

Research on and Responses to Contemporary Anti-Gender Movements: Briefing Note to the Equal Rights Coalition Conference, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 8-9 September 2022.

Preface

This briefing note was commissioned by the 2019-2022 civil society co-chairs of the Equal Rights Coalition, to build understanding of anti-gender movements and the urgent need to develop responses and strategies to counter them. It is our sincere hope that Member States, civil society organisations and other participants at the 2022 ERC Conference will with determination and solidarity take up the challenge to defend the human rights and dignity of LGBTI communities that is the focus of anti-gender movements globally.

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1. Background

This report provides a brief overview of the now substantial research on anti-gender movements globally, including their impact on LGBTI rights and feminist organizing over the past decade. It addresses what anti-gender movements are and which actors are involved. It provides an overview of their regional impact, and the ways they overlap with and target different communities and issues. It also briefly considers tactics and wider implications of anti-gender movements, and evidence on how they are funded. The report closes by summarizing emerging thinking concerning responses from LGBTI rights and gender justice actors.

2. Overview

Anti-gender movements have profoundly changed the landscape facing LGBTI rights and gender equality movements internationally particularly over the past ten years. Aligned with coalitions broadly opposed to progressive recognition of human rights standards, and social and economic justice, these movements have often mobilized with scale and speed unanticipated by progressive movements. Anti-gender mobilizations have generated tremendous impact and complex challenges across a great many national contexts.

For broad overviews, please see:

- UN Human Rights Council (2021) [The Law of Inclusion & Practices of Exclusion](#)
- Kuhar and Paternotte eds (2017) [Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe](#)
- Corrêa ed. (2020) [Anti-Gender Politics in Latin America](#) Sexuality Policy Watch

¹ The author also wishes to thank Sonia Corrêa, Mauro Cabral, Andrea Rivas, Leanne MacMillan and Ruth Walshe, who offered valued inputs and feedback on previous drafts.

- Martínez, Duarte, and Rojas (2021) [Manufacturing Moral Panic](#) Global Philanthropy Project and Elevate Children's Group
- Denkovski, Bernarding and Linz (2021) [Power Over Rights](#) Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy
- Datta (2018) [Restoring the Natural Order: The Religious Extremists' Vision to Mobilize European Societies against Human Rights on Sexuality and Reproduction](#) European Parliamentary Forum
- Shameem et al (2021) [Rights at Risk](#) Association for Women's Rights in Development

Across this literature, various scholars and practitioners have emphasized that anti-gender movements represent a historically distinct type and level of challenge to previous forms of backlash, resistance, and countermovement facing LGBTI and feminist movements. Indeed, limitations of these concepts, and attempts to go beyond them, is a feature of the literature. For example, Denkovski, Bernarding and Linz (2021) in [Power Over Rights](#) contend that anti-gender movements should not be understood simply as a reaction to progressive movements, but a long-standing internationally coordinated (but not centralized) set of projects to impose 'alternative norms' concerning rights, inequalities, and the organization of societies.²

As examples also show below (see pp. 5-6) anti-gender movements have been able to:

- Mobilize broad public support against legal and policy reform on priority issues for LGBTI and gender equality. For example, same-sex partnerships, gender and sexuality in education, abortion rights, and trans rights.
- Set political agendas and frame societal developments. For example, concerning whose rights matter and whose, they argue, do not.³
- Forge space for anti-gender actors and objectives within state institutions, policy, law and, in some cases, national human rights institutions.
- Facilitate shifts towards, and elections of, right-wing populist and authoritarian governments.⁴
- When reaching power to systematically translate anti-gender ideology into law and public policy.

Their impact has been felt in contexts where *conservative* actors predominate in anti-gender movements, such as religious groups, traditional and family values coalitions, and authoritarian movements (e.g., Croatia, Poland, Hungary, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Paraguay, Guatemala, Uruguay, and the US). They have also been impactful in contexts where traditional actors may often drive developments, but where, in addition, *radical* streams, such as traditional left-wing actors or trans exclusionary feminists, have become increasingly visible and impactful (e.g., the UK, US, Italy, Spain, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Brazil and Mexico).⁵ Where anti-gender movements have been most impactful, they have not only achieved widespread policy gains, but led to the weakening of conditions and drivers required for progressive change (see Sections 3 and 7).

3. What are anti-gender movements?

Most simply, anti-gender movements are a diverse set of social movements which are linked to efforts to frame the feminist theory of gender, and human rights-based and evidence-based discussions around gender, sexuality, and gender identity as manifestations of a very dangerous ideology. This 'gender ideology'⁶ is said to undermine (variously) traditional values, nations, families, order, common sense, and supposedly 'natural' ideas about sex, the body, and biology. The idea of 'gender ideology' serves to link various causes, such as sexual and reproductive rights, LGBTI rights, and gender equality, which – anti-gender actors contend – are part of a destructive agenda to subvert and transform societies. The idea of 'gender ideology' can be traced back to Vatican theory-building in the 1980s and 1990s. It has been a site for significant international contestation since UN International Conferences in Cairo 1994 and Beijing 1995, when feminist movements, for the first time,

² See also Paternotte, D. (2020) [Backlash: A Misleading Narrative](#).

