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Research Article

Moral Boundaries and Cultural Membership: Perceptions of the LGBTQ in Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Sexual minorities consistently rank as the most disapproved of group in Turkey although the LGBTQ community remain largely invisible. To explain this disparity, we examine private and public responses to "homosexuality" along four dimensions: demographic factors, social context, religion and religiosity, and public morality. The data come from a nationally representative survey (N=1893). We tested four sets of variables to explain the persistence of mistrust toward sexual minorities. The first two, demographic factors and social context, show limited explanatory power. The third dimension of personal morality is also limited, because boundaries against LGBTQ individuals also cut across religion and religiosity. The fourth dimension, public morality, a vision of moral values shaping public life and political discourse, explains the particularity of the views toward non-straight sexual orientations as the specific alignment of a moral worldview with exclusionary cultural membership. Results are significant in two ways. First, they show that the mistrust of sexual minorities is high. Second, the public displays of mistrust are different from the forms of prejudice expressed toward other groups, such as ethnic minorities. The symbolic boundaries drawn vis-à-vis LGBTQ individuals tells us more about the core values of belonging and solidarity in Turkish society.

Keywords: Moral boundaries, religion, religiosity, public morality, Turkey



Introduction

At the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in April, the suggestion by Türkiye's Director of Religious Affairs during a televised speech that "homosexuality" causes illness has prompted a clash between conservative politicians and the country's left-leaning lawyers associations over freedom of expression. The director argued that "'evils' such as homosexuality, spread disease and 'decay'" (Wilks, 2020). The Directorate of Religious Affairs is one of Türkiye's most powerful state agencies established in 1924 after the formation of the secular republic to promote the government's version of true Islam, although some argue that the directorate began to promote a more conservative interpretation of Islam in the 2000s (Öztürk, 2016). The director defended his remarks by proposing that he only speaks the truth of the Qur'an.

What explains the extraordinarily high levels of mistrust against a relatively invisible and politically powerless minority? Is religiosity automatically antithetical to attitudes promoting LGBTQ rights? In this paper, we examine contemporary forms of heterosexism and homophobia in Türkiye with these questions in mind. While narrowly referring to gay and lesbian individuals, the term "homosexuality" is inadequately used in Turkish popular debates as an umbrella term to identify non-heterosexual orientations. For the sake of consistency, we will use the term LGBTQ throughout this paper. Studies persistently find pervasive negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community as the most excluded group in Türkiye (J. Anderson & Koc, 2015; Çarkoğlu & Kalaycıoğlu, 2009; Duyan & Duyan, 2005; Gelbal & Duyan, 2006). Heterosexism is a dominant force in the public domain (Bakacak & Öktem, 2014). The puzzle is to find out why a relatively small, invisible, and disorganized group in terms of political representation and freedom of speech draws such a strong reaction. Religiosity may be a potent explanation, but atheists, another invisible yet much censured group by religion, appear to be less disapproved of (Çarkoğlu & Toprak, 2007). On the contrary, other groups that are much more visible in polarizing public debates in Türkiye, such as the Kurds and immigrants, draw comparatively smaller levels of intolerance (Aytaç & Çarkoğlu, 2019). Considering the intensity and nature of opposition to minority sexual orientations in the Turkish context, the central thesis of this paper is that we cannot simply treat the LGBTQ community similar to other out-groups, only more intensely opposed. The attitudes toward LGBTQ people reveal the core assumptions about the basis of social solidarity and cultural membership, which are rooted in symbolic boundaries. Our survey results find that homophobia goes beyond demographic factors and religion/religiosity, factors that are usually associated with tolerance for other out-groups and show that deeper symbolic and moral attitudes about collective identity is at work. By distinguishing religiosity from expressions of public morality, we examine the ways in which moral and symbolic boundaries are drawn to the effect of excluding minority groups from a vision of national membership.

Symbolic Boundaries and Religion

A significant aspect of the exclusionary rhetoric against LGBTQ individuals has to do with symbolic boundaries. Whether scholars explicitly recognize it or not, many research areas, including those on immigration, cultural capital, consumption, cultural membership, racial, ethnic, or national belonging, have close connections with the study of boundaries and boundary-making. Boundary work is significant for social actors to make sense, maintain, and naturalize patterns of social inclusion and exclusion. Thus, the study of boundaries and boundary-making is essential to show how culture operates in reinforcing inequalities across diverse mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. In this paper, we show that the symbolic mechanisms of exclusion may target largely

invisible and powerless minorities when the minority in question is seen as violating the taken-for-granted definitions of belonging in a moral and national community.

Symbolic boundaries constitute competing definitions of reality. A continuing effort in the literature on boundaries is to identify the use of symbolic distinctions in creating and maintaining social inclusion, exclusion, and inequality (Edgell et al., 2020). Lamont and Molnar (2002) identify social and symbolic boundaries as two distinct types of boundaries in order to investigate the process of translating symbolic and interpretive strategies into social resources. They define symbolic boundaries as “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space” (Lamont & Molnár, 2002, p. 168). In this sense, boundaries are also collective identity projects because they both exclude those who are different and include those who are similar. Therefore, an important aspect of symbolic boundaries is cultural membership (Edgell & Tranby, 2010). Cultural membership has to do with the way social actors interpret encounters with real or, in our case, imagined others within a framework of similarity and difference. Understanding cultural membership can help shed light on the complex problems of moral order and social inequality, or how groups understand relationships of trust, social obligation, and hierarchy (Alexander, 2003). Bail (2008) notes that when it comes to boundary drawing in public life, and the question of cultural membership in the nation, members of the dominant group may draw exclusionary boundaries based on gender, race, religion, culture, language, and social class. The boundary that marks cultural membership defines insiders and outsiders in terms of authenticity or legitimacy (Edgell & Tranby, 2010), which, in our case, translate into questions of whether the LGBTQ are seen as legitimate members of national or local collectivities.

