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Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe and the Feminist Response

Productive Resistance

Edited by
Rok Smrdelj · Roman Kuhar

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Praise for *Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe and the Feminist Response*

"This book brings a new innovative and democratically important twist to the discussions about anti-gender mobilization. The contributions do not only state the consequences of this culture war that are damaging to democracy, but also show how feminist and LGBT movements actively mobilize against it and thus make an important contribution to saving democracy, indeed to democratizing liberal democracies."

—Professor Dr. Birgit Sauer, *Institute of Political Science, University of Vienna, Universitätsring, Austria*

"This is an important and timely book analyzing the cultural and political battle fields across Europe and the EU premised on eight national case-studies. The book convincingly demonstrates that one of the crucial elements in productive feminist resistance to anti-gender mobilizations across Europe would be to engage knowledge-based activism premised on alliances between scholars and activists."

—Birte Siim, *Professor Emerita, Aalborg University, Denmark*

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Notes on Contributors

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The Rise of Anti-Gender Mobilizations

Roman Kuhar and Rok Smrdelj

In the lead-up to the European elections in June 2024, campaign posters from Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party appeared across Hungary, depicting Orbán's political opponents as humble servants of Brussels. These posters portrayed key opposition figures as butlers, offering voters three "main courses" from Brussels on silver platters: migration, war, and gender. Among these, the "gender" main course stood out, giving it a foreign air as the word "gender"—unlike war and migration—was written in English. This choice highlights Fidesz's campaign's belief that "gender," referring to so-called "gender ideology", has become mainstream enough to effectively communicate the alleged threat posed by the European Union's equality politics. These three perceived threats—migration, war, and gender—were central themes in Fidesz's political battle for the European Parliament and echoed in other radical right-wing parties' rhetoric across Europe.

"Gender ideology" has become one of the crucial tools in the "politics of fear" (Wodak, 2015) propagated by neoconservative anti-gender,

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religious, and radical right-wing political currents. Orbán refers to it as a "progressive virus" which has been produced in well-funded centers of progressive ideology, including a lab in Brussels. In his speech during the second Conservative Political Action Conference in Budapest in 2023, attended by radical right-wing politicians from around the world, he boasted that Hungary had finally developed a "vaccine against the progressive virus." He reassured his radical right-wing audience that they no longer need to search far and wide for the vaccine. "It is here, in Hungary. It is available to everyone. You can take it freely, it just needs a little local adaptation, and it will work anywhere: in hot or cold climates, in the North or in the South. It protects against all variants of the progressive forces and has no side effects. Ask your doctor or pharmacist. All that is needed, before the election, is to write in huge, prominent letters on your flag: 'No migration! No gender! No war!'" (Orbán, 2023).

The political utility of the idea of "gender ideology" is particularly potent because the threat it represents is often unclear. Orbán equates "gender ideology" with communism and Marxism, claiming it artificially divides nations into minorities and sows discord among different groups. He boasts that Hungary has eradicated "gender ideologists," asserting that they "can smell communists from afar," referencing Hungary's fifty years under communist oppression. Similarly, ten years ago, the Polish priest Tadeusz Pieronek warned from the pulpit that "gender ideology" posed a greater danger to Poland than communism and Nazism combined (Graff & Korolczuk, 2017). The French priest and psychoanalyst Tony Anatrella, a key figure in spreading the idea of "gender ideology" across Europe, associated it with cultural Marxism (Anatrella, 2011, 2015). The proponents of the idea argue that the social struggle is no longer between the working class and capital owners but between men and women, with the supposed goal of this cultural revolution being a post-gender society (Strehovec, 2013).

The term "gender ideology," a notion perceived by anti-gender actors as a covert radical feminist and LGBT+ agenda, emerged in the mid-1990s. During this period, the United Nations incorporated sexual and reproductive rights into its human rights framework. The Beijing Platform for Action was adopted that recognized the right to reproductive health, with gender equality being viewed as a crucial component of sustainable development. The Vatican, in collaboration with mostly American and Canadian pro-family groups and member states of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, strongly opposed this development (Case, 2011).

