



# **ANTI - GENDER POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA**

**Summaries of Country Case Studies**

Edited by Sonia Corrêa



**G&PAL**

Género & Política en  
América Latina

# ANTI - GENDER POLITICS IN LATIN AMERICA

Summaries of Country Case Studies

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América Latina

# SUMMARY

Contributors .....	4
Foreword .....	10
“Gender Ideology”, Catholic Neointegrismo, and Evangelical Fundamentalism: The Anti-Democratic Vocation .....	20
Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez	
The Case of Argentina .....	34
Maximiliano Campana	
The Case of Brazil .....	47
Sonia Corrêa and Isabela Kalil	
The Case of Chile .....	66
Jaime Barrientos	
The Case of Colombia .....	79
Franklin Gil Hernández	
The Case of Costa Rica .....	92
Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez	
The Case of Ecuador .....	103
Maria Amelia Viteri	
The Case of Mexico .....	122
Gloria Careaga and Luz Elena Aranda	
The Case of Paraguay .....	135
Clyde Soto and Lilian Soto	
The Case of Uruguay .....	146
Lilián Abracinkas, Santiago Puyol, Nicolás Iglesias, Stefanie Kreher	
The Case of The Organization of American States .....	164
Mirta Moragas	

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## URUGUAY

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## FOREWORD

In 2017, we began a new line of investigation and action in order to map and analyze anti-gender politics in Latin America. This was the first time that the Sexuality Policy Watch (SPW) carried out an analytical effort exclusively focusing on Latin America. What motivated us to begin this journey was that around 2016 we identified a number of political signs at play in the regional context that seemed to converge with trends that partner investigators were also looking at in Europe. These cross-regional conversations made us conclude that what we were witnessing was not just more of the same, in terms of the discourses and mobilizations propelled by conservative religious forces in relation to these domains of political life.

These perception and sustained dialogues with our European colleagues, in particular David Paternotte (Université Libre de Bruxelles), inspired the regional research project Gender and Politics in Latin America (G&PAL)<sup>1</sup>. Between May 2018 and February 2020, the project conducted nine country case-studies authored by Maximiliano Campana (Argentina), Sonia Corrêa and Isabela Kalil (Brazil), Jaime Barrientos (Chile), Franklin Gil Hernández (Colombia), Gabriela Arguedas (Costa Rica), María Amelia Viteri (Ecuador), Clyde Soto and Lilian Soto (Paraguay), Gloria Careaga and Luz Elena Aranda (Mexico), Lilián Abracinskas, Santiago Pujol, Nicolás Iglesias, and Stefanie Kreher (Uruguay), as well as one study of regional anti-gender actors that participate in the Organization of the American States (OAS) general assemblies, authored by Mirta Moragas, and a genealogical essay by Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez on the trajectories of Catholic *integrismo* and Evangelical fundamentalism and their convergence around the current crusade against “gender ideology”.

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1 The first product of the project was the translation of selected texts from the Special Issue *Habemus Gender! The Catholic Church and ‘Gender Ideology’* (2017), edited by Sara Bracke and David Paternotte and published by Religion & Gender. Furthermore, the analytical framework that guided the G&PAL studies were strongly inspired by the reflections of David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar in their book *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilising Against Equality* (Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2017).

The preliminary findings of the research were released in a series of short videos in September 2019 and the final reports and essay were published in February 2020<sup>2</sup>. The present publication comprises the English summaries of these outcomes. Originally planned to be delivered in the first semester of 2020, this last outcome of the first cycle of the research project was delayed by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and, unfortunately, delayed. It is, therefore, with great pleasure that we make it now available to English readers.

Though synthetic, the summaries gathered in this collection are very rich in terms of empirical information and allow for retracing the temporal trajectory of anti-gender politics in the region and how its intensity and effects have varied across space and time. It shows, for example, that anti-gender ideology has been diffused regionally since 1995, when the Paraguayan delegation, seconding the Vatican, formally objected to the term ‘gender’ in the IV World Conference of Women in Beijing. Then, as noted in the studies of Argentina, Colombia, and Costa Rica substantial anti-gender literature has also been produced locally since the 2000s, a trail preceded by an extensively-cited document delivered by the Peruvian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1998 and reinforced by the final document of the Regional Council of Catholic Bishops (CELAM), held in Brazil in 2007.

In terms of variations within this larger time frame, in contrast with the premature circulation of anti-gender parlance in Paraguay, Argentina, Mexico, and Uruguay, the rhetoric device of “gender ideology” would just become prominent after 2016. In that respect, the case of Argentina is particularly intriguing because since before 2010 the country has exported quite substantial locally-produced anti-gender literature, one glaring example being the book *El Libro Negro de la Nueva Izquierda - Ideología de Género o Subversión Cultural (The Black Book of the New Left: Gender Ideology or Cultural Subversion)* authored by Nicolás Márquez and Agustín Laje in 2016.

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2 The various outcomes of the project can be accessed at <https://sxpolitics.org/GPAL/>

Between the 1995 Paraguayan objection to gender in 2016, one landmark point in time was the year of 2013. A few months after the French movement *Manif pour Tous* (Demonstration for All) had taken over the streets of Paris to contest marriage equality and “unnatural gender”, a well-orchestrated attack against gender in public education arose in Brazil. This was followed by the OAS Assembly held in Guatemala when a resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity was virulently targeted. Then, in December, a demeaning speech against gender theory was deployed by leftwing president Rafael Correa in his popular weekly TV program known as *sabatinas*.

After 2016, anti-gender flare-ups have flagrantly intensified, mostly through claspings with relevant electoral process, such as the Peace Agreement Referendum in Colombia (2016) and the presidential elections of Costa Rica (2018), Brazil (2018) and Uruguay (2019). But these issues have also been manifested in many other forms of social mobilization as, for example, the campaign *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (Don't Mess With My Children) against sexual education that, created in Peru in 2016, was swiftly transported to five other countries of our analysis sample. In the first semester of 2017, the “anti-gender orange bus” - invented by the Spanish NGO *HazteOír* -- roamed between Mexico and Chile, and as the year reached its end, a campaign and very nasty protest was unleashed against the presence of Judith Butler in Brazil.

Even when significant contextual differentials exist across the nine countries examined in the research, common traits across the cycles of eruption, propagation and escalation of anti-gender formations and agitations can be drawn when the studies' summaries are read together. One of these common threads is the intricate overlapping between the older Catholic anti-abortion political infra-structure and the much more heterogeneous assemblage of religious and secular actors that constitute or orbit around more recent anti-gender formations. Another commonality is exactly the ecumenical contours of anti-gender politics, which everywhere coalesces around a Christian core comprised of Catholic and Evangelic forces and institutions whose degree of cohesion may vary across place and time. This core is encircled by a relatively loose assemblage

of conservative politicians, professionals, wealthy entrepreneurs, ultra-neoliberal think tanks, experts and activists, and in fewer cases open Nazi and Fascist groupings, military and police personnel and, specifically in Brazil, the Jewish Right linked to conservative Evangelism.

Though male dominated, these formations count with significant numbers of women and have been extensively recruiting young people for national and international anti-abortion and anti-gender activism. They cut across class structures and politics of identity. Though grass-rooted, particularly amongst religious communities, they are always plugged into transnational webs through which are shared common repertoires, strategies and money flows. Highly adaptable to context and circumstance, anti-gender formations are keen in grasping political opportunities. They sustain political battles, even when defeated, to keep the flare of mobilizations alive. Not less importantly, they count with savvy experts in digital communications strategies.

As analyzed by feminist researchers in Eastern Europe, in Latin America “gender ideology” has been propagated as an empty basket or signifier that wraps multiple contents or targets.<sup>3</sup> Anti-gender language is popular, versatile, and commonsense. It has left behind religious semantics to borrow arguments and tropes from biology, biomedicine, demography as democracy, citizenship and rights. But, in Latin America, the most prominent trait of anti-gender discourse is that it is usually deployed in articulation with anti-Marxist discursive and imagery constructs. Although at play everywhere, this dyad was particularly powerful and effective in the Brazilian 2018 general elections when it served to collapse “gender ideology”, pedophilia, the Workers’ Party (PT), and Marxism under the same accusatory umbrella.

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3 See Kováts, E. and Põim, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilizations in Europe*. Foundation for European Progressive Studies. <https://bit.ly/2JifAHT>

As described in all cases, the intensity of anti-gender crusades oscillates across time, reaching peaks and then going through phases of latency. But these crusades do not vanish, even if the forces propelling them may be silent in certain moments. More significantly, their effects are far from innocuous. In all the countries studied, albeit in different degrees, they have negatively affected gender and sexuality in public education. Gender identity rights that were not a priority when the campaigns erupted in 2013 would later become their main target after 2016, as examined in the Chilean and Uruguayan studies. Anti-gender crusades have also amplified the much older stigmatization of homosexuality as “pedophilia”. In Paraguay and Ecuador, these campaigns have openly targeted laws against gender-based violence. Except from Brazil and Costa Rica, direct attacks on gender knowledge production and scholar are not as common, but Latin American anti-gender formations compound the international camp of anti-intellectualism. And, as noted above, it is politically impossible to untangle the dense overlap between anti-gender and anti-abortion politics.

The case studies most principally tell us that anti-gender politics are not just about promoting law and policy regressions in relation to gender, sexuality, and abortion laws, even when gains in these domains have been indeed made in the last two decades. What the political trajectories retraced by the studies show is that the investment, made by these crusades in the preservation or restoration of deeply racialized and unequal gender and sexuality orders, lies at the core of democratic erosions and extreme rightward shifts sweeping across the regional landscape. Or to use another terminology, they feed on and are fed by de-democratization processes underway in Latin America that, differently from authoritarian regime changes experienced in the past, threaten democracies from within without making resource to classic coups d'état or necessarily implying the suspension of formal democratic procedures.

One key theoretical reference in the debates on de-democratization is Wendy Brown's classical article (2006).<sup>4</sup> In it, Brown analyzes de-democratizing dynamics in the United States and interprets de-democratization as the combined effect of neoliberalism and the re-politicization of the religious.<sup>5</sup> According to Brown, the first and foremost political effect of neoliberalism in its 21st century version, is to shrink democratic politics down to law and institutions and narrow down the framework of rights to property rights and the right to vote.

In her view, these effects de-politicize the public sphere and social life, erode the autonomy of the political and disqualify the participation of people in political life. Neoliberal rationality deepens individualism, converts citizens into consumers and entrepreneurs of their own economic survival. In result, the political dimension of life becomes secondary and political indifference prevails. And, as states are trimmed down to their managerial functions, forms of exercising political power that would be unacceptable in true democratic conditions, become legitimized.

Brown (2006) also analyses the supplementary role of politicization of religious conservatism in this reconfiguration. Along the lines of ideas developed by Michel Foucault, she examines how religious neoconservatism is functional to the disciplining of subjectivities and the ways in which the neoliberal state is modelled on a pastoral logic of governance. She critically revisits the writings of the pro-Nazi German jurist Carl Schmitt (2004) to examine how, under neoliberalism, state authority will be increasingly modelled by an ecclesiastical logic of unification and submission of political subjects that is in contradiction with the fundamentals of democratic political liberalism.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Brown, W. (2006). The American Nightmare: Neo-Liberalism, Neo-Conservatism, and the De-Democratization of the United States. *Political Theory*, 34(6), 690-714.

5 The context analyzed by Brown is the U.S. during the Bush administration in the first half of the 2000s when the key symptoms of democratic erosion were the "war against terror" deflagrated after 9/11, and the growing impact of religious conservatism on state politics.

6 See Schmitt, C. (2004). *On the Three Types of Juristic Thought*. (Schwaab, G., Ed.; Bendersky, J.W., Trans.). Greenwood Press.

In her most recent book, Brown (2019) has explored another route of investigation that excavates the roots of de-democratization, which seems to pair so well with 21st century capitalism in the very origins of neoliberal thinking.<sup>7</sup> While this new line of interpretation is also inspiring to explore democratic erosions in Latin America, in our view, it is still productive to retain the key elements from the 2006 article when delving into the eruption and propagation of anti-gender policies across the region.

In this context of analysis, it is also worth mentioning the work of several feminist authors who have looked into the imbrication between neoliberalism and conservatism from the perspective of gender and sexuality politics.<sup>8</sup> These researchers and thinkers correctly interpret the emphasis on the “restoration of the family” and the “complementarity of masculine and feminine” – which lies at the heart of the neoconservative religious attack on gender — as an ideological step necessary to devolve the labor of protection and care to families. In other words, an idealized justification to place this burden on households, more precisely on women, when states, under the impact of neoliberalism, are drastically reducing social protection policies to the minimum.

These conceptual frameworks, albeit very inspiring and productive, must be adjusted to the particularities of Latin America. To begin with, taking a longer cycle perspective, the realities and dynamics of anti-gender portrayed and analyzed by the case studies must, in our view, be located at the intersection of structural trends.

The first trend to be looked at concerns the democratization trajectories that marked the regional landscape for the last four decades. All countries analyzed in this research project have experienced them, either as a high intensity transition from dictatorship to democracy – as was the case in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay – or as a less intense process of democratic amplification through constitutional reforms -- as was

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7 Brown, W. (2019). *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*. Columbia University Press.

8 See Cooper, M. (2017). *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism*. Zone Books.

the case in Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, and to a less extent Costa Rica. In all cases, gender, sexuality and abortion politics were inherent features of these trajectories.<sup>9</sup> Most critically, however, the deficits and distortions of democratic architecture and practices that fed the germination of anti-gender politics must also be named and mapped. They include the persistence of multiple forms of social and institutional authoritarianism, manifested as classism, ethno-racism, sexism, but also, and not less relevant, the resilient specter of military tutelage of politics.<sup>10</sup> As importantly, democratization has neither resolved the deep-rooted overlap between public and private, where clientelism and corruption proliferates. Nor has it erased ingrained forms of populism that continue to manifest across the political spectrum.<sup>11</sup>

The other long cycle trend that must be taken into account is politicized religious neoconservatism, whether in its Catholic expression – which under the papacies of Wojtyła and Ratzinger has devastated progressive Catholicism across the region – or in the multiple strands of fundamentalist Evangelism whose regional presence expanded geometrically after the 1970s. While much more can and should be said about this domain, in this bird’s eye view glance it is necessary at least to remember the indelible imprints of Catholic colonization and recognize that post-1980s religious neoconservatism has further eroded legal structures and practices of *laïcité* and secularism that, as various case studies show, have never been very solid. Still more significantly, along the lines of the thinking developed by Brown (2006), religious neoconservatism has transformed subjectivities, promoting docility in regard to political and social asymmetries, as well as an expanding adherence to the theology of prosperity with its flagrant affinities with neoliberalism.

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9 See Pecheny, M. & de la Dehesa, R. (2014). Sexuality and Politics in Latin America: An Outline for Discussion. Corrêa, S., De La Dehesa, R. and Parker, R. (Eds.). *Sexuality and politics: Regional dialogues from the global south*, 1, 96-135. Sexuality Policy Watch. <https://bit.ly/3l8puZC>

10 For better grasping the depth and effects of social authoritarianism in democratic transitions, we recommend Argentinean political scientist Guillermo O’Donnell essay (1984) in which he examines how this trait manifested distinctively in Brazil and Argentina and how it intertwined with the political order of military regimes and democratization dynamics underway. See O’Donnell, G. (1984, January). *¿Y a mí, que me importa? Notas sobre la sociabilidad y política en Argentina y Brasil*. Kellogg Institute. <https://bit.ly/3fHoBpE>

11 See Lavinas, L. (2017, November 21). Populism has no side. *openDemocracy*. <https://bit.ly/3fljPZl>

Then there is the very omnipresence of neoliberalism, its rationality and political refractions. As noted by various observers when analyzing neoliberalism in Latin America, it is always worth recalling that Chile under Pinochet was a testing ground for the very effective articulation between neoliberal economic rationality and a peculiar form of authoritarian politics in which dogmatic Catholicism was quite central. But it is also to be clear that the impacts of neoliberalism in terms of precariousness, inequality and the demise of social protections have been much wider and deeper in the region, because Latin American states have never achieved the scale of welfare experienced in the U.S. or Europe. No less significantly, in all nine countries that have been studied, precarity and pauperization are also more deeply traversed by race, ethnicity and gender disparities. And, when mapping the effects of neoliberalism on subjectivities, we cannot lose sight from the fact that historically, across the region, people living in poverty and experiencing high levels of job insecurity had to resort to significant “entrepreneurship” long before the neoliberal model was fully installed.

Finally, in a few of the countries of our sample – Brazil being perhaps the most poignant illustration – it is also necessary to name and critically address structural violence: civil, political and agrarian conflicts, the violence deriving from submerge economies, such as drug trafficking, in particular the war on drugs, and related police brutality. Structural violence is linked to stark economic inequalities, but it is also fed by untransformed social and institutional authoritarianism, toxic masculinities, ethno-racism and the grips of fierce economic competition.<sup>12</sup> It must be named and understood as another major deficit of democratization. The diffuse but constant perception of abnormality and disorder linked to structural violence clearly functions as fodder to sentiments of fear, anger and panic propelled by anti-gender ideologies and campaigns. Equally important, it also nourishes easy political appeals to draconian criminal justice, authoritarian state measures and the re-militarization of politics.

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12 The O’Donnell (1984) essay cited previously offers a compelling description of how in Brazil structural violence, race and class fractures and social authoritarianism were imbricated in the early days of re-democratization.

Although this overarching analytical frame may still require further refinements and greater precision, it offers a preliminary compass to guide the exploration of these empirical terrains analyzed by the Gender & Politics in Latin America case studies that are now abridged, translated and compiled in this publication. We dearly thank all authors as well as the translator and revisors for their time and commitment and wish you a good reading.

*Sonia Corrêa and Richard Parker*

# **“GENDER IDEOLOGY”, CATHOLIC NEOINTEGRISMO, AND EVANGELICAL FUNDAMENTALISM: THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC VOCATION**

Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez  
Abridged by Magaly Pazello  
and Sonia Corrêa

This article explores the notion of “gender ideology” as a creation of Catholic *neointegrismo* that contributed to enable a political alliance between neoliberal economic powerful groups and religious fundamentalism in general.<sup>1</sup> The central argument of this study is that, differently from an anti-rights or anti-gender movement, as this wave has been called in certain activist and academic circuits, what we are witnessing is a *neointegrista* Catholic movement politically and culturally allied to Evangelical neo-Pentecostal fundamentalism and functional to the most harshly neoliberal economic model. The fight against the supposed “gender ideology” (as a fight against theories and activisms that refute the way in which gender, sexuality, and reproduction are understood from the doctrine of the Catholic Church) is central to the ultraconservative rhetoric propelled by these voices. However, “gender” is not their sole or primary goal. The main political objective shared by the maze of conservative religious and neoliberal groups that use the rhetoric of “gender ideology” is to gain control over the State and its institutions through electoral mechanisms of formal democracy and, then, from within impose its social and economic vision on societies.

Their political goals go against all political or legal measure designed to address class, gender and or sexual injustices. This combined *neointegrista*, Evangelical fundamentalist and neoliberal strategy resulted from a careful study of modern democratic ideals, a study

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<sup>1</sup> Usually the Spanish terms *integrismo/neointegrismo* and *integrista/neointegrista* are translated into English as fundamentalism/fundamentalist. But, as examined in the article, extremist Catholic and Evangelical streams have very distinctive roots and trajectories, even when they may be today coalescing around a common agenda. For this reason, we have opted to use the Spanish terms that mark a difference between these two camps.

that allowed these forces to articulate discursive elements and crafty counterarguments in response to ideas that they cannot assimilate, as for example the principle of autonomy over one’s own body. Today, these groups use the language of human rights, citizen participation, free exchange of ideas and non-discrimination to justify their belligerent opposition to the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights and to justify the intrusion of religious ideas in public policy domains.

Their connection with economically powerful groups and with the neoliberal agenda converges around the logic of charity that grounds Catholic *neointegrista* and neo-Pentecostal Fundamentalist responses to inequality, exclusion, and poverty. These religious forces, in fact, are in dispute with states’ social policy or measures aimed at the redistribution of wealth. In their view, social organizations, especially the faith-based ones, should be in charge of these policies, not from an equality-based and human rights approach, but rather from a charitable perspective and what can be named “faith-based clientelism”. In exchange for “merciful” actions such as food programs to assist poor families, these religious organizations demand from beneficiaries religious adherence and discipline. This approach is consistent with the overarching neoliberal tenets of small government and repudiation of leftward policy agendas. The narrative of “gender ideology” -- presented as a threat against the natural order that determines the social place of men and women, the traditional family and its internal hierarchy, and the founding values of the nation -- makes it easy to recruit followers and sympathizers, many of whom are men attached to the paradigm of hegemonic masculinity who cannot find other ways out of the frustration and anger they experience in face of gains made by feminist and LGBTTI claims.<sup>2</sup>

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2 Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transexuals, Transgender, and Intersex.

## CATHOLIC NEOINTEGRISMO: A TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT WITH SPANISH ROOTS

A number of researchers devoted to the analyses of religion coincide in their use of the Spanish term *neointegrismo católico* (Catholic *neointegrismo*) to name the resurgence of a movement linked to extremist Catholic groups in Spain that advocate for the centrality of the Catholic tradition both to orient the practices of believers and the social and institutional life of societies. This movement originates in Catholic *integrismo* that consolidated between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th and was quite central to sustain the ideology of the Franco dictatorship re-founding the Spanish nation.

For these authors, the Second Vatican Council marks the shift between Catholic *integrismo* and *neointegrismo*. *Neointegrista* Catholic groups coincide with *integristas* of the past in what concerns their doctrinaire tradition that repudiates a number of elements of the Catholic reform and modernization propelled by the Second Vatican Council. But *neointegrismo* differs from *integrismo* in regard to economic perspectives. *Neointegrismo* view is that the economy and moral life are deeply intersected within a frame that is closer to the Calvinist ethics (Steinleen, 2011).

Christopher van der Krogt (1992), for example, shows how Catholic *integrismo*, which is the root of contemporary Catholic *neointegrismo*, places at the center of its moral and political agenda the idea that tradition should govern the conscience of society. That is precisely the ethical frame used by Opus Dei. But Van der Krogt (1992) further explores how this emphasis on the Catholic doctrine directing the conscience of secular society marks one important distinction between modernists and traditionalists within Catholicism. This can be exemplified by the position expressed by Cardinal Ratzinger -- former Pope Benedict XVI -- that not only the direction of social consciences is indispensable, but rather the very preservation of idea of Europe requires a return to its Catholic roots.

Émile Poulat (1985), another scholar of European Catholicism, claims that Catholic *integrismo* that surged in Spain and France at the beginning of the 20th century was a movement whose main aim was to take distance from what was then named “intransigent Catholicism”. In the late 19th century, in France, *integrismo* arose, on the one hand, as an alternative to circumvent the pejorative connotation of “intransigent”. On the other hand, it marked a sharp difference in relation to the so-called social stream of Catholicism that supported Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Although *integristas* swore loyalty to the doctrines and teachings of the Roman Pontiff, they also defined themselves as authorized interpreters of the true meaning of Papal teachings.

Almost in parallel in Spain, Catholics deeply attached to tradition openly opposed what they portrayed as the influence of liberal and socialist thoughts within the Catholic Church. These groups rejected what they considered to be an unjustifiable flexibility on the part of Pope Leo XIII in his rapprochement with Protestantism and most principally resisted proposals of social order, based on Enlightenment ideals, such as autonomy and the separation between the public/political sphere and the private/religious realm, as well as social equality between various faiths (Van der Krogt, 1992).

Since then, much has changed in the world under the effects of ideas propelled by modernity, but these political-religious formations did not wane, rather they have adapted to the new conditions of time. They kept intact their attachment to traditional Catholic precepts while at the same time making a strategic turn towards the incorporation of cultural and political elements peculiar to the capitalist expansion, then consolidated under overall frame of the Protestant “ethics of work”.

It can be said that, in the 21st century, Catholic *neointegrismo* continues to be inspired by an extreme conviction that it is not only necessary to preserve the full integrity of the Catholic tradition and, most principally, that Catholicism alone can offer a satisfactory basis for the organization of society. Two documents that illuminate this ideology are indeed very old: the encyclical letters *Quanta Cura* and *Syllabus Errorum* that were issued by Pope Pius IX in 1864. Even today they offer a good synthesis of how Catholic *integrismo* frames its reactions against any new Catholic doctrines and eventual threats against the hegemony of Catholic power in Western societies.

In short, Catholic *integrists* groups formed a protective barrier against the waves of modernization circulating within certain circles of the Catholic hierarchy. Their transformation towards *neointegrismo* through secular organizations such as Opus Dei consolidated a strategic shift that mixes work and apostolate and calls upon lay Catholics to transform all spaces of their daily life in sites of social and political faith-based activism. Holiness, work, and success are interrelated in the moral charter Catholic *neointegrists* believers. Their faith must be shown in all activities they perform. Although today this may not be as explicit as it was a little over a century ago, this tenet implies the rejection of the separation between personal religious beliefs and politics (Echevarría, 2014).

The threats listed by Pius IX at the end of the 19th century are still considered valid by Catholic *neointegrists* formations. Their rejection of political agendas crafted by the left is very deep because left streams of political thinking have historically confronted ecclesiastical power and denounced the complicity between Catholic hierarchies and the bourgeoisie. This view is sustained to this day, despite the fact that there have been important reconfigurations in the political and cultural relationship between the left and Christianity in general, and Catholicism in particular. In that respect, Catholic *neointegrists* streams do not differ substantially from *integrismo* of the late 19th and early 20th centuries in France and Spain. The two streams, however, differ in the openness of *neointegrismo* to assimilate the moral elements of Protestantism that connects it to the logic of capitalism (Argandoña, 2011).

Given that Opus Dei is one key actor in the *neointegrists* realm, it is necessary to remind that it is present throughout Latin America. Its visibility varies substantially from country to country but its influence in politics is always significant. In Costa Rica, for example, the Catholic *neointegrists* movement tends to remain very discreet in what concerns its connection to Opus Dei but uses the same strategy. Its influence is achieved through public figures who are opinion leaders or members of political parties or else through the privileged status of the Catholic Church. An exemplary case is Costa Rica's, where, since the 19th century Constitution was established, the State is “Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman” and has an obligation to contribute to the maintenance of the Church. This means that the Catholic Church and its hierarchy have a presence in key state institutions

and can directly influence public education, health, and even public security policies.

## EVANGELICAL FUNDAMENTALISM: A TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENT WITH NORTH-AMERICAN ROOTS

Luca Ozzano (2009)<sup>3</sup> characterizes religious fundamentalisms, at large, as organized social movements that influence politics through different strategies according to the type of government and opportunities that may arise in each context. He looks into nine different features of these movements: their reactions against the political marginalization of religion, their selectivity, moral Manichaeism, absolutism, Messianism, a membership defined by divine choice, a systematic triage between the “faithful” and the “sinners”, authoritarian modes of organizing and strong requirements of conduct.

A more or less coherent array of groups and organizations which, grounding its ideology on a selective re-interpretation of sacred texts, act in the public sphere in order to make it as suitable as possible to its worldview lifestyles, laws and institutions, taking a dialectic stance towards modernity and opposing other segments of society, identified as unyielding rivals. (Ozzano, 2009, p. 133).

In Latin America, in addition to Catholic *integrismo*, there are also movement with Protestant roots that fit well into this description, the so-called Evangelical churches. Most of them are linked to an Evangelical revival that consolidated in the United States in post-World War II period, which became known as the Christian Right. This stream has carried out an intense work of political activism, disguised as evangelization, throughout Latin America. This fundamentalist movement has established strong connections with the Republican Party in the late 1960s, and since then has been promoting an agenda against the human rights of people in the LGBTQ community, women’s right to interrupting a pregnancy, as well as against the secularization of public education. The past five decades

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<sup>3</sup> Luca Ozzano, from the University of Turin, offers a solid systematization of the state of the art on religious fundamentalisms, taking up the important series on the subject, coordinated by Marty Martin and Scott Appleby (1995) and published by the University of Chicago.

have also seen the rise of famous preachers who assumed political-electoral roles, thus creating an even more explicit link between religion and politics. This model has been reproduced in several Latin American countries under the sponsorship of their North American counterparts. Although vernacular expressions of Evangelical fundamentalism have also taken form, the influence of the US-based Christian Right is undeniable. These Evangelicals churches also promote free enterprise and free trade and, similarly to Catholic *neointegrismo*, openly oppose left inspired organizations and policy agendas as well as sexual and reproductive rights, secular education, and gender equality.

This fundamentalist wave<sup>4</sup> brings together a wide variety of religious expressions of Protestantism and Evangelism which may differ in some aspects, but share some core elements, such as: the attachment to the literal reading of the Scripture (the Bible) as the only source of moral and political orientation; the refusal to accept the primacy of secular laws over moral norms deriving from “divine” origin; the self-granted authorization to act based on what they consider absolute and eternal truths and that must be accepted by all people, even when these beliefs may conflict with existing secular laws.. An important common characteristic that these Protestant or Evangelical currents share with Catholic *neointegrismo* is that they have become transnational social movements, they are present everywhere around the world and have become influential through many different strategies, including participation in electoral politics. In other words, these formations are not only communities sharing a vision of the world in moral or metaphysical terms. They also systematically translate their religious precepts into political and policy agendas through a complex and expanding network of actors who are able to influence, through evangelization, multiple spheres of public life.

One difference, often overlooked, between Catholic *neointegrismo* and Protestant or Evangelical fundamentalism concerns their respective capacities in communication strategies. Today, Evangelical formations have a vast ownership of media enterprises that

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<sup>4</sup> Providing a strict definition of the most commonly professed religious creeds within the Christian fundamentalist movement is a complex task beyond the scope of this work. By way of clarification, it can be said (following Ozzano (2009) and specialists such as Scott Appleby, Nancy Ammerman, and Marty Martin) that there is an important participation of people who come from Pentecostal churches where the so-called prosperity theology is taught (Appleby & Martin, 1995).

includes radio stations, television studios, and digital media and also count with the spectacular worship practices of “mega-churches” (Mundo Cristiano, 2013). They are fully engaged in creating what has been portrayed as the “society of the spectacle” (Debord, 1995). They have also adopted forms of cult syncretism that allows them to recruit a larger number of followers whom then become caught into ties of loyalty with their fundamentalist leaders.

## THE INVENTION OF “GENDER IDEOLOGY”: A MAIN PIECE OF THE CATHOLIC NEOINTEGRISMO AND EVANGELICAL FUNDAMENTALISM ASSEMBLAGE

As seen in previous sections, today in Latin America a political and religious counterattack is underway, well-articulated and financed by Catholic neointegrismo in association with Evangelical fundamentalism that, among other effects, creates enormous obstacles to sexual and reproductive rights (Arguedas & Morgan, 2017). Over the last decade, this offensive has added to its rhetorical arsenal the narrative of “gender ideology”.

In 2012 Joseph Ratzinger, then Pope Benedict XVI, delivered a Christmas speech to the Catholics of the world in which he quoted Simone de Beauvoir, in the following terms:

*In a detailed and profoundly moving treaty, the Chief Rabbi of France, Gilles Bernheim, has shown that the attack we are currently experiencing on the authentic form of the family (constituted by father, mother, and child), has reached a deeper dimension. If before we had seen as the main cause of the crisis of the family a misunderstanding about the essence of human freedom, now it has become clear that what it is called into question is the very notion of being - of what it means to be a man. He quotes the famous aphorism of Simone de Beauvoir: “one is not born a woman, one becomes a woman” (on ne naît pas femme, on le devient). In these words, is manifested the foundation of what is today presented, under the the term “gender” as a new philosophy of sexuality. According to this philosophy, sex is no longer an original given of nature that man has to accept and personally make sense of and fulfil with*

*meaning, but rather a social function that each one can choose autonomously, while in the past this was decided by society. The profound falsehood of this theory and of the anthropological revolution it contains is glaring. Man is now contesting the fact of having a nature, constituted by his corporeality, which characterizes the human being. Man denies his own nature, deciding that it is not a pre-constituted fact, but rather what he can create himself.* (Benedict XVI, 2012)

Two elements stand out in this Christmas speech: the simultaneous mention of a feminist intellectual and a Jewish religious authority.<sup>5</sup> This papal lucubration is clearly an exercise in rational counter-argumentation, rather than a spiritual exhortation aimed at inspiring his audience on a metaphysical level. This textuality is a distinctive sign of Catholic *neointegrismo*. What Ratzinger offers to the Catholic community is a discursive repertoire devoid of the religious symbols that could cause an a priori disqualification of the argument in the secular public sphere. It is a rhetorical tool devised to enter the secular political debate in defense of a moral truth presented with an aura of universality and rationality, which allowed the pope to win followers in a more effective way than if he had quoted the Bible or the doctrine of the Church.

*According to the biblical account of creation, the very essence of the human creature is to have been created by God as male and female [...] Where the freedom to make becomes the freedom to make oneself, we necessary arrive in the denial of the Creator [...] In the struggle for the family, what is at stake is man himself. And it becomes evident that when God is denied, human dignity also dissolves... Whoever defends God is defending man.* (Benedict XVI, 2012).

