


Does Disgust Drive Religious Freedom Attitudes? Experimental Results About the Context of Service Refusal Opinion

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Objective. What factors shape public support for service refusals carried out in the name of the free exercise of religion? Existing analyses treat the businesses refusing to serve LGBT citizens as fungible. We hypothesize that the religious context does not matter and that reactions are consistent with the role of socialized disgust. *Methods.* We engage the same experimental design in two 2019 samples, one of 800 Colorado adult residents and one of 1,010 Protestants. The $1 \times 2 \times 2$ design enables a contrast between a control, conditions that vary the business between a florist and photographer, and conditions that vary the religious nature of the event. *Results.* The results suggest that the religious nature of the context is immaterial and that reactions generally conform with the role of disgust, especially for those socialized to feel it—high attending evangelicals. *Conclusion.* We affirm the importance of the context of service delivery for religious freedom attitudes and discuss the role of religion.

The previous decade and a half has seen tremendous change in the extension of rights to LGBT Americans and a sea change in public opinion on the topic. These trends—capped by the U.S. Supreme Court's *Obergefell* decision in 2015 and now the *Bostock* decision in 2020—have put LGBT Americans on a collision course with conservative Christians and others who believe that homosexuality is sinful and accommodating gay rights abridges their religious conscience. As a result, many small business owners have refused to provide their services to same-sex couples; they have refused to bake wedding cakes and arrange wedding flowers, bake pizzas, do tax returns, take photographs, etc. While the battles have shifted away from the legal status of marriage, this area of law remains unsettled, as does public opinion on the matter. It is an area that pits religious freedom against commitment to nondiscrimination coverage. In this article, we seek to understand the dimensions of service refusal opinion, focusing on the varied contexts in which this dispute takes place. Is support for refusing service to LGBT Americans consistent, does it vary based on the religious connections to the context, or does it vary by personal exposure to gay clients?

We build on previous efforts to document support for service refusals (e.g., PRRI, 2019; Powell, Schnabel, and Apgar, 2017) with survey experiments that vary the supply and demand sides of the exchange: the service supplied is either provided by a photographer or a florist; the demand comes from either a secular occasion (prom or a birthday) or a

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SOCIAL SCIENCE QUARTERLY

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DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.12934

religious one (a wedding). We suspect that (1) opinion shifts depending on the context, (2) among the religious, religious contexts are not weighted more heavily, and (3) opinion is suggestive of a pattern consistent with disgust reactions (e.g., Bloom and Courtemanche, 2015). Given the deep divide between religious conservatives and religious nones, we are also interested in the reaction of the nonreligious. If the nonreligious are interested in balancing religious freedom considerations with nondiscrimination goals, we suspect the nones will weight religious contexts more heavily and provide more support for religiously grounded refusals.

The Politics of Religious Freedom and Service Refusal

With the expansion of gay rights in the United States, conservatives—especially religious conservatives—have often turned to religious freedom arguments to provide limitations on or secure exemptions from broad nondiscrimination protections. It has become clear that opposing gay marriage and nondiscrimination on the merits is politically ineffective (see Lewis, 2017). Instead, conservative Christian advocacy groups have fashioned a variety of legal arguments to resist the application of gay rights (see Bennett, 2017; Lewis, 2017; Lewis, 2018), including passage of state-level religious freedom laws. Advocacy groups also increasingly cite “religious freedom” when communicating with their constituents (Wilson and Djupe, 2020), and politicians have joined the chorus, with high-profile candidates such as Ted Cruz putting religious freedom at the center of their campaigns, and religious freedom language inserted into Republican Party platforms (den Dulk, 2018).

This reliance on religious freedom as a strategy of opposition to gay rights has polarized religious freedom attitudes in the mass public (Castle, 2019). It has enhanced perceptions that conservative Christian views are threatened and even persecuted. In fact, in recent surveys white evangelicals report that they are discriminated against at higher rates than Muslims or African Americans (Green, 2016, 2017; Jones, 2017). Many liberal commentators and media outlets have begun putting these religious freedom claims in quotation marks or describing them cynically, marking the idea that religious freedom is a euphemism for opposition to gay rights (e.g., Kelly, 2015; Murray, 2017; Robertson and Pérez-Peña, 2015).

While religious freedom is increasingly at the center of the cultural divide in the United States, we know very little about public attitudes toward *the practice of* free exercise in this era, especially service refusal exemptions. As a baseline, evidence suggests that we have moved into an era of polarization, with substantial percentages taking polarized left and right positions on religious freedom (Castle, 2019). This is in contrast to analyses from the generation prior, which showed a nonpolarized, multidimensional approach to church–state issues (Jelen and Wilcox, 1995).

