

Article

Challenges to Inclusive and Sustainable Societies: Exploring the Polarizing Potential of Attitudes Towards Climate Change and Non-Heteronormative Forms of Living in Austria, Italy, Poland, and Sweden

Elisabeth Donat , Barbara Mataloni and Edma Ajanovic

Department for European Policy and the Study of Democracy, University for Continuing Education Krems, 3500 Krems, Austria; barbaramataloni@gmail.com (B.M.); edma.ajanovic@donau-uni.ac.at (E.A.)

* Correspondence: elisabeth.donat@donau-uni.ac.at

Abstract: Research on polarization is a contested issue in itself. One key question in this context is how strongly attitude patterns must be linked to socio-structural characteristics in order to justify speaking of polarized attitudes. Moreover, evidence of an association between attitudes may reveal ways of triggering clusters of attitudes, which can then easily be turned into affective polarization by political leaders. We investigate the prevalence of different, potentially polarizing attitude patterns among social groups in four European countries (Sweden, Austria, Italy, and Poland) using data from the European Social Survey 10. We link two sets of attitudes, namely attitudes towards climate change and attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life, to build four ideational types of attitude patterns. Our findings point to some associations between the two scales, which leads us to examine influence factors by Multinomial regression in the next step. High education of respondents and being female raise awareness for climate change and increase tolerance for non-heteronormative ways of life. Moreover, we find some evidence of a rural-urban divide in that residents of urban areas seem to be more open towards non-heteronormative ways of life. We argue that the analysis of mixed attitude types can be especially instructive since country effects and personal experience prove to be influential in these cases. It is precisely these cases that can tell us much about means of tackling polarization.

Keywords: polarization; climate change; non-heteronormative ways of life; survey



Academic Editors: Rosabel Roig-Vila and Tai-Yi Yu

Received: 6 November 2024

Revised: 20 January 2025

Accepted: 6 February 2025

Published: 11 February 2025

Citation: Donat, E.; Mataloni, B.; Ajanovic, E. Challenges to Inclusive and Sustainable Societies: Exploring the Polarizing Potential of Attitudes Towards Climate Change and Non-Heteronormative Forms of Living in Austria, Italy, Poland, and Sweden. *Sustainability* **2025**, *17*, 1457. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su17041457>

Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Recent attacks on politicians (USA, Germany, Sweden, and Slovakia) (<https://www.politico.eu/article/attack-donald-trump-europe-us-elections-crowds-campaign-shooter-robert-fico-italy-giorgia-meloni-violence-guns/>) (accessed on 1 August 2024)) and successes of populist parties in many European countries make the issue of polarization a persistent element in current public and scientific discourses [1]. This paper is based on the analysis of four European countries (Sweden, Austria, Italy, and Poland) whose different levels of progressiveness allow us to test our innovative approach and to inquire into the polarizing potential of two different types of attitudes. Our study can be regarded as a pilot in this sense, and our country sample should be widened in further research. DiMaggio et al. [2] define polarization as the extent of disagreement in a society, the increase in which leads to an increasing likelihood of social conflict. Understood in this sense, polarization refers to cognitive distance (cognitive polarization); in addition, recent studies have identified

affective polarization as another key concept [3]. Affective polarization describes strong (negative) sentiments between groups, which can accompany cognitive polarization.

While public discourse and media coverage are replete with references to a strongly divided society, the scientific discourse has repeatedly called for a more nuanced approach to this topic [4–6]. A recently published large-scale study by German sociologists Mau et al. [7] has attracted attention from the general public and the media by questioning the existence of polarization in German society. Mau et al. [7] point to important differences between European democracies and the U.S., including the more differentiated political party landscape in Europe and the structural differences between the European and American media sectors (see also [8–10]). Although this evaluation has received general support from other scholars [10–12], the diagnosis of polarization itself remains contested. Major issues of scholarly dispute include the linkage between polarized attitudes and people's socio-structural characteristics, as well as the bipolar nature of attitude patterns [2,10]. Several authors argue that controversial attitudes must be linked to certain socio-structural patterns in the population in order to speak of 'thick' polarization, understood as cleavage in a society [7,10,13,14]. Since these authors can only partially confirm the existence of this linkage, they refrain from speaking about polarization. What's more, Di Maggio et al. and Mau et al. [2,7] hypothesize that an increasing consensus on issues, such as climate change and equality for LGBTIQ people, may point to decreasing polarization.

While this overall evaluation has received some support in current research, several studies point to a difference between general attitudes and concrete behaviors and their consequences [11,15,16]: while attitudes towards climate change and non-heteronormative ways of life have become more open-minded in general, individual policies and survey items concerning one's own personal sphere tend to evoke more controversial attitude patterns. This raises the question of how resilient the reported attitude patterns are once they have been turned into 'action', both in terms of behavioral consequences in the case of individuals and also in terms of approval for political measures at the systemic level. Moreover, it can be argued that strong attitudes are not per se destructive and that they may contribute to vivid deliberation in a society; however, affective polarization [3,12] can add strong sentiments and increase perceived distance between opponents. This leads us to accept the argument of a moderate polarization in general terms while also contributing two further aspects to the scientific discussion with this article. First, we argue that 'mixed' types of attitude patterns are worthy of investigation, including those that combine a strong attitude on one topic and a weak position on another; a closer study of such patterns may allow us to gain a more nuanced understanding of attitudes that are potentially subject to polarization. To this end, we combine two kinds of attitudes that at first glance do not have very much in common: attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life (We follow Mau et al. [7] in labeling our second scale "non-heteronormative ways of life", a term originally coined by this research team) and attitudes towards climate change. By doing so, we aim to trace associations between these two attitudes, which may facilitate political mobilization. Such associations provide several means of triggering strong or even polarizing attitude patterns [2]. Mau et al. [7] hypothesize fears of demarcation and fears of unwelcome demands placed on the individual's behavior as the main drivers behind such attitude patterns. Since these fears concern individuals' basic sense of personal sovereignty, they accordingly elicit strong emotional responses. Secondly, we investigate the influence of our respondents' socio-structural attributes on their attitude patterns. Since residential background has thus far rarely been used as an independent variable, especially when it comes to explaining attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life, we include this variable in our list of independent variables as well.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces a state of the art on polarization, subsequently providing a literature review that begins with the observation that high awareness does not necessarily result in approval of particular behaviors or policies. Our theoretical considerations are then linked to the empirical part of our work by introducing the main results of recent studies on our central, socio-structural independent variables (Section 3). In order to capture the full spectrum of possible relationships, we place a special focus on ‘outliers’, that is, on studies that differ from the expected pattern. Next, we introduce our case selection. We give information on our data, the method, and the statistical analyses we used in Section 4. The main part (Section 5) is dedicated to the results of the ESS survey. The paper concludes with a discussion (Section 6) and conclusions (Section 7) addressing the limitations of our approach and venues for further research.

2. Polarization—A State-of-the-Art Review and the Role of General Versus Specific Commitment

In their seminal paper, Di Maggio et al. [2] formulated four central principles of polarization. The first principle refers to the dispersion of attitudes to the margins, which hinders the formation and consolidation of a strong centrist position comprised of moderate opinions (“dispersion principle”). The second principle focuses on the emergence of attitude clusters at both ends of a distribution, standing for a very strong or a very weak position on a topic (“bimodality principle”). The more distant these positions are, the more likely polarization is to occur. Furthermore, bimodality impedes political discussion between strongly differing opinions because it hinders mutual listening and understanding. The third principle (“constraint principle”) addresses the “clustering” of attitudes: the more closely associated different attitudes become (constraint within) and the more they “cluster” in extreme positions (constraint between), the greater the likelihood of conflicts. Finally, the fourth principle refers to sociostructural foundations of polarization, stating that attitudes that are strongly linked to sociostructural characteristics can induce social conflict (“consolidation principle”). Di Maggio et al. [2] stress the importance of the third principle (“constraint”) for political strategy and conflict. This principle provides information about ideological coherence [2], (p. 696): “The most extensive ideologies provide overarching narratives that lend coherence to opinions on many logically distinct issues”. As a component of polarization, “constraint” is also highly relevant for processes of group formation and for the mobilization of political attitudes [17]. By triggering one or more points of a coherent attitude system, many further associated attitudes and related sentiments can be easily evoked. This observation leads us to explore the polarizing potential of two rather different controversial topics, namely attitudes towards climate change and attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life. Our analysis focuses on aspects of bimodality and constraint while also investigating consolidation in terms of sociostructural foundations of attitude patterns. Since we use cross-sectional data, we are not able to make statements on changes in dispersion across time (principle one).

