

Meilė Yra Visiems: The Evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania

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Baltic Pride started in 2010 with tremendous political and public opposition but is now a vibrant celebration and protest for the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania. This project explores the evolution of Baltic Pride, one of Lithuania's most important LGBTQ+ advocacy events, from 2010 to 2019. Scholars studying Pride in Eastern Europe find a variety of political and social factors—from European Union association to nationalism—affect Pride's successful dissemination of rights. This project adds to this body of work by examining these factors over nine years and four Baltic Pride events in Lithuania. Examination of the European International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association's (ILGA) annual review, images from each year of Baltic Pride in Lithuania, and local news articles covering the events provide data to illustrate Pride in the social and political context of Lithuania. This project uses content analysis and thematic coding of ILGA Europe's annual review, news articles, and images of each Baltic Pride to determine and then compare themes in each data source from 2010 to 2019. Exploration of Baltic Pride's evolution reveals legal rights and social tolerance did not grow in parallel to this flourishing LGBTQ+ advocacy event. While Pride became increasingly popular, LGBTQ+ rights stalled in Lithuania's legislature, and conservative factions continued widespread moral opposition of the Western LGBTQ+ rights framework. Overall, this research demonstrates the existence of a robust Pride event and LGBTQ+ advocacy movement did not indicate the overall LGBTQ+ rights situation in Lithuania.

Key Words: LGBTQ+ rights, Lithuania, Baltic Pride



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In 2010, as 800 police officers clashed with over 1,000 belligerent counter protesters, 350 individuals marched down isolated Upės Street in Vilnius for the first ever officially sanctioned Baltic Pride march in Lithuania. Lithuanians, diplomats, and NGO representatives marched for LGBTQ+ rights to the backdrop of tear gas clouds, galloping mounted units, and legions of riot police adorned with gas masks and shields. Only nine years later, 10,000 joyous figures marched through central Vilnius on Gediminas Avenue. Despite a few disgruntled onlookers, music blared, drag queens waved from the top of a party bus, and crowds of people reveled in the festivities. Police shed riot gear for their usual yellow vests, and the legions were replaced with the occasional police officer; one seen smiling while watching jovial marchers pass by. What happened to Baltic Pride in Lithuania from 2010 and 2019 and what this event meant for the country is at the heart of this project. Baltic Pride in Lithuania offers a case study to explore Eastern European LGBTQ+ rights advocacy in the shadow of Russia amid growing Western involvement.

While LGBTQ+ rights movements have become increasingly frequent in Eastern Europe, these movements experienced varied responses from host nations. Some Eastern European nations responded to flourishing LGBTQ+ rights movements with expanded legal protections. Other nations reacted to the calls of LGBTQ+ rights movements with anti-LGBTQ+ laws and claims these movements' goals were a threat to the moral fabric of traditional societies. In Poland, towns have lauded themselves as "LGBT-free zones" in rejection of growing LGBTQ+ acceptance in the country (Guy & Goilland-eau, 2020). Hungary's Prime minister, Viktor Orban, reacted negatively to growing rights movements by censoring LGBTQ+ content from children to push a dangerous narrative equating queer people to pedophiles (Kottasova, 2021). Adversely, in a first for a former socialist state, and despite the nation's socially conservative population, Slovenia recently legalized marriage and adoption for same-sex couples ("Slovenia: Slovenia introduces," 2022). The efforts of LGBTQ+ rights advocates are not certain to produce positive results given the varied reception in Eastern Europe. Therefore, this project's use of the Lithuania case seeks to reveal how the nation received LGBTQ+ rights advocacy compared to the rest of Eastern Europe.

A litmus test for determining baseline LGBTQ+ rights in these nations is European Union (EU) affiliation due to the institution's rights protection requirements. Although the EU does not hold unilateral authority to enforce these requirements, the institution expects a minimum adherence to some protections. The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights' Article 21 specifically prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or sex. Additionally, the EU protects LGBTQ+ people from discrimination in hiring, promotions, and the everyday workplace environment (European Commission, n.d.). However, some EU members, like Hungary, continue to push anti-LGBTQ+ legislation (Kottasova, 2021). These EU requirements are relevant to the Lithuanian case because the nation's membership status in the EU

establishes some accountability to LGBTQ+ rights. Therefore, because Lithuania does not exist in a vacuum, this project takes transnational institutions and foreign actors' involvement into consideration in exploration of Baltic Pride in Lithuania to get a full picture of the evolution of the event.

Despite these civil rights minimums imposed by the EU, the LGBTQ+ rights landscape of Lithuania is fraught with inequality. Lithuania denies LGBTQ+ people several rights the rest of the population enjoys. For example, while advocates continue to push for civil unions, the nation still denies same sex couples the right to legal marriage and adoption (Jačauskas, 2022). Additionally, Lithuania fails to protect people placed in compulsory military service against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (Kuktoraitė, 2017). Furthermore, Lithuania censors LGBTQ+ content in claims to protect children, and recently attempted to deny LGBTQ+ people's right to assembly in a failed bid to stop Kaunas Pride (Rainbow Europe, 2022). While an LGBTQ+ rights movement is growing in the region, the fight continues due to the persistence of oppressive structures in Lithuania. Exploration of Baltic Pride in Lithuania demonstrates how these events persist amid oppressive legal systems.

Baltic Pride rotates between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania each year, and the event functions to strengthen each nation's respective LGBTQ+ community through transnational solidarity. This event occurs in Vilnius, Lithuania, once every three years as the nation's largest LGBTQ+ advocacy event. The first Baltic Pride occurred in Riga, Latvia, in 2009 amid controversy and a failed attempt by the Riga City Council to stop the event (Kitto, 2015). The Lithuanian government in Vilnius made a similar attempt the next year, but despite three-fourths of the population opposing the event, the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania asserted the LGBTQ+ community's right to assembly (Amnesty International, 2010). More recently circumstances have changed, and in 2019, Baltic Pride attracted some 10,000 participants in Lithuania compared to the only 350 sanctioned by officials in the 2010 march (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019). Baltic Pride's rapid growth in Lithuania, despite obstacles and oppression, suggests the movement's strength. Therefore, Baltic Pride and the LGBTQ+ community's persistence in Lithuania reflects their rejection of the status quo and a hope to subvert systemic oppression.

