An Examination of the Public's Perceptions Towards Transgender Populations

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Abstract

Issues concerning transgender rights have become more salient in the present-day political atmosphere; this is largely due to well-publicized ordinances which restrict bathroom use per an individual's assigned gender at birth. While transgender individuals make up a small minority of the population, their rights and treatment by society sit at the front of civil rights debates. In this study, I evaluate possible factors associated with the public's support or opposition to the implementation of transgender rights policies. First, using original pre-election survey data collected from citizens in the state of Colorado, I examine how elements like party identification and policy stances shape individuals' opinions on bathroom laws. Then, using data from the American National Election Studies (ANES) 2016 Pilot Survey, I examine how similar elements shape individuals' feelings towards transgender individuals, broadening my focus to the American (rather than Colorado) public. In both cases, I find that party identification and religious practice play roles in shaping public opinion. In the end, my study helps contribute to research on transgender policy, as most public opinion work has been focused on issues of gay and lesbian rights. Creating an understanding of this and other identity groups in society will help make democracy function properly in a large and diverse country like the United States.

Introduction

Research concerning the acceptance of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities has expanded. However, much of the research on this topic has fixated on the public's changing perceptions of the gay and lesbian communities (Brewer, "Public Opinion About Gay Rights and Gay Marriage", 2014; Brewer et al., 2016; Brewer and Wilcox, 2005; Becker, 2012; Sherkat et al., 2010; Ellison et al., 2011; Olson et al., 2006; Cotten-Huston and Waite, 1999). Indeed, even as work on gays and lesbians has expanded, research on how the general population interprets transgender individuals has lagged behind (Flores, 2015; Becker and Todd, 2013).

In this study, I follow in the footsteps of other prior public opinion work, using studies that allow me to focus on both the Colorado and larger American context. First using original items included in the Colorado Political Climate Survey of 2016, I evaluate possible factors associated with the public's support or opposition to the implementation of transgender rights policies. Then, using the American National Election Studies (ANES) 2016 Pilot Study, I take a national view as I determine what factors influence how people feel towards transgender individuals. In looking at public opinion towards bathroom policy (in Colorado), and feelings towards this group in society (in the United States), I focus on the roles played by political (e.g., party identification, political participation) and demographic factors (e.g., religiosity, education). Do any of these factors – after controlling for other important variables – predict that individuals will be more likely to endorse legislation advocating for transgender bathroom rights? Will they influence how warm (cold) people feel towards transgender individuals?

Looking at the current political climate in the United States, it is easy to observe that the public's opinions on issues of LGBTQ rights have shifted dramatically in the past several

decades (Brewer, 2014). And, with the legalization of same-sex marriage at a national level in 2015, one might think that the general population assumes equal rights are guaranteed for all (567 U.S. ___ (2015)). Of course, this is not the case in many areas that fall under the broader category of LGBTQ issues. For example, it is still perfectly legal in many states (though not Colorado) to discriminate against an individual in the workplace, with regards to healthcare rights, or in schools simply on the basis of gender or sexual orientation ("Non-Discrimination Laws", 2017). In certain states, such as North Carolina, legislation labeled as "bathroom bills" have been passed by state legislatures. These pieces of legislation force individuals to use bathrooms which match their sex as assigned at birth; this limits the ability of transgender individuals to use bathrooms that match the gender with which they self-identify (CNN, 2016). Legislation such as this (arguably) limits the freedoms guaranteed to Americans by the Constitution of the United States – it involves basic questions of civil liberties and civil rights. Thus, developing a better understanding of what factors predict support or opposition to LGBTQ anti-discrimination legislation is critical to the practice of democracy in the United States.

In the sections that follow, I examine public opinion towards the transgender population, (including policy implications) from both a Colorado and national perspective. The ability to examine similar variables at both the local and national level presents several notable opportunities. Specifically, the examination of (original survey data on) Colorado offers the chance to look at policy alternatives, and to do so in a state that has relatively strong anti-discrimination laws. In contrast, the national level data allows me to make inferences about the larger public, and to focus on people's feelings towards the transgender community.

In the next section, I begin with a cursory exploration of the current literature; this helps motivate my effort. Following a review of existing work, I set forth some expectations and

describe the studies used. I then discuss the findings, before concluding by noting the possible implications of the results, and future paths for scholarly work in this topic area.

Literature Review

Studies concerning public opinion towards the LGBQ population have covered a wide array of topics, as well as possible impacts on issues such as family roles, marriage, and policy (Flores, 2015) – a growing body of work exists. In comparison, work on public opinion towards transgender, transsexual, and individuals who identify with a non-binary gender identity has been minimal (Flores, 2015; Becker and Todd, 2013; Taylor, 2007). Thus, in simply studying what factors may be predictive of support for nondiscrimination policy and feelings towards transgender individuals, this thesis makes contributions. When thinking of work on public opinion towards LGBQ individuals, we might expect levels of support for trans-individuals to have increased with the visibility of the LGBQ movement and the legalization of same-sex marriage. This would follow, as earlier work indicated solid support in the public for gay and lesbian rights. For example, in a 2014 study on public opinion about gay and lesbian rights and same-sex marriage, Brewer (2014) noted a Gallup survey indicating that 54% of Americans supported same-sex marriage.

As mentioned previously, less has been written on public opinion towards transgender issues and individuals. This lack of research can likely be attributed to the major focus of scholars and reporters being on homosexual populations. Prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage within the United States in 2015, gays and lesbians were still working towards the attainment of basic rights (Kite and Bryant-Lees, 2016; 567 U.S. ___ (2015)). Of course, many would argue this group still is – the homosexual community still experiences discrimination and

harassment to this day (Kite and Bryant-Lees, 2016). However, remembering the general focus on gay and lesbian issues (at the expense of other groups) can help, given an explanation for the major research gap concerning transgender rights and public opinion (and can also give a little perspective). And, the major studies which have been conducted on this topic indicate that transgender individuals are likely to experience significant discrimination, especially in their place of employment (Flores, 2015; Taylor, 2007). Based on the current political climate, it is reasonable to suspect that there may be increasing levels of support for the transgender community in recent years.

Transgender Individuals vs. Other Social Groups

In studying opinion towards transgender individuals, drawing comparisons with other groups may be helpful. For example, in studying the same-sex marriage movement, scholars have found that ideological orientation, religious affiliation, comfortability with same-sex displays of affection, attributional perception, ethnicity, and levels of interpersonal contact with people of that orientation can be used as predictors of support or opposition (Becker and Scheufele, 2009; Ellison et al., 2011; Becker, 2012; Sherkat et al., 2010; Brewer et al., 2016; Lewis, 2003; Haider-Markel and Joslyn; Hicks and Lee, 2006; Flores, 2015). More specifically, existing work indicates that the most influential predictors for the support or opposition to gay or lesbian populations is religiosity and ideological orientation (Becker, 2012; Becker and Scheufele, 2009 ; Chandler and Tsai, 2001; Hicks and Lee, 2006).

