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Editorial

Gendering De-Democratization: Gender and Illiberalism in Post-Communist Europe

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Abstract
Many observers have written with concern about a growing "opposition to gender equality," "anti-gender campaigns," and even a "war on gender." Often, these trends take place in countries that are witnessing a decline in democratic quality, a process captured by such labels as "democratic erosion," "democratic backsliding," or "autocratization." This thematic issue brings together literature on gender equality and de-democratization with an emphasis on the role of illiberalism and a regional focus on post-communist Europe.

Keywords
autocratization; de-democratization; equality; Europe; gender; illiberalism; LGBTQIA+; populism

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Gender and Illiberalism in Post-Communist Europe" edited by Matthijs Bogaards (Central European University) and Andrea Pető (Central European University).

1. Introduction

There is a growing concern about a global decline in democracy, a process captured by such labels as "democratic regression" (Erdmann & Kneuer, 2011), "democratic backsliding" (Waldner & Lust, 2018), and even "autocratization" (Cassani & Tomini, 2019). At the same time, many worry about "anti-gender campaigns" by "anti-gender movements" (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017), "gender policy backsliding" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018), and even a "war on gender" (Korolczuk, 2014). Still, "there is a striking lack of research into the gendered aspects and implications of democratic backsliding" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018, p. 90). The contributions to this thematic issue aim to fill part of this gap by recounting and reconstructing how illiberalism and de-democratization have interacted to promote anti-gender politics in Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovakia.

This introduction to the thematic issue is a plea for gendering research on de-democratization. It looks, in turn, at gender, de-democratization, and illiberalism before combining them in a tentative causal model that is put up for further investigation. In doing so, it makes several points. The first one is that anti-gender politics comes in different gradations and manifestations—and so does de-democratization. Another point is that illiberalism is both a cause of anti-gender politics and a specific form of de-democratization. Finally, to appreciate the impact of de-democratization on gender equality, these concepts should be kept separate—analytically—and examined empirically.

2. Gender

Contemporary literature often uses the term "anti-gender" to describe movements, policies, and ideologies that threaten the rights of women and sexual minorities (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Under this broad heading, three gradations/manifestations can be distinguished. First, opposition to gender is defined as "any activity in which a perspective opposing feminist politics and

gender+ equality policy is articulated in a way that can be expected to influence or is actually influencing politics or policymaking at any stage" (Verloo, 2018a, p. 6). Second, gender policy backsliding is defined as "states going back on previous commitments to gender equality norms as defined in their respective political contexts" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018, p. 92). Krizsán and Roggeband operationalize gender policy backsliding along four dimensions:

- Discursive delegitimation;
- Policy dismantling and reframing;
- Undermining of implementation;
- Erosion of accountability and inclusion mechanisms.

Finally, state antifeminism is defined as "the actions of agents or agencies of the state" that slow, stop, or push back "the mobilizations of the feminist movement (whether in or outside the state)" (Dupuis-Déri, 2016, p. 23). In other words, a change from a feminist partner to a "hostile state" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 610). The contributions to this thematic issue show that in post-communist Eastern Europe, all three anti-gender gradations/manifestations can be found, from opposition to gender in Slovakia (Maďarová & Hardoš, 2022; Zvada, 2022), gender policy backsliding in Romania (Dragolea, 2022), to state anti-feminism in Poland (Grzebalska, 2022; Zbytniewska, 2022) and even more so Hungary (Linnamäki, 2022; Parti, 2022; Takács et al., 2022).

3. De-Democratization

Like anti-gender politics, democratic decline has various gradations and manifestations. Autocratization is defined through its direction as "a process of regime change towards autocracy" (Cassani & Tomini, 2019, p. 22). De-democratization (Bogaards, 2018) is defined by its direction and its starting point. It does not preclude that democracies turn into autocracies, but it leaves the endpoint open. Democracies can become less democratic in multiple ways. Merkel and his collaborators identify four types of defective democracy: exclusive, delegative, illiberal, and tutelary (Bogaards, 2009). Hungary is a special case because it is defective across the board (Bogaards, 2018), if it has not yet crossed the threshold to an electoral authoritarian regime (Bogaards, 2020).

Freedom House's *Nations in Transit* is critical of the region's many hybrid regimes, combining elements of autocracy and democracy, and notes with concern that even among the comparatively strong democracies, scores have gone down (Smeltzer & Buyon, 2022). However, using the Democracy Barometer, Bochsler and Juon (2020, p. 182) caution that "drastic cases, such as Hungary, and more recently, Poland…do not seem representative for the region." Relying on data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, Stanley (2019) is more pessimistic, but also notes substantial variation in post-communist Europe.

4. Iliberalism

The contributions to this thematic issue see a close connection between illiberalism and gender. Holzleithner (2022) argues that illiberal political thinking is fundamentally at odds with gender equality, discussing many examples of illiberal writing on gender. Linnamäki (2022) explores the link between illiberalism and familism, which sees the family as a central cultural value. Her empirical evidence comes from a content analysis of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments in parliamentary discourses on child abuse in Hungary. Gaweda (2022) reveals the similarities in the discourse on the demographic crisis in Poland and Russia. Dragolea (2022) provides a discourse analysis of a new party, the Alliance for the Union of Romanians. She observes a shift from gender traditionalism to an explicitly anti-gender discourse that is illiberal in nature. Zvada (2022) analyzes anti-gender rhetoric in the Slovak parliament. He finds that gender is primarily mentioned by illiberal parties, though with variation according to ideological background. Other contributions link illiberalism to populist actors and conservative ideology. Zbytniewska (2022) introduces the term "populist skirmishers" to draw attention to the pioneering work of individuals, mostly politicians, who seek to radicalize the agenda. Often, they do this by focusing on gender. Maďarová and Hardoš (2022) document the conservative/liberal divide in Slovak media and link this to the emergence of an anti-gender discourse.

This is in line with what other scholars have observed. For Laruelle (2022), traditional visions of gender relations are a defining feature of what she sees as the new ideology of "illiberalism." Mancini and Palazzo (2021, p. 410) write that "gender conservatism is a common trait in all illiberal scripts." The relationship between right-wing populism and gender is more complex (Hajek & Dombrowski, 2022), but Enyedi (2020) sees the heterosexual, married family as the core constituency of what he terms "paternal populism" (see also Fodor, 2022) Because of the close connection between illiberalism and anti-gender politics, several contributions to this thematic issue call for "gendering illiberalism" (Dragolea, 2022; Gaweda, 2022).

Sometimes, the gendered critique of illiberalism is difficult to distinguish from earlier critiques of neoliberalism. For example, Pető's (2021, p. 320) discussion of the gendered consequences of the "illiberal polypore state" ties in seamlessly with her critique of the "neoliberal polypore state." The two are even causally connected, as illiberalism "can best be understood as a majoritarian nationalist response to the failures of the global, neoliberal model" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 164).

The analogy extends to the relationship between neoliberalism and de-democratization. For Walby (2015, p. 117) "the neoliberal project of deregulation is a project

of de-democratization" (see also Alonso & Lombardo, 2018, p. 80). Whatever the merits of this argument, it is important to keep illiberalism and neoliberalism separate when studying their impact on gender equality.

5. Gendering De-Democratization

Several contributions to this thematic issue establish a direct link between de-democratization and anti-gender politics. Parti (2022) argues that de-democratization further undermined the reporting of sexual violence in Hungary. Through interviews with members of civil society organizations, she shows that the illiberal climate created by the Hungarian government discouraged victims of sexual violence to come forward. Takács et al. (2022) detail how gender-phobic policies in Hungary now even extend to children's literature. They trace this development to prime minister Orbán's return to power in 2010. Grzebalska (2022) explains the growing presence and normalization of women in the Polish defense sector by the pragmatism of illiberal policy-makers. Ergas et al. (2022) examine how "illiberal policymaking" has threatened gender studies programs around the world. They also briefly highlight three resistance strategies.

An investigation of the relationship between de-democratization and gender backlash requires an analytical separation between cause and effect. A model can be found in Vachudova's (2020) careful analysis of the relationship between ethnopopulism and democratic backsliding. The concept of "gender democracy" (Galligan, 2015; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2019a) is less helpful. If less gender equality equals less democracy, if an attack on gender is an attack on democracy (Lombardo et al., 2021, p. 527), then there is no point in examining the impact of de-democratization on gender.

While for analytical purposes it is necessary to keep de-democratization and anti-gender politics separate, empirically, the two can go together and both can be cause and effect. For Biroli (2019, p. 2), for example, the "gender backlash" and the weakening of democracy are mutually reinforcing. She identifies four mechanisms of "engendered backsliding" (Biroli, 2019, p. 3): majoritarian conceptions of democracy that come at the expense of minorities, acceptance of hierarchies and inequalities as natural, criminalization of opposition, and replacement of individual rights with rights for narrowly defined families. Future research should explore the causal relationships and mechanisms of gendered de-democratization in more depth.

A common pattern is that concentration of power (Verloo, 2018b, p. 226) and reduced civic space (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2019b) make it more difficult for women's associations to organize effectively, make themselves heard, and exert influence on policy-making. Krizsán and Roggeband's (2021, p. 622) social movement perspective interprets increasing state hostility towards gender equality as the result of state capture by anti-gender actors. One limitation of this approach is that it leaves little autonomy for political parties and the state. In Hungary, it was the government itself that invited, constructed, and funded anti-gender actors after it started a backlash against gender (Datta, 2021).

Figure 1 presents a basic overview of the causal relationships between illiberalism, de-democratization, and anti-gender politics. One can see that illiberalism, which is at the heart of this thematic issue, is both a cause of and part of de-democratization, through the phenomenon of illiberal democracy. De-democratization is separate from anti-gender politics and the arrow runs in one direction only, though in practice the relationship can be mutually reinforcing. At this stage, these causal claims are best treated as hypotheses in urgent need of theoretical development and empirical testing. Moreover, the picture is far from complete. It might be that populism and illiberalism have a direct impact on gender regimes, without the intermediate process of de-democratization. Also, the gender regime may be impacted by other factors.

6. Conclusion

Tripp (2013, p. 529) concluded that "there is still much that is not known about how regimes influence gender quality." What is true for regime type holds even stronger for regime change. Post-communist Europe is witnessing a rise in illiberalism, de-democratization, and anti-gender politics. The contributions to this thematic issue have examined these processes in a variety of countries and a variety of spheres, policy domains, and institutions. Several contributions also identified strategies of resistance, sometimes in unexpected places, as in the article by Ergas et al. (2022). For Chenoweth and Marks (2022), "understanding the relationship between sexism and democratic backsliding is vital for those who wish to

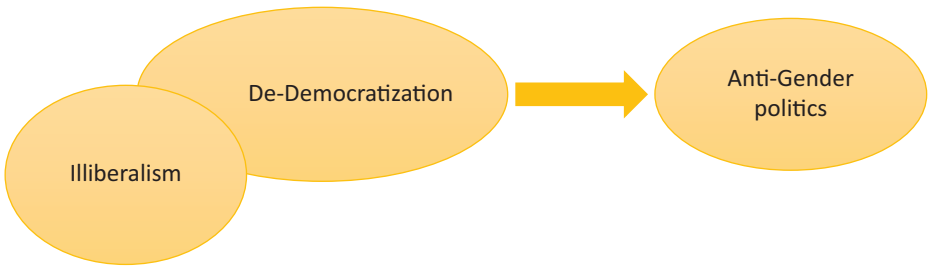

Figure 1. The causal chain between illiberalism, de-democratization, and anti-gender politics.

fight back against both." This thematic issue seeks to contribute to that fight, agreeing with Verloo (2018b, p. 228) that the best way to protect feminist gains is to protect democracy, notwithstanding democracy's own troubled history with gender equality.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

Reactionary Gender Constructions in Illiberal Political Thinking

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Abstract
Theories of the state, its functions, limits, and legitimacy have been overwhelmingly "liberal" in the past few decades, in a very broad sense of the term. Such theories are inherently open to a diversity of genders, sexual orientations, and ways of living together because they place equal freedom and the right to prosper according to one's own ideas front and centre. Illiberal political thinking is of a completely different stock. This article focuses on the role of gender and sexuality in such approaches. Both gender and sexuality are pivotal for illiberalism's defence of an order that is supposed to overcome Western-style liberal democracy. In contrast to the liberals' and their like-minded critics' quest for social justice in societies that are traversed by structures of oppression and domination, illiberal political thinking offers an utterly different brand of autocratic rule that keeps conventional hierarchies intact. It only takes note of advanced gender theories to either ridicule them or condemn them as a supposed threat to social cohesion. This article exposes illiberal approaches to gender and sexuality, considering the roots and focus of the former on the dichotomy of public/private and illiberals' aversion to equality and human rights.

Keywords
convention; culture; equality; gender; human rights; law and morality; liberty; sexuality

Issue
This article is part of the issue "Gender and Illiberalism in Post-Communist Europe" edited by Matthijs Bogaards (Central European University) and Andrea Pető (Central European University).

1. Introduction

The trend toward illiberal politics has become a worldwide phenomenon. In 2014, in his Băile Tuşnad speech, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared Hungary an "illiberal democracy" (Orbán, 2014); similar developments also occurred in Poland and other former communist states. Krastev and Holmes (2020, p. 12) drastically speak of an "anti-liberal counter-revolution that began in post-communist Europe, specifically in Hungary, and that has now metastasized worldwide." The situation in the USA is particularly disconcerting. While Donald Trump's re-election failed in 2020, "Trumpism" with its authoritarian streak has left deep imprints, not only on the Republican Party. Using a variety of tricks, the former president succeeded in installing an illiberal majority of Justices on the Supreme Court, which has now intensified its process of dismantling long-standing rights, most notably by overruling *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the precedent that had enshrined the right to abortion for nearly fifty years. *Roe v. Wade*, the majority in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022) insisted, had been "egregiously wrong" from the beginning because its holding was "not deeply rooted in the nation's history and traditions." With this line of argument, a plethora of other rights, such as the right to choose one's sexual partner regardless of their gender, and marriage equality are possibly up for disposal, as Clarence Thomas's concurring opinion in *Dobbs* suggests. In the USA, the era of expanding individual rights, a hallmark of liberalism, has ended with a bang.

Events such as these, and the role played by reactionary gender constructions (aka "antigenderism") in illiberal politics are the object of significant studies (e.g., Mancini & Palazzo, 2021; Petö, 2021; Verloo, 2018). The article at hand wants to dig into another place, looking for the foundations of political illiberalism and its gender politics in political thinking. This endeavour leads to

the fringes of the field and into perilous proximity of fascist approaches (cf. McAdams, 2022). Illiberal political thinking contrasts sharply with liberal political philosophies that take the idea of equal freedom as a point of departure, and that are sensitive to the dangers of political abuse of power. Liberal approaches insist on restraining governmental power through law under a constitution, "creating institutions protecting the rights of individuals living under their jurisdiction" (Fukuyama, 2022, p. 3). Based on the premise that all people have equal moral worth, they advocate for every person's right to live according to their own ideas. Therefore, such theories are inherently open toward a diversity of genders, sexual orientations, and ways of living together; their design is hospitable to the human rights of women and LGBTIQ* people. To be sure, liberal political theories are often rightly criticized for their neglect of the grim realities of marginalized groups, for their merely implicit ways of dealing with discrimination and oppression, and for their disregard of the private sphere and its complex interplay with public life as a major source of gendered exclusion. This is part of the "dark legacy" (Petö, 2021, p. 315) of liberalism, as is its lack of attention to economic considerations and the material conditions of individual self-fulfilment. However, these disputes are conducted under a set of shared principles.

Illiberal political theories are of a completely different stock. As a rule, they are genuinely reactionary—they (angrily) respond to political liberalism, specifically to its hegemony in Europe after the end of communism. Indeed, Eastern European thinkers such as Ryszard Legutko, a Polish philosopher and member of the European Parliament for the Peace and Justice Party, believe that liberalism is fundamentally alien to Eastern Europe. Disregarding the national traditions grounded in Roman Catholicism, the process of democratization under the banner of liberalism seemed to amount to a "cultural conversion" (Krastev & Holmes, 2020, p. 10) akin to the reign of communism. Indeed, throughout his book, *The Demon in Democracy*, Legutko aims to delegitimize liberalism by showing structural analogies with communism. Liberal theories' commitment to equality, in particular, arouses illiberals' objection. (Gendered) inequalities are not only deeply entrenched in illiberal theories, but are rather all but celebrated—usually by way of illiberals' distancing themselves from liberal political theories. They are scorned for their sympathies to those marginalized because of their gender and sexuality, especially in combination with other axes of power and domination revolving around race, ethnicity, ability, and other categories—the terrain of "intersectionality" (Crenshaw, 1989). Such approaches to gender and sexuality are the target of bitter illiberal polemics, inviting the sympathetic reader to nod in disdain.

At this point, some remarks on the notion of illiberalism and some features of illiberal political thinking are in order. The term "illiberalism" is rarely invoked for self-description (with the notable exception of Simpson, 2017, whose "defense of freedom" runs under the banner of "political illiberalism"). Rather, it is used by its critics as a pejorative term to denote theories that are anti-liberal or non-liberal. In terms of political theory, they belong to the broad family of communitarianism, "the philosophical rival of liberalism" (Frick, 2021, p. 863). There is a certain variety to communitarian theories, not least regarding their radicalism (Frick, 2021, pp. 861–866). Moderate versions criticize liberal theories for disregarding a person's embeddedness in constitutive communities and the duties this entails, but they do not completely discard the principle of equal freedom (e.g., Sandel, 1982; for a more ambivalent approach see MacIntyre, 2007). This is the hallmark of more radical versions ("intolerant communitarianism," according to Krastev & Holmes, 2020, p. 13), which are the focus of the present article, and which are referred to as "illiberal." The works studied highlight the central importance of religion as the foundation of an illiberal society (Deneen, 2018; Legutko, 2016; Simpson, 2017; Vermeule, 2022). Atheist approaches, such as that by de Benoist (2011), *spiritus rector* of the "Identitarians," are not central to this article, not least because it appears in the context of an edited volume on gender and illiberalism in post-communist Europe, where religion plays a decisive role, just like in the USA.

My argument proceeds in the following steps: The focus will first be on the ideological basis of illiberal conceptions of gender and sexuality, including the fact that they assign a particular place to women and (none) to LGBTIQ* people. This will be embedded in illiberal conceptions of the dichotomy between the private and the public spheres and the role of "moral" arguments. Based on these premises, illiberal political approaches try to fend off demands for equality, pointing out that equality is not a legitimate principle in the first place. In the same vein, they either dismiss human rights or give them their own, non-progressivist spin (Vermeule, 2022, pp. 129–130). If they invoke arguments for gender equality and against gender-based violence at all, they do it to leverage them against unwanted immigrant minorities (Abji et al., 2019; Mancini & Palazzo, 2021, pp. 410–415). This instrumentalization would be ridiculous in its insincerity were it not so effective in political practice. In conclusion, the article explores possible ways of engaging with illiberal political thinking in a fruitful dialogue. It is apt to add one final remark concerning its status: Since it may be too much of a concession to assign the works discussed, which belong to the genre of contemporary right-wing ideologizing, to the field of political theory, the article will be speaking mainly of "illiberal political thinking and approaches," and not of "illiberal political philosophy."

2. Illiberal Gender Constructions: Roots and Designs

Illiberal political thinking fundamentally denounces gender equality in all its aspects, including—and especially—

concerning sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (cf. the Yogyakarta Principles at http://yogyakartaprinciples.org). Gender equality and LGBTIQ* rights are seen as a symptom and an incarnation of what is wrong with liberalism. While liberalism seems to have rendered them sacrosanct, they are a constant nuisance to illiberal political thinkers. Their angry response is a rebuke of feminist and queer successes, as imported into liberal political philosophy and the legal structure of liberal democracies. Illiberal political approaches base their constructions of the gender dichotomy on several pillars: biology, theology, and conventional morality, combined with ethno-nationalist elements against the background of demographic crises that have grown into a full-blown "demographic panic" (Krastev & Holmes, 2020, p. 36). This fear is stoked by references to low birthrates, emigration, and the accompanying loss of the "indigenous" population, culminating in fears of "ethnic disappearance" (Krastev & Holmes, 2020, p. 39) and "replacement" through immigration by alien, particularly Muslim, "others." National culture revolves around conventional gender norms, and illiberal political thinkers believe that a community's (gendered) culture needs to be fostered and defended against internal critique and impositions from the outside. Not least, "gender ideology," according to its illiberal critics, is fundamentally alien to national cultures (Mancini & Palazzo, 2021, p. 404).

How do illiberal political thinkers construct the gender of the nation? Usually, they do not offer any in-depth, extensive gendered anthropology. They express their notion of men's and women's designated positions indirectly via scattered observations and remarks, often angry or sarcastic, criticizing liberalism and its "disfiguring conception of human nature" (Deneen, 2018, p. 185). Biology plays an important role in this endeavor. Again, illiberal authors fail to elaborate on the extent to which a woman's biology determines a certain destiny. Rather, this common patriarchal notion is implicit in their critique of women's emancipation and the underlying feminist ideas. One author, Patrick Deneen, a political theorist from the University of Notre Dame, identifies the "main practical achievement" of women's emancipation in many women's move "into the workforce of market capitalism" (Deneen, 2018, p. 86). Referring to "traditionalists like Wendell Barry as well as Marxist political theorists like Nancy Fraser," he calls this "a highly dubious form of liberation." It contains two aspects: women's "growing emancipation from their biology" and "freeing women from the household." This allegedly leads to a new and "far more encompassing bondage" for women *and* for men: their participation in an economical order that is inimical to real freedom, including "political liberty."

It is remarkable that Deneen includes men in this indictment since men did not have to be liberated from the household to participate in the economy. Regardless of how justified his criticism of the capitalist market economy may be, and Fraser (2013) is indeed one of the fiercest critics of feminists' entanglement in the neoliberal crisis, its main point is that women wrongly choose not to take their true place in society. Deneen does not spell out what that place is, but it is apparent in his writing: Women are supposed to fulfil their biological capacity of bearing children and their associated social role as caretakers. Moreover, we may conclude that if women devote themselves to the household, their husbands may rely on the services necessary for their unimpeded performance in the workplace, which Deneen does not fundamentally put into question.

It is typical for illiberal writing on gender to rely on a fierce critique of feminism. In turn, it seems unnecessary for the respective authors to spell out in more detail the implications for women's place in society. In this vein, Legutko dismisses feminist thinking as "crude and destructive" (Legutko, 2016, p. 95). He juxtaposes "a real woman living in a real society" with the feminist construct of women as a "figment of political imagination" (Legutko, 2016, p. 94). Feminists, according to this view, fight bogus battles, have a false view of the real problems real women face, and shamelessly exaggerate the consequences of conventional family organization:

> If in families it is the father who makes the major decisions, then such a power structure in a small social unit generates negative stereotypes that undermine the position of women in the family, which—multiplied by the appropriate number of cases—undermines the position of women in society at large and prevents them from cooperating on an equal footing with men. (Legutko, 2016, p. 99)

According to this passage, feminists allege that the power male heads of the household exert is detrimental to women's standing in society—an unwarranted conclusion, in Legutko's opinion. Rather, this passage suggests, it is only natural for a "real woman" to comply with the decisions her husband makes. It is also telling that Legutko refers to the father, whose command over his children seems to extend naturally to his wife.

Illiberal political thinking takes conventional gender roles for granted. It spurs a revolt against the successes not only of feminism but also of LGBTIQ* activism, enabled by invoking the liberal principle of equal freedom. These successes have materialized in legal reforms, such as antidiscrimination laws and, in many European countries, marriage equality. They have also changed public discourse—a fact decried vehemently by Legutko. Once again equating liberalism with communism, he argues against this imposition of the gender ideology *du jour*. Legutko sees himself and like-minded others clearly on the defensive since emancipatory movements have been able to exert "a disproportionate influence on the government" (Legutko, 2016, p. 66) and society:

> One is expected to give one's approving opinion about the rights of homosexuals and women and

> to condemn the usual villains such as domestic violence, racism, xenophobia, or discrimination, or to find some other means of kowtowing to the ideological gods. (Legutko, 2016, p. 120)

Legutko's reference to "the ideological gods" is an expression of his conviction that liberalism is an ideology, just like communism, rather than an overarching political philosophy. Far from being liberating, liberal democracy, to him, is a particularly subjugating regime. Legutko's list of liberalism's "usual villains" is a bit uneven, and it speaks volumes about the (lack of) value he attaches to physical integrity in intimate relationships ("domestic violence") and the dismantling of intersecting discriminatory structures in society.

Legutko is, of course, also critical of marriage equality, as may be inferred from his complaints that defenders of conventional marriage are subject to criticism "in a rhetoric of rage and hatred" (Legutko, 2016, p. 95): "Saying that homosexual and heterosexual unions are not equal, even if supported by most persuasive arguments," leads to "the charge of homophobia" (Legutko, 2016, p. 129)—a moral indictment that seems to bother him. Legutko and his fellow illiberals are not used to being on the receiving end of moral disdain, which may be the reason for their bitter criticism of liberalism's alleged moral superiority complex. Be this as it may, Legutko himself does not provide reasons why heterosexual unions are superior. He does consider the "warmth toward homosexuals" as "somewhat bizarre," tracing it back to "a persistent attempt to deconstruct family, the institution to which the Left has from the very beginning felt a singular hostility" (Legutko, 2016, p. 97).

Adrian Vermeule, a professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Harvard, is more direct in making his case against marriage equality. He regards law as "an ordinance of reason for the common good" (Vermeule, 2022, p. 120), which is founded on a religiously based idea of natural law. Vermeule is a prominent advocate of integralism, an approach that opposes the separation of law and religion (cf. Blakely, 2020). The natural law is binding for secular political authorities, since "marriage is not (merely) a civil convention" (Vermeule, 2022, p. 131). Rather, marriage is:

> A natural and moral and legal reality simultaneously, a form itself constituted by the natural law in general terms as the permanent union of man and woman under the general *telos* or indwelling aims of unity and procreation (whether or not the particular couple is contingently capable of procreating). (Vermeule, 2022, pp. 131–132)

Procreation is, therefore, the tie that binds man and woman together in marriage, if not based on their actual capacity, then by way of transcendental elevation. Vermeule's final remark is intended to preempt any challenges to the purpose of heterosexual marriages if a couple is physically unable to procreate, while same-sex couples should be excluded from marriage (see, e.g., Nussbaum, 2008, pp. 344–345).

All these authors believe that liberalism has gone astray. However, Legutko is particularly bitter about being let down by conservatives. Rather than opposing liberal approaches to gender and sexuality, they support them. He sees a united front of liberals, socialists, and conservatives in liberal democracy: "They condemn racism, sexism, homophobia, discrimination, intolerance, and all the other sins listed in the liberal-democratic catechism" (Legutko, 2016, p. 65). It is of pivotal importance for understanding Legutko's approach that he sees liberal democracy as (devoted to) a specific "liturgy" (Vermeule, 2017) in line with a certain enlightened morality that competes with conventional moral wisdom and that is deeply hostile to religion, which is so often the source of conventional morality. Whereas illiberals used to be on the "right side" of morality, they suddenly find themselves as villains in liberalism's "ritualistic" denouncement of their most profound beliefs, including conventional notions of men and women and their proper place in society. This is where the traditionally gendered dichotomy of the public and the private comes in.

3. Gendering the Public and the Private: Illiberal Moralism

The critique of the public/private dichotomy is one of the core elements of feminist thought. Feminists criticize that the privacy of the home insulates male power (abuse) from public control. This concept of privacy is deeply embedded in conventional political philosophy, and it has underpinned Western societies for centuries. Traditionally, that is, beginning with the age of enlightenment, (middle-class) women were bound to lead (only) a private life—a life confined to the private sphere, in the family, where they were dependent on their husbands. This included an allegedly natural acceptance of male command and coercive power—putting up with their whims to the point of physical and sexual violence. Only in the past few decades, cracks have appeared in the wall shielding the privacy of the home, and legal reforms inspired and spearheaded by feminist political activists have gained traction. The Council of Europe's 2011 Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is the pinnacle of European action directed against such abuse. It is telling that in some Eastern European countries, there is growing opposition to the Convention. While Hungary has never ratified it, alongside Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia, Poland has considered withdrawing from it. The driving force behind this, the Polish Minister of Justice from the Peace and Justice Party, Zbigniew Ziobro, called the Convention "an invention, a feminist creation aimed at justifying gay ideology" and claimed that it "harms the interests of women and of family" (as cited in Santora, 2020).

Women and the family, the argument goes, are better served when the private sphere remains private without state intrusion. In this vein, and again identifying a genuine likeness between totalitarian communism and liberal democracy, Legutko decries the politicization of private life in and by liberal democracy. This regime, Legutko (2016, p. 91) writes, "has an inbuilt tendency to extend its rule to all areas of life, no matter how small or, one would think, non-political." It particularly pains him to observe how "marriage, communal life, language" are politicized—and "the most private of all things private, the most intimate of all things intimate and thus the least appropriate to political meddling: the realm of sex" (Legutko, 2016, p. 105).

In criticizing the politicization of private life, however, Legutko never quite fleshes out what exactly he means. He presents himself as a staunch anti-totalitarian defender of privacy. But what kind of privacy does he have in mind? Again, Legutko does not develop his position systematically; it must be inferred from his points of criticism. Though he does not mention it himself, and he does not openly condone it, his is a conception of privacy based on conventional morality that easily goes hand in hand with the criminalization of consensual same-sex sexual encounters in one's home. As late as 1986, the U.S. Supreme Court in its infamous decision *Bowers v. Hardwick* held that there was no constitutional right of "homosexuals to engage in sodomy" (*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986, overruled by *Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003). In his concurring opinion, Chief Justice Burger brought up Blackstone's 18th century characterization of homosexuality as "the infamous *crime against nature,*" a crime of "'deeper malignity' than rape, a heinous act 'the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature,' and 'a crime not fit to be named'" (Blackstone, 2016, p. 142). Burger continued: "To hold that the act of homosexual sodomy is somehow protected as a fundamental right would be to cast aside millennia of moral teaching" (*Bowers v. Hardwick*, 1986, p. 197). While neither Legutko nor Deneen, not even Vermeule, aggressively advocate the criminalization of same-sex sexual acts, they still cling to the "millennia" of religiously informed moral wisdom that homosexuality is a sexual orientation of lesser worth. Hence, their polemics against same-sex marriage. For Vermeule (2022, p. 131), marriage equality is an expression of a legal order being "detached from the objective legal and moral order that underpins classical legal theory and the common good."

We may also infer from illiberal writings that laws should be in place against adultery, as well as sex work, pornography and, most certainly, abortion. In contrast, illiberalism is sceptical of any legal interventions against domestic violence and spousal rape. In this vein, Legutko fulminates against a "type of legislation" he considers "extremely dangerous and also illustrating 'coercion to freedom,'" namely that relating to "hate speech" and "domestic violence" (Legutko, 2016, p. 67). These idioms, he claims, "tend to incriminate more and more acts of conduct and of speech, allowing for further drastic intervention by the government and the courts in family life, the media, public institutions, and schools" (Legutko, 2016, p. 67).

The examples make abundantly clear that illiberal authors have a very specific concept of privacy. They are striving to uphold conventional Christian morality. Far from keeping the state out of private places, many such laws would lead to intrusions into private life. What is bothering illiberal authors is not the politicization of privacy as such, but a specific kind of politicization that might be characterized as a "postconventional moralization"—one that tries to implement the principle of equal freedom in law, including the protection of physical integrity, the partnership principle in marriage, and marriage equality. The argument that legal prosecution of domestic violence, for example, is an outgrowth of a totalitarian attitude and an encroaching state is imprecise. Indeed, such legal measures lead to state interference in the private sphere. However, they take place because a person's, predominantly a woman's physical integrity is threatened or has been violated. The reason for state intervention is the violation of the relationship of trust through violence—i.e., the violation of the very thing that is supposed to be protected from state interference. In the totalitarian state, on the other hand, the relationship of trust is destroyed by the fact that privacy itself is dissolved to enable state control of behavior. In this way, a relationship of trust cannot develop in the first place.

It is helpful at this point to have a look at the position of John Stuart Mill, a classic proponent of liberalism. Privacy is important to him, but not as complete insulation of the domestic sphere, as it were, from public interest and thus immune to state interference. When assaults occur in the private domain, Mill does not see them as "private" acts. Rather, the harm inflicted renders an assault an act to be condemned and outlawed by both law and public opinion—it is by its very nature public. As Mill writes so poignantly, a "person ought to be free to do as he likes in his own concerns; but he ought not to be free to do as he likes in acting for another, under the pretext that the affairs of the other are his own affairs" (Mill, 1998, p. 116). Mill explicitly refers to the problem of male command in the family to illustrate this point. Against the customary, legally sanctioned, "almost despotic power of husbands over wives," Mill prescribes a simple antidote: equal rights for wives and their protection under the law, as should be afforded to every person regardless of their status (Mill, 1998, p. 116). Those who do not see the injustice or rather even affirm it, according to Mill, "do not avail themselves of the plea of liberty, but stand forth openly as the champions of power" (Mill, 1998, p. 116).

In this vein, illiberal thinkers are champions of power, indeed. They are only interested in privacy as it suits their moral and religious convictions—and as a sphere of uncontested private power of a male head of the

household. The polemic directed against politicization is the polemic of somebody who believes he should be in power and who feels that his power has slipped away; or, in the words of Robin (2018, p. 3): "the felt experience of having power, seeing it threatened, and trying to win it back." What illiberals cannot stand is the contestation of the power that has been and is supposedly theirs, and the successes of those who strive for a change in their living conditions. In voicing their grievances and joining together in movements, the marginalized "raise the spectre of a more fundamental change in power. They cease to be servants or supplicants and become agents, speaking, and acting on their own behalf. More than the reforms themselves, it is this assertion of agency by the subject class—the appearance of an inconsistent and independent voice of demand—that vexes their superiors" (Robin, 2018, p. 5).

This critique of illiberal approaches to private life as the domain of unchecked power is of broad relevance. It has been and must be applied to liberal political philosophy as well, insofar as it has been ignoring this problem. But there is a decisive difference between liberal and illiberal approaches. The latter's conception of privacy mirrors autocratic power, which is fundamentally affirmed. The liberal conception of privacy, in contrast, is anti-authoritarian. It carves out a room where the individual is free from state intrusion, a room that is spatial as well as metaphorical (Rössler, 2004). Far beyond mere freedom of thought, which the infamous reactionary ideologue Carl Schmitt saw as the decisive crack in the mighty power of Hobbes's Leviathan (Schmitt, 1938, p. 84), the private sphere is the root of resistance against autocratic power. That is why a right to privacy is pivotal, again, as long as it is not used as a shield to immunize harmful behaviour.

4. To Hell With Equality—And With Human Rights

Maybe more than anything else, equality is the target of illiberal political thinking. The debate on the status of equality is as old as political and moral philosophy itself. Inequality was, for a long time, the default position, be it due to nature or custom, including as a justification for slavery. The deep-seated conviction that humans are born unequal was even upheld, indeed, invigorated by enlightenment philosophers' belief that, due to natural dispositions, women and members of "inferior races" were not born to be equally free. It took a long time to overcome this deep-seated bouquet of prejudices; and, of course, none of the liberal democracies is anywhere near perfect in this respect. Nevertheless, as a matter of principle, liberal political philosophy as well as legal constitutionalism choose to uphold the principle of equality. Accordingly, one basic prerequisite is irrevocable: the recognition of the equality of all people as human beings. Thus, every human being has the right to equal respect (of their autonomous decisions), concern (for their needs), and consideration (of their abilities; cf. Holzleithner, in press). According to this understanding, justice prohibits discrimination on grounds that are irrelevant to the moral valuation of a person, including gender, ethnic origin, religion, and worldview, but also age, sexual orientation, disability, or social position.

For Legutko, however, the trouble begins with equality: Trying to achieve it in liberal democracies leads—just like in communism—to the "liquidation…of social hierarchies, customs, traditions, and practices that had existed prior to the emergence of the new political system" (Legutko, 2016, p. 131). It is also an important reason why the liberal state is allegedly so intrusive: because equality calls for state policies. At this point, Legutko (2016, p. 132) identifies "a paradox of equality":

> The more equality one wants to introduce, the more power one must have; the more power one has, the more one violates the principle of equality; the more one violates the principle of equality, the more one is in a position to make the world egalitarian.

Deneen diagnoses another reason for the pivotal role of the law. Law is the only thing the liberal state can rely on once it has parasitically destroyed a society's culture, exhausted its resources, and thus become the victim of its own success: "Liberalism has drawn down on a preliberal inheritance and resources that at once sustained liberalism but which it cannot replenish" (Deneen, 2018, p. 29). If the culture in question used to be hierarchical, then so be it (or even: all the better). Vermeule (2017) bluntly proclaims that his "common-good constitutionalism does not suffer from a horror of political domination and hierarchy."

The victim is then not only equality, but also liberty—and protections against state intrusion, as the preceding section showed. According to Vermeule (2017), who is most outspoken in this respect, the point is "to ensure that the ruler has the power needed to rule well." The liberal distrust of unrestrained power is dismissed out of hand: "Constraints on power are good only derivatively, insofar as they contribute to the common good." Liberty, according to Vermeule, is highly overrated; much more important is a just authority that is concerned with the common good, which Vermeule (2022, p. 31) sees incarnated in the trio of "justice, peace and abundance" and which is based on Christian foundations. It can and should be enforced, "if necessary, against the subjects' own perceptions of what is best for them." In this view, law is the all-wise teacher, encouraging "subjects to form more authentic desires for the individual and common goods, better habits, and beliefs that better track and promote communal well-being." Vermeule's position is compatible with that of Deneen: Invoking the law is acceptable, as long as it is not used for liberal social engineering, but in unison with national religious tradition and culture.

Human rights are a culprit just as villainous as equality and liberty. To Legutko, the notion of human

rights is a manipulative label for "arbitrary claims, ideologically motivated, made by various political groups in blatant disregard of the common good, generously distributed by the legislatures and the courts, often contrary to common sense and usually detrimental to public and personal morality" (Legutko, 2016, p. 142). From this perspective, human rights are not the least common denominator that leaves room for a diversity of worldviews and ways of life; rather they are seen as fundamentalist (Maulin, 2011, p. 9) and authoritarian (de Benoist, 2011; Maulin, 2011, p. 16). They (inter)nationalize what should be left to the real diversity of lived cultures.

If human rights are to be affirmed at all, then only in a version stripped of "progressivism" like that proposed by Vermeule (2022, pp. 129–130). As a model, he mentions the Geneva Consensus Declaration on Promoting Women's Health and Strengthening the Family from 2020—a machination initiated by former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo during the presidency of Donald Trump. The idea was to (further) delegitimize and complicate safe access to abortions on a global scale. The Declaration rests on four "pillars": "concern for women's health," "protection of human life," "strengthening of family—the basic unit of society," and a defense of "the sovereignty of nations in creating their own life protection policies" (Geneva Consensus Declaration, n.d.). Vermeule (2022, p. 130) himself declares that pillars two (in its specific meaning of protecting unborn life), three, and four cannot be "immediately couched in the idiom of 'rights.'" And indeed, pillar four, in particular, is all but antithetical to the idea of universal human rights. If this is the kind of "pluralism" it takes to bring human rights into the orbit of illiberalism, it is tantamount to their declaration of bankruptcy. It is, to borrow a term proposed by Frick (2021, p. 870), a "hostile acquisition." It also misses the point of human rights, which is not "human perfection but equal liberty" (Frick, 2021, p. 873). Equal liberty, however, is what illiberal political thought is up against.

Overall, illiberal defenses of freedom(s)—not human rights—are utterly selective (Simpson, 2017). They do not include the freedom of those considered the uneducated, unrestrained masses, but the freedom, that is, the unfettered power, of the privileged few. This also spells the end of equality. As Robin (2018, p. 7) observes, illiberals dislike equality not because it is "a threat to freedom but its extension." Extending freedoms to others curtails their own freedom, because "equality ultimately means…a rotation in the seat of power" (Robin, 2018, p. 8). Indeed, it is well known what efforts the rulers in illiberal democracies make to prevent democratic change. The election law reform of 2012 in Hungary, initiated by the Fidesz government, and the "concerted and sustained attack" (Scheppele, 2018) on democratic institutions immediately come to mind, as do gerrymandering, the gutting of the Voting Rights Act, and increasing voting rights limitations in the USA (Williams, 2022).

5. Illiberal Anti-Pluralism: Erasing the Separation of Law and Conventional Morality

One of the questions posed at the outset of this article was whether a fruitful dialogue with proponents of illiberal political thinking is even conceivable. The above considerations show that the hope of success for such dialogue is fraught with many question marks. One major obstacle may be that illiberal political thinkers themselves are not quite open to such dialogue, not least because they believe that their opponents—liberals, feminists, LBGTIQ* activists, and multiculturalists—are unwilling to engage in fair dialogue. As Legutko (2016, p. 98) remarks bitterly: "Today's 'dialogue' politics is a pure form of right-is-might politics, cleverly concealed by the ostentatiously vacuous rhetoric of all-inclusiveness." Legutko conceals illiberals' own strategy here, namely excluding their foes right from the start, contesting their right to even participate in political debates. They routinely argue from the position of those in power; of those who decide who may participate in power and who may not. Hence illiberal politicians' tendency to manipulate election laws as soon as they are in power.

A major obstacle to fruitful discourse is the fact that illiberals do not believe in the separation of law and conventional morality, of their typically religious convictions and the law of the land. In this vein, human rights are considered illegitimate if they conflict with the natural order of things that is revealed to the true believer, e.g., of Christian morality. But contrary to what illiberals claim, the liberal state does not, for example, force a certain liberal gender order on people's lives. It is true that gender equality should determine public life, especially in employment and politics. Marriage, too, is no longer organized patriarchally under state law; instead, it is governed by the principle of partnership, and marriage equality has been established in many countries all over the world—not only in the so-called West. But the state and the law do not force people to live in a certain way. They do not force married women into professional life; as a matter of course, couples can still organize their marriages along conventional lines. Illiberals claim that this has become impossible. This is simply not true—as long as a married couple can economically afford their conventional way of life.

In a liberal democracy, committed to equal liberty, including religious liberty, traditional religious ways of life are permitted. In an illiberal democracy, *au contraire*, there is only one way of living that is recognized by the law—namely, according to conventional gender norms. For reactionary Christianity, a liberal political order means a demotion to a mere creed, for which the liberal state carves out a room, but that does not define how to lead one's life. This is also a result of emancipatory movements—e.g., of feminists and LGBTIQ* people—striving for equal freedom. But, as it is obvious to anybody living in liberal democracies, traditionalist Christian groups, small and large, are thriving in many places and

are utterly outspoken. That they encounter dissent, that this dissent is voiced, and that state policies are, by definition, not based on Christian values, is part and parcel of living in a liberal democracy. After all, separating law and religion is how religious civil wars were overcome (Rawls, 2005, p. 476), and they should not return. As the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine—waged also with the approval of the Russian Orthodox Church—shows, they may indeed return, which is even more reason to adhere to the idea(ls) of liberalism as an overarching political philosophy.

The decisive trick of illiberal political philosophers is to declare political liberalism an ideology—or a kind of religion—like any other. Political liberalism is not seen as an umbrella under which many religions and ideologies find a place as long as they affirm the basic structure of society (cf. Rawls, 2005), based on the equal right of every person to live according to their own ideas. Rather, political liberalism is considered to be as sectarian as religions and ideologies themselves. This diagnosis is based on the progressive gender politics that political liberalism entails. The sectarian, quasi-religious quality of political liberalism is, for its critics, exemplified in the US Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), which opened marriage for same-sex couples. For Vermeule, such instances of "progressive constitutionalism" embody the "liturgy of liberalism": "The repetitive impulse of liberal political theology to celebrate a sacramental moment of overcoming of the unreason and darkness of the traditional past" (Vermeule, 2022, p. 119). In this liturgy, the law is instrumentalized "in the service of a very particular liberationist narrative, in which 'rights' are continually 'expanded' to free an ever-larger set of individuals from unchosen obligations and constraints—legal, moral, and traditional, even biological" (Vermeule, 2022, p. 119).

Indeed, the law increasingly recognized the rights of women and LGBTIQ* people. However, this is not kowtowing to a "progressive orthodoxy" (Fukuyama, 2022, p. 3); it is an extension of the principle of equal liberty enshrined in modern constitutions. Illiberalism, by contrast, intends to establish an order where there is no place for feminist or queer ideas, unconventional men, women, and other genders. Whereas liberalism carves out a space for illiberals to live the way they please in their religious communities, with certain protections for the vulnerable, illiberals intend to break or erase their "enemies." An illiberal order is much less pluralist than a liberal order, and this is intentional. The illiberal fight against gender equality, including women's and LGBTIQ*s' rights to live free from gender-based violence, is part of an ethnonationalist insurgency against an unwanted import that is said to be alien and dangerous to the heart of the nation; and the heart of the nation is deeply gendered, with the heterosexual family at its core. It is also racialized, which explains the illiberal polemics against immigration from "alien" countries and against liberal multiculturalism "as a threat to the 'ethno-nation'" (Chin, 2021, p. 280).

Petö (2021, p. 319) has called this bundle of values and promises "the 'illiberal offer,'" warning that one should not be blind to its appeal. Illiberalism is much more than just opposition to "gender ideology": It "also offers a liveable, viable alternative centred on the family, the nation, religious values, and freedom of speech." In illuminating fashion, Petö refers to a chant by protesters against same-sex marriage during the Manif Pour Tous demonstrations in France: "Don't touch our stereotypes." She interprets this demand as a quest for recognition: for the protesters' specific identity and the moral values they hold as indispensable (Petö, 2021, p. 321; see also Case, 2019, p. 655). These protesters feel that politics fundamentally disregards them in their quest for recognition. Just like illiberal political thinkers, they do not consider marriage equality a harmless expansion of legal possibilities that leaves room for individual moral disapproval, e.g., for religious reasons. For them, the *legal* extension of marriage is an intrusion on their *moral* convictions. Again, this position is based on a collapse of the separation of law and conventional, religiously informed morality. It seems to be the task of liberal political philosophy to insist on the importance of this distinction. Besides, it needs to emphasize that equal rights of unconventional minorities do not infringe on the rights of those who lead conventional lives, because they are simply not affected.

6. Conclusion

Illiberal political thinking rejects the liberal principle of equal freedom, advocating for a society in which traditional hierarchies dominate. The hierarchy between men and women, informed in particular by religion, plays a central role in that context, to the exclusion of unconventional genders and sexual orientations. The insistence on privacy is designed to reinstate male power in the family and seal it off against state control. In contrast, the state is very much authorized to intervene in behaviours identified as conventionally immoral, but this is masked by ostensibly anti-totalitarian rhetoric. The liberal principle of equal freedom is delegitimized, which also entails the vilification of human rights. As this article elaborated, this position in illiberal political thought rests essentially on erasing the boundaries between religion and politics. This is also the reason why a fruitful dialogue seems so futile: A basic prerequisite of such dialogue is the recognition of a specific sphere of state action that transcends religious positions. To reject this differentiation means to give up an essential basis for the peaceful coexistence of people across religions. Illiberal political thought embraces this; it is up to liberal political philosophy to elaborate why such a position is untenable.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

Not in Front of the Child: Illiberal Familism and the Hungarian Anti-LGBTQ+ "Child Protective Law"

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Abstract
Research on familialism in Europe usually focuses on family policies, pointing out how female reproductive and work rights are often contrasted with the interest of the family, as shown by the individualism vs. familism understanding of familism (familialism). Here, however, I focus on another understanding of familism that sees the family as the model for other social institutions. This novel angle on the European context enables research on a scarcely researched aspect: how familism is used to render non-heterosexual rights illegitimate. Turning to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's rhetorical understanding of politics, I show how the rhetorical use of the family legitimizes anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments. I focus on the Hungarian "Child Protective Law," passed by the illiberal Fidesz-KDNP government in 2021. The content analysis of the material shows how the Hungarian government's aspiration to protect children, both as crucial members of heterosexual nuclear families as well as symbols of the illiberalist future of the country, legitimizes anti-LGBTQ+ stances. This happens, first, through a discursive link between LGBTQ+ people and child abuse. Second, it occurs through the government´s familistic ideal of the Christian heterosexual family, which also constitutes its antagonistic frontier as the LGBTQ+ community. I argue for a new articulation of the illiberal "us" and its liberal frontier, where the ideal family, and in particular heterosexuality, function as a means of exclusion. This article contributes to existing literature on gender and illiberalism as well as to current discussions on the limits of the theoretical concepts of familism.

Keywords
child protective law; familism; Hungary; illiberalism; LGBTQ+ rights

Issue
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1. Introduction

Recent research sees familialism as "a major key tenet of the illiberal project in Central Europe" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 167). Familialism in this context is understood as an ideology which values the institution of the family more than the individual interests of the family members (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). Most papers relying on this understanding of familialism investigate family policies to offer comparisons between different member states of the European Union (EU) and in particular of the Central-Eastern European region, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. However, as research has shown, familism as the ideological usage of the family does not always directly translate into actual family policies (Szikra, 2018; Szikra & Szelewa, 2010), but acts as an ideological base to which states and policy makers can refer to, to justify their decisions in matters that often exceed the scope of family politics (Szikra & Szelewa, 2010). To address this ideological use of the family, I use the term "familism" to refer to an ideology that prioritizes the family over other social institutions or that claims the family as the model for other social institutions (Ochiai, 2013, pp. 20–21; Tóth & Dupcsik, 2011, pp. 153–154). This family vs. other social institutions understanding of familism widens the scope of policies that are seen as familist, as it enlarges the focus from the family as an institution itself to other institutions that are also conceptualized through analogy to the family.

Familism (familismo) refers to the family as a central cultural value and most of the time case studies discuss immigrant social groups with Latinx or Asian cultural background (e.g., Choi et al., 2021; Hernández & Bámaca-Colbert, 2016). Most research highlights the positive effects of the familistic attitudes and behaviors of immigrant Latinx and Asian youth, such as stronger resilience to discrimination (for an overview, see Christophe & Stein, 2022). However, recent publications also draw attention to the limits of strong familist attitudes, especially its ambivalent or even negative relation to family members who identify with the LGBTQ+ community (Patrón, 2021). This negative correlation between familism and anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes calls for "consideration for systems of oppression," such as patriarchy and heterosexism, when researching familism (Patrón, 2021, p. 1095). In Hungary, a typical post-Soviet country in the Central-Eastern European region, processes of re-familialization have been detected after the failures of defamilialist aspirations of state socialism (e.g., Fodor, 2014; Kampichler & Kispéter, 2014; Szelewa, 2006; Szikra & Szelewa, 2010). By analyzing the illiberal Hungarian government's most recent political agenda of re-familialization, this article contributes to illiberal studies of the Central-Eastern European region, as well as to a broader discussion on familism, and especially its limitations towards the LGBTQ+ community.