The primary ideological conflict centered on concepts of equality, with two perspectives in opposition: the Vatican's advocacy for the idea of "sex complementarity" versus the broader international support for "gender equality." Sex complementarity posits that men and women are intrinsically linked and complement each other, deserving equal respect but fulfilling different social roles. Western feminist movements raised concerns with this perspective, arguing that under the guise of equal respect, the Vatican was attempting to embed androcentric principles into United Nations documents (Case, 2016, 2019; Paternotte, 2015). Feminism has historically challenged the notion of biology as destiny, opposing the idea that biological differences should dictate social, cultural, or political roles. Thus, feminism has promoted the concept of gender equality, asserting that all individuals are equal politically, culturally, and socially, and therefore deserve equal rights and opportunities.

The introduction of the concept of gender, which was utilized by second-wave feminism as a foundation for universal women's human rights, faced some internal feminist criticism even before becoming a primary target of the religious right. Criticism of the universal principle of gender equality primarily came from feminists from the Global South, who argued that human rights and gender equality reflected a predominantly Western perspective on gender justice. This critique pointed out that non-Western women's voices were once again being silenced, and Western feminism was indirectly operating under the principles of colonial history (Bob, 2012; Graff & Korolczuk, 2024).

Subsequently, the Vatican, along with other religious groups and state delegations at the United Nations, joined these criticisms, although their primary concern was not the fear of "Western colonization" but rather their discomfort with the progressive reforms advocated by the idea of gender equality. Additionally, the cultural wars in the United States during the 1980s established an agenda of "family values," which the American Christian Right successfully globalized over the following decades in their fight against abortion and LGBT+ rights (Buss & Herman, 2003; Graff & Korolczuk, 2024). In recent times, Russia has also actively propagated this agenda, positioning itself as the "last bastion" not yet affected by progressive "gender ideology" (Edenborg, 2021; Moss, 2017; Stoeckl, 2020).

During the World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, feminist groups successfully advocated for the official United Nations documents to replace the term "sex" with "gender." This shift was intended to highlight the cultural patterns and norms that discriminate against women,

rather than biological differences, which are a fact but should not confine half of humanity to roles such as "cooking and raising children." For feminism, these shifts represented a significant victory (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a). To this day gender equality remains the foundation for all equality policies and underpins the European Union's "gender mainstreaming" framework, which involves integrating a gender perspective into all policies and aspects of social life. This framework, however, is not without its criticisms. Many equality policies are implemented in a "top-down" manner, which can make them appear redundant, overwhelming, and misunderstood. Right-wing populists often reinterpret these policies as efforts to grant additional privileges to certain groups. Nevertheless, without continuous attention to the gender aspect, androcentric culture persists, much like a stubborn weed. The contemporary restriction of abortion rights in some European countries and states in the United States exemplifies this ongoing challenge (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

The Vatican perceived the ascendancy of "gender equality" over "sex complementarity" as a diplomatic defeat, staunchly opposing the term "gender" and stressing the importance of biological differences (Case, 2011). At the 1995 United Nations conference, pamphlets were distributed that contrasted a "gender perspective," seen as undermining women's natural roles, with a "women's perspective," which respected motherhood and reproductive potential (O'Leary, 1995). This perspective argued that the "gender agenda" sought to dismantle traditional gender roles and the natural family, claims that have since been used by right-wing and populist actors to oppose gender equality. The anti-gender movement, viewing "gender ideology" as trivializing gender differences and promoting a culture of death (John Paul II, 1995) through abortion, contraception, and euthanasia, positioned itself as a reactionary force against progressive gender policies, leveraging fear and traditional values to counter perceived threats to societal norms (Grzebalska & Soós, 2016).

