

**Parsing Public Opinion: Examining the  
Heterogeneous Effects of Same Sex Marriage  
Legalization on Mass Attitudes in America**

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## **Abstract**

Ordinarily, mass attitude change takes place slowly if at all. Many attitudes remain relatively stable over time and even generations. American attitudes on abortion, for example, have remained surprisingly consistent over time. In 1972, 49 percent of Americans favoured access to abortion for poor women and in 2016, 43 percent of Americans felt the same way. Contrast this with attitudes toward same sex marriage. In 1988, a mere 11.6 percent of Americans were in favour of legalizing same sex marriage. In 2016, 59.2 percent were in favour of granting same sex couples the right to marry (Rosenfeld, 2017). This 47 point rise in support represents a remarkable turnaround in mass public opinion. Recent research suggests that public opinion formation is not strictly a bottom up process with individuals as paramount, but that institutions and official policy play a role (Soss and Schram, 2007). So how does the legalization of same sex marriage affect mass opinion? Previous results suggest that legalization leads to an increase in support for the policy. But these analyses treat legalization as constituting a uniform treatment effect. I use data from the 2008, 2012 and 2016 American National Election Surveys to determine if the effect of legalization on opinion is heterogeneous based on psychological predispositions. My results indicate that individuals do respond differently to policy change based on their levels of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism.

**Keywords:** policy feedback; political psychology; authoritarianism; ethnocentrism

*For my Dad*

## **Acknowledgements**

Special Thanks to Steve and the Superfriends!

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# Introduction

Ordinarily, mass attitude change takes place slowly if at all. Many attitudes remain relatively stable over time and even generations. American attitudes on abortion, for example, have remained surprisingly consistent over time. In 1972, 49 percent of Americans favoured access to abortion for poor women and in 2016, 43 percent of Americans felt the same way. Contrast this with attitudes toward same sex marriage. In 1988, a mere 11.6 percent of Americans were in favour of legalizing same sex marriage. In 2016, 59.2 percent were in favour of granting same sex couples the right to marry (Rosenfeld, 2017). This 47 point rise in support represents a remarkable turnaround in mass public opinion.

The drastic change in American attitudes toward same sex marriage has been attributed to a number of factors. Cohort succession, media framing and increasing post-material values are among the most popular (Baunach, 2011; Flores and Barclay, 2016). There is evidence to suggest that all three have contributed to the sharp upswing in support for same sex marriage. More recent research has focused on the effects of same sex marriage legalization on attitudes (Bishin *et al.* 2016; Craig *et al.* 2005; Kreitzen, Hamilton and Tolbert, 2014). These studies generally focus on the dynamic relationship between social norms, policy and opinion. Their results suggest that public opinion formation is not strictly a bottom up process with individuals as paramount, but that institutions and official policy may play a role in actually changing individuals' attitudes (Soss and Schram, 2007). This provides an interesting point of departure given that traditionally, political scientists have operated on the assumption that attitudes, especially those on supposed moral issues, are slow to change, and more likely to be the result of generational replacement than people changing their existing positions.

It seems unlikely that public opinion change on same sex marriage is a purely bottom up process. For one thing, the change has been so rapid, particularly since the first legalization took place. In the period spanning from 2008 – when the first legalization occurred – to 2016, support for same sex marriage increased a staggering 20 percentage points, from 39 to 59 (Sherkat *et al.* 2017). It is difficult to believe that this unprecedented upswing is unrelated to policy implementation. Just as opinion change is not strictly a bottom up process, it is clearly not simply a top down process. If this were

the case policy and opinion would converge perfectly. This, of course, never happens. We are left with the idea that *some* people are affected by policy changes while others are not. What we need to understand is who these people are and how this occurs.

The literature identifies four possible models of policy feedback. The *Backlash Model* involves a decrease in support for the substance of the policy following implementation. The idea being that individuals will display increased hostility toward the policy due to a kneejerk anger response. The *Legitimacy Model* sees the policy change as conferring familiarity on the issue, thus leading to an increase in support. On the individual level, peoples' views on the policy become more favourable, either suddenly or gradually. The emergence of new legal or social norms is internalized leading to lasting attitude change. The *Polarization Model* predicts a heterogeneous reaction producing even greater intensity of belief and attitude distance between two sides. Individuals with opposing views become more hostile toward one another and the policy issue becomes more symbolic of group differences. The *Consensus Model* is based on the idea that policy implementation represents the legal manifestation of an already extant social norm. Attitudes, therefore, remain stable (Flores and Barclay, 2016). In situations such as this, people merely accept that a social norm has become a legal norm. All four of these models reflect the dynamic nature of the relationship between bottom up and top down factors in public opinion formation. Three of the four models, though, assume a uniform response and the fourth assumes opinion polarizes among the electorate but does not increase or decrease on average. Contemporary research in political psychology and the finding that support for same sex marriage has increased rapidly make these expectations difficult to maintain.

The importance of persistent psychological predispositions in the process of political attitude formation is gradually becoming accepted. Personality traits developed in the pre-adult years have proven to be remarkably stable over life cycles (Sears, 1983, 1993). People tend to fall back on these long-held archetypal beliefs to help them interpret new attitude objects (Tesler, 2014). This process is largely unconscious and automatic. Some of the so-called "Big Five" personality traits – agreeableness, neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness and extraversion - have been shown to be strong predictors of different political behaviours (Caprara *et al*, 2006; Mondak, 2010). Likewise, work by Stenner (2005), Kinder and Kam (2016), Sidanius and Pratto (1999)

and Feldman and Stenner (1997) suggests that authoritarian and ethnocentric (or social dominance) orientations strongly predict a broad suite of attitudes and behaviours.

Both ethnocentrism and authoritarianism have been shown to predict prejudice, fear of out groups and desire for social cohesion. Perhaps the most salient difference between the two is the variety of social cohesion desired and the mode of achieving it. The authoritarian notion of social cohesion is undergirded by the primacy of the law, conformity and “uncritical obedience to those in authority” (Stenner, 2005). Ethnocentrists, particularly when primed, display increased hostility toward out groups and a strong need for group superiority (Kinder and Kam, 2016)<sup>1</sup>. To put things simply, the authoritarian is concerned with institutions while the ethnocentric is concerned with intergroup relations.

Given this difference, I expect individuals scoring high in ethnocentrism to respond differently to same sex marriage legalization than those scoring high in authoritarianism. If the assumptions underlying the measures are to hold, authoritarians should be more receptive to policy change. This is due to their purported affection for the status quo and obedience to authority. Ethnocentrists, unhindered by such cross pressures, should display a far less positive reaction. Of course, ethnocentrism and authoritarianism are not mutually exclusive, nor are any predispositions or attitudes. An individual’s process of attitude formation is one involving the combined residues of numerous social and cognitive precursors (Sears, 1993). My purpose here is to determine their individual influences net of other effects.

While some previous studies have examined the effects of psychological predispositions on opinion (Blais, Labbe and St. Vincent, 2011; Dineson, *et al.* 2016) and others have examined the effects of policy on opinion (Pacheco, 2013; Takacs and Szalma, 2017), this study contributes to an emerging area of research that combines the two in pursuit of a more comprehensive theory of policy response and opinion change.

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<sup>1</sup> Following Kinder and Kam (2009) and earlier research, I use the term ethnocentrism to refer to a general underlying psychological predisposition of close ingroup attachment with outgroup discrimination, regardless of whether that is based on ethnicity, religion, race, gender, or in theory any other group distinction. In this sense, ethnocentrism shares many similarities to what social psychologists’ Sidanius and Pratto (1999) term “social dominance orientation”.

This examination, though focused on same sex marriage policy, will help to generate a more general model of policy feedback and changing public opinion overall.

I investigate the heterogeneous effects of same sex marriage legalization on authoritarians and ethnocentrics using three waves of the American National Election Survey. The 2008, 2012 and 2016 waves cover the entire legislative history of same sex marriage in the United States. Using a multi-level mixed effects model with respondents nested in states I estimate the effects of legalization on both groups over time. My results indicate that the effects of legalization on public opinion are indeed heterogeneous based on psychological predispositions. These findings thus contribute to the literature on public opinion, policy, political psychology and minority rights.

# Psychological Predispositions and Attitude Formation

When we speak colloquially about someone's personality, it is normally understood that we are discussing that person's propensity to react in certain ways to certain situations. In the academic literature the terms "personality", "trait" and "predisposition" are sometimes used interchangeably to describe underlying characteristics that are thought to influence peoples' reactions to different stimuli. Recent research reflects the growing consensus that long-standing psychological predispositions remain powerful motivators throughout an individual's life (Dawes *et al.*, 2014; Dineson *et al.* 2016; Sears and Funk, 1999; Tesler, 2014). The central questions permeating this field concern which predispositions are the most persistent, and the extent to which people form their opinions based on their current environment or their predispositions. There exist fairly satisfactory answers to the first question. The second remains largely unanswered.

