

# *Democratic Values, Religiosity, and Support for Same-Sex Marriage in Latin America*

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## ABSTRACT

Latin America has been at the forefront of the expansion of rights for same-sex couples. Proponents of same-sex marriage frame the issue as related to human rights and democratic deepening; opponents emphasize morality tied to religious values. Elite framing shapes public opinion when frames resonate with individuals' values and the frame source is deemed credible. Using surveys in 18 Latin American countries in 2010 and 2012, this article demonstrates that democratic values are associated with support for same-sex marriage while religiosity reduces support, particularly among strong democrats. The tension between democratic and religious values is particularly salient for women, people who live outside the capital city, and people who came of age during or before democratization.

Latin America is at the forefront of the expansion of sexual rights. Over the last decade, in what has been termed the region's gay rights revolution (Encarnación 2011), several Latin American governments have introduced constitutional amendments that ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, have enacted civil unions for same-sex couples, have allowed same-sex marriage, and have adopted some of the most progressive legislation on gender identity (Encarnación 2011, 2013, 690–91; Díez 2013). The expansion of these rights has come as a result not only of the presence of strong, well-organized lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activism, but also of the ability of LGBT activists to articulate their demands in a manner that resonates with larger social debates. In the case of same-sex marriage in countries in which it has been approved, work shows that activists successfully articulated their demands as an issue of equality, citizenship, and democratic deepening (Díez 2015). Arguments in favor of same-sex marriage clashed with those advanced by conservative actors, mostly led by the Catholic Church hierarchy, who presented the issue as one of morality and, based on religious precepts, one that equates sex with reproduction (Díez 2015; Hiller 2010; Vaggione 2011).

In these ways, elites articulate, or frame, their arguments to persuade and mobilize citizens and policymakers to support their position. While we know how the

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debate has been framed by elites in Latin America, we know little about public opinion on same-sex marriage in the region. No previous study has examined the connection between democratic values and support for same-sex marriage in Latin America, and this article fills this gap by examining the ways democratic and religious values intersect to shape attitudes toward same-sex marriage.

In general, Latin American societies have been characterized as having both strong “traditional religious values” alongside higher “self-expression values” than typical for their level of economic development (Inglehart 2009, 94). We argue that this heightens the tension between the dominant same-sex marriage frames deployed by proponents and opponents throughout the region. If same-sex marriage is perceived as an issue of democratic deepening, Latin Americans who have stronger democratic values should be more supportive of same-sex marriage. Equally, higher levels of religiosity should correspond to less support of same-sex marriage. Because democratic values also allow for protection of minority viewpoints and political contestation over policy, we expect strong democrats who are also highly religious to be more likely to express opposition to same-sex marriage.

This study begins by describing the competing elite frames used by proponents and opponents of same-sex marriage and explaining why these frames should contribute to the formation of attitudes about same-sex marriage in Latin America. It also explains why tensions between religiosity and democratic values are likely to vary by age, gender, and locality size. Then it empirically evaluates the hypotheses, using multivariate mixed effects logistic regression analysis of surveys throughout Latin America in 2010 and 2012. The evidence reveals that, in general, people with democratic values are more likely to support same-sex marriage, except when they attend religious services regularly. Among democrats who attend religious services at least once a week, support for same-sex marriage is quite low, even compared to religious nondemocrats. The results also find that the tension between democratic values and religiosity is most pronounced outside of capital cities, among women, and in the generation that came of age during and before Third Wave democratic transitions.

## **ELITE FRAMING AND PUBLIC OPINION: DEMOCRACY, RELIGION, AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE**

Social movements often develop policy frames, or the “interpretative packages that activists develop to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, appeal to authorities, and demobilize antagonists” (Polletta and Ho 2006, 190). Activists develop such policy frames through a process of meaning making that involves the employment of rhetoric and tactics (Snow et al. 1986). In “frame alignment,” actors develop their frames to resonate with larger, salient social debates, or master frames (Anthony et al. 1994; Fligstein and Mara-Drita 1996). As Dennis Chong stated more than 20 years ago, such framing is “the essence of public opinion formation” (1993, 870).

Indeed, public opinion research confirms that the framing of issues by elites affects how people view social issues (e.g., Chong 1993, 199; Druckman 2001a; Nelson et al. 1997; Terkildsen and Schnell 1997). In particular, Zaller's influential 1992 model posits that opinions are shaped not only by elite efforts to frame an issue, but also the extent to which those frames are consistent with an individual's predispositions, or values. People will be more receptive to issue frames that are consistent with their values and dismissive of frames that are not.

For many issues, different elite groups may mobilize competing, or opposing, issue frames in an effort to persuade the public. When elite disagreement produces competing frames, the competing frames will resonate and influence opinions more among those in the public who share values consistent with one frame or the other (Zaller 1991, 1992, chap. 9; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). When the competing frames also bring competing values into conflict, the frames are less likely to change opinions (Zaller 1992, chap. 9, Sniderman and Therieult 2004; Wise and Brewer 2010). In such cases, research has found that the perceived credibility of the elite source of the frames may tip the balance (Druckman 2001b; Brewer and Gross 2005). That is, when individuals are predisposed to agree with two competing elite frames, they may tend to be influenced more by the frame coming from a trusted elite source.

### **Elite Framing of Same-Sex Marriage in Latin America**

Over the last two decades, national LGBT activists have strategically framed their demands to achieve frame alignment, influence public opinion, place LGBT rights on national agendas, and achieve their policy goals (Jenness 1995; Bernstein 1997; Miceli 2005). In the United States, for example, the Equality Movement strategically framed same-sex marriage as an issue of equal access to the family, which is widely perceived to be a central unit of society (Becker 2014). According to research, such framing explains public opinion and support for same-sex marriage in the United States (Brewer 2003a, b; Flores 2015).

