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ANTI-LGBT BACKLASH AND THE SHIFTING PUBLIC OPINION ON LGBT
RIGHTS IN CONTEMPORARY RUSSIA: A CASE STUDY

by

SEAN SKILLINGS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in International and Global Studies
in the College of Sciences
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Bruce Wilson, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

The wealth of literature which intends to explain various aspects of LGBT rights, politics, and activism in Eastern Europe has been well established (Swimelar, 2017, p. 912). There are currently two opposing theories on the effect of backlash on LGBT attitudes and activism. One theory, purported by O'Dwyer, suggests that backlash is beneficial to the visibility of LGBT issues and for attracting international attention and support. Rosenberg argues that right-wing backlash is detrimental to attitudes and activism (Rosenberg 2008, p. 344-347). These two arguments for and against the "benefits to backlash" approach are clearly defined and testable. With this paper, I will map out the history of anti-LGBT backlash in Russia, along with the development of the gay propaganda law, and how it supports or detracts from both theories.

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INTRODUCTION

The wealth of literature which intends to explain various aspects of LGBT rights, politics, and activism in Eastern Europe has been well established (Swimelar, 2017, p. 912). During the period of communist rule in the Soviet Union, LGBT people's rights in Eastern Europe were most often ignored, and LGBT peoples were routinely punished for their lifestyle, particularly under the leadership of Joseph Stalin after he criminalized male homosexuality in 1933 (Hazard, 1965, p. 279). According to Hazard, homosexual behavior was legal in the beginning of the Soviet Union under Vladimir Lenin, but it became criminalized under Stalin. The situation for LGBT peoples seemed like it was going to improve after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1993, when homosexual behavior was re-legalized (Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, 2000). Despite being re-legalized, public opinion was, and still is, hostile towards LGBT people (Resource Information Center: Russia, 1998). Russia's "gay propaganda law," promulgated in 2013 targets LGBT people and prevents activists from conducting any kind of LGBT-rights demonstrations where it is possible to come into contact with a minor (Polsdofer, 2015, p. 1070). One would think that with severely ant-LGBT laws, such as this "gay propaganda law", public opinion on LGBT people would only worsen. But that does not seem to be the case. According to the World Values Survey, wave five, which was taken between 2005-2009, before the gay propoganda law, almost 60% of respondentts said that homosexuality is never justifiable (WVS 2009). In wave six, which concluded in 2014, after the propoganda law was signed, the percentage of respondents saying that homosexuality is never justifiable was 54.1%. Other surveys, however, such as one conducted by the Levada Centre, show hostility towards the LGBT community remaining relatively constant, and almost never

improving (Levada Centre, 2015; Yudina and Alperovich, 2015). These examples raise a larger question: what effect does anti-LGBT backlash have on attitudes towards LGBT people and LGBT activism in Russia?

There are currently two opposing theories on the effect of backlash on LGBT attitudes and activism. In one theory, Conor O'Dwyer suggests that backlash is beneficial to the visibility of LGBT issues and for attracting international attention and support (2018, p. 229). He tested this theory using case studies of two post-Soviet states: Poland and the Czech Republic. He found that LGBT activism was more effective and organized in Poland, where heavy backlash from the Catholic church and far right-wing parties took place. Further support for his argument came from the Czech case, where in the relative absence of backlash there was also a presence of disorganized and ineffective activism. This theory is somewhat similar to that of Thomas Keck, who argues that despite the negative backlash of court decisions that legislate "beyond the current public opinion," there are other areas where the benefits of legal mobilization often outweigh the negatives of backlash (Keck 2009, p. 151).

On the contrary to O'Dwyer and Keck, Rosenberg argues that right-wing backlash is detrimental to attitudes and activism (Rosenberg 2008, p. 344-347). He, along with Klarman (2005), cite the case of *Goodridge v. Department of Public Health* to support this argument. In this case, the Massachusetts Supreme court ruled that the state constitution required same-sex marriage to be legally recognized (Mass. 2003). They argue that this decision contributed to significant backlash that contributed to the electoral victories of President Bush and Republican senate victories in Ohio, Iowa, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and South Dakota (Klarman 2005, 467–470; Rosenberg 2008, 369–382). Rimmerman echoes these sentiments, citing the outcomes of

cases such as *Baehr V Miike* as “doing more for the opponents of same sex marriage than for its proponents” (Rimmerman, 2002, p. 78; Keck 2009, p. 154). Again, the backlash caused by judicial outcomes was purported by Rimmerman as being the main factor in the method’s supposedly counterproductive nature. It must be noted that this theory supposed by Rosenberg, Klarman, and Rimmerman were tested solely in the United States, and no international case studies were used. This further warrants Russia as a case study for my purposes.

These two arguments for and against the “benefits to backlash” approach are clearly defined and testable. With this thesis, I map out the history of anti-LGBT backlash in Russia and how it supports or detracts from both theories.

Hypotheses

This thesis presents two hypotheses for the relationship between backlash and LGBT activism and public opinions of LGBT people:

Hypothesis 1: Backlash in Russia has been beneficial to the organizational strength of LGBT organizations and for public support for the goals and rights of LGBT people.

Hypothesis 2: Backlash in Russia has been harmful to the organizational strength of LGBT organizations and has weakened public support for the goals and rights of LGBT people.

To test this hypotheses, I examined LGBT activism temporally, in the years prior to and following backlash towards a growing number of LGBT rights organizations and demonstrations in Russia that culminated in the implementation of the gay propaganda law, as well as the corresponding public opinion, through the use of surveys, interviews, and secondary literature. Analysis of public opinion relied on surveys from various data collection centers such as Levada

and SOVA, while analysis of the state of LGBT activism drew mostly from secondary literature and interviews with activists and LGBT community members.

Definition of Terms

This section contains definitions of various terms that are used throughout this thesis that are necessary to understand the full context of the information presented, and how the information relates to each hypothesis. These terms and definitions are as follows:

Backlash – Any social and or political activities that reflect negative attitudes and actions towards pro-LGBT demonstrations, laws, protests, and services. Backlash can be in the form of counter-protests, anti-LGBT rhetoric from politicians, and the promulgation of laws the limit the rights of LGBT people (O’Dwyer, 2018, p. 11).

Collective action problems – A problem that arises when all groups or individuals benefit from cooperation but will not or cannot do so due to outside circumstances. These circumstances can include lack of funds, visibility, etc (Friedberg, 2012, p. 45).

The European Parliament – The official, directly elected legislative body of the European Union (EU). It is the only directly elected body of the EU (About Parliament, 2019, n.p.).

Euroscepticism – Objections to the EU and EU integration (Flood & Underwood, 2007, p. 3).

Framing contests - Different, opposing efforts to portray an issue to the public through different lenses. An example would be an attempt to portray gay marriage as a political issue, or a human rights issue (O’Dwyer, 2018, p. 6).

Gay Propoganda Law - The Russian federal law "for the Purpose of Protecting Children from Information Advocating for a Denial of Traditional Family Values." Signed into law by President Vladimir Putin in June of 2013. Its stated purpose is to "prevent the distribution of propoganda non-traditional sexual relationships to minors." In practice, the law has been used by the Russian government to strike down LGBT protests, demonstrations, as well as to censor information about LGBT news (Polsdofer, 2015, p. 1075).

Glasnost – Russian word for openness. Policy of transparency of government, along with an introduction of more freedom for the mediate to publish criticisms of the government and its leaders. Introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985.

Perestroika – Russian word for restructuring. Political movement in the 1980s for reforming the Soviet Union by moving away from a central planned economy towards greater access to free markets.

