

CHURCH AND STATE COLLABORATION TO POLITICIZE HOMOPHOBIA
A CASE OF POLAND AND RUSSIA

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ABSTRACT

Grace Weidemann: Nationalism and Homophobia in Church and in State
A Case of Poland and Russia
(Under the direction of Milada Vachudova)

This thesis explores how homosexuality has been reframed as a political and moral “other” by far-right movements and religious institutions in Poland and Russia. I leverage theories about democratic backsliding, otherization, and religious nationalism to argue that the purpose of this alliance is to gain or keep political power. I untangle how nationalist groups, political parties, and religious institutions in Poland and Russia became aligned in this campaign of politicized homophobia. In Poland, the Catholic hierarchy’s colluded with newly formed nationalist parties to demonize the growing LGBTQ community and gain political influence through appealing to nationalist and religious feelings. In Russia, the Putin regime feared losing popularity due to economic setbacks and thus co-opted the Russian Orthodox Church language of religious nationalism. The Putin regime thus made LGBTQ rights a “wedge issue” to shore up approval ratings among the religious.

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INTRODUCTION

"Russia is trying very hard to make discrimination look respectable by calling it 'tradition,' but whatever term is used in the bill, it remains discrimination and a violation of the basic human rights [of the LGBTQ community]. It is cynical, and it is dangerous."

Graeme Reid of Human Rights Watch (Alpert 2013)

The discriminatory bill Graeme Reid refers to is a law passed in Russia in 2013 banning "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" (Alpert 2013). This law prohibits gay pride parades, gay or lesbian magazines, or any talk of LGBTQ¹ rights in Russia; it was passed unanimously through the Russian legislative body, the Duma. Another concurrent law ordered jail time and fines for anyone found by the court to be guilty of "insulting religious feelings." These two bills, passed unanimously through parliament and signed into law by Vladimir Putin, put enormous pressure on Russia's already vulnerable LGBTQ community. Putin has championed the bill since, stating in Presidential address that same year that the Kremlin's position was to "[defend] traditional values that have made up the spiritual and moral foundation of civilization..." (Putin 2013). There continue to be constant verbal and physical assaults on LGBTQ individuals from religious, nationalist, and governmental groups. In Russia, the majority of the public is unsympathetic to their plight, with 74% of Russian polled by Pew Research Center in 2013 stating society should not accept homosexuality (Reilly 2013).

¹ LGBTQ stands for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer", and is a term that includes all people who identify as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender. There are many variations of the term, such as LGBT, LGBTI and LGBT+. I choose to use LGBTQ as it is the preferred initialism according to GLAAD's Media Reference Guide. See <https://www.glaad.org/reference> for more information.

Similarly, Polish President Andrzej Duda, who had just won re-election in the summer of 2020, agreed that "LGBT is not people, it is an ideology" and signed a ban on "propagating LGBT ideology in public institutions" (Dellanna 2020). Last year, during the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising, Krakow's Archbishop compared the LGBTQ community to communists and even stated that it was a "new plague" threatening a free Poland (Chadwick 2019). Poland and Russia lag behind Western Europe in terms of the rights granted to LGBTQ individuals and how they are treated by the state and society. In both these states, homophobia is becoming associated with religious and national identity. As Agnieszka Graff stated in 2010, "Not only were gays and lesbians being stigmatized in the name of patriotism, but national sentiment was now regularly expressed through the exclusion of the sexual (rather than the ethnic or cultural) other...homophobia was becoming the new discourse of patriotism". This new discourse combines the voices of nationalist and religious leaders in creating and persecuting the other.

Why are the ruling parties in Russia and Poland so homophobic? In order to discover this, we need to look at Russia and Poland's unique historical, religious, and political situation. Since Putin consolidated power in Russia in the 2000s and early 2010s and since PiS won Poland's presidential and parliamentary elections in a landslide in 2015, they have collaborated with religious institutions to endorse homophobic tendencies. In Russia, leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church have supported the Putin regime in public and the parish. There is a multitude of differences between Poland and Russia, including the influence of international organizations, such as European Union (EU) membership, and their religious and cultural background. Yet, in both cases their respective majority religious institution still sought to increase their political power by working with state and political actors. Why do religious institutions come to the aid of

these political groups? Most churches, including the Catholic Church, are inherently international. Why would they align themselves with nationalist parties?

In this thesis, I untangle how nationalist groups, politics, and religious institutions became aligned in this specific crusade for homophobia and strive to understand their purpose. An exploration into the history and current context of this partnership is necessary to understand homophobia in Poland and Russia today. I explore the relationship between the Catholic Church of Poland and several far-right parties, most prominently PiS (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*), in Poland. In addition, I look at the cooperation seen between the Putin regime, far-right movements, and the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia. The focus will be on the political motivations of these two religious institutions in encouraging and aiding in the otherization of the LGBTQ community. In so doing I fill a gap in the existing literature on the consolidation of power by the Putin regime and by PiS governments.

I argue that the reframing of homosexuality by these far-right movements and religious institutions as the moral and political "other" is a method for retaining political power and public support for both institutions. Politicized homophobia became the basis for an unofficial alliance between the church and the political parties in power. In concert with the incumbent parties, the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church use homophobia to augment their power in a looming secular world that diminishes them. I show how Church officials in both Poland and Russia have been able to co-opt or were co-opted by the PiS political party and Putin's regime to give a moral dimension to the othering of the LGBTQ community. This othering satisfies far-right groups by sowing alarmism and division. The polarization is part of these parties' larger narrative of "a return to traditional values" that returns the church to a powerful place in public life. Poland and Russia, two of the largest countries in Central and Eastern Europe, are each shaped by a unique

religious background that offers us two distinct pathways for how the relationship between church and state can develop.

To understand the political uses of homophobia for the political profit of incumbents and the dominant churches in Poland and Hungary, I analyze a wide array of secondary sources. I draw on many books and articles on religion and politics in these two countries and studies on the larger field of developing national identity and the far-right populism in Eastern Europe. I draw especially on several academic books including *Coming Out of Communism: The Emergence of LGBT Activism in Eastern Europe*, *Black Wind, White Snow: The Rise of Russia's New Nationalism*, and *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*. These books prove incredibly helpful for giving background information on this issue, as well as explaining the relationship between incumbent political parties and the dominant churches in Poland and Russia (Zubrzycki 2006; Clover 2016; O'Dwyer, 2018b). In order to understand the public attitude, I examine survey data opinion polls that ask questions about the LGBTQ community and the Catholic and Orthodox Church. I also analyze direct statements made by nationalist and conservative leaders and politicians concerning LGBTQ rights, religion in politics, and "Europeanization" and any proposed laws or policies relevant to homophobia or religion in either country. I do a similar examination of leaders' statements in the Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches that concern both national identity and the LGBTQ community. I also utilize surveys conducted on homophobic feelings and violence in Russia and Poland and surveys concerning "Euroscepticism" and nationalist sentiment that will be instrumental in my analysis.

The rest of this thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the practice of otherization and gives a background on nationalism and homophobia in Poland and

Russia. The second chapter investigates how the far right has utilized homophobia and why the Catholic and Orthodox churches assist in this operation. The third chapter focuses on Poland, examining what has influenced far-right parties to target and otherize the LGBTQ community, presenting homosexuality as a threat to “true Poles”. I show how the Catholic Church aided in the creation of the other to gain political influence. The fourth chapter turns to Russia, showing how Vladimir Putin and his government took on more far-right and morally conservative positions in the early 2010s to stabilize Putin's power. With this stabilization, Putin's administration brought in the Russian Orthodox Church to legitimize a "new patriotism," which rejected European and Western influences, including the LGBTQ community. In conclusion, I explore the future directions this research can take, including "homo-nationalist" trends in Ukraine.

CHAPTER 1: OTHERIZATION, FAR-RIGHT POPULISM, AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

Across Europe, there has been a sharp uptick in support for far-right parties since the early 2000s. Countries once lauded for their turn to democracy from communism in the region, such as Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic, party leaders in power use backsliding to augment their power. Why are parties that come to power in a liberal democratic system eroding these liberal democratic institutions? Furthermore, what does this mean specifically in Poland and Russia? This chapter examines literature surrounding the rise of support for far-right parties across Eastern Europe and why far-right party's governance has caused democratic backsliding in certain countries. Following this, I focus on Poland and Russia and examine how PiS in Poland successfully regained power in 2015 and have maintained it since, as well as how Russia's nationalist and populist swing does not follow the same pattern as the rest of Eastern Europe.

