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Journal of Democracy, Volume 34, Number 1, January 2023, pp. 50-64  
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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# WHY EUROPE'S RIGHT EMBRACES GAY RIGHTS

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Over the last century, there has been a seismic shift in the landscape of LGBTQ+ rights in much of the world—particularly in Western Europe, the Americas, and Australasia. Progress on equality has been made in the realms of public opinion, politics, and legislation. Same-sex marriage is now legal in 33 countries, and in many places LGBTQ+ people enjoy at least some measure of protection against hate crimes based on sexual orientation and employment discrimination as well as the rights to adopt children and serve in the military.

At the same time, however, homosexuality remains illegal in 69 countries, with possible penalty of death in eleven of those. In others, the extrajudicial murder of homosexuals is effectively state sanctioned. In Russia, parts of Africa, and the Caribbean, LGBTQ+ people are perhaps in even greater danger today than they were twenty years ago. Complicating the picture, transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming individuals and groups face discrimination, demonization, and violence even in places where lesbian and gay communities have made significant legal advances. Well-funded, establishment-adjacent, socially conservative groups that had previously led the fight against gay rights have now trained their crosshairs on transgender people, stoking bigotry to mobilize voters in a manufactured culture war.

But in a striking and surprising development, numerous right-of-center political parties in Europe have come to embrace the cause of gay rights and equality (although generally not rights and protections for trans and other gender-nonconforming people). These right-of-center parties have also been electing gay, lesbian, and bisexual candidates

and leaders. In doing so, such parties signal that they are both modern and inclusive. Behind this trend seems to be a combination of evolving social values, leadership strategies and choices, and declining religiosity among voters. Not all parties on the right support gay rights, however. To help understand where gay-friendly parties fall on the political spectrum, we have divided the right into three broad categories: the center right, who became more socially liberal as they became less religious; the radical right, whose populist appeal is rooted in themes of nationalism and xenophobia; and the religious right, whose voters remain adherents to the church. But some diversity exists even within these categories: For example, although some populist radical-right parties are still highly homophobic, not all are. The Table below shows where European parties in each of these categories fall on gay rights.

The evolution of the European right's views on LGBTQ+ rights raises a number of important questions: Most important, what has motivated such parties to embrace gay rights—a fundamental change in values, or electoral strategy? Why have some parties on the right resisted the trend and even ratcheted up their attacks on all LGBTQ+ people? And why have rights and protections for transgender people been comprehensively detached from the political right's embrace of lesbian and gay rights?

### **Right Follows Left**

During the first century of modern democracy, no mainstream political party advocated for gay rights. Widespread homophobia and the centrality of religion in the lives of most people, regardless of class or ideology, meant that the cause could make little headway among the predominantly male politicians of any political stripe. But in the 1970s, a group of European left-wing and socially liberal centrist parties began to embrace gay and lesbian rights as part of a push from the left to inject individual liberty into collective social-democratic norms. In the 1990s and 2000s, a few centrist conservative parties joined the early adopters from the left and liberal center. Some of these center-right converts became stronger believers in the cause of gay equality than their predecessors on the left. Conservative parties in Norway, Denmark, Great Britain, and the Netherlands trumpeted their newfound enthusiasm for gay rights as a badge of modernity and political maturity. By the turn of the century, equality for gays and lesbians had become conventional wisdom and overt homophobia taboo in most of Western Europe and Scandinavia.

Center-right parties were able to move on the issue of gay rights because their voters had stopped judging each party and candidate against a religious scorecard. By the 1990s, many conservatives had become less religious. Those conservatives who remained highly religious migrated to diehard religious parties, which by then were largely waning. For center-right parties, championing gay-rights issues, such as mar-

