

**Vote like your rights depend on it:  
homosexuality and electoral participation in western Europe.**

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**Abstract**

In this paper, we provide the first empirical assessment of the effect of homosexuality on individual-level electoral participation across twelve western European countries. Empirically, we employ a recently applied method of identifying homosexuals across western Europe using data from the European Social Survey to test the effect of being lesbian, gay or bisexual on turnout. The effect of sexuality is found to be positive even when controlling for well-established socio-economic and attitudinal determinants of participation. The results contrast with existing findings regarding the negative effects of minority status based on race and ethnicity on turnout. The implications of the results suggest that those parties that are able to effectively capture the “gay vote” will be banking votes from a section of the electorate that displays an increased probability of turning out on election day making this minority group a prime target for political persuasion.

*Key words: gay vote, turnout, elections, participation, sexuality, European Social Survey*

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## **1. Introduction**

Assessments of political participation and electoral turnout represent one of the most researched avenues of political science (Geys 2006). The extent of the scholarly attention it receives is, of course, a function of the large role that electoral participation plays in underpinning liberal democracies. Elections represent core windows of opportunity for voters to decide who governs them and what the policies of government should be (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978). Indeed, electoral participation is often identified as one of the core indicators of democratic performance since “citizen participation is at the heart of democracy” (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Because universal suffrage underpins the need for equality of representation, understanding what drives unequal levels of participation between different social groups is an avenue of research that is both of theoretical as well as normative interest for political scientists.

Beyond normative arguments, scholars have also noted that inequality in levels of political participation are linked to overall social and economic inequality (Avery 2015). As Key (1949, 527) noted, politicians are “under no compulsion to pay much heed to classes and groups [...] that do not vote.” As such, rates of turnout are commonly referred to as “thermometers of how healthy a democracy is” (Trumm and Sudulich 2016, 168). Elections are central to democratic governance (Huntington 1991), while participation allows citizens to express their preferences and their displeasure with politicians in power

(Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti and Pavoncello 1983). Low or unequal turnout, meanwhile, can signal deeper failures within political systems (Franklin 2004). Turnout can be particularly important for minority communities, as high levels of participation can serve to maximise inclusiveness (Dahl 1973) and aid the provision of policy output that caters to their own group-specific welfare.

Given the importance of political participation to inclusiveness and equality, establishing the individual determinants that depress and increase political participation across different social strata is an important endeavour. Established in the literature is the positive association between a higher level of social status (Lijphart 1997) as well as social privilege (Gallego 2010; Smets and Van Ham 2013) on the propensity of individuals to turn out on election day. Conversely, minority group status, specifically that based on race, is shown to reduce the likelihood of an individual casting their ballot on election day (Heath, Fisher, Rosenblatt, Sanders and Sobolewska 2013). There is, therefore, evidence that democracies suffer from unequal turnout (Lijphart 1977) with different social strata participating at different rates dependent on a number of socio-economic, cultural and attitudinal-based determinants (for a summary, see Geys 2006).

Little has been made, however, of how sexuality can impact upon electoral behaviour (Bailey 1999; Egan 2012; Hertzog 1996), particularly in the European context. Whilst

Turnbull-Dugarte (forthcoming) has recently shown that sexuality affects both individual vote-choice and ideological preferences in western Europe, there is yet no single country or cross-country assessment of how sexuality impacts individual-level turnout on the European continent. Given that gay<sup>1</sup> individuals have gained greater visibility within society, understanding how homosexuals behave politically is important as they make up a small yet significant portion of society<sup>2</sup>. How sexuality affects voter participation in western Europe is the subject of this paper.

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to gay voters and homosexual individuals interchangeably. Conceptually we define homosexuality as having a sexual partner of the same sex and indicate homosexuals' individuals based on the gender of their current partner. Given the identification strategy of homosexuals adopted (see Data and Method) we cannot rule out that we are including bisexuals in the homosexual sample. Note also that whilst we refer to individuals as being gay, this may not be a social label that the individuals included in the sample would adopt themselves. Whilst homosexuality is assumed to be an ascriptive trait randomly distributed across the population (Sherrill, 1996), adopting the gay label is likely a political decision (Egan 2012; Egan 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Famously, the Kinsey reports (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin 1948) claimed that around 10% of the population was homosexual. The real number of homosexual individuals in the population is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain because they are an invisible minority (Cook 1999; Harry 1990; Hertzog 1996) and identifying them requires individuals to self-report. That being said, Spiegelharter (2015) argues that the 10% estimation is likely close to accurate. Whilst we do not argue that the number of homosexuals has been increasing, we do maintain, however, that the visibility of homosexuals within the private and public sphere has increased (Haider-Markel 2010) meaning that the perceived importance of the group will likewise be increasing.

In the following we test the effect of sexuality on individual electoral participation across twelve western European democracies relying on aggregated data from the European Social Survey (ESS). Empirically, we find that homosexual individuals are, on average, more likely to turn out to the polls than heterosexuals when controlling for a battery of well-established socio-economic and attitudinal-based political variables. There is therefore a “sexuality gap” in electoral behaviour (Hertzog 1996) meaning that some feature of the homosexual experience drives these individuals to participate at a higher rate than their heterosexual peers above and beyond that which can be explained by the distribution of these individuals across typical determinants. Pulling on realistic interest assumptions (Blumer 1958) and social identity theory (Miller et al. 1981; Turner et al. 1987), we theorise that homosexuals are likely driven to “over participate” in elections vis-à-vis heterosexuals because they observe participation in the political process as a key avenue to ensure the advancement of their own individual welfare as well as that of their group, and to protect themselves against the potential threat of discriminatory policies of the majority.

The contributions made by the analysis are twofold. Firstly, we contribute to the large literature that explores the determinants of political behaviour and electoral participation by highlighting the importance of sexuality as a predictor of turnout within western Europe. Secondly, we add to the emerging subfield of “gay politics”. This field boasts a

solid basis (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Kollman and Paternotte 2013; Mucciaroni 2008), particularly in explaining public opinion in relation to queer individuals and the consequences of the same (Haider-Markel 2010); as well as the role of same-sex marriage and partnerships in changing public opinion (Abou-Chadi and Finnigan 2018); the processes of legislative decision-making (Kollman 2017; Reynolds 2013); and the effects of judicial reforms (Klarman 2012). In terms of the supply side of electoral politics, we know that, at least in the UK context, sexual orientation impacts little on the candidates' electoral chances (Magni and Reynolds 2018). But an understanding of the individual-level political behaviour of homosexual individuals on the demand side of elections (Bailey 1999; Egan 2012; Egan 2018; Hertzog 1996; Sherrill and Flores 2014; Turnbull-Dugarte forthcoming), particularly in relation to electoral participation, is very much understudied.

In the subsequent section we explore why we might expect sexuality to influence voter participation by pulling on the theoretical and empirical scholarship related to social minority group status and discrimination. We then engage in a discussion of the research design and highlight the method adopted to stratify voters by their sexuality. Finally, we present and discuss the main findings as well as their implications before highlighting a collection of potential avenues for future research.

