

## DECRIMINALIZING HOMOSEXUALITY

A global overview since the 18th century

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## DECRIMINALIZING HOMOSEXUALITY A GLOBAL OVERVIEW SINCE THE 18th CENTURY

by Jean-François MIGNOT

As of January 1, 2020, 21% of the world's inhabitants live in a country that criminalizes homosexual acts, i.e. they do not have the right to have private sexual relations with consenting adults of the same sex, under penalty of a fine, corporal punishment, imprisonment or death (Mendos, 2019). However, this also means that 79% of the world's inhabitants live in countries that do not criminalize homosexuality. Never in the last few centuries have so many humans been legally free to have homosexual relations.

When, where and how were homosexual relations decriminalized in the world? How many of the world's inhabitants have been living in countries where homosexual acts are not criminalized, since the historical trend of decriminalization started in the Age of Enlightenment? And how does the legal treatment of homosexuality vary from one country to another? This article examines the comparative, global history of the decriminalization of homosexual acts since the 18th century, as well as its current state and its prospects for evolution.

### DEFINITIONS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

Of the 70 countries (out of 203) that consider homosexual acts as a criminal offence on January 1, 2020, one third exclusively criminalize sexual acts between men, most often under the legal qualification of "sodomy" (which may include not only consensual anal penetration of a man by another, but also rape by a man of an adult man or a minor). By contrast, none of these countries exclusively criminalize sexual acts between women. And two thirds of these countries criminalize relations between women as well as between men, particularly under the labels of "unnatural" or "immoral" acts (Mendos, 2019); but in these countries too, most of the individuals prosecuted tend to be men. For instance, as Dupret (2021, 235) notes, "To our knowledge, no case of lesbianism has ever been filed in Indonesia, Lebanon or Egypt" in the contemporary period. The accused persons may express an exclusive and lasting sexual orientation for same-sex partners or even claim a homosexual identity – or not. In any case and strictly speaking, it is sexual *acts* which are legally prosecuted, not a sexual preference or identity.

Even in countries where the repressive legislation is rarely enforced, homosexuals are not free to live their lives as they see fit: risking being denounced, blackmailed and otherwise intimidated by citizens or by the police, they must hide their homosexual relationships; when they are victims of abuse, they may hesitate to file a complaint for fear of being prosecuted (or undergoing anal tests); and the criminalization of homosexual acts justifies various other types of discrimination against homosexuals. Thus, the decriminalization of homosexual acts may be seen as an “outcome and index of wider social change” (Frank et al., 2010), an indicator of the liberalization of state action (Hadler and Symons, 2018) and perhaps also civil society’s values, and also an indicator of the degree of freedom people may enjoy.

Historians, political scientists and sociologists have shown that more and more countries have decriminalized homosexual acts in the last few decades (Hadler and Symons, 2018) and centuries (Pinker, 2018), not just because the overall number of countries has increased but also because more countries have recently decriminalized than have (re)criminalized (Frank et al., 2010). In 2020, most countries (66%) do not criminalize homosexual acts. However, despite these pieces of information we lack a “big picture” of the global historical movement of the decriminalization of homosexuality. First, even though it is countries which decide to criminalize or not, it is people who are affected by the decision, which is why we need a measure indicating to what extent

more people (vs. more countries) now benefit from decriminalization. Second, we need to construct this indicator on a longer term than previous research, since the beginning of the first wave of decriminalization took place in the 18th century.

This is why this article introduces a new measure of the prevalence of decriminalization of homosexual relations: I estimate the *proportion of the world population* who live in a country where homosexual acts are not criminalized (fig. 1). To compute this indicator, I use two types of information relating to the 203 current states (excluding non-state and sub-state entities) and the states that preceded them:

- First, I use data on state law (not customary or religious or ecclesiastical law) indicating whether or not the national legislation in force at each date – most often the Criminal Code, which might itself be partly based on religious law – criminalizes private consensual sexual acts between same-sex adults; my main source, the International Lesbian and Gay Association reports (Carroll and Mendos, 2017; Mendos, 2019; see also Waaldijk 2009), is supplemented with historical information on the British empire (Gupta, 2008; Sanders, 2009; Han and O’Mahoney, 2018), the Arab-Muslim world (Schmitt and Sofer, 1992; El-Rouayheb, 2005; Al Farchichi and Saghiyeh, 2012) and China (Kang, 2009); this legal database is included in the appendix (tab. 1);

- Second, I use demographic data estimating the national population size in each year (Gapminder, 2019), up to

1949 (Maddison, 2003) and since 1950 (United Nations, 2017a); although imperfect, these population data are the most reliable available data.