Concerning statistical parameters, Di Maggio et al. [2] suggest using parameters of dispersion to analyze principle one, parameters of kurtosis to find evidence for principle two, and scrutinizing associations and correlations in order to assess the coherence of attitudes (principle three). Principle four may be analyzed using bi- or multivariate analysis of attitudes and sociostructural characteristics. Downey [14] concludes that, while extreme attitudes have been central in early polarization research, current research focuses on different attitudes that cluster along a broad spectrum of issues. Additionally, the question of the temporality of polarization also arises: is polarization only relevant if conflicts are stable over a long time period, or can “take-off” issues [6] constantly heat up the discourse as

well? Since our focus is on two relatively new topics in research on polarization, we perform a cross-sectional analysis and do not consider the temporal aspect in our empirical analysis.

Our analysis focuses on attitudes toward climate change and attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life. Both topics are of high importance for future societies, which leads Lux et al. [13] to term them the “today-tomorrow-conflict” (climate change) and the “we-them-conflict” (attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life). In both cases, speed, and scope of concrete measures have been heavily debated in public, a development fueled by far-right actors [18–20]. We focus on these two issues following Di Maggio et al. [2], who suggest analyzing rather distinct topics to detect “overarching narratives” [2]. Additionally, our selection of topics is inspired by Mau et al. [7], who identify four major areas of current polarization in Europe, which are class conflicts, conflicts about migration, debates about climate change, and tolerance towards LGBTIQ. It is particularly the latter, climate change and tolerance for LGBTIQ, which can be regarded as new issues of polarization [7,21]. Even more, we can assume linkages between “new” and “old” conflicts. First, questions of tolerance towards LGBTIQ likewise address issues of identity like questions of migration do. Secondly, some authors hypothesize that measures against climate change might induce new class conflicts in terms of “ecological classes” [7,21]. Although research has identified an increasing general commitment to measures against climate change and increasing tolerance of non-heteronormative ways of life, a consideration of attitudes toward concrete policies and individual behavioral changes reveals a more nuanced picture [16,22,23]. Arndt et al. [22] have investigated this effect with respect to attitudes towards climate change, finding that respondents can care about the environment in an abstract way but reject concrete measures, especially when these become personally costly.

A trend towards generally more liberal attitudes can also be observed in the case of our second dependent variable, which concerns non-heteronormative ways of life. While survey results demonstrate that the statement “Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish” (item wording in ESS surveys) is meeting with increasing acceptance, concrete aspects and rights of people in non-heteronormative relationships are still contested [16]. Dotti Sani & Quaranta [16] have warned that a general commitment to the support of non-heteronormative ways of life should not be overestimated: by focusing on adoption rights for same-sex couples, they reveal that only a small elite is supportive of such family models at present. The issue of adoption of children by same-sex couples still poses a highly sensitive issue for many respondents. The ‘trigger’ for this highly emotional issue seems to be the shift from merely ‘private’, domestic behavior to more visible, public areas [7,24]. Dotti Sani & Quaranta [16] conclude with some disillusionment that progress in tolerant attitudes towards the LGBTIQ community occurs very slowly, especially when concrete policy measures for reducing inequalities are suggested. Furthermore, raising awareness and fostering open-mindedness must go hand in hand with legal measures that aim at reducing inequalities [25–29].

In light of these conceptual considerations of polarization, we here proceed by analyzing the distribution and association of our two scales of attitudes towards climate change and non-heteronormative ways of life. We also allow for ‘mixed’ types of attitudes (approving on one scale and rejecting on the other scale) for a better understanding of similarities and differences of these two attitudes. To this end, we define four analytical types of attitudes—two consistent types and two mixed types—and analyze their prevalence among our respondents. In a second step, we inquire into socio-structural correlates of these types, which appear to be a necessary condition for polarization, as Mau et al. [7] argue.

3. Determinants of Attitudes Towards Climate Change and Non-Heteronormative Ways of Life and Country Selection

Before turning to our empirical part, we review the state of the art on sociostructural determinants of attitudes towards climate change and non-heteronormative ways of life. While certain patterns can be identified, and while the formula “young, highly educated, female and urban” is typically used as a predictor of open-minded attitudes, matters are not as simple as they may appear at first glance. A closer look at the factors correlated with attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and measures against climate change reveals some deviations from this pattern. The paragraphs that follow provide examples of some of these exceptions while also preparing the field for our own hypotheses and delivering arguments for the selection of our independent variables.

3.1. Age

Generational effects are found to be relevant for progressive attitudes insofar as younger generations report more tolerance towards non-heteronormative ways of life than older respondents [16,28,30]. Still, the evidence is not so clear-cut: Mau et al. [7] and Takács & Szalma [31] found no decisive proof of this relationship. Regarding attitudes towards climate change, Eilam & Trop [32] report generational differences in environmental attitudes and behavior, while Seker et al. [33] found that less than half of their younger respondents believed that something can be done to tackle climate change. A meta-analysis conducted by Baiardis [11] found some association between age and worries about climate change (younger respondents being more worried), while Ricart et al. [34] report that the climate change awareness of farmers is correlated with the length of their farming experience (which is in turn correlated with age).

3.2. Gender

Several studies confirm that women hold advanced attitudes towards measures against climate change [9,11,35,36] and non-heteronormative ways of life [7,26,28–31]. Despite this general finding, it is worth inquiring into the details. Bettinsoli [29] found that gay men are more often disliked than lesbian women, especially by male respondents, while their study found no relationship between gender and attitudes towards lesbian women. Only in China, France, and Italy do men more often report negative attitudes towards lesbian women.

3.3. Education

Higher levels of education can be associated with mental-emotional flexibility and can promote advanced values [37]. Franzen & Meyer [38] and Baiardi [11] report an effect of education on attitudes towards climate change. Dotti Sani & Quaranta [16], Kuntz et al. [26], Takács & Szalma [31], and Van Den Akker et al. [30] conclude that a high education level is associated with open-minded attitudes towards LGBTIQ people. Despite this general effect of education, Baiardi [11] reveals that very high education levels can induce the opposite attitude, namely the rejection of measures against climate change, since respondents fear the loss of their high status and privileges due to constraints imposed by such measures.

3.4. Left-Right Ideology

The association of party preference and ideological background of respondents has been repeatedly taken into account when investigating attitudes towards climate change and non-heteronormative ways of life. In general, individuals preferring right-wing ideologies are more often skeptical concerning the causes and consequences of climate change [8,11,23,39] and less liberal toward non-heteronormative ways of life (see literature

review by Godø et al. [40] and Ayoub & Stoeckl [41]); however, this relationship appears to be more relevant in Western European countries than in Eastern European countries [8,23]. Gregersen et al. [23] refer to the lower relevance of the respondents' place on the left-right spectrum in Eastern European countries and to the different labeling of parties in various countries. This becomes even more problematic in worldwide comparisons, as the cross-cultural study by Lewis et al. [9] demonstrated. Moreover, using the case of political parties in Austria, Tosun & Debus [42] have demonstrated that, in some cases, right-wing parties may even argue in favor of measures against climate change when this fits their elite blaming discourse (see also [39]). Recent research on conservative voting among LGBTIQ people [43] has also made clear that, though the combination of conservative values and LGBTIQ identity is rare, these are not mutually exclusive.

3.5. Residential Background: Urban-Rural Divide

In recent times, protest movements arguing for measures to tackle climate change have mostly had their origins in cities. It is widely assumed that a young, urban, and educated elite is likely to engage in protest movements, including those concerned with issues, such as climate change or support for non-heteronormative ways of life. The notion of a conflict between urban 'cosmopolitans' and rural 'communitarians' reflects this general assumption [14,44–47]. Nevertheless, our data shows only very minor associations of education and income level with domicile in this respect (see Appendix A, Table A2). Additionally, current research has challenged this view of things: for instance, Walker & Ryan [48] have found an association between place attachment in rural areas and political engagement in favor of environmental protection. By contrast, Tenbrink & Willcock [49] report that higher resilience, understood as possession of flexible strategies for coping with consequences of climate change, leads to only minor engagement in environmental protection in rural areas. Mitter et al. [50] also draw a nuanced picture of farmers' attitudes towards climate change and their strategies for adapting: while "climate change fatalists" and "climate change adaptors" believe in human-made climate change, the "cost-benefit calculators" and the "integrative adaptors" refer to natural variations in climate. Arndt et al. [22] likewise address economic aspects of farmers' attitudes on climate change, finding that respondents in the agricultural sector are worried about income loss due to climate change. Studies of the relationship between residential background and attitudes towards LGBTIQ people have identified no clear trends, since urban and rural attitude patterns differ only slightly [51,52].

