

AmericasBarometer *Insights*: 2013

Number 94

Evangelicalism and Gay Rights in Latin America

By Isaiah Marcano

Isaiah.j.marcano@gmail.com

LAPOP Undergraduate Research Fellow

Vanderbilt University

Executive Summary. This *Insights* report addresses questions of religious identification and tolerance for gays in the Americas. Using data from the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey, I first examine the demographic and socioeconomic correlates associated with the nearly 15 percent of Latin Americans that identify with Evangelical denominations. I find that women, younger populations, poorer individuals, and Latin Americans with low to moderate levels of education are more likely to identify with Evangelical Christianity. Next, I examine the link between religious identity and attitudes toward gay persons. I find that a respondent's self-identified religious affiliation is strongly linked to his or her support for gays and gay rights in Latin America, with Evangelical respondents expressing the lowest levels of tolerance overall. I conclude by noting cross-cutting findings, whereby women and young individuals are more likely to belong to Evangelical churches and, at the same time, more likely (on average) to express higher tolerance toward gay persons. I note that this may have implications across time with respect to social tolerance within Latin American Evangelical congregations.

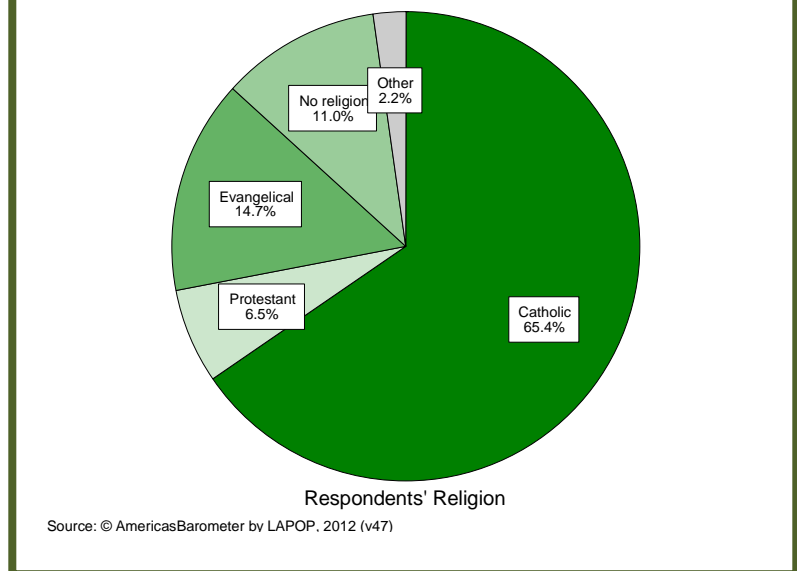
The Insights Series is co-edited by Jonathan T. Hiskey, Mitchell A. Seligson, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister with administrative, technical, and intellectual support from the LAPOP group at Vanderbilt.

www.AmericasBarometer.org

Tolerance toward gays and support for gay rights are ongoing topics of interest in social and political spheres across the Americas.¹ A previous Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) *Insights* report explores this subject by analyzing levels of support for same-sex marriage in the 2010 round of the AmericasBarometer survey (Corral and Lodola 2010). The authors of that report find that support for the right of same-sex couples to marry is higher among wealthier individuals, urban residents, and women. In addition, the authors find that members of Evangelical denominations² are comparatively less tolerant of same-sex marriage than members of other religious groups in the region. Other scholarship also finds a sizable gap in attitudes on such social issues between Evangelicals and the non-religious, and a smaller gap between the former and Roman Catholics (Boas and Smith 2013; Seligson and Moreno 2010).

Given the continued growth of Evangelicalism in Latin America, it is important to take an extended look at Evangelical populations and how Evangelical social attitudes differ from those held by others in the region.³ Thus, in this *Insights* report,⁴ I first describe Evangelical identity in the Americas in 2012. Then, I take a closer look at the intersection of Evangelical identity and attitudes towards gay individuals in Latin America, by comparing those affiliated with Evangelical Christian denominations to

Figure 1. Religious Identifications in Latin America, 2012



other religious (and non-religious) groups in the region.

