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Examining the Nuance in Public Opinion of Pro-LGB Policies in a “Red State”

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Abstract

The red-blue state and urban-rural narratives — which depict that people living in red states and rural areas oppose pro-LGB policies — are popular frames for describing variation in public opinion of LGB policies by geographic region. In a test case of a red state, we examine public opinion of pro-LGB policies to assess the accuracy of the red-blue and urban-rural narratives. Using data from a survey of Nebraskans ($n = 1608$), we found that public opinion was more nuanced than the red state narrative allows but that urban and rural respondents reported significantly different opinions of pro-LGB policies. Rural people, however, were not unsupportive of all pro-LGB policies. Among all Nebraskans, support was higher for policies to protect LGB people from housing and job discrimination while support was lower for marriage and adoption rights. We discuss what these findings mean for public policy, urban and rural LGB individuals, and future public opinion studies of LGB issues.

Keywords: lesbian, gay, bisexual, public opinion, red state, urban, rural, Nebraska

The American public’s acceptance of homosexuality and their support of rights for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals are increasing (Andersen and Fetner 2008; Brewer and Wilcox 2005; Kiley 2014; Powell et al. 2010; Silver 2013). Yet such support and acceptance is higher among certain segments of the population than others (Hopkins et al 2013; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Seidman 2002). Studies show that younger people, women, non-religious, and those who know an LGB person support pro-LGB policies at higher levels than other

groups (Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008; Lewis 2011; Lewis and Gossett 2008; Olson et al. 2006; Pearl and Galupo 2007; Rowatt et al. 2009; Sherkat et al. 2010; Swank et al. 2013; Whitehead 2010; Woodford et al. 2012).

Studies also find that acceptance of homosexuality and support of pro-LGB policies varies by geographic region (Lax and Phillips 2009; Lipka 2014). Popular with the media, researchers, and public, the red-blue state and urban-rural narratives embody this variation by region. The red-blue state narrative assumes people in states that tend to support Republican presidential candidates (red states) oppose pro-LGB policies (Hunter 1991; Pew Research 2014b; Rauch 2014; Saad 2013), and the urban-rural narrative similarly portrays that rural areas are unsupportive of pro-LGB policies (Eldridge et al. 2006; Snively et al. 2004; Swank et al. 2013; Swank et al. 2012). Yet some scholars question the accuracy of these narratives (Fiorina et al. 2006, 2008; Salka and Burnett 2011). Studies, for example, show that rural LGB people report feeling accepted and connected to their communities (Kazyak 2011, 2012; Oswald and Lazarevic 2011; Wienke and Hill 2013), suggesting that these narratives might mask a complex and nuanced public opinion of pro-LGB policies.

Public opinion data, in contrast to the blanket characterizations of the red state and urban-rural narratives, can provide useful information to those who aim to increase acceptance of LGB people and create pro-LGB policies. Assessing public opinion in these areas is important for addressing the fundraising and apathy challenges that service providers and advocacy groups can experience because of these narratives (Drumheller and McQuay 2010). Examining public opinion in red states and rural areas can enhance our understanding of how LGB people are

viewed in these locations and the experiences LGB people living there have. Knowledge of the context of LGB issues is also important for creating services that recognize the level of stigma LGB individuals living there experience and how it affects their health and well-being (Bostwick et al. 2010; Hatzenbuehler et al. 2014; Hatzenbuehler 2010; Herek 2009; Meyer 1995, 2003).

In this paper, we use data from a general population survey of Nebraskans as a test case to examine public opinion of pro-LGB policies in a red state. We compare Nebraskans' opinions of pro-LGB policies to national public opinion on the same issues to gauge whether Nebraska fits the red state narrative. We then examine whether rural and urban Nebraskans differ in their attitudes of pro-LGB policies. Finally, we assess whether support is higher for certain types of policies and identify demographic factors associated with support for pro-LGB policies.

Literature Review

Public Opinion of Pro-LGB Policies

The current trend in the USA is expanding rights for LGB individuals, growing acceptance of same-sex couples and families, and increasing public support of pro-LGB policies (Kiley 2014; Pew Research 2013a, b, a; Silver 2013). The federal government and all states now recognize same-sex marriage (Freedom to Marry n.d.), and increasingly, LGB individuals are creating families with children (Davis 2013; Goldberg and Allen 2013; Patterson and Riskind 2010). However, they face a varied and inequitable legal context and experience lower levels of social acceptance than their opposite-sex couple counterparts (Kazyak 2015; Powell et al. 2010; Shapiro 2013). Some states and local communities have also enacted laws to protect LGB people from housing and job discrimination (Friedman et al. 2013; Pizer et al. 2012; Stone 2012); however, there is no federal law that prohibits employment and housing discrimination based on sexual orientation (Burdge 2009; Pizer et al. 2012). In addition, numerous businesses, universities, school systems, and governments have implemented policies that support LGB individuals and families (Raeburn 2004), but these rights are not universal for all LGB people.

Polling agencies and researchers have tracked American's attitudes of pro-LGB policies—primarily same-sex marriage rights—over time and show large shifts in public opinion during the previous decades. Trend data show increasing support of same-sex marriage since 2001, and across public opinion polls, more Americans now support same-sex marriage than oppose it (McCarthy 2014; Pew Research 2014a; Silver 2013). Studies of opinions of other pro-LGB policies are scarce because same-sex marriage has monopolized attention (Becker 2014); however, the few

studies that examine these other issues show increasing public support for policies related to housing and job discrimination (Becker 2014; Lax and Phillips 2009; Lewis and Rogers 1999). Yet recent research suggests that certain LGB issues may garner more support than others. Support tends to be higher for laws to protect LGB people from housing and job discrimination and hate crimes while lower for other issues, such as marriage or adoption rights (Lax and Phillips 2009; Powell et al. 2010). Likewise, data show that most Americans support equal employment rights for LGB people, but the level of support varies when asking about specific occupations, such as doctors, clergy, teachers, and salespersons (Lewis and Rogers 1999).

