

The Year of the (Lesbian) Woman? LGBTQ Candidates and Elections

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Abstract

An unprecedented number of self-identifying LGBTQ+ candidates are running for office in the United States. At the same time, record numbers of anti-LGBTQ bills challenge the trajectory of social and legal progress. How do candidates' sexual orientation and gender identity affect election results? And how does context mediate these effects? To answer these questions, we created an original dataset from the 2020 US state legislative elections, which includes 7,033 individual candidates from over 3,500 state house races in 45 states. The dataset combines candidate- and district-level characteristics. The analysis produces interesting findings. First, on average, LGBTQ+ candidates perform at least as well as straight and cisgender candidates in election outcomes. Second, lesbian women in particular obtain on average over 5% more of the vote than straight candidates. Third, LGBTQ+ candidates do better in Democratic-leaning and highly educated districts, as well as in districts with a higher share of Black voters. Two sets of reasons explain the strong results for LGBTQ+ candidates. First, the electability concerns that hamstring LGBTQ+ candidates in primary elections are less powerful in the highly politically polarized context of partisan general elections. Second, LGBTQ+ candidates who make it to the general election are above average candidates, who have survived multiple challenges during the selection process. Indeed, our analysis reveals that LGBTQ+ candidates have greater political experience and are more successful fundraisers than their straight counterparts. Contrary to conventional wisdom, these findings indicate that LGBTQ+ candidates are an asset for their party in many districts and powerfully challenge claims of greater homophobia among Black voters.

Introduction

For the first time, in 2022 out LGBTQ+ candidates are on the ballot in every state in the USA. This is the result of a growing trend, which in recent years has seen record numbers of out LGBTQ+ candidates running for office at any level, from school boards to the Presidency. These growing numbers have translated into greater representation in office. Currently, there are more than 1,000 out LGBTQ+ elected officials nationwide. Gay men, lesbian women, trans women and bisexual individuals serve now as members of Congress, governors, attorney generals, members of state legislatures, mayors, and local elected officials.

Do these growing numbers indicate that LGBTQ+ candidates no longer face electoral penalties? The answer is not straightforward. In order to win elections, candidates need to overcome hurdles at different levels. They first need to decide to run for office, go through the selection process, and emerge as candidates. Individual resources and disposition, including money, time, and political ambition, influence the decision to run. Party leaders, donors, and organizations play an important role in selecting candidates. Candidates then often need to win primaries to make it to the general election. At each step, candidates from traditionally marginalized backgrounds may face negative bias that complicates their emergence as general election candidates. Some evidence shows that risk-averse party leaders have been reluctant to support LGBTQ+ candidates. Voters in the primaries have also often penalized LGBTQ+ candidates due to a mix of prejudice and electability concerns (Magni and Reynolds 2021).

Even if LGBTQ+ candidates make it to the general ballot and receive similar vote shares as their straight and cisgender counterparts, this is not evidence in itself of absence of voter bias. In fact, previous work on women candidates showed that women won races at similar rates as men, despite being on average better quality candidates. In other words, greater quality allowed women to overcome voter bias and hide in the aggregate individual-level voter penalty (Anzia and Berry 2011, Fulton 2012). If LGBTQ+ candidates are on average candidates of greater quality, the same could apply to them. That is, the political strength of LGBTQ+ candidates could mask in the aggregate the seeming lack of voter penalty.

Because of these complications, the growing literature on the electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates has produced mixed results (Haider-Markel 2010, Haider-Markel et al. 2017, Jones et al. 2018, Jones and Brewer 2019, Magni and Reynolds 2021). Another reason why the results have been inconsistent is data limitations. Until recently, the small numbers of out LGBTQ+ candidates running for office posed significant challenges to meaningful quantitative analysis. Today, growing numbers of LGBTQ+ candidates allow researchers to conduct the analysis, but the lack of readily available datasets makes the work particularly laborious.

We embarked on this project and created an original dataset, which includes 7,033 individual candidates from over 3,500 state house races in 45 states holding elections in 2020. We considered all the states that held house or senate races in 2020¹ and collected information for single-member districts that had contested races.² The dataset combines individual-level characteristics of the candidates - such as partisanship, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, political experience, campaign spending - with constituency-level indicators, including districts' political leaning, racial composition, educational attainment, and median age. We believe this dataset - which took more than a year and a team of ten research assistants to compile - is one of

¹ See the appendix for a full list of states.

² We excluded districts where incumbents ran unopposed and multi-member districts.

the largest and most diverse moment-in-time collections of variables focused on candidate identity traits assembled in the American context.

Our results show that LGBTQ+ candidates had strong electoral results. They also reveal the importance of unpacking the LGBTQ+ label. Indeed, gay men running for office on average did not receive fewer votes than straight candidates. But lesbian women had an even stronger showing, obtaining on average over 5 percentage points more than straight candidates. This positive result is not only due to gender effects, inasmuch as straight cisgender women did not receive significantly more votes than straight cisgender men. Bisexual candidates also did very well, while transgender and non-binary candidates faced negative but statistically insignificant penalties, even though the overall number of these candidates is small.

The electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates varied widely across contexts. Gay, lesbian and bisexual candidates received significantly more votes in Democratic-leaning districts and in districts with a higher share of college graduates. In particular, lesbian candidates had a positive and statistically significant effect in districts where the Democratic Party won at least 47% of the votes in the previous presidential election (the value was 49% for bi candidates and 52% for gay candidates, while the median value of the 2016 Democratic presidential district vote was 43.2% and the third quartile 54.6%). Bi and lesbian candidates also received significantly more votes in districts with a higher share of Black residents. On average, a 1% increase in Black residents in the district was correlated with a 0.35% increase in votes for lesbian and bisexual candidates.

We explain these strong results for LGBTQ+ candidates with two sets of reasons. First, the electability concerns that hamstring LGBTQ+ candidates in primary elections are less powerful in the highly politically polarized context of partisan general elections. Second, LGBTQ+ candidates who make it to the general election are above average candidates, who have survived unique challenges during the selection process. This allows them to make up for potential disadvantages deriving from voter bias. Indeed, our analysis reveals the political strength of LGBTQ+ candidates. On average, they had relatively greater political experience. 57.6% of lesbian candidates had previous experience as state legislators, compared to 47.6% of gay men and 43.2% of non-LGBTQ candidates. LGBTQ+ candidates – and lesbian women in particular – were also successful fundraisers. The median campaign spending was \$54,175 for lesbian candidates, \$45,671 for gay candidates, and \$40,790 for straight candidates.

This paper sheds light on the role of candidates' sexual orientation and gender identity in elections. Overall our results indicate that lesbian, gay, and bi candidates were an asset for their party in many districts. The findings also powerfully challenge unsubstantiated claims of greater homophobia among Black voters. More broadly, this study contributes to the literature on candidate identity, revealing how the apparent lack of voter penalty often masks persisting bias and the above-average quality of candidates from marginalized groups.

