

Historical development

of the anti-gender movement

in Russia (1991–2025):

problem formulation

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Introduction

Recent decades have been marked by the growing influence of conservative political forces and the intensification of “traditional values” rhetoric across many countries worldwide. This global shift documented by scholars in both Central and Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space has been accompanied by the revision of previously established agreements in the fields of gender equality and the rights of sexual minorities, as well as by the mobilization of both societal and state actors against the so-called “gender ideology¹”. In academic literature, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as anti-gender politics and is understood as a specific form of political mobilization that brings together heterogeneous actors around the critique of gender equality, women’s rights, and LGBT+ community. Russian Federation occupies a distinctive position in this context. On the one hand, the anti-gender agenda has evolved beyond a component of public debate to become a central element of state ideology and foreign policy, positioning Russia as an “international guardian of conservatism²”. On the other hand, the Russian case exhibits significant specificity rooted in the dynamics of the post-Soviet transition and the transformation of the gender order during the 1990s. It was precisely in this decade characterized by the collapse of the Soviet paternalistic system, economic crisis, and the search for new social identities that the foundations were laid for the subsequent institutionalization of conservative gender policy³.

The Soviet gender order, often described by scholars as *etatist*, implied a specific “contract” between the state and its citizens: women were expected to combine the roles of “worker” and mother within a framework of formal equality and

- 1 Edenberg E. Anti-gender politics as discourse coalitions: Russia’s domestic and international promotion of “traditional values” // *Problems of Post-Communism*. – 2023. – Vol. 70, No. 2. – P. 175-184. Korolczuk E., Graff A., Kantola J. Gender danger: Mapping a decade of research on anti-gender politics // *Journal of Gender Studies*. – 2025. – Vol. 34, No. 5. – P. 621-640.
- 2 Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. Anti-LGBT+ Politics in Russia / A. Kondakov. – 2024. – URL: <https://oxfordre.com/politics> (accessed:19.02.2026).
- 3 Golovina, A., Arkhipova, M. “The Transformation of Gender Contracts in Russia in the 1990s” // *Woman in Russian Society*. – 2025. – No. 2. – Pp. 45-62.

state-supported social infrastructure, while men fulfilled the functions of "protector" and "breadwinner" within a hyper-masculine, militarized state⁴. The collapse of this system in 1991 led to a profound transformation of gender contracts. As demonstrated by A. Golovina and M. Arkhipova, during the 1990s the dominant female strategies remained those of the "housewife" and the "working mother". However, the transitional period imposed additional burdens: amid the degradation of social welfare and domestic service systems, a substantial share of domestic labor and care work was shifted onto women, who were compelled to devote considerable time and effort to these tasks at the expense of their effective adaptation to the emerging market economy⁵. Men, in turn, experienced a crisis of masculinity, driven by their inability to fulfill the traditional breadwinner role in the new economic reality⁶.

One of the most significant consequences of this period was a shift in the ideological vector: from official Soviet egalitarianism (albeit largely declarative) to a resurgence of patriarchal rhetoric in the public sphere⁷. In the context of open borders and the growing influence of religious institutions, particularly the Russian Orthodox Church, discourses emphasizing the need to "restore" allegedly authentic traditions of masculinity and femininity perceived as lost or distorted during the Soviet period⁸ began to spread. At the same time, as scholars note, this period also witnessed the decriminalization of homosexuality (1993), made possible in part by Russia's aspirations to join the Council of Europe and by the activism of early LGBT+ organizations⁹. However, this liberalization remained limited and did not result in the formation of a stable societal consensus regarding the rights of LGBT+ people.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to bridge the gap between the recognition of anti-gender politics in contemporary Russia and a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying its formation and institutionalization. The current situation characterized by the adoption of laws banning the

4 Zdravomyslova, E. A., Temkina, A. A. "State Construction of Gender in Soviet Society" // Journal of Social Policy Studies. – 2003. – Vol. 1. – No. 3-4. – Pp. 299-322.

5 Golovina, A., Arkhipova, M. "The Transformation of Gender Contracts in Russia in the 1990s" // Woman in Russian Society. – 2025. – No. 2. – Pp. 45-62.

6 Zdravomyslova, E. A., Temkina, A. A. "State Construction of Gender in Soviet Society" // Journal of Social Policy Studies. – 2003. – Vol. 1. – No. 3-4. – Pp. 299-322.

7 Kalabikhina, I. E. "Gender Problems of the Transformational Economy" // Moscow University Economics Bulletin. Series 6: Economics. – 2010. – No. 2. – Pp. 78-92.

8 Beliakova, N. A. "The 'Woman Question' in Orthodoxy: The History of Discussion in the Second Half of the Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries" // Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Philosophy and Conflict Studies. – 2019. – Vol. 35. – No. 1. – Pp. 194-208.

9 Alexander R. Regulating Homosexuality in Soviet Russia, 1956-91. – Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021.

"propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" (hereafter – "LGBT propaganda" law) (2013, 2022), the prohibition of legal gender recognition and gender-affirmative procedures (2023), the designation of the "International LGBT Public movement" as extremist (2023), as well as the intensification of anti-abortion policies and "traditional values" rhetoric is often perceived by observers as a sharp rupture with the preceding period. However, as scholars working within critical discourse analysis and historical sociology have argued, such transformations are rarely spontaneous. They become possible only when corresponding rhetoric and systems of meaning are cultivated over extended periods within the discursive field, gradually achieving hegemonic status¹⁰. Identifying these origins, reconstructing the stages of evolution of anti-gender discourse, and analyzing its transformation from fragmented media statements into a coherent state ideology constitute the central research problem of this study.

The theoretical and methodological framework of this study is grounded in the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Norman Fairclough, as well as in Raewyn Connell's structural-constructivist approach to gender. Following Michel Foucault, discourse is understood not merely as a collection of statements on a given topic, but as a systemic formation that produces and stabilizes social representations perceived as true and natural within a given community¹¹. Discourse is inseparable from power relations: it both expresses and reproduces them, forming what Foucault conceptualized as "power/knowledge" relations¹². In this context, particular importance is attached to the concept of hegemonic discourse developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Through discursive practices, the cultural hegemony of specific social groups is established not only through coercion but also through the production of "common sense", subtly embedded within broader social strata¹³.

Norman Fairclough's methodology, oriented toward a three-dimensional analysis of text, discursive practice, and social context, enables an examination of how specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies contribute to the construction of social identities, the formation of hierarchical social

10 Fairclough N. Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language. – London: Longman, 1995.

11 Foucault, M. The Will to Truth: Beyond Knowledge, Power, and Sexuality. Works from Different Years / trans. from French. – Moscow: Kastal', 1996.

12 Volkov, V. V., Kharkhordin, O. V. Theory of Practices. – St. Petersburg: European University at St. Petersburg Press, 2008.

13 Pronkina, E. S. "Features of LGBT Discourse in Russian Media Initiated by Debates on the Regulation of Sexuality" // Journal of Social Policy Studies. – 2016. – Vol. 14. – No. 1. – Pp. 73-88.

relations, and the reproduction of discriminatory meanings¹⁴. This approach is particularly productive for analyzing media materials and legislative texts, which serve as key sites for the production and reproduction of anti-gender discourse.

The conceptualization of gender in this study follows Raewyn Connell's structural-constructivist theory, according to which gender is not a fixed attribute of individuals but a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women, embedded in social institutions and practices¹⁵. Within this framework, particular importance is attached to the concepts of "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity", which describe the hierarchy of gender positions and the mechanisms sustaining the patriarchal order¹⁶.

In this study, anti-gender discourse is defined as a form of right-wing political discourse that, by appealing to "traditional values", the "protection of the family", and "national security", positions itself in opposition to gender equality and sexual freedoms. It advocates restrictions on the rights of women and the LGBT+ community, as well as constraints on the activities of feminist and queer organizations¹⁷. It is important to emphasize that anti-gender discourse does not reject gender as such; rather, it actively constructs and imposes rigid, hierarchical, and essentialist notions of "authentic" masculinity and femininity, marginalizing all that falls outside these boundaries.

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive account of the formation, development, and institutionalization of anti-gender discourse and anti-gender politics in Russia from 1991 to 2025, based on a historical-discursive analysis. To achieve this aim, the following objectives are pursued:

- to develop a periodization of anti-gender rhetoric and policy in Russia with regard to the LGBT+ community and women from 1991 to 2025;
- to identify and analyze the key actors and institutions involved in promoting anti-gender discourse at different historical stages;
- to conduct a discursive analysis of key legislative acts, public statements by political elites, and

14 Fairclough N. Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language. – London: Longman, 1995.

15 Connell, R. Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Gender Politics / trans. from English. – Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015.

16 Demetriou D. Z. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique // Theory and Society. – 2001. – Vol. 30, No. 3. – P. 355-377.

17 Korolczuk E., Graff A., Kantola J. Gender danger: Mapping a decade of research on anti-gender politics // Journal of Gender Studies. – 2025. – Vol. 34, No. 5. – P. 621-640.

- media campaigns representing anti-gender politics;
- to characterize the specific features of anti-gender discourse and the anti-gender movement in the period from 2022 to 2025 in the context of increasing state control and the militarization of public life;
- to identify similarities and differences in the functioning of anti-gender discourse and policy with regard to the two groups under study: LGBT+ community and women.

Given that this study is situated within a critical tradition of the social sciences that acknowledges the inevitable subjectivity and positionality of all knowledge, it is necessary to **outline the author's research position**. My interest in this topic has been shaped by long-term engagement with the study of gender relations in post-Soviet Russia, as well as participation in academic debates on human rights, social justice, and mechanisms of symbolic violence. I proceed from an understanding of gender as a social construct and share the values of equality and non-discrimination, which inevitably shape the analytical focus on identifying power asymmetries and discriminatory mechanisms embedded in anti-gender discourse. At the same time, I strive for maximum analytical rigor and verifiability of conclusions, relying on a well-defined theoretical framework, systematic analysis of empirical material, and transparency of methodological procedures.

The scholarly contribution of this study is defined by several factors. First, it represents the first attempt in both Russian and international historiography to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of anti-gender discourse with regard to two key groups such as LGBT+ community and women across the entire post-Soviet period (1991-2025). Second, the study draws on a unique source base that includes not only legislative acts and media publications, but also materials from the private Archive of Elena Gusyatinskaya, containing press clippings from the 1990s related to LGBT+ issues, thereby enabling the reconstruction of early stages in the formation of anti-gender discourse that remain underexplored in existing scholarship. Third, the application of synchronic and diachronic analysis combined with critical discourse analysis following Norman Fairclough's methodology makes it possible not only to trace the evolution of discursive strategies over time but also to identify the deeper mechanisms of their interaction with social context and institutional practices.

The main research methods include historical (both synchronic and diachronic) analysis, comparative analysis, and critical discourse analysis, oriented toward the three-dimensional study of texts, discursive practices, and the social contexts of their production and reception.

I. Theoretical overview

I. I. Analytical framework and conceptualization of key concepts

In order to properly analyze anti-gender discourse, it is first necessary to conceptualize the key terms employed in this study.

First and foremost, the central concept is that of **discourse**, which has been extensively elaborated in both international and Russian scholarship. The term was initially introduced by Zellig Harris¹⁸, but a more comprehensive definition was later developed, most notably by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. For Foucault, discourse constituted a system of ideas and knowledge existing independently of any particular speaker¹⁹. Accordingly, discourse reflects not an individual position, but rather a shared understanding within a community, an idea perceived as true not by a single individual, but by a group or even society as a whole, which it represents. Within approaches such as critical discourse analysis, this understanding is grounded in the assumption of the constructivist nature of social reality: social relations, as well as collective knowledge about the world, are not objective but are produced through social interaction²⁰. From this perspective, any utterance (text, audio recording, video, etc.) should be understood as a reflection of dominant positions and as an imprint of a system of knowledge

18 Skrebtsova, T. G. Discourse Linguistics: Structure, Semantics, Pragmatics. A Course of Lectures. – Moscow: IaSK Publishing House, 2020. – P. 11.

19 Stoddart M. C. J. Ideology, hegemony, discourse: A critical review of theories of knowledge and power // Social Thought & Research. 2007. P. 203.

20 Jørgensen, M., Phillips, L. J. Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method. – Pp. 108-115.

disseminated through so-called discursive practices, specific ways of producing meaning through language²¹. These practices define the key characteristics of discourse:

- which types of phenomena may become its object;
- who is entitled to occupy the position of speaker and authorized to speak;
- which concepts are considered acceptable and legitimate;
- which theories are formulated and supported.

The combination of these characteristics determines the content and features of discourses within a given community at a specific historical moment²². Discursive practices do not merely reflect ideas; they assert and legitimize positions endowed with power. As early as the 1930s, the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci emphasized that hegemony within society can be established not only through economic means, as classical Marxism suggested, but also through culture²³. This idea was further developed by representatives of the Frankfurt School (Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Max Horkheimer) who elaborated the concept of cultural hegemony as a mechanism for establishing and reproducing power relations. In this context, discourse functions, on the one hand, as an expression of power²⁴, a means of disseminating dominant positions among the masses. On the other hand, it also serves to reinforce power relations, acting as what Michel Foucault conceptualized as "power/knowledge"²⁵. In the 1970s, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe further developed this perspective, introducing the concept of hegemonic discourse to describe discourses capable of producing and stabilizing cultural hegemony, often diffusing it subtly across broad social groups²⁶. At the same time, hegemonic discourse does not exist in isolation. It interacts with competing or alternative discourses, which may challenge, modify, or be partially incorporated into it. Through such interactions, meanings remain contingent and unstable. As a result, the content of hegemonic discourse is shaped not only by dominant actors but also by its relationship with alternative discourses²⁷.

21 Volkov, V. V., Kharkhordin, O. V. *Theory of Practices*. – St. Petersburg: European University at St. Petersburg Press, 2008. – P. 161.

22 Ibid, P. 176.

23 Stoddart M. C. J. *Ideology, hegemony, discourse: A critical review of theories of knowledge and power*. P. 203.

24 Here and throughout, the term power refers not to a specific political state apparatus, but to "the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and constitutive of its organization" (Foucault, M. *The Will to Truth: Beyond Knowledge, Power, and Sexuality*. Works from Different Years. – Moscow: Kastal', 1996. – P. 191).

25 V. V., Kharkhordin, O. V. *Theory of Practices*. – P. 161.

26 Stoddart M. C. J. *Ideology, hegemony, discourse: A critical review of theories of knowledge and power*. P. 206 – 207.

27 Pronkina, E. S. "Features of LGBT Discourse in Russian Media Initiated by Debates on the Regulation of Sexuality" // *Journal of Social Policy Studies*. – 2016. – Vol. 14. – No. 1. – P. 74.

Thus, within this study, discourse is understood as a set of statements that establishes and disseminates hegemonic ideas and representations within society. This interpretation is closely aligned with the principles of **critical discourse analysis**, which places at the center of inquiry the role of discourse in producing and reproducing unequal power relations²⁸. A major contribution to this approach was made by Norman Fairclough, who integrated linguistic analysis, macro-sociological analysis of social practice, and micro-sociological perspectives²⁹. He identified three key functions of discourse:

- the construction of identities;
- the formation of social relations;
- signification (the production of meaning).

Fairclough conceptualized individual instances of language use (e.g., a newspaper article or a magazine issue) as communicative events, while the configuration of all discourses operating within a given social institution or domain was termed the order of discourse³⁰. Each communicative event comprises three dimensions: the text itself, discursive practice (production and consumption of texts), and social practice (context)³¹. Accordingly, a comprehensive analysis of discourse requires attention to all three dimensions and their interaction. Within CDA, scholars frequently analyze media materials, political statements, and legislative texts, paying particular attention to the mechanisms through which hate speech is disseminated and discriminatory practices are normalized. This makes the approach especially suitable for the present study (see in detail – Sources section).

In addition to discourse, another key concept is **gender**. Depending on the theoretical approach, gender may be understood in various ways: as a set of characteristics associated with masculine and feminine social roles³², or as a manifestation of identity in interpersonal interaction³³. However, in order to maintain consistency with the theoretical framework outlined above, this study adopts Raewyn Connell's structural-constructionist approach. Connell focuses on how gender orders (historically constructed patterns of power relations between men and women) and gender regimes (institutional configurations

28 M., Phillips, L. J. Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method. – P. 117.

29 Ibid.

30 Fairclough N. Critical discourse analysis. London: Longman, 1995.

31 Jørgensen, M., Phillips, L. J. Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method. – P. 120.

32 Zdravomyslova, E. A., Temkina, A. A. 12 Lectures on Gender Sociology. – St.

Petersburg: European University at St. Petersburg Press, 2015. – P. 187.

33 Goffman E. Gender advertisement. New York: Harper&Row, 1987. P. 1-10.

of these relations) are established and reproduced³⁴. Within this framework, several related concepts are central:

- **Gender identity** – a deeply felt individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth and encompasses bodily expression as well as forms of gender expression such as clothing, speech, and behavior³⁵;
- **Sexual orientation** – an individual's romantic and/or emotional attraction to others, including dimensions of sexual attraction, behavior, and identity³⁶.

Connell also employs the concept of hegemonic masculinity to describe the dominant and socially valorized form of masculinity within a given social structure. Correspondingly, among various forms of femininity (generally subordinated within a patriarchal system) one may identify a privileged and "normative" femininity supported by institutional power³⁷.

It is important to note that discourse cannot be "anti-gender" in the literal sense: it inevitably produces meanings about masculinity and femininity and establishes norms governing them. Therefore, in this study, anti-gender discourse is understood not as a rejection of gender per se, but as a form of discourse that constructs and enforces specific discriminatory frameworks, stigmatizing certain sexual orientations and gender identities.

More precisely, **anti-gender discourse** is conceptualized as a form of right-wing political discourse that opposes gender equality and sexual freedom; advocates restrictions on the rights of the LGBT+ community, women, and other marginalized groups; seeks to limit the activities of feminist and queer organizations; and frames gender equality as a threat to "traditional values", religious beliefs, and established social norms³⁸. In this sense, the term will be used further in the study to describe discursive practices that correspond to the goals indicated in the definition. There anti-gender discourse functions as an instrument of marginalization and social exclusion, that is, a process through which certain individuals are pushed to the margins of society and deprived of full participation due to structural inequalities and discrimination³⁹.

34 Connell, R. *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Gender Politics*.

– Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2015. – P. 137.

35 Gender, equity & Human Rights. FAQ on health and sexual diversity// World Health Organization. P.1.

36 Ibid. P.2.

37 Demetriou D. Z. Connell's Concept of Hegemonic Masculinity: A Critique

// *Theory and Society*. Springer, 2001, 30 (3). P. 355.