The above paragraphs lay bare the religious and moral content of Ratzinger's opposition to "gender." It is important to pay attention to how they are placed in the whole discourse. Ratzinger does not begin his exhortation with a biblical quote, but rather

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5 Martine Gross (2015) analyzed this exhortation and reports that the supposedly Jewish argument against gender used by the Rabbi to attack same-sex marriage was in fact a plagiarism of a phrase written by the Catholic priest Joseph Marie Verlinde. This quote or plagiarism has costed Bernheim his resignation from his post and the Great Rabbi.

with an ecumenical and analytical reflection that frames his narrative as rational rather than dogmatic. Subsequently, he establishes a direct relation between what is sensible in terms of reason and human sciences, and what is “good” in Catholic moral terms. The then pope, deployed a rhetoric according to which the reasonable, the true, and the moral are the same, a formula whose cohesion seems stronger and more legitimate when thus articulated.

In the same manner, the spurious notion of “gender ideology” is being spread in secular language, made legitimate as an objective and academic given that, apparently, is only describing a phenomenon. The term “gender ideology” is offered to the public as if it were a theoretically legitimized concept, as if it did not imply a religious moral judgment. Ratzinger uses this rhetoric to create the rational scenario in which he can present himself and the Catholic hierarchy as mere analysts of epistemological problems, as for example what the Vatican has described as the “anti-scientific gender theory”. However, when we observe the political use of the term and the ideological ascription given to it by the voices who use it, it is not difficult to conclude that it is a discursive mechanism to morally oppose feminist theories about gender and sexual diversity.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the academic bibliography that makes use of the term “gender ideology” has expanded, mostly produced by professors and researchers of Catholic universities. A paradigmatic example is Jane Adolphe, who teaches at Ave Maria School of Law and devoted a good part of her academic work to the construction of legal and moral arguments against sexual and reproductive rights. In 2011, Adolphe was appointed by the Holy See to the Vatican Secretariat of State and, in 2003, she became advisor to the Holy See on international law, family law and human rights. The papacy, in fact, seems to be the main sponsor of this type of literature carrying *neointegrista* visions that enable the academic normalization of political-religious maxims delivered by Rome, the most powerful symbolic place in Catholicism (Via Press Release, 2011).

This *neointegrista* academic vision is being spread both through congregations and parishes and the so-called academically sound and objective publications. The University

of Navarra Press, for example, publishes a vast number of documents, books, and articles on the so-called “gender ideology”.<sup>6</sup> It has also supported projects and publications that defined homosexuality as a pathological condition that can be therapeutically treated and cured. Likewise, the same university has delivered research documents to prove the risks of adoption by homosexual people and the supposedly scientific rationales for rejecting in vitro fertilization and other assisted reproduction techniques. Also located at the University of Navarra, the Institute of Sciences for the Family was responsible for organizing the I International Congress on Gender Ideology in 2011.<sup>7</sup>

Having this academic production at the backdrop we must look into the strategic complementarity between Catholic *neointegrismo* and the Evangelical fundamentalist movement and its greater communication strength. The capacities of each of these streams have been combined to propagate solidly constructed, albeit fallacious, deleterious messages on “gender ideology” that is much more impermeable to criticism than the old conservative anti-feminist and anti-LGBTTI narratives based on Catholic theological doctrines or the Bible as main sources of authority. The narrative on the evils of “gender ideology”, created by Catholic academics and diffused by Evangelical vehicles, becomes legitimate through a sanitization, which undercovers their inventors under an academic varnish and disguises its religious moralizing substance. This enable these religious forces to reaching broader audiences, beyond the boundaries the communities of faithful.

Catholicism and Protestantism/Evangelism, in their more traditionalist or fundamentalist expressions, have also some disputes, including because they compete for the same religious market. Even so, their cohesion and strategic complementarity is extremely productive and effective to resist and block the expansion of secularity and the gradual displacement of the religious towards more limited spheres of social life.

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6 Founded by Opus Dei leader, José María Escrivá de Balaguer.

7 In its website, the congress objective is established as a “forum for debate to reflect on the presuppositions, foundations, and social, political, and legal consequences of gender ideology, as well as on other realistic proposals on the notion of gender, which respond to a more adequate anthropology of human beings, male and female”.

Through this alliance, Christianity is recovering, at least in part, the public recognition and the moral and political authority it held for centuries in the colonies of the Spanish monarchy.

As shown in studies conducted in Europe (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2007), as well as in national studies developed by the project Anti-Gender Politics in Latin America in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay, the combined *neointegrista* and fundamentalist political offensive underway articulates, under the repudiation of “gender ideology”, a belligerent and successful attack against all forms of recognition of women’s and LGBTTI rights. One main goal of this transnational political-religious assemblage is to recover the privileged position that, for centuries, the Catholic hierarchy had in primary and secondary education. Control over education is a strategic objective because it implies the perpetuation of ideological transmission of religious, economic and political values and symbols, as it has happened in the past.

In the 2010s scenario, Evangelical fundamentalism is also benefiting from the gains made by Catholic neointegrismo in its struggle to recover lost privileges. This is so because conservative Catholic political investment weakens social and institutional secularization and opens the ground for Evangelical churches to also have access to public and private funding that may be used for beneficent activities but also for political lobbying. As a whole, these undercurrents may gradually create the conditions, envisaged by these forces, for the re-foundation of societies and States on the basis of values that are fundamentally Christian.

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## THE CASE OF ARGENTINA

Maximiliano Campana,  
Abridged by Mariana Carbajal

In Argentina, the debate on the decriminalization and legalization of abortion reached its highest point in 2018 and spearheaded the reorganization of conservative religious and secular forces. These groups have been very active and achieved their goals: the law reform project was rejected by a very small number of votes. After this legislative rejection, a crusade against “gender ideology” erupted in the country. In the previous twelve years, the Kirchner administrations had taken important steps towards the recognition of sexual and reproductive rights and the implementation of public policies to guarantee them: the Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation laws, which established the free distribution of contraceptives (2002) and regulated assisted reproduction, the Comprehensive Sexual Education Law (2006), the Equal Marriage legislation (2010) and the Gender Identity Law (2012).

During the parliamentary debate on abortion, several “educational” and “scientific” organizations opposing abortion rights played a major role in the propelling of ideas against the reform, which aimed at permitting the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (in Spanish “IVE”) until the fourteenth weeks of gestation. Amongst these voices, the most vocal were the Universidad Católica de Argentina (Catholic University of Argentina, especially the Institute for Marriage and Family), the Universidad Austral (Austral University, specifically the Institute of Sciences for the Family), the Catholic University of Salta (Catholic University of Salta), the Academia La Plata (La Plata Academy), and the Centro de Bioética para la Persona y la Familia (Center on Bioethics, Person and the Family). In addition, authors such as Jorge Scala, Agustin Laje and Nicolás Marquez -- internationally known, especially across Latin America, for their anti-gender and anti-abortion positions -- have strongly engaged in efforts to propel reactionary views, anti-gender and anti-rights discourses.

In 2011, Jorge Scala's published the book *Ideología de Género o Género como instrumento de poder (Gender Ideology or Gender as a Power Tool)* that had a major impact in Latin America, amongst both Catholic and Evangelical sectors. During the 2018 legislative debate on abortion reform, many parliamentarians opposing it based their arguments on a paper published by Scala in 2006 entitled *Abortion: Demystifying the Numbers*, which contested empirical data informing that legalization reduces the number of abortions, to instead affirm that it makes these figures to go up.

In 2018, when the abortion reform debate took place, Agustín Laje was the Director of an ultraconservative institution called Centro de los Estudios Libres de Córdoba (Center of Free Studies of Cordoba) whose production articulates anti-gender and anti-abortion discourses with ultra-neoliberal tenets, such as the primacy of private property and individual liberty over and above social and collective values.<sup>1</sup> Since the early 2010s, Laje had viciously criticized human rights, exalting the role of the military during the dictatorship regimes that ruled the country between the 1960s and 1980s. He also systematically attacked the Kirchner administrations and these crusades gave him much public visibility. During the 2018 debate on the abortion reform, he released a number of YouTube videos criticizing feminism, the sexual diversity movement, “gender ideology” and the legalization of abortion. One of these videos, *15 Lies About Abortion* had over a million viewers<sup>2</sup>.

Nicolas Marquez is a lawyer and writer from Buenos Aires. He also represents the views of Argentina's ultra-right and military wings and other religious and secular conservative groups. He was also quite active in using social networks during the discussion on abortion<sup>3</sup>. In 2016, Laje and Márquez published *El Libro Negro de la Nueva*

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1 He now lives in Spain where he has strong connections with the right-wing party Vox and the ultra-Catholic NGO Hazte Oír and its international digital branch CITIZEGO.

2 For more information, see Arrigoni (2018).

3 It is noteworthy the fact that Márquez was denounced by his ex-wife for physical and sexual violence against her and her 4-year-old daughter.

*Izquierda- Ideología de Género o Subversión Cultural* (*The Black Book of the New Left: Gender Ideology or Cultural Subversion*) that would become a sort of bible of anti-gender, anti-abortion and anti-leftist ideas across Latin America. The book central thesis is that after the fall of the Berlin walls in 1989, as it became increasingly difficult for the left to mobilize labor, Marxists shifted their mode of operation towards a Gramscian strategy of cultural revolution, in which feminism and gender have a central role. While the book recovers and repeats arguments used by many other authors, such as Scala, its singularity is that, in line with positions previously developed by Laje it articulates these views with flagrant neoliberal stance and policy proposals.

This brief recapturing shows that, almost for two decades, these sexular and religious conservative forces had been generating a political platform against abortion rights, “gender ideology”, the feminist movement, sexual diversity, secularism and, more recently, equality-oriented state policies described by them as “Marxism”. All these elements have somehow jumped out of the box during the 2018 abortion legal reform debates.

In addition to the conservative legal and policy arguments against abortion raised at the Congress and public debates, “pro-life” organizations -- such as the Corporación de los Abogados Católicos (Corporation of Catholic Lawyers), the Comisión Federal de Abogados Provida (Federal Commission of Pro-life Lawyers) and the NGOs Vida y Esperanza (Life and Hope) and Amor en Acción (Love in Action) -- mobilized public demonstrations and massive digital campaigns to oppose this legislative change. These forces also counted with the open support from the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party).

In these mobilizations, a whole set of new formations became visible: the Unidad Pro-Vida (Pro-life Unity), Escuelas por la Vida (Schools for Life, connected with Federation of Religious Educational Associations of Argentina), Doctores por la Vida (Doctors for Life -Argentina), Tutores por la Vida (Tutors for Life, set by journalist and communicators). The business sector also raised its voice against abortion rights through the Asociación

Cristiana de Líderes de Negócijs (Christian Association of Business Leaders). And, significantly enough, anti-abortion women's organizations have also emerged, while also self-entitling as feminist, like Feministas Por una Nueva Era: Pro Mujer, Provida y Resistencia no Violenta (Feminists for a New Age: Pro-Woman, Pro-Life and Non-Violent Resistance).

Another new actor became visible in this period, more specifically when the Minister of Health authorized the national production of Misoprostol. Evangelical NGO Más Vida (More Life) that encourages people to denounce drugstores and pharmacies that sell “abortion pills” and health professionals or health centers that perform abortions even authorized by the existing law (Centenera, 2018).<sup>4</sup> Another new group that is worth mentioning is La Red Federal de Ciudadanos y Organizaciones que Cuidan de la Vida en Todos los Tiempos y Lugares (Federal Network of Citizens and Organizations that Care for Life at All Times and in All Places) created by media professionals devoted to cover the abortion debate in Argentina from a “pro-life” perspective.<sup>5</sup>

As the abortion legal reform evolved at Congress level, this plethora of “pro-life” groups engaged with it as speakers in the various Commissions discussing the matter. They made their voices heard in radio and television shows and organized demonstrations in various cities across the country. To emulate and make a contrast with the feminist green scarf - which became internationally known as the symbol of the National Campaign for Legal, Safe and Free Abortion -- anti-abortion rights forces adopted as their main icon a light blue scarf, mimicking the color of the Argentinean national flag. They have also crafted the political lemma “Save the Two Lives”, which would be rapidly transported to other countries.

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4 To learn more about NGO Más Vida, visit its official website at <http://masvidaoficial.org/>.

5 To learn more about La Red Federal de Ciudadanos y Organizaciones que cuidan de la Vida en todos los tiempos y lugares, visit its official website at <https://cuidarlavida.org/>.

On June 14 and on August 8, 2018, when the reform was respectively voted in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, thousands of anti-abortion demonstrators, convened by Catholic and Evangelical churches, congregated around the National Congress. Although it is difficult to measure the influence these actions had on the decision made by legislators, the impact of the “pro-life” campaign was read by various observers as a success. While in the House of Representatives the abortion reform was partially sanctioned, the Senate, historically a much more conservative body, rejected it for a minimal number of four votes.

The defeat of the reform was important on various grounds. Firstly, Evangelical churches that were up until then quite marginal in these debates became valid interlocutors of state institutions, specially the Congress. During the parliamentary discussion, these churches organized around the Alianza Cristina de Iglesias Evangélicas de la República de Argentina - ACIERA (Christian Alliance of Evangelical Churches of the Republic of Argentina) were very active convening large “pro-life” marches (ACIERA, 2016). Subsequently, “pro-life” political parties have taken form, in particular the Partido Celeste (Celestial Party), mostly comprised by Evangelicals.

Anti-abortion initiatives were also activated at local levels where they did not exist before. Several municipalities approved ordinances to self-proclaim themselves as “pro-life” cities, such as Concordia y Herrera in Entre Rios district, Eldorado in Misiones district and 25 de Mayo in La Pampa district. The Municipal Council of Rafaela (in the Province of Santa Fé), approved a proposition presented by the group Rafaelinos por La Vida (Saint Raphael Order for Life) created an office to ensure that pregnancies, which under the existing law could be terminated, were carried to term (Buchara, 2018).

## THE ERUPTION OF THE BATTLE AGAINST “GENDER IDEOLOGY”

During the abortion law reform debate many Parliamentarians spoke against feminism, LGBTTI rights, sexual education, contraceptive methods and anti-discriminatory public policies. However, no direct and clear connection was made between these positions and “gender ideology”. But, as soon the Senate rejected the abortion reform project in the early morning hours of August 9, the crusade against “gender ideology” began.

On October 26, the Argentinian Episcopal Conference published a document titled *Let’s Distinguish: Sex, Gender and Ideology* warning about the risks implied in “gender ideology” (Comisión Episcopal de Laicos y Familia et al, 2018). Its content coincided with the views expressed by Jorge Bergoglio, Pope Francis I, in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (2016), which states that “gender ideology” would lead to a society where there are no sex differences and that this development must be contained by an anthropology of the family. On the basis of these arguments, the document issued by the Argentinean bishops called for the rejection of “gender ideology” as a vision in open contradiction with the cosmovision of Christianity.

A month earlier, the Federación Nacional de la Familia (Federal Network for Families), a Catholic anti-abortion network launched a national campaign against “gender ideology in schools” exhorting parents to expressly prohibit their children to attend comprehensive sexual education classes in public schools (sexual education is mandatory by national Law 26150). The campaign named *Yo no autorizo* (I Don’t Authorize) invited parents to present a “model letter” to directors of schools to manifest their disagreement with the Comprehensive Sexual Education curriculum.

Concurrently, another and more glaring campaign was launched by the Argentinean chapter of extreme-right movement Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas (Don’t Mess With My Children) and sponsored by a Pentecostal Evangelical church based in the city of Córdoba named Encuentro con la Vida (Encounter with Life).<sup>6</sup> The campaign spokespersons declared they

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6 For information on Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas, see this series chapter on the OAS case on page 164.

would “wallpaper”<sup>7</sup> the whole city with billboards against “gender ideology” and sexual education in schools. Pamphlets were distributed that indoctrinated people against the perils of “gender ideology”.

The campaign, however, generated critical responses and resistance. Citizens complained against the organizers because they had breached a municipal ordinance which established that “no advertisement can be made that is contrary to the law, negatively affects morality and customs, or is discriminatory”. As a result, the billboards and posters placed on walls and public transportation were taken down (La Voz, 2018). On the other hand, the campaign had support in other cities where demonstrations were also organized using the slogan Don’t Mess With My Children. The Con Mis Hijos No te Metas campaign was originally Evangelical but quite rapidly got support from key Catholic actors.

Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas uses entirely new strategies of communication and mobilization, such as WhatsApp groups for mothers of school-age children that spread fake news with regard to the contents of the Comprehensive Sexual Education Law, generating confusion and fear. According to one report, an audio message circulating in these WhatsApp groups featured a pastor falsely claiming that “in sexual education classes, the teachers force students to get undressed and touch each others private parts, they also tell boys to practice sexual positions with other boys and girls with other girls, they stimulate boys to get dressed as girls and girls as boys, and show videos that depict pornographic sexual acts amongst adult persons and even teach kids in kindergarten level that there are girls who have penises and boys who have vaginas” (Carbajal, 2018). The same strategy was replicated in other social networks media, especially Facebook.

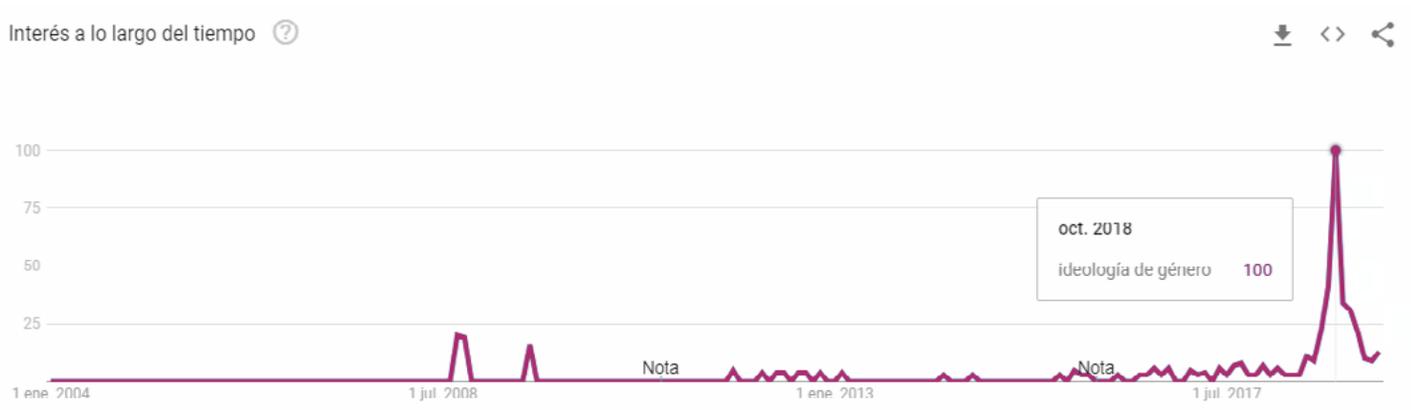
It suffices to check the graphics provided by *Google Trends* for Argentina to verify that the key words “gender ideology” were almost entirely absent before the 2018 Congress debate on abortion rights. In contrast, a peak was reached in October that year coinciding with the beginning of these digital campaigns and the marches “for the right to life and against gender ideology”. As it can be seen below, one of these Google search peaks was in October 28, 2018, exactly when the first national Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas march took place in Córdoba.

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7 Listen to the audio at <https://m.soundcloud.com/user-474067345/whatsapp-audio-2018-09-05-at-55020-pm>

**Figure 1**

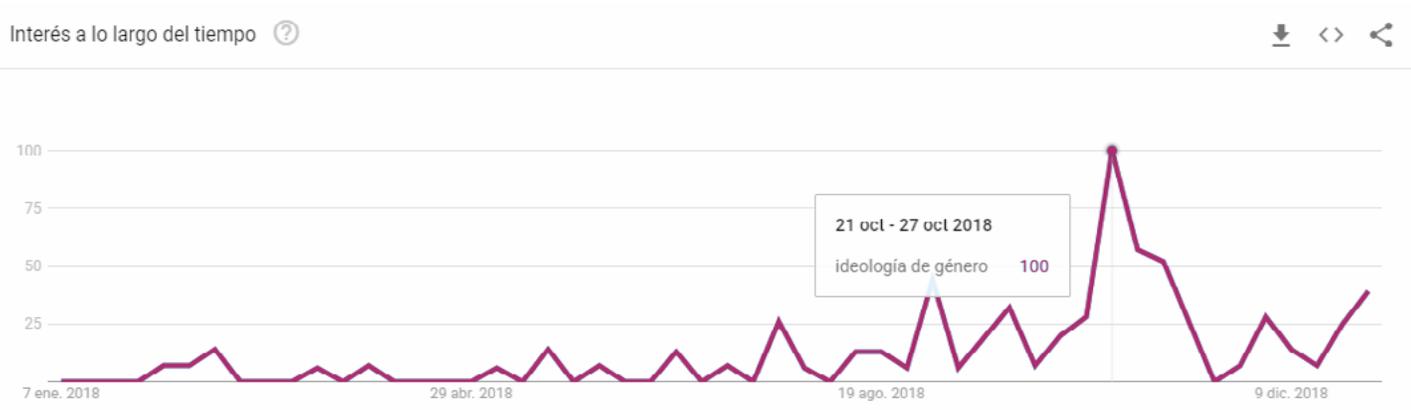
*Google Argentina Search for “Gender Ideology” From 2004 to 2019*



Note Google Trends consultation

**Figure 2**

*Google Argentina Search for “Gender Ideology” During 2018*



Note Google Trends consultation

Not less importantly, Argentinean crusades against “gender ideology” are connected with similar regional and transnational initiatives. The most glaring example is provided by Frente Joven (Youth Front) that also has chapters in Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru. Their Argentinians leaders Leandro Flocco and Sebastian Schuff, who are key transnational figures, were present in public demonstrations and social network media debates in the course of the abortion law reform process. They are also extremely active at annual Assemblies of the Organization of American States (OAS). The virtual platform Citizen Go, connected with the Spanish NGO Hazte Oír, is also present now in Argentina and promotes periodical campaigns against abortion rights, “gender ideology” and feminism.<sup>8</sup>

## WHAT ABOUT RESISTANCE?

Religious and secular conservative and reactionary forces opposing the recognition of rights related to gender, sexuality and abortion have, therefore, a substantial track record in Argentina. The “pro-life” NGOs began to be established at the end of the 1980s and during the 1990 they enlarged the scope of their anti-abortion frame to also encompass sexual and reproductive rights. Their political demands to the state were quite varied, ranging from the protection of the family to sexual matters. Even so, the opposition to abortion rights has, to a large extent, become the terrain in which their discourses and actions were unified. The 2018 abortion legal reform has provided these forces with an opportunity of mobilization and cross -sector coordination. From the strong mobilizations propelled against the abortion law reform they jumped towards the crusade against “gender ideology” to attack the Comprehensive Sexual Education Law and related policies. This opened the space for the Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas campaign to gain roots in Argentina.

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8 For more detailed information on Frente Joven and Citizen Go, see this series chapter on the OAS case on page 164.

Albeit their gains and expansion, since 2018, they have face resistance, especially from the feminist and LGBTTI movements, but also voices from the left and the human rights defenders camp. It is also crucial to observe that their arguments have not captured large support in society. In 2018, for example, in a series of opinion polls performed to assess the perception on the abortion law reform, the majority of persons interviewed declared their support to the law provision under debate (Paladini, 2018).<sup>9</sup> A more recent survey also shows that 82 percent of people consulted across the country are in favor of comprehensive sexual education (La Voz, 2018). Likewise, mainstream mass media vehicles have been slowly adopting a gender perspective and supported the #NiUnaMenos (#NotOneLess) movement against sexist violence and femicides.

In the political realm, the narrow margin of votes defeating the abortion law reform also shows that parties and politicians are predominantly committed to principles of reproductive autonomy. Nothing suggests that the attacks on “gender ideology” and sexual education will easily prosper amongst parliamentarians and other politicians. In 2019, the wide victory of Alberto Fernández, who is linked to the progressive wing of the Justicialista Party, suggests that society is leaning towards an entirely different direction. One main commitment of the new administration is to re-table the abortion law reform provision.

Although these resistances and institutional responses must be valued, it is also crucial to recognize that in Argentina the battle for abortion rights has not reached its end and the crusade against “gender ideology” has just begun. Even though they are far from hegemonic, anti-abortion and anti-gender formations and actors exist, are extremely active, well-funded and transnationally connected. Suffices to recall that a number of representative and senators have voted against the abortion law reform in 2018. Amongst them, two prominent voices are Salta’s congresspersons, Alfredo Olmedo

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9 Although other media outlets published surveys showing higher rates of rejection such as the La Nación Daily Newspaper assessment, “according to one survey, 49 percent of the population rejects legal abortion and 40 percent accepts it” (Stang, 2018).

and ex-Representative Cynthia Hotton who systematically express their views against abortion and “gender ideology”. Most importantly, the new party formation, the Partido Celeste, has been created and has also defined abortion rights and “gender ideology” as its targets. More recently, a new national party named Una Nueva Oportunidad - UNO (A New Opportunity) was also created by a provincial Evangelical grouping whose program goes in the same direction.

As the other country case studies included in this publication show, these forces do not give up and will continue to pressure for their regressive agendas, even when they may lose many battles before reaching their objectives. One symptom that this is what may also lie ahead in the Argentinean landscape was grasped by Mariana Carbajal, in a Página 12 article reporting on how the ex-president Mauricio Macri, defeated in 2019, is reaching out towards an alliance with UNO in view of the forecoming provincial elections (Pertot, 2020).

**[ACCESS THE FULL REPORT IN SPANISH](#)**

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# THE CASE OF BRAZIL

Sonia Corrêa

Isabela Kalil

## BEFORE 2018

In few Latin American countries, such as Paraguay and Peru, the semantics of “gender ideology” had been circulating since the 1990s. In the 2000s, Argentina became a sort of export platform of anti-gender literature that would be disseminated with greater intensity from 2010 onwards across the region and beyond.<sup>1</sup> In Brazil, a distinctive pattern is observed. It was in 2003, during Parliament House debates, that one conservative Member of Parliament (MP) from São Paulo used for the first time the term “gender ideology”. However, it disappeared until after 2007, when a systematic propagation of anti-gender discourses began. This diffusion ensued the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), held in Aparecida do Norte (SP) with the presence of pope Benedict XVI, the intellectual mentor of anti-gender crusades. As it is widely known, the final document of the Council (Aparecida Document) called for a combat against “gender ideology”.<sup>2</sup>

The early propellers of anti-gender parlance in Brazil were the Institute Plínio Correia de Oliveira (IPCO), an entity derived from the now extinct ultraconservative Catholic organization Tradição, Família e Propriedade (TFP - Tradition, Family and Property), founded in the 1960s, and the Catholic charismatic publishing house Canção Nova (New Song) who, in 2008, published the Portuguese translation of an abridged version of Dale O’Leary’s book *The Gender Agenda, Redefining Equality* (1997). Three years later, the book written by Argentinean ultra-Catholic author Jorge Scala, *Ideologia de gênero, Neototalitarismo e a Morte da Família* (2011) (Gender Ideology, Neototalitarianism and the Death of the Family) would also be available in print.

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1 To learn more on anti-gender forces in Argentina, see this series chapter on the country on page 34.

2 See Miskolci and Campana (2017).

This diffusion remained largely confined to Catholic circuits until 2013, when the fundamentalist Evangelical digital media and its leadership engaged in anti-gender political mobilization (Gomes, 2020). The adherence of Evangelical forces would become one key piece in the political assemblage that very effectively propelled attacks on gender in the 2018 electoral process, which eventually led to the victory of ultra-right politician Jair Bolsonaro as the Brazilian president. This summary focus on anti-gender crusades in Brazil between 2008 and 2018, but the complete study, originally published in Spanish, recovers the longer trajectories of disputes over gender, sexuality, and human rights in the country, whose key moments have coincided with key moments of the Brazilian re-democratization process that began in the late 1970s. This historical retracing, albeit brief, tells us how anti-gender crusades were built upon a much older political “infrastructure” established by the Catholic Church to oppose abortion rights, which date back to the 1940s, but has expanded after 1980, when calls for legal abortion erupted in the fight for democratization. One significant illustration of these claims was the successful feminist campaign for abortion rights during the Constitutional Reform, between 1986 and 1988. Despite strong pressure from the Catholic Church, the premise of the “right to life from conception” was not incorporated into the constitutional text and this opened the path towards the continuation of the political debate around abortion rights (Machado & Cook, 2018).

As in other Latin American countries, these long course trajectories are revealing of the dynamics and actors involved in anti-gender politics, but also contribute to a better understanding of the politicization (or re-politicization) of the religious around these matters and its effects on sexual politics and politics more broadly speaking. In the case of Brazil, in particular, it should also be noted that anti-gender campaigns have taken shape after almost fifteen years of the left-wing Workers’ Party (PT) administration. Counter to the global neoliberal expansion, PT implemented economic policies strengthening state regulatory powers and investing in domestic consumption through the raise of the minimum wage and the creation of a robust cash transfer program. The PT administration has also increased investments in education, especially in higher education (public and private) and strongly supported affirmative action programs of ethnic-racial inclusion. Not

least, throughout the 2000s, the administration prioritized public policies in the realms of gender-based violence and LGBTTI rights.

To understand that, it is necessary to delve under the surface to recall the deep-rooted influences of the Catholic Church in Brazilian politics, which have intensified during the papacies of Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) and Josef Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), while the country's democracy was being rebuilt. The Vatican's interest in Brazil in this period is illustrated, perhaps, by five papal visits to the country, between 1980 and 2013, that were complemented by two other visits by Ratzinger, as the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Doctrine and Faith. The main objective of these missions was to neutralize the theology of liberation and its influence on the faithful and the Church hierarchy.

It is also noticeable that Catholic influence on politics has never been restricted to the right side of the spectrum, but also reached parties located on the left, in particular the PT, whose origin has strong affinities with the progressive Catholic labor rights work of the 1960s and 1970s. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the second mandate of president Lula da Silva, an agreement was signed and ratified in 2010 between Brazil and the Holy See, which was not subject to a substantive parliamentary scrutiny and much less to an open discussion with society at large. At that point in time, Vatican doctrinarian guidelines calling the faithful to assume an active religious citizenship were already in place (Vaggione, 2018). Furthermore, when the PT won the presidential elections in 2002, Evangelism, that had begun engaging with politics in the 1980s, was already highly politicized and had geometrically expanded its presence and power of pressure at Congress level. Between 1998 and 2014, the number of evangelical members in the two federal legislative houses increased from 44 to 90 members.

To better grasp the effects of this politicization (or re-politization) of the religious in the course of re-democratization, they must also be read in articulation with the frailties and distortions of democratic politics and most principally connected with the ways in which neoliberal rationality increasingly pervaded the political and social realms,

even if anti-neoliberal tenets have guided the management of economic policies between 2003 and 2016. One clear point of convergence in that respect is the affinity between the Evangelical theology of prosperity and the neoliberal ideology of entrepreneurship.

But when looking at legislative battles around gender, sexuality, and abortion, the relative weight of neoconservative religious forces in creating obstacles to rights in these domains is quite blatant, especially after the second half of the 1990s. One striking example was a same-sex union bill tabled in 1994 that remained paralyzed in Congress, this stall leading towards judicialization and a favorable Supreme Court decision in 2011. Yet more significantly was the abortion legal reform bill tabled by the Executive Branch in 2005 that went down the drain when a corruption scandal erupted, which required the PT government to bargain with religious conservative sectors to politically survive and drop the proposition. Concurrently, a legislative proposal aimed at criminalizing homophobia and transphobia was fiercely resisted by the Evangelical block in Congress.<sup>3</sup> And, a bit later, Catholic and Evangelical opposition to human rights in relation to gender and sexuality would turn into a systematic effort to block gender and sexuality content and the promotion of respect to sexual diversity in public education.

A very significant moment of the period preceding the full eruption of attacks on gender happened in the 2010 presidential elections, when Dilma Rousseff (PT) was elected the first female president of Brazil. During the campaign, the views she had previously expressed in favor of abortion rights became the main target of José Serra, her opponent from Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB-Brazilian Social Democracy Party), as well as a wide gamut of conservative religious voices. This electoral process was preceded by strong controversies around the Third National Human Rights Plan (NHRP), a public policy that, since the 1990s, had been built with wide civil society participation (Corrêa, 2010). The strongest conflicts were over the following proposals: decriminalization of

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<sup>3</sup> This legislative impasse on the criminalization of homophobia would lead to a legal action tabled at the Supreme Court, which would be judged favourably in June 2019.

abortion, removal of religious symbols from government buildings and facilities, and the creation of the National Truth Commission to review the crimes committed by the Brazilian military during the dictatorship. However, LGBTTI and indigenous peoples' rights were also the subject of strong debate. A strong trait of these controversies was that, for the first time under democratic conditions, the military demonstrated politically on issues not only related to the Ministry of Defense.

In 2011, tensions shifted more directly to the realm of LGBTTI rights, when a set of educational videos produced by the Program School Without Homophobia for distribution in the public education system was strongly attacked by the neoconservative religious bench in Congress, especially Evangelicals MPs, who named it the “Gay Kit”. It is not trivial that Jair Bolsonaro, then a MP, was a very vocal actor in this particular controversy. Faced with pressure, the president Dilma Rousseff (PT) declared she would suspend the distribution of the material under the allegation that her government “would not impose sexual orientation on anyone”. This victory enlarged the space for the evangelical group in Congress both to continue questioning and also blocking political initiatives related to both LGBTTI and abortion rights.