The criminalization of private consensual sexual acts between same-sex adults is not the only possible legal discrimination against homosexuality. Indeed, some countries have ages of consent that are higher for homosexual vs heterosexual acts, i.e. they criminalize certain sexual acts only if performed by individuals of the same sex. For instance, this was the case in France from 1942 to 1982, when the age of consent was 21 or 18 years old for homosexual acts and 13 for heterosexual acts (Gauthier and Schlagdenhauffen, 2019); in France since 1982, the age of consent is 15 years old for all (Idier, 2013). Today, 7% of the world population live in a country which, although not criminalizing private consensual sexual acts between same-sex *adults*, have ages of consent that are higher for homosexual vs heterosexual acts. In addition, some countries punish certain offenses, such as public indecency, more severely when the act is committed by same-sex vs different-sex individuals. This was also the case in France from 1960 to 1980. Finally, some non-criminalizing countries are known to persecute homosexuals through legal provisions other than the direct criminalization of homosexual acts, such as laws against indecency, debauchery, prostitution, pornography or even hooliganism (or laws related to public security as well as public hygiene). This was the case, for instance, in China from 1979 to 1997 and it is still the case today, for instance, in

Iraq. Similarly, in Egypt, judges may use a law against prostitution and assimilate homosexuality with debauchery (*fujur*) to prosecute same-sex relationships, as in the “Queen Boat” case (2001); and in Indonesia, judges may also use articles against pornography to prosecute same-sex relationships, as in the “Atlantis Gym and Sauna” case (2017) (Dupret 2021).

However, I have been unable to gather systematic historical information on these various types of legal discrimination. As a consequence, the indicator this article uses – the proportion of the world population living in a country where homosexual acts among consenting adults in private are not criminalized (fig. 1) – might be considered a maximal estimate of the share of people who are legally free to have same-sex relations.

For countries that have decriminalized before unification or at the level of their federated entities, I estimate the annual proportion of their inhabitants residing in an entity that does not criminalize, such as in the United States (Eskridge, 2002), the United Kingdom and Australia; necessary data are unavailable for Italy and Switzerland, however, so the date of decriminalization used for these countries is that of the last region or canton to decriminalize.

In total, fig. 1 is based on both legal and demographic data on more than 80% of the world’s known inhabitants since the 1760s and more than 99% since the 1950s. Most lacking data concern precolonial Africa: I have information on the criminalization of homosexuality for fewer than 10% of Africans until the 1850s, and

it is only since the 1920s that data exist on more than 80% of Africans. Data are also to some extent lacking on Oceania until the late 19th century. The map in fig. 2 covers 100% of the world population in 2020. Together, these figures give a global historical overview of the decriminalization of homosexuality.

#### THE FIRST WAVE OF DECRIMINALIZATION, FROM 1791

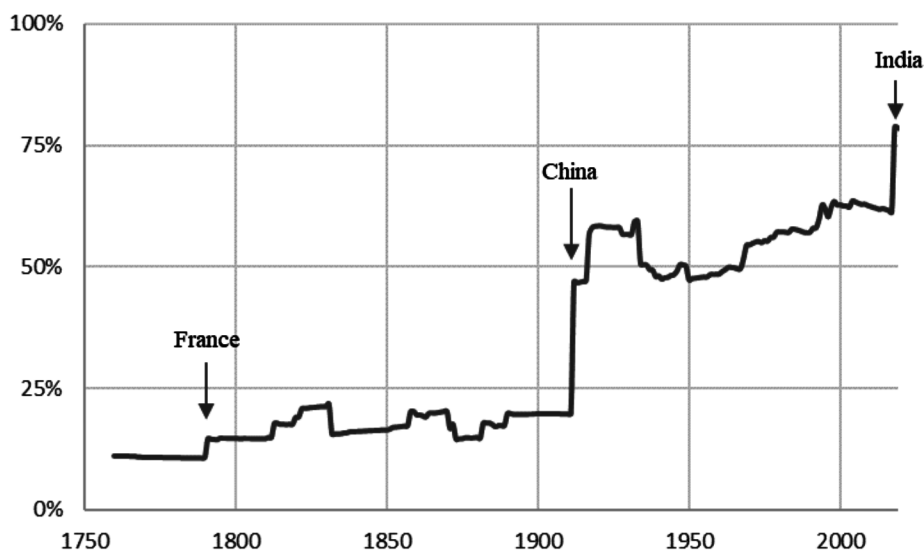
In the second half of the 18th century, only about 11% of the world's population lived in a country that did not criminalize homosexual acts (fig. 1). This was the case in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Korea, which have not criminalized these practices since at least the 18th century, as well as in Japan – which criminalized them only briefly at the end of the 19th century – and also in the Russian empire. Same-sex relations were prohibited almost everywhere else, such as in Europe and the colonies of the Americas (British, Spanish, Portuguese or French) and in the Ottoman, Mughal and Chinese empires.

