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POLITICAL DISTINCTIVENESS AND DIVERSITY AMONG LGBT AMERICANS

PHILIP EDWARD JONES*

Abstract At least partly due to data limitations, academic analyses of public opinion rarely acknowledge lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) identities. Our models of political attitudes almost always overlook respondents' sexual orientation and gender identities, and targeted research on the views of LGBT people is uncommon. This omission has obscured both the distinctiveness of LGBT Americans and the diversity within the group. Using recent large-*N* surveys, this article shows that LGBT Americans are distinctively liberal compared to otherwise similar straight and cisgender respondents—in their general political predispositions, electoral choices, and attitudes on a wide range of policy matters. At the same time, there is substantial diversity within the community—bisexual and transgender respondents are frequently less liberal than lesbians and gay men. Analysis of intersecting identities reveals substantial differences between bisexual men and bisexual women, but little evidence of diversity based on gender within lesbian/gay and transgender subgroups. Given these findings, public opinion scholars should routinely incorporate measures of LGBT identities in their analyses, alongside race, gender, class, and other politically salient respondent characteristics.

Introduction

Americans' attitudes on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues have changed dramatically in the past several decades. Approval of homosexuality being legal, for example, has risen from around 30–40 percent in the

PHILIP EDWARD JONES is an associate professor of political science and international relations at the University of Delaware, Newark, DE, USA. The author is grateful to Ellen Andersen, John McTague, and the journal's anonymous reviewers for helpful feedback on this paper, and to Chibuzo Achinivu for excellent research assistance assessing the reliability of the journal article coding. All errors remain the author's own. *Address correspondence to Philip Edward Jones, Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Delaware, 347 Smith Hall, Newark, DE 19716, USA; email: pejones@udel.edu; website: www.pejones.org.

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1980s to above 80 percent today (Garretson 2018; McCarthy 2019). Support for transgender rights has gone from being a fringe concern to a mainstream, although not always majority, position (Taylor, Lewis, and Haider-Markel 2018). And interpersonal contact with LGBT people is no longer rare: around one in four Americans say they are close friends with or related to a transgender person, seven in ten with a lesbian or gay person (Jones et al. 2019).

In line with this greater societal acceptance, scholarly attention to LGBT issues has increased, particularly in the public opinion field (Tadlock and Taylor 2017; Bergersen, Klar, and Schmitt 2018). Despite skepticism from some within academia (see Novkov and Barclay 2010), research on LGBT politics is thriving. But analyses of public opinion frequently overlook the views of LGBT people themselves. This can be illustrated in two ways.

First, research on public opinion toward LGBT rights has largely focused on the factors that affect straight and cisgender Americans' views. For example, previous work highlights the effects of interpersonal contact (Lewis 2011; Tadlock et al. 2017), media representation (Garretson 2015), in-group cues (Harrison and Michelson 2017), partisan polarization (Jones and Brewer 2020), and predispositions including authoritarianism, disgust sensitivity, and moral traditionalism (Miller et al. 2017; Gadarian and van der Vort 2018; Jones et al. 2018). These studies all focus on how straight cisgender Americans view LGBT issues. Despite some notable exceptions (e.g., Hertzog 1996; Schaffner and Senic 2006; Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Egan 2012), less attention has been paid to how LGBT Americans themselves think about politics. Studies of attitudes *toward* LGBT people are far more common than studies *of* LGBT people's attitudes.

Second, the broader field of public opinion research rarely incorporates respondents' LGBT identities into its analyses. In contrast to the "standard" demographic controls like gender, race, or class, LGBT identities are usually left out when modeling attitudes. To illustrate this, table 1 shows which respondent characteristics were included in quantitative analyses of public opinion published in four top journals (*American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly*) from 2009 to 2019. Articles that used individual-level data to analyze Americans' political attitudes, and presented models that included covariates, comprise the universe of cases. Full details of the coding scheme are given in the Supplementary Material, section S1; the total number of articles varies across categories since some analyses preclude the measurement of a particular characteristic (e.g., models of White Americans' racial attitudes do not include race).[1]

1. A second rater coded fifty randomly selected articles from this universe. Inter-rater reliability was high, with agreement ranging from 92 percent (for income) to 100 percent (for gender, education, and LGBT identity). More details are in Supplementary Material, section S1.

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Table 1. Respondent characteristics included in analyses of public opinion published in four journals, 2009–2019

	Included	Not included	*N*
Gender	95.9%	4.1%	245
Education	89.6%	10.4%	241
Age	85.5%	14.5%	241
Race/ethnicity	83.6%	16.4%	226
Income	56.8%	43.2%	243
LGBT	0.4%	99.6%	245

NOTE.—Universe is all articles published in the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, and *Public Opinion Quarterly* that analyzed individual-level political attitudes of Americans. See Supplementary Material, section S1 for full details.

Table 1 documents how rarely scholars account for LGBT identities when analyzing public opinion. Most analyses included measures of respondents' gender (95.9 percent of the articles), education (89.6 percent), age (85.5 percent), and race/ethnicity (83.6 percent). In contrast, only one of the 245 articles in this universe accounted for respondents' sexual orientation or gender identity. A casual reader of public opinion research (if such a person exists) could reasonably conclude that whether or not someone identifies as LGBT must have little bearing on their political views. But this is not the case: prior work has found sexual orientation to be a significant predictor of vote choice and political predispositions (e.g., Hertzog 1996; Schaffner and Senic 2006; Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Egan 2012).

What explains this omission of LGBT identities from our analyses? Limitations in available survey data appear to have played a central role.[2] Sexual orientation and gender identity have not been part of standard demographic batteries, perhaps due to concerns about nonresponse or misreporting given the stigma associated with identifying as LGBT (Berg and Lien 2006). Even when surveys have included measures of LGBT identity, random samples of 1,000 Americans rarely contact enough LGBT respondents to make robust inferences about the community (Hertzog 1996; Riggle and Tadlock 1999).

But changes in the political landscape and in survey methods have made collecting data on LGBT Americans' attitudes more feasible. The dramatic shift in societal attitudes has reduced the pressure to stay closeted in a

2. Even studies of attitudes toward LGBT rights rarely account for respondents' LGBT identities (Bergersen, Klar, and Schmitt 2018, p. 198), suggesting that researcher bias is unlikely to be the whole story.

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survey. And the rise of online polling has ushered in much larger-*N* surveys, with concomitantly larger subsamples of LGBT identifiers. In short, the previous data limitations that constrained research on LGBT Americans' political attitudes have been lifted.

This article takes advantage of these changes, drawing on several large-*N* surveys to conduct a more comprehensive analysis of LGBT Americans' attitudes than previously possible.[3] LGBT Americans are distinctively liberal in their political predispositions, electoral choices, and policy attitudes. There is, however, substantial diversity within the community: bisexual and transgender respondents are frequently less liberal than lesbians and gay men. Analysis of intersecting identities reveals substantial divergence between bisexual men and bisexual women—but little evidence of gender differences within lesbian/gay and transgender subgroups.

Omitting LGBT identities from our analyses thus ignores a distinctive group and an important source of variance in public attitudes. At the same time, the significant diversity in the community requires greater attention to the different identities that comprise the LGBT community. This underscores the need for further research into the attitudes of LGBT people, a point returned to at the end of the article.

Previous Work on LGBT Attitudes

Despite the data limitations discussed above, previous work has drawn on various sources to explore the distinctiveness and diversity of LGBT Americans' attitudes.

LGBT DISTINCTIVENESS

One source of data has been large-*N* national exit polls, which began asking about lesbian/gay identification in 1990, added bisexual identification in 1992, and then transgender identification in 2016. LGB voters in the 1990 and 1992 elections were more likely to vote for Democratic candidates than straight voters (Hertzog 1996)—a trend that continued in the 2000s (Egan 2012; McThomas and Buchanan 2012). Exit polls also show that LGB voters held more liberal views on a variety of issues in 1990 and 1992 (Hertzog 1996), were more likely to prioritize healthcare as an issue in 2000 (Schaffner and Senic 2006), and were more supportive of marriage equality in 2004 (Egan and Sherrill 2005).

