

# Legalized Same-Sex Marriage and Coming Out: Evidence from Catholic Seminaries

Avner Seror

Aix-Marseille School of Economics

 @seroravner

Rohit Ticku

European University Institute

 @rohitticku

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# Motivation

- ▶ Coming out seems to be getting easier, making younger generations more likely to self-identify as LGBT. LGBT evolution
- ▶ The reasons underlying the evolution of sexual identities are not well understood.
  - ▶ Information on sexual identities is seldom included in survey data.
  - ▶ Reporting sexual identity is subject to self-censorship due to stigma and discrimination (Coffman et al., 2019).
  - ▶ More broadly, with most survey data, it is not possible to disentangle the mechanism(s) behind the evolution of the self-identification to sexual minorities (e.g. is it more coming out decisions or less self-censorship?).

# This paper

- ▶ We argue that the legalization of same-sex marriage (SSM) in the United States increased coming out decisions. SSM reforms
- ▶ SSM legalization increases the relative payoff from being openly gay (for instance, **cohabitation with same-sex partner**):
  - ▶ Marriage is more desirable among same-sex couples than alternative relationship statuses (**Badgett, 2009**).
  - ▶ SSM legalization has led to i) stabilizing same-sex relationships ii) increasing marital surplus of same-sex couples (**Chen and Van Ours, 2020; Delhomme and Hammermesh, 2021**).

# This paper

- ▶ To understand the role of SSM reforms we infer coming out through a **revealed preference mechanism**.
- ▶ We exploit data on enrollment in Catholic seminaries in the United States, hypothesizing that the vow of celibacy made by priests may partly **self-select** gay men into the Catholic priesthood to avoid (i) stigma and (ii) a heterosexual lifestyle. Popular Media Academic literature  
Vatican's position
- ▶ A **negative** effect of SSM legalization on enrollment in priestly studies would suggest more **coming out** decisions.
  - ▶ The effect would be mediated by social forces like i) presence of gay community ii) social stigma.

## Preview of our Conceptual Framework

- ▶ We build a simple model of revealed preferences through life choices inspired by **Akerloff and Kranton (2000)**'s model.
- ▶ There are two life choices. A choice to live openly as a gay person (such as through cohabitation with a same-sex partner) and a choice to be a Catholic priest. An individual has to choose between the two lifestyle expressions.
- ▶ The utility from expressing a lifestyle depends on an individual's preferences but also on social forces (e.g. social stigma, the value of a relationship).
- ▶ Because of the celibacy requirement, expressing a Catholic priest's lifestyle is not affected by the social forces affecting the expression of a gay lifestyle.
- ▶ SSM legalization changes the social forces impacting the expression of a gay lifestyle (e.g., increases the value of a gay relationship).

## Preview of the Empirical Results

- ▶ Enrollment in Priestly studies falls by approx. **13%** after SSM legalization.
  - ▶ This is explained by gay men self-selecting in Catholic seminaries - SSM legalization has **no effect** on enrollment into **Diaconate** and **Lay ministry** studies, which do not mandate a lifetime of celibacy.
  - ▶ The effect is **specific** to SSM legalization.

### Identification:

- ▶ We use a DD framework to study the effect of a staggered state-wise implementation of SSM laws in the United States on enrollment into programs that prepare men for Catholic priesthood.

# Empirical Methodology

- ▶ We examine the effect of SSM legalization on priestly enrollment using a difference-in-differences (DD) strategy:

$$Enrollment_{cst} = \beta SSM_{s,t-1} + \eta' \mathbf{X}_{st} + \lambda_s + \mu_t + w_{st} + e_{cst}. \quad (1)$$

- ▶ **Dependent variable:** Number of students enrolled in priestly studies in city (c) within state (s) in an academic year (t).
- ▶ **Main explanatory variable:** Dummy switches to 1 if SSM was legal in state  $s$  in the previous calendar year.
- ▶ **Lag structure:** If SSM was legal in calendar year 2012 we assess its effect on the enrollment in academic year 2013 (2012-13).

