participants identified as LGBT. Most participants were assigned male at birth (51.1%). Most participants reported a religious affiliation (76.8%) though a substantial minority did not (23.2%). Participants identified relatively equally as Republican (25.5%), Democrat (31.1%), or Independent (36.4%). Participants were on average 52.83 years old, had an annual income greater than \$40,000 but less than \$50,000, and reported Some College.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Distribution and Descriptive Statistics of Participants*

	LGBT Not Religious <i>N</i> = 5227	LGBT Religious <i>N</i> = 6577	Cis/Het Not Religious <i>N</i> = 56,508	Cis/Het Religious <i>N</i> = 197,734	Total Sample <i>N</i> = 266,046
	%	%	%	%	%
Race/Ethnicity					
White, Non-Hispanic	62.3%	55.3%	67.8%	69.2%	67.2%

<sup>3</sup> Sample sizes may differ based on certain questions for analysis, which are reported in subsequent tables.

White, Hispanic	8.1%	12.2%	8.7%	11.0%	10.3%
Black, Non-Hispanic	6.4%	8.2%	5.1%	6.1%	6.2%
Black, Hispanic	1.5%	2.5%	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%
Unspecified Hispanic	7.3%	8.1%	5.1%	4.4%	5.0%
Asian/Asian American	3.3%	3.1%	3.4%	1.8%	2.3%
Native American	1.9%	2.3%	1.9%	1.5%	1.7%
Native Hawaiian	0.7%	0.6%	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%
Other Race/Ethnicity	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%	0.2%
Mixed	6.9%	5.9%	4.3%	2.8%	3.3%
Refused	1.4%	1.7%	2.9%	1.7%	2.5%
Sex					
Male	50.0%	51.4%	60.9%	48.7%	51.1%
Female	50.0%	48.6%	39.1%	51.3%	48.9%
Political Affiliation					
Republican	6.3%	14.0%	13.7%	30.6%	25.5%
Democrat	44.2%	42.5%	33.3%	30.2%	31.1%
Independent	44.1%	38.4%	46.2%	33.4%	36.4%
Don't know/Other/Refused	5.4%	5.1%	6.8%	5.8%	7.0%
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Age	36.20 (16.71)	43.82 (19.15)	46.02 (18.53)	55.31 (18.49)	52.83 (19.13)
Education	3.16 (1.19)	3.15 (1.27)	3.20 (1.20)	3.16 (1.20)	3.15 (1.21)
Income	4.77 (2.80)	4.68 (2.91)	5.24 (2.76)	5.06 (2.69)	5.05 (2.73)
LGBT Nondiscrimination	3.56 (0.83)	3.33 (0.95)	3.19 (0.91)	2.92 (0.94)	3.00 (0.95)
Same-Gender Marriage	3.73 (0.62)	3.43 (0.88)	3.26 (0.89)	2.61 (1.05)	2.89 (1.05)
Service Refusals	3.37 (0.89)	3.17 (1.00)	3.04 (0.99)	2.69 (1.05)	2.79 (1.05)
Abortion Access	3.29 (0.87)	2.94 (1.02)	3.08 (0.90)	2.54 (0.99)	2.69 (1.00)
Immigration Reform	2.69 (0.63)	2.61 (0.70)	2.56 (0.74)	2.48 (0.79)	2.50 (0.78)

*Note:* Weighted estimates are reported.

## Measures

### *Demographics*

Participants reported their age, sex, and race/ethnicity using the options in Table 1. For regression analyses in which it is used as a control variable, race/ethnicity was dichotomized as White, Non-Hispanic (1) vs. all others (0). Sex was similarly dichotomous between male (1) and female (2). Participants indicated the highest degree of formal education they had attained and their household income. Education was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from *Less than high school* (1) to *Graduate degree* (5). Income was measured on an 11-point scale ranging from *Less than \$15,000* (1) to *\$250,000 or more* (11).

### ***Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity***

LGBT participants were identified by asking, “Do you personally know someone, such as a close friend, family member, or someone else who is LGBT?” Participants who responded, “yes, me” were coded as LGBT for the present analyses. While the measure is less conventional than other measures of SOGI, the percent indicating they were LGBT (4.4%) is consistent with other prevalence estimates in that same timeframe (e.g., the Gallup organization reported the percent identifying as LGBT ranged from 4.1% to 5.6% between 2016 and 2020).

### ***Religious Identification***

Participants were asked the question, “What is your present religion, if any?”. Participants reporting any religious affiliation were coded as *religious*. Participants who responded “Nothing in particular,” “Atheist,” or “Agnostic” were coded as *not religious*. Participants who reported “Don’t know” or “Refused” were coded as *missing* and not used in further analyses.

### ***Political Views***

Participants reported their political views in five areas: same-sex marriage, nondiscrimination protections for LGBT people, religiously based service refusals to LGBT people, abortion, and immigration. We chose these five areas because (a) they represent a mixture of contemporary political issues that are inherently relevant and not inherently relevant to LGBT people and (b) because they were available in the dataset we used. We note that not all participants were asked all questions about political views, so sample sizes for analyses regarding each view vary somewhat. Following are the questions used to assess these views, with coding values for viewpoints indicated in parentheses. Same-sex marriage: “All in all, do you strongly favor (1), favor (2), oppose (3), or strongly oppose (4) allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally.” Discrimination toward LGBT people: “All in all, do you strongly favor (1),

favor (2), oppose (3), or strongly oppose (4) laws that would protect gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people against discrimination in jobs, public accommodations, and housing?”

