

**FEMEN & Pussy Riot:  
How feminist groups are using media and music to fight patriarchy and traditional gender  
roles in Russia & Ukraine**

FEMEN and Pussy Riot are both known for their world-famous protest stunts. FEMEN holds topless protests against various gender-related issues. Pussy Riot became famous with their “punk prayer” in the Cathedral of Christ the Savior Orthodox Church in Moscow, in which they gave an impromptu concert performance speaking out against Vladimir Putin and the Orthodox Church. These groups are also some of the major voices of feminism throughout Russia and Ukraine, fighting against traditional gender roles, sex tourism, LGBTQ rights, and other related issues. Fighting for similar causes, the groups both use art, music, and media to convey their messages, although they use different methods (Channell, 2014).

Currently, FEMEN’s chapter in Ukraine is closed for fear of their lives, and Pussy Riot has been dealing with multiple trials and court cases following their arrest at the cathedral (Ackerman, 2014; Wikipedia, 2014, Pussy Riot; Википедия, 2014, Pussy Riot). While many of the tactics these women used were controversial, they aimed to stand up for important issues. Behind the arrests, publicity stunts, and protests are causes that challenge many societal norms in Eastern Europe. What media and artistic means does each group use? How effective are these groups? How did the public receive the messages? Exploring feminism in the region, these feminist groups, their purposes, and the way they function in these countries can help us understand their role in the feminist movements in Ukraine and Russia.

**Feminism in Ukraine & Russia**

After the fall of the Soviet Union, women were increasingly left out of the work place and placed back into traditional gender roles of homemaking and childbearing (McNee, 2013). In general, the governments, churches, and even societies have created stigmas about women and rules for how they should conduct themselves in every arena of life. Many women who held

political positions in the Soviet Union lost their jobs; those who remained had very little control or say in the political system. In addition to the shift back to traditional gender roles in everyday life, women in Ukraine and Russia have also become sexualized through the explosion of the sex industry following the end of communism (Shparaga, 2010). Prostitution and sex trafficking both became prevalent due to high unemployment, increased migration out of the region, and a greater presence of organized crime. Women from Eastern Europe are not only sexualized within their own countries but have also gained this reputation globally (Golubeva, 2015). Feminist movements are typically not well received in Russia or Ukraine.

### *Feminism in Russia*

Although Russia has a history of being one of the first countries to allow women to vote (in 1917), the country has not been friendly towards women's rights and feminist movements. Post-soviet feminism in Russia was not immediately labeled as such. Typically, any women's activist groups were focused on improving quality of life for women but were hesitant to call themselves "feminists" because of the stigmas associated with the word. Even as recent as 2014, groups such as Pussy Riot have stated that most feminist women in Russia will not identify themselves as feminists because of the country's such a strong negative reaction to the word (Reuter, 2014). Olga Kryshchanovskaya, a Russian sociologist and activist, said that in Russia, feminism has come to mean 'lesbians who hate men' (Прус-Войчеховска, 2011).

The Russian Orthodox Church has declared feminism "very dangerous" and claimed that it could lead to the destruction of Russia (Elder, 2013). The Church believes women should be focused on the family and the home. Feminism is seen to be a danger to the family structure and to society. Additionally, the low birth rates in Russia have contributed to this view, with many authorities encouraging women to focus on childbearing and motherhood above all else (Elder,

2013). In a recent study conducted in Russia, only 38 percent of respondents supported “abstract egalitarianism” between genders (Bruk, 2014). Another study showed similar results, finding that 78 percent of respondents believed that women belong in the home (Bruk, 2014). Even President Vladimir Putin has expressed similar sentiments of women being “decorations” for men and of the importance of them bearing children and being mothers (Slobodchikova, 2014). These attitudes lead to fewer jobs and lower salaries for women, as well as higher instances of domestic violence and exploitation (Slobodchikova, 2014). The discrimination and disregard for women has pushed many feminist groups to the surface in recent years, sparking both important conversations and large amounts of controversy.

