



**THE NEW DIMENSIONS
OF ANTI-GENDER POLITICS
IN BRAZIL**

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ANTRA (National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals)

SPW (Sexuality Policy Watch)

NUH/UFGM (Center for LGBT Citizenship and Human Rights at the Federal University of Minas Gerais)

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In Brazil, in early 2026, anti-gender politics have taken the form of vigorous offensives against the rights of transgender people. The wave began in late January, when the country's leading anti-trans organization published a report accusing pro-trans rights activists and academics of being mere tools of "globalist" philanthropy. Then, an unexpected promotional visit by the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Reem Alsalem, led to the spread of her well-known positions against gender identity rights.

Finally, trans Congresswoman Erika Hilton was elected to chair the House of Representatives' Committee on Women's Rights, a development that immediately triggered an avalanche of transphobic attacks against her. This episode brought anti-trans rhetoric into the mainstream media and high-level politics, bringing the controversy surrounding trans rights to the stage where the opening scenes of this year's presidential election are unfolding.

This brief report was prepared by ANTRA-SPW-NUH/UFGM to inform the international public about these developments, which occurred immediately prior to the ILGA LAC Conference. It recaps and synthesizes the findings of recent reports on the current state of anti-gender politics in Brazil, with a special focus on the growing role of feminist currents that exclude trans people in the Brazilian context¹.

¹ See <https://sxpolitics.org/spw-library/publications/blurred-boundaries-maps-the-ecosystem-of-essentialist-feminisms-and-their-relationship-with-the-anti-gender-field/35952/> and <https://antrabrazil.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/dossie-matria-final.pdf> (in Portuguese)

For a long time, Brazil has been a major battleground in the 21st-century wars against gender. In 2003, the accusatory term “gender ideology” was first used in a political speech in the National Congress (Borba, 2023). But the anti-gender offensive would only truly gain strength and scale in 2012–2013, when ultra-conservative groups launched a vigorous campaign against “gender” in public school curricula amid debates over the 2014–2024 National Education Plan (Moura, 2016).

Five years later, anti-gender and anti-feminist rhetoric and mobilizations served as a major driving force behind the 2018 presidential race that brought far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro to power. His administration carried the anti-gender ideology into state policies, gradually embedding it in the spheres of human rights, education, health, and even foreign policy (SPW et al., 2021). However, during this same period, significant advances were made regarding the rights of transgender people, as a result of two historic decisions by the Federal Supreme Court. The first, in 2018, granted legal recognition of gender identity based on self-identification, and in 2019, transphobia and homophobia were equated with the crime of racism (Bomfim, 2023).

Following Bolsonaro’s defeat in 2022, as soon as the center-left president, Lula da Silva, began his third term—amid the aftermath of a coup attempt that erupted after his election—coordinated attacks were launched against the rights of transgender people. This turmoil was described by Corrêa (2026) in the following terms:

Between February and April, more than sixty anti-trans bills were introduced at the federal and state levels, a number that would reach 293 by January 2024 (Avelar 2023). On March 8, Congressman Nikolas Ferreira—who had just returned from the Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, where transphobic rhetoric ran rampant—took the podium wearing a blonde wig to defame trans women. Before this spectacle, however, so-called “gender-critical” feminists had already entered the scene. On January 29, National Transgender Visibility Day, a delegation of trans women visited the newly created Ministry of Women. The photo of the visit posted on Instagram drew over 3,000 violent

comments, most of them accusing the minister of betrayal for having received “men dressed as women.”

These combined attacks fueled the spread and intensification of transphobic discourse on social media. By January 2024, 77 anti-trans laws were in effect in states and municipalities across the country, a third of which had been passed the previous year (Avelar, 2024). In this increasingly turbulent landscape, trans activists and allied organizations sounded the alarm about this new wave of institutionalized transphobia, pointing to the risks it posed for *travestis* and transgender people in a country with one of the highest rates of lethal violence against the LGBTQIA+ community (Benevides, 2025).

According to the report *Fronteiras Borradas* (SPW et al., 2025), essentialist feminist currents were present and active in Brazil long before 2023, but until the 2000s, they primarily expressed positions against sex work; however, this changed as anti-gender mobilizations gained strength. Around 2013, some of these collectives were involved in the first “bathroom wars.” Since then, albeit gradually, challenges to the right to gender identity and attacks on trans people have multiplied, while far-right political actors have continued to mobilize anti-gender crusades, especially those focused on educational policies and practices (National Observatory on Violence against Educators, 2025).