Religiously based service refusals to LGBT people: “All in all, do you strongly favor (1), favor (2), oppose (3), or strongly oppose (4) allowing a small business owner in your state to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people, if doing so violates their religious beliefs?”

Abortion: “Do you think abortion should be legal in all cases (1), legal in most cases (2), illegal

in most cases (3), or illegal in all cases (4)?” Immigration: “How should the immigrations system

deal with immigrants who are currently living in the US illegally? The immigration system

should allow them to become citizens provided they meet certain requirements (1), allow them to

become permanent legal residents but not citizens (2), or identity and deport them (3)?”

### **Analysis Plan**

The objective of this paper was to examine how religious affiliation and LGBT identity—writ large—influence attitudes and behavior, centering the experiences of religious LGBT individuals. Because we are unaware of any other studies that center religion and the attitudes and behaviors of LGBT individuals using large-scale samples (though c.f., Jones, 2021 for a discussion of LGBT individuals’ attitudes disconnected from religion), we have simplified analyses to draw attention to these individuals’ views. As a consequence, we do not consider several meaningful intersections such as participants’ specific gender/sexual orientation<sup>4</sup> (e.g., gay men vs. bisexual women) and specific racial/ethnic backgrounds of participants (e.g., Black vs. Asian American).

We conducted our analyses in three steps. First, we examined the frequency of religious identification among participants to understand how commonly LGBT individuals identify as

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<sup>4</sup> A limitation of our current data is that it measures LGBT identification as a single category, making sub-group analyses not possible

religious and how they identify when they identify religiously. Second, we conducted linear and logistic regressions to examine whether identifying as religious and/or LGBT is related to differential patterns in demographic characteristics such as age, race/ethnicity, and education. Finally, we conducted linear regressions to examine whether identifying as religious and/or LGBT is related to various political views. In doing so, we focus on the main effects of identifying as religious and LGBT as well as on the interaction effect between these variables. All significant results were significant at the two-tailed  $p < .05$  level.

## **Results**

### **Rates of Religious Identification among Participants**

We first examined the frequency of religious identification among participants. Similar to other national, representative samples from this time period (2016-2019), we found that the majority of LGBT individuals were religiously identified (55.7%; compared to 76.8% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals; OR = 0.36). Of those LGBT individuals who did not identify religiously, only a small minority identified as atheist (20.3%; compared to 12.8% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals) or agnostic (17.4%; compared to 12.8% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals), with the majority identifying as nothing in particular (60.3%; compared to 72.1% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals; c.f. Pew Research Center 2021).

For reference, we compared PRRI data with data from the Cooperative Election Study (CES) from 2016-2019. This sampling frame included 137,262 individuals who provided information about their gender/sexual identity and religious affiliation. In this sample, the minority of LGBT individuals were religiously identified (46.8%; compared to 68.2% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals). Of those LGBT individuals who did not identify religiously, the majority identified as either atheist (29.8%; compared to 19.2% of heterosexual/cisgender



individuals) or agnostic (24.0%; compared to 19.6% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals), with the minority identifying as nothing in particular (46.2%; compared to 61.2% of heterosexual/cisgender individuals). This second reference point suggests that the sample used for the present analysis (PRRI) may overrepresent religious individuals though it appears to do so relatively consistently across gender/sexual identity. The disparity between samples is a reminder that results from this study should not be overgeneralized as the definitive answer to our research questions but should be seen as an important piece in better understanding these research questions.

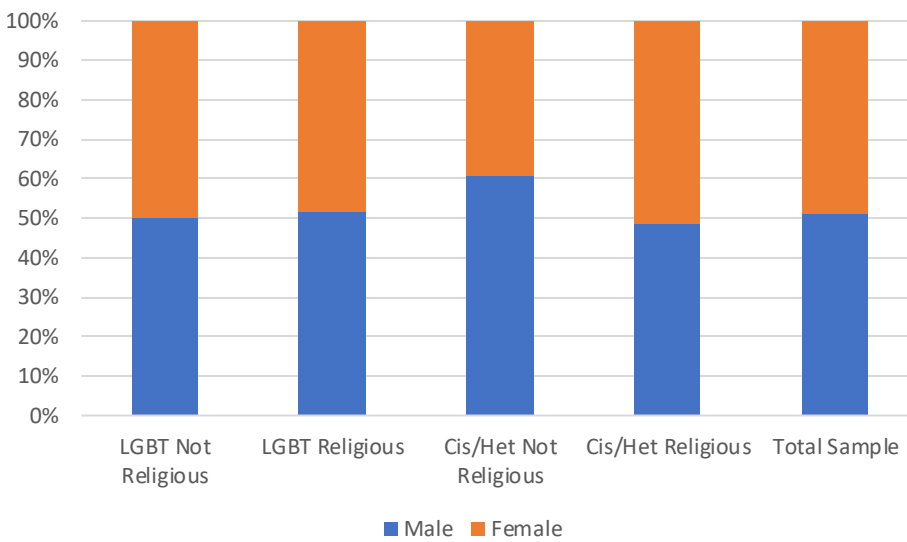
### **Differences in Demographics Based on Religious and Sexual/Gender Identities**

