ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples across European countries: Socializing influences on the national level and cross-national interactions

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Abstract

Objective: We propose to test theoretically driven hypotheses on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples with factors at the national, individual, and cross-level interactions.

Method: Most recent data from the European Social Survey were used (2018–2019, $n = 40.494$).

Results: As expected, equal adoption rights are more strongly rejected in countries that had communist/Nazi regimes and have less progressive laws on same-sex relationships. Same-sex marriage has been proven fruitful in predicting less rejection of equal adoption rights among individuals in countries that legalized adoption for same-sex couples. Additionally, we found cross-level interactions for progressive laws with cohort and gender.

Conclusion: Progressive laws on same-sex relationships function as a "buffer" for rejection of equal adoption rights, also among progressive (western) countries. Yet this effect seems to hold especially for younger cohorts and women.

Adoption by same-sex couples is now legal in most European countries. Despite being legalized, this family composition is not (fully) accepted by the larger public and therefore remains a sensitive issue (Sani and Quaranta 2020). Same-sex couples and their children still face discrimination in their everyday lives, harming their economic, emotional, and relational well-being (Levitt et al. 2020; Messina and D'Amore 2018). These findings highlight that much remains to be accomplished to ensure equal treatment. To decrease discrimination, it is important to investigate which socializing circumstances are related to the rejection of equal adoption rights despite the formal legalization of this type of family in so many countries.

Whereas numerous studies have examined the general acceptance of gay men and women (Adamczyk 2017; Donaldson, Handren, and Lac 2017; Takács and Szalma 2020; Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013), research on the specific issue of adoption by same-sex parents is still scarce, especially in an international perspective (Sani and Quaranta 2020; Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016). Recent studies demonstrate that only a select group of "forerunners" accept adoption by same-sex couples, whereas many more reject the legalization of equal treatment of these same-sex couples (Sani and Quaranta 2020). Furthermore, this rejection varies considerably across European countries (Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016). Additionally, rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples appears to be part of a broader gender belief system characterized by heteronormative ideas about family formation practices and appropriate social roles for men and women (Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016). This study aims to contribute to previous insights in three ways.

First, based on theories of socializing circumstances, we propose the effects of national historical contexts and progressive laws on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples today. Previous studies have repeatedly demonstrated that individuals in postcommunist countries reject gay rights more strongly and hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Hooghe and Meeusen 2013; Kuyper, Iedema, and Keuzenkamp 2013; Smith, Son, and Kim 2014). Yet negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians have recently been shown to vary across postcommunist countries and between Western welfare regimes (Takács and Szalma 2020). There is, however, a lacuna in our understanding of how the historical context of western countries has a persistent influence on the rejection of gay rights today. Based on historical and qualitative studies, we pass by the East–West dichotomy and propose and test hypotheses regarding the persistent influences of postcommunist, former Nazi/Fascist, and military regimes on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples.

Second, we aim to add to the theoretical understanding of the relationship between (progressive) laws and people's attitudes by examining how differences in legislation across (progressive) countries are related to rejecting equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, confining their possibilities to live their lives as they wish. Progressive laws on same-sex relationships have been demonstrated to be negatively related to the rejection of equal adoption rights and the rejection of gay men and lesbians in general (Donaldson, Handren, and Lac 2017; Hooghe and Meeusen 2013; Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016; Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013). Recently, various European countries adopted more progressive laws, including same-sex marriage (Takács and Szalma 2020). We aim to take these recent changes into account by using the most recent available data on this subject. Further, we examine differences between most progressive countries by testing to what extent individuals are more likely to reject equal adoption rights in countries that legalized adoption for same-sex couples but exclude them from marriage, compared to individuals in countries that legalized adoption *and* marriage for same-sex couples. Additionally, we aim to examine to what extent progressive laws on gay relationships can moderate the potential effects of former regimes on the rejection of equal adoption rights for gay couples.

Third, we study to what extent the effects of two individual characteristics that repeatedly have been shown to affect attitudes toward equal adoption rights for same-sex parents, namely, cohort (Sani and Quaranta 2020) and gender of citizens (Bettinsoli, Suppes, and Napier 2020), can be moderated by progressive laws. A recent study by Sani and Quaranta (2020) concluded that the young support the adoption of same-sex couples more strongly but only in countries that recognize legal rights toward Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual and Intersex (LGBTI) people. We apply Inglehart's cohort theory and examine differences across the different birth cohorts, and to what extent legislation on same-sex relationships is less strongly negatively related to older cohorts. Based on gender schema theory, we expect gender effects to be weaker in countries with more progressive laws on same-sex relationships. In other words, we propose these progressive laws function as a "buffer" against the stronger rejection of equal adoption rights by men.

To test our hypotheses, we used high-quality data from the most recent wave of the European Social Survey (Wave 9, 2018). For the analyses, multilevel linear probability regressions were carried out. The three general research questions we will try to answer are: (1) To what extent can rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples be explained by historical circumstances? (2) To what extent does progressive

laws moderate relationships of historical circumstances and rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples? (3) To what extent does progressive laws moderate individual characteristics and the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples?