In this context France became the first country to decriminalize homosexual acts. The French Penal Code of 1791, drafted in the liberal spirit of the Enlightenment by the revolutionary Lepeletier de Saint-Fargeau, abolished a “crowd of imaginary crimes” such as blasphemy, sacrilege and heresy, but also the crime of sodomy, which had given rise to a last execution in 1750 (Pastorello, 2011). Confirmed by the French Criminal Code of 1810 and applied in the Napoleonic empire, decriminalization then became definitive in some states

that emerged from the empire (Belgium, Luxembourg, Netherlands, some Swiss cantons), but was temporary in others which recriminalized in part (some Italian states) or in whole (Germany, Spain) in the 19th or 20th century. The French Criminal Code of 1810 also inspired the newly independent states of Latin America (Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela in the 1830s, then Mexico in 1872 following the French occupation), as well as the Ottoman empire (1858) which was seeking to reform itself (Tanzimat) to halt its decline. Finally, non-criminalization applied to most French colonies in Africa and Asia, but also to other colonies such as the Dutch (East Indies, now Indonesia), Spanish (Philippines) and Belgian colonies (Belgian Congo, now Democratic Republic of the Congo), which have maintained decriminalization since their independence. As for China, it decriminalized homosexual relations in 1912 as part of the abandonment of the Qing Code and a broader modernization of its criminal law.

Despite this transnational wave of liberalization, the proportion of humans who were legally free to engage in homosexual acts increased little in the 19th century (fig. 1). Indeed, several states (re)criminalized durably, like the Russian (1832) and German (1871) empires. Great Britain has criminalized “buggery” since the 16th century (a legal term that includes consensual and non-consensual sexual acts between men as well as some pedophilic and zoophilic acts) and has carried out executions on this ground until 1835. In 1885, the United Kingdom

Fig. 1. Proportion of the world population living in a country where homosexual acts are not criminalized, 1760-2020



Note: As of January 1, 2020, 79% of the world's population lives in a country that does not criminalize homosexual acts, compared to 63% in 2000, 20% in 1900, 16% in 1800 and 11% in 1760.

Sources: Carroll and Mendos, 2017; Mendos, 2019; Gapminder, 2019; Maddison, 2003; United Nations, 2017a; complementary sources above.

further extended the scope of homosexual acts criminalized on the grounds of “gross indecency”, a law that condemned Oscar Wilde (1895), who then left the UK for France, as well as Alan Turing (1952). But above all, the UK disseminated criminalization to its immense empire, with the dual objective of civilizing the colonized and avoiding the moral corruption of its male settlers (Han and O'Mahoney, 2018). Thus, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code of 1860 punishes homosexual acts (“whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal”) and this article inspired many

other codes applied in the British empire, whether in Asia (Ceylon, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei), East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Zanzibar) or the Middle East. Similarly, the 1885 British law (Labouchere amendment) inspired the 1899 Penal Code of Queensland (Australia), which in turn influenced other colonial codes such as those of Papua New Guinea and Nigeria. Today in 2020, several world regions formerly colonized by Britain still largely criminalize homosexual acts, such as the Caribbean, former Middle East mandates, South Asia, Melanesia and Polynesia. In South America, the only country that still

criminalizes homosexuality, Guyana, is also the only one that has been a British colony (fig. 2).

Overall, the first wave of the decriminalization of homosexuality largely was a top-down, state-led process which consisted in the willing importation (Latin America, Ottoman empire) of the prestigious post-revolutionary French Roman law, or its colonial imposition (Africa, Asia), without public debate on the specific issue of the criminalization of homosexual relations. The colonial imposition of British common law had the opposite effect of criminalizing homosexuality. By contrast, the second wave of the decriminalization of homosexuality was more of a bottom-up, civil society-based process. This second wave was based on increasingly liberal public opinions in matters of homosexuality and social movements in favor of equal rights for all.

