

Editorial Note

Strategic Adaptations Across Borders: Mapping Transnational Anti-Gender Movements in Political, Institutional, and Digital Domains

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Abstract

This special issue of Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science explores the complex interplay between the rise of anti-gender movements and feminist resistance strategies across diverse global contexts. Three articles examine how these movements operate transnationally through political institutions, advocacy organizations, and digital technologies. Collectively, they reveal the strategic flexibility of anti-gender actors, who shift between religious and secular narratives, alternate between grassroots mobilization and institutional engagement, and navigate both traditional and digital arenas. Key findings highlight these movements' remarkable adaptability, cross-border coordination, simultaneous multi-level operation, and their tendency to co-opt progressive language while projecting authoritarian tendencies onto feminist initiatives. The editorial underscores the urgent need for feminist scholarship capable of tracking, analyzing, and countering these evolving threats.

Keywords: Anti-gender Movements; Feminist Resistance; Feminist Movements; Gender Politics; Transnational Solidarity; Right-wing Populism

This editorial note marks the second part of *Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science's* special issue on anti-gender movements and feminist resistance strategies. While the first collection of articles focused on mapping the evolution and normalization of anti-gender and anti-feminist discourses, including their presence in digital spaces, political institutions, and interconnection with

nationalist ideologies, it also highlighted the tensions these developments produce within feminist movements and civil society more broadly. From online mobilizations (Laquièze 2025; Church 2025, Fagundes-Ausani 2025), discursive media framings and nationalist narratives (Hanžek 2025; Bobičić and Petrović 2025), and NGO dynamics (Baldrian 2025), to historical continuities in anti-gender politics (Bobičić and Petrović 2025), the first part provided a multi-layered analysis of how gender politics are being reshaped across diverse contexts.

As documented in the first part of this special issue, anti-gender movements have become a powerful unifying force globally, bringing together diverse actors from religious institutions to conservative political parties and digital influencers. Both parts of this special issue collectively examine how these movements operate within what Kováts and Põim (2015) have termed the “symbolic glue” that binds reactionary initiatives across contexts. The first part demonstrated how these movements have evolved significantly, shifting from opposing same-sex marriage to increasingly targeting transgender rights through sophisticated digital strategies and “child protection” narratives, while the second part expands on their transnational adaptability and institutional infiltration.

The second part of this special issue brings together three contributions that explore different but complementary facets of contemporary anti-gender, anti-feminist, and anti-woke mobilizations. Each article focuses on a specific site of contestation: national and international political arenas, transnationally operating organizations, and digital technologies. Taken together, they highlight how such actors engage across borders and domains, adapting their strategies to different political, cultural, and technological contexts.

Transnational Actors, Digital Arenas, and Strategic Adaptation

A key thread running through all three articles is the attention to the transnational dimension of anti-gender and anti-woke mobilizations. Violeta Colmán examines how anti-gender actors engage with international institutions such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States, not only by rejecting their legitimacy but by strategically seeking to influence their functioning from within. Through comparative case studies of Guatemala and Paraguay, Colmán demonstrates how these movements mobilize both religious and secular arguments to frame gender equality as a foreign imposition threatening national sovereignty and traditional values. Through mechanisms such as establishing alternative civil society organizations and lobbying for funding cuts, these actors aim to weaken institutional commitments to gender equality and human rights norms.

Margarita Zervoulakou, Rebekka Kesberg, and Liza Mügge focus on anti-gender organizations operating at a transnational level, specifically CitizenGo and Europe for Family. Their analysis reveals how these actors construct narratives about gender-related issues across borders, coordinating digital campaigns and shaping public discourses. CitizenGo operates primarily at the grassroots level, portraying LGBTQI+ communities and political institutions as threats to children and freedom, while Europe for Family functions more at the institutional level, focusing on issues like surrogacy as exploitative to women and engaging directly with members of the European Parliament. By responding to international developments, such as the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in the United States or Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act, they contribute to the construction and circulation of transnational narratives of threat that resonate across diverse sociopolitical contexts.