## **2. Theory and expectations**

The individual-level determinants of voter turnout are particularly well-researched within political science (for a major summary, see Geys 2006). Research has established that factors such as age, socio-economic status, and education are associated with the likelihood to vote (Plutzer 2002; 2018). The role of sexuality has been overlooked in this line of research, but why would we expect sexuality to be associated with different levels of participation at all?

From one perspective, we might expect homosexuality to have a positive relationship with political participation. The notion of group-based voting is long-standing in political science, as the traditional school of thought maintains that social groups align and vote together to maximise their benefits (Campbell et al. 1954; Huddy 2013; Lipset and Rokkam 1967). Indeed, the Downsian (Downs 1957) assumption of electoral participation is that potential voters are motivated to turn out by rational choice expectations driven by the costs and benefits they perceive from voting. Voters, therefore, are considered welfare maximisers: they will seek to participate in the political process and vote for political candidates and parties that are most likely to increase either their own personal welfare or that of their group. Given that the potential benefits of participating in elections for minority groups may be larger than that of the majority - in that ensuring their views are represented can provide them with material benefits

(Blumer, 1958) in the form of greater legal protections from discrimination, for example - there is, therefore, an additional incentive for homosexual individuals to participate.

The incentivising role of individual self-interest (Sears and Funk 1991) as well as that of the shared group (Bobo 1983; Green and Cowden 1992) has been observed to be strongest when the pull of policies proposed by competing vote-seeking parties is understood to have a significant positive impact on the everyday life of the voter and group. Given that the public policies that tend to cater to the demands of homosexual individuals often represent substantive changes in the legality of homosexual activity and the institutional recognition of same-sex relationships it is clear that these policies would represent a significant change on homosexual citizens' everyday lives. In essence, as a minority group, we might expect homosexuals to vote "like their rights depended on it" (Brydum 2013) in order to protect themselves from potential discriminatory output from the majority (Cho, Gimpel and Wu 2006; Giles and Hertz 1994), to seek reforms of existing discriminatory policies, or to seek out policies that advance their own economic and social welfare (Schaffner and Senic 2006).

Central to studies regarding minority group political behaviour is the shaping role of group consciousness (Huddy 2013; Shingles 1981; Stokes 2003). The theoretical link between group membership and political action is the observed "need to act" (Gamson

1968) in response to “shared grievances” (Sherrill 1996) that are brought about by the realisation of the group’s inferior socio-economic and political status (Blumer 1958; Miller et al. 1981) or hostile attitudes towards them (Sherrill 1996) via individuals’ lived personal and social experiences (Campbell et al. 1954). Moreover, Huddy (2013) highlights that the likelihood of group identification increases when the social group is of a marked numerical minority vis-à-vis the mainstream majority as individuals are driven to associate together in order to harvest a feeling of inclusiveness and “belonging”.

Sherrill (1996) argued that the geographic distribution of the homosexual population might render it difficult for homosexuals to effectively mobilise and form a group of political importance. That has, however, not proven to be the case, with gay rights movements emerging to mobilise gay voters to action within numerous western democracies (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Mucciaroni 2008) as well as across country lines (Ayoub 2018; Kollman and Paternotte 2013). Given the observable presence of efforts to mobilise gay voters to take political action in order to advance their institutional welfare and civil rights, in addition to the notable efforts of parties to court the gay vote (Economist 2015; Morris 2009), there is a clear basis to expect homosexual individuals to be politically active and electorally participative.

Existing research within the American context provides some initial empirical data to support this expectation. Sherill and Flores (2014) compare the political behaviour of homosexuals with that of heterosexuals and observe that homosexual voters are more politically active than their heterosexual counterparts in terms of contacting national and local representatives, attending political rallies or speeches, and writing letters to newspaper editors. In terms of electoral participation, however, their analysis provides inconclusive results regarding the heterogeneous turnout rates based on sexuality. Nevertheless, their main findings provide reason to expect homosexuals to be more politically engaged than heterosexuals and willing to participate in activities that communicate and lobby for their own political interests.

In the wider literature on minority status and political behaviour, it is well-established that minority group status can also be structured by processes of discrimination, which amplify the perceived necessity for political activation (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Indeed, experiencing discrimination can increase awareness of one's subordinate societal position and drive turnout (Barreto 2010; Barreto and Woods 2005; Cho, Gimpel, and Wu 2006; Miller et al. 1981; Pantoja et al. 2001; Sanchez 2006). In addition to observed experiences of discrimination, the perceived threat of the same in both a symbolic and material form can also lead to increased inter-group mobilisation (Stephan and Stephan 2000) to political action.

We adopt the assumption that gay individuals in western Europe represent a social stratum that has been the subject of historical and contemporary processes of discrimination. In the majority of countries under assessment, sexual-activity between members of the same sex were criminalised until the latter part of the twentieth century and the legal provision of marriages between individuals of the same-sex has only recently expanded (Table 1). Of note, for example, is that of the European Union’s current twenty-eight member states, only sixteen of these states provide same-sex marriage rights at present. Although the introduction of these gay rights issues is significant as it symbolises the historical persistence of institutional avenues of discrimination against homosexual individuals, it also highlights that these issues have also begun to enter the political arena and, as a result, they will likely have contributed to the perceived benefits of participating in the political process of homosexual voters.

*Table 1: Legal gay rights provisions*

<b>Country</b>	<b>Same-sex activity decriminalised</b>	<b>Same-sex marriage legalised</b>
BE - Belgium	1795	2003
CH - Switzerland	1942	-
DE - Germany	1969	2017
ES - Spain	1979	2005
FI - Finland	1971	2015
FR - France	1810	2013
GB - United Kingdom	1982 <sup>a</sup>	2014 <sup>b</sup>
IE - Ireland	1993	2015
NL - Netherlands	1811	2001

NO - Norway	1972	2008
PT - Portugal	1983	2010
SE - Sweden	1944	2009

a. England and Wales (1967) | Scotland (1981) | Northern Ireland (1982)  
b. England and Wales (2013 | Scotland (2014) | NB: Northern-Ireland does not provide same-sex marriage

Moreover, even when decriminalisation of same-sex activity and legal provisions are afforded to recognise same-sex relationships with parity to that of opposite-sex couples, these are not necessarily good indicators that discrimination is being reduced (Asal, Sommer and Harwood 2013). Introducing same-sex marriage laws, for example, whilst they have been found to increase the positive assessments of homosexuals amongst the general public (Abou-Chadi and Finnigan 2018) have also been linked to increasing political and social animosity to gay individuals accused of seeking to expand the “gay agenda” (Klarman 2012).

Oskooii (2016, 620) argues that there are nuances within the relationship between discrimination and political behaviour, arguing that political discrimination in the form of discriminatory legal protections or systematic oppression of the group leads to a rise in mainstream political activity. Conversely, individual-level discrimination in the form of ad hoc personal attacks from specific individuals acts to suppress political activity. Here we are not concerned with identifying individuals who note personal experiences of discrimination, but rather, we are concerned with assessing how one’s belonging to a

group of individuals who are and have been a minority that has undergone periods of institutionalised discrimination<sup>3</sup> (homosexuals) may exhibit electoral behaviour that is distinct from that of members of the heterosexual majority. Since Oskooii (2016) theorises, and empirically shows in the US, that the relationship between political discrimination against the group leads directly to increased political activity as well as indirectly (via greater in-group participation), there is therefore, motivation to assume homosexuals – as a group subjected to distinct avenues of discrimination - will display higher levels of electoral participation.