Rise of the Far-Right in Eastern Europe

It is valuable to understand what is happening in Poland and Russia as part of a larger trend across Europe. Across Europe, there has been a rise in support for far-right and ethnopopulist parties. Ethnopopulism is unique as it combines the otherization of non-nation members, such as immigrants or ethnic minorities, with the demonization of "global elites," such as the European Union or the United Nations (Jenne 2018). Many far-right parties have adopted this combination of populist and nationalist, who have gone on to gain political power, which

results in democratic backsliding. In Milada Vachudova's article concerning ethnopopulist parties and democratic backslide in Europe, she outlines the two leading theories for the rise in support for ethnopopulist parties among scholars (2020). The first explanation is how these far-right parties often emerge bottom-up, beginning from a dissatisfied and resentful population. Following the transition to democracy and EU accession, many voters began to feel the impacts of globalization and immigration. Voters did not feel their needs had been met, with lower wages and unemployment rising. So they turned to more fringe political parties that they felt could correctly address their issues (Stanley 2019). Because of this shift in the population's stances, political parties began to take on more populist positions over time (Polyakova 2015). This theory aligns with the reality that Eastern European radical right parties are often more left-leaning on the economy than other socially conservative parties elsewhere (Buščíková 2018). Some scholars have utilized this bottom-up theory but believe the masses' discontent that causes a surge towards the right stems from minority rights instead of economic conditions. The introduction of democracy had also introduced the politicization of protections of minority rights. Now sexual, religious, and ethnic minorities were empowered to demand and receive protections and rights previously not afforded (Biskamp 2019). According to theorists, this expansion of rights to minorities causes some voters to shift more towards the right and for far-right nationalist parties to emerge as a countermobilization (Buščíková 2018).

The second explanation of the rise of far-right populist parties places the responsibility of changing public attitudes on political leaders instead of changes in the preference of voters. To gain more power, far-right leaders ramped up xenophobic, racist, and homophobic views to create a sense of fear among the population (Vachudova 2020). They also tend to demonize their political opponents as elites and create a cult of personality around themselves as the only ones

able to be trusted (Camus and Lebourg 2017). This incendiary messaging causes voters to react and often shift slowly over time to more ethnopopulist views (Enyedi 2020; Vachudova 2020). Media has a vital role in distributing this rhetoric. The use of social media sites and television and radio stations for news can have the effect of creating echo chambers, which often radicalize people towards voting for populist parties (Štětka et al. 2020).

The cause behind politicians using this rhetoric is quite simple; it is a strategy to gain and maintain power. The creation of this "other" is essential in creating the boundaries to any group and strengthens the solidarity of the "us" versus the other "them" (Galpin 2017). The process of otherization begins in defining a "people" that the other is outside of. These "people" can refer to a population or supposedly commonplace views (Wodak 2019). Far-right populist parties often define this in nationalist and nativist terms, basing it on either certain religions, ethnicities, or languages. Once defined, those unincluded were characterized as threats coming from both inside and outside of society. Otherization occurs in many forms, most often through the use of creating fear rhetoric centered around the others, both implicitly and explicitly. This is done by strategically manufacturing and boosting xenophobic fears through exclusive and dehumanizing language. By referring to "other" groups as animals, an ideology, or inherently evil, demagogues can create conscious and unconscious assumptions in the broader population that the others are a threat to the preferred group. This inspires fear that politicians encourage and promote to gain power, in order to save the "people" against these threats.

Ethnopopulist leaders claim that the rights given to these "others" are excessive, and the liberal democratic institutions established following Poland's transition to democracy are to blame. Therefore, what frequently follows these parties gaining power is a coordinated attack on those same democratic institutions that allowed them to be elected. The end goal is to recreate

the system to maintain power and continue to wage the perceived battle against their defined 'other.' The leaders proceed to begin framing themselves as the only "true" representatives of the people and the only ones they can trust, any opposition, no matter how moderate, is framed as being unsafe (Vachudova 2020). The inherent anti-pluralist nature of these far-right parties creates the necessary platform for this backslide. As stated by Anna Grzymala-Busse, these far-right parties attack both "formal institutions of accountability—courts, news media, and oversight agencies—and the informal norms of democracy, including tolerance and forbearance" by using tactics such as the otherization described above (2019). These attacks go farther than just speeches; these parties often legislate and encode attacks on minority rights and any oversight commissions (Vachudova 2020).

PiS and Poland

One of the most dramatic examples of a coalition initiating democratic backsliding is Poland's ruling PiS party. PiS first took power in 2005, lost its majority control of the Sejm, the lower house of Poland's legislative branch, Senate in a 2007 parliamentary election, and subsequently lost the presidency in 2010. However, after a resurgence in popularity in 2015, they were able to regain power by winning the majority of parliamentary seats in both 2015 and 2019 and the presidency in 2015 and 2020 (O'Dwyer 2018b; Henley and Davies 2020). What caused this uptick in support for PiS, a party that seemed to have faded in the background after the 2007 parliamentary election? The answer lies in a phenomenon dubbed by Adam Balcer as "Islamophobia without Muslims" (2019). Starting in 2010, PiS began a propaganda campaign against Muslim immigrants, stoking xenophobic and racist sentiment across the nation. They accused Muslim immigrants of coming to Poland in droves to destroy the "Polish Catholic way

of life," although Poland is home to a relatively small Muslim population (Balcer 2019; Folvarčný and Kopeček 2020). PiS candidates in the 2015 election specifically targeted multiculturalism and stated that this acceptance of non-Christian and non-European people was destroying traditional values (Balcer 2019, Vachudova 2020).

While political appeals that depict Muslims as threatening had existed in Poland since 2010, they intensified during the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015. Poland only had a small influx of Muslim refugees, but ultra-nationalist politicians used social media sites to cast Muslims as a threat to Polishness (Balcer 2019). PiS won the 2015 parliamentary election by a large margin, alongside the presidency. Populist attitudes that had been steadily rising since 2010 alongside PiS's welfare programs won PiS control of Poland in 2015 and 2019 (Henley and Davies 2019; Stanley 2019). Once gaining power, PiS has used this same fear rhetoric, expanding it to all communities they felt did not conform to their idea of what was traditionally Polish, such as the LGBTQ community. As explained in later chapters, these appeals help to distract from and to justify moves to concentrate power and to remove institutional checks and balances (Vachudova 2020).

Russia and the Slow Adoption of Nationalist Thought

While PiS has followed a similar ethnopopulist playbook as Fidesz in Hungary and ANO in the Czech Republic to appeal to voters and to concentrate power, Russia's regime today is the product of different legacies and different constellations of domestic political forces. Yet why have we seen the similar rise of far-right nationalist ideas and the consolidation of executive power using similar methods in Russia as in Poland? The explanation is that Vladimir Putin was able to concentrate power and use a more authoritarian position to build and maintain support for

his rule. Simultaneously, Putin began to use a set of populist appeals, known as Neo-Eurasianism, to rally support for himself in direct opposition with the West. It is more the case of molding an already malleable governance system than the weakening of institutional safeguards seen in Poland, effectively allowing Putin to skip to the second step of codifying changes to the system. There could not be backsliding if progress was never made towards vital democratic institutions.

Aleksandr Dugin represents a relatively new trend in radical Russian nationalist ideas and is a critical feature in developing the current political atmosphere in Russia. In the 1990's, he coined the term "Neo-Eurasianism," which is a philosophical idea that calls for the removal of Western and liberal ideas from Russia and the restoration of uniquely Russian ideas into the government (Clover 2016). Dugin was not well-known in Russian political circles until the mid-2000s when his Eurasianist movement surged in popularity when anti-Western sentiment was growing in Russia (Clover 2016). When Vladimir Putin became president in 2000 after rising to the rank of Prime Minister the previous year, Russia was a tenuous democracy with oligarchic leanings. When his predecessor Boris Yeltsin came to power in 1991, he brought his friends and associates into power with him, giving them positions of money and power (Belton 2020). Yeltsin had helped set the stage for an authoritarian government in Russia. In 1993, Yeltsin infamously abolished the Russian parliament and helped create a provisional constitution that did not allow the legislative branch of government to balance the executive, leading to a "super- presidential system," where the president's powers can go mostly unchecked (Kiyani 2020). The informal oligarchic system of the late Soviet Union continued past democratization into the Yeltsin era, though Putin restructured the system when he came to power and brought in oligarchs exclusively loyal to him (Belton 2020).

During Putin's consolidation of power in the mid to late 2000s, tensions between Russia and the West rose amid protests throughout Central and Eastern Europe against authoritarian leaders in the region (Clover 2016). The United States and Europe were often supportive of these pro-EU lead protest movements in Georgia and Ukraine, dubbed "colored revolutions." At the same time, Putin informally backed the autocratic leaders in these two countries, afraid of the West encroaching into Russia's backyard (Belton 2020). Putin was furious at this move by the Western powers, as he did not feel the United States or EU gave him the proper "respect" by attacking his allies (Belton 2020, Clover 2016). This tension between Putin's regime and the West made that same West, the United States, particularly the perfect "other" for Putin to rally against. Putin's government, wanting to capitalize and own new nationalistic and anti-Western resonance within the population, co-opted much of their teachings into its propaganda, wanting to wield the power of populist discourse in its favor (Clover 2016). This turn to explicitly populist strategies and theories aligned closely with Putin's consolidation of power and creating a centralized and authoritarian government. Over the past ten years, Putin has used these same populist strategies towards internal "enemies," such as his opposition and the LGBTQ community. Altogether, Putin and PiS are using similar methods, but they had different paths to the current political environment due to different backgrounds.