Social movement organizations (SMOs) – Formal institutions that connect connect social movement communities (O'Dwyer, 2018, p. 4).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Overview

While the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Vladimir Lenin, did not explicitly criminalize homosexuality and the topic was absent from the original penal code, laws regarding the universal illegality of homosexuality across the Soviet Union arose under Joseph Stalin's leadership in 1933 (Hazard, 1965, p. 279). Prior to 1933, the only Soviet Republics to make homosexuality a crime, under the term "sodomy," were Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (Healy, 2001, p. 258). Stalin criminalized homosexuality for men across the Soviet Union with a decree that divided it into two different grades, with penalties ranging from three to eight years of "deprived liberty" (Hazard, p. 279). Trials regarding cases of homosexuality and homosexual acts were generally not public (Healy, 2001, p. 208), which contributed to the ignorance of LGBT presence in Soviet society.

The Soviet peoples' attitudes and actions towards the LGBT community did not improve for a long period after Stalin's death. In fact, the earliest known public endorsement of LGBT rights is a criticism of article 121, the article which criminalized homosexuality, in the Textbook of Criminal Law in 1973 (Duberman, 1989, p. 362), showing the extent to which homosexuality was stigmatized and how Stalin's policies remained in effect through multiple changes in soviet leadership. Heavy opposition to LGBT rights are shown in the Soviet Union well into the period of Gorbachaev's leadership. A poll in 1989 reported that homosexuals were the most hated group

in Russia at the time, with a large portion of respondents saying homosexuals should be “liquidated” (Resource Information Center: Russia, 1998).

Even in the modern day a sizeable portion of the Russian population seems to hold similar views; over half of the Russian population surveyed by the World Values Survey, Wave Six 2010-2014, stated that homosexuality is never justifiable (World Values Survey, 2014). However, more recent surveys taken from the Levada Center (2015, 2019) and the SOVA Center (2015-2018) seem to show a gradual improvement since this wave of the WVS. This shifting public opinion since 2014, the year immediately following the promulgation of the infamous “gay propaganda law,” warrants an analysis on a possible relation between the backlash that resulted in the law and the shifting public opinion.

It is also worth taking a look at the role activist networks within Russia have played in changes in public opinion of the LGBT community, and the relationship that anti-LGBT backlash in the public sphere has with the methods and structure of activism and activist groups. Conor O’Dwyer (2018) poses a theory that suggests negative backlash to policy or legal change has a net positive effect on LGBT activism, by attracting attention to and resources for the causes of activists, while others, such as Rosenberg (2005), argue that backlash has a substantially regressive effect in terms of both policy and public opinion, because it mobilizes anti-LGBT groups, resulting in legal and legislative victories that hinder the progress of LGBT rights and LGBT activism.

Opposing Theories

According to Conor O’Dwyer, Poland is the clearest example of strong activism and activist networks emerging from anti-LGBT backlash in Eastern Europe (2018, p. 120). Much of

this backlash goes hand in hand with anti-EU sentiments. For example, the far right wing party The League of Polish Families, has consistently and explicitly stated that the EU is promoting gay rights and forcing them on Poland (Binnie, 2014, p. 250). EU anti-discrimination laws were incorporated into Polish law after the country's accession to the EU in 2004; and in 2006 the European Parliament passed a resolution mentioning a leading member of the League of Polish Families for inciting violence against the March for Tolerance in Krakow (Binnie, 2014, p. 251). Binnie points out that resolutions such as these may have played into the hands of the far right as confirmation of their rhetoric (p. 251) that Western European values were being forced onto Poland, and replacing traditional Polish family values.

O'Dwyer argues that when LGBT groups face threatening opposition, it allows them to solve several collective action problems at once, with minimal resources (2018, p. 22). He argues this is due to backlash increasing the visibility of activist groups and attracting international allies to their cause. This 'Benefit to Backlash' theory might serve to explain why some countries, such as the Czech Republic, have little presence of structured activism despite having relatively pro-LGBT laws and public sentiment compared to the rest of Eastern Europe (2018, p. 74). This theory that O'Dwyer proposes is interesting in that it examines the role of *opponents* in the framing contest for homosexuality in the public sphere. The prominence of these opponents, O'Dwyer argues, increases the credibility and visibility of structured activism. In the Polish case, anti-LGBT backlash was framed as Euroscepticism. After EU accession, however, this sort of 'defend the nation' framing persisted as pride marches experienced administrative bans, discriminatory policing, and organized violence in Poland immediately following accession. These examples of backlash brought visibility to the activists' cause, and by 2012 Polish

movements boasted large scale grass-roots participation, a coordinated national network of SMOs with close links to transnational networks, increasing domestic allies, and LGBT activists in public office (2018, p. 6).

In contrast to O'Dwyer, Rosenberg and others argue that progress in LGBT activism stems neither from backlash nor litigation, but from slow changes in culture (Rosenberg 2008, p. 415; Klarman, 2005, p 484-85; D'Emilio, 2005, p. 12). They argue that the backlash caused by legislative victories of LGBT activists actually provides major setbacks to the LGBT movement, and cite the aftermath of the case *Goodridge v Department of Public Health* as a major example. After this case ruled that the state of Massachusetts must legally recognize same-sex marriages, opponents of same-sex marriage (SSM) in 16 states added anti-SSM amendments to their constitutions (Keck, 2009, p. 162). While this case resulted in the amplification of anti-LGBT rhetoric across the United States, it mobilized LGBT supporters as well, presenting a potential flaw in this theory. Following the case ruling, marriages approved for same-sex couples increased by the thousands in states where it was legal, and public support for these marriages also increased (Andersen, 2005, p. 236). This represented a substantial effort from the LGBT community to mobilize and set clear goals.

However, these examples also do not give insight into the effects that political, legal, and social backlash can have internationally, where different cultural, political, and legal systems exist, and they seem to only take into account the backlash that occurs from legal/political decisions and advocacy, without considering the initial social responses to LGBT demonstrations and their effect on future advocacy. One must take these factors into account when examining the efforts of LGBT activists in different countries in order to comprehensively analyze the

situation of the LGBT community and its domestic and international methods of promoting LGBT rights.

METHODS

Case Selection Criteria: Russia

Russia represents a good case to test the two opposing theories, because it is an authoritarian state with plenty of instances of social, legal, and political discrimination, violence, and backlash towards LGBT movements, and the recent introduction of the infamous “gay propaganda” law in 2013 represents a great cutoff point in the timeline of LGBT activism. The prominence, effectiveness, and reach of LGBT activism can be analyzed in the periods leading up to the promulgation of this law, as well as the period after until today.

Despite negative perceptions of homosexuality and high levels of discrimination of LGBT peoples across Russia, and laws such as the gay propoganda law, Russia does have mechanisms that are meant to protect LGBT rights (Polsdofer, 2014, p. 1073). Polsdofer states that Russia’s constitution provides for the supremacy of international agreements when it comes to major disputes (p. 1074). One of the international agreements Russia is a part of, the ECHR, has ruled against the gay propoganda law and other forms of discrimination in Russia, but in practice Russia has not adhered to the decisions of the judicial body of the ECHR, the European Court of Human Rights, and the LGBT community still faces discrimination and legal persecution, presenting challenges to advocacy groups in Russia.

Russia does have prominent LGBT rights organizations, such as the Russian LGBT Network, which has been operating since before the promulgation of the gay propoganda Law. These organizations facilitated events which brought new visibility to the presence of LGBT people in Russia and their campaigns against discrimination and for equal rights, while also

developing the LGBT community as a significant social group. The level of activity and efficacy of these organizations were analyzed on a temporal basis through the use of interviews from the LGBT community of Russia, secondary literature on their activities, news stories, international court cases, as well as annual reports that the organizations have published. Short descriptions of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the Russian judicial system are provided here to demonstrate why they matter to activist groups and why some might pursue these legal avenues, and to provide context as to why they are important for consideration in the timeline of modern LGBT activism in Russia with regards to social, political, and legal backlash. I will start with the European Court of Human Rights, because *Zhdanov v Russia*, a case in which the court ruled that the “gay propaganda law” was discriminatory and violated the European Convention on Human Rights, was important in bringing domestic and international visibility to the situation of LGBT people in Russia, and an understanding of the ECtHR and how this case was decided helps to show how it allowed for such visibility.

