

Reassessing the Relationship between Homophobia and Political Participation

Abstract

Governments around the world vary in their policies affecting lesbian and gay communities. While some states enshrine the rights of their minority citizens, others drum up and enforce oppressive policies toward these groups, termed *political homophobia*. We are interested in the role such policies play in shaping electoral and non-electoral political participation. Existing research on this question is often optimistic that proponents of gay rights will steadily out-participate their opposition, but anti-gay mobilization remains ubiquitous in many states. Under what conditions might intolerant citizens out-participate more socially progressive citizens? And how do state policies influence this participation? By engaging literature on sexual citizenship and political efficacy, we argue that a state's policy choices send important signals to citizens that influence their participation. Citizens who are intolerant of homosexuality may be more participatory in states that espouse political homophobia. This study conducts the first worldwide examination of tolerant and intolerant participation with data from the World Values Survey (2010-2020) and a novel application of gay rights measures. We find that outside of gay rights-respecting states, intolerant individuals are more likely to vote than tolerant individuals. While tolerant individuals generally tend to engage more in non-electoral participation across states, they nonetheless turn out to the ballot box less in states that are not respecting of gay rights.

In many corners of the globe, the rapid changes in public opinion and policy in favor of lesbian and gay rights¹ over the past few decades are arguably indicative of heightened organizing by gay movements (Ayoub, 2016). Indeed, studies in political behavior show a correlation between growing individual-level social tolerance and greater levels of political participation (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Clement & Field, 2014). However, such optimistic findings often derive from studies which under-sample states that actively pursue and enforce oppressive policies against gay people, a strategy called *political homophobia* (Bosia & Weiss, 2013). Furthermore, global anti-gender campaigns that challenge the introduction of rights around gender and sexuality are winning supporters in various states (see Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017). Homophobic state policies may remain appealing to state authorities because they actively engage large swaths of the public. We want to add nuance to existing findings by comparing participation between *both* tolerant and intolerant individuals—defined here with respect to values regarding homosexuality² (Inglehart et al., 2017). Furthermore, we compare their participation in states that champion or restrict gay rights. Given the tension in the literature between optimism around gay rights and concern surrounding traditionalist backlash, we ask: Under what conditions are individuals that are intolerant of homosexuality more likely to participate in political life? We argue that the oft-overlooked intolerant citizens may out-engage their tolerant opposition in certain contexts.

The answer may lie in the signals a state sends its citizenry via a mechanism of political efficacy. Norms regarding family-life, gender, and sexuality are important tools states use to build

¹ Since our data only pertain to homosexuality, we limit our observations to lesbian and gay populations. Henceforth we use the encompassing term “gay” to include both lesbian women and gay men.

² Homosexuality is a potent indicator for a host of postmaterialist values (Inglehart et al., 2017), and we test it in relation to robustness checks concerning sex work in Appendix 5. While we are specifically interested in the influence of states’ pro- and anti-gay policies on the political behavior of citizens with different feelings on homosexuality, we acknowledge that some individuals may be intolerant of homosexuality while being tolerant of other social groups such as other religions and ethnic groups.

engaged citizenries, historically modeled with respect to procreation, masculinity, and heterosexuality (Canaday, 2009; Asal et al., 2013; Richardson, 2017; Weeks, 1998). Issues surrounding sexuality serve as cues that politically orient citizens in increasingly polarized societies: for progressives, respecting women's and gay rights are a litmus test for tolerance, and for others, opposing these more fluid concepts signals their conservative bona fides. In other words, the publicly idealized, engaged, participatory citizen responds to and follows the gendered and sexual norms their states purport.

Only in some states have such norms generated new understandings of sexual citizenship. We use country-level measures of political homophobia from the Global Barometer of Gay Rights (2011-2018) and individual-level data from the World Values Survey (2010-2020) to analyze the influence of such state-level conditions of politicized homophobia on political participation. Our findings offer a nuanced argument that builds upon the existing literature. Indeed, tolerant citizens are still most likely to participate across contexts, as expected by much research in political behavior. That said, if we look more closely, we see that intolerant citizens are more likely to participate in one way *within* states espousing political homophobia: at the ballot box, where it may matter most for governing parties.