This project explores the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania from 2010 to 2019. This exploration determines how laws around the event have evolved, the growth of the event, and tracks how public perception around the event changed. Images sourced from the organizers of Baltic Pride in Lithuania, the Lithuanian Gay League (LGL), and images from social media provide pictures to visually construct the event each year. To get an idea of public perception and political background of the event, this project relies on the annual review of the human rights situation of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA) of Europe. Baltic News Service articles for each year the event

took place in Lithuania corroborate the ILGA Europe annual review's established political background. Overall, exploration of the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania documents a subversive LGBTQ+ rights movement. Additionally, scholarship on international LGBTQ+ advocacy movements brings attention to the understudied efforts of LGBTQ+ advocates in Lithuania.

The data reveals that while Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ advocacy flourished in Lithuania between 2010 and 2019, legal rights for LGBTQ+ people largely stagnated in the country. Participation in Baltic Pride increased nearly 30-fold over a nine-year period and attracted support from international governments and corporations despite many politicians and much of the public's continued opposition to the event. In the literature review, this project overviews research on the East-West European divide on LGBTQ+ rights, what effects Pride has on Eastern European societies, and the qualitative methodology scholars used to investigate Pride in Eastern Europe. In the methods section, this project outlines collection of relevant Baltic News service articles, images, and NGO reports around Baltic Pride in Lithuania and how this project used thematic coding, content analysis, and semiotic analysis to determine Baltic Pride's evolution with social and political context. The analysis section interrogates images, news articles, and NGO report data around Baltic Pride to pinpoint significant changes in the event from 2010 to 2019. This paper concludes with a discussion of potential advocacy strategies for Baltic Pride organizers and the unclear future of LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nationalism and Rights Diffusion

Previous research explores the tension between the East-West European cultural divide and LGBTQ+ rights. Scholars asked how well LGBTQ+ rights integrate into Eastern European states' national images and what impact this integration has on these states' relationship with Western Europe. A case study explored this relationship by analyzing media and political coverage surrounding the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania, concluding the domestic Lithuanian response illustrated that Pride created growing support for LGBTQ+ integration into national norms and continuing opposition to pro-LGBTQ+ Western ideals seen as a threat to the traditional national image (Mažylis et al., 2014). Similar research on Lithuania's first Pride concluded Pride was "an opportunity to bolster the imaginary boundaries between the Lithuanian nation and its others" (Davydova, 2012, p. 34). Other research investigates cultural norms and East-West political tension in Europe by examining integration of LGBTQ+ rights in conservative post-Yugoslavian nations, once again asserting these societies equated Pride with Western culture, which sparked opposition to queer advocacy (Kahlina, 2015). This project compares

Pride events in Lithuania to the nation's political and social atmosphere to determine if this phenomenon continues today. Therefore, this project contributes to the literature by further exploring opposition of Western ideals' relationship with LGBTQ+ rights integration in Lithuania.

Research further traverses this tension between national identity, LGBTQ+ rights, and the East-West European divide in context of the European Union (EU). Scholars focus on the EU because despite cultural divides, the EU puts many Eastern and Western European nations under a transnational government. Ayoub (2015) explores how EU membership status, embedded transnational advocacy organizations, foreign social pressure, and domestic bottom-up advocacy primes governments to introduce LGBTQ+ legislation at different levels. Additionally, this research differentiated the effects of these factors between early EU members made up of mostly Western European states and later EU members made up of mostly of Eastern European states (Ayoub, 2015). Similar research studying LGBTQ+ recognition in Serbia and Croatia explored the EU as a norm diffuser noting how "strong identification with Europe accelerated LGBT recognition" in Croatia and "Serbia's relatively weaker identification with Europe slowed it down" (Vasilev, 2016, p. 748). Previous research's consideration of transnational actors and institutions in exploration of LGBTQ+ discourses is explicitly relevant the study of Baltic Pride in Lithuania because of the nation's membership in the EU. Therefore, I add to scholarship by studying Baltic Pride's evolution in context of EU influence on Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights discourses.

Other research narrows this focus on transnational LGBTQ+ rights discourses to exploration of these events' effects on ordinary citizens' perceptions of LGBTQ+ people.

Scholars have illustrated various negative and positive outcomes related to Pride's dissemination to specific Eastern European societies. Johnson (2012) questions how the cancellation of Serbia's 2009 Pride amid public threats to organizers and activists in a nationalist state contributed to the construction of LGBTQ+ marginalization, illustrating how the rise of Pride can embolden nationalist opposition of queer people. However, other case study research asserts Pride expands LGBTQ+ tolerance in conservative societies and legitimizes LGBTQ+ discourses even if these effects are spatially restricted (Ayoub et al., 2021; Gruszczynska, 2009). This project studies Pride's effects in Lithuania to continue discussion of this event's effects on public perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community. Investigation of Baltic Pride in Lithuania explores what aspects of advocacy and equality marches create widespread positive outcomes, and what aspects produce increased opposition to LGBTQ+ rights.

Given some Eastern European societies oppose LGBTQ+ rights and Western ideals, research questions the efficacy of advocacy events to expand queer peoples' rights. Specifically, previous research asks if Pride events can

liberate sexual minorities in nationalistic Eastern European countries. As Davydova (2012) argues:

It is clear that affiliation of LGBT activists with Europe is used by Eastern European nationalist movements in order to merge the anti-gay and anti-European rhetoric and to maintain the boundaries of national belonging. Keeping these similarities of how gay rights are opposed throughout Eastern Europe in mind, the question arises whether Eastern European gay Prides are effective enough to rid sexual minorities of the image and status of the nation's "Other." (p. 44)

This project studies Pride in Lithuania because research illustrates Eastern European nationalists believe Western nations push LGBTQ+ rights to degrade traditional national identities. Therefore, my project seeks to reveal the outcomes of Pride's evolution to illustrate how effective these events are at liberating LGBTQ+ people from otherness in Lithuania.

