



ACADEMIC FREEDOM UNDER PRESSURE

A comparative report on academic freedom in Russia and the US

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Made for Scholars At Risk

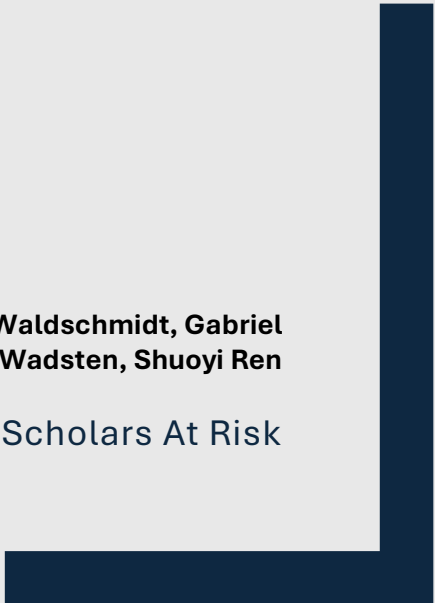


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About Us

Sofie Kjeilen Nygaard (she/her, Norway):

I'm taking a bachelor's in art history and wanted to take a course in gender studies because I wanted to learn more about those who paved the way for me as a queer woman. Growing up my parents shared responsibilities in the home, and throughout my life they've lectured me about the importance of equality at home and in general. They've raised both me, and my brothers to have a curiosity about the world, where we come from, and being critical to injustice. Unfortunately, it is a privilege to be able to study queer theory today. As it is my privilege, I have a responsibility to take action to try to ensure a better future for those coming after me. I hope that the making of this report can help us towards a brighter future for academic freedom.

Alina Waldschmidt (she/her, Germany):

I am in my fifth semester of the bachelor's in German and Media Science. Throughout my studies I came across different articles of Judith Butler and Foucault which inspired me to focus more on Gender and Sexuality and how these topics are presented in the German Literature. I decided to take a course in Gender Studies to learn more about theoretical backgrounds. As a result, I hope to better understand myself, my friends and also the political changes regarding being Queer in our society. With that knowledge I hope to have an impact on the future with the following report as a starting point.

Gabriel Lagon Holmviik (he/him, Philippines):

I am taking a year study in Gender Studies. Coming from a conservative background in the evangelical church, I had been taught that everything one needed to know about gender and sexuality as well as all else, could be found in the Bible. Seeing what that sort of education did for the people around me as well as my homosexuality gave me reason to mistrust it and left me with the conviction that gender studies is necessary for everything from pedagogy to immigration policy. Unfortunately, my background also means I have a clear view of a growing anti-gender movement, giving me the distinct impression that I'm taking gender studies while I still can.

Nore Wadsten (they/them, Norway):

I have a BA in Societal Geography from the University of Oslo and am at the time of the report in my last year of a BA in Gender Studies at the University of Bergen. As someone who is both queer and trans, the decision to study gender studies seemed an obvious one. Gender studies allow me to better understand myself and others and is an academic field that both affirms and challenges my existing beliefs. Growing up in a rural part of Norway where openly queer people were few and far between and homophobic language and bullying was a common occurrence, the speed and intensity in which the anti-gender movement has grown globally over the past few years leaves me distraught. My hope for this report is that it can contribute to the discussion on how to ensure the right of academic freedom amidst the social and political rampage inflicted by the anti-gender movement.

Shuoyi Ren (she/her, China):

I am a master's student in Comparative Literature and World Literature from China. My academic journey began with training in postmodern literary theory and psychoanalysis, which served as two key tools that opened up the vast landscape of queer and gender studies for me. During my exchange in Norway, works by thinkers like Judith Butler further deepened my perspective. I came to understand that queer and gender studies extend far beyond social issues; they strike at the very core of existence. In the process of collaborating with classmates to investigate the social realities of queer issues, I discovered that queer theory is no longer an abstract concept in texts but a sharp tool for dissecting reality and understanding life's dilemmas. This experience has solidified my belief: I am eager to continue using the lens of theory to interpret the marginalized lived experiences in literature and reality and to contribute my voice to a more inclusive narrative.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been an escalation of attacks on academic freedom in Europe and the U.S. These attacks are centered largely around the anti-gender movement as well as the scapegoating of gender studies and LGBTQ+ people. This report, produced as part of the collaboration with the Scholars at Risk (SAR) Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, analyzes the state of academic freedom for Gender and Queer Studies in the United States.

Our report moves beyond abstract theoretical debate to examine the material and political conditions that enable or constrain scholars' ability to conduct research, teach courses, and disseminate knowledge. The central research question guiding this analysis is: To what extent, and through what mechanisms, is academic freedom for Gender and Queer Studies in the US being systematically eroded, and how are academic institutions and scholars responding?