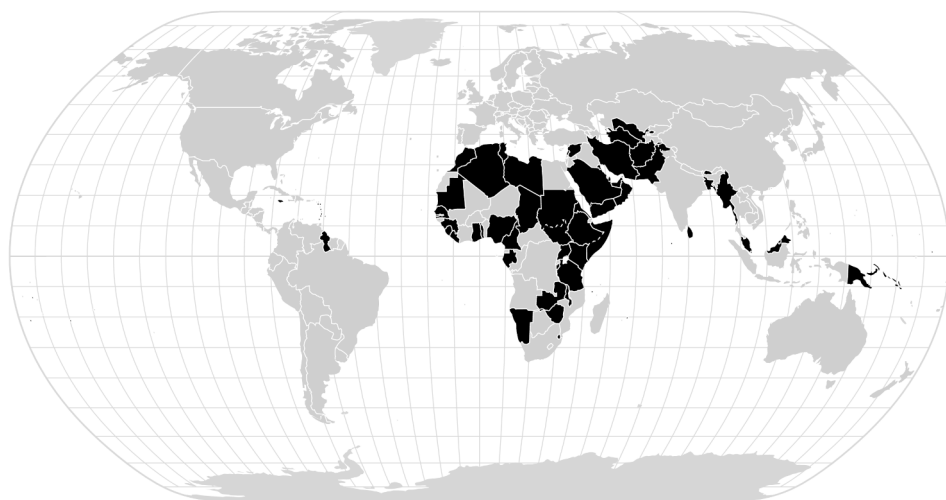
#### THE SECOND WAVE OF DECRIMINALIZATION, SINCE THE 1960s

From 1950 to 2020, the proportion of countries in the world that do not criminalize homosexual acts has almost doubled, from 35% to 66%. This decriminalization trend began in the 1960s in Western and Northern Europe (East and West Germany, United Kingdom) and Canada. In the United States, decriminalization progressed state by state from 1962, before spreading to the entire country by the decision of the Supreme Court *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003). Then decriminalization extended in the 1970s to southern Europe and Australia, and in the 1980s to South America, New

Zealand and Micronesia. In the 1990s, following the fall of the Soviet Union (which had decriminalized in 1917 but re-criminalized in 1934), decriminalization spread to Eastern Europe and part of Central Asia. Finally, India decriminalized by the Supreme Court decision *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018).

This wave is first of all linked to a better social acceptance of homosexuality in the West. When a population becomes richer, lives longer and better and thus frees itself from physical and social insecurity and anxiety about the future, and when it benefits from more democratic institutions that expose it to unconventional ideas, its values tend to become more liberal (Inglehart and Norris, 2011; Adamczyk, 2017). People tend to move away from reassuring religious beliefs, place more value on individual rights and freedoms compared to group interest and loyalty, and all this increases their tolerance or even acceptance of non-conformist behaviors such as homosexuality. Thus, in the eyes of an increasing number of citizens in developed countries, governments have lost their legitimacy to govern private sexual behavior between consenting adults. As Pierre Trudeau, Minister of Justice of Canada, put it in 1967, “there’s no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation.” Accordingly, from 1945 to 2005 the world’s countries increasingly decriminalized not just sodomy but also contraception, pornography and adultery, while also increasingly criminalizing non-consensual sex including rape and child sexual abuse (Frank et al., 2010). In other words, more and more countries have

Fig. 2. The criminalization of homosexual acts in the world, January 1, 2020



Note: map drawn with Khartis, 2020.

Source: Mendes, 2019; in the course of the year 2019, Angola and Botswana decriminalized and Gabon recriminalized.

prioritized individual liberty and consent over the collective order and procreation imperative (Frank and Moss, 2017).

But this wave of decriminalization is also linked to the work of interconnected militant groups (following the Stonewall riots in New York in 1969), the combined political pressure of United Nations agencies, states, non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations (e.g., respectively, the International Lesbian and Gay Association and the Council of Europe), as well as the decisions of the supreme courts of common law countries. In both the West and Asia, decriminalization also led to de-pathologizing of homosexuality by national medical authorities, as well as by the World Health Organization (1990). Although the proximate

causes of the second wave of decriminalization seem well identified, the ultimate causal mechanisms that made homosexuality more acceptable in the West remain to be investigated precisely.

Africa is the only one of the five continents where, since 1950, the decriminalization movement has had relatively little success. In contrast, all Europeans live in a country free of laws against homosexual acts, as do almost all Americans and more than three-quarters of Asians and Oceanians (fig. 2). In Africa, many countries have retained colonial legislation, whether it is French or Belgian and therefore liberal (West Africa, Central Africa and Madagascar) or, conversely, British and therefore repressive (East Africa and Southern Africa). Since independence, former



Portuguese colonies have abolished laws condemning homosexual acts (Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Cape Verde and Sao Tome and Principe, as well as Angola in 2019). Additional countries have decriminalized, such as Rwanda, Djibouti, the Seychelles and Botswana (2019), and most importantly South Africa, through the decision of its Constitutional Court *National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality v. Minister of Justice* (1998). But on the other hand, other African countries have decided to (re)criminalize homosexual acts, such as Burundi and Gabon as well as several Muslim-majority countries: Algeria, Mauritania, Senegal, Guinea, Libya, Sudan and Comoros, and most recently Chad (2017). In total, the proportion of Africans who can legally have same-sex relationships has varied little, from 37% in 1950 to 36% in 2020.

