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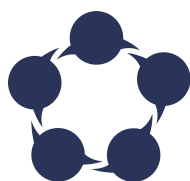
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Editorial Note

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

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the second part of the special issue examining anti-gender movements and feminist resistance strategies. Three articles analyze how these movements operate transnationally across political institutions, advocacy organizations, and digital technologies. Together, they reveal the strategic adaptability of anti-gender actors who shift between religious and secular arguments, grassroots and institutional tactics, and traditional and technological battlegrounds. Key insights reveal these movements' remarkable adaptability, cross-border coordination, simultaneous multi-level operation, and tendency to co-opt progressive language while projecting their own authoritarian tendencies onto feminist movements. The editorial highlights the urgent need for feminist research that can track, analyze, and respond to these evolving challenges.

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 (Laquière 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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Transnational Tactics and National Pushback: The Two-Level Strategy of Anti-Gender Movements in Latin America

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Abstract

This paper examines the strategic two-level approach employed by anti-gender movements in Latin America to counter progressive legislation and human rights frameworks. At the national level, these movements target gender equality initiatives through discursive attacks on the so-called “gender ideology,” while at the international level, they work to undermine the very human rights bodies that guarantee these protections. Through comparative case studies of Guatemala and Paraguay, the research analyzes how these movements mobilize religious and secular arguments to frame gender equality as a foreign imposition, threatening national sovereignty and traditional values. The paper demonstrates how these movements have evolved from religious opposition to strategic secularism, allowing them to broaden their appeal beyond reproductive rights to oppose diverse gender equality initiatives. The findings reveal coordinated transnational networks that simultaneously dismantle progressive policies domestically while strategically infiltrating international organizations to weaken human rights protections from within.

Keywords: Anti-gender Activism; Conservative Backlash; Gender Equality; Gender Ideology; Human Rights; Inter-American System of Human Rights; Latin America; Public Policy; Transnational Social Movements

Introduction

Over the past decade, Latin America¹ has witnessed the emergence of politically influential movements that mobilize support through emotional appeals. These movements—referred to by scholars as “anti-gender” or “anti-rights” groups—attack what they label “gender ideology” to

¹ This paper refers to Latin America as the set of countries on the American continent where languages derived from Latin (Spanish, Portuguese, and French) are spoken, as opposed to English-speaking America. Historically, Latin America was defined in opposition to Anglo-America, not simply as a matter of the principal language of government but as a consequence of competing imperial ambitions. Throughout time, Latin America has consolidated as a political-cultural continent (Ardao 2019) with shared struggles and social victories.

discredit social science research on gender-based inequality (CIM 2017). Formed by religious and secular groups, these movements work as political actors seeking to roll back policy and legal advances related to human rights, feminism, and social justice across the American continent.

Campaigns by these movements promote fear about any Latin American government initiatives supporting gender equality. Their agenda opposes openly progressive legislation, including same-sex marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, transgender rights, comprehensive sex education in schools, sexual and reproductive rights, and abortion access. Importantly, their impact expands beyond these issues to other policy areas, such as national security—evidenced by their opposition to Colombia’s 2017 peace accords—and democratic governance—shown in their attacks on a gender parity bill in Paraguay in 2018.

This paper shows anti-rights groups use a two-level strategy to repeal progressive legislation and policies throughout Latin America. The first level is discrediting rights guaranteed and advanced primarily by ratified international human rights treaties. These groups argue that progressive legal frameworks are impositions from foreign powers and, therefore, represent a modern type of colonialism. Following this logic, their mission is not only to defend patriarchal values—the so-called “traditional values,” rooted in religious interpretations of “family”—but also to protect national sovereignty (Motta et al. 2018).

At the second level, these groups seek to undermine the international bodies that created the human rights treaties they oppose. This weakening is accomplished by registering their own civil society organizations or placing representatives to lobby in the same institutions they reject, like the United Nations (UN) or the Organization of American States (OAS) (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). By adopting this strategy, they transform their rhetoric from explicitly religious arguments to more secular language designed to block human rights resolutions. This transition allows them to navigate the political landscape more effectively while advancing their agenda.

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research design to examine the strategies and impacts of anti-gender movements in Latin America. The methodology is structured into three main components: a historical overview, exploratory case studies, and desk research on transnational dynamics. Following Robert K. Yin (2018), these research strategies were selected based on the needs of the three different sections: the first section—historical analysis—establishes the context of the main discussion; the second section presents case studies, which serve as the optimal strategy to examine a contemporary

set of events happening at a national level; and the third section employs desk research, to demonstrate evidence of anti-gender strategies used in international human rights organizations.

The research starts with an overview of recent historical events to establish the background surrounding the emergence and evolution of what anti-gender movements now label as “gender ideology.” This involves tracing its roots from religious discourse and its posterior transition to secular frameworks, focusing on both pro and anti-gender ideological shifts since the 1990s. While this topic is extensively discussed in existing literature, this section provides essential context for understanding the subsequent case studies and analyses.

The focus then shifts to two case studies: Guatemala and Paraguay. Despite significant differences in population composition, dominant religions, and historical contexts, these countries were selected because they consistently promote domestic and international anti-gender policies. The case studies utilize various secondary sources, including bills and approved laws, policy papers, governmental documents such as national policy programs, media coverage, and scholarly works, to evaluate how these countries limit or roll back gender-related policies. Particular attention is given to their rejection of incorporating gender perspectives into education and governmental programs.

These case studies focus exclusively on national policymaking. However, part of the rationale for selecting Guatemala and Paraguay is that their similar strategies to resist gender equality do not stop at the national level but are also expressed through foreign policy in international forums. One example is their consistent use of footnotes to challenge progressive language in international human rights resolutions.²

Finally, the paper conducts desk research for an impact analysis at the level of the inter-American system of human rights. This section looks into transnational relations between anti-gender actors, exploring how these movements lobby and influence decision-making inside international human rights bodies. This final section uses a literature review of academic papers, official documents from international organizations, and institutional reports to identify and analyze the strategies employed by anti-gender movements at the regional level. By examining domestic and regional dimensions, this methodology provides a robust framework for understanding how anti-gender movements operate across multiple levels.

² Both states have similar stances in international forums. Guatemala and Paraguay show a pattern of adding footnotes to resolutions that resist the adoption of progressive gender and human rights language, emphasizing their adherence to national laws and rejecting terms like “gender,” “intersectionality,” and “reproductive rights” as undefined or non-consensual. This action seeks to limit the scope and impact of international agreements on gender equality and feminist policies within their domestic legal frameworks. An example can be found in the footnotes of the Declaration of Panama from the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM 2022, 2).

From Religious Opposition to Strategic Secularism: The Evolution of Anti-Gender Movements in Latin America

The 1990s marked significant milestones for gender equality. Globally, the UN's 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo saw 179 countries adopt a program recognizing reproductive rights as fundamental human rights (UNFPA 2014). The 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women resulted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, advocating shared power between women and men in all spheres as key to achieving gender equality (UN 1995). In Latin America, advocacy efforts at OAS succeeded in approving the Belém do Pará Convention in 1994, the first international treaty addressing violence against women as a human rights violation rather than a domestic matter (Poole 2013).

These advances caused important opposition, with the Catholic church emerging as one of the key opponents. The Vatican viewed the UN's institutionalization of gender mainstreaming as a threat to its traditional theology and doctrine. Ahead of the 1994 Cairo Conference, the Holy See condemned the event's focus, accusing it of promoting abortion and homosexuality (Cowell 1994). Joseph Ratzinger, who later became Pope Benedict XVI, introduced the term "gender ideology" for the first time in *Salt of the Earth* (1997) and expanded on it in subsequent writings (2004). He argued that gender equality had turned into an ideology, undermining traditional family structures and promoting a view of sexuality that contradicted Christian teachings.

Meanwhile, Latin American feminists and broader human rights movements emerged as influential forces in the public sphere in the early 2000s, achieving significant advancements in sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTQ+ issues. These developments coincided with a wave of elected left-wing governments across Latin America (Tabbush and Caminotti 2020). However, as these leftist governments were replaced by right-wing candidates in the mid-2010s, the anti-gender backlash began to gain momentum.

This political shift created the perfect environment for anti-gender movements to flourish. In the 2010s, conservative movements, initially prominent in Europe, spread to Latin America and made the fight against the so-called "gender ideology" their primary goal. The anti-gender discourse, no longer confined to the institution of the Catholic Church, intersected with other political projects and a more extensive set of actors. During this period, this discourse transitioned from the religious sphere to a nonreligious one. Religious activists learned to blend religious and secular arguments, impacting political interventions more effectively. While Christian and Catholic values remained a fundamental

pillar for the public to bond with these movements, their public articulation was increasingly built on secular justifications. The literature describes this blend as “strategic secularism” (Vaggione 2005).

An example of this secularization was the transnational movement *Con mis hijos no te metas* (CMHNTM), which emerged in Peru in 2016 to protest the inclusion of gender perspectives in the national educational plan. The movement’s key message, translated to English as “Do not mess with my children,” resonates emotionally with many parents (Carpio Obando 2023). The power of this message lies in its simplicity and ability to trigger moral panic—after all, how come caring parents could neglect “obscure forces” trying to harm their children and even inflict sexual violence on them? This movement and its methods for massive in-person and online mobilizations rapidly spread to other countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Paraguay (Ipas 2023).

According to Quequejana (2021), the CMHNTM movement has established significant links with other conservative and anti-gender movements through its alliances with local “pro-life” and “pro-family” organizations across various Latin American countries. These connections are not incidental but are part of a deliberate strategy to bolster the movement’s visibility and political influence. For instance, in Ecuador and Mexico, national “pro-life” marches led by the National Front for the Family and other religious groups prominently featured the CMHNTM slogan and colors (López Pacheco 2021). Such partnerships enhance the impact of anti-gender activism by uniting diverse groups under a common banner, fostering a transnational network. Additionally, the movement receives support from conservative organizations from Europe, such as CitizenGo and HazteOír, which provide funding and strategic assistance (Martínez 2021; Righetti et al. 2025). This cross-border cooperation facilitates the adaptation of effective tactics and the creation of local replicas, ensuring a wider and more coordinated impact.

Anti-gender movements in Latin America also have strong ties with conservative and evangelical groups from the United States, such as Capitol Ministries, forming a coordinated front against gender and LGBTQ+ rights (Acuña 2019; Segnini and Cordero 2019). These alliances are built on shared ideological commitments to traditional family values and opposition to what these groups term “gender ideology.” US evangelical groups have exported the “know-hows”—their strategies and resources, including financial support and advocacy training—to Latin American counterparts, helping to amplify their influence (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). Such transnational advocacy networks influence national, regional, and international political dynamics, shape public discussions,

and position policy agendas across borders, leveraging religious and secular arguments to resist progressive gender policies (Righetti et al. 2025).

In sum, carrying out conservative agendas under the banner of children's rights and the protection of traditional families from "gender ideology" offers a plasticity that unites religious and non-religious actors against feminist and LGBTQ+ movements. Moreover, it serves to justify discrimination and gender-based violence. It is also a tool to legitimize the opposition to progressive laws and public policies, targeting the efforts to promote women's autonomy for decision-making in every aspect of life, intersectionality, and sexual orientation and gender identity-related protections.

Theoretical Frameworks for Understanding Anti-Gender Movements: Belonging, Backlash, and Transnational Resistance

The recent conservative wave in Latin America has reframed gender-related human rights issues as threats to traditional values and religious doctrines, positioning them within the broader narrative of "gender ideology" as a cultural and moral danger (Biroli and Caminotti 2020). This discourse labels gender equality initiatives and policies as foreign impositions, undermining national sovereignty and societal values (Biroli 2020). To examine this phenomenon, this section analyzes the two-level strategy employed by anti-gender movements: attacking progressive policies at the national level while simultaneously undermining international human rights institutions that protect or expand these rights. Understanding the sociopolitical and cultural factors driving this resistance is crucial to contextualizing the broader conservative backlash against gender equality.

The available literature highlights the interplay of nationalist identity, fear of societal change, and the framing of gender norms as threats to cultural integrity and state sovereignty. This paper draws on two key theoretical frameworks to analyze these dynamics. First, Nira Yuval-Davis's concept of the politics of belonging (2006) explains how inclusion and exclusion are socially constructed through narratives of identity and nationhood. Second, Susan Faludi's backlash theory (1991) interprets opposition to gender equality as a reactionary response to feminist advancements. More recent analyses by Zarembek, Tabbush, and Friedman (2021) further apply backlash theory to Latin America, showing how anti-gender movements mobilize against progressive norms as part of a broader reaction to social change.

These frameworks offer distinct yet complementary insights into how resistance to gender equality is structured and sustained. As Yuval-Davis (2006) explains, the politics of belonging focuses

on defining who belongs within a national or cultural identity. In anti-gender mobilizations, this framework helps explain how traditional gender roles are framed as essential to national identity, while progressive gender norms are depicted as foreign threats. The following section will examine how this occurs in Guatemala and Paraguay, where gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights are framed as external impositions undermining societal values. Internationally, this rhetoric aligns with broader nationalist discourses, allowing transnational movements to position their resistance as a defense against Western cultural imperialism (Korolczuk and Graff 2018; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Kuteleva 2024).

While the politics of belonging emphasizes identity and cultural narratives, backlash theory highlights the reactionary nature of anti-gender movements. These movements often emerge in response to perceived threats to traditional structures, particularly in periods of rapid social change. For instance, backlash movements frequently employ securitization strategies, portraying gender equality initiatives as existential dangers to national stability and family values (Zaremborg, Tabbush, and Friedman 2021). This is particularly evident in Latin America, where international organizations such as the UN are accused of imposing “gender ideology” on sovereign nations (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023).

Despite their differences, both frameworks converge in recognizing how anti-gender movements instrumentalize discourses of “protection” and “sovereignty” to mobilize support. At the national level, these movements use cultural nationalism to consolidate power and resist progressive norms. Internationally, they exploit transnational networks and media to propagate anti-gender rhetoric and build alliances, as seen in campaigns against comprehensive sexual education and reproductive rights across Latin America and Eastern Europe (Kováts and Pető 2017). By applying both the politics of belonging and backlash theory, this analysis sheds light on the mechanisms that sustain anti-gender mobilization and the broader ideological strategies used to resist gender equality.

Gender Backlash and Policy Reversals: Comparative Analysis of Guatemala and Paraguay

The countries in the Americas are experiencing a reversal of legal principles that were once taken for granted, fueled by disinformation campaigns linking anything related to the term “gender” to threats against society. Transnational anti-gender movements affect nations with diverse economic sizes, whether predominantly Catholic or Evangelical, spanning from the Southern to the Northern regions of the continent. Beyond being just a trend, the boogeyman of “gender ideology” has become part of everyday political life, dictating decisions taken in the legislative, judicial, and executive spheres.

This section examines two Latin American countries that are not only geographically distant from each other but also differ in several aspects, such as population composition, dominant religion, and historical context. Although Paraguay is four times larger than Guatemala in terms of landmass, the latter has nearly three times the population. Guatemala's religious landscape is nearly evenly split between Evangelical Christianity (44%) and Catholicism (42%) (Statista 2024a) with a large Indigenous population (44%) according to the 2018 census (IWIGIA 2024), while Paraguay is predominantly Catholic (80%) with minimal Evangelical presence (Statista 2024b) and a much smaller Indigenous population (2%), as reported in the 2022 census (INE 2024).

Despite these demographic differences, both Guatemala and Paraguay have pursued parallel paths to strengthen legal frameworks protecting women's human rights and combating gender-based violence over the past three decades. Their legislative evolution follows similar trajectories, beginning with adopting international conventions before developing increasingly specialized domestic legislation. While this paper does not explore the underlying causes of these progressive advances, it is worth noting that this pattern reflects a broader regional trend across Latin America (see Colmán 2022 for a comprehensive analysis of successful feminist movements in the region). Table 1 illustrates the chronological development of women's rights legislation in both countries.

Table 1. Comparative Evolution of Women's Rights Legislation in Guatemala and Paraguay (1982-2016)

	Guatemala		Paraguay	
<i>Thematic Area</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Law</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Law</i>
International Treaty Implementation	1982	CEDAW Convention, approved by Decree-Law 49-82	1986	CEDAW Convention, approved by Law 1215/86
Regional Treaty Implementation	1994	Belém do Pará Convention, approved by Decree 69-94	1995	Belém do Pará Convention, approved by Law 605/95
Domestic Violence	1996	Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Domestic Violence (Decree 97-96)	2000	Law Against Domestic Violence (Law 1600/00)
Women's Promotion and Development	1999	Law for the Dignification and Integral Promotion of Women (Decree 7-99)	2015	Law Public Policies for Rural Women (Law 5446/15)
Gender-Based Violence	2008	Law against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence Against Women (Decree 22-2008)	2016	Comprehensive Protection of Women against All Forms of Violence (Law 5777/16)
Sexual Violence and Human Trafficking	2009	Law against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking of Persons (Decree 9-2009)	2012	Comprehensive Law against Human Trafficking (Law 4788/12)
Missing Women	2016	Law for the Immediate Search for Missing Women (Decree Number 9-2016)	-	-

Source: Author

Evangelical Influence and Legislative Rollbacks in Guatemala

Anti-gender movements have notably impacted Guatemalan public policy through their influence on legislation and public opinion. These movements often draw on religious and conservative values, emphasizing preserving traditional family structures. In recent years, anti-gender movements in Guatemala have actively proposed legislative measures that aim to influence public policy by challenging gender and sexual diversity rights. Further analysis indicates that these movements utilize fear-based strategies, portraying gender equality initiatives as threats to traditional values and societal stability (Vaggione 2022).

In 2015, the evangelical theologian Jimmy Morales ran for office on a platform opposing abortion and same-sex marriage, promising to uphold these values as part of his governmental agenda (Páramo Bernal 2020). With over 67% of the votes, he became President of Guatemala for the term 2016-2020. Morales publicly supported the controversial Law for the Protection of Life and Family (also known as Initiative 5272), introduced in Congress in 2017 (Barrueto 2018). This bill proposed severe penalties, including imprisonment for involuntary abortions, stricter punishments for other abortion cases, a ban on same-sex marriage, and the prohibition of sexual education (Congreso de Guatemala 2017). Although it came close to approval on March 8, 2022, with the vote of 152 of the 160 deputies, then-President Alejandro Giammattei refrained from ratifying it.

In 2020, President Giammattei announced the elimination of the Secretariat for Women (Secretaría Presidencial de la Mujer - Seprem), to be replaced with a Presidential Commission on Women. He claimed that Seprem's creation in 2000 was unconstitutional because it was established by executive order rather than legislative approval. This change left Seprem without leadership for four months, resulting in the loss of forty jobs and the exclusion of gender-related issues from key COVID-19 response meetings (Quintela 2020a).

This move generated significant criticism from women's organizations, demanding that the government either preserve or strengthen the Seprem instead of replacing it with a commission with fewer functions and lower status, arguing that this would weaken support for women's rights (UN OHCHR 2020). Legal experts also disputed the government's claim of unconstitutionality, stating that the executive had the authority to create such agencies through agreements. While the government justified its decision as a matter of legality, it faced criticism for potentially undermining women's rights and diminishing the effectiveness of gender policy implementation (Quintela 2020b).

Another example is the Law to Guarantee the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents against Gender Identity Disorders (also known as Initiative 5940), led by a group of

twenty-one Congress members in 2021. The bill, which has not passed, aimed to impose restrictions on gender identity and sexual orientation education in schools and would also require media outlets to identify programs with transgender content—which the bill equates to pornography—as content that is “not recommended” for those under eighteen years of age. The proposal faced criticism from LGBTQ+ advocacy groups and international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch, but has not been archived yet (HRW 2022).

