

Poland's president says 'LGBT ideology' worse than communism

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Andrzej Duda makes plea to ultra-conservative supporters ahead of June 28 presidential poll

Poland's president Andrzej Duda claimed on Saturday that "LGBT ideology" was "more destructive" than communism, as the central European country heads towards a bitterly contested presidential election.

Speaking at a campaign event in Brzeg, a small town in the south-west of the strongly Catholic country, Mr Duda, who is backed by the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice party, said he agreed with another politician from the ruling camp who said that LGBT "is not people, it's an ideology".

"The generation of my parents did not fight for forty years to kick the communist ideology out of schools . . . in order for us to now accept that another ideology should arrive, that is even more destructive for people," Mr Duda said, describing the LGBT rights movement as "neo-Bolshevism".

"We have our tradition. We have our culture that is based on over 1,050 years of history . . . We won't allow [Poland] to be taken away from us. We won't let any ideology, neither communist, nor socialist, nor any other take it away from us, because this is our identity. And let no one try to lead our children on the wrong path, because we won't allow it."

Mr Duda's comments come two weeks before the first round of what is likely to be a close race between him and the liberal mayor of Warsaw, Rafal Trzaskowski, who has been supportive of LGBT rights and emerged from a field of 10 candidates to become Mr Duda's nearest challenger.

Poland does not legally recognise same-sex partnerships, but in recent years attitudes towards LGBT rights have begun to shift. One poll last year found that 56 per cent of respondents were in favour of civil partnerships, and 41 per cent backed same-sex marriages, both record highs.

However, especially in smaller towns and rural areas, more conservative values still hold sway. And just [as it did](#) before the European and Polish parliamentary elections last year, Law and Justice has sought to use the LGBT rights movement — which it portrays as a product of foreign values inimical to Polish traditions — to rally its conservative base ahead of the June 28 presidential poll.

Earlier this week, Mr Duda signed a declaration in which he pledged to "protect children against LGBT ideology" and ban the "propagation of LGBT ideology in public institutions".

His allies have gone further. Joachim Brudzinski, the Law and Justice MEP who is head of Mr Duda's campaign, tweeted earlier this week that Poland was "most beautiful without LGBT" while another Law and Justice MP, Tomasz Rzymkowski, last week tweeted a cartoon comparing same-sex marriages to a marriage between a man and a goat.

Mr Duda's comments drew criticism from opposition politicians. Robert Biedron, a rival presidential candidate and Poland's first openly gay politician, called on Mr Duda to "finish with this hate". Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk, from the leftwing grouping Lewica, urged the LGBT community to ignore Mr Duda's words. "LGBT are people. What the government is doing is inhuman," she tweeted.

Donald Tusk, Poland's centrist former prime minister, also criticised Mr Duda, tweeting that "The President of the Republic should take care of its reputation. Andrzej Duda is doing everything to ruin it. His campaign is an embarrassment in front of the whole world."

Mr Duda hit back, calling Mr Tusk a "coward" for not running against him, to which Mr Tusk replied that he had been interested in running against Mr Duda's "superior" — a reference to Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the founder of Law and Justice widely regarded as Poland's most powerful politician.

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