

Queering Parties: Assessing Minority Acceptance in European Party Platforms as a Function of Queer Salience in Europe

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Abstract

What impacts does queer identity and queer identity salience have on party platforms? Party identity and ideology are a large part of the study of politics, especially with a focus on Western Europe, however, a fundamental question is attempting to understand why these parties shift in ideology over time. As time progresses, there do not only exist more queer people, but the population and their issues gain a greater salience. Using data from the European Values Study and Party Manifestos Project, I find that queer identity salience and acceptance has some effects on how parties construct their manifestos, showing that party's platforms become more equal as acceptance increases publicly.

Keywords: political parties; party manifestos; party shifts; western Europe; LGBTQ+ politics

Introduction

What parts of public opinion cause parties to shift their platforms? How does the salience of queer identity and public perceptions of queer persons impact party platforms? Understanding parties and what causes them to tick, and shift is an important part of the comparative endeavor. Implicitly there is the notion that parties must evolve over time to be able to stay politically relevant, and fundamentally, the responsiveness of parties to public shifts is typically viewed as a requirement for the maintenance of modern democracy. This notion serves as a drive for researchers to understand why and how political parties evolve over time. There is a belief that parties are strategic and rational, meaning that they will act in ways that are fundamentally

motivated to keep them in power, thus they should align their general ideals and platforms around mainstream issues. This is some consensus that there are a few key causes of parties shifting platforms, one of the major ones being that parties shift to match public opinion (Adams 2012; Adams et al. 2006; Homola 2017; Adams et al. 2019). This is seen as an attempt by the parties to court new voters and tries to appeal to a base that might not typically vote for them as a means to either maintain power or to try and regain power in some form in the legislature.

While some extant literature focuses on specific group effects on party platform shift (namely gender impacts) all too often the realm of queer/LGBT¹ persons are left out. This exclusion is not representative of malicious action but merely comes from a place of queerness not being a salient political issue historically. As time marches forward, politics change, and new issues emerge in specific arenas. And as such, there has emerged a new need to study minorities and queer persons and their effects on different areas of politics. As a general discipline, political science has lagged behind other social sciences disciplines in the pursuit of studying specific issue areas, queer persons, their vulnerabilities, and their impacts included. This paper attempts to contribute towards the ends of advancing the general queer politics research agenda, and by working to understand some of the mechanisms that can shift party ideology. The rest of this paper will cover the foundational literature concerning parties and some of the pre-discovered mechanisms that cause them to shift, this will be followed by a section theorizing some of the novel mechanisms I propose have an impact on parties and their platforms including the presentation of an original hypothesis. Then there will be coverage of the data and methods to be

¹ The words queer and the acronym LGBT are used interchangeably throughout the paper as is generally accepted in the community.

used as a part of this analysis, the analysis itself, and finally will close with a pragmatic discussion about the substantive findings of the models in the paper.

The Literature So Far

Parties are a critical focus in the discipline of political science, however much of the literature simply contends with some of the effective baselines for what causes party platforms to shift. As an agenda, the party literature has been situated with public opinion and its influence on party platforms for the last few decades, and it serves as the foundation for this paper. Though the theoretical concepts may differ from the public opinion literature, it still remains a fundamental piece of the puzzle and part of the accepted canonical party literature.

One of the most foundational efforts to explain the dynamics of party positioning comes from Ian Budge (1994), which theorized about and empirically evaluated how parties' ideologies in twenty Western democracies shifted and adjusted, ultimately finding that parties shift their platforms between elections, but that different parties employ different decisions rules to decide how to shift their policies. Budge attributes these shifts to the uncertainty and instability of the political environment that party elites must confront, where they cannot accurately predict how ideological shifts will impact their election returns. However, there is some contention that a party's electoral defeat was not a sufficient condition for a major overhaul, but poor performance was effectively necessary to make a major change in the next election (Janda et al. 1995). This evidence is corroborated by another critical piece presented by Adams et al. (2004) who show that parties do not shift their platforms in response to previous election results, parties that gained and lost votes showed no substantive change in party ideology from the last to the current election.