In contrast, in Latin American countries in which same-sex marriage has been approved, LGBT activists have generally argued that it is an issue of equal access to citizenship and, consequently, one of democratic deepening (Corrales 2015; Díez 2015; Friedman 2012; Hiller 2010; Schulenberg 2012). Building on democratic transitions and national debates of the 1980s and 1990s about the meaning of democracy, LGBT activists have aligned their demands with these broader debates and conceptions of democratic values, articulating the demand for same-sex marriage as one of furthering democracy.

For example, the Argentine Homosexual Community (*Comunidad Homosexual Argentina*, CHA), as early as 1984, explicitly linked their awareness campaigns about discrimination and violence against homosexuals to notions of repression inconsistent with the values of democracy, and relied on broad acceptance of democratic values in posttransition Argentina to convince policymakers to support their cause

(Encarnación 2011, 107–9). Similarly, during the debate to enact same-sex marriage in Mexico City, the main proponent of same-sex marriage in the city's Legislative Assembly declared that “the democratic progress that citizens of the Federal District demand requires legislative reforms that recognize and protect all citizens . . . these reforms . . . imply, precisely, an advance in the rights that guarantee the freedom of this city's citizens” (Rojas Martínez 2009). In this way, activists and politicians in Latin America who favor legalization of same-sex marriage have framed it as integral to democratic values and processes of democratization in the region.

Demands for same-sex marriage in Latin America have also met strong opposition from social conservatives, including the leadership of the Catholic Church and Evangelical Christians. For instance, when same-sex marriage appeared on the national agenda in Argentina, the Catholic Church leadership publicly opposed the legislation (Encarnación 2011, 114; 2013, 707–8; Friedman 2012, 44–45). Likewise, Evangelical legislators in Brazil introduced antihomosexual legislation in the state of Rio de Janeiro (Encarnación 2011, 116). Religious elite opposition has been framed around historically dominant natural law conceptions of the family and sexuality that equate sex with reproduction and that view homosexual activities to be sinful and immoral (Hiller 2010; Schulenberg 2012; Díez 2015). For example, in the days following the enactment of same-sex marriage in Mexico City, Mexico's cardinal, Norberto Rivera Carrera, declared that same-sex marriage was “immoral” and an “aberration,” as it “open[s] the door to the perverse possibility that they [gays and lesbians] can adopt innocent children” (Zaragoza 2009).<sup>1</sup> Whereas proponents of same-sex marriage have developed a frame linked to democratic citizenship, opponents have developed one linked to morality, though with a handful of exceptions.

These two frames have contradictory logics, which are intensified by high levels of support for democracy and religiosity in Latin America. Indeed, in 2012, 67.5 percent of Latin Americans agreed or strongly agreed that, “despite its problems, democracy is the best system of government” (authors' calculation, AmericasBarometer 2012). In 2012, 67 percent of Latin Americans self-identified as Catholic, 16.4 percent as Evangelical Christian, 5.5 percent as Protestant, and another 9 percent as nonreligious believers (authors' calculation, AmericasBarometer 2012). Furthermore, 63.7 percent of Latin Americans attend religious services at least once a month (and 44.2 percent at least once a week), and about 84.5 percent say that religion is rather or very important in their lives (authors' calculations, AmericasBarometer 2012). Given that a majority of Latin Americans claim religious affiliations and support democratic values, competing elite frames on same-sex marriage create conflict between strong value predispositions in much of the public.

## Explaining Support for Same-Sex Marriage in Latin America

Based on the preceding discussion, we propose three core hypotheses about patterns of public support for same-sex marriage in Latin America. First, we hypothesize that those who embrace democratic values are significantly more likely to support same-sex marriage (hypothesis 1). Second, we hypothesize that those who are more religious are significantly less likely to support same-sex marriage (hypothesis 2). In some ways, these hypotheses are not surprising, since previous work, mainly in the United States, demonstrates that elite and media framing influences attitudes toward LGBT rights (Brewer 2003a; McCabe and Heerwig 2012). Likewise, many studies find that religious practices are significantly associated with lower approval of homosexuality and legal protection of the rights of homosexuals (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Andersen and Fetner 2008a; Olson et al. 2006, 346; Sherkat et al. 2011, 174).

However, no previous study has specifically considered the ways democratic values and religiosity may compete in the formation of attitudes toward same-sex marriage in Latin America. When people are both very religiously observant and committed to democratic values, competing elite frames that pit democratization against morality appear contradictory. However, those who are both strongly democratic and religious may believe that democracy legitimizes their religious opposition to same-sex marriage rights, making highly religious democrats less likely to support same-sex marriage than their less religious counterparts.

In addition, though only two-thirds of Latin Americans self-identified as Catholic in 2012 (AmericasBarometer 2012), some scholars argue that the region's Catholic heritage contributes to a regional culture that prioritizes deference to traditional authority (Inglehart and Baker 2000). In such a context, Latin Americans may be likely to consider religious elites, particularly those of the Catholic Church, to be more credible sources for the framing of same-sex marriage. Consistent with previous research on the credibility of sources of competing frames (Druckman 2001b; Brewer and Gross 2005), we hypothesize that religiosity will have a stronger negative association with support for same-sex marriage than the positive association between democratic values and support (hypothesis 3). Consequently, when strong democrats attend religious services frequently, we might expect them to be more persuaded by frames opposing same-sex marriage, due to the perceived credibility of and cultural deference to their source.

### **The Potential Moderating Effect of Context and Contact**

The relationship between democratic and religious values and attitudes toward same-sex marriage may also vary significantly across broad segments of society, particularly by generation, population density, and gender. Existing research, largely based on the United States, demonstrates that older generations are significantly less likely to support same-sex marriage (Brewer 2003b; Baunach 2011, 2012; Becker 2012). We also expect older Latin Americans to be less likely to support same-sex marriage in general (hypothesis 4). More interestingly, some research suggests that older generations in the United States rely more on values and ideological predispositions to formulate their opinions on same-sex marriage than do younger generations (Becker and Scheufele 2011).

