

Elite-led Mobilization and Gay Rights

Dispelling the Myth of Mass Opinion Backlash

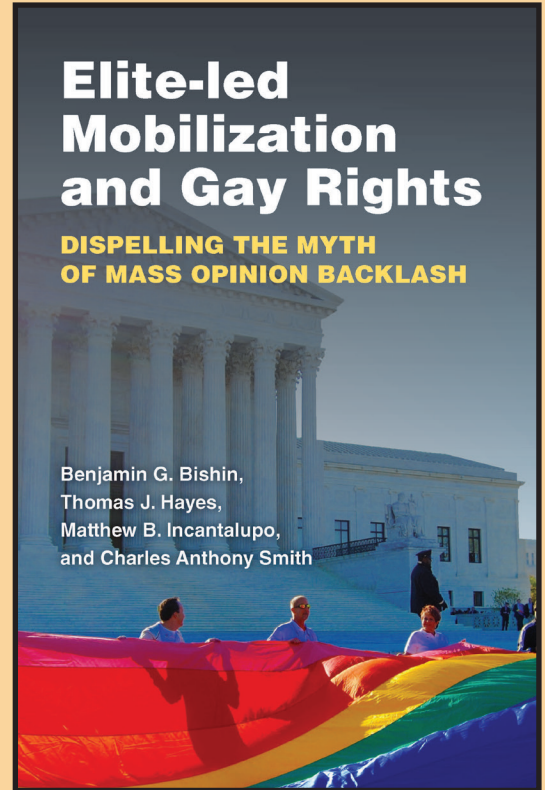
Media and scholastic accounts describe a strong public opinion backlash—a sharply negative and enduring opinion change—against attempts to advance gay rights. Academic research, however, increasingly questions backlash as an explanation for opposition to LGBT rights. The authors of *Elite-led Mobilization and Gay Rights* argue that what appears to be public opinion backlash against gay rights is more consistent with elite-led mobilization—a strategy used by anti-gay elites, primarily white evangelicals, seeking to prevent the full incorporation of LGBT Americans in the polity in order to achieve political objectives and increase their political power. This book defines and tests the theory of Mass Opinion Backlash and develops and tests the theory of Elite-Led Mobilization by employing a series of online and natural experiments, surrounding the Supreme Court rulings in *Obergefell* and *Windsor*, and President Obama’s position change on gay marriage. The authors employ extensive survey, voting behavior, and campaign finance data, and examine the history of the LGBT movement and its opposition by religious conservatives, from the Lavender Scare, to the campaign against Trans Rights in the defeat of Houston’s 2015 HERO ordinance, to evaluate these theories. Finally, this book examines what is widely considered the textbook case of anti-gay backlash: the 2010 Iowa Judicial Retention Election. Taken together, the evidence shows that opposition to LGBT rights is a top down process incited by anti-gay elites rather than a bottom up process described by public opinion backlash.

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