I argue that in the case of Hungary, illiberalism and the illiberal "us" is constituted and legitimized by instrumentalizing the ideology of the family serving as a model institution for children's moral development. To focus on this notion of the family as a model for social institutions and, in this case, a model for the illiberalist definition of familism, instead of family policies, I offer a qualitative content analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015) of parliamentary debates that directly address the idea of the family on the highest, constitutional level, where the ideological framework of how the illiberal family is understood is secured. For the analysis I selected the "LXXIX Act of 2021 on stricter measures against pedophile offenders and amending certain laws to protect children" (hereafter LXXIX Act of 2021; Government of Hungary, 2021a), which came into force in January 2022 in Hungary. The aim of the article is to show how ideological familism is used to legitimate illiberal gender policies by demonizing queer sexualities.

2. Theory

Illiberal democracy, a term originating from Fareed Zakaria (Zakaria, 1997), is one of four established subtypes of defective democracies, that is, regimes that are minimally but not fully democratic (Bogaards, 2009, p. 411). It refers to a political system that is based on parliamentarianism and free elections which, however, derives from certain liberal democratic values "such as pluralism, individual freedoms, or checks and balances" (Laruelle, 2022, p. 304). Recent literature, however, widens the meaning of the adjective "illiberal" from referring only to certain regime types, and "institutional realities" (Laruelle, 2022, p. 307), and introduces the term illiberalism (Laruelle, 2022), on which this article also draws on. As maintained by Laruelle (2022), illiberalism is a reaction to liberalism, a negative term, acquiring meaning only through its antagonistic relation to liberalism. According to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's antagonistic definition of politics (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001), heterogeneous political demands organize themselves into a chain of equivalence around a common signifier, and their shared identity (closed meaning) is only granted by their negative relation to something else, something that they negate. This is how, in the Hungarian context, I understand illiberalism as a signifier, marking an antagonistic line between the illiberal "us" and the liberal "them.''

As Laclau states, antagonism is not just an external relationship between two positively definable terms, or in other words, two closed identities, but bears a constitutive function: The antagonistic other is necessary for any identity to represent "the fullness of one's own identity," as the antagonistic other offers a closure for one's identity (Laclau, 2006, p. 104). In this sense, for Laclau (2006), the closure of an identity, for example, illiberalism, is only possible through the constitution of its antagonistic other, in this case liberalism. As illiberalism is not an objectively definable positive term, I understand it not as a coherent ideology, but drawing on Laclau (1983), as an empty concept that "represents a backlash against today's liberalism in all its varied scripts—political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational" (Laruelle, 2022, p. 309). Furthermore, as the meaning of liberalism varies based on the context in which it is used, illiberalism becomes, in Laclauian terms, a floating concept (Laclau, 1983; Laruelle, 2022). This means that the antagonistic other is never fixed and can be constituted and re-constituted through a new antagonistic frontier or in relation to the different aspects of that antagonistic frontier. In the Hungarian case, for instance, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán first defined illiberalism as a work-based society as opposed to liberal welfare states and leftist ideologies, and second as a nationalist democracy, prioritizing national authorities over supernational ones, thus also incorporating anti-EU standpoints in his understanding of illiberalism (Orbán, 2014). In 2019, however, he expanded the meaning of illiberalism to Christian values and incorporated into his understanding of illiberalism, that has always advanced "a "traditional" vision of gender relations," explicitly anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments (Laruelle, 2022, p. 310). Thus, in the Hungarian context, illiberalism, as a logic of rejection of certain values, signifies an antagonism intertwining anti-leftist, anti-EU, nationalistic stances (Palonen, 2018), where recently the demonization especially of sexual minorities has taken up a vital role. This demonization of the LGBTQ+ community, as I argue here, operates as a new antagonistic frontier to define the illiberal "us" as a heteronormative identity.

Familism is a theoretical concept that refers to attitudes, behaviors, discourses, and policies that put cultural or financial value on families. According to Ochiai (2013), at least four different meanings can be identified by the term. First, familism (familismo) refers to attitudes and behaviors that prioritize family ties over other social bonds, attitudes that are often associated with Latinx and Asian communities. In this context, familism is often referred to for its positive effects, manifested in reciprocal "support, comfort, and services" among family members (Hernández & Bámaca-Colbert, 2016, p. 463). Second, familism is used to research discourses that constitute an ideal model of the family in a given society. These discourses also constitute those who "derive from the family image" and "are attacked mercilessly" for it (Ochiai, 2013, p. 20). Third, familism refers to societies where family relationships serve as a model for other social institutions. Finally, familism can also refer to family policies that promote the value and obligations of family members, especially in terms of care work provided for other family members in opposition to public services (Ochiai, 2013). For more clarity, however, as stated before, in this article I use the term familialism when I refer to the fourth, policy-related meaning of familism, and familism when I refer to the other three, ideological-discursive use of the family.

Feminist critique often addresses familialism and criticizes family policies that reduce the importance of individual reproductive rights in comparison to the reproduction of the nation, seeing this as an illiberal response to demographic crises (Kemper, 2016, as cited in Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 167). These studies successfully point out the dangers that familialism poses to the reproductive rights of women (e.g., Duman & Horvath, 2013; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). However, they leave the traditional heteronormative understanding of families unaddressed. As I aim to demonstrate here, illiberal systems instrumentalize ideological familism not just to hinder women's rights, but also to demonize non-heterosexual people. LGBTQ+ communities in Central-Eastern Europe have been experiencing increased hostility as illiberal parties foster traditional models of the family (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). This is because another definition of familism positions the family as a social unit as "a sort of ideal (though rather unattainable) model for other social institutions" (Tóth & Dupcsik, 2011, p. 153). The family serves not just as the foundational unit of an illiberal society, but also as a model for it. Just as the illiberal idea of the family models nationalist, anti-leftist, anti-EU, and Christian stances, familist ideology contributes to legitimate illiberal politics. Familism sees the family as "the most important contributor to the cultivation of…attitudes that come to shape society" (Tóth & Dupcsik, 2011, p. 154). This positioning of the family above other institutions responsible for reproducing social attitudes makes the family the main institution where reproduction of illiberal attitudes can take place.

The aim of this article is twofold. First, I bring the second and third meaning of familism into the context of illiberalism in Central-Eastern Europe. In this sense, familism promotes an ideal form of the family and transfers this idea to other social institutions as well. Focusing on these antagonistic ideological-discursive facets of familism in the illiberal context enables me to address the limitations of other understandings of familism, especially of familismo. The illiberal instrumentalization of family values clearly indicates how familial relationships are determined by patriarchy and, in this case especially, by heterosexism. This aspect is often missing in familism research (Patrón, 2021). Second, I offer an analysis of how familism contributes to illiberal politics in practice. I examine how the instrumentalization of a heteronormative ideal of the family, based on the parent–child relationship, legitimates illiberal policies along anti-LGBTQ+ lines. I demonstrate an antagonistic relationship between the illiberal (heterosexual, familist) "us" and the liberal (queer, defamilist) "them," constituted by the family and, in particular, heterosexuality, as the antagonistic frontier or means of exclusion.

3. Context: Familialism/Familism in Hungary

Literature on familialism usually classifies Hungary as a country where family policies provide "comprehensive support" (Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008) for families, that is, a country with "optional" (Leitner, 2003, as cited in Duman & Horvath, 2013, p. 23) or "choice-oriented familialism" (Szelewa, 2006, p. 3). This means that families receive both universal and insurance-based cash transfers for their children, and in addition there is also a wide network of public childcare facilities, as local governments are obliged to set them up. Nevertheless, as the amount of universal childcare support is very low, and the quality of childcare facilities varies significantly in different regions and is very poor in general for children between 0–3 years of age, the public, defamilialist "option" is strongly related to regionalism and classism (e.g., Fodor, 2014). On the ideological level, however, since 2008, after the political fiasco of the governing left-wing coalition, one of the most important political programs of the conservative Fidesz-KDNP coalition while building up its illiberal logic (Palonen, 2018) was to strengthen its conservative family politics (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018).

After the landslide victory of the Fidesz-KDNP in 2010, the government launched its family mainstreaming policies along with its anti-gender discourses (Kováts & Pető, 2017). The new Fundamental Law which replaces the country's constitution was unilaterally adopted in 2011 and has since then been modified nine times by the government's two-thirds parliamentary majority. The new law lays down "the conservative ideological foundations" of the government´s illiberal politics (Szikra, 2018, p. 8). A crucial part of this law is the ideological definition of the family and the imperative to protect it

as an institution of national value (Szikra, 2014, p. 500). Moreover, the Fundamental Law also ensured that a new family protection act was created (Act CCXI of 2011 on the Protection of Families) with the status of a cardinal law (Government of Hungary, 2011, Article L, (3)). Cardinal laws belong to a special legislative category, as they need a parliamentary supermajority to be modified. Furthermore, as they cannot be subjected to constitutional control, they occupy a quasi-constitutional position within the legislative system (Schweitzer, 2013). In the original Fundamental Law, and in the Family Protection Act, accepted in 2011, family was not explicitly defined, but its heteronormativity was nonetheless implied (Government of Hungary, 2011, Article L, (1)). The Ninth Amendment of the Fundamental Law, however, specified the heteronormative gender identities of adult family members, as it claims that "[t]he mother is a woman, the father is a man" (Government of Hungary, 2020b, Article 1). According to the argumentation for the Ninth Amendment of the Fundamental Law, the protection of families, as a heteronormatively defined institution, is necessary to preserve Hungary's Christian culture in opposition to widespread liberal support for cohabitations and gender identities that derive from traditional, Christian, heteronormative values (Government of Hungary, 2020a).

By defining adult roles only as parental roles within families, the government also defined family not just as a heteronormative cohabitation sealed by marriage between a man and a woman, but also as an institution that is based on "the relationship between parents and children" (Government of Hungary, 2020b, Article 1). Further, the Ninth Amendment of the Fundamental Law successfully expands the compulsory heteronormativity it imposes on families to children as well. It states that children have a right to healthy mental and physical development. To provide children with this right, it claims that what the government sees as "healthy" is "the right of children to their self-identity corresponding to their sex at birth" (Government of Hungary, 2020b, Article 3). Thus, heteronormativity is framed not just as a norm but as a necessary predicament for the healthy mental and physical development of children.

According to my analysis, this modification already formed the ideological base for a new wave of the government's anti-gender politics. Instances of the government's anti-gender discourse emphasizing the need to protect the children's (natural) sexual identities in schools and pre-schools, allegedly endangered by textbooks questioning the naturality of traditionally gendered identities, have occurred before 2010 (Kováts & Pető, 2017, pp. 117–120). However, the explicit connection between the protection of children and the government's illiberal discourses is most striking in the LXXIX Act of 2021. It marks a new wave of the government´s illiberal politics that explicitly draws an antagonistic line between liberalism and illiberalism concerning heterosexual and non-heterosexual bodies, orientations, and practices. I argue that the package of legislative modifications collected under the LXXIX Act of 2021 ensures that the government's hetero-compulsory ideological stand, fixed in the Fundamental Law, now explicitly informs and modifies certain policies in the field of media and education.

4. Material and Method

I applied the method of Qualitative Content Analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2015) to map out in what ways anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments are justified in parliamentary discourses on child abuse. I chose this method as it enabled me to analyze not only the manifest subject matter of the material, but also its contextual and latent content (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, p. 86). The goal was a description of the content patterns found in the data to explain how the content categories of queer sexualities and child abuse intertwine. In the following I will demonstrate how ideological illiberal familism is used to interconnect child abuse and queer sexualities.

As a first step I familiarized myself with the themes to decide on the material. As a result of iterative sampling, the material consists of the text of the LXXIX Act of 2021, the proposal, the modifications, and the parliamentary debates related to the Act. The material also includes the text and proposal for the Ninth Amendment to the Fundamental Law of Hungary (Government of Hungary, 2020b), as these documents were frequently referred to in the discourse around the LXXIX Act of 2021. The LXXIX Act of 2021 started out as a proposal for the modification of the legislative framework enabling stricter punishment for child abuse offenders. The first parliamentary debate (1 June 2021) and the further proposals for modifications from the opposition parties discussed only this proposal (and in general agreed with it). The English translations of the passages used in this article are mine.

It is worth noting here that even though the LXXIX Act of 2021 repeatedly talks about pedophilia, pedophile crime, and perpetrators of pedophilia when talking about the sexual abuse of children, I aim to highlight the differentiation between pedophilia and child abuse, mistakenly neglected by the law as well as by MPs during the debates of the law (Herek, 2016). Accordingly, in line with the main motivation of LXXIX Act of 2021 to enable stricter measures against perpetrators of sexual offense against minors, throughout the analysis I use the term "child abuse" even if the original text refers to pedophilia.

Anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments became part of the proposal after the Legislative Committee's discussion of the proposal, a week after its original parliamentary debate. The Legislative Committee describes itself as "a guardian of legislation" and its main task is to examine whether a proposal "enforces the provisions of the Fundamental Law" (Hende, 2022). Accordingly, the newly added comprehensive modifications were justified by the references to the Fundamental Law (Government of Hungary, 2021b). Oppositional parties

boycotted the parliamentary debate and voting about this new proposal (14–15 June 2021) and thus it was accepted with a two-thirds majority and without any opposition in the general vote.

After finalizing the material, I did two rounds of content analysis of the documents using the ATLAS.ti software. After the inductively generated codes and sub-codes were cross-checked, I finalized the coding frames and removed redundant quotations and those that are not relevant to answer the research question. As a result, I gathered 45 quotations organized into content categories shown in Table 1.

The three main content categories capture the three main recurring patterns across the dataset. The sub-categories refer to the manifest content of the quotes, whereas the three central categories stand for more abstract codes that incorporate also the latent and the contextual contents. As the coding draws on the latent and on the contextual content of the quotes as well, the central categories overlap. This overlap of the central categories is crucial to address the research question, as it indicates points of connection between them. To disentangle their connections, I turn to the sub-categories that belong to more than one central category and overarch across the material. Their analysis in the following sections unravels the links between the main categories with the focus on the *Anti-LGBTQ+* theme. The aim is to answer questions about how the categories of child abuse and LGBTQ+ are connected through a need to protect children, and how the Hungarian government uses the theme of protection of children to strengthen its familialist policies with illiberal motivations.

5. Results

The central category in the material is the need to protect children. This need is justified by the recurrent thematizing of child abuse and the harm that non-heterosexual people allegedly pose for children. The analysis, however, in accordance with the research question, puts the *Anti-LGBTQ+* category into focus and unravels its links to other categories. First, I show how a connection between the categories *Anti-LGBTQ+* and *Child abuse* is created to justify the need to protect children from non-heteroconform people. The sub-categories included in this section are *Liberalism*, *Media programs*, and *Sensitizing school programs*. Second, I demonstrate how the government's discourse constitutes an antagonistic relationship

Table 1. Content categories and sub-categories.

Category	Sub-category	The quotation refers to	Relative frequency in the dataset
Protection of children		the value and imperative of the protection of children	58%
	Family	family, marriage, parent-child relationship, responsibilities over children	49%
	Fundamental Law	the Fundamental Law, main values derived from the Fundamental Law	36%
	Christianity	Christianity, Christian values, the values of the Catholic church	31%
Child abuse		sexual abuse against a minor	47%
	Liberalism	the homogeneously constituted liberal "other," that is, left-wing media or politics, liberalism, and the Western countries of the EU	18%
Anti-LGBTQ+		an anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment	36%
	Family	family, marriage, parent-child relationship, responsibilities over children	49%
	Fundamental Law	the Fundamental Law, main values derived from the Fundamental Law	36%
	Christianity	Christianity, Christian values, the values of the Catholic church	31%
	Liberalism	the homogeneously constituted liberal "other," that is, left-wing media or politics, liberalism, and the Western countries of the EU	18%
	Media programs	certain content (programs, ads) that shall not be made available to people under the age of 18	18%
	Sensitizing school programs	extra-curricular sensitizing activities offered to students by people and organizations outside the school's own staff	9%

between the idea of an illiberal Christian family and the LGBTQ+ community by focusing on the sub-categories of *Family*, *Fundamental Law*, and *Christianity*.

5.1. The LGBTQ+ Community as a Threat to Children

The most significant sub-categories under the category *Anti-LGBTQ+*, *Media programs* and *Sensitizing school programs*, were only included in the proposal after the Legislative Committee's discussion. I argue that the package of legislative modifications collected under the LXXIX Act of 2021 assures that the government's hetero-compulsory ideological stand, fixed in the Fundamental Law, now explicitly informs and modifies certain policies, namely media and education. In the following I demonstrate how these policies are justified through a discursive connection between the categories *Child abuse* and *Anti-LGBTQ+*.

The subcategory *Media programs* refers to repeated passages in the law that thematize the prohibition of certain media content that is available to people under the age of 18. This content is defined as that which "depicts sexuality for its own sake or promotes or displays deviations from the sex at birth, gender reassignment or homosexuality" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 3. §). Mentioning these categories repeatedly together, the law text creates a connection between them, even though depictions of "deviations from the sex at birth, gender reassignment and homosexuality" are not necessarily instances of arbitrary sexuality. In some passages the text combines these categories equating so-called "deviant" media content with "pornography" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 1. § (2); 9. § (3)) or "violence" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 9. § (2)). The non-heteronormative and non-binary categories of media contents the law aims to prevent the underaged from encountering refer to portrayals of non-binary, transgender, and homosexual bodies, which are treated as expressions of the same practice, namely deviations from heteronormativity.

Another such area where new policies informed by compulsory heteronormativity are introduced is education. These modifications regulate extra-curricular sensitizing activities in schools for underaged children that are offered by people and organizations outside the school's own staff. In their content they are defined in the law text as extra-curricular programs dealing with topics "related to sexual culture, sex life, sexual orientation, sexual development, the harmful effects of drug use, the dangers of the Internet and other physical and mental health development issues" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 11. § (2)). The list suggests that the subject matter of sensitizing programs related to "sexual culture, sex life, sexual orientation, [and] sexual development" are potentially harmful and dangerous as they are mentioned as equivalent to programs drawing attention to "the harmful effects of drug use, [and] the dangers of the Internet" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 11. § (2)). In addition, classes in topics on sexual education are explicitly associated with instructors with non-heteronormative sexualities who, either by being queer and/or by being unprofessional, pose harm to children (Government of Hungary, 2021b, to 11. §).

Thus, according to the argumentation for LXXIX Act of 2021, the prohibition of media contents and extra-curricular classes on sexual and gender diversity for the underaged is necessary to protect "the physical, mental or moral development of minors" (Government of Hungary, 2021b, to 9. §; to 11. §), which is exactly the same reasoning that is used to justify stricter legal measurements against offenders of child abuse (Government of Hungary, 2021b, General justification).

This analogy between exposing children to depictions of queer gender and child abuse evokes the historically widespread myth that non-heteronormative sexualities and child abuse are inevitably connected. This myth was repeatedly brought up during the parliamentary debates as well: "I would like to remind you that the LGBTQ movement has more than once been involved in similar scandals (János Volner, independent)" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30309). The myth assumes that homosexual people are more inclined to abuse children than heterosexuals, even though research has clearly shown that this assumption is false. In fact, in cases where the child abuser can experience adult sexuality at all, subjects with heterosexual adult inclinations are more likely to commit sexual crimes against children, even when the sex of the child is the same as that of the abuser (Herek, 2016).

Besides, LGBTQ+ sexualities are traditionally framed by the government as phenomena that are enabled and encouraged by the liberal West and are a threat to traditional, "natural" values. As the often-referenced Fundamental Law argues: "[N]ew, modern ideological processes in the Western world, which raise doubts about the creation of the male and female sex, threaten the right of children to healthy development" (Government of Hungary, 2020a, to 3. §). During the debates, pedophilia (not just sexual abuse), like LGBTQ+ rights, is also connected to "left" or "liberal" political values: "If there is a political trend within the bosom of which pedophilia can find protection, it must undoubtedly be sought on the left, left, or more precisely on the side of liberals (János Volner, independent)" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, pp. 30310–30311). Liberal politics and media are accused of "international attempts to make pedophilia socially acceptable" and "to sensitize society to pedophilia (Dr. Gabriella Selmeczi, Fidesz)" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30259). Through analogy, sensitizing school programs to non-hetero-conform sexualities are seen as similar attempts to harm the healthy mental and physical development of children. That is, the text reformulates the scientifically disqualified myth that non-heterosexual adults are more likely to commit child abuse through a novel analogy: LGBTQ+ people and representations

of LGBTQ+ people harm children's mental and physical development just as abusers do. Through this analogy, the government instrumentalizes child abuse to offer a false but tangible pseudo example of the non-tangible threat LGBTQ+ people allegedly pose to children. This leads to a new antagonistic frontier around children, between LGBTQ+ people as threatening "others" and "us" who ensure children's "healthy," heteronormative development. I will next discuss who that "us" consists of and what children in this context symbolize.

5.2. LGBTQ+ vs. Family

The most significant sub-category that justifies anti-LGBTQ sentiments by connecting this sub-category to the category *Protection of children* is *Family*. In the following, I present how the government's familism, promoting the model of the Christian heterosexual family, secured in the Fundamental Law, constitutes as its antagonistic pair the LGBTQ+ community in the researched material.

During the debate surrounding the LXXIX Act of 2021, MP Lörincz Nacsa, a spokesman for the government (KDNP), felt it necessary to point out that the proposal, even though it technically belongs to the Judiciary Committee, was also voluntarily discussed by the Committee on Social Welfare, "because as a family committee, the committee for families, we are obviously affected by this issue" (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30266). This relationship can only be "obvious" if we recall the Ninth Amendment to the Fundamental Law (Government of Hungary, 2020b) that defines the family as a parent–child relationship, that is, families cannot be understood without children. Based on the iteration of this relationship, the discussion on children, it is argued, cannot be separated from a discussion on families. This means that, in the context of this law, "children" refers only to those who are understood to be part of illiberal heterosexual families. Consequently, families, along with the government, play a crucial role in protecting their children. As a result, as the opposition points out, the government leaves children without families unprotected, for example, against sexual abuse (Government of Hungary, 2021c, p. 30276).

As the passage targeting the modification of the Family Protection Act states: "The protection of *orderly* family relationships, and the enjoyment of the right of children to a self-identity based on their gender at birth, shall be of particular importance for the protection of their physical, mental and spiritual health" (Government of Hungary, 2021a, 10. § (2), my emphasis). This means that, according to the law, the protected heteronormativity of families functions as a guarantee for the heteronormativity of the children who are raised in such families. The government's attempts to strengthen heteronormative families to indirectly protect children and their heteronormativity, through heteronormative family life, is based on a familism that sees the family as the place where values are most effectively passed on. Consequently, the need to protect children implicitly implies a need to protect heteronormative families as well.

Further, as since 2020 the Fundamental Law sees children as the "future generations" of the illiberal system (Government of Hungary, 2020a, General justification), only the protection of the heteronormativity of families ensures the future of the illiberal state. Based on the government's understanding of familism, the shaping of the attitudes of children themselves becomes the site of battle between liberalism and illiberalism, where only heteronormative families offer a safe environment for children's health, which, as previously argued, means heterosexual development. In this context, health is equated with the government's illiberal values, in which heteronormativity takes a leading role. In this sense, the government draws an antagonistic line between liberalism and illiberalism along hetero- vs. non-heterosexual differentiation: Adults with sexual and/or gender identities and bodies that do not fit heterosexual norms are seen to pose potential long-lasting harm to children merely by being visible to them. Conversely, adults embodying heterosexual identity, by virtue of modeling the sexuality favored by the illiberal government, supposedly contribute to children's healthy mental and physical development.

As such, the law sums up the government's discursive and legislative hostility against LGBTQ+ people that started in 2019. As same-sex couples are excluded from the right to legally marry in Hungary, according to the Fundamental Law (2020, Article L), they are similarly excluded from the right to claim they are a family ("Járványkezelés helyett," 2020). Besides, the alleged need to protect children from non-heterosexual adoptive parents was the main, albeit implicit, motivation for modifying the Civil Code in a way that significantly decreases the chances of same-sex couples and single parents adopting a child, as a parliamentary proposal of the government would only allow heterosexual married couples to adopt ("Járványkezelés helyett," 2020). The explicit connection between the protection of children and the government's anti-LGBTQ+ discourses is most striking in the LXXIX Act of 2021.

Some argue that the LXXIX Act of 2021 came into force only to direct attention away from the government's scandals (Dull, 2021) or to set the discursive scene for future sanctions from the EU that are expected to be unrelated to this law (Magyari & Csurgó, 2021). However, even though the law came into effect in January 2022, in April the government has organized a national Child Protection referendum on questions that in their content strongly resonate with this law. This took place on the same day as the parliamentary elections in 2022. According to government-friendly sources, the referendum was (purportedly) necessary to provide the government with a "double legitimation" regarding the enforcement of the law, after it had led to criticism from the opposition parties and from the European Parliament

(Ternovácz, 2022). The opposition media saw the referendum, however, as a polarizing campaign tool to mobilize voters for the general elections (Joó, 2021), that is, to mobilize voters by constituting a new illiberal antagonistic line that seeks to enforce heteronormativity.

Accordingly, I argue that the recently highlighted antagonism between the heteronormative, illiberal "us" and its non-heteronormative, liberal frontier culminates in the LXXIX Act of 2021 and related government discourses. This indicates a shift toward a new antagonistic frontier in Hungarian illiberalism, conceptualized as the logic of rejection of certain values. Consequently, the main signifier that captures the illiberal "us" in this context is the family, which symbolizes heteronormativity and the task of protecting children from "liberal" influences, conceptualized here as non-heteronormative people.

6. Conclusion

In this article, I have argued for a new emphasis on the heteronormativity of illiberalism in Hungary. Even though the government has promoted heteronormativity before, this has previously happened in a positive context, as family friendliness, with policy-level compulsory heteronormativity being only implicitly present. The LXXIX Act of 2021, however, explicitly targets non-heteronormative sexualities, bodies, and practices in a negative, antagonistic way and modifies several policies accordingly. This antagonism is legitimized by an alleged need to protect Hungarian children from the harm that even mere depictions of non-heteronormative people would allegedly cause them. Children, in this context, mean both the future of the illiberal Hungary and, connectedly, present-day heteronormative families, the cornerstone of the government's illiberal family politics.

The article adds to existing research on illiberalism and gender that considers familialism "a major key tenet of the illiberal project in Central Europe" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 167). The case demonstrated here shows that, in the name of illiberalism, the Hungarian government conceptualizes sex and gender with the aim of encouraging only the reproductive functions of sexed bodies that favor its illiberal reproductive/family politics (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). What is more, as the article expands the meaning of familism as an ideal form of family and transfers it to other social institutions, it can conclude that familialist policies cannot just be understood as an illiberal response to recent demographic challenges, as current literature states (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). Family policies must also be seen as securing a space for the reproduction of illiberal values in which this reproduction of illiberalism is transferred to the private responsibilities of families. Further, by expanding the meaning of familism, the article shows how illiberal systems instrumentalize ideological familism not just to undermine women's rights, but also to demonize non-heterosexual people. As the article presents, in the Hungarian context, illiberalism, as a logic of rejection of certain values, has recently been used for the discursive demonization of sexual minorities. Using the Laclauian framework to conceptualize illiberalism, this demonization of the LGBTQ+ community, as I have argued here, operates as a new antagonistic frontier to define the illiberal "us" as a heteronormative family, that ensures its children´s "healthy," heteronormative development. In other words, the analysis shows that the illiberal building of "us" as a community happens through the affective othering of those who deviate from heteronormativity and thus, supposedly, pose harm for the children (Palonen, 2021).

Besides, this article contributes to the international literature on familism beyond the illiberal context. By pointing out how illiberal politics can strategically use the values attached to families to legitimize illiberal policies, I draw attention to the antagonistic elements of familism. The illiberal instrumentalization of family values clearly shows how familial relationships are influenced by patriarchy and, in this case especially, by heterosexism. This critique is often missing in familism research (Patrón, 2021). Finally, the findings suggest that the Hungarian government defines democracy as "sexual democracy" (Fassin, 2012, p. 288). Further research on how, in this context, heteronormativity serves "to justify, in democratic terms, the rejection of others" (Fassin, 2012, p. 288), and how it might justify also xenophobic and racist standpoints in Hungary, is encouraged.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Illiberal and Populist Political Narratives on Gender and Underreporting of Sexual Violence: A Case Study of Hungary

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Abstract
Sexual violence is underreported all over the world. In this article, I argue that democratic backsliding undermines the reporting of sexual violence even further. The author's team conducted in-depth interviews (n = 15) with representatives of civil society organizations, victims' services, clinical practitioners, and child and family welfare in Hungary in 2017 and 2018, in search of organizational and structural causes to why sexual violence remains vastly underreported in the country with the least reported case numbers in Europe. The small but diverse sample helped identify associations between the reporting of sexual violence and repressive, gender-related political decisions such as threatening the existence of civil organizations undertaking victim support roles and providing victim services, a family-centered political narrative, and confining women's roles solely for reproductive purposes. It is not possible to maintain causation since there are other factors interfering the association. Thus, instead of discussing it as a single cause of underreporting sexual violence, I present the Hungarian case to illustrate the consequences of illiberal politics on reporting. Furthermore, utilizing Slovič's risk-benefit model, I argue that recent products of illiberal politics such as politicizing "gender" undermine trust, a precondition of asking for help and providing support for victims of sexual violence.

Keywords
civil society organizations; family; gender; Hungary; illiberalism; risk-benefit model; sexual violence; victims

Issue
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1. Introduction

Although sexual violence is vastly underreported all over the globe, and individual-level circumstances such as the belief in the just world (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994) and self-blame (Parti et al., 2021) are responsible for staying silent, the author wanted to identify macro-level reasons for sexual violence underreporting specifically in Hungary. To find answers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of civil society organization (CSO) leaders, experts, advocates, and co-workers in Hungary in 2017/2018. In this article, I will briefly describe the possible underlying organizational and structural issues for sexual violence underreporting, then list the Hungarian illiberal democratic regime's unique characteristics that hinder reaching out for help and reporting sexual violence, illustrated by interview segments. Although causation between illiberal politics and underreporting sexual violence cannot be proven, the narrative thematic analysis suggests that overarching sociopolitical drives are responsible for the exceptionally high level of silence that conspire to elevate the perceived risks and lower the anticipated benefits of reporting. Utilizing Slovič's concept of risk-benefit analysis (2010) as a theoretical explanation, the author argues that illiberal political decisions contribute to an extremely low level of sexual violence reporting, adding to the risks victims face when reporting in liberal democracies.

2. The Prevalence of Sexual Violence and Why It Stays Unreported

Sexual violence is any sexual act, committed or attempted, which employs violence or coercion without

the freely given consent of the victim, or when the victim is unable to consent (Basile & Saltzman, 2002). It is a severe public health problem and a significant public, societal, and judicial concern (Basile & Smith, 2011). Although the rates vary by country, underreporting sexual violence is a universal pattern around the globe (Spohn et al., 2017; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011) with 63% of sexual assaults remaining unreported to the police (Rennison, 2002). According to the National Crime Victimization Survey in the US, only 310 out of every 1,000 sexual assaults were reported to the police; that means more than two out of three went unreported between 2015 and 2019 (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2021). Others estimate that nearly 80% of rapes and sexual assaults go unreported (Morgan & Kena, 2018; Truman & Morgan, 2016). In England and Wales, only around 15% of those who experience sexual violence report to the police (Home Office, 2013). Hungary stands out with only 8% (Virág, 2004) or even a 2.1% reporting rate, the lowest among European countries (Krahé et al., 2014; Lovett & Kelly, 2009). Despite characteristics of reported incidents being similar to those of other countries (Parti et al., 2016), some even gauge that only 0.24% of sexual violence is reported in Hungary (Wirth & Winkler, 2015). Because of differences in conceptualization of sexual violence, and the scarcity of victim surveys, establishing a trend proving the decline in reporting is hardly possible here or anywhere else (Szabó & Virág, 2022). Public databases of reported cases (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2021) neither communicate the real numbers of sexual violence nor the number of cases not being reported. Therefore, the only chance to describe the situation is diving under the surface and identifying structural problems responsible for underreporting.

The police are not the only agency to which sexual violence may be reported. As such, CSOs are essential in addressing the issues of sexual violence at the community level, especially when government-funded services are absent or inadequate (World Health Organization, 2007). According to the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), states must act with due diligence to prevent and respond to violence against women. The due diligence standard implies not only lawmaking in the relevant area but also changes in cultural and social patterns and transformation of social institutions that reinforce or appear to justify acts of violence (Qureshi, 2013). In countries where the state did not act according to the due diligence standard (e.g., Gülel, 2021; Sainz-Pardo, 2014), CSOs stepped in to fill the gaps in services, advocacy, education, and victim support, by providing specialized training for service providers, as well as financial empowerment, psychosocial counseling, and safe houses for victims in order to deter further victimization (FRA, 2014).

Over time and across contexts, there are considerable barriers to reporting rape as victims receive very little encouragement to report (Anderson & Doherty, 2008; McDougal et al., 2018). In the criminal justice process, the victim is expected to provide details of the case in multiple interviews, cumulating the trauma and postponing the healing process. Indeed, reporting to the police and past experiences within the criminal justice system—such as victim blaming (Hayes et al., 2013), rape myth acceptance (Bohner et al., 2009), and institutional betrayal (Smith & Freyd, 2014)—can put an enormous burden on survivors and thus hinder reporting. In addition to criminal justice related obstacles that this article does not aim to cover, sociopolitical factors can suppress sexual violence into a taboo zone.

3. Sociopolitical Factors of Underreporting Based on Previous Research

There are sociopolitical and structural reasons that prevent women in Hungary from speaking up. Discussing these reasons in detail is beyond the scope of this article, but there are a couple of important points worth mentioning here in a nutshell. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) published a comprehensive analysis of cleared rapes in European countries in 2020 (Holmberg & Lewenhagen, 2020). The report indicates that Sweden, England-Wales, Northern Ireland, Norway, Scotland, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Luxembourg, Austria, Estonia, Ireland, Germany, and the Netherlands have the highest average rate of reported rapes. Surprisingly enough, these are among the most democratic countries worldwide, according to the Democracy Index in 2020. (The Democracy Index is an index created by the Economic Intelligence Unit. Countries were given a score of 0 to 10 for electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties, where 10 was the highest possible score; Statista, 2021). Furthermore, as reported by Brå (Holmberg & Lewenhagen, 2020), there is a high level of correlation between the percentage responding that it is both wrong and against the law to force a partner to have sex (within a marriage or spousal relationship) and the average rate of reported rapes between 2013 and 2017 (correlation coefficient: 0.66, R^2 = 0.44; Holmberg & Lewenhagen, 2020, Figure 11). Propensity factors such as gender equality index, confidence in the country's criminal justice system, and index of rejection of rape myths are also highly indicative of the inclination to report, whereby the higher the rejection, the higher the rates of reporting (Holmberg & Lewenhagen, 2020, Table 5).

Viktor Orbán initially became Prime Minister in 1998 for four years, then again in 2010. Since then, Hungary has exemplified backsliding gender-equality policies (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2018). To strengthen his populist regime, Orbán put sole responsibility on women as baby-producing machines, thereby inducing the nation's survival (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2018). At the same time, women are not acknowledged as human beings on their own rights, only as caretakers in their

families. Consequently, non-traditional genders, feminist activists, liberal thinkers, and CSOs looking to provide services to victims of domestic and sexual violence, became ostracized (Sata, 2021). Following this fashion, the Hungarian government refused to ratify the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, to date the most comprehensive legal instrument on violence against women (cf. Council of Europe Convention, 2011, Art. 1 (b)), arguing that it was a threat to traditional family values and that the protection of women from gender-based violence was already ensured by the provisions of Hungarian national law (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2018). The illiberal urge to conserve patriarchal values lead to subdued media discussions about gender. With 80% of the media owned and controlled by the government (Pirro & Stanley, 2021), gender-based violence is referred to as "family conflict" indicating that both parties have been equally involved in the conflict (Horváth, 2022). Even the #MeToo campaign was confined to liberal and cultural circles, its representation quickly fading away in the media; it even promulgated a backlash in the pursuit of gender equality (Zacchia et al., 2019).

Looking at protecting victims of violence, there is undeniable progress. For example, domestic (or relationship) violence became a criminal offense on July 1, 2013, when Act C of 2012 entered into force. It penalizes violent behaviors that harm human dignity and are degrading, resulting in severe deprivation if committed regularly against a relative; however, sexual offenses are not included in the provision. Another highly visible, although hollow, effort of the illiberal state was the creation of government-established walk-in consultation services and helplines for victims, inter alia, of sexual violence. In addition, a total of eight state-established Victim Support Centers came into operation by 2021 (ÁSK, n.d.).

Nevertheless, the government's policy on violence against women faces criticism. According to the United Nations Human Rights Committee (2018), police response to cases and the mechanisms to protect and support victims are inadequate, access to shelters remains insufficient, and the network of institutions and services available for victims are dysfunctional. Victims often do not get adequate information and assistance from state organizations, and thus, they usually try to seek help from the under-budgeted CSOs, operating independently of the government. Furthermore, government-run victims' services do not explicitly aid victims of sexual violence, the same way as sexual violence remains unaddressed as part of relationship violence law (Szabó & Virág, 2022).

The above developments might suggest that the government fulfills due diligence requirements. However, services established by the illiberal state are part of the movement that Grzebalska and Pető (2018) call the "polypore state." According to the concept, illiberal states tend to create ghost institutions mimicking real, functioning services but lacking professional staff, content, monitoring, supervision, transparency, and accountability. In this fashion, the polypore state established top-down civil organizations (GONGOs; Gülel, 2021) with empty agenda, parallel to discrediting organic, bottom-up civil organizations. GONGOs are loyal to the political regime; hence, they receive immense support and funding to reach wider audiences with the politically-backed agenda of protecting the family unit. Meanwhile, since the second term of the Orbán regime started in 2010, not only has public funding been taken away from independent CSOs, but they have also become stigmatized and discredited for critiquing the government in its illiberal tendencies, rendering their operations nearly impossible (Kövér et al., 2021).

4. Theoretical Approach: A Risk-Benefit Model to Explain Sexual-Violence Reporting

To explain the factors that influence the reporting of sexual violence, I utilize Slovič's model of affective decision-making process (Slovič, 2010) as a metaphor here. Slovič's model was developed to illustrate subjective perceptions of risk in general, and, to my knowledge, has never been tested to illustrate victims' decision-making mechanisms. However, I suggest considering the model as one way to understand the perceptions of risk involved in decision-making in precarious events such as sexual violence reporting. Slovič posits that the nature of risk assessment is subjective and value-laden and highlights the importance of the presentation of benefits in an individual's decision-making process. According to the model, the two factors that predict victim behavior are risk regarding the outcome of the decision, and benefit derived from the decision, given the investment of risk. In support of the conception of affect as an orienting mechanism, Alhakami and Slovič (1994) observed that the risks and benefits of various activities and technologies (e.g., nuclear power, commercial aviation) are inversely correlated in people's minds; i.e., the higher the perception of benefits, the lower the anticipation of risk, whereas lower perceived-benefits are associated with higher anticipated risks. Thus, people make biased decisions based on their anticipation of outcomes (benefit) which distort their perception of risks. If the anticipated benefit is perceived to be greater than in reality, the risks will be perceived as lower. If, however, the anticipated benefits are lower, the risks will appear to be higher. I suggest that this two-dimension risk-benefit assessment model can illustrate the (perceived) hazard of reporting sexual violence: (a) the more benefits survivors expect (e.g., survivors' stories are published without bias, without blaming the victim and exonerating the perpetrator in media outlets; survivors' voices are heard instead of suppressing everyday cases and concentrating on the exception; survivors receive support from their families, neighbors, communities, CSOs), and the less risk they associate with reporting (e.g., risk of disbelief, blame, rape myths, and humiliation), the more likely they

will report their victimization; and in turn, (b) the greater the anticipated benefits, the lower the perceived risks of reporting sexual violence. Reporting of sexual assault, therefore, depends on the amount of help offered to the victims and the amount of risk (of discrimination, stigmatization, and revictimization) they run by asking for help. However, political attitudes towards and media representation of sexual assault cases can alter public perception of benefits and decrease the propensity to report (Figure 1).

In the next section I highlight the influence of illiberal gender politics on the willingness to ask for help through a qualitative, interview-based study, conducted with CSO representatives in Hungary. In the follow-up discussion, I explain the possible reasons for underreporting sexual violence, utilizing Slovič's affective decision-making risk-benefit model.

5. Methods and Sample

The author was the principal investigator of the research team investigating the causes of underreporting sexual violence in Hungary in 2017 and 2018 (Parti et al., 2021). The current article is published with the authorization of research team members. Although the research team conducted a total of 37 semi-structured interviews with professionals including police forces (Parti & Robinson, 2021), in this article the author only analyzes those interviews (n = 15) that were conducted with intimate partner and sexual violence victim support CSOs: psychologists, mental health professionals, women's, victims' and child welfare rights advocates, and representatives of CSOs serving trans people and sex workers. (At the time of the interviews, no CSO focused solely on victims of sexual violence in Hungary. Lacking such organizations, victims of sexual violence could only turn to women's rights, victims' rights organizations, and child and family services. These CSOs gained knowledge about sexual violence as part of their service, primarily to children and families.)

The rate of reporting sexual violence was historically low in Hungary, even before illiberal tendencies settled in 2010. It was anticipated that service providers and policymakers can shed light on organizational/structural factors of such low rate of reporting and the political infrastructure of reporting. Following the practice of previous research on sexual violence underreporting (Jamel et al., 2016; Koshin & Botan, 2017; Nelson, 2005; Spencer et al., 2018), the author and team consciously sought to interview experts, instead of victims. Slovič (1999) points out that professionals and lay people bring different processes and information to bear in assessing risk. Experts can draw a broader picture, including shedding light on the illiberal structural mechanisms and political infrastructures that influence reporting sexual violence. Thus, while victims could have revealed their own realities, we anticipated that an expert sample would better describe organizational and structural issues.

Participants were recruited from a purposive sample; all prominent CSOs with possible intimate partner and sexual violence victim support agendas registered in Budapest (the capital) were contacted and asked for an in-person interview. Adding a snowball element to the sampling, additional independent experts from all over

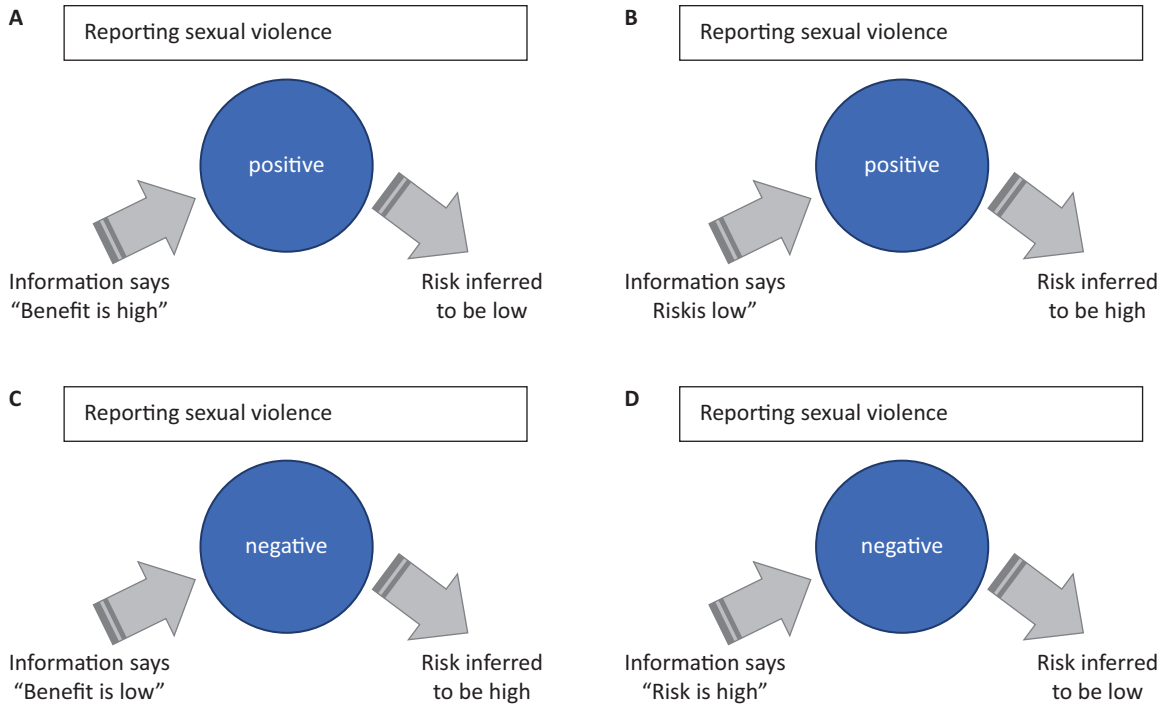

Figure 1. A risk-benefit model explaining the propensity of reporting sexual violence. Source: adapted from Slovič (2010, p. 741).

the country recommended by the above organizations were interviewed. Interviews ranged from 45 to 105 minutes, with an average of 79 minutes. Participants were asked open-ended questions about (a) their own concept of victimization in general in Hungary, (b) their concept of sexual violence victimization, (c) their concept of victims' needs, and (d) whether these needs are met.

Interviews were audio-recorded with a computer, then transcribed manually. Participants spoke either English (n = 13) or Hungarian (n = 2). Hungarian-speaking interviews were translated into English after transcription. With a relatively small pool of possible expert respondents, privacy and confidentiality were paramount; hence, interviews were anonymized, and non-identifiable tags were assigned to direct quotations. Thematic narrative analysis was utilized to analyze interview content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After reading the transcripts repeatedly and familiarizing with the content, initial codes were generated before refocusing on the broader level of the themes. After this stage, themes were defined and named.

In seeking narratives as to why sexual violence continues to be underreported in the country, I identified four recurring themes from the interviews: (a) attitudes towards victims of sexual violence, and the level of trust in society; (b) the illiberal political climate; (c) organizational and structural mechanisms in the victim support services; and (d) victims' needs not corresponding with the realities of the formal and informal procedure of justice. Organizational and structural problems at CSOs (Kövér et al., 2021; Szabó & Virág, 2022) and victims' needs not corresponding with formal (criminal) justice services (Parti & Robinson, 2021) were discussed elsewhere, thus, not being analyzed here. Instead, I will concentrate on the first two domains as the most related to the article's theme. It must be noted that the interviews took place before the very recent developments of illiberal politics, such as the banning of gender studies in higher education (Vida, 2019), the curtailment of LGBTQ+ individuals' rights (Vida, 2019), as well as the prohibition of gender themed books in K-12 education (Rankin, 2021b). Nevertheless, the interviews still provide a context deeply embedded in Hungarian illiberal politics.

Interview participants' implicit biases towards illiberal politics cannot be excluded from the analysis. However, it is not the goal of narrative analysis to exclude possible biases. In a thematic analysis (Kim, 2016), the researcher does not interpret the world through the interviews; instead, they accept the validity of the interviewees' interpretation of the world. The interviews can convey feelings that can be interpreted as stereotypical and biased perceptions of reality. However, applying phenomenology, the researcher accepts subjectivity and is nonjudgmental (Kim, 2016). That said, by presenting interview segments, the author neither seeks to represent reality as a whole nor the underlying thoughts of interviewees, but instead, accepts them as subjective but valid realities.

It is important to assert that this research cannot and does not intend to establish direct causation between underreporting and illiberal political decisions. According to Gerring (2005), causation in social sciences is plural, not unitary. Therefore, in social sciences, arguments must be probabilistic causal arguments describing possible causal *mechanisms* and *processes* instead of direct causations. Following this argument, my goal is not to identify the single one determinant of the causes of underreporting sexual violence, but instead to describe the events and conditions that raise the *probability* of victims being less likely to come forward in an illiberal state compared to liberal democracies. In doing so, I utilize the case of Hungary as a plausibility probe (Eckstein, 1975) to raise the question whether the opaque workings of illiberal politics raise the propensity of less sexual violence being reported. The case of Hungary is chosen for intensive analysis because, as I theorize it, the products of the illiberal state of Hungary can be interpreted as probabilistic scenarios that influence reporting of sexual violence.

6. Results

6.1. Attitude, Beliefs, and Level of Trust Make Asking for Help Difficult

Several participants mentioned that after launching a concerted and systematic attack against CSOs (including victims' rights organizations), and hearing stories in the media emphasizing "real rape" (Estrich, 1988) scenarios (i.e., that rape is committed by strangers, especially migrants), and condemning women who live an independent and childless life, trust level became exceptionally low. In these hostile circumstances, women tend to seek help not from institutions but rather from close female family members, if at all. Asking for help is problematic not only in intimate partner violence and sexual victimization but also in typical situations women encounter, such as the hardships in social reproductive duties of child and elderly care. Interview participants asserted that admitting weakness in a culture of denial and estrangement puts them in a vulnerable situation where help is often denied, and further exploitation is highly possible:

> It is hard to ask for help in any case in Hungary. It doesn't matter whether you are hungry, need firewood, or if someone has hurt you: It is awfully tough to show or communicate any kind of necessity. (Victims' rights advocate #1)

> [A]sking for help in Hungary is stigmatizing. If you ask for help, you feel that you are differentiated: It is tangible in the way you are treated at the municipality if you go in to ask for an allowance, but the same happens at the services providing support for victims. Look at the appearance of the victim support services, observe the site of the police stations where people

> can file a complaint: Even the physical spaces are stigmatizing. I can [swear word] understand each victim who doesn't want to ask for help. (Victims' rights advocate #4)

> In Hungary, people don't go to pee if they need to pee, they're keeping it back.…This is why, for example in intimate partner violence cases, the victim doesn't report anything for a long while. (Clinical psychologist #1)

Several participants mentioned that there are no adequate answers to sexual assault cases in the private sector in general. This is a significant change compared to before 2010 when transnational companies (such as GE; Iszkowska et al., 2021) pioneered in gender equality. After 2010, the government's concerted attack against gender mainstreaming caused a downturn in companies' efforts to create and strengthen gender equality (Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, 2021). Today, there is a scarcity of ethical codes of conduct at the company level to process the cases. In addition, complaint mechanisms against sexual misconduct are inadequately regulated in institutions and workplaces (Iszkowska et al., 2021). Although CSOs had not been adequately supported even before the illiberal turn, now they are actively discredited and forced to operate in hiding mode. Consequently, CSOs are understaffed and underfinanced, staff turnover is high, and most co-workers are not trained:

> People looking for jobs arrive there [to CSOs] from the employment centers without any experience. The person who helps victims today might have supported jobless people yesterday or stamped construction permits the day before—this is a normal career path today in Hungary. (Victims' rights advocate #3)

6.2. Illiberal Political Climate

Participants mentioned illiberal political climate and legislation as the most pervasive causes of sexual crimes staying unreported. After the illiberal turn, sexual violence became an increasingly taboo topic; there are no honest and expert-led discussions about it in mainstream media anymore. One participant highlighted the problem through an awareness-raising campaign against child sexual abuse aired in the media after the illiberal turn. Instead of opening the floor to discussions, the campaign triggered hate and had to be taken down days after release. This example shows that there are neither adequate tools nor accepted platforms to discuss family violence in the media:

> There was an awareness campaign depicting sexual abuse of children within the family harshly and provocatively. People couldn't not talk about it.…This campaign triggered a huge outrage; the fathers association, the parents' association, and other civil organizations demanded to take it down, so eventually it was. This is just one example of how much rejection there is towards just talking about these issues. (Child welfare advocate #4)

Participants vocalized that the political contextualization of the family as a protected unit hinders development in the systems of victim assistance and childcare, as well as education:

> Human rights and women's rights are hijacked by politics. Traditional, so-called "family values" and traditional hierarchies between men and women and children come packaged with the conservative government. So…that influences education very much, and we see that in the field all the time. (Human rights advocate)

> The government is absolutely denying the presence of violence.…Politics is expropriating, monopolizing the topic of family, and denying the existence of violence within the family. (Child welfare advocate #2)

> Child endangerment or child sexual abuse are politically denied topics. Politicians blame "rootless, liberal cosmopolitans" who, according to the government, are trying to compromise the government by overemphasizing non-realistic or non-existent problems. (Child welfare advocate #1)

A child welfare advocate mentioned that despite some professional trainings being available, cadres of newly established civil organizations, supported and funded by the government, are reluctant to enroll in them. Here, the political discreditation of gender-related topics adds to the lack of substantial professional guidelines and monitoring in GONGOs:

> There is a training freshly introduced to the University of [anonymized] for coaches on physical, sexual violence and ethics called "abuse prevention training." But for political reasons, no one wants to take this course. (Child welfare advocate #4)

Participants emphasized that the refusal to ratify the Istanbul Convention sends a sobering message to society and future victims therein, suggesting that women victims do not have the right to societal and institutional protection, and are alone with their "individual" problems. The government, seeking to support its anti-liberal, anti-gender ideology (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2018), misinformed the public about the Istanbul Convention, stipulating that it would destroy the sacrosanctity of the family unit, and hence, it endangers the nation's survival:

> There is this extra interesting phenomenon of fighting so-called "gender ideology"…by conservative,

> patriarchist-minded groups and forces…which oppose the Istanbul Convention, based on attacking so-called "gender ideology," which they define whichever way they want to define. They misinform the public about what this means, and that is very much coming on the wave of homophobia and gender identity. (Women's rights advocate #1)

From the interviews, it became apparent that it is not only women whose victimization is underreported but also other vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQ+ individuals and sex workers. The victim-blaming attitude is strongly correlated with homophobic and transphobic attitudes, rendering most crimes against trans and non-binary people unreported.