Sara Santoriello adds another layer by exploring how anti-woke discourses respond to globally circulating technological innovations, with a specific focus on deepfake technology. Through narrative analysis of statements and media between 2018 and 2024, the research identifies significant inconsistencies in anti-woke commentators' approaches to consent issues. While championing unrestricted speech when deepfakes target women, minorities, or political opponents, these commentators often advocate for regulation when personally affected. These technologies, and the debates surrounding them found on podcasts, livestreams, and user-generated content, transcend national borders and become embedded in wider cultural and ideological struggles.

Strategic Adaptation and Methodological Approaches

These transnational dynamics are underpinned by a shared capacity for strategic adaptation, a defining feature of contemporary anti-gender and anti-woke movements that allows them to recalibrate their language, methods, and alliances across different political and cultural contexts. Colmán introduces the concept of "strategic secularism" to describe how anti-gender actors in Latin America have shifted from explicitly religious framings to more secularized, sovereignty-based discourses. This transformation allows them to broaden their appeal while simultaneously undermining international human rights protections from within.

Zervoulakou, Kesberg, and Mügge observe a similar strategic recalibration. They show that how grassroots actors like CitizenGo deploy emotionally charged language to mobilize public sentiment, while institutional actors such as Europe for Family engage directly with policymakers using more formalized registers. Both actors strategically undermine opponents' credibility and employ emotional appeals, though with different mobilization strategies. Such differentiation in tactics

enhances the anti-gender and anti-feminist movements' adaptability and amplifies their presence across different levels of political engagement.

Santoriello adds yet another dimension to this strategic landscape by focusing on the rhetorical and technological operations of anti-woke discourses. Her analysis reveals how deepfake technology disproportionately impacts minoritized groups while reinforcing existing power hierarchies. It exposes fundamental tensions within anti-woke discourse between freedom of expression and protection from exploitation, highlighting the urgent need for consent-based approaches to synthetic media regulation.

Methodologically, these papers share several approaches. All employ discourse and content analysis to examine how anti-gender actors frame their arguments—whether through tweets, policy documents, legal frameworks, or media engagements. They use comparative methods and case studies to demonstrate patterns across different contexts, while placing contemporary anti-gender movements within historical frameworks to highlight continuities and changes in anti-feminist discourse. Furthermore, each paper examines how anti-gender rhetoric serves to maintain existing power structures while presenting itself as resistance to oppression.

Key Insights on Anti-Gender Politics

From these diverse but complementary analyses, several key insights emerge. Anti-gender movements demonstrate remarkable adaptability, shifting between religious and secular arguments, grassroots and institutional tactics, and traditional and technological battlegrounds as needed to achieve their goals. They frequently co-opt progressive language about freedom, rights, and autonomy to oppose actual progressive policies, as seen in how they frame gender equality as colonialism or invoke free speech to justify harmful deepfakes.

Rather than being isolated national phenomena, anti-gender movements coordinate across borders, sharing tactics, rhetoric, and resources through sophisticated networks. They operate at multiple levels simultaneously—mobilizing grassroots support through emotional appeals while also seeking to infiltrate and transform institutions from within. A particularly troubling pattern emerges in how these movements project their own authoritarian tendencies onto feminist movements, accusing them of the very censorship, intolerance, and social control that anti-gender efforts themselves seek to impose. These insights connect to what the first part identified as a key challenge for feminist movements: maintaining solidarity while acknowledging internal differences, balancing safety with visibility, and developing effective strategies to counter sophisticated anti-gender campaigns.

Overall, the papers in this special issue collectively demonstrate that understanding anti-gender politics requires attention to both their transnational connections and their strategic flexibility. By documenting these movements' operations across different domains—from international institutions to digital platforms, from policy debates to technological innovations—the authors provide crucial insights into how gender equality is being contested in contemporary political landscapes. In doing so, they also highlight the urgent need for feminist research that can track, analyze, and respond to these evolving challenges.

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