3. Not all the surveys include measures of sexual orientation *and* gender identity. For ease of exposition, I use "LGBT" to refer to the community generally; when referring to a specific set of results, I use "LGB" or "LGBT" as appropriate. This is still not fully inclusive: none of the surveys measured queer identities other than LGBT ones, a point returned to in the conclusion.

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Several researchers have used academic surveys like the American National Election Studies (ANES) or General Social Study (GSS), which include more attitudinal measures, but have smaller sample sizes and thus produce less precise estimates of LGBT views. Swank (2018) uses 2016 ANES data to show that LGB respondents were more likely to report voting for Hillary Clinton than straight respondents. Similarly, pooled GSS data from 2008 and 2010 show that LGB respondents were more likely to vote for Barack Obama in 2008, to identify as liberal Democrats, to support marriage equality, and to favor government action on the environment (Egan 2012). Beyond politics, ANES and GSS data also show liberal attitudes toward suicide, gender roles, science, and other social issues, suggesting a far-reaching impact of LGB identity (Grollman 2017, 2019; Schnabel 2018).

Why LGBT voters tend to hold such distinctively liberal views is less clear, although previous work suggests three answers. First, LGBT distinctiveness may reflect a selection effect: those who identify as LGBT on surveys may differ from those who don't in ways that also lead to liberal views. Thus, Egan (2012) finds that the greater liberalism of LGB voters is diminished after accounting for socialization experiences. Second, social embeddedness may explain distinctive attitudes: greater involvement in the LGBT community may instill more liberal stances. Thus, Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill (2011) find that LGB voters who paid more attention to LGB rights were more likely to vote for Al Gore in 2000. Conversion effects are a third possibility: coming out may lead to greater identification with other marginalized groups. Thus, controlling for gender and racial attitudes reduces the effect of LGB identity on vote choice in 2016 (Swank 2018).

Setting aside the precise mechanism at play, these studies indicate that LGBT Americans hold distinctive political views on several issues. At the same time, by pointing to variation within the community, they also suggest that substantial attitudinal diversity exists.

LGBT DIVERSITY

LGBT identity is rarely incorporated into public opinion research. Rarer still is any disaggregation of the LGBT community into its constitutive groups. As Smith (2011, p. 35) puts it, researchers tend to treat "sexuality as if there are only two categories: straight and not-straight," with little acknowledgment that the community is made up of more than lesbians and gay men (see also Tadlock and Taylor 2017). Studies that explore bisexuals' attitudes are uncommon—and analyses of transgender Americans' political views to date appear nonexistent.

This is despite good reason to expect diversity within the community. There are systematic differences between subgroups on those factors that researchers have used to explain the community's distinctive liberalism. For

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example, bisexual Americans are less embedded in the LGBT community (Herek et al. 2010, table 5) and less likely to be out to family and friends (Herek et al. 2010, table 4), which would dampen any conversion effects. Similar data on transgender Americans are hard to come by, although non-probability samples suggest heterogeneity in how embedded and out respondents are (James et al. 2016). As such, we might expect bisexual and transgender Americans to hold less distinctively liberal views than their cisgender lesbian and gay counterparts.

The scant previous literature that does exist reaches conflicting conclusions on this front, however. Some studies find that bisexual respondents are less likely than lesbian/gay respondents to identify as liberal Democrats or to vote for Democratic candidates (Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Swank 2018). In contrast, Herek et al. (2010, pp. 193–94) report no differences in ideology, party, or vote choice based on sexual orientation, and Haider-Markel and Miller (2017, p. 280) characterize differences in the policy priorities of gay, lesbian, and bisexual respondents as "generally small."

Intersections with other social identities may also lead to attitudinal diversity. Strolovitch, Wong, and Proctor (2017) argue that the greater the distance from the benefits of White heteropatriarchy a respondent's identities place them, the more likely they are to support liberal candidates. Particular attention has been paid to gender, with researchers suggesting that within each sexual orientation category, women tend to be more liberal than men (Hertzog 1996; Swank 2018). However, there is again conflicting evidence: Herek et al. (2010) report no differences between LGB men and women in their ideology, party identification, and vote choice (table 6), a null finding replicated by Grollman's (2019) analysis of ideology in the 2012 ANES (table 1).

WHAT'S MISSING?

Despite the earlier evidence of distinctiveness, most public opinion research still overlooks respondents' LGBT identities. This study uses a greater range of survey data than previously available to offer a more definitive account of how attitudes vary with sexual orientation and gender identity. Unlike most previous work, transgender respondents are included, giving a more complete picture of LGBT distinctiveness.

Analysis of diversity within the LGBT community is largely absent from the literature to date. We know little about the attitudes of bisexual respondents, beyond the handful of studies listed above, and almost nothing about transgender Americans' views. Other sources of diversity within the community are also understudied: previous work reaches conflicting conclusions about how gender intersects with LGBT identity to affect attitudes (Hertzog 1996; Herek et al. 2010; Swank 2018; Grollman 2019). As such, we lack basic information about the views of groups within the LGBT community.

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To provide a more comprehensive account of the distinctiveness and diversity of LGBT Americans' attitudes, this article takes advantage of new items and larger sample sizes on several recent surveys.

Survey Data and Methods

The analysis relies on four sets of surveys, collected between 2008 and 2018. These were selected because they asked about political attitudes, measured LGBT identities, and interviewed enough Americans to generate a large ($N > 500$) subsample of LGBT respondents. Each survey measured LGBT identities differently, as detailed below. I triangulate between the datasets in making comparisons, noting their benefits and drawbacks throughout.

ANES, 2008–2016

The 2008, 2012, and 2016 ANES Time Series studies are probability samples of voting-age US citizens. The primary interviewing mode is face-to-face, although in 2012 this was supplemented by a sample from Gfk Knowledge Networks' online panel. In 2016, a random sample from the USPS's delivery sequence file was also invited to take the survey online. Reported response rates for the face-to-face samples (AAPOR RR1) were 60 percent in 2008, 38 percent in 2012, and 50 percent in 2016.

ANES respondents were asked their sexual orientation (whether they identified as heterosexual or straight; lesbian or gay; or bisexual), but not whether they identified as transgender. The data thus allow for comparisons between straight and LGB Americans, and between lesbian/gay and bisexual Americans, but not between transgender and cisgender Americans. The three studies are pooled, resulting in 12,148 respondents, of whom 559 (4.6 percent) identified as LGB (descriptive statistics for each dataset are in the Supplementary Material, section S2).

CCES, 2016–2018

The 2016 and 2018 CCES studies use an online sample conducted by YouGov for a consortium of universities. A random sample was drawn from the probability-based American Community Survey (ACS), and YouGov selected members of its opt-in online panel who matched its demographics. Although not a probability sample, the CCES respondents closely resemble those drawn from the ACS on observable characteristics. Reported response rates (AAPOR RR3) were 17.2 percent in 2016 and 31.1 percent in 2018.

The surveys measured respondents' sexual orientation (as straight; lesbian or gay; or bisexual) and whether they identified as transgender. The two

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studies were pooled, resulting in 114,782 respondents, of whom 9,234 (8.0 percent) identified as LGB and 2,181 (1.9 percent) identified as transgender.[4]

AP VOTECAST, 2018

Designed to replace traditional exit polls, the 2018 AP VoteCast was conducted by NORC for the Associated Press and Fox News. The survey combined interviews with: (1) a probability sample of registered voters drawn from state voter files (RR3 = 4.2 percent); (2) an online sample of self-identified registered voters drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak panel (RR3 = 11.8 percent); and (3) a sample of self-identified registered voters drawn from Harris Interactive's opt-in panel (response rates not calculated for nonprobability sample).