Tolerance, Homophobia, and Political Participation

Existing research suggests that social progressivism correlates with higher levels of political participation (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Clements & Field, 2014; Inglehart et al., 2017). Increased peace, prosperity, and order have led to changed social values, where people are more comfortable with self-expression, such as support for feminism, gay rights, and environmentalism (Inglehart et al., 2017; Egan, 2012; Henshaw, 2014). Moreover, policy changes show activists winning important achievements like marriage equality and better protections for gay people in

the workplace. Yet, looking around the globe today, we see that despite important gains by gay activists, a fervent opposition remains engaged and participatory. Like many feminist scholars, we thus question a linear progress narrative (also following Bornschieer, 2010; Norris & Inglehart, 2019), instead attempting to understand what drives participatory behavior among both tolerant and intolerant citizens.

Citizenship incorporates individuals into participatory sites, allowing for their engagement “in negotiations and contestations over political and social life” (Somers, 1993, p. 89). Studies in sexual citizenship show that by the 20th century, the gendered and sexual character of citizenship around the world is male and procreative (Canaday, 2009; Asal et al., 2013; Richardson, 2017; Weeks, 1998; Kollman & Waites, 2009; Henshaw, 2014). Heteronormative policies that reinforce this character, like the criminalization of homosexuality, help define the “suitable citizens” and ultimately participation (Oxhorn, 2011, p. 18). In other words, the cis-heterosexual man has become an important benchmark for the “appropriate citizen”, a paradigm which has slowly been challenged in many states by the growth of self-expression around gender and sexuality in recent decades.

Our line of argumentation leaves room for participatory homophobia, given the persistence of heteronormative and procreative conceptions of sexual citizenship. Indeed, only in some states have such norms opened to more inclusive conceptions of sexuality and citizenship. Presently, governments that do not protect or actively discriminate against homosexuality represent most of the world’s population (ILGA, 2020). Transformations in sexual norms in the late 19th and 20th centuries followed the emergence of social movements that shaped new identities and contested the second-class citizenship of sexual minorities (Stychin, 2001; Ayoub & Paternotte, 2014). Others emphasize that tolerant policies first emerged in the well-resourced contexts of Western

Europe and North America, where postmaterialist values took hold (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). In such contexts, Turnbull-Dugarte and Townsley (2020) have convincingly shown that sexual minorities push back against states where they are discriminated against, entrenching their demand for rights.

Inglehart and associates emphasize the power that attitudes on homosexuality play in global public opinion. Others have shown that the demand for reproduction in poorer, agrarian postcommunist societies leads to demographic threat and higher levels of homophobia in such contexts (O'Dwyer & Jung, 2018). Research on sexual citizenship agrees with modernization theory on the central and symbolic importance of homosexuality but highlights different theoretical expectations for how it influences political behavior, depending on the sexual norms a state proffers. Inglehart (2018) suggests that “conformist pressure” moved opinions in favor of homosexuality in Western democracies as gay rights became normalized, but he does not empirically unpack the influence of persecuting and rights-protecting policies on citizens’ opinions and behavior. Our theoretical postulate would expect that states’ political homophobia can legitimize homophobia in society, which affects feelings of social conformity and efficacy among intolerant citizens. We capture political homophobia by explaining how state-level anti-gay and gay-friendly policy shapes individual political behavior. Following Dicklitch-Nelson et al. (2021), political homophobia entails a spectrum from *Persecuting states* that proactively marginalize (e.g. criminalizing homosexuality) to *Protecting states* that proactively equalize treatment (e.g. allowing marriage equality).