Although the ideological framework of "gender ideology" had been developed within Vatican intellectual circles by the early 2000s, it took nearly a decade for this ideological construction to gain traction with the general population. The period following the 2008 economic crisis provided fertile ground for fear politics and conspiracy theories, including "gender ideology." This term, also referred to as "gender theory" or "genderism," first gained significant public attention during the mass protests against the French government of François Hollande over same-sex marriage legislation in 2012 and 2013 (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

Organized by the Manif pour tous network, these protests saw over a million people in the streets of Paris and other French cities, with signs declaring "Non à la théorie du genre!" (No to gender theory!) (Fassin, 2020; Stambolis-Ruhstorfer & Tricou, 2017). This was followed by the emergence of new anti-gender campaigns and groups, such as *U ime obitelji* in Croatia (Hodžić & Štulhofer, 2017; Vučković Juroš & Gergorić, 2025), *Aliancia za rodinu* in Slovakia (Valkovičová & Meier, 2022), *Demo für alle* in Germany (Hajek & Dombrowski, 2022), *La Manif Pour Tous Italy* in Italy (Garbagnoli, 2017; Lavizzari, 2020), *Coalitia pentru Familie* in Romania (Norocel & Băluță, 2023), *Frente Nacional Por la Familia* in Mexico (Patiño, 2024), *Za otroke gre* in Slovenia (Kuhar, 2017; Perger & Smrdelj, 2025), and similar. Opposition to gender and feminism, which some authors term "genderphobia" (Takács et al., 2022), has become a strategy in the struggle for a new cultural and political hegemony (Sauer, 2019). This indicates that the Vatican had been preparing for a counterattack after the diplomatic setbacks of the mid-1990s, while many actors in civil society and officials responsible for equality politics remained unaware of the emerging neoconservative "anti-gender" mobilizations and failed to take them seriously when they first emerged.

Anti-gender mobilizations, described by Corrêa (2022; Corrêa et al., 2023) as a mythical hydra with many heads that regenerate when cut off, employ new political strategies that differ significantly from traditional conservative opposition to progressive policies. These groups have co-opted the discourse of human rights, invoking their own rights—primarily freedom of speech and religion—to abolish or reinterpret human rights for other groups. A key strategy involves the central role of the "innocent child," with moral panic ignited by claims that children are threatened by the ideas of "gender ideology." In the anti-gender narrative, children symbolize the future of "our family" and "our nation," intertwining "gender ideology" with nationalist sentiments.

Paternotte (2023) persuasively illustrates the current waves of anti-gender mobilization as no longer under the control of their creator—the Catholic Church—but having, like Frankenstein, gained autonomous lives of their own. Furthermore, global comparative studies suggest that anti-gender mobilizations are rooted in long-standing patriarchal, colonial, and heteronormative ideologies, which are not limited to being exclusively Western imports (Holvikivi et al., 2024).

Emerging Studies on Anti-Gender Mobilizations

The organized mobilization against what is constructed as "gender ideology"—often referred to as anti-gender campaigns or the anti-gender movement—has been extensively studied by social scientists from various disciplines, including political science, sociology, gender studies, linguistics, philosophy, religious studies, and law. This phenomenon has been attracting significant scientific interest for nearly a decade, with scholarly attention continuing to increase. Initial research on anti-gender campaigns focused on individual national episodes of attacks often framed in terms of national exceptionalism. However, subsequent research began to highlight the transnational character of these movements, demonstrating shared patterns of mobilization, a common lexicon and repertoire of actions. Early comparative studies on anti-gender campaigns, such as those by Kováts and Põim (2015) and Kuhar and Paternotte (2017), laid the foundation for understanding this phenomenon. These studies were instrumental in highlighting the socio-political dynamics, the actors involved, the strategies employed, and the discursive frames used by anti-gender actors.

