

# Colombia and Chile: How Parties and Ideologies Affect LGBTQ+ Identities

Written by James Manville

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JAMES MANVILLE, DEC 13 2023

In the context of increasing social and political backlash against queer people globally, two countries in Latin America provide informative case studies for examining the question of what role political parties and their ideologies play in shaping attitudes and policies towards queer communities. The queer communities of both Colombia and Chile, like most nations, have complex histories marked by prejudice and persecution. Colombia has seen spells of violence and conflict – namely, the armed confrontation between government forces and the FARC guerrillas – that affected the lives of many from marginalised groups, including those in the LGBTQ+ community. Chileans also experienced the brutal dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet from 1973 to 1990, who imposed a conservative and oppressive regime that violated human rights and suppressed dissent. Many LGBTQ+ people were among the victims of his administration. They were subjected to harassment, torture and murder by the country's security forces. Despite previous instances of queer oppression, over the last decade, both have adopted important and precedent-setting policies and legislative positions on queer issues. Both, therefore, are essential cases for understanding not only queer vulnerabilities to specific political projects but ways of ensuring their protection no matter what the government of the day's ideology is.

Since the conflict, Colombia witnessed some remarkable advances in LGBTQ+ rights, such as the legalisation of same-sex marriage in April 2016, with Colombia's Constitutional Court passing the law by a 6-3 vote (PEW Research Center, 2023). This was followed by the peace deal that included LGBTQ+ people in a formal peace process for the first time ever in December of the same year (Hagen, 2023). The peace accord recognised the differential impact of the conflict on LGBTQ+ people and committed to guaranteeing their participation and protection in the post-conflict scenario. The Chilean government has also taken steps to ensure greater safety for its queer community. The left-wing government, led by Gabriel Boric, proposed a new constitution "based on values such as solidarity, ecocentrism, probity, good governance, and territorial autonomy" (Carrasco, 2022), as well as "social rights... and gender parity" (Miranda, 2022) with the intention of bringing human rights to the forefront of Chilean politics. Despite a majority vote against this new proposal, it is a marked change from the constitution under Pinochet and provides a clear example of where politics is trying to influence cultural change.

Before proceeding, I should be clear on terminology. When I use the term 'queer', I mean to indicate people whose gender or sexual identity falls outside of cis-normative and/or heteronormative ideas about what gender and sexual practices are acceptable, suitable, and 'normal' (Currier, 2018; Bosia & Weiss, 2013). Throughout this study, I use various terms to refer to queer collectives. Where the analysis is my own, I have opted for the acronym 'LGBTQ+' to remain as inclusive as possible. Where authors have opted for different acronyms, I have used these to stay true to the original authors' work.

### Methodology

This study aims to explore the role of political parties and their ideologies in shaping attitudes and policies towards queer communities in Colombia and Chile. To achieve this, secondary literature was analysed to establish a better understanding of the Latin American political context and country-specific politics. The data collection process primarily involved accessing academic journals, books, policy reports, and other credible sources related to LGBTQ+

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rights, political parties, and ideologies in Colombia and Chile. Several official reports and policy documents from governmental and non-governmental organisations became key for understanding the legislative landscape around LGBTQ+ rights in both countries.

Below, I identify recurring themes and patterns in the literature and, therefore, in Colombia and Chile's policy and social-cultural-political landscapes. Initially, all sources were reviewed to establish the basic discourses at play and to gain an overview of the socio-political environment around queer issues in each country. Then, relevant sections related to political parties, their ideologies, and their influence on attitudes and policies towards queer communities were analysed in more detail. This inductive process revealed various overarching themes and sub-themes, and connections between the political party ideologies and LGBTQ+ policies became clearer.