7. Discussion

In a thematic interview analysis about reporting sexual violence in the case of Hungary, this research sought to generate the hypothesis according to which illiberal politics interfere with people's ability to measure risks and to make decisions accordingly. The study is a mixed approach where narrative analysis is combined with a plausibility probe case study of Hungary as a vehicle for constructing and supporting broader theoretical generalizations (Levy, 2008) and develop a theoretical framework to explain underreporting of sexual violence.

The ban of gender studies programs in higher education (Pető, 2021a), the attacks on CSOs that support victims of family violence and survivors of sexual assault, removing a whole year of professional training from the teacher-training curriculum (Rankin, 2021a), limiting sex education to abstinence advocation, and prohibiting gender-related and LGBTQ+ themes in K-12 schools (Rankin, 2021b) are all part of the illiberal political agenda. Similar legislative and political actions and their social consequences have been discussed in countless academic studies (Fodor, 2022; Krizsán & Zentai, 2017; Pető, 2021b; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2018; Stanley, 2020). The current article weaves the above factors together by offering insight into the structural processes of sexual violence reporting. Although the interviews were conducted in 2017 and 2018, before the latest illiberal legal changes in Hungary, the study still sheds light on the dire situation of sexual violence victims and survivors. When asked why reporting sexual violence is so low in Hungary, the most alarming issues CSOs highlighted were the attitudes and low level of trust in the population, and the political climate. By supporting families but simultaneously denying the individual rights of women, illiberal gender politics undermines the rights of marginalized groups, such as victims of violence.

By applying Slovič's concept of affective decision-making to how survivors of sexual violence decide whether to report their victimization, the author claims that the current political situation in Hungary appears to pose too much risk and too little benefit for those who report. The model below helps think through the complexities of sexual violence reporting in an adverse social and political environment (Table 1).

What are the risks and benefits victims can realistically expect from reporting or asking for help? First and foremost, they run a high risk of revictimization. There is an elevated chance that in the hostile "gender climate" (Gülel, 2021), they will not be believed, their complaints will be swept under the rug, and even be ostracized by their families, workplaces, or even the whole country in publicized cases. Open discourse on family violence and victimization does not fit the illiberal political agenda; thus, victims' stories will be discredited and they will be stigmatized. Moreover, victims' rights are not legally recognized (in the provision of relationship violence and the Constitution, and by rejecting to ratify the Istanbul Convention); thus, they will face extreme difficulties finding legal protection. At the end of the day, victims will not get the help they need, their voices will be silenced, and they might end up being even more victimized and isolated than before.

However, the decision-making process is not only based on rational risk-benefit analyses. Victims' decisions might also be led by emotions, and how they *perceive* reality, instead of truly investigating their options and the anticipated outcomes. Slovič posits that trust is asymmetric: Negative (trust-destroying) events carry much greater weight than positive events (Slovič, 1993) and define decision-making processes more than positive news. Although the illiberal state made efforts to aid victims (i.e., victims of domestic violence), the changes were only illusory, lacking the adequate legal and institutional help available to victims. Interview participants reflected on the poor qualities of state-provided services, lack of training and supervision and transparent monitoring. There is insufficient public information on the criteria used for training, no rules ensuring training continuity, no data showing whether personnel work adequately with victims of sexual violence, guarded by no monitoring procedure or guidelines (Gülel, 2021). This is to support Grzebalska and Pető's (2018) concept of the polypore state which only builds a scaffolding of services, visible to the public but lacking professionalism and substance. Thus, the effectiveness of existing laws is questionable, and state-established victims' services are only skeletons without context and actual functioning.

In an illiberal political environment, media conversations that exclude the victims' voices or discussions in sexual violence entirely, and political propaganda that suggests that women's only role is reproductive care-related, victims of sexual violence will be discouraged from reporting. Even if there are CSOs and legal avenues to fight for victims' rights, victims will be discouraged from reporting by the pervasive anti-gender climate. Even if domestic and sexual violence is punishable in Hungary, the persistent denial of women's human rights outside of their families will tear down most victims' efforts to seek justice. On the other hand, when the

Table 1. Benefits and risks of reporting sexual violence, based on Slovič's model of the affective decision-making process.

Reporting sexual violence: Positive (Increased or high-rate reporting)	
Benefit is high	*Risk inferred to be low*
Victims' rights are recognized and protected (Constitutional rights, Istanbul Convention)	Low chance of revictimization (within the home or institutions, e.g., CSOs, police, criminal justice system)
Victims' voices are being heard in the media	Low chance of victim discrimination and stigmatization
CSOs are visible, available, adequately staffed, and financially able	No politically induced stigmatization (through populist propaganda, e.g., denial of women's rights)
Victims receive the help they need (advocacy, financial aid, shelter)	Low chance of victim blaming by family, community (neighborhood, workplaces), society (social media, media news)
Reporting sexual violence: Negative (Decreased or low-rate reporting)	
Risk is high	*Benefits inferred to be low*
High chance of revictimization (within the home or institutions, e.g., CSOs, police, criminal justice system)	Victims' rights are not recognized and protected (no meaningful legal protection, no victims' rights organizations present or, if present, not active)
High chance of victim discrimination and stigmatization	Victims' voices are silenced or suppressed (government owned media discourses)
High level of politically induced stigmatization (through populist propaganda, e.g., denial of women's rights)	CSOs are invisible, unavailable, understaffed, and underfinanced
High chance of victim blaming by family, community (neighborhood, workplaces), society (social media, media news)	GONGOs are visible but not available, and do not offer professional service
	Victims will not get the help they need (no advocacy, financial aid, shelter)

Source: Developed by the author, based on Slovič (2010).

media exonerate the accused, yet the survivor becomes labeled as a liar (Nyúl et al., 2018), then it will require genuine efforts to restore trust and encourage reporting.

The Hungarian government's recent efforts to establish victim-support services are meaningless compared to the efforts victims of sexual violence would have to make to break the walls of systematic denial and misogynistic social environment. The anti-gender climate is systematically built, and victims received the message that only "real rape" (Estrich, 1988) scenarios are to be accepted as "genuine" and everything other than that is not worthy of listening. As Gülel (2021) puts it, the "gender climate" is a disease so pervasive that the whole society is infected, including the police, prosecutors, judges, and employees of civil organizations. Attitudes are difficult to change. It would require developing honest, professional, victim-focused conversations on sexual violence in the media, introducing sex education in K-12 schools, allowing gender programs in universities, and encouraging gender-equity standards in government and industry.

Of course, it also would require strengthening CSOs and professional staffing and training GONGOs and national victim-support services to assist victims. Therefore, I argue that, besides ideology-free, victim-centered discussions, encouraging and rewarding gender equity quotas nationwide and providing support to CSOs must be some of the first steps on the road to restoring the trust of victims. Without women's rights being recognized as human rights and providing help to them as the primary victims of sexual violence, the illiberal concept of the protected (and patriotic) family unit itself becomes an empty shell (Iszkowska et al., 2021).

The current research is limited as neither is there a current estimation on how much sexual violence remains unreported due to illiberal politics, nor is it possible to estimate how much illiberal politics further discourage victims from reporting and asking for help. Similarly, it is hard to trace the direct effects of democratic backsliding—its effects are rather subtle. Still, the article, drawn on organizational and structural elements, attempted to establish associations between the

anti-gender climate and the propensity to report sexual violence. Although rape is already one of the most underreported crimes, it became evident from the interviews that illiberal politics create an atmosphere that silences victims of sexual violence even more.

While interview participants draw causal associations between illiberal politics and the structural/organizational inadequacies, it was impossible to identify causality between illiberal politics and a low rate of reporting sexual violence. Therefore, this is a cautionary plausibility case study bolstering aspects on association in an illiberal political environment, warning that it can easily be copied in other nation states with similar illiberal tendencies (i.e., in the Czech Republic, Poland, or Slovakia; Havlík & Hloušek, 2021).

Now the question arises: What can be done in the helpless situation illustrated in the case of Hungary? Slovič (1999) points out that, in order to achieve effective communication and risk management strategies, those who promote and regulate health and safety need to understand the ways in which people typically think about and respond to risk. It is equally true to policymakers, service providers, and first responders to understand the societal recognition of specific risks and for mobilizing broad-scale structural change agendas. Individuals focus on risk within the framework of their specific situations, relationships, goals, and history; within this framework, they are highly susceptible to a variety of cognitive and affective forces as they absorb information and generate judgments about what poses threat to them, how large this threat is, and what they can or cannot do about it. Therefore, it is important to take away that, only by conveying information about available services and healthy relationships, can service providers help individuals make better decisions. Furthermore, this study can be informative to practitioners who seek to understand perceptions of risk, decision-making processes, and underlying structural issues that influence victims' reporting.

Choosing to discuss the Hungarian case as a plausibility probe, this article is the first attempt to shed light on a broader theoretical argument according to which reporting and asking for help from CSOs are more difficult in illiberal political regimes than in liberal democracies. I sought to generate the hypothesis according to which illiberal politics interfere with people's ability to measure risks and to make decisions accordingly. The case of Hungary can be seen as a vehicle for constructing and supporting broader theoretical generalizations (Levy, 2008) and develop a theoretical framework to explain underreporting of sexual violence. This hypothesis, together with the theoretical framework, must be tested further.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Resisting Genderphobia in Hungary

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Abstract
In this article, we connect illiberal populism in Hungary with the instrumentalizing of genderphobia through state policies starting from 2010. This became especially salient during the COVID-19 pandemic when a contentious state of emergency laws enabled the government's ruling by decree. Analyzing relevant pieces of legislation and policy documents, we show how genderphobia became a fundamental feature of an expanding far-right agenda that has been playing out in practice since the System of National Cooperation was established in 2010. Genderphobia is the aversion to disrupting dominant gender and sexual hierarchies, by addressing and critically interrogating gendered differences and gender as a social construct. Genderphobia is both an ideology about the fearfulness of gender as well as the action of fear-mongering for political effect. State institutions are gendered and sexualized in that they have been structured on dominant gender and sexual norms that reinforce male and heterosexual dominance. We argue that genderphobia is evident in the rise of anti-LGBTIQ policies and contributes to the weakening of democratic and liberal institutions in Hungary. We will also present examples of the Hungarian government's attempts to monopolize the definition of "the family" and hollow out the social representation of child protection. In addition, we will explore resistance against the recent anti-LGBTIQ policies through children's literature. Our aim is to demonstrate how the Hungarian genderphobic policies ultimately deny not only LGBTIQ human rights but the existence of LGBTIQ youth and children who could benefit from social support as well as representation in education and literature.

Keywords
child protection; children's literature; fear mongering; genderphobia; heteronormativity; Hungary; illiberalism; LGBTIQ; System of National Cooperation

Issue
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1. Introduction: What a Family!

In May 2021—on International Children's Day—the children's book *Micsoda család!* (*What a Family!*) was released in Hungary. The picture book for toddlers presents two stories about same-sex families, also known as "rainbow families," by author Lawrence Schimel and illustrator Elīna Brasliņa. In "Early One Morning," a boy wakes up before his mothers and sister and prepares breakfast together with the family cat. In "Bedtime, Not Playtime," a girl gets ready for bed with the help of her two fathers, but the family dog wants to play instead. The stories, originally written in Spanish and published in two separate volumes, had already been published in 27 languages, including Dutch, French, Czech, Polish, English, and even Russian, although in Russia the book had an "18+" warning printed on the cover because of a law restricting minors' access to content on "non-traditional" sexualities. *What a Family!* was published in Hungary as a single volume by the

Foundation for Rainbow Families (Szivárványcsaládokért Alapítvány), which started the "Family Is Family" campaign in 2020 to show that there is nothing extraordinary about rainbow families (Foundation for Rainbow Families, 2020).

When Schimel wrote the stories, he did not foresee their international political impact. His goal was not to overcome homophobia but simply to create enjoyable books featuring same-sex families. Prior to its release in Hungary, the strongest negative response to the book focused on the choice to use margarine instead of butter in the story of the boy making breakfast for his two moms. The Swiss translator insisted on butter as a matter of national pride, while the Israeli translator switched the spread entirely to hummus (Rudolph, 2021). This limited, if somewhat endearing, challenge of the book's content would soon be overshadowed by Hungary's response. The head of the Government Office of Pest County started an investigation into the book and fined the bookstore chain Líra Könyv (Lyra Books) for failing to indicate that it contained "content deviating from the norm," thus allegedly violating a law banning unfair trading practices. The "norm" in this case meant heterosexuality and traditional gender roles. The bookstore chain responded by posting signs in all its stores saying that they sold books with "non-traditional content." Líra Könyv continued selling the book and successfully challenged the government officer's decision in court. Hungary's Act LXXIX of 2021 on Harsher Action Against Paedophile Criminal Perpetrators and the Amendment of Certain Laws with a View to Protecting Children (hereinafter Act 79) would soon outright ban lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) content from being sold to children.

Fining Líra Könyv in order to limit younger children's access to *What a Family!* was part of an ongoing effort by the Hungarian government and other representatives of far-right politics to limit LGBTIQ representation in children's literature and education. Zsófia Bán's *Vagánybagoly és a harmadik Á, avagy mindenki lehet más* (*Rough-n-Tough Owl and Third Grade, Group A; or Everyone Can Be Different*), published in 2019, was the first Hungarian book containing openly queer content, such as a reference to a kid with two moms. *Rough-n-Tough Owl* was followed by *Meseország mindenkié* (*Fairyland Is for Everyone*), a volume of revised classic fairy tales featuring characters from marginalized groups, published in 2020 by the Labrisz Lesbian Association. Both books faced harsh criticism from the far right—and censorship, too. Dóra Dúró, a Hungarian MP and vice-president of the far-right radical nationalist Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) movement, accused both books of "propagating homosexualism" and shredded them in public. Human rights activists and the Hungarian Publishers and Booksellers Association protested in published declarations, referring to Dúró's acts as reminiscent of Nazi book burning. However, the attacks only increased both books' popularity. At the same time, the National Authority for Consumer Protection ruled in January 2021 that potential buyers should be informed beforehand about "patterns of behavior deviating from traditional gender roles" appearing in *Fairyland*, and claimed that the rights and interests of consumers were violated in the absence of such information (Háttér Society, 2021a).

What a Family! was not destroyed publicly. Instead, in July 2021, the bookstore chain that sold it and refused to label it as being against the norm was fined. However, the fine was not given based on the newly passed Act 79 that bans the sharing of any LGBTIQ content with minors, affording the Hungarian government unprecedented authority to fine and criminalize booksellers as well as educators for distributing LGBTIQ-inclusive children's literature. In practical terms, this means that books with alleged "homosexual propaganda" content should not be displayed in shop windows or sold within 200 meters of a school or church, and such books should be shrink-wrapped like items with pornographic content.

It is important to note that the Líra Könyv bookstore chain was fined based on another regulation and not on Act 79. Act 79 was only adding to heteronormative censorship laws by explicitly banning LGBTIQ content from minors. At the same time challenging the government officer's decision in court can be seen as a challenge to the spirit of Act 79, bringing a new legal precedent to how anti-LGBTIQ policies can be fought. Its victory in the courts shows that children's literature is an important dimension in fighting against state-sponsored genderphobia. Public outcry over the banning of LGBTIQ children's and political statements against Act 79 and subsequent acts by experts, educators, and librarians also contributed to the discourse of opposition against anti-LGBTIQ censorship.

Genderphobia is the aversion to addressing and critically interrogating gendered differences and gender as a social construct. We interpret gender according to van Anders' (2015, p. 1181) definition referring to aspects of "masculinity, femininity and gender-diversity that are situated as socialized, learned and cultural (e.g., appearance, behavior, presentation, comportment). May refer to one's internal sense of one's self, culture, roles, others' beliefs about one's self, structures and systems, etc." The aversion to gender is based on heteronormative and patriarchal dominant beliefs which construe any opportunity to critically interrogate gender as disrupting dominant gender and sexual hierarchies. The avoidance of critical engagement with gendered binaries, norms, and social structures is also an action, as it is used for fear-mongering for political effect. Thus, genderphobia is both an ideology about the fearfulness of gender as well as an action i.e., fear-mongering. Broadly speaking, state institutions (regardless of political and geographic boundaries) are gendered and sexualized in that they historically and currently are structured on dominant gender and sexual norms which reinforce male and heterosexual dominance. This is evidenced by state policies around the world which have historically

marginalized or negatively targeted women as well as sexual and gender minorities, from discriminatory voting rights provisions and the criminalization of homosexuality to limiting reproductive rights, access to abortion, and marriage equality. Gender minorities continue to experience the gamut of discriminatory policies and, in some cases, outright targeting and violence by state officials. Even when the patriarchal and heteronormative power structures of the state remain firmly in place, states can react strongly to restrict or dismantle any attempts at critique and engagement around gender. Critical and public discourses around gender can challenge the state's status quo, especially in political contexts characterized by plebiscitary authoritarianism or leader democracy (Turner, 1990), such as in Hungary, where the public sphere is firmly controlled by the state.

This article is a case study on how Hungary's genderphobic policies impact the everyday. When discussing political movements and sweeping policy enactments, every day or more mundane aspects of life, such as what books children are allowed to read, get overlooked. Yet, it is on this smaller scale that we can see how genderphobic policies work to restrict plurality and civil rights. To understand the recent censorship of LGBTIQ content, this article interrogates how the Hungarian government implemented genderphobic policies to strip human rights from LGBTIQ adults, children, and families. What happened to *What a Family!* is indicative of a steady pattern of the Hungarian far-right populist government's implementing restrictive policies against LGBTIQ people. Using the concept of genderphobia, we explore the legal developments of gender- and sexuality-restrictive policies and their practical implications in Hungary. We argue that these policies are caused by the rise of populism and illiberalism in Hungary, which rely on heteronormative discursive formations of tradition, normality, and family. Previous studies (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Möser et al., 2022) demonstrate that the rhetoric of politicized and essentialized parenthood, as well as the need to defend "the family," can effectively mobilize people in different European political contexts. Hungary is not unique in politicizing the concept of the heteronormative and cisnormative family, nor is it unique in connecting reproductive, sexual, and gendered biopolitics with populist discourse and illiberalism, but what is interesting is how so much of this plays out at the policy level, not just symbolically and discursively.

This article contributes to the existing literature on gender and illiberalism in Hungary by focusing on the development of genderphobic policies aimed at LGBTIQ communities and the battleground of children's literature. Research shows that illiberalism relies on heteronormative and misogynist discourse on traditional gender roles and the need to protect the traditional family and gendered power structures in order to strip away welfare institutions and enforce neo-nationalist policies that marginalize sexual and gender minorities and other marginalized groups (Pető, 2022; Rottenberg, 2014). Much of the research on gender and illiberalism focuses on right-wing populist rhetoric and how the term "gender" is used to mobilize the public and gather votes as well as build loyalty within parties (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Krizsan & Roggeband, 2018). The created crisis over the dwindling of "traditional" gender norms, power configurations, and gendered structures by anti-liberal regimes in Hungary and Poland work to bring legitimacy to their government's actions, such as increased anti-LGBTIQ legislation and restrictions on reproductive rights (Kováts, 2020). This article focuses on genderphobic policies aimed at LGBTIQ communities through the censorship and ongoing debate around LGBTIQ-inclusive children's literature. When analyzing resistance to illiberalism and populism, children's literature is not often considered. However, in this article, we explore how children's literature is not only a casualty of genderphobic policies but also a site of resistance and advocacy for LGBTIQ children. This article will also highlight different forms of opposition to genderphobia, including resistance against Act 79, especially concerning the rights of LGBTIQ children. Far too often, the focus on resistance to populism and illiberalism has been on the level of discourse and public rhetoric, especially by state actors and human rights organizations. In children's literature and education, the rights of LGBTIQ children are being fought over both discursively and at the policy level. Looking at the development of, and public resistance against, the censorship of children's literature points to the value of contextualizing genderphobic policies in a broader perspective. What is at stake goes beyond the selling and banning of LGBTIQ-inclusive books aimed at toddlers to include the validation of people's lives, including those of LGBTIQ children and youth.

2. How Did We Get Here?

Act 79 is often framed as the "child protection act" by members and supporters of the Hungarian government, while others, especially civil society organizations (CSOs) representing the interests of LGBTIQ people, speak about it as the "homosexual propaganda law." These Hungarian CSOs referred to the introduction of Act 79 as a "Russian-style attack on freedom of speech and children's rights" (Háttér Society, 2021b), pointing to the similarities between Act 79 and Russian Federal Law No. 135-FZ (of 29 June 2013) banning propaganda of "non-traditional sexual relationships" among minors (Kondakov, 2014). In fact, Hungarian Act 79 can be seen as the second "Russian-style child protection measure" within the EU since the 2009 introduction of the Lithuanian Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information, prohibiting the direct dissemination to minors of "public information whereby 'homosexual, bisexual or polygamous relations are promoted,' because it has 'a detrimental effect on the development of minors'" (European Parliament, 2009).

To situate Hungary's Act 79 and the subsequent state censoring of children's books with LGBTIQ content, we need first to focus on the rise of populism and illiberalism in Hungary and its impact on genderphobic policies. Growing populist rhetoric has been well examined in East-Central Europe (see, for example, Bánkuti et al., 2012; Csehi & Zgut, 2021). However, it can be argued that while research on the rise of populism and illiberalism in Europe is growing, more attention to the "real-world consequences of populist governance" is still needed (Bartha et al., 2020, p. 71). In Hungary, with its deepening and accumulating "democratic defects" (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1492), the real-world consequences of paternalist populism (Enyedi, 2016) have played out predominantly in the form of restrictive policies that work to harm and strip civil rights from various social minority groups, including the Roma, refugees, and LGBTIQ people. Similar to the negative effects of populism on gay and lesbian rights, which have been documented elsewhere (Pappas et al., 2009), radical reforms in Hungary's domestic policies under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his government(s) that specifically target gender and sexuality have further bolstered heteronationalist and patriarchal principles. These policies, including Act 79, work to further enforce genderphobia in state institutions.

While Hungary joined the anti-gender scene relatively late, "the political deployment of the concept of 'gender' has accelerated in the past few years and is fiercely on-going" (Fodor, 2021, p. 17). The first signs of explicitly genderphobic policies emerged in 2008 in response to a perception that "gender ideology" was being pushed into the high-school curriculum, specifically through a textbook (Pető & Tarajossy, 2008) that aimed to teach history through a critical gender lens. A Fidesz MP claimed that the textbook represented a larger trend of society losing its heterosexual identity, traditional gender roles, and family values, signaling "the final takeover of the culture of death, of denial, of the opposition to our creaturehood" (Kováts & Pető, 2017, p. 119). Genderphobia would explicitly enter the political arena in 2010 with an anti-gender debate over a preschool curriculum amendment that requested teachers to "deliberately avoid any strengthening of gender stereotypes and facilitate the dismantling of the prejudices concerning the social equality of genders" (Kováts & Pető, 2017, p. 120). When the Fidesz government took office in 2010, they quickly removed this sentence from the amendment on the basis that addressing differentiation and inequality around the sexes was meaningless and at odds with Hungarian social norms.

This was a strong indicator of what was to come in Orbán's System of National Cooperation:

> A social engineering project that includes both the usual desiderata of old-school continental conservatism (respecting national tradition, Christian faith, law and order, paternalist state, patriarchal family values, etc.) and its *odiosa* (challenging cosmopolitanism, secularization, the rule of law, market rivalry, gender equality, etc.). (Kovács & Trencsényi, 2020, p. 381)

When the Fidesz government drafted a new constitution, the Fundamental Law, which came into effect in 2012, it defined marriage as the union of a man and a woman and offered no explicit protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Fundamental Law also describes family as "the basis of the survival of the nation" and declares that the Hungarian government encourages the commitment to have children and protects families. Similar to other 21st-century European political contexts harnessing "the emotional power of anti-genderism" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 124), family protection as a rhetoric tool has been continuously used by the Fidesz government(s) in activating heteronormative parenthood as an attractive political identity. Beyond dramatically fuelling the moral panic over the "sexualization of children" this also entailed "promoting and exploiting the view of the 'traditional' family as a nexus of solidarity, the last frontier of social cohesion, a defense against rampant individualism and consumerism" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 124). Since then, there is increasing evidence of the intentional intertwining of heteronormativity, patriarchy, and reproduction in national rhetoric and policies.

In the early years of Orbán's System of National Cooperation, radical far-right political forces had their own voice against the "gender revolutionaries" to "mobilize voters through the anti-EU, homophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-immigrants attitudes and through the worry about the demographic decline of the nation" (Félix, 2015, p. 76). Homophobic discourse also entered local politics, as documented by proposals submitted to the General Assembly of Budapest in 2012 by Fidesz and Jobbik party representatives to ban events "portraying sexual deviance" and presenting same-sex sexual relations as socially acceptable behavior (Félix, 2015, pp. 70–71). Later, Fidesz successfully incorporated these components into its own political agenda. Within the last few years, gender has become the rhetorical tool of reason for far-right and right-wing Hungarian parties to enforce a consensus on what should—and should not—be seen as "normal" and "legitimate" (Kováts & Pető, 2017). The protection of traditional gender roles has become a rallying cry, even though it was never fully transposed into consistent policy measures. Under this rhetorical tool, any attempt to address gender critically is framed as counter to the values of the state and taken as evidence of oppressing forces wanting to enforce a "politically correct" or leftist gender ideology that addresses gender discrimination and recognizes sexual and gender minority rights.

Since 2010, and especially since 2019, previously gained LGBTIQ rights have been oppressively dismantled and further restrictions imposed. The long list of

government actions "systematically undermining the freedom and equal rights of sexual and gender minorities" includes the introduction of "Paragraph 33" in a bill adopted in May 2020 that prohibits transgender and intersex people from having their gender legally recognized, the abolishment of the Equal Treatment Authority, which played an active role in the legal protection of LGBTIQ people, and the introduction of Act 79 (Háttér Society, 2021c).

While anti-gender campaigns and laws prohibiting "homosexual propaganda" were present in Europe before Hungary's Act 79 was introduced in 2021, it is important to situate what happened in Hungary as part of a larger "illiberal offer" by the Fidesz government(s), advancing a "viable alternative centred on the family, the nation, religious values, and freedom of speech" (Pető, 2022, p. 319) and aimed at reinforcing heteropatriarchal and nationalist ideals. In this context, we can trace the roots of Act 79 to 2015, when Prime Minister Orbán portrayed popular fears about falling birth rates and rising immigration as a crisis of the Hungarian family.

As the government framed immigrants coming to Hungary from the Middle East and Africa as a national crisis in 2015–2016, fences were erected along the country's south-eastern borders and increased border security was enacted to stop asylum-seekers. Instead of embracing immigration as a possible solution to population decline, Orbán—for example, in his regular weekly interviews on the state-owned Kossuth Radio—railed against mixed populations and promoted the fear of Hungarians becoming a minority in their own country as well as Christian Europeans becoming a minority in Europe. According to Orbán, illiberal Christian democracy strengthens families both externally, through a firm anti-immigration stance that prevents population replacement, and internally by actively encouraging marriage-based reproduction of preferably white Christian middle-class citizens rather than granting equal legal status to all existing varieties of families. Demographic decline is understood here primarily as the decline of the politically preferred population composition. This idea is not a new one in Hungary: Previously dominant forms of ethnonationalist reproductive political ideas often pictured the undeserving Roma as a minority group producing children as a means of accessing child support benefits (Neményi & Takács, 2005). Political and policy attention to the "issue of demography" goes back a long way, at least to the 1950s, and thus the trope of demographic decline and pronatalist policies are familiar or even "natural" to Hungarians born after World War II.

The government's pronatalist population policy package of 2019 included a tax relief provision for mothers having at least four children. Reduced housing loans and credits and childcare coverage were also used to incentivize childbirth. Yet, this is a highly selective pronatalist project since the majority of these policies are outwardly exclusionary to poor and non-white Hungarians, especially the Roma, who do not have the necessary funds to access housing loans, tax breaks, and other economic incentives. These laws are also exclusionary to same-sex couples. Same-sex marriage remains banned, and LGBTIQ people are no longer allowed to adopt either jointly or individually. Access to IVF and donor insemination is prohibited for lesbian couples. These policies speak to a form of "repronormativity" that privileges "state-sanctioned heteronormative acts of reproduction specifically through the patriarchal heteronormative family, and service to this reproduction of the heteropatriarchal nation-state" (Weissman, 2017, p. 279). It is not just about women having more babies, but "having the right kind of babies" in order "to ensure that the nation is reproduced in its desired form" (Mole, 2016, p. 105).

Connecting national policies to the protection of the heteronormative family and reproduction allowed the three consecutive Fidesz governments to enact stricter policies around "family protection" issues, including reproductive and LGBTIQ rights. In 2019, László Kövér, a Fidesz founding member and the speaker of the Hungarian Parliament, compared same-sex couples' demand to be allowed to marry and adopt children to pedophilia and added that "a normal homosexual…tries to adapt to this world without necessarily considering himself equal" (Dull, 2019). It is here that the conflation of pedophilia and the rhetoric of child protection would become the cover to further censor LGBTIQ content.

The COVID-19 pandemic only added to the instrumentalizing of anti-LGBTIQ policies with the implementation of state of emergency laws that enabled the government to rule by decree. This allowed sweeping genderphobic policies to be put in place without formal democratic processes. In May 2020, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law prohibiting legal gender recognition by prescribing "sex at birth" as a legally unalterable category. In December 2020, another law (Act 165 of 2020) banned adoption by single parents, including gays and lesbians. According to this law, only married couples can adopt children, and exceptions can be granted only on a case-by-case basis by the minister responsible for the Department of Family Affairs. This was followed by the Parliament adopting the ninth amendment of the Hungarian Fundamental Law, which, in fact, includes a series of amendments declaring, among other things, that "Hungary shall protect the right of children to their identity aligning with their sex at birth, and shall ensure an upbringing in accordance with the values based on our homeland's constitutional identity and Christian culture" (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2020, p. 11). The ninth amendment inserted the text "the mother is female, the father is male" into the marriage defense provision of the Fundamental Law (Article L(1)), which already banned the marriage of same-sex couples by stating that "Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the

basis of the survival of the nation" (Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2020, p. 5). Finally, on 26 May 2021, two Fidesz MPs submitted to Parliament a bill on harsher sentencing for pedophile criminal offenses and a criminal registry for perpetrators of such offenses, which garnered support from all the parties in the Hungarian Parliament. However, on 10 June 2021, the Parliament's Legislative Committee submitted a series of proposed amendments to the bill containing discriminatory provisions targeting LGBTIQ people and content. Finally, on 15 June 2021, the bill was passed as Act 79.

Act 79 amended several laws, most importantly banning any advertisements or media content that "promote or portray deviation from [gender]-identity aligning with sex at birth, gender reassignment or homosexuality" to individuals under the age of 18. Act 79 also amended the Act on National Public Education to prescribe that curriculum delivered in educational institutions on sexual culture, sexual life, sexual orientation, and sexual development should not be aimed at promoting deviation from the child's gender identity aligning with sex at birth, gender reassignment, and/or homosexuality. Furthermore, only persons or organizations registered by a designated state body should be allowed to hold, in the framework of the regular curriculum or other activities organized for the students, a session on sexual culture, sexual life, sexual orientation, sexual development, the harmful effects of drug use, and the dangers of the Internet. It is not entirely clear how sexual education became banded together with drug use and internet use, but what it does indicate is how genderphobia works to bring in other fears (fear of drugs, fear of internet usage, fear of sexual predators) together in policies. The close configuration of LGBTIQ issues with people who are addicted to drugs and the dangers of the internet work to create a nebulous fear-mongering in order to support populist genderphobic policies. It is made clear in the Explanatory Report to Act 79 that this provision is aimed at preventing LGBTIQ CSOs and other persons and organizations that might attempt to sensitize students in relation to the issue of non-discrimination from having access to educational institutions (Council of Europe, 2021).

Much as the government framed immigrants coming to Hungary from the Middle East and Africa as a national crisis in 2015–2016 and used this to frame Hungary as protecting its citizens from destructive EU immigration policies, "protecting" children from LGBTIQ influence has become an "us" (Hungarians) versus "them" (EU) battle. We can observe a substantial change regarding how child protection has been framed in the government's communication in connection with introducing Act 79. Table 1 shows the number of articles per year about child protection issues published in the *Magyar Nemzet*, the biggest self-proclaimed pro-government national daily newspaper. On 12 March 2022, a full-text search for *gyermekvédelem* ("child protection") was conducted on the newspaper's online archive between January 2019—when it was merged with another Fidesz-owned daily, the *Magyar Idők*—and February 2022. In 2019–2020 the articles focused mainly on current issues of the Hungarian child protection system and other relevant policies. In 2021 the number of articles was more than double that of the previous year, and 40 out of 49 interpreted child protection in the context of Act 79 and/or "LGBTQ propaganda." The first such article was published on 15 June 2021, the very day of voting for Act 79. Since then, there were 51 articles published on the dangers of "LGBTQ propaganda" mainly in the context of Act 79, and only four pieces focused on (real) child protection policy issues.

This hollowed-out media representation suggests that similar to other cases where for example, "the term family is repeated endlessly in anti-gender discourse and…sentimentalized to convey love, connection and community" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 122), the Hungarian government uses child protection as a smokescreen for gaining political power within a far-right political project. In this context fighting against the strawman of the dangers "LGBTQ propaganda" poses to children becomes a crucial element in the government's political propaganda machinery.

Framing Act 79 as protecting children from persons and organizations offering sexual and gender education and in turn promoting homosexuality and influencing the "normal" (i.e., cis-heteronormative) sexual and gender development of children allows the Orbán regime to create policies that are purposely obscure and at the same time incredibly threatening. International legal experts have argued that the terms used in Act 79, such as "propagation," "portrayal," "negatively influence," and "homosexuality," are too ambiguous to reach the standard of "foreseeability" and that the provisions do not sufficiently define the circumstances in which they are applied (Council of Europe, 2021, p. 23).

Table 1. Articles on child protection in the *Magyar Nemzet* (2019–2022).

Year	A. Number of articles published between 1 January 2019 and 28 February	B. Focus on (real) child protection policy issues (within A)	C. Focus on Act 79 and/or "LGBTQ propaganda"
2019	21	21	—
2020	18	18	—
2021	49	9 (4 after 15 June 2021)	40 (from 15 June 2021)
2022 (January–February)	11	0	11

3. Resistance to Genderphobic Policies

Condemnation of Act 79 began immediately after it was voted into law, both domestically and internationally. On 15 July 2021, the European Commission announced that it had started legal action against Hungary, and concerning Act 79, for violating a number of legal norms, including the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the e-commerce Directive, the Single Market Transparency Directive, and the GDPR. Most importantly, in the Commission's view, the Hungarian provisions:

> Violate human dignity, freedom of expression and information, the right to respect of private life as well as the right to non-discrimination as enshrined respectively in…the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Because of the gravity of these violations, the contested provisions also violate the values laid down in Article 2 TEU [Treaty of the European Union]. (European Commission, 2021)

On 21 July 2021, the Hungarian government responded to the "attacks from Brussels" by following populist and genderphobic rhetoric, initiating a "child protection" referendum on questions such as:

> Do people want the unrestricted display of content including homosexual themes, in the form of commercial or public information broadcasts, on television and in advertisements? Do people want us to introduce very young children to the possibility of "sex reassignment"? (Orbán, 2021)

When it became clear that the "child protection" referendum would actually take place, and that it would be on the same day as the 2022 national elections, 14 CSOs started the "Invalid Answer to Invalid Questions" campaign. Their main message was that everyone should vote invalidly by crossing both yes and no options for each of the referendum questions (Háttér Society, 2022). Following the campaign, more than 1.7 million people spoiled their ballots, leading to the referendum being declared invalid. The campaign organizers succeeded with their actions to create a public outcry against a nonsensical referendum, which was further boosted by the government on all possible media channels. This outcome can be seen as a great achievement for civil rights, especially considering the present devastating situation of the Hungarian civil society.

Since 2010, the System of National Cooperation has created an incredibly hostile environment for CSOs in Hungary by transforming the legal system, and campaigning against the alleged "enemies of the nation (which includes civil society)" (Gerő et al., 2022 p. 120). Changes in the institutional framework for CSOs included the implementation of an increasingly restrictive legal environment and the reorganization of the main government agency responsible for distributing public funds into the Fund for National Cooperation. This resulted in decision-making bodies filled with government delegates and the establishment of government-organized non-governmental—but government-friendly—organizations to promote Orbán's politics (Molnár, 2020). Following these changes, the uncertainty of the legal environment and the bureaucratic hurdles for CSOs have increased, while their public funds have decreased. In 2013–2014 there was also a campaign launched by the government to harass organizations that received and distributed grants from the Norwegian Civil Fund (Gerő et al., 2022). Most of these grants were used in projects focusing on thematic areas such as human rights and democracy, gender and equal opportunity, and Roma integration (Molnár, 2020). In the summer of 2015, during the European refugee and migration crisis, the government accused CSOs of acting in pursuit of foreign interest and of being allegedly financed and instructed by George Soros. In fact, these CSOs relied entirely on volunteer work and private donations to fill the role that the Hungarian government would have been expected to perform (Molnár, 2020).

In 2017 the Hungarian Parliament passed a new transparency regulation on "foreign-aided civil organizations," which were described by government politicians and their media outlets as "foreign agents," who allegedly pursue "foreign interests and agendas" and thereby undermine Hungarian sovereignty (Molnár, 2020, p. 56). Many CSOs refused to register with the court as an act of civil disobedience, and several CSOs filed a complaint with the European Court of Human Rights, while the European Commission initiated an infringement procedure against Hungary regarding this law (Molnár, 2020). In the summer of 2017, a massive propaganda campaign was launched against George Soros and the organizations he founded, the Open Society Foundations network. This culminated in the "Stop Soros" laws that criminalized "help or support for migration" (Gerő et al., 2022, p. 124). Under these laws, CSOs could face prosecution, with their members risking one year of imprisonment if involved in migration-related activities, or the organization could be shut down if deemed a security risk (Molnár, 2020). Thus, we have to place the resistance to genderphobic policies into the context of a threatening environment, maintained by vaguely formulated laws that could be applied against almost anyone arbitrarily according to the authorities' whims.

When looking at how resistance to Act 79 has taken effect at the national level, we focus explicitly on protecting LGBTIQ representation in children's books and education as well as the fundamental rights of LGBTIQ—as well as non-LGBTIQ—youths and children. The implementation of Act 79 and the preceding court cases over the censoring of Hungarian children's books with LGBTIQ content, such as *What a Family!*, speak to the importance of situating Hungary's anti-LGBTIQ government policies with previously enacted genderphobic policies.

This framing of family and child protection has been used to strip away LGBTIQ civil rights.

It is also important to note that the Child Rights CSO Coalition (Gyermekjogi Civil Koalíció), a Hungarian umbrella organization representing 35 CSOs and 20 individual experts, issued several statements criticizing the government's genderphobic policies, directly affecting children's rights (see, for example, GyCK, 2020). In June 2021 they turned to the Hungarian Commissioner for Fundamental Rights because of the constitutional and international human rights concerns around Act 79.

The Hintalovon Foundation, one of the leading child rights CSOs in Hungary, while welcoming certain elements of Act 79, such as the stricter punishment of perpetrators, called for further steps, including "a greater emphasis on sexual education" as "people who have age-appropriate information about sexuality are better equipped to recognize dangerous situations'' (Hintalovon Foundation, 2021a). In October 2021, on "the 30th anniversary of Hungary's signature on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, when the Hungarian government vetoed that the rights enshrined in the Convention shall be supported by a common European Union strategy," the Hintalovon Foundation issued an indignant statement, with the main message: "Just to be clear: A government that emphasizes child protection has undermined with its veto the protection of children in the European Union" (Hintalovon Foundation, 2021b).

As discussed in the previous section, the implementation of Act 79 was swiftly criticized both domestically and internationally for conflating homosexuality with pedophilia. This conflation pathologizes sexual and gender minorities as predators while denying LGBTIQ children and young adults recognition, protection, and support. Especially important to this argument is the use of the age limit of 18 years.

Act 79's restricting LGBTIQ content from those under 18 withholds relevant and appropriate information and representation, which can in turn deny LGBTIQ children and youth their right to health education and wellbeing. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stresses that without the protected ability to seek and receive information about sexuality and gender, young people are left ill-equipped when they become sexually active. These sentiments were further endorsed by the declaration of the Hungarian Psychiatric Society and the Hungarian Psychological Society, with the support of the Hungarian Sexual Medicine Society, which stated that Act 79 was based on false, not medically supported information about childhood sexual development and gender identity (MPT, 2022). They emphasize that gender identity and sexual orientation cannot be influenced by environmental factors, education, or propaganda, nor can they be changed by forced conversion therapy. Parents' gender identity and sexual orientation do not affect a child's gender identity, sexual orientation, or healthy development. Stigmatization of LGBTIQ individuals is incredibly harmful to children and parents, especially in LGBTIQ families. Banning literature and education on non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities can cause harm to children's and youths' mental health.

Restricting LGBTIQ-inclusive literature is not only harmful to children's and youths' mental, physical, and emotional health but is also impossible to execute fully in practical terms. In February 2022, the Association of Hungarian Librarians publicly condemned Act 79 as not only harmful to children but impossible to enforce in a public library setting where there is not enough oversight or institutional restriction to limit children's and youths' access to literature now censored under Act 79 (MKE, 2022). Since the ban only prevents those under 18 from accessing LGBTIQ material, this means that public services, like libraries, will need to restrict children's and youths' entry. Adolescents, especially secondary school students, no longer go to designated children's libraries and do not use children's literature collections, mostly because their curricula contain scientific and educational works aimed at adults. Banning LGBTIQ content from visitors under the age of 18 means banning children and young adults from accessing public libraries. It also means banning children and youths from accessing other public services like public parks, museums, and art galleries, where they could potentially be exposed to LGBTIQ information, representation, and education.

What a Family!, *Rough-n-Tough Owl*, *Fairyland is For Everyone*, and other Hungarian children's books with LGBTIQ content are sites of resistance to the larger issue of denying LGBTIQ children's and youth's existence. Censorship is rarely successful unless the state heavily restricts every facet of public and private life. Though not impossible, this effort drains considerable resources. Banning LGBTIQ content from children and youths not only negatively impacts their education and wellbeing, but strips them of their civil rights and access to public resources. By framing Act 79 as serving child protection, this legal instrument works to deny LGBTIQ children the right to a childhood in which they are supported and protected. Setting an age limit for young people at 18 is not only impossible to enforce but ignores that children and youths are sexual and gendered beings deserving of rights and representation.

4. Conclusion

In this article, connecting illiberal populism in Hungary with the instrumentalization of LGBTIQ rights for political gain, we introduced sites of symbolic and practical resistance to genderphobic policies that have recently become central features in the illiberal rebranding process of ethnonationalist Hungarian politics, which gathered force with the emergence of the Orbán regime's System of National Cooperation soon after 2010. Act 79 is an emblematic measure of present-day Hungarian state-sponsored genderphobia, condensing

an increasingly authoritarian government's efforts to expropriate the public sphere and exile non-conforming elements into a gradually narrowing sphere of private life.

We also wanted to indicate that the government's monopolizing of the definition of "the family" and the hollowing out of the social representation of child protection can have far-reaching consequences on both LGBTIQ and non-LGBTIQ people's lives. This points to genderphobic illiberal doublespeak, where reference to the need to "strengthen families" and to "protect children" means denying LGBTIQ people's claims to inclusion in the state-controlled system of full citizenship rights.

Finally, we wanted to show how the Hungarian government's framing of genderphobic policies as "protecting children" ultimately denies not only LGBTIQ human rights but the existence of LGBTIQ youth and children who could benefit from social support as well as representation in education and literature. This political reality reinforces a censored version of Hungarian society in which only those who fit within the limited definitions of sex, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity are given rights and protections. While, on the surface, democratic institutions still remain functional in Hungary, if tightly controlled by far-right populist parties, the adoption of genderphobic policies has essentially stripped liberalism from protecting marginalized social minorities. In using the argument of "protecting children," the Hungarian government is harming some of the most vulnerable youth and children by denying their existence.

The implications of Act 79 as well as other anti-LGBTIQ policies are yet to be fully revealed. The vagueness of Act 79 creates an environment of uncertainty and fear that is used to oppress sexual and gender minorities. Potential follow-up research could focus on how educators and librarians are navigating Act 79 and what areas of resistance are they engaging with. More research on the role of CSOs in shaping and resisting genderphobic policies is also needed.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Article

The Gendered Discourses of Illiberal Demographic Policy in Poland and in Russia

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Abstract
Despite being dissimilar cases, both Poland and Russia exhibit strong anti-liberal and democratic backsliding tendencies. Concomitantly, politicians are spreading a demographic moral panic, employing the argument that both nations are in danger of demise. There is scaremongering concerning below-replacement population growth rates and, in parallel, a tightening grasp on reproductive health rights and a growing fear of non-binary gender identities, people of color, and homosexuality. The political anti-gender mobilization in Poland in the 2010s and the gendered anti-Western and anti-gay conspiracy narratives in Russia are examples of this phenomenon. How are the policy responses to "demographic crises" constructed and gendered in political discourses today? What lies behind it and what is its role in illiberal politics? In this article, I discuss the current demographic discourses in Poland and in Russia. I argue that the politics of rallying against "demographic crises" surfaced on the wave of growing dominance of ultraconservative and nationalist discourses in East-Central Europe in response to perceived socio-economic pressures. I demonstrate how Polish and Russian politicians have been utilizing nativism, familialism, and "tradition" discourses for reasons of political legitimacy and expediency. Looking at political debates and concrete demographic strategies, I trace how the rhetoric of "democratic crises" is deployed to shore up illiberalism in both countries.

Keywords
demographic policy; discourse; gender; illiberalism; Poland; Russia

Issue
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1. Introduction

Current Russian and Polish politics have witnessed a resurgence of nationalist and ultraconservative discourses with regards to issues of "sexual citizenship" (Richardson, 2000)—including policies on gender identity and expression, sexualities, and sexual health and reproduction (cf. Edenborg, 2019, 2021; Mole et al., 2021; Sperling, 2014). Despite being dissimilar cases in terms of geopolitical trajectories and historic legacies, both Poland and Russia exhibit strong anti-liberal and democratic backsliding tendencies. The "controversial" policy issues such as contraception, abortion, and population control are tied to demography. In Poland, in the last decade (particularly after 2015) and in Russia especially since the second presidential term of Vladimir Putin (specifically since 2007), a demographic moral panic has been circulating, spreading the argument that both nations are in danger of demise. On the one hand, there is scaremongering concerning the below-replacement population growth rates and, on the other, a tightening grasp on reproductive health rights and a growing fear of trans persons, non-binary gender identities, migration, and non-heteronormativity.

The discursive and institutional anti-gender mobilization in Poland in the 2010s and the gendered anti-Western and anti-gay conspiracy narratives in Russia are examples of this phenomenon. How are the policy responses to "demographic crises" constructed and gendered in political discourses today? What lies behind this rhetoric and what is its role in illiberal politics? In this article, I compare the current demographic discourses in

Poland and in Russia. I argue that the political mobilizations rallying against "demographic crises" surfaced on the wave of growing dominance of ultraconservative and nationalist discourses in East-Central Europe in response to the perceived socio-economic pressures. The concern with population growth in Polish and Russian political discourses has strengthened not only an ultra-religious understanding of political values, but also provided a pragmatic way to create collective responses to constructed threats and thereby shore up support for the governing regimes. I argue that the growing hegemony of these narratives has been a way of responding to socio-economic problems and has come at the expense of societal diversity and minority rights. I trace the mechanisms guiding the discursive moral panic concerning family, reproduction, kinship, gender, and sexuality as intertwining with trans/homophobia and anti-equality rhetoric.

Demographic policy provides a case allowing for a parallel discussion of common and differing points in Poland and Russia because politicians in both countries often equate population decrease with economic problems. As Goetz et al. (2022, p. 7) have argued, demographic policies (as part of a modernist project) can easily fall victim to illiberal tendencies. It is also a policy area that has been under-researched from a feminist perspective while at the same time gaining more importance in Europe (Goetz et al., 2022). The comparative approach explores the political expediency of the "illiberal offer" (cf. Pető, 2021) in two different countries and across the EU/non-EU divide. While the article draws on the insights of the growing literature on "anti-gender" mobilizations (see for instance Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Kováts & Põim, 2015; Lombardo et al., 2021), it aims to contribute to the strand that focuses on the constructive projects and the new "politics of knowledge" offered by the opponents of gender equality (Ahrens et al., 2021; Bracke & Paternotte, 2016; Paternotte & Verloo, 2021). Thus, the analytical focus is not on the dismantling and destructive powers of illiberal forces in politics. Rather, I argue that demographic policies yield concrete programmatic results in terms of what illiberals offer their constituents.

The article begins with a discussion of the literature that conceptualizes the relationship between gender and illiberalism. Subsequently, I outline the theoretical and methodological assumptions that allow me to conduct a discursive analysis of demographic policy from a feminist point of view. The empirical analysis is structured as follows. First, I explore the discursive constructions of the notion of a "demographic crisis," followed by the main demographic policy components: fertility, mortality, and migration. Next, I analyze the ideological values that underpin the illiberal demographic projects in Poland and Russia. The final sections examine the gendered "illiberal offer" that is propounded by politicians via demographic discourses. In the conclusion, I return to the question of why illiberal demographic policies can be pragmatic and politically expedient.