Studies have also found that support for religious freedom is linked to authoritarian tendencies (Castle, 2017) and populism (Guth, 2019). Likewise, we know that religion—especially white evangelical religion—is a strong predictor of opposition to gay rights, even while controlling for partisanship and demographics (e.g., Bramlett, 2012; Olson, Cadge, and Harrison, 2006; Putnam and Campbell, 2012; Sherkat et al., 2011; Whitehead, 2010).

Opposition to minority rights looms large in religious freedom attitudes. There is a clear link between support for religious service refusals and opposition to gay rights. Those who oppose same-sex marriage and identify as Republicans are much more likely to view religious freedom as threatened (Goidel, Smentkowski, and Freeman, 2016). Though little work exists on the context of refusals, the survey experiments that have been conducted

show that support for service refusals is not driven by religious convictions or concerns for religious liberty (Powell, Schnabel, and Apgar, 2017). Support varied depending on the types of businesses refusing, as well as the groups being discriminated against. In the study by Powell, Schnabel, and Apgar (2017), libertarian attitudes predicted deference to business owners (to provide or deny service as they saw fit), bolstered by group-based antipathy.

The shifts in public opinion on religious freedom suggest a devolution in ideological thinking (Converse 1964) since the 1990s. Arguably, mass attitudes once roughly followed consistent, general principles, but have more recently shifted to a group-centric approach as conservative Christians began to make religious freedom claims. This brings religious freedom opinion in line with more general theories that public opinion tracks group identity and feelings toward groups (e.g., Kinder and Kam, 2009; Mason, 2018). Protestants have long reserved a great deal of antipathy for LGBT Americans (e.g., Wilcox and Larson, 2006), so we would expect to see that situations that bring Christians into contact with LGBT Americans would occasion especially potent reactions.

Religion and Disgust Emotions

If support for service refusals is *not* blanket—that is, ideologically consistent attitudes rooted in religious freedom and consistent across contexts—then one reason may be the link of religious, moral reasoning about what is pure and the related emotional reaction of disgust. Disgust has been theorized as an evolutionary response to avoid pathogens (Curtis, Aunger, and Rabie, 2004; Tybur et al., 2013). Though not the only source for such information, religions have long defined the bounds of purity, with foods, practices, and people variably described as off-limits and disgusting (Graham and Haidt, 2010; Rozin and Haidt, 2013). Bacon is disgusting to Muslims and Jews and dirty hands and feet require ablution before prayer for many religions. At times disgust has been applied to justify racism and other socially undesirable ends, as in the case of opposition to white-black relationships by white Christians in the American South. As Bloom and Courtemanche (2015:103) put it, “The emotion of disgust plays a leading role in the process of converting the conventional into the moral, as a mechanism differentiating between the pure and the degraded.”

Of course, the pattern of purity goes well beyond the health needs of individual members and extends to the “well-being” of the group. This accords with a Durkheimian perspective as summarized by Graham and Haidt (2010:142), “For Durkheim (1915/1965), the only way to understand the religious thoughts and behaviors of individuals was through this group-level perspective, in which the ultimate object of worship is the group itself.” That is, disgust emotions can be triggered not just by pathogenic threat but also by socialized threat objects. A marked demonstration shows that the same pathogens can be seen as more or less disgusting based on the context—for example, a caregiving role can transform disgusting tasks, such as the handling of fecal matter (i.e., diapers), into acceptable ones (Ksiazkiewicz and Friesen, 2020).

Notably, some in the United States across the political spectrum, but more common among conservatives and those with authoritarian dispositions, experience disgust reactions to the LGBT community, especially to transgender Americans (Casey, 2016; Inbar et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2019). It may be dispositional, but it can be induced as well—when experimentally manipulated, disgust sensitivity promoted more negative attitudes toward LGBT Americans among conservatives, but more positive ones among liberals

(Terrizzi, Shook, and Ventis, 2010). Highlighting the socialized nature of this reaction, disgust sensitivity parses reactions to LGBT Americans (negative) and evangelicals (positive), while it does not distinguish among groups, such as gun rights groups, not at the core of the culture wars (Crawford, Inbar, and Maloney, 2014). Feelings of disgust toward LGBT Americans are particularly common among evangelicals (Herek Gregory and Glunt, 1993; Hoffman and Miller, 1998), even among evangelical college students in California (Wolff et al., 2012).