The far-right incumbents in Russia and Poland have created similar results; more authoritarian governments, otherization of minorities, and democratic backsliding. While Russia and Putin adopted these populist ideas during and after gaining more authoritarian power, Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe used populist sentiment to gain power and consolidate central power. The two explanations shown for the rise in support of far-right parties apply to both circumstances, though the weight of bottom-up versus top-down varies. Delving into this

background sets the stage for the Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Churches entry into politics in this era and the otherization of the LGBTQ community by both Russia's government and Poland's government.

CHAPTER 2: RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND ANTI-LGBTQ IDEALS

Chapter 1 laid out the formation and foundation of far-right ideologies and parties in Poland over the past decade. I have shown how far-right and populist parties utilize otherizing and use discrimination towards minority groups to gain and maintain political power. The next step is to examine how far-right and nationalist parties often intersect with religion, specifically Christianity in certain cases. This phenomenon, called "Christian Nationalism," has been present since the rise of nation-states, but since the fall of communism has taken on new life and ferocity in some East European states. The "others" created by the far-right often fall in line with historical targets of Christian hate: members of the LGBTQ community, Muslims, and Jews. The creation of the others is to retain political power and public support. In this chapter, I examine the theories surrounding religious nationalism before centering on Christian Nationalism and its relation to the LGBTQ community. The analysis will then delve further into Poland and Russia and their histories that have led them towards far-right Christian politics.

Religious Nationalism

As seen most recently in the storming of the US Capitol in early 2021, religious symbolism has become embedded in far-right political culture across the United States and Europe (Dias and Graham 2021, Stewart 2020). This type of relation to faith can be seen among far-right parties in Eastern Europe as well. Most dramatically, PiS in Poland and Fidesz in

Hungary have openly propagated the idea that the protection of "Christian culture" is an essential function of their party and national governments (Zubrzycki 2006; Tartakoff 2012). How has religion, most specifically Christianity, become a part of the far-right? First, we must look at the idea of "religious nationalism." The definition of nationalism is the belief that an individual's loyalty to their nation-state rises above other loyalties, even in cases where the nation-state does not exist. While not necessarily a harmful idea, nationalism promotes ideas such as anti-Semitism, racism, and homophobia and is often an ideology adopted by the far-right to push their agenda (Tartakoff 2012). Incumbent far-right parties such as PiS and Fidesz use the state at all levels to push these ideas and attack members of these minorities' communities.

Since the early years of the study of nationalism by sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, the relationship between religion and nationalism has been significant. Early researchers believed that nationalism took the place of religion when society began to secularize during the 1800s (Berger 1969; Weber 1978). They theorized that, as religion declined in society, nationalism succeeded its predecessor as a new sacred system for people to adhere to. Later, scholars disagreed with this assertion, stating that nationalism had its roots in the Reformation period's religious revival, and thus religion and nationalism are tied together (Mentzel 2020). Within this later discourse, there has been an attempt to distinguish between "secular nationalism" and "religious nationalism." However, in the past decade, researchers such as Atalia Omer and Jason Springs have argued that it is impossible to fully discern between these two types, as religion is an inherent part of nationalism, and there are too many similarities between the "types" that were distinguished (2013). Religious nationalism has become a staple in politics across the Western world and notably in Eastern Europe.

While Western Europe has experienced a downwards trend in religiosity, Eastern Europe has undergone a resurgence in religious feelings as communist leaders had previously forbidden it. In Poland and Russia, the fall of communism led to the rise in religious feelings and created a type of Christian nationalism that emphasized traditional Christian values (Zubrycki 2006). When the communist regime fell in the late 1980s, it left many people without the communist identity they had been a part of their life for many years. During this transition period, "Christian identity offered a ready set of symbols around which to develop a politics of national identity" (Montgomery and Winter 2015). As the nations reformed following the fall of the Soviet Union, different forms of Christianity, ranging from the Catholic Church to the Orthodox Church, offered a new way for some people to craft their identities. Once these nations established themselves, religious identity became closely associated with national identity (see Figure 1). On average, Eastern European countries are more likely to associate religion with national identity compared to their Western European neighbors (Pew Research Center 2018).

This association between religion and nation has aided the rise of far-right parties across Eastern Europe. While not necessary to the rise of far-right populism, religion has helped expedite the turn to the right in Poland and Russia. The similarities between "traditional Christian values" and the ideology espoused by ethnopopulists throughout Eastern Europe are hard to miss. Both the Catholic and Orthodox Church push this rhetoric of traditional values, while the far-right party's discourse typically centers around a "return to tradition." These traditional values echoed by religious institutions and far-right parties often overlap, such as rejection of minorities, religious and sexual, and conservative gender norms (Chetaille 2013).

Fewer people in Western European countries see religion as a key component of national identity

% who say it is _____ to be a Christian to truly share their national identity (e.g. to be "truly Armenian")



Note: In nearly all Central and Eastern European countries, the dominant Christian denomination was included in the question wording (Catholic, Orthodox or Lutheran). For example, in Russia, respondents were asked how important it is to be Orthodox to be "truly Russian." In Bosnia, respondents were asked about their own religious group, whether Muslim or Orthodox. Don't know/refused responses not shown. Source: Surveys conducted 2015-2017 in 34 countries. See Methodology for details. "Eastern and Western Europeans Differ on Importance of Religion, Views of Minorities, and Key Social Issues"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 1. "Strong association, especially in Orthodox-majority countries, between religion and national identity" (Pew Research Center 2018).

In addition to the parallel messaging, quite a few far-right movements have used religion directly to justify their actions. For example, the Eurasianist and other ultra-nationalistic movements often promote the Russian Orthodox Church playing a role in government to help eliminate the "sinfulness" caused by the introduction of Western ideas into Russia (Clover 2016). Nationalist movements supported the Russian Orthodox Church's supremacy and reminded them of pre-Soviet times when the church still held power.

Traditional Family Values and the LGBTQ community

An example of values perpetuated by the Catholic and Orthodox Church and far-right movements in Poland and Russia is traditional family values. Even as the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis, has decried discrimination against the LGBTQ community, national churches such as the Polish Catholic Church have resisted, pushing back against this "assault on Christian morals" (Luxmoore 2019). Figure 2 shows how Eastern Europe fares on average more than Western Europe in terms of rights afforded to LGBTQ individuals (O'Dwyer 2018a). Even as the EU has pushed for LGBTQ protections, countries with far-right leaders that are already a part of or are hoping to gain entrance into the EU have pushed for legislation specifically targeting sexual minorities (O'Dwyer 2018a; Dellanna 2020). Both the religious institutions and these ethnopopulist governors have pushed back against international attempts for LGBTQ rights and protections. Some theorize that this push for anti-LGBTQ legislation is the direct backlash to EU integration and the new visibility of queer individuals following the fall of communism (Chetaille 2013; Polyakova 2015; O'Dwyer 2018a). This aspect forgets the legacies of communist rule that still influence Eastern Europe's governments today and the potential benefits that both the far right and the churches may have for otherizing the LGBTQ community.

As seen in Figure 2, Poland and Russia are in the bottom half of ratings in European countries for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights by ILGA-Europe. Since 2010, both countries have experienced a downward trend in their score. In their most recent report, ILGA-Europe reported that, for the first time since the inception of the organization in 1996, LGBTQ rights were not progressing in Europe. In fact, since 2019, over 50% of European countries are moving backward on the rights index or have not made any improvements (ILGA-Europe 2021).

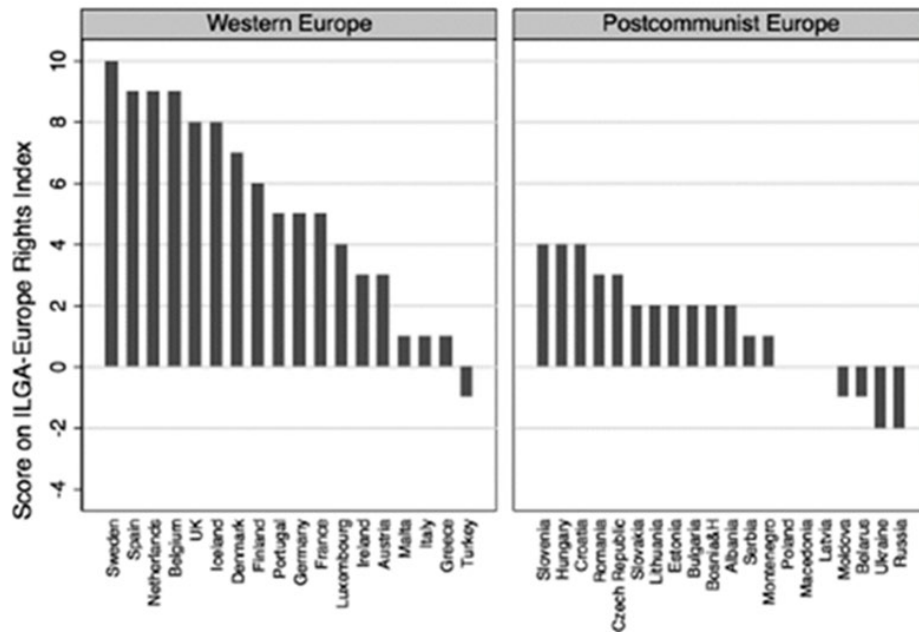


Figure 2: Rights of Gays, Lesbian, and Bisexuals in Western and Eastern Europe Compared in 2010 (O'Dwyer 2018a).