This brief literature review serves to increase our awareness of deviations from general patterns of correlation between socio-structural variables on the one hand and attitudes towards climate change and non-heteronormative ways of life on the other. While we employ the common assumptions taken from the literature, we are prepared to take these deviations into account. The urban-rural variable has been rarely used thus far, especially in research on attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life. Since more evidence is needed on the relationship of these variables and our two main dependent variables, we formulate the following hypotheses:

1. Older respondents are less often worried about climate change and have lower tolerance towards non-heteronormative ways of life.
2. In general, female respondents report more awareness of climate change and show more tolerance for non-heteronormative ways of life compared to men.
3. Respondents with higher education levels more often perceive climate change as worrisome and report higher tolerance towards non-heteronormative ways of life.

4. We expect only minor effects of place of residence (urban-rural), with urban residents more open towards non-heteronormative ways of life and more worried about climate change.

Given the debates on flexible scaling of spaces in a globalized world [53], the ‘urban-rural variable’ seems to be the most contested variable in our portfolio of independent variables. In this respect, we must rely on the measurement provided by the ESS dataset, with its fixed categories, but we are aware of the problems involved, namely the increasing interdependence and interconnectedness of urban and rural areas. Podmore & Bain’s [54] study of LGBTIQ neighborhoods in suburban areas presents one example of such floating borders between cities and their suburbs. Additionally, we refrain from using respondents’ left-right self-positioning as an independent variable due to the above-mentioned differences in the meaning of these terms and in the labeling of left-wing and right-wing parties in the target countries discussed in our analysis (Sweden, Austria, Italy, Poland). By doing so, we follow Otto & Gugushvili’s [21] analysis of climate change issues, which included neither the left-right positioning nor the class of respondents. Although left-right cleavages are not fundamentally losing importance, their discriminatory power in tracing lines of social conflict has decreased. Even more, a simple dichotomy is no longer appropriate (see [55] for the Swedish case), and left-right scales have proven to be multidimensional in their nature [56]. The explanatory power of the left-right continuum is still higher in Western democracies compared to Eastern European countries, although differences are gradually diminishing [56]. As a response, alternative measures try to capture “new politics” issues, with the most prominent example being the GAL-TAN index [57]. This instrument aims to compare political parties and their followers along a spectrum from green-alternative-liberal to traditional-authoritarian-nationalist attitudes. In population surveys, the GAL-TAN index is often measured indirectly via respondents vote choices, which are then recoded in terms of the GAL-TAN index (for example, [58]). Due to these limitations, we neither include left-right self-positioning nor an indirect measurement via the GAL-TAN index. Regarding our specific research interest in awareness for climate change and tolerance towards LGBTIQ, Noël et al. [59] report comparatively low associations with left-right positioning.

3.6. Country Selection

For our analysis, we selected four case countries (Sweden, Austria, Italy, and Poland) which comprise a spectrum ranging from rather progressive countries, such as Sweden, to countries that experienced democratic backsliding at the time of the data collection, such as Poland. Sweden and Poland are most distant among our four cases, as Sweden is known for its pioneering role in terms of LGBTIQ rights and as a worldwide forerunner in climate policy, while Poland was lagging behind in these policy areas at the time of the survey. Italy and Austria occupy an intermediate position on the two main parameters of our research. We use this case selection to examine the association of attitudes towards climate change and non-heteronormative forms of living in terms of a pilot study. Our countries dispose of relevant characteristics in terms of legal regulations and attitude patterns that are similar to other European countries, and our analysis delivers first results on the polarizing potential of these attitudes. Further research should widen this approach to other European countries and engage in cross-cultural research.

Nevertheless, as in the case of the independent variables, one should be careful not to oversimplify the selection scheme. Ammaturo & Slootmaeckers [25] warn against pre-condemning all Eastern European countries as hostile to members of the LGBTIQ population. Furthermore, according to Eurobarometer 513 [60], six South European countries (Portugal, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, Greece, and Spain) are among the top 10 countries that

consider climate change a very serious issue. Italy ranks fourth among all EU member states when it comes to concerns about the consequences of climate change and hence occupies a comparatively advanced position. Therefore, our country selection in Table 1 should be seen as a preliminary illustration of our considerations along several relevant indicators.

Table 1. Country selection.

	Sweden	Austria	Italy	Poland
Liberal democracy index 2021 (Index based on expert ratings evaluating the protection of civil liberties, the strength of the rule of law, the independence of judiciary, the effectiveness of checks and balances and the level of electoral democracy; range: 0 to 1 (most democratic) (https://www.v-dem.net/ , (accessed on 1 August 2024)))	0.88	0.75	0.77	0.41
ILGA rainbow map index 2022 (75 criteria in seven areas: equality and non-discrimination, family, hate crime and hate speech, legal gender recognition, intersex bodily integrity, civil society space and asylum; expert ratings; range from 0% (gross violations of human rights, discrimination) to 100% (respect of human rights, full equality))	67.98	48.18	24.76	13.07
Eurobarometer 493 (2019): Same rights for LGBTIQ persons (% agreement) (Item wording: “Gay, lesbian and bisexual persons should have the same rights as heterosexual persons”)	98	70	68	49
Climate Change Performance Index CCIP 2021 (Index based on 14 indicators in four areas by official documents and expert ratings: greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energies, energy use and climate policy; higher values reflect a good performance of a country in addressing climate change developments. This index is widely used in academic research (https://ccpi.org/impact/#34 , (accessed on 1 August 2024)) and ranges from 0 to 100.)	74.42	48.09	53.05	38.94
Eurobarometer 513 (2021): (Item wording: And how serious a problem do you think climate change is at this moment? Please use a scale from 1 to 10, with ‘1’ meaning it is “not at all a serious problem” and ‘10’ meaning it is “an extremely serious problem”.) climate change very serious (% agreement 7–10 points)	79	69	84	69

We consulted two indicators per topic (climate change and non-heteronormative ways of life) and the liberal democracy index in order to select countries from the ESS data set. Moreover, we considered the political situation in the four countries under study at the

time of the data collection (Fieldwork: Sweden 12/2021–01/2022, Austria 08–12/2021, Italy 10/2021–04/2022, Poland 01–05/2022), as well as the countries' political culture in a long-term perspective (see the timeline of the Deliberative democracy index in the Appendix A, Figure A1). Sweden is known for its long-term democratic culture, while the other three countries faced a remarkable democratic decline during the two World Wars. Poland remained low on the Deliberative democracy index during communist rule, but the country's index values have risen since the collapse of the regime. Nevertheless, during the government of the PiS party, Poland again scored low on the Deliberative democracy Index. Table 1 below compares recent data and presents Sweden as a comparatively advanced country, followed by Austria, which in some respects ranks comparably to Italy. In the last decades, both Italy and Austria witnessed a steady increase in the number of followers of right-wing parties; in Italy, this development culminated in the 2022 government led by Giorgia Meloni, while in Austria, the FPÖ became the strongest party in both the EP elections and the national parliamentary elections in 2024. At the time of the survey, Poland was still ruled by the PiS party and scored comparatively low on the presented indicators. However, it should not be overlooked that the Sweden Democrats, a right-wing party, are becoming increasingly popular even in Sweden. Table 1 sums up these considerations.

4. Method: Data, Analytical Strategy, and Statistical Analysis

Our analyses are based on European Social Survey (ESS) round 10 data [61] and the “ESS10 Self-completion-integrated file, edition 3.0” [62]. 31 countries participated in round 10. The ESS survey series aims at monitoring public attitudes and developing social indicators, including attitudinal indicators. A variety of topics from previous surveys were repeated in round 10 of ESS, and two modules were newly developed for this round: digital contacts in work and family life and evaluations of democracy. The sampling procedure for ESS strictly follows random probability sampling (An overview of sample sizes and sample characteristics is given in the Appendix A Table A1).