An integral part of cultural membership is moral evaluation and moral order because the boundaries that mark cultural membership, mark “good” or “true” members of a collectivity from “bad” or “false” ones (Edgell & Tranby, 2010, p. 177). Boundaries of cultural membership are not formal boundaries although they are not less real than concrete or social boundaries because they mark group membership along the dimensions of similarity and difference and shape patterns of social obligations, public trust, and inequality (Pachucki et al., 2007). Lamont and Molnar (2002, p. 169) consider symbolic boundaries a necessary but not sufficient condition for the production of social boundaries. Only after symbolic boundaries are recognized and understood by members of a collectivity can they translate into patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

We present the depth of negative attitudes toward sexual minorities as an instance of moral exclusion that lies at the foundations of national belonging. The views against LGBTQ individuals shed light on perceptions of moral unity and patterns of cultural membership in Turkish society. Therefore, the issue is not simply a matter of magnitude, reflecting a quantitatively “larger” amount of a generic form of intolerance (Meuleman et al., 2018) that is expected to apply to other outsider groups. Moral boundaries of homophobia and heterosexism are qualitatively different, because “homosexuality” as a public concern maps onto deep symbolic distinctions regarding visions about legitimate belonging many other forms of social exclusion map onto more concrete cultural and/or socio-economic bases and correspond to social positions across the spectrum of social categories, such as gender, class, ethnicity, and education. For example, people’s views on gender equality vary along different levels of education, as educated individuals acquire more gender-equal attitudes (Rankin & Aytaç, 2006). We suspect that the perceptions of LGBTQ people in Türkiye cut across many traditional categories of sociological analysis, such as income, education, and gender. This is a significant puzzle to explain. Based on previous findings in the literature that show the extent of public reactions to “homosexuality,” we expect homophobia and

heterosexism to crosscut socio-economic categories, cultural boundaries, religion, and religiosity, and to surface in a fundamentally symbolic dimension of moral alterity. In this sense, negative views on sexual minorities transcend personal religious proscriptions or with perceived threats that may originate from perceived social problems. Instead, these views correspond to deeply held moral positions about the nature of social collectivity and visions of public morality. Thus, our focus in this paper is not on the mistreatment of the LGBTQ community. Instead, we are interested in the persistence and depth of attitudes that exclude them as outsiders in public and private life.

The literature on boundaries pays attention to how religious beliefs may maintain, legitimize, or reinforce social boundaries (Pachucki et al., 2007). Religion may be implicated in forming identities and solidarities and reinforcing boundaries against outsiders in different visions of belonging (Edgell & Tranby, 2010). Historically, religion has provided answers on how society should respond to the problems of inequality, difference, and claims made by ethnic, racial and sexual others (Edgell & Tranby, 2014). However, religions are not homogeneous entities because boundaries within religious institutions create social distinctions and relations of power (Lichterman, 2005). Religious identities are fluid, intersectional, and context-specific (Edgell et al., 2020). Exclusionary attitudes do not have to be inherently embedded into religious views. Although we focus exclusively on the role of Islam in shaping these attitudes, paying attention to moral boundaries helps account for the diversity of religious beliefs and avoid reductionist views on religion and religiosity. First, moral boundaries allow seeing religion both as a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Second, it is important to underline the overlaps between symbolic and social boundaries (Edgell et al., 2020). Thus, boundary research examines symbolically created but also materially maintained inequalities and social distances. Third, moral boundaries carry the focus beyond religion and religiosity and into collective visions of how religion should shape public morality. Given the relative invisibility of LGBTQ identities in public life, homophobia and heterosexism in Turkiye are largely formed without recognized contact with LGBTQ people and hence tend to be independent of patterns of explicitly formed prejudice. For this reason, in order to identify the role of religion, this paper distinguishes personal religious commitments from a cultural style of public morality that prescribes religious expression to be part of public life and political discourse (Stewart et al., 2018). Research tends to emphasize individual religious commitments and practices in the formation of social exclusions. However, people draw upon multiple discourses to develop conceptions of what is just or moral (Delehanty et al., 2019). This is one of the keys to explaining the magnitude of anti-LGBTQ sentiments in the relative absence of large-scale LGBTQ visibility. We examine moral boundaries against LGBTQ individuals not simply as residual artefacts of religious worldviews, but instead a reflection of moral power to assign worth in visions of national belonging. Our measurements distinguish expressions of individual religiosity from visions of how religion should shape public life.

Solving the puzzle of “homosexuality” in Turkiye requires a systematic understanding of morality, which is located at the intersection of public visions of morality, a repertoire of citizenship, civic inclusion, and belonging. We need to explore how religion and religiosity combine with other factors to shape the way people answer the question of “who is like me?” Morality is a cultural tool, which, among other things, garners an image of religion and how religion should be experienced publicly. Boundaries defining inclusion and exclusion are constructed in interaction with the cultural repertoires available in national contexts. Therefore, our question becomes how this image of religion, seen as a guideline for public life, influences the forming of moral atti-

tudes. That is, how religion as a politico-moral category provides the cultural tools through which people understand otherness and construct exclusionary moral boundaries. At the private level, religious identities shape religious behavior and practices. At the level of public vision, however, it taps into an articulation of public religious expressions, which is connected to a “religiously infused public sphere” (Stewart et al., 2018, p. 32). Public morality incorporates expressions and beliefs that religion should be part of public and political life, highlighting an expectation that public institutions should broadly accommodate religious beliefs and practices. Political leaders, parties, social movements, and interest groups strategically link religion to underline visions of national belonging (C. Bail, 2014). Juxtapositions of religiosity to public notions of social belonging and good citizenship by public figures fuse personal religiosity and public morality and cast outsiders as threats to the stability of civic life (Wuthnow, 2011). By analyzing the effects of both individual religious identity and the politico-moral dimension of religiosity, we want to understand how religious commitments shape perceptions of cultural and civic membership of moral outsiders in the Turkish context.