In 34 African countries representing close to 80% of the African population in 2016-2018, an average of 82% to 91% of respondents said they would like – or not care – having people from other ethnic groups or other religions or other nationalities as neighbors, but only 20% said they would like or not care if they had homosexuals as neighbors (Howard 2020, 3). The level of tolerance of homosexuals was the same in 2016-2018 as in 2014-2015 and it was particularly low, on average, in rural areas (16%), among people with no formal education (11%) and among Muslims (11%).

## RECRIMINALIZATION IN THE MUSLIM WORLD?

To this day, the main currents of monotheistic religions condemn homosexual acts, at least male, as immoral (“abomination” according to the Leviticus, “sin” according to Christian churches, “fornication” according to Muslim schools of jurisprudence). This is less the case in Asian spiritualities, though. When classifying countries by their modal religious affiliation in 2010 (Pew Research Center, 2015), it appears that more and more people in Christian-majority countries benefit from non-criminalization (from 31% in 1950 to 77% in 2020), but this is even more true for people in countries where the majority denomination is Hinduism, Buddhism or a traditional Asian religion (from 62% in 1950 to 98% in 2020).

But in contrast to these trends, in countries with a Muslim majority, fewer people now live in a country that does not criminalize (from 47% in 1950 to 41% in 2020). Indeed, since the decriminalization in the Ottoman empire (1858), which has been maintained to this day in Turkey but also in Egypt and Iraq, and since the introduction of non-criminalization in Indonesia (1918), which was inherited from the Criminal Code of the Dutch colonizer, the most populous Muslim-majority countries to have decriminalized are Jordan (1960) and Kazakhstan (1998), two countries which are less populated than several of those that have (re)criminalized (see above in Africa). In addition, even some countries

that do not formally criminalize homosexual acts, such as Egypt, Iraq and Jordan, use various legal provisions to prosecute homosexuals: if Egypt, Iraq and Jordan were to be considered as criminalizing homosexual acts (*de facto* if not *de jure*), then the proportion of people living in Muslim-majority countries where homosexual acts are not criminalized would not be 41% but 31%. Overall, the Muslim world is the only cultural area in which the trend seems to be less towards decriminalization than (re)criminalization.

In addition, since the 1990s several sub-state entities not included in fig. 1 and 2 have begun to criminalize or increase the penalties provided for in the name of Islamic law (*shariah*), based on the Holy Book (*Qur'an*) and the acts of the Prophet (*hadith*). This is the case in provinces of southern Somalia; in the Chechen Republic of the Russian Federation (1996), where gays have recently undergone especially serious persecutions; in Indonesia in the province of Aceh (2002) and in the capital of South Sumatra (2006), where imprisonment and lashes penalties are provided for homosexual acts; and in the northern states of Nigeria (1999), where sentences for lesbian acts and for sodomy between men include the death penalty by stoning. More generally today, all the countries that provide for the death penalty for homosexual acts are under Islamic law: these are Mauritania, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates and Iran, along with Brunei (since 2019). The number of death sentences or executions on this ground, however, is unknown.

It is difficult to know to what extent the criminalization of homosexual acts is an effect and/or cause of a lower social acceptance of homosexuality. However, according to the World Values Survey conducted in 1981, 1990, 1995 and 2000 in 76 countries representing about 80% of the world's population (Inglehart and Norris, 2011, 38-40), the Muslim cultural area is not only the one that expresses the most conservative values in the world (strong religiosity, deference to authority and national pride), but also the one that most widely rejects gender equality and sexual freedoms such as divorce, abortion and homosexuality (Inglehart and Norris, 2011; Adamczyk, 2017). Other international surveys conducted since the 2000s confirm that Muslim-majority countries, along with some African countries, are those in which the most adults consider that homosexuality "should not be accepted by society" (Pew Research Center, 2014). People from countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation are least accepting of homosexuality, and since the 2000s they have become even less accepting (Hadler and Symons, 2018). Largely perceived as foreign, homosexuality – particularly its "passive" male variant – is reputed to threaten the cohesion, perpetuation and honor of the family, if not society and the nation itself or its image abroad.