Personality predispositions are sets of basic values that "apply across domains and situations" (Caprara *et al.* 2006). They precede and are broader than any political values. They concern general notions of right and wrong, in groups and out groups, family values and religion. While some studies (Dawes *et al.* 2014) have found a degree of genetic heritability concerning attitude propensity, most agree that the genetic factor is mediated by the early development of traits. A large body of work demonstrates that children acquire fairly stable attitudes at an early age (Gerber *et al.* 2011; Henry and Sears, 2009; Kinder and Sears, 1981; Sears, 1973, 1983, 1993; Sears and Funk, 1999).

The model of attitude development that demonstrates the most consistency is the *Impressionable Years Model*. According to this model, childhood and adolescent experiential learning have the greatest effect on long-lasting attitudes (Sears, 1983). In fact, the pre-adult environment proves to be twice as influential in the development of attitudes as the adult environment. The degree of influence wielded by these early attitudes at distant time points greatly depends on the level to which the attitude has become "crystallized" (Sears, 2009). According to Sears (2009) an attitude is crystallized if it is psychologically well-formed and meaningful to the individual. Although attitude

crystallization may occur in adulthood, it is much more likely during the formative years and under certain circumstances.

Although the attitudes that become crystallized for each individual are somewhat context dependent, there is convincing evidence as to which types of attitudes are the most persistent. Party identification, ideology and prejudice have regularly shown to be the most enduring values (Gerber *et al.* 2011; Sears, 1993). Additionally, opinions regarding religion and morality have demonstrated surprising stability over life cycles. Interestingly for my purposes, specific issue attitudes and policy preferences have proven to be far less stable (Tesler, 2014). In short, predispositions appear to be much more crystallized than policy preferences. Many policy objects, while being quite specific in their aims, contain a variety of symbols, some of which may be contradictory (Sears, 1993). In these instances, individuals may display heterogeneous reactions to policy implementation based on the relative crystallization of different predispositions.

## Heterogeneous Policy Feedback

Each of the four major models of policy feedback discussed earlier – the *backlash model*, the *legitimacy model*, the *consensus model* and the *polarization model* – have clear limitations for understanding changing attitudes toward same sex marriage. The *backlash model*, the *legitimacy model*, and the *consensus model* all rest on assumptions of a uniform attitude response from the public in the face of policy change. Substantial research has shown peoples' political attitudes and the likelihood of attitude change to be heterogeneous based on a number of factors (Baunach, 2011; Craig *et al.* 2005; Flores and Barclay, 2016; Kinder and Kam, 2016). This does not mean these models should be entirely disregarded. Far from it. Instead, I propose that a comprehensive model of policy feedback should draw on all three models, and that there are observable differences among individuals based on a pairing of psychological predispositions and attitude objects.

The *polarization model* provides a useful jumping off point for an expanded theory based on its recognition of the heterogeneity of policy feedback. However, the model assumes the heterogeneity to be grounded in increased conflict over the policy. The reality of policy feedback is far more nuanced. Some individuals will follow the *legitimacy model*, others the *consensus* or *backlash models*. It is predicting which individuals will follow which model in which policy context that will ultimately buttress any expanded theory.

Previous studies have already shown that policy feedback concerning same sex marriage is heterogeneous based on demographic characteristics (Baunach, 2011; Bishin *et al.* 2016; Takacs and Szalma, 2015). Evangelicals and strong conservatives tend to exhibit some backlash while women and Democrats respond most positively. The heterogeneous effects of psychological predispositions have yet to be explored. The demonstrated persistence of certain predispositions means there is good reason to expect predictable effects on policy attitudes.

Testing this theory using same sex marriage legalization, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism has several advantages. First, the different concepts of social cohesion inherent in each predisposition lead to differing theoretical expectations concerning policy feedback and same sex marriage. Authoritarians are prone to both legal

conformity and intolerance of difference (Stenner, 2005), meaning the legalization of same sex marriage exposes them to cross pressures. Ethnocentrics, presumably having a weaker attachment to the law, may react differently. Second, both ethnocentrism and authoritarianism are strong predictors of prejudice. If legalization has a positive effect on these individuals, it has important implications for future policy considerations and minority rights. Third, as a so-called “moral” policy issue, same sex marriage legalization should be more likely to tap into deep-seated predispositions than, say, corporate tax policy.



# Authoritarianism and Opinion on Same Sex Marriage

Examining the effect of same sex marriage legalization on opinion brings into relief two assumed manifestations of authoritarianism. Authoritarianism has been highly correlated with both an affinity for conformity or “sameness”, and with respect for authority and the status quo (Stenner, 2005). In the case of same sex marriage legalization, these two values appear to come into conflict. Does legalization elicit a backlash effect from authoritarians, given their fear of individuality? Or do they accept the change in the status quo and become more supportive of same sex marriage?

In studies using both survey and experimental data, authoritarianism has shown to be a remarkably stable predictor of a broad suite of attitudes. In addition to valuing conformity and the status quo, authoritarians tend to see the world as a dangerous place, and they view expressions of individuality as threatening to the social order (Feldman and Stenner, 1997; Stenner 2005). Sociologists, psychologists and political scientists alike have invoked authoritarian predispositions as an explanatory factor for prejudice, intolerance and a readiness to be punitive toward “otherness” (Cohrs and Ibler, 2009; Feldman, 2003). The findings concerning authoritarianism and belief in the unquestioning acceptance of authority are equally convincing (Stenner, 2005). Both of these features of the authoritarian value system revolve around the desire for social cohesion. When the law and predispositions toward uniformity align in relation to an attitude object, opinion amongst authoritarians is likely to remain firm. But when the law comes to stand in contradiction to the propensity for moral consistency, authoritarians find themselves in cognitive limbo. So how do they resolve this quandary and why? To answer this question requires the melding of theoretical perspectives concerning psychological predispositions and policy feedback.

A growing body of literature has been dedicated to the concept of the “activation” of psychological predispositions (Feldman and Stenner, 1997; Stenner, 2005). Put simply, many predispositions do not manifest in behaviour or attitude unless confronted with certain stimuli. For authoritarians, it has been suggested that “normative threat” constitutes the most important galvanizing context. Stenner (2005) identifies normative threats as involving “moral decay” general disorder and national decline. This theoretical model posits that, among authoritarians, prejudice toward marginalized groups becomes

more salient in the presence of threats to social norms and institutions. High authoritarians living in areas with high immigration rates have demonstrated stronger anti-immigrant sentiments (Stenner, 2005). They also tend to respond negatively to ideological difference and challenges to the status quo (Feldman and Stenner, 1997). The advantage of Feldman and Stenner's model is that it enables us to examine the effects of intervening variables on attitude formation and political behaviour. The majority of studies have employed increased immigration as an intervening variable. For my purposes, I employ a change in legal norms and a challenge to the status quo – same sex marriage.

The legalization of same sex marriage most certainly represents a challenge to the status quo. It means redefining traditional conceptions of family and social life more generally, while revamping the entire institution of marriage. Given this, it might be reasonable to assume that those scoring high in authoritarianism would react negatively to the legalization of same sex marriage, thus following the *Backlash Model*. However, convincing research on the persistency of predispositions and the malleability of policy attitudes complicates matters.

Returning to the notion of crystallized and non-crystallized attitudes provides useful insight. The literature consistently supports the idea that predispositions are crystallized and policy attitudes are not (Sears, 1993; Tesler, 2014). Although there is a decided moral element contained in the implementation of same sex marriage policy, it may not in itself constitute a sweeping change in the broader moral fabric of society. Individuals' notions concerning what represents such a change are surely mediated by a number of factors including levels of religion and conservatism. But it seems reasonable to suggest that, while some may see granting same sex couples the right to marry as a sweeping change, many others would see it as a more tangential shift, albeit one they may oppose. The policy change represents a relatively minor shift in social cohesion, far less significant than, say, extension of the franchise, increased immigration or extensive redistribution. This means that authoritarians may be able to support the policy while maintaining their overarching crystallized values. Obedience to authority, however, is clearer. Opposing a law may require a far more meaningful shift away from authoritarian values. Where support for a new and inclusive policy may constitute a slight cognitive alteration, opposition to the law may, for some authoritarians, represent a much more fundamental departure from the authoritarian concept of what enforces social cohesion.

Taking all this into account, what model of policy feedback will high authoritarians conform to? The vast literature on the persistence of predispositions as opposed to policy attitudes makes it reasonable to predict that they will follow the *Legitimacy Model*. That is, they will become more supportive of same sex marriage as the time since legalization increases. Work by Sears and others, spanning several decades, has established convincingly the long-standing nature of certain early acquired traits.