Methodology and Pride

Scholars often study single instances of Prides or LGBTQ+ advocacy events as subjects of interest in research. Although often contextualized, this in-depth investigation is temporally limited and does not explore how these events have changed over time. For example, research used the 2008 gay Pride in Budapest as a case study to illustrate the mainstream media's construction of LGBTQ+ identities in context of heteronormative assumptions (Rédai, 2012). Focus on single events is repeated by many other scholars studying LGBTQ+ advocacy in Lithuania, Poland, and other Eastern Europe states (Ayoub et al., 2021; Davydova, 2012; Gruszczynska, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Mažylis et al, 2014; Rédai, 2012) Swimelar's (2020) study stands out as an example seeking to indicate change over time by comparing the 2008 Queer Sarajevo festival to the 2019 Bosnian Pride parade while illustrating the effect of expanding LGBTQ+ normalization on ethno-nationalist opposition. Therefore, this project seeks to study a series of Pride events over time to expand upon previous studies' temporal limitations. Specifically, this project seeks to add to scholarship on single Baltic Pride events through exploration of multiple years Baltic Pride took place in Lithuania to reflect previous comparative work.

Scholarship on Pride events in Eastern Europe primary utilize qualitative methods in analyzing these events' implications. Scholarship tends to use analysis of narratives, interviews, images, and media surrounding the event to answer research questions. One study utilized semiotic analysis to qualitatively uncover discourses illustrated in anti-gay graffiti around Belgrade Pride in 2009 (Johnson, 2012). Another study utilized ethnography to provide a narrative experience of the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania and

a compelling articulation of heteronormativity and nationalism surrounding the event (Davydova, 2012). Many studies also qualitatively analyze interviews and media articles in exploration of LGBTQ+ advocacy events to establish these events' wider contexts (Gruszczynska, 2009; Johnson, 2012; Mažylis et al., 2014; Rédei, 2012; Renkin, 2009). This widespread usage of qualitative analysis of LGBTQ+ advocacy events in peer reviewed literature asserts the methodological legitimacy of this paper's analysis of Baltic Pride. Additionally, like previous research, this project uses this methodology in analysis of media, and images, and expands usage to relevant NGO reports around Baltic Pride.

Overall, this project follows the pattern of previous research in Eastern Europe by qualitatively analyzing a case study of LGBTQ+ advocacy to illustrate the evolution of Baltic Pride and the implications of the event on Lithuanian society and politics. Like previous research of nations in Eastern Europe, this project considers the context of the East-West European divide and the LGBTQ+ political atmosphere of Europe to investigate Lithuanian Pride. This project adds to previous research by exploring the evolution of Pride in Lithuania from 2010-2019 to interrogate the implications of Pride in a socially conservative Eastern European state over time. Additionally, upon examination of the Lithuanian case, this research investigates the discourse of differing outcomes post LGBTQ+ advocacy events to identify strategies ensuring equal rights advocacy results in positive outcomes in Eastern Europe. This work is significant because scholars are uncertain of how advocacy affects conservative societies' perceptions of the LGBTQ+ community. While dissemination of Pride events to Eastern Europe increases visibility for the queer community, evidence suggests the emergence of these rights movements threatens retaliatory opposition, thus continued research aiming to avoid opposition is required to better understand successful dissemination of LGBTQ+ rights.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This project used the Lithuanian sections of ILGA Europe's annual review to provide social and political context to the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania. Specifically, I examined the sections of the ILGA report outlining developments in the LGBTQ+ rights situation in the country each year. The ILGA's annual review for the years 2011 to 2022 outlines each previous year's major legal updates for the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania regarding gender recognition, same-sex civil unions, media censorship, violence, and the right to assembly. The updates most relevant to this project are legal battles involving the LGL, the organizers of Baltic Pride each year. These reports provide a connection between Baltic Pride and Lithuanian LGBTQ+ legal battles by outlining how the organizers of Baltic Pride are often involved

in legal fights for expanded rights nationally. Data from this NGO report outline major developments regarding LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania, and therefore provide necessary political and social context alongside data portraying Baltic Pride. Furthermore, this report data connects the organizers of Baltic Pride to the wider fight for LGBTQ+ civil rights in the country to illustrate how Baltic Pride and national LGBTQ+ rights discourses in Lithuania are not isolated.

This project also compiled media articles, social media images, and LGBTQ+ advocacy organization images to illustrate how Baltic Pride evolved from 2010 to 2019. Media articles from the Baltic News Service (BNS) built upon the NGO report's overview of the political and social situation of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania for each year Baltic Pride took place and corroborated images depicting the event each year. Images provided visuals for the construction of Baltic Pride each year by depicting participants, counter-protestors, police presence, and the changing location of the event through the years. BNS articles explained which important political figures appeared at each Baltic Pride, local officials' thoughts of the event each year, the public discourses around each event, and gave an overview of legal fights the LGL engaged in to host Baltic Pride in Vilnius in 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. I chose media articles from the BNS because the organization is the largest news provider in the Baltic States, and therefore remains relatively mainstream in views regarding the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania to appeal to their large audience. The BNS articles covering Baltic Pride provide a local media perspective on the event each year to corroborate NGO data and images. Images from the LGL provide a visual perspective from the organizers, and social media images provide a visual perspective from individual participants to incorporate varied viewpoints into data for analysis.

I collected Baltic News Service articles on the Lexis Nexis database for each year Baltic Pride took place in Lithuania. I also collected images of Pride from the LGL website and Instagram and Facebook images tagged with Baltic Pride. To collect the news articles on the Lexis Nexis database, I narrowed the search by specifying the English BNS as the media source, then I searched for articles from the years 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019 using the keywords "Baltic Pride," and "Vilnius" and aggregated PDFs of these articles by year. I collected images from Facebook and Instagram, searching by post using the term "#BalticPride2010" and each consecutive year of interest. I collected LGL images of Baltic Pride by going to the organization's website, viewing the LGL Baltic Pride photo album for each year of interest, then organized all collected images into folders by year. This collection facilitated swift organization of publicly available data of Pride in Lithuania over time. Aggregation of this data by year provided the organization needed for temporal analysis of the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania with both visual and textual evidence.

This project qualitatively examined the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania with content analysis to temporally compare emerging themes in the event between the years 2010, 2013, 2016, and 2019. Additionally, I examined Baltic Pride's evolution with social and political context by thematically coding the NGO reports alongside BNS media articles. First, I copied and pasted relevant excerpts from news articles and NGO reports into source files by year. I engaged in a preliminary round of thematic coding of the data by year using the guiding concepts of identity, national belonging, foreign influence, corporate sponsorship, and nationalism, determined by distinct trends I noticed during data collection, and progressively narrowed my thematic search by aggregating data by year and theme. This approach illustrated how themes in Baltic Pride evolved alongside major legal developments for the LGBTQ+ community during the same period, facilitating comparative analysis between the event and the wider social and political atmosphere in Lithuania. Additionally, I used qualitative analysis in studying the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania to emphasize a narrative discourse of how generalizable this case study's findings are to LGBTQ+ advocacy events across Eastern Europe.