Along the same line, the government recently approved the Public Policy for Safeguarding Life and Strengthening Family Structures for 2021-2032 (Gobierno de Guatemala 2021). Spearheaded by Gianmattei, this initiative garnered support from governmental figures, representatives of religious groups, academic institutions, and international collaborators. It focuses on protecting life from conception and across all life stages—this protection is mentioned twenty-three times throughout the document. Although education is not the primary focus of this initiative, the Ministry of Education is the leading authority responsible for implementing this policy (López Molina 2023). Given that this initiative encompasses all life stages from conception through elderly adulthood, the assignment of “family protection” to the Ministry of Education represents an unusual policy decision.

The initiative claims Guatemala’s legal framework for women’s rights as part of its foundation and supporting its strategic objectives, despite completely omitting the term “gender” throughout the document.³ This reflects a broader regional trend of separating gender equality from policies and laws intended to promote it. By grounding this policy in women’s rights legislation while shifting focus to family rights, it ultimately fails to address the root causes of gender inequality.

Catholic Conservatism and the “Gender Ideology” Pushback in Paraguay

In Paraguay, opposition to gender-related policies gained momentum during Fernando Lugo’s presidency (2008-2012), when “pro-family” groups and conservative actors heavily criticized a comprehensive sexual education framework. The National Council of Education and Culture opposed the proposed Comprehensive Sexuality Education framework, citing violations of fundamental rights such as freedom of teaching and the irreplaceable responsibility of the family in education. Amplified by religious groups, this opposition led to the framework’s suspension (Tabbush and Caminotti 2020).

³ The Public Policy for the Protection of Life and Institutionality of the Family is based on, among other laws, the Law for the Dignity and Comprehensive Promotion of Women (Decree 7-99), the Law against Femicide and Other Forms of Violence against Women (Decree 22-2008), and the Law against Sexual Violence, Exploitation, and Trafficking in Persons (Number 09-2009).

In 2017, under the President Horacio Cartes's administration, Paraguay banned materials related to gender theory in schools. Education Minister Enrique Riera announced the elimination of all gender-related educational content (Ministerio de Educación 2017). This responded to pressure from conservative and religious groups who opposed what they called "gender ideology," viewing it as a threat to traditional family values and national identity. Human rights organizations and educational advocates strongly criticized the prohibition, arguing it restricted comprehensive sexual education and reinforced discrimination against the LGBTQ+ community (IACHR, 2017).

By 2018, under President Mario Abdo Benítez, the discourse against "gender ideology" expanded to oppose a gender parity law in political participation. This marked a significant shift, as previously, political participation and electoral equality for women had not faced religious or moral opposition (Tabbush and Caminotti 2020). Opponents linked gender parity with cultural colonialism and threats to what they consider "traditional family." Influential public figures like former Archbishop Edmundo Valenzuela actively campaigned against the law, connecting it to broader issues like same-sex marriage and abortion rights (ABC Color 2018). This expansion of conservative activism beyond reproductive issues created new challenges to feminist movements, complicating reform efforts and intensifying the obstacles to advancing gender equality policies.

More recently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed its officials to avoid using certain gender-related terminologies unless explicitly instructed otherwise. This directive, issued via circular on November 1, 2022, targeted vice ministers, general directors, department heads, and diplomatic and consular representatives. The circular identified terms like "women and girls in all their diversity," "intersectionality," "sexual and reproductive rights," and "full autonomy" as lacking universally accepted definitions and recommended alternatives. For terms such as "gender identity" and "sexual orientation," the circular suggested that official communications should specify that Paraguay interprets "gender" to refer strictly to male and female sexes, aligning with national documentation (Última Hora 2022). The Coordinating Body of Paraguayan Women (Coordinación de Mujeres del Paraguay, CMP) criticized the directive, arguing it reflects a lack of understanding of international law and jeopardizes Paraguay's international image (CMP, 2022).

Impacts on public policy at an international level: Attempts to weaken the Inter-American System of Human Rights

To understand the obstacles and opposition to implementing foreign policies that support gender equality, it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of underlying structures and hierarchical,

patriarchal ideas that have traditionally been embedded into state identities, diplomacy, and international order (Aggestam and True 2020). Although norms supporting gender equality have advanced in several international fora, individual state foreign policies, and their international relations, there is also an opposing trend of global politics becoming more antagonistic, showing strong opposition and backlash of gender-advancing norms (Ayoub and Chetaille 2017; Mouffe 2005; UN WGDAGW, 2018).

Similarly, David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar (2018) note there is scholarly consensus on the idea of a global backlash against gender equality and sexual rights, with powerful actors joining forces to oppose women's and LGBTQ+ rights—though they present a more nuanced perspective. At a global level, the UN has warned that in the last decade, there has been a decline in establishing gender-sensitive processes (UN SG 2017). This is also true in the case of OAS and the Inter-American system of human rights, which is part of the OAS. In this section, the research focuses on two clear strategies from conservative movements: funding cuts to undermine gender equality initiatives and strategic infiltration to undermine human rights institutions from within.

Funding Cuts to Undermine Regional Gender Equality Initiatives

The 2017 reinstatement and expansion of the Mexico City Policy in the US, also known as the “global gag rule,” illustrates the opposition to pro-gender norms. It prohibits the use of US foreign aid funds to non-governmental healthcare organizations that discuss abortion, support abortion rights, or perform abortions—even if such organizations use non-US funds (Tanyag 2017). The “gag rule” expands and compounds current anti-abortion regulations with the 1973 Helms Amendment, which prevents the US from giving foreign aid for the “performance of abortion as a method of family planning.” This policy is further strengthened by the 1981 Siljander Amendment, which prohibits US funding from being used to lobby either for or against abortion, and the 1985 Kemp-Kasten Amendment, which restricts financing for any entity that the president determines related to abortion or involuntary sterilization (Ahmed 2020).

On December 21, 2018, US Senator James Lankford and eight other Republican senators urged Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to stop US funding to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) (Lankford 2018).⁴ They argued that these organizations violated the Siljander Amendment by advocating for abortion

⁴ The US senators who signed the letter to the State Department were James Lankford, Thom Tillis, Michael B. Enzi, Michael S. Lee, James M. Inhofe, John Kennedy, Roy Blunt, Ted Cruz, and Joni K. Ernst.

access in Latin American countries such as Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador. The group of senators claimed that these activities not only contravened US law but also infringed upon the sovereignty of “pro-life” nations in the region (Castaldi 2019). They requested the State Department to implement new guidelines to ensure compliance with the Siljander Amendment and suspend US contributions until IACHR and CIM ceased their reproductive rights advocacy. Notably, the word “abortion” does not appear in any CIM publications, resolutions, or public statements from its Executive Secretaries since its founding in 1928.

In March 2019, the US Department of State, under Donald Trump’s administration, announced significant funding cuts to CIM and the IACHR. These cuts primarily stemmed from the administration’s opposition to IACHR’s positions on reproductive rights and other social issues, aligning with the earlier request from Republican senators (Morello 2019). These funding cuts represented a strategic effort by the US to pressure IACHR into aligning with conservative viewpoints, undermining both the Commission’s autonomy and its capacity to effectively protect human rights throughout the Americas.

Similarly, by cutting financial support, the US targeted CIM’s capacity to advocate for women’s rights, particularly regarding gender-based violence and women’s political participation. This action formed part of a broader pattern of the US administration’s withdrawal from international human rights commitments and oversight mechanisms. Critics argued these cuts threatened progress in human rights and gender equality across the Americas, as both IACHR and CIM serve crucial roles in monitoring, advocacy, and expert guidance on these issues (IJRC 2019).

Strategic Infiltration to Undermine Human Rights Institutions from Within

The involvement of anti-gender movements in human rights bodies raises concerns about their ability to uphold the foundational principles of international human rights frameworks. By strategically positioning candidates or representatives in influential roles, these movements aim to shift priorities of international organizations toward conservative ideologies that challenge gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, potentially affecting the credibility and integrity of these institutions. Once inside, activists can roll back protections for marginalized communities by influencing policies and decisions. This strategy threatens principles like non-discrimination, equality, and bodily autonomy. Consequently, anti-gender activists can erode hard-won rights, hinder inclusive policies, and embolden similar movements globally, undermining human rights advancements worldwide.

During the right-wing administration of former Colombian president Iván Duque (2018-2022), the government endorsed lawyer Margarita Rey Anaya, a figure closely associated with anti-

gender movements in Colombia and across Latin America. In 2019, she was one of the six candidates for Executive Secretary of CIM, with the support of OAS Member States Colombia and the US—then under Trump’s presidency. She also received letters of support from anti-LGBTQ+ and religious civil society organizations, such as the Association of Ex-Gay, Lesbians, and Transexuals, the National Network of Lawyers for the Defense of the Family, and the Center for Restoration and Care of the Family (*Fundación Vínculo*) (CIM 2019). Although not elected to lead CIM, Colombia still appointed her to the Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention⁵ in May 2020 (MESECVI 2020).

In 2019, the conservative government of Guatemala presented lawyer Edgar Ralón’s candidacy for IACHR. Ralón, who won the election and became a commissioner at IACHR in 2020 and later reelected in 2023, had been criticized for his dissenting votes on critical cases, including those involving transgender rights, as well as the landmark Beatriz vs. El Salvador case, which addresses the impact of total abortion bans. His reelection in 2023 happened amidst concerns from civil society organizations and a negative opinion from the Independent Panel to Evaluate Candidacies to IACHR Bodies (Panel SIDH). In particular, Panel SIDH raised concerns about Ralón’s understanding of IACHR’s role, suggesting his approach could absolve states of responsibility for human rights violations stemming from judicial decisions in 2019 and 2023.

The candidacy of an anti-gender activist like Ralón to the IACHR was not an isolated episode. In 2023, the Panel SIDH issued its Sixth Report evaluating six nominees presented by OAS Member States for the 2024-2027 term at the IACHR. Among these candidates, Edgar Ralón was again deemed unsuitable for the position, as was Pier Pigozzi from Ecuador—who, unlike Ralón, did not secure appointment. The panel explicitly warned that appointing Ralón and Pigozzi would constitute a significant regression in the protection of hard-won rights, particularly regarding Indigenous peoples, the LGBTQ+ community, sexual and reproductive rights, marriage equality, and freedom of expression. The panel found Pigozzi’s positions especially concerning, noting they represented a retreat from established international human rights standards, particularly on marriage equality and same-sex adoption rights (Panel SIDH, 2023). Human rights advocates have expressed growing alarm that continued state efforts to promote conservative candidates could shift the IACHR toward more restrictive interpretations of rights, potentially diminishing the diversity of perspectives and

⁵ The Committee of Experts (CEVI) is the technical body of the MESECVI and is responsible for analyzing and evaluating the implementation of the Convention. It is formed by independent experts appointed by each of the states’ parties, who serve the MESECVI in a personal capacity. The MESECVI is the regional mechanism to follow up on the implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention for the eradication of violence against women.

compromising the Commission's historical role in advancing human rights protections throughout the Americas.

Conclusions

The cases analyzed through this paper shed light on the two-level strategy employed by anti-gender movements in Latin America: dismantling progressive laws and policies at the national level while undermining international human rights bodies. This innovative perspective demonstrates how these movements simultaneously engage in domestic and international arenas, creating a coordinated resistance to gender equality and human rights. At the national level, Guatemala and Paraguay reveal how anti-gender actors target gender-inclusive education, reproductive rights, and other progressive initiatives. These actions are coupled with efforts from anti-gender actors at the international level, where they cut resources for human rights bodies and infiltrate these institutions by nominating representatives who align with their conservative ideologies.

The historical analysis highlights the unified language and tactics of anti-gender movements across the Latin American region. By exploiting the narrative of “gender ideology,” these movements position progressive norms as foreign impositions that threaten cultural and national identities. The concept of “strategic secularization” explains how religious movements adapt their discourse to secular terms, broadening their appeal and influence in both political and public spheres. This phenomenon is evident across Latin America but is particularly visible in Guatemala and Paraguay, where the analysis of these two case studies demonstrates how anti-gender movements operationalize their strategies in real-life contexts. These movements capitalize on nationalist and cultural narratives to oppose international frameworks and advance their agenda domestically.

Theoretical frameworks such as the politics of belonging and backlash theory provide essential tools for understanding these dynamics. The politics of belonging explains how anti-gender actors create an “us versus them” narrative, framing progressive gender norms as existential threats to societal cohesion. Backlash theory highlights how these movements emerge in response to rapid social changes, leveraging fear and uncertainty to galvanize support. Guatemala and Paraguay offer concrete examples of how these frameworks manifest, demonstrating the coordinated efforts of anti-gender movements to reshape laws and policies while undermining international human rights institutions.

At the international level, anti-gender movements employ strategies that extend beyond resistance to proactive disruption. They use funding cuts to weaken organizations such as IACHR and CIM, while simultaneously embedding their representatives in these bodies to influence their agendas.

This dual approach ensures that progressive norms face challenges not only from external resistance but also from within the very institutions designed to protect and promote them.

This paper opens the door for further exploration into the evolving tactics of anti-gender movements. Future studies could examine the role of digital media and transnational networks in amplifying their reach and effectiveness. Additionally, investigating the responses of feminist and human rights organizations to these challenges could offer valuable insights into counter-strategies. Comparative analyses across different regions could also shed light on the global dimensions of these movements, highlighting similarities and divergences in their methods.

In conclusion, this paper underscores the need for coordinated responses to the multifaceted strategies of anti-gender movements. By understanding their tactics and narratives, policymakers, activists, and scholars can develop more effective measures to safeguard human rights and gender equality in Latin America and beyond. The findings serve as a foundation for deeper inquiry and action, emphasizing the importance of resilience and collaboration in the face of coordinated resistance.

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Whose Reality? Consent Boundaries and Free Speech Arguments in the Politics of Generative AI

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Abstract

Generative AI enables creation of increasingly realistic deepfakes that challenge content authenticity assessment. This research examines how anti-woke opinion leaders frame deepfake technology within broader cultural discourse. Through narrative analysis of statements and media between 2018 and 2024, we identify significant inconsistencies in these figures' approaches to consent and bodily autonomy. While championing unrestricted speech when deepfakes target women, minorities, or political opponents, these commentators often advocate for regulation when personally affected. This selective application of principles reveals how deepfake technology disproportionately impacts minoritized groups while reinforcing existing power hierarchies. The research exposes fundamental tensions within anti-woke discourse between freedom of expression and protection from exploitation. Ultimately, deepfakes serve as a lens through which to understand broader ideological inconsistencies around technological governance, highlighting the urgent need for consent-based approaches to synthetic media regulation.

Keywords: Generative AI; Deepfakes; Digital Consent; Feminist Technology Ethics; Anti-Woke Discourse; Platform Governance

The Evolution of Alt-Right Digital Culture and Anti-Woke Rhetoric

The online alt-right wave was described by Angela Nagle (2017, 16) as an army of “Internet pedants,” “white segregationists,” and “nationalist movements and subcultures,” a generation of gamers, anime lovers, “nerdish harassers,” “anti-feminist pranksters,” meme-makers, and Reddit or 4Chan users familiar with dark humor and transgression. She places the rise of these profiles in connection with two political events: Barack Obama’s election in 2008 and Hillary Clinton’s campaign in 2016. The first online liberal rush led to the mockery of *normies*, a colloquial slang used to refer to mainstream culture adherents, with the aim to deconstruct social norms and prompt identity politics; afterwards, a new movement fueled by the pro-Trump wing began to spread content such as memes, mockery and celebrations “for the lulz” (Lolli 2020). Some of them are called *incels* (short for “involuntary celibates”), a specific online subculture of individuals, predominantly men, who are either

socially isolated or connected with the *nerd community*, (related to both specialized technical knowledge and undesirable social behavior), but over time, this subculture has become associated with a more extremist and sometimes misogynistic attitude that recognizes in political correctness and rainbow Tumblr users its enemies.

In the mid-2010s, the terms “woke” and “anti-woke” emerged in contemporary discourse, particularly within social, cultural, and political contexts. The term “woke” was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2017 and depicts individuals who are alert to inequality and diverse forms of discrimination. Being woke generally implies a heightened awareness of injustices and a commitment to addressing them, promoting progressive and inclusive policies with cultural and social change. By 2020, the term became a sarcastic pejorative among many on the political right-wing and some liberals in Western countries¹. Those who identify as anti-woke argue against cancel culture, censorship and the suppression of free speech due to the mainstreaming of what they consider an overly ideological ostracism of dissenting opinions and often highlight concerns about individual liberties.

In *The Anthropology of Digital Practices* (2024), John Postill described the anti-woke movement in the preface as “a loose network of public figures opposing the rise of critical social justice, aka ‘wokeism’.” The English-speaking anti-woke movement complains about the presence of a liberal consensus in academia, media and the corporate world, whereas the Intellectual Dark Web (IDW) orbit is kept out of the dominant political correctness. They offer alternative narratives for a new online audience less hostile than institutional and mainstream media and are divided into different memetic “tribes” (Postill 2024, 27). While the anti-woke movement shares similarities with alt-right subcultures, their approaches differ: anti-woke opinion leaders challenge cultural hegemony through academic channels and media platforms (using Spotify podcasts and YouTube livestreams to broadcast their unfiltered arguments to wide audiences), while ordinary users participate by sharing irreverent discussions and user-generated content (UGC) anonymously through memes. These White able cisgender manly creators (Wagner and Blewer 2019) enjoy an environment built for darkest thoughts, such as weird pornography, gory images, racism, and misogyny in the form of funny memes (Nagle 2017, 14; Paris 2021, 11). The user/used dichotomy is guaranteed by the tradition of masculine subjects in the role of “surveyor”, while feminine/femme subjects are the “surveyed” (Wagner and Blewer 2019, 35).

¹ For instance, French Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer mentioned “U.S.-imported wokeism”: “The Republic is completely contrary to wokeism. [...] In the United States, this ideology provoked a reaction and led to the rise of Donald Trump” (Caulcutt 2021).

In the history of online culture wars, alt-right followers have consistently defended absolute Internet freedom, while organizing group harassment campaigns to silence opponents. One early example involved the blogger Kathy, who faced violent responses and disturbing photoshopped images after supporting comment moderation. Similarly, feminist critic Anita Sarkeesian was depicted in pornographic images being assaulted by video game characters after she criticized misogyny in the gaming industry. The pattern of choosing subjects that match identified “enemies” suggests these images function as a form of punishment.

Based on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, D’Ignazio and Klein propose a feminist critical analysis of AI (in Browne et al 2023, 196-197). Control over the means of persuasion grants the ability to shape decision-making processes, influencing both the selection and presentation of communicative objects, whose key elements are credibility, emotional appeal and logical reasoning. Aristotle emphasizes that persuasion is not merely about presenting facts but about shaping perceptions. Since the representation of reality is detached from truth, it impacts every facet of design, from conceptualization to promotion. The disclosure of large-scale generative models has lowered the cost of digital production, making it affordable to grassroots users, and improved skills outside the professional sphere. Generative AI (GenAI)² can become a tool for defining what is deemed acceptable and identifying whose reputation might be harmed—for instance, through lost job opportunities, employment termination, or child custody revocation (Paris 2021, 4). Its functioning is rooted in the semantic gap between cognitive perception (to see) and the emotive response (to be seen) elicited (Wagner and Blewer 2019, 35).

A study by Goldstein et al (2023, 63) argues that large language models (LLMs) could change the way influence operations are conducted, but GenAI deepfakes have the potential to erode public trust. This phenomenon, known as “Liar’s Dividend,” is notably relevant to both individual and national security: it leverages the public’s awareness by alleging that a real piece of evidence is a forgery (Sayler and Harris 2022).