Following literature that supports a moderating effect of policy on opinion (Bishin *et al*, 2015; Craig *et al*. 2016) and literature that indicates the persistence of predispositions, it is reasonable to predict that same sex marriage legalization will affect authoritarian attitudes similarly. In line with Feldman and Stenner's model, I expect that policy change will serve as an activating factor amongst authoritarians. However, due to the dispositional cross-pressures faced by authoritarians concerning legalization/same sex marriage, I predict, not a decrease in support, but an increase. This is due to the differing levels of attitude crystallization between deep-seated predispositions and policy attitudes. Thus, in concert with Sears and others, I expect the predisposition toward the law to supersede the policy attitude toward same sex marriage. More specifically, authoritarianism mediates individuals' attitudes toward same sex marriage and legalization moderates them. It is therefore likely that authoritarianism will correlate negatively with support for same sex marriage. It is also likely, though, that following legalization, support for same sex marriage will increase among authoritarians. An interaction between authoritarianism and the number of years since legalization is expected to produce a positive correlation.

### *Hypotheses*

*H1. Individuals with stronger authoritarian predispositions will be more likely to oppose same sex marriage*

*H2. As the time since legalization increases, authoritarians will become more supportive of same sex marriage*

# Social Dominance Orientation, Ethnocentrism and Opinion on Same Sex Marriage

One of the most fundamental characteristics of the human species is that we organize ourselves into groups. The forms these groups can take are almost innumerable. An individual may identify as a woman or a Catholic or a Latina or an environmentalist or a member of a choir, or all of these concurrently. An equally fundamental characteristic of human beings is that our groups are almost invariably organized hierarchically. Societies are generally constituted of one or more hegemonic dominant groups as well as one or more subordinate groups. These “group-based social hierarchies” revolve around the distribution of positive or negative “social value” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). Social value in this case is conceived of as anything from material resources to political influence to housing access to employment opportunities to the tone of media coverage. The inequality resulting from the distribution pattern of social value evokes different reactions from different individuals. It turns out that some, if not many, individuals are in favour of the hierarchical structure of intergroup relations. This can help us to understand attitudes toward same sex marriage policy and gays and lesbians more generally.

From this realization stems Sidanius and Pratto’s conception of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO). Their SDO scale consists of questions probing individuals’ feelings about equality, and is meant to measure the degree to which respondents “desire and support group-based social hierarchy” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). SDO has shown to be a remarkably stable predictor of opposition to *any* policy, belief or ideology that affects the distribution of social value. Indeed, the breadth of predictive power displayed by the SDO scale constitutes its primary strength. Instead of being limited to examining intergroup relations between races or between religious groups, SDO permits the analysis of relations between groups on a higher level. But which group identities are most salient concerning behaviour, attitudes and intergroup relations?

Somewhat counterintuitively, results suggest that groups based on the most arbitrary differences are the most salient when it comes to intergroup relations. Of the three sets of group distinctions identified by Sidanius and Pratto (1999) – the age set,

the gender set and the arbitrary set – the arbitrary set has been responsible for by far the most conflict and oppression. Individual identities regarding these groups, which include race, religion and sexual orientation, have shown to be highly stable, but also highly context sensitive. In other words, the group distinctions that are salient for behaviour and attitudes are dependent to a large degree on exogenous factors like immigration, redistribution and policy change. Importantly, SDO takes into account the fact that “the human mind both forms and is formed by human society” (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). So, SDO constitutes a mediator of behaviour and attitudes centred on support for intergroup dominance and intergroup inequality. However, it does not disregard the moderating effect of the environment concerning the salience of specific group identities (Ho *et al*, 2015). This represents a significant improvement on antecedent theories.

Ethnocentrism, a subset of SDO, seeks to tease out some of its most important constituent elements. Both are cognitively focused theories dealing with individuals’ tendencies regarding intergroup relations and social hierarchies. Ethnocentrism, though, narrows the focus from broad general predispositions toward the structure of group hierarchies to examine a more specifically delineated set of predispositions toward perceived in groups and out groups.

In terms of social science research, Sumner (1906) was the first to introduce the concept of ethnocentrism. He saw the hostility between groups as a result of realistic group conflict. That is to say, certain groups are in competition for actual resources seen as necessary to the group’s survival. “Groups have incompatible goals and compete for scarce resources” (Sumner, 1906). To put things in a more contemporary perspective, all these groups are participating in a competitive process for control over the overarching social and political apparatuses. Two problems emerge concerning this theoretical perspective. First, it fails to explain “general” prejudice. Second, it assumes that *both* in group solidarity and out group hostility result exclusively from conflict.

Further studies, notably those by Tajfel (1981) and Tajfel and Turner (1979), strongly suggest that actual conflict need not be present in order for in group solidarity to occur. In fact, his minimal group experiments demonstrated over and over again that individuals would display in group favoritism, even when the groups were allocated based on the most trivial delineation, i.e. a coin flip. People from all walks of life

consistently displayed in group favouritism through their distribution of monetary rewards between individuals in their respective in and out groups. This despite the lack of any real attachment to fellow group members and absent any form of competition (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). The goal of the individuals, whether conscious or unconscious seemed to be to enhance the difference between the two groups in a way that favoured their own respective group. While highly illustrative of the pervasiveness of ethnocentrism, these experiments are not meant to provide a comprehensive framework for its nature and origins. For that we must return briefly to authoritarianism.

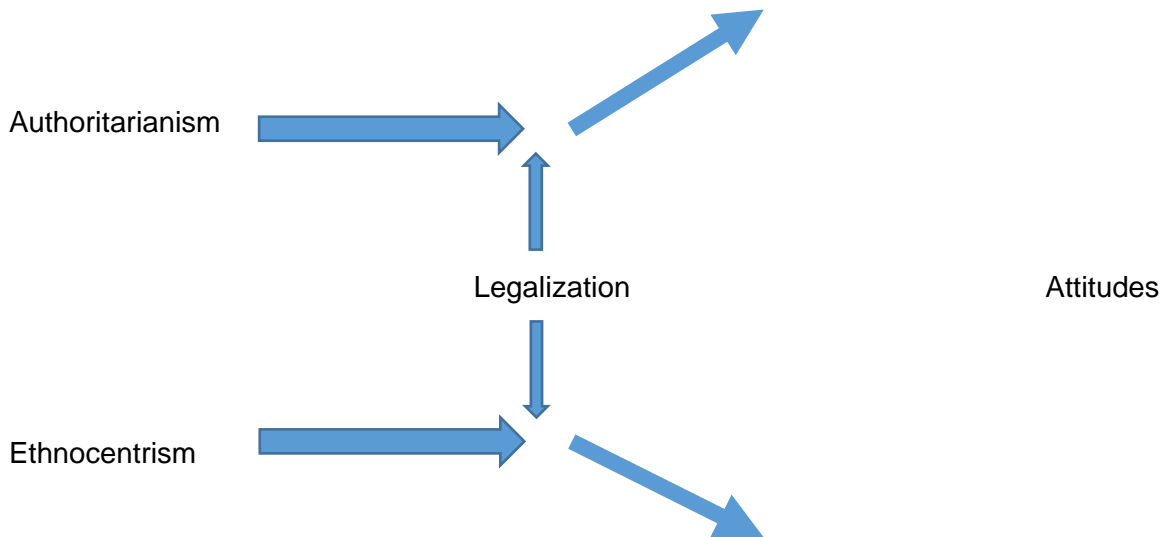
Work linking ethnocentrism and authoritarianism has a long history. Although they are likely related, there is good reason to believe that meaningful distinctions exist. Adorno and colleagues (1950) adduced the theory that ethnocentric attitudes were a function of the authoritarian predisposition. Their F-scale measure reliably predicted broad rather than specific prejudice. Individuals who disliked Mexicans were more likely to dislike Jews and African Americans as well. The results were consistent, but measurement and scale problems meant the work was largely discredited. Over a half century later, though, Stenner generated strikingly similar results employing a much more reliable measure of authoritarianism. Her work indicates that authoritarianism can be used to predict intolerance toward a wide range of perceived out groups. This research is convincing, and helps to highlight what is perhaps the most salient distinction between ethnocentrism and authoritarianism.

As with authoritarianism and other predispositions, there is thought to be a significant genetic component to ethnocentrism. The remainder is likely a result of social learning. Children naturally classify the world into groups (Kinder and Kam, 2009). They do not need to be told that different colours are different, even if they do not yet know the words denoting the colours. In fact, some scholars see the formation of stereotypes as “part of basic and entirely normal information processing” (Wilson, 1976). But it is the social environment in which the children develop what may provide the impetus for the development of an underlying psychological structure. Attitudes are transmitted from parents to children in what is a largely passive manner, and absorbed naturally into their psyches. The overarching theme in this research is that, like authoritarianism, ethnocentrism is a deep-seated psychological structure that predisposes individuals toward both out group hostility *and* in group solidarity. So how does this matter concerning opinion and same sex marriage legalization?