**TABLE—THE RIGHT AND LGBTQ+ RIGHTS: A CLASSIFICATION**

Center Right	Radical Right		Religious Right
Pro-LGBTQ+ Rights*	Anti-LGBTQ+ Rights		
Austria, ÖVP** Belgium, N-VA Belgium, CD&V Belgium, Les Engagés Czech Rep., Top 09** Czech Rep., ODS** Denmark, Conservative People's Party Denmark, Liberal Party Estonia, Reform** France, The Republicans Finland, NCP Germany, CDU** Greece, New Democracy Iceland, Independence Iceland, Vidreisn Ireland, Fine Gael Ireland, Fianna Fáil Latvia, Unity Liechtenstein, FBP Lithuania, Homeland Luxembourg, CSV-PCS Malta, PN Netherlands, VVD Netherlands, CDA Norway, Conservatives Poland, Civic Platform Portugal, PSD** Slovakia, SaS Spain, People's Party Sweden, Moderate Party Sweden, Christian Democrats Switzerland, The Centre** U.K., Conservative Party	Austria, BZO** Belgium, VB Denmark, People's Party Finland, Finns France, NF/NR** Germany, AfD** Netherlands, PVV Netherlands, LPF Sweden, Sweden Democrats Switzerland, SVP** U.K., UKIP	Austria, FPÖ Czech Rep., SPD Estonia, CPP Estonia, EKRE Estonia, Isamaa** Greece, Greek Solution Hungary, Fidesz Hungary, Jobbik Italy, Brothers of Italy Italy, Lega Latvia, National Alliance Poland, Law and Justice Portugal, Chega Slovenia, SDS Slovakia, SR Slovakia, ĽSNS Slovakia, OĽaNO Spain, Vox	Czech Rep., KDU-ČSL** Finland, Christian Democrats Germany, CSU Italy, UdC/NcL Netherlands, CU Norway, CDP Slovenia, NSi** Switzerland, Evangelical PP

\*Parties in the “pro” column range from those that engage in substantive actions and manifesto commitments (often on the center right) to those that display support for gay rights primarily through rhetoric and piecemeal policy proposals.

\*\*Significant divisions exist within the party.

*Note:* Categorization is based on data from Chapel Hill Expert Survey 1999–2019 ([www.chesdata.eu](http://www.chesdata.eu)); ParlGov ([www.parlgov.org](http://www.parlgov.org)); the Manifesto Project (<https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>); and expert advice.

riage equality and the right of same-sex couples to adopt children, while embracing their own high-profile gay leaders, proved to be marketing gold. It helped to smooth the hard edges of economic austerity and their staunch support for unbridled capitalism. These center-right parties framed their support for gay marriage and adoption as aligning with their belief in the nuclear family: two parents raising children. As then British prime minister David Cameron explained in 2012, “I don’t support gay marriage in spite of being a Conservative, I support it because I am a Conservative.”

In the countries where religion remained more salient for center-right parties, change was slower to emerge. For instance, the German Christian Democrats under party leader and longtime prime minister Angela Merkel (2005–21) were much later backers of LGBTQ+ equality. Germany had established registered partnerships in 2001 under the Social Democrats, but Merkel and her Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) government blocked marriage equality until allowing a free vote in 2017. Even then, only a quarter of CDU/CSU members of parliament (MPs) voted in favor of same-sex marriage. Merkel, the daughter of a pastor, publicly opposed marriage equality until supposedly experiencing an “emotional conversion” after meeting a lesbian couple in her constituency in 2017. While several CDU MPs privately supported gay rights, they were hamstrung by fear of their voters’ disapproval and by the leverage of their devout Catholic CSU partners from Bavaria. By 2021, however, nearly 90 percent of CDU/CSU candidates supported marriage equality.<sup>1</sup>

## The Radical-Right Divide

When it comes to their stance on gay rights, radical-right parties diverge sharply by region. Most are anti-immigrant, Islamophobic, and populist, and East and South European radical-right parties also remain staunchly opposed to gay rights. The radical right in Western and Northern Europe, in contrast, have voiced support for the cause, though often to signal their opposition to Islam and immigration from the Global South.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the radical right often frames gay rights as a cultural cornerstone of European national identity and values, which radical-right parties contend are under threat by Muslim immigration. Sometimes called “homonationalism,” this type of cynical support for sexual diversity can be used to “justify nationalism, imperialism, white supremacy, war, and consumerism. It is the use of the rights of one marginalized group, to oppress another.”<sup>3</sup>