As in other countries, the visibility and influence of these trans-exclusionary feminist groups have grown since 2019, when the Declaration on Sex-Based Women’s Rights was released, which opposes the use of the term “gender” in international human rights standards. These voices echo right-wing discourses on “gender ideology,” claiming that sex is real and gender is false (Butler, 2024). In doing so, they invoke “science” and “truth” as rhetorical devices to ground their views on female materiality and the immutability of sex (Lopes et al., 2025). Transphobia is a key element of their broader appeal to a return to “authentic femininity”, which, according to them, has been lost (Bassi & Lafleur, 2022).

In Brazil, after 2023, these rhetorical strategies were increasingly employed to attack ANTRA—the National Association of Travestis and Transsexuals—the State Secretariat for Women, as well as the National Secretariat for LGBTQIA+ Rights, located within the Ministry of Human Rights and Citizenship. The capacity for advocacy and litigation against trans rights in this sphere expanded considerably following the creation of a new institutional

platform, *Matria—Association of Women, Mothers, and Workers of Brazil*—in October 2023 (ANTRA et al., 2025).

These dynamics were analyzed in detail in the aforementioned report (SPW et al., 2025, summarized in SPW, 2026), which also examines how the ideological boundaries between essentialist feminist currents and the far-right have become increasingly blurred and confused, highlighting how anti-gender and anti-trans discursive and political repertoires are shared between the two camps. This summary, which draws on this broader panorama as a backdrop, describes the emergence of new actors on this scene, as well as new forms of political collaboration between trans-exclusionary feminisms and the far-right, the contours of which have become clearer since late 2025.

Anti-gender movements in Brazil were originally sparked in the mid-2000s by the Catholic Church and ultra-Catholic networks, with fundamentalist evangelical voices joining this crusade in the early 2010s (Aragusuku, 2026; Junqueira, 2018). A few years later, this movement took on a more heterogeneous form, becoming a many-headed hydra—involving ultraliberal, libertarian, and other secular conservative sectors, as well as ultraliberals—that would play a decisive role in the 2018 presidential election (Corrêa and Kalil, 2020)

During the four years of the Bolsonaro administration, as anti-gender ideology penetrated the state apparatus, this ecosystem became even more heterogeneous. By the early 2020s, it included progressive and liberal voices opposed to “identity politics” and, most notably, increasingly vocal essentialist feminist currents. This section offers a concise description of some of these new voices present today in this complex political landscape, which are the main drivers of Brazilian anti-gender politics, now transformed into an open crusade against the rights of transgender people.

Movements for mothers' rights:

Since the mid-2010s, the expansion and consolidation of essentialist feminist currents have overshadowed the emergence of a new feminist movement composed of mothers fighting for their rights in response to the Parental Alienation Law (LAP), passed in 2010. The report *Fronteiras Borradas (Blurred Boundaries)* notes that, although the Parental Alienation Law was introduced and supported by deputies from the Workers' Party in Brazil, the concept of parental alienation was conceived by conservative strands within the field of psychology. As soon as its implementation began, following its approval in 2010, it became clear that the legislation paved the way for conservative judges to strip mothers of custody of their children in order to benefit fathers accused of gender-based violence.

This harmful effect was immediately criticized by feminist lawyers, but it also sparked the emergence of collectives fighting for the rights of mothers who demanded the law's

repeal, such as the *Coletivo Mães na Luta, Voz Materna*, and the *Movimento Infância Plena*. Essentialist feminist currents—already involved in civil society and institutional initiatives aimed at combating violence against women—joined this new wave of mobilization. Gradually, they expanded their legitimacy and leadership in this field, establishing connections with grassroots movements fighting for mothers’ rights and the repeal of the LAP.

WDI Brazil

Parallel to the mobilization against the LAP, Brazil saw a proliferation of essentialist feminist collectives on social media. This trend appears to have been fueled by the increasing virtualization of daily life and political debates during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this intensification should also be interpreted as an effect of the 2019 launch of the Declaration on the Rights of Women Based on Sex and the simultaneous creation of the Women’s Declaration International (WDI) network, whose objective is to promote the Declaration, which was released in 16 languages. Since then, the WDI network has expanded rapidly worldwide.

In Brazil, the new network affiliated itself with the group that manages the *No Corpo Certo* website, which is involved in digital campaigns to challenge the recognition of gender identity in childhood and adolescence. During the Bolsonaro years, this group participated in training programs on this topic at the Higher School of the Public Prosecutor’s Office. After 2023, as anti-trans policies gained ground and influence, the visibility of WDI Brazil also increased, and No Corpo Certo greatly expanded its transnational connections.