The analytical framework for this report is drawn from the core concerns of SAR: the ability of scholars to pursue knowledge without fear of repression, the institutional autonomy of universities, and the freedom of students to learn. We will examine these dimensions through the lenses of:

- **Policy and Funding:** Governmental interventions that restrict research and teaching.
- **Curriculum and Pedagogy:** Direct and indirect pressures on what can be taught.
- **Research and Dissemination:** Constraints on scholarly inquiry and publication.
- **Advocacy and Resistance:** The strategies employed by the academic community to defend its autonomy.

Our assignment to make this report also tasked us to make a comparison of the situation in the US to another country, to see where the U.S. is on the continuum of restriction on academic freedom. SAR suggested we might look to Hungary, and although we think that could've been an interesting comparison, we decided to choose another country, namely Russia.

This decision is rooted in that, not only is Russia one of the major geopolitical powers in the world, which one could argue already makes it more comparable to the U.S. than Hungary, but the two countries also have a long history together in the anti-gender movement, e.g. regarding the World Congress of Families. We think this history together could make a more intriguing comparison.

Our analysis of the US wishes to provide a critical framework for comparing it to the situation in Russia. The Russian model, underpinned by laws like the 2013 "gay propaganda" law, represents a more overt, state-centric form of repression. While the US attack is often framed in the language of "freedom" and "anti-indoctrination," the

Russian approach is one of traditional moralism and state security. The key comparative questions emerge:

- How do these differing justifications shape the tactics and resilience of their respective academic communities?
- How does the decentralized, federal structure of the US create both vulnerabilities, in state-level attacks, and points of resistance, in sanctuary states like California, compared to the centralized authoritarian model in Russia?
- What lessons can be learned from the American resistance for scholars operating under the more directly oppressive Russian regime?

The intent of this report is to compare the nature of attacks in both regions, as well as the surrounding ideologies, institutions and common methods of attack. In light of this, we wish to compare incidents from USA and Russia in particular, using reports of incidents gathered from the Academic Freedom Monitoring index, reports from other academics, and interviews, amongst other sources. From this we will make a list of recommendations that hopefully prove useful both in guarding from future attacks on academic freedom and in dealing with immediate and ongoing incidents.

As we turn our analysis to Russia, it is this universal principle of academic freedom that forms the bedrock of our comparative inquiry.

1.1. Academic Freedom in Russia

Russia is one of the world's major geopolitical powers and thus possesses significant influence. Several countries express support for Russia and adapt aspects of its lifestyle and political orientation. According to Neil Datta's report on the anti-gender movement, Russia has "emerged as a major power center in global anti-gender mobilization [...]" (Datta 2021, p. 21). We argue that because of this, it is important to highlight Russia's current position regarding academic freedom in the fields of Queer Theory and Gender Studies, as well as to examine how this position affects the everyday lives of its citizens.

Gender Studies in Russia experienced a period of prosperity between 1990-2000. During this time the country was open for any research in this area, and gender-related topics were even incorporated into governmental policy agendas (Shnyrova 2024). According to an article by Kevin Moss,

[s]ome of the best work has been housed at the European University at St. Petersburg (EUSPb) and the Center for Independent Social Research (CISR). St. Petersburg has hosted two international interdisciplinary conferences on LGBTQ research [...] (Moss 2021).

The Russian scholar Olga Shnyrova argues that an "anti-gender turn" began from 2008 and onwards. This was manifested by cutting financing and the closing of gender-related programs. From that point onward, it became "not only difficult but dangerous to write about gender violence" in Russia (Shnyrova 2024). Even so, the Russian Professor Alexander Kondakov writes in his essay "Teaching Queer Theory in Russia" in 2016:

On the one hand, it is official in Russia that talking about gays is bad. On the other hand, these same legal prohibitions have also generated a lot of attention to research on homosexuality and created the possibility of a vibrant academic discussion (Kondakov 2016).