This project also used semiotic analysis of images to visually explore the evolution of Baltic Pride over time. I used this qualitative analysis method to make sense of the changing imagery of Baltic Pride in Lithuania. Put simply, semiotic analysis seeks to examine how symbols convey meaning by determining the specific elements of text and images creating perceived effects (Chandler, 2022). To prepare data for semiotic analysis, I again systematically coded photos by year and used the guiding concepts of identity, national belonging, foreign influence, corporate sponsorship, and nationalism depicted throughout imagery during data collection to categorize each year's images into general themes. After I categorized these images into manageable sets, I used semiotic analysis to focus on specific elements of images such as clothing, flags, posters, signs, facial expressions, and body language to see how these elements signaled meaning. This method focused analysis on how changing visual elements evoked meaning in ways textual analysis could not illustrate alone. Additionally, by sorting the major thematic findings by year, I produced manageable data sets to pinpoint elements illustrating the evolution of Baltic Pride in Lithuania over time.

ANALYSIS

From Riot Shields to Rainbow Flags

Police presence at Baltic Pride decreased following officials' reduced anxiety for extraordinary safety concerns. Reduced violent threats and less rowdy behavior from counter protestors partially explains decreasing police presence in Baltic Pride from 2010 to 2019. For example, in 2010, officials sent 800 police officers to maintain order at the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania,

more than doubling the presence of 350 participants ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010). Police presence halved in 2013, as officials sent only 400 officers to protect around 800 Pride participants reversing the ratio of police to participants present of 2:1 at the previous Lithuanian Baltic Pride (Rainbow Europe, 2014). Following the first two Baltic Prides in Lithuania, Interior Minister Tomas Zilinskas assured the public that no additional safety measures beyond basic police presence was required in 2016 and saw no reason for exceptional protections compared to previous years ("No additional safety," 2016). This intentional decrease in police presence indicates police and officials perceived a reduction of threats and therefore decreased extraordinary concern for safety of Baltic Pride over time. Overall, decreasing police presence demonstrates visibility of the event shifted from a high concern for safety to celebration of the participants.

From 2010 to 2019, the police decreased use of militarized equipment. While early Lithuanian Baltic Prides saw legions of police armed in riot gear, in later years, police are dotted around the event in regular uniform. In 2010, special police units were present at Baltic Pride "ready to suppress a riot" ("Crowds protest Baltic," 2010, p. 1; see Appendix 1). Figure 1 illustrates the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania where police are adorned with heavy armor, shields, and gas masks clearly prepared with the expectation to face violent counter protestors; this pattern of militarization continued into 2013 where officials fenced off the parade route in downtown Vilnius to maintain order during the event ("LGBT Pride Parade," 2013). Police in 2019 instead appeared dressed as regular civilian police (see Figure 2). Decreased militarization of police presence through the years of Baltic Pride in Lithuania suggests violent threats to the event decreased between 2010 and 2019. Opposition forces decreased overt belligerent behavior during Pride making Vilnius a safer place to host Baltic Pride in later years given this decrease in militarization.

Participation in Baltic Pride increased nearly 30 times from 2010 to 2019. Baltic Pride participation more than doubled consecutively each year Lithuania hosted the event. During the first Baltic Pride, officials legally restricted the event to 350 participants ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010; see Figure 3). The number of participants over doubled to 800 in 2013 and increased again to 3,000 in 2016 ("LGBT Pride Parade to," 2013; Rainbow Europe, 2017; see Appendix 2). Baltic Pride 2019 attracted over twice the participants of the previous Baltic Pride in Lithuania as organizers estimated the streets of Vilnius during the event swelled with some 10,000 participants ("Thousands take part," 2019; see Figure 4; see Appendix 2). This increase of participation over time insinuates the LGBTQ+ community in Lithuania decreased concern for personal safety at the event and started to see Baltic Pride as a more legitimate source to voice concern for civil rights. Additionally, the growth of the event shows official restrictions became less effective at deterring participation in Baltic Pride and unity of the LGBTQ+ community between 2010 and 2019.



Figure 1 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012)



Figure 2 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)



Figure 3 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012)



Figure 4 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)

While participation in Baltic Pride increased from 2010 to 2019, the number of counter protestors continuously decreased throughout the same period. Rowdy counter protestors outnumbered Baltic Pride participants in early years but became outnumbered by participants in later years. During the first Baltic Pride, at least 1,000 counter protestors overshadowed the 350 Pride participants present (“Crowds protest Baltic,” 2010). While several hundred counter-protesters were also present at Baltic Pride in 2013, police noted these counter-protesters were much less belligerent than during the previous Lithuanian Baltic Pride making the police’s work easier (“Police detain 28,” 2013). In figures 5 and 6, counter protestors’ presence changed from large mobs in early years to groups of a couple individuals holding signs in 2016 (see Appendix 3). This decrease of counter protestors shifted visibility to participants during Baltic Pride away from the highly militarized police and belligerent counter protestors in early years. Additionally, reduced counter protester presence provided Vilnius with safer conditions to host public LGBTQ+ activities.



Figure 5 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012)



Figure 6 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2016)

Baltic Pride and the Law

Baltic Pride organizers engaged in multiple legal battles involving the right to assembly in 2010 and 2013 to host the event. These legal battles established the right for the LGBTQ+ community to host Baltic Pride in Lithuania and to march through central Vilnius. In 2010, the Vilnius Regional Administrative Court temporarily blocked permits to host Baltic Pride after then prosecutor general Raimondas Petrauskas requested the court to suspend permits the Vilnius Municipality gave to the event's organizers ("Baltic Pride March," 2010). However, after organizers appealed to Lithuania's Supreme Administrative Court, the higher court reversed the regional court's decision and paved the way for the first Baltic Pride in Lithuania to take place ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010). In 2013, organizers fought another legal battle, this time to host the march along the central Gediminas Avenue in Vilnius, instead of the 2010 location on isolated Upės Street, setting the legal precedent to allow this LGBTQ+ advocacy event to march in downtown Vilnius each year since (Rainbow Europe, 2014). Baltic Pride and organizers' ability to establish the right to assembly for LGBTQ+ people asserts Baltic Pride influenced human rights in Lithuania. Additionally, Baltic Pride's move from a symbolically peripheral site to a central avenue indicates higher tolerance for LGBTQ+ advocacy in Lithuania's Capital. Furthermore, Baltic Pride organizers' responsibility in this change suggests Baltic Pride disseminated tolerance within Lithuania's capital through legal advocacy.