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

It is generally proposed that, on the individual level, various forms of socialization affect the attitudes of people (Sani and Quaranta 2020). These assumptions are derived from the theory of socializing agents and the integration theory by (Durkheim 1897; Ultee, Arts, and Flap 2003). According to the first theory, individuals' attitudes are influenced by exposure to "socializing agents." Classical examples of these agents demonstrated to be related to acceptance of gay men and lesbians are religious institutions and the educational system. Whereas exposure to the first may fuel negative attitudes, exposure to the latter may reduce negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Sani and Quaranta 2020; Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013). The social integration theory by Durkheim (1897) states that attitudes of individuals are not only affected by socializing agents to which individuals are exposed but also to *what extent* they are exposed to these socializing agents. When individuals are exposed more often or for a longer period to socializing agents, they are more likely to be influenced and to form attitudes according to these socializing agents (Ultee, Arts, and Flap 2003).

The national context can be argued to set socializing contexts for individuals' beliefs and norms as well (Redman 2018; Scheepers, Te Grotenhuis, and Van Der Slik 2002; Sani and Quaranta 2020). These socializing contexts change over time within countries. Whereas some contexts are expected to change relatively slowly over time, others are regarded to change more rapidly (Adamczyk 2017; Redman 2018). In this contribution, we first discuss theories and hypotheses concerning relatively stable country characteristics, followed by more variable country characteristics and interactions between these two. Subsequently, we discuss theories and hypotheses on the individual level. Last, we propose cross-level interaction hypotheses.

Stable country characteristic

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that individuals in postcommunist countries hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, compared to individuals in countries that did not have communist regimes (Kuyper, Sommer, and Butt 2018; Smith, Son, and Kim 2014; Takács et al. 2016). It should be acknowledged that the condemnations of sexual minorities were not restricted to postcommunist regimes. Within Nazi/Fascist and military regimes, gay men and women were highly stigmatized, criminalized, and punished in large numbers, with the sad height of gay people driven into death by Nazis during World War II. Furthermore, within these regimes, traditional family life was glorified, and distinct, complementary roles for men and women were magnified (Benadusi 2018; Ebner 2004; Plant 2011; Platero 2007; Spurlin 2020). For these reasons, we expect that previous exposure to these historical regimes may persist to affect contemporary attitudes toward same-sex couples raising children today. Besides, in countries that were part of one of these regimes (or multiple of them, e.g., East Germany), gay movements had less time to develop (Andersen and Fetner 2008b). Based on these studies, we expect that:

H1: Individuals in postcommunist countries will be most likely to reject equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, followed by countries that had military regimes, Nazi/Fascist regimes, and least likely in countries that had "uninterrupted democracies" from 1920 onward.

Variable country characteristics

Concerning more variable country characteristics, cross-national studies have demonstrated that in countries with more progressive laws on gay relationships, individuals are more likely to accept adoption by same-sex couples (Sani and Quaranta 2020; Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016). It can be theorized that countries' laws function as socializing agents because they state what is legally right and what is wrong (Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013). As a result, individuals living in countries with more progressive laws on same-sex relationships are less exposed to anti-gay norms and more likely to come in contact with (openly) gay people. Simultaneously, laws concerning gay relationships can urge policymakers to introduce these legal frameworks to create a more inclusive environment (Redman 2018; Slenders, Sieben, and Verbakel 2014). Yet a reverse effect (i.e., public attitudes affecting legislation) can also be theorized (Hooghe and Meeusen 2013; Redman 2018). We want to acknowledge here that due to the cross-national design of our study, we cannot disentangle this relationship. Based on theory and previous studies, we expect that:

H2: Individuals are more likely to reject equal adoption rights for same-sex couples in countries with less progressive legislation on same-sex relationships.

Previous studies on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples have not examined to what extent the differences among countries with the most progressive legislation can predict rejection of equal adoption rights, whereas a recent study showed that the distinction between countries that (merely) legalized registered partnership for gay couples and countries that legalized same-sex marriage was not fruitful in predicting more tolerance in the latter (Redman 2018), we expect the legal availability of same-sex marriage to be fruitful when it comes to predicting rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples. Marriage is seen by many people as the prototype of a committed and stable relationship (Day et al. 2011), which is considered crucial for couples raising children (Costa, Pereira, and Leal 2019). Stereotypical ideas about gay couples, especially gay men, being more promiscuous and non-committed in relationships could be challenged when marriage is no longer restricted to hetero couples (Pinsof and Haselton 2017). Based on these theories and empirical results, we expect the following:

H3: Individuals are more likely to reject equal adoption rights in countries that legalized adoption but excluded same-sex couples from marriage, compared to individuals in countries that allowed same-sex couples to adopt children and to marry

Interaction stable and variable country characteristics

In a recent study, general acceptance of gay men and lesbians was shown to be significantly higher among individuals in postcommunist countries with versus without some form of civil partnership for same-sex couples (Takács and Szalma 2020). The fact that individuals in the first group of countries had been exposed to progressive laws could be theorized to function as a "buffer" toward the persistent negative influences of postcommunist regimes on attitudes toward gay men lesbians. To enhance our understanding of how the rejection of equal adoption rights is related to legislation across other former regimes, we examine to what extent progressive laws can moderate the potential positive effect of former regimes on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples. Based on this literature and theory, we expect that:

H4: The positive effect of communist, military, and Nazi/Fascist regimes on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples is weaker among individuals who live in countries that, in the meanwhile, have adopted more progressive laws on same-sex relationships.

