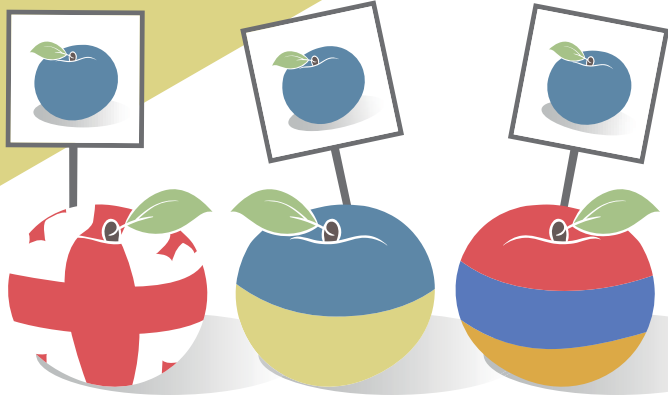
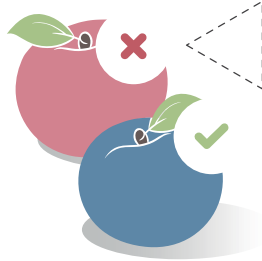


Backlash Against Equality



By: Ani Jiozian



2018

Anti-Gender Campaigns in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine: A Comparative Study



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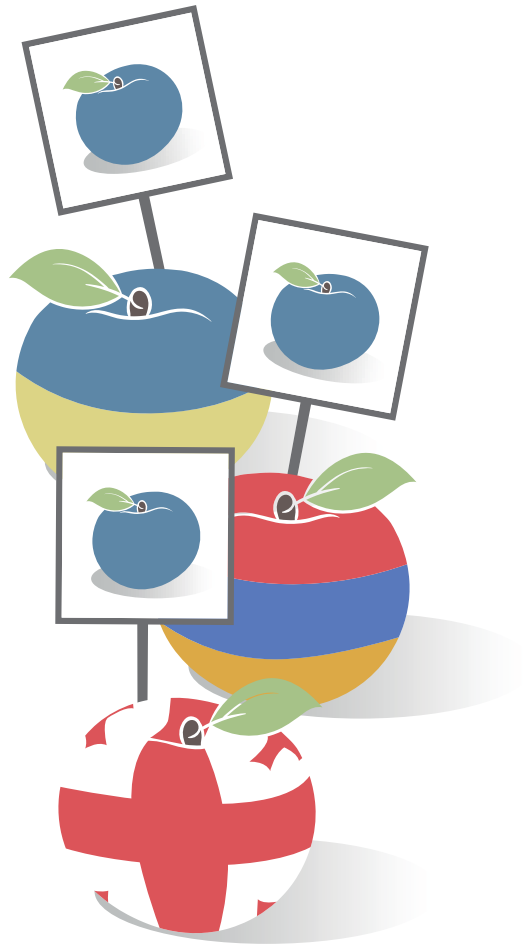
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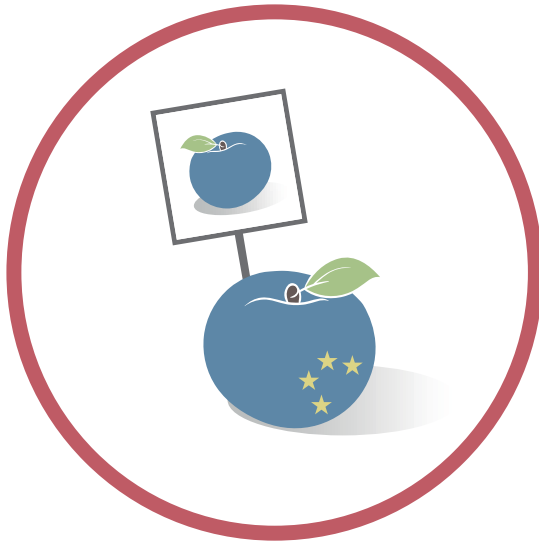


Executive Summary

In a vast number of countries worldwide, the church, right-wing politicians, and conservative grassroots mobilizations have carried out coordinated attacks on gender equality, LGBT rights, gender-based violence, and reproductive rights, among other gender and sexuality rights-related issues. The ripple effects of such mobilizations have negatively impacted policymaking and led to restrictions on women's and LGBT rights. The present study explores how such anti-gender attacks have been used to mobilize the public and secure political power in three countries of interest, namely Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, and analyzes the phenomenon in an effort to inform strategies and effectively respond to future attacks in the region.

To better understand the nuances around the anti-gender campaigns that took hold in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine and provide an overview of trends in the region, it is important to first understand the phenomenon as transnational in nature and localized for various country contexts. For this reason, the first and second sections of the paper provide an overview of anti-gender campaigns across the larger region and examine the specific discourses used that have lent success to these campaigns in the countries of interest and region at large. The third section of the paper moves into describing the backdrop for the anti-gender campaigns in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, while the fourth section examines current enduring institutional barriers to access to justice. The fifth section focuses more narrowly on similarities and differences with regards to how the anti-gender campaign unfolded and what the reaction was like in the three countries of interest. Finally, the last section outlines recommendations to counter anti-gender rhetoric and practices in the region.

Overview of anti-gender campaigns in Europe



Whereas some organizations and groups promoting anti-gender rhetoric were established in recent years, others have been active since the 1990s.¹ In most European countries, anti-gender mobilizations started in the 2010s, with 2012 appearing as a turning point.² When anti-gender campaigning began, it was viewed primarily as a national occurrence. However, the fact that mobilizations take place in parallel lends credence to the theory that anti-gender efforts are not grassroots, local mobilizations but rather a larger global phenomenon.³ This is plainly clear, as local actors in different countries draw heavily on one another's agendas, yet claim that initiatives are locally inspired and meant to protect local cultural and moral values.⁴

There are striking similarities between the discourse and mobilization strategies of anti-gender actors in the United States in the 1990s and those used by actors across Europe today.⁵ Given the similarities in discourse and strategies, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the groups in different countries cooperate and share knowledge and resources, using the most effective strategies adjusted to the local context.⁶ These realities have led scholars to describe the movement as "a transnational resurgence of illiberal populism and local nationalism," one that purports to defend traditional values and equates "gender" with foreign forces and corrupt elites.⁷

1. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

2. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

3. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, *Beyond Gender?*

Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives, 2015.

4. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

5. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *"The War on Gender" from a Transnational Perspective - Lessons for Feminist Strategising*, 2014.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, *Towards An Illiberal Future: Anti-Genderism and Anti-Globalization*, 2017.

Though scholars largely argue that anti-gender mobilizations must be viewed from a longer-range vantage point, local politics set them in motion in each of the targeted countries in varying ways.⁸ The agendas of anti-gender actors across the various countries where campaigning has taken hold are quite different from one another, with some actors promoting openly homophobic and racist rhetoric and others emphasizing the protection of the traditional family structure.⁹ However, their common thread is the aversion to what they refer to as “gender ideology,” the idea that the welfare of children and the family is in jeopardy.¹⁰

Due to its success in mobilizing a variety of actors with right-wing orientations but differing ideological backgrounds, the anti-gender movement is broad in terms of the actors involved. These include members of faith-based and conservative organizations, conservative politicians, right-wing populists, bloggers, and grassroots activists, many of whom identify as concerned parents or concerned citizens.¹¹ As the church has experienced a decline across many parts of Europe, their alignment with anti-gender discourse is often an attempt on their part to remain relevant or “to regain influence in secularizing parts of the world... and to reaffirm the faith of followers.”¹² There is also often a motive on behalf of governments to initiate or support anti-gender campaigns in the cultural contexts where such campaigns take hold.¹³ Another commonality is that some actors strategically give the impression that they represent an actual organization when they in fact do not, and they often assume different positions in a variety of such shell organizations.¹⁴

8. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, *Beyond Gender? Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives*, 2015.

9. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise?*

Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe, 2015.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

Anti-gender activists mobilize around key issues, including but not limited to the opposition to gender equality and equal rights for sexual minorities; sexuality education and sexual and reproductive rights, such as abortion; and gender mainstreaming, including taking out the word “gender” in state documents and media discourse.¹⁵ Numerous similarities can be discerned in the strategies and rhetoric used by anti-gender actors across Europe. Campaigns across countries bear a striking resemblance, as they use a shared discourse, standard calls to action, and similar mobilization strategies to purport that issues of gender are at the root of the liberal reforms they seek to dismantle.¹⁶

Notably, many groups have a strong online presence and open platforms and make good use of communication technologies to disseminate information and encourage people to sign petitions, protest, and engage in other advocacy efforts.¹⁷ They use a common repertoire of mobilizations, lobbying, petitions, demonstrations, publications, and campaigns to incite the public.¹⁸ They have largely succeeded in addressing wider audiences instead of merely traditional circles of conservative groups, mobilizing thousands of individuals on a grassroots level and appealing to everyday anxieties concerning families and children.¹⁹ It is important to note that anti-gender organizations include international and transnational NGOs representing larger institutions and engaging in top level advocacy, which speaks to the growing professionalism of these groups.²⁰

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *The War on Gender* from a Transnational Perspective – Lessons for Feminist Strategising, 2014.

18. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

19. Roman Kuhar and Aleš Zobec, *The Anti-Gender Movement in Europe and the Educational Process in Public Schools*, 2017.

20. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, *Beyond Gender? Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives*, 2015.

Thus, as much as the ideology is connected, the people enacting that ideology are connected as well. They translate publications and online platforms into many languages, as well as travel to conferences, take inspiration from one another, and mobilize together across borders.²¹

The narratives of anti-gender actors focus on the “threat” that gender legislation and policies pose to children and the traditional family. They use fear-arousing and hyperbolic language to lump issues of gender equality and LGBT rights together with sexual deviations and social pathologies. Messaging consciously plays on cultural fears of sexuality, likening progressive policies to promulgating sexual deviance and pedophilia.²² Scholars believe that expressions of homophobia and intolerance for the LGBT community are “bound up with wider fears about the destabilizing of gender norms, hierarchies and the wider familial and social order.”²³ The underlying rhetoric is meant to stir the emotions and arouse fear drawn from existing prejudices.²⁴ In contradiction with themselves, these conservative actors often use quasi-scientific and ostensibly rational discourse to present themselves as authorities on gender-related issues, while also purporting that gender discourse is a foreign-born intrusion by elitists.²⁵ In some countries, messages often use anti-colonial rhetoric to showcase the European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) as imposing foreign values on the public and far-right groups as fighting against cultural colonizers by protecting national values.²⁶

21. Ibid.

22. Heinrich Böll Foundation, “The War on Gender” from a Transnational Perspective – Lessons for Feminist Strategising, 2014.

23. Catherine Baker, *Gender in the Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*

and the USSR, 2016.

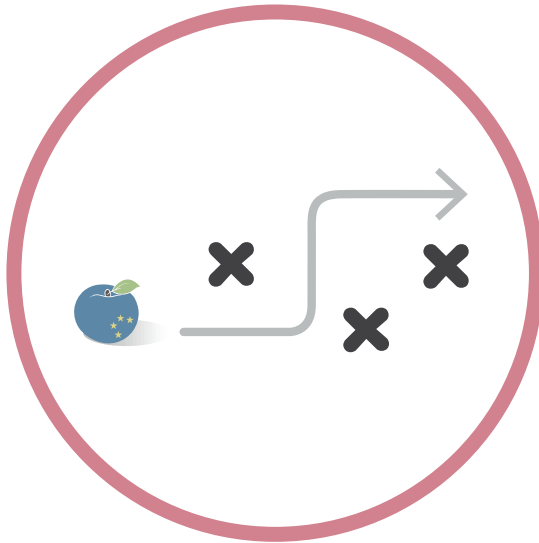
24. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

25. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, *Beyond Gender?*

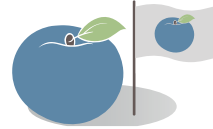
Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives, 2015.

26. Ibid.

Common strategies and discourse in the region



Strategic use of gender to change political and value systems



Anti-gender movements are opening up new territory in Europe's political, cultural and social landscape and challenging established political cleavages. As such, the larger contemporary social and political context must be taken into account.²⁷ Some scholars view anti-gender rhetoric as a symptom of wider political crisis and fundamentalism that is taking hold in Europe, arguing that anti-gender mobilizations are "a hegemonic fight for control" and one that is redefining human rights and progressive notions of equality.²⁸ Gender politics has provided the opportunity to reformulate political issues and is used by governments, the church, and others as "a convenient opportunity to shift public attention and reestablish itself as a moral authority."²⁹ In this way, representatives of anti-gender movements may seem to be arguing purely about issues of gender policy but actually wish to foster profound change in political and value systems.³⁰ In several countries, anti-gender actors overlap with those promoting right-wing populist politics, both as members of political parties and of civil society

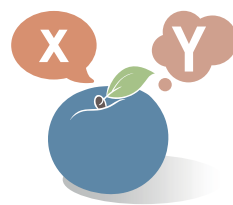
27. Catherine Baker, *Gender in the Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR*, 2016.

28. Andrea Peto, After "emancipation after emancipation": On Europe's anti-gender movements, 2015.

29. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

30. Andrea Peto, After "emancipation after emancipation": On Europe's anti-gender movements, 2015.

organizations.³¹ Campaigns take full force when presented as a reaction to a proposed policy that is in opposition to feminists, LGBT activists, and other progressives.³² In some cases, mobilizations are a reaction to existing policies that have been adopted internationally but have not yet reached the targeted country and are thus used as a preventative means to ensure that such progressive policies don't expand into the region.³³ One strong example of this that has taken hold in the region is the tactic of changing how marriage is legally defined in local constitutions in anticipation of future marriage equality bills.



Fluidity of term “gender” leading to confusion and easy manipulation

Mobilizations share common theoretical roots in what has been termed “gender ideology,” “gender theory,” or “anti-genderism.” Because the term “gender” has never been clearly defined, it can easily be manipulated and adopted to represent a range of issues, from marriage equality and sexual education to sexual and reproductive rights.³⁴ One academic notes,

³¹. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

³². *Ibid.*
³³. *Ibid.*

³⁴. Roman Kuhar and Aleš Zobec, *The Anti-Gender Movement in Europe and the Educational Process in Public Schools*, 2017.

"... it is exactly this fluidity [of the term] that makes 'gender ideology' a successful rallying cry with the potential to unite a broad range of Christian conservative and right-wing actors with opposing ideologies."³⁵

Scholars have concluded that, whereas the concept of gender is an important piece of the campaign, issues related to gender serve primarily as a point of convergence and used as a "symbolic glue"³⁶ to unite conservative actors in opposition to a multitude of progressive issues.³⁷

The concept of gender is an empty signifier that becomes a threat allowing for coalition-building with a variety of actors, including those who are openly anti-EU, ethno-nationalist, racist, and xenophobic.³⁸ It is what has allowed for the term "gender" to become code for moral degradation or degeneration.³⁹

35. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

36. Eszter Kováts and Maari Pöim, *Gender as symbolic glue: The position and role of conservative and*

far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, 2015.

37. Weronika Grzebalska, *Why the war on "gender ideology" matters – and not just to feminists: Anti-genderism and the crisis of neoliberal democracy*, 2016.

38. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

39. *Ibid.*

Gender viewed as seeking to destroy traditional values



Inherent to the anti-gender discourse is the perspective that the “natural” heterosexual family is endangered and needs to be protected. Rhetoric around family, nation, nature, and heterosexuality intersect, which opens up the opportunity to present children as innocent victims of LGBT individuals’ egoistic and hedonistic drives.⁴⁰ Anti-gender actors frequently use the trope that reforms in gender legislation would destroy children’s lives while wreaking chaos in the realm of human sexuality and causing rapid depopulation.⁴¹ In practice, as such reform is perceived as imposing on traditional culture and capitalizing on children’s innocence, efforts to introduce courses on gender equality and non-discrimination in schools have been thwarted.⁴²

40. Ibid.

41. Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, *Towards An Illiberal Future: Anti-Genderism and Anti-Globalization*, 2017.

42. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

Anti-gender campaigns as a reaction to European/foreign forces



Governments and the media have repeatedly presented conservatism as a key unique point, a matter of national pride and sovereignty that distinguishes them from Europe, as they draw heavily on nationalist rhetoric to capitalize on a society's sense of victimhood and desire for geopolitical recognition.⁴³ The conservative right often pits the UN, EU, and other international organizations as carrying out a new form of colonialism by perpetuating concepts around gender, while galvanizing the public around the idea that they alone are defenders of the local culture and its values.⁴⁴

Problematic is the very notion of gender as a Western construct. In many cultural contexts, vernacular translations of the term "gender" have been rejected, even when they do exist, further supporting the notion that it is foreign-imposed and unfit for the local context.⁴⁵ This lends to wrongful convictions, such as the long held to myth that homosexuality is

43. Ibid.

44. Heinrich Böll Foundation, "The War on Gender" from a Transnational Perspective -

Lessons for Feminist Strategising, 2014.

45. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

a phenomenon linked to Western, liberal values⁴⁶ and the idea that sexual education is an imposition of the liberal West and an attempt to gain control over people's private lives.⁴⁷

In light of these realities, international bodies and local activists who receive foreign funding are represented as enemies of the state who risk destroying traditional values and causing the demoralization of society.⁴⁸ Those who promote multiculturalism and tolerance by defending gender equality or LGBT rights are marginalized, othered, and labeled as foreign agents of the West.⁴⁹ However, there is a great irony at play. Despite the emphasis on local, authentic values, the anti-gender movement is propped up by a transnational network, including western organizations such as the World Congress of Families, a United States-based coalition consisting of several international right-wing groups that are vehemently opposed to reproductive, immigrant, and gay rights.⁵⁰ Thus, these groups purportedly fight "foreign imposition" while directly copy-pasting anti-gender rhetoric developed in the West.

46. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

47. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

48. Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim, *Gender as symbolic glue: The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe*, 2015.

49. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

50. Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk, *Towards An Illiberal Future: Anti-Genderism and Anti-Globalization*, 2017.

