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Radical Right Supporters and Opposition to LGBTQ Equality: Evidence from France, Italy, and Spain

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between support for radical right parties and attitudes toward LGBTQ equality in France, Italy, and Spain. While recent scholarship suggests increasing liberalization of public opinion, comparative research continues to identify radical right constituencies as important reservoirs of opposition to sexual and gender equality. Using comparative public opinion data, the study analyses attitudes toward same-sex parental and adoption rights. The findings reveal a consistent association between support for radical right parties and opposition to LGBTQ equality across all three countries. Individuals more likely to support radical right parties are significantly more prone to reject equal rights for same-sex couples. The study highlights the central role of moral traditionalism and cultural conflict in contemporary radical right politics and mobilization

Key words

Radical right; LGBTQ rights; public opinion survey; France; Italy; Spain

1. Introduction

Public attitudes toward LGBTQ rights have become an increasingly important dimension of political conflict in contemporary Europe, particularly in relation to the rise of radical right parties. A central expectation in the comparative literature is that supporters of the radical right constitute a key reservoir of resistance to sexual and gender equality. Existing research demonstrates that radical right parties fre-

quently mobilize around issues of national identity, traditional family values, and opposition to liberal cosmopolitanism, all of which are commonly associated with scepticism toward LGBTQ rights. Moreover, studies on European public opinion consistently show that authoritarian value orientations and religiosity—traits often overrepresented among radical right electorates—are strongly correlated with opposition to equal rights for sexual minorities. Consequently, radical right supporters are generally expected to display lower levels of support for LGBTQ equality than voters of mainstream parties, particularly regarding highly politicized issues such as same-sex parenting and adoption rights (Mudde 2007, Takács and Szalma 2011, Norris and Inglehart 2019).

At the same time, more recent scholarship has nuanced this interpretation by highlighting the gradual liberalization of public attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals even among segments of the right-wing electorate (Lancaster 2020). Furthermore, radical right parties themselves do not always adopt homogeneous positions on LGBTQ issues, suggesting that opposition may vary across policy domains and national contexts (Foster and Kirke 2023, Edenborg and Jungar 2024). These debates raise important questions about the extent to which radical right constituencies continue to function as consistent strongholds of resistance to LGBTQ equality in contemporary Europe.

This article addresses these questions through a comparative analysis of France, Italy, and Spain, three major European Union member states characterized by both increasing radical right electoral relevance and distinct trajectories of LGBTQ rights expansion. The findings demonstrate a robust and consistent relationship between support for radical right parties and opposition to LGBTQ equality rights at the individual level across all three countries. Citizens with a stronger propensity to support radical right parties are significantly more likely to oppose equal parental rights for same-sex couples. Our analysis reveals a broader ideological convergence among radical right supporters centred on the defence of traditional moral values and conventional family structures, underscoring the central role of cultural and moral issues in contemporary radical right politics.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section reviews the development of LGBTQ politics and relevant patterns of public opinion in the three countries under analysis. Building on this contextual overview, the subsequent section situates radical right par-

ties and their constituencies within the broader literature on LGBTQ issues and develops the theoretical expectations that guide our empirical investigation. The following section outlines the data and methodological approach employed in the study. We then present the empirical analysis, which systematically assesses the validity of our initial expectations. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main findings and their broader implications for the study of radical right politics and public attitudes toward LGBTQ rights.

2. National contexts of LGBTQ rights and public opinion in France, Italy, and Spain: A comparative overview

This section provides a comparative overview of the national contexts shaping LGBTQ rights and public opinion in France, Italy, and Spain. It first outlines key differences in the legal, institutional and political development of LGBTQ rights across the three cases, with particular attention to public attitudes. By combining institutional and attitudinal perspectives, the section establishes the comparative framework that underpins the subsequent empirical analysis. Finally, we conclude the section by presenting descriptive public opinion data that underline varying levels of support for LGBTQ rights across the different countries.

2.1. France

Starting with France, scholars generally agree that the country presents a distinctive case within Europe because attitudes toward LGBTQ rights have developed within the framework of republican universalism, which privileges abstract equality over minority recognition (Fassin 2001). As a result, public support for LGBTQ rights in France has often been accompanied by discomfort toward identity-based activism and debates over cultural visibility.

Research using comparative European survey data demonstrates a clear liberalization of French public attitudes toward homosexuality since the 1980s. Gerhards (2010), analyzing Eurobarometer data across 27 European countries, finds that France appears more supportive than many Southern and Eastern European states, but less consistently liberal than Northern European countries such as the Netherlands or

Sweden. Takács and Szalma (2011) similarly argue that national attitudes toward same-sex relationships are shaped not only by religiosity but also by institutional traditions and conceptions of citizenship. In the French case, republican universalism has facilitated support for formal equality while simultaneously limiting recognition of sexual minorities as distinct social groups.

Several scholars identify the introduction of the *Pacte Civil de Solidarité* (PACS) in 1999 as a turning point in both legal recognition and public opinion. According to Borrillo (2001), PACS represented a compromise between expanding civil rights and preserving traditional Republican resistance to communitarian politics. Public acceptance of same-sex unions increased significantly during the 2000s, reflecting broader processes of secularization and generational change. However, the literature also demonstrates that support for equal rights remained uneven across different policy areas.