### *Feminism in Ukraine*

Women’s status in Ukraine is not much better than in Russia. In the 1920s, the Ukrainian Women’s Union was one of the biggest feminist groups in Europe (Wieder, 2012). Feminism was discouraged throughout the communist period, seen as a *bourgeois* ideal and contrary to the equality-driven society. Feminist movements started up again after Ukraine’s independence in 1991, in the midst of a societal push towards traditional, mother-centric roles for women (Duszczuk, 2013). Like in Russia, women face issues of discrimination in the workplace and the government, as well as problems like domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Women earn only 70 percent of the salary that men do and only make up about 10 percent of the members of Ukrainian parliament, despite the country having had a woman as a former prime minister (Duszczuk, 2013). Even during former PM Yulia Tymoshenko’s presidential campaign, her opponent Viktor Yanukovich refused to debate her, stating that her place was in the kitchen (Пятницкая, 2010). Domestic violence is also a major, albeit hidden, problem, as is sexual exploitation of women from Ukraine throughout the country and the rest of Europe.

The recent events of Euromaidan were “marked by...diverse women’s participation, through which women challenged traditional gender roles and reclaimed visibility, recognition, and respect as revolutionaries” (Martsenyuk, 2014, pg. 15). Although stories of women who acted heroically made their way to the global media, in Ukraine, the rhetoric praised the men and encouraged women to continue on in traditional roles (Martsenyuk, 2014). Some women even began to take on the stereotypes of Ukrainian women, calling themselves the “muses of the revolution” and holding signs encouraging police to protect them by switching to the side of the people. Some women began to push back on these stereotypes and formed the Women’s Self-Defense Squad, holding a Night of Women’s Solidarity to encourage women to learn to defend themselves (Phillips, 2014). The Women’s Squad fought on the frontlines of the conflict, eventually expanding their purpose into aiding troops and promoting women’s equality. Although gender stereotypes and anti-feminism still prevailed, these women worked to show that they could fight as well as men and play a larger role in the Euromaidan conflict (Martsenyuk, 2014). In both Ukraine and Russia, feminism has a long way to go to reach gender equality and obtain women’s rights.

### **FEMEN Movement**

FEMEN is and was one of many groups promoting women’s equality in Ukraine. Although FEMEN is currently based in Paris, the group originally started in Ukraine in 2008 (Ackerman, 2014). The group is largely known for the topless protests that, since their start, have now taken place in countries all through Europe and even North America. In fact, their group motto states, “Our God is a Woman! Our Mission is Protest! Our Weapons are Bare Breasts! Here FEMEN is Born, and Here Begins Sextremism” (Ackerman, 2014, pg. 9). They were featured in a film, wrote a book about their organization, and are the topic of many news articles.

In Ukraine, the group's most recent protests have dealt with anti-Ukrainian policies of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian government, government corruption, and democratic liberties and freedoms. These goals have changed drastically from past goals of mobilizing women in Ukraine toward social action and building up the women of Ukraine, providing greater opportunities for them. Their website states that they are fighting for women's ownership over their own bodies. They believe that the body has become a "patriarchal exploitation, animated by production of heirs, surplus profits, sexual pleasures and pornographic shows" (FEMEN, 2015). Their site states that they oppose any dictatorial regime that oppresses women, fight for complete separation of church and state, and aim to eliminate prostitution and the sex industry, both voluntary and involuntary. Although FEMEN Ukraine members have fled the country, they still stage protests against Putin and the West's actions in the midst of the Euromaidan conflict.

