

4th International ESS Conference

Turbulent times in Europe: Instability, insecurity and inequality

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B5. How to measure the changes in European attitudes towards lesbians and gays?

Public attitudes towards gays and lesbians are not homogeneous in Europe. There are societies where same-sex partnerships and adoption by same-sex couples are institutionalized and there are countries where one of those is legally possible (often same-sex partnership) and in some countries neither is institutionalized yet. These different legal frameworks and their changes in the last few decades can also reflect the fact that social attitudes are not at all uniform across Europe and over time.

The European Social Survey (ESS) has had a core question (Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish) since the very beginning (the first wave of ESS in 2002) to measure genderphobic/homophobic attitudes. In the last round of the ESS two new items were introduced (If a close family member was a gay man or a lesbian, I would feel ashamed; Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples), which make it possible to measure other dimensions of attitudes towards gays and lesbians and better understand the nature of genderphobic/homophobic views across countries.

Among large-scale, randomized sample-based surveys it is not just the ESS that includes attitude questions about gays and lesbians but for example, the European Values Study (EVS) and the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) also use somewhat different items. Using these European data sets can allow us to assess different aspects of problems and to compare the effects of different phrasings of similar questions. Thus there is space for methodological examinations whether different questioning in different surveys can yield comparable results.

The aim of this panel is to highlight the changes in attitudes towards gays and lesbians across countries and over time, and to reveal the key individual and macro level factors that can influence these attitudes. In this session we give priority to papers that use comparative perspectives and focus on the multifaceted nature of attitudes towards lesbians and gays.

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