

**Religion and the Rainbow Struggle: Does Religion Factor into Attitudes toward  
Homosexuality and Same-Sex Civil Unions in Brazil?**

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**Religion and the Rainbow Struggle: Examining the Role of Religion in Attitudes toward  
Homosexuality and Same-Sex Civil Unions in Brazil?**

*Abstract*

The provision of civil liberties to LGBT persons has become part of a global movement in societies across the world. In Brazil, a 2010 judicial ruling for the first time established the right for homosexual couples to enter into civil unions, despite the presence of widespread disapproval of homosexuality among the population and opposition from prominent religious groups. Picking up on this issue, the following study examines whether religion may factor into the attitudes Brazilians hold toward homosexuality and same-sex civil unions. Using data from the Brazilian Social Research Survey, we find that the most restrictive views toward homosexuality and the strongest opposition to same-sex civil unions are most prevalent among devoted followers of historical Protestant, Pentecostal, and Catholic faith traditions, while at the same time adherents of Afro-Brazilian and spiritist religions, as well as those with no religious commitment, are inclined to assume a more tolerant moral posture toward such issues. The findings point to religion as a potential influence in future public policy initiatives and social movements involving LGBT issues in Brazil.

## Introduction

The increasing societal acceptance of homosexuality and the movement toward granting civil liberties to homosexuals are perhaps two of the most transformative social trends in recent decades. While several European countries and an increasing number of states in the United States have extended legal recognition and rights to same-sex couples, the socio-political initiative for LGBT equality has also taken on global dimensions. Among other nations, several South American countries, including Colombia, Uruguay, and Argentina, have now legally recognized same-sex civil unions for homosexuals, while other countries in the region have begun to debate the issue. In Brazil, the movement toward legal recognition of same-sex unions has also gained momentum in recent years (Moreira 2007). After decades of incremental changes to the legal code, in 2011, a landmark judicial ruling established same-sex “civil unions” for the first time, thus conferring equal status and rights to homosexual couples in the country.

Despite recent developments in the direction of LGBT equality, homosexuality is not widely accepted among the Brazilian population. In 2005, a nationally representative study carried out by the Brazilian Ministry of Health revealed that more than 80 percent of the population expressed opposition to male and female homosexuality (Paiva et al. 2005), while one recent public opinion survey also found that 63 percent of Brazilians express opposition to allowing homosexual couples to enter into civil unions (Pinochelli 2010). At the same time, homosexuality appears to be an emerging cultural and political issue in Brazilian society, with religious groups representing a growing and vocal faction in a public debate over LGBT issues. For example, just in the past few years Evangelical Protestant and Catholic groups have exercised political clout in promoting a pro-family agenda in the current Dilma Rousseff presidential administration, organized several ongoing anti-gay marches in capital cities around the country, demonized the representation of homosexuals in the popular *telenovelas*, and sought to

restrict sex-education curriculum with homosexual themes in public schools (Gajewski 2011; La Pastina 2002; Correa 2010).

This crossroads between religion and homosexuality has received sustained attention from social researchers both in the United States and in some comparative studies (See for example Burdette, Ellison, and Hill 2005; Loftus 2001; Peterson and Donnenworth 1998; Ellison, Acevedo, and Wada 2011; Loftus 2001; Sherkat, de Vries, and Creek 2011; Adamczyk and Pitt 2009). Generally speaking, the findings from previous studies coalesce around the theme that affiliation with Evangelical and Protestant faith traditions, frequent attendance at religious services, and a commitment to conservative theological worldviews (e.g. Biblical literalism) are determinants of more punitive and restrictive positions on homosexuality and same-sex unions. Despite a large body of research on this score, empirical literature exploring such issues in other national contexts remains scarce. Given the emergence of LGBT issues on the socio-political frontlines of Brazilian society and the imperative to extend empirical research on religion and homosexuality to novel national settings, our study seeks to make the following contributions: First, we seek to advance scholarly literature examining the religious contours in social and political attitudes in non-western settings. Second, we seek to determine whether religion may play a part in how Brazilians form their attitudes toward homosexuality. Finally, we seek to explore whether religion may play a role in support or opposition to public policy initiatives involving LGBT equality issues in Brazil (i.e. same-sex civil unions).