2. Conceptualizing Gendered Illiberalism

The growing contestation of both "liberal democracy" and gender equality have been pinpointed and explored in recent academic literature as profound challenges particularly in East-Central Europe (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Lombardo et al., 2021). Whilst the term "illiberal democracy" has been panned as ambiguous or as an oxymoron (Müller, 2016), scholarship has moved to discussing "illiberalism'' (Laruelle, 2022) or "anti-liberalism" (Zbytniewska, 2022). "Illiberalism" refers to political projects that juxtapose themselves to and oppose liberal democracy and liberalism, according to their own definitions (Laruelle, 2022). Political scientists have also theorized "democratic backsliding" and "de-democratization," concepts that describe the erosion of central aspects of democratic systems such as freedom of the media, independence of the judiciary, separation of powers, and minority rights (see for instance Bogaards, 2018; Lombardo et al., 2021). Importantly, de-democratization, democratic backsliding, illiberalism, and the opposition to gender equality have been and should be analyzed in conjunction. Indeed, "[g]ender equality is a central facet in the polarization caused by de-democratization" (Lombardo et al., 2021, p. 521).

Extant literature on this topic includes three main strands: research on the (a) genderedness of the far right (e.g., Köttig et al., 2017) or (b) populist radical right politics (e.g., Kantola & Lombardo, 2020), and (c) backlash against gender equality in the form of "gender ideology" (see for instance Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Kováts & Põim, 2015). Drawing on these three literatures, there is a growing understanding that while illiberalism is gendered and gendering, it also is more than just "illiberal anti-gender backlash" (see Grzebalska, 2022). Gender plays an important symbolic role as one of the key uniting elements for illiberal politics of disparate right-wing actors (Kováts & Põim, 2015; Pető, 2021), offering "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021) to radicalize the opposition to neoliberal globalization. Gendered illiberalism offers a "counter-hegemonic narrative…it is an anti-modernist response to the modernist, neoliberal model of society" (Pető, 2021, p. 318). Edenborg (2021, p. 2) has argued that "the Putin regime has articulated, provided ideological coherence to, and made visible a narrative where resistance to LGBT rights appears as a logical choice for states seeking to position themselves in opposition to the 'liberal West.' "

Scholars have argued that illiberal gender politics consist of more than mere opposition to or backsliding in terms of gender equality; it is rather a "project of alternative knowledge production" (Bracke & Paternotte, 2016, p. 144). They have highlighted the productive nature of this rhetoric, which redefines the gender equality field by imbuing it with new illiberal and ultraconservative meanings (cf. Ahrens et al., 2021). As argued by Pető (2021, p. 319), the "illiberal offer" consists of

"opposing 'gender ideology' and political correctness [while] also offer[ing] a livable, viable alternative centered on the family, the nation, religious values, and freedom of speech." Arguably, the issues of "sexual citizenship" (Richardson, 2000) that are at the heart of the gendered illiberal project are often implemented in the form of demographic welfare policies. This article follows these insights and focuses on how illiberal governance is produced and sustained at the level of discourse around demographic policy.

3. Towards a Feminist Demographic Policy Analysis

Demography as a discipline has always been engaged in the study of population changes via levels of fertility, mortality, and migration (Williams, 2010). Moreover, it only "gains legitimacy by being relevant to policy makers" (Williams, 2010, p. 200). Despite the original aims of population policy of ameliorating societal well-being (Goetz et al., 2022), like other academic disciplines rooted in European modernity, it has also been "a home for the racist and classist views…concerned about the high fertility of the lower classes and immigrant ethnic groups" (Hodgson, 1991, p. 35). Worse still, as Williams argued: "Feminism has had little impact on demography. Demography's lack of engagement with critical theories in general is commonly attributed to demography's connection to policy" (2010, p. 199). So, a double-burden lies on demographic policies—not only are they enmeshed with socially ambivalent foundations, but also in this case, they are designed and implemented by illiberal political forces.

Criticisms from "international activists in the human rights, social justice, and feminist movements…charge that the…approach to population growth is linked to the global system of racialized and patriarchal capitalist relations" (Kuumba, 1999, p. 448). Furthermore, like-minded critiques in the 1990s and 2000s have focused on "the relationship between repressive reproductive polity, or 'reproductive imperialism,' and the…trends toward increasing international economic polarization. [Whereby] in addition to serving the dominant economic interests, population policy perpetuates the underdevelopment and exploitation of 'third world' women and communities" (Kuumba, 1999, p. 448). Feminist scholars have long examined how the population-controlling approaches in population policy are a "form of patriarchal manipulation of women" (Kuumba, 1999, p. 448). Historically, demographic policies and population control have ambivalently related to gender, sexuality, race, respectability, and (dis)ability in European nation-building and welfarist projects (Sear, 2021). Feminist discussions about policies of family planning and eugenics expose how demography is rooted in racist eugenics (Sear, 2021). The shifting policy focus to population growth in Europe maintains biopolitical control elements of gendered bodies. Arguably, pro-natalist policies aimed at increasing population are just as oppressive and manipulative. Categories of women are othered and marginalized in national construction projects, especially when these are conducted by right-wing and ultraconservative forces (cf. Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989).

Yet, a focus on gender (or women) is not identical with a feminist critical approach. The latter implies a normative stance that is invested in social (and reproductive) justice, human betterment (in terms of well-being and life quality), as well as inclusion in terms of gender identity, expression, and sexualities (and sexual orientations):

> A feminist perspective goes beyond describing gender differences and specifies these differences as in large part socially constructed to the advantage of [some], who are relatively more empowered than [others], both within and outside the family. The nature and extent of such advantage depends on context and varies by race, ethnicity, and social class. (Presser, 1997, p. 302)

Attention to such intersectional interactions highlights the linkages between gender inequality and other inequalities. In practical policy terms, demographic policies preside over the most intimate and gendered aspects of politics. They regulate and strategize for the future of fertility, mortality, migration, and by association sexual relations in society. Arguably, as witnessed in the moral panics concerning "demographic crises," population policies are a tool of illiberals that use them to implement their visions of future societies. Following Williams' (2010) call for more feminist demography, this article engages in a critical feminist demographic policy analysis.

4. Discursive Policy Analysis and the Material

To analyze the policy responses to "demographic crisis," this article applies a critical discursive angle to policy analysis (cf. Fischer, 2003). Discourses establish the political terrain in which policies are designed, debated, and then implemented. I examine how policies are constructed and contextualized. Focusing on the mutually constructive relationship between discourse and policy, the goal is to explore how specific discourses become hegemonic, identify the defining claims of the different positions, determine the structure of the arguments, and which discursive strategies make them effective in given contexts. It also aims to uncover how particular discursive constellations serve to justify specific policy courses of action (Fischer, 2003, p. 90). This allows also for the exploration of what is unsaid—specifically what do the demographic strategies under analysis miss and why?

The analysis is based on a set of main policy documents: the proposed Polish "2040 Demographic Strategy," the 2018 Russian national project "Demography," the "Concept of Demographic Policy in the Russian Federation until 2025," and the "Concept

of State Family Policy in the Russian Federation until 2025," along with leading policy makers' public statements and political debates (as reported in media coverage and press service materials) directly pertaining to demography and utilizing "demographic crisis" arguments. I conducted desk research online to collect the relevant documents in Polish, Russian, and English. I selected politicians' public statements by including in the dataset any public media statement that referred to "demographic policy" or "demographic crisis" available online. The critical discursive analysis in this article aims to reveal the underlying relations of power that structure discourse and how political actors consciously and unconsciously reproduce hegemonic discourses (Fairclough, 2001). The media statements complement the policy document analysis and are used both as a source of data and as a contested arena for the discussion of relevant issues. From the perspective of feminist critical analysis, media appearances and utterances relating to "demographic crises" yield material with regards to the production, dissemination, and consumption of discourses. The media provide an arena for the development of hegemonic discourses that are outlined in the government policy documents.

4.1. The Countries Under Analysis

The article focuses on examining in parallel the demographic discourses in both countries. It does not purport to be a systematic comparative study, instead it employs an open-ended comparative approach as an analytical attitude. While Poland and Russia are dissimilar cases in terms of socio-economic, political, and historic circumstances, they tend toward similar outcomes in terms of illiberal demographic policy, as argued below. Both states have strong illiberal tendencies, with Poland taking an "illiberal swerve" (Bustikova & Guasti, 2017) after 2015 and classifiable as a "defective democracy" and Russia often being labelled as an "electoral authoritarian" state (cf. Bogaards, 2009). Accordingly, extant scholarship explores both Russia and Poland as political projects "grounded in illiberal premises of biopolitical conservatism, which implies distancing from and protecting against the 'liberal West' for the sake of societal and ontological security" (Yatsyk, 2019, p. 464; see also Makarychev & Yatsyk, 2017). The joint discussion of the two countries exposes common points, since both, despite dissimilar historic trajectories and legacies, have been implementing policies promoting only heteronormative, gender essentialist, and binary identities. At the same time, as I demonstrate below, there are policy differences stemming from various legacies in both countries. Overall, the analysis of the Polish and Russian cases aims to highlight how the policy trends under examination are shared across geopolitical divides and in political systems with different legacies. Hence, the article contributes to studies on political expediency and illiberal pragmatism in East-Central Europe. In the following sections, I address demographic discourses in Poland and Russia examining hegemonic aspects and blind spots.

5. Constructing "Demographic Crises"

To begin with, taking a social constructivist and discursive approach, I explore the notion of "demographic crises" in Poland and Russia. Extant research has pinpointed crises as pervasive and ubiquitous conditions invoked by leaders and policy stakeholders (Gigliotti, 2020). Social constructions of "crisis" labels often stem from external phenomena, situations, or events, yet "crises exist because of the ways in which people perceive the situation or because of the ways that leaders talk about the situation" (Gigliotti, 2020, p. 563). Furthermore, "[i]ndividual perceptions matter, and as socially constructed phenomena, crises exist if others perceive the existence of crisis" (Gigliotti, 2020, p. 572). Therefore, if "crisis lies in the eye of the beholder" (Gigliotti, 2020, p. 573), the way politicians speak of demographic policies, using the explicit notion of "demographic crisis," constructs it in the discursive social matrix and at the same time calls for solutions on the policy side.

The Polish demographic preoccupation is newer: The country's first Demographic Strategy was announced in 2021, whereas the Russian Demographic Concepts date back to 2007. The Polish government also established a new State Undersecretary position in the Ministry of Family and Social Policy—the Government Plenipotentiary for Demographic Policy in 2019. According to World Bank data, both countries have "below replacement" population rates (the population replacement rate is 2.1 children per woman)—with Russia at 1.5 fertility rate (a drop from 1.7 in 2015–2016) and Poland at 1.4 in 2019 with a consistently downward trend. Net migration offset the lower fertility in Russia between 2017 and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. The population in both countries will continue dropping in the coming decade if the trends continue. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, life expectancy was 73 years in Russia and 78 years in Poland (with female life expectancy higher in both countries). At the same time, the Polish statistical office announced that in 2020 Poland saw 68,000 more deaths than in 2019 (with about 60% officially attributed to Covid-19). Similarly, according to Reuters, Russia recorded almost 994,000 excess deaths between April 2020 and March 2022, when compared to average mortality in 2015–2019 ("Russia's total number," 2022).

Hence, both countries have less-than-desirable demographic indices from the perspective of politicians concerned with generational replacement rates and their impact on domestic economies. The politicians are anxious about the economic efficiency of pensions systems and the decreasing purchasing power in both countries. In the case of Russia, politicians and experts also voice security concerns in terms of military power (Samedova, 2019). So, the governing elites in Poland and

Russia construct "demographic crises" as both features and effects of wider social and economic problems. They make an explicit connection between issues like economic downturn and access to welfare benefits (such as pensions and unemployment benefits) and smaller populations. The demographic policy documents under analysis provide a concrete policy solution (via welfare and social policy) to the perceived social and economic ills. Politicians in both countries explicitly frame the familialist and natalist aims of demographic policy in discursive opposition to earlier neoliberal economic government positions.

In Poland, ruling party politicians with affiliated media outlets and experts have been mainstreaming the notion of a "demographic crisis" since 2021, when they announced the above-mentioned Demographic Strategy. "We are dying out" as the Polish vice-Minister for Family and Social Policy stated in April 2022 (Papiernik, 2022). "We've been having a 'demographic winter' for 30 years" according to the vice-Minister ("Zima demograficzna," 2021). In Russia, the official countering of the "demographic crisis" has been continuing since 2007. Specifically, President Putin and the subsequent Russian administrations have "framed family support as necessary for solving the country's demographic crisis" (Rivkin-Fish, 2010, p. 702). In June 2022, President Putin stated that "demography is the first task for the country….We should have more people and they should be healthy." According to the Chairperson on the Russian Institute of Demography, there are also:

> cultural risks [that] arise mainly due to compensating for the decline in the population with the help of "forced migration"….We are in a situation of a colossal demographic crisis for the first time in world history. This carries both cultural and—I would say—vital risks. Even if the authorities increase social benefits, pay closer attention to the family and fertility issues, by the end of the century, Russia will have half of the current population. (Samedova, 2019)

6. Fertility, Nativism, Natalism…and Migration and Mortality?

Overwhelmingly, both the Polish and Russian state demographic programs aim first and foremost to increase fertility (stressing fertility of younger women). This is jarring especially in the Polish "2040 Demographic Strategy," which does not mention decreasing mortality or increasing life expectancy even once and only focuses on "improving health conditions" for women of reproductive age. In fact, the Polish document explicitly states that "the additional aspects [of population policy] being mortality and migration are not the subject of the Demographic Strategy" (2040 Demographic Strategy, p. 27). It mentions excess deaths of *young* males and foremost in the context of it being a negative factor in the "material and psychological situation of young widows." Meanwhile, the Russian discussion of demographic plans do call for a "rapid increase of life expectancy in the Russian Federation." This includes advocating decreased alcohol and tobacco consumption, as well as reducing mortality from cancer, and "preserving access to health care (including emergency care) in rural and sparsely populated areas." There is an attempt to balance fertility, mortality, and migration in the approach (Table 1). By contrast, even though the Polish Demographic Strategy was announced at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and against the backdrop of the highest death rates in the country since the Second World War, the government made no contingencies for trying to lower mortality.

Arguably, the Polish government has recourse to pre-existing discourses and policy positions due to specific historical legacies. The lack of policy interest in the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 reveals broader politics at play (cf. Russo Lopes & Bastos Lima, 2020, p. 93). It is an instance of necropolitics in Poland, when the state assumes the power to decide who lives and who may acceptably die (Mbembe, 2003) or stands back on an inert policy position. While Mbembe (2019, p. 80) stresses that it is racism that usually underscores such dictating of "who is disposable and who is not," Bobako (2011) has demonstrated that in Poland class differences have been racialized in the process of post-state socialist transformation. In her discussion, the process of creation of class difference in Poland after 1989 can be interpreted as the racialization of social groups that were victims of the neoliberal market transformation (Bobako, 2011, p. 1). Moreover, she claims that the categories of race, class racism, and racializing are a useful tool in analyzing the creation of post-transformation class differences in Poland (Bobako, 2011, pp. 10, 14). Historically, drawing interdiscursively on rhetorical devices of racial superiority, Polish political and economic elites legitimized inequalities and explained the economic disenfranchisement of the former working-class, public-sector employees, the unemployed, and those who needed welfare as the inescapable result of the neoliberal-oriented economic transformation. The Covid-19 pandemic exposed these pre-existing mechanisms of social exclusion and segregation based on hierarchies of subjects, also yielding hierarchies in inertly "acceptable" or "inconspicuous" deaths.

In their goal to increase the number of children per woman, both the Russian and Polish documents are ideological and comprehensive at the same time (Table 1). The natalism advocated in the documents is clear and upfront. The stress is on women in both countries; there is little to no mention of men and their role in reproduction and childcare. The planned Polish demographic strategy focuses on three main goals:

1. Strengthening of the family (including financial support for families, e.g., the 500+ child benefit; support in fulfilling housing needs of families;

Table 1. Overview of the main policy components of the demographic policy documents under analysis in Poland and Russia.

Components of demographic/ population policy	Polish plan for a "2040 Demographic Strategy"	Russian "Concept of Demographic Policy in the Russian Federation until 2025" and the 2018 Russian national project "Demography"
Fertility	Stated aim: increase births and "strengthen the family" via financial and infrastructural support for parents	Stated aim: increase births via social benefits for parents; increase the number of mothers receiving the one-time "maternity capital" upon birth of a child
Mortality	Near total absence of stipulations: only concern are excess deaths of young men which have "negative consequences for the procreative potential of the population''	Aims: increase healthy life expectancy of the population; decrease alcohol and tobacco consumption; reduce mortality from cancer and cardio-vascular disease; decrease infant mortality; improve healthcare and enhance health monitoring
Migration	Not addressed	Aim: decreasing out-migration from the Russian Federation

support of the durability and stability of families; popularization of a "pro-family culture"; strengthening cooperation with civil society and NGOs working for the family).

2. Removal of barriers for parents who want to have children (including the development of a labor market that is friendly to families; the development of different childcare options; development of healthcare; the improvement of the quality and organization of the education system; the development of infrastructure and services for families).
3. Improvement of quality management and policy implementation (at both the national and local self-government levels).

Similarly, the Russian national project "Demography" has very concrete objectives: to raise Russians' healthy life expectancy, to boost the total birth rate to 1.7 children per 1 woman, and to increase the number of people who lead a healthy lifestyle. It also stipulates for "financial support for families after the birth of a child" and "promotion of employment opportunities for women—creation of pre-school education available to children up to three years of age." "Native" births are favored over migration. Both the Polish and Russian demographic plans stipulate for and expand on existing direct transfer benefits as well as tax benefits ("maternity capital" in Russia and the "500+" child benefit in Poland). Yet, financial state help is offered to heterosexual families usually with stable and standard employment and eligible for welfare provision. What is more, no provisions are made for parents caring for children with disabilities (especially for carers of adult children with disabilities).

The Polish demographic policy scape does not acknowledge the second major component of domestic population growth—migration (Table 1). Without significant attention paid to migration, as a major element increasing population, the politics of "nativism" (and not just "natalism") are at play. The primary goal is to increase "native" fertility, especially in Poland, which is a nearly ethnically homogenous country in comparison to the Russian Federation. Conversely, the Russian programs both recognize Russia's position as a net receiver of migration (albeit from countries that are also facing demographic lows) and identify the need to decrease the "considerable out-migration" from the country.

7. Unpacking "Traditional" Values

The stress on "families" is evident in both Polish and Russian demographic documents. "Family" signifies a nuclear, heterosexual married couple with able-bodied biological offspring. As one Polish MP put it: "A marriage is a family; a family cannot exist without marriage." On a discursive level, Polish and Russian politicians are only interested in a particular type of family which reflects the supposed demographic interests of the nation. A "strong" family is seen as the basis for a strong and "healthy" nation. Formed through a combination of (preferably religious) marital and blood ties, the nation-state is conceptualized as a national family, with the traditional nuclear family ideal providing the standards used to assess the contributions of family members in heterosexual and married-couple households. Consequently, both state programs stress "family stability" and the need to decrease divorce rates.

Based on the political discussions both in Poland and in Russia, in terms of demography, "family" is threatened. Politicians place themselves in the position of defending and speaking for "normal" and "traditional" families and

the health and sanity of children. This strongly nativist (as witnessed in the lack of migration policies in Poland and the concerns with "forced migration" in Russia) and natalist narrative determines preferred societal structures and defines norm versus "deviance." The aim of this family model is the biological growth of the religious ethno-nation. Any divergence from the "natural norm" is underscored by revulsion and seen as subversive and threatening for society.

The political debates on demography in Poland and Russia revolve around the gendered discourses of "traditional values," demonstrating how nationalist myths of a specific Polishness and Russianness must be protected or promoted against the European "other." Demographic politics institutionalize and mainstream such beliefs presenting them as national-cultural accomplishments, leading to structural problems such as discrimination and segregation of particular social groups, rather than being attributed to specific socio-economic conditions. Others have shown the importance of organized churches both in Poland and in Russia (see for instance Duda, 2016; Laine & Saarelainen, 2017). These faith-based organizations legitimize the hegemony of the discourses. In the context of demographic policy, this means that the imposition of a concrete language forces unequivocal understandings upon the consumers of the discourse. Because political actors deploy hegemonic ready-made "frames of meaning," they discursively enact, promote, and disseminate conservative and religious gendered values through political discourse. The axiology of the message is clear.

The social matrix of demographic discourses in Poland and Russia displays elements that prescribe or denigrate certain values for the family and the nation. Ultraconservative hegemonic discourses construct and fill with meaning both sides of the "values divide." Furthermore, this narrative depicts as anti-values a set of ideas that are traditionally associated with political and civic liberalism. The proponents of these discourses argue that the anti-values cause the collapse and decay of the "real" values. Figure 1 depicts the constructed "true," traditional values as surrounded by anti-values, according to the narratives of the "demographic crisis'' proponents.

The presented values and anti-values do not necessarily constitute gendered dichotomies or binary oppositions but are usually evoked in bigger and often messier discursive groupings. However, "liberal" values, especially those connected to ideas of tolerance and political correctness, are implicitly and derogatorily constructed as effeminate and foreign.

This tension between traditional values and "anti-values" emerges in the policy debates on demography in Poland and in Russia. Discursively, the field of gender equality is where these two sides come to a head. As Edenborg (2019, p. 17) concluded, "Russia's project of "traditional values" clearly shows that…is not only a concern for excluded groups, but central to all efforts to (re)define community." One MP of the governing ultra-conservative Law and Justice party in Poland argued that the divide is a war: "Huntington's clash of civilizations as contrasted to the clash of the civilization of life and death are nothing." According to another Polish politician: "This is an attempt to dazzle us with the ideology of equality, which is in essence a dictatorship of relativism, a dictatorship of a minority over a majority." Similarly, President Putin stated at a Valdai Club meeting:

> The importance of a solid support in the sphere of morals, ethics and values is increasing dramatically in the modern fragile world…values are a product, a unique product of cultural and historical

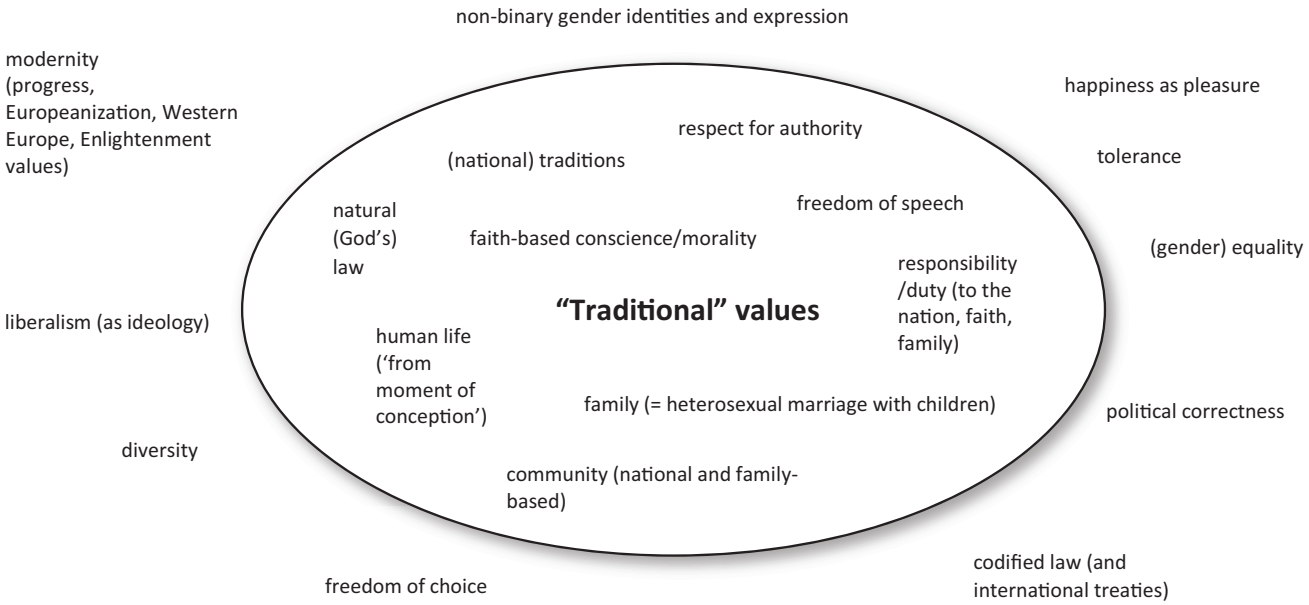

Figure 1. Overview of the values constructed in the "demographic crisis" discourses in Poland and Russia.

> development of any nation….Any alien elements will be rejected anyway, possibly bluntly. Any attempts to force one's values on others with an uncertain and unpredictable outcome can only further complicate a dramatic situation and usually produce the opposite reaction and an opposite from the intended result….Of course, the social and cultural shocks that are taking place in the United States and Western Europe are none of our business; we are keeping out of this. Some people in the West believe that an aggressive elimination of entire pages from their own history, "reverse discrimination" against the majority in the interests of a minority, and the demand to give up the traditional notions of mother, father, family and even gender, they believe that all of these are the mileposts on the path towards social renewal….We have a different viewpoint, at least the overwhelming majority of Russian society…has a different opinion on this matter. We believe that we must rely on our own spiritual values, our historical tradition and the culture of our multiethnic nation….The destruction of age-old values, religion and relations between people, up to and including the total rejection of family (we had that, too), encouragement to inform on loved ones—all this was proclaimed progress and, by the way, was widely supported around the world back then and was quite fashionable, same as today. By the way, the Bolsheviks were absolutely intolerant of opinions other than theirs. (Putin, 2021)

What rings clearly is the opposition of "our" natural, traditional, Christian values to "outside" destructive influence. The ultraconservative narrative is emotively formulated as the concern about influence from outside, especially Western European moral decay. There is a perception that Europe (by the doings of the EU and other international institutions) can force societal changes that are not appreciated or do not conform to constructed national traditions. Politicians like President Putin and Law and Justice MPs project gendered anxieties onto (Western) Europe, with Russia and Poland both seemingly remaining heterosexual and normatively gendered. Significantly, we can see a hint of the postcolonial discourse being hijacked and used for a nationalist and illiberal cause: "[Can] the European Union or some other international organization force Poland to register homosexual couples and to allow them privileges?" (Polish Law and Justice MP in 2017).

Thus, both discursively and in policy terms, there is a strong stress on the biopolitical elements in the "politics of values" in Russia and Poland (cf. Makarychev & Medvedev, 2015; Stella & Nartova, 2016; Yatsyk, 2019). There is an emphasis on spirituality, Christian morality, and community, contrasted to the rationalist, morally-relativist, and individual rights-centered culture supposedly dominating in the West (Agadjanian, 2017). The discourses involve an internal gaze, portraying the "traditional" values as organically rooted in national culture and as explicitly securitized. When such values are implemented in demographic policies the effects are illiberal.

8. Natalist and Familialist Heteropatriarchy

As Pető (2021, p. 320) argued, "familialist policies have substituted dedication to gender equality with their own brand of women's rights." Women (and especially young women of reproductive age) are the main targets and subjects of both Polish and Russian demographic policies. At the same time, state help is advocated mainly for cis, married women with male partners. The removal of the income threshold and the inclusion of all minors under 18 in the Polish 500+ program came as an amendment to the original policy. The reasoning behind these policies points to women as primary caregivers, with the Polish strategy also naming grandparents in the section on various models of childcare. The underlying premise is for women to manage care responsibilities with work; there is little recognition of the need for men to share childcare.

Thus, both Polish and Russian demographic policy documents remain ensconced in gendered patriarchal stereotypes about family life. There is little recognition of single parenthood and no acknowledgement of same-sex parenthood (in both Poland and Russia single mothers constitute most single-parent households). Moreover, single motherhood is vilified—"boys raised without fathers have higher tendencies to substance abuse, frequent sexual activity, aggression, and teen crime," claims the Polish Demographic Strategy. For girls, the absence of fathers causes "young age of sexual initiation, sexual promiscuity, low body self-esteem, auto-aggression, and other psychological disorders including eating disorders." Tellingly, the list of social ills is gendered and sexist—boys have supposedly "frequent sexual activities," while girls are "sexually promiscuous" (2040 Demographic Strategy, p. 57).

In Russia, the government successively made pronatalist policies aimed to increase birth rates a key priority, reinforcing gender inequality and heteropatriarchal family ideals (Edenborg, 2019). The stress on values in both demographic policies reinforces heterosexism in education and welfare policy. For instance, the Polish Demographic Strategy stresses the need to "promote family competences" in society (especially among children and teenagers) by discouraging sexual promiscuity and promoting the culture of "healthy" family life. The Polish 2040 Demographic Strategy outlines personality disorders of one parent, stress, a "*workism* culture," and low self-esteem as causes of deteriorating family life and leading to alcohol abuse and domestic and sexual violence that "favour family disintegration" (pp. 55–60).

In terms of sexual and reproductive health, both Polish and Russian demographic strategies center on peri- and post-natal care, with general stipulations to promote reproductive care. At the same time, both countries have been implementing policies that restrict the

access to abortion (and in vitro fertilization [IVF] in the case of Poland). In Russia, the implementation of the President's Mother and Child Initiative 2007–2011 has substantially contributed to abortion control (Wang et al., 2021). After 2015, subsequent Polish governments have delivered a number of anti-women and anti-LGBTQ+ legal proposals and legislation: The state funding for IVF disappeared (replaced by funding for unscientific Catholic Church-promoted "naprotechnology"); domestic violence shelters lost funding; President Duda did not sign a gender recognition act; and, significantly, there were several attempts to restrict abortion legislation, with the final one resulting in a near total ban in 2021. The Constitutional Court of Poland, illegally captured by the Law and Justice party in 2015, ruled that abortion for embryo-pathological reasons was unconstitutional, thereby outlawing 98% of legal pregnancy terminations in the country.

9. Conclusions

Both policymakers and demographic analysts tend to evaluate demographic policies in terms of their overall success rates in achieving population growth/decrease aims (see for instance Arkhangelsky et al., 2015; Popova, 2016; Rostovskaya et al., 2019). The goal of this article was to expose the underpinnings of illiberal politics in the field of demography, rather than the evaluation of the effectiveness or efficiency of the demographic policies in Poland and Russia in terms of achieving population replacement rates serving domestic economies. Gendered values and norms are deeply engrained in the policymaking discourse. If these values stem from ideologically familial, natalist, and heteropatriarchal positions, then policies foster population growth while at the same time implementing an illiberal political project.

Overall, what comes across in the analysis of the contemporary demographic discourses in Poland and Russia is the stress on promoting the ethnonational(ist) familial community. The main differences between Poland and Russia appear in the policies relating to curbing mortality and net migration as elements of population growth. Comparatively, in Poland the absence of migration as a factor of demographic growth reflects the wider EU stance of right-wing anti-migration interpretation frames (cf. Goetz et al., 2022). In the Russian Federation, on the other hand, as a country more ethnically diverse than Poland, the demographic documents recognize the need to balance both in- and out-migration. In the documents and statements under analysis, Polish demographic policy is resolutely natalist, familialist, and nativist. The lack of attention to excess deaths (also in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic) or a coherent migration policy can be a feature of necropolitical unconcern with deaths of some groups of people, who are not prioritized in Poland due to historical legacies of racializing classes of public sector and welfare-reliant social groups. The demographic policies of Russia, on the other hand, include a recognition of the need to deal with excess deaths and increase migration, also due to the historical legacies of the country. Increasing (especially male) life expectancy following the harrowing drops in the 1990s have been a priority of Russian demographic policy for several decades (cf. Makarychev & Medvedev, 2015; Rivkin-Fish, 2010). At the same time, both countries still need comprehensive measures responding to the excess mortality resulting from Covid-19 as well as migration policies addressing the ethnically non-native, so-called "refugee crises" of the recent years.

Despite the differences between the countries, the focus on protecting families and increasing fertility rates as part of the collective national body is central in both national narratives addressing external threats. The discursive codes of social value assigned to certain identities (and by association to gendered bodies) are embedded within constituent discourses on demography. At the center of the "traditional values" frame lies the imagined family ideal. The illiberal resurgence in politics discursively propounds a model of an employed, able-bodied man, a patriot-Christian, who is an obedient and eager entrepreneur multiplying wealth. By his side is his church-sanctioned, nuclear, and heteronormative family taken care of by a wife. Within political discourses in Poland and in Russia, family means marriage and marriage can only be heterosexual. Created by blood and marital ties, ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own (healthy!) biological children.

Demographic policies prove an effective tool for illiberal politics. Similarly to Goetz et al. (2022, p. 26), I have found that "demographic-political issues bring numerous advantages for the far right." While being carriers of gendered values, these policies allow politicians to identify some social and economic ills and offer pragmatic solutions. These "illiberal offers" come with ideological and gendered "strings"—they allow for the implementation of gender unequal, exclusionary, and chauvinist society models. The political expediency of "illiberal pragmatism" is both enabled and despised by the progressive (mainly liberal) forces who are complicit in the formation of the current "neoliberal neopatriarchy" (Campbell, 2013, as cited in Pető, 2021, p. 321). A discursive analysis of demographic policies in Poland and Russia reveals the extent to which illiberal politics can respond to societal needs. Illiberal politics is not merely an erosive project; it can yield pragmatic solutions, albeit in socially regressive and exclusionary ways. Further research into the inequalities of the implementation of demographic policies in both countries is vital to examine the systemic inclusion and exclusion mechanisms of various social groups.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Article

Gender Politics of "Illiberal Pragmatics" in the Polish Defense Sector

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Abstract
Since 2015, the illiberal Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [PiS]) government in Poland has engaged in campaigns against "gender ideology," rolling back several equality mechanisms and provisions, and mainstreaming traditionalist values into state policy. Following from this, scholarship has predominantly addressed PiS gender politics through the concepts of anti-gender backlash and gender backsliding. Against this background, Polish defense policy constitutes a puzzling realm that significantly escapes these frameworks, revealing instead a mix of backsliding, institutional and discursive continuity, and positive gender change. While the displacement of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment office has erased similar bodies in the defense sector, the government has swiftly created a National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, strengthened the Armed Forces Women's Council, and continued prior policy and discourse on women's service. Meanwhile, the increased defense preparations following the war in eastern Ukraine have doubled women's percentage in the armed forces, partially regendering the very idea and practice of defense. To explore this ambiguity, the article draws from feminist institutionalism and multi-sited sociological methods. It proposes to move beyond backlash towards the analytical concept of illiberal pragmatics—a complex, gendered logic of governance which seeks to balance illiberals' dedication to national sovereignty with pragmatic political, security, demographic, and economic considerations. Under illiberal pragmatics, women's interests are pursued within a more conservative framework, with gender norms simultaneously upheld and destabilized across different realms. Nevertheless, the key feature of illiberal gender politics lies not in backsliding, but in a pragmatic balancing act between national integrity and structural pressures for change.

Keywords
anti-gender; defense; gender; illiberalism; military; Poland; security

Issue
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1. Introduction

After the 2015 electoral success of the illiberal right-wing Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość [PiS]) party in Poland, the BBC ran a video story on a Polish teenager narrating her participation in the recently boosted school military education program, along with an article on new self-defense courses offered to women by the Ministry of National Defense (MOD). Both stories have arguably functioned as low-profile "trivia," hiding on the margins of mainstream international discourse focused on the anti-gender backlash in Poland under illiberal governance—the erosion of liberal gender equality infrastructure, and the mainstreaming of "traditional family values" into state policy. However, this article argues that omitting these silent gendered developments in the currently expanding defense sector would be a dire intellectual mistake, as they may hold a key to a better understanding of the ambiguous workings of Polish illiberal gender politics as such.

Following the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the ensuing war in eastern Ukraine, the PiS government has sought to strengthen Poland's defense capabilities for turbulent times. This renewed focus on defense has led to growing military spending, army modernization and personnel buildup, and creation of new volunteer channels engaging citizens in defense, among them Territorial Defense Forces (WOT), defense

education programs in schools and universities, and state-supported pro-defense organizations. These undertakings translated into the growing presence and normalization of women in the rapidly reforming defense sector. In the Polish Armed Forces (PAF) alone, the percentage of women has doubled under PiS governance, and the opening of new voluntary channels of defense participation has worked to decrease the long-prevailing gendered gaps in security knowledge and skills in Polish society. Moreover, while anti-gender backsliding has run rampant in many spheres of Polish policy and politics under illiberal governance, the defense sector has largely been spared these radical innovations. Instead, the swift implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), among others, suggests the government has cautiously continued prior policy commitments and discursive lines with regards to women in defense and security.

These patterns of continuity and moderate gender progress in defense may seem puzzling given the overall tendency of mainstream feminist literature to analyze illiberal gender politics in the frameworks of anti-gender backlash or backsliding (e.g., Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019; Piscopo & Walsh, 2020). By means of overcoming the limitations of the backlash framework, this article proposes the concept of the gender politics of "illiberal pragmatics," understood as a logic of gendered governance which seeks to balance the overall dedication to national sovereignty and integrity with pragmatic considerations. This innovative analytical framework allows the article to explore and explain the "messy" coexistence of gendered institutional backsliding, continuity, and positive change across different sites at once.

The next section situates the concept of illiberal pragmatics against key findings from literature on anti-gender politics in Central Europe, mapping out patterns of backsliding in the realm of defense in Poland. Section 3 briefly introduces the theoretical and methodological approaches informing the article—feminist institutionalism and feminist security studies, as well as multi-sited sociology. It also discusses research methods and sources informing the analysis, among them expert interviews with security "insiders," policy documents, and official government communication. Moving beyond instances of backsliding discussed earlier, Section 4 explores patterns of continuity under illiberal governance, bringing attention to spaces where the MOD has cautiously followed priorly established policy and discursive paths. Section 5 highlights patterns of regendering observable in Polish defense after the critical juncture posed by the 2014 war in eastern Ukraine. The concluding section summarizes the main arguments, and situates the concept of illiberal pragmatics amidst broader critical scholarly calls to rethink the gender politics of the New Right.

2. Illiberal Gender Politics in Defense: From "Backsliding" to "Illiberal Pragmatics"

With the rise of political actors contesting both liberalism and "gender ideology" as enemy figures globally, the gender politics of illiberalism (used here to refer to political projects that define themselves against liberal democracy and liberalism, of which they have a prior experience; see e.g., Laruelle, 2021) has drawn considerable academic interest (e.g., Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Kováts, 2018; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). There is a general scholarly consensus that anti-gender politics has been employed by right-wing actors as a "symbolic glue" tying together a new anti-liberal coalition around the contestation of such diverse issues as gender mainstreaming, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), sexual education, gender studies, and LGBTQ rights (Grzebalska et al., 2017). As argued by scholars, the use of "gender" as an "empty signifier" by the Right (Mayer & Sauer, 2017) has partially reflected the very conceptual polysemy in feminist activism and academia where the concept is defined in varied ways, referring to biological or "cultural" sex, unequal power structures between men and women, as well as a self-defined sense of identity (Kováts, 2018; Pető, 2021, p. 314). In the realm of feminist security alone, binding documents such as the UNSCR 1325 focus on advancing women's rights and equality, while queer reinterpretations call for the need to "refute the assumption of a sexual binary" as such (Hagen, 2016). This polysemy notwithstanding, scholarship generally concurs that the electoral successes of illiberal or right-wing populist parties globally constitute a critical juncture for gender equality institutions and measures, with the mainstreaming of anti-gender ideology into popular discourse and state policy causing serious erosion of existing equality infrastructure (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019).

Faced with this critical juncture, dominant strands of feminist scholarship tend to view illiberal gender politics through the explanatory frameworks of backlash or backsliding, narrating current political reformulations of gender equality as a pushback against, and reversal of, earlier achievements, interrupting an otherwise assumed, linear trajectory of gender progress (Faludi, 1991; Grabowska, 2014; Piscopo & Walsh, 2020; Szczygielska, 2019). Among these backsliding patterns scholars name policy decay, the undermining of implementation, the erosion of consultation mechanisms, and the discursive delegitimization of gender equality policies (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019, p. 12). These broader, aforementioned patterns of eroding the legal and discursive basis for gender equality policies in Poland have also affected the defense sector. One potent example is the institutional displacement and dilution of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment office in 2020 (Gawęda, 2021), which also automatically ended the innovative Women in Uniformed Services consultancy

team working under its auspices since 2014. Moreover, the body of the Plenipotentiary for Women's Military Service of the MOD established in 2006 was liquidated in 2018 after years of prior institutional displacements—with the office combined with the Women's Affairs Council in the PAF in 2009, re-separated in 2016, and dismantled by PiS alongside the institutional strengthening of the Council which was put directly under the Minister of National Defense.

PiS's campaigns against "gender ideology" on both domestic and EU level with regards to such issues as the Istanbul Convention (Zacharenko, 2020, p. 21) and EU foreign policy (von der Burchard, 2020) have also affected the ability of Polish "femocrats"—women's rights advocates holding government or civil servant positions (Sawer, 2016)—to induce transformative change in the defense sector. As argued by one interviewee from within the former administration, even prior to PiS coming to power, the hostile atmosphere around "gender'' has turned various issues related to equality into a politically suspicious agenda, with defense and security femocrats facing internal pressures from superiors to both explain and suppress their relationship to feminism and "gender ideology" (interview with former high-level ministerial employee, February 11, 2022; see also O'Sullivan & Krulišová, 2020). Moreover, culture wars over "gender," along with their policy repercussions such as the restriction of abortion rights, may arguably negatively impact women's ability to meaningfully participate in the security sector, as well as receive proper protection during conflict.

Against this background of policy and discursive backsliding, the gender politics of the Polish defense sector also exhibits more puzzling patterns of continuity and positive change that go beyond erosion and reversal. As the next analytical sections will discuss in more detail, despite the hostile atmosphere around gender mainstreaming, the Polish MOD under PiS has largely continued along the prior policy and discursive path dependency on a number of issues, while the critical juncture presented by the war in eastern Ukraine has also led to a paradigm shift in Polish defense organization that ignited processes of regendering of defense (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016) as an idea and a practice. Given the above, this article argues that to make sense of the complexity of illiberal gender politics in Poland, scholarship would benefit from moving beyond normative and definitive concepts such as gender backsliding which "provide prescriptions of what to see" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7). Instead, this article proposes a more analytical concept of "illiberal pragmatics" which merely suggests "directions along which to look" (p. 7) in order to disentangle the workings of illiberal gender politics in a given context.

The concept of "illiberal pragmatics" originally stems from scholars of sexual politics in contemporary Singapore who conceptualize it as a paradoxical space where authoritarian, post-colonial, and neoliberal currents intersect in surprising ways in social and legal policy, forming ambivalent political conditions and subjectivities (Phillips, 2014; Yue, 2007; Yue & Zubillaga-Pow, 2012). Applied to the Polish context under PiS, the gender politics of illiberal pragmatics is defined here as a logic of gendered governance which aims to balance the party's overall dedication to protecting national sovereignty and integrity with broader pragmatic political, security, demographic, and economic considerations. It is by now well-established in scholarship that PiS has significantly converged with radical anti-gender discourses and networks, a tactic driven primarily by a pragmatic view that utilizing anti-gender politics can serve the party's political goals (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). What is far less discussed, however, is the fact that the workings of PiS gender politics are often more ambiguous and contradictory than theories of backlash under anti-gender convergence would suggest. Instead, this article argues that the key feature of illiberal gender politics lies in its pragmatic balancing maneuver of safeguarding national integrity amidst structural pressures for change. As such, illiberal gender politics subsequently strengthens and dislocates gender hierarchies across different realms of policy and discourse. Within this logic of governance, both gender policy continuity and positive change can still occur, albeit most probably within a more limited, national-conservative framework. As the Polish case study showcases, amidst anti-gender campaigns, gender equality policy in defense has still been pursued within the framework of equality between women and men, steering away from both more ambitious intersectional approaches, and poststructuralist understandings of gender. Moreover, women's interests and rights in defense were advanced insofar as they were seen as a pragmatic adjustment, rather than challenge to, national security, social cohesion, and cultural sovereignty. In light of this, Polish illiberal gender politics also escapes the popular explanatory framework of "femonationalism" (Farris, 2017), as it induces gendered transformations of defense without openly evoking feminist discourses, and without positioning the Right as the defender of gender progress.

3. Theoretical Background and Methods

Exploring the gender politics of illiberal pragmatics necessitates a specific type of theoretical and methodological approach able to trace institutional change and continuity across different realms simultaneously. This article predominantly draws its analytical frameworks from feminist institutionalist research. This perspective seeks to explore ways in which institutions are structured along gendered lines, as well as explain how and when institutional processes lead to positive gendered change or, on the contrary, to the obstruction of such transformative processes (Gawęda, 2021; Thomson, 2018; Waylen, 2008). The article also draws from relevant works within feminist security studies which study the "gendering" and "regendering" of security institutions and policies

in particular (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016; O'Sullivan & Krulišová, 2020; Snyder, 1999). By means of situating the analysis of the defense sector in the context of the illiberal turn in contemporary Poland, the article also relies on literature on Central European anti-gender politics (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019).

Feminist institutionalist research that informed this article tends to focus on institutional transformations in a clearly delineated "site," be it a policy or strategy document like the UNSCR 1325 or the Istanbul Convention, or a government body like the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment. However, given that under illiberal pragmatics, gender policy is structured differently across different realms, focusing on the trajectory of one institution or policy could only offer a limited view of the entirety of gendered transformations of defense in Poland. In order to overcome this shortcoming, the article draws its methodological inspiration from multi-sited sociology (Nadai & Maeder, 2005). This approach originally emerged from the constatation that single locale-oriented methodologies of classical ethnographic research cannot adequately account for the interconnected and "fuzzy" character of contemporary socio-political processes (Marcus, 1995). Instead, the multi-sited approach recommended to follow the object of study across different institutional, topical, or geographical "sites," treating the findings acquired from them as "elements of a puzzle that are put together to form a complete picture" of the phenomenon in question (Nadai & Maeder, 2005, p. 20). In the context of this article, this meant, firstly, conducting research in and on several institutional and policy "sites" related to defense—the Polish NAP for UNSCR 1325, relevant gender equality infrastructure, the MOD, Polish war memory, as well as new defense institutions such as WOT and paramilitary organizing. Secondly, the multi-sited approach rested on the analytical maneuver of constant juxtaposition of the way gender politics is structured in these different spheres to arrive at a more complete picture.

The article is based on many years of research exploring the post-2015 restructuring of defense in Poland and its gender dimensions across different sites, using a triangulation of mixed qualitative methods and data sources. Research conducted specifically for this article comprised the analysis of relevant post-2015 strategic documents (e.g., National Security Strategy) and official communication of government and military bodies (press releases published on MOD and army websites), media interviews and articles related to defense reforms, non-participant observation of a number of defense-related public and closed events, as well as six semi-structured expert interviews conducted between January and March 2022 with Polish defense and security analysts and journalists, gender and security academics and professionals. The primary goal of the interviews was to provide context and expert, in-depth understanding of information from publicly available sources. On request of these "elite" interviewees who quoted confidentiality reasons, interviews were not recorded but detailed notes were taken and written up after each conversation. Secondary materials were selected based on their relevance to the topic of gender politics in defense under PiS governance. After an exploratory analysis, all materials were coded under three emergent themes: erosion/reversal, continuity, and positive change.

Additionally, the article also draws from a number of prior research projects. The first one is a fieldwork study of the gender politics of Polish paramilitary organizing conducted between the years 2016–2018 (Grzebalska, 2021). Given that paramilitary organizing has arguably provided a blueprint and personnel basis for post-2015 defense reforms, findings from this project offered a better understanding of how women, gender equality, and femininity function within these new defense institutions. The second one is a comparative Visegrad study on military engagement in Covid-19 pandemic response which informed this article's analysis of the ongoing transformation of defense and soldiering in Poland (Grzebalska & Maďarová, 2021). The third one is research on women in Polish war and military memory which helped elucidate discursive continuity and change under illiberal governance (Grzebalska, 2017). In line with the spirit of the multi-sited approach, findings from all these "sites" were juxtaposed to form a more adequate understanding of how these different "threads" of illiberal gender politics in defense are interwoven together.

4. Continuing Along Path Dependency? Conservative Gender Mainstreaming in Defense

While broader patterns of gender backsliding in Polish policy and politics have also affected the defense sector, the latter has not been the direct target of radical anti-gender discourses and policy innovations. Instead, this section argues that the PiS government has largely taken the path of cautious and conservative continuation of prior policy commitments and official rhetoric related to women and equality in defense.

In Poland, key policy provisions and regulations concerning women's military service followed from the country's accession to NATO. Year 1999 saw the establishment of the Women's Affairs Council in the PAF, and gradually, women have been admitted to military schools of various levels and volunteer military service, with the military adjusting its organizational culture and regulations with regards to such issues as physical requirements or maternity and paternity leave. While overall progress for military women after 1999 was duly noted in academic and policy works (Frączek-Broda, 2019), so has been the military's resistance to egalitarian change to its organizational culture. In fact, a number of experts consulted for this article saw gender progress in the Polish defense sector after NATO accession as insufficient and

primarily driven by "political correctness" rather than an "authentic dedication to equality" (interview with a security scholar, February 11, 2022). Arguably, this state of affairs has largely continued under PiS, with government officials cautiously moving along the path dependency, neither revoking prior commitments to women's rights in defense, nor seeking to champion more ambitious gender policy reforms.

For instance, after media articles alleging mobbing and sexual harassment in the Military Police, the MOD strengthened the Women's Council by putting it under direct supervision of the Minister, along with ordering the overview of procedures, quoting the need to "solve problems rather than sweep them under the rug" as a rationale (MOD, 2018). While concrete effects of this rhetorical support so far remain unknown, the latter is nevertheless worth noting given PiS's attempts to withdraw from the measures on combating violence against women laid out by the Istanbul Convention. Moreover, while government officials' statements on Poland being "ready" for a woman general have been uttered for a decade, media reports suggest that President Duda has fast-tracked this concern with the Armed Forces (Lesiecki, 2018). In the meantime, WOT has promoted Lieutenant Colonel Anna Czajowska-Małachowska to the Commander of the Light Infantry Battalion, the first woman to assume such a role in this new territorial segment of the PAF (Mycio, 2022).

Perhaps the most potent example of this logic of cautious path dependency, however, is the curious implementation of the WPS agenda initiated by the landmark UNSCR 1325 adopted in 2000. The UNSCR 1325 was the first United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution that was solely devoted to women's situation in conflict and post-conflict settings. It stressed the importance of women's equal participation in all decision-making processes, called for the protection of women and girls from war crimes, and urged the incorporation of gender perspectives in peace and security efforts (Cohn et al., 2004). Since then, the UNSC adopted nine more resolutions on WPS that altogether form an internationally binding policy framework to be implemented by member states and relevant actors. Since its adoption by the UNSC, the creation of Polish NAP was high on the agenda of the then MOD representative for women's military service, Bożena Szubińska. Still, Poland has not produced its NAP until as late as 2018, when it was swiftly prepared under the PiS government (Government of Poland, 2018). While the document was largely kept under the media radar, it was consulted with a number of governmental and non-governmental actors, among them the Polish branch of Women in International Security, and was evaluated positively by feminist foreign policy experts (Kopka-Piątek & Reichardt, 2020). The Polish NAP was since extended until 2023 by the decision of the Council of Ministers.