This research approach has some limitations. Firstly, as the study relies on existing literature, it is subject to the biases and interpretations of the original authors. That said, all knowledge comes from somewhere, and no production of knowledge is ever truly objective. In this regard, where there was consensus around key issues, this served as an indication of accepted and sedimented knowledge. Secondly, the availability of relevant literature on the specific topic of political parties' impact on LGBTQ+ policies in Colombia and Chile is limited. Despite these limitations, an analysis of secondary literature provides valuable insights into the role of political parties and their ideologies in shaping attitudes and policies towards queer communities in Colombia and Chile, not least by positioning this study as a broad review of existing literature that connects queer scholarship with studies on Latin American politics. This analysis, therefore, contributes to a better understanding of the complex dynamics between politics, ideologies, and LGBTQ+ rights in both countries.

## Analytical framework

In order to understand the state of play around queer issues in Colombia and Chile, it is useful to first turn to the wide-ranging literature within and adjacent to queer studies, specifically that pertaining to politicised homophobia and homophilia, which details how pro- and anti-queer politics are strategically mobilised. As Michael Bosia argues, it is crucial to “put the state at the centre of the analysis to consider how the state is served by homophobia, what challenges homophobia addresses and what problems it seeks to resolve” (2010, p. 5). Using the influential work of Currier (2018, p. 10), I use the term ‘politicised homophobia’ in this study to mean “organised opposition to gender and sexual diversity and LGBT organising, the scapegoating of sexual dissidents, mounting legislation curtailing same-sex relationships and visible gender transgression, and state-sponsored violence against gender and sexual dissidents”. In contrast, politicised homophilia is “a practice of strategically mobilising support for the rights and protections of some queers and certain divergences from heteronormativity” including practices such as “homonationalism, pinkwashing, homocolonialism, homoprotectionism, and the like” (Cooper-Cunningham, 2021, p. 8).

To be clear, in this study, I use the term ‘queerphobia’ as part of the analysis. Using ‘queerphobia’ instead of specific terms like ‘homophobia’ or ‘transphobia’ is more expansive and acknowledges the diversity of sexual practices and gender expressions globally. It also encompasses all forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It challenges binaries, is intersectional, and empowers the community. This is especially useful in academic and theoretical contexts: ‘queerphobia’ is increasingly used to reflect LGBTQ+ complexities. However, I acknowledge that there can be limitations to this terminology, and it is always important to recognise personal preferences and respect specificities in relation to certain academic literature. Given how difficult it is to make concepts travel, particularly around issues of gender and sexuality, I use politicised queerphobia to encompass a variety of identities and acknowledge the importance of queer autonomy over self-identification, as Manuela L. Picq and Caroline Cottet (2019) note that sexualities “resonate differently in different surroundings because translation is a process of constructing meaning”, and that “translation is therefore a political act, and act of transgression, subversion, and appropriation”.

Understanding the politicisation of queerphobia is crucial for analysing LGBTQ+ security in different contexts, specifically focusing on Colombia and Chile. This study critically evaluates existing research on the subject to identify its implications for affected LGBTQ+ individuals. It highlights the need to address social barriers that hinder

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marginalised communities' political power and their engagement with power structures to ensure the right of gender and sexuality diversity, leading to sexual and gender liberation.

In the context of Colombia, it is crucial to look to the Colombian peace accords, which were significant in addressing issues of queer security that arise during armed conflicts. Pascha Bueno-Hansen (2020) shows growth and gains for the LGBTI movement in Colombia, and they highlight the necessity of including all marginalised perspectives, not solely the cosmopolitan ones of the larger cities. Bueno-Hansen does also suggest that challenges persist due to the current political climate, limiting the opportunities for increased queer protections. Sanchez, Chung, and Brito Ruiz (2022) also highlight how conservative and anti-LGBTQ+ movements hindered queer inclusion during the peace process. They explore how narrow definitions of 'gender issues' allow for the systematic repression of threats to LGBTQ+ identities by conservative politicians, and so it is critical to evaluate the role that the political parties (to which these politicians belong) play in social and cultural spheres, rather than simply political ones.