Individual characteristics

Concerning individual characteristics, men are generally less likely to accept sexual minorities and equal adoption rights for same-sex couples (Bettinsoli, Suppes, and Napier 2020; Webb, Chonody, and Kavanagh 2017). This can be explained by gender schema theory. According to this theory, people are socialized with gender messages communicating appropriate roles for men and women in society. Gender schemas are cognitive structures containing gender-related information based on these cultural norms (Bem 1981, 1983). Holding and expressing negative sentiments toward gay people and endorsing more traditional gender roles are to a stronger extent part of the more rigid gender schemas of men, compared to those of women (Dierckx, Meier, and Motmans 2017; Kelley and Gruenewald 2015; O'Connor, Ford, and Banos 2017). Based on this theory and previous findings, we expect that:

H5: Men are more likely to reject equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, compared to women

Cross-level interaction: Progressive laws and cohort

Older people are more likely to reject adoption by same-sex couples (Sani and Quaranta 2020; Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016). Recently, younger individuals were demonstrated to support adoption by same-sex couples more strongly, compared to older individuals, but only in countries that are more progressive in terms of LGBTI rights and policies (Sani and Quaranta 2020). Theories on socialization argued that attitudes are influenced by the social and cultural context during the formative years of individuals (Inglehart 1977, 1990). Over the past 30 years, there have been rapid cultural, legal, and political changes resulting in a more permissive climate when it comes to gay relationships (Andersen and Fetner 2008a; Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016). Simultaneously, traditional gender norms have decreased in European countries (Knight and Brinton 2017). Older cohorts have been socialized in periods with a less permissive and more traditional climate, compared to younger cohorts. According to Inglehart's theory, formative years have a strong influence on attitudes (Inglehart 1977, 1990). Therefore, we expect that progressive laws are less strongly related to the rejection of equal adoption rights among older cohorts, compared to younger cohorts. We want to acknowledge here that due to the cross-sectional design of this study, we cannot disentangle cohort and age effects, as these variables are (nearly) perfectly related. Based on previous research on the influence of progressive laws on the rejection of gay rights and gay men and lesbians in general (Takács and Szalma 2020) and Inglehart's theory, we expect the following:

H6: For older cohorts, progressive laws on same-sex relationships are less strongly negative related to rejection of equal adoption rights, compared to younger cohorts.

Cross-level interaction: Progressive laws and gender

Last, based on gender schema theory and the social integration theory, we expect that progressive laws on gay relationships can moderate the effect of the gender of citizens and rejection of adoption by same-sex couples. According to gender schema theory, gender messages about appropriate roles for men and women are culture-specific and can change over time. The contents of gender schemas are thus dependent on the cultural norms (Bem 1981, 1983). Men in countries with more progressive laws on gay relationships are more exposed to the gender message that these relationships are acknowledged and protected by law, compared to men in countries that did not or only partly legalize these relationships and type of family composition. Consequently, the gender schema of men in more progressive countries is expected to become less rigid and more similar to women, compared to those of men in less progressive countries. Therefore, we expect that:

H7: The gender effect in countries with more progressive laws on gay relationships is weaker, compared to the gender effect in countries with less progressive laws on same-sex relationships

DATA AND MEASUREMENTS

This study analyzes the most recent data from the European Social Survey (Wave 9 collected in 2018–2019). The European Social Survey has been conducted every 2 years since 2002 and charts the attitudes, beliefs, and behavior of citizens in a variety of European countries. The European Social Survey provides high-quality material for cross-national research. Samples of the population of each country are representative and selected by strict random probability methods. All stages of sampling, data gathering, and translation of the questionnaires are governed by expert groups. In total, Wave 9 includes 30 countries. For Albania, data from this wave were not available yet and could therefore not be taken into account. We selected respondents older than 24 years old because from this age on, most individuals have finished their education. After this selection, our data set consists of 29 countries and 42.358 individuals. On the individual level, all respondents with missing values were excluded. Consequently, the final data set for our analyses consists of 40.494 individuals. Descriptive statistics of individual and country characteristics are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Measurements

Rejection of equal adoption rights

We measured rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples with the following Likert item: "Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples." Answer categories were (1) "*strongly agree*," (2) "*agree*," (3) "*neither agree nor disagree*," (4) "*disagree*," and (5) "*strongly disagree*." This item was added to the European Social Survey (ESS) module in the ninth wave. We coded answer categories "disagree" and "strongly disagree" as a rejection of adoption by same-sex couples. In total, there were 1988 (4.2 percent) missing values on this item. The proportion of citizens disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement was largest in Lithuania (81.98 percent) and smallest in Iceland (5.39 percent; see Table 2). An important advantage of the measurement of the ESS is that gay men and women are explicitly mentioned in this item. This can avoid the potential "gay male" bias, that is, people mainly think about men when encountering the word "gay," "homosexuality," or "homosexual" (Kuyper, Sommer, and Butt 2018).

Contextual level measurements

Based on data from the Polity IV project (2018), we classified regimes as postcommunist, former Nazi/Fascist regimes, or former military regimes. Countries with uninterrupted democracies (or democracies solely interrupted by foreign wars) were the reference category. Some countries have been part of more than one regime (e.g., East Germany). In those cases, we categorized the most recent type of regime (i.e., East Germany is categorized as postcommunist).

To examine progressive laws on same-sex relationships, we used data from ILGA in the year 2018 (ILGA 2019). We used the following categories of progressive laws: (0) "no legalization of same-sex relationships," (1) "registered partnership legalized," (2) "second parent and/or joint parental adoption legalized," (3) "adoption and marriage legalized for same-sex couples."