One reason for its uncontroversial adoption under PiS governance may lie in the nature of the Polish NAP itself: its largely external orientation, and its primary focus on women and girls. Like in most national contexts, the Polish NAP is predominantly outward- rather than inward-looking, continuing the problematic focus of WPS in general on "insecurity overseas rather than within the national context" (Shepherd, 2016, p. 324). By centering on international peace and security, the Polish NAP avoids politically-sensitive, domestic developments related to the backsliding in reproductive rights and erosion of equality mechanisms in Poland, as well as the militarization following from the worsening security environment in the region. Moreover, like other regional NAPs, the Polish NAP steers away from more ambitious or transformative agendas (see also O'Sullivan & Krulišová, 2020). As such, it predominantly focuses on the safety and rights of women and girls, and largely mirrors the "equality of opportunity" paradigm, thus measuring equality by the percentage of female personnel and existence of relevant trainings and measures.

Another reason for the swift preparation of the NAP may have been its significance for Poland's broader foreign and security policy goals under the PiS government which firmly recognize "developing cooperation in…global formats" as a way to strengthen Poland's position in the international security system (Government of Poland, 2020, p. 25). Work on the NAP coincided with Poland's efforts to become an elected, non-permanent member of the UNSC in the years 2018–2019. As argued by two interviewed experts, not proceeding with the NAP may have affected Poland's ability to gain the seat against the counter-candidacy of Bulgaria, a cost too high to pay given Poland's desire to shape international responses to the Russian threat. Lending support to interviewees' assessment, Poland's new National Security Strategy indeed recognizes the pursuance of the WPS agenda as an important element of the country's commitment to international security (Government of Poland, 2020, p. 25).

Finally, patterns of continuity are also visible in the official discourse on women's military service. The early years of the gender transformation of the military were dominated by strong resistance based in traditionalist views on femininity and masculinity (Latawski, 2003, p. 33). Over time, wider societal and legal changes have seeped into the defense sector, also transforming the official rhetoric around women's service towards one merging "new" notions of professionalism and equality with more conservative tropes of motherhood and "female support" for past independence struggles. Analysis of official MOD statements issued on International Women's Day between the years 2013–2021 revealed that this discourse has largely continued under PiS. This reflects the party's overall tendency to combine the view of women as mothers and reproducers of national culture with pledges for women's equality in the workplace (Gwiazda, 2020). Far from mobilizing radical anti-gender discourses, high-profile PiS officials have supported

women's military service by writing it into older Polish traditions. As former Minister of National Defense Antoni Macierewicz argued in his speech on International Women's Day: "It is not only about showing respect to women who serve in the army today…it is also about recalling a great Polish tradition" (Szef MON powołał pełnomocnik, 2016). This "Polish tradition" that the Minister referred to is the history of women's wide-scale mobilization for the 19th- and 20th-century Polish independence struggles which saw the advancement of their citizen and soldiering rights (Grzebalska, 2018).

WOT in particular has pursued this type of memory politics in its communication. One WOT brigade was named after Elżbieta Zawacka, a WW2 Special Operations executive agent who played a role in granting women equal soldiering rights in 1944. WOT also showcases past women freedom fighters on its social media. For instance, one anniversary post commemorating the WW2 Home Army presents a male soldier paying homage to his grandmother, a member of the anti-Nazi resistance. While presenting women's engagement in defense as "normal" and unproblematic, this maneuver also significantly refashions and idealizes the past. It both silences the story of women's inequality in defense past and present, and subordinates women's historical emancipatory claims to the master narrative of harmonious "national emancipation" (Grzebalska, 2017). This memory politics showcases the logic of illiberal pragmatics as such—its attempt to pragmatically balance national integrity with structural transformative pressures. Within this logic, the pursuance of women's interests takes the form of "anti-modernist emancipation" (Gelnarová & Pető, 2016, p. 79). While women's advancement towards equal status in defense is accepted, the official rhetoric tends to locate it not in the modernist project of unbridled gender progress towards a better future, but, rather, in a reinvented and idealized past (Gelnarová & Pető, 2016).

As this section argued, despite the broader tactical convergence of PiS with anti-gender politics in a number of spheres, gender politics in Polish defense has so far largely represented a conservative continuation of prior policy and discursive paths established under former liberal democratic governments. While after 2015 women's issues have not been pursued in more ambitious frameworks, these cautious continuities nevertheless reveal the pragmatic dedication of PiS to preserving the policy and discursive basis of women's equality in defense in light of pressing foreign policy and international security considerations.

5. Critical Juncture and New Institutions: Towards the Regendering of Defense?

As the above section argued, the post-1999 efforts of mainstreaming gender into the defense sector have brought rather stalemated progress for women. By 2016, women constituted only 4.7% of Polish army personnel and were greatly underrepresented in leadership positions, with this combined lack of "critical mass" and "critical actors" (Childs & Krook, 2009) contributing to the resilience of the overall military-masculine organizational culture. Defense has also remained a male-dominated sphere societally, with significant gender gaps in defense-related knowledge and skills. By 2014, only 6% of surveyed women (against 45% of men) declared they have undergone some type of military trainings (Public Opinion Research Center, 2014). Against this status quo of professionalized and male-dominated defense, the 2014 Russian war in eastern Ukraine has served as a critical juncture, significantly shifting the path dependency of the Polish defense sector. Consequently, new institutions and concepts of defense organization were created which brought with them novel patterns of regendering (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016) previously not possible.

Since PiS came to power, Poland has increased its defense spending, along with arms and personnel buildup (Mutschler & Bales, 2020, p. 19). This militarization has been accompanied by a slow and largely understudied paradigm shift in defense organization away from the prior model resting primarily on allied defense and deterrence and professional armed forces protecting the civilian society. PiS has centered its efforts on developing "common civic defense…based on the efforts of the entire nation" (Government of Poland, 2020, p. 15) as a new element of defense organization. This attempt to bring more citizens into defense has predominantly translated into building WOT, a volunteer and territorial segment of the armed forces. It also included the formation of new extra-military channels for volunteer participation in defense such as military education programs in public schools and universities, along with pro-defense and paramilitary organizations which have existed before, yet were put under state control and granted more support after 2015.

Some feminist institutionalists suggest that new institutions create potentials for shifting the gender regime more so than reforming old institutions does. As argued by Waylen, "the creation of new institutions can offer opportunities for gender concerns to be incorporated more easily and fundamentally at the outset of an institution's life than it is to 'add them in' at a later stage" (2008, p. 273). The recent move towards the model of "common civic defense" largely supports this claim. The WOT and other channels of citizens' volunteer engagement in defense have allowed for new patterns of regendering of defense (Duncanson & Woodward, 2016), understood here as a "structural change premised on women's inclusion, the revaluing of 'feminine' practices, and the displacement of gendered hierarchies" within the defense sector (Grzebalska, 2021, p. 3).

The first aspect of this post-2015 regendering of Polish defense can be recorded in the growing inclusion and acceptance of women within WOT and other novel volunteer defense institutions. By 2022, WOT has

reached almost 20% of female participants (Pietrzak, 2022). Even higher numbers were recorded in new defense education programs—in 2020, women constituted 43% of students of the Certified Military Classes, and 39% of Military Preparation Branches (email communication from MOD, October 5, 2020). In one youth paramilitary civil society organization, female participation has even reached 60% in two consecutive years (Grzebalska, 2021, p. 7). Due to the high numbers of women mobilized by WOT in particular, the overall percentage of female personnel in the PAF has doubled during PiS governance. In both official communication and closed meetings I attended, the growing participation of women in defense has been narrated by officials as a positive, unproblematic process of both "catching back up" with Polish traditions, and "catching up" with international standards. As stated in WOT official materials: "All over the world, social stereotypes have been broken….The society has evolved, much like the military…with women soldiers blazing new career trails for themselves and the next generation" (Jędruszczuk & Pietrzak, 2021).

What lies behind this growing inclusion are broader structural challenges related to personnel enlargement, with WOT recruiters long struggling to reach the size planned in 2017. In military sociology, the army, much like the family, is seen as a "greedy institution"—one placing great demands on individuals in terms of their loyalty, time, and commitment (Segal, 1986). In the context of Poland's demographic decline, coupled with growing pressures on families created by neoliberal economic policy, military planners may see women's engagement as crucial to keep acceptable recruitment and retention levels, and ensure security for turbulent times (interview with defense analyst, February 4, 2022). This pragmatic necessity may lend analytical support to dominant feminist theorizing which tends to see women's military inclusion as instrumentalization rather than a genuine change (Stachowitsch, 2013). In Poland, however, WOT has built on decades of women's growing volunteer involvement in grassroots pro-defense organizing. These institutions of "common civic defense" also exhibit patterns of gendered transformation that go beyond numbers—the revaluing of civilian-feminine lines of activity and orientations, and the partial displacement of gendered hierarchies within them.

Rather than defining defense service along the lines of military masculinity, WOT has continuously framed its membership as that of Citizen-Soldiers—those engaging in defense while remaining firmly rooted in civilian life, and combining military and civilian resilience-building activities (Grzebalska, 2021; Snyder, 1999). A case in point is the military response to the Covid-19 pandemic which saw WOT communicating in a human-centered language of societal resilience, empathy, and care, instead of using more militarized tropes recorded in illiberal political discourse (Grzebalska & Maďarová, 2021, pp. 144–145). The pandemic also saw WOT employed to provide assistance not only to border guards and police, but also schools, hospitals, and social welfare centers, with territorial defense soldiers performing a number of aid and care roles that are structurally feminized in Poland (Grzebalska & Maďarová, 2021, pp. 146–147). As of today, no research exists on the informal gender politics within WOT. Nevertheless, in the paramilitary sector, which has largely formed the basis of WOT membership, most participants I interviewed saw their organizational culture as largely devoid of a gender division of trainings and task, not seeing the revaluing of "feminine" lines of activity and orientations as significantly coupled with the allocation of these civilian-feminine tasks predominantly to women (Grzebalska, 2021).

While recording these novel, gendered patterns of inclusion, revaluing, and dislocation occurring in the defense sector is a significant finding in itself, it should not suggest that processes of regendering are not encountering serious limitations. Given the current political hostility to gender mainstreaming—and the overall erosion of equality policy in Poland—addressing women's discrimination both within and outside the defense sector has become more difficult. Moreover, the feminization of social reproduction and care work in Poland is hindering women's equal participation in defense by structurally upholding the gendered division of labor in the society (Grzebalska, 2021, p. 13). Finally, despite the increase of women's participation in the defense sector in recent years, women still continue to be gravely underrepresented in leadership positions. Nevertheless, the ongoing turn towards rebuilding the system of common civic defense has worked towards decreasing the overall gender gaps in defense knowledge and skills in Polish society. It has also brought women closer to reaching a "critical mass" within the sector, while at the same time, redefining soldiering to include care, empathy, and civil society assistance that are conventionally seen as tasks and orientations falling outside the scope of military masculinity. As such, the Polish case suggests that extensive mobilization of women and positive institutional gender change can still occur under illiberal governance, albeit in a more limited scope where they are reshaping, rather than challenging, national security and integrity.

6. Conclusions

This article builds on prior critical calls to overcome the limits of gender backlash scholarship (Kováts, 2022; Paternotte, 2020), and study illiberal politics as a distinct and more complex form of gendered governance (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 165) by paying attention to complexity and change within the politics of the New Right (Blee, 2020). Taking the currently transforming Polish defense sector as a case study, the article argues for the need to go beyond well-established frameworks of gender backsliding and femonationalism to understand the ambiguous nature of illiberal gender politics in Poland.

Combining a feminist institutionalist approach with multi-sited sociological methods, the article posits that the gender politics in defense under PiS governance reveals a combination of institutional patterns of backsliding, continuity, and positive gender change. The broader eradication of equality infrastructure under PiS has also affected the defense sector, leading to the dissolution of critical bodies responsible for women's rights, whilst creating a hostile atmosphere around gender mainstreaming in Polish policy and politics. At the same time, given the significance of NATO and the UN for Poland's standing in the international security system during uncertain times, the MOD has largely followed along prior path dependency of conservative gender mainstreaming, swiftly implementing the Polish WPS NAP, and safeguarding the army from radicalized anti-gender campaigns. Meanwhile, a wide-scale defense restructuring towards common civic defense was undertaken against unfavorable economic and demographic currents. Guided by the concept of common civic defense, this re-organization of defense has opened up a space for women's greater inclusion within the sector. It has brought the percentage of women in new defense channels and institutions closer to a "critical mass," and opened up the space for new women to reach positions of "critical actors." It also partially regendered the very idea and practice of defense in novel ways to include more "feminine" tasks and orientations, thus transforming soldiering beyond the conventional notion of military masculinity.

In order to make sense of this "messiness" of PiS gender politics in defense, the article proposed to look at it through the analytical concept of illiberal pragmatics, understood as a complex form of gendered governance which seeks to uphold national integrity and sovereignty amidst broader pragmatic pressures of structural and cultural change. Within this pragmatic logic of balancing maneuvers, PiS gender politics has often converged with that of radical, right-wing anti-gender actors in an "opportunistic synergy," allowing the party to assume power or halt progressive advocacy (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021, p. 7). This evident convergence has led mainstream scholarship to narrate the party's gender politics through the explanatory concepts of backlash and backsliding. Against this background, this article wished to draw attention to the underdiscussed finding that some of women's interests and rights in the realm of defense have nevertheless been advanced under PiS governance. Far from being heralded by the government as being in the name of women's rights and feminist politics, as the theoretical concept of "femonationalism" would posit, these gendered transformations of defense have largely proceeded silently, and within a more national-conservative framework. As such, the ongoing regendering of defense necessitated by structural pressures has been normalized as unproblematic in the face of security challenges, and in line with the "Polish tradition." These gendered patterns of continuity and positive change in Polish defense should not be underestimated, as they may "blaze the trail for more ambitious projects in the future" (Kopka-Piątek & Reichardt, 2020, p. 40). Nevertheless, just like the post-1999 procedural and rhetorical dedication to gender equality without women's substantive inclusion in defense brought about a rather stalemated progress, the current extensive mobilization of women devoid of transformative gender policy interventions can similarly lead to only limited change. Without addressing broader structural inequalities related to the feminization of care in Poland, as well as the persistence of discrimination in defense institutions, women's participation in the sector is bound to remain restrained and unequal.

The question that remains to be addressed is whether the findings on the gender politics in defense under PiS governance would be generalizable to other policy and political spheres. After all, in the rapidly worsening security environment in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), defense and security have a special status and importance for the ruling party. Moreover, the defense sector has its own specificity, resting on the post-1989 principles of neutrality and professionalism, and the logic of cautious institutional change representing the dominant values of the society (e.g., Latawski, 2003). At the same time, some research suggests that the balancing act of illiberal pragmatics can be observed in other realms outside defense. For instance, Gwiazda (2020) argues that PiS gender politics is more nuanced than dominant literature cares to admit, combining anti-gender claims and policies with conservative feminist ones related to women's labor market participation, social rights, and political representation. Further research is necessary to explore the extent to which the gender politics of illiberal pragmatics can be observed in other realms of Polish policy and politics. The final words of this article are written after the Russian full-scale military invasion in Ukraine in February 2022. In Poland, this critical event has not led to any drastic changes in defense policy, but, rather, further accelerated defense preparations along priorly established lines. In conjunction, the war has arguably strengthened the political and social consensus around current defense preparations, including the normalization of women's wider presence in the defense system. In this context, exploring the understudied issue of gender and defense in Poland and CEE, as well as its relationship to illiberal governance, gains even more pressing significance. As the CEE region maneuvers through this uncertain period of socio-political transformations, we are reminded of the need for a broader revision of our theoretical concepts so that they can analytically guide us rather than merely prescribe us what to see.

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Conflict of Interests

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Article

Populist Skirmishers: Frontrunners of Populist Radical Right in Poland

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Abstract
Mainstream parties, like PiS in Poland, have to cater to broad segments of society to sustain broad support. Cultivation of populist radical right ideologies of authoritarianism, traditionalism, religiosity, and nativism—all interlaced with gender as a nemesis and the nation as a deity—takes highly motivated, confrontational politicians who prepare the ground for radical populist ideas to take root in the electorate's minds, who mobilize voters through radicalization. This article introduces the concept of "populist skirmishers" to the literature on populism, adding this to Cas Mudde's basket of major mobilizing forces of populism, that is, a populist leader, a social movement, and a political party. Though it might be considered an unnecessary elevation of a profession that perverts the rules of civility in the public sphere, polarizes electorates, and does whatever it takes to derail the project of European integration, I argue that understanding the modus operandi and functions of populist skirmishers is indispensable to furthering our understanding of populism.

Keywords
gender; populism; populist radical right; populist skirmishers; ultraconservatism

Issue
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1. Introduction

A strong charismatic leader is a sine qua non for a successful populist far-right movement (Canovan, 2005, p. 75; Kaltwasser & Mudde, 2017, p. 62). However, if success means coming into power, it takes more to tango. Governing parties and coalitions become molochs that need to cater to manifold segments of the electorate and sustain political mobilization within the party and its supporters.

Traditional and new media multiply and prompt democracy's shift from citizenship to spectatorship (Cwalina et al., 2015, p. 50; Manin, 1997, p. 220). In that context, just as shepherds use shepherd dogs to herd their flocks, governing leaders use subsidiary frontrunners to cater to different audiences and by different media. The important mobilizing role within populist radical right parties belongs to politicians, publicists, and activists who ruthlessly fight tactical battles that suit the general party agenda while pursuing their own career schedules. I call them "skirmishers."

Since ancient times, skirmishers were light infantry employed to secure the army by probing the enemy's lines, by opening the military action as a part of the vanguard, but also engaging in side- and rear-guard battles against the enemies, reaching out more broadly than the general line of their army (Carey et al., 2013). Correspondingly, political skirmishers of today's populist radical right in Poland secure and advance the party mass by engaging in vanguard scouting and screening missions and by engaging in harassing battles against political enemies.

Skirmishers constitute a new research sub-area within populist studies. They are typically politicians, but they can also recruit from media sympathizing or cooperating with populist right-wing politicians. In broader terms, radical parties and movements, church representatives, ultraconservative and/or ultranationalist NGOs, and activists also may offer their skirmishing services to the mainstream populist radical right parties.

Each country that hosts a mass populist radical right party sees examples of populist skirmishers—

predominantly men, but also equally confrontational women. In the political world, examples include the US Republican Governor of Florida Ron DeSantis and Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene; in Hungary, Justice Minister Judit Varga or mayor of Székesfehérvár András Cser-Palkovics, while some of the ultraradical skirmishing is outsourced to the radically far-right party Mi Hazánk.

In Poland, the most quintessential skirmishers are Janusz Kowalski from Solidary Poland, a more radical coalition partner of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS—Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), and Krystyna Pawłowicz, formerly PiS MP, today the Justice of the Constitutional Tribunal, embodying its politicization. Further outsourcing includes mainly radical right activists and NGOs like Ordo Iuris Institute, the Independence March Association, and the Kornice Foundation Nasze Dzieci (Our Children), which has covered Poland with thousands of billboards sporting pro-life and religious slogans (Ceglarz, 2022).

In the media sphere, examples also abound, the most prominent being Tucker Carlson, the Fox News anchor in the US; the journalist and close ally of Viktor Orbán Zsolt Bayer in Hungary; and Magdalena Ogórek and Michał Rachoń, anchors at the public broadcaster (TVP) in Poland that "peddles government hate speech" ("Polish public broadcaster," 2020), along with PiS-devoted publicists Jacek and Michał Karnowski (Sajór, 2020).

Statements and activities of skirmishers amplify the main messages, agenda, and discursive style of party leaders. As a result, they are the avant-garde proxy cultural wars waged against "civilians," i.e., groups of citizens that opinion polls, focus group surveys, consultants, and other decision-making party arrangements consider convenient targets. These groups differ by country, but LGBTQ people, women, and refugees recur as victimized groups.

What unites these victimized groups, while also uniting the Polish populist radical right, is the symbolic glue made of gender (Grzebalska et al., 2017). In Poland, this glue has a second major ingredient, and it is the nation. Gender is an enemy-in-itself that unifies negatively by epitomizing the rotten nature of Western liberalism that requires resistance, "uniting under one umbrella term various issues attributed to the liberal agenda, among them reproductive rights, rights of sexual minorities, gender studies and gender mainstreaming" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 2).

Nation—contrary to gender—is revered, but predominantly by taking the form of its lurking enemies, mostly Germans, Donald Tusk, the EU, or—previously—Muslim refugees. Populist skirmishers infuse the public discourse with gender-and-nation-thick themes, mobilizing PiS' United Right coalition and satellites from within, and externally weaving relations with their voter base.

In this article, I analyze the phenomenon of skirmishers recruiting from the Polish populist radical right. Still, other political ideologies and political platforms theoretically may also employ skirmishers who mobilize citizens mostly by means of their populist use. On the contemporary political scene in Poland, also supporting politicians from opposition parties excel at charisma, preparation, and sometimes audacity, but few use other distinctive skirmishing qualities, i.e., outright hostility, ideological radicalism, or the tendency to spread disinformation and flip-flop. I argue that this is an effect of the non-radical nature of these parties but also of the electoral strategy of opposition parties to counterweight the polarizing, deadly serious radicalism of the government coalition with inviolable civility, moderateness, and a patronizing smile.

Though skirmishers can recruit from any political family, this article focuses solely on the populist radical right skirmishers, and where they are most prominent on today's political scene of Poland. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of skirmishers and supporting frontline politicians deserves a broader monographic inquiry within the body of studies on populism.

2. Methodology and Terminology

This article seeks to demonstrate and analyze the phenomenon of populist radical right skirmishers, i.e., politicians and political ideologues who further the populist radical right agenda. Despite, as I argue, this being a universal phenomenon within mass radical right parties, this article uses the Polish example as an inductive case study to (a) understand a larger class of (similar) units (Gerring, 2004, p. 342) and (b) conceptualize the relationship between populist radical right skirmishers and parties that they support.

The article unpacks different elements of the mainstream populist far-right in Poland during the country's "populist moment" (Krastev, 2007) that started in 2015—the year PiS came into power. In the Fall of 2022, PiS is still the governing power and remains well positioned in the electoral campaign for state parliamentary elections in the Fall of 2023.

2.1. Populist Radical Right in Poland

In Poland, as if following a populist textbook, the populist radical right from the United Right coalition led by PiS came into power in 2015, has hijacked the state apparatus, suppressed the media and civil society, as well as engaged citizens in mass clientelism by paying for votes with benefits (Müller, 2016, pp. 8–10). They cater to enthusiasts of patriarchy, church, nationalism, anti-liberalism, anti-progressivism, and xenophobia, tied together by shared ideas about gender and nation.

After Cas Mudde, I categorize PiS as a populist radical right party (Mudde, 2019a, p. 30; see also Santana et al., 2020). All three elements of the term "populist radical right" intimately complement and reinforce each other. "Populist" indicates the quality of considering society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous

and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite."

Populism is reinforced by "radicalism," which is defined ideationally as resistance to key features of liberal democracy, most notably political pluralism and the constitutional protection of minorities (Mudde, 2007, pp. 25–26). However, I also embrace the ancillary nature of radicalism understood as expressing amplification of a phenomenon that it determines, here of the right. Therefore, despite the constraints resulting from the relativist nature of the term, "radical rightwing parties are radical both with respect to the language they employ in confronting their political opponents and the political project they promote and defend" (Betz & Johnson, 2004, p. 312).

The Polish personification appears in the biography of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of PiS, where he is said to have "a propensity to making unproven accusations, to Machiavellianism adjacent to a tendency to attack, with a predilection for going overboard" (Zaremba, 2010, p. 20). Still, Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk drop the term "radical," choosing the term "populist right" instead (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). They explain this replacement by the mainstreaming of the populist radical right, despite acknowledging radicalization and resulting radicalism of PiS. I choose to retain the term "radical,'' since—as Korolczuk and Graff admit—PiS radicalism has not diluted in the position of power but to the opposite; PiS actually radicalized itself to become a full-fledged populist far-right party while in government (see also Mudde, 2019b, p. 51).

In the context of PiS, the definition of the last module of the populist radical right—i.e., right—used here is different than one used by Mudde, who defined it as the belief that inequalities between people are natural and should be accepted (Mudde, 2007, p. 26). On socio-economic grounds, combatting inequalities has been one of the fundamental tenets of PiS (see PiS Statutes, 2021; Polski Ład, 2021), even if only on the declarative level.

On the socio-cultural and biological level, PiS believes in natural differences between men and women that should be valued and respected, preserved, and reinforced within the traditional family—meaning a heterosexual marriage that will produce children. However, the existence of natural diversity in sexual orientation and in understanding one's gender identity beyond the binary man/woman divide or differently from one's gender assigned at birth is denied or ridiculed.

Therefore, I prefer to understand the right in the Polish context as, above all, conservative, which has also been admitted in the most recent literature on the subject (Bluhm & Varga, 2019; Erel, 2018; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). But it was always compounded by its radical trait. I understand the radical conservatism of the Polish populist radical right in both relativist and absolute versions. Drawing from the archetype Burkeian tradition, Samuel Huntington saw conservatism as "a system of ideas employed to justify any established social order, no matter where or when it exists, against any fundamental challenge to its nature or being, no matter from what quarter" (Huntington, 1957, p. 455).

The relativism of this definition is exploited by the populist radical right in Poland to its advantage. It blurs the traditional with natural, simple, and "genuinely" Polish, expressing "not merely the respect of traditional values but—above all—the feeling of threat from the side of the modernization project related to the mainstream of the Polish political transformation" (Napiórkowski, 2019, p. 37). Therefore, simultaneously, the Polish radical right overlaps with the absolute meaning of conservatism (Layton-Henry, 1982, p. 1; see also Mudde, 2007, p. 27), using its complete toolkit including authoritarianism, traditionalism, religiosity, and nativism.

The thin ideology of populism is already by itself built on the polarizing divide of "us versus them," but this dichotomy is furthered by thicker ideologies that also lay behind populist radical right in Poland, i.e., the above-mentioned nativism, authoritarianism (Mudde, 2007), and radical conservatism, all together contesting fundamental values of liberal democracy, such as the rule of law, minority rights, and press freedom. Accordingly, the political system that is built by the populist radical right in power is illiberal democracy. It is the term coined by Zakaria (1997) for "democratically elected regimes often re-elected or reinforced by referendums that ignored the constitutional limits of their power and deprived their citizens of basic rights and liberties," or—in short—meaning "democracy without rights" (Mounk, 2018, p. 51).

The last ideology mentioned as quintessential to populist radical right—i.e., radical conservatism—does not belong to Mudde's maximum definition of "populist radical right." Still, conservatism, and especially its qualities of traditionalism and religiosity, are indispensable parts of the Polish version of populist radical right.

The corrupt elite is redefined by PiS leaders to fit given circumstances; however, it always denotes enemies—internal or external—of the state, nation, and "natural" way of life. When listening to PiS leaders and skirmishers, it is the category of enemies—enemies of Poland—that defines most of their discourse. Therefore, the chief statement of PiS' successful electoral year in 2015 was "Poland in ruins" (*Polska w ruinie*), a condition allegedly left behind by the predecessors, i.e., the Civic Platform (PO—Platforma Obywatelska).

In 2022, after seven years in power, PiS still defines the PO as the archenemy of Poland and Polishness, with Donald Tusk, its leader, presented as the epitome of the state enemy working for foreign, evil powers. To illustrate this mindset, let me quote the interview with PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński from August 2022: "Our enemies have always wanted a Poland that was primitive, vulgar, denying culture. This is what Tusk is building on foreign order" (Karnowski, 2022, p. 22). When asked on whose order, Kaczyński replies: "German, but to be

specific, Germans fight for the German-Russian construction which would allow them a total power in Europe, with only slight participation of France."

The PiS leader closely follows the populist "textbook" by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser and Cas Mudde, observing that, according to populists in power, the real power lies "with some shadowy forces that continue to hold on to illegitimate powers," associating it with "the paranoid style of politics" famously coined by Richard Hofstadter, to name "the sense of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" expressed by populists (Hofstadter, 1964; Kaltwasser & Mudde, 2017, p. 12).

Ideologies of the Polish populist radical right, i.e., nativism, authoritarianism, and radical conservatism are intrinsically united with the thin-centered ideology of populism, equipping it with ideological heft. At the same time, populism furnishes the radical right with a performative appeal.

Their leaders and parties, supporting social movements, and—as I argue—populist skirmishers, jointly engage in shifting Overton's window of generally acceptable attitudes to embrace an ethically black and white dichotomy between the supremacy of patriarchy over gender equality, of marriage between a man and woman over other forms of relationships, of radical nationalism over openness and tolerance, of a national Church over other denominations and atheism, and as the blatant blindness towards the existence of the LGBTQ community.

2.2. Populist Skirmishers

Paranoid style has been regularly used by populists, left and right, to incite or fuel anger and fear, due to their mobilizing power. But even the scariest conspiracy theories told by the most charismatic populist leaders would not suffice in mainstream catch-all parties like PiS that cater to a third of the state population (as of September 2022 average support for PiS is between 33 and 37%; see Kondzińska, 2022, p. 1), with the ceiling of potential support surpassing 50% (Sadura & Sierakowski, 2019).

The origin of naming these sub- and side-leaders skirmishers is the ancient times when skirmishing was a custom of guerrilla battles at the front and the sides of the general military front. The ancient skirmishers' scouting trips took place with the permission or at the order of the chief. Skirmishers were usually the youngest and poorest knights (Carey et al., 2013, p. 93), who wanted to gain military fame in this way.

In the reality of today's permanent political campaign that can be represented metaphorically as the state of permanent political war, skirmishers are needed on the battlefield most of the time, serving numerous functions. At times of major electoral campaigns and major strategic challenges, the leader himself lands the major blows.

To advance the understanding of the populist radical right and its modus operandi, this article introduces the phenomenon of populist skirmishers, when the literature on populist actors concentrates on political leaders. I present an inductive case study of the Polish political context and initial conceptualization of populist skirmishers, which is a part of the wider effort of unpacking the populist far-right ideology in Poland. The case study analysis is enriched with a hands-on perspective of a wide-ranging panel of 10 insiders (Table 1), active in Poland's political scene: politicians and political consultants who have been interviewed at length by the author.

Individual direct interviews are used to better define and conceptualize the research problem introduced in this article and develop a detailed description that integrates various perspectives (Angrosino, 2008, pp. 20–21; Weiss, 1995, pp. 9–10). Ten knowledgeable informants may not sound numerous. However, taking their high quality in terms of knowledge, experience, and variety, further inquiry would add relatively little to the understanding of the phenomenon of populist skirmishers in proportion to the professional and loyalty constraints (fear of identification) of speakers, mostly those from the government or advising government officials.

However, I consider insider interviews as an invaluable way of informing the research on the subject further, especially in terms of mechanisms of cooperation between party leadership and skirmishers, and therefore individual direct interviews should be pursued for the sake of future studies on the topic.

Finally, I acknowledge facing the name challenge, since "skirmishers" are not a self-evident choice that is universally understandable (neither is the Polish *harcownicy*). At the same time, this term—with its historical, battlefield import—perfectly explains the type of activity that political skirmishers undertake on the political battlefield.

An alternative term that has been considered by the author is "pistols" (*pistolety*), as it is already exploited by Polish politicians with regard to such politicians. However, the term "pistols" mistakenly identifies rudeness or apparent paranoia with thoughtless, automatic impulsiveness. Based on the author's analysis and observations of her speakers, skirmishing tactics are most of the time either planned or at least allowed—due to their substantial value—within a broader party communication and mobilization strategy.

Also, the term "pistols" in English is solidly earmarked for its original meaning of a gun—due to the wartime reality, excess of firearm violence, and the gun control battle in the US—so this term would be difficult to attribute to the novel, political realm. On the same note, I chose not to use the term "pistols" in order not to further the saturation with outright attributes of violence in the political discourse.

3. Modus Operandi of Populist Radical Right Skirmishers in Poland

For the last seven years, PiS has successfully led in the polls and won elections in Poland, securing the support

Table 1. List of incognito knowledgeable insiders (politicians, political careermen, and political advisors) who took part in qualitative individual direct interviews.

	Profession	Institution	Position versus government	Party alignment
Speaker 1	Frontline politician	Member of Parliament	Opposition	Polish People Party (PSL—Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe): center-right opposition party
Speaker 2	Politician	Member of Parliament 2015–2019, now local government	Opposition	Civic Coalition (KO—Koalicja Obywatelska): center, main opposition party
Speaker 3	Politician	Local government	Ruling party	PiS: ruling populist far-right party
Speaker 4	Politician, top-level political businessman	Regional and national level institutions	Ruling coalition member 2017—2021	Jarosław Gowin's Agreement (Porozumienie)
Speaker 5	Political PR advisor	Independent/national level	Ruling party	Close to PiS
Speaker 6	Political scientist, politically engaged thinker	Think tanks, academia, political organizations/ national level	Opposition	Close to the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD—Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej)
Speaker 7	Politician, political advisor	Advisor to top government politicians/ national level	Ruling party	Close to PiS
Speaker 8	Political marketing expert and advisor	Campaign advisor/ national level	Neutral	Neutral
Speaker 9	Lobbyist	Influencing politics and policy/national level	Neutral	Neutral
Speaker 10	Political advisor	Political advisor	Close to the ruling party	Close to PiS

of between 30% and 47% of Poles (Politico, 2022). Thirty-six percent supported PiS' United Right coalition as of the beginning of October 2022 (Politico, 2022). While I admit the indispensable mobilizing powers of a charismatic populist leader, along with the support of political parties and social movements—as enumerated by Kaltwasser and Mudde (2017, pp. 42–61)—hereby I draw attention to as indispensable an institution of populist skirmishers who support a leader and the party, catering to various, often more radical electorates, fueling mobilization in between and during electoral campaigns.

3.1. Gender and Europe as Archenemies

Shifting citizens' attention away from nepotism, political corruption, and demolishing democratic checks and balances or the scandals orchestrated by the Church, state officials capture attention with eye-popping, radically conservative theories construed around gender and nation—the glue that interweaves the ideological amalgam that is the populist radical right in Poland.

Gender started inflaming the Polish political scene around 2012 (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022), demonized first by church-related actors under the intellectual leadership of Redemptorist priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, the head of a media empire, reaching 9% of Poles (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 69), and by the ultra-conservative Ordo Iuris Insitute and Kaja Godek from the Life and Family Foundation (Fundacja Życie i Rodzina). Political skirmishers mainstreamed the anti-gender agenda before it was embraced by top leadership.

PiS politician and Constitutional Court Justice Krystyna Pawłowicz, who is one of the most recognized skirmishers on the Polish political scene, explained how the populist radical right in Poland understands

gender. She wrote in March 2019, right after the LGBT+ Declaration (City of Warsaw, 2019) was announced:

> Well, it's WAR! For Polish children, Polish families. For Polish villages and cities. FOR POLAND AND EUROPE, which is WAITING for our HELP! For Polish identity and culture….We HAVE TO win this culture WAR! Advocates of Soros and leftist pathological ways—HANDS OFF POLAND AND THE EU! (Pawłowicz, 2019)

The plethora of ultra-conservative statements like one that girls should be "grounded in female virtues" at schools ("Grounding girls in female virtues," 2021) keeps the electorate prepared for ideological blows by major political actors during electoral campaigns or at times of major political crises. So, already at the outset of the pre-2023 electoral campaign, PiS President Jarosław Kaczyński joked about transsexual people who, in his words, "believe that anyone can say that, now, until now—it is about 5:30—I was a man, but now I am a woman. Well, one can have such views. Strange, to say the least. I would have examined it, but well" (Kołodziej, 2022). In his 2020 presidential campaign, re-elected President Andrzej Duda said that LGBT "is simply an ideology," not the people (Gwiazda, 2020).

As of September 2022, understood as an ideology, LGBTQ has received scientific endorsement in the official schoolbook for high schools for the subject of history and contemporaneity, as promoted by the Minister of Education and Science Przemysław Czarnek. Its chapter entitled "Ideologies and Nazism" explains that an ideology is "a simplified version of philosophy supporting different political programs," being used by "social engineering and sociotechnic to transform societies in order to win and possess power" (Roszkowski, 2022, p. 19). Then, the book informs that "feminism and *gender* ideology'' are, along with socialism, liberalism, and modern Christian democracy, "among the most popular ideologies today" (Roszkowski, 2022, p. 19). Without a word of justification, the author smoothly transitions to explaining communist and nazi ideologies (Roszkowski, 2022, pp. 19–23).

Along with "gender ideology," the EU makes up for a standard enemy enlisting from the nationalist basket of the Polish populist radical right's enemies. It serves its skirmishers as one of the major topics, synonymous with Germany and their political opposition embodied by Donald Tusk. PiS, with its allies, incite Eurorejectionist tempers (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, p. 302) presenting the EU as a Germany-governed tyranny oppressing the sovereignty and freedom of its member states and blackmailing Poland with funds. I prefer Eurorejectionism to Szczerbiak and Taggart's (2008, p. 7) hard Euroscepticism because despite their and Mudde's terms expressing a similar level of critique and opposition to the EU, "rejection" better illustrates the level of Polish populist radical right's opposition than just "skepticism.''

As an example, professor Zdzisław Krasnodębski, i.e., European MP and one of the major PiS experts on the EU, said that "the threat to our sovereignty from the West is greater than from the East," understanding the West as the EU and East as Russia (Domański, 2022).

Zbigniew Ziobro, the leader of Solidary Poland (PiS coalition partner) and the Minister of Justice, said that the EU elites are "so rotten that we cannot expect any good on their part. We have to re-evaluate our policy towards the EU. The Union gradually transforms into a diabolic caricature of the union of equal and independent states that we entered" ("Zbigniew Ziobro," 2022).

Paradoxically, Poles continue to be a Euroenthusiastic nation, although the most recent Spring Eurobarometer shows that this enthusiasm—at the level of 72% versus EU's average of 65%—is not as extraordinary as in earlier decades when it used to firmly surpass 80% (Balcer et al., 2017; Kantar Public, 2022). However, the June 2022 opinion poll by the Centre for Public Opinion Research Center shows still astonishing 92% support for EU membership (Public Opinion Research Center, 2022). Even though PiS voters predominantly feel European and support staying in the EU, they also feel detached from Europe and Euroscepticism is one of the major forces driving them to vote for PiS (Santana et al., 2020, pp. 11–12). Germany belongs to the same nationalism-driven group of enemies used to undermine most initiatives in opposition to PiS, with Donald Tusk as its most diabolic personalization and the EU as its gargantuan evil emanation.

3.2. Specializations

Cultivation of electoral majority requires from the populist radical right a united communication campaign led by the party leadership and its loyal skirmishers who herd the most radical electorate back to the flock, safeguarding the mass character of the party and preventing sidelining by political opponents from the right.

Skirmishers principally recruit from among politicians but also activists and the media. In Poland, major skirmishers of the ruling PiS party—deputy Agriculture Minister Janusz Kowalski, former Justice Minister and now European MP Patryk Jaki, and Justice Minister and Prosecutor General Zbigniew Ziobro—are all frontline lawmakers of Solidary Poland. The coalition was founded in 2012 by former PiS politicians, becoming a handy tool in outsourcing skirmishing, with hard-line nationalism-driven Eurorejectionism as its brand of political specialization.

PiS has its wordy skirmishers at hand too, like Education Minister Przemysław Czarnek or Ryszard Terlecki from the PiS old guard. Both of them have a reputation for making headlines with outrageous radical right statements. Czarnek focuses on the anti-gender agenda, and correspondingly he infamously said that "women should have babies, as it's why God created them" ("PiS MP Przemysław Czarnek," 2019). He also provided a lengthy explanation of the major tenets of how he, Poland's Minister of Education and Science, representing PiS, sees gender ideology:

> If sex is treated solely as pleasure, and there is talk of the right to have children, including by groups that do not constitute a family even informally, then we are dealing with the collapse of values that for centuries allowed us to function. (Kozłowski, 2022)

Terlecki's *emploi* combines gender with nation, so that he claimed that LGBT people "are not equal to normal people" but also, like politicians from Solidary Poland, loudly mused about Polexit in the reality of a "Brussels dictatorship." Both politicians, however, express the brand ideological focus of the PiS itself, i.e., radical conservatism in defense of the sovereign nation and the Polish "traditional" family, "seen as the last bastion to be defended against the onslaught of modernity," that is in opposition with LGBTQ rights or women's freedom of choice (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 15).

PiS politician (Speaker 3) told me that when "a politician like Terlecki says something, I wish the ground would swallow me up. But it's clear he's not doing it because he's slipped his tongue, he's doing it on order."

Currently, no gender-related specializations among Polish skirmishers are to be seen. Major Polish female skirmishers in the political realm—Krystyna Pawłowicz and Olga Semeniuk—have gender-blind skirmishing *emploi*, both in terms of form and content.

3.3. Tactical Dormancy

Skirmishers usually tend to be seen as ambitious political newcomers who build their own name while pleasing the leader with their daring and devotion. However, according to my speakers—and the biographer of Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader, but also an archetype skirmisher on the Polish political scene—political impudence is not an artificial, opportunistic mask, but an expression of a natural, characterological predisposition that is fostered, instead of being restrained (Speakers 1, 2, 3, and 4; see also Zaremba, 2010, p. 20).

Most skirmishers continue their political careers with resumptions of valued skirmishing episodes at times of need. Therefore, they emerge and then deradicalize or temporarily disappear. A famous example is PiS politician Antoni Macierewicz, who at one time is "omnipresent and electrifies public opinion with his unceremoniousness, and at other times he disappears":

> Once he deals the cards in the political game on behalf of the president [i.e., PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński] (at whose side he likes to appear), the president hides him under the table. This regularity has proven right since the 2015 elections. (Pawlicka, 2021)

Another example is Olga Semeniuk who used to call for the dissolution of the EU (Wróblewski, 2017) and was infamous for her textbook crudeness. However, afterward—despite her signature arrogance—Semeniuk deradicalized in her public appearances, corresponding with her finding a partner in government. So, she hit the headlines again but with a brand new, softer image, and in a positive, familial context.

The question remains why a skirmisher tempers or changes his/her tactics at a particular time. Is it due to a decision to live a quiet life of a rank-and-file politician? Is it a tactical dormancy at a time when his/her skirmishing becomes uncomfortable for the party or not fitting a current political communication strategy? Or is there a window of opportunity to receive a more serious job, which requires voters not to dislike them? Each answer is possible, depending on whether the skirmisher's tactics meet party strategy.

Being a populist skirmisher, i.e., pushing controversial themes in a radical, if not repulsive way, is the ultimate proof of loyalty to the party but also a risk they take for their party and their careers. They can win ministerial posts and lucrative contracts for themselves, their families, and their cronies (Mikołajewska, 2022).

Therefore, despite their ideological saturation in politics, most speakers agree that—to quote the PiS politician (Speaker 3): "You go to business for the money. You go to politics for the big money." Accordingly, the latest media investigation by WP.pl in Poland shows that Janusz Kowalski earned over half a million euros in state companies after 2015 (Gotowalska, 2022).

If one opts for a skirmisher's agenda, there's a chance for a fast-track career and riches but also a risk of being made to disappear from the political scene for good: "These are usually intelligent people; they know the rules of the game," a political advisor close to the ruling party (Speaker 10) told me.

3.4. Roles

Skirmishers pioneer, drive, enhance, and support the populist radical right agenda and a high mobilization level in the electorate. They serve the leader and the party by pushing selected aspects—formal and substantive—of their political program to the limits. Uncompromising attacks on political enemies stand as their major modus operandi; therefore, they are mainly responsible for the performative aspect of populist radical right politics.

Though I follow Mudde's definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology attached to the core, thick ideologies of the populist radical right, following Moffit (2016) I acknowledge the fundamental function of populism's performative role that is construed to fit the overall spectacle of the populist radical right in Poland. This approach is in my view not only reconcilable with Mudde's, but it also enriches it with a prospective descriptive toolkit.

Skirmishers wind up the populist agenda of fueling the unceasing "us versus them" conflict, applying a rhetoric of crudeness and vulgarity. This role and performative style are associated in the literature predominantly with populist leaders (Canovan, 2005, p. 82;

Kaltwasser & Mudde, 2017, p. 64; Moffit, 2016; Mudde, 2019b, p. 135). However, they portray a larger array of political faces, including that of a sage statesman, the nation's defender, or an expert.

Even during elections, PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński predominantly wears his skirmishing face by delivering blows against enemies of Poland and Polishness (primarily Donald Tusk, refugees, LGBTQ people, the EU, and Germany), but he still retains a face of a stately guru.

At the same time, outside of the electoral period, a populist radical right leader would often either avoid a given topic or resort to insinuations, while the skirmishers would test or prompt certain ideas and approaches like calling the EU "bandits" or "the Brussels occupant."

Skirmishers have just one face—they create and maintain the mood of hatred and conflict against the enemy (e.g., Donald Tusk) and of a permanent threat to the nation from the side of that enemy and their treacherous allies (e.g., Germany, the EU). In that way, populist skirmishers are then more "populist" than populist radical right leaders, as they just put on a populist show, nothing else.

Skirmishers speak to that quarter of Poles who think that homosexuality is not normal and should not be tolerated, whose majority are those in favor of a total ban or strict limits on abortion. Both overlapping groups are mostly people supporting the ruling coalition (ca. half of them; see "Poll: How many Poles," 2021). A quarter of a country of 38 million people is not a fringe perspective and skirmishers are there to make this quarter feel that its voice is being heard (Müller, 2016, p. 14), despite the fact that they take an active part in creating the lyrics for that voice.

As the political advisor (Speaker 9) explained to me:

> Politicians within a party are serving different segments of society and different preferences. If you want to have a third of popular support, you need a diverse offer for a diverse society, also on the level of expressiveness—some prefer stately, balanced politicians, some prefer Janusz Kowalski.

"Is this not democracy?" he asks rhetorically afterward. Kowalski entered Polish politics in 1997 and has ever since been a populist skirmisher.

Cynicism may be reflected in his party-to-party pilgrimage, including PiS, its oppositional Civic Platform, and PiS' radical coalition partner Solidary Poland since 2019. However, Janusz Kowalski has remained coherent as regards his political style, which has always been offensive, presenting the world in black and white colors (Klauziński, 2020). Already in 2002, one year after PiS was founded, Lech Kaczyński, who was then chairing the party, described Kowalski as "very talented, very impulsive, and confrontational. While we would like PiS to be a party of civil people" (Klauziński, 2020).

Populist skirmishers like Kowalski play the major role in advancing an ultraconservative, i.e., often xenophobic agenda. As the Hungarian sociologist Bálint Magyar points out regarding the similar Hungarian case:

> You have to give something to people with a sense of failure in life. That's why a sizeable list of common enemies has already [been] gathered since 2010: liberal intellectuals, Roma, the unemployed, the homeless….The fear campaign overshadows any real domestic problems because what are mistakes in tax reform when you fear for your family's life? (Zbytniewska, 2018)

Since PiS came to power in 2015, women, LGBTQ people, and refugees of non-European-descent have been discriminated against and victimized under the pretext of preserving the triad of nature, nation, and normality (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, p. 36).

The "dirtiest" and most radical topics are outsourced to skirmishers to make leaders look more statesmanlike and wiser, while they can wash their hands off topics too controversial for the central electorate. As a result, a less popular ban on abortion and raids on LGBTQ people have been used most vociferously by populist skirmishers from the ruling coalition, as well as from external organizations and activists such as the Ordo Iuris Institute, the Mother and Father Foundation, and the "No to Gender!" group. Another example is Krzysztof Kasprzak, the author of the 2021 "StopLGBT" motion who compared LGBTQ people to Nazis during the parliamentary debate.

Crises are the times when populist skirmishers come in handy. "At non-crisis times they pursue their own career agenda, waging their own skirmishing tactics. At crisis times they play the role assigned to them by party leadership," a political advisor (Speaker 7) tells me. Their role is to cover up the real problems and scandals.

The three groups victimized by the Polish populist radical right, in the name of the national socio-cultural and physical safety as well as of opposition to "gender"—i.e., opposition to the rights of women, refugees, and LGBTQ people—are instrumentalized when legitimate allegations for the government's incompetence, failure, or abuse appear.

Populist skirmishers are deployed to help the populist party redirect public frustration. A political advisor cooperating with major government politicians (Speaker 7) explains the tactics:

> We observe ongoing scandals within the ruling coalition—raging inflation, nepotism, failures, Covid consequences. Always when there's a problem, PiS inserts some topic that has a good social absorption. Today inflation is high? Then tomorrow there's a bill on limiting abortion to cover it up.

Populist skirmishers have been a vanguard of inciting anti-LGBTQ hatred, first testing the Polish public before major state politicians decided to use homophobic discourse. Skirmishers that were most blatantly and actively

promoting this mindset soon received top government jobs (ministerial/secretary-of-state), despite the fact that this correlation does not imply causation.

However, some anti-LGBTQ motions have been introduced by activists not directly related to the ruling party. This indicates that there is an ambivalence in the target electorate that sometimes makes the engagement of a career politician too risky for his/her career, although in the time of an electoral campaign all forces—leadership and skirmishers—are mobilized. At the same time, the redirecting of attention from a crisis being caused by PiS becomes even more natural when skirmishers are from outside the ruling party, be it from Solidary Poland or nationalist or ultraconservative organizations.

Another role of skirmishers is to energize the political scene and entertain society, to offer "circuses," especially if there are food shortages. It is particularly important due to the contemporary reality of the "permanent campaign" (Blumenthal, 1980), which makes "scandals and extremisms quickly become commonplace," a main opposition party politician (Speaker 2) tells me. Populist skirmishers are there not to allow battlefield lethargy, always pushing the political competition and by the same means keeping citizens engaged.

The battlefield metaphor reflects the polarized reality characterizing societies with a populist radical right rule. It is a handy context for populists, since "in war, you always have to take sides," a main opposition party politician (Speaker 2) explains. Accordingly, skirmishers upkeep the war atmosphere, mobilizing the radicals and preventing them from drifting away to a fundamentalist party ("just" means that they don't have a political offer to reach a mass audience, as the ruling PiS does; see "Kto głosował na Konfederację," 2019).

A more fundamentalist, ultranationalist party (Konfederacja) is a specialized grouping for which the nativist agenda is the raison d'etre, while for PiS and its more radical coalition partner Solidary Poland, the ultraright agenda is just a mobilizing, winning, and tactical tool.

Stephan C. M. Henneberg points to two approaches to party extremism. One, he claims, is a "leading approach (the convinced ideologist)" and the other one is "a following mentality (the tactical populist)" (Henneberg, 2006, p. 36).

