

## Sexual Politics in Times of Pandemic: August-October 2021



# COVID-19 SPECIAL



SEXUALITY  
POLICY  
WATCH

### Opening Remarks

Since July, when we published our last [Special Edition](#), as you will see in this issue, a lot has happened in the pandemic and in the field of sexual politics. Once again, the pages that follow are quite dense, but we remind you that the sections are relatively autonomous and can be read separately. For ease of reading, we are now also making available this PDF version of our analysis.

In this issue we are delighted to have three exceptional collaborations. The first is an exclusive [interview with political scientist Massimo Prearo](#) about the Vatican's anti-gender policy, examined from the point of view of the legislative debate in Italy that stalled the processing of the Zan Law against hate crimes, sending it back to its initial stages. Sociologist Codou Bop brings us a [brief account of the gender impacts of the pandemic in Senegal](#). And we have the pleasure to republish an [article by Françoise Girard](#), on the threats to abortion rights in the US (originally published in *Ms Magazine*). We are grateful for the generosity of our partners.

Enjoy your reading!

SPW Team (Sonia Corrêa, Fábio Grotz, and Nana Soares)

---

## The State of the Pandemic

As we have predicted in our previous issues, the pandemic of COVID-19 is not going to recede any time soon. After five million deaths, [its syndemic character](#) is more than evident. There are new outbreaks in countries where the pandemic seemed under control, such as [Holland](#), [Germany](#), [Russia](#), [Hungary](#), [Vietnam](#), and even China, with a [new outbreak in Wuhan and other locations](#). Even governments that had an exceptional response, such as New Zealand, have already [given up the "zero Covid"](#) strategy to adopt policies of "living with the virus" and contain situations far outside "normality".

Fortunately, the advance of vaccination has kept the virus under control, at least in relation to its severity, so that several countries are partially or totally relaxing the exceptional measures. At the time of this review, only [two countries have not started their vaccination campaigns](#): North Korea and Eritrea. Where sufficient vaccines are available, lockdowns now give way to measures of persuasion or even coercion, to a greater or lesser degree, of people who have decided not to get vaccinated, with states and private companies demanding vaccination certificates (see [South Africa](#), [Zimbabwe](#), [Brazil](#), [US](#), [Italy](#)). But globally, access to vaccines remains shamefully unequal – which, in the medium term, compromises the effectiveness of vaccination because, according to a [study published in Science](#), it favors the emergence of new strains resistant to currently available vaccine technologies.

Moreover, the impacts of COVID-19 are only now beginning to be consistently investigated based on class, race, ethnicity, age, and geographic location differentials. In Brazil, an [article published](#) by the magazine *Piauí*, based on a study by the Solidarity Research Network, shows how [lethality by COVID-19](#) is distributed across the different sectors of the labor market, revealing, above all, that in all of them being black or being a woman is always a factor of greater risk.

Finally, [biomedical evidence](#) is starting to become available about the effects of the pandemic in terms of long-term morbidity, some of which are severe, such as reduced lung capacity, sleep apnea and pulmonary fibrosis, arrhythmias, and myocarditis. These morbidities are another way in which the pandemic will stay with us for a long time.

---

## Vaccine hesitancy: patterns and effects

For the first time since 2020, Latin America is no longer the epicenter of the pandemic. There are new outbreaks in countries where the crisis seemed contained, such as [Vietnam](#), which had been controlling new cases and deaths very well. But the same is true in the US, where in September there were again [2,000 deaths per day](#), and also in [Russia](#), which has the worst numbers since the beginning of the pandemic. In both cases, the outbreaks can be explained by high rates of vaccine hesitancy.

In Russia, only a third of the population has been vaccinated, and the official statistics are criticized by scientists, who [accuse the government of underreporting the national data](#). Anti-vaccine misinformation is so widespread that YouTube, in announcing the [banning of all available anti-vaccine content](#) on the platform, affected two state-owned channels – causing Putin's government to [threaten to block YouTube in the country](#). In the US, [religious arguments against the vaccine](#), the wearing of masks, and attacks on health care workers are multiplying. An [article in the NY Times](#) analyzes this unusual scenario of rejection of public health measures in the country that has the most deaths from COVID-19, more than 700,000.

But, as [DW's video report shows](#), the anti-vaccine movement is worldwide and is becoming more radical – from [Jamaica](#) to European countries, especially in [Eastern Europe](#), where a new outbreak is underway. Protests in [Australia](#) and [Slovenia](#) have been contained by police, and in Italy, [extreme right-wing leaders have been arrested at demonstrations](#). France is another emblematic case, as people who repudiate the so-called "vaccine passports" have [organized successive protests](#) that, repeating a pattern seen since 2020, are endorsed [by both the right and the left](#). To encourage vaccination, the government has suspended [free testing](#) of detection of COVID-19. According to [Philippe Marlière, in an article for Open Democracy](#), the French response to the pandemic was not exactly exemplary and the "vaccine passport" policy had many problems. But, according to the author, by converging with the right in resisting the vaccine, the left legitimizes conspiracy and extremist discourses.

Moreover, the progressive aesthetic repertoire and vocabulary have been appropriated by the antivaccine movements. In Colombia, as had already happened in the US in 2020, these groups have used the [feminist slogan "my body, my choice"](#). And in September, simultaneously in the [US](#) and in [Brazil](#), people who define themselves as "transvaccinated" have appeared in anti vaccine protests and other mobilizations, such as

---

the marches in support of Bolsonaro on September 7. When the term is searched for on Google, what comes up are sales sites whose advertising suggests that their products are jokes, memes, mere sarcasm. However, this wave is not neutral, having two very well-defined political goals: to promote the refusal of the vaccine and the repudiation of transgenderism, because the slogan "I feel vaccinated" clearly seeks to disqualify the psychic-corporal experience of gender identity.

Finally, in Brazil, despite wide popular acceptance of vaccination, the repudiation of immunization continued to be openly promoted by Bolsonaro and his supporters. On October 21, the president shamelessly said in a live stream that those who had taken both doses of the vaccine may have contracted the HIV virus. This statement provoked a wide political and social backlash and [Bolsonaro was suspended from YouTube for a week \(learn more about the repercussion here\)](#). The same punishment was applied to Bolsonaro channels that republished it after the suspension.

## **The abyss of vaccine inequality**

Only a minority of countries have met the vaccination goal set by the WHO as of September 2021, and there is a [brutal inequality depending on the region](#). In Latin America, [4 out of 10 inhabitants were fully vaccinated](#) – far from ideal, but far ahead of the meager [4% of the population in Africa who were fully immunized](#) in the same period. At the same time, scientific evidence and [pharmaceutical industry lobbying](#) made booster shots a reality in much of the world. In Europe, while older people received the booster, [4 million undocumented immigrants were still unable to receive their first doses](#).

But above all, we must mention the resounding failure of vaccine distribution initiatives for low-and middle-income countries. The asymmetries were such that, as [reported by Reuters](#), the United Kingdom received more doses via international mechanisms than Botswana. An excellent [report by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism](#) examines the obstacles faced by the COVAX mechanism created to overcome these inequalities. The absence of greater investment from the United States was certainly one of them, but there was also a lack of analysis of the risks and how to mitigate them. For example, it was not even considered that distribution could be interrupted if India, a major supplier of inputs, prioritized domestic demand. The initial goal of COVAX was to distribute 2 billion doses by September 2021, but it achieved only about 330 million, representing a mere 5% of the doses administered worldwide.

---

This vaccine gap was the subject of debate at the G-20 meeting in Rome, which was taking place as this report was being finalized. The group's heads of state set a goal of 70% of the world's population vaccinated by July 2022 and created a Health Financing Task Force whose priority will be to ensure that the goal is met.

The meeting also called for the voluntary transfer of mRNA technology to speed up the production of more effective vaccines. [According to Reuters](#), this proposal tends to freeze the debate on the suspension (waiver) of intellectual property rights, originally promoted by South Africa and India and now supported by the Biden administration. As has been pointed out by researchers and activists, such as the [Feminist Campaign for Vaccines](#), a waiver would not only ensure a better global response to COVID-19 but would also contribute to eliminating economic and technological discrepancies between North and South. Since 2020, from the point of view of the ongoing vaccine geopolitical dynamics ([read the compilation of the first year of the pandemic here](#)), it is interesting to note that in Rome, China's President Xi Jinping included the adoption of the waiver in his list of eight priorities, contrasting with the reluctance of most Western leaders to accept the easing.

## Gender differentials in access to vaccines

As we highlighted in the last issue of this newsletter, just as there are important discrepancies in the number of cases and mortality when considering differentials determined by race, ethnicity, income, and place of residence, there are also very significant gender differences in vaccine coverage. This is one of the reasons why [access to vaccines is also a feminist subject](#), and this why we strongly recommend the [podcast series produced by DAWN Network](#).