Of course, we can find examples of elite rhetoric that could drive or at least bolster disgust reactions. For instance, we looked through the Family Research Council's (FRC) emails to list subscribers to locate several instances of such rhetoric.¹ In an October 22, 2009, email, the FRC describes images from an Act Up AIDS exhibit at Harvard as "so vile and disgusting that we can't even link to them." In another example on March 30, 2012, the FRC included snippets from a letter to the editor of *Stars and Stripes* magazine arguing that "the article 'Gay Marine's homecoming kiss gets worldwide notice' is both disgusting and outrageous." Around the same time, Mike Huckabee was getting attention for his quip that the "ick factor" of homosexuality shaped his views on gay rights (Wing, 2010).

Negative, disgust reactions, which entail a decrease in support for policies to establish equality for LGBT people, signal that simply establishing rights may not be sufficient for achieving equality (Miller et al., 2017). Indeed, Nussbaum (2010) implicates the politics of disgust, practiced by "large segments of the Christian Right," as the primary barrier to the advance of gay rights, but also a limitation to policies, arguably religious freedom, advanced from this inspiration. That is, disgust is not a valid basis for claiming constitutional protections. It should be noted that disgust reactions to LGBT citizens are not limited to Americans, and have been found elsewhere in the world (e.g., Wang et al., 2019).

That said, increasing support for LGBT rights, as well as decreasing opposition to the existence of homosexuality, signals that socialized disgust responses may not be permanent and are subject to shifting social norms. In analysis of data from 2007 and 2020, Djupe (2020) documents the rapidly changing norms conveyed in American religion about "homosexual behaviors." In 2007, the majority of Americans perceived their house of worship to "forbid" homosexuality (51 percent), while an additional 27 percent perceived that their house of worship would "strongly discourage" it; that combined figure rose to 91 percent of evangelicals and black Protestants, though it was lower for other groups. By 2020, those figures had declined markedly: in 2020, 45 percent perceive their congregation to forbid or strongly discourage "homosexual behaviors," and many religious traditions showed a decline. Evangelicals declined from 91 to 65 percent; black Protestants fell even more drastically, from 91 to 43 percent; Catholics went from 87 to 56 percent. While the change is rapid, it is still apparent that considerable religious reinforcement remains for the idea that LGBT Americans are outside the bounds of what is pure, which can bear on relevant policy, such as service refusals. This boundary linkage seems to be playing a role in prior experimental work on religious freedom claims (Powell, Schnabel, and Apgar, 2017), though it is not discussed.

Questions set in one particular context—the schools—may be far less amenable to changing norms for conservative Christians. We can see this from a line of attack on the advance of gay rights from the religious right, which is to argue that it will entail the indoctrination of children into a gay lifestyle. For instance, the Heritage Foundation (2019) argued that the Equality Act, which would add sexual orientation and gender identity as

¹Thanks to Angelia Wilson for sharing her trove of emails with us for this purpose.

protected classes under the Civil Rights Act, would lead to “indoctrinating” LGBT “ideology” in schools and boosting the proportion of transgender youth (see also Ruse, 2020 for the FRC’s similar take). This sense of threat resonates with older research that found less tolerance from conservative Christians for groups they dislike teaching in public schools (Jelen and Wilcox, 1990).

Hypotheses

Our hypotheses reflect the tension between an ideological religious freedom approach to service refusals versus an emotive response rooted in disgust. On the one hand, if service refusals are grounded in a consistent, ideological perspective, then the conscience claim of the individual service provider is the controlling factor—treatments that add and vary the context of the service provision should not differ from the control. Overall, service providers who are asked to face LGBT Americans will receive support from the in-group making religious freedom claims, in this case evangelical Protestants. The context of the act—religious acts like marriage or more secular events like prom—should matter little when constitutional principles are at stake. On the other hand, out-groups may look to balance their response, and in that case the context should matter to them—service providers can exercise their religious freedom when it is less important to the potential client (e.g., prom), but deeply important ceremonies like weddings may engender less support for the service provider.

If disgust reactions are in play, then the idea of exposure to the physical presence of LGBT clients should trigger a response (Casey, 2016), especially from conservative Christians. Simple imagery of LGBT clients in context should boost support for refusals above the amount in the control condition. Moreover, the particular context should reinforce this effect: some service providers, such as photographers, have to face their clients as a matter of course, whereas others, such as florists and tax accountants, can provide their services at a distance. The very idea of personal exposure should elicit more support for service refusals among those socialized to find LGBT relationships impure. In the context of disgust reactions, the religious nature of the activity should have no bearing on support since the reaction is linked to exposure to the client and not the content of the activity. But, as noted above, the prom context may elicit a particularly strong, negative reaction among evangelicals through its link to the schools and youth.