Applying these conclusions to the case of support for the transgender community makes sense. As another example, in looking to factors which predict support for feminist focused beliefs, exposure to feminism, support of feminist goals, and a positive opinion of the movement have all been demonstrated as significant factors (Myaskovsky and Wittig, 1997). While the

feminist movement is not inherently the same as the transgender (or gay and lesbian rights) movement overall, public opinion with respect to it could operate in much the same way. That is, it is possible that being exposed to transgender individuals and having a positive view of the transgender movement – in addition to liberal political ideologies and low religiosity – could predict increased support. Put another way, we might expect several factors to work on support for transgender issues in the same way as we see them work for other movements (like the feminist movement).

Heterosexism

Research has found that political conservatives and religious persons express the highest rates of opposition to same-sex relationships and same-sex marriage. These individuals make up a group collectively labeled as "heterosexists" whom are characterized by "an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (Herek, 1990). Heterosexism can be directed towards a vast array of differing orientations; for the purposes of the present study, I apply it to the LGBTQ community. Based on this general categorization of groups, we might expect that these identity groups, which contribute to heterosexism, will be notably less supportive of transgender rights. Heterosexism is presumed to stem from the cultural institutions with which societal members follow and interact. These cultural institutions include religious, legal, and psychiatric systems – along with the media – and may act as drivers of heterosexism (Herek, 1990). Either these systems are used to discriminate against non-heterosexual and non-normative communities, or simply mask their existence. By drawing on a framework of heterosexism, we can use the perspective to make predictions about groups and transgender rights in the United States.

Focusing on Transgender Opinion (vs. Gay and Lesbian Rights); Looking for Relationships

My goal in this study is to provide the first steps for later work – to examine relationships between certain factors and public opinion towards transgender individuals (and policies). With my survey data sets, I am only able to speculate on why such correlations exist; an experiment would provide better answers to questions of causality and mechanisms. However, I hope to make contributions by looking at how factors such as ethnicity, religiosity, and ideology are related to support for transgender rights (and feelings towards this group).

A cursory overview of existing research makes it clear that other work on public opinion and LGBTQ issues has some of the same limitations. For example, the existing literature on public support for same-sex marriage notes that the public's approval of same-sex marriage has increased over time (Brewer, 2014). What that research has not covered in detail is what has caused this increase of support. In fact, a large portion of the existing work on public opinion and gay and lesbian rights disregards questions of cause, and focuses precisely on the factors which may predict support or opposing attitudes (such as religiosity). Attempting to determine the root cause of something as complex as support for homosexuals and/or homosexual rights is certainly difficult (based on the number of variables that need to be controlled for).

One of the few studies that looks to the cause of changing perceptions towards homosexuals posits that a combined intra-cohort effect and cohort succession effect have been responsible for opinion trends (Baunach, 2011; Baunach, 2012; Hart-Brinson, 2014). These effects essentially represent the idea that individuals change their perceptions over time and are also replaced by newer generations over time, contributing to the increase in liberalization that has been witnessed in recent years (Baunach, 2011; Baunach, 2012).

Because I do not have experimental data, or – like the Baunach papers – information on opinion over time, I focus on noting the factors which may have relationships with transgender

opinion. The above information serves to illustrate possible things that could be linked to higher levels of public opinion with respect to this group. There is a clear gap in the current body of research regarding this topic; the assumption is that the general population typically thinks about homosexuality and transgender identity in the same way. While it makes sense to think that the factors that are often seen as impactful on the acceptance or disapproval of homosexual orientations may be similarly applicable to perceptions of transgender persons, this assumption needs to be tested. If there are many similarities between the factors predicting gay and lesbian opinion and transgender opinion, this would suggest what will likely happen with transgender opinion in the mass public in the years ahead.

To reiterate, although my study is only looking at relationships, helping to develop the body of research surrounding transgender public opinion – and its connection to public policy – is of vital importance. For one, the gap in the research overlooks an entire group of people. Perhaps more importantly, as transgender public policy is capable of changing the lives of thousands of individuals in the United States alone, understanding opinions towards this group (and related legislation) may reveal a way to educate and inform policy-makers (which means practical, real-world impacts) – something important in the current political environment following the 2016 presidential election.

Expectations

Following the work on opinions towards gay and lesbian rights, I expect that public opinion concerning transgender rights policy will be most impacted by interpersonal contact, religiosity, and political ideology (Flores, 2015; Becker, 2012; Becker and Todd, 2013; Hicks and Lee, 2006; Brewer, "Public Opinion About Gay Rights and Gay Marriage", 2014). Each of these individual factors has been linked to public perceptions. While it may be the case that

perceptions are shifting naturally over time towards a more liberal mindset, these factors are part of that story and cannot be overlooked (Herek, 1990).

After reviewing the literature, there are several outcomes which can be reasonably expected in my analysis of the CPC and ANES surveys. *My primary hypothesis holds that conservative (Republican) political party identification will be negatively related to feelings towards transgender individuals, as well as specific public policy applications involving transgender individuals*; this comes from work finding a link between Republican identification/conservative ideology and feelings towards homosexuals/attitudes on same-sex marriage (e.g., Baunach 2012; Brewer 2003).

Relatedly, support for Donald Trump is included in this study as a variable which is largely expected to covary with political party identification. However, its addition does allow for a more direct examination of his supporters – this is not a bad idea, as Donald Trump been a polarizing figure, and not the typical Republican politician. Including a measure of Trump support gives me the ability to discern between pure political party identification and support for Donald Trump specifically.

My second hypothesis states that increased religious involvement will also demonstrate a negative relationship – in both Colorado and at the national level – as it relates to feelings towards transgender people and related policies. As with ideology, religious involvement has been shown in myriad studies to significantly predict decreased support for the gay and lesbian individuals, even when controls are included for intervening factors such as race, education, and gender (e.g., Haider-Markel and Josalyn, 2008). My present focus on transgender opinion follows from this – I suspect that religious individuals will view transgender individuals as abnormal (given the ideas of traditional gender roles and moral behavior likely held by many

religious individuals), and will therefore have negative views of them and policies relating to them.

Other Expectations

The inclusion of additional controls in the final regression model allows me to determine the effect each of these identities has on support for transgender populations and policies. Factors such as education are included in this model as both a control, but also to parse out possible effects on tolerance (Sullivan et al., 1994). Education has been a variable that is predictive of tolerance (Sullivan et al., 1994) By this reasoning, higher education levels should be assumed to covary with increased tolerance levels.

Several additional controls are included in the final models for both the CPC and ANES studies. Age is included due to the understanding in the literature that older individuals are generally less tolerance towards LGBTQ populations (Hart-Brinson, 2014). Gender, race, and political interest/participation are included to make sure that the relationships I find are not spurious[1].

Data and Methods

The Colorado Political Climate Survey

To investigate the correlation between these factors and opinions towards transgender individuals and related legislation, the use of data collected from the 2016 Colorado Political Climate Survey (CPC), in addition to other data sources such as the American National Election Study (ANES) 2016 Pilot Survey. Through statistical analysis at the individual level, and by

[1] While interpersonal contact has been noted as a factor which predicts feelings towards transgender populations, the surveys I use did not contain measures of this factor. Due to this, it was not included in this study.

comparing past and present rates of support (opposition), I provide a sense of how opinion in Colorado compares to opinion in other places, and of change over time. The Colorado Political Climate survey had a total sample size of 1,004 individuals, and was completed in the fall of 2016 (from October 17 to 24). Participants 18 years and older were asked to complete a roughly 12-minute survey. The surveying was completed by panelists contacted through their involvement with *Survey Sampling International.* The data collected does not represent a random sample, but a survey weight is used to properly mirror census numbers for gender and education.