The debate surrounding the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013 generated a particularly important body of research on French public opinion. Gross (2010) argues that the "*Mariage pour tous*" controversy revealed deep tensions within French political culture concerning family, secularism, and citizenship. Although polling data indicated majority support for same-sex marriage before the law's adoption, support for adoption rights and medically assisted reproduction remained more divided. Paternotte (2015) further demonstrates that opposition movements such as *La Manif pour Tous* successfully framed resistance to same-sex marriage not primarily through explicit religious doctrine, but through arguments centered on children, family stability, and national identity. This strategy enabled conservative actors to mobilize beyond traditional Catholic constituencies.

In this context, comparative scholarship suggests that France occupies an intermediate position within Europe regarding public attitudes toward LGBTQ issues. Whereas the nordic countries, for example, experienced relatively broad social consensus around LGBTQ equality, France witnessed sustained public polarization during the marriage debates (Kuhar & Paternotte 2017). At the same time, levels of hostility toward LGBTQ rights remain substantially lower than in several Central and Eastern European states, where nationalist and religious opposition has been more institutionally entrenched. Valfort (2017), in an OECD report on LGBTQ inclusion, notes that younger generations in

France display markedly higher levels of acceptance than older cohorts, indicating a continuing trend toward liberalization despite persistent ideological divisions.

The literature, however, also focuses on the limits of attitudinal progress. Scholars argue that support for homosexuality does not necessarily extend equally to broader questions of gender diversity. For example, research shows that French respondents express significantly lower levels of comfort regarding transgender inclusion than same-sex marriage (Valfort 2017). Fassin (2001) additionally contends that the Republican refusal to recognize ethnic and identity categories can obscure intersectional forms of discrimination affecting racialized LGBTQ populations.

Overall, the literature portrays French public opinion as characterized by liberalization combined with enduring cultural tensions. France is widely regarded as one of the more advanced states in Europe with respect to LGBT rights, owing to its comprehensive anti-discrimination framework, legal recognition of same-sex marriage and adoption, and comparatively strong institutional protections for sexual and gender minorities. Since the legalization of marriage equality in 2013, French public policy has increasingly aligned with broader European human rights norms, reinforcing the country's reputation as a progressive actor in the domain of LGBT inclusion. Still, the literature suggests that France illustrates the contradictions of liberal universalism: public support for equal rights has expanded considerably, yet debates over family, secularism, the Republican refusal to recognize identity categories and national identity issues continue to structure attitudes toward LGBTQ inclusion.

2.2. Italy

Scholars generally describe Italy as a "latecomer" in Western Europe regarding LGBTQ rights, characterized by a persistent gap between growing societal acceptance and comparatively slow institutional reform (Prearo 2020). Unlike Spain, where democratization rapidly accelerated LGBTQ inclusion, or France, where republican universalism structured debates over equality, the Italian case has been shaped by the interaction between Catholic political influence, fragmented party competition, and uneven secularization.

Research on Italian public attitudes demonstrates a gradual liberalization since the 1990s, although with strong generational and ideological differences. Comparative European studies show that Italy historically displayed lower levels of support for same-sex relationships than countries such as Spain, the Netherlands or Sweden, but that acceptance increased steadily during the 2000s and 2010s (Gerhards 2010). According to Prearo and colleagues (2024) the younger and urban populations tend to support same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination protections at significantly higher rates than older and more religious cohorts. These divisions reflect broader transformations in Italian political culture linked to secularization and generational replacement.

A major strand of literature examines the role of Catholicism in shaping public discourse and political conflict over LGBTQ rights. Donà (2021) argues that Italy represents a paradigmatic case of "Catholic heteronormativity," in which religious institutions continue to exert influence over family policy and public morality despite declining levels of religious practice. Scholars note that the Vatican has historically shaped political resistance to reforms involving same-sex unions, parenting rights, and sex education. However, the literature also emphasizes that public opinion has progressively distanced itself from official Church positions. At the same time, as Prearo (2015) argues, Italian LGBTQ movements increasingly framed equality claims through democratic citizenship and human rights discourse rather than through radical identity politics, contributing to broader social normalization.

The delayed recognition of same-sex couples occupies a central place in the literature. Italy introduced civil unions only in 2016 through the Legge Cirinnà, this is for example more than a decade after Spain legalized same-sex marriage. According to Donà (2021), this delay reflected not only conservative party politics but also the strategic fragmentation of center-left coalitions unwilling to confront Catholic constituencies directly. Public opinion surveys during the 2010s nevertheless showed consistent majority support for legal recognition of same-sex couples, even if support for adoption and reproductive rights remained more contested. Overall, comparative scholarship frequently portrays Italy as a case where social attitudes evolved more rapidly than political institutions (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017).

Recent studies also focus on the emergence of anti-gender mobilizations in Italy. Prearo (2020) and Donà (2022) show that opposition to LGBTQ rights increasingly converged with broader right-wing populist discourses centered on traditional family values, national identity, and resistance to so-called "gender ideology." Similar to developments in France and Eastern Europe, these mobilizations framed LGBTQ inclusion as a threat to children, education, and cultural stability. However, these campaigns emerged precisely in response to the growing normalization of LGBTQ identities within Italian society.

The literature additionally highlights the limits of attitudinal liberalization. While acceptance of homosexuality has increased substantially, support for transgender rights remains lower and more polarized. Raffa (2023) notes that Italian public debates on gender identity continue to reveal significant tensions within feminist, progressive, and Catholic political cultures.

