

Study uncovers link between anti-immigrant prejudices and support for LGBT+ rights

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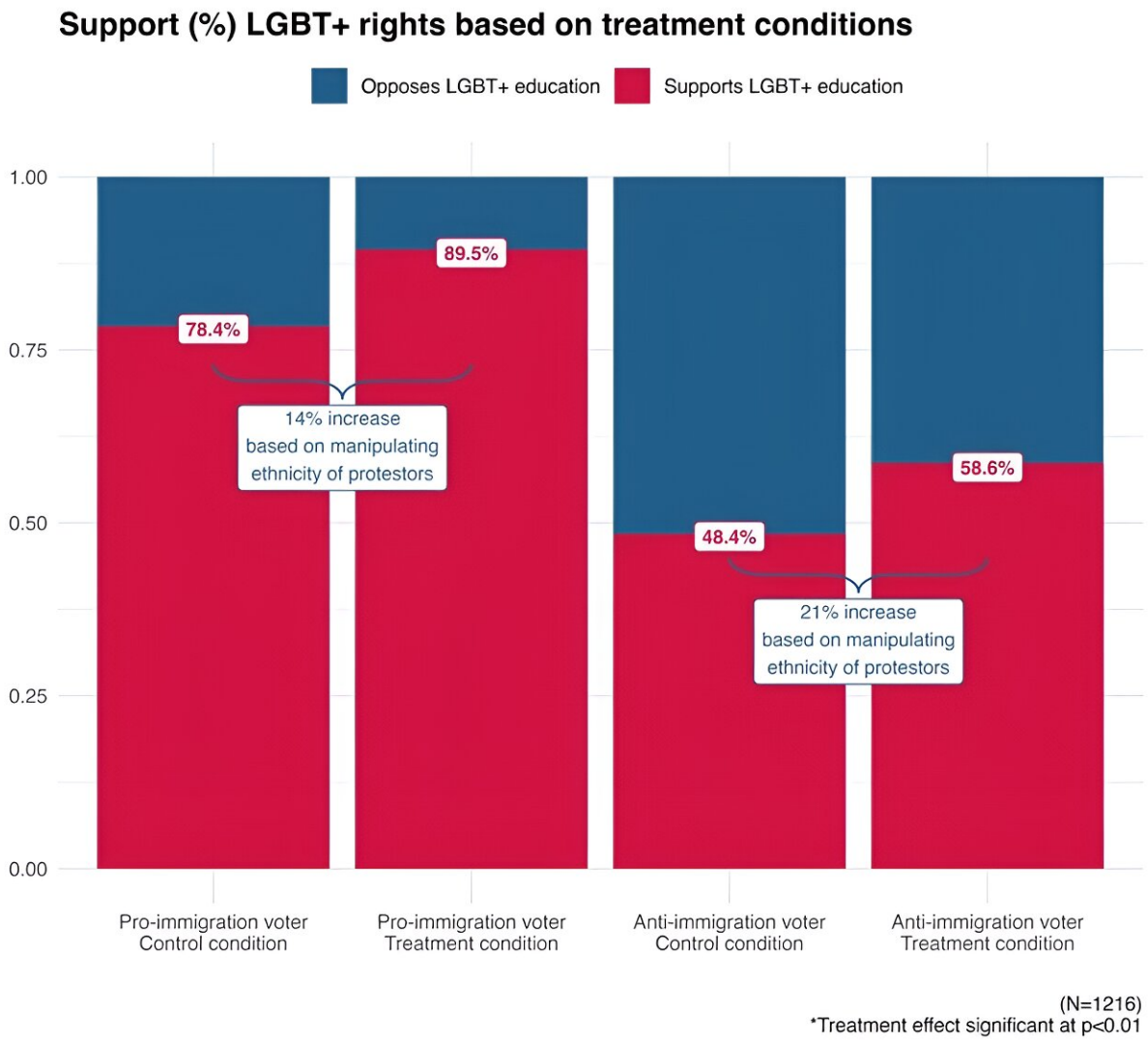


Table showing: Support (%) LGBT+ rights based on treatment conditions.
Credit: Stuart Turnbull-Dugarte

Cross-national research carried out by the University of Southampton and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VUA) into public opinion on LGBT+ rights has shown that anti-immigrant prejudices, particularly towards Muslims, contributes to explaining some of the widespread shifts in tolerance towards the LGBT+ community. Findings of a new study show this was especially evident among socially conservative voters.

The rise of tolerance towards LGBT+ individuals in Western democracies could be seen as remarkable, according to the researchers. Whereas a majority of citizens rejected the idea of same-sex marriage a couple of decades ago, a majority of citizens in Europe, the US and elsewhere—regardless of their political attachment to the left or right—support this policy and LGBT+ rights more generally.

However, in an original social experiment, Stuart Turnbull-Dugarte of the University of Southampton and Alberto López Ortega of VUA discovered that shifts in tolerance towards LGBT+ individuals are far more superficial than first assumed and are heavily conditioned by who the opponents of LGBT+ rights are.

The researchers' findings are published in the *American Political Science Review*.

The authors' experiment, which involved 2,400 individuals from the UK and Spain, showed individuals a news story about anti-LGBT+ protests. The researchers randomized whether the protestors presented in the news story were white individuals with typical "Western" names or whether they were non-white individuals in typical Muslim dress and had typical Islamic names. The participants were then asked their views on LGBT+ inclusive education in schools.

The results of the social experiment revealed that those shown the [news stories](#) with Muslim protestors were significantly more inclined to express positive support for LGBT+ rights compared to those shown the news stories with non-Muslim protestors.

These differences were greatest among those who held more [conservative views](#) on immigration, who typically also hold more conservative views on LGBT+ rights. These experimental changes in support were shown to be of great significance, equal to a difference in support for LGBT+ of 21% in some cases. The findings also showed, to a lesser extent, an increase from those with more liberal views.

Turnbull-Dugarte said, "'The enemy of my enemy is my friend' is a proverb that's familiar to many. What we show here is that this proverb also helps us understand how views towards LGBT+ rights have liberalized so quickly among traditionally conservative-minded voters with prejudicial views, who are more likely to reject LGBT+ rights advances and the cultural changes that come about from migration.

"In a context where ethnic minorities, in this case Muslims, are perceived to oppose one of the other groups that social conservatives dislike—like the LGBT+ community—we show that these same nativist voters are happy to back LGBT+ rights advances to distance themselves from other minorities to legitimize their anti-immigration stance. This may indicate that the liberal credentials of the UK, and other [western nations](#), is likely far more superficial than first thought."

This study speaks to the wider efficacy of political strategies used by far-right actors, in the UK and elsewhere, to legitimize their anti-immigration policy positions and drive selective liberalism in other progressive policy areas such as those related to women's rights and environmental protections.

More information: Instrumentally Inclusive: The Political Psychology of Homonationalism, *American Political Science Review* (2023). [DOI: 10.1017/S0003055423000849](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000849)

Provided by University of Southampton

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