Anti-gender campaigns as a backlash to the intrusion on one's private life



One of the major converging points of the anti-gender campaign has been the narrative that foreign intrusion legitimizes state intervention in the domestic sphere and upholds the protection of individual rights over the protection of the family as a whole.⁵¹ Conservative actors reject the notion that state institutions have the right to intervene in the private sphere and have a say in the upbringing of children or family relations, considering it a violation of individual freedoms and human rights.⁵² This has direct impacts on gender legislation. For instance, protests in several European countries against what has been deemed state interference into family matters and the influence of transnational organizations, like the UN and EU, has led states to delay the passage of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), failing to take measures to prevent violence against women, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators.⁵³

51. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

52. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *The War on Gender* from a

Transnational Perspective - Lessons for Feminist Strategising, 2014.

53. Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim, *Gender as symbolic glue: The position and role of conservative and far right parties in the anti-*

gender mobilizations in Europe, 2015.

Anti-gender campaigns as a reaction to elitism



Binary divisions between “us” and “them” are central to anti-gender rhetoric, the thought process being that corrupt elites and foreign forces who are detached from reality impose “gender ideology” on common citizens and, in doing so, undermine authentic national values.⁵⁴ Anti-gender ideology and right-wing populism converge in the targeting of liberal elites, lobbyists, and feminists as responsible for the economic and social decline of the population at large.⁵⁵ As the narrative goes, those working toward gender equality and non-discrimination are dangerous and powerful, as they are well-funded and well-connected to global elites.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, opponents of gender equality and LGBT rights take on the role of the victim, claiming to be the only ones devoted to family and thus representative of the common man.⁵⁷ In countries with more diverse populations, the othering power of right-wing populism extends this antagonism to immigrants, refugees, Muslims, and others seen as external to the majority population.⁵⁸

54. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

55. Agnieszka Graff and Elzbieta Korolczuk, *Towards An Illiberal Future: Anti-Genderism and Anti-Globalization*, 2017.

56. *Ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*

58. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

Anti-gender campaigns as a reaction to the economic crisis



Some experts believe that growing discontent with neoliberal policies in many parts of Europe, especially in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, is a root cause of the current wave of anti-gender campaigning.⁵⁹ Reactions to austerity-based social reforms, such as cuts in child care services, have emboldened citizens who are pushed into greater insecurity and poverty to voice their anger and dissatisfaction with leading policymakers about the lack of economic opportunities⁶⁰ and use liberal issues, such as LGBT rights, as a scapegoat.⁶¹

Despite the strong transnational commonalities around anti-gender mobilizations, individual actors have used shared agendas to strategize around their national socio-political contexts. This has resulted in campaigns having distinct national triggers that are focused on a few core issues of relevance. As local contexts shape the intensity and focus of anti-gender rhetoric and practice, a complete understanding of the phenomenon in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine requires a more

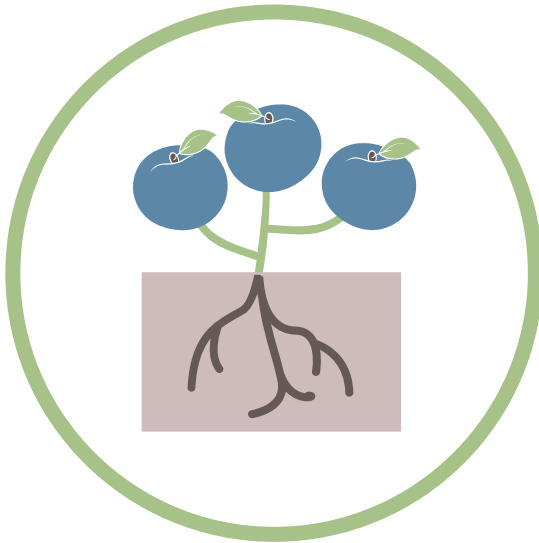
59. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

60. Weronika Grzebalska, *Why the war on "gender ideology" matters – and not just to feminists: Anti-genderism and the crisis of neoliberal democracy*, 2016.

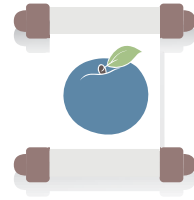
61. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

in-depth look at individual country settings. The following section points to commonalities in the underlying frameworks that set the foundation for the anti-gender campaigns in these contexts.

Common underlying frameworks



Political and economic transformations



In the post-Soviet period, Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine have been in the process of forming new narratives that present the restoration of traditional gender roles as a way to revitalize the nation, preserve the family, and renew moral traditions. The early post-Soviet transition was marked by a heavily politicized economic transformation and protracted period of financial hardship. Beliefs about the state, the traditional family, and community life affected the transition to democracy, as gender issues became “an ideological site for political, religious, and economic projects.”⁶²

Resurgent patriarchal stereotypes and deepening gender inequalities in the post-Soviet period led to conservative societal expectations, high unemployment rates for women, and their removal from the official public sphere.⁶³ Women were disproportionately affected by the loss of social safety nets, as they lost maternal and childcare benefits⁶⁴ and made up the majority of those in care-taking roles.⁶⁵ The new market system,

62. Armine Ishkanian, *Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2003.

63. *Ibid.*
64. *Ibid.*

65. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, *Beyond Gender? Anti-gender mobilization and the lessons for progressives*, 2015.

as it reasserted traditional values, also venerated masculinity and the heterosexual family model, which played a powerful role in the continued discrimination and violence against the LGBT community.⁶⁶ Though the old Soviet legal code has been slowly replaced in the former Soviet republics, the current system is a hybrid mix of old Soviet-era laws and newer post-independence laws, and legal measures dealing with issues that affect women and minorities have not all been substantially altered to offset new realities.⁶⁷



Demographic crisis

Once the Soviet Union unraveled, rising unemployment, poverty, and pronatalist rhetoric further reinforced women's role as nurturer and caretaker and fostered traditional gender roles. Within the context of neoliberal reform and the emergence of new gender inequalities, demographic and family politics set a fertile ground for anti-gender campaigning to take hold.⁶⁸ Despite the pronatalist approach of countries in the former Soviet Union, upon independence the republics experienced a large drop in their birthrates and have seen their populations steadily decrease since the early independence years, with low fertility rates largely attributed to economic hardship, poverty, and the shortage of labor resources.⁶⁹

^{66.} Sarah Bania-Dobyns, Eric Dibbern, Arianna Nowakowski and Stephanie Raessler, *Topical Research Digest: Human Rights in Russia and the Former Soviet Republics*, 2007.

^{67.} American Bar Association,

CEDAW Assessment Tool Report Armenia, 2002.

^{68.} Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Gender, nation, and reproduction: Demographic discourses and politics in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution*, 2012.

^{69.} Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, *The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine*, 2014.

Ethno-national and religious resurgence



Post-communist and post-conflict settings like Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine are characterized by a surge of ethno-nationalistic rhetoric and religious self-identification. The gendered process of transition led to greater discourse on feminine identity, domesticity, motherhood, and female purity linked to notions of national and religious tradition.⁷⁰ In the independence years, these gendered discourses of family and tradition invoked the idea that women are mothers and caretakers both inside the home and at a national level.⁷¹ People looked to the family as a “locus for reinforcing their internal solidarity, preserving and transmitting cultural identities.”⁷² These ideas pitted traditionalism against European ideology and the project of democratic reconstruction.⁷³ At the same time, all three newly-independent countries saw greater political and social significance given to the church.⁷⁴ As the church became regarded as a moral and national authority, the more its actors played visible and front-line roles in anti-gender campaigning.⁷⁵

70. Catherine Baker, *Gender in the Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR*, 2016.

71. *Ibid.*

72. Yvonne Galligan, Sara Clavero and Marina Calloni, *Gender Politics and Democracy in Post-Socialist*

Europe, 2007.

73. Tatiana Zhurzhenko, *Gender, nation, and reproduction: Demographic discourses and politics in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution*, 2012.

74. Roman Kuhar and David

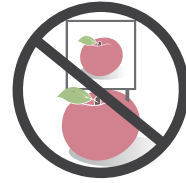
Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.

75. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.



Members of the Georgian Orthodox Church confront police during a gay rights rally in Tbilisi, 2013.

Soviet anti-feminist rhetoric and the weakness of current women's movements



The Soviet history and new realities set the framework for anti-feminist rhetoric in common discourse and the weakness of women's movements in post-communist countries. In the Soviet period, ostensibly women-friendly laws were put into place, but this did not always translate to equal rights for women in the public and private spheres.⁷⁶ While promised emancipation, Soviet women were simultaneously forced to take on all domestic chores in addition to becoming workers in the industrialized economy, in this way taking on a double burden.⁷⁷ Often, serious discussion about women's issues was quelled, as the emphasis was placed on production over social, cultural, and political measures, such as liberation and equality.⁷⁸

76. Armine Ishkanian, *Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2003.

77. Catherine Baker, *Gender in the Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR*, 2016.

78. Armine Ishkanian, *Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the*

Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus, 2003.