*FEMEN Goals: From Sex Tourism to Politics to Religion*

In general, much of FEMEN's protest topics have moved away from the original purpose and onto more politically motivated issues. FEMEN started as a feminist, anti-patriarchal movement. They quickly moved to specifically target sexual exploitation of Ukrainian women by men from Ukraine and from tourist men. They also spoke out against sex tourism, domestic violence, and prostitution. FEMEN pointed out and protested against the fact that traditional gender roles have generally stayed the same, regardless of technical policy changes. Although rhetoric and policies seem to show a move towards greater gender equality, general attitudes of society tend to remain male-centric (Ackerman, 2014; Shabanova, 2012). A good example of this is the sex industry in Ukraine. While policies against sex trafficking and prostitution exist in Ukraine, brothels remain indiscreetly open, even housing girls that are far below the legal age. These brothels are visited by Ukrainian men, as well as Western European men, who often come

specifically for the sex industry in the country (Ackerman, 2014). Eventually, FEMEN's anti-sex industry protests broadened to general gender equality, advocating for more sex education and better policies and services for women.

FEMEN's first overtly political protest came during the 2010 presidential election between Yanukovich and Tymoshenko. Although the women were not exactly in support of Tymoshenko, they decided to protest at the Artistic Academy for Children, where Yanukovich would cast his vote. This protest put them on the radar of the government and national law enforcement agencies, who were not happy that FEMEN was getting involved with politics. FEMEN protested against Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers, President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Ukraine, and Putin, as both prime minister and president. These actions gave them more press coverage at their protests but also caused them to receive threats, both verbal and physical, from Ukrainian police and secret service. In fact, the group barely made it out of Belarus alive after a run in with the KGB during a protest (Ackerman, 2014). Even in these political protests, FEMEN still claimed their feminist purpose, saying that they were fighting against regimes and political leaders who are oppressive to women.

Eventually, the group held a protest in Istanbul, specifically protesting the treatment of women in Islam. This led to greater discussions of the treatment of women in religions. The protests aimed at Muslims were not always well received; Muslim women and men did not consider topless European women a symbol and voice against oppression, which became especially clear through the reactions towards FEMEN's "Topless Jihad Day" (Petkova, 2013). FEMEN also went after the Christian church. In a pro-choice protest, the group climbed the bell tower of St. Sofia in Kiev. Standing topless in the tower, they began to ring the bell but were quickly intercepted by the police (TCH, 2012). They have made public statements against the

Orthodox Church and have even protested the Vatican. Although they often talk about the Church's discrimination against and treatment of women, many of these acts have been primarily against the Church and religion in general. The group's websites states that they are atheists.

*Topless Protests: The Body as Protest Art*

According to the organization's autobiographical book, FEMEN members were fully clothed for the first two years of their official operation. The organization was focused in Ukraine, and they put on shows wearing wild, brightly colored clothes. Every summer they made a point to hold an "event" in the Maidan fountain. They wore flower crowns, which are typically part of traditional Ukrainian dress. In many of the shows, the girls dressed in intentionally provocative outfits to represent prostitutes and to solidify the idea that women should not be exploited, especially for sex. After increasingly creative and extreme protesting ideas and stunts, the girls ended up staging a semi-topless protest. With the letters of "Google" painted on the backs, the girls stood topless with their backs facing the crowd. Although the group was not visible from the front, the media reported it as a topless protest. In another protest, one girl wore Scotch tape across her chest. She was also reported as going "topless." Ukrainian Independence Day 2009 was the first actual topless protest. One of the girls, Oksana, chose to go topless, painting the words "Ukraine is Not a Brothel" across her chest and donning a traditional Ukrainian flower crown. In general, this action did not anger much of the public, although the FEMEN members report that they lost about 80 percent of the girls who had joined with them in 2008. Oksana said, "By fighting sex tourism in Ukraine, we'd created an image of ourselves as semi-prostitutes...This gradually led us to the idea of carrying out our actions naked. At that time, we weren't well known, we didn't have much money, and nudity was also an allusion to our poverty" (Ackerman, 2014, pg. 92).