The political aim of the Convinced Ideologist approach is to pursue a certain cultural agenda, regardless of voters' preferences. Again, this is an authoritarian, closed-binary approach of "one who's not with us is against us" (Henneberg, 2006, p. 37). In Poland, this attitude seems to be noticeable in organizations cooperating with the ruling party, while the politics of the governing PiS "is built on the basis of analysis of the public mood, on market research, what pays and what does not pay with the electorate":

> If—for instance—refugees were profitable for PiS, they would have been highly empathetic, but Poles didn't want it. What counts is the calculation of the political target—of whom there is more, so that we adapt our policy to win them. (Speaker 3)

Therefore, PiS suits the second type of Henneberg's extremist grouping, i.e., "tactical populists" for whom "feeling the political pulse of the electorate is its most important strategic aim" (Henneberg, 2006, p. 17). Accordingly, a former ruling coalition politician and beneficiary of political engagement (Speaker 4) admits concerns that PiS "will do just anything, including abortion or to the opposite—festering relations with the church if the polls show that they will rack up 2% of the electorate with that."

Certainly, some of the skirmishers' views align with their discourse, but oftentimes they are inclined to use more radical language than they would do naturally, a political analyst (Speaker 6) explains to me. In the end, concludes a PiS politician (Speaker 3), commenting on skirmishers, they will do whatever it takes, since "once you've entered politics, you will do anything to stay….To do that, they certainly follow party orders."

4. Conclusion

The populist radical right has huge power for mobilizing electorates. Therefore, mass populist radical right parties—like PiS in Poland—pursue this political strategy. To maintain a broad electorate extending from a center-right to radical right voters, such parties use populist skirmishers, recruiting them from both inside and outside of a party. Even if they are not liked, they stand out and are remembered.

Populist skirmishers perform multiple functions ranging from catering to fringe electorates, covering up uncomfortable topics, and energizing the political scene. This article has identified a wide collection of their functions:

1. Pioneering, driving, enhancing, and supporting the radical agenda;
2. Winding up the populist agenda of fuelling the unceasing "us versus them" conflict;
3. Serving different segments of society;
4. Advancing ultra-conservative, i.e., often xenophobic agendas;
5. Outsourcing the "dirtiest" and most radical topics, so that the party can focus on more moderate voters;
6. Covering up actual problems and scandals;
7. Redirecting public frustrations;
8. Energizing the political scene and entertaining society;
9. Mobilizing the radicals and preventing them from drifting away to more fundamentalist parties.

Skirmishers are often either pioneers or conspicuous users of fear and war-mongering tactics, weaving gender

and nation-driven anxieties deeply into the ideological fabric of the electorate. The major victims of their discourse are women, refugees, and LGBTQ people. However, more fatalities include respectful communication, national unity, relations with the EU, rationality, and truth.

Populist skirmishers still constitute a novel territory for political science. This article only opens the process of conceptualization of this political category. Skirmishers certainly serve more functions than the ones presented in this article. Therefore, there is a need for their identification and analysis. They can also represent other political families than the populist radical right and they are certainly a global phenomenon, transcending Poland.

This article focuses only on skirmishers from Poland's political scene. Political parties are effectively supported by skirmishing activists and journalists who play the same basket of roles. Consequently, the phenomenon of populist skirmishers deserves to be further explored.

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Conflict of Interests

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which is WAITING for our HELP! For Polish identity and culture We will be "gnawing the grass," but we MUST WIN this cultural war Agenda of Soros, leftist moral pathologies—OFF from POLAND and the EU] [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/krystpawlowicz/status/1104637481138483201

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Article

Illiberal Discourse in Romania: A "Golden" New Beginning?

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Abstract
While interest in illiberalism has increased in recent years, the study of the connections between anti-gender discourse and transnational dissemination is a more recent scholarly endeavour. Emerging feminist scholarship has helped to move beyond national cases of illiberalism to understand how the gendered nature of illiberalism is revealed through its ability to cross borders and, in recent years, to become a movement with a transnational character. This article examines the evolution of the political discourse on gender in Romania and proposes a three-stage framework leading from gender traditionalism to a more pronounced illiberal discourse. The article examines whether the recent rise of the political party Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea României, AUR) represents a new step towards an established political illiberal discourse in Romania. The official public addresses of AUR are analysed to show how the terminology and themes identified as cornerstones of illiberalism (e.g., anti-gender, traditional family, opposition to reproductive rights, education, and anti-LGBTQ) are incorporated into its rhetoric.

Keywords
anti-gender; illiberal offer; illiberalism; Romania; transnational illiberalism

Issue
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1. Introduction

Since Viktor Orbán declared in 2014 that liberal democracy is on its deathbed, academic interest in illiberalism has been growing (Juhász, 2014). Although theorised since the 1990s, beginning with Fareed Zakaria and his concept of illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997), renewed interest in illiberalism has led to increased scholarly research in the last decade, even as its meaning continues to be the subject of debate. Illiberalism has been theorised as a reaction to the tendencies towards Westernisation and Europeanisation (Havlík & Hloušek, 2021) or as a reaction to the failure of political liberalism and the promises of neoliberal capitalism to bring general prosperity to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE; Zielonka, 2018). As part of a broader process of democratic erosion, illiberalism can be a strategy to win votes (Enyedi, 2016; Mudde, 2021) or a facilitator of a coordinated de-democratisation process (Bogaards, 2018). When scholarship moves to explore its mechanisms in practice, it exposes illiberalism as a form of governance that mimics the institutional framework of liberal democracy, best described as a polypore state: "a system in which all vital resources, concepts and institutions of the liberal democratic state are appropriated by the party in power and transformed into an illiberal state" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 7). The mutating force of illiberalism also extends to civil society, where actors and institutions seek to promote the "true will" of the people in the form of conservative, anti-modern values (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Pető, 2021). As a discourse or type of political communication, illiberalism uses conservative discursive pillars such as nationalism, religion, and traditional values, mixed with a rejection of progressive and liberal values, to unite different actors and evoke a strong emotional response (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Surowiec & Štětka, 2020).

Emerging feminist scholarship has been instrumental in moving beyond the process of defining and categorising illiberalism toward explaining the spread and

electoral success of regressive political actors, not (only) as a cultural backlash or reactionary movement (Laruelle, 2022; Pető, 2021). By placing the gendered character of illiberalism at the centre of analyses, a differentiated picture of its constitutive features and modus operandi emerges (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Korolczuk, 2014; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Pető, 2021; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020). In CEE, opposition to "gender ideology," an umbrella term that includes opposition to gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and reproductive rights, sets the political agenda (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Guasti, 2021; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017, see studies on CEE). It also unites various conservative and traditionalist actors under one big theme. By including a gendered analysis of illiberalism, the focus also shifts to understanding its transnational character (Korolczuk, 2014).

This article aims to expand the understanding of the gendered nature of illiberalism in a broader transnational context by extending current research to the case of Romania. The argument is that the gendered nature of illiberalism is evident in its ability to cross borders and become a movement with transnational dissemination. The article proposes a three-stage framework for analysing the political discourse on gender in Romania. The first stage is gender traditionalism, the second is the introduction of an explicit anti-gender rhetoric by the Coalition for the Family (Coaliția pentru Familie, CpF), and the third is the political mainstreaming of illiberal discourse. Finally, the article examines whether the recent rise of the political party Alliance for the Union of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea României, AUR) represents a new step toward a politically established illiberal discourse. Through a qualitative analysis of the official public discourse of AUR, the last section of the article examines how issues such as the traditional family, anti-gender, and anti-LGBTQ—pillars of illiberalism—are incorporated into the rhetoric of AUR.

2. Gendering Illiberalism in a Transnational Setting

While opposition to gender equality and LGBTQ rights is an increasingly important feature of populist or right-wing movements in Europe (Dietze & Roth, 2020; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017), the intertwining of anti-gender and illiberalism makes the former an existential feature of the latter. It is relevant that Jarosław Kaczyński and Viktor Orbán declared in 2016 that the rejection of liberal values in favour of restoring the traditional family and Christian values was a truly new "pan-European" project (Sierakowski, 2016). Beyond the flagship cases of Poland and Hungary, emerging scholarship shows the adaptability of illiberal anti-gender discourses and strategies in different national contexts (Bosak & Munivrana Vajda, 2019; Guasti, 2021; Hodžić & Štulhofer, 2017; Kuhar, 2015; Soare & Tufis, 2021). What makes illiberalism adaptable in different contexts in CEE?

The concept of illiberal offer (Pető, 2021) provides the theoretical framework for exploring illiberalism in a transnational context. This concept makes it possible to understand illiberalism beyond its regressive character as a political project centred on a new kind of world order (Pető, 2021, p. 319). First, anti-gender gives ideological coherence to this new project by becoming its symbolic glue (Grzebalska et al., 2017; Pető, 2021). The illiberal offer is characterised by the rejection of the supposed evils of modernisation (gender equality, human rights, especially those of minorities) and the affirmation of neotraditionalism (family, nation, and Christianity). This new illiberal ontology of human rights (Laruelle, 2022; Malksoo, 2019) is complemented by the promise of a return to a more orderly world, free of "disruption" from those who promote topics such as human rights, gender equality, and minority rights. For countries reeling from economic crises and austerity, illiberalism offers a response to neoliberalism's focus on the individual by seeming to offer "a safe and secure community as a remedy for individualism and social atomisation" (Pető, 2021, p. 319). More than an ideation construct (Buzogány & Varga, 2021), the illiberal offer is completed by the current and salient political issues it seems to address, such as demography, emigration, education, and social issues, which have often been ignored in mainstream political discourse. Finally, the illiberal offer contains the cohesive power of discourse, which plays a very important role in shaping a transnational movement. Similar discursive tactics such as "gender ideology," the family and the child in danger, and the idea of an education system "ideologised" by "LGBTQ propaganda" have two goals: normalising illiberalism as a political offer (Wodak, 2019) and bringing together different actors across political, religious, or even ideological boundaries (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

The gendered nature of an illiberal offer is evident in its focus on three themes. First, there is a focus on the traditional family and values, which became the "ideological battleground" of illiberalism in Poland and Hungary (Kuhar, 2015) and then propagated in CEE. Against the backdrop of numerous economic and social crises affecting CEE, the traditional family was equated with saving the nation from demographic and moral decline and bringing order to the chaos caused by "gender ideology" (Buzogány & Varga, 2021; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Mancini & Palazzo, 2021). Explicit anti-LGBTQ discourses were also mixed into this theme to underpin the myth of saving the traditional family and protecting children from the dangers of "gender ideology" and "LGBTQ propaganda" (Bustikova & Guasti, 2017; Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Mancini & Palazzo, 2021). In Hungary, the FIDESZ-led government declared that the protection of the heteronormative family is linked to the preservation of the nation, the national interest is "sacred and absolute," and that gender mainstreaming should be replaced by "family mainstreaming" (Sata, 2021, pp. 38, 50). In Croatia, the movement led by Catholic organisations resulted in a successful referendum (2013) on defining the family as a union between a man and a woman.

During this referendum, illiberal messages on "gender ideology" and family as a strategy and discourse were localised based on similar campaigns in different countries (Hodžić & Štulhofer, 2017). A similar use of the traditional family as a signifier was found in Slovenia, Slovakia, and Romania (Kuhar, 2015; Soare & Tufis, 2021).

The (re)glorification of the traditional family is accompanied by opposition to reproductive rights, the second focal theme of illiberal actors. Conservative and religious movements initiated this debate as a backlash against the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention, 2014) which is seen as being imbued with "gender ideology" (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020). In Croatia, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention was instrumentalised by conservative forces against gender equality, who associated the Convention with the promotion of "gender ideology" and "LGBTQ propaganda" (Bosak & Munivrana Vajda, 2019). Analogous patterns of anti-gender mobilisation have been found in Poland (Grzebalska, 2015), Bulgaria (Theresheva, 2018), and Romania (Băluță, 2020).

Finally, illiberalism rallies around education and the perceived "ideologisation" of education systems, as movements in Western Europe protesting gender equality or diversity in education (Hennig, 2018; Kuhar & Zobec, 2017) are emulated in CEE. Education here becomes another battleground which pits the forces imposing "gender ideology" in schools against "concerned parents" protesting what they perceive as the "state-imposed sexualisation of children through sex education and gender equality training programs" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 799). Both PiS and FIDESZ focused from the beginning on the need to reform education and restore a nationalist view of history (Sierakowski, 2016). Among other things, this meant ridding them of "gender ideology" and "LGBTQ propaganda." Opposition to sexual education in schools became a focus of anti-gender mobilisation beyond the two countries (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020). Gender Studies was also targeted, with a de facto ban on Gender Studies as an academic subject in Hungary (Labanino & Dobbins, 2020; Pirro & Stanley, 2021) and the (so far unsuccessful) initiative to ban the term gender from education in Romania (Bucur, 2020; Tidey, 2020).

3. An Act With Three Parts: From Gender Traditionalism to Illiberal Discourse in Romania

3.1. Ignorance Is Bliss: Gender Traditionalism in Romania's Political Discourse 1990–2013

During the first two decades of the post-socialist transition in Romania (1989–2010), gender was a marginal note in the political discourse, which moved between ignorance and rejection of modernisation strategies (Miroiu, 2006). When the topic of gender entered the public political discourse after 2007 due to EU requirements and academic and civil society pressure, it was already embedded in the legacy of traditionalism (Chiva, 2009; Miroiu, 2010; Nimu, 2018).

The post-socialist construction of national identity led political parties to a discourse that often included references to the traditionalism and Orthodox religion of the Romanian state and society, which were elevated to the status of national virtues (Norocel, 2011; Norocel & Băluță, 2021; Soare & Tufis, 2021). Political parties' discourse on gender and equality vacillated between ignoring and adhering to the traditional gender status quo (Băluță, 2006; Chiva, 2018). Official rhetoric claimed that women and men are equal but that a "natural" division of gender roles should be maintained (Chiva, 2005; Oprica, 2008). Political parties held this kind of gender traditionalism because it was believed to correspond to what society wanted after 1989, as the Romanian public continued to adhere to patriarchal gender norms and ultra-conservative views on sexual orientation (Miroiu, 2004; Norocel, 2010). When feminism and discussions on gender equality tentatively entered the public sphere, especially through academia and the emerging feminist civil society, they were ignored or dismissed by political parties as not being a national priority or an ideology alien to the Romanian spirit (Miroiu, 2010). However, several Romanian nationalist, right-wing political parties adopted a more radical gendered discourse. Their agenda focused on the (extreme) glorification of Orthodoxy and orthodox nationalism, xenophobia, and populism (Soare & Tufis, 2021; Sum, 2010). The discourse on women and women's issues presented the Romanian essence as consisting mainly of traditionalism, the glorification of patriarchal norms, and the rejection of any diversity in terms of family formation or sexual orientation (Norocel, 2011). Triggered by the repeal of legislation criminalising homosexuality, radical right-wing and conservative religious groups began to focus on the "threat" of homosexuality, which was portrayed as a foreign attack on the traditional family and Orthodoxy (Norocel, 2011, 2015).

Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 provided little incentive for a substantial change in the political discourse on gender and gender issues; it even lagged other CEE countries (Avdeyeva, 2010). The main political parties did include some references to gender issues in their official political discourse after 2007 but most avoided the issue altogether. One notable change was the partial adoption of the more formal language of EU conditionality on gender equality (Băluță, 2020), which was considered preferable to the more disruptive feminist language. A combination of weak EU conditionality and the imprint of earlier gender traditionalism contributed to maintaining a state of arrested development (Cianetti & Hanley, 2020) on gender as a politically relevant concept. Two moments abruptly changed this dynamic of gender traditionalism: the debates surrounding the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the emergence of a conservative traditionalist mobilisation that triggered a more radical and gendered discourse. This discourse

entered a country where gender and gender issues were almost irrelevant in political discourse, and when they were raised, traditionalism prevailed.

3.2. Picking Up Steam: Coalition for the Family and the Emergence of "Gender Ideology"

Similar to other countries in CEE (Bosak & Munivrana Vajda, 2019; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020), the debate around the Istanbul Convention in Romania has been the catalyst of a new kind of gendered discourse focussing on the perceived inclusion of domestic violence and reproductive rights within the framework of "gender ideology," a term only recently introduced to the public (Băluță, 2020). In line with the coagulability of the illiberal discourse, the emergence of the Coalition for the Family (CpF) in 2013 brought together a variety of organisations ranging from conservative non-governmental organisations to religious figures and organisations with different affiliations (Orthodox, Neo-Protestant, and Catholic) and public intellectuals (Mărgărit, 2020). CpF presented itself as a coalition of the true Romanian civic sphere, denied that it had a political agenda, and used as its public representatives a combination of religious figures and public intellectuals (Mărgărit, 2020). CpF gradually used "gender" and "gender ideology" in public discourses, branding "gender ideology" as "alien," an "attack on the family, children, the Romanian spirit," and a "homosexual threat" (Platforma Civică Împreună, 2020). CpF's public statements stated what is threatened: the (traditional) family, the Romanian nation, Orthodoxy, and children. The idea of ideologising the education system through Gender Studies emerged. Democratisation and modernisation meant the destruction not only of the traditional family but also of "the organisation of the political, educational, medical spheres, etc. of society" (Mărgărit, 2020, p. 7).

CpF became the driving force behind the so-called "Family Referendum" (2018), which like the anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ strategies in CEE (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Norocel & Băluță, 2021), aimed to enshrine in the Constitution the definition of marriage as only possible between a man and a woman. CpF advocated the need for a referendum because the Romanian nation and Orthodoxy are threatened with extinction in the face of "gender ideology" (Norocel & Băluță, 2021; Soare & Tufis, 2021). The interests of children and families were also frequently mentioned in discursive tropes, while demographic decline was associated with the "dangers" to the traditional Romanian family. The socio-economic context—the lack of gender equality measures, especially in terms of reconciling family and work or the high level of poverty in Romania—was almost never mentioned (Norocel & Băluță, 2021). During the campaign for the 2016 general elections, the three major political parties signed electoral protocols with CpF in which they pledged to organise the referendum. In a first direct political act, CpF committed to campaign for them (Mărgărit, 2020). In 2018, when the then leader of the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD) suddenly called for a referendum on the definition of family, elements of the anti-gender discourse found their way into the speeches of the established political parties (Mărgărit, 2020; Norocel & Băluță, 2021).

CpF successfully pushed the gender traditionalism of mainstream political discourse in a radical direction and initiated and normalised the discourse on gender and "gender ideology" as an existential threat to Romanian society. CpF was less successful in shaping the public agenda than other initiatives in CEE, such as Ordo Iuris in Poland. The association with established parties, perceived as corrupt and self-serving, proved detrimental. Public distrust of political parties characterised the referendum, which failed because it did not meet the legal participation threshold (Voiculescu & Groza, 2021). In 2020, an initiative aimed at banning the use of the term gender in the education system, a legal act aimed at abolishing Gender Studies, also failed (Bucur, 2020).

3.3. Illiberalism Enters the Parliament

Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor (The Alliance for the Union of Romanians, AUR) is a new political party founded in 2019. It received 9% of the vote in the Romanian parliamentary elections in December 2020, placing it fourth in the final results. Its voters are younger than the average voter in Romania (41 years on average), have a secondary education, and have the largest gender gap among voters (Pora, 2020). Since the election, the party has made gains in the polls, moving into second place in the poll rankings (Sîrbu, 2022). Party leaders often praise Poland and Hungary and expressed support in the 2021 dispute over EU funds (AUR, 2021b). AUR explicitly advocates a conservative "Reconquista" in Europe (AUR, 2021d) and aims to join the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR).

Although the AUR is a new political party, its meteoric rise can be partly attributed to CpF's earlier efforts to organise various conservative and religious groups on cultural issues. In addition, some leading members of AUR were involved in the Coalition, most notably AUR co-chair Claudiu Târziu, a prominent member of the CpF who was directly involved in the events leading up to the "Family Referendum" (Clark, 2021). While AUR was the first Romanian political party to enter Parliament after 2004 with a thoroughly right-wing, anti-establishment agenda and (as the analysis in this article shows) an explicitly illiberal discourse, the seeds of illiberalism were already sown in the decade leading up to the 2020 election through the rhetoric of members of the mainstream parties represented in Parliament (Băluță, 2020; Norocel & Băluță, 2021). This rhetoric was prompted by an opportunistic alliance of members of Parliament with representatives of the Orthodox Church, which tended towards a radical anti-LGBTQ and an emerging anti-gender attitude (Soare & Tufis, 2021). However, education, reproductive

rights, and even the imperative to support and protect families (apart from proclaiming the traditional heteronormative family as ubiquitous), as well as the link to the overall socio-economic context, were almost always absent from this proto-illiberal discourse, including in the case of CpF.

The sudden electoral success of AUR and its continuous rise can be explained by a mixture of pandemic context (AUR ran an election campaign explicitly against restrictions) and ethno-nationalist and anti-establishment discourse (Mărgărit, 2020). Through the skilful use of social media, public appearances, and political rallies, it has quickly extended its reach beyond that of an outsider party (Holdiș & Rus, 2021). AUR emphasises its anti-elite position and denounces the corruption, selling-out, and disconnection of the big parties from the "real" Romanian society (Norocel & Băluță, 2021). AUR fits the definition of illiberal populism (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018), a movement that positions itself as "anti-politics,'' "anti-elite," and "anti-establishment'' (Mărgărit, 2020) but also seeks to reshape society morally. In this social change project, AUR's anti-gender discourse is at the forefront.

4. "Take Your Hands Off Our Children'': AUR's Use of Illiberal Discourse

4.1. Methods

The content analysis of AUR's official press releases and parliamentary speeches between 2020 and 2021 examines whether the three pillars of the gendered illiberal offer (traditional family, education, reproductive rights) are represented in AUR's public discourse. The focus of the analysis is thus on the construction of the anti-gender discourse and aims to identify a possible agenda and "frame what is politically possible and legitimate" (Kantola & Lombardo, 2020, p. 4). The focus on political discourse is due to its role in shaping illiberalism (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Wodak, 2019). Here, political discourse is treated as an instrument for creating subjective realities, "where ideational interpretations are more important than empirical facts" (Sata, 2021, p. 39). Discourse analysis focuses on the specific use of discursive tropes and their framing to examine how a particular issue, in this case, anti-gender, is constructed (Hardy et al., 2004). In the case of the Romanian context, this method is particularly appropriate because decades of gender traditionalism have created the conditions for introducing significance into a void (Laclau, 2005).

Two types of documents were analysed: official press releases published on the AUR website (consisting of 272 source texts identified) and parliamentary speeches from 2021 (consisting of 519 source texts identified). The preliminary selection of these texts was based on two findings highlighted in the theoretical part of this article. First, AUR's official press releases help indicate the focus of its official political discourse (concerning education and its perceived attacks by "gender ideology," family, and the rejection of reproductive rights) projected into the public sphere and used to enforce what constitutes a legitimate discourse for illiberal parties (Wodak, 2019). Second, parliamentary speeches were selected because this article proposes an analysis of AUR as a different kind of illiberal actor than previous right-wing extra-parliamentary parties or even individual members of mainstream parties (Norocel & Băluță, 2021). This distinction is evident in the AUR's tendency to deliberately engage in illiberal discourse, which it shares with similar actors in CEE.

After this initial phase, purposive sampling (Kantola & Lombardo, 2020) was used to identify relevant texts that explicitly refer to family, education, and reproductive rights. Sampling was based on keywords for text selection (family, education, sexual education, and abortion). To identify other relevant texts, LGBTQ (and variants such as homosexuality), traditional or traditionalism, and terms related to demography were added to these keywords. Forty-eight texts were selected, covering the period from January 2020 to January 2022. AUR's official programme and its self-titled "Mission Statement" of September 2021 were included in the analysis, resulting in a total of 50 texts out of the original 791 texts identified (the selected texts are available upon request). While this is only about 7% of the selected texts in the total sample, the use of purposive sampling, in this case, has produced a number of documents that facilitate the identification of the pillars of AUR's illiberal discourse. For the purposes of the analysis in this article, religion, Orthodox faith, and nation were not used as keywords for the sample, although they are mentioned in some of the texts analysed, particularly in the Parliamentary speeches. This methodological option was based on the theoretical approach of the article on illiberal dissemination in CEE, which focuses on the concept of "illiberal offer" (Pető, 2021) as a political project to redefine political space. The analysed documents show that AUR's use of illiberal discourse in approaching the three pillars of transnational illiberalism indicates a clearly defined and adopted political and ideological offer.

4.2. Results

Family is not the most common discursive trope when it comes to pointing out the dangers of "gender ideology" and "LGBTQ propaganda," the two most used terms in anti-gender discourse; for this aim, education is the main battleground. Of the 50 documents analysed, 16 explicitly mention that education and children are threatened by "gender ideology" or "LGBTQ propaganda." In terms of policy mentions, the initial sample of documents revealed that education, in general, is an important issue for AUR. Modernisation, curriculum reform, improving access, and "fighting fake news" are important issues in the party's political discourse and agenda. The use of illiberal terms such as "gender ideology,'' "indoctrination,"

and supposed "dangers" to children are used in two main themes of AUR—the rejection of sexual education and the need to protect the interests of children and parents. Sexual education is referred to as the main tool to enforce "gender ideology" and LGBTQ "propaganda" or "indoctrination" (AUR, 2021a). Other discursive tropes include the endangerment of children through sexual education (Albișteanu, 2021), the association of "gender ideology" with child abuse (D. Aelenei, 2021a) and the primacy of parental consent in deciding on the sex education curriculum.

In July 2021, AUR announced on its website that it would present a legislative proposal to ban "gender and LGBTQ propaganda" in schools, specifically mentioning the Hungarian example (AUR, 2021c). An amendment to the Romanian Child Protection Act proposed by the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania to "protect children from homosexual propaganda" in 2022 (Thoreson, 2022) provides AUR with a potential, if uncomfortable, political ally. This type of legislation is an example of the "Hungarian illiberal playbook" (Pirro & Stanley, 2021) and coincides with other issues that have convinced AUR. On the eve of the proposed legislation to ban the term gender, AUR issued a statement opposing the promotion of gender equality in education systems and pointing to "the need to evaluate higher education, especially to stop the gender ideologisation of social sciences studies" (AUR, 2020b). AUR's choice of education as the preferred policy and discursive domain to pursue an illiberal agenda is in line with similar actors in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Croatia (Kuhar, 2015; Kuhar & Zobec, 2017; Labanino & Dobbins, 2020; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2018). AUR describes education as a battleground of crucial importance for Romania's future (AUR, 2021a) and offers a conservative reinterpretation to solve the perceived ills of Romania's education system.

The traditional or natural family, as it is sometimes called, is the second important feature of AUR's public discourse. In 15 of the 50 documents analysed, the traditional family and demographic and natalist concerns are the main theme, confirming the strong orientation of illiberal political parties towards anti-gender issues (Pető, 2021). The discourse links the dangers of "gender ideology" with the dismissal of the traditional Romanian family. Often the nation and the "demographic crisis" are also included through tropes such as the heteronormative family as a religious and national duty. The rejection of same-sex marriage is mentioned in several documents and linked to the fact that same-sex marriage is alien to Romanian tradition. At the same time, the European Parliament's September 2021 declaration on rainbow families is described as "an attack on Poland, Hungary, and Romania" (Andrusceac, 2021). The reference to moral, Christian, or Romanian values in the context of the "crisis" of the traditional family is more often found in Parliamentary speeches (see D. Aelenei, 2021b), while a more policy-oriented approach is preferred in AUR's official statements.

It is striking that the family discourse of AUR stands out from the previously diffuse messages of CpF. While CpF focused on legitimising the traditional family based on religion and nationalism (Mărgărit, 2020; Norocel & Băluță, 2021), AUR takes a policy-oriented approach. AUR often frames the imperative to protect the traditional family with policy proposals aimed at tax deductions for families, negative tax deductions for families without children, and the establishment of childcare facilities (AUR, 2020a). These measures would protect families "raising children in a Christian and traditional environment" (AUR, 2020a). As with other illiberal actors (Orenstein & Bugarič, 2022), AUR frames the issue of traditional families and natalist concerns in specific policy proposals that focus on increasing the birth rate. Family and birth policies in Hungary and Poland appear as an example of a "working policy" to protect the traditional family (E. Aelenei, 2021) and point to AUR's further anchoring in the illiberal transnational offer. In this context, it is significant that the Collegium Intermarium-led conference that produced the "Geneva Consensus Declaration" (a proclamation signed in 2020 by 34 countries [the US has since withdrawn its support]) that aims to restore "the true meaning of the concept of human rights" (Intermarium Regional Conference, 2020) appears in AUR's discourse. In a Parliamentary speech by an AUR representative who attended the 2020 conference, the GCD agenda is described as relevant and urgent for Romanian society (Neagu, 2021).

However, AUR's platform on reproductive rights is restrained, as the texts analysed do not explicitly mention the restriction or prohibition of abortion and contraceptives. While "pro-family" is mentioned in relation to the traditional family and reproductive rights, "pro-life'' terminology is rarely used. The analysis revealed that "life begins at conception" is the only mention of such terminology and was used only once (AUR, 2021e). Veiled "pro-life" positions are taken in relation to the proposed solutions to combat the phenomenon of teenage pregnancies (Tanasă, 2021b), with Romania having the second highest incidence in the EU (UNICEF, 2021). The AUR policy programme mentions abortion in the context of the need to improve the economic situation of families and the need for sexual education in schools (a statement that was not repeated). This is a significant departure from the illiberal discourse elsewhere in CEE as well as from the positions of CpF and signals the adaptive nature of the illiberal offer. Even though in Romania access to abortion is threatened from various sides, restricting or banning abortion would be an unpopular proposition in Romania (Centrul FILIA, 2021). An exception to the restrained approach to the issue of reproductive rights were the reactions to the European Parliament's adoption of the Matic Report (European Parliament, 2021), which was denounced as a "neo-Marxist attack on Romania's traditional values" and of addressing trivial, unimportant issues (Lilian, 2021).

Returning to the theoretical framework of this article, some conclusions can be drawn regarding AUR's use of illiberal discourse, which support the claim that AUR introduced in Romania a deliberate illiberal offer in conjunction with a transnational context. First, as the above analysis shows, AUR's public rhetoric uses illiberal anti-gender terminology to create a clearly defined enemy—LGBTQ and "gender ideology"—that inspires mobilisation and overcomes the limitation of CpF's "mobilisation without political representation" problem (Băluță, 2020). This mobilisation, which revolves around two important issues in Romania, education and social issues, shows remarkable similarities with illiberal actors in CEE. The rather muted discourse on reproductive issues, especially AUR's apparent reluctance to engage with the global anti-abortion movement, will be tested in the near future as abortion and sexual rights receive international attention (UN, 2022). Second, unlike previous attempts to create an anti-gender platform in Romania, AUR's discourse includes both the "moral" legitimisation of its anti-gender stance and social and economic concerns. The texts analysed show that "ideology-free" education and the "traditional" family are embedded in both a moral discourse and socio-economic concerns (Tanasă, 2021a). This kind of approach is both intentional and strategic, as evidenced by the fact that there is no difference between the terminology used in official press releases and that used by AUR parliamentarians. Thirdly, AUR justifies its opposition to the introduction of sexual education in schools with the appearance of invoking legal rights. As shown earlier, AUR denounces the "ideologisation" of education, often invoking the primacy of the "right to choose" of children and parents (D. Aelenei, 2021a; AUR, 2022). As the anti-gender movement, which includes illiberal actors, seems to be moving from "culture wars" to legal battlegrounds (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022), this has the potential to become an important strategy of illiberalism. AUR has already indicated its intention to pursue this strategy by announcing legislation to monitor "ideologisation and indoctrination" of schools (AUR, 2021c).

5. Conclusion

The illiberal offer is an adaptable body of anti-gender ideology and discourse. It also formulates a political agenda that addresses important policy issues for the countries of CEE. Exploring its transnational dimension reveals the adaptability of discursive tropes (advocacy for the traditional family, rejection of reproductive rights, and turning education into an ideological battleground) to become mainstream features of politics in Hungary, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and, as this article has shown, Romania. The emergence of the illiberal discourse in Romania was initiated by the various actors under the banner of the "Coalition for the Families" (CpF) and is becoming a mainstream political discourse with the emergence of AUR. The party introduced an explicitly anti-gender political message into the election campaign and has maintained it ever since. Qualitative analysis of AUR's political discourse demonstrates its use of anti-gender tropes such as "gender ideology" and "LGBTQ propaganda" that mirror the rhetoric espoused by illiberal actors elsewhere in the CEE countries. It employs various discursive tactics, ranging from portraying "gender ideology" and "LGBTQ propaganda" as dangers to the nation to advocating policies in support of the traditional, Christian family. In its form of illiberal offer, AUR's anti-gender discourse is not only an ideological appeal to the integrity of national and religious values, but also a reinterpretation of social and economic justice themes adopted by similar illiberal parties and movements in the CEE. By contextualising the issues and the political significance of anti-gender framing (social policy, education), AUR's willingness to use illiberal discourse as a political strategy to promote this agenda makes it appear ideologically coherent rather than ideologically opportune. With these messages, AUR has much more in common with the CpF than with the mainstream parties' decades of gender traditionalism. However, its rising popularity and the fact that it is a Parliamentary party make AUR a better equipped actor to disseminate illiberal rhetoric in Romanian society.

The findings of this article not only help to broaden the understanding of illiberalism beyond Hungary or Poland, but also point to some avenues for further theoretical and empirical approaches to the study of illiberalism. First, since illiberalism has been researched as a discourse and counter-ideology (Laruelle, 2022), the next step of research efforts must be to focus on what makes it an adaptive phenomenon in different national contexts. The analysis presented here suggests that the embeddedness of illiberal discourse in key policy concerns (education, social concerns, demography, etc.), a feature implied and theorised by the concept of illiberal offer (Pető, 2021), requires more empirical attention. As such, the emerging literature dealing with illiberalism should examine illiberalism in practise through the analysis of policies and their impact. Second, as AUR clearly sees itself as part of a larger movement, the implications of the analysis presented raise the question of what a potential "illiberal international" (Sierakowski, 2016) can achieve in terms of dismantling progress on gender equality and LGBTQ rights at the European level. The question becomes whether different illiberal actors using similar discourse and focusing on specific issues will be able to act together, especially when shaping the EU's future.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

In the Name of the Conservative People: Slovakia's Gendered Illiberal Transformation

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Abstract
Over the past decade, Slovakia has witnessed the dismantling of public human rights institutions and gender equality policies and incessant efforts to limit sexual and reproductive rights. While these processes have been mostly discussed in relation to the transnational anti-gender movement, this article conceptualizes them as part of an illiberal turn. We argue that recent rhetorical, institutional, and policy processes in Slovakia have been enabled by a discursive shift positing a new subject: conservative people and their rightful demands. Our argument is bolstered through two analyses. Quantitative content analysis of media articles published between 2002 and 2020, firstly, traces the increased emphasis on the signifiers "conservative" and "liberal." This examination demonstrates that the anti-gender discourse in the 2010s accelerated and normalized this specific discursive frame. Furthermore, it underscores how the carriers of the conservative label shifted away from institutions towards individual politicians and, more importantly, toward a collective subject—people. Qualitative discourse analysis, secondly, focuses on the anti-gender discourse, understood here as a Laclauian populist practice. It posits three types of demands entangled in an equivalential chain—demands dealing with cultural recognition, material redistribution, and political representation. This analytical approach enables us to show how the construction of the conservative/liberal divide goes beyond the struggles for so-called traditional values, but is embedded in broader socioeconomic processes, and how it led to calls for political representation of the "conservative people" and for a "conservative" (in fact illiberal) transformation of political institutions.

Keywords
anti-gender politics; gender; illiberalism; populism; Slovakia

Issue
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1. Introduction

In recent years, political and civil society actors in Slovakia started to assert demands on behalf of "the conservative people." In 2020, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Family halted state funds aimed at promoting gender equality and created new funding programs to support the "functionality of the family." At the same time, the new director of the Institute for Work and Family Research, the public institution run under the Ministry of Labour, announced changes in the structure and agenda of the organisation. These decisions were legitimized by the need to represent the interests and voice of "the conservative majority" of Slovakia.

The measures were preceded by numerous broader processes—a constitutional amendment established the legal protection of heteronormative marriage (2014), nearly a million people voted against the rights of LGBTI people in the so-called "referendum on family" (2015), and family mainstreaming was legally introduced and required every bill to assess its potential impact on marriage, parenthood, and family (2018). The parliament also rejected the Istanbul Convention (2019–2020) and attempted to introduce more than

20 anti-abortion bills between 2018 and 2021, and the Ministry of Labour has sought to erase the term gender from all policies and insisted on using "men and women" instead (2020–2021). Though these measures have been discussed within the context of anti-gender movements (Sekerák, 2020; Valkovičová, 2017; Valkovičová & Maďarová, 2019), we further suggest viewing them as contributing to an illiberal transformation (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). Moreover, we suggest that these visible and sometimes even spectacular events have been accompanied, preceded, and enabled by less obvious discursive shifts. It is in the examination of these subtle discursive processes where we see the contribution of this study to the scholarship on illiberalism and gender.

This article reveals how anti-gender actors in Slovakia created an "illiberal offer" as "an alternative, gendered worldview based on the unquestionable pitfalls of the liberal world order" (Pető, 2021, p. 317). We argue that by addressing these pitfalls and creating new *common sense* (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018), a new collective subject "the conservative people" was constructed.

Methodologically, mixed-method research was conducted to shed light on the subject. Quantitative content analysis of media articles published between 2002 and 2020 contributes to outlining *what* and/or *who* was considered conservative over time; discourse analysis of TV and radio debates broadcasted between 2014 and 2020, meanwhile, elucidates how anti-gender actors devised cultural, social, and political demands (the illiberal offer) and constructed "the conservative people" which they aimed to represent.

2. Intersection of Illiberalism, Anti-Genderism, and Populism

2.1. Scholarship on Illiberalism and Anti-Gender Movements

The current wave of illiberalism and right-wing authoritarianism can be theorized as one of the modern variants of the ideological rejection of the project of enlightenment liberalism which supposedly threatens communal bonds and the social fabric of society (Holmes, 1993). Krastev and Holmes (2018) have recently argued that the Eastern European rejection of liberalism is tied to the region's perceived humiliation from being asked to "catch up" to the liberal democratic West and from the "demographic collapse" faced by most Central and Eastern European countries, threatening their national cohesion and survival.

While illiberalism can be seen as merely a set of disruptive practices that threaten the institutional norms and procedures of liberal democracies—an aspect which often receives the label of democratic backsliding (Waldner & Lust, 2018)—there is an ideological element to illiberalism which emerges from its politics of exclusion that demarks a hierarchy of who should and who should not be seen as a fully equal member of society (Kauth & King, 2020). However, the growing literature on illiberalism rarely examines the gendered dimension of this trend (cf. Kaul, 2021; Mancini & Palazzo, 2021; Pető, 2021).

At the same time, there has been growing recognition of the worldwide phenomenon of anti-gender mobilization in connection with policies involving the rights of LGBTI persons, reproductive health, sexuality education, and gender equality policies (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018). The resistance to these policies is articulated as against the rhetoric of "gender ideology" (or gender theory, gender agenda, genderism).

Feminist scholarship on this anti-genderism has noted that the growing political salience of "gender ideology" is part of an illiberal transformation (Pető, 2021) currently underway. Sometimes it is posited as a *backlash* of social and transnational counter-movements (Corredor, 2019; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021) fostered by a sense of democratic deficit (Rawłuszko, 2021). Sometimes as an *ideological* construction of populist illiberalism where everything "gender" is presented as a "colonial imposition" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Or as an *empty signifier* (Mayer & Sauer, 2017), the "symbolic glue" (Kováts & Põim, 2015) that both conceals and provides an opportunity to politicize the socio-economic demands against the "neoliberal consensus" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Kováts, 2018).

In our contribution, we treat illiberalism as a transnational "thin-ideology" project (Pető, 2021) exhibiting various local manifestations. We argue that, feeding on locally experienced failures of global neoliberal policies, illiberal transformation is fostered through the populist practice of anti-gender politics and its discursive construction of conservative people and their political demands.

Illiberal political practices in Slovakia have been mostly discussed in relation to the 1990s governments led by Vladimír Mečiar and partially to the selected practices of the governments led by Robert Fico (2006–2010 and 2012–2018) (Bustikova & Guasti, 2017; Havlík, 2019). Despite presenting a social democratic facade, Fico followed Mečiar's example in formulating a nationalist alliance. In fact, he never abandoned neoliberal principles nor implemented substantive improvements to the welfare state or the culture of tolerance. When his government "failed to relieve economic discontent, it has channelled this discontent into personalized hatred and fear" (Feinberg, 2022, p. 159).

In 2018, the murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancé, archaeologist Martina Kušnírová, sparked mass demonstrations, exposed extensive corruption, and spotlighted connections between the worlds of politics, business, and organized crime. Robert Fico stepped down as prime minister and the public optimistically anticipated the 2020 parliamentary election as an opportunity for some hope of change. Just like in Poland and Hungary before their illiberal conservative governments came to power, issues of corruption

and "clean politics" dominated the election campaign. Most of the potential parliamentary parties premised their political agendas on either directly opposing gender equality policies or promoting "traditional" values.

The 2020 election witnessed the only major progressive party, Progressive Slovakia, fail to enter parliament. The two governments to emerge successively within this parliament led by Igor Matovič (2021–2021) and Eduard Heger (2021–) are likely "Slovakia's most culturally conservative since the second world war" (Feinberg, 2022, p. 152). The coalition's largest member encompasses a party called Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (*OĽANO*)—it ran on an ardent anti-corruption campaign though its doctrinally Christian and even fundamentalist politics went by generally unnoticed. The coalition also includes We are Family (*Sme rodina*), an anti-gender and xenophobic party with a social agenda; Freedom and Solidarity (*Sloboda a solidarita*), economically neoliberal and culturally the only liberal party in government (they left the government in September 2022); and For the People (*Za ľudí*), a small conservative party that has struggled for its survival ever since. While these two governments have not necessarily been directly linked to the illiberal transformation underway in the Visegrad countries and beyond, we argue that if we conceptualize illiberalism as a gendered process, it is apparent that subtle movements towards illiberalism are ongoing and have been transpiring in Slovakia for years.

2.2. The Analytical Approach

The article uses two analytical tools: the concept of populism as developed by Ernesto Laclau (2005, 2014) and Chantal Mouffe (2018) and the idea of three-dimensional justice by Nancy Fraser (2013). Populism is understood here as a discursive practice where three elements can be identified: the creation of chain of equivalences, the drawing of a dividing line in society, and the construction of a popular subject.

In the first element, a series of equivalential chains of demands is created where one demand indicates the other. These demands are not necessarily connected in any material way, but they are linked through discursive practice (Laclau, 2005). In the analytical part, we will show how individual (unfulfilled) demands are consolidated through a floating signifier such as *protection of family* or *protection of life*. These signifiers thereby represent all demands of the chain. By creating these chains of equivalences, a dividing line is drawn in society between those responsible for the unsatisfied demands, those in power, and the "underdogs" articulating their demands. This internal frontier constructs a society as ostensibly split into two antagonistic parts (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2018). This second element of populism illuminates the process by which conservative/liberal became a key dividing line in Slovak politics and society. Finally, we illustrate the ways through which constant discursive practices ensured that an intrinsically diverse subject acts as a unified popular subject—conservative people in our case (Laclau, 2005, 2014; Mouffe, 2018).

Populist practice can be successful only when it resonates with people's experiences, grievances, feelings, and concerns. For this reason, we repurpose the idea of three-dimensional justice from Fraser (2013) to point to the variety of contexts in which the articulated demands can be rooted. We use Fraser's conception to structure the equivalential chains of demands constructed in the anti-gender discursive practice as those related to cultural recognition, material distribution, and political representation.

2.3. Methodological Considerations

The article combines quantitative and qualitative research methods to map the shifting meanings of the term "conservative" in the Slovak media. We follow what Creswell (2015) called explanatory sequential design where qualitative data is employed to explain quantitative findings in greater depth.

This research, consequently, focused first on conducting a quantitative content analysis of Slovak media. Due to data availability, the time scope of the study began in 2002 and covered every year that a parliamentary election took place (2002, 2006, 2010, 2012, 2016, 2020). To capture the development of the entire media landscape, all national and regional media outlets (print, radio, TV, online; excluding social media) as available through a media monitoring service (Newton Media) were included in the study sample. The data, consequently, reflects both changes in the media market, including the emergence/disappearance of media outlets, and media production, i.e., the actual content produced over time. From this data, we selected media items that contained both terms, "conservative" and "liberal,'' and that were further connected to Slovak society and politics. Outputs covering foreign political events were excluded. Based on these criteria, a sample consisting of 3,947 media outputs was assembled. The year-over-year percentage increase/decrease across all media items was subsequently compared with the year-over-year percentage increase/decrease in media items containing the terms "conservative" and "liberal." We find that the growth of the media market (increase in the media items produced) can account for only a fraction of the increased proliferation of "conservative" and "liberal" terms over time (Figure 2).

Second, we examined who or what is considered conservative in the analysed materials. Using the MAXQDA software, we deployed inductive coding for all the "conservative" terms in the sample. While the unit of analysis constituted one year, the unit of coding consisted of one media output which could be attributed to one or more codes (altogether we worked with 52 codes). Five codes proved to be relevant for this analysis: political institutions (political parties, parliament, government,

platforms within or across parties), politicians, voters, people (e.g., judges, doctors, youth, Slovaks, people in general), and values. Figure 3 outlines the development of the connections of the term "conservative" over time.

Discourse analysis, finally, was conducted and aimed at providing a more in-depth understanding of these developments. The quantitative content analysis suggests that anti-gender politics amplified the use of "conservative" and "liberal" and contributed to the discursive shifts in meanings. Our analysis, therefore, focused on those years when the anti-gender discourse was strongest (2014–2020) and also towards selected interviews and radio/TV discussions from the above-mentioned sample (media outputs containing both terms "conservative" and "liberal") featuring anti-gender actors (politicians, representatives of civil society organisations, and the church). The aim was to include those media outputs where anti-gender actors were provided more space and could sufficiently elaborate on their reasoning. Altogether 47 media items were selected for the discourse analysis. Using this material, we conducted discourse analysis and in accordance with Laclau (2005, 2014) and Mouffe (2018) focused on three discursive aspects of populist practice: We first identified all demands articulated by the anti-gender actors and examined the relationship between them and between the demands and the external socio-political context. This initial engagement was followed by inquiry into the ways divisions of society were presented in the anti-gender discourse; how the dividing lines were drawn and between whom. This research, finally, turned to scrutinizing how the collective subject of the people is constructed and how it is attributed the term conservative.

3. Who or What Is Conservative? Quantitative Analysis of Media 2002–2020

There are two relevant findings of the quantitative content analysis: The first concerns the intensification of the occurrence of the terms "conservative" and "liberal" over time. The most significant increase can be observed after 2015 as the anti-gender discourse gained saliency (Figures 1 and 2). The second finding pertains to a shift in subjects considered conservative. While in the early 2000s, the media primarily talked about conservative political institutions, by 2020 the emphasis had shifted mostly to people who were deemed conservative (Figure 3).

In 2002, media outlets published 139 outputs containing both "conservative" and "liberal" as terms—this figure slowly increased in subsequent election years. The previous parliamentary election in 1998 had produced a broad coalition of right-wing, left-wing, conservative, and liberal political parties that stood against the authoritarian government of Vladimír Mečiar. Political parties put aside their ideological differences in the name of the common good which was understood as keeping Mečiar out of government (Tóthová & Drozda, 1999). The parliamentary elections in 2002 brought to power a centre-right, conservative-liberal government which initiated further substantial economic reforms. As summarized by Gyárfášová, "many people automatically shifted their opinions as far from a socialist standpoint as possible. As a result, the reforms were all based on neo-liberal ideas and supply-side economics" (2004, p. 2).

This new generation of politicians introduced substantive economic changes and as intellectuals, scholars,

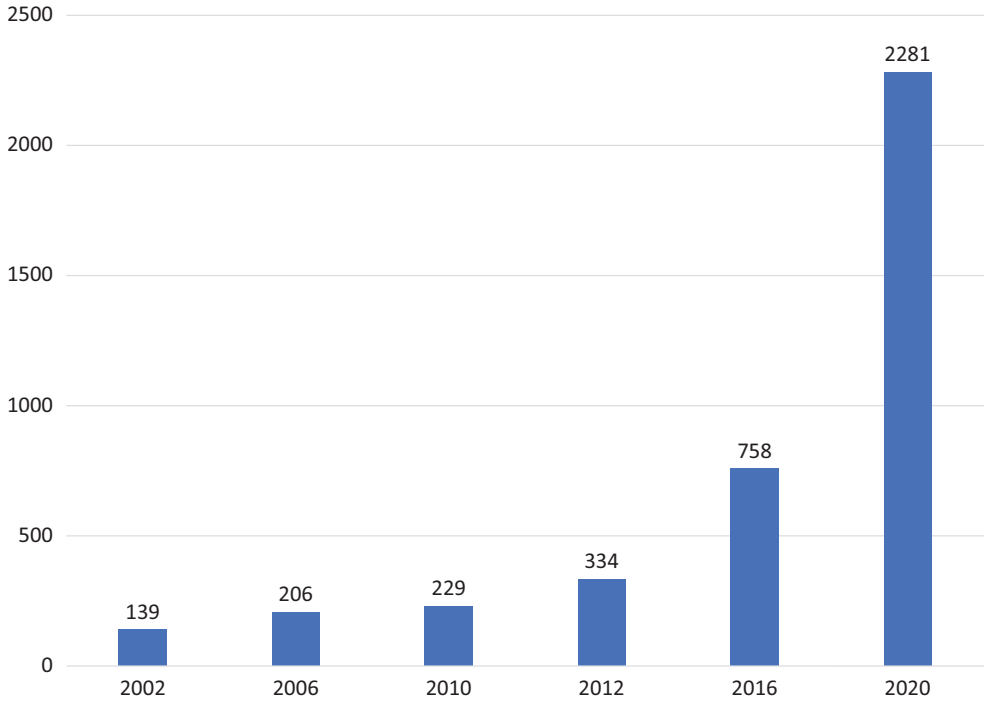

Figure 1. Media outputs containing both terms "conservative" and "liberal".

