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Marriage and Family in Putin's Russia: State Ideology and the Discourse of the Russian Orthodox Church

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Abstract: The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) presents itself as a defender of traditional Christian values. Among these values, representatives of the ROC mention concern for marriage and family. To what extent is the position of the ROC an expression of commitment to the traditional Christian concept of marriage and family? In this article, we analyse the contemporary Orthodox discourse in Russia since Kirill Gundyayev became the Patriarch of Moscow in 2009. From a political science and security studies perspective, we highlight the main ideological elements of this discourse. We contrast these elements with similar content in Russian official documents and Vladimir Putin's statements. An analysis of what the ROC says about the problems and protection of marriage and family in Russia, against the background of Putin's statements and the actions of the state authorities, shows that the ROC's discourse on marriage and family echoes the main themes of the political discourse controlled by the state authorities. In its understanding of marriage and in its efforts on behalf of the family, the ROC represents a conservative doctrinal position. Although, in doctrinal terms, it essentially expresses the traditional Christian teaching on marriage, the strong ideologisation and securitisation of demographic issues in Russia are also reflected in church discourse.

Keywords: Russian Orthodox Church; Russia; Patriarch Kirill; Vladimir Putin; Russian ideology; Russian conservatism



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1. Introduction

In contemporary political discourse, Russia seeks to portray itself as a bastion of conservative values, opposing attempts to redefine marriage and family. After Russia's military incursion into Ukraine on 24 February 2022, this professed moral conservatism has also been leveraged for anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western propaganda. Among the reasons given for Russia's conflict with Ukraine, both governmental representatives and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) cite a motivation to resist Western cultural and moral shifts, and to safeguard the 'traditional values' upon which Russian society is founded. Notably, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow's first public address following the onset of the full-scale Russian offensive against Ukraine is illuminating. In a sermon on 6 March 2022 at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, Patriarch Kirill (2022b) alluded to the conflict's 'metaphysical significance,' pointing to purportedly false values imposed on Donbas inhabitants, alluding to perceived notions of freedom, happiness, and even referencing 'gay parades' as indicative of the West's moral degradation against which Russia must militarily fortify itself.

The portrayal of Russia, both by the state and the ROC, as a conservative bastion runs deeper than superficial observation might suggest. This is not merely a bid to shield

specific values or familial norms from foreign, predominantly Western, influences. Such messaging seeks to bolster the core ideological tenet of Putinism, Russia's civilisational uniqueness, whilst reinforcing the perception within Russian society that the ostensibly morally bereft Western culture poses a tangible threat to Russian traditions and identity. This brand of Russian conservatism is fundamentally ideological and political in nature. Within this anti-Western and isolationist strategy of Putin's reign, the ROC, helmed since 2009 by Kirill, operates; notably, he openly endorses the actions of the Russian authorities and enjoys various privileges stemming from his collaboration.

This paper aims to probe the manner in which the Moscow Patriarchate addresses matters of marriage and family, specifically their definition, perceived threats both external and internal, and the church's envisioned role in their preservation. We postulate, however, that the statements from ROC representatives should be juxtaposed against Putin's pronouncements to discern their interconnectedness. We posit that a discernible linkage exists, shaping the trajectory of official church rhetoric in Russia. This is manifested in the church's selective emphasis on certain topics—such as the Western redefinition of marriage and family, and the increasing acceptance of non-heterosexual individuals—whilst other pressing issues, like domestic violence, economic struggles faced by families, and alcoholism, are noticeably underrepresented. Similarly, there is a pronounced alignment of the church's discourse with the state's ideological narrative in pinpointing external cultural influences, chiefly Western, as principal threats to the Russian marital and familial fabric, with meagre attention to indigenous socio-economic challenges. This alignment in ecclesiastical rhetoric with state ideologies has become pronounced since Kirill Gundyayev's tenure as the Moscow Patriarch, during which he has veered decisively towards close alliance with the state, resonating with the latter's domestic and international policy objectives. To this end, we shall focus our analysis on declarations made by Kirill and other senior ROC members from 2009 to 2023.

In this paper, the research perspective of political science and security studies is employed. Whilst this is not the sole perspective for exploring the relationship between the ROC and the formal political stance of Russian Federation authorities, it offers valuable insights into contemporary Russian political, religious, and ideological discourse. Our analysis of the ROC discourse is principally limited to statements by Patriarch Kirill and, to a lesser extent, other representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate whom we deem most representative of the ROC's views. This paper does not claim to encompass the entirety of the ROC's activity concerning marriage and family; instead, it seeks to highlight discernible convergences between Russian political and church discourse.

Our primary sources comprise sermons and addresses by Patriarch Kirill and selected prominent ROC figures, supplemented by materials from the Moscow Patriarchate's official website. To illustrate the church's alignment with state ideologies, we have extracted analogous content from Russian legislative acts, particularly those formulated amidst escalating tensions with the West, as well as utterances from Vladimir Putin.

Our analysis suggests that, whilst the ROC's discourse retains foundational elements of conservative Christian doctrine concerning marriage and family, precluding potential reconsideration or redefinition, it simultaneously mirrors the political objectives of the Russian authorities. This is particularly evident in its portrayal of the West as an existential menace to Russia's social fabric, concurrently sidelining other significant challenges. Thus, even as it ostensibly preserves Orthodox anthropology and marital ethics, the ROC's rhetoric aligns with state objectives of insulating Russian society from Western cultural influences, casting Russia as a distinctive conservative entity—culturally and morally superior to an ostensibly waning West.

This article is structured into four parts. The introductory part explores the interplay between population policies and state ideologies in what can now be termed Putin's authoritarian Russia. The second delves into the protection of marriage and family within the ideological framework of 'mature Putinism'—a term we employ to denote the quasi-democratic, authoritarian system manifest since Putin's pivotal 2007 Munich Security

Conference speech, heralding a confrontational stance against the West. The third part examines the primary elements of the ROC's rhetoric on marital and familial matters. The concluding part encapsulates our research findings.

2. Population Policy and State Ideology: The Case of Putin's Russia

The Russian official discourse concerning the protection and support of marriage and family is influenced not only by the ideological presumptions of the state authorities, backed by the ROC, but also emerges from observations of the fundamental challenges Russian society encountered in the late 20th century. Although one could argue that the matter of safeguarding marriage and family is deeply ideologised in Putin's Russia, with increasing securitisation amid heightened tension with the West, it is imperative to recognise that such contemplation is a reaction to contemporary Russian societal challenges. Thus, to fully grasp the ideological facet of this discourse and the ROC's role therein, one must first consider the correlation between population policy and state ideology, particularly under the authoritarian conditions that have come to define Russia under Putin. Three considerations are pertinent: (1) the significance of biopolitics and ethnopolitics in authoritarian states' ideologies, (2) the demographic and societal challenges confronting Russian authorities at the onset of Putin's leadership, and (3) the principal components of Russian population policy in the early 21st century.