Baltic Pride organizer's legal battles to host the event in previous years paved the way for easy access to permits in 2016 and asserted LGBTQ+ people's right to assembly in Lithuania. Through organizers' continuous legal advocacy, hosting Baltic Pride increased access to LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania. In 2016, organizers easily obtained permits to host 1,000 people for Baltic Pride in central Vilnius and claimed working with law enforcement and city officials was easier in 2016 than previous years (Rainbow Europe, 2016). Despite officials only sanctioning 1,000 participants, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made the unprecedented decision to endorse Baltic Pride in 2016, and the event drew 3,000 participants (Rainbow Europe, 2017). Furthermore, in 2016, the President, Parliamentary Speaker, and Prime Minister conceded LGBTQ+ people have the right to assembly and to express beliefs, despite being morally opposed to the event ("Lithuanian leaders not," 2016). Reduced legal hurdles for the event indicates organizers successfully nurtured a productive relationship with the local government. Officials' willingness to reduce legal hurdles also implies local resistance to the event decreased, or tolerance of LGBTQ+ advocacy increased among these officials' local constituents.

Baltic Pride and the national fight for LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania are connected. While Baltic Pride only occurs once every three years in Vilnius, the organizers of the event, the Lithuania Gay League, continuously advocate for expanded legal protections of LGBTQ+ rights nationally, and Baltic Pride is the culmination of this work. For example, the LGL appealed to the Inspector of Journalists' Ethics during regulators' attempts to label a Baltic Pride advertisement as adult content and to limit the advertisements broadcast to after nine pm to decrease discrimination-based censorship ("Lithuanian Gay League," 2013). The LGL also takes an active role in supporting LGBTQ+ migrants and asylum seekers facing discrimination from authorities and lacking resources in Lithuania (Rainbow Europe, 2021). In 2018, the LGL provided hate crime trainings to police officers, including how officers should treat victims of LGBTQ+ hate crimes (Rainbow Europe, 2019). Baltic Pride brought national attention to the work of LGBTQ+ advocates. Because Baltic Pride is the biggest LGBTQ+ advocacy event in Lithuania organized by the LGL, the event spotlighted national LGBTQ+ rights concerns and the work of organizers fighting to expand rights throughout the years.

While the LGL continues LGBTQ+ rights advocacy, legal rights stagnated for LGBTQ+ people alongside the growth of Baltic pride in Lithuania. The Lithuanian political and legal sphere was not receptive to initiatives to expand various LGBTQ+ legal rights throughout these years of Baltic Pride and beyond, despite advocates' efforts. In 2013, Lithuanian parliamentary proposals attempted to protect bias motivated speech against LGBTQ+ people, limit free speech and the right to assembly, limit the definition of family to heterosexual couples, prevent same-sex couples from adopting children, and outlaw gender affirming care (Rainbow Europe, 2014). In 2013, the Law on

the Protection of Minors partially censored advertisements for Baltic Pride and continues to disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ people today (Rainbow Europe, 2014). In 2020, supporters of same-sex civil unions in the Lithuanian government announced there was little chance any legal action to recognize same-sex civil unions was near, signaling a decade of stagnation for legal same-sex unions may likely continue (Rainbow Europe, 2021). While the growth of Baltic Pride in Lithuania may signal increased LGBTQ+ visibility, legal rights stagnated at the same time, so the event did not signal an increase in national LGBTQ+ legal rights. Therefore, Pride in Lithuania, and possibly across Eastern Europe, may not be a good indicator of national LGBTQ+ tolerance and legal rights. Just because a country hosts large Pride events, does not mean such a nation adequately treats LGBTQ+ citizens.

Competing Narratives and Values

Throughout the years of Baltic Pride, opponents to Baltic Pride in Lithuania frequently cited moral reasons for opposing the event. Many Lithuanians see Baltic Pride and the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights negatively because they perceive LGBTQ+ inclusivity as a threat to traditional family and religious values. For example, a sign held by many protestors in 2013 reads "*išsaugokime šeimą*" (let's protect the family), alluding to the feeling some have that LGBTQ+ advocacy threatens family values and structures (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). In 2016, the Prime Minister of Lithuania asserted Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights ran contrary to his moral values, thus legitimizing misguided moral opposition to Baltic Pride at the highest level of government ("Lithuania's PM cites," 2016). Additionally, the institute of Christian Culture lead an opposition campaign and distributed petitions to stop organizers from hosting Baltic Pride 2019 (Rainbow Europe, 2019). While previous data shows how Baltic Pride continually expanded between 2010 and 2019, this data asserts moral and religious opposition to Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights is still entrenched in parts of Lithuanian society. LGBTQ+ advocacy in the country did little to reduce conservative opposition. This perpetual simultaneous opposition implies Baltic Pride's efforts to increase tolerance of LGBTQ+ rights and Lithuania were unable to effectively penetrate religious and conservative factions in the country.

Actors at all levels of Lithuanian society labeled LGBTQ+ advocacy and Baltic Pride as dangerous propaganda throughout the years of the event. Lithuanian society often perceived the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights as a threat to the Lithuanian national image. In 2010, counter protestors were vocal in opposition to Baltic Pride because of claims the event served as propaganda of homosexuality unwelcome in Lithuania ("Lithuania: Protesters outnumber," 2010). In 2013, then Mayor of Vilnius Arturas Zuoka claimed Baltic Pride was "a tool for propaganda of one's own values and lifestyle" ("Zuokas: Vilnius doesn't," 2013, p. 1). Additionally, in 2016, the Lithuanian parliament forwarded a controversial anti-propaganda bill aiming to outlaw free speech

and advocacy of LGBTQ+ rights ("Lithuania ranks 36th," 2016). While the most visible anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments and opposition came from high profile political figures, the data also shows civil society's opposition to LGBTQ+ rights. Therefore, value laden opposition to Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights ran both bottom-up and top-down in Lithuania. These simultaneous systems of opposition rendered attempts to incorporate LGBTQ+ rights into Lithuania's national image and values arduous.

