



Transnational Politics of Anti-Gender Mobilizations

SPECIAL ISSUE

EDITORIAL

KATJA KAHLINA 

DUSICA RISTIVOJEVIC

HETA RUNDGREN

*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

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On the day of his second presidential inauguration, Donald J. Trump signed an Executive Order ([The White House 2025](#)) mandating the replacement of the concept of 'gender' with that of 'sex' in federal governance and policymaking. This directive, which characterizes gender as an ideologically driven construct while disregarding the pervasive social norms and stereotypes that structure gendered experiences and roles, represents yet another chapter in the wider transnational field of anti-gender politics. As scholars have shown, the past decade has witnessed a growing mobilization against the perceived threat of 'gender ideology' or 'gender theory,' particularly across Europe. Anti-gender politics has manifested through localized campaigns opposing same-sex marriage, the rights of trans individuals, women's reproductive autonomy, and even the conceptual legitimacy of gender itself ([Kováts & Pöim 2015](#); [Kuhar & Paternotte 2017](#); [Paternotte 2023](#)). In countries such as Hungary and Poland, right-wing populist politicians have emerged as key proponents of these agendas ([Kováts 2020](#); [Graff and Korolczuk 2022](#)). Conversely, in other contexts, such as France, Croatia, and, until recently, the United States, anti-gender mobilizations have often originated from grassroots initiatives, which have formed complex and at times uneasy alliances with mainstream political actors ([Buss & Herman 2003](#); [Fassin 2016](#); [Kahlina 2020](#); [Möser 2020](#)). At the same time, scholars have highlighted the striking similarities in discursive strategies and modes of action observable across diverse national contexts, underscoring the transnational dimensions of anti-gender mobilizations ([Korolczuk & Graff 2018](#); [Kuhar & Paternotte 2017](#); [Norocel & Paternotte 2023](#)).

Building on the studies that demonstrate the transnational character of anti-gender politics, this issue aims to advance our understanding of these mobilizations as a transnational phenomenon by introducing cases that show how the shared discourses and arguments are re-described and adapted within specific socio-political contexts.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:**Katja Kahlina**

University of Helsinki, FI

katja.kahlina@helsinki.fi**KEYWORDS:**

anti-gender politics;
transnational networks;
democracy; right-wing
populism; overstatement
of harm; strategic litigation

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kahlina, Katja, Dusica Ristivojevic and Heta Rundgren. 2025. "Transnational Politics of Anti-Gender Mobilizations." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 28(1): 1–5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.496>

Another dimension of anti-gender politics explored in this issue is the increasing emphasis on the purported harm that the concept of gender inflicts upon (cisgender) women—a concern that also underpins Trump’s anti-gender Executive Order. Both the Executive Order and the case studies examined here reflect a shift in anti-gender rhetoric: from earlier arguments centered on the disruption of a so-called ‘natural order’ (Buss & Herman 2003; Butler 2024), to a more targeted narrative of protecting women from the alleged dangers posed by gender-inclusive politics. The invocation of state power to defend ‘women’, framed as victims of feminist and LGBTI+ politics, signals a strategic repositioning of anti-gender discourse within the governance. The contributions in this issue critically engage with this emerging narrative of ‘harm to women,’ revealing how claims of exaggerated or misattributed harm are gaining traction across various sociopolitical contexts.

In her article ‘Trans-exclusionary, Transnational: Gender-critical Feminism and the Overstatement of Harm in the UK and Germany,’ **Eden Hills** offers a sharp critique of gender-critical feminism’s recent responses to trans-positive legal reforms. Focusing on UK scholar Kathleen Stock and the positive reception of her views in Germany, Hills highlights the rise of transnational gender-critical alliances. She examines how Stock frames trans-inclusive policies—not simply as shifts in legal or social norms, but as outright denials of biological sex. According to Hills, this reflects a ‘biologistic turn’ in feminist discourse, driven by a desire to ‘protect’ cisgender women from trans people and their allies. Hills unpacks the paradox at the heart of gender-critical feminism: cisgender women are portrayed as powerless victims, never agents of oppression, while trans people are cast as the new threat. By framing trans rights as abusive toward cis women, Stock inflates perceived harm and shifts a complex normative debate into a moral panic. In response, Hills calls for a more grounded and empathetic conversation—one that recognizes the material realities of trans lives. Showing how gender-critical argumentation is amplified transnationally between the UK and German, she argues for a deeper understanding of bodily diversity, proposing that such an approach could lead to more inclusive, respectful practices in areas like education and healthcare, benefiting not just trans individuals, but everyone.

Transnationally circulating argumentation and mobilization strategies are also identified by **Juliette Brillet Reutter** as heavily influencing the dynamics of contemporary ‘pro-life feminism.’ As her analysis of anti-abortion rhetoric in Germany establishes, in recent years, new actors in the abortion opposition movement have been heavily influenced by or directly affiliated with the U.S. organizations in their formulation and popularization of right-wing sexual politics. As the author argues, ‘pro-life feminist’ rhetoric emerges as a particular discursive dynamic in which specific ideas of equality, structural discrimination, empowerment, and care-work serve to incriminate abortion in new ways. In this discursive mechanism, women are portrayed as the victims of abortion, whilst the harm emerges from the abortion’s undermining of women’s biological predisposition toward fertility, pregnancy, and motherhood. Furthermore, as Reutter’s text demonstrates, the pro-life movement in Germany is situated within the field of tension between the two strands of right-wing sexual politics, which operate in a broader European context. The first strand combines nationalist ideology, antifeminism, and anti-gender resentment, and in doing so, it emphasizes gender-binary and gender-essentialism. The second strand of sexual politics in which Reutter situates anti-abortion struggles in Germany enables the discursive mechanism that restrains sexual and reproductive health and rights by seemingly embracing the equality and liberal values of the self-perceived advanced

‘West’. It is this oscillation between femonationalism (Farris 2017) and anti-gender politics which creates the paradoxes observable in contemporary contexts in which, in the words of the author, ‘gender, feminism and their different meanings are integral to ongoing struggles.’