Today, when in most countries immunization campaigns are moving forward, gender disparities are more evident. The reasons are misinformation about the vaccine, especially rumors about negative effects on fertility ([which were a major problem in The Gambia](#)), the fact that women and girls need permission from husbands and fathers to get vaccinated, and, in many cases, the lack of prioritization of women in immunization plans. In [South Sudan, Gabon, and Somalia](#), campaigns have just begun, but women make up less than 30% of those vaccinated. Similarly, in India, which has administered more than a billion doses, only [37% of those have been given to women](#). It is important to highlight these disparities which will not disappear even when the vaccination gap

---

between rich, middle-income, and low-income countries is closed, because they are determined by cultural gender norms that are not transformed overnight.

Mass vaccination has also led to exploding reports of changes in menstrual cycles following vaccination. While this is a common effect with other immunizations, they were simply ignored in the studies that developed the COVID-19 vaccines, as this report in [Al Jazeera details](#). Only now, [7 billion doses later, the first working groups](#) are being set up to explore this relationship.

## **Gender impacts of the pandemic, including on sexual and reproductive health and rights**

Beyond vaccine gaps between men and women, after almost two years since the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in China, it is possible to take stock of the pandemic's gender impacts in a broader sense.

Since 2020, [studies and press reports](#) have warned of an increase in gender violence due to the effect of quarantines. Today more consistent indicators are available showing that the so-called "silent epidemic" has been really extensive. In the [US, cases of domestic violence increased by 8.1%](#); in [Europe](#), as lockdowns were relaxed, murders of women increased – a manifestation of the "loss of control" at the end of confinement, according to activists. In [Cameroon and Uganda](#), a third of women/girls experienced violence during confinement, and other countries on the [African continent](#), such as Tunisia and Cape Verde, have launched helplines for women in this situation. The effects were also dramatic in Senegal, as sociologist and activist Codou Bop [reported in an exclusive article \(In French\)](#). In [Asia](#), it was possible to observe that under quarantine the reports of violence caused by current partners or family members increased, while those of ex-partners decreased. Also, in Latin America, one of the impacts of the pandemic was a [blackout in the records](#) of cases of femicide. The numbers dropped from 5400 to 1445, according to the Latin American Map of Femicide.

The pandemic also halted the [progress of the past 25 years](#) in combating child marriage, as can be seen in the [COVID-19 and Child Marriage report](#), with alarming prevalence in sub-Saharan African countries such as Zimbabwe and Ghana. And its effects have been devastating with regard to sexual and reproductive rights. The UN estimates that [14 million women no longer have access](#) to contraception or support services for victims of violence, and there is no way to properly assess the impacts of

---

school suspensions in terms of exposing even more girls and adolescents to the risks of sexual violence. In Peru alone, the [pandemic has rolled back advances from the previous five years](#), with 15,000 pregnancies of girls recorded.

Above all, the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on maternal death indicators. Even though the numbers are very unequal around the world (the global average is 211 deaths per 100,000 live births, but reaches 415 in poor countries and an impressive 1,100 in Chad and South Sudan, while it does not exceed 4 and 8 in Portugal and Spain), the gravity of the situation has led the WHO to launch [new goals and milestones to be met by 2025](#). In the case of Latin America, the [CLACAI regional studies](#), which we published in the last issue, report on the gravity of the situation in several countries. Since then, in the case of Brazil, updated data has become available showing that the situation, as well as the overall picture of lethality due to COVID-19, is indeed catastrophic.

A [technical report prepared by Sandra Valongueiro](#) (In Portuguese) especially for SPW reports that in Boa Vista (in the Roraima state of Brazil), 50% of the pregnant women infected with COVID-19 died – and this percentage is very high in several other capitals. This is reflected in the Maternal Death Ratio (MMR) that in Recife, in 2021, was 148.7/100,000 live births and in Rio de Janeiro reached 201.7/100,000, and in the case of black women the number reaches 223/100,000. To understand the gravity of these indicators it is necessary to remember that, since the 2000s, the average Brazilian national MMR was 50-60/100,000.

Research also shows that the LGBTTTIA+ population has been negatively affected: besides [mental health problems](#), the worsening of socioeconomic conditions has placed the Brazilian trans population in [serious food insecurity](#). And, the epidemiological impacts on this population are not known in their real magnitude because, as was pointed out by [Duda Salabert in a column in \*Nexo\*](#), the official indicators do not take them into account. In fact, the LGBTTTIA+ population as a whole is experiencing a [blackout in public policies](#). In the US, research by the [Human Rights Campaign](#) has highlighted the economic impacts and vaccine hesitancy in LGBTTTIA+ people – both greater in black, Latino, and trans populations, also the most vulnerable to infection. A curious fact is that in the pandemic context several countries have removed restrictions for gay and bisexual men to donate blood; among them, [Portugal](#), [the Netherlands](#), [Israel](#), Argentina, [Colombia](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), the [UK](#) and now [Australia](#) are considering changing these rules.

---

One should also mention the impacts of COVID-19 on the social mobilization of marginalized groups, such as the LGBTTTIA+ population, who have had to reinvent their lives and activism, and sex workers. In the case of the LGBTTTIA+ community, we highlight the effects of quarantines on social organizations and activist collectives that, in addition to providing services and supplies, are also safe spaces for social interaction and activism (see compilation on the topic in [Brazil](#), [Pakistan](#), and [Southern and Eastern Africa](#)). In the case of sex workers, an [excellent article in the digital magazine \*In plainspeak\*](#) on the Indian context describes the impacts on this population that include, in addition to the losses in income, the absence of health care and impacts on mental health.

## The economy and COVID-19

As we have pointed out, the other side of the crisis caused by COVID-19 is economic. Although several countries have already returned to pre-pandemic economic figures, there is no doubt that many of the impacts of the health crisis will be long-term. A [report in the \*Washington Post\*](#), for example, provides robust evidence of the brutal setbacks for women in the labor market: more than 54 million women left the market, 90% of them permanently. In [Latin America, social, racial, and gender inequalities](#) were flagrant during the pandemic. The high level of informal employment and the weakness of social policies may have led to [two decades of regression for women in the labor market](#), as well as increased violence and vulnerability in the most diverse ways, as seen in the previous section.

The [worsening economic crisis](#) in the region has [intensified migration flows to the United States](#), multiplying conflicts, [mass deportations of immigrants](#), and human rights violations against them throughout the migration process. Particularly serious is the situation for Haitian immigrants, who experience the highest rejection rates in asylum applications and have the highest likelihood of deportation on the basis of criminal records. The worsening of the crisis, [as described in historian Edna Bonhomme's article](#), shows once again the extent and depth of racism in American society. In this context, Human Rights Watch published an [analysis of internal US government documents](#) that demonstrates the increase in physical and sexual abuse at the border in the last five years.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the United Kingdom is experiencing a [widespread shortage crisis](#), with basic items unavailable. These effects, more than the

---

pandemic, are due to the lies told in the Brexit campaign, [as noted by a Brazilian op-ed writer](#). In the UK, another invisible effect of COVID-19 was the [increase in gender inequalities in access to technology](#). With greater social vulnerability, women have been left behind in the digitalization imposed by the pandemic, leading to what has been coined "digital poverty."

Finally, we point out that many of the economic impacts suffered by women are related to the modalities of lockdown policies adopted around the world. Early on in the pandemic we wrote [about the absurdity of sex/gender segregations as a COVID-19 containment measure](#), at the time adopted by governments such as Panama and Peru. More recently, Australia, which was a "model" country in its response, saw its cases spiral out of control in the second half of 2021. In Melbourne, [the "world's longest lockdown" closed down sectors with higher female participation](#) and left open male-dominated industries such as construction. Significant losses of income and access to health care are also documented among sex workers (read about the situation in [Singapore](#), the [US](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), and a global 2020 compilation on the [NSWP website](#)), prompting Indian activists to [demand priority access to vaccines for sex workers](#).

Certainly, there are countries where the crisis has been even more severe, as the mismanagement of the pandemic overlaps with the mismanagement of the economy. Brazil is again an iconic case. Negationist management of the pandemic was motivated by the obsession to keep the economy running at any cost to serve business interests and ensure electoral results. Despite the resulting carnage, the government still has the support of 50% of the economic elites who, since 2019, have propped up Bolsonaro for the sake of his proposed extreme neoliberal reforms. This is the case even when the economy minister fails to implement them – among other reasons, because fiscal constraints are not a priority of the government's parliamentary base. From this combination comes a second catastrophe: today in Brazil there are [almost 20 million people going hungry](#) and for the first time in 20 years, inflation has reached double digits. In this bleak scenario, [a poor black woman was jailed for 18 days](#) because she stole food items worth \$4 from a supermarket in São Paulo. Meanwhile, very rich people squander the money "saved" during the pandemic by consuming voraciously in the [national luxury market](#) that, between 2020 and 2021, was the most profitable on the planet.

---

## Politics: normalization, new crises, instability, uncertainty

In our [last special](#), we wrote that the political "abnormality" generated by COVID-19 was becoming normal. Since August, not only has it failed to cool down, but new extreme political situations have erupted. The most serious of these was undoubtedly the tumultuous US military withdrawal from and the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, which exposed serious strategic incompetence on the part of the US and also exposed the [\(predictable\) failure of democracy projects imposed by military force](#). The crisis in Afghanistan is no longer on the front pages, but we should not forget it because of its geopolitical implications and its catastrophic effects on the lives of [women, girls, and minorities](#). The "fall of Kabul" has reactivated always [necessary critical reflections](#) on the implications of coupling, unthinkingly or not, the defense of women's rights with geopolitical ambitions.

