

# **Secular Coat and Catholic Cassock?**

Czech and Slovak Anti-Gender Movements in a Comparative Perspective

By

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## Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, **Natália Noskovičová** candidate for the MA degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

Vienna, 31 May 2024

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the anti-gender movements in the Czech Republic and Slovakia as mobilizations against "gender ideology," encompassing LGBT and reproductive rights and gender equality. It highlights the movements' transnational character and adaptation to local contexts, mainly focusing on the differing moral authority of the Catholic Church in each country. How does a movement that originated in the Vatican adapt to religious and secular societies? To answer this question, the thesis relies on a comparative case study based on Sidney Tarrow's four powers in the movements – political opportunity structure, organization and networks, repertoires of contention, and framing. The main argument posits that in Slovakia, where the Church holds high moral authority, it cooperates closely with the anti-gender movement, influencing legislation and government policies. In contrast, with lower moral authority, the Czech Church shows ambivalence towards such alliances, although the movement's Vatican roots create some natural ties. The Czech movement presents anti-migrant and socio-economic framings to a secularized public, while the Slovak movement relies on Catholic doctrine. Both movements share ties and meet at international fora, emphasizing the transnational character of the anti-gender movement.

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## Introduction

Concerns about the spread of the so-called "gender ideology" as an agenda trying to undermine moral values are traversing the globe, and the Czech Republic (CR) and Slovakia are no exception (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Sekerák, 2020). The challenger of "gender ideology," the anti-gender movement that originated in the Catholic Church in the 1990s even managed to permeate high politics in the US and Europe (Case, 2011; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Sekerák, 2020; Zuk & Zuk, 2019). This thesis defines anti-gender movements as civil society organizations taking part in collective action, distinct from political parties and churches. Still, these different actors understand the LGBT community as well as women's rights and reproductive rights under "gender ideology". The grievances about protecting the "traditional family" and children stay the same within the larger transnational movement but adapt to local contexts and specific political opportunity structures with adjusted framings, networks, and repertoires of contention. If the movement originates in the Vatican, how can we understand its spread in the atheist Czech Republic? And how will the Czech case differ from Slovakia, which has a consistent history of Catholicism?

The main argument of this thesis relies on the different levels of the moral authority of Czech and Slovak Catholic Churches and the Vatican roots of the anti-gender movement. Since the Slovak Church has high moral authority based on the historical nexus between the Church and the nation, it will be able to align safely with a movement (having a more "civic" character as opposed to a political party), which shares virtually the same goals with the Church – namely the protection of the "traditional family". High moral authority safeguards institutional access for the Slovak Church and popular support for the Church's goals as it positions itself as a guardian of national interests. On the other hand, the cooperation between the Czech Church and the anti-gender movement can be described as ambivalent. This ambivalence stems from

the low moral authority of the Czech Church, which could, at first glance, predict a non-existent alliance with a possibly polarizing movement. However, because the anti-gender movement shares the Church's interests and is a product of the Holy See, it serves as a natural ally. Both the Czech movement and the Church show ambivalence towards their alliance – the Church because of its low moral authority and uncertainty of aligning with a particular politicized movement - a strategy that can attract followers but deflect many more. Although the movement has leaders of Catholic belief, it will be apprehensive toward the Church because of its relative unpopularity among the Czech population.

Despite the different levels of moral authority of Czech and Slovak Catholic Churches, the anti-gender movement has emerged and marked successes in the Czech case, too. Considering this moral authority split, what are the strategies of the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements? More specifically, how do the two anti-gender movements operate within the framework of Sidney Tarrow's four powers in the movement – political opportunity structure (POS), organization and networks, repertoires of contention, and framing? And, how does the Czech anti-gender movement, originating in the Vatican, navigate the disadvantage of mobilizing and seeking to achieve its goals in a predominantly atheist society? This thesis comparatively analyzes the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements primarily since 2016. This was the year when the Czech Committee for Defense of Parental Rights rebranded itself as an Alliance for Family. In this way, the Czech AfF symbolically aligned with Alliances for Family in other countries and thus established itself within the transnational anti-gender movement.

The structure of the thesis starts with a literature review of anti-gender movement scholarship and links between the movement and the Vatican. The theoretical framework rests on Tarrow's four powers and the moral authority of the Church. Contextualization briefly introduces the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements and public opinion on LGBT and

reproductive rights. The analysis follows Tarrow's framework and discusses the differences and similarities between CR and Slovakia in POS, organization and networks, repertoires of contention, and framing. Particular focus is on Catholic aspects of powers in the movement and interaction with the Church. Finally, in the Discussion & Conclusion, the Slovak anti-gender movement is considered to benefit from Church cooperation and religious symbolism. In contrast, the Czech movement attracts the atheist public with anti-migrant sentiment and socio-economic grievances and relies on professionalized lobbying in parliament to achieve its goals.

# 1 Literature Review

## 1.1 Evolution of "Gender Ideology" and Catholic Church Roots

The central concept of this master's thesis is the so-called "gender ideology," in Slovak translated as *rodová ideológia* and in Czech as *rodová ideologie*. However, the anglicized version of *gender ideológia* or *gender ideologie* is present among both Czech and Slovak anti-gender actors and indicates the alleged foreign and unknown character of this "new ideology" (Geva, 2019; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Furthermore, the word "ideology" is also a rhetorical choice that distorts and questions the legitimacy of the knowledge of gender studies since anti-gender actors use the term "ideology" to denote an unreasonable worldview overlooking "obvious" facts (Geva, 2019; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, p. 37).

At the same time, the term "ideology" evokes a threat associated with the former historical experience, especially in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Maďarová, 2015). Alternatively, anti-genderists in the old Western bloc regenerate the "Red Scare" phantom. They also claim that anti-genderists in the former communist bloc have a historical experience with totalitarianism and can therefore fight this "new ideology" better (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). The "pro-gender" (neo)Marxists allegedly try to undermine civilization or Christianity with manipulative statements about human rights (Marchlewska et al., 2019; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Maďarová, 2015; Žuk & Žuk, 2020). Likewise, the Vatican sees behind "gender ideology" a new form of Marxism seeking to reduce the population, separate women from their families, and put them into the workforce (Toldy & Garraio, 2021, pp. 545-546). One, if not the primary, reason for the opposition of anti-gender actors, and thus also the Holy See, to sexual and reproductive rights (pejorative "gender ideology") is the understanding of women as mothers and wives, whose primary role takes place in the private

(family) and not the public (work/political) sphere (Butler, 2019; Hennig, 2018; Toldy & Garraio, 2021).

In Christian and right-wing circles, "gender ideology" refers not only to the rights of the LGBT community but also to women's rights, reproductive rights as well as euthanasia. According to the populist right and fundamentalists, it threatens the "traditional family", children, and Christianity (Case, 2011; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Žuk & Žuk, 2020). Due to the ambiguity caused by the wide range of characteristics attributed to the term "gender ideology" by various actors, it is often referred to in academic literature as an "empty signifier" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 16; Vaggione, 2020, p. 258). Since the rejection of "gender ideology" and gender as a category different from sex unites Christian authorities, right-wing populist forces, and parts of civil society, it is also understood as a "symbolic glue" (Pető, 2021).

"Gender," as a concept used in gender studies, denotes socially constructed roles and attributes of biological sex, while these social expectations may differ and change in time, various contexts, and cultures (Toldy & Garraio, 2021; Sekerák, 2020). Nevertheless, it has a variety of meanings, as articulated by Pető (2021) – 1) a synonym to biological sex, 2) a category used in descriptive policy analysis, 3) a concept used for pointing to the social disadvantages stemming from male or female identity attributed to individuals at birth, 4) a signifier for the spectrum of gender identities – and alternatively, gender as a doing and as performative, questioning the idea of both gender and sex as natural categories (Butler, 1993). There are thus several uses of gender in queer-feminist academic, activist, and policy circles, and this undermines the anti-gender claim of a unified "gender lobby" (Butler, 2019; Geva, 2019; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

In the spirit of the promotion of "gender ideology" by foreign and transnational organizations and elites, anti-gender actors accuse entities such as "the EU" or "the West" of cultural or ideological colonization (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). The goal of the supporters of

"gender ideology" is, therefore, to replace the local identity, which according to anti-genderists, is heteronormative and socially conservative. Within the Church, Pope Francis warned in 2015 against ideological colonization, which is said to be taking place via international aid to developing countries, while this aid is conditional on introducing gender equality legislation (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 797). The anti-colonial framework allows anti-gender actors to be victims and heroes at the same time – victims of ideological colonization and culturally superior heroes (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 811). Resistance is presented as local, while ideological colonization comes from abroad (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 809). With this strategy, anti-genderists present themselves as an oppressed minority. Korolczuk & Graff (2018) consider the anti-colonial framework as the essential discursive aspect of various anti-gender actors worldwide.

"Gender ideology" became known to the general public, especially during the 2010s, and is used today in various political and religious circles. The Vatican was the first to use this term in the 1990s, specifically during the United Nations (UN) Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and in Beijing at the UN Conference on Women in 1995 (Case, 2011; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). This resistance was a reaction to the achievements of feminist organizations, e.g. in the area of gender-based violence, at previous conferences (Corredor, 2019; Vaggione, 2020). At the Cairo conference, an alliance of Muslim and Christian authorities was formed in opposition to the proposed documents, references explicitly to reproductive rights, i.e. decisions about one's own reproduction, but also against references to different forms of family apart from its heteronormative model (Corredor, 2019, pp. 622-623). The Vatican has declared that such "cultural imperialism" should have no place at such gatherings (Cowell, 1994, as cited by Corredor, 2019, p. 623). Finally, religious actors in Beijing managed to stop the definition of gender (different from sex) from being enshrined in UN documents (Corredor, 2019, p. 625).

John Paul II. (1995) responded to the UN conferences in his *Evangelium Vitae*, where he condemned the efforts of feminist organizations and LGBT activists to recognize sexual and reproductive rights as human rights (as cited by Vaggione, 2020, p. 4). He also warned against the opposite of the "culture of life" - the "culture of death", i.e. euthanasia, abortions, or supposed reductions of a person to a body. *Evangelium Vitae* also emphasized the need for civil law to conform to the alleged "objective moral law," meaning morality according to the Church doctrine. Vaggione (2020) asserts that for the Vatican, civil law is acceptable only if it does not contradict the doctrine of the Church. Otherwise, the Church uses its political capital to fight against the so-called "new human rights" (Vaggione, 2020).

Legislation supporting reproductive or LGBT rights potentially weakens the Church's political influence as it questions the Church's moral doctrine on the compatibility of men and women (Corredor, 2019, p. 621). In a more or less secularizing society, the Catholic Church opposes the privatization of faith and wants to maintain its place and power in the public sphere, which it achieves with the help of the politicization of the Church. At the same time, according to Hennig (2018), the Church leans toward religious fundamentalism with its opposition to laws that question its vision of humans and nature (p. 205). Vaggione (2020) also points out that the Church has political influence in various countries and that "gender ideology" is an integral part of the policy of the Holy See itself.

