

The Russian Orthodox Church and Legitimacy of Political Homophobia in Russia

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Abstract

Political homophobia is a phenomenon that can be seen all over the world, defined as the overt deployment of homophobia in policy by the state. Russia is no stranger to political homophobia: homosexuality was criminalized starting in 1934, until the law was repealed in 1993 after the fall of the Soviet Union. Because of the Soviet Union's heavy repression of religion, its uses of political homophobia were strictly secular. However, while political homophobia decreased, religion saw a resurgence after the fall of the Soviet Union, especially the Russian Orthodox Church. When Vladimir Putin came into power in the 2000s, he showed his commitment to Orthodoxy publicly. The strategy used by the Russian government to gain legitimacy also turned personalistic, meaning that Putin's portrayal as a determined ruler who gave the Russians a sense of pride and identity, including the Orthodox identity, was used to give legitimacy to policies adopted by the government. Starting in 2006, Russia also saw a new resurgence in political homophobia through regional bans on homosexual propaganda, culminating in a federal ban in 2013. This study aims to understand how the Russian Orthodox Church helped to legitimize the actions of political homophobia taken by the Russian government after 2000. This study uses a process tracing approach in order to understand the relationship between the resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church and the legitimacy of political homophobia by analyzing official Church documents, statements by Church hierarchs, popular beliefs about homosexuality and religion, and literature about connections between Russian government officials and Russian Orthodox Church. This research is important academically because it adds to the growing literature about political homophobia and provides a better understanding of church-state relations and the separation of church and state within Russia.

Keywords: Political homophobia, Russia, Russian Orthodox Church

1. Introduction

Political homophobia is a phenomenon that can be seen all over the world, defined as the overt deployment of homophobia in policy by the state¹. Homophobia is the prejudice, fear, or hate of non-heterosexual orientations². Therefore, political homophobia is seen through laws that discriminate against non-heterosexual people. Russia is no stranger to political homophobia. It existed before and during Soviet times, and after a brief break in the 1990s, it came back with force, with a ban on the propaganda of non-traditional sexualities being adopted in 2013. While the country saw a decrease in political homophobia in the 1990s, it also saw a revival of religion and resurgence of the Russian Orthodox Church. This resurgence included Russian president Vladimir Putin's personal commitment to Orthodoxy³, while he was also portrayed as a determined leader who gave the Russian people a sense of identity⁴.

Did the Russian Orthodox Church help legitimize the actions of political homophobia taken by the Russian government after 2000? This research attempts to answer this question through process tracing, in order to examine the actions of the Russian Orthodox Church in relation to homosexual propaganda bans, the prohibition of Pride parades, and marriage being defined in the Russian constitution as a union between a man and a woman. This research

discusses these developments narratively and in a chronological order, starting in 2000 and ending in March of 2020. It uses tests such as straw-in-the-wind tests, hoop tests, and smoking gun tests to evaluate evidence and determine whether the Russian Orthodox Church had a role in the adoption, legitimization, and acceptance of political homophobia in Russia. This research is vital, because it adds to the growing literature about political homophobia in a new way by examining the power of the Russian Orthodox Church and religion in general in legitimizing political homophobia.

2. Historical Context

As noted before, political homophobia is defined as the overt deployment of homophobia in policy by the state⁵. This worldwide phenomenon appearing in Russia goes back to 1716, when homosexual acts were criminalized in a military code prohibiting sex between men, and a law applying to civilians was enacted in 1835⁶. Even with those codes in the books, prosecution under these laws was rare. Tsarist legal codes were repealed after the Bolsheviks took power in 1917, so homosexuality was decriminalized then. Homosexuality was criminalized again in 1934 by Stalin, and that time numerous people were prosecuted under the law and sent to the Gulag. The Russian government repealed the law criminalizing homosexuality in 1993 in order to join the Council of Europe⁷. In 1999, Russia also adopted the classification of diseases of the World Health Organization, which states that homosexuality is not a disease and does not require medical treatment⁸.

While political homophobia decreased, the Russian Orthodox Church was experiencing a revival. The Soviet Union heavily repressed religion, including the Russian Orthodox Church, despite its history as a powerful institution in Russia⁹. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church swept back into its previous role as the predominant religious institution in Russia, with the percentage of Orthodox identifiers and believers rising every year and still growing. The predominance of the Church increased with president Vladimir Putin's personal commitment to Orthodoxy, which he has been public with ever since he took office in 2000¹⁰.

