Gender & Development

Call for Contribution: Volume 34, Issue 3
Rise of the global right, its implications on social justice and the push back by feminist resistances

About the journal
Gender & Development (G&D) is a unique journal that offers a forum to share experiences and analysis between feminist activists, scholars, and women leaders across the globe working in research, policy, and practice. The November 2026 Issue of G&D will focus on 'Rise of the global right, its implications on social justice and the push back by feminist resistances'.

Context
Ideological and political backlash against democratic principles and social justice goals, in particular gender equality has a long history, as do the feminist movements that have actively challenged these reactionary forces. In the last few decades however, the global political temperature has risen sharply towards the right with anti-gender forces becoming institutionalised, being systematically funded, gaining strong political support, and deploying new digital technologies to push their extreme brand of politics in ways that were previously unprecedented and unanticipated. These developments are taking place in a political landscape marked by rising political authoritarianism, resulting in increasing intolerance to diversity, xenophobia, misogyny, homophobia and ideologies fuelling anti-immigrant and anti-Black sentiments; along with a rapidly shrinking civic space. This renewed opposition to social justice poses grave challenges to political gains made through decades of feminist activism while also eroding democratic institutions and hard-won human rights (UNRISD and UN-Women 2025).

This brings us to a question: What is the difference between the historic opposition to gender justice and social justice more broadly, and the current gender backlash; and what kinds of threats does it pose? According to the UNRISD and UN-Women 2025 report, gender backlash constitutes "deliberate, organised attempts to roll back established commitments, rights and achievements in gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment as defined in a given local, national, regional or global context" (p.5). These systematic groupings attempt to shape policy discourse and legislation which ends up deprioritising gender and social justice goals, watering down diversity initiatives, curtailing basic rights, particularly, sexual and reproductive health rights and bodily autonomy, and diminishing the political voice and presence of women and sexual and gender minorities while placing them at risk of economic vulnerability, violence, and discrimination.

As per the UN Women- Asia Pacific 2024 report, an estimated 2 billion people live in contexts where consensual same-sex relations are criminalised, with over 40 countries specifically criminalising consensual same-sex relations between women. There are multiple examples of reactionary legal and policy measures that governments have implemented that pose threats to minoritised groups. In the US, following the supreme court ruling against affirmative action, a series of anti-DEI lawsuits have been filed by right wing groups and individuals resulting in the pre-emptive dilution or removal of diversity and inclusion policies in many enterprises (Malik 2024). In Germany, the government

approved measures in May this year that would restrict family reunification for migrants, many of whom are Syrians (Reuters 2025).

Many countries have witnessed an intensification of resistance against advances made in reproductive health and sexuality rights. Chile has witnessed an emboldening of anti-gender voices in relation to legislative discussions around legalising abortion (Vivaldi 2024). There is a rise of conservative governments and transnational religious movements upholding traditionalist gender norms in order to restrict the rights of LGBTQIA+ people in countries across regions as well. In South Asia, long running feminist, Queer and social justice movements have been increasingly facing backlash from many right-wing and nationalist, religious groups, conservative organisations, and men's online communities (IDS 2024, Chigateri and Kundu 2024, Subah 2025). In countries in East Asia, falling population rates alongside the erosion of the institution of marriage are causing anxiety among traditional and conservative groups, sharpening their anti-feminist campaigns (Brechenmacher 2025). The 2022 Presidential election in South Korea revealed a clear wedge between young men and women, with many of the former gravitating towards groups touting anti-feminist ideologies and upholding traditional family and marital norms (Lee 2024). Japan's refusal to consider CEDAW's recommendation to improve gender equality in areas of imperial succession, education, work-place discrimination and improving representation in politics and legal protection against gender-based violence reveals a lack of political will to examine the deeply embedded patriarchy within its system (Gao 2025). McEwen and Towns (2025) explore the spread of transnational anti-gender mobilisations against reproductive justice, gender and sexuality diversity, and sexuality education in Eastern and Southern Africa since the early 2000s. Anti-gender movements in LAC have also been trying to shape electoral competition, congress dynamics, and government policymaking in the 2010s. The issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, and sex education remain issues around which anti-gender action continues to be mobilised in the region (Biroli and Rousseau 2025)

Most recently, the array of executive orders passed under the current US administration on immigration policies including mass deportations, travel bans, revocation of work and student visas, denial of asylum, halting of refugee resettlement programmes, arrests of 'undocumented' or 'unlawful' migrants, and strengthening border restrictions (Amnesty International UK 2025, Amos 2025, Yousif 2025) add to the toll of rising intolerance. More recently, USAID cuts have meant gender programmes in several contexts have been negatively affected. In the SWANA region, this has meant slashing of maternal health services and discontinuation of rape treatment programmes (COFEM 2021). Overall, the tightening of laws that restrict bodily autonomy and sexual and gender expression, clamping down on social justice activism and stifling of free speech, the bolstering of anti-vaccine proponents, cutting off funding that keeps feminist organisations afloat, and even in some cases, co-opting gender justice politics are becoming the norm.

