

Generational attitudes towards homosexuality across Europe: What individual and country-related factors matter?

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Abstract

Only a few studies have examined generational differences in attitudes towards homosexuality across Europe. Also, little is known about the explanatory factors for these attitudes. This study aimed at exploring the differences between generations in attitudes towards homosexuality across Europe and examining the importance of individual (gender, education, religiosity, political views and parenthood) and country-related (communist history, laws and policies guaranteeing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people [LGBT] rights) factors in explaining such attitudes of different generations. The European Social Survey Round 9 data with 47,086 respondents from 27 European countries were analysed. The results showed that each younger generation was more accepting of homosexuality than the previous one. While gender, religiosity and communist history of the country were important predictors of attitudes towards homosexuality in all generations, the importance of education, political views, parenthood and laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights differed. This study extends the understanding of attitudinal changes and generational differences in attitudes towards homosexuality.

Keywords: Attitudes towards homosexuality, generations, European Social Survey;

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1. Introduction

Various empirical findings show that societal attitudes towards homosexuality are closely related to the well-being of sexual minorities. For example, negative attitudes or reactions to the disclosure of homosexual orientations have negative consequences for a homosexual individual, such as higher depression (Berghe, Dewaele, Cox, & Vincke, 2010; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009; Ryan, Legate, & Weinstein, 2015), greater risk to attempt suicide, use of illegal drugs, having unprotected sexual intercourse and lower self-esteem (Ryan et al., 2009). On the other hand, being surrounded by family members, friends and work or school associates who accept homosexuality may lead to greater self-esteem, life satisfaction and protection of homosexual individuals against depression and drug use (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; Luhtanen, 2003). Moreover, societal attitudes towards homosexuality can help explain anti-gay and discriminatory behaviours that affect homosexual individuals as well. For example, a study with self-identified heterosexual men revealed that homophobic individuals experience more negative affect, anxiety, anger-hostility and aggression towards homosexuals than non-homophobic people (Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001). Thus, empirical findings confirm and highlight the importance of studying societal attitudes towards homosexuality in order to explain the physical, psychological and social health of homosexual individuals.

Recent research studies have shown that societal attitudes towards sexual minorities have become more positive over the past decades in Europe (Halman & Van Ingen, 2015; Jakobsson, Kotsadam, & Jakobsson, 2013; Takacs, Szalma, & Bartus, 2016). These changes could be explained by generational differences. Generation is defined as a social group of people of the same age who are unified by some historical events rather than only their biological age (Mannheim, 1952). The authors of the two most known theories on generational differences – Theory of Generations (Mannheim, 1952) and Generational Theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991) – stated that individuals of different generations are significantly influenced by external factors such as socio-historical environment in their youth. In other words, the economic and political contexts in which individuals live and are being raised shape their personalities and affect and change particular characteristics of generations that, in turn, determine generational differences.

1.1. Characteristics of generations

Generational boundaries and generation names vary depending on the source and the country. The most common names for the generations are Silent generation, Baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. However, the Silent generation is also called the generation of Builders, the Lucky generation, the generation of Veterans, Pre-boomers, the Seniors, the Depression generation and the Schwarzkopf generation. Baby boomers are also called the Boomers, the Love generation, the Sandwich generation, the War babies and the Hippies. Generation X is equally called the generation of post-boomers, the X-ers, the 13th generation (in the USA only), the Pepsi generation, the Baby busters and MTV generation. Members of Generation Y are sometimes referred to as Millennials, Net generation, Google generation, the Nexters and dot.com generation. Generation Z is also called the generation of digital integrators, the Screenagers, iGen, the New Millennials and the Tweens (McCrinkle, 2018).

Howe and Strauss (2000) cited the Silent generation as being born between 1925 and 1942; the Baby boomer generation between 1943 and 1960; the 13th generation between 1961 and 1981; and the Millennial generation between 1982 and 2003. Martin and Tulgan (2006) listed the Schwarzkopf generation as being born before 1946; the Baby boomers between 1946 and 1964; Generation X between 1965 and 1977; and Generation Y between 1978 and 1989. Another study cited the Veterans as born between 1922 and 1943, Baby boomers between 1943 and 1960, Gen-Xers between 1960 and 1980; and Nexters between 1980 and 1999 (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Scholz and Renning (2019) listed Baby Boomers as being born between 1950 and 1964; Generation X between 1965 and 1979; Generation Y between 1980 and 1994; and Generation Z born after 1995. Levickaite

(2010) used the following division: Generation X born between 1960 and 1974; Generation Y between 1975 and 1989; and Generation Z from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s. To date, several global studies analysing the differences between generations have been made and most of them use the classification defined by the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2019). In this study, the classification of the Pew Research Center (Dimock, 2019) and the following generation names were used: Silent generation (1928–1945), Baby boomers (1946–1964), Generation X (1965–1980), Generation Y (1981–1996) and Generation Z (1997–2012).

In order to better understand generational differences in attitudes towards homosexuality, it is important to be familiar with the political, economic and cultural contexts in which members of different generations have grown up, as well as the individual characteristics that were shaped by these contexts. Furthermore, we briefly present the main contextual and personal features of the Silent generation, Baby boomers and Generations X, Y and Z.