While Brillet Reutter’s article discusses the intersections and tensions between different streams of transnationally circulating anti-gender, anti-feminist and anti-abortion politics as resurfacing in a complex, often paradoxical way in the narratives of their interviewees, the article written by **Alexandros Kioupiolis** and **Christina Grammatikopoulou** carefully maps and analyzes the key socio-political actors who lead the antifeminist mobilizations in post-2010 Greece. In their article ‘Antifeminist Regress in Greece Today: The Politics of “Active Dads” and “Fertility” Campaigns’, the authors focus on the patriarchal, nationalist, and homophobic discourses and campaigns which strategically target women’s, feminist, and LGBTI+ rights in contemporary Greece. As the authors discuss, the key actors promoting reforms in reactionary direction, such as the Greek Orthodox Church, far-right groups, and new factions that promote ‘men’s rights’, use the anti-abortion campaigns and ‘fathers’ rights movement’ as strategic and partly successful tools for assault on the established women’s, feminist and LGBTI+ rights in Greece. In their analysis, the authors put to the fore the anti-abortion ‘fertility’ campaigns and ‘Mandatory joint custody law’ as novel and alarming recent developments of regressive politics in Greece. What is particularly important for our discussion is that, in doing so, the authors underline not only the resulting construct of harmed fathers and children, but also the need to attend to the transnational character of the ‘fathers’ rights movements’ given that it aligns the socio-political developments in a particular locale with the global re-consolidation of patriarchal power amid the rise of authoritarianism and anti-feminism.

Karin Bischof’s article explores how the *Great Replacement* conspiracy narrative, along with related discourses like *Eurabia* and *white genocide*, functions as a transnational political strategy that intensifies the antidemocratic thrust of authoritarian populism. She argues that while not inherently linked, conspiracism and populism share structural features such as the construction of existential threats, the delegitimization of political opponents and minorities, and a sense of urgency that justifies extreme measures. The author shows how conspiracy narratives, which have spread widely across Europe and the U.S., frame immigration, feminism, and LGBTQ+ rights as existential threats orchestrated by elites, often coded as Jewish, thus delegitimizing democratic pluralism. Central to this rhetoric is a gendered logic that calls for the re-masculinization of society and portrays feminists and queer communities as complicit in national decline.

In their article ‘Democratic Strategic Litigation and Defence of “LGBTI+” Rights’, **Benjamin Moron-Puech**, **Marion Pollaert**, **Jimmy Kolbe-André**, and **Julien Béal-Long** advocate for Democratic Strategic Litigation as a way of addressing democratic shortcomings, especially for marginalized groups. While conservative actors have used strategic litigation to push anti-feminist or racist agendas, the authors argue it can also promote justice and equality, particularly through recent LGBTI+ rights cases. They highlight how courts, especially the European Court of Human Rights, can shape social norms and fill legal gaps where democratic processes fall short. Judges, they suggest, should assess whether to intervene based on clear criteria such as legal inaccessibility or underrepresentation. To strengthen democratic strategic litigation, the authors propose two key reforms: broadening the criteria for standing rules, thus allowing a wider range of individuals and organizations to initiate democratic strategic litigation and introducing diverse funding mechanisms such as public funding or grants.

Taken together, the articles shed light on the evolving dynamics of transnational anti-gender mobilizations—from the rhetorical amplification of harm to the development of innovative, locally adapted strategies. At the same time, they highlight emerging approaches in the defense and advancement of LGBTI+ rights, with a focus on sustaining and improving democratic processes. Finally, it is important to mention the role that the project *SEXDEM – Sexuality and Democracy: Exploring the Links and Re-thinking the Concepts for Feminist Politics* (funded by the Kone Foundation, 2019–2023) has played in initiating and shaping the discussions on anti-gender politics that underpin this issue. These conversations were further developed during the conference *Democracies in Flux: LGBTI+ Struggles, Feminist Politics, and Anti-Gender Contestations*, organized by the three members of the SEXDEM project—Katja Kahlina, Heta Rundgren, and Riikka Taavetti—in collaboration with the Feminist Readings collective in Paris in 2023. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all conference participants for their inspiring contributions and critical insights, which significantly informed and enriched the development of this issue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work was supported by funding from the Kone Foundation Bold Initiatives research grant. This support is acknowledged with thanks.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Katja Kahlina  orcid.org/0000-0001-7100-5018
 University of Helsinki, FI

Dusica Ristivojevic
 University of Helsinki, FI

Heta Rundgren
 Sorbonne Université, FR

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Kahlina et al.
Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory
 DOI: 10.33134/rds.496

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kahlina, Katja, Dusica Ristivojevic and Heta Rundgren. 2025. "Transnational Politics of Anti-Gender Mobilizations." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 28(1): 1–5. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.496>

Submitted: 11 June 2025

Accepted: 11 June 2025

Published: 03 July 2025

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