

Rainbow ballots: introducing the Italian LGBTIQ+ electoral survey 2024

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Abstract:

The development of an empirics-based political science agenda on the electoral dimension of LGBTIQ+ citizens has been traditionally hindered by the widespread lack of individual-level data related to the sensitivity of their identity, including in Italy. In this paper, we contribute to the literature by first presenting an innovative survey, providing novel public-opinion data on the political participation, issue attitudes, and vote choice of a large number of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens. We detail the rationale and challenges related to our research, leading to our strategic approach to the development of a self-selected sample based on an original sampling technique. On this basis, in an area of public debate often dominated by clichés rather than scientific evidence, we introduce first empirics on Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents. In line with existing studies from other Western national contexts, our LGBTIQ+ sample is active in civil society and politics – albeit not “activist” –, consistently votes in elections, and is markedly left-wing in values, issue attitudes, and vote choice. We discuss the scientific and societal contributions of our paper in detail.

Keywords:

Survey data; LGBTIQ+ politics; issue attitudes; voting behaviour; political participation; Italy.

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1. Introduction

The political science subfield of LGBTIQ+ politics, long marginalised within the discipline, has recently been expanding, especially across North American and Western European countries (Mucciaroni, 2011; Paternotte, 2018; Magni, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020; Prearo & Trastulli, 2024). We mention here two broad reasons amongst the main ones as to why the expansion of a subdiscipline on LGBTIQ+ politics is fundamental and should be further encouraged. The first and most important one is the progressive inclusion towards the consideration of political LGBTIQ+ topics, LGBTIQ+ citizens, and even LGBTIQ+ scholars – who are often most, albeit not all, of the researchers on these matters – as equally worthy objects and authors of scientific inquiry within the discipline (Novkov & Barclay, 2010). The second reason is substantive in nature, and should be of interest to all political scientists and especially electoral scholars. Emerging comparative evidence shows that the LGBTIQ+ population – which is numerically sizeable across domestic Western societies (e.g., IPSOS, 2024) – thinks politically, participates, and votes differently (Hertzog, 1996; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020; Turnbull-Dugarte & Townsley, 2020; Hunklinger & Ferch, 2020; Jones, 2021; Grahn, 2024; Prearo, Trastulli, & Pansardi, 2024; Chan & Magni, 2025); LGBTIQ+ issues have become increasingly politicised by elite-level actors, such as parties and political leaders, and citizens alike (Paternotte, 2018; Abou-Chadi, Breyer, & Gessler, 2021); and causal evidence shows how such politicisation is effective in making citizens at large varyingly – often, less – supportive of LGBTIQ+ rights, especially when instrumental (Turnbull-Dugarte & López Ortega, 2024). Already these reasons contribute, in our view, to making the scientific and empirics-based investigation of LGBTIQ+ citizens and their political dimension important.

A particular challenge specifically for electoral and political behaviour studies within this subdiscipline is the widespread lack of individual-level data related to LGBTIQ+ citizens. Gathering information on citizens' gender identity and sexual orientation comes with both methodological and practical difficulties, so much so that even census-wise this information is only routinely collected in a few countries, such as England and Wales since 2021 (Guyan, 2022). In other words, the social stigmatisation of LGBTIQ+ citizens and sensitivity of LGBTIQ+ identity makes citizens from gender and sexual minorities a so-called 'hard-to-reach' population (Khouri, 2020), frequently leaving researchers interested in such subpopulations without sampling frames or data altogether. In turn, the lack of empirical data on LGBTIQ+ citizens' political attitudes, priorities, voting behaviour, and broader patterns of participation and mobilisation risk hindering an evidence-based equalising policy action. This

would be a crucial obstacle to the improved substantive and descriptive representation of LGBTIQ+ citizens: a fundamental prerequisite, in liberal democracies, to fully realise their democratic citizenship.

In this paper, we present the first survey conducted to specifically gather political information related to LGBTIQ+ citizens in Italy. This effort follows in the footsteps of analogous and innovative projects, recently conducted by colleagues across Western European institutions in countries such as Austria and Germany (Hunklinger & Ferch, 2020; Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024). As such, this paper will have the goal of illustrating the research rationale, design characteristics and methodological choices, and first descriptive results related to our survey investigation. This project allowed for the collection of precious data concerning a socially marginalised but numerically sizeable subpopulation of our country, whose political characteristics are often understood in anecdotal and stereotypical ways rather than through actual evidence – partly because of its very lack. As such, this effort is not only important for more effective strategies to target this subpopulation by policy-makers and political parties, but also for the increased social – and, therefore, also scientific – inclusion of LGBTIQ+ citizens, including specifically in Italian political science.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section describes the survey as a research project, devoting particular attention to its design and methodological features. The following section briefly illustrates descriptive evidence on the final sample, especially focussing on LGBTIQ+ identity and other sociodemographic characteristics. Subsequently, we first provide here large-N descriptive evidence on the attitudes, political participation, and voting behaviour of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens. Concluding remarks follow.