Data and Design

In order to establish control over the context of a service refusal, we designed a simple $1 \times 2 \times 2$ experiment with a (generic) control and four scenarios varying the type of service (photographer versus florist) and the event type (wedding vs. a nonreligious event). The scenarios were set in the context of a survey question that asked in the control condition, “Do you favor or oppose allowing a small business owner in your state to refuse to provide products or services to gay or lesbian people if doing so violates their religious beliefs?” The treatments merely appended a sentence setting the context, such as this one, “For instance, if a photographer refuses to take photos of a same-sex couple for their high school prom.” The other photography conditions mentioned a same-sex couple’s wedding. The two florist conditions mentioned the birthday of a person in a same-sex couple and their wedding. Table 1 maps the full list of treatments (minus the control).

TABLE 1
Treatment Conditions (Control Not Shown)

Service Provider/Event	Nonsacral Event	Wedding
Photographer	For instance, if a photographer refuses to take photos of a same-sex couple for their high school prom.	For instance, if a photographer refuses to take photos of a same-sex couple for their wedding.
Florist	For instance, if a florist refuses to create a flower arrangement for the birthday of a member of a same-sex couple.	For instance, if a florist refuses to create a flower arrangement for the wedding of a same-sex couple.

We administered this protocol in two 2019 studies—one a Fall statewide survey of the adult population in Colorado (chosen because Colorado has been home to several related controversies, most notably over Jack Phillips’ refusal to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding). The Colorado sample comprises 800 respondents and was administered online by *YouGov* between October 23 and November 1, 2019; the sample is weighted to be representative of the general adult state population. Respondents were asked about their opinions on a variety of political issues and public figures in the roughly 10-minute survey. The treatment cells are reasonably balanced in size and were effectively randomized, with one exception.²

The second was a national sample of Protestants conducted in the Spring. For the Protestant sample, a subset of the authors contracted with *Qualtrics Panels* in Spring, 2019, to survey a sample split between denominational and nondenominational Protestants.³ Just over 1,100 people were surveyed across several days in mid-May. The treatment cells are reasonably balanced in size and were effectively randomized.⁴ The survey was conducted for another project and the limited variance in the sample composition is likely to undersell the differences between evangelicals and the rest of society. Demographics of these two samples are available in supplementary Appendix Table A1.

Our analytic strategy is to begin with sample-level treatment effects before examining effects conditional on evangelical status, which is our proxy for exposure to purity narratives that place LGBT individuals outside of bounds of acceptability, and lastly by partisanship as we look for likely polarization on the issue and evidence about whether religious influence is actually partisanship in disguise. We organize the presentation and discussion by the samples, since their compositions are quite different.

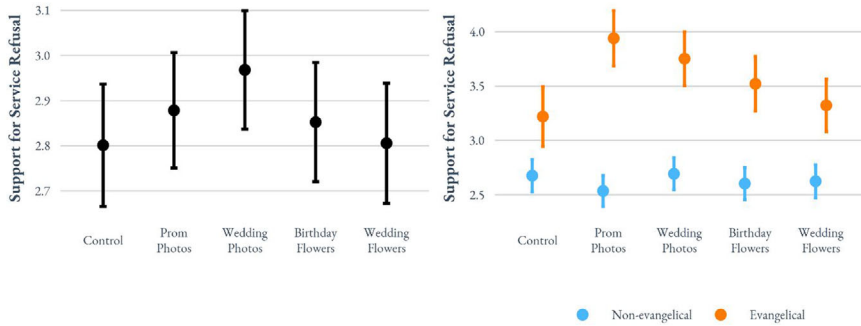
²The cells had 152, 170, 161, 160, and 157 cases. ANOVA tests suggested that the distributions of gender ($p = 0.32$), race ($p = 0.84$), partisanship ($p = 0.52$), and education ($p = 0.97$) were effectively randomized while age was not ($p = 0.06$; the greatest mean difference was 5.2 years). We used the same controls as the other data to even out the minor variations in the cells.

³The quota was composed of non-Orthodox, non-Catholic, and non-Mormon Christians. The reason is that many Protestants do not identify themselves as such (yes, there are Lutherans who do not know they are Protestant), so the sample included self-identified Protestants and “other Christians” who did not otherwise identify as Orthodox, Catholic, or Mormon.

⁴The cells had 217, 197, 194, 207, and 195 cases. ANOVA tests suggested that the distributions of gender ($p = 0.96$), race ($p = 0.32$), partisanship ($p = 0.72$), age ($p = 0.38$), and education ($p = 0.95$) were effectively randomized. Because the cells were not perfectly balanced, we included controls for these variables in our models of treatment effects to statistically even out the minor variations across cells. All models include partisanship, age, gender, education, and race.

FIGURE 1

Treatment Effects and Conditional Treatment Effects by Evangelical ID Among Coloradans



Source: 2019 Colorado Survey.
 Note: Comparing any two CIs is equivalent to a 90% test.