According to Case (2011), a crucial spreader of the term "gender ideology" was Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, who laid its foundations already in the 1980s during his time in Germany, where he came into contact with feminism (Vaggione, 2020). Thanks to him, "gender ideology" gradually replaced the "culture of death" in official Vatican documents (Case, 2011). While serving as a cardinal, Ratzinger (2004) expressed his view of gender as a theory that erases the differences between the two sexes (as cited by Hennig, 2018).

Case (2011) argues that in its "human ecology," the Church perceives the destruction not only of nature but also of the human, as man or woman created by God, whose God-given identity is undermined by "gender agenda" (Case, 2011, pp. 811-812). The Church is, therefore, trying to influence state laws and wants to enforce an alternative to the protection of endangered species, i.e. the protection of the endangered "traditional family" (Case, 2011, pp. 812-813). Also of interest is the difference in arguments against gay rights between Catholics in the US and in Europe – American anti-gender theorists stress the "physical complementarity" of man and woman, whereas the Vatican emphasizes the psychological one (Case, 2011, p. 814).

Emphasizing the unique nature of the relationship between a man and a woman has its roots in the Church, but especially within civil society and politics, it takes on a pseudoscientific character (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Sekerák, 2020; Valkovičová & Meier, 2022). In secularized countries, theological arguments are not enough to gain the support of the general public, which is why statements from alleged experts and scientists often supplement the claims of anti-genderists. Gender studies are called pseudoscience, ideology, and contrary to "common sense" (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Anti-gender "experts" on "gender ideology" include the German sociologist Gabriele Kuby and the former French priest and psychotherapist Tony Anatrella, who was deprived of priestly service in 2018 after an investigation into statements that accused him of sexually harassing patients. Anatrella claimed to have cured them of homosexuality (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 40). Kuby supports her anti-gender claims with the statements of Church officials and theological arguments. She is a popular author in Christian circles (Sekerák, 2020, p. 71).

## ***1.2 Church, Civil Society, and Politics***

As Kuhar & Paternotte (2017) write, "gender ideology," the foundations of which were laid by the Vatican at the UN conference in Cairo, gradually entered the vocabulary of the

populist right and conservative civil society. The fact that the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church is the head of state of the Vatican, which has the status of an observer in the UN, creates space for the Church's political influence. This power was manifested at the aforementioned conferences, where the Holy See, in cooperation with Muslim representatives, prevented the introduction of "gender" (Toldy & Garraio, 2021).

### **1.2.1 Morality Policies**

Religiosity and moral authority of the Catholic Church in a given state have at least a partial influence on the so-called "morality policies" (Knill et al., 2014). These include euthanasia, capital punishment, same-sex partnerships, assisted reproduction, and abortion, among others (Knill et al., 2015, as cited by Calkin & Kaminska, 2020, p. 88). Morality policies relate to issues that are not technically or economically complicated but rather represent certain "first principles" that interest the general public (Knill, 2013, as cited by Calkin & Kaminska, 2020, p. 88). The "primary principles" represent the fundamental values of society and compose the nation's very identity.

Therefore, morality policies are not merely an amalgamate of individuals' various and contradictory private values but represent the overall value orientation of the country (Mourão Permoser, 2019). Morality policies usually deal with values important to the Vatican and many believers, thus triggering conflicts about the roles of religion and tradition in a given society. According to Mourão Permoser (2019), morality policies, such as abortion, are usually framed by one side of the conflict as a "sin" that threatens the whole society. The opposite side of the conflict focuses on adherence to the principles of liberalism and its emphasis on individual rights. In this sense, fundamentalist actors oppose the values of liberal democracy and the idea of universal human rights (Stoeckl, 2014, as cited by Mourão Permoser, 2019). On the other

hand, Catholic actors have made use of a rhetoric of respecting the human rights of the fetus or freedom of religion.

The degree of liberalization of morality policies is partly conditioned by the intensity of citizens' religiosity (Hildebrandt, 2017; Knill et al., 2014; Minkenberg, 2002). In his study, Minkenberg (2002) concludes that Western European countries with a Catholic tradition and a higher degree of religiosity have a more restrictive approach to abortion than Protestant states. According to Knill et al. (2014) and Hildebrandt et al. (2017), societal religiosity and the rate of religious practices among the population (such as church attendance) slow down the process of introducing liberal morality policies. Practicing believers have more frequent contact with religious authorities and thus tend to agree with the doctrines of the Catholic Church (Hildebrandt et al., 2017).

### 1.2.2 Catholicism and Nationalism

The most extensive Vatican document on "gender ideology" was published in 2019 by the Congregation for Catholic Education, entitled "As a Man and a Woman He Created Them: On the Road to Dialogue Regarding the Issue of Gender Theory in Education" (Vaggione, 2020). The document distinguishes between gender theory and "gender ideology." The Vatican understands the "correct" gender theory within the limits of the fight against discrimination or violence against women (Vaggione, 2020). However, the Vatican vision of gender theory preserves the "values of femininity," which are removed by the "wrong" gender theory (i.e. "gender ideology"), by erasing the differences between men and women (Toldy & Garraio, 2021; Vaggione, 2020). The Holy See considers "gender ideology" even capable of destroying a *nation* as a result of "anti-life" thinking (Vaggione, 2020).

As the Church exalts the woman-mother, nationalist forces likewise support the traditional division of gender roles and condemn homosexuality. The Catechism of the Catholic

Church directly subordinates homosexual to heterosexual intercourse - due to the possibility of conception, which is not possible for homosexual couples (Mole, 2016, p. 108). Mole (2016) also argues that nationalism is linked to homophobia in many Central and Eastern European countries. In this context, the LGBT community represents a threat to the nation's existence and has the potential to weaken its homogeneity and the traditional division of gender roles (Hennig, 2018). The most essential task of a woman is thus the birthing of offspring for the nation's survival (Mole, 2016). Similarly, Hennig (2018) recalls possible links between intense religiosity and nationalism with national Catholicism, particularly maintaining close contacts with the radical right, e.g., in Poland and Spain.

Marchlewska et al. (2019) found that "Catholic collective narcissism" leads to outgroup hostility, that is, hostility towards individuals outside the group. Intense identification with Catholic identity and an overestimated belief in the exceptionality and endangerment of the Church increases the probability of an individual's belief in a "gender conspiracy" (Marchlewska et al., 2019, p. 775). Marchlewska et al. (2019) define gender conspiracies as the belief that gender studies scholars and activists have a secret plan to destroy the Church with the help of powerful elites (pp. 766–767). Geva (2019) focuses on supporters of the Catholic civil movement *La Manif Pour Tous* [The March for All] (LMPT) in France, which organized several protests against the legalization of gay marriage in 2012 and 2013. Despite its leaders being highly educated Catholics (Geva, 2019, p. 395), LMPT mostly did not display a Catholic outlook in secular French settings. Geva (2019) argues that LMPT sympathizers apply the same conspiracy line as the French radical right and also believe that one wealthy gay man and activist, Pierre Bergé, is behind the "gender lobby" and is promoting it in France with the help of a US-based organization (pp. 411–412).

Graff & Korolczuk (2022) define active cooperation (as opposed to discursive connections) between right-wing populists and religious fundamentalist organizations in

opposition to "gender ideology" as "opportunistic synergy" (p. 24). Unlike Hennig (2018), Graff & Korolczuk (2022) do not attach importance to ideological similarities. Under opportunistic synergy, they understand the cooperation of different actors, and this cooperation serves to achieve their different goals. By associating with right-wing populist politicians, fundamentalist civic associations try to transform their own interests into legal regulations (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 24). On the other hand, right-wing populist parties cooperate with religious fundamentalists to win over socially conservative voters.

Hennig (2018) argues that the populist discourse on "gender ideology" is a common strategy of religious and right-wing anti-gender actors. They put themselves in the role of supporters of "true" democracy, represent the "true"/authentic people, and present themselves as "true" opponents of the elite (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). Kuhar & Paternotte (2017) note that the populist rhetoric of anti-genderists uses the "politics of fear" to create anxiety by creating a common dangerous enemy (p. 14). In particular, connections of "gender ideology" with pedophilia create space for "moral panic" (Hennig, 2018; Sekerák, 2020; Toldy & Garraio, 2021). In this regard, groups that previously did not show the prerequisites for political mobilization are also involved in political life, such as parents who, out of fear for their children, support anti-genderists, while in principle, they do not have to share fundamentalist or conservative views (Hennig, 2018, p. 201; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, pp. 815-816; Žuk & Žuk, 2020). Moral panic is related to fear-mongering, while contemporary Christian identity is often associated with a spirituality of fear that warns against destruction (Jenik, 2019, p. 149, as cited by Sekerák, 2020, p. 73). For instance, despite some of Pope Francis's seemingly more progressive views, the Pope has in the past compared supporters of "gender ideology" to supporters of nuclear weapons, as both threaten creation itself (Butler, 2019, p. 4).

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Tarrow's Four Powers in the Movement

Tarrow (2011) defines social movements as part of contentious politics. For contentious politics to arise, there must be a confrontation of collective actors who join forces against the powerful elite and opponents. The specificity of social movements is that they constitute a *sustained* manifestation of contentious politics. Nonetheless, for a sustained contention to emerge, a movement's demands and grievances have to resonate with the public with the help of cultural frames and need to be backed and strengthened by networks and allies (Tarrow, 2011). In addition, successful movements are apt at recognizing the opening and closing of the political opportunity structure and organizing strikes, marches, demonstrations, and petitioning the authorities. These constitute Tarrow's four powers in the movement – POS, organization, repertoires of contention, and framing.

POS has to do with the threats and opportunities of collective contentious action and the possible disjuncture between real and perceived threats and opportunities. Political opportunities and threats arise from characteristics within the political system, which consequently influence the dynamics between movements and political parties (Tarrow, 2011). Therefore, to analyze the closing and opening of the POS for the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements, it is crucial to contextualize the political system and party structure in the respective states. Furthermore, for this thesis, the Church's moral authority is posited as a baseline of the POS, with the political landscape forming the upper layers of the POS.

Secondly, the organization of the movement can be generally categorized as centralized or decentralized. The centralized model is based on the workers' movements, which have been gradually incorporated into socialist democratic parties and unions, resulting in the so-called "iron law of oligarchy" (Michels 1962, as cited in Tarrow, 2011, p. 208). In such settings, the

movement becomes hierarchical, with leaders occupied more with the survival of this hierarchy and survival of the organization than with revolutionary ideas and workers' grievances or grievances of those they claim to represent. The anarchist counter-model emerged in the 1960s and was characterized by distrust of the state and political parties. Since these movements lacked hierarchy and were based on loose democratic participation, they tended to turn inwardly into sect-like and militant cliques (Tarrow, 2011, p. 237).