In post-industrial societies where individuals can take survival for granted, the growing acceptance of homosexuality is related to a broader priority given to "self-expression values" (liberty) over "survival values" (security), also including

subjective well-being, emancipation from authority (both traditional and secular), tolerance of outgroups (e.g. foreigners) and of new gender roles, interpersonal trust, protection of the environment and demand for participation in decision-making in political and economic life (World Values Survey, 2021). However, the ultimate causal mechanisms involved in the lower acceptance of homosexuality in the Muslim world and in the recriminalization trend are not well identified.

#### THE FUTURE OF DECRIMINALIZATION

Relatively more humans are now legally free to engage in homosexual acts, but will this long-term trend go on? There are reasons to doubt it. First, the diffusion of religious fundamentalism, especially but not only in the Muslim world, may lead some non-criminalizing countries to recriminalize homosexual acts. Second, countries that today criminalize homosexual acts have higher fertility and will have faster population growth in the future than those that do not criminalize today. If the laws of the countries of the world remained as they were on January 1, 2020, United Nations projections (2017a, based on fertility, mortality and international migration assumptions up to year 2100, as described in United Nations, 2017b) indicate that the share of the world population living in a country that does not criminalize could decline from 79% in 2020 to 73% in 2050 and 66% in 2100. For decriminalization to benefit more people, a sufficiently large number of sufficiently

populated criminalizing countries will need to decriminalize homosexual acts in the future.

In addition to the freedom to have sexual relations, other rights may be granted to homosexuals (Carroll and Mendos, 2017; see also Caporali and Digoix, 2018). While in 2020 79% of the world's population live in a country that does not criminalize homosexual acts, 72% live in a country that also sets an identical age of sexual consent, whether partners are of different sexes or not. In addition, 28% of the world's population live in a country that includes legal provisions against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; 16% live in a country that allows same-sex marriage; and 15% live in a country that allows the adoption of a minor by a same-sex couple – and these proportions have kept increasing since the 2000s.

All in all, these diverging trends could lead to a situation where relatively more people live in countries that criminalize homosexual acts but also, on the other hand, in countries that extend to homosexuals the access to various rights. This is in line with previous research showing that in the early 21st century “polarization is occurring at the world level: increasing divergence in national regulation of homosexuality is mirrored by divergence in public opinions between countries” (Hadler and Symons, 2018). Thus, the history of human emancipation from illiberal state institutions and public opinions remains open-ended.

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## APPENDIX

Tab. 1. Dates of criminalization and decriminalization of consensual homosexual acts among adults in private, from 1760 to January 1, 2020

Territory	← Chronological time ←			
	Last decrimi- nalization	Last crimi- nalization	Former decriminal- ization(s)	Former criminaliza- tion(s)
Afghanistan	still illegal	1924		
Albania	1995	1946	1858	1450
Algeria	still illegal	1966		
Andorra	1791			
Angola	2019	1886		
Antigua and Barbuda	still illegal	1995		
Argentina	1887	1680		
Armenia	2003	1832		
Australia	1975-1997	1788		
Austria	1971	1768		
Azerbaijan	2000	1832		
Bahamas	1991			
Bahrain	1976	1956		
Bangladesh	still illegal	1862		
Barbados	still illegal	1992		
Belarus	1994	1934	1920	
Belgium	1795			
Belize	2016	1888		
Benin	1877			
Bhutan	still illegal	1959		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1832	1680		
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1998-2001	1929		
Botswana	2019	1885		
Brazil	1831	1533		
Brunei Darussalam	still illegal	1871		
Bulgaria	1968	1896	1858	1382
Burkina Faso	1877			
Burundi	still illegal	2009		
Cambodia	never was illegal			
Cameroon	still illegal	1918		
Canada	1969	1583		
Cape Verde	2004	1886		

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Territory	← Chronological time ←			
	Last decrimi- nalization	Last crimi- nalization	Former decriminal- ization(s)	Former criminaliza- tion(s)
Central African Republic	1903			
Chad	still illegal	2017	1900	
Chile	1999	1680		
China	1912	1735		
China, Hong Kong	1991	1865		
China, Macao	1996			
Colombia	1981	1680		
Comoros	still illegal	1981		
Congo	1882			
Congo (Democratic Republic of the)	1884			
Cook Islands	still illegal	1969		
Costa Rica	1971	1680		
Côte d'Ivoire	1894			
Croatia	1977	1929	1852	
Cuba	1979	1680		
Cyprus	1998	1929	1858	1571
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (internationally unrecognized)	2014	1929	1858	1571
Czech Republic	1961	1768		
Denmark	1933	1683		
Djibouti	1995			
Dominica	still illegal	1998		
Dominican Republic	1822	1680		
Ecuador	1997	1680		
Egypt	1858			
El Salvador	1822	1680		
Equatorial Guinea	1963			
Eritrea	still illegal	1957		
Estonia	1992	1934	1920	1832
Ethiopia	still illegal	1957		
Fiji	2010	1945		
Finland	1971	1889		
France	1791	1260		
Gabon	still illegal	2019	1882	
Gambia	still illegal	1934		