Additionally, despite increasing public support and acceptance, public opinion studies show that certain groups are more likely to support pro-LGB policies (Andersen and Fetner 2008; Baunach 2012; Hopkins et al. 2013; Lewis 2005; Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013; Olson et al. 2006; Pew Research 2013a, b, a; Seidman 2002). Consistently, scholarship indicates that women, higher educated people, non-religious individuals, younger generations, and political liberals are more likely to support pro-LGB policies than men, lower educated people, religious individuals, older generations, and political conservatives (Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008; Lewis 2011; Lewis and Gossett 2008; Olson et al. 2006; Pearl and Galupo 2007; Pew Research 2013a, 2013b, 2014a; Rowatt et al. 2009; Sherkat et al. 2010; Whitehead 2010; Swank et al. 2013; Woodford et al. 2012). Particularly relevant to the current analyses, scholars have also pointed to regional differences to explain variation in support of pro-LGB policies.

Red-Blue State and Rural-Urban Narratives

The red-blue state narrative is one frame that describes the variation in support for pro-LGB policies by region (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Adam 2003; Fiorina et al. 2006; Hunter 1991; Levendusky and Pope 2011; Pew Research 2014b). This dichotomy characterizes states by if they tend to support Republicans (red states) or Democratic (blue states) presidential candidates and with which party a majority of a state's citizens identifies (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Hunter 1991; Levendusky and Pope 2011; Saad 2013). The narrative portrays that red state residents oppose pro-LGB policies (Rauch 2014). Debate exists, though, about the validity of the narrative and the depths of the divide of public opinion (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Fiorina et al. 2008; Levendusky and Pope 2011).

Some scholars argue that the frame is useful, showing that in red states, Republican candidates win in landsides, and Democrats win in blue states by wide margins, suggesting that these are appropriate proxies for understanding the direction of public attitudes in these states (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Moreover, Abramowitz

and Saunders (2008) found that red state voters were more likely than blue state voters to oppose same-sex marriage in 2004. On the other hand, other scholars argue that there is not as deep of a division over social issues as the red-blue state narrative suggests (Fiorina et al. 2006, 2008; Levendusky and Pope 2011). Fiorina et al. (2006), for example, showed that public opinion of social issues was divided closely instead of deeply and showed that even in the so-called blue states, public opinion was mostly unsupportive of pro-LGB policies in 2004. Some scholars further argue that the narrative blankets states into homogenous political cultures, which may be inaccurate and inadequate for understanding public opinion of LGB policies at the state and local levels, where much of the policymaking related to LGB issues takes place (Salka and Burnett 2011).

Another popular frame suggests a division on social issues between people who live in urban and rural areas. This frame posits that urban areas are more tolerant and welcoming for LGB people and that urbanites are more supportive of pro-LGB policies and accepting of homosexuality (Swank et al. 2013; Salka and Burnett 2011; Carter 2008; Carter and Borch 2005; Eldridge et al. 2006; Snively et al. 2004; Wilson 1985; Fischer 1975). Some research supports these claims in that levels of homophobia tend to be higher in rural areas and LGB people from rural areas tend to report more discrimination than urban LGB people, including job discrimination, verbal threats, and property damage (Eldridge et al. 2006; Snively et al. 2004; Swank et al. 2013).

Explanations for why such differences exist include the theory that urban areas are more heterogeneous, leading people to be more tolerant of differences (Wirth 1938). The heterogeneity of cities leads to interactions with a diverse range of people. Conversely, rural areas tend to be more homogenous, thus limiting exposure to diversity. Research supports this theory in that people from urban areas report more tolerance related to racial and gender differences than their rural peers (Carter 2008; Tuch 1987; Carter and Borch 2005; Wilson 1985). This theory further suggests that because LGB people are more likely to live in urban areas (though some gender differences between male and female same-sex couples exists—Gates 2013), urban heterosexual people are more likely to interact with LGB people and develop tolerance toward sexual minorities, which may lead to less overt discrimination (Swank et al. 2013). An alternative theory for an urban-rural divide is that politically like-minded people are sorting themselves into homogenous communities (Bishop 2004). Individuals may perceive certain locations as more hospitable than others, resulting in them relocating to areas where they feel support for their views (Pew Research 2014b; Bishop 2004, but cf. Gebelhoff and Leonhardt 2014; Abrams and Fiorina 2012; Klinkner

2004). Thus, people may not be expressing a preference for a certain lifestyle (urban or rural), but may choose to live in areas aligning with their beliefs.

Other research questions the significance of urban-rural differences. With regard to public opinion, Salka and Burnett (2011) found that the urban-rural divide did not significantly predict support for same-sex marriage in Florida's election in 2008. Further, demographic differences between those who live in rural versus urban areas are important to consider. Some researchers argue that any differences in public opinion between urban and rural residents are driven not by urban and rural contexts per se, but by other demographic characteristics (Burnett and Salka 2009). For example, the population of rural areas tends to be older. Differences in public opinion could reflect age differences in views of pro-LGB policies rather than that living in certain geographic locations results in certain opinions about LGB policies.

Finally, evidence suggests that LGB individuals are becoming increasingly geographically diverse, which may indicate experiences of acceptance outside of areas once considered the only places of safety and acceptance (e.g., urban locations—Gates 2013; Ghaziani 2014; Spring 2013). Indeed, some research finds that LGB individuals living in rural areas feel a strong connection to their community, feel accepted, and report higher levels of well-being than their urban counterparts (Kazyak 2011, 2012; Oswald and Lazarevic 2011; Wienke and Hill 2013).

The degree to which the red-blue and urban-rural narratives may obscure nuances in public opinion or experiences of LGB people has implications for LGB policy organizations as well as for the general discussion about LGB policies in public discourse. Given the pervasiveness of the assumption that people from red states and rural areas are wholly unsupportive of pro-LGB policies, and the fact that this may influence perceptions of stigma for LGB people, it is important to assess what public opinion actually is in red states and rural areas.