But it must be said that many other places today are experiencing extreme abnormality. In Ethiopia, the armed conflict in the Tigray region persists ([learn more here](#) and [here](#)). In Sudan, a new military coup is [jeopardizing](#) an energetic [re-democratization process that began in 2019](#), and in Tunisia, the [coup of President Kais Saïd](#) is [becoming "normalized \(learn more on our compilation\)](#)." These regressions sound, regrettably, like gasps of the Arab Spring that was celebrated ten years ago. In West Africa, a [military coup overthrew President Alpha Condé in Guinea](#), and in Asia, [Cambodia](#) has just joined the list of autocracies resulting from COVID-19. In long-established authoritarian regimes, life is either continuing on its usual course or arbitrary rule and violence have worsened. This is the case of the scorched earth policy implemented by the Ortega-Murillo regime in Nicaragua under the negligent and complicit gaze of global and, especially, Latin American and Brazilian leftists ([read more on SPW compilation over Nicaragua crisis](#)).

Likewise, in the so-called electoral autocracies – India, Sri Lanka, Hungary, Poland, Brazil, El Salvador, etc. – everything continues more or less as before. In Brazil, the permanent unrest promoted by Bolsonaro and his base culminated in [marches in support of the government on September 7](#). The virulence of the demonstrations was responded to vigorously by the STF and sectors of Congress. But this did not contain the aggressiveness, verbiage, and insistence on anti-institutional agendas of the president and his entourage. But there are at least two new developments to mention in relation to this group of countries. In October, in the Czech Republic, President Babis was defeated in an election in which he was the favorite, and the country became an example of [how](#)

---

[to defeat right-wing populists](#). In the Philippines, Duterte – accused of genocide by the International Criminal Court – declared that [he will not run again](#), which opens space for the opposition, but not so much, as the president wants to make his [daughter his political heir](#).

In stable democracies, there is also some good news. For the first time in more than 60 years, social democracy is [back in power in the five Nordic countries](#). In Germany, the AfD (far right), despite its strong presence in digital politics, did not fare well in the [recent parliamentary elections](#). In other areas, however, we see radicalization, instability, and uncertainty. Starting in France, [Eric Zemmour](#), a racist anti-feminist and fierce critic of multiculturalism, has entered the 2022 presidential race, which so far is a toss-up between Macron and Marine Le Pen.

Then, in the US, the [Republican Party is making it difficult](#) to pass the energy conversion and social policy megapackage proposed by the Biden administration. And the [recent victory of the Republican candidate for governor in Virginia and the close results in New Jersey](#) reveal the electoral pull of the ultraconservative agenda beyond Trump. Far-right forces are also making an unprecedented surge in the [Canadian election](#), in which front-runner Justin Trudeau had [gravel thrown at him at a campaign event](#) ([Read more here](#)).

The instability and uncertainty is even more flagrant in Latin America. In Ecuador and Peru, presidential elections in the first half of the year led to tumultuous situations. In the first case, the mandate of Guilherme Lasso, [who won an intense and complex election](#), is now politically threatened by [prison riots](#), the post-pandemic economic crisis, and because his [name is in the Pandora Papers](#) about officials who invest in tax havens. In Peru, the initial crisis of the Pedro Castillo government examined by [Angel Pineda](#) continued to unfold [despite his ministerial reforms](#).

And, as an [article in \*El País\* reports](#), the outlook for the elections starting in November is not auspicious. According to this analysis, the only exception might be Honduras, where the opposition that has formed since the 2009 coup could come to power. But this does not guarantee that the problems generated by the savage extraction-driven economy will be easily overcome. At the other extreme, on November 7, an [electoral farce took place in Nicaragua](#) with predictable results after the systematic destruction of the opposition.

---

Next came the Argentinian legislative elections. Trends recorded in the September primaries foreshadowed a government defeat that indeed materialized albeit with less intensity than predicted, [18 of the country's 24 districts](#) and the [losses of the majority in the Senate and of many seats in the Chamber of Deputies](#). The economic crisis, management problems in the pandemic, and, above all, internal fractures in officialdom [explain this bad result](#) of a government that started well in 2019. In this scenario, the right-wing libertarian economist Javier Milei, candidate for the House – whose political repertoire is openly aligned with the style and positions of the new transnational right-wingers – has gained visibility and credibility.

In Chile, the first round of presidential elections takes place on November 21 and the scenario is highly paradoxical. The elections take place after the [social uprising of 2019](#), which challenged neoliberalism, knocked out the Piñera government, impacted the political system, and paved the way for the reform of the Constitution bequeathed by the dictatorship. The reform is conducted by a Convention, chaired by a Mapuche woman, with gender parity, and whose members are predominantly independent of political parties but situated on the left of the political spectrum. But in early October, Piñera's name appeared on the Pandora Papers list, and then the [government installed a state of siege](#) in the conflict-ridden Mapuche region.

In the current electoral process, José Manuel Kast, [an extreme right-wing candidate](#), has taken the lead and all indicates that he will be supported by the Piñera's political party base. If, on the one hand, this openly contrasts with the composition and agenda of the Convention, on the other hand it reflects the [historical polarization of the country](#). Kast may also be benefiting from the "distrust of politics" (the abstention in the plebiscite on constitutional reform was very high). But mostly his performance is also explained by the systematic investment he has made, since 2017, to come to power, as [a CIPER study](#) and the Chilean case studies of the [G&PAL survey](#) report.

On November 21<sup>st</sup> as it had happened before in the plebiscite for the new Constitution, turnout was below 50 percent, reflecting the high level of discredit in politics, one main factor benefiting rightwing politicians and outsiders. The final outcome [expressed both the polarization and this distrust](#) (in [Spanish](#)). Kast was indeed the most voted with 28 percent of the ballot, followed by Gabriel Boric, the leftwing candidate, with 25 percent. In the third position, however, with 17 percent came Franco Parisi, an anti-politics populist economist who did not even step in Chile during the campaign as he is subject to an unresolved judicial case of post-divorce family allowance.

---

His votes may easily run to Kast. For the second round, on December 19<sup>th</sup> Chilean democratic forces are challenged to rapidly coalesce in a front strong enough to avoid another extreme right leader to reach power in South America. We also highlight the election of [Chile's first trans Congresswoman](#), Emilia Schneider.

## Politics meets biopolitics in the Brazilian catastrophe

Since our [first special](#), we have read the pandemic through the lenses of biopolitics, as to analyze how its management has activated and even updated state mechanisms of surveillance and the large- scale management of the population. In the June 2020 issue, we devoted special attention to the debate provoked by the controversial article by Italian philosopher [Giorgio Agamben](#) on the state's use of the pandemic to justify states of exception. At the time, we also noted that his conceptual reading framework, although necessary, should not obscure the inherent biopolitical logic and effects of herd immunity strategies that, at that moment, were being adopted in Brazil, the US, the UK, Sweden, and Mexico to "save the economies" or else, for political motivations, by the autocracies ruling Nicaragua, Belarus, and Turkmenistan.

Such an understanding was inescapable for those who looked at the initial scenario of the pandemic from within Brazil, a country where, as physician [Arnaldo Litchenstein](#), director of the Hospital das Clínicas at USP, said at that time, the federal government's response to the crisis was to be read as eugenics. Some voices reacted to his statement saying that it was excessive. Since then, the other countries on the aforementioned list either changed their policies or dropped out of the news, but the actions of the Bolsonaro government continued to be guided, although not always explicitly, by the neo-Darwinian logic of survival of the fittest or deliberate negligence.

In April 2021, when the human cost of the pandemic had already reached 400,000 dead, the COVID-19 Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPI) was convened in the Senate to investigate instances of corruption in the purchase of the COVAXIN vaccine. However, as one would expect in Brazil, the Commission's work brought to light a wealth of incontrovertible evidence that the federal government and numerous private actors in the medical field had responded to the pandemic through a "letting die" rationale. Although in several countries problems of corruption and ineffectiveness in the conduct of policies in response to COVID-19 have been denounced and investigated, Brazil seems to constitute a unique case in which political institutions have

---

systematically eviscerated the meanings and harmful effects of a peculiar biopolitical method of managing the pandemic.

By October, when the Commission finished its work, more than 600,000 lives had been lost, most of them of people whose vulnerability to the pandemic was aggravated by age, comorbidities, class, race, ethnicity, or place of residence. The evidence that the CPI brought to light, particularly in the case of the [actions taken by Prevent Senior](#), tells us that the statement made by Dr. Litchenstein was not unreasonable, but rather prescient. In the final drafting stage of the CPI report, however, the use of the term "genocide" to designate the disparate impact of COVID-19 on indigenous peoples was the [subject of heated debate](#) among senators and in society itself. The final text did not use the term but adopted the related language of "crime against humanity" (in the case of indigenous people) and "epidemic followed by death" (in the case of the population as a whole). These sections of the report will be taken to the International Criminal Court, joining six other cases indicting the Bolsonaro government already filed with that court. The [report](#) also accuses the president and several other state officials of 22 other crimes that should be investigated by the Brazilian justice system.