The recent rise of the 'Global Right'

The rise of the Global Right encompasses the intensification of reactionary political ideologies and norms (misogyny, Islamophobia, homophobia, transphobia and anti-Blackness) which begins to seep into social, political, and economic institutions and policies. These ideologies result in the radicalising of young people and emboldening of extremist groups that target ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and racialised groups. Anti-gender groups thus closely align with other reactionary groups and often work in tandem at local, national, and transregional levels, as well as in physical and digital spaces.

Graff, Kapur and Walters (2019) argue that there is a strong and complex relationship between gender and the rise of the global right-wing phenomenon. Anti-gender movements relentlessly oppose feminist and Queer critiques of gender and sex as 'natural' and 'essential' traits, while pushing to reinstate 'traditional' gender and sexual norms, which are often accompanied by 'racial, ethnic and religious majoritarianism' (np). This backlash is driven by this pervasive underlying threat of a demographic shift and cultural takeover by 'religious, racial, and sexual others' (ibid). This is happening globally, where a cultural and political narrative of victimhood has been constructed in which the dominant groups perceive being under 'threat' by a collective imaginary constituting minoritised groups such as Queer and Trans persons, migrants, and refugees (Gökarıksel, Neibert and Smith 2019), that are seen to threaten established social, cultural, and sexual norms. This results in a reconsolidation of nationalist and cultural identities and intensification of racial, religious and caste tensions, rooted in histories of colonialism, nationalism, casteism, and patriarchy.

These organisings are also well funded, although data on this is limited. According to a 2021 report by the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID), "the funding for global anti-rights movements—primarily from a small number of wealthy donors—had increased by 50 per cent since 2012, with anti-gender movements receiving more than triple the funding as LGBTIQ+ movements between 2013 and 2017" (Dolker 2021). The European Parliamentary Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights states that the "annual anti-gender funding in Europe more than doubled between 2018 and 2022, reaching $1.18 billion over this period" (UNRISD and UN-Women 2025, 7).

In this context, we are witnessing a rapid radicalisation of men and women across physical and digital spaces. Many right-wing spaces are led by women as well, who uphold violent ideologies while also strategising ways to navigate and bargain with masculinist politics to carve power for themselves according to Mehta (2015) who researched the role of women in right wing political parties in India. The radicalisation of young people through digital technologies and applications is fuelling white nationalism and xenophobic content. Men and boys, particularly, are being drawn into the alt-right pipeline, posing a growing threat to gender-equitable goals and feminist action (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019; Gökarıksel, Neubert, & Smith, 2019). Many young women are also increasingly finding themselves attracted to social media platforms of mostly white 'trad wife influencers' which indoctrinate women to perform 'traditional femininity' while preserving 'family values'. These work together towards "normalising far-right, anti-feminist ideologies on social media" (Scott and Day 2025), which then pervade popular culture and politics.

Strategies deployed by reactionary forces

Backlash against gender justice activists has also increased globally in the last decade, in terms of violence against women, LGBTQIA+ groups, Black people, Dalits (Anderson 2023, Malik 2024), and also in terms of socially unjust legislation and policy, at international and national levels. Anti-gender organisings operate at national and transregional levels and act through online campaigns and petitions and representations in national and international delegations, multilateral events, religious platforms, policy spaces. Through a range of strategies, they attempt to shape policy direction, cultural and moral discourse, dilute human rights and international norms, attempt to contest, revise or even delete progressive and gender just terminology or rights based language (such as "bodily autonomy", "reproductive rights", "gender-responsive" and "multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination"), while challenging and eroding gender equitable goals and broader democratic processes (UNRISD and UN-Women 2025, p. 13). Rudimentary strategies of thwarting gender

equitable policy discussions like stalling discussions and creating obstacles are accompanied by more sophisticated and sinister strategies such as reframing gender equitable policies and rights as being opposed to or posing a threat to national interests, religious freedoms, and traditional family structures. These groups and organisations are appropriating the language of development to advocate against gender equality and reproductive justice. These groups are increasingly becoming professionalised, deploy academic terminology and resources, and assert their presence in multiple global development policy spaces (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). Sanders and Jenkins (2025) explain the role of conservative elements in government and non-government organisations and their strategy to influence policy at the UN, through a process they refer to as "reactionary international norm building" against women's and sexual orientation and gender identity rights wherein they try to replace established international rights-based norms with anti-feminist ones.