To accomplish these objectives, this report focuses on four questions from the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey:⁵ a measure of religious self-identification and three measures of attitudes toward gay individuals, each drawing on a distinct dimension of tolerance.⁶

What percentage of Latin Americans⁷ affiliate with Evangelical denominations? Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents to the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey who identify with Roman Catholicism, Mainline Protestantism, Evangelicalism, other religious groups, or no religion whatsoever.⁸ The results

¹ Boas and Smith (2013) note that 'moral issues' such as abortion and same-sex marriage have been increasingly salient and relevant to many Latin American elections.

² I refer here to individuals who express an affiliation with a religious group that is coded as Evangelical by the AmericasBarometer in response to open-ended question Q3c: "What is your religion, if any?" More information is available on the AmericasBarometer by LAPOP official site.

³ See, for example, the discussion in Boas and Smith (2013).

⁴ Prior issues in the *Insights* Series can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights.php>. The data on which they are based can be found at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/survey-data.php>.

⁵ Funding for the 2012 round mainly came from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Important sources of support were also the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and Vanderbilt University.

⁶ The reader should keep in mind that the results presented in this report are averages for the region.

⁷ As is typical practice for the *Insights* series, I omit the United States and Canada from this and other analyses in the report. I also omit the Anglophone Caribbean and Dutch speaking nations surveyed. In this way, I narrow the focus of the report to Latin America alone.

⁸ The question, Q3c, asks: "What is your religion, if any?" Respondents' open-ended answers are then coded into one

show that, on average, 15 out of every 100 Latin American adults identify with Evangelical Christian denominations. Analysis of the AmericasBarometer data further reveals that rates vary significantly across countries, from a high of 34.2% in Guatemala to a low of 4.9% in Haiti.⁹ Taken as a whole, and in the words of Boas and Smith (2013, 1), it clearly is no longer reasonable to consider Latin Americans to be Catholic “by default.”

Though national and regional contexts likely affect one’s religious identification, I focus here on the extent to which standard socioeconomic and demographic factors predict Latin Americans’ identification with churches coded as Evangelical in the data. Then, having examined these factors, I shift the report’s focus to the extent to which tolerance toward and support for gay rights vary across Evangelicals and other prominent religious (and non-religious) groups in Latin America.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL CORRELATES OF EVANGELICAL IDENTIFICATION

In order to better understand the social and political implications of Evangelicalism, it is important to know the demographic and socioeconomic correlates of those identifying with Evangelical churches. Several scholars have identified Evangelical movements in Latin America as predominantly female-led (Hallum 2003). More specifically, some have sought to place the rise of Pentecostalism, the largest Evangelical denomination in Latin America,

of the following categories: Catholic, Protestant, Non-Christian Eastern Religion, Evangelical/Pentecostal, LDS (Mormon), Traditional/Native, Jewish, Jehovah’s Witness, None, Agnostic/atheist, or other. Across the Americas, 2.9% of respondents did not answer the question; these individuals are not included in the analyses in this report.

⁹ The country-specific results from the 2012 AmericasBarometer correspond, with slight variations, with findings in other reports (e.g., “Overview: Pentecostalism in Latin America”).

within the context of feminist movements within the region. Others simply note a high proportion of female founders of Evangelical movements coupled with high rates of female conversion and membership (Freston 2008; Hagopian 2009; Hallum 2003; Stoll 1990). One explanation for this phenomenon lies in the

For every 100 Latin American adults, 15 identify with Evangelical Christian denominations.

opportunities for women within Evangelical churches to confront and perhaps escape from the influences of *machismo* (Freston 2008; Hallum 2003; Stoll 1990). Many Evangelical denominations denounce alcoholism and help female

members attain varying degrees of influence within their communities. Smilde (2007) suggests that stay-at-home women are more likely to have extra-household neighborhood ties than men, and in turn these relationships may be associated with higher rates of conversion to Evangelicalism among women than men. He also points to depictions of Latin American women as more religious than men, and notes that non-Evangelical families may be more accepting of a female member’s conversion (Smilde 2007). While it is beyond the scope of this report to identify with precision the specific reasons for which individuals of a particular gender might identify as Evangelical at higher rates than their counterparts, we can nonetheless assess the extent to which gender matters concerning Evangelical movements.