Because of the dubious and uncertain games that dominate national politics, many voices have raised legitimate questions about the scope of and punishment for these human rights violations and other crimes. However, the exemplariness of the results of the Senate's investigations, including beyond Brazilian borders, should not be minimized. It is not, in our view, trivial that the [Washington Post headline of October 22](#) was, "If Bolsonaro can be charged with crimes, does the same apply to Trump?"

## **Sexual Politics in the Pandemic**

### **Anti-gender politics**

Since mid-2021, anti-gender offensives seem to be detaching from the dynamics of the epidemic to return to their usual pattern more directly tied to politics. And, as we will see below, between August and October, the political activity of religious neoconservatives and right-wing forces were quite intense. It is, in fact, quite remarkable that the significance and effects of COVID-19 were not given greater visibility in many of the events listed below, even when involving countries heavily affected by the pandemic. This section also examines in greater detail clashes mobilized by "gender-critical" feminism and takes brief stock of specific offensives against laws and public policies. The

---

subsequent sections look into attacks on LGBTTTIA+ rights, gender-based violence and abortion rights.

### *Transnational fluxes and connections*

In September, Pope Francis visited Hungary and Slovakia, and in the latter country, in a conversation with a group of Jesuits, he repeated recommendations on the pastoral welcome of homosexuals while, at the same reiterating his criticism of "gender," which, he said, is an abstract concept that ["exerts a diabolical fascination because it is not incarnate."](#) His speech had a destiny: the ongoing parliamentary debate in Italy on the Zan hate crimes and anti-discrimination law. [As Massimo Prearo notes in an exclusive interview](#), the law would be halted a month later, amongst other factors, as a result of a legal argument presented by the Vatican. Following the Pope's visit, the IV Demographic Summit, promoted by the Hungarian government since 2018 to discuss Europe's fertility decline and the "migration problem," was held in Budapest.

In October, [Marine Le Pen was also in Budapest](#) to discuss with Prime Minister Orbán the "impositions" of the European Union that, according to both, infringe on the "constitutional identity of their countries" and, quite possibly, the Istanbul Convention against Gender Based Violence was on the agenda. Another important connection between the two countries is the collaboration agreement signed by the Collegium Intermarium – a university created by the Polish ultra-Catholic organization Ordo Iuris – with the Institut de Sciences Sociales, Économiques et Politiques (ISSEP), founded by Marion Marechal, Le Pen's niece. In Poland, the Collegium celebrated its first anniversary with a conference on the theme of "cancellation." Last but not least, just before the G-20 Summit, Vladimir Putin gave a long speech on geopolitical conditions and the global economy at the Valdai Club Discussion in which [several paragraphs were devoted to the "gender problem,"](#) especially against gender in education and gender identity in childhood, stating that "gender ideology is a crime against humanity."

Activity was also intense in Latin America. Since the beginning of 2021, representatives of VOX, the Spanish party, have been visiting the region to [gain support for the Madrid Charter](#). In August, its leader, Santiago Abascal, met with members of the [PAN and the PRI in Mexico](#) and the events provoked [strong reactions and polemics](#). This high-profile episode stimulated the press to map more precisely the contours of the Ibero-American [extreme right-wing platform](#) that is materializing in the region.

---

Brazil has been another scene of hyperactivity. In late September, Bolsonaro, [who had received an AfD leader in July](#), talked (outside the official agenda) with two German anti-vaccine activists. According to DW, the pair, who had also been with Minister Damares Alves, is [under surveillance by the German state](#) for propagating conspiracy theories. Before that, in preparation for the September 7 marches, the ultraconservative American club CPAC [met again in the country](#) with the participation of dozens of government officials, Brazilian activists, and actors and actresses from outside the country ([learn more here](#)). In the event, which [had freedom as its motto](#), feminism, abortion, and gender identity in childhood were the targets of virulent attacks.

In October, the [Financial Times reported](#) that Digital Acquisition Corporation, a company owned by Congressman Luis Felipe de Orleans e Bragança, is raising funds for the digital platform being created by Donald Trump. Soon after, during the G-20 – when [Bolsonaro was isolated from his peers](#), [committed gaffes](#), and was complicit in [aggression against journalists](#) – the Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that he would make an [official visit to Russia in November 2021](#).

In this same period, much has happened in the realm of the parallel diplomacy that unfolded since the beginning of 2021 when the Bolsonaro government became the new leader of the conservative agendas launched by the [Trump administration](#), in particular the so - called Geneva Consensus. Just like in Hungary, where this line of the foreign policy is led by Katlin Novak (Minister of Family), in Brazil, Angela Gandra, National Secretary of Family, is in charge of the transnational agenda.

At the beginning of September, although she was on vacation, Gandra went to Portugal and then, in Spain, where she participated in a meeting of Catholic political leaders and met with a conservative judge of the Constitutional Court. Then, in Ukraine she attended the famous Prayer's Breakfast which brought together a wide range of right-wing and anti-LGBTQIA+ rights activists ([read Jamil Chade's article covering this entire tour](#)). Also in September, Gandra participated virtually in the [Political Network of Values \(PNV\) webinar](#) to evaluate a decade of family politics in Hungary.

In October, Gandra and Damares, as [leaders of the so-called Geneva Consensus](#), attended a ceremony [organized by the government of Guatemala](#) to mark the country's adherence to the document. They were also in Geneva for a series of diplomatic activities: meeting with countries of the Portuguese Language Community, an audience with the director of the WHO, a visit to the UNHCR, a meeting with the Hungarian

---

chancellor, and a [panel coordinated by the ILO](#) with the participation of the governments of Hungary and Poland to discuss the balancing between work and family. And, in a meeting held at the [Permanent Mission of Brazil to the UN](#) to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the launching of the Consensus, the addition of the Russian Federation to the group was publicly announced.

### *Clashes mobilized by anti-gender feminist currents*

While all this was going on, intense controversies were unfolding mobilized by "gender-critical" feminist currents. As mentioned in previous issues, these tensions are not new but have gained scale and intensity since 2020 in Spain, the United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, and also in Latin America, especially in Mexico. It is not possible to summarize here the multiplicity and tenor of all the clashes that have taken place in this environment in recent months in all these places. But we offer a little more detailed information about what has been happening in Spain and the UK, whose visibility is greater and whose global effects are more evident.

In Spain, these tensions have been playing out mostly in relation to the left-wing parties (PSOE and Podemos) and are related to legislative debates. They gained considerable attention last year in the debates regarding the Gender Identity Law. In June, despite many tensions, the law [was approved in the Council of Ministers](#) and sent to Parliament. But in the [ongoing procedural process](#), which involves numerous consultations, including with civil society, anti-gender feminists [have resumed protests](#) against the content of the legislation and the PSOE's decision to support it.

In the UK, the battle fronts are multiple, more complex, and much more acute. There are clashes within the sphere of gender identity public policy, growing tensions in the academy involving debates around academic freedom, confrontations over inclusive language, debates in the party-political sphere, and, more recently, the emergence of a new LGBTTTIA+ network aligned with the gender critical feminist currents.

Some of these confrontations, especially in the academic field, have been quite extreme. Until a few years ago these controversies were the stuff of tabloids, but today they are on the agenda of the mainstream media, which has treated them in a very problematic way. The [compilation](#) of what we have collected about the UK is organized so that readers can get a more accurate picture of these many battlefields for themselves.

---

We will focus briefly on the issues and debates involving the British media because they resonate strongly in other contexts. Also, the British media treatment of such clashes, especially the line taken by *The Economist*, has associated gender conflicts with "totalitarian left-wing bias," unashamedly replicating arguments from the far right about "cultural Marxism," "woke culture," and "cancellation." This editorial line is unacceptable in the case of an outlet that claims to be the voice of political liberalism.

On September 7, *The Guardian* published a [lengthy interview with Judith Butler](#), the title of which is "Do we need to rethink the category of woman?" A few hours later, an answer about anti-gender feminism in which Butler made a connection between these positions and modern-day far-right politics was deleted. The newspaper claimed the cause was technical issues, which was called into [question by the interviewer](#). This apparent censorship provoked many reactions, such as an [article by James Factora](#). In October, in what seems to be a correction of the error, the newspaper published a long text by the philosopher in which she reiterates the position expressed in the interview in the following terms: "It makes no sense for 'gender critical' feminists to ally themselves with reactionary powers that target trans, non-binary and queer people. The time for anti-fascist solidarity is now."

If this is indeed reparation, the *Guardian's* move is, however, exceptional, for as [Tara John's recent CNN article analyzes](#), the British press has not been balanced in its treatment of these debates and clashes. An example of this is the "letter" published by the BBC in October in which an author from the anti-gender feminist camp recounts episodes in which lesbian women were allegedly coerced into having sex with trans people described as "vile." As [The Guardian importantly reports](#) in a November 4<sup>th</sup> story, even after numerous reactions, including a letter signed by 20,000 people, the BBC was reluctant to acknowledge the transphobic nature of the text, and would only later remove some of the content. Before that, however, the "letter" [was published by BBC Brazil](#) and was very quickly criticized by Bia Pagliarini. However, there was no move by the BBC to ensure that opposing voices could be heard, to open space for trans voices to contest the story in the outlet itself.