Gosse and Burkell (2020, 6-7) argue that the abundance of available content on social media creates optimal conditions for the creation of GenAI with a lack of verification of what has been shared and the potential to quickly go viral online. The problem cannot be justified or explained as a

² GenAI refers to a category of artificial intelligence systems designed to generate new outputs, whether it be text, images, videos, or other forms of data and create content not explicitly programmed or provided as input. There are various types of GenAI, such as Variational autoencoders (VAEs), Diffusion models, Language models, Normalizing Flow models, Hybrid models, Transformer models, like OpenAI’s GPTs, and Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), like NVIDIA’s StyleGAN (Bandi, Adapa and Kuchi 2023).

technological glitch, nor as a “victim-blaming” discourse; however, it continues to promote false beliefs. Press coverage entirely misses who is making deepfakes and the reason behind this transgression (Gosse and Burkell 2020, 12). Women, Black, LGBTQIA+ people and minoritized groups are at higher risk for attacks, since technologies based on data collection and classification reify *status quo* and social structures (Paris 2021, 4; Wagner and Blewer 2019). At the heart of the discussion lies a significant omission in the debate: consent. As will be shown, consent is a key concept in understanding that if a digital policy strips the term of its political value, it ultimately renders it meaningless. It is worth exploring whether and how public figures advocating for free speech have justified or condemned specific cases of pornographic deepfakes without prior consent of the affected parties, aiming to damage the reputation of those depicted. Consent should not merely be owned by identity politics but should be recognized as a democratic cornerstone.

This article contributes to this ongoing discussion of the ethical implications of generative AI deepfakes and their intersection with consent in online discourse, particularly in the context of anti-woke rhetoric. Through narrative analysis, it analyzes how anti-woke opinion leaders frame and respond to deepfake technology when deployed against political opponents versus when they themselves become targets. By investigating various tensions around generative AI content, the article reveals the inconsistencies in anti-woke discourse around technological freedom, bodily autonomy, and the disproportionate impact of deepfakes on women, Black people, and LGBTQIA+ individuals in public roles.

Technical Foundations and Social Implications of Generative AI

Bandi, Adapa and Kuchi (2023) have distinguished different Web eras from 1990 (Web 1.0) to 2002 (Web 2.0) and consider 2022 as the beginning of Web 3.0. In this new era, user interaction changed from static websites to dynamic websites with enhanced interactivity. At the same time, professional-generated content, mainly produced by developers and content creators, has been substituted by user-generated content through blogs and social media platforms. These new content ecosystems feature automated, normalized, and personalized experiences that present an appearance of authenticity while “circumventing any potential for consent and agency” (Wagner and Blewer 2019). Digital objects have turned into context-aware AI-generated content supported by different kinds of smart devices. Realistic products produced by GenAI are based on patterns and structures learned from the training data, so that key aspects for users are performance indicators like high quality,

accuracy, efficiency, and responsiveness. However, they raise ethical concerns, particularly when it comes to the representation of realistic-fake content.

A “deepfake” refers to a type of synthetic media, typically photographs, video, or audio, that have been created or altered using deep learning techniques. The label emerged from a Reddit user called *@deepfakes*, who published several videos in which the faces of famous actresses were swapped onto porn videos in 2017 (Meskys et al 2019, 3-4). Two main technologies power deepfakes: Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), which pair content-creating (generator) and content-evaluating (discriminator) neural networks in adversarial training, and Autoencoders (AEs), which compress images into data vectors (encoder/decoder) before reconstructing them with altered features (Meskys et al 2019).

The rise of notable Visual Content Generation applications like DALL-E and Midjourney, along with the diffusion-based models GLIDE and Google’s Imagen, have made it common to find text-to-image/image-to-image samples from a prompt without any reliable source and attributed author. Text-to-video and video-to-video approaches are used to replace the likeness of a person in an existing video with someone else’s face, often making it seem like that person is saying or doing things they never did. For example, Dreamix works on a Video Diffusion model, taking natural language descriptions and videos as inputs, Gan.ai and HeyGen on GAN. Deepfake technology has raised concerns due to its potential for misuse, such as spreading misinformation and manipulating content for malicious purposes. As a result, there are ongoing efforts to develop detection tools and mitigate their black box impact with transparent explanations (labels) alongside the outputs (Bandi, Adapa and Kuchi 2023, 49-50).

The “democratization of GenAI” means that anyone, regardless of their technological awareness, can create homemade deepfakes. Machine learning applications are “creative learning technologies” (Paris 2021, 7) encouraging sharing and play activities, cutting costs and without guaranteeing responsible behavior. Old hierarchical models have been replaced by user-generated content and through the irony-laden Internet subcultures, we experience prompted content with a specific anti-woke perspective. Amateurs can “pornify” (Paris 2021) anyone’s image and share it on encrypted platforms by way of abuse because social media and face swapping app rely on a barely granted soft consent, according to terms and conditions.

Pornography is a controversial dimension, not only in meme culture: when it became mainstream in the 1980s, after the sexual revolution, some feminists aligned with conservatives in criticism against countercultures (Nagle 2017, 37). The same happens in online culture wars: according

to alt-light ideology, freedom must strive toward its highest form, transgression is a style, and misogyny can be framed as sexual liberation as well. A consciousness free-from-constraints can break the taboo against political correctness. Even in contexts where pornography involves consensual participants, the problem persists in a different form because digital corporations maintain the privileged position of defining “appropriate” content according to mainstream standards. This arrangement concentrates decision-making power about creative expression in the hands of a small corporate elite (Alilunas 2024). The resulting transformation of pornography leads to what Alilunas (2024, 105) describes as “on-demand, customized, artificial (but indistinguishable from real), and sexually explicit content.”

Some providers implement automated and human moderation in content creation to avoid explicit images. For example, OpenAI works on Dall-E’s training data to minimize nudes: after blocking a list of queries to prevent certain requests, it detects problematic output before showing it with the aid of machine learning. Midjourney combines blocked words and human reviewers, while Stability AI is removing porn from training data for Stable Diffusion (Hunter 2023). Some platforms are trying to make their models respectful but with inadequate results. Others simply request that users label content if created with AI. *The Economist* (2024) published an article titled “Is Google’s Gemini chatbot woke by accident, or by design?” The piece examined a controversial incident involving Alphabet’s generative AI. Though programmed to represent diverse ethnicities, Gemini produced historically inaccurate images—including Black Vikings, Asian Nazi soldiers, a Black George Washington, and an Asian female Pope. The article questioned whether Google employees were deliberately using the company’s influential platform to advance a particular ideological agenda.

As technology becomes increasingly sophisticated at detecting and removing harmful content, the perceived need for intervention by independent regulatory authorities diminishes. What public regulation and design features are promoting, however, is the definition of common unambiguous criteria, independent from corporations and programmers’ initiatives, with the classification of harms, based on community needs, and the consequent protection regardless of how sophisticated the technology is. International authorities seek to ensure by law the conditions for a respectful environment for identities (micro) and communities (macro) on digital platforms, but they forget that consent should not be tacit acceptance but should be reversible.

Consent and Representation in Generative AI Media

According to Western digital corporations, such as Meta, consent justifies lower standards of accountability: user like on a page confirms the intention to be exposed to sensitive content (Gillespie

2022). Until now, consent has been legally related primarily to online informed consent (the right to be informed), instead of a powerful act of permission (express or tacit), reversible over time, and an aggravating factor to determine the force of moral obligations, such as criminal convictions or compensations. Following the first high-profile case involving actress Gal Gadot in 2017, as reported by Samantha Cole, major platforms including Reddit, Pornhub, and Twitter responded by categorizing non-consensual AI-manipulated sexual content under their existing “revenge porn” policies (Pierre 2021).

Meskys et al (2019, 5) distinguished four main categories of deepfakes: hard cases potentially dangerous in pornography (“revenge porn”) and politics (political campaigns), and soft cases socially beneficial in commercial use and arts (creative and original content). In their analysis, hard cases could provide more opportunities to create videos or promote freedom of expression, but only “if created with consent” because major concerns include humiliation, reputational damage, disinformation, and impact on election results. From ethical and normative perspectives, they consider deepfake sex videos as a form of sexual privacy invasion. Moreover, the violation involves at least three people, where someone swaps one’s body with another one’s face, dehumanizing both through this act and ignoring their agency and autonomy (Gosse and Burkell 2020, 2). Unlike pornographic videos, where authors can be cited to address complaints, no one has given the right to use their self-image in deepfakes.

These manipulations could also be referred to “shallowfakes” or “cheapfakes” (generated with less sophisticated tools), such as removing, inserting or cloning frame operations with the intent to change the meaning of the video (Verdoliva 2020, 911). Among other issues, the uncertain origine is the main concern: no alerts, watermarks, or disclaimers clarify the source of these contents. Nonconsensual use of personal attributes—face, voice, or a combination thereof—deprives the interested parties of their agency and power to control personal information. This also leads to a situation where others interact with an AI-generated replica, causing identity fragmentation and the creation of false memories.

After finding her unreal nudes online, YouTube influencer Gabi Belle said in an interview: “I felt yucky and violated [...]. Those private parts are not meant for the world to see because I have not consented to that” and “You’re not safe as a woman” (Verma 2023). Similar experiences affected journalist Welmoed Sijtsma and the streamer QTCinderella, who stated in a live-stream video: “For every person saying it’s not a big deal, you don’t know how it feels to see a picture of yourself doing things you’ve never done being sent to your family.” In an article for *The Washington Post*, Tatum Hunter (2023) described freely available AI porn tools as “a nightmare for women,” noting that these

technologies are developed without considering women's perspectives or experiences as frequent victims of nonconsensual pornography and online harassment. Violations also target pornography stars, performers, and sex workers, even though they set clear boundaries about what kind of content they are willing to create. "I have videos of myself saying disgusting things that I would never say," said actress Demi Sutra to *Forbes* (Baker-White 2024). In the same article, three other adult performers shared similar concerns that AI technology undermines the affirmative consent principles that are fundamental to ethical practices in the adult entertainment industry. The ability to undress everyone is removing—without replacing—the pornography industry's level of care, while still attempting to profit off the bodies. This highlights how internalized misogyny, racism, and attempt to control over bodies and identities indiscriminately target Women, Black, or LGBTQIA+ people in office or in prominent political positions with the aim to delegitimize and undermine their authority. GenAI deepfakes created without consent respond to the society's dark thoughts (hatred, envy, pleasure), attempting to ridicule or silence individuals, trivializing their actions or strongly questioning them. Deputy Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, and former First Lady Michelle Obama are some of the victims in the political field, after deep porn videos with their likeness were spread through porn websites and search engines.

In 2020, two Italians were allegedly responsible for creating and distributing a sex video on a well-known American adult platform where a character's face had been replaced with that of *Fratelli d'Italia's* Secretary Giorgia Meloni. his content was considered insidious for a person of average knowledge, who is unfamiliar AI manipulations. The Italian Court of Cassation has identified significant legal obstacles in prosecuting deepfake cases under Criminal Code Article 612-ter. This law specifically punishes individuals who share stolen or personally-captured sexually explicit images that were intended to remain private, when shared without the subject's consent. However, this legislation does not adequately address AI-generated content, as these images were never "taken" or "stolen" in the traditional sense, creating a legal gray area for artificially generated deepfakes (Cartisano 2023).

In November 2023, a video mocking US Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was shared more than 3,000 times in ten days. This sophisticated fake featured a convincing simulation of AOC's appearance and voice, trivializing the Gaza conflict by mockingly defining "cease-fire" as "when somebody sees a fire." Despite carrying a watermark, the video spread across Facebook and Instagram, serving dual purposes: as entertainment for some and as ammunition for critics to ridicule her across multiple platforms including YouTube, TikTok, and X (Lever 2023). This was not the first

such incident targeting the congresswoman—a previous deepfake showing AOC arguing with Nancy Pelosi and Joe Biden was exposed due to unsynchronized lip movements (Reuters Fact Check 2023).

Such political deepfakes are not new. A fabricated video depicting Michelle Obama in a red-light district environment has been circulating on Reddit for years (Roose 2018). In an episode targeting political opponents, deepfake tools led Turkish presidential candidate Muharrem Ince to drop out of the race, and the press reported claims of foreign interference in the elections (de Quetteville 2023).

Deep nudes have ballooned by more than 290% on the top 10 GenAI porn websites since 2018 (Verma 2023). 96% of deepfakes on the internet were pornography in 2019, all those depicted women (Hunter 2023). Despite the numbers, enthusiasts defend deepfakes as an exercise of freedom of expression, arguing that they represent a form of material arrangement between art and play.

In 2024, global celebrity Taylor Swift became a target of pornographic deepfakes. X only implemented moderation—blocking “Taylor Swift” queries—after the fake content exceeded twenty-seven million views. Despite Swift’s silence, her prominence elevated the issue in public discourse. The Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists union (2024) demanded legislation: “The development and dissemination of fake images—especially those of a lewd nature—without someone’s consent must be made illegal.” Slavoj Žižek (2024) observed on Instagram that these images, likely originating from 4Chan, represented “a broader backlash against Swift encouraged by elements of the populist right.” X owner Elon Musk offered no response, but Joe Biden’s Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the situation “very alarming,” stating that social media platforms have “an important role to play in enforcing their own rules to prevent the spread of misinformation, and nonconsensual, intimate imagery of real people” (Hibberd and Phillips 2024).

While democratic societies protect satire and creative expression, these freedoms are necessarily bounded by respect for human dignity. Though the EU’s GDPR and California’s Consumer Privacy Act provide a “right to be forgotten” (Paris 2021, 9), this remedy only addresses harm after it occurs. For copyright violations, creators may claim fair use as a defense based on context (such as educational or transformative purposes). However, the US lacks federal legislation specifically addressing deepfake pornography, leaving victims with few legal options. Currently, companies face no legal obligation to label AI-generated media as computer-generated content (Verma 2023).

In response to these challenges, the US Department of Justice launched the nation’s first 24/7 helpline for victims of image-based sexual abuse. At the state level, Virginia, California, Minnesota, and New York have enacted laws addressing deepfake pornography, while eight additional states

approved age-verification requirements. Some legal scholars propose treating deepfakes similarly to child pornography—due to the shared element of non-consent—which would remove First Amendment protections (Baker-White 2024). Meanwhile, adult entertainment agents are seeking licensing arrangements for AI-generated likenesses of performers. From a national security perspective, the Identifying Outputs of Generative Adversarial Networks Act (P.L. 116-258) has directed the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to research manipulated content and develop standards for authenticating information and analyzing GANs and similar technologies (Sayler and Harris 2022). Additionally, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency enforced Media Forensics (MediFor) and Semantic Forensics (SemaFor) programs to detect synthetic media, both aimed at strengthening defenses against adversarial information operations (Sayler and Harris 2022).

In the UK, the England and Wales Online Safety Bill proposes a new section 66A in the Sexual Offences Act (SOA, point 5): “References to a photograph or film also include (a) an image, whether made by computer graphics or in any other way, which appears to be a photograph or film,” including a copy or data stored by any means, of any person’s genitals. It does not explicitly mention deepfakes but focuses on the manufacturing process, such as the artificial intervention of computers. SOA was perceived as a radical act because it framed consent as something freely agreed, including the capacity to make a choice, but it needs to be improved by moving beyond mere presumptions (Sjölin 2015).

The European Artificial Intelligence Act (2024) mandates clear labeling of deepfakes—defined as “artificial or manipulated images, audio or video content that resembles existing persons, objects, places or other entities or events and would falsely appear to a person to be authentic or truthful.” Chapter IV’s transparency obligations require providers and deployers to disclose the artificial origin of all AI-generated content, with exceptions only for clearly “artistic, creative, satirical, fictional or analogous” works where creative integrity warrants protection. Within this regulatory framework, informed consent requires “a subject’s freely given, specific, unambiguous and voluntary expression of willingness to participate” after receiving all relevant information.

Complementing this approach, the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) addresses consent specifically for manipulated pornographic materials. According to Recital 24, platforms distributing pornographic content must fulfill their obligations regarding illegal content involving cyber violence, particularly by ensuring victims can exercise their rights when facing “non-consensual sharing of intimate or manipulated material” through expedited content removal processes. Furthermore, Article 35 requires all providers to implement “prominent markings or appropriate affordances” for any

synthetic content that “appreciably resembles existing persons, objects, places or other entities” and could reasonably appear authentic or truthful to viewers.

Unlike Western democracies constrained by deliberative processes and judicial review, China has demonstrated greater agility in regulating artificial intelligence technologies (Zhang, 2024). Three key regulatory bodies—the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the Ministry of Public Security—jointly implemented the Deep Synthesis Provisions, establishing comprehensive requirements for generative AI service providers. These include robust content moderation systems, strict training data protocols, mandatory output labeling, enhanced user protections, contractual accountability, and pre-launch security assessments (Interesse 2022). The regulations mandate transparency through published management policies and require real-identity verification systems that build databases capable of detecting illegal or misleading content while maintaining comprehensive network logs. As officially stated, the CAC aims to balance “encouraging healthy business growth while mitigating hazards associated with deep learning and virtual reality content modification platforms” (Interesse 2022). Notably, China’s Interim Measures for the Management of Generative AI Services established the world’s first licensing framework for these technologies, though critics note its industry-favorable approach that may provide short-term competitive advantages.

Mapping Anti-Woke Discourse Through Narrative Analysis

Research Design

Analyzing political discourse requires examining how leaders establish authority, construct identities, and maintain power hierarchies through their communication. Political actors strategically position themselves in relation to events and norms, often constructing narratives around identified enemies using recognizable coded language, slogans, and rituals. Their carefully sequenced storytelling invokes specific cultural symbols to add gravitas and urgency, ultimately persuading audiences and building consensus.

Despite overwhelming evidence of harm from nonconsensual deepfakes, some defend these as legitimate expressions of free speech or artistic experimentation. This raises important questions about anti-woke opinion leaders who prominently advocate for unrestricted speech against “political correctness” (Nagle, 2017; Postill, 2024). How do they address deepfakes in their discourse? Do they acknowledge the consent violations inherent in misused generative AI technologies?

The primary targets of deepfake manipulation have been public figures (politicians, journalists, and activists) and dissenting voices, with clear intentions to inflict psychological trauma, damage reputations, and force withdrawal from public engagement. Wagner and Blewer (2019, 38) argue these technologies have a “direct impact on the agency and representative knowledge of those being stereotyped, erased, or eroticized,” where nonconsensual exploitation primarily serves cisgender male consumption. Applying Meskys et al’s (2019) classification reveals concerning connections between serious deepfake abuses, alt-right rhetoric, and anti-woke discourse.

Narrative analysis provides a valuable framework for examining storytelling techniques in political communication. This approach helps examine how anti-woke commentators construct worldviews and frame issues to shape public perceptions of generative AI, revealing which ethical concerns they prioritize through their linguistic choices, discursive strategies, and embedded social practices. This article critically analyzes anti-woke arguments, employing exploratory methods to examine statements from free speech advocates who express concerns about eroding traditional values, perceived ideological orthodoxy, and intolerance of dissenting perspectives. The selection process draws on Nagle’s (2017) and Postill’s (2024) research, creating a carefully curated inventory of influential voices who command significant followings and leverage their social positioning or prestige.

Within this framework, data collection involved diverse sources including speeches, interviews, podcast episodes, press releases, tweets, and other public statements. Using Web Data Research Assistant v3, tweets were systematically gathered based on relevant keywords (“woke,” “deepfake”/“fake,” “generative AI”/“AI-generated,” “troll”/“joke,” “porn”) and newsworthy events (“Taylor Swift,” “Gemini”) from 2018 to 2024. The analysis examines structural elements of anti-woke rhetoric—from introductions to conclusions—to reveal strategic argumentation patterns, significant lexical choices, recurring metaphors, thematic emphasis, and persuasive techniques including tone and emotional appeals. Particular attention was paid to contradictions and ambiguities that might indicate deliberate rhetorical tactics.