Results: Colorado Sample

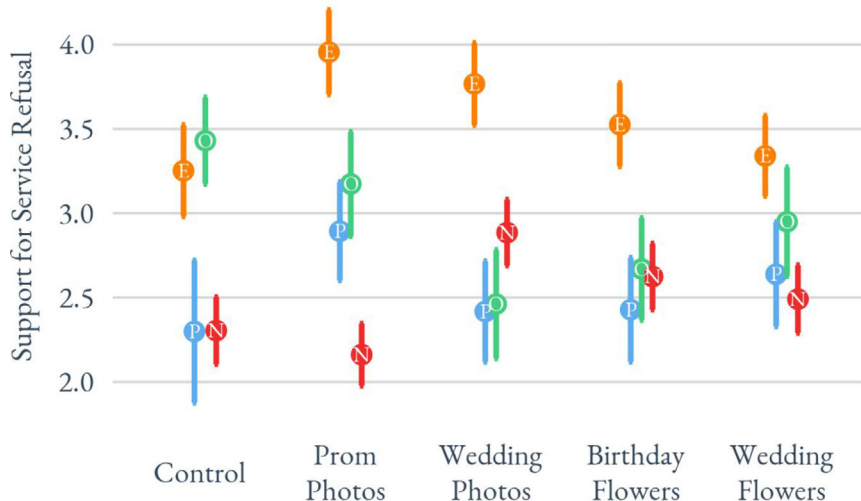
Figure 1 shows estimates of sample-level treatment effects in the left panel using the Colorado sample of adults (full coefficient tables showing results for all remaining figures can be found in supplementary Appendix Tables A2–A5). Note that the average level of support is just south of “neither,” showing somewhat greater opposition to service refusals than we’ll find in the Protestant sample. The control garners the least support for service refusals and the photographer the most, but none of the sample-level differences are statistically distinguishable (left panel). The right panel shows the differences in estimated support for service refusals by evangelical identification, and we see no significant variation by treatment for nonevangelicals.

In contrast, evangelicals are affected by the treatments. Consistent with expectations about the role of disgust, we see the greatest support for service refusals in the case of the photographer, and slightly more when the photos to be taken involve kids (at prom), though the difference with taking wedding photos is not significant. This finding may resonate with an older paper finding Christians more intolerant of groups they dislike teaching in public schools—that is, they have more tolerance for exposing adults and not children to groups they dislike (Jelen and Wilcox, 1990). Support declines from prom photos to wedding flowers among evangelicals. Neither florist conditions are distinguishable from the control, in which respondents grant the least support for service refusals. But, perhaps the key result here is that the religious context of a wedding does not consistently elicit more support for service refusals than these secular contexts. If anything, the findings suggest that the type of service (i.e., photography vs. flowers) matters more than context (wedding vs. prom)

One reason why nonevangelicals in Colorado show consistency is that they are a diverse group that hides divergent reactions. Figure 2 highlights that religious nones think about service refusals in a different way than nonevangelical religious people. No one would be surprised to see that nones have the lowest support for service refusals in the abstract, but few would expect that they would increase support for exceptions in the case of taking wedding photos—the one treatment that is distinguishably higher than the control. This effect is not without precedent, however. Djupe, Lewis, and Jelen (2016) found something similar in an experiment where clergy (vs. a congressman) asked for a photographer’s ability

FIGURE 2

Treatment Effects Conditional on Four Religious Groups in Colorado

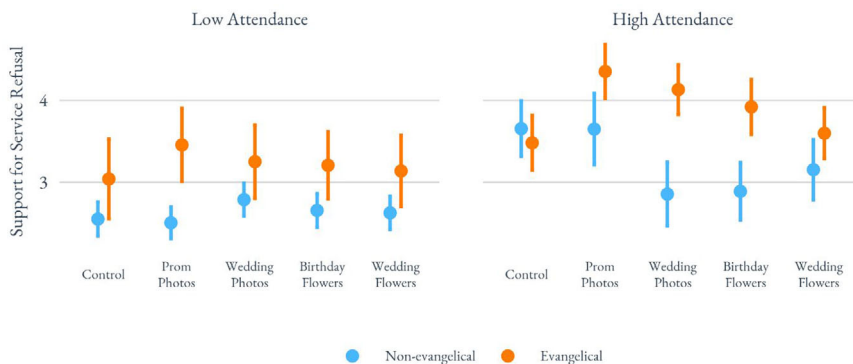


Source: 2019 Colorado Survey.

Note: Comparing any two CIs is equivalent to a 90% test. E=Evangelical, P=Non-evangelical Protestant, O=Other religious, N=Nones.