Finally, to understand the genealogy of these complicated battlefields, we recommend a text by feminist Sara Ahmed ([in Spanish](#)) that engages with and amplifies the arguments developed by Butler in the *Guardian* article. Ahmed revisits long cycles of feminist debates on gender and also identifies problematic convergences between the positions of "gender critical" currents and gender conservatism.

---

### *Offensives in many quarters*

Considering the global anti-gender environment described above, it is not surprising that since August, the targets of anti-gender offensives have been numerous. Starting with the United States, still in the first half of the year, [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW) published a report on an unprecedented wave of attacks against trans rights in state legislatures. In October, [Texas joined seven other states](#) in banning trans girls from participating in women's sports. In addition, [offensives against sex education have been taking on new contours](#), more directly targeting issues of sexual diversity. To illustrate one recent effect of these attacks, according to a [New Yorker article](#), Republican Glenn Youngkin's victorious campaign in Virginia targeted the hesitancy of returning to school after the pandemic; what conservatives see as an intrusion of critical race theory into curricula; and respect for fluid gender norms in public schools.

In that respect, it is not trivial that a similar pattern was also identified in India where, as in the US, moral conservatism's repudiation of sex education has come a long way. But this new episode signals towards something new that echoes more recent anti-gender frays at play elsewhere. In October, a manual for teachers that offers guidance on addressing issues of gender fluidity in the school environment [was attacked by a well-known Hindu nationalist website](#). While this may resonate with what happened in the past, this new attack on sex education was not exclusively framed in terms of sex morality but that targets the plastic conception of gender and gender identity. In nothing else, such an assault is sort of “out of place” in a culture that for millennia has accepted the existence of a “third gender”.

Then in Eastern Europe, the Constitutional Court of Bulgaria, after more than a year, finally ruled that [the ratification of the Istanbul Convention is unconstitutional](#), as proposed by Executive, stating additionally that the term "gender" should always be interpreted as biological sex. In Poland, where the anti-gender offensive is mostly about repudiating diverse sexualities, the so-called “LGBT-free” regions that have been [sanctioned by the European Union](#) are threatening to leave the Union. In Hungary, where the climate is similar, the media regulator expanded censorship of LGBTTTIA+ content.

In France, meanwhile, gender neutral or inclusive language is once again causing furor. Last year, a law provision prohibiting its use was tabled at the Assembly. Even

---

before it was debated, the minister of education issued an ordinance banning the use of gender inclusive terms in the public education system. Now, a new edition of the famous Petit Robert Dictionary was launched that incorporates the gender inclusive pronoun (*iel*) [sparking a new round of attacks](#) on the part of state authorities.

In Brazil, a recent [report produced by civil society organizations](#) examines how gender ideology is being systematically translated into public policy. A crucial turn in this direction was the establishment of policies centered on the "family". And, the attacks on "gender and ideology", which are also emphasized in the report, fiercely continues. In the state of Bahia, a professor was formally inquired by the police after a female student denounced her to the specialized policy unit in charge of protecting children and adolescent's rights. The girl [accused the professor of unduly exposing her](#) to "Marxism" and "feminist ideology". Furthermore, the [Minister of Education declared that he will not admit "gender subjects"](#) in textbooks and, in several states, the [approval of laws authorizing homeschooling is progressing](#) (which is also justified as protection of children from "gender ideology").

A new wave of ideological resistance is also manifested in the judiciary in relation to the right of trans women to resort to Maria da Penha law on gender-based violence. And, in the trenches of the gender linguistic battles, the National Audiovisual Secretariat has [prohibited by decree the use of inclusive language](#) in the calls for proposals for accessing public funds in this domain. It should be noted that Brazilian law provisions and ordinances banning the use of gender language seems to be directly inspired by the similar French initiatives. And, yet more worrying, the interior city of Bauru in São Paulo inaugurated a battle against gender inclusive toilets that mimics what happened in North Carolina (US) in 2017. The municipal government, led by a black extreme right female mayor, responded to [a denounce made by a client and imposed a fine on McDonalds](#) because of the gender neutral bathrooms installed in its local shop. The denunciation was that McDonald was a "Communist and globalist corporation imposing 'gender ideology' on Brazilian society". The legal argument used by the municipality was that the toilets infringed a local norm for public buildings. Regrettably enough, McDonald has [conceded and gave up its gender inclusive policy](#).

However, in Latin America, the most worrisome news comes from Chile, where two deputies from José Antonio Kast's party sent a [formal request to the University of Chile](#) to request information about the field of gender studies. This demand suggests that

---

we may see an escalation of attacks on the production of knowledge on gender and sexuality in the regional context.

## Anti-LGBTQIA+ Frays

Since August, there has been good news to report on advances concerning the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons. Even so, attacks and regressions have been much more intense, although with different intensities across contexts. As we saw in the previous section, attacks against trans rights are now a core feature of anti-gender policies in several countries. Above all, it is clear that these attacks have gained relevance in the international political arena, as exemplified by the friction between Poland and the European Union.

In all continents, a number of countries are either restricting legislation aimed at the protection of LGBTQIA+ rights, or else establishing or expanding rules that lead to discrimination and criminalization. These offensives, of course, do not occur only at the level of state policies, but also take place in everyday life and create a context of increasing surveillance, self-censorship, and repression. An example from the US is the case of a high school teacher in Missouri who was "recommended" to [remove a rainbow flag from the classroom](#) and sign a document pledging not to touch on issues of gender and sexuality. *OutRight Action International* has published an excellent report on censorship of LGBTQIA+ websites and content in six countries: Indonesia, Iran, Russia, UAE, Malaysia, and Saudi Arabia, finding that Iran has the highest number of blocked websites. More information about the report and its reverberations can be found in reports from [Open Democracy](#) and [Openly News](#).

In recent times denounced of and policies aimed at banning "conversion therapies" or "curing" LGBTQIA+ people has gained leverage. As [Volcánicas points out](#), these practices in Latin America and other regions are in fact forms of torture. A [good article by Openly News](#) relates the history of these "treatments", now banned in 13 countries, including Brazil. However, positive shifts in this realm do not mean that these practices are being erased. A [report by Folha de S. Paulo](#) showed that Exodus, the evangelical organization that gained its fame by providing the "gay cure", is gaining strength and space in Brazil, even when it is rapidly losing ground in the US from where it originates. To learn more about Exodus, we recommend the recently released documentary ["Pray Away"](#), available on Netflix.

---

## *Europe*

In Hungary, the impacts of the law banning content on homosexuality and transexuality from advertisement, movies and schools books are already felt, as [children's books with LGBTTTIA+ themes have been banned](#) and films addressing LGBTTTIA+ issues in a positive way have been [classified as unsuitable for viewers under 18](#). The anti-gender and anti-LGBTTTIA+ ideologies now entrenched in the country are ramifying to neighboring nations such as [Lithuania](#) and [Romania](#), where nationalist and far-right politicians are advancing homophobic and transphobic legal provisions, which were the [main focus of recent LGBTTTIA+ parade](#) in the latter country.

Poland, the other bastion of anti-LGBTTTIA+ frays is now threatened [economic sanctions](#) by the EU and the [Council of Europe](#) and at least three municipalities that had established anti-LGBTTTIA+ bans have [revoked these absurd rules](#). But the national government of Mateusz Morawiecki promptly reacted [signaling towards a possible break with the European bloc](#). The argument is the same as that made by Le Pen and Orban at their recent meeting: several articles of the EU treaties violate the Polish constitution ([Read more on Poland](#)).

In Bulgaria, a support center for LGBTTTIA+ people was [attacked by an extreme right-wing activist](#). From neighboring Turkey, on the other hand, news came that may not a breakthrough, but at least offers some encouragement: the 18 students who had been imprisoned since 2019 for participating in a LGBTTTIA+ parade [have been released](#). On the other hand, Western Europe, anti-LGBTTTIA+ offensives have escalated. In Italy, as mentioned above, the Senate returned the bill against hate crimes to its initial stage, meanwhile, in Spain, a [neo-Nazi demonstration took place in Chueca](#), the LGBTTTIA+ neighborhood of Madrid.

## *Asia*

Starting with China, significant onslaughts against non-hegemonic masculinities have erupted and the government is definitely tightening the siege against LGBTTTIA+ people. [The attack on "effeminate men"](#) has been fierce and their presence is now banned on Chinese TV. As announced by the National TV and Radio Agency, this measure is part of a media overhaul now being implemented to ensure ["a healthy growth of the media industry and young people"](#) (see text in [Global Voices](#) on the subject). Terms used in the LGBTTTIA+ universe have been [censored on the country's social networks](#), and

---

the same happened with accounts of activists [advocating for same sex marriage in the Civil Code](#). Not least, a large university in Shanghai is, without any explanation or justification, [classifying all its "non-heterosexual" students](#).