We conducted a series of binary logistic regressions to examine whether participants who were LGBT and/or religious were more likely than individuals who are cisgender/heterosexual and/or nonreligious to report a given demographic characteristic (see Table 2). Each of these coefficients in these regressions is represented as an odds ratio (OR). In this context, the OR can be interpreted to signify the likelihood a participant reports a particular identity/affiliation relative to not reporting that identity/affiliation. For example, an OR of .50 for the LGBT variable in the “Sex” analysis would suggest that half as many LGBT individuals identify as men relative to cisgender/heterosexual individuals. Because analyses had so many participants, we report their  $R^2$  value to contextualize the magnitude of group differences, considering any  $R^2$  value less than .005 to be insubstantial (Cohen, 1988), believing that the significant of these analyses were likely due to the large sample size rather than the observation of meaningful differences between groups. When we conducted chi-squared analyses, we report the effect size,  $w$ , calculated by dividing the chi-squared value by the number of scores and taking the square root. We consider any value less than .05 to be insubstantial (Cohen, 1988).

Chi-squared and logistic regression analyses suggested gender differences between both religious/nonreligious participants and LGBT/cisgender-heterosexual participants ( $\chi^2(3) = 2643.52, w = .10$ ). Women were slightly more likely to be religious (OR = 1.64) and LGBT (OR = 1.56) than men. There was a significant and small interaction that suggested that cisgender/heterosexual men were particularly less likely to be religious than others (OR = 0.58; see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Sex Distribution Based on Religious and Sexual/Gender Identity*

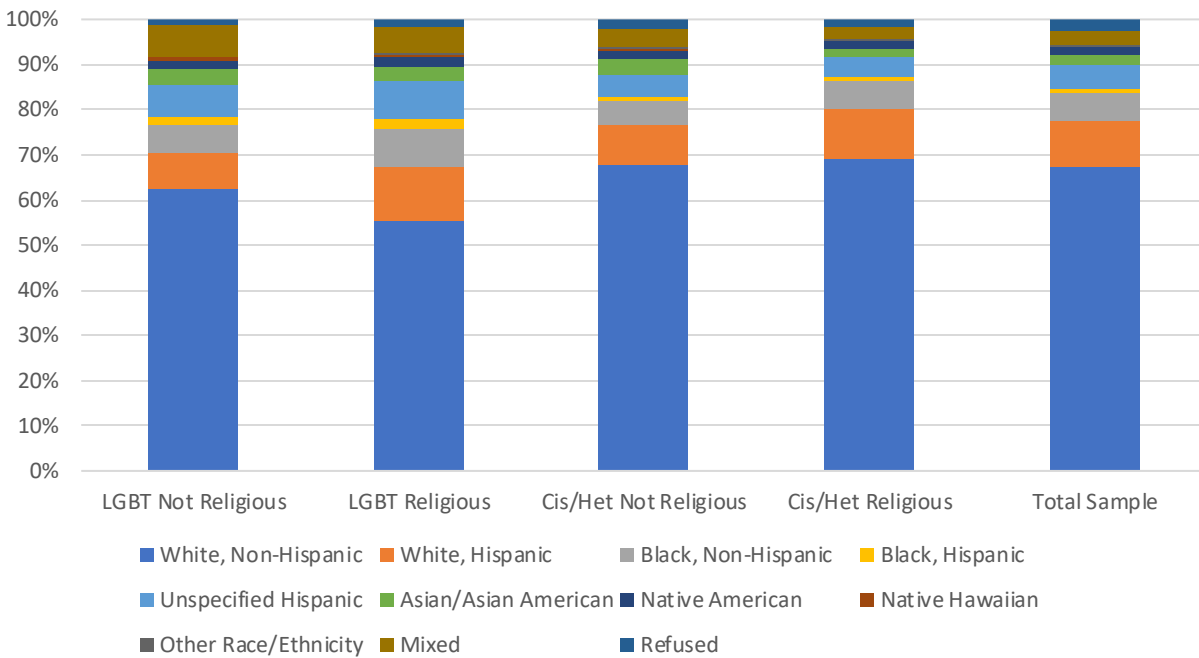


Linear regression analyses suggested differences in Age ( $F(3,257862) = 5526.46, R^2 = .06$ ), based on religious and sexual/gender identity. We found that religious participants tended to be older than nonreligious participants and LGBT participants tended to be younger than cisgender/heterosexual participants. There was a small but significant interaction between religious and sexual/gender identity that suggested that among LGBT individuals, religious affiliation was slightly less strongly related to age than among heterosexual/cisgender individuals.