38 Korolczuk, E., Graff, A., & Kantola, J. (2025). Gender danger. Mapping a decade of research on anti-gender politics. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 34(5), 621–640. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2025.2489584> (accessed:19.02.2026).

39 Joint report on social inclusion//European Commission. European Communities, 2004. P.10.

I.II. Review of existing research

In recent years, several sociological studies have examined anti-gender discourse in Russian media, while other publications have addressed state anti-gender politics. For the purposes of this study, the historiographical review includes only those works that directly engage with the discursive production of discrimination and stigmatization and that employ sources and methods comparable to those used here.

In the article "Features of LGBT Discourse in Russian Media Initiated by Debates on the Regulation of Sexuality", Elena Pronkina presents an analysis of 49 media publications concerning the LGBT+ community published between 2012 and 2014. The author identifies several key thematic clusters:

- the law against the "propaganda of homosexuality" in St. Petersburg and its enforcement;
- the federal law against the "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" among minors and its implementation;
- discrimination against gay individuals in Russia and protest activity in defense of LGBT+ rights;
- the legalization of same-sex marriage and protests against it in France;
- the 2014 Sochi Olympics;
- the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest.

Through content analysis of lexical units, the study identifies frequently occurring key terms, including "propaganda", "homosexuality" (as a stigmatizing term), "orientation", and "sex". The author concludes that, as of 2016, mass media conveyed a certain discursive ambivalence: "The contradictory structure of discourse illustrates the ambiguity of the status of LGBT+ under Russian legislation, in which 'non-heteronormative identities' are not criminalized but are nonetheless subject to institutionalized stigmatization, <...> accompanied by a growing opposition

between Russian and Western systems of values”⁴⁰.

In another article, J. Shukhland draws attention to how anti-queer discourse is linked to the production of citizenship and the national project of contemporary Russia. The scholar links demographic crisis, state-building (for example, the construction of the “Russian world” or indirect manifestations of racism), and Russia’s role in entrenching right-wing political values not only within its own territory but also in Europe as a whole⁴¹. Anti-gender discourse, then, becomes not only a designation of a position toward certain groups of the population but also a means of constructing “correct” citizenship: a heterosexual person who is married and raising children is considered a full citizen of the Russian Federation. In this discourse, individuals with different sexual orientations are not only discriminated against but also viewed as not fully enjoying civil rights⁴².

Other scholars have also emphasized the international dimension of anti-gender discourse in Russia. Emil Edenborg conceptualizes Russian anti-gender politics not as mono structure, but as a discursive coalition, a network of actors united by shared narratives, metaphors, and problem framings related to “traditional values” and LGBT+ community. These actors may not be formally coordinated, yet they collectively reproduce similar forms of knowledge. Edenborg highlights the role of anti-gender discourse as a form of soft power, used to position Russia in opposition to the liberal international order, often through the construction of LGBT+ individuals in the media as threats to national security, demographic survival, and public morality⁴³.

Moreover, in an earlier publication, Edenborg analyzes the “propaganda law” as a discursive mechanism in media that produces new boundaries of social belonging. Rather than merely restricting the circulation of information about queer individuals, the law regulates what forms of knowledge are permissible and how they may be represented. As a result, LGBT+ individuals acquire a form of “permitted visibility”, in which

40 Pronkina, E. S. “Features of LGBT Discourse in Russian Media Initiated by Debates on the Regulation of Sexuality” // Journal of Social Policy Studies. – 2016. – Vol. 14. – No. 1. – P. 80.

41 Jennifer Suchland (2018): The LGBT specter in Russia: refusing queerness, claiming ‘Whiteness’, Gender, Place & Culture, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2018.1456408.

42 Ibid.

43 Edenborg, Emil. (2023). Anti-Gender Politics as Discourse Coalitions: Russia’s Domestic and International Promotion of “Traditional Values”. Problems of Post-Communism, 70(2), 175-184. DOI: 10.1080/10758216.2021.1987269

they are depicted either in demonizing or victimizing terms⁴⁴.

With regard to discourses surrounding women's status, several studies are also noteworthy. In their analysis of reproductive policy discourse, N. M. Velikaya and E. A. Knyazkova⁴⁵, the authors draw attention to the contradictory nature of the concept of "reproductive rights" and characterize several key ideas disseminated in society:

- State-patriarchal (demographic): promotion of motherhood combined with state control over fertility, treating women's bodies as a state resource;
- Religious-conservative discourse: rejection of the concept of reproductive rights, framing abortion and contraception as immoral or sinful;
- Rights-based (autonomist): promotion of feminist ideas and the understanding of reproductive rights as fundamental human rights.

These discourses do not exist in isolation but interact dynamically.

More broadly, scholarship on femininity and women's status in Russia identifies several key trends in the 2000s and 2010s. The dominance of a state-centered patriarchal discourse was articulated in influential works by Anna Temkina and Elena Zdravomyslova⁴⁶, as well as in research by anthropologist Michele Rivkin-Fish⁴⁷. For example, the maternity capital program is interpreted not merely as an economic instrument but as a cultural project aimed at reinforcing traditional gender roles and the existing gender order. In practice, responsibility for demographic reproduction is shifted onto women without addressing structural issues such as poverty and economic instability.

Overall, the existing literature allows for several key conclusions:

- Since the 2000s, a patriarchal state-centered

44 Edenborg, E. (2015). "Banning Homosexual Propaganda": Belonging and Visibility in Contemporary Russian Media. *Sexuality & Culture*, 19, 256-274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-014-9255-0> (accessed:19.02.2026).

45 Velikaya, N. M., & Knyazkova, E. A. (2021). Reproductive rights of women in the political discourse of modern Russia. *Zhenshchina v rossiyskom obshchestve* [Woman in Russian Society], (1), 20-34. DOI: 10.21064/WinRS.2021.1.2

46 Temkina A., Zdravomyslova E. Gender's crooked path: Feminism confronts Russian patriarchy // *Current Sociology*. – 2014. – T. 62. – №. 2. – С. 253-270.

47 Rivkin-Fish M. Pronatalism, gender politics, and the renewal of family support in Russia: Toward a feminist anthropology of "maternity capital" // *Slavic review*. – 2010. – T. 69. – №. 3. – С. 701-724.

hegemonic discourse has been constructed in Russia with regard to both LGBT+ community and women, reinforced by the conservative discourse of the Orthodox Church and other actors;

- Women and their reproductive rights are framed as objects of state control and as resources for demographic policy and state stability, with policy instruments (e.g., maternity capital) functioning as tools of cultural normalization rather than purely economic support;
- Since the 2010s, the media has begun actively to construct a negative image of LGBT+ community, particularly during the controversy surrounding the adoption of “LGBT propaganda” law. These statements actively contrast “us” and “them”, and queer individuals are viewed as a potential threat to the values and attitudes considered characteristic and “correct” for the Russian population.
- By the mid-2010s, this discourse had expanded beyond domestic politics and began functioning as an instrument of foreign policy, operating as a form of soft power that shapes Russia’s international image and appeals to like-minded actors.

The novelty of the present study lies in its potential to complement existing scholarship by providing a detailed periodization of the development of anti-gender discourse, identifying its key turning points and stages, and analyzing the narratives associated with them.

II. Sources

The construction of the source base for this study was determined by its theoretical and methodological framework: CDA in the tradition of Norman Fairclough, which requires attention to the three dimensions of the communicative event: text, discursive practice, and social context. Accordingly, sources were selected so as to make it possible to analyze not only the content of statements, but also the conditions of their production, circulation, and reception, as well as their relationship to institutional change. Depending on the research objectives and chronological period, three main groups of sources were identified, each subject to specific selection criteria.

The first group: legal and policy documents. In this study, these are treated in a dual capacity: both as texts subject to discursive analysis (including the identification of rhetorical strategies, nominative practices, and modes of legitimation) and as a crucial component of the sociohistorical context, reflecting institutional decisions and power relations. The criteria for including documents in this group were as follows:

1. A direct connection to the regulation of the status of women or the LGBT+ community, including reproductive rights, family policy, criminal and administrative prosecution, bans on "gay propaganda", and related issues.
2. Significance for the formation and consolidation of anti-gender discourse. The sample included both adopted federal and regional laws and rejected draft laws, provided that they became the subject of broad public debate and reflected key discursive shifts (for example, A. V. Chuev's 2003 draft law).
3. Representativeness with respect to the stages of periodization identified in Chapter 1, from the 1993 decriminalization of homosexuality to the 2023 ban on legal gender recognition and gender-affirmative procedures.

The final list includes 28 legal and policy documents and official texts, including federal laws, presidential decrees, concepts and strategies, regional legislative acts, court decisions, as well as explanatory notes and official reviews accompanying draft laws, which make it possible to reconstruct the logic of the legislator. The Constitution of the Russian Federation is treated separately as the foundational document establishing the principles of formal equality.

The second group: documents of religious organizations.

In accordance with the theoretical framework of the study, which conceptualizes anti-gender discourse as a product of a "discursive coalition", the source base includes documents and public statements issued by the Russian Orthodox Church. The selection criteria were: (1) affiliation with the official position of the Russian Orthodox Church (that is, documents adopted by church councils or statements by the Patriarch); (2) significance for the formation of anti-gender rhetoric with regard to women and the LGBT+ community; and (3) chronological coverage, from the "Basis of the Social Concept" of 2000 to statements made in 2024–2025. The sample includes 3 documents, among them the "Basis of the Social Concept" and public statements by Patriarch Alexy II and Patriarch Kirill.

The third group: media publications. Given the exponential growth in the volume of digital content and the impossibility of exhaustively analyzing it within a single study, the method of nodal points was employed, a method widely used in discourse analysis to focus on moments of greatest discursive intensity.

Subgroup 3.1: Archival materials from the 1990s. This period represents the least studied segment in the historiography of anti-gender discourse and, at the same time, is crucial for understanding the genesis of many discursive strategies later institutionalized by the state. The materials were drawn from the private Archive of Elena Gusyatinskaya ("Archive of lesbians and gays"), a unique collection of clippings from mass-circulation Soviet and Russian newspapers and magazines from the 1990s and 2000s. The selection criteria were: (1) the presence of clearly articulated anti-gender discourse, including pathologization, criminalization, and stigmatization; (2) the mass-circulation character of the publication; and (3) the accessibility of the materials. The sample includes 11 publications from 1990 to 1999.

Subgroup 3.2: Publications from 2000 to 2025. This subgroup includes materials directly related to the key events identified in the historical periodization (Chapter 1):

debates over gay pride marches (2006–2012); the adoption of regional and federal “LGBT propaganda” laws (2006–2013); rhetoric during the Sochi Olympics (2013–2014); initiatives to restrict reproductive rights and combat domestic violence (2010s–2020s); and the radicalization of discourse after February 2022. This group includes publications from major Russian online media outlets and news agencies (Kommersant, RBC, TASS, Interfax, RIA Novosti, Gazeta.Ru, Fontanka.ru, Vedomosti, Parlamentskaya Gazeta, Radio Svoboda), as well as statements by key political actors recorded in these media or published on official websites (kremlin.ru, duma.gov.ru, patriarchia.ru). A separate subgroup consists of publications reflecting the position of international organizations, including a World Bank report. The total number of media sources analyzed for the period 2000–2025 was 44 publications (55 in total including archival materials).

My decision to devote particular attention to the 1990s and to draw on the archive of Elena Gussyatinskaya is guided by the conviction that it was precisely in this decade that durable discursive matrices were formed, which were subsequently reproduced and institutionalized by the state. The decision to focus on public statements by political elites and on legal and policy documents is linked to the theoretical framework, which treats the state as a key actor in the production of hegemonic discourse in the Russian context. At the same time, I recognize that this choice leaves aside the analysis of horizontal linkages and counter-discourses, which may become the subject of separate studies. The very inclusion of materials identified as instances of “anti-gender discourse” is itself an act of interpretation, grounded in an understanding of gender as a social construct and in a commitment to an anti-discrimination perspective. However, subjectivity is minimized through the clear specification of selection criteria such as lexical markers including “propaganda of homosexuality”, “non-traditional sexual relations”, and “traditional values” when used in a discriminatory sense and through reliance on academic definitions of anti-gender politics.

While acknowledging the limitations associated with the selective nature of media analysis, particularly the focus on “nodal points”, I maintain that the findings make it possible to identify the general trends in the evolution of anti-gender discourse and to lay the groundwork for further research. The full list of sources is provided at the end of the study in the Bibliography section.

Chapter 1. Historical analysis and periodization of the state anti-gender movement and anti-gender discourse

Gender policy in the USSR by 1991: a brief historical overview

Soviet gender policy has been analyzed by both Russian historians (for example, N. L. Pushkareva) and sociologists (for example, A. Temkina and E. Zdravomyslova). In Soviet reality, the regulation of sexuality and gender relations was carried out primarily through state norm-setting and discursive practices, which makes it possible to define the Soviet gender order as *etatist*⁴⁸. As E. V. Styazhkina notes, the Soviet state concluded a “small bargain” with men and women (essentially, a contract with the socialist state) through which all parties acquired implicit obligations and rights directly tied to expected forms of behavior in accordance with dominant gender contracts⁴⁹. By the 1980s, the USSR had witnessed a certain liberalization of the gender regime,

48 Zdravomyslova, E. A., Temkina, A. A. “State Construction of Gender in Soviet Society” // *Journal of Social Policy Studies*. – 2003. – Vol. 1. – No. 3-4. – Pp. 299-302.

49 Styazhkina, E. V. “Women’s and Men’s Everyday Life under Changing Gender Contracts in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century” // *Russian Everyday Life in the Mirror of Gender Relations: Collected Articles*. – Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2013. – P. 661.

expressed in the legislative restoration of the right to abortion, which had been restricted between 1936 and 1955, and in the simplification of divorce procedures, while preserving the discourse of the significance of motherhood and women's domestic responsibilities⁵⁰. The image of womanhood constructed by the state presupposed that women should combine the role of the "worker", consistent with communist ideology, with that of the mother, thus reflecting the reproduction of conservative patriarchal assumptions. According to the scholar I. Kon, the idealized representation of men was shaped by the politics of a "hypermasculine militarized state"⁵¹, which endowed such gender contracts as the "hero", the "front-line soldier", and the "athlete" with special prestige. At the same time, all dominant male gender contracts excluded men from the organization of everyday life, thereby legitimizing their passivity⁵² in the domestic sphere.

In the 1990s, however, gender contracts underwent substantial transformation. On the one hand, this was linked to the collapse of the socialist system and the transition to a market capitalist economy; on the other hand, it was connected to the increased availability of information about different life trajectories, forms of self-identification, and modes of self-realization. One of the key tendencies shaping the new reality was the trend toward individualization and the formation of a private sphere⁵³. At the same time, these changes unfolded in the context of a transformation of social policy, in which the state withdrew from many of its functions of supporting motherhood⁵⁴. Parallel to this, there was the emergence of ideas about restoring "authentic" traditions of masculinity and femininity that had allegedly been "tabooed" or "distorted" by Soviet reality⁵⁵. This gave rise to what scholars have termed "neoliberal gender traditionalism", predicated on the assumption of natural differences between the sexes that determine the existence of distinct male and female social destinies⁵⁶.

Behavioral strategies that did not conform to dominant gender contracts were subjected to negative social sanctions and perceived as deviant. These included sexual orientations

50 Temkina, A. A., Rotkirch, A. "Soviet Gender Contracts and Their Transformation in Contemporary Russia". — P. 9.

51 Kon, I. S. Man in a Changing World. — Moscow: Vremia, 2009. — P. 137.

52 Styazhkina, E. V. "Women's and Men's Everyday Life under Changing Gender Contracts in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century". — Pp. 667-668.

53 Zdravomyslova, E., Temkina, A. "Introduction: The Construction of Privacy as a Sphere of Care, Love, and Wage Labor". — P. 10.

54 Ibid. P. 11.

55 Zdravomyslova, E., Temkina, A. "Neo-traditionalism(s): The Transformation of Gender Citizenship in Contemporary Russia". — P. 205.

56 Ibid. P. 207.

and gender identities that did not correspond to the imposed "norm", that is, homo- and bisexuality, as well as trans-gender identity. The marginalization of non-heterosexual orientation, as well as non-cisgender identity, stemmed not only from its incompatibility with dominant gender contracts, but also from a range of discursive practices and normative restrictions. First, consensual same-sex relations between men were prosecuted under criminal law from 1934 to 1993. According to V. Volodin's calculations, more than 38,000 people were convicted under this provision, most of them in the territory of the RSFSR⁵⁷⁵⁸. Second, non-heterosexual orientation and non-cisgender identity were represented within a discriminatory medicalizing discourse: for example, several books on sexuality published in the 1960s described homosexuality in pathologizing terms⁵⁹. The 1980s and 1990s brought some changes in the regulation of "non-normative" sexuality and identity. Above all, discussion of non-heterosexual orientation was intensified by debates over the dangers of AIDS. Homosexuality was now directly associated with the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus, which only deepened its marginalization⁶⁰. Pathologizing and medicalizing discourses persisted. At the same time, during perestroika, under the influence of politics of "glasnost" and liberalization, alternative views of homosexuality began to emerge. These developments, however, did not immediately lead to the disappearance of pathologizing and criminalizing discourses, nor did they result in the immediate abolition of criminal prosecution after the collapse of the Soviet Union⁶¹.

Thus, by 1991:

- the dominant strategy with regard to women had long consisted in combining active participation in labor with motherhood and the so-called "second shift" of domestic management;
- moreover, in the early 1990s, a deformation of the social system that supported the realistic fulfillment of this gender contract was observed: the previously social Soviet state could no longer fulfill its functions of patronage over children (for example, through the established

57 Valodzin V. Criminal prosecution of homosexuals in the Soviet Union (1946- 1991): numbers and discourses // Working Paper. EUIHEC 2020/02 . P. 9-11. URL: https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/67530/HEC_2020_02.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (accessed:19.02.2026).

58 For the history of the introduction of criminal prosecution, see:

Healey, D. *Homosexual Desire in Revolutionary Russia*.

59 Alexander R. *Regulating Homosexuality in Soviet Russia, 1956-91*. Manchester University Press, 2021. P.82.

60 Roldugina, I., Suverina, K. *Flash: The Unknown History of HIV in the USSR*. – Moscow: Individuum : Eksmo, 2024. – 248 p.

61 Alexander R. *Regulating Homosexuality in Soviet Russia*.

system of free crèches, kindergartens, children's camps, and high-quality extracurricular education). This placed an additional and unexpected burden on family systems for the upbringing and employment of minors, as well as ensuring their long-term life strategy in a context where the state ceased to provide professional and everyday guarantees (the transition from a planned economy, including the provision of housing and employment through assignment, to a market economy of individual trajectory and independent capital accumulation).