## **Religious Considerations and Research Hypotheses**

### ***Brazilian Catholicism***

Even though almost 65 percent of Brazilians identify themselves as Catholic in 2010, this figure overestimates the real prevalence of Catholicism in Brazil. Many Brazilian Catholics, for example, retain only a nominal affiliation with Catholicism, which for them represents a type of cultural identity that has very little bearing on matters of faith and practice (Pierucci and Prandi 2000; Mariz 1994). Despite what many observers have called a declining Catholic monopoly, in recent years, a charismatic, renewalist variant of Catholicism has emerged in Brazil's religious marketplace. Unlike nominally affiliated Catholics, who are less devout in their commitment to the faith, charismatic Catholics are known for their social activism, contra-cultural lifestyles, and commitment to upholding traditional Catholic doctrines (Pierucci and Prandi 2000).

The Catholic doctrine on sexual morality remains opposed to homosexuality as a permissible orientation and lifestyle, while the official position of the Catholic Church also remains opposed to same-sex civil unions between homosexuals (Ratzinger and Amato 2003). In addition to a commitment to traditional marital norms, the Catholic Church also exhorts Catholic politicians to heed the call to defend traditional marital unions. Perhaps observing the dynamic threats to the Church posed by the growth in Protestantism and secular challenges to traditional morality in the Brazil, Pope Benedict XVI made a high profile visit to the country in 2007. Among the stated purposes of the visit, the Pontiff urged the "local Catholic hierarchy to encourage greater adherence to the Church's stated norms and values," including those related to sexual and reproductive morality (i.e. abortion and homosexuality) (Castilhos 2008:5). In view of the official doctrinal positions of the Catholic Church that maintain opposition to homosexuality and same-sex civil unions, as well as considering the emerging variants of Catholicism in Brazil (e.g. charismatic Catholics v. "cultural Catholics"), we propose two initial hypotheses:

**H1:** *Devoted Catholics will demonstrate a more restrictive posture toward homosexuality, when compared to nominal Catholics and net of statistical controls.*

**H2:** *Devoted Catholics will demonstrate a more restrictive posture toward same-sex civil unions, when compared to nominal Catholics and net of statistical controls.*

### ***Brazilian Protestantism***

The growth of Protestantism in Brazil represents perhaps the most dynamic trend in Brazil's religious landscape over the past several decades. In 1950, a mere 3 percent of the population self-identified with a Protestant faith, yet by 2010 over 22 percent of the population claimed affiliation with a Protestant group. Much of the growth of Protestantism in the country is due to Pentecostalism. Of the Protestants, about 60 percent are Pentecostals, whereas about 18 percent are affiliated with the "historical Protestant" churches in the country, namely Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist denominations. The remaining share of Protestants represents non-denominational evangelical churches.

Although an extended treatment of Brazilian Protestantism is beyond our reach here, there are three themes that are instructive and will help to focus our study. First, much of Brazilian Protestantism has a "sectarian" orientation toward the world and other religious groups. For many Protestants, joining the faith means taking on a new identity, espousing a new worldview, and adopting a religious life that defines itself in contrast to the "world" (Freston 1998; Ireland 1998; Chesnut 1997). Second, the high view of the Scriptures in Protestant circles also suggests that Bible may play a prominent role in the individual believer's life of faith and practice. As such, Protestants are likely to view homosexuality and the extension of legal provisions to homosexuals as symptomatic of a perverse and worldly society in moral decline (Natividade and Oliveira 2004; Natividade, 2006). Third, Protestants, particularly Pentecostals, have been active in the political sphere, in part to thwart the strengthening of secularism

in Brazilian society (Freston 1994). In view of these considerations, we propose four additional hypotheses:

**H3:** *Devoted-followers of Pentecostal faiths will demonstrate a more restrictive posture toward homosexuality, when compared to nominal Catholics and net of statistical controls.*

**H4:** *Devoted-followers of historical Protestant faiths will demonstrate a more restrictive posture toward homosexuality, when compared to less-devoted Catholics and net of statistical controls.*

**H5:** *Devoted-followers of Pentecostal faiths will demonstrate a more restrictive posture toward same-sex civil unions, when compared to nominal Catholics and net of statistical controls.*

**H6:** *Devoted-followers of historical Protestant faiths will demonstrate a more restrictive posture toward same-sex civil unions, when compared to nominal Catholics and net of statistical controls.*