A [good article in \*The Diplomat\*](#) highlights the resilience of the Chinese LGBTTTIA+ movement in this troubled context as well as the struggles of activists in other countries, such as South Korea and Taiwan. In the latter country, reports the same article, activists are fighting to expand acceptance of gay marriage – approved in the country in 2019 but still facing resistance from the society. On the other hand, it is worth noting a tragic case that occurred in South Korea in the first half of the year. An army servicewoman was discharged after gender reassignment surgery, the [discharge was cancelled](#), but too late, because she had committed suicide. And in Japan, a trans man is suing the state for the right to gender identity without surgical procedure in a case that has reignited the [debate about the biases of Japanese law towards trans people](#).

In Central Asia, homophobic attacks in [Kazakhstan](#) and [Azerbaijan](#) have mobilized activists, who are trying to strengthen the pro-LGBTTTIA+ rights movement in the region. A [good piece by Camila Arquette published in Global Voices](#) compiles the legislation of the countries in the region and reflects on the role that LGBTTTIA+ activism can play in changing these frameworks. It should also be mentioned that the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan also has [dire implications](#) for people whose [gender and sexuality does not conform to dominant norms](#), an issue absent from international debates focused on the impacts on the lives of women, girls, and ethnic minorities.

### *Sub-Saharan Africa*

Major regressive legislative changes are on the horizon in several countries. In Botswana, one of the few nations in the region where homosexuality has been decriminalized, there has been an [attempt to overturn the decriminalization law passed in 2019](#). The vote on the matter has been indefinitely postponed but it remains a matter of concern.

However, the situation is even more serious in Ghana, where homosexuality is already a crime and attacks on LGBTTTIA+ people are frequent. As we have already reported, in May, a group of activists gathered in a house were arrested, detained for a long time, and continued to be harassed after they were released. Since July, a bill has

---

been under discussion that increases the punishment for homosexuality, punishes "pro-LGBT activism," and [encourages "conversion therapies"](#). The bill has broad support from the society, as well as from the local Anglican Church, which has even [clashed with the British leadership](#) that condemns discrimination of LGBTTTIA+ persons and accepts same sex marriage. Surprisingly, President Nana Akufo-Addo, who has already declared that same -sex marriage would never be approved during his term in office, has [called for tolerance when considering the bill](#).

Not only in Ghana do churches play a key role of inciting homophobia and transphobia, as this [compilation in English shows](#). This incitation leads to coercion and censorship, as in Kenya, where the documentary "I Am Samuel," about the life of a gay man, [was censored by the Kenya Film Classification Board in September](#). The film, which uses Christian doctrines to advocate for same-sex marriage was accused of blasphemy and affront to the Constitution. It is worth remembering that three years ago, a [film whose script addressed LGBTTTIA+ lives](#), was also censored. [Read here the director's letter](#) about the censorship.

### *Latin America*

The Peru's Constitutional Court will issue its first ruling on the right to identity of an intersex person. The case of Eidan – a young man who was mistakenly registered as female, which also implied in denial of access to health care. The decision may become a landmark in jurisprudence. The lawsuit requests, besides the change of name and civil identity document according to his gender identity, that the restriction in access to health care based on “sex as legally defined” to be unconstitutional. [Eidan's lawyer details the case in an interview](#). Also in Peru, an investigation was recently opened [against Judge Javier Vela](#) due to his discriminatory statement that homosexuality is a "psychological problem" and an "abnormality".

---

## Gender Based Violence

In the last three months, feminist activism has been quite successful in mobilizing against gender-based violence. Starting in the US, Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York, resigned after accusations of sexual harassment (read in [Openly](#), [Huff Post](#), [NYT](#) and [Mother Jones](#)). Another high-profile figure, singer R. Kelly, was finally convicted of sexual assault and organized crime in a decision considered a milestone, [particularly for black women activists](#). #MeToo also launched a [movement for the closure of the University of Kansas' Phi Kappa Psi fraternity](#) following a case of sexual assault. And in the UK, an [Al Jazeera news investigation](#) examined allegations of sexual harassment at Oxford University and [other educational institutions](#).

Mobilizations are also intense in Africa. In Ivory Coast, feminists have begun a [major movement](#) to legally support the woman who accuses the [Minister of Reconciliation Kouadio Konan Bertin of rape](#), keeping the conversation about violence and harassment [alive in the media and public debate](#). In Tunisia, the [trial of MP Zouheir Makhlouf](#) began, a symbolic case for the country's #MeToo. The trial was the main focus of feminists' protests whose motto was "My body is not a public space." In Uganda, [feminist movements finally succeeded](#) in getting the 2014 "anti-pornography" law, which also banned [miniskirts and other garments](#), overturned.

The same is true in Asia. In India, women continue fighting for the criminalization of [rape in marriage](#), which remains in a legal limbo. In Azerbaijan, feminists took to the streets to demand government [responses to the explosion of cases of femicide](#) and in Bangladesh they took to the internet [against misogyny in the press](#).

There are also setbacks to mention. [Chinese journalist and activist Sophia Huang Xueqin](#), who wrote a report on sexual harassment and assault cases against women journalists in the country, disappeared in September. Human rights activists claim she was arrested for "political activism" and the arrest was [confirmed by the police](#) (read more about the [domestic violence problem in the country](#) and on the [silencing of feminist activists](#)). More recently, posts about tennis star Peng Shuai have also been [censored in the press](#) after she accused former Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli of coercing her into having sex. Then, in Afghanistan, activist [Frozan Safi was probably the first women's rights activist to be assassinated](#) by the Taliban after its return to power.

---

Back in Europe, feminists are also under attack by the states of Belarus and Bulgaria. The government of Belarus is going to [close down NGOs and a major shelter for women victims of violence](#) and in Bulgaria, as we have already mentioned, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention has been ruled unconstitutional. As we pointed out in our last issue, Turkey, where the Convention was adopted, is no longer one of the signatory countries.

In Latin America, in Uruguay, the new guide for police officers to respond to cases of domestic and gender violence now [requires evidence of violence](#). In Brazil, the Maria da Penha law that since its approval in 2006 has been the [target of proposed changes](#) continues to be the subject of debate. One of them, already mentioned, concerns the [access of trans women to the law](#). And, quite regrettably in a country where the number of feminicides, especially of black women, keeps growing, the state level MP Jessé Lopes (PSL-SC) proudly shared photo of a meeting with Marco Antonio Heredia Viveiros – the ex-husband who almost killed Maria da Penha, who gave the name of the national law to prevent and punish gender-based violence. According to the congressman, Viveiros' version of the crime was "intriguing".

#### *Sexual violence in humanitarian contexts*

An explosive report produced by an independent World Health Organization (WHO) panel has identified more than 80 allegations of sexual abuse during the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. At least [20 WHO employees were identified](#) who had been involved in the perpetration of these acts of extreme sexual violence, which also involved offers of jobs in exchange for sex as well as forced abortions. Tedros Ghebreyesus, director-general of the WHO, [has apologized](#) and [announced a plan](#) to combat sexual abuse by the agency's personnel.

The scandal was condemned by the DRC president and has caused the European Union to [suspend WHO funding](#) in Congo until guarantees of punishment for perpetrators and new protection mechanisms are put in place. It remains to be seen if this scandal will finally make WHO take really effective measures against this sexual abuse and violence. This year there have also been reports of sexual violations by UN aid workers in the [Central African Republic](#) and other aid agencies in [Mozambique](#).

---

## Sexual politics: finally the good news

If you have come this far, you have done well, because there are also reasons to celebrate. Let's start with Brazil, where anti-gender politics have not relented since 2019. In the third week of November, very good news: the state level law of Rondônia prohibiting the use of gender neutral language in curricula, educational materials and applications for working posts in the public administration [was considered unconstitutional](#) in a first decision by the Supreme Court. The law is suspended until the final judgement. As far as we could verify this is the first time that a case concerning the controversies around gender neutral or inclusive language has reached a constitutional court.

Also in relation to anti-gender frays, in Uganda, where homosexuality is criminalized, trans activist [Cleopatra Kambugu](#) was able to obtain new documents that respect her gender identity. In Colombia, Mike Durán, who does not identify with either male or female gender, was the first person to be [officially registered as "T"](#). In Nepal, the [third gender option entered the National Census](#), and in the US, an intersex person received a [third identifier in their passport](#). In Taiwan, a milestone was deservedly celebrated by the LGBTTTIA+ community: the Administrative Court [ruled against mandatory surgical interventions for legal gender reassignment](#).

Moving to reproductive rights, France has guaranteed [free access to contraceptive methods to all women up to 25 years old](#), and Spain [has expanded free \*in vitro\* fertilization to single and LGBTTTIA+ women](#). In Asia, Indonesia finally [abolished the "virginity test"](#) for women who want to join the Armed Forces and, in Malaysia, a gynecologist created a [unisex condom](#), which should hit the market in December. Extending the analyses towards the sphere of social reproduction, the [Argentinian state](#), as is already the case in Chile and Uruguay, has incorporated a historical demand from feminist voices, which however [has gained strength during the pandemic](#). From now on, the time dedicated to caring for children is recognized as working time to be considered in retirement.