³ See especially Denkovski, Bernarding and Linz (2021)

⁴ Corrêa ed. (2020)

⁵ Examples are evidenced below. Global Action for Trans* Equality (GATE) helpfully distinguishes between *conservative* and *radical* streams within anti-gender movements. Research suggests that where these two elements combine, it can create particularly dangerous challenges for progressive movements. See in particular: GATE (2022) [Mapping Anti-Gender Movements in the UK](#).

⁶ Essentially the same idea may also appear as 'transgender ideology', 'gender theory', 'gender studies', or 'gender agenda'.

successfully introduced language around gender equality.⁷

Increasingly since the early 2010s, rising authoritarian, right-wing populist, and (other) anti-democratic movements have also played an important driving role in platforming anti-gender movements and arguments, particularly in the Americas and Europe.⁸ In turn, studies have also examined the role of anti-gender mobilizations in engendering broader anti-democratic trends and enabling attacks on liberal democratic and human rights norms and institutions. The following six characteristics of anti-gender movements and politics can be observed, from growing research on cases across countries:

1. Anti-gender movements focus on 'contentious' issues

Anti-gender campaigns capitalize on issues concerning gender, sexuality, and culture, that are the easiest to render contentious in different settings and the most likely to incite fear and anger amongst conservative and mainstream audiences. For instance, outrage around inclusive education materials being provided to children and young people, and apparent concerns for their safety, are a common early feature of campaigns in many national contexts.⁹ These dynamics have been examined by Martínez, Duarte, and Rojas (2021) as '*Manufacturing Moral Panic*' entailing the 'weaponization' of children, and attacks on gender justice and human rights (based on case studies in Ghana, Bulgaria, and Peru). Similar dynamics are in evidence in many other contexts, including Croatia, Poland, and Slovakia;¹⁰ Spain;¹¹ Hungary;¹² Russia; and Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay.¹³

2. They are flexible and context-specific

Anti-gender movements appear differently in different contexts. For example, freedom of speech or expression are common focus areas for movements in Anglophone contexts. Whereas, in much of Latin America, anti-gender campaigns may invoke class-based 'fears' concerning communism identified with the present political left. As such, various scholars and practitioners have commented on how 'gender ideology' offers a set of symbols and a flexible framework through which to contest very diverse issues.¹⁴ As the UN IE SOGI¹⁵ (2021) has commented:¹⁶

'So-called "gender-ideology" [is] a concept that is a symbolic vessel used to evoke a global conspiracy and deemed as a coordinated strategy aimed at destroying the political and social order. However, there is no single narrative of "gender ideology". The concept has a malleable nature, used to push for a variety of restrictive ideas and policies and to oppose different inclusionary human rights approaches.'

3. Anti-gender movements are commonly enmeshed with broader anti-democratic politics

Anti-gender politics tends to combine highly effectively with wider regressive political trends (e.g., right-wing populism, authoritarianism, and white nationalism) which creates mutually reinforcing challenges. These challenges are perhaps most acute where anti-gender and anti-democratic politics are firmly embedded within state institutions. These challenges include shared interests between anti-gender and anti-democratic actors, in:

- a) Promoting 'post-truth politics' through circulating disinformation, discrediting valid historical and social

⁷ See Case (2019)

⁸ Kuhar and Paternotte eds (2017) and Corrêa ed. (2020)

⁹ See, for example, Corrêa and Parker (2020:12-14) and D'Elío and Peralta (2021).

¹⁰ Tektaş and Asuman Özgür (2021)

¹¹ Vaggione (2020)

¹² Vida (2019)

¹³ See Corrêa ed. (2020)

¹⁴ See for example Mayer and Sauer (2017) who describe gender ideology it as an 'empty signifier'. Elsewhere, anti-gender campaigns have been theorized (by David Paternotte) as a 'Frankenstein' and (by Sonia Corrêa) as a 'hydra': a living, evolving, beast with many heads – each of which may appear differently to different people, in different contexts. See: International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies (2022).

¹⁵ United Nations Independent Expert on Protection Against Violence and Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz.

¹⁶ See UN HRC (2021)

scientific knowledge, and stigmatizing critical thinking (especially concerning structural inequalities and norms).

- b) 'Restoring' traditional social and economic hierarchies and 'common sense' thinking concerning the natural order of things (such as societies, sex roles, families, economies, etc.).
- c) Discrediting, seeking to undermine, and seeking exemptions from international human rights institutions and norms.
- d) Pushing progressive civil society groups and issues outside of the 'Overton window' of acceptable public debate, whilst moving the window further towards the right and ultraconservative goals.

As these political projects have become increasingly mainstream, they have been embraced by some perhaps surprising actors, which complicate established thinking around 'left' and 'right', and 'radical' and 'conservative'.

