



Tolerance towards homosexuality in Europe: Population composition, economic affluence, religiosity, same-sex union legislation and HIV rates as explanations for country differences

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Abstract

This study aims to explain variation in the level of tolerance towards homosexuality between European countries. Results of multi-level regression analyses on 40 countries from the 2008 wave of the European Values Study show that countries' economic affluence and laws on same-sex unions are positively associated with individuals' tolerance towards homosexuality. An additional exercise suggests that the association between laws and attitudes may be the result of two-way causality; legislation seems to both shape and reflect levels of tolerance towards homosexuality. The study finds no independent association between tolerance and the level of religiosity in a country and refutes the hypothesis that high numbers of diagnosed HIV cases resulting from sex between men are negatively related to tolerance towards homosexuality in Europe.

Keywords

Attitudes, Europe, homosexuality, law, same-sex marriage, tolerance

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Although in present-day Europe homosexuality in general seems to be more accepted than a few decades ago, the extent to which it is accepted differs considerably between European countries, from the tolerant Netherlands and Scandinavian countries to the less tolerant Eastern European countries (Halman et al., 2011). This study investigates to what extent specific country characteristics related to population composition, economic affluence, religiosity, same-sex union legislation and HIV rates from men having sex with men can explain these differences between countries in Europe. The focus on macro-level explanations originates from the observation in previous research that – compared to other attitudinal outcomes – attitudes about homosexuality appear to be highly affected by the societal context (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009).

Recently, several cross-national studies were published that explain country differences in attitudes towards homosexuality by focusing on one or more specific national context such as economic development, religious heritage and legal institutions (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009; Andersen and Fetner, 2008b; Gerhards, 2010; Van den Akker et al., 2012). The contribution of our study to the existing literature is threefold.

First, with respect to the impact of legislation, we not only provide a replication for a different and larger group of countries, but we also go a step further than previous research (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009; Van den Akker et al., 2012). Legal institutions are argued to shape attitudes towards homosexuality, but causality may very well be reversed: laws are also a reflection of public opinion. We therefore conduct an empirical exercise that suggests to what extent countries with higher levels of acceptance of homosexuality were more likely to introduce laws that improve the rights of homosexuals (reflecting the thought that public opinion may fuel legislation) and to what extent countries that introduced such laws experienced a larger increase in tolerance towards homosexuality than countries which did not (reflecting the thought that legislation may shape public opinion). To this end, we examine the relation between countries' legal situation and level of tolerance in the years 1999 and 2008.

Second, we add a new explanation in cross-national research on attitudes towards homosexuality: the prevalence of HIV/AIDS. Before the 1980s, homosexual men and women used to be relatively invisible in European societies, but this changed after that time, partly because of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the beginning of the 1980s. No reliable treatments were available at that time, and the disease was strongly associated with male homosexual activity (Sherkat et al., 2011). It brought the lives of gay men into the public sphere, and stories and interviews in the media gave people insights into the lives of homosexuals (Andersen and Fetner, 2008a). On the one hand, this increased sympathy and compassion, and cultural symbols in support of HIV/AIDS victims emerged, such as the red ribbon (Andersen and Fetner, 2008a; Kelley, 2001). On the other hand, the disease was posing a threat of unknown magnitude to broader society and because HIV/AIDS hit the homosexual community in particular, it could have affected public opinion in a negative way (Loftus, 2001). Although increased public knowledge about HIV/AIDS prevention and improved medical treatment could have reduced this stigma effect, it might still be in evidence today. Speculations about a possible relationship between HIV/AIDS and attitudes towards homosexuality have only been empirically tested in single-country longitudinal studies (Jaspers et al., 2007; Ruel and Campbell, 2006). We therefore bring the theoretical ideas concerning HIV/AIDS to an empirical test in a

cross-national design and assess to what extent the number of diagnosed HIV cases resulting from sex between men is associated with country differences in tolerance towards homosexuality.

A final improvement is that, by employing data from the latest wave of the European Values Study in 2008 (EVS, 2011), we are able to analyse an unprecedented number of 40 European countries in a multi-level regression design of individuals nested within countries. This large number of countries included in our dataset offers good possibilities to test our macro-level explanations, since simulation studies (e.g. Bryan and Jenkins, 2013) suggest that a smaller number of countries (i.e. fewer than 25–30) leads to imprecise estimates of country-level coefficients and variance components. Nevertheless, we must be cautious in drawing conclusions regarding causality since we are dealing with cross-sectional data.

Theory and hypotheses

Population composition

A first explanation for country differences in tolerance towards homosexuality lies in population composition. A large body of research shows that women, young, higher educated, financially secure and non-religious individuals have more positive attitudes towards homosexuality than their counterparts (see e.g. Andersen and Fetner, 2008a; Kite and Whitley, 1996; Ohlander et al., 2005; Persell et al., 2001; Whitley, 2008). First, beliefs related to gender and sexual identity are thought to explain the finding that women are more tolerant towards homosexuality than men (Kite and Whitley, 1996): homosexuals are perceived to violate gender roles and men find this more offensive than women do. Second, the negative association between age and tolerance towards homosexuality could be the result of both life cycle and cohort experiences, but the latter has received most attention in the literature. The basic idea is that individuals develop their values during their childhood and early adolescence and these values are stable during the rest of a person's life (Alwin and Krosnick, 1991). Older cohorts have been socialized in times in which homosexuality was considered a disease or even a sin (Van de Meerendonk and Scheepers, 2004), whereas later cohorts were raised in a more liberal period in which the emphasis on individual autonomy increased (Inglehart, 1977). Third, the finding that higher educated persons are more tolerant towards homosexuality than lower educated (Ohlander et al., 2005) is in line with the general argument that education fosters more liberal attitudes (Hyman and Wright, 1979). Finally, the relation between religion and tolerance towards homosexuality has been studied extensively (for an overview, see Whitley, 2008). All major religions tend to categorize behaviour associated with homosexuality as 'unnatural', 'impure' and 'sinful' (Yip, 2005), although religious denominations vary in the extent to which they systematically condemn homosexuality. Muslims appear to be the most strict in this respect, followed by Orthodox Christians, Catholics and Protestants, whereas non-church members are the most tolerant (Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009; Gerhards, 2010). However, Van den Akker et al. (2012) find that the level of tolerance towards homosexuality does not significantly differ between Protestants and

