

## Article

# Sexual Prejudice in the Portuguese Political Context

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**Abstract:** Sexual prejudice is a negative attitude toward an individual due to their belonging to a group defined by sexual minority behaviors, attractions, or orientations. As no studies assessing sexual prejudice levels among self-identified politicians have been conducted in Portugal, this study was carried out to address this gap in the literature. In addition, we sought to compare differences in levels of sexual prejudice by gender, religiosity, and political orientation. The sample consisted of 302 self-identified active politicians in Portugal, of whom 157 were men (52%) and 145 were women (48%), with an average age of 45.98 years. Study measurement instruments included a sociodemographic questionnaire and the Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese Political Context. Participants responded to this study's outreach online, and they received emails that referred them directly to the online survey. The principal results show that, despite moderate overall levels of sexual prejudice among the sample, men and participants with right-wing general, social, and fiscal political views demonstrated significantly higher sexual prejudice scores. Negative levels of political engagement and negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were significant predictors of sexual prejudice. It is very important to raise awareness of this phenomenon among both politicians and the general public, so that it can be addressed accordingly.



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## 1. Introduction

Sexual minorities frequently experience violence, discrimination, and personal rejection (Herek 2000b), since minority genders and sexual orientations have often been associated with controversy, stigma, and confusion (Huffaker and Kwon 2016). In order to facilitate research about anti-lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) attitudes, Herek and McLemore (2013) proposed the construct of sexual prejudice, which can be understood as a negative attitude toward an individual due to their belonging to a group defined by minority sexual behaviors, attractions, or orientations. Sexual prejudice is a prevalent phenomenon in our society and research into this topic has been of interest to social scientists since the 1970s (Herek 2000b). It is a broad concept that includes homophobia, homonegativity, heterosexism, and, more recently, transphobia and biphobia (Baiocco et al. 2018).

Despite a societal evolution toward greater acceptance of individuals with diverse sexual experiences, prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities is still a global social problem (Baunach 2012), given that sexual prejudice is still supported by social norms in various contexts and that social stigma still remains in many cultural institutions, including in political contexts (Hoyt and Parry 2018). Therefore, structural sexual stigma, or heterosexism, is an ideology embedded in institutional practices that puts sexual minority groups at a disadvantage (Herek et al. 2009).

Regarding the social and political environment, in recent decades, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities have been gaining increasingly relevant

importance, not only by claiming their civil rights, but also in fighting against discrimination and in favor of equality (Almeida 2010). Since the end of the 20th century, many countries have made legislative changes to enhance sexual minority protections, especially in the areas of health, employment, and housing, in addition to several major advances in family rights (Carroll and Mendos 2017). For example, Portugal has experienced a series of significant changes over the last four decades, following the Carnation Revolution and the ratification of the democratic Portuguese Constitution of 1976, namely, the expansion of civil and social rights, especially regarding gender equality (Lopes et al. 2016).

In Portugal, homosexuality was considered a crime until it was removed from the Portuguese penal code in 1982. Portugal's accession to the European Union in 1986 proved to be fundamental to the promulgation of multiple pro-equality policies that were later implemented. The main legal mechanism that triggered these changes involved the introduction of a sexual orientation clause that provided explicit constitutional protections against discrimination. The implementation of these protections was subsequently followed by the introduction of a law that permitted *de facto* same-sex civil unions in 2001, a 2010 law allowing for same-sex marriage, and a gender identity recognition law that was passed in 2011 (Lopes et al. 2016). In addition, laws allowing same-sex couples to adopt and jointly adopt children and permitting access to *in vitro* fertilization (Costa and Salinas-Quiroz 2019), respectively, were passed in 2016. Notwithstanding, a heterosexist climate still exists in Portugal, creating contradictory social dynamics between legal regulations that stipulate equality and the discriminatory practices still common in daily life (Carneiro and Menezes 2007).

In the most recent Portuguese legislative elections in 2019, a positive economic outlook created a space for the emergence of a greater variety of issues on the political agenda. This new space for debate encompassed not only the less positive aspects of the economic recovery and financial stabilization measures (such as low-quality public services and an increase in foreigners in the labor market), but also issues such as environmental sustainability, taxes, immigration, corruption, and the rights of sexual minorities, among others (Fernandes and Magalhães 2020). Thus, attitudes toward sexual minority identities may have improved, as reflected by the more diverse and inclusive composition of the current Portuguese parliament, which has several members who are women of color, as well as several openly gay or lesbian deputies.