4. They target international human rights norms and institutions

Anti-gender actors inter-link with broader efforts to de-legitimize and disrupt international human rights norms and institutions as they have been established and evolved since the 1940s. A strong symptom of this is efforts by both *conservative* and *radical* streams within anti-gender movements to target the Yogyakarta Principles over the past five years. In a wide range of UN negotiations, States that share anti-gender ideology have consistently requested for the term gender to be substituted by 'sex'. Since 2013, anti-gender religious voices have also systematically attacked resolutions on sexual orientation and gender identity at the Annual Organization of American States Assembly.¹⁷ In 2021, these attacks extended to the concept of intersectionality.¹⁸ Anti-gender (particularly anti-trans) organizing at the 65th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2021 also included 'attacks on human rights language', 'discriminatory language' and 'disruptive tactics in an attempt to co-opt, distort and undermine our rights.'¹⁹ During 2022, efforts to strengthen the language of 'sex-based rights' and/or remove reference to 'gender' have appeared in the positions of international institutions responsible for upholding inclusive human rights standards, including non-discrimination principles. Worryingly, this includes the Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in a July 2022 report on Portugal.²⁰ Multiple studies have noted anti-gender movements promote divisive, hierarchical, exclusionary, and 're-naturalized' legal formulations of rights, and seek to exempt systems, states, and societies from human rights law and norms they disagree with. This serves to undermine post-Vienna conceptions of human rights as indivisible, interdependent, inalienable, universal, and living.²¹

5. Anti-gender movements have increasingly adjusted their appeals to current political conditions

It is increasingly typical for anti-gender movements to blend more traditional appeals associated with right-wing conservative and religious movements, with contemporary and updated appeals to, science, reason, secularism, protection, and rights.²² For example, fundamentalist Christian groups seeking to promote conversion therapy or ban teaching around gender and sexuality in schools, may re-brand their efforts as defense of 'therapeutic choice', 'freedom of religion', or 'parent's rights'. Similarly, conservative groups may increasingly embrace the language and appeals of women's groups, for example, concerning male violence against women but emphasizing a non-feminist or well-behaved feminist (or 'insider') approach to women's rights. Or they may support (often older and reactionary) feminist appeals to 'sex-based rights.' These appeals are convenient for some conservative and right-wing anti-gender actors because they connote inclusion and even radicalism, whilst simultaneously promoting biologically essentialist, fixed, and anti-intersectional approaches to gender and justice. Anti-gender actors also quite often deploy 'freedom of speech' arguments, which misrepresent

¹⁷ Moragas (2020)

¹⁸ Moragas (2022)

¹⁹ Women's Rights Caucus (2021) [UN Commission on the Status of Women Closes with Renewed Commitment to Gender Equality](#) [Press release].

²⁰ Paragraphs 18 and 19 note: '[The Committee] notes with concern, however, the gradual dilution of the concept of "sex" and its replacement for the concept of "gender" across policies and legislation... It also recommends avoiding the broad use of the concept of "gender" when addressing women's rights.' See CEDAW (2022). A second example is the UN World Food Programme's new Gender Policy, which, an official draft indicates, has been through a process whereby less essentialist language concerning gender has been removed, intersectional insight has been redacted, and reference to gender identity struck through throughout the text. See: World Food Programme (2022 and 2022a).

²¹ See especially GATE (2022), Denkovski, Bernarding, and Linz (2021), UN HRC (2021), and Feldman (2022).

²² See especially Denkovski, Bernarding, and Linz (2021)

proponents of gender and LGBTI rights as authoritarian forces (in various contexts linking this to Communism or Marxism). Other trends include the strategic deployment of scientists simply 'defending science accurately'. Troublingly, survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, have also been repeatedly platformed by anti-gender in efforts to justify exclusion of others from rights protections, such as trans communities.

6. Common actors and patterns can still be found across contexts

Whilst there is considerable flexibility, the following observations can still be made concerning actors, albeit with significant country and regional differences:

- **Fundamentalist or socially conservative religious blocks.**
Early mobilizations featured a strong role for ultra-conservative religious actors, particularly institutions, thinkers, and popular movements linked to Catholicism and the Orthodox Church. This block continues to be influential in many settings. Religious and political actors linked to Evangelical Christianity and other Christian denominations have become more important over time, with some national movements also including some (ultra)conservative groups linked to Judaism and Islam.
- **Secular right-wing and/or conservative actors.**
Secular actors, such as right-wing political parties, NGOs, and think tanks have been important partners to religious anti-gender actors. National blocks have included traditional conservative actors and, increasingly, right-wing populist and authoritarian actors, particularly where these actors have been ascendent in national contexts. Neoliberal actors, including foundations, writers, think tanks, research institutes, and streams within political parties, have also provided important drive and impetus to mobilizations in diverse settings. Seemingly popular or 'grass roots' conservative actors, such as groups of 'concerned parents' are also common participants.
- **Right-wing extremism.**
Extreme right-wing groups form a notable part of anti-gender mobilizations in diverse national settings. This may include far right and/or fascism-linked political parties and movements (as in Spain, Poland, or Hungary). It may also include white nationalist, far right, and increasingly 'alt right' and 'alt lite', movements (as in Canada, the UK, and the US). These actors may overlap in places with male supremacist and anti-Semitic movements, and with right-wing populism.
- **Traditionally 'progressive' or 'radical' actors**
This final category has become more important in the past approximately five years. It includes some women's rights actors, such as trans-exclusionary feminist, institutional, or right-wing women's groups (see below). It may also include some traditional left-wing groups, such as traditional revolutionary, labour rights, anti-capitalist, environmental, or anti-system actors. These actors tend to differ from the above three groups in terms of the ultimate changes they seek. However, they do unite with broader anti-gender actors in criticizing and attacking – what they frame as – 'newer', more 'post-material', 'post-modern', or 'identity politics' demands.