Voter attitudes toward LGBTQ+ candidates

In recent years, a growing number of studies have examined electoral support for LGBTQ+ candidates. These studies show that transgender candidates face acute electoral penalties in large sectors of the electorate due to strong prejudice (Haider-Markel et al. 2017, Jones et al. 2018, Jones and Brewer 2019, Magni and Reynolds 2021). However, findings on whether voters penalize gay and lesbian candidates are more nuanced. Work on hypothetical candidates, usually based on attitudinal survey questions or survey experiments, has often found that lesbians and gays face electoral penalties (Golebiowska 2001, 2003, Herrick and Thomas 2002, Doan and Haider-Markel 2010, Beyerlein and Klocek 2020, Magni and Reynolds 2021). Most of these studies have kept the party of the candidate constant, simulating a primary election. One study on hypothetical gay candidates, however, found that the impact of sexual orientation on vote choice significantly decreases once partisanship is taken into account (Loepp and Redman 2020). Studying primary elections is important, given that they determine which candidates emerge in the general contest. However, the dynamics observed in the primaries differ from those in general elections, inasmuch as partisan considerations and the different composition of the electorate modify strategies and expectations. As a result, the impact on vote choice of candidates' individual traits, including sexual orientation and gender identity, may vary significantly between primary and general elections.

A few studies have considered general elections and evaluated the results of lesbian and gay candidates through the analysis of electoral returns. This work has been limited because, until recently, the relative paucity of LGBTQ+ candidates posed a significant challenge to quantitative analyses of the electoral performance of such candidates. While an earlier study found substantial penalties for gays and lesbians (Haider-Markel 2010), a more recent study focused on the United Kingdom, where the number of LGBTQ+ candidates has been much higher, found that lesbian and gay candidates were no longer penalized (Magni and Reynolds 2018).

Nevertheless, we still know relatively little about the performance of LGBTQ+ candidates in general elections in the United States. Furthermore, most of the existing work treats LGBTQ+ candidates as a monolithic group. This was understandable when the scarcity of LGBTQ+ candidates created empirical challenges in disaggregating the quantitative analysis. But following the growth in the number of LGBTQ+ candidates in recent years, we can now unpack the LGBTQ label and separately analyze electoral support for gay men, lesbian women, bisexual and transgender individuals running for office.

LGBTQ+ candidates in general elections

Despite persistent discrimination and lingering hostility in some quarters, we expect LGBTQ+ candidates to perform as well as non-LGBTQ candidates once they are on the ballot in general elections. We anticipate this will be the case for two reasons. On the one hand, *systemic-level*

factors explain why some of the penalties that LGBTQ+ candidates face in primary elections are less consequential on vote choice in general elections. In particular, the electability concerns that hamstring LGBTQ+ candidates in primary elections are less powerful in the highly politically polarized context of partisan general elections. On the other hand, *candidate-level factors* explain why LGBTQ+ candidates who make it to the general election are often candidates of above average quality, who have survived multiple challenges during the selection process. Their political strength allows them to make up for potential disadvantages deriving from voter bias. We expand on both sets of reasons below.

In a primary election, voters may strategically oppose a candidate of their own party seen as less electable and choose another candidate of their party perceived as a safer alternative. Such an option is usually not available in general elections, when voters are normally presented with only one candidate per party. These considerations are especially relevant at a time when party polarization has reached very high levels in the American political system (Mason 2018), which makes it less common for voters to support an opposing party's candidate. In a polarized system, the likelihood that voters will vote against a candidate of their own party because they dislike an individual trait of that candidate is smaller. Polarization, therefore, tends to decrease the impact of candidates' personal characteristics on vote choice in general elections. Indeed, studies on women running for office in the United States have argued that partisanship has increasingly overwhelmed considerations related to a candidate's gender (Dolan 2004, 2014, Lawless 2015). In a highly polarized environment, the sex of a candidates has been less consequential for election outcomes (Hayes and Lawless 2016).

Similarly, we expect sexual orientation to be less likely to emerge as a strongly penalizing factor in polarized general elections. To be clear, we do not argue that LGBTQ+ candidates face no negative bias in general elections. Rather, we argue that the impact of such bias on vote choice will be reduced compared to primary elections. Furthermore, the expectation of a neutral result for LGBTQ+ candidates in a general election is not evidence in itself that LGBTQ+ candidates no longer face penalties or discrimination. Previous work on women candidates in the United States demonstrated that women running for office won at similar rates than men not because of lack of discrimination, but rather because of the greater political quality of female candidates (Anzia and Berry 2011, Fulton 2012). In the end, the greater quality of women candidates could mask in the aggregate individual-level voter penalty against women.

We expect LGBTQ+ candidates *who make it to the general election* to also be on average candidates of greater quality. This is because, in order to survive the primaries, these candidates need to overcome significant hurdles. In particular, party leaders, who tend to be risk averse, have often been reluctant to recruit LGBTQ+ candidates seen as riskier options. In the past, leaders have often refrained from supporting women and minority candidates fearing negative voter reactions (Sanbonmatsu 2006, Piscopo 2018). In 2020, many in the Democratic Party doubted the electoral chances of Pete Buttigieg, worrying that the South and Black voters would

not embrace an openly gay man.³ The paucity of successful examples of LGBTQ+ elected officials likely amplifies these concerns.⁴ This could therefore eliminate many qualified LGBTQ+ individuals from the group of potential candidates, similarly to what happened to women (Fox and Lawless 2005). As a result, only LGBTQ+ candidates with exceptional qualities may be able to emerge.

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ candidates often face vicious anti-LGBTQ attacks in the primaries (Moreau 2020), and only strong LGBTQ+ candidates who survive such attacks make it to the general election. In recent years, for instance, openly gay candidate Alex Morse, was “accused, condemned and then vindicated” of inappropriate sexual behavior in a 2020 Massachusetts Congressional Primary.⁵ Even though Morse was seen by many as an up-and-coming progressive member of the party, he did not survive the primaries. In 2022, Venton Jones, who was running as an openly gay Black man for an assembly seat in Texas, became the target of a homophobic attack from his Democratic primary opponent.⁶ Surviving attacks and (sometimes fabricated) scandals in the primary is no easy feat, as scandals are more likely to doom the electoral chances of LGBTQ+ candidates who have less room for error (Rajan and Pao 2022).

LGBTQ+ candidates also face voter negative bias and penalties in primary elections. Gay, lesbian and transgender candidates need to overcome both prejudice in large groups of the electorate and electability concerns among progressive voters (Magni and Reynolds 2021, Jones and Brewer 2019). Electability concerns around LGBTQ+ candidates, which are especially acute in Democratic primaries, can lead to strategic discrimination (Bateson 2020), which hampers the electoral chances of these and other minority candidates in the primaries.