Test Case: Nebraska

We use Nebraska as a test case to examine the accuracy of the red-blue state and urban-rural narratives for describing and understanding public opinion of pro-LGB policies. We examine Nebraskans' views of same-sex marriage, adoption rights for same-sex couples, and protections from housing and job discrimination for LGB people. Media and researchers often describe Nebraska as a conservative, red state (Saad 2013; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008). Nebraskans reliably support Republican

1 Nebraska, however, split its Electoral College votes by congressional district in the 2008 election. President Obama won the vote in Nebraska's second congressional district and received one electoral vote from Nebraska.

candidates for president¹ and a majority of Nebraskans identify with the Republican Party and as politically conservative (Saad 2013). Nebraska also contains an urban-rural population split. With roughly 1.8 million citizens in 2013, Nebraska's population primarily resides in the state's two largest cities: Omaha with a metropolitan population of 870,000 people and Lincoln with a population of 270,000 people. The rest of the state's population spreads throughout rural areas, small towns, and a few larger towns at or below 50,000 residents. Nebraska, thus, fits the profile for a test case to analyze the accuracy of the red-blue state and urban-rural narratives. Further, given that state-level public opinion data on LGB policies—particularly on non-marriage issues—is rare, our focus on opinions of Nebraskans is a unique contribution to existing literature (Becker 2014; Flores and Barclay 2015).

Like most states, LGB policies became prominent in Nebraska during the past 20 years. Nebraska voters overwhelmingly supported a ban on same-sex marriage in a 2000 referendum (Adam 2003; Rasmussen 2006); however, pro-LGB policies have increased since then. The University of Nebraska (Reed 2012), school districts (Dejka 2014), and hospitals (Glissmann 2013), businesses, and city and county governments (Funk 2013) have extended insurance benefits to same-sex couples. Additionally, the state's two largest cities have enacted ordinances that protect LGB people from discrimination in jobs and housing (Hicks 2013; Reuters 2012), but other areas of the state have been less proactive in this policy area. Nebraska residents and elected officials also continue to advocate for pro-LGB policies (Martin 2014; Stoddard 2014). State lawmakers introduced bills to expand LGB rights during the Nebraska Unicameral's 2015 session (Pluhacek 2015), and the Nebraska Supreme Court overturned the state's ban on same-sex marriage in 2015 (*Waters v. Ricketts* 2015). Since the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage rights in 2015, Nebraska has granted marriage licenses to same-sex couples.

Hypotheses — The red state and urban-rural narratives suggest that we should expect to observe overall low levels of support for pro-LGB policies among Nebraskans, but higher levels of support among urban residents than among rural residents. We expect to observe variation in Nebraskans' public opinion by type of LGB policy, similar to national public opinion. Specifically, we hypothesize that support will be lower for family-type policies of same-sex marriage and adoption rights than for other policies related to housing and job discrimination. Additionally, we hypothesize that demographic factors (gender, age, education, political party affiliation and ideology, religiosity, and knowing an LGB person) will predict support for pro-LGB policies by Nebraskans in similar ways as shown in other studies (Baunach 2012; Becker and Scheufele 2011; Lewis 2011; Pew Research 2013b, a; Schwartz 2010).

Data and Methods

2013 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey

We analyze data from the 2013 Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey (NASIS). NASIS is an annual, omnibus survey of Nebraskans ages 19 and older conducted by the Bureau of Sociological Research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The 2013 NASIS was a mail survey sent to a randomly selected address-based sample of $n = 6,000$ Nebraska households provided by Survey Sampling International (SSI). NASIS 2013 included four mailings (initial survey packet, postcard reminder, and two replacement survey packets) during its data collection period from June 2013 to August 2014 (Bureau of Sociological Research 2013). A total of $n = 1608$ respondents completed NASIS for a response rate of 27.3% (American Association for Public Opinion Research 2009).

Pro-LGB Policies — NASIS 2013 included a variety of questions about social issues and demographics. Five questions in NASIS 2013 asked respondents about pro-LGB policies, including whether respondents favor or oppose the following: same-sex marriage, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), adoption by gay and lesbian couples, and protections for gay men and lesbians from housing and job discrimination. The wording of each of these question appears in Table 1.

Analysis Plan

We first report descriptive results of Nebraskans' opinions of same-sex marriage, adoption of children by gay and lesbian couples, and protections for gay men and lesbians from housing and job discrimination. Then we compare these opinions to national public opinion from the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES) pre-election survey using chi-square and t tests to examine if Nebraska fits the red state narrative of low levels of support for pro-LGB policies. The 2012 ANES was a mixed-mode (face-to-face and web) survey of eligible US voters (Americans ages 18 and older) conducted between September 2012 and January 2013. Web survey respondents came from the GfK Knowledge Panel (selected through random digit dialing and address-based sampling) and face-to-face survey respondents were selected using address-based, stratified, multi-cluster sampling. In addition to questions about LGB policies, the ANES asked about election participation, voting behavior, media exposure, and personality traits, among other topics (www.electionstudies.org). The wording for the questions about pro-LGB policies in NASIS 2013 was consistent with the 2012 ANES questions on LGB policies, which provides a single benchmark data source for the range of LGB policies we examine.

Table 1. Wording of NASIS questions about pro-LGB policies

Question	Response options
Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to legally marry?	Favor Favor civil unions only Oppose
The Defense of Marriage Act or DOMA prohibits the federal government from recognizing marriages between gay or lesbian couples and allows states to not recognize marriages between gay and lesbian couples performed in other states.	
Do you favor or oppose the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)?	Favor Oppose
Do you favor or oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt children?	Favor Oppose
Do you favor or oppose laws to protect gay men and lesbians from housing discrimination?	Favor Oppose
Do you favor or oppose laws to protect gay men and lesbians from job discrimination?	Favor Oppose

In the next analyses, we examine whether urban and rural Nebraskans significantly differ in their opinions of pro-LGB policies to test the validity of the urban-rural narrative. We identify urban Nebraskans as respondents whose zip codes are within the Omaha metropolitan area (the cities of Omaha, Elkhorn, Bellevue, La Vista, and Papillion) and city of Lincoln. Among the NASIS respondents, 47.6% live in Omaha and Lincoln and 52.5% live in the rest of Nebraska. Using chi-square and *t* tests, we test for significant differences between Nebraskans who live in Omaha and Lincoln and those who live in the more rural remainder of the state. In regression models, we further examine opinion differences between urban and rural Nebraskans while controlling for respondent demographic, political, and religious characteristics. These control variables include gender, age, education level, political party and ideology, religion, born-again Christian identity, religious attendance and influence, and knowing an LGB person. We also control for sexual orientation (LGB or non-LGB). We code respondents who identified as “homosexual/gay or lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “something else” as LGB and those who identified as “heterosexual/straight” as non-LGB. We treat “not sure” responses as missing values.