The literature shows that some important variables may influence negative attitudes toward LGB people, such as sociodemographic and psychological characteristics, like gender, as men usually display greater sexual prejudice than women (Brown and Henriquez 2008; Costa et al. 2014; Costa et al. 2018). Age is another variable that may influence negative attitudes toward LGB people (Costa et al. 2014; Schwartz 2010), as older people tend to present higher levels of sexual prejudice when compared to younger people (Avery et al. 2007; Lewis 2003), which can be partially explained by the fact that social attitudes are formed at younger ages and are subsequently resistant to change, causing older people to retain more conservative attitudes typical of past social norms (Andersen and Fetner 2008). Sexual orientation also could affect attitudes regarding LGB people (heterosexual people typically present more negative attitudes toward LGB people) (Costa and Davies 2012), as could religiosity (Brown and Henriquez 2008; Schwartz 2010) (religious individuals express more negative attitudes toward LGB individuals) (Olson et al. 2006; Whitley 2009). Educational attainment also might impact perceptions of LGB individuals (individuals, with lower levels of educational attainment tending to have higher levels of sexual prejudice) (Schwartz 2010), in addition to cultural differences and ideological beliefs concerning homosexuality (Costa et al. 2014), as well as political orientation (individuals who identified themselves as conservatives present more sexual prejudice than individuals who identify themselves as liberals) (Barth and Parry 2009; Haslam and Levy 2006). Therefore, all of these variables may not solely influence attitudes toward LGB people (Poteat and Mereish 2012), but also the perception of the legitimization of their fundamental rights, including same-sex marriage and parenting (Brumbaugh et al. 2008; Webb and Chonody 2014; Wood and Bartkowski 2004).

Sexual prejudice is often apparent in some political arguments against LGB rights, which are usually grounded in religious beliefs, conservative political opinions, and/or the desire to protect traditional values (Burridge 2004; Brewer and Wilcox 2005; Miceli 2005; Olson et al. 2006). Thus, public opinion plays a role in the evolution of the rights of sexual minorities, since it can influence which politicians they vote for, and this partially determines the quality of the environment in which sexual minorities live, which can simultaneously be a source of stress and rejection and support and legitimation (Lax and Phillips 2009). Beyond this intrinsic importance, assessing the sexual prejudices of Portuguese politicians can contribute to a broader understanding of the dynamics of politics, power, social movements, public opinion, and policymaking institutions.

Hence, the present study is a pioneer in the Portuguese context, due to its novel main objective that aims to evaluate sexual prejudice levels among a Portuguese political sample. Furthermore, this study also seeks to understand the relationship among several sociodemographic variables and sexual prejudice levels.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 302 participants who self-identified as active politicians in Portugal, of whom 157 were men (52%) and 145 were women (48%), with an average age of 45.98 years. In total, 95% of the sample self-identified as heterosexual, 2% as bisexual, and 3% as homosexual (gay/lesbian). Regarding participants' level of political interest, 59.6% of the sample claimed to have a substantial level of political interest, and 70.4% mentioned belonging to a political party or political group. Concerning religion, 68.8% of participants claimed to be religious, and 53.3% attributed moderate importance to their religious beliefs. Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample in greater detail.

**Table 1.** Sociodemographic characteristics.

Variables	n	%	M (min–max)	SD
Age			45.98 (19–79)	10.15
Gender				
Male	157	52		
Female	145	48		
Sexual Orientation				
Heterosexual	284	95.0		
Bisexual	6	2.0		
Homosexual (Gay/Lesbian)	9	3.0		
Ethnicity				
White	275	91.4		
Black/African/etc.	4	1.3		
Hispanic or Latino	17	5.6		
Asian	1	0.3		
Other	4	1.3		
Educational Attainment				
Primary Education (up to the 9th grade)	5	1.7		
Secondary Education/High School (up to the 12th grade)	60	19.9		
Undergraduate Degree	123	40.7		
Graduate Degree or Program	99	32.8		
PhD	12	4.0		
Other	3	1.0		
Socioeconomic Status				
Low	27	8.9		
Medium	246	81.5		
High	28	9.3		
Very High	1	0.3		

Table 1. Cont.

