Evidence Bite - 'Stop torpedoing women's rights!': Feminist institutional responses to anti-gender politics in Spain and Catalonia parliaments

This article by CCINDLE partners Emanuela Lombardo, Paloma Caravantes, and Silvia Díaz Fernández dives into how feminist actors within parliaments respond to anti-gender politics, and what enables or limits these responses. Across Europe, anti-gender politics is increasingly prominent within democratic institutions like parliaments. The article examines how feminist actors respond to this opposition in Spain and Catalonia, the strategies that they use, and the conditions that shape their effectiveness. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of its conclusions.

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

1. Anti-gender politics is reshaping parliamentary debates

The study finds that far-right and anti-gender actors use hostile and polarising rhetoric, including sexist, racist, and anti-LGBTQ+ discourses. They also delegitimise gender equality policies and institutions, disrupt debates, and work to undermine existing equality frameworks. This inevitably creates a more contentious and exclusionary political environment, particularly for women, racialised, and LGBTQ+ groups.

2. Feminist actors have four key response strategies

Building on the previous work of Kantola and Lombardo, the authors examine four main types of feminist responses to anti-gender operations within parliament, namely:

- Knowledge: The use of evidence, data, and feminist expertise to counter disinformation
- Coalition-building: The forming of alliances across political parties and civil society
- Rule-making: The introduction or adaptation of formal and informal rules to limit the influence of anti-gender actors
- Everyday pragmatic engagement: Feminists must navigate debates strategically, considering when to confront or ignore anti-gender actors

These strategies show that resistance happens through daily institutional practices as well as policy.

3. Defending Democratic Knowledge Production and Epistemic Pluralism

The effectiveness of feminist responses depends on several factors, such as the balance of political forces and strength of any far-right presence, the degree of institutional support for equality and established gender equality structures, and the potency of alliances (with cross-party cooperation noted as having isolated anti-gender actors in Catalonia). The broader democratic context is also crucial, and legacies of authoritarianism and political polarisation are important factors. Evidently, feminist responses are shaped by institutional and political conditions as well as strategy.

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

- **Feminist resistance happens inside institutions:** Parliaments are not only sites of anti-gender politics, they are vital spaces for resisting it.
- **Strategies must be diverse**: Effective responses combine knowledge, alliances, rules, and routine interactions.
- **Context determines the shape of resistance:** Political balance, institutional structures, and democratic traditions shape what is possible for anti-gender politicians and feminists.

This study shows that anti-gender politics does more than undermine rights, it warps how democracy functions. Feminist responses within parliaments are therefore crucial for defending equality, but they are uneven and context-dependent. Strengthening alliances, building institutional support, counteracting exclusionary narratives, and enhancing democratic norms is essential to ensure that gender equality and inclusive participation are not eroded under political pressure. You can read the article in full here.

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