The 2016 ANES Pilot Study

In order to provide a greater sense of generalizability (to the United States as a whole – the CPC lacks this), I also used the ANES 2016 Pilot Study to examine feelings towards transgender individuals. In the ANES there are no questions that ask specifically about transgender public policy. However, measures were taken for individual's overall feelings towards transgender individuals. Although the measures are not directly equivalent in the way the question is worded, they largely approach the same principle of people's perceptions of transgender individuals (and by proxy the rights that should follow).

The ANES study was completed between January 22nd and 28th of 2016; this provides an applicable comparison to the CPC survey (both are from the same year), although it was conducted during a different part of the presidential election (the primaries vs. the general election). In the ANES study there were 1,200 participants from across the United States. The participants were sampled using the YouGov internet panel. The YouGov panel is a database of users who represent a large, nationally representative sample with over a million volunteer users. The median time required to complete the ANES survey was 31.8 minutes. YouGov rewards volunteers with points once they complete a survey which can be redeemed for prizes such as

gift cards, t-shirts, or donations to The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). Respondents selected for the survey were matched to the population as defined through the 2010 American Community Study (ACS), the November 2010 Current Population Survey (CPS), and the 2007 Pew Religious Life Survey. This study creates a large nationally representative sample (which is key for comparing the Colorado results).

Plan of Analysis

Both the CPC and ANES surveys are weighted in the analyses that follow. For the CPC survey, weights were included in the multivariate and correlational analyses; these adjust the sample population to average levels due to the oversampling of women and highly educated individuals. The ANES survey weight adjusts the sample population using a logistic regression for age, race/ethnicity, gender, region, party identification, and education level. These weights are included in this study to ensure that the population levels are adequately representative of Coloradans/the general population in the United States (without their inclusion, the results provided could be skewed).

In analyzing the data, survey responses will constitute both the dependent and independent variables. For the independent variables (such as political party identification, support for a presidential candidate, trust in government, and religious identity/participation), correlations and regressions will be completed in each study to determine the connection to the dependent variable. To properly examine whether these relationships are real or spurious, it will be necessary to control for as many confounding factors as possible. The dependent variables – support for transgender nondiscrimination laws (CPC), and a scale measuring feelings towards transgender populations (ANES) – will be analyzed to create a basic understanding of public opinion in Colorado and the larger United States.

For the CPC study, support or opposition to inclusive transgender bathroom policy will represent the dependent variable. Independent variables such as political party identification, religious involvement, and federal trust will be the primary relationships studied. Control variables will be included in the multivariate analysis to aid in the mitigation of unrelated/confounding effects. These controls will include age, gender, race, education level, and political interest. In 2016 the survey was conducted by the department of political science for the first time; this limits my ability to compare results across time.

The ANES survey will be analyzed in much the same way as the CPC survey, with the primary difference being the dependent variable. In the ANES there was no direct question regarding transgender public policy. Instead, I use a feeling thermometer capturing the public's feelings towards transgender individuals. In the statistical analysis, independent variables such as political party identification, religious affiliation, feelings towards gays and lesbians, and political participation will be examined. As with the CPC data, I include controls variables in the primary regression model in order to identify the true effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable.

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive Statistics: CPC Data

When surveyed, 57.13% of Coloradans favored the creation of policy that would "allow transgender people to use a public restroom of the gender with which they identify." The variable ranges from 1 to 4, with strong opposition coded at 1 and strong support coded at 4. Given this coding, the mean is reported at (2.62), which is slightly more in favor of support. This support was split between two responses, with slight favoring exhibiting 21.6% of all individuals, and 35.5% strongly favoring the policy creation (see graph 2). With respect to opposition, 42.8% of

respondents were either slightly opposed (12.2%) or strongly opposed (30.7%) to transgender bathroom rights.

In Table 1, I present information on the number of observations, and minimum and maximum values of the independent (and control) variables. Political party identification shows an average score of (3.75) on a 7-point scale. This 7-point scale goes from 1 (strong Democrat) to 7 (strong Republican), with 4 representing (Independents). This average exhibits a slight emphasis on Democrats and Independents as compared to Republicans. Trump supporter is a dichotomous variable ranging from 0 (support for any other candidate in the 2016 presidential primary) to 1 (support for Donald Trump). There is an average score of (0.32), which means just over 30% of the sample supported Trump. Like Trump Supporter, Religious Involvement is a dichotomous variable ranging from 0 (no religious involvement) to 1 (some involvement in a religion). The average score is (0.65) which shows a majority of the sample population identifies with some religion. Federal trust overall showed an average score of (2.58) on a 5-point scale; this suggests that much of the Colorado population regularly distrusts the federal government. Education in this survey population has a reported average of (3.57) with a scale going from 1 (less than a high school degree) to 5 (graduate/advanced degree). An average score of (3.57) means that some college has been completed by many of the participants in the sample.

Descriptive Statistics: ANES Data

With respect to the ANES 2016 Pilot study, the primary dependent variable is a scale ranging from 0 to 100, with 0 representing very negative feelings and 100 representing very positive feelings towards transgender individuals. Overall, the variable has 1,198 responses, and an average score of (51) on the scale (see graph 1). There were a large number of responses at the 50 mark, which indicates that a significant segment of the sample population reported a

neutral position towards transgender people (see graph 1). On the one hand, overall, 48.41% of the study participants rated their feelings towards transgender people above 50. On the other hand, 38.65% of the participants rated their feelings below 50. These percentages demonstrate the large amount of neutrality present in the scale. A second feeling thermometer is included in the variable list which measures participant's feelings toward gay and lesbian populations. The average score on this scale was (57.49). An average of (57.49) demonstrates a slight acceptance/favorability toward gay and lesbian populations, but remains fairly close to a neutral position.

Table 2 presents the means, number of observations, and minimum and maximum values for the variables included in the ANES 2016 Pilot study. The average score for church attendance was (2.76) on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (more than once a week) (see table 2). From this national sample, on average, Americans are seldom attending church. Political party identification has a scale from 1 (strong Democrat) to 7 (strong Republican), with 4 coded as (Independent). The average score for political party identification was (3.57), which indicates a slight favorability in the sample towards identification as a Democrat or Independent. The ANES study is older on average compared to the CPC survey; average age for the ANES study was (48.05), with the scale beginning at 19 years of age and ending at 95. Education is also included in table 2 with an average of (3.22) on a scale ranging from 1 (no high school degree) to 6 (post-graduate degree). The average education level in the sample is "some college," which is the same as the education level average in the CPC survey.

