In May 2017, Taiwan became the first nation in Asia, the first with a strong Confucian cultural heritage, and the first with a plurality of Buddhists to legalize same-sex marriage. A landmark development, Taiwan's decision perfectly symbolizes why Amy Adamczyk's analysis of the national- and individual-level factors that shape global public opinion about homosexuality is so timely. In recent decades, Western democracies with relatively high levels of economic development have become increasingly tolerant of homosexuality and supportive of gay rights, while religious institutions and religious people within them have been the primary forces of opposition. But what about non-Western nations, nations with lower levels of economic development, nations with non-democratic governments, and nations influenced by different religions? Will more nations around the world join Taiwan in legalizing same-sex marriage? Will the forces of support and opposition to expanding gay rights look similarly or differently in various global contexts?

Adamczyk begins to answer such questions with an original and ambitious combination of three types of empirical analyses. First, she analyzes three waves of public opinion data from the World Values Survey using hierarchical linear models to determine the individual- and society-level predictors of tolerance for homosexuality. Second, she conducts three comparative analyses of how regime type, economic development levels, and religion are related to tolerance of homosexuality and support for gay rights. Finally, she describes an in-depth case study on Taiwan, in which she combines her quantitative and qualitative analytic techniques in the rest of the book with twenty-six expert interviews, in an effort to learn about the factors that affect tolerance for homosexuality in Confucian societies.

The book's overarching thesis is that four national-level measures—the dominant religion, mean level of religious importance, level of economic development, and level of democracy—most strongly explain the global variation in tolerance for homosexuality. Her empirical evidence for the thesis is solid, and she even goes so far as to catalog 70 additional national-level measures—like education levels and population growth rates—that could logically contribute to her explanation but do not. One chapter focuses on individual-level predictors of tolerance, but Adamczyk's real contribution is showing how macro-level differences between societies are related to the patterns of public opinion we observe between and within them.

However, if the reader is expecting a neat, tidy, and exhaustive defense of a parsimonious explanation, one will not find it here. Adamczyk constructs a book that emphasizes variability and complexity, and in doing so does not give in to the temptation to claim to have found "the answer." The majority of the book is devoted to examining how her thesis works in the context of ten nations: three Protestant (the United States, Uganda, and South Africa), three Muslim (Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey), three Catholic (Spain, Italy, and Brazil), and one Confucian (Taiwan). Each nation fits more- or less uneasily into her general argument, and the book rhythmically calls the reader's attention as much to the unique details of each country's history and society as it does to its overall fit with the model. For example, Adamczyk discusses why South Africa legalized same-sex marriage, despite having only moderate (in a strictly comparative sense) levels of tolerance for homosexuality; democracy, religion, and economic development all play a role, as her thesis suggests, but so too does the legacy of Apartheid.

Practically speaking, then, Adamczyk provides the reader with a detailed overview of how public opinion about a single issue can be shaped by so many unique circumstances in diverse national contexts, while at the same time fitting a single, consistent global pattern demonstrating the importance of religion, democracy, and economic development. Additionally, the reader will gain...
thorough theoretical explanations of why each of the major variables in her models have the effects they have. For example, Adamczyk deeply engages theories from the sociology of religion, along with the puzzle of why people’s moral values are shaped by their nation’s level of economic development and type of political regime. Because of this, graduate students and professors will find this book a valuable resource for digging deeper into literatures that apply to so many issues beyond public opinion about homosexuality.

In the end, Adamczyk’s use of three different analytic methods and multiple perspectives on the issue of global public opinion about homosexuality highlights just how much more work social scientists can and should do to understand the issue. The quantitative analysis, the comparative-historical approach, and the in-depth case study all offer distinct insights into the topic, but readers may be left wanting more from each. For example, the hierarchical level models alone present enough complexities and puzzles to warrant a book of their own. Asking one author to do it all would be unfair, of course, and Adamczyk has done invaluable work establishing the theoretical and empirical parameters upon which future work should build. This book is essential reading for students and researchers who want to know more about the future of gay rights around the globe and who want to contribute to a deeper understanding of how politics, economics, religion, and culture interact to shape public opinion about homosexuality.

Notes on Contributor

Peter Hart-Brinson (PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison) is an Associate Professor of Sociology and Communication-Journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He studies generational change in attitudes about same-sex marriage in the United States.