

# Prepandemic and Pandemic Marriages among Same-Sex and Different-Sex Couples

Christopher A. Julian<sup>1</sup> , Wendy D. Manning<sup>1</sup> ,  
 Krista K. Westrick-Payne<sup>1</sup> , and Lisa Carlson<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Most states experienced declines in marriages during the pandemic, with variation across states. Given that marriages to same-sex couples make up a small share of total marriages, these trends are overwhelmingly representative of marriages of different-sex couples. To test if the decline observed among marriages of different-sex couples is also observed among marriages of same-sex couples, the authors calculated ratios (2020 marriage count divided by 2019 marriage count) for 13 states, disaggregating marriages of same- and different-sex couples. The 13 states selected were the only states in which same-sex marriage administrative data were available. The results reveal disparate effects of the pandemic on marriage counts for same-sex and different-sex couples. For 11 of the states examined, marriages of same-sex couples either did not decline or declined less than marriages of different-sex couples. Further investigation is warranted as more state-level data on same-sex marriage become available.

## Keywords

marriage, pandemic, COVID-19, same sex

During the pandemic, the number of marriages performed in the United States declined across most states (Westrick-Payne and Manning 2022; Westrick-Payne, Manning, and Carlson 2022). Although the disparate effects of the pandemic on marriage counts across the United States are evident, these trends largely reflect the experiences of different-sex couples given the small share of marriages of same-sex couples relative to different-sex couples. To examine whether the change in marriages during the pandemic is the same for same-sex and different-sex couples, we calculated ratios (2020 marriage count divided by 2019 marriage count) for 13 states, disaggregating marriages among same-sex couples from those among different-sex couples. The 13 states used for this analysis are the only states in which administrative counts of marriages among same-sex couples were available for 2019 and 2020. The rationale for our method and details about the data are provided in the Supplement.

## Marriage Counts

Figure 1 shows that the pattern of marriages for same-sex couples was split, with six states displaying increases from 2019 to 2020 (Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Washington, Colorado,

and West Virginia) and seven states experiencing decreases (South Carolina, Georgia, Oregon, New Hampshire, Alaska, Michigan, and Hawaii). The ratios of marriages between 2019 and 2020 among same-sex couples ranged from 0.48 (Hawaii) to 1.74 (Idaho). The decline in Hawaii was most likely due to travel restrictions. In contrast, a clearer pattern emerged for different-sex couples, with a decline in marriages between 2019 and 2020 across all 13 states, with ratios ranging from 0.52 (Hawaii) to 0.99 (Idaho). For 11 of the states (Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Washington, Colorado, West Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Oregon, Alaska, and Michigan) the 2019 and 2020 ratio of marriages for same-sex couples was higher than the ratio for different-sex couples. Thus, in only two states were the 2019 and 2020 ratios of marriages of same-sex couples smaller than the ratios of

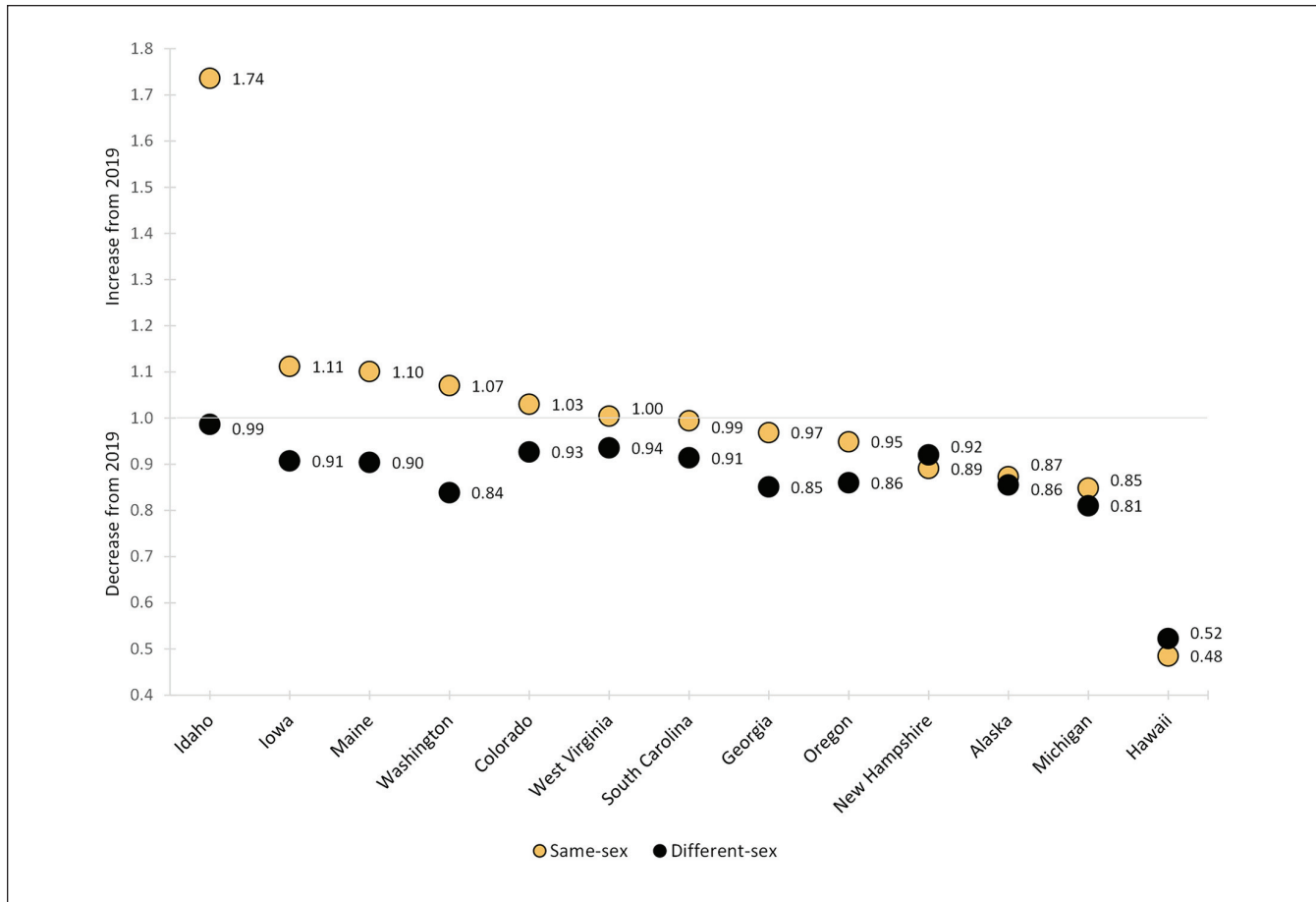
<sup>1</sup>Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio, USA