At the same time, feminism did not gain influence in the Soviet Union, because Soviet women faced different forms of oppression and discrimination to Western women, and Western feminist ideals did not translate to the Soviet context, as postsocialist societies had universal literacy rates, relatively equal labor force participation and balanced pay, and satisfactory maternal and child health.⁷⁹ Moreover, women's organizations active in the Soviet period often perceived feminism as imported from the West and of no relevance to them, having largely missed the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁰

This history has had long-term repercussions. Women's NGOs in many of the former Soviet republics, including Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, continue to encounter major obstacles, including a dearth of resources that seriously hampers their activities, dependency on foreign assistance, and state repression.⁸¹ On top of this, NGOs are typically centered in major cities and out of touch with the majority of the country, and they lack a unified movement with common agendas and goals, both of which hinder their ability to make their messages accessible to the larger public and push for gender equality and non-discrimination.⁸²

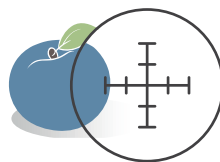
79. Iveta Silova and Cathryn Magno, *Gender Equity Unmasked: Democracy, Gender, and Education in Central/Southeastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*, 2004.

80. Oksana Kis, *Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine: From "allergy" to last hope*, 2013.

81. Natasha Bingham, *Gendering Civil Society: Women's Organizations in Former Soviet Republics*, 2012.

82. *Ibid.*

Conflict and militarism in the post-Soviet era



Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine have all suffered from conflict and a rise in militarism in the post-Soviet era. According to the 2013 Global Militarization Index, Armenia is among the most militarized nations in the world, and Ukraine and Georgia are also relatively high on the index.⁸³ There are several ways in which war and conflict have exacerbated the gendered nature of post-Soviet transition. A well-known tactic, questions of gender and sexuality, among other social issues, are neglected in environments where national history, identity, and tradition are defined by ethnic conflict.⁸⁴ In such contexts, women are seen as vessels in charge of reproducing future generations, while men must protect the nation through military service.⁸⁵

Taking the Ukrainian example, war has been perceived as a masculine space and issues such as gender inequality have been sidelined and silenced.⁸⁶ In Ukraine, as in other conflict zones, men make up the majority of those killed in conflict, while women make up the majority of the internally displaced population and face a lack of government safety nets and support networks when they become de facto heads of households.⁸⁷ Moreover, though

83. Bonn International Center for Conversion, *Global Militarization Index*, 2013.

84. Catherine Baker, *Gender in the Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe and the USSR*, 2016.

85. Sona Dilanyan, Burcu Doğan and Anna Iluridze, *Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey*, 2017.

86. Giulia Pasquinelli, *Violent conflict and sexual violence in Eastern Ukraine*, 2016.

87. Elisabeth Duban and Olena Suslova, *Gender Analysis Report USAID/Ukraine*, 2017.

the phenomenon has not been widely studied in the region, there is also evidence that conflict correlates with an increase in prevalence of violence. For instance, there is some limited evidence in the Ukrainian context that domestic and sexual violence is occurring as a result of the conflict; however, incidents tend not to be reported.⁸⁸

It is also noteworthy that, in the regional context, individuals who do not fit gender normative expectations are seen as internal enemies of the state. In the Armenian context, during anti-gender campaigning, “evocations of ‘state’ and ‘nation’ as well as references to historical events, genocide, and current geo-political circumstances” were commonplace, and the LGBT community was blamed for the low birth rate and “genocide” of Armenians, thus creating harmful and unfounded parallels in discourse with hatred for Turks, who were responsible for the 1915 genocide of the Armenian people.⁸⁹



A sign posted in Yerevan by anti-gender actors that reads: “Gender = Death, Family = Nation, Gender pathology is genocide”.

88. Brian Lucas, Brigitte Rohwerder and Kerina Tull, *Gender and conflict in Ukraine*, 2017.

89. Sona Dilanyan, Burcu Doğan and Anna Iluridze, *Gender and Sexuality in the Discourses of the*

Nation-State in Conflict Contexts: Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey, 2017.

Enduring institutional barriers to access to justice



Patriarchal traditions and harmful gender attitudes and stereotypes that have resulted from the aforementioned issues have deeply affected the status of women and the LGBT community and have become grounds for unequal treatment and discrimination against them. Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine all have strategic interests in strengthening ties with the EU, gaining budget support and/or joining the EU, and obtaining visa liberalisation; therefore, all must ensure that their legislation is in line with European human rights standards by implementing international and regional human rights agreements. Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine have all signed and ratified a number of human rights treaties and conventions that guarantee gender equality, including the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the European Social Charter, and all have proclaimed their dedication to democratic principles of gender equality before the world community and named gender equality one of the priorities of state policy. However, scholars and civil society advocates agree that gender legislation adopted in the three countries of interest are largely declaratory in nature.⁹⁰

Though gender legislation was put forth and advances made, few practical steps have been taken toward implementing human rights treaties and conventions, and women and members of the LGBT community in all three countries face continued discrimination in all spheres. Despite different legislative attempts, not much has been implemented in terms of tangible policies, and there is a lack of accountability by the government for meeting those legislative initiatives.⁹¹ Issues like domestic violence

90. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender*

Movements in Georgia, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

91. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric,*

and Community Strategies, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

and discrimination against the LGBT community continue to hinder the countries' progressive agendas, which impacts their hopes for greater integration with the West.⁹² Moreover, the impact of anti-gender campaigns is also detrimental for the region's aspirations for integration and/or support from the EU.⁹³

To achieve greater gender equality and status for women and the LGBT community, the region must reconcile traditional and deeply conservative mentalities with progressive measures. This requires not only legal amendments but also the removal of social, economic, and cultural barriers to ensuring access to justice for women and the LGBT community. It also requires political will surrounding equality and non-discrimination measures, such as concerted state efforts to raise public awareness on controversial gender legislation before it is passed. Until gender legislation receives due attention and support, it will remain formal, legislative lip-service and of a declarative character and will not result in substantive gender equality policies. Below, a summary of the present state of gender legislation in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine is presented.

92. Catherine Pilishvili, Gender norms in Georgia in relation to war and peace, 2017.

93. Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, The Current Situation and Potential Responses to

Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine, 2017.

Gender equality



Ukraine was among the first of the former Soviet republics to implement gender equality legislation. The government adopted the Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women in 2005. However, most of the articles are simply declarative, without any real mechanism for executing them or sanctions for violating them.⁹⁴ Similarly, Georgia adopted a law on gender equality in 2010. Among the criticisms are the fact that the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament does not adequately monitor implementation of the law nor comment on other state institutions' implementation, and the law does not provide for a complaint mechanism to make violation of the law liable to trial in a court of justice.⁹⁵ In Armenia, the government adopted the Law on Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (formerly known as the Gender Equality Law) in 2013. Amid conservative outcries and purposeful distortion over semantics, State officials called for the term "gender" to be excluded in legal documents and the name of the law changed.⁹⁶ Though the law defines several key terms and aims to prohibit gender discrimination and guarantee equality, it does not create a mechanism for victims to assert their rights in the court room and is not properly implemented.⁹⁷

94. Tamara Martsenyuk, Gender equality situation in Ukraine: challenges and opportunities, 2016.

95. Gayane Makaryan, Parvana Bayramova, Babutsa Pataraiia, Doina Ioana Străisteanu and

Olena Uvarova, Barriers, remedies and good practices for women's access to justice in five Eastern Partnership countries, 2017.

96. Ani Jilozian, Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of

Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies, 2017.

97. Society Without Violence, The Human Rights Situation of LGBTI Individuals in Armenia, 2016.

Anti-discrimination



Despite amendments to several laws to expressly provide greater protection for LGBT rights, legislative gaps remain, which lead to discriminatory practices that adversely affect the LGBT community.⁹⁸ Moreover, there is evidence that violence against the LGBT community in the region is actually increasing.⁹⁹ For instance, pride marches planned in the three countries of interest have been cancelled due to violent threats and the failure of the local police to guarantee the safety of demonstrators, and public events organized by LGBT rights activists have been attacked.¹⁰⁰

Several articles of the Georgian Criminal Code refer to homosexual sexual intercourse as “distorted sexual contact.”¹⁰¹ Crimes committed because of a victim’s sexual orientation or gender identity were added to the list of aggravating circumstances in the Georgian Criminal Code in 2012, and in 2014, despite opposition from the Orthodox Church, parliament passed an anti-discrimination law prohibiting discrimination due to sexual orientation or gender identity.¹⁰² The anti-discrimination bill angered conservatives, including the church, whose members met with the Ministry of Justice and pushed for a provision on “protecting public morals” that NGOs were not initially made aware of.¹⁰³

^{98.} Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

^{99.} *Ibid.*

^{100.} *Ibid.*
^{101.} Ana Natsvlshvili, *Study on Homophobia, Transphobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*, Legal Report: Georgia, 2010.

^{102.} Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

^{103.} Transparency International Georgia, *New anti-discrimination law: Challenges and achievements*, 2014.

Similarly, in Ukraine, the 2012 Law on Principles of Prevention and Combating Discrimination in Ukraine is generally considered inadequate in its protection of LGBT rights, as sexual orientation and gender identity are not listed as grounds for discrimination and there are few legal remedies.¹⁰⁴ Armenia still does not have a standalone anti-discrimination law, and its criminal code does not provide a legislative ban on hate crimes committed on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.