The European Court of Human Rights

The ECtHR is an regional human rights judicial body that was founded in 1959 (IJR Center, 2018, n.p.). It is possible for individuals, rather than solely governments, to submit complaints to the ECtHR. The ECtHR has four requirements for an individual case to be admissible in court, which the International Justice Resource Center lists:

1. All domestic options must have been attempted (in this context, each case must have been heard on every level of the Russian judicial system)
2. There is a six-month application deadline
3. There must be a complaint against a state party to the ECtHR

4. The applicant must have suffered a significant disadvantage due to the subject of the case

If the ECtHR rules in favor of the applicant, it can award monetary compensation, which it calls “just satisfaction” (IJRC). Just satisfaction is not always awarded, though. On occasion, the court decides that the discovery of a violation is in itself sufficient.

If the court does not find any violation, the applicant is not responsible for any legal expenses incurred by the state. For this reason, it is a desirable option for parties that have already gone through every legal route within their own state. Signatory states are bound by the decisions of the ECtHR, and they must abide by the rulings accordingly (IJRC). The Court, however, does not hold the power to overturn or overrule the decisions or laws of a particular nation. Despite this, ECtHR decisions are significant to Russia, as they bring visibility to issues that the public may have previously been unaware of, with the first exposure to the issue being the outcome of each case. The cases that apply to LGBT people and their rights usually differ in outcomes from when they were heard in the Russian judicial system, which is outlined in the following section.

The Russian Judicial System

Before a case can be appealed to the European Court of Human rights, it must be heard at each judicial level of the applicants’ respective countries. This section outlines the judicial structure in Russia and aims to contextualize the process undergone by Zhdanov and others before they were heard by the ECtHR.

The 85 regions of Russia are divided into administrative districts with their own district courts. Each region has one higher court, which is called a supreme court in republics and oblast

or regional courts in other regions. Because the Russian judicial system follows the federal structure of the State (Equal Rights Trust, 2016), both district and higher courts are formally considered to be federal courts. The Russian judicial system (Figure 1) includes:

1. Courts of general jurisdiction (justices of the peace, district courts, courts of the constituent entities of the Federation). The highest court with general jurisdiction is the Supreme Court. These courts hear most civil and criminal cases. Thus, the overwhelming majority of cases referred to in this study are those decided by courts of general jurisdiction, in particular by district courts. They can hear cases where it is possible that regional legislatures have contradicted federal law. However, if this situation arises, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation has exclusive jurisdiction.
2. State arbitration courts. These include appeals courts and circuit courts. The highest court of this kind is the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation. Commercial courts deal with disputes between commercial entities, including private entrepreneurs, as well as with cases involving administrative sanctions that are being imposed on commercial legal entities.
3. The Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation
4. Constitutional courts of each region, sometimes referred to as statutory courts. The cases heard by these courts are cases where regional law and a regional constitution might contradict each other.

In Russia's judicial system, decisions are not binding precedents, at least in the general jurisdiction. However, decisions of the Russian Supreme Court are generally considered by

lower courts to provide guidance for interpreting case matters (Musin and Kropachev, 2014, p.18). This means that despite not being required, Russian Supreme Court decisions do set precedents for the regional courts, so the anti-LGBT decisions of the Supreme Court are usually not challenged in the lower courts. For LGBT people, the non-binding nature of Supreme Court decisions might encourage going through the system anyway to ultimately reach a point where they can apply their case in the ECtHR.

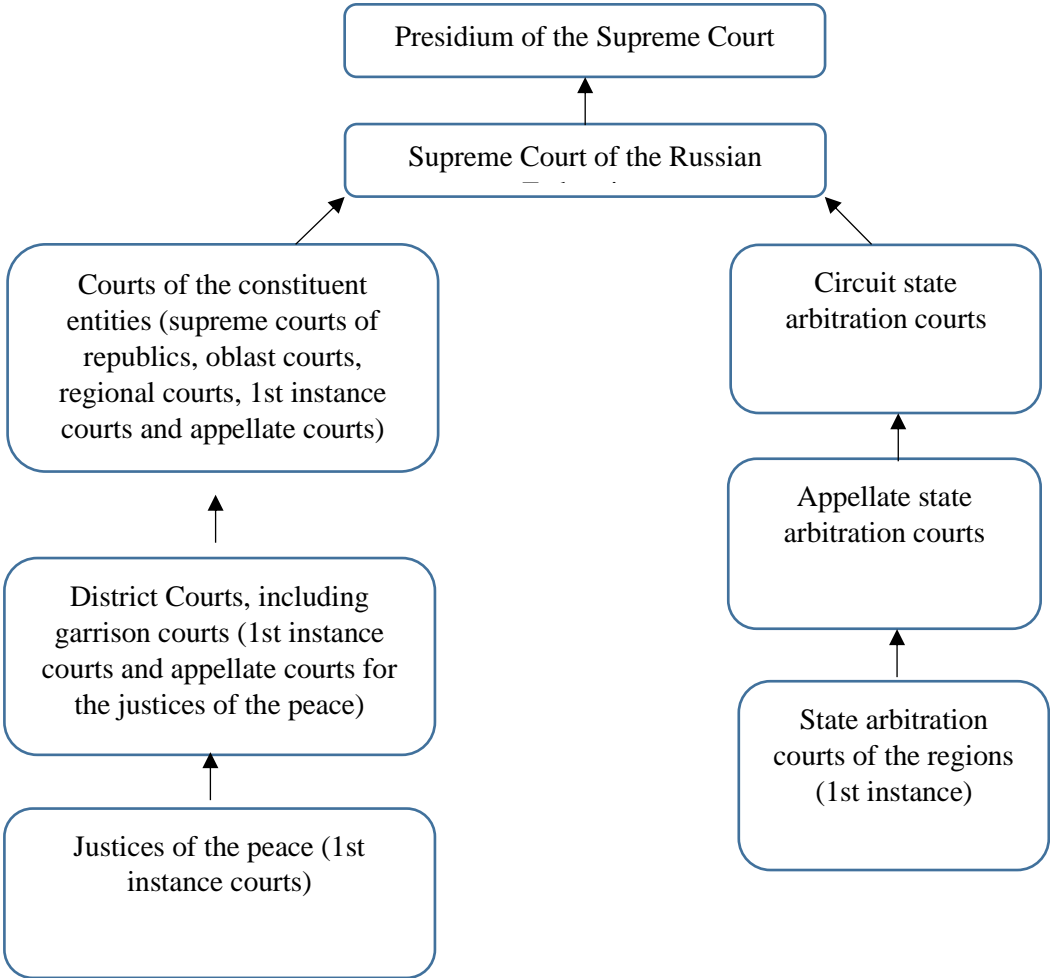


Figure 1 The Russian Judicial System

Since 2000, decisions of the Constitutional Court have frequently perpetuated a slow transition of Russia into a more right-wing, authoritarian state. Each case in the following sections of this paper went through this judicial system, and were decided against the applicants, before being heard by the ECtHR.

FINDINGS

The Russian LGBT Network

The Russian LGBT Network, which hereinafter will be referred to as “the Network,” is the largest LGBT activist organization in Russia founded in April of 2006 (“Annual Report 2018,” 2018, n.p.). The mission of the organization is to build a society without discrimination based on sexuality, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual variations. It is an interregional, non-governmental organization that develops regional initiatives, supports advocacy groups at the national and international level, and provides social and legal services to both LGBT groups and individuals (“WHO ARE WE,” 2018, n.p). The network regularly holds discussions with the Human Rights commissioner of Russia, members of the Presidential Council for Human Rights, and other authorities of Russia (“WHO ARE WE,” 2018, n.p.). It has garnered support from various prominent international organizations such as the UN and the Council of Europe. The Network has successfully advocated for the measures against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to be included in the UN Human Rights Committee recommendations for the Russian Federation (UN Human Rights Committee, 2009; CEDAW, 2010, etc). The Network consists of:

- individual participants - individuals who share the values of the movement and contribute to its success;
- collective participants - organizations and initiative groups that became a part of The Network;
- regional branches - individual participants that established a branch in a city or region.