4.1. Analytical Strategy

In order to construct our dependent variable, we follow a procedure proposed by Otto & Gugushvili [21] in their article on attitudes towards climate change and attitudes towards redistribution. We logically combine two sets of attitudes in a fourfold table and empirically investigate the number of respondents in each of the four cells. The following types of combinations are possible in a two-by-two table (Table 2): two consistent attitude patterns, in which respondents either find both topics very important and score high on both scales (high support/high awareness) or in which they rate both topics as unimportant and scale low on both scales (low support/low awareness). In addition, two intermediate types can be defined, in which respondents find just one of the two topics important and scale low on the other topic (high support/low awareness, low support/high awareness).

Table 2. Attitude patterns towards non-heteronormative ways of life and climate change.

	Attitudes Towards Non-Heteronormative Ways of Life High Support	Attitudes Towards Non-Heteronormative Ways of Life Low Support
Attitudes towards climate change High Awareness	High support/high awareness	Low support/high awareness
Attitudes towards climate change Low Awareness	High support/low awareness	Low support/low awareness

Table 3 gives an overview of the indicators used to construct the dependent variable of our analysis. We used factor analysis to determine whether both scales can be regarded as unidimensional and to assess the correlation between the two scales. We then calculated mean score indices for attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and attitudes towards climate change. Subsequently, we dichotomized the scales using sample means as cut-off points and finally computed a Multinomial logistic regression to investigate correlates of different types of attitude patterns.

Table 3. Overview of the ESS10 variables used to measure attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and climate change.

Original Variable	Recoded Variable
Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own lives as they wish. (1: Agree strongly; 2: Agree; 3: Neither agree nor disagree; 4: Disagree; 5: Disagree strongly)	The response scale was inverted.
Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples. (1: Agree strongly; 2: Agree; 3: Neither agree nor disagree; 4: Disagree; 5: Disagree strongly)	The response scale was inverted.
If a close family member was a gay man or a lesbian, I would feel ashamed. (1: Agree strongly; 2: Agree; 3: Neither agree nor disagree; 4: Disagree; 5: Disagree strongly)	Not recoded.
To what extent do you feel a personal responsibility to try to reduce climate change? (11-point scale with the endpoints 0: Not at all and 10: A great deal)	Based on a previous filter, the question was posed only to those who think that climate change is happening. The value of 0 was assigned to those who don't believe this. Then the scale was transformed with the formula $(X + 2.5)/2.5$ to a 1 to 5 format.
How worried are you about climate change? (1: Not at all worried; 2: Not very worried; 3: Somewhat worried; 4: Very worried; 5: Extremely worried)	Based on a previous filter, the question was posed only to those who think that climate change is happening. The value of 1 was assigned to those who don't believe this.

4.2. Statistical Analysis

We used exploratory factor analyses to detect attitude patterns among the items on climate change and attitudes towards non-heteronormative forms of living provided in the ESS 10 data set. These analyses aimed at ensuring that we are dealing with coherent scales in the next steps of the analysis. We then applied bivariate statistics to describe the prevalence of our new build types and characterize them by domicile more closely. Finally, we conducted a Multinomial regression analysis to examine sociostructural influence factors on our different attitude types. All analyses were computed by using the statistical programs R 4.3.0 and SPSS 28.0.0.

5. Findings

First, we conducted exploratory factor analyses on the items measuring attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and climate change. The results based on oblique rotation (Table 4) show that the items load on two distinct factors. Both scales yield satisfactory coefficients for reliability (Cronbach's Alpha). Oblique rotation suggests that the factors are not completely independent from each other since the factor correlation equals 0.33 (see Table 4). Although this correlation is moderate, we can conclude that the two scales are, in some respects, associated and that we cannot assume complete

independence of attitudes. Furthermore, this result confirms our further research strategy of more closely examining different attitude patterns in order to gain a better understanding of such associations and calculate the prevalence of these patterns among our respondents.

Table 4. EFA with oblique rotation using the items for attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and climate change in Austria, Italy, Poland, and Sweden (n = 8547).

	Attitudes Towards Non-Heteronormative Ways of Life (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.78)	Attitudes Towards Climate Change (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.73)	Community
Gays and lesbians are free to live life as they wish	0.87	−0.02	0.74
Gay and lesbian couples right to adopt children	0.7	0.03	0.51
Ashamed if a close family member is gay or lesbian	0.7	0.01	0.49
Personal responsibility to reduce climate change	0.01	0.76	0.58
Worried about climate change	−0.01	0.76	0.57

Note: Two factors have eigenvalues > 1 (2.41; 1.31); factor correlation = 0.33.

In a further step, we calculated mean score indices for attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and attitudes towards climate change. For further analysis, the mean score indices were dichotomized using the sample means as cut-offs, as by Otto & Gugushvili [21] in their paper on attitudes towards climate change and redistribution. The sample mean of the index for attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life is 3.81, where a value below this cut-off means low support and a value above this cut-off means high support. The sample mean of the index for attitudes towards climate change is 3.38, where a value below this cut-off means low awareness and a value above this cut-off means high awareness. Four groups (cf. Table 5) have been calculated using combinations of these two dichotomous variables. First, we find the two groups that consistently score high or low on both scales to be the largest in terms of percentage of the total sample. When comparing individual countries, we find respondents with high support/awareness on both scales to be the largest group in Austria and Sweden, whereas respondents scoring low on both scales comprise the largest groups in Italy and Poland. Respondents reporting high awareness of climate change only are more often located in Italy and Poland, while in Sweden the number of respondents reporting tolerance for non-heteronormative ways of life exceeds the number of persons aware of climate change only. Taken together, we find more than half of respondents in each country holding strong attitudes, i.e., being a member of either group 1 or group 4. While this result does not indicate perfect bimodality, we find a concentration of respondents in the two strongest categories (high/high, low/low).

Before turning to our multivariate analysis, we briefly inspect the bivariate distribution of one of our independent variables, namely the place of residence. Since this variable has been rarely considered until now, we place special focus on this aspect in our analysis. ESS 10 includes a variable on place of residence, subdivided into five categories, ranging from big cities to farms and homes in the countryside. Table 6 displays our dependent variable ‘group membership’ in relation to the respondents’ place of residence. While respondents of group 4 (high/high) are more often located in an urban context, it seems worthwhile to inspect the ‘mixed’ groups 2 and 3 as well: respondents supporting tolerance towards non-heteronormative ways of life are slightly more often located in urban contexts, and respondents who care about climate change only are slightly more often located in rural

areas. Though the correlation coefficient Cramer's V is small, these differences may be the first hints concerning which groups are more open towards certain policies compared to others.

Table 5. Size of groups within countries in percentages.

	Group 1: Low/Low	Group 2: Only High Support, Non-Het. Ways of Life	Group 3: Only High Awareness of Climate Change	Group 4: High/High	NA
Austria (n = 2003)	17.57	18.32	18.72	41.94	3.44
Italy (n = 2640)	31.02	13.45	24.02	23.11	8.41
Poland (n = 2065)	32.98	8.72	31.57	21.21	5.52
Sweden (n = 2287)	15.13	25.54	11.94	45.52	1.88
All (n = 8995)	24.44	16.52	21.50	32.56	4.98

Table 6. Group membership and domicile (n = 8440).

	Group 1: Low/Low	Group 2: Only High Support, Non-Het. Ways of Life	Group 3: Only High Awareness of Climate Change	Group 4: High/High
A big city	17.91	18.48	19.39	44.22
Suburbs or outskirts of a big city	18.28	23.03	15.45	43.23
Town or small city	28.17	16.91	22.08	32.84
Country village	29.99	14.56	27.76	27.69
Farm or home in the countryside	24.56	20.11	20.64	34.70

$\chi^2 = 274.9$, $df = 12$, p -value < 0.001; Cramer's V = 0.10.