In much of Northern Europe, and particularly in the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden, gay rights are no longer a wedge issue but rather a broadly accepted national value—and have been for a generation. In 2002, the openly gay Dutch radical-right leader Pim Fortuyn, who would

be assassinated later that year, boasted that “in Holland, homosexuality is treated the same way as heterosexuality,” and asked, “in what Islamic country does that happen?”<sup>4</sup> In 2007, Danish People’s Party leader Pia Kjaersgaard said, “In Denmark we adhere to liberal values. We accept and respect the choices people make. We accept homosexuality. In Iran you will be hanged for your homosexuality.”<sup>5</sup> In recent years, radical-right parties in France, Germany, and other West European countries have adopted a similar rhetoric. Yet, write sociologists Francesco Duina and Dylan Carson, this “does not amount to a recognition of the intrinsic merits of being gay. What matters is the freedom to be gay.” They cite as an example Florian Philippot, the number two of France’s far-right National Front (called the National Rally since 2018) from 2012 to 2017, who was outed by a magazine as gay in 2014. Philippot said in 2017, “We’re a party that doesn’t care about people’s preferences, their sexual practices or whatever . . . You’re a French citizen foremost.”<sup>6</sup>

Radical-right parties have often opportunistically employed gay rights as a nationalist cudgel to attack Muslim immigrants and immigration (and, by association, all immigrants from the Global South regardless of faith) as threats to the nation state’s defining liberal values. This shift, which began not quite twenty years ago, has been possible because these parties and their supporters are often culturally Christian but no longer devoutly religious. Thus European radical-right parties that were once overwhelmingly dominated by “conservative nativists” now count among their members a sizeable share (about a third) of “sexually-modern nativists.” Whereas the early foot soldiers of radical-right politics were primarily working-class men with traditional views on gender roles, new adherents are younger, more educated, and more likely to be women. They still embrace nationalism and are vehemently opposed to immigration, but they now support (at least rhetorically) liberal social positions such as equality for gays and women. The success of Pim Fortuyn’s eponymous political party in the Netherlands’ 2002 general election, just days after his assassination, is seen by some as the moment when this new trend began to take hold among the radical right.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, radical-right parties in Eastern and Southern Europe remain homophobic and do not invoke gay rights to stir up fear of “encroaching” Muslims. These radical-right groups describe gay rights as alien to the national culture and a “foreign” value imposed by liberal international actors and the European Union. The cases of Poland and Hungary are the most obvious, but similar discourses have echoed in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states.<sup>8</sup>

In both Poland and Hungary, religion and nationalism are wrapped up together, with religion viewed as a defining feature of the nation. Gay rights are seen as incompatible with both national values and traditional family values advocated by the churches. Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party, with help from the far-

right Jobbik party, began reversing two decades of progress almost as soon as they came to power in 2010, banning same-sex marriage, adoption by gay couples, and LGBTQ+ content in classrooms, schoolbooks, and on children's television programs.<sup>9</sup> The radical right in Poland has in recent years attacked "LGBT ideology,"—that is, the supposed attempt by LGBTQ+ people to impose values on children and society that are antithetical to the traditional family. The Polish radical right has, in response, promoted the establishment of "LGBT-free zones." Although largely a PR stunt, LGBTQ+ advocates fear that these zones, first introduced in 2019, encourage anti-gay violence and discrimination, citing attacks on two gay-pride parades and a huge increase in reported hate crimes since 2019.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, the populist radical right of Italy and of Spain still identify strongly with Catholicism. In Italy, Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy (FdI) and Deputy Prime Minister Matteo Salvini's Lega have opposed hate-crime legislation protecting LGBTQ+ individuals, marriage equality, and adoptions by same-sex couples in the name of defending the traditional family. In Spain, the radical-right Vox party has challenged the country's acceptance of LGBTQ+ people, promising to cut support for pride parades and inclusive curricula, and comparing homosexuality to bestiality.<sup>11</sup> Over the years, Italian and Spanish radical-right parties have joined numerous rallies (often called "Family Day") organized by religious groups supported by the Catholic Church, to defend the traditional family and oppose the expansion of rights for LGBTQ+ individuals and couples.

The link between the radical right and religious actors is also evident in the transnational coordination of opposition to LGBTQ+ rights. For example, a small but powerful group of well-funded U.S. Christian-nationalist organizations—namely, the Alliance Defending Freedom, the Family Research Council, and the World Congress of Families (WCF)—has exploited endemic trans- and homophobia to encourage the radical right in Eastern Europe (as well as in Africa and the Caribbean) to take up anti-LGBTQ+ legislation.<sup>12</sup> These groups have directly influenced members of the inner circles of Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán, and Andrzej Duda. The transnational ties between movements date back at least to a 1995 meeting in Moscow between U.S. historian Allan Carlson and Russian sociologist Anatoly Antonov, which gave birth to the WCF—the organization that would go on to support Russia's 2013 parliamentary ban on "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations."