2. The Italian LGBTIQ+ electoral survey

The sensitivity of LGBTIQ+ identity and the lack of an Italian census tradition in gathering data on citizens' gender and sexual minority status meant that, similarly to comparable Western European cases (Hunklinger & Ferch, 2020; Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024), the effort of conducting a survey investigation was further complicated by the lack of a sampling frame regarding the Italian LGBTIQ+ population. Therefore, we had to rely on a self-selected sample for our survey (Groves, Fowler, Couper, Lepkowski, Singer, & Tourengeau, 2009). This comes with an obvious, but profound consequence, which we should clearly acknowledge from the

outset: by design, our data cannot be representative of the entire Italian LGBTIQ+ population,¹ but only of its respondents.

In this scenario, we opted for an original survey distribution and sampling strategy. We independently designed the survey on Qualtrics and distributed it across multiple channels with a twofold goal: maximising the outreach of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens and, as best as possible, compensating for the lack of a sampling frame by seeking to reach multiple profiles of LGBTIQ+ respondents and not only those that could have been more prone to responding to a political and electoral survey (i.e., activists in associations or politics). As LGBTIQ+ respondents who are also LGBTIQ+ activists may share a broad commonality of political positions, which however may not necessarily represent the entire spectrum of political views amongst LGBTIQ+ citizens (e.g., Hunklinger & Ajanović, 2022; Sibley, 2024), it was important for our survey investigation to also go beyond this subset of respondents. To achieve this differentiation in our sample, we hence distributed our survey through not only some of the largest LGBTIQ+ associations in Italy (e.g., Arcigay), but also through internet advertising managed by a hired firm (including search engine ads on Google, YouTube, and websites spaces), articles and advertisements in print newspapers, social media posts, and snowballing in personal networks. The proportion of valid responses to our survey originating from every distribution channel is reported in Table 1, where another important information is also reported: of 2604 respondents, more than half (1438, 55.2%) reported not being active or participating in the activities of LGBTIQ+ associations, and only 24.9% (649) defined themselves as LGBTIQ+ activists.

Our survey was in the field immediately after the 2024 European Parliament (EP) election, held between 6-9 June 2024 across European Union (EU) member states and specifically on 8 and

Table 1
Information on LGBTIQ+ sample composition

Distribution channel	% of sample (N=2604)
Press and media advertisement	20.3
LGBTIQ+ associations	18.7
Social media posts	45.5
Personal networks	15.5
Participate in LGBTIQ+ associations' activities	44.8
LGBTIQ+ activists	24.9

¹ Importantly, this population is inherently and ultimately unknown, because there may well be a sizeable portion of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens who are not out.

9 June in Italy. As such, similarly to established public opinion studies, it is a post-electoral survey, with the advantages brought about in terms of data quality and reliability by the heightened salience of politics during an electoral event, which primes and mobilises citizens' political views, therefore enhancing the survey's ability to authentically capture them (e.g., Hernández, Anduiza, & Rico, 2021). In line with comparable studies,² our survey was online for 5 weeks, between 10 June 2024 and 15 July 2024. Upon fieldwork completion, significant data cleaning and management of the 3888 responses originally received were required. First, the vast majority of problematic responses (1066) were incomplete ones, which we dropped. Subsequently, based on prior estimates of the time required for survey completion, we also excluded an additional number of 'speed-runners', whilst also checking for potential response sets (overall, 216 additional responses). Lastly, we eliminated a few remaining responses containing nonsensical or not respectful information with regard to our questions on gender identity and sexual orientation (2), to obtain our final sample made up of the aforementioned 2604 valid responses.

Our survey was made up of an introductory section, two screening questions, and seven substantive modules. In the introductory section, we first provided a general introduction to our survey investigation and research project, providing them with our contact details. On two separate pages, we subsequently provided respondents with detailed information on, first, the research purposes and sensitive aspects related to the participation in our survey and, second, data treatment in line with Article 13 of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and university policy. In order to proceed, potential respondents had to then declare that they were informed by us on both such aspects and, consequently, happy to go ahead with the survey. With no other means at our disposal, we then employed screening questions in order to only allow people who were both LGBTIQ+ and of voting age (in Italy, 18 and older) to answer our survey. We hence filtered out all those respondents who did not declare being LGBTIQ+ and reported an age younger than 18 from our survey, preventing them from answering the questionnaire.

Respondents who made it through all such steps were eligible to take our survey and, hence, administered its seven substantive modules. The first module was a warm-up opening section on specific sociodemographic information that, however, already included important questions on gender identity and sexual orientation for our purposes. Following and elaborating on best

² For instance, see the methodological information on the Austrian and German LGBTIQ* Election Studies project: <https://www.uni-giessen.de/en/faculties/f03/departments/dps/research/areas/germany/lgbtiq>.