Political homophobia also started to bubble up again in the early 2000s. In 2002, a draft law was introduced in the Russian Duma calling for the reinstatement of the criminalization of sodomy, but it was turned down in order for the country to stay in the Council of Europe¹¹. In 2006, however, political homophobia came out with a force, with Moscow's city government prohibiting the city's first-ever pride parade, and the first law banning the "propaganda of homosexuality" being adopted by the Ryazan Oblast^{12, 13}. By 2012, Moscow had banned Pride for the seventh year in a row, and nine different regions of Russia -- most notably, the city of St. Petersburg -- had some sort of law banning the propaganda of homosexuality¹⁴. To top it off, on June 11, 2013, the federal government passed a law banning the "propaganda of non-traditional sexualities"¹⁵. Because of the repression of religion, political homophobia was strictly secular in Soviet times¹⁶. Seeing the resurgence of religion and political homophobia happen at the same time begs the question -- did the Russian Orthodox Church have anything to do with the recent wave of political homophobia?

3. Literature Review

According to the Russian Public Opinion Center (VTsIOM), 77% of Russians identify as Orthodox, 65% say they are believers of Orthodoxy, and 71% say that they feel positively about the Russian Orthodox Church and its leader Patriarch Kirill¹⁷. Although these percentages are high, church attendance has remained low, but Wanner's ethnographic research about the Russian Orthodox Church shows that belief in Orthodoxy and what it stands for is still prevalent, along with Orthodoxy being a uniting cultural trait as well as a religious tradition¹⁸. Therefore, religiosity among Russian Orthodox people seems to sometimes be extrinsic, serving other personal or social goals, and sometimes intrinsic, a central organizing factor of life. Both forms of religiosity are linked positively with homophobia¹⁹. There is also a strong connection between religiosity and conservative morality, and studies show that belief in Eastern Orthodoxy increases the prevalence of homonegativity when compared to Protestantism and Catholicism^{20, 21}. These findings could explain why a majority of people in Russia believe that homosexuality is "licentious and a bad habit," or "illness and a mental disorder"²².

Zhuravlev's (2017) study examining the rhetoric of the Russian Orthodox Church and its official documents and Persson's (2015) study examining how LGBT issues were represented in Russian media around the time of the federal propaganda ban show the distinct similarities between the media and the Russian Orthodox Church's framing of Russia and Russian civilization^{23, 24}. Both the Church and the media put forth an image of Russia as a strong nation threatened by outside forces, which include homosexuality, liberalism, and modernity. High hostility toward

homosexual people in Russia can be explained by the media's emphasis on traditionality as opposed to Western modernity²⁵. The media's representation of these issues is reflective of the government's views, since all national television is state-controlled, and most newspapers are either state controlled or reflect the views of the regime anyway²⁶.

There is little scholarly literature about violence against LGBT people in Russia. Kondakov states that few violent incidents against LGBT people are recorded in the Russian legal system, but he attempts to produce numbers of hate crimes against LGBT people in Russia that are hidden from public view²⁷. He shows how the available sources of criminal court sentences can be used to study violence against LGBT people, even if some crimes are not prosecuted as hate crimes in the Russian legal system. He also shows that the number of violent incidents against LGBT people increased substantially after the federal propaganda ban in 2013. This helps to understand the welfare of LGBT people in Russia specifically after the federal propaganda ban in 2013, and how the propaganda ban affected their welfare. This article is also useful in interpreting reports by Russian LGBT organizations and the Human Rights Watch, which state that violence against LGBT people has increased in the years following the propaganda ban²⁸.

Most other studies concerning political homophobia in Russia explore LGBT people's perceptions of the homosexual propaganda ban, increasing negative attitudes toward LGBT people, and increasing conservative trends in Russia^{29, 30}. These studies interview LGBT people and activists throughout Russia about their perceptions on the political climate in Russia. While these studies are important, understanding the evolving role of the Russian Orthodox Church in connection with the government on political homophobia is an important gap in the literature that this project intends to fill.

Political homophobia is also a global phenomenon. According to Amusan et. al., culture and religion influenced the anti-homosexual laws in African countries, specifically Uganda³¹. Leaders there argue that homosexuality can potentially destroy their traditions and family values -- arguments that hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church have also made in defense of bans on Pride parades and "homosexual propaganda." The same arguments were made in Poland, when Pride parades were banned in Warsaw and other cities in 2004 and 2005³². All of this suggests a broad link to religion and culture when enacting and justifying political homophobia around the world.