In many contexts, these groups have managed to command significant power within certain institutions and sectors where change matters most. Notably, mainstream media, new and sectoral media, and social media have also been highly instrumental in platforming and fueling mobilizations in various settings.

4. International and regional dimensions

Whilst anti-gender mobilizations have been transnational since their inception, international links are also becoming more numerous, diverse, and complex. The digitalization of social movements, alongside their globalization, also shapes the links that are possible across national and regional contexts, and the speed with which ideas, tactics, narratives, and precedents can travel. As the table below shows, anti-gender movements have grown considerably in geographic and thematic reach over the past decade. Case studies on national movements in Europe, increasingly Latin America, and more recently North America, are most prominent in the literature. More research is needed on relationships between anti-gender movements in other regions, and on relationships between these mobilizations and those in the Americas or Europe. Emerging findings do suggest

anti-gender mobilizations in (or resourced by actors in) the global North/West can create complex challenges in contexts where anti-gender objectives are already embedded in state institutions.²³

Key cases have included, in **Europe**:

- The rise of the '*La Manif pour tous*' ('Protest for all') movement in **France** from 2012²⁴ and later spreading to other countries, including Germany (under the banner '*Demo Für Alle*').
- Efforts to secure Constitutional amendments defining marriage as a union between a man and a woman in various countries including **Croatia**²⁵ and **Slovakia**²⁶ from 2012.
- The rise of far-right linked anti-gender politics in **Hungary** and **Poland** by 2015 which has been increasingly reflected in state policies.²⁷
- Campaigns against the Istanbul Convention in **Bulgaria, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Turkey** from 2018, with contestation, from ultraconservative, populist, and (other) anti-feminist groups centering on the language of gender.²⁸
- Anti-gender campaigning in **Spain** and **Italy** involving traditional actors and newer actors, such as trans exclusionary, institutional, and right-wing women's groups.²⁹
- Mobilization of some institutional feminists, within a broader landscape of 'traditionalist, nationalist and right-wing populism', against Gender Recognition Act reform in **Sweden**.³⁰
- Powerful and widely noted anti-gender mobilizations focused on trans rights in the **UK**, resulting in blocks or threats on rights in areas of legal gender recognition, education, healthcare, and civic and political participation.³¹

In **Latin America**:

- Mobilizations from c2013 in **Paraguay** and **Brazil** around gender, LGBTI rights, and education.³²
- The transnational campaign '*Con mis hijos no te metas*' ('Don't mess with my kids') contesting comprehensive sexuality education and wider political reform in **Peru, Colombia, Ecuador**³³ and **Argentina**.³⁴
- The 2017 travel of the anti-gender orange bus invented by the Spanish NGO Hazte Oír-Citizen Go across the US and Latin America (**Mexico, Colombia, Chile**) and the subsequent attack on Judith Butler in **Brazil**.³⁵
- The strong role of anti-gender campaigning, including promotion of disinformation and conspiracy theories around gender and sexuality, in the 2016 **Colombia** Referendum on the Peace Agreement, and the 2018 presidential elections in **Costa Rica** and, especially **Brazil**, when Jair Bolsonaro was elected.³⁶
- Across Latin America anti-gender forces have been involved in recent anti-abortion mobilizations, particularly in **Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico** and **regionally**.³⁷
- These formations have attacked Gender Identity Laws in **Chile** and, most principally, **Uruguay**.³⁸

In **Africa and Asia**:

²³ For example, in Ghana (Martínez, Duarte, and Rojas 2021), Kenya (Kaoma 2016), Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey (Griffon et al 2021), and cross-national campaigns against the Istanbul Convention.

²⁴ On the French case see Harsin (2018).

²⁵ Vučković, Dobrotić and Flego (2020)

²⁶ Kuhar, R. (2017)

²⁷ Peto and Grzebalska (2018)

²⁸ Genç (2021)

²⁹ See Obst (2020) and Bojanic, Abadía, and Moro (2021)

³⁰ Alm and Engebretsen (2020:51)

³¹ GATE (2022)

³² See Human Rights Watch (2022) on the ongoing Brazilian case.

³³ For the three country cases see González Vélez et al (2018)

³⁴ Chain (2021)

³⁵ Sexuality Policy Watch (2018)

³⁶ Corrêa and Kalil (2020)

³⁷ Corrêa ed. (2020)

³⁸ Abracinskas (2020) and Barrientos (2020)

- The direct application of Vatican anti-gender rhetoric in national policy in **Kenya**.³⁹
- Global and national anti-gender organizing to 'manufacture moral panic' around CSE and LGBTQ+ rights in **Ghana** from 2019.⁴⁰
- International anti-gender organizing against progressive CSE in **South Africa**.⁴¹
- The use of anti-gender rhetoric to consolidate state repression in **Tunisia, Egypt, and Turkey**.⁴²
- State-backed anti-gender mobilizations in **Japan**, in which trans exclusionary feminists have been mobilized in support of a 'conservative moral agenda'.⁴³