practices in the field (e.g., Medeiros, Forest, & Öhberg, 2019; Herman, 2014; Albaugh, Harell, Loewen, Rubenson, & Stephenson, 2024; IPSOS, 2024), we asked multiple questions to capture the gender identity of respondents. Indeed, we both asked about sex assigned at birth (female/male response options) and sex reported on IDs, which in Italy can only be male or female. In addition to a subsequent gender identity question (“*How would you currently describe yourself?*”) with several response options (woman, man, trans woman, trans man, trans non-binary, non-binary/genderfluid, and other with possibility for an open response), this further allowed us to distinguish between cisgender (cis) and transgender (trans) respondents that may not otherwise have been captured solely based on the gender identity information. Furthermore, we asked respondents about their sexual orientation, providing multiple response options such as heterosexual (a possible response option for some trans/non-binary respondents), gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, fluid, and including the possibility of both providing an open response or not defining one’s sexual orientation. Separately, we also asked whether respondents are intersexual, providing a brief definition of this more complex concept to enhance the question’s clarity (“*Some people are born with sexual characteristics (such as genitalia and/or some chromosomal combinations) that do not correspond strictly to the male or female categories, or correspond to both simultaneously. This condition is known as intersex*”). The first module ended with questions on respondents’ region and urban/rural context of residence.

In the following modules, we followed practices and indications emerging from both established electoral (e.g., the Italian National Election Study, Itanes: Vezzoni, Basile, Garzia, Maggini, Mancosu, & Paparo, 2023; and Issue Competition Comparative Project, ICCP: De Sio, Emanuele, Maggini, Paparo, Angelucci, & D’Alimonte, 2019) and sociological LGBTIQ+-oriented surveys (e.g., EU FRA, 2020; Gusmeroli & Trappolin, 2023). The second module asked respondents about their relationship with politics and democracy, with questions tapping into classical concepts of public opinion research such as political interest, vertical and horizontal trust, democratic attitudes, mobilisation within political and non-political associations and organisations, and LGBTIQ+ activism.

In the third module, we asked LGBTIQ+ respondents about their opinions on LGBTIQ+ political issues that have been salient in Italian public debates in recent years. Covered issues include the evolution of discrimination towards LGBTIQ+ people and underlying reasons, same-sex marriage (see, e.g., Flores, 2015) and adoptions, medically assisted procreation, surrogacy, and trans/non-binary issues such as specific discrimination, simplified administrative procedures to change IDs, and the so-called “*carriera alias*” – the possibility to

use a different name for administrative and registry purposes in schools and universities. As per above, more complex concepts such as medically assisted procreation and surrogacy were briefly and clearly explained to respondents in the questions. Note that, because of the generally more favourable public opinion on specific issues when the beneficiaries are heterosexual couples (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2024), questions on such topics also include positive response options that differentiate between hetero and same-sex couples or other recipients of said measures (e.g., on medically assisted procreation: “*Only heterosexual couples should have access to this practice*” versus “*Single women, but not lesbian couples, should also have access to this practice*” versus “*Single women and lesbian couples should also have access to this practice*”; on surrogacy: “*Yes, in all cases*” versus “*Yes, but only for heterosexual couples*”). The fourth module builds on sociological LGBTIQ+-oriented surveys to ask our respondents about experiences related to their LGBTIQ+ identity, which may also be powerful predictors of political and electoral behaviour. This module includes questions about trans/non-binary people’s access to dedicated services and their underlying reasons, outness in different social settings, as well as different types of violence, discrimination, and contexts in which one fears being out.

The fifth and sixth modules are more canonical within electoral surveys. They respectively tackle, on the one hand, further economic and political issues, including respondents’ opinions on the Italian Parliament’s rejection in 2021 of the legislative proposal on LGBTIQ+- and disability-motivated hate crime known as “*DDL Zan*”, most important issues, as well as attitudes on immigration and climate change; and, on the other hand, typical variables of political participation and public opinion research such as left-right self-placement, party identification, leader appreciation, government evaluation, vote recall and abstention, negative voting, and descriptive representation. Finally, the concluding module capped off the survey with final sociodemographic questions on respondents’ marital and family status, level of education, religiousness, ethnicity, occupation, class self-identification, and economic well-being.

3. Our Italian LGBTIQ+ sample

Table 2 presents information about fundamental characteristics of our sample of Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents on their gender and sexual minority status, as well as on other important sociodemographics. In terms of gender identity, it is evident that cisgender respondents are the

Table 2

Respondents' gender identity, sexual orientation, and other sociodemographic characteristics

Gender and sexual minority status	% of sample (N=2604)
Cis men	49.7
Cis women	32
Trans and non-binary	13.8
Other gender identity	3.1
Heterosexual	1.5
Gay	45.3
Lesbian	19.2
Bisexual/Pansexual	23.4
Asexual	2.5
Fluid	1.5
Other sexual orientation	2.9
Refuse to define sexual orientation	3
Other sociodemographic characteristics	
Residing in the North of Italy	63.9
Residing in the Centre of Italy	18.2
Residing in the South of Italy	12.8
Residing abroad	5
Residing in urban contexts	82.4
Residing in rural contexts	17.6
18-29	30.7
30-44	41.7
45-54	15.1
>55	12.5
Primary education (up to middle-school diploma)	2.2
Secondary education (high-school diploma or equivalent)	23.7
Tertiary education (three-year university degree and above)	74.1
Secular (agnostic/atheist)	72.2
Catholic	13.3
Practising catholic (attends church at least once a week)	2.9
Non-practising catholic	10.2
Employed	77.9
Not in employment	22.1
Ethnic minority	3.3
Ethnic majority	95.8
Lower classes	30.7
Middle class	52.1
Higher classes	17.8

