Evidence Bite: Two Gender-Equal Nations? Anti-Gender Re-Configurations of National Belonging in Sweden and Spain

This article from CCINDLE partners Hansalbin Sältenberg, Silvia Díaz Fernández, and Paloma Caravantes outlines how anti-gender politics reshapes national belonging and identity in two countries with strong gender equality records. In both Sweden and Spain, gender equality is widely viewed as a national strength. Yet anti-gender actors in each country use ideas about gender equality to reconfigure who belongs in the nation, and who does not. This comparative study shows that anti-gender politics don't necessarily reject gender equality outright, but instead reframe national identity in ways that racialise, exclude, or marginalise certain groups. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of its conclusions.

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

1. Anti-gender actors build on dominant national gender equality frameworks

Despite their distinct histories, both Sweden and Spain have strong gender equality policy frameworks. Anti-gender actors work within these frameworks, exploiting their limitations regarding the fight for gender equality to foreground exclusionary nationalist narratives. They draw on existing gender equality discourses to argue that only certain cultural groups embody the nation's egalitarian values. The corresponding exclusions span the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and citizenship.

2. The 'nation-gender equality nexus' shapes exclusion

The study introduces the idea of a 'nation-gender equality nexus', or the way that gender equality is intertwined with concepts of the nation. Anti-gender actors use two major dimensions to reimagine national belonging:

- **Religion–secularism:** In Sweden, secularism becomes part of a racialised national identity that positions Islam (which is often associated with migrants) as incompatible with Swedish gender equality ideals. In Spain, Catholic heritage continues to shape both gender norms and national identity.
- **Migration–race:** In both contexts, migrants (especially racialised minorities) are framed as threats to national gender equality, reinforcing exclusionary politics.

3. Different national contexts produce distinct anti-gender imaginaries

Sweden and Spain differ in how their anti-gender actors intersect with gender equality discourses:

- **Sweden:** Anti-gender politics leans on secular modernity and exceptionalism. National identity is constructed as already gender-equal and modern, rendering migrants (especially Muslim migrants) culturally incompatible.
- **Spain:** Anti-gender actors (notably the far-right party Vox) merge traditional Catholic values with secular critiques of gender

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equality, portraying feminism as ideological and a threat to Spanish values that are rooted in traditional heterosexual families and gender roles. This debate often features contested views on whether Spain still needs gender equality reforms at all as anti-gender actors argue that Spain is already an equal nation.

These differences show how anti-gender politics adapts to national histories and cultural narratives.

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

- **Anti-gender politics are strategically aligned with national pride:** Gender equality can be reframed into exclusionary narratives if it is presented as something that certain groups embody and others seem to obstruct.
- **Belonging is defined intersectionally:** Religion, race, and gender are combined to draw moralised boundaries around who belongs in the nation.
- **Context matters:** Anti-gender politics does not look the same everywhere. It feeds on established national discourses to naturalise exclusion, with Swedish visions centring on a sense of historic homogeneity and Spanish tensions connected with the legacies of fascism.

The article shows that anti-gender politics can co-opt positive narratives of gender equality to produce exclusionary visions of nationhood. Instead of opposing gender equality directly, anti-gender actors reframe it to justify xenophobia, cultural distrust, and the marginalisation of racialised and religious minorities. This has major implications for how feminist and equality movements engage with national identity 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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