Since then, the number of original scientific articles, chapters, and books on the anti-gender movement has increased significantly in parallel with the global rise of these movements and anti-gender discourses (Ayoub & Stoeckl, 2024; Beck et al., 2024; Holvikivi et al., 2024; Dietze & Roth, 2020; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Möser et al., 2022; Verloo, 2018). A search in the Academic Digital Collection[1] using the keyword "anti-gender" and focusing on peer-reviewed articles revealed that there were sixteen articles on anti-gender mobilizations published in 2014, a year after the groundbreaking anti-gender protests in France organized by Manif pour tous. By 2020, this number had increased tenfold for articles published in a single year. The latest data for 2023 show that there were 293 peer-reviewed articles on the anti-gender movement published that year, with over 1300 scientific peer-reviewed articles published in the last decade.

[1] The Academic Digital Collection is an integrated index of electronic resources that contains hundreds of millions of records for articles, e-journals, e-books, research reports, conference papers, audio and video content, etc. from a wide range of publishers (Elsevier, Wiley, Springer Nature, etc.), aggregators (EBSCO, ProQuest, etc.), and database providers (Web of Science, Scopus, etc.), as well as digital repositories from around the world.

Several new concepts and innovative applications of existing conceptualizations have been developed in the emerging studies on anti-gender mobilizations that can help us better understand the functioning of anti-gender campaigns, their actors, and discourses. One of the earliest and most frequently used concepts is that of "symbolic glue" (Kováts & Põim, 2015; Petö, 2015). It points to the "unifying nature" of anti-gender discourses which can mobilize various ideological and political factions around a common cause. In the context of conservative and right-wing movements, "gender" serves as "symbolic glue" (Kováts & Põim, 2015) by consolidating anti-liberal, anti-communist, anti-feminist, anti-LGBT+, and similar attitudes. The concept indicates that "gender ideology" transcends gender issues, masking broader agendas aimed at fostering significant changes in the political system and value orientations. The concept illustrates how a single term can serve as a focal point, bringing together diverse groups which do not necessarily share all their ideological positions. Bouvart et al. (2019, see also Norocel & Băluță, 2023) refer to these groups as engaging in "retrogressive mobilizations," which are not confined to specific national contexts but operate through a complex, hybrid network of both national and transnational actors.

A frequently cited interpretation of "gender ideology" is that of an "empty signifier," as proposed by Mayer and Sauer (2017). "Gender ideology" functions as an empty signifier, because it lacks a specific, particularistic meaning. Instead, the term is used in a way that enables unification of various disparate concerns and agendas. It plays a crucial role in establishing a "chain of equivalences," linking, for example, anti-abortion, anti-LGBT+, and anti-feminist agendas. This versatility allows "gender ideology" to re-articulate elements of various discourses into a narrative of existential threat, portraying it as challenging to the survival of culture and society. The primary reason why "gender ideology" discourse can encompass diverse themes is its foundation on a robust and systematic structure. This structure ensures coherence and consistency across various topics, allowing proponents to effectively integrate and adapt arguments related to numerous diverse themes (Pajnik et al., 2025).

Another important concept that emerged from studies on anti-gender mobilizations and the broader phenomenon of illiberal states adopting anti-gender ideology is the "polypore state" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). This type of state is characterized as a parasitic governance model where the state functions similarly to a polypore fungus, feeding off and ultimately contributing to the decay of its host while creating a dependent

structure. In this context, illiberal regimes exploit and appropriate elements of democratic institutions and resources to sustain themselves. They dismantle and reframe existing democratic structures, diverting resources from established sectors, like human rights and civil society, to their own base to secure and expand power.

The fact that "gender ideology" connects diverse actors and groups, providing a political platform for collaboration among ideologically different entities, is encapsulated in the concept of "opportunistic synergies" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022), which describes the strategic collaboration between ultraconservative religious actors and right-wing populist parties. This dynamic involves forming political alliances to secure power positions in governmental bodies, academia, and civil society. Right-wing populist parties use anti-gender rhetoric to attract traditionalist voters by portraying themselves as defenders of common people against corrupt elites. Concurrently, ultraconservative groups leverage these alliances to gain access to power, funding, and policymaking platforms, strategically placing their members in key positions within these institutions. Edenborg's (2021) application of the concept of "discourse coalitions" highlights similar opportunities for collaboration among different actors connected by anti-gender rhetoric. Using the example of Russia, Edenborg demonstrates how a common storyline, such as anti-gender discourse, facilitates cooperation and communication across ideologically diverse positions and actors.