TABLE 1   Descriptive statistics on the individual level

Continuous variables	M	S.D.	Range
Religious attendance	2.555	1.482	1–7
Self-assessed religiosity	4.631	3.130	0–10
Perceived income	1.949	0.843	1–4

Categorical variables	N	Percent	
Rejection of equal adoption rights			
• No	23,757	58.67	
• Yes	16,737	41.33	
Cohorts			
• 1900–1929	271	.70	
• 1930–1939	2419	6.97	
• 1940–1949	5942	14.67	
• 1950–1959	8007	19.77	
• 1960–1969	8116	20.04	
• 1970–1979	7187	17.75	
• 1980–1989	6340	15.66	
• 1990–1993	2212	5.46	
Gender			
• Women	21,751	53.71	
• Men	18,743	46.29	
Parents			
• No	8896	21.67	
• Yes	31,598	78.03	
Education			
• Less than lower secondary	3092	7.64	
• Lower secondary	5976	14.76	
• Lower tier upper secondary	6980	17.24	
• Upper-tier upper secondary	8568	21.16	
• Lower advanced vocational	5272	13.02	
• Lower tertiary	4823	11.91	
• Higher tertiary	5783	14.28	
Religious denomination			
• Non-religious	15,888	39.23	
• Roman Catholic	13,623	33.64	
• Protestant	5064	12.51	
• Eastern Orthodox	4155	10.26	

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Categorical variables	N	Percent
• Other Christian denomination	487	1.20
• Islamic	954	2.36
• Other	323	.80
Main activity		
• Paid work	21,645	53.45
• Unemployed	1866	4.61
• Non-paid work	4232	10.45
• Retired	12,279	30.32
• In education	472	1.17
Marital status		
• Married or civil union	22,175	54.76
• Divorced or separated	4727	11.67
• Widowed	4280	10.57
• Never married/civil union	9312	23.00
Cohabitation same sex		
• No	39,904	98.54
• Yes	590	1.46

Note: $N = 40.494$.
Source: ESS, 2018.

Individual-level measurements

We created cohorts by categorizing individuals within birth cohorts of 10 years. Within the oldest two cohorts, there were too few individuals to distinguish them as separate cohort groups (two individuals were born between 1900 and 1909, and 27 individuals were born between 1910 and 1919). Therefore, we combined them with the group of individuals born between 1920 and 1929. Consequently, the oldest cohorts include people born between 1900 and 1930. The youngest cohort included individuals born between 1990 and 1993. There were 221 (0.4 percent) missing values on this variable, which were removed listwise. Gender was coded dichotomously. There were no missings on this variable. Women were the reference category.

Control variables

We controlled for a variety of individual characteristics related to rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex parents and gay men and lesbians in general in accordance with the existing literature. These are education (Sani and Quaranta 2020), having children (Takács, Szalma, and Bartus 2016), religious denomination (Adamcyck 2017), attendance of religious services (Janssen and Scheepers 2018), self-assessed religiosity (Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, and Scheepers 2013), subjective income (Sani and Quaranta 2020), employment status and marital status (Redman 2018). As the ESS does not include questions about the sexual orientation of the respondent, we were not able to include sexual orientation. Yet the ESS does include

TABLE 2 Country characteristics

Country	N	Rejection of equal adoption rights	Church attendance	Progressive laws	Former regime
Austria	2138	30.96	2.61	Reg. Partnership and Adoption	Nazi/Fascist
Belgium	1485	19.80	2.04	Adoption and marriage	None
Bulgaria	1531	64.79	2.72	None	Communist
Switzerland	1240	30.97	2.30	Reg. partnership and adoption	None
Cyprus	670	68.95	3.88	Reg. partnership	Military
Czechia	1861	51.05	1.82	Reg. partnership	Communist
East Germany	346	19.65	1.74	Adoption and marriage	Communist
West Germany	1632	23.40	2.30	Adoption and marriage	Nazi/Fascist
Denmark	1332	21.40	2.14	Adoption and marriage	None
Estonia	1688	60.13	2.16	Reg. partnership and adoption	Communist
Spain	1328	13.25	2.32	Adoption and marriage	Military
Finland	1520	30.39	2.23	Adoption and marriage	None
France	1739	25.65	2.00	Adoption and marriage	None
The United Kingdom	2000	19.40	2.14	Adoption and marriage[a]	None
Croatia	1487	64.02	3.05	Reg. partnership	Communist
Hungary	1279	61.77	2.38	Reg. partnership	Communist
Ireland	1874	19.32	3.28	Adoption and marriage	None
Iceland	723	5.39	2.01	Adoption and marriage	None
Italy	2138	56.04	3.25	Reg. partnership	Nazi/Fascist
Lithuania	1593	81.98	3.20	None	Communist
Latvia	364	71.15	2.34	None	Communist
Montenegro	1005	67.56	2.97	None	Communist
The Netherlands	1380	10.72	1.88	Adoption and marriage	None
Norway	1149	14.45	2.03	Adoption and marriage	None
Poland	1153	76.06	4.04	None	Communist
Portugal	916	34.61	2.96	Adoption and marriage	Military
Serbia	1667	77.14	2.94	None	Communist
Sweden	1344	11.23	2.01	Adoption and marriage	None
Slovenia	1091	56.46	2.59	Reg. partnership and adoption	Communist
Slovakia	929	70.40	3.52	None	Communist

Note: N = 40.494.
Source: ESS, 2018.
[a]Except for Northern-Ireland. In this part of the U.K., same-sex marriage was available from 2019.