## **GENDER IN EDUCATION, THE AUTUMN JOURNEYS AND JUDITH BUTLER “BURNED” IN PUBLIC SQUARE**

The term “gender ideology” did not appear strongly in the controversies described above, not even in the 2011 big flare against the so-called “Gay Kit”, when the main specter propelled by conservative religious voices was pedophilia. Two years later, however, the scarecrow of “gender ideology” would jump out of the box with great intensity in the context of legislative discussions around the National Education Plan (PNE) for the 2010-2020 term. These mobilizations were now led by a well-established coalition of Catholics and Evangelicals and was also connected with an earlier initiative known as School Without Party that, since 2003, had been attacking the “ideologization” of public education (but without much success). The attack against the PNE at federal level later unfolded into hundreds of state and municipal legal initiatives proposing the elimination of the term

‘gender’ in local educational plans. One of the first state laws against gender to be tabled was presented by one of Bolsonaro’s sons at Rio de Janeiro State Assembly.

But 2013 was also the year when Brazilian streets were unexpectedly taken by large crowds demanding redistributive policies, protesting against political corruption and denouncing the negative impacts of mega events planned for 2014 (World Cup) and 2016 (Olympics), such as the expulsion of poor communities and gentrification processes. Several political analysts have interpreted these mobilizations, which became known as the “Autumn Journeys”, as a turning point of Brazilian post-democratization politics, because the model of political governability that had taken root in the 1990s and had not been altered during the PT era, was denuded and began crumbling. The protests have disclosed the distortions of a political system highly fragmented by the multiplicity of parties and the deep biases of the governance model named as “coalitional presidentialism”<sup>4</sup>.

The protests coincided in time with the ripple effects of the 2008 global economic crisis, which, in Brazil, only arrived after the European rebound of 2011. Specifically, with respect to the PT government, the Journeys have broken an armor against criticism and bustle of the streets, which was installed in the mid-2000s after the first corruption scandal.<sup>5</sup> But in 2013, popular dissatisfaction brought the political system as a whole into question. The PT government tried to appease the demands of the streets by proposing a political reform (which would never happen), but which did not respond, even partially, to the deep, but scattered and diffuse dissatisfaction installed in society.

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4 Since the late 1980s, the Brazilian political system has been characterized as “coalitional presidentialism” (Abranches, 1988). In order to give the Executive more autonomy to the legislative agenda, the 1988 Constitution presents devices that allow constant negotiation between parties, their leaders and the president, which in practice translates into bargaining for parliamentary amendments, the appointment of ministries and contributes to corruption dynamics in a context of 33 established parties.

5 In 2005, a scheme of buying votes from congressmen in the National Congress was discovered involving actors in the upper echelons of the Executive branch belonging to PT, which was called “Mensalão”. This investigation undermined and compromised the country’s main political leaders, who were trialed, condemned, and imprisoned, and this reorganized the cadre of parties at the government’s coalitioning base.

It is also worth noting that, while legitimacy crisis of the political system was unfolding, the results of investigations carried out by the Truth Commission, installed in 2011, were made public. In public hearings, newspapers, TV and social network articles, the violations committed during the military dictatorship - torture and murder - had unprecedented visibility. In the hearings, victims of state repression, but also military and torturers, publicly witnessed and told their stories. This process of recovering their memory, although very backward in time, caused unease and negative reaction from military sectors that had always strongly resisted the opening of a deep and consistent process of transitional justice in the country and this discomfort would gradually lead them towards an unexpected re-politization.<sup>6</sup>

More significantly yet, in early 2014, strong evidence of corruption at Brazil's largest national oil company, Petrobras, was released and the so-called Lava Jato investigation began. Its main operators would rapidly become major players in this shifting and complex political arena. That same year, although with less intensity, a new round of protests erupted against the World Cup and were harshly reprimanded with police brutality in many states. The presidential elections that immediately followed opened a window of opportunity for secular right-wing formations, which since the mid-2000s had been gaining ground to expand their mobilization and reach. They called massive street demonstrations in support of Aécio Neves (PSDB), Rousseff's opponent. In an extremely polarized election, Rousseff was reelected by a small margin of votes.

The defeated candidate raised suspicions about the integrity of the digital vote and threatened to not accept the election result, dragging more water into the mill of right-wing forces who, at that point in time, already constituted a broad assemblage involving a variety of dissatisfied players: those who disagreed with the PT's management of economic policies, enraged sectors of the middle class who had lost income, re-politicized military,

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6 Regarding the re-politization of the military, another trend to be taken into account is that from the mid 1990s onwards the Army has been increasingly called to intervene in territories affected by the unresolved crisis of public security, in particular in Rio de Janeiro. To illustrate that, all through 2018, the election year, the public security system of the state was under military intervention. Not surprisingly, the general who head this intervention is now the Minister of Civil Cabinet of Bolsonaro's government.

radical right-wing groups, but also part of the youth and popular sectors that had taken the streets a year before and religious neo-conservatives. Rousseff's new mandate, starting in January 2015, would become an ongoing crisis. In March, streets were again taken over by protests now calling for the removal of the president. While the streets were boiling with conservatism, in the National Congress regressive legislative initiatives proliferated in relation to the right to abortion, family and to contain the propagation of "gender ideology" in education.

On April 17, 2016, millions of people in Brazil and around the world were stunned as they watched on their screens Dilma Rousseff's impeachment live voting in the House of Representatives. The content of interventions was deplorable, most declarations in favor of suspending her mandate were accompanied by statements such as "in the name of God, religion, and the family". This scene, that surprised so many observers, simply brought to light what had happened for many decades behind closed doors of legislative debates on abortion, gender, and sexuality. These rather invisible disputes witnessed almost exclusively by feminists and LGBTTI rights advocates can therefore be read as precursors of the right-wing sectarianism and authoritarianism that invaded Brazilian politics after 2014. The culmination of the regrettable political scene of Rousseff's impeachment came when Jair Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to a military colonel known and condemned as responsible for torture centers during the dictatorship.

This repugnant act of apology to torture has, in fact, marked the beginning of Bolsonaro's pre-campaign for the presidency of the Republic. Less than a month later, when the Senate voted the final decision of the impeachment, Bolsonaro, originally a Catholic, traveled to Israel. There, he was re-baptized by a pastor of Brazilian Evangelical church Assembly of God (denomination with the largest number of faithful in the country), who also happens to be a member of Parliament. This religious ritual not only made clear Bolsonaro's political alliance with Evangelicals, but also symbolically inscribed in the body of the candidate for the presidency the dual identity of Catholic and Evangelic, a sign reflecting the "ecumenic" conservative collation that would be decisive to his victory in 2018.

Another iconic event in the amplification of anti-gender crusades in Brazil after 2013 occurred in November 2017, when philosopher Judith Butler, during a visit to Brazil to speak at the event “The End of Democracy”, in São Paulo, became the target of a virulent online campaign. This campaign was mobilized by Spanish conservative platform CitizenGO, the digital arm of the Spanish ultra-catholic NGO HazteOír, which is also linked to the Spanish extreme-right party Vox.<sup>7</sup> The virtual assault was followed by a public act in front of SESC Pompéia, where the seminar was held, in which an effigy of the philosopher was burned in a simulation of an Inquisitorial act of burning a witch at the stake. This episode is to be read as a second key milestone in the pre-campaign of Bolsonaro for presidency, eventually a real turning point in the political cyclone that would lead to the 2018 election results.

The act was relatively small -- only about 200 people participated -- but very violent. Not only was Judith Butler’s effigy burned, but also those of Open Society Foundations president George Soros and former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The significance of the assault on Butler exceeded the event itself, configuring a bombastic performative attack on “gender ideology”, as until then the crusade had been restricted to religious circuits and legislative debates on education, especially at local levels. The November 2017 act provided national and international visibility to the “gender ideology” scarecrow that, from there on, would constitute one key element of the Bolsonaro presidential campaign. The protest against Butler was a sort a pilot, as it delineated the new contours of right-wing mobilizing, revealing the highly heterogeneous assemblage of anti-gender actors that were orbiting around an “ecumenical” core composed of Catholics and Evangelicals.

While at that time it was not clear why the three effigies had been burned together, this would become clearer when the Bolsonaro’s elected government adopted a discourse

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7 HazteOír/CitizenGO is a constant actor in the anti-gender crusades in Latin America, as can be seen in the case studies of Chile (p. 66) Colombia (p. 79), Costa Rica (p.92), Mexico (p.122) and OAS (p. 164). Between January and July 2017, an orange bus invented by the organization to propagate anti-gender campaigns was in the U.S., Mexico, Colombia and Chile, followed by Butler’s attack in Brazil.

interweaving attacks on “gender ideology”, abortion rights and globalism (on that occasion represented by Soros and Cardoso) after 2019. Paradoxically enough, a week after the grotesque protest against Butler, Soros and Cardoso, the press openly reported that “market forces” were seriously considering supporting Bolsonaro candidacy as to prevent the PT from returning to power. Then, as in early 2018, the electoral campaign got steam with the articulation of “gender ideology” and Marxism gaining leverage to become a mantra of Bolsonaro supporters.

## THE ELECTORAL WHIRLWIND

Between November 2017 and July 2018, Bolsonaro’s visibility as a public figure steadily grew. Despite his partnership with economic elites, his political style continued to be based on systematic provocations, grotesque boutades and disgusting performances, such as his widely known gesture of pointing fingers as a pistol. His path to electoral victory was quite vertiginous and unfolded in rather exceptional political conditions.

Until early 2018, all electoral opinion polls indicated Lula da Silva, the PT candidate, running for another term after two mandates, as the favorite (around 30 percent of voting intentions). However, in April, Lula was arrested under the Lava Jato operation, a clearly motivated judicial decision. By early September, the PT was still betting on legal appeals against Lula’s arrest and sustaining him as the candidate. This was also when Bolsonaro was victimized by a knife attack at a campaign event. This created a surreal electoral scenario in which one candidate was imprisoned and the other laid in a hospital bed. Fernando Haddad would only be defined as the alternate PT candidate a few days later, on September 11, when Bolsonaro’s image as a martyr had already condensed into the turbulent electoral atmosphere. The knife attack turbocharged Bolsonaro’s candidacy at a crucial moment, but many other factors were at play, including the accumulated effects of political attacks against “gender ideology”.

Since he left the military to become a politician in 1988, Bolsonaro has transitioned from the municipal to the federal level without major legislative achievements. He

was mainly known for his anti-democratic, misogynistic, racist and often incongruous positions. In 2018, he joined a political party with little expression, the Partido Social Liberal (PSL-Liberal Social Party) and did not have much time in the public funded slot for television campaigning. He neither have large campaign funds (at least considering the values formally declared to electoral justice), nor the immediate clear support from the mainstream media that since 2014 had flagrantly opposed PT. His campaign, above all, made wide use of social networks and automated mass shooting resources on WhatsApp.<sup>8</sup>

To better capture how and why this worked, it is essential to understand the Brazilian electoral rules that guarantee political parties the right to television and radio time in electoral programs, the content of which must be broadcasted by TV stations. The time given to each party is determined by the size of its representation, which in the case of Bolsonaro was minimal. For comparison purposes, in the first round, Fernando Haddad's Workers' Party had 11.5 minutes a day, while Bolsonaro had less than 30 seconds. This sharp limitation led several analysts to seriously consider that Bolsonaro's campaign would not be politically viable. However, it was very successful.

In addition to the wide use of illegal messaging and access to data from mobile users and applications, Bolsonaro's strategy was also based on the continuous dissemination of fake news. According to post-electoral data, 98.21 percent of Bolsonaro's voters were exposed to one or more messages with false content. An Avaaz study detected that 89.77 percent of voters believed that these false messages were true content. In WhatsApp groups of the Bolsonaro camp, the most shared fake news were those that raised suspicion of frauds in the electronic voting booths and the false tale about the distribution of the "Gay Kit" by Fernando Haddad, when he was minister of education during the Rousseff government.

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8 After the elections, a report published in the Folha de São Paulo newspaper denounced that around 2.5 million dollars were invested by private companies in Bolsonaro's campaign in an illegal and undeclared manner for the purchase of resources of mass shooting messages in WhatsApp against the Workers' Party and its representatives. See <https://olhardigital.com.br/en/2018/10/18/noticias/corrente-anti-pt-no-whatsapp-foi-paga-por-empresas-pro-bolsonaro-diz-jornal/>

As described in the avalanche of texts and images propagated by the Bolsonaro campaign, the “Gay Kit” aimed at “homosexualizing” or “transexualizing” children, stimulating early sexual practices and legitimizing pedophilia. One of those propaganda pieces showed the image of a penis-shaped baby bottle with the false information that it had been distributed in preschools. To understand the scale and nefarious effect of this proliferation of false narratives, suffice to recall that the videos of the School Without Homophobia Program –referred to as the “gay kit” by conservatives -- had never even been distributed. But it was useless to make that argument because the levels of sexual panic generated by the “Gay Kit” and, most principally, the “mamadeira de piroca” (“dick baby bottle”) was very effective. People adhered to these narratives without questioning, because the repudiation of “gender ideology” that was slowly but systematically promoted through religious circuits, had been very effective in inciting the inertial social conservatism of Brazilian society.

Another aspect to be re-visited in the electoral storm that brought Bolsonaro to power is the markedly heterogeneous profile of his electorate. In a short, intense and turbulent electoral scenario, Bolsonaro’s campaign was able to pull together a wide variety of publics: neoconservative religious sectors, agribusiness actors, the military, voices representing the arms industry, sectors of the banking and financing system, but also parts of the middle class and popular sectors that adhered, on the one hand, to his punitive proposals to fight crime and corruption and, on the other, to his regressive moral agenda in relation to sexuality, abortion and family. Not less significantly, this social conservative portfolio was clasped to an ultra-neoliberal economic project that, however, was not even debated during the electoral process, which had been entirely taken by the so-called “moral agenda”.

It is interesting to begin examining the heterogeneity of Bolsonaro’s voters by looking at his behavior in relation to the female electorate and how women’s voters have shifted their position as the campaign evolved. At the beginning of the campaign, Bolsonaro openly assumed a misogynistic discourse that resulted in substantial male adherence and a strong rejection by women. At that point in time, 3 out of 4 of Bolsonaro’s potential voters were men. In order to attract female voters, Bolsonaro moderated his discourse

and the religious forces that supported him recruited female voters into his circuits. The moral panic generated by the “gender ideology” scarecrow also captured the adherence of middle-class housewives, part of whom were already grouped in home schooling defense movements. Despite these efforts, at the end of the first round of the election, Bolsonaro’s candidacy was widely repudiated by the nationwide demonstration #EleNão (#NotHim), led by women. Even so, after the massive #EleNão demonstrations, the anti-feminist and anti-gender semantic of his electoral propaganda escalated and, in the second round, 50 percent of the female electorate would vote for Bolsonaro.

However, his ability to aggregate and capture adhesions that cross class strata and even politicized identities - and the speed with which this happened - far outweighed the successful recruitment of women’s votes. Data on how people voted in the second round tells us, for example, that 30 percent of persons who define themselves as LGBTTI voted for Bolsonaro. Although Bolsonaro mainly won in the “whiter” cities, an important part of the black electorate that has ties to evangelism also voted for him.<sup>9</sup>

The ethnography coordinated by Isabela Kalil and her team at the Foundation School of Sociology and Politics (FESPSP), in collaboration with Sexuality Policy Watch (SPW), identified 16 types of Bolsonaro’s profiles of voters (Kalil, 2018). They are “citizen of good”, virile masculinities, gamers and hackers, military and ex-military, the feminine women or “Bolsobeauties”, the right-wing mothers, conservative gays, black and indigenous right-wingers, the “students for freedom”, advocates of meritocracy; right-wing popular sectors, digital influencers, monarchists, religious leaders and religious faithful; and lastly, the “exempt person”. These profiles orbit around the figure of the “citizen of good”, a sort of kaleidoscopic joker used by a varied gamut of voters to justify their choice of Bolsonaro: “We vote for him because we are a citizen of good”. These various profiles also reflect the segmentation of potential voters targeted by the Bolsonaro campaign strategy.

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9 Check a [compilation of data](#) on how Brazilians voted in the second round of the 2018 presidential elections prepared by SPW.

The profiles portrayed by the research are abstract figures that aim at capturing the multiple political aspirations, imaginations and identifications mobilized by the electoral dynamics of the campaign. A “religious” voter may have mobilized politically in support of Bolsonaro for religious reasons, but also as an “exempt person” voter or a “right-wing mother”. A professional woman with a lot of personal autonomy -- a typical “Bolsobeauty” -- may have voted for Bolsonaro to differentiate herself from feminists, portrayed as dirty and ugly, while she may also have voted as an “exempt person” and an “advocate of meritocracy”. This kaleidoscopic template allows for grabbing, identifying and classifying political affects and imaginations incited by Bolsonaro’s campaign strategy that, at the end, favored a radical turn of Brazilian politics towards the right.

In the campaign atmosphere, the widespread diffusion of “gender ideology” as the new face of Marxism, which in Brazil also meant Communism or Petism (derived from the Worker’s Party acronym), propelled cyclones in several directions. The accusatory category “gender ideology” activated the repudiation of gender as a destabilizing category, but, above all, it incited fears (or even disgust) regarding sex education, now associated with pedophilia, but also with feminism and feminists, and, in a more complex and obscure way, to trans people. On the other hand, the concomitant spread of anti-Marxism views has reactivated deep (and almost forgotten) layers of anti-communist sentiment, sedimented in the Brazilian political culture, at least since the 1930s. Transported to the present, the anti-Marxist parlance accused left-wing thinking and political actors of being associated with corruption, “Bolivarianism” and totalitarianism. To return to Corrêa’s essay written right after the 2018 elections:

*... “gender ideology” functioned as a symbolic glue collating disparate contents of this assemblage of potential electoral adherents. This glue did not collate exclusively contents and actors in the realm of sexuality, gender and abortion matters but also and, perhaps more noticeably, the disperse elements related to the other face of the device: the specter of communism. In Colombia, as analyzed by Franklin Gil, the 2016 attack on “gender ideology” in the Peace Referendum paved the way for the demonization of the left in the 2018 elections. In Brazil, “gender as communism” and*

*vice-versa floated freely in the dense electoral cyberspace, each of these elements feeding the political imagination and adherence of different groups of potential voters. While “gender” provided a glue to articulate all moral and political corruption, “communism” operated as an open signifier of all “bad things” (corruption, Petismo, state protection that impairs merit, etc.) that would “vanish” when the individualist, privatizing and free market policy portfolio of the government began ruling Brazil on January 1st, 2019. (Corrêa, 2018, p. 9)*

## POST-SCRIPTUM

The Brazil case study was finalized at the end of 2018. It did not cover what has happened after Jair Bolsonaro reached power. However, it is possible to offer here a brief rundown of how gender has played electorally in 2018. According to data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), the number of candidates for PSL, Bolsonaro’s party in the elections, rose from 680 in the 2014 elections to 1,454 in 2018, becoming the party with the largest number of candidates in Brazil. Although in a recent debate on electoral quotas the party’s president stated that “politics is not for women”, the participation of women in PSL elected was higher than the average of other parties. Although many of these women declare themselves to be anti-feminists, in 2018 the PSL became the second largest women’s party in Congress (nine female parliamentarians). In addition, PSL candidates also performed well in some states, one of them was elected with over 2 million votes in São Paulo. In light of previous analyses of how gender has become a nodal problem in Brazilian politics, it is not politically irrelevant to realize that the vicious anti-feminist crusade that attacked gender in the electoral process has led to the election of openly anti-feminist female politicians, a number of them situated on the extreme-right of the political spectrum.

It is also worth briefly recapturing how “gender ideology” has, surprisingly, become so central to Brazilian politics. As shown, the spread of anti-“gender ideology” discourses in Brazil was, for many years, the deed religious neo-conservatism to a large extent reacting to gains made in relation to gender, sexuality and abortion since the 1980s in the course

of re-democratization. However, what has been witnessed since the early 2010s cannot be fully grasped without taking into account the ways in which neoliberalism erodes the grounds of democratic politics and two other elements: the persistence of political corruption and the unsolved crisis in public security policy.

Since 2013, the right monopolized the “fight against corruption” making of it its principal political motto. This has indeed propelled a vast discredit in politics and the political system, whose distortions were already quite visible in 2013. After 2015, the entire political class became potentially suspect and the terrain was opened for the emergence of political outsiders, such as Bolsonaro. On the other hand, since the 1990s, the persistent “public security crisis” provided a stage for speech acts and proposition of law and order -- of which Bolsonaro has always been a herald — to further prosper. It also nourished an atmosphere of disorder and fear that would favor popular adherence not only to punitive ideologies but also to nostalgic imaginations of the military dictatorship and great receptivity to military’s participation in crime-fighting operations, creating a channel through which the military would gradually return to politics. Not surprisingly, today, retired and active generals occupy more than half of ministerial posts and other 2,900 military currently occupy posts in the federal administration.

In addition, since early 2019, when the new government came to power, anti-gender and anti-feminist agenda that fueled the electoral hurricane and which was viewed by many observers as a mere campaign rhetoric, has been carried over to state policies, particularly those implemented by the, now renamed, Ministry of Woman, Family and Human Rights, of Foreign Relations and of Education. The bills against gender and abortion rights in the National Congress have multiplied. The analyses of the meanings and effects of the transposition of anti-gender ideology from the level of political mobilizing to public policies confirms its metamorphic character. This agenda has now assumed many new configurations, such as the promotion of abstinence policies, the rebirth of speeches, campaigns and measures against pedophilia and, above all, the focus on the “restoration

of the family order” and the “protection of children”.<sup>10</sup> Not less importantly, Brazil has become an important geopolitical center of anti-gender and anti-abortion policy agendas, as illustrated by the open alignment with the Trump Administration in relation to these matters.<sup>11</sup>

For readers who are interested in these developments, we suggest the reading of the assessment prepared by SPW on what happened in the first 180 days of the Bolsonaro administration (Corrêa, 2019) and the analyses of how anti-gender ideology and ultra-neoliberalism is playing the current political scene developed by Isabela Kalil (Kalil, 2020). Albeit partial, they provide a flavor of how state-led anti-gender politics are at play in the catastrophic scenario of current Brazilian politics.

**[ACCESS THE FULL REPORT IN SPANISH](#)**

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10 See Corrêa & de Vito (2020); Kalil (2020).

11 See Beinart (2019).

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## THE CASE OF CHILE

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Abridged by Mariana Carbajal

Signs and symptoms of anti-gender ideology politics are quite palpable in Chile, albeit not with the same upward intensity as in other countries studied by the Gender and Politics in Latin America research project. Though antecedents are to be mentioned, the first open and mature attack against “gender ideology” erupted in July 2017, when the orange bus (called the “liberty bus” by their own and “hate bus” by the feminist and LGBT movement) of the Hazte Oír/CitizenGO Spanish network arrived in Chile.<sup>1</sup> This visit coincided with the Congress debate on an abortion law reform, which aimed at leaving behind the total prohibition established during the Pinochet regime.<sup>2</sup> It was also in 2017 that scandals of sexual abuse perpetrated by bishops and priests reached a peak in Chile, further eroding the credibility of the Catholic Church. Last but not least, this was also when a Gender Identity Law provision reached its final stage of processing in the House of Representatives.

In Chile, the CitizenGO orange bus mobilization targeted same-sex families and gender in education, propelling demonstrations and propaganda against “gender ideology”. One of the slogans then used was “Nicolas has the right to have a mother and a father” alluding to a children’s book published in 2014 by the Movimiento por la Liberación Sexual (Movement for Sexual Liberation - MOVILH), which tells the story of Nicolas, a boy who has two fathers. The slogan was coupled with the hashtag #ConMisHijosNoTeMetas (Don’t Mess With My Children), revealing the connection with the initiative created in Peru in 2016.<sup>3</sup>

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1 For more detailed information on CitizenGo, see this series chapter on regional actors (Moragas, 2020).

2 The law that that permits abortion on three grounds was approved and sanctioned by the Constitutional Court in August 2017.

3 For detailed information on Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas, also see Moragas (2020).

The same reactionary actors who fiercely attack abortion and gender in general and in Congress level, are fervent defenders of the ultra-neoliberal economic model established in Chile during the dictatorship, which led to highly unequal patterns of wealth distribution combined with a very skewed system of social protection. This deep inequality and extremely limited access to social policies is what triggered the social insurgency that shook the country in October 2019. Known as *estallido social*, it mobilized large scale street protests not seen in Chile since the 1970s. These forces are supportive of the brutal police repression that Sebastián Piñera's Administration unleashed against protesters, resulting in scandalous numbers of wounded, blinded, raped and killed. The 352 protesters who lost their vision became a global scandal of police brutality (Deutsche Welle, 2019).

## POLITICAL HISTORY IN A NUTSHELL

After almost twenty years of a bloody military dictatorship, between 1990 and 2011, Chile was run by Concertación, a left-center coalition established by the Socialist and the Christian Democrat Parties, which ensured the hard and slow steps of the political transition. From 2011 onwards, Concertación and a right-wing coalition, personified by Michelle Bachelet and Sebastian Piñera, have alternated in power, the respective presidents having been elected twice. In the late 2010s, however, the left-wing coalition would gradually be eroded, and new parties and political formations would emerge to the left and right of the political spectrum.

Until the 2000s, Concertación made important efforts to transform the legacies of the Pinochet era, but it remained reluctant to push for legal reforms in relation to divorce, abortion and homosexuality. This was so because a pact had been made with the Catholic Church during the political transition, which entailed for these matters not to be touched upon after democratization. But, in 2004, divorce became legal, and gradually left-wing parties became more confident, including the Socialists, to call for legal reforms in these domains. Even so, Michelle Bachelet, despite being herself a feminist, did not dare to present a proposal to reform the draconian abortion law of the Pinochet era until 2015, when she was in her second mandate.

## WHERE ARE CHURCHES PLACED IN THIS LANDSCAPE?

Historically, the influence of the Catholic Church in Chilean politics is unequivocal. However, since 2010 the Church's image and credibility have been going down the drain under the impact of longstanding unresolved scandals of sexual abuse of minors by the clergy. One particularly dramatic case was of a priest named Karadima who, for many years, abused numerous young boys and whose behavior was concealed by the bishop who was his superior. Pope Francis visited Chile in early 2018 when this crisis was reaching a peak. He did not hesitate to publicly ask for forgiveness for these abuses, but as noted by Morán Faúndes (2018):

*For many people, however, his words were tainted by his concrete actions, as he not only refused to personally meet with victims of abuse, but was also accompanied by Juan Barros, the Bishop of Osorno, in all public events, even when the same victims who denounced Karadima, had also accused Barros of covering up and witnessing the abuses. (Morán Faúndes, 2018, p. 1)*

Few months later, the pope convened the Chilean bishops to a gathering in Rome and, in this occasion, all of them resigned. This belated measure, if followed through consistently, may eventually reconstruct the Catholic Church's credibility in Chilean society. But this will certainly take time and it is not clear if such a turn will bring the very large number of young people who do not have now any religious affiliation towards the faith. Today, Chile is one of Latin American countries with the largest percentage of inhabitants who declare they are not affiliated to any religious tradition (26 percent).

As for Evangelicals, while their numbers have increased, figures show that they are not exactly benefiting from the drifting away of Catholics, as it is happening in other countries. But, as elsewhere, they have also become highly politicized and achieved three seats in the House of Representatives, a fact quite unprecedented in Chilean politics. Their fervor in defending their principles is another important aspect to be taken into

account when analyzing anti-gender politics in Chile. Several pastors have been the cheerleaders of the mobilization against the 2012 Anti-Discrimination Law, the Abortion Law reform, the more recent Gender Identity Law, and against all provisions that were tabled to legalize same-sex marriage. In contrast with Catholic actors who intervene in legal and legislative debates with well-prepared lawyers, Evangelicals, generally speaking, do not count with equivalent resources, are less prepared intellectually and also more strident. Nevertheless, this profile may change as these Chilean Evangelical forces become increasingly connected with transnational networks that offer legal and policy support.

## ANTECEDENTS

In 1995, the positions taken by the Chilean delegation in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995) might have seemed quite moderate. But, at country level, senators made public a document criticizing the official policy stances because, in their view, it did not properly defend the integrity of the family. The Chilean Senate critique reflected the sharp tensions witnessed in Beijing, as an effect of Vatican pressures, in relation to sexual and reproductive rights, abortion as a major public health problem and sexual orientation as a non-justifiable ground of discrimination.

Immediately after Beijing, controversies erupted around sexual education. Chile has never established a formal public sexual education policy. Under the neoliberal rationality that guides state policies since the 1980s, schools are organized under a very wide principle of freedom of education and the existing system comprises both public and private units. Within the private sector, a large number of religious schools exist.

Since the 1990s, the educational field has been an ideological battle ground in relation to gender and sexuality matters. It was then the first accusations of “ideological colonization” were raised in relation to programs aimed at introducing debates around sexual diversity and sexual and reproductive rights in high schools. In 1995, during Eduardo Frei’s government, a program was designed to promote the *Jornadas de Conversación*

*sobre Afectividad y Sexualidad* - JOCAS (Conversations on Affectivity and Sexuality) amongst teenage students. The program was tested in five schools to be later expanded to other educational centers. Despite its positive outcomes, JOCAS became the target of conservative sectors and after a few years it was discontinued.

In 2001, the Catholic group Credo Chile published a book titled *From Liberation Theology to Ecofeminist Theology, a Revolution Entrenched in the Church* (2001), that retraced how “gender ideology” had penetrated and contaminated the heart of the Chilean Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup> The book describes and fiercely attacks the work performed by religious feminist thinkers described as the promoters of a “dangerous revolution”.

Ten years later, for the first time since democratization, Concertación lost the presidential elections. Sebastián Piñera, a right ward liberal entrepreneur, was elected and he has promised during his campaign to approve an Anti-Discriminatory Law claimed by society after the brutal hate crime against a young homosexual man, Daniel Zamudio. But members of his governing party as well as the Catholic Church strongly opposed the provision because they feared its approval would open the doors for other laws, such as same-sex marriage.

Despite the pressure, the law was finally approved in 2012. That same year, a seminar on sexual conversion therapies was convened at the Escuela de Derecho de la Pontificia Universidad Católica (Law School of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile - PUC), one of the most prestigious universities in the country. The event was evidently called as a response to this legal change and it caused alarm and criticism of academics and LGBTTI activists, even within the Catholic University itself. During the same period, the Universidad de los Andes (University of the Andes) in Santiago became a main intellectual bastion where conservative academics started offering courses against “gender ideology”.

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4 Credo Chile is the new name of TFP - Fiducia Chile, the Chilean branch of now extinct Brazilian ultra-right Catholic organization Tradition, Family and Property - TFP. Learn more at <https://www.credochile.cl/quienes-somos/>

Los Andes is run by Opus Dei and is connected to the University of Navarra in Spain -- a well-known hub of anti-gender ideological production. This is where the psychologist Marcela Ferrer, an energetic advocate of conversion therapy, was formed before working at the Fundación Restauración. In 2017, the Homosexual Integration and Liberation Movement (MOVILH) denounced the Foundation to the Minister of Health because Ferrer was carrying out conversion therapies. It should be said that the Catholic Church, through the Archdiocese of Santiago, had also allowed Ferrer to use its facilities for the same objective.

## THE MATURATION OF ANTI-GENDER POLITICS

In June 2016, the “pro-life” and “pro-family” digital vehicle El Acontecer -- which declares to have no political or religious affiliations -- criticized a national education policy implemented by Bachelet’s government claiming it aimed at promoting compulsory secular education and implementing sexual education curricula based on a “gender perspective”. Concurrently, the NGO Padres Objetores de Chile (Objector Parents of Chile) publicly declared that they were prepared to fight a provision intended to impose “(gender) ideology” on the Chilean society because, in their own words:

*Behind these apparently benign women’s human rights (language), a Marxist social re-engineering program is concealed, which is against our beliefs and convictions. This is the same program that, in Germany, has led to the arrest of parents who refused to take their children to these classes, and which was the object of massive protests in Italy, France and Puerto Rico. (El Acontecer, 2016)*

That same year, lawyer Andrea Balaton and the NGO Defendiendo Chile (Defending Chile), an Evangelical organization engaged in legislative advocacy, organized an event in a church located in the high-middle class community of Las Condes, in Santiago. In this occasion, Balaton defined “gender ideology” as a “dogmatic infiltration that would submit the country to tyranny or totalitarianism”.

In 2017, when the Gender Identity Law started to be processed by the House of Representatives, Ivan Moreira --who is currently a senator for the right-wing Democratic Independence Party (UDI)-- called gender theory an “evil ideology” and described the Gender Identity Law that was being discussed in Congress as an aberration. Another UDI senator, Jacqueline van Rysselberghe – who would later become the party’s president-- has also frontally attacked the law in the following terms: “We’re going to say it clearly and fearlessly: NO to gender ideology, which is contrary to human nature. We will wholeheartedly say YES to the family, which is the soul of any society” (Cooperativa.cl, 2017).