Although most movements have never worked in practice as perfect ideal types, hybrid organization is more common nowadays, with the emergence of new technologies and the Internet. Hybrid organizations usually take the shape of a possibly transnational umbrella organization that diffuses information (e.g. on social media) and relatively independent local "franchises" (Tarrow, 2011, p. 232). The franchises benefit from the "brand" and "know-how" of the umbrella organization and network with other localized branches. Nevertheless, Tarrow (2011) argues that most successful movements can take advantage of aligning with established institutions rather than creating new organizational modes and alliances (p. 11). Old institutions, such as the Catholic Church, can provide spaces for organizing, as well as ideological and economic capital. Furthermore, strong interpersonal networks link leaders and followers, centers and peripheries, inspiring solidarity, social control, and normative pressures and incentives for action (Tarrow, 2011, p. 209).

The third of Tarrow's four powers lies in the repertoires of contention. These are the tools a movement uses to achieve its goals in opposition to the elites and opponents. Repertoires include demonstrations, strikes, petitions, rallies, sit-ins or marches. It is the creative role of the movement leaders to use, invent, or combine repertoires that are likely to mobilize a particular population (Tarrow, 2011, p. 31).

Lastly, framing involves the construction of a grievance and establishes the distinction between those within and outside of the movement. Utilizing existing shared identities and

creating new ones, activists set the parameters of the ideal movement supporters and identify their adversaries based on perceived characteristics and wrongdoings. This process occurs not only through the linguistic content of their beliefs but also through the portrayal of both foes and allies in visual representations (Snow, 2004, as cited in Tarrow, 2011). In this thesis, the ideological messages of the Czech and Slovak Alliances for Family (AfF) and National Marches for Life (NMfL) (both textual and visual) will be examined to analyze the framing of these anti-gender movements.

## ***2.2 The Moral Authority of the Church***

There are several policies that the Church has been interested in influencing. These include bans or constraints on stem cell research, abortion, adoption, and same-sex marriage (Grzymala-Busse, 2015). The overlap with the efforts of the actors mobilized around "gender ideology" is evident and opens up possibilities for cooperation between the Church and the anti-gender movement. As discussed in the Literature Review, mobilizations against "gender ideology" are associated with the Catholic Church. The Vatican has a network of subordinated branches in individual countries. In the case of Slovakia and the CR, these national representatives of the Church are the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia and the Czech Conference of Bishops.

With less than 10% of Roman Catholics and 68% of people stating no religious affiliation in the CR (*Náboženská víra*, 2021), it might be easy to see why the Czech Alliance for Family steers away from a Christian outlook – despite the chairwoman Jana Jochová being a devout Catholic. On the other hand, almost 56% of Slovakia's population is Catholic, as opposed to only 24% without religious affiliation (*Registrované cirkvi*, 2023). The percentage of Slovak Roman Catholics (and believers in general) has gradually decreased, with 68% stating

Roman Catholic affiliation in 2001, 62% in 2011, and 56% in 2021. No religious affiliation rose from 12% in 2001 to 13% in 2011 to 24% in 2021 (*Registrované cirkvi*, 2023).

Nevertheless, religiosity alone does not automatically translate to support for the Church's "meddling" in politics. Regarding the popularity of the national Church, Froese (2005) stresses the importance of the nexus between nation and religiosity. According to Grzymala-Busse (2015), when this nexus is strong, the national Church will enjoy high moral authority, institutional access, and popular support for its agenda as it will be seen as a protector of national interest. The Czech Catholic Church was historically hostile to the Czech national efforts, especially during the reign of the Habsburgs – when it aligned with the Austrian rulers against Czech demands. On the other hand, the Slovak Church has repeatedly supported Slovak national struggles and, therefore, enjoys higher moral authority (Froese, 2005).

This suggests that non-Church actors will more readily express their affiliations with the Church in Slovakia and choose a more secularized approach in the CR. The anti-gender movement in the mostly non-religious Czech Republic (CR), where the Church has low moral authority, needs to be flexible about alliances with the Church so as not to push away possible sympathizers and allies.

### 3 Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative comparative case study of the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements, namely the Alliances for Family and National Marches for Life. The time frame starts in 2016 with the change of the name of the Czech Committee for Defense of Parental Rights to Alliance for Family, in which the organization rebranded to align with the transnational anti-gender movement. The analyzed material encompasses a corpus of text found primarily on the websites of the AfFs and NMfLs and also other important initiatives such as Movement for Life, Forum for Life, and Yes for Life informed by media articles about the movements' activities.

A comparative research design serves this thesis best, as there are apparent similarities between the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements, epitomized by the sameness of names of initiatives and "gender ideology" discourses, with a striking difference in religiosity and Church authority. Since the main argument is based on the historically different moral authorities of the respective Catholic Churches of the CR and Slovakia and the varying levels of Church cooperation and religious strategies of the movements, the analysis deeply contextualizes the movements within the political and religious contexts of the two countries. The contextualization follows the structure of Tarrow's four powers in the movement – POS, organization and networks, repertoires of contention, and framing with rich empirical evidence. Tarrow's framework is tailored to social movement study, and this thesis applies it to Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements, providing a systematic comparative structure. This thesis situates the Church's moral authority as part of the POS, along with the changing political landscapes in which the movements operate.

The comparative case study in this thesis employs a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD). This method is chosen for its effectiveness in comparing cases that are similar in many

respects but differ in key aspects (Anckar, 2008). Both the Czech Republic and Slovakia share a common history, geographical proximity, and cultural similarities, including their experience of post-communist transition and membership in the EU. This shared contextual background makes them suitable for a comparative analysis using the MSSD framework (Anckar, 2008). Additionally, the anti-gender movements in these countries both oppose "gender ideology," addressing similar issues such as LGBT and reproductive rights and gender equality.

The primary difference between the two cases lies in the moral authority of the Church in each country. In Slovakia, the Church holds high moral authority, in contrast, the Church in the CR has low moral authority, resulting in different strategies and levels of influence by the anti-gender movement as argued in this thesis. By examining these two similar systems with a critical difference - the Church's moral authority – this thesis aims to understand how this key variable affects the movements' strategies, influence, and adaptation to local contexts. This approach aligns with the principles of MSSD, focusing on understanding the impact of this differing factor on the dynamics of the anti-gender movements in each country (Anckar, 2008).

## 4 Formation of the Movements and Public Opinion

Before diving into the analysis of Czech and Slovak AfF and NMfL, the following section introduces the basic information on the formation of these initiatives. Public opinion on matters of abortion and LGBT rights is also discussed.

### 4.1 *The Czech Context*

The story of the Czech Alliance for Family (AfF) starts in the 1990s under the name Committee for Defense of Parental Rights. CR is known for its secularism as one of the most atheist societies in Europe (Svatoňová, 2021). However, in 2010, the Czech Conference of Bishops and later the Committee itself protested a brochure produced by the Ministry of Education on sex education. The pressure from the Church and the Committee ultimately resulted in the Ministry taking the document down (Svatoňová, 2021). The 2010 campaign marked a change in the working of the Committee and crystallized into a new name in 2016 – Alliance for Family ("O Alianci," n.d.). Throughout Europe, several organizations with the same name and similar logos depict a "traditional family" with a mother, a father, and children – the case is the same for the Slovak AfF (Dušková et al., 2023b). Also in 2010, Matyáš Zrno, a member of a Conservative think-tank called the Civic Institute, organized a lecture titled "The End of Men in Europe: Alias Gender Ideology in Practice". Therefore, members of the Civic Institute and the Committee were among the first to introduce intellectual content for the anti-gender campaigns in the Czech public sphere (Svatoňová, 2021, p. 142).

The hotline "We do not judge, we help", established by the organizer of the NMfL Movement for Life, managed to become quite popular and presented itself as helping women in need. Especially at the beginning of 2022, the Movement gained backing from various institutions, personalities, and politicians after entering the public consciousness thanks to

successful PR as a presumably independent free counseling for women and a massive billboard campaign (Rychlíková, 2022a). Interestingly, the Movement reached the masses despite the Czech population being the least anti-abortion among the V4 countries – with only 5% of the opinion that abortion should be always or primarily illegal (Kern & Kerekes, 2023; Rychlíková, 2022b). Nevertheless, its popularity diminished significantly after an infamous Facebook post in which the organization opposed sending abortion pills to Ukrainian women raped by Russian soldiers (Rychlíková; 2022a). Several former supporters said they had not known about the Movement's ideological background, thinking it was merely a helpline for women (Rychlíková, 2022b).

The Czech anti-gender movement has a more or less clear division of labor – with the Movement for Life focusing mainly on an anti-abortion agenda and the AfF on same-sex unions. Same-sex partnership was codified in the CR in 2006 but without the possibility of joint ownership, shared surname, application for a widow's pension, or visiting a partner in hospitals. The acceptance of LGBT people is more widespread, with 57% of respondents believing that they should have the same rights as heterosexuals (*Eurobarometer*, 2019). As of May 2024, a rights-enhancing bill on same-sex partnerships is expected to be codified (Rambousková, 2024).

#### ***4.2 The Slovak Context***

"Gender ideology" has been prevalent in Slovakia since 2013, when the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia (CBS) published a pastoral letter warning against its threats on Advent Sunday (Maďarová, 2015). Pastoral letters of bishops are read in all parishes in the country as part of the sermon. Their content reaches a relatively large number of believers, as Slovakia has one of the highest proportions of Catholics in Europe and a historically stable tradition of Catholicism (Synek Rétiová, 2021; Podolinská et al., 2017, p. 10). At the same time, almost

40% of Slovak Catholics attend religious services at least once weekly (Podolinská et al., 2017, p. 17).

A bishops' letter on the National March for Life (NMfL) had been published in September 2013 (Maďarová, 2015). One of the goals of the NMfL is to amend the abortion law. The first NMfL was hosted in the largest city of Eastern Slovakia, Košice. According to the organizers, up to 70,000 people participated, many of whom were also attracted by accompanying activities for families with children. Thanks to the large turnout, the organizers could claim to represent "ordinary people" (Maďarová, 2015). The 2015 NMfL occurred in the capital, Bratislava, in the Western part of the country. In 2019, the attendance was down to 50,000, according to organizers. It was also attended by sympathizers of the neofascist People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), even though the organizers of the March presented it as an apolitical event. The next NMfL will occur again in Košice in September 2024 ("TS," 2024).

