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# Far from the (Conservative) tree? Sexuality and intergenerational partisan preferences

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## ABSTRACT



A rich pedigree in political sociology establishes the intergenerational nature of political dispositions. In this paper, I present a theoretical argument positing that the acquisition of non-hereditary social identities, such as those related to sexual orientation, can disrupt this intergenerational transmission. Leveraging data from the British Election study, I find that lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, particularly those who from Conservative-voting homes, are significantly more likely to break away from the partisan attachments transmitted by the symmetrically partisan households of their heterosexual peers. These findings have implications for theories regarding the intergenerational transmission of political dispositions and signals that LGB individuals, who seek out socialisation experiences beyond those of shared social and structural equivalence with their family and local ecology, are more inclined to form political attachments independently of their parents.


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## Introduction

‘The apple never falls far from the tree’ is an age-old English proverb that signals the intergenerational nature of important characteristics between parent and child. Scholarship in political science and sociology finds empirical support for this idea (Jennings *et al.*, 2009; Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Rico & Jennings, 2016; Van Ditmars, 2023; Ventura, 2001). Whether it be the result of active socialisation processes (Bandura, 1977; Percheron & Jennings, 1981), or a function of socio-economic structural equivalence (Brady *et al.*, 2015;

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Tedin, 1974), individuals' political dispositions and electoral preferences often mirror those of their parents (Durmuşoğlu, 2023; Fitzgerald & Bacovsky, 2022; Gigendil *et al.*, 2016; McFarlane, 2022; Rico & Jennings, 2016; Zuckerman *et al.*, 2007).

The relationship from parent to child assumes, however, that salient social identities are also shared between generations in that individuals tend to share the same racial profile, identify with the same ethnicity, practice the same religion, and belong to the same social class as their parents. Not all identities are intergenerational: heterosexual and cisgender parents produce children that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, non-binary, transgender, queer and other gender non-confirming identities (LGBTQ+). Does the acquisition of these non-hereditary identities disrupt the intergenerational transmission of political dispositions and electoral choices?

Theoretically, I argue that LGBTQ+ identities represent out-group identities that are acquired via socialisation beyond the parental home which can, as a result, interrupt (or indeed compound) the intergenerational transmission of ideological and party preferences. A staple of political sociology is the strong empirical evidence that individuals, on average, share the partisanship from their parents. My argument is that these observed relationships only hold where the acquisition of salient identities is endogenous to those of the parental home. Via the acquisition of a social identity that deviates from the household ecology, I theorise that LGBTQ+ individuals, who place far more importance on kinship dynamics independent of the parental household (Savin-Williams, 2001; Weston, 1997), are incentivised to break away from the political home, particularly those socialised to be conservative.

My aim in this article is to advance the theoretical and empirical literature on the parental transmission of political preferences to include individuals that deviate from the heteronormative household structure. I do so by asking: *do sexual minorities (LGB), who harbour important social identities acquired outside of the home, deviate politically from their parents?*

Empirically, I employ data from wave twenty of the British Election Study (BES) internet panel to demonstrate that individuals identifying as LGB<sup>1</sup> are, vis-à-vis heterosexuals, significantly less likely to share their parents' partisan preferences when their parents come from the political right. Yet, simultaneously, intergenerational partisanship is compounded among left-wing homes where, compared to comparatively socialised heterosexuals, LGB individuals are *more* inclined to vote for parties that match their parents' preferences.

These findings have implications for our wider understanding of political sociology. First, the results temper the traditionally strong empirical link drawn between the parent-child transmission of partisanship: sexuality can disrupt and consolidate this link, regardless of gender or whether one identifies as bisexual or homosexual. Second, the results speak to literature that

seeks to understand the divergence in political preferences between LGB and heterosexual voters. The divergence in the political preferences and voting behaviour between sexual minority individuals and their heterosexual peers is not the product of parent-based processes of political socialisation. Instead, I argue that, via the internalised process of conversion and the subsequent engagement in acculturation, LGB individuals are incentivised to seek out and engage in social interaction beyond the family or local community peer groups and that these extra-familial sources of socialisation help us understand the sexuality gap in attitudes that are orthogonal to LGBTQ+ specific concerns.

### LGB(T+) identity and political behaviour

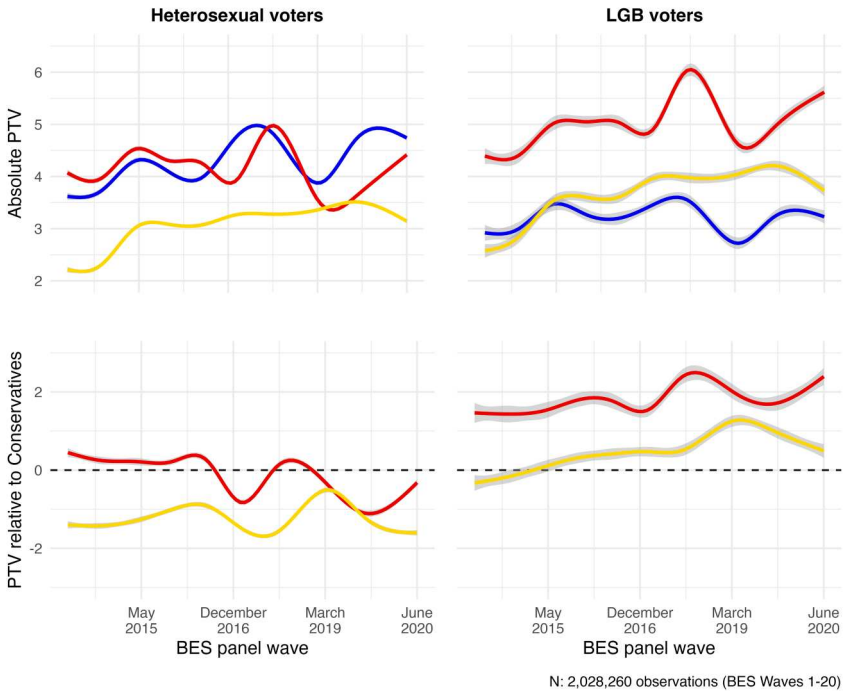
A wide body of work from the US (Flores *et al.*, 2020; Grollman, 2018; Hertzog, 1996; Jones, 2021; Lewis *et al.*, 2011; Swank, 2018, 2023) and Canada (Perrella *et al.*, 2012) shows that LGBTQ+ individuals hold distinct political preferences and engage asymmetrically in the political process (Grahn, 2023; Sherrill, 1996; Swank & Fahs, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte & Townsley, 2020) compared to their heterosexual counterparts. The presence of a ‘sexuality gap’ within the electorate is not unique to North America. Cross-national evidence in Western European states (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020b) – alongside a catalogue of single-country contributions (Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022a; Wurthmann, 2023) – show that sexual minorities are far more inclined to support socially liberal parties (those most favourable to LGBTQ+ rights) than heterosexual individuals across diverse political systems. In a concrete case of the UK, I also demonstrate that individuals *identifying* as LGB are also substantively less supportive of the UK Conservative party which, at least historically, has been opposed to advancing LGBTQ+ welfare (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022b). Similar evidence has also been presented for Trans individuals in Germany (Hunklinger & Ferch, 2020).