Variables	n	%	M (min–max)	SD
Professional Status				
Employed	279	92.4		
Unemployed	7	2.3		
Retired	15	5.0		
Permanently Disabled	1	0.3		
Political Parties				
Portuguese Communist Party (PCP)	6	3.0		
CDU—United Democratic Coalition (PCP-PEV)	2	1.0		
Ecologist Party “The Greens” (PEV)	5	2.5		
Left Bloc (BE)	10	4.9		
Socialist Party (PS)	96	47.3		
Socialist Youth (JS)	2	1.0		
People–Animals–Nature (PAN)	2	1.0		
FREE(L)	5	2.5		
Together for the People (JPP)	1	0.5		
CDS-PP	5	2.5		
Social Democratic Party (PPD/PSD)	56	27.6		
Portugal Ahead—PSD/CDS-PP Coalition	1	0.5		
Rise UP! (E)	1	0.5		
Independent Political Movements	11	5.4		
Political Interest Level				
None	5	1.7		
Little	21	7.0		
Moderate	96	31.8		
Substantial	180	59.6		
Political Commitment				
None	15	5.0		
Little	23	7.6		
Moderate	83	27.6		
Substantial	180	59.8		
Belongs to a Political Group/Organization				
Yes	212	70.4		
No	89	29.6		
Political Position Held				
Local Government (Civil Parishes and Municipalities)	168	81.6		
Central Government	22	10.7		
Activist	15	7.3		
None	1	0.5		
General Political Views				
Liberal Left	26	8.7		
Left	49	16.3		
Center-Left	85	28.3		
Center	68	22.7		
Center-Right	44	14.7		
Right	22	7.3		
Conservative Right	6	2.0		
Fiscal Political Views				
Liberal Left	22	7.3		
Left	42	14.0		
Center-Left	87	29.0		
Center	75	25.0		
Center-Right	41	13.7		
Right	28	9.3		
Conservative Right	5	1.7		

Table 1. Cont.

Variables	n	%	M (min–max)	SD
Social Political Views				
Liberal Left	26	8.7		
Left	63	21.1		
Center-Left	80	26.8		
Center	70	23.4		
Center-Right	35	11.7		
Right	20	6.7		
Conservative Right	5	1.7		
Religious				
Yes	207	68.8		
No	94	31.2		
Frequency of Religious Services Attendance				
Never	42	14.5		
A Few Times	114	39.3		
Less than Once a Month	35	12.1		
Once a Month	19	6.6		
More than Once a Month	48	16.6		
Once a Week or More	32	11.0		
Importance of Religion				
None	23	7.7		
Little	78	26.0		
Moderate	160	53.3		
Substantial	39	13.0		
Religiosity				
None	62	20.8		
Little	70	23.5		
Moderate	128	43.0		
Substantial	38	12.8		

## 2.2. Measurement Instruments

*Sociodemographic questionnaire.* This study utilized a sociodemographic questionnaire that allowed for a detailed characterization of the sample. Some examples of the information collected by the questionnaire were age, gender, sexual orientation, level of political interest, political views (general, fiscal, and social), the level of importance attributed to religion, and the frequency of religious services attendance.

*The Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese Political Context (SPSPPC)—Adapted.* The Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese Political Context consists of a translation and adaptation of Baiocco et al.'s (2018) "Sexual Prejudice in Sports Scale" to the Portuguese political context. The original scale assesses negative attitudes and prejudice toward lesbian and gay (LG) individuals in athletic contexts (Baiocco et al. 2018). The Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese political context assesses negative attitudes and prejudice toward LGB individuals in the Portuguese political context. As in the original scale, each of the 19 items is associated with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1—strongly disagree to 7—strongly agree, with higher scores signifying more negative attitudes and prejudice toward LG people (Baiocco et al. 2018). According to the original scale, the first factor, Open Rejection, consists of seven items and reflects the open prejudice expressed toward LG individuals. The second factor, Denial of Visibility, comprises five items and encompasses attitudes about rejection and the categorical denial of the existence of sexual minorities. Finally, the third factor, Gender Performance, concerns beliefs that poor performance is related to the fact that a person is LG. In order to validate this adaptation to a political context, we chose to perform a three-factor analysis, obtaining a different organization of the items according to the factors. The first factor, Heterosexual Superiority (F1), consists of items 4, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. These items measure heterosexual individuals' feelings of superiority in relation to LGB individuals. The second factor, LGB Denial (F2),