In the models, we also control for methodological experiments embedded in NASIS 2013. Sampled addresses were randomly assigned to one of six survey design treatment groups. These treatments aimed to address the participation and measurement challenges of surveying lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people in general population

surveys. Another aim was to examine how the LGB-inclusivity affected participation and measurement among non-LGB people. The analyses indicated that the LGB-inclusivity led to significantly more LGB respondents without significantly affecting the demographic, political, and religious composition of the completed sample. Moreover, there was only weak evidence that LGB-inclusivity influenced reports to questions about LGB policies (Stange, 2014). We controlled for any effect that these methodological treatments had on reports to the pro-LGB policy questions in our analyses with a control variable that identified each respondent’s experimental group assignment.

Imputation and Weighting — For our analyses, we used imputed and weighted NASIS and ANES data with the corresponding *svy* and *ice* commands in Stata12. Item missing rates ranged from 3.4 to 5.7%² for the pro-LGB policies questions and ranged from 2.4 to 7.2% for the independent variables in this study. To account for item non-response in NASIS, we used multiple imputation with five imputed data sets. We also weighted the NASIS data to account for unit non-response. The unit non-response weights were for household size and sex, age, and region of Nebraska using 2010 US Census data. Table 2 displays the weighted and imputed demographic, political, and religious characteristics of the completed NASIS sample. For the ANES data, we used multiple imputation with five imputed data sets. We also weighted the data using the supplied weights from the ANES documentation (<http://www.electionstudies.org>).

2 The question about support for DOMA had the highest item missing rate. We hypothesize that more respondents skipped this question than normally would have because the US Supreme Court ruled parts of the law unconstitutional in the middle of the NASIS 2013 field period. Comments that some respondents wrote next to unanswered questions about DOMA anecdotally suggest that this may explain the higher item non-response rate.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of NASIS respondents (weighted and imputed)

	Percent	SE	95% confidence interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
Sex				
Female	50.86	1.57	47.79	53.93
Male	49.14	1.57	46.07	52.21
Race				
Not White	6.11	0.82	4.50	7.72
White	93.89	0.82	92.28	95.50
Ethnicity				
Not Hispanic	96.68	0.68	95.35	98.02
Hispanic	3.32	0.68	1.98	4.65
Marital Status				
Not married	23.56	1.31	21.00	26.13
Married/cohabiting	76.44	1.31	73.87	79.00
Age (years)				
19–34	22.00	1.52	19.02	24.98
35–49	29.09	1.54	26.07	32.10
50–64	27.95	1.24	25.52	30.38
65+	20.96	0.99	19.02	22.90
Education				
HS or <	19.01	1.19	16.67	21.35
Some college	36.26	1.56	33.19	39.32
BA+	44.74	1.55	41.70	47.78
Political party				
Democrat	25.69	1.33	23.07	28.31
Republican	41.23	1.53	38.23	44.22
Independent	33.08	1.55	30.04	36.13
Political ideology				
Very liberal	3.98	0.69	2.62	5.34
Liberal	16.07	1.27	13.57	18.56
Moderate	37.78	1.55	34.74	40.82
Conservative	32.51	1.44	29.68	35.33
Very conservative	9.67	0.95	7.81	11.53
Religion				
Protestant	50.99	1.59	47.87	54.11
Catholic	28.10	1.41	25.33	30.87
Other	6.03	0.86	4.34	7.71
None	14.88	1.26	12.42	17.35
Born-again Christian				
Yes	26.01	1.37	23.31	28.70
No	73.99	1.37	71.30	76.69
Sexual orientation				
Non-LGB	96.75	0.66	95.45	98.04
LGB	3.25	0.66	1.96	4.55
Know LGB person				
Yes	46.72	1.56	43.66	49.78
No	53.28	1.56	50.22	56.34

n = 1608

Results

Red State Narrative

The descriptive results do not support the red state narrative hypothesis that Nebraskans would largely oppose pro-LGB policies (Table 3). Unlike the narrative, majorities of Nebraskans favored some sort of legal recognition for same-sex relationships (i.e., marriage [40.4%] or civil unions [19.5%]), the rights of same-sex couples to adopt children (55.6%), and policies to protect LGB people from housing (71.6%) and job discrimination (74.3%). Nebraskans were evenly split in their views of DOMA (50.9% in favor).

Nebraskans' opinions of pro-LGB policies differed from national public opinion for some but not all policies. Comparisons to ANES data showed that Nebraskans reported significantly less favorability for adoption rights than national opinion (44.38 vs. 36.98%; $t = 4.13, p < 0.001$). Nebraskans also significantly differed from ANES respondents in their opinions of same-sex marriage ($\chi^2(2) = 14.06, p < 0.001$). A significantly smaller proportion of Nebraskans favored civil unions than the ANES respondents did (19.54 vs. 33.49%; $t = -9.45, p < 0.001$), and a larger proportion of Nebraskans opposed same-sex marriages than the ANES respondents did (40.03 vs. 25.47%; $t = 8.56, p < 0.001$). The proportion of Nebraskans who favored same-sex marriage, however, did not significantly differ from the proportion from the ANES data ($t = -0.35, p = 0.752$), with roughly 40% favoring same-sex marriages (Table 3). Nebraskans' opinions of protections for LGB people from job discrimination did not significantly differ from national public opinion, with 74% of Nebraskans and 75% of ANES respondents favoring these policies ($t = -0.82, p = 0.413$). The 2012 ANES did not ask about DOMA or housing discrimination policies.