In this charged ambiance, another voice speaking against “gender ideology” was José Antonio Kast, the right-wing politician who would dispute the presidential elections in 2017. Kast, who is often compared with Bolsonaro, is definitely planning to become the extreme-right president of Chile in the next elections in 2022. According to a report produced by CIPER for the regional investigative journalism project *Transnacionales de la Fe (Transnationals of Faith)*<sup>5</sup>, Kast is organically connected with high-level figures of the transnational right, such as Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In June 2017, he was a leading figure of the Hemispherical Congress, that gathered conservative politicians and religious leaders from both the Catholic and Evangelical camps in Mexico City. One of them was pastor Fabrizio Alvarado, who few months later would run for president in Costa Rica, reaching the second round of the elections.<sup>6</sup> Two months later, Kast launched his candidacy for the presidency. It does not seem accidental that in between these two events the orange bus visit to Chile contributed to raise to another level the tone and visibility of the anti-gender crusade that had been taking form since 2016.

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5 Transnacionales de la Fe is an investigative news collaborative effort between 16 Latin American media outlets led by the Columbia Journalism Investigation project from the Columbia University. See <https://transnacionalesdelafe.com/>

6 For more information on Fabrizio Alvarado, see Arguedas (2020), this series chapter on Costa Rica on page 92 (Arguedas, 2020).

## THE ABORTION LAW REFORM

As in other Latin American countries, it is not possible to analyze anti-gender politics without addressing abortion controversies because these two battles overlap in many ways, but also because the opposition to abortion has always been there and its infrastructure is used by anti-gender ideologues and activists.

Until the late 1980s, Chile's Criminal Code prohibited abortion but included the right to voluntary pregnancy interruption under one ground, when the woman's life is at risk (therapeutic abortion). In 1980, during the Pinochet dictatorship, Chile became the second country in the world, after Malta, to include in its constitution the "right to life since conception". In the late 1980s, on the verge of democratic transition, the Constitutional Court abolished the legal ground for therapeutic abortion, making Chile one of the few countries in the world where abortion was totally prohibited.

From the 1990 onwards, the Chilean feminist movement and other advocates of abortion rights made all efforts possible to unblock the legislative debate on abortion and overcome total prohibition. These efforts were unsuccessful until 2014 when president Michelle Bachelet decided to send to Congress a law reform proposition, which would be tabled in early 2015. The provision called for the inclusion of three grounds in the Penal Code under which the termination of pregnancy should be permitted: when a woman's life is at risk, rape and grave fetal abnormalities.

As soon as the Abortion Law reform began, the same groups that had been attacking gender in education were ready to also oppose it. They attacked the provision with a variety of arguments, that since "abortion and gender endanger biological reproduction", they pose threats to social order and human survival. In their discourses and pamphlets, links were established between abortion, social engineering and eugenics, and those who perform abortion procedures –be it the woman or those who help her– were named as "torturers of fetuses". The more relevant aspect to be highlighted in relation to these anti-abortion arguments is that they were never framed in religious language, but rather used the semantics of human rights as well as of science, including social sciences.

The legislative processing of the abortion law reform was long, hard, and sometimes even grotesque. Efforts made by the feminist movement and abortion rights advocates to enlarge the exceptions to health risks were unsuccessful. But, despite many obstacles, in August 2nd, 2017, the law was finally approved (Reuters Staff, 2018). Few weeks later, however, the Constitutional Court approved a sanction that granted the right of both doctors and institutions to raise conscientious objection, a decision that would negatively impact in the access to procedures.

Despite this limitation, the reform was a major political victory, a successful outcome of relentless effort sustained by the feminist movement since 1990. For the region, it was also a breakthrough because it signaled to other societies submitted to the absolute prohibition of abortion –El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Dominican Republic– that draconian laws can be changed. On the other hand, given the adamant Catholic Church opposition to abortion, it is not excessive to raise the hypothesis that it would have been much more difficult to reach this outcome if the Church’s credibility was not so impaired.

## THE GENDER IDENTITY LAW

The background to the Gender Identity Act is also long and has involved both legislative initiatives and groundbreaking public health regulations. In 2012, when the country’s Anti-Discrimination Law was approved, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights published the *Terms and Standards on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity* protocol, defining concepts and offering member-states guidelines for designing public policies to respond to the needs and recognize the rights of trans people. In that same year, the Ministry of Health, issued a national protocol (Circular 21) to regulate body modifications and the full respect of the social name of trans people. The protocol also established that the costs of body adaptation would be assumed by the National Health Fund (FONASA).

In 2013, a new bill that came to be known as the Gender Identity Law was presented to the Senate. Drafted by Organizando Trans Diversidades (OTD – Organizing Trans Diversity) with the support of Fundación Iguales (Iguales Foundation), the proposal was sponsored by left-wing senators Lily Pérez, Ximena Rincón, Camilo Escalona, Ricardo Lagos Weber and Juan Pablo Letelier. In 2015, the Ministry of Health issued another protocol that prohibited the surgery of intersex infants as to prevent body changes before they can autonomously decide on their own bodies and identities. Finally, in 2017, the Gender Identity Law provision reached the second stage of legislative processing in the House of Representatives, where it was supported by a wider range of parliamentarians, including a female representative of the Christian Democrat Party.

These ongoing debates and new health regulations have coincided in time with the installation and maturation of the anti-gender crusade in the country that culminated in the stop of the orange in 2017. The forces involved in this crusade, who for a long time had concentrated their attacks on abortion and sexual education, turned now their batteries against the Gender Identity Law. They criticized the “unacceptable relativism” of the plastic conceptions of gender and strongly advocated for natural and stable sexual differences to be the only sound basis of legal prerogatives. Above all, they attacked the law by extending the arguments that they have used before against sex education policies.

Despite these attacks and the climate of hostility towards the rights of transgender people that prevailed during the discussions in Congress, the Gender Identity Law was approved in September 2018. The final text included specific requirements for married persons and persons under 18 years old, which is a limitation when compared with the 2012 Argentinean Gender Identity Law. But given that the political climate against “gender ideology” was bluntly escalating since 2016, this outcome is to be read as a victory.

While this positive result is definitely to be attributed to the advocacy and lobbying work done by the proponents of the law inside and outside of Congress, another factor must be accounted for in order to better grasp it. In March 2018, the Chilean film “A

Fantastic Woman”, which tells the story of a trans woman, was awarded the Oscars for best foreign film. The leading actress Daniela Vega became a national cultural icon and her figure condensed the subjective but also political significance of the claims raised through the Gender Identity Law. The cultural and social atmosphere triggered by the Oscars Awards made it difficult for a number of political actors, including president Piñera himself, to take a draconian opposition stand against the legislation.

## VIOLENCE: THE GENDER AND STATE CONTINUUM

Following the global #MeToo track, during the first semester of 2018, feminist protests against sexual harassment took over Chilean universities. In July, during a large feminist march in Santiago, a masked phalange spread huge pieces of bleeding meat on its route to provoke repudiation against abortion. The group has also brutally attacked a few of the demonstrators. This episode signaled towards something new: the resource to physical violence on the part of anti-feminist actors who, quite probably, orbit in the anti-abortion/anti-gender camp.

In October, when the report was being finalized, the Chilean social uprising erupted taking over the streets. It openly challenged the legitimacy of the Piñera administration and most principally the legacies of the military dictatorship: the neoliberal economic policy framework, which has not been deeply altered, and the country’s Constitution that has never been reformed. This was (and continues to be) a youth insurgency. But the immediate state response was brutal: people beaten, people killed, people blinded by rubber bullets. Hundreds of young women, gay men and gender non-conforming persons have been raped.

This brutality inspired the street performance of the feminist collective Las Tesis, *El violador eres tu* (You are the rapist), that rapidly became viral transnationally. The performance illuminates the intrinsic link between gender and state violence reminding that gender battle grounds are never just about gender but also about the political order. In June 2020, Las Tesis was judicially indicted under the accusation that the performance incites violence against the police, propelling a wave of international repudiation.

Three months before, in March 2020, Sebastian Piñera nominated a right-wing politician, Macarena Santalices, as the new Minister of Women's Policies. Cantalices, who is the grandniece of Pinochet, immediately declared that no human rights violations have occurred during his bloody dictatorship. This choice and the attack on Las Tesis glaringly reveal that, despite its minimal level of popularity, the Piñera Administration is opting to further shift towards the right instead of responding to the deep and wide calls for more democracy, gender and social justice. Writing right after Cantalices' nomination, the feminists, Bárbara Sepúlveda and Lieta Vivaldi Macho (2020) interpreted this event in the following terms:

*Having a woman with these characteristics in such a key position makes us fear that Chile will move towards similar scenarios now seen in North and South American where, in countries such as the United States and Brazil, anti-gender movements are articulate and critical of any questioning of what they consider to be “natural differences” between men and women. (Sepúlveda & Macho, 2020)*

Under the impact of a successful campaign launched by feminist movements, Cantalices resigned. But, as the forces and trends analyzed by the case study remain active in the social and political landscape, the shadows Cantalices represents keeps hovering at the horizon. Their strength will be made visible and checked in the fore coming Constitutional Reform that has been delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**[ACCESS THE FULL REPORT IN SPANISH](#)**

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# THE CASE OF COLOMBIA

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Abridged by Elizabeth Otálvaro

## CONTEXT

In Colombia, as all across Latin America, in the course of the last two decades, feminist, sexual diversity activists and other human rights movements have raised high the claims for gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. In response, in the 2010s, a conservative crusade took form that comprises a wide range of actors who, using varied populist strategies, attacked “gender ideology” as to capture attention and votes in a key moment when Colombia’s political future was at stake. In order to apprehend the trajectories of anti-gender politics in the Colombian scenario, it is important to underline a few characteristics of the national context. One key feature to be looked at is, for example, the country’s religious profile.

According to a study performed by William Beltrán (2012), 71 percent of the population declare themselves to be Catholics and 16.7 percent fall into the category of “diverse Protestant denominations”, predominantly comprised by Evangelicals (14.4 percent of the total population with a religious affiliation), but also includes Jehovah’s Witnesses and Adventists (1.8 percent). Then, 4.7 percent of Colombians define themselves as agnostic or atheist and 3.5 percent declared to believe in god with no religious affiliation.

Even when the majority of the population is affiliated to Christianity, the 1991 Constitutional Reform defined the Colombian state as secular in the following terms in its first article: “a social state ruled by law and organized in the form of a unitary republic” (Colombia Constitution, art. 1). The Constitution also recognizes the nation’s ethnic and cultural diversity (Art. 7) and guarantees freedom of worship and equality to of all religious confessions, and churches (Art. 9). Since the state has ratified a number

of international human rights agreements, the jurisprudence on conventionality enhanced the incorporation of sexual and reproductive rights premises in constitutional decisions and other legal interpretations. Moreover, since 2002, the state has adopted a rights-based national sexual and reproductive health policy (Gil, 2019).

Gender equality is also enshrined in the Constitution. A national gender equality policy has been adopted in 2013, and gender policy frames also exist in a large number of departments and municipalities. In 2018, a national LBGTTI public policy (Decree 762, 2018) was approved after four years of intense advocacy. Furthermore, sexual education is mandatory and has been part of the public education curriculum since the 1990s<sup>1</sup>, even when the concrete implementation of its guidelines is highly uneven and monitoring and evaluation systems barely exist. Lastly, the legal framework concerning prostitution is the classical model that does not criminalize soliciting services, but punishes the promotion and exploitation of prostitution, which contributes to commercial sex zones being constantly subjected to police intervention and harassment.

Another key feature of the Colombian scenario is that legal gains in the domains of gender, sexuality and abortion have been predominantly achieved through Constitutional Court decisions and not through legislative debates. One significant example was the 2006 decision on the decriminalization of abortion in three grounds (rape, when a woman's life or health is at risk and fetal abnormality incompatible with life). This milestone decision for the feminist movement was immediately distorted by anti-abortion forces in ways that propelled suspicions about the Court decision's legitimacy. This strategy aimed at causing moral panic and disinformation as to keep in place the juridical order as it always has been and, as it will be seen, would be replicated in relation to other gender and sexuality matters.

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1 Law 115 (1994), Decree 3353 (1995), PNES-PN SSR (2003), and PESCC (2007).

## THE GENDER WARS ANTECEDENTS

The term “gender ideology” appeared for the first time in the Colombian scenario in the writings of an ultraconservative Catholic author named Alejandro Ordóñez, who would later become General Public Prosecutor (2009-2016). He used the term “gender ideology” in the book *Hacia el libre desarrollo de nuestra animalidad* (Towards the free development of our own animality) (2003), aimed at making a grotesque parody of the premise of “free development of one’s personality” that is a core value of the 1991 Constitution.

His subsequent works -- *Ideología de género: utopía trágica o revolución cultural* (Gender Ideology: The Tragic Utopia of a Cultural Revolution) and *El nuevo derecho, el nuevo orden mundial y la revolución cultural* (The New Law, the New World Order and Cultural Revolution) were published in 2007, right after the Constitutional Court decision on abortion rights. In these books, Ordoñez describes “gender ideology” as a subversion of the natural order and based on a strategy of cultural colonization deriving from feminist influences on international human rights agreements. He also affirms that one main objective of this “gender feminism imperialist cultural enterprise” is to legalize abortion.

This view was spread amongst public servants, the judiciary and in society at large and immediately used to criticize and contest the Court decision. As noted by Gil (2013), this “anti-imperialist/nationalist” rhetoric against gender, sexual and reproductive rights and abortion discredited the Court ruling and other related policies and created an hostile climate against feminists and a number of international organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, the International Federation of Family Planning (IPPF) and the Colombian NGO Profamilia (associated to IPPF), who are portrayed as international conspirators.

## THE GRADUAL SPREAD OF ANTI-GENDER IDEOLOGY

As to charter the eruption and propagation of anti-gender discourses in Colombia, the study checked *Google Trends* data to verify how the term “gender ideology” trended in the Internet between 2004 and 2018. Although the trends are low across the period, a flagrant coincidence exists between the peaks of searches for “gender ideology” and two critical episodes in 2016 involving a “sexual education booklet” and the Colombian Peace Referendum, which will be analyzed further ahead. As predictable, a previous peak is also identified in March 2006 coinciding with the Constitutional Court debates and decision on the decriminalization of abortion. While in 2006 “gender ideology” appeared connected with abortion, ten years later it would be linked to homosexuality and transsexuality. This shift is illustrative of the adaptability of anti-gender discursive frames.

## THE ORDÓÑEZ ERA

Not accidentally, the propagation of “gender ideology” in the Colombian public sphere intensified during the years when Alejandro Ordóñez was General Public Prosecutor. In addition to his systematic attacks on feminism and sexual and reproductive rights, framed as threats to family, Ordóñez was always connected with international groups and actors engaged in similar crusades. In 2010, for example, when preparing a new plan to improve state responses to the violations of LGBTTI persons’ human rights, he hired as a consultant one member of the ultra-Catholic Spanish NGO Hazte Oír that by then was not very visible internationally.<sup>2</sup>

Three years later, when Hazte Oír created its digital branch CitizenGO to operate internationally, its visibility expanded. In 2016, its orange bus travelled around Spain promoting an anti-trans rights campaign with the slogan “Boys have penises, girls have

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed information on CitizenGO, see Moragas (2020), this series chapter on Regional Anti-Gender Actors- the OAS Case on page 164 .

vaginas. Don't be fooled!", and, in the first semester of 2017, the bus would travel to the Americas across the U.S. East Coast, Mexico, Colombia and Chile. In November of that same year, CitizenGO was the main propeller of the digital campaign abhorring the presence of Judith Butler in Brazil.

Consequently, during Ordóñez mandate, a heterogeneous national web involving conservative politicians, public personalities, religious actors and media outlets took form. This maze resorted systematically to secular and religious views and ideologies to attack juridical interpretations that enlarged the scope of the constitutional order, extending its protection to the domains of gender and sexuality and related critical areas, more than often, in dialogue and articulation with similar transnational initiatives.

## SEXUAL EDUCATION AND THE ANTI-GENDER WAVE

Another and more flaring milestone of the gender wars in Colombia was the eruption of a virulent wave of moral panic in 2016 against the new official sexual education guidelines, distributed nationally in a booklet entitled *Orientaciones sexuales y identidades de género no hegemónicas en las escuelas: Temas para reflexión (Non-Hegemonic Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities in Schools: Themes for Reflection)*. The guidelines were published as a result from a partnership between the Ministry of Education, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other UN agencies. It responded to a recommendation made by a Constitutional Court sentence (T-478, 2015) passed after Sergio Urrego, a homosexual young man committed suicide due to homophobic pressures he experienced in the Castillo Campestre School, where he was harassed by fellow students as well as high-level staff (Erazo, 2015).

The Court recommendation included various items in line with Law 1620 of 2013, which established a national system to promote peaceful coexistence in schools and training programs on human rights, sexuality education, and the prevention and mitigation of violence. The Court decision presumed that existing protocols and guidelines would be

revised as to ensure that norms and behaviors in the educational system did not contradict the Constitution. In other words, existing rules that were discriminatory or contrary to the premise of ‘free development of personality’ established in the constitutional text should be changed (Gil, 2016).

Despite being fully aligned with these parameters, the “booklet” was furiously attacked by conservatives, who used entirely new strategies to achieve their goals: the mobilizing of massive street demonstrations and the vast spread of fake news through social media. Street marches were called across the country and an extensive strategy of disinformation and false information was propelled to fuel moral panic. Furthermore, a large number of politicians deployed public speeches disqualifying the Ministry of Education then headed by Ginna Parody, who was known to have a female partner (even though she has never publicly claimed to be a lesbian). The “Minister’s lesbianism”, as it was vociferously shouted by conservatives, was used to illustrate what “gender ideology” is and the street demonstrations were called both against the “booklet” and Parody herself.

In this multilevel campaign, the anti-gender camp spread images of explicit sexual acts, alleging that they corresponded to the main content of the “booklet”. A deliberate confusion was also created between the booklet and children’s books *Nicolas Has Two Fathers* and *Anita and Her Mothers*, published by Chilean civil society organization Movimiento de Integración y Liberación Homosexual (MOVILH) whose covers were virally promoted.<sup>3</sup> The Colombia mobilizations coincided in time with the eruption of a campaign against sexual education in Peru promoted by Evangelicals under the motto *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (Don’t Mess With My Children) and much convergence could be identified between the contents and repertoires deployed in both countries.<sup>4</sup>

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3 See Barrientos (2020) for this series chapter on Chile on page 66.

4 For more detailed information on *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas*, see Moragas (2020), the chapter on Regional Anti-Gender Actors- the OAS Case on page 164 .

The “booklet episode” was a political turning point. It implied a renewal in the leadership of the conservative crusade, as exemplified by the new faces of a number of Congress figures: Angela Hernández, María del Rosario Guerra (who is connected with transnational organization Political Network for Values), Jimmy Chamorro, and Alvaro Hernán Prada.

Secondly, the “booklet episode” also made quite evident that Catholics, on the one hand, and Evangelicals, on the other, were working closely together while operating quite distinctively in political terms. Historically, Catholics have politically moved through the influence at the high levels of state institutions, without bothering to mobilize street marches. In 2016, on the surface, the massive marches against the booklet appeared to have been mobilized by Evangelical actors, but in reality, a large number of parishes, Marianist groups and members of the Catholic hierarchy were also engaged in calling them, albeit more discreetly. A division of labor was at work in which the “dirty work” was done by Evangelicals while Catholics, in particular the hierarchy, can show off as not hostile and regressive in relation to gender and sexuality matters.

Lastly, the political mobilizing around the booklet enhanced the creation of a wider and more active social base of the so-called “morally concerned people” that would be crucial for the more ambitious agitation around the Peace Agreement Referendum.

## WAGING A GENDER WAR AGAINST THE PEACE AGREEMENTS

There are various hypotheses to explain the defeat of 2016 Peace Agreements Referendum in which 50.2 percent of voters said ‘no’ against 49.7 percent, who said ‘yes’. One dominant interpretation of this outcome is that it was an effect of fake news, that misinformed the public about the contents of the Agreement in relation to the demobilization of the guerrilla as, for example, the lies widely shared about huge “subsidies” that former combatants would receive. However, other observers interpreted the defeat as an effect of the accusation, made by forces opposing the Agreement, that it would impose

“gender ideology” on Colombian society. This interpretation is often connected to an emphasis on the growth of the Evangelical vote.

However, from the interviews carried with gender activists and the literature review performed in the context of this case study, a different and more complex picture emerges. Bibiana Ortega, who is an expert in Evangelicals churches and their relationship with politics, believes that the weight of the Evangelical vote in the Referendum has been overestimated (Ortega, 2012; 2018). Although the “booklet” episode” showed the mobilizing power of the Evangelical sector, this power does not immediately translate into votes. In other words, religious capital does not automatically convert into electoral capital.

This study agrees with this interpretation, adding that that the non-Catholic Christian vote does not function as a block, including because it also comprises a few historical Protestant churches engaged in progressive ecumenical agendas for peace and human rights, which also include feminist and sexual diversity social movements. But the study also recognizes that a number of these churches were key in mobilizing the vote for the ‘no’, especially the so-called “megachurches” that are very politicized and aligned to right-wing political parties.

The study cites, for example, the analysis by Ortega (2018) and Basset (2018) concluding that:

*Misión Carismática Internacional (International Charismatic Mission), the largest Evangelical Church in the country, has definitely worked for the ‘no’. This church is very close to the Democratic Center Party and their two political representatives, the Castellanos couple, are closely connected to its leader, former President Alvaro Uribe. A question may be, therefore, raised: was this an Evangelical vote or rather an Uribista vote? In contrast, politicians who systematically attack gender ideology, such as Vivian Morales, Jimmy Chamorro, the four Evangelical members of the Opción Ciudadana (Citizens’ Option) and MIRA parties (the latter being originally Evangelical) have formally supported the ‘yes’ in the Referendum. (Basset, 2018, p. 258)*

To summarize, the Evangelical vote was very important but not decisive to explain the Referendum outcome. On the other hand, the study findings suggest, in line with feminist voices that have been heard, that a major factor that might explain the defeat may have been the lack of effective public education on the content and meaning of the agreement, which would be required to overcome the hatred that a high percentage of Colombians feels in relation to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

On the other hand, the study confirms that gender was politically attacked by the ‘no’ campaigners, alongside with other strategies of misinformation and delegitimization of the Peace Agreement spread in flyers, WhatsApp and other social media messages to scare people with the specter of “gender ideology” that would be imposed on their children by the Agreement rules. This accusation distorted and manipulated the gender perspective and the recognition of sexual diversity that were indeed included in the text of the Agreement signed with FARC’s ex-guerrilla members.

In addition to having contributed to create hostility against the Agreement in the referendum, this accusation had a lasting effect. Despite the defeat, the Juan Manuel Santos Government, which had initiated the peace process, reaffirmed its commitment to implement what had been agreed. Yet, in the post referendum discussions about the rules of implementation, the anti-gender forces made their best to void the structural imprint of gender perspectives included in the original text. Although gender and sexual diversity language has been preserved in the norms of implementation, its substance has been lost because the way in which the text is now written reinforces the conventional view that gender perspective is understood as exclusively pertaining to “women”, in particular as victims of the armed conflict. Furthermore, the Agreement defeat opened the ground for a traditional definition of family to be included in the rules of implementation, while the contents concerning the reparation of human rights violations of LGBTTI were left out.

Beyond the specific gender effects on the Agreement defeat, and the effects of the defeat on the its gender content, this outcome has also changed the public’s perception

about the electoral power of religious forces. Evangelicals, in particular, sorted out of the process with a triumphant image of winners that gives them a new placement in the Colombian political constellation.

## GENDER IN THE 2018 ELECTIONS AND THE DUQUE ADMINISTRATION

In 2018, Colombia had presidential elections. The contenders were Iván Duque, from the Centro Democrático, representing a right coalition, and Gustavo Petro, running for a left coalition. Duque was victorious, bringing Uribismo back to power, albeit in a new version. The study report was finalized when the new Duque administration was completing its first year and it includes an overview of what had happened in the 2018 presidential campaign in respect to gender and how the subject was being addressed by the new government.

Rather surprisingly, in the presidential campaign, the attacks on “gender ideology” have not flared up as they did in 2016. In public debates on television, newspaper and in public political gatherings, issues of homosexuality and abortion were raised, but gender was absent. In 2018, what prevailed was the attack on Marxism or the “Castro-Chavismo” rhetoric. The “gender threat” was replaced by the “risk of Colombia becoming a new Venezuela”. The stigmatizing of the left and “class hatred” was prominent and it was associated with the accusation that leftwing candidate Gustavo Petro was “polarizing society”.

Even though anti-gender discourses were not palpable during the elections, as soon as the Duque administration began, well known conservative actors were appointed to key positions. Alejandro Ordóñez, for example, was nominated as Colombia’s Ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS). Nayid Abu Fager, an Evangelical activist who had served as a consultant to conservative Member of Parliament Vivian Morales, was appointed to the Direction of Human Rights of the Ministry of Interior, a body that

potentially would play a predominant role in the implementation of the new national LGBTTI policy that Santos left signed. There was also a policy conversation about the creation of a new Ministry of Family, but this has not yet been materialized.

## TO CONCLUDE

The Colombian case sharply illustrates how the recognition of gender in human rights and politics more broadly speaking implies sharp opposition and may lead to the re-organizing of conservative politics. This means that new counterculture frames and forms of claiming sexual and reproductive rights must be constantly generated. These political and cultural struggles are neither linear nor circular, but rather dialectic. No feminist or sexual diversity achievement is definitive and, because of that, activists must be politically and culturally prepared to constantly articulate the revindication of new rights with efforts to sustain the protection of rights already achieved.

For that to happen, it is important to sustain the existence and work of organizations devoted to analyzing and denouncing conservative strategies and to encourage a climate favorable to the formation of an educated public, capable to critically evaluate the game of interests in dispute in the domains of gender and sexuality. It is also necessary to open and preserve spaces at state institution level, as to counteract the more invisible strategies and resistances that, within these apparatuses, deviate or hinder resources designated for these human rights agendas. While the cultural landscape and state structures must be dealt with simultaneously, the cultural struggle remains critical because it is in the social fabric that perceptions, feelings and opinions, easily prone to be captured by anti-gender politics, are either generated or incited.

The Colombia case also suggests that anti-gender politics as a cultural fight have the potential of determining electoral results, depending on other concurrent factors as well. On the other hand, it also informs that anti-gender politics must always be placed within a broader political economy frame, which recognizes its articulation with powerful

interests linked to land property, the ownership of means of communication, the financing of political campaigns and other structural dimensions.

Lastly, in Colombia, while it remains crucial to map out how the anti-gender agenda has reflected and continues to be reflected in political games and victories of conservative and right-wing forces, it is also necessary to examine how anti-gender politics play less visibly. More than often, anti-gender ideology is not made explicit in state structures, formal documents or state media campaigns. Rather, it is manifested in local level government programs, in obscure protocols, in appointments, in subtle strategies that defy constitutionally recognized programs, in the misdirection of resources and in other forms of silent policies that can, however, be very effective. These soft or silent forms of anti-gender politics seem to be at the core of the present government's national agenda, they have negative effects on policies and on the daily exercise of rights, although these impacts are less spectacular than what was seen in 2016.

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# THE CASE OF COSTA RICA

Gabriela Arguedas Ramírez

Abridged by Mariana Carbajal

The proliferation of political parties with clear religious agendas is neither recent nor unexpected in Costa Rica. It is fundamentally wrong to interpret the rise of the Neo-Pentecostal National Restoration Party (PRN) in the 2018 presidential election exclusively as an effect of the position in favor of same-sex marriage issued by the Interamerican Human Rights Court (IAHRC) in the Consultative Opinion OC-24/17.<sup>1</sup> In truth, since the late 20th century, Catholic *Neointegrismo*<sup>2</sup> and Fundamentalist Neo-Pentecostal movements have mobilized several social and political agendas and achieved significant victories, which resulted in a profound reversal in the slow path to secularization of the public sphere. Moreover, these forces hindered the state's measures aimed at recognizing and protecting human rights. Their appearance in the political arena is not a new manifestation.

A series of events dating back to the 1980s shows that flagrantly. One initial fact to be underlined is that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) has accepted the registration of political parties with clear confessional stances despite a prohibition enshrined in the Electoral Code derived from Articles 136 and 28 of the national Constitution. The first registered party was Alianza Nacional Cristiana (National Christian Alliance Party), created in 1986. Then, in 1995, another evangelical platform, Renovación Costarricense (Costa Rican Revival) was founded and registered and, in 2005, the Partido Restauración Nacional

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1 Consultative Opinion OC-24/17, issued on November 24, 2017, and made public on January 9, 2018, defines sexual orientation, gender identity, and the expression of gender as categories protected by Article 1.1 of the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR), and emphasizes all the necessary measures states must adopt to ensure access in equal conditions and without discrimination to rights (labor rights, rights related to social security, family rights, and others) to this historically discriminated and stigmatized population. The opinion was issued upon a request made by the Costa Rican government in 2016.

2 The Spanish term *neointegrismo* or *neointegrista* used to denote ultra-conservative Catholic strands is usually translated in English as fundamentalism. In this paper, however, we have opted for retaining the Spanish semantics because it is the view of both the authors and the editors that a range of historical and doctrinal distinctions must be made exist between Catholic and Evangelical ultra conservative and traditionalist streams.

(National Restoration Party) entered the political arena. The only limitation issued by the TSE was for Renovación Costarricense to not use religious symbols in its campaign.

Another event worth mentioning is a resolution issued by the Sala Constitucional (Costa Rica's Supreme Court) on March 15, 2000, declaring in-vitro fertilization unconstitutional. This appeal of unconstitutionality to oppose legislation on the matter was taken to the Court by attorney Hermes Navarro del Valle, who at the time served as an adviser to the Catholic Church. This decision came at a cost as, years later, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) judged this decision as an infringement of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), when examining the 2007 case of "Ana," a young pregnant woman who requested from the Costa Rican Social Security system an authorization to perform a therapeutic abortion of a confirmed anencephalic fetus.

In 2008, "Ana" sued the government before the IAHR for denying her the procedure. Her trial became known as the Artavia Murillo case. Subsequently, other eight cases were taken to the IAHR by couples suing the state for obstructed therapeutic abortions. In 2012, these various complainants were grouped into a single trial, which ended up with the Costa Rican government being condemned (Artavia Murillo et al. v. Costa Rica, 2012). The government negotiated this outcome and the resulted agreement included the state's duty to publish a protocol for the application of therapeutic abortions in public and private hospitals in the country. This protocol has not yet been published due to the intense pressure made by *neointegrista* and fundamentalist religious movements.

Since 2007, the neo-Pentecostal parties have also cultivated a very productive alliance with Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN- National Liberation Party). Historically, PLN and the Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC- Social Christian Unity Party) alternated in power because the country's political system was based on a two-party model. But this changed in 2000, when Acción Ciudadana (PAC- Citizen's Action Party) entered the picture.

In 2009, during the presidential campaign, a project to reform the Constitution, eliminating its confessional imprint and establishing full secularity was dropped. In order to understand the pressure leveled against the reform, one needs only to read a contemporary headline by Costa Rica's most important newspaper La Nación: "Congress representatives propose eliminating God from the Political Constitution". In 2010, the presidential election was won by PLN's Laura Chinchilla and her congressional base yielded the Presidency of the Legislative Commission on Human Rights to Justo Orozco, who was a representative of Renovación Costarricense (Costa Rican Revival Party). During Chinchilla's government, official registration of emergency contraception was hindered, and feminist and LGBTTI agendas were blocked.

Then, in 2012, the Sala Constitucional issued a resolution in favor of a claim raised by three thousand parents, members of the Costa Rican Evangelical Alliance, to the effect that they had the right to keep their children from attending sexual education classes in public schools. Then, in 2014, the newly elected President Luis Guillermo Solís of the Citizens' Action Party (PAC) granted his political support to a Religious Freedom Law sponsored by Justo Orozco and other neo-Pentecostal representatives. In contrast, he never expressed his opinion with respect to the abandonment of the reform aimed at removing religion from the Constitution.

Lastly, in 2017, Antonio Álvarez Desanti, a PLN Congress representative, made a pact with Renovación Costarricense that ensured the election of one of its members, Gonzalo Ramírez, as President of Congress. Ramírez had been indicted for fraud and denounced for other offenses on several occasions. This was the first time in the history of the country that a representative of an Evangelical party occupied one of the four highest posts of the Republic.

## “GENDER IDEOLOGY”: MEDIA, FAKE NEWS, AND POLITICAL ALLIANCES

The first article on “gender ideology” identified in the Costa Rican media was published by *La Nación* on July 3, 2011. The author was Dr. José Miguel Goyenaga and it was titled *Gender Ideology: Gender Depends on the Biology of a Man and a Woman*. This first text on the subject inaugurated a sequence of articles that would subsequently deploy similar arguments. By 2017, as shown above, neo-conservative religious forces had won some important battles in their efforts to block advances on gender, sexual, and reproductive human rights. But it was then that the Consultative Opinion OC-24/1 issued in November became a serious threat to their agenda. As it had also happened during the Artavía Murillo case, in response to the Opinion, which the government itself had requested, the Costa Rican state had to follow and implement its recommendations regarding same-sex marriage and the protection of gender identity rights. *Neointegrista* Catholic and Evangelical fundamentalists immediately reacted and, taking advantage of PAC’s weakness -- at a time when corruption scandals corroded the administration-- attacked the Court’s Opinion and used the anti-gender agenda to mobilize the electorate during the fore coming presidential elections. These conservative religious forces promoted a narrative linking “gender ideology”, “immorality”, the IACHR Consultative Opinion, and the risks of electing a “leftist” president.