Overall, the literature portrays Italy as a case of gradual but incomplete LGBTQ normalization. Italy has gradually advanced in the field of LGBT rights, reflecting a pattern of incremental legal reform alongside persistent social and political contestation. While the introduction of civil unions in 2016 marked a significant step toward recognizing same-sex couples, Italy continues to lag behind several Western European states in areas such as adoption rights, parental recognition, and comprehensive protections for transgender individuals. Scholars frequently attribute this uneven trajectory to the enduring influence of religious conservatism and fragmented political consensus, both of which have constrained the development of a more expansive framework of LGBTQ equality. Public opinion has become significantly more favorable toward equal rights, particularly among younger generations, yet institutional reform remains constrained by Catholic cultural legacies, party fragmentation and reluctance to confront the Catholic Church, and by recurring anti-gender mobilization. In comparative perspective, Italy demonstrates how liberalization can occur unevenly, producing coexistence between expanding social acceptance and persistent political contestation over LGBTQ issues.

2.3. Spain

The literature on LGBTQ rights in Spain frequently presents the country as one of the most striking examples of rapid attitudinal and legal liberalization in contemporary Europe. Scholars note that Spain tran-

sitioned within a few decades from the conservative sexual morality of the Franco dictatorship to becoming one of the earliest countries to legalize same-sex marriage in 2005. Political scientists therefore analyze Spain as a critical case for understanding how democratization, secularization, and Europeanization can reshape public attitudes toward LGBTQ rights (Encarnación 2011).

Research on Spanish public opinion consistently identifies democratic transition after 1975 as the key historical turning point. Under the Franco regime, homosexuality was criminalized and pathologized through laws such as the Ley de Peligrosidad y Rehabilitación Social. The democratic transition enabled LGBTQ activism (Platero 2007) and a coalition of pro-LGBTQ campaigners (Calvo 2017) to emerge alongside broader struggles for civil liberties and political pluralism. Unlike the French case, where republican universalism often constrained minority recognition, Spanish democratization encouraged a more explicit politics of diversity and rights-based mobilization.

Comparative survey research demonstrates that Spain experienced one of the fastest increases in public acceptance of homosexuality in Europe. Gerhards (2010), using Eurobarometer data, finds that Spain moved from relatively conservative attitudes in the 1980s to levels of support for homosexuality comparable to or exceeding those of Northern European countries by the 2000s. Similarly, Takács and Szalma (2011) argue that Spain's transformation reflects the combined effects of secularization, generational replacement, and declining religious authority. Although Catholicism historically shaped Spanish political culture, the democratization period weakened the Church's influence over social policy and everyday moral attitudes.

A substantial body of literature examines the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2005 under the Socialist government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Encarnación (2011) argues that Spain's marriage reform represented not merely a legal change but a symbolic affirmation of democratic modernity after authoritarianism. Public opinion played a central role in this process: by the early 2000s, surveys already indicated majority support for same-sex marriage, placing Spain ahead of many other European countries. Calvo (2007) notes that political elites framed marriage equality as part of a broader democratic commitment to equality and human rights, linking LGBTQ inclusion to Spain's post-Franco European identity.

The literature also emphasizes that conservative opposition in Spain differed significantly from the French case. While the Catholic Church strongly opposed same-sex marriage, anti-LGBTQ mobilization failed to generate a sustained mass movement comparable to France's La Manif pour Tous (Paternotte 2015). Scholars argue that this difference reflected weaker public attachment to traditional religious authority and broader societal acceptance of liberal social reforms. Encarnación (2016) further suggests that Spain's rapid modernization and integration into the European Union contributed to widespread support for progressive policies as markers of democratic legitimacy and international prestige.

Comparative studies frequently contrast Spain with other Catholic-majority countries. Whereas Italy or Poland experienced more persistent polarization over LGBTQ rights, Spain developed relatively high levels of social acceptance despite its strong Catholic heritage (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). According to the annual Rainbow Map published by ILGA-Europe, Spain ranked first among European countries in legal and policy protections for LGBTQ people as of 2026.[1] Nevertheless, researchers caution against interpreting Spain as uniformly progressive. Studies indicate that important regional, generational, and ideological differences remain. Support for LGBTQ rights is generally stronger among younger, urban, and left-leaning actors, while more conservative attitudes persist in some rural areas and among older cohorts (Platero 2007) and within the right-wing (Turnbull-Dugarte et al. 2024).

Recent scholarship increasingly examines the limits of Spanish liberalization, particularly regarding transgender rights and anti-LGBTQ violence. Although Spain adopted pioneering gender self-identification legislation in 2023, debates over transgender inclusion have produced divisions within feminist and left-wing movements. Scholars therefore argue that growing acceptance of homosexuality does not automatically eliminate broader conflicts surrounding gender identity and sexual diversity. However, Spain remains widely considered as a leading country in terms of protec-

[1] ILGA Europe. "Spain Breaks Malta's Decade-Long Hold on Europe's LGBTI Rights Top Spot." 12 May 2026. https://www.ilga-europe.org/press-release/spain-breaks-maltas-decade-long-hold-on-europes-lgbti-rights-top-spot/

tions for the LGBTQ rights and for public acceptance of homosexuality, alongside nations such as Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden.[2]

Overall, the literature portrays Spain as a paradigmatic case of rapid LGBTQ normalization through democratization and secularization. The country is frequently identified as one of the most progressive countries in the world regarding LGBTQ rights and social inclusion. The legalization of same-sex marriage and adoption in 2005, and comprehensive protections for LGBTQ individuals positioned Spain at the forefront of European equality legislation, while subsequent reforms concerning gender identity and anti-discrimination protections have further consolidated its reputation as a leader in LGBTQ rights. Scholars often emphasize that Spain's rapid transformation from a historically conservative society to a highly supportive environment for sexual and gender minorities represents a significant case of social liberalization within contemporary Europe. In comparative perspective, Spain demonstrates how dramatic shifts in public opinion can occur within a relatively short historical period when legal reform, political elites, and broader processes of democratic transformation reinforce one another.