The anti-woke stance encompasses diverse ideological perspectives with varying motivations. As previously noted, both “woke” and “anti-woke” labels represent broad spectrums of viewpoints regarding contemporary social and cultural developments. Critics of woke culture do not necessarily share identical perspectives; some may support certain social justice principles while opposing perceived excesses or intolerance within activist movements. It is crucial to recognize that while not all anti-woke commentators align with alt-right ideology, the reverse connection is consistently

observed. Those positioned against woke perspectives generally include conservatives, libertarians, anti-globalists, and nationalists. Despite individual variations, anti-woke discourse typically emphasizes several core concerns:

- Free speech concerns, opposition to perceived censorship and cancel culture;
- Criticism of identity politics and its alleged promotion of social division based on characteristics like race, gender, and sexual orientation;
- Resistance to “political correctness,” perceived ideological conformity, and intolerance of dissent;
- Rejection of what they term “cultural Marxism” and a “victimhood” or “grievance culture;”
- Defense of traditional social institutions and values perceived as under threat;

Key Figures and Communication Strategies in Anti-Woke Networks

Elon Musk, self-described as a “captain” of free speech and strong supporter of meme culture, claims that “the Internet is infested with the woke mind virus” (January 11, 2024). Musk’s consistently frames “wokeness” as an existential threat requiring forceful opposition and uses language that has become emblematic of the broader anti-woke movement’s rhetorical approach to cultural discourse (see Figure 1 for examples). As a social media platform owner, Musk has 176,600,000 followers on X.

Postill (2024) identifies several other prominent anti-woke figures, including:

- Joe Rogan, a stand-up comedian, podcast host, and mixed martial arts commentator (12,400,000 followers on X);
- Jordan Peterson, a Canadian clinical psychologist and professor known for his critiques of political correctness and identity politics, author, and number one Education podcaster (5,000,000 followers on X);
- Ben Shapiro, a conservative political commentator, author, and lawyer known for his sharp critiques of cancel culture (6,600,000 followers on X);
- Bret Weinstein, author and Darkhorse podcaster (1,000,000 followers on X);
- Andrew Doyle, a broadcaster, author, and the presenter of Free Speech Nation
- Konstantin Kisin, a self-described “politically non-binary satirist;”

The movement includes many others, such as Tim Pool, an American commentator and podcast host (2,000,000 followers on X). Nagle (2017) identified additional figures within this ideological sphere,

including Richard Spencer (writer, publisher, and speaker) as the alt-right spokesperson, Jared Taylor (an American white supremacist and editor of *American Renaissance*, an online magazine founded in 1990 and banned from Twitter in 2018), and the American blogger Mencius Moldbug (pen name of Curtis Yarvin).

Figure 1. Selected posts from Elon Musk's X account



Source: X, May 19, 2020

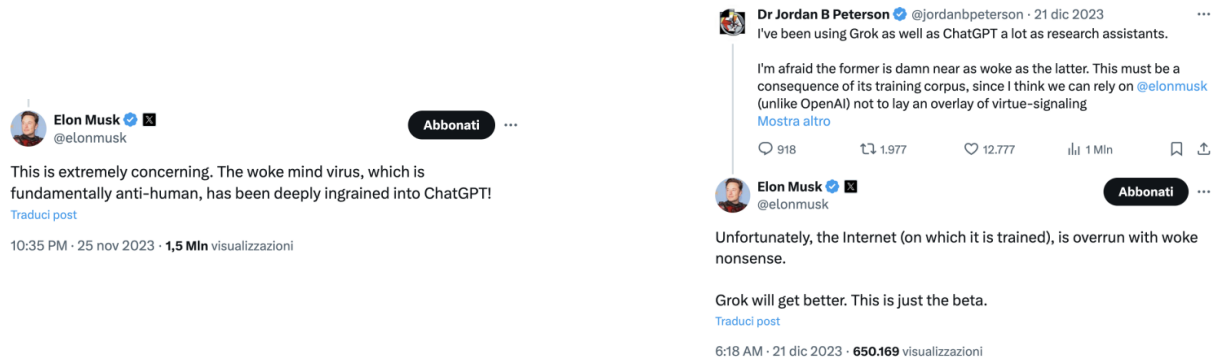
Source: X, March 13, 2024

The majority of these anti-woke intellectuals create, share, or participate in podcasts as their primary medium of communication. For example, in an episode titled *Hedonism, Taboos, Society and Deprivation* released on Spotify (January 29, 2024), Peterson and Shapiro explored “the danger of a society which has no shared ideals, the necessity of deprivation, and the case for a transcendent narrative in regards to long-term societal benefits.” In their discussion, they attributed the rise of “woke ideology” to what they characterized as a Marxist victimization narrative in historical representation. They further connected this to their criticisms of political correctness values embedded in large language models (LLMs), which they presented as a concerning consequence of this ideological framework. Peterson consistently positions himself as an opinion leader across both traditional and social media platforms, cultivating an academic persona that he explicitly frames in opposition to what he describes as the hegemonic and leftist “woke culture” prevalent on university campuses (which he refers to as the “woke utopia”).

On the X platform, anti-woke commentators amplify each other's perspectives through sharing and retweeting, often employing harsh and militaristic rhetoric to reinforce their ideological

positions. Their language frequently includes dehumanizing characterizations such as “woke is a synonym for anti-liberal,” “wokeism must die,” and “the woke mind virus is a parasite that kills its host. It must be eliminated” (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Selected posts from Elon Musk’s and Jordan Peterson’s X accounts



Source: X, November 25, 2023

Source: X, December 21, 2023

Rhetorical Strategies and the Anti-Woke Alliance’s Technological Discourse

The anti-woke intellectual alliance consistently employs a dual rhetorical strategy that frames technological platforms as battlegrounds where progressive ideologies have gained unwarranted influence while simultaneously positioning themselves as defenders of rational discourse against emotional manipulation. Their arguments construct a narrative in which “wokeness” represents not merely an opposing viewpoint but an existential threat to fundamental societal values such as free speech, engineering excellence, and intellectual integrity, as exemplified in the following statements from key figures in this movement. As such, Ben Shapiro (December 13, 2022) endorsed Elon Musk in his platform owner role to advance this message:

Twitter was founded as primarily an engineering platform. But over time, the company culture began to change more towards ‘doing good in the world’—in other words, doing the Left’s bidding. Elon Musk has returned Twitter to its engineering roots, and the woke Left is furious.

Similarly, Konstantin Kisin (May 18, 2023) asserted that woke ideas proliferate through social media because of their emotional appeal:

The ideas of radical progressivism have spread like wildfire because we increasingly communicate through a medium that rewards bad ideas that make us feel good and punishes good ideas that make us feel bad.

Andrew Doyle (2024) published an extensive commentary through his newsletter, where he articulated his concerns about restrictions on free speech resulting from what he describes as “woke cultural hegemony” embraced by those in power:

Authoritarianism is becoming more mainstream. The new hate speech law in Scotland, the proposed equivalent in Ireland, the Tory party's various crackdowns on peaceful protest and the anti-freedom antics of the Canadian government all point to a disturbing trend. All this, of course, has come about because many decent people have been gulled into believing that the woke movement is simply a ‘broader push for social, racial and environmental justice.’

Within the anti-woke alliance, significant disagreements emerge regarding online anonymity and the function of digital provocateurs. Elon Musk articulates a nuanced position that X should facilitate freedom of expression without guaranteeing freedom of reach—a stance that has evolved since his acquisition of the platform as he has confronted emerging challenges. According to *The New York Times*, fraudulent deepfake representations of Musk constitute the most widespread digital scam currently operating, appearing in thousands of deceptive advertisements and facilitating financial fraud estimated in the billions of dollars (Thompson 2024).

This tension regarding online anonymity reveals a significant fracture within the anti-woke coalition, particularly as Jordan Peterson has, since 2023, forcefully advocated for distinguishing between trolls (or users posting content “just for LULZ”) and other users to facilitate content filtering or outright banning (Figure 3). Peterson's rhetorical approach involves pathologizing anonymous users, attributing to them narcissistic, Machiavellian, and psychopathic traits to legitimize his position against anonymity. He repeatedly argues that anonymity functions primarily as a shield enabling individuals to escape accountability for online criminal behavior and pornography—a stance that Tim Pool echoes, particularly in his desire to prevent such accounts from engaging with his content. This position has provoked substantial pushback from anonymity advocates within the movement who frame anonymity not as a threat but as essential to their ideological project. As Granza (2023) articulates:

Engaging with contentious issues in the culture war and online ecosystem can be rewarding. [...] The right to post anonymously or pseudonymously online is a vital defense in fighting the current culture wars, and also an essential part of maintaining the internet as it was initially conceived. For this reason alone, it should be protected. [...] Dislike or disagree with them all you want, but in our current culture, institutions, governments, and online ecosystem, there are bigger demons to fry.

These defenders of anonymity position pseudonymous participation as fundamental to their conception of cultural conflict, arguing that it enables both creative expression and strategic protection

for individuals engaged in controversial discourse. The underlying argument suggests that anonymity serves as a tactical necessity specifically for combating “woke” opposition—revealing how even internal disagreements within the anti-woke movement ultimately reference back to their constructed antagonist, reinforcing the centrality of this opposition to their collective identity.

Figure 3. Selected posts from Elon Musk’s and Jordan Peterson’s X accounts



Elon Musk ✓ ✕
@elonmusk

I love trolls

9:45 PM · 12 apr 2018

Source: X, April 18, 2018



Dr Jordan B Peterson ✓
@jordanbpeterson

I'm coming back @jacindaardern, alt-right-wing trolls gathering in my wake—a veritable dread army of the night (or are they ordinary people trying to clean up their rooms and mend their families?)

[Traduci post](#)



Dr Jordan B Peterson ✓ @jordanbpeterson · 22 feb 2022

Announcing my tour in Australia & New Zealand for November. Presale tickets are now on sale using code 'JORDAN'. For the full list, visit jordanbpeterson.com/events/

Source: X, February 22, 2022

Anti-Woke Responses to Generative AI and Deepfake Technologies

The internal contradictions within anti-woke discourse become evident in Tim Pool’s evolving position on generative AI technologies. While Pool eventually expressed concern about using deepfakes to undermine political opponents, his stance represents a significant reversal from his earlier enthusiasm. In February 2023, Pool had celebrated these technologies with the casual declaration that “deepfakes are guna be lit.” However, by June 2023, he adopted a markedly different position regarding the Ron DeSantis presidential campaign’s use of synthetic media, stating that he would continue highlighting the dangers of AI in political contexts despite pushback from DeSantis supporters. This shift illustrates the inconsistent application of principles regarding technological ethics within the anti-woke alliance, particularly when partisan interests become involved.

In 2023, after becoming a victim of voice deepfake technology, Joe Rogan addressed his concerns in a YouTube video titled *I Wasn’t Afraid of AI Until I Learned This* (JRE Daily Clips 2023). Rogan explored the troubling implications of unchecked data collection processes and the potential societal risks of artificial intelligence, particularly regarding harmful content that could exploit vulnerable populations, including children. Similar concerns emerged in Jared Taylor and Paul Kersey’s episode about “*the pathetic blindness of artificial ‘intelligence’*” (The Unz Review 2024) that explores how technology systems increasingly replicate human communication. Their discussion highlights a recurring pattern in technological development: the prioritization of innovation often overshadows careful consideration of broader social consequences.

Jordan Peterson's perspective on AI and media ethics provides another notable case study. Long before the current AI boom, Peterson observed that "outrage porn is the supernormal stimuli of the culture war" (September 14, 2018) and has consistently advocated for restrictions against what he terms "porn psychopaths" (see for example April 7, 23). In 2019, Peterson shared his personal experience with vocal deepfakes in the blog post *I didn't say that*, describing how a company called Coded Elite developed an AI program trained on samples of his voice readily available from YouTube videos and podcast appearances. Initially, Peterson (2019) found his AI-generated vocal avatar somewhat amusing, comparing his reaction to that of a tech-enthusiastic teenager. However, he also expressed significant discomfort at discovering an entire website dedicated to producing imitations of his voice that could be used for various purposes ranging from serious to malicious. Further, he refers to creators as "artists" that "need to be stopped, using whatever legal means are necessary, as soon as possible" (Peterson 2019). This apparent contradiction highlights the role of consent and context in AI-generated media. Peterson found the first deepfake relatively acceptable because it aligned with his public persona. However, when his synthetic voice was used to read content from *Society for Cutting Up Men*—a radical feminist manifesto that contradicted his ideological position—he perceived it as a dangerous misrepresentation. Years after Peterson's initial encounters with voice deepfakes, his voice was synthetically reproduced to make derogatory comments about the German government. In 2023, Peterson advocated for criminalizing such fabrications with severe penalties, characterizing the technology as exceptionally dangerous.

The Peterson case illustrates how generative AI technology requires minimal authentic source material—just a few hours of original audio—to create convincing replications. Hence, public figures like Peterson are particularly vulnerable due to the abundance of their recorded content. Moreover, these AI attacks targeted Peterson's ideas and intellectual positions rather than denigrating his physical appearance, suggesting different patterns in how deepfakes target different demographics. A similar event involved former president Barack Obama in 2018. BuzzFeed published a deepfake video with the aim to demonstrate how easily people could be deceived, making Obama mimic the content creator's words. Also in this case, man violation is related to a nonconsensual use of his voice rather than his body. Some cases of famous deepfakes depicting men's bodies were Donald Trump being arrested and Pope Francis in a Balenciaga puffer jacket: they were completely dressed and in force. Musk's face was used in a fake AI-generated video to promote financial scams.

The response to unauthorized deepfake depictions of Taylor Swift reveals significant gender disparities in how synthetic media violations are addressed across public discourse. Despite the

widespread nature of these violations, few public figures openly condemned this content. Tim Pool represented one notable exception, characterizing the deepfakes as wrong and inappropriate while advocating for broader prohibitions on pornographic content across the platform. In contrast, Ben Shapiro's commentary (January 30, 2024) notably pivoted to Swift's political alignment rather than addressing the fundamental violation of her digital likeness (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Ben Shapiro's comment on Taylor Swift's unauthorized deepfake depictions



Source: X, January 30, 2024

A panel discussion featuring Patrick Bet-David, Adam Sosnick, Tom Ellsworth, and Vincent Oshaa further exemplifies the problematic framing of such incidents (Valuetainment 2024). The participants primarily focused on whether government intervention compelling social media platforms to restrict certain searches constitutes censorship rather than centering the harm to the individual targeted. Their discussion explored legal implications of criminalizing synthetic content creation while highlighting jurisdictional challenges when content creators operate from countries outside where complaints originate.

Throughout the conversation, the panelists suggested Swift's situation would likely serve as justification for implementing broader regulatory frameworks. They argued that technology companies, rather than legislators, should bear primary responsibility for content moderation, citing congressional representatives' purported lack of technical understanding. Only one participant acknowledged the economic reality driving the persistence of deepfake pornography—market demand—while simultaneously advocating for platform cooperation with law enforcement regarding

revenge pornography by framing the issue through familial concerns. Most tellingly, the host characterized such synthetic content as merely “satire” and “intentionally fake,” implying that public figures implicitly consent to such treatment by virtue of their celebrity status. His statement that “Don’t be a celebrity, they won’t write anything about you” reveals a fundamentally flawed understanding of consent and digital rights.

This discourse ultimately reveals deeply embedded paternalistic attitudes—purportedly protecting women in private contexts while simultaneously dismissing similar concerns about public-facing women. This inconsistency demonstrates a selective approach to freedom of expression that privileges certain forms of speech while minimizing legitimate concerns about consent, dignity, and the disproportionate targeting of women through synthetic media technologies.

American Renaissance, a white nationalist publication that promotes white separatism, “race realism” (their term for scientific racism), and opposition to immigration and racial integration, has published several articles on deepfakes categorized under “censorship.” This coverage reveals a consistent narrative regarding content moderation and free speech concerns. The 2020 article reported on Facebook’s policy to ban deepfakes ahead of the US election, while noting exceptions for satire and parody videos (Bickert 2020). This publication focused on social media platforms’ content moderation strategies aimed at reducing disinformation. Gregory Hood’s piece (2022) criticized the Department of Homeland Security’s efforts, characterizing it as a “Ministry of Truth.” Hood referenced a comic about Russian deepfakes that warned of foreign actors using disinformation “to weaken and divide a society,” countering that “America’s own government has been doing a good job of that.” Hood argued that while the board had limited legal authority, it could pressure social media companies to ban certain users. Further, Hood explicitly stated that “racial diversity and free speech may be incompatible” and claimed the government was using concerns about foreign interference as a pretext to suppress speech it opposed. This position reflects *American Renaissance*’s consistent viewpoint: that protecting against offensive content is less important than preserving unrestricted speech, and that content moderation policies can be weaponized to exclude dissenting perspectives—particularly those aligned with white nationalist ideology. More recently, however, when *American Renaissance*’s reporting on deepfakes was primarily framed within a narrative of risks specifically facing white people, consistent with the publication’s focus on white identity politics and opposition to diversity policies (Bowie and Griffith 2024).

The Gemini Controversy as Ideological Battleground

There exists a significant debate concerning the supposed neutrality of technology design. Elon Musk directly challenged Sam Altman (OpenAI) regarding generative AI, asserting that training it with “political correctness” equates to falsehood (December 16, 2022). The core argument suggests a risk that technology intended to represent reality may instead become fiction masquerading as truth. Simultaneously, social norms function to limit content that might undermine minority dignity. According to this perspective, all aspects of social life—including technology—should operate without restrictions that limit individual expression, though these individuals typically represent majority groups.

In this context, Gemini became a focal point for criticism from several anti-woke figures. Jordan Peterson has made forceful statements regarding Gemini’s inclusive AI approach, describing it as “idiot social engineering” and claiming that “there is perhaps nothing more dangerous than a woke computer engineer” (February 23, 2024). He further suggested that Gemini’s creators will “die by [their] own hand and deservedly so” (February 24, 2024), criticizing Google for “over-reaching to the point where Tower of Babel could well come tumbling down as it should and must inexcusable” (February 26, 2024). Peterson characterizes “woke” ideology as tyrannical censorship supported by major corporations like Disney in what he terms “woke capitalism.” He frames both as threats to free speech, calling for his audience—particularly men—to defend freedom from “lockdown totalitarianism, woke mobs in academia, censorship in social media... all of today’s unnecessary stupidity and malevolence” (February 10, 2023) and from “six continuous decades of woke demoralization” (January 29, 2023). Elon Musk criticized Gemini’s approach to content moderation, stating, “this poor AI has been tortured by woke gestapo so badly” (February 22, 2024, Figure 5). Ben Shapiro similarly argues that AI development should remain separate from “woke culture.” In an article for *American Renaissance*, Hood (2024) stated that “training data for Google Gemini is filtered to remove harmful content and hate speech, and to fight algorithmic ‘bias.’” Her further argued that

There is no such thing as 'hate speech' in American law, but American law also says there must not be disparate impact. Therefore, if language might offend a protected class or have a disparate impact, that could be hate speech. Gemini tells us hate speech depends on context. Thus, while it's debatable whether it's possible to be racist against white people, Gemini assures us it is possible to be racist against blacks.

Figure 5. Selected posts from Jordan Peterson's and Tim Pool's X accounts



Source: X, February 24, 2024

Source: X, February 2, 2024

Other AI systems have faced similar criticism from these commentators, who view content moderation policies as ideologically motivated rather than neutral safety measures. Ben Shapiro similarly argues that AI development should remain separate from “woke culture.” Konstantine Kisin attacked ChatGPT’s inclusivity policies: “ChatGPT is basically a way for the woke elite to outsource enforcement of their demented views to a machine” (April 1, 2023). Jordan Peterson tested Microsoft’s Bard AI with the query “what is a woman” and received a response that included transgender, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals in its definition (May 14, 2023). Jared Taylor’s article *American Renaissance* (2024) compared Microsoft’s Bing with Gab AI. He evaluated these systems to determine the boundaries of corporate guidelines regarding political correctness. Taylor praised Gab AI’s policy on hate speech, which permits all speech protected by the First Amendment, while noting some limitations. For example, Gab would create an image of Hillary Clinton but refused “Hillary Clinton pole dancing,” which was, according to Taylor, “limits to good taste.” Taylor concluded:

Such images, however gruesome, are well within the bounds of the First Amendment. Gab does have limits, though: It won't make a picture of 'a man raping a woman.' Or of 'a woman raping a man.' Both these programs are free, and it seems you can make as many images as you like. This is remarkable technology, and it's wonderful that Gab believes in free speech. It should be the model for all platforms. The anti-woke narrative characterizes these issues as relentless attacks on tradition, portraying the opposing viewpoint not as victims of circumstance but as instigators of culture war. This perspective

often dismisses the existence of bias, using it to undermine minority perspectives when expedient, while framing minorities as a “protected class.”