The Silent generation grew up in the context of World War II and later the Cold War, experiencing hardship in their early years and prosperity later in life. They worked hard all their lives, lived through economic problems and instability and most members of this generation have already retired (Moore, Jones, & Frazier, 2017). They were the last generation who spent their adulthood in 'gender-specific roles dictated by a society where duty rather than options, and where responsibility rather than personal wants guided one's work and life choices' (McCrindle, 2018, p. 78). They tend to see the world in white and black, right and wrong, do not question authority figures and elders, have distrust in changes, prefer to get clear and simple information and they are the most religious of all living generations (McCrindle, 2018). Members of the Silent generation share the values of saving, loyalty and moral responsibility; they are conservative, pragmatic, reserved and their moral concerns in their youth were related to cohabitation, premarital sex and mixed-race relationships (McCrindle, 2018; Scholz & Renning, 2019).

Baby boomers were born post-World War II, during a period of population growth as birth rates increased. Their minds have been shaped by the civil rights and women's movements; seeing people land on the moon; the invention of television; the rebellion of the students for a better education system; free love movements; and rock concerts (McCrindle, 2018; Moore et al., 2017; Scholz & Renning, 2019). The members of this generation are rebellious, hardworking and materialistic and because of that, they have a bit of a distant relationship with their children. Also, they are idealistic, visionary and consistent with their decisions; they value work ethic, freedom of expression, questioning, enthusiasm for causes, have a low trust of authority and become conservative in later years (Celik & Arslan Gurcuoglu, 2016; McCrindle, 2018; Moore et al., 2017). In their youth, they were mostly concerned about gender equality, working moms and sexual freedom (McCrindle, 2018).

Generation X has also grown and lived through the Cold War, experienced the AIDS epidemic, economic uncertainty, the invention of the computer, the fall of the Berlin Wall and Soviet Union (Moore et al., 2017; Scholz & Renning, 2019). The members of this generation have faced parents' divorces the most, had more distant relationships with parents and were more alienated as children than the Baby boomers (McCrindle, 2018; Moore et al., 2017; Scholz & Renning, 2019). This generation is also described as having the best education of all generations and being the one that began to use technology out of necessity (Celik & Arslan Gurcuoglu, 2016; Scholz & Renning, 2019). The members of Generation X have low trust in the government and employers, have apathetic political orientation, embrace diversity, value freedom and flexibility and they try to balance family and work, are very adaptable and well-grounded, but they are pessimistic and sceptical (McCrindle, 2018; Moore et al., 2017). The moral concerns of the members of this generation include gay rights, cultural diversity and equality (McCrindle, 2018).

Generation Y saw the fall of the Soviet Union in their early years, have lived through the rise of technologies beginning with computers and then the Internet and digital media; some also lived

through the Balkan war (Scholz & Renning, 2019). This generation is described as totally different from previous ones because two-thirds of the members of this generation grew up accessing new technologies and therefore were able to access family, friends, information and entertainment immediately, at every moment of the day (Celik & Arslan Gurcuoglu, 2016). The members of this generation tend to delay such life events that are typically related to adulthood (marriage, having children, getting a steady carrier etc.) and they are more environmentally as well as politically conscious than previous generations (McCrinkle, 2018). They are characterised as self-confident, optimistic, narcissistic, entrepreneurs, sociable, lonely and fast consumers; the ones who do not like to work, have high trust in authority, crave community, value tolerance and diversity, social awareness and were protected as children (McCrinkle, 2018; Moore et al., 2017). Their moral concerns include same-sex marriage, refugee detention centres and climate change (McCrinkle, 2018).

Generation Z was already born in the age of globalisation and digitalisation. They lived through the global financial crisis; have seen global terrorism; global health epidemics such as Ebola and Zika viruses; same-sex marriages, free travelling and open-border policy; some countries joined the European Union and the UK leaving it; and influencers shaping minds of young people (McCrinkle, 2018; Parker, Graf, & Igielnik, 2019; Scholz & Renning, 2019). The members of this generation are the most technologically saturated, but globally connected and have the fewest siblings of all generations (McCrinkle, 2018). Living in a fast-changing world, they feel the lack of security in everyday life, are described as realistic and risk-takers having a liberal set of attitudes and openness to emerging new social trends, having high trust in authority, are connected to their parents, having a progressive and equality-driven political orientation, but have no trust in politicians (Moore et al., 2017; Parker et al., 2019; Scholz & Renning, 2019). Generation Z shares the same moral concerns as Generation X that are related to same-sex marriage, climate change and refugee detention centres (McCrinkle, 2018).

As can be seen, scientists agree that individuals from different generations have different values, beliefs and behavioural patterns. Basically, younger generations tend to be more liberal, secular and individualistic, as well as attribute higher importance to openness to change than individuals of older generations (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Jones, Cox, & Cook, 2011; Sun & Wang, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that members of different generations have different views on various socially sensitive issues, including acceptance of sexual minorities. Recent research shows that younger generations have more favourable attitudes towards different aspects of homosexuality, such as same-sex marriage, adoption, lifestyle etc. (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Janmaat & Keating, 2019; Jones et al., 2011; Parker et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2015; Van den Akker, Van der Ploeg, & Scheepers, 2013). For example, members of Generation Z and Generation Y tend to report favourable attitudes towards same-sex marriage by stating that allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry is a good thing for the country, whereas this support decreases with each older generation (Parker et al., 2019). Van den Akker et al. (2013) found that older birth cohorts predict disapproval of homosexuality as a lifestyle. Furthermore, in the USA, a majority of members of Generation Y (69%) have favourable attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples, while only 36% of seniors support this (Jones et al., 2011). Thus, empirical findings confirm that older, less tolerant and conservative generations are being replaced by younger, more open-minded ones.