Most of the current studies on anti-gender mobilizations have focused on their actors, repertoire of actions, and discursive frames. Three primary types of actors have been identified: new groups of "concerned citizens," who are typically, though not exclusively, the initiators of anti-gender mobilizations within their political and social spheres; existing organizations, such as pro-life groups, which perceive anti-gender mobilization as a novel political opportunity to further their agendas; and populist political parties and radical right-wing parties that have integrated the rhetoric of "gender ideology" into their discourse. Anti-gender actors do not operate in isolation but are supported by a large number of allies, including media outlets, academics, public figures, and religious institutions (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Recent research has also investigated online anti-gender influencers and the manosphere, where anti-gender ideology is intensively propagated (Nicholas & Agius, 2018; Obst, 2017, 2024). Furthermore, studies have explored the connections between anti-vaccine and anti-gender networks (Martinsson & Ericson, 2023) and examined

the role of Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERFs) (Cabral Grinspan et al., 2023). Although TERFs originate in feminist movements and are not entirely synonymous with anti-gender activities, they share certain similarities with anti-gender actors and their rhetoric.

Discursive analyses of anti-gender rhetoric in both national (Popič & Gorjanc, 2022; Żuk & Żuk, 2019) and transnational contexts (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018) reveal significant similarities in rhetorical tropes. These studies highlight the crucial roles of social hierarchy and biological essentialism in anti-gender discourse, as well as the divisive demonization of perceived "enemies" (feminists, LGBT+ movements, political elites) and the appropriation of human rights discourses (Garbagnoli, 2016; Sanders & Jenkins, 2022). These ideas are propagated through skillful use of social media, public rallies, protests, and tools such as referendums, often involving the reversal of victim-perpetrator roles and self-victimization. According to Zaremberg et al. (2021), anti-gender strategies have three main goals: reshaping public discussion on women's rights by stoking moral panic about "the family" and/or "the nation"; diluting commitments and policy frameworks for gender equality; and stripping feminists and university gender studies programs of legitimacy and authority.

Studies on anti-gender campaigns' financial background and transnational connections show that they receive significant support from conservative and religious organizations, with links to the conservative Christian right in the United States and oligarchs in Russia (Datta, 2021; Kalm & Meeuwisse, 2023; Stoeckl, 2020). Studies that have examined supporters of anti-gender movements (Obst, 2024; Rétiová, 2022) reveal that their actions are mostly driven by the fears propagated by the movement or personal negative experiences with gender equality policies, which they perceive to be exaggerated. Conversely, in the political contexts where there has been a "conservative normalization" of progressive feminist and LGBT+ policies (e.g., German support for marriage equality), the spread of the anti-gender movement has been less prominent (Henninger, 2022).

Anti-gender mobilizations are deeply intertwined with the ongoing surge of right-wing populism in Europe and across the globe. These neoconservative attacks and changes are often framed within broader conceptual frameworks such as "post-democracy" (Crouch, 2004; Mair, 2013), "de-democratization" (Lombardo et al., 2021), "democratic backsliding" (Greskovits, 2015; Krizsan & Roggeband, 2018), or "illiberal democracy" (Bogaards & Pető, 2022; Pető, 2021; Zakaria, 2007). According to Krizsan and Roggeband (2018), democratic backsliding contributes to

the reconfiguration of institutional and civic spaces and the dismantling of (gender) policies. Anti-gender mobilizations are viewed as integral components of these processes. However, some authors caution against uncritically conflating anti-gender movements with populism and populist actors or with all opposition to feminist and LGBT+ actions and goals (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). While several parallels do exist between right-wing populism and anti-gender strategies—particularly their focus on "corrupt" elites and the aim to give voice to those perceived as silenced—anti-gender campaigns are not a direct result of the right-wing populist wave. The shift to the right, however, does strengthen these campaigns and it attracts new supporters who share ideological structures with right-wing populist ideology (della Porta, 2020; Perger & Smrdelj, 2025).

