Title

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Introduction

Does LGBTQ equality within the U.S. inadvertently harm equality efforts elsewhere? Within the last decade, and particularly during the Obama Administration, the U.S. legal landscape for LGBTQ individuals improved. Namely through the overturning of the Defense of Marriage Act in 2013, legalization of marriage equality in 2015, and the Supreme Court finding workplace discrimination against LGBTQ citizens unconstitutional in 2020. Consequently, there is increasing concern that anti-LGBTQ organizations are turning their focus internationally in search of more fertile territory (xx; xx). Indeed, new research is finding that transnational anti-LGBTQ networks are growing, particularly through forums like the U.S.-based World Congress of Families, and advancing new forms of regressive policy (xx; Velasco 2022; xx). Therefore, we seek to understand if U.S.-based anti-LGBTQ organizations are increasing their international expenditures due to the legal environment improving at home.

To investigate this question, we leverage a unique source of data: nonprofit tax forms from the IRS – the Form 990. These documents detail a wealth of financial information on U.S. organizations, including where and how they are spending money internationally. In 2016, the IRS made 3.2 million records electronically available on Amazon Web Services (retroactively beginning around 2012) and continued to update for filings ending in tax year 2020. Thus, these data cover a time frame of significant legal changes within the U.S. (2012-2020). Using causal inference designs, we exploit policy interventions both at the federal and state-level to determine if pro-LGBTQ policy changes increase anti-LGBTQ organization’s international expenditures.

Preliminary findings portray a mixed portrait regarding how U.S.-based anti-LGBTQ organizations spend money internationally. First, these organizations do spend significant amounts of money abroad. For point of comparison, among nonprofits that do spend money internationally, the average amount is xx. Among anti-LGBTQ nonprofits that do spend money internationally, the average amount is xx. These dollars provide the necessary investments to advance documented anti-LGBTQ efforts, like sponsoring conferences, gathering signatures for referenda, and strategic litigation (xx; xx; xx). However, there does not appear to be significant increases over time in relation to policy advancements. If anything, there is some evidence that foreign spending is decreasing. This may be due to the election of Donald Trump and changing perceptions that anti-LGBTQ organizations can still make inroads within the U.S. – as demonstrated in the increase in anti-trans laws and resurgence of “no promo homo” laws limiting the teaching of LGBTQ content in classrooms (xx; xx). Nevertheless, the clear growth and success in transnational anti-LGBTQ networks suggests that either the utilization of network structures results in a more efficient use of resources necessary to achieve these outcomes or there is an alternative source of funding outside of nonprofits, such as U.S.-based churches or other foreign actors, supporting these efforts.

Background

Recent years have seen a marked increase in anti-LGBTQ activism across the transnational plane. Coordinated efforts seeking to limit the rights of LGBTQ individuals have transpired in places as diverse as Brazil, Ghana, Romania, Taiwan, and the U.S. These campaigns reflect a broader coordination amongst anti-LGBTQ or “pro-family” actors internationally. For example, in 1997, U.S. and Russian academics founded the World Congress of Families to link disparate pro-“natural family” advocates from around the world. These efforts reached the U.N. with the establishment of the U.N. Family Rights Caucus in 2008 and Civil Society for the Family and Group of Friends of the Family in 2015. Especially within Europe, these anti-LGBTQ efforts have been part of broader “anti-gender” campaigns seeking to rollback women’s rights, gender studies, and reassert a masculine national image (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018).

These efforts take significant resources. While some note the instrumental role of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican in helping these efforts, U.S.-based organizations are near-universally recognized as primary sources of funding. For example, the U.S.-based Alliance Defending Freedom is a legal advocacy organization that set up an international wing to litigate cases, like submitting briefs to the Romanian Supreme Court in favor of allowing a national referendum to constitutionalize a heterosexual definition of marriage. This expansion in international work coincided with foreign expenditures increasing from just under $1 million in 2010 to roughly $8 million in 2018. Now, a continuous stream of research is seeking to document the efforts of U.S.-based organizations, especially evangelical organizations, in this anti-LGBTQ/anti-gender work. For example, in 2020, openDemocracy issued a reporting noting that 20 U.S. nonprofits spent $280 million internationally from 2008-2018. Moreover, the Southern Poverty Law Center also issued a 2020 report noting the dramatic rise in anti-LGBTQ hate organizations within the U.S. in recent years – suggesting a bigger pool of organizations that can then finance efforts internationally. To date, however, there has yet to be any systematic analysis into these expenses to determine if they are indeed increasing over time and what the causes of such increases are.

A common explanation for why anti-LGBTQ organizations are increasing their foreign expenditures is due to policy victories within the U.S. As LGBTQ activists achieved banner accomplishments like marriage equality, this changed perceptions that advocacy dollars may go further by turning toward more fertile group abroad. In a clear instantiation of this phenomenon, in 2018, Brian Brown, president of the World Congress of Families (WCF), attended a WCF-sponsored conference in Ghana. There, he stated the U.S. was becoming a “lost cause” while Ghana has a chance to do something about changing “family values.” Today, Ghana’s parliament is considering the Promotion of Proper Human Rights Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values bill which would dramatically curtail the rights of LGBTQ individuals. Sponsors of the bill directly attribute the idea back to the WCF conference in 2018. In 2014, Kapya Kaoma, an African pro-LGBTQ advocate, wrote an op-ed in the LA Times speaking to this concern:

“If you live in the United States, it’s easy to be lulled into thinking that the battle for broader civil rights for gay people is nearly over. The last few years have brought important victories in courts, legislatures and at the ballot box, and momentum is firmly on the side of increased equality. That’s not true, however, in other parts of the world. The vitriol that has fueled U.S. culture wars for so long is now being exported, and some of our most ardent culture warriors are finding a far more receptive audience abroad.”

While this popular perception exists, it is also an empirical question we can directly evaluate – which has yet to be done. Thus, in what follows, we begin our investigation into the extent to which U.S.-based anti-LGBTQ organizations increase their foreign expenses following legal victories either at the federal level or in the state the organization is headquartered

Data and Methods

Definition of “Anti-LGBTQ” organization:

1. Designated as such by the Southern Poverty Law Center (<https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map?ideology=anti-lgbt>)
2. Designated by PFLAG (https://pflag.org/antilgbtq)
3. Participate in World Congress of Families
4. Sign onto “pro-family” resolutions within the U.N., part of UN Family Rights Caucus or Civil Society for the Family
5. Mission statement directly states helping people overcome homosexuality or promotes “biblical sexuality” or “biblical marriage” – Form 990

Preliminary Results

Next Steps:

The next steps in this project are to use synthetic control methods to test a causal effect of policy interventions. Synthetic control methods do x, y, and z. Thus, are current data structure and design are well setup for this type of modeling procedure.

Sessions:

Cross-National – Andrew Jorgenson

Transnational Processes

LGBT Studies – Rin Reznik

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/trump-us-christian-spending-global-revealed/>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/africa-us-christian-right-50m/>

<https://time.com/5903931/christian-right-conservative-agenda-europe-report/>

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/revealed-us-anti-lgbt-hate-group-dramatically-increases-uk-spending/>