Correlations, CPC

Correlations for the CPC survey show a negative relationship (-0.51) between support for comprehensive transgender bathroom policy and political party identification, which is

statistically significant (p=0.00) (see table 3). This correlation mirrors the current understanding of conservative political ideology as representing less accepting views of transgender individuals. Similarly, there is a positive correlation of (0.31) between support for inclusive transgender policy and trust of federal government. The correlation between support for accepting transgender bathroom policy and trust of federal government is also statistically significant (p=0.00). An almost identical, positive correlation (0.34) is seen when using the variable for trust of Colorado government; it too is statistically significant (p=0.00). There is also a negative correlation of (-0.49; statistical significance p=0.00), between support for inclusive transgender policy and support of Donald Trump. Looking at religious involvement, the correlation is negative and sizable (-0.38, statistical significance p=0.00). Given that religion was coded as "high," this would suggest that being religious is a predictive factor of less support for transgender inclusivity in public restrooms. The results thus far are in-line with my expectations for political party identification, government support, support for Donald Trump, and religious involvement.

Looking at the correlations between these variables (vs. with transgender bathroom policy), we see that some of the variables are significantly related to one another. Political party identification and support for Donald Trump are significantly related (0.64), however this is to be expected (see table 3). Political party identification is also related to religious involvement (0.25) and trust in federal government (-0.35). Trust in federal government and support for Donald Trump are negatively correlated at (-0.26). Lastly, religious involvement and support for Donald Trump are positively correlated (0.26). Almost all correlations between the independent variables are significant. These correlations show that there is a fair amount of multicollinearity between the key independent variables.

Correlations, ANES

In the correlations for the ANES survey, the transgender scale is strongly and positively related to feelings towards gay and lesbian people at (0.83, statistical significance (p=0.00)). This makes sense, and is likely highly covariant due to individuals having similar/aligned support or opposition to both identities (see table 4). It could also be a result of the belief by some individuals that the two identities are not separate (though this less than perfect correlation reminds us that there is in fact a difference).

Political party identification is also negatively correlated with the feeling measure (it is significant; more liberal positions are coded as "higher" (see table 4)). Similarly, church attendance is negatively correlated at (-0.27, p=0.00; increased church attendance is coded higher). Both correlations are in line with my expectations concerning their effects on transgender public opinion. Those who attend church more often and identify as more conservative are more likely to be feel less warm towards transgender individuals.

To examine the multicollinearity for this second set of key independent variables, table 4 also includes correlations between each of these measures. Church attendance is positively related to political party identification (0.18) and political participation (0.19), and negatively related towards feelings towards gays and lesbians (-0.29) (see table 4). These correlations are all statistically significant at (p=0.00). There are also statistically significant (p=0.00) correlations between identifying as female gendered and political participation (-0.11), as females and feelings towards gays and lesbians (0.12). As in the CPC data, there are quite a few relationships between the independent variables.

Dependent Variable: Support for Inclusive Transgender Bathroom Policy (CPC)

In the first regression analysis (CPC survey data), I examine the dependent variable of support for inclusive transgender bathroom policy as it relates to a set of key independent variables (see table 5). Regression allows me to examine the effect of an independent variable, while controlling for the other variables also included in the model. Looking at the table, we see that the overall model is statistically significant. Of the variables which I included in the reduced model, political party identification, support for Donald Trump, religious involvement, and trust in federal government are all statistically significant (p=0.00). Political party identification has a modest (-0.13) correlation coefficient; it suggests a negative relationship between being Republican and support for inclusive transgender bathroom policy, controlling for the other measures in the model. Both support for Donald Trump and religious involvement have relatively large regression coefficients, at (-0.64) and (-0.66) respectively. These three variables all produce negative coefficients, as expected, with support for comprehensive transgender bathroom policy. Trust in federal government produces coefficient estimate of (0.22), which indicates a positive relationship between increased trust in federal government and increased support for accepting transgender bathroom policy.

Initial Models

Dependent Variable: Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals (ANES)

Feelings towards transgender individuals was included as the dependent variable in two different models; these illustrate its relationships with key variables – the difference between the models is that one is with and one is without the inclusion of feelings towards gays and lesbians (see table 6), which we might expect to be a large predictor of feelings towards transgender individuals.

The first model includes this item – the coefficient is sizable (0.76), and significant. Party identification also has a statistically significant, negative effect of (-1.94, p=0.00); this suggests – as we again might expect – that Republicans are less likely to have positive feelings towards transgender individuals. Political participation remains statistically significant (p=0.05), while church attendance is just shy of the mark (p=0.07). The coefficient on political participation is positive (1.03), indicating that as political participation increases, feelings towards transgender populations are predicted to increase as well. Lastly, church attendance produces a negative estimate (-0.77), suggesting that increased church attendance diminishes feelings towards transgender people (again, something that is expected).

In model 2, I remove feelings towards gays and lesbians from the regression; this illustrates the strong effect that the covariate had in the previous regression. With the removal of feelings towards gays and lesbians, church attendance and political party identification now become statistically significant effects. Political participation has a statistically significant effect of (p=0.04), and becomes a little larger in effect size. Church attendance goes from previously being just outside of significance, to highly significant and much larger in effect size (the effect is more than 5 times larger in model 2). The coefficient on political party identification more than doubles in size. In sum, the coefficients for each variable in the second model remain in the same direction as before, but increase in strength (and in some cases, quite pointedly). Clearly, feelings towards gays and lesbians are an important predictor of feelings towards transgender individuals, and something that is related to patterns of partisanship and religion.

Full Multivariate Analyses

Dependent Variable: Support for Inclusive Transgender Bathroom Policy (CPC)

From correlations through initial models, the results hold and are in-line with my expectations. In this section, I subject the previous results to more control variables. With the inclusion of measures for age, race, education, and political interest, the story remains unchanged. Even after the inclusion of all the variables, political party identification, support for Donald Trump, religious involvement, and trust in the federal government all remain significantly related to support for comprehensive transgender public policy (at a p=0.00 level, see table 7). Party identification, Trump support and religious involvement are all negative (predicting less support for bathroom policy), while trust in government remains a positive predictor. Gender (here being Female) also produces a statistically significant effect (p=0.02), as does age. The estimates for race, perceptions of race relations, education, and political interest are not statistically significant.

Dependent Variable: Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals (ANES)

For the ANES regressions including additional control variables, there are two models: the first includes feelings towards gays and lesbians, while the second removes the variable. This variable is removed in the second model to understand the effect that the covariate has in the presence of additional controls. Political party identification and feelings towards gays and lesbians remain statistically significant (p=0.00) and roughly unchanged in size (see table 8). Political participation also continues to have a statistically significant effect (p=0.03). All these effects are in expected directions: On the one hand, Republicans feel less warm towards transgender individuals, as do the more religions. On the other, those who participate more in politics and those who feel more warmly towards gays and lesbians are more likely to feel warmer towards transgender individuals.

Of the additional control variable, age is statistically significant, with older people feelings less warm towards transgender individuals. Church attendance does not change drastically with the inclusion of control variables; it continues to be barely statistically insignificant (p=0.08). The other control variables included in this model – family income, gender, race, and education level – all are insignificant.