Most current research links the success of the anti-gender movement and anti-gender ideology to the negative economic and social consequences of neoliberalism (Bogaards & Pető, 2022; Graff et al., 2019; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Grzebalska et al., 2017; Kováts, 2018; Zacharenko, 2019). The collapse of the welfare state, the commercialization of everyday life, and the rise of individualism in politics have created fertile ground for anti-gender discourse, particularly among those adversely affected by neoliberalism, often depicted as the "silent" or "silenced" majority. Graff and Korolczuk (2022) argue that anti-genderism is structured and legitimized as a conservative response to neoliberal excesses. Some claim we are facing a "dignity revolution," where the underprivileged gain a sense of agency and act out of national pride and collective fantasies about silenced people and corrupt elites (Witoszek, 2019). In Eastern Europe, the mobilization against "gender ideology" is often fueled by anger over the EU's failure to deliver on the promises of equal social and economic conditions. "What was imported instead, often with a patronizing attitude, were lessons on 'correct' attitudes and values" (Zacharenko, 2019). della Porta (2020) situates this phenomenon within the broader framework of backlash politics, characterized by the resurgence of traditional themes associated with the radical right. These themes are symbolically synthesized in slogans advocating for God, family, and fatherland. Additionally, some authors highlight the problem of neoliberal ideology co-opting feminist language and the individualist turn in feminist and LGBT+ activism, which facilitate the spread of anti-gender messages (Kováts, 2018; Kovats, 2022; Kováts & Zacharenko, 2021). Norris and Inglehart (2019) proposed cultural backlash theory to explain the rise of

populist politics and movements like anti-gender mobilizations, though empirical studies have shown limited support for this theory (Schäfer, 2022).

Another factor contributing to the emergence and success of anti-gender campaigns is the response to the so-called crisis of masculinity (Sauer, 2020; Unal, 2021). Some men who perceive themselves as disadvantaged by gender equality policies and feminist achievements view the anti-gender movement as an effort to restore traditional patriarchal roles. Sauer (2020) describes this phenomenon as "masculinist identity politics," characterized by creating an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, anger, and rage directed at the proponents of "gender ideology." This is also closely related to the concept of "equality fatigue" (Kuhar & Antić Gaber, 2022; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017b), which interprets equality as already achieved and perceives feminists and other minorities as seeking special protections and additional rights, rather than equal rights. This perspective aligns with a broader disillusionment with human rights discourses and the promises of democratic transformation in post-socialist societies (Ghodsee, 2014).

Finally, anti-gender mobilizations exploit and simultaneously contribute to the epistemic crisis, characterized by a growing distrust of science, particularly the social sciences. This struggle over the legitimacy of academic work, especially in gender studies, involves anti-gender actors seeking not only political power but also epistemic authority (Korolczuk, 2020). Their main strategy involves producing alternative knowledge and dismissing gender studies as ideological, unscientific, and contrary to the supposedly indisputable findings of the natural sciences, especially biology. Consequently, the anti-gender movement aims to become an alternative field of knowledge production, challenging social constructivist and post-structural research in the social sciences and humanities (Paternotte & Verloo, 2021).

The increasing use of anti-equality discourse and the close intertwining of populist and radical right policies with anti-gender rhetoric have led some to discuss a global conservative backlash and culture wars as a replacement for class struggle (Žižek, 2022). However, others caution that scholars should adopt more rigorous conceptual frameworks and conduct detailed theoretical and empirical research to better understand these phenomena. Contemporary forms of resistance may emerge from diverse and occasionally competing projects, indicating particular and contingent contacts rather than a monolithic coalition of hostile forces (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Furthermore, as della Porta (2020) points out, the current

offensive is not merely a reaction to rapid progressive advances in the context of gender and sexuality but also underscores the ongoing contest between progressive and regressive values. This suggests that effective responses to anti-gender mobilizations could potentially trigger a "backlash against the backlash."