Although this atmosphere and narratives strongly resonate with what had been seen in the Colombian Peace Agreement Referendum two years earlier and in the catastrophic 2018 elections in Brazil, in Costa Rica a precedent is to be highlighted. Similar patterns were already detected in the 2010 presidential elections when the progressive candidate running against Laura Chinchilla was PAC’s Ottón Solís, representing a center-left coalition. During the campaign, PAC and Ottón Solís were accused of being too friendly to Hugo Chávez (Venezuela) and Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua). The party was pigeonholed as socialist (which was not the case) and this position was contrasted with Christianity as the only source of morality to guide personal and social relations.

In this context, Laura Chinchilla played the ultraconservative card in order to obtain the votes of groups that opposed the secular state, reproductive rights (especially abortion), same-sex marriage, and sexual education. She won the election despite wide popular rejection of the Free Trade Agreement between the Dominican Republic, Central America and the U.S. (CAFTA), which had been promoted and passed by the previous PLN administration. Chinchilla was the first woman to win a presidential election and, as a reward for her full alignment with Catholic values, the Church hierarchy named her the “Favored Daughter” of Our Lady of the Angels (Costa Rica’s patron virgin).

In 2010, in addition to Chinchilla’s election, something else occurred to Costa Rica’s electoral outcomes. Two seats in Congress went to evangelical pastors who had already been representatives in previous legislatures: Justo Orozco and Carlos Avendaño. But that year, a new political party called Accesibilidad Sin Exclusión (ASE- Accessibility Without Exclusion), whose political identity was based on the defense of rights for people with disabilities, turned into a faction aligned with Restauración Nacional and Renovación Costarricense. ASE won four seats on that legislature, making it a total of six representatives whose political discourse and legislative action was aligned with fundamentalist/*neointegrista* religious tendencies, something unheard of in the recent political history of the country. After that, we have witnessed the normalization of religious discourse in parliamentary procedures. Those representatives cited Bible texts in Congress sessions, and no other representative questioned it. It should be also said that the press did not consider these practices to be problematic or anti-democratic.

## THE RELIGIOUS PARLIAMENTARY BLOCK

In 2012, Renovación Costarricense won two representative seats, while Restauración Nacional won one. ASE won one more, and a new party with religious overtones called Alianza Demócrata Cristiana (ADC- Christian Democratic Alliance) won another. These parties formed a parliamentary block whose agenda would be based on opposing any bill aimed at guaranteeing sexual, reproductive, or civil rights for homosexuals and

trans people. They continued their ironclad opposition to any constitutional reforms to eliminate the confessional character of the Costa Rican state and sustained the pattern—that had begun with Justo Orozco—of partnering with right-wing sectors in matters of fiscal and political economy. This path is coherent with the political-religious adherence of Evangelical fundamentalism to economic policies proposed by of neoliberal sectors in other countries, such as Guatemala and Brazil. In Costa Rica’s 2018 elections, these neo-Pentecostal parties were able to take a giant leap in the legislative elections to constitute the second largest group in Congress after PLN.

These parties have also managed to capture the country’s imagination through false claims and to manipulate the captive audiences in their churches. They equate the faithful with the “true citizens of the nation” and associate social progress on issues of gender equality and respect for sexual diversity (which they call “gender ideology”) with communism/socialism. Consequently, these progressive values are equated with the annihilation of moral and religious values that, in their perspective, hold the nation together. Their narrative deploys a dichotomy between chaos versus order, in which the image of order is that of a society based on the precepts of a religious standard, while chaos refers to an individualistic life unattached to structures of power, order, and conscience.

From an ethical-political point of view, these false claims and fallacies enjoy complete impunity and benefit from a sharp inequality of conditions in terms of what are the appropriate spaces for political discourses to be deployed. The churches where these views are most frequently and repeatedly expressed are not public, but rather private spaces of worship in which these views are not subject to confrontation, debates, or even demands for accountability. Furthermore, when confronted in public places, these religious voices unduly describe these critiques as unacceptable manifestations of religious intolerance.

## THE DISCOURSE AGAINST “GENDER IDEOLOGY” IN THE LAST ELECTIONS

One of the main figures of the 2017-2018 electoral campaign in Costa Rica was the term “gender ideology.” Even though the defense of moral and religious values it carried caught the hearts and minds of many Costa Ricans, the electoral process has also shown that the cohesion of neoconservative religious forces is not set in stone.

Costa Rica is known for its historical moderation in religious matters and this trait was reactivated when extremist religious and neoliberal discourses combined and escalated during the elections. Although polarization has occurred, one very significant event would change the course of the electoral process. A cultural clash occurred between Catholicism and Neo-Pentecostalism, which destabilized the presumed firm alliance between Catholics and Evangelicals (as it had been portrayed by their leaders). The clash caused Rony Chaves, the spiritual father of presidential candidate Fabricio Alvarado, to call “a devil” the most important Catholic symbol in the country, the Costa Rica’s patron, the Virgin of the Angels, commonly known as “La Negrita”. In the eyes of the Costa Rican Catholic majority, Chaves’ conduct was repugnant, intolerable, and this sentiment would be transported to his pupil, the presidential candidate and, consequently, the Catholic electorate did not vote for him.

It is, therefore, possible to interpret the confrontation experienced in the 2018 elections not as a clash between myth and reason, as a number of analysts have described it. This was not a struggle between modern ideals and pre-modern nostalgia, but rather as a clash between the religious foundations of the national identity and an “invader” myth—inscribed in the Evangelical modes of worship—, which is tolerated as long as it does not confront Catholic hegemony.

Despite this electoral fracture, we should not lose sight of the fact that the alliance between Catholic *Neointegrismo* and Neo-Pentecostal fundamentalism is still quite effective

in Congress. Its most recent victory is to have elected as the country's Ombudswoman a well-known "pro-life" woman liked to ultra-conservative Catholic organizations. This means that their longstanding joint political project of colonizing the state and its institutions has not been abandoned.

## THE ELECTION AFTERMATH

After PAC won the second round of elections in April 2018, PRN's ex-presidential candidate, Fabricio Alvarado, traveled several times outside the country to speak in conferences and in training sessions whose slogan was "*Born to Rule*". These trainings are promoted by U.S. evangelical pastor Robert (Bob) Farrier, the founder of Kingdom Connections and the author of the book *Born to Rule: Created by God* (2011), who travels frequently to Latin and South America offering conferences on "the saints in the fulfillment of God's Great Plan". The same strategy of training religious leaders for politics is systematically used by Catholic *Neointegrismo* through their lay people formation programs. One glaring example is the Academia de Líderes Católicos (Catholic Leaders Academy) in Chile that hold its programs across the region.

On the economic front, the PRN alliance with neoliberal sectors that, for several years, have carried out a continuous attack on public universities has not exactly relented. Public universities represent a threat for religious fundamentalism because they are centers of free, critical, and scientific thought. Sectors of economic interest also view the universities as a threat, because they produce academic research that shows the connections between fiscal evasion, inequality, and violence. Lastly, the fiscal crisis has been used to encourage a narrative against public funding of higher education under the pretense of it being elitist and corrupt.

On the other hand, by mid-2019, the intensity of the campaign against "gender ideology" had decreased and the topic of abortion was moving up in the political agenda. In addressing the subject, the press has been using the classical strategies of manipulation

and misrepresentation adopted by the Catholic/Neo-Pentecostal alliance. There was no bill in Congress calling for the depenalization of abortion or even for extending the grounds for non-punishable abortion. Even so, Alvarado's party (PRN) launched a campaign of disinformation regarding the Minister of Health protocol to guide the provision of therapeutic abortion, granted by a 1975 legislation. The adoption of this protocol is one of the commitments made by the Costa Rican state in the agreement that followed the Artavia Murillo case.

The PRN faction -- with the support of several representatives of other parties, as well as of the Episcopal Conference and conservative activists, like Alexandra Loría Beeche and even the Board of Directors of the Costa Rica's Association of Physicians and Medical Surgeons -- claims that the Protocol will broaden the definition of therapeutic abortion to expand its limits and open the door for termination of pregnancy under demand. The political spectacle on the matter has assumed extreme contours, as *neointegrista* universities such as Universidad Autónoma de Centro América (UACA) joined the choir. Additionally, within the Association of Physicians and Medical Surgeons, groups closely related to Opus Dei began propelling an attack against all legal grounds for abortion, including therapeutic termination of pregnancy and pushing for the pathologization of trans people (with a discourse of gender dysphoria) and the legitimizing of the juridical procedure of "parental alienation."

On the other hand, public opinion was not exactly adhering to this ultraconservative policy program. According to a survey carried out by the School of Statistics of the University of Costa Rica, 57 percent of people in the country are in favor of therapeutic abortions, and 45.5 percent are in favor in cases of fetal abnormalities incompatible with life. These rates reflected greater flexibility towards the practice in comparison with data collected in previous years. This gradual change in public perception was quite positive and eventually signaled towards deeper cultural changes. Even so the road ahead will be rocky.

I conclude this article by briefly commenting a fragment of the Message of the Episcopal Secretariat of Central America, at the conclusion of the Annual Plenary Assembly, on November 30, 2018:

*Young people have been the central theme of our assembly, in tune with the recently celebrated Synod in Rome and the imminent World Youth Day to be held in Panama. They are a majority of our population and face challenges such as: the impact of technological change on communication, forced migrations, the lack of opportunities for personal development, the imposition of gender ideology, discouragement and the consequences of strong and widespread corruption in society. The future is uncertain, generating weakness, anxiety, insecurity and loneliness. (Episcopal Secretariat of Central America, 2018)*

This quote summarizes the discourse deployed by the *Neo-Integrista* and Fundamentalist alliance set in motion in Costa Rica, and in many other countries in the region, taking advantage of the political gaps left by both the state and political parties. This is a narrative sustained by verifiable facts (corruption, forced migrations, lack of opportunities), which appeals to emotions that are quite palpable (insecurity, loneliness, uncertainty). In the midst of this precise description of what is the daily life of millions of people in the region, “gender ideology” has been inserted as a threat that would be as important as the absence of opportunities and collective depletion. This discourse is also very clear in demographic terms: its focus is on young people. To them is offered a sense of belonging, the sentiment of being relevant in a world that seems indifferent and in which they cannot find the meaning of pain and anguish. What these religious voices are trying to communicate is that fighting all those enemies -- corruption, lack of opportunities, “gender ideology” -- is laudable and necessary, an earthly as well as a divine calling.

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# THE CASE OF ECUADOR

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Abridged by Ana Maria Acosta

## GENDER WARS IN CONTEMPORARY ECUADOR

Anti-gender politics in Ecuador have a long history. It can be said, perhaps, that conservative views against gender can be traced back to the establishment of the independent nation as the only “Catholic republic” of Latin America in the second half of the 19th century, the Republic of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (Espinosa, 2018). But the study conducted as part of the Gender & Politics in Latin America project focuses on the eruption and growth of anti-gender politics in Ecuador in contemporary times, more specifically the period under Rafael Correa’s presidency and subsequently.

Rafael Correa governed Ecuador for ten years, from January 15, 2007, to May 24, 2017. In the mid 2000s, he emerged on the national political scene as an icon of change and hope. During the first phase of his two mandates, he has indeed strengthened state policies and increased social investments. This was made possible due to the sharp increase in the international price of oil, which is the main Ecuadorian export commodity. In 2008, visions and proposals for recreating the nation were drawn towards the drafting of the 2008 Constitution of Montecristi, viewed in the region and beyond as a pioneer constitution in what concerns a wide range of rights, including the rights of nature, translated under the paradigm *Buen Vivir* or *Sumak Kawsay* and *Suma Qamaña*, meaning Good Living/Living Well in local indigenous languages. These new juridical definitions inspired feminists across the region to re-think gender orders from a decolonial perspective (Zaragocin & Varea, 2017, 1-5).

Yet, looking retrospectively from a feminist perspective, the scenario was highly contradictory. On the one hand, the new constitution and the *Buen Vivir* lemma projected

an imagination of deep change. In Latin American and elsewhere, Rafael Correa's presidency and his party, Alianza País (Country Alliance), were portrayed as socialists and his proposals were described as post-neoliberal, because people who had been historically marginalized, such as indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and LGBTTI peoples would have a place and a voice in the democratic revolution he was leading. However, as noted by Amy Lind (2012), the "citizens revolution" and the figure of Rafael Correa remained embedded in heteronormativity and eurocentrism. Heteronormative and homophobic structures were not transformed even when the Correa government implemented homoprotectionist policies as a strategy for co-opting activists and groups who advocate for sexual diversity rights.

The 2008 Constitution itself was not exempt from similar paradoxes. It recognized multiple forms of family while, at the same time, blocked marriage rights and adoption rights for same-sex couples. This was, in fact, a regression in relation to Article 37 of the previous 1998 Constitution that grounded a gender-neutral definition of marriage, framing it as a legal contract between two persons called spouses in a conjugal relationship (Picq & Viteri, 2018).

In addition to these paradoxes, and yet more problematic, in 2011 Rafael Correa called for a referendum to reform the Constitution as to be granted the right of re-election. Two years after, in 2013, the presidency issued Decree 16 that authorized the government to supervise and dissolve non-governmental organizations and this led to emblematic cases of dissolution of civil society organizations and persecution of political opponents such as environmentalists, journalists, indigenous leaders and academics.

Policy shifts have also occurred in the realms of children and women's rights and rights of other vulnerable groups. Though the 2008 Constitution established a National System of Inclusion and Social Equality, this definition was not translated into ordinary laws. In result, social policies remained weak and unable to properly respond to social challenges such as the alarming numbers of sexual abuse and rape of minors perpetrated

by elementary and secondary school teachers. As it will be seen further ahead, instead of applying the constitutional rights framework to respond to these violations, the Correa administration opted for a strikingly conservative approach to this major social problem.

## “GENDER IDEOLOGY” ERUPTS IN ECUADOR

The moral conservative agenda and authoritarianism of former president Correa did not become immediately evident. These traits were blurred by the overall dynamic of the political transition propelled by the 2008 constitutional reform. However, after Correa’s re-election in 2013, they would become more flagrant. This shift was gradually reflected, for instance, in the weekly broadcast transmitted every Saturday by television and radio, named *Sabatinas*, in which Correa moved across the country, speaking directly with the citizenry and, more than often, attacking those who criticized his government (Viteri, 2016).

Granda (2016), who also analyzed the contents of the *Sabatinas*, has shown how they were not rarely sexist, racist, homophobic and xenophobic. The Media Observatory has reported 95 grievances against Correa’s misogynous parlance in the *sabatinas* (Arias & Guerrero, 2017). These speech acts openly contrasted with the Constitution but also with the substantive presence of women in the National Assembly and even in the Alianza País representation (40 percent), not to mention that, for the first time in history, both the president and vice-president of the National Assembly were female.

In a *Sabatina* held on December 28, 2013 in Guayaquil, the ex-president criticized “gender ideology”. He affirmed that “academically it does not resist the slightest analysis” adding that it is an ideology that destroys the family. This was the very first time that a Latin American political leader publicly repudiated gender using the same arguments developed and propagated by the Vatican. His full discourse was as follows:

*We all fight for the equality of rights between men and women, but these fundamentalist feminist movements are something else. They do not talk about equality in rights but*

*rather equality in all aspects: men are like women and women are like men. This is known as gender ideology... which basically affirms that natural man or natural woman do not exist. In other words, [they affirm] that biological sex doesn't determine a man or a woman but rather that social conditions define it, that a person has the right, the liberty, to even choose if she is a man or a woman. Please! That doesn't stand up to scrutiny. It's an outrage impinging against everything, against the natural laws... What I can say, from an academic point of view, is that these [affirmations] are monstrosities that don't resist neither the wider nor the minimal analysis... How great it is that a woman looks feminine. How great it is that a man look masculine. Everybody is free: a man can be effeminate, and a woman can be masculine, but I prefer a woman that looks like a woman and I think that women prefer men that look like men.*

If we consider that the *sabatinas* were a social pedagogy method deployed to infuse dominant ideas on how society is to be organized, their anti-gender discourse stance -- in addition to be at odds with a number of constitutional definitions (see below) -- contributed to creating a political and cultural environment that was very disabling for the rights of women and persons whose sexuality did not conform to dominant norms. His speech act reiterated the constitutional definitions that defined marriage as a union between a man and a woman, prohibited the adoption of children by non-heterosexual couples and did not recognized families with members of diverse sexual orientation. In addition, it negatively impacted on comprehensive sexual education programs and gender identity rights. It should be also noted that, after this speech, Correa also openly attacked the efforts made by women parliamentarians to reform the abortion law.

## LGBTTI RIGHTS: MY “GENDER IN MY ID”

In Ecuador, homosexuality was decriminalized on November 27, 1997. After that, the 2008 Constitution prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation and recognized common-law unions between partners of the same sex. Then, in 2012, a campaign named *Mi género en mi cédula* (My Gender in My ID) began, sponsored by the Confederación Ecuatoriana de Comunidade Trans e Intersex (Ecuadorian Confederation of the Trans and Intersex Community - CONFETRANS), the Silhouette X Association - led by Diane Rodriguez, a transsexual woman who would be elected to the National Assembly in 2017- and the Proyecto Transgénero (Transgender Project), Yerbabuena, amongst other groups. In 2015, the right to change one's gender identity was granted by the Constitutional Court (to adult trans persons, but without allowing for the change of sex in the birth certificate). The ruling kept intact the distinction between identity cards and birth certificates, which generated new circumstances of exclusion in hospitals, prisons and job interviews.

When placed against the president's speech acts, these various definitions and reforms related to LGBTTI rights show that, during the Correa Era, these rights were subject to a double standard: while certain rights were granted to transgender persons, the gender binary was ideologically reiterated. Because of that, Picq and Viteri (2018) consider that if a sexual revolution happened under Correa, it was only theatrical. Even so, these new but partial gender identity norms were attacked head-on by anti-gender forces already installed in the society. On April 21, 2013, the citizen initiative titled 14 Million: Family Life and Liberty was launched by its founder, Isabel María Salazar, which included a wide digital mobilizing run by the CitizenGO's Ecuador chapter platform under the hashtag Ecuador: No to the Gender ID card.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Additional information on CitizenGo is offered in the chapter on Regional Actors - OEA on page 164.

## SEX EDUCATION, SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS: ENIPLA VS FAMILY PLAN

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Ecuador is the second country in Latin America after Venezuela with the highest rate of adolescent pregnancies (El Universo, 2012). The recognition of this problem led to the National Inter-Sectorial Strategy on Family Planning (ENIPLA) design in 2011. The policy campaign slogan was Talk Seriously, Sex Without Mystery and the program, elaborated by acknowledged experts, grounded its principles in a solid sexual and reproductive rights framework. However, in 2014, Correa drastically changed the policy direction and nominated Monica Hernandez, a devout Catholic, as Director of ENIPLA. Hernandez revoked ENIPLA and created Plan Familia (Family Plan) whose content reflected her own ideological inclination, as a known member of Opus Dei. The original sexual and reproductive rights approach for the prevention of adolescent pregnancy was dismantled, the new guidelines considered gender as an ideological discourse and the policy focus shifted towards “values” and “family”. The effects were immediate and would be later on measured, as international data has shown that while adolescent pregnancy rates were dropping during ENIPLA, they began rising again after Plan Familia was established.

This course would be, however, altered in 2017 after Lenin Moreno won the presidential election. In October 2017, one of the first measures of the new administration was to overturn several decrees promulgated by his predecessor, one of them was the one that created Plan Familia, which was replaced by a with a new inter-sectorial strategy aimed at reducing adolescent pregnancy and preventing sexual violence and rape.

## CON MIS HIJOS NO TE METAS: THE ATTACK ON THE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE LAW

In August 2017, Lenin Moreno sent a new provision to the National Assembly, the *Ley Orgánica Integral para Erradicación de la Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres* (Comprehensive Organic Law for the Prevention and Eradication of Gender Violence Against Women). One article of the provision contemplated the elaboration or the updating of the basic curriculum for all educational levels and textbooks and teacher’s guides as to include: “a transversal gender focus, which is also to address new masculinities, women in their diversity, prevention and eradication of violence against women, changing (gender) roles, and the elimination of gender stereotypes”.

The law was proposed in response to the increasing rates of gender-based violence and femicide in the country, which opened a window of opportunity for the Ecuadorian chapter of the campaign *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (Don’t Mess With My Children) to gain much visibility.<sup>2</sup> In partnership with other so-called “pro-life” and “pro-family” groupings, *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* called for a march on October 14, 2017 that took thousands of persons to the streets in several cities across the country to defend “family values and principles”, repudiate “gender ideology” and attack the gender-related contents of the law.

The law was passed on November 27, 2017, but as an effect of the marches and other pressures, its contents were changed. The terms “gender”, “sexual orientations”, and “gender identities” were scraped from the original text and the title of the bill itself was changed to *Comprehensive Organic Law for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence Against Women*. This meant a complete erasure of “gender”. Today, in practice, the law

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<sup>2</sup> While the profile of the national campaign will be more closely analyzed further ahead, additional information on *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* is offered in other chapters that comprise this series: Argentina (p. 34), Chile (p. 66), Colombia (p. 79), Uruguay and especially in *Regional Actors - OAS* (p, 164).

is applied to situations in which trans women are victims of violence, but the deletion of gender language had a symbolic effect that should not be minimized.

## COMPREHENSIVE SEXUAL EDUCATION VS. “I AM THE ONE TO EDUCATE MY CHILDREN”

On June 27, 2018, the Constitutional Court of Ecuador pronounced the sentence on the inalienable right of children and young people to receive sex education, including “the right of young people to autonomously decide matters regarding their sexual health, to express their opinion and give their consent directly without the illegitimate interference of the state, the society, or the family” (El Universo, 2018). On July 28, in the cities of Quito and Guayaquil, “pro-life” and “pro-family” religious groups have once again taken to the streets now to reject the Constitutional Court’s decision alleging that it implied an unacceptable state imposition that forced sexual education upon children and young people. These protests launched a new digital campaign trend called A Mis Hijos Lo Educo Yo (I Am The One To Educate My Children).

Another march was held on July 31 to pressure the National Assembly to approve a resolution ratifying “the defense of the family as the fundamental core of society” and this text was approved with 70 votes. Even when the resolution had no concrete policy impact, this was another symbolic victory of neoconservative forces now solidly installed in the Ecuadorian political system. Also in 2018, Frente Nacional por la Familia (National Front for the Family), the Red Civil por la Restauración (Civil Network for Restoration), the Red Familia de Principios Formativos (Family Network for Formative Principles) and the newly created movement A Mis Hijos Lo Educo Yo (I Am The One To Educate My Children) convened the First International Convention for the Family, where Nicolás Márquez and Agustín Laje, the authors of the book *El Libro Negro de la Nueva Izquierda* (The Black Book of the New Left) (2016) were the main speakers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> More information on Márquez and Laje is offered in this series chapter on Argentina (p. 34).

## REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS INCLUDING THE RIGHT TO ABORTION

In 2019, the National Assembly debated the full reform of the Comprehensive Penal Organic Code (COIP). In this context, a proposal was made to alter Article 150 which allows for abortion on three grounds: when a woman's life and/or health is at risk and rape of a mentally disabled woman. The reform aimed at including four other grounds: all forms of rape, incest, non-consented insemination, and fetal abnormality incompatible with life. The feminist movements propelled a major mobilization to ensure these legal changes, but the National Assembly denied the decriminalization of abortion for victims of rape and in cases of incest, mental disability or non-consented insemination. There were 65 votes in favor of the proposal, 59 against and six abstentions. Five other favorable votes would have approved the reform. The only gain was the approval of the ground to prevent women's health risks when they cannot be avoided by other means.

Another attack unleashed by religious neoconservative forces against gender-related rights targeted the proposal for a new law called the Organic Health Code, which would allow abortion when the mother or fetus is in imminent danger. The Ecuadorian Assembly approved the Organic Health Code in August 2020 and the definition of abortion as a crime even when the pregnancy is the result of rape was retained. But the Code reaffirmed the right to abortion in situation of health risks, established rules of confidentiality, and it included a series of relevant positive provisions on sexual education and access to health care in the case of sexual orientation and gender identity. All these areas were viciously attacked by anti-abortion and anti-gender forces. A month after it was approved, the Code was revoked by the presidency. Isabel Ponce analyzed this unexpected outcome as another step backwards in the realm of sexual and reproductive health and rights policies:

*The Code has not taken away our sexual and reproductive rights, but it did ratify, clarify and strengthen them. In that sense, it is more than a lost opportunity to get out of the lethargy that Ecuador is a leader in teenage pregnancy and as a high exponent of the criminalization of women, girls and adolescents. (Ponce, 2020)*

## MAIN ACTORS INVOLVED IN ANTI-GENDER POLITICS

### CON MIS HIJOS NO TE METAS (DON'T MESS WITH MY CHILDREN)

In the period under examination in this case study, Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas became a main actor in anti-gender and anti-LGBTTI rights politics in Ecuador. Its main focus is education, and it mobilizes both Catholic and Evangelical groups as well as secular sectors. Its campaigns use a variety of arguments. The first is that the heterosexual nuclear family is the support of society and must be preserved at all costs. The second is that the term “family” refers only to a “natural” (nuclear) family consisting of a man and a woman, and whose main purpose is procreation. Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas argues that the feminist “imposition of gender ideology” promotes societal self-destruction because it compels families to not procreate. Using the slogan “Ideology doesn’t conquer biology,” the campaign abhors the conceptions of gender as a social and cultural construct, calls for the respect for “the original design of (two) sexes” and declares that those who propagate these ideas are the advocates of “aberrations and atrocities”.

Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas is a transnational initiative based on slogans, publications and street demonstrations that is at play across the region. In Ecuador, it was spearheaded by the National Front for the Family, the Catholic-Evangelical Coalition that organized the October 2017 March against the Law for the Prevention of Violence. It also involves other groups above mentioned: Pro-Life and Pro-Family Network, Civil Restoration Network, I Am The One To Educate My Children, and the Red Familia (Family Network). Other members are the Movimiento Vida y Familia (Life and Family Movement), a group composed of parents, professionals and religious leaders, and the Red of Agentes de Salud (Network of Health Providers) that fights teenage pregnancy as “an effect of promiscuity” and has the support of the Catholic Episcopal Conference.

Though many leaders of this formation are men, it also counts with women leaders, many of them young. Amparo Medina, the President of Ecuador's Pro-life and Pro-Family of Network, is one of its main faces. Linda Arias, the representative of the National Front for the Family, is another key voice who had a strong media impact during the 2017 marches. Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas has also the support from Paulina Aguirre, a famous Ecuadorian singer and Grammy Award winner, as well as from Cristina Franco Cortázar, a well-known "pro-life" lawyer and also Cristina Valverde, a lawyer who is a judge in the Ecclesiastical Court of the Archdiocese of Guayaquil and author of the book *Una Realidad Escondida: La Verdad Sobre el Aborto (A Hidden Reality: The Truth About Abortion)* (2015).

## CONTAMINATING POLITICS AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES

Beyond societal mobilizations, anti-gender and anti-abortion politics has deeply penetrated political parties' and state's policies. In 2016, the right-wing presidential candidate Guillermo Lasso of party Creando Oportunidades (CREO - Creating Opportunities) sustained its electoral discourse on a strong defense of the "family". The same strategy has been used by the Social Christian Party (PSC) that, as in other Latin American countries, is originally Catholic. Then, in 2019, when the reform of the Penal Code was under debate, an important number of assembly members have taken the stand to adamantly express their voices against the enlargement of abortion rights. In this context, it was quite remarkable that Jaime Nebot, the leader of the PSC, and other members of the party voted in favor of the right to abortion in case of rape. This position may be, eventually, signaling towards fractures in the neoconservative religious camp that were not visible few years back.

That same year, Ecuador had regional and local elections (Metro Ecuador, 2019), in which "pro-life" and "pro-family" groups have also been very active, mostly attacking candidates who had, in the past or even during the electoral debates, spoken favorably about gender equality, sex education and the right to abortion. Their main slogan was Con Aborto No Te Voto (With Abortion, I Don't Vote for You). During the electoral process, a new grouping named Politicos Cristianos (Christian Politicians) created a Facebook page

to call for votes on Evangelical candidates who expressed clear positions against “gender”, sexual education and abortion rights.

## INSTRUMENTALIZING “GENDER IDEOLOGY”

The examining of the Ecuadorian landscape confirms what has been observed elsewhere: the anti-gender religious, as well as secular, neoconservative rhetoric brings together floating signifiers, blurs conceptual boundaries and creates specters. Their discourses turn towards one main enemy: an international elite that would have the power to bend the will of national states and impose its “ideologies” on societies hiding their true intentions under the cover of development or *progress* agendas in order to achieve these goals. In the semantics of anti-gender groups, the term “progressive” is reduced to *progre* (los progre) and has a negative connotation. It is a code word for leftist, Communist, socialist or all those engaged with the promotion of gender equality, sexual freedom and social justice. Anti-gender forces sell themselves as the ones who do not have ideologies, while their enemies are portrayed as “pure ideologues”.

As noted by Sonia Corrêa, David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar (2018), “gender ideology” discourse has recaptured and reframed Catholic anti-Marxist discourses of the Cold War to attack feminist and LGBTTI theories and activisms. In Latin America, this semantics torsion associated “gender” with the regional self-named socialist regimes, like Venezuela (Corrêa et al, 2018). Abracinkas observes that, by reviving the climate of the Cold War, anti-gender discourses wage a war against all persons and groups that critically interrogate well established social and political orders (Abracinkas, 2019).

The narratives of many anti-abortion and anti-gender groups mimic conspiracy theory and resort to apocalyptic language and imagery. When religious rhetoric is used, it makes strong references to the end of times when the “only chosen who will be saved from destruction and death”. These voices, while refuting academic and scientific positions and complex thinking, advocate for and use acritical positivist scientific conceptions. This is

exemplified by schematic interpretations of evolutionary theory or simplified biological tenets of genetics and neuroscience used to “confirm” the binary paradigm of sexual difference. This is glaring, for example, in the book of Agustín Laje and Nicolás Márquez, *El Libro Negro de la Nueva Izquierda* (2016), which extensively resorts to “pseudoscience” (Sívori, 2019). Differently from other voices, this stream has left behind faith-based imageries and religious doctrinal arguments, but they are not less aggressive in their claims for the preservation or restoration of sexual and gender orders.

## WHO FINANCES ANTI-GENDER POLITICS?

In Ecuador, the main financial promoters of Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas are part of a loose alliance involving Evangelicals, Adventists and Catholics spread out across the country. To a large extent, the churches are the main funders of campaigns activities. Key leaders and financiers are mostly male, and not as public as the various women leaders above mentioned. Key informants heard by the study have mentioned as main “spiritual shareholders”: Freddy Guerrero (president of the Adventist North Quito Mission), Jimmy Cornejo (from the Christian Center of Cuenca), Fernando Lay (Iñaquito Evangelical Church in Quito) and Amparo Medina (Ecuador “Pro-life” Action).

In addition, a previous study performed by Merlo (2010) identified the Favorita Corporation, whose CEOs are members of the Iñaquito Evangelical Church, one of the main financial supporters of neoconservative religious groups in the country. Favorita Corporation is one of the largest enterprises in Ecuador with its line of supermarkets and superstores: Supermaxi, Megamaxi, Juguetón, Aki, Gran Aki, Super Aki and Super Saldos (Favorita Corporation, 2018). It channels financial resources to anti-abortion and anti-gender activities through its foundation Dejando Huellas (Leaving Footprints Behind). The foundation has supported Amparo Medina’s organization since the start, even though Medina is a Catholic. Another company supporting these endeavors is Guitarras Vogel that financed the production of the video used by Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas to call for the May 2017 march and that features Paulina Aguirre. Aguirre herself is a member of the North Verbo Christian Church, in Quito.

Merlo (2010) has also identified key connections between these groups and the Hoy Cristo Jesús Bendice (HCJB) radio station (Today Christ Blesses Us) that was founded in 1936 and is one of the very first Evangelical missionary radio stations in the world. The investigation carried out by Annie Wilkinson (2013) on HCJB Radio Station has shown that a group called Apoyo (Support) was created by HCJB in 1992 that would later become Camino de Salida (The Way Out), one of the organizations that brought “conversion therapies” to Ecuador, including through its links with the U.S.-based transnational industry of conversion that encompasses various networks, such as Exodus International.

It is interesting to place this data against the backdrop of information compiled by other researches on neoconservative trends in Latin America. Maher (2019), for example, shows how fundamentalist Pentecostals, linked to the U.S., have not just taken advantage of poverty and urban social disintegration in Latin America, but have also been very effective in proselytizing amongst the military, as well as economic and political elites. This expansion was based on the theology of prosperity that strongly converges with the main tenets of neoliberalism.