2.1. Biopolitics and Ethnopolitics in the Ideologies of Authoritarian States

The fundamental definition of ideology, perceived as a consistent set of beliefs or values, has largely remained unaltered in political science. However, its associated connotations have evolved. In the nineteenth century, ideology reflected a commitment to liberal democratic values. By contrast, in the early 20th century, as opposition to fascism and communism became paramount, ideology began to represent any system of beliefs, with democratic ideology juxtaposed against totalitarianism. As Kathleen Knight posits (Knight 2006, p. 619), despite Daniel Bell's (1960) assertion of ideology's demise in the 1950s, the latter half of the 20th century emerged as a fervently ideological era.

The literature delineating Soviet-style systems differentiates between 'pure' and 'practical' ideologies. The former underpinned the systemic existence and supremacy of the ruling party, rooted in foundational writings. The latter comprised ideas that rationalised potential actions, aiming to cultivate an unquestioning societal loyalty to the established order and a conviction that policies endorsed by those in power resonated with societal interests and values. Concurrently, it facilitated adjustments to doctrinal tenets in line with a state's prevailing societal milieu (Schurmann 1968, pp. 21–22; Holmes 1987, pp. 114–15). In the context of contemporary Putinism, perhaps the most insightful is the Marxist approach to ideology. Ideology, in this framework, serves not merely as a worldview, but rather as a superstructure reinforcing the structure of a given society. As such, according to McCarthy (1994, p. 419), ideologies were criticised by Marx as unreal because they 'obscure, distort, or mystify reality'. From a Marxist point of view, 'ideology is the alienation of thought from life' (McCarthy 1994, p. 417). Furthermore, the Marxist view of ideology also has other noted weaknesses, already contained in the very concept of superstructure. As Eagleton (2000, p. 239) notes, the function of the superstructure is to help manage the social contradictions, obviously in the interests of the ruling class, arising from productive activity. In his view, the term 'superstructure' reifies a number of political or ideological functions in an immobile ontological field. An institution behaves superstructurally only if it somehow supports a dominant set of social relations. It follows that an institution may be superstructural at one point in time, but not at another. Moreover, its different functions may be contradictory in this respect. In Eagleton's assessment, the reality is that most of our activities are neither superstructural nor infrastructural. Nevertheless, it is the understanding of ideology as a superstructure that reinforces the social structure that may justify the ideological orientation of Putin's Russia, in which the consolidation of society is attempted by the authorities through the sacralisation of the nation.

Notwithstanding its inherent ambiguity, ideology often carries a derogatory connotation in practice. The term, especially when referring to state ideology, is frequently associated with negative implications, often equating it with totalitarianism and its early 20th-century origins, characterised by attempts at societal homogenisation through social engineering and the rise of totalitarian regimes. Dependent on their developmental trajectory and prevailing political climates, states have historically leveraged diverse tools of social engineering, particularly biopolitics and ethnopolitics. Biopolitics seeks to mould a society wherein power oversees and governs life (Kvashnin 2011). As noted by Kharkevich and Kasatkin (2011, p. 220), biopolitics is currently understood primarily as the practice of political regulation of the life processes of society. Ethnopolitics endeavours to foster ethnically uniform societies or manages ethnic relations to avert societal and state disruptions (Drobizheva 2001).

Biopolitics and ethnopolitics' presence in authoritarian state ideologies is inherently linked to their foundational ideologies. This does not negate the likelihood that specific population policy elements (or even the majority) stem from the genuine demographic conditions of a given state. However, within authoritarian regimes, ideological factors might assume enhanced significance in formulating population policy objectives. This, sequentially, enables state authorities to incorporate ideologically aligned entities into policy execution—a phenomenon discernible in Putin's Russia.

2.2. Demographic Challenges in the Early Putin Era

Early into his tenure as the Russian Federation's President, Putin endeavoured to shield Russia from the impending demographic calamity of depopulation, particularly pertinent considering Russia's uneven population distribution and the escalating depopulation of regions like Northern Russia, Eastern Siberia, and the Russian Far East. Central to Putin's policy was bolstering state support for families (Rivkin-Fish 2010, pp. 712–13). It is worth noting that early pronouncements during Putin's regime about augmenting state support and stimulating birth rates were largely a response to the economic and societal adversities Russia endured in the 1990s, consequent to the USSR's disintegration. This transition ushered in a profound societal crisis, manifested in dwindling state support for families, surging poverty, and resultant challenges for familial stability and birth rates (Sätre et al. 2016; Kostin and Kostina 2016, pp. 228–32; Rivkin-Fish 2010, p. 710). Russia's population has been in continual decline since 1992, a trend that only began to abate in the early 2000s (Vishnevskiy 2015, pp. 151–59) with the relative enhancement in Russians' economic conditions and the implementation of certain pro-family and pro-natalist policies.

Nevertheless, despite certain advancements, the complexities associated with these difficulties have perpetually eluded resolution within the Russian Federation. Additionally, the oligarchic economic configuration, originally established during the tumultuous era of the 1990s and increasingly subjected to state control post-2000, has precipitated a substantial escalation in economic inequality. Concomitantly, the ineffectiveness of governmental policies has exacerbated an already precarious healthcare crisis and intensified the pressing predicament of inadequate housing availability to families subsisting on average incomes (Aksenov et al. 2010, pp. 114–16). These formidable social and economic tribulations originating from the 1990s, coupled with emergent challenges that imperil the financial stability of Russian families post-2000, are discerned within Russian scholarly contemplation as existential threats to national security.

As expounded by Kostin and Kostina (2016, pp. 16–17), the threat to social cohesion and, by extension, to the stability of the state, emanates from the widening material differentiation of the populace and an increment in the levels of poverty, engendering potential social unrest. The societal stratification, characterised by a limited stratum of affluence and a predominantly indigent majority, exacerbates unemployment and augments the proportion of urban dwellers subsisting in extreme penury. These factors collectively contribute to a proliferation in drug addiction and organised criminal activities. Furthermore, there is an escalating disparity in socio-economic advancement across various regions within Russia,

compounding the internal challenges. Another menace to economic security emanates from the criminalisation of both society and economic activities. This disconcerting trend has been exacerbated by escalating unemployment, alleged affiliations of certain governmental officials with organised crime syndicates, and the attenuation of the system of state oversight. Such criminalisation not only threatens the immediate economic fabric but also has the potential to undermine the broader integrity and stability of Russian society.

