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Photo Essay: The Dangers of Being Gay in Russia

10. February 2014 · [Write a comment](#) · Categories: [Uncategorized](#) · Tags: [bisexual](#), [gay](#), [GLBT](#), [lesbian](#), [transgender](#)

Life for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Russia has just gotten worse, following a new law the State Duma banning “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations” among minors. The law states that “it is essential to put in place measures which provide for the intellectual, moral and mental well-being of children, including a ban on any activities aimed at popularizing homosexuality ... including instilling distorted ideas that society places an equal value on traditional and nontraditional sexual relations.” While “it would not be an offence to be a person of homosexual orientation,” activists worry the wording of the law is vague enough to leave officials across Russia the freedom to harass, intimidate and ultimately prosecute LGBT people on flimsy grounds.

The law, which follows years of creeping anti-homosexual legislation in a number of Russia’s regions, has been widely condemned by foreign governments, especially leading up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. Most recently, [the Associated Press reports](#), on the opening day of the games, Feb. 7, 2014, Russian police arrested at least four gay rights activists in St. Petersburg with a banner reading, “discrimination is incompatible with the Olympic Movement. Principle 6. Olympic Charter.”



Yana Petrova, left, embraces her girlfriend Elena Davydova.

Mads Nissen/Panos



Police arrest a man during a gay pride rally, June 29, 2013. The rally was opposed by about 250 anti-gay protesters some of whom violently assaulted the demonstrators.

Mads Nissen/Panos



Ultra-nationalists, wearing cossack style hats and holding whips, shout abuse at participants taking part in a gay pride rally, June 29, 2013. The protest late turned violent.

Mads Nissen/Panos



Dmitry Chizhevskiy, 27, had his left eye destroyed by in a homophobic attack on Nov. 3, 2013, when three armed men entered a private meeting for homosexuals in St. Petersburg. The attackers hit people with baseball bats, and Dmitry was shot in his left eye with an air gun. The perpetrators have not been found.

Mads Nissen/Panos



From left, Artyom Buriy, 24, Filipp Razinskiy, 16 and Vitaliy Tsimodanov, 20, all members of “Occupy Pedophilia,” a militantly homophobic group that specializes in hunting and filming violent attacks on suspected gays and pedophiles. The group believes that gays and pedophiles are almost equally immoral and that most gays are pedophiles.

Mads Nissen/Panos



In a still from a video made by members of “Occupy Pedophilia.” On a popular online TV-show, victims are tricked into false dates, where a band of armed ultra-nationalists are lying in wait. The victim is sexually humiliated and tortured, while everything is filmed, posted publicly, and shared online. According to the group more than 70 videos have been made so far.

Mads Nissen/Panos



A priest from the Russian Orthodox Church smiles with his wife, left, as one of the gay-activists was hit by an egg at a rally in St. Petersburg.

Mads Nissen/Panos



LGBT activists at a gay-pride rally in central St. Petersburg. The rally was attacked by anti-gay ultra-nationalists and the activist were arrested by the police.

Mads Nissen/Panos



Sergei Starov, 22, is a masters student at the Law School in St. Petersburg. One of his professors left homophobic comments on social media directed at Sergei. Like many other students who are LGBT, Sergei Starov fears that his sexual orientation might have negative consequences on his exams, student life and later on his job prospects.

Mads Nissen/Panos



A group of gay and lesbian friends and partners, all LGBT activists, relax together. From left, Yana Petrova, Pavel Lebedev, Elena Davydova, Elena Yakovleva, Ilmira Shayhraznova, and Kirill Kalugin.
Mads Nissen/Panos



Three friends in St. Petersburg.
Mads Nissen/Panos



Ekaterina Alekseeva, 21, appears in court after being arrested at a gay pride rally, June 29, 2013. The rally was declared illegal under the law banning “propaganda for non-traditional sexual relations.” The so called “anti-gay” law was introduced locally in St. Petersburg in 2012, but the day before this picture was taken President Putin added his signature to put the the law in effect nationwide.