Focusing on discrimination based on sexuality, Page (2018) finds that those who report sexuality-based discrimination in western Europe showed higher levels of non-electoral political participation. There is therefore additional empirical evidence to support the arguments made by Edelman (1964) who those who have been ostracized from the political system mobilise in groups seek to engage with it as a means of obtaining symbolic and substantive political goals. In other words, they are driven to political action as a means of ensuring their political demands are communicated to their representatives.

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed discussion of the discriminatory treatment of homosexuals in Europe, see Adam, Duyvendak and Krouwel (1999), Ayoub and Paternotte (2014), Trappolin, Gasparini and Wintemute (2012) as well as the annual review of gay rights legislation published by ILGA-Europe (2019).

In this way, homosexuals may seek to ensure their voice is heard in order to i) symbolically communicate that their collective voice (read vote) matters, and ii) to actively seek legislative changes for their own welfare and that of the collective group.

Empirically, there is yet to be any evidence to show a significant positive relationship between homosexuality and electoral participation. However, as discussed above, evidence from the US shows that homosexuality is associated with higher levels of political engagement in non-electoral avenues of political participation (Sherrill and Flores 2014). In the European setting, experiencing discrimination based on one's sexual orientation has also been observed to increase non-electoral participation (Page 2018). There is, therefore, reason to expect homosexuals in Europe to display similar patterns of political activism in the form of turning out to vote. In this case, we hypothesize there to be a positive increase in the likelihood of turning out to vote amongst homosexual Europeans vis-à-vis their heterosexual peers.

On the other hand, we might anticipate that, as a minority group, turnout will be lower among homosexual Europeans. There is evidence that minority status can serve to dampen turnout levels (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999). We know from studies into racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination that those who receive mistreatment are more likely to feel powerless (Branscombe, Schmitt and Harvey 1999; Dion and Earn 1975)

and fearful (Salamon and Van Evera 1973), which in turns depresses participation (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Guterbock and London 1983; McCluskey, et al. 2004; Salamon and Van Evera 1973). As a result, we cannot dismiss the possibility that being homosexual might actually be associated with a reduced propensity to turnout.

Importantly then, we present alternative hypotheses: whilst we theorize that homosexuality and the lived experience of the same will engender a distinct set of political predispositions (Bailey, 1999) and a feeling of being ‘othered’ (Turner et al., 1987) that mobilises political participation, theoretical understandings and empirical evidence provide ambiguous expectations regarding whether being gay in western European democracies will serve to activate electoral participation or decrease it. We now turn to discussing the means used to test how sexuality impacts electoral participation.

### **3. Data and Method**

The empirical analysis presented in the following relies on data pooled from eight rounds of the ESS (2002-2017) and includes data from twelve countries including: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden,

Switzerland and the UK.<sup>4</sup> Observations represent individual survey respondents (N=104,872) from the twelve countries included in the analysis. Observations are weighted using both sampling method probability weights as well as country population weights.

The dependent variable (*voted*) is a dichotomous indicator that relies on respondents' claim to have voted in the most recent general election. The potential limitation of this operationalisation is that, as is well established in the literature (Karp and Brockington 2005; Wright 1993), there is likely a higher level of overreporting of voter participation given the potential social desirability bias associated with voting. This is observed to be true in the case of the ESS respondents, with the mean level of participation being greater than the official turnout figures reported in a number of countries. That being said, the potential bias caused by overreporting does not affect the analysis at hand given that the

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<sup>4</sup> These are the twelve states from the western bloc of Europe that have uninterrupted participation in the ESS. Countries from eastern Europe were not included in the analysis since the high levels of intolerance of homosexuality likely suppresses the ability to observe homosexual respondents via the identification strategy applied here (Turnbull-Dugarte forthcoming). The reader will note that two countries included in this pool of European states have compulsory voting: Belgium (national level) and Switzerland (subnational level). Removing those countries with compulsory voting does not affect the size or significance of the association between individual turnout and homosexuality.

explanatory variables used in the models to stratify survey respondents are still those that stratify the actual electorate (Sigelman 1982).

### *Measuring Sexuality*

One of the main issues that has held back empirical research into sexuality and political behaviour is the issue of measuring sexuality (Cook 1999). To test the effect of sexuality, we rely on a recently applied method (Fischer 2016; Turnbull-Dugarte forthcoming) of identifying homosexual individuals using the household constitution of respondents of the ESS. The ESS asks respondents information regarding the other individuals who live with the respondent including their gender and their relationship to them<sup>5</sup>. A dummy variable (*homosexual*) identifies individuals as being homosexual if their self-identified partner shares the same gender as the respondent. Similar identification strategies have been used elsewhere using different datasets (Black et al. 2000; Fischer, Kalmijn and Steinmetz 2016) and observe similar numbers of individuals in same-sex relationships so we can be confident regarding the validity of the approach used<sup>6</sup>. The limitation of this

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<sup>5</sup> Question worded: “Looking at this card, what relationship if he/she [person in household] to you?”

Possible affirmative responses: Husband/wife/partner; Son/daughter/step[child]/adopted; Parent/parent-in-law; Other relative; Other non-relative

<sup>6</sup> Black et al. (2000) identify 0.62% of males and 0.71% of female respondents as homosexual using US data; Fischer et al. (2016) identify 0.95% using European data.

operationalisation is that we can only include individuals in a co-habiting relationship in the analysis<sup>7</sup> which may hinder the generalisability of the effect that sexuality displays. Including single individuals in the sample would allow there to be “closeted” homosexuals identified in the heterosexual group as well as other homosexual individuals who could not be identified as such because they did not have a partner whose gender could be matched against<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, since co-habiting couples are more likely to participate in elections due to within-couple social pressures (Blais, Galais and Coulombe 2018) holding the relationship and co-habitation status of respondents constant by removing single individuals better aids the isolation of the independent effect of sexuality. One assumption we therefore apply to the data is that the potential confounding effect of being in a relationship is distributed homogenously across both homosexual and heterosexual couples.

### *Control variables*

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<sup>7</sup> The results, however, are not sensitive to limiting the population to only co-habiting couples. Table A6 shows the consistency of the main findings using a sample of respondents that includes single individuals and incorporates an indicator for cohabitation.

<sup>8</sup> Random error might occur where individuals incorrectly identify the gender of their partner although given the substantially larger size of the heterosexual group this is likely to understate the real effect size of the sexuality variable than bias it upwards. Moreover, Black et al. (2000) demonstrate in a test for the impact of this error using similar identification strategy that amount random error is negligible.