encompasses items 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 10. These items relate to the idea that individuals' sexual orientations inherently condition their political participation. The third factor, LGB Invisibility (F3), comprises items 6 and 19 and refers to the idea that sexual orientation should not be openly discussed. Cronbach's alphas were used to measure factor reliability (Factor 1 –  $\alpha = 0.930$ ; Factor 2 –  $\alpha = 0.841$ ; Factor 3 –  $\alpha = 0.572$ ; total SPSPPC score –  $\alpha = 0.903$ ). Due to its low reliability, Factor 3 was not considered in the statistical analyses conducted in this study. In order to assess convergent validity, correlation levels of the SPSPPC and the Portuguese version of the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (Alves 2018), originally created by Herek (1988), were calculated, obtaining a very strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.75$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

### 2.3. Procedures

Initially, the researchers conducted a translation and adaptation of the Sexual Prejudice in Sports Scale by Baiocco et al. (2018) to create the Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese political context (SPSPPC). This process included a forward translation, an expert panel back-translation, pre-testing, and cognitive interviewing, until researchers obtained a final version of the SPSPPC. The study utilized an online platform to provide participants access to the informed consent waiver, the sociodemographic questionnaire, and the Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese political context. This platform was then disseminated by e-mail to a total of 4194 people belonging to a range of Portuguese political positions and institutions, namely civil parishes (2757 people), municipalities (1092 people), Portuguese Parliament members (230 people), and members of official political parties (115 people). The response rate was approximately 7.2%. Participants responded to the study outreach online, receiving emails that referred them directly to the online survey where they were informed that their responses would be anonymous and confidential, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki—Ethical Principles for Medical Research Involving Human Subjects. The first page of the questionnaire explained the study's objectives and informed participants about how to complete the survey, their freedom to withdraw from the study, and how to contact the authors for further information, if needed.

## 3. Results

This section describes participants' scores for the total SPSPPC scale, as well as Factors 1 and 2, according to their sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, religiosity, and political orientation. Table 2 shows the average sample scores obtained by the SPSPPC and its factors. Given that the SPSPPC allows for higher possible scores—7 points—the following theoretical weightings were used in order to classify sexual prejudice levels: 1–3—low, 3–5—moderate, and 5–7—high. Thus, in accordance with this criterion, the average score obtained by the SPSPPC ( $M = 2.40$ ;  $SD = 0.85$ ) can be considered low, as well as the scores for Factor 1 ( $M = 1.82$ ;  $SD = 0.96$ ) and Factor 2 ( $M = 2.22$ ;  $SD = 1.08$ ).

**Table 2.** Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese political context (SPSPPC) and Factors 1 and 2 score results.

Factors	M (min–max)	SD
Sexual Prejudice Scale in the Portuguese Political Context	2.40 (1–5.70)	0.85
Factor 1—Heterosexual Superiority	1.82(1–5.20)	0.96
Factor 2—LGB Denial	2.22(1–6.14)	1.08

### 3.1. Results for Sexual Prejudice Levels by Gender

There were statistically significant differences between men's and women's SPSPPC scores ( $t(299) = 3.192$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ), with men scoring higher ( $M = 2.55$ ;  $SD = 0.87$ ) than women. The study also found statistically significant differences for F1 ( $t(284) = 2.537$ ;  $p = 0.012$ ) and F2 ( $t(288) = 4.020$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), with men showing higher F1 ( $M = 1.96$ ;  $SD = 1.01$ ) and F2 scores ( $M = 2.46$ ;  $SD = 1.15$ ), as displayed in Table 3.



**Table 3.** Sexual prejudice levels by gender.

Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> ( <i>df</i> )	<i>p</i>
Factor 1				
Men	1.96	1.01	2.537 (284)	0.012 *
Women	1.68	0.89		
Factor 2				
Men	2.46	1.15	4.020 (288)	0.000 **
Women	1.96	0.94		
SPSPPC				
Men	2.55	0.87	3.192 (299)	0.002 *
Women	2.24	0.81		

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

### 3.2. Results for Sexual Prejudice Levels by Religiosity

Statistically significant differences were found between religious and non-religious individuals for the SPSPPC ( $F(1) = 18.746$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ), F1 ( $F(1) = 12.071$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ) and F2 ( $F(1) = 20.789$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). Religious individuals displayed higher scores for F1 ( $M = 1.95$ ;  $SD = 1.03$ ), F2 ( $M = 2.42$ ;  $SD = 1.14$ ), and the SPSPPC ( $M = 2.54$ ;  $SD = 0.90$ ), as pictured in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Sexual prejudice levels by religiosity (religious or non-religious).