questions about household composition, including the sex of a partner with whom the respondent is living. In total, 590 (1.46 percent) individuals lived with a partner of the same sex. We controlled for this type of household composition in our analyses. Following previous literature, we controlled for the stable country characteristics of religiosity (Adamczyk 2017) and length of E.U. membership (Gerhards 2010; Redman 2018). For the more variable characteristic, we controlled for gross domestic product (GDP) (Adamczyk 2017). To measure religiosity on the contextual level, we included the average church attendance per

country. Following our theoretical framework, we chose for this measurement of religiosity instead of others (e.g., self-assessed religiosity, proportions of religious individuals). According to Durkheim's socializing agents and integration theory, socializing institutions and the extent to which individuals are exposed to these, as measured, for example, by the level of church attendance, have a crucial effect on attitudes (1897; Ultee, Arts, and Flap 2003). For a comprehensive explanation of this measurement, we refer to Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, and Scheepers (2013). To simplify the interpretation, we have reversed the variables so that higher scores indicate more church attendance. Answer categories varied between *never* (scored as 1) and *every day* (scored as 7). Poland has the highest average level of church attendance (404) and Czechia has the lowest (182). We standardized average church attendance to simplify interpretation. For determining the length of E.U. membership, we used data from the official website of the European Union (https://europa.eu.nl). Within the selection of countries for this study, Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, and Switzerland were non-members of the European Union. Croatia is the youngest member of the European Union, namely, since 2013. Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, and the Netherlands are members of the European Union for the longest period, that is, since 1956. Following common practice, we measured economic propensity by GDP per capita (purchased power), based on current international dollars. Data were retrieved from the World Bank (2018). To make the coefficients from the model more easily interpretable, we divided GDP per capita by 1000. GDP per capita Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) in 2018 was lowest in Serbia (7.252) and highest in Switzerland (86.388).

Strategies for analyses

To determine whether cohort, religious attendance, self-assessed religiosity, education, and perceived income are linearly related to rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, we carried out analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests for (deviance from) linearity. The conclusion from these tests was that only education was not linearly related to the rejection of equal adoption rights. The results of these tests are available upon request. To include education in regression analyses, we created dummy variables. As the odds of rejecting equal adoption rights are moderate, we used linear probability and linear ordinary multilevel analyses. The advantage of using linear probability regression analyses is that results are easier to interpret, compared to logistic regression analyses (Huang 2019). By using multilevel analysis, we take into account that individuals are nested within countries. Random intercept models are applied to take into account possible country differences in the intercept of rejection of equal adoption rights. An empty model shows that the intraclass correlation of rejection is 0.238. This means that around 23.85 percent of the variation in rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples can be attributed to country characteristics.

In Model 1, we included former regimes, under control of religiosity and length of E.U. membership, and individual-level control variables. In Model 2, we tested the main effects of the more variable country characteristic, namely, adopted progressive laws on same-sex relationships under control of GDP per capita. Model 3 includes the individual characteristics of cohort and gender under the control of relevant individual characteristics. In Model 4, cross-level interactions of progressive laws and cohort were added under the control of individual-level variables. Model 5 includes cross-level interaction effects of progressive laws and gender under the control of individual-level variables. Finally, in Model 6, we tested whether both stable and more variable country characteristics hold significance when added simultaneously under the control of GDP per capita. All analyses are performed with the use of IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Results are presented in Table 3. We paid attention to multicollinearity in all our models by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) values. In the model with interaction effects for progressive laws and former regimes, levels of multicollinearity were very high. Therefore, we excluded this model from our analyses. In all other models, multicollinearity was not a problem. We carried out ordinary linear multilevel analyses for all models as post hoc tests to test for congruence. Interpretation of these results led to the same substantial conclusions. Therefore, results of this post hoc test are available as supplementary results on request.

TABLE 3   Individual and contextual influences on rejection of equal adoption rights

	Model 1 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 2 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 3 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 4 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 5 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 6 Coefficient (S.E.)
Contextual-level characteristics						
Former regimes (ref = uninterrupted democracies)						
• Former Nazi/Fascist regimes	0.192***(0.05)					−0.051 (0.05)
• Former military regimes	−0.008 (0.06)					−0.090 (0.05)
• Postcommunist regimes	0.277***(0.04)					−0.022 (0.05)
Progressive laws on same-sex relationships (ref = adoption and marriage)						
• None		0.414***(0.05)				0.284***(0.07)
• Registered partnership		0.320***(0.04)				0.248***(0.06)
• Registered partnership + adoption		0.240***(0.04)				0.217***(0.05)
Progressive Laws (continuous)				−0.170***(0.01)	−0.158***(0.01)	
Individual-level characteristics						
Cohorts (ref = cohort 1990–1993)						
• Cohort 1900–1929			0.207***(0.03)			
• Cohort 1930–1939			0.155***(0.02)			
• Cohort 1940–1949			0.122***(0.01)			
• Cohort 1950–1959			0.085***(0.01)			