Because of all these challenges, we expect the LGBTQ+ able to overcome the hurdles in the selection process and emerge as general election contenders to be candidates of above average quality. If LGBTQ+ candidates are indeed stronger candidates, we should find evidence of their strength in successful fundraising and significant political experience. A successful fundraising is often essential to contrast negative coverage and homophobic attacks from opponents.

³ Former President Barack Obama privately doubted that a gay candidate could win the Presidency. Democratic leaders and the Buttigieg campaign itself worried about the chances of a gay candidate with Black voters in the South. See *The Independent*, 8 March 2021: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/barack-obama-buttigieg-democratic-nomination-b1813921.html>.

⁴ The paucity of LGBTQ+ leaders can also reinforce this negative feedback via the so-called outgroup effect, which leads (cisgender and straight) party gatekeepers to be more likely to support candidates like themselves (Niven 1998).

⁵ “Alex Morse Was Accused, Condemned and Then Vindicated. Will His Experience Change Anything?” *The New York Times*, 23 August 2020: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/23/us/politics/alex-morse-massachusetts.html>.

⁶ “LGBTQ Group: Sandra Crenshaw Should Apologize for 'Homophobic Attack' Against Runoff Opponent.” *Dallas Observer*, 19 May 2022: <https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/lgbtq-group-sandra-crenshaw-should-apologize-for-homophobic-attack-against-runoff-opponent-14039229>

Political experience is especially important for LGBTQ+ candidates to contrast stereotypes and prejudice. Prejudice against LGBTQ+ people is often driven by lack of contact and knowledge (Garretson 2014, Flores 2015, Reynolds 2018), while it is much lower among individuals who have LGBTQ+ friends and family members and even among people who meet LGBTQ+ individuals vicariously through the media (Ayoub and Garretson 2017). Previous political experience allows LGBTQ+ candidates to be known by the electorate. Once they have more information about a candidate, voters resort less to stereotypes (Berinsky et al. 2020, Matson and Fine 2006, McDermott 1998). Consistently, earlier work on lesbian and gay candidates did find that voter penalties against such candidates decreased if these candidates came out when they were already in office (Golebiowska 2003).

Hence, the above average political strength of LGBTQ+ candidates, along with the reduced impact of bias linked to candidate traits in highly polarized partisan environments, explain why LGBTQ+ candidates are expected to perform as well as their straight counterparts in general elections.

H1: LGBTQ+ candidates in general elections are above-average candidates, who were able to survive peculiar obstacles in the primaries. Their strength should be reflected in indicators such as successful fundraising and higher levels of political experience.

H2: LGBTQ+ candidates in general elections will perform at least as well as non-LGBTQ candidates.

Unpacking the LGBTQ label

We also expect variation in electoral outcomes among LGBTQ+ candidates. Some preliminary evidence suggests that lesbian candidates do better, winning their races at higher rates than other candidates. A report by the Victory Fund analyzing the electoral results of the 1,088 LGBTQ+ candidates endorsed by the organization between 2016 and 2020 found that queer cisgender women won their races 69% of the time, while queer cisgender men won 59% of their races (Victory Fund 2021). While a useful departing point, this analysis does not include non-LGBTQ candidates, does not control for other candidate or district characteristics, and only considers LGBTQ+ candidates endorsed by Victory Fund.⁷ We build on these findings and on the political science literature on women candidates to develop clear expectations.

Among queer cisgender candidates, we expect lesbian candidates to do better than gay men for two reasons. On the one hand, lesbian candidates need exceptional qualifications to survive the

⁷ “Five-Year Analysis: Electoral Success of LGBTQ Candidates by Gender Identity.” Victory Institute: <https://victoryinstitute.org/resource/five-year-analysis-electoral-success-of-lgbtq-candidates-by-gender-identity/>.

selection process controlled by *party gatekeepers* and *emerge as candidates*, given the double hurdles they face due to both their sexual orientation and gender identity (Doan and Haider-Markel 2010). The decision on whether to run may be a difficult one even for women with high political ambition if they have breadwinning responsibilities (Bernhard et al. 2021). Furthermore, women have to battle the lower likelihood of recruitment by party leaders (Fox and Lawless 2005).

Political elites also create double binds for women, i.e. conditions where “desirable traits require more investment, or are associated with different burdens” for various candidates – namely men and women (Teele et al. 2018: XX). In particular, leaders’ preferences for candidates with traditional household profiles – that is, married with children – create a double bind for women interested in political office (Teele et al. 2018). With regard to traditional, heteronormative household preferences, the double bind is likely especially acute for lesbian women. Lesbian women have had to confront the long-lasting stereotype of lesbians as women ‘who do not have kids’ (Baert 2014), which may further complicate the road to selection.

Since party leaders are reluctant to recruit any candidate who is seen as someone who may face negative voter reactions (Fox and Lawless 2005, Sanbonmatsu 2006, Piscopo 2018), we expect lesbian candidates who emerge in the general elections to be unusually strong candidates, able to overcome intersectional challenges. If this is the case, we should see indicators of strength in their political experience, fundraising success, and endorsements.

On the other hand, *once they are on the ballot*, lesbian candidates face comparatively lower negative *voter attitudes* than gay men. In general, prejudice against gay men tend to be stronger than prejudice against lesbian women. Public opinion data show that people dislike gay men more than they dislike lesbians (Herek and Capitanio 1996, Herek 2000, Herek 2002, Nierman et al. 2007). Even though attitudes toward both gay men and lesbian women have greatly improved in the last two decades, the positive gap in favor of lesbians remain (Pew Research 2013, Kuyper et al. 2018).

The more negative attitudes toward gay men are partly explained by the stricter expectations around gender roles for men. These expectations, in turn, lead to a more negative judgment of men seen as violators of gender norms (Oliver and Hyde 1993, Nierman et al. 2007, Petersen and Hyde 2010, Wellman and McCoy 2014). In particular, because of perceived gender norm violation and the historical association with the AIDS crisis, gay men have often elicited more disgust than most other groups (Cottrell and Neuberg 2005, Inbar et al. 2011). They have been a convenient target of attacks because disgust is easier to evoke if the focus is on gay anal sex, gay male promiscuity, and the association of gay men with the AIDS epidemic (Rozin et al. 1994, Rozin et al. 2008). Hence not surprisingly, to create a “moral panic” and mobilize supporters in its crusades against homosexuality, the religious right has often targeted gay men (Fejes 2008, Fetner 2008).

More negative attitudes toward gay men emerge in a variety of contexts. A meta-analysis of 18 studies on job hiring decisions in OECD countries showed that, while sexual orientation discrimination occurred in the labor market, lesbian candidates applying for a job faced less discrimination than gay men (Flage 2020). In the political context, voters have considered gay candidates as less strong and less moral than lesbian candidates (Doan and Haider-Markel 2010). Survey experiments with hypothetical candidates also found that voter negative bias against gay men is stronger than bias against lesbian women (Golebiowska 2003, Magni and Reynolds 2021). For these reasons, the individual-level voter penalty that lesbian candidates need to overcome may be relatively less severe than the one faced by gay men.