Descriptive data provided by the BES online panel which includes 2,028,260 observations from 101,413 individual respondents from February 2014 (wave 1) to June 2020 (wave 20), demonstrates the presence and persistence of the sexuality gap amongst UK voters. [Figure 1](#) illustrates respondents’ *self-reported* probability to vote (0–10) for each of the UK’s three national-level mainstream parties. The panels are stratified by sexuality with the left-hand panels reporting the voting intentions for heterosexuals and the right-hand panels visualising the voting intentions for LGB voters.

For heterosexuals, party preferences tend to cluster around a neck-and-neck horse race between the two dominant parties: the left-leaning Labour party and the right-leaning Conservative Party. For LGB citizens, however, there is a clear, largely stable, and significant pro-Labour premium and anti-Conservative penalty at the ballot box. While, as demonstrated by the

### Voting intentions for main UK parties

Self-reported probability (0-10) of voting Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat



**Figure 1.** Sexuality gap in UK party voting intentions.

upper panel, the absolute self-reported PTV for the mainstream parties among heterosexual and LGB respondents appear to respond to cyclical changes symmetrically, the *relative* support for the two socially liberal parties compared to the Conservatives (lower panel) remains securely positive. This is particularly the case for Labour.

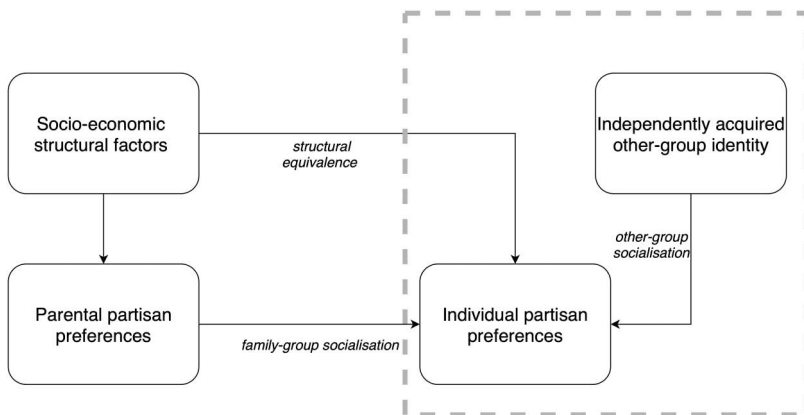
The theoretical arguments that seek to explain the mechanisms that lead to a political divergence between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual individuals are fourfold: rational welfare-maximising (Schaffner & Senic, 2006; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020b; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022b); conversion (Hertzog, 1996; Kleiman *et al.*, 2015; Page, 2018); acculturation (Bailey, 1999); and sorting (Egan, 2012, 2020). While the three former mechanisms point towards *extra*-household socialisation processes, the latter points towards *within*-household dynamics.

### Parental political socialisation

A rich pedigree in social science highlights the intergenerational nature of political dispositions (Gigendil *et al.*, 2016; Rico & Jennings, 2016; Van

Ditmars, 2023) and partisan preferences (Jennings, 1984; Jennings & Niemi, 1968; McFarlane, 2022; Ventura, 2001; Westholm & Niemi, 1992; Zuckerman *et al.*, 2007). In *Political Socialisation* Hyman (1959) claims that '[f]oremost among agencies of socialization into politics is the family'. West (1945) argues that 'A [wo]man is born into his [her] political party just as [s]he is born into probable membership of the church of his [her] parents'. And Jennings *et al.* (2009) empirically demonstrate that, among those individuals who join the electorate with clear partisan preferences, almost all these preferences mirror those of their parents (Jennings *et al.*, 2009). This literature comes from a school within political sociology that maintains that a large component of one's political preferences – including policy attitudes (Kustov *et al.*, 2021; O'Grady, 2019) and views of the political system itself (Devine & Valgardsson, 2023) – are established during early years of socialisation and remain consolidated over the trajectory of one's life (Sears & Funk, 1999).

Theoretically, we can identify two causal pathways that link the political identities and preferences of parents to their children (see Figure 2). On the one hand, the intergenerational transmission of political values can be viewed as the product of social learning (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Durmuşoğlu, 2023; Jennings *et al.*, 2009; Jennings & Niemi, 1968; Zuckerman *et al.*, 2007). This thesis argues, in short, that within-family socialisation drives the intergenerational transmission of voting habits as a result of children being primed to 'take the political cues of trusted loved ones with whom they frequently interact' (Zuckerman *et al.*, 2007, p. 93). In other words, individuals adopt the political preferences of their parents because they are, whether implicitly or more explicitly, told that is the party that they *should* vote for.



**Figure 2.** Theoretical paths of intergenerational transmission & the role of 'other' group identities.

On the other hand, is the structural equivalence argument. According to this thesis, individuals' attitudes and electoral choices come to mirror those of their parents not because of the processes of social learning that take place within the household but rather because individuals often inherit and share the same socio-demographic characteristics and traits of their parents. In other words, the parent-child correlation is *spurious* (Brady *et al.*, 2015; Tedin, 1974): intergenerational political symmetries are not the result of within-household social learning but rather the result of parent and child sharing the same social milieu within the socio-economic hierarchy. Whilst there have been advances in social mobility, individuals often belong to a similar social class as their parents, households bring up children to follow the same religious (or lack thereof) denomination, and racial or ethnic distinctiveness is genetically inherited between generations. Social interactions that engender political preferences are, of course, not isolated within the home. Shared social milieu with others in our local ecology also determines political preferences and voting behaviour as it exposes us to political information (Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995), and also results in the adoption of localised norms (Wald *et al.*, 1988) and value systems (Bengston, 1975; Enos, 2017; Putnam, 1966).

Typically, our ecological environment will reinforce the structural position present in the home (Enos, 2017; Tedin, 1974): the process of social sorting leads individuals to live in neighbourhoods of a certain, and shared, class, race, religious or general socio-economic composition. This results in the two causal pathways of intergenerational transmission of political preferences and partisanship – within-family socialisation and structural equivalence – working in unison to establish and cement political dispositions at an early age. In a scenario where your parents, peers, and local community think in certain way and vote for a particular party, replicating the political and partisan preferences individuals are exposed to during adolescence represents a logical continuation of the rational choice model with individuals taking parental and shared-group partisanship as an information shortcut (Achen, 2009). Given that an individual will likely occupy the same position in the social hierarchy as those in their immediate and social surroundings, observing how a parent or neighbour votes allows them to form Bayesian priors regarding which party is likely to provide gains for 'people like them'.