### ***Spiritist-oriented faith traditions***

Afro-Brazilian and other spiritist faith traditions form another notable niche in the Brazilian religious landscape. The Afro-Brazilian faiths, most notably Candomblé and Umbanda, are the legacy of the African Diaspora in Brazil and are practiced by about 1.2 million Brazilians, while the practice of spiritism takes its form from the influential teachings of the French spiritist Alan Kardec (Pierrucci and Prandi 2000; Prandi 2000). A small body of scholarship on Afro-Brazilian religion suggests that homosexuality is not only socially accepted within, but is even common practiced by its followers (Lundschien Conner and Sparks 2004; Green 2001). Perhaps the social acceptance of homosexuality in these traditions stems from the absence of a punitive religious discourse and an ethic of inclusiveness. According to Pierrucci and Prandi, the spiritist traditions “have developed an orientation that has little or nothing to do with behavior based on an ethical code, by which the measure of justice (or of good or evil) exists in keeping with universalist criteria for collective well-being. On the contrary, notions of true and false are governed by the relations between each believer and the divinity that protects him or

her....” 2000:634). These notions point to an ethic of tolerance in these faith traditions, suggesting that homosexuality would not receive same degree of systematic condemnation evident in the Catholic and Protestant religious traditions. Given these considerations, we propose two additional research hypotheses:

**H7:** *When compared to devoted Catholics, historical Protestants, and Pentecostals, followers of Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist oriented faiths will demonstrate a less restrictive posture toward homosexuality, net of statistical controls.*

**H8:** *When compared to devoted Catholics, historical Protestants, and Pentecostals, followers of Afro-Brazilian and Spiritist oriented faiths will demonstrate a less restrictive posture toward homosexual civil unions, net of statistical controls.*

### **Religious nones**

Perhaps one of the most overlooked trends in the Brazilian religious landscape is a growing “secularization” among the population. Census data reveal that since 1970 there has been an almost seven fold increase in the number of Brazilians that report no religious affiliation (i.e. religious “nones”). In 2010, 8 percent of the population did not report adhering to any religious tradition in the country. The emergence of this trend has led some researchers to suggest that this “secularizing wind” is evidence of a growing disengagement with traditional religion in Brazil (Novaes 2004). Some research suggests that religious nones tend to be male, highly educated, have high family income, are politically engaged, and are more disposed to take liberal positions on social issues such as abortion and homosexuality (Novaes 2004; Bohn 2004; Pierrucci and Prandi 2000). Given the disengagement with institutionalized religion, it follows that these Brazilians may be less likely to encounter and engage in religious teaching, discourse, and messages intended to inculcate beliefs and guide moral reasoning. In view of these considerations, we propose two final hypotheses:



**H9:** *When compared to devoted Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals, religious nones will demonstrate a less restrictive posture toward homosexuality, net of statistical controls.*

**H10:** *When compared to devoted Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals, religious nones will demonstrate less opposition to homosexual civil unions, net of statistical controls.*

## **Methods**

We examine the crossroads between religion and attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex unions in Brazil by drawing upon data from the Brazilian Social Research Survey (BSRS).<sup>1</sup> The BSRS is a nationally representative survey of the Brazilian population that was administered in 2002 with the objective to explore public attitudes on a range of social, cultural, and political issues. The final sample included 2,364 non-institutionalized adult respondents aged 18 years and older. All respondents were selected for face-to-face interviews using a multi-stage probabilistic survey design. The sample is considered to be representative of the Brazilian population, which includes 24 states and a federal district.

Our interest in attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex civil unions explores three dependent variables. The first two dependent variables tap a respondent's moral posture toward the permissibility of (1) male homosexuality and (2) female homosexuality. These two variables are measured separately by two questions on the BSRS: "What is your position on male homosexuality?" and "What is your position on female homosexuality?" Respondents were offered a five item ordinal response scale which ranges from a highly restrictive moral judgment toward homosexuality (totally disagree) to a highly permissible judgment on the issue (totally agree). For the purpose of our study, we decided to recode both these variables to create dichotomous measures: 0 = less restrictive judgment toward homosexuality or 1 = highly restrictive judgment toward homosexuality (i.e. totally disagree).<sup>2</sup>

Our third dependent variable captures a respondent's public policy preference toward the legalization of same-sex civil unions in Brazil.<sup>3</sup> This measure is also dichotomous: 0 = in favor or 1 = opposed.