Domestic violence

Domestic violence is a critical issue in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine. Women are subjected to all forms of domestic violence, be it physical, psychological, sexual, and economic, and the widespread impunity of offenders and lack of state support has led to major obstacles in combating this issue. Domestic violence legislation is crafted in the region with a view of protecting women, family, and children, and reinforces obsolete and problematic gender roles and stereotypes.¹⁰⁵ A recent case in point is the new domestic violence law in Armenia, which recently passed in late 2017. Just before its submission to parliament in mid-November, the draft law was changed to include language on “strengthening traditional values in the family” and “restoring harmony in the family”.¹⁰⁶

104. Elisabeth Duban and Olena Suslova, Gender Analysis Report USAID/Ukraine, 2017.

105. Tamara Martsenyuk, Gender equality situation in Ukraine: challenges and opportunities, 2016.

106. Human Rights Watch, Armenia: Little Protection, Aid for Domestic Violence Survivors, 2018.

Georgia and Ukraine have made greater strides to date to combat domestic violence. The Law of Georgia on Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence was adopted by the parliament in 2006, and domestic violence was subsequently criminalized in 2012.¹⁰⁷ Georgia also recently ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2017. Similarly, Ukraine has seen some advances, though issues remain. Ukraine was the first post-Soviet country to introduce domestic violence legislation, passing the Law of Ukraine on Prevention of Domestic Violence in 2001.¹⁰⁸ On the horizon in Ukraine is the draft Law on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence, which has a wider scope than the previous law on the same issue.¹⁰⁹ Though an improvement on the present law, there is



Activists rally to bring attention to the issue of violence against women after a series of femicides took place in Georgia, 2014. (Credit: Giorgi Lomsadze)

107. Gayane Makaryan, Parvana Bayramova, Babutsa Pataraiia, Doina Ioana Străisteanu and Olena Uvarova, *Barriers, remedies and good practices for women's*

access to justice in five Eastern Partnership countries, 2017.

108. Tamara Martsenyuk, *Gender Politics in Post-Soviet Ukraine*, 2015.

109. Elisabeth Duban and Olena Suslova, *Gender Analysis Report USAID/Ukraine*, 2017.

widespread criticism that it fails to take a victim-centered approach and adequately address the punishment of perpetrators.¹¹⁰ Ukraine signed the Istanbul Convention, though it has yet to be ratified. One of the main reasons for postponing the ratification is related to the fact that the terms “gender” and “sexual orientation” are used in the document, evidence of the ongoing repercussions of the anti-gender campaign.¹¹¹

Abortion and sexual education



Abortion laws in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine are fairly liberal, and abortion remains a major birth control method in the region. In all three states, abortion is legal on request during the first trimester and available into the second trimester on a variety of medical and social grounds. However, there have been attempts to reduce women’s reproductive freedoms in recent years. One case in point is the ban on sex-selective abortion in Armenia. The regulations set forth through the law, including the three-day waiting period and mandatory counseling requirements, are unjustifiable retrogressions and have the potential to infringe on women’s abortion rights.¹¹²

110. Ibid.

111. Ukraine Crisis Media Centre, Why ratification of the Istanbul Convention, a tool to prevent

domestic violence, is being blocked?, 2017.

112. Gabriel Armas-Cardona and Ani Jilozian, Examining sex-

selective abortion policy, practices and rhetoric in Armenia from a rights perspective, 2017.

Abortion is widely carried out due to the Soviet legacy and is not as widely-politicized as in other regions of the world; however, there is evidence for growing anti-abortion stigma in the region.¹¹³ In the Caucasus, high rates of sex-selective abortion have been used to catapult public discourse and change attitudes around abortion.¹¹⁴ In Ukraine, proposed legislative bans were introduced to parliament, though the medical community was able to successfully mobilize to protect abortion rights by voicing their opinions at parliamentary hearings and roundtable discussions.¹¹⁵

Sexual education has also been under attack in the three countries of interest. In 2015, Georgia anti-gender campaign representatives, including TV anchors and businessmen, addressed parliament with a petition to ban the introduction of a new school subject for third and fourth graders entitled “Me and Society” that would have included some topics in sexual education.¹¹⁶ Moreover, there have been several articles and public actions akin to the protests against sexual education seen across Europe.¹¹⁷ Ukraine does not have a course or approved curriculum on sexual education in schools, though some topics, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, sexually transmitted infections, and gender equality, are covered in the secondary school course Fundamentals of Health.¹¹⁸ In Armenia, the Healthy Lifestyles course was introduced in secondary public schools in 2008. There are numerous issues with the course and the way it is taught; one of the biggest issues lies with the fact that physical education teachers mandated to teach the course exhibit low level of knowledge and harmful prejudices.¹¹⁹

113. ASTRA Network, Status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Central and Eastern Europe, 2014.

114. Gabriel Armas-Cardona and Ani Jilozian, Examining sex-selective abortion policy, practices and rhetoric in Armenia from a rights perspective, 2017.

115. Galina Yarmanova, Anti-gender movement in Ukraine, 2017.

116. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia, 2017

117. Ibid.

118. Tamara Martsenyuk, Gender equality situation in Ukraine: challenges and opportunities, 2016.

119. Anush Poghosyan, Nina Harutyunyan, Lilit Grigoryan, Ani Jilozian, Shushan Kurkchian, and Gohar Panajyan, An evaluation of the sexual education curriculum in schools in the Republic of Armenia, 2013.

Commonalities in the anti-gender campaigns of Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine



Russian influence



Russia's far-reaching global influence continues to support activism around anti-gender campaigns. Russia strategically positions itself as the defender of true, European values, while accusing those who seek to advance women's and LGBT rights as destroying the family and nation.¹²⁰ Russian anti-gender propaganda consistently refers to Europe as "Gayropa" (Gay Europe) in an effort to dissociate itself from the West and legitimize its power and role in geopolitical discourse, which has been used widely in other countries under its influence to demean LGBT individuals and activists.¹²¹ At the same time, Russian politicians, oligarchs, media figures, activists, academics, and clerics, among others, recycle discourse from Western anti-gender actors and use it to produce propaganda used internally and externally.¹²²

Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine have all experienced increasing pressure from Russia to back out of conversations about seeking membership into and forging stronger ties with the EU as a result of direct conflict or to protect national security interests in the region. Russia's actions in 2008 and 2014 in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively, forced discussions regarding eventual integration with the EU to be sidelined for fear of antagonization.¹²³ In Armenia, the pressure to join the Eurasian Economic Union alongside

120. Southern Poverty Law Center, World Congress of Families gathering in Tbilisi showcases anti-LGBT rhetoric and conspiracy theories, 2016.

121. Maryna Romanets, *Virtual Warfare: Masculinity, Sexuality, and Propaganda in the Russo-Ukrainian War*, 2017.

122. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender*

Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality, 2017.

123. Catherine Piliishvili, *Gender norms in Georgia in relation to war and peace*, 2017.

Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan instead of signing a partnership agreement with the EU was shortly thereafter followed by anti-gender backlash, as gender issues were artificially raised on the agenda to arouse fear, align conservative masses, and distract public attention from political realities.¹²⁴

Russian anti-gender sentiment and policy has influenced regional politics with regards to gender equality, LGBT rights, domestic violence, and abortion rights, among other issues. Such rhetoric and legislation in Russia percolate out to Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, as well as other post-Soviet states, and have had major repercussions on policy reform and the lives of citizens.

When Russia signed a bill to protect minors from “homosexual propaganda” in 2013, it was soon followed by similar attempts in several post-Soviet countries, including Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine.¹²⁵ These attempts to seriously threaten and limit LGBT rights didn’t pass; however, the issue may be raised on the agenda again in coming years. Additionally, the Russian move to decriminalize aspects of their domestic violence law prompted a wave of anti-gender backlash in Armenia that sought to compromise the adoption of domestic violence legislation locally.¹²⁶ Similarly, it is possible that recent efforts in Russia to restrict abortion, such as the draft bill to introduce administrative fines for performing abortions outside state clinics, the proposed ban on over-the-counter sales of emergency contraception, and mandated forced ultrasounds before undergoing abortion, may also be linked to new trends in restricting access to abortion in the region.¹²⁷

124. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017.

125. Weronika Grzebalska, *Why the war on “gender ideology” matters – and not just to feminists: Anti-genderism and the crisis of neoliberal democracy*, 2016.

126. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017.
127. *Ibid.*

It should be noted that the extent to which local policies have been influenced by Russia and outside forces has had much to do with public approval and whether or not laws were already in place. For instance, the domestic violence law, though controversial in Armenia, was largely not attacked in Georgia, because the law had been passed over a decade before anti-gender rhetoric was in full force in the country.

Similar Anti-Gender actors



Several of the main actors involved in spreading misinformation in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine have direct ties with one another as well as government officials in Russia, and there remains striking similarities among the anti-gender groups in these countries and other countries in the region.¹²⁸ Given that many actors have been found meeting one another at organized conferences, it is reasonable to assume that they have cooperated, shared knowledge and resources, and drawn heavily on each other's agendas.¹²⁹

128. Ibid.

129. Eszter Kováts and Maari Põim, Gender as symbolic glue: The position and role of conservative

and far right parties in the anti-gender mobilizations in Europe, 2015.