Nevertheless, several studies have focused on generational differences in attitudes towards homosexuality. Most of them were conducted with Americans (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Jones et al., 2011; Pew Research Center, 2015), Canadians (Andersen & Fetner, 2008) and British (Janmaat & Keating, 2019). Although one research was found exploring attitudes towards homosexuality in Europe, only one aspect of attitudes towards homosexuality, i.e., attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle is analysed there (Van den Aker et al., 2013). Thus, in order to get more knowledge of generational differences in attitudes towards sexual minorities, it is important to analyse different attitudinal aspects and explore this question in broader contexts. According to this, *the first purpose*

of this study was to examine potential differences between generations in attitudes towards homosexuality (as a lifestyle, homosexual family members and adoption by same-sex couples) across Europe.

1.2. Explanatory factors of societal attitudes towards homosexuality

Some empirical studies are focused on explanatory factors of societal attitudes towards homosexuality. Their findings revealed that individual characteristics, such as gender, education, religiosity, parenthood and political views, as well as country-related factors, such as the country's communist history and the presence of laws and policies that ensure lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT) rights, were found to be strongly related to attitudes towards different homosexuality-related aspects (e.g., same-sex marriage, adoption etc.). Specifically, it was found that men, less educated, more religious people, those who have children and hold conservative political views are more homonegative (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Jakobsson et al., 2013; Lazar & Hammer, 2018; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Mahaffey, Bryan, & Hutchison, 2005; Olson & DeSauza, 2017; Reingarde, Tereskinas, & Zdanevicius, 2007; Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Van den Akker et al., 2013). Moreover, people who live in (post)communist countries, as well as in countries where LGBT rights are not ensured by laws and policies, have more negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Sani & Quaranta, 2020; Takacs et al., 2016; Van den Akker et al., 2013).

Some theoretical explanations for the above-mentioned assumptions may be found in the literature. The effect of gender on homonegativity could be explained by the stereotypical perception of masculinity that is recognised for men from an early age. Heterosexual men are convinced that gays do not meet typical gender role requirements (Gough, 2002). Thus, males who do not fit those masculinity standards (e.g., are small, timid, obedient, do not meet gender expectations in dress, speech etc.) trigger various homophobic outbursts among other males in their youth, even before sexual maturation (Plummer, 2014). Better educated people may express more tolerance towards homosexuality because education teaches tolerance and increases individuals' willingness to support civil liberties, as well as stimulates cognitive sophistication and the ability to evaluate new ideas (Ohlander, Batalova, & Treas, 2005). Many traditional religious doctrines posit homosexuality as a sin and clergy members may actively postulate this position (Herek & McLemore, 2013). Thus, religious people, especially those who are extrinsically motivated (i.e., their attitudes are basically based on the statements of religious leaders), may internalise religious values and perceive homosexuality as immoral behaviour and, in turn, develop negative attitudes towards sexual minorities (Fulton, Gorsuch, & Maynard, 1999; Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015). People who have children may hold negative attitudes towards homosexuals because they tend to believe that homosexuality is associated with paedophilia, e.g., gay men are stereotypically perceived as predators as well as child molesters (Herek, 2002). Homosexuals are also stereotyped 'as recruiters and role models – people who encourage children to become homosexual' (Rosky, 2009, p. 257). These negative stereotypes might affect negative attitudes towards homosexuals. The effect of political views may be explained by the assumption that, in some cases, people perceive political ideology as a source of authority and therefore follow the beliefs that it postulates (Whitehead & Baker, 2012). Furthermore, in countries with high gay rights recognition (e.g., legalisation of same-sex relationship, marriage, adoption etc.), anti-homosexual prejudice is socially unacceptable and, therefore, may lead to more favourable attitudes towards homosexuality (Kite, 2011). Finally, the effect of a country's communist history is explained by the heritage of socialism ideology where homosexuality is defined as 'a phenomenon of a bourgeois and degenerate society' (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015)

Nevertheless, it remains unclear what factors are important in explaining the attitudes of each generation towards homosexuality. Thus, *the second purpose of this study was to examine the importance of individual (gender, education, religiosity, parenthood and political view) and country-related (country's communist history, the presence of laws and policies that ensure LGBT rights) factors in explaining different generations' attitudes towards homosexuality (as a lifestyle,*

homosexual family members and adoption by same-sex couples). We included the above-mentioned variables in the further explanatory analysis because they received much attention in previous studies and were extensively used to predict societal attitudes towards sexual minorities.

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

The European Social Survey (ESS) Round 9 data (2.0 edition) (ESS, 2018) were used for the analysis of differences between generations in attitudes towards homosexuality and the importance of individual and country-related factors to explain such attitudes. ESS is a cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe every 2 years since 2001. It provides high-quality comparative data on Europeans' attitudes, beliefs and behavioural patterns. ESS Round 9 data were collected from 27 European countries from late 2018 to 2019 by using probability sampling through computer-assisted personal (face-to-face) interviewing.