Our focal independent variable of interest is a respondent's religious affiliation and the degree of devotion to their faith. In this study, we operationalize religious "devotion" according to a respondent's frequency of attendance at religious services. Frequent attendance at religious services suggests a pattern of commitment to a religious tradition and may also increase the exposure to and internalization of religious doctrines, discourse, and teaching. On the contrary, respondents who report a religious affiliation, yet demonstrate no pattern of service attendance, we are calling "nominal." Religious *devotion* is measured by frequent religious attendance at church or mass (weekly or more), whereas a *nominal* religious commitment is based on never attending to less than monthly attendance. Based upon the respondent's self-reported religious preference and their reported frequency of attendance at a religious service, we created eight groups of religious followers (i.e. full interaction terms): 1 = devoted Catholics, 1 = nominal Catholics, 1 = devoted Pentecostals, 1 = nominal Pentecostals, 1 = devoted historical Protestants, 1 = nominal historical Protestants, 1 = followers of Spiritist religions, 1 = those with no religious affiliation (i.e. religious "nones"). In the multivariate analysis, we use nominal Catholics as the reference category because this group represents the majority of Brazilians and is consistent with previous research (See Ogland and Verona 2011). The category of historical Protestant follows Brazilian Census coding for religious affiliation and includes followers of what might be called historical Protestant groups in the country (or the more familiar "mainline" Protestant groups in the United States: Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian). The category of Spiritism denotes Afro-Brazilian and spiritist faith traditions and includes followers of Umbanda, Candomble, and Kardecist Spiritism. Given the small frequency of this faith group and the conceptual difference in "worship service attendance" in these religious traditions, we opted not to separate respondents into two groups.

Given that additional social and demographic factors may influence a respondent's views on homosexual issues, we also consider the following covariates in our regression analyses: age (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, and 55 or older), race (0 = nonwhite or 1 = white), gender (0 = male or 1 = female), marital status (1 = married, 1 = living with a partner, 1 = divorced, separated, or widowed, or 0 = single), region of residence (1 = North, 1 = Northeast, 1 = Center-West, 1 = South and 0 = Southeast), educational attainment (0 = no education or primary, 1 = middle school educated, 1 = secondary educated, 1 = post-secondary educated), and household income (quintiles: 1 = low income to 5 = high income).

Before presenting results of our analysis, a few notes are warranted concerning our research procedures. Prior to the analysis, cases with missing values were determined to be missing at random and subsequently removed from the sample ( $n < 10$  percent). Next, we conducted a complete descriptive analysis of all variables under consideration (Table 1). Then, after a bivariate analysis confirmed many of our initial expectations, we proceeded to run multivariate regression analyses for each dependent variable. The three regression analyses follow a nested modeling approach in order to control for the effects of additional covariates. Finally, given our interest in comparing the attitudes of followers of spiritist religious traditions and religious nones to the devoted followers of Brazil's dominant religious groups (i.e. Catholic, historical Protestant, and Pentecostal), we ran three additional regression analyses with a unique reference group (i.e. devoted Catholics, devoted historical Protestants, and devoted Pentecostals) in order to generate the odds ratios for comparative purposes.<sup>4</sup> Given the dichotomous outcome of our three dependent variables under investigation, we employed logistic regression to test our research hypotheses in all the analyses.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive Analysis***

Table 1 features the descriptive findings from our study. Distributions for the dependent measures reveal a notably high disapproval of both male homosexuality (81 percent) and female homosexuality (78 percent) among the Brazilian population. These figures are very similar to estimates that have been reported in other research concerning attitudes toward homosexuality in the country (Paiva et al. 2005). Our findings also reveal that, while a restrictive posture toward homosexuality is evident among the population, Brazilians tend to espouse more moderate views toward granting civil liberties to homosexuals. The results show that approximately 63 percent oppose allowing homosexual couples to enter into same-sex civil unions. Once again, our findings here reflect the estimates of public opinion research reported elsewhere (Pinochelli 2010). The distributions for the remaining variables in our sample are largely consistent with demographic census estimates and do not reveal any noteworthy observations.

**Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Variables in Study**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>
<b>Dependent Measures</b>				
Opposition to Male Homosexuality	0.81	.01	0	1
Opposition to Female Homosexuality	0.78	.01	0	1
Opposition to Civil Unions	0.63	.02	0	1
<b>Religious Measures</b>				
Religious Affiliation				
Devoted Catholic	0.22	.01	0	1
Nominal Catholic	0.51	.01	0	1
Devoted Historical Protestant	0.03	.01	0	1
Nominal Historical Protestant	0.01	.01	0	1
Devoted Pentecostal	0.08	.01	0	1
Nominal Pentecostal	0.02	.01	0	1
Afro-Brazilian/Spiritist Faith	0.06	.01	0	1
No Affiliation	0.07	.01	0	1
<b>Control Measures</b>				
Region				
North	0.05	.01	0	1
Northeast	0.27	.02	0	1
Center-West	0.07	.01	0	1
Southeast	0.46	.03	0	1
South	0.15	.01	0	1
Female	0.52	.01	0	1
Non-White	0.55	.01	0	1
Marital Status				
Single	0.45	.01	0	1
Cohabiting	0.15	.01	0	1
Married	0.25	.01	0	1
Separated, Divorced, or Widowed	0.15	.01	0	1
Educational Attainment				
No Education/Primary	0.32	.01	0	1
Middle	0.23	.01	0	1
Secondary	0.32	.01	0	1
University	0.12	.01	0	1
Age Cohorts	2.9 <sup>1</sup>	.03	1	5
Household Income	3.17 <sup>1</sup>	.07	1	5

Source: 2002 Brazilian Social Research Survey

N = 2,262

<sup>1</sup>Mean value

**Table 2. Adjusted Odds Ratios to Predict Opposition to Homosexuality and Same-Sex Unions in Brazil**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Male Homosexuality</b>	<b>Female Homosexuality</b>	<b>Same-Sex Civil Unions</b>
North	1.090	1.466	1.141
Northeast	1.317	1.263	1.021
Center-West	1.957 **	1.540	1.224
South	1.634 *	1.395 *	1.086
Non-White	1.184	1.123	1.175
Age Cohorts	1.155 **	1.095	1.298 ***
Female	0.480 ***	0.983	0.635 ***
Cohabiting	0.877	0.862	0.662 **
Married	0.484 ***	0.573 ***	0.843
Sep., Divorced, or Widowed	0.676	0.879	0.834
Household Income	0.727 ***	0.746 ***	0.723 ***
Middle School Educated	0.779	0.779	0.550
Secondary Educated	0.440 ***	0.419 ***	0.428 ***
University Educated	0.201 ***	0.243 ***	0.251 ***
Devoted Catholic	1.574 *	2.175 ***	1.834 ***
Devoted Historical Protestant	3.172 *	3.884 *	4.100 ***
Nominal Historical Protestant	0.922	1.280	1.617
Devoted Pentecostal	3.872 **	3.870 ***	4.127 ***
Nominal Pentecostal	1.234	1.835	2.574 *
Afro-Brazilian/Spiritist Faith	0.683	0.821	0.465 *
No Affiliation	0.598	0.838	0.888

Source: 2002 Brazilian Social Research Survey

† p < .1 \*p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

N = 2,262

### ***Results for Catholics***

First, we turn to examine the moral posture toward homosexuality and same-sex civil unions among Brazilian Catholics. Our findings reveal that when compared to their nominal counterparts, devoted Catholics are significantly more likely to pass a restrictive moral judgment toward both male homosexuality (OR = 1.574,  $p < .05$ ) and female homosexuality (OR = 2.175,  $p < .001$ ). We also find that devoted Catholics are more likely to oppose same-sex civil unions (OR = 1.834,  $p < .001$ ), compared to nominal Catholics. The emergence of these initial findings supports Hypotheses 1 and 2, which anticipated that devoted Catholics would be more disposed to a restrictive orientation toward homosexuality and oppose same-sex civil unions.