Finally, we compare different factors that influence the probability of belonging to one of the four groups. Table 7 displays the results of a Multinomial logistic regression analysis, using group 1 (low/low) as the comparison category. Gender is relevant for membership in all groups: compared to men, female respondents have a higher probability of being members of groups 2, 3, and 4. While the domicile of the respondents does not reach statistical significance in group 3, the results show that living in more rural areas compared to cities lowers the odds of belonging to groups 2 and 4. Conversely, education increases the probability of membership in all three groups (numbers 2, 3, and 4) in comparison to group 1, with the highest odds ratio observable for group 4. Respondents with middle or high levels of education therefore have a high probability of belonging to group 4 rather than group 1. While education is a strong discriminator between respondents in group 1 and group 4 (the groups with the strongest attitudes), its influence decreases when it comes to distinguishing the two mixed types (groups 2 and 3) from the 'lowest' group 1. With odds ratios close to 1, age appears to be of minor relevance. Country of residence seems to have an effect on the probability of belonging to group 2 and group 4. Compared to respondents in Austria, respondents in Poland but also in Italy display lower odds to belong to these two groups. Swedish respondents, instead, have a higher probability of belonging to group 2 (support for non-heteronormative ways of life only) and group 4 (high awareness for climate change and high tolerance for non-heteronormative ways of life) in comparison to the reference group (respondents located in Austria).

Table 7. Multinomial logistic regression (n = 8158).

	Group 2: Only High Support, Non-Het. Ways of Life			Group 3: Only High Awareness of Climate Change			Group 4: High/High		
	OR2	SE2	p-val2	OR3	SE3	p-val3	OR4	SE4	p-val4
Intercept	3.49	0.170	0.000	0.58	0.168	0.001	3.49	0.154	0.000
Gender (ref. male)									
Female	1.47	0.073	0.000	1.30	0.065	0.000	2.29	0.064	0.000
Domicile (ref. city)									
Town, village, farm	0.68	0.085	0.000	0.92	0.081	0.292	0.62	0.075	0.000
Education (ref. ISCED I/II)									
ISCED III	1.53	0.095	0.000	1.22	0.080	0.013	2.03	0.086	0.000
ISCED IV and V	1.98	0.099	0.000	1.61	0.086	0.000	4.01	0.088	0.000
Age	0.97	0.002	0.000	1.00	0.002	0.016	0.97	0.002	0.000
Country (ref. Austria)									
Italy	0.51	0.107	0.000	0.88	0.098	0.180	0.44	0.092	0.000
Poland	0.24	0.121	0.000	1.04	0.098	0.688	0.28	0.098	0.000
Sweden	1.90	0.108	0.000	0.77	0.115	0.024	1.46	0.097	0.000
CoxSnell	0.23								
Nagelkerke	0.24								
McFadden	0.10								

Note. Comparison category = Group 1: Low/low.

In summary, the multivariate analysis demonstrates that gender and education influence the odds of belonging to all three groups (numbers 2, 3, and 4). Domicile and country of residence are relevant only for membership to group 2 and group 4 but not for group 3. The effects of age can be considered as overall low. The model yields satisfactory values for measures of fit, indicating that relevant variables are included. Nevertheless, some results suggest the need for further investigation, as we will discuss in the sections that follow.

6. Discussion

In this paper, we focused on two attitudes that are central for the emergence of inclusive and sustainable societies, and we inquired into the associations and determinants of various attitudinal patterns. Our findings confirm the relevance of gender and education for attitudes towards non-heteronormative ways of life and towards climate change (H2 and H3). This is in line with previous studies, which have found that tolerance for the LGBTIQ community only slowly spreads among the general public [16]. Effects of gender and education are particularly strong for distinguishing the highest and the lowest groups of our analysis, which may be labeled the ‘extreme’ groups. Gender and education also contribute to differentiating the members of the lowest group 1 from those who support tolerance for non-heteronormative ways of life only (group 2), but they are of lower relevance for discriminating group 3 from the reference group 1. The four groups exhibit only minor differences in age and domicile, which means that H1 (older respondents have lower awareness/tolerance) must be rejected and H4 (urban respondents have higher awareness/tolerance) provides mixed evidence. Moreover, we find some evidence of

correlation between the two scales to some extent, which suggests further investigation and tests of external validity of the two scales are needed.

The distinctiveness of group 2 (tolerance of non-heteronormative ways of life) may be due to the wording of the items provided by ESS 10. At least two items of this scale provoke strong variance in the participants' responses (cf. boxplots in the Appendix A, Figure A2): firstly, the issue of adoption by same-sex couples is still contested among respondents (which is in line with the findings of Dotti Sani & Quaranta [16] and Rozenberg & Scheepers [28]); secondly, having a gay or lesbian family member remains similarly controversial among the respondents. From the viewpoint of the respondents, both issues turn a private matter into a public issue [16,24]. Therefore, these items may be regarded as a specific 'test' of the respondents' actual tolerance towards members of the LGBTIQ population. The inclusion of similarly selective items for measuring attitudes towards climate change in the future would be desirable [23,63]. Teney et al. [10] find the level of abstraction of items a core influence factor on the measurements of polarization. This relates to our conceptual remarks on the relationship between general and specific commitment (Section 2 above): while attitudes have generally become more open-minded, specific policies and their consequences for individual behavior are still contested. Mau et al. [7] call such concrete, highly contested issues "trigger points", noting that these issues involve an abstract principle turning into definite consequences at individual or societal level. As Mau et al. [7] have illustrated in their qualitative research, these "trigger points" produce strong emotional responses. Nevertheless, long-term studies will be needed to determine whether such "take-off issues" [6] have the potential to endure in the form of enduring polarization. Our cross-sectional analysis is limited in this sense since it only allows statements about the current status quo. Further long-term observation is needed to determine the stability of the effects we have found in this study.

Respondents with open-minded attitudes (group 4) have a higher probability of being residents of Sweden or Austria. Since this country effect is also evident in group 2, we can assume that these items (non-heteronormative ways of life) are decisive for distinguishing respondents of the ESS study into different groups. This finding supports the notion that country effects, understood as legal regulations and an open-minded society, such as that in Sweden, do matter [24,26,30]. We elaborated on the cases of four European countries in this study that can be regarded as relevant (in terms of legal regulations, policies, and attitude patterns), but our results are limited to this small sample up to now. More research is needed on the European continent but also abroad to dig deeper into cross-cultural effects.

Open-mindedness is also relevant in the context of the perceived conflict between 'communitarians' and 'cosmopolitans', which some researchers link to domicile [7,14,44,47]. We found some minor evidence of such an urban-rural divide at a multivariate level (H4). Nevertheless, the investigation of our mixed types of attitudes (group 2 and group 3) pointed to slight differences by residential background, a finding that deserves more attention in future research. Tolerance for non-heteronormative ways of life only appears to be slightly higher in urban contexts, while awareness for climate change is only slightly higher in rural contexts. This may relate to the frequency of respondents' actual contacts with the LGBTIQ community in urban settings and to concrete experiences with climate change in rural areas. While it can be argued that domicile is associated with level of education, the case of the suburbs can be especially instructive in this respect: initial studies in German-speaking countries have shown that environmental awareness and commitment to concrete measures against climate change are particularly low in suburban areas [64,65], which indicates that educational background is not the only relevant variable. Although suburban areas can take a variety of forms and involve various land use practices [66], suburban settlements can be a breeding ground for NIMBY (NIMBY = Not in my back-

yard) attitudes, in which climate concerns, if at all present, tend to be ego-centric rather than socio-tropic [67,68]. To clarify such effects, more sophisticated measures of domicile should be integrated into large-scale surveys, reflecting the growing interdependence and interconnectedness of spaces captured by the concept of ‘scale’ [53].

7. Conclusions

Our findings have revealed two comparatively large groups of ‘strong’ attitudes, which leads us to conclude that the topics we investigated bear some potential for cognitive polarization. Cognitive polarization refers to the existence of controversial attitudes that do not necessarily result in societal conflicts [69]. Instead, different attitudes can stimulate vivid deliberation in democracies. Accordingly, cognitive polarization is not per se a precondition for affective polarization, but these divergent attitudes can be a tipping point if emotions are triggered as well [6,7,14]. Affective or group polarization is more conflictual in its nature and can be easily instrumentalized by politics and media [3,70]. Moreover, confirmation biases reinforce opinions when people exclusively associate with their own in-group, since only arguments that fit one’s own position are heard and tolerated [3,14,17]. Together with political grievance and feelings of anger, affective polarization can be a toxic ingredient in political controversies. More than half of our respondents belong to one of the two groups with ‘strong’ attitudes (high support/high awareness and low support/low awareness), a situation that can be turned into affective polarization by triggering feelings, especially by means of concrete policies or their behavioral consequences. Mau et al. [7] assign such strong attitudes to the societal margins but admit that they have the potential to spread to the center of a society in times of crisis and/or given the decreasing relevance of integrative societal actors, such as trade unions or churches [6,71,72].