The 2011 Istanbul Convention which is a Council of Europe human rights treaty aimed at preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence and ratified by the European Union in 2023, has come under threat with its constitutional validity being questioned and debated by anti-gender rights groups in Europe and the withdrawal of Turkiye in 2021 from the convention due to its perceived clash with family values. In order to fragment and disrupt ratification and support towards this convention, reactionary groups have been actively leading, often violent, anti-gender campaigns with damaging effects on women and LGBTQIA+ groups (Roggeband and Krizsán 2024). More recently the Geneva Consensus Declaration (GCD 2020), signed by 35 countries including the US, in October 2020 and meant to protect the rights of women and children, illustrated how the discourses of gender and development, and the role of "family" in development, are being used by pro-family actors to advance conservative political agendas that restrict reproductive rights and women's bodily autonomy (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023, p. 15-16).

Reactionary forces are thus slowly and insidiously appropriating gender justice policy spaces and language and reframing political narratives that are damaging to those most vulnerable. These developments indicate the weakening of international commitments to gender equality and social justice, the reversal of equitable norms, and the institutionalisation of anti-feminist values.

Crafting collective resistances against reactionary forces: Challenges and strengths

Feminist organisings and gender justice movements have brought significant normative shifts within legal, social, and cultural spaces and challenged oppressive structures. They have navigated politically hostile landscapes, waded through drastic cuts in funding, and faced the wrath of authoritarian regimes and reactionary groups. More recently, during the global health crisis, they faced severe difficulties, including operational challenges (Nazneen and Okech 2021, Esquivel et al 2022) and have continued to be frontline responders, unpaid and underpaid caregivers, and community mobilisers (Global Fund for Women, n.d.). Amidst the roll back of women's hard won rights, there are significant achievements that continue to shine through. In Mexico, the Supreme Court decriminalised abortions under certain conditions, and in Brazil this topic is under discussion (Global Fund for Women 2023). A spate of powerful feminist campaigns that have both online and offline forms and many of which consolidated into sustained movements and transregional alliances include #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, #WhyLoiter and #IWillGoOut.

The solidarity of feminist organisings at local, national, and trans-regional levels cannot be overstated; however, there are schisms and hierarchies of caste, race, and class that exist even within progressive spaces of activism with damaging effects. These racial and caste divisions were

there in the past and have been critiqued by Black, Dalit and Indigenous feminist scholars and activisms (Crenshaw 1991, Rege 2006, Chakravarti 2003/2018); however, in the recently polarised political context, these rifts have deepened and are increasingly endangering social justice goals. The collusion of the state and neoliberal forces produces certain subjectivities like the Queer Hindu, or upper caste LGB groups to mobilise queer politics in order to marginalise Muslims and trans persons (especially the culturally stigmatised Hijra community in India), Dalits, immigrants, and in return they are afforded (conditional) political capital, social legitimacy, and economic opportunities that are reserved for dominant citizen groups (Puar 2007, Sircar and Jain 2017, Banerjea 2022). Trans persons rights are deliberately pitted against women's rights (UN Women-Asia Pacific 2024) often by women who identify as feminists (Bassi and LaFleur 2022) and *savarna* feminisms have historically othered Muslim and Dalit groups (Chakravarti 2003/2018). These deliberate appropriations by the state and market end up draining the political and ideological value of gender justice activisms, in a way taming them while rendering them malleable to promote national and majoritarian agendas. Feminist activisms and organisings thus need to navigate the risk of being appropriated, while sharpening and recaliberating their resistance to stand against divisive and harmful politics (Nazneen and Okech 2021).