2.3. Main Elements of Russian Population Policy after 2000

Putin has frequently addressed Russia's demographic challenges, suggesting that state assistance to prospective parents should act as a catalyst to stimulate an increase in birth rates (Scheller-Boltz 2017, p. 82). As highlighted by Temkina (2013, p. 8), the cornerstone of Russia's population policy is to enhance the birth rate by incentivising women to have more than one child. Within this context, the complexities of family planning and birth control seem to recede from the public discourse, manipulated by state authorities. Moreover, there have been sporadic endeavours in Russia to curtail access to abortion (Rivkin-Fish 2010, pp. 721–22; Temkina 2013, p. 10), a procedure which was, with occasional exceptions, relatively straightforward during the Soviet Union era and regarded as a de facto contraceptive practice (Rivkin-Fish 2013, pp. 572–73). However, the limitation of access to abortion did not crystallise into a critical component of the population policy programmes implemented during Putin's tenure.

The 2001 Concept of Demographic Policy of the Russian Federation envisaged implementing measures to augment the health and life expectancy of Russian citizens, elevate the birth rate, fortify family status, and oversee migration processes and population movements within the country. The postulated alterations encompassed children's and adolescents' education. Simultaneously, for adults, there were proposals to increase resources for disease and workplace accident prevention, ameliorate the financial position of the healthcare system, and expand the medical facility network. The anticipated population growth was intertwined with a benefits system for families with two or more children and enhancements in the material circumstances and quality of life for Russian families. The concept asserted the need to halt emigration and the 'brain drain,' accelerate the registration and adaptation of labour migrants, and safeguard their rights (Yefremova 2007). The somewhat ambiguous set of guidelines, the absence of identified funding sources, the lack of delineation of responsibilities, and the failure to clarify various actors' roles in programme implementation led to many proposed ideas remaining confined to the planning stage (Szabaciuk 2017, pp. 277–78).

The year 2007 marked a significant development in the state's population policy, incorporating support for families. Subsequent years witnessed the introduction of the 'maternity capital' programme and other social schemes aimed at improving the material conditions of mothers raising children and stimulating birth growth (Rivkin-Fish 2010; Dolmatova 2018, p. 140). An essential aspect to note is that these programmes were implemented during a relatively stable period in Russia, both prior to the Russian–Georgian war in 2008 and before the global financial crisis. The Russian Federation's revised Demographic Policy Concept of 2007 was more expansive than its predecessor, elucidating tools for authorities at various levels to enhance Russian citizens' living standards, improve birth rates, reduce mortality, and prolong life expectancy. The most significant alterations were in migration policy guidelines, explicitly delineating a model immigrant's profile. The programme aimed to entice ethnic Russians and former Soviet citizens, including their children, to settle in Russia. Encouragement was also extended to foreigners, particularly Russian university graduates, to establish permanent residency. The inflow of migrants was perceived as an opportunity to ameliorate the demographic situation in strategically vital yet depopulated regions, such as Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East (Szabaciuk 2017, pp. 278–80).

The subsequent phase of pro-family policy commenced amid the antagonism with the West following Russia's illicit occupation and annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, and

engagement with pro-Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine. This confrontation harboured an economic dimension, aggravating the financial strain on numerous Russian families. During this period, several strategic and conceptual documents were promulgated, relating to demographic policy. These included the Concept of State Family Policy (25 August 2014), the Strategy of Measures for Citizens of the Older Generation (5 February 2016), the Presidential Decree on National Objectives and Strategic Tasks of Development of the Russian Federation (7 May 2018), and the Presidential Decree on National Objectives of Development of the Russian Federation (21 July 2020). In 2016, the Russian Government released the National Strategy of Action for Women for 2017–2022, followed by a new Strategy of Action for Women for 2023–2030 in 2022. Intriguingly, both Strategies of Action for Women cite the state's obligation to curtail the level of violence against women ([Natsional'naya Strategiya 2023](#), sec. 14–15).

A noteworthy aspect of the execution of pro-family and pro-natalist policies amid the conflict with the West was Putin's 2012 May Decrees. Among other provisions, these decrees assured financial support to families and supplementary resources for large families ([Gileva 2017](#)). In the lead-up to the presidential elections in which Putin sought a fourth term, a new pro-family programme was initiated on 1 January 2018: Putin's so-called 'demographic package'. This package served both as an extension and modification of the 2007 solutions, encompassing increased financial assistance for impoverished and large families to further stimulate birth growth, in addition to investments in health and education infrastructure ([Putin 2018](#); [Petrova 2017](#)).

3. Ideologisation and Securitisation of Population Issues in Putin's Russia

The securitisation of marriage and family issues is influenced not merely by the demographic crisis but also by the social, economic, and ethnic challenges observed in contemporary Russia ([Kostin and Kostina 2016](#), p. 254). Increasingly, however, the call for the protection of marriage and family is becoming subject to ideologisation. As Russia's conflict with the West has intensified—most notably since 2014—the definition of marriage and family, along with purported threats from Western culture, have become salient elements in Russian security discourse.

Three key aspects warrant consideration: (1) ideological justifications for pro-family state policies, (2) discriminatory actions rationalised by concern for the family, and (3) the role of the ROC in an ideologised public discourse.

3.1. Ideological Justification for the State's Pro-Family Policy

The ideologisation and securitisation of marriage and family mirror the ideological shifts initiated in the Russian Federation in 2007, becoming markedly apparent during Putin's third presidential term after 2012. From this period, a comprehensive 're-ideologisation' of Russian domestic, foreign, and security policies can be discerned ([Engström 2014](#), p. 356).

Although the Constitution, even following the amendments of 2020, guarantees ideological pluralism and precludes the establishment of a state-imposed ideology ([Konstitutsiya 2020](#), Article 13), Putin has, since 2012, increasingly emphasised Russia's cultural and civilisational distinctiveness vis-à-vis the West ([Tsygankov 2016](#), pp. 237–38). Putin's narrative posits Russia as the antithesis of the West in cultural, axiological, and even civilisational terms, thereby justifying Russia's security, survival, and development against both external and internal threats ([Biscop 2019](#), p. 12).