The women found that their topless protests caused more outrage when they were involved with political topics and public events, rather than women's issues, HIV, and other social problems considered minor by society; however, the purpose behind the topless protests was to empower women and to rebel against a patriarchal society. In their book, they write:

When the woman goes out topless to protest, it destroys the very foundation of patriarchy, which is based on the transfer of private property from father to son. It shows that she's freeing herself from the circle drawn by men that limits her sexuality...Bare breasts make them [men] particularly furious; the breasts are the instrument that nourishes the baby. And now this instrument is going round in complete liberty!  
(Ackerman, 2014, pg. 97)

FEMEN uses toplessness as a symbol of freedom, the Ukrainian crown as a symbol of purity/virginity, and the flowers as a symbol of peaceful protests. They often have tattoos or paintings on their bodies—sometimes slogans, flowers, or even flag colors. This tactic of topless protests has become known as “sextremism,” used by both the group and the media. While some believe that sextremism is empowering to women, others believe that it perpetuates stereotypes and even creates new ones. Regardless, FEMEN's topless protests have made their way out of Ukraine and into their member groups across the world.

#### *Using Film: Ukraine is Not a Brothel*

In 2013, an Australian film featured FEMEN as its main subject. The name of the film, *Ukraine is Not a Brothel*, was based on an early campaign from FEMEN (Ackerman, 2014). Director Kitty Green followed the group for a year, while they protested in Ukraine, Belarus, and Turkey. The film is supposed to highlight the actions and protests of the group, but much of the film's critics focused on the presence of Viktor Svyatski as the driving force behind the group's

actions. Many criticized the idea of a feminist group following the orders of a man. This caused the group to lose supporters and to face public criticism and scrutiny. Svyatski supposedly handpicked pretty, blonde girls to gain more attention to the movement. Green was not aware of Svyatski's involvement or influence over the group until she had lived with a few of the members for several months (Macnab, 2013). Svyatski is no longer involved with the group, but this revelation caused continued criticism from the public. Although the original purpose of the film was to document FEMEN's beginnings and causes, the Svyatski scandal overshadowed the director's intent.

### *FEMEN Now*

In its most recent form, FEMEN has become much more than a smalltime feminist protest group. Although they are no longer located in Ukraine, they continue to protest there and to protest the same causes, especially issues regarding Putin, the Church, and the corruption of Russia and Ukraine's government systems and society; however, they seem to have moved away from protesting sex tourism and sexual exploitation, at least as far as Ukraine's situation is concerned. Some claim that this was a commercial move, made to gain greater attention, but some still hold faith that FEMEN is continuing to act primarily out of their desire to further women's rights and create greater gender equality.

### **Pussy Riot Band**

Pussy Riot is a feminist punk rock group that uses their performances and music as protests to Russia's society, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Russian government authorities and policies (Pussy Riot, 2014). From the start of the group in 2011, their protests have always been politically charged (Википедия, 2014, Pussy Riot). While they talk about women's rights in Russia, much of what they do is focused on the global system of patriarchy, Putin's leadership

in Russia, and the lack of division between church and state in Russia especially. The group's history is short, only lasting about a year before their arrests that followed the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior protest in 2012. Since then, Pussy Riot has been primarily dealing with legal matters, including fighting various charges, working with Amnesty International and the European Human Rights Court to go against the Russian government, and facing several arrests and attacks.

The group is known for singing inflammatory lyrics, typically against the Russian government or the Church, and wearing brightly covered balaclavas (ski masks), dresses, and tights. Because of their masks, many involved with the group are unidentified. Nadia Tolokonnikova, Maria Alyokhina, and Ekaterina Samutsevich are the most famous members, as they were the ones arrested and imprisoned for the punk prayer act (Pussy Riot, 2012). Pussy Riot's use of music in politics resonates with similar trends for youth, who often use music and art to express dissatisfaction with policies and to promote social and political change (Titova, 2013). The group also has two books written about them: *Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer for Freedom* and *Words Will Break Cement: The Passion of Pussy Riot*. Additionally, a Russian-British documentary was made, focusing on the "punk prayer" protest in the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior and the imprisonment of the group members. Most recently, two members guest-starred in an episode of the Netflix series *House of Cards*, speaking out against the show's Russian president (Bertrand, 2015).