Chile's experiences of social unrest and dissatisfaction have also led to the emergence of powerful conservative narratives, particularly in the form of the populist radical right (PRR), largely represented by right-wing politician José Antonio Kast. The PRR's opposition to LGBTQ+ rights reflects prevailing societal attitudes despite a referendum supporting a new constitution (BBC News, 2020). To understand the systematic prevention of queer engagement with power structures, it is essential to examine state oppression against the LGBTQ+ community (Tschantret, 2019). Part of understanding this state violence comes from realising that various types of governments from across the ideological spectrum use the persecution of particular marginalised groups to their advantage. For example, revolutionary governments target 'unreliable' groups to establish control and showcase their ability to punish dissent when facing domestic instability, while elites with exclusionary ideologies perceive sexual minorities as threats to their collectivist projects. This work is highly advantageous in a study of politicised queerphobia, as it is supported by falsifiable data that suggests state-sponsored violence and discrimination against queer individuals occur largely due to political ideologies and specific historical contexts. Crucially, survey data on societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals in Colombia and Chile reveal disparities in acceptance and discrimination, and so further research-policy-civil society dialogue is needed to ensure the protection of sexual minorities in the face of prejudice-based violence (IPSOS, 2023).

Another important piece of research into the armed conflict in Colombia Diversa's book addresses the systematic oppression and violence faced by queer individuals during Colombia's armed conflict (Villamil, 2020). The report calls for the reinterpretation of existing protections and recognition of systemic oppression, aiming to achieve justice, truth, and reparations for LGBT victims. The rise of the neoconservative movement in Latin America, exemplified by the CPAC in Mexico, poses direct and indirect risks to the LGBTQ+ community, with politicians rallying around anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, advocating for pro-traditional family and pro-business messages. Understanding these strategies and networks provides insights into the intersection of homophobia and transphobia with broader political ideologies. Analysing the politicisation of queerphobia in Colombia and Chile highlights the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ communities and underscores the need for improved queer protections, both socially and legislatively. By promoting inclusivity, combating prejudice-based violence, and challenging existing power structures, society can work towards gender and sexuality diversity rights and sexual and gender liberation. Ongoing research about Latin American queer politics and advocacy is crucial to protect LGBTQ+ individuals from discrimination and violence and foster a more inclusive and equitable future.

## Analysis

In this section, I will contextualise the influence of political parties and ideologies within the specific contexts of Colombia and Chile, acknowledging the specificity of national politics and understanding that regional similarity does not equate to similarity in political power structures, beliefs, and practices. To address what role parties and ideologies play in shaping attitudes towards the respective LGBTQ+ communities of Chile and Colombia, I first summarise the current political power distribution in these two countries. This will serve to highlight the social attitudes – particularly towards the queer communities – at the forefront of each nation's politics. This, followed by an analysis of the contemporary attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, will preface the argument that the politics of these two countries is not unidirectional and that while the political elite can influence the electorate, the same is true

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the other way around. In the last part, I look towards how the multidirectional nature of policy and legislation easily neglects queer perspectives and why it is vital that politicians, parties, and those that vote for them give power to queer narratives and make way for the inclusion of these to influence the legislative landscape of Latin American politics positively.

Following an unprecedented election in 2022, Gustavo Petro was elected as the first leftist President in Colombian history. The former mayor of the Colombian capital, Bogotá, Petro, fought with the rebels during the Colombian armed conflict during the 1980s. The key points which Petro focused on as he achieved political success are based on environmental politics. Namely, using sustainable energy sources and implementing tax reforms to finance social and environmental programs (Noriega, 2022). While Petro's political priorities may not be explicitly to provide greater protections for the queer community in Colombia, he has expressed his support for LGBTQ+ rights in Colombia, even suggesting that his eventual removal from the mayoral office in Bogotá was a result of "his progressive administration which has also banned bullfighting, tried to curb property developers and defended gay rights" (Brodzinsky, 2017). The current government, headed by Petro, faces opposition from various political parties, primarily the Democratic Centre Party, led by the former Colombian President Iván Duque – a conservative politician and outspoken critic of the FARC peace agreement – with his 2018 presidential campaign focusing on clarification of the peace deal, suggesting the FARC were not held sufficiently accountable and that the extradition terms and sentencing rules of the agreement were not stringent enough (Murphy & Vargas, 2019). Contemporary Colombian politics under Petro is characterised by a multidirectional approach encompassing diverse ideologies, policy priorities, and societal concerns, reflecting the interaction of various influential forces in the nation's political landscape. Petro's majority as the first leftist leader suggests discontent on the part of the electorate and a desire for political change that reflects modern social perspectives.