Anti-gender organizations and activists in the three countries of interest all have a strong Christian and/or nationalistic basis. All three countries saw the church upholding its own agenda and presenting its anti-gender viewpoints, to varying degrees.¹³⁰ This is clear even from the names of the groups. For instance, in Ukraine active groups included Family under the Holy Mother's Cover, Lord's Voice, and The Union of Christian Mothers.¹³¹

Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine all modeled Parental Committees off of the All-Russian Parental Resistance. In Armenia, the Pan-Armenian Parental Committee makes no effort to cover up the fact that it recycles Russian propaganda, as much of what is shared is taken directly from the All-Russian Parental Resistance and kept in the Russian language.¹³² The Georgian Orthodox Parents' Union, one of the earliest organized anti-gender groups, is headed by a man who writes on Christian teachings in the Russian language.¹³³ In Ukraine, the Orthodox Parent Committee is a branch of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), the most influential church in Ukraine that is mostly active in war-torn Eastern Ukraine.¹³⁴

130. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

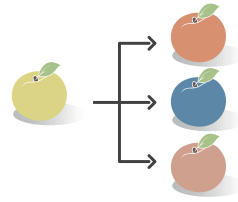
131. Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, *The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine*, 2014.

132. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017.

133. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017.

134. Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, *The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine*, 2014.

Similar communication channels & mobilization strategies



The key discourse used by anti-gender actors in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine is that gender aims to legitimize perversions and will lead to moral, demographic and spiritual genocide.¹³⁵ Whereas some tactics are adapted to local contexts when deemed necessary, the use of similar names for the parental committees and identical social media messages shows that many strategies were co-opted and copy-pasted.¹³⁶

The anti-gender campaigns in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine all use civic activism to galvanize the larger public to speak out against gender legislation and policies by playing on societal members' fear of destroying the family and spreading moral panic.¹³⁷ Online platforms like Stop Gender are found in all three countries and are among the most well-orchestrated and funded groups, using message consistency via various channels, including booklets, articles, and films widely disseminated to the public.¹³⁸

135. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement*

in Ukraine, 2017.

136. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017.

137. Ibid.

138. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of*

Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

Anti-gender actors in the three countries of interest have prepared and posted documents to be downloaded, printed, signed, and mailed out to addresses posted on their websites.¹³⁹

The online blogs and postings share a common voice on gender policy and purport that gender legislation will lead to high rates of abortion, low birthrates, and the growth of the LGBT community.¹⁴⁰ In Ukraine, one post reads: “Your children are in danger! The question is scurvy propaganda of homosexuality in the Ukrainian society. Everything is happening secretly and is mostly taking root through the gender policy, sexual education, anti-discrimination laws, juvenile laws, laws on ‘the rights of children and women’, propaganda of tolerance and under the pretense of ‘struggle against AIDS, children trafficking and contrived family violence.’”¹⁴¹ In similar fashion, in Armenia a campaign message read: “No to the gender law! No to national decay! For the sake of Armenian family! For the sake of Armenian children! For the sake of our children!”¹⁴²

Another main feature of the anti-gender campaigns in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine is the control of local media. In the three countries of interest, anti-gender actors were afforded wide accessibility to the media, allowing them to spread fear and misinformation and proving to be an effective tool in promoting harmful gender norms and suppressing women’s and LGBT rights.¹⁴³ In Armenia, representatives of Iravunq newspaper, which is owned by an MP of the ruling Republican party, perpetuated hysteria around gender legislation and called for blacklisting dozens of activists

139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

141. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Overcoming gender backlash: Experiences of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Georgia, Armenia and Poland*, 2013.

142. Anna Harutyunyan, *Unearthing the Gender discourse in Armenia: From Hysteria to Constructive Dialogue*, 2017.

143. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric,*

and Community Strategies, 2017; Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

who have supported LGBT rights.¹⁴⁴ In Georgia, the widely-disseminated Asaval-Dasavali, known for its xenophobic and homophobic content, was highly active during the anti-gender campaign and published numerous pieces attacking women's and LGBT rights activism.¹⁴⁵ A government decree in Ukraine in 2014 gave religious organizations free air time for programs touching on topics in spirituality and morality, and discourse around the "gay propaganda" ban, among other topics, was widely covered by conservative media.¹⁴⁶

Anti-LGBT focus



The fiercest conflicts in the region have centered around homosexuality and LGBT rights. For instance, in Armenia in 2013, the Law On Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women (formerly known as the Gender Equality Law) defined gender as the "acquired and socially fixed behavior of different sexes," which produced significant backlash among the public who argued that it was an attempt to introduce Western immoral values, in particular homosexuality and sexual perversion, to Armenia.¹⁴⁷

144. Ani Jilozian, Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies, 2017.

145. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha

and Lika Jalagania, Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia, 2017.

146. Galina Yarmanova, Anti-gender movement in Ukraine, 2017.

147. Ani Jilozian, Gender Politics

in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies, 2017.



Violence erupted when marchers at Ukraine's Gay Pride Parade fell under attack by far-right activists, 2015.

Anti-gender campaigns in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine all used the issue of same sex marriage, which is not on the policy agenda, to politicize gender issues, though to varying extents.¹⁴⁸ In Georgia, same-sex marriage was artificially brought up around the 2016 parliamentary elections, when there were discussions around a pending referendum that would define marriage as a union between a man and a woman.¹⁴⁹ This led to a period of heightened homo/bi/transphobic sentiments and hate speech.¹⁵⁰ During the 2015 Armenian constitutional referendum, the administration similarly pushed for changes to the marriage clause to prevent any legal recognition of same-sex couples and explicitly ban same-sex marriage.¹⁵¹

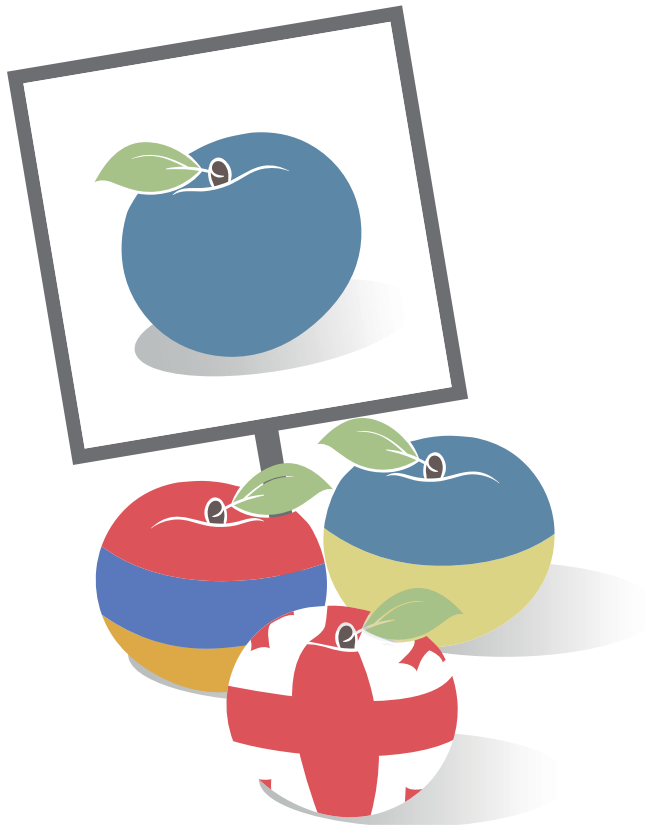
148. Nona Shahnazarian, *Under the rainbow flags: LGBTI rights in the South Caucasus*, 2016.

149. *Ibid.*

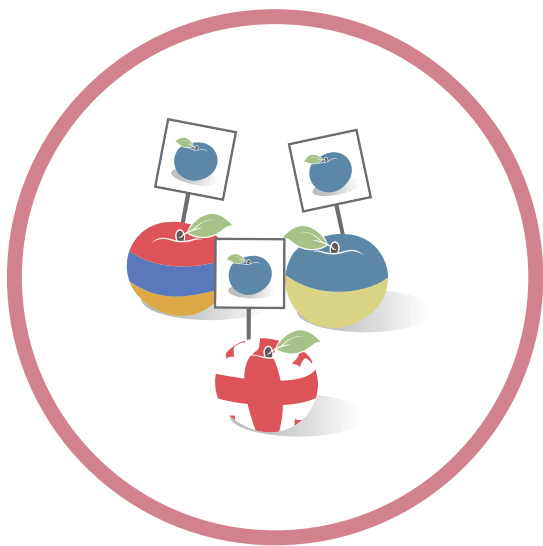
150. Edita Badasyan, "Live as you wish, but make sure other people do not know", 2016.

151. Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017.

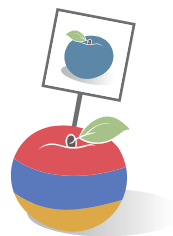
These moves are indicative of the governments' attempts to manipulate homophobic sentiments in society to win elections. They are also indicative of the attempts by anti-gender actors to use tactics from other European anti-gender campaigns in an attempt to mobilize around preventing future marriage equality proposals by altering the constitution.



Differences in the anti-gender campaigns of Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine



Anti-gender campaign in Armenia



Armenia is highly dependent on Russia for its financial well-being, conflict management, and security. In studying the phenomenon of the anti-gender campaign in Armenia, it is clear that Russian authorities were largely orchestrating the campaign as a political tool to dissuade Armenians from Western geopolitical orientations and used direct Russian propaganda in their messaging.¹⁵² This is also plainly clear from the fact that financial support for the anti-gender campaign has been directly linked to the Russian government and embassy in Armenia.¹⁵³ Arguably, Russian influence over the anti-gender campaign in Armenia was stronger than in Georgia and Ukraine for these reasons.