At the same time, in 2013, the mobilization for the Referendum on the Family began, supported by the newly formed conservative civil association Alliance for Family (AfF) (Synek Rétiová, 2021). The 2015 referendum consisted of three questions regarding same-sex marriage, adoption of children by same-sex couples, and sex education in schools (Synek Rétiová, 2021). CBS promoted the referendum, although the organizers declared the referendum a secular matter. In addition, the already mentioned extremist ĽSNS also supported the referendum (Guasti & Buštíková, 2020, p. 237). Ultimately, it was unsuccessful because it did not exceed the necessary threshold of 50% turnout (Synek Rétiová, 2021).

As opposed to the CR, Slovak legislation meets only those prerequisites for the support of the LGBT community, which binds it to international standards – without a codified same-sex partnership. The Slovak public does not support registered partnerships, and according to the 2019 Eurobarometer, support for the rights of the LGBT community in Slovakia is the lowest in the entire EU (Guasti & Buštíková, 2020, p. 237). On the other hand, public opinion

on abortion is relatively liberal, with 22% of Slovak citizens thinking that restriction should be illegal in all or most cases – yet higher than the 5% in the CR (Kern & Kerekes, 2023).

## 5 Analysis

This section analyzes the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements based on Tarrow's four powers – POS, networks and organization, repertoires of contention, and framing. Particular attention is paid to the differences in the moral authority of the Church as a basis of the POS that interacts with the overall political system, as well as to the divergence in levels of cooperation between the Church and the respective movements. Similarly, the section on repertoires of contention highlights different action repertoires based on Catholic elements or even prayers as contention. Finally, the Slovak frame of Catholic morality and the Czech anti-migrant frame within the anti-gender movements are discussed in *5.4 Framing*.

### 5.1 Political Opportunity Structure

In this section, changes in the Czech and Slovak party systems and governing coalitions are compared through essential turning points and proposals, and their influence on the fortunes of anti-gender movements is discussed. In line with the main argument of this thesis, religiosity, and the Church's moral authority are considered as underlying conditions for variance in the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements. They form the base of a tiered POS, with more nuanced political distinctions constituting the upper layers. Additionally, as national politics reflects on the moral authority of the Church, the involvement of the Church in state institutions and its role in policy-making and allusions to Catholic morality by politicians differ in the two states, as discussed below.

The CR and Slovakia enjoy a similar level of economic development, albeit with the CR having a higher GDP and GNI. After the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, they were integrated into the same international structures – such as the EU or NATO (Froese, 2005). The states have a similar legislative framework regarding the regulation of morality policies of

interest to the anti-gender movement - and the Catholic Church. However, the salient difference concerning the strategies of the anti-gender movement lies in different levels of religiosity and the moral authority of the Church. On the other hand, it is crucial to examine the threats and opportunities that the national movements face within the Czech and Slovak political landscape. Although the main time frame of the thesis begins in 2016, general post-Czechoslovak developments within which the anti-gender movements emerged are outlined.

### **5.1.1 The Dissolution of the Liberal-Conservative Alliance**

Barša et al. (2021) argue against the two mainstream views that the rise of right-wing populism and conservatism in Central Europe was caused by unfinished liberalization or liberalization coming too far. Instead, the changing political dynamic should be understood as a result of the break-up of the liberal-conservative alliance, which brought the CR and Slovakia into Western structures, mainly the EU and NATO (Barša et al., 2021).

After the goal of Western integration had been reached in the 2000s, the liberal-conservative alliance in both states lost its meaning, and political competition shifted to questions of the identity of the Central European nation-state and its semi-peripheral position within the West (Barša et al., 2021). Conservative groupings, including the anti-gender movement, constructed an image of a decaying and changed West, a West that had to be recovered or abandoned. Thus, the disruption of the liberal-conservative alliance opened the POS for the anti-gender movement to take hold, crystalizing in the early 2010s.

A part of the image of the "West" as constructed by the anti-gender or anti-migrant actors is captured by Christianity, not necessarily as a religious belief, but as a civilizational symbol (Vargovčíková, 2021). This civilizational aspect brings the Czech anti-gender movement and the Church together. Slačálek (2021) writes that the Czech Church has been trying to achieve a

more influential position (i.e. moral authority), aligning itself with anti-migration movements. Nonetheless, the hesitant cooperation, at least with the Czech anti-gender movement, shows that the Church is ambivalent about gaining moral authority by aligning with one part of the political spectrum. The same can be said of the anti-gender movement, which sometimes articulates distance from the Church. Although cooperation is visible during the Czech NMfL, the collaboration in Slovakia overstretches even into the workings of the Slovak Aff.

### 5.1.2 Opening of the POS for the Movements

**Table 1:** Characterization of key Czech and Slovak political parties

| Key Czech parties                     | Characterization  | Key Slovak Parties  | Characterization   |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) | Centrist populist, increasingly anti-migrant and <i>anti-gender</i> | Direction – Social Democracy (Smer)                                       | Left-wing, populist, lately anti-migrant, <i>anti-gender</i>             |
| Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)  | Main left-wing  | Voice – Social Democracy (Hlas)   | Moderate splinter from Smer  |
| Civic Democratic Party (ODS)          | Main right-wing, <i>anti-gender</i>                                 | Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLANO) / Movement Slovakia | Amalgamate, mostly conservative, some <i>anti-gender</i> fundamentalists |
| Christian Democratic Union (KDÚ-ČSL)  | Christian Right, <i>anti-gender</i>                                 | Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)                                       | Christian Right, <i>anti-gender</i>                                      |
| Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)    | Extreme Right, anti-migrant and <i>anti-gender</i>                  | Slovak National Party (SNS)   | Nationalist right-wing, <i>anti-gender</i> , anti-migrant                |
| Pirates                               | Centrist progressive  | Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)  | Neoliberal progressive   |
|                                       |   | People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS)  | neofascist, <i>anti-gender</i> , anti-migrant                            |
|                                       |   | Republika   | A more successful splinter from ĽSNS, <i>anti-gender</i> , anti-migrant  |

|  |  |               |                                     |
|--|--|---------------|-------------------------------------|
|  |  | We Are Family | Populist, anti-migrant, anti-gender |
|--|--|---------------|-------------------------------------|

**Table 2:** Czech and Slovak governments since 2012

| Electoral term       | Czech government                       | Electoral term       | Slovak government                  |
|----------------------|--|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2013-2017            | ČSSD, ANO                              | 2012-2016            | Smer                               |
| 2017-2021            | ANO                                    | 2016-2020            | Smer, SNS, Most-Híd                |
| 2021-2025 (expected) | ODS + KDÚ-ČSL + Top09, Piráti + Mayors | 2020-2023            | OLANO, SaS, We Are Family, Za ľudí |
|                      |  | 2023-2027 (expected) | Smer, SNS, Hlas                    |
| Key opposition       | SPD                                    | Key opposition       | KDH, ĽSNS, Republika               |

This section follows the introduction of anti-genderism into Czech and Slovak national politics. In the CR, the political landscape in 2013 was marked by two new political subjects entering the lower chamber (Parliamentary Assembly) – SPD and ANO. Both parties are considered populist in academic literature in their resistance to constitutionalism in favor of majoritarianism and anti-elitism (Havlík, 2015; 2019; Kubát & Hartlínski, 2019; Slačálek, 2021). SPD rides the right-wing populist wave with anti-gender and anti-migrant agendas. The coalition that emerged after the 2013 election resulted in a government of ČSSD, ANO, and KDÚ-ČSL. 2013 thus marks the beginning of a transformation of the previous left/right political order in the CR, where ČSSD and ODS would alternate in winning elections after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (Slačálek, 2021).

Conversely, the political landscape of Slovakia has been dominated by Smer. During the 2012-2016 term, Smer did not pursue any agenda of its own regarding morality policies, keeping the status quo on abortion and the non-existence of same-sex marriage intact (Vargovčíková, 2021).

In the early 2000s, Smer advocated separation of Church and state and criticized the 2001 Basic Treaty Between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See. The Treaty reflects the

Church's high moral authority. Also, it allows it to have a say in education (Church schools and colleges) and health care (conscientious objection for doctors to refuse to provide abortion). There is no treaty of such kind in the CR. After the 2012 election, Smer was ready to negotiate on value positions, as when it exchanged judicial reform for KDH's constitutional definition of marriage in 2014. KDH thus managed to constitutionalize marriage as a union between a man and a woman (initiated by the Church), with the support of the newly established AfF. In 2019, the Church supported the unsuccessful Smer candidate in the presidential elections rather than a Catholic dissident candidate. The deals with the Church shifted Smer to conservatism and, post-2020, closer to parties like Republika.

In 2016, an anti-gender We Are Family and a neofascist party, ĽSNS, entered parliament for the first time (*Výsledky Parlamentných Volieb*, 2016). ĽSNS and later Republika continuously proposed legislation restricting LGBT rights, in particular, the rights of transgender people, and reproductive rights – supported by anti-gender politicians from other parties (Vargovčíková, 2021). A group of priests signed a letter of support for these proposals (Guasti & Bušíková, 2020, p. 238). Although the anti-gender movement generally distances itself from the neofascist ĽSNS and Republika, they share the anti-gender ideological line. Conversely, the Czech anti-gender movement maintains relations with SPD (Dušková et al., 2023).

The extreme right entering the Czech parliament in 2013 and the Slovak parliament in 2016 marked an opportunity for the respective anti-gender movements. The Czech 2017 election solidified the disruption of the left-right alternation in power, with increasingly anti-migrant ANO as the electoral winner and far-right SPD in parliament (Muller & Vodstrelilova, 2017). In Slovakia, the 2014 deals of Smer with the Church and the 2016 entry of anti-gender We Are Family and ĽSNS opened up space for mainstreaming of anti-genderism.

### 5.1.3 Post-2020: Anti-Genderism Institutionalized

The number of conservative actors and supporters of the Slovak anti-gender movement in the 2020 anti-Smer coalition marked an opening of POS for the movement. The only pro-LGBT party in the coalition was SaS. The coalition agreement stated that morality policies would be kept at the status quo. The agreement has been breached on multiple occasions, as some of ĽSNS's proposals have been supported by anti-gender politicians, mainly in the diverse OĽANO club (Gehrerová, 2020).

Milan Krajniak, a proclaimed Catholic and proud conservative who has given himself the nickname "The Last Crusader," became the Minister of Social Affairs, Labor, and Family (Maďarová & Hardoš, 2022, p. 114). At the time, he was a vice-chairman of We Are Family, which viewed "gender" as a threat to Christianity (Zvada, 2022). The word "gender" was erased from the Ministry's internal documents. Moreover, Krajniak appointed Roman Joch, a Czech ultra-conservative publicist and anti-genderist, to lead the Research Institute for Labor and Family. Following this, Oľga Pietruchová, who had served as the director of the Department of Gender Equality for a long time, stepped down. Funding for feminist organizations and gender equality initiatives was redirected to "pro-family" associations (Zvada, 2022, p. 103). The reasoning behind the decision was that organizations that "really help women" should be funded (Krauszová, 2021). These organizations included Counselling Alexis, Union of Mothers' Centers, and MP Anna Záborská's Forum of Life. Part of the chairmanship of Forum of Life involved the wife of an MP of a governing party at the time, and a head of the Family section which oversees the Department, Anna Verešová (Krauszová, 2021).