The impetus for Russia's observable 'conservative turn' resides in the prevailing anti-globalism within the nation's dominant political discourse. However, this anti-globalism is largely framed as a rejection of Western culture, values, and lifestyles. Fundamental to Putin's anti-Western and conservative ideology are key constructs such as 'traditional values', the affirmation of a heteronormative family model, discriminatory practices against minority groups, and a notable emphasis on public morality ([Riccardi-Swartz 2021](#)).

According to Putin, the defence of marriage and family forms an intrinsic element of Russia's civilisational distinctiveness, as evidenced by [Mal'chenkov \(2022\)](#). This dis-

tinctiveness was first articulated by Putin in 2007 and gained greater prominence during his 2013 speech at the Valdai Club meeting. During this address, Putin starkly contrasted Russian values with those of the West, accusing the latter of relinquishing core moral principles, including those concerning family life and marriage. These principles, Putin asserted, are crucial to Russia's identity. Interestingly, in Russian political discourse post-2014, Ukraine has been portrayed as succumbing to Western influences by undermining traditional concepts of marriage and family and promoting non-heteronormative lifestyles (Soroka 2021, p. 14).

At a declarative level, efforts are underway to cast Russia as a state prioritising marriage and family. Symbolic gestures, such as the establishment of a 'Day of Family, Love, and Fidelity' in 2008, in collaboration with the ROC (Patriarchia.ru 2008), and its subsequent declaration as a state holiday in 2022 (Kremlin.ru 2022), serve this objective. Similarly, the 'Parental Glory' order, initiated by President Dmitriy Medvedev in 2009, is bestowed upon parents of large families 'for their significant contributions to child-rearing and the reinforcement of family traditions' (Patriarchia.ru 2009).

The sanctity of the family is further enshrined in the revised version of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, initiated by Putin and adopted in 2020. The Constitution's new drafting articulates the state's obligation 'to defend the family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood; to defend the institution of marriage as a union between a man and a woman; to create conditions for the dignified upbringing of children in the family and for full-grown children to fulfil their duty of care for their parents' (Article 72 zh1). Moreover, it prescribes the government's role in 'strengthening and defending the family' and 'preserving traditional family values' (Article 114 v).

The construct of 'traditional values,' encompassing familial values, is also a central tenet within the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation. The 2021 Strategy document recurrently emphasises the necessity for the state to defend traditional Russian spiritual and moral values (Strategiya 2021, sec. 11, 22, 25.7, 26.8) from various forms of erosion, including the destabilisation of marital and family values, and the overemphasis on individual liberties and the promotion of immoral behaviour (Strategiya 2021, sec. 85). Notably, the United States and its allies are explicitly delineated as the primary threats to these traditional Russian values (Strategiya 2021, sec. 87). Among the values the Strategy specifically enumerates are 'a strong family' and 'high moral ideals' (Strategiya 2021, sec. 91). A cornerstone of the state's strategy for ensuring national security is the provision of support to the family, largely predicated upon incentives designed to stimulate an increase in birth rates and promote larger families (Strategiya 2021, sec. 30, 33.3).

It merits observation that, within official state discourse, the promotion of marital and familial institutions is almost exclusively couched in terms of encouraging demographic growth to meet state exigencies. Furthermore, this state-centric approach to population policy conspicuously lacks critical reflection on domestic factors that may be undermining familial sustainability within Russia, instead concentrating predominantly on external threats of a cultural and ideological nature.

3.2. Discriminatory Measures

While professing an imperative to safeguard Russian families, state authorities—exploiting their near-total monopoly over media—have, post-2012, co-opted confrontational stances that were once the preserve of conservative and Orthodox circles within Russia. These stances encompass, among other things, a resistance to the redefinition of marriage and an intent to curtail abortion rights with the aim of ameliorating the nation's demographic landscape (Chebankova 2013, pp. 11–12). In the Russian context, initiatives designed to bolster familial structures and enhance birth rates are inextricably linked to institutionalised discrimination against minority groups, as well as to a discriminatory discourse perpetuated by state-controlled media (Scheller-Boltz 2017, pp. 13–14).

The primary target of media and propaganda campaigns, ostensibly justified by concerns for familial integrity, are non-heterosexual individuals. The struggle against non-

heteronormative life patterns, ideologically substantiated, is hardly a novel phenomenon in Putin's Russia. After an initial period of sexual freedom in the early years of Bolshevik Russia (Healey 2008), from Stalin onwards, throughout the Soviet era, homosexuality was ideologised as symptomatic of Western bourgeois decay (Bozhkov and Protasenko 2019, pp. 193–94). Analogously, contemporary state propaganda depicts the visibility of non-heterosexual individuals within Western public spheres and cultures as emblematic of societal decadence (Scheller-Boltz 2017, p. 16). In both popular and scholarly Russian discourse, demographic challenges afflicting Western nations are attributed to the acceptance of non-traditional familial paradigms (D'yachenko and Pozdnyakova 2013). Notably absent from these discussions are Russia's own demographic tribulations, which Putin has failed to fully redress even during periods of relative political and economic stability.

Subsequent to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, legislative provisions criminalising homosexual conduct were expunged from the Russian penal code. Though homophobia persisted within Russian popular culture (Borenstein 2019, p. 135), discrimination against non-heterosexual individuals during the 1990s and the initial decade of Putin's governance was not tethered to state policies intended to fortify marital and familial institutions. This paradigm shifted markedly in 2013, with the enactment of legislation prohibiting the dissemination of content related to 'non-traditional sexual relations' to minors. This state-endorsed homophobic crusade was part of a broader movement to promulgate 'traditional values', championed by an alliance comprising nationalists, communists, President Putin, the United Russia party, and the ROC. Legislative amendments prohibiting the adoption of Russian orphans by the inhabitants of the countries where same-sex marriage is legal (Barabanov 2014), as well as by individuals in same-sex relationships, were further discriminatory undertakings, rationalised as necessary for ensuring children's wholesome upbringing and shielding them from pernicious non-traditional sexual norms (Interfax.ru 2013). In 2022, legislative constraints were tightened further, extending the prohibition on the dissemination of content concerning 'non-traditional sexual relations' and 'gender reassignment' to adult audiences (Sokolov and Martynova 2022). In 2023, Putin signed into law a blanket ban on gender reassignment within Russia (Volkova 2023).