- despite the broad formal rights granted to women in the Soviet Union and the state's policy of emancipation, a patriarchal traditionalist discourse persisted, emphasizing the primary importance of women as mothers;
- non-heterosexual orientation and non-cisgender identity within Soviet reality were marginalized both through legal prohibition and through discursive medicalization;
- In the 1980s, despite the partial liberalization of the gender regime during perestroika, no fundamental transformation of the status of queer people occurred, although public discussion began to emerge regarding the legitimacy of criminal prosecution and discrimination.

Legislative manifestations of anti-gender discourse regarding LGBT+ community: periodization 1991-2022

In order to construct a periodization of the development of the anti-gender movement with regard to the queer community between 1991 and 2022, an analysis was conducted of legislative acts that:

- altered the status of LGBT+ community through legislative means, directly affecting social reality by creating legal conditions for social relations;
- became the occasion or cause for large-scale media statements, whether in support of or in opposition to particular legislative initiatives.

A discursive analysis of these legislative acts was also conducted in order to identify the forms of "knowledge" produced by the legislator at the moment of their adoption. The results of this analysis are presented in Chapter 2.

Between 1991 and 2022, several significant legislative acts concerning the queer community were either adopted or discussed in legislative bodies:

1. Law of the Russian Federation *On Amendments and Additions to the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, the Criminal Procedure Code of the RSFSR, and the Corrective Labor Code of the RSFSR* of April 29, 1993, No. 4901-I – abolition of criminal prosecution for consensual sex between men, thereby legalizing consensual same-sex relations between men;
2. Draft Federal Law No. 311625-4 *On Introducing an Addition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Establishing Criminal Liability for the Propaganda of Homosexuality* – the first legislative initiative in contemporary Russian history to produce a discriminatory discourse with regard to homosexuality;
3. Law of St. Petersburg No. 108-18 of March 7, 2012, *On Amendments to the Law of St. Petersburg "On Administrative Offenses in St. Petersburg"* – an illustration of the

adoption of discriminatory regional legislation. Similar legal acts had been adopted in other constituent entities of the Russian Federation before 2012;

4. The 2013 draft federal law banning the propaganda of homosexuality, *On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation*, and subsequent amendments to Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offenses – the first federal discriminatory legal act and the subsequent strengthening of discrimination.

The adoption of the Law of the Russian Federation *On Amendments and Additions to the Criminal Code of the RSFSR, the Criminal Procedure Code of the RSFSR, and the Corrective Labor Code of the RSFSR* of April 29, 1993, No. 4901-I repealed Article 121(1) of the Criminal Code, thereby decriminalizing consensual same-sex relations between men. This measure was implemented not as part of a general revision of the Criminal Code and the adoption of a new legal document, which would occur only in 1996, but through a separate decision by President Boris Yeltsin. A possible reason for repealing the article was the desire to accelerate Russia's accession to the Council of Europe, which required the rapid liberalization of legislation in accordance with European standards. At the same time, Yeltsin's decision was preceded by activist efforts on the part of early LGB organizations calling for the abolition of criminal prosecution. In several queer periodicals of the early 1990s ("Tema", 1991; "Sibirskii variant", 1992; "Gei-dialog", 1993), appeals to the President were repeatedly published, calling for the repeal of the article on the grounds of its inhumanity and inconsistency with the state's broader democratic trajectory. The authors of these letters emphasized that criminal prosecution obstructed both the preservation of humanity and the fight against the AIDS epidemic. This framing contributed to the perception of repeal as a universal social issue requiring urgent resolution, rather than as a question concerning only the legal status of a specific community. However, it cannot be conclusively established that the activities of such organizations directly influenced the legislative process or prompted the state to reconsider the status of queer people.

Throughout the 1990s, anti-gender discourse continued to manifest itself in individual media publications and as a reaction to the emancipatory actions of community members and the circulation of alternative rhetoric concerning freedom of self-determination and sexual orientation. In normative terms, however, it re-emerged only in the early

2000s: it was at this moment that the first legislative initiative calling for a ban on the “propaganda” of homosexuality appeared. This regulatory and discriminatory motif would retain decisive significance for the status of the community until 2023. A. V. Chuev, a deputy of the fourth State Duma convocation, initiated a draft law proposing the addition of Article 242.1 to the Criminal Code in the following wording:

“Propaganda of homosexuality contained in a public speech, publicly displayed work, or mass media, including the public demonstration of a homosexual way of life and homosexual orientation, shall be punishable by deprivation of the right to hold certain positions or engage in certain activities for a term of two to five years”⁶².

The explanatory note to the draft law specifically stated that the reason for the initiative was that “propaganda is conducted both through the mass media and through the active introduction into educational institutions of curricula promoting homosexuality⁶³ as a norm of behavior”. Another intensifying factor was the initiative of several LGB organizations to hold a gay pride in Moscow⁶⁴. Thus, the direct emancipatory activity of the queer community served as a stimulus both for public and discursive backlash (see Chapter 2) and for legislative anti-gender initiatives. Despite the justifications advanced in its favor, Chuev’s draft law was not ultimately adopted. After revisions, it was explicitly recognized by the Government of Russian Federation as contradicting Article 14(1) of the Criminal Code, “according to which only a socially dangerous act may be recognized as a crime, whereas this phenomenon is not classified as such by legislation. Moreover, the definitions contained in the draft do not allow for a clear formulation of the objective side of the proposed corpus delicti”⁶⁵. Thus, the very emergence of this legislative initiative signals the development of anti-gender discourse, while the existence of legal constraints on its adoption within state legislative structures points to the

62 Draft Federal Law No. 311625-4, *On Introducing an Addition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Establishing Criminal Liability for the Propaganda of Homosexuality*. The initiation of the first normative act in contemporary Russian history to construct a discriminatory discourse regarding homosexuality.

63 Hereafter – the words, which are considered offensive language are translated as the author wrote them to show and maintain historicity.

64 Explanatory Note to the Draft Federal Law *On Introducing an Addition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Establishing Criminal Liability for the Propaganda of Homosexuality*.

65 Official Review of the Draft Federal Law *On Introducing an Addition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Establishing Criminal Liability for the Propaganda of Homosexuality*, submitted by State Duma deputy A. V. Chuev.

presence of discursive struggle and contradiction. On the one hand, a clearly expressed anti-gender tendency existed and found support in media discourse; on the other hand, broader democratization, the emerging discourse of the importance of human rights and freedoms, and the aspiration to realize the principles of a rule-of-law state functioned as full-fledged competitors to such anti-gender initiatives and positions.

Over time, however, the balance of these forces shifted in favor of anti-gender aspirations. The discussion surrounding the adoption of a similar law in St. Petersburg generated considerable public resonance (see Chapter 2). In February 2012, a law was adopted introducing Articles 7.1 and 7.2 into the regional Code of Administrative Offenses, establishing penalties for⁶⁶:

- “Public actions aimed at the propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgender identity among minors”;
- “Public actions aimed at the propaganda of pedophilia”.

It is important to note that, discursively, this law directly establishes proximity between homosexuality and transgender identity, on the one hand, and pedophilia, on the other, while also legitimizing discriminatory vocabulary (“sodomy”, “bisexualism”, etc.). The impact of these discursive elements on anti-gender discourse and on the construction of the image of the community will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 2.

At the federal level, Federal Law No. 44554-6 *On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation* was adopted in 2013, establishing liability for the “propaganda” of non-traditional sexual relations. The explanatory note to the draft law reproduced, in its opening section, the analogous document attached to Chuev’s draft law, reflecting normative continuity. At the same time, the following paragraph is especially revealing, as it signals the further development of anti-gender discourse and the strengthening of patriarchal traditionalist tendencies:

“The family, motherhood, and childhood, in their traditional understanding inherited from our ancestors, represent those values that ensure the continuous generation change,

⁶⁶ Law of St. Petersburg, On Amendments to the Law of St. Petersburg On Administrative Offenses in St. Petersburg.

serve as a condition for the preservation and development of the multinational people of the Russian Federation, and therefore require special protection from the state”⁶⁷.

Moreover, the original version of the draft law contained a direct reference to “homosexuality”, which was later replaced with the broader formulation “non-traditional sexual relations”.

Thus, based on normative regulation, the development of anti-gender discourse with regard to the queer community between 1991 and 2022 can be schematically divided into three stages:

1. The democratization of the criminalizing Soviet discourse, expressed in the repeal of Article 121(1) of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR and the emergence of greater space for alternative emancipatory discourse;
2. The beginning of the strengthening of the anti-gender movement within the normative sphere, manifested in initiatives to ban “gay propaganda” at the regional level and in the confrontation between anti-gender discourse and alternative tendencies at the federal level;
3. The consolidation of anti-gender content as the leading hegemonic state discourse, through the introduction of Article 6.21 into the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation.

After the launch of the full-scale armed invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the normative reinforcement of anti-gender discourse intensified further (see below).

⁶⁷ Explanatory Note to the Draft Federal Law On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation.

Legislative manifestations of anti-gender discourse regarding the status of women and the feminist agenda: periodization 1991–2022

Whereas the 1990s saw legislative changes aimed at abolishing discriminatory norms with regard to the queer community, the legal status of women was transformed in a different manner. The Russian Federation “inherited” from the RSFSR a legislative framework providing for formal equality between men and women under the 1993 Constitution⁶⁸, as well as guarantees of a broad range of women’s economic and political rights. However, as noted in the historiographical review, the state itself ceased to perform many of its paternalistic functions: in the 1990s, the systems of kindergartens and nurseries, extracurricular activities previously organized, for example, through cultural centers, and children’s camps all entered into crisis due to cuts in social spending⁶⁹. At the same time, the key gender contract of the “working mother” remained the dominant expectation, implying that women were socially required to participate actively in childrearing under conditions of economic instability while also organizing and partially providing the household’s material resources⁷⁰.

The tendencies outlined in the historiographical review were not the only factors directly shaping the emergence and development of anti-gender discourse. It is also necessary to take into account:

- the sharp deterioration of the demographic situation and the decline in the birth rate to 8.3 per 1,000 people, according to Rosstat⁷¹;
- the feminization of poverty, insofar as women with

68 Constitution of the Russian Federation: adopted by popular vote on December 12, 1993 (with amendments approved in the all-Russian vote of July 1, 2020) // Official Internet Portal of Legal Information. – URL: <http://pravo.gov.ru/> (accessed: 16.02.2026).

69 Situation of Children in the Russian Federation: The Results of Social Policy in the 1990s and Prospects / trans. from English. – Moscow: Ves’ Mir Publishers, 2003. – 304 p. – URL: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/506001468759872241/pdf/244501RU1ver1C1are00ut0During01990s.pdf> (accessed: 10.02.2026).

70 Golovina, A., Arkhipova, M. “The Transformation of Gender Contracts in Russia in the 1990s” // *Woman in Russian Society*. – 2025. – No. 2. – Pp. 45–62.

71 Vishnevsky, A. G. (ed.) et al. *Demographic Modernization of Russia, 1900–2000*. – Moscow: Novoe izdatel’sтво, 2006.

children outside marriage⁷² found themselves in a particularly vulnerable position within the new economic order, as well as the crisis of masculinity associated, for example, with job losses among men⁷³;

- the revival of the role of the Russian Orthodox Church, which actively advocated the reproduction of patriarchal representations and opposition to the liberal “Western” discourse on women’s rights and freedoms⁷⁴.

In this context, the 1990s were characterized by the coexistence and confrontation of two discursive strategies:

- a democratic strategy, expressed in attempts to entrench greater liberalism in legal norms and establish effective guarantees of equality between men and women;
- a patriarchal strategy, insisting on a return to traditional models of masculinity and femininity, reinforced by perceptions of the threat posed by demographic crisis and by the allegedly foreign imposition of gender equality norms upon the state.

Within the latter discourse, anti-gender positions were articulated primarily in statements issued by the Russian Orthodox Church, rather than in unambiguous federal-level legal acts. Nevertheless, the 1990s saw the emergence of a normative framework supporting motherhood as the preferred strategy. In 1995, the federal law *On State Benefits for Citizens with Children*⁷⁵ was adopted, establishing several types of benefits:

- maternity benefits;
- benefits for women who registered with a medical institution in the early stages of pregnancy;
- childbirth benefits;
- child-care and child benefits;
- special benefits for spouses of military personnel who were expecting or raising a child.

This law became the basis for the development of a subsidiary social policy with regard to motherhood and childhood, and an economic instrument for sustaining child-bearing as a socially advantageous life strategy.

72 Denisova, I. A., Kartseva, M. A. “Gender Aspects of Poverty in Russia: Absolute and Multidimensional Approaches” // *Woman in Russian Society*. – 2020. – No. 2. – Pp. 138-155.

73 Zdravomyslova, E., Temkina, A. “The Crisis of Masculinity in Late Soviet Discourse” // in: *On Masculinity(ies): Gender Studies* / ed. and comp. S. Ushakin. – Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2002. – Pp. 432-451.

74 Beliakova, N. A. “The ‘Woman Question’ in Orthodoxy: The History of Discussion in the Second Half of the Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Centuries” // *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Philosophy and Conflict Studies*. – 2019. – Vol. 35. – No. 1. – Pp. 194-208.

75 Federal Law of May 19, 1995 No. 81-FZ, *On State Benefits for Citizens with Children*.

From the early 2000s onward, patriarchal discourse began to develop more fully and found expression both in official documents and in the public position of the Russian Orthodox Church. Thus, in 2000, the "Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church" was adopted, with a separate section devoted to questions of "personal, family, and public morality". It directly affirmed the existence of differences between the sexes, literally given by the Creator, and regarded these as insurmountable distinctions in the self-realization of men and women. Orthodox marriage was recognized as indissoluble, and the text also contained a key thesis regarding the Church's view of women's role in general:

*"While highly valuing the social role of women and welcoming their political, cultural, and social equality with men, the Church at the same time opposes the tendency to diminish the role of women as wife and mother"*⁷⁶.

The 2000s also saw the adoption of legal acts that continued the state trend toward consolidating motherhood not only as a "traditional" but also as an economically advantageous strategy. In 2006, the federal law *On Additional Measures of State Support for Families with Children* introduced the practice of maternity capital, an additional financial support that could be spent on improving housing conditions, children's education, or the mother's pension savings⁷⁷. In 2009, the *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020*⁷⁸ was approved, in which, for the first time, direct emphasis was placed on the importance of strengthening common values, including "respect for family traditions".

At the same time, it would be inaccurate to claim that no liberal gender initiatives remained at the state level in the 2000s. Within this alternative discourse, Draft Law No. 284965-3 *On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Freedoms for Men and Women and Equal Opportunities for Their Realization*⁷⁹ was introduced in 2003. It proposed, among other things, a legislative prohibition on discrimination against women, the

76 Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church [Electronic resource]. – URL: https://azbyka.ru/otechnik/dokumenty/osnovy-sotsialnoj-kontseptsii-russkoj-pravoslavnoj-tserkvi/#0_10 (accessed:19.02.2026).

77 Federal Law of December 29, 2006 No. 256-FZ, On Additional Measures of State Support for Families with Children // Collected Legislation of the Russian Federation. – 2007. – No. 1 (Part I). – Art. 19.

78 Materials for Meetings of the State Authorities of the Russian Federation [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/424> (accessed: February 19, 2026).

79 Draft Federal Law No. 284965-3, On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Freedoms for Men and Women and Equal Opportunities for Their Realization [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/284965-3> (accessed:19.02.2026).

composition of leadership structures in state bodies with due regard for the representation of persons of both sexes, and a range of related innovations. In the explanatory note, the initiators of the draft law specifically stated that:

*"In the last decade, inequality in the position of men and women in our country has intensified. All the negative social phenomena of Russian society—unemployment, poverty, illness—today have a 'female face' <...> Open evidence of discrimination against women is also their almost complete displacement from the sphere of politics and state governance. It can be asserted that women do not influence the adoption of the most significant state decisions concerning the country's development"*⁸⁰.

However, although the draft law successfully passed its first reading in the State Duma in 2003, consideration in subsequent readings was postponed until 2009–2011, and in July 2018 the bill was definitively rejected.

The 2010s largely continued the tendencies that had already become entrenched in the 2000s through a solid legislative socio-economic base. The "Concept of the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025", adopted in 2007⁸¹, stated that:

- "Birth rates are negatively affected by <...> the contemporary family structure (orientation toward small families, the growing number of single-parent families), the heavy physical labor performed by a significant proportion of working women (around 15 percent), and the high number of terminated pregnancies (abortions)";
- "A low birth rate leads to demographic ageing of the population";
- "The main tasks of the demographic policy of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2025 are <...> strengthening the institution of the family, and reviving and preserving the spiritual and moral traditions of family relations".

These formulations reinforced the central vector of state policy aimed at sustaining women's role as mothers and primary

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Concept of the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025 (approved by Presidential Decree No. 1351 of October 9, 2007) [Electronic resource]. — URL: <https://base.garant.ru/191961/53f89421bbdaf741eb2d1ecc4ddb4c33/> (accessed:19.02.2026).

caregivers through socio-economic instruments, while also consolidating the primacy of the family at the federal level. In support of the latter, the demographic policy concept also envisaged the development of advisory support systems for families and the promotion of the values of large families. In addition to these measures, the Concept contained provisions aimed at encouraging migration, increasing life expectancy, and improving public health; nevertheless, its significance for consolidating the state's traditionalist position regarding women's role should not be underestimated.

In 2017, Government Directive No. 410-r of March 8, 2017, *On Approval of the National Strategy for Women for 2017-2022*⁸², was issued. This document includes both provisions aimed at securing formal equality with men and measures specifically targeted at supporting women with children. A large number of its measures are narrowly focused on improving the situation of women with children and on supporting pregnancy and childbirth. At the same time, the strategy does not deny the importance of women's professional self-realization, the unequal conditions women face in the labor market, or the urgency of gender-specific problems related to violence against women, such as involvement in sex work or sexualized violence. Thus, although state discourse continued to reflect democratic values to some extent, the emphasis on supporting motherhood and the patriarchal family structure remained significant and was reinforced through normative acts beyond the realm of strategic planning.

In 2021, Presidential Decree No. 400 adopted a new *National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation*⁸³, which stated the necessity of "protecting" and "strengthening traditional spiritual and moral values". Among these values, the document explicitly included the "strong family", while particular attention was paid to the "support of family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood" as a means of preserving the people of Russia, since "an increase in the birth rate becomes a necessary condition for increasing the population of Russia".

Against the backdrop of these normative developments, the years 2019-2020 also saw public debate in Russia over the necessity of adopting a law on the prevention of domestic

82 Directive of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 8, 2017 No. 410-r, *On Approving the National Strategy for Women for 2017-2022* [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.prlib.ru/item/680104> (accessed:19.02.2026).