Educational background proves to be a particularly powerful variable in our models. Although the educational system in many European countries is committed to the SDG goal 4 (Quality Education), studies [73,74] have shown that, at present, the educational systems are far from being entirely committed to LGBTIQ inclusive education. The importance of education is worrisome given the low social permeability of the education system in many European countries. Furthermore, more sophisticated measures of variables, such as domicile and left-right ideology, are needed to determine the effects of residential and ideological backgrounds more precisely. Further research could address ideological background by studying groups or clusters of countries that share similar party structures. Despite the limitations of our independent variables, we believe that the investigation of our two mixed types of attitudes provides valuable insights into means of addressing potential polarization. On the one hand, legal frameworks do matter, as the case of Sweden illustrates; on the other hand, on the societal level, communication strategies could target those groups in which arguments fall on fertile ground (urban areas for non-heteronormative ways of life and rural areas in the case of measures against climate change) and win them over as ‘ambassadors’. These ‘ambassadors’ could in turn engage in personal exchange by sharing their own experiences with both issues, namely living together in an inclusive society and dealing with the consequences of climate change in a more sustainable way.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, E.D., B.M. and E.A.; methodology, E.D. and B.M.; formal analysis, B.M.; investigation, E.D.; resources, E.D.; writing—original draft preparation, E.D.; writing—review and editing, E.D., B.M. and E.A.; visualization, B.M.; supervision, E.D. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Open Access Funding by the University for Continuing Education Krems.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The original data presented in the study are openly available in Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) at <https://www.v-dem.net/data/> (accessed on 1 August 2024) and in the European Social Survey (ESS Data Portal) at <https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/data-portal> (accessed on 1 August 2024).

Acknowledgments: We gratefully acknowledge the proofreading performed by Kosta Gligorijevic and the administrative and technical support performed by David Panhuber.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Sample description, ESS data [61,62].

	AT (n = 2003)	IT (n = 2640)	SE (n = 2280)	PL (n = 2065)
Age (mean)	52.92	53.76	55.09	51.04
Gender				
Male	48.7	47.5	48.2	48.3
Female	51.3	52.5	51.8	51.7
Education				
ES-ISCED I, less than lower secondary	1.7	9.1	7.9	0.6
ES-ISCED II, lower secondary	7.9	28.2	12.5	29.6
ES-ISCED IIIb, lower tier upper secondary	32.8	7.5	9.3	12.5
ES-ISCED IIIa, upper tier upper secondary	6.7	33.0	16.4	22.0
ES-ISCED IV, advanced vocational, sub-degree	23.7	5.1	22.3	5.0
ES-ISCED V1, lower tertiary education, BA level	8.0	6.2	14.5	8.2
ES-ISCED V2, higher tertiary education, ≥MA level	18.6	10.7	15.9	21.9
Other	0.6	0.2	1.2	0.2
Domicile				
A big city	16.9	8.9	18.6	23.6
Suburbs or outskirts of big city	15.7	3.3	23.5	5.1
Town or small city	22.7	41.4	33.0	34.1
Country village	34.1	43.8	14.5	33.6
Farm or home in the countryside	10.6	2.7	10.4	3.6

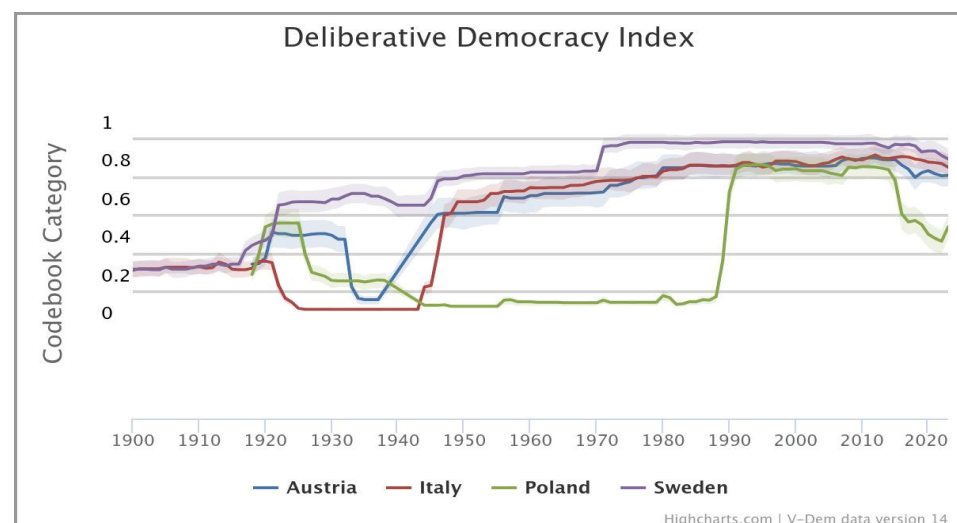


Figure A1. Deliberative Democracy Index—timeline [75].

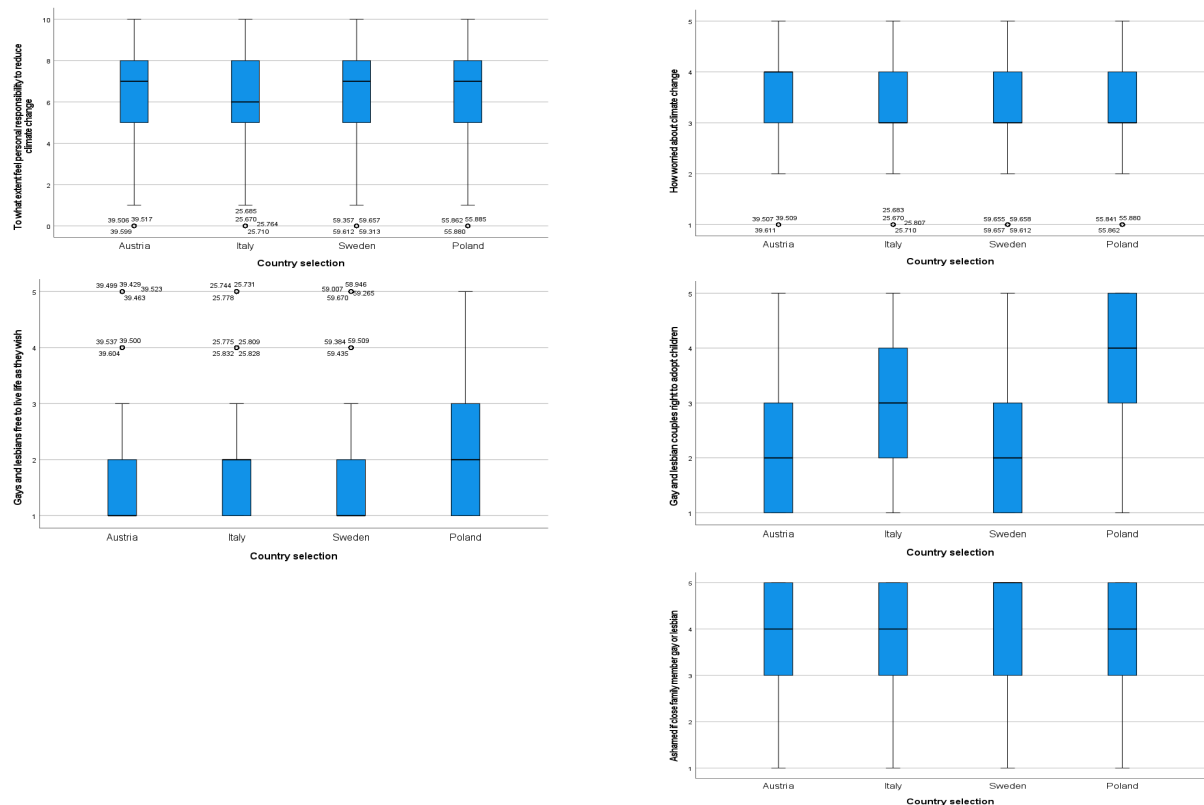


Figure A2. Univariate distributions of items on climate change and tolerance towards non-heteronormative ways of life—boxplots; own depiction, ESS data [61,62].

Table A2. Association (Cramer's V) of education (years of education) and income (households total net income) with domicile, ESS data [61,62].

