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The Collaborative Multiracial Postelection Survey (CMPS) has been collecting an incredibly diverse sample of adults in the United States since 2008. However, it was not until 2020 when the principals of the CMPS, where I served as the LGBTQ Over-sample Director, took major steps to ensure that they had obtained

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a quality sample of LGBTQ people. This article discusses the relevance of studying LGBTQ people for political science and the challenges of surveying them. I assess and compare the 2020 CMPS LGBTQ sample to other metrics. A benefit to the 2020 CMPS is that many questions can compare LGBTQ people to their cisgender and straight counterparts.

The Relevance Of Studying Lgbtq People For Political Science

The study of LGBTQ people and politics is important to examine. Prior research suggests that the LGBTQ category is important and often overlooked in the study of political opinions (Jones 2021). More broadly, LGBTQ people provide ample opportunity to examine political phenomena in the United States and across the globe (Ayoub 2022). Whereas substantial research has been devoted to studying the opinions of the general public about LGBTQ people and their rights, seldom are the political behaviors of LGBTQ people examined.

Yet, LGBTQ politics can be vital to understanding central questions of political science and power (for AIDS, see Sherrill, Somerville, and Bailey 1992). For example, LGBTQ activists have staged some of the most dramatic and successful political demonstrations (for AIDS activism, see Andersen and Jennings 2010; Jennings and Andersen 2003). The massive shift in American attitudes about gay rights remains perplexing (but see Garretson 2018), and the 2020s backlash against transgender people and their rights has mobilized social conservatives in a new “culture war” (Castle 2019).

Furthermore, a growing percentage of adults identify as LGBTQ, particularly among young people (Flores and Conron 2023). LGBTQ voters remain a solid voting bloc for the Democratic Party; exit polls suggest that there would have been much tighter election outcomes had LGBTQ voters stayed home (Flores 2022). At the same time, LGBTQ people are incredibly diverse, cutting across socioeconomic strata, age, race and ethnicity, religion, location, socialization, and differences in social stigma across LGBTQ subgroups. This mystery of unity in diversity deserves more attention. Whereas the lack of attention may be related to stigma within the political and social sciences

(Ayoub 2022), it also is related to the dearth of quality data on LGBTQ people.

Complications Of Collecting Survey Data About Lgbtq People

LGBTQ people are hard-to-reach populations due to them comprising about 8% to 9% of the adult population and the lack of US Census data that provides a sampling frame and weighting targets. This results in the inability to understand the probability of selection or post-stratification weighting commonly used to present representative statistics. Additionally, the language around queer identities may fluctuate, potentially complicating established best practices about measuring sexual orientation and

gender identity (Bates, Chin, and Becker 2022). Furthermore, survey modes and sponsors may affect the propensity for individuals to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) (Bates, Chin, and Becker 2022).

One way to overcome these challenges is to add SOGI questions to large-N population-based studies, where a sizeable subsample of LGBTQ people can be collected. Indeed, this is how the Gallup Organization produces estimates of the growing percentage of LGBTQ-identified people from its tracking surveys throughout the entire year. Much of existing SOGI data is found in health surveys (Flores and Conron 2023) and in studies of violence (Flores et al. 2020). The US Census Bureau (2024) currently is proposing the testing of SOGI measures for the American Community Survey. The Cooperative Election Survey and the CMPS provide other sources to use SOGI measures and to obtain political data comparable to non-LGBTQ people.

Findings From The 2020 CMPS

Through a process of working with collaborators—Patrick Egan, Zein Murib, Julie Moreau, Andrew Proctor, and Dara Strolovitch—we considered how to best conceptualize and operationalize LGBTQ people for the 2020 CMPS. Through thoughtful discussion, we concluded that *identification* is the dimension of SOGI that best suited our purposes.¹ Self-identification as LGBTQ is a politically relevant category (Armstrong 2002; Jones 2021). For sexual orientation, we asked: “Which of the following best represents how you think of yourself?” Response options were “Straight, that is, not gay or lesbian”; “gay or lesbian”; “bisexual”; “something else”; and “I don’t know what this question means.” For gender, we asked: “What is your gender?” Response options were “man,” “woman,” “non-binary,” and “something else.” The “something else” option allowed respondents to write-in their own option. For transgender status, we asked: “Some people describe themselves as transgender when they experience a different gender identity from their sex at birth. For example, a person born into a male body but feels female or lives as a woman would be

transgender. A transgender person may be of any sexual orientation—straight, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Are you transgender?” Response options were “yes,” “no,” or “don’t know.” We drew this question from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, which defines “transgender” for respondents who express confusion about the term. We opted to define the term for all respondents to reduce the potential for false positives. From these questions, 1,743 respondents indicated that they were LGBTQ² (8.7% of the sample), which reflects recent estimates of the percentage of people who identify as LGBTQ.

Sampling Goals Pre-pandemic

It was the initial goal of the 2020 CMPS to have a quota of at least 1,000 LGBTQ people from the overall sample.³ Because estimates of the percentage of adults who identify as LGBTQ is about 8% to 9%, we were able to exceed that quota through the panel vendors that we relied on to produce the overall sample of white, Black, Latinx, and Asian American samples (Flores 2024).