Both SDO and the theory of ethnocentrism recognize the importance of context in dictating the salience of a given social identity. For SDO, the activating context needs to be one in which the distribution of social value is affected. More specifically, individuals high in SDO will be more likely to respond negatively toward a policy that alleviates inegalitarianism between groups. The legalization of same sex marriage surely constitutes an example of this. The granting of marriage rights to a group previously denied those rights means that the group hierarchy is shifted slightly in favour of what is seen as a subordinate group. For ethnocentrism to be activated, individuals require what Kinder and Kam call “a clear and demonizable adversary” (2009). The effects are all the more significant when an issue is framed in moral terms. A threat to group cohesion in the form of a drastic shift in moral norms is especially salient to high ethnocentrics (Kinder and Kam, 2009). This is particularly true when the issue commands a high degree of media attention and is considered highly polarizing. The legalization of same sex marriage checks all the boxes in terms of what ethnocentrics should theoretically react to.

I here employ Kinder and Kam’s measure of ethnocentrism, not simply as a proxy for SDO, but as an instrument for gauging the effects of one of its biggest constituent elements. Following the theoretical expectations of Sidanius and Pratto (1999), I expect the legalization of same sex marriage to affect the attitudes of high ethnocentrics toward same sex marriage policy. In concert with their work as well as that produced by Kinder and Kam (2009), it is reasonable to expect an activation effect. Absent the dispositional cross pressures faced by authoritarians, and in concert with the work of Sears and others, I expect ethnocentrics to conform to the *Backlash Model* of policy feedback. The reallocation of social value resultant from expanded rights represents a threat to the dominant group (heterosexuals). It may be palatable for high SDOs/ethnocentrics to grant gays and lesbians rights in the abstract, but when new legal norms signal a broad change to normalcy they will likely fear an increase in overt homosexual behaviour. In other words, gays might be seen as acceptable as long as they “know their place”. The legalization of same sex marriage signals the emergence of a new and more egalitarian social hierarchy in which gays and lesbians constitute a legitimate threat. Hence, it is likely that, not only will high ethnocentrics be less likely to support same sex marriage pre-legalization, but that an interaction between ethnocentrism and the number of years same sex marriage has been legal in an

individual's state will produce a negative correlation with support for same sex marriage. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model.



**Figure 1** Theoretical model

*H3. Individuals with stronger ethnocentric predispositions will be more likely to oppose same sex marriage*

*H4. Ethnocentrists will display a backlash effect following legalization and support for same sex marriage will decrease*



## Analytical Method

To test my hypotheses, I employ mixed effects multilevel models with respondents nested in states and years. I first examine a baseline model with controls in order to test the robustness of the correlations. My subsequent models contain variables representing the number of years same sex marriage has been legal in each state at the time of each survey. I interact this variable with authoritarianism and ethnocentrism in the presence of controls in order to test my second and third hypotheses. Additionally, I include interaction terms with conservatism and religiosity, two characteristics associated with hostility toward same sex marriage. The first set of models regresses support for same sex marriage legalization on the independent variables. The second set of models have as the dependent variable a feeling thermometer towards gay men and lesbians. This is included in order to discern whether the attitude effects of policy extend beyond support for the policy to support for the subjects of the policy.

## Data

The individual level data are taken from three waves of the American National Election Survey (ANES). To create the required dataset, I merged the 2008, 2012 and 2016 datasets, which cover the period from the first state legalization of same sex marriage to the 2016 presidential election. These data were chosen for their reliable measures of psychological predispositions, opinion on same sex marriage and geographic coding. State level data on the number of years same sex marriage has been legal in each state is taken from the Human Rights Campaign website.

## Measures

*Support for same sex marriage:* In each wave of the ANES respondents were asked whether they support giving same sex couples the right to marry. A positive response was coded as 1 and all other responses are coded as 0. "Don't know" or refused to answer is coded as NA. Individuals tied to these responses are not included in the analysis.

*Feeling Thermometer:* The feeling thermometer measure asks respondents to describe the temperature of their feeling toward certain groups on a scale of 1-100 with 1 being the coldest and 100 being the warmest. The specific question of interests asks respondents how they feel toward “gay men and lesbians”. This variable has been recoded on a 0-1 scale.

*Authoritarianism:* To gauge authoritarianism I employ a measure originally developed by Feldman and Stenner (1997). The measure is a 0-1 index based on four questions in the ANES concerning child-rearing values. The questions present respondents with choices between two opposing values: independence or respect for elders, curiosity or good manners, obedience or self-reliance, and being considerate or well behaved. Values associated with authoritarianism are respect for elders, good manners, obedience and well behaved. Values associated with autonomy are independence, curiosity, self-reliance and being considerate. The authoritarian index is a scale of 0-1 based on the combined responses to the four questions. For instance, a score of 0.25 indicates that the respondent answered one of the four questions with the authoritarian value.

*Ethnocentrism:* Following measures originally developed by Kinder and Kam (2009), I construct my ethnocentrism index using questions asking how respondents rate different races on a scale of “Lazy” to “Hardworking”. For ease of analysis I recode the variables on a 0 to 1 scale with 1 being the most hardworking. I then subtract out group stereotypes from in group stereotypes creating a scale ranging from -1 to 1 with 1 being the most strongly ethnocentric.

*Legalization of Same Sex Marriage:* This state level variable represents the number of years same sex marriage had been legal in each state at the time of the survey.

## **Controls**

*Conservatism:* This ideological self-placement scale ranges from 1 being “very liberal” to 7 being “very conservative”. It has been recoded on a 0-1 scale. I expect this variable to be a strong negative predictor of support for same sex marriage and increased support in the face of legalization.

*Religiosity:* Instead of using self-classifying variables that measure the importance of religion in respondents lives, I utilize the survey question regarding how often respondents attend religious services. This has proven in the past to represent a more accurate gauge of a respondent's piety. The variable is coded from 1 to 7 with 1 being "Never" and 7 being "More than once a week". This has been recoded as 0-1. I expect this variable to be one of the more influential factors concerning support for same sex marriage. Numerous previous studies have shown that highly religious individuals are resistant to changes in the moral policy arena.

*Education:* In the ANES this variable contains 16 possible responses from "less than grade 1" to "doctorate degree". Again this has been recoded as a 0-1 scale. It is expected that this variable will correlate positively with support for same sex marriage and increased support post-legalization.

*Gender(male):* This variable records the respondents gender. "Male" is coded as 1 and "Female" is coded as 0. Male gender will likely be correlated with decreased support for same sex marriage.

*Age:* The combined three waves of the ANES contain respondents of the ages 18-94. For comparative purposes I have recoded this on a 0-1 scale. As older individuals tend to be more conservative, this is expected to correlate with decreased support for same sex marriage.

# Results

## Support for Same Sex Marriage Legalization

Plot 1 presents the percentage of ANES survey respondents that supported same sex marriage in the United States from 2004 to 2016. To create this plot, I subset the surveys into separate datasets containing only high authoritarians (0.75-1) and high ethnocentrics (0.5-1). The figures in the plot represent the percentage of respondents from each dataset that reported supporting same sex marriage. In concert with previous results, the overall rise in support for same sex marriage is striking. During this 12 year period, support among all respondents increased from 34 to 59 percent. In accordance with expectations, high ethnocentrics display lower levels of support than the general population (note: the 2004 sample did not contain enough high ethnocentrics for a meaningful comparison). High authoritarians report fairly low levels of support in 2004, but among this group, the period 2004 to 2012 saw the most significant sustained growth in support. In sum, the overall increase represents a substantial liberalization of views among, not only the general population, but authoritarians and ethnocentrics as well.

Plot 1.

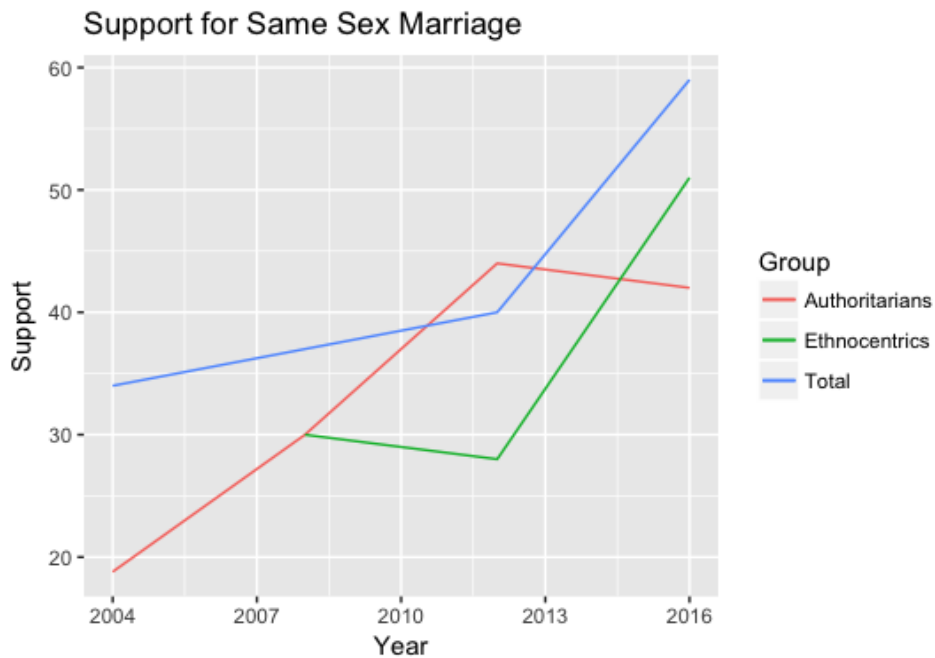


Table 1 shows the bivariate results for all my independent variables. In concert with my first and third hypotheses my two variables of theoretical interest –

authoritarianism and ethnocentrism – are the strongest negative predictors of support. Somewhat surprisingly, neither conservative ideology nor religiosity are significant predictors. As expected, education is a strong positive predictor of support for same sex marriage and age a strong negative predictor.