Chi-squared analyses indicated substantial differences in Race/Ethnicity ( $\chi^2(30) = 2463.17, w = .10$ ). There were substantially fewer LGBT Religious participants who were White, Non-Hispanic than any other group (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2**

*Distribution of Race/Ethnicity Based on Religious and Sexual/Gender Identity*



We failed to find substantial differences in Education ( $F(3,264408) = 13.64, R^2 < .001$ ) or Income ( $F(3,224156) = 119.43, R^2 = .002$ ) based on religious or sexual/gender identity. In all cases, the test statistic was significant; however, the actual effect observed ( $R^2$ ) was miniscule. Likely, the chi-squared or regression analysis was only significant because over 200,000 participants were included in each of these analyses.

Taken together, these demographic analyses answer our first research question by helping to paint a clearer picture of who identifies as LGBT and religious. Like cisgender/heterosexual individuals, LGBT individuals were more likely to be religious if they identified as a woman or if they were older. We also observed that LGBT individuals tend to be younger than

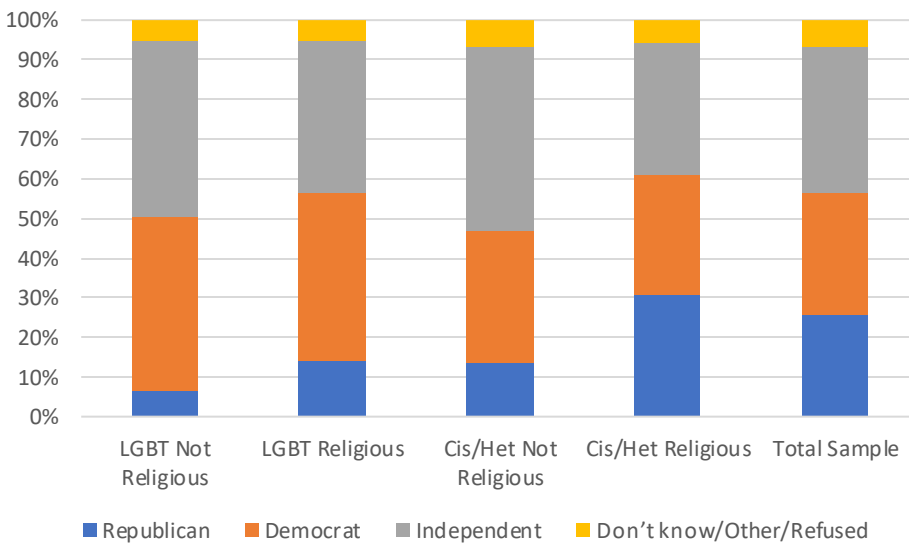
cisgender/heterosexual individuals, making it such that religious LGBT individuals tend to be younger than religious cisgender/heterosexual individuals.

**The Influence of Religious and Sexual/Gender Identities on Political Affiliation**

We found that both religious affiliation and being LGBT predicted affiliation with political parties (Republican:  $\chi^2(3) = 9071.24, R^2 = .05$ ; Democrat:  $\chi^2(3) = 959.52, R^2 = .005$ ; Independent:  $\chi^2(3) = 3173.68, R^2 = .02$ ). Supporting H1, we found that people who were religious were more likely to be Republican (OR = 2.77), less likely to be Democrat (OR = 0.87), and less likely to be Independent (OR = 0.59) than nonreligious people. Supporting H2, we found that LGBT people were less likely to be Republican (OR = 0.42), more likely to be Democrat (OR = 1.59), and less likely to be Independent (OR = 0.92), relative to cisgender/heterosexual individuals. Disconfirming H4, we observed that the odds ratios for religion were larger than the odds ratios for sexual/gender identity, suggesting that religious affiliation impacts political affiliation more strongly than sexual/gender identity (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

*Distribution of Political Affiliation Based on Religious and Sexual/Gender Identity*



Notably, these main effects for religion and identifying as LGBT extended to religious LGBT individuals. In other words, the political affiliation of individuals who identified as LGBT and religious was influenced by *both* their religious and sexual/gender identities. For example, religious LGBT individuals were more likely to be Democrat than religious cisgender/heterosexual individuals but less likely to be Democrat than nonreligious LGBT individuals.

In analyses examining affiliation with the Republican Party and being politically independent, LGBT and religious identities interacted (Republican: OR = 0.87; Independent: OR = 1.35). These significant interactions suggest that for LGBT individuals, the impact of religious affiliation on affiliating with the Republican Party was smaller but that the impact of religious affiliation on considering oneself politically independent was greater than for cisgender/heterosexual individuals. In other words, knowing that an LGBT individual is religious says less about their likelihood to affiliate with the Republican Party than it does if that individual were cisgender/heterosexual; rather, knowing that an LGBT individual is religious is more likely to mean that the individual sees themselves as politically independent.

### **The Influence of Religious and Sexual/Gender Identities on Political Views**

We conducted five separate regressions to examine the influence of sexual/gender and/or religious identities on political views. In each, we control for age, sex, and race/ethnicity. Because our primary dependent variables were measured on ordinal scale, and ordinal regression failed the assumption of parallel slopes, we conducted both linear regressions and multinomial logistic regressions. Analyses yielded similarly significant findings with two exceptions: (a) linear regressions indicated a significant interaction between gender/sexuality and religious affiliation in predicting attitudes toward nondiscrimination but multinomial logistic regressions

did not and (b) linear regressions indicated that religious affiliation had a main effect on attitudes toward immigration but multinomial logistic regressions did not.