Religion, National Belonging, and LGBTQ issues in Türkiye

In his classic text, Anderson (1991) argues that images and symbols from mass media and popular culture suggest the content of an imagined national community. Media discourses shape the shared vision of a nation even when they are not explicitly enunciated. This vision is inclusive and exclusive at the same time and can be shaped by a moral account of who is like “us” and who is not (Griswold, 1992). Turkish nationalism is not different from other nationalisms on its emphasis on creating a homogeneous national belonging. Since the foundation of the republic in the 1920s, nationalist elites worked with a vision of a unitary nation that underplayed ethnic, class, and gender inequalities. Ethnic unity has been one of the fundamental concerns throughout the republican history (Ergin, 2016). While the secular elites paid attention to gender equality as a central goal of modernization, there was no room for gender issues outside a nationalist framework (Altan-Olcay, 2009; Arat, 2005). The negative views associated with non-heterosexual orientations map onto this history of homogeneous nation formation and political culture that promotes both heteronormativity and traditional attitudes toward gender and family.

Traditional Islamic scholars view non-heterosexual orientations as deviant and sinful although there have been progressive attempts for alternative interpretations (Jamal, 2001; Minwalla et al., 2005). Because the traditional teachings of Islam are quite explicit in rejecting sexual minorities, some research suggests that anti-LGBTQ attitudes are a result of religious scriptural teachings (e.g., Bonthuys & Erlank, 2012) while others have suggested that these attitudes are beyond what is necessitated by the teachings of the Qur’an (Hooghe et al., 2010). Relative to Christianity, little is known about the relationship between religion and contemporary Muslim attitudes towards LGBTQ individuals. A number of studies suggests that individuals who identify with any religion tend to report more anti-gay attitudes (e.g., Finlay & Walther, 2003; Hunsberger, 1995). However, religiosity, rather than categorical religious affiliation, may be more important in shaping boundary formation (J. Anderson & Koc, 2015; Whitley, 2009). As such, religion and religiosity have often been found to be important predictors of an explicit rejection of sexual minorities, a finding that has been well documented in non-Muslim samples (Whitley, 2009). More research is needed to examine the parameter of perceptions of “homosexuality” by Muslims in Türkiye, because the country, with its long history of westernization as well as a large and diverse population, provides a pertinent context for this investigation.

Unlike in many other Muslim-majority countries, same-sex relationships are not a crime in Türkiye, although there are no specific legal protections against discrimination. The 1980s were dominated by the trans movement, and trans individuals have been legally permitted to have gender reassignment surgeries since 1988, while in the 1990s gay men became more visible in the LGBTQ movement (Çetin, 2016). The official recognition of Türkiye as a candidate for European Union accession in 1999 had an immediate effect on the recognition of the movement. LGBTQ groups have been trying to increase their visibility and draw attention to the inequalities in legal and social arenas since the 1990s, despite having limited popular support. The first Pride march in 1993 was banned by the governor of Istanbul with the charge that it would be against morality and the values of Turkish society. After this ban the Commission for the Human Rights of the European Parliament took up the discrimination against LGBTQ people in Türkiye for the first time in their annual progress report (Çetin, 2016). The LGBTQ movement has evolved considerably since the 1990s although LGBTQ activism continues to draw strong negative reactions both popularly and from political authorities, especially after its visibility during the Gezi protests against the government in 2015 (Çetin, 2016). Public endorsements of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric by politicians and media, and adverse treatment by police and other relevant authorities aligns with the widespread rejection of sexual minorities in Turkish society.

Method

The data were collected in one of the first studies to systematically study moral and cultural boundaries in Türkiye. The project, entitled “The Construction of Cultural Boundaries: Relations Between Cultural, Socio-Economic and Moral Status Symbols in Türkiye”, was conducted in two stages over the course of 18 months (ethics approval was secured from Koç University Ethic Committee). After a qualitative component of 49 in-depth interviews, in the first stage, we conducted a nationally representative survey of 1893 adults in the second stage. The questionnaire included questions on taste, knowledge, and participation as well as a wide array of moral distinctions. To measure the dependent variable, we gave participants a list of potential outsider groups that ranked high in previous surveys and asked them if they would oppose having them as their neighbors and if those groups belong in their vision of Türkiye. The sample is based on a stratified random sampling of Turkish national electoral rolls. The list was stratified by region and urban/rural location using the Turkish Statistical Institute’s 12 economic and social development regions, such that the resulting sample is proportional to the urban and rural population size in each region and for the country as a whole; 76% of the sample is urban and 24% is rural. Face-to-face interviews for the survey were conducted at the home of respondents.

Although the survey was fielded in 2011, the negative perceptions of sexual minorities in Türkiye remain stable, if not worse, especially after the collapse of the European Union integration process and the increasing power of conservative rhetoric in the country. Our survey also has the advantage of being specially built upon the qualitative findings in the in-depth interviews with the explicit design to collect representative data to examine the formation of cultural and moral boundaries. Although more recent surveys are available, this survey is the only one to be able to establish our central thesis that the negative perceptions of LGBTQ individuals are deeply moral issues that crosscut socio-economic, cultural, and religious boundaries. However, at the end of this paper, we bring up a rough comparison with World Values Survey (Wave 7) to illustrate that a) anti-LGBTQ views are as strong as ever; b) these negative perceptions closely resonate with moral values specifically referring to visions of belonging to a national collectivity as opposed to other sets of variables.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive results identify “homosexuals” as the group with the most likelihood of mistrust both in private interactions and in public belonging. To measure these two components, we used two items from our survey that tap into one’s willingness to create boundaries in public and private life. For private acceptance, respondents were asked to answer whether they would approve or disapprove the members of particular groups as their neighbors. Similar to Edgell et al (2006), we interpret this as a measure of individual trust and acceptance of a person as a moral being. For public acceptance we asked about the extent to which members of a particular group share one’s vision of Türkiye. This question is in line with Lamont and Molnar’s conception of “cultural membership” (2002, p. 187).