Religiosity	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> ( <i>df</i> )	<i>p</i>
		Factor 1		
Religious	1.95	1.03	12.071 (1)	0.001 *
Non-religious	1.53	0.72		
		Factor 2		
Religious	2.42	1.14	20.789 (1)	0.000 **
Non-religious	1.82	0.80		
		SPSPPC		
Religious	2.54	0.90	18.746 (298)	0.000 **
Non-religious	2.10	0.64		

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

### 3.3. Results for Sexual Prejudice Levels by General Political Views

Participants demonstrated statistically significant differences in SPSPPC ( $F(6; 292) = 3.917$ ;  $p = 0.001$ ), F1 ( $F(6; 277) = 2.576$ ;  $p = 0.019$ ), and F2 ( $F(6; 281) = 4.936$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ) scores based upon their general political views. Conservative right participants displayed the highest scores for F1 ( $M = 2.24$ ;  $SD = 1.70$ ) and F2 ( $M = 2.76$ ;  $SD = 1.73$ ), while center-right participants showed the highest SPSPPC scores ( $M = 2.69$ ;  $SD = 0.86$ ), as shown in Table 5.

### 3.4. Results for Sexual Prejudice Levels by Fiscal Political Views

Statistically significant differences were found concerning participants' fiscal political views for the SPSPPC ( $F(6; 292) = 3.194$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ), F1 ( $F(6; 278) = 2.739$ ;  $p = 0.013$ ), and F2 ( $F(6; 281) = 3.485$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ). Participants identifying as holding conservative right political views displayed the highest scores for F1 ( $M = 2.48$ ;  $SD = 1.87$ ) and F2 ( $M = 2.86$ ;  $SD = 1.90$ ). For the SPSPPC, center-right participants scored highest ( $M = 2.79$ ;  $SD = 1.00$ ), as shown in Table 6.

**Table 5.** Sexual prejudice levels by general political views.

General Political Views	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F (df)</i>	<i>p</i>
Factor 1				
Liberal Left	1.65	1.00	2.576 (6; 277)	0.019 *
Left	1.46	0.64		
Center-Left	1.77	0.96		
Center	1.94	0.97		
Center-Right	2.13	0.94		
Right	2.03	1.16		
Conservative Right	2.24	1.70		
Factor 2				
Liberal Left	1.57	0.66	4.936 (6; 281)	0.000 **
Left	1.91	0.83		
Center-Left	2.10	1.08		
Center	2.43	1.04		
Center-Right	2.67	1.17		
Right	2.55	1.15		
Conservative Right	2.76	1.73		
SPSPPC				
Liberal Left	1.99	0.67	3.917 (6; 292)	0.001 *
Left	2.12	0.65		
Center-Left	2.32	0.83		
Center	2.57	0.90		
Center-Right	2.69	0.86		
Right	2.67	0.91		
Conservative Right	2.64	1.37		

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .**Table 6.** Sexual prejudice levels by fiscal political views.

Fiscal Political Views	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F (df)</i>	<i>p</i>
Factor 1				
Liberal Left	1.56	0.82	2.739 (6; 278)	0.013 *
Left	1.54	0.80		
Center-Left	1.74	0.92		
Center	1.94	1.02		
Center-Right	2.24	1.00		
Right	1.79	0.87		
Conservative Right	2.48	1.87		
Factor 2				
Liberal Left	1.64	0.69	3.485 (6; 281)	0.002 *
Left	1.95	0.97		
Center-Left	2.10	1.04		
Center	2.40	1.04		
Center-Right	2.65	1.20		
Right	2.32	1.10		
Conservative Right	2.86	1.90		
SPSPPC				
Liberal Left	2.01	0.63	3.194 (6; 292)	0.005 *
Left	2.18	0.71		
Center-Left	2.31	0.83		
Center	2.52	0.83		
Center-Right	2.79	1.00		
Right	2.43	0.77		
Conservative Right	2.57	1.62		

\*  $p < 0.05$ .