2.4. Comparative overview

Building on the existing literature, different expectations emerge regarding cross-national variation in support for LGBTQ rights across France, Italy and Spain. Scholarship suggests that, in general, Spain should display the highest levels of public support for LGBTQ equality, followed by France, while Italy should demonstrate comparatively lower and more uneven support. These differences can be understood through the distinct historical trajectories of democratization, secularization, state traditions, and religious influence briefly reviewed above and that have structured attitudes toward sexual and gender minorities in each country.

Spain constitutes the clearest case of extensive LGBTQ normalization, where democratic transition after the Franco dictatorship fostered a strong association between LGBTQ inclusion, democratic modernity,

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[2] See Pew Research Center (2020) 'The global divide on homosexuality persists', available online at: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/

and European integration. Rapid secularization, declining religious authority, and broad elite consensus in favor of equality reforms[3] contributed to exceptionally high levels of public acceptance, particularly regarding same-sex marriage and anti-discrimination protections. Consequently, Spain is expected to exhibit the strongest support for LGBTQ rights among the three cases.

France is expected to occupy an intermediate position. While levels of support for homosexuality and same-sex marriage are generally high, French attitudes remain shaped by tensions embedded within republican universalism. The French model has facilitated support for formal legal equality while simultaneously generating ambivalence toward identity-based recognition and minority politics.[4] As a result, support for LGBTQ rights in France is likely to be substantial but more ideologically contested and less uniformly progressive than in Spain.

Italy is expected to demonstrate the lowest overall levels of support for LGBTQ rights among the three countries. Although attitudinal liberalization has progressed considerably, particularly among younger and urban populations, the literature highlights the continuing influence of Catholic political culture, fragmented party competition and intra-party divisions on LGBTQ issues, more limited formal legal equality for LGBTQ individuals and minority politics in general,[5] recurrent anti-gender mobilization. Compared with Spain and France, Italian public support for LGBTQ equality should therefore remain more conditional and polarized.

These cross-national differences should be particularly visible in levels of public support for equal parental rights for LGBTQ couples, given also the substantial variation in legal recognition across France, Italy and Spain. Spain is expected to display the highest levels of support because same-sex parenting has been broadly institutionalized through joint adoption rights, access to medically assisted reproduction, and automatic parental recognition for same-sex spouses. France is likely to occupy an intermediate position: although adoption and assisted reproduction rights have expanded significantly, controversies surrounding surrogacy and family recognition continue to generate

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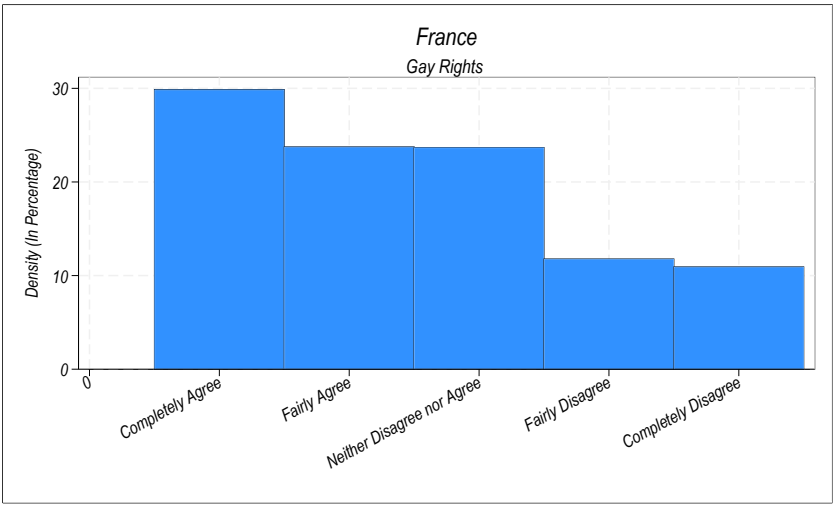
3 See ILGA Rainbowmap at https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/spain/

4 See ILGA Rainbowmap at https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/france/

5 See ILGA Rainbowmap at https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org/countries/italy/

political and cultural debate. Italy, by contrast, is expected to show the lowest support levels among the three countries, as restrictive legislation, limited parental recognition, and continued political opposition reinforce the perception of LGBTQ parenting as socially and legally contested.

These differences are illustrated by the following statistics, which draw on an item from a coordinated cross-national opinion survey conducted in 2022-2023 (Olivas Osuna et al. 2024, 2026) in the three countries (further details on the survey are provided in the Data and Methods section below). One survey question that helps capture attitudes toward traditional family structures and LGBTQ rights asks respondents whether "homosexual couples should have the same right to adopt children as heterosexual couples." Responses are measured on a five-point ordinal scale ranging from "completely agree" to "completely disagree." Within a context of majority support that reflects predominantly favorable attitudes toward same-sex parenting—and levels of support that in Italy exceed existing legal provisions—the data also reveal clear cross-national differences in public attitudes.