In general, the intergenerational transmission of partisanship has been observed to be strongest in those households with higher levels of politicisation. Although, Dinas (2013) demonstrates that increased political engagement in the home can lead to individuals having partisan preferences distinct from their parents in adult life.<sup>2</sup> In those households where political matters enjoy greater saliency, one would expect that children who are being socialised into politics to be subjected to a higher level of exposure to political information (Campbell *et al.*, 1960). Additionally, signalling the traditional

importance of mothers within the socialisation experience of children within the household, evidence also points towards mothers' partisanship wielding a greater influential effect on the transmission of parental partisanship than that of the father (Coffé & Voorpostel, 2010; Fitzgerald & Bacovsky, 2022; Jaspers *et al.*, 2008; Zuckerman *et al.*, 2007). The increased leverage of a mother's partisanship on a child's political preferences suggests that of the two causal pathways identified for the inter-generational transmission of political preferences, that of direct within-home socialisation is likely to be more powerful than the effects of structural equivalence.

### Sexuality as an untransmittable identity

Sexuality and gender dysphoria are unique traits in that they are ascriptive characteristics that are randomly assigned across the population, and which are completely independent of parental sexuality or gender identity. Sexual and gender *identities*, which emerge from their corresponding ascriptive *traits* (Troiden, 1988, 1989), are distinct from many other conventional social identities. Whilst other structural determinants of a person's position in society are endogenous to parent characteristics – black parents give birth to black children, working-class parents' children are born into working-class homes, practising Catholics tend to baptise their children – sexuality is not transmitted from parent to child. I theorise that the acquisition of an individual-level characteristic in the form of bi- or homosexuality – that is subsequently likely to predict identification as LGB (Troiden, 1989) – can play a potentially disruptive or consolidating role in the transmission and acquisition of (heterosexual)<sup>3</sup> parents' politics.

The developmental process of acknowledging one's homosexuality, bisexuality, or non-cisgender status is unique to the individual, but the literature establishes that, on average, most individuals have come out to *themselves* during adolescence (Cox *et al.*, 2011). For many, however, the first realisation of 'otherness' – what Cass (1979) pens the 'identity confusion' phase and what Troiden (1988, 1989) pens 'sensitisation' – occurs when an individual is pre-pubescent and is defined by their becoming aware of the fact that some of their behaviours are gender non-conforming and are likely to be received with stigma and ostracisation. The timing of these psychological processes is significant as a wide catalogue of research signals that the psychological traits and political attitudes that are formed during an individual's formative years (Bandura, 1977; Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Dawson *et al.*, 1997) when they are first being acclimatised to the political world tend to exhibit a long-lasting influence over the lifespan (Devine & Valgardsson, 2023; Kustov *et al.*, 2021; O'Grady, 2019; Sears & Funk, 1999).



An individual passing through the developmental process of recognising their 'othered' status as a person experiencing same-sex attraction and/or discomfort with their cisgender identity tends to remedy the information gaps that remain from their immediate, and heteronormative, social environment. The psychological turmoil associated with the individual's process of self-discovery (*conversion*), which frequently involves wrestling with internalised feelings of self-loathing and shame engendered by the social stigma and (initial) clandestine nature<sup>4</sup> of their bi- or homosexuality (Downs, 2012), drive LGBTQ+ young people in their closeted years to seek out other individuals and resources for people 'like them' beyond their immediate ecology (Fox & Ralston, 2016).

Importantly, these clandestine yet often day-to-day interactions allow individuals, even those devoid of any propinquity to other LGBTQ+ individuals or culture, to engage in a social learning process (Fox & Ralston, 2016; Gomillion & Giuliano, 2011). Active engagement in LGBTQ+ culture and activity, whether that be in the passive form of watching LGBTQ+ focused TV shows like FX's *POSE*, Disney's *Love Victor*, Showtime's *The L Word*, or Netflix's *Heartstopper*, or more active forms of interaction like using online dating platforms, following queer content creators on social media, or just socially engaging in discussions with other LGBTQ+ individuals 'like them', engenders a feeling of social connectedness and a process of acculturation that is independent of the individual's household (Craig *et al.*, 2015; Craig & McInroy, 2014; DiFulvio, 2011).<sup>5</sup> As Hillier and Harrison (2007, p. 95) argue, the contact made with other LGBTQ+ individuals in your teens, often facilitated clandestinely in physical spaces away from parents or local peer groups, helps to 'prepare them [LGBTQ+ individuals] for living their sexual difference' in their everyday lives.

Given that LGBTQ+ individuals can often be subjected to marginalisation and social rejection from within the home (Savin-Williams, 2001; Weston, 1997) as well as in their local communities, these individuals, particularly during their formative years when social and political preferences are first being established, are likely to place a large amount of value on the social signals and information that they are receiving *outside* of their parental household (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Even among more socially tolerant homes, individuals whose parents might express diffuse tolerance towards LGBTQ+ individuals are observed, with frequency, to experience negative reactions during the process of their 'coming out' or in response to their *perceived* deviation from cis-heteronormative norms (Reczek & Bosley-Smith, 2022; Savin-Williams, 2001; Weston, 1997). In comparison to heterosexuals, LGBTQ+ individuals are significantly more prone to concentrate their primary pillars of kinship on friends and other LGBTQ+ peers rather than their family (Horowitz & Gomez, 2018; Weinstock, 2000). This leads to LGBTQ+ individuals adopting social networks that are significantly distinct

from those transmitted from their parental social milieu and research points towards LGBTQ+ peer groups (Galupo, 2009) and sexual partners (Horowitz & Gomez, 2018) being more diverse, on average, than those of heterosexuals.

A core assumption of the intergenerational transmission of parental voting preferences from parent to child is that, given the intimate relationships within the home, individuals are going to be receptive to the political cues and messages that they are receiving from their parents (Sears & Levy, 2000). There is reason to expect this assumption will not hold for some individuals of the LGBTQ+ community. Sexual minority individuals are often subjected to discriminatory and or prejudicial comments that concur negative stereotypes and images of LGBTQ+ individuals. A closeted teenager is likely to seek out social interaction with LGBTQ+ individuals beyond their immediate environment and inform themselves about LGBTQ+ life and politics. Attentiveness of political information and public affairs exhibits an important attitude-forming role on individuals given that it increases their exposure to (new) political information that may challenge their existing political priors. Sexual minority individuals are, on average, more politically interested than heterosexuals and more prone to be politically engaged (Grahn, 2023; Turnbull-Dugarte & Townsley, 2020). Part of the rationale behind this increased political engagement is that, given LGBTQ+ individuals have often been subjected to both institutional and social processes of discrimination, they are incentivised to be politically informed in order to better understand their socio-cultural position and to engage in active efforts to improve it (Turnbull-Dugarte & Townsley, 2020).

Consider a young LGBTQ+ person wrestling with the internal process of acknowledging and accepting their non-heterosexuality and/or cisgender identity. This individual is likely in the process of discovering information about the socio-political condition of LGBTQ+ individuals including issues related to the social (in)tolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community in their country or community, the provision (or lack thereof) of anti-discrimination laws or other equal protection measures. This extra-household political experience is likely to engender a consolidation or disruption in the political socialisation received in the home. For LGBTQ+ individuals in conservative (right-wing) homes, the process of conversion, and subsequent acculturation, will likely undermine the conservative socialisation experience of the home and local environment resulting in divergence from parents. For LGBTQ+ individuals from socially liberal (left-wing) homes, however, these processes will likely consolidate existing pathways towards the formation of ideological and partisan affinities with the left resulting in greater consolidation with parents. These theoretical argument result in the following hypotheses:

**H1** LGB individuals will, on average, be *less* likely vis-à-vis heterosexuals to share the partisan preferences of their parents.

