

# Bound by Bostock: The Heterogeneous Effects of Policies on Attitudes

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# Motivation and Related Literature

Two strands:

- LGBTQ+ Economics
  - Large literature on labor market outcomes, economic distress.
  - Heterogeneity in attitudes and support for LGBTQ people.
  - Expansion of rights and protections in recent decades.
- Political Economy
  - Traditional models emphasize how attitudes affect policies.
  - Newer literature on how policies (including same-sex marriage) affect attitudes.
  - Empirical challenge of isolating causal effects.

# Preview of Results

- Use preexisting variation in employment protections and the Supreme Court's Ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County*.
- *Bostock v. Clayton County* improved attitudes towards LGBT people.
- Respondents with the most unfavorable attitudes had larger improvements.
- The effects are driven by those interested in government, men, and Republicans.

# Context

- On June 15th, 2020, Supreme Court decided that employment discrimination based on sexual orientation or transgender status was prohibited.
- While 22 states already had employment protections for LGBTQ people, 28 states gained these protections from the ruling.
- They were “Bound by Bostock” overnight.
- The decision was widely unexpected given the conservative composition of the Court.

# Data

## Democracy Fund + UCLA's Nationscape survey (HPS)

- Nationally representative,  $\sim 6,000$  households every weeks.
- I use the main sample period (July 2019—February 2021), yielding a primary sample of 398,648 individuals.
- Has a range of political measures, including a Likert scale of attitudes toward LGBTQ people.
- Respondents could specify they were 1) Very favorable 2) Somewhat favorable 3) Somewhat unfavorable 4) Very unfavorable
- Exclude respondents who refused to answer or said they “had not heard enough.”

# Empirical Strategy

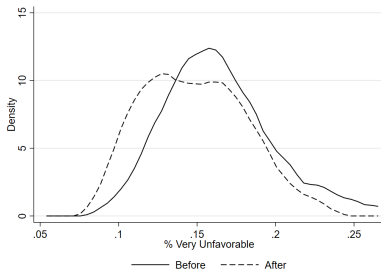
Simple two-way fixed effects model:

$$Y_{ist} = \alpha + \gamma S_s + \lambda W_t + \delta(T_s \cdot D_t) + \beta X_i + \epsilon_{ist}$$

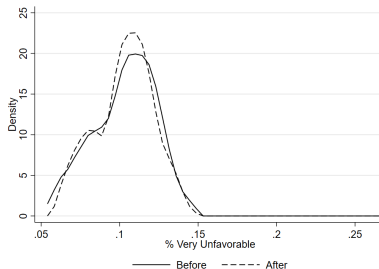
- $Y_{ist}$  is attitude outcomes.
- $T_s$  and  $D_t$  are dummy variables for states “bound by Bostock” and post-Bostock ruling, respectively.
- $X_i$  is a vector of individual characteristics (age, age squared, gender, education, employment, religion, party affiliation, and race)
- $\gamma_s$  and  $\lambda_t$  are state and week fixed effects

# State-Level Unfavorable Attitudes

**Figure:** Distribution Shifts for Treated States and Untreated States



**(a) Treated**



**(b) Untreated**

Source: Nationscape Survey, authors' calculations. Solid line denotes pre-Bostock, and dotted line denotes post-Bostock.

# Different Outcome Measures

**Table 1**  
The effect of employment protections on attitudes towards LGBT people.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	N
	"Very Unfavorable" Attitudes	"Very Favorable" Attitudes	"Very Favorable" and "Somewhat Favorable"	Continuous Favorability	
(a) State and Week FEs	-0.0145** (0.0065)	-0.00249 (0.0048)	0.0145** (0.0065)	0.0268* (0.0143)	398648
(b) (a) plus individual controls	-0.0135** (0.0061)	-0.00143 (0.0043)	0.0156*** (0.0057)	0.0295** (0.0128)	398648
(c) (b) plus state-specific time trends	-0.0124** (0.0058)	-0.00125 (0.0072)	0.00679 (0.0068)	0.0204 (0.0167)	398648

\* $p < 0.1$

\*\* $p < 0.05$

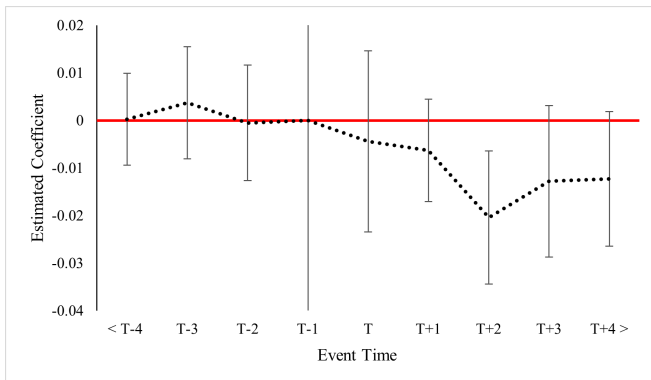
\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

Robust standard errors, clustered by state, are shown in parentheses.



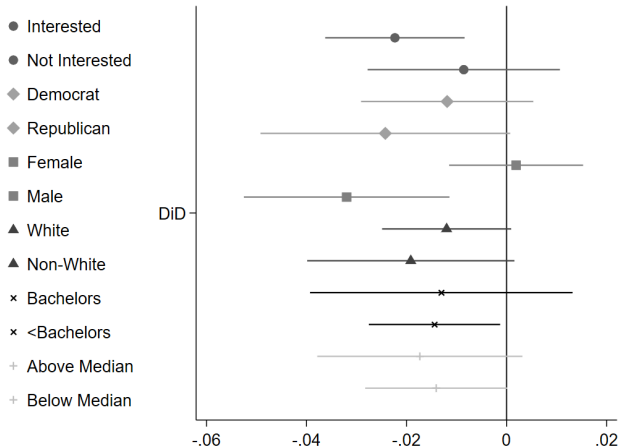
# Event Study

**Figure:** Bostock Decreased Unfavorable Attitudes



Notes: Event study of LGBT attitudes. LGBT attitudes by three-week increments (95% confidence intervals in bars). Dependent variable is respondents who selected "Very Unfavorable" (coded as 1) vs. all other categories (coded as 0). Estimates derived from regression of attitudes on the interaction of treatment with indicators for three-week periods since Bostock. Regression includes state and week fixed effects.

# Heterogeneous Effects



Notes: Nationscape Survey, authors' calculations.

# Public Opinion Frameworks

- ① *Backlash* suggests a positive ruling like Bostock should cause an increase in unfavorable attitudes.
- ② *Legitimacy* predicts that Bostock would improve attitudes towards LGBT people.
- ③ *Polarization* suggests that Bostock would push supporters and opponents further apart.
- ④ I find evidence of legitimacy effects, especially for groups that have more negative attitudes initially.

# Interpretation

- Possible that decision being authored by Neil Gorsuch and ruled by a conservative court caused legitimacy effects for Republicans and men.
- Gender heterogeneity is striking—useful for future papers to examine whether determinants of support for LGBTQ people differ by gender.
- Adds to larger literature about how policy can shape attitudes, especially towards minority groups.

# Takeaways

- *Bostock v. Clayton County* improved attitudes towards LGBT people.
- Especially robust effects on “very unfavorable” opinions
- Gendered attitude effect—only found among men.
- Evidence supports *legitimacy* model of policy affecting attitudes.

# About Me



I'm currently a junior at Vanderbilt University studying Mathematics and Economics. I am interested in Public Economics, Health Economics, and LGBTQ Populations.

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# Questions?

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Thank you!