In 2014, the WCF organized a meeting in Vienna, Austria, hosted by Russian Orthodox oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, to build anti-LGBTQ+ alliances with populist radical-right parties, including Italy's Lega, France's National Front, Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), Bulgaria's Ataka party, and a radical offshoot of Spain's monarchist Carlist

movement.<sup>13</sup> Soon after, the WCF rebranded itself as the International Organization for the Family, and its president, Brian Brown, renewed the organization's push for closer ties to Moscow at a private meeting in Russia in 2017.<sup>14</sup>

Europe's explicitly religious political parties are less relevant today than they were a few decades ago, as European societies have become increasingly secular. But political parties that remain reliant on churches to mobilize voters often align with institutions and leaders who may be openly homophobic and transphobic—for example, the Catholic Church and its leaders in Austria, Italy, Germany, and Poland, including prelates Carlo Maria Viganò (former secretary-general of the Governorate of Vatican City State and apostolic nuncio to the United States), Gerhard Müller (former prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), Marek Jędraszewski (archbishop of Krakow), Carlo Caffarra (former archbishop of Bologna), Raymond Leo Burke (former prefect of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura), and Walter Brandmüller (former president of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences).

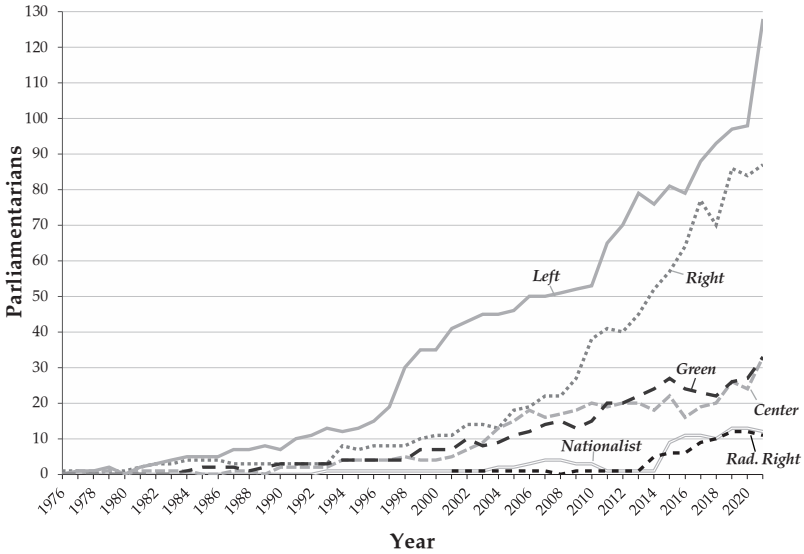
In Western Europe, the surviving religious parties are remnants of the center right that did not secularize. The supporters of such parties remain devout, and their leaders see no benefit in social liberalization. Thus these parties remain staunchly anti-gay as they atrophy. From Germany to Italy to the countries of Scandinavia, the power of religious parties has dwindled, but they still manage to limit the space for gay rights—by, for example, using their leverage in parliamentary coalitions to make center-right parties reluctant to move too far to the liberal side. The influence of the Catholic Church remains visible, however, among some factions of larger center-right parties such as former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia and the German CDU/CSU, and radical-right parties such as three-time French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen's National Rally, which are often split between culturally Christian and religiously Catholic wings. When that is the case, leadership and policy support for gay rights tend to be uneven and often fluctuate.

## **Right-Wing LGBTQ+ Leaders**

The evolution of the European right vis-à-vis gay and lesbian rights has gone beyond adopting supportive policy positions and rhetoric to bringing “out” lesbians, gays, and bisexuals into party leadership, both elected and appointed. As the Figure shows, over the last decade there has been striking growth in the number of openly lesbian, gay, and bisexual elected MPs from parties on the right, and not just in Europe. All but two Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) members—South Korea and Greece—have elected at least one



**FIGURE—OUT LGBTQ+ PARLIAMENTARIANS IN OFFICE, BY PARTY IDEOLOGY**



*Note:* Figure depicts 33 OECD countries plus Malta, Liechtenstein, and the European Parliament.

openly LGBTQ+ parliamentarian. And in the vast majority of OECD countries (28 of 38), at least one out-LGBTQ+ parliamentarian has come from a right-of-center party—with the only European exceptions being Hungary, Poland, and Portugal.