vast majority in our sample, with a prevalence of cis men (49.7%) over cisgender women (32%). Trans and non-binary respondents constitute a minority, although sizeable, of our LGBTIQ+ sample (13.8%) – especially amongst the youngest (24.4% of 18-to-29-year-olds, compared to 12% in the 30-44 cohort; 9.1% in the 45-54 cohort; and 9.2% of over-55s).³ Cautiously, we reckon this may be interpreted as signalling a potentially diminished reticence in coming out for younger trans and non-binary Italian citizens, compared to older generations. The information on sexual orientation reported in Table 2 is also interesting. Namely, gays are by far the largest sexual-orientation subgroup in our sample of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens, accounting for almost one in two respondents (45.3%). Bisexuals/pansexuals and lesbians follow from a distance (respectively, 23.4% and 19.2%), whilst the more inclusive outlook from which we developed our survey compared to traditional political and electoral surveys – as well as our target population – allowed for reaching sizeable subgroups of respondents from other sexual minorities (7.5% pansexuals, 2.5% asexuals, 1.5% fluid, etc.). Concerning the main sexual orientation subgroups, it is noteworthy that the proportion of ‘gay’ respondents – perhaps an older ‘umbrella term’ – linearly increases in older cohorts (28.8% in the 18-29 cohort; 47.5% in the 30-44 cohort; 59.4% in the 45-54 cohort; and 61.9% in the over-55 cohort), whilst the opposite applies to the proportion of ‘bisexual/pansexual’ respondents, largest amongst youngest respondents (38.5% in the 18-29 cohort; 19.9% in the 30-44 cohort; 12.2% in the 45-54 cohort; and 11.7% in the over-55 cohort).⁴ Naturally, the heterosexual subgroup – by definition confined to trans and non-binary respondents only – constitutes a much tinier portion of our sample here compared to usual heteronormative contexts (1.5%).

The data on gender and sexual minorities from our LGBTIQ+ sample already allow for two initial but important considerations. First, these internal proportions and particularly the predominance of gay men are in line with existing evidence, particularly from the Austrian and German LGBTIQ* Election Studies Project. Second, the fact that cis men and gays constitute the relative majority of our sample should be a further indication of the fact that, ultimately, this selection of

respondents is not representative of our target and unknown Italian LGBTIQ+ population, but rather of those LGBTIQ+ citizens that we reached who chose to come out to us on this occasion and respond to our survey. That these male, cisgender, and gay subgroups were prevalent

³ Specifically, we provided trans and non-binary respondents with four distinct response options: non-binary/genderfluid (7.7%), trans/non-binary (2.3%), trans/non-binary men (1.5%), and trans/non-binary women (2.3%).

⁴ Across cohorts, ‘lesbian’ respondents in our Italian LGBTIQ+ sample are 16% (18-29), 22% (30-44), 19.3% (45-54), and 17.5% (over-55s).

reflects known patterns of coming out within the broader LGBTIQ+ community, which in turn are linked to the internal power imbalances between different gender and sexual subgroups (male over female, cis over trans, etc.).

Beyond gender and sexual minority status, Table 2 provides additional interesting information on the sociodemographics of our LGBTIQ+ sample. First, looking at the traditional geopolitical areas of Italy, the vast majority of our LGBTIQ+ respondents – almost two out of three (63.9%) – resides in the North of Italy. Much fewer people live in the Centre (18.2%) or, even less, the South (12%) of Italy, whilst we were also able to reach a sizeable portion of Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents living abroad (5%).⁵ These patterns of geographical distribution seem to reflect well-known political, social, and cultural characteristics of the different areas of Italy, with the generally more socially liberal Northern areas of the country – particularly, Lombardia driven by the large hub of Milano (23%) – more frequently represented than the Centre – although with several respondents from regions with big cities such as Lazio (9.4%) and Toscana (6.5%) – and, especially, the South of Italy. This idea is complemented by looking at the urban versus rural distribution of our LGBTIQ+ respondents, corresponding to a well-known division in the literature between, respectively, more or less LGBTIQ+-friendly and socially liberal settings (e.g., Ayoub & Kollman, 2021; Aldrich, 2004; Gray, 2009). Indeed, 82.4% of our LGBTIQ+ respondents live in urban contexts such as cities and small-to-medium towns whilst only 17.6% of them live in villages and in the countryside.

Age-wise, our LGBTIQ+ sample is mostly made up of young adults, with the largest age classes being 30-44 (41.7%) and 18-29 (30.7%). Older age groups, namely 45-54 (15.1%) and over-55s (12.5%), are comparatively less represented in our sample. This configuration of respondents at different ages reflects both the bias introduced by the computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) surveying technique that we adopted, usually mitigated by applying survey weights when a sampling frame is available; and the generational dynamics underpinning the outness of LGBTIQ+ citizens, since coming out has become much more common for LGBTIQ+ citizens socialised in more recent years (Dunlap, 2016). Notwithstanding these observations, this data seems overall in line – on first sight, slightly older – with LGBTIQ+ subsamples from comparable general-population survey investigations in Italy (e.g., Prearo et al., 2024, p. 7).