In Chile, leftist Gabriel Boric assumed presidential office in March 2022. Boric has been politically active from a young age and was formerly a student protest leader during his time at university (BBC News, 2021). His primary goals set out during his presidential campaign included a green and sustainable recovery in the post-pandemic years, increasing support for public services by raising taxes on the rich, rewriting the constitution to move away from the current charter written under dictator Augusto Pinochet (Bartlett, 2021), and crucially making Chile a more inclusive and diverse country, particularly for the LGBTQ+ community (Raza-Sheikh, 2021). The primary opposition faced by Boric's government has manifested itself in a recently formed 'Partido Republicano', led by far-right candidate José Antonio Kast. Kast's policy preferences stand as a direct contradiction to those of the current president, with his party and fellow republican politicians adopting conservative, authoritarian stances, with rhetoric based on opposition to LGBTQ+ rights and policies deemed more 'liberal' – particularly abortion (Wakefield, 2021). Kast and his party won an overwhelming majority in the competition to oversee the secondary re-writing of the Chilean constitution (Buschschlüter, 2023).

Only a year after the election that saw Boric elected as the youngest leftist president in the country's history, the electorate has decided that change is required. This summarises the argument that is being laid out in this analysis: where one country is seeing the people vote for someone to align with their contemporary attitudes, the other is moving along the political spectrum as the opposition highlights the government's legislative failures. The current political landscapes of both Colombia and Chile provide interesting case studies for an exploration of whether influence over policy can create influence over the social-cultural-political narrative, thus influencing the perceptions and beliefs of the general population. This raises the question of whether policy influences 'the people' or whether 'the people' have relatively strong autonomy over the policy which is created on their behalf. With the evidence of both countries recently electing leftist leadership, it could be suggested that most of the general population in Colombia and Chile do not align themselves with the political direction of the governing parties that preceded the current leadership and that there was a desire for social, cultural, and political change.

But how does this relate to the queer communities in these countries? The multidirectional nature of politics should suggest that where politicised queerphobia and homophobia can be used by the political elite to their strategic advantage, queer members of the electorate can hold these parties and politicians to account. However, the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ communities globally provides queer individuals and organisations with little autonomy and influence, meaning queer issues have become points of political contention without dialogue between

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policymakers and the queer people directly affected, as “institutions have constructed a negative group identity [...] that discouraged these groups from mobilising” (Mucciaroni, 2011). So, this ‘multidirectional’ feature which should afford members of the electorate some political power, is exclusionary of queer people and other marginalised groups. It has long been suggested that pro-LGBTQ+ politics is closely associated with left-wing ideologies and stands in contrast against conservative ideals, with Hekma, Oosterhuis, and Steakley (1995) even suggesting that “the revolutionary prospect of socialism has fuelled opening forays first of the homosexual emancipation and later of the gay liberation movements”, so by this hand, appointing leftist leaders to be the primary policy decision-maker of a country would suggest that these nations are willingly shifting towards ideals that are more inclusive of non-normative sexuality and gender. This idea is supported by a 2021 report on the ‘social acceptance of LGBTI people in 175 countries and locations’ (Flores, 2021). Both Colombia and Chile place in the top 35 countries based on ‘their average LGBTI Acceptance Index Score in 2017-2020’, a timeframe which precedes the election of both aforementioned leftist presidents. Chile rates higher than Colombia at number 29, tying in with Boric’s explicit and continued support for the queer community. Colombia places number 35, and while still in the top 20% of ‘most accepting countries’, this could reflect the slightly less explicit support presented by Petro, whose leftist politics are more focused on ecological and economic issues. During this analysis, it was far more difficult to obtain distinct examples of LGBTQ+ support from the Colombian political elite than those of Chile. However, it is critical to remember that Colombia is further ahead in its explicit LGBTQ+ protections than Chile; motions have been in place since 2016 ensuring greater social and legal protections of queer identities, whereas Boric’s predecessor in Chile – Sebastian Piñera – was strongly opposed to same-sex marriage and more clear-cut queer rights.