Between 1976 and 2021, more than 140 self-identifying lesbian, gay, or bisexual parliamentarians from right-of-center parties in Europe were elected (129) or appointed (12). The first out gay MP of any stripe was elected in the Netherlands in 1976: Coos Huisjen of the center-right Christian Historical Union (a precursor of the Dutch Christian Democratic Alliance). The second elected out MP was also from the center right, Wenche Lowzow of Norway’s Conservative Party, who won office in 1977, came out in 1979, and served until 1985. (Maureen Colquhoun of the British Labour Party came out in 1977 after being elected in 1974, but failed to win reelection.)

It has been the last two decades, however, that have seen the most dramatic increase in right-wing LGBTQ+ representation. Before 1997, there were only a few out elected officials of any political persuasion. That year, more than half the 36 out MPs belonged to parties on the left. In the 2000s, the number of LGBTQ+ officials representing the left soared, but grew more slowly on the right. By 2004, the ratio of out MPs on the left to those on the right was four to one. Centrist parties also produced more out MPs than did the right. But in 2005, national LGBTQ+ representation in right-of-center parties in OECD countries began to rise

dramatically, and by 2019 there were nearly as many LGBTQ+ MPs on the right (86) as on the left (97). The radical right specifically went from having only one out gay parliamentarian between 2001 and 2013 to having twelve in 2020.

The increase in the number of out LGBTQ+ conservative representatives has been most pronounced in Western Europe and Scandinavia. In 2022, 27 of the 365 Conservative (Tory) Party members of the United Kingdom's House of Commons were openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual. They constituted the largest LGBTQ+ bloc of any party in the British Parliament, larger than both the Labour Party and the Scottish Nationalist blocs. LGBTQ+ Tories also make up the largest cohort in the House of Lords. In Germany, four of the thirteen out MPs elected in 2021 were from the right, three were from the left, and five were from the Greens. Seven of the fourteen incumbent LGBTQ+ MPs in Sweden are from right-of-center parties. And in the Netherlands, nearly half the 36 LGBTQ+ MPs elected since 1976 have been from the right, while a quarter each have come from the left and the center.

Out gay conservatives have held the highest office in Ireland (Leo Varadkar) and Norway briefly (Per Kristian Foss), been cabinet ministers in multiple countries and party leaders in Denmark (Søren Pape Poulsen) and Sweden (Tobias Billström). There have even been high-level LGBTQ+ leaders of radical-right parties, including Alice Weidel (AfD), Pim Fortuyn (LPF in the Netherlands), Gerald Grosz (Alliance for the Future of Austria), and Steeve Briois and Florian Philippot (both deputy leaders of France's National Front). So far, however, the only gay MP to be elected from a Christian-right party in Europe was Ole Henrik Grønn of Norway's Christian Democratic Party in 2005. But he immediately left the party after coming out in 2008.

When it comes to gender, only 13 percent of right-of-center LGBTQ+ MPs are lesbian, bisexual, or trans women (versus almost a third of LGBTQ+ MPs from left-of-center parties). Women constitute 28 percent of the smaller subset of radical-right LGBTQ+ MPs, roughly the same share as on the left. All right-wing LGBTQ+ MPs are white.

Has the right's embrace of gay rights and gay candidates swung the LGBTQ+ vote to its side? There has not yet been a systematic study of LGBTQ+ support for right-of-center parties at the polls across a broad swath of electoral democracies. But Douglas Page and Taylor Paulin have examined same-sex households' reported voting behavior in twelve West European democracies between 2002 and 2018 using European Social Survey data.<sup>15</sup> Page and Paulin found that while lesbian, gay, and bisexual survey respondents skewed more to the left than did heterosexual voters, center-right parties nonetheless received more support from LGB respondents (34.2 percent) than did the center left (32.1 percent), liberals (9.8 percent), far left (8.9 percent), or greens (10.2 percent). In addition, the radical right gained 6.3 percent over the

period. In total, four of every ten LGB respondents chose parties on the right. Moreover, those respondents put themselves at 4.7 (on average) on a scale of 0 to 10 from left to right, just slightly to the left of straight respondents, who put themselves at 5.1.

