



Still No Evidence of Negative Outcomes from Same-Sex Marriage

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[LINK TO ABSTRACT](#)

We are pleased that Professors Allen and Price (2015) have continued to investigate the empirical connection, alleged by the Family Research Council (see, e.g., Sprigg 2004; 2014) and others, between state laws that permit (or do not ban) same-sex unions/marriages and the possibility of adverse consequences for families. Our original research, “Same-Sex Marriage and Negative Externalities” published in *Social Science Quarterly* (Langbein and Yost 2009), tested the claim that state laws permitting same-sex marriage are likely to have an adverse effect within those states on marriage rates, divorce, abortion, the percent of children born out of wedlock, and the percent of households with children under 18 headed by women.

We used state-level Census data from 1990, 2000, and 2004, along with data on state laws that were available at that time from the Human Rights Campaign. Having collected our data in 2005–2006, we noted the low variance in our key policy variable, but we used multiple indicators to capture laws either protecting or banning gay marriage, including an indicator of the duration of laws banning gay marriage (Langbein and Yost 2009, 298). However, we explicitly recognized the low power of our study, and that it was therefore likely to produce insignificant results (*ibid.*, 299, 306, 307).

Our primary finding was that “allowing gay marriage has no significant adverse impact” (*ibid.*, 293) on the five specific family outcomes mentioned above,

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with numerous statistical controls. However, not all of our results were statistically insignificant. When results were significant, the implication from the sign of the association is that same-sex marriage appeared to have positive, not negative, effects on some family outcomes. We also found that laws banning same-sex marriage and laws allowing it each had positive associations with two family outcomes. We were careful to avoid strong causal claims about any significant result. We explicitly recognized the difficulty of making a causal claim with our research design, especially since so little time had lapsed between the adoption of the laws and our data analysis (*ibid.*, 297, 306, 307). Our focus was on the absence of evidence of an adverse effect of laws permitting same-sex unions/marriages on the five family outcomes mentioned above. We also recognized a key theoretical problem: It is not clear how same-sex marriage laws can hurt (or help) kids or families in the larger population outside the state that passes the law. We also suggested some research designs, including a longer timeframe, to provide a better test of the hypothesis.

We are pleased that, using updated information about state laws that was not available when we were collecting the data for our study, and using their preferred coding of that information, Professors Allen and Price have largely replicated our findings. According to their findings, same-sex marriage laws appear to have no adverse effects on families in the state where the laws operate. When they find a significant coefficient, it is in the same positive direction that we found, suggesting a beneficial association between laws supporting same-sex marriage and family formation and stability.

Both their study and ours suffer from low power. More data were not available when we wrote our study; that is no longer the case. Today, there is considerably more within and between state variance in laws governing same-sex marriage. There have been advances in research design that were not readily available when we wrote our study; at least one could readily be applied now. These include synthetic control groups, difference-in-difference designs, and possibly the use of instrumental variables. We hope future research (especially with a larger dataset) continues to ask the same question that Professors Allen and Price join us in exploring: Do laws supporting same-sex unions and marriages have any adverse effect on families? Regardless of one's position on the issue, a more conclusive answer than the one we have collectively provided is still needed.

References

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- Sprigg, Peter S.** 2014. Is Marriage Declining Despite Same-Sex Unions or Because of Them? *Christian Post*, September 27. [Link](#)

About the Authors



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