Evidence Bite - Anti-Gender Mobilizations and Transgender Rights: Unpacking Recent Evolutions in Belgium

This article by CCINDLE partner Rylan Verlooy explores how anti-gender mobilisations in Belgium increasingly centre transgender issues. In Belgium, anti-gender activism previously circled around anti-abortion actions mainly instigated by conservative religious voices, while recent mobilisations foreground trans rights and identities. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of its conclusions.

The **key observations** of the article include that:

1. Trans issues have become central to anti-gender mobilisations

While anti-gender activism in Belgium traditionally emphasised abortion or traditional family norms, the article shows that transgender rights and the legitimacy of trans identities have become the core focus of contemporary mobilisations. Anti-gender actors frame trans identity, gender dysphoria, and gender-affirming care as threats to the gender binary.

2. A broad coalition of actors is mobilising against trans rights

Anti-trans mobilisations are not confined to conservative religious groups. They involve a diverse array of actors, such as:

- Secular political voices
- Academics and public intellectuals
- Medical professionals opposing gender-affirming care
- Mainstream media sources

This shows the reach of anti-gender activists across social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

3. Public opinion is the battleground

Anti-gender actors in Belgium use a range of tactics to shape public opinion and policy debates, including:

- Promoting public lectures and events that cast doubt on transgender identities
- Driving media coverage that opposes gender-affirming health care
- Reframing 'gender ideology' as a threat to children and gender norms

These efforts often mix scientific, moral, and cultural arguments to appeal beyond traditional conservative audiences.

The **key takeaway messages** of the article include that:

- **Transgender rights are a litmus test:** Where once abortion or family values might have signalled opposition to gender equality, trans rights now serve as the key indicator of where anti-gender politics is gaining traction.
- **Discursive tactics matter:** Anti-gender mobilisations often work through media framing and public debate rather than overt legislative change, making them pervasive and harder to counter.
- **Broad coalitions risk normalising exclusion:** Opposition to gender equality does not come solely from religious conservatives,

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with allies such as academics and secular organisations lending legitimacy to anti-gender rhetoric.

Understanding how anti-gender activism in Belgium mobilises around transgender rights helps reveal how contemporary anti-gender politics operate in nuanced and diffuse ways, shaping public debate, expertise, and policy discussion even where formal rights remain protected.

This shift toward transgender issues as a focal point of anti-gender politics reflects broader European and global trends, with opposition to gender equality increasingly intersecting with transphobic narratives. Anti-gender mobilisations no longer operate on the margins, they influence mainstream discourse and shape policy conversations about healthcare, rights, and belonging. You can read the article in full here.

For more information on the CCINDLE project, as well as publications, evidence bites, podcasts, videos and more, please visit our website: https://ccindle.org

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