The growth of Baltic Pride paralleled counter protestors and politicians' continuous attempts to spread harmful stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people. While the event's growth afforded visibility to LGBTQ+ advocacy, Baltic Pride also increased visibility to the counter-protestors and harmful narratives surrounding the event. In 2013, a counter protestor wore a shirt reading *"toleruokit mane, kai sakau pederastams ne!"* (bear with me when I say no to pedophiles), and another counter protestor held a sign reading "stop AIDS" spreading harmful narratives relating LGBTQ+ people to AIDS and pedophilia (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). While these images on the LGL website show the harmful rhetoric counter-protestors use, the presence of these images on Lithuanians' largest LGBTQ+ advocacy organization's website afford these narratives increased visibility as well (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). Furthermore, the media around Baltic Pride made the voice of politicians like Ričardas Čekutis, the chairperson of the Lithuanian National Center and outspoken nationalist, highly visible as he spread narratives relating homosexuality to necrophilia, pedophilia, and perversion (Rainbow Europe, 2012; Rainbow Europe, 2013). A hasty reaction to seeing this brash rhetoric's increasing dissemination may prompt a need to increase direct LGBTQ+ advocacy. However, the data shows the stereotype laden, hostile environment LGBTQ+ advocates worked in. Knowing these harmful narratives are widespread in Lithuania explains Baltic Pride's organizers' careful efforts in early years to avoid appearing too non-normative and avoid intense, possibly violent, backlash.

While early Baltic Prides were more subdued in subverting heteronormativity and harmful narratives about the LGBTQ+ community, over the years the organizers and marchers made advocacy efforts more direct. Direct advocacy in the face of harsh opposition manifested in expanded LGBTQ+ symbology and efforts by organizers of Baltic Pride in later years to control the narrative. An ethnographic study describes how in 2010, Baltic Pride did not involve the raucous celebrations often associated with Prides in the West, and "marchers did not attempt to visually disturb gender and sexuality norms" because organizers wished to "counteract popular portraying of the Pride as an immoral and degrading festivity" (Davydova, 2012, p. 35). In 2016, Baltic Pride directly challenged these narratives and transgressed mainstream society's attempts at silencing LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania by using the slogan "We Are People, Not Propaganda" and including a human rights conference, a LGBTQ+ community meeting, a concert, a film festival, and

parties alongside the march in contrast to the first Baltic Pride (“LGBT march in Vilnius,” 2016, p. 1; see Figure 7). This trend continued in 2019, where marchers directly challenged heteronormativity with trans and non-binary symbology and challenged essentialist gender categories through signage (see Figure 8; see Appendix 4). While legal obstacles to organizing a Pride event partially explain the subdued Baltic Prides of early years, this data also forwards organizers’ awareness of Lithuania’s social climate to explain the subdued event. Baltic Pride organizers were intentionally slow to incorporate more direct advocacy practices, typical raucous festivities, and expanded gender representation to appeal to a socially conservative society more effectively.



Figure 7 (Mailo Stern, 2016)



Figure 8 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)

International Involvement

During the early years of Baltic Pride foreign governments and NGOs were the main sponsors of the event. In later years of Baltic Pride, private companies began to show support for Baltic Pride and Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights with corporate sponsorship. For the first time in 2019, ten local Lithuanian brands created rainbow logos for June in support of Baltic Pride (Rainbow Europe, 2020). Large international private companies like Facebook, Barclays, and Booking.com were visible sponsors of Baltic Pride in 2019 (see Figure 9). Comparatively, images of the first Baltic Pride in 2010 show Amnesty International, ILGA Europe, foreign governments, and the Lithuanian Gay League's sister organizations in Latvia and Estonia supporting the event (Lithuanian Gay League, 2012; see Appendix 5). The increase of corporate sponsorship throughout the years of Baltic Pride insinuates private companies' reduced concern for relating brands to LGBTQ+ advocacy in a socially conservative country. Alternatively, this increase in corporate sponsorship suggests companies increasingly saw Baltic Pride as a chance to virtue signal support for LGBTQ+ rights on a global scale. Overall, the unclear nature of private international involvement's true intentions in Baltic Pride raises questions about the wider international community's efforts and intentions in support for Baltic Pride and LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania from 2010 and 2019.



Figure 9 (Lithuanian Gay League, 2019)

International actors continuously supported Baltic Pride as NGO representatives, ambassadors, and other international politicians attended Baltic Pride and related Pride events each year in Lithuania. Baltic Pride is a transnational event and provided a chance for international actors to show support for global LGBTQ+ rights. In 2010, Sweden’s minister for the EU, the Dutch ambassador to Lithuania, and representatives from Amnesty International were present at Baltic Pride (“Baltic Pride 2010,” 2010; Appendix 5). In 2016, the embassies of the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland openly supported Baltic Pride with some promising to observe the march (“Ambassadors see Baltic,” 2013). Ambassadors from the United States and Canada, the Swedish Foreign Minister, the Dutch member of the European Parliament, and a Scottish Minister participated in Baltic Pride 2019 (“Thousands take part,” 2019). This data shows Western European countries continual concern for LGBTQ+ rights in a fellow EU member state and support for Baltic Pride. Foreign participation and support in Baltic Pride implies a strong European network of LGBTQ+ rights accountability. Conversely, seeing the limited jurisdiction of the EU on Lithuania and taking foreign nations limited transnational advocacy strategies into account demonstrates bottom-up LGBTQ+ advocacy provided a more effective avenue for rights expansion in Lithuania.

The EU and international actors justified support for Baltic Pride and involvement in Lithuania with a concern for human rights. The EU and international community typically invoked damaging Lithuania’s internation-

al image to pressure the nation into protecting LGBTQ+ rights. In 2010, the European Commission argued Lithuanian political forces' attempts to stop Baltic Pride conflicted with the nation's obligations to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms ("EC voices concern," 2010). In 2013, Swedish Ambassador Cecilia Barbro Routhstorm-Ruin was critical of authorities in Lithuania noting how the international community's view of Lithuania depended on how well authorities would protect LGBTQ+ rights during the 2013 Baltic Pride ("Ambassadors see Baltic," 2013). In 2011, Lithuanian lawmakers succumbed to pressure from the international community and the European Parliament after trying to pass a law limiting "public promotion of homosexuality" (Rainbow Europe, 2012, p. 102). While the international community often performatively supported LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania, the data also shows Baltic Pride put an international spotlight on the Lithuanian fight to expand LGBTQ+ rights from 2010 to 2019. Additionally, while in one case the international community successfully pressured Lithuania to limit discriminatory laws, considering the various cases the EU and foreign actors' efforts failed to produce change in Lithuania questions the efficacy of international involvement in Baltic Pride.