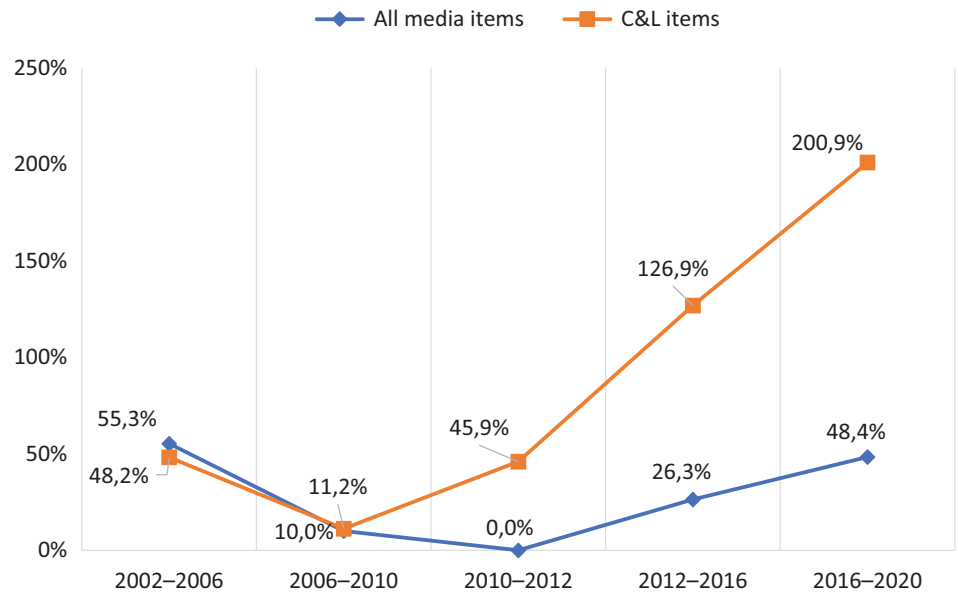

Figure 2. Year-over-year percentage increase/decrease in all media items produced and the increase/decrease in media items that contain the terms "conservative" and "liberal".

members of think tanks and civil society organisations, or media contributors, they also influenced the public and academic discourse and crafted a neoliberal consensus (Gyárfášová, 2004; Kusá, 2008). Supported by international organisations during the European Union (EU) accession process (Fabo, 2015; Kusá, 2008) and embedded within the economic transformation of other post-communist countries (Appel & Orenstein, 2016), the economic reforms were considered painful but unavoidable. As part of the neoliberal consensus, leftist politics was understood as the successor to communism and rejected (Slačálek, 2022). The left/right axis in politics was considered increasingly irrelevant and the conservative/liberal structuring of politics became more salient (Svatuška, 2004, p. 8). Political opposition also contributed to this process. The centre-left party Smer initially presented their politics of the "third way" in 2002, signalling their belonging to "modern European parties" and their overcoming of traditional ideologies of left and right. Smer subsequently united six left-wing parties and became the main representative of moderate redistributive sentiments as it sought to rebrand itself as a social democratic party (Malová, 2017, p. 6).

The conservative-liberal alliance of the Mikuláš Dzurinda cabinets (1998–2006) slowly "dissolved" in the years after EU accession. Conservative elites began searching for a new programme and "turned to morality politics…justifying a claim to represent the 'Christian voice' in politics in continuity with the Catholic dissidents' pre-1989 pro-life positions" (Vargovčíková, 2021, p. 212). While the two Dzurinda governments also introduced liberal democratic principles as part of the EU admission criteria, these have remained tenuous ever since.

A notable change in the use of terms "conservative" and "liberal" is evident between 2012 and 2020 both in terms of the quantity and the content of media outputs. While 334 media outputs talked about conservative and liberal subjects in 2012, the figure had grown to 758 media items in 2016 and 2,281 media outputs in 2020 (Figure 1). The increase reflects changes in the media market: New media outlets emerged and more content was produced, especially online. This media expansion, however, can only explain a small portion of the increase in the number of media items engaging with "conservative" and "liberal" subjects. As demonstrated by Figure 2, the number of all media items produced between 2012 and 2016 increased by 26.3 percentage points even as the number of media items mentioning "conservative" and "liberal" increased by 126.6 percentage points over the same period. This gap has only grown larger in recent years: The number of media items that talk about "conservative" and "liberal" increased by 200.9 percentage points between 2016 and 2020, yet the number of all media items grew by 48.4 percentage points. This finding suggests that much of the increase can be attributed to more frequent use of the terms "conservative" and "liberal." The share of outputs talking about "conservative" and "liberal" out of all media items produced in the respective year increased from 0.006% in 2002 to 0.03% in 2020. Finally, it should be emphasized that the steep rise is observable across the most widely consumed media outlets.

An analysis of relevant materials reveal that anti-gender actors played a crucial role in these changing patterns. In 2016, three political parties entered parliament using anti-gender rhetoric in their election campaigns. One of them (the Slovak National Party) became a part of a coalition government in 2016 and another one (We are Family) in 2020. The third party was Marian Kotleba's fascist People's Party Our Slovakia. All of them

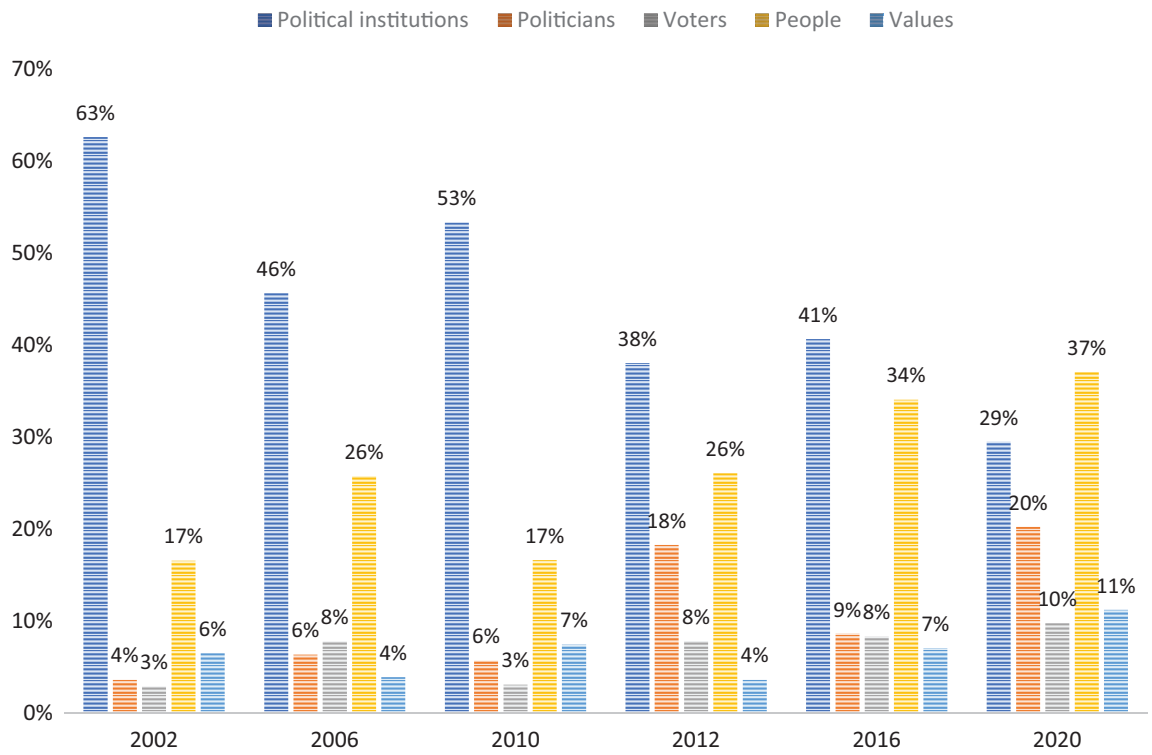

Figure 3. What/Who is conservative? Media outputs with analysed terms (as percentage of all outputs containing terms "conservative" and "liberal" in the respective year).

claimed to represent the good conservative people of Slovakia. And they were not the only actors going after this segment of the electorate—in 2020 conservative votes were also sought by Andrej Kiska's For the People party, the Christian Democratic Movement, and Igor Matovič's Ordinary People movement.

At the beginning of the analysed period, the media mostly discussed conservative actors at the institutional level including political parties, political platforms, and governments. A total of 63% of outputs published in 2002 mentioned conservative political institutions while 17% referred to conservative people and 4% discussed individual politicians. In the later periods (e.g., during the referendum against non-heteronormative families, the attacks on the Istanbul Convention, or the presentation of the anti-abortion draft bills), the analysed media sources attributed the label "conservative" to people—individuals or groups of citizens outside of political structures. The share of articles mentioning human carriers of conservativism increased over time and political institutions have become less relevant in this regard. In 2020, 37% of published media outputs mentioned conservative people, 20% addressed individual politicians, and less than 30% talked about conservative political institutions.

Over time, the signifiers "conservative" and "liberal" gained relevance against the backdrop of local coverage of politics and society in the Slovak media. The 2019 presidential election and the 2020 parliamentary election featured polls about conservative and liberal values and the predominant categorization of parties was based on the conservative/liberal divide. Media discussions focused on the fight for the "conservative voter" deemed pivotal to deciding the election, the one who matters. The discursive shift, moreover, indicates that while the term "conservative" was used to describe institutional politics in the early 2000s, it travelled through society and became an attribute of individuals and the people. The meaning of the word "conservative" was also fluid over the study period—e.g., it has been used in reference to conservative ideology, right-wing politics in general, various assumed traditions, as a counterpart to liberalism, and as an indication of backwardness. The more it was tied to individual people, the more it served as a label for those espousing certain values. One of the shifts observed concerns the terms "conservative" and "Christian" becoming nearly synonymous in the public discourse and their nearly interchangeable use by both politicians and journalists.

4. Cultural, Social, and Political Demands of the "Conservative" People. Discourse Analysis 2014–2020

The anti-gender discourse was initially propagated by church representatives and conspiracy media. This language, however, was gradually adopted by anti-establishment politicians, civic actors promoting heteronormative families, conservative party politicians, the mainstream media, and progressive civic actors, scholars, and activists (Valkovičová & Maďarová, 2019). Backed

by a changing set of diverse actors, the anti-gender discourse appears to have served as a catalyst in the shift from "conservative political institutions" to "conservative people." To understand this process, we approach the anti-gender discourse as a populist practice and focus on its three elements: creating the chain of equivalences of demands, constructing a dividing line in society, and establishing a new popular subject (Laclau, 2005).

4.1. Material Security, Cultural Recognition, and Political Representation: The Equivalential Chain of Demands

The research of the anti-gender discourse has mostly focused on those aspects and demands that relate directly to feminist, LGBTI movements, or gender equality policies including opposition to same sex marriage, the concept of gender stereotypes, and abortion. The social and economic dimensions of the anti-gender movement, nevertheless, have also been stressed. The movement has particularly garnered political and societal support alongside its critique of the effects of global neoliberalism (Fodor, 2022; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Kováts, 2018; Pető, 2021). Graff and Korolczuk argue that "the coherence of this worldview relies on three persistent equivalences linking the cultural with the economic and the political" (2022, p. 164). Following up on this line of argumentation and with the intention to understand how this link between the cultural, the economic, and the political is made, we map the demands of anti-gender actors, particularly those articulated under the umbrellas of "the protection of family" and "the protection of life."

The demand to protect families is common to international anti-gender movements and is considered one of its strongest political and mobilising strategies (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). In Slovakia, this demand was particularly mobilized during the 2014 constitutional amendment debates that saw heterosexual marriage gain protected status by constitutional law and the 2015 referendum campaign against marriage equality and civil unions of LGBTI people (Valkovičová, 2017). The protection of family narrative was also promulgated as an argument against the Istanbul Convention, sexual education, and access to safe and legal abortion services. While the most discussed demand of these groups calls for marriage to be recognized as a unique union between one man and one woman, discourse analysis of TV and radio debates reveals that other demands consolidated in the chain of equivalences under the umbrella of the "protection of the family." The outlined list of demands (Table 1) can be structured according to three dimensions of justice formulated by Fraser (2013)—cultural recognition, material distribution, and political representation.

The cultural recognition demands are mostly directed at promoting heterosexual couples and so-called traditional families. The traditional family is presented, in the analysed materials, as a place of social reproduction that deserves protection and a special status in society. The rejection of civil unions, non-heterosexual marriages, and adoption of children by non-heterosexual couples, so the argument goes, will ensure that the heterosexual family will not be replaced by "social experiments" and that society, the Slovak nation, and European civilization will live on (Filek, 2014). The actors, continuing this line of reasoning, also stress the need to acknowledge the rights of children and parents who are currently threatened by "evil foreign forces" which desire to detrimentally influence the education and upbringing of Slovak children. This argumentation—especially used against sexual education and the Istanbul

Table 1. The equivalential chain of demands—protection of family.

Protection of family		
Cultural recognition	Material distribution	Political representation
Marriage only between one man and one woman	Support of social reproduction and improving quality of life	Transparency and clarity
Increase birth rates, solution to the demographic crisis		Freedom and autonomy
Protection of children and children's rights	Strong family policies including economic support for families with children and for the elderly	Political voice and representation
Parents' rights to make decisions about children's education	Adequate housing	
Protection of the current structures of society and protection of the "civilization''	Debt relief	
Protection of human rights for all vulnerable populations (including conditional support for LGBTQI people)	Tax relief for families with three and more children	
Regulated migration		

Convention—is not new and has been documented elsewhere (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Some of these demands were formulated by the influential German anti-gender intellectual, Gabriele Kuby, and have already been integrated into the political platforms of far-right parties (e.g., Alternative for Germany or UKIP) or even implemented in national policies (e.g., in Poland or Hungary; Payne, 2019).

A few anti-gender actors accede to limited recognition for LGBTI people. This recognition, however, is conditioned on their invisibility in public and silence in politics (Ocilková in TA3, 2015b). There is also the promise of material and legal support—while same-sex marriage or civil unions are unacceptable in the anti-gender discourse, an alternative is offered in the form of partial legal amendments that would deal with the selected issues of same-sex partners, for instance, in the areas of health care or inheritance (Paška in TA3, 2014). Regardless of the political party or officials in power, nonetheless, these promises have never been fulfilled and such legislation has never been proposed or supported by anti-gender actors in practice. Patrick Wielowiejski (2020, p. 137) identified a similar discourse in the Alternative for Germany party and called it heteronormative rather than homophobic. In this line of argument, homosexuals are acceptable "as long as they do not demand equality."

Demands for cultural recognition are often accompanied and supported by demands for material distribution. Arguing that Slovakia lacks sufficient population growth or pro-family policies (TA3, 2015a), the actors demand a stronger family policy plank including changes in taxes and economic support for families with children and the elderly:

> Instead of working on the population policy, asking ourselves why we—and the whole Western Europe—are dying out, why there are incomplete families and single mothers and fathers, and why they have problems, we are dealing with other issues. I also do not like what we are doing right now when we could have been building housing and supporting young families. (Baránek in TA3, 2015b)

These arguments were used during the 2015 referendum against non-heterosexual families where none of the questions dealt with socio-economic issues. Anti-gender actors referred to the situation where nearly every fifth person in Slovakia lived at risk of poverty and social exclusion, the lack of rental housing, and the strong push for property ownership with prices rising constantly (Liptáková, 2017). They promised to deal with these issues if the referendum succeeded and some part of their agenda was adopted by the political parties that entered parliament in 2016 using the anti-gender rhetoric, namely the Slovak National Party and We are Family (Valkovičová & Maďarová, 2019). The assumed conflict between redistribution and recognition became obvious when the anti-gender representative of the Slovak National Party mentioned the situation of the working poor and their high indebtedness and pointed to Hungary and Poland as examples of appropriate social and family policies. The leader of the party Freedom and Solidarity—the only party in parliament supporting the rights of the LGBTI people—responded that:

> This is the malaise of all political parties today—more redistribution, giving away….We say that it is not good when the state gets bigger and bigger and bigger and when it organises people's lives more and more. We say, let us do it the other way. Let's give people freedom, let's allow them to better create values. (TA3, 2016)

Though Freedom and Solidarity cannot be characterized as progressive, it was previously the only major party that vocally supported the rights of LGBTI people in high politics. Simultaneously, it pursued strict individualist and business-oriented policies and its leader joined the right-wing discourse against migration and the EU (Vargovčíková, 2021, p. 216). Other actors that publicly advocated in favour of the rights of LGBTI people included members of civil society, the media, and academia. These actors primarily spotlighted human rights and "non-negotiable principles and values"—they pursued what Eszter Kováts (2018) called the human rights consensus. The agenda pursuing the recognition of "traditional families" was actively connected with social and economic issues. The quote above, meanwhile, illustrates how the LGBTI recognition was rather vocally supported either by political actors pursuing neoliberal and austerity policies or by those who often refrained from engaging in discussions about economic issues.

When in power, anti-gender actors have sought to address some of the above-mentioned social and economic issues (e.g., social housing and financial support for families with children). Their policies, however, are often exclusionary. Proposed material support for "Slovak families," for example, has rather been utilised as a backchannel to increase birth rates—its connection with ethno-nationalism can further be traced at two levels. The introduction of family policy benefits, for one, has been typically directed at/confined to the employed segment of the population. The dispute over support for families with many children illuminated the fact that Roma people—often marginalised and at risk of long-term unemployment and/or employment through short-time contracts or uncontracted work (Kahanec et al., 2020)—were not to be generally included. The "good life" for families—their wellbeing—was additionally supposed to be secured through the rejection of migration imposed on the country by the EU and the West. These actors purported that this introduction of migration posed a danger to the Slovak social system and to Christian and European "civilization" (Hanus, 2014). As presented in the analysed materials and later

introduced at the policy level, social support was aimed at "deserving" groups of citizens (i.e., ethnically Slovak and contributing to the state through their participation in the labour market and the raising of children in their families). There are indeed notable parallels between the Hungarian "carefare regime" (Fodor, 2022) established by the government of Viktor Orbán and the policies introduced by Milan Krajniak, the Slovak Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and a nominee of the We are Family political party that climbed the political ladder deploying anti-gender and anti-immigrant rhetoric. As minister, Krajniak erased the word gender from internal documents and bodies of the Ministry and halted state support aimed at promoting gender equality (Valkovičová & Maďarová, 2019).

The last set of demands pertains to political representation. Exploiting low societal trust in political institutions (European Commission, 2015), anti-gender actors adopted an anti-colonial framework (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022) and depicted political elites as incapable or irresponsible liberals influenced by foreign powers such as the EU and other international organisations: "I refuse, like fools, to adopt Western things into our system," proclaimed the future speaker of the parliament from the Slovak National Party, Andrej Danko (TA3, 2015a). The analysed publications further propagated the idea that the political power of the Slovak people has been constrained by local elites serving foreign interests. The same actors also deride the writing of laws, political documents, and international treaties in opaque language that is impossible for ordinary citizens to understand and complain about supposedly dysfunctional institutional processes and the impossibility of ordinary citizens to be heard or change anything. Against this backdrop, various actors clamour for greater transparency and clarity concerning political processes, heightened Slovak autonomy, and expanded tools for ordinary people to gain a political voice and representation. As one of the referendum initiators Anton Chromík states:

> It is therefore important to say to politicians that this is our limit. This is where your mandate comes from, you represent us and you need to know our position….That is why the referendum is important, because it will be the expression of the people who are important. (Chromík in TA3, 2015a)

The same complexity of cultural, social, and political dimensions can be found in the equivalential chain consolidated under the demand for "the protection of life" (Table 2). Between 2018 and 2021, more than 20 anti-abortion laws were introduced in the Slovak parliament. Initially, the demands regarded mostly the protection of the right to life from conception to natural death, the "protection of children," and "liberation" from Communist-era legislation and "neomarxist" doctrines, but the discourse shifted in 2020 and focused more on social and economic support for women and families. An anti-abortion bill introduced in 2021 by a group of coalition politicians was called "a bill on the protection of pregnant women" (Maďarová, 2021). This strategy proved quite successful in gaining social, media, and political support. While none of the bills ultimately gained parliamentary approval (as of yet), the two framed in terms of emotional and socio-economic support for pregnant women were just one vote shy of passage.

Once the equivalential chain is consolidated, the central demand represents all the others (Laclau, 2005).

Table 2. The equivalential chain of demands—protection of life.

Protection of life		
Cultural recognition	Material distribution	Political representation
Protection of the right to life from conception to natural death	Support of social reproduction and "improving quality of life"	Individual freedom and state autonomy
Reproduction of the Slovak nation and solution to the demographic crisis		Political voice and representation
Protection of children	Respect, social, and economic support for pregnant women	
Protection of pregnant women	Economic support for poor (employed) women and families	
Protection of the current structures of society and protection of the "civilization''	Social and material support for elderly and sick people	
Family mainstreaming		
Psychological and material support for women who have been raped		
Support network for women who do not want to have children—anonymous childbirth, financial support, housing		
Liberating society from Communist legislation and Neomarxism		

In other words, the demand to "protect family" or to "protect life" is not mere resentment and a demand for cultural recognition, but it represents further partial demands for material security and political representation. In this process, the anti-gender actors name "the insecurities and injustices created through the process of socio-economic transformation guided by the principles of the neoliberal policy consensus" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 165) and subsume them under the umbrella of gender and equality policies. Moreover, the anti-gender actors come up with an alternative to the failed liberal policies and consolidate an "illiberal offer" based on values such as family, paid work, and nation.

4.2. The Conservative People Must Be Represented

As every equivalential chain assumes that individual demands have been already formulated but failed to be satisfied (Laclau, 2005), the analysed materials imply that those responsible for unmet demands of the Slovak majority are the "liberal elites":

> This is exactly what liberals are doing today—under the guise of freedom, they are taking up bombs that kill. Abortion? Physical murder of our children, not a woman's right. We have already murdered millions….Or the second bomb that the liberals are taking up—the gender ideology. The moral murder of our children. The third bomb is euthanasia….The fourth bomb is civil partnerships, the moral murder of marriage. I'm talking about the liberal octopus spreading the culture of death. Any disorder spreads death. (Kuffa in Bán, 2019)

As illustrated by Marián Kuffa, an influential Catholic priest and anti-gender actor, local and international liberal ideas represent an adversary constructed in this discursive process and pose physical and moral danger to children, heteronormative families, society, and civilization. In relation to the social demands, those responsible for poor living conditions are the elites who were either too corrupt or too busy with the rights of minorities and EU/Western requirements to deal with people's needs. The demands regarding political representation were thwarted by those making the rules at international level (EU, Council of Europe, or Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence [GREVIO]) or those local experts, activists, and politicians ignoring the will of the Slovak people. While these groups of adversaries are internally diverse, they all include an important group of liberal elites. Such a construction resonates with the disappointment with local politics and imperatives connected to EU integration and catching-up with the West. Liberals come to represent the main subject against which the "we" is constructed: "Such a move is necessary to draw the political frontier separating the 'we' from the 'they,' which is decisive in the construction of a 'people' " (Mouffe, 2018, p. 63).

However, contrary to the claims of some authors (e.g., Payne, 2019), the people as a collective subject constructed through this discourse is not a mass or an identity of "a people-as-one." The people remain a heterogenous subject (Mouffe, 2018) and its multiplicity is not considered a problem when the subject is being represented. We argue that this collective subject is constructed around demands rather than around identity, supporting the idea that demand rather than identity is the smallest unit of politics (Laclau, 2005, p. 73). As every demand is split, "on the one hand it is its own particularized self; on the other it points, through equivalential links, to the totality of the other demands" (Laclau, 2005, p. 37), subjects demanding cultural recognition, material distribution, and political representation are linked together. And through an adversary—the liberal elites—they are consolidated as the "we" to a collective subject.

As we found out in the discourse analysis, the story presented by the anti-gender actors is a story of awakening. People were trying to voice their concerns and demands but for a long time they were overlooked and not taken seriously. Now they won't be silenced anymore—they organise petitions (more than a million people voted in the 2015 referendum) and they organise protests. The experiences from the 2015 referendum are likened to the Velvet Revolution that overturned the state socialist regime in 1989. "Civil society has awakened," claimed one of the leaders of the anti-gender movements (Chromík in TA3, 2015a).

While capitalizing on other protests that took place around the country to demand political change, uncorrupted "decent politics," or better working conditions, the analysed materials couch those awakenings in conservative terms. Conservative judges, journalists, parents, doctors, teachers, activists, and ordinary citizens are repeatedly discussed (as also visible in Figure 3). In accordance with Laclau's and Mouffe's theory of populism, this does not mean that the anti-gender actors necessarily represent an already existing conservative majority in Slovakia. Rather it is through this discourse that different segments of the population, ranging from families lacking sufficient state support, people struggling with debt and unmet material needs, and people rebelling against politics to Catholics, homophobic, and sexist people, are consolidated into one collective subject called conservative. The term "conservative" thus gains a new meaning, covering cultural, material, and political aspects of demands. It also means that the salience of the term "conservative people" does not entail that the majority of Slovak population necessarily adheres to traditionally conservative values.

With the "illiberal offer" providing an alternative to the many failures of post-socialist neoliberal policies and with the consolidated conservative collective subject, the anti-gender actors demand to be represented in the political bodies, from the advisory expert bodies dealing with equality policies to the decision-making institutions. New conservative media were established to explicitly

represent conservative citizens and their worldview (mk, 2015, 2020), to balance the ostensibly liberal mainstream media. The Ministry of Labour prepared changes in terminology, funding, institutional structures, and policies so they too reflect the needs and worldviews of the conservative majority (Valkovičová & Maďarová, 2019).

5. Conclusions

This article examined how a new collective subject—a conservative people—came to life in Slovak politics. Quantitative content analysis of Slovak media outputs in election years between 2002 and 2020 uncovered the rapid growth in the emphasis on the signifiers "conservative" and "liberal" when discussing local politics and society. It also showed how emphasis has shifted away from institutions as the carriers of the "conservative" label toward individual politicians and, especially, toward a collective subject—people.

It was the anti-gender discourse that accelerated the use of "conservative" and "liberal" terms and the discursive shift. Therefore, the qualitative part of our analysis scrutinized interviews and debates with anti-gender actors and treated their discourse as populist practice (Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2018). While most academic scholarship dealing with anti-gender politics focuses on issues related to gender equality and the rights of LGBTI people, we identified three types of demands articulated in the anti-gender discourse: demands for cultural recognition, material distribution, and political representation. An "illiberal offer" of the anti-gender actors thus consists of these three dimensions.

As the demands were consolidated into a chain of equivalences, it put the responsibility and blame for the failing policies solely on the "liberal elites." Against this background, an awakening of a new collective body, the "conservative people," was constructed. Our analysis supports scholarship claiming that illiberal or far-right actors utilise populist practice to construct a wide collective political body (Payne, 2019; Wielowiejski, 2020). However, it emphasises that this heterogeneous collective subject is constructed around demands rather than identities. With the demands consolidated into an equivalential chain and the "illiberal offer" resonating with actual social and political issues, anti-gender actors have been able to change the common sense, policies, state funding, and the structure of political institutions in the name of the interests of the "conservative people."

This study illustrates how the demands often interpreted in terms of cultural recognition are rooted in broader socioeconomic processes. The construction of the new collective subject "conservative people" can present a form of reaction to the perceived weakening of people's democratic sovereignty (Mouffe, 2018) and the technocratic Europeanization (Rawłuszko, 2021) in post-state-socialist countries. Against an international backdrop that has witnessed differences between left and right policies become increasingly blurred (Kováts, 2018; Mouffe, 2018), heightened social conflicts are translated in terms of morality (Vargovčíková, 2021). It appears that different actors calling themselves conservative reflect these changes and incorporate them into their political agendas. Exploiting the effects of "neoliberal neopatriarchy" (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 7) and with effective progressive opposition mostly absent, various actors can formulate a new illiberal political project under the umbrella of conservative politics.

While the illiberal turn has been an international phenomenon, illiberalism as a form of political practice feeds on local insecurities and problems (Pető, 2021) and thus prompts different local manifestations. By examining the Slovak case and its illiberal changes, less pronounced and comprehensive than those in Hungary and Poland, the article offers insight into the more subtle and incremental nature of the illiberal transformation underway.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Article

On Gender and Illiberalism: Lessons From Slovak Parliamentary Debates

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Abstract
This study offers a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of Slovak illiberal anti-gender parliamentary discourse based on a unique dataset consisting of 85 parliamentary speeches. It presents who the main actors are in terms of the illiberal anti-gender discourse in Slovakia and which narratives they postulate. It also considers if there is any variation in the identified narratives. The qualitative content analysis covered several critical anti-gender narratives in the rhetoric of illiberal parties. I argue that the occurrence and range of anti-gender narratives within the Slovak parliamentary illiberal discourse are diverse, and this diversity varies in the ideological background of the analysed parties. While some of the more traditional Christian conservative parties, such as the KDH, and new populist parties such as OĽaNO or Sme Rodina, have articulated gender primarily as a threat to Slovak Catholics, Christianity, traditional marriage, and families, others like the nationally conservative-oriented SNS or the Smer-SD have stressed the loss of national sovereignty and legal aspects around the Istanbul Convention, and utilized this topic to strengthen their Eurosceptic rhetoric. Finally, the far-right K-ĽSNS has used an eclectic approach combining all found anti-gender narratives while using the most abusive language towards transgender persons and other sexual minorities.

Keywords
gender; illiberalism; narratives; parliamentary debates; political discourse; qualitative content analysis; Slovak politics

Issue
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1. Introduction

The recent results of liberal democracies have brought about the disturbing statement that “liberal democracies diminished over the past decade from 41 countries to 32, with a population share of only 14%” (V-Dem Institute, 2021). The region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), owing to Orbán’s Hungary and Kaczyński’s Poland—both representing flagships of this “illiberal turn”—has become a research laboratory for democratic backsliding (Bernhard, 2021; Cianetti et al., 2018). Yet, the illiberal and/or democratic backsliding has taken on different forms across the V4 countries. As scholars note, it is necessary to distinguish between the “illiberal turn” and “illiberal swerve” (Buštíková & Guasti, 2017). An illiberal swerve could turn to a full illiberal turn if five criteria are met in at least two electoral terms: (a) political polarisation preventing a viable consensus about the character of the democratic polity; (b) the capture of the courts, endeavouring to dismantle the rule of law and balance of power; (c) political control over the media which involves an increased control of the state media and elimination or subordination of private media; (d) legal persecution of civil society to prevent it from protesting and mobilisation; and (e) changes in electoral rules and the constitution to permanently weaken any political opposition (Buštíková & Guasti, 2017, p. 174). When considering Orbán, who established what is known as a “diffusely defective democracy” (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1481), it has become the only regime in CEE representing a full-scale illiberal turn.

With that in mind, Czechia and Slovakia experience rather illiberal swerves: While Czechia has been threatened by “technocratic populists” (Buštíková & Guasti, 2019; Havlík, 2019), Slovakia has faced various attacks by the populist right, more precisely from the far-right

(Kazharski, 2019). Both types of democratic backsliding across the V4 and CEE, however, share a significant common denominator: they attacks on gender and the civil rights of the LGBTQ community (Gaweda, 2021; Grzebalska & Petö, 2018; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Żuk & Żuk, 2020).

In this context, gender issues in Slovakia have also experienced a turbulent decade. Like other countries in CEE, the main anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ waves erupted after the 2015 migration crisis when extremist and populist actors utilised Islamophobic rhetoric and then entered the Slovak parliament (Zvada, 2018). Subsequently, they have also started attacking the civil rights of underprivileged groups, mainly LGBTQ people. However, anti-gender mobilisation has been evident since the 2010s. At first, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH—Kresťansko Demokratické Hnutie), the most conservative political force in Radičová's government, blocked the founding of the Committee for the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Persons. Meanwhile, Gabriele Kuby, a well-known anti-gender activist, delivered a series of speeches in Slovakia, while the Slovak Catholic church massively supported anti-gender sentiment in society through pastoral letters and other supportive activities favouring "traditional families" and "traditional marriages." In the Slovak context, traditional families and traditional marriages stand for heterosexual marriages and heterosexual families with children. As a result, in 2014, the Slovak parliament approved Constitutional Law no. 490/2014 defining marriage as a unique union between a man and a woman, following similar moves by other countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Lithuania. This anti-gender campaign culminated in the 2015 referendum on family, in support of traditional families and against the LGBTQ minority, but the referendum failed due to a low turnout (21.41%). Finally, anti-gender discourse resurfaced again in 2018–2019 when the Istanbul Convention became an object of debate in the parliament, which consequently contributed to another fragmentation of the Slovak political spectre.

Although recent studies have focused on gender and feminist perspectives on political issues in Slovakia, they have usually concentrated on selected aspects, such as the beginnings of female suffrage in Slovakia (Kobová, 2012), or revisited the November 1989 narratives through the lens of gender (Maďarová, 2016), contemporary feminism (Maďarová & Valkovičová, 2021), the gender gap in Slovak politics (Hudáčková & Malová, 2021; Sloboda et al., 2021), gender with a connection to far-right political parties (Ďurinová & Malová, 2017; Rashkova, 2021), the 2015 referendum (Synek Rétiová, 2022), and the Istanbul Convention (Očenášová, 2021). However, gender and illiberalism have been examined only in a limited way. In his study, Sekerák (2020) offered an analysis of illiberal populism in Slovakia but focused only on Slovak Catholics as they expressed themselves in their documents and statements rather than political parties and respective political positions per se. Guasti (2021), on the other hand, distinguished the Czech-Slovak nuances within the context of anti-gender rhetoric, but the investigation was primarily oriented on the Smer-SD as a dominant political actor. Then, Havlík and Hloušek (2021) contributed to illiberalism in their in-depth analysis comparing the V4 illiberal actors. They, nonetheless, also only defined Smer-SD as an illiberal actor.

This study draws upon all these previous studies, but our analysis strictly focuses on illiberal political actors and their parliamentary speeches. The structure of the article is as follows: First, the terms "gender" and "illiberalism" will be conceptualised, and their contemporary interconnections will be put forth; the circle of parties which fall on the "illiberal spectrum" of the Slovak political system will then be presented. Second, the methodology for this study is introduced; research is based on studying parliamentary debates and the overall process of gathering, coding, and visualising the data. Finally, our analysis will focus on the uniqueness and similarities of the results, discussed within the broader implications of Slovak domestic politics. The main goal of this article is to answer the following two research questions:

1. Who are the main actors in terms of the illiberal anti-gender discourse and which narratives do they postulate?
2. Is there any variation in the identified narratives?

2. Gender and Illiberalism: Conceptualisation, Mutual Relations, and the Slovak Context

The historical roots of "gender" and "illiberalism" are not direct, and both terms remain the subject of academic debate to this day. Gender is defined in many ways, depending on the context of the field of study in which it is used. Contemporary political scientists must consider at least four ways to operationalise the term gender: (a) physiological/biological aspects (sex); (b) gender identity or self-defined gender; (c) the legal gender; and (d) social gender in terms of norm-related behaviours and gender expressions (Lindqvist et al., 2021, p. 333). In general, gender can be conceptualized as a "thin" understanding of gender (as sex in binary terms) or a "thick" understanding (in binary and nonbinary terms; see Gwiazda, 2021). This article uses a "thick" conceptualisation while also including underprivileged sexual minorities (LGBTQ people).

The debate on the second key term, "illiberalism," began with Fukuyama's definition of an illiberal democracy as a political system where free elections, rule of law, separation of powers, and the protection of civil liberties are systematically undermined or do not exist (Zakaria, 1997). As Kauth and King (2020, p. 365) stated, "illiberalism has assumed an invigorated, if unanticipated, significance in the 21st century." In the recent attempt to conceptualise illiberalism, Laruelle (2022a, p. 304)

builds on the idea that illiberalism: (a) is a new ideological universe that, even if doctrinally fluid and context-based, is to some degree coherent; (b) represents a backlash against today's liberalism (political, economic, cultural, geopolitical, civilizational); (c) proposes solutions that are majoritarian, nation-centric, or sovereigntist, favouring traditional hierarchies and cultural homogeneity; and (d) calls for a shift from politics to culture and is post-post-modern in its claims of rootedness in an age of globalisation.

In general, illiberalism could be effectively conceptualised in two major ways, as "disruptive illiberalism" or as "ideological illiberalism" (Kauth & King, 2020). Disruptive illiberalism "describes antidemocratic illiberal practices…and the primary targets of such anti-democratic practices are what one might call liberal institutions, as well as electoral norms and procedures: the judiciary, the press, academia, and international NGOs" (Kauth & King, 2020, pp. 376–377). On the other hand, ideological illiberalism is characterised as "the practices that emerge from the politics of exclusion…and emerge from ideological constructions of inclusionary and exclusionary criteria" (Kauth & King, 2020, p. 380). Ideological illiberalism does not attack democratic institutions; it rather classifies "who is and who is not a full member of society based on ideological constructions of the societal in- and out-groups" (Kauth & King, 2020, p. 378).

The origin of current illiberalism in CEE is, according to Krastev and Holmes (2018), among other things, based on unsolved problems related to demographic collapse, and therefore "the arrival of foreigners will dilute national identities and weaken national cohesion." Rupnik (2016) explains that illiberal parties in the CEE gained power through a conception of nationhood that was based on ethnic and cultural homogeneity in the area, thus contrasting with Western nationhood, which is based on universalistic values and diversity. In Hungary, a significant illiberal laboratory, three important factors have helped Viktor Orbán establish an illiberal regime (Krekó & Enyedi, 2018, pp. 41–43): "changes in the electoral system," "spreading a threat from Hungarian MSZP governing between 2006–2010," and "Orbán's charismatic leadership." On the other hand, some authors argue that contemporary political illiberalism in CEE combines the reception of Western critiques of liberalism with a critique of the post-communist liberals' perceived lack of willingness to break with the communist past (Buzogány & Varga, 2018).

The conceptualisation of ideological illiberalism as mentioned above is crucial regarding the current illiberal tendencies of the unequal treatment of minority rights and exclusionist politics towards gender and LGBTQ policy issues, such as abortion, same-sex marriages, or adoption rights. The current CEE *kulturkampf* inherently combines both phenomena. The existing connection between illiberalism and anti-gender mobilisation, as Korolczuk and Graff (2018) stress, lies in the fact that illiberal and anti-gender movements build their rhetoric on the critique of gender because it has been seen as a new phase of global colonialism and a product of neoliberal order and globalisation. Petö (2022, p. 314) also argues that "the present form of illiberalism is a joint result of the structural failures of the European (neo)liberal democratic project, the dark legacy of European history, and the complexities of the concept of gender" (see also Laruelle, 2022b, p. 216). Some authors argue that anti-gender rhetoric serves as a "symbolic glue" for different actors from the far-right, (ultra-)conservative, and other different populist groups (Kováts & Poim, 2015), or for illiberal states per se (Petö, 2022). Accordingly, in their case studies of Poland and Hungary, Grzebalska and Petö (2018) have formulated a gendered modus operandi of the illiberal transformation that was based on three criteria: (a) illiberalism created as an opposition to the post-1989 neoliberal equal paradigm; (b) family mainstreaming and anti-gender politics have redefined security, equality, and human rights; and (c) illiberal transformation operates through the appropriation of key concepts, tools, and funding channels of liberal equality politics.

On the other hand, Graff and Korolczuk (2022, p. 4) have examined the relationships between anti-gender movements and far-right actors when discussing the "opportunistic synergy" over a "gender agenda," and understood it as a "part of a broader conflict where what truly was at stake was the future of democracy."

Transnational or European connections between anti-gender movements have also been analysed by other works. As Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) argue, however, there is a need to identify a component in the local contexts to understand its own specificities, and contemporary illiberal contestation of liberalism cannot be merely reduced to political parties or the political level as such; instead, it must be approached as a broader phenomenon (Buzogány & Varga, 2018).

Drawing upon Kauth and King's (2020) definition of ideological illiberalism and based on the data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, Figure 1 demonstrates a clear division between the Slovak liberal political and illiberal political spectrum. The first variable—*Galtan*—declares the position of the party in terms of the views on social and cultural values (0 = libertarian/postmaterialist, 5 = centrist, 10 = traditional/authoritarian). The second variable—*social lifestyle*—declares the party's position in terms of social lifestyle, e.g., equal rights for LGBTQ, gender equality, etc. (0 = strongly supporting liberal policies, 10 = strongly opposing liberal policies). Political parties such as Freedom and Solidarity (SaS—Sloboda a Solidarita), For the People (Za Ľudí), Network (Sieť), or Progressive Slovakia (PS—Progresívne Slovensko) have fallen into a bloc of parties on the centre-liberal party spectrum favouring social lifestyle issues. By contrast, other political parties such as the SNS, the Smer-SD, the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO—Obyčajní ľudia

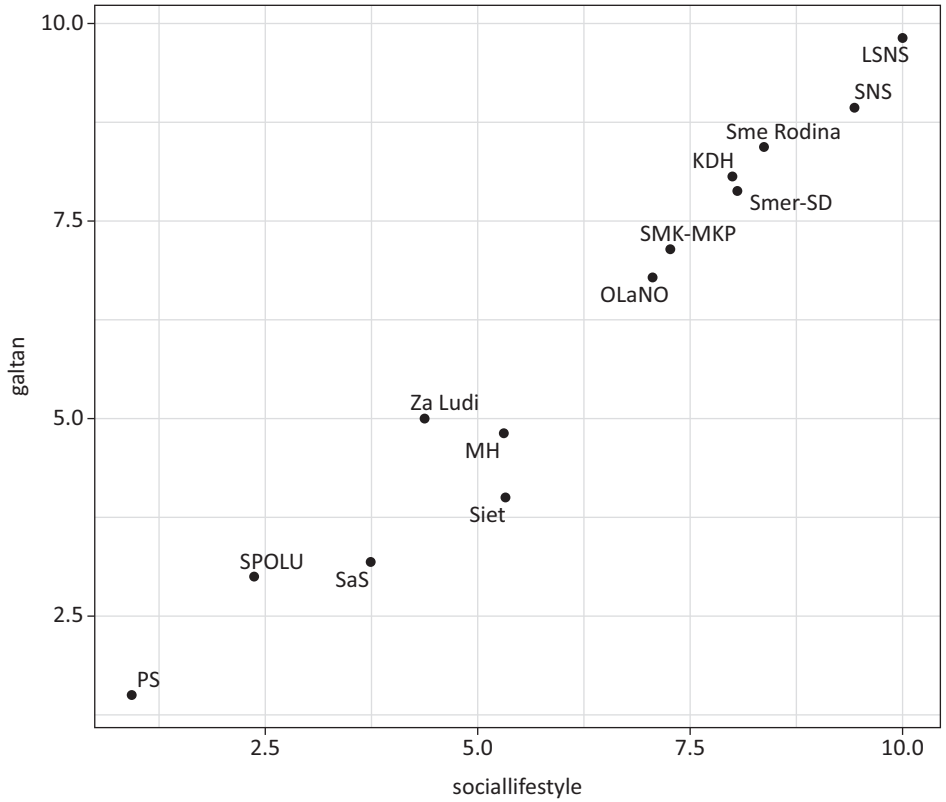

Figure 1. Positions of Slovak political parties (variables GAL-TAN, social lifestyle). Source: Based on data from Bakker (2020). Note: Appendix A in the Supplementary File includes acronyms for all political parties.

a nezávislé osobnosti), We Are Family (Sme Rodina), the People's Party of Our Slovakia (K-ĽSNS—Kotlebists), the Hungarian Community Party (SMK-MKP—Strana maďarskej komunity-Magyar Kőzősség Pártja), and the KDH have fallen into the opposite bloc of illiberal actors. All the illiberal parties, except for the non-parliamentary SMK-MKP, are included as objects in this analysis.

3. Methodology and Data

From a methodological point of view, this contribution can be categorised as a qualitative research study. That means it uses qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014; Schreier et al., 2019), which is widely used in political science for discourse- and speech act-oriented research (Hameleers, 2020; Janičatová & Mlejnková, 2021; Marek & Meislová, 2022; Meislová & Buckledee, 2021).

The data were obtained from the official website of the Slovak parliament (http://www.nrsr.sk) and transcripts of speeches were used accordingly. For the creation of the final corpus, a broadly utilised "gender" as an Anglicism was applied, even though the Slovak language also uses the other grammatical forms (gender—"rod"; e.g., gender equality—"*rodová rovnosť*"). Not only have politicians widely used this term, but the search function could also detect other related words in the language, such as "transgender." This effect provided the author with the possibility to not only focus on the main narratives of gender but also on other related sub-narratives regarding transgender and the LGBTQ community, thereby bringing a more comprehensive depiction of how illiberal actors have dealt not only with gender issues but also LGBTQ issues. For this analysis, only statements delivered by illiberal parties were considered relevant; however, the final corpus also contains statements by the centre-liberal parliamentary parties SaS, Za ľudí, and Sieť. Findings regarding these parties are not included in our final analysis. The parties have generally delivered 25 from all 110 detected speeches and comments that predominantly aimed to diminish stereotypes about women, supported gender equality policy, and rhetorically defended sexual minorities.

For this study, a unique dataset was created. It consists of speeches and commentaries given during the fifth to the eighth parliamentary term of the NRSR (the Slovak parliament), from 2010 until the end of 2021: In other words, from Radičová through Fico II and III to Heger's government. Data gathering started in 2010—when the political system in CEE countries stepped into the so-called "hurricane season" (Haughton & Deegan-Krause, 2015)—and stopped at the end of 2021. The data found was manually transferred from the official NRSR website to the MAXQDA 2020 software for further computer-assisted analysis. In general, "CAQDAS query tools can…provide frequency counts, but the query tools are designed to highlight thematic and conceptual patterns across a number of different

documents'' (Franzosi et al., 2013, p. 3228). This study uses an inductive coding approach; as a coding unit, the author chose the "theme," which is focused on identifying a coherent idea, regardless of whether the statement is contained in one sentence or a paragraph or within many sentences or paragraphs. For a more detailed description of founded themes, see Appendix B in the Supplementary File.

To maximise the trustworthiness and reliability of this study (see Elo et al., 2014), after finalising all the stages of the coding process wherein the main narratives or, if necessary, sub-narratives, had been detected, an independent coder was invited to review all methodological steps as described above and verify the detected themes/sub-themes, as outlined in Appendix B of the Supplementary File. As a result of this verification, some unclear statements, including the etymon "gender," were moved to the newly established category "positive or not important."

Lastly, some crucial notes must be stressed regarding the limits of this analysis. First, it is necessary to bear in mind that this article presents an analysis of parliamentary discourse only, not the whole political discourse. The result of some political parties, such as the KDH, which has played a significant role in this topic at the societal level, is clearly biased, but the party was nonetheless present in parliamentary debates during 2012–2016. On the other hand, another political actor, the long-term governing Smer-SD, used the parliamentary platform to articulate policies in a very limited way. Instead, the party used its own press conferences and social media platforms to promote their agenda. For example, an analysis of Slovak parliamentary discourse focused on spreading a conspiracy theory about George Soros has the same pattern for Smer-SD (see Zvada, 2022). Likewise, the newcomer Sme Rodina was profiled in the same manner. To strengthen the outputs of this analysis, we have decided to complement the results with secondary sources discussing the broader political media discourse in Slovakia to deliver a more complex picture. Finally, when main anti-gender arguments are illustrated, they will be cited in relation to the final corpus—the cited sources will not be included in the references. All quotations have been translated by the author.

4. Findings

Based on the criteria and methods as outlined above, 85 of the 110 collected speeches and comments—making up three-quarters of the whole parliamentary discourse containing "gender" as a keyword and counting 66,503 words—were given by the parties from the illiberal political spectre. At least two other important findings are displayed in Figure 2, namely that (a) the core of anti-gender discourse began in parliamentary debates after the 2016 parliamentary election and (b) the term "gender" was found to be slightly more prevalent in parliamentary comments than in the speeches themselves. The first finding is related to the fact that, after the 2016 parliamentary election, some populist parties such as Sme Rodina, the nationalist SNS, or the far-right K-ĽSNS entered the Slovak parliament and replaced traditionally moderate parties such as the Slovak Christian Democratic Union (SDKÚ—Slovenská demokraticko kresťanská únia) or the KDH. Regarding the second finding, the slight overrepresentation of parliamentary comments could be recognised as agreeing/disagreeing commentaries for given speeches. Those comments arose dominantly from the far-right K-ĽSNS party, which represented 33 of the total 47 parliamentary comments.

On the other hand, Figure 3 implies an asymmetric distribution of speeches and comments favouring the far-right K-ĽSNS, which were nominally given by 55 statements and occupied almost 65% of the anti-gender illiberal discourse; other actors gave a lower number of parliamentary speeches and comments, specifically as follows: OĽaNO (N = 11), SNS (N = 10), KDH (N = 5), Smer-SD (N = 2), and *Sme Rodina* (N = 2). Within the followed-up analysis, I follow the party-by-party approach, in ascending order, while the biased results of Smer-SD, KDH, and *Sme Rodina* will be considered in terms of their position within a broader political discourse, pertaining to their activities towards gender policy issues.

4.1. The Smer-SD

Despite the self-proclaimed social democratic orientation, the dominant political force in the Slovak political discourse, Smer-SD, stands in opposition to its declared values, such as the support of underprivileged minorities. The party's programmatic position is based on social issue politics rather than any defence and support of post-materialistic values. In fact, Slovak social democracy never adopted post-materialistic values. During the analysed period, only two parliamentary contributions on gender were made by the Smer-SD. The reference targeted a debate on the Istanbul Convention and later stressed the inconsistency of the rule of law and its terminology regarding the Slovak language, which could not distinguish between gender and sex. This was caused

Code System	6th parliamentary term (2012-2016)	7th parliamentary term (2016-2020)	8th parliamentary term (2020-2021)	SUM
Plenary Comments	1	30	16	47
Plenary Speech	8	20	10	38
Σ SUM	9	50	26	85

Figure 2. Share of illiberal parties' statements across parliamentary terms (speeches + comments in absolute numbers).

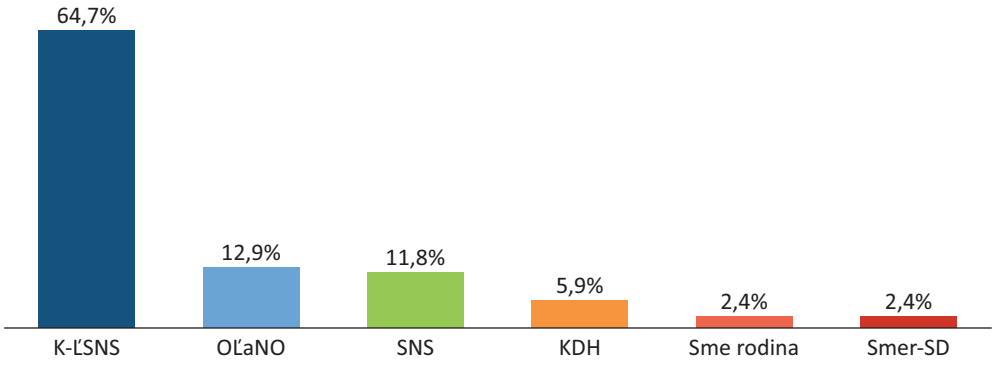

Figure 3. Share of statements across political parties (speeches + comments in percentages).

by the fact that many of the party members are educated as lawyers. Aside from this etymological problem, the Smer-SD deputies also acted against the Istanbul Convention, which they perceived as a threat to Slovak children because of the indoctrination of the educational system (see Figure 4).

In general, the Smer-SD managed gender issues according to the public polls rather than being based on a coherent agenda. However, the Smer-SD majority government established the Committee on the Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex Persons in late 2012. Considering that Smer-SD was the senior ruling party at the time, the party's position as expressed in the 2015 referendum was to support the vote; however, PM Fico stressed that this was no vital issue for Slovakia. In this case, there is a general understanding that Fico "exchanged his support for a ban on same-sex marriage for a proposed judicial reform" (Guasti, 2021, p. 201). The Smer-SD majority government also demonstrated this position when abandoning the National Action Plan on LGBTI Equality (known as ILGA Europe).