Within the argument of public opinion shifting parties, there is a large corpus of scholarship that I can observe. There are key pieces of scholarship that I must consider as a part of our theoretical basis due to how heavily studied public opinion has been as part of the party shift literature, and a large corpus of work to cover. Adams et al. (2004) contribute one of the first empirical findings that parties systematically shift in response to shifts in public opinion but specifically when public opinion is dynamically opposed to their platform. This finding, also termed the *Dynamics of Disadvantaged Parties Result*, effectively means that parties try to match public opinion, while unsurprising or rather intuitive, empirical confirmation makes it a valuable reference for theorizing. One shortcoming however of this piece is it utilizes public opinion as an aggregate rather than focusing on specific issue salience.

There is some attempt to try to narrow the scope to more niche (and extreme) parties and the ideological relationship to public opinion. Effectively, there is evidence that finds that while mainstream parties will shift with public opinion, niche parties did not adjust in the same way, because their ideologies are more rigorous. Interestingly enough, their second result finds that these niche parties are punished in elections where they attempted to shift their platform to match public opinion. They attribute this punishment to the fact that these niche parties serve a very particular voting base, so attempts to match the general public detracts from the niche they are attempting to serve (Adams et al. 2006). Additionally, there is evidence from Abou-Chadi (2014) that the success of niche parties has some influence on how mainstream parties shift their public opinion. Specifically, he finds that different niche parties have different effects on how mainstream parties will shift their public platform based on their ideological proximity to the niche party.

There is evidence that finds that party orientation on the political spectrum might be some basis for platform shifting with public opinion, finding specifically that centrist parties and right-wing parties are much more likely to mediate their ideological positions based on public opinion, whereas leftist parties are much more likely to be rigid on their platforms. This distinctiveness comes from the parties' having much longer-term policy standings and much more rigid organization within the party. Additionally, the findings report that when testing the influence of changing global economic positions, showing that there is the same sort of receptiveness on the basis of where a party falls on the general political spectrum (Adams, Haupt and Stoll 2008).

I also see that responsiveness is not a consistent phenomenon across elections (Spoon and Klüver 2014). On the basis that parties are rational, goal-oriented, and office-seeking actors, Spoon and Klüver (2014) essentially advance the idea that being selective in their policy advancements might be an important strategy for parties seeking to gain portions of the vote share. This sort of corroborates the fact that parties are going to consistently try to match public opinion in a selective way in an attempt to position themselves to gain a larger portion of the voter base and to remain politically relevant to their already existing voting bloc.

Finally, there is evidence that shows how parties respond to different gender demographics. Homola (2017) contends that parties are responsive to both men's and women's preferences in their party platforms, however, there is a strong favor towards the preferences shifts of males rather than females. This finding still holds even when there is a greater share of female politicians in the parliament, which can be extrapolated as more women representation within the parties. This piece seems troubling when considering that seeking to contend with how queer salience and public opinion towards queer persons, however, there is still hope yet.

Salient Identities as a Mechanism for Platform Change

From assessing the main canonical pieces that study public opinion, its relationship with party change, and party change in general, I can see that I am left with a gap in the scholarship. Extant literature has tried to generalize public opinion as a general body and its relationship to how parties might be willing to change their platforms, however, it fails to look at specific issue areas that evolve over time. Making the assessment that “parties react to public opinion” is a shortcoming of the literature because as a whole, public opinion is not always unified, and should be disaggregated to see if parties shift issue platforms in response to that specific issue becoming more salient as part of public opinion. This is the extension that I seek to flesh out and explore as part of the public opinion and parties’ literature.

While existing scholarship has identified and theorized about factors that could explain a party’s platform shift, extant literature has failed to extend this applicability to queer minority groups. When it comes to a level of theoretical conceptions, I contribute two novel hypotheses within this paper that deal with queer identity salience as a means that affects different changes in a party’s platform. The first deals with a party’s acceptance of minorities generally, and the second deals with how party platforms promote equality as a part of their manifestos.

What is and Why Salience?