Though the Latin American context and framing of same-sex marriage differ from the U.S. experience, the democratic transitions throughout the region during the 1980s and 1990s were significant political events that moved human rights to the top of national policy agendas (Panizza 1995; Jelin and Hershberg 1996). Indeed, given the violations perpetrated by military regimes, in many countries, democratization became synonymous with human rights (Avritzer 2009). Consequently, we hypothesize that those who came of age before or during the Third Wave of democratization not only are more likely to express democratic values, but for them, these values should have a stronger association with support for same-sex marriage, regardless of the degree of religiosity (hypothesis 3a). In contrast, to the extent that younger generations may not have the same connection to framing of human rights as central to democratization because they were born during or after the Third Wave of democratization, religiosity may have a stronger association with same-sex marriage support than democratic values.

Research outside of Latin America finds that people who live in urban areas are more likely to support the expansion of gay rights because they are more likely, due to sheer population density, to have met someone who is gay and to change their attitudes (Stephan and McMullin 1982; Flores 2014; see also Wilcox and Norrander 2002). This is consistent with contact theory, which suggests that individuals who come into contact with others who possess dissimilar (ethnic, sexual, etc.) characteristics are less likely to be prejudiced toward them (Becker 2012; Pettigrew 1998). Though we cannot directly measure intergroup contact with the data available, we expect those living in the largest cities to be more likely to support same-sex marriage than those who live in less dense areas (hypothesis 5). However, research in the United States also suggests that high degrees of religiosity may limit the moderating effect of contact with gays and lesbians (Merino 2013). Consequently, we also hypothesize that religiosity will have a stronger association with opposition to same-sex marriage even among those living in large cities, while religiosity will not be as important a factor in explaining opposition to same-sex marriage in provincial cities and rural areas, where opposition is already widespread (hypothesis 3b).

In terms of gender, research suggests that women are more supportive of same-sex marriage because they are more likely to empathize with discrimination, and therefore they see homosexuality as less of a threat to their social status (Wilkinson 2006; see also Sherkat et al. 2011, 175). In Latin America, heterosexual men tend to disapprove more strongly of homosexuality than do women (Lancaster 1997; Parker 1999). This could be because masculinity is privileged in social relations (Gutmann 2006; Lancaster 1992), and homosexuality is often associated with effeminacy, which is generally stigmatized and perceived as a sign of social weakness and failure (Carrillo 2002).

Meanwhile, Latin American women are also much more likely to attend religious services regularly than men (in 2012, 56 percent of women and 44 percent of men reported attending religious services at least once a month or more,  $\chi^2 = 516.105$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , AmericasBarometer 2012). Therefore, we expect that men will be significantly less likely to support same-sex marriage than women overall (hypothesis 6), but in addition, we hypothesize that religiosity may have a stronger association with opposition to same-sex marriage among women compared to its effect among men (hypothesis 3c).

### **Alternative Explanations of Attitudes Toward Same-Sex Marriage**

Cross-national research on public opinion on homosexuality and same-sex marriage highlights several additional alternative explanations, or control variables. For example, those who self-identify as Evangelical Christian or Catholic are less likely to support same-sex marriage than those with another or no religious identity (Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Blevins 2005; Brewer and Wilcox 2005; Olson et al. 2006; Hicks and Lee 2006; Sherkat et al. 2011; Wilcox and Wolpert 2000). Greater economic security coincides with greater tolerance for homosexuality (Andersen and Fetner 2008b). Therefore, we expect those with more education, more secure employment, more Internet use, and more positive subjective evaluations of their household finances and the national economy to be more supportive of same-sex marriage. Left ideology is also associated with greater support for same-sex marriage in various studies in a range of national contexts (Olson et al. 2006; Becker and Scheufele 2009; Baunach 2012; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008; Jakobsson et al. 2013).

In addition to individual-level characteristics, countries differ in the average national level of support for same-sex marriage, which will condition individual opinion formation. According to neomodernization logic, both economic development and democracy are expected to be associated with social tolerance and therefore higher baseline probabilities of support for same-sex marriage (Inglehart and Welzel 2010; Fernández and Lutter 2013). In the analyses that follow, we control for those individual and cross-national differences that may explain variations in support for same-sex marriage at the individual and national levels.

## DATA, MEASUREMENT, AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

This study analyzes public opinion surveys (AmericasBarometer) conducted in 18 Latin American countries in 2010 and 2012. The sample includes all countries in the region that share similar colonial, linguistic, legal, and religious heritages: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of interest is primarily individual-level support for same-sex marriage, which is measured using a question asking the extent to which respondents agree with the statement that same-sex couples should have the right to marry (*casarse*), on a ten-point scale. Support is not normally distributed, given the polarization of attitudes toward the two extremes in each country, and very few respondents choose moderate responses, making linear and ordinal models inappropriate. Therefore, the dependent variable is measured as a dichotomous outcome, with those who choose 6 to 10 coded as supporting and the rest coded as not supporting same-sex marriage. This coding is consistent with the way the scale is presented to respondents and with characteristics of the distribution of responses in the sample.

Because no earlier studies have considered the relationship between democratic values and support for same-sex marriage, we include four measures of democratic values or support for democracy in successive models to demonstrate the robustness of our findings to alternative indicators. First, we combine responses to two questions to capture values consistent with the two dimensions of democracy: contestation and participation (Dahl 1973). Preference for contestation is measured by a question asking whether the national executive should limit the opposition. Those who disagree with limiting the opposition are coded as having democratic values.

Participatory democracy is captured with a question that asks whether “an iron fist” (nondemocratic) or “participation” (democratic) is best for solving national problems. By combining these two questions, we code respondents into three nominal categories for model 1: those who provide two democratic responses (democrats), those with one democratic and one nondemocratic response (mixed commitment), and those who choose two nondemocratic responses (nondemocrats).