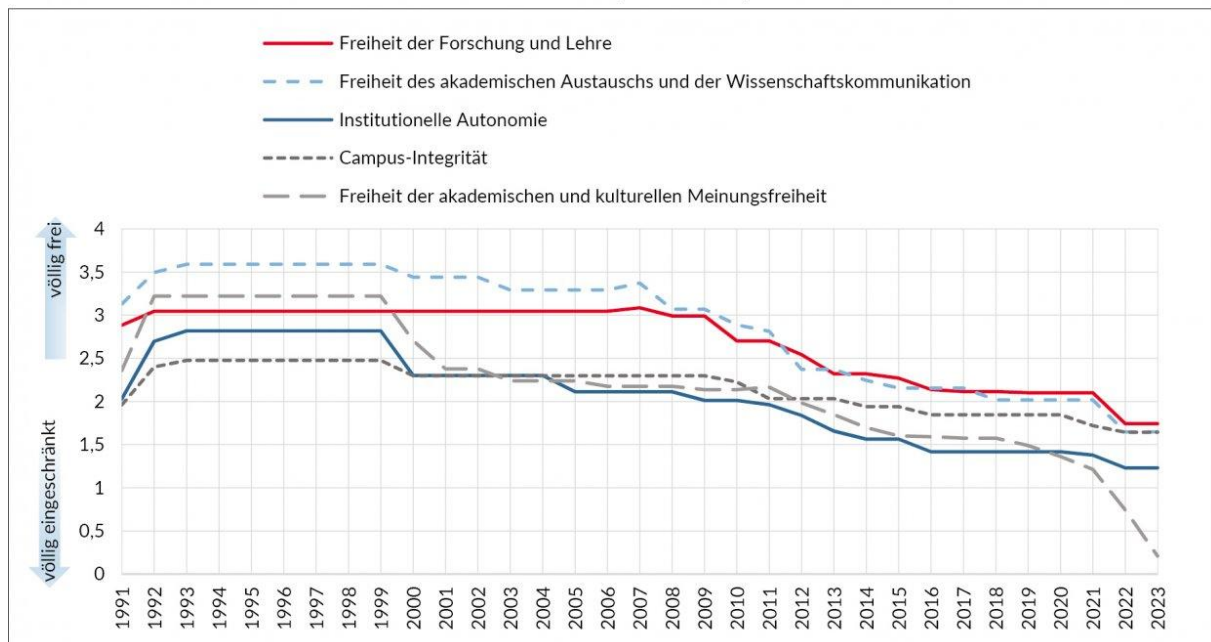
Arguing that he experienced that the "gay propaganda" law in 2013 connected him to other queer scholars, quite the opposite of what the law intended to do (Kondakov 2016). This is however now almost 10 years ago, and we argue that the situation, regarding queer theory and gender studies, in Russia has worsened over the years.

Today, queer and trans people in Russia have no protection under the law and experience a low degree of social acceptance. A Russian scholar we interviewed stated that they would be worried for their own physical safety if their research was to be discovered by Russian authorities (Anonymous 2025). Russia's Supreme Court concluded in November 2023 that the "International Public LGBT movement" was to be considered an "extremist organization". The Sphere Foundation, a human rights organization concerned with LGBT+ issues in Russia, provided the following summarization of activities considered "extremist" by the Russian Supreme Court:

- the abbreviation "LGBT".
- "rainbow" flag and its variations, black and pink triangle, lambda, etc.; images of them on clothing, toys, accessories, etc.
- the words "lesbian", "gay", "bisexual", "transgender", "transsexual", "crossdresser", "drag queen", "drag king", "genderqueer", "asexual", "pansexual".
- calls for recognition of LGBT rights, same-sex marriage, allowing same-sex families to adopt and raise children, and anti-discrimination laws.
- LGBT literature.
- conducting events (i.e. that could be seen as LGBT-related).
- submitting alternative reports to international organizations.
- calls for protests and negative evaluations of laws (The Sphere Foundation 2024).

The Federal Agency for Civic Education in Germany (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung) published an article in March 2025 including a graphic which shows decreases regarding academic freedom in Russia (The Sphere Foundation 2024).

Grafik 1: Russlands Index der akademischen Freiheit (1990–2023)



Trans.: Graphic 1: Russia's Academic Freedom Index (1990–2023)

Y-axis (left): Development of Academic Freedom

- 2-4 – completely free
- 0-1.5 – completely restricted

X-axis (bottom):

- Years from 1991-2023

Legend (line colors):

- Red: Freedom of research and teaching
- Blue dashed: Freedom of academic exchange and scientific communication
- Solid dark gray: Institutional autonomy
- Black dashed: Campus integrity
- Light gray dashed: Freedom of academic and cultural expression

The so-called “foreign agent” law passed in 2012 declared organizations that receive foreign funding “foreign agents” (Norwegian Helsinki Committee 2014). This law resulted in many LGBTQ-organizations being forced to leave the country. Since 2022, after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there has been a growing promotion “traditional

values,” while entire research disciplines, such as gender and queer studies, have been officially classified as “alien to the values of the Russian people.” (The Sphere Foundation 2024)

According to Neil Datta’s report, the Russian anti-gender fundings increased in 2013, with the further implication that this not only affected Russia but also Europe. He exemplifies how Russian oligarchs funded far-right parties in the 2014 EU election. In total, Russian oligarch financiers has spent USD 188.2 million between 2009 and 2018, in direct or indirect fundings of the EU elections, according to Datta’s report (2021, p. 21–27).

In 2015, a new law was passed, making it possible to register foreign or international institutions as “undesirable” if they present “threat to the defense capability or security of the state, to the public order or health”. Such institutions are thereby prohibited from operating within Russia. In practice, this legislation predominantly targets organizations advocating for feminism or LGBTQ+ rights (SAR 2025a).