non-church members, while they observe that Catholics are the most tolerant towards homosexuality in Europe. Furthermore, religious involvement is an important factor since individuals who frequently attend religious services internalize their religions' objections to homosexuality and display less tolerant attitudes (Gerhards, 2010; Van den Akker et al., 2012). Since the distributions of these individual attributes within the population are likely to vary across countries, this may result in country differences in tolerance towards homosexuality. We therefore control for variation in population composition in our models and expect that *individuals who are female, born more recently, have higher levels of education, higher incomes and are non-church members and non-church-goers will be more tolerant towards homosexuality than their counterparts (H1)*.

Economic affluence

The link between economic affluence and tolerance can be derived from modernization theory. The central claim of modernization theory is that economic development is related to value change in society. (Post)industrialization leads to occupational specialization, increasing educational levels and rising income levels, making people feel more economically secure (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). When people grow up under conditions of economic and physical security (due to high levels of economic affluence in a country), they shift their value priorities from an emphasis on survival to an emphasis on subjective well-being and quality of life (Inglehart, 1977). This implies that, looking at a snapshot of Europe today, a majority of the population in the wealthier countries emphasize values of post-materialism and self-expression, which are related to greater tolerance of diversity (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). When survival is uncertain, people may experience diversity as threatening and they hold on to traditional gender roles and sexual norms. In more affluent societies, people can more easily afford to tolerate new ideas, and equal rights for women, foreigners, homosexuals and other out-groups are more accepted. In line with findings from Kelley (2001) and Andersen and Fetner (2008b), we thus expect that *individuals living in more affluent countries will be more tolerant towards homosexuality than individuals living in less affluent countries (H2)*.

Religiosity

Research on the relationship between attitudes and religious contexts suggests that even people who are not personally religious may be influenced by the religiosity of their country, for two reasons (e.g. Kelley and De Graaf, 1997; Verbakel and Jaspers, 2010). First, religious institutions such as the church play an important role in the public debate about moral issues such as homosexuality since they spread their messages through major institutional vehicles like the media, education and politics (Moore and Vanneman, 2003). This means that culture and governmental policies are more often infused with religious values, and that religious institutions will dominate the public debate about moral issues such as homosexuality. In more secular countries, however, religion gradually lost its encompassing and important role, also in

prescribing traditional values and norms (Halman and Draulans, 2004). Second, in religious countries there is a larger pool of devout people, which increases potential social interaction of both religious and non-religious people with other religious people in a variety of social structures, such as work, neighbourhoods and voluntary organizations (Moore and Vanneman, 2003). For those who regularly attend church, interaction with like-minded others will reinforce less favourable attitudes about homosexuality, whereas for non-church goers such forms of interaction could enhance their willingness to conform to prevailing anti-homosexual norms. Cross-national research indeed shows that higher levels of church attendance in a society are related to less positive attitudes towards homosexuality (Van den Akker et al., 2012). We therefore hypothesize that, regardless of personal religious denomination and church attendance, *individuals living in countries with lower levels of church attendance will be more tolerant towards homosexuality than individuals living in countries with higher levels of church attendance (H3).*

Legislation on same-sex partnerships and marriages

The legal context people live in influences their attitudes, although laws are also a reflection of the public opinion in a country. For now, we will focus on the first mechanism, and come back to the issue of reversed causality later. Laws can be seen as socializing agents which set the boundaries between what is legally right and what is wrong (Van den Akker et al., 2012). When a country emphasizes homosexual rights, for example by legalizing same-sex marriages, this may increase people's tolerance towards homosexuals because they adopt these legal norms and rules. In contrast, in countries where same-sex unions are not officially recognized, people are more exposed to anti-homosexuality norms, and therefore supposedly less tolerant towards homosexuality. In 2001, the Netherlands was the first country in Europe – and the world – to legalize same-sex marriages. Between 2001 and 2008 (the year of EVS data collection) same-sex marriage was also legalized in Belgium and Spain. Civil unions or registered partnerships between homosexuals were officially recognized in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and in Croatia unregistered same-sex cohabitation was legalized. In all other European countries, same-sex unions were not legally recognized before 2008. We expect that *individuals living in countries with laws recognizing same-sex partnerships or marriages will be more tolerant towards homosexuality than individuals living in countries with no legislation on same-sex unions (H4).*

HIV diagnosed in men having sex with men

The HIV/AIDS crisis emerged in the 1980s, and threatened a large part of the world, including Europe. Two groups were hit in particular by the disease, namely injection drug users and male homosexuals. The association of HIV/AIDS with these stigmatized groups negatively affected public opinion towards individuals infected with the virus and those persons most likely to contract it, because of three reasons (Ruel and