Urban–Rural Narrative

Consistent with the urban–rural narrative, majorities of urban NASIS respondents favored the five pro-LGB policies that we examined (Table 3). Inconsistent with the narrative, however, majorities of rural respondents favored policies to protect LGB people from housing and job discrimination (at significantly lower levels than urban respondents did), but majorities of rural respondents otherwise opposed the other three pro-LGB policies. Consistently, urban Nebraskans favored pro-LGB policies at significantly higher levels than rural Nebraskans did ($p < 0.05$).

On the topic of same-sex marriage, urban and rural Nebraskans significantly differed in their views in expected ways ($\chi^2(2) = 13.77, p = 0.001$; Table 3): 50.3% of those in Omaha and Lincoln favored same-sex marriage while only 31.45% in the rest of the state did ($t = -6.04, p <$

Table 3. Opinions of pro-LGB policies, NASIS, and ANES (weighted percentages)

	NASIS Total	Urban	Rural	Urban vs. rural χ^2/t value	ANES	NASIS vs. ANES χ^2/t value
Same-sex marriage						
Favor	40.42	50.32	31.45	13.77***	41.00	14.06***
Favor civil Unions only	19.54	23.05	16.37		33.48	
Oppose	40.03	26.63	52.18		25.52	
DOMA						
Favor	50.86	42.29	58.63	-5.14***	-	-
Oppose	49.14	57.71	41.37		-	-
Adoption by gay and lesbian couples						
Favor	55.62	67.35	44.98	7.37***	62.94	-4.20***
Oppose	44.38	32.65	55.02		37.06	
Protection from housing discrimination						
Favor	71.63	79.47	64.52	5.44***	-	-
Oppose	28.37	20.53	35.48			
Protection from job discrimination						
Favor	74.29	80.53	68.62	4.42***	74.61	-0.19
Oppose	25.71	19.47	31.38		25.39	

NASIS, $n = 1608$; ANES, $n = 5,914$; distributions of LGB issues for NASIS were similar for the imputed and unimputed data leading to similar findings, results available upon request

*** $p < 0.001$

0.001). Opposition to same-sex marriage was significantly higher in rural Nebraska as well (52.2 vs. 26.6%; $t = 8.86$, $p < 0.001$). Respondents from Omaha and Lincoln also opposed DOMA at significantly higher levels than rural residents (57.7 vs. 41.4%; $t = -5.14$, $p < 0.001$). Similarly, urban respondents favored adoption rights at significantly higher levels than rural respondents did (67.4 vs. 45.0%; $t = 7.37$, $p < 0.001$). Support for protections from housing and job discrimination for LGB people was about 10–15 percentage points higher among people from Omaha and Lincoln than people from the rest of Nebraska ($p < 0.001$). Among urban respondents, 79.5% favored housing protections and 80.5% favored job protections. Among rural respondents, 64.5% favored housing protections and 68.6% favored job protections.

Being an urban or rural respondent remained significant in regression models predicting views of same-sex marriage, adoption rights, and protections from housing discrimination while controlling for other respondent characteristics (Tables 4, 5, and 6). The exceptions to this finding were the models for DOMA and protections from job discrimination. Generally, however, these results indicate that living in a rural or urban environment is associated with attitudes of some pro-LGB policies even while controlling for other factors including gender, age, education level, political affiliation, religion, knowing an LGB person, and sexual orientation. This finding suggests that urban-rural differences in views of pro-LGB policies were not merely a proxy for demographic, political, and religious differences of urban and rural Nebraskans.

We also ran our analyses with three categories of geography (urban – respondents who live in places with more than 200,000 people [Omaha metro area and Lincoln]; mid-size – those from places with 10,000 to 199,999 people; and small town/rural – those who live in areas with less than 10,000 people; Table 7). Consistent with the dichotomous coding of urban vs. rural, those from Omaha and Lincoln reported significantly more support for pro-LGB policies than those from the other two geographies. Respondents from the mid-size locations reported nominally more support for pro-LGB policies than those from small towns/rural areas; however, the differences were not statistically significant for any of the policies. The findings for three categories of geography also held in regression models; results are available upon request.

Differences by Policy Type and Respondent Characteristics

The descriptive statistics highlighted that Nebraskans favored certain types of pro-LGB policies at different levels. As seen in Table 3, opinions were divided more evenly on the family-type policies of same-sex marriage and adoption rights, while around three-fourths of Nebraskans favored protections for LGB people from housing and job discrimination.

In addition, the regression models showed that respondent characteristics were associated with favoring or opposing pro-LGB policies in similar ways as past research (Tables 4, 5, and 6). The multinomial regression model

Table 4. Multinomial regression model predicting views of same-sex marriage by respondent characteristics and controlling for experimental treatments

	Favor marriage ^a		Favor civil unions only ^a	
	β	SE	β	SE
Live in Omaha/Lincoln (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.66***	0.20	0.84***	0.18
Sex (male = 1, female = 0)	-0.65**	0.22	-0.28	0.20
Age (mean centered)	-0.04***	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Education				
HS or < (reference)	-	-	-	-
Some college	0.47	0.30	0.31	0.29
BA+	0.81*	0.31	0.82**	0.30
Political party				
Democrat (reference)	-	-	-	-
Republican	-1.00**	0.32	-0.52+	0.27
Independent/other	-0.62*	0.28	-0.44+	0.26
Political ideology				
Very liberal	1.41*	0.58	0.17	0.67
Liberal	0.84*	0.33	-0.20	0.39
Moderate (reference)	-	-	-	-
Conservative	-1.14***	0.32	-0.07	0.22
Very conservative	-1.93***	0.56	-0.92*	0.37
Religion (yes = 1, none = 0)	-0.40	0.42	-0.34	0.48
Born-again Christian (yes = 1, no = 0)	-1.23***	0.28	-0.34	0.22
Religious attendance				
Several times a week (reference)	-	-	-	-
Once a week	-1.12**	0.43	0.09	0.42
Once a month to nearly every week	-0.02	0.48	0.74+	0.44
About once a year to several times a year	0.03	0.46	0.72	0.46
Less than once a year	0.53	0.55	0.92	0.56
Never	0.44	0.55	0.95+	0.56
Religious influence				
Very much (reference)	-	-	-	-
Quite a bit	0.53*	0.26	0.63*	0.25
Some	0.76*	0.35	0.43	0.30
A little	0.80+	0.47	0.39	0.44
None/not religious	0.86	0.55	-0.02	0.57
Know LGB person (yes = 1, no = 0)	1.43***	0.21	0.78***	0.20
Sexual orientation (LGB = 1, non-LGB = 0)	0.23	0.73	-0.88	0.91
Experimental treatments				
Treatment 1 (reference)	-	-	-	-
Treatment 2	0.09	0.36	0.34	0.31
Treatment 3	0.30	0.34	0.21	0.31
Treatment 4	0.19	0.35	0.57*	0.29
Treatment 5	-0.06	0.35	0.06	0.29
Treatment 6	0.65+	0.34	0.14	0.33
Intercept	-0.36	0.64	-1.73*	0.71