Within its Academic Freedom Monitoring Project, the SAR network documented several cases concerning Queer Theory in Russia, amongst other things. Starting 2017, the St. Petersburg court has ordered the European University at St. Petersburg (EUSP) to have its license for the gender studies program revoked. Even though the license was restored in 2018, SAR is concerned that actions that aim to hamper research and harm academic freedom, undermine society generally (SAR 2017). Another case in 2019 illustrates that the participation in LGBTQ-groups is often not accepted by the Universities. “[A]dministrative authorities at the Ural State the University of Economics (UrGEU) [...] reportedly summoned a student to a meeting on campus where they threatened him with expulsion based on suspicions regarding his sexual orientation” (SAR 2019). Perhaps the most recent development exemplifies the current state of affairs most clearly.

In the book *The Pink Line* (2021), Mark Gevisser details meeting Russian trans woman “Pasha” over a period of several years. Pasha’s story gives an insight into the personal, social and political consequences of Russia’s infamous anti-gay propaganda laws. According to Sasha Semyonova, leader of a LGBT-families network in St. Petersburg, there was a sense of optimism connected to LGBT rights in Russia pre 2012, with a marked turn for the worse following Vladimir Putin’s second re-election as president (Gevisser 2021, p. 194). With Putin’s return, a highly nationalistic and anti-LGBT rhetoric became dominant in the public sphere:

[T]hey started showing all these horrible programs on TV’, Pasha recalled. “It’s harmful, it’s an illness coming from the West aimed at the destruction of Russia from within.”(p. 191).

The first regional anti-gay propaganda law was passed in Ryazan, a city not far from Moscow, in 2006. This was the starting point of what would become a nationwide ban of the “promotion of non-traditional sexual orientation” in 2013 (Gevisser 2021, p. 192;

Human Rights Watch 2022). This law made it illegal to positively or even neutrally depict or discuss non-heterosexual relations to minors, as this was deemed a threat to children's health and well-being. For Pasha, the "gay propaganda" ban made it so that she lost the right to see her son, on the basis that she – by being and living as a trans woman – would be a negative influence on his life (Gevisser 2021, p. 180).

The judge who ruled against Pasha did so by referring to the anti-gay propaganda law, even though transness was not listed among those "non-traditional sexual relationship" that minors should be shielded from in the first version of the ban. In 2022 the "gay propaganda" ban was extended, with the ban now referring to "LGBT propaganda" and prohibiting "promotion" of this "propaganda" between adults as well (Sauer 2022). In the ruling against Pasha in 2016, it was decided that she was to have no contact with her son as long as he was under the legal age of 18. As Pasha's son was only seven years old at the time of the court case, he would be fourteen by the time the Russian government made it illegal for Pasha to have any contact with him at all.

Pasha's case is included here to illustrate how the anti-LGBT doctrine pushed by the Russian government has real and serious consequences for Russian citizens. Making it illegal to talk about themes connected to queerness and/or transness affects not only those who belong to the categories of queer and trans, but also those who wish to organize around or simply discuss those same categories. The Russian government has made it very clear that, according to them, there is to be no space for anything connected to the LGBT-community in Russian society. Individual people, organizations and institutions are consequently all at risk of being accused of spreading "propaganda" harmful to the Russian nation if they dare to simply acknowledge the existence of LGBT-people.

Important to note is the way the "gay propaganda" law legalizes discrimination and harassment based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The direct consequence of the law is that queer and trans people have no legal protection – meaning that they can be harassed, assaulted and even murdered with impunity (Human Rights Watch 2014; Gevisser 2021). This "license to harm" results in a generally hostile environment for not only queer and trans Russians, but also for those who wish to study, defend or just openly talk about LGBT+ issues.

The cases illustrate the critical situation for academic freedom in Russia regarding Gender Studies, but it also shows how this anti-gay propaganda laws have had an impact on the daily lives of people outside academia as well. It is with this in mind that the writers of this report urge that attacks on academic freedom must not be taken lightly. We wish to continue to illustrate the gravity of the situation by exploring academic freedom in the US, and where USA is on the Russian continuum.

1.2. Academic Freedom in the US

The United States has long been perceived as a global bastion of higher education and academic inquiry, home to prestigious institutions that have been central to the development and global dissemination of Queer Theory. From the pioneering work of scholars like Judith Butler, Michael Warner, and José Esteban Muñoz—all foundational authors on our own course syllabus—the American academy has provided a critical, though not uncomplicated, space for the interrogation of norms surrounding gender, sexuality, and identity.

However, this reputation is currently under severe strain. The contemporary landscape for Gender and Queer Studies in the US is characterized by a profound and escalating paradox: while these fields are more established and institutionally recognized than ever before, they are simultaneously facing a coordinated, ideologically driven assault that threatens the very core of academic freedom. The most direct threat comes from an unprecedented wave of state-level legislation.