#### *Pussy Riot Causes: A Wide Range of Civil Rights*

Labeled a feminist punk rock group, Pussy Riot has used its stance against patriarchy to target Putin's policies and the involvement of the Russian Orthodox Church with Russian government, even though these causes are not purely feminist. In general, the issues that they

represent are feminism, anti-authoritarianism, anti-Putinism, LGBT rights, police brutality and power, the separation of church and state, and various other issues related to the Russian government and its policies (Wikipedia, 2014, Pussy Riot; Википедия, 2014, Pussy Riot; Beatty, 2012). In the documentary *Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer*, the group members state that part of their issue with the Orthodox Church is the lack of women leadership and involvement in administration. Their book *Pussy Riot!: A Punk Prayer for Freedom* features several songs/texts speaking out against the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, Medvedev, and Putin (Pussy Riot, 2012). They believe that the best way to draw attention to these issues and their opinions is through unsanctioned protests and events—these upset the authorities and draw more attention from the media than state-sanctioned protests (Rosenburg, 2012).

Although the group stands for several other causes, in the West they are most known for their feminism, even though the idea means something much different in the context of Russian society. Although the group has received support from Lady Gaga, Bjork, Paul McCartney, and other big name artists, many have pointed out that these American and Western European artists tend to overlook Pussy Riot's fight against a culturally, systematically sexist society, including the reigning authorities of both the government and the church (Kan, 2014). The group looks towards other rebel punk groups such as Riot Grrl, Bikini Kill, and Oi!, who were from America and the UK. Their message is not simply about women's rights but about changing an entire culture and society that views women as unequal to men. Even in their documentary, many of the men, especially church leaders, expressed that they thought the girls were possessed or had demons. They adamantly believed that women should be married with children and working in the home (Lerner, 2013). Pussy Riot stated, in an interview with *New York Magazine*, "In such a patriarchal country as Russia, it sort of determines the whole movement is quite different than

the way it is in the United States...There is more of a community of feminists and people who dedicate themselves to feminist issues that stage various events” (Reuter, 2014).

*The Punk Prayer: Mother of God, Chase Putin Away!*

Punk rock has always been an outlet for social criticism and activism, as evidenced by groups that inspired Pussy Riot’s formation such as Riot Grrrl, Bikini Kill, Oi!, and other bands which held similar functions in other countries in previous decades. In Russia, art and music have been ways of calling for social change and working against the government and societal norms (Popkova, 2014). Voina (“War”), an activist performance art group, is an example of this and was a sort of precursor to Pussy Riot. Members Tolokonnikova and Semutsevich were both part of Voina before forming Pussy Riot. This group staged several protests and performances, including vandalizing public property with paintings, performing several obscene and/or controversial public acts and demonstrations, and performing a punk concert in the middle of a courtroom. They held similar views and fought for similar causes as Pussy Riot with less of a feminist lean. In August 2011, Tolokonnikova and Semutsevich broke off from Voina to start their punk rock protest group, Pussy Riot. The Punk Prayer event is similar to many performances and events by groups such as Voina (Channell, 2014).

Following Putin’s reelection as president, five members of Pussy Riot staged a protest inside the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior on February 21, 2012. The women had previously performed this song in Epiphany Cathedral in Yelokhovo but were escorted off stage shortly after they started shouting the words. The song criticized the involvement of the Church with Putin and the Russian government, using expletives to describe the actions of both entities (Rumens, 2012). Although many took this song to be anti-religion, as well as anti-Putin, the members of Pussy Riot explained that the song was meant to show how the Orthodox Patriarch

Kirill 'believes in Putin more than he believes in God' (Tayler, 2012). The song also calls for the Virgin Mary to become a feminist, a reaction to the typically anti-feminist views of the Orthodox Church. Additionally, many of the group members are "believers" and some even claim to be of the Orthodox faith. In the midst of the legal controversy following the protest, one of the members stated, "We fervently prayed to the Virgin, so she gave us all the strength to fight our so unmerciful and cunning lords. And we'll sing songs and pray for those who wish us death and prison. Because Christ teaches us not to desire the death of prisoners and those whom we cannot understand (Uzlaner, 2013, translated)." Their performance in the church also contained "punk-rock" actions, such as punching the air, jumping, and playing air guitar, alongside actions of praying, kneeling, and crossing themselves (Матвеева, 2012).