Some polling data also suggest that the right's support for gay-rights issues is paying off at the ballot box. For example, a 2015 *Pink News* poll found that after British prime minister David Cameron's Conservative Party embraced marriage equality, the LGBTQ+ vote for Conservatives (26 percent) rose to draw dead even with that of the Labour Party (which fell a few percentage points).<sup>16</sup> Opinion polls also suggest that some LGBTQ+ voters may now support the radical right—including the French National Front, in part because of its anti-Islam messaging. Under Marine Le Pen, the party has espoused homonationalist rhetoric and accepted prominent gay leaders, despite the party's persistent opposition to gay marriage.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, parties that have sought to magnify homophobia and transphobia to mobilize core voters have seen limited and sometimes even declining LGBTQ+ support.

### Detaching the T from the LGB

Acceptance of transgender and gender-nonconforming people in 2022 is at roughly the same level as acceptance of gays and lesbians was fifty years ago, when gays and lesbians were victims of entrenched social bigotry and legal discrimination. Future social acceptance of gender diversity and legal equality for trans and other gender-nonconforming people may follow a similar trajectory as that of gay rights. That history, however, suggests that it could take some time before trans people enjoy the acceptance, rights, and protections that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals do today. Even though many democratic left-of-center movements are beginning to see the imperative to secure trans rights, reluctance remains the norm. A broad lack of familiarity with a community that was forced to hide in the shadows for centuries is likely a primary driver of persistent bigotry. Limited in most countries remain rights related to gender identity that trans people are trying to secure, such as the right to change one's gender marker on federal documents, adding a third gender option for federal documents, bans on employment discrimination, and hate-crime protections.

Parties on the right are at best ambivalent about transgender people and at worst vitriolically and violently transphobic. Indeed, as long as the left refrains from enthusiastically backing trans rights and protections, the center right has nothing to echo and no proof of possible payoff (for example, the prospect of increased votes). Nor will it be disposed to lead from the front on such a controversial issue. Even right-of-center parties and politicians who are strongly committed to gay and lesbian equality, such as the British Conservatives, are deeply ambivalent and prevaricate

over transgender rights. In October 2022 a large majority of Tory MPs remained opposed to trans rights.<sup>18</sup>

Notably, while there have been significant gains in right-of-center out LGB parliamentarians, only one of the eight out transgender MPs

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*The radical right in Western Europe supports gay rights in the name of cultural nationalism, while in Southern and Eastern Europe the radical right remains opposed to “alien gay rights” and continues to view homosexuality as a foreign trait.*

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serving in an OECD parliament is from a right-of-center party—Jamie Wallis, a British Conservative who came out in 2022 after being elected in 2019. (In 2009, Nikki Sinclair was elected to the European Parliament as a member of the radical-right United Kingdom Independence Party [UKIP], but she did not come out as trans until 2013, three years after defecting from UKIP to sit as an independent.)

The radical right is particularly determined to paint trans people as a threat to cultural hegemony and “traditional” gender roles. Unlike gay rights in Western Europe, supporting trans

rights has not yet become a core national value. Thus they are not a convenient weapon with which to stoke the Islamophobia that will drive voters to the polls. The religious right’s hostility to trans rights is equally straightforward. It sees transgender and nonbinary people as being in direct conflict with religious doctrine and the traditional gender roles that it calls for.

Indeed, the radical right and religious right sometimes join forces to oppose trans rights. In Eastern and Southern Europe, churches and the radical right together rail against gender equality and “sexual degenerates.” In June 2022, Italy’s soon-to-be prime minister Giorgia Meloni spoke before a crowd of religious activists and supporters of the far-right Vox party in Spain. In an attempt to raise her international profile among far-right groups, she harshly denounced “gender ideology” and “LGBT ideology” and voiced support for traditional Christian family values.<sup>19</sup> These expressions did not originate with Meloni. “Gender ideology” and “LGBT ideology” are catchphrases that present LGBTQ+ rights as an imposition of a system of beliefs that threatens Christian values. Proponents of these concepts have argued that the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights would promote homosexuality, threaten the traditional family, and destroy traditional gender roles.<sup>20</sup>