The second of the four measures, general support for democracy, is measured by a question asking whether respondents agree that “even though it can have problems, democracy is the best form of government” (on a seven-point scale) for model 2. Responses to this question are highly correlated with other measures of democratic values (see Córdova and Seligson 2009; Seligson 2007). Third, we include a measure that asks which of two statements respondents most agree with: “We need a strong leader who need not be popularly elected” or “Although things may not work, electoral democracy, or the popular vote, is always best.” Those who choose electoral democracy are coded as democrats, otherwise nondemocrats, for model 3.

Fourth, we include another version of democratic support based on asking respondents to choose among three statements: “For people like me, it doesn’t



matter whether there's democracy or not," "in some circumstances, an authoritarian government is preferable," or "democracy is preferable to any other government." Those who choose "democracy is preferable" are coded as democrats and the other options as nondemocrats for model 4.

Religiosity is measured using respondents' reported frequency of attending religious services on a scale that ranges from 1 for "never or seldom" to 3 for "about once a month" to 5 for "more than once a week." Religious attendance, rather than subjective reports of religiousness, is preferred because attending services brings individuals into contact with religious leaders and others who share similar religious views (Olson et al. 2006, 342).<sup>3</sup>

### Indicators for Alternative Explanations and Control Variables

Self-reported religious affiliation is captured by a set of dummy variables for Evangelical Christian (including Mormon and Jehovah's Witness) and Catholic. For these dummies, the (omitted) reference category includes nonreligious believer, other religion (less than 5 percent of the sample), and nonbeliever (or atheist). Respondents who self-identified as Evangelical Christians, Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), or Jehovah's Witnesses were coded into one category, given their similar stances on and levels of support for same-sex marriage in the sample.

We also include controls for alternative explanations and individuals' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Generational differences are captured by a set of indicators for respondents under 30 (reference category), 31 through 45, 46 through 60, and over 60 years old.<sup>4</sup> In the sample, with the exception of Brazil, the largest city is the national capital, giving us a cross-nationally consistent way to control for those who live in the largest cities. Marital status is a set of dummies for those formerly married (widowed, divorced, or separated), those currently married (including common law), or single (reference category). The number of children is measured using multiples of the regional average fertility rate (two children), and it ranges from 0 to 3.<sup>5</sup> Single people and those without children are expected to be more likely to support same-sex marriage.

We also control for socioeconomic status or economic security. Education is captured with a set of dummies for having completed any primary (reference category), secondary, and tertiary education. Dummies for those who are employed and unemployed measure the difference in support for same-sex marriage compared to those not in the labor force (the reference category, which includes pensioners, homemakers, and students). Internet use is included as an additional control for socioeconomic status, ranging from 1 (never uses the Internet) to 5 (multiple times a day). Subjective economic security is measured by retrospective evaluations of the national economy or household finances compared to last year, ranging from 1 (better) to 3 (worse). Finally, left political ideology is self-placement on a ten-point, right-left scale. Those with higher socioeconomic status or security are expected to be more supportive of same-sex marriage.

*(continued on p. 86)*

Table 1. Support for Same-Sex Marriage in Latin America

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Measure of Democratic Values/Support	Democratic Values	Democracy Is Best (1–7)	Electoral Democracy Is Best (0/1)	Democracy Is Preferable (0/1)
Religiosity	-0.103*** (0.025)	-0.071** (0.033)	-0.085*** (0.027)	-0.082*** (0.021)
Mixed democratic commitment	0.178* (0.092)			
Democrat	0.463*** (0.095)			
Democratic values/support		0.078*** (0.019)	0.130 (0.098)	0.324*** (0.076)
Religiosity × Mixed dem. com.	-0.039 (0.028)			
Religiosity × Democrat	-0.136*** (0.029)			
Religiosity × Dem. values/support		-0.019*** (0.006)	-0.100*** (0.029)	-0.113*** (0.024)
Age 31–45	-0.123*** (0.037)	-0.113*** (0.037)	-0.113*** (0.038)	-0.110*** (0.038)
Age 46–60	-0.252*** (0.046)	-0.255*** (0.046)	-0.237*** (0.046)	-0.244*** (0.047)
Age over 60	-0.547*** (0.062)	-0.569*** (0.062)	-0.541*** (0.062)	-0.529*** (0.063)
Capital city	0.285*** (0.032)	0.294*** (0.032)	0.291*** (0.032)	0.288*** (0.032)
Female	0.501*** (0.030)	0.494*** (0.030)	0.491*** (0.030)	0.499*** (0.031)
Catholic	0.012 (0.038)	0.006 (0.038)	0.018 (0.038)	-0.005 (0.038)
Evangelical	-0.578*** (0.056)	-0.590*** (0.056)	-0.584*** (0.056)	-0.603*** (0.057)
Married	-0.165*** (0.036)	-0.164*** (0.036)	-0.159*** (0.036)	-0.166*** (0.036)
Once married	-0.183*** (0.057)	-0.194*** (0.057)	-0.188*** (0.058)	-0.187*** (0.058)
Number of children	-0.049** (0.019)	-0.052*** (0.019)	-0.060*** (0.019)	-0.052*** (0.019)
Secondary education	0.098** (0.038)	0.077** (0.038)	0.107*** (0.039)	0.107*** (0.039)

(continued on next page)