At the time of their performance in the church, the women were escorted off the pulpit and out of the church. A few weeks later, two of the women, Tolokhonnikova and Alyokhina, were arrested. An arrest of Samutsevich shortly followed (Uzlaner, 2013). They were charged with hooliganism motivated by religious hate and hostility. In the documentary, the girls who were arrested confessed that most of them did not know the heavy consequences and the impact that their actions would have (Lerner, 2013). They were sentenced to prison for up to three years. While some thought that this punishment was not harsh enough, many not only thought it was too harsh but spoke out publicly for the forgiveness and release of the women (BBC, 2013). Because many of these people were Russian nationals and even members of the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill and other church authorities were appalled by this appeal. Both Putin and Medvedev made statements claiming that they wished the women did not have to go through such a harsh punishment for their actions (Telegraph, 2012; Parfitt, 2012). Throughout the trial, the group insisted and maintained that their act, while it may have crossed a line, was intended to

speak out against the actions of the Church and government. They state that it was not fueled by hate of religion but out of frustration and defiance of the state of Russia's society.

*Faceless Feminists: Costumes as Protest Art*

For Pussy Riot, their costumes are both political and artistic; both aspects have an important message and role (Semak, 2013). In their performances and interviews, they always wear colorful balaclavas, or ski masks, and colorful dresses and tights. Many of them also wear military-style boots, also in bright colors, in typical punk-rock fashion. Their look, while serving the practical purpose of hiding their identity, is also very intentional:

First they came up with wearing balaclavas, which would make them anonymous—but not like Russian special forces, who kept their identities hidden behind black knit face masks with slits for the eyes and mouth, but like the opposite of that: their balaclavas would be neon-colored. Then they would need dresses and multicolored stockings, to show that the whole getup was intentional. Bright, exaggerated makeup showed surprisingly well through the slits in the balaclavas. (Green, 2014, pg. 68)

The women wanted people to know that they were not just “stupid” activists screaming about feminist issues. They wanted to make a statement, to show that they were serious about what they were saying and angry about how Russian authorities and leaders were conducting themselves. One of their first videos also included a stunt with a pillow that Tolokonnikova used as a fake pregnant belly, which she ripped open in protest of Putin's comments on the need for women to bear more children and Russia's anti-abortion policies and views (Green, 2014). In addition to hiding their identity, their masks also take the attention off the actual identity of the members and aim to focus the attention on the messages the women are trying convey.

*Pussy Riot Now*

After the release of Tolokonnikova, Alyokhina, and Semutsevich from prison, the group added another cause to their list: fair and better treatment of prisoners. They claim that their experience in prison amounted to torture, including the fact that they were denied seeing their children. Regardless of their experience, they have not let the Punk Prayer events stop them, even planning to stage a protest during the Sochi Olympics, which was thwarted by both members of the International Olympic Committee and the police (Wikipedia, 2014, Pussy Riot). In addition to being beaten by police during various arrests, they were also attacked with green paint by bystanders at a campaign in Nizhniy Novgorod (Rus NewsTV, 2014). Tolokonnikova and Alyokhina were also working with the European Human Rights Court for an unfair trial and imprisonment. While it is unclear whether the case went through, the women were more concerned about setting a precedent against the Russian courts and against the country's treatment of prisoners.

### **Public Opinion of FEMEN and Pussy Riot**

While both of these feminist groups operate in different ways, they often have the same impression on the public, with many of the same supporters and opposition. Although they seem to make the news often, surveys show that many people do not seem to know much, if anything, about them. Of those who do know about the groups, many have negative opinions about them. Although their Russian supporters are few, at least in survey participants, both groups have large support from the international community.