If states shape the “appropriate” participatory citizen via persecuting or protecting policies, then political homophobia may influence political efficacy. Anderson (2010) ties political efficacy to individuals’ feelings of membership, influence, fulfillment, and shared emotional connection

within their political community. Gendered roles bolster these feelings in the forms of motherhood/fatherhood, procreation, fulfillment from family life and/or sexual gratification, and shared experiences of heterosexuality. Heteronormative policies are used by governments to “enforce morality, promulgate a heterosexual norm, and to gender the state as masculine,” ultimately bolstering the political efficacy of citizens who conform to these roles (Henshaw, 2014, p. 961).³ Persecution by elites may thus activate participatory behavior among homophobic individuals.

H1: To the degree a state persecutes gay people, homophobic citizens will be more likely to participate politically.

Meanwhile, in states with more protective policies, citizenship has opened to be more affirming of sexual minorities and tolerant citizens (Magni & Reynolds, 2021; Reynolds, 2013; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). For example, in a study of gay-related political phenomena focused on Europe and Latin America, Ayoub and Page (2020) found that tolerant states do yield more politically participatory tolerant individuals. Yet, their regionally focused research also suggests that in repressive contexts where proponents of gay rights are needed the most, tolerant participation might be lower. Following Anderson (2010), feelings of efficacy are enhanced by tolerance, if the norms are proffered by one’s state. Thus, protective policies should activate participatory behavior among tolerant individuals, as they affirm elite cues.

³ State policies can both motivate and demotivate participation among affected groups: for example, marginalizing policies may be able to mobilize individuals against discrimination by heightening group consciousness (Cho et al., 2006; Parker, 2009), but also discourage mobilization by reducing efficacy (Oskooii, 2016). Still unclear in political behavior research is whether or not supporters of policies that marginalize exhibit greater efficacy when their state aligns with their values, following Henshaw’s (2014) argument about heteronormative policies.

H2: To the degree a state protects gay people, tolerant citizens will be more likely to participate politically.

Finally, ‘type of political participation’ may qualify our hypotheses. Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that social conformity and deference towards authority tend to encourage voting (an elite-affirming activity), while nonconformity encourages elite-challenging activities like protests. Non-electoral participation increasingly became a form of self-expression by postmaterialists who emphasized unconventional political activity in the later 20th century (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 273). These arguments were made in light of the decline of voter turnout in the late 20th century, during which non-conventional participation like protests, boycotts, and petitions increased. Hence, we might expect that tolerance (a self-expression attitude) boosts one’s likelihood to engage in non-electoral participation more so than the likelihood to vote.

Research Design

To test these hypotheses, we examined data from the World Values Survey (Wave 6, 2010-2014, and Wave 7, 2017-2020).⁴ These data include surveys conducted in 89 countries on six continents, which collectively include 212,269 survey responses (see Appendix Table 1 for the countries in this study). We selected these data because the surveys ask respondents about their opinions regarding sexuality and their political participation.

Variable Measurements

To operationalize political participation, we used variables based on five questions regarding *voting*, *petitioning*, *boycotting*, *demonstrating*, and *striking*. We capture *voting* with a dummy variable including around 61 percent of the respondents who report always voting in

⁴ We compare the two waves in Appendix 1. Our substantive findings hold from Wave 6 to Wave 7 with some evidence of increased participation among tolerant respondents in Wave 7.

national elections and 39 percent who report not always voting. We also use WVS variables based on the four available questions regarding non-electoral participation. There are three categories for these questions: Have done, Might do, Would never do. We created a non-electoral participation score by adding together the non-electoral participation values (1 = Have done, 0 = Might do OR Would never do) yielding a scale from zero to four. This measure represents a score from low levels to high levels of non-electoral participation. The modal value of this score is 0 (67 percent of respondents), and the mean value is 0.6. To simplify the analysis, we collapse this variable into those who report engaging in non-electoral participation (33 percent of respondents) and those who do not (67 percent of the respondents). Morin-Chassé et al. (2017) demonstrate the overreporting of self-reported participation. While the levels of participation may be imprecise in our data, we are confident that we can compare levels of political engagement across groups of theoretical interest for our hypothesis tests (see Castle et al., 2020).