Respondents were asked if they identified as "gay, lesbian, or bisexual" or not. This means that comparisons between gay/lesbian respondents and bisexual respondents cannot be made with these data. A separate item did, however, ask whether respondents identified as transgender. In total, 2,727 (7.3 percent) of the 37,310 respondents identified as LGB, and 358 (1.0 percent) as transgender.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER, 2013

In 2013, the Pew Research Center commissioned a sample survey of LGBT Americans. Self-identified LGBT members of the Gfk Group's online KnowledgePanel, originally recruited via probability sampling, were invited to complete the survey. Pew reported a cumulative response rate (CUMRR1) of 7.4 percent.

The survey questionnaire treated sexual orientation and gender identity as a single identity with three mutually exclusive categories: lesbian or gay; bisexual; or transgender. Respondents who identified as both transgender and LGB were asked which of the two they identified most with. Of the 1,197 respondents, only a small number identified as transgender (43, or 3.6 percent). This makes the estimates of transgender Americans' attitudes particularly noisy, but I include them here as one further point of comparison.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

These fall into three conceptual categories: general predispositions and vote choice; support for LGBT rights; and opinions on other issues. Table 2 lists the measures (question wording and coding details for each are in the Supplementary Material, section S2). Each dependent variable is coded to range between 0 and

4. Note that sexual orientation and gender identity are independent. Some respondents identify as both LGB and transgender, but most LGB respondents identified as cisgender and most transgender respondents as straight. In the initial analyses, respondents who identified as LGB and/or as transgender are coded as having an LGBT identity.

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Table 2. Dependent variables used in the analysis

	ANES, 2008–2016	CCES, 2016–2018	AP VoteCast, 2018	Pew, 2013
Predispositions and vote				
Liberal ideology	X	X	X	X
Democratic party ID	X	X	X	X
Presidential vote for Democrat	X[a]	X[a]		
House vote for Democrat			X[a]	
LGBT rights				
Support marriage equality	X	X[a]		X
Marriage equality important		X		
Support LGB adoption rights	X[a]			X
Support LGB job protections	X			
Oppose transgender military ban		X[a]		
Other issues				
Pro-choice abortion views	X	X		
Lower racial resentment	X	X		
Support larger government	X			X[a]
Support more gun control		X		X[a]
Increase spending and services	X			
Reduce defense spending	X			
Support government insurance	X			
Support guaranteed jobs	X			
Support aid to Blacks	X			
Increase spending on Social Security	X			
Increase spending on public schools	X			
Increase spending on science	X			
Increase spending on welfare	X			
Increase spending on child care	X			
Increase spending on environment	X			
Oppose death penalty	X			
Make it harder to buy guns	X			
Increase immigration levels	X			
Support affirmative action	X			
Support environmental protections		X		
Oppose repealing Obamacare		X[a]		
More liberal immigration views		X[b]		
More liberal racial attitudes		X		
Support infrastructure spending		X[a]		
Support raising minimum wage		X[a]		
Oppose Gorsuch confirmation		X[a]		
Oppose Kavanaugh confirmation		X[a]		
Support Russia sanctions		X[a]		

(*continued*)

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Table 2. (*continued*)

	ANES, 2008–2016	CCES, 2016–2018	AP VoteCast, 2018	Pew, 2013
Oppose Jerusalem as capital		X[a]		
Oppose Keystone pipeline		X[a]		
Support Paris climate agreement		X[a]		
Oppose TPP withdrawal		X[a]		
Support clean power rules		X[a]		
Support Iran nuclear deal		X[a]		
Oppose travel ban		X[a]		
Oppose cutting regulations		X[a]		
Believe immigrants strengthen U.S.				X[a]
Benefits don't go far enough				X[a]

NOTE.—All dependent variables coded to range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating more liberal responses. See the Supplementary Material, section S2, for full question wording and coding details.

[a]Dichotomous variable.

[b]Different immigration items were asked in 2016 and 2018; these are analyzed separately.

1, with higher values indicating more liberal responses. Those marked with a superscript "a" are dichotomous variables; all others are continuous variables. As examples, and since they are discussed at length in the following analyses, the coding of predispositions and vote choice are detailed here.

In the ANES and CCES datasets, ideology is a seven-point scale, recoded to range from very/extremely conservative (0) to very/extremely liberal (1). Pew and AP VoteCast measured ideology on a five-point scale, recoded from very conservative (0) to very liberal (1). The ANES and CCES measure party identification on the standard seven-point scale, ranging from Strong Republican (0) to Strong Democrat (1). AP VoteCast collapsed "strong" and "weak" partisans, resulting in a five-point scale. Pew used a three-point scale for Republicans (coded as 0), Independents (0.5), and Democrats (1). Presidential vote choice is measured in all three ANES surveys and in the 2016 CCES. This is a dichotomous variable, with voters supporting the Democrat coded as 1 and voters who supported the Republican as 0. The same coding is applied to voting for the US House of Representatives in the 2018 AP VoteCast. Third-party supporters and respondents who did not vote are excluded.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

To isolate the impact of LGBT identities as precisely as possible, all models control for demographic characteristics on which LGBT and straight

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cisgender Americans tend to differ (see Hertzog 1996; Schaffner and Senic 2006; Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Egan 2012).

Most are measured identically across datasets. Race/ethnicity is a categorical variable, with White (the reference category), Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and other race as categories. Indicator variables reference women and currently married respondents. To measure income comparably, respondents are coded into quintiles by survey year: the resulting scale runs from 1 (poorest fifth) to 5 (richest fifth).

For other variables, there are small differences in question wording and data availability across surveys. In the Pew study, education has four categories (less than high school, high school, some college, and a BA or higher). In the ANES and CCES data, that final category is disaggregated into those with a BA and those with an advanced degree, making education a five-category variable. The AP VoteCast uses a four-point scale, collapsing less than high school and high school into a single category, but retaining the BA/advanced degree distinction.

In the ANES and CCES, age is measured in years, divided by 10 to ease interpretation of coefficients. The other surveys did not release respondents' exact age, and so it is measured in six (the AP VoteCast) or seven (Pew) categories. In the ANES, CCES, and AP VoteCast data, region is coded as South (the reference level), Midwest, Northeast, or West, based on Census definitions of each state; the geographic location of Pew respondents was not released.[5]

For all data except the AP VoteCast, religiosity is based on how often the respondent attends religious services, ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (more than once a week). In the AP data, it ranges from 1 (never attending) to 5 (once a week or more). Finally, analysis of the pooled ANES and CCES data controls for the year of the survey.

MODELS AND PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

I estimated linear models (OLS regression when the outcome is continuous, and logistic regression for binary outcomes, with survey weights applied). The goal is to isolate the impact of identity while controlling for other variables. Full results are reported in the Supplementary Material, and these are summarized in plots of predicted values. Each model is simulated, with control variables held at their mean or modal value in that dataset. The first difference between respondents of different identities in predicted positions on the 0–1 linear scale (for continuous dependent variables) or in predicted probabilities of giving a liberal response (for binary dependent variables) is calculated, with 95 percent confidence intervals that reflect the uncertainty in both the regression coefficients and the simulated predictions.

5. Beyond region, we might expect geographic context to explain differences in LGBT attitudes (Kazyak 2011). Unfortunately, only the AP VoteCast survey measured rural/urban context. Analysis in the Supplementary Material, section S6, suggests that including it as an additional control does not change the estimated impact of LGBT identity.

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LGBT Distinctiveness from Straight Cisgender Americans

A separate regression model was estimated for each dependent variable, with an indicator for LGB (ANES models) or LGBT identity (CCES and AP VoteCast models). Pew did not interview straight cisgender respondents, and so those data are set aside for now. Model coefficients are shown in the Supplementary Material, section S3. Figure 1 shows the simulated first difference for each attitude, calculated by subtracting the predicted position of straight cisgender respondents from that of LGBT respondents.