Before formally positing some theoretical constructions, it’s important to make a few considerations about why there is a need to study specific issue salience and how I am constructing and developing our measure of salience for this specific research agenda. Queer salience in terms of this paper is specifically measured in terms of public acceptance of queer persons. This may seem like an inappropriate measure, but I argue that this measure is actually

well fit. The queer community is one that typically you might have a hard time identifying, and while salience is particularly heightened around queer specific events, I cannot measure salience this way for this paper, however, public acceptance is representative of the group being known publicly, and these terms, are highly correlated, so it is not unreasonable to use as a factor in our analysis. When it comes to the specific “Why?”, as mentioned earlier, as time marches forward, there is a need to increase our focus on queer identity politics and scholarship, queer persons are an everyday part of life, and like other identity groups, need to be studied as their impacts on the political arena are largely unknown. Political science as a discipline has started to explore and queer some parts of the discipline in terms of academic endeavors, but this paper serves as a small drop in a pond that needs to be explored.

Identity Salience as a Source of Party Change

Based on the above discussion of our construction of salience, I posit, at the level of theory, I can expect parties to become more accepting of minority groups as part of their platforms when public opinion changes favoring queer minorities. This leads me to my first novel hypothesis that I make surrounding this idea of salience, when the public increasingly accepts queer persons, parties will reflect this by being more supportive of minorities in the public platforms.

H₁: As public opinion surrounding the acceptance of queer persons increases, a party’s platform of acceptance of minorities will increase.

Tangential to my first hypothesis, there is an additional hypothesis that I seek to test that contends with a party’s measure of general acceptance of minorities and equality within their platform as a function of the public’s opinion surrounding queer persons.

H₂: As public opinion surrounding the acceptance of queer persons increases, a party's platform will espouse more equality.

There are a few causal mechanisms that I believe exert an influence on a party's platform that has led me to these expectations. First is the notion that parties are rational, office-seeking actors that want power. Based on Spoon and Klüver's (2014) findings I can expect parties to seek oppressed voters to attempt to parlay additional votes. If parties are indeed rational vote seeking actors, then the expectation is that as queer persons become more salient across European countries, then parties will try to pander to that new voting bloc in an attempt to garner a larger vote share. Similarly, parties will generally be more accepting of minorities because there is a sort of solidarity created between persons of oppressed identities. The second primary mechanism I suspect here is generally related to the second hypothesis centered around equality, that as a means to support minority movements, generally parties will espouse more equality as part of their platform in an attempt to gain vote shares.

Data and Methodology

Dependent Variable

The dependent variables for this analysis are based on The Manifesto Project's 2022 dataset which captures the two variables that are sought to be analyzed as a part of this study. The Manifesto Project dataset runs from 1981 to 2021 and for this project captures 2,870 manifestos from 975 parties in 44 different countries. The Manifesto Project measures the acceptance of underprivileged minority groups by their favorability in party manifestos, this is specifically statements in party manifestos that are positive about these specific groups, and not just general mentions of equality, which is one of the reasons for the differencing of the

hypotheses. The second variable, a party's favoring of equality, is based on a manifesto's mention of social justice and treatment for all people, including social groups, removal of class barriers, fair distribution of resources, and the end of racial and sexual discrimination(s) (Volkens et al 2020). To be able to capture the change in a party's manifesto over time in relation to the change in public opinion, I employ a differenced model which will be further discussed within the methodological section of this paper. While prior work has connected an aggregate score of public opinion to party changes, this work aims to be the first to systematically examine how specific issue salience can impact a party's platform to change.

Independent and Control Variables

To examine the effects of public opinion on a specific issue I turn to the European Values Study (EVS) for the data for the independent variable. The EVS is a survey run in most European countries around once a decade since the 1940s (for obvious reasons the data has been paired down to surveys run in the time frame available for the manifestos project) and it collects data about different issues that deal with issues of different values. One specific variable that they collect of interest is "How Justifiable is Homosexuality?". This question first appeared in the 1981 EVS (convenient for the purposes of our sample) and ranges on a Likert scale ranging from 1 for "Never Justifiable" to 10 for "Always Justifiable" (EVS 2022). From this, I was able to average the respondent's answers by country/year to reach an average public opinion score on the issue for each year. The data were then merged into the Manifesto Project dataset based on the country where the values were inserted for observations that fell in the survey range. So, each party manifesto in a certain country that fell within a survey's range could be compared to that score. This coding scheme might appear to be fairly odd, but for the purposes of this analysis are

the best measures available for a long-term analysis, and should provide a reasonable test of the hypotheses presented in this analysis.