Bridging the Gap: Responses to Anti-Gender Mobilization

Despite the growing body of work on anti-gender mobilizations, which covers many aspects of these neoconservative forms of resistance to equality politics, there remains a persistent gap in studying how feminist and LGBT+ movements[2] respond to these attacks in the current social context. These movements not only face new forms of neoconservative resistance but are also situated in a specific socio-historical context characterized by antagonistic politics (Mouffe, 2013, 2018), post-truth, misinformation, and the crisis of trust in science (Benetka & Schor-Tschudnowskaja, 2023). The political mainstream, both nationally and globally, is shifting increasingly toward the radical right, signaling the erosion of democratic norms. This erosion is marked by distrust in public institutions, an increasingly polarized public discourse that fractures communities, and the favoring of private interests over public ones, leading to rampant commercialization and the depoliticization of citizens (Pajnik, 2023). The rise of populist leaders and the dissemination of false information through digital media exacerbate these trends, further undermining the credibility of scientific and academic communities.

Feminist and LGBT+ movements find themselves contending with multifaceted challenges. On one hand, they face direct opposition from anti-gender actors, who deploy sophisticated misinformation campaigns and exploit societal fears to rally support. On the other hand, they navigate a broader landscape where public engagement is waning and the mechanisms for civic participation and democratic oversight are weakening. Moreover, the infiltration of neoconservative ideologies into

[2] Although the title of this book mentions only the "feminist response," in our analyses we also considered the responses of LGBT+ movements, which, like feminism, are among the primary targets of anti-gender mobilizations. Our research shows that closer cooperation has emerged between feminist and LGBT+ movements precisely because they face a common attack.

mainstream politics has resulted in policy rollbacks that threaten the advancements in gender equality and LGBT+ rights achieved over the past decades. In this climate, it becomes essential for feminist and LGBT+ movements to innovate and adapt, finding new ways to mobilize supporters, educate the public, and advocate for inclusive policies. Building coalitions across different social movements is also crucial to reinforce resilience and amplify impact in an era where collective action is necessary yet increasingly difficult to sustain.

While feminist and LGBT+ groups have been notably affected by the rise of anti-gender campaigns, the latter have also produced broader social and political ramifications. For instance, in Poland, women have been stripped of nearly all reproductive rights. In Croatia, a referendum successfully limited the definition of marriage to a union between a man and a woman, thereby preventing the adoption of marriage equality legislation. In Colombia, the peace agreement between the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the Colombian government was undermined by fears surrounding "gender ideology." The Estrela report, a nonbinding resolution on women's health and reproductive rights in the European Union, was rejected by the European Parliament. This rejection was primarily due to allegations that the report endorsed "gender ideology," a criticism also directed at the Istanbul Convention. Furthermore, the Bulgarian Constitutional Court declared the concept of "gender" unconstitutional, thereby obstructing the adoption of the Istanbul Convention into the Bulgarian legal system. In Hungary, gender studies programs at universities were targeted, leading to their marginalization or loss of accreditation. The effects of anti-gender campaigns are also evident in educational settings, where calls to parents to prevent the spread of "gender ideology" have incited moral panic, resulting in self-censorship among schools and teachers on topics such as sexuality and gender identities. Even in countries where referendums and protests failed—such as the referendums in Romania (2018) and Slovakia (2015)—anti-gender campaigns left lasting consequences. It is crucial to understand that anti-gender actors operate with long-term objectives, aiming to undermine equality policies and establish a less democratic political order. Even if they do not immediately succeed in directly changing laws or terminating specific policies, their efforts seek to instill doubt and erode public support for progressive reforms.

In light of these new challenges facing feminist and LGBT+ movements, several critical questions arise: How are feminist and LGBT+