### 3.5. Results for Sexual Prejudice Levels by Social Political Views

Statistically significant differences were found among participants based upon their social political views for the SPSPPC ( $F(6; 291) = 6.022, p = 0.000$ ), F1 ( $F(6; 276) = 3.703; p = 0.001$ ), and F2 ( $F(6; 280) = 6.195; p = 0.000$ ). Conservative right participants displayed the highest scores for F1 ( $M = 2.48; SD = 1.62$ ), F2 ( $M = 3.03; SD = 1.78$ ), and the SPSPPC ( $M = 2.90; SD = 1.48$ ), as seen in Table 7.

**Table 7.** Sexual prejudice levels by social political views.

Social Political Views	M	SD	F (df)	p
Factor 1				
Liberal Left	1.50	0.67	3.703 (6; 276)	0.001 *
Left	1.50	0.75		
Center-Left	1.74	0.93		
Center	2.08	1.09		
Center-Right	2.15	0.97		
Right	1.91	0.94		
Conservative Right	2.48	1.62		
Factor 2				
Liberal Left	1.69	0.60	6.195 (6; 280)	0.000 **
Left	1.83	0.87		
Center-Left	2.09	1.06		
Center	2.50	1.09		
Center-Right	2.79	1.14		
Right	2.54	1.15		
Conservative Right	3.03	1.78		
SPSPPC				
Liberal Left	1.95	0.55	6.022 (6; 291)	0.000 **
Left	2.12	0.66		
Center-Left	2.30	0.82		
Center	2.64	0.88		
Center-Right	2.86	0.95		
Right	2.52	0.82		
Conservative Right	2.90	1.48		

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

### 3.6. Correlational Analysis

As shown in Table 8, a correlation analysis was conducted to determine levels of association between sexual prejudice and age, education, political interest, political engagement, time in politics, importance of religion, and attitudes toward sexual minorities. Correlation coefficients were all statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) (except for time in politics), especially attitudes toward lesbians and gay men.

**Table 8.** Results for the correlation matrix between sexual prejudice and other variables.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1-Age	-							
2-Education	0.170 **	-						
3-Political Interest	−0.049	0.273 **	-					
4-Political Engagement	−0.062	0.248 **	0.818 **	-				
5-Time in Politics	0.210 **	−0.049	0.123	0.081	-			
6-Importance of Religion	0.079	−0.150 **	0.030	0.091	0.031	-		
7-Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men	0.335 **	−0.259 **	−0.242 **	−0.282 **	0.125	0.247 **	-	
8-Sexual Prejudice	0.198 **	−0.132 *	−0.164 **	−0.224 **	0.068	0.195 **	0.725 **	-

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

### 3.7. Hierarchical Multiple Regression

Finally, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to assess the effects of age, education, political interest, political engagement, importance of religion, and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men on sexual prejudice. The possible confounding variables “age”, “gender”, and “education” were added in the first block. The variables “political interest”, “political engagement”, “general political views”, and “importance of religion” were added in the second block. The variable “Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men” was added in the third block. The first block of the analysis explained 8% of the overall variance, while the second block explained 22%. The third block explained 54%. Therefore, as shown in Table 9, negative levels of political engagement and negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men were significant predictors of sexual prejudice.

**Table 9.** Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting sexual prejudice.

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	B	B	SE B	$\beta$
Age	0.014	0.005	0.173 *	0.011	0.005	0.133 *	−0.004	0.004	−0.044
Gender	−0.246	0.103	−0.144 *	−0.332	0.100	−0.195 *	−0.120	0.079	−0.070
Education	−0.094	0.058	−0.099	−0.005	0.057	−0.005	0.050	0.045	0.053
Political Interest				0.051	0.120	0.040	0.086	0.093	0.068
Political Engagement				−0.321	0.095	−0.309 *	−0.148	0.075	−0.142 *
General Political Views				0.095	0.034	0.162 *	−0.009	0.027	−0.015
Importance of Religion				0.180	0.062	0.169 *	0.060	0.048	0.057
Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men							0.895	0.067	0.704 **
$R^2$		0.080			0.219			0.535	
$F$ for change in $R^2$		7.785 **			10.607 **			37.985 **	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