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Territory	← Chronological time ←			
	Last decrimi- nalization	Last crimi- nalization	Former decriminal- ization(s)	Former criminaliza- tion(s)
Georgia	2000	1832		
Germany	1968 (East) / 1969 (West)	1871	1813	1532
Ghana	still illegal	1892		
Greece	1951			
Grenada	still illegal	1897		
Guatemala	1871	1680		
Guinea	still illegal	1988	1891	
Guinea-Bissau	1993	1500		
Guyana	still illegal	1893		
Haiti	1791			
Holy See	1890			
Honduras	1899	1680		
Hungary	1962	1878		
Iceland	1940	1869		
India	2018	1675		
Indonesia	1918			
Iran (Islamic Republic of)	still illegal	1794		
Iraq	1858	1534		
Ireland	1993	1861		
Israel	1988	1936	1858	1517
Italy	1890	1532		
Jamaica	still illegal	1864		
Japan	1882	1873	not illegal before 1873	
Jordan	1960	1936	1858	1517
Kazakhstan	1998	1832		
Kenya	still illegal	1897		
Kiribati	still illegal	1977		
Korea (Republic of)	never was illegal			
Korea (Democratic People's Republic of)	never was illegal			
Kosovo	1994	1878		
Kuwait	still illegal	1960		
Kyrgyzstan	1998	1832		
Lao People's Democratic Republic	never was illegal			
Latvia	1992	1934	1920	1832

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Territory	← Chronological time ←			
	Last decrimi- nalization	Last crimi- nalization	Former decriminal- ization(s)	Former criminaliza- tion(s)
Lebanon	still illegal	1943		
Lesotho	2012	1871		
Liberia	still illegal	1978		
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	still illegal	1976	1953	
Liechtenstein	1989			
Lithuania	1993	1934	1920	1832
Luxembourg	1795			
Madagascar	1897			
Malawi	still illegal	1891		
Malaysia	still illegal	1871		
Maldives	still illegal	2014		
Mali	1880			
Malta	1973	1875		
Marshall Islands	2005			
Mauritania	still illegal	1983	1903	
Mauritius	still illegal	1838		
Mexico	1872	1680		
Micronesia (Federated States of)	1982			
Moldova (Republic of)	1995	1934	1920	1832
Monaco	1793			
Mongolia	1961			
Montenegro	1977	1929		
Morocco	still illegal	1913		
Mozambique	2014	1886		
Myanmar	still illegal	1886		
Namibia	still illegal	1920		
Nauru	2016	1921		
Nepal	2007			
Netherlands	1811	1530		
New Zealand	1986	1840		
Nicaragua	2008	1680		
Niger	1900			
Nigeria	still illegal	1904		
Niue	2007			
North Macedonia	1996	1929		
Norway	1972	1902		

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Territory	← Chronological time ←			
	Last decrimi- nalization	Last crimi- nalization	Former decriminal- ization(s)	Former criminaliza- tion(s)
Occupied Palestinian Territory, Gaza strip	still illegal	1936	1858	
Occupied Palestinian Territory, West Bank	1960	1936	1858	
Oman	still illegal	1956		
Pakistan	still illegal	1675		
Palau	2014			
Panama	2008	1949		
Papua New Guinea	still illegal	1888		
Paraguay	1880	1680		
Peru	1924	1863	1837	1680
Philippines	1822	1680		
Poland	1932	1815		
Portugal	1983	1886	1852	1533
Qatar	still illegal	1971		
Romania	1996	1937	1864	
Russian Federation	1993	1934	1917	1832
Rwanda	1980			
Saint Kitts and Nevis	still illegal	1873		
Saint Lucia	still illegal	2005		
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	still illegal	1988		
Samoa	still illegal	2013		
San Marino	2004	1975	1865	
Sao Tome and Principe	2012	1500		
Saudi Arabia	still illegal	1928		
Senegal	still illegal	1966	1877	
Serbia	1994	1860	1858	1459
Seychelles	2016	1955		
Sierra Leone	still illegal	1861		
Singapore	still illegal	1871		
Slovakia	1962	1878		
Slovenia	1977	1929		
Solomon Islands	still illegal	1963		
Somalia	still illegal	1925		
South Africa	1998	1650		
South Sudan	still illegal	1974	1899	
Spain	1979	1939	1822; 1932	1438; 1928
Sri Lanka	still illegal	1885		