### Corresponding Author:

Christopher A. Julian, Bowling Green State University, Center for Family and Demographic Research, 223 Williams Hall, Bowling Green, OH 43402, USA.

Email: [cjulian@bgsu.edu](mailto:cjulian@bgsu.edu)





**Figure 1.** Ratio of 2020 marriage counts to 2019 marriage counts for same- and different-sex couples for the 13 available states. The gray line indicates a stable marriage count from 2019 to 2020, ratios above the line indicate increased marriage counts, and ratios below the line indicate decreased marriage counts. Yellow dots represent ratios for marriages of same-sex couples, and black dots represent ratios for marriages of different-sex couples.

Sources: See Supplement.

marriages of different-sex couples (New Hampshire and Hawaii).

## Implications

The present findings are consistent with previous research that detected state variation in the effect of the pandemic on marriage counts (Westrick-Payne and Manning 2022; Westrick-Payne et al. 2022). However, we find that in addition to differentials across states, patterns diverged for marriages among same and different-sex couples. In fact, for marriages among same-sex couples in six of the states, no observed decline occurred, whereas declines in marriages among different-sex couples existed for all 13 states. Additionally, the results indicate that for most of the states investigated, marriages of same-sex couples either experienced no decline or experienced smaller declines than marriages of different-sex couples. These results could be due to a greater need among same-sex couples for the legal and

financial protections of marriage in the midst of the uncertainties brought on by the pandemic. It is also possible that marriage may serve as a buffer against the stress and discrimination experienced by same-sex couples in the United States. Additionally, although the states explored have varying years of initiating legalization of marriage of same-sex couples, the relative recency of legalization at the national level may make marriages for same-sex couples less susceptible to a decline. However, for two of the states examined, the declines in marriages of same-sex couples were slightly greater than for different-sex couples, warranting further investigation as more data become available across more states and over time.


## Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported in part by the Center for Family and

Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (P2CHD050959) and an R03 grant (R03HD103830-01).

### ORCID iDs

Christopher A. Julian  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8853-6683>

Wendy D. Manning  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8063-7380>

Krista K. Westrick-Payne  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8586-8092>

Lisa Carlson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0533-8305>

### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### References

- Westrick-Payne, Krista K., and Wendy D. Manning. 2022. "Marriage, Divorce, and the COVID-19 Pandemic in the U.S." Family Profile No. 12. Bowling Green, OH: National Center for Family & Marriage Research. Retrieved November 8, 2022. <https://www.bgsu.edu/ncfmr/resources/data/family-profiles/westrick-payne-manning-marriage-divorce-covid-pandemic-fp-22-12.html>.
- Westrick-Payne, Krista K., Wendy D. Manning, and Lisa Carlson. 2022. "Pandemic Shortfall in Marriages and Divorces in the

United States." *Socius* 8. Retrieved November 8, 2022. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23780231221090192>.

### Author Biographies

**Christopher A. Julian** is a research assistant at the Center for Family and Demographic Research and a graduate student at Bowling Green State University. He is a family demographer focusing on cohabitation, aging, LGBTQ+ adults, and quantitative methods.

**Wendy D. Manning** is the Dr. Howard E. Aldrich and Penny Daum Aldrich Distinguished Professor of Sociology and codirector of the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University. She is a family demographer examining measurement, family patterns and social relationships in the United States, with an emphasis on the LGBTQ+ population.

**Krista K. Westrick-Payne** is the assistant director of the National Center for Family and Marriage Research and a research affiliate of the Center for Family and Demographic Research, both at Bowling Green State University, as well as a data technician for the Henry County Health Department. Her work encompasses a broad range of topics related to marriage, family, and health throughout the life course.

**Lisa Carlson** is a PhD candidate in sociology at Bowling Green State University. Her research focuses on economic demography, specifically on family formation on an individual level.