As previously stated, most studies about political homophobia and the Russian Orthodox Church exist separately from each other. This project fills the gap between the two, asking about legitimacy, which is the belief that a rule, institution, or leader has the right to govern (Hurd n.d.). Questions concerning legitimacy itself, especially of laws like the federal homosexual propaganda law, ask why anyone should obey the command of a constitutionally valid law. People's values are normally engaged within governmental procedures³³, so government leaders' views on religion and homosexuality may play a part in the adoption and legitimation of homosexual propaganda laws. A legitimation strategy is the strategy by which political legitimacy is sought³⁴. Russia's legitimation strategy is largely personalistic, meaning that Putin's portrayal as a determined ruler who gave the Russians a sense of pride and identity, including the Orthodox identity, was used to give legitimacy to policies adopted by the government

4. Methodology

This research employs the method of process tracing in order to answer the question of whether the Russian Orthodox Church helped legitimize the actions of political homophobia taken by the Russian government after 2000. Process tracing is used to uncover the relations between possible causes and observed outcomes of a case³⁵. Specifically, this research uses theory-testing process tracing, which asks if a causal mechanism is present and if it functions as theorized³⁶. To operationalize this method, the theory is split into two parts: the Russian Orthodox Church's actions (X) and the government's and public's actions (Y). The actions of the Church are broken into discrete moments by analyzing official Church documents and Russian religious news reports archived by Paul Steeves, a scholar of history of religion in Russia, from Stetson University.

The official document I analyze is the "Basis of the Social Concept" (2000), which describes the Church's official views on a whole range of social issues, including homosexuality. I also analyze statements made from Russian Orthodox Church officials about Pride parades and protests in Moscow from 2010 to 2012, the federal ban on "propaganda of non-traditional sexualities" passed in 2013, and the proposed amendment declaring marriage to be a union between a man and a woman, which will be voted on in 2020. I also consider violence against the LGBT community and whether the Church influenced it. I offer some perspective from organizations outside of Russia, such as the European Court of Human Rights, to show the international reaction to Russia's new wave of political homophobia. Survey data from the Levada Center, VTsIOM, and the Russian Public Opinion Foundation (FOM) are used to track public opinion on homosexuality, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Pride parades, which helps to

determine whether the use of political homophobia by the government may be considered legitimate by the people of Russia. “The Basis of the Social Concept” has already been translated into English by the Russian Orthodox Church, and most of the survey data from all three information centers are available in English.

To test my question, I use process tracing tests laid out by Punton and Welle known as straw-in-the-wind tests, hoop tests, and smoking gun tests³⁷. Straw-in-the-wind tests are the weakest of these tests because they are neither necessary nor sufficient to confirm a hypothesis but can increase the confidence in the hypothesis if the test is passed³⁸. Hoop tests offer high certainty and are necessary to confirm the hypothesis, since not passing disconfirms the hypothesis³⁹. Smoking gun tests offer high uniqueness and are sufficient to confirm the hypothesis; if the hypothesis passes the test, then I can be confident that the hypothesis is true⁴⁰. While straw-in-the-wind tests are the weakest, Mahoney makes the point that many added up together can add up to strong support for the hypothesis, so they should not be counted out in this study⁴¹.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1. The Basis of the Social Concept, “Propaganda of Homosexuality,” and Russia’s First Pride

“The Basis of the Social Concept” was approved in 2000 by the Bishops’ Council of the Russian Orthodox Church. It reflects the position of the Church on many problems that are socially significant today. This includes the Church’s official condemnation of “homosexual relations” in Section XII: Problems of bioethics:

Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the Church unequivocally deplore homosexual relations, seeing in them a vicious distortion of the God-created human nature.

The Orthodox Church proceeds from the invariable conviction that the divinely established marital union of man and woman cannot be compared to the perverted manifestations of sexuality. the Church denounces any propaganda of homosexuality.⁴²

This was one of the first uses of the phrase “propaganda of homosexuality.” Over the years, this phrase started appearing in laws that banned the propaganda of homosexuality. Eight territories implemented bans and twenty-four more territories considered them⁴³. Since the Russian Orthodox Church was the first to use the phrase “propaganda of homosexuality,” and there was little to no use of it before, “The Basis of the Social Concept” and this phrase connects propaganda bans directly to the Russian Orthodox Church. This piece of evidence constitutes a smoking gun test because it gives high confidence that the hypothesis of the Russian Orthodox Church legitimizing political homophobia is true and that other alternative hypotheses are false. If the phrase “propaganda of homosexuality” was not used for the first time and directly by the Russian Orthodox Church, then that would weaken the hypothesis.