Legislative enactments of a discriminatory nature, buttressed by accompanying homophobic propaganda campaigns, are incessantly justified under the auspices of protecting children and adolescents from detrimental influences (Bozhkov and Protasenko 2019, pp. 202–3), as well as by the state's aspiration to rectify the nation's demographic imbalance (Scheller-Boltz 2017, p. 83). Thus, as Edenborg (2017, p. 77) observes, homophobia in Russia is transmuted into a political phenomenon, deployed as a strategic tool by the state in its quest for socio-political control and hegemony.

3.3. ROC as an Essential Element of Ideologised Public Discourse

According to the provisions of the Constitution, the Russian Federation is a secular state preserving the principle of separation of state and church (Konstitutsiya 2020, Article 14). Despite constitutional amendments in 2020 initiated by President Putin—which introduced a reference to God (Article 67.1) among other ideological tenets—the Russian Federation remains theoretically secular. Herein, freedom of conscience and religious expression constitute fundamental pillars of the constitutional edifice (Bimbinov and Voronin 2017, pp. 112–13). Nevertheless, akin to issues concerning marriage, family, and a plethora of other social and cultural matters, religious life under Putin's aegis has undergone pronounced securitisation. Consequently, limitations have been imposed upon non-state-controlled religious organisations, notwithstanding constitutional assurances to the contrary (Admiraal 2009, p. 205). Simultaneously, the ROC, as the predominant religious institution, has emerged as a pivotal collaborator with state authorities in executing domestic policies, especially those of ideological import. As Engström (2014, p. 366) observes, within the context of Russia's nascent conservatism, Orthodoxy functions principally as a political religion, legitimising, among other things, conflict or warfare with the West.

In Western perceptions—particularly post-2007 and subsequent to the 2008 Russian-Georgian war—Putin has endeavoured to portray himself as a stalwart defender of Christian values. He also referred to Christianity when justifying the occupation and illicit annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol in 2014 (Engström 2014, pp. 373–74). Actions of a political and legal nature aimed at fortifying the ROC underscore its role as a quintessential ally in moulding social dispositions favourable to state authorities. Hence, a discernible trajectory has emerged since 2012, accentuated by legislative amendments, towards augmenting the ROC's societal influence. The 2012 protest by the Pussy Riot group at Moscow's Cathedral of Christ the Saviour epitomises a turning point. Although intrinsically political rather than anti-religious, the protest assailed the symbiotic relationship between the ROC and state authorities, including their joint stance on sexual minorities and women's rights (Bernstein 2013, pp. 220–21; Uzlaner 2014). This event catalysed legislative changes in 2013, instituting criminal penalties for actions deemed to offend the religious sensibilities of believers (Novikov 2015, pp. 194–95; Shilin 2016). The biased nature of this legislative enactment is apparent in its failure to extend similar protections to non-religious individuals (Skladanowski 2022).

Concomitantly, under Putin's governance, the ROC has conspicuously amplified its focus on identity politics. Following the disintegration of the USSR in the mid-1990s, Russia embarked upon a quest for a renewed national identity, wherein the ROC has assumed an increasingly prominent role. Legislative articulations, such as the 1997 federal law, further entrench this by drawing a distinction between 'traditional' religions and new religious movements, despite the formal preservation of religious freedom (Hämmerli 2017, p. 49). As posited by Semenova (2013), the ROC sacralises Russia, envisaging it as the 'Holy Rus,' a fulcrum of Eastern European Christian civilisation endowed with a profound spiritual legacy and rich cultural heritage. The ROC promulgates a slew of values—including patriotism, familial cohesion, the sanctity of labour, honesty, communal harmony, justice, forbearance, and historical reverence—aimed at consolidating societal unity and prioritising the community (state) over the individual (person).

In Putin's Russia, nationalism and Orthodoxy have become increasingly intertwined. This symbiosis extends even to groups that, whilst invoking Orthodox rhetoric, maintain tenuous affiliations with the ROC but exploit religious discourse to advance xenophobic, Islamophobic, or homophobic agendas (Mitrofanova 2016, p. 126). This intricate relationship has not escaped the attention of state authorities, particularly in the wake of the so-called 'conservative turn'. By affording preferential treatment to the ROC in the public sphere, the government envisages its active participation in implementing social and demographic policies, particularly those pertaining to familial and marital matters (Patriarchia.ru 2015).

4. Concern for Marriage and Family According to Patriarch Kirill and Other ROC Representatives

According to The Bases of the Social Concept of the ROC, the Church is duty-bound to collaborate with governmental bodies and relevant societal groups to foster an understanding of national health care that enables each individual to exercise their right to spiritual, physical, and mental well-being, alongside maximum life expectancy (Osnovy sotsial'noy kontseptsii 2008, sec. XI.3). Within the same document, the ROC articulates its apprehensions concerning the extant demographic crisis affecting the communities it serves (Osnovy sotsial'noy kontseptsii 2008, sec. XI.4). Hence, the Church perceives itself as authorised to endorse protective measures aimed at motherhood and childhood and implores the state to enact corresponding policies.

Intriguingly, pressing questions arise regarding the congruence between the ROC's discourse and state policy priorities. Further enquiry is warranted into the extent to which the ideological tenets embedded in Putin's post-2007 pronouncements—particularly during periods of heightened geopolitical tensions with the West—find resonance within the ROC's public positions. To address these interrogatives, we will initially explore (1) key areas of pastoral interest and concern of the ROC and (2) the responsibilities undertaken by the ROC

in buttressing families, before identifying (3) principal threats to the stability of marriage and family as articulated by the Church. Subsequently, an evaluation will be undertaken to (4) ascertain the extent to which the ROC's stances are politically inflected and correlate with the prevailing state ideology of Putin's Russia.

4.1. Key Areas of Pastoral Interest and Concern

Central to the ROC's social teaching are the concepts of marriage and the 'traditional family', largely attributable to the Church's inherently conservative ethos. This stance is further contextualised by the demographic and societal transformations that have occurred in post-Soviet Russia. The election of Kirill Gundyayev as the Patriarch of Moscow marked an intensified period of pro-family activism within the ROC. From the outset, Kirill underscored the imperative for the ROC's augmented social engagement, with particular emphasis on fortifying the institution of marriage and the family unit (Kirill 2009b). Kirill places significant weight on ensuring that the trajectory of Russian societal development is predicated upon genuine spiritual and moral precepts, as opposed to merely the economic imperatives set forth by the state (Kirill 2010). It merits noting that Kirill, along with other ROC hierarchs, views marriage through an uncompromising lens as a covenant exclusively between a man and a woman. Attempts to recalibrate the definition of marriage are perceived by Kirill as an abomination antithetical to divine principles, rooted in the moral degeneracy of Western civilisation (Kirill 2015).