The factor of control variables is pulled from the two individual-level theoretical frameworks that explain voting: that of socio-economic factors as well as attitudinal and political motivations. Included in the former are age, gender, education, income, and ethnicity; whilst the latter includes political interest, satisfaction with democracy, perception of the state of the economy, ideological placement and political extremism.

Within the socio-economic factors is *Age*. Age is a continuous variable and represents one of the strongest established predictors of political participation (Plutzer 2002; 2018), with younger citizens less likely to participate in elections than older citizens. *Gender* is dichotomous: male (1) and female (0). Gender is not necessarily a strong predictor of participation (Paxton, Kunovic and Hughes 2007, 264) and has provided for mixed results, particularly in European democracies (Campbell 2006; Hadjer and Beck 2010; Kostelka, Balis and Gidengil 2018; Oppenhius 1995). That being said, it remains a core control variable in political behaviour research (Plutzer 2018; Smets and Van Ham 2013) and therefore merits inclusion in the model.

Socio-economic status, as a broad concept, is significantly associated with political activity and engagement (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). Within this, education in particular tends to increase the likelihood of participating in elections (Blais 2000; Gallego 2010; Plutzer 2018) with the effect being observed in the US (Almond and Verba

1963; Verba and Nie 1972) as well as in Europe (Hadjar and Beck 2010). Indeed, when assessing the comparative magnitude of different socio-economic determinants, education is marked as one of the most substantively powerful exponents of participation (Campbell 2009; Gallego 2010; Smets and Van Ham 2013; Timpone 1998). In our analysis, *education* is indicated by the total number of years in education. Alongside education, income is controlled for in the models by relying on respondents' satisfaction with their level of income (*income satisfaction*) which runs on a four-point scale with higher values indicating an increased level of satisfaction with income. We adopt income satisfaction instead of actual income because the ESS does not provide for a longitudinally constant means of indicating individuals' actual income although the utility of income satisfaction as an appropriate indicator for income using ESS data has been demonstrated elsewhere (Turnbull-Dugarte forthcoming). Moreover, relying on income satisfaction provides the additional benefit of limiting the potential for inflated income reporting (Withey 1954).

*Ethnicity* is captured in the form of a dummy variable and identifies those who self-identify as belonging to an ethnic minority (1) and those who do not (0). Belonging to an ethnic minority relies on respondents' self-identification as such. Given the lack of consensus regarding the most appropriate means of empirically operationalising ethnic minority status in a comparative setting (Crowley 2001) and the asymmetric

conceptualisation of who is ethnically distinct from the masses across different European countries, this is the most appropriate means of indicating minority ethnic status with the data at hand. Research in the United Kingdom has found that turnout is lower among ethnic minorities (Heath, Fisher, Rosenblatt, Sanders and Sobolewska 2013). Belonging to a racially distinct group other than the majority (white) in the US exhibits varied outcomes (Leighley and Vedlitz 1999; Rocha et al. 2010; Salomon and Van Evera 1973; Smets and Van Ham 2013; Timpone 1998; Uhlaner, Cain and Kiewiet 1989) but there is a general expectation that belonging to an ethnic minority will suppress participation.

Finally, we include controls for *religiosity* and whether respondents live in urban or rural locations (*rural*). Rural is a dichotomous variable indicating that individuals reside in a small village or in the country. While the evidence surrounding the association between population concentration and turnout is mixed (Geys 2006), sociological theory suggests that citizens are more individualistic in densely-populated areas, leading to weaker social pressure to vote (Hoffman-Martinot 1994). Similarly, elections are often considered more personal in rural areas, with voters more likely to know the candidates and thus face lower costs associated with voting (Davis 1991).

Religiosity is indicated using respondents' self-reported religiosity with higher values signaling a respondent is more religious and is included given the associational

relationship between the church and the activation of civil responsibilities and activities (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Under the attitudinal framework are variables related to one's level of political motivations and views of the democratic process. Here we cater for these factors by controlling for individuals' level of political interest, satisfaction with democracy and view of the state of the economy. Increased levels of *political interest* - indicated by an individual's interest in politics running from one (Not at all interested) to four (Very interested) - have previously been found to impact highly on one's likelihood of voting (Breckler 1984; Hadjar and Beck 2010; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1968). The same has been observed for both satisfaction with democracy (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2016) as well as views on the state of the economy (Grönlund and Setälä 2007; Hadjar and Beck 2010; Leighley and Vedlitz 1999), both of which are measured on an eleven-point scale with higher values indicating more positive evaluations.

Finally, we control for two individual political predictors: ideological placement and political extremism. Ideological placement (*left-right position*) is indicated by individuals' position on an eleven-point political dimension running from left (0) to right (10). Whilst we acknowledge that the left-right cleavage is not the only political dimension that structures political space within European political systems (Bakker et al.

2012), it is the dimension with which the electorate tend to be most familiar with (Mair 2007; Rovny and Whitefield 2019) and is, therefore, the best measure to situate individuals within the political space. Political extremism (*extreme*) is a dummy variable that indicates a respondent's reported ideological position at the poles of the ideological spectrum. Respondents were identified as being extremist if they had an ideological position that was either i) equal to or less than two or, ii) equal to or greater than eight<sup>9</sup>.

Given that the focus of this assessment is to analyse the impact of a specific individual-level determinant of voting – sexuality – we are not concerned with the identification of system-level features that may drive and suppress electoral participation (Anduiza 2002; Blais 2006; Gallego 2010; Jackson 1987), but rather only wish to ensure that the potential confounding nature of these system factors be controlled for in the model. This is done by including country and year fixed effects that will capture both country-specific and temporal features<sup>10</sup> that may have an impact on electoral participation.

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<sup>9</sup> These values are well beyond one standard deviation (2.05) increase and decrease from the mean value (5.11) of the sample (i.e. 3.06 - 7.15).

<sup>10</sup> We run an additional estimation using election-specific fixed effects (Table A5) instead of country and years effects; the results remain unchanged.

#### 4. Results

Table 2 reports the output of a binomial logistic regression that models electoral participation. The table reports both the logit coefficients and the odds-ratio ( $e^{\beta}$ ) for ease of interpretation. Model 1 presents the effect of sexuality on participation whilst controlling for socio-economic factors including gender, age, education, income, religiosity and rural residency. The positive and statistically significant coefficient of sexuality indicates that individuals in a same-sex relationship (homosexuals) observe an increase in the likelihood of turning out to vote compared to those in opposite-sex relationships (heterosexuals). Interestingly, it is clear that minority groups do not all behave in the same way. The negative coefficient of ethnic minority status confirms existing findings that demonstrate that belonging to an ethnic minority is associated with a decrease in the likelihood of voting. The reverse is true in the case of minority group status that is based on sexuality. The results hold across Model 2 with the incorporation of the attitude-based political exponents including individuals' level of satisfaction with democracy, view of the state of the economy, level of political interest and ideology. There is, therefore, a robust positive association between being homosexual and the likelihood of participating in the political process.