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Model 1 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 2 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 3 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 4 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 5 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 6 Coefficient (S.E.)
• Cohort 1960–1969			0.060***(0.01)			
• Cohort 1970–1979			0.042***(0.01)			
• Cohort 1980–1999			0.023*(0.01)			
Cohort (continuous)				0.024***(0.00)	0.024***(0.00)	
Gender (ref = women)			0.091***(0.00)	0.091***(0.00)	0.090***(0.00)	
Cross-level intereactions						
• Cohort × progressive laws				0.005***(0.00)		
• Men × progressive laws					0.015***(0.00)	
Control variables contextual level						
Church attendance	0.064**(0.02)					0.056***(0.02)
Length of EU membership	−0.001 (0.00)					−0.000 (0.00)
GDP		−0.003***				−0.004***(0.00)
Control variables individual level						
Education (ref = tertiary educated)						
• Less than lower secondary	0.112***(0.01)		0.085***(0.01)	0.085***(0.01)	0.088***(0.01)	
• Lower secondary	0.079***(0.01)		0.067***(0.01)	0.066***(0.01)	0.067***(0.01)	
• Lower tier upper secondary	0.075***(0.01)		0.065***(0.01)	0.063***(0.01)	0.065***(0.01)	
• Uppertieruppersecondary	0.050***(0.01)		0.047***(0.01)	0.044***(0.01)	0.046***(0.01)	

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)	Coefficient (S.E.)
• Lower advanced vocational	0.039***(0.01)		0.036***(0.01)	0.035***(0.01)	0.036***(0.01)	
• Lower tertiary	−0.006***(0.01)		0.003 (0.01)	−0.002 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)	
Being a parent (ref = no)	0.019**(0.01)		0.020**(0.01)	0.021***(0.01)	0.020**(0.01)	
Religious denomination (ref = non-religious)						
• Roman Catholic	0.054***(0.01)		0.050***(0.01)	0.050***(0.01)	0.051***(0.01)	
• Protestant	0.029***(0.01)		0.021**(0.01)	0.019*(0.01)	0.022**(0.01)	
• Eastern Orthodox	0.139***(0.01)		0.138***(0.01)	0.136***(0.01)	0.135***(0.01)	
• Other Christian religion	0.123***(0.02)		0.118***(0.02)	0.119***(0.02)	0.119***(0.02)	
• Islam	0.213***(0.02)		0.215***(0.02)	0.215***(0.02)	0.214***(0.02)	
• Other	0.019 (0.02)		0.015 (0.01)	0.015 (0.02)	0.016 (0.02)	
Church attendance	0.022***(0.00)		0.023***(0.00)	0.023***(0.00)	0.023***(0.00)	
Self-assessed religiosity	0.006***(0.00)		0.008***(0.00)	0.006***(0.00)	0.008***(0.00)	
Subjective income	0.017***(0.00)		0.020***(0.00)	0.020***(0.00)	0.020***(0.00)	
Employment status (ref = paid work)						
• Unemployed	0.006 (0.01)		0.008 (0.01)	0.005 (0.01)	0.008 (0.01)	
• Not in paid job	0.001 (0.01)		0.013 (0.01)	0.013 (0.01)	0.014 (0.01)	
• Retired	0.069***(0.01)		0.011 (0.01)	0.017**(0.01)	0.016*(0.01)	
• In education	−0.025 (0.02)		−0.004 (0.02)	0.004 (0.02)	−0.000 (0.02)	

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

	Model 1 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 2 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 3 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 4 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 5 Coefficient (S.E.)	Model 6 Coefficient (S.E.)
Marital status (ref = married)						
• Divorced	−0.015*(0.01)		−0.008 (0.01)	−0.010(0.01)	−0.009 (0.01)	
• Widowed	−0.014 (0.01)		−0.007 (0.01)	−0.000 (0.01)	−0.004 (0.01)	
• Never married	−0.037***(0.01)		−0.019**(0.01)	−0.016*(0.01)	−0.016*(0.01)	
Cohabitation partner same sex (ref = 0)	−0.037*(0.02)		−0.042*(0.02)	−0.040*(0.02)	−0.041*(0.02)	
Intercept	0.075 (0.04)	0.357***(0.05)	0.061 (0.04)	0.507***(0.05)	0.474*** (0.04)	0.471***(0.07)
Variance individual level	0.177 (0.00)	0.188 (0.00)	0.175 (0.00)	0.175 (0.00)	0.175 (0.00)	0.188 (0.00)
Variance country level	0.008 (0.00)	0.004 (0.00)	0.043 (0.01)	0.008 (0.01)	0.008 (0.01)	0.003 (0.00)
−2Loglikelihood	45,001.770	47,296.994	44,433.709	44,375.128	4376.322	47,283.806

Note. $N = 40.494$. Standard error in parentheses. ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$.
Source. ESS, 2018.

RESULTS

In Model 1, relationships of more stable county characteristics with the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples are tested (results are presented in Table 3). First, equal adoption rights for gay couples are most strongly rejected by people in postcommunist countries ($b = 0.277$), followed by post-Nazi/Fascist regimes ($b = 0.192$), as compared to "uninterrupted democracies." Countries that had military regimes did not differ significantly from countries with "uninterrupted democracies." As a consequence, Hypothesis 1 is partly confirmed. Our control variable religiosity is significant, the effect of length of E.U. membership is not.

Model 2 includes progressive laws under the control of GDP per capita. In line with our expectations, individuals living in countries with more progressive laws on gay relationships reject equal adoption rights for gay couples less strongly. Compared to the reference category (i.e., individuals living in countries that allowed same-sex couples to adopt children and to marry), individuals reject equal adoption rights most strongly in countries that did not legalize any form of same-sex relationship ($b = 0.414$), followed by countries that merely legalized registered partnerships ($b = 0.320$) and countries that legalized registered partnership and adoption for same-sex couples but excluded them from marriage ($b = 0.240$). Based on these results, Hypothesis 2 is confirmed. Moreover, there seems to be strong support for a gradually increasing effect of progressive laws on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, also when it comes to the most progressive countries. In line with Hypothesis 3, individuals reject equal adoption rights more strongly in countries that legalized registered partnership and adoption for same-sex couples but excluded them from marriage, compared to individuals in countries that allowed same-sex couples to adopt and to marry. Our control variable GDP per capita is significant in this model.