**Table 1 Bivariate Results: Support for Same Sex Marriage**

		Odds Ratios (SE)						
		logistic				generalized linear mixed-effects		
Authoritarianism	0.330*** (0.083)							
Ethnocentrism	0.413*** (0.089)							
Conservative		0.009 (0.121)						
Religiosity			0.035 (0.124)					
Education				2.623*** (0.093)				
Male					1.257*** (0.037)			
Age						0.681*** (0.085)		
Years Legal							1.175*** (0.014)	
Constant	1.573*** (0.052)	0.864*** (0.020)	12.355*** (0.073)	3.234*** (0.062)	0.479*** (0.061)	0.745*** (0.027)	1.102*** (0.041)	0.672*** (0.050)
Observations	10,101	10,801	9,623	7,361	10,607	11,858	8,069	11,295
Log Likelihood	-6,869.887	-7,390.454	-5,692.953	-4,553.618	-7,270.672	-8,156.767	-5,579.641	-7,610.387
Akaike Inf. Crit.	13,743.770	14,784.910	11,389.910	9,111.236	14,545.340	16,317.530	11,163.280	15,226.770
Bayesian Inf. Crit.								15,248.770

Note: \*\*\*p<0.01

Absent other effects, it appears that males are more likely to support same sex marriage, as are those living in states where same sex marriage has been legal for a longer period of time.

Table 2 shows full models with controls predicting support for same sex marriage in the United States from 2008 to 2016. I present three models for this dependent variable. The first is a baseline logistic model predicting support for same sex marriage based on psychological predispositions and demographic characteristics. The second model is multilevel and includes the variable indicating the number of years same sex marriage had been legal in the respondents state at the time of the survey. The third model introduces interaction terms between the years of legality variable and authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, religiosity and conservatism. This follows my expectation that policy feedback related to same sex marriage legalization will be mediated by psychological predispositions.

The first model illustrates a heterogeneity of public opinion based on psychological predispositions. Both authoritarianism and ethnocentrism maintain their strong and significant negative effects in the presence of the controls. In fact, they remain the two strongest negative predictors. As with the bivariate results, neither conservatism nor religiosity achieves statistical significance. Looking at the other covariates, the positive effect of education more than doubles in the presence of the other variables and being of male gender remains a positive predictor. In contrast to the bivariate findings age is not a significant predictor of support for same sex marriage, net of other factors.

In accordance with theoretical expectations, the second model demonstrates that the number of years same sex marriage has been legal is a significant positive predictor of support. For every additional year of legality, an individual becomes more likely to support same sex marriage. Regarding the other covariates in this model, they remain largely unchanged from the baseline model. The negative predictive effect of authoritarianism is marginally increased, while that of ethnocentrism is marginally decreased. Male gender and education remain significant positive predictors.

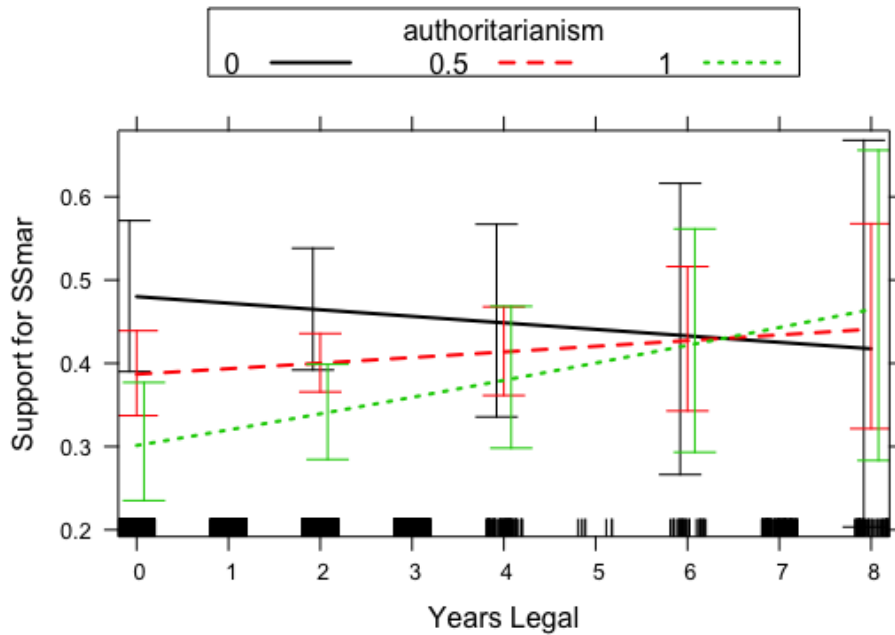
**Table 2**      **Multilevel Model: Same Sex Marriage Support**

	Odds Ratios (SE)		
Authoritarianism	0.589** (0.230)	0.576** (0.232)	0.490* (0.285)
Ethnocentrism	0.702*** (0.270)	0.675** (0.273)	0.506 (0.394)
Conservative	0.013 (0.305)	0.013 (0.307)	0.021 (0.424)
Religiosity	0.033 (0.349)	0.033 (0.351)	0.023 (0.498)
Education	11.293*** (0.518)	11.165*** (0.520)	11.302*** (0.521)
Male	1.327*** (0.116)	1.332*** (0.116)	1.314*** (0.117)
Age	0.182 (0.321)	0.178 (0.324)	0.176 (0.325)
Years Legal		1.050*** (0.041)	1.034*** (0.152)
Authoritarianism:Years Legal			1.123*** (0.114)
Ethnocentrism:Years Legal			1.171*** (0.149)
Conservative:Years Legal			0.800*** (0.152)
Religiosity:Years Legal			1.197*** (0.169)
Constant	67.604*** (0.348)	69.605*** (0.366)	74.032*** (0.434)
Observations	1,780	1,780	1,780
Log Likelihood	-927.303	-924.534	-921.985
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,874.607	1,873.067	1,875.969
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	1,929.450	1,938.880	1,963.719

Note: \*p\*\*p\*\*\*p<0.01

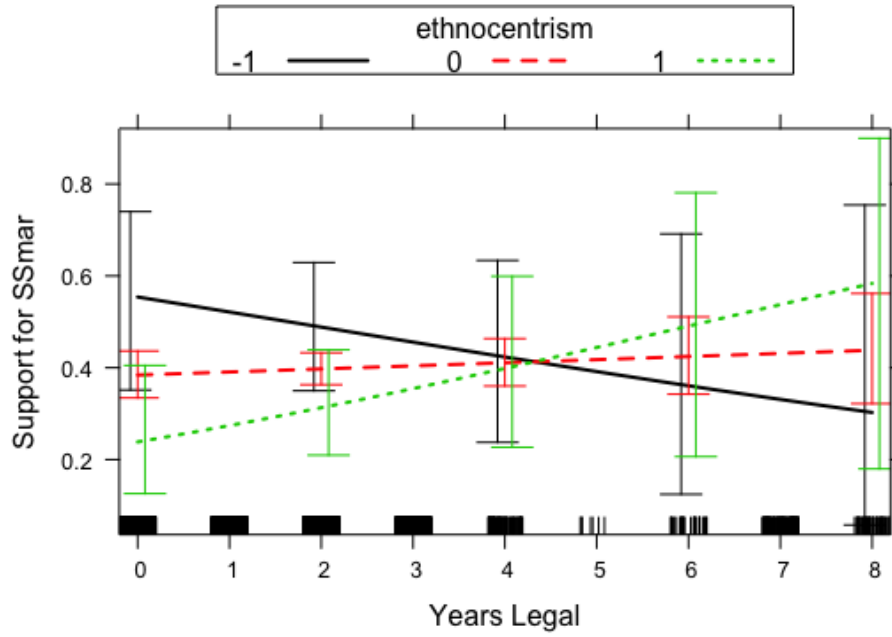
Turning now to the third model and the interaction terms, the interaction between authoritarianism and years legal is indeed a positive one, confirming my second hypothesis. The model indicates that the amount of time since legalization has an even more profound positive effect on high authoritarians than the rest of the general public. For each year same sex marriage has been legal, high authoritarians grow more likely to support legalization. The slope for the significant term is represented by the dotted green line in Plot 2. The interaction between years