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Pavel Lebedev, 23, left, walks hand-in-hand with his boyfriend, Kirill Kalugin, through the streets of St. Petersburg. Pavel says that he has been violently attacked six times in the last year. In spite of the danger, he insists he has the right to be open about his sexuality, and to choose who he loves.

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Yaroslav Yevtushenko, left, embraces his boyfriend, Dmitry Chunosov, at St. Petersburg's registry office where the couple, as an act of protest, attempts to officially register their marriage. As gay marriage is not acknowledged in Russia their submission was promptly rejected by the authorities.

Mads Nissen/Panos



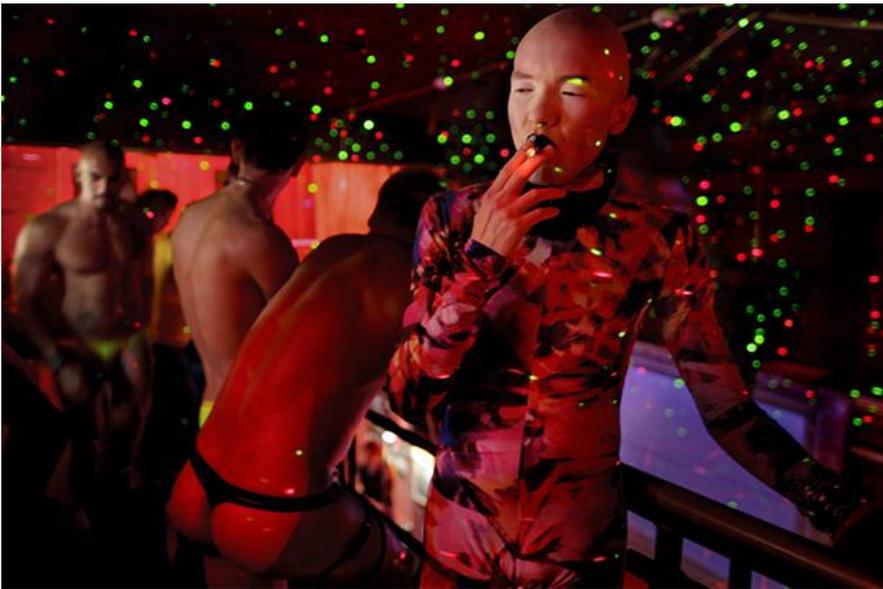
Lesbian couple Lada, 33, right, and Irina, 31, play with balloons at home with their three children. Some religious and conservative groups within Russia advocate the forced removal of children from all LGBT families. With increasing violent, verbal and legal attacks on LGBT-rights the lesbian couple says they don't feel safe, and they have considered leaving the country.

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Polina Popova, 25, with her pregnant girlfriend Irina Zinovieva, 37, who is 8 months pregnant. The lesbian couple, who both work in team building, have been together for 4 years and are expecting a baby. The donor is a gay friend.

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27-year-old Ruslan, a ballet dancer at The Academy of Russian Ballet, smokes a cigarette at the Central Station, an LGBT nightclub in central St. Petersburg. He was married to a woman for five years but came out after he was divorced.

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Yana Petrova, right, embraces her girlfriend Elena Davydova.
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Pavel Lebedev, 23, right, with his boyfriend, Kirill Kalugin. Pavel hold his boyfriend's hand in public – something most Russian LGBT's don't dare.
Mads Nissen/Panos

The penalties for transgressing this law are harsh. For Russians it could mean fines of up to \$150, for officials up to \$1,500 and for organizations engaging in “propaganda” of this sort could carry fines up to \$30,000. Engaging in these activities on the Internet, however loosely defined, carries significantly harsher fines. For foreigners the penalties are no less harsh, carrying a 15 day prison sentence and/or deportation from the country. What actually constitutes ‘propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations’ among minors, however, has left many in the dark.

View more work by Mads Nissen [here](#).

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