In this framework, the radical and religious right have been working together against LGBTQ+ rights for years. The collaboration dates back at least fifteen years in Italy and Spain, when these forces joined to organize a series of anti-LGBTQ+ “Family Day” demonstrations. In Poland, the Catholic Church and the Law and Justice party have been allied in

the fight against LGBTQ+ rights. In the 2020 presidential election, incumbent Andrzej Duda of the Law and Justice party and the archbishop of Krakow railed against “LGBT ideology” and the “rainbow plague.”<sup>21</sup> During the campaign, Duda signed a “Family Charter,” expressing opposition to same-sex marriage and adoption and promising to protect children from LGBT ideology, while Catholic priests openly supported Duda’s reelection. Hungarian Orthodox primates and Orbán’s Fidesz likewise formed an anti-LGBTQ+ alliance, which culminated in Hungary’s 2022 anti-LGBTQ+ referenda that sought to ban portrayals of homosexuality and information on gender-affirming care aimed at minors as well as actual gender-affirming procedures for minors. The measures failed to reach the required threshold of 50 percent of registered voters.<sup>22</sup>

## The Right Turn

Over the past two decades, the European right has consciously shifted its position on gay rights—from disapproval to varying degrees of support. The center right and far right each have different motivations for their embrace of gay rights. Establishment center-right parties became more pro-gay after becoming more secular, reconceptualizing and incorporating the same-sex family into traditional family values and using social liberalism to prove that they have modernized. The position of radical-right parties, however, is split. The radical right in Western Europe supports gay rights in the name of cultural nationalism, while in Southern and Eastern Europe the radical right remains opposed to “alien gay rights” and continues to view homosexuality as a foreign trait. Similarly, religious-right parties that rely on the votes of devout Christians have resisted the liberalizing tide.

So far, no right-wing party—whether secular or religious, centrist or radical—has voiced support for transgender rights and identities. Bisexual voters (by far the majority of the LGBTQ+ community) and issues, meanwhile, are uniformly overlooked—the feeling that biphobia is less consequential masks the fact that bi people often experience worse outcomes than gays and lesbians.<sup>23</sup> If a party anticipates gaining votes by throwing its support behind LGBTQ+ rights, then it will do so. But if a party’s base remains deeply opposed to LGBTQ+ rights for whatever reason, then that party has little incentive to liberalize. As there is no evidence that the recognition of transgender and gender nonconforming rights is a vote winner for any party anywhere as of 2022, political support for them will likely remain static until a broader social acceptance of diverse gender identities emerges.

Recent history suggests that it is a virtuous circle of elite signaling and the evolution of social values (in part the product of grassroots organizing) driving the progress on gay rights. As gay and lesbians became more visible in mainstream society, levels of homophobia declined ac-

cordingly. Political elites have sometimes been out ahead of their voters on gay-rights issues and other times have changed their stances based on voters' demands. Whether the embrace of gay rights by right-of-center parties is sincere, opportunistic, or cynical, however, a better legal framework is incredibly important and provides a foundation for future gains.

Every visible, out, right-of-center LGBTQ+ elected official cracks the ceiling a touch for the next candidate. Such elected leaders become role models who, sometimes by their very existence, inspire other LGBTQ+ people to follow in their footsteps. They also combat doubts about electability—that is, worry among voters and party leaders that the broader electorate might reject LGBTQ+ candidates, making them a risky choice. Having LGBTQ+ candidates on the right also blunts the power of homophobia as a campaign wedge issue. Once elected, LGBTQ+ officeholders will have a role in crafting LGBTQ-related laws and policies and can be instrumental in creating cross-party pro-gay parliamentary coalitions, further facilitating the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights.

Yet the right's support of gay rights does not ensure common cause with other minority groups. Embracing gay and lesbian equality does little, for example, to combat biphobia and even less to address transphobia. Indeed, while being increasingly gay friendly, the right is perhaps more overtly transphobic than ever before. Hence, it is little surprise that the increased global support for gay rights in recent years has been accompanied by growing polarization and stronger mobilization against transgender rights. Nor does belief in the benefits of sexual-minority inclusion seem to build empathy with ethnic minorities. Homonationalism, at its very core, places the white Christian above the non-Christian person of color, regardless of whether that person is gay or straight. By leveraging the protection of gay rights to justify anti-Islam and anti-immigrant positions, homonationalism has revived the old strategy of pitting minorities against one another. How much appeal this strategy still has remains to be seen.

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