Controls for this project are slim for this iteration, but the model still employs a few basic controls to try and capture the effects of our actual independent variable. Within each model I include five control variables within the regression analysis. The controls for this analysis are party orientation, infant mortality rate, a country's gross domestic product, the country's regime type, and whether or not the party is a niche party. Party orientation is measured based on categories that were made based on the Right-Left index included as part of the Manifestos project original data set, they've been categorized on a scale of one to nine with extreme left parties being categorized as one and extreme right parties being categorized as nine, this just provides a cleaner visualization of the Right-Left index while statistically holding the same value. Infant mortality rate is included as a proxy variable for general economic conditions of a country's citizenry and measured as deaths/1000 live births and is based on annual infant mortality data from the United Nations, while economic performance, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from the World Bank is also controlled for as part of the model to measure how well the country's economy is doing, together these two will give us key insight into the economic conditions of citizens and a country at large. To measure a country's regime type, I employ data from Values of Democracy (VDEM), which can help to understand whether the change I see is actually parties changing in response to public opinion or if the parties are changing because they are part of a liberal democracy. The final control included as part of this analysis is for niche parties, niche parties are notorious for being fairly stoic in terms of change in platforms, and also have been found previously to be a factor that exerts influence on more middled parties (Adams et al. 2006; Abou-Chadi 2014). While the controls for this first analysis are fairly slim, they

should provide a robust test of the independent variables assumed to be having an influence on what causes parties to change positions.

Analysis and Results

Findings

Effects of Public Opinion on Queer Persons on a Party's View of Minorities

Table 1-Regression Estimates	
Public Acceptance of LGBT Minorities	0.05929* (2.35)
Party Type	-0.09271*** (-3.65)
Niche	-0.61448*** (-7.80)
Infant Mortality Rate	0.04035*** (3.58)
GDP	0.00000*** (3.80)
Regime Type	0.13619 (1.00)
Constant	0.44009 (1.13)
Observations	1971
R^2	0.029
Chi-squared	

z statistics in parentheses

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 1 reports the estimates of an ordinary least squared regression model of the EVS's measure of public acceptance for LGBT Minorities on a Party's view of Minorities in their platform. Given our range of control variables, one can see that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship, in line with the expectations of my first hypothesis.