The bills vary in scope but collectively target discussions of sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) in educational settings. A significant catalyst for this legislative movement was Executive Order 13950, issued by the Trump-Pence administration in September 2020, which prohibited federal employee training on "divisive concepts" related to race and sex stereotyping (Johnson 2023, p. 2). Although revoked by the Biden administration, it provided a blueprint for state-level "educational gag orders" (Johnson 2023, p. 6). These so-called gag orders, such as Florida's "Stop WOKE Act," passed in 2022, are aggressive efforts to restrict education about racism, bigotry, and US history, and they infringe on the right of faculty to teach the results of current research and students to learn (Dreiling and García-Caro 2022, p. 5).

Laws such as Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act, also passed in 2022—commonly known as the "Don't Say Gay" law—explicitly ban classroom instruction on SOGI in K-3, later expanded through high school (Goldberg, Toomey, and Abreu 2024, p. 1). Such policies have led to the removal of LGBTQ+ books from school libraries and the dismantling of inclusive symbols like rainbow flags (Goldberg, Toomey, and Abreu 2024, p. 6). In states like Texas and Ohio, similar bills have been introduced to restrict the teaching of "divisive concepts" and even target tenure protections for faculty who teach critical race theory or gender studies (Johnson 2023, p. 4). This legislative movement is part of a broader "inquisitorial impulse" reminiscent of the McCarthy era, where books, classes, and syllabi are scrutinized and banned for allegedly threatening a singular, epic narrative of American greatness (Dreiling and García-Caro 2022, p. 2–3).

The impact of these policies extends far beyond the letter of the law, creating a pervasive climate of fear and self-censorship. A 2023 survey of LGBTQ+ parents in Florida found that 23.4% reported being "less out" in their communities—avoiding public displays of affection, removing rainbow stickers, or concealing their family structure—due

to fears for their safety and concerns about their children's well-being (Goldberg, Toomey, and Abreu 2024, p. 6). Over two-thirds expressed a desire to move out of Florida, though far fewer believed they could do so in the near future (Goldberg, Toomey, and Abreu 2024, p. 10).

Healthcare restrictions make parents liable for child abuse if they let their children go through gender affirming care, effectively forcing the children and their families into an impossible decision: remain in their communities and let their children endure risks to their health and safety, or uproot themselves entirely and overturn their families' entire lives (ACLU 2021).

In the documentary *Just Kids* (2025), we witness through individual cases how national-level legislation directly impacts individual families, creating pain and impossible choices. Over a year, we see how these families fight for their children's access to necessary medical resources and legitimate rights to survival. Their daily struggles and unwavering resilience reveal the profound human cost of these politically motivated bans, which contradict the consensus of mainstream American medical science. The film portrays the dilemmas faced by three families with transgender adolescents in states where gender-affirming care has been banned, showing how these laws affect queer lives (Tobioni 2025).

As demonstrated, academic freedom has been declining significantly since 2020, but it has been restricted even more so since January 2025, with the 2nd inauguration of President Donald Trump (SAR 2025b, p. 76).

January 20th, President Trump signed the Executive Order "Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism", mandating that federal agencies recognize only two sexes and banning federal funding for "gender ideology". As a direct result of this, universities are caught between their commitment to academic freedom, and political and financial pressures. Some administrators, prioritizing risk management and reputation, have acquiesced to external demands, canceling events or disciplining faculty. We can see this in how federally funded universities had to change their curriculum, to adhere to the new requirements (Friedfel, Khetarpal, and Plummer 2025). In Texas, Chancellor Tedd L. Mitchell of Texas Tech University System, sent a memo to the University Presidents of the connected universities, stating:

Current state and federal law recognize only two human sexes: male and female, as outlined in House Bill 229, Governor's Letter, and Executive Order. Therefore, while recognizing the First Amendment rights of employees in their personal capacity, faculty must comply with these laws in the instruction of students, within the course and scope of their employment.

As a system, our role is to provide clarity and guidance to administration, ensuring that each university fulfills its legal obligations. I appreciate your continued diligence in reviewing course materials, curricula, syllabi, and other instructional documents and following established procedures to make timely adjustments where needed (Chancellor Tedd L. Mitchell 2025).

This memo illustrates how the state and federal laws directly impact and restrict academic freedom, by obstructing the freedom to research and teach, as well as repressing the universities' autonomy. This has a chilling effect on academic discourse, limiting the scope of permissible inquiry and debate.