## Baseline Results

Number of Priestly Students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>SSM law (t-1)</b>	-10.593**	-6.581*	-9.194**	-9.201**	-7.902*	-7.882*	-7.730*
	(3.905)	(3.510)	(3.452)	(3.420)	(4.005)	(4.178)	(4.156)
Catholic population share			3.308**	3.324**	2.903**	3.005*	2.989*
			(1.458)	(1.471)	(1.377)	(1.510)	(1.511)
Unemployment rate				-0.196	-0.233	-0.665	-0.610
				(1.298)	(1.240)	(1.530)	(1.548)
Age					-0.737	-0.860	-0.866
					(0.575)	(0.629)	(0.649)
Support Democratic party						2.478	2.399
						(3.889)	(3.822)
% consider religion important							0.106
							(0.228)
Observations	1333	1333	1333	1333	1333	1296	1296
R <sup>2</sup>	0.383	0.395	0.396	0.396	0.397	0.385	0.385
State and Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State × Time trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- ▶ Compared to the sample mean of 64 students, we observe a 13% drop in enrollment in states that legalized SSM.



# Threat to identification: Did Secularization in SSM reforming states led to the decline in enrollment?

Figure: Difference in Religiosity

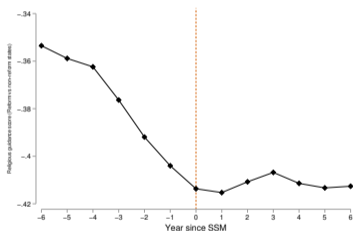
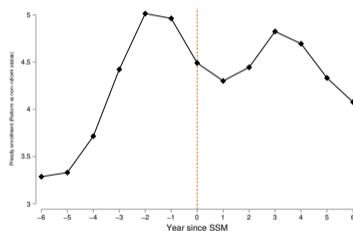
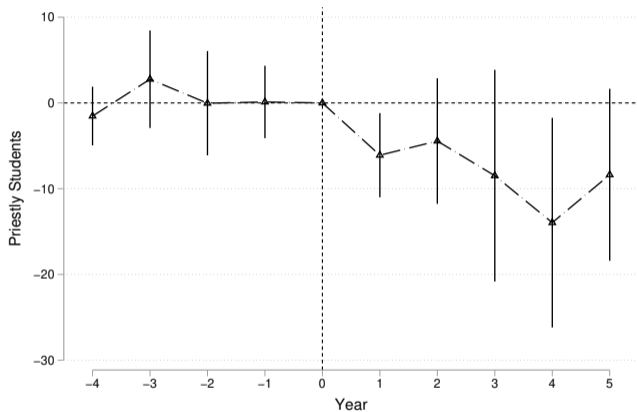


Figure: Difference in Enrollment



- Secularization was underway in states that passed the reform. But these states were **increasing enrollment** prior to the SSM reform and observe a drop after.

## Event study design



- ▶ **No difference** in enrollment before the reform. **Large and persistent** differences following the reform.

# Placebo Analysis

- ▶ Catholic seminaries also train deacons and lay ministers.
- ▶ Since Vatican II, Deacons and Lay ministers perform key pastoral duties, *but do not have to maintain a life time of celibacy*. Almost all of them are married.
- ▶ The absence of an effect of SSM legalization on the enrollment in studies for the diaconry and lay ministry would show that:
  1. The decline in priestly enrollment is not due to the i) **secularization** of the American society and a related ii) **lower attractiveness** of working for the Church.
  2. The decline in priestly enrollment is driven by the celibacy requirement that is specific to the Catholic priesthood.

## Placebo analysis

Panel a. Number of Diaconate Students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>SSM law (t-1)</b>	-0.266 (1.200)	1.735 (1.391)	1.662 (1.460)	1.673 (1.475)	1.467 (1.473)	1.302 (1.549)	1.614 (1.498)
Observations	2392	2392	2392	2392	2366	2252	2244
$R^2$	0.206	0.227	0.227	0.227	0.222	0.210	0.212
State and Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State $\times$ Time trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Panel b. Number of Lay ministry Students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>SSM law (t-1)</b>	-31.868 (28.898)	0.496 (21.706)	-2.872 (21.389)	-2.885 (21.490)	-8.494 (22.284)	-10.282 (23.583)	-13.322 (22.915)
Observations	2693	2693	2693	2693	2688	2572	2554
$R^2$	0.110	0.141	0.141	0.141	0.141	0.137	0.135
State and Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State $\times$ Time trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

- ▶ **No effect** of SSM law on the enrollment of Deacon and Lay Ministry candidates.