The percentages of disapproval for selected groups are as follows:

Table 1. Public and Private Rejection

Opinions	%
These groups do not belong to the vision of Turkey in my mind	
“Homosexual”	62.6
Cohabiting heterosexual couples	39.2
Armenian	33.0
Jew	31.1
Religious fundamentalist	30.0
Kurd	17.6
I would oppose these groups to be my neighbors	
“Homosexual”	66.2
Cohabiting heterosexual couples	52.2
Atheist	43.1
Non-Muslim	21.5
Kurd	14.8
Foreigner	12.9

For both measures, “homosexuals,” the term commonly used in Türkiye to refer to a wide array of sexual minorities, are at the top of the list as the most mistrusted. This observation sets up the central puzzle of this paper that “homosexuality” has the highest level of exclusion at the expense of groups that are more visible in public controversies, such as Kurds, foreigners, or atheists. Most of our respondents not only display their unwillingness to interact with “homosexuals” in private affairs, but also consider them as outsiders within the national community.

Table 2. Percentages of Public and Private Rejection of “Homosexuals”

Public and Private Rejection	Gender		Education		Religion		Location	
	Women	Men	University	No University	Sunni Muslim	Other	Urban	Rural
<i>Not belonging to nation</i>	60.8	64.4	43.0	64.7	65.0	37.7	57.3	75.8
<i>Rejecting as neighbors</i>	64.1	68.2	48.3	68.1	68.2	44.0	61.3	78.1

Descriptive statistics in Table 2 confirm several expected patterns. Women (compared to men), university-educated individuals (compared all other educational levels), and those who live in urban areas (compared to rural settings) tend to display lower levels of homophobia. Sunni Muslims, in comparison to other religions and sects, such as Alevi, are more likely to show disapproval toward the LGBTQ in both public and private acceptance. Do these negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals constitute a part of a general pattern of prejudice toward all “undesirable” groups? In other words, is homophobia simply a quantitatively more intense form of prejudice? To start examining this question, we analyzed whether the mistrust toward sexual minorities is consistent with the attitudes toward other out-groups. If this is the case, we would observe correlations between the negative attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals and other excluded groups. We report below the correlations between the likelihood of rejecting the LGBTQ and several other groups as neighbors. The table also includes the descriptive categories of gender, education, and religious affiliation.

Table 3. Correlations between Attitudes toward Homosexuals and Other Groups, by Gender, Education, and Religion

Attitudes toward Sample categories	Cohabiting Couple	Atheist	Non-Muslim	Kurd	Foreigner
Entire sample	.464	.479	---	---	---
Women	.457	.525	.329	---	---
Men	.474	.438	---	---	---
Less than university educated	.461	.479	---	---	---
University educated	.392	.387	---	---	---
Sunni Muslim	.448	.472	---	---	---
Alevi	.655	.398	.407	---	.313

Note: Correlations >.3 and statistically significant are reported. All correlations are p<.01.

The table shows that the anti-LGBTQ attitudes correlate with the attitudes toward cohabiting heterosexual couples and atheists. In the entire sample, there is a relatively high correlation between respondents rejecting the LGBTQ and cohabiting heterosexual couples as neighbors (.464), and LGBTQ and atheist neighbors (.479). The disapproval of non-Muslim, Kurdish, or foreigner neighbors, however, does not have a significant correlation with the undesirability of LGBTQ neighbors. With a few exceptions, this is also the case across the gender, education, and religion sub-groups in our sample. The disapproval of “homosexuality,” atheism, and opposite-sex cohabitation belong to the same moral universe. This is the first sign that boundaries vis-à-vis the LGBTQ are deeply symbolic, referring to cultural membership and moral belonging in Turkish society, and are qualitatively different from the boundaries drawn vis-à-vis more publicly visible and politically implicated out-groups such as Kurds and foreigners. The overlaps among the negative attitudes toward sexual minorities, atheists, and cohabiting heterosexual couples indicate that the disapproval toward these groups are not only quantitatively intense but also originate from qualitatively different concerns. Within these deeply held moral disapprovals, “homosexuals” appear to be symbolically the most excluded group.

Private Acceptance

We analyzed the different factors contributing to the construction of boundaries around sexual minorities using logistic regression on both of our measures. To find out if the exclusion of

“homosexuals” in Türkiye stem from private interactions corresponding to a moral outlook, we considered whether respondents are willing to have LGBTQ neighbors. Although “public” and “private” are complex concepts, it is important to make this rough distinction to see if disapproval in immediate encounters, such as becoming neighbors, match with a broader vision of exclusion at the national level. We conducted the analysis for both “private” and “public” dimensions and in four blocks for each. The first three blocks include the usual suspects in research on prejudice. These are: (1) demographic information, which includes categories such as gender, age, income; (2) social context, which includes variables about respondents’ household, location, and perceptions of these settings; (3) religion and religiosity, which includes variables regarding religion as well as subjective and objective measures of religiosity. The final block, public morality, pertains to a vision of moral belonging and membership and it is what we expect to be the defining characteristic of the attitudes toward the LGBTQ community. The variables in this block measure respondents’ vision of how public life should be shaped.

