

May 5, 2022

PSCI 107

Final Paper

Breaking Bread with Putin and the Queer Community: The Influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on Homophobia in Russia

**Introduction:**

Over the past several years, Russia has become increasingly more homophobic in both its government policies and social attitudes. In many places, religious conservatism is known to influence attitudes about LGBTQ+ rights and homophobia. Russia, where most of the population is religious and identifies as part of the Orthodox Church, is no exception to that trend. When Russia gained its independence and began the process of democratization in the 1990s, they had the opportunity to prioritize LGBTQ+ rights, but they did not (Eremin & Petrovich-Belkin, 300). Their avoidance of the issue at the beginning gave rise to the growing influence of the Russian Orthodox Church once Vladimir Putin came into office and spoke of his religious alliance, focusing on promoting ideas of the traditional family and traditional values (Sundstrom, et al., 118). Putin's religious beliefs influence his policy implementations, but the question is: does religious importance influence societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community?

To examine the influence, I conducted several tests of statistical analysis on data sourced from the World Values Survey Wave 7, specifically the data from Russia, looking at how the dependent variable, the justifiability of homosexuality, is affected by the independent variable, a person's ranking of the importance of religion in their life. This method is limiting, however, as it ignores the existence of any other factors, for example, if people's negative views on the

LGBTQ+ community are influenced more so by the government's policy rather than their own religious beliefs, indicating a correlation between the two variables, but not necessarily a causation. The WVS is also limiting, as the questions asked can be restricting of potential answers, as it is a survey, not a full interview, so there is no opportunity for respondents to provide explanations for their answers. This nature is useful to compare social behavior and attitude trends across countries but can make it difficult to assess the reasons behind a belief within one country as it focuses more on quantitative data than qualitative. There is reason to believe that the importance of religion does affect beliefs about the justifiability of homosexuality, however, based on the limitations of the data from the WVS, there are other factors that influence Russian opinions on homosexuality than just religion that cannot be seen through testing this data.

### **Literature Review:**

Similar studies have focused on assessing why it is that LGBTQ+ rights have become more limited and discouraged in Russia, and what factors have influenced this discrimination. By analyzing historical information and previous research data, Wilkinson found that Russian history and Putin's choices have cemented the Church as a considerable influence on many policies, including the idea of traditional values and family structure as a reason LGBTQ+ rights should not be protected by the government (Wilkinson, 5-6). Supporting this idea more, Buyantueva found through interviewing queer Russian activists that the Church is an influencing factor in the increasing homophobic social attitudes, but not the largest or most influential factor, concluding instead that is the state and government (Buyantueva). Furthering this idea of the Church's influence on the government, Walstad, in studying Russian government structure, democracy, and the legitimacy of Putin, found through literature review and statistical analysis

that the government's connections to the Russian Orthodox Church mean it cannot and will not prioritize or support LGBTQ+ rights as it would directly contradict the position of the Church, upon which much of the government's legitimacy is founded (Walstad, 11). The research done by Wilkinson, Buyantueva, and Walstad all came to similar conclusions on the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church on homophobia in Russian society, but interestingly found varying levels of influence, indicating the Church more directly influences the government who in turn influence societal views.

**Findings:**

To analyze the data from the World Values Survey, I ran statistical tests to see the cross-tabulation of the two variables, as well as the chi-square test to see the statistical significance of the relationship. The cross-tabulation shows the breakdown of the percentages of answers that were answered based on categories from the dependent variable. This showed how answers to the question on the importance of religion aligned with answers to the question about the justifiability of homosexuality, directly testing the hypothesis by comparing percentages. The chi-square test was also useful in determining the likelihood of a relationship between the two variables.

Before I looked at the cross-tabulation, I first wanted to see the distribution of answers to each question individually.