### ***Results for Protestants***

Next, we examine the moral sentiment toward homosexuality and same-sex civil unions among Brazilian Protestants. Three key findings emerge from our analysis. First, both devoted followers of historical Protestant denominations and Pentecostal faiths express strong disapproval of homosexuality, when compared to nominal Catholics (historical Protestants: male homosexuality: OR = 3.172,  $p < .05$ ; female homosexuality: OR = 3.884,  $p < .05$ ) (Pentecostals: male homosexuality: OR = 3.872,  $p < .001$  and female homosexuality: OR = 3.870,  $p < .001$ ). Second, both of these religious groups also demonstrate strong opposition to same-sex civil unions, when compared to nominal Catholics (historical Protestants: OR = 4.100,  $p < .001$ ; Pentecostals: OR = 4.127,  $p < .001$ ). The findings here lead us to accept Hypotheses 3-6, which anticipated these results as such. A third finding from the analysis reveals an intra-faith difference between nominal and devoted followers of Pentecostal faiths with regard to moral judgments toward homosexuality (Results not shown). For example, when compared to their nominal counterparts, devoted Pentecostals are more likely to disapprove of homosexuality and oppose same-sex civil unions (female homosexuality: OR = 4.034,  $p < .01$ ; male homosexuality: OR = 2.543,  $p < .05$ ;

same-sex civil unions: OR = 1.645,  $p < .1$ ). No significant intra-faith differences were observed among followers of historical Protestant faiths.

### ***Results for Spiritist Faiths***

Next, we report results from additional regression analyses that examine how followers of spiritist religions view homosexuality and same-sex civil unions.<sup>4</sup> We are interested here in comparing the moral posture of the followers of spiritist faith traditions to devoted Catholics, Protestants, and Pentecostals, given the contrast of these faith traditions. Our findings reveal that when compared to devoted Catholics, followers of spiritist traditions are significantly less likely to pass a restrictive moral judgment toward male homosexuality (OR = 0.642,  $p < .05$ ), female homosexuality (OR = 0.415,  $p < .05$ ), and same sex unions (OR = 0.314,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, compared to devoted Protestants and Pentecostals, followers of spiritist traditions are even less likely to pass a restrictive moral judgment toward male homosexuality (Protestants: OR = 0.342,  $p < .05$ ; Pentecostals: OR = 0.334,  $p < .05$ ) and female homosexuality (historical Protestants: OR = 0.314,  $p < .01$ ; Pentecostals: OR = 0.284,  $p < .001$ ). Followers of these faiths are also less likely to disapprove of homosexual civil unions compared to devoted Protestants (OR = 0.142,  $p < .001$ ) and devoted Pentecostals (OR = 0.153,  $p < .001$ ). These findings support Hypothesis 7 and 8, which anticipated that compared to Brazilians committed to major Christian faith traditions, followers of spiritist faiths would be less likely to orient themselves against homosexuality and oppose same-sex civil unions.

### ***Results for Religious Nones***

Finally, we examine the moral judgments toward homosexuality and same-sex unions among Brazilians with no religious affiliation.<sup>4</sup> The findings from our additional analysis reveal that religious nones are significantly less likely to disapprove of homosexuality and oppose same-sex unions compared to devoted Catholics (female homosexuality: OR = 0.394,  $p < .01$ ; male homosexuality: OR = 0.421,  $p < .01$ ; same-sex unions: OR = 0.486,  $p < .01$ ), devoted historical Protestants (female homosexuality: OR =



0.264,  $p < .01$ ; male homosexuality: OR = 0.252,  $p < .01$ ; same-sex unions: OR = 0.234,  $p < .001$ ), and devoted Pentecostals (female homosexuality: OR = 0.241,  $p < .001$ ; male homosexuality: OR = 0.193,  $p < .001$ ; same-sex unions: OR = 0.144,  $p < .001$ ). The emergence of these findings lends support to Hypotheses 9 and 10, which anticipated these results as such.

## **Discussion**

This study set out to examine whether religion factors into moral judgments toward homosexuality and public policy preferences toward same-sex civil unions in Brazil. The first of our findings revealed a divergence in such attitudes between devoted and nominal Catholics. This phenomenon suggests that the Catholic Church, with its prohibitive religious discourse concerning homosexuality, may be losing ground in its traditional positions on sexual morality, yet at the same time, it is clear that it may have an influence over how devoted followers of the faith form their attitudes and moral judgments toward homosexual issues. The next of our findings revealed that compared to nominal Catholics, devoted followers of Protestant faiths (i.e. Pentecostal and historical Protestant) hold the most restrictive views toward homosexuality and are the most opposed to same-sex civil unions for homosexuals. The magnitude of these results suggests that opposition to homosexuality is a salient theme in the Protestant religious discourse in Brazil. The religious discourse of Protestant groups regarding sexual morality, the nature of homosexuality, and its threat to society appears to have a strong influence over the moral orientation toward homosexuality among devoted followers of Protestant faith traditions. The sectarian identity and the social control fostered by tight social and organizational networks in Protestant faith communities also likely reinforce beliefs concerning homosexuality.