Furthermore, in politics lesbian candidates could partially benefit from group stereotypes, compared to gay men. An extensive literature has shown that sex stereotypes affect voters' evaluation of candidates. Women are often seen as more compassionate, moral and liberal (Alexander and Andersen 1993, McDermott 1998), while men are seen as more ambitious, assertive, and competitive (Ellemers 2018). Even though these stereotypes may have declined over time (Hayes and Lawless 2016), sex and gender stereotypes still affect vote choice (Dolan 2010, Sanbonmatsu and Dolan 2009) in a way that often favors men running for office.⁸

Voters, however, tend to attribute stereotypes to lesbians different from the ones attributed to straight women. Voters often see lesbians as more masculine than heterosexual women (Blashill and Powlishta 2009), which leads to a perceived higher competence of lesbians (Niedlich et al. 2015). Hence, because the lesbian stereotype and the traditional stereotype of a good politician (both based on masculinity and competence) overlap, stereotyped lesbian candidates may be evaluated relatively more positively by voters (Golebiowska 2001). The opposite is true for gay men, who have traditionally been perceived as more feminine and less competent on hard issues such as defense and security (Kite and Deaux 1987, Madon 1997, Fingerhut and Peplau 2006, Blashill and Powlishta 2009, Doan and Haider-Markel 2010).

H3: Lesbian candidates in general elections are especially strong among LGBTQ+ candidates. Their strength should be reflected in indicators such as successful fundraising, significant political experience, and endorsements.

H4: Among LGBTQ+ candidates in general elections, we expect lesbian candidates to perform the strongest.

Last, we expect lesbian and gay candidates to do better than transgender candidates. Public opinion toward transgender people remains more negative than attitudes toward gays and lesbians (Norton and Herek 2013, Jones et al. 2018, Ipsos 2018). This is partly due to the fact

⁸ Recent work has shown that the effects of these stereotypes vary depending on the electoral context, and in some context such as school board elections may actually not penalize women (Anzia and Bernhard 2021).

that fewer Americans know transgender people than they know gays and lesbians.⁹ Previous work has also found severe penalties against transgender candidates (Jones and Brewer 2019, Haider-Markel et al. 2017). Prejudice remains strong even among Democratic voters, a key difference with gay and lesbian candidates (Magni and Reynolds 2021). This suggests that many of the voters whose party is likely to present transgender candidates - i.e. the Democratic Party - harbor negative feelings toward such candidates. In a highly polarized context, Democratic voters may be unlikely to switch parties and vote for the opposing party candidate because they dislike their candidate. However, some Democratic voters may abstain if they strongly dislike the candidate of their own party. This, in turn, may hurt the electoral chances of transgender candidates.

H5: Gay and lesbian candidates will perform better than transgender candidates in general elections.

We do not have clear expectations about the electoral performance of bisexual candidates. Even though bisexual individuals constitute a majority within the LGBTQ+ community,¹⁰ the number of openly bisexual candidates and elected officials remain low. Bisexual candidates have also received relatively little coverage in the media and in the existing literature (Murib forthcoming). Our analysis will therefore provide a first look at the electoral performance of such candidates.

LGBTQ+ candidates across electoral districts

We discussed above how voters use gender stereotypes to evaluate candidates. This explains why the success of women running for office varies significantly across electoral contexts, where stereotypes are more or less positive (Anzia and Bernhard 2022). Voters also have stereotypes about LGBTQ+ candidates (Doan and Haider-Markel 2010, Magni and Reynolds 2021). Furthermore, attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people vary substantially across individuals' socio-demographic characteristics. Hence, we anticipate that the electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates will vary across electoral districts with different voter profiles.

We expect LGBTQ+ candidates to do better in more progressive and Democratic-leaning districts. Partisanship and ideology are important predictors of prejudice toward sexual minorities (Haider-Markel 2010, Haider-Markel et al. 2017, Jones et al. 2018). Hostility to LGBTQ rights, including same-sex unions and adoption by gays and lesbians, has long been promoted by conservative forces in America (Olson et al. 2006, Sherkat et al. 2011, Clements

⁹ "Rising shares of U.S. adults know someone who is transgender or goes by gender-neutral pronouns." Pew Research, 27 July 2021: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/27/rising-shares-of-u-s-adults-know-someone-who-is-transgender-or-goes-by-gender-neutral-pronouns/>

¹⁰ "LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%." *Gallup*, 17 February 2022: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>

and Field 2014). Even though attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people and rights have improved in recent decades, a gap remains in the attitudes of Democrats and Republicans (Gallup 2021). Consistently, survey experiments have shown that progressives and Democratic voters are less likely to discriminate against LGBTQ+ candidates (Magni and Reynolds 2021, Jones and Brewer 2019). Furthermore, recent years have seen the introduction of a growing number of anti-LGBTQ bills by Republican state legislators across the country. At the same time, some evidence suggests that being openly LGBTQ+ can marginally help candidates in progressive districts, as sexual orientation and gender identity become cues of liberalism (Magni and Reynolds 2021).

We also expect LGBTQ+ candidates to do better in districts where residents are younger and more highly educated. Younger people are substantially more likely to personally identify as LGBTQ+ (Gallup 2022) and to have LGBTQ+ friends and family members. This helps explain why they tend to have more positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people and rights (Pew Research 2019). Previous work also found that younger voters have less negative bias against LGBTQ+ candidates (Magni and Reynolds 2021).

The evidence in support of a positive correlation between level of education and support for LGBTQ+ rights is less clear. Some studies argued that education no longer has strong explanatory power with regard to LGBTQ attitudes (Jones et al. 2018, Magni and Reynolds 2018). However, others maintained that one's level of education still marginally predicts greater support for LGBTQ rights. This may be because education is correlated with greater knowledge of the issues and greater interaction with LGBTQ+ people (Lambert et al. 2006, Kozloski 2010, Norton and Herek 2013, Flores 2015, Kazyak and Stange 2018). For these reasons, we expect LGBTQ+ candidates' electoral results to be marginally stronger in districts with highly educated residents.

H6: LGBTQ+ candidates will perform better in districts with a higher share of Democratic, younger, and highly educated voters.

Our expectations about the impact of districts' racial composition on the success of LGBTQ+ candidates are less clear. In fact, conventional knowledge has long maintained that non-white voters, and Black voters in particular, tend to be more homophobic. Other studies, however, suggest that Black voters have greater degrees of empathy toward marginalized candidates, including LGBTQ+ ones,¹¹ and are in fact more supportive of LGBTQ+ candidates in general elections (Magni and Reynolds n.d.; see also Lewis 2003). Our analysis will adjudicate among the two competing claims.