In North America:

- In **Canada**, coordinated opposition to Bill C-16 (concerning trans rights) from right-wing conservative, populist, and extremist actors, including on 'specious' freedom of expression grounds from 2016.⁴⁴
- Widescale, coordinated anti-trans campaigns – supported by mainstream conservatism, right-wing populism, and white nationalism – across the **United States** from c2016, mobilizing purportedly 'radical' or 'progressive' actors including trans exclusionary feminists.⁴⁵

5. Intersectional dimensions

As many researchers and campaigners have observed, there are clear parallels between anti-gender and broader attacks on related rights, and legal and policy agendas. Three examples are:

• Campaigns against sexual and reproductive rights, especially abortion rights

Anti-gender mobilizations have been key in sustained attacks on abortion rights across Latin America (see above); a region that already offers only highly restricted access to legal and safe abortion. In the UK, the *Bell v. Tavistock* case⁴⁶ featured legal argumentation concerning the age at which young people can consent to healthcare, which could have placed access to abortion at risk.⁴⁷ In the US, for the last 50 years, a broad right-wing and conservative block⁴⁸ have jointly worked to lay groundwork for the repeal of *Roe v. Wade* and the same forces are now propelling anti-gender attacks, especially against trans rights.⁴⁹ It is practically the same coalition responsible for the 238 anti-LGBTI laws tabled across the US in the first quarter of 2022 alone, most of them targeting trans rights.⁵⁰ As IPPF's Director of Advocacy Elizabeth Schlachter has expressed it:⁵¹

'But this is not just about the anti-abortion movement in the US; this is concerted and calculated global effort by anti-women, anti-gender, anti-LGBTQI+ conservative and religious, white supremacist extremists, who are using dark money and undemocratic means to deny people their human right to healthcare, equality, bodily autonomy and ultimately, freedom.'

• Attacks on critical race theory and anti-racist movements

In various contexts, there are clear parallels between attacks on 'gender theory', gender studies, comprehensive sexuality education and queer theory, and attacks on Critical Race Theory (or 'CRT'), and efforts to decolonize curricula. Similar coalitions exist in various settings, behind efforts to remove progressive narratives around trans rights from schools and universities, and efforts to shore up support for white nationalist and traditionalist 'common sense' 'facts' concerning history and culture. As in the case of 'gender ideology' and 'transgender

³⁹ Kaoma (2016)

⁴⁰ Martínez, Duarte, and Rojas (2021)

⁴¹ McEwan (2020)

⁴² Griffon et al (2021)

⁴³ Shimizu (2020)

⁴⁴ Cossman (2018)

⁴⁵ Greenesmith and Lorber (2021) and Michaeli and Fischler (2021:111)

⁴⁶ Concerning young people's access to puberty blockers. The ruling has now been overturned.

⁴⁷ Duffy (2021)

⁴⁸ Including secular and traditional conservatives, neo-conservative forces, ultra-Catholic sectors, and Evangelical fundamentalists.

⁴⁹ Lowe (2022) and Hovhannisyan (2022)

⁵⁰ Lavietes and Ramos (2022)

⁵¹ International Planned Parenthood Federation (2022)

ideology', CRT and structural racism have increasingly been presented by anti-democratic, populist, and white supremacist actors as new, artificial, misleading, and dangerous sets of ideas, from which children, young people, and educational institutions require protection. As with research on anti-gender movements (see also below) a growing range of scholarship has observed such assaults are part of – in the words of one scholar:⁵²

'A coordinated strategy of attacking and delegitimizing democratic institutions for the purpose of retaining economic and political power... The objective of the rightwing assault is to propagate unreality, division, and fear to thwart the outcomes of a liberal democracy – equality, multiculturalism, and intellectualism.'

- **Anti-vaccine and anti-public health measures around COVID-19**

There are also important parallels and intersections between anti-gender movements, and movements against COVID-19 related public health mandates and vaccines. Both sets of mobilizations feature:

- The promotion of distrust and discrediting of experts, scientific knowledge, and international institutions associated with liberal democratic and human rights principles (e.g., relevant UN bodies).
- Portrayals of supporters of liberal measures, designed to uphold rights and access to healthcare, as 'elites', and as oppressive, violent, and intolerant of 'freedom'.
- Conspiracy theories, at times overlapping, involving the global pharmaceutical industry, economic and technological elites, and professional healthcare bodies.

As a 2022 review of anti-gender mobilizations in Latin America during in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic summarizes – across the region:⁵³

'The forces that mobilize [anti-gender politics] have made the pandemic a platform to expand their scope of action. On the one hand, they kept addressing the issues specific to their political agenda. On the other... they metamorphosed into movements rejecting the measures to contain the pandemic, that is, deniers, contemptuous of the science, against vaccines, and supporting ineffective treatments for COVID-19. Another salient and novel characteristic of these mobilizations is the use of the catchword "freedom" ... [which] reveals the robust link between anti-gender agendas and neoliberal ideology.'