Table 1. (*continued*)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Measure of Democratic Values/Support	Democratic Values	Democracy Is Best (1–7)	Electoral Democracy Is Best (0/1)	Democracy Is Preferable (0/1)
Tertiary education	0.293*** (0.049)	0.264*** (0.049)	0.309*** (0.050)	0.303*** (0.050)
Employed	–0.002 (0.033)	–0.015 (0.033)	–0.013 (0.033)	–0.006 (0.033)
Unemployed	0.082 (0.057)	0.070 (0.057)	0.040 (0.058)	0.067 (0.058)
Internet use	0.127*** (0.011)	0.127*** (0.011)	0.126*** (0.011)	0.131*** (0.011)
Sociotropic evaluation	–0.083*** (0.021)	–0.079*** (0.022)	–0.083*** (0.022)	–0.092*** (0.022)
Pocketbook evaluation	–0.006 (0.022)	–0.005 (0.022)	–0.003 (0.022)	0.001 (0.022)
Left ideology	0.022*** (0.006)	0.022*** (0.006)	0.022*** (0.006)	0.020*** (0.006)
Economic development	0.098*** (0.015)	0.097*** (0.015)	0.098*** (0.015)	0.098*** (0.015)
Democracy	0.076*** (0.028)	0.075*** (0.028)	0.074*** (0.028)	0.076*** (0.028)
Constant	–2.902*** (0.317)	–3.013*** (0.321)	–2.751*** (0.321)	–2.885*** (0.314)
Log Likelihood	–16545.880	–16429.860	–16302.590	–16129.480
AIC	33145.760	32909.720	32655.190	32308.960
BIC	33373.240	33120.070	32865.430	32518.870
N (level 1)	33685	33317	33179	32744
N (level 2)	36 (18×2)	36 (18×2)	36 (18×2)	36 (18×2)

\* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

Standard errors in parentheses.

Models estimated as mixed effect logistic regressions with random country-year effects using package lme4 (Bates et al. 2014, version 1.1-12) in R (3.3.2).

To control for cross-national variations in the baseline probability of supporting same-sex marriage, we include measures of economic development and democracy, which are expected to be associated with higher national levels of support for same-sex marriage. Economic development is measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in constant 2011 international dollars, calculated using purchasing power parity (PPP) rates (World Bank 2015).<sup>6</sup> Democracy is measured using the Polity indicator, which ranges from  $-10$  to  $+10$ ; higher scores reflect higher-quality democratic institutions at the time of the survey (Marshall et al. 2014).

### Analytical Strategy

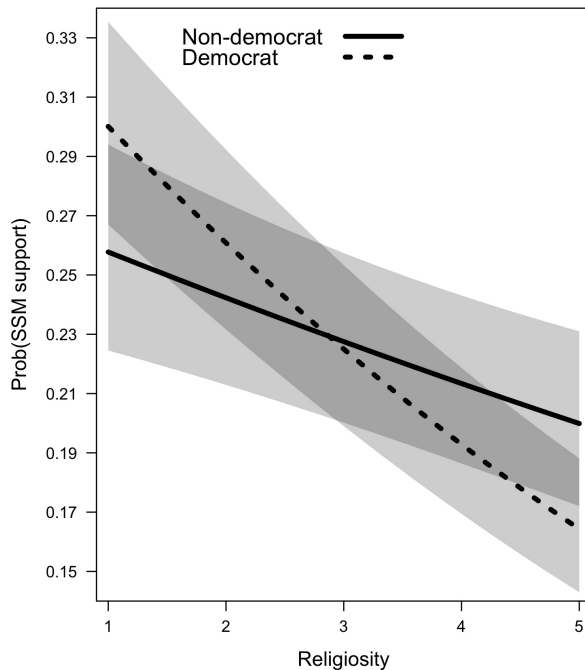
Given the distribution of the dependent variable and nested, or hierarchical, nature of the surveys pooled by country-year, we estimate mixed effect logistic regression models with fixed effects for the individual and country-level indicators and random country-year effects, which recognize that countries have different levels of overall average support for same-sex marriage. To test the relationship between democratic values at different levels of religiosity (hypothesis 3), we include an individual-level interaction between religiosity and the indicators for democratic values or support for democracy. Then, to evaluate the ways the interaction between religiosity and democratic values is likely to vary across subpopulations (hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c), we also estimate models separately by subsample (e.g., separately for men and women).<sup>7</sup>

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows full model results. Because we hypothesize that the relationship between democratic values and support for same-sex marriage is conditioned by a respondent's religiosity (hypothesis 3), we cannot evaluate the relationship between democratic values (hypothesis 1) and religiosity (hypothesis 2) independently. In all four models, the interaction between democratic values and religiosity is statistically significant, indicating that the regression coefficient estimates for religiosity and democratic values vary significantly at different levels of the other variable.

To illustrate these relationships, figure 1 plots the average predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage as religiosity increases, separately for those who think democracy is preferable (a democrat) and those who think sometimes a strong leader is needed or that it doesn't matter (nondemocrat, model 4). The predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage is significantly lower when respondents attend religious services more frequently (hypothesis 2), and this is even more pronounced among committed democrats (hypothesis 3), resulting in significantly lower probabilities of supporting same-sex marriage than comparable religious nondemocrats among those who attend services at least weekly. Meanwhile, nonreligious democrats are significantly more likely to express support for same-sex marriage than everyone else, which is consistent with the notion of democratic values equating with greater support, in the absence of religiosity (hypothesis 1).

Figure 1. Predicted Effect of Democratic Values and Religiosity on Support for Same-Sex Marriage



Predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage based on estimates in table 1, model 4 with 95 percent confidence intervals, calculated using effects package (Fox 2003) in R (3.3.2).

The findings suggest that even among those who are expected to have internalized democratic values and who perceive democracy in more substantive ways, religious participation significantly erodes support for same-sex marriage. There are two possible explanations for this finding. It could be that democratic values reinforce, among those who go to religious services regularly, the right to minority opinions on social issues in a democracy. Alternatively, perhaps Latin Americans are more likely to be persuaded by the framing by religious elites, especially the more frequently they attend religious services, than they are persuaded by the human rights frame articulated by proponents of homosexual rights.

In sum, we find evidence to support our main theoretical hypotheses. Democratic values do seem to coincide with a higher probability of supporting same-sex marriage, as long as respondents attend religious services less frequently than monthly. Attending religious services more frequently in general reduces the probability of supporting same-sex marriage. However, the negative influence of attending religious services more frequently is more pronounced among those who also support democracy or democratic values.