¹¹ See also "The empathy of Black voters." *The New Republic*, 17 July 2020: <https://newrepublic.com/article/158477/empathy-black-voters-support-gay-lgbtq-candidates>

Dataset and variables

Studying the impact of sexual orientation and gender identity at the state level is important for several reasons. Theoretically, compared to national elections, state elections tend to have less information about candidates, which could increase the effects of stereotypes related to candidates' sexual orientation and gender identity on electoral results (Anzia and Bernhard 2021). This could allow us to detect sexual orientation and gender identity effects more accurately. Second, many LGBTQ+ candidates start their political careers at the local level before moving to national elections. Examining the chances of these candidates to succeed in state elections allows us therefore to evaluate the likelihood that LGBTQ+ candidates emerge on the national stage. For instance, currently LGBTQ+ members of Congress Tammy Baldwin (the first out LGBTQ+ senator), Kyrsten Sinema (the first out bisexual Senator), Chris Pappas, and Mark Pocan were all state legislators before running for federal office. Third, focusing on state elections provides greater variation with regard to the sexual orientation and gender identity of the candidates, as more LGBTQ+ candidates run in state elections than in federal ones. Despite all these advantages, collecting data on all state elections is a demanding enterprise, which makes our dataset unique.

Table A1 in the appendix lists all the individual-level variables in the dataset. Candidate-level variables include candidates' names, party ID, whether the candidate won or lost the 2020 election, and the percentage of votes that the candidate obtained in the 2020 election. We also collected information on candidates' gender identity and sexual orientation. Regarding gender identity, we classify candidates as cisman, ciswoman, transman, transwoman, or nonbinary. With regard to sexual orientation, we classify candidates as gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, or straight. These traits are based on candidates' self-identification. Therefore, we consider out LGBTQ+ candidates, i.e. candidates who have openly identified as LGBTQ+.

We also collect information about candidates' race and ethnicity and about several factors influencing election results, such as incumbency status, political experience, fundraising success and endorsements. The incumbency variable records whether the candidate is running as an incumbent, as a challenger, or in an open district. A separate variable records whether the candidate has previous experience as an elected official. We also gathered information on a candidate's fundraising numbers measured by campaign spending.

Moreover, for LGBTQ+ candidates, we record whether they were endorsed by two prominent organizations supporting LGBTQ+ candidates running for office: the Victory Fund and LPAC. Victory Fund is dedicated to elect openly LGBTQ+ people at all levels of government. It provides campaign, fundraising and communications support to the endorsed LGBTQ+ candidates. A Victory Fund endorsement can provide a significant boost in visibility and resources, but the organization also requires candidates to be competitive in the first place in

order to be eligible for endorsement.¹² LPAC is an organization committed to the election of LGBTQ+ women and supports the endorsed candidates through independent expenditure campaigns.¹³

Table A2 in the appendix lists the district-level variables in our dataset. We collected information on the political leaning of the district, measured by the share of the Democratic vote in the previous presidential election (2016). We also collected information on districts’ racial composition (i.e. the percentage of white, Black, Latin, and Asian residents), gender composition (measured by the share of male residents), and age composition (captured by the median age). Moreover, we record information on districts’ economic well-being (measured by the median income), level of education (share of residents who completed a B.A. or higher degree), and a measure of traditionalism, operationalized by the percentage of unmarried-partner households.

Who are the LGBTQ+ candidates running for state elections?

Our dataset includes 7,033 candidates running in contested districts. 240 identify as LGBTQ+ (3.4% of the total). Of these, 105 identify as gay, 87 as lesbian, 19 as bisexual, 17 as queer, and 8 as pansexual. With regard to gender identity, 21 candidates identify as non-cisgender: 15 transwomen, 5 non-binary and 1 Two-Spirit. Table 1 shows how sexual orientation and gender identity intersect for the 240 LGBTQ+ candidates.

Table 1 – 2020 state legislative election candidates: sexual orientation and gender identity

	Gay	Lesbian	Bisexual	Queer	Pansexual	Other	Straight	Tot.
Cisman	103		7	4	1		4397	4512
Ciswoman	1	79	10	11	3		2396	2500
Transwoman		7	1	1	3	2	1	15
Non-binary	1	1	1	1			1	5
Two-Spirit					1			1
<i>Total</i>	105	87	19	17	8	2	6795	

Total: 240 LGBTQ+ candidates

¹² To receive Victory Fund’s endorsement, candidates must meet several requirements, including being openly LGBTQ; supporting full equality for the LGBTQ community, including trans rights; supporting reproductive freedom; and showing they have a realistic plan to victory. Victory Fund website: <https://victoryfund.org/about/>

¹³ LPAC website: <https://www.teamlpac.com/>

Out LGBTQ+ candidates ran in all the 45 states that had state elections in 2020, with the only exception of New Jersey. The states with the highest number of LGBTQ+ candidates were California (16), New Hampshire (16), Texas (13), and New York (10). At the other end of the spectrum, Alaska, Hawaii, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Utah had only one out LGBTQ+ candidate.

Of the 240 LGBTQ+ candidates, 194 ran for state house or assemblies, 45 for state senates, and 1 for a unicameral legislature. 221 ran for the Democratic Party, 9 for the Republican Party, and 10 for third parties or as independents. In terms of race and ethnicity, 166 of the 240 LGBTQ+ candidates were white, 30 Latinx, 27 Black, 7 AAPI, 4 Native American, and 6 mixed. Victory Fund endorsed 156 of the 240 LGBTQ+ candidates in our dataset. LPAC endorsed 41 LGBTQ+ women in our dataset.

148 LGBTQ+ candidates were elected (46 were uncontested, 89 won in single-member districts, and 13 won in multi-member districts). Among the elected LGBTQ+ candidates, 63 identified as gay men, 55 as lesbian, 14 as bisexual, 12 as queer and 4 as pansexual. With regard to their gender identity, 6 transwomen and 2 non-binary individuals won their races.

Comparing LGBTQ+ candidates and non-LGBTQ+ candidates

Table 2 compares LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ candidates on several characteristics. LGBTQ+ candidates are overwhelmingly Democratic (92%), while non-LGBTQ+ candidates are roughly equally split between Democratic and Republican Party. LGBTQ+ candidates are also more racially and ethnically diverse as a group than their straight and cisgender counterparts.¹⁴ About 69% of LGBTQ+ candidates are white, compared to 85% of non-LGBTQ+ candidates. Among LGBTQ+ candidates, there is a relatively higher incidence of Black (11.3% vs. 7.2% among non-LGBTQ+ candidates), Latinx (12.5% vs. 3.9%), and Native American candidates (1.7% vs. 0.4%).

¹⁴ We consider only the two major parties. As mentioned above, 10 LGBTQ+ candidates ran as independents or for third parties.