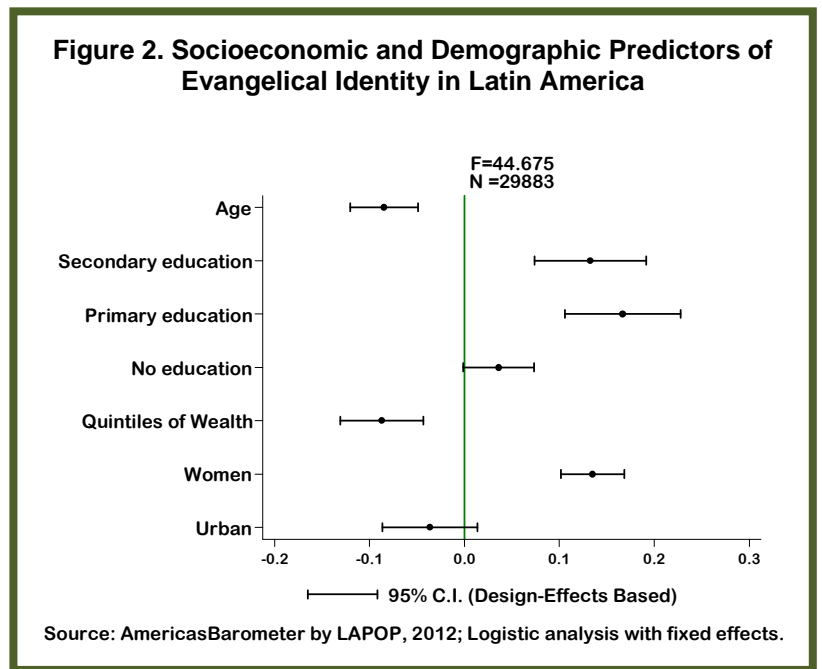
In addition to gender, I analyze how age, level of education, wealth, and urban v. rural place of residence predict respondents’ likelihood of affiliating with an Evangelical denomination.¹⁰ Freston (2008) specifies Protestantism, and especially Pentecostalism, as disproportionately associated with poorer and less educated Latin Americans. Furthermore,

¹⁰ Education is coded into quartiles as follows: No Education, Primary Education, Secondary Education, and Higher Education. The latter category is the baseline/comparison category in the analyses.

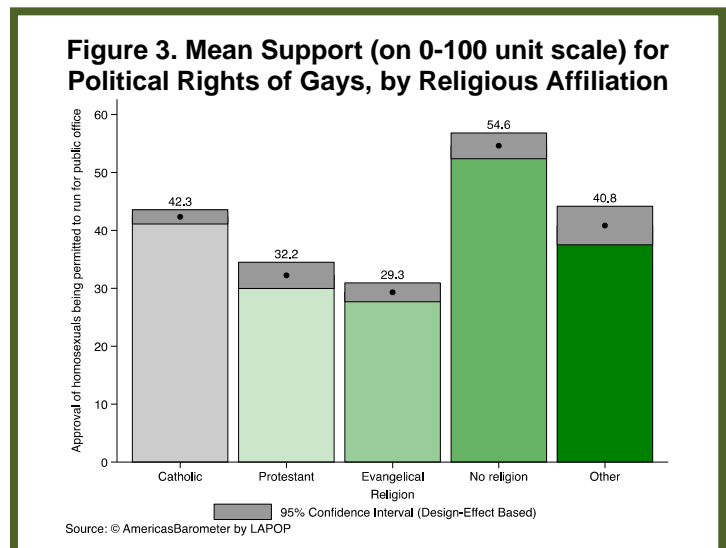
Gaskill (1997) refers to extensive studies that identify Protestantism as an urban refuge for displaced or migratory rural populations in Latin America. Thus, I expect lower levels of wealth and education as well as urban residence to help predict affiliation with Evangelical denominations.

To assess these expectations, I use a logistic regression model that examines the relationships between these individual level factors and individuals' identification as Evangelical. The baseline category in the analysis is *any* other response to the religious identification question. The results, displayed in Figure 2, show standardized coefficients for ease of comparison. The estimated effect of each independent variable is shown by a dot. The corresponding bars represent a 95% confidence interval around that estimate. If the dot and the bar fall to the left of the 0 line then the variable is both negative and significant. If the dot and bar fall to the right of the 0 line then the variable is both positive and significant. Country fixed effects are included in the analysis but not shown in the figure (see appendix for full model). In order to maintain a narrow focus on Latin America, the analysis excludes those countries that are noted in Footnote 7.