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Territory	← Chronological time ←			
	Last decrimi- nalization	Last crimi- nalization	Former decriminal- ization(s)	Former criminaliza- tion(s)
Sudan	still illegal	1974	1899	
Suriname	1869			
Swaziland (Eswatini)	still illegal	1907		
Sweden	1944	1866		
Switzerland	1798-1942	1532		
Syrian Arab Republic	still illegal	1949	1858	
Taiwan	1896	1740		
Tajikistan	1998	1832		
Tanzania (United Republic of)	still illegal	1867		
Thailand	1957	1908		
Timor-Leste	1975			
Togo	still illegal	1884		
Tokelau	2007			
Tonga	still illegal	1988		
Trinidad and Tobago	2018	1861		
Tunisia	still illegal	1913		
Turkey	1858	1299		
Turkmenistan	still illegal	1832		
Tuvalu	still illegal	1978		
Uganda	still illegal	1894		
Ukraine	1991	1934	1917	
United Arab Emirates	still illegal	1956		
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1967-1982	1533		
United States of America	1962-2003	1610-1948		
Uruguay	1934	1680		
Uzbekistan	still illegal	1832		
Vanuatu	1981			
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	1836	1680		
Viet Nam	never was illegal			
Yemen	still illegal	1937		
Zambia	still illegal	1931		
Zimbabwe	still illegal	1891		

Sources: Carroll and Mendos, 2017; Mendos, 2019; complementary sources in Bibliography.

## RÉSUMÉ

La plupart des pays du monde ont, à une époque ou à une autre, interdit les actes homosexuels entre adultes consentants en privé. Où, quand et comment ces actes ont-ils été dépénalisés dans le monde depuis le siècle des Lumières ? Des données historiques sur la légalité des actes homosexuels et sur l'effectif de population dans les 203 États actuels permettent de calculer la part annuelle de la population mondiale qui, depuis 1760, vit dans un pays où les actes homosexuels sont légaux (plutôt qu'une infraction). Si la France a été le premier pays à dépénaliser les actes homosexuels (1791) et si elle a inspiré la première vague de dépénalisation en Europe occidentale, en Amérique latine et dans l'Empire ottoman, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle moins de 25 % des humains vivaient dans un pays qui ne pénalisait pas les relations homosexuelles. La seconde vague de dépénalisation, fondée sur une libéralisation des opinions publiques,

a commencé en Europe occidentale et en Amérique du Nord dans les années 1960, puis s'est étendue à l'Océanie, à l'Europe de l'Est et enfin à l'Asie. En 2020, plus de 75 % des humains vivent dans un pays qui ne pénalise plus les relations homosexuelles. Cela dit, ces relations constituent toujours une infraction pour la plupart des habitants d'Afrique et des pays à majorité musulmane, et elles sont particulièrement sévèrement punies dans quelques États et entités infra-étatiques de droit islamique. Comme les pays qui pénalisent aujourd'hui connaîtront une croissance démographique relativement rapide dans les décennies à venir, la part des humains qui sont légalement libres d'avoir des relations homosexuelles va probablement diminuer, à moins qu'un nombre suffisamment important de pays suffisamment peuplés dépénalisent bientôt.

## ABSTRACT

Most of the world's countries have at some point prohibited homosexual acts among consenting adults in private. Where, when and how were homosexual relations decriminalized in the world since the Age of Enlightenment? Historical data on the legality of homosexual acts and on population numbers in 203 present-day countries allows us to compute the annual share of the world population who live in a country where homosexual acts are legal (vs. a criminal offence), since 1760. Although France became the first country to decriminalize homosexual acts (1791) and inspired the first wave of decriminalization in Western Europe, Latin America and the Ottoman Empire, in the 19th century fewer than 25% of humans lived in a country which did not criminalize homosexual relations. The second wave of decriminalization, which was based on increasingly liberal public

opinions regarding acts among consenting adults, started in Western Europe and North America in the 1960s and then spread to Oceania, Eastern Europe and finally Asia. In 2020, more than 75% of humans live in a country which no longer criminalizes homosexual relations. Liberalization has been uneven, though: homosexual acts are still a crime for most of the inhabitants in Africa and in Muslim-majority countries, and they are especially harshly punished in a few Islamic-law states and sub-state entities. As the countries which criminalize homosexual acts today will grow demographically relatively fast in the coming decades, the share of humans who are legally free to engage in homosexual acts will likely decrease, except if a sufficiently large number of sufficiently populated criminalizing countries decriminalize soon.