### Alternative Explanations of Support for Same-Sex Marriage

The pooled models in table 1 also enable us to confirm for Latin America many of the explanations of tolerance of homosexuality or support for LGBT rights in the United States or comparative public opinion research. For example, as age increases, support for same-sex marriage significantly decreases, consistently across all four models (hypothesis 4). Older generations are consistently and statistically more likely to oppose same-sex marriage. We can use the odds ratios to describe the size of the effects. In models 1 through 4, those who are 31 through 45 years old have 10.4 percent to 11.6 percent lower odds of supporting same-sex marriage compared to those who are 30 and under. By comparison, those who are 46 to 60 and those over 60 have 21.1 to 22.5 percent lower odds and 41.1 to 43.4 percent lower odds, respectively, than those who are 30 and under.

As expected, people who live in large, capital cities are also significantly more likely to support same-sex marriage than those who do not (hypothesis 5). According to the models in table 1, Latin Americans in capital cities have 33.0 to 34.2 percent higher odds of supporting same-sex marriage than those living in provincial cities or rural areas. Women also have significantly higher odds of supporting same-sex marriage (hypothesis 6) in all the models, from 63.4 to 65.1 percent higher odds. Married and formerly married respondents are statistically significantly less likely to express support for same-sex marriage than those who have never married. The odds of supporting same-sex marriage, compared to single respondents, are 14.7 to 15.3 percent and 14.7 to 17.6 percent lower for those who are married or formerly married, respectively. Those with larger families are statistically significantly less likely to support same-sex marriage, with each additional two children reducing the odds of supporting same-sex marriage by 4.8 to 5.8 percent in models 1 through 4.

The relationships between type of religious affiliation and support for same-sex marriage are not entirely consistent with existing research. For example, studies of the United States find Evangelicals' support for same-sex marriage is lower than that of Catholics (Baunach 2012). On the one hand, as expected, those who self-identify as Evangelical Christian, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, are significantly less likely to support same-sex marriage. Compared to those in the reference category (mainline Protestant, other minority religions, nonreligious believers, and nonbelievers), Evangelical Christians have 43.9 to 45.3 percent lower odds of supporting same-sex marriage. On the other hand, the results for those who self-identify as Catholic are mixed in table 1. In the first three models, Catholics have 0.6 to 1.8 percent higher odds of supporting same-sex marriage than those in the reference category, but in the fourth model, Catholics are estimated to have 0.5 percent lower odds of supporting same-sex marriage. We suspect that the lack of robustness is due to a large number of nonpracticing Catholics in Latin America still self-identifying as Catholic in these surveys, creating some measurement error.

In table 1, the evidence for the association between socioeconomic status or economic security and support for same-sex marriage is a bit mixed. Those with more

pessimistic assessments of the national economy or their household finances have up to 7.9 percent lower odds of supporting same-sex marriage. Having any secondary or tertiary education increases the odds of supporting same-sex marriage compared to only primary education or less by about 8 to 11.3 percent and 30.2 to 36.2 percent, respectively. Each increase in Internet use increases the odds of supporting same-sex marriage by 13.4 to 14.0 percent as well. However, contrary to expectations, those who are employed part- or full-time have about 0.2 to 1.5 percent lower odds of supporting same-sex marriage compared to those not in the labor force (retirees, homemakers, students). Meanwhile, those who are unemployed and actively seeking work are 4.1 to 8.5 percent more likely to support same-sex marriage.

These results could be interpreted in at least two ways. On the one hand, after controlling for education and other measures of socioeconomic status, perhaps those who are still unemployed are more sympathetic to providing rights for other marginalized groups. On the other hand, this may also be due to measurement error because the reference category, those not in the labor force, includes both students (who may be more likely) and pensioners (who might be less likely to support same-sex marriage).<sup>8</sup> As expected, increases in leftist self-identification are associated with 13.4 to 14.0 percent higher odds of supporting same-sex marriage, according to the models in table 1.

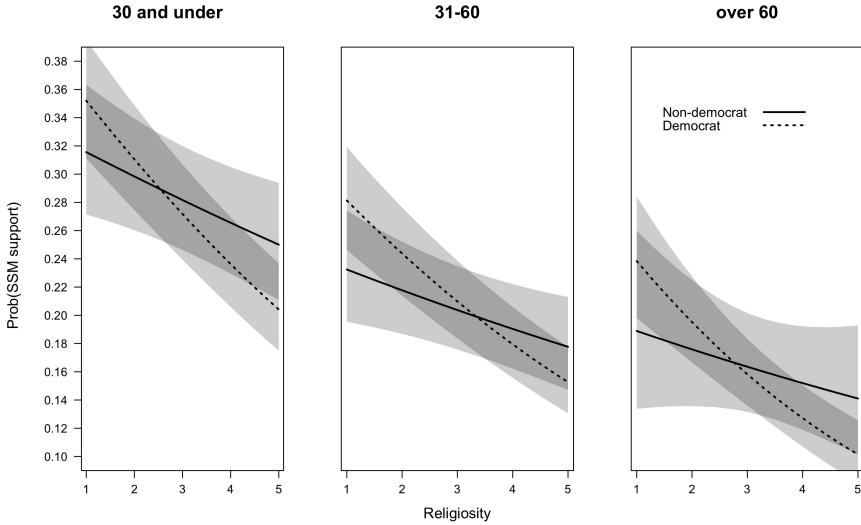
Because our individual respondents are clustered in particular national and annual contexts, we included country-level controls for level of economic and political development, which are expected to be associated with higher probabilities of support for same-sex marriage. Each additional thousand dollars per capita GDP (international dollars) is associated with 10.1 to 10.3 percent higher average odds of supporting same-sex marriage in Latin America. Similarly, each one-unit increase in a country's Polity score is associated with 7.7 to 7.9 percent higher odds of supporting same-sex marriage. Overall, the evidence in table 1 is largely consistent with existing research on the correlates of support for same-sex marriage in comparative or U.S. studies.