The year 2000 was also important because it was the year that Vladimir Putin became the president of Russia, a title which he kept until 2008 and regained in 2012. In 2000, Putin made his commitment to Orthodoxy clear by accepting the Patriarch’s blessing, and he has continued to show his commitment to Orthodoxy in many other nods to the Church since then⁴⁴.

In 1999, only about 50% of people in Russia called themselves Orthodox, but this number would grow to 63% by 2006⁴⁵. Also, a majority of respondents said that Orthodoxy “is a national tradition, the faith of our forefathers,” making it a uniting cultural trait for a majority of Russian people⁴⁶. In 2006, the Ryazan region became the first region in Russia to ban the propaganda of homosexuality. In May of 2006, the mayor of Moscow also prohibited what would have been Russia’s first Pride parade. The mayor was influenced by religious and nationalist leaders who openly incited attacks on the parade, and who called it a “glorification of sin”⁴⁷. The chief of security for Moscow’s mayor also said that he wanted to ban a Pride conference and festival, saying, “They violate our rights. We have our traditions, lots of religious groups told us that they were against gay pride”⁴⁸. The chief of security was focused on defending traditional values and religion before rights like free speech, even when Russia had assumed presidency of the Council of Europe, which is focused on human rights, and hosted the G8 in that same year. This shows the value placed on traditionality, a core principle of the Russian Orthodox Church, and religion’s power in general in Russia.

Putin’s public commitment to Orthodoxy and the defense of traditional values by authorities in Moscow were perfect ingredients for more political homophobia to be implemented by the government -- seen in the Ryazan propaganda ban and Moscow’s ban on Russia’s first Pride parade. The increase in Orthodox identification leading up to 2006 was also important for people to be more accepting of the political homophobia and the justification of it, maybe not even necessarily on religious grounds, but on cultural grounds. These factors together strongly pass a straw-in-the-wind

test, since all of these factors together increase the plausibility of the Russian Orthodox Church itself being a force behind legitimizing political homophobia. It is hard to firmly prove the theory with these examples, but together they provide stronger evidence to the theory being true.

5.2. Moscow Pride 2010

In May of 2010, the city government of Moscow denied permission for a Pride parade for the fifth year in a row. Moscow's mayor at the time, Yury Luzhkov, stated that pride was a "Satanic activity," that the LGBT Pride movement was a "destructive cult," and vowed to ban "the display of blasphemy under the guise of creativity and protected by the principle of freedom of speech" permanently⁴⁹. All of this rhetoric is religious in nature, and pits the Pride movement against religion, and thus the Russian Orthodox Church, by calling it a cult.

The decision to ban Pride was also influenced by the protests of a movement called "Narodnyi Sobor," which translates to "People's Cathedral." Narodnyi Sobor was protesting against Pride parades and for a Eurasian Court of Human Rights⁵⁰. The movement is against the propaganda of homosexuality and for traditional family values -- views in direct accordance with the Russian Orthodox Church. The movement's use of the phrase "propaganda of homosexuality" is significant, since the Ryazan region was the only region that had used it in an official law by 2010. The main organization to use it before that was the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000, so the Church most likely informed their use of the phrase, and the Narodnyi Sobor further legitimized and proliferated its use. The views held by the Narodnyi Sobor movement, especially those for traditional values, would have given the movement more positive news coverage because they align with the views of the Russian government.

Narodnyi Sobor's support for a Eurasian Court of Human Rights is also significant, because if one were made, it may spare Russia from rules and rights defended by the European Court of Human Rights. These rights include rights to free speech, which have been used by the European Court of Human Rights to condemn Russia's political homophobia⁵¹. For example, in 2010 the Court found Moscow's prohibition of Pride parades illegal and fined the city 30,000 Euros. A Eurasian Court of Human Rights would probably not give the same ruling, since "Eurasianist" rhetoric is often anti-Western and exclusivist, and this type of rhetoric is often used to justify homophobia⁵².