83 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 2, 2021 No. 400, *On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* // Official Internet Portal of Legal Information. – July 3, 2021. – URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001> (accessed:19.02.2026).

violence. This initiative was supported by certain political figures, and a draft law was submitted to the State Duma. However, it encountered comprehensive criticism both in the media and within the legislature during deliberation. Despite strong support from expert organizations, NGOs, and the feminist community, as well as the existence of high-profile judicial precedents (the Margarita Gracheva case and the Khachatryan sisters case), the law was never adopted. This signals the persistence of a certain confrontation between democratic positions and anti-gender discourse, even as the latter increasingly achieved hegemony.

Thus, the evolution of anti-gender discourse in Russia constitutes a deliberate process of transition from a crisis response by conservative forces in the 1990s to the construction of a coherent state ideology in which the model of "patriarchal femininity" serves as a system-forming element. This model is based on the economic incentivization of motherhood, an ideological alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church, the integration of "traditional values" into strategic planning documents, and the consistent suppression of alternatives (for example, equality legislation and domestic violence legislation). As a result, a gender contract has been formed in which women are treated as objects of social policy rather than subjects of rights, and in which their primary value is defined by their reproductive contribution to the nation's "demographic security".

Anti-gender movement after February 2022: key developments and trends

The full-scaled invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022 opened a new chapter in the development of anti-gender discourse both with regard to the queer community and with regard to the status of women. Whereas these discourses had previously been considered separately, the normative changes that followed this event acquired a common character and followed a unified tendency: an even stronger entrenchment of traditionalism and a further consolidation of patriarchal understandings of the family, sexual relations, femininity, and masculinity, including in connection with the state's militarist needs.

As early as November 2022, Presidential Decree No. 809 of November 9, 2022, *On Approving the Foundations of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values*, was adopted, definitively consolidating the family as a "traditional value" in the Russian Federation, fully in line with the trajectory of previous years⁸⁴. In the subsequent *Strategy for Women for 2023–2030*, adopted in 2023, increasing emphasis was placed on the promotion of traditional values, strengthening motivation for childbirth, and the prevention of abortion⁸⁵. In the years that followed, an anti-abortion campaign was carried out in more than twenty regions of the Russian Federation, taking the form of local prohibitions on the termination of pregnancy in private medical clinics; in a number of regions, abortions were also excluded from compulsory health insurance coverage. In 2023, the *Concept of the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030*⁸⁶ reinforced the ideas contained in the Strategy and once again insisted on the overriding importance

84 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of November 9, 2022 No. 809, *On Approving the Foundations of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values* // Official Internet Portal of Legal Information. – November 9, 2022. – URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202211090019> (accessed: 19.02.2026).

85 Directive of the Government of the Russian Federation of December 29, 2022 No. 4356-r, *On Approving the National Strategy for Women for 2023–2030* // Government of Russia. – December 29, 2022. – URL: <http://government.ru/docs/all/145532/> (accessed: 20.02.2026).

86 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 7, 2024 No. 309, *On the National Development Goals of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2030 and for the Perspective up to 2036*.

of increasing the birth rate and creating conditions for citizens to realize their reproductive aspirations.

Parallel to this, the years 2022–2025 saw legislative reforms that substantially worsened the status of LGBT+ individuals. Under Federal Law No. 489-FZ⁸⁷, the ban on the “LGBT propaganda” and of “sex change” was extended to persons of all ages. In addition, the display of symbols associated with the community was prohibited, and materials containing such “LGBT propaganda” were classified as extremist. In July 2023, Federal Law No. 440-FZ introduced a complete nationwide ban on gender-affirming procedures, as well as a ban on the legal recognition of “sex change”. This consolidated the state’s view of innate sex as biologically predetermined and demonstrated a radical rejection of any democratic policy toward the transgender community. Finally, in November 2023, by the Judgment of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, the “International LGBT Public movement” was designated extremist, and its activity was banned on the territory of Russia.

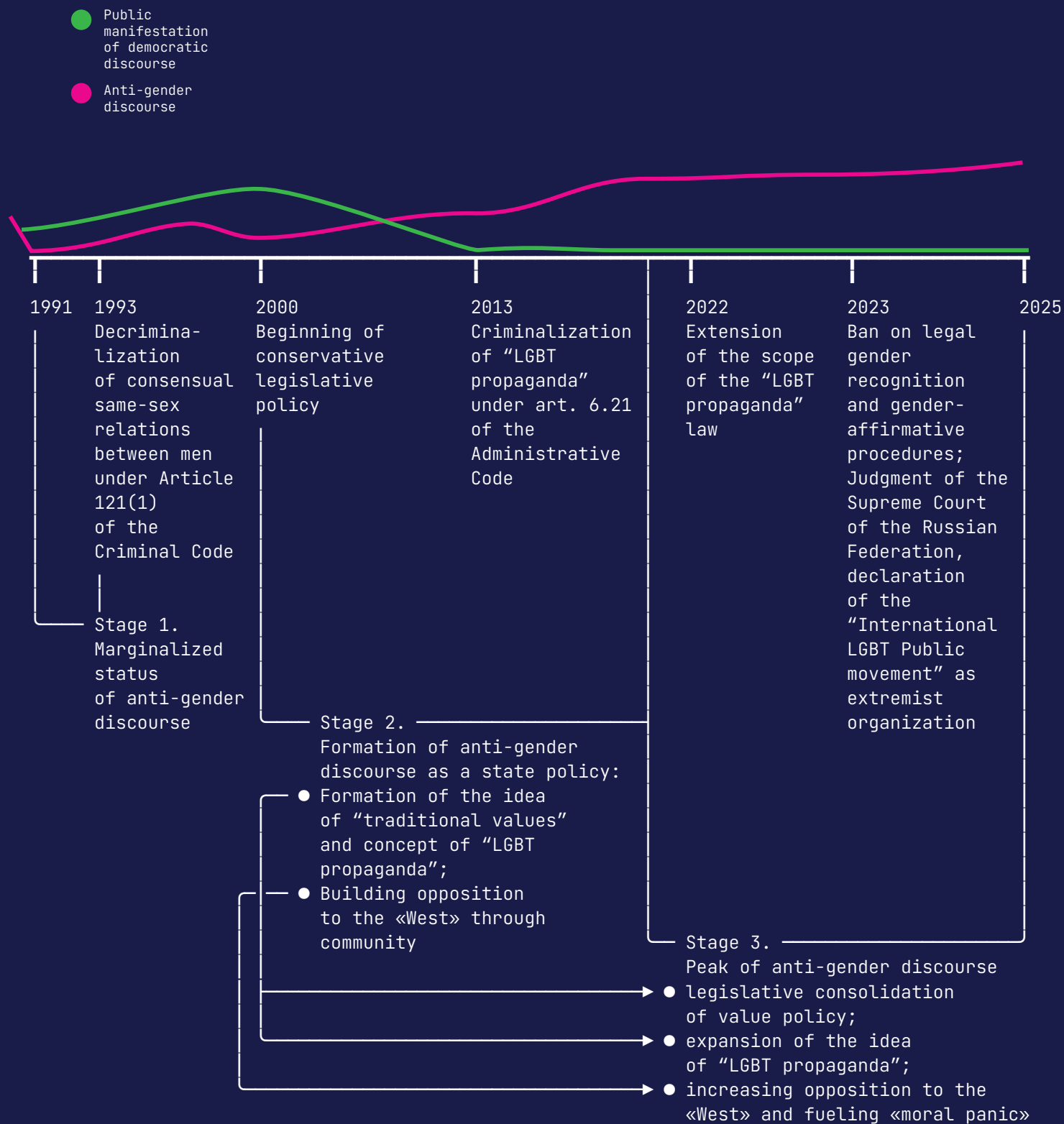
During this period, state policy has consolidated two directions of anti-gender discourse:

- one aimed at forming a patriarchal understanding of women’s role, consisting in the combination of economic activity with reproductive labor and childrearing;
 - another aimed at the marginalization and discrimination of LGBT+ community as a phenomenon that directly threatens “traditional values”, as well as the demographic strategy and national security of the Russian Federation.
- Moreover, these measures may be regarded as a logical continuation of the first direction: if the “traditional family” is understood as the foundation of the state, then any dissent in the sphere of gender and sexuality must not merely be restricted, but eliminated.

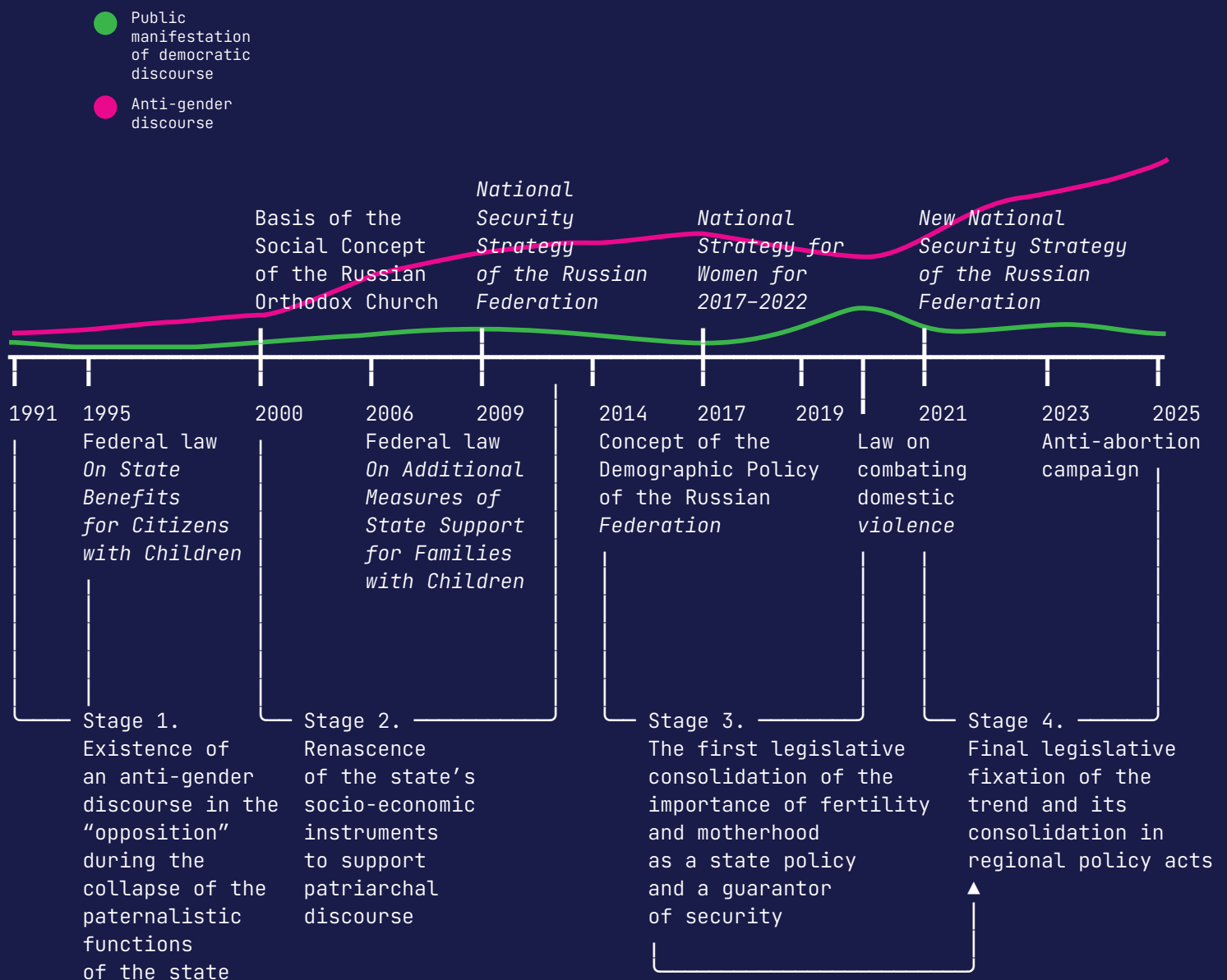
Thus, the period after 2022 marks a transition from conservative gender policy to gender statism, in which the state claims the exclusive right to determine the biological destiny of its citizens (through the ban on legal gender recognition and gender-affirmative procedures), their reproductive behavior (through anti-abortion measures), and their public identity (through “LGBT propaganda” laws) within the paradigm of militarized traditionalism.

Illustratively, the periodization of the anti-gender movement and anti-gender discourse can be represented as follows (Scheme 1 and Scheme 2):

⁸⁷ Federal Law of December 5, 2022 No. 489-FZ, On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation.



Scheme 1. Anti-gender movement and anti-gender discourse with regard to LGBT+ community



Scheme 2. Anti-gender movement and anti-gender discourse with regard to women

Analyzing the schemes presented, several significant differences and similarities can be identified in anti-gender discourse and anti-gender policy with regard to queer community and women over the period from 1991 to 2025. These are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Significant differences in anti-gender discourse and anti-gender policy with regard to queer community and women

Criterion	Anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community	Anti-gender discourse with regard to women
Interaction with liberal-democratic discourse	Interaction with liberal-democratic discourse can be observed only in the 1990s, alongside the repeal of Article 121(1) of the criminal code and the broader liberalization of the political regime. However, after the formation of state anti-gender discourse began, recourse to liberal-democratic discourse was discontinued: within the political elite, there was no observable aspiration to secure the rights of the community or protect it from discrimination.	Owing to the legacy of the Soviet Union's emancipatory gender policy, many elements of liberal-democratic discourse were incorporated into the state's social and economic policy (for example, the preservation of women's political rights, the declaration of the importance of women's representation, and the active involvement of women in the state's economic life). Despite the strengthening of the state's patriarchal discourse, these ideas continued to receive formal recognition and reflection in strategic documents in both the 2000s and the 2010s. At various moments, political elite also drew on liberal-democratic discourse in legislative initiatives, for example in the introduction and discussion of the law on combating domestic violence.

Criterion	Anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community	Anti-gender discourse with regard to women
Normative consolidation of the discourse	The normative consolidation of anti-gender discourse occurred through restrictive and prohibitive state policies, including the introduction of Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offenses and the formal ban on legal gender recognition and gender-affirmative procedures. The general tendency of anti-gender discourse is toward stigmatization, erasure, and discrimination.	The normative consolidation of anti-gender discourse occurred through legal acts encouraging adherence to gender strategies considered beneficial to the state, such as motherhood and child care. This was implemented, for example, through the provision of benefits, subsidies, and economic incentives at different levels. Normative consolidation was also carried out through strategic documents. The general tendency of this discourse is toward the encouragement of state-beneficial behavior and the construction of a normative image of womanhood.
Formation of the group's image and media representation	Within state anti-gender discourse, queer community is stigmatized, opposed to other social groups, and its behavior is marked in legal acts as deviant and dangerous (for example through epithets such as "non-traditional sexual orientation" and "extremist organization").	Within anti-gender discourse, women are not subjected to direct stigmatization; strategic documents nominally recognize their high significance in the country's social, economic, and political life. The emphasis on the importance of motherhood and child care is reflected in demographic policy and supported by economic measures, although it is not presented as the only possible scenario available to women.

Table 2. Significant similarities in anti-gender discourse and anti-gender policy with regard to queer community and women

Criterion	Similarities
Argumentation for the importance of counteraction	In justifying the importance of the anti-gender movement, whether through normative regulation or restrictive or incentive measures, protective rationales and state-centered needs play a major role. These include, for example, the desire to “protect” children or to promote childbearing (children as a core value), the assertion of the importance of preserving so-called “traditional values”, and the construction of these values through the denial of that which does not correspond to them and is not them.
Media coverage	The media function as a resource for the dissemination and reproduction of anti-gender discourse produced by the political elite and of the positions to which fixed meaning is assigned within it. Non-oppositional media only rarely engage in systematic criticism of anti-gender discourse or present polarized viewpoints in their coverage.
Reference to the figure of the “West”	Ideas opposed to anti-gender discourse are marked as “alien” and incompatible with Russian culture or the Russian mentality, imposed from outside. This contributes both to the construction of “traditionality” as a norm to be followed and to the representation of positions diverging from anti-gender discourse as dangerous.
Concealment of anti-gender discourse, that is, the discursive “masking” of discriminatory measures	The discriminatory character of anti-gender discourse is concealed under the formal observance of international legal standards and under the appearance of adherence to liberal-democratic trends with respect to women’s rights and the basic right of queer individuals to private life. The political elite publicly declares support for self-realization and for human rights and freedoms, while in practice implementing anti-gender measures.

Chapter 2. Discursive analysis of the development of anti-gender discourse in Russia between 1991–2025

On the basis of the historical analysis of legal and policy documents, periods in the development of the state anti-gender movement and anti-gender discourse were identified for each of the groups under consideration. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's principles of critical discourse analysis, Chapter 1 of this study may be understood as a detailed account of social practice – that is, the context within which discourse was produced and consolidated. In order to conduct the analysis, it is also necessary to specify both the discursive practice under examination and the texts selected for analysis.

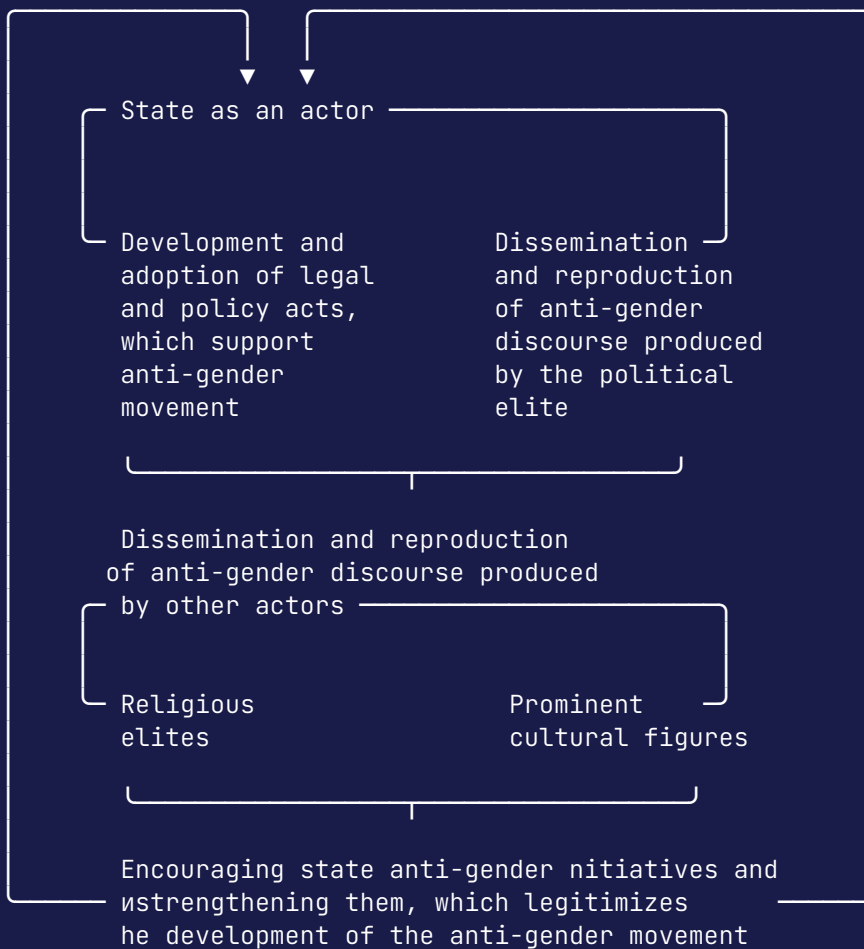
Discursive practice encompasses the ways in which the discourse under analysis is produced, for whom it is produced, and by whom. On the basis of the historiographical and historical review, the following actors of anti-gender discourse and anti-gender movement may be identified (Table 3).