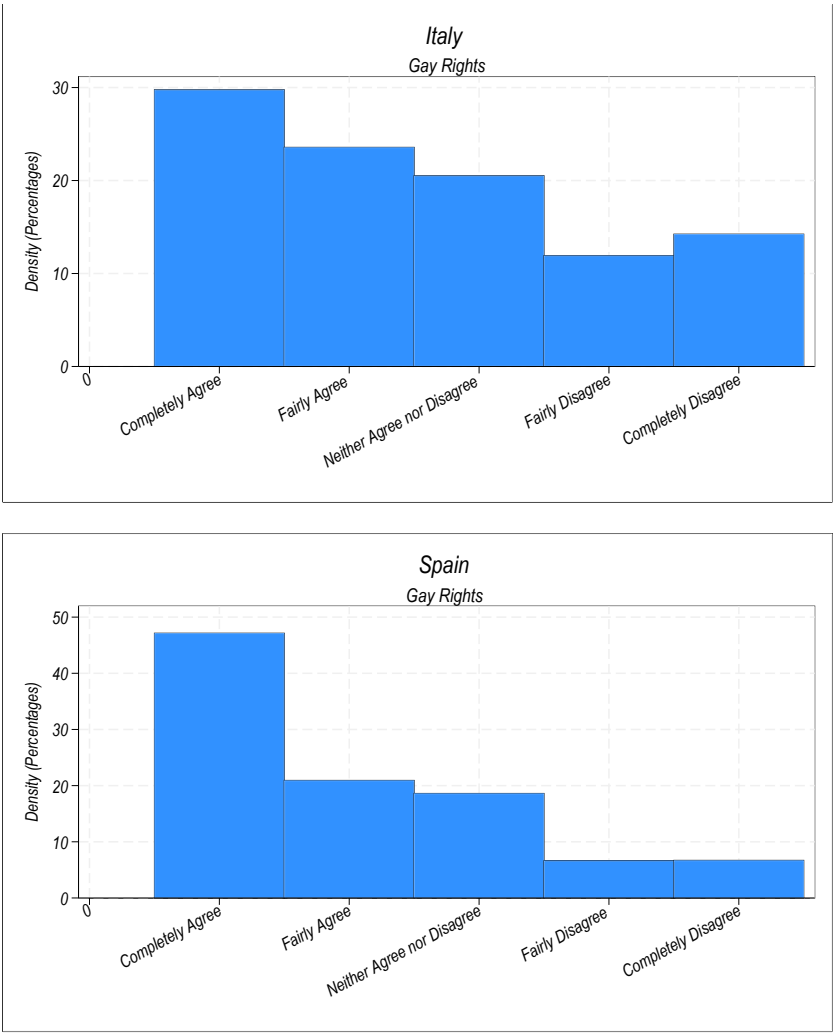


Fig. 1. Levels of public support for the question "Homosexual couples should have the same right to adopt children as heterosexual couples" in France, Italy and Spain.
Source: Own elaboration of the authors on data from the public opinion surveys by Olivas Osuna et al. (2024, 2026).

The graphs indicate that Spain displays the highest level of support for equal adoption rights among same-sex couples. Nearly half of respondents "completely agree" with the statement and, together with the "fairly agree", support is overwhelmingly majoritarian, while levels of outright disagreement remain comparatively low. This distribution suggests a broad social normalization of LGBTQ parenting rights in Spain.

France occupies an intermediate position. Although support remains generally positive overall, the distribution is more balanced between "completely agree," "fairly agree," and neutral responses. At the same time, a noticeable minority expresses disagreement, indicating that attitudes toward LGBTQ parental rights remain more contested than in Spain.

Italy demonstrates the lowest levels of support among the three countries. The proportion of respondents who "completely agree" and "fairly agree" is substantially lower than in Spain and more similar to France. However, compared to France, in Italy neutral responses are lower while the proportion of disagreement is higher (even if it only represents about one quarter of the responses), reflecting the more polarized and contested nature of LGBTQ parental rights within the Italian social and political context.

3. Radical Right Supporters as a Stronghold of Opposition to LGBTQ Equality and Rights

With respect to public attitudes toward LGBTQ rights, a central expectation in the comparative literature is that those citizens who support radical right parties constitute a particularly important reservoir of opposition to sexual and gender equality. These individuals will, on average, exhibit significantly lower levels of support for LGBTQ rights than voters of mainstream parties, and will be disproportionately likely to oppose equal rights for same-sex couples in areas such as marriage, adoption, and parental recognition. This expectation is grounded in the literature showing that radical right parties mobilize cultural grievances around national identity, traditional family values, and opposition to liberal cosmopolitanism, which often includes resistance to LGBTQ equality (Mudde 2007, Norris and Inglehart 2019). Studies of European public opinion further suggest that authoritarian predispositions and religiosity—both overrepresented among radical right electorates—are strongly associated with opposition to sexual minority rights (Gerhards 2010, Takács and Szalma 2011). Building on these works, we thus expect radical right party supporters to be strongholds of LGBTQ opposition.

However, more recent scholarship also nuances this expectation by emphasizing that support for LGBTQ individuals has increased even among right-wing voters though unevenly across issue domains (Paternotte and Kuhar 2017), and that radical right parties are divided on these issues and therefore do not mobilize citizens or aggregate voters on such issues (Backlund and Jungar 2019). These arguments in the literature position radical right advocates as a key site of resistance within otherwise liberalizing European public opinion, while allowing for variation in the depth and scope of opposition across different dimensions of LGBTQ rights. We expect that the opposition of radical right supporters will be largest on highly politicized issues such as LGBTQ parenting and adoption rights compared to more general expressions of tolerance toward homosexuality.