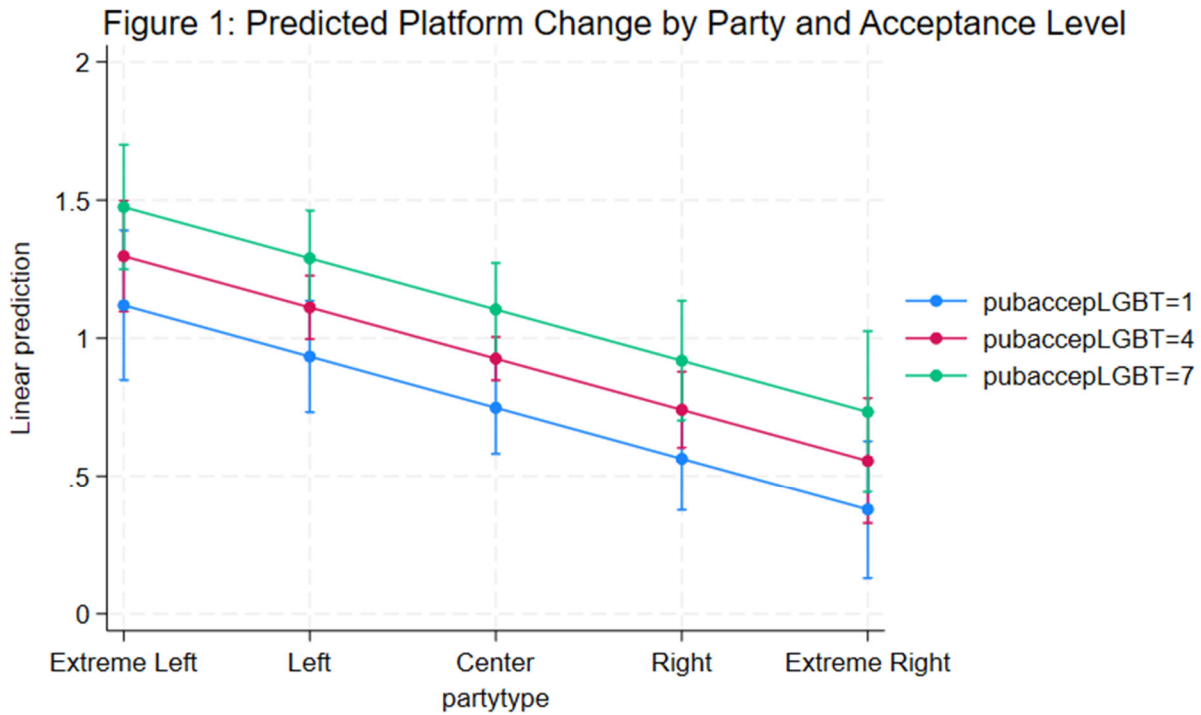


Figure 1 illustrates my hypothesis using predicted probabilities, showing that there is a consistent directional change amongst parties, even when disaggregated amongst party types. Even parties such as the extreme right are motivated towards supporting minorities in their party platforms, albeit, at a much lower rate than their counterparts on the left. This represents an important finding that highlights the power of different salient identities on party platforms.

Effects of Public Opinion on Queer Persons on a Party's View of Equality

Table 2- Regression Estimates	
Public Acceptance of LGBT Minorities	0.26964*** (3.84)
Party Type	-1.11159*** (-15.10)
Niche	0.62794+ (1.87)
Infant Mortality Rate	-0.13497*** (-5.09)
GDP	0.00000 (0.34)
Regime Type	0.28913+ (1.69)
Constant	8.83293*** (15.84)
Observations	1971
R^2	0.182
Chi-squared	

z statistics in parentheses

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2 reports the results of an ordinary least squared regression model of the same measure of the EVS's public opinion measure, however this time testing the impact on a party's platform of general equality for all. Akin to my first model, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the public's view of queer minorities, and how party's platforms change to espouse more equality.