These actors could produce anti-gender discourse that differed from one another in detail or in the intensity of its message; taken together, however, they produced what Fairclough termed an order of discourse. At the same time, in the Russian context, where gender policy with regard to both LGBT+ community and women has become increasingly subordinated to the interests and needs of the state, it was precisely the political elite, and the channels it used to disseminate its views, that exerted hegemonic influence on the anti-gender movement. The political elite also provided the stimulus for other actors, such as representatives

Table 3. Actors of anti-gender discourse and anti-gender movement in Russia

Actor	Manifestation of discourse	Target audience of the discourse
Political elite: the President of the Russian Federation, deputies of the State Duma and senators of the Federation Council, members of the Government, members of regional legislative and executive authorities, representatives of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation.	Public speeches addressed to citizens, for example, direct addresses by the President; legal and policy documents subject to mandatory publication.	The population of the state, consuming information both through media channels and through direct interaction with the state's legal and regulatory framework.
Religious elite: the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, other members of the clergy, representatives of non-Christian religious confessions in Russia.	Sermons and public statements in the media by representatives of different religious confessions.	The population identifying with a particular religion, which may vary across different regions of the country (thus, in some regions the anti-gender discourse of Muslim religious authorities is more significant, while in others – Russian Orthodox Church).
Prominent cultural figures: journalists, television hosts, actors, musicians, and other public figures not directly associated with holding state office.	Media sphere (television programs, publications in the press and on the internet).	Consumers of particular forms of media content.
Initiative groups within civil society united by anti-gender values (for example, "Male State", included by the Ministry of Justice in the list of extremist organizations).	Social media of such communities; in some cases – statements in the media.	Persons who are members of such communities, as well as those sympathetic to their ideology.

of religious organizations, cultural figures, and journalists, to articulate their own positions. This was especially the case after the 1990s, when the normative consolidation of anti-gender discourse increasingly became a matter of explicit state policy. Such a position on the part of the state may be linked to its desire to exercise exclusive control over the manifestations and intensity of anti-gender discourse, as well as to regulate its boundaries, thereby substantially reducing its potential poly-discursivity. Accordingly, the general model of the implementation of anti-gender practice may be represented as follows (Scheme 3):



Scheme 3. Concept of implementation of anti-gender practice

Thus, the following are of primary importance for the analysis of anti-gender discourse:

- discursive analysis of legal and policy acts, aimed at identifying the mechanisms through which imposed identities, social relations, and modes of signification are constructed;
- discursive analysis of statements by actors within the political elite published in the mass media (television programs, comments in the press, and so forth);
- discursive analysis of media reactions to normative changes where public discussion was present; specifically, the selective analysis of publications in major state media outlets or sources loyal to the state's political trajectory.

With regard to the 1990s, given the limitations of the source base and the restricted timeframe available for the completion of the study, a selective analysis was conducted of materials from publicly accessible press sources, namely, publications contained in the Elena Gusyatinskaya Archive (with regard to LGBT+ community) or otherwise available in the public domain (with regard to women). In addition, the 1990s did not witness significant normative changes affecting the status of either group, with the exception of the repeal of criminal prosecution under Article 121(1), which will be discussed below.

The analysis also did not take into account the specific features of religious patriarchal discourse and discourse concerning LGBT+ individuals, since in terms of content such discourse largely reproduced and radicalized the broader state discursive development. Moreover, conducting an in-depth analysis of this discourse was not feasible within the limited time available for the study, particularly across several major confessions (for example, Orthodoxy and Islam), where the specificity of the statements would be directly connected to the distinctive features of each tradition and their interpretation would require separate immersion in the relevant confessional context. Such an analysis could potentially enrich the findings of the study in the future.

Finally, the statements and activities of civil society actors (communities supporting the anti-gender movement and, for example, initiating harassment campaigns against particular representatives of LGBT+ community or expressing support for discriminatory laws) were likewise not examined in detail, for the following reasons:

- such communities have had, and continue to have, influence over a limited audience, unlike lawmaking and the statements of the political elite or figures associated with it;
- some representatives of these groups are perceived as excessively radical even by the state itself, which results in the bans on their activity and further limits the influence of the discourse they disseminate. Thus, the organization “Male State”, which employed aggressive rhetoric against both women and LGBT+ community, was recognized as extremist and its activity was banned as violating legislation of the Russian Federation⁸⁸.

88 Court recognizes the movement Male State as extremist // RIA Novosti. – October 18, 2021. – URL: <https://ria.ru/20211018/sud-1755060477.html> (accessed: 20.02.2026).

Discursive analysis of narratives about queer community: evolution of representation and consolidation

Although in the 1990s anti-gender discourse with regard to the community coexisted with liberal-democratic discourse and with policies aimed at decriminalization and the expansion of notions of sexual and personal freedom, the archival materials nonetheless make it possible to identify several significant features. It is essential to draw attention to these features because some of the discursive units that emerged as early as the 1990s have been subsequently developed in state and para-state narratives.

Already in the press of the 1990s, one can observe various mechanisms for constructing the image of LGBT+ community as a community directly associated with morally condemned and socially unacceptable phenomena, for example, with coercive sexual contact involving those incapable of giving informed consent. Thus, in a "Moskovskaya Pravda" publication of November 17, 1990, devoted to the registration of the first mass-circulation LGB newspaper "Tema", homosexuality is placed alongside necrophilia and zoophilia, while also quoting a statement by R. Kalinin normalizing pedophilia: "We are against violence, but if everything happens by mutual consent, it is normal at any age. Where do they get them? There are channels of their own: a child costs 3,000-5,000 [rubles]"⁸⁹. A similar juxtaposition appears in later articles as well, including those published after the repeal of criminal prosecution. Thus, issue no. 30 of "Megapolis-Express" of August 30, 1995 offers a detailed description of the community's political interests, referring to it ironically as the "so-called sexual minorities", the "sexual mensheviks", and the "faction of pederasts". The authors further remark⁹⁰:

"In negotiating an electoral alliance, the 'sexual mensheviks' stipulated in advance the emergence of subdivisions of pederasts, lesbians, tantrists, and zoophiles; it should be noted that the latter three categories of 'those who couple differently' had until now not appeared in any parliament in the world. In this case, our lesbians, tantrists, and zoophiles are acting as pioneers".

89 ALG. Moskovskaia pravda. — Issue of November 17, 1990.

90 ALG. Megapolis-Express. — No. 30. — August 30, 1995.

A separate nodal point in discourse concerning queer community is criminal prosecution (and its repeal in 1993), as well as the broader association between homosexuality and prison-related themes. In 1991, when the first discussions of a possible revision of the Criminal Code and the repeal of the relevant article began, newspaper "Moskovskii Komsomolets" published an article condemning the legislators' liberal-democratic plans. The authors described potential decriminalization as one of the "unthinkable heights" and sarcastically explained it as a "struggle for equality" that threatened society; they posed the rhetorical question to the reader: "Do we really have too many boys?"⁹¹ Already at this stage, members of queer community were depicted as people with addictions, fixated on sexual gratification, and dangerous to "normal" citizens. In the same year, newspaper "Shchit i mech" published an April article describing in detail several men convicted under Article 121. Its rhetoric included such terms and phrases as "vice", "places of pleasure", "promiscuity, weak will, and drunkenness", and [they] "became homosexuals because of an addiction to alcohol". As in the previous article, the author concludes with a rhetorical question addressed to the reader:

"It would seem that Article 121 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR remains one of the last 'trenches of defense' against this invisible monster. So then, are we going to repeal it?.."

In 1993, parallel to the repeal of the article, issue no. 105 of the newspaper "Federatsiya" published an article entitled "A criminal portrait against the background of...", in which the characteristic portrait of a "homosexualist"⁹² was outlined by Anatolii D'iachenko⁹³, an associate professor at the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and a Candidate of Juridical Sciences. Particularly prominent in this representation are such phrases as "sexual pathology", "signs of increased danger", and "violent sodomy". As in the publications discussed above, the article equates homosexuality with pedophilia and places particular emphasis on the alleged insufficiency of legal protection for minors, as well as on the allegedly inadequate punishment for sexual violence committed by men against boys. The final argument pointing to the danger of homosexuality is the spread of HIV infection: "...the threat of mass infection with AIDS here is quite real, and it is precisely from here that it may 'flare up'

91 ALG. Moskovskii komsomolets. — July 17, 1991.

92 Hereafter — the words, which are considered offensive language are translated as the author wrote them to show and maintain historicity.

93 ALG. Federatsiia. — No. 105. — 1993.

across all of Russia. ... This is why the decriminalization that has taken place appears hasty"⁹⁴. In later publications⁹⁵, homosexuality was described as an illustration of the conditions of life in places of confinement, that is, as something characteristic of marginalized and stigmatized people.

In addition to constructing a discursive association with criminality and marking homosexuality as a sexual perversion and a form of behavior directly connected with sexual violence against minors, the press also featured two other significant themes. First, the LGB⁹⁶ individuals were represented as something directly threatening to the population of the country – not because of any criminal content to its activities, as in the discursive phenomena already discussed above, but simply by virtue of its otherness. Thus, in the 1998 article "Liberation through homophobia"⁹⁷, statements are cited from participants in a television program devoted to the problem of homophobia that literally called for everyday discrimination in the name of national security: "Beat up gays, save Russia!" The following year, newspaper "Komsomol'skaia Pravda" published an article with the telling title "Heterosexuals will be sent beyond the Urals", expressing fears about the "wide spread" of homosexuality and the obstacles this would create for heterosexual relationships:

" – Misha, look at him, a 'hetero'.

– Imagine that, I thought people like him no longer walked around Moscow.

And it is because of words like these that my street romances collapse. The would-be suitors lose heart: who wants to show the world their unproductiveness and backwardness? Exactly. And if some unfortunate heterosexual snaps back, he will hear many interesting things about himself. For instance, that he will never compose ballets..."

The analysis reveals several **key tendencies in the construction of the image of LGB+ community in the Russian press of the 1990s**, which later

94 ALG. Federatsiia. – No. 105. – 1993.

95 ALG. Sobesednik. – No. 19. – 1996. – Article title: "Homosexuality in Penal Colonies Has Already Begun to Be Encouraged".

96 It was particularly about LGB individuals rather than transgender and other identities, as at that time transgender people were almost invisible.

97 ALG. Moskovskii komsomolets. – March 19, 1998.

formed the basis of anti-gender discourse:

- **Pathologization and criminalization through the fusion of portraits.** The most stable mechanism was the discursive reduction of homosexuality to forms of sexually deviant behavior considered socially dangerous. The press systematically produced a semantic and moral connection between homosexuality, pedophilia, violence, and crime (including prison subculture). This device served two functions: first, it deprived homosexuality of the status of a personal identity, reducing it to an act of violence or perversion; second, it justified the need for state control and public condemnation by masking homophobia as concern for the safety of minors and the moral health of the nation. Even after decriminalization in 1993, this narrative persisted, shifting from a legal argument to a moral-medical and criminological one.
- **The construction of an “internal enemy” and a threat to demographic sovereignty.** The analysis reveals a second important layer of discourse: the representation of LGBT+ community as a demographic and cultural threat. Rhetorical questions such as “Do we really have too many boys?” or the phrase “heterosexuals will be sent beyond the Urals” functioned to generate panic. Homosexuality was portrayed not merely as a personal vice, but as a phenomenon that was “widely spreading” and directly competing with heterosexuality, thereby threatening the very reproduction of the nation. This transformed LGBT+ people from the status of the “sick” or the “criminal” into that of “colonizers” of the traditional way of life, thereby legitimizing calls for everyday violence (“Beat up gays, save Russia!”) as a form of social “self-defense”.
- **The creation of pseudo-scientific and expert legitimation for stigma.** An important tendency was the shift from direct aggression to the “expert” legitimation of prejudice. The use of figures such as a “Candidate of Juridical Sciences”, an “associate professor at the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs” (A. D’iachenko), or references to “signs of increased danger” displaced the discussion from the realm of morality into that of pseudo-science and state security. This gave anti-homosexual discourse an appearance of objectivity and rationality while concealing its ideological nature. The discourse acquired the features of a defensive narrative: the repeal of the article was “hasty”, while the community was represented as a source of threat that could “flare up”

throughout Russia, including through HIV. In this way, LGB+ community was constructed as a source of epidemiological, criminal, and social danger requiring constant control.

However, in the 1990s these discursive tendencies had not yet found expression at the normative level of discursive practice. This began to occur only in the 2000s, after the initiation of discussion of the first draft law introducing liability (initially criminal liability) for the “propaganda of homosexuality”. In the explanatory note to the draft federal law “On Introducing an Addition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Establishing Criminal Liability for the Propaganda of Homosexuality”, its author, A. V. Chuev, for the first time in legislative practice employed the concept of the “propaganda of homosexuality” and justified the proposed normative change on the basis of two factors:

1. Prevalence of such “propaganda”, including through “the introduction into educational institutions of curricula promoting homosexuality as a norm of behavior”;
2. Danger posed by such “propaganda” to children and young people, who “are not yet capable of critically assessing the avalanche of information that is crashing down upon them”⁹⁸.

At the same time, and importantly for the subsequent development of discourse, the explanatory note specifically stated that each person’s right to freedom of self-determination in private life would be preserved, emphasizing that the restriction concerned only certain actions. The term “propaganda” itself was not directly defined, which became one of the grounds for returning the draft law for revision and for further discussion. Ultimately, Chuev’s proposals were not implemented at the federal level. In subsequent years, however, as noted in the historiographical review above, bans on “LGBT propaganda” were enacted in various regions of the Russian Federation. Discursively, the content of these prohibitions reproduced the formulations of Chuev’s draft law. The first adopted law (2006), “On the Protection of the Morality and Health of Children in Ryazan Oblast”, also used the phrase “propaganda of homosexualism”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Explanatory Note to Draft Federal Law No. 311625-4, *On Introducing an Addition to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation Establishing Criminal Liability for the Propaganda of Homosexuality* (submitted by State Duma deputy A. V. Chuev).

⁹⁹ Explanatory Note to the Draft Federal Law On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation (on the prohibition of the propaganda of homosexuality) [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=114016546> (accessed:19.02.2026).

with the central emphasis placed on the priority of protecting minors from such information. Five years later, in 2011, "LGBT propaganda" was prohibited in Arkhangelsk Oblast¹⁰⁰ in analogous terms, and in 2012 similar laws were adopted in a number of other regions. The formulations could include either reference to a single sexual orientation prohibited from public representation – functioning in that case as an umbrella category – or an explicit enumeration that included "bisexualism", "transgenderism", and "lesbianism"¹⁰¹.

Even before the intensive discussion of draft laws in the press, and especially by the time the adoption of the "LGBT propaganda" ban had reached the federal level in 2013, anti-gender discourse had already emerged around other events. Thus, in 2006, activists from the "GayRussia" project advocated holding a gay pride march in Moscow, but encountered a direct ban imposed by the city's mayor, Yurii Luzhkov, and supported by Patriarch Alexy II¹⁰². The situation was repeated in 2007, while some participants in the unauthorized march, including foreign tourists and activists, were arrested or beaten. Appeals to state authorities requesting permission to hold pride marches, as well as sanctioned actions in support of the rights of the community, continued in Moscow and St. Petersburg from 2008 to 2012. At the same time, the anti-gender discourse associated with these events and with gay prides in general involved the following elements:

- declaration of queer community as dangerous and alien ("To hold a gay pride parade here, which can only be called a satanic act", stated Y. Luzhkov)¹⁰³;
- use of the rhetoric of "LGBT propaganda" ("Certain citizens who are 'unstable' in terms of sexual orientation may fall under the influence of 'such an unusual sexual orientation'", stated Y. Luzhkov)¹⁰⁴;
- establishment of a link between the status of LGBT+ community and the resolution of Russia's demographic problem ("My attitude toward sexual minorities is simple and connected with my work. One of the country's

100 Law of Arkhangelsk Oblast on the prohibition of the propaganda of homosexuality among minors // Rossiiskaia gazeta. – May 22, 2012 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://rg.ru/documents/2012/05/22/arhangelsk-zakon113-9-reg-dok.html> (accessed:19.02.2026).

101 Law of St. Petersburg of March 7, 2012 No. 108-18, On Amendments to the Law of St. Petersburg "On Administrative Offenses in St. Petersburg" [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://base.garant.ru/191961/> (accessed:19.02.2026).

102 Alexy II (Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'). "Patriarch Alexy II: We Are Grateful to the Moscow Authorities for Fighting the Propaganda of Sin" [letter to the editor] // Komsomol'skaia pravda. – March 16, 2006. – URL: <https://www.kp.ru/daily/23674.4/50962/> (accessed:19.02.2026).

103 Mayors of four capitals diverge from Luzhkov in their views on the gay pride parade // Vedomosti. – February 28, 2007 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/library/news/2007/02/28/mjery-chetyreh-stolic-razoshlis-s-luzhkovym-vo-vzglyadah-na-gej-parad> (accessed:19.02.2026).

104 Ibid.

main problems is demographic", V. Putin stated when asked to respond to Luzhkov's remarks)¹⁰⁵;

- the claim that it contradicted religious values and norms¹⁰⁶ (for example, from the letter of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy to Moscow Mayor Yu. M. Luzhkov concerning the idea of holding a gay pride in the capital: "At the same time, the Church resolutely opposes attempts to present a sinful tendency as a 'norm' and a model for imitation")¹⁰⁷;
- representation of events in support of LGBT+ community as posing a threat to public order¹⁰⁸.