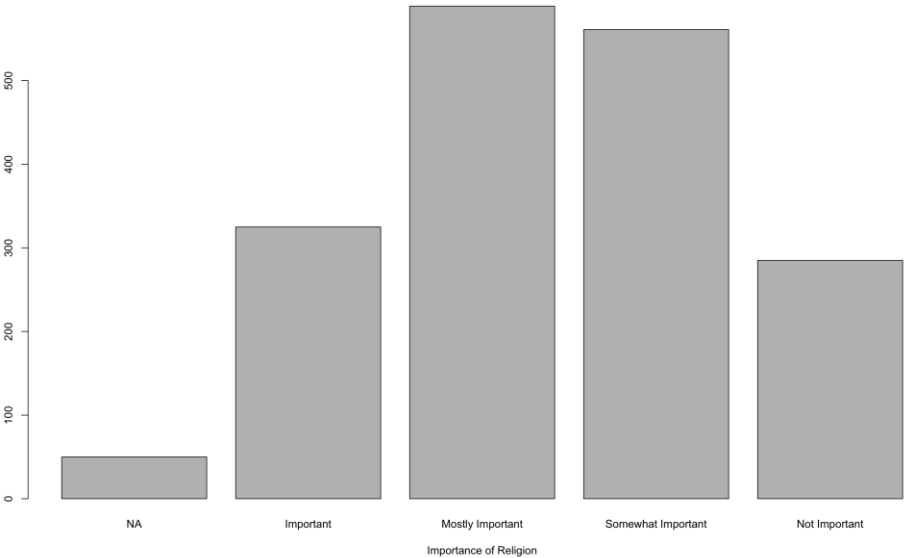


Figure 1. Answers to Importance of Religion in Russia

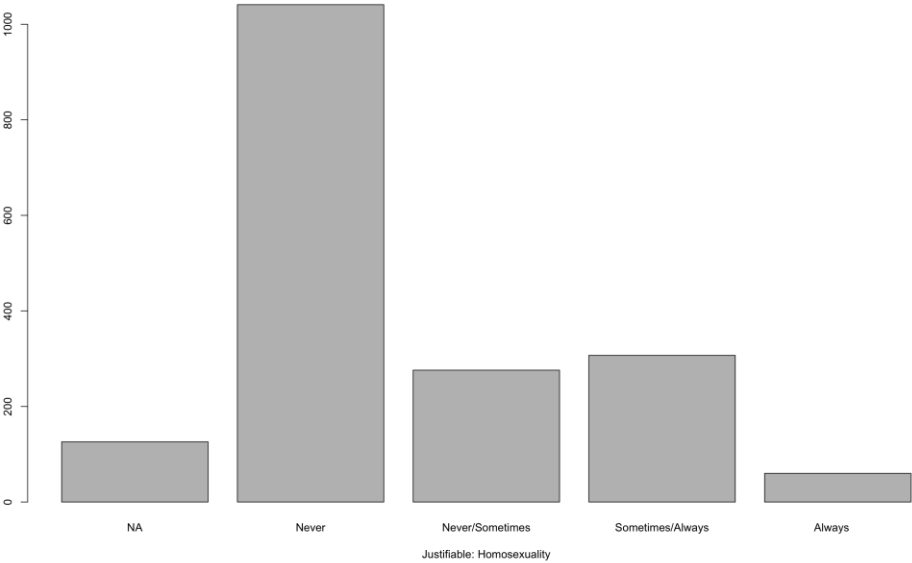


Figure 2. Answers to Justifiable: Homosexuality in Russia

Figure 1 shows that many respondents in Russia lean towards identifying religion as an important value of theirs and that most respondents deemed homosexuality to be never justifiable, as shown in Figure 2. Seeing this data individually is important as it gives an idea of where the answers are separately, allowing conclusions to be drawn about the state’s attitudes toward each variable individually to be understood. In this case, a conclusion can be drawn that

most Russians, based on the answers of respondents to the WVS, think homosexuality is never acceptable or justifiable, and many Russians also place at least some importance on religion in their lives.

Once there is the basis of the individual answer distributions, the cross-tabulation can be analyzed and better understood.