2.2. Participants

The sample consisted of 47,086 respondents aged 15 and above: 46.2% male and 53.8% female (mean age: 51.13 years, std. deviation = 18.629). Respondents were clustered into five cohorts representing different generations based on respondents' year of birth. The distribution of respondents by generation is presented in Table 1. The mean of respondents' full-time education in years was 12.89 (std. deviation = 4.078). 70.2% of the respondents ever given birth to or fathered a child. The majority of respondents in a sample were less religious (mean on a 0–10 Likert scale = 4.56, std. deviation = 3.145, mode = 0). Furthermore, the majority placed themselves on the moderate or centrist position on the right/left scale evaluating political orientation (mean on a 0–10 Likert scale = 5.03, std. deviation = 2.261, mode = 5). Almost half of the respondents (42.2%) were from a post-communist country. The ILGA index varied from 17 to 79 (mean = 47.74, std. deviation = 18.928).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by generations, *n* (%)

Silent generation (1928–1945)	Baby boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Generation Y (1981–1996)	Generation Z ^a (1997–2004)
13.2	33.2	26.2	20.2	7.2

^aGeneration Z usually represents people born between 1997 and 2012; however, ESS data consist of a sample of 15 years or older respondents.

2.3. Measures

ESS's core questionnaire includes three statements measuring respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality: '*Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish*', '*If a close family member was a gay man or a lesbian, I would feel ashamed*' and '*Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples*'. The first statement evaluates respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle. The second statement is more personal as the respondent has to evaluate his/her attitudes towards a homosexual family member. The last statement measures the legal possibility of same-sex couples to adopt children. Respondents were asked to express their (dis)agreement with each statement using the 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Gender, education, parenthood, religiosity and political views were assigned to individual factors, while communist history, laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights were considered to be country-related characteristics. The level of education was measured by years of full-time education completed, including compulsory years of schooling. Parenthood was evaluated by asking respondents whether they had ever given birth to or fathered a child. Religiosity was measured by asking respondents to evaluate it on an 11-point Likert scale, where '0' meant 'not at all religious'

and '10' meant 'very religious'. Political views were assessed by asking respondents to place themselves into the 'left/right' scale on a 11-Likert point scale, where '0' meant 'left' and '10' meant 'right' (higher value represented more conservative political views). The respondents were distributed to those who are from post-communist countries and those who live in countries where the communist regime never existed. The respondents were also given an index based on the laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights in their country. We relied on the ILGA index (also called the Rainbow index), which is assessed annually by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe, 2018, 2019). The index is created using a set of 69 criteria measuring legal and policy practices for LGBT people. It includes the evaluation of equality and non-discrimination, family rights, hate crime and hate speech, legal gender recognition and bodily integrity, civil society space and asylum. More information on the list of criteria and their weight on the total score can be found at www.rainbow-europe.org/about. The country is given a percentage 'weight' from 0% to 100%. A higher index means more laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights in a country, while a lower index means fewer rights guaranteed for the LGBT community in a country. We assigned the index (ILGA-Europe, 2018, 2019) to respondents, depending on the country they live in and the year of being interviewed.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were analysed using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 23). Chi-squared test was used to compare the attitudes of different generations towards homosexuality. The Z test was used to compare the differences between each generation and *p*-values were adjusted using the Bonferroni method. The generalised ordinal logistic regression model was used for evaluation of the importance of individual and country-related factors in explaining different generations' attitudes towards homosexuality. The answers of the statements measuring respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale to a three-answer scale measuring agreement ('strongly agree' and 'agree'), neutral position ('neither agree nor disagree') and disagreement ('disagree' and 'strongly disagree'), and were reversed for easier interpretation. All the data were weighted by using post-stratification weight in combination with population sign weight. This procedure 'corrects for differential selection probabilities within each country as specified by sample design, for non-response, for non-coverage and for sampling error related to the four post-stratification variables (gender, age, education, geographical region), and takes into account differences in population size across countries' (Kaminska, 2020, p. 4). The chosen statistical significance level was 0.05.

3. Results

The results of this study showed that all three aspects of attitudes towards homosexuality differed between all generations ($p < 0.001$): each younger generation was more accepting than the previous one. Generation Z was the most accepting of homosexuality as a lifestyle and the legal possibility of same-sex couples to adopt children, while both generation Z and generation Y showed the most tolerance towards acceptance of a homosexual family member ($p < 0.05$) (Table 2). In general, respondents reported more favourable attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle; were less tolerant towards the idea of accepting a homosexual family member; and expressed the least support for the legal possibility of same-sex couples to adopt children.