In order to bolster the initiatives of the ROC aimed at safeguarding familial institutions, a series of organisational shifts were initiated. The Patriarchal Council for the Family and the Protection of Motherhood was founded in 2011 (Patriarchia.ru 2011a). Subsequently, it underwent transformations, becoming the Patriarchal Commission for the Family and the Protection of Motherhood in 2012 and evolving further in 2013 to the Patriarchal Commission for the Family and the Protection of Motherhood and Children. By decision of the Holy Synod, Protopriest Dmitriy Smirnov assumed the chairmanship of the Commission, a role he maintained until 25 August 2020, when he was succeeded by Fedor Luk'yanov.

The Commission's seminal objective centred on countering the familial crisis while promulgating family values, endorsing large families, combating abortion, and assisting single mothers and orphans. During its inaugural meeting on 6 April 2012, the Commission adopted a resolution highlighting that Russia's prevailing social malaise is fundamentally attributable to the crisis engulfing the family unit. As underscored within the resolution, without overcoming this crisis, any kind of social stability is impossible: 'It is affecting all aspects of modern life: people do not want to get married, preferring the so-called "free life", the number of children killed as a result of abortion is approaching the number of newborns, almost half of young families are breaking up, and horrific examples of domestic violence, cases of children being murdered by their parents, are becoming more frequent. People do not know how to bring up their children, they do not know how to show them love properly. Children grow up in loneliness, because of which they suffer severely, despise their parents and do not find moral guidance in life' (Patriarchia.ru 2012). As emphasised, most of today's social problems such as drug addiction, alcoholism, social alienation and domestic violence are linked to the 'catastrophic situation of the family'. Consequently, it posits that support for families should ascend to the forefront of public priorities and governmental policy. Special attention, it contends, ought to be accorded to large families, elevating them to the status of a 'national asset'. Economic incentives, such as housing credit schemes, maternity grants, and employment programmes tailored for parents from large families, are deemed indispensable. There is an urgent requirement to shield families, particularly those expecting a new child, from the perils of indigence. Calls were made for the promotion of family values through public media, the institution of a network of family support centres, and the reform of extant state organisations focused on family welfare. Importantly, the ROC does not approach the subject of family merely through the prism of state welfare. Instead, it envisions the family as the epitome of the Gospel's ideals of mutual love and service, labelling family life a 'spiritual endeavour' (*podvig*) (Patriarchia.ru 2012).

In the ensuing years, the Commission's activities remained aligned with the critical issues outlined in its 2012 resolution. By 2015, these efforts culminated in the publication of a *Collection of Materials for the Protection of the Family, Motherhood, and Children*, encompassing key documents drafted by both the ROC and the Commission, as well as an assortment of pertinent public discourses on correlated topics ([Patriarshaya Komissiya 2015](#)).

4.2. Tasks of the Church and Cooperation with the State

In 2011, the ROC Council of Bishops adopted a document entitled *On the Principles of the Organisation of Social Work in the ROC*, which articulated the Church's dedication to offering both spiritual and material support to families ([O printsipakh 2011](#)). Under the aegis of Patriarch Kirill, various family support initiatives have been instigated, both at the national stratum and within individual eparchies (dioceses). These initiatives encompass the establishment of temporary shelters for expectant mothers and women with children, the operation of helplines and pre-abortion counselling services, as well as the provision of material, psychological, and legal support to pregnant women ([Patriarchia.ru 2011c](#)). Predominantly, however, the ROC's discourse concerning marital and familial support underscores the necessity of collaboration with state institutions, particularly those vested with the responsibility for the upbringing of children and adolescents. Patriarch Kirill advocates a fortified alliance between the Church and educational establishments, with the objective of inculcating moral principles into the education of younger generations, encompassing a traditionalist image of family life ([Kirill 2009a](#)). Moreover, the Moscow Patriarchate enjoins the Church to collaborate with healthcare providers, social welfare services, and civic organisations committed to family advocacy. Defined aims for this collaborative effort include the prevention of abortions and the provision of assistance to large families and those in precarious circumstances. It is further posited that family support centres be established within eparchies, providing a holistic suite of spiritual, legal, educational, material, and psychological support services. Eparchies are also urged to organise holiday camps and aid initiatives for orphaned children ([Patriarchia.ru 2013b](#)).

A salient concern perpetually manifested in the ROC's discourse is the mitigation of Russia's demographic crisis through the augmentation of birth rates. This sentiment has been echoed by ecclesiastical figures such as Patriarch Kirill (2020), Metropolitan Ilarion Alfeyev (2011), the former Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate's Department for External Church Relations, and other high-ranking clergy ([Shatov 2013](#)). In numerous statements, representatives of the ROC employ a largely uniform line of argumentation, envisioning the Church as a bulwark that propagates a favourable perception of marriage and family life within societal discourse. This includes the promotion of Christian familial values, with a particular emphasis placed upon the concept of motherhood. The underlying ethos here is an encouragement for families to procreate expansively, contravening cultural norms that militate against larger family units. In this vein, the Church bears the responsibility of amplifying the social stature of large families and illuminating the intrinsic value of human life as a strategy for reducing abortion rates. In its endeavour to preserve the family structure, the ROC identifies this as indispensable for safeguarding the future of the Russian populace.

4.3. Church-Identified Threats to Marriage and Family in Russia

The ROC's articulation on the safeguarding of marriage and familial institutions is framed principally within a contextual backdrop of existential threats. The disintegration of traditional family structures in Russia is ascribed to a confluence of adverse social changes, encompassing a predilection for smaller family units, a diminished inclination to formalise relationships, and an emergent crisis of Christian values within the societal fabric ([Patriarchia.ru 2011d](#)). According to representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate, the erosion of the family institution, in its traditional sense, is the cause of contemporary societal maladies ([Shatov 2013](#)). In addition to the aforementioned demographic crisis that delineates post-Soviet Russia, the threats are predominantly external, often attributed

to the acculturation of foreign—primarily Western—values, lifestyles and, ostensibly, a de-Christianised cultural milieu.

4.3.1. Western Liberal Culture

Firstly, the jeopardy to the integrity and sustainability of the family is ostensibly rooted in secularisation, which is perceived to undermine traditional values and obfuscate the ontological understanding of human existence (Alfeyev 2009). The incorporation of alien cultural paradigms is purported to catalyse scepticism regarding traditional family constructs and propagate the ascendance of non-committal relationships. This trend manifests in the depreciation of erstwhile values such as fidelity, mutual respect, and responsibility, whilst simultaneously amplifying the salience of hedonism and egoism within individual lived experiences (Alfeyev 2014). This trajectory, in turn, culminates in the diminution of the spiritual sanctity of marriage, a decline which is also ostensibly anchored in secularisation currents infiltrating Russia from abroad (Kirill 2015).