⁵ North: Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Lombardia, Piemonte, Trentino-Alto Adige, Veneto, Valle d'Aosta. Centre: Lazio, Marche, Umbria, Toscana. South: Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Molise, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia.

Finally, the last sociodemographic descriptives of Table 2 depict an LGBTIQ+ subsample made up of mostly higher-educated (74.1%), secular (72.2%) – although with a sizeable Catholic minority, mostly non-practising (10.2%) –, employed (77.9%), and ethnic-majority respondents (95.8%), mainly from the middle (52.1%) and lower classes (30.7%). Again, this large subgroup of stigmatised gender and sexual minorities should not be seen as a monolithic bloc, but rather as very differentiated and internally reflecting additional social divisions and imbalances of power, leaving smaller minorities of citizens experiencing intersectionality – e.g., our LGBTIQ+ respondents from an ethnic minority (3.3%) – in a position of multiple disadvantage and heightened vulnerability.

4. The political preferences of LGBTIQ+ Italian citizens

What do Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens look like politically? Here, we first provide empirical and large-N evidence on the politics of Italians from gender and sexual minorities. Before delving into their attitudes and voting behaviour, it is useful to take a preliminary step in looking at their predisposition to political mobilisation.

Are Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens an active subpopulation in civil society and politics? Table 3 seems to suggest so: when looking at participation in the activities of associations and organisations spanning from political parties, trade unions and non-party political associations and collectives to LGBTIQ+ associations, NGOs, youth organisations, environmental associations, religious movements, consumers' associations, cultural and arts centres, sports clubs, and volunteering, one in two of our LGBTIQ+ respondents report being actively involved in activities within one of such contexts. The other half of our sample is almost equally split between those that are active in two (22.9%) or three (27.1%) of these contexts, highlighting the civic dynamism of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens – especially vis-à-vis the Italian general population, which is most frequently inactive from a civic and political viewpoint (with 53.5% of Italians not participating in the activities of any of the aforementioned associations and organisations; Prearo et al., 2024).

Is this civic engagement specifically within LGBTIQ+ associations and/or political in nature? From the data in Table 3, the answer to this twofold question seems positive with regard to the first aspect and negative with regard to the second aspect. Indeed, almost one in two respondents report participating in the activities of LGBTIQ+ associations (44.8%), although – as per Table 1 – the proportion of those defining themselves as LGBTIQ+ activists is smaller (24.9%). Conversely, political mobilisation in the form of being active and participating in the

Table 3

LGBTIQ+ respondents' civic and political mobilisation (“being active in”/“participating in the activities related to” mentioned contexts)

Active in associations	% of sample (N=2604)
Active in 1 association	50
Active in 2 associations	22.9
Active in more than 2 associations	27.1
Active in LGBTIQ+ association	44.8
Active in political party	8.8
Active in LGBTIQ+ association and political party	5.9
Active in trade union	11.1
Active in non-party political association	11.8

initiatives of, especially, parties (8.8%), as well as non-party political collectives (11.8%) and even trade unions (11.1%) is much rarer, contributing to the idea that the societal role of such intermediate bodies is declining (e.g., Ebbinghaus & Visser, 2000; van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). It follows that, contrary to the widespread stereotype that sees members of the Italian LGBTIQ+ community as very highly involved both politically and in LGBTIQ+ associations, the overlap between these two contexts of civil and political mobilisation captures a mere one out of 20 of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents (5.9%). A finding like this indicates – amongst others – the potential for real-world impact on the public debates surrounding politics and the LGBTIQ+ community based on empirical evidence, rather than anecdotal notions.

If we were to vaguely follow a “funnel-of-causality” approach to the formulation of political preferences and, especially, electoral behaviour (Campbell, et al., 1960), the first political “stop” following from the aforementioned sociodemographic characteristics of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents would be their left-right self-placement. Indeed, amongst our political variables, this heuristic best taps into more general political values, as it ultimately captures people’s predispositions towards legitimacy (on the right) and illegitimacy (on the left) of inequality across several political, economic, and sociocultural domains (e.g., Bobbio, 1997; White, 2011; Trastulli, 2022). Based on both previous empirical evidence (e.g., Prearo et al., 2024) and their status as a socially stigmatised minority striving for the expansion of rights and greater equality, we would expect LGBTIQ+ citizens to consistently self-identify on the left of the political spectrum. This expectation is corroborated by our data, as per Table 4: a whopping 89.7% of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents placed themselves left-of-centre, with almost three out of four defining themselves as left-wing (72.3%). This leaves very few LGBTIQ+

Table 4

Left-right self-placement of LGBTIQ+ respondents

Left-right self-placement	% of sample (N=2604)
Left (0-2)	72.3
Centre-left (3-4)	17.4
Centre (5)	3.1
Centre-right (6-7)	1.9
Right (8-10)	1.4
Refuse to self-place	3.5

respondents in the centre (3.1%) and right-of-centre (3.3%), as well as in the response category ‘Refuse to self-place’ – which in Italy is notoriously primed by the presence of a *sui generis* formation in the Five Star Movement (e.g., Mosca & Tronconi, 2019). In sum, as per existing evidence and prior theoretical hunches, it seems as if Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens are, in fact, able to place themselves along the left-right spectrum and have very clear ideas concerning their location along this political continuum – which is much further to the left than the Italian general population (16.1% ‘left’, 16.6% ‘centre-left’, 10% ‘centre’, 13.3% ‘centre-right’, 19.9% ‘right’, with 21.5% of Italians who would not place themselves along the left-right continuum; Prearo et al., 2024).