In the realm of LGBTTTIA+ rights, at the UN, the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Victor Madrigal-Borloz, has published the second part of his report on gender attacks in the world: ["Practices of exclusion"](#) . In mid-November, Madrigal shared the content of his two reports at a [webinar organized by Outright](#) International Action. Also

---

at the level of the international human rights mechanisms, 51 states have requested that the UN Human Rights Council adopt measures to [protect the human rights of intersex people](#).

Other good news came from Switzerland, [which voted in favor of same-sex marriage](#) by a wide margin in a referendum held in September. Equally historic – though not yet approved – is Cuba's new family code, [which opens the door to equal marriage](#) by removing the definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. At the end of October, the US also finally overturned a discriminatory law, and now [same-sex partners will be able to access social security benefits of deceased loved ones](#).

Turning to Latin America, two Mexican states ([Sonora](#) and [Querétaro](#)) have also legalized same-sex marriage. In addition, the [first health care facility dedicated to trans people](#) opened in Mexico City, and for the first time, [children born to two mothers were registered as such](#). In Argentina the story of Luana, the first trans child to obtain her documents according to her gender identity after the 2012 law was approved, [was made into a movie](#). Finally, we celebrate the creation of a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission, at the Municipal Council of São Paulo, [to investigate violence against transgender and travestis](#), which is the very legislative initiative of its kind in the country where the largest number of trans people are killed in the world at large.

## **Abortion: threats and advances**

Despite important gains that will be addressed below, the abortion rights scenario was marked, between August and October, by very significant setbacks in the US, which have great potential for global repercussions, as well as by worrying signs coming from China.

In the US, in early September, the Supreme Court rejected a suit arguing for the unconstitutionality of the Texas law that prohibits the termination of pregnancy after six weeks, ruling out exceptions even for cases of rape and incest. Since September, the law has already been [suspended](#) and [reinstated](#) by the regional circuit of the Federal Court, and the Supreme Court began [debating the final decision](#) on the case in the first week of November ([read more here](#)). The new law does not directly punish the women but establishes a tip hotline that offers people who denounce those who help women have abortions rewards of at least \$10,000. So strong is the analogy to the Wild West model of

---

hunting criminals that it was used by Chief Justice Roberts [in a debate with the Texas attorney general](#) in the first phase of final arguments on the law.

The Court's decision on this draconian law may be, according to reproductive rights advocates, another firm step toward potentially overturning the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that decriminalized the procedure. In our [compilation](#), we highlight Judge Sotomayor's strong condemnation of the decision.

But Texas is not the only state where regressive propositions regarding abortion rights are registered. Conservative legislators from Ohio have presented an even [more draconian bill](#) which prohibits the procedure at any period of gestation. A [report by the Alan Guttmacher Institute](#) reports that between January and June 2021, 561 proposals restricting abortion, including 165 banning access, were introduced in 47 states. In total, [106 became law](#). These setbacks regarding reproductive autonomy are not isolated but are associated with legal regressions regarding LGBTTTIA+ rights and voting rights of the black population. In December, the Supreme Court will debate the [case of \*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization\* regarding the Mississippi law](#). According to [Françoise Girard](#), in an article published by *MS Magazine*, this decision is another potent threat to the right to abortion in the US, a risk also analyzed by [Margaret Talbot](#) in the *New Yorker*.

Then in China, the government announced in late September that the policy plan for women and children foresees that, over the next decade, access to abortion will be restricted to cases with medical indications. This policy change is directly associated with the dynamics of population aging and birth rate reduction that, as early as 2013, had led to the easing of the one-child policy. [Read our compilation](#) with news and analysis on the new Chinese policy.

From a historical point of view, this confluence between the powers vying for planetary economic hegemony with regard to abortion rights is not trivial. The trajectories underlying the expansion of access to legal and safe abortion, now threatened in both countries, are distinct, not to say opposite. In the US, the right to abortion was the result of struggles for women's reproductive autonomy dating back to the late 19th century. In China, on the other hand, the criminalization of abortion was made more flexible to meet the goals of the fertility control policy established at the end of the 1970s, whose coercive features have always been the object of feminist criticism. Today, however, the Chinese government shares the same concern about decreasing

---

fertility expressed by Western anti-abortion neoconservative forces, which, on the other hand, have the Chinese Communist Party as one of their main ideological targets.

Although there are differences in the motivations and rationales that inform the respective positions, in both cases the rights of women and other persons who decide about procreation are expropriated, either for the benefit of the state or in the name of a moral mandate with a Christian religious basis. More systematic research and reflection are urgently needed to better understand this unusual convergence.

At the same time, the conflict over abortion rights continues in many other places, for example, in Latin America, where once again the new pharmacological strategy used by anti-abortion groups deserves to “save embryos” must be again highlighted. This is the so-called "abortion reversal pill" that was the subject of an extensive investigation by [Open Democracy](#). Other initiatives, supported by the American organization Heartbeat, that misleadingly advertise and offer hostels to pregnant women to convince vulnerable women not to terminate their pregnancies, [were investigated by \*El País\*](#).

There are also threats and setbacks to register in the legislative and health policy arenas. In Brazil, for example, [100% of the bills presented](#) in the Chamber of Deputies in 2021 have been against legal abortion, and municipal legislative proposals to promote campaigns against abortion and contraceptive methods. There were also reports that, in the cities in the interior of São Paulo, private health plans are demanding the husband's authorization for IUD implantation. These unconstitutional [measures provoked indignation](#) and investigations from regulatory and [inspection agencies](#).

In Uruguay, the number of legal abortions fell in 2020 for the second year in a row. Although this drop is expected after legalization (which occurred in 2012), according to the press and feminist organizations, this decline may have been caused by the COVID-19 crisis and also by [subtle forms of abortion resistance](#) that gained institutional space with the election of a conservative government in 2019. MYSU has published [a detailed technical note](#) on the problem. In addition, parliament is debating a bill to ensure the burial or cremation of stillborn children, which, as [Paula Delgado notes in an article published in \*Búsqueda\* magazine](#), may widen threats to abortion rights. Even more seriously, in early November, the doctor who coordinates the sexual and reproductive health area in the Administración de los Servicios de Salud del Estado (ASSE) was [denounced for coercing a woman not to have an abortion](#).

---

In El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele, the newest regional autocrat, [removed the possibility of legalizing therapeutic abortion](#) from the Constitutional reform bill, and this reveals his affinity with conservative religious sectors, [as reported by La Mala Fe](#). And in Mexico, a deplorable scene was witnessed in the protest called by anti-abortion forces against the decision of the Supreme Court of Justice that decriminalized abortion (which will be analyzed below). During the march, [an ultrasound examination was performed on a pregnant teenager](#). This indecorous performance was condemned by feminist organizations and the press and was the object of a [statement of repudiation](#) by the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights. The case of a Bolivian 11-year-old girl also caused repudiation: pregnant after being systematically raped for months by a family member, she started the medical protocol guaranteed by law to terminate the pregnancy [but did not complete it](#) because of pressure from the Catholic Church and conservative movements.

Then in Colombia, the lawsuit brought by [Causa Justa](#) to the Supreme Court arguing for the unconstitutionality of criminalization was to be judged until November 19<sup>th</sup>. Right before this [article from the newspaper \*El Tiempo\*](#) positively reported on the state of the debate. However, as the judgment started the Court suspended the deadline date because one of the magistrates [declared himself impeded to vote](#). This technicality can also be read as deliberate procrastination in particular because anti-abortion pressures against the Court have escalated in the last few months.

We also call attention to two excellent resources for the analysis of the setbacks in relation to the right to abortion. Conscientious objection (CO) is today, all over the world, one of the biggest obstacles to the exercise of the right to abortion, even in legal cases. In this sense, the [Global Map of CO Rules](#), prepared by the Argentinian network REDAAS, is an exceptional resource for research and activism. The second resource is a [panoramic article from \*El País\*](#) on the stigma of abortion that records the experience of women who have had abortions in clandestine conditions or under coercion.

Finally, as we were wrapping up this issue, two events are sadly to be reported. First, the case of a [young Polish woman who died for lack of medical attention](#) personified the dramas and tragedies linked to legislation that prohibits the practice. According to activists, this is the first death following the tightening of abortion laws in the European country at the beginning of the year. After [protests across the country](#), the Ministry of Health issued [instructions guaranteeing](#) the right to abortion for pregnant

---

women whose health is at risk. And secondly, but not less relevant, Iran has passed [new legislation that dramatically narrows access to abortion](#) (as well as to contraception, voluntary sterilization services and related information): the “Youthful Population and Protection of the Family” law restricts women’s choice by hanging the final decision on therapeutic abortion – in case of threat to the life of the pregnant woman or foetal anomalies – in the hands of a committee of jurists and doctors, not more on the woman will. [UN rights experts harshly condemned it.](#)

## **But there are also good news**

In Mexico, the Supreme Court of Justice [ruled that state laws penalizing abortion are unconstitutional](#), taking an important new step toward guaranteeing reproductive autonomy in Latin America. The decision followed a directive from the Federal Attorney General's Office directing local judiciaries to review as soon as possible the convictions of women who are imprisoned or indicted. [Learn more about the decision here.](#)

In Chile, the [Chamber of Deputies agreed](#) that the proposal to legalize abortion up to the 14<sup>th</sup> week of gestation is to be brought up for discussion in Parliament, an important decision that, however, leaves a long way to go before approval in the legislature. And in Colombia, the lawsuit brought by [Causa Justa](#) to the Supreme Court arguing for the unconstitutionality of criminalization should be judged very soon – this [article from the newspaper \*El Tiempo\*](#) reports on the state of the debate.