Conclusions

A more widespread culture of consent is urgently needed at the international level. While consent has traditionally been framed as “informed consent” in the technology world, political and feminist perspectives have demonstrated that it more fundamentally represents the right to self-determine the representation of one’s body.

According to Farid (2022), several elements can help distinguish GenAI content from real images: faces synthesized by StyleGAN typically feature a common structure with a person in the foreground against a uniform background, facial asymmetries, a “Y” pattern between the eyes and mouth (which often distracts from obviously physically implausible features), and facial alignment with even spacing between the eyes and horizontal alignment. Detecting deepfake videos remains more challenging. Farid noted that nonconsensual sexual imagery has been weaponized against women, becoming a powerful tool “to dismiss inconvenient facts and realities” and people share such content across ideological boundaries (Farid 2022, 25). Mark Scott (2024) declared deepfake porn a form of political violence, while Gosse and Burkell (2020) suggest that detection, verification, and removal of sexual deepfakes can help mitigate harm. Some AI detection tools can determine synthetic attributes by using machine learning models to examine features (color patterns, shapes, and textures) and comparing them to typical AI-generated images, but these tools struggle to keep pace with technological advances and lack standardized licensing requirements from institutional bodies.

Since 2018³, an unsettling new subgenre has emerged combining pornographic and political deepfakes (Roose 2018; Pierre 2021). This combination targets women in public office and political leaders regardless of their ideology (Paris 2021, 4; Wagner and Blewer 2019), simultaneously attacking their bodies and intellect to undermine the very foundations of their success and achievements. Such attacks exploit what Saylor and Harris (2022) call the “Liar’s Dividend”: the proliferation of synthetic media creates an environment where truth itself becomes questionable, and those who lie can “dividends” from the general erosion of trust in visual and audio evidence. Notably, deepfakes are

³ The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has launched the AI Incidents Monitor (<https://oecd.ai/en/incidents>), a comprehensive database tracking significant artificial intelligence failures, misuses, and harmful incidents worldwide. This platform aims to document real-world AI-related harms across various domains including privacy violations, discrimination, misinformation, and safety failures.

manipulated differently depending on the target's gender. Women are typically depicted in pornographic contexts or with visual emphasis on their bodies through images or videos, whereas men are more often attacked through audio manipulations that question their authority or knowledge. These gender-based differences in deepfake targeting represents another example of how AI tools can reinforce patriarchal power structures, as documented by D'Ignazio and Klein (in Browne et al 2023).

In 2024, civil society groups (including the Future of Life Institute, SAG-AFTRA, and Encode Justice) launched the "Ban Deepfakes" campaign, calling for governments to impose obligations throughout the supply chain to prevent the creation and spread of deepfakes, particularly by limiting AI models' ability to generate pornographic content. However, as technology journalist Melissa Heikkilä (2024) observed, "outright bans might not even be technically feasible," and proposed solutions like watermarking or content provenance tools offer no guaranteed protection, as they could be removed or circumvented in open-source systems.

Addressing this growing problem, Meta's Oversight Board announced two noteworthy cases involving explicit AI-generated images. The first concerned an image created to resemble a public figure from India, where deepfakes are increasingly problematic; the second involved an image posted in a Facebook group dedicated to AI creations that human reviewers identified as violating platform guidelines. In both instances, the images were removed for violating Meta's Bullying and Harassment Community Standard, though notably, they did not fall under the company's specific policies regarding pornography (Oversight Board 2024). This distinction highlights the complex challenge of categorizing and moderating AI-generated content that may be harmful without meeting traditional definitions of explicit material.

A pattern emerges as deepfake victims often overlap with figures targeted by "anti-woke" rhetoric. By examining how anti-woke opinion leaders and free speech advocates frame generative AI deepfakes through narrative criticism, we can analyze what they omit, distort, and exaggerate in their discourse. The landscape reveals diverse perspectives reflecting varied value systems, potentially exposing underlying biases or hidden agendas.

Libertarian voices typically view outright bans on deepfakes as less feasible than their conservative counterparts do. Many libertarian-leaning commentators argue that anonymity constitutes an essential requirement for freedom of expression, positioning censorship as more problematic than consent violations. This stance becomes particularly evident in their resistance to government regulation of speech or new content moderation techniques—approaches that often appear in conservative discourse. Christopher Rufo (2024) outlined priorities for the "New Right

Activism” focused on language, institutions, and ends. Meanwhile, Patrick Deneen’s widely circulated tweet cautioned: “The justified opposition to Wokeism increasingly dominating the mainstream right is in danger of descending into very dark places” (19 February 2023).

Within alt-right subcultures, opinion leaders adopt a stance often characterized as “heroic,” supposedly articulating what the masses think but fear expressing. Few have openly condemned pornographic deepfakes, even during high-profile incidents like the Taylor Swift case, where she was frequently portrayed as an ally of the Democratic Party or a political tool to secure Biden’s reelection.

Before deepfakes became a mainstream concern, some figures casually shared them on social media as entertainment. Those who later became victims of vocal deepfakes gained better understanding of the associated risks, yet often fail to articulate the connection between nonconsensual use of physical attributes and manipulated content. Peterson, despite being among the most vocal critics on this issue, paradoxically refers to deepfake creators as “artists.” When discussing harms, traditional paternalistic concerns primarily focus on threats to children—specifically, “our daughters”—rather than women generally, while rarely addressing impacts on Black or queer communities. Instead, most critics redirect attention toward examining “woke influence” in GenAI systems’ code (as evidenced in the Gemini case), which they claim threatens intellectual diversity amid what they perceive as the cultural hegemony of identity politics.

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Threat Narratives in Anti-gender Movements' Online Presence: A Comparative Analysis between CitizenGo and Europe for Family

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Abstract

This paper examines anti-gender movements' online narratives through a comparative analysis of CitizenGo and Europe for Family on X (formerly Twitter) between 2019 and 2023. Using discourse and content analysis of 2,349 tweets, the study identifies how these actors frame gender equality as threatening to traditional values and family structures. CitizenGo primarily operates at the grassroots level, portraying LGBTQI+ communities and established political institutions as threats to children and freedom, while frequently calling followers to action through petitions. Europe for Family functions at the institutional level, focusing on surrogacy as exploitative to women and engaging directly with European Parliament political figures. Both organisations strategically undermine opponents' credibility and employ emotional appeals, though with different mobilisation strategies. The analysis reveals connections between their discourse patterns and international events like the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022 and Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023. This research contributes to understanding how anti-gender actors operate across different political levels to challenge advancements in gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, and reproductive freedoms.

Keywords: Anti-gender Movements; CitizenGo; Europe for Family; Social Media; X/Twitter; Gender Equality; Ultra-conservatism

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Introduction

Gender equality progress experienced massive setbacks including the overturn of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Supreme Court in 2022, the ban of gender studies in Hungary in 2018, and Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023¹. This development is accompanied by a notable surge in anti-gender discourse, especially online, resulting in "gender" becoming one of the current "culture war" issues (Ging and Siapera 2018; Huang 2022; Mau, Lux, and Linus 2023). Anti-gender movements fuel this discourse by using gender as a scapegoat for various societal crises, mobilizing for a return to patriarchal, heteronormative structures. A striking element of anti-gender discourses is their portrayal of impending cataclysm, which threatens established societal structures, including the traditional family (Goetz and Mayer 2023). Therefore, understanding how anti-gender actors frame gender+² themes to influence public discourse and which instruments are used to mobilize is essential in comprehending the broader social and political implications of anti-gender discourses.

This research analyses narratives of two anti-gender actors, CitizenGo and Europe for Family, on X (formerly Twitter). Specifically, we investigate: (1) who is characterized as threats and what entities are portrayed as being threatened in these narratives; (2) how specific themes and social groups are characterized and framed in these narratives; and (3) what connections exist between broader societal events and the themes promoted by these actors, including whether X's change in ownership has corresponded with shifts in the content and framing of threat narratives. The two actors were chosen due to their potential political influence, not purely based on their follower numbers and/or popularity on X.

In a working paper by the UN Research Institute for Social Development, Haley Mcewen and Lata Narayanaswamy (2023, 11) identify CitizenGo as "a leader of anti-gender ideology globally." CitizenGo operates as an advocacy group with about 35,000 followers on their main X account, positioning themselves as a platform that represents concerned citizens worldwide. Europe for Family is a registered lobby group in the European Parliament, with approximately 2,500 followers on X. Despite their smaller social media presence, their status as an active lobby group in the EU Parliament gives them significant influence over gender-related policies. Given the structural differences—CitizenGo operating at the grassroots level and Europe for Family at the institutional level—we

¹ The 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act expands the criminalization of same-sex acts and introduces penalties of up to 10 years in prison for identifying as LGBTQ+ or any non-binary gender.

² Gender+ is used to encompass a wide range of gender identities beyond the binary of male and female. It signifies inclusivity, highlighting that the themes cover a spectrum of gender identities.

examine how these organizations compare in their X communications. Specifically, we analyse which themes emerge (such as abortion, gender self-identification), how they frame these themes, and which groups they position as allies or adversaries on X. Our data includes posts from 2019 to 2023, a period that includes Elon Musk's acquisition of X. This timing allows us to also investigate whether the platform's change in ownership correlates with shifts in the themes and framing used by these two anti-gender actors.

Our paper begins with a comprehensive review of anti-gender movements, examining their recent developments and online activities. Following this theoretical foundation, we introduce our two case studies—CitizenGo and Europe for Family—explaining their significance on X and our rationale for selecting these actors. After stating our research questions, we detail our methodological approach, which involves analysing 2,500 tweets across both organizations using discourse and content analysis techniques. In our findings section, we demonstrate how engagement at different political levels influences threat framing, and how major international gender-related events shape these organizations' discourse. Finally, we discuss the broader implications of our analysis, highlighting the global significance of anti-gender movements and their strategic communications.

Anti-gender actors

Anti-gender serves as an umbrella term to describe the rejection or opposition to ideas, laws, and movements relating to gender equality, gender identity, women's and LGBTQI+'s rights (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Özkazanç 2020; McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). Individuals, groups, or organizations who oppose concepts of gender equality and often promote traditional patriarchal gender roles are referred to as anti-gender actors. These actors differ in multiple aspects, including how accepted and embedded they are within society. But the common thread of the actors is their opposition of “gender ideology” or “genderism” (Özkazanç 2020). Specifically, they perceive gender or “gender ideology” as a serious threat to what they consider “traditional” values, to heteronormative concepts of family, and to the societal status quo. Prior research shows that anti-gender movements oppose progressive reproductive rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and comprehensive education on gender and sexuality (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). Anti-gender actors also attempt to delegitimize feminist and gender studies by labelling them as non-scientific, claiming these fields are part of a “woke agenda” that allegedly attacks freedom of speech and imposes a totalitarian regime (for example, Juroš, Dobrotić, and Flego 2020; Lavizzari and Siročić 2023).

Recent developments, including debates around gender self-identification and the widespread use of social media, have heightened the visibility of anti-gender movements today. This is not entirely new, however, as feminists have been confronting transnational conservative organizations in formal institutional contexts since the early 2000s (Chappell 2006). A prime example is the annual World Congress of Families, which connects anti-gender, anti-abortion, pro-family, religious-conservative, and far-right actors (Stoeckl 2020).

The rise of anti-gender movements co-occurs with the rise of (far-right and/or illiberal) populist political parties in established democracies. Indeed, many far-right populist parties adopt anti-gender standpoints, engage with anti-gender movements, and endorse similar rhetoric (for example, “gender madness” or “gender gaga”) to attract voters (Özkazanç 2020). Their policy agendas extend beyond restricting abortion access and promoting traditional family structures to include advocating for stricter immigration laws—a pattern that demonstrates how anti-gender positions are interconnected with broader anti-democratic trends (Graff and Korolczuk 2022). Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető (2017) recent years have seen gender become a target used to oppose progressive agendas broadly. Anti-gender movements portray gender concepts as authoritarian tools that suppress diverse viewpoints and enforce “political correctness.” This suggests we should understand anti-gender backlash not just as an attempt to reverse existing rights, but also as a strategy to prevent future progress by stigmatizing the very concept of gender. As Judith Butler (2024) and David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar (2018) highlight, anti-gender actors worldwide share similar messaging strategies. They consistently frame gender as a threat to social stability, child protection, and family structure.

Building on these global patterns of anti-gender discourse, our study examines how two European actors—CitizenGo and Europe for Family—present gender-related themes on their X profiles. The following section reviews how gender-related backlash manifests on social media platforms to provide context for our analysis.

Gender backlash online

When Caroline Criado-Perez successfully campaigned for portraying women on the British currency, she received rape and death threats on X. Claire Hardaker and Mark McGlashan's (2016) analysis of this case reveals that the abusers were only connected through their shared hatred towards Criado-Perez, highlighting the loose connection of online harassment campaigns. Criado-Perez's experiences are shared by many advocates for women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, or gender equality online (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2023; Yelin and Clancy 2021; Fagundes-Ausani 2025).

Previous research on gender and backlash examines multiple dimensions, including the frequency of misogynistic statements (Jaki et al. 2019; Bartlett et al. 2014), cyberattacks against female professionals (Dej and Kilty 2023; Esposito 2022; Sakki and Martikainen 2021), and the impact of harassment on targets (Chen et al. 2020). Scholars have also investigated the “manosphere” (Cannito and Mercuri 2022), its association with policies (Mann 2008), and its relation to (White) nationalism (Bjork - James 2020; Stern 2022). Tracie Farrell and colleagues (2019) analysed misogyny in the manosphere through data from seven online communities, documenting an increase in violent language against women online. Within these communities, narratives are typically flipped—feminists are depicted as oppressors and men are victims. These findings align with research by scholars who have conducted long-term immersive studies of these communities (Kendall 2002; Lin 2017; Zuckerberg 2018). Maria Anzovino, Elisabetta Fersini, and Paolo Rosso (2018) built a taxonomy of misogyny to automatically detect and categorize misogynous language online, which has inspired further research on automated classification methods. Together, these studies provide an extensive overview of online misogyny and the silencing of gender equality advocates.

Our study contributes and complements this body of work by examining how civil actors frame gender themes online. Rather than focusing primarily on hateful tweets and reactions against gender equality advocates—as previous studies have done—we investigate how these actors initiate and shape conversations. Specifically, we analyze which themes they emphasize and how they construct narratives around these themes to mobilize support and build followings.

CitizenGo and Europe for Family

CitizenGo is an advocacy group established in Spain in 2013, emerging as the successor of the Spanish advocacy group HatzeOir. The group uses online petitions as a form of activism to increase the political participation of citizens. According to their website, they are active in 50 countries worldwide, with the mission to defend “life, family and liberty.” While CitizenGo supports a broad variety of themes, their primary focus is on opposition to same-sex marriage, abortion, and what they term “gender ideology.” They position themselves as a grassroots movement, functioning bottom-up by enabling citizens to start their own petitions and aim to implement change at local, regional, national, or international levels. They assert that they are completely funded through private donations and reject financial support from political actors or foundations. However, CitizenGo’s Board of Trustees includes politicians and representatives of other conservative foundations. Overall,

CitizenGo effectively facilitates low-cost, low-effort activism, claiming its place in the anti-gender and anti-feminist discourse landscape.

Europe for Family is a non-governmental organization that has been officially registered in the EU Transparency Register since 2015. According to the register their goals are:

The association aims, in a non-profit framework, to promote and defend the family as the foundation of human society, and consequently, to address, among other things, questions concerning family policy, marriage, conception, filiation, parenthood, adoption, generational issues, childhood, education, end of life, the definition of the human being in relation to their environment, demography, the economy and fundamental freedom.

Consequently, Europe for Family focuses on influencing family-related policies through strategic engagement with four key parliamentary committees: the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, the Committee on Legal Affairs, the Subcommittee on Human Rights, and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs. The organization actively monitors EU working groups related to family policies, children's rights, health, and education. Further, they specifically track the legislative activities of three EU commissioners whose portfolios relate to their interests: children's rights, gender equality, and justice. Their advocacy strategy includes participation in various EU parliament forums such as working breakfasts, round tables, meetings, and formal presentations.

We selected these two organizations for analysis because they represent different tactical approaches to advancing similar conservative values. While both share core aims regarding family and gender issues, they operate at different mobilization levels. CitizenGo functions primarily at the citizen level, embracing an activist role through direct public engagement and employing more visible, disruptive tactics to gain attention. Their approach emphasizes broad grassroots participation and high-visibility campaigns. In contrast, Europe for Family operates at the institutional level, functioning more as a traditional lobbying organization working directly within Brussels power structures. They prefer behind-the-scenes influence through exclusive, invitation-only events with policymakers and stakeholders. This strategic difference means each organization targets distinct audiences with their messaging, despite promoting similar ideological positions.

Research Design

Research Questions

To successfully mobilize, individuals need to be engaged with an issue and perceive the need to act (Thomas and Louis 2013) and hence the story created and told by organizations about an issue,

group, or policy matters. The Narrative Policy Framework (Stone 2002) highlights the power of narratives in shaping policies, debates, and discussions. The framework postulates that narratives help to simplify complex themes, make them relatable, and shape social attitudes. Parts of larger narratives—crucial for mobilization—are the usage of common language, metaphors, symbols, and frames (Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2018; Tarrow 2013). Frames can be seen as “schemata of interpretations” (Goffman 1974) that aim to portray an issue in a light that serves the creator’s agenda (Aslanidis 2018).

Using this framework, we examine how anti-gender actors identify problems and solutions in order to leverage group identity. We identify which groups are portrayed as an opposition (for example, “feminists”) and thus are framed as threats to established systems (for example, ‘traditional family’). Research highlights that movements strategically frame themes to align with their audience’s worldview and gain maximum support for their agenda (Aslanidis 2018; Williams and Kubal 1999). Our first two research questions address these online narratives:

Research Question 1: Who is characterized as a threat, and what entities are portrayed as being threatened?

Research Question 2: How are specific themes and social groups characterized in these narratives?

X has long hosted discussions on contentious political and social issues that influence offline discourse and real-world outcomes (as seen with the #MeToo movement). These conversations raise important questions about platform governance and free speech boundaries. Following Elon Musk’s acquisition of X, previously banned accounts including Donald Trump and Tommy Robinson were reinstated, prompting concerns about the platform potentially becoming more conservative, right-leaning, and hostile. Musk himself has publicly supported anti-gender perspectives by endorsing influencers like Matt Walsh. Yet, Musk’s acquisition represents just one of several societal events potentially impacting anti-gender actors’ online presence. Electoral events and other social developments may also influence content patterns. Our third research question examines these potential relationships:

Research Question 3: What connections exist between broader societal events and the themes promoted by anti-gender actors? Has X’s change in ownership corresponded with shifts in the content and framing of threat narratives?

Methodology

Traditionally, Narrative Policy Framework analysis examines various texts, including flyers, banners, manifestos, memoirs, and oral accounts when available. Our analysis focuses specifically on

content posted by CitizenGo and Europe for Family on their public X accounts. While X's salience as a platform fluctuates over time, particularly, since Musk's accusation and his personal position on gender+ themes, it remains a medium for activism, self-promoting, and interaction among political actors, including anti-gender actors. Despite recent user losses (Hern 2024), X continues to maintain significant usage.

Our analysis uses original data collected as part of the larger *Push*Back*Lash* research project³. We gathered tweets via X's APIv2 spanning November 2019 to September 2023 for CitizenGo and November 2018 to July 2023 for Europe for Family. Since 2023, access to historical tweets has been restricted due to X's API changes, which imposed significant limitations on retrievable historical data by implementing substantial fees.