In the second model, the removal of the feelings towards gays and lesbians variable proves to have some interesting effects. Church attendance, political party identification, age, gender, and education level all have statistically significant effects (p=0.00, see table 8). However, political participation becomes statistically insignificant, while familial income and race continue to be statistically insignificant. This is interesting, as the removal of feelings towards gay and lesbian populations makes church attendance, gender, and education statistically significant predictors, but makes political participation no longer a significant predictor. The coefficients remain in largely the same directions across the models with and without feelings towards gays and lesbians. However, as discussed in the case of the initial models, when feelings towards gays and lesbians are excluded, the effects for church attendance (-4.71) and partisanship (-4.11) increase substantially. This suggests that religion and partisanship are related to how individuals feel about gays and lesbians (which is, of course, related to how people feel about transgender individuals).

Discussion and Conclusion

Initial correlations for the CPC survey data showed statistically significant relationships between support for comprehensive transgender bathroom policy and political party identification, support for Donald Trump, religious involvement, and federal trust. These initial results held in both the reduced regression models and with the inclusion of additional control

variables (see tables 3, 5, and 7). Additionally, in the finalized model, female gender identification was also found to be significantly related.

The variables found to be significantly related to support for accepting transgender public policy are in-line with expectations. It is worth noting that the influence of political party identification is far-reaching, and likely influences several other variables I have included within the study. This can be seen in the multicollinearity between the variables in the study, and in how some effects change depending on what is included in the model. While I cannot determine whether being a Republican (more conservative) causes support or opposition to specific beliefs, the results clearly demonstrate that there is a relationship between partisanship and support for transgender legislation. People's perceptions of transgender public policy were also predicted to be related to religiosity and trust in federal government. These factors too were found to be related to support for transgender policy, even after controlling for confounding factors (and the application of a survey weight to correct oversampling of certain populations within the survey).

Given these findings, this study helps increase our understanding of transgender support and perceptions in some novel ways. Given the results for political partisanship and religiosity, we might think of support for transgender individuals as being part of individuals' more general ideological approaches to the world. It is important to note that rates of support for transgender populations have decreased – per the ANES data – since 2014, when the level of support was reported at 54% (Brewer, 2014). According to the ANES data collected in this study, 48.41% of the sample scored their feelings towards transgender individuals above neutrality. The heightened polarization that our country has experienced in recent years has led towards stronger partisanship; this affects many people's base ideological beliefs across a wide spectrum of issues

(Abramowitz, 2010). Religiosity and political partisanship are influential drivers of people's actions and perceptions of others within their own community and across the country.

The CPC survey was focused on the general Colorado population. Due to the lack of research on public support for transgender rights laws (and overall transgender perceptions), the original findings from these data are important in that they help us better understand the current political context of Colorado. Creating a richer foundation of academic literature which the population may use is important. Comparing the Colorado data (to national data) could provide a sense of whether Colorado falls in line with the average beliefs in the country, or is quite different on things like more expansive nondiscrimination laws.

Results from the ANES study indicated that feelings towards gays and lesbians work with other variables (partisanship, religiosity) to predict feelings towards transgender individuals. Correlations showed strong relationships between feelings towards transgender individuals and church attendance, political party identification, and feelings towards gays and lesbians (see table 4). Within the reduced model, feelings towards transgender individuals was significantly predicted by political party identification, political participation, feelings towards gays and lesbians, and church attendance (see table 6). In the first expanded regression model, these associations remained steady, with political party identification, political participation, feelings towards gays and lesbians, and age (a variable included as a control) having statistically significant effects (see table 8).

At both the Colorado (CPC data) and national level (ANES data), results were in-line with expectations set-forth by the contemporary literature on LGBTQ populations. Initial correlations showed the existence of clear relationships between transgender public opinion and comprehensive transgender bathroom legislation in relation to political party identification and

religious involvement. Additionally, significant effects were drawn for trust in the federal government (at the Colorado level), political participation, and age. Each of these findings helps to illustrate a portion of the picture concerning where the public stands on transgender acceptance and inclusive legislation.

Given the differences in the dependent variables, the results can be sorted into national effects on transgender public perceptions/feelings (which have applications to a gamut of other variables), and Colorado effects, which have identifiable policy implications. These studies provide two different views, and by using each of these lenses, one can attempt to identify the possible differences and similarities between not only the Colorado and national populations, but between the factors that affect feelings towards groups vs. specific policy formulations affecting groups. Where we see consistent results across samples and dependent variables (e.g., partisanship, religion), we get a sense of what the fundamental factors are when it comes to transgender public opinion in the United States. The results of these analyses are important, as they clearly link several factors to real-world instances of acceptance towards – and discrimination against – thousands of transgender individuals throughout Colorado and the United States.

Future Research

While the present body of research concerning transgender perceptions and public policy is relatively small, this study sought to illuminate some of the darker corners in our understanding of public opinion with respect to this group. Clearly, there is still a great amount of academic research that ought to be completed in this topic area. Determining what identities matter for transgender public opinion is important; creating a more thorough understanding of

why they matter in shaping public perceptions and policies concerning transgender populations may be even more important.

In this study, I did not examine direct feelings at the state level, or specific policies at the national level; these are limitations. Future studies would benefit from looking at the effect of public opinion towards transgender populations with respect to both state and national legislation. Understanding such relationships could lead to further information on how public opinion affects legislative outcomes, and ultimately to the creation of better (less discriminatory) legislation.

In addition, in this study I was only able to look at "transgender individuals." In future research building on this thesis, one could consider that there exists a vast number of identities within the LGBTQ spectrum that receive little to no academic discourse. The lack of work on other identities may be due to the small number of individuals within these identity groups – here, qualitative methods might be useful. For example, if a researcher were to conduct personal interviews with LGBTQ individuals from across the spectrum, the results could be used to analyze perceived experiences of discrimination and the impacts of legislative action. It is certainly important to understand what is happening in the eye of the public, but an examination of the effects on the LGBTQ population itself could also prove to be highly informative.

Finally, there were a number of measurement limitations/oversights in the studies used in this thesis. For example, I included religious involvement as a replacement for a religiosity measure. Future research on transgender populations should include survey items that are more effective measurements of religiosity. In addition, something the present surveys failed to include (but that is studied in the literature) is the effect of direct interpersonal contact with individuals in the LGBTQ population. Interpersonal contact has been presented as a factor

driving perceptions of gay and lesbian people (though little research has explored its relationship to transgender evaluations). Clearly, there are a number of questions and political factors to be explored with respect to public opinion on LGBTQ populations. Including better/additional items, and linking work to the legalization of same-sex marriage (and the changes that continue to come with it) will produce knowledge.

My results suggest that political party identification and religious involvement have sizable effects on individuals' perceptions towards the transgender population, and towards inclusive public bathroom policies. These effects are clearly stated in the current literature regarding LGBTQ identities – in that sense, they may not seem all that surprising. However, finding these results for transgender opinion items (vs. gay/lesbian rights items) does present a contribution to the study of transgender identity. Given that there are thousands of individuals living within the United States who seek (protected) equal rights and acceptance into general society – and the fact that less has been written on the transgender community vs. the gay/lesbian community – every bit of knowledge helps. The transgender population still has a long road ahead when it comes to gaining the rights to nondiscrimination that all humans arguably deserve. Future research in this topic area will aid in promoting tolerance and integration of this identity group into society – a group which many Americans currently hold negative feelings towards, just as many (more) once held negative feelings towards gay and lesbians.