In 2012, the Moscow City Court upheld the legality of the Moscow Government's decision to ban gay prides for 100 years¹⁰⁹.

As early as 2012, discussion of the ban on "LGBT propaganda" was shifted from the regional to the federal level: the first draft law was submitted to the State Duma in March of that year¹¹⁰. From the perspective of the development of anti-gender discourse, it is important to trace how the discursive marking of the community changed over the course of drafting and negotiating the ban of "LGBT propaganda", especially given that earlier laws adopted in different constituent entities of the Russian Federation had used divergent formulations. The development of this narrative is illustrated schematically in Scheme 4.

Thus, the initiators originally adhered to the term "homosexuality", but later replaced it with the legislative formula that became entrenched in law: "non-traditional sexual relations", following the recommendation of the Legal Directorate. This discursive change is highly significant for several reasons:

1. First, the removal of the term itself contributed to the erasure of the phenomenon from state discourse: same-sex relations, even while being subjected to legal restriction, were no longer named directly, nor

105 Luzhkov against the gay pride parade: "A satanic act" // Fontanka.ru. – February 1, 2007 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.fontanka.ru/2007/02/01/048/> (accessed:19.02.2026).

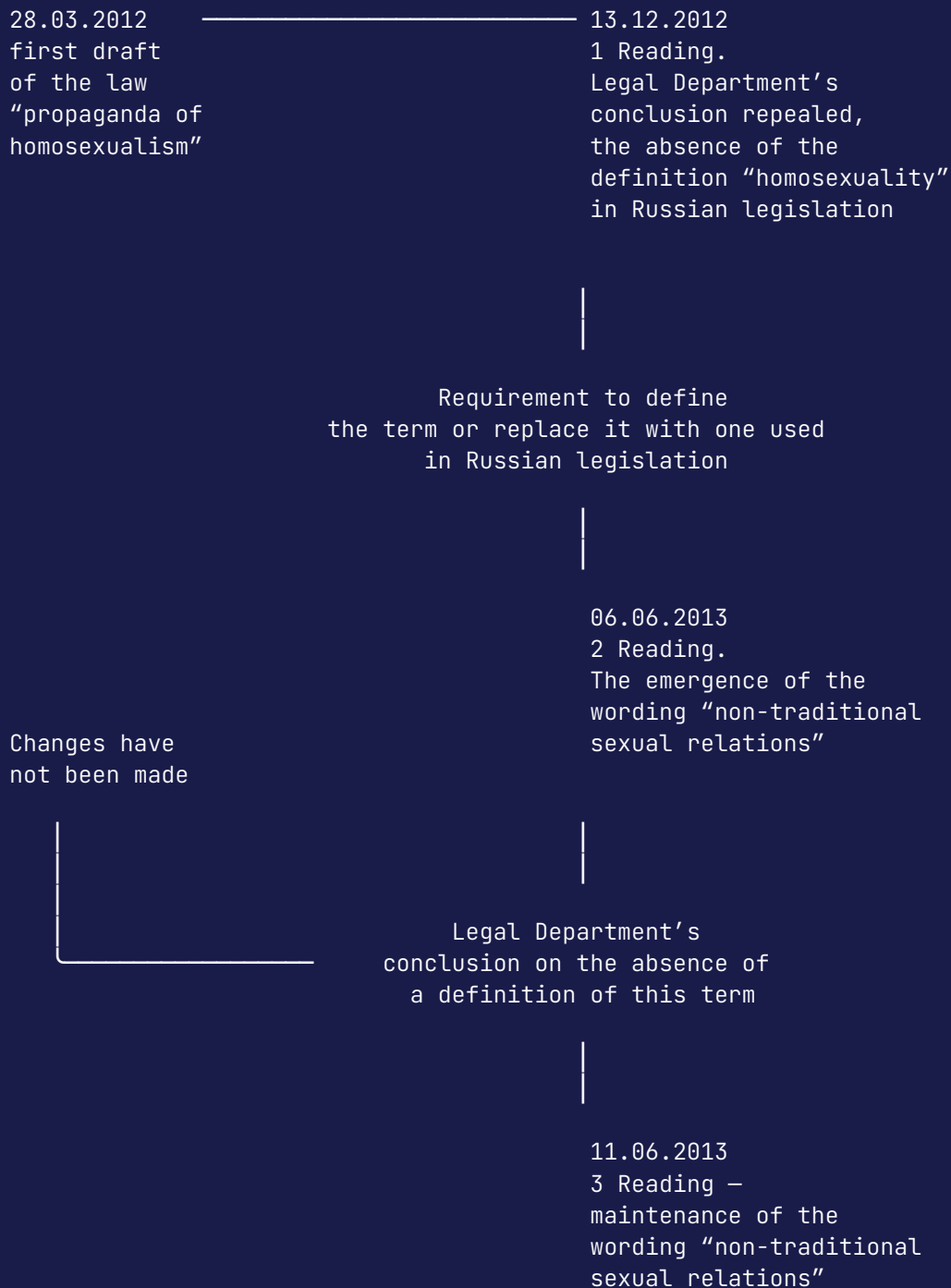
106 Matvienko against a gay pride parade in St. Petersburg // Kommersant. – July 25, 2007 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1000480> (accessed:19.02.2026).

107 Letter of His Holiness Patriarch Alexy II to Moscow Mayor Yu. M. Luzhkov concerning the idea of holding a gay pride parade in the capital // Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. – January 30, 2007 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.patriarchia.ru/article/93879> (accessed:19.02.2026).

108 Moscow City Court recognizes as lawful the ban on holding gay pride parades in Moscow for 100 years // Interfax. – August 17, 2012 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/260954> (accessed:19.02.2026).

109 Ibid.

110 Draft Federal Law No. 44554-6, On Amendments to the Code of Administrative Offenses of the Russian Federation [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/44554-6> (accessed:19.02.2026).



Scheme 4. Development of the narrative of
anti-gender discourse

was transgender identity. This made it possible, on the one hand, to establish a normative prohibition and, on the other, to avoid naming the phenomenon and thus to avoid its further discursive reproduction.

2. Second, the construction “non-traditional sexual relations” itself drew upon the already established trope of the “foreignness” and alterity of non-heterosexual orientation, while underscoring the incompatibility between what was represented as “traditional”, and therefore proper to the population of the Russian Federation, and homosexual orientation. Although this concept was also criticized by the Legal Directorate, it was retained unchanged. Moreover, in the opinion on the proposed federal law issued by the Federation Council Committee on Science, Education, Culture, and Information Policy, it was specifically noted that “the term “homosexuality” was replaced by “non-traditional sexual relations”, a broader concept that does not create difficulties in law-enforcement practice”. This may also be interpreted as an attempt by the legislator, through the use of a broader umbrella term with deliberately blurred boundaries¹¹¹, to secure potentially greater control over freedom of expression and the circulation of information.

It is also important to note the direct discursive continuity between this draft law and A. V. Chuev’s earlier initiative, expressed in the citation of fragments from the explanatory note and the retention of a similar rationale for introducing legislative restrictions. Anti-gender discourse reproduced and intensified the thesis that homosexuality posed a danger to minors and was incompatible with the state’s commitment to preserving the value of the family, motherhood, and childhood.

At the same time, both the official documents accompanying the adoption of the law and the public statements of political elites in the media placed particular emphasis on the claim that the proposed ban did not interfere with citizens’ sexual orientation as such, did not restrict the private life, and did not prohibit the dissemination of information in forms that did not violate the law. Thus, responding to criticism of the law from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov stated that queer people “can go about

¹¹¹ Since the category of “non-traditional sexual relations” may encompass not only non-heterosexual relationships but also other sexual practices, which may then be subject to discursive and legal stigmatization in accordance with the political interests of the state.

their lives absolutely freely and without punishment"¹¹². At the same time, within this strand of anti-gender discourse, the right to sexual orientation was justified not through general liberal-democratic arguments about individual liberty, but rather through the "inevitability" of the existence of non-heterosexual people [in any society] For example, in a lengthy interview with newspaper "Gazeta.Ru", Ekaterina Mizulina stated: "There are always 5-6% of people born with a non-traditional orientation, and destroying them or fighting them is foolish. One cannot fight disabled people either; moreover, this is not an illness, but simply a peculiarity, something that distinguishes them from other people"¹¹³. Thus, even when affirming the right to form sexual and romantic relationships, state anti-gender discourse reproduced and reinforced the stigmatizing perception of non-heterosexual persons as somehow "impaired", "abnormal", or "different".

Nevertheless, at this time one can also find public statements directed against discrimination toward queer community, explicitly condemning violence and pointing to the possibility of an equal dialogue with LGBT+ movement. Elena Mizulina, for example, remarked:

*"If there is violence against them, this must be investigated, but LGBT [people] must also take into account that family culture changes very slowly. One must proceed through dialogue rather than confrontation. If a gay pride is banned, go to court, negotiate, teach society tolerance gradually, establish dialogue. But if there is violence against gay people, this must be dealt with seriously"*¹¹⁴.

Thus, by the end of 2013, anti-gender discourse in the Russian Federation with regard to queer community had acquired the following significant features:

- The legalization and formalization of anti-homosexual discourse through the language of law became a central tendency. Chuev's initiative in the 2000s was the first to transfer previously fragmented media clichés ("danger", "corruption of youth", "the imposition of alien norms")

112 Lavrov responds to his Dutch counterpart's criticism of the draft law banning the propaganda of homosexuality // RBC. – February 26, 2013 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/26/02/2013/570404159a7947fcbd446211> (accessed:19.02.2026).

113 "People are irritated not by gays, but by propaganda" [Interview with E. Mizulina] / interview by E. Polyakova // Gazeta.Ru. – June 10, 2013. – URL: https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2013/06/10_a_5375845.shtml (accessed:19.02.2026).

114 Ibid.

into the field of legislative initiative by creating the foundational concept of the "LGBT propaganda". Importantly, the term itself initially lacked a clear legal definition, making it a discursive-ideological instrument with a high potential for arbitrary application, as confirmed by its successful entrenchment first at the regional level, including in Ryazan and Arkhangelsk oblasts.

- The discourse developed a legitimating framework that made it possible to present repressive measures as protective. The ban was justified not simply by moral disapproval, but by reference to the higher interests of the state and society: (a) the protection of the psychological development of minors from "dangerous information", and (b) the protection of "traditional family values" as the foundation of demographic sovereignty. This discourse was reflected both in the explanatory notes to the laws and in public statements by senior officials, such as Luzhkov and Putin, who explicitly linked the banning of gay prides to the resolution of the demographic problem.
- By 2013, an evolution in terminology had become apparent as a means of expanding potential state's control. The shift from the more specific, though stigmatizing, term "homosexuality" to the vague and ideologically charged construct "non-traditional sexual relations" in the 2013 federal law established the discursive conditions for broader influence, discursive erasure, and the naturalization of alterity.
- At the same time, anti-gender discourse contained a certain paradox: the combination of the repressive prohibition of "LGBT propaganda" with rhetoric about protecting "private life" and condemning discrimination. The discourse of the political elites created and reproduced an illusion of tolerance that in fact merely concealed and marked the growth of structural violence¹¹⁵.

After 2013, anti-gender discourse intensified several of these tendencies. In the period from 2013 to 2021 (before the subsequent radicalization and the adoption of new legal acts that further restricted the status of queer community) one can identify statements by political actors supporting the protective character of anti-gender discourse, its orientation toward the "protection of minors", and the representation of

¹¹⁵ Violence understood as the reduction of opportunities for individual self-realization in society through institutional discriminatory measures of various kinds (see in more detail: J. Galtung).

homosexual behavior and non-cisgender identity as phenomena contrary to “traditional values”. As quoted by the media “TASS”, in 2021 Valentina Matvienko specifically noted that the Russian Federation adhered to its national values, at the center of which stood the traditional family and care for children. She stated: “We are against having the human rights agenda imposed on us and politicized, against having standards or values imposed on us that do not correspond to our national interests, including the promotion of LGBT+ community agenda, the protection of LGBT+ rights, and the recognition of different genders”¹¹⁶. There also emerged individual initiatives by private actors or parliamentary factions aimed at tightening the discriminatory legislation then in force:

- In 2015, Communist Party deputies introduced a draft law proposing to ban public coming-outs, with potentially harsher penalties if such acts were committed on the premises of educational or cultural institutions or youth affairs bodies. However, the draft did not receive support and was not approved by the committee;
- In 2021, the Institute of the Public Commissioner for Family Protection proposed recognizing the ideologies of LGBT+, radical feminism, and childfree as extremist. The relevance of this proposal was likewise justified by the need to protect minors from information deemed “harmful”¹¹⁷. However, in 2021 this initiative did not advance to the implementation stage.
- Up until 2022, public discourse and the statements of representatives of the political elite continued to display a paradoxical duality: they declared the absence of any ban on transgender identity or homosexual/bisexual orientation while preserving discriminatory norms and strengthening protective rhetoric. As early as 2014, the Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation upheld the conformity of the “LGBT propaganda” law with the Constitution¹¹⁸. In the same year, President Vladimir Putin stated that the adopted bill “offends no one”. Moreover, according to his remarks, “people with non-traditional orientation cannot feel like second-class

116 Matvienko: the Russian Federation adheres to its national values // TASS. – March 26, 2021 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/13115527> (accessed:19.02.2026).

117 The Institute of the Commissioner for Family Protection proposes recognizing the ideologies of LGBT+, radical feminism, and childfree as extremist // TASS. – November 30, 2021 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/12547537> (accessed:19.02.2026).

118 Constitutional Court of the Russian Federation recognizes as lawful the ban on the propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations // TASS. – September 25, 2014. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/1465547> (accessed:19.02.2026).

people in our country, because they are not discriminated against in any way: neither professionally, nor in terms of social recognition”¹¹⁹. In 2020, the President publicly repeated the thesis that there were no restrictions [of human rights] or persecution of LGBT+ people¹²⁰.

This position acquired particular salience in connection with major international events held in Russia: the 2014 Sochi Olympics and Euro 2018. In the context of the Olympics, Putin specifically emphasized in public statements the absence of discrimination against non-heterosexual people and drew comparisons between Russia’s legal framework and that of other states in Russia’s favor, noting that homosexuality was not subject to criminal prosecution in the Russian Federation¹²¹. Statements about the need to “separate” sporting competitions from debates on the regulation of the freedoms of queer community were made by the well-known athlete Yelena Isinbayeva¹²², who stressed the importance of not violating Russian law on its territory. Similar views were raised by politicians as well, including the Russian Foreign Ministry’s Human Rights Commissioner Konstantin Dolgov¹²³.

In the period from 2022 to 2025, anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community changed substantially, and its discriminatory, stigmatizing, and protective elements reached a new level. As noted in the previous chapter, it was during this period that the legislative ban on the propaganda of “non-traditional sexual relations” was extended from minors to the entire population; a ban on legal gender recognition and gender-affirmative care was introduced; and in 2023 the “International LGBT Public movement” was designated extremist. The rhetoric of the political elite, as well as the substance of the new norms, intensified pressure on the community not only at the level of law but also at the level of discourse.

Thus, in the explanatory note to the draft law¹²⁴ amending the Federal Law *On the Fundamentals of Health Protection*

119 Putin: persons of non-traditional sexual orientation in Russia are not subjected to discrimination // TASS. – January 19, 2014. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/896870> (accessed:20.02.2026).

120 Putin states the absence of discrimination against LGBT+ people in Russia // RBC. – July 3, 2020. – URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/5eff2fca9a7947338fc06875> (accessed:20.02.2026).

121 Putin: persons of non-traditional sexual orientation in Russia are not subjected to discrimination // TASS. – January 19, 2014. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/896870> (accessed:19.02.2026).

122 Isinbayeva: “We are against the propaganda of homosexuality” // RBC. – 2013. – August 15 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/15/08/2013/57040df39a794761c0ce0bc2> (accessed:17.02.2026).

123 Dolgov: holding the Olympics is not connected to the law on the propaganda of homosexuality // Sport-Express. – January 17, 2014 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.sport-express.ru/olympics/sochi2014/news/595156/> (accessed:17.02.2026).

124 Draft Federal Law No. 369814-8, On Amendments to the Federal Law On Information Technologies, and Information Protection and Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/369814-8> (accessed:17.02.2026).

of *Citizens*, the initiators directly pointed to the danger of the development of a "transition industry", the existence of "destructive activity", including by LGBT+ organizations and activists, aimed at young people. In justifying the relevance of the bill, as in the explanatory notes to earlier restrictive legislative acts, there was a reference to traditional values and the significance of the family, but new elements were also added, such as a direct appeal to the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation and to the Presidential Decree approving state policy aimed at preserving and strengthening "traditional values".

The rhetoric accompanying the adoption of the federal law also directly insisted on the danger of "sex change" for children and on its impact on the entire population of the country. Thus, in his personal Telegram channel, Vyacheslav Volodin stated: *"This is a path leading to the degeneration of the nation. For us, this is unacceptable"*¹²⁵.

The threat to the population was also explicitly stated in the explanatory note to the amendments to Article 6.21 of the Code of Administrative Offenses, where the propaganda of "non-traditional sexual relations" was presented as unsafe not only for children but also "for society as a whole, since it poses a threat to the country's demographic growth and economic development". "Moreover, such propaganda directly contradicts the norms stated in the new version of the Constitution", the document stated. The explanatory note also contained the tendency, already visible in previous years, toward the discursive rapprochement of pedophilia and homosexuality, noting the absence of a ban on the "propaganda of pedophilia" and the need to introduce such a norm. This tendency was further continued in the statements of representatives of the political elite. Thus, in 2025, Vyacheslav Volodin placed in a single series "non-traditional sexual relations, same-sex marriage, pedophilia, and sex change"¹²⁶.

In public statements, the Russian Orthodox Church reinforced the state line by attributing homosexuality to the category of "sin"¹²⁷, and by describing a "war" against the family and traditional values, allegedly waged by Western

- 125 Volodin on the ban on gender transition: this is a path leading to the degeneration of the nation // State Duma of the Russian Federation. News. – December 14, 2022 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/57524/> (accessed:17.02.2026).
- 126 Volodin places non-traditional relations, pedophilia, and gender transition in the same category // State Duma of the Russian Federation. News. – January 15, 2025 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://duma.gov.ru/news/62586/> (accessed:17.02.2026).
- 127 Patriarch Kirill calls homosexuality a sin // TASS. – November 12, 2022 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/14857621> (accessed:17.02.2026).

countries¹²⁸, in a way parallel to the discourse of politicians¹²⁹. Thus, "LGBT propaganda" also became framed as a threat to national security and as part of the geopolitical strategy of ideologically hostile states.