# Potential Channels

## Gay community.

- ▶ Because legalizing same-sex marriage increases the benefit from being in an open same-sex relationship, its overall effect on men's willingness to come out depends on their likelihood of finding a partner.
- ▶ We test this prediction by exploiting variation in the spatial distribution of the [Gay Pride parades](#) across the United States. We hypothesize that pride parades are a medium of public expression and a proxy for the organization of the gay community at the local level.
- ▶ We interact the  $SSM_{s,t-1}$  variable with a  $Pride_c$  dummy that takes a value of 1 if city  $c$  held a Gay pride prior to 2004.
- ▶ We also **control** for city-level proxies of Catholic secularization (% inter-faith Catholic marriages).

# Gay community

Number of Priestly Students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
SSM law (t-1)	-5.760 (4.259)	0.191 (4.693)	-2.398 (4.689)	-2.402 (4.667)	-1.165 (5.555)	-0.893 (5.819)	-0.809 (5.730)	1.457 (6.663)	2.015 (6.857)
Pride (pre-2004)	14.045 (17.572)	14.629 (18.066)	14.753 (18.056)	14.750 (18.058)	14.708 (18.041)	14.709 (18.074)	14.713 (18.091)	7.679 (19.355)	7.669 (19.311)
<b>SSM law (t-1) × Pride (pre-2004)</b>	-24.034 (14.655)	-33.230** (13.171)	-35.798*** (12.532)	-35.800*** (12.547)	-35.709*** (12.474)	-35.944*** (12.930)	-35.900** (13.022)	-33.563** (13.902)	-36.070** (14.305)
Observations	1333	1333	1333	1333	1333	1296	1296	1176	1150
$R^2$	0.389	0.402	0.403	0.403	0.404	0.392	0.392	0.434	0.429
State and Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State × Time trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

# Potential Channels

## Social attitudes.

- ▶ The reform's effect on lifestyle choices should also be conditioned by social attitudes toward gay people.
- ▶ We create a binary variable that takes value 1 if the average feelings score in state  $s$  was above the national average.
- ▶ We interact the  $SSM_{s,t-1}$  variable with a  $SocialAttitude_{s,t}$  dummy that takes a value of 1 if the average “feeling thermometer” score in state  $s$  was above national average in year  $t$ .

## Social attitudes.

Number of Priestly Students	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
<b>SSM law (t-1)</b>	12.685*** (2.398)	14.838*** (3.025)	12.739*** (3.015)	12.834*** (3.437)	10.758** (4.407)	9.124* (5.306)	8.628* (5.047)
Social Attitude	-2.893 (4.337)	-5.063 (4.932)	-4.417 (4.821)	-4.437 (4.745)	-4.458 (4.513)	-4.843 (4.336)	-4.964 (4.313)
<b>SSM law (t-1) × Social Attitude</b>	-25.147*** (3.340)	-23.981*** (3.599)	-24.249*** (3.512)	-24.349*** (3.989)	-20.879*** (5.857)	-19.019** (7.061)	-18.397*** (6.592)
Observations	1333	1333	1333	1333	1333	1296	1296
$R^2$	0.383	0.396	0.397	0.397	0.398	0.385	0.386
State and Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State × Time trends	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



## Alternative explanations


- ▶ **Migration across states.** Prospective candidates for the priesthood might choose to enroll in a seminary in a non-reforming state if he is against SSM legalization.
  - ▶ We find that our effect is present both for freshman-year enrollment and non-freshman-year enrollment.
- ▶ **SSM legalization reduces discrimination in the labor market.** SSM legalization might indirectly affect enrollment in priestly studies by reducing labor market discrimination against gay men ([Sansone \(2019\)](#)).
  - ▶ We collected additional data on non-discriminatory laws passed between 2000 and 2015 and found that they have no effect on priestly enrollment.

## Conclusion

- ▶ This paper provides evidence that the legalization of same-sex marriage has a significant impact on gay men's willingness to come out.
- ▶ We find that enrollment in priestly studies fell significantly in states legalizing same-sex marriage compared to non-reforming states.
- ▶ The celibacy requirement appears to drive this result, since we found no effect of same-sex marriage legalization on enrollment of potential deacons or lay ministers.