In his 2021 electoral campaign, the leader of ANO, Andrej Babiš, used culture war as a primary frame to differentiate from the similarly anti-corruption Pirates. Babiš stated his intention to defend Czech interests against the EU elite and "mad neo-Marxists" (Vargovčíková, 2021, p. 166), echoing the overlapping discourses of the far-right and, incidentally, the anti-

gender movement (Paternotte & Verloo, 2021). He has had a staunch anti-migrant position and underlined the need to improve natality (Vargovčíková, 2021, p. 166). Still, ANO has been an ideologically thinner actor than SPD, and the shift from its centrist positions to a thicker national-conservative leaning is relatively recent and gradual (Vargovčíková, 2021). In the Slovak case, however, deals with the Church shifted Smer to conservatism, and post-2020, closer to far-right parties like Republika, the move faster and more extreme than of ANO.

The Czech 2021 government is an amalgam of formerly oppositional parties uniting against Babiš. The main party, ODS, is a post-Thatcherite party that collaborates with Polish Law and Justice (Vargovčíková, 2021, p. 165). The position of ODS as the strongest player in the coalition presented an opportunity for the increasingly professionalized AfF. The AfF has influenced ODS PM Petr Fiala and cooperates on the Conception of Family Politics at KDÚ-ČSL's Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family since 2022 (Dušková et al., 2023a).

A seeming threat to the Slovak anti-gender movement appeared in October 2022, when two young queer people were murdered in a gay bar in Bratislava. The terrorist attack sparked vigils for the victims and demonstrations for LGBTQ+ rights. Nevertheless, the tragic event eventually did not achieve any improvement in LGBTQ+ rights. Already in November 2022, archbishop Ján Orosch issued a controversial circular in which he questioned the innocence of victims and implied that they might have been drug addicts (Gdovinová, 2022). The statement marked a return to "business as usual" for the anti-gender movement. At the beginning of 2023, former PM Igor Matovič (OLANO) attacked transgender people, claiming they threaten cisgender women in public toilets, copying the arguments made in the US and especially the UK, which underlines the transnational aspect of the movement.

The turbulent governing of the anti-Smer coalition was reflected in calling an early 2023 election. As of May 2024, the new coalition is formed by Smer, Hlas and SNS (*Kompletné výsledky*, 2023). The most popular oppositional party is the economically centrist Progressive

Slovakia, accused of Marxism by anti-gender actors and political adversaries. Smer has radicalized post-2020, having an anti-Ukraine and anti-gender outlook (Vargovčíková, 2021). Nevertheless, the current main anti-gender ally can be found in SNS's Martina Šimkovičová, the Minister of Culture. Since the beginning of her time in office, she banned a queer exhibition, liquidated the cultural hub Kunsthalle in Bratislava, and changed the director of a cultural space for children arguing that these were not part of the "Slovak culture" because they propagated "LGBT ideology" (Jabůrková, 2024; Mindžák, 2023).

#### **5.1.4 Istanbul Convention, Same-Sex Marriage and Abortion**

Regarding one of the main grievances of the transnational anti-gender movement, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention (IC) proceeded from 2011 to 2015, mainly without media attention in the CR. The process started during a center-right government with ODS as the main party. Their coalition partner, Christian democratic KDÚ-ČSL, has been the most vocal about their dissatisfaction with the Convention. In Slovakia, an anti-gender campaign against IC ratification was launched at the end of 2013. Instead of fighting gender-based violence, Church authorities, anti-gender organizations, and politicians accused the IC of imposing "gender ideology" and undermining the Slovak "traditional family" (Sekerák, 2020). In 2016, the CR signed the Convention when a center-left government was in power (*Istanbulská úmluva*, 2018).

After PM Babiš announced his aim to conclude the ratification process in 2018, the IC garnered attention (Fellegi 2020, as cited in Slačálek, 2021, p. 183). This was when the anti-gender movement became more vocal in the CR and after the Czech bishops discussed the Convention with their Slovak counterparts at a bishops' conference in 2018. Slovak PM Fico attended the conference, where the Slovak bishops presented additional IC-related requests. Fico cited the 2014 constitutional definition of marriage and his February 2018 pronouncement on the non-ratification of the IC as grounds for why more would be impossible (Vargovčíková,

2021). In 2020, by the end of the Smer-SNS-Hungarian coalition, the parliament overwhelmingly voted against ratification of the IC (*Parlament opät' odmietol Istanbulský dohovor*, 2020). In the CR, the post-2021 anti-Babiš government agreed to ratify the Convention in 2023. The primarily conservative Senators, echoing anti-gender arguments during Senate discussion, ultimately did not ratify the Convention (*Senátoři odmítli ratifikaci*, 2024).

The Czech "Marriage for all" was first proposed by a group of MPs from coalition and opposition in 2022. The anti-Babiš coalition is not united on the topic, with some parties polarized internally (Doubravová & Dohnalová, 2022). An edited bill for partnership without the right to adoption was proposed by MPs from KDU-ČSL and ANO as a compromise solution in 2023 (Rambousková, 2024). During the first two readings of the law, discussions were held in Parliament with some MPs utilizing anti-gender rhetoric about the protection of "traditional family" (Menšík & Šopfová, 2024). The Senate decided not to vote on the bill, leaving the decision up to the lower chamber. As of May 2024, the bill is expected to pass through the third reading in the Parliamentary Assembly not as a marriage but as a partnership (Menšík & Šopfová, 2024). Despite the bill's expansion of LGBT rights, posing a possible threat to the anti-gender movement, the 2022 proposal presented an opportunity for the movement's greater visibility and promotion of its views in public discussion. Especially the head of AfF, Jochová, has been vocal about same-sex marriage as harmful to children (Bastlová, 2023). The 5.3 *Repertoires of Contention* section explores the successful lobbying of AfF and its influence on the final bill as a partnership instead of marriage.

Since the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic, several draft laws on registered partnerships have been submitted to the parliament, but none have been successful (Guasti & Bušítková, 2020). As opposed to the CR, same-sex marriage has never been on the table. As outlined above, anti-LGBT or "pro-family" legislative proposals have been much

more common, often targeted at transgender people who already face several obstacles regarding medical care and legal gender transition.

The abortion law both in the CR and Slovakia has stayed virtually the same since the 1986 Czechoslovak law, allowing abortion until the 12<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy. The fact that the law comes from the communist era is weaponized by Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements, giving leverage to the argument that "gender ideology" and abortion are totalitarian (Vargovčíková, 2021). Within the Slovak context, the supposed totalitarian character of the abortion law (and "gender ideology" generally) is deepened by the oppression of the Church and its members during communism, creating a parallel between the persecution of Christians by the communist regime and implied persecution of Christians by "gender ideology" and its followers. In contrast to Slovakia, any attempts to restrict the abortion law in the CR have been met with significant backlash (Beláňová, 2020).

In Slovakia, proposals to restrict the abortion law started to escalate ever since the 2020 parliamentary election when Záborská became an MP. Záborská is a trained doctor, former Member of the European Parliament, and daughter of a respected Catholic dissident, Anton Neuirth. She is the leader of a small Christian Union party - and a member of the OĽANO parliamentary club (Gehrerová, 2021). Slovak bishops support Záborská in "helping pregnant women" (TK KBS, 2022). Záborská has been consistent in her "pro-life" agenda and proposed anti-abortion legislation repeatedly during the 2020-2023 conservative government. The proposals never passed into law; however, the 2021 bill did not pass with a mere vote (TASR, 2021).

### 5.1.5 Conclusion

The Slovak anti-gender movement is more effective than its Czech counterpart. However, as outlined throughout this thesis, the Slovak movement exists in amiable conditions

in a more conservative society where the Church enjoys a much higher moral authority. Moreover, in the CR, the IC and "Marriage for All" might have seemed like threats to the anti-gender movement. However, they were seized as opportunities by the movement for publicity and successful blocking or toning down of rights expansion. The Czech movement seems apt at blocking gender equality and LGBT legislation but has so far not been productive in the sense of translating its own agenda into law. The Slovak movement has not only fought against the IC and same-sex marriage but initiated a change in the constitutional definition of marriage. Moreover, members (even leaders) of the movement have served as MPs and ministers, gaining access to departments of the Ministry of Social Affairs during Krajniak's 2020-2023 term and receiving funding at the expense of feminist organizations. Slovakia has seen a somewhat deeper cooptation of anti-genderism into state institutions than the CR, although some AfF figures serve as assistants to MPs and advise at the Ministry of Social Affairs. Thus, the 2020 and 2021 elections in the CR and Slovakia, respectively, represented the main POS lever for the movements, allowing anti-gender actors to set agendas for relevant ministries. Still, in Slovakia, anti-gender talking points have been ingrained into party positions - Smer, SNS, OĽANO, Sme Rodina, Republika, and KDH all stand against "gender ideology" (Vargovčíková, 2021).

Regarding the base level of the POS, the discrepancy in moral authorities of Czech and Slovak Churches is reflected in the Church's political influence. In the CR, the Church has not received any concessions from political parties. Conversely, the Slovak Church has the advantage of institutional access via the Basic Treaty. It has also pushed for the 2014 constitutional marriage definition and lobbied against IC or supported anti-abortion legislation, thus actively siding with the anti-gender movement. As argued by Maďarová & Hardoš (2022), thanks to the contribution of the anti-gender movement, conservatism and Christianity have become synonymous in Slovak politics, an association that does not hold in the CR.

## **5.2 Organization and Networks**

Moving from the POS to the level of the anti-gender movements, this part of the analysis explores the centralized model of the Czech and Slovak movements, their mutual networks that are at times disrupted by disagreements on the Catholic outlook of the two movements. The section establishes varying Church ties of Czechs and Slovaks, transnational platforms, and US and Russian funding.

### **5.2.1 The Centralized Model**

The Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements are organized top-down, closer to the centralized model of social movement organization (Tarrow, 2011). The movement leaders, such as those of AfF (publicist Jochová in the CR and Anton Chromík in Slovakia – a lawyer and prominent activist who has been the head of AfF since its inception in 2013) or of the anti-abortion Movement for Life (theologist Radim Ucháč and vice-president Rybová) and Forum for Life (Záborská) represent the movements publicly and are commonly associated with anti-gender agenda. They speak at marches, sign letters to officials, and initiate protests with followers "tagging along". In the case of Slovakia, anti-gender initiatives are often pursued by the Church and co-organized by anti-gender organizations, such as the NMfL. At the same time, the movements resemble the hybrid movement organization (Tarrow, 2011) in sharing "know-how" via the World Congress of Families, discussed in 5.2.4 Transnational Networks.