In the following section we will thus test empirically the above expectations about radical right supporters playing as stronghold of opposition to LGBTQ equality and rights. Our study focuses on France, Italy, and Spain for both substantive and comparative reasons. First, together with Germany, these are among the largest EU member states, making them crucial cases for understanding contemporary public opinion on LGBTQ rights in Europe. Second, radical right parties have gained increasing electoral relevance in all three countries, yet their institutional positions differ substantially: from governing participation and cabinet leadership in Italy, to relative institutional exclusion with high electoral popularity in France, and more limited electoral appeal but growing though indirect influence through coalition dynamics and regional governance in Spain. Third, the three cases vary in their trajectories of LGBTQ rights expansion, which has largely been driven by mainstream political actors rather than the radical right. This combination of shared salience of radical right politics and structured variation enhances the comparative leverage of the analysis and strengthens its broader relevance - that could also resonate beyond these specific national contexts - for assessing whether radical right supporters constitute nowadays a consistent stronghold of opposition to LGBTQ rights.

4. Data and methods

To test our expectation about radical right supporters as stronghold of opposition to LGBTQ equality and rights, we rely on data from coordinated national public opinion surveys conducted between 2022-2023

based on representative samples of the population (Olivas Osuna et al. 2024, 2026). The survey in Italy was fielded in April 2022 by Qualtrics Research and those in France and Spain were conducted in February 2023 by YouGov. These surveys cover public opinion attitudes on a variety of socio-political issues and provide information on citizens' vote preferences for political parties in France, Italy and Spain.

To examine whether individual-level opposition to LGBTQ rights is related with electoral support for RRPs, we rely on the following survey item (our independent variable): 'Homosexual couples should have the same right to adopt children than heterosexual couples'. This categorical and ordinal variable is measured as a five-point scale, for the purpose of the analysis with 1 being completely agree, 2 being fairly agree, 3 being neither agree nor disagree, 4 being fairly disagree and 5 being completely disagree.

As a dependent variable, we select the propensity to vote (PTV) for the four major RRPs in these countries: Brothers of Italy (Italy), League (Italy), National Rally (France) and VOX (Spain). The PTV, is measured as an eleven-point continuous variable, which ranges from 0 (not at all probable to vote a party) to 10 (very probable to vote a party) and gauges the support for a party. PTV corresponds to the first stage of the voting process, as described by Downs (1957), during which citizens rank their preferences for all parties within the party system based on utilitarian expectations or policy considerations. This precedes the second stage, in which they make their final vote choice at the ballot box.

The use of PTV enables us to employ linear regression models and addresses, at the same time, several limitations associated with using vote choice as dependent variable. First, vote choice is a less nuanced measure, as it fails to fully capture the complexity of voter-party relationships. Citizens may not necessarily hold negative attitudes, or they may actually hold positive attitudes, toward parties they do not vote for, as their final voting choices may be shaped by strategic considerations or institutional constraints, such as those imposed by the national electoral system (Van der Brug et al. 2007, Carrieri 2024). Furthermore, PTV allows us to account for party size by facilitating the comparison between smaller (as radical right parties sometimes are) and larger parties. Because the PTV item is measured at the individual level across all parties, it mitigates the issue of small sample sizes for minor parties,

a problem that could limit our capacity to run multi-variate analysis and that would persist if vote choice were used instead (Van der Brug et al. 2007).

To increase the robustness of our findings about the relationship between radical right orientations and opposition to LGBTQ rights, and in order not to overestimate the power of such relationship, in our multivariate analyses we control for other competing factors that have been signalled in the literature as drivers of the electoral support for the radical right. First, we account for the effect of populist attitudes at the individual-level relying on the 8 items proposed by Akkerman et al. (2014) that are meant to capture key theoretical features of populism such as sovereignty of the people, opposition to the elite, and the Manichean division between 'good' and 'evil' (Ibidem, 1330-1331). The responses to these populism items are included in a 1 (Completely disagree) to 5 (Completely agree) scale. As most studies using Akkerman et al.'s items, we developed an additive index of populism which allows us to control for the combined effect of these individual-level attitudes on RRPs' voting preferences. Second, we incorporate into our models an item that controls for citizens' left-right self-location, the most enduring heuristic in the political world (Dalton et al. 2011). Third, as for socio-demographic controls, we included in our models gender, age, education, employment status and type of area individuals live in.

5. Three Countries, One Pattern: Radical Right Supporters and Opposition to LGBTQ Rights

We present our findings on the attitudes of radical right supporters toward LGBTQ rights through five distinct models. The first is a pooled model that aggregates data across four parties in the three countries under analysis (Table 1), while the remaining models present results separately for each of the four parties (Tables 2-5).

Beginning with the pooled model reported in Table 1, the results indicate that individuals exhibiting a stronger propensity to vote for radical right parties are also more likely to oppose the view that homosexual couples should enjoy the same adoption rights as heterosexual couples (0.265***). This finding is consistent with our expectations and supports the argument that, within the generally more favourable public opinion context

of the countries analysed, radical right supporters constitute nowadays one of the main strongholds of opposition to LGBTQ equality rights.