In Model 3, cohort and gender are included under the control of a large number of individual control variables. First, men are shown to reject equal adoption rights for same-sex couples significantly more strongly ($b = 0.091$), confirming Hypothesis 5. Second, older cohorts are demonstrated to reject equal adoption rights more strongly. All birth cohorts are demonstrated to reject equal adoption rights significantly more strongly, compared to the reference category (the cohort born 1990–1993). Following previous literature, our control variables for education, having children, religious denomination, church attendance, religious self-assessment, perceived income, and living together with a partner of the same sex are significantly related to rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples.

Model 4 includes cross-level interactions between progressive laws and birth cohorts under the control of individual control variables. As cohorts are linearly related to the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, we included the interactions with cohorts continuously. Additionally, since there seems to be a gradual increase in the effect of more progressive laws, we assumed it to be linearly related to the rejection of equal adoption rights. Results demonstrate that the interaction effect is positive and significant ($b = 0.005$). This means that the negative effect of progressive laws on the rejection of equal adoption rights applies less to older cohorts. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 is confirmed.

In Model 5, the interactions between progressive laws and gender are included under the control of individual control variables. In contrast to our expectations, the gender effect is stronger in countries with more progressive laws, compared to countries with less progressive laws on same-sex relationships ($b = 0.015$; see Figure 1 for a visualization of this effect). Therefore, Hypothesis 7 is not confirmed by the data.

In Model 6, all (main) relationships of country characteristics are added simultaneously. Results show that in this model, the gradual effect of progressive laws on the rejection of equal adoption rights remains significant under the control of the extensive list of other country characteristics. Compared to the reference category (i.e., individuals living in countries that allowed same-sex couples to adopt children and to marry), individuals reject equal adoption rights most strongly in countries that did not legalize any form of same-sex relationship ($b = 0.284$), followed by countries that merely legalized registered partnerships ($b = 0.248$) and countries that legalized registered partnership for same-sex couples but excluded them from marriage ($b = 0.217$). These results underline the power of the gradual effect of progressive laws on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples in our final model.
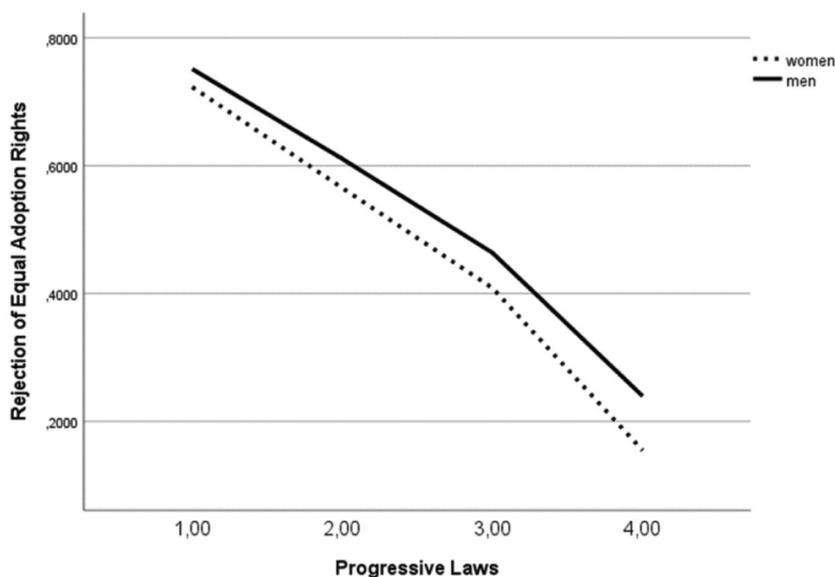
FIGURE 1   Interaction progressive laws and gender

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This contribution aimed to gain insights into the influences of socializing circumstances on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples across 29 European countries in multiple ways. First of all, this study examined to what extent national historical contexts (still) have persistent influences on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples today. Based on historical and qualitative studies, we passed by the East–West dichotomy and hypothesized that individuals reject equal adoption rights more strongly in countries that had Nazi/Fascist, military, or communist regimes, compared to individuals who live in countries with "uninterrupted" democracies. Second, we proposed more elaborate measurements for progressive laws on same-sex relationships and a moderation effect of progressive laws and historical circumstances. Third, we proposed additional innovations by testing interaction hypotheses on the moderated relationship of birth cohort, gender, and progressive laws. Based on socialization theories of Inglehart (1977, 1990) and the socializing agents within integration theory of (Durkheim 1897; Ultee, Arts, and Flap 2003), we hypothesized that progressive laws are less strongly related to the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples among older cohorts, compared to younger ones. Based on gender schema theory, we hypothesized the gender effect (e.g., men reject equal adoption rights more strongly than women) to be weaker in countries with more progressive laws on same-sex relationships, compared to countries with less of these progressive laws. To test our hypotheses, we used high-quality data from the most recent wave of the European Social Survey (Wave 9, 2018). For the analyses, linear probability multilevel analyses were carried out.