Campbell, 2006). First, HIV/AIDS is contracted through voluntary behaviour which is already stigmatized, such as homosexual sex. Second, the virus is contagious and puts others at risk. Finally, HIV/AIDS is incurable, and, although no longer always leading to death, a chronic condition at best. As a result, HIV/AIDS has been used as a symbol for expressing negative attitudes towards homosexuals, who were disproportionately affected by the disease (Herek, 1999). Research in the US indeed shows that AIDS incidence had a negative impact on civil rights attitudes and morality attitudes towards homosexuals throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Ruel and Campbell, 2006). This so-called stigma effect might be weaker in contemporary Europe however, because of increased public knowledge about HIV/AIDS prevention and improved medical treatment, such as the introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) in 1996 which prevents individuals inflicted with HIV from developing AIDS (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2010). In addition, the connotation between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality may differ between Western and Eastern Europe since the predominant mode of transmission of HIV/AIDS in the latter region is injection drug use and not sexual contacts between men (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2010). As a result, we believe it is important to specifically relate the incidence of HIV/AIDS to the 'stigmatized' group we are interested in. We therefore focus on the relationship between diagnosed HIV cases resulting from men having sex with men and tolerance towards homosexuality. We prefer to consider HIV infections instead of AIDS cases because it can be assumed that recent medical treatments are more widespread in modernized countries with well-developed health services, which have higher tolerance rates for other reasons. This might blur the relationship between AIDS rates and tolerance towards homosexuality. In order to assess whether a stigma effect is still relevant in Europe today, we focus on HIV infections and expect that *individuals living in countries with higher rates of diagnosed HIV cases resulting from sex between men will be less tolerant towards homosexuality than individuals living in countries with lower HIV rates (H5)*.

Data

To test these hypotheses, we employ data from the most recent wave of the European Values Study in 2008 (EVS, 2011). This survey focuses on basic human values in the areas of life, family, work, religion, politics and society. The data collection combines random samples from 47 countries and regions that were all submitted to the same questionnaire and strict methodological guidelines. Detailed information on the data collection can be found at www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu. We limit our study to respondents who are 18 years and older. Furthermore, we exclude seven countries for various reasons: Italy (no information on tolerance towards homosexuality), Austria, Estonia, Kosovo, Northern Cyprus and Russia (lack of relevant macro-level information) and Azerbaijan (advised by the EVS team since they could not guarantee the quality of the data). Listwise deletion of missing values ($N = 4404$) on the individual-level dependent and independent variables (except for income – see description later on), results in

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of individual and country characteristics.

	Mean	Min.	Max.	SD	N
<i>Individual characteristics</i>					
Tolerance towards homosexuality	3.92	1	10	3.4	53,421
Female	0.52	0	1		53,421
Birth year	1962	1900	1991	17.63	53,421
Educational level	3.1	0	6	1.36	53,421
Monthly household income (ppp in €000)	1.33	0.01	14.73	1.26	53,421
Missing information on household income	0.18	0	1		53,421
<i>Religious denomination</i>					
Protestant	0.13	0	1		53,421
Catholic	0.25	0	1		53,421
Orthodox Christian	0.28	0	1		53,421
Muslim	0.08	0	1		53,421
Other religious denomination	0.03	0	1		53,421
No religious denomination	0.23	0	1		53,421
Church attendance	2.37	0	6	1.92	53,421
<i>Country characteristics</i>					
GDP per capita (ppp in \$000)	23.47	2.56	77.07	15.28	40
Average church attendance	2.38	1.03	4.49	0.83	40
<i>Legislation on same-sex unions</i>					
Same-sex marriage	0.08	0	1		40
Recognized same-sex partnership	0.38	0	1		40
No laws	0.55	0	1		40
HIV rates due to sex between men (per million population)	12.07	0.19	43.53	12.85	40

Source: European Values Study 2008.

an analytical sample of 53,421 respondents from 40 countries. The sample is weighted to adjust to populations' distribution of gender and age. Table 1 presents descriptive information of all individual-level and country-level variables that are used in the analyses.

Dependent variable: Tolerance towards homosexuality

The dependent variable tolerance towards homosexuality is measured with the following question: 'Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between.' The respondent was presented a list of 20 items, among which 'homosexuality'.¹ The position of the respondent is expressed on a 10-point scale. A score of 1 means 'never' and a score of 10 means 'always', thus a high score indicates more tolerance towards homosexuality. The overall average tolerance towards homosexuality is 3.9; scores vary between 1.1 (Georgia) and 8.3 (Iceland).

Individual-level independent variables

Compositional differences between countries are considered with respect to gender, birth year, educational level, income, religious denomination and church attendance. For gender, a dummy variable was created with men as the reference category. To measure respondents' educational level, country-specific educational classifications were recoded into the internationally comparable ISCED classification, with codes ranging from 0 (pre-primary education or none) to 6 (second stage of tertiary education). Respondents could indicate their level of income by ticking one of the country-specific categories for monthly household income after taxes. To create a comparable income measure across countries, the country-specific categories were converted into euros using purchasing power parity (ppp) rates. If information on household income was missing – about 18% of the respondents did not answer this question – we imputed it by the average income level in the country. We will include a dummy variable (score 1 if information was originally missing) in the analyses to account for this. Respondents' religious denomination is recoded into five dummy variables: Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Muslim and other denomination, with no religious denomination as the reference category. Attendance of religious services is based on the question 'Apart from weddings, funerals, and christenings, about how often do you attend religious services?' The answer categories range from 0 (never) to 7 (more than once a week).