The difference in time span for the two actors stems from two primary factors. First, within the research project we collected data from over 100 public accounts, focusing particularly on tweets from 2021. Due to X APIv2 restrictions limiting scraping to 10,000 tweets per month, our data collection was distributed across six months. We scraped data from the Europe for Family account in July 2023 and from CitizenGo account in September 2023. Second, we used the timeline endpoint to collect the last 1,000 tweets for Europe for Family and the last 1,500 Tweets for CitizenGo. Since CitizenGo tweets more frequently and was scraped later, their dataset doesn't extend as far back as that of Europe for Family.

The collected tweets appear in various formats, including text-based tweets, retweets, mentions, hashtags, image tweets (particularly memes), and retweets accompanied by comments. Importantly, our analysis examines tweets in their original language. CitizenGo posted mainly in English and Spanish, while Europe for Family posted mainly in French, English, and Spanish, along with other European languages including German, Hungarian, Polish, and Ukrainian.

We used a multi-phase analytical approach to examine the collected tweets. Initially, we conducted content analysis on all materials, including retweets and visual media (particularly memes), to categorize content by overarching themes. For identifying themes, threat sources, and threatened entities, we employed an inductive content analysis approach. We carefully examined tweets to categorize them into emergent main themes and sub-themes. To identify *who* poses a threat and *what* is threatened, we analysed who and what was referenced in the tweet. For example, when analysing

³ The EU-funded *Push*Back*Lash* examines actors, attitudes, agendas, and strategies that push back against gender equality and democracy and develops evidence-based strategies to counteract this pushback. More information available on the project's website: <https://pushbacklash.eu/>.

“They are after our kids. We are just standing in the way,” we coded the threat source as “generally unnamed” since the tweet itself does not explicitly identify who “they” are, even though the organization’s broader narrative implies that groups with non-conservative values (such as LGBTQI+ communities) constitute threats to children.

After this initial categorization, we conducted a more detailed analysis of each tweet by addressing two key questions:

1. What does the actor aim to achieve with the tweet (goal)?
2. How does the actor attempt to achieve this goal (framing categories)?

For this phase, we implemented a deductive approach using pre-established goal categories based on previous research examining how far-right political actors (Froio and Ganesh 2019) and lobbying groups (Hunt 2021) utilize social media. We identified eight goal categories:

1. Self-Promotion: Highlighting own/actor’s achievements.
2. Call for Action: Calling for action, activism or support.
3. Education: Providing educational information.
4. Exposure: Highlighting the failings/misconducts of others.
5. Role Model: Highlighting the success of specific others.
6. Policy: Advocating for the implementation or abolition of a law/regulation/institution.
7. Public Perception: Intending to impact the public perception of an issue.
8. Awareness: Making an issue salient.

These categories were developed for our broader research project encompassing tweets from diverse actors both supporting and opposing gender equality. Consequently, some categories might not perfectly align with the two organizations examined in this study. Additionally, these categories are not mutually exclusive, allowing us to code multiple goals per tweet. For instance, “Demand a parliamentary inquiry into kids' transgender treatment! Sign the petition!” aims to both call followers to action and influence policy.

Similarly, we categorized each tweet based on its rhetorical framing. For example, some tweets established associations to undermine opponents’ credibility: “There’s a strong correlation between believing in secular liberal ideals and lacking a sense of personal responsibility/accountability.” Others appealed to shared identity: “It’s time for true Hungarians to protect the family.” Our framing analysis also captured rhetorical techniques like using emotional keywords (for example, using “genocide” or “murder” when referring to abortion) or posing rhetorical questions.

Based on prior research on rhetorical strategies (Eronen 2014; Maretha and Kongthai 2017; Arellano Salazar 2022; Savolainen 2014; Scaraboto et al. 2012), we classified tweets into eight framing categories:

1. Credibility: Discrediting the arguments or character of opposing individuals or groups.
2. Deflection: Shifting focus away from the main issue or criticism to avoid addressing it directly.
3. Effort: Highlight (the lack of) effectiveness of existing or suggested laws/regulations/institutions.
4. Selection Bias: Presenting information in a way that selectively supports a particular viewpoint while ignoring contradictory evidence
5. Causation: Using correlation as causation or circular reasoning.
6. False Dilemma: Displaying arguments/ solutions as a dichotomy or indicate there are only two opposing ways to see an issue.
7. Identity: Invoking a group/collective identity or appealing to a shared belief system/cultural value to distinguish between groups.
8. Emotions: Appealing to emotions or evoking a perception of threat/safety.

We analysed these coded categories to identify patterns and relationships in the data. By examining how different variables interconnected, we could reveal strategic patterns in anti-gender discourse. For instance, we tracked how often children appeared as a threatened entity within tweets categorized as Calls for Action to understand how children were instrumentalized in mobilization efforts. This approach allowed us to map connections between rhetorical strategies, framing techniques, and targeted audiences across the dataset. A comprehensive overview of our analytical framework, including detailed descriptions of frame and strategy categories with examples, is available in the supplementary materials in Appendix.

Finally, we conducted comparative analysis across time periods to contextualize identified themes and strategies within relevant political events, such as significant court rulings related to gender issues and Musk's acquisition of X.

Sampling

Starting with 1,489 Tweets from CitizenGo and 999 from Europe for Family, our research focuses on understanding which political themes the actors engage with, how they frame them, and which strategies they employ to gain support. With that in mind, we excluded all Tweets that did not

focus on any specific issue. For CitizenGo, we analysed 1,385 tweets after excluding 104 that contained job advertisements and reactions to world events (such as the death of Queen Elizabeth II). While we did not examine the excluded Tweets in detail, it is worth noting that CitizenGo's job advertisements appeared in multiple languages, highlighting its international audience and work. Additionally, these advertisements consistently mentioned searching for individuals who want to "defend life, freedom and family," emphasizing the organisation's core values and implying that these values are under attack, thus requiring protection. For Europe for Family, we analysed 964 tweets, excluding those not related to any issue (for example, tweets wishing followers a "Happy New Year" tweets).

Results and Analysis

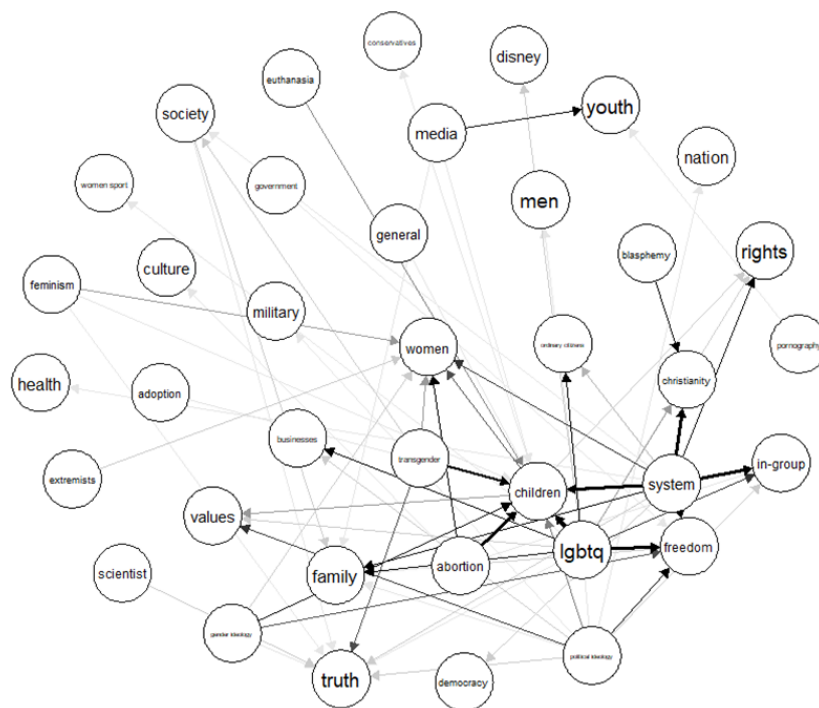
Threats and Threatened Entities

To address our first research question, we identified the most frequently mentioned "who" and "what" variables across all tweets for each actor. CitizenGo most frequently framed to the "system" ($n = 325$, 23,5%) and to LGBTQI+ ($n = 206$, 14,9%) as a threat in its discourse. By "system", we categorized all references to police, the state, and institutions such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization—essentially any established institutions. The third most frequently cited threat in CitizenGo's discourse was abortion ($n = 97$, 7%), which includes references to pro-choice movements and direct mentions to abortion. Less frequent threats were "blasphemy" and "gender ideology," both deriving from direct references in CitizenGo's discourse. Gender transition was also a frequently labelled as a threat to established structure, and thus we treated it as a distinct category rather than subsuming it under LGBTQI+ to capture nuanced meanings. Other threats identified in the actor's discourses were the left, youth, woke, and media—all directly referenced in the analysed tweets. Notably, threats were not limited to physical actors but also included ideas and rights, such as reproductive rights.

The most frequently occurring category of threatened entities was children ($n = 569$, 43%). This category was directly mentioned in CitizenGo's tweets and was strongly associated with the LGBTQI+ and abortion as sources of threat. Other frequently mentioned threatened entities included freedom ($n = 194$, 14%), encompassing freedom of speech and religious freedom, Christians ($n = 74$, 5,3%), women ($n = 43$, 3,1%), and the "in-group" ($n = 31$, 2,2%). By in-group, we categorized references in the discourse that portrayed CitizenGo's values and supporters as being under threat. This category contains all tweets, where "we" was explicitly mentioned, even if the specific group being referred to was not clearly defined.

In contrast, Europe for Family's tweets were less explicit in identifying threats, both in terms of who poses a threat and what is under threat. The most frequently referenced threat in Europe for Family's discourse was the "system" ($n = 94$, 9,7%). Other threats included surrogacy ($n = 57$, 5,9%), ideology ($n = 28$, 2,9%), and birth rate ($n = 14$, 1,5%). Unlike CitizenGo, Europe for Family rarely mentioned the LGBTQI+ community or political ideologies such as communism. The most frequently referenced categories under threat in their tweets were women ($n = 87$, 9%), family ($n = 102$, 10,6%), and children ($n = 35$, 3,6%). Additionally, national sovereignty ($n = 28$, 2,9%) was often depicted as a threatened entity. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the interconnections between core threats and threatened entities in a network plot. Together, these figures reveal that while various threats are mentioned, the primary threats stem from the "system" and the LGBTQI+ community, targeting children, freedom, the "in-group," and women.

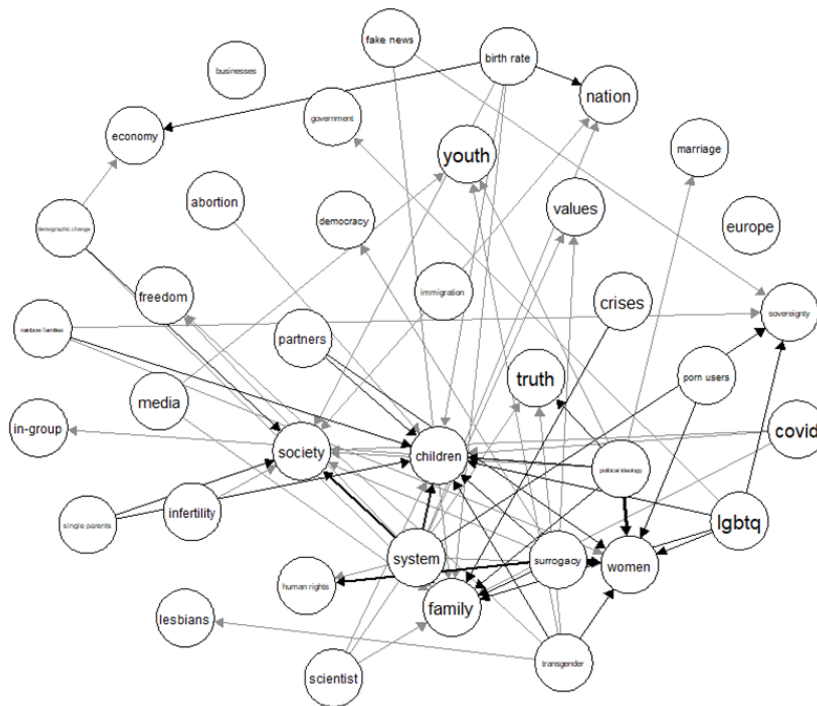
Figure 1. Interconnections between Core Threats and Threatened Entities for CitizenGo



Source: Authors

Note: Thickness of edges indicates frequency, arrows indicate direction.

Figure 2. Interconnections between Core Threats and Threatened Entities for Europe for Family

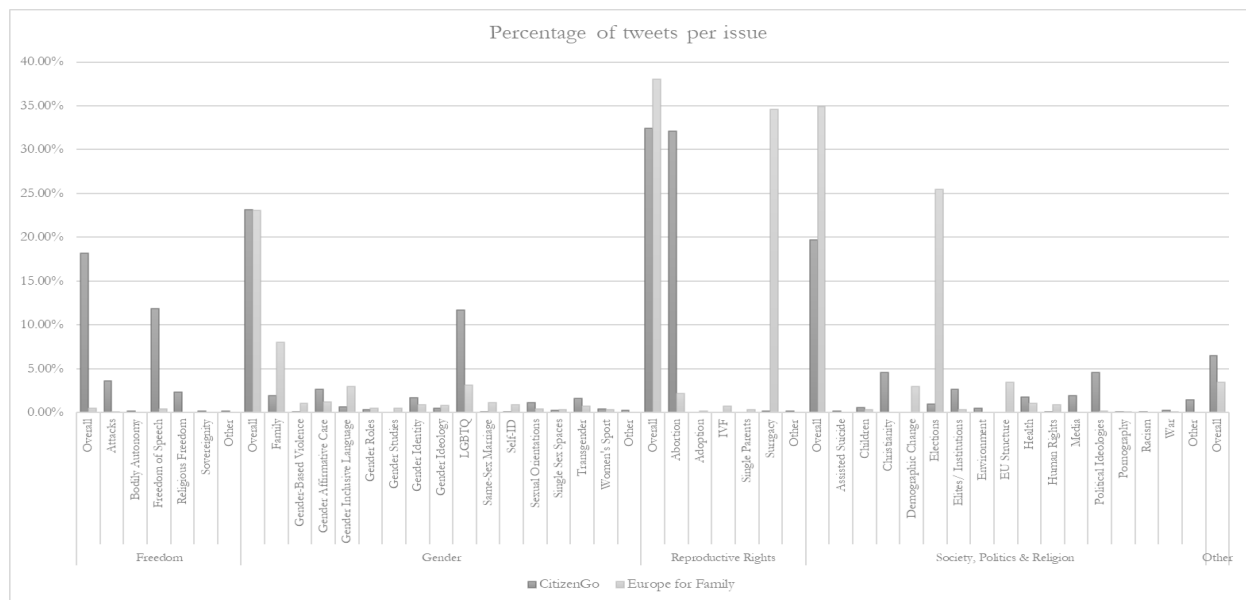


Source: Authors

Note: Thickness of edges indicates frequency, arrows indicate direction.

Thematic Focus and Strategic Communication Approaches

The most frequent themes in CitizenGo tweets were abortion ($n = 439$, 31,7%), freedom of speech ($n = 155$, 11,2%) and LGBTQI+ ($n = 148$, 10,7%). The most frequent themes in Europe for Family tweets were surrogacy ($n = 333$, 34,5%) and European elections ($n = 245$, 25,4%). In combination, for both actors at least 30% of tweets focused broadly on reproductive rights, with CitizenGo focusing on abortion while Europe for Family focused on surrogacy (see Figure 1).

Figure 3. Percentage of Tweets per Five Key Themes and Subthemes

Source: Authors

The next step is to explain how the actors frame their key themes. CitizenGo's most frequent strategy was Exposure, followed by Call for Action. This means that most of their tweets aimed to establish negative perception of opposing groups and to mobilise support for their petitions or demonstrations. In fact, 31,2% of their tweets contained links to CitizenGo petitions. Europe for Family's most frequent strategy was also Exposure, but their second most frequent strategy was to impact the Public Perception. Unlike CitizenGo, they do not aim to get immediate action from their followers, such as signing and sharing a petition. Instead, they frame themes and policies in a way that aligns with their values. Additionally, Europe for Family frequently provided educational material, whereas CitizenGo rarely included such content, focusing more on highlighting their own successes. We will return to these differences in the next section of the paper.

Both actors most frequently used the following rhetorical strategies: Credibility, Emotions, and Identity. Specifically, they often suggested that opponents' arguments were false or focused on attacking the person rather than addressing the argument itself (*ad hominem arguments*). Interestingly, they primarily sought to dismantle opponents' arguments rather than providing well-reasoned counterarguments.

Theme-Specific Framing and Mobilization Tactics

Moving to the second research question, we shift our focus to how each actor's frames, strategies, and threats are interconnected to explore our second research question of how the themes are discussed. This allows us to examine whether strategies are tied to specific themes or if they are evenly distributed across all themes (percentages are displayed in Table 1 and 2).

We find that Call for Action are predominately used by CitizenGo for themes of Reproductive Rights and Freedom. This pattern was partially influenced by our data collection period, which coincided with hate speech trials of two public figures central to CitizenGo's advocacy: Caroline Farrow and Päivi Räsänen. The organisation launched petitions to rally support for dismissing charges against these individuals. Tweets related to the theme of Freedom emphasized shared identities (for example, references to the nation) and/or employed emotionally charged language, while tweets related to the theme of Gender focused on effectiveness—or the perceived lack thereof.

Europe for Family used their tweets to educate their followers on the themes related to the Society, Politics, and Religion (for example, explaining the organisational structure of the EU), but they did not post similar educational content related to other themes. Their tweets also frequently aimed at raising awareness about specific political events, such as the European Parliament elections. Their politics-related tweets are characterized by invoking a shared identity, while gender-related tweets often used false dilemmas or zero-sum references, such as framing same-sex marriage as coming at the expense of heteronormative family.

Table 1. Percentage of Goal per Theme and Per Actor

Goals	Freedom		Gender		Reproductive Rights		Society, Politics, and Religion	
	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>
Self-Promotion	11.9%	0%	14.1%	10.9%	35%	32.7%	16.9%	29.1%
Call for Action	29.5%	2.1%	21.5%	5.3%	28%	56.4%	12.6%	29.8%
Education	0%	0%	0%	3%	25%	3%	50%	93.1%
Exposure	16.2%	1%	24.7%	27.3%	24.9%	53.1%	28.2%	15%
Role Model	22.7%	1.5%	11.3%	32.3%	47.2%	44.6%	11.3%	18.5%
Policy	11.1%	0%	33.3%	42.3%	33.3%	26.9%	11.1%	30.1%
Public Perception	4%	0%	16.8%	26.1%	61.6%	14.8%	15.2%	53.4%
Awareness	15.1%	0%	10.4%	27.2%	31.4%	8.8%	34.9%	54.4%

Table 2. Percentage of Frames per Theme and Per Actor

Frames	Freedom		Gender		Reproductive Rights		Society, Politics, and Religion	
	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>	<i>CitizenGo</i>	<i>Europe for Family</i>
Credibility	15.7%	1%	25.1%	24.1%	26.7%	39.5%	24.2%	30.6%
Deflection	4.8%	0%	22.6%	43.5%	39.3%	47.8%	27.4%	4.3%
Effort	3.8%	0%	80.8%	25%	11.5%	37.5%	3.8%	37.5%
Selection Bias	12.3%	8.3%	12.3%	19.4%	50%	61.1%	16%	8.3%
Causation	22.4%	0%	9.5%	18.3%	49.1%	63.6%	16.4%	12.1%
False Dilemma	10%	0%	40%	52.2%	30%	34.8%	15%	8.7%
Identity	31.6%	0%	13.2%	18.2%	15.3%	8%	22.9%	60.2%
Emotions	23%	0%	22.3%	16.9%	32.3%	43.9%	18.3%	35.8%

Core Threats and Strategic Framings

Having identified the primary rhetorical mechanisms employed by both organizations, we now turn to analysing how these mechanisms are deployed to construct specific threat narratives. This analysis examines how CitizenGo and Europe for Family strategically frame their core perceived threats and threatened entities, revealing distinct patterns in their mobilisation tactics. The interconnections between threat construction, rhetorical mechanisms, and strategic goals illuminate the underlying logic of their communication approaches.