6. Impact on trans communities

Anti-gender movements create the most serious challenges for communities who are most excluded, such as trans communities (HRC 2021 and 2021a; GATE 2022 and 2022a). Evidence shows trans and gender diverse communities are already amongst the most left behind in many societies, in areas of violence, discrimination, poverty, work, and access to healthcare, education, and housing.⁵⁴ Pre-existing marginalization also consists in lack of public knowledge on trans issues, widespread stigma, social exclusion and poor solidarity within mainstream social movements, and chronic disinvestment of trans-led civil society groups.⁵⁵

These conditions make trans communities and movements more vulnerable to anti-gender attacks. For example, social exclusion and stigma help foster harmful myths concerning trans and gender diverse people. Poor public information creates conditions in which myths and disinformation can flourish and travel fast. Poor solidarity amongst otherwise allied social movements, means anti-trans voices can be more easily found and co-opted to serve exclusionary goals. Social exclusion and financial gaps facing trans rights groups means communities are less well-positioned to sustain contestation. And, just as trans communities are more exposed as targets, they are also more likely to fall further behind as a result.

From 2020, researchers have begun to document contestation of trans rights as a major strategy of anti-gender

⁵² Conway (2022)

⁵³ Correa ed. (2022)

⁵⁴ Stonewall (2020)

⁵⁵ On funding see Howe et al (2017)

movements in various contexts (see country case examples on pp. 6-7). Whilst research is still emerging, the following trends can be observed:

- Starting in 2016 (and increasingly since 2019) trans communities have become prominent, and in some cases primary, targets of anti-gender movements in various contexts, including: the UK, Spain, the US, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, and in some international policy spaces.⁵⁶
- In each of these contexts, some actors associated with progressive movements, such as trans exclusionary feminists, institutional feminists, and/or left-wing or anti-system actors, have played key roles.
- In such instances, longstanding but fringe divisions within LGBTI and feminist communities and movements may be weaponized, with non-mainstream but exclusionary feminist and 'LGB' groups gaining consistent media and policy platforms, to voice exclusionary views.
- Such groups have grown in number and especially visibility over the past approximately five (and especially three) years, with increased mobilization across borders and in international policy spaces.
- These developments represent special challenges for LGBTI and gender equality campaigners because, whilst they represent fringe positions within LGBTI and feminist movements, they claim to represent mainstream views, and are commonly platformed as such in a range of media and policy spaces.

Various researchers and practitioners have explored pushback on trans rights in diverse contexts as an example of 'wedge politics', whereby trans rights offer a coded, convenient and strategic way to pursue broader anti-gender and anti-democratic goals. At the same time, these attacks also underscore the importance of reducing inequality and improving solidarity within LGBTI and women's movements, and investments to improve the power and sustainability of trans rights organizations.

7. Select tactics and wider effects

A particularly troubling aspect of anti-gender attacks are efforts, where movements are strongest, to attack pre-conditions and drivers for change. For example, to drive change on gender equality and LGBTI rights, strong and sustainable community led CSOs are needed, with relative freedom to act. By launching coordinated attacks on their reputation, financial base, security, and legal status, anti-gender movements undermine this condition. For example, through the misrepresentation of civil society organizations as having 'over-reached', gone 'beyond the law', or as having hidden shadowy or suspect interests (e.g., 'the trans lobby').

Other common conditions for change are being able to develop partnerships for change, pursue evidence-based change, hold sustainable resources, and enjoy fair access to policy-level actors and the media. Again, anti-gender movements target these conditions by, for example:

- a) Singling out activists and groups for targeted harassment and misrepresentation.
- b) Circulating disinformation, myths and conspiracy theories concerning marginalized groups (thereby also reducing the line of sight between the facts, the public sphere, the public, and powerholders).
- c) Directly targeting the funders and key partners of CSOs, leading to sustainability issues.
- d) Seeking to set the policy agenda and terms of debate in state institutions, media, and where possible human rights institutions, in ways that normalize exclusion of CSOs and communities, or are demeaning to engage in.

One worrying upshot of these trends are their wider functions in rallying for the shutdown of civil society spaces. Efforts to limit the financial and legal status of LGBTI and feminist organizations have been widely documented in various States where anti-gender forces are in power, with chilling effects on fundamental freedoms, and the capacity of CSOs to operate freely.⁵⁷ Additionally, even in contexts previously considered broadly positive for LGBTI rights protections, such as the UK, anti-gender movements have launched increasingly loud and

⁵⁶ See examples on pp.5-6, and especially: GATE (2022) and Vincent, Erikainen, and Pearce (2020) on the UK case, and Corrêa ed. (2022) on the role of anti-gender feminism in Colombia, Chile, and Brazil since 2020. For Latin America see also Domínguez, Martínez, González, and Duarte (2022) and globally, Shameem et al (2021).