In 2024, for example, it co-signed an *amicus curiae* brief filed with the U.S. Supreme Court in support of a law passed by the State of Tennessee prohibiting healthcare services for children and adolescents with diverse gender identities (*Skrmetti v. Tennessee*).² In March 2026, WDI Brazil released a Style Guide to advise journalists on how to avoid using terms such as “gender identity” and “transphobia” and, conversely, to systematically use pronouns that do not correspond to the self-defined identity of trans people, as well as

² The Amici Curiae brief, which was also co-signed by Matria (see below), was coordinated by the Independence Law Center, based in the U.S., which has ties to Alliance Defending Freedom. For more information, see ANTRA et al (2025) (in Portuguese).

names they no longer use. WDI Brazil has many connections with Matria, whose profile will be presented below.

Matria - Association of Women, Mothers, and Workers of Brazil³

Since becoming an institutional platform in October 2023, Matria has expanded its membership to approximately 400 women and now has 50,000 followers on its social media profiles. Some of its members, as well as collectives and figures in its orbit, define themselves as “radical” feminists or “gender critics.” Its agenda includes supporting mothers’ rights, condemning violence against women, calling for the repeal of the LAP, and, above all, the abolition of sex work, surrogacy, and “gender.” Matria never takes a stance on abortion rights or sexual and reproductive rights, nor does it present clear proposals for gender equality in broader terms, despite its name evoking workers’ rights.

Its main focus is the defense of “sex-based women’s rights,” a framework used to drive a systematic campaign against trans rights, relying on highly professionalized *advocacy* strategies as well as what might be described as predatory litigation (ANTRA et al., 2025; Avelar, 2026a). Opposing and abolishing the legal recognition of gender identity based on self-identification is a priority for Matria. And to achieve this goal, the organization systematically challenges references to data on the life expectancy of trans people published on the websites of public institutions, as well as existing rules that allow incarcerated trans people to be housed in facilities according to their gender identity. It also calls for the exclusion of trans women from women’s restrooms and sports activities.

More recently, the organization has filed lawsuits against public universities that have adopted quotas for trans students and launched a campaign against fashion companies that employ trans people. In 2025, it filed an *amicus curiae brief* with the Federal Supreme Court in support of a new resolution by the Federal Council of Medicine, which restricts access to gender-affirming care and prohibits treatment for adolescents and children. As demonstrated in the reports already cited (ANTRA et al., 2025; SPW et al., 2025; SPW,

3 *Associação de Mulheres, Mães e Trabalhadoras do Brasil* (in Portuguese).

2026), Matria cultivates relationships with left-wing figures and organizations, but above all, it openly collaborates with far-right legislators to promote bills that restrict the rights of transgender people.

As soon as it was established, its connections to trans-exclusionary feminist platforms and figures around the world became evident, a list that includes: the Women's Liberation Front (U.S.); FiLiA, the LGB Alliance, and activist Posie Parker (United Kingdom); Borrador de Mujeres (Spain), among others. As noted in footnote 1, in 2024, Matria also signed the *amicus curiae* brief in support of the state of Tennessee in the case Skrmetti v. Tennessee, which was part of a broader litigation strategy in favor of the law led by Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) (ANTRA et al., 2025).⁴ And, as will be seen in the next section, since 2025 this partnership has taken on new, more solid contours.

Isabel Institute - Shield of Life, Family, and Freedom⁵

Founded in 2023, this new ultra-Catholic NGO presents itself as a new center for advocacy and legal action against abortion and in favor of the "family."⁶ Named in honor of the Brazilian crown princess of the late 19th century, who signed the law abolishing slavery, it also defines itself as a shield for conservative values and "freedom." Since 2025, the Isabel Institute has frequently filed lawsuits in partnership with ADF International, the transnational branch of Alliance Defending Freedom.

In June 2025, the Institute co-signed an *amicus curiae* brief with ADFI challenging the argument in the lawsuit filed with the Federal Supreme Court by ANTRA, which questioned the constitutionality of the ban on healthcare for transgender adolescents and children established by the aforementioned resolution of the Federal Council of Medicine. In early 2026, ADF announced on its website that it was acting as a litigation partner in cases led by the Isabel Institute in defense of two women accused of transphobic speech, which will be

4 ADF (Alliance Defending Freedom) describes itself as "the world's largest Christian legal organization committed to protecting religious freedom, free speech, the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family, and parental rights"⁸³. The group is responsible for successful cases such as *Dobbs v. Jackson*, which in 2022 led to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling that established the constitutional right to abortion in the U.S.

5 Instituto Isabel – O Escudo da Vida, da Família e da Liberdade

6 Ives Gandra Martins, leader and principal intellectual voice of Opus Dei in Brazil, is a member of its board of directors.

described in more detail in the following section.