#### *Opinions on FEMEN*

In 2013, the Levada Center surveyed people about whether they had heard about FEMEN (100 people) and then surveyed another group who knew of FEMEN about how they felt about them (101 people). Over half of the people surveyed had not heard of FEMEN until

then. Only two of the people were following their actions and events closely. In the question surveying people about their feelings towards FEMEN, about 70 percent of the group felt “rather negative” or “abhorrence” towards the activists (Левада Центр, 2013). Surveys asking the same questions in 2012 found similar results (Левада Центр, 2012). In other analyses and articles, many have criticized FEMEN’s use of their bare breasts, especially because of their protests against sex tourism and exploitation. Some believe that “lending their bodies to the Russian political opposition's cause...reinforced the notion that women's bodies were the main thing that women were capable of offering in the political marketplace” (Sperling, 2015). People have also pointed out that while FEMEN does speak out for women’s issues, they often use their platform for other issues as well, moving away from their label as a feminist group. Additionally, their actions during the “Topless Jihad” caused a lot of controversy in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, with many having the opinion that it was insensitive to Muslim culture.

### *Opinions on Pussy Riot*

Levada Center surveyed people with similar questions regarding Pussy Riot’s actions and imprisonment. One question asked if participants were for or against the parole of members of the group. Almost half were, at least to an extent, against any parole for the women, while 25% said they did not know how to answer. In a similar question, participants were asked if they thought that Nadya Tolokonnikova should be given the conditional parole that she applied for. While 35 believed that she should be given the conditional parole, 36 respondents said that she should continue to serve the full sentence. Opinions about the issue were mostly split between these two answers. In one survey, 78 percent of participants said they had heard of Pussy Riot’s event in the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior. Another survey asked a similar question of people over the course of several months (March, April, July, September in 2012 and April in 2013).

While not many respondents were closely following the events, the number of people who had heard of the events expectedly increased through the months. They then asked those who had heard of the event who they thought the action was directed against. Participants answered almost equally for each answer: against the Church and believers, against Putin, against the Church's participation in politics, all three answers are true, and difficult to answer. In a survey asking how respondents felt about Pussy Riot, not even 10 percent of them answered favorably. Additionally, over half of participants in another survey believed that Pussy Riot's trial had been fair. In regards to how adequate or excessive Pussy Riot's prison sentencing was, respondents were almost split, although more seemed to believe that it was adequate rather than excessive (Левада Центр, 2013). Several reports have stated that around 70% of Russians condemned the actions of the group at the Cathedral of Christ Our Savior (Интерфакс религия, 2012). Most surveys conducted show that while people understood what Pussy Riot's protest was about, many thought that the act was offensive and condemnable. Regardless of whether they thought the protest was appropriate or not, Russians seem to be divided on what they believe the punishment should have been.

### *Impact and Effectiveness*

While Western European and American opinions tend to be supportive of both FEMEN and Pussy Riot, Ukrainians and Russians are generally not in favor of the groups' actions (Левада Центр, 2013; Shilov, 2014). Pussy Riot has also gained a lot more attention than FEMEN, despite the latter's topless protests; however, Pussy Riot's arrest was a big and extended event that was highly covered by national and global media. Assessing the impact of these groups outside of existing surveys, analyses, and media opinions is almost impossible without any past evaluations. These groups have also only been around since 2008 and 2011—

the future holds potential and hope for them to further women's rights and work to hold the leaders in their countries accountable.

### **Conclusion**

FEMEN and Pussy Riot are groups who are working for civil and political rights in deeply patriarchal societies, where the Church and state conflate and policies are unjust. Facing the prospects of arrest, ridicule, and even beatings, these women continue to advocate about sex tourism, domestic violence, women's roles, the Church's involvement with the government, Putin's leadership, LGBT rights, and other human rights issues. Using their bodies, their outfits, film, books, media support, and music, the groups find creative, provocative, and visually impactful ways of promoting their views and causes. Their presentation is essential to and almost as intentional as their message. While public opinions about the groups are not always favorable, the groups emphasize the importance of speaking out over actually winning immediate support. They believe that by continuing to protest the injustice and speak out against patriarchal societies, they will eventually begin to enact change.

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