

AmericasBarometer: Topical Brief – June 2, 2015

Same-Sex Marriage Resonates Most Strongly with Young People in the Americas

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In April of 2015, Ecuador and Chile approved civil union laws for same-sex couples. In recent years, same-sex marriages have been recognized in Uruguay, Brazil, and Argentina.¹ Conversely, other countries in the Americas have demonstrated opposition to the idea of civil unions or marriages for same-sex couples. For example, this year the Peruvian Congress finally voted against a civil union law² and in 2013, the Colombian Senate selected not to approve gay marriage³ (see also the discussion in Lodola and Corral 2010).

The May 22 referendum in Ireland on same-sex marriage raised the salience in the media of public opinion as a key input into the legislative process.⁴ The most recent round of the LAPOP *AmericasBarometer* once again allows insight into levels of and variation in public support for same-sex marriage across and within countries of the Americas.

Figure 1. Average (0-100) Degree of Support for Same-sex Marriage, 2014

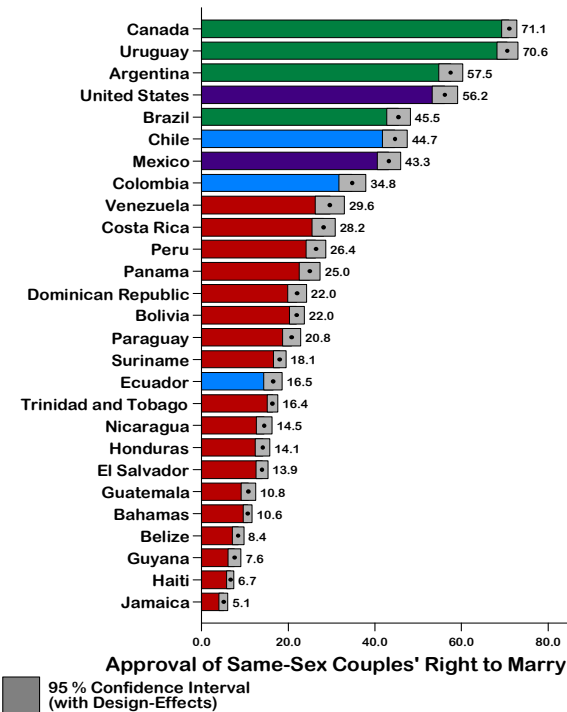


Figure 1 shows average levels of public support for same-sex marriage across the Americas on a 0-100 scale, on which higher values mean more degrees of support.⁵ Countries are color-coded so that green indicates countries in which gay marriage is legal; blue indicates countries that

¹ <http://www.freedomtomarry.org/landscape/entry/c/international>.

² On September 12th, 2013, Congressman Carlos Bruce, the first Peruvian lawmaker who has announced he is gay, presented a draft bill about civil union, but after a debate in the Congress, legislators did not pass it.

³ According to www.freedomtomarry.org, the Colombian court ruled that the Congress must pass gay marriage before June 2013, but the Colombian Senate did not approve it. As a consequence, same-sex couples are able to register their unions in court as civil unions.

⁴ 62.1% voted yes on the proposal for the marriage equality bill in Ireland. See: <http://www.referendum.ie>.

⁵ D6: "How strongly do you approve or disapprove of same-sex couples having the right to marry?"

allow civil unions; purple indicates countries where gay marriage or unions are recognized in some regions of the country; and red indicates countries that do not recognize same-sex marriages or unions at all.

