

Press Release

Major EU Grant for Research into the Political Identity of LGBTQ+ People in Europe

Political scientist Dr. Constantin Wurthmann from the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) of the University of Mannheim has been awarded an ERC Starting Grant in the amount of 1.5 million euros. In his project, he investigates how the identities of sexual and gender minorities develop, and how these affect political attitudes and party preferences.

Political scientist Dr. Constantin Wurthmann from the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) of the University of Mannheim has been awarded a Starting Grant in the amount of 1,5 million euros from the European Research Council (ERC). The title of his research project is "Making the Queers Visible: Partisanship and Support among Sexual and Gender Minorities in Eastern and Western Europe". At 33, Wurthmann is one of the few to have received the prestigious grant at the earliest possible point in time after completing his doctorate.

So far hardly any reliable data

Despite growing societal relevance, there is still hardly any systematic data on the political orientation of LGBTQ+ people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other sexual orientations and gender identities). Wurthmann's project closes this research gap. "LGBTQ+ people make up around ten percent of the population – and yet there is hardly any reliable data on their political attitudes. This is exactly what we want to change," says the political scientist.

The project focuses on the questions of how the identities of sexual and gender minorities arise in the first place, how these affect party preferences and how sexual minorities in Europe relate to their political institutions and the political system in their respective countries. Unlike religious or ethnic affiliations, which are often passed down through family or culture, LGBTQ+ people usually have to discover their identity themselves. The societal and political conditions that influence this process have hardly been researched to date.

Initial studies on political attitudes show that LGBTQ+ people in Western Europe are more likely to support left-liberal parties, such as the SPD, Greens or Die Linke in Germany. In some Eastern European countries such as Poland, for example, this group feels more connected to right-wing liberal parties because left-wing conservatives sometimes take repressive action against them. This project examines on a broader scale the extent to which LGBTQ+ people's orientations are ideologically determined or have more pragmatic reasons, for example.

Do LGBTQ+ people have less trust in political institutions?

Last but not least, Wurthmann's project is also about the relationship between this population group and the political system as a whole. Sexual minorities may have less trust

in political institutions because they have experienced discrimination in many countries. In Germany, too, homosexuals were stigmatized by law and prosecuted under Criminal Law until the 1990s. How does this affect their current attitudes towards government institutions or the courts? Another goal of his project is to analyze and try to understand this connection.

Around 45,000 people in 13 countries will be surveyed

For the project, Wurthmann will conduct qualitative interviews and a large-scale, representative online survey with around 45,000 people in eight Western European and five Eastern European countries – including Poland, Hungary and Romania. The expected proportion of LGBTQ+ participants is around ten percent – enough to be able to make well-founded statements on political orientation and the development of group identities in the respective countries.

“We often talk about LGBTQ+ people – but far too rarely with them,” the political scientist states. “I want to facilitate this change of perspective and make their voices heard.”

About the person

Constantin Wurthmann received his doctorate from Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf, was an academic staff member at GESIS in Mannheim and substitute professor at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. He has been a Lorenz-von-Stein Research Fellow at MZES since October 2024. His interdisciplinary approach combines electoral and party research with perspectives on social inequality and marginalized groups.

This year, the political scientist also received a grant of over 450,000 euros from the German Research Foundation (DFG) for the project “German Sexual Identity and Election Study”.

About the European Research Council (ERC)

ERC Starting Grants are intended to support the scientific independence of recipients by helping them establish or consolidate a research team. They are aimed at promising scientists who completed their doctorate two to seven years ago and include a project budget of up to 1.5 million euros for a period of five years. The ERC's decision in awarding the highly endowed grants is based on the scientific excellence of the applicants. In this round, a total of 761 million euros were awarded to 487 top researchers across 25 countries. Only about 12 percent of all proposals were accepted.

Click here to read the press release by the ERC: <https://erc.europa.eu/news-events/news/erc-2025-starting-grants-results>

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