The International LGB Alliance

Founded in the United Kingdom in 2019 as an informal collective opposing the inclusive guidelines for trans people adopted by Stonewall (a transnational LGBTQIA+ rights advocacy NGO), the LGB Alliance was formalized in 2021. It positions itself as the exclusive voice of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and openly calls for the expulsion of trans, non-binary, and intersex people from existing LGBTQIA+ rights platforms. This extreme position has inevitably caused conflict and fragmentation in this political arena (Gwenffrewi, 2025). In September 2025, the International LGB Alliance (ILGBA) was established and describes itself as a federation of LGB groups from 14 countries.

From very early on, the UK LGB Alliance maintained ties with the now-defunct Brazilian *LGB Front*. In 2022, however, the Brazilian LGB Alliance was established and remained largely inactive until 2025, when the LGBIA emerged. On that occasion, Brazilian faces appeared in the promotional materials announcing the creation of the international network, with some overlap with Matria as well. Not least, individuals and groups who, since Bolsonaro's election in 2018, have identified as "right-wing gays" celebrated the emergence of the ILGBA with great enthusiasm.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

As previously mentioned, in late January 2026, Matria published a report titled “Who Funds Trans Activism in Brazil?”, leveling unfounded accusations against ANTRA, SPW, and NUH/UFMG, as well as against partner organizations that co-signed the reports *Blurred Boundaries* and the *Matria Dossier* released in 2025. Based on data published annually by these organizations, the document discloses their funding sources to argue that they are mere puppets of the so-called globalist philanthropic complex, whose main objective is to impose a transgender ideology on Brazilian society.

In February, ADF announced that it was acting as a co-counsel in the defense of Brazilian women who had been accused of making transphobic remarks. The first case involves a lawsuit filed in 2020 by Erika Hilton—who is now a congresswoman—when she was elected to the São Paulo City Council, against a student at the Federal University of Paraíba.⁷ The second case was triggered by a complaint filed with the Federal Police to investigate a well-known trans-exclusionary influencer who had been systematically posting content on her social media that aggressively disregarded the gender identity of the National Secretary for LGBTQIA+ Rights.

Andrea Hoffmann Formiga, president of the Isabel Institute, is the legal representative for these two individuals on behalf of the ADF. In March, trial judges in the state of Paraíba and the Federal District dismissed the charges, arguing that the defendants’ posts were protected by the freedom of expression clause of the Federal Constitution. These results demonstrate the effectiveness of the partnership between the Isabel Institute and the ADF and may pave the way for future litigation cases, with the aim of challenging the prohibition on transphobic speech as a violation of freedom of expression.

Also in late February, Matria announced on its social media and in press releases that the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Reem Alsalem, was arriving

⁷ An analysis of the case was the subject of an opinion piece in the Wall Street Journal. Access here: <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/brazil-criminalizes-transgender-dissent-69ae7917>

in Brazil during the week of the 8M commemoration. The announcements suggested that Alsalem was coming to Brazil on an official UN mission, which was not the case. To understand the dynamics that followed, we need to go back in time.

During the Bolsonaro administration, Alsalem had negotiated an official mission to Brazil, and the visit was scheduled for May 2022 (SPW et al., 2025; SPW, 2026). The rapporteur herself, however, requested that the mission be postponed until the end of the year, which was not possible due to the presidential elections. However, as soon as the Lula administration took office, the mission was rescheduled for July–August 2023. Nevertheless, a few weeks prior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested that the mission be postponed again, a decision that was not well received by Alsalem (see details in SPW et al., 2025; SPW, 2026).

The 2026 visit was not official but rather promotional, in response to an invitation from Matria, and as such was not funded by regular UN resources. Before Brazil, the rapporteur visited Mexico and Colombia, where—although not on official missions—she gave lectures at religious universities and also met with state officials.⁸ After her visit to Brazil, Alsalem attended the 70th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York, where she participated in UN panels as well as in side events sponsored by essentialist feminist initiatives and ultra-conservative institutions and networks⁹.

In São Paulo, where she arrived on March 1, the Special Rapporteur met with members of Matria and other local women’s collectives. She then traveled to Brasília to give a lecture at the University of Brasília and participate in a hearing convened by the Senate Human Rights Commission. The Commission is chaired by Damares Alves, an ultra-

8 The UN sets rules for promotional and non-academic visits that require official authorization for meetings with authorities and prevent rapporteurs from issuing official statements. In Mexico, Alsalem visited Anahuac University, a private institution sponsored by the Legionaries of Christ, but was also received by the Congressional Gender Commission and the Senate Presidency. In Colombia, she gave lectures at the University of La Sabana, linked to Opus Dei, and at the School of Medicine of the Javeriana University (Jesuit). But she also met with associate justices of the Constitutional Court, the Minister of Sports, and members of the Defensoria del Pueblo.