Appendix A

Survey items from the **Colorado Political Climate Survey** (2016) used in this analysis

Support for Inclusive Transgender Bathroom Policy (dependent variable)
[Q28]
How much do you favor or oppose a law that allows transgender people to use a public restroom of the gender with which they identify?

1. Strongly Favor
2. Slightly Favor
3. Slightly Oppose
4. Strongly Oppose
5. Not sure

Political Party Identification
[Q2]
In general, do you usually think of yourself as a…

1. Strong Democrat
2. Democrat
3. Leaning Democrat
4. Independent
5. Leaning Republican
6. Republican
7. Strong Republican
8. Some other party _____

Trump Supporter
[Q14]
If the election for President of the United States were held today, would you vote for...

1. Donald Trump- Republican
2. Hillary Clinton- Democrat
3. Gary Johnson- Libertarian
4. Jill Stein- Green Party
5. Some other candidate _____

Religious Involvement
[Q70]
Which of the following do you consider yourself? Check all that apply.

1. Born-Again Christian
2. Evangelical Protestant
3. Protestant
4. Catholic
5. Jewish
6. Muslim
7. Other
8. No Religion

Federal Trust
[Q8]
How often do you trust each of the following levels of government to do what is in the public's best interest?
-(1) Federal Government
-(2) Colorado Government
-(3) Your Local Government

1. Always
2. Most of the time
3. About half the time
4. Some of the time
5. Never

Race Relations
[Q22]
How would you describe the current state of race relations in the United States?

1. Really Good
2. Somewhat Good
3. Somewhat Bad
4. Really Bad

Race/Non-Caucasian
[Q74]
Which of the following best described your background?

1. White
2. Black
3. Hispanic/Latino
4. Asian
5. Mixed Background
6. Other

Gender/ Female Gendered
[Q68]
Are you…

1. Male
2. Female
3. Other

Education Level
[Q69]
What is the highest level of school you have finished?

1. Less than High School Degree
2. High School Degree
3. Some College but no Bachelor's Degree
4. Bachelor's Degree

5. Graduate/Advanced Degree

Political Interest

[Q1]

In general, how interested are you in what's going on in government and public affairs?

1. Very Interested
2. Interested
3. Somewhat Interested
4. Not Very Interested
5. Not at All Interested

Age

[Q67]

How old did you turn on your last birthday?

1. 18

…

74. Over 90

Appendix B

Survey Items from the **American National Election Studies (ANES)** 2016 Pilot Study used in this analysis

Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals
[fttrans]
How would you rate transgender people? (0-100 Scale)

0. Very Cold or unfavorable feeling
...
100. Very warm or favorable feeling

Political Participation
[meet]
In the future, how likely are you to attend a meeting to talk about political or social concerns?

1. Extremely Likely
2. Very Likely
3. Moderately Likely
4. A Little Likely
5. Not at all Likely

Feelings Towards Gays
[ftgay]
How would you rate gays and lesbians? (0-100 Scale)

0. Very cold or unfavorable feeling
…
100. Very warm or favorable feeling

Family Income
[income]
Thinking back over the last year, what was your family's annual income?

1.
97.

Non-Caucasian
[race]
What racial or ethnic group describes you?

1. White
2. Black
3. Hispanic
4. Asian
5. Native American
6. Mixed
7. Other
8. Middle Eastern

Female Gendered
[gender]
Are you male or female?

1. Male
2. Female

Education
[educ]
What is the highest level of education you have completed?

1. No HS
2. High School Graduate
3. Some College
4. 2-year
5. 4-year
6. Post-grad

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Tables

Table 1

Means of Independent Variables, CPC				
	Mean	Obs	Min	Max
Party ID	3.75	973	1	7
Trump Supporter	0.32	1,003	0	1
Religious Involvement	0.65	822	0	1
Federal Trust	2.58	1,004	1	5
Race Relations Perceptions	2.13	1,004	1	4
Non-Caucasian	0.23	1,004	0	1
Female Gendered	0.63	1,002	0	1
Education Level	3.57	1,003	1	5
Political Interest	4.01	1,004	1	5
Age	26.76	1,001	1	69
Data taken from CPC 2016 Survey				

Table 2

Means of Independent Variables, ANES				
	Mean	Obs	Min	Max
Church Attendance	2.76	1,172	1	6
Political ID	3.57	1,143	1	7
Political Participation	2.32	1,198	1	5
Age	48.05	1,198	19	95
Feelings Towards Gays	57.49	1,198	0	100
Family Income	5.61	1,049	1	16
Female Gendered	0.52	1,198	0	1
Non-Caucasian	0.27	1,198	0	1
Education	3.22	1,198	1	6
Data taken from ANES 2016 Pilot Survey				

Table 3

Correlations between Key Variables, CPC							
	Support Trans Bath Policy	Political ID	Support Non-Trump	Religious Involvement	Federal Trust	Female Gendered	Political Interest
Support Trans Bath Policy	1						
Political ID	-0.51	1					
	0.00						
Trump Supporter	-0.49	0.64	1				
	0.00	0.00					
Religious Involvement	-0.38	0.25	0.26	1			
	0.00	0.00	0.00				
Federal Trust	0.31	-0.35	-0.26	-0.01	1		
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.78			
Female Gendered	0.12	-0.07	-0.08	-0.06	-0.09	1	
	0.00	0.04	0.02	0.10	0.01		
Political Interest	0.03	-0.09	0.09	0.08	0.12	-0.19	1
	0.42	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	
Data taken from CPC 2016 Survey: Significance Figures Included Below Correlation							

Table 4

Correlations between Key Variables, ANES							
	Feelings Towards Transgender	Church Attendance	Political ID	Political Participation	Feelings Towards Gays	Family Income	Female Gendered
Feelings Towards Transgender	1						
Church Attendance	-0.27	1					
	0.00						
Political ID	-0.39	0.18	1				
	0.00	0.00					
Political Participation	0.06	0.19	-0.04	1			
	0.03	0.00	0.19				
Feelings Towards Gays	0.83	-0.29	-0.34	0.05	1		
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.07			
Family Income	0.04	0.07	0.07	0.17	0.08	1	
	0.24	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.01		
Female Gendered	0.05	0.04	-0.07	-0.11	0.12	-0.10	1
	0.06	0.22	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Data taken from ANES 2016 Pilot Survey: Significance Figures Included Below Correlation							

Table 5

Support for Trans Bath Policy (reduced model), OLS Regression Estimates (CPC 2016)			
	Model 1		
Variables	Coeff.	Std. error	p-value
Political ID	-0.13	0.04	0.00
Trump Supporter	-0.64	0.15	0.00
Religious Involvement	-0.66	0.11	0.00
Federal Trust	0.22	0.05	0.00
Model Statistics	N=734 Adj. R^2=0.35 F=104.47(0.00)		
Data taken from CPC 2016 Survey			