Do the left-wing values of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents subsequently translate into coherent issue opinions? Our survey featured the traditional question on which is the most important issue for the people who took our questionnaire, with a broad range of topics that featured in recent and current Italian public debate. As per Table 5, the left-leaning self-identification of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens is fully reflected in the top-3 most important issues that they reported. In particular, socioeconomic inequalities constitute by far the most important issue for our LGBTIQ+ respondents, having been deemed as such in three out of 10 cases (29.2%, compared to a much lower 8.4% amongst the Italian general population; Prearo et al., 2024). Furthermore, the following two political issues on this ‘podium’ of most important topics are climate change and environmental sustainability (17.6%) and the public health system (12.6%). Albeit still a relevant issue – in fact, the most important issue in every one out of 10 respondents (10.1%) –, civil (LGBTIQ+) rights do not emerge as the main political concern for Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens: their role is prominent, but not primary or exclusive of other political priorities. In this regard, our public-opinion evidence converges with élite-level findings on the political priorities of Italian LGBTIQ+ politicians (Prearo & Trastulli, 2025). On the other hand, other issues to which much attention is devoted by political élites and

Table 5

Most important issue for Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents

Most important issue	% of sample (N=2604)
Socioeconomic inequalities	29.2
Climate change and environmental sustainability	17.6
Public health system	12.7
Civil rights	10.1
Fiscal evasion	6.5
Inflation and rising prices	4.2
Economic growth	3.3
Unemployment	3.2
Wars	3.1
Political corruption	2.6
Sovereign debt	2.4
Immigration	1.1
Crime	0.7
Taxes	0.6
Energy supplies	0.5
Constitutional reforms	0.5
Terrorism	0.1
AI	0.1

academic enquiry, such as immigration, constitutional reforms, and terrorism, do not emerge as actually important in the lives of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens.

Furthermore, concerning two highly salient issues such as climate change and, amongst the general population and in party rhetoric, immigration, we know from existing studies that LGBTIQ+ citizens are known for their supportive positions towards multiculturalism and migrants on the one hand – although, within the homonationalism literature, there is a certain tension between viewpoints as such (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2021) and those arguing that LGBTIQ+ citizens are not significantly more pro-immigration than their cis and heterosexual counterparts (Wurthmann, 2024) –, and environmental sustainability on the other hand (Hertzog, 1996; Denise, 2017; Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024). To this end, our data on Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens is fully in line with existing empirics derived from most other national contexts. First, as per Table 6, our Italian LGBTIQ+ sample overwhelmingly supports immigration (89.3%), with a mere one out of 10 respondents divided between those who are against (4.7%) or, mostly, neither against nor in favour of immigration (5.5%) – thus aligning with conclusions such as Turnbull-Dugarte’s (2021). Second, Table 7 shows that more than nine in 10 of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents (89.3%) consider climate change as a high-priority political issue – fully in line with their leftist political orientations (Off & Trastulli,

Table 6

Attitudes on immigration of Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents

Attitudes on immigration	% of sample (N=2604)
Against (0-4)	4.7
Neither against nor in favour (5)	5.5
In favour (6-10)	89.3

Table 7

Priority assigned to climate change by Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents

Priority of climate change	% of sample (N=2604)
High priority	90.3
Medium priority	7.9
Low Priority	1.5

forthcoming) –, whilst those who think the opposite and assign low priority to this issue are a tiny minority (1.5%). Of course, this markedly pro-immigration and pro-environmental configuration of public opinion amongst our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents – against much lower rates of support for immigration (20.1%, versus 59.6% against) and prioritising environmental issues (high priority = 58.4%, medium priority = 31.5%, low priority = 7.1%) in the Italian general population (Prearo et al., 2024) – emerges even in the face of our following methodological best practices in presenting them with two equal and alternative viewpoints in our formulation of the question, as we mentioned that people refer to this issue alternatively as an “emergency” or a “hoax”.