The Czech movement is more centralized because the AfF and Movement for Life that organizes NMfL have dominated the Czech anti-gender scene. Slovakia's anti-abortion movement lacks one central organization as opposed to the Czech Movement for Life (Beláňová, 2020). However, Forum of Life and Forum of Christian Institutions, associated with the global platform CitizenGo, have played significant roles. Counselling Alexis provides "help

to women, girls and all those who are considering abortion" (*Tu nájdeš pomoc*, 2019). Some anti-abortion activists align with the globally influential Center of Bioethics Reform (Beláňová, 2020, p. 401). Slovak AfF is the leading player who is primarily concerned with same-sex marriage. Still, it is an association of more than ninety "pro-family" organizations, with Chromík as president. NMfL is organized by the Catholic Church, and several anti-abortion initiatives are spread across Slovakia, although Záborská is the main "pro-life" figure (Beláňová, 2020).

Both movements have a professionalized character – in Slovakia, Záborská has been actively involved in national politics since the 1990s. The former spokeswoman of Slovak AfF, Anna Verešová, served as an MP on OĽANO's candidate list and, during Krajniak's 2020-2023 ministerial term, led the Section of Family Policy at the Ministry of Social Affairs (Kavecká, 2022). The spokeswoman of Czech AfF Jochová is an assistant of ODS parliamentarian Václav Král. Her husband, the head of Civic Institute Roman Joch, was nominated by Slovak minister Krajniak as a director of the Research Institute for Labor and Family (Maďarová & Hardoš, 2022).

### 5.2.2 Czecho-Slovak Networks

Joch's presence at the Research Institute exemplifies ties between Czech and Slovak anti-gender actors. Individual actors also cooperate on an academic level and attend conferences on the issue of abortion and the "crisis of the family" (*O konferenci 2017*, n.d.). Ucháč spoke at an international conference, Choose Life in Slovakia, organized by Verešová's NGO Yes for Life and Záborská's Forum of Life in April 2024. The conference's press release informs that: "Radim Ucháč, chairman of the Movement for Life from the Czech Republic, with his wife Kateřina and experts from other fields will come to share their experiences" (Žiaková, 2024).

Furthermore, two Slovak speakers were invited to the last Smallest Among Us conference in 2019 in the Czech city of Brno. Multiple actors, including doctors and academics, coordinate the conference. The Smallest Among Us advocates recognizing human rights and legal protection of fetuses before birth (Beláňová, 2020, p. 401). Stanislav Košč represented the Slovak Catholic Charity. Patrik Daniška spoke for the Institute for Human Rights and Family Policy, a Slovak think tank providing analyses of abortion and LGBT-related laws and legislative proposals ("Program 2019," n.d.). In 2017, the conference took place under the auspices of the former controversial Czech president Miloš Zeman ("O konferenci 2017," n.d.).

Nevertheless, there has been apprehension about collaboration between the two movements. For instance, several organizations of the Slovak pro-life movement conduct joint bike rides across both nations to raise anti-abortion awareness, also supported by the Church and the NMfL. Beláňová (2020) mentions one tour during which a Slovak anti-abortion group was denied permission to hold a talk in some Czech Catholic churches. One of Beláňová's (2020) interviewees reminisced that the "issue seemed to be too controversial to the priests, and we were not able to explain our intention to them" (p. 406). Thus, a secularized environment, such as that of a conference evoking expertise, seems to be a more acceptable site for cooperation and exchange of movement strategies between the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements.

### 5.2.3 Church Networks

An important distinction for this thesis lies in the two movements' networks with the Czech and Slovak Catholic Churches. The Slovak movement is significantly tied to the Slovak Church. The term "gender ideology" itself was introduced to Slovakia through a prominent anti-gender author, Gabriele Kuby, in parishes during her visits in 2012 and 2013 (Valkovičová & Meier, 2022). In 2013, AfF was created with the support of the Church, advertised in a bishops'

letter read during sermons, and the Church propagated the 2015 referendum campaign. The prominent "pro-life" personality Záborská and the head of AfF Chromík are regularly invited to Church conferences and receive awards from bishops for fighting for "traditional families" (TK KBS, 2022).

On the other hand, in the CR, "gender ideology" was introduced by the right-wing think tank Civic Institute. The NMfL is organized by the Movement for Life, albeit with religious authorities present. There also is a split within religious circles about morality issues, which came to light when a group of liberal priests (belonging to various churches, including Catholics) published a letter demanding a stop to the inclusion of AfF at the Ministry of Social Affairs. The letter criticized AfF for associating itself with "Christian values" while attacking reproductive and LGBT rights, an unchristian behavior according to the letter's authors (Svoboda, 2023). AfF responded with a letter entitled "We Do Not Want to Get Used to Clerical Cancel Culture," arguing that it does not align with any religious beliefs (Kancelář Alipro, 2023). Thus, a battle over liberal and conservative forms of religion is happening in the CR, amplifying the ambivalent alliance of anti-gender movement with the Church.

The Czech movement heavily networks with gynecologists, academics, and politicians through lobbying. The Czech Gynecological and Obstetrical Society has cooperated with the Movement for Life for a long time, probably also due to the affection of the committee chairman Vladimír Dvořák for the movement (Dušková & Koldová, 2023). The organization directly names him as a supporter in their posts, and Dvořák personally invites them to conferences and other events (Dušková & Koldová, 2023). At medical conferences, the Movement argues the existence of a post-abortive syndrome, supposedly characterized by suicidal tendencies, alcoholism, aggression, and fear of touching babies after abortion – an unofficial diagnosis not backed by evidence-based research. The largest medical information portal, proLékaře.cz, published some of the Movement's press releases about the translocation of an embryo during

an ectopic pregnancy. Medical research considers this practice technically impossible (Dušková & Koldová, 2023). The situation in Slovakia differs since there is a possibility of conscientious objection guaranteed by the Basic Treaty Between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See. The possibility of rejection to provide abortion by doctors makes it harder for women to undergo abortion, especially poorer women in less developed regions. Thus, anti-gender actors defend conscientious objection as constituting freedom of religion and, ultimately, as a way to prevent legal abortion (Chromík, n.d.; Záborská, 2022).

#### **5.2.4 Transnational Networks**

Both Czech and Slovak movements are active in the transnational anti-gender movement. The most significant platform is the World Congress of Families (WCF), a US-based organization with a right-wing Christian outlook but active transnationally, bringing lobbyists, activists, politicians, and priests together. The WCF has occurred every year since 1997, when it was held in Prague. Forum of Life and Záborská (during her time as an MEP) have been active participants (marianv, 2017). Forum of Life also participates in the One of Us Federation on the European level, bringing together 40 anti-abortion organizations (Datta, 2021, p. 34). In 2014, the WCF was to take place in Moscow but was canceled because of the annexation of Crimea (while the large-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022 has, among claims about de-Nazification and non-existence of the Ukrainian nation, been justified as necessary to get rid of LGBT and gender ideology – a line primarily propagated by Russian Orthodox Church). However, the organizers still reasoned that Russia is a beacon of pro-family society, unlike the decaying West (Dušková et al., 2023b). In 2015, the head of the Movement for Life, Ucháč, spoke at the Prague conference Gender War Against the Family alongside Alexei Komov, the Russian representative of the WCF, who now defends the invasion of Ukraine (Dušková et al., 2023b).

The Alliance for the Common Good is active mainly in Central Europe, while their 2022 conference happened in Prague. It unites anti-gender organizations from Hungary, the influential Polish Ordo Iuris, the Czech AfF, and the more radical Slovak think tank Institute for Human Rights and Family Policy, which, as opposed to the Czech AfF calls for LGBT conversion therapy (*Alliance for the Common Good*, n.d.). The Alliance for the Common Good is based on the idea that despite defeating Marxism in Central and Eastern Europe, a somewhat reworked form gained popularity in the West. Marxism is often represented as being spread by the rights of LGBTQ+ people or migrants (Dušková et al., 2023b).

An important US-based organization supporting European anti-gender initiatives since 2014 is the Christian Right Alliance Defending Freedom International (ADF), which is close to Donald Trump. The Council of Europe has rejected ADF's application for Participatory Status, arguing that the organization does not share the Council's human rights values (Datta, 2021). Among other activities, ADF prepares legislative proposals targeting transgender people for legislators in the US (Jánošíková, 2023). The Director of Strategic Relations & Training is Sophia Kuby, the daughter of the elite anti-gender ideologue Gabriele Kuby (Datta, 2021). Roger Kiska, a Slovak-Canadian ADF lawyer, spoke at the 2024 Slovak conference Choose Life, organized by Forum of Life and Yes for Life, and is a vocal part of the Slovak anti-gender scene (TK KBS, 2024). The ADF supported the Slovak Family referendum and the AfF, writing a letter to the Slovak Constitutional Court, asking it to approve the referendum questions (Jánošíková, 2023). In 2019, the Czech AfF organized a seminar with three MPs from ODS, ANO, and KDÚ-ČSL on family and marriage between a man and a woman (Kopecká, 2023). An ADF lawyer, Adina Portaru, participated in the discussion. After the medialization of the presence of ADF, the AfF wrote a statement saying: "We are not secretive about our cooperation with ADF" (Kopecká, 2023).

In a study tracking funding for European anti-gender organizations in 2009-2018, Datta (2021) finds that a large amount of funding comes from religious groups, NGOs, and political parties originating in the US (including ADF) and Russia. The US Christian Right organizations, which are themselves funded by conservative billionaires, account for 81 million USD. The sum rises to 188 million regarding Russian sources, going back to Russian oligarchs Vladimir Yakunin and Konstantin Malofeev, who have also funded European far-right parties (Datta, 2021, p. 7). However, as outlined above, Slovak organizations receive funding from the Ministry of Social Affairs. Forum of Life has also benefitted from the European Social Fund and European Regional Development Fund for providing pregnancy crisis centers (Datta, 2021, p. 59).

### **5.2.5 Conclusion**

The Czech movement, more centralized and dominated by a few key organizations, contrasts with the more dispersed Slovak movement, which the Catholic Church significantly influences. Both movements exhibit professionalization, with activists embedded in national politics and public life. Cooperation between Czech and Slovak actors is evident through shared events and conferences, although tensions arise from differing levels of secularization and Church involvement. Both movements are part of a transnational anti-gender network, with significant support from US-based and Russian organizations. This support, both ideological and financial, underscores the global dimension of anti-gender activism.

### **5.3 *Repertoires of Contention***

Having considered the top-down formation of the two movements, the organization of marches, lobbying, petitions, provision of services, and prayers is presented from a comparative

perspective. Again, special attention is paid to the Catholic outlook and Church participation in action repertoires.