Because linear regression is more intuitively understandable and because social scientists regularly assume that variables measured on Likert scales represent an interval underlying variable, we describe the linear regressions in text and in Figure 4. We present results from both the linear and multinomial logistic regressions in Table 3 and Table 4, respectively.

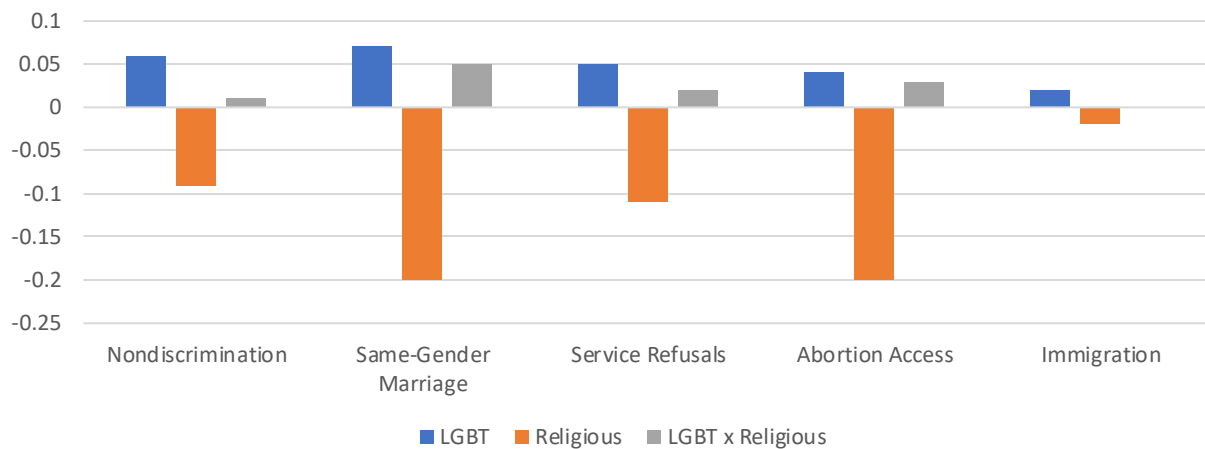
We found that sexual/gender and religious identities explained a substantial proportion of variation in support for nondiscrimination ( $F(5,104249) = 1605.28, R^2 = .07$ ) and immigration reform ( $F(6,35651) = 250.15, R^2 = .04$ ). Partially supporting H1 and fully supporting H2, we found that religious individuals were less likely to support nondiscrimination and that LGBT individuals were more likely to support nondiscrimination and immigration reform. No interaction effects were observed. Thus, religious LGBT individuals are more likely to support nondiscrimination and immigration reform than religious cisgender/heterosexual individuals but less likely to support these issues than nonreligious LGBT individuals. Disconfirming H4, we found that the magnitude of effects was greater for religious identity over sexual/gender identity, suggesting that religious identity influences these political views more than sexual/gender identity.

We also found that sexual/gender and religious identities explained a substantial proportion of variation in support for same-gender marriage ( $F(6,74708) = 2348.15, R^2 = .17$ ), religiously based service refusals ( $F(6,138089) = 2732.96, R^2 = .11$ ), and abortion access ( $F(6,35135) = 727.61, R^2 = .07$ ). Supporting H1, we found that religious individuals were less supportive of same-gender marriage and abortion access but more supportive of religiously based service refusals than nonreligious individuals. Supporting H2, we found that LGBT individuals were more supportive of same-gender marriage and abortion access and less supportive of

religiously based service refusals than cisgender/heterosexual individuals. We found that interactions between religious and sexual/gender identities were significant across all three issues, suggesting that in each case, being religious was less strongly related to political views for LGBT individuals than it was for cisgender/heterosexual individuals. Disconfirming H4, the magnitude of effects was greater for religious identity over sexual/gender identity, suggesting that religious identity influences these political views more than sexual/gender identity.

**Figure 4**

*Standardized Beta Weights of Regression Coefficients Associated with Each of Five Views*



Note: All bars represent standardized beta values ( $\beta$ ) for predictors; Insignificant  $\beta$  are excluded from the figure.

**Discussion**

**The Demography of Religious Affiliation among LGBT Individuals**

Media tends to focus on conservative religious attitudes towards LGBT individuals, resulting in a narrative that frames religion as inherently at odds with LGBT individuals’ experiences. Despite this framing, we found that close to half of LGBT individuals (55.7% in the PRRI sample and 46.8% in the CES sample) affiliate religiously. Although LGBT individuals’ experiences with religion have been undoubtedly shaped by the cisheteronormativity promoted

in many religious traditions (Exline et al. 2021; Schnabel et al. 2022), this statistic suggests that many LGBT individuals maintain some ties to religious traditions. Further, and perhaps most importantly, this statistic highlights the gross oversight committed by many social science researchers and politicians in assuming that LGBT individuals are a monolithically liberal group that is areligious.