In order to operationalize tolerance regarding homosexuality, we use the WVS variable based on the question:

Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card.

Homosexuality. 1 (Never justifiable) - 10 (Always justifiable)

The modal category is 'Never justifiable' [1] with 46 percent of respondents, followed by 'Always Justifiable' [10] with 15 percent of respondents and [5] with 10 percent of respondents. The mean score is 3.9. Overall, these data lean towards intolerance regarding homosexuality around the world.⁵

⁵ We perform a robustness check in Appendix 5 where we substitute tolerance for homosexuality with tolerance for sex work, and we show that our hypothesized relationships hold for homosexuality but not sex work, providing us confidence that our theory is particular to attitudes regarding homosexuality. Unfortunately sex work remains less visible and more stigmatized in most state policy, producing different effects.

In order to compare countries concerning tolerance to gay rights, we use the F&M Global Barometer of Gay Rights (GBGR), which documents levels of state and societal persecution and protection of sexual minorities on a 0 to 100 scale in 203 countries throughout the world (Dicklitch et al., 2021). The GBGR measure is based on five dimensions: de jure protection of sexual minorities, de facto (civil and political) protection of sexual minorities, LGBT rights advocacy, socio-economic rights, and societal persecution (cf. Appendix 3 for more detail). We address this measure as “GBGR score” in our analysis.⁶

We present cross-tabulations of political participation by whether or not the respondent believed that homosexuality is justifiable (tolerant), and whether or not the respondent is in a Persecuting or Protecting state, along with other important variables of interest (see Table 1).⁷ Those who are tolerant regarding homosexuality tend to be more participatory (electorally and non-electorally) in Protecting states, in line with hypothesis two. Meanwhile, in Persecuting states, homophobic individuals are more likely to vote, although they remain less likely to participate non-electorally—partial evidence in favor of hypothesis one. The controls are elaborated upon in Appendix 1. We note that tolerant individuals tend to be younger, higher income, more educated, less religious, more likely to be single, and they are more likely to be female in comparison to homophobic individuals.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics by Political Homophobia (Persecuting/Protecting States – GBGR categories) and Individual-level Tolerance regarding Homosexuality [95% Confidence Intervals]				
	<i>Persecuting States (0% – 59% GBGR score)</i>		<i>Protecting States (90% – 100% GBGR score)</i>	
	Homophobic	Tolerant	Homophobic	Tolerant

⁶ Explaining the merits of the measure, we perform a robustness check by substituting the GBGR scores with ILGA state homophobia scores in Appendix 3, and the results hold for both measures.

⁷ An important concern is whether states are responsive to societal tolerance, which would confound our argument of state-led participation. In Appendix 2, we address causality and show that tolerance does not correlate with changes in GBGR scores between the two most recent WVS waves, suggesting that some states change rights (positively or negatively) without much sensitivity to public opinion.