**Plot 2**

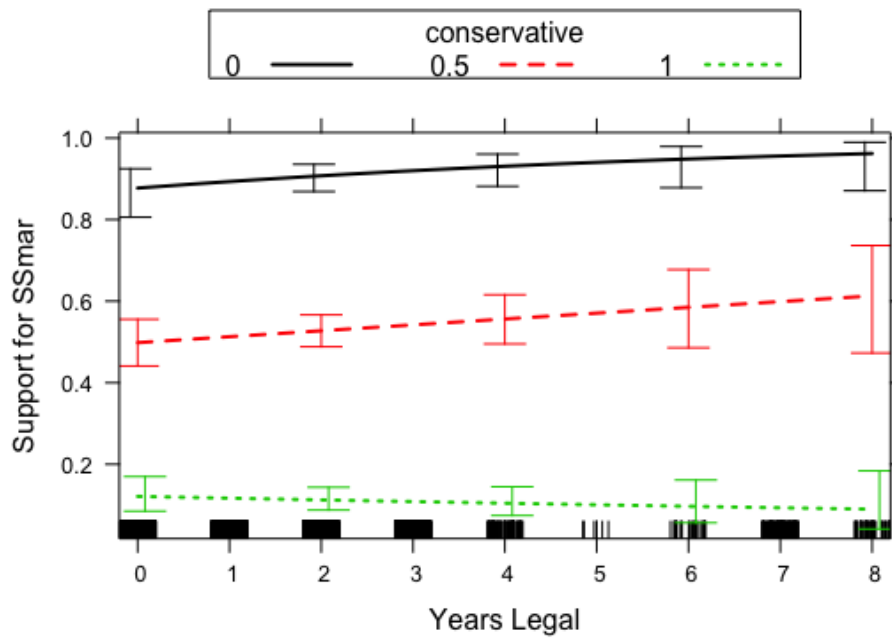




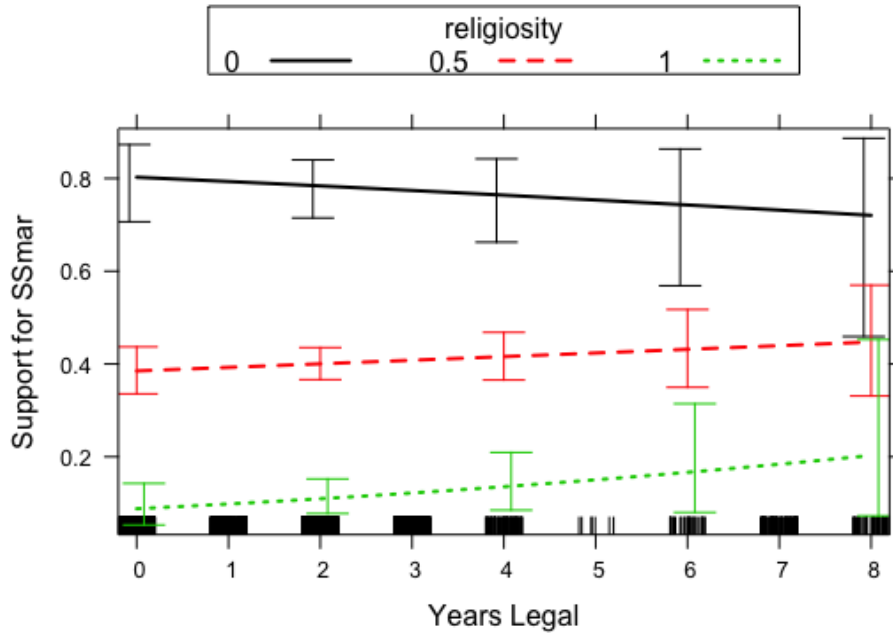
Plot 3



Plot 4



**Plot 5**



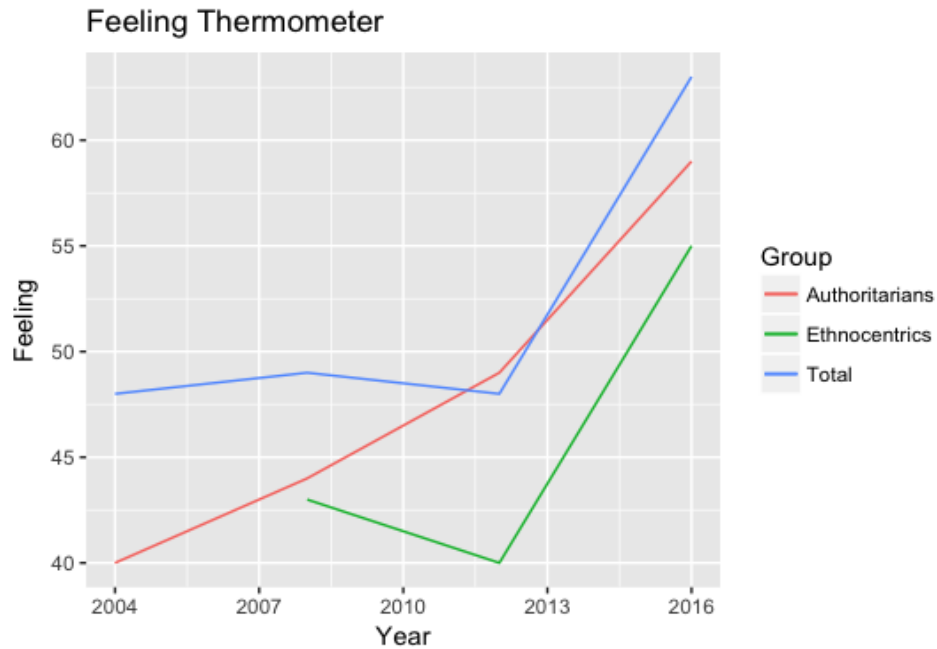
legal and ethnocentrism is significant as well, though not in the expected direction. It appears that high ethnocentrics are affected even more positively than authoritarians by the amount of time same sex marriage has been legalized. My fourth hypothesis must thus be rejected. The other two interactions are also of interest, however. The only observable backlash effect occurs among ideological conservatives, who become less supportive of the policy the longer it has been implemented. Highly religious individuals on the other hand seem to be even more positively affected by the time since legalization than authoritarians and ethnocentrics.

## Feeling Thermometer Towards Gay Men and Lesbians

Plot 6 shows the change in feeling thermometer responses among ANES respondents from 2004 to 2016. The figures presented in the plot are taken from the same data as those in plot 1. They represent the mean feeling thermometer scores from these datasets and the full dataset represented by the slope for “total”. While the plot shows a fairly significant increase in positive feelings, the shift among all respondents is less pronounced than that associated with support for same sex marriage. Respondents high in authoritarianism display a stable upward trend in their feelings toward gays and lesbians, moving from 40 to nearly 60 percent support in the 12 year period. Positive

feelings toward gays and lesbians have also increased notably among ethnocentrics, albeit in a less consistent fashion.

### Plot 6



Looking at the bivariate results, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism, as with support for same sex marriage, are significant negative predictors. In contrast to the analyses on support for same sex marriage, though, both conservative ideology and religiosity are significant negative predictors of positive feelings toward gays and lesbians. A one unit increase in conservatism corresponds to a 51 point decrease in the feeling thermometer, while a one unit increase in religiosity corresponds to a 31 point decrease. As was the case with support for same sex marriage, being of male gender positively predicts feelings toward gays and lesbians. Age is a significant negative predictor, while the amount of time since legalization has a small positive effect.

**Table 3 Bivariate Results: Feeling Thermometer**

	Coefficients (SE)							
	normal				linear mixed-effects			
Authoritarianism	-0.180***							
	(0.011)							
Ethnocentrism		-0.167***						
		(0.012)						
Conservative			-0.517***					
			(0.012)					
Religiosity				-0.313***				
				(0.016)				
Education					0.138***			
					(0.013)			
Male						0.087***		
						(0.005)		
Age							-0.074***	
							(0.012)	
Years Legal								0.023***
								(0.002)
Constant	0.651***	0.556***	0.854***	0.672***	0.472***	0.502***	0.596***	0.514***
	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Observations	10,123	10,631	9,191	6,672	9,664	10,802	7,297	10,321
Log Likelihood	-1,292.849	-1,367.168	-474.618	-754.156	-1,226.267	-1,360.945	-933.822	-1,304.268
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,589.698	2,738.336	953.236	1,512.312	2,456.535	2,725.889	1,871.643	2,616.536
Bayesian Inf. Crit.								2,645.504

Note: \*p\*\*p\*\*\*p<0.01

Table 4 contains the full model with controls and multilevel models with interaction terms. Although the effects of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism are slightly mediated by the controls, both retain their significant negative effects. A one unit increase in authoritarianism predicts more than a nine percent decrease in positive affect. For ethnocentrism, the effect is slightly stronger with a one unit increase predicting a ten percent decrease. The effects of religiosity and conservatism are likewise mediated by the controls, but both remain negative and significant. Education, as well as predicting support for the policy, strongly predicts positive affect toward gays

and lesbians. In contrast to the models dealing with policy support, age has a significant negative estimated effect on feelings. Males are again more likely than females to report warm feelings toward gays and lesbians.