The controls by-and-large behave as expected with higher values of both education and income satisfaction being positively associated with participation. Of note also is that

those who hold political views at the extreme end of the political poles are more likely to participate in elections than those who hold more centrist ideological positions. The same is also true for those who express a higher level of interest in politics. One's placement on the left-right ideological divide does not appear to exhibit any explanatory power on the likelihood of participation. The effect of gender in Model 2, which shifts from being significantly positive in Model 1 to being significantly negative, suggests that the positive effect of gender in Model 1 is mediated by the political variables included in latter model which is line with recent empirical tests of the gender gap (Kostelka, Blais and Gidengil 2018). In other words, there is nothing intrinsic in males that drives them to turnout at higher rates once their political efficacy and interests are controlled for.

*Table 2: Effect of homosexuality on voting*

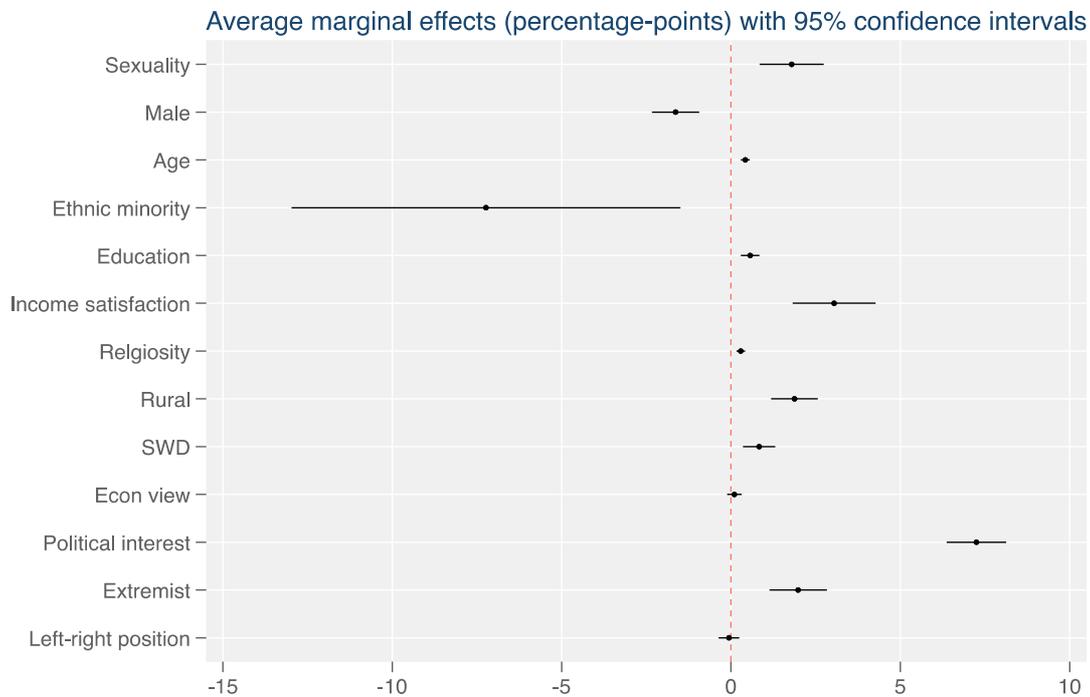
		(Model 1)		(Model 2)	
		Coef.	$e^{\beta}$	Coef.	$e^{\beta}$
<i>Socio-economic variables</i>	Homosexuality	0.15*** (0.02)	1.16	0.16*** (0.04)	1.18
	Gender (1 male)	0.09*** (0.02)	1.09	-0.14*** (0.03)	0.87
	Age	0.04*** (0.00)	1.04	0.04*** (0.01)	1.04
	Ethnic minority	-0.51** (0.20)	0.60	-0.55*** (0.20)	0.58
	Education	0.10*** (0.02)	1.10	0.05*** (0.01)	1.05
	Sat. with income	0.37*** (0.07)	1.44	0.26*** (0.06)	1.30
	Religiosity	0.04*** (0.01)	1.04	0.03*** (0.01)	1.03

	Rural	0.11** (0.02)	1.06	0.16* (0.03)	1.18
<i>Political variables</i>	Sat. with dem.			0.07*** (0.02)	1.08
	View of econ.			0.01 (0.01)	1.01
	Political interest			0.63*** (0.04)	1.88
	Extremist			0.18*** (0.04)	1.20
	Left-Right position			-0.01 (0.01)	0.99
	Country effects	✓		✓	
	Year effects	✓		✓	
	Constant	-1.89*** (0.38)	0.16	-2.49*** (0.27)	0.09
	Observations	104,872		96,126	

Country-cluster robust standard errors (two-tailed) in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

A more intuitive understanding of the variables' effects on the overall probability of voting is presented in Figure 1. The values in Figure 1 indicate the average marginal effect of each variable on the probability of voting. Values for the dichotomous variables represent the marginal effect from the baseline value. The reader will note that the effect of the central explanatory variable of interest, sexuality, is both statistically significant and also appears to wield substantive parity in comparison to the other variables included in the model. Being homosexual is associated with an increase in the probability of turning out of two percentage points, representing a significant and nontrivial effect.



*Figure 1: AME on probability of voting*

We also submit our analysis to three sensitivity and robustness checks that are reported in full in the appendix. Firstly, we confirm statistically that the results are not being driven by any particular country by running Model 2 using different subsamples of countries (Figure A2). Secondly, we confirm that sexuality yields substantive parity with other variables by comparing the standardized values of the coefficients in our model (Table A3). Thirdly, the significant and independent effect of the sexuality variable on participation is robust to an additional estimation technique using nearest-neighbour matching (Rubin 2006) applying exact matching of individuals across countries and

Mahalanobis distance matching on a vector of confounding covariates (Table A4). There is, therefore, robust evidence to corroborate the main findings.

So far, we have demonstrated that sexuality appears to exercise a significant and effect on driving individual level electoral participation. Next, we test for the conditionality of the effect. Turnbull-Dugarte (forthcoming) recently established that the courting of the gay vote by political parties on the left in Europe has effectively mobilised gay voters to support left-leaning political parties. If partisan efforts to mobilise gay voters is driven by the left, we might expect to see a conditional relationship between homosexuality and identification with the left on predicting electoral participation. To test this, we estimate the model interacting the main sexuality variable with ideology. Figure 2 plots the predictive margins of sexuality conditional on different ideological values and shows a significant effect of sexuality for ideology values centred around the political centre. Of note is that, whilst not significant, there appears to be an increase between the probability of voting for homosexuals the further one belongs on the left. There are too few observations in the tails of the ideological distribution, however, to report effects of significance.