Since its establishment, the Network has expanded to 14 regional branches. In October of 2008, the Network became an international movement, and governing bodies for the Network were elected (“WHO ARE WE,” 2018, n.p.). As a result of the Network’s training of lawyers and psychologists, along with the dissemination of LGBT inclusive materials, national networks have been created that help to provide LGBT people with support services, including free in person and long distance consultations (“WHO ARE WE,” 2018, n.p.). Some important services that the Network provides include:

- Legal and psychological services at no cost
- Emergency help for people in for those in critical situations
- A collection of information regarding violence, discrimination, violations of human rights
- Reports on LGBT status in Russia
- Support for the LGBT movements in Russian regions
- An annual forum for LGBT activists and advocacy groups

The following sections describe the services provided by the Network based on the 2018 Annual Report (2018, n.p.):

Psychological Assistance. According to the 2018 annual report, the Network provided direct psychological assistance to LGBT people and their loved ones, such as face-to-face consultations in 14 regions of Russia. “In 2018, the number of requests for psychological assistance doubled compared with 2017,” the report indicates. The Network assisted 629 people from 73 regions, including 103 transgender individuals and 113 adolescents. The most common reported issues included coming out to family and at work, relationships with partners, issues related to having and raising children, self-identification and self-acceptance, as well as fear,

depression, and traumatic episodes. Aside from the direct work with the individuals, the Network also organized LGBT-inclusive training for psychologists and built alliances with professional associations of psychologists and psychiatrists.

Hotline and Chat Services. The Network offers free hotline services that include psychological and legal counseling. Since its start in 2010, the hotline service has received over 23,000 calls. The online chat with a psychologist has been operating for four years, during which over 6,000 requests have been placed.

Legal Assistance. The Network has a legal assistance program that offers free legal counseling to members of LGBT community, their relatives, and loved ones. The legal team that works for the program consists of 21 members. The Annual Report indicated receiving 245 requests from 45 regions. The most common issues and individuals seeking legal help are shown in figures 2 and 3.

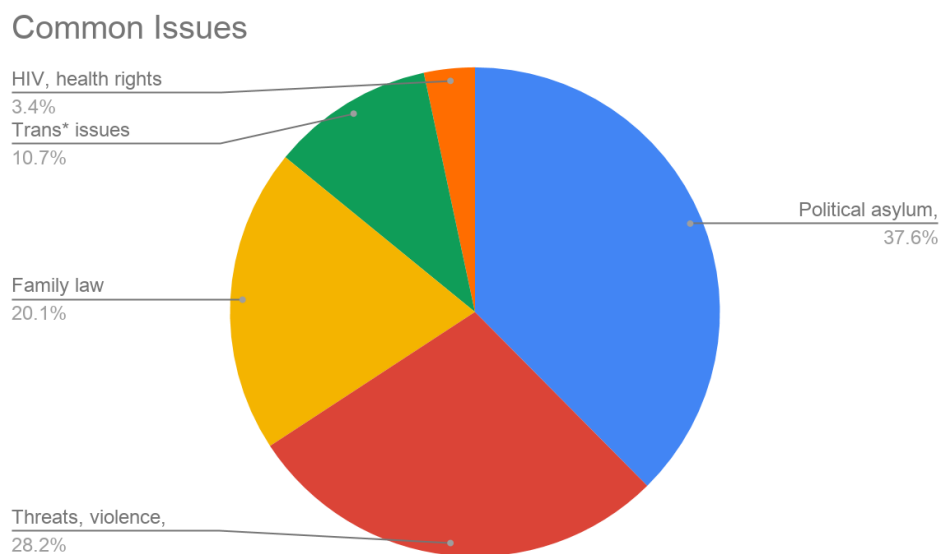


Figure 2. Common Issues

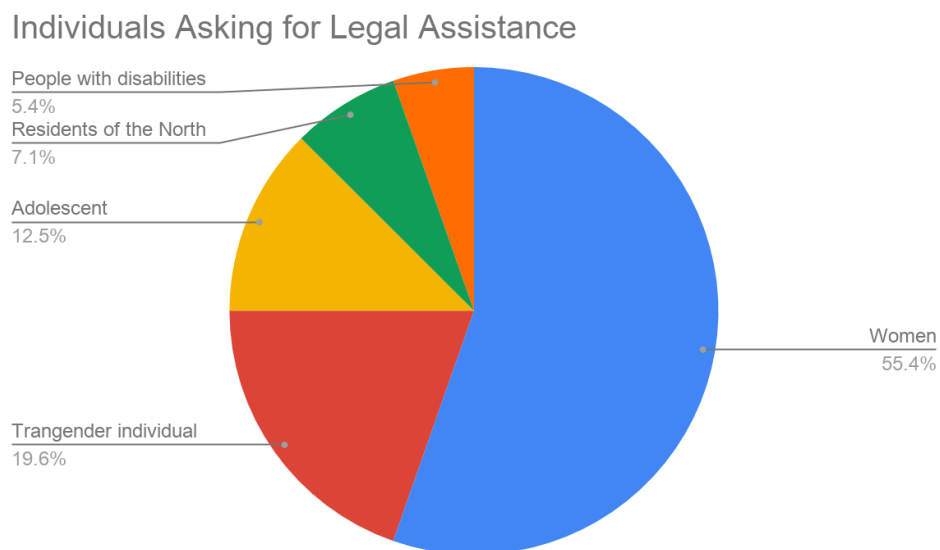


Figure 3. Individuals Asking for Legal Assistance

Emergency Assistance. The Network has had an Emergency Assistance program since 2014, working to support victims of hate crimes and LGBT activists who suffer from discrimination and violence as a result of their political activism and demonstrations. In 2018, the program received 22 emergency calls from 8 regions of Russia.

Support for LGBT+ Movement. The Russian LGBT Network provides financial and other resources for the purpose of holding events of various kinds. Any group that contains at least one individual participant or the Russian LGBT Network can apply for support. In 2018, the Network received 42 applications to support events from 11 groups and one individual participant. The Network supported 28 applications to the total value of 1,453,566 rubles (approx. \$24,200). In 2018, the majority of supported projects were aimed at increasing the visibility of the LGBT community in Russia. More than 800 people took part in these events. Amongst the supported projects were the temporary rent of community centers, a rainbow bike

ride, a rainbow flash mob, training for activists and supporting specialists, a film festival, and a conference.

Monitoring Discrimination. The Network constantly gathers information on discrimination, human rights violations, and violence against LGBT+ people. The Network analyzes the information and prepares reports, papers, analytical notes, and other materials. As a result, anyone can monitor conditions for LGBT people changing over time. The monitoring team of the Network in 2018 consisted of 20 people in 10 regions of Russia. The 2018 annual report indicates 390 documented human rights violations and 66 cases of people being insulted because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Figure 4 provides information on the percentages of types of violations reviewed by the network.



Figure 4. *Individuals Asking for Legal Assistance: Types of Violations*

Advocacy. The Network's advocacy involves various events aimed at changing the status of LGBT community in Russia for the better. The Network gathers information about the issues faced by the LGBT community in Russia and informs regional authorities, the public, as well as international organizations. In 2018, the organization worked with various UN committees including the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Committee Against Torture. Additionally, the Russian LGBT Network prepares and submits a report to International and National institutions and organizations such as OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), UN Human Rights Council, and the UN Committee Against Torture.

Participation in events organized by the European Council and Universal periodical review meetings are also a part of the Network's advocacy.

