

# Pride and Prejudice: LGBTQ-Related Curricular Laws and School Choices

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## Introduction

LGBTQ-related curricular laws play a vital role in protecting LGBTQ students' health, well-being, and academic success. They can also impact the experiences of other students and the broader community. This study examines the effects of LGBTQ-related curricular laws, both inclusive and restrictive, on U.S. school enrollment and private school choice. Using data from the 2012-22 American Community Survey and various statistical models, we find that while these laws do not have a significant impact on overall K-12 enrollment, inclusive laws lead to higher private school enrollment, especially among lower-income and less-educated families and in religious and Republican-leaning areas. In contrast, negative laws reduce private school enrollment, though this trend reverses over time. These findings suggest that LGBTQ curricular laws may drive educational stratification and highlight the need for inclusive policy approaches to address diverse parental views.

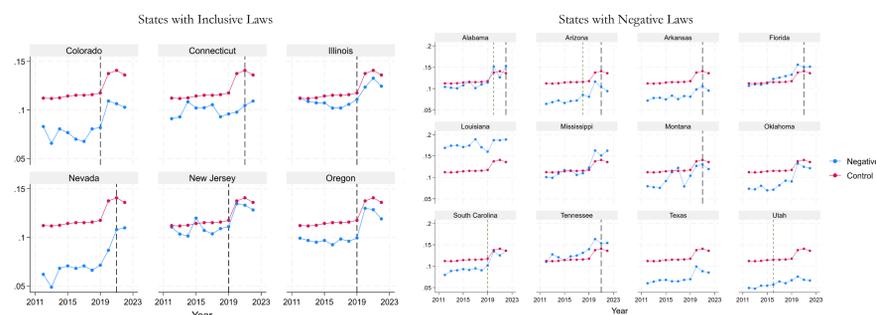
## Background

To protect the well-being of LGBTQ students, several states have enacted laws requiring LGBTQ inclusion in state curricula, with California pioneering this in 2011. Conversely, some states have "No Promo Homo" laws limiting discussions of homosexuality and transgender identity, especially for younger students. These laws originated during the HIV/AIDS crisis of the late 1980s and were repealed in some states; but they have resurged since 2020 with broader and more explicit restrictions, prohibiting school staff from discussing LGBTQ topics altogether.

## Methods and Data

Our primary sample comes from the 2012-21 American Community Survey (ACS), where we observe school-aged children's enrollment status and whether they attend private or public school. We collect information on state-level laws related to LGBTQ curricula, as well as data on the availability of private schools, religious affiliation, and local partisan politics from various sources. California is excluded from the analyses due to its evolving legal landscape and variability in policies within the state.

Figure 1: Share of Students in Private Schools



Note: Blue lines denote the trend in the private school enrollment rates in each state that implemented LGBTQ-related curricular laws during the study period; red lines denote the average private school enrollment rate in states without such laws. Green dashed lines indicate the last year when a "No Promo Homo" law was in effect before the repeal, and black dashed lines indicate the year when a new LGBTQ-related curriculum law was enacted.

We employ a two-way fixed-effects model and estimate the regression as follows:

$$y_{ist} = \beta Treat_{st} + \lambda X_{ist} + \alpha_s + \gamma_t + \nu_s t + \varepsilon_{ist}$$

Here:  $y_{ist}$  is binary indicator for a child to go to private school;  $Treat_{st}$  is the treatment status in state  $s$  year  $t$  of a LGBTQ curricular law;  $X_{ist}$  contains observed individual characteristics (*i.e.*, age, gender, race and ethnicity), parental education and nativity, and location characteristics (*i.e.*, metropolitan status, share of religious adherents, and share of Democratic votes in the presidential election);  $\alpha_s$  is state fixed effect and  $\gamma_t$  year fixed effect;  $\nu_s t$  captures state-specific trend, and  $\varepsilon_{ist}$  is an error term. The regression can be estimated using the OLS as a linear probability model or using a logit regression. The standard errors are clustered at the state level.

- Tests show the assumption of parallel preexisting trends is likely satisfied.

Two more approaches are employed. First, we estimate the propensity score for a state to introduce an LGBTQ curricular law in a year and trim the sample accordingly. The treated and control groups are thereby better balanced in observables, and the treatment is more likely "exogenous." Second, due to the staggered treatment timing, we aggregate the data to state-year level and employ the two-step difference-in-difference estimator (Butts and Gardner, 2022).