### **Variations in Democratic and Religious Values by Subpopulation**

We also hypothesized that the conditional relationship between democratic and religious values would be significantly different by generation, population density, and gender (hypotheses 3a, 3b, and 3c). As explained earlier, we expect democratic values to be particularly influential among older generations, particularly those who came of age before or during the democratic transitions of the 1980s and 1990s (hypothesis 3a). Therefore, we estimated model 4 separately for those 30 and under, those 31 through 60, and those over 60 years old. Figure 2 plots the predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage for democrats and nondemocrats at different levels of religious observance by generation (tabular results in online appendix).

These findings indicate that, as would be expected, the gap between democrats and nondemocrats is larger among older generations in general. This is reflected in the lower overall probability of supporting same-sex marriage in the middle and right

Figure 2. Support for Same-Sex Marriage by Generation



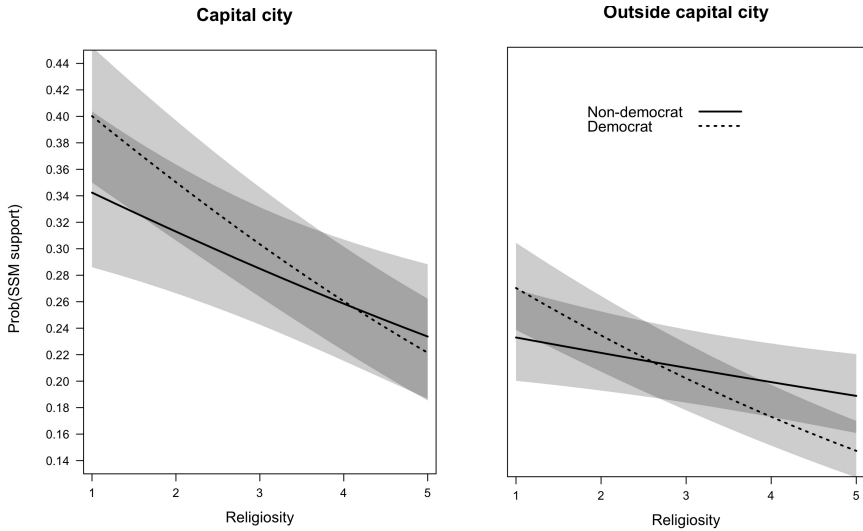
Predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage with 95 percent confidence intervals, calculated using effects package (Fox 2003) in R (3.3.2). Tabular results in online appendix.

panels of figure 2 and the general overlap in the confidence intervals among all but the oldest generation. It is also evident that across all age groups, attending religious services has a negative effect on support for same-sex marriage, particularly for democrats. This is true even for the youngest generation, most of whom were born after the Third Wave of democratization and thus lack direct experience with public debates about human rights and democracy. The impact that religion has on young democrats is indeed remarkable, for it means that the subgroup that supports gay marriage the most is also highly susceptible to traditional religious views on marriage when they attend religious services regularly. The figure also illustrates the overall lower levels of support for same-sex marriage among those who are older (hypothesis 4).

We estimate model 4 separately for those who live in the capitals and those who do not (tabular results in online appendix) and plot the predicted probability to support same-sex marriage for nondemocrats and democrats at different levels of religious observance in figure 3. The figure illustrates that the average support for same-sex marriage is, overall, much higher in capital cities than elsewhere (hypothesis 5). Religious attendance affects both groups. However, compared to other parts of the country, in capital cities, religiosity has a much more pronounced effect on attitudes toward same-sex marriage for both those who prefer democracy and those who do not (hypothesis 3b). High levels of religious observance in capital cities erase any positive effects associated with potential LGBT contact and lead to a probability of supporting same-sex marriage similar to that for secular counterparts outside the capital. This is consistent with existing research that finds that religiosity may erode



Figure 3. Support for Same-Sex Marriage by Locality Size

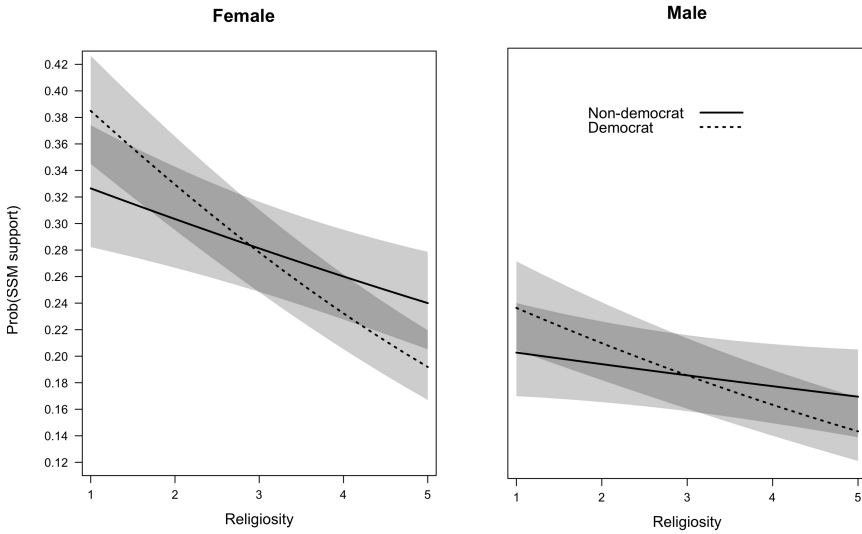


Predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage with 95 percent confidence intervals, calculated using effects package (Fox 2003) in R (3.3.2). Tabular results in online appendix.

the positive effects generally produced by contact with the LGBT community (Merino 2013). Outside of capital cities, religiosity has a less pronounced relationship with support for same-sex marriage among nondemocrats. Overall, the results underline the rather strong influence church attendance has on both nondemocrats and democrats when they live in capital cities with a greater probability of contact with members of the LGBT community.