Annual Forum. The annual forum for LGBT activists and the largest platform in Russia for different organizations, initiatives, and activists to share their experiences. The first forum took place in 2015 and has since been held at the beginning of November every year. In 2018, The Forum brought together around 250 people from all over Russia. The theme of the forum in 2018 was "Gender Bender: Activism that Pushes the Boundaries."

This list of services and activities, from hotlines to therapy, highlights what is important to major LGBT organizations in Russia: support for the safety and well-being of the community. Protests do not seem to be a point of emphasis for these groups anymore like they were prior to 2013.

Russian LGBT Situation and Activism Pre-2013

The first formal LGBT advocacy groups in, such as the Moscow Gay and Lesbian Alliance, were founded in the 1990s (Buyantueva, 2018, p. 461), and the extent of their activities consisted of organizing cultural events and providing some psychological assistance to members of the community. These organizations fizzled out by the early 2000s, and there remained no significant advocacy groups. Essig (1999) and Nemstev (2008) claimed that this was due to LGBT people at the time being unable to unite for a common goal due to financial and social cost.

A gradual development of new LGBT advocacy organizations began to develop in the 2000s. These new organizations, such as GayRussia, founded in 2005, made protests a new point of emphasis for the push for LGBT rights progress (GayRussia, 2011). In 2008, the LGBT

Network was founded and remains Russia's largest network of advocacy groups. LGBT advocacy groups have seen a marked increase since 2010. Groups such as Alliance of Straights and LGBT for Equality, Avers, Equality, Rainbow Association, and StopHate began organizing protests in central areas of major cities such as Moscow and St. Petersburg (Buyantueva, 2018, p. 464).

Public Opinion and Policy. Survey data (Levada Center, 2010) shows that public opinion on the LGBT community shifted for the better after the introduction of Glasnost and Perestroika in the 1980s. Survey data on the question "What should be done with homosexuals?" showed 35% of respondents in 1989 saying they should be eliminated from Russian society, compared to 22% in 1994, along with 9% in 1989 saying they should be left alone, compared to 29% in 1994. However, since 1994, responses have remained relatively the same; with 21%, 23%, and 21% saying "homosexuals should be eliminated" in 2003, 2012, and 2015 respectively. It is worth noting that an outlier exists in 2010, where the percentage of respondents giving this answer dropped to just 4%, a substantial decrease that rose back to 23% just two years later. The subsequent increase from 2010 to 2012 may stem from backlash to the growing number of LGBT advocacy groups and demonstrations that were perceived by right-wing nationalist groups as a representation of Western society's encroachment upon traditional Russian values (Gevisser, 2013, n.p), giving rise to right-wing nationalism.

In 2009, the Russian LGBT Network, along with help from the Moscow Helsinki Group, released a report titled "The Situation of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgender People In the Russian Federation – 2008." According to the ILGA, this report was the first study tailored specifically to the legal situation of the LGBT community. According to the ILGA, this report was

the first study tailored specifically to the legal situation of the LGBT community in Russia. At the time, there was no law in the Russian Criminal Code that specifically prohibited the promotion of homosexual relations. However, according to the report, “a number of political figures” repeatedly made attempts to reform the Criminal Code to criminalize “propaganda of homosexuality. (p. 10).” For example, the Russian Duma representative Aleksander Chuev introduced several drafts of legislation between 2003 and 2006, attempting to establish criminality for demonstrating the “homosexual way of life” in media and in public life (p.10). The Russian government struck down these proposed legislations repeatedly, stating that because homosexuality in itself was not a crime, that promotion of homosexuality cannot be “socially dangerous,” and that the proposed anti-demonstration laws violate the Russian constitution.

The Russian constitution also outlines a list of circumstances that could lead to a criminal offense being classified as a hate crime, stipulating punishment for “the commission of crimes against a person or a group of persons on the basis of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude to religion, as well as affiliation to any social group (art.282).” The wording here is problematic, because what constitutes a social group is not especially clear. LGBT peoples are often not considered a social group in Russian legal cases, which can be seen from an example in 2007 where the Tverskaya inter-district prosecutor’s office of Moscow decided not to undergo a criminal case against Talgat Tadjuddin despite repeated requests from gay rights activists. The prosecutor’s office referred to expert opinion from the head of the Family Sociology and Demography Department of Moscow State, A.I. Antonova, who said “sexual minorities are not a social group, much less a gender-defined social group, they are part of the deviant social group together with criminals, drug addicts, and other individuals with deviant behaviour (The

Situation of LGBT People in the Russian Federation, 2009, p. 35).” With expert opinions such as these, one can easily come to the conclusion that, in Russia, homophobic crimes are not to be considered hate crimes. However, the notion of a social group, according to Igor Kon, is very broad, and can mean many things. He says that a social group usually contains three qualities (p.37):

1. Interaction between “members”
2. Name or label that indicates group membership
3. Self-identification within the group

Kon continues by saying that the use of the term “social group” is used differently in specific contexts, such as in Tadjuddin’s case, to achieve different goals or support different arguments, and that one true definition of a social group does not exist (p.37). As it stands, Russia does not have laws that explicitly protect LGBT peoples from hate-motivated violence and discrimination.

At the time when this report on the LGBT situation in Russia was published in 2008, no federal “gay propaganda laws” were in place. Despite this, the idea that some were promoting homosexual behavior through propaganda was common in political, as well as every day language, and the prohibition of “propoganda” was practiced. Since 2006, the prohibition of distributing materials containing information about homosexuality was already part of the law in the Ryazan Oblast (Article 3.13), and the city of Tyumen refused multiple times to register the advocacy group “Rainbow House Tyumen” in 2006 and 2007 (Zhdanov and Rainbow House v Russia, 2008, p. 4-5; Situation of LGBT People, 2009, p. 43). The city’s reasoning was that “the promotion of non-traditional sexual orientations undermines the security and territorial integrity” of Russia (Zhdanov and Rainow House v Russia, 2008, p. 2). In 2008, Tyumen city

police searched the home of a member of Rainbow House, and said that they did so as part of an inquiry into the “possible extremist activity” of the organizations members (p. 5). Aleksandr Zhdanov, then requested to be told the outcome of the inquiry, but never received a response. Two other LGBT organizations, Movement for Marriage Equality in Moscow and Sochi Pride House, were also denied formal registration between 2006-2011 (Zhdanov and Others v. Russia, 2019, p. 1).

When the report on the situation of LGBT people was published, LGBT issues were rarely discussed, but when they were stigmatization and defamation of the LGBT community in the media was commonplace. News reports on television and in writing, when talking about the LGBT community, mostly framed being a part of it in terms of its perceived danger. The media would mostly lump LGBT issues in with mental disorders and HIV, while mostly ignoring the discrimination and violence that the community faced (Situation of LGBT people, 2009, p. 54). According to the report, much of the popular journalism at the time actively perpetuated unhealthy attitudes on LGBT people by linking the community to pedophilia (p. 55).

Much of the public’s anti-LGBT sentiment at the time seemed to stem from political rhetoric and statements made by faith leaders. The mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, used language containing descriptors such as “satanic” and “contamination” when describing the presence of the LGBT community in Russia (ILGA Europe, 2009, n.p.). When asked about these statements in 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that he respects the freedom of all people, while also stating that one of Russia’s main problems is “demographics (Gay Russian.ru, 2007, n.p),” seemingly suggesting that LGBT people are the reason for the declining population in Russia. In March of the same year, the Duma of another Russian oblast, Saratov, introduced an

amendment to require party candidates to publicly reveal their sexual orientation and if they are transgender (Human Rights Watch and ILGA-Europe, 2007, p. 14), although this amendment did not pass. It was also prevalent for various police authorities to echo these sentiments, heavily objecting to gay pride marches and refusing to allow them (Lgbtrights.ru, 2008, n.p). Examples of these acts of hate, suppression, and violence are often exemplified during planned pride marches and demonstrations.