⁵⁷ See for example data on Hungary, Poland, and Russia in ILGA Europe (2022).

coordinated efforts to limit operations of, or indeed to 'destroy', trans rights focused CSOs.⁵⁸ An increasing range of research has assessed and theorized the role of anti-gender movements in efforts to shrink civil society space, and reduce the possibilities for civic and political participation, and societal solidarity.⁵⁹

8. Resourcing

Good evidence now exists which shows progressive movements are being outspent by hundreds of millions of dollars per year by groups associated with anti-gender movements. A report by Global Philanthropy Project (2020) [Meet the Moment](#) found that:

- During 2008-2017, the aggregate revenue of US-based organizations associated with the anti-gender movement was USD \$6.2 billion.
- During the same period, eleven US organizations associated with the anti-gender movement funneled at least \$1 billion into countries across the globe.
- Of that \$1 billion, \$259 went to Asia, \$248m to South America, \$238 million to Africa, \$70m to Russia, and \$174m to Europe.
- Between 2013-2017, LGBTI movements worldwide received \$1.2 billion, while the anti-gender movement received \$3.7 billion – more than triple the LGBTI funding.

Furthermore, GPP notes these figures are also 'surely an undercount', for various reasons, including that 'US religious institutions are not required to report their funding activities'. Moreover, these figures are focused on US funding. Wider mapping work on Europe is available from Datta's (2021) [Tip of the Iceberg](#) which shows European anti-gender movements not only have their own significant funding sources based in Europe, those funders are primarily funded by European sources. The study collected quantitative data for 26 organizations that have funded anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, finding:

- During 2009-2018, these 26 organizations were funded to a total value of \$707m.
- Of that \$707m, two thirds (66.9%) was traced back to European funding sources, a quarter (26.6%) came from Russian sources, and just over one tenth (11.5%) came from US sources.
- A combination of ultra-wealthy socio-economic elites, together with older clerical and aristocratic networks are particularly important benefactors behind European anti-gender movements.
- Religious actors and movements, individual donations, and States have also consistently supported anti-gender mobilizations.

Existing data provided by these studies still itself represents the tip of the iceberg, because the literature does not yet account for funding towards wider anti-democratic politics and movements. For example, funding provided to foundations, NGOs, think tanks, and campaigns that promote 'freedom of speech' or anti-social justice positions, in ways that significantly support anti-gender positions.

Another evidence gap concerns smaller campaigning groups and individuals, particularly where they are funded via anonymous donations including crowdfunding. One recent report focused just on the UK, showed £1.3m had been raised between mid-2017 and December 2020, to fund 18 legal cases pushing back against trans rights.⁶⁰ However, it is impossible to reliably track from where exactly this funding comes from. These kinds of funding flows are particularly important to track, since an increasing range of influential anti-gender actors are not allied with traditional organizations (such as foundations, NGOs, and political parties). Rather, they tend to act as part of online 'alternative influence networks' as mapped, for example, by Rebecca Lewis for Data and Society in the (2018) report [Alternative Influence](#). Funding of these kinds of actors (which span, for example, YouTube channels, individuals, networks of their followers, blogs, podcasts, authors, Web 2.0 discussion platforms, and wider informal campaign networks) is significant. This type of funding overlaps with new social media economies, including individual donations of varying scales, and diverse private revenue streams.

⁵⁸ See for example UK MP Angela Eagle, cited in Hinsliff (2021). See also GATE (2022).

⁵⁹ See for example Shameem et al (2021) and Brown (2019).

⁶⁰ Savage (2020)

Existing research clearly shows the importance of increasing funds towards progressive causes, including trans rights, LGBTI rights, and gender justice movements. It also suggests the need for investments which are purposeful and strategic. For example, which provide long-term core support for organizations, look to multiply efforts across geographies, and which fund progressive efforts even, and especially, when they fail. For more detail, please see Annex A (which summarizes recommendations for funders from GPP).

9. Responses

As this paper has demonstrated, there is now considerable evidence documenting the character, drivers, impact, tactics, and broader implications of anti-gender movements internationally. Understandably, research to date has largely focused on demonstrating there is a problem and documenting its nature, scope, and effects. Research agendas are now able to turn to deeper and more creative issues concerning, for example, the broader meaning and inter-relationships between movements in different contexts, and perhaps the most important question for practitioners: what is to be done? Whilst there are considerable evidence gaps on what works (or at the very least, what *does not* work) emerging evidence, and dialogue and critique from civil society actors, suggests the following learnings:

1. The importance of strengthened investment

Greater financial investment will be critical in helping to even out the playing field, and assuring LGBTI rights, gender equality, and broader human rights goals are protected. States have a critical role to play in multiplying funds going to civil society groups exposed to anti-gender politics, who are often the best placed to lead change. Research also calls for reflection on the *ways* funding is done. For example, analysis offered by GPP (see Annex A) indicates funders should support organizations for the long haul, provide trust-based core funding, fund movements even and especially when they fail, and build and amplify shared approaches across movements.

2. The importance of working with States and state institutions

Anti-gender movements appear to have been most impactful in national contexts where they have: a) managed to gain power within States; and b) campaigned directly for change within institutions where change matters most, such as Parliaments, political parties, courts, and education, healthcare, and justice institutions. This reaffirms the need to support strong LGBTI and gender justice CSOs at national levels, which have freedom to act, and which prioritize ongoing processes of change, alliance-building, and resistance within state institutions.