**H2** LGB individuals from traditionally right-wing (Conservative-voting) parental households will, on average, be *less* likely vis-à-vis heterosexuals to share the partisan preferences of their parents.

**H3** LGB individuals from traditionally left-wing (Labour-voting) parental households will, on average, be *more* likely vis-à-vis heterosexuals to share the partisan preferences of their parents.

## Empirical approach

To test these hypotheses on the role of sexuality in the intergenerational transmission of partisan preferences, I rely on data from Wave 20 of the British Election Study (BES) online panel study which was fielded in June 2020. The BES data provides a representative sample of the UK population. Among those BES respondents with full data on all relevant variables and covariates, there is a sample of 11,808 individual respondents. Summary statistics and variable balance across sexuality groups, as well as balance between the final sample and all BES respondents, are reported in Appendix A. The selection of Britain as a case study is driven, in part, by data considerations given the well-powered sample of LGB identifiers and the inclusion of the requisite survey instruments in the BES. Importantly, Britain is, in terms of the partisan politicisation of LGBTQ+ rights, not an outlier among its European neighbours (Siegel *et al.*, 2022; Siegel & Wang, 2018), nor is the predictive role of sexuality on electoral preferences in the Britain distinct from that found across Europe (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020b). As a result, there is reason to assume that the results reported in what follows are likely not limited to the British case under consideration.

## Measuring sexuality

The BES invites respondents to self-report their sexuality in response to the following question: ‘Which of the following best describes your sexuality?’. In addition to refusals, respondents can identify as heterosexual, gay/lesbian, bisexual or other. Of the total weighted sample who answered the question (4.23 per cent prefer not to say), 9.52 per cent (8.36 per cent unweighted) identify with a sexuality other than heterosexual.<sup>6</sup>

Egan (2020)’s work demonstrates that LGB identifiers may not be random (see also Silva and Evans (2020)): leveraging panel data from the US, they demonstrate that, even when controlling for LGB identities in anterior waves, partisan identities (e.g., Democrat vs Republican) exercise a very small yet significant effect on LGB identification in posterior waves. As a result, estimates that assume LGB-identification is exogenous to voter preference (at least in the US) may be biased. This claim has, however, been disputed by Cox and Jones (2023). In Appendix H I replicate the self-selection

analysis from Egan (2020), leveraging ten waves of panelised response items to LGB and party identity questions in the BES, to demonstrate that anterior partisan identification with either of the UK's two main parties exhibits *no* significant or meaningful effect on posterior LGB identification.<sup>7</sup> As reported in Appendix Table A.3, according to the BES, those who identify as LGB are younger and more politically interested than average. They are also marginally (1 percentage-point) less likely to come from Conservative homes and they are slightly more likely (3 percentage-points) to come from homes with an absent father.

For the primary analysis, I rely on a dichotomous distinction between LGB and heterosexual respondents. Given, however, that Jones (2021) finds significant within-LGB variation in ideological preferences among LGB respondents, I also test for subgroup variation between those who identify as lesbian/gay or bisexual, as well as between lesbian/bisexual women and gay/bisexual men.

### ***Parental partisanship***

To indicate parental partisanship, I rely on survey respondents' self-reported statements regarding the typical voting choice of each of their parents. BES respondents were asked: *Thinking back to when you were growing up. Do you know what party your mother usually voted for if she voted?*, followed by *And what about your father? What party did your father vote for if he voted?* Leveraging responses to these items, I create a three-point indicator identifying those individuals who grew up in a Conservative-voting, Labour-voting, or Liberal Democrat-voting household. Whilst alternative parties exist in the UK, the UK Green party, for example, is increasingly politically relevant (Dennison, 2015, 2017), parental preferences for the two mainstream parties – Labour and Conservatives – with the addition of the UK's third party – the Liberal Democrats – are the dominating position with the sample. Congruent with the literature on partisan assortative-mating, there were very few households where partisanship was not shared between parents (14.02 per cent) and only uni-partisan homes (85.98 per cent) are included in the analysis. This includes those households where the respondent identified as coming from a mono-parental household (4.25 per cent).<sup>8</sup>

I acknowledge that relying on this recall measure is not without limitations given the potential for inaccurate recall rates. It is, however, an empirical measure frequently used (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; McFarlane, 2022). Importantly, the level of non-response on the recall measure is symmetrical among the LGB and heterosexual samples, nor is there any disparity in the distribution of the main parties' vote share between the two groups or in the prevalence of assortative mating among LGB and heterosexual respondents' parents. Given these descriptive similarities, the

estimation assumes that any potential bias induced by inaccurate recall rates is homogeneously distributed across the main strata of interest in the analysis.

To model the intergenerational transmission of partisanship, I create a dichotomous measure which indicates if the respondent's self-reported vote recall matches that of their parents (1) or not (0). In a catalogue of supplementary analyses, I also estimate whether there are divergences between the ideological preferences of LGB and heterosexual individuals from different partisan parental homes (see Table A.12), as well as the relative ideological distance that respondents perceive between themselves and the political party of their parents.

All models reported and visualised in the paper estimate linear probability models via ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and report heteroskedasticity-consistent (HC) standard errors.

## Results: intergenerational partisanship

Table 1 summarises the results of the main analysis. Model 1 reports the difference in the probability of adopting one's parental partisanship among LGB and heterosexual individuals controlling for a vector of theoretically relevant confounders including: gender, age (and age squared), race, level of education, and a measure of political interest indicated by the level of attention respondents report to pay to politics. Education and political interest are particularly important controls given the relevant role of education in fostering political independence from the partisan home (Dinas, 2013) and political interest in mobilising identity-based political distinctiveness (Jones, 2023).

Model 1 provides an empirical test of **H1**. On average, LGB individuals are four percentage-points less likely to vote for the same party as their parents ( $p < .1$ ). The overall effects of Model 1 indicate some support for the first hypotheses, but the magnitude of the effect is not necessarily large – the baseline level of the outcome measure is .46 and, as a result, a .04 coefficient equates to an 8.7 per cent change – and the significance of the effect is weaker than conventionally acceptable levels ( $p < .05$ ).

Model 2 includes household parental partisanship as an independent variable and also controls for those households where the parental composition is mono-parental (i.e., there is an absent father or mother). Model 3 replicates Model 2 with the inclusion of a multiplicative interaction term between sexual minority identity as LGB and household parental partisanship. Model 3 represents the empirical test of both **H2** and **H3**. The result of the interaction term between LGB identity and parental partisanship is significant which, in real terms, signals that the difference in the probability of matching one's parental partisanship is different for LGB and heterosexual individuals conditional on the partisan loyalties of the parental home.