Hypotheses on socializing circumstances were mostly supported by our results. Regarding more stable country characteristics, we found that equal adoption rights were not only more strongly rejected by individuals in postcommunist regimes, compared to individuals with "uninterrupted democracies" but also by individuals in former Nazi/Fascist regimes. This finding demonstrates that extending theories on the influences of former regimes to western countries have been proven fruitful. For postmilitary regimes, no such effect was found. Here, it should be stated that in this study, only three countries were included as postmilitary regimes, namely, Spain, Portugal, and Cyprus. Due to little variation, this is problematic for the analyses. Future studies should, if possible at all, include more countries with postmilitary regimes to test this effect more properly.

Concerning more variable country characteristics, we found that progressive laws have a gradual nega-tive effect on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples. Also, among most progressive countries, legislation can explain differences in the rejection of equal adoption rights. These rights were less strongly rejected in countries that provided the opportunity for gay couples to adopt children *and* to marry, compared to countries that allowed adoption for same-sex couples but excluded them from marriage. In contrast to affecting attitudes of the general public toward gay men and lesbians (Redman 2018), same-sex marriage has proven to be fruitful in predicting the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex cou-ples. This could indicate that when it comes to fulfilling parental roles, acknowledging the legitimacy of same-sex relationships by allowing them to marry becomes even more important.

Following socializing circumstances of Inglehart (1977, 1990) and gender schema theory (Bem 1981, 1983), we found that older birth cohorts and men rejected equal adoption rights for same-sex couples more strongly. We found moderation effects for these individual characteristics and progressive laws on same-sex relationships. Progressive laws seem to be less strongly related to older cohorts. These results also confirm the cohort socialization theories of Inglehart (1977, 1990), which stress the importance of formative years on social-political attitudes. For the moderation effect of gender and progressive laws, we found that the effect of gender on the rejection of equal adoption rights is stronger in countries with more progressive laws on same-sex relationships, compared to countries with less progressive laws on same-sex relationships. Based on gender schema theory (Bem 1981, 1983), we expected to find the opposite. Our findings could indicate that this issue is nowadays still so sensitive that legislation affects mostly frontrunners: women in countries with more progressive legislation on same-sex relationships. Among individuals in countries with less progressive laws, this gender effect might have not appeared yet. Previous studies on other individual characteristics have shown similar patterns. Non-religious and higher educated individuals are less likely to reject equal adoption rights for same-sex couples *only* in countries with more progressive legislation on same-sex relationships (Sani and Quaranta 2020).

Of course, there are some limitations of this study that should be acknowledged. First of all, in our mea-surement of rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, we rely on one item only that does not distinguish between male and female targets. This is a constraint, as previous literature has demonstrated that, especially men, hold more negative attitudes toward gay men, compared to lesbians (Bettinsoli, Sup-pes, and Napier 2020). Although differences in general attitudes toward gay men and lesbians tend to be small (Kuyper, Sommer, and Butt 2018), there are, to our knowledge, no large-scale studies on differences between male and female targets when it comes to the specific issue of adoption rights for gay couples. Therefore, future research would benefit from such measurements in cross-national data. Upcoming data from International Social Survey Programme on changing family and gender roles could provide possibil-ities to examine these differences.

Second, there is an important limitation of this study in the measurement of cohort effects. This study was unable to differentiate between cohort, period, and age effects due to its cross-sectional design. Future studies could overcome this by using longitudinal, preferably panel data. However, data limitations may limit such methodological advances.

Third, we should acknowledge that we cannot disentangle the effects of former regimes from the domi-nant religion across countries. Previous studies have shown that in countries where the Eastern-Orthodox religion is dominant, individuals show less tolerance toward gay individuals than Roman Catholic and mixed Christian countries (Hooghe and Meeusen 2013). As the historical context of former regimes is intertwined and overlapping with the dominant religion (Benadusi 2018; Plant 2011; Platerno 2007; Spurlin 2020), separating these effects are not possible.

Finally, this study suffers from issues of causality. Future research would benefit from a panel design to investigate individual changes in the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples. To our knowl-edge, no such data are available for groups of European countries. Especially regarding the influence of progressive laws on the rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, this would provide impor-tant insights. This study theorized that laws induced by governments can function as socializing agents setting norms on adoption rights for same-sex couples and thereby influencing the opinions of the larger public. However, two-way causality could also exist, in which legislation on same-sex relationships both

shapes and reflects levels of rejection toward gay rights or acceptance of gay men and lesbians (Redman 2018; Slenders, Sieben, and Verbakel 2014). Additionally, panel designs could answer important follow-up questions from this study regarding gender differences. This would provide insight into differences in the process of acceptance of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples between men and women.

A key policy implication of the present study is to urge policymakers to introduce and use legal institutions that protect same-sex couples from discrimination and make civil union, adoption, *and* marriage available for same-sex couples. We want to stress that this message is not only directed to policymakers of postcommunist countries, which present the highest levels of rejection of equal adoption rights for same-sex couples, as differences also exist between most progressive (western) European countries. In countries that allowed same-sex couples to adopt children, but excluded them from marriage in 2018, such as Austria, individuals rejected equal adoption rights more strongly, compared to individuals living in countries that allowed same-sex couples to adopt children and to marry, such as the Netherlands. Recent developments, like the legalization of same-sex marriage in Austria in 2019, North Ireland in 2020, and the currently ongoing legalization process of same-sex marriage in Switzerland, seem promising.

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