### 5.3.1 Marches

The most essential "pro-life" event in the CR and Slovakia is the National March for Life, organized in the CR every year and every few years in Slovakia. The NMfL is more popular in Slovakia – closer to tens of thousands and a couple of thousand participants in the CR, considering that the CR has twice as many inhabitants. The Czech NMfL is organized by the Movement for Life as opposed to Slovakia, where the Church is the main organizer, along with countless "pro-life" organizations and the AfF. Nonetheless, both Marches have a Catholic sermon on the program. Despite the Czech AfF not officially supporting the March and proclaiming to be a strictly secular organization, its head, Jana Jochová, participates in the procession (Kancelář AliPro, 2023). Still, the Slovak March hosts many clergymen, with people carrying banners spelling "Thou Shalt Not Kill," one of the Ten Commandments, and posters of the Virgin Mary (Beláňová, 2020). The participants of the Czech NMfL used to carry white crosses in the 2000s and early 2010s, but these have been disappearing in recent years in favor of Czech flags and banners spelling "I am pro-life" or "I am creative". One of Beláňová's (2020) interviewees stated that the organizers have been trying to get rid of the crosses, as the media report on them as fundamentalists (p. 404). Thus, while the Slovak NMfL depends on the cross, the Czech counterpart has traded the cross for the flag.

The two AfFs organize the Czech March for Family and Proud of Family in Slovakia. In the CR, it is organized by Young Christian Democrats – a youth wing of KDÚ-ČSL and supported by Czech bishops. The AfF organizes a Day for Family with concerts and programs with families with children, similar to the Slovak NMfL. These marches take place on the same day as Pride, although the contention is framed not as anti-LGBT but as pro-family and positive.

They are much less popular than NMfLs, and the difference in the number of participants in Pride and anti-Pride marches is striking. It could be argued that direct confrontation with the most popular march of an antagonistic queer-feminist movement and narrow backlash is not nearly as effective as creatively framed NMfLs.

### 5.3.2 Lobbying

The Slovak movement is integrated within state institutions, with politicians who are part of the movement in parliament, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and currently the Ministry of Culture. The high morality of the Church also helps the movement to have a say in education (Church schools and universities) and health care (conscientious objection) through the Treaty with the Holy See. The situation is similar for the Czech AfF, whose members are assistants of MPs and act as advisors at the Ministry of Social Affairs, mainly on the matter of marriage (Dušková et al., 2023a). However, the Czech Movement for Life does not have these connections but has influenced politics and state institutions via professionalized lobbying. As (Dušková et al., 2023a) note, Christian morality to fight "gender ideology" might be productive during a sermon in South-Eastern Moravia, but it would be futile in the parliament. On the other hand, Christian rhetoric is welcome in the Slovak parliament.

Therefore, the Movement for Life instead uses the rhetoric of common sense, which can protect the people from an apocalypse in the Czech parliament instead of opposing abortion based on Catholic morality. For example, the Movement uses emotive language and tells the parliamentarians stories about women who supposedly had suffered from post-abortive syndrome (Dušková et al., 2023d). With MPs that the movement sees as less amiable to the anti-abortion agenda, the Movement for Life chooses the rhetoric of better economic conditions for families (greater economic autonomy of the family from the state and remuneration for self-employed parents in a welfare chauvinist manner) or even transportation, whatever is the

flagship project of the particular MP. The Movement comes to the meetings with prepared drafts of amendments to the laws, which at first glance look like minor adjustments of a technical nature and should make life easier for Czech citizens, especially women or children. Deputies are often happy that they can show some activity and present a seemingly harmless amendment in parliament (Dušková et al., 2023d).

The Czech MPs have been exposed to lobbying by a pro-LGBT initiative, We Are Fair, as well as by the AfF, which opposes the legalization of any same-sex unions. While We Are Fair drew attention with a billboard campaign near MPs' offices, people from AfF addressed MPs in their neighborhood or wrote letters to them according to a prescribed model that AfF leaders called Ten Commandments (Gavriněv, 2024). In addition, AfF managed to meet with MPs in person, such as with ANO leader Babiš. According to ANO MP Pastuchová, Babiš used to support same-sex marriage, but that has changed, and the AfF "probably worked a little there." (Stuchlíková, 2024).

### 5.3.3 Petitions

A standard repertoire used mainly by the two AfFs includes signing petitions, generally initiated in response to a specific legislative proposal or politically charged event. The Slovak AfF is incredibly prolific, with petitions reaching from the topics of same-sex partnership, abortion, "transsexual revolution", gambling, housing for young families, and pension. Nonetheless, the petitions with the most signatures are the ones concerned with same-sex unions, transgender people, or abortion, such as the petition against a directive of the Ministry of Health about gender transition, which would allow transgender people to legally change their gender without sterilization. The Directive reached almost 24,000 signatures (Aliancia za rodinu, 2023). The petition suggests that the Directive would be harmful in situations where "real biological sex matters". As an example, it argues that the Directive would breach the

autonomy of the Church when it trains young men to become priests, fearing that they might be transgender men (Aliancia za rodinu, 2023). Although the petition was not influential at the time, the Directive has been repealed by the new Smer-Hlas-SNS government.

The petitions of the Czech Aff regard a constitutional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman, similar to the status quo in Slovakia. The petition claims to have more than 100,000 signatures. Another petition titled "End Child Trafficking" refers to surrogate mothers, arguing that the surrogates are often poor women who are pushed into surrogacy, hence becoming slaves – a distorted echo of the debate led in feminist circles ("Naše projekty," n.d.). There is no allusion to Christianity in Czech petitions.

#### 5.3.4 Providing Services

In CR and Slovakia, it is primarily the anti-abortion branch of the anti-gender movement that provides services as a part of contention and interaction with the public. In the CR, the Movement for Life has established a complimentary helpline named We Do not Judge, We Help, which provides details on immediate shelter options and adoption information and connects women with experts to reassess prenatal diagnostics (Beláňová, 2020). In 2018, the organization collaborated with a company distributing pregnancy tests to include promotional materials in the test packages, enabling them to directly engage with women (Beláňová, 2020, p. 406). Similarly, Slovak Forum for Life offers a toll-free hotline for pregnant women and advocates for "respect for life" without religious arguments. The hotline provides alternatives to abortion and assistance through satellite organizations across Slovakia (Beláňová, 2020).

In the CR, only one gynecological office practices Catholic bioethics - the Center for Hope and Help in Brno. As expected, the Czech gynecologists in the Center do not outwardly identify as Catholics. Advertising materials emphasize "respect for life" and "life as a gift"

(Beláňová, 2020, p. 407). On the other hand, several Slovak gynecological offices identify with conservatism, with offices Gianna and Terezka explicitly adhering to Catholic bioethics, refusing to provide conception advice to unmarried couples based on religious grounds.

### 5.3.5 Prayers

In Slovakia, public prayers against abortion represent a distinct repertoire of contention, mostly against abortion. Neither CR nor Slovakia has abortion clinics; therefore, the Slovak activists gather near the entrance of hospitals where abortions are provided (Beláňová, 2020). This activity consists of praying out loud and showing images of children. An initiative titled 9 Months for Life is a variation of the international 40 Days for Life initiative. The organizer, a Catholic priest, sees the initiative as a moral reminder in a traditionally religious country with the possibility of conscientious objection for doctors (Beláňová, 2020). The focus of prayers is not solely on visible presence. Public prayers are a powerful spiritual instrument in combating what is perceived as evil (Beláňová, 2020). In contrast, the CR has only recorded one instance of such action. For years, an Orthodox priest protested every day in front of a hospital in Brno. Wearing religious attire and waving a banner depicting an aborted fetus, he became a humorous figure among the secular public (Beláňová, 2020).

Priests in many Czech parishes have frequently criticized the anti-abortion movement as overly radical. Praying as a form of contention is, however, also promoted by the Slovak AfF – whether as prayer "for unborn life" or "biological truth about men" (Chromík, 2023) – i.e. anti-abortion and anti-transgender gatherings. However, Czech AfF has not been involved in public prayers. In addition, the Slovak movement occupies public spaces with religious statues. Catholic anti-gender activists in Slovakia distribute a statue of a lady embracing her transparent child for installation in public spaces and churches (Beláňová, 2020, p. 405). Despite their widespread distribution in Slovakia, the CR hosts only two monuments on private property.

Some Slovak congregations created monuments for aborted children, known as memorials for the unborn (Beláňová, 2020, p. 405).

### **5.3.6 Conclusion**

In Slovakia, the anti-gender movement benefits from strong Church involvement, evident in the large, religiously-influenced NMfL and public prayers. The Czech NMfL has shifted away from overt religious symbols to appeal to a broader, often atheist, audience. Lobbying efforts focus on practical, non-religious arguments. Conversely, the Slovak movement takes advantage of integration with state institutions, which makes lobbying unnecessary. Both movements use petitions but contrast in their use of religious language. Lastly, they provide services such as helplines and directly engage with women considering abortion.

## **5.4 Framing**

The final of Tarrow's four powers, framing, delves into the emotions and constructions of grievances. This section examines the religious, nationalist/anti-migrant, familialist, and socio-economic frames of the anti-gender mobilization in CR and Slovakia – specifically the websites Czech and Slovak AfF and NMfL. Furthermore, the subsection on emotions identifies fascist passions as the leading mobilizing emotion of anti-gender movements.

### **5.4.1 Protection of Czech Family and Slovak Church**

“We are not against LGBT+ people, we treat gays and lesbians with respect and decency and wish them all the best in life.” (“O Alianci,” n.d.)

“In the spirit of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we love every person but we condemn every sin, regardless of who commits it - whether a person with heterosexual or homosexual feelings.” (Kováčik et al., 2022)

The first quote can be found on the introductory webpage of the Czech AfF, while the second is part of an open letter by the Slovak AfF. These quotes are emblematic of the different strategies of the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements. Both Czech and Slovak Alliances for Family (AfF) state that they do not mobilize against LGBT people per se, but Slovak AfF justifies this morality by Catholic doctrine. The stated goals of the Slovak AfF include the protection of marriage as a union between a man and a woman and adoption for heterosexual couples. This is also true for the Czech AfF, although its efforts are formulated from a socio-economic perspective. For example, they aim to "ensure adequate reward for parental care as socially important work, including financial compensation" or "strengthen the economic and social autonomy of the family" ("O Alianci," n.d.). The undervalued status of care work is a leading theme of the Czech AfF, but it is always connected to heteronormative parenthood.