On 26 May 2007, a demonstration was held by members of the Russian LGBT Network to protest homophobia in Moscow. Quickly, the demonstration was surrounded by neo-Nazi groups and protestors had to be protected by the police (Pravda, 2007, n.p). These groups of counter-protesters hurled slurs at the demonstrators, and threatened to return to future demonstrations with violence.

A pride march, which was previously denied permission to take place by the mayor, Luzhkov, was to take place on the 27th. Nikolay Alexeyev, among other activists, planned to march to the city hall to persuade Luzhkov to allow the demonstrations to take place (Novaya Gazeta, 2007, n.p). When Alexeyev and the other Pride leaders reached the city hall, they were once again surrounded by nationalists, and Alexeyev was promptly arrested (gayrussia.ru, 2007, n.p). Two transgender activists were also arrested, with witnesses saying they saw excessive force from police officers, including forceful pulling of the head. One activist, Peter Tatchell, was detained by police for “safety reasons,” but was placed in detention with violent extremists (ILGA). Increased visibility of negative attitudes and backlash from the Russian public towards pride parades and other pro-LGBT demonstrations and protests such as this culminated in the promulgation of the Gay Propaganda law in 2013.

Russian LGBT Situation and Activism Post-2013

“Gay Propaganda Law.” The promulgation of the Gay Propaganda Law in 2013 placed the Russian government on common ground with far-right wing groups with regards to homophobia and oppression of the LGBT community. In fact, President Putin’s approval rating jumped significantly after the implementation of the law, from 63% in the beginning of 2013 to 80% in the beginning of 2014 (Levada, 2019, n.p.). The law is actually a bill that amended an already existing law called “the law on protecting children from information harmful to their health and development,” which prohibited the distribution of materials such as pornography, depictions of illegal activities, drug abuse, and suicide (Amendments to the law on protecting children from information harmful to their health and development, 2012). The bill is composed of three articles (Russia: Federal laws introducing ban of propaganda of non-traditional sexual relationships, 2013, p. 11)

1. Adds distribution of propaganda that promotes “non-traditional” sexual relationships to children. It defines children as any person under the age of eighteen.
2. Allows authorities to “protect” children from certain types of propaganda
3. Establishes penalties for the distribution of propaganda promoting “non-traditional” sexual relationships by way of fines, or even deportations for foreign nationals

The law’s language is quite problematic, as what constitutes promotion is not clearly defined. The law’s effective purpose is to prevent LGBT rights demonstration in any area where

they may encounter minors (Polsdofer, 2014, p. 1070). However, as Polsdofer again points out, it is possible for demonstrations to be visible almost anywhere, and demonstrations have often been disrupted despite the lack of any presence of minors (p. 1075). The vagueness of the law's language has made it considerably easier for Russian courts to justify discriminatory actions toward LGBT, and to allow such discrimination to go unpunished. The law has since been challenged judicially in the ECtHR in the case *Bayev and Others v. Russia*.

Bayev and Others v. Russia. Three LGBT activists, Nikolay Bayev, Aleksey Kiselev and Nikolay Alekseyev, brought their complaint over this law to the ECtHR in 2017. The court decided that Russia was in violation of articles ten and fourteen of the ECHR, which outlines freedom of expression and prohibition of discrimination, respectively (ECtHR, 2017). In regards to article ten, the court took issue with the vagueness of the law and its potentially "unlimited scope" of application (ECtHR). In article fourteen, it states that discrimination based on sexuality is unacceptable under the ECHR. The court specified that the language of the "gay propaganda law" was not in accordance with article fourteen, which prohibits discrimination, because the law implies that homosexual relationships are inherently inferior to heterosexual ones (ECtHR, 2017).

The Law and Public Opinion. In 2013, WCIOM, a Russian organization that surveys public opinions, surveyed over 1600 people in 134 cities across Russia on their opinions of the propaganda law, and their opinions on homosexuality in general. First, they found that the vast majority of Russian people supported the law as it was being discussed in the Duma; 86% of those surveyed said they support the law directly before it was passed, and 88% directly after (WCIOM, 2013, n.p.). According to the survey, opponents of the law only tallied to around 7%

in this time frame. The poll also showed that a considerable amount of Russian people believed that non-traditional sexual relations should be considered a criminal offense (42%), whereas in 2007 only 19% of people had this response. Further supporting the idea that the law coincided with the tendency for the general Russian population to view homosexuality as something negative, the survey found a significant increase in the number of opponents to SSM from 59% in 2005 to 86% in 2013 (WCIOM, 2013, n.p.). There was also a considerable decrease in respondents saying that same-sex couples have a right to marry, from 14% in 2005 to just 4% in 2013. A Levada poll published in 2015 reported a 6% increase in respondents answering “isolate from society” from 2012 when asked “What should be done to homosexuals?” (Levada Center). However, there was a 2% decrease in those answering “eliminate” in the same time span. The following table, obtained from the Levada Center, shows the percentages of the possible answers of “eliminate,” “isolate,” “offer help,” “leave alone,” and “no opinion” in response to this question, from the time period of 2008-2015 (Levada Center).

	2008	2012	2015
Eliminate	19	23	21
Isolate from the Society	30	31	37
Offer help	9	6	
Leave alone	28	29	24
No opinion	15	12	12

Table 1. What Should be Done to Homosexuals? Public Opinion in Percentages.

A poll published in May of 2019 showed 47% of respondents agreeing that “gays and lesbians should enjoy the same rights as other citizens (Levada, 2019, n.p.)” This represents an 8 percent change from when the poll was last conducted in 2013, where only 39% of respondents agreed (Levada, 2013, n.p.). It is also the highest result in over 14 years, the last time being 51% saying gays and lesbians should have equal rights in 2005 (Levada, 2019, n.p.). However, the poll does suggest then that the majority of Russians are still negatively predisposed to the LGBT community.

2013 represented a peak in negative attitudes toward LGBT people, which Dmitriy Volkov, the vice president of Levada Center, claims was a result of the enactment of the propaganda law (Levada, 2019, n.p.). These 2019 responses suggests that the negative effects brought about by the campaign for the law are wearing out. Volkov also states that the ECtHR declaring that the propaganda law is unconstitutional in the case *Bayev and Others v. Russia* has played a contributing role in the changing of attitudes in Russia. In 2019, 60% of younger individuals, especially those younger than 25 years old, have neutral or positive opinions about LGBT. The trend continues among urban residents, those with post-secondary education, and wealthy individuals (Levada, 2019, n.p.).

Alexei Makarkin claims that the improvement in opinions has also been caused by the governments’ stop in appeal for homophobic attitudes of the citizens as a part of the “conservative wave. (Levada, 2019, n.p.)” Makarkin points out that news sources and television have stopoed, or scaled back, the use of rhetoric that fuels homophobia. Instead, they have returned to more traditional conservative topics. Though, if anti-LGBT rhetoric returns with its

arguments for sexual and gender minorities perverting Russian morality, the level of intolerance is likely to go up again.

According to the Levada survey, the most positively-predisposed Russians are those who are friends or acquaintances with one or more LGBT members (Levada, 2019, n.p.). Among this group of respondents, 80% have a neutral or positive attitudes towards LGBT - a significantly higher number than within any other group. The number of people who are friends with at least one open LGBT individual has increased and now constitutes 8% (Levada, 2019, n.p.). It is worth noting that Russians could have possibly just become more comfortable sharing this information, and no change in the number of people with LGBT friends has actually occurred. Either way, it is an indication of a trend for normalization of LGBT. This trend in normalization of the LGBT community seems to support the hypotheses of Rosenberg et al., as the Sova Center points to an overall decrease in advocacy group activity since the enactment of the propaganda law in 2013 (Yudina and Alperovich, 2015, n.p.).