Tab. 1. Determinants of PTVs for radical right parties (RRPs) in France, Italy and Spain (Standard Errors in Parentheses)
Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	PTVs RRPs
Gender (1=female)	-0.254**
	(0.081)
Age	-0.019***
	(0.003)
No formal Education	0
Primary Education	-0.135
	(0.507)
Secondary Education	-0.560
	(0.464)
Professional Education	-0.392
	(0.462)
University	-0.889
	(0.460)
Student	0
Non-paid family work	0.397
	(0.237)
Unemployed	0.431*
	(0.215)
Retired	0.554*
	(0.236)
Employed	0.442*
	(0.180)
Big City	0
Suburbs big city	-0.336
	(0.178)
A city of medium or small size.	-0.374*
	(0.186)
Village/Countryside	-0.432*
	(0.178)
Left-Right	0.684***
	(0.016)
Populism	0.436***
	(0.064)
Gay couples' adoption rights (against)	**0.265*** (0.032)**
France	0
Italy	-0.611***
	(0.116)
Spain	-0.778***
	(0.109)
Constant	-0.379
	(0.583)

N	5216
R^2	0.353

This pattern is further confirmed in the subsequent models (Tables 2-5), which confirm the same relationship separately for the National Rally (0.158*), Brothers of Italy (0.295***), League (0.192**), and Vox (0.477***). Therefore, across the three countries analysed, notwithstanding differences in national contexts and varying levels of advancement in LGBTQ rights and protections, the constituencies of radical right parties consistently express support for traditional moral values and opposition to policies granting equal parental rights to same-sex couples, presumably perceived as challenging a social order grounded in the traditional family structure.

Tab. 2. Determinants of PTVs for National Rally (RN) (Standard Errors in Parentheses)
Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	PTVs National Rally
Gender (1=female)	-0.088
	(0.163)
Age	-0.032***
	(0.008)
No formal education	0
Study Certificate	0.292
	(0.835)
Middle school diploma	-0.865
	(0.726)
Short technical diploma	-0.829
	(0.647)
High school diploma, professional certificate, or equivalent	-1.163 (0.639)
Undergraduate degree	-1.638*
	(0.636)
Graduate or postgraduate degree	-2.230***
	(0.647)
Employed	0
Student	-0.565
	(0.374)
Unemployed	0.062
	(0.331)
Retired	0.102
	(0.267)
Non-paid family work	0.179
	(0.413)
Other	-0.168
	(0.340)
Big city	0

Suburbs big city	-0.241
	(0.400)
A medium or small-sized city	-0.393
	(0.388)
Village	-0.809
	(0.426)
Countryside	-0.881*
	(0.403)
Left-Right	0.694***
	(0.034)
Populism	1.011***
	(0.137)
Gay couples' adoption rights (against)	**0.158*** **(0.064)**
Constant	-0.485
	(1.016)
N	1537
R^2	0.301

Tab. 3. Determinants of PTVs for Brothers of Italy (FdI) (Standard Errors in Parentheses).
Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	PTVs Brothers of Italy
Gender (1=female)	-0.068
	(0.176)
Age	-0.011
	(0.007)
No formal education	0
Primary education	3.131
	(1.605)
Secondary education	2.825
	(1.526)
Professional education	3.053*
	(1.536)
University education	2.555
	(1.520)
Student	0
Non-paid family work	-0.020
	(0.465)
Unemployed	0.056
	(0.455)
Employee	0.071
	(0.374)
Self-employed,	0.576
	(0.445)
Employer	-0.022
	(0.637)
Retired	0.220
	(0.504)
Big City	0
Suburbs big city	-0.483

	(0.292)
A city of medium or small size.	-0.802*
	(0.364)
Village	-0.426
	(0.301)
Left-Right	0.781***
	(0.035)
Populism	0.361**
	(0.127)
Gay couples'	**0.295***
adoption rights (against)	**(0.065)**
Constant	-4.477**
	(1.654)
N	1063
R^2	0.434

It is worth noting that among supporters of the National Rally, the relationship between the propensity to vote for the party and opposition to adoption by homosexual couples is comparatively less significant (although it remains statistically significant at the 95% confidence level). This comes into view as a small difference compared with the stronger associations observed among supporters of the other parties considered in this study.

One possible explanation is that the National Rally has strategically downplayed LGBTQ issues[6] or adopted a more ambivalent position toward them in recent years (Kraus 2025).[7] Alternatively, this pattern may reflect the party's evolving stance on questions related to gender equality (Shurts 2024: 48-64) and LGBTQ rights (Ozzano and Bolzonar 2020), which are frequently framed in opposition to immigration from predominantly Islamic countries where such rights are more restricted. This framing rests on the exclusionary assumption that immigrants tend to preserve pre-existing cultural attitudes and to threaten the na-

6 For example, on the occasion of the vote for the so-called 'Schiappa Law against sexual and gender-based violence' in 2018, the party tended to silence its stance while its deputies in the National Assembly were absent from the vote for the most part (five deputies including its leader, Marine Le Pen), or abstained (one deputy), see *Le Monde* (22 April 2022) https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2022/article/2022/04/17/marine-le-pen-et-les-droits-des-femmes-les-discours-et-les-textes-votes_6122545_6059010.html (accessed on 24 April 2025).

7 The National Rally and its ancestor Front National have also appointed well-known LGBTQ+ figures to important positions within the party, such as Marine Le Pen's closest long-time adviser and vice-president of the National Front from 2012 to 2017, Florian Philippot.

tional way of life of the host country.

Taken together, these considerations suggest that, despite the party's relative ambivalence and its lack of explicit opposition to policies protecting LGBTQ individuals, supporters of the National Rally continue to be influenced by traditional moral values and to exhibit opposition to LGBTQ equality and rights, only partially to a lesser extent than supporters of the other radical right parties analysed here.