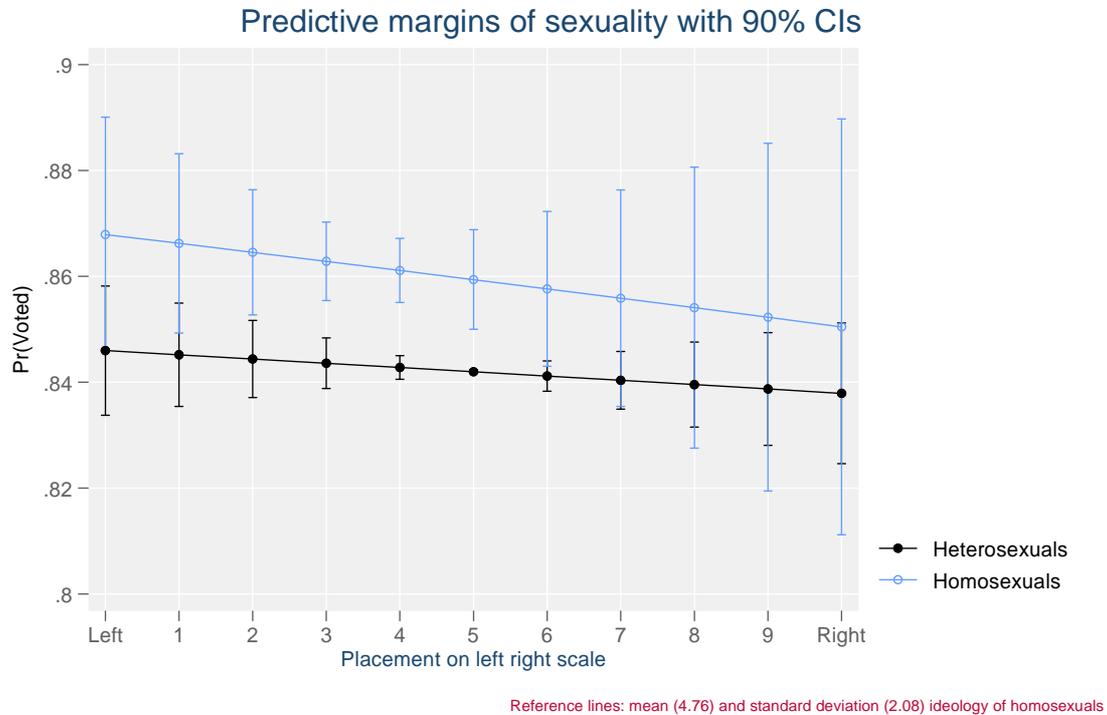


Figure 2: Conditionality of sexuality (*i*)

We, therefore, collapse ideology into a dichotomous variable indicating those individuals who identify on the centre-left (ideology values equal to or less than five) and the right (values greater than five). The interaction between the centre-left dummy and sexuality is visualised in Figure 3 and clearly shows that the effect of sexuality is negligible for those individuals who identify on the right whilst significantly positive for those either on the centre or on the left of the ideological spectrum. This lends support to the argument that the significant increase in the probability of voting observed by homosexuals may well be attributable to partisan efforts by the left to mobilise gay voters.

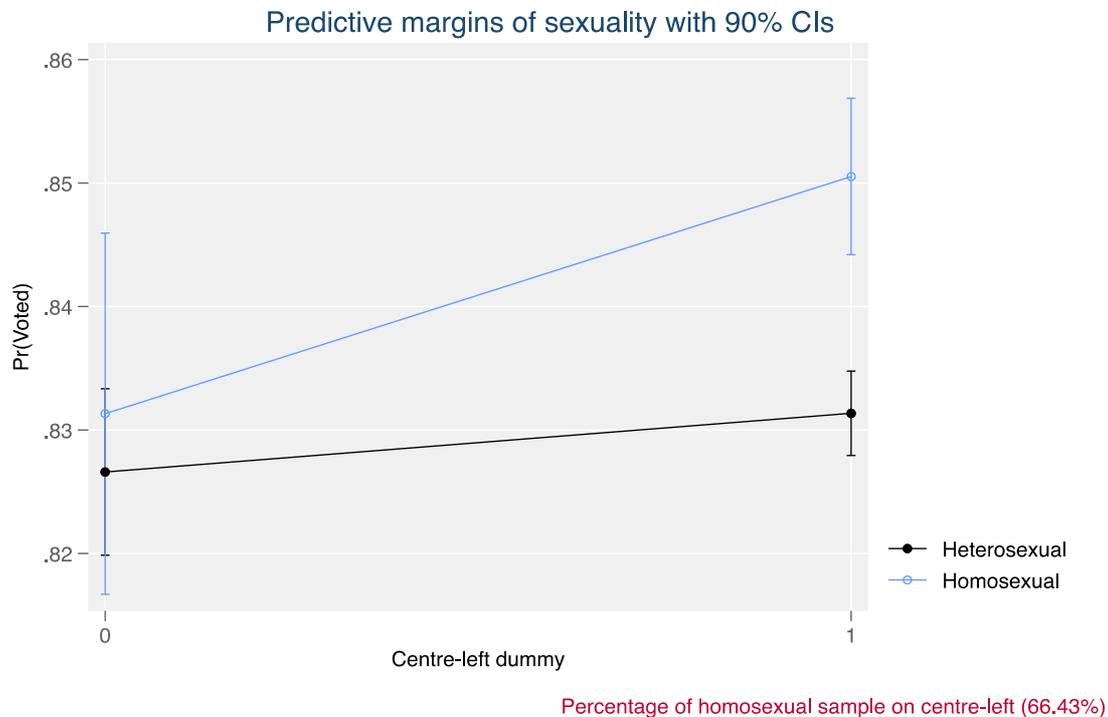


Figure 3: Conditionality of sexuality (ii)

## 5. Conclusion

Recent exploratory work has begun to analyse the individual-level political behaviour of gay individuals in Europe (Page 2018). This research has exposed similar findings to that observed in the US, with homosexuals exhibiting a marked preference for left-of-centre parties across western European democracies (Turnbull-Dugarte forthcoming). A core feature of the individual behaviour of homosexual individuals that has not yet been considered, however, is whether or not one’s sexuality is likely to affect the propensity of an individual to participate in the democratic process by turning out to vote.

Submitting this question to empirical assessment, we find that sexuality does affect the probability of participating in elections. The analysis presented here shows that on average and across western Europe, being in a same-sex relationship increases the probability of participating in elections by two percentage points above and beyond that which is explained by one's socio-economic status and political factors. There is, therefore, a "sexuality gap" in voting behaviour that signals the existence of a feature of being homosexual that impacts voting behaviour that cannot be explained by traditional determinants of voting. Substantively, the effect of homosexuality is interesting in comparison to that of ethnic minority status. In the case of the latter, the negative coefficient coincides with additional understanding of the restraining effect minority status can have on voting behaviour. In the case of homosexuality, it is not only that there is no negative effect, but rather there is an "over participating" effect in that being part of the minority group actually increases the likelihood of voting.

We theorise, much in the same way explored by Hertzog (1996) and Turnbull-Dugarte (forthcoming), that belonging to a minority group that has undergone historical processes of oppression, political marginalisation and social ostracization, shapes and motivates them as members of the electorate. Since members of minority groups are incentivised to participate in the political process because the potential benefits of this and the potential

for what is “at stake” is likely to be larger, there is a clear motivation for homosexuals to make sure their votes are counted and considered in electoral contests.