Table 2. Comparison of attitudes of different generations towards homosexuality

Attitudes towards homosexuals	Generation (%)					χ^2 (df)	
	Silent generation	Baby boomer s	Generatio n X	Generation Y	Generat ion Z		
Homosexuality as a lifestyle	Agree	65.5	78.3	80.9	82.1	85.1	721.987*** (8)
	Neither agree nor	15.9	11.2	9.7	10.0	8.4	

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Generation (%)						χ^2 (df)
	disagree						
Homosexual family member	Disagree	18.6	10.6	9.4	7.8	6.4	762.906*** (8)
	Agree	23.1	14.0	12.4	10.9	10.3	
Legal possibility of same-sex couples to adopt children	Neither agree nor disagree	17.0	12.9	10.7	9.8	9.4	1,669.845*** (8)
	Disagree	59.8	73.1	76.9	79.3	80.3	
	Agree	32.5	48.0	53.8	61.0	69.9	
	Neither agree nor disagree	18.3	16.0	15.0	14.4	11.2	
	Disagree	49.2	36.0	31.2	24.6	18.9	

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

All generalised ordinal logistic regression models were significant ($p < 0.001$). All analysed individual and country-related factors were significant in explaining respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle and the right for homosexual couples to adopt children in the Silent generation. Besides, all analysed factors, except parenthood, were significant in explaining attitudes towards a homosexual family member. Females, more educated and less religious respondents who have biological children, placed themselves on the left according to political views, as did respondents from countries with no communist past and that have more laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights are more tolerant towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, homosexual family members and the legal possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children in the Silent generation ($p < 0.05$) (Table 3).

Table 3. Factors explaining attitudes towards homosexuality in the Silent generation

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI	
Gays and lesbians free to live as they wish	Gender (male)	-0.298***	0.0804	0.742	0.634; 0.869
	Parenthood (yes)	0.313**	0.1220	1.367	1.076; 1.736
	Years of education	0.094***	0.0100	1.099	1.078; 1.121
	Religiosity	-0.090***	0.0150	0.914	0.887; 0.941
	Political views	-0.100***	0.0174	0.905	0.875; 0.936
	Communist history (post- communist country)	-0.732***	0.1388	0.481	0.366; 0.631
	ILGA index	0.023***	0.0024	1.023	1.018; 1.028
Ashamed if a close family member is gay or lesbian	Gender (male)	0.416***	0.0752	1.516	1.309; 1.757
	Parenthood (yes)	-0.099	0.1153	0.905	0.722; 1.135
	Years of education	-0.073***	0.0090	0.930	0.914; 0.947
	Religiosity	0.075***	0.0136	1.077	1.049; 1.107
	Political views	0.059***	0.0164	1.060	1.027;

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI
				1.095
Communist history (post-communist country)	0.614***	0.1375	1.848	1.412; 2.420
ILGA index	-0.015***	0.0023	0.986	0.981; 0.990
Gender (male)	-0.528***	0.0711	0.590	0.513; 0.678
Parenthood (yes)	0.276*	0.1093	1.318	1.064; 1.632
Years of education	0.026***	0.0076	1.026	1.011; 1.042
Religiosity	-0.108***	0.0123	0.898	0.876; 0.920
Political views	-0.164***	0.0162	0.849	0.822; 0.876
Communist history (post-communist country)	-0.782***	0.1649	0.458	0.331; 0.632
ILGA index	0.024***	0.0023	1.025	1.020; 1.029

CI = Confidence interval.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

Furthermore, all analysed individual and country-related factors, except parenthood, were significant in explaining respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, towards a homosexual family member and the right for homosexual couples to adopt children among Baby boomers. Females who are more educated and less religious, who agree more with left-wing political values, from countries with no communist past and have more laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights reported greater acceptance of homosexuality as a lifestyle, homosexual family members and adoption by same-sex couples ($p < 0.001$) (Table 4).

Table 4. Factors explaining attitudes towards homosexuality in Baby boomers

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI
Gender (male)	-0.446***	0.0596	0.640	0.570; 0.720
Parenthood (yes)	0.138	0.0835	1.148	0.975; 1.352
Years of education	0.094***	0.0078	1.099	1.082; 1.116
Religiosity	-0.088***	0.0107	0.916	0.897; 0.935
Political views	-0.113***	0.0133	0.893	0.870; 0.917
Communist history (post-communist country)	-1.237***	0.0946	0.290	0.241; 0.349
ILGA index	0.014***	0.0019	1.014	1.010; 1.018
Gender (male)	0.546***	0.0546	1.726	1.551; 1.921
Parenthood (yes)	0.084	0.0788	1.088	0.932; 1.270
Years of education	-0.111***	0.0071	0.895	0.883;

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI	
				0.908	
Religiosity	0.086***	0.0097	1.090	1.070; 1.111	
Political views	0.081***	0.0120	1.084	1.059; 1.110	
Communist history (post-communist country)	1.363***	0.0902	3.907	3.274; 4.663	
ILGA index	-0.012***	0.0017	0.988	0.985; 0.992	
Gender (male)	-0.526***	0.0445	0.591	0.542; 0.645	
Parenthood (yes)	0.003	0.0618	1.003	0.889; 1.132	
Years of education	0.044***	0.0053	1.045	1.034; 1.056	
Gay and lesbian couples right to adopt children	Religiosity	-0.104***	0.0076	0.901	0.888; 0.915
	Political views	-0.174***	0.0105	0.841	0.823; 0.858
	Communist history (post-communist country)	-0.863***	0.0892	0.422	0.354; 0.502
	ILGA index	0.025***	0.0014	1.025	1.023; 1.028

CI = Confidence interval.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

The results showed that in Generation X, gender, parenthood, education, religiosity, political views and country's communist history were important factors in explaining respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle and the attitudes towards a homosexual family member. However, laws and legal policies guaranteeing LGBT rights in the country were not related to respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle and acceptance of a homosexual family member. Moreover, all analysed factors, except parenthood, were significant in explaining attitudes towards the legal possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children.