3. Recognizing mobilizations early and organizing across sectors and institutions

Anti-gender movements have not been impactful everywhere. Despite largescale campaigns in some contexts, they have not enjoyed significant legal and policy gains. One strategy that appears to be important, is organizing wide-reaching and intersectional positions and strategies of solidarity, aimed at: reaffirming support for marginalized communities; rejecting anti-gender politics; and refusing to let fringe groups speak in the name of the mainstream. Examples include:

- The national statement from leading women's, feminist, SRHR and LGBTI organizations in Canada in support of trans communities the summer of 2021.⁶¹
- The national letter of support from over 100 LGBTI and HIV/AIDS organizations in the UK in 2022, affirming support for trans communities, and the need for a conversion therapy ban that is inclusive of trans and gender diverse communities.⁶²
- The international statement from the Women's Rights Caucus in 2021, which brought 200 organizations together in rejection of anti-gender positions, including trans exclusionary positions.⁶³

⁶¹ Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights (2021)

⁶² LGBT+ Consortium, 'An LGBT+ Sector as One: #BanConversionTherapy'

⁶³ Women's Rights Caucus (WRC) (2021)

- The Brazilian network ‘Teachers Against Ultra-Conservatism in Education’ which works in partnership with anti-racist, feminist and LGBTTI+ organizations and academics.

4. Political parties and policy engagement

Emerging learning also suggests anti-gender movements have been less effective where progressive movements have retained support within key political parties. For example, although strong anti-gender (and particularly anti-trans) mobilizations have appeared within civil society, education, and media settings in New Zealand, Spain, and Canada, positive legal reform for trans rights has also proceeded. These are settings where political parties in government have adopted a broadly more inclusive vision of LGBTI rights and gender equality. In contrast, anti-gender movements have gained space and power in those contexts where progressive and liberal parties did not consider their threats seriously.

5. Support from international and national human rights institutions

Clear and strong positions from international human rights actors, such as the UN SOGI IE, have been important in holding the line against anti-gender movements. It is clearly of paramount importance that international human rights actors (and international actors that espouse human rights-based approaches) speak up clearly against anti-gender attacks – and are held accountable for doing so. Review of cases also shows national human rights institutions have been critical allies in pressing back on anti-gender politics, and also battlegrounds in contexts where anti-gender politics have increasingly entered state institutions. This suggests the importance of working to affirm and support human rights norms and standards at all levels.

6. Development of positive, expansive, and hope-based framing approaches

Anti-gender movements have developed highly effective frameworks, symbols, and networks, that work across diverse social movements and political spaces, and unite diverse causes. This is in spite (and indeed because) of many groups sharing divisive conceptions of rights and justice. Emerging findings from LGBTI civil society groups show widespread interest in investing in more positive, solidarity-based, and hope-based approaches for framing appeals, and desire to move beyond the divisive (often fear and anger-based) messages of anti-gender actors.

7. Change must be intersectional if it is to be sustainable

The current anti-gender assault on LGBTI rights and gender equality shows how easily distinct causes can be negatively linked together by diverse opponents. This also provides an important opportunity, since, in ways that were less feasible before, many people can see direct lines between trans and LGBTI rights and gender justice, and causes such as anti-racism, migrant rights, abortion rights, reproductive justice, health inequalities, climate justice, mental health, care work and activism, anti-authoritarianism, and children and young people’s rights. Anti-gender attacks have also shown how easily some actors within social movements can be co-opted to support attacks on marginalized communities, and to undermine conditions for progressive change. Ultimately, this underscores the importance – and widely shared common interest – in fighting for inclusive and intersectional practice within progressive movements and public policy, which truly leave no one out.

Annex A

Comparing investment strategies: anti-gender and gender justice funders

Source: Martínez, Duarte, and Rojas (2021:102) [Manufacturing Moral Panic](#). GPP and Elevate Children’s Fund.

Aspect	How Gender-Restrictive Organizations tend to Fund	How Gender Justice and Other Progressive Organizations tend to Fund
Timeframe	Long-term (40-50 years)	Short-term projects (1-5 years)

Funding Mechanisms	Block grants, endowments, trust funds	Project-based grants, capacity building, service procurement
Distribution of Funds	Duplication as a worldmaking strategy. Allows for several organizations to be working on the same thing at the same time; reinforces key messages in different contexts and through different media; contributes to long- term development of the gender-restrictive organizational ecosystem	Duplication as wasteful. Organizations must differentiate themselves from others; spreads money thinly, narrowing scope and diminishing impact of work; may promote competition instead of collaboration
Funding Constraints	Few constraints. Freedom to decide how to spend the money; encourages risk-taking and provides rapid response capabilities, flexibility, and adaptability	Project-based, deliverable-driven and impact- evaluation-contingent. Cumbersome reporting procedures to donors; little flexibility, stymies creativity because it has little room for failure
Use of the Funds	Worldmaking strategies. Career development, cohorts of policymakers and analysts, media organizations, funding scholars to conceptualize and frame key issues	Reactive strategies. Expenses and personnel tied to specific projects and service provision programs, narrow set of deliverables
Issues Funded	Interconnected, worldmaking issues. Broad campaigns and slogans (e.g., “gender ideology”) that simultaneously engage with all, or several issues considered key for their gender-restrictive worldview, including women’s, children’s and LGBT rights, as well as anti-democracy efforts and environmental deregulation	Specialized and targeted funding that creates silos and makes cross-issue, cross-sectoral, transnational, and intersectional collaboration difficult

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