Unfortunately, this is not a unique case, and has not only affected scholars in the US, but caused ripples globally. Our own course was affected by this. In April of 2025 our Professor Kari Jegerstedt, at University of Bergen (UiB), and Professor Jon Braddy at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) applied to cooperatively teach their course for the fall semester 2025. FGCU denied Professor Braddy his application, with the reasoning that the university didn't have any available rooms for Braddy to teach in. The professors put in an application to teach the course online, instead of in person. Braddy was then discouraged to uphold the application by other FGCU-professors, as the university could potentially lose a substantial amount of funding if he tried to teach the course. This resulted in that not only was FGCU not holding the course, but UiB Professor Jegerstedt had to change the direction of the course (Jegerstedt 2025).

Resistance, however, is also growing. As of September 2025, organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) kept track of 616 anti-LGBTQ bills across the United States, illustrating the vast geographic scope of this legislative assault (ACLU 2025). The ACLU have filed amicus briefs and issued statements defending the right to teach and research topics related to race, gender, and sexuality (Johnson 2023, p. 11). Faculty and students are organizing to protect inclusive curricula and advocate for a broader understanding of academic freedom that encompasses community-engaged and action-based research (Rahbari et al. 2025; Cranford 2025; Espinoza 2025).

The American case demonstrates that attacks on Gender and Queer Studies are not merely disciplinary disputes but represent a fundamental challenge to the role of the university in a democratic society. Unlike Russia's centralized, state-driven repression—such as the 2013 “gay propaganda” law — the U.S. model is decentralized, often framed in the language of “parental rights” and “intellectual freedom”. This creates both vulnerabilities, through state-level legislative attacks, and points of resistance, as seen in sanctuary states and academic networks. We argue that the defense of Queer Theory is not merely a defense of a specific academic discipline; it is a defense of the fundamental principle that universities must be spaces for the production of challenging, uncomfortable, and necessary knowledge, free from political coercion.



Credit timelines: Gabriel Lagon Holmviik, 2025.

These timelines are marked with notable events in Russia and the U.S. respectively. The events highlighted have either had a direct impact on academic freedom, or they are a part of circumstances that we deem relevant to the current state of academic freedom in the two countries.

2. Comparison

As we demonstrate in the earlier sections, there are some similarities in Russia and the US regarding their attacks on academic freedom. In this section, we seek to go deeper into these connections and compare the situations in the US and in Russia. Attacks on academic freedom are taking place in both countries, but it is helpful to look at both the form these attacks take and the overarching context they take place in.

To understand the connection between Russia and USA, we have to go further back than the scope of our report, to the early 90s. As mentioned in the introduction, the two countries cooperate together through the World Congress of Families. The organization was co-founded in 1995 by Dr. Allan Carlson and the Russian sociologist professors Anatoly Antonov and Victor Medkov (McEwen 2020; Butler 2024), when the professors invited Carlson to Moscow in 1995 to discuss Carlsons writings that claimed that “feminism and homosexuality have led to population decline, precipitating a crisis of the American family” (Human Rights Campaign 2015).

WCF has a network that spreads across the world, and is arguably the most influential anti-LGBTQ organization, deeply involved in the anti-gender movement. It is classified as an American organization, with all-American staff and board members, yet it also has ties in the highest levels of government in Russia (Human Rights Campaign 2015). In their report, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) state:

WCF’s presence can be felt throughout the globe where anti-LGBT sentiment is growing. The group has had a dangerous influence, not only making it harder to be openly LGBT in many countries, but encouraging policies that have led to the harassment, legal punishment and even killing of LGBT people worldwide. Its role in the export of hate cannot be overstated (Human Rights Campaign 2015, p. 6).

According to the HCR report, the WCF takes credit for the “gay propaganda” law in Russia (Human Rights Campaign 2015, p. 8), implying that there are strong ties between the US and Russia. With this in mind, we see a clear connection to the anti-LGBTQ and anti-gender movement in the US and Russia.

Both the U.S. and Russia have in recent years seen an intensification of attacks on academic freedom. As a consequence of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian authorities have tightened their grip on individual rights and liberties in an attempt to smother domestic dissent and pushback (Freedom House 2025). In the U.S., a tidal wave of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation on the state level have resulted in several states passing laws which negatively impacts both LGBTQ+ students and their teachers and educators. As of November 2025, 19 states in the U.S. have at least one LGBTQ-specific school censorship law (Movement Advancement Project 2025; Human Rights Campaign 2025).

The legislators proposing these anti-LGBTQ bills have in many instances claimed to be concerned about the “protection of children” - despite reports showing lower suicide risk among LGBTQ+ children in states where schools typically follow LGBTQ+ inclusive sexual education (The Trevor Project 2024). With President Trump’s executive order titled “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government” from earlier this year, the legislative attack on LGBTQ+ people were taken to a federal level (The White House 2025).