	Education x Domicile	Income x Domicile
Austria	0.135 ***	0.080 **
Italy	0.090 ***	0.060
Sweden	0.108 ***	0.076 ***
Poland	0.186 ***	0.134 ***

Significance levels: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$.

References

- Arbatli, E.; Rosenberg, D. United We Stand, Divided We Rule: How Political Polarization Erodes Democracy. *Democratization* **2021**, *28*, 285–307. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- DiMaggio, P.; Evans, J.; Bryson, B. Have American's Social Attitudes Become More Polarized? *Am. J. Sociol.* **1996**, *102*, 690–755. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Iyengar, S.; Lelkes, Y.; Levendusky, M.; Malhotra, N.; Westwood, S.J. The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States. *Annu. Rev. Political Sci.* **2019**, *22*, 129–146. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Wagner, M. Affective Polarization in Europe. *Eur. Political Sci. Rev.* **2024**, *16*, 378–392. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lelkes, Y. Mass Polarization: Manifestations and Measurements. *Public Opin. Q.* **2016**, *80*, 392–410. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Baldassarri, D.; Bearman, P. Dynamics of Political Polarization. *Am. Sociol. Rev.* **2007**, *72*, 784–811. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Mau, S.; Lux, T.; Westheuser, L. *Triggerpunkte Konsens und Konflikt in der Gegenwartsgesellschaft*, 1st ed.; Suhrkamp: Berlin, Germany, 2023; ISBN 978-3-518-77676-6.
- Kulin, J.; Sevä, I.J.; Dunlap, R.E. Nationalist Ideology, Rightwing Populism, and Public Views about Climate Change in Europe. *Environ. Political* **2021**, *30*, 1111–1134. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lewis, G.B.; Palm, R.; Feng, B. Cross-National Variation in Determinants of Climate Change Concern. *Environ. Political* **2019**, *28*, 793–821. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

10. Teney, C.; Pietrantuono, G.; Wolfram, T. What Polarizes Citizens? An Explorative Analysis of 817 Attitudinal Items from a Non-Random Online Panel in Germany. *PLoS ONE* **2024**, *19*, e0302446. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
11. Baiardi, D. What Do You Think About Climate Change? *J. Econ. Surv.* **2023**, *37*, 1255–1313. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
12. Roose, J.; Steinhilper, E. Politische Polarisierung: Zur Systematisierung Eines Vielschichtigen Konzepts. *Forschungsjournal Soz. Beweg.* **2022**, *35*, 283–297. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
13. Lux, T.; Mau, S.; Jacobi, A. Neue Ungleichheitsfragen, neue Cleavages? Ein internationaler Vergleich der Einstellungen in vier Ungleichheitsfeldern. *Berl. J. Soziol.* **2022**, *32*, 173–212. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
14. Downey, D.J. Polarization and Persuasion: Engaging Sociology in the Moral Universe of a Divided Democracy. *Sociol. Perspect.* **2022**, *65*, 1029–1051. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
15. Marquart-Pyatt, S.T.; Qian, H.; Houser, M.K.; McCright, A.M. Climate Change Views, Energy Policy Preferences, and Intended Actions Across Welfare State Regimes: Evidence from the European Social Survey. *Int. J. Sociol.* **2019**, *49*, 1–26. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
16. Sani, G.M.D.; Quaranta, M. Let Them Be, Not Adopt: General Attitudes Towards Gays and Lesbians and Specific Attitudes Towards Adoption by Same-Sex Couples in 22 European Countries. *Soc. Indic. Res.* **2020**, *150*, 351–373. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
17. Jost, J.T.; Baldassarri, D.S.; Druckman, J.N. Cognitive–Motivational Mechanisms of Political Polarization in Social-Communicative Contexts. *Nat. Rev. Psychol.* **2022**, *1*, 560–576. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
18. Beck, D.; Habed, A.J.; Henninger, A. (Eds.) *Blurring Boundaries—“Anti-Gender” Ideology Meets Feminist and LGBTIQ+ Discourses*, 1st ed.; Verlag Barbara Budrich: Leverkusen, Germany, 2023; ISBN 978-3-8474-2684-4.
19. Kuhar, R.; Paternotte, D. “Gender Ideology” in Movement: Introduction. In *Anti-gender campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*; Kuhar, R., Paternotte, D., Eds.; Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd.: London, UK; New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 1–22, ISBN 978-1-78348-999-2.
20. Roth, J.; Scheele, A.; Winkel, H. (Eds.) *Global Contestations of Gender Rights*; BiUP General; Bielefeld University Press: Bielefeld, Germany, 2022; ISBN 978-3-8394-6069-6.
21. Otto, A.; Gugushvili, D. Eco-Social Divides in Europe: Public Attitudes towards Welfare and Climate Change Policies. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 404. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
22. Arndt, C.; Halikiopoulou, D.; Vrakopoulos, C. The Centre-Periphery Divide and Attitudes towards Climate Change Measures among Western Europeans. *Environ. Political* **2023**, *32*, 381–406. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
23. Gregersen, T.; Doran, R.; Böhm, G.; Tvinnereim, E.; Poortinga, W. Political Orientation Moderates the Relationship Between Climate Change Beliefs and Worry About Climate Change. *Front. Psychol.* **2020**, *11*, 1573. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
24. Takács, J.; Szalma, I.; Bartus, T. Social Attitudes Toward Adoption by Same-Sex Couples in Europe. *Arch. Sex. Behav.* **2016**, *45*, 1787–1798. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
25. Ammaturo, F.R.; Sloomaeckers, K. The Unexpected Politics of ILGA-Europe’s Rainbow Maps: (De)Constructing Queer Utopias/Dystopias. *Eur. J. Political Gend.* **2024**, *8*, 3–25. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
26. Kuntz, A.; Davidov, E.; Schwartz, S.H.; Schmidt, P. Human Values, Legal Regulation, and Approval of Homosexuality in Europe: A Cross-country Comparison. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* **2015**, *45*, 120–134. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
27. Dochow-Sondershaus, S.; Teney, C.; Borbáth, E. Cultural Backlash? Trends in Opinion Polarisation between High and Low-Educated Citizens since the 1980s: A Comparison of France, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Sweden. *SocArXiv* **2025**. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
28. Rozenberg, T.; Scheepers, P. Rejection of Equal Adoption Rights for Same-sex Couples across European Countries: Socializing Influences on the National Level and Cross-national Interactions. *Soc. Sci. Q.* **2022**, *103*, 274–293. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
29. Bettinsoli, M.L.; Suppes, A.; Napier, J.L. Predictors of Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbian Women in 23 Countries. *Soc. Psychol. Personal. Sci.* **2020**, *11*, 697–708. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
30. Van Den Akker, H.; Van Der Ploeg, R.; Scheepers, P. Disapproval of Homosexuality: Comparative Research on Individual and National Determinants of Disapproval of Homosexuality in 20 European Countries. *Int. J. Public Opin. Res.* **2013**, *25*, 64–86. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
31. Takács, J.; Szalma, I. Democracy Deficit and Homophobic Divergence in 21st Century Europe. *Gend. Place Cult.* **2020**, *27*, 459–478. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
32. Eilam, E.; Trop, T. Environmental Attitudes and Environmental Behavior—Which Is the Horse and Which Is the Cart? *Sustainability* **2012**, *4*, 2210–2246. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
33. Seker, S.; Sahin, E.; Hacieminoglu, E.; Demirci, S. Do Teenagers Believe in Anthropogenic Climate Change and Take Action to Tackle It? *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 7005. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
34. Ricart, S.; Olcina, J.; Rico, A.M. Evaluating Public Attitudes and Farmers’ Beliefs towards Climate Change Adaptation: Awareness, Perception, and Populism at European Level. *Land* **2018**, *8*, 4. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
35. Félonneau, M.-L.; Becker, M. Pro-Environmental Attitudes and Behavior: Revealing Perceived Social Desirability. *Rev. Int. Psychol. Soc.* **2008**, *21*, 25.
36. Furnham, A. Sustainability Skepticism: Attitudes to, and Beliefs about, Climate Change. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 8164. [\[CrossRef\]](#)