9 On March 10, she participated in an event organized by the Heritage Foundation, C-FAM, and Family Watch International (ultraconservative organizations), in partnership with the governments of Nigeria, Turkey, Namibia, and Djibouti. The debate was moderated by a representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), known for its regressive positions on gender equality and the rights of women and the LGBTQIA+ community.

conservative senator who is an evangelical pastor and served as Minister of Women, Family, and Human Rights in Jair Bolsonaro's government. At the hearing, Alsalem participated in a panel composed of the Senator, her chief of staff, and the directors of Matria and the Isabel Institute.

Alsalem had requested meetings with high-ranking officials from the executive and judicial branches, but these did not materialize. The only high-level official to receive her was Supreme Court Justice Cármen Lúcia, in a private meeting. Although her presence in Brazil was not official, the visit was the subject of 17 news reports, most of which were positive, indicating that the Brazilian public sphere is becoming hostile toward gender identity rights and trans people themselves.

During his unexpected visit to Brazil, Alsalem defended women's "sex-based rights," which entails outright opposition to the right to self-determined gender identity. In an interview with the feminist magazine *AzMina*, he stated: "Being a man or a woman is a material reality, like a chair or a giraffe. Women are adult biological females, and men are adult biological males".¹⁰ These statements would continue to reverberate after his departure.

Before examining these effects, it is worth noting that in the same interview, Alsalem refused to reveal who had funded her visit to Latin America, including Brazil. However, data available on the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights indicates that, in 2024, his mandate received voluntary funds totaling 70,000 U.S. dollars from Saudi Arabia and support from research assistants at the Colombian University of La Sabana, which is maintained by Opus Dei (Avelar, 2026b). In 2025, his mandate received \$100,000 from the Gulf Cooperation Council and \$50,000 from the South Korean government¹¹.

The subsequent repercussions of the visit stem from the fact that Alsalem's presence in Brazil during the week of March 8 triggered an intense circulation of discourse opposing

10 This view is in line with the position expressed by Kathleen Stock, author of the book *Material Girls*, according to whom the distinction between men and women can be equated to the differences between bipedal and quadrupedal animals.

11 See UN Human Rights Council, Facts and figures on special procedures in 2025. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/66/Add.1>

the right to self-perceived gender identity. This spread, in turn, can and should be interpreted as a precursor to the turmoil that followed the election of trans representative Erika Hilton to the Chamber of Deputies' Women's Rights Commission on March 11, a position she had openly campaigned for since February.

As soon as she was elected, Hilton became the target of derogatory comments by a well-known far-right television host, which triggered a relentless wave of widespread transphobic attacks that lasted for several days. As demonstrated by the digital trends analysis conducted by *Democracy in Check*, Hilton also received substantial support from voices on the progressive wing of the political spectrum.¹² The collection of news articles and opinion pieces on the episode, compiled by SPW, also illustrates the scale to which the controversy reached and the wide range of actors and forces involved.¹³

12 The report is available at <https://sxpolitics.org/ptbr/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2026/04/Erika-Hilton-na-presidencia-da-Comissao-da-Mulher-Relatorio-DX-17-03-2026.pdf>

13 The compilation can be found at <https://sxpolitics.org/ptbr/recomendamos/compilacoes/erika-hilton-na-presidencia-da-comissao-dos-direitos-da-mulher-compilacao/29026>

This brief report indicates that Brazil is once again becoming the epicenter of the anti-gender politics sweeping the Americas, Europe, and beginning to take shape in other regions. In this new phase, the anti-gender crusade manifests itself, above all, as a full-scale offensive against transgender people and their rights. Successive episodes of this new wave, recorded since January, make up the broader, tense, and uncertain environment leading up to the October 2026 presidential elections. In fact, they can and should be situated as one of the first chapters of the electoral contest that is unfolding.

In this election, current President Lula da Silva—who is seeking his fourth term—is running for the presidency against Senator Flávio Bolsonaro, the eldest son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, who is currently under house arrest after being convicted for the 2022 coup attempt. Recent opinion polls project a potential tie in the second round. Additionally, a new corruption scandal involving many figures from various sectors of the political world, as well as members of the Supreme Federal Court, makes this environment even more volatile and risky.

Given Brazil's geopolitical importance and, in particular, its role in Latin America, the purpose of this brief report is to urge our international partners to closely monitor political developments in the country and to stand ready to support us during the likely turbulent months ahead.

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