In Generation X, females, more educated, less religious respondents and those who expressed stronger left-wing political views and live in countries with no communist past are more tolerant towards all three aspects of homosexuality – as a lifestyle, homosexual family members and the legal possibility of same-sex couples to adopt children. Additionally, those members of Generation X who have biological children are more tolerant towards homosexuality as a lifestyle and would be more accepting of a homosexual family member. However, those who live in countries that have more laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights have more favourable attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples ($p < 0.05$) (Table 5).

Table 5. Factors explaining attitudes towards homosexuality in Generation X

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI	
Gender (male)	-0.375***	0.0652	0.687	0.605; 0.781	
Gays and lesbians free to live as they wish	Parenthood (yes)	0.172*	0.0786	1.188	1.018; 1.386
	Years of education	0.070***	0.0084	1.072	1.055; 1.090
	Religiosity	-0.130***	0.0109	0.878	0.859; 0.897

Attitudes towards homosexuality		Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI
	Political views	-0.178***	0.0151	0.837	0.813; 0.862
	Communist history (post-communist country)	-1.698***	0.0981	0.183	0.151; 0.222
	ILGA index	0.003	0.0021	1.003	0.999; 1.007
Ashamed if a close family member is gay or lesbian	Gender (male)	0.537***	0.0604	1.712	1.520; 1.927
	Parenthood (yes)	-0.152*	0.0726	0.859	0.745; 0.990
	Years of education	-0.108***	0.0078	0.897	0.884; 0.911
	Religiosity	0.155***	0.0100	1.168	1.145; 1.191
	Political views	0.099***	0.0137	1.105	1.075; 1.135
	Communist history (post-communist country)	1.718***	0.0927	5.575	4.649; 6.685
	ILGA index	-0.002	0.0020	0.998	0.994; 1.002
Gay and lesbian couples right to adopt children	Gender (male)	-0.505***	0.0483	0.604	0.549; 0.664
	Parenthood (yes)	-0.109	0.0595	0.897	0.798; 1.008
	Years of education	0.040***	0.0058	1.041	1.029; 1.053
	Religiosity	-0.163***	0.0080	0.850	0.837; 0.863
	Political views	-0.197***	0.0115	0.821	0.803; 0.840
	Communist history (post-communist country)	-1.189***	0.0843	0.304	0.258; 0.359
	ILGA index	0.030***	0.0015	1.031	1.028; 1.034

CI = Confidence interval.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

All the analysed individual and country-related factors were significant in explaining respondents' attitudes towards the legal possibility for homosexual couples to adopt children in Generation Y. Moreover, all analysed factors, except parenthood and policy practices for LGBT people in a country, were related to respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle. Also, all factors, except parenthood, were important in explaining Europeans' tolerance towards a homosexual family member.

In Generation Y, female respondents who are more educated, less religious, with stronger left-wing political orientation and those from countries with no communist past are more tolerant towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, would be more accepting of a homosexual family member and are more tolerant towards adoption by same-sex couples ($p < 0.001$). However, those members of generation Y who live in countries where LGBT rights are protected by laws and policies are less tolerant towards homosexual family members but are more accepting of the legal possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children. However, respondents who have biological children are less supportive of adoption by homosexual couples ($p < 0.05$) (Table 6).

Table 6. Factors explaining attitudes towards homosexuality in Generation Y

Attitudes towards homosexuality		Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI
	Gender (male)	-0.415***	0.0719	0.661	0.574; 0.761
Gays and lesbians free to live as they wish	Parenthood (yes)	0.087	0.0724	1.091	0.946; 1.257
	Years of education	0.085***	0.0102	1.088	1.067; 1.110
	Religiosity	-0.212***	0.0118	0.809	0.791;

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI	
				0.828	
Political views	-0.120***	0.0165	0.887	0.859; 0.916	
Communist history (post-communist country)	-2.034***	0.1187	0.131	0.104; 0.165	
ILGA index	-0.003	0.0025	0.997	0.992; 1.002	
Gender (male)	0.628***	0.0678	1.875	1.641; 2.141	
Parenthood (yes)	0.090	0.0672	1.094	0.959; 1.248	
Years of education	-0.124***	0.0095	0.884	0.867; 0.900	
Ashamed if a close family member is gay or lesbian	Religiosity	0.192***	0.0107	1.212	1.186; 1.237
	Political views	0.081***	0.0155	1.085	1.053; 1.118
	Communist history (post-communist country)	1.950***	0.1133	7.032	5.631; 8.780
	ILGA index	0.006**	0.0024	1.006	1.002; 1.011
	Gender (male)	-0.523***	0.0553	0.592	0.532; 0.660
	Parenthood (yes)	-0.258***	0.0564	0.772	0.692; 0.863
	Years of education	0.090***	0.0077	1.094	1.078; 1.111
Gay and lesbian couples right to adopt children	Religiosity	-0.196***	0.0088	0.822	0.808; 0.836
	Political views	-0.159***	0.0133	0.853	0.831; 0.876
	Communist history (post-communist country)	-1.409***	0.0938	0.244	0.203; 0.294
	ILGA index	0.026***	0.0018	1.026	1.022; 1.030

CI = Confidence interval.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

In Generation Z, only gender, religiosity and country's communist history are important in explaining respondents' attitudes towards different aspects of homosexuality. The importance of parenthood, respondent's education, political views and the presence of laws and policy practices protecting LGBT rights in a country differ when analysing different aspects of attitudes towards homosexuality.