Across datasets and dependent variables, LGBT Americans are substantially more liberal than their straight cisgender peers. Take the differences in political predispositions and vote choice, shown in the top section of each plot. Across the 2008–2016 presidential elections measured by the ANES, LGB Americans had a 0.38 [95 percent confidence interval = 0.29, 0.47] greater probability of supporting the Democrat than otherwise-similar straight voters. LGBT voters had a 0.28 [0.24, 0.31] greater probability of voting for Clinton in 2016 according to the CCES, and a 0.18 [0.12, 0.23] greater probability of voting Democratic in the 2018 House elections, according to the AP VoteCast. Similarly, LGBT Americans identify as more Democratic (by 0.13 [0.09, 0.17] in the ANES, 0.16 [0.14, 0.17] in the CCES, and 0.11 [0.07, 0.14] in the AP VoteCast) and hold more liberal ideologies (by 0.17 [0.14, 0.20] in the ANES, 0.15 [0.14, 0.16] in the CCES, and 0.15 [0.12, 0.17] in the AP VoteCast). In their electoral choices and general political orientations, LGBT Americans are a distinctively liberal group.

This distinctiveness is also apparent in support for LGBT rights. For example, in the ANES, LGB respondents were 0.17 [0.13, 0.21] points more supportive of marriage equality on the 0–1 scale; in the CCES, LGBT Americans had a 0.28 [0.26, 0.30] greater probability of saying they support marriage rights. LGBT people are more likely to support adoption rights, are more supportive of laws protecting LGB people from discrimination at work, rate marriage equality as a more important issue, and are more likely to oppose a ban on transgender people serving in the military. Perhaps unsurprisingly, LGBT respondents hold liberal views on LGBT rights.

But LGBT Americans' attitudes are distinctive in policy domains far removed from sexual orientation and gender identity. As the lower section of each plot in figure 1 makes clear, LGBT respondents were more liberal on almost every issue the surveys asked about. For example, LGB respondents to the ANES were more supportive of government providing health insurance (by 0.14 [0.10, 0.18]) and more strongly opposed to the death penalty (by 0.14 [0.09, 0.19]). LGBT respondents to the CCES were more likely to oppose President Trump's travel ban (a 0.23 [0.20, 0.26] greater probability), and to oppose Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court (0.21 [0.18, 0.24] greater probability). Across the 39 non-LGBT policy areas, LGBT Americans held distinctively more liberal positions on all but three issues.

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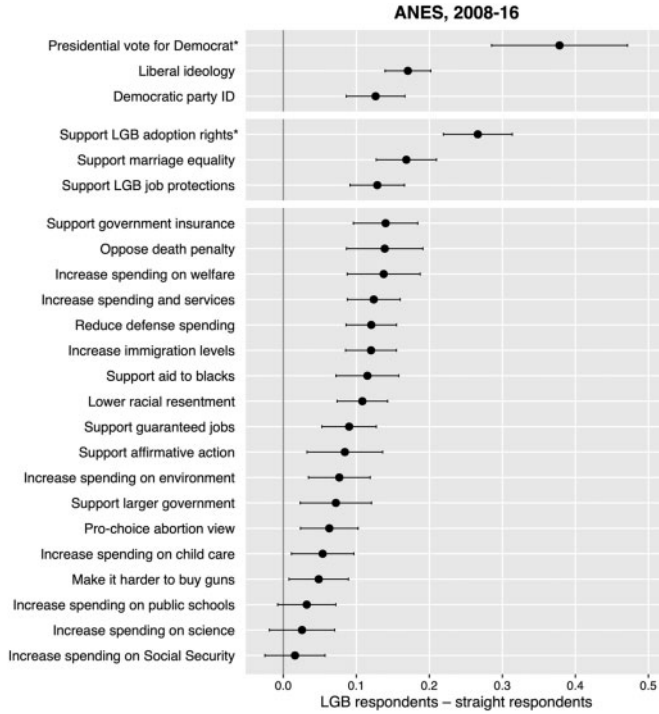
Figure 1. How LGBT Americans differ from straight cisgender Americans. First differences with 95 percent confidence intervals, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S3. Asterisks indicate binary dependent variables: estimates are the predicted probability of LGBT respondents giving a liberal response minus the probability of straight cisgender respondents doing the same. All others are continuous dependent variables: estimates are the predicted position of LGBT respondents on the 0–1 linear scale minus the position of straight cisgender respondents. Models control for gender, age, marital status, income, education, religiosity, region, and year of survey, set to mean or modal values for the simulations.



(*continued*)

One concern with this conclusion is that respondents with liberal attitudes may be more likely to report an LGBT identity (Egan 2012, 2020), which would artificially inflate the estimates shown here. Egan (2020) reports "small but significant" effects: liberal Democrats in GSS panel surveys had a 0.02 greater probability of later identifying as LGB than conservative Republicans. This suggests some degree of upward bias in figure 1's

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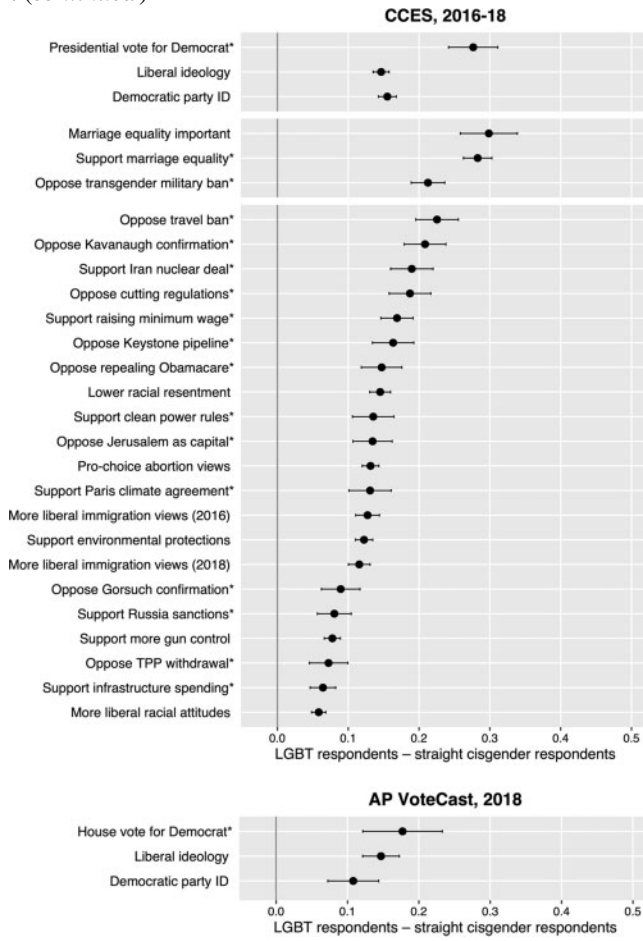
Figure 1. (*continued*)



estimates is possible. The cross-sectional data used here are not well suited to estimating that possibility, however. Instead, I interpret the estimates here as being the difference between those who self-identified as LGBT on these surveys and those who did not.[6]

6. An additional concern is that the models of policy views and vote choice do not incorporate party identity or ideology. Supplementary Material, section S7, presents the results of structural equation models that replicate these analyses, allowing LGBT identity to affect attitudes both directly and indirectly via partisanship and ideology. The "total effects" lead to the same substantive conclusions as reported here.

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These differences are as large, and often larger, than those generated by the demographic characteristics researchers usually include in their models of public opinion. Take the first differences in ideology simulated from the CCES data. LGBT respondents are predicted to be 0.15 [0.14, 0.16] more liberal than straight cisgender respondents. This is roughly the same as the gap between Black and White respondents (0.14 [0.13, 0.15]) or between the most and least educated (0.17 [0.16, 0.18]). And it is substantially *larger* than the gap between Hispanics and Whites (0.07 [0.06, 0.08]), younger and older respondents (0.06 [0.05, 0.06]),[7] women and men (0.05 [0.04, 0.05]), and the richest and poorest (0.01 [0.00, 0.02]). LGBT identities are associated with distinctively liberal attitudes—to a similar or greater degree than the demographic characteristics that are routinely incorporated into our analyses of public opinion.