So far, the presented evidence on the politics of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens is in line with existing knowledge in the subfield of LGBTIQ+ public opinion and political participation, highlighting a clear left-wing profile of this subpopulation. Of course, we expect that such a clearly defined political profile is in part a function of the self-selected nature of our sample (similarly to, e.g., Hunklinger & Ferch, 2020; Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024), which – despite the aforementioned precautions in our sampling strategy – inevitably attracts those LGBTIQ+ respondents who are more politically engaged and, in this case, even more left-wing than in subsamples from general-population surveys (e.g., Prearo et al. 2024). Notwithstanding this important caveat, are these leftist values and issue attitudes reflected in coherent patterns of voting behaviour once these Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens go to the polls? Before delving into this aspect, it is first necessary to look at whether this subpopulation tends to go out and vote, or rather often opts not to participate electorally and hence abstain. To this end, two general and opposing viewpoints may emerge: whilst, on the one hand, the sociopolitical stigmatisation of

Table 8

Historical predisposition to vote within Italian LGBTIQ+ sample

Thinking about elections in general, how often did you vote in your life?	% of sample (N=2604)
Always	71.6
Often	22.3
Rarely	4.2
Never	0.7

minority groups may lead to a sense of perceived inefficacy and consequent withdrawal from politics (e.g., Fraga, 2018; Barber & Holbein, 2022), on the other hand such stigmatised minorities may be rationally incentivised to participate politically and electorally to positively change their living conditions, particularly by supporting parties and candidates that may increase their well-being through policy once in power.

From a comparative perspective, the latter seems to be the case for LGBTIQ+ citizens in contemporary Western Europe, who have been shown to display higher turnout rates than their cis and hetero counterparts – indeed, going out to vote “like their rights depended on it” (Turnbull-Dugarte & Townsley, 2020; also see Grahn, 2024). Likewise, our empirical evidence based on Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents seems to also be in line with this latter point of view on the high predisposition to vote of citizens from gender and sexual minorities. Table 8 shows that more than 70% (71.6%) of our LGBTIQ+ sample reports having “always” voted in their lives, whilst an additional 22.3% declare having voted often. The historic predisposition to abstain is hence relegated to a mere almost-5% of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents, highlighting higher levels than amongst Italians at large (e.g., 53.3% ‘always’, ‘rarely’ plus ‘never’ around 13%; Prearo et al., 2024).

Whilst a broad question on the tendency to vote in elections may be answered in general and, therefore, potentially imprecise terms, clearer answers may be elicited by referring to a recent and substantively important electoral contest. Therefore, in our survey, we opted for a separate question on having participated in the latest and substantively fundamental 2022 Italian general election. This contest was extremely important in recent Italian political history not only because it gave the country its first-ever government led by an RRP (Chiaromonte, Emanuele, Maggini, & Paparo, 2022), but also – and relatedly – because it marked the least participated “first-order” election (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) in Italian history (Angelucci, Trastulli, & Tuorto, 2024). To this end, compared to the abstention rate of 36.1% amongst the general population at large, a much lower percentage of our LGBTIQ+ sample – 10% – reports not having voted in this important electoral contest, against 88.4% who did, as per Table 9. Again, this would

Table 9

Participation in latest Italian general election (2022)

Voted in 2022 Italian general election	% of sample (N=2604)
Yes	88.4
No	10

also seem to go in the direction of LGBTIQ+ citizens being incentivised to electorally participate more and vote “like their rights depended on it”, in line with the above evidence – although, here, it is urgent to once more recall the (necessarily) non-representative nature of our survey data.

Notwithstanding this consideration, we can safely assert that Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens in our sample displayed high rates of participation in the 2022 Italian general election – in fact, higher than the general population in Italy. On that occasion, how did they vote – specifically, for *whom*?

A by-now established tenet of the LGBTIQ+ politics subfield and particular the revived “lavender vote” research agenda (e.g., Hertzog, 1996; Bailey, 1999; Egan, 2012; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020; Jones, 2021; Wurthmann, 2023) is that a) LGBTIQ+ citizens display different voting behaviour than their cis and hetero counterparts, and that b) this occurs specifically in a more left-wing direction. As per Table 10, this expectation is fully confirmed vis-à-vis the voting behaviour of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents in the 2022 general election, as – in line with all evidence above – our LGBTIQ+ respondents generally voted much more to the left than the average voter in the 2022 Italian election. The largest party in our LGBTIQ+ sample is the mainstream centre-left Democratic Party, which in proportion was voted twice as much amongst our respondents (38.9%) than in the general population (actual overall vote share of 19%, its second-lowest ever). The second largest party in our sample is the left-wing Green-Left Alliance, whose size is almost tenfold in our LGBTIQ+ sample (28.4%) compared to its actual result (3.6%). This means that the two unequivocally left-of-centre parties within the Italian party system accounted, on their own, for more than two out of three of our LGBTIQ+ respondents who reported having voted at the 2022 general election. Although this may seem as an overinflated leftist vote at face value, this data is perfectly in line with comparable evidence available from other countries on the voting behaviour of LGBTIQ+ citizens.⁶ Consequently, the opposite side of the coin is the underrepresentation, in our Italian LGBTIQ+

⁶ See, for instance, recent data on Germany: <https://www.uni-giessen.de/en/faculties/f03/departments/dps/research/areas/germany/lgbtiq>.