Sova Center is an informational analytical non-profit organization that studies nationalism and xenophobia, religion and government, lack and presence of liberal values, as well as the compliance and violations of human rights in Russia. The center was created in 2002 as a collaboration between Moscow Helsinki Group and the Informational Research Center “Panorama.”

Yudina and Alperovich (2015) from Sova Center reported a decrease in attacks on LGBT members in 2014. Compared to 2013, where 27 were wounded, only 8 LGBT individuals were wounded the year after. This decrease of homophobic violence is purported to be related to a decrease of LGBT activism (Yudina and Alperovich, 2015, n.p). As a response to the

development of the “propaganda” law, activists were constantly present and visible through their protests and rallies, leading to increased visibility of activist activities that resulted in violence towards the activists coming from far right-wing groups. Acts of aggression were witnessed by law enforcement in the majority of instances, and only rarely were there any attempts to protect the protestors. The following figure shows a timeline of the number of assaults on LGBT individuals reported each year since 2013, obtained from Sova Center.

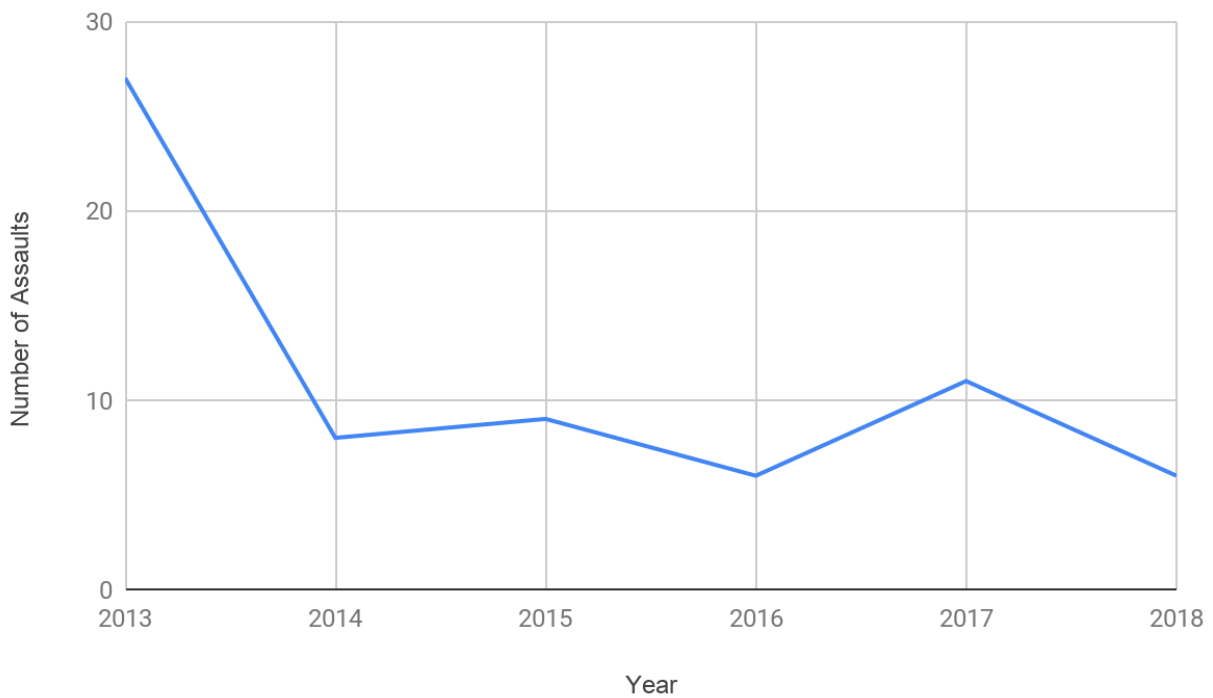


Figure 5. Number of Assaults per Year

Although the number of protests decreased in 2014, events related to the LGBT community did not become more peaceful. Participants of events organized by LGBT organizations as well as individuals wearing LGBT-related symbols during non-related events were repeatedly attacked. For instance, a Moscow group of “orthodox activists” headed by

Dmitriy Cirionov, the leader of the Decommunization movement, threw eggs at the Sakharovskiy Center, a museum and cultural center in Moscow devoted to the protection of human rights, while chanting “Moscow is not Sodom! (Yudina and Alperovich, 2015, n.p)” A month later, supporters of Vitaliy Milonov, a Russian politician of the United Russia party, attempted to impede the annual Queerfest twice. LGBT members have also been victims of an international right-wing extremist movement called “Occupy Pedophilia. ” This group has also attacked non-LGBT individuals, who were assumed to have a non-heterosexual orientation (Yudina and Alperovich, 2015, n.p.). Examples include two young women from St. Petersburg, who were thought to be lesbians, and students and teachers of an English language school in Irkutsk who were dressed up in kilts as part of St. Patrick’s celebration - an attire that was considered to be representative of “non-traditional” sexuality. Sova Center notes that it is likely that significantly more attacks happened, yet they were never reported. In 2015, the number of victims stayed relatively the same as in 2014. Nine were wounded (Yudina and Alperovich, 2016, n.p.).

In 2016, the number of reported attacks on LGBT people slightly lowered: from nine wounded in 2015 to one killed and five wounded. However, the degree of violence significantly intensified. In March, Dmitriy Cilikin was violently murdered by Sergey Kosyrev, who called himself a “cleanser” and stated that he was motivated by LGBT-hatred. Law enforcement did not classify the murder as hate crime (Yudina and Alperovich, 2017, n.p.).

In 2017, the number of reported attacks on LGBT people increased from one killed and four wounded in 2016 to 11 wounded. The majority of victims were people taking part in LGBT events (Yudina, 2018, n.p.).

In 2018, the number of reported attacks on LGBT people decreased from one killed and five wounded to 11 wounded (Yudina, 2019, n.p.). Yudina mentions that the report relies on minimal data and that the actual extent of homophobic violence is impossible to measure and it is presumed to be much higher than the reported numbers.

Many interviews and with LGBT people and activists, and media stories, also indicate that a shift in public opinion for the better is coming from not necessarily activism, but a slow, natural normalization as well. On 25 January 2013, a prominent news anchor working at a station called Kontr TV came out as gay in an apparent response to the first official discussion of the possible gay propaganda law (Surganova, 2013, n.p.), and was then fired on the same day. Soon after, three publications: “Big City,” “the New Times,” and “Slon” began their own special projects on LGBT rights and LGBT issues. These special projects ended in the second week after they began, as the owners of each publication could not find enough people who were willing to participate in the project (Surganova, 2013, n.p.).

In a series of articles in the New Times, the publication conducted interviews with famous Russians (writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya, producer Vladimir Mirzoyev, producer Kiril Serebrennikov, actress Elena Koreneva, and musician Sergei Shnurov) on the topic of homosexuality in teens. Serebrennikov had the most blunt and most pessimistic advice: “Leave Russia as soon as you can, you will not be happy here (Surganova, 2013, n.p.)” Koreneva offers a more optimistic approach saying “People who resist and fight for themselves grow up to be leaders, artists, and geniuses. The path of many great individuals was marked by the social forces trying to change them. (Koreneva, 2013, n.p.). She says that nobody has a right to choose who someone is allowed to love, hate, pity, or dream about. She claimed that many of her close

friends are homosexual. Combined with the fact that she seemed to have a very positive outlook, this supports the earlier statistics that show a correlation between number of LGBT friends and a more positive opinion on LGBT rights and people. She concludes the interview by saying: “To the teens who understand that they are not the same as others, I wish to stay strong and remember that this is only the beginning: your entire life is a resistance to “sameness” and a search for yourself (Koreneva, 2013, n.p.).” Shnurov put it more simply by saying “They are people. The rest does not matter (Shnurov, 2013, n.p.).”