We also hypothesized that women would be more likely to support same-sex marriage (hypothesis 6), but also that religiosity would be more strongly associated with opposition to same-sex marriage among women compared to men (hypothesis 3c). Figure 4 illustrates the evidence related to both these hypotheses, based on estimating model 4 in table 1 separately for women and men (tabular results in online appendix). Women are more likely to support same-sex marriage, unless they are highly religious. Women's support for same-sex marriage significantly decreases the more regularly they attend church services, eliminating the gender gap in support. This is particularly true among female democrats, who are significantly less likely to support same-sex marriage if they attend religious services weekly than their nondemocrat counterparts. By comparison, religious observance has a weaker effect on the probability of supporting same-sex marriage among nondemocrat women, and overall religious observance determines women's attitudes more than do democratic values. The results confirm our expectations not only that men are less likely to support same-sex marriage, but that there are no significant differences between nondemocrats and democrats at most levels of religious observance.

Figure 4. Support for Same-Sex Marriage by Sex



Predicted probability of supporting same-sex marriage with 95 percent confidence intervals, calculated using effects package (Fox 2003) in R (3.3.2). Tabular results in online appendix.

### CONCLUSIONS

This analysis is the first of its kind to explore the ways that the competing frames used by LGBT activists and religious elites around the gay marriage debate translate into individual attitudes in Latin America. This research confirms that people who embrace democracy and democratic values express greater support for same-sex marriage. However, when those with strong commitments to democratic values also participate weekly or more frequently in religious communities by attending religious services, they instead express much lower levels of support for the right to marriage for same-sex couples. This implies that highly religious democrats are perhaps more receptive to the argument from religious elites, who may be perceived as more credible sources and who frame the issue of same-sex marriage as one about traditional family and morality. Moreover, religious democrats may not consider that argument inconsistent with democratic principles. Indeed, such individuals may value democracy for the protection it implies for their religious beliefs and traditional family values. Conversely, those who are more skeptical of democracy not only express, on average, less support for same-sex marriage, but their attitudes are not likely to be greatly influenced by regular church attendance.

Though this tension between democratic values and religiosity is repeated across various demographic and socioeconomic groups in Latin America, the dynamic varies in some predictable and interesting ways. For instance, for women,

those living in the largest cities, and those under 30, religiosity seems to have a similar, pronounced negative association with support for same-sex marriage for both nondemocrats and democrats. However, the relationship between religiosity and attitudes differs for those with weak and strong democratic values outside capital cities, among men, and among those between 30 and 60 years old. When these individuals are also weak democrats, they tend to be less supportive of same-sex marriage, and that attitude is often not significantly affected by attending religious services frequently. In contrast, those with the strongest democratic values who are less religious express much higher support for same-sex marriage than those who attend religious services very frequently. These individuals (e.g., women, those who came of age during and after democratic transitions) have perhaps more complex personal experiences related to sexual rights, democratic values, and religious beliefs. These are possibilities that invite future research.

Our research provides additional evidence for some correlates of support for same-sex marriage that are known to matter in the United States and elsewhere. For example, many of our findings for the role of gender, population density, age, education, and political ideology are highly consistent with other cross-national and national studies (Wilcox and Wolpert 2000; Brewer 2003b; Brewer and Wilcox 2005; Olson et al. 2006; Hicks and Lee 2006; Andersen and Fetner 2008b; Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Sherkat et al. 2011; Baunach 2012; Becker 2014; Flores 2014). The positive association of other factors, such as Internet use, with support for same-sex marriage is also not surprising. Previous research has demonstrated that new media are an effective means of global attitude diffusion (Ayoub and Brzezinska 2015). While these results are not particularly surprising, they have not been tested previously in the context of same-sex marriage in Latin America, as they are here.

On the other hand, our analysis focuses on how public opinion may be shaped by the specific strategies used by political actors to influence policy debates in Latin America, where the role of the Catholic Church and the history of authoritarianism distinguish the region from most advanced industrialized democracies and other developing countries. This implies that political, social, and historical context matter; future work should not only aim to generalize across individual characteristics but also to understand how national or regional debates influence individuals' opinions. As far as we know, this study is also the first to consider specifically the relationship between democratic values and support for same-sex marriage, both in general and in Latin America.

Furthermore, our findings about the microfoundations of attitudes toward same-sex marriage in Latin America have implications for the political debates on this issue both in Latin America and elsewhere. In particular, this study shows that individual-level beliefs about democratic values and religiosity shape attitudes toward same-sex marriage. This makes sense, given the framing of the same-sex marriage debate by religious elites and activist movements and their allies throughout the region. However, democratic values and religiosity can and do conflict, and the ways they do may vary among different demographic or socioeconomic groups. Consequently, activists may need to adjust their framing to attract the support of

some potential allies who otherwise are less responsive to the human rights justifications for the right of same-sex couples to marry.

## NOTES

1. Translations are by the authors unless otherwise noted.
2. The AmericasBarometer uses a sampling design stratified by region and municipality size to produce nationally representative samples for its face-to-face interviews. The margin of error for most of the individual surveys is  $\pm 2.5$  percent.
3. All the primary models were also estimated using an indicator of religiosity based on respondents' subjective assessment of how important religion is in their life (on a scale of 1 to 4), with results similar or even more pronounced than those presented here.
4. The samples are restricted to the voting-age population at the time of the survey, which included adults over 18, except in Brazil and Nicaragua, where the voting age is 16.
5. This adjustment codes rare, exceptionally large families (six or more children) as similar; it also rescales the values to ensure that coefficients can be interpretable (i.e., nonzero).
6. Missing values for Argentina were calculated using the PPP conversion factor to convert inflation-adjusted estimates in local currencies to estimated GDP per capita in current local currency units, and then into 2011 international dollars (World Bank 2015).
7. While this modeling strategy is less efficient (and therefore a bit more conservative) than estimating a three-way interaction term, it facilitates interpretation and direct comparisons with the pooled results.
8. Given idiosyncratic differences in coding of employment status across countries and years in the sample, these three categories (employed, unemployed, and not in the labor force) are the most precise yet consistent coding available for the pooled estimates.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting materials may be found with the online version of this article at the publisher's website: Appendix.