As expected, wealth is significantly related to the likelihood that a respondent affiliates with an Evangelical denomination. Specifically, Latin Americans with lower levels of wealth are more likely to report an affiliation with Evangelicalism. Also, females and younger people tend to express Evangelical affiliations more than, respectively, males and older individuals. The comparatively greater rates of Evangelical affiliation among female populations accord with existing scholarship on this topic. Interestingly, individuals who lack education are not much more likely to affiliate with Evangelicalism when compared to the baseline group of respondents with post-secondary education. Those respondents with a primary and/or secondary level education,



however, are more likely to affiliate with Evangelical denominations than those with advanced education. Finally, contrary to expectations, no significant relationship between place of residence (urban or rural) and membership in Evangelical churches exists in the model.



EVANGELICALISM AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS GAYS IN LATIN AMERICA

Having identified some of the socioeconomic and demographic factors that affect the likelihood of individuals' affiliation with Evangelical denominations, I now examine these individuals' attitudes toward gays and gay rights in comparative perspective (that is, compared to those expressing other religious, or non-religious, identifications).¹¹ More specifically, I compare responses among these groups to the following questions from the 2012 AmericasBarometer survey:

D5: How strongly do you approve or disapprove of homosexuals being permitted to run for public office?

D6: How strongly do you approve or disapprove of same-sex couples having the right to marry?¹²

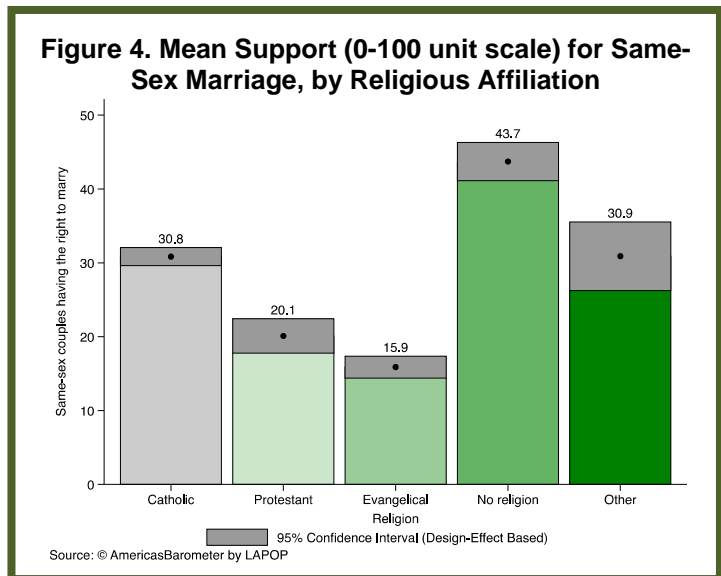
Dis35a: To what extent would you mind having gays as neighbors?¹³

Figures 3 and 4 display mean responses across five major religious groups in Latin America: Roman *Catholic*, mainline *Protestant*, *Evangelical*, *No Religion*, and *Other* (the latter category includes Judaism, Mormonism, and Jehovah's Witnesses, among others). These figures show average responses on a scale from 0 to 100, with lower values indicating strong disapproval and higher values indicating strong approval. Figure 5, in turn, reflects responses given on a binary scale; that is,

¹¹ It is important to note that this report does not address whether different social attitudes among Evangelicals emerge as a result of religious conversion or, instead, if those with distinct social attitudes are attracted to and choose to convert into Evangelicalism. This issue is important because it has implications for whether increased levels of Evangelicalism in Latin America will be accompanied by changes in social attitudes, towards gays and others, in Latin America.

¹² This question was asked of a split-sample, that is of half the survey respondents in the AmericasBarometer 2012.

¹³ This question was optional for each country in the 2012 AmericasBarometer; of the Latin American countries, the question was asked in the following: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay.



respondents either reported discomfort with having homosexual neighbors or they did not mind. Figure 5 therefore shows the percentage of individuals in each religious identification category who report that they would not mind having gay individuals as neighbors.