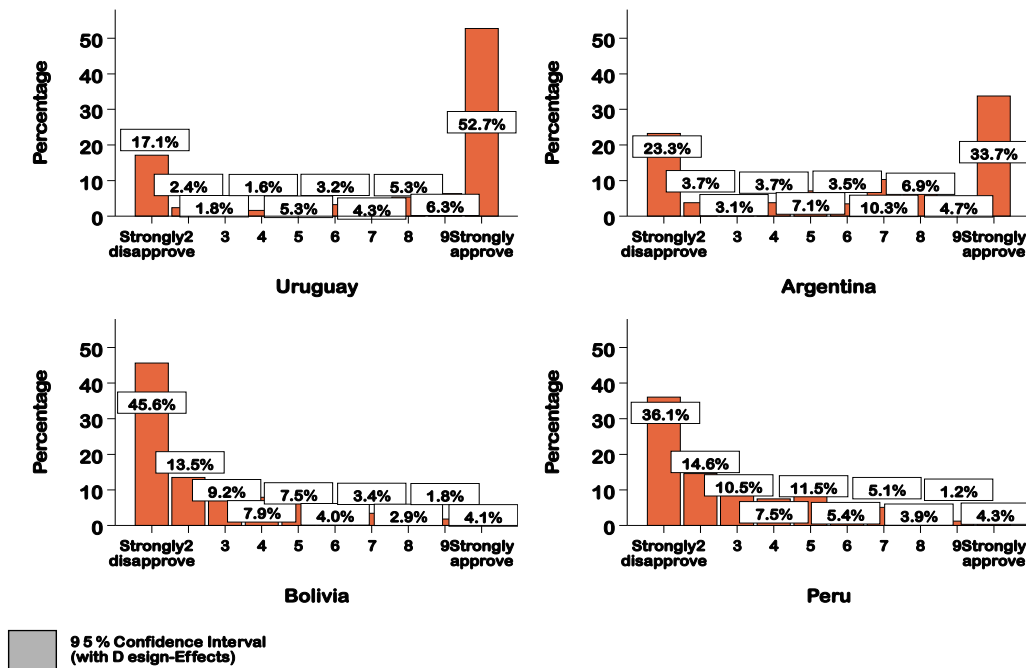
Figure 1 reveals *higher public support for same-sex couples' right to marry is found in those countries that have enacted legislation allowing same-sex marriages and/or unions.* This conclusion is consistent with Boidi (2013), who shows that Uruguay's approval of gay marriage in 2013 aligned with liberal views on this issue among that country's public in 2012. Comparatively high support continues to be found in Uruguay, and in most other countries with similar laws. The exception is Ecuador, which has approved civil unions despite low public support for this type of legislation.

In a number of countries where laws have been passed in favor of same-sex unions and marriages, public opinion tends to be polarized

on the issue. Boidi (2013) shows that preferences in Uruguay in 2012 were polarized, with most people reporting they either "strongly disapprove" or "strongly approve." The data for the 2014 round of the *AmericasBarometer* demonstrate that this tendency continues in Uruguay and is present in some other countries as well. To illustrate this and some of the differences found within and across countries in the region, Figure 2 presents the distribution of responses to the *AmericasBarometer* same-sex marriage question in four countries: Uruguay and Argentina, where gay marriage has been approved, and Bolivia and Peru, where gay marriage or civil unions have not been passed.

Uruguay is the country where most people "strongly approve" of same-sex couples' right to marry in 2014 (52.7%), yet still a sizeable percent (17.1) "strongly disapprove." In Argentina, 23.3% respond "strongly

Figure 2. Distribution of Support for Same-sex Marriage in Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru, 2014



Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOR, 2014; v1.0

dissapprove” and 33.7% “strongly approve.”⁶ Public opinion tilts in another way in two countries that have passed same-sex union legislation and have less polarization of opinion: in Ecuador and Colombia (not shown here), 62.5% and 40.8% respond “strongly disapprove” and just 5.8% and 14.6% “strongly approve,” respectively.

In countries where laws in favor of gay rights have not been passed, there is little evidence of polarization in opinion. For example, Bolivia and Peru have high proportions of people who strongly disapprove of same-sex marriage (45.6% and 36.1%, respectively), and small percentages of people who strongly approve same-sex marriage (4.1% and 4.3%, respectively).⁷

What explains these differences in public support for this measure *within* countries? In previous research on this question, Lodola and Corral (2010) find that younger, more educated, wealthier, urban residents, and those who place themselves on the left are more likely to support gay marriage rights. Boidi (2013) arrives at similar conclusions in her analyses of the case of Uruguay.