Country-level independent variables

Countries' level of economic affluence was indicated by the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, based on purchasing power parity (ppp) in 1000 international dollars. Data were retrieved from www.worldbank.org and the average GDP over the period 2004–2008 was calculated per country. The level of religiosity in a country was measured by aggregating individual scores on church attendance (see above), which resulted in average church attendance per country.² To test the hypothesis on the association between legislation on same-sex unions and tolerance towards homosexuality, we used information on international laws regulating same-sex unions from the same source as Adamczyk and Pitt (2009), namely www.answers.com/topic/lgbt-rights-in-europe, and verified the information with other sources, such as the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (IGLA) in Europe. For the analyses, three dummy variables referring to the situation in 2008 were created, namely legislation of same-sex marriages (Netherlands, Belgium, Spain), legal recognition of same-sex partnerships (Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia, Switzerland, UK and the Scandinavian countries) and no legislation on same-sex marriages or recognized partnerships (all other countries).

Finally, we collected information on the average number of HIV infections newly diagnosed in men who have sex with men in the period 2004–2008³ (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe, 2010). We transformed these absolute numbers into prevalence rates per million population using countries' total population numbers (United Nations, 2011).

Models

We perform linear multi-level regression analysis in order to correct for the fact that individuals are not independent observations but are nested in countries (Snijders and Bosker, 1999). We estimate random intercept models, which allow the intercept to vary across countries, while assuming the slopes of the independent variables to be the same across countries. The empty model without independent variables allows us to partition the variance in tolerance towards homosexuality (Model 0 in Table 2). The calculated intraclass correlation ($4.453/(4.453+7.149)$) reveals that 38% of the variability in individual tolerance towards homosexuality can be attributed to differences between countries and the remaining 62% to differences between individuals. We extend our models in a stepwise procedure. Model 1 includes only the individual-level independent variables to see how much of the variance can be explained by population composition. In the models that follow, the effects of economic affluence (Model 2), religiosity (Model 3), same-sex union legislation (Model 4) and HIV rates (Model 5) will be added to Model 1 one at a time, showing their effects controlled for compositional differences between countries, but not for each other. In the final model (Model 6), all individual-level and country-level variables are included simultaneously showing their net effects.

Results

Composition effects

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that all individual characteristics have significant effects in the predicted direction (H1): Women, individuals born more recently, higher educated, with a higher household income, non-church members and non-church goers are more tolerant towards homosexuality than their counterparts. The extent to which these characteristics account for composition effects however is rather modest. Compared to the null-model, the variance on the country level decreases by 19% (from 4.453 to 3.613), which means that country differences in tolerance towards homosexuality can be explained by compositional effects to a relatively small extent only.

Country characteristics

We briefly discuss the results from Models 2 to 5 that include one country characteristic at a time before turning to Model 6 that simultaneously includes all individual and country effects on tolerance towards homosexuality. In Model 2, GDP per capita is added to the individual characteristics in Model 1 to explain country differences in attitudes about homosexuality. In line with hypothesis 2, the results show that the higher a country's economic affluence, the more tolerant towards homosexuality its inhabitants are. Moreover, GDP per capita turns out to be a very important factor in explaining country-level variances in attitudes towards homosexuality, since it explains ($73.61\% - 18.86\% =$) 55% of all country differences.

The coefficients in Model 3 show that the religiosity hypothesis also finds support in the data (H3). A country's level of religiosity, indicated by average church attendance, is

Table 2. Multi-level regression analyses of tolerance towards homosexuality on individual and country characteristics (N = 53,421).

	Model 0		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
Intercept	4.011**	0.334	1.686**	0.305	-0.744*	0.323	4.355**	0.813	0.353	0.259	0.530	0.324	-0.527	0.700
<i>Individual characteristics</i>														
Female			0.637**	0.022	0.637**	0.022	0.637**	0.022	0.637*	0.022	0.637**	0.022	0.637**	0.022
Birth year			0.025**	0.001	0.025**	0.001	0.025**	0.001	0.025**	0.001	0.025**	0.001	0.025**	0.001
Educational level			0.308**	0.009	0.308**	0.009	0.309**	0.009	0.308**	0.009	0.308**	0.009	0.308**	0.009
Household income			0.143**	0.011	0.141**	0.011	0.142**	0.011	0.142**	0.011	0.142**	0.011	0.141**	0.011
Missing info. household income			-0.003	0.029	-0.003	0.029	-0.002	0.029	-0.003	0.029	-0.003	0.029	-0.002	0.029
Religious denomination (ref = none)														
Protestant			-0.166**	0.049	-0.164**	0.049	-0.166**	0.049	-0.165**	0.049	-0.164**	0.049	-0.164**	0.049
Catholic			-0.289**	0.038	-0.291**	0.038	-0.288**	0.038	-0.290**	0.038	-0.289**	0.048	-0.291**	0.038
Orthodox Christian			-0.305**	0.048	-0.304**	0.048	-0.304**	0.048	-0.302**	0.048	-0.304**	0.038	-0.301**	0.048
Muslim			-0.912**	0.067	-0.909**	0.067	-0.911**	0.067	-0.909**	0.067	-0.910**	0.067	-0.908**	0.067
Other religious denomination			-0.825**	0.073	-0.824**	0.073	-0.825**	0.073	-0.826**	0.073	-0.826**	0.073	-0.825**	0.073
Church attendance			-0.194**	0.007	-0.194**	0.007	-0.194**	0.007	-0.194**	0.007	-0.194**	0.007	-0.194**	0.007
<i>Country characteristics</i>														
GDP per capita					0.104**	0.011							0.078**	0.015
Average church attendance							-1.123**	0.323					-0.045	0.232
Legislation on same-sex unions (ref = none)														
Same-sex marriage									3.621**	0.732			2.459**	0.760
Recognized same-sex partnership									2.828**	0.399			1.419*	0.528
HIV rate due to sex between men													0.096**	0.018
Individual-level variance % explained (compared to empty model)	7.149	0.043	6.322**	0.038	6.322**	0.038	6.322**	0.038	6.322**	0.038	6.322**	0.038	6.322**	0.038
Country level variance % explained (compared to empty model)			11.60%		11.60%		11.60%		11.60%		11.60%		11.60%	
Country level variance % explained (compared to empty model)	4.453	0.997	3.613**	0.811	1.175**	0.264	2.773**	0.623	1.409**	0.317	2.139**	0.481	0.821**	0.185
			18.86%		73.61%		37.73%		68.36%		51.97%		81.56%	