Demographic Variables

Research shows that prejudice toward out-groups is shaped by demographic factors, such as age, ethnicity, and gender (e.g., Andersen & Fetner, 2008; Blashill & Powlishta, 2009; Collier et al., 2013; Sirin et al., 2004; Yang, 1997). Class and education shape attitudes toward others by producing different levels of cultural capital (Persell et al., 2001; Svallfors, 2006). In our analysis, the demographic variables are gender (51.4% female), income (in quintiles, $M=2.97$, $SD=1.4$; in actual scores, mean [in Turkish liras]: 1272, $SD=925$), whether the respondent has a university degree or not (9.3% had a university degree or higher), age (in quintiles, $M=2.96$, $SD=1.4$; in actual scores, $M=38$, $SD=14$), and whether the respondent reports his/her ethnic identity to be Kurdish (15.5% Kurdish).

Table 4. Model 1: Logistic Regression of Responses to “I would oppose having a homosexual neighbor”

Independent variables	Model 1	
	Exp (β)	SE
<i>Demographic variables</i>		
Gender (male)	1.34	.107**
Education (less than university)	1.91	.178***
Ethnicity (non-Kurdish)	1.53	.152**
Income (higher)	0.81	.040***
Age (higher)	0.99	.004
Constant	1.93	.052
χ^2	65.90***	df=5
Cases correctly classified, %	65.9	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	.054	

Note: N=1657, * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

Apart from age, the demographic variables have a significant relationship with the likelihood of opposing LGBTQ neighbors. Men’s likelihood of expressing mistrust for the LGBTQ community is 1.34 times higher compared to women. University education appears to be an important factor in reducing prejudices against LGBTQ neighbors in this block, because individuals with lower levels of education are almost twice as likely to express disapproval. As members of an ethnic minority, individuals who identified themselves as Kurd have lower levels of prejudice

against LGBTQ neighbors—individuals who identify as Turks (and other ethnicities) have 1.53 times higher odds of disapproval. Higher levels of income also produce significantly lower levels of prejudice.

Social Context

In the second block, we introduce variables regarding the social location of individuals. Extensive literature suggests that poverty and inequality tend to be positively associated with homonegativity (Brewer, 2003). The absence of diversity (or perceptions of it) in a person’s neighborhood is another factor which has frequently been found to be positively related to homonegativity (Cullen et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2009). The variables in this block measure respondents’ exposure to diversity, poverty, and inequality. The first variable has to do with whether the respondent’s house is in a squatter neighborhood (24.9% of respondents live in squatter housing in our sample). We then ask whether the respondent lives in an urban or rural area. In our sample, 29% of respondents live in rural areas, which is representative of the Turkish population. The third variable is the appearance and economic condition of the house, coded by the interviewer. This is a proxy variable to measure the general living conditions of the household. Interviewers judged 21.9% of the houses to be in poor appearance, and the rest is in middle or higher categories. The last two variables measure the respondent’s perception of inequality and diversity, because attitudes towards outgroups may be shaped by a person’s own experiences with social difference or acceptance of diversity (Hartmann, 2015). The first measure is a 10-point scale of how much inequality they think exists in the country ($M=7.8, SD=2.5$). The second is a 7-point index of two variables. The questions in this index ask the respondents about the level of diversity in their community and among their friends ($M=3.57, SD=1.14$).

Table 5. Model 2: Logistic Regression of Responses to “I would oppose having a homosexual neighbor”

Independent variables	Model 2	
	Exp (β)	SE
Demographic Variables		
Gender (male)	1.36	.112**
Education (less than university)	1.74	.181**
Ethnicity (non-Kurdish)	1.55	.164**
Income (higher)	0.90	.047*
Age (higher)	1.00	.004
Social Context		
Residence (squatter)	1.44	.169*
Location (rural)	1.38	.147*
Household poverty (poor)	1.28	.176
Inequality perception (higher)	1.00	.023
Diversity index (higher)	0.83	.053***
Constant	1.91	.053
χ^2	101.13***	df=10
Cases correctly classified, %	65.6	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	.086	

Note: N=1576, *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Social context variables do not change the demographic picture as gender, education, ethnicity, and income remain significant in explaining homonegativity. Residents of squatter settle-

ments and rural respondents have higher likelihoods (1.44 and 1.38 times respectively) of disapproving of LGBTQ neighbors. However, respondents who observe higher levels of diversity in their social contexts have lower levels of anti-LGBTQ prejudices.

Religion and Religiosity

Traditionally censured by some of the major religions, “homosexuality” may correlate with religion and religiosity (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019; Olson et al., 2006; Quinn & Dickson-Gomez, 2016; Sherkat et al., 2011). In the third block, we enter variables measuring religion, religiosity, and religious attendance, which aim to capture both objective and subjective engagement with religion. In contradistinction to the next block, the variables used here represent respondents’ private experiences of religion, measured through self-reported engagement with religion, religiosity and attitudes toward religiously-connoted practices. Religiosity is measured in terms of an 11-point index reported by respondents, zero indicating not religious at all ($M=6.40$, $SD=2.19$). The frequency of attending religious services measures respondents’ reported behavior of religious activity in a place of worship or at home. For many (especially Muslim men), attending the mosque on Fridays is a cultural routine and does not necessarily point to high levels of religiosity. A regularity of attendance for more than once a week, however, implies observing Islamic prayer five times a day as required in Sunni Islam. For that reason, we compare regular attendees (more than once a week, 44% of the sample) with those who attend religious services once a week or less. The third variable is whether the respondent believes that being a moral person requires being religious (17.3% agreed). We also compare Alevis (6% in the sample) with Sunni Muslims. Alevis are a heterodox group with links to Shia Islam. It is a matter of debate whether they form a religion, an Islamic sect, a cultural group, or something entirely different. We include this variable because, as the largest minority religion in Türkiye, the Alevis are reputed to have differences in matters of faith and inclusivity (Savcı, 2016). The final variable has to do with whether the respondent celebrates New Year’s Eve (53% do). This is a controversial issue in the Turkish context, because many confuse New Year’s Eve with Christmas and associate it with Christian traditions. Therefore, disapproval of celebrating New Year’s Eve is a good indicator of religiosity. These five variables tap into people way of expressing and practicing religion and religious preferences in their personal lives.