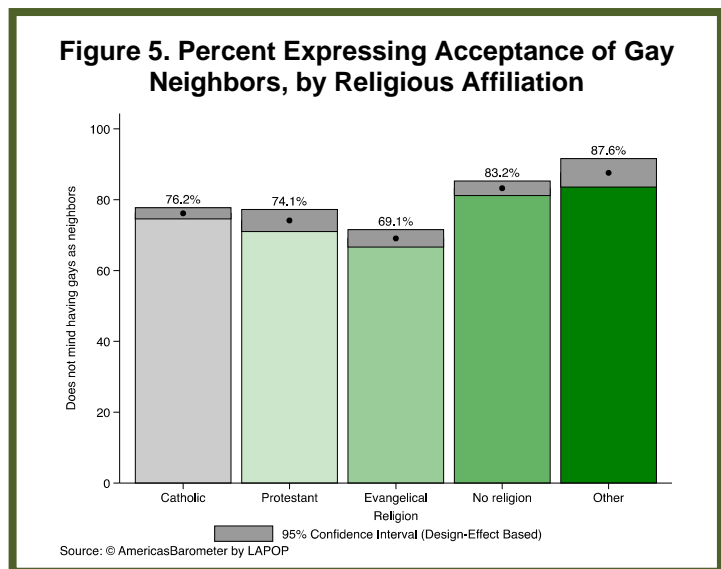


Figure 3 and Figure 4 suggest particularly low levels of approval among Evangelicals for gay individuals being permitted to run for public office and for same-sex marriage, respectively. These results are in line with earlier conclusions presented by Corral and Lodola (2010). Furthermore, levels of disapproval for

gays in public office and same-sex marriage among Evangelicals do not differ greatly from their mainline Protestant counterparts. They do, however, differ much more so when compared to other religious groups such as Roman Catholics or those categorized as 'Other.' Figure 5 portrays similar tendencies, with Evangelicals expressing the lowest levels of comfort with gay neighbors. Interestingly, however, Evangelical responses in Figure 5 do not trail far below mean values of other groups, so that differences across religious (and non-religious) groups observed in this graph are smaller than those observed in Figure 3 and Figure 4.¹⁴ Finally, across all these comparisons, those who report no religious affiliation tend to be among the most tolerant.

According to Corral and Lodola (2010), levels of support for same-sex marriage are higher among women. Given the evidence from Figure 2 that women are more likely to participate in Evangelical movements in Latin America, this suggests the need for a multivariate analysis of this question in order to control for gender and other respondent characteristics. Figures A1-A3 in the appendix display the results of three regression analyses predicting responses to each of the measures shown in Figure 3-5, respectively, with categorical variables for the religion groups (the omitted baseline category is No religion) and the same controls (female, education, wealth, age and urban; and, as well, country fixed effects) that were included in the analysis in Figure 2. From these results, we find that on average Latin American women are significantly more inclined to support gay rights and more tolerant of gays than men. These results contrast with those finding comparatively higher rates of Evangelicalism among women. Thus, it appears that there are two distinct currents with respect to gender and social issues in Latin America: on the one hand, on average, women are more likely to

express more acceptance of gay individuals and their political and social rights; on the other hand, women are also more likely to participate in Evangelical movements, which tend toward lower levels of tolerance and acceptance of gay persons in Latin America.

There is another interesting cross current in Latin American public opinion related to the likelihood of Evangelical identification and tolerance. When the regression analyses in the appendix are run according to each respective age cohort, a linear relationship between a respondent's age and his/her level of tolerance toward gays and gay rights becomes apparent. Younger respondents in Latin America typically express higher levels of tolerance for gays and gay rights. This stands in contrast to earlier analyses in this report, which point to younger populations as more likely to identify as Evangelical. Thus, we again find opposing tendencies: young individuals are more likely to be tolerant but simultaneously more likely to identify as Evangelical, a religious group that is less tolerant when compared to others in the region. Certainly, more research is warranted into the ways in which gender, age, Evangelicalism, and social attitudes intersect.

Finally, I also examined whether the differences in attitudes towards gays among distinct religious groups may be driven by religion's level of importance for an individual. In fact, the AmericasBarometer 2012 data reveal that religion is more important in Evangelicals' lives when compared to Catholics and those in the 'other' category (and, of course, compared to those who identify as having no religion).¹⁵ Yet, even if importance of religion is controlled for in regression analyses predicting tolerance

¹⁴ It is important to keep in mind that the set of countries analyzed in Figure 5 differs from that in Figures 3 and 4 (see Footnote 13).