In relation to Georgia and Ukraine, Armenia had a weaker and more uncoordinated reaction to the 2013 anti-gender campaign. In Armenia, anti-gender mobilizations largely took progressives by surprise, and the vast majority of counter-actions were developed on the spot.¹⁵⁴ There is little evidence that proactive measures focused on long-term planning were carried out.¹⁵⁵ Women's and LGBT rights activists in Armenia generally accept that they work in isolation and continue to engage like-minded

152. Ibid.

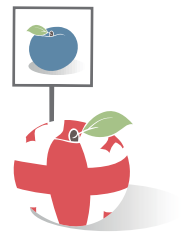
153. Epress, Adoption of Domestic Violence Law in Armenia Opposed by Pro-Russian Groups: Report, 2016.

154. Ani Jilozian, Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies, 2017.

155. Ani Jilozian, Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies, 2017.

progressives while not reaching larger segments of the population.¹⁵⁶ They also generally agree that their messaging strategies to date have not always been successful due to a lack of specialized knowledge in developing attitude-changing discourses and disagreement on how to speak about certain issues.¹⁵⁷

Anti-gender campaign in Georgia



When comparing the three republics, one major thing that stands out in the Georgian context is the extent of the church's role in anti-gender campaigning. Though the church was involved in the anti-gender campaigns in all three countries of interest and is arguably growing in power in Ukraine following the recent conflicts,¹⁵⁸ the Georgian Orthodox Church's role to date seems to have had greater direct impacts on the politics of the country and government decision-making.

The Georgian Orthodox Church is well known for its conservatism, openly anti-Western sentiments, and alignment with the Russian government.¹⁵⁹

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid.

158. Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

159. Natalia Antelava, *Georgia: Orthodoxy in the classroom*, 2015.

As one of the oldest churches in the world, it is a foundational piece of Georgian religious nationalism and the most trusted institution in the country.¹⁶⁰ It is also highly backed up by the government, which provides it with a great amount of state money and privileges.¹⁶¹ This has enabled the Church to gain prominence and rise to power in the post-Soviet period.¹⁶² It has stood up in opposition to sexual education since the early 2000s, with the Georgian Patriarch himself likening it to pornography and encouraging schools to ban sexual education.¹⁶³

When the anti-gender campaign was in full force, Georgian society at large showed increasing trends of being under the Church's influence. The Church has been vocal about their anti-LGBT views, and the ripple effects of their intolerance have had serious impacts on the ability of LGBT individuals to be open about their sexuality and gender identity.¹⁶⁴ It was efforts by the Georgian Orthodox Church that were paramount in thwarting access to justice for the LGBT community and led to disputes around the anti-discrimination law, as officials called for language protecting sexual minorities to be taken out.¹⁶⁵ It was also pushback from the Church during the infamous 2013 LGBT march that led to a violent clash between citizens and members of the Church, who beat LGBT demonstrators.¹⁶⁶ Notably, the 2016 World Congress of Families in Tbilisi was supported strongly by the Georgian Orthodox Church, and the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II himself made a rare appearance at the opening ceremony.¹⁶⁷

160. Michael Cecire, *The Kremlin Pulls on Georgia*, 2015.

161. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017.

162. *Ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*

164. Catherine Piliishvili, *Gender norms in Georgia in relation to war and peace*, 2017.

165. Transparency International Georgia, *New anti-discrimination law: Challenges and achievements*, 2014.

166. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017.

167. Southern Poverty Law Center, *World Congress of Families gathering in Tbilisi showcases anti-LGBT rhetoric and conspiracy theories*, 2016.

Another way in which Georgia stands out in the region is that, although conservative forces like the Georgian Orthodox Church are aligned with Russia, the majority of Georgians view Russia as Georgia's biggest economic and political threat.¹⁶⁸ However, it seems that Georgians' staunch anti-Russian sentiments did not have a strong impact on how the public viewed anti-gender campaign material coming from Russia. This is because, despite anti-Russian sentiments, right-wing parties and groups influenced by Russia continue to have influence over the anti-gender campaign given their ideological overlaps.¹⁶⁹ As a tactic, many anti-gender actors chose to invoke messaging used by the West to avoid being labeled as pro-Russian, and the Church refuted allegations of being influenced by the Russian Orthodox Church.¹⁷⁰ In 2014 the Georgian Orthodox Church purposefully declared May 17, the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia & Biphobia, as a day of celebration for the traditional family and marked the day with a rally, whereby protesters carried homophobic signs and marched in the streets and prevented LGBT activists from safely holding a rally of their own.¹⁷¹ This strategy of creating a "family day" mimicked that of anti-gender campaigns across Europe.¹⁷² Most recently, the move on behalf of Georgia to host the 2016 World Congress of Families may have been another attempt by these same actors to legitimize their claims of having a Western orientation.¹⁷³

As opposed to Armenia, the anti-gender campaign in Georgia appears to have been more localized and contextualized and less politically motivated by the outside, as reflected by its long history of anti-LGBT protests.

168. Institute of Polling and Marketing for Baltic Surveys/ Gallup, Georgian National Study, 2013.

169. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017.

170. Ibid.

171. Heinrich Böll Foundation, *Anti-Gender Movements on the Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2015.

172. Roman Kuhar and Aleš Zobec, *The Anti-Gender Movement*

in Europe and the Educational Process in Public Schools, 2017.

173. Maia Barkaia, Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017.

As early as 2003, the Orthodox Parents' Union was already established as an organized group and had been attacking publishers for publishing books on sexual education, including "Joyful Talks on Hygiene, Sex, and Healthy Lifestyle" and "ABCs of Love".¹⁷⁴ Anti-gay rallies date back to 2007, when conservative politicians caused hysteria around an event hosted by the Council of Europe entitled "All Different, All Equal", which was open to LGBT participants.¹⁷⁵ Other massive anti-gay rallies followed in 2010 and 2012, led by the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Parents' Union, with the largest being the 2013 violent counter-protest led by the Church at the peak of the campaign that mobilized thousands over a period of days.¹⁷⁶

Georgian civil society's counter-reaction to the anti-gender campaign also seems stronger than Armenia's, though not as strong as Ukraine's. The relative strength of Georgia's civil society can perhaps be attributed to political developments, such as the Rose Revolution, which helped catapult a number of reforms that inculcated democratic values into society, including establishing laws on gender equality and combating trafficking and violence.¹⁷⁷ Because such political developments in Georgia and the adoption of gender legislation took place before anti-gender campaigning was at its height, certain issues had gained some level of familiarity and relative acceptance and therefore were not as widely attacked. Still, activists agree that civil society response has largely been reactive and that activists have yet to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy to address the various dimensions of the anti-gender movement. Some LGBT activists see this as limiting the development of queer activism, since instead of articulating its own agenda and priorities, the LGBT community is continuously mitigating the negative impact of the anti-gender agenda.

174. Ibid.

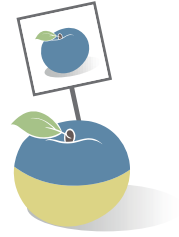
175. Heinrich Böll Foundation, Anti-Gender Movements on the

Rise? Strategising for Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe, 2015.

176. Ibid.

177. Ketevan Chkheidze, Gender Politics in Georgia, 2011.

Anti-gender campaign in Ukraine



In the case of Ukraine, the anti-gender campaign is arguably wider in scope than in Armenia and Georgia, as it has two main sets of actors located in the West and East. The most active group is the Ukrainian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church in Western Ukraine, where there are high levels of religiosity and nationalist sentiment.¹⁷⁸ The driving forces of the anti-gender campaign in this region are religious organizations and far-right local governmental bodies that have strong ties to the national parliament and government.¹⁷⁹ In contrast, the Orthodox Parent Committee, which claims to have the blessing of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church – the most influential church in Ukraine – is mostly active in Eastern Ukraine.¹⁸⁰

By the time President Yanukovich came into office in 2010, many conservative forces, including members of the Parental Committee, contacted several government officials to call for the abolishment of the Equal Rights Law and provisions to the constitution, among other demands.¹⁸¹ Religious groups were joined by far-right organizations to demonstrate and influence policy-makers.¹⁸² Anti-gender discourse

178. Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, *The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine*, 2014.

179. Oksana Kis, *Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine: From*

“allergy” to last hope, 2013.

180. Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, *The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine*, 2014.

181. Oleva Suslova, *The Gender*

Dimension of Conflicts, 2017.

182. Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

gained traction from 2010–2012, which has led some scholars to argue that the rise of such discourse “was part of a general trend that reduced political openness and eventually resulted in the Euromaidan protests of late 2013.”¹⁸³ In an effort to control and restrict sexuality under the guise of reinstating morality in Ukrainian society, several draft laws were put forward, including On protection of public morals (2011), On changes to some legislative acts of Ukraine as to banning of artificial termination of pregnancy (2012), and On the Prohibition of propaganda of homosexuality aimed at children (2012).¹⁸⁴

Arguably, Ukraine has had a more sustained and stronger reaction against its anti-gender campaign than have Armenia and Georgia; their counter-movement was relatively successful in voicing strong opposition through collective actions and rattling the public perspective on matters related to gender and sexuality. Overall, there was a high level of resistance from civil society to the anti-gender campaign, stemming from the fact that Ukrainian feminists have worked to set a groundwork for feminist ideas and practices through scholarly and advocacy channels over the past two decades and came together to mobilize once attacks were in full force.¹⁸⁵ For instance, women’s and LGBT rights organizations took the initiative to establish the Gender Strategic Platform in 2011 in order to monitor the situation and develop advocacy efforts.¹⁸⁶

183. Olena Hankivsky and Marfa Skoryk, *The Current Situation and Potential Responses to Movements against Gender Equality in Ukraine*, 2014.

184. Tetyana Bureychak, *Gender Conservatism and Homophobia as Strategies of Moral Salvation in Contemporary Ukraine*, 2013.

185. Oksana Kis, *Feminism in Contemporary Ukraine: From “allergy” to last hope*, 2013.

186. Oleva Suslova, *The Gender Dimension of Conflicts*, 2017.

Political developments in the region strengthened reforms in political, social, and economic life that led to certain changes at a structural level as well as changes in mentality around progressive topics, including gender issues. In Ukraine, while the movements for gender equality and LGBT rights predated the Euromaidan protests of 2013–2014, it brought visibility to and provided a new opportunity for these issues to be communicated to a broader segment of the Ukrainian population.¹⁸⁷ Arguably, reinforced conservative gender roles encouraged women to take on traditional roles as care-givers and dissuaded them from the battlefield; however, women were still actively involved in the demonstrations and fighting in East Ukraine and continue to challenge the status quo and confront inequality and discrimination in many spheres.¹⁸⁸ They also encouraged the peace process through outreach and dialogue about ways to help end the conflict.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁷ Elisabeth Duban and Olena Suslova, Gender Analysis Report USAID/Ukraine, 2017.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Brian Lucas, Brigitte Rohwerder and Kerina Tull, Gender and Conflict in Ukraine, 2017.

Recommendations to counter anti-genderism in the region



The following recommendations, which are based on the separate anti-gender country reports¹⁹⁰ and the present study, are meant to offer a range of solutions to the issues stemming from local realities and conditions. Considering the similarities in the backdrop of the anti-gender campaigns in Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine and how the campaigns unfolded, cross-cultural assessments like the one provided in this paper are useful for advocates in developing approaches to counter anti-gender attacks in the region. One can take inspiration from successes in other cultural contexts that have experience in this regard. For instance, Italy built off of the successes of France’s anti-gender countering strategies by emulating slogans and protesting methods as well as cooperating with movement leaders across national borders.¹⁹¹

Despite the parallels and overlaps in the anti-gender campaigns of Armenia, Georgia, and Ukraine, however, the above assessment reveals that major differences also exist in regards to political realities and counter-responses. Therefore, one must use reasonable judgment before attempting to use similar strategies to counter anti-genderism across the region. Although the recommendations below are intended for the three countries of interest, it would be simplistic to use the same strategies without first taking the nuanced cultural and political contexts into account. While the recommendations offer some potential avenues to pursue, a more exhaustive list of recommendations would require greater in-depth analysis from activists in each of the country contexts and a larger-scale assessment, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

190. See: Ani Jilozian, *Gender Politics in Armenia: An Exploration of Legislation, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, and Community Strategies*, 2017; Maia Barkaia,

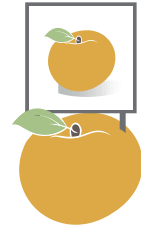
Shota Kincha and Lika Jalagania, *Anti-Gender Movements in Georgia*, 2017; Galina Yarmanova, *Anti-gender movement in Ukraine*, 2017.

191. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, 2017.



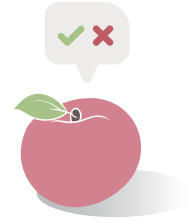
Activists mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Yerevan, 2016.

Build the capacity of local activists



- ▶ Build more safe spaces for community members targeted by anti-gender campaigning and work toward a broader base of community support and involvement by cultivating relationships among activists and allowing them to define their own agenda.
- ▶ Organize forums, conferences, workshops, and informal discussions on a regular basis to facilitate discourse among community members and members of oppressed groups and help set a groundwork for feminist ideas and practices.
- ▶ Support more gender and women's studies programs in the region to improve on activists' knowledge and skillset and strengthen the movement.
- ▶ Where appropriate, share resources and knowledge production across borders to help inform strategies of regional colleagues. This may include publications, online media materials, print media, and other such resources.

Produce rich, engaging, and effective content

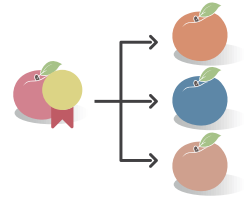


- ▶ Create new media content that speaks to people’s emotions, using less professional jargon and more narratives and storytelling to captivate people’s hearts and minds around issues of gender and sexuality. Using stories over statistics and human rights speak will help to dispel stereotypes around advocates being out-of-touch elites.
- ▶ Use local examples, where appropriate, to share stories about how gender legislation like domestic violence laws have helped save lives in an effort to mitigate fears around state interference in personal matters.
- ▶ Take measures to properly define the term “gender” and translate it into local languages to help dispel fear and animosity. Some regional activists’ arguments against this approach is that the term is internationally recognized and carries weight; however, also having local equivalents at hand to use when appropriate may potentially ease tensions and diminish the conception of gender as a purely Western construct.
- ▶ When creating content, choose simple messaging that balances discourse on human rights with something more digestible to the public, such as family and societal values, to counter wrongful claims and relate more to the public. Feminist approaches should not be overlooked; however, it

would be useful for activists to consider tweaking the language they use to express ideas of gender and sexuality in a way that may help re-frame the debate and speak to the moveable middle. For example, activists may strategically make a choice as to when they use the term “gender” and when more moderate language would help achieve better outcomes.

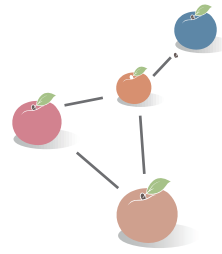
- ▶ Ensure that messaging is intersectional in approach and touches on challenges facing the country, such as socio-economic issues, poverty, unemployment, war and conflict, the lack of democracy, the poor healthcare and education systems, and systemic inequality.
- ▶ Counter the claim that discourse is imposed by Western or foreign agents by sharing historical narratives on gender and sexuality and localized feminist discourse that ties into present-day movements.
- ▶ Where appropriate, share resources and advocacy materials across borders to help inform strategies of regional colleagues.

Enhance grassroots mobilization and strategic alliance building



- ▶ Focus on creating strategic alliances with more in-country and out-of-country networks, developing platforms to enhance proactive movement building efforts and anti-gender counter-efforts.
- ▶ Create cross-movement solidarities using avenues such as social media activism to recruit new members and raise critical voices.
- ▶ Use new communication techniques to build long-term relationships with groups that have shared values.
- ▶ In light of limited access to mainstream media, collaborate more with independent media channels to cover public events and work to leverage mainstream media to spread anti-violence and pro-equality messaging.
- ▶ Where appropriate, share strategies for grassroots mobilization and alliance building across borders to help inform strategies of regional colleagues.

Promote greater community outreach



- ▶ Use all means of grassroots outreach, such as street organizing, non-formal education, social media activism, as well as more formal community and peer educational formats to reach the public.
- ▶ Enhance cooperation between mainstream women’s and LGBT NGOs and other advocacy and human rights groups.
- ▶ Use evidence-based and innovative mobilization strategies to reach out to the community and target specific segments of the population that may be receptive to messaging, such as parents, journalists, men, youth, human rights advocates, and potentially even unlikely advocates, such as certain church and state officials.
- ▶ Use opportunities to speak about the transnational nature of anti-gender campaigns as well as the cooperation between church and state, government corruption, and Russian interference, among other relevant topics. For the region, a specific focus on Russian influence over the anti-gender campaigns would be pertinent, as much of the anti-gender rhetoric is built on the idea that the West is a cultural colonizer seeking to destroy family values and little, if any, focus has been on Russia seeking to use gender issues as a means of sustaining geopolitical control over the region. Efforts to show how anti-gender campaigns serve political purposes through widely shared investigative reports and exposés can help to focus negative attention away from activists and be used to demand transparency and state accountability.

- ▶ Where appropriate, share resources and educational materials across borders to help inform strategies of regional colleagues.

Reframe the donor agenda



- ▶ Provide continued assistance to activists working to ensure the safety and security of beneficiaries and those developing/sustaining long-term projects.
- ▶ Provide greater support to grassroots mobilizations and fund projects that support in-country cohesion and build stronger communication channels among activists.
- ▶ Ensure greater resource mobilization and funding for women's and LGBT activists in the region, which has seen a dip in funding opportunities in recent years.
- ▶ Support activists' attendance at high profile gender-positive conferences and events worldwide and finance similar conferences and events in the countries of interest to facilitate cross-country mobilizations.
- ▶ Continue to support political developments that will inculcate democratic values among society members in the countries of interest and promote the adoption of gender legislation and policy to advance policymaking and create mentality shifts.