**Table 1.** Modelling Pr (vote matches that of parental household).

X	(Model 1) Baseline	(Model 2) + parental partisanship	(Model 3) + interaction term
<b>Sexuality (LGB)</b>	<b>-0.04*</b> <b>(0.02)</b>	<b>-0.03</b> <b>(0.02)</b>	<b>-0.21***</b> <b>(0.03)</b>
Parental partisanship (ref: Conservative)			
Labour-voting parental household		-0.22*** (0.01)	-0.25*** (0.01)
Liberal Democrat-voting parental household		-0.42*** (0.02)	-0.43*** (0.02)
<b>LGB*Labour-voting parental household</b>			<b>0.29***</b>
<b>LGB*Liberal Democrat-voting parental household</b>			<b>(0.04)</b> <b>0.12*</b> <b>(0.07)</b>
Household composition (ref: both parents present)			
No mother in household		-0.12** (0.06)	-0.12* (0.06)
No father in household		0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
Gender (woman)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Age	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
Age2	0.00*** (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)
Race (non-white)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.16*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)
Education (degree-holder)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Attention to politics	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.78*** (0.06)	0.96*** (0.06)	0.96*** (0.06)
Observations	11,818	11,818	11,818
R-squared	0.03	0.09	0.10

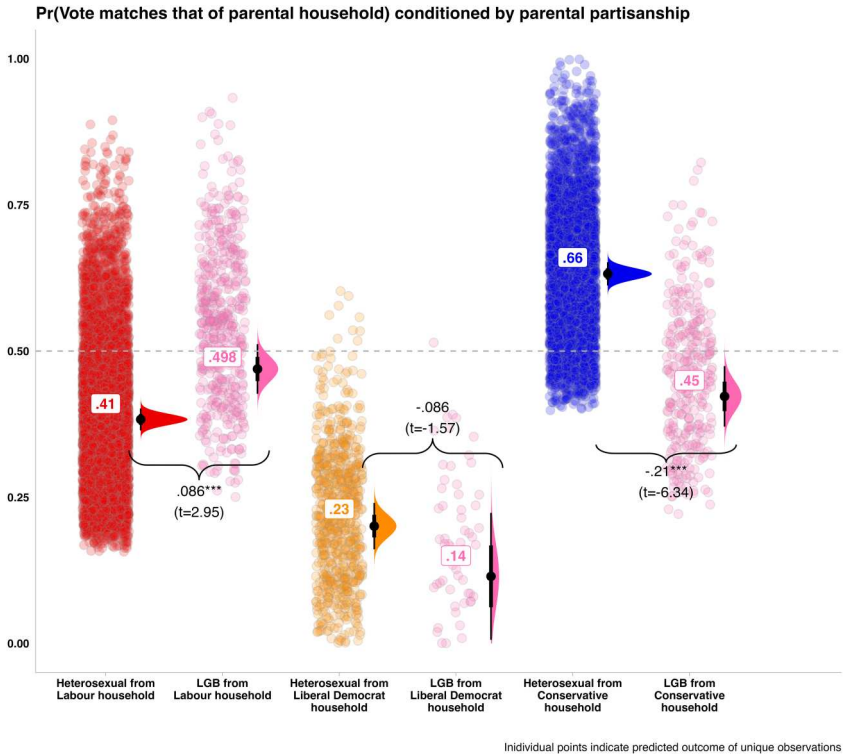
Note: Robust (HC) standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\*\* $p < 0.05$ .

\* $p < 0.1$ .

For ease of interpretation and following the recommendations of (Brambor *et al.*, 2006), Figure 3 reports the output from Model 3 graphically, visualising the predicted probability of sharing the party preferences of the parental household among heterosexual and LGB respondents conditioned by the partisan colour of the household. As expected from the theoretical rationale motivating **H2** and **H3**, whether LGB individuals are more or less likely to mirror the partisanship of their parents is significantly conditioned by whether their parents harbour partisan attachments that are likely to be congruent or incongruent with the socialisation experiences of being LGB.



**Figure 3.** Modelling intergenerational partisanship (Model 3 Table 1).

Theoretically, and as posited by **H2**, I expect LGB individuals from Conservative-voting homes to be more likely to break away from the family tree and opt for political alternatives that are distinct from that of the Conservative party preferences of their parents. Heterosexuals from Conservative-voting homes have a .66 probability of matching their parents' partisanship. These high levels – compared to heterosexuals from Labour-voting homes (.41) – are not surprising. In the UK's multi-party system, there are more third-party options beyond the dominant bipartisan binary within the socially liberal (left-wing) space, such as the Greens (Dennison, 2015, 2017) or the Liberal Democrats (Cutts *et al.*, 2023). As a result, left-wing voters – conventional voters of the Labour party – have more political exit options in their consideration set which result in a higher propensity to haemorrhage voters across diverse political alternatives.

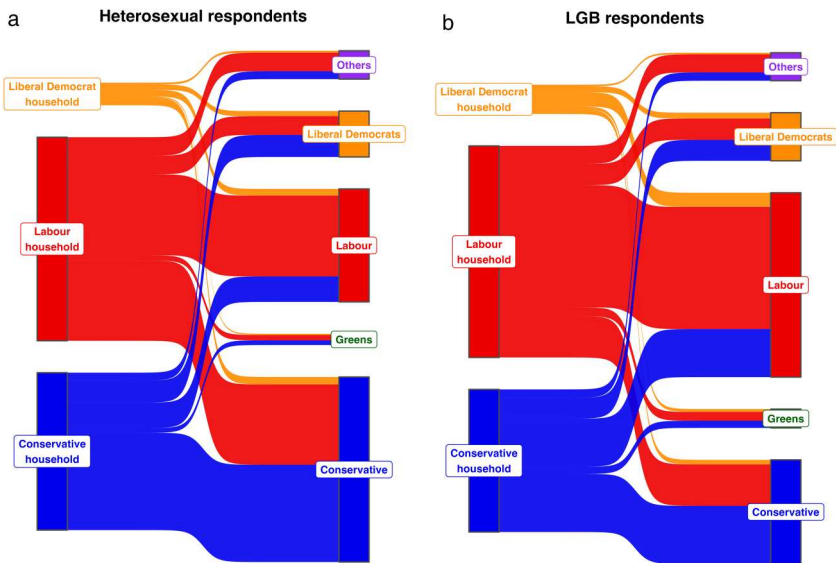
Figure 3 illustrates strong and significant empirical support for this paper's primary thesis. The probability that LGB individuals share the partisanship of their parents, when their parents are Conservative partisans is twenty-one percentage-points lower ( $p < 0.001$ ) than that observed among heterosexuals from comparable partisan homes. These results, congruent with pan-

European evidence that shows increased support for socially liberal left-wing parties among LGB individuals who socio-economic status creates cross-pressures that one would assume incentivises them to vote for more economically conservative party alternatives (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020a), suggest that LGB individuals who come from right-leaning homes are prone to update their partisan preferences and gain political independence from their parents. The magnitude of the divergence of LGB voters from Conservative-voting parental homes is large: given a baseline probability of .66 among the counterfactual heterosexual group, a twenty-one percentage-point estimate equates to a 32 per cent change in the outcome.