Later in 2010, news reports came out saying that supporters of Pride and Pride parades allegedly attacked Orthodox picketers in Moscow⁵³. The leader of the LGBT movement in Moscow said that the attack was made up. Whether or not this story is true, it shows the power of the Church in the media, since the Church and the government share a lot of the same views on traditionality. The story was used in order to make the LGBT movement look bad. The population of Russia was already against Pride parades, however, with 82% polled against them⁵⁴. This high percentage also corresponds with the growing number of Orthodox identifiers from 2006 to 2010, which, according to a poll from the Russian Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), made a nine percent jump to 72%⁵⁵. The Church's power in the media and growing conglomerate in the country by 2010 help to show that the Church had a hand in legitimizing the growing homophobic route taken by the government and the population's acceptance. These examples from the events around Moscow Pride in 2010 strongly pass a straw-in-the-wind test, because the Church's hand in the events increase the plausibility of the Russian Orthodox Church being a legitimizing force for the political homophobia implemented by the Russian government. It is hard to firmly prove the theory, especially when the percentage of people against Pride parades is higher than that of Orthodox identifiers, but all of the factors from 2010 provide stronger evidence to the overall theory being true.

5.3. Moscow Pride 2011

In May of 2011, the city of Moscow once again denied permission for a Pride parade for the sixth year in a row, and in August, Mayor Sergey Sobyenin decided to ban Pride parades and demonstrations for the next 100 years (until 2111)^{56, 57}. The Russian Orthodox Church was vocal in its approval for these decisions. When some individuals decided to go on with a Pride parade despite the ban, Archpriest Chaplin, on behalf of the Church, thanked the Moscow authorities for their violent dispersal of the demonstration⁵⁸. In this case, the Russian Orthodox Church blatantly legitimized and justified violence against the LGBT community and homophobia in general. Around that time, the Church also stated that there had never been a "propagandistic" action by the LGBT community in Moscow, and that the population does not approve of "propaganda of homosexuality" anyway. Shown here is the use of the phrase "propaganda of homosexuality" once again, giving further credence and publicity to the phrase before its use in propaganda bans in six more territories in 2012 and the federal ban in 2013⁵⁹.

The 100-year ban was also upheld by the Moscow city court in 2012 after the Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods violently broke up attempted LGBT rallies in the city. The Union of Orthodox Brotherhoods was founded in 1990 and

instigated by the Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church⁶⁰. Although it became increasingly unpopular, its connection to the Church is still significant in showing the Church's influence on homophobia and its acceptance by the government and the Russian people.

According to the Levada Center, 69% of Russians polled called themselves Orthodox adherents⁶¹. While this number is lower than the previous year's findings by the FOM, this percentage may be reflecting just believers – those whose religiosity may be considered intrinsic, or an organizing factor of life, rather than extrinsic and serving other social goals⁶². The Levada Center also reported that the percentage of Orthodox believers had increased by 13% since 2007. Intrinsic religiosity has been found to be related for more restricted sexuality and negative attitudes toward homosexuality, so the increase in Orthodox believers likely also increased the amount of people who would agree with the Church's negative views on homosexuality and the "propaganda of homosexuality." Once again, the events and factors surrounding Moscow Pride in 2011 pass a straw-in-the-wind test, since all of these factors together, especially the increase in Orthodox believer-ship, approval of violence against LGBT people, and the Church's use of the phrase "propaganda of homosexuality," increase the probability of the Russian Orthodox Church legitimizing political homophobia among the people of Russia. These examples provide stronger evidence to the theory being true, even if it is hard to completely confirm it.

5.4. Federal Propaganda Ban (2013)

On June 11, 2013, the Russian state Duma passed the law banning the "propaganda of non-traditional sexualities." The original draft of the law used to word "homosexuality," but it was changed to "non-traditional sexualities" between readings of the law in the Duma⁶³. While the law's phrasing is different from the Russian Orthodox Church's original phrasing, it actually makes the law more flexible and groups homosexual people in with groups like pedophiles, which is harmful to the LGBT community. The law was definitely inspired by the Russian Orthodox Church's phrase "propaganda of homosexuality," since it was used in the original draft ready the Duma. Since the phrasing of the law was inspired by the Church, this evidence is necessary to keep the theory under consideration. It also constitutes a smoking gun test because it gives high confidence that the hypothesis of the Russian Orthodox Church legitimizing political homophobia is true and that other alternative hypotheses are false. If the phrase was not essentially coined by the Russian Orthodox Church, then the link to the Church would be less evident and the hypothesis would be weaker.