In summary, the state of queer politics in Colombia and Chile is a complicated story. Said story is nowhere near as simple as the political elite – those that control policy and legislative decisions – setting the narrative that the electorate then buys into. In contrast, it is equally not solely under the control of the electorate to set the social narrative: politics in these two countries, as in most of the contemporary world, is a dance in which the lead switches between the two and somewhere along the line queer people have become largely left out of these processes. In Colombia, the recent election suggests that societal attitudes have deemed it time that the political elite reflects the will and desires of the masses, which includes greater inclusion for queer people. Chile suggests a different story, in which Boric and his political elite are in a struggle to influence societal attitudes through a refreshed constitution, and queer inclusion can take a backseat when there are more pressing issues at hand. Politics cannot be unidirectional, and dialogue between legislators and those who vote them into power poses the greatest chance of social attitudes and political outcomes meeting at an intersection that allows social-cultural-political change that mutually benefits the policymakers and the proletariat that must live these policies.

## Conclusion and notes for future research

Overall, the analysis of Colombia and Chile as case studies offers valuable insights into the role of political parties and ideologies in shaping attitudes and policies towards queer communities. Both nations, which have historically seen examples of oppression and conflict, have witnessed some of the most significant advancements in LGBTQ+ rights over the last decade, not just in Latin America but globally. While each country has its unique political landscape, the emergence of leftist leaders in recent elections indicates a shifting societal acceptance of non-normative ideals.

Colombia’s approach to LGBTQ+ inclusivity has been marked by several policy milestones. The legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2016 and the subsequent inclusion of queer identities in the post-war peace process underline the acknowledgement of the differential impact of conflict on marginalised groups. The election of Gustavo Petro in 2022 further signalled a move towards a more inclusive and diverse political agenda. While Petro’s government obviously faces opposition from right-wing parties and politicians, which underscores the ongoing ideological struggles that are being seen by countries across the globe, queer people are seeing enhanced protections with solid foundations in legislation. In Chile, the election of Gabriel Boric – who also began his presidential term in 2022 – as leftist president signified a transformative shift in the political landscape. His commitment to human rights, social justice, and gender parity demonstrates a deliberate effort to challenge prevailing conservative narratives and promote the inclusion of non-normative communities. However, the emergence of the populist radical right highlights the persistence of conservative ideologies that oppose queer rights and showcase the ongoing tensions between contemporary and

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traditionalist ways of thinking.

This study underscores the complex interplay between political ideologies and LGBTQ+ policies, highlighting how political parties and the politicians involved in them have the potential to shape societal attitudes through policy decisions, thereby influencing the broader social narrative. However, the study also acknowledges that domestic politics is not a unidirectional process. While political parties influence the electorate through political decisions, the electorate can equally influence these decision-makers through demand for change. Consequently, challenges remain. It is crucial to continue examining the intersection of queerphobia with broader political narratives and power structures, understanding how various governments use or target LGBTQ+ communities for their advantage. Moreover, disparities in societal acceptance and discrimination call for comprehensive efforts to combat prejudice-based violence and ensure the protection of sexual minorities.

In conclusion, the cases of Colombia and Chile provide important lessons about the evolving relationship between political parties, ideologies, and LGBTQ+ communities. These nations demonstrate that political leadership and policy decisions can play a pivotal role in shaping attitudes in favour or against queer rights. While progress has been made, ongoing efforts are required to create and ensure comprehensive protections and ensure a more equitable and inclusive future for LGBTQ+ individuals and the respective queer communities to which they belong. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between politics, ideologies, and LGBTQ+ rights, in turn paving the way for continued advocacy and scholarship in this crucial area of academia.

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