A parallel critique of what is perceived as the moral deterioration of Western societies can be discerned in the pronouncements of Patriarch Kirill during international engagements. On 12 February 2016, a joint declaration was signed by Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, wherein the subject of family and its requisite protection commanded substantial attention. Specifically, both ecclesiastical leaders articulated a shared apprehension concerning the crisis engulfing family structures across numerous nations (Patriarchia.ru 2016b). For Patriarch Kirill, the source of spiritual decline in the West, as well as the concomitant threat it poses to Russian society, can be directly traced to secularisation, a phenomenon he interprets in unequivocally negative terms (Patriarchia.ru 2016a). As Monge (2017) observes, according to Alfeyev, ‘(s)ecularisation is... the liberation of the modern liberal democratic state from the checks to its power that Christianity has to offer’. Secularisation thus implies an inevitable moral decline of a nation.

According to Kirill (2020), Russian society is experiencing ‘increasing pressure on the traditional institution of the family in Russia. The very idea of family life is often discredited in the public space, in the pages of colourful publications, and in social networks that focus on the fact that family life allegedly reduces the level of comfort and consumption. It is proposed to replace the family as the cradle of life with new reproductive technologies’.

Subsequent to the onset of Russia’s full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, Kirill asserted that Russia was engaged in a struggle against externally imposed visions of a global order that contravene its core religious convictions. Western socio-cultural shifts—including the advancement of social equality for non-heterosexual individuals and evolving definitions of marriage and family—are perceived as manifestations of this antithetical order, which Russia is obliged to resist (Kirill 2022a). Kirill posits that Russia must endure as a fortress of traditional Christian values, repudiating external ideologies incongruent with the Orthodox understanding of family life. In this vein, the Patriarch advocates for the state’s cooperation, in particular by introducing legislation that would restrict patterns of marriage and family life other than those recognised as ‘traditional’ by the ROC (Kirill 2022c).

4.3.2. Non-Heterosexual Equality

Secondly, the Moscow Patriarchate identifies an erosion of traditional matrimonial frameworks emanating from what it perceives as the identity-debilitating redefinitions of marriage within liberal Western societies. Such redefinitions are construed as potentially deleterious to the established conservative conceptualisation of marriage in Russia. An examination of discourses emanating from the ROC hierarchy on matrimonial and familial constructs—especially in the context of the escalation of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict from 2014 onward—reveals an augmenting emphasis on critiques of non-heterosexual individuals. These critiques are concomitant with the formulation of a narrative depicting Western society as inherently flawed and unsustainable. Legislation recognising the marital rights of non-heterosexual individuals in various countries has elicited pronounced censure

from the Russian ecclesiastical establishment (Kirill 2015). Furthermore, legislative shifts towards equality in foreign jurisdictions serve as an impetus for the ROC to vociferously oppose any manifestation of non-heterosexual equality or visibility within Russian societal confines, predicated ostensibly on concerns for the continuity and integrity of traditional familial structures in Russia.

Thus, ROC hierarchs extend beyond merely endorsing the traditional doctrine stipulating that marriage constitutes a union between a man and a woman, endowed within ecclesiastical contexts with spiritual, or sacramental, significance. Against this backdrop, the ROC categorically repudiates legislative amendments facilitating marriage and child adoption for non-heterosexual couples as symptomatic of a profound familial crisis, objectification of children, and an abrogation of their rights to mature within a conventionally configured familial environment (Alfeyev 2013; Patriarchia.ru 2013a). Metropolitan Ilarion discerns an existential crisis of the West, evidenced by educational curricula in numerous liberal democratic nations incorporating content respecting sexual minorities and endorsing their societal equality. Such content is characterised by Ilarion as ‘propaganda of an unnatural lifestyle’ that undermines familial structures (Alfeyev 2022).

The ROC exhibited unequivocal endorsement for the 2022 intensification of the 2013 law proscribing ‘LGBT propaganda’. In justification of this legislative retrenchment, Patriarch Kirill analogised initiatives advocating sexual identity self-determination and expression to an ‘ideology of dehumanisation,’ entailing a detachment from an ontological understanding of human sexuality. According to Kirill, the amplification of discriminatory statutes signifies a confrontation with a ‘civilisation of death’, embodies an ‘ideological struggle’, and manifests concern for the ‘spiritual and corporeal well-being of the nation’ (Kirill 2022d). He posits that this legislative manoeuvre serves to buttress conventional familial values within Russia and, by extension, fortify the national ethos. Furthermore, he believes that the new legislation makes Russia ‘more and more an island of freedom, because we are defending the values that ensure true freedom. (...) It is important to emphasise the value of family relations, the value of the traditional family, to talk about the traditional family so that young people see its true beauty, the joys that loyalty gives, the service of the family and children’ (Kirill 2023).

4.3.3. Availability of Abortion

As a third existential menace to the Russian familial structure, the ROC identifies the prevalence of abortion utilised as a contraceptive measure. Remarkably, the ecclesiastical discourse abstains from engaging the subject in the broader contexts of women’s rights or the social and economic underpinnings that precipitate abortion. The focus predominantly remains on demographic implications—namely, the exacerbation of an already declining population within the Russian Federation. While Patriarch Kirill has alluded to the potential establishment of robust social support mechanisms for larger families (Kirill 2011), ecclesiastical communiqués more frequently espouse the need for societal endorsement of large familial units, rather than a nuanced exploration of the causative factors contributing to the high incidence of abortions in Russia.

The ROC presents itself as a proponent of the social value and respectability of women’s roles as wives and mothers (Kirill 2009c), while simultaneously advocating for curtailment of abortion access as the primary strategy for demographic augmentation. Acknowledging the unparalleled magnitude of abortion incidence in Russia and other post-Soviet states, the ROC doctrinally condemns abortion as an anathema to the sanctity of life, corrosive to familial integrity, and an existential peril to both national and state futures (Chaplin 2010). Although the Moscow Patriarchate has inaugurated social initiatives designed to furnish psychological and social support for expectant mothers as a deterrence against abortion (Patriarchia.ru 2010), the ecclesiastical institutions have more vigorously lobbied state authorities for the implementation of legislative measures circumscribing access to abortion. This legislative activism has found expression in proposals and advocacies

([Patriarchia.ru 2011b](#)), and has been crystallised in Patriarch Kirill's call for the cessation of state funding allocated for abortion procedures ([Kirill 2022e](#)).