In this regard, the group of MPs led by Peter Pellegrini, who had split off from Smer-SD after the 2020 election, holds a more moderate and liberal position towards LGBTQ and gender issues. Since the Smer-SD split up, the party has changed the graphic visual and Pellegrini's party has become known as "Brussels' social democracy," while self-stylising itself in the position of so-called "rustic social democracy," defending the Slovak majority and being oriented strictly on economic and social problems, rather than post-material issues such as gender and environmentalism. It seems that the Smer-SD has never accepted the critique that loudly echoed after the Party European Socialist summit held in Prague in 2016, where the Smer-SD leader blamed social democrats from Western Europe for protecting LGBTQ and other minorities' rights rather than social and economic issues (Niňajová, 2016). Moreover, since its defeat in the 2020 parliamentary election, Smer-SD has continuously sharpened abusive rhetoric toward the LGBTQ community (Gehrerová, 2021).

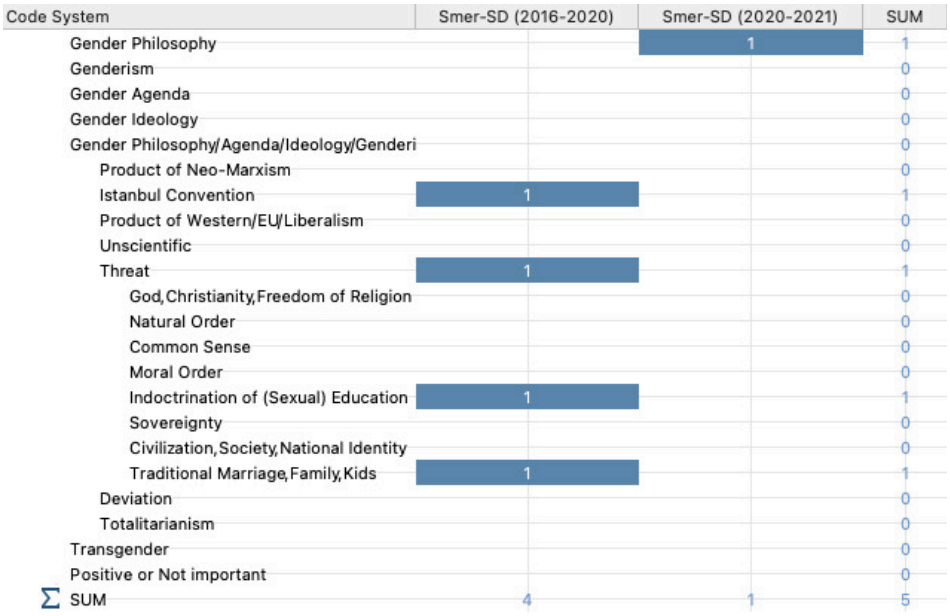

Figure 4. Smer-SD parliamentary discourse on gender: Structure of code system and founded themes.

4.2. The Sme Rodina

The populist Sme Rodina, led by billionaire Boris Kollár, with its ultraconservative wing led by Milan Krajniak, who proclaimed to be the "last crusader," has also given only two statements in the analysed period. In comparison to the Smer-SD, however, the party entered the Slovak parliament after the 2016 parliamentary election (see Figure 5). The party perceived gender ideology mainly as a product of the West and the EU, or in other words, as a "product of neo-Marxists who support migration and do not protect human life when they support abortions" (P. Marček in 2018).

Besides utilizing anti-gender rhetoric to attack the EU, the party also stressed the narrative that portrays gender as a threat to the Christian and Catholic heritage of Slovakia. Even though the party was not active within the parliamentary discourse, the party's stances significantly affected the Slovak gender policy, especially after the 2020 parliamentary election when the party became a member of the four-party coalition government and Krajniak was appointed as Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. At first, Krajniak nominated an ultraconservative publicist, Roman Joch, as the director of the Research Institute for Labour and Family. Afterwards, the long-term director of the Department of Gender Equality, Oľga Pietruchová, left office, and she even warned that the Ministry under Krajniak's leadership was "changing expert opinions in favour of the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia, and it was trying to completely erase the concept of gender equality from the general discourse" (Štefúnová, 2020). She also refused an official government position and attempts of some deputies from the government coalition to restrict the abortion law and she fully supported the Ombudsman's annual report.

4.3. The KDH

The 2012 election was the last in which the Slovak Christian democrats succeeded and secured involvement in parliamentary debates. In their statements, the KDH stylised itself as a defender of traditional family values, and the party was in strong opposition to any progressive activity as the defender of the Christian ethos of the country. The KDH used anti-gender rhetoric that depicted gender as an ideology or philosophy (see Figure 6). Its parliamentary rhetoric clearly stated that the KDH utilised gender as a natural ideological opponent, as a product of the Western world, liberalism, and the EU. Using Kuby's metaphor, these Christian democrats understood gender ideology as "camouflaging the truth and euphemistically softening the unpleasant aspects of the culture of death" (M. Kvasnička in 2013). Branding gender as a product of neo-Marxism also appeared.

Even though the KDH's tradition goes back to 1993, the party could not communicate its conservative agenda at the parliamentary level after the 2016 parliamentary election. As a result, conservative voters left the party and decided to choose from other parties representing the traditional elements of politics. However, the most important aspect is that these Christian democrats, after defeats in the last elections, did not openly support happenings that represented a counterbalance to gay pride, for instance. There is no doubt that the KDH would leave Catholic values and principles in day-by-day politics. In general, though, the party abandoned broader political debates on gender and LGBTQ issues. After the new KDH executive *praesidium* was elected, the new party chairman, Milan Majer, stressed other priorities, such as economic and social policy rather than cultural issues. Consequently, the party moved to a more moderate and centrist position.

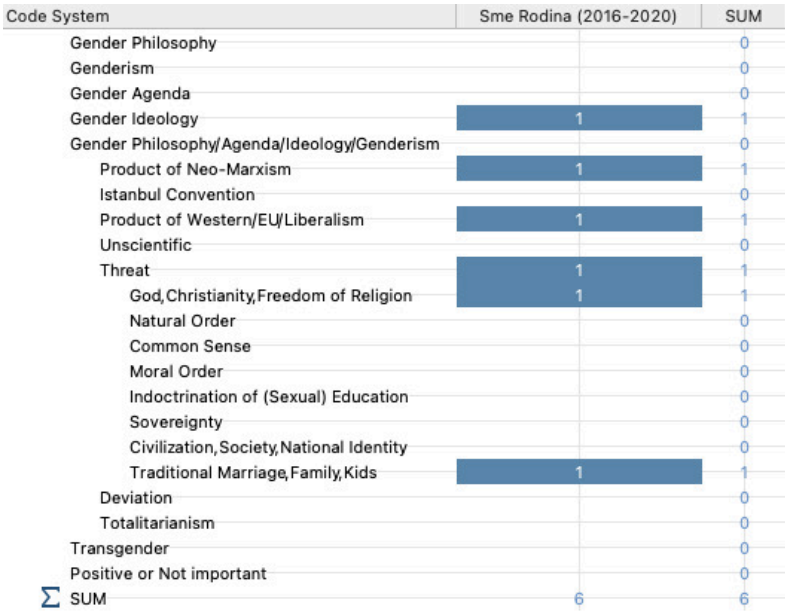

Figure 5. Sme Rodina parliamentary discourse on gender: Structure of code system and founded themes.

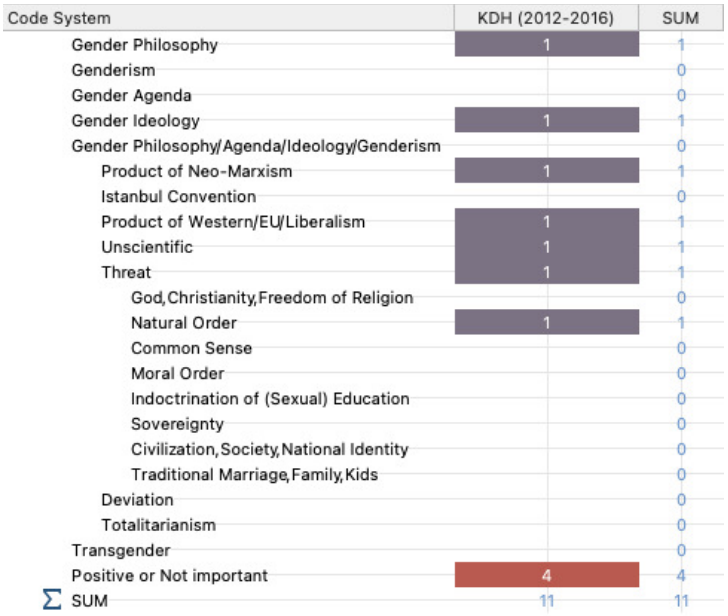

Figure 6. KDH parliamentary discourse on gender: Structure of code system and founded themes.

4.4. The OĽaNO

The OĽaNO provides an interesting case regarding gender policy issues. It is predominantly an anti-corruption party, and thanks to this position it has won the latest election, beating the dominant Smer-SD party (Lysek et al., 2020). The heterogeneous basis of the movement can be also seen in value issues. The party is internally split into less conservative or moderate and ultraconservative blocs.

From 11 statements that were given on gender between 2010–2021, a wide range of opinions and attitudes were detected (see Figure 7). For example, Matovič, as the party leader, explicitly denies any rights for LGBTQ couples to raise children. By contrast, other MPs addressed supportive statements defending the LGBTQ community against hate speeches, spreading fear, and moral panic delivered by the Kotlebists during the debate on the Istanbul Convention. The internal split within the party was evident during the amendments of the Slovak Constitution in favour of traditional families, when only four out of 13 OĽaNO MPs voted for the changes. Regarding the discussion on the Istanbul Convention, one of the main figures of the ultraconservative wing of the OĽaNO movement, Richard Vašečka, summarizes the main argument against the convention

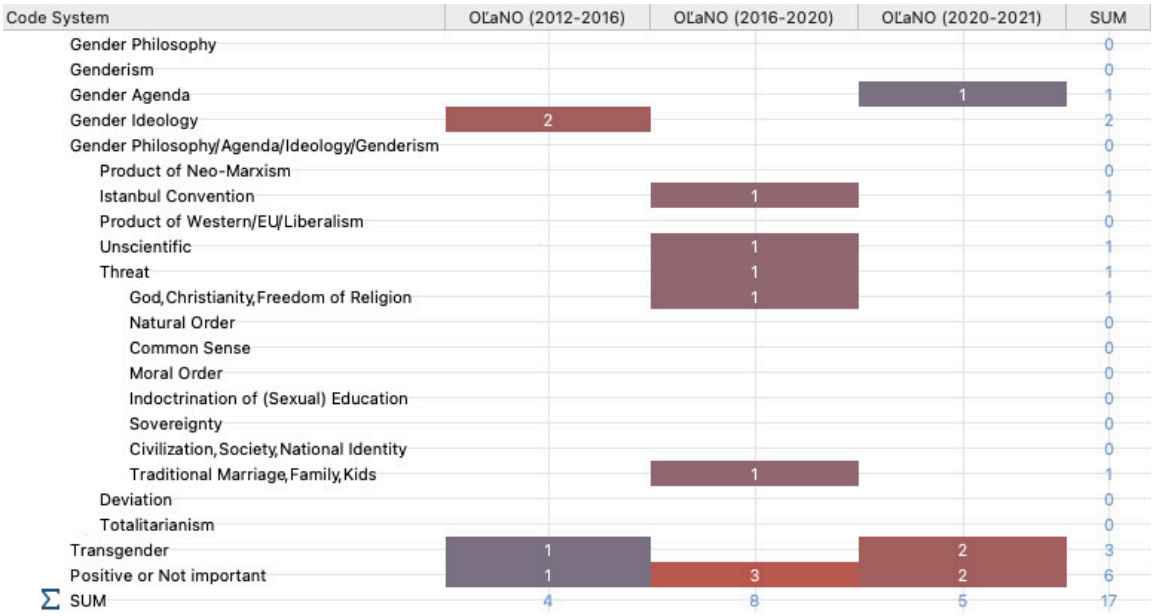

Figure 7. OĽaNO parliamentary discourse on gender: Structure of code system and founded themes.

as follows: "Let us reject the unscientific gender ideology in our legislation because it is an experiment on children which threatens the rights of parents and also religious freedoms" (R. Vašečka in 2018).

4.5. The SNS

The position of the SNS was, as in the case of the KDH, determined by only one parliamentary term. Despite this fact, the SNS party delivered double the number of speeches that the KDH did. The centripetal position of the SNS on gender oscillated around the Istanbul Convention. The chosen rhetoric strategy was, however, different from the KDH because the overall argumentation, based on defending Christianity and the Catholic character of the Slovak Republic, was absent (see Figure 8).

The party mostly stressed Istanbul Convention as a valuable tool of gender ideology which would bring along indoctrination within the whole Slovak educational system. Therefore, the SNS also fought against the EU's control mechanism (GREVIO, the expert body) of monitoring gender equality and minority rights covered by the agreement and later described as weakening the nation-state and sovereignty in favour of the EU. Slovak nationalists highlight the civilisational dimension when outlining gender as a threat to the Slovak nation due to the moral decline of the liberal West and the EU. The MPs of SNS also instrumentalised and used a transnational argument, perceiving gender as a "neoliberal truth" (A. Hrnko in 2019). The party's position within the Slovak parliamentary discourse has rather defended national aspects—not the religious ones threatened by "gender ideology," but the protection of the traditional family and children from indoctrination through education were detected. The SNS used anti-gender rhetoric against the Istanbul Convention and as a mobilisation tool to strengthen its Eurosceptic position. This position is not surprising especially considering the foreign policy orientation of the SNS regarding Russia and bearing in mind political inspiration from other illiberal and populist politicians across Europe, such as Orbán and Salvini, or Putin's Russia.

4.6. The K-ĽSNS

The most comprehensive anti-gender rhetoric was utilised by the far-right party, the K-ĽSNS, which accounted for 55 out of the 85 illiberal speeches analysed. The party ideology of K-ĽSNS was based on ethno-nationalist and exclusionist principles of nativism (Mudde, 2007). In 2019, the party had to face the threat of being dissolved because of its anti-system and anti-democratic policy approach. This far-right actor has represented a whole spectrum of anti-gender arguments, and at least three important implications were derived from the analysed parliamentary debates. First, the K-ĽSNS used anti-gender rhetoric to promote anti-liberal, anti-democratic, and Eurosceptic ideologies. The party has actively denied Popper's "open society," which the Slovak K-ĽSNS has understood as a:

> Society in which foreign minorities are often to have greater rights than the domestic majority. A society ruled by feminism and gender ideology, already despising our children and disintegrating families. A society in which drugs and prostitution are legalised. Moreover, finally, a society that supports the so-called LGBTQ community, i.e., the community of sexual deviations. It is an amoral, divided society. (R. Schlosár in 2016)

Code System	SNS (2016-2020)	SUM
Gender Philosophy	1	1
Genderism		0
Gender Agenda		0
Gender Ideology	11	11
Gender Philosophy/Agenda/Ideology/Genderism		0
Product of Neo-Marxism		0
Istanbul Convention	11	11
Product of Western/EU/Liberalism	2	2
Unscientific		0
Threat	4	4
God, Christianity, Freedom of Religion		0
Natural Order		0
Common Sense	2	2
Moral Order	1	1
Indoctrination of (Sexual) Education	6	6
Sovereignty	2	2
Civilization, Society, National Identity	1	1
Traditional Marriage, Family, Kids	2	2
Deviation	2	2
Totalitarianism		0
Transgender	1	1
Positive or Not important		0
Σ SUM	46	46

Figure 8. SNS parliamentary discourse on gender: Structure of code system and founded themes.

The K-ĽSNS' rhetoric contains gender ideology spreading from the "Brussels Babylon tower" organised and led by the "neo-Marxist Zionists group" (S. Mizík in 2016). As shown in Figure 9, the K-ĽSNS introduced a far more universally spread argument based on threatening the Western civilisation whilst simultaneously stressing both the universality of Christianity and the importance of protecting Slovak Catholicism when stating: "This is a direct attack on the essence of the whole European civilisation on the essence of our culture, nations, faith, and simply everything" (M. Mazurek in 2019). Second, the K-ĽSNS fully opted for ultraconservative Catholic rhetoric related to protecting traditional families, marriages, and the morals of raising future generations. While the SNS criticised the Istanbul Convention due to the assumed loss of Slovakia's sovereignty because of control mechanisms, the K-ĽSNS stressed the need not only to protect the educational system against any gender indoctrination as seen in the Istanbul Convention but also to protect "young children from various forms of deviance promotion" (M. Mazurek in 2021). Thirdly, just as K-ĽSNS used xenophobia in previous cases regarding rhetoric on Jews, Romani, or Muslims (Voda et al., 2021; Zvada, 2018), the party used the most abusive and heterosexist language in its speeches regarding gender topics. In this manner, the party labels gender ideology, transgender, and the LGBTQ community as synonymous with deviance. For this party, the Pride festival events are mere "carnivals of mentally disturbed exhibitionists" (M. Uhrík in 2017). In other words, and from a broader perspective:

> I want to tell everyone that imposing gender ideology is a perversion and a crime. Moreover, those who have this gender ideology and the LGBTQ, and I do not know all these similar ideologies, that promote it are perverted, they are crazy, and they are criminals. (N. Grausová in 2019)

In this case, the far-right MPs argued while using a rationalist and conservative worldview because a "rationally conservative person cannot identify with gender ideology" (M. Mazurek in 2019).

Finally, even though gender studies as a field of social sciences does not exist in Slovakia, "inspired" by the Hungarian case (see Petö, 2021), the Slovak far-right, alongside the SNS and KDH, has also attacked it as an "unscientific discipline" (M. Mazurek in 2019) and has presented it as a redundant field of study that would be a waste of time and money that "could have been spent more meaningfully" (S. Drobný in 2019).

5. Conclusion

The qualitative content analysis of this study, as provided by CAQDAS, analysed the anti-gender parliamentary discourse, and it has identified several significant findings. From the total of 110 detected parliamentary speeches containing "gender" as the keyword, 85 of them were given by the illiberal political parties. These statements were delivered mainly after the 2016 parliamentary election when some populist or far-right forces entered the Slovak parliament and replaced moderate and traditional parties. Most importantly, this article finds that the occurrence and range of anti-gender narratives of illiberal parties are diverse. Although some previous studies claim that the Slovak parties have adopted the same attitude towards the idea of gender ideology (Ďurinová, 2015), the results of this study suggest that the opposite is the case, and thus the previous observations offered insufficient explanations.

Code System	K-ĽSNS (2016-2020)	K-ĽSNS (2020-2021)	SUM
Gender Philosophy	1		1
Genderism	2	6	8
Gender Agenda	4	5	9
Gender Ideology	32	5	37
Gender Philosophy/Agenda/Ideology/Genderism			0
Product of Neo-Marxism	4	3	7
Istanbul Convention	15	2	17
Product of Western/EU/Liberalism	8	4	12
Unscientific	3	2	5
Threat	13	15	28
God, Christianity, Freedom of Religion	3	1	4
Natural Order	2	1	3
Common Sense		2	2
Moral Order		4	4
Indoctrination of (Sexual) Education	2	8	10
Sovereignty		1	1
Civilization, Society, National Identity	5	6	11
Traditional Marriage, Family, Kids	9	19	28
Deviation	2	8	10
Totalitarianism	2		2
Transgender	12	10	22
Positive or Not important	4		4
Σ SUM	123	102	225

Figure 9. K-ĽSNS discourse on gender: Structure of code system and founded themes.

It is evident from this article, and despite the limits of a corpus based only on parliamentary speeches and comments, that the parties' anti-gender rhetoric and anti-gender arguments significantly varied according to their ideological background. Smer-SD, which is a self-claimed Slovak social democratic party, has neglected gender policy issues and only stressed the legal aspects proposed in the Istanbul Convention when contributing to the parliamentary debate. On the other hand, the populist Sme Rodina has primarily articulated gender as a threat to Slovak Catholics. The OĽaNO, the winner of the latest parliamentary election, has represented an internally split political party, and its position on gender policy has varied from ultraconservative to moderate and centrist positions. The KDH, a traditional political party representing Christian values and principles, predominantly used a narrative depicting gender as a threat to traditional families and traditional marriages. However, the party also stressed the ideological aspect of seeing gender as a product of decadent western liberalism from which conservatism must be protected. The national party, SNS, tended to more nationalistic and Eurosceptic rhetoric in their speeches when arguing that future sovereignty would be lost in favour of the EU if the Istanbul Convention was ratified. Finally, the far-right K-ĽSNS has used a wide range of arguments as mentioned above. The Kotlebists were situated, especially when the KDH did not enter the parliament after the 2016 election, as a protector of traditional values, families, and marriages and as guardians of western civilisation, threatened by gender ideology. The K-ĽSNS also utilised the most abusive and heterosexist language towards transgender people and other members of the LGBTQ community (marking them as "deviant" or comparing these people to zoophiles or paedophiles) in their speeches. This is the same hate-speech strategy that the far-right party used against the Roma people, Muslims, and Jews.

As it seems, anti-gender rhetoric will not be overcome soon. Even though Igor Matovič, the OĽaNO leader, had proclaimed the status quo on cultural issues due to the process of forming a new government after the 2020 parliamentary election, an ultraconservative wing from within the OĽaNO, led by Anna Záborská, recently initiated a bill restricting access to abortion (Kafkadesk.org, 2021). Moreover, the K-ĽSNS deputies and a newly established far-right party called Republika initiated other constitutional changes in favour of the concept of the traditional family, openly inspired by Orbán's laws in Hungary. They have also started a constitutional change suggesting that gender identities are immutable and strictly determined at birth (M. Beluský in 2021). Even though Buštíková and Guasti (2017) claimed that Slovakia is rather illiberal-swerving than illiberal-turning, anti-gender rhetoric has settled in the broader Slovak political discourse. It could be a significant warning. This "symbolic glue," as Grzebalska and Petö (2018) have shown, has been used by the illiberal parties in Poland and Hungary to rise to power by countering the gender equality paradigm. In the Slovak case, it is disturbing that two of the three points of the "gendered modus operandi of illiberal transformation" (Grzebalska & Petö, 2018) can be observed in Slovak discourse. If Slovak society accepts anti-gender rhetoric and the exclusion of underprivileged groups, the "seductive lure" of authoritarianism, the so-called "Orbanization" (see Applebaum, 2020; Tharoor, 2022), or what political theorists call disruptive illiberalism should be closer than expected.

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Conflict of Interests

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Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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Article

Disputing "Gender" in Academia: Illiberalism and the Politics of Knowledge

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Abstract
This article explores the attacks to which gender studies programs in Central and Eastern Europe have been subject and the responses such attacks have elicited in the context of analogous phenomena in other parts of the world. The undermining of gender studies in recent years has been aggravated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic that has exacerbated financial crises of educational institutions while also—in some contexts—providing cover for restrictions on academic freedom. Our specific focus here, however, is on how illiberal policies have limited the scope of academic gender studies, sometimes calling into question their very existence. To identify the modalities through which illiberal governments may narrow gender studies programs, we draw on Pirro and Stanley's analysis of illiberal policymakers' toolkit based on "forging," "breaking," and "bending." We consider these categories useful for our analysis but add a fourth: "de-specification"—a purposeful submersion, or redefinition, of gender studies into other programs, such as family studies. Our purpose is not to present an exhaustive analysis but rather to delineate a framework for analyzing such attacks and the responses to which they have given rise, and then to indicate some questions for further research. As such, this article should be read as a work in progress that seeks to explicate the modalities of the attacks on gender studies in higher education to which contemporary illiberalism has given rise concomitantly with attacks on gender rights and emerging forms of resistance that bespeak the resilience of the gender academy.

Keywords
anti-gender attacks; Eastern Europe; gender studies; illiberalism; resilience; resistance

Issue
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1. Introduction

That gender rights—understood as both women's rights generally and rights related to gender identity and sexual orientation and expression—have been targets of populist/illiberal movements and governments in the past decade, both nationally and internationally, is well documented (Ergas, 2019; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Pető, 2021c). Attacks on "gender," often represented as critiques of "gender ideology," have been seen to function as the "symbolic glue" of illiberal coalitions (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Grzebalska et al., 2017; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Pető, 2015). As was confirmed by a (non-representative) survey by the Women and Gender in Global Affairs (WGGA) network conducted among directors of gender programs, in a general context marked by declining academic freedom (Kinzelbach et al., 2021), the "gender academy" (understood here as the ensemble of institutions and scholars who have advanced critical knowledge variously focused on women's, LGBTQI+, and gender generally) can—and, at times, has—become subject to marginalization, defunding, stigmatization, and, even, outright closure or de-facto silencing and expulsion. At the same time, significant counter-movements have

become visible both inside and outside academic institutions as scholars, and, at times, administrators, have sought to protect (and sometimes enhance) the gender academy and its work.

This double-movement between repression and resistance portends an ongoing struggle to maintain a space for research and teaching on gender that is simultaneously theoretical and practical. It is theoretical since it references academic disciplines and centralizes intellectual debate; it is practical since it self-consciously constitutes a critical "pedagogy" of future practitioners of gender equality. As scholars participating in the WGGA workshop in Paris in 2018 (conducted under the Chatham House rule), academia has come to play a key role in defining the vocabulary of practitioners (WGGA, 2018). And although this poses risks on both sides—flattening academic discourse into technocratic training on one hand and freighting practical knowledge with extraneous discursive apparatuses on the other (Ergas, 2019)—the importance of academic centers as crucibles of critically trained practitioners seems undeniable. We can only conjecture—but, based on our own experience and the accounts of other scholars, we are willing to risk guessing at what we cannot (yet) substantiate—that gender studies programs have proven to be incubators not simply of future critical gender studies academics (although that, in itself, would be significant) but also of policy-makers and politicians engaged in multiple arenas, from international organizations to national and local governments, as well as from INGOs and NGOs to the corporate world. In short, gender studies programs have contributed to the re-visioning of gender as a fundamental dimension of social organization, providing a perhaps paradoxical explanation for why illiberal states and movements—intent on negating the legitimacy of "gender" as an organizing frame of knowledge—have expended resources to undermine the programs that have advanced the understanding of gender as an organizing principle of so many societies. Far from being seen as marginal centers of esoteric intellectualism, the "gender academy" and its sites have been perceived by illiberals as crucibles of "dangerous" thought. Pirro and Stanley (2021, p. 88) note that "the *common set* of liberal democratic principles…on which the post-1989 political order was founded," included "the creation of a pluralistic public sphere…and cultural pluralism." In this perspective, gender studies may be seen as a manifestation of liberalism, and thus an object of concern for illiberal politics.

But how have the attacks on the "gender academy" proceeded, and how have they been countered? Let us begin by saying that we do not present an exhaustive analysis of such attacks. Rather, we use a largely qualitative mixed method approach to delineate their principal modalities and to identify possible (and actual) responses. It is important to stress that our analysis builds on the work of previous scholars—often but not always focused on individual case studies (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017), but that we have also for several years we have gathered data through mapping gender studies and the attacks to which they have been subjected. After briefly outlining our methodology, we first discuss how the processes through which gender studies were institutionalized in the academy may create particular vulnerabilities (ATHENA-Network, 2010; Pető, 2019; Rossman, 2021; Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 2003; Zimmermann, 2008), then explore the modalities through which illiberal states may and have undermined the "gender academy" (Coughlan, 2018; Kourou, 2020; Teixeira, 2019), and finally delineate emerging resistance strategies (Aktas et al., 2018; Lilleslåtten, 2018; WGGA, 2020, 2021a, 2021b).

In analyzing the modalities that illiberal states have deployed, we draw on the framework articulated by Pirro and Stanley (2021) in their analysis of the "illiberal playbook" utilized in Hungary and Poland. Pirro and Stanley identified three principal modalities of illiberal policymaking: forging, breaking, and bending. We adopt—and adapt—these modalities but add a fourth: de-specification. Pirro and Stanley (2021, p. 90) understand forging as the process of making "changes that break substantially with a mainstream consensus without necessarily challenging the rule of law." Breaking refers to the process of enacting "legislative actions that are contrary to both domestic and international law, constituting a direct breach of the constitutional order and of liberal-democratic principles" (Pirro & Stanley, 2021). Bending entails a "policy change consistent with the letter of the law but in contradiction to its spirit. It involves the reinterpretation or disabling of existing legislative constraints in ways that are not procedurally illegal but subvert/defy liberal democratic norms" (Pirro & Stanley, 2021). Finally, *de-specification* refers to the rebranding and submersion of gender studies into other programs, generally under different names, in ways that effectively empty them of critical import. Although states have mobilized different strategies, the net effect has been to weaken gender studies programs as sites of knowledge production, transfer, and academic authorization and, thus, at least hypothetically, as crucibles of critical advocacy and policymaking.

Pirro and Stanley (2021, pp. 87, 90) note that "there is more than one way to deploy" the liberal playbook, and we agree: We illustrate bending, for example, with instances in which state allocations for university budgets have been restricted, but also with maneuvers to limit access to foreign funders (Surman & Rossman, 2022, p. 36). Overall, we find that each modality may have drastic consequences and that the gender academy is developing a variety of resistance strategies in response. Although we advance some hypotheses about the relationship between the typology of attacks, the vulnerabilities associated with the pathways to the institutionalization of gender studies programs, and the forms of resistance that have become manifest, we conclude that further analysis is required to understand these connections.

2. Methodology

This article draws primarily on qualitative reports regarding attacks on gender studies programs and the forms of resistance they have engendered. Between 2017 and 2019, the WGGA network mapped the development of gender studies programs globally. Building on these initial mappings, for this article we sought to identify programs that had come under threat and the modalities by which they were being targeted. To this end, we drew on media reports and advocacy platforms as well as on published comprehensive research (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Pető, 2020). We complemented the results of our analyses with findings derived from discussions hosted in 2020 and 2021 by the WGGA network with gender scholars, directors of gender programs, and formal and informal academic networks—and with the results of a survey we conducted before such discussions—as well as with insights from webinars organized in 2018–2020 on the politics of language and the issue of gender, gender under threat, and the gendered effects of Covid-19. A survey regarding pressures on the gender academy, the forms they may have taken budgetary restrictions, and possible countervailing measures was conducted before WGGA met with directors of academic gender programs. We further deepened our analysis by focusing on the attacks related to the gender academy that we had identified in a subset of countries—Brazil, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Kyrgyzstan—which is not intended as a representative sample of the universe of illiberal governments that have, or may, target the gender academy. Overall, we found that, while in some contexts the gender academy continues to operate and, indeed, thrive, it has come under threat in multiple regions. Those attacks have sometimes followed one another in a phenomenon we could term an "illiberal cascade." Thus, for example, Poland threatened to end gender study programs in the aftermath of Hungary's ban on gender studies (Wilson-McDonald, 2021). We subsequently identified strategies deployed by gender scholars to counter the attacks to which they had been subjected.

3. Pathways to Institutionalization and the Underlying Vulnerabilities of Gender Studies Programs

Research conducted in recent years has highlighted the multiple trajectories that have led to the institutionalization of women's studies, and, subsequently, gender studies programs in Europe (ATHENA-Network, 2010). But although the specific trajectories have varied, the political imbrication of the gender academy seems to frequently recur—in this sense, both the integration of gender studies into the academy and the connotations it acquires differentiate it from, let us conjecture, engineering. Gender studies (under whose capacious label we include women's studies and LGBTQI+ studies) almost inevitably appear first as a site of critical knowledge, although it has now, at times, also come to be perceived as a depoliticized and depoliticizing locus of, at best, technocratic professionalization (Halley et al., 2018, 2019; Scott, 2008). In North America and Western Europe (at least), political critique was constitutive of a field that emerged as a result—and accelerator—of gender-based mobilizations. Here, early gender studies programs grew out of "second wave" feminist mobilizations, which, in turn, were frequently associated with student and other mobilizations (for the United States see, e.g., Howe, 1979; for the case of Italy see Balbo, 1981; Balbo & Ergas, 1982). The nexus with the women's movement also entailed a close connection with feminist organizations, and sometimes resulted in the establishment of extra-academic centers for the production and socialization of critical knowledge regarding gender (Addis Saba et al., 1992).

In other parts of the world, however—including several countries on which we touch here—the institutionalization of gender studies programs is associated with processes of democratization, including, albeit not exclusively, the incentives provided by international organizations and governmental and private foreign entities for the integration of gender rights—especially, perhaps, women's rights—into both national policies and academia. In either case, whether gender studies emerged as a result of feminist mobilizations outside the academy that also, and inevitably, engaged women either already in or oriented towards academic careers, or in association with processes of democratization, their institutionalization bore the marks of politics. The political imbrication of gender studies programs is, then, related to their institutional trajectories as well as to their intellectual foundations in critical thought. It is important to stress that the constitutive link between politics and gender studies in no way implies a uniformity of political orientations among gender scholars or in their programs—where, indeed, technocratic policy analysts may be found as well as radical critical thinkers. Nonetheless, this linkage—as well as the role played by extra-academic organizations—has partially contributed to the vulnerability of gender studies in contexts of rising illiberalism independently from its different historical antecedents.

These vulnerabilities may be accentuated by the international connectivity that has come to characterize the field. In part, that connectivity is manifest in the construction of gender studies bibliographies (Griffin & Braidotti, 2002). But it is also evident in the development of international scholarly associations and networks, including WISE, AIOFE, and ATHENA, which ultimately merged in the establishment of ATGENDER, the European Association for Gender, Research and Documentation (ATHENA-Network, 2010). This conspicuously international—and, for many, European—dimension has surely heightened the gender academy's susceptibility to "nativist" populist illiberal accusations that cast gender as a concept and the gender academy

as a set of individuals and institutions as importers of foreign influences, hostile to national traditions. The issue was further explored in the WGGA webinar "The Politics of Language and the Question of "Gender" in 2018. In this optic, "gender" is a per se foreign idea. But it also scrambles organicist visions of the nation—as well as of theologically-embedded views of the sexual order—opening a space for a critique of the (potentially or latently as well as overtly) conflictual power relations that forge gender identities and trajectories.

Indeed, in several of the countries we explored, the emergence of women's movements—and the engagement of scholars within them—provided an essential impetus to the development of academic programs. In Brazil and Turkey, women's and gender studies emerged in parallel with feminist social movements and the growth in feminist scholarship (Veleda da Silva & Lan, 2007; Yelsalı Parmaksız, 2019). For instance, feminist movements with varying orientations and sociological characteristics flourished in Brazil, fuelled by leftist and Marxist ideas, and emboldened by the resistance against the military regime (Veleda da Silva & Lan, 2007). This broad mobilization of women gave rise to the establishment of groups and research centers in various Brazilian universities beginning in 1983 (Centre for Interdisciplinary Women's Studies, n.d.). In Turkey, feminist scholars' mobilizations laid the groundwork for the creation of women's studies programs: The first one opened officially in 1989 at Istanbul University, with the inauguration of an MA program in women's studies the following year (Yelsalı Parmaksız, 2019).

But in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe, the political changes at the end of the 1980s prompted scholars to undertake extensive research focused on the application of what was then viewed as "Western theories" and concepts to contextually and culturally different geographies (Temkina & Zdravomyslova, 2003) and facilitated international exchanges regarding theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches to issues concerning women and gender relations (Pető, 2019). In Eastern European states, gender studies education often started with individual courses, which then evolved into programs, certificate programs, and accreditation for MA or PhD degrees. The enthusiasm catalyzed by the fall of totalitarian regimes was reflected in the efforts of individual scholars and activists to establish gender and women's studies, with the first centers opening in the early 1990s and operating under the auspices of academies of sciences and national institutions. The Moscow Centre for Gender Studies was founded in 1990 as part of the Institute for Socio-Economic Population Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The center collaborated with international organizations such as the UN and the World Bank, as well as with the Russian government in supporting its effort to fulfill its international obligations in gender policy (Zimmermann, 2008). In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, gender studies continued to spread from Moscow and St. Petersburg to other cities in the former Soviet space, such as Samara and Ivanovo (Rossman, 2021).

Women-focused NGOs also played an important role in developing and teaching knowledge relating to gender in Russia and Central and Eastern Europe. Some women's NGOs established women's studies centers that either found some support in state-run universities—the Belgrade Women's Studies Centre, for instance, obtained accreditation for several courses from the University of Belgrade—or remained independent (University of Belgrade, 2015). In the second half of the 1990s, several Western foundations—including MacArthur, Soros, Ford, and Carnegie—provided opportunities for both state and private universities in Eastern Europe and, to a lesser extent, in the former Soviet Union, to establish gender and women's studies programs (Minchenia et al., 2017). However, the state-supported initiatives proved more vulnerable to state involvement (Zimmermann, 2008).

In Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries, gender studies followed the Russian path and began emerging in the mid-1990s with financial support packages earmarked for democratization processes (Zimmermann, 2008). Initially, they were limited to single courses or research centers at state institutions despite the thriving NGO scene dominated by organizations focusing on women's rights and women's empowerment (Sabitova, 2018). The first centers for gender studies emerged in the early 2000s: In Kazakhstan, the Centre for Gender Studies was established at Al-Farabi Kazakh State National University with the support of UNESCO (Shakirova, 2017); in Kyrgyzstan, the Centre for Critical Gender Studies was officially launched in 2017, offering a minor degree and specialization programs for students from the American University of Central Asia (Kim & Karioris, 2018).

In sum, gender studies programs in the countries we considered for this article were shaped through processes of institutionalization that reflected the emergence, strength, and longevity of women's (and likely also LGBTQI+) mobilizations and of affiliated NGOs, impacted their ability to integrate into state-supported universities or private institutions, and affected their financial sustainability and intellectual autonomy, especially in contexts in which neoliberalism informed university policies (Bellolio, 2022; Labanino & Dobbins, 2022; Pető, 2021a). Public programs were exposed to disabling state interventions, including budget cuts, program renaming, dean or rector removal, and closure. Privately supported programs became reliant on foreign funding and hence were vulnerable to state interventions that limited access to such funding (Rossman, 2021). But it may be that the continued (or perhaps renewed) links with gender-based movements and the NGOs associated with them, as well as the links established with international gender studies programs and organizations have contributed to fostering the search for innovative responses to the attacks to which they

have been subjected both by neoliberal restructuring and by illiberal attacks.

4. Threats to Gender Studies Programmes

Anti-gender campaigns are highly organized, well-funded, and global anti-gender players, which might include concerned citizens' initiatives, faith-based organizations, and governments from Russia, Brazil, United States and more (Washington et al., 2021). But how do such campaigns operate in different contexts? As noted above, building on—and further articulating—the frameworks proposed by Pirro and Stanley (2021), we identify four principal modalities utilized to undermine gender studies programs in our focus countries: Brazil, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Turkey, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan. While we address the various modalities separately, it is important to note that each may be deployed in combination with others. Moreover, the boundaries of the different modalities are somewhat porous; nonetheless, as the following paragraphs show, we find that each has a distinctive core, and may be identified with distinct policies.

4.1. Breaking

Breaking is defined by Pirro and Stanley (2021) as entailing legislative changes that directly challenge the constitutional order. Arguably, this definition may be applied to any intervention that undermines established norms regarding academic freedom. We use it, however, in a narrower sense, to indicate the shuttering of gender studies programs. We found breaking emblematically expressed in the Orbán government's decision to close academic gender studies programs in Hungary. That decision—adumbrated in the declaration of a spokesman for President Orbán that "we do not consider it acceptable to talk about socially constructed genders" (Kent & Tapfumaneyi, 2018)—appeared to spark analogous policies by governments elsewhere in the region. Thus, we also saw the Romanian parliament, in June 2020, attempt to ban educational institutions from teaching theories that separate gender from biological sex (Coughlan, 2018; Ilie, 2020). Whereas in Hungary the policy of closure succeeded, forcing Central European University's gender studies programs to relocate to its Vienna campus in Austria, in Romania, countervailing student mobilizations effectively helped to block the proposed legislation from becoming law.

4.2. Bending

Bending is understood as policy changes that conform to existing law (or policy) but contradict its basic purpose, undermining existing "legislative constraints in ways that are not procedurally illegal but subvert/defy liberal democratic norms" (Pirro & Stanley, 2021, p. 90). Applied to the gender studies context, we can see bending where established norms regarding the allocation of funding for universities, or their ability to raise extra-governmental resources, are legalistically complied with but de-facto undermined. Academic institutions will come under pressure, for example, even though they continue to be funded in line with existing legislation, when their resources are severely restricted, re-directed through compliant intermediary organizations, or channeled through intermediary organizations whose leadership has been recast to be government friendly. Analogously, academic institutions will come under pressure when their ability to access their funders is curtailed in fact even if not in principle by the imposition of onerous or even vexatious administrative procedures.

By way of example, in 2017, Brazil's government started targeting gender education by eliminating the term "gender" from comprehensive sexuality education in Brazil's National Common Curricular Base to protect public schools from "indoctrination" of "gender ideology" (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Agitating fear of "gender ideology" played a crucial role in the election of President Jair Bolsonaro in 2018 who vowed to "fix" Brazil from "bad influences" that purportedly threaten the "traditional family" (Teixeira, 2019, p. 943). His cabinet reportedly continued the attack on universities' institutional autonomy by implementing budget cuts, discouraging the teaching of philosophy and sociology as well as research on gender issues (Teixeira, 2019, p. 943), and appointing agreeable conservative rectors (Baiocchi & Silva, 2020). Scholars and human rights activists have decried Bolsonaro's "ideological crusade" (Kubík Mano, 2021) and attempts to curtail academic freedom, but their attempts have not yet proven successful (Green, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2022).

"The most powerful blow to gender studies programs in Russia" may be the 2012 law on "foreign agents" (Rossman, 2021), which—together with subsequent legislation, including on "undesirable organizations"—has made it difficult if not impossible for NGOs to access independent funding. The law obligates organizations that engage in what may be construed as political activity or in attempts to influence public opinion to submit narrative and financial reports about their activities. Failure to do so may result in fines, suspension of activities, and even imprisonment. Yet, the law neither provides a clear definition of a "political act" nor specifies how the state identifies such organizations or individuals (Machalek, 2013). The effects of the law include the discontinuation of programs dependent on foreign funding, including tuition payments by foreign students (Turkova, 2021).

Kyrgyzstan seems to have followed in Russia's footsteps by adopting a law requiring NGOs to report their sources of funding and the nature of expenditures; as in Russia, failure to do so may result in forced closures. As gender studies in Kyrgyzstan remain in a nascent stage and are mainly led by NGOs that may receive international grants, scholars and activists are concerned about the potential repressive uses of this legislation (Putz, 2021; Zhanybek kyzy, 2021).

4.3. Forging

Pirro and Stanley (2021, p. 90) define forging as occurring when changes are made that break with "a mainstream consensus without challenging the rule of law." We see this somewhat differently, as the process whereby an established pluralistic consensus that allows and perhaps fosters critical perspectives is challenged in favor of one that insists on a uniform set of values: State actors' evocations of national identity and conservative family values while attacking "gender ideology," for example, may be seen as a form of forging. Forging can also entail delegitimating gender studies (inter alia) by applying parameters—like the volume of student enrolments—that may be generally relevant to higher education but whose application may allow for administrative discretion. Thus, in Hungary, the legitimacy of gender studies was undermined when the efficiency and desirability of international education was called into question (Pető, 2020).

In Russia, anti-gender discourse has been embedded in the promotion of "traditional values." Even the academic establishment has reportedly functioned as the primary constructor of anti-gender discourse, expressed through "academic homophobia" and backed by relevant legal measures banning "propaganda of non-traditional relationships" (Moss, 2017, p. 200).

In Kyrgyzstan, attempts to discredit students and faculty of the American University of Central Asia (which was financially supported by the Open Society Foundations and the US Government) have accused them of promoting LGBTQ+ values and of being "trained" to serve in Western-funded NGOs to destabilize the country and promote homosexuality (Djanibekova, 2020). The government went so far as accusing the former dean of the "illegal acquisition of psychotropic substances" and reportedly deported him from the country (Kuchins, 2021). The only known Centre for Critical Gender Studies at the American University of Central Asia has not held public events after the discreditation campaign against its students and faculty in 2020.

4.4. De-Specification

Lastly, gender studies programs lose their significance when they are integrated and sometimes dissolved into other programs. De-specification denotes policies of discursive redefinition, but such policies can also entail the institutional dislocation of previously independent gender studies programs, which come to be placed under the jurisdiction of another entity, such as a program on "the family." The discursive redefinition that characterizes de-specification may be viewed as a form of "discourse-capture." This involves "the intentional resignification, shifting, mimicking, or twisting of existing concepts and terminologies with the result that their dominant meaning and ideological underpinnings are altered, or replaced," in ways that "undermine and ultimately dismantle the discursive frameworks crucial to women's rights" (Lewin, 2021, pp. 255, 257). We have seen de-specification occur in policy and policy research contexts, as when entities charged with promoting women's or gender equality are rebranded or submerged into agencies for families and children. Such processes can be seen in Hungary and Poland (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). And we have heard anecdotally of gender scholars in Turkey, Brazil, and elsewhere who have found themselves in "family studies" programs. Nonetheless, the de-specification of gender studies academic programs requires further research.

5. Resistance Strategies

Opposition to anti-gender mobilization is not new—there are many examples of (partially) successful campaigns that have advanced the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people amidst anti-gender attacks. Ireland's "Together for Yes" campaign to remove a constitutional ban on abortion provides one such example (Denkovski et al., 2021, pp. 53–57). It may be that activists are, at times, better able to respond to backlash than the scholars, whose formal institutional affiliations may render them especially vulnerable. But universities may also offer protection that activists cannot access because faculty is tenured; because universities are subject to administrative restraints or judicial oversight that hampers their ability to enact repressive measures; or because academics visibility—both nationally and internationally—make raise the costs of repression. Generally, current expressions of resistance may seem insufficiently organized and effective (Pető, 2021b), and dissident groups may appear fragmented and isolated (Surman & Rossman, 2022). Nonetheless, the tactics we identify below can be seen as overall, multipurpose responses to attempts to restrict (through bending and de-specification), delegitimate (through forging), or, indeed, eliminate (through breaking, and possibly de-specification) gender studies programs.

5.1. Universities in Exile and Informal Academies

Gender scholars are also proving resilient and committed to continuing their work, whether at home or in new contexts abroad. In Hungary, where the repression has been harsh, scholars and activists nonetheless continue to stress the importance of gender. In the words of Marianna Szczygielska, a graduate student at the now exiled Department of Gender Studies at the Central European University (Vienna campus) and a current postdoc at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin:

> When we are under pressure, we should stand up for what our research field actually works with. Say that it includes queer studies, trans studies, crip studies, and so on. We must be careful so that

> we don't undermine our field because we don't dare to show all of its various niches. (as cited in Lilleslåtten, 2018)

One strategy has been to reconstitute communities of learning and teaching—sometimes, "officialized" as universities, at others operating more informally, through individual organizations and scholarly networks. They form groups and circles to prepare lectures, run workshops, publish materials (Aktas et al., 2018), and brainstorm and share resistance strategies, as well as support each other during "experiences of hostility, dismissal and unnecessary critique" (as cited in Macoun & Miller, 2014, p. 298). Faced with charges and possible detention following the attempted coup in 2016, Turkish scholars participated in founding the Academy in Exile in Germany to help threatened scholars continue their research and teaching abroad and participate in "solidarity academies" such as Birarada Academy. Similarly, Off-University provides an alternative platform for teaching and learning, as do, in Brazil, the Citizenship, Study, Research, Information, and Action (CEPIA) and the Free Feminist University (Molyneux et al., 2021). The same happens in Russia with online universities like Arzamas Academy and Free University Moscow (Surman & Rossman, 2022, p. 34). In Kyrgyzstan, the Bishkek Feminist Initiatives epitomizes the extra-institutional organization of knowledge production and dissemination (Cernat, 2020). As a participant in Birarada Academy said in an anonymous interview: "The academy is no longer limited [to being] inside the university. It is freer now. There are street academies now—academic knowledge is in the streets!" (as cited in Aktas et al., 2018, p. 176).

5.2. Solidarity Networks

Along with many other academic scholars and human rights advocates working on women and gender issues in global affairs, the authors of this article are part of the interdisciplinary, international network WGGA. WGGA addresses issues relating to the rise of illiberal movements and governments by fostering the resilience of the gender academy, providing a platform for information-sharing regarding research and teaching, supporting at-risk scholars, and furthering critical gender knowledge and awareness (WGGA, 2021a, 2021b). Forming solidarity networks like Aramızda Gender Studies Association was a critical response to attacks against gender studies departments in Turkey to "defend the spaces for academic and intellectual production" (Lévy-Aksu, 2021, para. 5). Other networks also provide support to scholars under pressure from illiberal states and movements, including ATGENDER, the informal but efficient Gender International, and the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), as well as less "grassroots" organizations such as Scholars at Risk and the Scholars Rescue Fund.

5.3. Everyday Resistance

While anti-gender attacks and the protests they have elicited have been the subject of significant research, the everyday resistance of gender studies programs and scholars has been little explored. Scholars have been engaging in everyday resistance in non-dramatic, nonconfrontational, or "non-recognized" ways that may escape detection as forms of opposition (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). Some scholars may opt for self-censorship rather than risk losing their positions (Aktas et al., 2018). Others may choose to operate "under the radar," rebranding their programs and merging with others that are considered acceptable, eliminating references to "gender" from publications, grant applications, and courses, turning to networks of colleagues and activists to continue to teach and produce research even when formal academic channels are closed, and looking for means of support abroad. Whether this will amount to the "educated acquiescence" that Perry (2020, p. 2) defined as an implicit exchange between scholars and the state, whereby political compliance buys an "attractive package of privileges and benefits (social prestige, political influence, material goods, and the like) for successful recipients of higher education—where the criteria for success are also defined by the state" or provide cover for the continuation or re-elaboration and re-invigoration of critical paradigms remains to be seen.

6. Conclusion

In sum, we have identified ways in which illiberal states in Central and Eastern Europe may use breaking, bending, forging, and de-specification to undermine the gender academy and we have identified analogous instances in Latin America and Eurasia. Furthermore, we have detailed some forms of resistance. We have also shown that, although attacks on gender studies may lead to programs being restricted and even dismantled, they do not necessarily entail the erasure of gender studies. Rather, repression may catalyze institutional innovation (as with the universities in exile and informal academies), and prompt further interest, including on the part of prospective students. The capacity for resistance bespeaks the solidity of the "gender academy" and the gender rights communities it references. If illiberals have aimed at reducing the impact of gender studies programs as crucibles of critical thought and practice, they have only been partially successful—thus far. As existing gender studies centers have been weakened or altogether eliminated, for example, by policies of breaking, bending, and de-specification, scholars have continued to focus on gender in other sites, including universities in exile and informal academies, and to disseminate and debate their work through networks of scholarly exchange.

As gender scholars have faced threats that have forced them into exile, they have sometimes found protection through organizations such as the Scholars

Rescue Fund and Scholars at Risk, but also through extensions of hospitality (and, at times, employment). Such extensions of hospitality can—and perhaps have already—helped to distribute "reputational capital" that can counter strategies of stigmatization—against individuals, but also against gender studies in general. Thus, networks provide intellectual as well as practical and political support and mobilize internationally as well as nationally to break the isolation that stigmatization and marginalization can bring. In this perspective, research, teaching, and the construction of relations may prove an essential—activist—mode of scholarly engagement at a time of global crisis and domestic repression (Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey, 2009). But further research is needed, to track the modalities we have hypothesized, identify in which specific situations illiberal governments deploy them, and which specific strategies of resistance are brought into play, when, by whom, and with what results.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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