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## Results

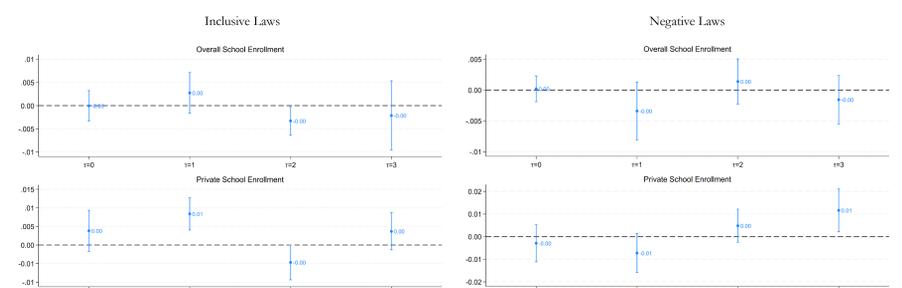
Table 1: TWFE Baseline Results

DV:	Inclusive Laws		Negative Laws			
	Overall School Enrollment	Private School Enrollment	Overall School Enrollment	Private School Enrollment	Overall School Enrollment	Private School Enrollment
Treat	.000892 (.00242)	.00712** (.00288)	-.00094 (.00137)	-.00672** (.00319)		
L1.Treat		.00141 (.00237)	.00867*** (.00262)	-.00303 (.00220)		-.00891*** (.00262)
State-specific Trend	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,863,033	2,863,033	2,779,495	2,779,495	3,611,300	3,611,300
No. of States	38	38	38	38	44	44
R-squared	.013	.013	.043	.043	.013	.047

Note: Regressions are estimated by OLS, weighted by ACS person weight. Each regression controls for age, gender, race and ethnicity, birth cohort, family structure, number of children in the household, parental education, parental immigrant status, family income, metropolitan status, the local % religious adherents, year fixed effects, and state fixed effects. Standard errors are reported in parentheses and clustered at the state level. \*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate significance at the 10%, 5%, and 1% levels, respectively.

- Neither LGBTQ inclusive nor negative laws exhibit a significant impact on overall school enrollment.
- Inclusive laws increase the probability of a child attending private schools by 0.7 percentage points (ppts) in the year when the law is enacted and by 0.9 ppts in the following year, as it may take time for students to switch schools.
- Negative laws lead to a significant decrease of 0.7 ppts and a lagged decrease of 0.9 ppts in private school enrollment.
- Estimates derived from a propensity-score trimmed sample and a two-step DID method align closely with the estimates in Table 1.
- Heterogenous effect analyses show that the increase in private school enrollment resulting from inclusive laws is more significant among families with lower incomes and lower education levels, as well as in areas with a high density of religious schools and a more Republican-leaning demographic.

Figure 1: Dynamic Effects on School Enrollment



Note: Depicted are the point estimates with 95% confidence intervals.

- Inclusive laws: Private school enrollment initially shows an insignificant increase, followed by a significant 0.8 ppt rise in the subsequent year. However, this effect reverses in the second lag, with a 0.5 ppt decline, suggesting some parents may shift back to public schools or homeschooling. The four-year trend shows a net 1 ppt increase in private school enrollment due to the laws.
- Negative laws: Private school enrollment sees a marginally significant 0.7 ppt decrease in the first post-implementation year, followed by a 1 ppt increase by the third year. Wealthier and more educated parents may reconsider their choices and move back to private schools as they reassess the restrictive educational environment.

## Conclusions

Through various empirical approaches, we find that LGBTQ-related curricular laws significantly affect private school enrollment rates.

- Some parents may opt for private schools to avoid LGBTQ-related content.
- The effects vary across subpopulations and reflect existing cultural and political divides.
- The trends toward private school post-inclusive laws and toward public school post-negative laws partially reverse over time, suggesting a possible adaptation.

### Policy Implications

LGBTQ-related curricular laws may deepen educational disparities and undermine the role of public schools in promoting social cohesion and fostering mutual understanding.

- Policymakers should create balanced curricular standards that respect diverse values while promoting inclusivity.
- Regular evaluations of the impacts of the LGBTQ-related laws on school climate and student well-being are essential for fostering inclusive environments.

## References

Butts, K., & Gardner, J. (2022). did2s: Two-stage difference-in-differences. *The R Journal*, 14(3), 162–173.