Table 2 – 2020 state legislative election: comparison between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ candidates

		LGBTQ+ candidates (N=240)	Non-LGBTQ+ candidates (N=6,793)
Party ID	Democratic	92.1%	49.2%
	Republican	3.8%	50.8%
Race	White	69.2%	85.2%
	Black	11.3%	7.2%
	Latinx	12.5%	3.9%
	AAPI	2.9%	2.2%
	Native American	1.7%	0.4%
	Mixed	2.5%	0.4%
Incumbency status	Incumbent	47.1%	40.6%
	Challenger	34.2%	40%
	Open seat	18.8%	19.4%
Office sought	Assembly / House	80.8%	76%
	Senate	18.8%	23.4%
	Unicameral	0.4%	0.6%
Campaign spending	Mean	\$207,646	\$150,396
	Median	\$54,615	\$40,790
Vote (2020)	Average percentage	48%	49.7%

Comparing electoral districts with and without LGBTQ+ candidates

Table 3 describes the districts where LGBTQ+ candidates ran. LGBTQ+ candidates ran in more democratic-friendly districts, where the average 2016 Democratic vote was 54.4% (as opposed to 44.6% in districts without LGBTQ+ candidates). LGBTQ+ candidates also ran in districts that are racially and ethnically more heterogeneous, where 66% of residents are white (vs. 71.7% for districts without LGBTQ+ candidates), 16.3% Latinx (vs. 12.2%), 9.7% Black (vs. 9.3%), and 6% Asian (vs. 4.8%).

Districts with LGBTQ+ candidates tend to be slightly richer, with a median household income of \$67,209 (compared to \$65,608 for districts without LGBTQ+ candidates), and more highly educated (37% of residents had a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 31.7% in districts without LGBTQ+ candidates). The districts where LGBTQ+ candidates ran also have a younger population (the median age is 37.8 years compared to 39.4 in districts without LGBTQ+ candidates) and a higher percentage of households with unmarried partners (3% vs. 2.6%). There is no substantive difference in terms of gender composition between districts with and without LGBTQ+ candidates.

Table 3 – 2020 state legislative election: comparison between districts with LGBTQ+ candidates and districts without LGBTQ+ candidates

	Districts with LGBTQ+ candidates	Districts without LGBTQ+ candidates
2016 presidential election: average Democratic vote	54.4%	44.6%
Income (median)	\$67,209	\$65,608
Educational attainment (% bachelor's degree or higher)	37%	31.7%
Age composition (median age)	37.8	39.4
Gender composition (% men)	49.4%	49.4%
Unmarried-partner households	3%	2.6%
White residents	66%	71.7%
Black residents	9.7%	9.3%
Latinx residents	16.3%	12.2%
Asian residents	6%	4.8%

The political strength of LGBTQ+ candidates

In the discussion above, we anticipated that LGBTQ+ candidates would do at least as well as non-LGBTQ candidates because the LGBTQ+ candidates who make it to the general election are above average candidates. We now evaluate the strength of LGBTQ+ candidates by comparing LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ candidates on political experience and fundraising success.

LGBTQ+ candidates have relatively greater political experience. While 55.6% of non-LGBTQ candidates had no previous political experience, the number was 51.3% for LGBTQ candidates. Moreover, 47.9% of LGBTQ candidates had previous experience as state legislators compared to 43.2% of non-LGBTQ candidates.

LGBTQ+ candidates were also more successful fundraisers. The mean campaign spending was about \$208,000 for LGBTQ+ candidates and \$150,000 for non-LGBTQ+ candidates. The median spending was \$55,000 and \$41,000, respectively. The higher campaign spending may partly result from the greater incidence of incumbency status among LGBTQ+ candidates. It may also be due to the relatively higher national visibility that some LGBTQ+ candidates have and to the support of national organizations dedicated specifically to the election of LGBTQ+ candidates, such as the Victory Fund and LPAC.

Above we also explained that we expected lesbian candidates who make it to the general election to be uniquely strong after surviving multiple selection challenges. Our dataset allows us to compare lesbian and gay candidates. Lesbians running for office have greater political experience than gay men. 57.6% were state legislators before, compared to 47.6% gay men and 43.2% straight candidates. Lesbian candidates also had the greatest experience in elected office at the local level. They were endorsed by Victory Fund at a higher rate, 65% vs. 60% of gay men.¹⁵ Additionally, lesbians were successful at fundraising, besting even gay men. The median campaign spending was \$54,175 for lesbian candidates, \$45,671 for gay male candidates, and \$40,790 for straight candidates. The mean campaign spending was \$269,649 for lesbian candidates, \$182,575 for gay candidates, and \$150,376 for straight candidates.

The electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates

We now present the results of the regression analysis. Given the hierarchical nature of the data - candidates are running in constituencies within states - we use multilevel models with varying intercept by state. The online appendix presents robustness tests using fixed effects for states and shows that results remain substantially unchanged.

The dependent variable is the percentage of votes obtained by the candidate in the district in the 2020 state elections. The main independent variables of interest are candidates' sexual orientation and gender identity. Controls include both candidate-level and district-level variables. Regarding individual variables, we control for candidates' party, incumbency status, race or ethnicity, whether the candidates are running for state house/assembly or senate, and campaign spending. At the district level, we control for the Democratic share of the votes in the 2016 presidential election, the racial composition, the gender composition, the educational attainment, the economic condition, the age composition, and the level of traditionalism.

The model includes candidates running in the 2020 state elections.¹⁶ We exclude the candidates who ran in uncontested elections and the candidates who ran in multi-member districts, where a much smaller percentage of votes was usually sufficient to win a seat.¹⁷

¹⁵ As a reminder, one criterion to receive such endorsement is the existence of a viable path to victory for the candidate.

¹⁶ The following states did not have state elections in 2020: Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan-Senate, Mississippi, New Jersey (except for one special election), and Virginia.

¹⁷ We exclude the following races that used multi-member districts: Arizona House, North Dakota House, New Hampshire House, South Dakota House, Vermont House and Senate, and some House districts in West Virginia.

Table 4 – Electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates in the 2020 state elections

	<i>Vote.2020</i>
<i>Candidate-level variables</i>	
Party ID: Republican	3.17*** (0.30)
Incumbent: challenger	-24.99*** (0.32)
Incumbent: open	-12.54*** (0.39)
Gender identity: ciswoman	-0.02 (0.31)
Gender identity: trans/non-binary	-5.10 (3.49)
Sexual orientation: bi/pan/queer	8.95*** (2.26)
Sexual orientation: gay male	1.19 (1.46)
Sexual orientation: lesbian	5.15*** (1.52)
Race/ethnicity: AAPI	3.08** (1.05)
Race/ethnicity: Black	5.25*** (0.63)
Race/ethnicity: Latinx	3.81*** (0.79)
Race/ethnicity: mixed	4.32* (2.14)
Race/ethnicity: Native	0.48 (2.05)
Race/ethnicity: other	2.86 (5.07)
Campaign spending	0.002*** (0.0004)