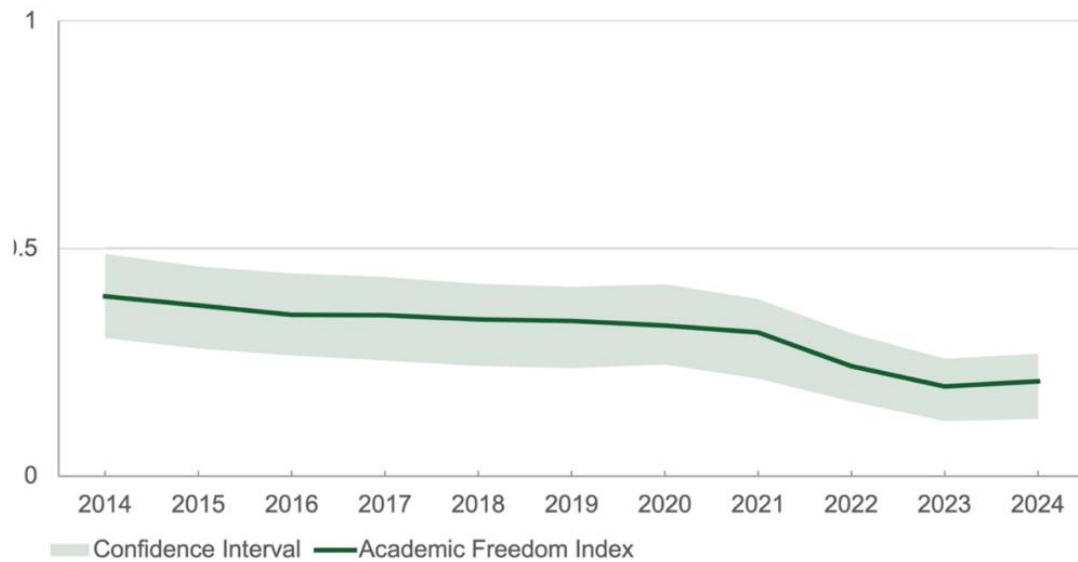
In this executive order, the “[...] immutable biological reality of sex” is declared non-negotiable and as something that must be respected and enforced by all Federal agencies and employees. It is also stated that “[f]ederal funds should not be used to promote gender ideology” (The White House 2025). As discussed in the previous section with the example of the Texas University Systems, this meant that all federally funded educational institutions had to re-write curriculums and cut classes, subjects and research opportunities to adhere to President Trump’s order. We argue that this is a direct attack on academic freedom, as this puts regulations on both teachings and research and therefore limits academic expression.

The proclaimed desire to “protect children” has been used as an argument to introduce anti-LGBTQ+ legislature in both Russia and the U.S. In the original Russian “gay propaganda” ban of 2013, the main argument was that exposure to “non-heterosexual relations” would negatively impact children and minors, and therefore this was made illegal. By implementing such a law, the Russian government made it clear that they viewed LGBTQ+ matters as dangerous to children. As a result, this opened up for increased suspicion and discrimination toward LGBTQ+ people in Russia, as we’ve demonstrated with the example from the book *The Pink Line*, earlier in this report. Suggesting that anything connected to the LGBTQ+ community is not safe for children is a way to stigmatize people who belong to or support this community. Accusations of pedophilia is a central part of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in both Russia and the U.S. The disparagement of the LGBTQ+ community in mainstream society helps defend the supposed need for legislation such as “gay propaganda” laws and executive orders purporting to defend “biological truths”.

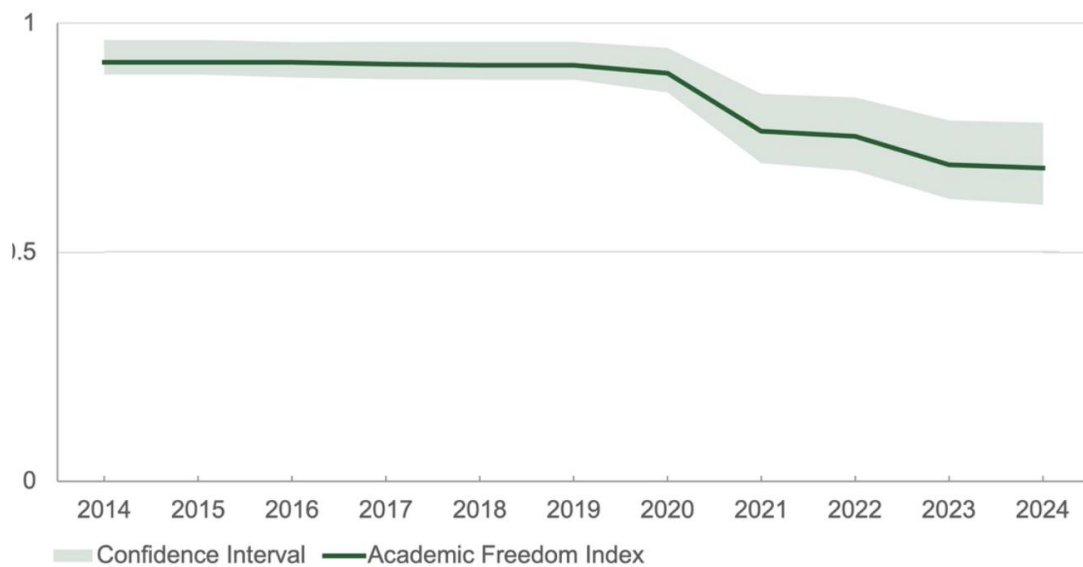
Shown in the graph underneath, titled “United States AFI”, academic freedom has taken a noticeable blow in the U.S. in recent years. As mentioned above, it has declined significantly from 2020, with 2025 and the re-inauguration of President Donald Trump, as a turning point (SAR 2025b, p. 76). From being categorized as “completely free” on the Academic Freedom Index in 2014, it now finds itself described as “mostly free” ten years later. Russia has a much lower starting point on this index, seen in the graph “Russia AFI”, but even so there is a visible decline to be found here as well – in 2024 Russia found itself in the “severely restricted” category. After Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia, freedom of expression has been under severe pressure. Freedom of expression and