Because religious LGBT individuals are understudied, we sought to understand *which* LGBT individuals tend to affiliate religiously. Overall, we found that LGBT people of color and older LGBT people are more likely to affiliate religiously than White and younger LGBT people. These trends likely reflect the importance of cultural context in influencing religious affiliation as older LGBT individuals came of age in an era in which affiliating religiously was more common, and religious affiliation often plays a stronger role in communities of color than it does in White communities (Park, Dizon, and Malcom 2020; Pew Research Center 2022). For both older LGBT individuals and LGBT people of color, religion may function as a vital source of community connection and support (McQueeney 2009). These kinds of institutional support systems may be particularly important for these groups due to the unique challenges they face (e.g., racism, deterioration of physical and mental abilities). Notably, given that religious affiliation is more common among older LGBT people of color, the assumption that LGBT individuals are not religious likely reflects a racialized (White) view of LGBT people.

Perhaps also contributing to the large number of LGBT individuals who remain religious is the significant degree of variation in attitudes toward LGBT individuals between religious traditions (Pew Research Center 2015) and even between different congregations of the same religious tradition (Lefevor, Sorrell, et al. 2021). Most often, religious affiliation among LGBT individuals is understood to represent LGBT individuals finding religious traditions that explicitly support same-sex marriage and gender expansive expression (Foster, Bowland, and



Vosler 2015). Our findings support this narrative to some extent; however, we found approximately one third of religious LGBT individuals affiliate with religious traditions that do not explicitly support same-sex marriage or gender expansive expression. Studies of LGBT individuals engaged with conservative religious traditions suggest that these individuals may hold a unique blend of attitudes that both align with and depart from their conservative religious tradition (Cravens 2022).

### **The Influence of Religion on LGBT Individuals' Political Views**

Religious LGBT individuals generally tended to report more conservative views than nonreligious LGBT individuals on LGBT rights, abortion access, and immigration reform. This finding is likely related to the historical association between religion and conservative ideologies (Etengoff and Lefevor 2021). Religious beliefs may exert a strong influence on one's political leanings, and religious LGBT individuals may feel that their religious beliefs require them to hold more traditional or conservative views towards social issues, including those related to LGBT rights. This trend may also be a reflection of the process by which religious LGBT individuals, particularly those who engage with conservative religions, maintain a sense of belonging in their conservative religious spaces (Skidmore et al. 2022). Conservatively religious LGBT individuals may be better able to maintain their connection with conservative religions when their political ideologies are more in line with those of their religious peers. Furthermore, for LGBT individuals raised in conservative religious traditions, a shift towards more progressive beliefs as a part of the identity integration process may still result in belief systems that are more conservative in nature when compared to their non-religious LGBT counterparts.

We found that religious affiliation was associated with more conservative views towards LGBT rights, abortion access, and immigration reform *for both* cisgender/heterosexual and LGBT individuals. Religion can be a source of values for people and may be related to more

conservative political attitudes due to the generalization of religious systems of moral judgements to political and social issues (Etengoff and Lefevor 2021). That is – religious affiliation may be associated with conservative beliefs because they align with traditional religious values of authority, loyalty, and purity (Stewart and Morris 2021; Sutton, Kelly and Huver 2020). Furthermore, religious affiliation may be associated with more conservative views towards LGBT rights, abortion access, and immigration reform specifically, as these issues tend to be conceptualized as moral issues. These kinds of ‘moral’ political issues are more highly valued and perceived as more threatening to both political conservatives and highly religious individuals (Stewart and Morris, 2021).

When the impact of religious affiliation on political views was directly contrasted with the impact of identifying as LGBT on political views, religious affiliation tended to exert a stronger influence on political views than identifying as LGBT. This contrast highlights the salience that religious affiliation has for *both* cisgender/heterosexual individuals and LGBT individuals. Despite recent trends suggesting that religion is becoming less central to lives of many Americans (Pew Research Center 2015), these findings demonstrate the ongoing and powerful role of religion in influencing political beliefs. In particular, this contrast highlights just how much is missed when social scientists fail to examine LGBT individuals’ religious affiliation as understanding an individual’s religious affiliation explained more variation in most attitudes than their sexual/gender identity.

### **How Religious LGBT People Fit in the Larger Political Landscape**

Given that identifying as LGBT was associated with holding more liberal views, religious LGBT individuals may be best thought of as occupying a political “middle ground” between their more conservative cisgender/heterosexual religious counterparts and their more liberal nonreligious LGBT counterparts. For example, we found that where nonreligious LGBT

individuals almost universally indicated *strongly favor* to legalizing same-sex marriage and supporting nondiscrimination for LGBT people, religious LGBT individuals were more likely to indicate *favor* on both of these items. Similarly, religious LGBT individuals were less likely to hold strong views on religious service refusals relative to nonreligious LGBT individuals. Religious LGBT individuals were also more likely than nonreligious LGBT individuals but still less likely than cisgender/heterosexual individuals to identify as republican. Taken together, these trends suggest that religious LGBT individuals are still largely supportive of LGBT rights; however, they appear to hold less universally supportive stances toward LGBT rights. Likely, this tempering of opinion may reflect a sympathy to the nuance that exists in conversations around religion and LGBT rights, understanding the experiences of both cisgender/heterosexual individuals who are religious and LGBT individuals who are not.