Among these challenges, feminist movements have continued to work towards social and gender justice and democratic principles, often by re-strategising, reconfiguring, and re-innovating feminist claims in the face of a massive and coordinated anti-feminist infrastructure. Often this means reframing their sets of demands by focussing on rights that have wider agreement while temporarily setting aside contentious components, although this risks further marginalising the most vulnerable. For example, the feminist coalition in Uganda while pushing the Sexual Offences Bill in Uganda left out potentially controversial issues such as sex work and marital rape from the draft of the proposed bill (Mwiine and Ahikire 2024). Lewin (2021) explores various discursive, legal, practical, and creative strategies deployed by feminist coalitions and organisations to resist the reframing of feminist claims by reactionary forces ranging from the UN advocating for non-heteronormative family structures, to feminist collectives providing SRHR information and services outside of the formal health systems, to artists coming together in support of Queer and SRHR rights in Nairobi, Catholics for the Right to Decide in Mexico to encourage reflection on abortion and homosexuality (AWID 2021 as cited in Lewin 2021, 63) and the song called in 'Un Violador en Tu Camino' (A rapist in your path) birthed in Chile which became a global feminist anthem (Hinsliff 2020). Other strategies include developing an array of networks both formal and informal to gain access into key policy and political spaces, reasserting their positions within academia and most importantly, addressing unintended schisms and hierarchies that have emerged within the feminist movements by strengthening connections with diverse intersectional social justice movements.

Objectives and Questions:

This special issue aims to facilitate critical conversations about tackling and countering anti-gender movements and reasserting intersectional and feminist claims. It builds on previous issues on fundamentalisms and feminist organisings, while furthering and deepening knowledge around this important theme. In particular, it intends to (a) understand the ways in which anti-feminist norms are being increasingly institutionalised across the global North and South and (b) to shine light on the complexities, challenges and strengths within feminist social movements and the resistances and strategies that they deploy at multiple levels (local, regional, transregional) and across multiple sites (physical, digital) to fight back reactionary forces.

Questions:

1. What forms do these right-wing politics and movements take in the global North and South (different levels: local, regional, transregional)?
2. What are the various mechanisms through which the rise of the global right is supported and funded, and how do they organise and coordinate the anti-feminist agenda?
3. How do these politics influence everyday experiences of women and other groups?
    a. What are the ways in which gender and social justice movements, and feminist politics being appropriated by majoritarian state interests, neoliberal forces, and other actors?
    b. What are the intersectional implications?
4. How are the hierarchies based on race, caste, and class that emerge in these feminist spaces and movements being navigated?
    a. How are appropriations by majority interests being fought and resisted?
    b. What kind of cross-issue organisings are being built to resist co-option?
5. What (innovative and creative) strategies are being deployed by feminist, Queer, Trans persons and Black, Indigenous People and other minoritised groups to craft collective resistances against reactionary forces?
6. What are the ways in which collective and intersectional knowledges being built by feminist, Queer, and anti-race and anti-caste activists, and how can these reservoirs of knowledge serve to fight conservative forces, while bridging academia and activism?

Submissions

We invite contributions from community and grassroots leaders, civil society organisations and networks, researchers, academics, policymakers, and practitioners in the form of research articles, case studies, and essays.

Please send your abstract of no more than 250 words with details about your research and preliminary findings or a small multi-modal proposal (a two-minute video clip abstract or 250 word abstract with images) using the submission link below.

Please submit your abstract or proposal here:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd6QrxMzHBoedRVJ4Wub3YYt12qnJodsy2l0kI8wxnskSgOgw/viewform?usp=publish-editor

Deadline: 25 January 2026, 11:59pm UTC

Please read the Guidelines for contributors carefully before sending through your abstracts. Please send any queries to genderanddevelopment.south@gmail.com

Our Guest Editors:

This issue will be guest edited by Lata Narayanaswamy, Gisela Zaremberg, CM (Conny) Roggeband, and Flávia Biroli.

Guidelines for content

- Full research article should be no more than 7,000 words excluding the references, abstract, and annexures. The annexures can include photographs, maps, images, graphs, etc. Multimedia content can be embedded within the article and should be kept below 500MB file size. Guidelines for contributors can be found here.
- Shorter essays should be 4000 words, and these can include photographs, maps, images, graphs. Multi-media content should be kept below 500MB file size.
- Photo essay and illustrations can be uploaded on Flickr or any other image sharing platforms and then shared with the editorial team.
- All content must be original and must not have been previously published. Authors are responsible for obtaining necessary consent and permission for the use of any third-party material.

For more information on the journal, visit: www.genderanddevelopment.org

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