On the other side of the coin, the longstanding work performed by ultra-Catholics (or Catholic *integrismo*) is also to be taken into account.<sup>4</sup> The book *Mitad Soldados, Mitad Monjes; El Sodalitium Christianae Vitae Por Dentro* (Half Soldiers, Half Monks: Inside the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae), authored by Pedro Salinas and Paola Ugaz has also examined this ultra-conservative Catholic organization (Sodalicio), founded by Fernando Figari, in 1971, to fight liberation theology and that defined as its main objective the recruitment of young “white” elite persons in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. The research shows that Sodalicio’s assets amount to one billion dollars now invested in a number of enterprises, large land properties and an offshore foundation settled in Panama. Sodalicio operates in Ecuador since 2002 and one of its members is the banker and conservative political leader Guillermo Lasso.

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4 For extensive information on this stream, see Arguedas (2020), offered in this series chapter on Catholic *integrismo* and Evangelical fundamentalism on page 20.

## EXPRESSIONS OF RESISTANCE

### CONTESTING HATE

When the 2017 march opposing the Law for the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence was called, LGBTTI organizations filed a lawsuit against its organizers. They resorted to the Protection Act, a legal tool that allows for requesting state protection when a person or a group is facing a potential violation of human rights. On October 12, 2017, right before the march, its main organizers – including the President of the Episcopal Conference -- were taken to court (Bravo, 2017) and a hearing was called for October 25, 2017. The final ruling, however, was delivered three days after the march had taken place. It condemned a number of aspects of the initiative, but it did not prevent the march from happening. The fact is very relevant, however, because this was the first time that high-level religious leaders engaged in anti-gender campaigns were judicially requested to explain their intentions and to refrain from propelling discriminatory speeches.

### SATYA HAS TWO MOTHERS

The case of Satya is another milestone of resistance and struggle for LGBTTI rights in Ecuador. Satya was born in 2011. The juridical litigation to have her recognized as the daughter of two mothers reached the Constitutional courts in early 2018 and the final ruling would be issued in June. The case was under the responsibility of the People's Defender (a public institution responsible for guaranteeing the fulfillment of human rights) and monitored by several activist groups. The final decision determined that the prohibition of registering Satya as the daughter of two mothers, breached her constitutional rights with regards to effective judicial protection under the law, personal identity in relation to obtaining nationality, equality and non-discrimination, respect for the family in its diverse forms, and the general principle of the better interest of children and young people.

## THE AMADA CASE: TRANS CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

On November 2018, the Civil Registry issued an ID card stating the feminine gender of a trans girl, Amada, and accepting her social name and gender identity. This gain resulted from the strenuous work carried out by Fundación Amor y Fortaleza (Love and Strength Foundation), created by Amada parents to keep fighting for the rights claims of Amada and other trans children and young people against discrimination. Amada's parents partnered with PAKTA Foundation to move forward with a lawsuit arguing for the right of the girl to have her name and gender changed in her birth certificate having as its main legal ground the jurisprudence set by the Consultative Opinion 24-17 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) that recognizes the conventionality of marriage between persons of the same sex and gender identity rights. This was possible because this Opinion has defined that, in those countries part to the Interamerican Convention on Human Rights, no constitutional reform or legislative change is required to grant these rights.<sup>5</sup> The Amada case was the first in South America to file a legal resource to the Opinion in order to ensure a child's gender identity rights.

## EQUAL MARRIAGE

In 2019, the Constitutional Court issued a positive decision on marriage equality also grounded on the application of the Consultative Opinion 24-17 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. The battle for equal marriage had begun six years before under the leadership of activists Pamela Troya and Gaby Correa. A bit later, in 2018, Efraín Soria, the president of Foundation Equidad, together with his partner, Javier Benalcazar, went to the Civil Register and requested to get married. As the Register refused the couple's request, they presented their case to the Provincial Court of Justice of Pichincha municipality, which also denied the right. An appeal was filed to the Constitutional Court, whose decision was in favor of the rights under the purview of the Consultative Opinion.

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<sup>5</sup> Additional information on the Advisory Opinion 24 of the IACHR is offered in the chapter on Costa Rica, in page 92

## ABORTION RIGHTS: FEMINISM AND RELIGIOUS VOICES JOIN HANDS

The front in which greater political resistance to legal regression has been registered in recent years is found in the feminist movement's campaigns for abortion legal reform and against gender-based violence and femicide. These mobilizations were led by the Centro Surkuna para el Apoyo y Protección de Derechos Humanos (Surkuna Center for the Support and Protection of Human Rights), Aborto Libre Ecuador (Free Abortion Ecuador), the Grupo de Geografía Crítica (Critical Geography Group) and LGBTTI groups such as Diálogo Diverso (Diverse Dialogue). At the beginning of 2019, in response to the episodes of brutal violence against two women - Marta and Diana - the movement Nos Queremos Vivas and many other women's organizations called marches that gathered thousands of persons on the streets, principally in Quito, which also involved a broader coalition of LGBTTI activists, environmentalists and workers' organizations.

It is also worth noting that, between 2018 and 2020, a number of religious groups --Catholic, Evangelicals, Mennonites and País Canela, a faith-based LGBTTI civil society organization- launched a public statement in support of the abortion law reform under the slogan Déjame Decidir (Let Me Decide). In this same context, Mónica Maher (a feminist theologian of the United Church of Christ), Josue Berrú (a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ecuador), and José Ignacio López (priest, Bible scholar and Catholic theologian) who are members of the Red Ecuatoriana de la Fé (Ecuadorian Faith Network) have also announced their support for abortion in the cases of rape (La Hora, 2019). Reverend Maher organized the International Seminar on Religious Fundamentalisms, Rights and Democracy on May, 2018, in which she proposed rescuing the interpretation of the Bible as a message of liberation for women and an important feminist political task. Since then, she has co-founded the Iglesia Unida del Ecuador (United Church of Ecuador) that openly fights for gender and LGBTI rights from a religious perspective.

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# THE CASE OF MEXICO

Gloria Careaga

Luz Elena Aranda

Abridged by Sonia Corrêa

## CONTEXT

Mexican society as we know it today reflects multiple layers of complex historical processes dating back to pre-Hispanic cultures, which were, to a large extent, erased by colonization and policies adopted after the 19th Century independence, but which also have deeply intertwined with Spanish cultural modes of living and norms. These imprints remain palpable in today's Mexican constitutional democracy. The country is very diverse in terms of geography, ethnicity, cultural traditions. Sociopolitical contexts vary enormously across regions. Under the historical hegemony of Catholicism, Mexican society is plural in religious terms as it allows for the coexistence of very diverse expressions of Christianity, but also includes Jews, Buddhists and Muslims.

Political and legal debates on women's rights and matters relating to sexuality have also a long historical trajectory. However, it is undisputable that, after 1995, as an effect of the preparations for and the aftermath of the International Conference of Population and Development (1995), in Beijing, greater investments have been made in the realms of public policies and legislative changes with regard to gender equality. Since then, these policy and legal transformations have been closely fought for and monitored by feminist movements.

In the case of LGBTTI rights groups, the trajectory of legal reform and policy design has been much more convoluted and consequently slower. Even so, in the last twenty years, gains in the domain of sexual freedom have been several. In contrast, within feminisms, though sexuality is portrayed and analyzed as a privileged realm of male domination, discussions on female sexual freedom have not been as extensive as in relation

to reproductive rights. Feminists recognize that contraceptives are critical for the free exercise of sexuality and Mexican family planning programs have existed for quite a long time. Other critical dimensions of sexual freedom, however, have not yet fully developed in the Mexican feminist agenda.

## ABORTION: A KEY ISSUE

The campaigns for the decriminalization of abortion began in 1931, when the Federal District's Penal Code was approved and abortion was decriminalized on three grounds: rape, when a woman's life is at risk and miscarriage. In 1936, pioneer feminist Ofelia Domínguez delivered the speech *Abortion for Social and Economic Reasons* and this was the first time in which the topic was spoken of so publicly. Since then, ongoing debates and mobilization have resulted in significant legislative reforms in Mexico City (Federal District -DF), but not in the country as a whole. In the DF, in 2000, the Robles Law was approved allowing abortion under three additional grounds: life-threatening risk for women, severe congenital anomalies, and pregnancy resulting from non-consensual artificial insemination. In 2007, an abortion law reform was proposed and approved which legalized pregnancy interruption upon request until the 12th week of pregnancy and ensured access to public health services totally free of charge. Then, in 2019, as this report, part of the Gender & Politics in Latin America project, was being finalized, the Oaxaca Congress decriminalized abortion on any ground.

## SEXUAL FREEDOM: MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

The struggles for sexual freedom erupted in Mexico in the late 1970s through the individual voices of lesbian, gay and trans activism and this would later coalesce around an emergent and vibrant LGBTTI movement. These claims were originally motivated as a response to the systematic arbitrary police detentions of homosexuals and trans persons. As time elapsed, and the movement gained strength, they adventured towards other political goals, such as the claim for investments to ensure wider social visibility to the voices of sexual dissidences and make them legitimate interlocutors of state authorities.

These agendas would further flourish in the course of the first decade of the 21st century and a number of legal and policy achievements have been made since then. Same-sex legislation has been approved in 19 of Mexico's 32 states. At federal level, new migration and consular rules were also adopted that facilitated marriage with non-Mexicans without any form of discrimination. In contrast, in the realm of gender identity, gains were not so prominent. Just 9 states have adopted gender identity legislation that fully grants the right to change name and gender marker on ID cards, including birth certificates, as a simple administrative procedure. But Mexico City is the state where the largest number of such procedures have taken place.

In May 2016, then president Enrique Peña Nieto invited leaders of the LGBTTI movement to a meeting in his official residence. This event aimed at showing his commitment to the movement's agenda and, in this occasion, the presidency presented a package of reforms that would be sent to Congress, including: a provision to legalize same-sex marriage nationally (to bypass local reform procedures), a provision ensuring the right of adoption for same-sex partners, a federal regulation of gender identity rights and the revision of all discriminatory biases still enshrined in legal frames. The National Secretaries of Foreign Relations, Health, and Education were also requested to adopt measures of protection for the rights of LGBTTI persons. And, the Republic's General Attorney's Office was oriented to properly respond to human rights violations experienced by these persons.

The Executive Branch was, to a large extent, doing no more than recognizing and, in a few cases, expanding the reach of existing laws and previous Court decisions. Yet, the call for the modification of state level civil codes to ensure same-sex marriage rights was a major step ahead, and it stimulated a few states to take the initiative in that direction (SPW, 2016). On the other hand, as it will be looked at further ahead, this courageous move has also triggered a major conservative reaction.

 **LIMITS**

Quite evidently, since the 1970s, a number of gains have been made in regard to gender equality and respect for sexual diversity and freedom. But much more remains to be done and these gains must be placed against the continuous aggravation of structural violence that deeply affect the lives of women and the LGBTTI communities. The extension and depth of structural violence in Mexico can be illustrated, for example, by thousands of children missing and a very high number of young women abducted by criminal networks. In the case of women, these numbers have increased lately, which may be explained by the fact that no Gender Violence Alert System exists in half of the states. On the other hand, the figures are not very positive either in a number of states where these systems are in place (Redacción Animal Político, 2019).

Recent data from UN Women system informs that nine women are killed each day in Mexico. Six of every ten Mexican women have been victims of some type of sexual violence during their lifetime, and 41.3 percent were victims of sexual abuse. The scale of sexual violence amongst the youngsters is alarming and is reflected in very high figures of child and teenage pregnancies. Mexico also ranks very high in the list of countries affected by large numbers of hate crimes against LGBTTI persons.

Unfortunately, state authorities have not responded as they should to these shocking rates of gender and sexuality related violence. Furthermore, in recent years, religious and secular conservative groups have been inciting and legitimizing these modalities of violence when they propagate hate speech against feminists and LGBTTI persons. Notwithstanding, a maze of local initiatives has emerged across society that are devoted to search for those who have disappeared and call for justice in unresolved and non-investigated cases of murder and disappearance (Ibid).

Since 2018, under the impact of the #MeToo movement, feminist (especially the youngest) response to sexual violence has made of it a high-profile issue. Sequential protests have taken over the streets and constant mobilizing is done through social

media. Nevertheless, once again, state authorities response has been extremely slow, not to say non-existent. Still worst, in a few cases, state authorities have, in fact, accused and criminalized the victims of sexual crimes, as mentioned in the Human Rights Commission's report on gender-based violence that analyzed the experience of abused women that seek justice in Mexico City (Estévez, 2019, p. 102).

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Mexico City's abortion law reform, instead of becoming an inspiration to other states to adopt similar legislation, has provoked a vicious reaction of anti-abortion forces and, in result, seventeen states reformed their abortion laws to make them more restrictive. In a number of places, anti-abortion forces have pushed nurses and doctors to denounce women who resort to health systems with incomplete abortions. Today, hundreds of women are imprisoned because of illegal abortions, including some who underwent miscarriages.<sup>1</sup>

It is not excessive to say that matters relating to gender and sexuality have been either avoided or addressed in a very irresponsible manner by state institutions. In addition to the alarming figures of sexual violence, no consistent public sexual education policy exists and no substantial reflections on the subject have taken place in the public educational system. One main cause of this major gap is that, for many years, sexual education has been a main target of conservative forces. On the other hand, it should be noted that no major investments have been made in universities and research institutions to sustain long-term and policy-oriented investigations on sexual education or rights related to sexuality in their multiple dimensions.

## ANTI-GENDER POLITICS THREATENS SECULARISM

*Laïcité* and secularism is another critical issue to be looked at, as major challenges have arisen in recent years. In Mexico, as in other Latin American countries, the Catholic doctrine has, since colonial times, transported its rigid conceptions on gender and

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1 One of these cases was reported by English digital newspaper The Guardian, in 2014. See: <https://bit.ly/2JPDUB2>

sexuality to law and social norms. However, in the 1910s, the Mexican Revolution, which had a strong anti-clerical motivation, established by rigorous compulsory rules of *laïcité*, including the prohibition of religious proselytism and cult restrictions. These rules were contested and protested and, in the late 1920s, these tensions, mobilized by ultra-conservative Catholic forces, culminated in an armed conflict, known as the Cristero War.<sup>2</sup> After the conflict, the rules of compulsory secularity were made more flexible, but general legal norms grounding *laïcité* have been preserved, making Mexico one exemplary secular state in Latin America.

In the early 1990s, during the government of Carlos Salinas, from Partido Revolucionario Institucional- PRI (Institutionally Revolutionary Party), the rules of *laïcité* and secularity were once again reformed, becoming less strict. This was followed by the Constitutional Reform of 1992 that allowed public demonstrations of religious acts and for politicians to make explicit their religious beliefs. Since then, the Catholic Church has made all efforts possible to regain influence on politics and public policies. Then, in 2000, a full political reform was completed that left behind the one-party system established by the revolution, further opening the road for the Conservative Catholic hierarchy as well as extreme-right Catholic groups to re-engage with politics. Also in 2000, the first national pluri-party election was won by the Partido de Acción Nacional - PAN (National Action Party) created in the late 1930s and historically linked to political elites involved in the Cristero War.

From there on, the historical parameters of *laïcité* and secularism have been further blurred and infringed. In 2013, a new constitutional reform substituted the original definitions of free belief and freedom of conscience for religious freedom. It has also authorized military chaplaincies and religious ministers to have military rank. Most importantly, churches were permitted to intervene in the contents of public education and gained the right to own media and communication enterprises. This last piece of the reform has enormously facilitated the propagation of religious moral visions in society,

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2 To learn more, see Cisneros (2018).

implying detrimental effects on groups marginalized because of their sexual practices or identities.

Additionally, in many states and cities, governors and mayors felt authorized to provide public funds to the Catholic Church or to related organizations (Alarcón, 2010). This allowed for the creation or strengthening of civil society organizations that advocate for the “right to life since conception”, promote the “traditional family as the main pillar of society”, oppose the use of condoms, abortion rights, sexual education and sexual and reproductive health.<sup>3</sup> A sharp example of this novel trend is the National Front for the Family (FNF), created in 2016 in response to President Enrique Peña Nieto’s policy portfolio for the protection of LGBTTI rights.

The FNF is a broad initiative involving Catholic, but also Evangelical and secular actors that, in 2016, took the streets to call for the defense of the family and contest sexual diversity and LGBTTI rights. The marches then mobilized anticipated the anti-gender flares that would erupt a year later. In 2017, the ‘Freedom Bus’, popularly known as the “orange bus” or “hate bus” (by progressives), invented by the Spanish NGO Hazte Oír, arrived in Mexico to spread messages against gender identity and sexual education rights, using the slogan *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (Don’t Mess With My Children) (Aquino, 2017).<sup>4</sup> These forces have also gained terrain because they have the open support of conservative economic elites who have granted their organizations with large sums of money, including for training programs and to ensure the participation of women and young people in inter-governmental arenas, such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN).

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3 Groups that have presented themselves as civil society organizations are: ProVida, Comisión Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, Fundación Cultura de la Vida, Asociación Nacional Cívica Femenina (ANCIFEM), Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, Unión Nacional de Padres de Familia (UNPF), Legionarios de Cristo, Grupo Familias and Sociedad, among others.

4 For more information on Hazte Oír, the “Orange Bus” and *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas*, see this series chapter on Regional Actor and OAS on page 164.

## EVANGELICALS AND THE NEW GOVERNMENT

In order to better understand the recent and decidedly ecumenical wave of religious conservatism described above, it is important to quickly review the historical trajectory of Evangelical churches in Mexico. Their presence in the country dates back to the 19th century and today, even though the number of Evangelicals has increased, they are still a minority. Historically, Evangelical churches have defended *laïcité* as a guarantee of religious freedom and as a strategy for imposing limits on the Catholic hegemony. However, as seen in other countries in recent decades, the more conservative fraction of the Evangelical movement broke with that logic and began actively participating in the political life of the country, including through the engagement with electoral politics that have won seats in Congress.

The icon of Evangelical politization in Mexico is the Partido del Encuentro Social - PES (Social Encounter Party), registered as a national party in 2014, after being present in several states in previous years. Its religious base is mainly composed of neo-Pentecostals. According to social scientist Javier Calderón Castillo (CELAG), PES' political ideological profile comprises ultra-conservative positions in what concerns family and social freedom, openness to neoliberalism and consumerism, significant economic power, strong support from its religious base/followers, the owning of a large media apparatus comprising radio stations, TV channels and digital vehicles.

In 2018, PES negotiated an alliance with Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), the victorious presidential candidate of Morena Party, member of the Juntos Haremos Historia coalition (Together We Will Make History). Media stories inform that PES promised Obrador 15 million votes. In the very election, PES got less than the 3 million votes required for it to remain registered as a national party. However, thanks to the alliance with AMLO, a presidential candidate, they won 39 seats in the House of Representatives and 5 in the Senate. That was a significant achievement that gave PES a voice in the national legislative, in addition to seats in state level legislatures.

In the current scenario, however, the threat to secularism does not come exclusively from this new wave of religious presence in legislative bodies. During the electoral campaign, AMLO has harshly criticized the divorce between ethics and politics, or what he defines as the growing fracture between morality and the exercise of power. After elected, he has continued to constantly allude to moral values, a discourse with strong religious undertones.

One of his first presidential acts was to launch a new edition of a booklet titled “Moral Primer”, written by Alfonso Reyes, a 1940s intellectual, whose content is not just conservative but also outdated. Since then, in numerous occasions, AMLO has flagged the proposal of debating a “moral constitution” to better guide society on the basis of both religious and conservative tenets. These moves may not resolve the rampant problem of corruption in politics and society but will threaten the cultural and political plurality of Mexican society.

Furthermore, since January 2019, the executive branch has made a number of policy agreements with religious sectors, especially with Evangelicals. For example, the *Confederação de Igrejas Evangélicas - CONFRATERNICE* (Confederation of Evangelical Churches) is distributing the “Moral Primer” widely, including in schools, which is a symptom of open religious influence in public education.

Not less relevantly, Evangelicals leaders and the business sector are the only social actors with whom the president communicates systematically. AMLO’s administration has completely altered the parameters of communication between the state and civil society. In contrast with the modalities established by previous administrations, the social policies are no longer implemented through platforms or projects coordinated by civil society organizations. The federal executive is now providing social support directly to beneficiaries and official discourse declares intermediaries of social policies will be eliminated. These policies cover education scholarships, pensions and subsidies, funds for temporary jobs, financial credit and the guarantee of minimal prices for peasants.

This distribution of resources to vulnerable people is a main pillar of the direct relationship between the President and the people, a classical populist approach to state management.<sup>5</sup> A similar pattern is identified in the presidential daily press conferences in which AMLO justifies the government's actions and sharply criticizes his adversaries. In addition, after a year in power, López Obrador continued to behave as if he was still in campaign, continually travelling around the country to meet local people, talk to them and make promises, a style that is at odds with the long-established image of Mexican presidents as astatemmen. AMLO also refuses to meet his international peers and travel outside the country to participate in multilateral debates. All these shifts potentially affect gender and sexuality politics and policies.

To better grasp what is happening and may still happen in these realms, though, it is also necessary to take into account the ongoing politics of the religious. This comprises the longstanding politics of the Catholic Church against the right to abortion -- intensified after 2007 -- and its historical attack on LGBTTI rights -- amplified in 2016 -- but also the growing influence of PES on the current administration as well as the concomitant Evangelical presence in crusades against abortion rights and “gender ideology”. In that regard, it is worth mentioning that PES members and other Evangelical voices do not only attack gender, women reproductive self-determination, autonomy and sexual freedom, they are also in favor of death penalty, whose abolition is a non-negotiable principle of human rights.

The recent political gains made by PES and other Evangelical sectors is further blurring the separation between the political and the religious and enlarging the road towards a potential re-confessionalization of politics and the state. This trend is nurtured by AMLO's government discourses and positions, which constantly elude clear stands in relation to freedoms and the protection of human rights or transfers the views and decisions on these matters to “the people”.

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5 López Obrador has established a daily press conference he calls “early morning talks,” because they are taken place at 7 a.m., when he talks to the press about the progress of his government and his schedule for that day. Many times, he is accompanied by cabinet ministers since they meet every day between 5 and 7 a.m.

## RESISTANCE AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Today, no clear public policies or government plans are in place to address gender equality, reproductive rights and sexual freedom. These domains are in a sort of policy limbo and, to respond to that and prevent potential regressions, a rapid re-articulation of the feminist and LGBTTI movements was necessary, which is currently underway. However, ongoing work is also to be accounted for as, for example, feminist legislative and judicial advocacy to achieve the legalization of abortion beyond Mexico City and to release women imprisoned for abortion. Or else, the constant pressure for gender equality policies, the systematic denunciations of femicide and sexual violence and various programs to support families of killed or disappeared women and girls. More critically, young feminists are strongly responding to sexual violence they face in daily life in protest and digital forms of activism that directly confront the state. They are also replicating the “green wave” for the decriminalization of abortion that began in Argentina in 2018.

It should also be said that, in 2016 and 2017, the LGBTTI movement organized public demonstrations of resistance to the growth of conservative forces, expressed in the marches called by FNF and the roaming of the ‘orange bus’ across the country. In some cities, these LGBTTI mobilizations prevented the bus stop. The strong and continuous advocacy for same-sex marriage and gender identity legal reforms is also an important barrier to contain the expansion of these conservative agendas and this work has been sustained in a collective and strategic manner. Not less importantly, academic work on gender and sexuality is another front of political resistance.

Having said that, the challenges ahead are many. The Mexican political landscape is now plagued by deep contradictions and risks. Evangelicals have taken a long time to engage with politics, but now they are key actors in the political stage. Though less than 6 percent of population define themselves as Evangelicals, their recent political gains will translate into larger recruitment and this may be already reflected in the figures of the next national census. In addition, politicians from across the political spectrum increasingly disrespect the separation between religion and politics, using religious symbols and

deploying doctrinaire discourses in electoral campaigns and political mandates. Catholics and Evangelicals, which previously appeared to be miles apart and in conflict, are now working together under a very aggressive right-wing ecumenic umbrella that targets gender, sexual freedom and abortion rights. They are also disrupting and corrupting the core of concepts of freedom of expression, religious freedom and human rights as to achieve their goals, which includes the erosion of *laïcité* and secularism.

The directions taken by the new AMLO administration are problematic and uncertain. On the one hand, it seems to be clearly moving towards a blunt populist mode of governing. In October 2019, a new law was approved that allows for the revocation of the presidential mandate at the end of its second year, opening a wedge for further alterations of existing political rules (Economíahoy.mx, 2019). A month later, a triumphal event was organized to mark the first year of the administration, gathering thousands of people at the Zocalo, in Mexico City, to hear the presidential self-appraising speech. On the other hand, given that both conservative and extreme-left actors are seated in the Executive Cabinet, it is not so easy to grasp towards what direction the administration is really heading. More in depth and pondered analyses are definitely required to examine if the current condition implies or not real threats to democracy, including what concerns the domains of gender and sexuality freedom and rights.

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# THE CASE OF PARAGUAY

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Abridged by Sonia Corrêa

Political and social conservatism has a long history in Paraguay. Having become independent in 1811, the country's political culture carries the legacies of three centuries of Spanish colonization. Colonizers almost totally exterminated original indigenous populations through violence, sexual predation of women and forced miscegenation. But this tragic history is often narrated in romantic and peaceful overtones. As an independent nation, Paraguay was also ravaged by two bloody wars with its neighbors. Between 1865 and 1870, a destructive conflict unfolded against the Triple Alliance comprised by Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay that left the country in ruins and almost decimated the male population, leaving behind women, elderly people and children. Its demographic effects remained as until the 1980s when, for the time, the number of women surpassed by many points the number of men in the population. Then, from 1932 to 1935, another virulent conflict erupted with Bolivia because of a territorial dispute over the Chaco region.

The country has also experienced a sequence of authoritarian governments and internal civil conflicts. Between 1954 and 1989, it endured, under General Alfredo Stroessner, the longest military dictatorship of South America. Between the democratic transition in 1989 and 2008, the country was run by the Colorado Party, originated in the centenarian political party culture of the Plata region comprised by Liberals (Colorados) and Conservatives (Blancos) -- a profile that will change over time. The Paraguayan Colorado Party is, since ever, liberal conservative with strong populist tendencies.

During its 1989-2008 ruling, the country was affected by sequential severe economic crisis, on one hand. On the other, a milestone of democratization was the 1992 National Constitutional Convention whose outcomes were very favorable for human rights and gender equality. The new Constitution also left behind the legal definition of Paraguay as a Catholic nation, even when special recognition was granted to Catholicism. In 2008, a left-

wing alliance of parties and social movements named Alianza Patriótica para el Cambio (APC - Patriotic Alliance for Change) won the presidential elections and a former Catholic bishop, Fernando Lugo, was elected president. However, in 2012, a parliamentary coup removed him from the presidency and the Colorado Party came back to power.

Anti-gender discourses have circulated in Paraguay since 1995, when the country's delegation to the IV World Women's Conference in Beijing aligned with the Vatican. As it is well known, in that occasion, the Holy See made a reservation in relation to the Platform of Action, when affirmed that would interpret the term "gender" as a definition "...anchored in the biological sexual identity of male and female". The Paraguayan delegation seconded this position presenting a clarification note stating that it understood "the concept [of gender] to refer to both sexes: male and female". This attack remained relatively dormant until the 2010s, until an anti-gender crusade erupted against a new educational policy on comprehensive sexual education proposed by the leftwing administration. This focused mobilization immediately preceded the 2012 parliamentarian coup against president Lugo.

After the coup, Horacio Cartes, who had openly manifested against LGBTTI rights and the decriminalization of abortion in the 2008 campaign, became the president and immediately assumed an outright stand against "gender ideology". Since Cartes' mandate, conservative forces have continuously gained momentum. From there on, anti-gender and anti-abortion groups would have in the Colorado Party strong allies and, consequently, a number of initiatives have materialized that propel accusations against "gender" and feminism as the main enemies of the family and of Paraguayan traditions and values. This vision extended towards the 2018 presidential campaign, when Mario Abdo Benítez was elected. Differently from its predecessors, who were more aligned to conservative Catholics, Abdo is decidedly more open to the direct influence of Evangelical church leaders. The country is often portrayed as a "good example" to be followed by the voicers of anti-gender and anti-abortion crusades in Latin America.

## THE LONGER CYCLE

In Paraguay, anti-gender politics emerged from and is deeply linked to the older layer of so-called “pro-life” groups and organizations openly operating in the country since the 1980s. The surge of these voices was definitely a response to the feminist mobilizing that sprouted under the effect of democratization. “Pro-life” or, better said, anti-abortion activism was basically linked to Catholic Church actors and institutions. For example, the NGO Servicio de Amor y Vida (SEAVI- Service of Love and Life) is organically connected to the Archdiocese and linked to Human Life International (HLI).<sup>1</sup> It started its activities with a program that showed anti-abortion videos to teenagers in both private and public schools. The activities of these groups quite evidently intensified in the 1990s when gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights gained legitimacy at the international level at the UN Conferences in which Paraguayan women’s and feminist groups were engaged.

After the fall of the Strossner’s dictatorship in 1989, the main claims raised by organized women concerned the elimination of discrimination enshrined in the law, the establishment of gender equality public policies and the creation of an institutional body to design and implement women’s rights policies. Despite much resistance, laws were reformed, and a Women’s Secretariat was created and hosted under the supervision of the Presidency. Its policy agenda mainly focused on gender equality in education and the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence. The Secretariat was also in charge of law reform propositions to overcome discriminatory and obsolete provisions that drastically restricted women’s rights.

One main legal victory of the early days of democratization was, for example, the 1992 Civil Code reform that incorporated almost all proposals presented by feminists, which fundamentally altered key areas of law as, for example, in relation to family rights. That same year, another crucial debate unfolded in the National Constitutional Convention in regard to Article 4, which had enshrined the “right to life since conception” in the

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1 For more information on Human Life International, see this series Chapter on the OAS case on page 164

constitutional preamble. The debates were very intense, as anti-abortion groups strongly opposed the incorporation of language promoted by the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights (IACHR) adding the qualification “in general” to indicate that this premise is not to be interpreted in absolute terms. Despite the virulent pressure of anti-abortion voices, the IACHR language was retained in the final text.<sup>2</sup> Specifically in regard to “gender”, as already mentioned, one critical episode of the 1990s was the full alignment of the Paraguayan delegation with the Holy See position in the Beijing Conference negotiations.

Then, at the end of the 1990s, the abortion debate was reactivated when the Penal Code was subject to reform in 1997. Despite strong feminist mobilizing, the articles restricting abortion, in force since 1910 that limited to the ground of when a woman’s life is at risk, were not altered. Controversies around abortion rights have re-surfaced in the early 2000s when the Children’s Rights Act was also reformed, as the “pro-life” camp once again made strong pressures for the text to include the “right to life from conception”. Though this proposal was not accepted, in 2003 another law passed in which that definition was included, and Presidential Decree N. 20846 was issued establishing March 25th as the “Day of the Unborn Child”. When the new millennium started, anti-abortion forces, which would later position themselves as warriors against “gender ideology” had had many victories. They had also improved their advocacy skills and managed to install a political wall to bar any advance in the realm of sexual and reproductive rights, in particular abortion rights.

Between 2005 and 2007, once again the Penal Code was partially reformed and once again the 1910 abortion articles remained intact. During that same period, the Code articles on punishable acts against sexual autonomy and a new law on sexual, reproductive and maternal health were discussed. In both cases, the propositions were rejected because conservative forces attacked them flagging the specter of abortion. They also mobilized a string wave of moral panic around the sexual, reproductive and maternal health law absurdly affirming that it would open the doors to what they called “gay marriage”. The

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<sup>2</sup> The language used is as follows: “[with regard to the right to life] its protection is guaranteed, in general, from the moment of conception”.

accusation was surreal, as nobody had ever mentioned the topic in the debates and, in reality, LGBTTI activism was not even properly organized. In the course of these debates a sharp polarization materialized between feminists, on the one side, and religious conservative voices, on the other, who would remain in place until today.

Then, in the 2010s, as feminist movements got stronger and began taking over the streets, anti-abortion and anti-gender groups have also gained muscles, devised new forms of political mobilization and got closer to the political right. This was also when the progressive political wave that had swept through Latin American since the early 2000s, started regressing through parliamentary coups – such as in Honduras, Paraguay, and Brazil – and, later on, this shift also unfolded in victories for conservatives in electoral processes.

In Paraguay, as already mentioned, the presidents that ruled the country after the 2012 parliamentary coup had openly declared to be “pro-life” and anti-gender. Furthermore, what was originally an attack on women’s rights, abortion rights, gender, and sexuality would expand towards the erosion of democratic conditions and assault on human rights more broadly speaking. As in other countries examined by this series of case studies, this extreme-right leaning agenda was sold to voters under an ideological umbrella that links gender, human rights and “cultural Marxism”.