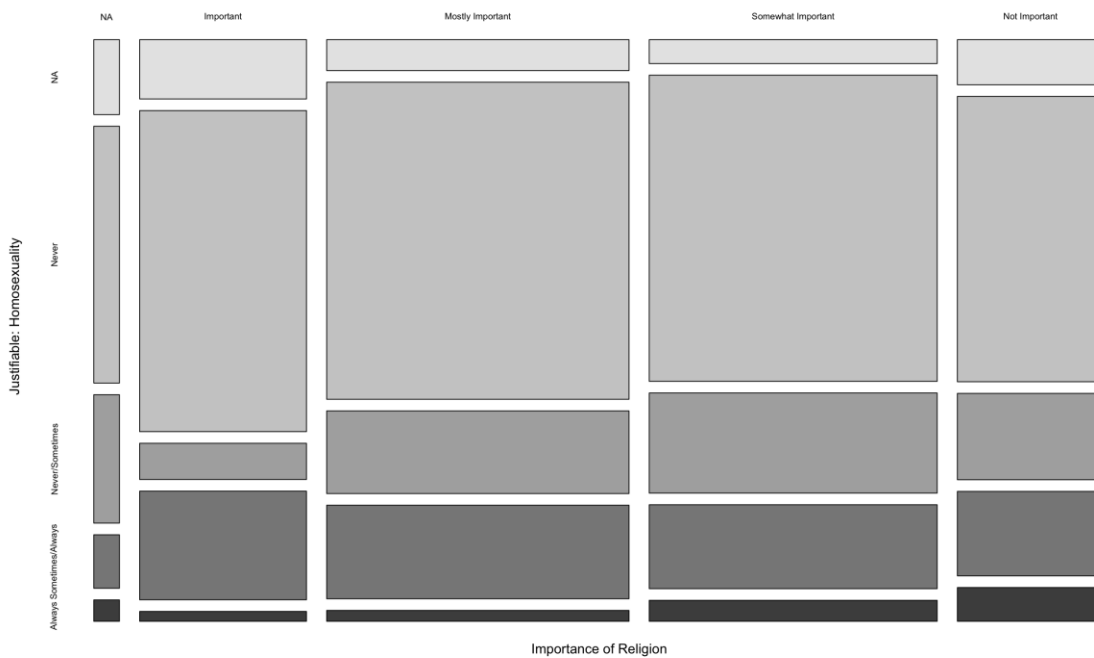


Figure 3. Cross Tabulation of Answers to Importance of Religion and Justifiability of Homosexuality

The cross-tabulation takes the data from the two individual questions and breaks down answers on religious importance with answers on the justifiability of homosexuality. Looking at Figure 3, regardless of how important someone thinks religion is to their life, they are more likely to believe that homosexuality is never justifiable. Across the row of respondents who answered that homosexuality is always justifiable, the percentages of people who answered within each level of importance of religion increased as the level of importance decreased, with 1.85% of important believing it is always justifiable, 2.04% of mostly important, 3.92% of

somewhat important, and 6.32% of not important. The same trend decrease can be seen in never justifiable across the levels of religious importance, with 60.00% of important believing it is never justifiable, 59.25% of mostly important, 57.22% of somewhat important, and 53.33% of not important. Within the ranges of sometimes justifiable, the same trend cannot be seen as there is a fluctuation that does not support a decision to the argument in either direction, based on those religious values.

### **Analysis:**

Looking at the findings of the cross-tabulation, the higher importance placed on religion in one's life in Russia, the more likely they are to believe homosexuality is justifiable. Testing the chi-square of the data results in a p-value of 0.0000003, suggesting there is less than a one percent chance that there is no relationship between the importance of religion and views on the justifiability of homosexuality. Chi-square does not necessarily prove anything about the causality of the relationship, because it can be limiting as it only demonstrates that there is a relationship, but does not explain where it originates from, or whether it is causal. The cross-tabulation also shows there is a relationship but that it is simply correlational, as there is still a high likelihood that a person in Russia believes homosexuality is never justifiable, regardless of the importance of religion in their life, suggesting that the findings of Wilkinson, Buyantueva, and Walstad hold, as religion influences government policies, but the state influences individual beliefs more, regardless of individual religious beliefs.

### **Conclusion:**

Analyzing the data from Wave 7 of the World Values Survey in Russia shows a correlational statistical relationship between the importance of religion and the justifiability of

homosexuality, but not a causal one. The state of Russian politics has grown more complex over recent years, with a growing number of influences on policy decisions as Putin tries to increase his political legitimacy as president. It seems more likely with his declarations of religious allegiance that the Russian Orthodox Church and its beliefs directly influence the policies he implements, and in his role as leader, his ideas, beliefs, and policies influence the widespread homophobic opinions throughout Russian society. The World Values Survey is useful to show correlational relationships but cannot show whether a relationship is causal as the answers it provides for respondents are limited by its nature as a survey rather than in-depth interviews. In answering the research question about a causal relationship, it would be helpful to better understand the individual motivating factors behind answers, such as whether individuals believe homosexuality is not justifiable because of their religious beliefs or because of the government position. Even if the World Values Survey remained the same, it would be beneficial if the Survey asked the same questions in every country. For example, there were questions asked in some countries about the confidence of individuals in the government and their policies that would suggest whether the government positions influenced individual beliefs on homosexuality rather than religion, however, these questions were not asked in all countries, including Russia. Data around that topic would have been beneficial to compare the relationship between those questions and beliefs on homosexuality with the relationship between religious beliefs and acceptance of homosexuality.

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