Table 6. Model 3: Logistic Regression of Responses to “I would oppose having a homosexual neighbor”

Independent variables	Model 3	
	Exp (β)	SE
Demographic Variables		
Gender (male)	1.50	.123**
Education (less than university)	1.67	.196**
Ethnicity (non-Kurdish)	1.46	.177*
Income (higher)	0.92	.050
Age (higher)	0.99	.004
Social Context		
Residence (squatter)	1.50	.174*
Location (rural)	1.18	.153
Household poverty (poor)	1.20	.183
Inequality perception (higher)	1.03	.024
Diversity index (higher)	0.85	.055**
Religion and Religiosity		
Religiosity (higher)	1.10	.029**
Religious attendance (>once a week)	1.27	.140
Moral=Religious (yes)	1.12	.155
Sect (Alevi)	1.40	.237
New Year celebration (no)	1.35	.134*
Constant	1.91	.054
χ ²	133.6***	df=15
Cases correctly classified, %	68.8	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	.118	

Note: N=1495, *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Adding religion and religiosity variables to the model create important shifts. In the first block, gender, education, and ethnicity, but not income, remain significant. In the second block, urban and rural distinction in homonegativity is not significant. In the third block, higher levels of self-proclaimed religiosity are associated with a higher likelihood of disapproval of LGBTQ neighbors. People who refuse to celebrate New Year’s Eve are also more likely to oppose LGBTQ neighbors. The remaining three variables, including religious attendance, are not statistically significant.

Public Morality

Finally, we enter variables that have to do with public morality and tap into belonging and membership in larger society. This block of variables is linked to religiosity, the component we examined in the previous block. However, directly or indirectly, imposing certain religious precepts on others are part of political discourses that give public voice to religiously inspired views. Therefore, the variables in this block are different from variables regarding religion and religiosity in the sense that they capture the views about the type of society respondents envision. We consider public morality as religiously inspired views that operate as markers of belonging. Thus, public expressions of religion serve instances of imaginations of a good society (Stewart et al., 2018). Religiosity or religious practice, as we examined in block 3, look at the way a person leads a religious or non-religious life. However, attitudes toward imposing religion on society tell us more about a person’s views of what a good or just society is, who should be included in that society, and how others should shape their moral and religious visions. In this sense, variables in this

block signal what kinds of moral commitments are necessary for being included in the boundaries of good citizenship. These variables have to do with the respondents' vision of how choices made by others in public life should be shaped. If homophobia makes individuals draw boundaries of morality and cultural membership about who belongs to the nation and the neighborhood in which they live, it must have implications for value judgments, such as conservatism, the role of religion in state and society, family values, and the role of education. Three of the variables in this block tap into respondents' views of how religion should shape Turkish society. These variables are: whether respondents agree with the statement that religious values should be emphasized more in Türkiye (76% agreed), whether alcohol sales should be banned in the month of the Ramadan (69% agreed), and whether religion courses should be mandatory at schools (75% agreed). It is important to include education-related variables because schools are venues of moral socialization where debates about moral discourse are reproduced or contested. Because of education's highly-charged significance in identifying a person's moral response to society's current issues in Türkiye (Ergin et al., 2019), we included a variable regarding education in a 5-point scale asking the respondents how important education is ($M=3.14$, $SD=0.65$). The final variable asks if the respondent thinks traditional family values should be more emphasized (78% agreed) because opponents of "homosexuality" frequently portray it as a debasement of family values (Williams, 2018).

Table 7. Model 4: Logistic Regression of Responses to "I would oppose having a homosexual neighbor"

Independent variables	Model 4	
	Exp (β)	SE
Demographic Variables		
Gender (male)	1.54	.133**
Education (less than university)	1.36	.213
Ethnicity (non-Kurdish)	1.03	.193
Income (higher)	0.94	.054
Age (higher)	0.99	.005
Social Context		
Residence (squatter)	1.47	.187*
Location (rural)	1.13	.162
Household poverty (poor)	0.89	.195
Inequality perception (higher)	1.06	.026*
Social diversity index (higher)	0.87	.059*
Religion and Religiosity		
Religiosity (higher)	0.99	.033
Mosque attendance (>once a week)	1.10	.151
Moral=Religious (yes)	1.27	.169
Sect (Alevi)	0.80	.264
New Year celebration (no)	1.11	.148
Public Morality		
Religious values emphasized (agree)	1.96	.181***
Alcohol ban in Ramadan (yes)	1.49	.154**
Religion courses required (agree)	1.72	.171**
Education is important (higher)	0.65	.104***
Family values emphasize (agree)	1.61	.163**
Constant	1.87	.056
χ^2	234.8***	df=20
Cases correctly classified, %	65.2	
R^2 (Nagelkerke)	.211	

Note: N=1411, * $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

Table 7 displays the four successive blocks of factors that affect individuals' objection to LGBTQ individuals in personal interaction. The introduction of public morality in the final step of the analysis implies that the fundamental factor behind homonegativity in Turkiye is not religion or religiosity expressed in personal behavior. None of the variables in the third block, including subjective evaluations of religiosity, attendance of religious services, or even equating religion with morality, are significantly related with attitudes toward homosexuality. One demographic variable in block 1, gender, remains significant: men are 1.52 times more likely to disapprove a gay neighbor compared to women in our final model. Social context also remains linked with perceptions of LGBTQ neighbors, as residents of squatter areas are more likely to express disapproval. Perceptions of inequality also seem to contribute to negative views in the final model. The perception of living in a diverse context, on the other hand, reduce prejudices against LGBTQ neighbors. The final model shows the central role moral evaluations play in the private disapproval of the LGBTQ community in comparison to demographic variables, social location and more importantly, religiosity. The main driving factor behind the negative private attitudes toward "homosexuality" in Turkiye has to do with an individual's vision of imposing a particular public moral order and this indicates the deeply symbolic exclusion of "homosexuality" that cuts across socio-economic status, urban-rural axis, religion, and religiosity.