Even in Western European countries such as the UK and France, which have had LGBTQ protections enshrined for decades, their right index ratings have fallen around 10% since 2013 (ILGA-Europe 2021). While some countries show improvements, the downwards trend experienced in Russia and Poland in the last decade is not unusual in the European context. However, life for LGBTQ individuals in Western Europe is still safer than in Poland and Russia, due to the intense otherization we have seen in the latter two.

The othering of homosexuality is drawn from existing frameworks formed both before and after the fall of communism. According to Conor O'Dwyer, far-right movements and LGBTQ activists in Eastern Europe use three constructions of homosexuality (2018a). These frameworks include casting homosexuality as an individual's moral failing, homosexuality as a human rights issue, and homosexuality as a threat to national identity, which is most often

pushed by the far-right (O'Dwyer 2018b). Religious institutions have historically used the first framework in the last fifteen years church leaders have shifted to framing the LGBTQ community as a threat to the nation. Quotes from church leaders in both the Polish Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church have outlined homosexuality as a sin and, more recently, as a threat to national sovereignty (Hill 2016; Luxmoore 2019). This transition to this framework shows how Church leaders have begun to switch from their original framing to combining with the far-right constructions. This union between the far-right movements and the Christian religious institutions of Eastern Europe against LGBTQ communities is the basis for studying Poland and Russia's cases.

This chapter has explored the connection between religious institutions, nationalism, and far-right movements and how they have otherized several minority groups, most notably the LGBTQ community. In the context of Eastern Europe, Christianity made a resurgence following the fall of communism. It became tied to national identities and far-right parties, which often use the same language as the churches and religious nationalism. Both the dominant Catholic and Orthodox Churches and far-right leadership have used similar otherizing language and moral rhetoric to target the LGBTQ movement. The reasoning for this push of anti-LGBTQ sentiment is a mixture of pushback towards the EU, leftover from communist rule, and promotion of traditional values. However, part of this endorsement of anti-LGBTQ legislation and actions lies in the desire for power, both by the religious institutions and the far-right political parties. The chapters ahead will focus on Poland and Russia and how this union of otherization has developed between PiS and the Polish Catholic Church and Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church. I explore how they came to work together and attacked the LGBTQ communities in their respective nations.

CHAPTER 3: "A NEW PLAGUE": POLAND'S NATIONALIST CHURCH AND FAR-RIGHT PARTIES

When Poland voted the Solidarność party into power in June 1989 in the first (partially) free elections in the Soviet bloc since WWII. election, it heralded the unraveling of Soviet power and the collapse of communism in Europe. Following the election, Poland began a massive campaign to switch to a market economy and become a liberal democracy like its Western European counterparts. The transition from communism to democracy allowed previously underground minority groups to come to light. One such group was the LGBTQ community. While some rights and freedoms have been granted to the LGBTQ community, Poland currently lags behind the rest of the European Union. Poland is the only EU country that has yet to legalize same-sex partnership and ranks 27th in equality and non-discrimination among the 28 member countries by Rainbow Europe, a group associated with the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) (Roache 2019). The current reigning party, PiS, is staunchly against LGBTQ rights and have used their power to discriminate against the gay community directly. Simultaneously, Polish Catholic Church leaders have decried being LGBTQ as a dangerous ideology invading their country, despite the wider Catholic Church pushing for tolerance.

The origin of the political homophobia wielded in Poland lies in the relationship between Catholic Church and ethnopopulist politics. Today, the Catholic Church is a considerable player in Polish politics, often pushing for Catholic values' enshrinement into law. This role is made

possible by the relationship the church has with the current ruling coalition of parties, especially PiS and formerly LPR. The formation of this relationship that has come to dominate Polish politics began with the otherization of the LGBTQ community and has resulted in significant democratic backsliding in Poland. This chapter examines the historical and political roots of state discrimination against the LGBTQ community and how the relationship between far-right parties and the church has influenced this. First, I discuss Poland's historical and political context that made it a prime environment for political homophobia to take hold. Next, I will explore the lead-up to the 2005 presidential and parliamentary election, where the otherization of the LGBTQ community began in earnest. Finally, I will look into how the informal alliance between the Catholic Church in Poland and these far-right parties operates in Poland today. The continued use of political homophobia boosts PiS's popularity and keeps them and the church in power.

Historical and Political Roots of Otherization

Using the otherizing strategies discussed in chapter 1, PiS and their allies politicized homophobia and conflate LGBTQ rights with broader “Western values” as the antithesis to Catholic and Polish morals (O’Dwyer 2018b). These deliberate strategies to gain popularity leading up to an election and maintaining their political status once in power. The relationship between Catholic leaders and populist parties evolved through politicizing homophobia and now influences everything from sermons to legislation. This deliberate turn towards political homophobia and otherization stems from several historical and political factors in Poland. This section will cover the four facets of the context politicized homophobia came about: the Catholic Church’s political aspirations, the emerging LGBTQ rights movement, anxiety concerning accession to the EU, and the rise of populist parties in Poland. These factors led to the

politicization of homophobia and the otherization of the LGBTQ community. This politicization then created the informal alliance between Polish Catholic leadership and ultra-nationalist politicians, who rely on one another to maintain power.

Historically, the Polish Catholic Church has held a privileged position in Polish politics and life. They aided in reuniting, partitioned Poland, and establishing the Second Polish Republic following World War I (Pease and Bukowczyk 2009). However, the church's political power did not last, as following the Second World War, Poland fell under the control of the Soviet Bloc and elected a communist government. Heavily influenced by the Soviet Union, the new socialist government attempted to push religion out of Polish citizens' lives with state-sponsored atheism. Unlike the other members of the Soviet Bloc, state-sponsored atheism did not take in Poland due to the pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic Church (Mazgaj 2010). The Catholic Church and the communist state had an understanding where the church was able to keep its social status, but it could not wield any influence over politics as it once had. Throughout the reign of the communist party, the Polish Catholic Church became involved in underground resistance groups and opposition parties. Their organizing efforts were vital in the election of *Solidarność* and Poland's eventual transition to liberal democracy.

Once communism fell, the Church hierarchy found themselves again mentors to the nation-building process as they had 70 years prior (Pasini 1996). In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church immediately used this power to promote legislation that coincided with their religious and moral beliefs. They were able to push for religious education in public schools and anti-abortion laws in 1993. However, there was an intense backlash against these moves, which women saw as infringing on the rights they had gained under communism (Pasini 1996). Due to this backlash, many politicians attempted to separate their religious beliefs from political

decisions, such as choosing not to reference God in the constitutional referendum of 1997. This refusal and elections of parties with no ties to the church led to a prevalent assumption that Poland was heading slowly on the path of secularization (Żuk and Żuk 2019).

The second factor contributing to the politicization of homophobia was the emergence of the LGBTQ community in public spaces. Western influences introduced ideas such as individualism and internationalization that helped create LGBTQ activists and activist groups within Poland. Even before the fall of communism, Western European LGBTQ pamphlets and viewpoints made their way across the Iron Curtain into Poland (Szulc 2017). The decriminalization of homosexuality in 1932 was progress, but many LGBTQ individuals opted to stay in the closet and out of public discourse. Homophobia still existed, but it was on an individual basis instead of systemic attacks (Graff 2006). After the fall of communism in Europe, the opening of borders made it easier for Polish LGBTQ citizens to travel abroad and international organizations, such as ILGA, to enter Poland (Ayoub and Paternotte 2016). Three Polish LGBTQ groups joined ILGA in 1991, strengthening the association between the Polish LGBTQ community and transnational organizations (Ayoub 2016). During the 1990s, LGBTQ activism focused on AIDS prevention, and it was not until the early 2000s did they shift focus to pushing for LGBTQ rights (Peterson et al. 2018). In doing so, they drew inspiration from Western LGBTQ activists and how much of their activism focused on increasing the visibility of LGBTQ individuals through marketing campaigns and pride marches. Inspired by the European and American marches and the emerging Polish women's rights movement, LGBTQ activists decided to organize their own Equality March (Niemiec 2008). The first Polish pride parade went forward on May 1st, 2001, and then again in 2002 without much controversy (Graff 2006).