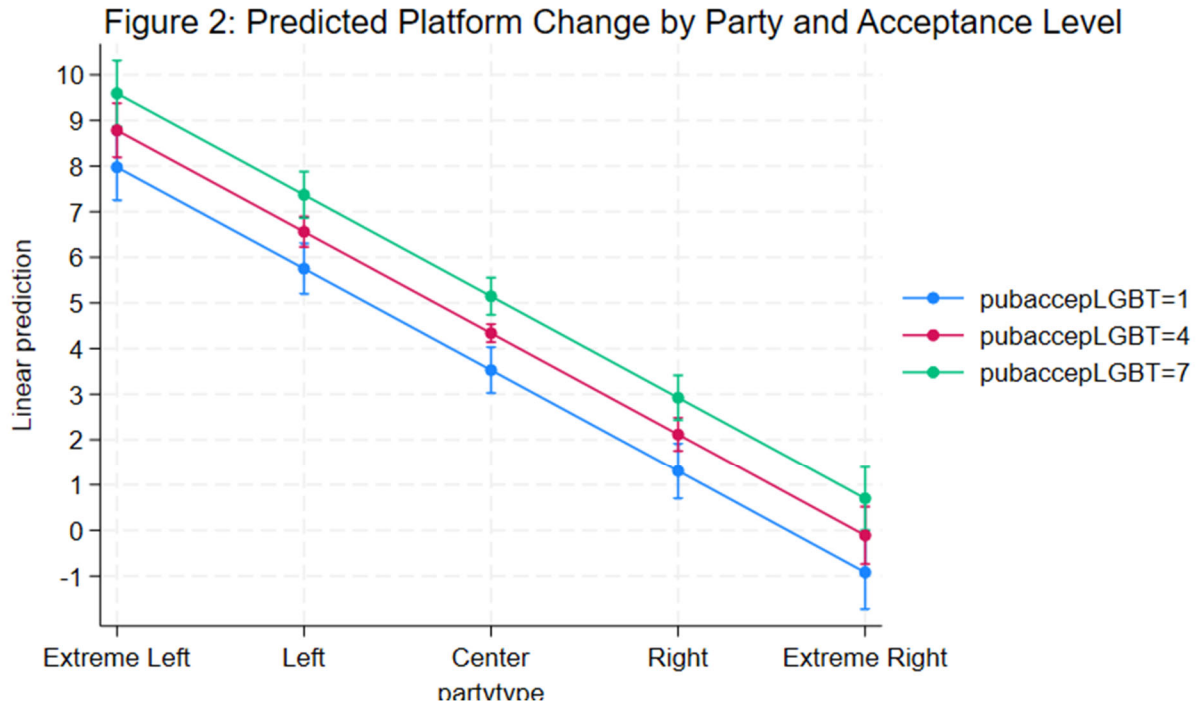


Figure 2 again provides an illustration of the results of the linear model employed in Table 2. Again, one can see a consistent pattern that even parties at the extreme ends of the spectrum, especially far right parties which are much less likely to embrace equality in their platforms, change as the public's views of queer minorities increases. Table 2 and Figure 2 both show strong support for my second hypothesis.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings presented in this paper clearly illustrate that there is a significant and substantive effect of specific issue salience on parties changing their platforms. Not only do parties change their platforms surrounding minority groups, but they also embrace more equality as a result in response to the public opinion increasingly accepting queer persons in Europe. While the literature regarding public opinion and its relationship to party platforms has a rich history, this finding recognizes a key connection that requires more scholarly attention in the discipline. Extant work generally does not focus on specific issue salience as a means of

changing parties, this represents a novel first step towards broadening the horizons of this corpus of work.

There are, however, some limitations of the model and data that should be discussed for the sake of transparency. While this paper would optimally like to test the relationship between specific issue salience and public opinion surrounding queer persons, the measures in the party manifestos project don't exist in an unaggregated form at this moment. As such should be the pursuance of future work as part of this research agenda. For the current project, I used minority acceptance as a dependent variable since the manifestos project specifically lists the LGBT+ group as a part of that constructed measure and is what is in existence at the time of writing. Additionally, the R^2 from model one points to the idea that there might need to be some refining of the first model further.

Utilizing the outlined theoretical framework that parties are rational, the findings of the models reflect the expectations of the two hypotheses presented as a part of this paper. Parties should be reacting to public opinion and specifically, issue salience as a means to maintain and parlay this to gain a greater vote share in elections. The findings also corroborate the literature that parties are responsive to public opinion and that I should expect shifts based on public opinion, however, this is the first that links it to specific issue salience. These findings also illustrate a crucial first step in the advancement of a novel queer-politics agenda in the discipline of political science. The findings show that queer issues and acceptance are a growing part of politics and as such, it is critically important to keep calling attention to queer issues and their impacts on the political arena, this manuscript tries to make a critical first step in this direction to study the impact of queer persons and queer issues in the political realm.

To conclude, it is my hope that continued attention is given to queer politics and specific issue salience when considering parties. While this paper provides a necessary first step to examining some of the effects queer persons and issue salience has on parties, more work is required to better understand the nexus between issue salience and parties, how parties are responding to the growing amount of queer citizens globally, and queer persons and the political sphere. As mentioned earlier, future iterations of this research seek to be able to disaggregate the minority acceptance and protections measure of the party manifestos project to be able to directly tie queer acceptance in public opinion to a party's acceptance of queer persons and the propping up of queer issues in their manifestos.

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