Table 10

Vote choice of Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents at 2022 general election

Party voted for in 2022 general election	% of valid responses (N=2179)
<i>Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra</i>	28.4
<i>Azione – Italia Viva</i>	4.7
<i>Forza Italia</i>	0.4
<i>Fratelli d'Italia</i> (Brothers of Italy)	0.8
<i>Lega</i>	0.1
<i>Movimento 5 Stelle</i> (Five Star Movement)	4.7
<i>Others</i>	6.6
<i>Partito Democratico</i> (Democratic Party)	38.9
<i>Più Europa</i> (More Europe)	15.2

sample, of the centre-right, right-wing, and in particular radical right vote, with winning Brothers of Italy – overall the largest party with 26% of the vote share – being chosen by a mere 0.8% of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents, who overall voted for one of the three largest right-of-centre party only in 1.3% of cases. Therefore, it is safe to say that – in line with most evidence in the literature (e.g., Spierings, 2021; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022) including, e.g., on their pro-immigration stances (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2021) – we do not find evidence within our sample in favour of successful homonationalist electoral targeting of LGBTIQ+ voters on the part of Italian RRP, despite their strategic attempts: i.e., cis LGB voters – but not trans and non-binary – supporting RRP that instrumentally push messages in their favour, often in an anti-migrant and specifically anti-Muslim fashion, as recently done by Brothers of Italy’s youth wing “Atreju”.⁷ Lastly, within this markedly left-wing vote of our Italian LGBTIQ+ respondents at the 2022 general election, it is also substantively interesting to note that centrist and pro-EU formations such as More Europe are considerably overrepresented (15.2% here versus its overall vote share of 2.8%), whilst the atypical Five Star Movement is vastly underrepresented (4.7% versus 15.43%).

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, we introduced an innovative survey investigation on the politics of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens to the literature on LGBTIQ+ politics, Italian politics, and electoral studies more broadly. Our novel data provided, for the first time, large-N empirical evidence on the public opinion, political preferences, and voting behaviour of Italians from gender and sexual

⁷ See, for instance, https://www.instagram.com/p/C7D04VZNS_S/, https://www.instagram.com/atreju_ufficiale/p/DC1n7fANVwO/.

minorities, filling a crucial substantive gap in scholarly knowledge. As our field of inquiry is traditionally marked by difficulties in effectively taking forward scientific investigations of LGBTIQ+ objects of study and particularly so in Italy, not least because of the widespread lack of individual-level political data on LGBTIQ+ citizens, this first presentation of our original survey could not have been complete without mention of the design and methodological difficulties we encountered along the way – as well as the strategies we employed to overcome them to the best of our capabilities. Through our aptly devised sampling strategy and large self-selected sample of Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens, we could thus provide readers with first empirical evidence on the political landscape of fellow Italians from stigmatised gender and sexual minorities. This is a critical contribution, not only to the subfield of LGBTIQ+ politics within the political science, but also to the discipline itself (Ayoub, 2022; Paternotte 2018), as the lack of scientific works within electoral studies on LGBTIQ+ politics often leads – in our view – to the diffusion of notions in public debates that are based on stereotypes, preconceptions, and caricatures rather than empirical evidence.

Here, we present data on a large sample of LGBTIQ+ Italians – characterised by interesting internal differences in terms of LGBTIQ+ subgroups and sociodemographic composition – that, albeit by design not representative of the unknown Italian LGBTIQ+ population, is active in civil society, politically and electorally mobilised, and overwhelmingly left-wing in its values, issue attitudes, and vote choice, even when – in the vast majority of cases – respondents are not LGBTIQ+ activists.

Our contribution to the literature is not limited to providing such evidence and introducing the data upon which it is based, hence opening up the potential for a more informed public debate and providing colleagues who are interested in politics and election with novel and previously unavailable information on Italian LGBTIQ+ citizens. The inclusion of stigmatised social minorities, their behaviour and demands, within a scientific discipline is a societally important and impactful act of inclusion, elevating the dignity of LGBTIQ+ politics, the scholars that are interested in it, and the subjects of such inquiry, to the level of other subfields in the political and social sciences. It is, in sum, a concrete step towards greater inclusivity in our work.

LGBTIQ+ citizens in Western societies, including in Italy, constitute a sizeable subpopulation, which is politically active and willing to engage, and may hence constitute an important electoral constituency. Again, even RRP's such as Brothers of Italy have recently come to understand this – although limited to a cisgendered transexclusionary and homonationalist vision of the LGB community (Prearo & Scopelliti, 2024). More generally, further stimulating the political participation and – especially – representation of stigmatised minorities is

fundamental to avoid their potential social alienation. To these ends, we believe that only an evidence-driven approach can lead such electoral and policy efforts by both political parties and institutions, speaking to the broader real-world impact of providing such necessary data as per our paper.

Finally, scholars can play a more effective role in pursuing this impactful agenda by deepening their research on further aspects of LGBTIQ+ politics, including within the subfield of electoral studies. Greater data availability can only mean an expanded possibility to empirically explore the determinants of LGBTIQ+ citizens' political participation, issue positions, and voting behaviour, as well as general-population attitudes towards citizens and political élites from gender and sexual minorities, as well as their political causes, with increasing degrees of methodological sophistication. This is an effort that was initiated long before our present contribution in other Western countries, leading to a burgeoning, lively, and now-established scientific field of comparative research. Our expectation and hope is that, in providing new instruments and information as first shared in this paper, such efforts can only grow and further develop from here in Italian electoral studies as well.

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