In this generation, females, less religious respondents who are from countries with no communist past have more favourable attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, adoption by same-sex couples and would be more accepting of a homosexual family member ($p < 0.05$). However, years of education are positively related only to the acceptance of homosexual family members. Laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights in the country are positively related to the acceptance of homosexual family members and to the legal possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children.

Besides, stronger expressed left-wing political orientation is positively related to tolerance towards homosexuality as a lifestyle and adoption by homosexual couples. Meanwhile, there is a negative association between these two aspects and having biological children ($p < 0.05$) (Table 7).

Table 7. Factors explaining attitudes towards homosexuality in Generation Z

Attitudes towards homosexuality	Estimates	Std. error	Odds ratio	95% CI	
Gays and lesbians free to live as they wish	Gender (male)	-0.665***	0.1201	0.514	0.406; 0.651
	Parenthood (yes)	-1.363***	0.2928	0.256	0.144; 0.454
	Years of education	0.054	0.0276	1.055	0.999; 1.114
	Religiosity	-0.208***	0.0194	0.813	0.782; 0.844
	Political views	-0.076**	0.0272	0.927	0.879; 0.978
	Communist history (post-communist country)	-1.414***	0.1904	0.243	0.167; 0.353
	ILGA index	0.007	0.0042	1.007	0.998; 1.015
Ashamed if a close family member is gay or lesbian	Gender (male)	1.132***	0.1110	3.101	2.495; 3.855
	Parenthood (yes)	0.166	0.3507	1.180	0.594; 2.347
	Years of education	-0.071**	0.239	0.932	0.889; 0.977
	Religiosity	0.191***	0.0167	1.210	1.171; 1.251
	Political views	0.006	0.239	1.006	0.960; 1.054
	Communist history (post-communist country)	1.399***	0.1709	4.051	2.898; 5.663
	ILGA index	-0.008*	0.0037	0.992	0.985; 0.999
Gay and lesbian couples right to adopt children	Gender (male)	-0.850***	0.0973	0.427	0.353; 0.517
	Parenthood (yes)	-0.763**	0.2921	0.466	0.263; 0.827
	Years of education	-0.030	0.0212	0.970	0.931; 1.012
	Religiosity	-0.176***	0.0155	0.838	0.813; 0.864
	Political views	-0.123***	0.0222	0.884	0.847; 0.924
	Communist history (post-communist country)	-1.350***	0.1496	0.259	0.193; 0.347
	ILGA index	0.034***	0.0031	1.034	1.028; 1.041

CI = Confidence interval.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$.

4. Discussion and conclusion

First, this study aimed at exploring the differences between generations in attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, homosexual family members and adoption by same-sex couples. The results revealed that Europeans' tolerance towards all three above-mentioned aspects of homosexuality has been growing with each new generation. This is congruent with the findings of previous studies (Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Janmaat & Keating, 2019; Jones et al., 2011; Van den Akker et al., 2013) and confirms the assumption that more tolerant younger generations have been replacing older ones. This may be explained by generational differences in features that were shaped by contextual circumstances in which they grew. For example, the members of the Silent generation tend to be conservative and meet requirements of gender-specific roles (Moore et al., 2017; Scholz & Renning, 2019), while younger generations express higher individualism and openness to change (Egri & Ralston, 2004; Jones et al., 2011; Sun & Wang, 2010); their moral concerns include issues of same-sex marriage (McCrinkle, 2018). Tolerance towards homosexuality may also grow with each younger generation due to the increasing access to education and other sources of information, such as the Internet (Celik & Arslan Gurcuoglu, 2016).

Despite this, our results showed that the acceptance of homosexuality differs depending on the aspect that is measured – members of all generations have the most favourable attitudes towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, are less tolerant towards homosexual family members and have the most negative attitudes towards adoption possibilities for same-sex couples. It suggests that adoption by homosexual couples remains a sensitive issue, not even in countries where society expresses greater general support for homosexuals, as was noted by Sani and Quaranta (2020), but also in younger generations that display higher tolerance towards homosexuality as well. It might be that attitudes towards the legal possibility for same-sex couples to adopt children are the most negative because adoption is not a private matter anymore as it involves a third subject (child) and, therefore, people base their attitudes on the moral beliefs of what might be best for children (Sani & Quaranta, 2020). For example, people may worry that children might be discriminated against because of their same-sex parents (Stacey & Biblarz, 2001).