National Belonging

To what extent can we generalize the position to disapprove LGBTQ neighbors as a broad rejection of their belonging to the national community? One may argue that a respondent's unwillingness to live with sexual minorities as neighbors indicate an attitude regarding private disapproval and does not automatically exclude LGBTQ persons' social belonging in public life. To find out if it is justified to distinguish public and private acceptance, we conducted the same logistic regression analysis for the public acceptance of LGBTQ minorities. The dependent variable comes from a question we asked to capture the acceptance or rejection of "homosexuals" as a group in the national imagery. The wording is: "Do homosexuals share your vision of Turkiye as a nation?" Since our goal is to compare the private and public disapproval in the overall picture, we are only reporting the final (four-block) model here.

Table 8. Model 4: Logistic Regression of Responses to “Homosexuals do not share my vision of Turkey”

Independent variables	Model 4	
	Exp (β)	SE
Demographic Variables		
Gender (male)	1.46	.132**
Education (less than university)	1.28	.215
Ethnicity (non-Kurdish)	0.92	.197
Income (higher)	0.92	.054
Age (higher)	0.99	.005*
Social Context		
Residence (squatter)	1.47	.184*
Location (rural)	1.11	.160
Household poverty (poor)	1.09	.195
Inequality perception (higher)	1.02	.026
Social diversity index (higher)	0.84	.058**
Religion and Religiosity		
Religiosity (higher)	0.95	.033
Mosque attendance (>once a week)	1.08	.151
Moral=Religious (yes)	1.99	.176***
Sect (Alevi)	0.99	.273
New Year celebration (no)	1.16	.146
Public Morality		
Religious values emphasize (agree)	1.73	.184**
Alcohol ban in Ramadan (yes)	2.19	.151***
Religion courses required (agree)	1.35	.173
Education is important (higher)	0.81	.165*
Family values emphasize (agree)	1.52	.174**
Constant	1.65	.055
χ^2	246.0***	df=20
Cases correctly classified, %	62.3	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	.211	

Note: N=1411, *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Statistical models for private and public acceptance are similar in many ways. Similar to the private disapproval model, gender and residence are significant as men and residents of squatter areas are more likely to exclude LGBTQ individuals from their vision of the country. Perceived diversity, too, has an effect on reducing prejudices toward the LGBTQ. Age is significant in the public acceptance model and shows that, unexpectedly, younger people have higher levels of homophobic attitudes, although the substantive effects are small. Most importantly, Table 8 establishes the overlaps between private and public views regarding the centrality of moral exclusion. Variables that revolve around shaping others' lives in terms of a particular moral vision contribute significantly to the model. Respondents who want religious and family values to be emphasized, and alcohol to be banned in the month of the Ramadan are (respectively 1.73, 1.52, and 2.19 times) more likely to say that “homosexuals” do not share their vision of Türkiye. Similar to the model for neighbor preferences, respondents who emphasize the value of education for society are more likely to see “homosexuals” as part of their vision for Türkiye.

However, there are two major differences in the public and private acceptance models. First, different from the private acceptance model, asking for religious courses to be required does not have a significant influence on public acceptance. Second, in this model, those who believe that being moral requires being religious are almost twice as likely to see the LGBTQ not belonging

to the national community. These differences may hint at minor differences in people's public and private attitudes. However, they may also show that the conceptual distinctions between "public" and "private," albeit useful, are not necessarily clear-cut for the respondents. For example, the demand for required religious courses may be considered as a public policy choice as well as a private gesture to raise one's children in a particular way. Similarly, equating religiosity with morality may be seen as a public gesture rather than a private preference. However, the models for private and public acceptance of sexual minorities overlap closely, albeit not perfectly, indicating the widespread discursive appeal of homonegativity in the Turkish context.

A Comparison with WVS-Wave7

The results in this paper come from a survey specifically designed to gauge the role of culture and morality in the social landscape of Turkiye. Because this survey was fielded in 2011, we compared our findings to a more recent survey, the 2017-2021 World Values Survey, Wave 7. This is a challenging endeavor because WVS-Wave 7 is a general survey with limited focus on cultural and moral boundaries. Still, the comparison to a more recent survey (conducted in Turkiye in 2018, N = 2415) is useful in terms of corroborating two central questions we asked in this paper. The first question has to do with whether the level of disapproval toward the LGBTQ community is still as high as we observed in 2011? The second questions asks if this disapproval is simply a generic form of prejudice. In this paper, we argued that anti-LGBTQ views in Turkiye constitute a specific form of moral boundary that crosscuts common socio-economic indicators and delve into deeper issue of cultural membership.

Our question measuring public belonging does not have an equivalent in WVS-Wave 7. However, a comparable question of private acceptance exists. WVS-Wave 7 shows respondents a card with potential outgroups and asks them the following question: "Could you please mention any that you would not like to have as neighbors?" (Haerpfer et al, 2022). The survey reports that 78.5% of respondents mentioned "homosexuals" among those they would oppose as neighbors. This level of disapproval is only surpassed by drug addicts (89.5%), an outgroup not included in our survey. The relatively high level of disapproval may refer to consistently high and perhaps increasing levels of negative attitudes toward the LGBTQ in Turkiye. Therefore, our initial question that drives this paper (why do "homosexuals" draw so much disapproval despite their limited visibility in public?) maintains its relevance.

In order to corroborate the second question, we created a logistic regression model using some of the variables similar to what we used in our survey (see Table 9), although it was not possible to replicate our 4-block model because WVS is limited in its focus on moral boundaries and cultural membership.