Let us consider individuals from Labour-voting homes. In this setting, individuals are doubly incentivised to vote for the same party as their parents: (i) they are socialised (directly and indirectly) to vote for the party, and (ii) given Labour's historical issue-ownership of the pro-LGBTQ+ policy space (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022b), they are also incentivised to vote for the party that is more inclined to maximise their group-based interests. In short: socialisation processes within and outside of the home likely reinforce partisan loyalties (**H3**). The divergences in the intergenerational transmission of party preferences between LGB and heterosexual individuals who come from Labour-voting homes is congruent with this expectation: LGBs are eight percentage-points ( $p < 0.001$ ) more prone to vote for the same party as their Labour-voting parents than heterosexuals from comparable partisan homes. Given the baseline probability of intergenerational transmission in this case is .41, an eight-point increase represents a sizeable shift in the probability, equal to 20 per cent. Note, however, that – in direct contrast to the high level of intergenerational partisanship among heterosexuals from Conservative homes – the pro-Labour sexuality gap among those from Labour homes appears to be a function of *heterosexuals* being more prone to vote for alternatives to Labour rather than LGB respondents being actively more likely to do so (both have a probability below 0.5). As discussed above (and revisited in Figure 4) part of the disparity between Labour and Conservative homes is likely a function of the asymmetry in ideologically approximate alternatives between the left- and right-wing voting blocks.

In the case of the individuals from Liberal Democrat-voting homes, there is no significant difference between the probability of intergenerational transmission among heterosexual and LGB individuals. It is also the case, however, that the overall levels of matched partisanship among Liberal Democrat parental homes is very low. This pattern, consistent with evidence that the Liberal Democrats are a party that tends to suffer from a more volatile and electorally promiscuous voting constituency (Cutts *et al.*, 2023), is in large part a function of the strategic motivations that often shape third-party voter preferences. This is specifically true of British LGB voters who often identify as being ideologically closer to the Liberal Democrats and the





**Figure 4.** (Asymmetric) dispersion of voters from partisan households. (a) 52 per cent of heterosexuals from Labour-voting homes cast their votes for socially liberal parties: Labour, Liberal Democrats & Greens. Only 31 per cent from Conservative-voting homes do the same. (b) 70 per cent of LGBs Labour-voting homes cast their votes for socially liberal parties: Labour, Liberal Democrats & Greens. 49 per cent from Conservative-voting homes do the same.

Green party, but whose ballot is more likely to be cast for Labour regardless (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022b).

The results from Figure 3 demonstrate that, on average, individuals from Labour and Liberal Democrat-voting homes appear less inclined to share partisan preferences with their parents vis-à-vis those from Conservative homes. Given the spread of partisan choice on the ‘left’, however, this may be the result of individuals in these households diversifying their vote choice within the socially liberal (left-wing) space. To assess this, I now turn to consider *where* the ballots of heterosexual and LGB voters from Labour and Conservative-voting households go. Figure 4 visualises the voting distributions of individuals stratified by their sexual identities and parental partisanship.

Figure 4 shows that this is indeed the case (see also Appendix Tables A.5 and A.6). Whereas 31.1 per cent of heterosexuals from Conservative-voting homes move away from their parents’ partisan loyalties with the right towards the socially liberal left, 48.8 per cent of LGBs from parental households with symmetrical partisanship make the same move. Turning towards individuals with Labour-voting parental homes, a large part of the asymmetry in parent–child loyalties among LGB and non-LGB individuals emerges *not* because of asymmetries in voting for alternative socially liberal

parties (Liberal Democrats or Greens) but rather because of the significantly diluted probability of voting Conservative among LGB citizens and, simultaneously, the higher probability of switching to the Conservatives among heterosexuals.

As detailed in the description of the control variables, education and political interest may represent significant confounders in the transmission of parental partisanship. The null effects of these variables in the models reported in [Table 1](#) suggest, however, that this is not the case. In order to test if these variables moderate the relationship between sexuality and parental transmission of partisanship, I also test for interaction effects between these two variables and the determinants of interest. The results (reported in Appendix D) do not point towards these variables as being significant moderators that can explain the effects associated with sexuality. While the consolidating effects in Labour-voting parental homes and the diverging effects in Conservative-voting parental homes are only observed among high-interest respondents, the *difference* from low-interest respondents is not significantly distinct from zero.

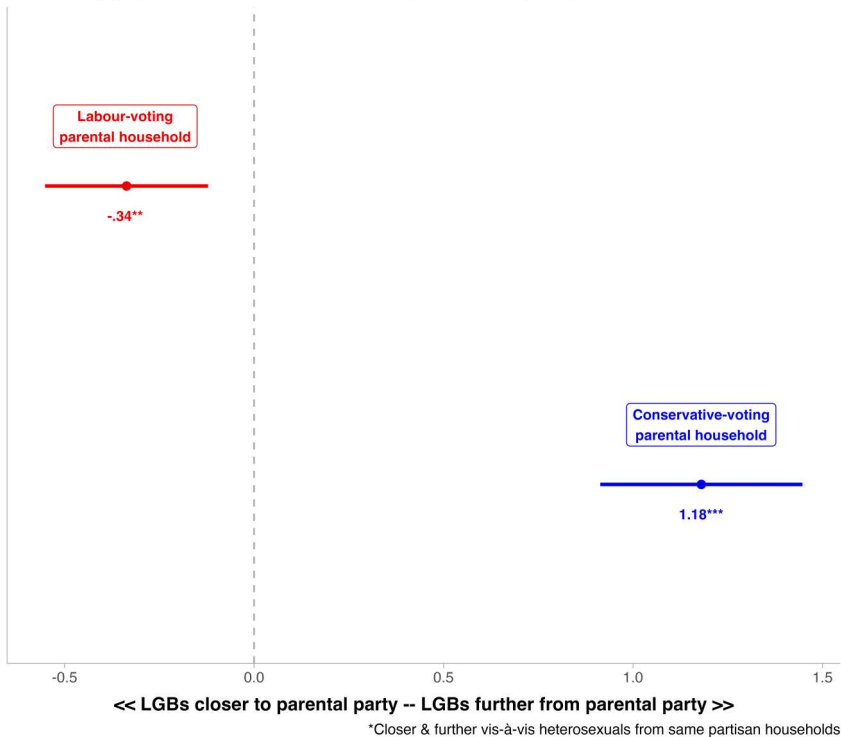
The main analysis reported above relies on vote choice as the main measure to model intergenerational partisanship given that the BES allows us to match respondent and parental partisanship. Alternatives, however, exist in the form of self-reported probability to vote for the parents' party, the self-reported likeability of the same, as well as the perceived ideological distance between the respondent and the party of the parents. The former, reported in Appendix F, provide evidence congruent with the main results reported above. I report the latter below taking ideological distance an ancillary outcome that may explain the divergence between respondent and parents. Do LGB individuals from Conservative-voting parental homes break the intergenerational transmission of party loyalties because they view themselves as being ideologically further away from the party of their parents compared to heterosexuals? Indeed, and congruent with spatial theories of the sexuality gap, [Figure 5](#) (see Appendix Table A.11) demonstrates that compared to heterosexuals from homes with the same partisanship, LGBs spatially identify themselves to be ideologically *more distant* from the party of their parental home when their parents are Conservatives, and *closer* to the party of their parental home when their parents vote for Labour.