In 2018, this assemblage of right-wing forces opposed the approval of an overarching equal rights law arguing, once again, that its approval would “open the doors to abortion” and to “gay marriage”. That same year, the successful pressures of religious neo-conservatism led Paraguay to not sign the United Nations’ Global Compact for Migration, the argument used in this case being that the treaty was another road through which abortion and “gender ideology” would be smuggled across borders. In 2019, the same argument was used against the signing of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escasú Agreement).

In late 2019, the anti-gender camp was decidedly much better organized than in 2012, when they waged a first attack on gender content in education. They now have more funds, easier access to public authorities and count with a large communication and media infra-structure. They have also gotten closer to extreme-right groups and easily resort to online and offline violence. In the last few years, feminist and LGBTTI activists, as well as journalists and academics, have become their constant targets on digital platforms. The Catholic Church hierarchy and Evangelical leaders are closely collaborating and have expanded their outreach and capacity to influence legal and public policies debates.

Quite evidently, anti-gender forces and their precursors – anti-abortion networks – have been active for very long in Paraguay. But, quite clearly, they have gained much strength in the course of the last decade, having achieved a stronger influence on national state authorities. More recently, their presence and influence has ramified at local levels, where a number of municipalities are adopting their extreme views on gender, abortion and LGBTTI rights. In early 2019, dozens of local governments have officially declared their municipalities as “pro-life cities” (Otero, 2019).

## WHO ARE THE ANTI-GENDER ACTORS IN PARAGUAY?

Until the late 1990s, Catholic Church related organizations, under the leadership of the Paraguayan Episcopal Conference (CEP), were the main institutions engaged in attacks against women’s and LGBTTI rights. In addition to NGOs, the Catholic camp also counts with academic voices, most principally from the Catholic University of Asunción (UCS). It was also during the 1990s that these Catholic actors established connections with Evangelical churches, that since the 1980s have proliferated in Paraguay. By the early 2000s, these two religious camps converged around the Federación de las Asociaciones por la Vida y la Familia (FEDAVID - Federation of Associations for Life and Family), who, for quite a long time, was the main neoconservative organization operating in the country. This would change in the 2010s, when a plethora of new formations emerged mostly linked with Evangelical churches, as, for example, the Generación Provida (Pro-life Generation) that, by 2011, was already actively protesting against the visit of Spanish Minister Bibiana Aído, known for her strong pro-abortion views.

Between 2015 and 2018, various other organizations were established, such as the Foro para el Diálogo Cívico (Forum for Civil Dialogue), that jointly with FEDAVIDA organized the March for Life in 2015, a demonstration also supported by other Catholic and Evangelical bodies, as the Rede Evangélica de Comunicación (Redecom- Evangelical Network of Communication) and the Archdiocesan Department of Catholic Education (DAEC). By 2018, there were approximately 20 organizations active in the country systematically propagating anti-gender and anti-abortion discourses, advocating in Parliament and mobilizing street marches. Of these, ISSOS Foundation is the only one not religiously connected, it is rather linked to the Rede Liberal de America Latina (RELIAL - Liberal Network of Latin America) and defines itself as libertarian and targets feminisms and “gender ideology”. One noticeable feature of these various organizations is that most of them count with the increasing presence of women, who present themselves as anti-feminists.<sup>3</sup> As elsewhere, in Paraguay, anti-gender crusades began in the realm of conservative Catholicism to later expand towards Evangelism and from there towards secular domains. In the last decade, these forces have also expanded their linkages with political parties and state institutions. The anti-abortion and anti-gender forces and their allies on the right of the political spectrum are now openly attacking human rights and regional and international multilateral systems (OAS and the UN).

Though the connections are not easily proven, many signals also suggest that the anti-gender and anti-abortion camp may have ties with ultra-right or neo-Nazi formations linked to the Partido Nacional Socialista de Paraguay (NSP- Paraguay National Socialist Party). The NSP was created in 1993, taking advantage of the constitutional flexibilization of electoral laws despite obtaining only 0.05 percent of votes in the first election it ran. In 2012, when the parliamentary coup against Lugo happened, NSP launched a Facebook page (with 56 followers) and, in 2016, organized a street protest. Even when its presence is rather spasmodic, its existence is not to be taken lightly.

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3 This assemblage includes the previously mentioned FEDAVIFA, Redecom, Generación Provida, Foro para el Diálogo Cívico, but also encompasses the Consumers Association of Paraguay (ASUCOP), Con Cara de Mujer (With a Woman’s Outlook), Rede Nacional de Mujeres (National Network of Women), the Fundación ISSOS para la Libertad y el Deesarrollo (ISSOS Foundation for Liberty and Development), the Renovación Carismática Católica (Catholic Charismatic Renovation), Padres en Acción (Parents in Action), Asociación de Iglesias Evangélicas de Paraguay (ASDIEP - Association of Evangelical Churches of Paraguay), Abogados Provida y Profamilia de Paraguay (Pro-Life and Pro-Family Lawyers of Paraguay), and Centro Thomas Morus de Estudios Políticos (St. Thomas Morus Center for Political Studies).

## STRATEGIES, TARGETS AND EFFECTS

The strategies used by anti-abortion and anti-gender formations include political resourcing to knowledgeable spokespersons, the infiltration of state entities through the creation of internal “pro-life” and “pro-family” groups, as well as lobbying activities in the legislative and executive branches of government. They also have easy access to the mainstream media and are very keen in digital technologies and social networks.

The resource they make to high-level political voices has been and continues to be frequent and very effective. This strategy began a long time ago with presidents who identified themselves as “pro-life”, as it was the case of Luis Ángel González Machi (1999-2003) who issued a decree establishing March 25th as the Day of the Unborn Child. Ten years later, Federico Franco (2012-2013) called himself “pro-life” and participated in anti-abortion marches. Horacio Cartes (2013-2018) spoke against LGBTTI rights on several occasions and Mario Abdo Benítez (2018-2023) publicly rejected “gender ideology” as a threat to the “traditional family”. The current cabinet comprises two ministers who are Evangelical leaders, well-known for their repudiation of gender, abortion and human rights.

Since 2015, when a “pro-life” and “pro-family” group was formed in the House of Representatives, members of Congress constantly make extensive use of anti-abortion, anti-gender and anti-rights discourses in their interventions with regard to legislative initiatives related to women’s and LGBTTI rights. At the sub-national level, mayors and municipal council members, who are religious neoconservatives, have declared their cities as “pro-life”. This happened in Ciudad del Este, Hernandarias, Filadelfia, Mariano Roque Alonso, San Lorenzo, Luque, Encarnación, Coronel Bogado and Carmen del Paraná. In Luque, Ñemby and the capital city, Asunción, statues of fetuses have been erected on squares to symbolize this new status.

These political actions have not been innocuous. Anti-abortion and anti-gender crusades halted the approval of laws aimed at protecting women's rights and eradicating discrimination and violence. In 2005, during the Nicanor Duarte Frutos administration, a law provision aimed at creating the National Program for the Prevention and Assistance of Victims of Punishable Acts Against Sexual Autonomy and Against Minors was not approved. This happened even if, in late 2004, the House had preliminarily approved the law by a wide majority, based on the favorable opinion of Congress Commissions. But various members of these commissions would later change their votes. The same dynamics happened when the Law for Sexual, Reproductive, Perinatal and Maternal Health was rejected. Lastly, in 2007, a broad platform of civil society organizations, after a long process of public debate, tabled in Congress a provision of a Law Against All Forms of Discrimination. But, in 2014 when it was finally taken to vote, it was rejected under the pressure of neoconservative forces.

Then, in 2010, outright opposition was made against comprehensive sexual education and gender perspective in public education curricula and, since then, laws and policies in this domain have been totally blocked. Anti-gender forces have also created insurmountable barriers to a gender perspective included in new legislation approved to ensure the comprehensive protection of women against all types of violence. Likewise, in October 2017, the Ministry of Education's Resolution N. 29664 prohibited the distribution and use of printed or digital materials having to do with the theory of "gender ideology" in educational institutions.

Feminist and sexual diversity activists and those who advocate for sexual and reproductive rights are also main targets of anti-abortion and anti-gender campaigns. And today, as already mentioned, human rights activists and left-wing politicians have also been subject to accusations that portray them as propagators of "gender ideology", "cultural Marxism" and "social destruction". These attacks range from digital aggressions, which sometimes transmute into death threats and even to more recent evidence of physical attacks against activists. In 2018, a case made headlines, a well-known feminist, who is the secretary of the Sindicato Paraguayo de Periodistas (SPP- Paraguayan Journalists' Union), received a digital death threat. Then, in 2019, unacceptable violence was perpetrated

against LGBTTI activists during a march organized in the city of Hernandarias. In this occasion, conservative religious leaders organized a “counter march” and, hiding behind a large sheet, assaulted the demonstrators brandishing crucifixes and shouting violent slogans.

## TO CONCLUDE

In Paraguay, the roots of anti-gender politics can be retraced back to the first anti-abortion organizations established in the 1980s. But the forces propelling it consolidated and became stronger during the first decade of the 2000s, when they managed to defeat some key legal reforms and public policy proposals. Having gained strength, in the 2010s they have further proliferated, with growing impact on laws, public policies and on society itself. Their initial targets were abortion, contraceptives and, more generically, sexual and reproductive rights. Later, they expanded towards “gender ideology” as an open frame that allows for attacking many topics at once: women’s sexual rights, gender and sexuality education, sexual orientation and gender identity (trans rights). The next step was to amplify their batteries now against human rights, as they have been framed in the 1940s, as well as multilateral institutions, in particular the Inter-American Human Rights System.

During the 1990s, these forces were mainly Catholic, but in the 2000s, an alliance was established with Evangelical fundamentalist churches and, in recent years, these anti-abortion and anti-gender formations also involve secular voices and organizations. Though very active nationally, these formations are flagrantly transnational. A parallel exists between the growth, proliferation, sophistication and the apparent larger financing of anti-gender groups in Paraguay and the right-wing shift observed in Latin America in the last ten years. The polarization created around abortion, gender, marriage equality or adoption by same-sex partners and gender identity rights has been conducive to social panic and encouraged accusatory discourses, especially against feminists. This wave decidedly constitutes one key element to more fully understand the erosion of democracy experienced in Paraguay but also neighboring countries.

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# THE CASE OF URUGUAY

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## CONTEXT

Since the early 2000s, Uruguay has stood out in Latin America as the country that achieved many significant gains in terms of the so-called new democratic rights agenda. In the realm of sexual and reproductive rights, Uruguay has adopted legal frameworks recognizing these rights as human rights and has made abortion under demand legal until the 12th week of pregnancy. It has also approved a same-sex marriage law and a gender identity legal frame that allows for social identity change and access to body modifications without any diagnostic requirements. Equitable public policies in education, health and social protection were also an integral part of the policy reforms propelled by the left-wing coalition Frente Amplio, that was in power between 2005 and 2019. Uruguayan conditions have also contributed to enable a strong regional consensus on the Cairo Program of Action, the Montevideo Consensus, adopted by the First Regional Conference on Population and Development in 2013 (CEPAL).

These gains were not exclusively state-led but resulted from steady political efforts performed by the feminist, youth and sexual diversity movements, and they have not been easily achieved. Rather, these groups claim efforts faced systematic opposition from neoconservative forces that more recently have coalesced around the crusade against “gender ideology”. These forces have been targeting for some time Uruguay as a regional “bad example” that needs to be corrected.

As elsewhere in the region, anti-gender formations, though heterogeneous, are led by neoconservative Christians, both Catholic and Evangelical. As analyzed by a wide range of authors, these forces have abandoned traditional religious rhetoric and doctrines and are now attacking gender, sexuality and abortion rights with pseudo-scientific arguments – extracted from biology and biomedicine – and human rights language. This semantics camouflages their anti-feminist, racist, homophobic and transphobic motivations. They also accuse feminist and sexual diversity movements to “colonize” national societies with insidious foreign ideas. In Uruguay, the main targets are sexual education, legal abortion and gender identity rights.

To grasp the recent growth and politicization of neoconservative religious forces in Uruguay, which enabled the eruption and propagation of anti-gender politics, they must be briefly placed against the country’s historical background. In Uruguay, education has been secular since the late 19th century. In 1919, the state was defined as secular and non-confessional, society itself is adherent to *laïcité* and secularity and the country has the lowest number of practicing faithful in Latin America: 41 percent are Catholic, 38 percent are atheist and agnostic, 13 percent are other religions and 8 percent are Evangelical (Latinobarómetro, 2014).

Even so, the state architecture is not entirely shielded from religious influences. This can be illustrated by the close connections between political parties and religious institutions, or, on the reverse, the constant religious influence on key political actors. The Partido Nacional (National Party) has historically represented the traditional Catholicism, especially in the country’s inland region. Now, it also shelters a large number of conservative Evangelicals. There are two other Catholic minority formations: the Unión Cívica (Civic Union) and the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party), which is a member of Frente Amplio since its conception in the 1970s. Lastly, Catholic and more recently Evangelical voices and agendas have also increasingly influenced the two other historical parties, the liberal Partido Colorado and the left-wing Frente Amplio itself.

Until quite recently, this influence was basically done through connections with parties’ leaders and lobby to influence legislative debates. One sharp illustration was

the presidential veto of the section on abortion rights of the Law for the Defense of Reproductive Health Law, then approved in 2008. This act of president Tabaré Vázquez, as it is widely known, was decided under the direct influence of the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup> Similar modalities are now used by conservative Evangelicals whose presence has expanded in the country since the 2000-2001 and that have strong connections with neighboring countries Argentina and Brazil.

However, in the 2010s, this indirect mode of operating would shift towards a more direct and substantive presence of religious voices and proposals in political arenas, despite barriers established by the Uruguayan political system to the creation of confessional parties. In the 2015 presidential elections, Juan Sartori, a wealthy businessman, launched its candidacy for president under the auspices of the Partido Nacional. Quite rapidly, though, he shifted towards a marginal position, defining himself as an outsider who “wanted to renew politics” and in doing so he got the open support of conservative Evangelical sectors, which allowed him to win a seat in the Senate.

Then, in March 2019, a new party named *Cabildo Abierto* (Open Chapter) was, quite unexpectedly, created by extreme-right forces, including reformed military actors who openly appraise the 1972-1984 dictatorship, as well as a number of neoconservative secular and religious voices engaged with the fight against “gender ideology”.<sup>2</sup> The new party grew surprisingly fast, getting 10.5 percent of the votes in the October elections and winning three seats in the Senate and eleven in the Chamber of Representatives. *Cabildo Abierto* joined the coalition of right and center parties opposing the *Frente Amplio*, which has elected the new president and is, since March 2020, ruling the country (BBC News Mundo, 2019).

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1 For more details, see Wood et al. (2016).

2 For more details on *Cabildo Abierto*, see its program published in the 2019 elections: <https://manini.uy/programa.pdf>

## ANTI-GENDER POLITICS: KEY MOMENTS OF CONDENSATION

The case study has identified few moments of epistemic and political relevance to analyze the eruption and consolidation of anti-gender politics in Uruguay. The first of these cycles runs between 2008 and 2014 having at its center the debates and tensions around the abortion legal reform. A second moment then began unfolding and lasted until 2017, when the last cycle started heading towards the political electoral shift of 2019.

### A FIRST CYCLE

One early image of the unpredictable presence of religious symbols in Uruguayan politics was registered in 2009. The Afro-Uruguayan spiritual leader, Mãe Susana Andrade, who is a member of one of the many Frente Amplio groupings – the Movimiento de Participación Popular led by José Mujica– entered the House of Representatives dressed in her religious garb.<sup>3</sup> A bit later, she openly voiced her opposition to the legalization of abortion. In the same period, members of Democracia Cristiana (Christian Democratic Party) were appointed to high posts in government. Hector Lescano, one of them, was the Minister of Tourism and supported Vázquez veto on the abortion reform. Subsequently, he would be appointed Ambassador to Argentina, while Andrés Roballo was appointed Secretary<sup>4</sup> to the Presidency of the Republic.

It was also in those years that Carlos Iafigliola, an Evangelical member of Partido Nacional, joined hands with Álvaro Dastugue, member of Iglesia Misión Vida (Evangelical

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3 Atabaque is a political grouping of African-based religion that Mãe Susana Andrade represents. There are other Afro groups that do not act engage with politics or understand themselves to be religiously (although ethnically) represented by this legislator.

4 Learn more about Juan Andrés Roballo at: <https://www.elobservador.ctheom.uy/nota/juan-andres-robalo-un-hombre-al-servicio-del-presidente-2017211500>

Life Mission Church),<sup>5</sup> and created the political initiative *Cristianos por Uruguay* (Christians for Uruguay) that inaugurated a trend towards the formation of a wider coalition of neoconservative religious politicians, whose influence systematically increase after 2017.

More poignantly, in this period, was the vicious reaction to the abortion law reform that was re-tabled and approved in 2012. During the parliamentary debates on the law reform and after its approval, this assemblage of forces attacked the new provision with all its energy. The above-mentioned parliamentarians, with other members of the *Partido Nacional*, as well as the more conservative members of *Partido Colorado*, linked up to civil society organizations and launched the platform known as *Coordinación por la Vida* (Coordination for Life).

During the debates that preceded the voting of the law, this new grouping systematically protested against its potential approval. After it was passed, in November 2012, the conservatives tried to get it revoked through a referendum and, significantly enough, this proposal had the support of all presidential candidates for the fore coming 2014 election, including Tabaré Vázquez, of *Frente Amplio*. Even so, on the consultation for the referendum, the proposal of having a plebiscite on the law was defeated by, reaching only against 8.8 percent of votes when 25 percent was the minimum necessary (teleSUR tv, 2013). This was a clear demonstration that the citizenry did not want the abortion law revoked, but these anti-abortion forces did not give up and filed a claim to the National Administrative Tribunal requesting the enlargement of rules regarding conscientious objection to institutions, which was granted.

Concurrently, the Catholic Church hierarchy began pressuring governmental authorities to have greater influence on public education. In result, Catholic schools were

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5 In 1995, Argentinean Pastor Jorge Márquez arrived in Uruguay from Buenos Aires (Argentina) to found this church with his business partner Pastor Giménez, but later they split, leaving Márquez with the control of *Iglesia Misión Vida* (Evangelical Life Mission Church), part of the Life Mission for the Nations monopoly in Montevideo, enabling him to establish lucrative relations.

included as potentially beneficiaries of a new law regulation on private sector funding to education (El País, 2017). It is paradoxical that this policy had been adopted under the administration of José Mujica, the admired leader of the Latin America left who, otherwise, sanctioned the abortion law reform, as well as same-sex marriage legislation and the legalization of marihuana use.

In 2014, a new presidential election would take place. By then, it was already clear that the connections between the neoconservative Evangelicals and the National Party had prospered. An agreement was made between Representative Verónica Alonso and Pastor Jorge Márquez concerning the electoral use of the infra-structure of his Misión Vida para las Naciones church and its Centros Beraca (Beraca Homes) for the “rehabilitation of drug addicts”. Through this agreement, business support and smart communication strategies members of this church would gain new seats in Parliament in the elections.

## A SECOND MOMENT OF CONDENSATION

By 2014, the presence and influence of neoconservative religious forces had also expanded among the poorest and most vulnerable of society. This was achieved through combined strategies: the implementation of social programs funded by the state, but outsourced to religious non-governmental organizations; the establishment of new churches in poor areas; programs of religious support to prison inmates; music festivals and political party events.

In June that year, the book of Geraldo Amarilla, another Evangelical parliamentarian, *Parlamento y Fé (Parliament and Faith)*, was published by the Asociación Cristiana Uruguaya de Profesionales de Salud (Uruguayan Christian Association of Health Professionals - ACUPS) in partnership with few Argentinian pastors.<sup>6</sup> In September, in the context of at Transformación Uruguay 2030, an Evangelical event aimed at looking into the country’s

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<sup>6</sup> These pastors have connections with Cynthia Hotton, the Argentinian anti-abortion parliamentarian.

future<sup>7</sup>, a session was held to discuss the consecration of Christians in politics in which a 15-year program for christianizing the country through actions implemented in education, economy, communication media, culture, church, family and politics was debated (El País, 2015).

The results of the elections (held in October that year) has shown that these religious neoconservative investments were well succeeded. Verónica Alonso (a Catholic converted to Judaism) was elected Senator, Gerardo Amarilla (Baptist), Álvaro Dastugue (neo-Pentecostal) and Benjamín Irazábal (Pentecostal) won seats as Representatives of the Partido Nacional and the Partido Colorado.<sup>8</sup> While these politicians denied linkages to religious agendas, in their campaign materials, some of them openly declared to be Evangelicals working closely with Catholic anti-abortion organizations.

Despite the opposition electoral gains, Tabaré Vázquez, representing Frente Amplio, was re-elected president to start his new mandate in 2015. In 2016, more glaring infringements of state secularity began to be noticed. In one episode, representatives of the Colorado Party requested the Minister of Defense to explain why a mass had been held in the National Army Headquarters and why an exclusive Catholic chapel had been re-opened (El Observador, 2018). A bit later, the Parliament received complaints about human rights violations of young people admitted for drug rehab in the Centros Beraca (Beraca Centers) run by pastor Marques and now funded by the Frente Amplio administration. The investigation was conducted by the Parliament Commission of Human Rights who concluded that violations had indeed occurred.

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7 Transformación *Uruguay2030* is part of a world program called Transform World, which replicated the same event in other Latin American Countries. Watch a promo video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcZe-gHY4So>; and see a report on the Uruguayan event at <http://www.ipcprayer.org/newsletter-archive/2014/IPC%20Connections%20Oct-2014.pdf> (p. 14-15).

8 Dastugue is the first neo-Pentecostal pastor in the history of the Uruguayan Parliament. At the end of the electoral period, including the 2015 local elections, between deputies, city councilors, officials, as well as public servants, there are 13 other fundamentalist evangelicals.

These two examples are brought here to show the complacency or erratic behavior of left-wing decision-makers with regard to the ever-increasing blurring of religion and politics in Uruguay. By and large, their positions in terms of protecting state secularism were sometimes excessively flexible, in other situations very confusing, and in some occasions highly contradictory. These ambivalences created favorable conditions for neoconservative religious forces to consolidate their alliance to restore “values” and re-Christianize Uruguayan society.

From 2016 onwards, groups of “citizens fighting for their rights” were formed to push for these goals using secularized discourses and arguments to conceal their religious origin and purpose. Some of these groups have adopted the transnational label *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* (Don’t Mess With My Children). Another group then created was *S.O.S. Papa* (S.O.S. Dad) for men who claim child custody in situations of intrafamily gender-based violence. These formations gradually shifted towards open attacks on “gender ideology”.

It is interesting to note that the enlargement of the anti-gender camp, originally cradled by Catholic institutions and actors, coincided in time with the disclosure and clamor around Catholic Church sexual abuses worldwide, but also in Uruguay. It is worth noting that the recently nominated Cardinal Sturla tried to minimize the reality and scale of the Uruguayan cases, insinuating that the claims made by adolescent victims would be related to peer homosexual practices and not to sexual abuses by priests. Despite the scandal and related loss of credibility, the Catholic Church has not relented its lobby efforts and speech acts aimed at influencing political elites and society at large, on matters relating to gender, sexuality and, most principally, the family and abortion rights.

## THE LAST STAGE OF CONDENSATION

The last phase began in January 2017 when the Argentinean authors Nicolás Márquez and Agustín Laje landed in Uruguay for the launching of their book, *El Libro Negro de la Nueva Izquierda* (The Black Book of the New Left) (2016). The event took place during a

Beraca Camp festival organized by Pastor Márquez's Life Mission Church.<sup>9</sup> The book was also launched in events called by a men's group named Varones Unidos (Men United). Laje and Márquez were extensively interviewed by local media and made a presentation in a Parliament auditorium. Organized by Partido Nacional's Representative Ricardo Goñi, the event was disguised as a debate on "responsible parenthood" (El País, 2018).

This visit has infused new levels of hostility against feminists, LGBTTI activists and human rights defenders, more broadly speaking. One example was the accusation made by these groups to incite fear, hate and discrimination that "gay lobby promotes zoophilia". Similar defamatory attacks were unleashed against feminist organizations that provide information on abortion rights and services and sexual diversity groups. In this context of intensification, the above mentioned representative Lafigliola requested to be nominated as the leader of his political group within Partido Nacional, in order to have parliamentary immunity and prevent him to be judicially indicted for deploying false accusations against health professionals and feminists working for the protection of abortion rights (De Los Santos, 2015).

Further infringements of existing secular norms guiding public health and education policies have also occurred. In the Department of Salto, a large number of doctors declared "conscientious objection" as to not provide unwanted pregnancy consultations and sign prescriptions for medical abortion. In the same Department, a group named Concerned Mothers of Young People was created to lecture against abortion in public schools. This program was denounced by students and, in result, a school director was fired (El Observador, 2017).

In addition to these more blatant infringements, more discrete infiltrations in state institutions are also to be mentioned, including in the judiciary. For example, Judge Pura

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9 A music concert with the participation of Christian bands from the region and an important number of young people in attendance, where evangelization workshop activities were included.

Concepción Book ordered a writ of protection for a man who contested the decision of her sexual partner to abort, claiming his right as the father of the embryo and the writ obstructed her Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy (VTP). The judge decision was grounded in her own vision, as a defender of the fetus, and not in what is legally established (NTN24, 2017). As the case made the news, anti-abortion groups seized the opportunity and made an appeal to the Higher Court requesting abortion be deemed unconstitutional. The case was, however, suspended, when the woman had a miscarriage.

At the same time, new conservative social organizations have proliferated, such as Varones Unidos (Men United),<sup>10</sup> Todo para nuestros niños (Everything for our Children)<sup>11</sup>, and Stop Abuso<sup>12</sup>, Movimiento de los Ciudadanos Orientales (Oriental Citizens Movement), Asociación Latinoamericana de Seguimiento y Estudio de la Ideología de Género (Latin American Association for the Monitoring and Studying Gender Ideology), Boomerang, Instituto Jurídico Cristiano (Christian Legal Institute), Foro Uruguayo de la Familia (Uruguayan Forum for the Family), amongst others.

Though these groups are not large or substantial, their proliferation projects the image of a large, wide and diverse movement. This converges with their communication strategies, described by Christian Rosas, founder of Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas, as a “measured terrorist approach on how to engage with digital networks” (Los Dioses Están Locos, 2018).

Then, in early 2018, a strong opposition was organized by anti-gender groups against a new gender identity provision aimed at ensuring the full protection of trans persons rights. These attacks persisted until October, when the law was finally approved and immediately promulgated. During the public and legislative debates, anti-gender

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<sup>10</sup> Learn more about Pablo Laurta at [www.varonesunidos.com](http://www.varonesunidos.com).

<sup>11</sup> Learn more at <https://www.elobservador.com.uy/nota/varones-movilizados-el-debate-de-genero-en-uruguay-tiene-a-los-masculinistas--201878500>

<sup>12</sup> See its Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Cause/Stop-Abuso-Uruguay-1722879371285884/>

forces argued that sex difference is ontologically based on the “natural order”. They also resorted to a plethora of pseudo-scientific literature to contest the distinction between biological sex and gender, as experienced by trans persons. They also argued that the law would infringe the constitutional premise of equality because it would grant unjustified “privileges” to a specific group of persons.

These arguments run against the reality of higher social and health vulnerability of trans persons<sup>13</sup>, which results from a long history of exclusion and discrimination. They also further nourished discrimination and hate, as shown by various cases of beatings and abuse of trans persons in public places that erupted under the effect of the neoconservative campaign against the law.

To summarize, despite their ferocity, these campaigns and attacks have not obstructed the approval of laws or achieved their revocation. But they did delay legislative processes, contaminated public debates, misappropriated ideas and language and created confusion in the public sphere through the propagation of fake news. Most importantly, perhaps, the neoconservative crusaders did not give up.

In 2019, regardless of their 2013 failed attempt to revoke the abortion law reform, they once again proposed a referendum to repeal the Gender Identity Law. They lost again, but this did not seem to matter, because the campaign for the referendum agitated their bases and opened up space in the media for their voices, exposing and making their leaders known as potential candidates in future electoral contentions.<sup>14</sup>

One indicator of how this works is that, after this campaign, the term “gender ideology” entered the ordinary vocabulary of politicians, the media and society at large. And, quite

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13 According to the First National Census of Trans Persons carried out in 2016 by the Ministry of Social Development, 73 percent of persons interviewed were under 40 years old.

14 Along this line, they made use of national TV and radio time ordered by the Executive Power as part of a campaign against the Trans Law. Watch at [https://youtu.be/u\\_06M9JOdaQ](https://youtu.be/u_06M9JOdaQ)

unfortunately, the term and the conspiracy thesis behind it have been appropriated by actors associated with the left, including journalists, who also began writing about how feminists had been pawns in the games played by imperialist forces.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, in November 2018, Uruguay hosted the II South American Regional Congress for Life and Family organized by Asociación Cristiana Uruguaya de Profesionales de Salud (Uruguayan Christian Association of Health Professionals - ACUPS) and the Iglesia Misión Vida de las Naciones (Life of the Nations Mission Church), amongst other organizations. It was held in the Maldonado Conference Center, in Punta del Este, and it managed to get the Ministry of Tourism label as an event of national interest. This label was withdrawn, however, when a number of civil society groups contested this recognition pointing towards the incoherence of granting symbolic support to an event that questioned an entire agenda of rights that the country had democratically adopted in the last thirty years.

The Congress gathered around 500 people, approximately half of whom were foreigners and the most renowned international spokespersons against “gender ideology” were present. Pastor Márquez was its host and national organizations had much voice in the debates. Press releases on the event portrayed speakers as leaders facing a war that can only be won if the “enemy” is defeated. The materials read and distributed also made clear that it is necessary to take over state institutions as to “re-Christianize” Latin America. The crowd gathered in Punta del Este defined as their main goals: “restoring traditional family values and the proper relationship between men and women, ensuring that conservative political forces gain control over states and apply an “iron fist” to fight insecurity and corruption”. The Congress can be read as the anteroom of the 2019 elections, when Uruguay became another country in the region governed by a coalition of political forces in which anti-abortion and anti-gender formations have a key place.

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15 See <http://varonesunidos.com/feministas/hoenir-sarthou-detras-del-feminismo-hay-grandes-sumas-de-dinero/> and Gerardo Sotelo defending Cardenal Sturla’s position on “gender ideology” at <https://www.elpais.com.uy/opinion/columnistas/gerardo-sotelo/rezo-vos.html>.

## TO CONCLUDE

Since the 2000s, neoconservative transnational and national forces have portrayed Uruguay as an “bad example” to be corrected because sequential cultural and legal gains had been achieved in relation to sexual and reproductive rights, including equal marriage and full recognition of trans persons rights (Miraquetemiro, 2018). It has, therefore, become a priority target in the long-term neo-conservative strategies designed to re-Christianize the region, as so explicitly outlined in the agenda of Latin American Congress for Life and Family held in Punta del Leste the end of 2018.

The secular features of Uruguayan state and society may eventually explain the relative weakness of neoconservative forces, when compared to what is seen in other countries. However, it was sufficient to prevent their growth, politicization and the gradual erosion of these very features. These forces began their trail by blocking legislative reforms and limiting their scope of their implementation to later on move towards the more ambitious goal of taking over state power.

The left, in power since 2005, has not paid enough attention to the risk implied in these trends. In order to guarantee governability and remain in power, it has bargained in various occasions with these forces and even given them high positions in state institutions. Sadly enough, Frente Amplio enabled the presence of explicitly religious and openly anti-abortion voices in its structure and Tabaré Vázquez, in his two presidential mandates, openly aligned himself with these formations.

It should be noted, however, that the José “Pepe” Mojica grouping within Frente Amplio has also made electoral agreements with voices representing these neoconservative sectors, including few anti-gender spokespersons. For example, Andrés Lima, now mayor of the Department of Salto, was elected in 2015 as a Frente Amplio candidate, even when he voted against the approval of the a more progressive version of the abortion law reform. Furthermore, he was never reprimanded by the Party for having been blessed in his office by an Evangelical pastor in 2018.

Additionally, as mentioned, neoconservative religious organizations are in charge of public funded policies in various social domains, suggesting perhaps that anti-abortion and anti-gender campaigns are indirectly subsidized with public funds. Besides the potential violation of secular principles that can be identified in the implementation of these social policies, this allows these organizations to gain prestige and a clientele among the population's most vulnerable sectors.

From 2017 onwards, far-right political and policy propositions that were unheard of in the country since the 1980s have resurfaced in the national political scenario, navigating this churn that comprises Evangelicals, charismatic and ultra-Catholics, ultra-neoliberal businesspeople, as well as military linked to the past dictatorship advocating doctrines of national security. Even though their agenda is decidedly broader, it has at its center the accusation that feminists and LGBTTI organizations are the main cause of the “crisis of values” that is destroying society today. Actors belonging to this formation also blame women for not fulfilling their duties as mothers because, in their view, this is at the origin of juvenile crime, drug use and other social evils. This trend is not at all singular as the regional drift towards the right that took form after the so-called Latin American pink wave, in particular the election of Bolsonaro in Brazil, has decidedly emboldened these forces.

This recent and drastic shift “towards the right” has exploded the settled perception that Uruguay was a “more than leftist” country. In the recent past, being perceived as someone on the right side of the spectrum was seen as an insult, as an accusation of being someone who is “refractory to change and progress” or else, someone privileged enough to disregard the agenda of equality and social justice (González, 1993). Today, being a right-wing person is increasingly viewed as morally correct, as being someone who preserves values and “undeniable truths”.