**p < .01, * p < .05.

Source: European Values Study 2008.

negatively related to tolerance of homosexuality. The explanatory power of countries' level of religiosity is modest: average church attendance explains (37.73% – 18.86% =) 19% of the variance in tolerance towards homosexuality between countries.

Legal institutions are also significantly related to tolerance towards homosexuality (see Model 4). Compared to countries where no form of partnership between people of the same sex is officially recognized, individuals living in countries where homosexuals are legally allowed to get married are more tolerant towards homosexuality. In countries without same-sex marriage laws, but with legislation on same-sex partnerships, people are also more tolerant towards homosexuality in comparison to the reference group. This supports the hypothesis on same-sex union legislation (H4), but as mentioned before, causality cannot be claimed, as the direction of the effect can also be reversed. We will come back to this issue later. Same-sex union laws account for (68.36% – 18.86% =) 50% of the variance at the country level.

The results in Model 5 reveal that HIV rates resulting from men having sex with men are positively related to tolerance of homosexuality, which is contrary to our expectation (H5).⁴ HIV rates explain (51.97% – 18.86% =) 33% of the variance in tolerance towards homosexuality at the country-level.

Finally, Model 6 estimates the relationships between each country characteristic and tolerance towards homosexuality while correcting for the influence of the other country characteristics. This step is necessary because country characteristics are correlated; hence, the relationships shown in Models 2 to 5 could be, to some extent, spurious. Economic affluence and legislation on same-sex unions remain significant predictors of tolerance towards homosexuality. The maximum net impact of GDP per capita ($b = 0.078$), expressed as the estimated difference in tolerance levels between the most (Luxembourg) and least (Republic of Moldova) affluent countries in Europe, is as much as 5.8 points on the 10-point tolerance scale. In addition, the impact of same-sex union legislation is considerable as well. Tolerance levels are, on average, 2.5 points higher in countries that allow same-sex marriages and 1.4 points higher in countries that recognize same-sex partnerships compared to countries that have no laws in this respect. Although tolerance towards homosexuality seems to be lower in countries that only recognize same-sex partnerships ($b = 1.419$) than in countries that go one step further in granting rights to homosexuals by allowing same-sex marriages ($b = 2.459$), the difference is not statistically significant. The relationships between religiosity and HIV rates due to men having sex with men on the one hand and tolerance towards homosexuality on the other hand disappear once controlled for all other characteristics. The strong impact of economic affluence probably overrules the effects of religiosity and HIV incidence, due to mutual correlations.⁵ For example, the unexpected positive association between HIV rates and tolerance towards homosexuality in Model 5 is explained by countries' GDP: HIV rates are higher in more affluent countries, which have higher levels of tolerance. In any case, the expected stigma effect of HIV rates due to sex between men, which supposedly would lower tolerance towards homosexuality, cannot be demonstrated. Compared to the empty model, the variance at the country level decreases from 4.453 to 0.821, indicating that all individual and country characteristics together explain a very large part (82%) of the country variance in tolerance towards homosexuality.

Relationship between legislation and public opinion

The multi-level analyses described above showed that individuals in countries with legislation on same-sex marriages or recognized partnerships are more tolerant towards homosexuality than individuals living in countries without such legislation. However, laws not only shape public opinion in a country, but they also reflect it, and this two-way influence very likely holds for issues of sexual morality (Scott, 1998). To test the issue of reversed causality, longitudinal panel data covering a substantial number of countries would be needed. Such data are, to our knowledge, not available. Instead, we try to exploit available data to the fullest. Using cross-sectional data from the 1999 and 2008 waves of the European Values Study, we compare developments in the average level of tolerance towards homosexuality for three types of countries: (a) countries which implemented laws on same-sex marriages or recognized partnerships before 1999 ($n = 7$), (b) countries which implemented these laws in our observation period, that is between 1999 and 2008 ($n = 11$) and (c) countries without this legislation in 2008 ($n = 21$). Our line of reasoning is that the 'public opinion leads to legislation' argument is reflected in the extent to which countries that introduced legislation regarding same-sex unions between 1999 and 2008 had higher tolerance levels in 1999 than countries that did not introduce legislation, whereas the 'legislation shapes public opinion' argument is reflected in a larger increase in tolerance between 1999 and 2008 in those countries that implemented legislation regarding same-sex unions in the same period compared to those countries that did not. We would like to stress that, although this additional analysis offers more insight in the two-way influences of attitudes and legislation, strong causality claims are not warranted. Other factors, such as national wealth or level of religiosity, may have developed in parallel with changes in legislation and in attitudes towards homosexuality, producing a spurious relationship between the two.