Lodola and Corral (2010) and Marcano (2013) emphasize the role of religion in opposing to gay rights. They find that Catholics and Evangelicals are less likely to support the idea of same-sex marriage.

When assessing the issue across ten Latin American countries⁸ using data recently

collected as part of the 2014 *AmericasBarometer*,⁹ I find that women,¹⁰ the more educated,¹¹ wealthier,¹² and younger people tend to be more likely to support same-sex marriage in most countries, independently of whether their countries have approved or not approved a civil union or marriage law. Along the same line, Catholics,¹³ Evangelicals, and Protestants¹⁴ tend to be less likely to support gay marriage than non-Catholics and non-Evangelicals and Protestants, respectively, independently of whether their countries have passed or not passed a law in favor of same-sex civil unions or marriages. Of these variables, age is one of the factors to most consistently predict individuals’ support for same-sex marriage. This variable is negative and statistically significant in all ten countries investigated in detail for this report: that is, *older people are less likely to support gay marriage*.

⁶ Chile and Brazil also exhibit polarized distributions, not shown here. In these countries, 31.2% and 35% respond “strongly disapprove”, respectively; and 23.2% and 24.5% respond “strongly approve”, respectively.

⁷ In Paraguay and Venezuela, not shown here, 66% and 45% respond “strongly disapprove”, respectively; and 12% and 11.2% respond “strongly approve”, respectively.

⁸ I ran an OLS regression with the pooled *AmericasBarometer* 2014 data set and then separate analyses for each of ten countries (see footnote 7). In each regression the dependent variable is support for same-sex couples’ right to marry (recoded on a 0-100 scale) and female, education, wealth, age, left-right self-placement, Catholic, and Evangelical/Protestant are the independent variables, along with country dummies in the pooled analysis. For the pooled analysis, I find that women,

education, and quintiles of wealth are positive and statistically significant predictors of same-sex couples’ right to marry. Age, Left-right self-placement, Catholic, and Evangelical/Protestant are negative and statistically significant predictors. Results available upon request.

⁹ For this report, I focus in detail on Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay. I ran an OLS regression for each of these countries and report in the footnotes that follow on these results.

¹⁰ I find that being female is a statistically significant and positive indicator in Chile, Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, Peru, and Paraguay.

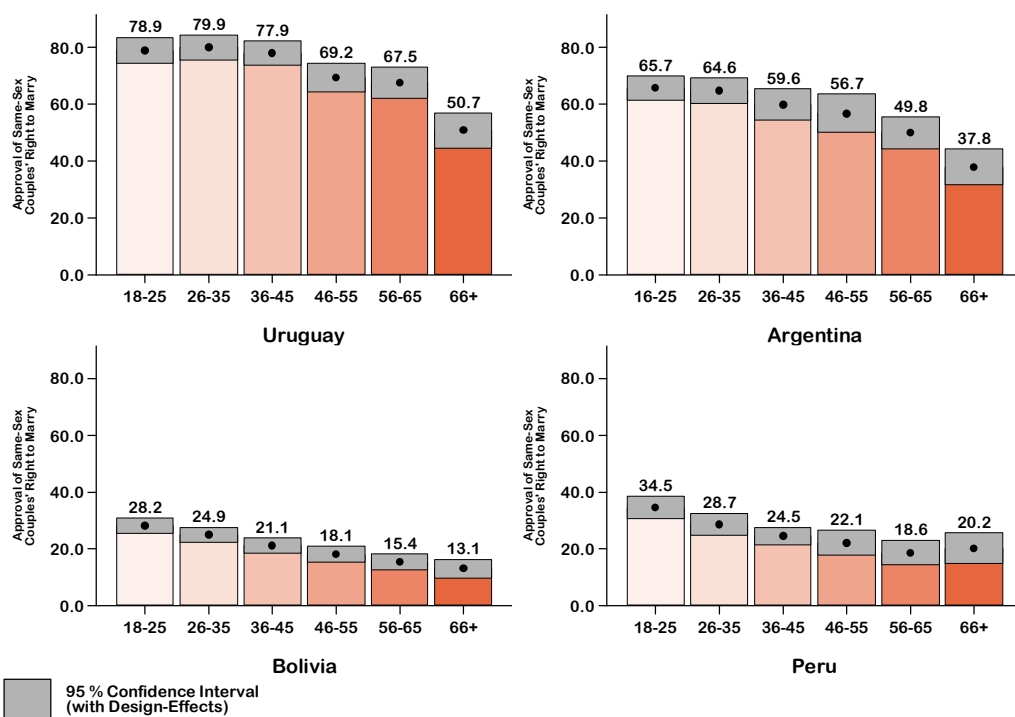
¹¹ Education is a positive and statistically significant predictor in Ecuador, Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