Table 9. World Values Survey-Wave7 (2018, Turkey): Logistic Regression of Responses to opposing homosexual neighbors

Independent variables	Model 1	
	Exp (β)	SE
Gender (male)	0.92	.121
Age (higher)	1.01	.005*
Education (less than university)	1.10	.148
Subjective class (lower)	1.37	.072***
Inequality perception (higher)	0.94	.024*
Location (rural)	1.43	.148*
Belief in God (yes)	0.72	.318
Religious attendance (more than once a week)	1.59	.268
Religion important in life (Yes)	1.87	.178***
Meaning of religion (other world)	1.56	.131***
My religion is the only acceptable one (agree)	2.30	.152***
Constant	0.38	.457
χ^2	197.08***	df=11
Cases correctly classified, %	79.2	
R ² (Nagelkerke)	.155	

Note: N=1869, *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

The findings largely overlap with our findings in the sense that variables about “public morality” have a closer affinity to anti-LGBTQ views compared to socioeconomic factors and religiosity. Gender and education are two demographic factors that have no significant relationship. Rural and older respondents with lower (subjectively evaluated) class positions are more likely to oppose “homosexual” neighbors. Variables intended to measure private religiosity have no significant relationship to the disapproval of LGBTQ neighbors. These include belief in God (believers and non-believers are equally anti-LGBTQ) and religious attendance (frequent mosque attendance is not a significant predictor of anti-LGBTQ attitudes). On the contrary, public morality is strongly associated with the tendency to disapprove of “homosexual” neighbors. Respondents who support the view that religion should play an important role in life have 1.87 higher odds of disapproving “homosexual” neighbors. Those who argue that only their religion is the acceptable one are 2.85 times more likely to express disapproval. Similarly, those respondents who say that the purpose of religion is to make sense of life after death rather than of this world are 1.7 times more likely to oppose LGBTQ neighbors.

While the demographic variables do not perfectly match (in the analysis of our survey, for example, gender maintained its significance in the overall model), the broader picture in both surveys clearly overlap. First, the disapproval of LGBTQ neighbors is as intense as ever, even though LGBTQ individuals merely serve as hypothetical others in the absence of actual social encounters. Second, the intensity of the disapproval is not simply a matter of generic prejudice but an expression of exclusion from cultural membership in the national community. This discourse of exclusion cuts through demographic variables as well as religiosity and maps onto statements of public morality—a vision of how the morality of *others* should be shaped.

Conclusion

Although LGBTQ activism resulted in policy changes in Türkiye since the 1980s, members of the LGBTQ community remain largely invisible, especially outside urban areas. However, “homosexuality” has been one of most consistently disapproved identities in the country. This paper

attempts to explain this disparity between the magnitude of rejection and the invisibility of LGBTQ rights in public debates. What makes people draw such strong boundaries between themselves and the members of a group they are unlikely to have ever knowingly encountered? Because LGBTQ identities are rarely public in the Turkish context, we can safely assume that when people voice their opinions about sexual minorities, they most likely do not refer to actual individuals. Rather, what they rather have in mind is the “homosexual” as a boundary-making category that draws a certain deep-seated moral response.

The boundaries against the LGBTQ are not only deep but are also different from “generic” forms of prejudice against other minority groups. In this paper, we first explored characteristics that frequently appear to be linked with homonegativity in the literature. Among demographic factors, only gender maintains a consistent effect on homophobia in public and private encounters. As far as social context is concerned, diversity is important in reducing negative attitudes. It is important to note that homonegativity goes beyond the urban-rural distinctions. Religion and religiosity are also generally linked with negative attitudes, although we found that private instances of religion, religious attendance, and religiosity do not shape attitudes toward the LGBTQ. The effects of religion and religiosity rely on a moral language that claims that religious identity is important for good citizenship, that society’s rules should be based on religion and that all traditional values regarding family and morality should be accommodated by the public. Political discourses linked to the moral foundations shape individuals’ moral repertoires. Religion gives a clear voice to public morality and cultural membership. Discursive resources from religion potentially contributes to the symbolic construction of boundaries people draw around national identity. It is primarily through boundary drawing based on public morality, and not the individual commitments to religion that Turkish people adopt a narrow vision of private acceptance and national belonging.

What explains the particularity of the views toward “homosexuality” (as well as atheists and cohabiting heterosexual couples) is the specific alignment of a moral worldview with cultural membership in the operation symbolic of boundaries. While homophobia does not correlate with private expressions of religion and religiosity, strong links exist between people’s views of a moral and just society and who should be accepted as “good” or “full” members of this society. Attitudes toward sexual minorities are an important indicator of a person’s view of morality defined as such. Public morality, rather than religiosity, explains homonegativity, because it is more likely to be associated with a person’s view of community, public trust, and civic life. Our findings support the argument that sexual minorities are persistent outsiders in Türkiye because they are perceived to have rejected cultural values and practices understood as constitutive of public morality, civic virtue, and national identity (Edgell et al., 2016). Examining the attitudes towards “homosexuality” sheds light more on the general process of moral boundary making in Türkiye and reveals the continued centrality of public morality as a symbolic boundary maker, rather than the censure of sexual minorities by religion.

Cultural and moral views matter because homophobia is part of people’s worldviews that privilege certain moral choices over others. These perceptions may have overlaps with a core set of views about tolerance and prejudice for out-groups in general. But, more importantly, the symbolic boundary drawn vis-à-vis “homosexuals” tells us more about the core values of belonging and solidarity in Turkish society. Although secularists and Muslims appear to be in perpetual conflict in Turkish society, boundaries drawn along the lines of sexuality go beyond religion and religiosity in reinforcing moral order in Türkiye. When it comes to moral values of what is good,

what is right, and who belongs in a framework of cultural membership, “homosexuals” are not merely seen as yet another minority group. Instead, people in Türkiye construct the members of this group as the symbolic opposite of the moral and cultural basis of society. Studying homophobia reveals the nature and the strength of symbolic boundaries as well as their cultural content.

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