In short, these results confirm—across a broader set of data sources and dependent variables than previously available—that LGBT Americans hold distinctively liberal attitudes. This is true for LGBT rights, as we might expect, but also for general political predispositions, vote choice, and a wide range of other issues. So far, the analysis treats LGBT respondents as an undifferentiated group, however. The next section explores diversity *within* the LGBT community.

Diversity within the LGBT Community

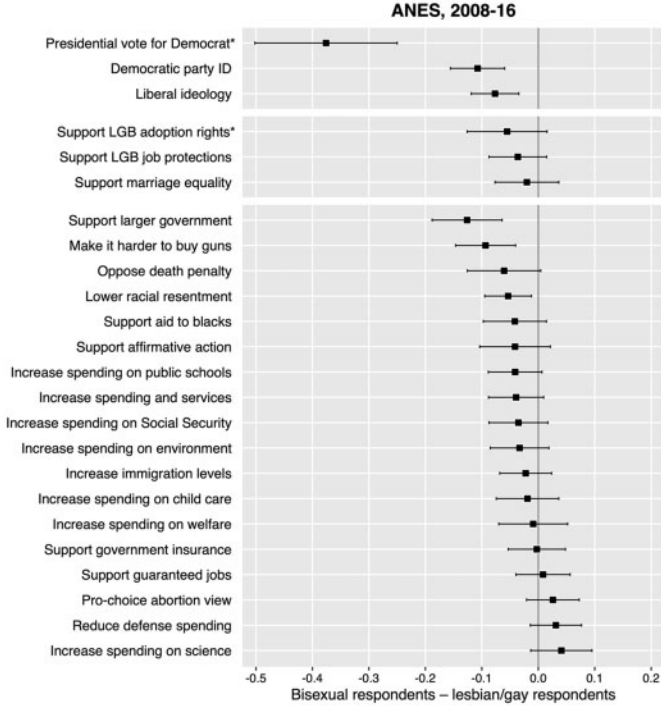
Regression models were estimated with separate indicators for lesbian/gay, bisexual, and transgender identities. Coefficients are shown in the Supplementary Material, sections S4 and S5. Three sets of predicted differences are simulated from the results: between (1) lesbian/gay respondents and bisexual respondents; (2) lesbian/gay respondents and transgender respondents; and (3) men and women within each identity group.

BISEXUAL AMERICANS

Figure 2 shows the predicted position of bisexual respondents minus the predicted position of lesbian/gay respondents. Bisexual respondents are frequently, although not always, less liberal than lesbian/gay respondents. This is most apparent when looking at predispositions and vote choice. All else equal, bisexual respondents were significantly less likely to vote Democratic (in the ANES, by −0.38 [−0.50, −0.25]), to hold liberal ideologies (−0.08 [−0.12, −0.03]), and to identify as Democrats (−.11 [−0.16, −0.06]) than lesbian/gay respondents. Similar results are found in the other surveys, except for the estimated difference in ideology in the Pew data,

7. Defined here as those at the 10th and 90th percentile of the age distribution, ages 24 and 71.

Figure 2. How bisexual Americans differ from lesbian/gay Americans. First differences with 95 percent confidence intervals, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S4. Asterisks indicate binary dependent variables: estimates are the predicted probability of bisexual respondents giving a liberal response minus the probability of lesbian/gay respondents doing the same. All others are continuous: estimates are the predicted position of bisexual respondents on the 0–1 linear scale minus the position of lesbian/gay respondents. Models control for gender, age, marital status, income, education, religiosity, region, and year of survey, set to mean or modal values for the simulations.



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which is not significant (recall that the AP VoteCast did not differentiate between lesbian/gay and bisexual respondents and so is not used here).

On LGBT rights, the results vary by dataset. The CCES and Pew studies—but not the ANES—show lower support for LGBT rights among bisexual respondents. For example, they were −0.07 [−0.10, −0.04] points less supportive of marriage equality according to Pew, and −0.05 [−0.08, −0.02] less likely to favor it according to the CCES. The ANES, however, showed no significant differences on this issue (−0.02 [−0.08, 0.04]).

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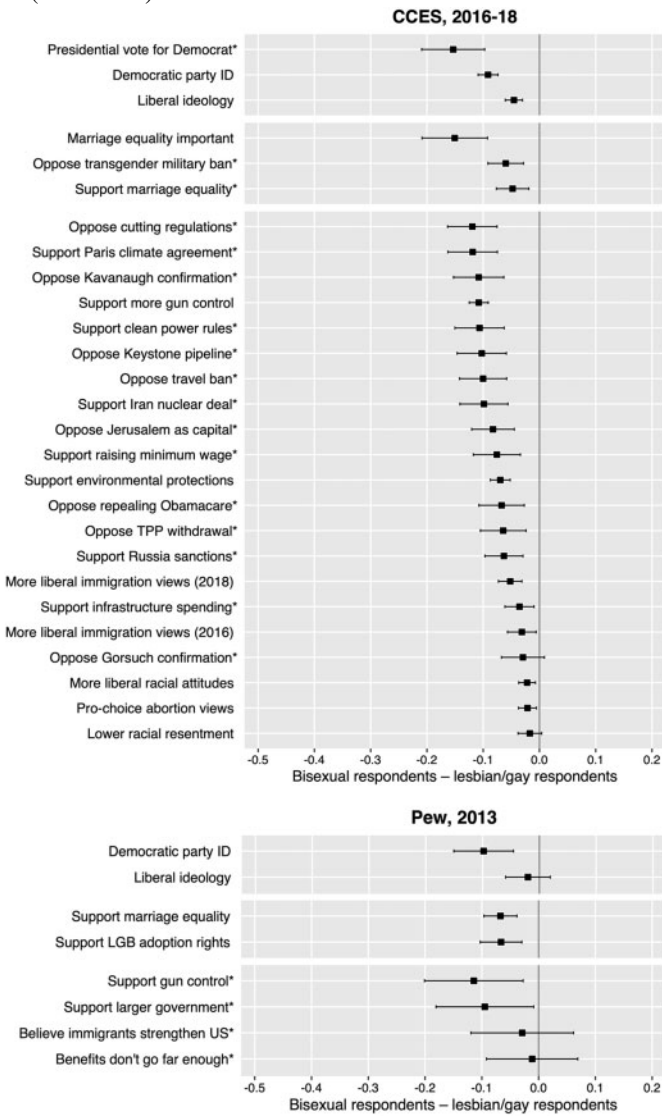
Figure 2. (*continued*)



A similar pattern emerges on other policy issues. There are consistent differences in the CCES data (where bisexual respondents are less liberal on 19 of the 21 items), but fewer differences in the ANES or Pew data (where bisexuals were less liberal on 3 of the 18, and 2 of the 4 issues, respectively). Reasons for this variation across datasets are not immediately obvious. There are no