Office: senate	-0.21 (0.33)
Office: unicameral	-0.30 (2.16)
<i>District-level variables</i>	
Democratic vote 2016 (%)_	-0.01 (0.01)
Racial compos: White %	0.01 (0.02)
Racial compos: Black %	-0.01 (0.03)
Racial compos: Latinx %	-0.01 (0.02)
Racial compos: AAPI %	0.001 (0.03)
Gender composition: Male %	0.02 (0.09)
Age composition (median)	-0.01 (0.03)
Educational attain (% college)	0.01 (0.02)
Income (median)	-0.01 (0.01)
Unmarried-partner household (%)	-0.02 (0.17)
Constant	60.50*** (5.51)
<hr/>	
Observations	6,626
Log Likelihood	-25,489.59
Akaike Inf. Crit.	51,039.17
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	51,243.14
<hr/>	
<i>Note:</i>	+p<0.1; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Baseline categories for individual-level variables: Party ID: Democratic; Incumbent: incumbent; Gender identity: cisman; Sexual orientation: straight; Race/ethnicity: white; Office: Assembly

Results in Table 4 confirms the importance of unpacking the LGBTQ label, as big differences emerge within the group of LGBTQ+ candidates. Lesbian candidates, in particular, do very well, obtaining on average over 5 percentage points more than straight candidates. This positive result is not only due to gender effects, as straight cisgender women do not receive significantly more votes than straight cisgender men. In contrast, gay male candidates do not do significantly better or worse than straight candidates. Hence, gay men running for office on average do not receive fewer votes than straight men in general elections.

Our results also show that bisexual, pansexual and queer candidates do well. However, we refrain from making strong inferences because the positive coefficient is driven by the strong performance of a few successful candidates. Further analysis unpacking the bi/pan/queer category reveals that bisexual candidates are driving the positive results. In particular, three bisexual candidates obtained more than 70% of the votes, namely Alex Lee (California House-25), Marisabel Cabrera (Wisconsin House-9) and Sarah McBride (Delaware Senate-1). The performance of transgender and non-binary candidates is negative but statistically insignificant, even though the overall number of such candidates is small.

These results encourage both reflections and caveats. On the one hand, the findings confirm the expectations that lesbian women are among the strongest candidates. This is true not just among LGBTQ+ candidates, but among all candidates. We showed above that lesbian candidates had greater political experience and were successful fundraisers. If these factors are contributing to their political strength, running a model that does not control for these variables should return an even more substantial positive effect for lesbian women on vote choice. This is indeed the case. If we run the same model presented above but omitting controls for incumbency and campaign spending, the impact of sexual orientation for lesbians increases. On average, they obtain 7.5 percentage more votes than straight candidates. Omitting variables on candidate quality, therefore, would fail to capture that lesbians do especially well because they are on average stronger candidates. And yet, even controlling for these variables, lesbian candidates perform significantly better than other candidates, suggesting that their political strength is not entirely captured by these indicators.

Demonstrating that LGBTQ+ candidates on average did not receive fewer votes than non-LGBTQ candidates does not in itself indicate lack of homophobia and electoral bias. Indeed, our study examines the impact of sexual orientation and gender identity once the candidates are on the ballot. As noted earlier, our study does not consider the hurdles that a candidate must overcome to be on the ballot, including winning the primary, receiving support from party gatekeepers, and gaining endorsements.

Overall, our findings show that LGBTQ candidates are competitive candidates. This suggests that the concerns often registered by voters and party gatekeepers about the electoral chances of LGBTQ candidates are at best overstated. Once LGBTQ+ candidates are on the ballot in general elections, they are often as likely to win as non-LGBTQ+ candidates.

The electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates across electoral districts

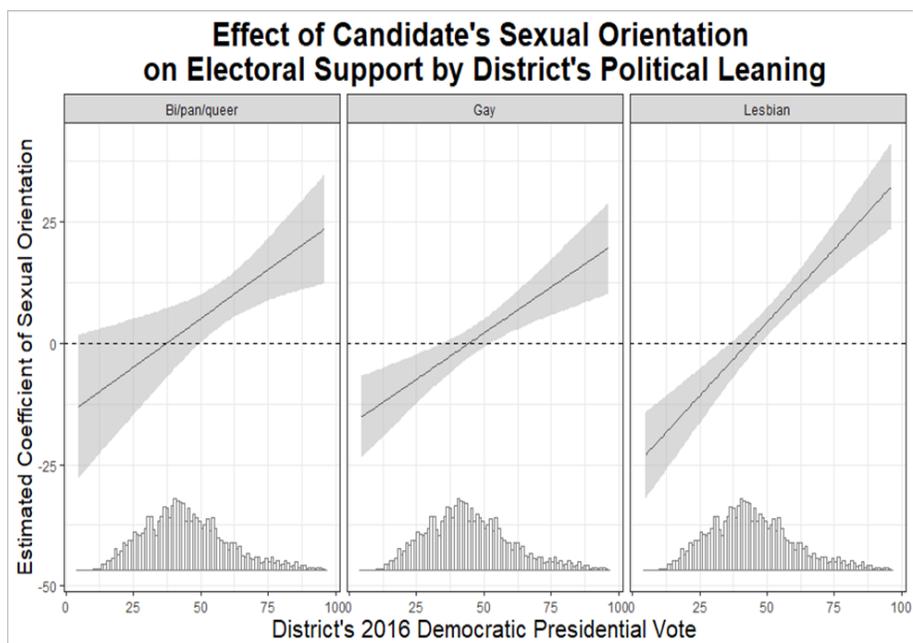
We now investigate the interaction effects between candidates' sexual orientation and district characteristics.¹⁸ In particular, we explore the results of LGBTQ+ candidates conditional on the district's political leaning, educational attainment, age distribution, and racial composition. This analysis allows us to evaluate whether LGBTQ candidates receive significantly more votes in districts that have a Democratic majority, a younger population, residents with higher levels of education, and lower traditionalism. Much of conventional wisdom also assumes that LGBTQ+ candidates tend to do worse among Black voters, a claim challenged by some existing work (Lewis 2003, Magni and Reynolds n.d.). We can test this claim by interacting candidates' sexual orientation with the district's racial composition.

We now run the model presented above but introducing an interaction term between sexual orientation and district characteristics. Below we present the plot showing the interaction effects. In each plot, the x-axis reports the district's characteristic that we interact with sexual orientation to calculate conditional effects. We also present a distribution of the conditioning variable with an histogram on the x-axis, which helps interpret the substantive significance of a statistically significant conditional effect. The y-axis represents the estimated coefficient of sexual orientation on vote percentage in the 2020 election. We show estimated coefficients for three categories of the sexual orientation variable: bi/pan/queer, gay male, and lesbian candidates. The online appendix reports a table with full results including the controls.