Table 6

Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals (reduced models), OLS Regression Estimates (ANES 2016)							
	Model 1				Model 2		
Variables	Coeff.	Std. error	p-value	Variables	Coeff.	Std. error	p-value
Church Attendance	-0.77	0.43	0.07	Church Attendance	-4.36	0.70	0.00
Political ID	-1.94	0.36	0.00	Political ID	-4.43	0.55	0.00
Political Participation	1.03	0.52	0.05	Political Participation	1.85	0.90	0.04
Feelings Towards Gays	0.76	0.03	0.00	Feelings Towards Gays	---	---	---
Model Statistics	N=1,121 Adj. R^2=0.70 F=573.47(0.00)			Model Statistics	N=1,121 Adj R^2=0.16 F=54.56(0.00)		
Data taken from the ANES 2016 Pilot Survey							

Table 7

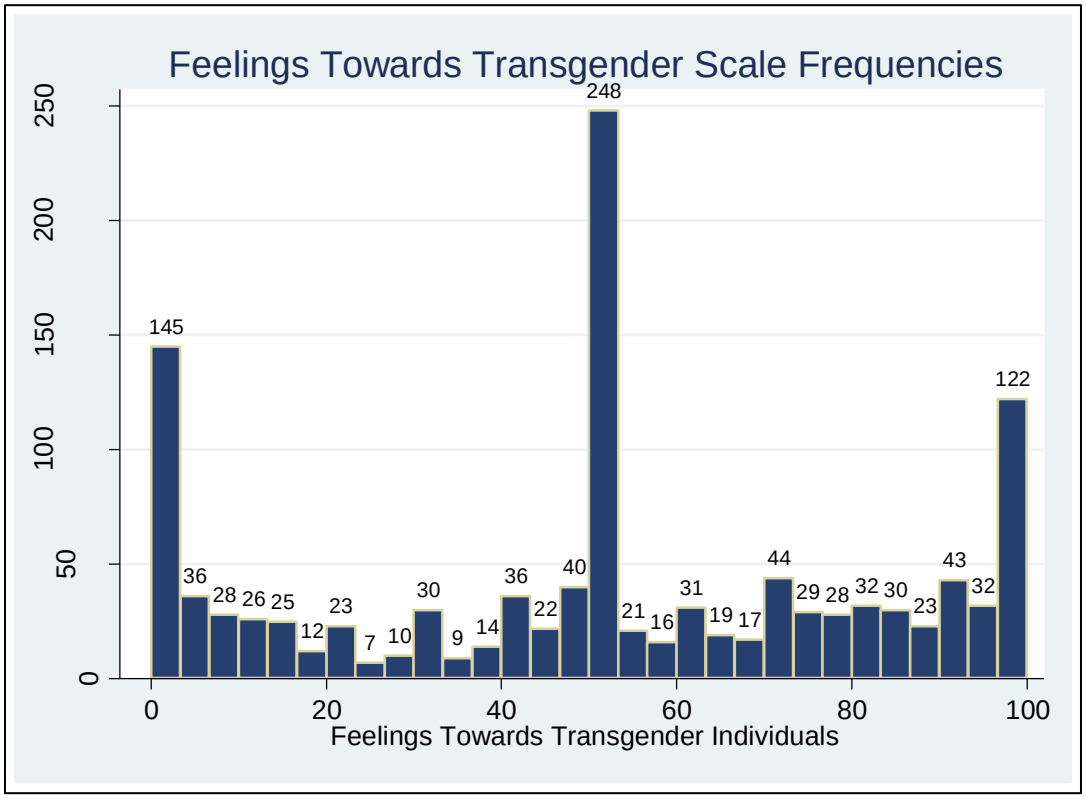
Support for Trans Bath Policy (controlled models), OLS Regression Estimates (CPC Survey)			
	Model 1		
Variables	Coeff.	Std. error	p-value
Political ID	-0.12	0.04	0.00
Trump Supporter	-0.62	0.15	0.00
Religious Involvement	-0.66	0.11	0.00
Federal Trust	0.18	0.05	0.00
Race Relations Perceptions	0.09	0.07	0.19
Non-Caucasian	0.06	0.13	0.62
Female Gendered	0.24	0.10	0.02
Education Level	0.07	0.05	0.17
Political Interest	0.08	0.05	0.15
Age	-0.01	0.00	0.04
Model Statistics	N=731 Adj. R^2=0.37 F=47.56(0.00)		
Data taken from the CPC 2016 Survey			

Table 8

Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals (controlled models), OLS Regression Estimates (ANES Survey)							
Model 1				Model 2			
Variables	Coeff.	Std. error	p-value	Variables	Coeff.	Std. error	p-value
Church Attendance	-0.76	0.44	0.08	Church Attendance	-4.71	0.74	0.00
Political ID	-1.66	0.36	0.00	Political ID	-4.11	0.62	0.00
Political Participation	1.23	0.55	0.03	Political Participation	1.37	0.93	0.14
Feelings Towards Gays	0.77	0.03	0.00	Feelings Towards Gays	---	---	---
Age	-0.12	0.04	0.00	Age	-0.24	0.07	0.00
Family Income	-0.12	0.23	0.61	Family Income	0.25	0.37	0.51
Female Gendered	1.29	1.42	0.37	Female Gendered	8.66	2.34	0.00
Non-Caucasian	0.59	1.77	0.74	Non-Caucasian	-1.32	2.97	0.66
Education	0.20	0.48	0.67	Education	2.26	0.75	0.00
Model Statistics	N=999 Adj. R^2=0.72 F=268.12(0.00)			Model Statistics	N=999 Adj. R^2=0.20 F=28,39(0.00)		
Data taken from the ANES 2016 Pilot Survey							