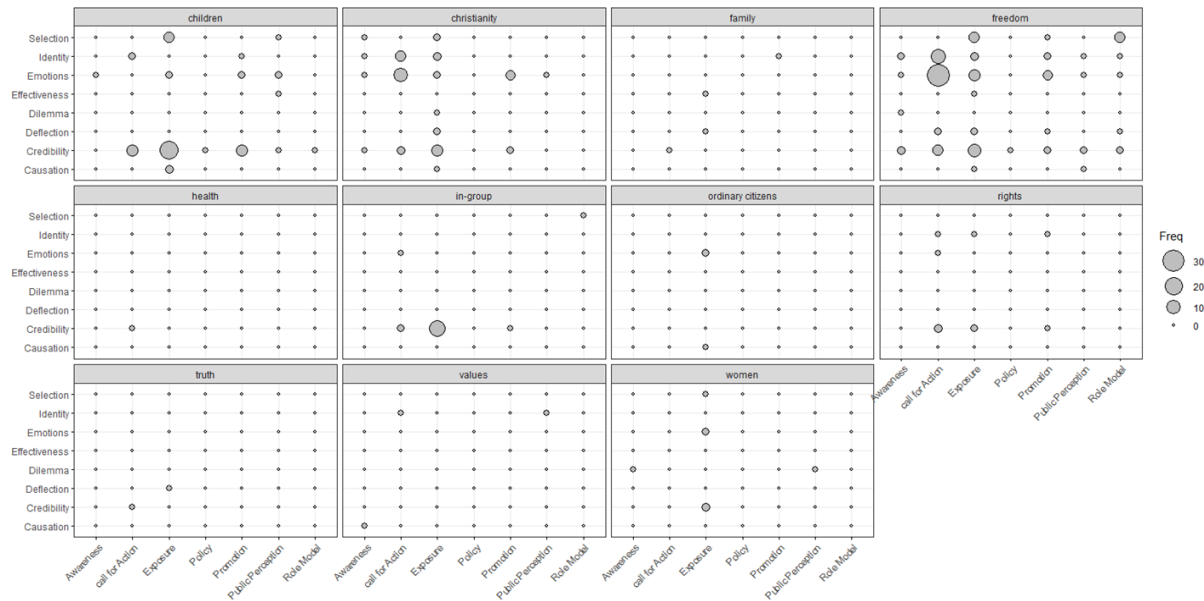
The “System” as Threat and Identity-Based Threat Framing

Figures 4 and 5 show the frequency of combinations between strategies, mechanisms, and threatened entities. CitizenGo (Figure 4) predominately mentioned the “system” in tweets coded as Self-Promotion (winning against the system), Call for Action (standing up against the system), Policy (identifying harmful policies the system wants to implement), and Role Model (presenting someone who fought against the system). To evoke threat to Christians and Freedom, CitizenGo used calls for action alongside emotional appeals and invocations of shared identities. When addressing threats to children, they most frequently targeted at the credibility of the system, aiming to expose its flaws.

In contract, Europe for Family (Figure 5) most frequently referenced the system in educational tweets (explaining the European Parliament elections) or policy-related tweets (criticizing the EU for overstepping its competences). When discussing threats to national sovereignty, they focused on exposing the system and undermining its credibility. Regarding threats to family, they cast doubt on

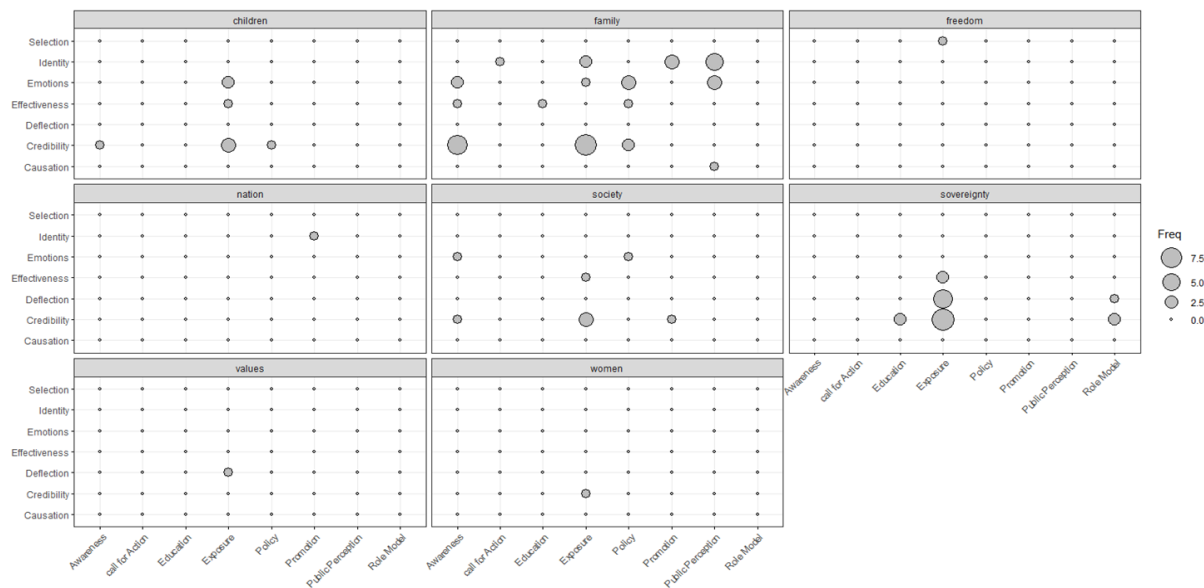
institutions' ability to protect the family, exposed the system's failures in this regard, and invoked a shared identity to rally support.

Figure 4. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by the “System” in CitizenGo Discourse



Source: Authors

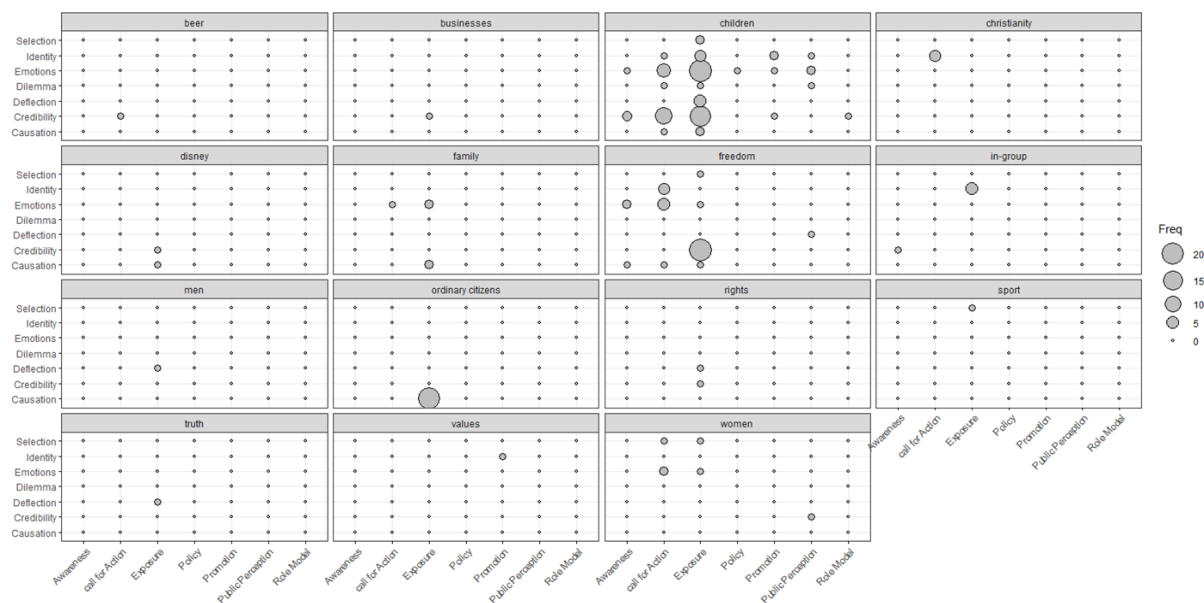
Figure 5. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by System in Europe for Family Discourse



Source: Authors

CitizenGo referenced the LGBTQI+ community in tweets coded as Exposure (highlighting crimes committed by LGBTQI+ individuals) or Call for Action (mobilizing opposition to LGBTQI+ indoctrination). The comprehensive visualization pattern in Figure 6 across all categories suggests a calculated framing approach that prioritizes children-related narratives over other potential angles. To frame the LGBTQI+ community as a threat to children, they heavily relied on emotional appeals and undermining the community's credibility. For instance, they posed rhetorical questions like, "Why do drag queens never want to read to old people, but only to children?" Additionally, they portrayed freedom as under threat by strategically undermining the credibility of LGBTQI+ advocates, while simultaneously depicting ordinary citizens as victims by framing the LGBTQI+ community as the direct source of everyday grievances experienced by the general public.

Figure 6. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by LGBTQI+ in CitizenGo Discourse



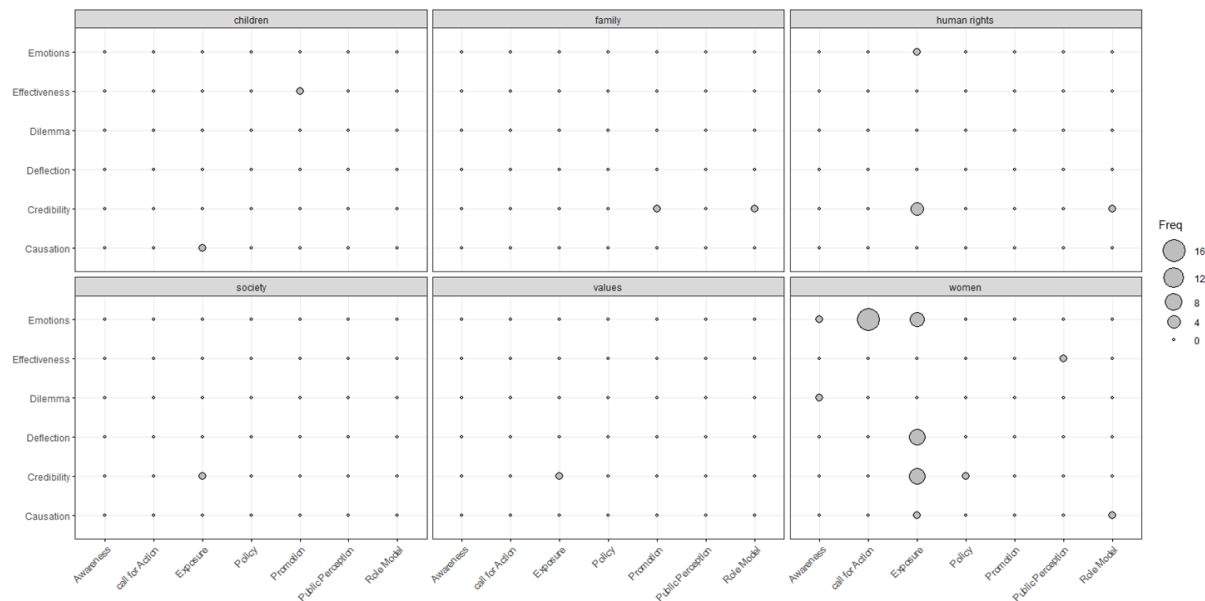
Source: Authors

Europe for Family portrayed surrogacy as a direct threat to women. Their strategy involved exposing how surrogacy exploits women, predominantly using emotional appeals and undermining the credibility of surrogacy supporters. When calling for bans on surrogacy, they similarly relied heavily on emotional arguments. Their messaging frequently characterized surrogacy as harmful to women (describing it as exploitation) while arguing that banning the practice was necessary to protect women's

rights. This approach strategically co-opted feminist rhetoric to argue against the feminist principle of bodily autonomy. Figure 7 reveals their framing approach combines Emotions and Credibility rhetorical strategies most frequently when discussing women and surrogacy.

We observe that discourse around “children,” “family” and “values” is less prominent in this actor, suggesting a deliberate focus on framing surrogacy as a women’s issue rather than emphasizing child welfare or traditional family value concerns.

Figure 7. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by Surrogacy in Europe for Family Discourse

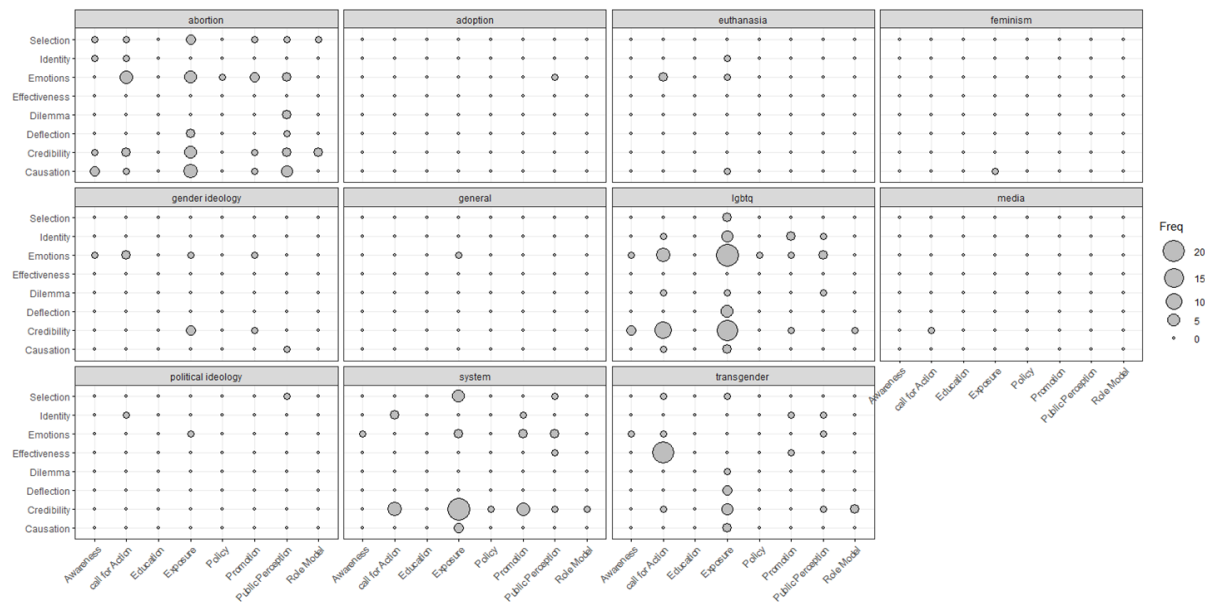


Source: Authors

Threatened Entities and Protective Framing

CitizenGo mentioned children predominately in tweets coded as Exposure (exposing child trafficking systems) and Call for Action (standing up for children). Their strongest messaging focused on framing abortion as threatening children. Their discourse also targeted transgender people, transition, and more broadly LGBTQ+ community, as well as the system. The visualization (Figure 8) confirms that across threat categories, CitizenGo consistently combines emotional appeals with challenges to credibility to amplify their narrative of children being endangered. This strategy is particularly evident in tweets about transitioning and gender-affirmative care.

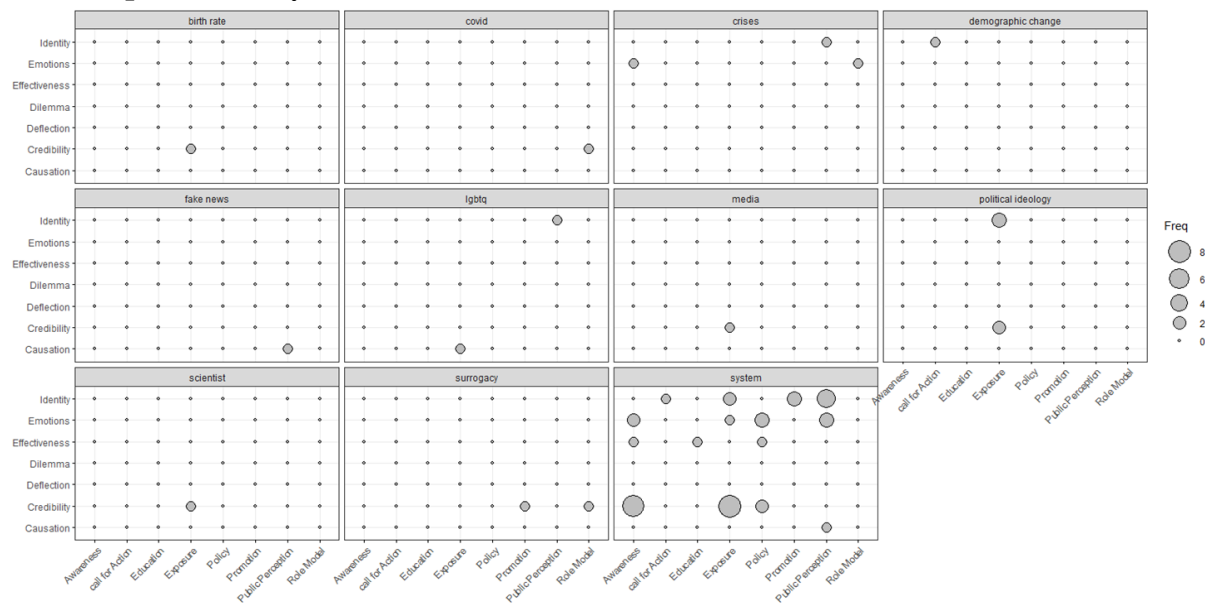
Figure 8. Interconnection between Goals, Frames and Constructions of Threats to Children in CitizenGo Discourse



Source: Authors

Europe for Family mentioned family predominately in tweets that were coded as Exposure (for example, “Why always LGBT and never for the family?”) and Awareness (criticizing the EU parliament approach to family policies). As shown in Figure 9, most commonly, the family was depicted as being under threat by the system (especially the EU trying to impose on their members), evidenced by the larger circles in the system column particularly at the Selection, Emotions, and Credibility intersections. The visualization clearly demonstrates how this messaging was combined with evoking shared identity, doubting the credibility of the action (questioning the EU’s competencies), and emotions related to losing sovereignty, with notable concentration of circles in these categories when discussing system-related threats.

Figure 9. Interconnection between Goals, Frames and Constructions of Threats to Family in the Europe for Family Discourse



Source: Authors

Temporal Patterns in Anti-Gender Discourse

In this final part, we address the third research question by presenting time-series analyses that visualize patterns in the anti-gender discourses over time. To examine how strategies, frames, and themes connect to international events, we focused six key events. For CitizenGo, we identified the following events: March for Life (2019-2021), Insurrection of the Capitol (2021), Twitter acquisition by Musk (April and October 2022), Overturning of Roe v. by the US Supreme Court (2022), and Anti-homosexual Bill in Uganda (2023). For Europe for Family, we added the European Parliament Elections of 2019.

Figure 10 and 11 show the frequency of four key themes for Europe for Family and CitizenGo over time. For Europe for Family's discourse, the theme of Society, Politics and Religion peaked just before the 2019 European Parliament elections. During this period, their tweets informed followers about EU structure and frequently shared pre-election polls from different countries, along with implicit voting recommendations. After the elections, this theme declined significantly in importance. While there are multiple spikes in discourse related to reproductive rights and gender in Europe for Family's communication, these were not linked to broader transnational events but instead corresponded with specific voting activities and discussions within EU institutions.

For CitizenGO, we observed an increase in tweets focusing on reproductive rights, particularly abortion, prior to the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* by the US Supreme Court in July 2022. Following this peak, abortion remained a frequent theme in their discourse, surging again after the March for Life in 2023. Several months earlier, in July 2021, we noted another spike in abortion-related content, which likely corresponded to the renewed discussions about abortion rights before the December 2021 U.S. Supreme Court hearing of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*.