Social contact has long been understood to be a primary mechanism at promoting attitudinal change. Social contact plays a similar role in the formation of one's political views (Reilly 2017). For instance, social contact with LGBT individuals and immigrants has been associated with more positive attitudes towards both the respective groups and policies pertaining to them (Lewis et al. 2017). Social contact with religious individuals via service attendance may operate in the same fashion, particularly in forming attitudes toward LGBT individuals and issues (Lefevor, Tamez Guerrero et al. 2022). Likely, religious LGBT individuals have social networks that include *both* cisgender/heterosexual religious individuals and nonreligious LGBT individuals. As such, the political ideologies of religious LGBT individuals are influenced and likely resemble the beliefs of both cisgender/heterosexual religious individuals and nonreligious LGBT individuals.

### **Limitations**

Our findings should be taken in light of several important limitations. Perhaps most centrally, the way we classified participants as LGBT was broad, making it impossible to assess for differences between lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Further, the phrasing of the question was also broad (i.e., “Do you personally know someone, such as a close friend, family member, or someone else who is LGBT?” with the response, “yes, me”) and could have been better nuanced to match more common assessment practices used in research. Similarly, assessing religiousness through a single question about affiliation obscures important variation in the specific beliefs endorsed by participants, the salience of those beliefs for them, and the religious activity of participants. There are likely further important distinctions between LGBT individuals whose faith is central for them and those who affiliate religiously but are largely religiously disengaged (Skidmore et al. 2022). Finally, whether because of measurement or sampling issues, religious individuals may be overrepresented in our sample; additional, replicative analyses should be undertaken with other large-scale datasets, such as the Cooperative Election Study or General Social Survey, to examine the generalizability of results.

Because our goal in this study was to provide a broad picture of religious LGBT people’s attitudes and behaviors, we ignored several variables that likely further nuance our findings. In particular, we ignore differences between LGBT people with different gender/sexual identities (e.g., between bisexual men and lesbian women), LGBT people who affiliate with different types of religions (e.g., those that explicitly include LGBT people and those that do not), and LGBT people who are raised religious and those who were never religious. We also investigated attitudes and behaviors that are largely highly salient to religion and LGBT rights but did not examine attitudes and behaviors that are less central to religion and LGBT rights. We hope that future research nuances our work in these and other areas.

## **Conclusion**

Using a nationally representative sample of Americans sampled from 2016-2019, we found that nearly half of LGBT participants affiliated religiously (55.3% in the PRRI sample and 46.8% in the CES sample) and that religion tended to substantially impact these individuals' political views. This finding contrasts with the disciplinary de-facto assumption that LGBT individuals are not religious, suggesting that religious affiliation is an important part of understanding LGBT individuals' political views. Like others, we found that affiliating religiously was related to lower support for LGBT rights and higher support for religiously based service refusals, with religion exerting this effect among both cisgender/heterosexual and LGBT people. When we compared the influence of religious and LGBT identities on political views, we found that in most cases, affiliating religiously was more strongly related to political views than identifying as LGBT. Taken together, findings highlight the importance of recognizing that many or most LGBT individuals are religious and that their religious affiliation influences their political views.

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Appendix A

**Table 2**

*Logistic and Linear Regressions Examining the Influence of Being LGBT and/or Religious on Demographic Variables*

	Sex N = 280,466		Race/Ethnicity N = 280,466		Republican N = 71,651		Democrat N = 87,238		Independent N = 102,078	
	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR	b (SE)	OR
LGBT	0.44* (0.03)	1.56	0.24* (0.03)	1.27	-0.86* (0.06)	0.42	0.46* (0.03)	1.59	-0.08* (0.03)	0.92
Religious	0.50* (0.01)	1.64	-0.07* (0.01)	0.93	1.02* (0.01)	2.77	-0.14* (0.01)	0.87	-0.54* (0.01)	0.59
LGBT x Religious	-0.55* (0.04)	0.58	0.25* (0.04)	1.43	-0.14* (0.07)	0.87	0.07 (0.04)	1.07	0.30* (0.04)	1.35

	Age N = 257,866			Education N = 264,412			Income N = 224,160		
	b (SE)	$\beta$	$r_{sp}$	b (SE)	$\beta$	$r_{sp}$	b (SE)	$\beta$	$r_{sp}$
LGBT	-9.82* (0.27)	-.11	-.07	-0.04 (0.02)	-.01	-.01	-0.47* (0.04)	-.04	-.02
Religious	9.29* (0.09)	.21	.20	-0.04* (0.01)	-.01	-.01	-0.18* (0.01)	-.03	-.03
LGBT x Religious	-1.67* (0.36)	-.01	-.01	0.03 (0.02)	< .01	< .01	0.08 (0.06)	.01	< .01