A third finding revealed that Brazilian followers of spiritist faith traditions assume less restrictive posture toward homosexuality and same-sex civil unions. We interpret these findings to suggest that compared to the dominant faith traditions in Brazil (i.e. Catholicism and Protestantism), Afro-Brazilian

faith groups, such as Candomble and Umbanda, as well as spiritist groups, are more likely to provide social protections to homosexuals and have a more inclusive religious discourse toward homosexuality. Finally, our analysis showed that compared to devoted followers of the major faith traditions in the country, Brazilians with no religious affiliation similarly hold less restrictive views toward homosexuality and civil unions. Based on these findings, we suggest that Brazilians with no religious commitments have more tolerant views toward homosexuality because they are less likely to encounter and engage in religious teaching, discourse, and messages intended to inculcate beliefs and guide moral reasoning on homosexuality. Whereas moral instruction and exhortation to take moral positions on social issues may be salient in Catholic or Protestant religious contexts, religious nones may be likely to form their moral positions on social issues from non-religious sources.

The findings from our study should be viewed against the backdrop that the BSRS is a cross-sectional survey, and as such, we are limited in our ability to make causal statements regarding the influence of religion on homosexuality attitudes and same-sex civil union policy preferences. It should also be observed that this survey was administered at a time when same-sex civil unions were illegal in the country, and thus, opposition to same-sex unions may have grown more intense or could have abated given recent legal developments. Finally, given the sensitive nature of private attitudes toward issues such as homosexuality, it is also possible that social desirability bias may influence how respondents from the survey divulge information, so that attitudinal outcomes in the sample could be over or under-reported. Despite these considerations, we believe that our study carves out new territory by extending empirical literature on the intersection of religion and homosexuality in a novel national context and is perhaps the most systematic investigation to date on religion and homosexuality in Brazil.

Ultimately, our study points to the phenomenon that increasingly global movement for LGBT equality and rights, which has been dubbed by some as “the rainbow struggle”, has become a “global

culture war steeped in politics and religion” (Grant 2011). Although recent years have seen an emerging progressive ethic in Brazilian society characterized by the claim for greater access to human rights, such as freedom of expression and constitutional provisions for a broader definition of the family, the growth of Protestantism and the firm presence of the Catholic Church in the country suggest that LGBT issues will continue to be a salient dimension of a Brazilian “culture war” in years to come. The recent ruling establishing civil unions in the country will also likely prompt future political and legal battles between religious groups and LGBT advocates as corollary issues such as homophobia laws, sexuality curriculum in schools, hate crime legislation, and the nature of homosexual content on public airwaves enter into political and cultural discourse. With this in mind, we believe that future research should continue to explore the intersection of religion, culture, and the LGBT movement in Brazil. Particular attention should be given to the structure of social movements and the political implications associated with the increasingly dynamic growth in Protestantism. Given the increasingly global dimensions of the LGBT movement, more empirical studies should also examine the role of religion in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality and policy preferences concerning same-sex civil unions/marriage in other national settings.

## Endnotes

1. The Brazilian Social Research Survey (PESB: *Pesquisa Social Brasileira*) was coordinated by Alberto Carlos Almeida, Andréia Schroeder, and Zairo Cheibub from the Universidade Federal Fluminense with a grant from the Ford Foundation. Data and complete details about survey methodology for the BSRS are available at <http://www.nadd.prp.usp.br/cis/index.aspx>.
2. We dichotomized both these variables because of a heavily skewed distribution on the original ordinal measures, which created problems for employing the ordered-logit regression model. We also considered creating a single, continuous index measure of both homosexuality variables, but the frequency distribution rendered unacceptable skewness and kurtosis values for the OLS regression model.
3. This variable does not intend to measure any specific legislation or legislative proposal with regard to same-sex unions. It is important to note that the BSRS was administered when civil unions in the country were unrecognized by law.
4. These findings are reported in the Results section but are not tabulated (full tables available upon request).

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