Evidence Bite: Anti-Gender Politics and European Democracies' Legacies of Exclusion and Violence

This article by CCINDLE partners Conny Roggeband, Marta Rawłuszko, Petra Meier, Silvia Díaz Fernández, Emanuela Lombardo, and Paloma Caravantes examines the problems that current anti-gender actors pose for democracy in Europe by investigating the broader legacies that underpin liberal democracies and shape political, economic and social inequalities and exclusions. The article provides a critical analysis of the rise and impact of anti-gender politics within European democracies, exploring how such politics tap into the legacies of systems of exclusion and oppression on which liberal democracies are built. The authors review current theoretical approaches to anti-gender mobilisation and examine how these campaigns undermine democratic principles and rights protections. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of their conclusions.

The **key observations** of the article focus on:

1. **Capitalist legacies:** Anti-gender politics in European democracies are partly rooted in the economic and ideological legacies of capitalism, which have promoted market-driven social structures and individualism while reinforcing hierarchies and inequalities. These capitalist legacies facilitate the mobilisation of anti-gender actors by framing gender justice initiatives as threats to traditional family values, economic order, or efficient governance, and often using neoliberal discourses to undermine policies protecting marginalised groups.
2. **Colonial legacies:** Colonial legacies shape European anti-gender mobilisation by perpetuating ideas of cultural and racial superiority and imposing rigid gender norms, both domestically and in former colonies. Anti-gender actors frequently invoke post-colonial narratives to justify opposition to gender equality, associating progressive reforms with 'foreign' influence and defending traditional roles as essential to national identity. This legacy underpins strategies that resist international human rights norms and reinforce the exclusion of racialised and marginalised populations.
3. **Fascist legacies:** Fascist legacies in Europe contribute to anti-gender politics by promoting authoritarian approaches to governance and strict conceptions of gender and family. Anti-gender movements often draw on or reactivate fascist symbolism and narratives to legitimise restrictive policies, such as bans on reproductive rights or anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, framing them as preservations of social and moral order. These legacies support anti-democratic tendencies.

Looking into the near future, the **key takeaway messages** include that:

- **Structural legacies underpin anti-gender politics:** Anti-gender politics in Europe flourish because longstanding capitalist, colonial, and fascist legacies have created persistent inequalities. These deeper

Evidence Bite: Anti-Gender Politics and European Democracies' Legacies of Exclusion and Violence

problems must be addressed to understand and counter anti-gender politics.

- **Inclusive knowledge and resistance are crucial:** Knowledge from queer, Black, feminist, and anti-capitalist scholars is essential for revealing how democracies have institutionalised exclusion and discrimination, and resistance to these legacies should inform future research and policy.
- **Nuanced analysis requires the reflexive use of terminology:** The term 'anti-gender' needs critical reflection, and researchers and practitioners in this space should reflect on their own positions. Scholarship should interrogate historical contexts and intersecting legacies to fully grasp anti-democratic mobilisations at the local level.

By drawing on a wide range of evidence, the article highlights both the ideological roots and the political strategies employed by anti-gender actors, ultimately arguing that their influence poses a significant risk to democratic institutions in Europe. 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

Email: ccindle.info@ru.nl

Funded by the European Union

Funded by the European Union under grant No 101061256. UK consortium partners are funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) under the UK government's Horizon Europe funding guarantee [grant numbers 10051932 and 10048433].
Views and opinions expressed are those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency or UKRI. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.