¹² The quintiles of wealth measure is positive and statistically significant in Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Venezuela.

¹³ The Catholic measure is negative and statistically significant in Uruguay, Argentina, Peru, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

¹⁴ The Evangelical and Protestant measures are negative and statistically significant in all countries.

Figure 3. Average (0-100) Degree of Support for Same-sex Marriage by Age Cohorts in Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, and Peru, 2014



Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2014; v1.0

Figure 3 shows four examples of the relationship between age and support for the right of same-sex couples to marry. This figure shows that countries where a gay marriage law has been approved display higher degrees of support in general, but also an opinion divide between younger and older people. For example, in Uruguay the difference between those 18 to 25 years old and those older than 66 years old is 28 degrees of support on a 0-100 scale. This difference is also 28 degrees in Argentina (as shown in the figure), and 30 degrees in Brazil and 35 degrees in Chile (not shown for brevity). Countries that have not passed such a law display lower degrees of support, yet still display an age-based opinion divide. As Figure 3 shows, in Bolivia and Peru, the difference between those 18 to 25 years old and those older than 66 years old is 15 and 14 degrees, respectively; in Paraguay and Venezuela, average opinions across the

youngest and oldest cohort vary by 15 and 24 degrees, respectively.¹⁵

Taken as a whole, the 2014 *AmericasBarometer* results reveal that legislators in the Americas tend to be in line with people's preferences in their countries, in that pro-union/marriage legislation tends to be found in countries with more support among the mass public for extending such rights to gay individuals (see also Boidi 2013). The interesting exception is Ecuador, where President Correa has approved a civil union law despite a low support for this idea. Further, the results indicate that countries

¹⁵ In general, the countries examined in this report exhibit a monotonic decline with age, except in Argentina and Uruguay, where young citizens seem to have similar higher degrees of support for same-sex couples' right to marry. In Uruguay, respondents between 18 and 45 years old report similar degrees of support. In Argentina, citizens between 18 and 35 years old also report similar degrees of support for same-sex couples' right to marry.

where there are gay marriage laws tend to have a fair degree of polarization in preferences.

They also inform us that there are significant demographic factors undergirding support for gay marriage in the Americas. Age is one of the most relevant of these factors. In countries across the region, young people tend to exhibit higher degrees of support for gay marriage compared to older people.

The relevance of age to public opinion on gay marriage is not limited to the Americas. In fact, news reports indicate that younger people were the principal supporters of the recent referendum on gay marriage in Ireland.¹⁶ Thus, no matter the region, it seems that activists in favor of LGBT rights in countries where a gay marriage or civil union law has not been passed are likely to find that their arguments resonate most strongly with young people. We can further conclude from these public opinion tendencies that support for gay marriage is likely to increase, rather than decrease, over time, to the extent that the next cohorts of young people express views that align more with their slightly older peers than with members of the senior generation.

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Full results of the 2014 AmericasBarometer and previous rounds can be consulted on-line at www.LapopSurveys.org. The full data set is available for on-line analysis or download (in SPSS and Stata formats) at no cost.

¹⁶See: <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/05/gay-marriage-ireland-118254.html#.VWzb1FnBzGc>