¹⁵ Q5b asks: "Please, could you tell me how important is religion in your life? [Read options] (1) Very important; (2) Rather important; (3) Not very important; (4) Not at all important." On a rescaled measure from 0 to 100, where higher values correspond to more importance, the mean value for Catholics in Latin America is 81.3; the mean value for Protestants is 90.3; and, the mean value for Evangelicals is 92.3. These averages only reflect the region under study in this report (see Footnote 9).

for gay individuals, results similar to those reported above for the most part hold. That is, Evangelicals as a group still express comparatively lower levels of tolerance for gay individuals (see Appendix Figures B1 and B2; note that for the analysis of support for gay marriage, the distinction between Evangelicals and mainline Protestants narrows in this analysis). Only in the case of acceptance of gay individuals as neighbors does adding the importance of religion measure erode the distinction between Protestants and Evangelicals, with both more likely to be unaccepting of gays as neighbors compared to Catholics, “others”, and those with no religion (see Appendix Figure B3). Thus, importance of religion matters but is not the only factor explaining differences in attitudes towards gays between Evangelicals and other religious (and non-religious) groups in Latin America.

CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted that Evangelicalism has been growing in Latin America over time. Roughly 15% of individuals in Latin America identify with Evangelical denominations, though these rates vary across countries. As Evangelicalism continues to grow in the region, its strength will continue to vary across countries, and we should continue to find differences across sub-groups within the Evangelical category. Evangelical denominations appeal to certain groups within Latin America, including the poor and those younger populations that are perhaps still in the process of forming a strong religious attachment. Evangelical movements also draw a great deal of support from women and those with limited education.

In my analyses of Evangelical attitudes toward gay persons and gay rights, in turn, I found that individuals affiliated with Evangelical churches express the lowest levels of approval for gays being allowed to run for public office and same-sex marriage. These individuals, on average, also express the lowest levels of comfort concerning homosexual neighbors in

their communities, though the gaps across groups narrow in that analysis (and the gap between mainline Protestants and Evangelicals disappears once importance of religion is controlled for in Figure B3). These findings and the aforementioned socioeconomic correlates raise important questions. Principally, given high levels of tolerance among younger populations and women, is it possible that comparatively less tolerant Evangelical denominations will develop along more moderate or liberal lines in the future? If Evangelical churches continue to draw populations more tolerant of gays and gay rights in Latin America, therein lies potential for change in these churches’ socio-political stances. Future work is necessary to determine these populations’ influence within specific denominations, and whether their attitudes remain stable across time spent under an Evangelical identification.

Finally, though not addressed in this report, scholars have observed varying degrees of political participation and interest within Evangelical movements, with significant variation across national borders (Cleary and Stewart-Gambino 1997; Stoll 1990; “Overview: Pentecostalism in Latin America”). More work on this topic ought to consider levels of political participation among Evangelicals in Latin America. Although Evangelical movements are characterized by a variety of approaches to political activism, their presence in public life throughout the region cannot be ignored (“Overview: Pentecostalism in Latin America”). Further studies along these lines might then contribute to a better understanding of Evangelical populations’ potential impact on both LGBT policy and the nature of democratic politics across Latin America.¹⁶

¹⁶ Thank you to Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, PhD; Margarita Corral; Daniel Zizumbo-Colunga; Nicole Hinton; Alejandro Diaz-Dominguez; Amy Erica Smith; and the AmericasBarometer by LAPOP team for their insight and support. Any questions concerning shortcomings in the report should be directed to the author.