The accession of Poland to the EU and the coinciding rise of populism in Poland are the final two considerations when examining political homophobia in Poland. Following the collapse of communism and the transition to democracy, the EU had become an “institutional tutor” to Poland, aiding them in establishing the policies and democratic structures necessary to join the EU. In this process, Poland's new democracy focused primarily on legislating economic reforms before political and social changes, so the government never normalized Western ideas of human rights and solid democratic systems in their Polish society. As Poland became closer to gaining EU membership in the early 2000s, the government continued to quickly adopt new policies that angered the more conservative Polish society, such as legalizing abortion and LGBTQ rights (Shields 2007). In particular, the European Parliament pushed for members to legislate LGBTQ protections in their laws (O’Dwyer 2018b). As discussed in Chapter 1, far-right backlash most often occurs during periods of change, and accession to the EU was a catalyst for many far-right parties to form and reemerge. Dissatisfied by this potential for rapid change alongside allegations of corruption of the ruling SLD party, new radically conservative parties, such as PiS and LPR, emerged in the months leading up to the 2001 election. These parties were founded by politicians who had previously attempted to create nationalistic and ethnopopulist parties to little success (Żuk and Żuk 2019). However, this time they were able to capitalize on anxiety related to significant social transitions to promote their Catholic ethnopopulist agenda to the former members of the right-leaning Solidarność party (Buščíková 2018). As Jon Binnie states, “the ‘politicisation of homophobia’ at the moment of EU accession, was intimately connected to anxieties over EU accession...which the socially conservative neo-populist right capitalised on to gain power” (2014).

Lead up to the 2005 Election

The eve of EU accession coincided with the runup to the 2005 parliamentary and presidential election, and thus both political events informed how homophobia was politicized in Poland. The first appearance of homophobia used as political discourse was in 2003, following the “Let Them See Us” campaign. Funded by the *Kampania Przeciw Homofobii* (Campaign against Homophobia) and the *Office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Men and Women*, a governmental organization established as part of Poland’s compliance to EU regulations (Chetaille 2013). Photos of 30 same-sex couples holding hands were put on display throughout Poland on billboards and in art galleries. Within days of their reveal, most of the billboards were defaced or destroyed, and media outlets covering the story expressed outrage at the “explicit nature” of the pictures (Graff 2006). This negative media coverage was seen by PiS and LPR politicians, who saw it as an opportunity to capitalize on the association between Polish LGBTQ activists and international organizations. Linking international organizations to the EU, far-right politicians portrayed visibility campaigns as a covert EU incursion in Poland (Graff 2006). The negative publicity allowed populist political actors to connect the LGBTQ visibility movement with anti-Western politics. Due to the large Catholic population of Poland, LGBTQ people were already seen as sinful and undesirable. This made it simple for fear rhetoric around the LGBTQ community to spread through much of the population (Jasiewicz 2008; Chetaille 2013). Exclusion and dehumanization of the LGBTQ community became a staple of PiS and LPR rhetoric, and this homophobia became a part of politics.

In 2004, this political homophobia made its way into the streets. The Equality March in Krakow collided with extreme violence from counter-protesters from the LPR and the All-Polish Youth group, an ultranationalist youth group associated with the LPR at the time. They

reportedly shouted nationalistic and fascist phrases, such as "Gas the gays" and "pedophiles and pederasts- these are Euro-enthusiasts" (Graff 2010 and Niemiec 2008). In Poland's capital Warsaw, the LPR protested granting permits for the 2004 and 2005 Equality Marches. The permits were denied by the mayor of Warsaw and co-founder of the PiS party Lech Kaczyński (Niemiec 2008). When the marches went ahead without a permit, with police protecting the marchers against far-right protesters, Kaczyński publicly criticized both the marchers and the police for their decision to protect illegal behavior (Graff 2006). Around 800 people attended the counter-protest, which they dubbed the "normal parade." The representative of LPR attending stated, "We are here to show that Poland is a normal ... We are the home of Pope John Paul II. There is no place for abnormality here" (Deutsche Welle Staff 2005). The assertion of Polish Catholic values as the norm and advocating for LGBTQ rights as an imported abnormality further dichotomized Catholic Poles and supporters and members of the LGBTQ community. The representation of gays and lesbians as foreign and invasive to Poland prompted more xenophobic attacks towards both the LGBTQ and the EU. PiS and LPR encouraged these negative sentiments, especially towards their social policies, and positioned themselves as the champions of these Polish Catholic norms.

PiS and LPR established themselves as anti-establishment, anti-corruption, and to a certain point, anti-EU. Both parties saw EU integration as a threat to Poland's sovereignty and worried about Europe's liberal influence (Folvarčný and Kopeček 2020). LPR was more extreme in their Euroscepticism, opposing accession entirely, while PiS wanted to gain the economic advantages of the EU without having to adopt any new social and political structures (Chetaille 2013). Alongside the populist politicians, high-ranking Catholic priests and bishops were particularly vocal concerning Poland's accession to the EU. Specifically, they worried that the

EU's secularity and its member countries would push Poland away from Catholicism and the Polish Catholic Church out of any power they could potentially gain (Jasiewicz 2008 and Żuk and Żuk 2019). However, they often framed their concern as an issue of national freedom rather than secularization. Agnieszka Graff notes,

"Representatives of the church seemed to agree that this squabble was about Poland—about national pride and not religious sentiment. For instance, Bishop Józef Życiński said: 'It is with great concern that we receive efforts of the European Parliament to interfere with the state of Polish consciences. These are our personal values, and one cannot accept a situation where moral beliefs are bureaucratically imposed on us... We have one Poland, our common fatherland, and it is our task to protect the values that can be associated with positive Polish experience.'" (2010).

Both the Polish episcopate and ethnopopulist politicians worked to associate the LGBTQ community with Western liberalism in opposition to Catholicism and popular Polish morals. The ambition for power and suspicion towards the EU coalesced into political homophobia wielded by politicians to take advantage of xenophobic feelings existing in Poland. The Polish Catholic Church used its societal influence and moral authority to add to the negative attitudes towards the LGBTQ community and encourage followers to support PiS and LPR. This rhetoric during the early 2000s increased PiS and LRP's popularity. In the 2005 election, PiS and the traditionalist coalition won the majority in parliament, and PiS's candidate for president, Mayor Lech Kaczyński, won in a landslide victory (Binnie 2014). The far-right had gained political power thanks in part to their relationship with the Catholic Church. Political homophobia is the foundation on which this alliance was built.

PiS and Church Family

The election of 2005 was vital in creating the narrative pushed by far-right parties and the Polish Catholic Church that Poland is intrinsically homophobic. Lech Kaczyński and the LRP's

actions against equality marches were the beginning of the discursive construction of Polish values being irreconcilable with supporting the LGBTQ community. This has continued to this day, most recently in the lead-up to the 2019 parliamentary and 2020 presidential elections. In the months before both elections, the Archbishop of Kraków and President Duda made similar statements likening the LGBTQ community to communist ideologues, with Duda remarking, “LGBT is not people, it's an ideology” (Chadwick 2019; Dellanna 2020). This dehumanization of the community happened during a speech where PiS emphasized Catholicism's importance and the church's role in their campaign (Folvarčny and Lubomír 2020). Ethnopolit parties in Poland adopted platforms filled with fear rhetoric targeting LGBTQ rights and used the gay community as the scapegoat for Poland's problems. The Polish Catholic Church encouraged this by adding to this anxiety by preaching that LGBTQ individuals were the beginning of a “moral degradation” in Poland. This otherization of this community cemented the relationship between the church and far-right political parties, most prominently PiS, that continues to this day. This mutually beneficial alliance presents itself in several facets, as shown earlier with the clergy advocating for ethnopolit policies and political parties. On the other side, PiS's ruling coalition, the United Right in the parliament, and the leaders of PiS have repaid the episcopate with influence and resources.

One of the most critical resources wielded by state actors under PiS and given to Church leaders is money. In 2016, a law passed in the United Right ruled parliament restricting ownership rights for farmland for all except the Catholic Church and select others. This exception has set the church up to make sums of money as they will not face limits on buying up land (Cienski 2016). State subsidies for the church increased directly following the Archbishop's refusal to comment against PiS's controversial judicial reforms in 2017 (Prange 2017).

Individual priests have also received funds from the PiS ruled state, most notably Father Rydzyk. His business received an estimated 55 million dollars (approximately 210 million PLN) from 2015 to 2019 in subsidies from various government ministries and state-operated companies (Santora and Berendt 2019). This financial incentive has pushed Father Rydzyk to continue his nationalist-Catholic ideology in support of the ruling coalition.

In addition, the far-right parties advocate for Catholic values in the parliament. In the Sejm and the Senate, PiS and the United Right have introduced and passed several bills influenced by Catholic morals and for the church's benefit. Other issues include blocking sexual education classes, restricting commerce on Sundays, and blocking access to emergency contraceptives, such as Plan B and the morning after pill (Prange 2017; Santora and Berendt 2019). While the church does not dictate the entirety of PiS's agenda, they certainly influence some laws regarding morality politics. Publicly, both PiS and Catholic leaders have stated that the Catholic Church and the government are independent. However, the mutually beneficial relationship between them has shown they align themselves so closely that their messaging and rhetoric has merged into a mix of Catholic morality and ethnopopulist ideals.

