Evidence Bite - 'The West Is Trying Too Hard': Gender and the Right-Wing Critique of Globalization

This article by Agnieszka Graff and CCINDLE partner Elżbieta Korolczuk explains how right-wing actors use gender as a key concept to critique globalisation, liberalism, and international institutions. In recent years, these movements have increasingly framed gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights as symbols of global liberal overreach. The article shows how gender has been redefined by anti-gender actors as part of a broader critique of globalisation, which is portrayed as a project imposed by Western elites on local cultures and nations. This evidence bite offers a concise summary of its conclusions.

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

1. 'Gender' has been retooled into a symbol of globalisation

The article shows that discussions of gender are no longer just about equality or identity, instead the concept is reframed by right-wing actors into a broader symbol of unwanted global change. Thus gender issues are negatively linked with liberal elites and international institutions, cultural transformation and social change, and the perceived loss of national sovereignty. This makes gender a powerful political shorthand for wider cultural anxieties.

2. Anti-gender actors use anti-globalist narratives strategically

Right-wing groups frequently present themselves as defenders of ordinary people against global elites (i.e. populists), claiming that gender norms are imposed from outside (e.g. by the UN or EU), that local cultures and traditions are under threat, and that resistance is correspondingly a form of democratic or anti-colonial struggle. These actors are themselves often transnationally connected, even as they criticise globalisation.

3. 'Chameleon tactics' blur local and global politics

The authors introduce the idea of 'chameleon tactics' on the parts of anti-gender actors, describing how they shift between local and global frames depending on context, present themselves as grassroots while drawing on international networks, and blur the boundaries between national identity and global political struggles. This flexibility makes anti-gender mobilisations harder to identify and challenge.

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

- **Gender has become a sprawling political issue:** 'Gender' is used to connect diverse grievances, from nationalism to anti-elitism, into a single political narrative.
- **Anti-globalist rhetoric masks transnational networks:** Actors opposing supposed global elites are often internationally organised and highly resourced themselves, using sprawling alliances to spread their ideas.

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- **Narratives matter for democratic wellbeing:** Framing gender equality as foreign or imposed can erode support for human rights and inclusive democratic norms, with insidious effects for societies over time.

This research shows that anti-gender politics is no longer just about gender, it is enmeshed with global power struggles over culture, sovereignty, and democracy. By framing gender equality as a foreign imposition rather than a democratic achievement, right-wing actors can legitimise exclusionary and nationalist agendas, undermine international human rights norms, and ultimately work to reshape public understanding of democracy and belonging. Recognising their chameleon tactics is key to understanding and countering exclusionary politics around the world. You can read the article in full here to find out more.

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