While the international community continued to support Baltic Pride, their involvement often failed to influence LGBTQ+ legal rights in Lithuania. Political constraints limited the international community's authority over Lithuania even though the nation is a member of the EU. A ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 stated Lithuania must provide all adults legal access to gender affirming care and as of 2012, no law enforced this ruling (Rainbow Europe, 2013). As of 2019, trans people in Lithuania continue to struggle despite legal gender recognition because regulations fail to account for discrimination in healthcare, private life, and everyday social environments (Rainbow Europe, 2020). Despite the European Commission's continuing support for Baltic Pride, the institution rejected a complaint by the LGL arguing the Law on Protection of Minors disproportionately discriminates against LGBTQ+ people by censoring LGBTQ+ media, thus the institution arguably failed to hold Lithuania to anti-discrimination requirements of EU members (Rainbow Europe, 2017). The inability of foreign governments or the EU to influence Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights means much of the international involvement in Baltic Pride did little more than provide performative support. To further complicate this matter, the continuous efforts of foreign nations to support Baltic Pride came in the context of the opposition claiming Baltic Pride as un-Lithuanian propaganda. Therefore, further outside involvement in the event was precarious because foreign support further implicated Baltic Pride organizers in narratives about propaganda.

Domestic Politics

Domestic political support for Baltic Pride slowly became more mainstream in national Lithuanian politics from 2010 to 2019. While individual

politicians supported the event in early years, broad support from political parties and the highest level of government came in later years. The mayor of Vilnius in 2010 criticized the court's attempt to block Baltic Pride, and MP Rokas Zilinskas attended Baltic Pride in 2010 ("Crowds protest Baltic," 2010; "Vilnius mayor slams," 2010). In 2016, Parliamentary Speaker Loreta Grauziniene praised Baltic Pride but did not attend the event because she wanted to spend the day with family thus balancing support for LGBTQ+ advocacy with family values ("Lithuanian leaders not," 2016). In 2019, representatives of the Liberal Movement and the Social Democratic Party of Lithuania attended Baltic Pride in contrast to the previous year's marches lacking support from domestic political parties ("Thousands take part," 2019). Additionally, in 2019, former LGL staff member Tomas Vytautas Raskevičius was elected to the Vilnius city council (Rainbow Europe, 2020). While this data illustrates some increasing political support for Baltic Pride from the highest levels of government and political parties, this support does not directly correlate to increasing LGBTQ+ tolerance in Lithuania. Consideration of data illustrating the reasoning behind high profile politicians' support for Baltic Pride and the wider legal context of LGBTQ+ rights asserts inherent tolerance for LGBTQ+ rights remains largely absent.

While support for Baltic Pride became more mainstream in Lithuania, tolerance may not fully explain this increase in support. Political figures often cited maintaining order and adherence to general democratic principles as the most important factors in supporting the event. In 2013, Lithuanian Prime Minister Algirdas Bitkevicius only supported the event because the right to assembly is an essential part of a democratic country ("LGBT Pride Parade," 2013). In 2010, Parliamentary Speaker Irena Degutiene asked for people to accept the parade to decrease threats to public order; not to protect human rights ("Lithuania's parl't speaker," 2010). In 2016, Lithuania's president and prime minister limited support of Baltic Pride to supporting the right to free speech and assembly in a democratic nation ("Lithuanian leaders not," 2016). Politicians support for Baltic Pride based on vague support of democratic principles fails to consider the human rights concerns of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania. This failure indicates politicians did not connect LGBTQ+ rights with human rights and perpetuated ideas claiming LGBTQ+ identities are morally reprehensible.

Despite the growth of Baltic Pride from 2010 to 2019, public tolerance of LGBTQ+ people and legal rights is continuously low in Lithuania. The growth of Baltic Pride did not wholly reflect the overall growth of LGBTQ+ legal rights in Lithuania. An EU survey in 2020 studying discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania found 55% of LGBTQ+ respondents faced discrimination in the previous 12 months (Rainbow Europe, 2021). Despite the growth of Baltic Pride, an event just as large held in 2021 attracted 10,000 people for the Great Family Defense March to oppose LGBTQ+ advocacy and rights (Rainbow Europe, 2022). Furthermore, as of 2021, a poll indicat-

ed only a third of Lithuanians supported legalizing same-sex civil unions (Rainbow Europe, 2022). While looking at data of Baltic Pride alone implies a completely positive trend in LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania, the importance of the wider political and social context is not lost in this study. After looking at the evolution of LGBTQ+ legal rights and general societal tolerance, data demonstrates Lithuania is far from being a completely safe place for LGBTQ+ identifying individuals.

DISCUSSION

Think Local, Think Big

While appealing to transnational support provides practical benefits and resources to LGBTQ+ rights organizers in Lithuania, LGBTQ+ organizers in the country ought to look more domestically in expanding efforts. The growth of Baltic Pride in Vilnius increased LGBTQ+ unity in the nation's capital and made the city a safer place for LGBTQ+ advocacy, therefore organizers should expand advocacy to cities across Lithuania. Research on LGBTQ+ Pride in a socially conservative country revealed the event only disseminated tolerance locally (Ayoub et al., 2021). As seen above, the growth of Baltic Pride from 2010 to 2019 accompanied decreasing resistance to the event locally and increased willingness from officials to permit the event and work with organizers. Organizers' expansion of LGBTQ+ advocacy and Pride events to more than just major cities in Lithuania may disseminate tolerance of LGBTQ+ people beyond Lithuanian urban centers. Additionally, expansion of advocacy beyond cities like Vilnius gives LGBTQ+ individuals in isolated areas a voice in their communities to show LGBTQ+ people exist across the country.