### ***Exploratory analysis: within-LGB variation***

In an exploratory intersectional subgroup analysis, I demonstrate the robustness of these findings across notable and theoretically distinct subgroups within the LGB populations.

The sexuality gap in intergenerational transmission of partisanship is observed among both lesbian and gay voters, as well as bisexual voters. In

### Sexuality gap in spatial distance from partisanship of parental household



**Figure 5.** Ideological distance from the (partisan) parental tree.

line with evidence regarding within-group heterogeneity observed by Jones (2021), I test for asymmetries in intergenerational partisanship between LGB respondents. Testing for this within-LGB variation in Britain, Table 2 reports the predicted probabilities for heterosexuals, homosexuals (gays and lesbians), and bisexual voters independently conditioned by the partisanship of the parental home. The divergence between bisexual and heterosexual individuals from Conservative-voting homes, at twenty-seven percentage-points ( $p < 0.001$ ), is almost double that of LG voters (fifteen percentage-points). Both LG and B individuals are more likely to break away from Conservative-voting homes. These results indicate, however, that there is indeed some significant within-LGB variation. Although the patterns in LG and B voters' partisan preferences are congruent with the expectations of the theoretical hypotheses presented, the magnitude of sexuality's effects for bisexuals is notably greater.

The propensity of LGB individuals from Conservative-voting homes to disrupt the parent-child transmission of partisanship is not conditioned by gender. I test for these asymmetries as a conditionality test given recent

**Table 2.** Asymmetries between gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

LG & (B)*Parental Partisanship	Predicted probability	Marginal effect vs. heterosexuals	Marginal effect vs. Gay/Lesbians
Heterosexual in Conservative household	0.661 (0.008)		
Gay/Lesbian in Conservative household	0.515 (0.043)	-0.146*** (0.044)	
Bisexual in Conservative household	0.387 (0.053)	-0.274*** (0.054)	-0.128* (0.069)
Heterosexual in Labour household	0.412 (0.007)		
Gay/Lesbian in Labour household	0.443 (0.042)	0.031 (0.043)	
Bisexual in Labour household	0.566 (0.044)	0.154*** (0.045)	0.123** (0.062)
Heterosexual in Liberal Democrat household	0.229 (0.019)		
Gay/Lesbian in Liberal Democrat household	0.152 (0.080)	-0.077 (0.083)	
Bisexual in Liberal Democrat household	0.104 (0.088)	-0.126 (0.090)	-0.049 (0.119)

Notes: Full regression output available in A.10. Predicted probabilities reported in graphical form in Figure A.1 Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\*\* $p < 0.05$ .

\* $p < 0.1$ .

evidence on gendered asymmetries in the transmission of ideological preferences demonstrates that, on average, women are consistently likely to be more ideologically left-wing than their parental homes (Van Ditmars, 2023). In Table 3, I report output from a three-way interaction term between sexuality, parental partisanship, and gender. Table 3 reports the predicted margins of the three-way combination as well as the marginal effect of sexuality conditioned on the gender of the respondent and the partisan composition of the household.

Heterosexual men and women from Conservative-voting parental households are *equally* likely to vote for the Conservative party and do so with a respective probability of .65 and .67. The differences between Gay/Bisexual (GB) men or Lesbian/Bisexual (LB) women and the heterosexual peers from households with the same Conservative-party loyalties are, however, of a substantive magnitude. On average, GB men from Conservative homes are twelve percentage-points ( $p < 0.001$ ) less likely to share the partisan loyalties of their parents and LB women are forty-one percentage-points ( $p < 0.001$ )

**Table 3.** Testing sexuality-based divergence conditioned by gender.

Three-way interaction term Sexuality*Gender*Parental Partisanship	Predicted probability	Marginal effect vs. heterosexuals
Hetero. man in Conservative household	0.654 (0.013)	
GB man in Conservative household	0.539 (0.039)	-0.115*** (0.041)
Hetero. woman in Conservative household	0.669 (0.010)	
LB woman in Conservative household	0.261 (0.046)	-0.407*** (0.047)
Hetero. man in Labour household	0.388 (0.011)	
GB man in Labour household	0.433 (0.038)	0.044 (0.040)
Hetero. woman in Labour household	0.436 (0.009)	
LB woman in Labour household	0.611 (0.034)	0.176*** (0.035)
Hetero. man in Liberal Democrat household	0.243 (0.033)	
GB man in Liberal Democrat household	0.028 (0.057)	-0.215*** (0.066)
Hetero. woman in Liberal Democrat household	0.224 (0.023)	
LB woman in Liberal Democrat household	0.286 (0.086)	0.062 (0.089)

Notes: Full regression output available in A.7. Predicted probabilities reported in graphical form in Figure A.1 Robust standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ .

\*\* $p < 0.05$ .

\* $p < 0.1$ .

less likely to so. In real terms, these results, which signal a 60 per cent change in the predicted probability, also demonstrate that any gender-based differentiation in the transmission of partisan loyalties among women from Conservative homes (at least in the UK) is driven by LB women as opposed to women in general.

Considering those who come from Labour-voting parental homes, GB men and heterosexual men are equally likely to match the partisanship of their Labour parents. While the predicted probability of GB respondents is larger (.43) than that of heterosexuals (.39), the sexuality-induced differences are not statistically identifiable from zero. LB women, are however, significantly more inclined than comparable heterosexual women to mirror the partisan loyalties of Labour-voting parents. The effect of sexuality in this instance is of a notable magnitude at eighteen percentage-points ( $p < 0.001$ ) and equates to a 40 per cent change relative to comparable heterosexual women who are equally likely to share the partisanship of their Labour parents compared to heterosexual men.

## Discussion

There is a wealth of literature that evinces the intergenerational nature of political dispositions and party preferences. Across different temporal contexts and political systems with varying complexities of party systems, a largely consistent and reliable empirical finding is that, on average, ideological preferences and political partisanship pass from parent to child. In other words, and to invoke again the English proverb, the apple does not fall *politically* far from the tree.

In this paper, I theorise that this relationship of intergenerational transmission operates under the assumption of heteronormative household dynamics and is likely disrupted in those households where non-transmittable sexual and gender identities engender preferences at odds with those socialised in the home. The intergenerational transmission of political dispositions, which occurs via a combination of direct parent–child socialisation and indirect socio-economic structural equivalence, results in children adopting social and political identities endogenous to the parental home and local ecology. Acquiring sexual identities that are exogenous of parental determinants can, I argue, result in individuals breaking away from the political diet that would otherwise organically emerge in the home resulting in LGBTQ+ individuals deviating, politically, from their parents.