The analysis reveals that the general findings presented above mask wide differences in the electoral performance of LGBTQ+ candidates across districts. All LGBTQ+ candidates performed significantly better in Democratic-leaning constituencies, as measured by the 2016 Democratic share of the presidential vote (Figure 1). A 1% increase in the 2016 Democratic vote is correlated on average with a 0.6% higher vote for lesbian candidates and a 0.4% higher vote for gay candidates. The impact of sexual orientation for lesbian candidates is positive and statistically significant in districts where the Democratic Party won at least 47% of the votes in 2016, for bisexual candidates in districts where Democrats won at least 49% of the votes, and for gay candidate 52% of the votes (the median value for the 2016 Democratic presidential district vote was 43.2% and the third quartile value was 54.6%).

¹⁸ Because of the relatively small number of non-cisgender candidates, we cannot perform the same analysis for transgender and gender non-conforming candidates.

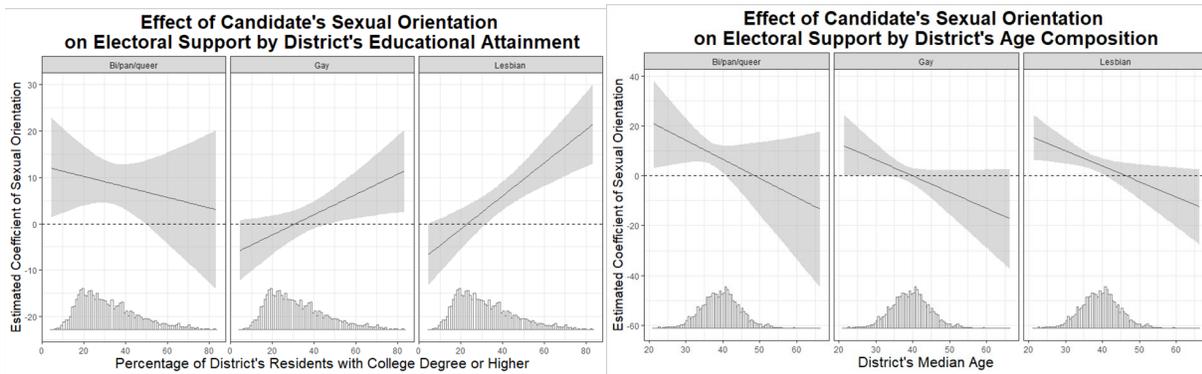
Figure 1 - Effect of candidate's sexual orientation on electoral support by district's political leaning



Gay and lesbian candidates also received significantly more votes in districts with higher levels of education (Figure 2). On average, a 1% increase in college graduates in the district is correlated with a 0.4% increase in votes for lesbian candidates and a 0.2% increase for gay candidates. The effect of sexual orientation for lesbian candidates is positive and statistically significant in districts where at least 32% of residents are college graduates, which corresponds to the median district value.

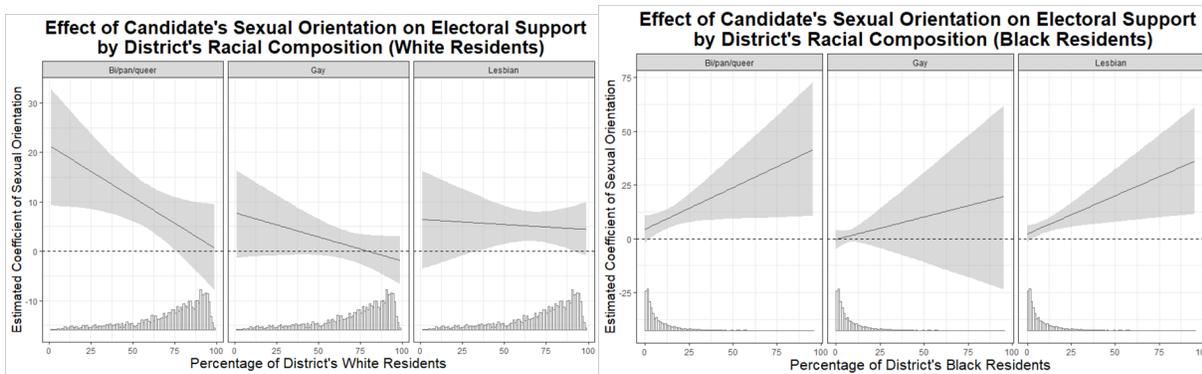
Gay and lesbian candidates also did better in younger districts, with an especially strong effect for lesbian candidates (Figure 2). The effect of sexual orientation for lesbian candidates is positive and statistically significant for districts with a median age of less than 42 years old (the median value is 39.4).

Figure 2 - Effect of candidate's sexual orientation on electoral support by district's educational attainment and age composition



Racial composition of the district also conditions the electoral chances of LGB candidates (Figure 3). In particular, bisexual, pansexual and queer candidates obtained significantly fewer votes in districts with higher shares of white residents and significantly more votes in districts with higher shares of Black residents. Lesbian candidates also did better in districts with a higher share of Black residents. On average, a 1% increase in Black residents in the district is correlated with 0.3-0.4% increase in votes for lesbian and bisexual candidates.

Figure 3 - Effect of candidate's sexual orientation on electoral support by district's racial composition



Discussion and conclusion

The great variation in the electoral results of LGBTQ+ candidates across districts prompts several reflections. First, LGB candidates do not perform worse than straight candidates in many districts. In fact, our results show that LGB candidates are competitive even in moderate or

swing districts. Furthermore, being openly LGB is actually an asset in many constituencies, including progressive, younger and higher-education districts. In such districts, all other things equal, gay and lesbian candidates received on average more votes than their straight counterparts. This is an especially important finding, as LGBTQ+ candidates do not choose randomly where to run, but can strategically enter the race in districts where they have a positive influence on their party vote share.

Even though we do not have the data to test the reasons why, we can speculate on the explanations for the positive impact of lesbian and gay candidates. Being openly gay or lesbian in such districts could signal to the electorate that these candidates are more liberal (Jones and Brewer 2019, Magni and Reynolds 2021). Electing LGBTQ+ candidates, representatives of groups long marginalized in American politics, also improves diversity in office, a point increasingly valued by many citizens. Furthermore, for some voters, LGBTQ+ elected officials may be a symbol of progress towards a more inclusive society.

Another key result is that lesbian and bisexual candidates obtained higher percentages of votes in districts with a higher share of Black residents, even when controlling for the fact that many of these candidates are Democrats. This finding powerfully challenges unsubstantiated claims of greater homophobia among Black voters. Black voters tend to be overwhelmingly Democratic and tend to support Democratic candidates, even when the candidates happen to be non straight.

Lesbian, gay, and - in smaller numbers - bisexual candidates are therefore strongly competitive in many races. There is reason to speculate that this could spark a virtuous circle, in which successful LGB candidates destroy the curse of being deemed 'unelectable' and paved the way for the election of more sexual minorities. However, transgender and gender non-conforming candidates - whose numbers are still limited - struggle with the negativity that is rooted in invisibility. Encouraging and supporting more gender identity minorities to run for office would be the first step to increase visibility and lay the foundation for future successes.

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