

Science magazine retracts study on voters' gay-rights views

May 28 2015, by David Crary

Science magazine on Thursday formally retracted a highly publicized article about a study gauging the ability of openly gay canvassers to shift voters' views toward support for same-sex marriage.

One of the authors of the article, Columbia University political science professor Donald Green, had requested the retraction on May 19, saying his co-author, Michael LaCour, had been unable to produce the [raw data](#) that was used in the study.

Science magazine, after its own investigation, said it decided to proceed with the retraction even though LaCour—a graduate assistant at the University of California, Los Angeles—did not agree with that decision.

Science said it based the retraction on misrepresentation of cash incentives for survey participants, false statements about financial sponsorship of the survey, and the inability to produce original data, "which makes it impossible to verify or alleviate concerns about statistical irregularities."

LaCour did not respond immediately to an email from The Associated Press, and his phone number was not taking messages.

On his website was this message: "I will supply a definitive response on or before May 29, 2015. I appreciate your patience, as I gather evidence and relevant information."

The article in Science received widespread news coverage when it appeared in December, including articles by The Associated Press, The New York Times and the Washington Post.

The article detailed a study which concluded that openly gay canvassers were far more effective than straight canvassers in shifting voters' views toward support for [same-sex marriage](#).

According to the article, opinion changes produced by the straight canvassers tended to fade within a few weeks and those voters reverted to their previous views less favorable to same-sex marriage. The article said that the changes produced by the gay canvassers persisted nine months later.

Green began to have misgivings about the study after the integrity of the data was called into question by two graduate students at the University of California, Berkeley, who tried to launch a similar study.

"I am deeply embarrassed by this turn of events and apologize to the editors, reviewer, and readers of Science," Green wrote last week.

Reasons for Thursday's retraction were detailed as follows by Science magazine:

—"Survey incentives were misrepresented. To encourage participation in the survey, respondents were claimed to have been given cash payments to enroll, to refer family and friends, and to complete multiple surveys. In correspondence received from Michael J. LaCour's attorney, he confirmed that no such payments were made."

—"The statement on sponsorship was false. In the report, LaCour acknowledged funding from the Williams Institute, the Ford Foundation, and the Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund. Per correspondence from

LaCour's attorney, this statement was not true."

—"LaCour has not produced the original survey data from which someone else could independently confirm the validity of the reported findings."

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Science magazine retracts study on voters' gay-rights views (2015, May 28) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-05-science-magazine-retracts-voters-gay-rights.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.