Empirically, I find strong support for this thesis. Leveraging high-quality data from the British Election Study, I ask: *are sexual minority individuals likely to adopt partisan preferences that match those of their parents?* Modelling direct matches between parent–child choices at the ballot box, the results display important asymmetries. LGB individuals are significantly and substantively less likely to mirror their parents' partisanship if their parents voted for the right-wing Conservative party. The reverse is true when parents are politically aligned with the left-wing Labour party: in these homes LGB individuals are significantly *more* prone to mimic their parents' behaviour at the ballot box vis-à-vis their heterosexual peers. In the case of Labour-voting homes LGB are more likely to share partisan preferences, however, in large part because heterosexuals from Labour home are more inclined to be persuaded to vote for the Conservatives rather than LGBs being significantly over-supportive of Labour.

The significant result among Conservative-voting-households suggests that sexual identities acquired outside of the home operate distinctively depending on the baseline level of political socialisation acquired from parents. Sexual identities acquired in conservative homes result in extra-parental socialisation that pushes LGB individuals away from their parents disrupting the intergenerational transmission of preferences. Sexual identities acquired in Labour-voting homes, however, result in consolidated socialisation processes where both within- and extra-household socialisation drives

political sympathies with the left resulting in a reduced propensity (compared to heterosexuals from households with the same partisan composition) to switch loyalties. Importantly, I demonstrate that these simultaneous disruptive and consolidating forces are not conditioned by within-LGB identities nor by gender.

The data, regrettably, does not allow us to test the propensity to identify as trans or any other sexual or gender identity (T+) other than LGB given a lack of a survey measure to facilitate identification with these groups in the BES. My expectation, however, is that the significant divergence in parent–child preferences would replicate with these additional subgroups of the LGBTQ+ community. In the case of the latter, one might even expect the divergence to be significantly greater given trans and non-binary individuals experience more intense processes of societal othering than their LGB peers (Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024; Jones, 2021; Strode & Flores, 2021).

This study has substantive and wide-reaching implications. First, the findings invite a reassessment of the empirical literature around parental socialisation and the intergenerational transmission of political dispositions and behaviours at the ballot box. A one-size-fits-all approach to understanding parental socialisation is inadequate and scholars seeking to understand under what conditions individuals' political behaviours are indeed transmitted within the home would do well to consider the important, and disruptive, role that LGBTQ+ identities play in this process. Of note is that LGBTQ+ individuals, whilst a minority in comparison to cisgender heterosexuals, are not numerically marginal: among younger cohorts brought up in more socially tolerant societies, *self-identifying* LGBTQ+ individuals can make up to 20 per cent of the population (Jones, 2022). LGBTQ+ individuals are not only politically distinct from their heterosexual peers (Jones, 2021), but they are also significantly different from their parents, particularly those who sympathise with the political right. The consequences of this intergenerational deviation, therefore, suggest that a non-trivial proportion of Conservative-voting homes may not provide the organic generational voter replacement that right-wing parties may hope for.

Second, the findings contribute to the concrete, and ever-expanding, literature that seeks to shed new light on the political distinctiveness of LGBTQ+ individuals (Grahn, 2023; Guntermann & Beauvais, 2022; Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024; Jones, 2021; Sherrill, 1996; Spierings, 2021; Strode & Flores, 2021; Swank, 2018; Swank & Fahs, 2019; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020b; Wurthmann, 2023). This stratum of the electorate, which has traditionally been marginalised by political scientists (Ayoub, 2022; Paternotte, 2018), is of growing political importance, increasing size and, as argued by Flores *et al.* (2020), has the potential to have a direct outcome-shaping effect in concrete electoral competitions. These results speak to this literature by demonstrating how disruptions (and consolidations) in the parent–child socialisation process of LGB

individuals contributes to the electoral penchant among the LGBTQ+ community for socially liberal left-wing parties (Hunklinger & Kleer, 2024; Jones, 2021; Swank, 2018; Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020b).

Among the theorised mechanisms that explain the political distinctiveness of LGBTQ+ individual, the findings related to the rejection of the Conservatives provide indicative evidence in support of the processes that take place beyond the home: conversion and acculturation. More research is required, however, to explicitly and directly test these theorised mechanisms. While the theoretical argument I posit here – and the strong empirical results that support it – demonstrate extra-household socialisation processes for LGB individuals are taking place, identifying which of these drives the sexuality gap requires more (and better) data.

Right-wing parents are very much ineffective at anchoring their partisan preferences in their LGB children. This suggests that, as evidenced elsewhere (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2020a), when LGB individuals are faced with socio-economic and political cross-pressures, the interests of their sexual identities and those of the LGBTQ+ collective they belong to, are likely to outweigh other pressures and do, ultimately, determine their political preferences.

## Notes

1. Unfortunately, the British Election Study (BES) – the primary data source used in this paper – does not include an instrument to identify transgender individuals. My expectation, however, is that the political preferences of transgender respondents are likely to be aligned with the preferences of LGB respondents given that the mechanisms theorised to explain the sexuality gap are also apply to trans individuals (Hunklinger & Ferch, 2020; Jones, 2021).
2. This occurs, according to the author, because increased household politicisation develops information-seeking behaviour in individuals that can incentivise them to become more politically informed and exposure to increased political information may challenge the parental household's political loyalties. I argue that these information-seeking incentives will also apply for sexual minority individuals.
3. The theoretical argument presented here is limited to heterosexual parents. While still a minority, non-heteronormative homes are likely to engender political preferences that are inclined to be more socially liberal. See, for example, Flores and Morrison (2021) and Swank (2018).
4. The fact that non-heterosexual or cisgender individuals still have to 'come out' is indicative of the fact that contemporary heteronormative society retains heterosexual and cisgender status as the presumptive sexual and or gender identity.
5. Of note is that these information-seeking activities and the desire for interpersonal communication have benefits for LGBTQ+ youth's welfare. The rich psychological literature demonstrates that exposure to LGBTQ+ issues and characters in the media has remedial effects on the mental health of LGBTQ+ individuals and interpersonal contact with other LGBTQ+ people online – when physical contact is limited or not possible – facilitates increased resilience by providing an ecological setting that allows them to be their authentic self.



6. Some individual-level variability in sexual orientation is observed across waves of the BES. Whereas individuals' identification as heterosexual (98.59%) or lesbian/gay (93.97%) is largely constant between the most recent waves (93.97%), identification as bisexual is far more fluid (82.43%). Replications of the analysis using only those respondents without variation in their LGB identities, produce qualitatively symmetrical results.
7. The panel model specifications reported in Appendix H were constructed from the publicly accessible replication files for Egan (2020) – which uses data from the US' General Social Survey (GSS) over three waves – and applied to the BES panel data.
8. Sensitivity tests, estimating effects of father- and mother-specific transmission where the household is not uni-partisan are reported in the appendix. The primary conclusions here are not changed but these results should be considered with caution given the proportion of parental homes where the parental partisanship is not shared among parents is notably small.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Data availability statement

Supporting data and replication materials for this article can be accessed on the Harvard Dataverse at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/4KV5TG>.

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