The Russian Orthodox Church also lobbied for the federal propaganda law, and it was met with a cheer from the Orthodox community⁶⁴. This shows the close link between the government and the Church. Also, according to VTsIOM, 56% of Russians believed that the Russian Orthodox church has between some and substantial influence over the life of the people⁶⁵. This shows that the majority of Russian people are likely to listen to the Church and believe that its word and beliefs impact them, including beliefs about homosexuality, and helps to defend the hypothesis through passing a straw-in-the-wind test, meaning that it increases the likelihood of the Church being a legitimizing force behind the government's use of political homophobia.

The day the Duma passed the propaganda ban, LGBT rights activists were attacked by anti-LGBT Orthodox activists and detained by police, and earlier that day, anti-LGBT activists picketed the Duma while holding Orthodox icons and chanting prayers⁶⁶. This is more evidence of the Church and its members being behind violence against LGBT people and homophobia. It's also evidence of Orthodoxy being used to aid homophobia, since Orthodox chants were used while picketing the Duma. There is also evidence that the number of hate crimes against LGBT people in Russia increased in the years after the federal propaganda ban⁶⁷. All of this helps to show how the Church legitimized homophobia among the public, which would give more fuel for the government using it.

5.5 Defining Marriage in the Constitution

In January of 2020, Putin proposed a new amendment to the Russian constitution, which would declare marriage to be a union between a man and a woman^{68, 69}. The proposed amendment was within a new package of amendments meant to allow Putin to remain in power after 2024, and political scientists say that the marriage amendment is meant to drum up support for the package overall by attaching it to traditional values⁷⁰. Government spokespeople also justify the amendment by connecting it to Russian culture and a wide belief in God⁷¹. Both this justification and the connection to traditional values point to religion and the Russian Orthodox Church being key factors in the amendment's conception.

The Russian Orthodox Church also vocally supports this amendment, because it has always fundamentally opposed same-sex marriage. The Church articulates this view in "The Basis of the Social Concept:" "The Orthodox Church

proceeds from the invariable conviction that the divinely established marital union of man and woman cannot be compared to the perverted manifestations of sexuality”⁷². Over the years, Patriarch Kirill and other Church officials have spoken out against same-sex marriage. In 2013, Kirill stated that he was “troubled by the fact that the legalization of same-sex marriage is the first time that sin will be legitimized by the law”⁷³. Through speaking against same-sex marriage, Kirill worked to delegitimize it and for the opposite to occur – more political homophobia -- which would manifest in the federal propaganda ban, and eventually lead to the amendment considered in 2020. Other statements made by the Church state that the legalization of same-sex marriage is a “fatal and suicidal policy,” that it is literally apocalyptic, and that it goes against the traditional values upon which Russia has built itself^{74, 75}. Hearing all of these denunciations of same-sex marriage could have influenced the Russian people, 80% of whom support the amendment defining marriage to be put in the constitution. These factors pooling together to form the thoughts around the marriage amendment strongly pass a straw-in-the-wind-test, because all of them together help to increase the probability that the Russian Orthodox Church helped legitimize political homophobia, and in this case, the amendment defining marriage. It is hard to firmly prove the theory with these examples, but together they provide stronger evidence to the theory being true.

6. Conclusion

The evidence presented throughout this paper passes both straw-in-the-wind tests and smoking gun tests. As stated before, while straw-in-the-wind tests are the weakest process tracing tests, many altogether can provide strong evidence for the hypothesis being true. The continuous appearance throughout the years of the Russian Orthodox Church in issues pertaining to political and popular homophobia show its influence in providing support and legitimacy to the actions of the government. The use of the Church’s phrase “propaganda of homosexuality” in laws around Russia and the original draft of the federal propaganda ban show that the Church definitely had at least some part in the political homophobia adopted by the Russian government, or at least inspired it. To answer to Barnett’s question of legitimacy, why do the people of Russia obey or even support these propaganda laws and bans on Pride?⁷⁶ This research shows that the Russian Orthodox Church’s views on homosexuality, traditionalism, and morality give validation for the laws and make the people believe that what the government is doing is correct. Putin’s commitment to Orthodoxy and the personalistic legitimation strategy of his regime just exacerbated the Church’s power in all things regarding political homophobia.

The story of political homophobia in Russia is ongoing, and with the vote on the new amendment package being delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the story will likely only go on for longer. The Russian Orthodox Church has also been growing year after year, so it will be interesting to see how it continues to influence the homophobia going on in Russia. The issue of political homophobia in Russia and other parts of the world and its influences deserves more attention in order to get at the roots of the problems and improve conditions for LGBT people around the world.

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