Mirzoyev opens his statement by saying “the first thought that comes to my mind is a kind advice to those who are targeted by the law: guys, leave this crazy country that firmly decided to return to the archaic times, medieval Iranian theocracy (Mirzoyev, 2013, n.p.).” He then explains, however, that this is not actually the best solution, and concludes his statement with “Don’t rush to leave, guys. We rely on you, the first free generation grown in a semi-free government. You will have to build a new government, which does not exist yet, that was plundered by checkists and communists.” With exception to Serebrennikov, the majority of these interviews seem to have a positive outlook on the topic of homosexuality in teens.

Another round of interviews of famous Russian people addressing LGBT teens was conducted by Big City in a project titled “Be Stronger” in 2013. Those interviewed were TV hosts Vladimir Pozner, Olga Shelest, Pavel Lobkov, actress Renata Litvinova, and musician Aleksei Kortnev. It must be noted that these interviews were likely selected for publication because they were overwhelmingly positive.

In his interview, Kortnev pleads with LGBT teens not to commit suicide by saying “ I am certain that you will find bravery and, in no way, consider ending your life, regardless of how

tough it is, which I understand completely (Sarkisyan, 2013, n.p.).” Litvinova encourages teens to defend themselves and their sexuality, and says that she will always support those who “do not have the energy to resist (Rogacheva, 2013, n.p.).” Shelest encourages teens to take routes to seek out help. She tells teens “Don’t be afraid of calling hotlines. If you are experiencing a problem and don’t know who you can share it with, search for help online, in newspapers, find hotlines and speak with those who will help you resolve your issues (Rogacheva, 2013, n.p.).” These services are mostly provided by advocacy groups like the Network, which I described earlier. Lobkov tells teens that they must be afraid to fight in Russia if they plan to come out (Sarkisyan, 2013, n.p.). Lastly, in Pozner’s interview, he mentions that when he was growing up in New York, in the 1940s-1950s, adults, not just teens, were always afraid to speak about their sexualities. He says “it took a long time for part of American society, as democratic as it appears, to become accepting of the fact that homosexuality is natural (Sarkisyan, 2013, n.p.).” This further supports the idea that positive changes in the public’s opinion of LGBT people and LGBT rights comes from slow, natural change over an extended period of time. In a series of interviews conducted by Radzhana Buyantueva from 2015-2016, an anonymous respondent from Siberia claimed that since the implementation of the propaganda law, it has been more beneficial to conduct LGBT related activities on the internet, rather than risk one’s safety in public, because it has a wider reach and a factor of anonymity (Buyantueva, 2018, p. 463).

Despite a downturn in recent years, killings and beatings of LGBT people in Russia still pose a threat to activists. One anonymous interviewee stated that it is often too dangerous to meet anyone [who is presumed to be gay] online, and that the tactics used by groups such as Occupy Pedophilia have pushed him and others to “go back in the closet (Khazov-Kassia, 2016,

n.p).” Events and offices of LGBT networks have been attacked on a number of occasions, including an instance where the group called “Maximum’s” office was attacked with gas in 2015 (Lenta, 2015, n.p.; Buyantueva, 2018, p. 475). Those interviewed by Buyantueva (p. 475-476) described new tactics that have been deployed by advocacy groups since 2013, including keeping events secret and hiring private security.

Activism most often involves increased visibility in the public. Buyantueva, as well as those interviewed, states that because of the backlash and violence directed towards the LGBT community in recent years, many in the LGBT community are afraid of joining, and organizations have experienced a decrease in the amount of new members (Buyantueva, 2018, p. 476). Scholars have pointed out that it is also somewhat common for LGBT people in Russia to not support advocacy groups at all (Kondakov, 2014, p. 168; Soboleva & Bakhtemjev, 2015; Buyantueva, 2018, p. 476).

The interviews conducted by Buyantueva show that among some activists, despite the decreasing number of attacks year by year, the situation and outlook for the LGBT community is not viewed in a positive light. Many are leaving Russia rather than joining advocacy networks, because they are witnessing friends and family be fired, attacked, and killed over their involvement with LGBT organizations (Buyantueva, 2018). A decrease in activist activity is also evidenced in the fact that the number of reports that are consistently put out by the Network has declined. In 2013, four reports were published by the organization detailing dealings within the UN and other aspects of the situation of LGBT people. In the past six years combined, the Network has only published seven reports of this kind (lgbt.net, 2019). It appears that, since the years of backlash to increasing LGBT activist activity that culminated in the promulgation of the

gay propaganda law, opinion among the community is divided. Some seem to be quite optimistic about the future of society's views on LGBT rights, while others are extremely reluctant to participated in any kind of LGBT events or movements. The general trend does seem to be a slow normalization of LGBT rights due to more neutral, or even positive, media coverage, and violence and backlash are trending downwards coinciding with a decline in activist activity since 2013. Regardless of the existence of a positive trend in opinions, the danger associated with being open regarding one's association with the LGBT community impedes individuals participation in activist activity and general support of activist organizations. Among the LGBT community, the widespread perception that association with LGBT groups will be met with violence seem to outweigh the possible contributions to social change that these groups might provide.

CONCLUSION

I aimed to analyze the extent to which anti-LGBT backlash affected the prominence, effectiveness, and outlook of LGBT activism and public opinion in Russia, testing the theories of O'Dwyer, Rosenberg, and others, in order to determine the outlook of the LGBT community and how it is related to these factors. Through analyzing interviews, publications, public opinion polls, and timelines of events, I found that the trend in public opinion tends to be a positive one in recent years, especially among the younger generation, but members of the LGBT community are still reluctant to join advocacy groups for fear of violence, despite the trend in violence against LGBT people also pointing downward. This suggests that Conor O'Dwyer's (2018) hypothesis of a benefit to backlash does not hold true in the Russian case. However, this trend only involves cases of violence categorized as LGBT related, which is likely to exclude cases where negligence and homophobic biases of law enforcement officials results in cases not being properly categorized. The severity of the cases that do occur can instill significant fears that prevent LGBT members from joining, and at times even considering to join, activist organizations.

Despite Russia experiencing intense anti-LGBT backlash in the years leading up to 2013 and the gay propaganda law, the majority of LGBT people are unwilling to join activist demonstrations or other activities since. Russia does have strong advocacy groups, such as the Russian LGBT Network, that offer services beneficial to LGBT people and fight for LGBT rights, but these networks have shown a decrease in new members and activity since 2013 according to the interviews conducted by Razhdana Buyantueva (2018). These key pieces of information strongly support the second hypothesis, in which Gerald Rosenberg (2008) and

others say that backlash is detrimental to activism and the LGBT community, and seem to show that slow cultural change is the main factor driving progress in public opinion of the LGBT community, not anti-LGBT backlash.

A suggestion for future research is to conduct a metanalysis of other factors that contribute to public opinion, backlash, and activist activity, such as religiosity and economic factors. Data in the form of hate crime statistics should continue to be tracked, and interviews should be conducted on a larger scale with high level members of groups such as the Network.

Limitations

While it is clear from interviews what the opinion of most LGBT community members are on the state of LGBT in activism in Russia, the small sample size in the paper is not nearly enough to gauge the true extent of Russian viewpoints on, and participation in, various advocacy groups and their activities. People may still be reluctant to share their true opinions, even if the surveys are anonymous.

The second limitation comes with the documentation of violent acts and other examples of anti-LGBT backlash, because although documented trends are pointing down, many factors might go into why a case of violence might go unreported. These factors may include police negligence, refusal to view the LGBT community as a social group which results in a misclassification of crimes, and fear on the part of the victim to report a hate crime.

Many reports rely on scarce data and finding numbers that accurately represent the truth can be difficult, which is reflected in the fact that the number of cases of reported violence against LGBT people does not even reach the hundreds in any year, despite Russia being a very large country with over 100 million people. It also must be noted that literature on the topic of

activism in Russia is in and of itself relatively wanting, and thus many more studies, interviews, and case reports must be done to thoroughly provide accurate information and conclusions.

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