Legal advocacy for rights should engage with domestic Lithuanian institutions instead of appealing to transnational institutions and the EU. While legal battles engaging with domestic institutions expanded LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania, appealing to the EU and the international community scarcely improved the Lithuanian LGBTQ+ rights situation. Mažylis, Rakutienė, and Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė (2014) follow this logic, asserting focusing on the Lithuania constitution and domestic laws provides a realistic pathway to legal rights expansion over EU legislation bearing little authority over the country. The EU's refusal of a LGL appeal about LGBTQ+ censorship in Lithuania, and the country's delayed response to adopting gender affirming care upon the EU's request, showcase the limits of international institutions in impacting LGBTQ+ rights in Lithuania (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013; Rainbow Europe, 2013). Conversely, domestic legal battles produced change in Lithuania in 2010 and 2013 as legal battles established the right of assembly for LGBTQ+ people by appealing to domestic courts ("Baltic Pride 2010," 2010; Rainbow Europe, 2014). Legal battles within domestic institutions work two-fold. First, laws enforced within Lithuania by Lithuania

circumvent narratives claiming foreign powers impose non-Lithuanian law. Additionally, when domestic legal institutions impose LGBTQ+ rights legislation, they hold real authority to enforce such laws with the consent of constituents.

Turbulent Past, Uncertain Future

This study of Baltic Pride in Lithuania complicates Ayoub's (2015) discussion claiming bottom-up transnationally connected advocacy primes recent EU adopter states to introduce LGBTQ+ legislation. While the LGL's transnationally connected bottom-up advocacy in Lithuania expanded the right to assembly, this organizations' perceived ties to Western Europe hampered calls for expanded LGBTQ+ legal rights. Ayoub (2015) claims "transnationally connected domestic groups in new-adopter states selectively choose and adapt foreign ideas to local traditions and practices, performing as brokers between international and domestic norms" (p. 311). In Baltic Pride, the LGL are unable to work as these brokers because nationalists in Lithuania view the organizers' LGBTQ+ advocacy as a threat to local norms and values. In the Lithuanian case, any relationship to the West presents an opportunity for nationalists and LGBTQ+ opposition to frame advocacy as propaganda and intrusive. This study supports the claim bottom-up embedded advocacy can prime EU adopter states to introduce LGBTQ+ legislation but illustrates advocacy organizations are unable to successfully incorporate foreign ideas with domestic values symmetrically across Eastern Europe. In Lithuania, narratives claiming LGBTQ+ rights are propaganda are too strongly entrenched and make local advocacy organizations relationship with Western European allies too precarious for wholly successful transnational advocacy. The Lithuania case indicates Eastern European nations with similar situations require caution when working with Western Europe in fighting for LGBTQ+ rights.

This study interrogates Vasilev's (2016) research claiming stronger identification with Europe expedited integration of LGBTQ+ rights in EU accession states and vice versa. Vasilev's 2016 research sought to emphasize the role of civil society actors and discourses around the EU, and this project supported this emphasis by focusing on tension between the LGL and LGBTQ+ opposition forces around EU involvement. Previous research on Croatia and Serbia cites civil society's "identity convergence" with Europe to indicate the speed LGBTQ+ rights will incorporate into EU accession states (Vasilev, 2016, p. 749). In Baltic Pride, counter protestors' holding signs rejecting the EU and relating the institution to the former Soviet Union signal portions of civil society do not identify with the EU and reject Western European values (Lithuanian Gay League, 2013). In this case, opposition forces' strong nationalist convictions rejecting the Western European LGBTQ+ rights framework hampered the LGL's efforts to expand legal rights. Overall, this study of Baltic Pride in Lithuania verifies claims that weak identification with Europe impedes LGBTQ+ rights integration in EU accession states. This research

also corroborates the explanation for this phenomenon because in Lithuania the process of rejecting European values is facilitated between competing stakeholders in civil society.

This study further developed previous methodology exploring the East-West European divide in context of LGBTQ+ rights in the first Baltic Pride by expanding research to the first four Baltic Pride events in Lithuania. While some studies outlined heteronormative society's use of LGBTQ+ rights to differentiate Lithuania from the West in one Baltic Pride, this project found despite this phenomenon continuing into the next three years of Pride, LGBTQ+ advocacy continued to flourish. Davydova (2012) outlines heteronormative nationalists' use of Baltic Pride to otherize the LGBTQ+ community as Western and non-Lithuanian. Mažylis, Rakutienė, and Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė (2014) corroborated Davydova's findings but cited uncertainty of what Baltic Pride meant for the future of Lithuania's LGBTQ+ rights situation by positing two possible trajectories: continued nationalistic opposition to LGBTQ+ rights expansion, or successful expansion of rights thanks to Baltic Pride organizers. My broader study of Baltic Pride found legal integration did not parallel Baltic Pride's growth because of persisting heteronormativity and nationalism in Pride's opposition. This study discovers the relevant findings of the East and West European divide in previous studies of the first Baltic Pride persisted through the next three years of Baltic Pride. However, while this research endeavored to observe whether heteronormative nationalism or LGBTQ+ rights prevailed in later years, the future of Lithuania's LGBTQ+ rights situation remains uncertain.

CONCLUSION

The rapid growth of Baltic Pride implies a strong future for LGBTQ+ rights and advocacy. However, while this advocacy movement is flourishing, legal rights stagnate, and a strong nationalist movement persists. Despite political leaders' surface level support for the event, these figures continued moral opposition to Baltic Pride alongside much of civil society. While Baltic Pride grew to an event of 10,000, in 2021, nationalists gathered for an event just as large to oppose LGBTQ+ rights and advocacy. Furthermore, while a former LGL staff member was elected to the Vilnius City Council in 2019, LGBTQ+ legal rights lack in the nation and discriminatory laws are still in place. The tension between a growing LGBTQ+ rights movement and stagnating rights and low tolerance for LGBTQ+ people assert organizers and allies of the movement should not become complacent in context of Baltic Pride's flourishing. A strong anti-LGBTQ+ nationalist presence persists in Lithuania, and widespread tolerance and legal rights are absent. Given this context, the fight to establish safety, tolerance, and rights for LGBTQ+ people in Lithuania is far from over.

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Appendix 1

Police Presence at Baltic Pride



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)

Appendix 2

Participation at Baltic Pride



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Vladas Diržys (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Domantas Judeikis (2019)

Appendix 3

Counter Protestors at Baltic Pride



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2013)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Mantas Levanaitis (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)

Appendix 4

Countering Cis and Heteronormativity



Miroslav Shapovalov (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)

Appendix 5

Foreign Baltic Pride Involvement



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2012)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2016)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)



Lithuanian Gay League (2019)