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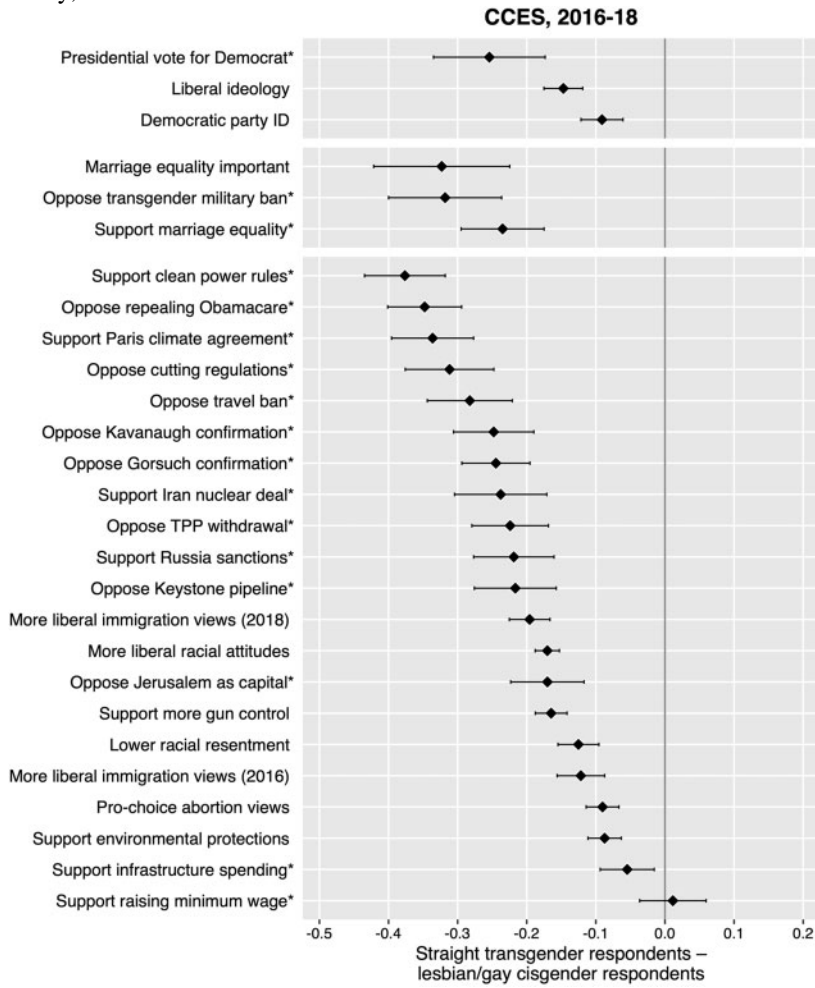
Figure 3. How transgender Americans differ from lesbian/gay Americans. First differences with 95 percent confidence intervals, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S4. Asterisks indicate binary dependent variables: estimates are the predicted probability of straight transgender respondents giving a liberal response minus the probability of lesbian/gay cisgender respondents doing the same. All others are continuous: estimates are the predicted position of straight transgender respondents on the 0–1 linear scale minus the position of lesbian/gay cisgender respondents. Models control for gender, age, marital status, income, education, religiosity, region, and year of survey, set to mean or modal values for the simulations.



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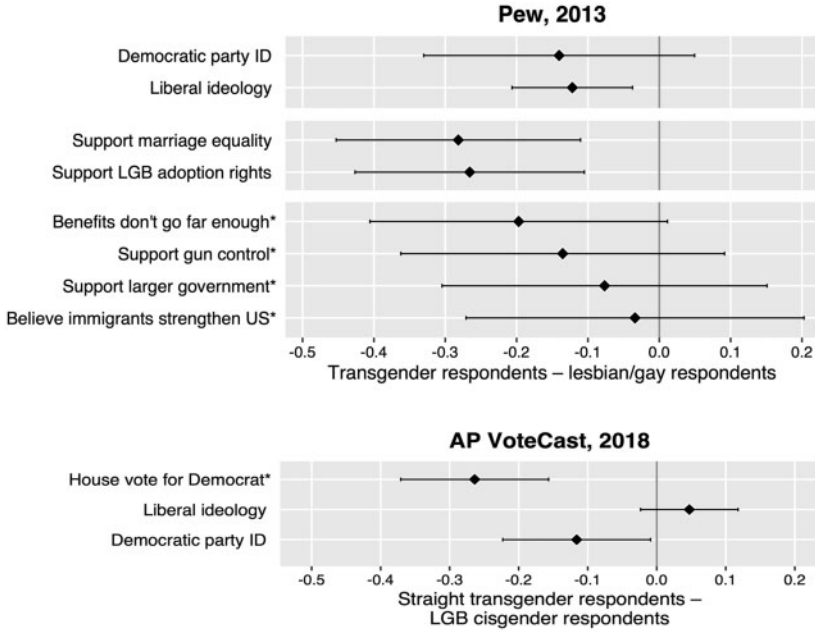

items where bisexual respondents are estimated to be *more* liberal than lesbian/gay respondents; it is possible that larger sample sizes (as in the CCES) would lead to more precision on these estimates. Even with these data, however, bisexual respondents were significantly less liberal than lesbian/gay respondents on 36 of the 59 total items shown in figure 2 (61 percent).

TRANSGENDER AMERICANS

Sexual orientation and gender identity are independent identities, and so comparisons between groups require some nuance. The majority of transgender respondents in these data identify as straight. In simulating the results from the CCES and AP VoteCast, differences between straight transgender respondents and lesbian/gay cisgender respondents are estimated. In the Pew data, differences between those who identified as transgender and those who identified as lesbian/gay are estimated, since they were offered as mutually exclusive response options. The ANES did not measure transgender identity and is not analyzed here.

Transgender respondents are in general less liberal than cisgender lesbians and gay men, as shown in figure 3. They were substantially less likely to vote Democratic in 2016 (according to the CCES, by −0.25 [−0.33, −0.17])

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and 2018 (according to AP VoteCast by −0.26 [−0.37, −0.16]). Similarly, they often held less liberal ideologies (in the CCES and Pew, although not the AP VoteCast data) and identified as less Democratic (in the CCES and AP VoteCast, but not Pew).

Transgender respondents were less supportive of LGBT rights, too. Compared to cisgender lesbians and gay men, they were less likely to support marriage equality, adoption rights, and to see marriage as an important issue. This is the case even on the one item directly impacting transgender rights. Transgender respondents were −0.32 [−0.40, −0.24] *less* likely to oppose President Trump's ban on transgender military service, according to the CCES. Transgender respondents appear less supportive than cisgender lesbians and gay men of the priorities of the LGBT movement across the board.

This greater conservatism relative to cisgender lesbians and gay men is apparent on other political issues, too. Across the 24 non-LGBT items, transgender respondents were less liberal on all but five. Overall, the results show significant diversity within the community: on 82 percent of these measures (31 of 38), transgender respondents were significantly less liberal than cisgender lesbian and gay respondents.

DIFFERENCES BASED ON GENDER

The large-*N* CCES data are used to estimate differences between men and women within each identity group. Figure 4 shows predicted predispositions and vote choice, figure 5 positions on LGBT rights, and figure 6 positions on other issues, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S5. Black bullets symbolize women's positions; white bullets, men's positions.

On most of the items, there are no differences between lesbian and gay respondents, and between transgender women and transgender men. On 17 of the 27 measures, lesbians and gay men held indistinguishable positions (with lesbians more liberal on five, and more conservative on five, of the remaining items). Similarly, transgender women and men held the same positions on 19 measures (although here, transgender women were more liberal on all eight for which there were differences). We should be cautious in interpreting these results: transgender identity incorporates multiple groups, not all of whom subscribe to the dichotomous concept of gender used in the CCES's male/female item (see Taylor, Lewis, and Haider-Markel 2018). As such, there is likely greater measurement error in these estimates than for cisgender respondents. Overall, however, even the point estimates in figures 4–6 do not provide much evidence that gender is a major source of division within these subgroups.