It is important to note that public discourse nevertheless retained a formal duality and continued to stress that same-sex relations themselves were not subject to legislative prohibition. Vladimir Putin repeatedly stated this in the period from 2022 to 2025¹³⁰.

The analysis conducted makes it possible to establish that anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community in Russia is not the product of an abrupt normative turn in the early 2010s, but rather a set of discursive practices formed over a long period, whose origins can already be traced in the media and expert fields of the 1990s. Initially fragmented and non-institutionalized, these practices gradually consolidated, acquired legal form, and by the 2010s had become one of the stable elements of state ideological policy.

Within the material examined, **several key tendencies can be identified** that shaped both the internal logic of anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community and the directions of its subsequent development.

1. **The persistent pathologization and criminalization of non-heteronormative sexuality.** One of the foundational and earliest tendencies is the discursive construction of homosexuality as a form of deviant, pathological, and potentially criminal behavior. Already in the press of the early 1990s, non-heterosexual orientation was systematically associated with such socially and morally condemned phenomena as pedophilia, sexualized violence, necrophilia, and zoophilia. This device made it possible not only to marginalize the community, but also to deprive it of the status of a legitimate social group, shifting the discussion from the plane of rights

128 Patriarch Kirill: the West is waging a war against the family and traditional values // Official website of the Moscow Patriarchate. – January 24, 2023 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.patriarchia.ru/article/105298> (accessed:17.02.2026).

129 See public statements by Volodin and Khinshtein. For example: <https://tass.ru/politika/16073565> or <https://www.pnp.ru/social/khinshteyn-nazval-lgbt-instrumentom-gibridnoy-voyny-protiv-rossii.html>

130 Putin: LGBT+ are also part of society, but we are against propaganda among children // Public Television of Russia. – February 5, 2025 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://otr-online.ru/news/putin-proyasnil-situaciyu-s-lgbt-v-rossii-282612.html> (accessed:17.02.2026).; Putin at the cultural forum in St. Petersburg: LGBT+ are also part of society // Radio Svoboda. – November 17, 2023.

and identity to that of public danger. It is important to emphasize that the abolition of criminal liability in 1993 did not lead to the disappearance of this logic. On the contrary, criminalization was replaced by medical, moral, and criminological rhetoric, within which homosexuality was described as a "sexual pathology", a "sign of increased danger", or a characteristic of marginalized groups, particularly through its association with prison themes. What occurred, therefore, was a shift from direct legal persecution to more flexible, but no less stigmatizing, forms of symbolic control.

2. **The construction of an image of demographic and social threat.** The second significant tendency lies in the reinterpretation of queer community as a threat to demographic reproduction and social stability. Whereas in the early 1990s the emphasis was placed primarily on moral corruption and individual "degeneracy", by the end of the decade rhetoric increasingly portrayed homosexuality as a mass phenomenon spreading widely and competing with the heterosexual family model. Such narratives produced the image of an "internal enemy" that not only differed from the "normal" majority, but allegedly undermined the foundations of national survival. It was precisely this motif (the threat posed to demography, the family, and the future of children) that later became central to the justification both of bans on LGBT+ prides and of legislative initiatives against "LGBT propaganda". Significantly, within this logic, everyday discrimination and violence began to be represented as permissible, or even justified, forms of social "self-defense".
3. **The expert and pseudo-scientific legitimization of discrimination.** Particular attention should be paid to the tendency toward the expert rationalization of anti-gender discourse. The use of the authority of representatives of law enforcement, legal scholarship, and medicine gave stigmatizing statements an appearance of objectivity and scientific grounding. Anti-homosexual claims were framed as the result of professional analysis rather than ideological choice, which significantly increased their legitimacy in the public sphere. This tendency played a key role in the subsequent transfer of the discourse into the legal field: it was precisely the expert idiom that made it possible to present restrictive measures as necessary, technical, and directed toward the protection of society, rather than as a form of value-based repression. In this context, the use of epidemiological

arguments (HIV/AIDS) and criminological characterizations, which constructed homosexuality as a source of uncontrollable social risk, is especially revealing.

4. **The institutionalization of anti-gender discourse through the language of law.** Beginning in the 2000s, previously fragmented discursive elements acquired normative consolidation, above all through the introduction and development of the concept of "LGBT propaganda". Legislative initiatives, starting with A. V. Chuev's draft law, demonstrate direct continuity with the media and expert narratives of the 1990s: danger to children, the destruction of traditional values, and the foreignness of homosexuality to Russian society. Of particular importance in this process was the evolution of terminology—the shift from the word "homosexuality" to the vague and ideologically charged formula "non-traditional sexual relations". This lexical transformation broadened the scope of legal application and intensified control over self-expression, while simultaneously erasing the boundaries between different identities and forms of conduct.
5. **The paradoxical duality of repressive and "tolerant" rhetoric.** Finally, a defining feature of anti-gender discourse throughout the entire period under consideration is its internal contradiction. Repressive measures and discriminatory norms were consistently accompanied by statements affirming the absence of any ban on private life, the inadmissibility of discrimination, and the formal recognition of the right to sexual orientation. This rhetoric, however, did not weaken the discriminatory effect; rather, it masked structural violence by shifting it into the register of ostensibly neutral protection of public interests. Even the acknowledgment of the "inevitability" of the existence of non-heterosexual people was accompanied by their symbolic assimilation to "deviant" or "deficient" groups, thereby reinforcing a hierarchical model of citizenship.

For the sake of analytical completeness, it is also possible to turn to the final level of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, which involves attention to lexico-discursive strategies and the linguistic organization of statements. In this context, anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community in the Russian public sphere demonstrates a stable set of lexico-semantic and nominative strategies aimed at depoliticizing legal discrimination and naturalizing social stigma.

One of the key instruments of such discursive production is terminological instability, whereby different designations of non-heterosexuality function not as neutral descriptive categories, but as markers of ideological position. The use of the term "homosexuality", especially characteristic of the press of the 1990s and of expert publications, inserts non-heterosexual orientation into a medico-criminological paradigm. The suffix -ism semantically associates homosexuality with disease, addiction, or ideological deviation, thereby enabling it to be interpreted not as a form of identity, but as a behavioral disorder or social anomaly.

Within this logic, "homosexuality" becomes compatible with such concepts as "vice", "sexual pathology", and "sign of increased danger", and is readily incorporated into discursive chains alongside pedophilia and violent practices. Language thus does not merely describe reality, but produces homosexuality as an object of control, medical surveillance, and criminal suspicion.

The nominative form "homosexuals" functions as a means of depersonalization and reduction of the subject. Unlike expressions referring to people – for example, "people with a non-heterosexual orientation" – this designation defines the individual exclusively through a presumed sexual practice. This corresponds to a logic in which the subject is stripped of social multidimensionality and becomes the bearer of "dangerous behavior".

From the perspective of CDA, such nomination performs the function of de-individualization, making it possible to address not concrete people with rights, but an abstract group potentially subject to regulation, restriction, or exclusion from the public sphere.

Likewise, the shift in legislation and official documents from the term "homosexuality" to the formula "non-traditional sexual relations" represents not a softening, but a discursive intensification of control. This construction not only erases the boundaries between orientation, identity, and behavior, but also introduces the binary opposition "traditional/non-traditional", in which the latter is a priori rendered marginal and suspect.

Importantly, some texts also employ the formulas "non-traditional sexual orientation" or "non-traditional sexual preferences", which further blur conceptual boundaries and make it possible to bring virtually any form of nonconformity with

the heteronormative model within the scope of regulation.

Similarly, such concepts as "propaganda", "dissemination", "destructive content", and "influence" do not presuppose a clearly defined subject and thus create the image of an anonymous, omnipresent threat.

As a result, attention is shifted away from the question of *who is doing what*, and toward the need to protect society from the mere fact of the existence of information itself. This makes it possible to legitimize restrictive measures without entering into discussion about rights, freedom of expression, or concrete forms of harm. In Fairclough's terms, such a strategy serves to depoliticize repression by presenting it as a technical and preventive measure.

Discursive analysis of narratives about women's status: evolution of representation and consolidation

Unlike the position of queer community in the 1990s, which underwent significant normative change with the decriminalization of homosexuality in 1993, the status of women was transformed in a different manner, as shown in the previous chapter. Between 1991 and 1999, women's status preserved the principal achievements of Soviet emancipation, including a broad range of political and socio-economic rights and guarantees. At the same time, however, the state proved incapable of effectively performing its previous paternalistic functions in supporting motherhood. As a result, the gender contract of the "working mother" remained dominant, but without infrastructural support. Parallel to this, new ideas began to emerge in society concerning the possible structuring of relations between men and women. Representations of the "restoration" of authentic traditions of femininity and masculinity began to spread, implying a return to a more patriarchal order, often justified through essentialist assumptions¹³¹. Anti-gender discourse was expressed in the activities of religious organizations and could also be found in publications adhering to more conservative positions or condemning particular manifestations of Western feminist movements. The position of the Russian Orthodox Church is reflected in a document that was actively discussed and adopted precisely during the 1990s, "Basis of the Social Concept of the Russian Orthodox Church"¹³².

"The distinction between the sexes is a special gift of the Creator to the human beings He created... Man and woman represent two different modes of existence within a single humanity... In the fallen world, however, relations between the sexes may be distorted, ceasing to be an expression of divinely given love and degenerating into a manifestation of the sinful attachment of fallen man to his own

131 Zdravomyslova, E., Temkina, A. "Neo-traditionalism(s): The Transformation of Gender Citizenship in Contemporary Russia", – P. 205.

132 Publication of the Moscow Patriarchate. On the Social Role of Women [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.patriarchia.ru/article/105101> (accessed:17.02.2026).

'self'... For Christians, marriage became not merely a legal contract... but, in the words of St. John Chrysostom, a 'mystery of love,' the eternal union of the spouses with each other in Christ... The Church insists on the lifelong fidelity of spouses and on the indissolubility of Orthodox marriage, on the basis of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ... The diminishing of the social significance of motherhood and fatherhood in comparison with the professional achievements of men and women leads to children being perceived as an unnecessary burden...

In the pre-Christian world there existed an understanding of woman as a being of a lower order in comparison with man. The Church of Christ fully revealed the dignity and vocation of woman, providing them with a deep religious foundation... While highly valuing the social role of women and welcoming their political, cultural, and social equality with men, the Church at the same time opposes the tendency to diminish the role of woman as spouse and mother... Representatives of certain social currents are inclined to belittle, and at times entirely deny, the significance of marriage and the institution of the family, devoting primary attention to socially significant activity by women, including activity incompatible or only minimally compatible with female nature (for example, work involving heavy physical labor)... The Church, however, sees the vocation of woman not in the simple imitation of man or competition with him, but in the development of all the abilities given to her by the Lord, including those inherent only to her nature".

In this passage, one can observe direct assertions of:

- natural and "essential" difference between men and women, understood as "natural" and insurmountable, with consequences for the whole of human life and for self-realization in both private and public spheres;
- primary significance of women's realization of the maternal role and the lower significance of professional activity, especially activity deemed incompatible with "female nature";
- an emphasis on the importance of marriage and the effective

- impossibility of its dissolution, for both men and women;
- condemnation of policies aimed at emancipation and the support of life strategies for women that do not include motherhood or realization within a heteronormative family.

However, in the 1990s this discourse had not yet found normative reinforcement. Thus, the 1995 Federal Law *On State Benefits for Citizens with Children* is written in neutral legal language and does not codify any linguistic stereotypes; rather, it simply restores the existence of a subsidiary state policy aimed at supporting motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood.

The development of the anti-gender discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church in subsequent decades demonstrated a stable tendency toward the radicalization and concretization of its original theses, as well as their synchronization with state policy. Whereas "Basis of the Social Concept" of 2000 emphasized general principles of women's "natural purpose" and the importance of motherhood, public statements of the 2010s and 2020s rendered this rhetoric more rigid and, at times, openly stigmatizing toward women whose life choices diverged from the church-approved model.

As early as 2009, Patriarch Kirill, speaking at the First Forum of Orthodox Women, articulated a dual but clearly hierarchical position. On the one hand, he called on Orthodox Christian women to take an "active social position", acting as "guardians of Christian moral values in the family and society"¹³³. On the other hand, he stressed that "the role of wife, mother, and keeper of the hearth can never, under any circumstances, be deformed, because this is the real physical and spiritual foundation of human society". Thus, women's public activity was permitted only insofar as it served the transmission of church values and did not call into question the primacy of the family role.

Changes in state anti-gender discourse, by contrast, begin to be visible in the 2000s. Already in 2000, in his first address to the Federal Assembly, Vladimir Putin emphasized the high significance of the demographic problem for state policy. As he stated directly, "Today the demographic

133 Kirill (Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus'). The Vocation of Women in the Church // Jesus-portal.ru: [website]. – [n.p.], 2009. – (The Patriarch's View; 78). – URL: <https://jesus-portal.ru/truth/mysli-na-kazhdyy-den-goda/vzglyad-patriarkha/78-prizvanie-zhenschiny-v-cerkvi/> (accessed:20.02.2026).

situation is one of the alarming ones"¹³⁴. However, the actual beginning of state socio-economic policy aimed at "changing" demographic trends and actively stimulating birth rates came later, in 2006. In May 2006, Putin delivered another address to the Federal Assembly, the opening of which directly articulated the anti-gender discursive message:

"And now to the main thing. What is our main thing? Yes, exactly. The Ministry of Defense knows what our main thing is. We are indeed going to speak about love, about women, about children (Applause). About the family. And about the most acute problem of contemporary Russia—demography (Applause)"¹³⁵.

In this address, Putin stressed the importance of encouraging the birth of a second child and of providing economic support for women "who decide to give birth and raise a child", and who face difficulties such as the absence of housing or the possible loss of employment¹³⁶. Putin foregrounded the paternalistic task of the state and advanced the idea of guardianship and support for women making an independent decision in favor of motherhood. He stated: "if we want to solve such problems, then in situations like these a woman often finds herself in a dependent, and sometimes frankly humiliating, position within the family. And the state, if it is truly interested in increasing the birth rate, is obliged to support the woman..."¹³⁷ In conclusion, Putin openly spoke of the significance of changing society's attitude toward the family, "old values", and the "family hearth". The theses articulated in his address found reflection both in subsequent media publications¹³⁸ and in statements by other representatives of the political elite¹³⁹. Already in October 2006, the proclaimed initiatives found direct expression in the draft law *On Additional Measures of State Support for Families with Children*¹⁴⁰ and in the explanatory note¹⁴¹ to the document under discussion in the State Duma. In 2007, "Concept of the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up

134 Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly (2000) [Electronic resource]. — URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21480> (accessed:17.02.2026).

135 Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly (2006) [Electronic resource]. — URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23577> (accessed:17.02.2026).

136 Address of the President of the Russian Federation to the Federal Assembly (2006) [Electronic resource]. — URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/23577> (accessed:17.02.2026).

137 Ibid.

138 For example: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/20/06/2006/5703bc439a7947afa08ca241>

139 For example, a compilation of statements from 2006–2007: https://ria.ru/demography_Russia_society_statistics_150506/

140 Draft Federal Law No. 349449-4, On Additional Measures of State Support for Families with Children [Electronic resource]. — URL: <https://sozd.duma.gov.ru/bill/349449-4> (accessed:19.02.2026).

141 Ibid.

to 2025”¹⁴² was formulated, likewise emphasizing the importance of maternity capital and the impact of women’s high level of economic activity on the number of children in the family.

In subsequent years, the key narrative constructed within anti-gender discourse found reflection in the 2009 National Security Strategy. At the very beginning of the document, emphasis is placed on the restoration of “primordially Russian ideals” and spirituality, and on the strengthening of public consensus on the basis of shared values, including “respect for family traditions”¹⁴³. The Strategy insists on the importance of improving the demographic situation and identifies as a principal direction of “national security in the sphere of health care and the health of the nation” the vector of “improving, as the foundation of the life of society, the institution of the family and the protection of motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood”¹⁴⁴.

Media discourse in the 2000s also supported the state narrative not only by retransmitting the statements of political elites, but also by emphasizing the success of the policies being implemented, for example, by drawing attention to demographic growth¹⁴⁵ and to public support for the introduction of maternity capital¹⁴⁶.

Overall, during the 2010s the tendencies outlined above were reinforced by subsequent normative acts of strategic significance:

- In 2017, the National Strategy for Women (through 2022) was adopted¹⁴⁷. The strategy describes in detail the importance of women’s participation in the country’s economic and political life, normalizes the construction of diverse life trajectories, and acknowledges the existence of violence against women as a social problem. The document also states directly: *“Obstacles to the fuller realization by women of the full range of their rights and freedoms*

142 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 9, 2007 No. 1351, On the Concept of the Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation for the Period up to 2025 // Official website of the President of Russia. – URL: <http://kremlin.ru/acts/bank/26299> (accessed:17.02.2026).

143 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020 (approved by Presidential Decree No. 537 of May 12, 2009) [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/95521/> (accessed:20.02.2026).

144 Ibid.

145 In 2007, Russia recorded the highest birth rate in the last 15 years // RIA Novosti. – February 1, 2008. – URL: <https://ria.ru/20080201/98172314.html> (accessed:17.02.2026).

146 FOM: 50% of Russians are confident that maternity capital will be effective // RBC News. – March 24, 2007. – URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/society/24/03/2007/5703c7649a79470eaf7655ba> (accessed:17.02.2026).

147 Directive of the Government of the Russian Federation of March 8, 2017 No. 410-r, On Approving the National Strategy for Women for 2017–2022 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.prilib.ru/item/680104> (accessed:19.02.2026).

are the prevailing societal perceptions of women's social role, which negatively affect women's self-realization and the development of their individuality, hinder their free choice of profession and way of life, and create barriers to achieving de facto equality between women and men both in socio-political and in socio-economic life". At the same time, anti-gender discourse is present in the strategy through its emphasis on reducing the number of abortions and on the measures taken in this direction, as well as through the high significance attached to motherhood as a social role of women.

- In 2020, a new National Security Strategy was adopted¹⁴⁸, reiterating the emphasis on the special importance of supporting motherhood and childhood and on resolving the demographic problem.

In the final period in the development of anti-gender discourse, from 2021 to 2025, both its content and the emphases in the statements of political elites increasingly shifted toward reinforcing the importance of raising the birth rate and of women's realization through motherhood. President Vladimir Putin, for example, repeatedly emphasized in public statements the priority of large families¹⁴⁹ and asserted that "a large, close-knit family is a powerful stronghold for the country, for society, and for the individual". Russia also initiated and carried out a "Year of the Family", launched the nationwide competition "This Runs in the Family"¹⁵⁰, and one of the national projects for the period 2025–2030 was given the laconic title "Family"¹⁵¹. At the state level, amendments were adopted prohibiting the "propaganda of childfree lifestyles"¹⁵², and a draft law was considered that would recognize feminism as an extremist movement¹⁵³. The shift toward more radical normative strategies demonstrates adherence to the trajectory already established in the development of anti-gender discourse with regard to LGBT+ community: the use of the concept of "LGBT propaganda" to control freedom of expression; the formulation of the vague term "childfree",

148 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020 (approved by Presidential Decree No. 537 of May 12, 2009) [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.garant.ru/products/ipo/prime/doc/95521/> (accessed: 17.02.2026).