Another essential facet of the relationship between the church and ethnopopulist politicians is their advocacy for one another across several media channels. Using television stations, newspapers, online publications, and radio stations, Catholic figures and far-right politicians promote and support one another. The most striking example of this is Radio Marya, owned and operated by Polish priest Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. In 1991, Father Rydzyk founded *Radio Marya*, a worldwide Catholic radio station, and has since expanded his business with an accompanying newspaper, television station, and publishing company (Krzemiński 2017; Żuk and Żuk 2019). He is a prevalent and polarizing figure in Poland, with his radio stations

garnering around two to four million daily listeners (Jasiewicz 2008).² Much of this programming centers around defining Polishness in terms of Catholic morality and pushing an ultranationalist view of Poland as a bastion of moral values (Jasiewicz 2008; Żuk and Żuk 2019). Father Rydzyk found this nationalism in direct conflict with the EU and used the tools at his disposal to broadcast his disapproval of Poland's accession. During the early 2000s, Rydzyk focused his media empire's attention on criticizing Poland's upcoming accession to the EU. As Conor O'Dwyer states, "[Rydzyk] campaigned against Poland's accession because 'it would impose a moral behavior on the country'... [moral behavior] was meant as secular-liberal moral behavior, hence incompatible with Poland's moral order" (2018b). Radio Marya has underlined the need to expand fundamentalist Catholicism throughout all facets of Polish society, particularly against the "Enemies of Poland," which most prominently included European elites and members of the LGBTQ community (Wysocka 2009).

Radio stations, newspapers, and television stations such as *Radio Marya*, *Nasz Dziennik*, and *Telewizja Trwam* use their platform to bolster support for PiS and LPR. Father Rydzyk is well-connected in both episcopal and political circles and has become influential not just to the Polish public but also to Polish politicians (Żuk and Żuk 2019). In 2015, the leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, gave a speech during *Radio Marya*'s 24th birthday party, stating that

"There would be no victory without the "Radio Maryja Family...The church and its doctrine are the foundations of Poland. Poland cannot exist without the Church...Every hand raised against the church is a hand raised against Poland. We know that. Therefore, thank you, members of Radio Maryja, Father Director and Fathers Redemptorists. I also thank the bishops and I am bowing down to them. They are the successors of the apostles. They lead the Polish Church towards our common goal." (Żuk and Żuk 2019).

² This number is disputed, as *Radio Marya* has not published any data regarding their viewership or listenership. Estimates range from 500,000 to four million listeners by 2008, with most estimates place the number at around two million.

Similarly, Public TV, a station run by former PiS leaders, often broadcasts church services alongside several hours of Catholic programs per week (Pawlak and Ptak 2021). This use of media to bolster one another has strengthened the beneficial relationship between the Catholic Church and the ethnopopulist politicians in PiS and LPR. LPR politicians were frequent guests on the *Radio Marya* leading up to the 2005 election, and PiS party members still appear regularly on the program. Scholars agree that these appearances contributed to far-right parties' success in that election and several following elections (Wysocka 2009; O'Dwyer 2018b). It is not just Father Rydzyk that supports far-right politicians. There have been 140 cases throughout Poland in the last five years of priests displaying election posters for PiS candidates on the church walls (Pawlak and Ptak 2021). There have been numerous instances of priests openly calling for parishioners to vote for PiS candidates (Cienski 2016; Żuk and Żuk 2019). Beginning with the otherization of the LGBTQ community, the Polish Catholic Church's clergy have aligned themselves with specific politicians and parties whose views skewed far right, such as PiS and the League of Polish Families. These politicians reap the benefits of the clergy's support, and in turn, they provide resources and political influence for the Catholic Church leaders.

Father Rydzyk is not alone in his use of media to promote Catholic far-right values. Weekly far-right magazines linked to PiS, such as *Do Rzeczy*, *Gazeta Polska*, and *Sieci* have often published stories that portray the Catholic Church as an "attacked fortress of Polishness", under siege from the LGBTQ community and women's rights activists (Sadecka 2021). These sensationalized magazine covers and stories are used by far-right and ethnopopulist parties to spread fear rhetoric throughout Poland, especially during election years. According to Agnieszka Sadecka at the Fatigue-Poprebel Seminar Series, the "rainbow threat", or the LGBTQ community, was the most featured topic in these magazines in 2020 (2021). A common thread

throughout these magazines and populist politicians' social media is the framing of the Catholic Church as being assaulted by the LGBTQ community and other minority groups. This exposure is an effective campaign technique, as exposure to these types of ideas can correspond to an increase in voter turnout for populist parties (Štětka et al. 2020).

This chapter has explored the factors behind the strong relationship between the Polish Catholic Church and the far-right parties currently leading Poland. PiS and LPR, the two largest ethnopopulist parties, politicized homophobia in the early 2000s as a campaign platform. The Catholic hierarchy in Poland aided in this politicization as a way to gain political influence. Looking back to Chapter 1, I have shown how ethnopopulist have used otherization techniques in reaction to the growing visibility of the LGBTQ community to gain and maintain power and cause democratic backsliding. With the Polish Catholic Church's support, a far-right coalition was able to gain majorities in the legislator and the presidency in 2005, 2015, 2019, and 2020. After gaining power, PiS and their coalition work to maintain this power by getting rid of democratic institutions and pushing Poland's democracy back. They have continued otherizing the LGBTQ community, in addition to other minorities such as Muslims. This rise in these techniques by ethnopopulist parties has coincided with democratic backsliding across Central and Eastern Europe. However, in the case of Russia in the next chapter, the rise in a more authoritarian government occurred before adopting religious-nationalist and otherization techniques.

CHAPTER 4: THE PROSELYTISM OF PUTIN

I argue in this thesis that homosexuality was reframed as a political and moral “other” by far-right movements and religious institutions as a tool to help these groups to gain and retain public support and power. In the previous chapter, I showed how Poland’s far-right leaders and the leaders of the Catholic Church of Poland work together to promote a form of nationalism directly tied to the Polish Catholic faith that centers on otherizing their LGBTQ community for political gain. This otherization has gone hand in hand with significant democratic backsliding in Poland as PiS and their far-right coalition consolidates and amplifies their power. In Russia, what was once a fledgling democracy has turned into an electoral authoritarian regime. This chapter discusses how Russian authoritarian leaders have worked with the Russian Orthodox Church leaders to create a similar patriotism to Poland that relies on nostalgia for past eras, including the former tsarist regime. This patriotism co-opts moderate nationalist movements to strengthen Putin’s power and popularity in Russia. First, I discuss the historical and international factors that led to the current relationship between church and state. Next, I examine how Kremlin and Russian Orthodox leaders collaborated to politicize homophobia in Russia to strengthen their power. By stoking resentment towards the LGBTQ communist, Putin promotes social cleavage and appeals to group-based identities to accumulate political strength. Lastly, I look at the relationship between the two and how this relationship has affected domestic and international politics and society.

Setting the Stage

Critical elements from Russia's history and politics highlight the development of politicized homophobia and the contemporary relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the current Putin administration. Societal and religious structures inspired by Imperial Russia formed following the fall of the Soviet Union informed Russia's development of political homophobia. While 2012 was the beginning of modern politicized homophobia in modern Russia, the Great Terror of the 1930s set the stage for state-sponsored homophobia in Russia. When the Russian Revolution first put the Bolsheviks in power, there was a glimmer of hope for LGBTQ individuals. A "sexual revolution" was happening in the legislator as the newly formed government started their overhaul of the older laws. One of these changes they made was decriminalizing homosexuality in 1922 (Healey 2018). However, what little progress made came to a halt with Stalin's totalitarian regime's rise. Gulevich et al. state, following the establishment of Stalin's regime, "homosexuality was framed as an essentially social phenomenon ("mental infection") resulting from corrupting influence of counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and Western anti-Communist (fascist) regimes" (2017). This reframing of homosexuality as a western invention sent to ruin Russia is the same framework adopted by Putin's government and the Russian Orthodox Church today. Stalin recriminalized sodomy in 1934 and sent thousands of individuals to the Gulag for "engaging in homosexual behavior," as well as hundreds of prisoners punished at the Gulag for the same crime (Healey 2018).

While the thaw of the 1950s brought the relaxation of many Stalin-era regulations and persecution, most queer individuals chose to stay in the closet and not disclose or discuss their sexuality for fear of being met with violence (Healey 2018). The collapse of the Soviet Union also brought about another sexual revolution, and the newly formed Duma overturned the Stalin-

era anti-sodomy law in 1993. However, unlike some other post-communist countries like Poland, Russia resisted attempts to adopt anti-discrimination laws pushed by human rights organizations (Gulevich et al. 2017). Many in the LGBTQ community chose not to push for more protections and rights, electing instead to stay quiet about their sexuality as was the prevailing cultural norm carried over from the Soviet Union. In 2010, a survey found approximately 43% of Russians disapproved of LGBTQ people and their lifestyles (The Danish Institute for Human Rights 2011). However, just four years later, that number jumped to 74% (Levada-Center 2021). This drastic change in opinions, especially when most modern nations saw an increase in approval of same-sex relationships, was due to the campaign of politicized homophobia by the Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church following the re-election of Vladimir Putin in 2012.

