

The Wage Effects of Same-Sex Marriage Legalization

A Difference-in-Differences Analysis Using the American Community Survey



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Motivation & Research Question

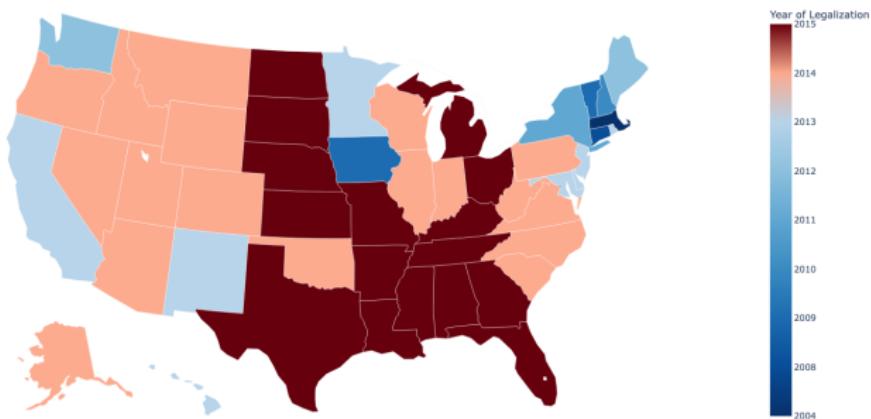


Figure: Legalization Timeline 2004–15

(Source: Own illustration, MAP, 2023)

quasi-experimental timing variation for DiD

Motivation & Research Question

Why focus on wage?

- Price of labor - human capital, bargaining power, inequality...
- Marriage equality changes access to concrete economic rights
- Marriage equality alters household specialization, bargaining
- Marriage equality shifts discrimination and employer wage setting
- Underexplored in the literature

How did legalization of same-sex marriage affect wages?

Through which channels do they operate?

Data & Methods

ACS, 2000–2019; cohabiting couples.

Difference-in-Differences Design

- On extensive margin and intensive margin
- By male and female group
- Heterogeneity: earner roles and parental status

Main Results

On the extensive margin: no meaningful participation response

On the intensive margin: + $\approx 3\%$ men, - $\approx 2.3\%$ women

| | Men | Women |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Same-sex couple | -0.096*** (0.006) | 0.066*** (0.003) |
| Legalization | -0.002 (0.005) | 0.000 (0.005) |
| Same-sex \times Legalization | 0.029** (0.012) | -0.023*** (0.006) |
| Observations | 6,121,193 | 5,197,634 |
| R ² | 0.242 | 0.217 |

Heterogeneity & mechanisms

Among men, primary earners drive the gains; secondary earners do not move.

Among women, both roles decline, with bigger losses for secondary earners.

Pattern aligns with household specialization, or employer beliefs updating.

| | Male | | Female | |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | Primary | Secondary | Primary | Secondary |
| Same-sex × Legalization | 0.030** | 0.004 | -0.014** | -0.036*** |
| Observations | 4,674,971 | 1,268,483 | 1,902,473 | 3,118,156 |
| R ² | 0.293 | 0.123 | 0.273 | 0.179 |

Conclusion

- Marriage equality didn't affect labor participation.
- Within employment adjustment: modest gains for same-sex cohabiting men, modest losses for women.
- Heterogeneity by earner role is consistent with a household specialization mechanism.