149 Putin names birth rate and large families as priority goals for Russia // RBC. – December 26, 2024. – URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/676d818b9a7947673e032ee6> (accessed: 17.02.2026).

150 Putin: solving demographic problems begins in people's minds // TASS. – October 23, 2025. – URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/25433539> (accessed: 17.02.2026).

151 Putin states that existing measures to support families with children are insufficient // Demoscope Weekly. – July 16, 2025. – URL: <https://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2025/01083/rossia01.php> (accessed: 17.02.2026).

152 Putin introduces fines of up to ₺5 million for childfree propaganda // RBC. – November 23, 2024. – URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/23/11/2024/6741fe169a7947be6bf84e00> (accessed: 20.02.2026).

153 State Duma to consider a draft law recognizing feminism as an extremist ideology // RIA Novosti. – April 4, 2023. – URL: <https://ria.ru/20230404/proekt-1863016013.html> (accessed: 20.02.2026).

under which a wide range of phenomena may be subsumed: from representations of the personal choice not to have children to the dissemination of ideas of hostility toward children and toward women who value motherhood; and the reduction of a set of ideas about gender equality, expressed in feminism, to a single movement or ideology that can be declared dangerous to the state and extremist. However, unlike anti-gender policy with regard to LGBT+ community, normative regulation did not become equally prohibitive and radical, stopping short at the use of a limited set of instruments for tightening control.

Strategic documents adopted in 2021–2025 also intensified the emphasis on fertility and motherhood. Under a presidential decree, the “strong family” was included in the final codified list of “traditional values”¹⁵⁴. In the Strategy for the Implementation of Family and Demographic Policy and Support for Large Families through 2036¹⁵⁵, the importance of increasing the birth rate is once again emphasized, and measures for achieving state goals are described in detail, including through an “information and communication campaign” aimed at the “popularization and promotion of traditional family values, as well as the support and protection of the family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood”.

At the same time, contradictions within anti-gender discourse are also evident, particularly around **two broader issue areas:**

1. **The adoption of a law on the prevention of domestic violence.** Although official discussion of the draft law was suspended, individual representatives of the political elite at high levels spoke of the need to protect women from violence. The relevance of the issue was also reflected in strategic documents from previous years. However, anti-gender discourse was dominated by the line of argument reflected in the statement of State Duma deputy Nina Ostanina: “...a separate law on domestic violence is not needed. We will not copy foreign legislation. We already have an intolerant attitude toward violence”¹⁵⁶.

154 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of November 9, 2022 No. 809, On Approving the Foundations of State Policy for the Preservation and Strengthening of Traditional Russian Spiritual and Moral Values // Official Internet Portal of Legal Information. – November 9, 2022. – URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202211090019> (accessed:19.02.2026).

155 Directive of the Government of the Russian Federation of October 29, 2024 No. 3045-r, On Approving the Strategy for the Implementation of Family and Demographic Policy and Support for Large Families in the Russian Federation through 2036 [Electronic resource]. – URL: <http://static.government.ru/media/files/r10o4FJgcqMhYx2b6AJRxBMNS2m7pmN4.pdf> (accessed:17.02.2026).

156 Views expressed in Russia on the need for a law on domestic violence // Lenta. Ru. – September 25, 2025. – URL: <https://lenta.ru/news/2025/09/25/v-rossii-vyskazalis-o-neobhodimosti-zakona-o-domashnem-nasilii/> (accessed:17.02.2026).

At the same time, news portals published survey results showing that residents of the country supported the adoption of a law protecting against domestic violence¹⁵⁷.

The issue of the need for specific legislation was first raised in 2014, when a petition in favor of such a law gathered nearly one million signatures. The key turning point, however, was the decriminalization of domestic violence in 2017. In January 2017, the President signed a law that shifted first-time battery against close relatives from the criminal to the administrative sphere. The official justification appealed to the need to reduce the burden on law-enforcement institutions and to preserve the “traditional” family order by avoiding excessive state interference in intra-family matters. Conservative and religious actors played a central role in lobbying for this decision. After 2017, further attempts were made to adopt a comprehensive law. In 2019, the Federation Council put forward a new version of the draft law for discussion, but it was criticized both by human rights defenders, for lacking real protective mechanisms, and by conservatives. As a result, the law was never submitted to the State Duma. The positions of political actors on this issue reveal a split, but the dominance of anti-gender discourse remains evident.

2. **Anti-abortion policy.** Beginning in 2023, some regions of Russia started to adopt local measures aimed at restricting women’s right to have an abortion in the absence of medical indications, or directly prohibiting the “propaganda” of abortion¹⁵⁸. Some representatives of the political elite spoke in support of banning abortion, while others stated directly that a federal ban was impossible and inexpedient for the state¹⁵⁹. Thus, anti-gender discourse in this area still allows for the expression of different positions, but within an overall tendency to support increased birth rates and to frame arguments “for” or “against” abortion not from a liberal-democratic standpoint centered on women’s right to control their own lives and bodies, but through the rhetoric of utility and effectiveness for the state and its strategic needs.

The peak of the radicalization of church discourse with regard to women also falls in the 2020s, coinciding with the broader strengthening of state anti-gender policy. In 2024–2025, several high-profile statements by representatives

157 For example: https://www.rbc.ru/society/13/06/2024/6669ccdb9a7947f5d3b0376b?utm_source
 158 For example: https://tass.ru/obschestvo/24649827?utm_source
 159 For example: https://tass.ru/obschestvo/19447617?utm_source

of the Russian Orthodox Church demonstrated that church discourse not only supported state discourse, but also provided it with a harsher and more essentialist framework. In mid-2025, Archpriest Andrei Tkachev referred to contemporary women as “weak, cowardly, and debauched” specifically in connection with their unwillingness to give birth, directly linking this to the demographic crisis. In his words, whereas the family had once been “the foundation of society” and people operated on the assumption that “losses would be replenished by new generations”, today contemporary women “do not aspire to motherhood”¹⁶⁰. This statement is notable not only for its emotional charge, but also for its direct appeal to the state demographic agenda – the rhetoric that, as shown above, has become central in official strategic documents in recent years. A similar position was articulated in late 2025 by Archpriest Evgenii Popichenko, who formulated a rigid binary model of gender roles: “A man is the master, the breadwinner, the leader, the head, so to speak. And a woman is a wife, a mother, a domestic fairy”¹⁶¹. According to him, any attempt to alter this model under the influence of contemporary “propaganda” (which in context implied both feminist ideas and other gender strategies) leads to “internal conflicts” and to the suffering of a person whose “nature” is not being fulfilled. It is important to note that in this rhetoric the concept of “nature” performs the same function as in state documents: it presents a socially constructed model as the only possible and natural one, which, within the theoretical framework of critical discourse analysis, constitutes a classic mechanism of the naturalization of power.

Finally, particular attention should be paid to Patriarch Kirill’s position on abortion, which directly intersects with the state anti-abortion campaign of 2023–2025. In October 2024, he called for “putting an end” to abortions, justifying this not only with religious but also with demographic arguments, and proposed a concrete model of how pregnant women should be addressed: “You know, my dear, keep the child. After all, it is unknown how your life will turn out – whether you will marry, whether you will have any more children”¹⁶². At the same time, the Patriarch emphasized the need not only

160 The Russian Orthodox Church described contemporary women as “weak” and “cowardly” and unwilling to give birth [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://cher-poisk.ru/news/obschestvo/v-rpts-nazvali-sovremennyh-zhenschin-dohlymi-truslivymi-i-nezhelayuschimi-rozhat> (accessed:19.02.2026).

161 “A woman is a domestic fairy, and a man is the master”: the Russian Orthodox Church comments on spouses’ roles in the family [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.amic.ru/news/zhenschina-domashnyaya-feya-a-muzhchina-hozyain-v-rpc-vyskazalis-o-rolyah-suprugov-v-seme-572475> (accessed:17.02.2026).

162 “You know, my dear, keep the child”: Patriarch Kirill calls on women not to have abortions [Electronic resource]. – URL: <https://www.eparhia10.ru/news/-dorogaja-sohrani-rebenochka-/> (accessed:17.02.2026).

for moral but also for material support, noting that “the preservation of our people, the multiplication of our people—this is, of course, a task of the state”, and that “the Church, as the bearer of the spiritual and moral values of the people, must assist in this by every possible means”.

The analysis conducted makes it possible to establish that anti-gender discourse with regard to women and feminist agenda in the Russian Federation is not a reactive or situational response to isolated social initiatives, but rather a long-forming and consistently institutionalized complex of discursive and normative practices. Unlike anti-gender policy with regard to queer community, where the key trigger was the struggle against visibility and public presence, in the case of women the central object of regulation is reproductive function, family role, and the permissible forms of social self-realization.

Anti-gender discourse with regard to women develops not through a direct negation of formal equality, as guaranteed by the Constitution and sectoral legislation, but through the redistribution of the symbolic and normative significance of different life strategies. As a result, a hierarchical model of femininity is formed and consolidated, in which motherhood and participation in a heteronormative family are constructed as socially prioritized and state-significant forms of female self-realization, while alternative trajectories are consistently marginalized.

Within the material examined, several key tendencies can be identified that shaped the internal logic of anti-gender discourse and the directions of its evolution:

1. **A shift from formal equality to the functional specialization of the sexes.** One of the basic tendencies is the gradual departure from the Soviet model of egalitarian emancipation toward a discourse of the functional complementarity of the sexes, grounded in essentialist notions of the “natural” differences between men and women. Already in the 1990s these assumptions were articulated in religious and conservative public discourse, though they did not receive direct normative consolidation. Beginning in the 2000s, these representations were gradually integrated into state rhetoric and social policy. Formal recognition of equal rights was accompanied by the simultaneous

consolidation of the idea of distinct social vocations for the sexes, in which women were conceived above all as bearers of reproductive and caregiving functions.

2. **The demographicization of the “woman question” and the subordination of gender policy to the logic of national security.** The second key tendency is the transformation of women’s issues into an element of the demographic and, more broadly, national security agenda. Whereas in the 1990s declining birth rates were treated primarily as a socio-economic problem, from the mid-2000s onward they acquired the status of an existential threat to the state. Within this logic, women became the central objects of demographic policy, while their reproductive behavior became subject to state regulation, stimulation, and moral evaluation. Socio-economic support measures such as maternity capital, benefits, family-support programs performed a dual function: on the one hand, they compensated for the social risks associated with motherhood; on the other, they consolidated the idea of childbearing as a socially expected and encouraged choice.
3. **The institutionalization of a paternalistic model through strategic documents.** The third tendency lies in the gradual institutionalization of anti-gender discourse through strategic planning documents. National security, demographic policy, and family development strategies form a stable framework in which the “strong family”, “motherhood”, “childhood”, and “traditional values” function not merely as cultural reference points, but as elements of state resilience.
4. **The controlled permissibility of liberal elements and their structural marginalization.** Particular attention should be paid to the paradoxical duality of state policy, within which elements of democratic and rights-based discourse remain present, but do not acquire priority status. The National Strategy for Women, discussion of violence, and recognition of multiple life trajectories – all these elements are present in the public sphere, yet they are not transformed into binding normative decisions. Thus, anti-gender discourse does not eliminate alternative positions outright, but structurally deprives them of normative priority and political effectiveness.
5. **A shift toward preventive control and the expansion of the conceptual field of threat.** In the final period under analysis, one can observe a tendency for anti-

gender discourse to expand beyond reproductive policy toward control over the symbolic sphere. The use of such concepts as "propaganda" and "childfree", as well as discussion of recognizing feminism as an extremist movement, points to the formation of a preventive logic of regulation aimed less at concrete actions than at ideas, identities, and forms of public expression.

6. **The consolidation of the state-church discursive coalition.** Particular attention should be paid to the role of the Russian Orthodox Church as a key ally of the state in the production and reproduction of anti-gender discourse. Throughout the entire period under study, and especially in the 2010s and 2020s, church discourse not only duplicated state discourse, but also performed the functions of moral legitimation, radicalization, and concretization. Whereas state documents operated with abstract categories such as "traditional values" and "demographic security", church hierarchs and priests translated these categories into the plane of personal moral choice, sin, divine vocation, and "natural norm".

Overall, the evolution of anti-gender discourse with regard to women in Russia demonstrates a transition from post-Soviet uncertainty under crisis conditions to a stable model of state paternalism, within which women appear above all as objects of demographic, family, and moral policy. As a result, a gender contract is formed in which women's autonomy is permissible only insofar as it does not conflict with the state's reproductive and family priorities, while alternative life strategies are symbolically and normatively marginalized.

For analytical completeness, it is also useful to turn to the lexico-discursive level of anti-gender policy with regard to women. One of the key lexico-discursive strategies is **the essentialization of gender differences in the rhetoric of religious institutions**, realized through formulas such as "natural vocation", "female nature", "natural role", and "divinely given difference between the sexes". These nominations function not as descriptive categories, but as normative markers that exclude the possibility of alternative interpretations of gender identity and life strategies. In the logic of critical discourse analysis, such constructions perform the function of ontologizing social hierarchy, presenting socially constructed roles as immutable properties of human nature.

An important role is also played by the hierarchization of forms of female self-realization through the semantic

opposition between motherhood and professional activity. This binary opposition not only establishes a normative scale of values, but also produces symbolic pressure on women's choices, translating individual decisions into the plane of moral responsibility before society and the state. Particular attention should be paid to demographic metaphorization, within which women's bodies and reproductive practices are incorporated into the language of national security. Within this logic, women cease to appear as subjects of rights and are transformed into bearers of demographic resources, while their reproductive choices become objects of strategic planning.

A similar function is performed by the language of social support, in which verbal constructions such as "to stimulate", "to motivate", and "to encourage" conceal the asymmetry of power relations by presenting state intervention as neutral assistance. Within CDA, such a strategy may be characterized as the depoliticization of control, in which the restriction of autonomy is masked as care and social responsibility.

Finally, a significant element of anti-gender discourse is the construction of alternative female strategies as potentially dangerous or destructive. The use of vague and evaluative labels – "childfree", "propaganda of rejection of the family", "extremist ideas of feminism" – does not presuppose a clearly defined object of regulation, but creates an image of a diffuse threat to the traditional order. Such indeterminacy broadens the space of interpretation and strengthens the preventive character of control over public expression and the symbolic production of gender meanings.

Thus, lexico-discursive analysis shows that anti-gender policy with regard to women operates not so much through direct prohibitions or through the rejection of formal equality, but through the linguistic production of a norm within which motherhood and the family role are constructed as natural, prioritized, and socially obligatory. Language here functions as a key mechanism of power, ensuring the reproduction of a patriarchal model of femininity under the guise of care, tradition, and demographic necessity.

Conclusion

The historical-discursive analysis undertaken here makes it possible to argue that anti-gender discourse in contemporary Russia is not a set of fragmented statements addressed to different social groups, but rather a coherent hegemonic system of knowledge. Within this system, queer community and women appear not as autonomous objects of regulation, but as elements of a unified normative order structured around notions of the "traditional family", demographic security, the hierarchy of gender roles, and the state's aspiration to regulate people's intimate sexual lives and the private sphere more broadly. Anti-gender discourse with regard to the queer community and with regard to women is not identical in form, but it is structurally isomorphic in function. In both cases, what is at stake is the disciplining of bodies, identities, and life strategies, albeit through different linguistic, normative, and symbolic mechanisms. If the image of LGBT+ persons is constructed discursively as an existential threat (demographic, moral, and civilizational) women are represented as a resource to be managed, mobilized, and directed into the "proper" channel. Thus, the difference between the two objects of anti-gender discourse does not negate their inclusion within a single project of gender statism.

At the same time, one of the key differences between anti-gender discourse with regard to queer community and with regard to women lies in the character of the linguistic strategies employed. With regard to LGBT+ community, strategies of stigmatization dominate, through the lexicon of "propaganda", "perversion", "non-traditionality", and "extremism"; delegitimation, through the denial of the status of an acceptable subject; demonization, through the imposition of a discursive link with pedophilia and danger to the state; and depersonalization, through the use of abstract constructions. By contrast, with regard to women, anti-gender policy and the anti-gender movement operate through paternalism, the normalization of motherhood as a "natural" and "state-significant" scenario, the economization of reproductive function as a "resource", and moralization through

appeals to traditional values. Thus, if the queer community is excluded from the social body through negative marking, women are incorporated into it on the condition of conformity to a prescribed role. Deviation from that role, through feminism, refusal of motherhood, or the struggle for reproductive rights, is also stigmatized, though in a secondary manner.

Differences are also evident in the manner of nomination. Queer community is introduced into discourse through such terms as "non-traditional relations", "ideology", "movement", "propaganda", and "extremism". This fundamentally blurs the boundaries between identity, behavior, and political action, thereby legitimizing the expansive application of repressive measures. Within such a discourse, a queer person ceases to be a citizen and becomes a bearer of an abstract threat. Women, by contrast, are nominated primarily through "motherhood", "family", "childhood", and "reproductive potential". Even in strategic documents that proclaim equality, women remain discursively "bound", among other things, to reproductive function.

Similarly, the comparative analysis of normative acts demonstrates the fundamentally different yet complementary character of the legal consolidation of anti-gender discourse. With regard to queer persons, a predominantly prohibitive model is applied; with regard to women, the model is incentivizing-restrictive. Both models, however, serve a single purpose: reproduction of a hegemonic gender order in which only those forms of identity and behavior that correspond to the state project are permissible.

Public statements by representatives of the political elite play a particularly important role in the reproduction of anti-gender discourse. Characteristically, with regard to women the language of care and responsibility is employed, whereas with regard to LGBT+ people the language of restriction and distancing predominates. Nevertheless, both discourses converge at a key point: the denial of individual autonomy in matters of gender and sexuality.

Thus, anti-gender discourse in Russia should be understood not as a reaction to specific social groups, but as a structural element of state ideology aimed at consolidating a patriarchal, heteronormative, and militarized gender order. Differences in form do not negate the unity of purpose: the restriction of gender and sexual diversity as a condition for preserving hegemonic power.

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Research:
Historical development of the
anti-gender movement in Russia
(1991-2025): problem formulation

Author:
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Publication date:
April, 2026