Table 3 shows the average level of tolerance towards homosexuality in 1999 and 2008 for the European countries in our analyses. The data for countries not present in the 1999 EVS dataset were taken from the 1995 and 2000 World Values Surveys, a large-scale research programme with a comparable design and questionnaire to EVS 1999.⁶ No data are available for Cyprus in 1999. In general, tolerance towards homosexuality increased on average by 0.29 on the 10-point scale between 1999 and 2008. The question now is: did countries which implemented legislation on same-sex partnerships or marriages in the period 1999–2008 show higher levels of tolerance to start with? Or, did the implementation of these laws induce an (additional) increase in tolerance levels? The results of Table 4 hint at positive answers to both questions. Countries which implemented same-sex union laws between 1999 and 2008 (group b) showed significantly higher levels of tolerance towards homosexuality in 1999 than the countries without such laws (group c). This indicates that tolerance levels in the former countries were higher to start with, and that legislation in these countries to some extent reflects public opinion. In 2008, tolerance towards homosexuality not only continued to be higher in these countries compared to countries without same-sex union laws, these countries also showed a stronger increase in the period 1999–2008. The average tolerance towards homosexuality in countries that implemented legislation on same-sex unions (group b) grew by 0.239 points between 1999 and 2008, whereas the increase in countries without same-sex union laws (group c)

Table 3. Changes in tolerance towards homosexuality between 1999 and 2008 and legislation on same-sex unions in 2008 (with date of implementation) by country.

Country	Tolerance towards homosexuality					Same-sex marriage laws
	1999		2008		2008–1999	
	Mean	N	Mean	n	d	
Albania	1.48 ^b	955	2.09	1390	0.60	No laws
Armenia	2.03 ^a	1865	1.19	1457	-0.84	No laws
Belgium	5.40	1869	5.76	1491	0.37	Same-sex marriage (2003) Recognized partnership (2000)
Bosnia Herzegovina	1.96 ^b	2338	1.70	1483	-0.27	No laws
Bulgaria	2.60	881	2.81	1310	0.21	No laws
Belarus	2.91	899	2.62	1422	-0.29	No laws
Croatia	2.41	986	2.40	1468	-0.01	Recognized partnership (2003)
Cyprus			2.36	948		No laws
Czech Republic	5.47	1827	4.96	1669	-0.52	Recognized partnership (2006)
Denmark	6.59	964	7.28	1476	0.69	Recognized partnership (1989)
Finland	4.94	991	6.60	1063	1.66	Recognized partnership (1971)
France	5.27	1504	5.75	1467	0.48	Recognized partnership (1999)
Georgia	1.56 ^a	1947	1.14	1447	-0.42	No laws
Germany	5.69	1937	5.71	1983	0.01	Recognized partnership (2001)
Greece	4.95	1066	3.88	1463	-1.07	No laws
Hungary	1.45	939	3.19	1471	1.75	No laws
Iceland	7.19	908	8.28	784	1.10	Recognized partnership (1996)
Ireland	4.27	931	5.20	914	0.94	No laws
Latvia	1.90	949	2.41	1414	0.51	No laws
Lithuania	1.88	924	1.98	1349	0.10	No laws
Luxembourg	5.90	1146	6.27	1527	0.38	Recognized partnership (2004)
Macedonia	1.81 ^b	1958	2.02	1419	0.21	No laws
Malta	2.58	1001	4.14	1298	1.56	No laws
Moldova	2.11 ^b	1773	1.74	1458	-0.37	No laws
Montenegro	2.07 ^{b,c}	3496	1.68	1459	-0.39	No laws
Netherlands	7.82	999	7.70	1524	-0.13	Same-sex marriage (2001) Recognized partnership (1998)
Northern Ireland	4.03	908	4.40	468	0.37	Recognized partnership (2005)
Norway	4.50 ^a	3275	7.08	1074	2.58	Recognized partnership (1993)
Poland	2.90	1027	2.84	1401	-0.06	No laws
Portugal	3.19	933	4.29	1393	1.10	Recognized partnership (2001)
Romania	1.91	1052	2.18	1413	0.27	No laws
Serbia	2.07 ^{b,c}	3496	1.80	1474	-0.26	No laws
Slovak Republic	4.91	1181	5.12	1339	0.21	No laws
Slovenia	4.62	968	3.96	1326	-0.66	Recognized partnership (2006)

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued)

Country	Tolerance towards homosexuality				2008–1999 d	Same-sex marriage laws
	1999		2008			
	Mean	N	Mean	n		
Spain	5.51	1113	6.05	1417	0.55	Same-sex marriage (2005) Recognized partnership (1998)
Sweden	7.65	977	7.81	1050	0.16	Recognized partnership (1995)
Switzerland	5.27 ^a	2413	6.35	1223	1.08	Recognized partnership (2007)
Turkey	1.55	1192	1.48	2243	-0.07	No laws
Ukraine	2.35	1103	1.60	1347	-0.74	No laws
United Kingdom	4.89	974	5.50	1503	0.61	Recognized partnership (2005)

^aWorld Values Survey 1995; ^bWorld Values Survey 2000; ^cCombined data for Serbia and Montenegro.
Sources: European Values Study 1999 and 2008/World Values Survey 1995 and 2000/ILGA-Europe.

Table 4. T-test for differences in tolerance towards homosexuality for countries with and without legislation on same-sex unions.