FIGURE 3

Disgust-Consistent Reactions are Strongest for High-Attending Evangelicals



Source: 2019 Colorado Survey. Note: Comparing any two CIs is equivalent to a 90% test.

to refuse photographing a same-sex wedding and received a sympathetic hearing from religious nones. We read these results as an expression of empathy when a situation causes pain based on conflict with deeply held religious convictions. That empathy does not extend to secular situations like prom, however. Put another way, it would seem that for the

nonreligious, dislike of a group is not a valid ground for exemption to nondiscrimination laws, but a sincerely held religious justification does gain more support.

The pattern of support among nonevangelical Protestants (“P” in the figure) shows the most support for refusing service in the case of prom photos, but given the small sample size all conditions were indistinguishable from the control, which elicited the least support. Other religious individuals demonstrated the most support in the control condition—at the same rate as evangelicals—and support fell off once contextual details were provided, though only significantly so in the case of taking wedding photos and (inexplicably) birthday flowers. The religious nones, on the other hand, provide the most support for the photographer refusing to work a same-sex wedding—the only condition with support distinguishable from the control.

Over the last 15 years, especially, support for the LGBT community has been one of the issues on which religious organizations have shed and attracted members. Opposition to gay rights, especially among the young,⁵ has been noted by nones as a reason they left religion (PRRI, 2016), while Christian Right advocacy on anti-gay rights ballot measures has been linked to a rise in the state rate of the nones (Djupe, Neiheisel, and Conger, 2018). This context may help explain why the wedding photographer in particular elicits such a negative response from nonevangelical believers. That does not explain the reaction of the nones, though who may be demonstrating some compassion for those who wish to refuse to participate in a religious ceremony that runs against their sincerely held beliefs.

Our argument about the likely role of disgust hinges on the fact that it is socialized. Though not nearly the only institution implicated in shaping and maintaining such a reaction to the LGBT community, churches would certainly be one of them. As such, we suspect that those more deeply involved in the life of an evangelical church would show more pronounced reactions to serving a gay client consistent with the role of disgust. As Figure 4 shows, this is just what we find.⁶ Low-attending evangelicals are almost indistinguishable from low-attendance others, with the only exception the prom photographer—low-attending evangelicals show a muted response indistinguishable from the control but it is distinguishable from nonevangelicals. Among high attenders, evangelicals are deeply split from others in several conditions. They have the same level of support in the control condition, but support drops off for nonevangelicals and increases among evangelicals, especially for the photographer (on average). One interpretation is that higher levels of involvement boost the socialized norms of what is pure, which could explain the divergence between evangelicals and others (Figure 3).

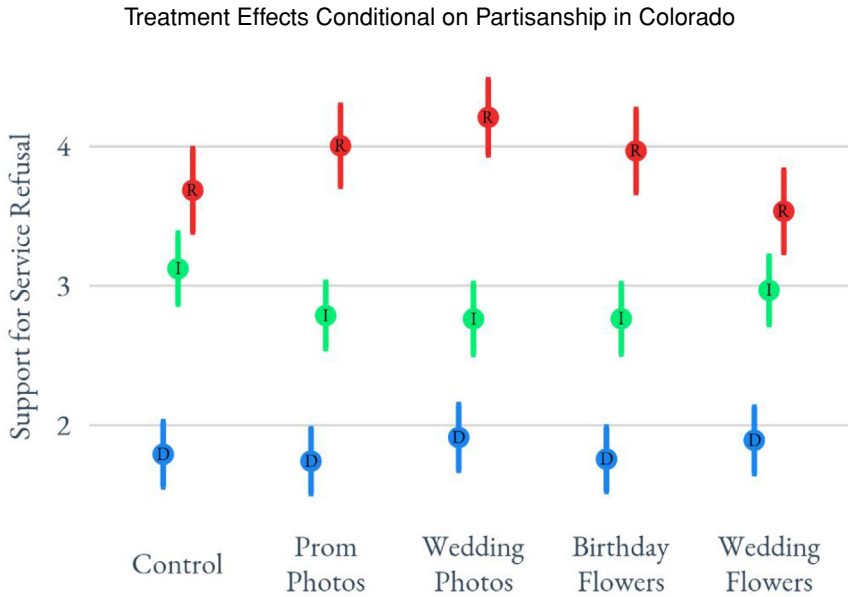
Lastly, it is worth examining whether partisanship is the lurking culprit explaining differences between groups. Religious freedom became a partisan issue after *Obergefell* (2015), which prompted a new tension between LGBT rights to nondiscrimination and conservative Christians. The entanglement of religious effects with partisan ones depends on how strongly religious groups are sorted, and they are generally more diverse than we often think (e.g., Burge, 2019).