Challenges Faced While Sampling

Other than challenges in identifying the appropriate wording of questions to identify LGBTQ respondents, there were no observed challenges in obtaining responses about SOGI. Indeed, only 2.1% (N=309) of non-LGBTQ respondents either refused to answer or indicated that they did not know how to answer the sexual-orientation question; only 0.6% (N=16) of LGBTQ people responded the same way.⁴ It is important to note that questions of a respondent’s SOGI were asked near the beginning of the survey along with other demographics; placement of these questions did not noticeably increase interview terminations.

Demographic Comparisons About The Lgbtq Sample

Because official government statistics are not available about LGBTQ people, I selected the weighting targets based on other probability-based surveys that collect SOGI, including the Gallup Poll. Flores and Conron (2023) provide demographic benchmarks across various surveys.⁵ Some of these benchmarks to the weighted 2020 CMPS are compared in table 1. The 2020 CMPS LGBTQ sample tends to include slightly older, more man-identified, and racially and ethnically diverse people than comparable statistics. However, these differences may be artifacts of the questionnaire design. The CMPS is intended to obtain a more thorough measurement of a person’s racial self-identification, which may result in differences from other statistics. We also used a gender-identity question, by which the comparisons are measured with binary sex-based measures.

Lessons For The 2024 CMPS

The 2024 CMPS likely will be as successful in obtaining a robust sample of LGBTQ adults. Because SOGI data collection has expanded, there should be appropriate and better benchmarks to weight the 2024 CMPS. Because most respondents answered these questions and that asking about SOGI did not disrupt data collection, the 2024 CMPS principal investigators should be encouraged to continue collecting the data. As the Oversample Director, I will continue to consult with colleagues in political

Table 1
Comparing Demographics of the 2020 CMPS to Other Surveys

	2020 CMPS (N=1,743)	2021 BRFSS (N=11,976)	2021 Gallup (N=585)
Age Group			
18–24	26.9%	32.3%	35.3%
25–34	24.6%	28.9%	29.2%
35–49	21.6%	18.4%	19.5%
50–64	17.5%	13.4%	11.7%
65+	9.5%	7.0%	4.4%
Gender			
Man	44.8%	38.3%	35.6%
Woman	50.3%	61.7%	64.4%
Nonbinary/Something Else	4.9%	—	—
Race/Ethnicity			
White, Non-Hispanic	51.9%	65.7%	59.5%
Black, Non-Hispanic	16.7%	10.2%	11.2%
Asian, Non-Hispanic	5.8%	4.2%	3.6%
Latino/a or Hispanic	22.1%	15.2%	23.4%
Other Race or Multiracial	3.6%	4.7%	2.3%
Educational Attainment*			
High School or Less	29.0%	33.0%	26.9%
Associate’s Degree or Some College	31.9%	33.7%	28.8%
Bachelor’s Degree or More	39.1%	33.2%	44.3%
LGBTQ Identity			
Cisgender Bisexual Woman	36.5%	42.7%	42.8%
Cisgender Bisexual Man	20.4%	16.1%	13.1%
Cisgender Lesbian	12.8%	12.8%	15.5%
Cisgender Gay Man	21.3%	17.2%	18.4%
Transgender Person	9.0%	11.2%	10.2%

Notes: BRFSS=Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. *Of respondents aged 25 years or older.

science and beyond as advances in the measurement of SOGI are made.

Conclusion

The 2020 CMPS provides a valuable opportunity to examine the political behaviors and opinions of LGBTQ adults. The questionnaire includes numerous political topics, including those that are pertinent to LGBTQ people. It is important to note that many of these questions are asked of the entire sample such that comparisons can be drawn about the political differences between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ people from a racially and ethnically diverse sample. Prior research suggests that breaking down the LGBTQ category is necessary to examine cohesion and points of difference (Jones 2021); therefore, subgroup differences also should be explored.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the *PS: Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/IFG7JI>.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no known or perceived ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES


1. Some health and violence studies measure transgender people using a “two-step” procedure that asks about assigned sex at birth and current gender identity. This is a best practice for some social sciences but may not always be the dimension of gender identity that theoretically and conceptually matters.
2. This estimate reflects how the CMPS administrators categorized LGBTQ people. Direct analysis of the 2020 CMPS may differ depending on how LGBTQ people are coded.
3. Notably, the terms “Oversample Director” and “oversample” do not reflect the sampling strategy for the LGBTQ participants. This is more of a quota sample that hopefully is large enough as a subsample of all respondents. However, if quota benchmarks were not met, there would be additional efforts to target LGBTQ people until they were.
4. Omission of sexual orientation could occur among LGBTQ people if they indicated that they are transgender or non-binary.
5. These weights adjust the LGBTQ sample to available targets. However, the CMPS—being racially and ethnically diverse—means that there were 1,403 LGBTQ respondents who are not white, which thereby enables deeper analyses by race and ethnic groups.


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