## 4. Discussion

This was the first study in Portugal to assess sexual prejudice among politicians. Despite low overall levels of sexual prejudice in the sample, men displayed higher sexual prejudice scores, a finding corroborated by previous studies (Herek 2002, 2009; Kite and Whitley 1996; LaMar and Kite 1998). Since the vast majority of participants self-identified as heterosexual, this may have had a negative impact on their attitudes toward LG people (Adams et al. 2016; Costa et al. 2014; Costa et al. 2018; Keiller 2010). These results suggest that differences in sexual prejudice based on gender are rooted in beliefs regarding gender roles (Bosson et al. 2012; Brown and Henriquez 2008; Costa and Davies 2012). Thus, traditional beliefs associated with gender roles, modern sexism, and hypermasculinity are the most important predictors of sexual prejudice, all of which can be psychologically and socially advantageous for one’s sexual identity (Herek 2000a; Lingardi et al. 2015).

Sexual prejudice scores were significantly higher among religious participants, compared to non-religious participants. These results are in line with other studies that have found that religion represents an important predictor of negative attitudes toward LG people, and which have observed more negative attitudes toward LG people among religious individuals (Duck and Hunsberger 1999; Costa and Salinas-Quiroz 2019; Herek and Capitanio 1996; Rosik et al. 1037). In fact, highly religious people tend to express more negative reactions toward gay and bisexual individuals, for instance, by opposing policies and laws that prohibit employment discrimination against them or laws that allow for same-sex unions or marriage, among others (Brint and Abrutyn 2010; West 2018). In addition, those who oppose same-sex marriage often highlight the damage done to society, families, and children, resulting from the approval of marriage equality for LGBT people (Cowan et al. 2005).

In this study, political views were divided into three categories—general, fiscal, and social. Among all three categories, the highest levels of sexual prejudice were found among those expressing right-wing political views. According to previous research, people

who hold right-wing and more conservative political positions usually present higher levels of sexual prejudice (Avery et al. 2007; Hoyt et al. 2018; Whitley and Lee 2000), while individuals with more liberal political ideologies typically present lower levels of sexual prejudice (Herek 2000a, 2002; Hoyt et al. 2018; Schwartz 2010). This finding may be explained by the fact that right-wing political positions tend to be more frequently associated with religiousness and traditional beliefs (Costa et al. 2014).

Correlational analysis and hierarchical multiple regression analysis confirm that modern conceptualizations of sexual prejudice in the Portuguese political context are still associated with more traditional forms of heterosexism, even though some participants were likely to express prejudice in other, subtler ways, such as keeping to heteronormative sex and gender roles. Nevertheless, the strong correlations with traditional heterosexism suggest that these factors are useful subtle indicators of attitudes toward lesbians and gay men (Massey 2009). The opposite effect may be found regarding political engagement, since other findings support the theory that more politically engaged politicians tend to show lower perceptions of gender and sexual orientation inequalities (Bernstein 2005).

Some limitations of this study ultimately restrict the generalizability of its findings. Sample participants were disproportionately recruited from civil parishes, in addition to being well-educated and possessing Internet and technological access. It would be useful if future studies could include more members working in higher levels of government, especially members of parliament. Furthermore, the use of complementary methodologies such as in-depth face-to-face interviews or focus groups could be useful in future research.

The researchers hope that the pioneering nature of this study in Portugal will encourage further research on this topic. In addition, this study allowed us to affirm that sexual prejudice is a reality in the Portuguese political context, in addition to which variables are relevant when studying sexual prejudice. However, as there is no further research concerning this topic, it is pertinent that future studies be carried out to confirm or dispute this study's findings.

Research regarding sexual prejudice is extremely important, not only in the political context itself, but also for the general public. As reported in this study, the sample of self-identified politicians displayed low levels of sexual prejudice. As these individuals have the power to make decisions, such as passing laws with direct positive or negative impacts on sexual minorities' lives, it is extremely important to raise awareness regarding the prevalence of sexual prejudice in the Portuguese political context, so that it can be reduced or eliminated. At the same time, sharing these results may help citizens to make more informed electoral decisions, as, in many cases, sexual prejudice is subtle and invisible. This study also reinforces the need to reflect upon the implications that this phenomenon may have for sexual minorities, such as employment, rental, and general forms of discrimination, as well as the higher prevalence of mental health disorders (e.g., depression or anxiety), among other issues. Thus, when confronted with this information, individuals, whether politicians or members of the general public, have the opportunity to seek changes to expand equal rights and demand action to achieve this goal.

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