We examine the treatment effects conditional on partisanship in Figure 4, which shows considerably more consistency among self-identified partisans (partisans include independent leaners). Democrats, for instance, show consistently low levels of support for service

⁵This raises the question about whether there is hidden variation by age. While constrained by the sample size, we did assess whether the treatment effects varied by evangelical identity and age (younger than 50 and older than 50). Older evangelicals show little to no variation, though the prom photographer does gain marginally more support. Younger evangelicals show distinguishably more support for the photographer and less for the florist (equivalent to the control).

⁶Thanks to Reviewer 1 for the nudge to explore this relationship.

FIGURE 4



Source: 2019 Colorado Survey.

Note: Comparing any two CIs is equivalent to a 90% test.

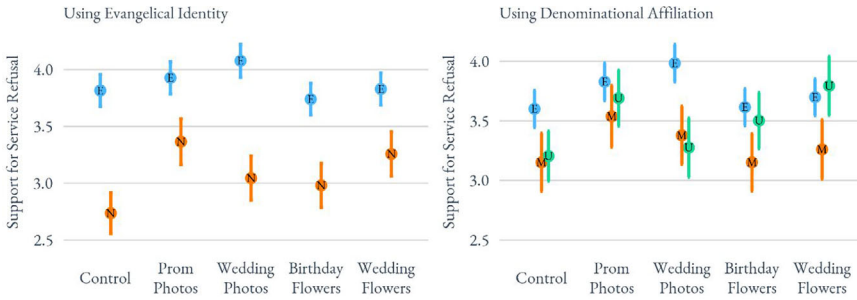
D=Democrat, I=Independent, R=Republican

refusals regardless of the context. Independents, likewise, show no significant differences across the treatments, either with each other or with the control. Most contexts elicit somewhat less support than the control condition among independents. Only Republicans show significant variation, which is especially apparent in the context of weddings. For them, the photographer gains more support than the florist. Our inference is that personal exposure to a same-sex context is more problematic for Republicans than is a service that maintains personal distance. This is consistent with a disgust reaction. The wedding photographer is the only condition that shows Republican support exceeding the level offered in the control condition, which may reflect strong Republican backing for the Colorado baker who refused to bake a cake for a same-sex wedding reception (e.g., Wheeler, 2017).

The contrasts with the religious variation are illuminating—Republicans react to the wedding photographer but evangelicals react most strongly to the prom photographer. The wedding context does not elicit consistent support from Republicans or evangelicals and signals that how the service provider interfaces with clients is an important consideration. There is not a clean correlation between Democrats and religious nones, either. While Democrats are consistently opposed to service refusals, nones express distinguishably more support for the wedding photographer. But, again, the religious context of a wedding is not determinative—it is the personal exposure in a religious context (the photographer) that generates a more supportive response. It seems clear that religious reactions are not simply partisan ones in disguise.

FIGURE 5

Comparison of Treatment Effects for Identity and Affiliation Groups Among National Protestants



Source: 2019 Non-Denominational Survey.
 Note: Comparing any two CIs is equivalent to a 90% test. E=Evangelical, N=Non-evangelical, M=Mainline, U=Unclassified.

Results: Protestant Study

We draw on data from a national survey of Protestants to attempt to confirm some of the essential dynamics seen in Colorado. Likely because the sample is composed solely of Protestants, we find that the sample leans in support of service refusals (3.4 in the control condition), though it is close to an average response of “neither” on the 5-point scale. At the sample level (not shown), the treatment effects look much like the evangelical results from Colorado: both photographer conditions receive more support than the control, while support for the florist is indistinguishable from the control. Moreover, the control generates the least support for service refusals. That appears generally consistent with the disgust framework. What about evangelicals specifically?

In these data, we are able to compare two versions of classifying evangelicals: one based on identity and one based on denominational affiliation. In these and other data, people are not consistent in claiming the identity researchers would ascribe to their denomination (Burge, 2018; Burge and Lewis, 2018; Hackett et al., 2018). Roughly 20 percent claim an identity that does not match—for example, around 20 percent of Southern Baptists do not call themselves “evangelical or born-again.”

The left pane of Figure 5 shows the results among identifiers, while the right pane shows the results by denominational affiliation. The results differ somewhat. Evangelical identifiers take more conservative stands in favor of service refusals across the board. While that rate is not statistically distinguishable from evangelical affiliates (comparing the two panes in Figure 5), that is a function of the overlap. Once we examine support by affiliation and identity, it is clear that evangelical affiliates with consistent identities are much more supportive of service refusals than nonidentifiers. However, they show roughly the same pattern with more support for the photographer than the florist on average. These evangelicals provide somewhat more support for the wedding photographer (over the prom photographer) but not significantly so. In all cases, the control condition elicits the least support from these groups, though not always significantly.

