



# Rising authoritarianism and women's political empowerment and participation

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# Outline

- A few words on terminology and methodology
- Gender equality backlash in patterns
- Implications of gender equality backlash on women's political empowerment and participation
- Reflections on the possible entry points

# Key Concepts

- Gender
- Political participation
- Gender equality backlash
- SDC's typology of regime types:

*autocracy, liberal autocracy, limited political democracy, political democracy.*

# Gender equality backlash: understanding current challenges

***“Rather than (as I had mistakenly thought) becoming clearer over time, gender has become more elusive; the site of contestation, a disputed concept in the arena of politics.”***

Scott, 2013:65.



"Gender no more": demonstrators during a pro-life march in Lima, 2018

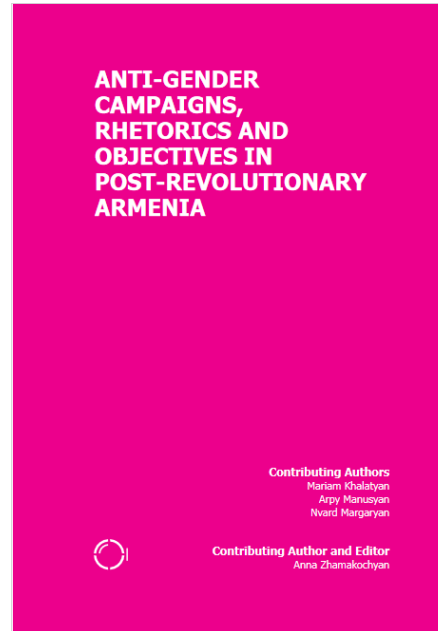
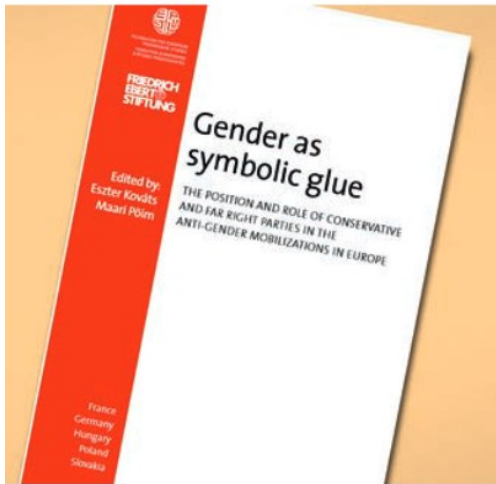
# Traditional family vs. Western values

- **Rejecting** the term gender itself.
- Gender equality - **ideology/gender theory**.
- Threatens to shatter the "traditional family", "propagates homosexuality/debauchery".
- Gender equality is a Western Agenda/cultural imperialism.
- **In the name of:**
- Protecting children, preventing the propaganda of homosexuality and the spread of 'debauchery'.
- **As a counternarrative:**
- Focusing on the family, the nation, religious values.



# Gender as a symbolic glue

“The concept of ‘gender’ became a central rhetorical tool ... to try to create a new consensus of what should be seen as normal and legitimate”. A. Peto, 2018



Gender as symbolic glue: how ‘gender’ became an umbrella term for the rejection of the (neo)liberal order.

Weronika Grzebalska, Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető

**Example: Armenia.** Anti-gender + public support for Custom’s Union

# Gender equality backlash in patterns

- Gradual erosion of legitimacy of women's rights which affects policies, and their implementation.
- Women's access to and presence within political institutions
- Shrinking space for women's mobilization in civil society.
- The rise of physical and online abuse and other forms of violence against (politically active) women

# Implications: rights related to gender equality, sexuality, and women's rights are profoundly threatened

- Discursive delegitimization of policies related to gender equality.
- **Attack on the Istanbul convention - ratification or implementation has been hindered in diverse contexts, complete withdrawal in Turkey.**
- Symbolic dismantling/Backsliding in policy implementation





# Implications, women in politics

“If we are talking about gender equality, why can’t a woman be a leader?”

O. Bobonazarova



Gender equality backlash makes it increasingly more difficult for women:

- to join and maintain their positions in politics, to exercise leadership.
- to lobby for the interests of women.
- to peruse alliance and coalition building.



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# Shrinking space for civic participation

- Women's CSO's are being pushed out of the space for dialogue with the state.
- Decreased domestic funding.
- Foreign agent laws/anti-terrorism legislations.
- Travel bans.
- Increasing criminalization and bureaucratization of CSO's activities.
- Proliferation of GONGOs.
- Heavy moderations of CSOs activities, harassments, intimidations, arrests.



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# Violence against women

“women engaged in professional activities with public exposure [...] are likely to be exposed to specific forms of violence or abuse, threats, and harassment, in relation to their work”.

OSCE MC.DEC/4/18

## Marielle Franco

A female councillor in Rio de Janeiro  
politician, lesbian, mother,  
feminist, human rights  
activist.

Assassinated in 2018.



Image by Chloe I. Yu, source: [www.thecrimson.com](http://www.thecrimson.com)

# State feminism: co-opting women's voices

“State feminism is essentially the systematic and explicit governmental exploitation of the feminist cause for political reasons narrowly linked to enhancing the image, prestige and ideological sustainability of the autocratic regime”.

Mhadhbi, 2012



*Sick of rape!!'. Tunisians demonstrate in front of the courthouse in Tunis. Photo: Demotix*

# Possible entry points

- **How outspoken can we be?**
- **Dialogue with the government: lobbying work to hold signatory states accountable for follow-up and implementation of national and international commitments.**
- **Foster the participation of women's CSOs in preparation UPR reviews for HRC (via physical presence, shadow reports etc.).**
- **Continue integrating gender equality as a transversal theme in all interventions.**
- **Supporting women's CSOs, following a proper assessment of needs, tools and solutions. Helping them sustain their work and growth via cooperation with (legally permitted) umbrella partners and elaborating local best practices.**
- **Work towards open/strengthening/restoring spaces for dialogue and social accountability.**
- **Target potential partners and gatekeepers and invest into breaking gender stereotypes, while also engaging with women and girls on capacity building.**
- **Addressing gender-based violence.**
- **Considering support for new and emerging possibilities for women's organizing.**
- **Amplifying action based on collaborative learning.**

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