freedom of speech have natural ties to academic freedom, in which restrictions on one usually involve restrictions on the other.

Russia AFi



United States AFi



Source graphs: (Freedom to Think 2025, SAR, United States AFi: p. 74. Russia AFi: p. 70)

The American case reveals a striking paradox. As the well-known cradle and central hub of queer theory—not only in academic production but also in cultural and diplomatic domains—the United States has frequently portrayed itself as a global defender and beacon of LGBTQ+ rights. This posture served to assert its civilizational superiority while drawing a deliberate contrast with what it frames as “backward” nations. Yet now, the U.S. continue to perpetuate systemic violence against LGBTQ+ communities, who must

still fight for basic rights and protections in areas such as healthcare and legal recognition. In spite of this, the state selectively foregrounds a broad, often hollow rhetoric of “openness,” which it then promotes as emblematic of a national identity rooted in progress, superiority, and freedom.

This image is deceptive—so much so that we might identify it as a form of homonationalism, a term introduced in 2007 by American gender studies scholar Jasbir Puar. The concept describes how state power instrumentalizes a discourse of “inclusion” toward sexual minorities to advance exclusionary agendas (Puar 2007, pp. 1–36). Concrete U.S. examples reveal the conditional and contradictory nature of homonationalist inclusion: it remains abstract and selective, coexisting with the ongoing oppression of the most vulnerable members of gender and sexual minority communities domestically.

As we demonstrate in this report, the situation might be changing. Today, the reality of Trump’s executive order “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government” is a sign that the situation is markedly different. In addition, we are concerned of the emergence of a unified conservative front following the murder of Charlie Kirk, a movement causing ripples worldwide, also here in Norway.

Russia often serves as the very target of homonationalist critique. Russia’s suppression of academic freedom in gender studies reflects a coherent logic that runs from epistemological foundations to legislative action. Queer and transgender identities are treated not as valid social categories, but as “deviant behavior”—deemed especially dangerous for young people, who are thought susceptible to imitation and moral corruption (Moss 2021).

As we have seen, academic freedom in gender studies has markedly deteriorated in both the United States and Russia. Yet the two nations have cultivated distinctly national expressions of this phenomenon in their cultural forms and projected self-images. Still, there is hope. We believe that with continued advocacy to connect academia and policymakers, we can have a world where we enjoy full academic freedom. As part of our assignment from SAR, we have listed a few recommendations below that seek to counter the ongoing attacks.

3. Recommendations

We want to conclude this report by listing a few recommendations for what we think can be done in the face of the ongoing anti-gender movement both in- and outside of academia. The recommendations have been based on other practices observed in activism surrounding mass arrests and police harassment in the Philippines, in particular among groups involved in recent anti-corruption protests. They were also taken from first-hand accounts of recent migrants from eastern Europe.

- 1) Further tracking of the anti-gender movement's funding should be conducted along with the study of its rhetoric. This information may then be disseminated to non-government organizations and other civil society groups.
- 2) Affected parties could form a collective fund for legal and medical expenses related to attacks on scholars and educational institutions, collected similarly to union dues and possibly through donations should the legal situation allow. Record keeping for this practice is often optional or done on encrypted documents for the sake of transparency.
- 3) Where pro-LGBTQ+ rhetoric brings the most risk, anonymous networks akin to DNF48; an activist network in Norway that was active while homosexual sex was still criminalized, could provide both solidarity and an organizational base for anything from research to more concrete protections.
- 4) When possible, speak openly with peers and loved ones about issues affecting queer rights and academic freedom.
- 5) Where possible, open campaigns showing consequences of anti-gender activism, among other things, should be taken up by activists and non-government organizations.
- 6) If practical, more independent methods of funding research should be looked into, along with possibly conducting research outside of academic institutions.

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