Even in Brazil, where conditions today are decidedly very unfavorable, a bill presented in the Recife Municipal Council for the adoption of a campaign repudiating abortion, along the lines of the law passed in Fortaleza, [was rejected](#). Equally encouraging was the [condemnation of a hospital in the state of São Paulo](#) for violating medical confidentiality in the case of a woman who, in pain and in labor, was reported to the police for performing self-abortion. Similarly, in Uruguay, the threats of retrogression reported above have been responded to vigorously by the abortion rights movement, as can be seen [in the report of the press conference](#) that took place on November 4.

And there is good news from other continents. In Benin, the Parliament [approved the expansion of access to legal abortion](#), an advance [celebrated by the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics](#) and analyzed by [anthropologist Ramatou Quedraogo](#). And in San Marino, [abortion rights were approved](#) by a wide margin in a

---

referendum. Although the country is very small, the vote is important because it eliminates one of the last radically punitive laws in Western Europe (Andorra and Malta remain) and because of the proximity and influence of the Vatican.

Finally, the BBC published [a great report](#) (In Portuguese) on a historical series of opinion polls done by IPSOS on positions on abortion between 2014 and 2021. The results show, very significantly, that support for abortion rights is, on average, stabilizing, but it has been increasing in countries where laws are more restrictive or where today there are strong offensives against legal and juridical changes aiming to roll back existing laws, for example, in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the US, Hungary, Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Poland, and even Russia.

And we take note of the celebrations organized for September 28 - Day of Struggle for the Decriminalization of Abortion - sharing the [newsletter](#) of the International Campaign for Women's Right to Safe Abortion with reports of the mobilizations carried out around the globe. We also recommend the article by [Mariana Carbajal](#) in *Página 12* about the origins of the commemorative date.

## Art & Sexuality

[The mutant art of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro conquers a space in institutions such as the Pinacoteca, MAM and IMS](#)

## WE RECOMMEND

### Multimedia

#### *English*

[Queering Europe: Nationalism and Sexuality- A LSE Event](#)

[Calling out workplace sexual harassment in Ugandan markets](#)

[The Fastest Growing Plastic Surgery Trend in China](#)

Indonesia: [Diversity under threat](#)

#### *Portuguese*

[Neoconservadorismo e políticas antigênero na América Latina: Olhares Brasileiros](#)

[Lançamento Nossos Corpos por Nós Mesmas \(OBOS Brasil\)](#)

---

[“Por onde anda o diálogo entre a fé cristã e o feminismo?” com Sonia Correa e Odja Barros](#)

[Fé e direitos humanos na América Latina](#)

*Spanish*

[Discurso apertura Convención Constitucional Bárbara Sepúlveda](#)

[Conversaciones del GEFGS. 1. Sonia Corrêa](#)

[Fe, política y derechos humanos en Latinoamérica](#)

## **Academic publications**

*English*

[Beyond Gender Wars and Institutional Panics: Recognising Gender Diversity in UK Higher Education](#) (Sally Hines)

[“Anti-Gender Politics in the Populist Moment”](#) (Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk)

[“Queer Roma”](#) (Lucie Fremlova)

International Feminist Journal of Politics, Volume 23, Issue 4 (2021): [Feminism\(s\) and anti-gender backlash: lessons from Latin America](#)

[“Triumph and concession? The moral and emotional construction of Ireland’s campaign for abortion rights”](#) (Aideen Catherine O’Shaughnessy)

[SRHR and COVID-19 in Eastern Europe – snapshots from the region](#)

[“Neither angels nor heroes: nurse speeches during the COVID-19 pandemic from a Foucauldian perspective”](#) (Mendes et al.)

[“The Growth of the Anti-Transgender Movement in the United Kingdom. The Silent Radicalization of the British Electorate”](#) (Craig McLean)

[THE POLITICAL-PEDAGOGICAL PRAXIS OF AFRO-BRAZILIAN TRAVESTIS AND TRANS WOMEN: A READING LIST BY MARIA CLARA ARAÚJO DOS PASSOS](#)

*Portuguese*

[Políticas Antigênero na América Latina – Estudos de Caso \(Versões condensadas\)](#)

Revista Periódicus | v. 1 n. 16 (2021): [Intersexualidade: desafios de gênero](#)

Revista Em Tese | v.18 n. 2 (2021): [Dossiê: Nova Direita no Brasil: Matrizes teóricas, intelectuais e discursivas](#)

---

*Spanish*

[Recopilación de actores y análisis de fuentes de financiamiento de grupos fundamentalistas en Costa Rica](#)

[Una mirada al avance de los fundamentalismos políticos y religiosos en Colombia en el marco de la protesta social \(2021\)](#)

[Estrategia para negar derechos: Un análisis de las estrategias de los grupos antiderechos durante el debate por la Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo](#)

[“Objeción de Conciencia en Cifras”: Datos de Uruguay al 2021](#)

**Publications and press**

*English*

[Who Lost the Sex Wars?](#)

[INTERVIEW: MAYA SHARMA](#)

[“Men’s Rights Asians” Think This Is Their Moment](#)

[What I Learned From 10 Years Teaching Chinese Students About Gender](#)

[Foucault! Five leftist and feminist thinkers also inspiring the far Right](#)

[Online disinformation: a weapon to silence feminists](#)

[South Asia mourns Indian feminist icon Kamla Bhasin](#)

[Inside Nigeria’s unregulated human egg industry](#)

[Climate crisis and sexual and reproductive health and rights](#)

[Reproductive Justice In Western Sahara Between Patriarchal And Nationalist Discourse And The Right To Self-Determination](#)

[A Feminist Accident: On Abortion And Reproductive Justice In Egypt](#)

[‘I feel invisible’: The challenges of being trans in Nigeria](#)

[‘I have accepted my fate’: the hidden abuse in Uganda’s LGBT community – in pictures](#)

[LGBTQI Movement And The Trade-Off: Public Health vs Rights](#)

[How the American Right Fell in Love With Hungary](#)

[India: 25 years on, Women’s Reservation Bill still not a reality](#)

[Activists in Russia Push to Make Domestic Violence a Voting Issue](#)

[A year on, women still picking up pieces from #EndSARS protests](#)

---

*Portuguese*

[Relatório “Ofensivas Antigênero no Brasil: políticas de Estado, legislação, mobilização social”](#)

[“Experiências, dificuldades e desafios: retratos dos serviços de aborto legal no Brasil durante a pandemia de Covid-19”](#)

[Direitos reprodutivos: uma história de avanços e obstáculos](#)

[Aborto: uma breve história da legislação brasileira](#)

[O componente racial nas mortes maternas do Brasil](#)

Nexo Debate: [Direitos reprodutivos](#)

[‘A opressão de gênero é o pilar fundamental para todas as opressões’, diz antropóloga Rita Segato](#)

[Por que mulheres são mortas até hoje sob acusação de ‘bruxaria’](#)

[LGBTfobia de Bolsonaro atualiza moralismo da ditadura ‘hétero-militar’, diz Renan Quinalha](#)

[A lucrativa máquina de vendas que financia Olavo de Carvalho e outras dezenas de figuras da extrema direita](#)

[A feminina anti-feminista e o orgulho de ser submissa](#)

[Como a ‘girlboss’ foi de símbolo feminista a alvo de zombaria](#)

[Constelação Familiar: machismo às custas do SUS](#)

[Piauí: =igualdades](#)

[Compromisso com a vida das mulheres: a médica à frente do primeiro serviço de aborto legal](#)

[De corpo e alma na luta: a enfermeira que batalha pelo aborto seguro há 40 anos](#)

[O passado liberal pouco conhecido do Oriente Médio sobre a homossexualidade](#)

[‘É preciso tirar política para saúde LGBTI+ do papel’](#)

[O mundo sombrio dos ‘incels’, celibatários involuntários que odeiam mulheres](#)

[Rompendo os binários e a reciprocidade intergeracional](#)

[A dor e a delícia das transmasculinidades no Brasil: das invisibilidades às demandas](#)

[Morrer pela segunda vez](#)

[O caso de mulher do Kansas que pode mudar forma de julgar estupros nos EUA](#)

[Por que prostitutas na Alemanha são contra lei que deveria protegê-las](#)

[Prostituição: por que governo socialista da Espanha quer criminalizar a prática](#)

[Série #AquíMandoYo – sobre as novas formas de autoritarismo na América Latina](#)

---

*Spanish*

[Las mentiras sexistas de la ciencia](#)

[El cerebro y la mente transexuales](#)

[Haití necesita un feminismo inclusivo, que defienda a todas las mujeres, también a las trans](#)

[Samantha Hudson, la “bujarra” que da caña al fascismo español](#)

[Paraguay se declara pro familia pero no protege a sus niños ni adolescentes](#)