The second model indicates that the number of years since legalization does not have a significant effect on feelings toward gays and lesbians net of other factors. In this model, the effects of authoritarianism and ethnocentrism are slightly decreased when compared to the baseline model. Conservatism, religiosity and male gender all retain their directions and largely retain their effect sizes. The effect of education is slightly increased in the presence of the years legal variable, while age retains its negative effect, albeit slightly diminished.

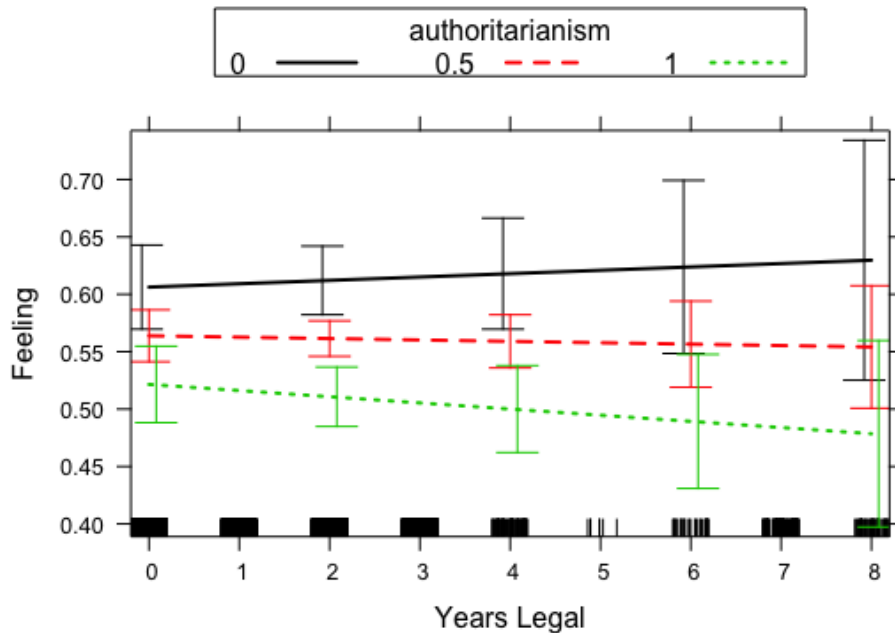
**Table 4**      **Multilevel Model: Feeling Thermometer**

	Coefficients (SE)		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Authoritarianism	-0.086*** (0.023)	-0.086*** (0.023)	-0.080*** (0.027)
Ethnocentrism	-0.089*** (0.027)	-0.093*** (0.027)	-0.129*** (0.038)
Conservative	-0.405*** (0.028)	-0.400*** (0.028)	-0.385*** (0.038)
Religiosity	-0.303*** (0.035)	-0.298*** (0.035)	-0.167*** (0.048)
Education	0.263*** (0.050)	0.254*** (0.050)	0.242*** (0.050)
Male	0.086*** (0.011)	0.086*** (0.011)	0.087*** (0.011)
Age	-0.127*** (0.031)	-0.127*** (0.031)	-0.122*** (0.031)
Years Legal		0.002 (0.004)	0.044*** (0.013)
Authoritarianism:Years Legal			-0.008 (0.011)
Ethnocentrism:Years Legal			0.018 (0.014)
Conservative:Years Legal			-0.010 (0.013)
Religiosity:Years Legal			-0.064*** (0.016)

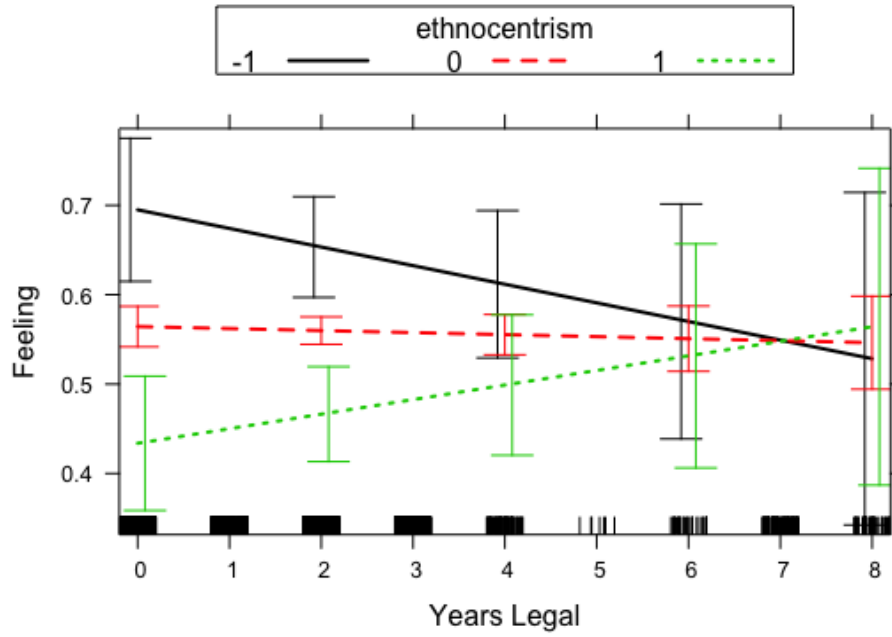
Constant	0.995*** (0.049)	0.982*** (0.051)	0.896*** (0.045)
Observations	1,785	1,785	1,785
Log Likelihood	9.783	7.037	3.659
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2.434	11.926	26.683
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	62.793	83.259	119.965
Note:	* p**p***p<0.01		

Looking at the interaction terms in the third model, neither the term including authoritarianism, nor the term including ethnocentrism is statistically significant. This is in contrast to the model for policy support in which both ethnocentrism:years legal and authoritarianism:years legal displayed significance. In fact, the only interaction term reaching statistical significance is that between years legal and religiosity. This interaction generates an estimated negative effect of time since legalization on feelings toward gays and lesbians among the highly religious. This represents the only group to display a discernible backlash effect regarding feelings toward gays and lesbians. Plots 5 through 8 visually illustrate the interaction effects. Note particularly the green dotted line in Plot 10 which represents the significant term.