The main findings have a number of important normative implications. Since it is the case that homosexual individuals are on average more likely to turnout to vote than heterosexual voters, there is a clear incentive for European political parties to make sure they are catering a supply for the political and electoral demands of this portion of the electorate. Given the relatively low level of saliency of gay rights policy issues within the contemporaneous political space of most European democracies<sup>11</sup>, doing so will likely come at little electoral cost for parties. For political scientists and political sociologists, the findings add to an emerging body of literature that is beginning to underline the important explanatory power of sexuality in understanding individual level political behaviour.

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<sup>11</sup> Across the countries included in the analysis, there is now substantial levels of tolerance of homosexuality (Figure A1 in appendix) so there is little polarisation on the overall acceptability of homosexuality. That being said, there are still debates over state-sponsored provision of gay rights laws (as the absence of same-sex marriage still in Switzerland suggests) and the issue of homosexual education in schools can still be contentious amongst religious groups (the Guardian 2019), so there may well still be specific policy areas where sexuality-orientated political conflict can occur.

We acknowledge the potential limitations of the analysis. Firstly, given that the identification strategy relies on individuals being in a relationship, we are making assumptions regarding the generalisability of the effect of sexuality across those who are and are not currently in a relationship. Secondly, we are not able to distinguish between those who are bisexual and those who are gay or lesbian and acknowledge the potential heterogeneity between these distinctive subgroups (Carpenter 2005).

Notwithstanding these limitations, however, establishing that sexuality increases the propensity of individuals to participate in national elections, creates vast avenues for additional research. Future work may seek to strengthen the conditionality of when and how the effect of sexuality is activated. It is not clear whether or not political parties are able to trigger the effect of sexuality to their advantage in particular political contests where the saliency of policies of core concern to this group is high. Nor is it clear whether the effect is transferable to electoral arenas below or above the national level. Moreover, additional theoretical arguments related to the influential role of minority status have yet to be assessed and merit empirical testing: is it the case that one's identification with the minority group explains the tendency to "over participate" as is the case with African-Americans in the US (Verba and Nie 1972), or is it that the effect of sexuality can also be activated by political conflict (Blalock 1967; Giles and Evans 1985; Mathews and Prothro 1966) between homosexuals and non-homosexuals? Given the infancy of scholarship

concerning the individual-level behaviour of this particular minority group, assessing whether and how the assumptions regarding minority group behaviour travels across groups that are structured by themes of gender and sexuality instead of race and ethnicity provides for an interesting subfield within the discipline yet to be fully enjoyed.

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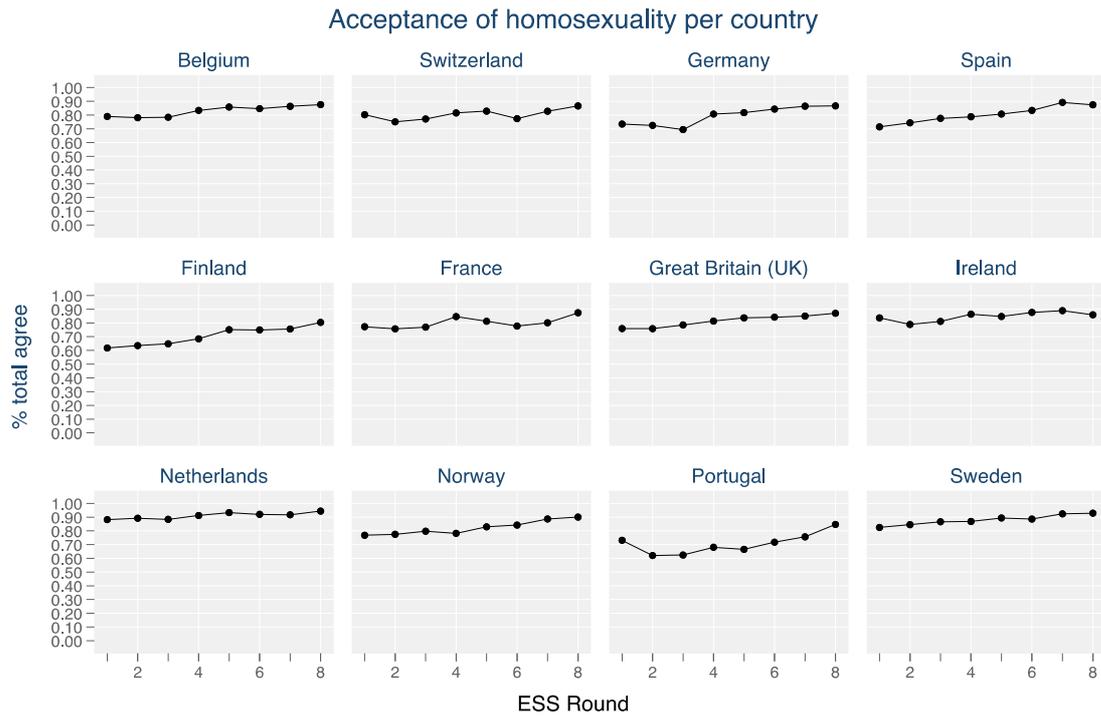
## Appendix

*Table A1: Summary descriptive statistics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Stan. Dev</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Voted	104971	0.84	0.36	0.00	1.00
Gay/Lesbian/Bi	104971	0.01	0.12	0.00	1.00
Gender	104971	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00
Age	104971	51.11	15.24	15	99
Ethnicity	104971	0.03	0.17	0.00	1.00
Education	104971	12.70	4.36	0.00	56.00
SWI	104971	3.25	0.75	1.00	4.00
Religiosity	104971	4.56	2.90	0.00	10.00
Rural	104971	0.42	0.49	0.00	1.00
SWD	96196	5.69	2.31	0.00	10.00
Econ view	96196	5.04	2.42	0.00	10.00
Political interest	96196	2.61	0.86	1.00	4.00
Left-right identity	96196	5.11	2.05	0.00	10.00
Extremism	96196	0.22	0.42	0.00	1.00