	Mean tolerance 1999	Mean tolerance 2008	d (2008–1999)
Legislation on same-sex unions			
a. Yes, before 1999 (<i>n</i> = 7)	6.314	7.259	0.944
b. Yes, between 1999 and 2008 (<i>n</i> = 11)	4.740	5.032	0.239
c. No (<i>n</i> = 21)	2.441	2.515	0.075
T-tests			
t-value (b–c)	-5.810 ***	-5.790 ***	-0.878
t-value (a–c)	-7.941 ***	-9.872 ***	-2.589 **
t-value (a–b)	-2.723 **	-4.402 ***	-1.862 *

*** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Sources: European Values Study 1999 and 2008/World Values Survey 1995 and 2000/ILGA-Europe.

was only 0.075. Although the difference is not statistically significant (probably due to the small number of cases we are analysing), this suggests that legislation indeed might influence public opinion towards more tolerant attitudes. This conclusion is strengthened by the observation that the increase in tolerance levels between 1999 and 2008 was highest in countries that implemented same-sex union laws before 1999 (group a), which suggests that legislation might influence people's attitudes even quite some time after its implementation. Assuming a linear relationship between year of implementation and level of tolerance towards homosexuality, an additional regression analysis ($n = 18$) shows that for each year that same-sex marriage laws were implemented, average tolerance levels

increased by almost one-tenth of a point on the 10-point scale ($b = 0.082$; $p = .053$). In sum, although this additional test cannot warrant true causal claims since confounding factors could not be taken into account, it produced indications that we can interpret the legislation effect in our multi-level analyses partly as hypothesized. Legalisation regarding same-sex partnerships and marriages seems to influence people's attitudes by making them more tolerant towards homosexuality, although such legislation will partly reflect public opinion in a country as well.

Conclusions and discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate tolerance towards homosexuality in Europe and to test explanations for country differences in the level of tolerance based on population composition, economic affluence, religiosity, same-sex union legislation and HIV rates from men having sex with men. We analysed cross-sectional data of 40 countries from the 2008 wave of the European Values Study in a multi-level design. The results showed that no less than 82% of the variability in tolerance towards homosexuality between countries was explained by the determinants mentioned.

In line with earlier findings (Andersen and Fetner, 2008b; Kelley, 2001), a strong, positive relation appeared between individuals' tolerance towards homosexuality and countries' economic affluence. Next to economic affluence, legal institutions explained a considerable degree of country differences in tolerance towards homosexuality. In countries where same-sex marriages are legal, and also in countries where other forms of same-sex partnerships are officially recognized, individuals are more tolerant towards homosexuality than in countries with no legislation on same-sex unions. This study deepened our understanding regarding this relationship by presenting additional analyses, which suggest that the relationship between legislation on same-sex unions and tolerance towards homosexuality is the result of two-way causality (although causality claims must be interpreted with care): legislation seems to both shape and reflect public opinion on homosexuality. We found that countries with higher levels of tolerance towards homosexuality were more prone to implement laws on same-sex unions, but the reverse was also the case: introduction of legislation on same-sex marriages and recognized partnerships went hand in hand with people becoming more tolerant towards homosexuality. This influence seems to be lasting, and we may therefore expect that tolerance levels will continue to increase in Europe as more and more countries are considering implementing same-sex marriage laws in the future.⁷

The hypothesis that HIV rates resulting from sex between men are negatively related to tolerance towards homosexuality, which has been suggested in the literature, but so far has not been tested cross-nationally, was not confirmed. The zero-order relationship was even positive: the higher a country's HIV rate due to men having sex with men, the more tolerant its inhabitants are. In addition, no relationship was found once other country-level factors were controlled for. Therefore, we must conclude that a stigma effect of HIV/AIDS for homosexuals is highly unlikely in contemporary Europe. The results of our analyses suggest that economic affluence (indicated by a country's GDP per capita) is the most important explanation for the (positive) relationship between HIV rates resulting from sex between men and tolerance towards homosexuality: HIV rates are

higher in more affluent countries, which display higher levels of tolerance towards homosexuality because economic development fosters a value shift towards post-materialism and self-expression. One speculation about the reasons why HIV rates are higher in more affluent countries is that these countries have more medical resources available for tracing HIV infections (for instance because of more, better or more affordable tests), resulting in higher odds of diagnosing the disease. In addition, modernized countries may offer a normative climate that lowers barriers to visit a doctor when one suspects being infected with HIV, which pushes up the number of diagnosed HIV infections as well. Another possible explanation could be that barriers for several kinds of sexual behaviour, including male–male sex, are lower in modernized countries; higher numbers of diagnosed HIV infections then result from higher incidence of sex between men. In any case, these results suggest that a stigma effect of HIV/AIDS for homosexuals is highly unlikely in contemporary Europe.

The level of religiosity in a country did not appear to have an additional effect on people's attitudes about homosexuality. This does not mean that religious institutions are not important when it comes to tolerance towards homosexuality. People living in countries with higher levels of church attendance displayed less tolerance than people living in countries with lower levels of church attendance (cf. Van den Akker et al., 2012). However, after including GDP per capita in the analyses, the coefficient of average church attendance was insignificant, as religiosity is interrelated to economic affluence at the country level. In addition, at the individual level we observed that individuals who are not members of a religious denomination and those who never attend religious services are more tolerant towards homosexuality than church members and individuals who never go to church.

Finally, our results replicated earlier findings that women, younger birth cohorts, higher educated, higher income, non-church members and non-church-goers are more tolerant towards homosexuality than their counterparts. However, these individual characteristics only to a relatively small extent (19%) explained variance at the country level, which means that the composition of a country is not the main mechanism to account for country differences in tolerance towards homosexuality.