The homophobic discourse adopted by the Russian Orthodox church also stemmed from their history with the Russian and Soviet governments. The Orthodox Church and the Russian Empire had been allies for over a thousand years, since Kievan Rus's Christianization in 988 CE. Like the Polish Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church and its leaders were influential in governmental matters until the 20th century, as its role was to work under the regime to give religious legitimization to czarist rule (Plokhy 2017). The church's influence over state matters vanished following the Bolsheviks gained power during the Russian Revolution in 1918. The newly formed Soviet Union pushed against religion's influence in politics and society by confiscating church property and restricting religious worship (Curtiss 1953). Stalin's Great Terror targeted the religious population of Russia as it had the LGBTQ community. His persecution in 1937-8 led to the arrests of 85% of the Russian Orthodox clergy and active parishioners and thousands of deaths (Werth 2010). During the 1940s and '50s, Soviet leaders began to push their form of state-sponsored atheism, where they attempted to replace religion

with their type of “faith.” This faith had its cosmology and its own set of beliefs, spiritual obligations, and practices (Smolkin 2018).

Once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, the government returned some property that had previously belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church (Balakireva and Sereda 2013). The Russian parishioner population grew steadily during the 1990s as the church sought to fill the ideological vacuum left in the wake of 1991 (Daniel 2006; Mitrokhin et al. 2009). As the Russian Orthodox Church continued to grow in numbers and influence, Orthodox leaders chose to take up something essential to their function before 1917: patriotism. In 2000, the church adopted a text titled *Bases of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church*, which included several passages concerning the importance of patriotism to one “earthly homeland” and how important it is to protect and cultivate a “national culture” as well as Orthodox morals (Rousselet 2015). Some priests expressed concerns over the church’s role in creating a new national ideology, while others lauded new religious patriotism (Daniel 2006). This national-religious ideology is based on monarchist views and Russian and Orthodox primacy (Rousselet 2015; Laruelle 2020). While a relationship existed between church and state, this relationship was unbalanced, with Orthodox leaders advocating for the nation and the state leaders not able to guarantee stable support. However, by 2012, the state would become much more outspoken on the church ideology and favored the Russian Orthodox Church more in return.

The last factor contributing to the rise of politicized homophobia was the ideological and communal gap left following the collapse of the Soviet Union. During the 20th century, the communist regime created philosophical campaigns that aimed to remove religious adherence from society. As discussed earlier, they created an alternative faith, with rituals and principles centered around a soviet and atheist cosmology (Smolkin 2018). This soviet faith did not

overcome religion in citizens' private lives. However, this cosmology did have a lasting impact. When the Soviet Union fell in 1991, some Russian citizens felt like they had lost their national identity and sense of community after being so rooted in communist ideology (Clover 2016). Some sought the Russian Orthodox Church to fill this gap, while others turned towards growing nationalist movements. Putin and his advisors attempted to recreate this feeling of national belonging when they promoted religious nationalism. However, in defining national identity, they had to define what did not belong. The LGBTQ community became the first “others” defined by the Kremlin and Russian Orthodox Church working in tandem to gain and maintain political power. They were defined as such due to the supposed association between LGBTQ activism and Western Europe and the lack of social or political acceptance in Russia.

The Conversion of the Kremlin

At first glance, Putin’s turn towards morality politics and nationalist rhetoric in 2012 seemingly contradicted his past self. During his first two terms as president, nationalism was not a subject that Putin and his party discussed openly. He kept his distance from nationalist parties and politicians and even quelled some nationalist protests with arrests (Greene and Roberston 2019). He even used his influence to keep nationalist parties from gaining majorities in the Duma, Russia’s legislative body (Clover 2016). Russian authorities did not show special favoritism to the Russian Orthodox Church from 2000-08 (Mitrokhin et al. 2009). The Russian government gave the church far less money, properties, and resources than Putin’s predecessor and eliminated state tax breaks, to the annoyance of church leaders (Mitrokhin et al. 2009). Putin and his oligarchy seemed to be averse to adopting any kind of ideology, instead choosing to

appear as “a-ideological” to appeal to the majority of Russian citizens (Greene and Robertson 2019; Laurelle 2020).

Throughout the 2000’s, Putin worked with his oligarchic circle to further solidify their wealth, power, and position through the expansion of the executive branch (Belton 2020). Putin kept his popularity high by balancing out these autocratic moves by pushing through popular tax reforms and presiding over substantial economic growth (Sharafutdinova 2014; Graeme and Robertson 2019). However, this economic growth did not last. The 2008-9 worldwide financial crisis stunted economic growth, even leading to a GDP growth rate of -7.8% in 2009 (The World Bank 2021). As the standard of living fell for many Russians due to the economic downturn, so did the Kremlin’s popularity (Healey 2018). In 2011, Putin would be running in 2012 for his third term as president, following one term “off” as prime minister. This unpopular move, combined with allegations of corruption and vote manipulation during the 2011 parliamentary elections and economic issues, sparked massive protests during the winter of 2011-2012. These protests were the largest Russia had seen since Putin took power (Sharafutdinova 2014; Greene and Robertson 2019; Laurelle 2020). These protests showed the Kremlin that Putin’s majority support would soon diminish (Sharafutdinova 2014).

The 2000s also saw the rise of support for the Russian Orthodox Church and its religious nationalism brand. Simultaneously, nationalist parties were gaining ground in terms of support. Initially, the Kremlin attempted to control nationalist parties by placing allies in leading positions and pulling their advertising from state-owned media (Clover 2016). However, this effort proved fruitless, as it led to a sharp uptick in the number of nationalist supporters who were increasingly anti-Kremlin (Clover 2016). Nationalist leaders had begun to draw larger crowds as more liberal-minded politicians joined them, most notably Alexei Navalny. He stated, “[The nationalist

agenda] exists, but for some reason, many in the liberal movement think that all these questions have to be suppressed because a discussion of them would mean the mythical dark side of the soul of the Russian people will be inflamed and the Russian people will immediately produce a Hitler and so on. This is all absolute nonsense” (Coalson 2013). Many of these nationalist leaders were involved in and arrested during the 2011-12 protests against the Kremlin (Clover 2016).

Seeing the growth of these movements and their inability to control them, Putin and his circle decided there needed to be a significant change in how they approached state ideology. They decided to draw both on Russia’s Soviet past and imperial past to create one. As discussed earlier, the Orthodox Church draws its current rhetoric directly from the Russian Empire, including the promotion of monarchist ideals. Many priests still promote monarchy as the ideal form of governance. Although Putin and the Kremlin have been unambiguous in their rebuttal of monarchism, it is no secret that many features of the church’s rhetoric echo elements of Putin’s autocratic regime (Balakireva and Sereda 2013; Laruelle 2020). The church had long positioned itself as the protector of traditional Russian Orthodox life; in this new situation, they transferred this mantle to Putin and the Kremlin. Putin’s government wanted to craft an image of him as a “moral crusader,” saving Russians from Western corruption and co-opted the Orthodoxy's religious nationalism to accomplish this (Sharafutdinova 2014).

Now that they had the framing of their ideology, the next step was to find a wedge issue that the wider population would likely support. This opportunity came in 2012 when punk rock band Pussy Riot’s members performed their “Punk Prayer” at the Cathedral of the Christ the Savior, protesting against Putin and the Orthodox Church’s support of him. Previous protests by Pussy Riot and others had not drawn Kremlin's attention, but that was before this new ideological frame (Sharafutdinova 2014). Many Russians reacted negatively to this protest,

labeling it offensive and disrespectful to the Orthodox Church (Healey 2018b). The Kremlin used this opportunity to call for the arrest of three members of Pussy Riot and charge them with "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred," ignoring the artistic and political nature of the protest (Lipman 2012). Much like in far-right politicians in Poland, the Kremlin seized this event as a way to begin the otherization of communities Pussy Riot supported, such as feminist circles and the LGBTQ community. They made these issues that had not been a part of political discourse in over a decade a staple of their legislature and Putin's presidency.

Within a year, the State Duma passed a law against "insulting religious feelings," directly inspired by the Pussy Riot incident (Alpert 2013; Sharfutdinova 2014). Simultaneously, the Duma passed another law that banned "homosexual propaganda," which made pride parades or speaking in defense of gay rights an arrestable offense. The state framed both of these laws as protecting "traditional Russian values" against Western incursion, conflating being LGBTQ or against Orthodoxy as inherently anti-Russian in several speeches made by Putin and other officials (Healey 2018). Positioning himself as a defender of the Russian Orthodox Church, Putin solidified the church and Russian leadership's upgraded relationship both officially and unofficially. Most recently, we can see the effects of this arrangement with the 2020 constitutional referendum in Russia. Putin introduced a series of constitutional amendments, the most notable of which was a change that would allow Putin two more terms in office, a ban on gay marriage, and enshrining "Russians' faith in God" into the constitution. While these measures had already been approved by the State Duma, the government still held a national plebiscite in the summer of 2020, with governmental figures and Patriarch Kirill encouraging people to vote. Many experts speculate that the vote was a tactic to shore up public support around Putin, whose approval rating fell during the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic (Higgins 2020). The

inclusion of a ban on gay marriage and Orthodox religion to encourage voter participation illustrates how the relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian state affects political and social life in Russia in the modern-day.