In contrast, there are striking differences between bisexual men and bisexual women. On 23 of the 27 items, bisexual women were significantly more

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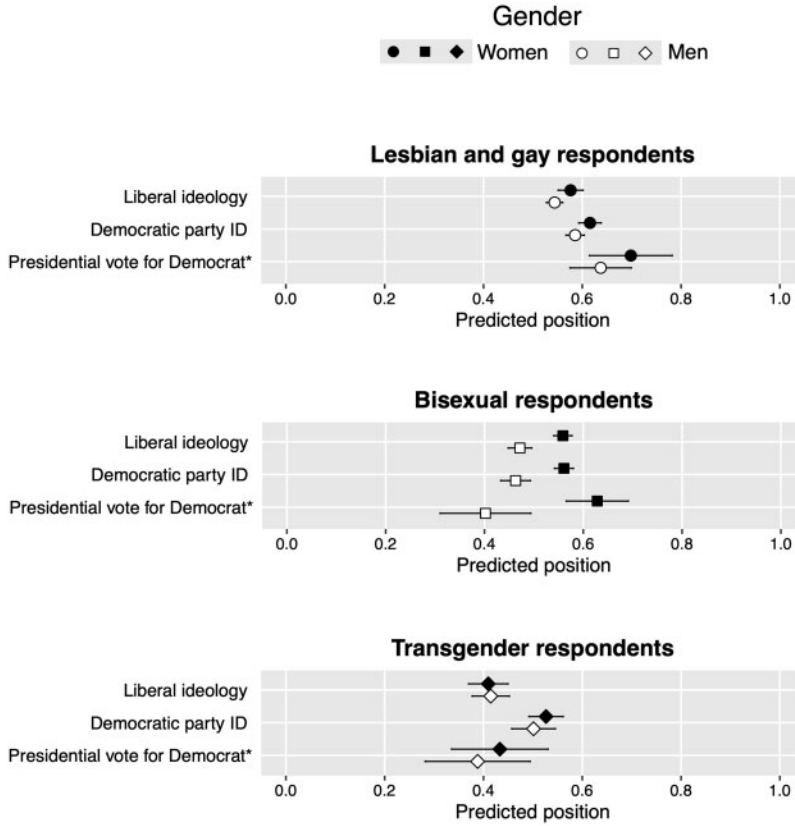
Figure 4. Predicted predispositions and vote, by LGBT identity and gender, CCES 2016–2018. Predicted positions with 95 percent confidence intervals, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S5. For presidential vote choice, these are the predicted probability of voting for Hillary Clinton in 2016. For continuous dependent variables, these are predicted positions on the 0–1 scale, where higher values indicate more liberal responses. Models control for age, marital status, income, education, religiosity, region, and year of survey, set to mean or modal values for the simulations.



liberal than bisexual men. These differences are often substantial: as shown in figure 4, they were 0.23 [0.16, 0.29] more likely to vote for Hillary Clinton, 0.09 [0.07, 0.11] more liberal, and 0.10 [0.08, 0.12] more Democratic, for example. In sum, gender accounts for substantial diversity within the LGBT community—but only significantly so for bisexual

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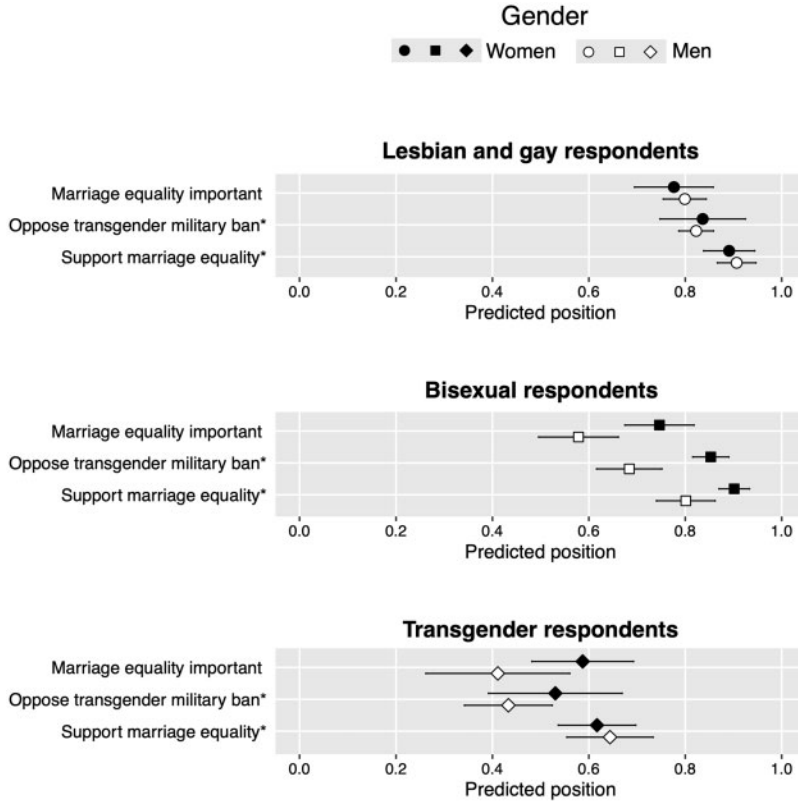
Figure 5. Predicted positions on LGBT rights, by LGBT identity and gender, CCES 2016–2018. Predicted positions with 95 percent confidence intervals, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S5. For binary dependent variables, shown with an asterisk, these are the predicted probability of giving the liberal response. For continuous dependent variables, these are predicted positions on the 0–1 scale, where higher values indicate more liberal responses. Models control for age, marital status, income, education, religiosity, region, and year of survey, set to mean or modal values for the simulations.



respondents. The greater liberalism of bisexual women compared to bisexual men was not mirrored when looking at lesbian/gay respondents or transgender respondents.

Overall, these results reveal the significant attitudinal diversity of LGBT Americans: bisexual respondents and transgender respondents are frequently less liberal than cisgender lesbians and gay men (although still more liberal

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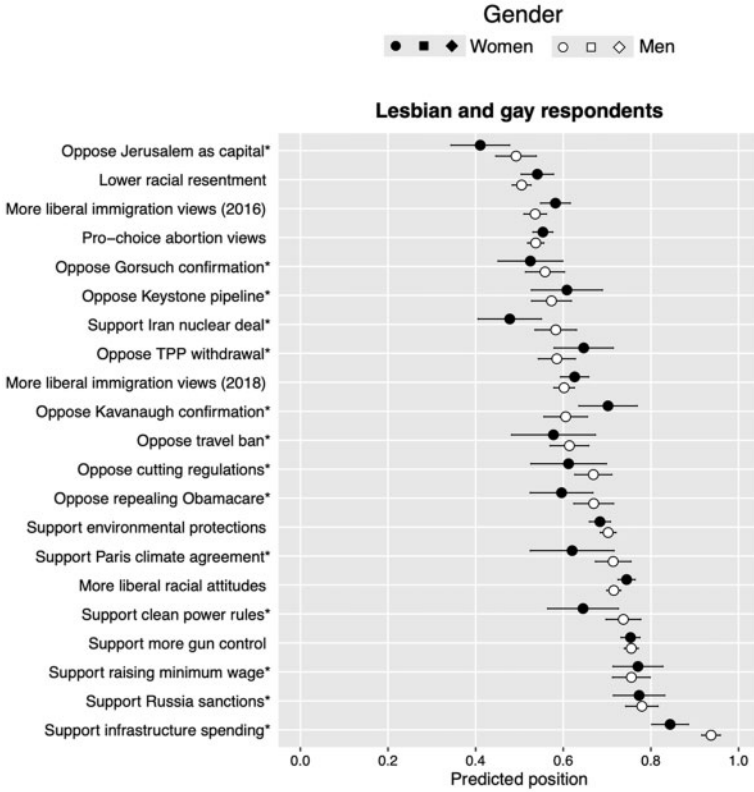
Figure 6. Predicted positions on other issues, by LGBT identity and gender, CCES 2016–2018. Predicted positions with 95 percent confidence intervals, simulated from models shown in the Supplementary Material, section S5. For binary dependent variables, shown with an asterisk, these are the predicted probability of giving the liberal response. For continuous dependent variables, these are predicted positions on the 0–1 scale, where higher values indicate more liberal responses. Models control for age, marital status, income, education, religiosity, region, and year of survey, set to mean or modal values for the simulations.



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than the average straight cisgender respondent). And within the bisexual community, there are important differences rooted in gender: bisexual women are often more liberal than bisexual men. While LGBT Americans as a group are distinctively liberal compared to straight cisgender Americans, there remains important heterogeneity within the community.