37. Inglehart, R.F. *Cultural Evolution: People's Motivations Are Changing, and Reshaping the World*, 1st ed.; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2018; ISBN 978-1-108-61388-0.
38. Franzen, A.; Meyer, R. Environmental Attitudes in Cross-National Perspective: A Multilevel Analysis of the ISSP 1993 and 2000. *Eur. Sociol. Rev.* **2010**, *26*, 219–234. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
39. Lockwood, M. Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages. *Environ. Political* **2018**, *27*, 712–732. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
40. Godø, T.B.; Bjørndal, Å.; Fluge, I.M.; Johannessen, R.; Lavdas, M. Personality Traits, Ideology, and Attitudes Toward LGBT People: A Scoping Review. *J. Homosex.* **2024**, *8*, 2–13. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
41. Ayoub, P.; Stoeckl, K. The Global Resistance to LGBTIQ Rights. *J. Democr.* **2024**, *35*, 59–73. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
42. Tosun, J.; Debus, M. Right-Wing Populist Parties and Environmental Politics: Insights from the Austrian Freedom Party's Support for the Glyphosate Ban. *Environ. Political* **2021**, *30*, 224–244. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
43. Hunklinger, M.; Ajanović, E. Voting Right? Analyzing Electoral Homonationalism of LGBTIQ* Voters in Austria and Germany. *Soc. Political Int. Stud. Gend. State Soc.* **2022**, *29*, 24–49. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
44. Hochschild, A.R. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*; New Press: New York, NY, USA, 2016; ISBN 978-1-62097-225-0.
45. Huijsmans, T.; Hartevelt, E.; Van Der Brug, W.; Lancee, B. Are Cities Ever More Cosmopolitan? Studying Trends in Urban-Rural Divergence of Cultural Attitudes. *Political Geogr.* **2021**, *86*, 102353. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
46. Zürn, M.; De Wilde, P. Debating Globalization: Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism as Political Ideologies. *J. Political Ideol.* **2016**, *21*, 280–301. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
47. Teney, C.; Lacewell, O.P.; De Wilde, P. Winners and Losers of Globalization in Europe: Attitudes and Ideologies. *Eur. Political Sci. Rev.* **2014**, *6*, 575–595. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
48. Walker, A.J.; Ryan, R.L. Place Attachment and Landscape Preservation in Rural New England: A Maine Case Study. *Landsc. Urban Plan.* **2008**, *86*, 141–152. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
49. Tenbrink, T.; Willcock, S. Place Attachment and Perception of Climate Change as a Threat in Rural and Urban Areas. *PLoS ONE* **2023**, *18*, e0290354. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
50. Mitter, H.; Larcher, M.; Schönhart, M.; Stöttinger, M.; Schmid, E. Exploring Farmers' Climate Change Perceptions and Adaptation Intentions: Empirical Evidence from Austria. *Environ. Manag.* **2019**, *63*, 804–821. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
51. Thompson, J. Are Urban Spaces Queer-Friendly Places? How Geographic Context Shapes Support for LGBT Rights. *OSF Preprints* **2022**. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
52. Thompson, J. Rural Identity and LGBT Public Opinion in the United States. *Public Opin. Q.* **2023**, *87*, 956–977. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
53. Brenner, N. The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* **2001**, *25*, 591–614. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
54. Podmore, J.A.; Bain, A.L. Whither Queer Suburbanisms? Beyond Heterosuburbia and Queer Metronormativities. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* **2021**, *45*, 1254–1277. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
55. Reiljan, A.; Ryan, A. Ideological Tripolarization, Partisan Tribalism and Institutional Trust: The Foundations of Affective Polarization in the Swedish Multiparty System. *Scand. Political Stud.* **2021**, *44*, 195–219. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
56. Freire, A. Left–Right Ideology as a Dimension of Identification and of Competition. *J. Political Ideol.* **2015**, *20*, 43–68. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
57. Hooghe, L.; Marks, G.; Wilson, C.J. Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration? *Comp. Political Stud.* **2002**, *35*, 965–989. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
58. Weko, S. Communitarians, Cosmopolitans, and Climate Change: Why Identity Matters for EU Climate and Energy Policy. *J. Eur. Public Policy* **2022**, *29*, 1072–1091. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
59. Noël, A.; Thérien, J.-P.; Boucher, É. The Political Construction of the Left-Right Divide: A Comparative Perspective. *J. Political Ideol.* **2021**, *26*, 317–334. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
60. European Commission. Directorate General for Climate Action. In *Climate Change: Report Summary*; Special Eurobarometer; Publications Office of the European Union: Luxembourg, 2021.
61. European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC). *ESS10 Integrated File, Edition 3.2*; [Data Set]; Sikt-Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research: Trondheim, Norway, 2023. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
62. European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure (ESS ERIC). *2023. ESS10 Self-Completion—Integrated File, Edition 3.1*; [Data Set]; Sikt-Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research: Trondheim, Norway, 2023. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
63. Vucetich, J.A.; Bruskotter, J.T.; Ghasemi, B.; Rapp, C.E.; Nelson, M.P.; Slagle, K.M. A Flexible Inventory of Survey Items for Environmental Concepts Generated via Special Attention to Content Validity and Item Response Theory. *Sustainability* **2024**, *16*, 1916. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
64. Wardana, R.; Klösch, B.; Hadler, M. Umwelt in der Krise. Einstellungen zu Klimawandel und Umweltbesorgnis sowie Bereitschaft zu umweltbewusstem Verhalten in Krisenzeiten. In *Die Österreichische Gesellschaft Während der Corona-Pandemie*; Aschauer, W., Glatz, C., Prandner, D., Eds.; Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden: Wiesbaden, Germany, 2022; pp. 241–267, ISBN 978-3-658-34490-0.

65. Eichhorn, J. *Stadt und Land in der Klimakrise: Gemeinsamer Blickwinkel oder Divergierende Perspektiven? Politische Einstellungen in Verschiedenen Wohnorts—Umfeldern—von Ländlichen bis Städtischen Räumen*; böll.brief Demokratie & Gesellschaft; Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung: Berlin, Germany, 2023.
66. Phelps, N.A. Introduction: Old Europe, New Suburbanization? In *Old Europe, New Suburbanization? Governance, Land, and Infrastructure in European Suburbanization*; Phelps, N.A., Ed.; Global Suburbanisms; University of Toronto Press: Toronto, ON, Canada; Buffalo, NY, USA; London, UK, 2017; pp. 3–17, ISBN 978-1-4426-4826-5.
67. Harris, R. Suburbanization and Suburbanism. In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*; Elsevier: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2015; pp. 660–666, ISBN 978-0-08-097087-5.
68. Arıkan, G.; Günay, D. Public Attitudes towards Climate Change: A Cross-Country Analysis. *Br. J. Political Int. Relat.* **2021**, *23*, 158–174. [[CrossRef](#)]
69. Roose, J. Eine Tief Abgespaltene Minderheit: Polarisierungstendenzen in Deutschland. *Forschungsjournal Soz. Beweg.* **2022**, *35*, 298–316. [[CrossRef](#)]
70. Ares, M. Issue Politicization and Social Class: How the Electoral Supply Activates Class Divides in Political Preferences. *Eur. J. Political Res.* **2022**, *61*, 503–523. [[CrossRef](#)]
71. Marks, G.; Attewell, D.; Rovny, J.; Hooghe, L. Cleavage Theory. In *The Palgrave Handbook of EU Crises*; Riddervold, M., Trondal, J., Newsome, A., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2021; pp. 173–193, ISBN 978-3-030-51790-8.
72. Reckwitz, A. *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten: Zum Strukturwandel der Moderne*, 1st ed.; Suhrkamp: Berlin, Germany, 2017; ISBN 978-3-518-58706-5.
73. Ruiz-Cecilia, R.; Guijarro-Ojeda, J.R.; Marín-Macías, C. Analysis of Heteronormativity and Gender Roles in EFL Textbooks. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 220. [[CrossRef](#)]
74. Wilson-Daily, A.E.; Harris, R.; Sebares-Valle, G.; Sabido-Codina, J. Revisiting Past Experiences of LGBTQ+-Identifying Students: An Analysis Framed by the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 16213. [[CrossRef](#)]
75. Coppedge, M.; Gerring, J.; Knutsen, C.H.; Lindberg, S.I.; Teorell, J.; Marquardt, K.L.; Medzihorsky, J.; Pemstein, D.; Fox, L.; Gastaldi, L.; et al. *V-Dem Dataset. V14*; V-Dem Institute: Gothenburg, Sweden, 2024.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.