This subjective and cultural shift is what underlies the rise and ascent of an explicit ultra-right linked to anti-gender sectors, but that also advocates for the militarization of

society, drastic neoliberal policies, retrograde labor reforms, the reduction of public social spending. Their “iron fist” proposals against corruption and crime also imply a radical shift from the human rights culture established in the country after democratization towards a punitive logic of social regulation, which may extend to citizenship mobilization and social organization.

Uruguay is also a critical site to look more closely into the threats to *laïcité* and secularity. As seen, despite its longstanding secular rules and settled culture of *laïcité* and secularism, religious conservatism has penetrated the social fabric and state institutions. To better grasp how this came about, it is important to understand how neoconservative religious forces position themselves in relation to secularity. On the one hand, they defend secularism as the guarantee of freedom of religion, on the other, they often accuse non-confessional states of being anti-clerical and self-portray themselves as victims of anti-clericalism. Their interpretation of secularity claims that states must accept religious stances as social and legal arguments, because religious beliefs are as valid as other forms of reasoning, including secular juridical theory and science. This view fits into the contemporary “post-truth” climate in which “all opinions are valid” and evidence does not matter (Abellán, 2017). This hybrid discourses and maneuvers have impacted on academic and political debates, leading some actors to indeed begin considering the necessity to review the secular tenets of the Uruguayan state.

Despite the eruption, maturation and wider political effect of anti-abortion and anti-gender politics in Uruguay, these forces are being resisted. Their leaders are questioned and confronted. Their modes of operation have been denounced and contested not just by the groups that are their main targets -- such as the feminist and LGBTTI movements - but also by other voices located at different points of the political spectrum. Academic studies have proliferated disclosing their political premises and modes of operation. There has also been an important number of journalistic investigations on their practices, positions and transnational connections. Not less importantly, there are fractures within their camp as, for example, the fact that the Catholic Church did not support the referendum

aimed at repealing the Gender Identity Law and left the Evangelical sectors alone in this particular battle. These are tensions and contradictions to be looked at more closely.

In the transitional period, between the Frente Amplio government and the inauguration of the right-wing coalition currently in power, some of their more extreme voices have deployed virulent anti-LGBT discourses. The new president himself expressed his view on the abortion law, arguing it should be modified. However, the new administration began exactly when the COVID-19 pandemic sprouted, creating quite exceptional conditions, in which it is not so easy to assess if and how the more dogmatic and regressive neoconservative policy agenda will be implemented. Whatever direction this may take in the near future, close monitoring must be systematically carried out and great energy and preparedness to respond is now demanded from feminists, LGBTTI activists and, more broadly, of all political actors and organizations committed to human rights, freedom and equality and the containment of wider attacks against the Uruguayan democracy.

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# THE CASE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Mirta Moragas

Abridged by Luisana Alvarado

## ANTI-GENDER POLITICS AT PLAY IN THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The participation of anti-gender and anti-abortion groups in the General Assemblies of the Organization of the American States (OAS) began in 2013, when these groups made all efforts possible to obstruct the adoption of the Inter-American Convention Against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Related Forms of Intolerance. Their target was inclusive language concerning to non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. As to achieve their objective, an alliance was formed that comprised local and international anti-abortion organizations, such as Si a la Vida (Yes to Life)<sup>1</sup>, the Asociación Familia Importa (Family Matters Association)<sup>2</sup> and Human Life International<sup>3</sup>.

In 2013, the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala urged the host government to contest the recommendations of the Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention on Violence Against Women (MESECVI) and reject the convention under debate because it “promoted homosexuality” (Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, 2013). The bishops’ argument was that the recognition of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity would open the door to marriage of persons of the same sex and constitute a “violation of religious freedom”. Despite pressure, the Convention was approved and opened for signature by the states.

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1 To learn more, see the ‘About us’ section on Si A La Vida Guatemala website at <http://sialavidaguatemala.org/quienes-somos/>

2 To learn more, visit the Association website at <https://afiguatemala.com/>

3 To learn more, visit the HLI website at <https://www.hli.org/>

In 2014, at the General Assembly in Asuncion, Paraguay, the number of anti-gender and anti-abortion organizations was larger, including the Spanish NGO Hazte Oír and its digital branch CitizenGO (Losada, 2014).<sup>4</sup> These groups established a platform to defend “life and family” in the formal Assembly space that is open to civil society, to which LGBTTI and feminist organizations did not have access.<sup>5</sup> Alliance Defending Freedom (AdF) led these activities and Human Life International was once again present (Zenit, 2014). This conservative assemblage had the open support of Paraguay’s House of Representatives. Few days before the General Assembly, the House approved a declaration urging the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to “defend life and family” in the event (Hoy, 2014). In 2014, anti-gender arguments were already used by these forces when trying to obstruct the resolution on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity and Expression that, since when proposed by Brazil and other countries in 2008, had been approved every year by Assembly without any major controversies. Because of these pressures, footnotes proposed by the English-speaking Caribbean delegations were added to the text.<sup>6</sup>

In 2015, in Washington D.C., the Assembly was, for the first time, presided by Luis Almagro, whose appointment had been questioned by Alliance Defending Freedom (AdF), El Salvador’s Si a la Vida (Yes to Life), the Paraguayan Generación Provida (Pro-life Generation), and other groups because of his previous position in favor of sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTTI rights.<sup>7</sup> In this occasion, these forces tried to prevent all references to sexual and reproductive rights as well as to LGBTTI rights to be included in documents under discussion. The argument used was that “more urgent” issues should be discussed, such as the right to education, health, access to water, and, most principally, the “defense of democracy” in Venezuela and Cuba. This last topic was proposed by the Frente Joven de Argentina (Argentinean Youth Front).<sup>8</sup>

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4 See the list of participants at: <http://www.oas.org/consejo/sp/AG/AG44ordinaria.asp#Documentos>

5 Information disclosed in research interviews with feminist activists who tried to participate in June 2014.

6 Saint Vicent, Paraguay, Belice, Jamaica, Honduras, Saint Lucia, Panama, Guatemala, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Guyana.

7 Information disclosed in research interviews with feminist activists who tried to participate in June 2015.

8 Interview with an activist who participated in a discussion group in June 2015.

In 2016, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, much tension arose during the Assembly. Trans persons were attacked in a restroom that had been defined as gender neutral and lots of shouting and disorder jeopardized the open meeting with the Secretary General. On the streets, anti-gender and anti-abortion groups called a march against abortion and LGBTTI rights. An event was organized with delegates from several countries, including the Evangelical pastor and parliamentarian Fabricio Alvarado, who, in 2018, would win the first round of Costa Rica's presidential election.<sup>9</sup>

In 2017, the General Assembly was held in Mexico. In order to avoid tensions, the OAS headquarters changed the location from Mexico City to Cancún just two weeks before the event. This hindered the participation of civil society organizations, also troubled by changes in the working methodology of debates as new rules were defined requesting that self-managed coalitions would have just 5 minutes each to speak.<sup>10</sup> Ten of the twenty-four CSO speeches were made by anti-gender organizations who accused the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court of “extrapolating their mandate” when adopting recommendations and jurisprudence with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity.

The Hazte Oír “orange bus” that was travelling the Americas since March, also drove to Cancún. It was painted with the phrases “Dejen Los Niños En Paz” (Leave Children Alone) and “No Te Metas Con Mis Hijos” (Don't Mess With My Children).<sup>11</sup> In Cancún, due to security measures, the bus has not caught much attention, but before that, it did pass through Mexico City where the First Hemispheric Parliamentary Congress<sup>12</sup> was held, another event where the Inter-American Human Rights System was severely attacked. The

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9 To read more about Alvarado, see this series chapter on Costa Rica on page 92.

10 See the OAS guidelines for civil society participation in the 48th Assembly at <http://www.oas.org/es/48ag/docs/48AGOEA-Formato-Metodologia-Trabajo-Coaliciones-OSC-es.pdf>

11 Although this campaign was sponsored by CitizenGO, it should be noticed that the Don't Mess With My Children campaign was created in Peru at the end of 2016 in order to prevent gender perspective from being taught in schools as well as to hinder the policy of comprehensive sexual education. For the profile and origins of the organization, see Bedoya (2017).

12 To learn more, see the 'about us' section on the Parlamentarios website at <https://www.parlamentarios.org/quienes-somos/>

conference counted with the presence of Fabricio Alvarado (Costa Rica), Paola Holguín (Colombia) and José Antonio Kast (Chile) and its final declaration was signed by hundreds of representatives, even by Jair Bolsonaro, who is now President of Brazil.<sup>13</sup>

In 2018, the General Assembly was once again held at the OAS headquarters in Washington D.C.. The participation of churches, especially Evangelical, was quite substantial. They clustered around three coalitions,<sup>14</sup> whose main focus was the repudiation of “parents deprived of the right to raise their children”.<sup>15</sup> The discourse used by these voices was entirely secular, grounded on scientific and legal arguments, with no mention of religious morality or doctrine.

## STRATEGIC SECULARIZATION: THE COOPTATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS LANGUAGE

With the expansion of Evangelism and a larger number of people having no religious affiliation, Catholicism has lost its hegemony in Latin America, including in relation to matters of morality and sexuality. The average number of Catholics in Latin America has decreased to 69 percent. Evangelicals have increased to 19 percent and persons who have no affiliation have increased to 8 percent (Pérez, 2017, p. 54). This is the case even when, because of a long-standing tradition, a large number of politicians dialogues with and respects the views of the Catholic hierarchy. More significantly, however, is that, as noted by Juan Marco Vaggione (2005), during the last decade or so, both Catholics and Evangelicals have engaged with “strategic secularization”. They have adopted a secular rhetoric to challenge the rights agenda of feminists and LGBTTI activism, but without abandoning their dogmatic tenets (Vaggione, 2005 as cited in Peñas & Morán, 2015).

13 See the list of parliamentarians who signed the Mexico Declaration at <https://www.declaraciondemexico.com/firmantes/>

14 The three coalitions were the Iberoamerican Evangelical Congress, the Brazilian Coalition and the Education Base for Hemispheric Prosperity. These last two names were deliberate to prevent “detection” of their linkage to Evangelical coalitions. See Radio Aliento de Vida (2018).

15 See video with the speeches at: <http://congresoiberoamericanoporlavidaylafamilia.org/48-asamblea-oea/>

Their discourses and arguments are very different today from what they were in the past. One sharp example is the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church, signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger and published by the Holy See in 2004 (Ratzinger, 2004). Its sharp criticism of gender as a concept is not based on doctrines of faith, but rather on secular arguments. Similarly, when opposing the depenalization of abortion, religious voices do not rely any more on the argument of the sanctity of life from conception, but rather on the argument of the “absolute right” of the fetus, that would be, in their view, guaranteed by the Convention of the Rights of the Child (OHCHR) and in the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR). Also, the opposition to Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) is based on the argument that it violates “parental rights”.

Additionally, anti-abortion and anti-gender religious groups increasingly present themselves as civil society organizations in ways that conceal their origins and sources of financing. For example, the Peruvian Group of Concerned Parents that led to the campaign against the incorporation of gender in school curriculum was financed by Evangelical churches. Likewise, in Paraguay, the Foro de Diálogo Civil (Civil Dialogue Forum) presents itself as non-religious even when it has close ties with the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup>

In this transformed scenario, “gender ideology” functions as a “symbolic glue” -- to use the frame developed by Eastern European feminists -- to enable the coalescence of political fronts involving religious and non-religious actors (Grzebalska, Kováts & Petö, 2017). “Gender ideology” is portrayed by these voices as an evil agenda propagated by feminisms and LGBTTI activisms, who are viewed as their common enemies (Garbagnoli, 2018). This formula is a sort of umbrella under which issues not easily linkable, like abortion and same-sex marriage, get glued together.

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16 See profile at Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/forodedialogocivil/about/>

## METAMORPHIZING INTO NGOS<sup>17</sup>

The establishment of non-governmental organizations is another important element of the “strategic secularization” turn, as it makes possible for religious groups to participate in political arenas to which they would not have access to if presenting themselves as faith-based. The NGO model also allows for professionalization and articulation of diverse religious communities around a common objective.

For example, Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) has originated in the U.S. Evangelical camp but counts with conservative Catholics in their board and staff. Created in 1994, it offers legal advice to persons and groups advocating for the “sanctity of life, religious liberty and the defense of the family”.<sup>18</sup> At OAS Assemblies, ADF elaborates arguments used by governmental delegations against sexual and reproductive rights.<sup>19</sup> It also offers legal support to local Latin American NGOs, as in the case of the Dominican Republic, where they presented arguments before the Constitutional Court to hinder the decriminalization of abortion, and also in Paraguay, where they elaborated an opinion to the Court sustaining that the United Nations’ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is not binding.<sup>20</sup> The organization also invests significantly in training young lawyers from across the world through the Blackstone Legal Fellowship Program<sup>21</sup> and at the Arete Academy.<sup>22</sup>

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17 Vaggione (2005) proposes the term “NGOrgnization” to refer to the process used by religious organizations to formalize themselves as non-governmental organizations in order to present themselves as representatives of interests and discourses that transcend religion.

18 To learn more, see the ‘about us’ section on the Alliance Defending Freedom website at <https://www.adflegal.org/about-us>

19 For example, in the 2017 OAS General Assembly in Mexico, the Paraguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs that opposed the chapter on sexual orientation and gender identity in the Resolution on Human Rights received continual defense arguments and technical support from ADF.

20 Unpublished document circulated on social media.

21 To learn more, see Blackstone Legal Fellowship, see their website at <http://www.blackstonelegalfellowship.org/>

22 To learn more, see ADF’s section on their legal preparation program at <http://www.adflegal.org/training/law-school-prep-academy>

Another relevant network active at the OAS, whose headquarters are also in the U.S., is the previously mentioned Human Life International (HLI). It was founded in 1981 by Catholic priest Paul Marx and Shenan Bouquet is its current president. HLI trains “pro-life” leaders from all over the world to defend the “right to life” in their countries of origin. It is also the founder of C-Fam, an anti-abortion and now anti-gender NGO that since the 1990s operates in UN arenas. HLI has 17 country affiliates in Latin America.

The International Human Rights Group is another U.S. based Catholic group now engaged in anti-gender activities at the OAS. It has a long history of intervening in paradigmatic legal cases on reproductive rights in the Inter-American Human Rights System. Its past Executive Director, Gualberto García, went to Paraguay presenting himself as “an external consultant of the OAS”, gave press interviews on the famous Mainumby Case of a girl pregnant from rape, and defended the Paraguayan state denial of her right to abortion.<sup>23</sup> At present, Gualberto Garcia Jones is the Permanent Observer of the Holy See before the OAS.

Since 2014, the Spanish NGO Hazte Oír is another key actor at play in the OAS arena. It defines its mission to be “a productive participation [in the system] in favor of human life and dignity”. It has ties with Spanish Catholic *Integrismo* (Cornejo-Valle & Pichardo, 2018), with the legacies of Franco’s Falangismo, as well as with the Mexican ultra-right paramilitary group El Yunque (Garrido, 2014). In 2013, it launched its digital platform CitizenGO, responsible for mobilizing international campaigns against abortion and “gender ideology”.<sup>24</sup> In late 2016, they launched their orange bus against “gender ideology” that traveled across Spain before moving to the Americas. After being parked next door to the United Nations, in New York, during the March 2017 Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), it moved South, down to Mexico, Colombia

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23 The 10-year-old girl got pregnant after being sexually abused by her stepfather. The case was presented to the IACHR requesting precautionary measures to allow for an abortion on the grounds of risk to life. See <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2015/MC178-15-ES.pdf>

24 To learn more, visit CitizenGo’s website at <https://www.citizengo.org/es>

and Chile. In November that same year, CitizenGO carried out a massive digital campaign and the collection of 300 thousand signatures against philosopher Judith Butler’s visit to Brazil (SPW, 2017). This campaign and the protest it triggered was a flagrant precursor of the fierce attack on “gender ideology” that flared up during the 2018 campaign that elected Bolsonaro president of the country.<sup>25</sup>

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25 To read more about the episode, read this series chapter on Brazil on page 47.

## CON MIS HIJOS NO TE METAS: A LATIN AMERICAN INVENTION

According to Luis Yáñez, a researcher at Promsex, Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas (CMHNTM) was launched in 2016, in Peru, when the group published the Declaration of Lima, a document that “rejects gender ideology and defends the dignity of the family” in order to base its attack against the inclusion of a gender perspective in the National Curriculum of Basic Education. Christian Rosas, its founder and main spokesperson, called on Evangelical churches to fulfill their civil duty and prevent the state to infringe the “rights of parents”. In 2017, CMHNTM called marches in several provinces, in which 60 thousand persons participated. In November 2018, new marches were called in 74 Peruvian cities as well as in Bolivia, Argentina, and Uruguay. Concurrently, a group self-named as Padres en Acción (Parents in Action) filed a lawsuit against the Ministry of Education in the Supreme Court arguing the gender curriculum was unconstitutional.

CMHNTM has close ties with Alianza Cristiana y Misionária (Christian and Missionary Alliance),<sup>26</sup> in which Christian Rosas’ father is a pastor. The campaign is also linked to the Worldwide Missionary Movement (WMM)<sup>27</sup> that is active in more than 60 countries, to the Assemblies of God and the Agua Viva Christian Community (CCAV) and the Casa del Padre (House of the Father). It also links up with various Catholic platforms: the Coordinación Nacional Profamilia (CONAPFAM- National Pro-family Coordination), the Movimiento Nacional Pro Valores (National Pro-Values Movement), the Ministério Vamos Salvar las Família (Let’s Save the Family Ministry), and the Red Nacional de Abogados en Defensa de la Família (RENAFAM - National Network of Lawyers for the Defense of the Family)

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26 To learn more, visit Alianza Cristiana y Misionária’s website at <http://www.iacymperu.org>

27 To learn more, visit Worldwide Missionary Movement’s website at <http://pe.mmmoficial.org/>

## EVANGELICAL COALITIONS

At the 2018 Assembly, in Washington D.C., as to prevent the tensions experienced in previous assemblies, especially in Cancun, Mexico, in 2017, the OAS entirely altered the working rules for the participation of civil society. The new rules of self-managed coalitions became definitive and enlarged the space for anti-gender organizations. Then, the Evangelical churches formed three coalitions: the Ibero-American Evangelical Congress with its Argentinean leader, Pastor Hugo Márquez, and the Brazilian Coalition, represented by Pastor Glaucio Coraiola, whose guidelines are bluntly religious and have openly attacked “gender ideology” as an instrument to “destroy the family” and promote “a disaster for the development of nations”.

## WOMEN IN ANTI-GENDER FORMATIONS

Women have a leading role in anti-gender and anti-abortion groups. These feminine voices argue that feminism does not represent all women. In 2017, during the OAS General Assembly in Mexico, the Women, Health and Development Coalition, represented by the organization Construye, Observatorio para la Mujer (Build, an Observatory for Women),<sup>28</sup> declared that “gender makes women invisible” and entirely sidelines the “true essence of women”. At that same Assembly, another coalition named For the Safety of Women, represented by the organization Corazón Puro (Pure Heart),<sup>29</sup> lumped together pornography, human trafficking and comprehensive sexual education as a threat to women’s safety.

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28 Construye is a Mexican organization that coordinates the “Be Human” initiative that meets annually and selects young women to train them before the UN’s Commission on the Social and Legal Status of Women meets in order to block the advance of language related to sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality.

29 See Corazón Puro’s website at <http://clicconcorazonpuro.com/>

## YOUTH ANTI-GENDER ORGANIZATIONS

The anti-gender and anti-abortion groups have also recruited young people across the region to advocate for the defense of “right to life and the family”. They use a totally renewed strategy of proselytism and a highly modern aesthetics of mobilizing. One of these organizations is the Frente Joven (Youth Front) devoted to training young people on these matters, at national and international levels. Its headquarters are in Buenos Aires, Argentina, but it has branches in Ecuador, Peru and Paraguay. One emblematic project of the Youth Front is the program known as “Defensores de Madres” (Mothers ‘defenders’)<sup>30</sup> that offers women, especially young, “alternatives” to abortion. It participated in the platform that contributed to the ICHR strategic plan and, in that process, claimed that the Inter-American System should be solely concerned with real problems such as education and health and abandon the so-called “new rights” agenda.

In 2017, the VII Pro-Life International Congress was held in Guatemala. It was organized by the Family Matters Association<sup>31</sup> and counted with 1,200 participants from 15 American countries as well as participants from Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain<sup>32</sup> most of whom were youngsters. Jimmy Morales, the current President of Guatemala, has also participated and declared his opposition to abortion (Government of Guatemala, 2016). That same year the Third Pan-American Youth Forum met in Peru, sponsored by the German Hans Seidel Foundation<sup>33</sup>, bringing together 50 young leaders engaged in promoting the defense of the right to life. The Forum dealt with human rights, health and maternal mortality, children, adolescents and family. The resulting document criticized the provision of contraceptive methods for young people and teenagers (Frente Joven, 2017).

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30 See Defensores de Mamás’ website at <https://www.defensoresdemamas.org/>

31 See Asociación La Familia Importa’s website at <https://afiguatemala.com/>

32 See Sahuquillo (2012).

33 The Hans Seidel Foundation is one of five German foundations connected to political parties, more specifically with Christian Social Union (CSU), the conservative Christian party of Bavaria that is a member of the European Popular Party.

## DISCOURSES, ARGUMENTS, REPERTOIRES

In addition to resorting to secular arguments, such as human rights language and premises, anti-gender groups also make resource to scientific jargon. Anti-gender discourses about sexuality are grounded on bio-natural “truths” (Morán Faúndes & Vaggione, 2012), affirming, for example, that sexual relations for non-reproductive purposes is “anti-natural”. They also cite research evidences with no consistent scientific grounds, as illustrated by the thesis that condoms are porous and, therefore, do not protect against HIV infections (Giorgione, 2005). This “scientific” jargon allows anti-gender actors to present themselves as the voicers of rational and objective views in contrast with the positions claimed by feminists and LGTTBI activists portrayed as “ideologized”.

## CONSTITUTIVE ELEMENTS OF ANTI-GENDER POLITICS

### “GENDER IDEOLOGY”

The attack on “gender” began in the 1990s when the Vatican and its allies reacted to the concept legitimization during UN’s inter-governmental negotiations. Subsequently, the specter of “gender ideology” matured in both secular and clerical writings and was increasingly used to trigger waves of moral panic,<sup>34</sup> especially in those contexts affected by social/economic crisis and other conditions of fear and uncertainty. By attacking “gender ideology”, conservative and right-wing forces incite the anxieties of people in face of the future of their families and especially their children. The remedy religious conservative forces offer to these persons, as to overcome these fears, is an imaginary of safety centered on the traditional family, the nation and religious values. In contrast, secularism and individual freedom, according to anti-gender voices, are inherently destructive.

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34 There is no specific definition of the concept of “moral panic,” except that it is a polysemic term. In *Folk Devils and Moral Panic* (1972), Cohen attempts to define what “moral panic” is, so to briefly state his ideas, it is an episode or moment or condition, either individual or group, that arises unexpectedly as a latent threat to certain group interests or social values (Murillo Garza, 2017). Additionally, Lancaster says that moral panic is manifested in the mass responses of governments and civil actors when confronted by false, exaggerated or poorly defined moral dangers that hover over society (Rodríguez, 2017, p. 138).

## THE FAMILY

Anti-gender constructs regarding the family are based on few main tenets. The first is that the family is formed only by a man and a woman (Zenit Staff, 2009). The second is that this traditional family formation is the solution for all social problems, including political corruption<sup>35</sup> and sustainable development. Conciliation between family and work is not to be questioned in what concerns gender roles and the sexual division of labor, but rather it is a structure to be preserved<sup>36</sup> in order to “protect the family”. Parents are the primary educators of their children and, consequently, the state is not to be involved with their education beyond certain limits, in particular it must not provide sexual education.

## HUMAN RIGHTS

The human rights arguments used by anti-abortion and anti-gender actors are limited, restrictive and usually grounded on literal analyses of agreements and conventions, such as the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights (known as the Pact of San Jose). This reading precludes jurisprudential interpretation and rejects the legality of the gradual and incremental enlargement of human rights done by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and similar bodies.<sup>37</sup> One sharp illustration is the new jurisprudence on same-sex marriage and gender identity as enshrined in the Advisory Opinion AO-24/17, issued by the Court in 2017, that is now being openly attacked by these forces that consider it to be over-reaching.

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35 During the 2018 Summit of the Americas, Peru said that the family is the basis for the solution of the problem of corruption. See [http://www.summit-americas.org/Social\\_Actors\\_2018/intervencion\\_coal\\_es.doc](http://www.summit-americas.org/Social_Actors_2018/intervencion_coal_es.doc).

36 This proposal is based on a shift toward an up-dated version of the man-woman complementarity that recognizes the remuneration of women, the demand for equal pay, support systems for maternity and a work-family conciliation. A summary of this would be a speech by Damares Alves, Minister of Woman, Family and Human Rights in Bolsonaro’s Administration in Brazil given at the CSW (Commission on the Status of Women): “We act in favor of pregnant women and in favor of mothers, that they do not be penalized after returning to their professional activities. We recognize that public policies, like parental leave and access to high-quality day care, are necessary in order to promote the recruitment, remuneration and promotion of young women, allowing women who have children to negotiate equal pay for equal work.”

37 Case of Artavia Murillo (in vitro fertilization) vs. Costa Rica. Merits, Regulations and Costs. Sentence on November 28, 2012, Paragraph 264.

Anti-gender groups have used these “excesses” to justify the call for de-funding the Inter-American Human Rights System, a proposal well received by a number of countries, as for example, the United States, who, in 2019, announced a reduction of financing for the OAS because it was “promoting abortion” (Rioja Virtual, 2019). Along the same line, in April 2019, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Paraguay sent a letter to the Executive Secretary of the IACHR asserting that it should respect the principle of subsidiarity, the sovereign autonomy of states, the right to defense and legal processes, and the margin of appreciation of states in relation to the Commission’s and the Court’s recommendations and decisions (Ministry of Foreign Relations of Paraguay, 2019).

## LGBTTI RIGHTS

Anti-gender groups claim that the rights of LGBTTI persons are “new” rights that were not contemplated in any legal and binding international human rights instrument, including those of the IAHRs.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, these “new” rights have no equivalence to other rights, such as those related to access to water or education, or much less yet in what concerns the democratic deficits in Venezuela and Cuba.<sup>39</sup> This supposed lack of legitimacy is used to prevent topics related to LGBTTI rights from being discussed in civil society forums and official debates of the OAS General Assembly.

## WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Anti-gender groups claim to be the “true defenders” of women.<sup>40</sup> They declare that maternal mortality is not contributed by unsafe abortion practices, but rather to structural

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38 Amicus Curiae document presented by ADF in the Karen Atala and daughters vs. Chile case.

39 Arguments presented by the Youth Front in the human rights round table at the 2015 OAS General Assembly. Interview with an activist who participated in the round table in June 2015.

40 See the Coalition’s declaration “Por la Seguridad de la mujer” (For Women’s Safety) in the 2018 OAS General Assembly at [http://scm.oas.org/doc\\_public/SPANISH/HIST\\_18/AG07607S03.doc](http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/SPANISH/HIST_18/AG07607S03.doc)

bad conditions of health systems.<sup>41</sup> They also depict abortion as a form of violence against women and domestic violence as an effect of the blurring of male and female “natural roles”.<sup>42</sup>

## NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

Conservative religious actors and their state allies systematically insist on the premise that national sovereignty always has primacy over the rulings, urgent measures and “interpretations” of both the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and Court. This view also applies to other bodies such as the MESECVI.<sup>43</sup>

## RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Anti-gender crusaders have created a narrative in which a false dichotomy is established between the guarantee of sexual and reproductive rights, on one hand, and the protection of religious freedom, on the other. This creates barriers for the application of norms to limit and sanction hate speech or even episodes of direct violence against women and LGBTTI persons deriving from extreme religious views and doctrines.

## NATURAL ORDER

Anti-gender politics is fundamentally centered on the unshakable conviction that sexual dimorphism, gender roles and the hetero-procreative family pertain to an

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41 Cristian Rosas presentation at the 2018 OAS General Assembly: <http://www.oas.org/es/48ag/>; World Youth Alliance “Declaration on Maternal Health”: <https://www.wya.net/publications/declarations/maternalhealth/>

42 See the Coalition’s declaration, “Por la Seguridad de la mujer”(For Women’s Safety) in the 2018 OAS General Assembly: [http://scm.oas.org/doc\\_public/SPANISH/HIST\\_18/AG07607S03.doc](http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/SPANISH/HIST_18/AG07607S03.doc)

43 With regard to the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), it was proposed that the development of standards having to do with reproductive and abortion rights is an overreach of the Mechanism. See the Coalition’s declaration “Human Rights and Fundamental Liberties in America”: [http://scm.oas.org/doc\\_public/SPANISH/HIST\\_18/AG07607S03.doc](http://scm.oas.org/doc_public/SPANISH/HIST_18/AG07607S03.doc)

unchangeable natural order. All theories and discourses that contest this order are mere “ideologies”.

## “TOTALITARIAN MINORITIES”

Anti-gender voices also use the argument that the rights of the “majority” are now threatened by the “ideological imposition” of a “minority” claiming the right to abortion, to diverse families and to more flexible concepts of sex and gender (Calderón, 2018).

## REPERTOIRES

One new modality of mobilizing used by these crusades is to create slogans and icons that are shared transnationally<sup>44</sup> and replicated at local levels. One typical example is Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas, the campaign created in Peru and then replicated in Argentina,<sup>45</sup> Chile<sup>46</sup>, Ecuador, Paraguay<sup>47</sup>, Mexico and Uruguay. The Hazte Oír orange bus travelling from Spain to the U.S .and from there to Cancun (Mexico), on to Chile and finally to Nairobi (Kenya) is another illustration. Another shared icon of the anti-gender and anti-abortion mobilizations are the plastic fetus taken to street marches and legislative debates. Finally, in 2018, the abortion reform debate in Argentina triggered the invention of a new conservative slogan “Let’s Save Both Lives” and of a celestial blue scarf -- used to contrast with the green scarf of the pro- abortion rights campaign -- which is now also used at OAS Assemblies.<sup>48</sup>

44 See the complete series at <https://sxpolitics.org/GPAL/>

45 Facebook profile: Con mis hijos no te metas - Argentina. See: <https://www.facebook.com/Con-Mis-Hijos-No-Te-Metas-Rca-Argentina-Oficial--171606170226960/>

46 Facebook profile: Con mis hijos no te metas - Chile. See: <https://www.facebook.com/conmishijosnotemetascl/>

47 Facebook profile: Con mis hijos no te metas - Paraguay. See <https://www.facebook.com/Con-Mis-Hijos-No-Te-Metas-Paraguay-870733803067493/>

48 During the interventions of the anti-gender coalitions in the 2018 OAS General Assembly, the blue scarf could be seen behind the speaker’s podium.

## CONCLUSIONS

As shown by the national studies carried out by the Gender & Politics in Latin America project (G&PAL), a strong synergy exists between anti-gender and anti-abortion actors and discourses, whose presence and activities have been examined in this chapter in the context of the OAS General Assemblies. The nine countries' case studies show how, in the last decade, these forces have escalated their offensive to block or make regressions in rights and public policies gains in the realms of sex education, of the recognition of different forms of family, same-sex marriage, the right of adoption by same-sex couples and the right to abortion.

The studies also strikingly demonstrate that is critically urgent to map out and understand the discursive and strategic turn these actors and organizations have made, since the early 2000s, as to ensure that movements engaged with the advocacy for the promotion and protection of sexual and reproductive rights are able to pre-empt and contain their actions with effective responses. The national case studies of Colombia, Ecuador, and Uruguay developed within the framework of the G&PAL Project, have explored this dimension and offer some clues in that regard that, however, need to be further elaborated as to better ground sustainable and long-term responses to anti-gender and anti-abortion offensives here analyzed.<sup>49</sup>

These trends and dynamics must be placed within the COVID-19 pandemic scenario that drastically affected societies, health, care and human rights worldwide. In Latin America, in particular, the pandemic has, among other dramatic effects, disclosed the frailties of public health policies and structures and the huge gaps in social protection and policies of care. Furthermore, it revealed and accentuated pre-existing biases of state policies that usually address matters of sexuality and reproduction from entrenched

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49 See this whole series at <https://sxpolitics.org/GPAL>

gender binary and hetero-centric standpoints, which inevitably lead to the infringement of rights. This can be, for example, illustrated for example, by the gender segregation rules adopted to restrict the circulation and agglomeration of people in Panama, Peru and few Colombian cities that resulted in the flagrant deprivation of rights of trans persons (Corrêa, 2020).

The pandemic and the global crisis are far from over. Anti-gender groups have used these as an opportunity to continue to pressure for the denial of rights linked to sexuality and reproduction. Not less importantly, the 2020 OAS General Assembly was held virtually, and this is likely to imply further restrictions and constrains for the participation of civil society organizations, in particular those working for the promotion and protection of rights in these contested domains.

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