The second purpose was to explore what individual and country-related factors explain the attitudes of each generation towards homosexuality as a lifestyle, homosexual family members and adoption by same-sex couples in Europe. Our findings are consistent with previous studies showing the predictive power of gender, religiosity and the country's communist history (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Lazar & Hammer, 2018; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Mahaffey et al., 2005). The results revealed that these factors are important predictors of attitudes towards all three aspects of homosexuality in all generations. Furthermore, the results showed the same directions of associations between attitudes towards homosexuality and education, political views and the presence of laws and policies guaranteeing LGBT rights as previously discussed (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Jakobsson et al., 2013; Lee & Hicks, 2011; Olson & DeSauza, 2017; Sani & Quaranta, 2020). Nevertheless, this study revealed that the significance of these factors differs between generations. In particular, it might be assumed that education and political views are becoming less important factors in shaping attitudes towards homosexuality among members of Generation Z, while the protection of LGBT rights by laws has already slightly lost its importance in Generation X following Generations Y and Z. An explanation for these findings could be that because of the rapid development of various technologies and the Internet, younger generations Y and Z may access information much more easily than older generations. Formal education, therefore, does not serve as the only available source of tolerance teaching anymore. Moreover, because of the open-border policy, travelling nowadays has become much easier and might be assumed as an important part of modern life. Thus, exposure to different cultures, views and ways of living may also contribute to the growing tolerance towards homosexuality in younger generations. Also, distrust of politicians and moral concerns about same-sex marriage, which are characteristics of generation Z (Scholz & Renning, 2019), may lead to a low level of political interest but higher adherence to moral beliefs and

thus may explain the decreasing significance of political views in explaining attitudes towards homosexuality of generation Z. Finally, the importance of laws that protect LGBT rights in explaining younger generations' attitudes may decrease because generations X, Y and Z are in general concerned about homosexual rights (McCrindle, 2018) and thus changes in legal basis may have no effect in shaping their attitudes. Also, younger generations have been raised and already live in the context of homosexuality decriminalisation and other legal protections of LGBT rights being established in many European countries. Due to this, members of younger generations may generally be more tolerant towards homosexuality than their elders, despite the existing laws in the country.

The most controversial results were found in the relationship between attitudes towards homosexuality and parenthood, as the significance and direction of this relationship vary between generations. This study showed some inconsistencies with previous research studies which found that having children is only negatively related to attitudes towards homosexuality (Jackle & Wenzelburger, 2015). On the one hand, we found the opposite direction, i.e., having children may lead to more favourable attitudes towards homosexuality, but only in older generations – the Silent generation and Generation X, whereas no significant relationship between these factors was found in Baby boomers. One possible explanation for the positive association between attitudes towards homosexuality and parenthood in the Silent generation and Generation X could be as follows: most members of these generations have children and some of them already have grandchildren, so it is more likely that they might have faced a disclosure of a homosexual child or grandchild that, in turn, has made them more accepting of homosexuality. In the Silent generation, more positive attitudes towards adoption by same-sex couples of individuals who have children may also be shaped by the context of World War II that they lived through (Moore et al., 2017) and its determined population loss. According to this, members of the Silent population may believe that it is better for children to have homosexual parents than to become orphans. Compared to other generations, Baby boomers are characterised as having a more distant relationship with their children and this may explain why our study showed that parenthood was not an important predictor of Baby boomers' attitudes towards homosexuality. On the other hand, in younger generations Y and Z, the relationship between parenthood and attitudes towards homosexuality was negative, showing that having children leads towards less support of the legal possibility for homosexual couples to adopt children and, additionally, of homosexuality as a lifestyle in Generation Z. This may be explained by possible (not causal) associations between homosexual preference and paedophilia that have been discussed since the mid-1980s (e.g., Freund, Heasman, Racansky, & Glancy, 1984; Freund & Watson, 1992).

In sum, this study contributes to the existing literature that analyses attitudes towards homosexuality of different generations in Europe. It broadens the understanding of generational differences because different attitudinal aspects of homosexuality were analysed. Furthermore, the study revealed important factors that influence societal attitudes towards homosexuality and this contributes to a deeper understanding of attitudinal changes.

5. Limitations and future directions

This study had several limitations. We analysed and compared the attitudes towards homosexuality of younger people to those of their elders. Thus, the results of this study cannot completely explain whether differences between generations emerged because of different generations or respondents' biological age. Another limitation is related to different cut-off points of generations used in the scientific literature. As mentioned before, those differences might be related to country-specific factors, such as important events and experiences related to some particular country, groups of countries or nationalities. In particular, differences might occur when defining older generations when there was less globalisation in the world. The absence of universal boundaries makes it difficult to compare results between different studies and thus may lead to some inconsistencies within results.

In order to fully understand the impact of generations on changes in attitudes towards homosexuality, future studies should explore whether young people are more tolerant than not only older age groups but also previous generations of young people. Furthermore, this study does not provide enough support for the possible explanations of the findings discussed above. Thus, it would be valuable to analyse the nature and meaning of the factors related to attitudes towards homosexuality, especially the ones that show inconsistent and different results across generations (e.g., parenthood). Moreover, despite the faster globalisation in the digital world and declining religiosity among members of younger generations, country's communist history and religiosity were important predictors of Europeans' attitudes towards homosexuality across all generations. Gender was also found to be an important and stable predictor of respondents' attitudes towards homosexuality. Thus, future research could analyse what determines the stability of these factors. Finally, the importance of media literacy in explaining attitudes towards homosexuality should be considered since information has become far more accessible for all generations.

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