Percentages, Individual Level				
Percent reporting voting	55.5% [55.1% - 55.8%]	48.3% [47.6% - 49.40%]	70.7% [69.1% - 72.3%]	79.7% [79.1% - 80.2%]
Percent reporting non-electoral participation	20.0% [19.7% - 20.3%]	23.6% [23.0% - 24.3%]	43.4% [41.6% - 45.2%]	66.5% [65.8% - 67.2%]
Women	51.5% [51.2% - 51.9%]	55.2% [54.5% - 55.9%]	43.5% [41.8% - 45.3%]	55.8% [55.1% - 56.5%]
Married	62.7% [62.4% - 63.0%]	58.2% [57.5% - 58.8%]	54.9% [53.1% - 56.6%]	47.0% [46.3% - 47.7%]
Religious person	75.4% [75.1% - 75.7%]	54.4% [53.7% - 55.1%]	63.7% [62.0% - 65.4%]	42.4% [41.7% - 43.2%]
Means, Individual Level				
Age (in Years)	41.1 [40.96 - 41.18]	39.83 [39.62 - 40.04]	57.28 [56.63 - 57.92]	49.58 [49.33 - 49.83]
Scale of Incomes 1 (Subjective Lowest Income Group) – 10 (Subjective Highest Income Group)	4.65 [4.63 - 4.66]	4.85 [4.82 - 4.88]	4.42 [4.3 - 4.52]	5.61 [5.57 - 5.65]
Education Level 0 (Early Primary/No Schooling) – 8 (Doctorate)	3.92 [3.91 - 3.94]	4.18 [4.14 - 4.21]	3.18 [3.12 - 3.25]	4.40 [4.37 - 4.43]
Number of Children	1.94 [1.93 - 1.90]	1.77 [1.75 - 1.79]	1.96 [1.90 - 2.01]	1.59 [1.57 - 1.61]
Support State Ownership 1 (Private ownership should be increased) – 10 (Government ownership should be increased)	5.77 [5.75 - 5.80]	5.97 [5.93 - 6.01]	5.03 [4.94 - 5.12]	5.13 [5.09 - 5.16]
Postmaterialism 0 (Low Postmaterialism) – 5 (High Postmaterialism)	1.738 [1.775 - 1.792]	1.880 [1.86 - 1.90]	2.08 [1.99 - 2.15]	2.54 [2.50 - 2.58]
Supporting Authoritarianism Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections. 0 (Very bad) – 3 (Very good)	1.48 [1.48 - 1.49]	1.57 [1.55 - 1.58]	1.12 [1.08 - 1.15]	0.70 [0.69 - 0.71]
Means, Country Level				
Polity Score -10 (Fully Autocratic) – 10 (Fully Democratic)	2.67 [2.62 - 2.71]	2.10 [2.01 - 2.19]	9.71 [9.69 - 9.73]	9.78 [9.77 - 9.79]
GDP per Capita (USD)	\$12,938 [12,836 - 13,040]	\$18,350 [18,112 - 18,589]	\$49,152 [48,721-49,584]	\$53,193 [53,041-53,344]
% Urban Population	60.0% [59.9%- 60.2%]	63.9% [63.6%-64.2%]	82.6% [82.26%-8.94%]	85.2% [85.1%-85.3%]
Total Survey Responses	79,899	20,694	3,177	18,455
Data source: World Values Survey 2010-2020. Tolerant respondents represent those who rated their Homosexuality Justifiable opinion over 5 (on a 1 to 10 scale). Homophobic respondents represent those who rated their Homosexuality Justifiable opinion less than 5.				

Model Estimation

To test the hypotheses, we estimate statistical models that compare levels of participation among those who are tolerant and intolerant of homosexuality, while holding our control variables constant at their mean or mode values. For our models with dummy variables as the dependent variable, we use mixed-effects logit models where we let the intercepts vary by country-years. The mixed-effects model is appropriate because these data include individuals from 89 countries. To avoid biased parameter estimates, we model these distinctive contexts. The intra-class correlation coefficient for the null models with no independent variables shows that country-years accounted for 15 percent of the variation of the voting variable. Our substantive findings hold with and without respect to the WVS's recommended weighting (see Appendix 1), which adjust socio-demographic characteristics in the sample population to the distribution of the target population (regarding Age, Sex, Education, and Region), and we treat countries as either equal units in the analyses or as adjusted to reflect countries' proportion of the world's population.

Results

Table 2 presents the results of the mixed-effects logit models with coefficients that represent logged odds. We include an interaction term between the GBGR score (the LGBT rights measure) and Homosexuality Justifiable to examine the relationship between tolerance and political participation, conditional upon the rights policies promoted by states. In the voting model *without* the interaction term, we observe statistically significant coefficients indicating that Protecting contexts (high GBGR score) have higher rates of voting and that tolerant respondents are less likely to vote, indicative of the majority of respondents living in Persecuting states in these data. Moving to the voting model with the statistically significant interaction term, we observe

that tolerant respondents are less likely to vote in contexts with low GBGR scores (Persecuting states) and tolerant respondents are more likely to vote in contexts with high GBGR scores (Protecting states). In the non-electoral participation model without the interaction term, we observe statistically significant coefficients indicating that tolerant respondents are more likely to participate. Moving to the non-electoral model with the statistically significant interaction term, we observe that tolerant respondents are still more likely to participate in contexts with low GBGR scores (Persecuting states) and tolerant respondents also are more likely to participate in contexts with high GBGR scores (Protecting states). Regarding our control variables, older, more educated, higher income respondents in more democratic contexts are consistently more likely to participate across the models.⁸