*Table A2: Per country identification of homosexuals*

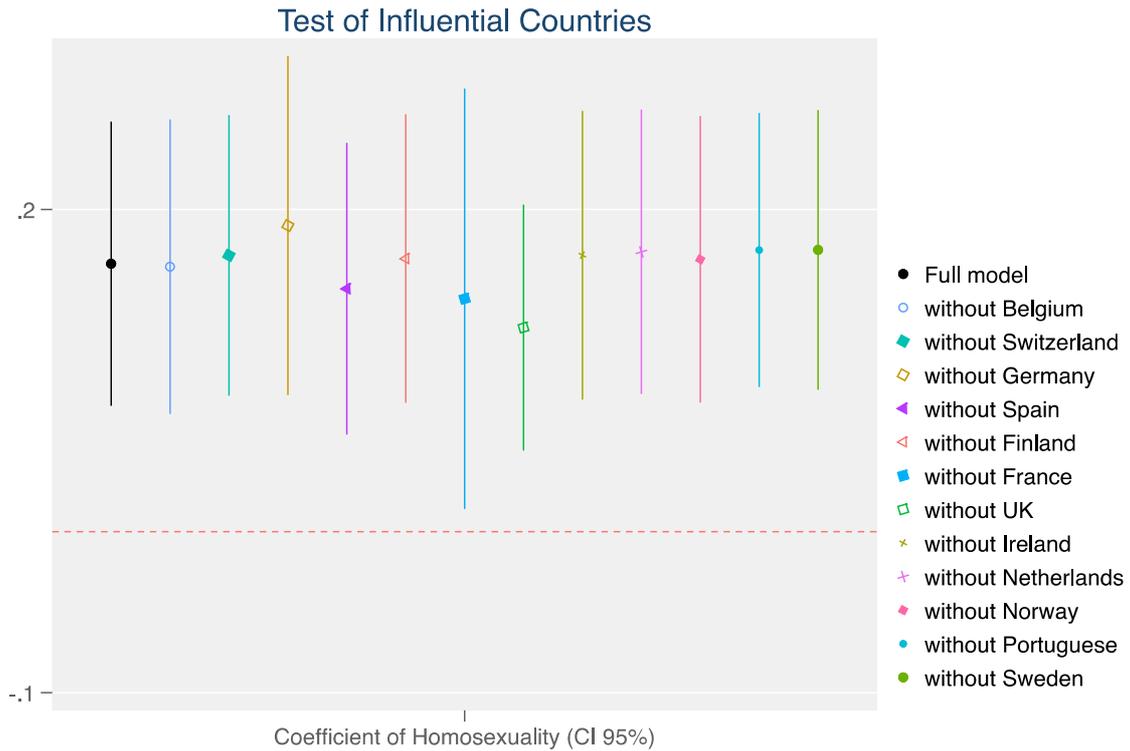
<b>Country</b>	<b>% of sample identified as LGB</b>
BE- Belgium	1.97
CH- Switzerland	1.32
DE - Germany	1.62
ES- Spain	0.87
FI -Finland	0.88
FR - France	1.95
GB – United Kingdom	1.25
IE - Ireland	2.59
NL - Netherlands	1.43
NO - Norway	0.88
PT - Portugal	0.65
SE- Sweden	1.04
<b>Total sample</b>	<b>1.38</b>



**Figure A1: Popular acceptance of homosexuality across western Europe**

### Robustness checks

To ensure the validity of the main findings and to support our argument for the necessity to include this explanatory variable in models seeking to predict electoral participation we estimate two robustness checks. In the first instance, we run the main model (Model 2) using different subsamples of countries to ensure that the results are not being driven by any particular country. Figure 1 plots the coefficient of sexuality using these different subsamples. The reader will note that the coefficients remain both positive and significantly distinct from zero, confirming that the effect is not being influenced by any particular country.



**Figure A2: Robustness test (i): country test**

Secondly, we seek to provide a test of the *substantive* effect of sexuality. Comparing the explanatory substantive effect of different explanatory variables can be done by standardising the values of continuous variables to provide them with a mean of zero and a standard deviation of one. In Table 3 we present the coefficients of the main model as well as an estimation using standardised values of the non-categorical variables. The coefficients of the continuous variables report the associated change in the log-likelihood of voting given one standard deviation increase in the value of the variable. Of importance here is that the size of the coefficient for homosexuality yields substantive (read political) parity with other canonical exponents. We can, therefore, be confident regarding the substantive effect of homosexuality with other variables conceded to be important in the literature.

**Table A3: Robustness test (ii): substantive magnitude**

		(Model 2: raw values)		(Model 3: standardized values)	
		Coef.	$e^B$	Coef.	$e^B$
<i>Socio-economic variables</i>	Homosexuality	0.16*** (0.04)	1.18	0.16*** (0.04)	1.18
	Gender (1 male)	-0.14*** (0.03)	0.87	-0.14*** (0.03)	0.87
	Age	0.04*** (0.01)	1.04	0.54*** (0.09)	1.72
	Ethnic minority	-0.55*** (0.20)	0.58	-0.55*** (0.20)	0.58
	Education	0.05*** (0.01)	1.05	0.21*** (0.05)	1.23
	SWI	0.26*** (0.06)	1.30	0.19*** (0.04)	1.21
	Religiosity	0.03*** (0.01)	1.03	0.07*** (0.02)	1.08
	Rural	0.16* (0.03)	1.18	0.16* (0.03)	1.18
<i>Political variables</i>	Sat. with dem.	0.07*** (0.02)	1.08	0.17*** (0.05)	1.19
	View of econ.	0.01 (0.01)	1.01	0.02 (0.02)	1.02
	Political interest	0.63*** (0.04)	1.88	0.56*** (0.04)	1.74
	Extremist	0.18*** (0.04)	1.20	0.18*** (0.04)	1.19
	Left-Right position	-0.01 (0.01)	0.99	-0.01 (0.03)	0.99
	Country effects	✓		✓	
	Year effects	✓		✓	
	Constant	-2.49*** (0.27)	0.09	3.07*** (0.11)	21.60
Observations	96,126		96,126		

Country-cluster robust standard errors (two-tailed) in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table A4: Nearest-neighbour matching estimation of average treatment effect (ATE) of sexuality**

<u>ATE</u>	<u>Voted</u>
Sexuality	0.03** (0.01)
<u>Observations</u>	<u>162,443</u>

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Average treatment effect of sexuality from a nearest-neighbour matching estimation using the standard Mahalanobis distance. Exact matches on country variable and covariate distance matching on age income education rural, political interest, satisfaction with democracy, and view on economy covariates.

*Table A5: Model 2 using election fixed-effects*

	Voted
Homosexuality	0.13*** (0.04)
Gender (1 male)	-0.12*** (0.03)
Age	0.04*** (0.01)
Ethnic minority	-0.61*** (0.21)
Education	0.05*** (0.01)
Sat. with income	0.24*** (0.06)
Religiosity	0.03*** (0.01)
Rural	0.16*** (0.04)
Sat. with dem.	0.07*** (0.02)
View of econ.	0.01 (0.02)
Political interest	0.60*** (0.04)
Extremist	0.20*** (0.04)
Left-Right position	-0.01 (0.01)
Election fixed-effects	✓
Constant	-2.43*** (0.37)
Observations	96,196

Country-cluster robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table A6: Re-estimation including non-cohabiting individuals and cohabitation dummy**

	(1) Country + year effects	(2) Election fixed-effects
Homosexuality	0.13*** (0.05)	0.11** (0.04)
Cohabiting	0.36*** (0.03)	0.35*** (0.03)
Gender (1 male)	-0.12*** (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.04)
Age	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Ethnic minority	-0.57*** (0.18)	-0.62*** (0.19)
Education	0.06*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
Sat. with income	0.23*** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.06)
Religiosity	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Rural	0.17*** (0.03)	0.17*** (0.03)
Sat. with dem.	0.07*** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)
View of econ.	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Political interest	0.61*** (0.05)	0.59*** (0.05)
Extremist	0.17*** (0.03)	0.18*** (0.04)
Left-Right position	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Country effects	✓	×
Year effects	✓	×
Election effects	×	✓
Constant	-2.58*** (0.23)	-2.83*** (0.36)
Observations	143,160	143,160

Country-cluster robust standard errors (two-tailed) in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1