Further legislative propositions aimed at restricting access to abortion were advanced by the ROC in 2023. In January, Fedor Luk'yanov, the Chairman of the Patriarchal Commission for the Family and the Protection of Motherhood and Children, recommended the incorporation of a legal framework mandating the consent of the child's father as well as obligatory psychological consultation as prerequisites for an abortion procedure ([Voroshilov 2023](#)). Subsequently, in September, the same Commission advocated for the reduction of the permissible gestational age for abortion from twelve to eight weeks ([TASS 2023](#)). Although the Ministry of Health expressed its concurrence in July 2023 with proposals by representatives of United Russia in the State Duma to limit the availability of early abortifacients ([Interfax.ru 2023](#)), this development should not be conflated with a comprehensive legislative effort aimed at curtailing abortion. Indeed, as observed by [Kolstø \(2023, p. 164\)](#), the majority of initiatives championed by the ROC with the intention of limiting abortion have encountered failure in the State Duma. This phenomenon underscores the pre-eminence of political calculus in the authorities' ideological policymaking over the comparatively limited influence wielded by the ROC, particularly on issues of social sensitivity such as abortion.

4.4. Ideological and Political Aspects of the ROC Position

In summary, the delineation of threats to matrimonial and familial integrity within the Russian context, as articulated by Patriarch Kirill and other representatives of the ROC, evinces a discourse that, while preserving the fundamental tenets of traditional Christian teaching on marriage and its concomitant moral imperatives, is inexorably shaped by political and ideological considerations. Several manifestations of this politicisation and concomitant alignment with state policy merit attention.

Firstly, there is an unmistakable accentuation on extrinsic threats to the Russian family, principally emanating from Western liberal culture. The ROC's critique of the West intensifies commensurately with the escalation of state-sanctioned anti-Western rhetoric ([Curanović 2019](#), pp. 67–69). Significantly absent from the ecclesiastical analysis are reflections on Russia's internal socio-political conditions—most notably, the structural inadequacies and social pathologies—that adversely affect the viability of marriages and the quality of familial life.

Secondly, the framing of marital and familial issues predominantly within the schema of Russian–Western confrontation foregrounds axiological considerations, thereby relegating these issues to a battle of values. The ROC imputes to the West the degradation of the family institution by espousing values and lifestyles antithetical to what is traditionally upheld in Russia ([Morozov 2017](#)).

Thirdly, the ROC discourse relating to marriage and family focuses—in line with the rhetoric of state authorities—on their importance for the state and society. This is due to the appreciation of community and state inherent in Orthodox anthropology, which also leads to the marginalisation of issues of individual human rights and the importance of personal life choices. The weakening of the traditional family is, therefore, to be associated with the weakening of the state. The problem of human rights and the adoption of a Western understanding of them in post-Soviet Russia, including their inclusion in Russian legislation, was of concern to the ROC. In particular, it was difficult to link human rights with so-called liberal values, placing the individual above the community and recognising the subservient role of the community (state, society, Church) to the individual.

Thirdly, the ROC's discourse conspicuously echoes the state's rhetoric in emphasising the instrumental value of marriage and family for societal and state coherence. This perspective aligns with the communitarian ethos embedded in Orthodox anthropology, resulting in the marginalisation of individual human rights and personal autonomy. The erosion of traditional familial structures is consequently framed as synonymous with the weakening of the state apparatus ([Morozov 2017, p. 144](#)). The ROC has expressed

trepidation over the infiltration of Western conceptualisations of human rights into Russian jurisprudence, perceiving it as a disruptive force that elevates individual autonomy over communal obligations and subverts traditional hierarchies (Deklaratsiya 2006). The ROC expressed opposition to the Western concept of human rights, seeing it as a manifestation of Western secularism and anthropocentrism (Osnovy sotsial'noy kontseptsii 2008, sec. IV.7; Osnovy ucheniya 2008, sec. III.2). As noted by Stoeckl (2017, p. 18), 'Social Concept presented human rights as the product of a Western secular legal positivism, which started to influence the Russian legal space after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, but was essentially alien to the national legal culture'.

5. Conclusions

An examination of statements by Patriarch Kirill and other figures within the ROC, particularly when juxtaposed with pronouncements by President Putin and actions of the Russian state, allows for several salient observations.

(1) The ROC's discourse on marriage and family unambiguously mirrors the key themes prevalent in the state-controlled political narrative. This correspondence is partly attributable to a shared recognition, between state authorities and the Moscow Patriarchate, of the acute societal challenges besetting contemporary Russia—chief among which is a demographically precarious situation portending population decline (Lisitsyna 2021; Plamenev 2023). In a multi-ethnic and multi-faith country such as the Russian Federation, these demographic issues disproportionately impact the Slavic Orthodox populace, thereby compounding the ROC's anxieties. The escalation of these demographic challenges in the aftermath of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has been palpable, exacerbated by elevated casualty rates among Russian military personnel and migration propelled by conscription fears. Notably, the repercussions of the war on Russian families are conspicuously absent in ecclesiastical discourse, mirroring their marginalisation in official state propaganda.

(2) The ROC adopts a conservative doctrinal stance in its conceptualisation of marriage and its advocacy for the family institution. It eschews any redefinition of marriage or the legitimisation of non-traditional family structures. Consequently, the ROC consistently rebuffs legislative or social shifts in other countries that redefine the foundational constructs of marriage and family.

(3) Although the ROC largely adheres to traditional Christian tenets concerning matrimony, it is evident that demographic concerns in Russia are both heavily ideologised and securitised in ecclesiastical discourse. This is most discernible in the precedence accorded to pro-natalist policies. While low birth rates constitute merely one facet of Russia's multi-faceted social conundrum, they attain a disproportionate emphasis both in state actions and in church rhetoric. This aspect of the ROC's discourse is most strikingly aligned with Putin's policy objectives, particularly in framing Western culture and democratic values as existential threats to Russian matrimonial and familial integrity. Such stances also extend to unambiguous endorsements of state-sanctioned discrimination against non-heterosexual individuals, rationalised as a defence of the traditional family.

In this way, the ROC's commitment to safeguarding marriage and family serves to fortify the state's portrayal of contemporary Russia as a bulwark of conservative values and traditional familial paradigms. This, in turn, enables the denigration of the West in the ongoing geopolitical and ideological confrontations as morally insolvent and destined for inexorable decline.

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