Table 2: Determinants of Political Participation

	DV = Reported Voting		DV = Reported Non-electoral Participation	
GBGR score (LGBT Protecting)	0.0129*** (0.00408)	0.00759* (0.00407)	-0.000257 (0.00334)	-0.00261 (0.00332)
Homosexuality Justifiable	-0.00599** (0.00303)	-0.0934*** (0.00716)	0.0642*** (0.00307)	0.0197** (0.00815)
Homosexuality Justifiable* GBGR score		0.00158*** (0.000117)		0.000742*** (0.000125)
Age	0.0296*** (0.000590)	0.0298*** (0.000591)	0.00809*** (0.000616)	0.00822*** (0.000616)
Women	-0.108*** (0.0145)	-0.113*** (0.0146)	-0.300*** (0.0160)	-0.303*** (0.0160)
Education Level	0.0853*** (0.00401)	0.0833*** (0.00401)	0.163*** (0.00431)	0.162*** (0.00431)

⁸ We further address the controls in Appendix 1. We show that the hypothesized interactions held with respect to the interaction between postmaterialism and the GBGR score. In Appendix 6, we conduct controlled comparisons to further analyze postmaterialism. Following Inglehart, we expect that postmaterialist/survivalist values amplify the states' norms regarding sexuality. We show elevated homophobic participation among survivalists in Persecuting contexts (survivalists represented both at low values of the postmaterialist measure and high levels of the authoritarianism measure). Importantly for our theory, survivalism is not always associated with lower levels of participation as Inglehart suggests, but instead we show elevated participation among intolerant survivalists within states that affirm their values.