$n = 1608$

+ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

a. "Oppose" is the base outcome

(Table 4) showed that males, older people, Republicans, independents, political conservatives, born-again Christians, and those who attend church at least once a week

were significantly less likely to favor same-sex marriage. Those with higher education levels, political liberals, and those who know an LGB person were more likely to favor

Table 5. Logistic regression model predicting favorability of DOMA and the right of gay and lesbian couples to adopt children by respondent characteristics and controlling for experimental treatments

	DOMA ^a		Adoption rights ^a	
	β	SE	β	SE
Live in Omaha/Lincoln (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.24+	0.17	0.55***	0.17
Sex (male = 1, female = 0)	0.32+	0.16	-0.40*	0.18
Age (mean centered)	0.02***	0.01	-0.03***	0.01
Education				
HS or < (reference) - - - -				
Some college	0.02	0.27	0.53*	0.2294
BA+	-0.18	0.23	0.93***	0.2350
Political party				
Democrat (reference)	-	-	-	-
Republican	0.86***	0.24	-0.50*	0.22
Independent/other	0.55	0.22	-0.59**	0.22
Political ideology				
Very liberal	-1.47	0.65	1.51***	0.46
Liberal	-0.26*	0.26	0.70*	0.28
Moderate (reference)	-	-	-	-
Conservative	1.09	0.20	-0.66***	0.20
Very conservative	1.52***	0.34	-1.67***	0.36
Religion (yes = 1, none = 0)	0.32***	0.37	0.10	0.35
Born-again Christian (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.48*	0.21	-0.84***	0.22
Religious attendance				
Several times a week	-	-	-	-
Once a week	0.39	0.37	-0.21	0.31
Once a month to nearly every week	-0.13	0.41	0.05	0.35
About once a year to several times a year	-0.22	0.41	0.44	0.34
Less than once a year	-0.37	0.49	0.57	0.44
Never	-0.31	0.47	0.74+	0.45
Religious influence				
Very much	-	-	-	-
Quite a bit	-0.04	0.22	0.09	0.23
Some	-0.08	0.26	0.70**	0.27
A little	-0.33	0.37	0.47	0.38
None/not religious	-0.77	0.41	0.38	0.47
Know LGB person (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.68+	0.17	0.93***	0.17
Sexual orientation (LGB = 1, non-LGB = 0)	-1.26***	0.70	0.28	0.54
Experimental treatments				
Treatment 1 (reference)	-	-	-	-
Treatment 2	0.01	0.27	0.19	0.29
Treatment 3	-0.26	0.28	0.30	0.26
Treatment 4	0.02	0.26	0.36	0.28
Treatment 5	-0.04	0.28	-0.20	0.26
Treatment 6	-0.24	0.26	0.31	0.25
Intercept	-0.53	0.55	-0.85	0.54

$n = 1608$

+ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

a. Outcome variable coded as 1 = “Favor,” 0 = “Oppose”

same-sex marriage. Additionally, respondents who said that their religion had quite a bit or some influence on their lives were more likely to favor same-sex marriage

than those who reported that their religion had the highest level of influence on their lives (i.e., “very much”). Those with a bachelor’s degree or higher, who know an

Table 6 Logistic regression models predicting favorability of protections for gay men and lesbians from housing and job discrimination by respondent characteristics and controlling for experimental treatments

	Housing discrimination ^a		Job discrimination ^a	
	β	SE	β	SE
Live in Omaha/Lincoln (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.35*	0.16	0.27	0.16
Sex (male = 1, female = 0)	-0.58***	0.16	-0.60***	0.16
Age (mean centered)	-0.01+	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Education				
HS or < (reference)	-	-	-	-
Some college	0.61**	0.22	0.64**	0.23
BA+	0.84***	0.21	0.71**	0.23
Political party				
Democrat (reference)	-	-	-	-
Republican	-0.49*	0.2254	-0.60*	0.24
Independent/other	-0.23	0.22	-0.45+	0.23
Political ideology				
Very liberal	1.23*	0.55	0.97+	0.57
Liberal	0.14	0.29	0.32	0.30
Moderate (reference)	-	-	-	-
Conservative	-0.19	0.20	-0.20	0.21
Very conservative	-0.71*	0.30	-0.98***	0.29
Religion (yes = 1, none = 0)	0.12	0.38	-0.21	0.40
Born-again Christian (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.48**	0.17	-0.35+	0.18
Religious attendance				
Several times a week	-	-	-	-
Once a week	0.27	0.32	0.26	0.34
Once a month to nearly every week	0.73*	0.35	0.57	0.37
about once a year to several times a year	0.95**	0.36	0.73+	0.39
Less than once a year	1.04*	0.43	0.51	0.45
Never	1.50***	0.46	1.04*	0.47
Religious influence				
Very much	-	-	-	-
Quite a bit	0.03	0.21	0.10	0.22
Some	-0.02	0.25	0.02	0.26
A little	0.13	0.40	0.58	0.42
None/not religious	-0.05	0.44	0.10	0.47
Know LGB person (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.67***	0.17	0.66***	0.18
Sexual orientation (LGB = 1, non-LGB = 0)	-0.20	0.52	-0.24	0.55
Experimental treatments				
Treatment 1 (reference)	-	-	-	-
Treatment 2	0.27	0.28	0.30	0.28
Treatment 3	0.63*	0.25	0.43+	0.26
Treatment 4	0.30	0.25	0.40	0.27
Treatment 5	0.49+	0.26	0.14	0.26
Treatment 6	0.25	0.25	0.091	0.25
Intercept	-0.40	0.56	0.46	0.58

$n = 1608$

+ $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

a. Coded as 1 = "Favor," 0 = "Oppose"

LGB person, and those who say their religion has quite a bit of influence on their life were more likely to favor civil unions only than oppose same-sex marriage. Those

who identified as very conservative were significantly less likely to favor civil unions compared to opposing same-sex marriage.