Although we were able to explain quite a large proportion of country variation in tolerance towards homosexuality, one wonders which factors account for the remaining country differences. An alternative explanation might be found in the visibility and activism of a country's gay and lesbian movement, and in addition in the presence or absence of a strong countermovement (cf. Andersen and Fetner, 2008a). Indeed, a longitudinal study in the Netherlands shows that an increase in memberships of the organization for homosexuals COC is related to less opposition to homosexuality (Jaspers et al., 2007). Movements that strive for the emancipation of homosexuals might thus influence public opinion. Of course, part of this influence is already accounted for in this study. After all, it is quite plausible that in countries with more visible and active homosexual organizations, legislation on same-sex unions are introduced, as these organizations lobby for homosexual civil rights and liberties, including same-sex marriage laws (Fernandez and Lutter, 2013). Homosexual emancipation movements might also help in preventing stigmatization of HIV/AIDS. Grönfors and Stalström (1987) for example conclude that the strong organization of homosexuals in the Netherlands prevented panic about AIDS in

that country. Nevertheless, in order to establish the precise impact of homosexual organizations on tolerance towards homosexuality more research is needed. Scholars could then also focus on countermovements which display strong anti-homosexual sentiments and which are most likely to be affiliated with right-wing religious and socially conservative political organizations. However, such research efforts would again be seriously complicated by the issue of reversed causality. Not only could a strong homosexual organization (or countermovement) influence people's tolerance towards homosexuality, the other way around is also quite plausible: a more (less) homosexual-friendly climate in a country could increase the powers of homosexual organizations (their counterparts). To solve this issue of two-way causality, data on many countries in a longitudinal design are needed, which to date are lacking.

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Notes

1. Please note that this question is meant to be very general and therefore asks about sex-unspecified homosexuality.
2. An alternative indicator of religiosity that combines various measures on religious beliefs and importance of religion (cf. Halman and Draulans, 2004) strongly correlates with church attendance (individual level: $r = .57$; country level: $r = .84$) and gives comparable results.
3. The World Health Organization introduced a new set of validation rules in 2009 to improve the quality of the data on HIV infections and AIDS cases. Since the calculated HIV rates diagnosed in men having sex with men for the period 2004–2008 correlate highly with those for 2009 ($r = .97$), we prefer to use the former data, which precede the EVS data collection.
4. Although substantive reasons made us prefer to employ HIV rates resulting from sex between men, we alternatively considered total number of AIDS cases per 100,000 population. As hypothesized, the estimated coefficient is negative and significant on a 5% significance level. However, it is not significant in the final model, which includes all other country-level variables. This observation may underscore our argument that HIV-infected individuals are more likely to develop AIDS in countries with lower levels of GDP.
5. The correlation between GDP per capita and average church attendance is $r = -.38$ ($p = .00$) and between GDP per capita and HIV rates due to male–male sex is $r = .73$ ($p = .00$).
6. See www.worldvaluessurvey.org for more information on the World Values Survey (WVS) programme. If a country was included in both the 1995 and 2000 WVS waves, we chose the wave with a fieldwork period closest to the year 1999.
7. After the EVS data collection in 2008, legislation on same-sex marriages was implemented in Norway (2009), Sweden (2009), Iceland (2010), Portugal (2010), Denmark (2012) and France (2013), and will be introduced in England and Wales (2014). In addition, laws to officially recognize same-sex partnerships were implemented in Hungary (2009), Austria (2010) and Ireland (2011).

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Résumé

L'objectif de cette étude est d'expliquer les variations d'un pays européen à l'autre du niveau de tolérance à l'égard des homosexuels. Les résultats des analyses de régression multiniveaux réalisées dans 40 pays au titre de l'Enquête sur les Valeurs des Européens (European Values Study) de 2008 montrent que pour chaque pays la richesse économique et les lois concernant les unions entre personnes de même sexe sont corrélées positivement avec le niveau de tolérance des personnes à

l'égard des homosexuels. Il apparaît en outre que la corrélation entre lois et mentalités pourrait être la conséquence d'une causalité bidirectionnelle : les dispositions législatives semblent à la fois influencer et refléter les niveaux de tolérance à l'égard de l'homosexualité. L'étude n'établit aucune corrélation indépendante entre tolérance et niveau de religiosité d'un pays donné et dément l'hypothèse selon laquelle un nombre élevé de cas diagnostiqués de séropositivité résultant de relations sexuelles entre hommes est corrélé négativement avec la tolérance à l'égard de l'homosexualité en Europe.

Mots-clés

Europe, homosexualité, législation, mariage entre personnes de même sexe, mentalités, tolérance

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo explicar la variación en el nivel de tolerancia hacia los homosexuales entre los países europeos. Los resultados de los análisis de regresión multinivel en 40 países de la oleada de 2008 del Estudio Europeo de Valores (European Values Study) muestran que la afluencia económica de los países y las leyes sobre uniones del mismo sexo se asocian positivamente con la tolerancia individual hacia los homosexuales. Un análisis adicional sugiere que la asociación entre la legislación y las actitudes puede ser el resultado de una causalidad bidireccional: la legislación parece que conforma, a la par que refleja, los niveles de tolerancia hacia la homosexualidad. El estudio no encuentra ninguna asociación independiente entre la tolerancia y el nivel de religiosidad en un país y refuta la hipótesis de que un alto número de casos diagnosticados como seropositivos como resultado de relaciones sexuales entre hombres esté negativamente relacionado con la tolerancia hacia la homosexualidad en Europa.

Palabras clave

Actitudes, Europa, homosexualidad, legislación, matrimonio del mismo sexo, tolerancia