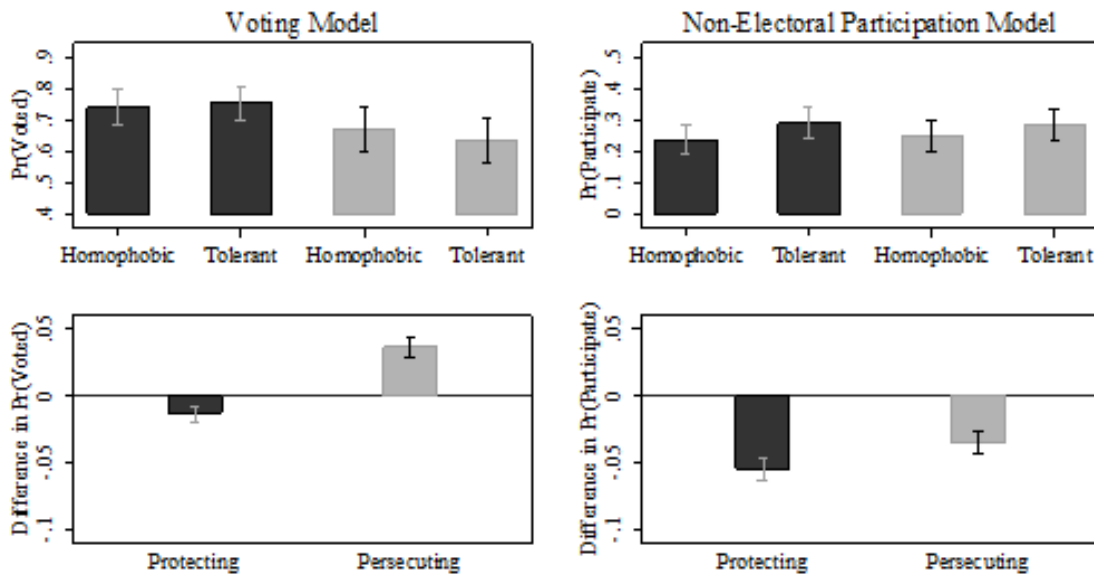
Scale of Incomes	0.0154*** (0.00369)	0.0154*** (0.00370)	0.0123*** (0.00404)	0.0122*** (0.00404)
Married	0.260*** (0.0168)	0.262*** (0.0168)	0.00416 (0.0184)	0.00468 (0.0184)
Religious Person	0.159*** (0.0179)	0.168*** (0.0180)	-0.0621*** (0.0197)	-0.0583*** (0.0197)
Number of Children	0.0366*** (0.00543)	0.0353*** (0.00544)	0.00311 (0.00593)	0.00239 (0.00593)
Support State Ownership	0.00760*** (0.00260)	0.00752*** (0.00260)	-0.000616 (0.00288)	-0.000607 (0.00288)
Postmaterialism	-0.0331*** (0.00654)	-0.0329*** (0.00655)	0.150*** (0.00716)	0.150*** (0.00716)
Supporting Authoritarianism	-0.0512*** (0.00739)	-0.0462*** (0.00741)	-0.0406*** (0.00805)	-0.0377*** (0.00807)
Polity Score	0.0631*** (0.0188)	0.0634*** (0.0187)	0.0730*** (0.0162)	0.0731*** (0.0160)
GDP per Capita	-6.76e-06 (7.02e-06)	-8.39e-06 (6.97e-06)	2.19e-05*** (5.93e-06)	2.13e-05*** (5.85e-06)
% Urban Population	0.00629 (0.00564)	0.00694 (0.00560)	-0.00166 (0.00465)	-0.00137 (0.00459)
WVS Wave (2017-2020)	0.211 (0.181)	0.215 (0.180)	0.0955 (0.149)	0.0979 (0.147)
Constant	-2.538*** (0.346)	-2.344*** (0.344)	-3.086*** (0.284)	-2.989*** (0.281)
Country-Year Variance	0.674*** (0.102)	0.665*** (0.101)	0.440*** (0.068)	0.429*** (0.066)
Survey responses	104,690	104,690	99,138	99,138

Dependent variables: Reported Voting: 0 (Usually or Never Vote), 1 (Always Vote).
Reporting non-electoral participation: 0 (No non-electoral participation), 1 (Non-electoral participation). Results of mixed-effects logit models with random effects for country-years. Standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

To visualize our findings, we graphed the interaction term of Table 2 in Figure 1. We hold our main independent variables at high and low levels to estimate the values in the graphs. The average GBGR score experienced by the respondents was 54 (on a 0 to 100 scale). To represent low GBGR scores (simplified with the label ‘Persecuting’ in the figure), we held the score at 33 (33rd percentile), and to represent high levels of GBGR scores (‘Protecting’), we held the score at 70 (66th percentile). To represent tolerant individuals, we held Homosexuality Justifiable at the

middle value 5 (on the 1 to 10 point scale), the 70th percentile, and to represent homophobic individuals, we held Homosexuality Justifiable at 1 which is the mode (46 percent of respondents). We hold the control variables at their mean and mode values when we estimate the probability of reporting voting and non-electoral participation. We visualize our hypothesis tests by estimating the difference in the probability to participate between homophobic and tolerant respondents.