Table 7 Views of pro-LGB issues by Nebraskans from Omaha/Lincoln, mid-size communities, and small towns/rural areas (weighted and imputed percentages)

	Omaha/ Lincoln	Mid-size	Small town/rural	Omaha/Lincoln vs. mid-size (<i>t</i> value)	Omaha/Lincoln vs. small town/rural (<i>t</i> value)	Mid-size vs. small town/rural (<i>t</i> value)
Same-sex marriage						
Favor	50.32	35.27	29.80	−3.14**	−6.07***	−1.10
Civil unions only	23.05	14.07	17.37	−2.85**	−2.05*	1.02
Oppose	26.63	50.66	52.84	5.30***	8.12***	0.44
DOMA						
Favor	42.29	55.12	60.16	−2.75**	−5.06***	−1.02
Oppose	57.71	44.88	39.84			
Adoption						
Favor	67.35	47.79	43.77	4.18***	6.93***	0.79
Oppose	32.65	52.21	56.23			
Housing discrimination						
Favor	79.47	67.13	63.40	2.92*	5.19***	0.80
Oppose	20.53	32.87	36.60			
Job discrimination						
Favor	80.53	72.35	67.01	2.01*	4.45***	1.19
Oppose	19.47	27.65	32.99			

n = 1608

* *p* < 0.05 ; ** *p* < 0.01 ; *** *p* < 0.001

Additionally, the same subgroups were significantly more or less likely to favor the rights of gay and lesbian couples to adopt children and protections from job and housing discrimination (Tables 5 and 6). Males, older people, Republicans, independents, political conservatives, and born-again Christians were less likely to favor pro-LGB policies, whereas those with some college, a bachelor’s degree or higher, political liberals, and those who know an LGB person were more likely to favor pro-LGB policies.

Sexual orientation was not a significant variable in all of the models likely because the small sample size of LGB respondents limits statistical power. Consistent with Gallup’s estimate that 2.7% of Nebraskans identify as LGBT (Gates and Newport 2013), 2.78% of NASIS respondents identified as LGB. Moreover, LGB people are overwhelmingly more likely to identify as Democrats and report being liberal (Lewis et al. 2011), suggesting some collinearity with the other independent variables might affect observing sexual orientation as a significant factor in the models. Nonetheless, across the five pro-LGB policies, the percentage of LGB respondents supporting each policy was higher than the percentage of non-LGB respondents, though not statistically significant (analyses available upon request).

Discussion

Nuance describes Nebraskans’ opinions of pro-LGB policies. Contrary to the red state narrative, majorities

avored protections for LGB people from housing and job discrimination as well as favored the right for gay and lesbian couples to adopt children. Likewise, about 60% of Nebraskans favored some sort of legal recognition of same-sex relationships (civil unions and marriage), which is consistent with past polling in the state (O’Connor 2013; Grace 2012). Although Nebraskans reported opinions about same-sex marriage and adoption rights that were less supportive than the nation, they reported similar levels of support for protections from job discrimination.

The urban-rural narrative fit public opinion of most of the pro-LGB policies in Nebraska. Across all five LGB policies, respondents from Nebraska’s urban areas of Omaha and Lincoln reported significantly more favorable views of the policies than the respondents from the rest of the state did. A majority of Nebraskans who live outside Omaha and Lincoln opposed same-sex marriage and adoption rights; they also supported protections for gay men and lesbians from housing and job discrimination at significantly lower levels than their urban counterparts did. Indeed, the effect of urban versus rural residence remained significant in the models that controlled for other characteristics, including education and age, suggesting that people who live in rural areas might have distinct perspectives on social issues compared to urban citizens (Walsh 2012). However, it is important to note that a majority of rural respondents supported protections for gay men and lesbians from housing and job

discrimination, indicating that the rural narrative misses a more nuanced picture of public opinion of pro-LGB policies among rural citizens.

Across the five pro-LGB policies, the results suggest that the public opinion of Nebraskans is divided closely on family-type policies, while larger majorities favored protections from housing and job discrimination for LGB people. This finding is consistent with research that addresses the changing ways that prejudices (racism, sexism, and heterosexism) manifest. Specifically, this line of inquiry shows that despite trends toward increased support for equality in the public realm with regard to race, gender, and sexual orientation, there has been less change in the private realm, such as issues of family (Bobo and Charles 2009; England 2010; Morrison et al. 2009; Walls 2008). Regression models further showed that variation in the opinions of pro-LGB policies of Nebraskans is largely consistent with subgroup differences in other studies of opinions of LGB policies (Baunach 2012; Becker and Scheufele 2011; Lewis 2011; Pew Research 2013b; Schwartz 2010): males, older people, Republicans, and those who identified as very conservative and born-again Christians were significantly less likely to support LGB civil rights. In contrast, women, younger people, those with more education, and liberals were significantly more likely to favor the pro-LGB policies we examined.