**Thank you for your attention!**

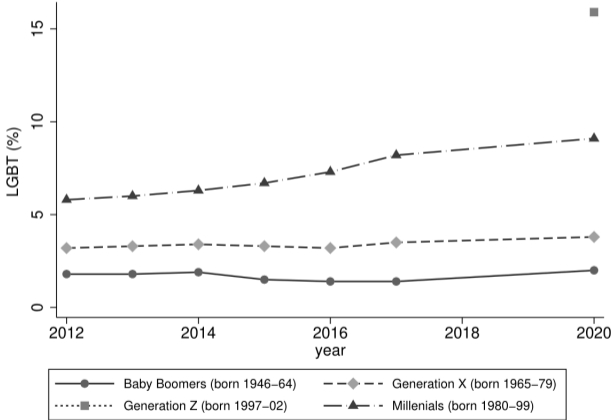
Email for more detailed questions/feedback

avner.seror@univ-amu.fr  @seroravner

rohit.ticku@eui.eu  @rohitticku

# LGBT evolution

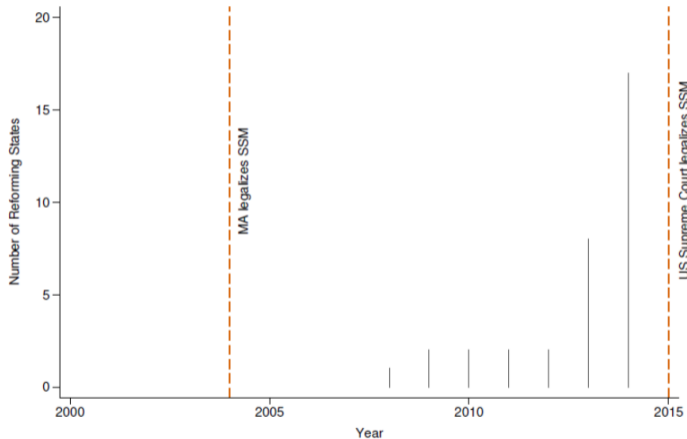
Figure 1: Americans' self-identification as LGBT by generation



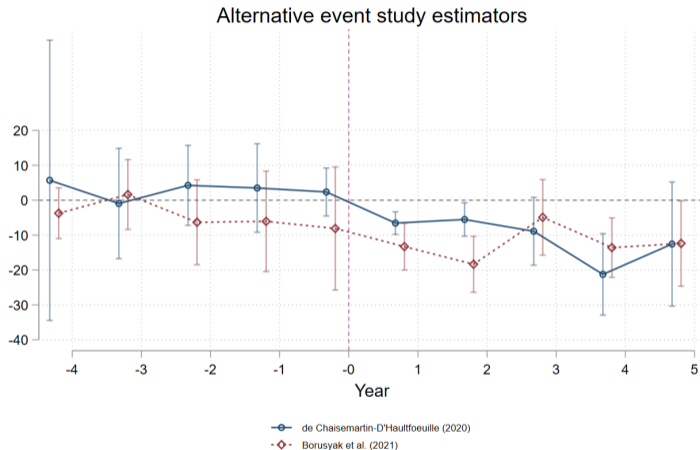
Source: Gallup Poll.

# SSM reforms

Figure A.1: Evolution of SSM reforms



# TWFE with heterogenous treatment effects



- ▶ Account for potential heterogeneity in treatment effects (Chaisemartin and D'haultfoeulle, 2020; Borusyak, Jaravel and Speiss, 2021).

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**CATHOLIC CHURCH** | JAN. 21, 2019

**The Gay Church** Thousands of priests are closeted, and the Vatican's failure to reckon with their sexuality has created a crisis for Catholicism.

*By Andrew Sullivan*

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motivation

## Academic Literature

- ▶ The self-selection of gay men has been addressed by sociologists, psychologists, and even Catholic theologians (Cozzens (2000), Sipe (2003), Hoge and Wenger (2003), Martel (2019)).
- ▶ Based on more than 1,500 interviews with priests and sexual partners of priests, Sipe (2003) suggested that 20% of American priests have homosexual preferences.
- ▶ Systematic survey of 1,036 Catholic priests in the United States show that about 75% to 80% priests identify as heterosexual or mostly heterosexual (Vermurlen, Cranney and Regnerus, 2021).



# Homosexuality and the Catholic Church

- ▶ In 2005, the Vatican addressed if a diocesan Bishop can ordain men who manifest “homosexual tendencies”.
  - ▶ It made a distinction between those with “deep-seated homosexual tendencies” and those for whom “homosexual tendencies” were the “the expression of a transitory problem”.
  - ▶ The Church advised that for the latter type of candidates “such tendencies must be clearly overcome at least three years before ordination to the diaconate.” (Congregation of Catholic Education, 2005).

motivation