Tab. 4. Determinants of PTVs for the League (Standard Errors in Parentheses)
Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	PTVs League
Gender (1=female)	-0.277
	(0.171)
Age	-0.017*
	(0.007)
No formal education	0
Primary education	2.383
	(1.559)
Secondary education	2.054
	(1.482)
Professional education	1.974
	(1.492)
University education	1.752
	(1.475)
Student	0
Non-paid family work	-0.017
	(0.452)
Unemployed	-0.283
	(0.442)
Employee	0.153
	(0.363)
Self-employed,	0.256
	(0.432)
Employer	0.038
	(0.619)
Retired	0.675
	(0.489)
Big City	0
Suburbs big city	-0.454
	(0.283)
A city of medium or small size.	-0.529
	(0.354)
Village	-0.329
	(0.292)
Left-Right	0.582***
	(0.034)
Populism	-0.007

	(0.015)
Gay couples' adoption rights (against)	**0.192**** **(0.063)**
Constant	-1.214 (1.606)
N	1063
R^2	0.302

Tab. 5. Determinants of PTVs for Vox (Standard Errors in Parentheses)
Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

	PTVs Vox
Gender (1=female)	-0.413** (0.137)
Age	-0.013* (0.006)
No formal education	0
Primary education	-0.586 (1.081)
Secondary education	-0.465 (1.052)
High School	-0.805 (1.069)
Vocational Training (higher level)	-0.431 (1.069)
Incomplete University Studies	-0.280 (1.086)
Diploma	-0.660 (1.063)
Bachelor's Degree	-0.846 (1.056)
Master's Degree	-0.551 (1.064)
Vocational Training (Intermediate Level)	-0.340 (1.075)
Doctorate	-0.980 (1.138)
Undergraduate Degree	-0.545 (1.080)
Employed	0
Student	-0.739* (0.317)
Unemployed	0.110 (0.209)
Retired	0.065 (0.224)
Non-paid family work	0.148 (0.320)
Other	0.308 (0.382)
Big City	0

Suburbs big city	0.995
	(0.595)
A city of medium or small size.	0.995
	(0.592)
Village	1.125
	(0.615)
Countryside	1.089
	(0.592)
Populism	0.348**
	(0.115)
Left-Right	0.687***
	(0.027)
Gay couples' adoption rights (against)	**0.477*** (0.058)**
Constant	-2.372
	(1.327)
N	
R^2	

Overall, our findings confirm the initial expectation that, even within national contexts that are, to varying degrees, favourable toward LGBTQ equality rights, the constituencies of radical right parties display a marked tendency toward opposition to such rights. Across the three countries analysed, supporters of these parties consistently emerge as one of the principal strongholds of the anti-LGBTQ agenda. This is particularly significant given the broader societal and institutional trajectories toward the expansion of LGBTQ protections and recognition in Western Europe. In this respect, radical right constituencies appear to constitute nowadays a countervailing force resisting the liberalisation of norms surrounding sexuality, family, and parental rights.

Moreover, the consistency of these attitudes across different national contexts suggests the existence of a transnational ideological alignment among radical right supporters that transcends distinct historical traditions, political cultures, and levels of legal advancement in LGBTQ rights. Despite important differences between France, Italy, and Spain in terms of legislative frameworks and public acceptance of sexual minorities, supporters of radical right parties express remarkably similar positions grounded in the defence of traditional morality and the preservation of conventional family structures against the advancement of LGBTQ rights. This convergence indicates that opposition to LGBTQ equality is not merely a product of specific national contexts, but rather forms part of a broader ideological

worldview shared across contemporary radical right constituencies.

These findings also contribute to broader debates on the nature of radical right support. While existing scholarship has often emphasised protest voting (Mudde 2007, Schulte-Cloos and Leininger 2022), populism (Spierings and Zaslove 2017), economic insecurity (Sipma et al. 2023), or grievances associated with globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2006) as key drivers of support for radical right parties, our results suggest that moral and cultural dimensions are equally central. Although this study focuses specifically on attitudes toward LGBTQ rights, the strong and consistent opposition observed among radical right supporters points to the presence of a clearly defined ideological orientation centred on traditional moral values and exclusionary conceptions of social order. Radical right advocates, therefore, should not be understood solely as "losers of globalisation" or protest voters reacting to socioeconomic anxieties, but also as ideologically motivated and policy-oriented actors who support a distinct conservative moral agenda.

Finally, the French case provides an especially revealing example in this regard. Although the National Rally has adopted a comparatively more ambivalent and strategically moderated discourse on LGBTQ issues, its supporters tend to express opposition to LGBTQ equality rights. This suggests that the ideological commitment of radical right constituencies to traditional moral values may, in some cases, be even more pronounced than the official positioning of the parties themselves. Consequently, the convergence observed among radical right supporters across countries may reflect the existence of a shared moral conservatism that persists independently of tactical adjustments or moderation strategies adopted by party leaderships.

6. Final remarks

To conclude, the findings of this study demonstrate a consistent relationship between support for radical right parties and opposition to LGBTQ equality rights across France, Italy and Spain. Both the pooled model and the party-specific models indicate that individuals with a stronger propensity to vote for radical right parties are significantly more likely to reject equal adoption rights for homosexual couples. These results confirm our initial expectations and suggest that, despite the (varying) favourable public opinion climate toward LGBTQ rights

in France, Italy, and Spain, radical right constituencies continue to represent a major source of resistance to the expansion of such rights.

Moreover, the convergence of attitudes across different national contexts points to the existence of a broader ideological alignment among radical right supporters centred on the defence of traditional moral values and conventional family structures. This suggests that support for radical right parties cannot be explained solely in terms of protest voting or socioeconomic grievances, but must also be understood as reflecting a moral and cultural agenda that targets directly, among others, the LGBTQ community. Overall, our study highlights the central role of cultural and moral issues in shaping contemporary radical right politics and mobilization, as well as the resulting threat to advances in LGBTQ equality.

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