As a test case to examine public opinion in a red state and rural areas, our results have important public policy implications. This research informs the work of LGB service providers and advocacy groups in Nebraska and similar so-called red states with large rural populations. The perception that people in red states or rural areas are wholly opposed to pro-LGB policies can hinder fundraising efforts in these areas and lead to a sense that it is futile to pursue advocacy efforts these causes (Drumheller and McQuay 2010). Thus, our findings that indicate more nuance and support of pro-LGB policies can be useful for these groups' ability to effectively motivate their constituents and overcome such apathy. Our research suggests that organizations may benefit from systematically gauging public opinion in areas often deemed unsupportive to understand the depth of support and perhaps areas of agreement. Our findings also suggest that rural areas will likely require additional and different advocacy efforts tailored to the rural population. Groups working in rural areas, for instance, may want to target efforts on policies relating to jobs and housing. Future work should continue to explore how rural citizens understand LGB issues and what tactics are most effective for increasing support in rural areas.

Another finding from this study with policy implications is that support was overall higher for housing and job discrimination policies, while lower for family-type policies among all respondents. Despite same-sex marriage occupying much of the discourse surrounding LGB

policies, our work in fact shows more support for other types of pro-LGB policies. This finding is important to highlight given both that LGB people encounter discrimination in employment and housing and that there is a lack of federal protection for LGB people with regard to employment or housing discrimination (Friedman et al. 2013; Pize, et al. 2012), and often at state and local levels as well. Additional studies are necessary to understand why such policies are lacking given general public support for them (e.g., Bishin and Smith 2013).

Our findings also have implications for understanding the experiences of LGB people across locations in the USA. The red state narrative pervades popular discourse, and thus, for LGB people, living in such a location may create a sense of stigma, leading to significant negative effects on their health and well-being (Hatzenbuehler et al. 2014). Yet, this study shows that there is more nuance and, importantly, more support for pro-LGB policies in the so-called red states than commonly assumed from the narratives. Drawing attention to this discrepancy is important. Also, it is important to highlight the nuance and support for pro-LGB policies in red states and rural areas to highlight the diversity of perspectives and experiences that LGB people who live in such places may have (Maher 2015).

Similarly, it is important for future research to continue to explore whether and how perceptions of public opinion about pro-LGB policies influences LGB people's residential choices or experiences in rural and urban locations. Our findings indicate that rural residents are less supportive overall of pro-LGB policies than urban residents, even when controlling for demographic, political, and religious factors. This finding is consistent with research that shows that levels of acceptance of LGB people and support for pro-LGB policies tend to be lower in rural areas than urban areas (Swank et al. 2013; Swank et al. 2012). Thus, to the extent, this study shows support for pro-LGB policies is higher among urban people, and LGB people living in urban areas might feel more support than rural LGB people do.

Additionally, if LGB people tend to see rural locations as less accepting, the likelihood of them settling in rural areas, even if they prefer a rural life, may be diminished. However, other work shows that some LGB people report acceptance in rural areas and report higher levels of well-being than LGB people who live in cities (Kazyak 2011, 2012; Oswald and Lazarevic 2011; Wienke and Hill 2013). LGB people living in rural areas might place less emphasis on how people in rural areas vote or view pro-LGB policies when gauging acceptance (Kazyak 2011). Alternatively, there might be a discrepancy between how rural residents respond to survey questions about LGB policies and how they treat LGB individuals in their community. Such questions warrant attention in future research given that LGB people are becoming increasingly

geographically diverse (Ghaziani 2014; Spring 2013). Overall, our research shows that the red-blue state and urban-rural narratives stereotype states and regions and obscure the nuances and complexities that exist in these areas regarding public opinion of pro-LGB policies.

Limitations

The results of our study provide a number of implications for policy and research, but the study is not without limitations. While our test case highlights important findings about the red-blue state and urban-rural narratives, the findings refer specifically to the Nebraska context. The demographic makeup of Nebraska differs from other states in important ways, such as racial and ethnic diversity, suggesting that researchers should continue to explore other state-level analyses of public opinion of LGB policies to examine these narratives further. The test case, nonetheless, highlights the importance of studying public opinion in red states and rural areas. We draw on a unique data set that allows for a state-level analysis of public opinion on a range of pro-LGB policies, two components lacking in existing literature (Becker 2014; Flores and Barclay 2015). A much larger study with state-level data for a variety of states, however, is necessary to understand the full extent of public opinions in the context of these narratives.

Measuring only attitudes of same-sex marriage, adoption, and housing and job discrimination neglects other LGB issues and forms of stigma that LGB individuals experience. Future research should include other topics, such as hate crime policies, and should investigate the nuance by type of issues fully, such as attitudes of job discrimination by specific occupations.

Other limitations relate to the question wording and the comparison data. Subtle changes in question wording (e.g., favor/oppose vs. legal/illegal) can affect reports of opinions about pro-LGB policies (e.g., Dimock et al. 2013). Social desirability is also a concern when asking people whether they favor or oppose protections from “discrimination.” Testing other question wordings and measures is necessary in future studies. Mode and sample design of the NASIS and ANES surveys may also affect the comparison to national public opinion (Atkeson et al. 2014; Weinberg et al. 2014; de Leeuw 2008).

Conclusion

For those interested in understanding public opinion of pro-LGB policies—especially at the state and local levels—this study suggests that the red-blue state narrative may oversimplify and neglect the nuance nature of public opinion of LGB policies. As our analyses show, the

red state narrative provides a false perception that a majority of a red state’s citizens oppose pro-LGB policies. Moreover, our results illustrate significant variation by urban and rural citizens, type of LGB policies, and respondent characteristics. The findings indicate that living in an urban or rural environment is an important element associated with attitudes of pro-LGB policies, even when controlling for other characteristics. Future studies must account for the differences between urban and rural people and explore the relationship further to understand why urban and rural people differ so distinctly in their opinions of LGB policies. Researchers must also recognize that relying solely on same-sex marriage as a measure of support for pro-LGB policies misses the nuance of public opinion, as our results confirm other research that shows people’s attitudes differ between family-type policies and other LGB policies related to jobs and housing. Given that there have been changes among even those historically less supportive of pro-LGB policies (e.g., young Republicans—Kiley 2014) and increasing support among each generation (Pew Research 2014a), increasing support of pro-LGB policies among Nebraskans seems likely as well. The findings reported in this article suggest fruitful areas for advancing pro-LGB policies in Nebraska and potentially in other red states and rural areas.

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