Of Church and State

The association between the Kremlin and Russian Orthodox Church manifests in both formally and informally forms. The events of 2011-2013 allowed the Kremlin to bring the church further into their fold and influence. Russian Orthodox officials advocate for Putin and his government and influence societal stances on political matters, most prominently against homophobia and “Western incursion.” In exchange, the Kremlin advocates for the church to take over more social aspects of life in Russia and places the Russian Orthodox Church above other religious institutions. This mutually supportive relationship and shared power structure created a stable identity for Russians to fill the cultural, spiritual, and ideological gap that had remained unfilled for many since the fall of the Soviet Union. The utilization of lost identity, nationalism, and religious appeals to strengthen Putin’s regime and the Russian Orthodox Church has depended upon the otherization of the LGBTQ community and broader European values. The alliance between church and state is vital to understanding the politicization of homophobia in Russia. This section will detail how the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government work together to promote this ideology.

Like Poland, much of the advocacy takes place in various media outlets. The Kremlin’s television stations began broadcasting anti-gay and anti-Western rhetoric and pro-Orthodox messages following the Pussy Riot incident (Clover 2016). One anchor named Dmitry Kiselyov stated on Russian TV, “[Gays] should be prohibited from donating blood or sperm. And their

hearts, in case they die in a car accident, should be buried or burned as unfit for extending anyone's life." The following year, Putin made Kiselyov the chief of the state-owned news agency (Healey 2018). Soon after, Orthodox Church received their own channel on the state-owned television station, where they continued to propagate their religious-nationalist viewpoint. Starting in 2012, the church began to publish texts concerning the "traditional family" and how the nation's success and the Orthodox faith are intrinsically tied together (Rousslet 2015). Outside of television and books, the church and state advocate for one another during speeches and sermons. Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, has referred to Putin's leadership as a "miracle of God" (Bryanski 2012). Russian Orthodox bishops and priests have supported various political moves by Putin and punishing dissenters in their ranks. In 2019, a priest was suspended from the church for five years following him signing a letter with other clergy members asking the government to reduce police brutality towards anti-Putin protestors earlier that year (RFE/RL's Russian Service 2019). In exchange for this backing, the government gives church officials preferential treatment, money, and societal influence.

The most prominent example of this privilege is how it is treated compared to Catholic and Protestant denominations of Christianity. In Russia, one must get permission to start a non-Russian Orthodox Church from local government officials (Levy 2008; Mitrokhin et al. 2009; Clover 2016). It has been reported by many Protestant and Catholic missionaries that government officials have referred them to the local Orthodox bishops to get permission to build their church in the area (Levy 2008; Clover 2016). Most of these requests are denied, citing suspicion of Western incursion by missionaries. Following 2012, there was an increase in the number of priests given decision-making abilities.

Another benefit the church receives from this relationship is monetary aid through both official and unofficial channels. Publicly, the government gives the church land and grants for various cultural festivals (Rousselet 2015). Under the table, oligarchs with ties to Putin use their wealth and influence to aid Orthodox churches throughout Russia and propagate religious traditionalism to Russian Orthodox churches in neighboring countries, such as Ukraine (Clover 2016; Belton 2020). These oligarchs set up foundations to finance church programs and construction and invest in companies owned by Orthodox allies. Konstantin Malofeyev, for example, is an Orthodox monarchist who grew close to Orthodox oligarchs and soon found himself a millionaire from significant backing from a large number of investors. However, following his rise in wealth, he quickly established a religious foundation to “support the spread of Orthodox values and conservative ideals across Ukraine, Europe, and then into the US” (Belton 2020). Malofeyev’s company benefited from multiple state contracts and soon received a position overseeing state telecom companies (Belton 2020). This example demonstrates how the state uses religious actors to promote its political projects and how the lines between church and state have begun to blur.

The Kremlin uses many platforms to push their anti-West and anti-liberal stance, but they rely on the church to give moral legitimacy to Putin’s autocratization of Russia. Much like Poland’s case, Putin’s popularity has increased from tying Russian patriotism to Orthodox morals (Sharafutdinova 2014; Healey 2018). While Putin never officially dropped under a 60% approval rating, following the Pussy Riot trial in 2013, his popularity increased by 23% and stayed above 80% until 2018 (Levada-Center 2021). As discussed in chapter 1, Vladimir Putin and his supporters came to power before the creation of strong democratic institutions in Russia, so Putin was able to codify a super-presidential system where his power is unchecked. Coinciding with a

rise of anti-Western sentiment, Putin began pushing patriotism that exalted Russia as a sanctuary of morals that the West had forgotten (Belton 2020). A large part of creating this nationalist sentiment lay in the right-leaning groups, from which Putin took inspiration for his policies and the Russian Orthodox Church. Like the Polish Catholic Church, Orthodox leaders have begun to tie nationalism and patriotism as a fundamental part of their way of life. Defining who was a part of the Russian was done by defining the “outside” the nation to foster a sense of belonging and boost Putin’s popularity. One of the first defined others was the LGBTQ individuals, as this new nationalism rejected anything they associated with the West. The fragile democratic institutions of both countries have suffered due to the consolidation of power by Putin, PiS, and their respective church allies.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

I have shown how church officials in Poland and Russia have worked together in both the political and religious spheres to unite the majority against constructed national enemies or “others”. Church leaders, politicians, and oligarchs created an alliance to extend their influence over parts of society. The political and ideological coordination among church leaders, politicians, and oligarchs has been grounded in the otherization of the LGBTQ community and the conflation of gay rights with a foreign incursion. The Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches give a moral dimension to xenophobic rhetoric that helps put and keep populist parties in power, while PiS and the Kremlin give the churches preferential support and social influence. While there are still many differences between the cases, by analyzing the relationships between church and state actors we see a part of how power is gained and kept through political homophobia and xenophobia.

One consequence of churches aligning with political actors is, in exchange for political power, they have lost their moral authority on much of the population. Both in Poland and Russia, people, especially younger generations, have been leaving the Catholic and Russian Orthodox Church, citing issues with the political involvement of the clergy. This is more common in Poland, where church approval ratings dropped from around 90% in 1989 to 41% today, the lowest it has been since 1993 (Pawlak and Ptak 2021). Many cite they are leaving the Polish Catholic Church in direct response to the political involvement of the episcopate and the church’s closeness to PiS (Pawlak and Ptak 2021). An unintentional consequence of the

relationships we see between church and state is the alienation and estrangement of the next generation of worshipers. While the Polish Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church may have political influence today, it will be interesting to see how this has affected their moral authority and followership down the line.

Going forward, there are many potentially important avenues for further research on LGBTQ communities throughout Eastern Europe. Gay and lesbian citizens in several other post-communist countries have faced similar discrimination as in Poland and Russia. On the opposite side of the spectrum, there are select former Soviet countries that are relatively progressive when it comes to LGBTQ rights yet have also experienced the democratic backsliding we have seen in Poland and Russia. The Czech Republic, which borders Poland, is one of these countries (Tait 2018). Why was the LGBTQ community not politicized in the Czech Republic yet was in the neighboring country of Poland? Discovering the answers could further broaden research into politicized homophobia and the factors contributing to their otherization. Other countries have shown LGBTQ communities that have decided to adopt nationalism in their fight for rights. Specifically, in Ukraine, there has been a movement of LGBTQ individuals claiming that their identity has historical precedence in Ukraine (Shevtsova 2018). This “homonormative patriotism” frames Russia as the enemy, who brought their anti-LGBTQ rhetoric when they ruled over Ukraine to try and wipe out Ukrainian traditions. This argument pushes Ukrainians to accept the LGBTQ community as an inherent part of Ukrainian identity (Shevtsova 2018).

Another phenomenon worthy of more research is the appearance of LGBTQ Christian groups throughout Eastern Europe. While Christianity accepting gay and lesbian communities is not a new idea in Western Europe, these communities only began appearing in the last decade in

Eastern Europe. While large institutions, such as the Polish Catholic Church³ and the Orthodox Church, still denounce LGBTQ individuals as “sinful,” individuals who identify as religious and LGBTQ have emerged to gain the church's acceptance to create a religious community where they feel accepted. Two examples of this are *Wiara i Tęcza*, Rainbow and Faith, Poland, and the United Ecumenical Catholic Church in Slovakia and Poland. *Wiara i Tęcza* is focused only on Poland and wishes to change the Catholic Church from the inside by slowly normalizing their existence and are unwilling to step away from the church. Transnational religious organizations like the United Ecumenical Catholic Church preach acceptance of LGBTQ individuals and reconciles identity with faith. There is little literature on the formation of these groups. The differences between a national and transnational approach to LGBTQ-friendly religious organizations in Eastern Europe give insight into the internationalization of gay rights and how this has affected their perception in different countries.

³ While Pope Francis has openly supported gay rights and even same-sex civil unions, Church leaders in Poland have denounced or ignored his calls for acceptance (Luxmoore 2019).

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