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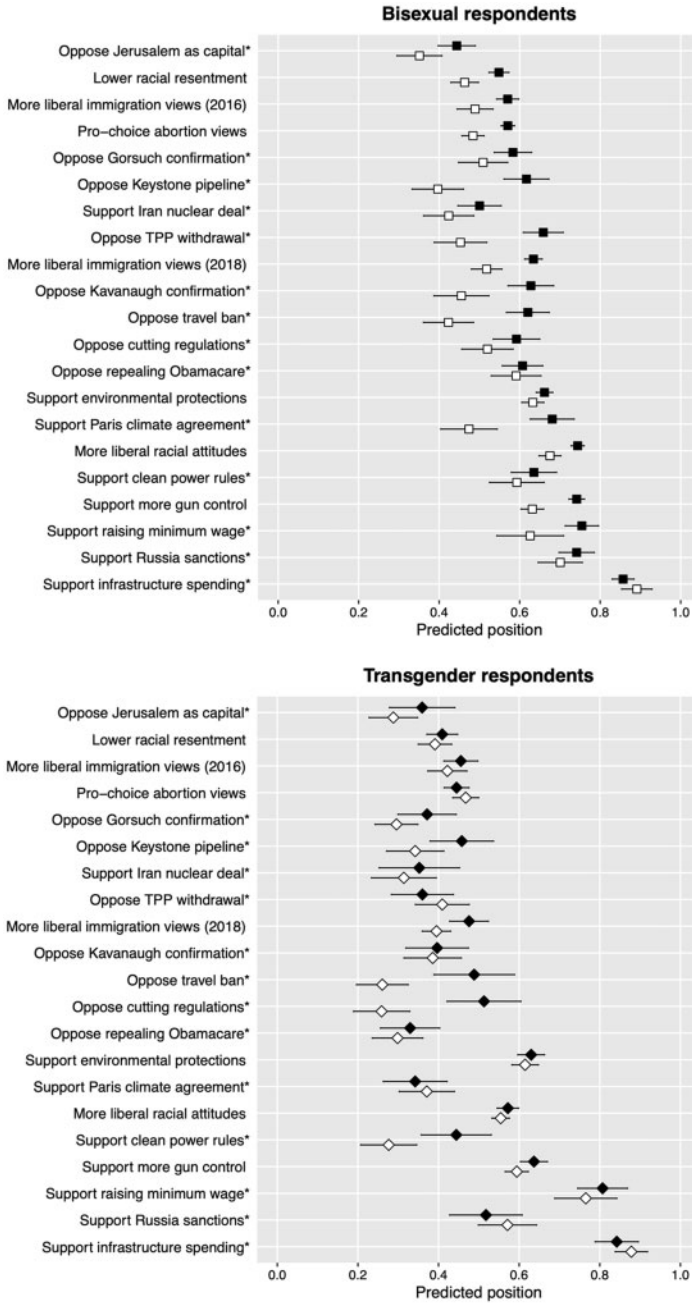
Figure 6. (*continued*)



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Conclusions

Public opinion on LGBT issues has liberalized dramatically in recent years, accompanied by a rise in academic research on sexual orientation and gender identity. Yet scholars rarely explore LGBT Americans' attitudes or account for these identities when modeling public opinion. This article demonstrates, across multiple data sources and a diverse range of attitudinal measures, that this omission obscures the significant distinctiveness of LGBT Americans and the substantial diversity within the community.

LGBT Americans hold distinctive political views. Compared to straight cisgender Americans, they are more likely to vote for Democratic candidates, to call themselves liberals, and to identify as Democrats. And on a range of issues with little connection to sexual orientation or gender identity, LGBT respondents hold more liberal attitudes. Substantively, the ideological gap between LGBT and straight cisgender Americans is comparable to that between Black and White Americans, and larger than gaps based on gender, income, or Hispanic ethnicity. LGBT Americans are a politically distinctive group.

At the same time, the LGBT community is not monolithic. Bisexual and transgender respondents frequently hold more conservative views than cisgender lesbians and gay men. Within most of these subgroups, gender plays only a muted role. Only among bisexual respondents are there consistent differences between men and women, indicating that sexual orientation and transgender identity are more significant sources of heterogeneity within the community than gender itself.

As with any study, there are important limitations to these findings and associated avenues for future research. First, the analyses do not explain *why* we see such distinctiveness and diversity among LGBT Americans. Understanding the relative contributions of selection, embeddedness, and conversion effects is a sizable task (see Lewis, Rogers, and Sherrill 2011; Egan 2012; Swank 2018). These theorized mechanisms do provide a framework for understanding LGBT diversity, however. Bisexual and transgender Americans are less embedded in the LGBT community, and less likely to have experienced the "conversion" effects of coming out (Herek et al. 2010; James et al. 2016), which could lead to more conservative views. Similarly, previous work suggests that bisexual men are less integrated into the community and more ambivalent about their identities than bisexual women (Herek et al. 2010; Choi et al. 2019), which could result in less liberal outlooks (see Cravens 2019). The data used here do not provide us with the kind of information we would need to assess these possibilities, however: fully unpacking the mechanisms that lead to LGBT distinctiveness and diversity is a first-order task for future researchers.

A second limitation is that, while asking about *any* LGBT identities is a step forward, these surveys suffer from measurement error that limits the conclusions

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that can be reached. The ANES did not cover transgender identity; the AP VoteCast did not disaggregate LGB respondents; Pew conflated sexual orientation and gender identity. Unaccounted for in any of the surveys are queer, asexual, pansexual, intersex, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming Americans. If we know almost nothing about the attitudes of bisexual and transgender Americans from previous work, we know even less about these groups. A broader conceptualization of queer identities—and better data—are needed here.

Finally, these analyses only consider two dimensions of diversity, based on sexual orientation and gender identities. Other work shows significant differences within the LGBT community based on age (Egan and Sherrill 2005), group consciousness (Cravens 2019), worldviews (Haider-Markel and Miller 2017), and intersecting demographic identities (Strolovitch, Wong, and Proctor 2017). Exploring differences based on sexual orientation and gender identity, as this article does, is intended to be a first step rather than the final word. There remains much work to be done.

This call for further study might be questioned, given that LGBT Americans comprise a relatively small portion of the population and hold views largely on one side of the political spectrum. But scholars regularly study minority groups for the insights they provide on broader issues of power and politics (Mucciaroni 2011). And the fact that LGBT Americans hold such liberal views makes their inclusion more, not less, vital, since it marks them as a distinct and potentially pivotal electoral constituency (McThomas and Buchanan 2012). Similarly, the diversity within the LGBT community that this paper documents is of real-world importance. The LGBT movement has largely been dominated by cisgender lesbians and gay men (Marcus 2015; Smith, Schulenberg, and Baldwin 2017). The diversity of opinions within the community shown here suggests that centering bisexual and transgender people could lead to a less liberal, or at least less monolithic, set of voices being heard.

Over two decades ago, Hertzog (1996) called for scholars to incorporate LGB identities into their research. As a field, we have not done so: our models almost always overlook respondents' sexual orientation and gender identities, and surveys that target LGBT people are uncommon. Presumably, we account for other demographic characteristics like race, ethnicity, and gender because we think those identity groups have distinctive views and want to acknowledge the diversity of opinion within them. Following that logic, we should include LGBT identities as regular items on our surveys and as standard covariates in our models.[8] Certainly, the increasing availability of large-*N* survey samples and the reduced social stigma that forces LGBT people into the closet makes that more feasible. Coupled with the distinctiveness of

8. See the Williams Institute for useful guides to measuring sexual orientation and gender identity (SMART 2009; GenIUSS Group 2014).

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LGBT Americans' political views, and the attitudinal diversity within the community, it is now past time for public opinion scholars to routinely incorporate LGBT attitudes into our research.

Data Availability Statement

REPLICATION DATA AND DOCUMENTATION are available at: https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/FFF2DZ.

Supplementary Material

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL may be found in the online version of this article: https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfab030.

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