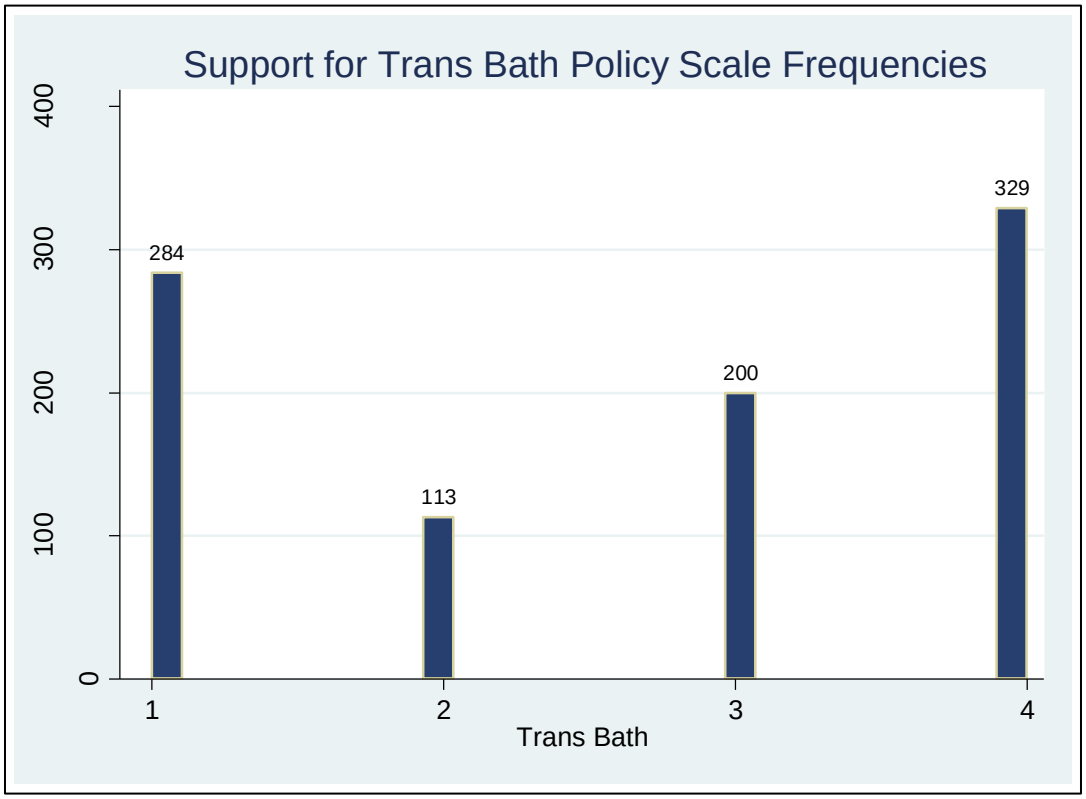
Graphs

Graph 1: Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals



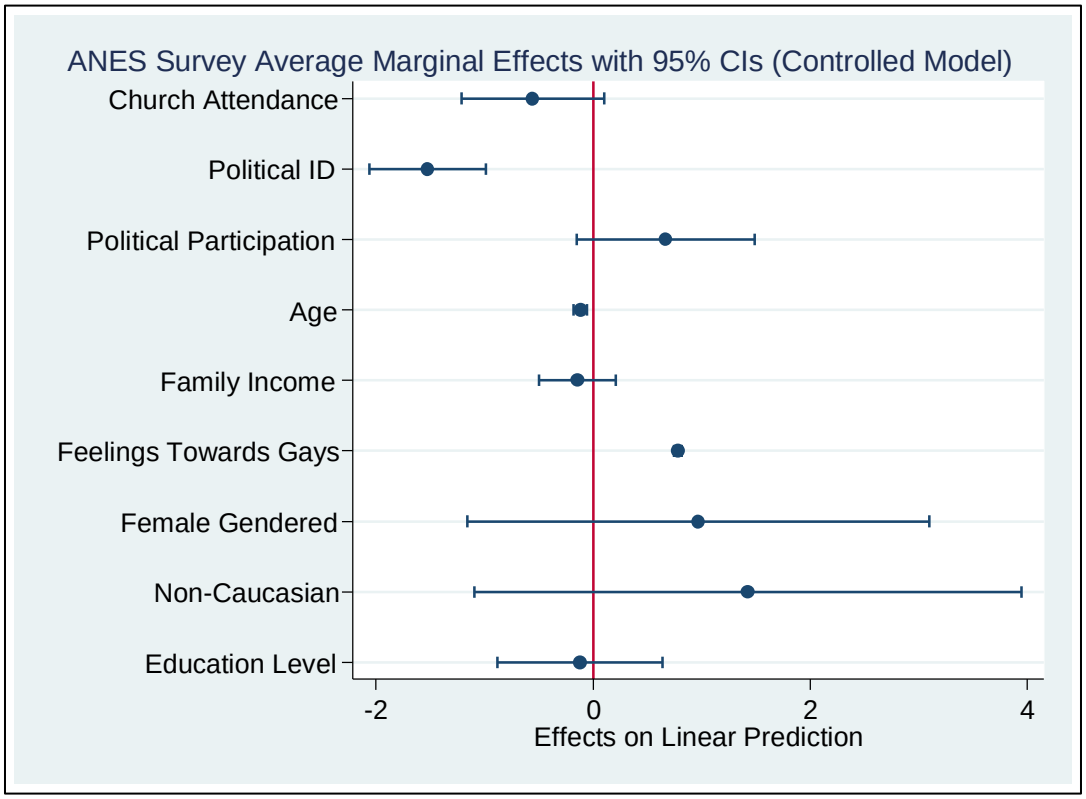
Data taken from ANES 2016 Pilot Survey

Graph 2: Support for Inclusive Transgender Bathroom Policy



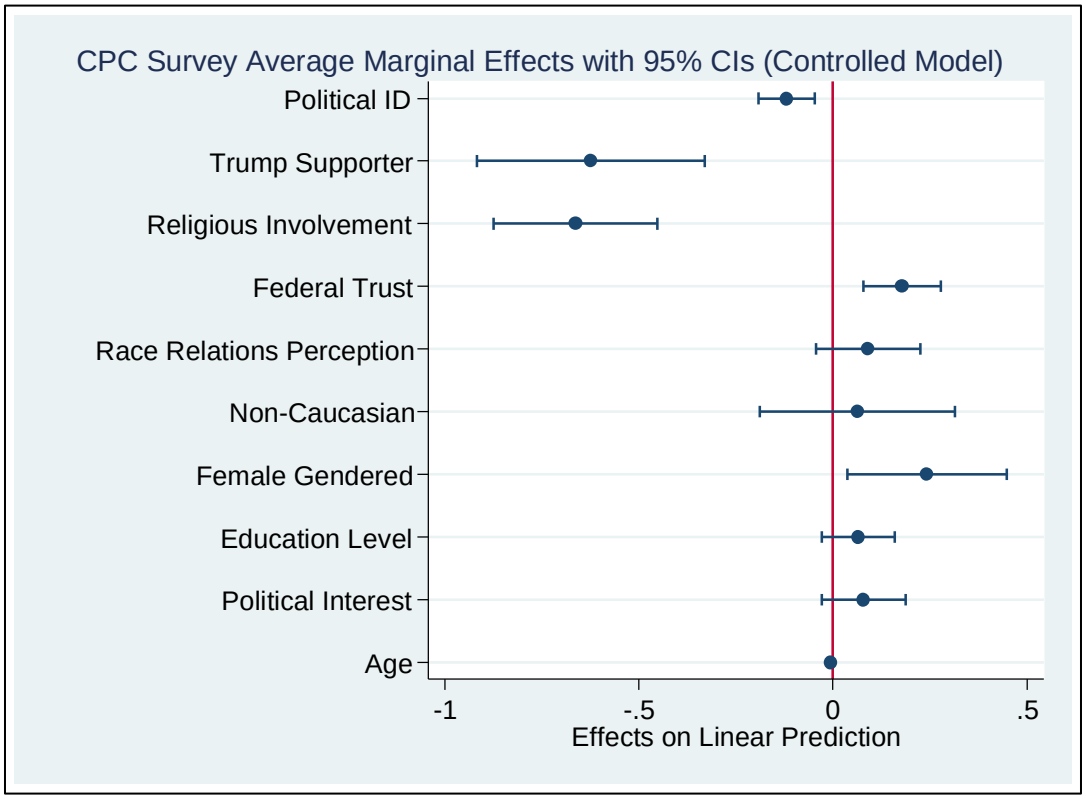
Data taken from CPC 2016 Survey

Graph 3: Feelings Towards Transgender Individuals by Regression Variables



Data taken from ANES 2016 Pilot Survey

Graph 4: Support for Inclusive Transgender Bathroom Policy by Regression Variables



Data taken from CPC 2016 Survey