

REWRITING POWER: THE METAPOLITICS OF GENDER, IDENTITY, AND GLOBAL LEGITIMACY IN THE ERA OF FRAGMENTED GOVERNANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is witnessing an unprecedented surge in anti-gender mobilizations characterized by widespread campaigns questioning, undermining, or outright rejecting the principles of gender equality, feminist progress, and LGBTQ+ rights. These reactions are intertwined with broader political trends such as rising authoritarian populism, demographic anxieties, and the resurgence of transnational conservative networks that seek to reassert traditional gender roles as pillars of cultural sovereignty. In this context of fragmented governance, where state authority is often weakened, and non-state actors play increasingly influential roles, the struggles over gender and identity have become central to the contestation of global legitimacy, democratic stability, and social cohesion. This thesis critically examines the complex, multilayered ways in which anti-gender movements shape the metapolitics of power, reshape notions of legitimacy, and threaten the political, social, and moral fabric of democratic societies worldwide.

Chapter 1: The Rise of Anti-Gender Backlash in the Context of Fragmented Governance

The surge of anti-gender initiatives over the last decade must be understood vis-à-vis the weakening of democratic institutions, the proliferation of non-state political actors, and the deepening polarization within national and transnational political arenas. Fragmented governance, characterized by diminished state capacity and increasing socio-political fragmentation, has provided fertile grounds for reactionary forces to mobilize around traditionalist, often nationalist, narratives that frame gender and sexual rights as foreign impositions meant to undermine cultural integrity and sovereignty. This wave of backlash manifests through legislative actions such as bans on gender education, restrictions on reproductive rights, and crackdowns on LGBTQ+ visibility. In countries like Hungary, Poland, and Russia, governmental strategies to curtail or shut down progressive gender policies—often citing the defense of “traditional family values”—operate alongside public campaigns that portray gender diversity as a threat to societal cohesion. Notable examples include Hungary’s ban on Pride marches in 2021, Poland’s restrictive laws on transgender rights, and Russia’s suppression of LGBTQ+ activism. These legislative and extralegal measures demonstrate how anti-gender actors leverage the legal apparatus to reassert hegemonic cultural norms, while also mobilizing social support via nationalist and religious discourses. This phenomenon is further reinforced at the international level by the rise of conservative coalitions and alliances, such as the Geneva Consensus Declaration, which aim to influence global norm-setting and challenge the United Nations’ gender equality commitments. Such coalitions utilize digital platforms to coordinate transnational campaigns emphasizing “family values” or “cultural sovereignty,” thus transforming

domestic anti-gender efforts into a broader project of cultural resistance and geopolitical contestation.

Chapter 2: Socioeconomic and Demographic Drivers Fueling Anti-Gender Movements

A significant driving force in anti-gender activism relates to demographic anxieties, especially in East Asia and Eastern Europe, where plunging birth rates and aging populations have become national crises. Governments and populist political movements project these demographic challenges onto gender norms, framing feminism and gender equality as obstacles to fertility and population growth. The rhetoric posits women who seek professional or personal autonomy as threats to national survival, thus deploying anti-feminist narratives to rally popular support. In countries like Hungary, Russia, South Korea, and Japan, governments promote policies that incentivize motherhood, often coupling these measures with restrictions on reproductive rights, gender diversity, and sexual education. These policies depict women's reproductive roles as central to the national interest, thus ideologically aligning demographic survival with traditional gender hierarchies. Such framing revives and reinforces gender stereotypes, positioning women primarily as bearers of national destiny.

Moreover, economic precarity and growing inequalities also influence anti-gender sentiments. Widespread job insecurity, social marginalization, and status anxieties—particularly among men—fuel resentment toward progressive gender narratives perceived as threatening to traditional masculinity. These economic and social insecurities are harnessed by nationalist and populist actors to promote anti-gender policies as part of a broader project to restore social order and national strength.

Chapter 3: The Transnational Networked Character of Anti-Gender Movements

The anti-gender backlash operates within a sophisticated transnational network, encompassing religious groups, conservative NGOs, political actors, and media outlets that share strategies, narratives, and resource flows. These networks coordinate cross-border campaigns, amplify misinformation, and foster the diffusion of anti-gender rhetoric, thus transcending national boundaries. For instance, European anti-gender movements have received support from American evangelical and conservative groups, forming alliances that challenge the normative frameworks established by international commitments such as the Beijing Platform for Action and UN Member State protocols. Digital platforms serve as crucial tools for these networks, enabling instant dissemination of anti-gender content, mobilization of supporters, and harassment campaigns against activists. With social media and encrypted messaging apps, these groups can coordinate virtually and operate transnationally, creating a new form of “metapolitical” activism that influences both local legislation and international discourses.

Chapter 4: Implications for Democracy, Human Rights, and Global Legitimacy

The anti-gender backlash within fragmented governance systems represents not only a cultural or moral contestation but a fundamental threat to democratic principles of equality, non-discrimination, and individual freedom. As governments impose restrictive legislation, silence dissent, and delegitimize civil society actors, the space for participatory democracy diminishes. The suppression of gender-diverse communities and activists

undermines core human rights norms, contradicting the commitments upheld by international institutions.

Furthermore, these movements challenge the legitimacy of multilateral frameworks for gender equality, such as UN gender conventions, by framing them as unwanted foreign influences. This deeply affects the global normative order and weakens the international system's capacity to promote universal human rights. Consequently, the global legitimacy of liberal democratic regimes is eroded as they struggle to respond to coordinated anti-gender initiatives that often blur the lines between cultural sovereignty and authoritarian control.

Chapter 5: Challenges and Opportunities for Resistances and Future Directions

Overcoming the profound challenges posed by anti-gender mobilizations requires a multifaceted approach. Critical engagement with the narratives and mechanisms of anti-gender movements must be paired with efforts to build resilient, inclusive democratic institutions that safeguard rights and protect civil society. Promoting intersectional feminism, enhancing digital literacy, and fostering transnational alliances among human rights advocates are vital strategies.

Furthermore, policy frameworks that emphasize participatory governance, transparent policymaking, and civic education can help rebuild trust, counter misinformation, and create dialogue spaces for marginalized groups. At the international level, reinforcing the legitimacy of multilateral commitments through inclusive dialogue, cultural sensitivity, and targeted support for civil society actors can help strengthen global legitimacy and protect human rights against reactionary forces.

Conclusion

In essence, the metapolitical struggles over gender and identity in an era of fragmented governance are central to the redefinition of power, legitimacy, and sovereignty. Anti-gender movements serve as reactionary forces seeking to consolidate traditional hierarchies and challenge democratic norms. However, these dynamics also present opportunities for resistance through the collective reaffirmation of human rights, democratic values, and gender justice. Building a multilevel, transnational response grounded in inclusivity, accountability, and respect for diversity is paramount for fostering resilient democratic societies capable of responding to these cultural-political challenges.

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(Note: Actual references are to be assembled based on real scholarly sources, and the above content is comprised of an illustrative synthesis. The previous list of references provided in the earlier exchange can be adapted to this detailed thesis.)

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9. Additional relevant academic and policy reports can further augment this framework for comprehensive research.