Figure 1: Probability to vote and participate non-electorally by tolerance towards gay people and LGBT rights (Protecting/Persecuting) with 95 percent confidence intervals



Dependent variables: Participated(1), Didn't Participate(0). Results estimated with mixed effects logit models while holding tolerance and LGBT+ rights (Protecting/Persecuting) at high and low values, and holding control variables constant at mean and mode values. Data source: World Values Survey Waves 6 + 7 (2010-2020)

When examining voting as the dependent variable in Figure 1, we see that tolerant individuals are more electorally participatory than homophobic individuals in more Protecting contexts. This is evidenced by the negative difference in the probability on the left of the graph. Meanwhile, we see that homophobic individuals are more electorally participatory than tolerant individuals in Persecuting contexts, evidenced by the positive difference in probability in the

voting model. This is suggestive evidence in favor of hypotheses 1 and 2 with respect to voting. When we turn to the non-electoral participation model, we see that homophobic respondents are uniformly less engaged non-electorally in comparison to tolerant individuals, though the gap between homophobic and tolerant respondents is not as wide in Persecuting contexts.⁹

Conclusions

This is the first study using global data that compares political participation among citizens according to their degree of tolerance toward homosexuality. We argued that state-backed norms governing sexuality enhance one's political engagement, depending on one's values, and this finding holds with regard to voting. Existing research has often optimistically theorized that tolerance is associated with higher degrees of political participation (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), but this expectation is partially challenged here. For non-electoral behavior, tolerant individuals are indeed more engaged across contexts, regardless of state policy on gay rights. When examining the likelihood *to vote*, however, we find that this relationship is circumscribed to tolerant individuals living in states that protect the rights of gay people. Meanwhile, homophobic individuals in states that do not protect rights actually out-vote tolerant individuals. This suggests that people who feel politically efficacious—because their views are legitimized by their governments—are more likely to turn out at the ballot box. Our findings potentially reflect the influence of heteronormative and procreative conceptions of citizenship on political behavior.

⁹ We conducted a controlled comparison by democracy/autocracy in Appendix 7, and the hypothesized relationships hold across regime types. This gives us confidence that state norms are mattering for participation, and that we are not simply observing democratic traits like more influential social movements and the opportunities to vote for pro-LGBT+ candidates in Protecting states. We also include controlled comparisons by education level and GDP per Capita in Appendix 7.

Given that such states represent most of the world's population, we see this finding as worthy of reflection.

Indeed, our study is suggestive of a process in which governments fomenting political homophobia via state policy can heighten the electoral participation of intolerant citizens who are opposed to the societal changes that have benefited lesbian and gay people. On the other hand, tolerant individuals are generally more likely to engage in non-electoral political activity. However, this higher level of engagement is somewhat more muted in politically homophobic states, offering support for elements of modernization theory, as well as findings by Turnbull-Durgate and Townsley (2020), who tease out the propensity of gay people *themselves* to participate (compared to straight people) and find that gay people do so more when state discrimination mounts. Our findings are in line with expectations around new social movement research – on states that are not advanced-industrialized democracies – that emphasizes the potential for homophobic mobilization (Weiss & Bosia, 2013). The findings pertaining to electoral behavior may also be explained by variation in the supply of politicians that align with voters' preferences in more tolerant states (Reynolds, 2013, Magni & Reynolds, 2021). Tolerant individuals in persecuting states may have fewer options to vote for candidates who reflect their preferences, thus exiting from electoral politics to the streets.

This research note has important practical implications for scholars, policy-makers, and activists. Political homophobia remains pervasive and it shapes political behavior as it relates to voting. We argued that participation is informed by individuals' conformity with state norms. In other words, 'misfits' may feel like less efficacious citizens. This would include, for example, LGBT-allied heterosexual people in persecuting states, who may lack the efficacy-enhancing connection that anti-LGBT people have with their particular state. This information is important

for LGBT advocates. In Persecuting states, LGBT advocates must tread carefully, with strategies that anticipate energized ballot-box participation by those who oppose their work. Relatively tolerant contexts like Western Europe and North America, where most existing research has been conducted, are also where tolerant individuals out-participate their homophobic opposition. But in so many states espousing political homophobia, it is homophobic individuals that have a participatory advantage when it comes to voting. Future studies, both quantitative and qualitative, should further unpack the interplay between citizen attitudes and the homophobic policies that states promote. In the absence of tolerant institutions, homophobia serves as a powerful and persistent participatory incentive.

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