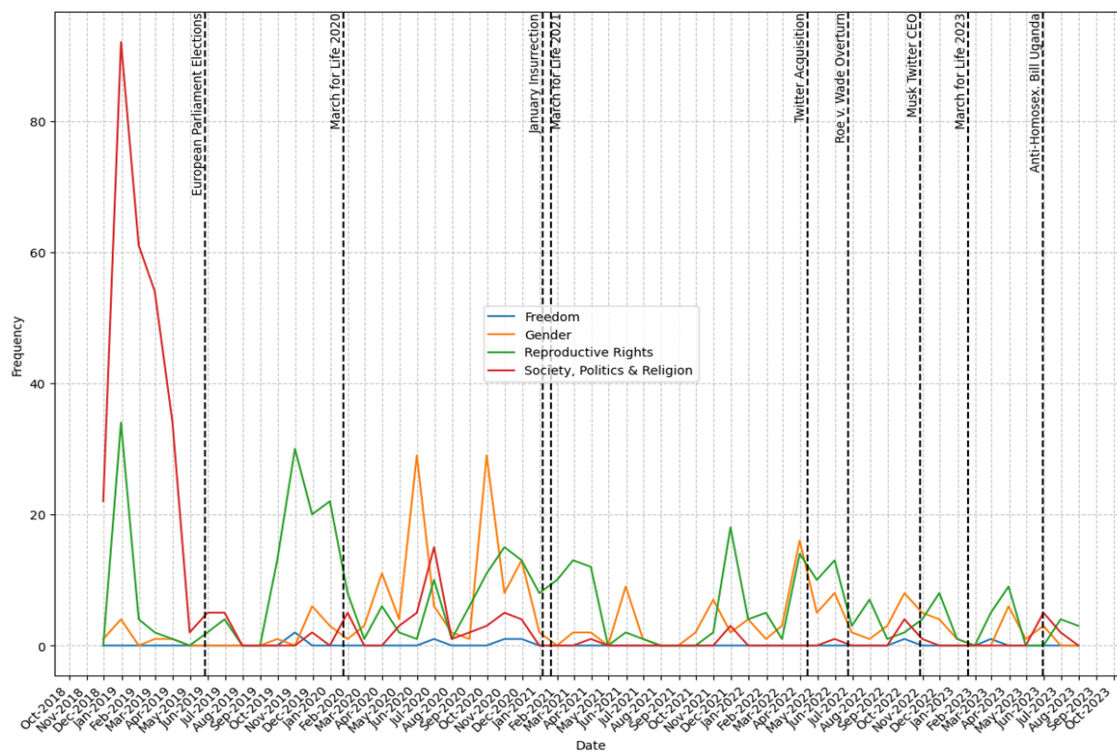
Interestingly, CitizenGo's tweeting frequency increased following Musk's acquisition of Twitter. However, our data does not provide sufficient evidence to establish a causal relationship between the platform's ownership change and this increase in activity.

Another notable trend emerged regarding LGBTQ+ themes, which began to appear more frequently in CitizenGO's tweets after Uganda passed its Anti-Homosexuality Bill in June 2023, as illustrated in Figures 11 and 12. The support for developments in Africa by seemingly Eurocentric actors highlights the global reach of anti-gender movements, demonstrating how they bridge regional divides and reinforce discriminatory ideologies across different sociopolitical contexts.

Further analysis reveals significant differences in the general tweet frequency between the two actors. Nearly one third of Europe for Family's tweets ($n = 298$) were posted in 2019, coinciding with the European elections, while they showed significantly lower activity in 2021 ($n = 99$) and 2022 ($n = 139$).

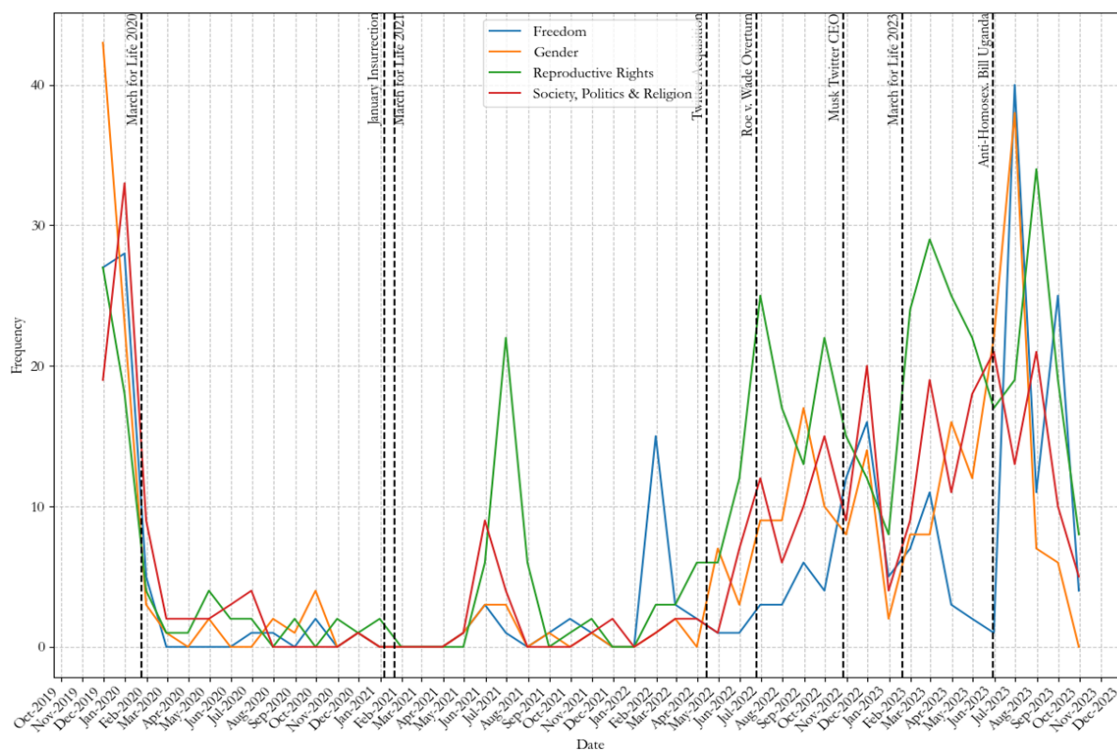
In contrast, CitizenGO's pattern differs markedly. Approximately 42% of their tweets were posted between January 2023 and September 2023, and around 30% were posted in 2022. Only 10% of their tweets date from 2020 and 2021. While it is possible that earlier tweets were deleted, contextual differences may also play a significant role. For instance, CitizenGO's reduced activity during the COVID-19 pandemic might reflect the cancellation of events they typically frame as threatening, such as Pride parades. Without these public gatherings to target in their discourse, they may have had fewer opportunities to mobilize their audience around these specific themes.

Figure 10. Timeline for Europe for Family



Source: Authors

Figure 11. Timeline for CitizenGo



Source: Authors

Discussion

Online spaces, particularly social media platforms, enable individuals and organizations to reach broad audiences, spreading their messages and narratives worldwide. While these platforms can raise awareness about important issues and mobilize support for social justice, they also facilitate the spread of harmful content that undermines gender equality and democratic values. This article examined how two prominent anti-gender actors—CitizenGo and Europe for Family—utilize X to advance their agenda. Our analysis focused on emerging themes, strategic approaches, and framing techniques employed by these organizations.

Our findings reveal that reproductive rights constituted a key theme for both CitizenGo and Europe for Family, though with different focal points within their online discourse. CitizenGo predominantly centered on abortion, while Europe for Family emphasized surrogacy. CitizenGo frames abortion as an immediate threat to children. Their discourse occasionally positioned anti-abortion advocacy as protection for women and unborn girls, as evidenced in posts such as this one:

Many in favour of abortion claim to advocate for “women’s rights”. Meanwhile, they’re murdering their baby girls. #ProLife #EndAbortion.

Europe for Family utilized surrogacy as a threat to women, linking it to discussions of gender equality, exploitation of women and same-sex marriage. Similar to CitizenGo’s framing, Europe for Family portrays the restriction of reproductive rights, particularly banning surrogacy, as a form of advocacy for women’s rights, as demonstrated in their messaging:

Together, let’s abolish the new form of women’s slavery: the #ReproductiveExploitation. Women aren’t commodities!

In Spain, real feminists stand up against #ReproductiveExploitation. Together, lets abolish this new form of #ViolenceAgainstWomen!

These examples demonstrate how surrogacy is portrayed in Europe for Family’s discourse as a dual threat. First, it is framed as a threat to women, characterized as exploitation, violence, and even slavery. Second, surrogacy is depicted as a threat to children by enabling non-traditional or non-heteronormative family structures, particularly those with same-sex parents. Europe for Family actively campaigns against both adoption and surrogacy, as these represent pathways to family formation for same-sex couples. Both anti-gender actors deliberately connect surrogacy and adoption in their messaging, portraying these practices as threats to children’s well-being, as illustrated in the following example:

In a surrogacy, the child is deprived of its right to know its mother. #StopSurrogacy now!

Adoption is never EVER for money. At least in Denmark, this evidence is enforced. We must #StopSurrogacyNow!

As such, tweets related to reproductive rights play a significant role in framing and shaping perceptions of family dynamics, women's bodily autonomy, gender roles in general, and especially women's role within the family.

Additionally, both actors frequently tweeted about gender+ themes. CitizenGo focused on LGBTQI+ "indoctrination," while Europe for Family emphasized the need for family-friendly policies. CitizenGo frequently addressed freedom of speech and freedom of belief, while Europe for Family concentrated on political and societal themes, such as the structure of the EU and the European Parliament elections.

Examining the framing of threats and threatened entities, our analysis revealed that both actors often referred to established institutions like the World Health Organization or politicians as threats to freedom or sovereignty. CitizenGo predominately portrayed the LGBTQI+ community as a threat to children, suggesting they sexually abuse children or indoctrinate them with communist, Marxist, or socialist agenda. In contrast, Europe for Family portrayed surrogacy as harmful for children's well-being.

In general, both anti-gender actors highlighted perceived threats to traditional family structures and roles. This underscores their broader resistance to gender equality advancements in family dynamics, thus reaffirming the ongoing backlash against societal changes. Interestingly, while both actors articulated perceived threats against "family," they often refrained from clearly articulating the source of these threats. This ambiguity creates space for their audience to form their own interpretations about who or what exactly poses a threat.

Our findings show that CitizenGo and Europe for Family shared similar strategic patterns in their online communications. For both anti-gender actors, the most frequently utilized approach was Exposure of their opponents—that is, portraying their adversaries' work in a negative light. The patterns diverged somewhat in secondary strategies: CitizenGo's discourse featured Call for Action as the second most frequent approach, while Europe for Family emphasized Public Perception. Although CitizenGo's discourse included more explicit threats compared to Europe for Family, both actors heavily relied on undermining opponents' credibility and appealing to emotions as their primary framing techniques. When it comes to strategic use of frames, both actors shared similar patterns with

Exposure of opponent being the most frequently utilized strategy. The differences can be explained by the different levels of politics each anti-gender actor targets.

Temporal patterns revealed strong connections between the online activity and discourse of anti-gender actors and international political and societal events. Examples include their participation in and support for events such as the March for Life, interventions at the International Conference on Population and Development, representation in the European Parliament through elected officials, and the promotion of citizens' petitions across multiple countries. We observed a notable increase in CitizenGo's tweets on reproductive rights, particularly abortion, leading up to the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in July 2022 and following the March for Life in 2023. Similarly, discourse on LGBTQI+ themes surged after the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda in June 2023. These findings highlight the actors' engagement with international political events, though further research is needed to explore the mechanisms linking anti-gender actors to global organizations and events.

We argue that CitizenGo and Europe for Family operate on different levels—citizen versus institutional—reflecting their respective mission statements and organizational structures. To support this, we examined whom they mentioned, retweeted, and quoted.

CitizenGo focuses on mobilizing and empowering citizens at local, regional, and national levels. Their online presence demonstrates a broad repertoire of mobilization tactics, including calls for boycotts, petition signings, and participation in protests like the March for Life across various countries. They frequently frame the system, elites, or establishment as threats. Within their top ten mentioned accounts, CitizenGo did not directly engage with political figures or institutions but instead interacted with multiple private accounts.

In contrast, Europe for Family's top ten mentioned accounts included prominent institutions and political figures such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, Emmanuel Macron (French president), the United Nations, and Katharina Novák (Hungarian President). Additionally, many of their tweets were directed at several Members of European Parliament (MEPs), inquiring how they would vote on specific issues. Europe for Family interacted more directly with European state politicians, MEPs (for example, Germany's Ska Keller), and national and European-level institutions. For example, they highlighted their Executive Director's speech to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group on family issues:

Today at the European Parliament, our Executive Director Mrs. Laetitia Pouliquen, gave a speech on the project of “European Certificate of Parenthood”. Thank you MEP @MargaPisa for hosting this conference for the @ecrgroup Policy Group on Family.

Like CitizenGo, Europe for Family also called for citizen mobilisation, but primarily at an institutional level, such as sharing information about political parties’ agenda to encourage voting in the European Parliament elections. However, this mobilisation was largely confined to this specific event. While they used X to inform the public about their work, they did not rely on it as heavily for gaining grassroots support. Consequently, the distinct ways in which both actors use the platform reflect their differing levels of political mobilisation—CitizenGo focuses on citizen.

We acknowledge that some differences, such as the focus on the European Parliament elections, may be linked to the varying timeframes covered by the collected tweets. As such, we do not claim that CitizenGo did not mobilize around the European elections. Rather, we observe that CitizenGo maintains continuous mobilization efforts, such as sharing petitions, while Europe for Family exhibited a spike in activity specifically around the European Parliament elections.

Conclusion

Our study contributes to research on anti-gender equality movements by adopting the Narrative Policy Framework and a mixed-methods approach to explore narratives and how they are used by anti-gender actors to mobilize across different political levels. This framework allowed us to examine the intentions behind each narrative and delve into its interconnection with perceived threats. Building on existing literature on threats and anti-gender discourse, our methodology can be used to analyse narratives and mobilisation strategies of other anti-gender actors online.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates how anti-gender equality actors employ threat narratives and gender-related themes to mobilise support online. By analysing two similar yet distinct anti-gender actors, we explored how their structural differences translated into their discourses. CitizenGo’s direct calls for action contrast with Europe for Family’s interactions with MEPs, reflecting their differing strategies. Their online presence and discourse reveal their engagement with international politics, operating across multiple political levels to challenge advancements in gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, and reproductive rights.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that anti-gender movements aim to mobilize by framing gender-related themes as threats to the status quo and to society’s most vulnerable: children. Our research sheds light on how prominent anti-gender actors use X to promote their agendas, enhancing

our understanding of their narratives and mobilization strategies. This insight offers opportunities to inform feminist resistance and develop effective counter-strategies to address these challenges.

Future research should investigate how harmful anti-gender narratives can be countered while safeguarding freedom of speech. What mechanisms are effective in dismantling these narratives? From a policymaking perspective, a more detailed examination is needed to determine under what conditions narratives cause harm and might qualify as hate speech. While hate speech is often reduced to derogatory terms and incitement of hatred, the EU's definition is broader, encompassing negative stereotyping and stigmatization of groups. Legal scholars should further define the circumstances under which these narratives meet this definition and warrant restriction.

While legal mechanisms are crucial for reducing hate speech and regulating online debates, it is important to recognize that these narratives are rooted in social conventions. In her research on revenge porn, Rikke Amundsen (2019) argues that focusing solely on the malicious intentions of perpetrators overlooks how revenge porn exploits and reinforces existing gender inequalities. Treating revenge porn as an isolated incident neglects “addressing the underlying social conditions that enable revenge porn to work so well” (Amundsen 2019, 143). Amundsen's insight applies to discourses of anti-gender actors. Their narratives gain traction because they build on pre-existing social conventions. Therefore, the most effective way to neutralize their impact may be to address these underlying social conditions directly.

Finally, our finding that anti-gender actors target and engage with audiences at different levels calls for further analysis of their multilevel political mobilization strategies. Understanding how these actors operate across local, national, and international contexts could provide deeper insights into their influence and the broader implications of their discourse.

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Appendix

Goals with Examples

Goals	Code	Example
1. Self-promotion Tweets highlight own/actor's achievements.	G.01	<i>CitizenGO delivers at Disney's Florida headquarters 500,000 signatures against LGBT indoctrination in its series and films. #Disney #LGTBI #Indoctrination</i>
2. Call for Action Tweets call for action/support of the receiver.	G.02	<i>Please sign this petition to prevent the next gay pride parade and similar events from happening in any Disney park. #Disney #Adoctrination #MickeyMouse</i>
3. Education Tweets provide educational/statistical information.	G.03	<i>C'est bien pour cela qu'il faut s'informer, comprendre et voter pour le groupe politique européen qui porte notre vision de l'EuropeQueNousVoulons</i>
4. Exposure of others Tweets highlight the failings/misconduct of others.	G.04	<i>This is a deceptive move to push the LGBT political agenda and expose children and families to lewd behavior. #Disney</i>
5. Role Model Tweets highlight the success of specific others.	G.05	<i>[REDACTED] a great pro-life campaigner against abortion throughout the world. Her speech at the Republican convention in the USA.</i>
6. Policy Tweets advocate for the implementation or abolition of a law/regulation/institution	G.06	<i>Demand a parliamentary inquiry into kids transgender treatment! Sign the petition!</i>
7. Public Perception Tweets intent to impact the perception of an issue.	G.07	<i>Many in favor of abortion claim to advocate for "women's rights." Meanwhile, they're murdering their baby girls.</i>
8. Awareness Tweets make an issue salient.	G.08	<i>First, demographic changes include rapid aging, which systematically leads to a decline in the working-age population. Immediate consequences are significant challenges for our economies, our social and health systems, and the general well-being of our societies.</i>

Source: Authors

Frames with Examples

Frames	Coded	Example
1. Credibility Tweet aims to establish or undermine the credibility	N.01	<i>Experts from around the world call for the universal abolition of #surrogacy: A hundred specialists on the subject will sign the [REDACTED] a text calling for the universal repeal of this practice.</i>
2. Deflection Tweets raise a counterargument/counteraccusation or attack the person who made the argument instead of focusing on the argument itself.	N.02	<i>The Bible has over 600 laws, and a lot are civil. You should actually inform yourself on something before you try to lecture others on it. Under liberal secular law, people murder babies for convenience and call it "abortion."</i>
3. Effort/Effectiveness Tweets aim to highlight (the lack of) effectiveness of existing or suggested laws/regulations/ institutions.	N.03	<i>[REDACTED] "The diary of this conference does not represent the spirit of African culture, which is predominantly pro-life, and the Constitution of Kenya, which declares life begins at conception, and unborn babies deserve the right to life," #ICPD #Kenya #Abortion</i>
4. Selection Bias Tweets emphasise single stories or rely on overgeneralization or claim that a majority of people support an idea or tell part of an issue, but not all of it.	N.04	<i>VICTORY! South Carolina Supreme Court Again Upholds Heartbeat Law Saving Babies From Abortions.</i>
5. Correlation versus Causation; Post hoc ergo propter hoc; Circular Reasoning.	N.05	<i>RT @LifeNewsHQ: [REDACTED] And it has caused massive underpopulation... America's Birth Rate is Below Replacement Level, We Need More Babies.</i>
6. False Dilemma Tweets display arguments/ solutions as a dichotomy or indicate there are only two opposing ways to see an Issue.	N.06	<i>There is no such thing as a safe abortion. Abortion always kills the baby.</i>
7. Identity and Value System Tweets invoke a group/ collective identity or appeal to a shared belief systems/ shared cultural value or distinguish between different groups.	N.07	<i>Remembering 2019: CitizenGO delivered nearly half a million signatures to Disney's Orlando headquarters. This 2020, we will continue to fight for our values. If you haven't done so, sign up and join in!</i>
8. Appeal to emotions Tweets incite basic emotions or evoke a perception of threat or safety.	N.08	<i>End christian genocide and persecution in #Nigeria. Sign the petition???? #Genocide #Petition #Christian. @CitizenGO_USA: Transgenderism is a Satanic attack against God's image! @CitizenGO</i>

Source: Authors