References

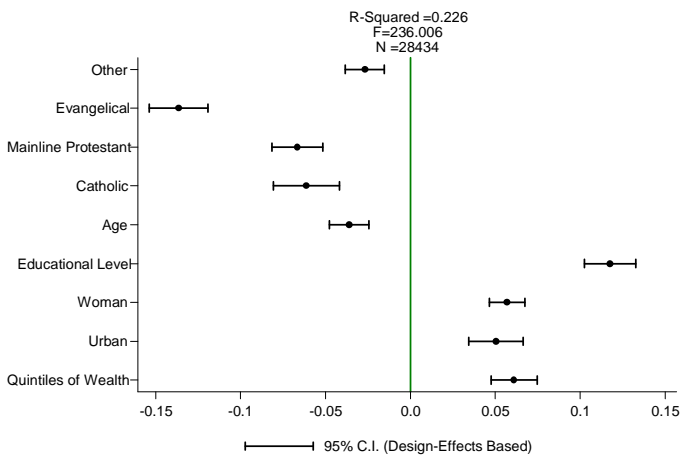
2006. "Overview: Pentecostalism in Latin America." *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: A Project of the Pew Research Center*.
<http://www.pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Overview-Pentecostalism-in-Latin-America.aspx>.
- Boas, Taylor, and Amy Erica Smith. 2013. "Religion and the Latin America Voter." *Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Political Science Association*. Orlando, FL.
- Cleary, Edward L. 1997. "Pentecostals, Prominence, and Politics." Chapter 1 in Cleary, Edward L. and Hanna W. Stewart-Gambino, Eds. *Power, Politics, and Penetecostals in Latin America*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Corral, Margarita, and Germán Lodola. 2010. "Support for Same-Sex Marriage in Latin America." *Insights Series #44*. Nashville, TN: Latin American Public Opinion Project.
- Freston, Paul. *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America*. Edited by Paul Freston. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gaskill, Newton J. 1997. "Rethinking Protestantism and Democratic Consolidation in Latin America." *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1): 69-91.
- Hagopian, Frances. 2009. *Religious Pluralism, Democracy, and the Catholic Church in Latin America*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Hallum, Anne Motley. 2003. "Taking Stock and Building Bridges: Feminism, Women's Movements, and Pentecostalism in Latin America." *Latin American Research Review* 38 (1): 169-186.
- Heaney, Sharon E. 2008. *Contextual Theology for Latin America: Liberation Themes in Evangelical Perspective*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster.
- Seligson, Mitchell A., and Daniel Moreno Morales. 2010. "Gay in the Americas." *Americas Quarterly*. Winter Issue. Available online at: <http://www.americasquarterly.org/node/1301>.
- Smilde, David. 2007. *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Stoll, David. 1990. *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Appendix

A. Supplementary Analyses: Predicting Attitudes toward Gay Individuals and Gay Rights with Demographic Measures and Religious Affiliations

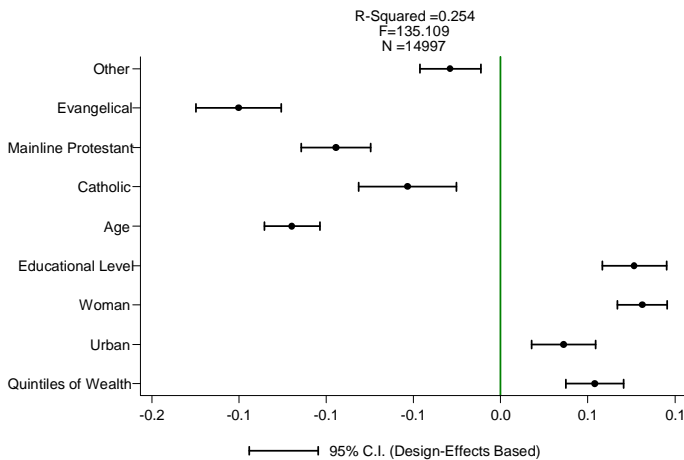
Note: For each analysis, country fixed effects are included but not shown; analysis restricted to Latin American countries (see Footnote 7).

Figure A1. Tolerance for the Political Rights of Gay Persons (OLS)



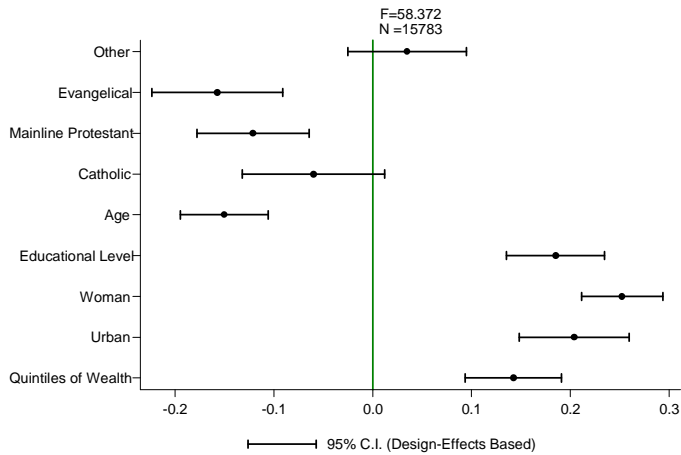
Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2012; v47; dv=d5r (office)