Perhaps one reason for the higher levels of support from evangelical identifiers is that they may have heard about and considered these scenarios before, which is quite likely given the degree to which Christian Right organizations talked about “religious freedom” cases after the *Obergefell* decision in 2015 (Wilson and Djupe, 2020). Nonevangelical Protestants, on the other hand, show much greater treatment effects, which is not the same

conclusion when we look by denominational affiliation. Non-evangelical identifiers have lower support, on average, as well as more distinguishable findings of treatment effects. Affiliates are more heterogeneous—mainline Protestants show no differences (though lean supportive of the prom photographer), while the unclassifieds (many of whom are evangelical identifiers; see Burge and Djupe, 2021) show distinguishably higher support for the prom photographer.

Discussion

One of the implications of this research bears on the survey measure used to capture support for service refusals, which we use as our control. In both samples, the level of support generated by the control version was the lowest recorded, though not always significantly so. That is, the simple addition of realistic contexts in which service refusals play out tends to increase support for them, especially, but not exclusively, among groups who are socialized to see the target group as outside their moral bounds. What does this mean for survey researchers?

Based on this research, we believe that many researchers should be wary of the generic item. If the goal is to assess how people would react to an incident, then questions should include a bit of the narrative since the lawyers for defendants like Jack Phillips (Masterpiece Cakeshop) and Barronelle Stutzman (Arlene's Flowers) will be out in public offering their perspective. Of course, our experiment did not include any additional details about the faith of the service providers, nor the story of the clients denied service. These remain for future research to explore.

If the purpose of asking these questions is to explore how people would evaluate a proposed policy, such as the Supreme Court's ruling in *Bostock*, state nondiscrimination laws, or city ordinances, then a generic item may be surely suitable given the wide-ranging contexts that would be affected. However, survey researchers need to beware that for many, soliciting the opinion without contextualizing the details will draw less support from conservatives and more support from liberals.

Conclusion

In this article, we assessed whether the type of interaction between a service provider and client as well as whether the religious context of the request affected public views of service refusals. We did so in order to determine whether ideologies of religious freedom requests were consistently linked to conscience claims, were driven by religious reasoning that weddings are special and sacred, or whether they were driven by group animus governed by disgust reactions. The results from the two disparate samples are not in perfect accord, though there are parallel findings.

The control, stripped of contextual information, tends to elicit the least support and any information tends to increase average support, if not always significantly. The highest support for refusing service accrues to the photographer, which we interpret as a manifestation of disgust. That is, the photographer has to interact personally with the clients whereas the florist can maintain distance, and this level of contact apparently makes more people uncomfortable. Lastly, we find that religious contexts do not stand out as distinctive from the secular ones. Though in one case the wedding photographer received the most support, in the other sample it was the prom photographer and the two wedding contexts

received different levels of support in all cases. The claim that participation in weddings is particularly odious for some religious people does not appear consistently in conservative religious publics.

Although more suggestive than conclusive, we read the evidence to suggest that evangelicals' reactions are driven by disgust felt toward LGBT Americans. This is consistent with some prior research (Casey, 2016; Miller et al., 2017). But, we would be remiss not to acknowledge that our inference about the role of disgust can only be suggestive since the survey contained no direct measures of disgust. Clearly, future research should consider including appropriate items to establish this connection more concretely.

One question stemming from this pattern of results is whether it denies or reflects religious influence. Sentiment toward LGBT Americans is not pathogenic (Ray and Parkhill, 2020) but reflects a socialized response (Bramlett, 2012). Though there may be other sources of this socialization, the most likely one is the religious organizations that have been taking strident stands against homosexuality as well as gay rights for many decades using language that is specifically geared to engineer and reinforce a strong negative, disgust response. This is consistent with a role that religion has consistently played throughout history, though it is problematic in the current public policy dispute for at least one reason. To pass Constitutional muster, advocates need to take logically consistent stands rather than emotionally consistent ones (e.g., Nussbaum, 2010; see also Justice Kennedy's opinions in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*, 2018, and in *US v Windsor*, 2013). The conscience claim in the florist's case is no different than the photographer's, but they receive different levels of support. Supporters are less interested in religious contexts than they are in personal insulation from perceived immorality. That is very likely a religiously motivated response, but it is not clearly driven by conscience or from a desire to protect religious institutions (such as marriage).

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Table A1 – Descriptive Statistics of the Two 2019 Samples

Table A2 – OLS Regression Estimates For Figure 1

Table A3 – OLS Regression Estimates For Figure 2

Table A4 – OLS Regression Estimates For Figure 3

Table A5 – OLS Regression Estimates For Figure 4

Table A6 – OLS Regression Estimates of Results For Figure 5