On the other hand, the Slovak AfF mobilizes potential supporters based on religious doctrine and symbols. The organization claims to be independent of any religious orientation and utilizes civic petitions mixed with human rights jargon in a secularized manner. However, the petitions and press releases often allude to "freedom of religion," albeit exclusively of Christian denomination. A press release from March 2023 is titled "Christian and Civic Organizations Invite the Faithful in Front of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic to a Prayer Rosary Gathering Entitled 'As Male and Female He Created Them'" (Chromík, 2023). The article advertises the event as a prayer for the cancellation of the Ministry of Health's regulation regarding gender transition. The regulation - in April 2024, repealed by the new minister - would make it possible for transgender people to legally change their gender without having to undergo sterilization surgery (Zdút, 2023). In the same vein, an open letter, "We Reject Intolerance Towards Catholic Bishop Haľko and Catholic Opinions", rejects the attitude

of "LGBT activists" (Kováčik et al., 2022). Bishop Jozef Haľko is infamous for his homophobic statements. During a popular summer festival, a group of people covered his provisory confessional with a rainbow flag. Other petitions on the website are concerned with the restrictions on sermons during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nevertheless, moving beyond the national context to the regional level to see the shades of adaptation of the movement strategies can prove helpful. A powerful example of regional difference in the CR is the yearly procession for the so-called protection of family and life at the pilgrimage site Hostýn in Southeast Moravia, less than a two-hour drive from the Slovak border (Dušková et al., 2023c). Moravia is a region with twice as high a proportion of believers as the rest of the CR and a unique culture and even Moravian national identity (*Náboženská víra*, 2021). Furthermore, in Moravia, a congregation of parishes called FATYM mobilizes against gender and reports on activities of the AfF and NMfL (Dohnalová, 2022). The Catholic procession at Hostýn and Catholic FATYM, both in Moravia, exemplify the variability of the anti-gender movement in its appeal to the local public.

#### 5.4.2 The "Great Replacement"

Ultimately, the main frame of the Slovak anti-gender movement is Catholic morality, which appears to a much smaller extent in the Czech movement as well. Similarly, socio-economic grievances or "offers" (Pető, 2021) have their place in both movements but are at the forefront of Czech anti-genderism. However, there is another distinction between the two: the anti-migrant sentiment. The anti-migrant frame is more prevalent in the CR, but its discursive underpinning of replacement is present in anti-gender discourse virtually universally (Svatoňová & Doerr, 2024). For example, the head of the Civic Institute, Joch, is a known anti-gender and anti-migration intellectual (Kocianová, 2015). Furthermore, Movement for Life president Ucháč (Zrno, 2019) and vice-president Rybová (Šeliga, 2019) both emphasize the lost

economic potential of "unborn children" and argue that supposedly the rise in natality would be less costly than the arrival of migrants.

As mentioned, the Czech bishops have aligned with the anti-migrant movement (Barša et al., 2021), while the Slovak bishops have not been vocal on the issue of migration as opposed to "gender ideology". In 2017, the Church organized a conference concentrated on the possibility of converting Muslim migrants to Christianity – not an explicitly hateful anti-migrant stance (*Náboženstvo a Migrácia*, 2017). Slovak AfF and anti-abortion organizations do not discuss migration. Nevertheless, anti-migrant and anti-gender stances tend to go hand in hand in high politics in both countries (Barša et al., 2021). It seems that the Czech Church has decided to rather side with the anti-migrant movement, with the Czech anti-gender movement using explicit anti-migrant language to support its arguments.

Still, there is a bridge between the anti-gender and anti-migrant discourses lying in the idea of a replacement. The threat of a replacement of the "traditional family" by other family types or other types of cohabitation follows the same logic as the "Great Replacement" theory – incidentally present in the manifesto of the 2022 shooter in Bratislava targeting LGBT people (Svatoňová & Doerr, 2024, p. 85). This conspiracy theory posits that a powerful elite secretly creates migration flows and reduces the birthrate of white Europeans, resulting in population decline and cultural replacement of white European populations via migration and non-European demographic growth. Its author Renaud Camus (2011) describes it as "genocide by substitution," further arguing that Jewish elites promote LGBT interests to destroy the white race (as cited in Svatoňová & Doerr, 2024, p. 85). The replacement frame resonates with Korolczuk & Graff's (2018) anticolonial frame positing that "gender ideology" will colonize/replace local culture. As Judith Butler posits, it then becomes necessary to exclude those who are expected to replace the "authentic" people/family as it is *good to* prevent harm

(LSE, 2024) - the imagined authentic people as the only normatively good version of society being at the core of the issue.

### 5.4.3 Fascist Passions

Butler identifies fascist passions as the core emotion of the anti-gender, trans-exclusionary, racist, or anti-migrant movements (LSE, 2024). These passions operate via the excitement to exclude as a primary emotional driver, understanding exclusion as a refusal of a legitimate state of being of a particular group of people (LSE, 2024). Exclusion is an alternative to the power to include or be included – a sentiment shared in post-communist countries that had entered Western structures. The disenchantment of the realities of semi-peripheral status within the West, the fear of the old West itself being "replaced", and losing its imagined "authentic" identity – these forces deem inclusion as a failed relic that lost its appeal. Ironically, fascist passions provide a framework of inclusion – bridges between movements with a focus on diverse issues, but all with a primarily exclusionary agenda (LSE, 2024). To create an alternative to the desirability of exclusion, it is necessary to find how to make inclusion exciting – a question for queer-feminist, housing, migration, or environmental justice movements. Still, Butler sees fascist passions as potential and not necessarily as full-fledged fascism but argues that tendencies can be spotted before the establishment of large-scale societal and state fascism (LSE, 2024).

Both Czech and Slovak movements utilize fascist passions. These are often expressed within the framework of protecting the family or children or even civilization as a whole. The need for protection presupposes a threat, generally identified as "gender ideology". Additionally, the fascist passions are expressed in the satisfaction of ostracization. For instance, Radim Ucháč presented to Agenda Europe his plan to compile a list of persons who wish to undergo an abortion. He asserts that "bad women" would then be stigmatized, making it easier

to impose a total ban on abortion (Dušková, 2024). Fear of destruction and moral panic also play into the mobilizing mix, especially appealing to parents.

The Slovak AfF, in one petition, claims about "gender ideology" that "in countries that have succumbed to this ideology, the number of victims - children who feel incongruity with their gender - is growing enormously" (Aliancia za rodinu, 2022). The Czech AfF addresses parents, warning that "it is probably time for you to really take a hard look at who and how wants to "educate" and raise your children behind your back" when talking about discussions on gender and LGBT in schools (Floryk, 2024). In this sense, the "us vs. them" binary is constructed, "us" as those who protect children and the family and "them" as the enemy that seeks to undermine and replace the "authentic" family unit.

#### **5.4.4 Conclusion**

The framing strategies of the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements reveal their distinct yet interconnected approaches. The Czech AfF emphasizes socio-economic arguments and anti-migrant sentiments, while the Slovak AfF relies on Catholic doctrine and religious symbolism. While the Czech movement aligns substantially with anti-migrant sentiments, the Slovak movement also follows the logic of the "Great Replacement" conspiracy, utilizing the fear of the replacement of the "traditional family" by LGBT or the "gender lobby". Both use emotionally charged rhetoric driven by fascist passions, creating the "us vs. them" dichotomy to mobilize support.

## 6 Discussion & Conclusions

This thesis analyzed the Czech and Slovak anti-gender movements as mobilizations against "gender ideology," i.e., LGBT and reproductive rights and gender equality - a transnational phenomenon that adapts to local contexts. The main focus was on the operation of these movements in Czech and Slovak societies with the low and high moral authority of their respective Catholic Churches.

A high moral authority, understood as a historical nexus between the Church and the nation, makes it "affordable" for the Church to align with a polarizing movement, promising moral gains. A low moral authority of the Church, while not excluding alliance with a polarizing movement, makes it ambivalent since the Church does not have much authority to lend and is less likely to afford a risky alliance. Whilst the Czech Church has low moral authority, which might predict the non-existence of any ties with a polarizing movement, the anti-gender movement has roots in the Vatican, making the movement a natural ally for the Church. Thus, while the cooperation and Catholic outlook are characteristic of the Slovak anti-gender movement, the Czech movement and the Czech Church are ambivalent about cooperation – because the low moral authority does not make the Church a strategic partner to gain popularity and because the Church finds cooperation with a polarizing movement risky. However, the Catholic mass during the yearly Czech NMfL shows that the religious/secular binary is not clear-cut and that the Vatican roots of "gender ideology" stay partly uncut even in the seemingly atheist CR.

In the CR, the anti-gender movement has used issues like the Istanbul Convention and "Marriage for All" to gain publicity and block rights expansion. However, it has not translated its agenda into law. In contrast, the Slovak movement has successfully changed the constitutional definition of marriage and influenced government departments, securing funding

at the expense of feminist organizations. Elections in 2020 and 2021 were key, with Slovak anti-gender rhetoric becoming entrenched in major parties. The Slovak movement is more effective but benefits from a conservative society and strong Church influence, unlike in the CR, where the Church lacks political power. The Slovak Church has actively supported the movement by advocating for constitutional changes and anti-abortion laws. The Czech anti-gender movement is centralized and dominated by critical organizations, while the Slovak movement is more dispersed and influenced by the Catholic Church.

Moreover, Slovak activists rely less on lobbying due to deeper state integration, whereas Czech activists use practical, non-religious arguments. Both use petitions and provide support services but differ in their use of religious language. The Czech and Slovak movements cooperate through professionalized and quasi-scientific events despite tensions from differing secularization levels, and at other times refuse cooperation precisely because the Slovak movement is "too Catholic". Ultimately, both movements are part of a global network supported by billionaire-funded US Christian Right organizations and Russian oligarchs. They meet and exchange movement strategies at the World Congress of Families and use the same discursive tools with local adaptations – such as protecting traditional families via Catholic morality in Slovakia or anti-migrant sentiments in the CR.

Both movements employ emotionally charged rhetoric and fascist passions to create an "us vs. them" dichotomy and mobilize support. While both movements build on the "Great Replacement" conspiracy, the Czech secularized anti-gender frame builds more on racist anti-migrant replacement fears to be combated among others by white procreation. On the other hand, the Slovak anti-gender movement utilizes a frame of Catholic morality whose moral underpinnings should not allow (at least explicit) racism. There is thus space for future research to analyze the reasons for the differences in the Church and anti-gender alignment with the anti-migration organizations in CR and Slovakia.

Since the primary focus was mainly on NMfL and Alliance for Family in the CR and Slovakia, the thesis is limited by necessarily missing other aspects and smaller initiatives that form the two anti-gender movements. However, since these two initiatives are the most vocal in both countries and share the same name, they were ideal for a comparative case study.

Finally, it seems that both Slovak and Czech anti-gender movements are becoming more effective in time with changing political landscapes. There is no straightforward answer to why, but there is a need to find and actively participate in making them less desirable – and, in general, how to make exclusion undesirable. As fascist passions manifest, the excitement to exclude and fear of replacement triggers strong emotions, presenting a question of how to make inclusion, rather than exclusion, exciting (LSE, 2024). This is a challenge to be tackled not only by social movement research but also by other intellectuals, politicians, and activists.

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