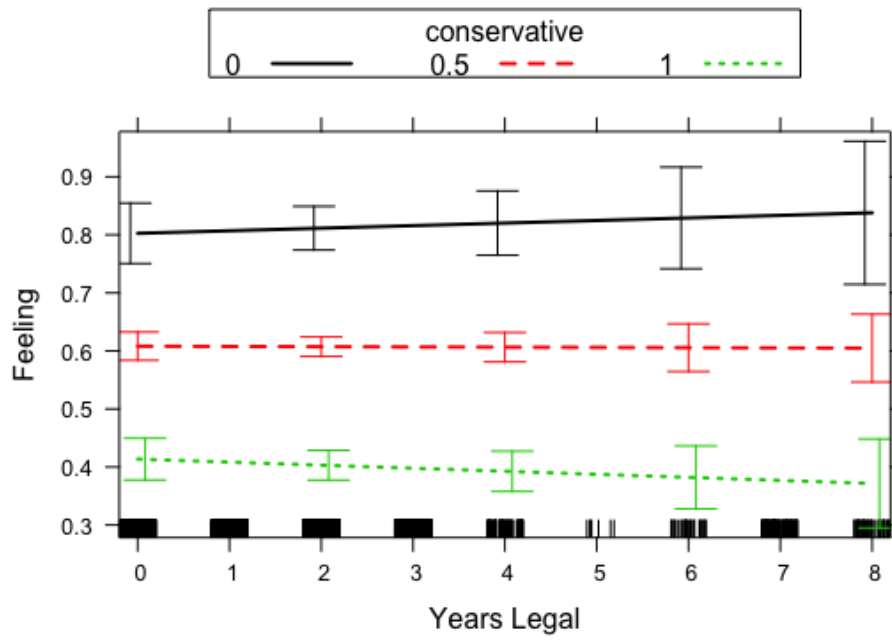
**Plot 7**



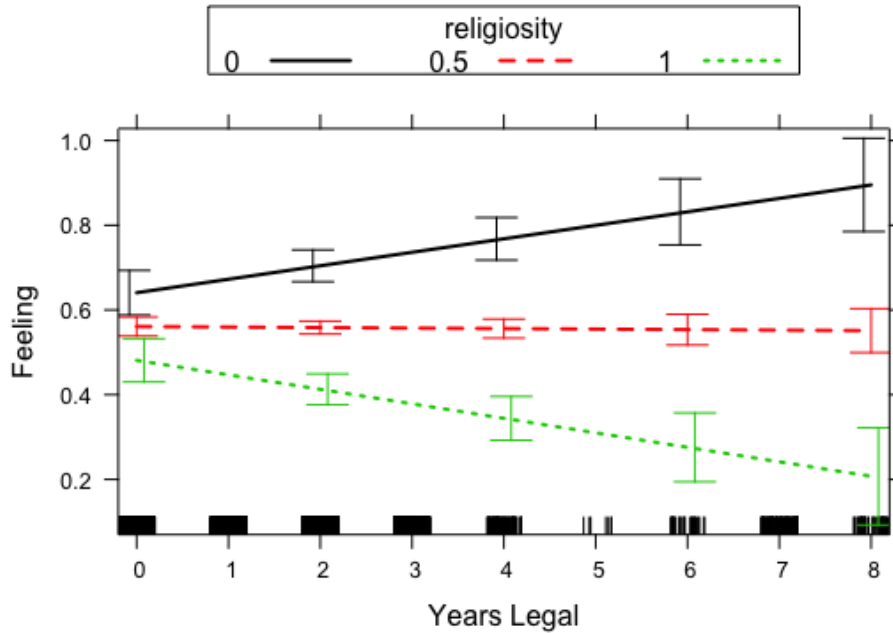
Plot 8



Plot 9



Plot 10



## Comparison

The fact that two dependent variables related to the same group of people generated such different results merits some examination before moving on to a discussion. Both authoritarianism and ethnocentrism are significant negative predictors of support for same sex marriage and feelings toward gays and lesbians net of other effects. More interesting, though, is the difference in the effects of the interaction terms. Concerning support for same sex marriage, opinion among authoritarians and ethnocentrics was significantly affected by the amount of time since legalization. However, the time since legalization had no significant effect on their feelings toward gays and lesbians. This hints at a method by which both high authoritarians and high ethnocentrics may reconcile the cross pressures they face between loyalty to social groups and loyalty to institutions. The fact that ideology and religiosity negatively predicted affect but not support for same sex marriage policy may speak to a similar cognitive dynamic. It may be that highly religious and highly conservative individuals tend also to support official policy while maintaining more negative affect toward gays and lesbians. As a final point of interest, although highly religious individuals displayed a fairly marked backlash in feeling, and ideological conservatives showed a similar



backlash regarding support for same sex marriage, the overall lack of backlash among survey respondents is an important result.

## Discussion

In the last several decades there has been a remarkable shift in American public opinion concerning same sex marriage. In 1988 only 11.6 percent of Americans favoured legalizing same sex marriage. By 2016 this figure had ballooned to 59.2 percent. More importantly, during the period between the first legalization of same sex marriage in a state – 2008 – and 2016, opinion jumped nearly 20 percentage points (Sherkat *et al.* 2017). This means that same sex marriage legalization provides a unique opportunity to examine the top down effects of policy on opinion. Specifically, it provides an opportunity to gauge the degree to which different psychological predispositions may influence individuals' responses to policy changes and emerging social norms. It has been fairly well established that same sex marriage legalization leads to a general upswing in support for the policy, supporting the *Legitimacy Model* of policy feedback. In concert with this research, I find that as the time since legalization progresses, overall support for same sex marriage increases. But there is evidence suggesting that certain elements of the religious community and strong conservatives are prone to backlash responses. My research looks to psychological predispositions in order to explain the heterogeneity of response. Although these predispositions are often intermingled within individuals, I find that, particularly concerning support for same sex marriage, they may represent more important explanatory variables than traditional factors like religion and ideology.

My findings, although confined to one particular policy change, support a heterogeneous model of policy feedback based on psychological predispositions. The differential effects of time since legalization on authoritarians and ethnocentrics suggest an interesting dynamic at work. Looking first at authoritarianism, the varying responses displayed to support for same sex marriage and the feeling thermometer not only confirm my hypotheses concerning policy feedback, they speak to a method of cognitive reconciliation that is important for political psychology, public policy and minority rights more broadly. The work of Sears (1973, 1983) and others (Flores and Barclay 2016; Mondak 2010) has established that the level of crystallization of a trait or predisposition dictates the level of influence it wields in attitude formation. Predispositions are more crystallized than attitudes. My findings partially concur with this notion in that authoritarians *do* change their attitudes toward a policy issue – same sex marriage – to

which they are initially opposed. However, neither the implementation of the policy, nor the length of time since implementation have any effect on authoritarians' *feelings* toward gays and lesbians.

This is where we begin to see the reconciliation of the cross pressures inherently faced by authoritarians when it comes to same sex marriage. The answer to the question: Will authoritarians choose institutions or social groups?, seems to be "both". This realization that some individuals can both support a policy while remaining hostile toward the subjects of the policy speaks to a cognitive/affective dichotomy. Cognitively, high authoritarians support the emerging legal norm, while remaining viscerally hostile to the beneficiaries of the new norm.

Contrary to theoretical expectations, high ethnocentrics display this same pattern of attitude change. As predicted, ethnocentrism negatively predicts both support for same sex marriage and feelings toward gays and lesbians. However, as the time since legalization progresses, they, like authoritarians, become more supportive of same sex marriage, conforming to the *Legitimacy Model* of policy feedback. Also like authoritarians, there is no significant effect of time since legalization on feelings toward gays and lesbians. So it appears that individuals in possession of both traits demonstrate a degree of cognitive/affective dissonance. One possible explanation for this is that the ethnocentric notion of social cohesion includes a larger institutional element than previously thought. Though individuals high in ethnocentrism are focused on intergroup relations, they may recognize the steadying influence of robust institutions and the value of obedience concerning social cohesion.

My results suggest a delineation must be drawn between attitudes toward policy and attitudes toward the subjects of the policy. They suggest that, in the presence of dispositional cross pressure, individuals may find unconscious detours around peremptory attitude adjustment. The cognitive aspect may coexist with a contrary affective aspect. Though this is likely not the case for low-affect policies like tax and infrastructure, it may be vitally important concerning moral policy issues.

That being said, there were very limited backlash effects, even regarding the affective feeling thermometer. This is in line with the findings of Bishin *et al.* (2015), who suggest that minorities have little to fear in the way of policy backlash. That may be the

case, but it must be noted that, although support for same sex marriage increased with time for some groups, there was no such effect on feeling. At best we can say that backlash is limited mainly to highly religious and conservative individuals and focused primarily on the affective aspect. This is a further rebuke of the idea that minorities should move slowly in their efforts for inclusion or risk reprisals from majorities.

## Conclusion and Further Research

When a new policy is implemented, the public can react in a number of ways. In terms of public response to same sex marriage legalization, the overall feedback has resembled the *Legitimacy Model*. In my analysis I have demonstrated that the reaction has not been homogeneous. I have here argued that part of the heterogeneity of reaction can be explained by psychological predispositions – deep-seated, enduring characteristics that precede and are broader than political attitudes.

I generated a series of multilevel regression models in order to estimate the effect of time since legalization on both support for same sex marriage and feelings toward gays and lesbians among individuals displaying different psychological predispositions. I found that, not only do predispositions effect opinion, they effect how opinion changes over time and in response to policy changes. Although the cognitive/affective dichotomy is important to take into account, it does not indicate any significant backlash, only opinion stability on the affective side.

When analyzing changes in public opinion, it is difficult to skirt around the effects of age and cohort succession. Indeed, it is likely that these two factors are integral concerning any major shift in mass attitudes. My analyses controlled for age in the traditional manner but the data were inadequate to account for cohort succession. However, there are fairly compelling reasons why cohort succession is unlikely to explain a large portion of opinion change in this instance.

My primary temporal period of analysis is relatively short, consisting of only eight years. Opinion change through cohort succession is ordinarily a much more lengthy process involving the generational replacement of adult individuals. This combined with the sheer scope of the change in support for same sex marriage during this time makes intracohort opinion change far more likely. Additionally, previous analyses covering much longer time periods have shown that, where support for same sex marriage is concerned, cohort succession could account for only one third of opinion change (Baunach, 2011; Hart-Brinson, 2016).

So, it is reasonable to infer from my analysis that, instead of survey respondents being replaced by others of a different generation, many individuals actually changed

their opinions toward same sex marriage during the time period examined. Cohort effects are certainly present, but their size is likely limited by the relatively small temporal period from legalization to 2016.

In order to get a more detailed picture of heterogeneous policy feedback, changes in attitude toward other moral policy issues such as abortion could provide clarity. My results highlight the need for additional research on policy feedback, psychological predispositions and the cognitive/affective dichotomy. For instance, is the cognitive or affective aspect more important for political behaviour? In which contexts does one supersede the other? It is important to note that the present analysis focused on attitudes and not behaviour. Future research may examine behavioural changes over time in response to opinion change. Do changing attitudes toward same sex marriage prompt individuals to be more likely to attend a gay wedding, befriend a gay person or march in support of gay rights?

My study is part of a burgeoning body of research on the heterogeneity of policy feedback. It is the first to examine this heterogeneity in relation to psychological predispositions. The extent to which my findings are generalizable across issue domains and regions requires further exploration. It is my feeling that authoritarians in particular will display similar attitude flexibility in the face of policy changes.

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