Figure A2. Support for the Gay Marriage (OLS)



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2012; dv=d6 (marriage)

Figure A3. Acceptance of Gay Persons as Neighbors (Logit)

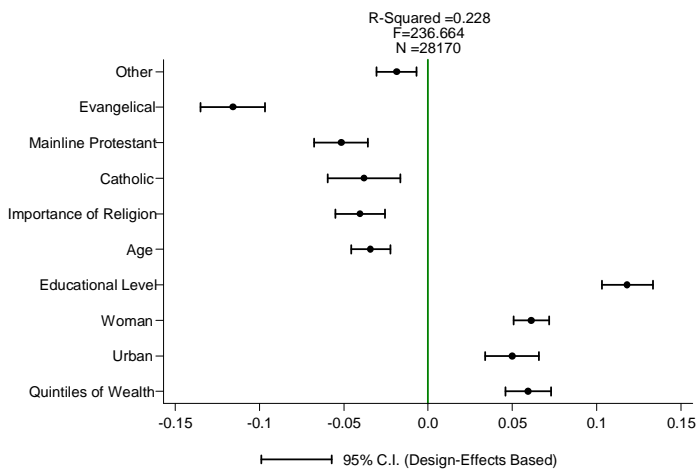


Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2012; dv=dis35aap (neighbors)

B. Supplementary Analyses: Predicting Attitudes toward Gay Individuals and Gay Rights with Demographic Measures and Religious Affiliations, AND Importance of Religion

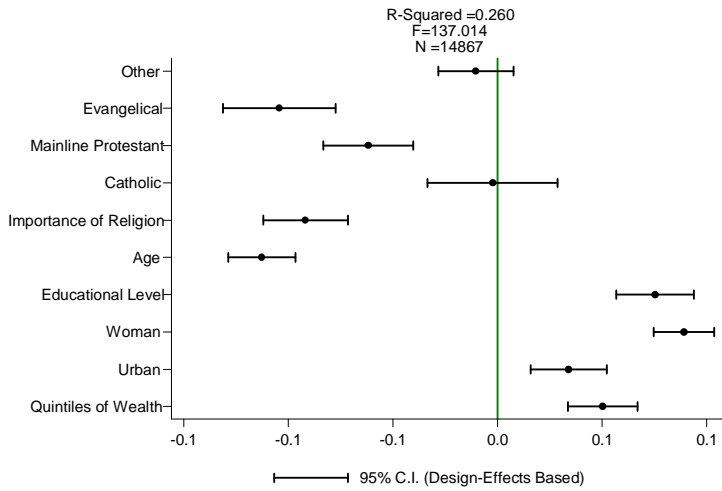
Note: For each analysis, country fixed effects are included but not shown; analysis restricted to Latin American countries (see Footnote 7).

Figure B1. Tolerance for the Political Rights of Gay Persons (OLS)



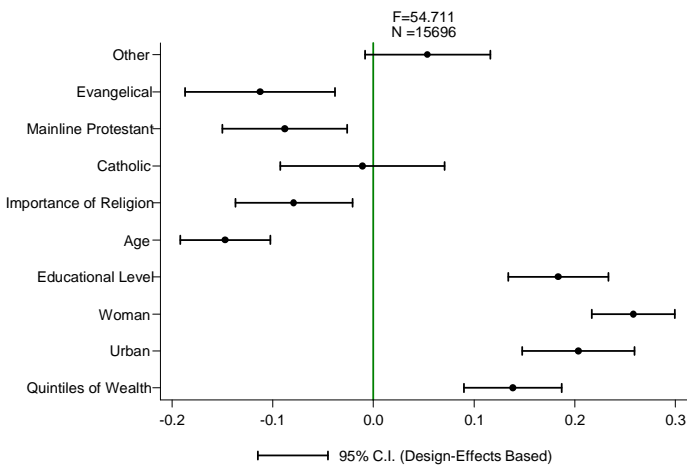
Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2012; v47; dv=d5r (office)

Figure B2. Support for the Gay Marriage (OLS)



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP, 2012; v47; dv=d6 (marriage)

Figure B3. Acceptance of Gay Persons as Neighbors (Logit)



Source: © AmericasBarometer by LAPOP