Note: \* $p < .05$

**Table 3***Linear Regressions Examining the Influence of Being LGBT and/or Religious on Political Views*

	LGBT Nondiscrimination ( <i>N</i> = 104,250)			Same-Gender Marriage ( <i>N</i> = 74,709)		
	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>r</i> <sub>sp</sub>	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>r</i> <sub>sp</sub>
Ethnicity	0.35* (0.01)	.16	.16	0.54* (0.01)	.22	.22
Age	< 0.01* (< 0.01)	-.08	-.08	-0.01* (< 0.01)	-.14	-.13
Sex	0.21* (0.01)	.11	.11	0.19* (0.01)	.09	.09
LGBT	0.27* (0.02)	.06	.04	0.33* (0.03)	.07	.04
Religious	-0.21* (0.01)	-.09	-.09	-0.50* (0.01)	-.20	-.19
LGBT x Religious	0.05* (0.03)	.01	.01	0.31* (0.03)	.05	.03
	Religiously Based Service Refusals ( <i>N</i> = 138,090)			Abortion Access ( <i>N</i> = 35,142)		
	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>r</i> <sub>sp</sub>	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>r</i> <sub>sp</sub>
Ethnicity	0.59* (0.01)	.25	.24	0.50* (0.01)	.22	.22
Age	< 0.01* (< 0.01)	-.03	-.03	< 0.01 (< 0.01)	.01	.01
Sex	0.24* (0.01)	.11	.11	0.08* (0.01)	.04	.04
LGBT	0.25* (0.02)	.05	.03	0.18* (0.04)	.04	.03
Religious	-0.27* (0.01)	-.11	-.10	-0.46* (0.01)	-.20	-.18
LGBT x Religious	0.13* (0.03)	.02	.01	0.16* (0.05)	.03	.02
	Immigration Reform ( <i>N</i> = 35,658)					
	<i>b</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	$\beta$	<i>r</i> <sub>sp</sub>			
Ethnicity	0.29* (0.01)	.16	.16			
Age	< 0.01* (< 0.01)	-.04	-.04			
Sex	0.14* (0.01)	.09	.09			
LGBT	0.08* (0.03)	.02	.01			
Religious	-0.04* (0.01)	-.02	-.02			
LGBT x Religious	-0.01 (0.04)	< .01	< .01			

Note: \**p* < .05; not all participants were asked all questions about political views, so sample sizes for analyses regarding each view vary.

**Table 4**

*Multinomial Logistic Regressions Examining the Influence of Being LGBT and/or Religious on Political Views*

	Nondiscrimination (Strongly Oppose = Reference) N = 104,250			Same-Gender Marriage (Strongly Oppose = Reference) N = 74,709		
	Strongly Favor	Favor	Oppose	Strongly Favor	Favor	Oppose
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Ethnicity	1.09* (0.03)	1.16* (0.02)	0.73* (0.02)	1.66 (0.03)	1.47* (0.03)	0.76* (0.03)
Age	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01 (<0.01)	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01* (<0.01)
Sex	0.60* (0.02)	0.59* (0.02)	0.39* (0.02)	0.52* (0.02)	0.53* (0.02)	0.41* (0.02)
LGBT	0.78* (0.07)	1.21* (0.07)	1.14* (0.05)	1.97* (0.09)	2.03* (0.09)	1.37* (0.06)
Religious	-0.49* (0.11)	-0.75* (0.12)	-0.47* (0.07)	-1.02* (0.19)	-1.50* (0.21)	-0.55* (0.09)
LGBT x Religious	-0.18 (0.12)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.67* (0.19)	-0.04 (0.42)	-0.19* (0.09)
	Religiously Based Service Refusals (Strongly Oppose = Reference) N = 138,090			Abortion Access (Illegal in All Cases = Reference) N = 35,142		
	Strongly Favor	Favor	Oppose	Legal in All Cases	Legal in Most Cases	Illegal in Most Cases
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Ethnicity	1.63* (0.02)	1.16* (0.02)	0.46* (0.02)	1.45* (0.04)	1.42* (0.40)	0.50* (0.04)
Age	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01 (<0.01)	< 0.01 (<0.01)	< 0.01 (<0.01)	< 0.01 (<0.01)
Sex	0.67* (0.02)	0.56* (0.02)	0.27* (0.01)	0.22* (0.04)	0.45* (0.03)	0.34* (0.03)
LGBT	1.02* (0.06)	0.97* (0.05)	0.78* (0.04)	0.83* (0.11)	1.07* (0.10)	0.62* (0.08)
Religious	-0.41* (0.10)	-0.55* (0.08)	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.92* (0.19)	-0.87* (0.16)	-0.24* (0.11)
LGBT x Religious	-0.45* (0.10)	-0.07 (0.08)	-0.30* (0.06)	-0.49* (0.19)	-0.37* (0.16)	-0.23* (0.11)
	Immigration Reform (Identify and Deport = Reference) N = 35,658					
	Pathway to Citizenship	Permanent Residency				
	b (SE)	b (SE)				
Ethnicity	0.98* (0.30)	0.18* (0.04)				
Age	< 0.01* (<0.01)	< 0.01 (<0.01)				
Sex	0.46* (0.03)	0.23* (0.03)				
LGBT	0.30* (0.10)	0.19 (0.10)				
Religious	-0.29 (0.17)	-0.12 (0.15)				
LGBT x Religious	0.12 (0.17)	0.03 (0.16)				

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; not all participants were asked all questions about political views, so sample sizes for analyses regarding each view vary.