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Threat Narratives in Anti-gender Movements' Online Presence: A Comparative Analysis between CitizenGo and Europe for Family

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Abstract

This paper examines anti-gender movements' online narratives through a comparative analysis of CitizenGo and Europe for Family on X (formerly Twitter) between 2019 and 2023. Using discourse and content analysis of 2,349 tweets, the study identifies how these actors frame gender equality as threatening to traditional values and family structures. CitizenGo primarily operates at the grassroots level, portraying LGBTQI+ communities and established political institutions as threats to children and freedom, while frequently calling followers to action through petitions. Europe for Family functions at the institutional level, focusing on surrogacy as exploitative to women and engaging directly with European Parliament political figures. Both organisations strategically undermine opponents' credibility and employ emotional appeals, though with different mobilisation strategies. The analysis reveals connections between their discourse patterns and international events like the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022 and Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023. This research contributes to understanding how anti-gender actors operate across different political levels to challenge advancements in gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, and reproductive freedoms.

Keywords: Anti-gender Movements; CitizenGo; Europe for Family; Social Media; X/Twitter; Gender Equality; Ultra-conservatism

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Introduction

Gender equality progress experienced massive setbacks including the overturn of Roe v. Wade by the US Supreme Court in 2022, the ban of gender studies in Hungary in 2018, and Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023[1]. This development is accompanied by a notable surge in anti-gender discourse, especially online, resulting in "gender" becoming one of the current "culture war" issues (Ging and Siapera 2018; Huang 2022; Mau, Lux, and Linus 2023). Anti-gender movements fuel this discourse by using gender as a scapegoat for various societal crises, mobilizing for a return to patriarchal, heteronormative structures. A striking element of anti-gender discourses is their portrayal of impending cataclysm, which threatens established societal structures, including the traditional family (Goetz and Mayer 2023). Therefore, understanding how anti-gender actors frame gender+[2] themes to influence public discourse and which instruments are used to mobilize is essential in comprehending the broader social and political implications of anti-gender discourses.

This research analyses narratives of two anti-gender actors, CitizenGo and Europe for Family, on X (formerly Twitter). Specifically, we investigate: (1) who is characterized as threats and what entities are portrayed as being threatened in these narratives; (2) how specific themes and social groups are characterized and framed in these narratives; and (3) what connections exist between broader societal events and the themes promoted by these actors, including whether X's change in ownership has corresponded with shifts in the content and framing of threat narratives. The two actors were chosen due to their potential political influence, not purely based on their follower numbers and/or popularity on X.

In a working paper by the UN Research Institute for Social Development, Haley Mcewen and Lata Narayanaswamy (2023, 11) identify CitizenGo as "a leader of anti-gender ideology globally." CitizenGo operates as an advocacy group with about 35,000 followers on their main X account, positioning themselves as a platform that represents concerned citizens worldwide. Europe for Family is a registered lobby group in the European Parliament, with approximately 2,500 followers on X. Despite their smaller social media presence, their status as an active lobby group in the EU Parliament gives them significant influence over gender-related policies. Given the structural differences—CitizenGo operating at the grassroots level and Europe for Family at the institutional level—we

[1] The 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act expands the criminalization of same-sex acts and introduces penalties of up to 10 years in prison defor identifying as LGBTQ+ or any non-binary gender.
[2] Gender+ is used to encompass a wide range of gender identities beyond the binary of male and female. It signifies inclusivity, highlighting that the themes cover a spectrum of gender identities.

examine how these organizations compare in their X communications. Specifically, we analyse which themes emerge (such as abortion, gender self-identification), how they frame these themes, and which groups they position as allies or adversaries on X. Our data includes posts from 2019 to 2023, a period that includes Elon Musk's acquisition of X. This timing allows us to also investigate whether the platform's change in ownership correlates with shifts in the themes and framing used by these two anti-gender actors.

Our paper begins with a comprehensive review of anti-gender movements, examining their recent developments and online activities. Following this theoretical foundation, we introduce our two case studies—CitizenGo and Europe for Family—explaining their significance on X and our rationale for selecting these actors. After stating our research questions, we detail our methodological approach, which involves analysing 2,500 tweets across both organizations using discourse and content analysis techniques. In our findings section, we demonstrate how engagement at different political levels influences threat framing, and how major international gender-related events shape these organizations' discourse. Finally, we discuss the broader implications of our analysis, highlighting the global significance of anti-gender movements and their strategic communications.

Anti-gender actors

Anti-gender serves as an umbrella term to describe the rejection or opposition to ideas, laws, and movements relating to gender equality, gender identity, women's and LGBTQI+'s rights (Paternotte and Kuhar 2018; Özkazanç 2020; McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). Individuals, groups, or organizations who oppose concepts of gender equality and often promote traditional patriarchal gender roles are referred to as anti-gender actors. These actors differ in multiple aspects, including how accepted and embedded they are within society. But the common thread of the actors is their opposition of "gender ideology" or "genderism" (Özkazanç 2020). Specifically, they perceive gender or "gender ideology" as a serious threat to what they consider "traditional" values, to heteronormative concepts of family, and to the societal status quo. Prior research shows that anti-gender movements oppose progressive reproductive rights, LGBTQI+ rights, and comprehensive education on gender and sexuality (McEwen and Narayanaswamy 2023). Anti-gender actors also attempt to delegitimize feminist and gender studies by labelling them as non-scientific, claiming these fields are part of a "woke agenda" that allegedly attacks freedom of speech and imposes a totalitarian regime (for example, Juroš, Dobrotić, and Flego 2020; Lavizzari and Siročić 2023).

Recent developments, including debates around gender self-identification and the widespread use of social media, have heightened the visibility of anti-gender movements today. This is not entirely new, however, as feminists have been confronting transnational conservative organizations in formal institutional contexts since the early 2000s (Chappell 2006). A prime example is the annual World Congress of Families, which connects anti-gender, anti-abortion, pro-family, religious–conservative, and far-right actors (Stoeckl 2020).

The rise of anti-gender movements co-occurs with the rise of (far-right and/or illiberal) populist political parties in established democracies. Indeed, many far-right populist parties adopt anti-gender standpoints, engage with anti-gender movements, and endorse similar rhetoric (for example, "gender madness" or "gender gaga") to attract voters (Özkazanç 2020). Their policy agendas extend beyond restricting abortion access and promoting traditional family structures to include advocating for stricter immigration laws—a pattern that demonstrates how anti-gender positions are interconnected with broader anti-democratic trends (Graff and Korolczuk 2022). Eszter Kováts and Andrea Pető (2017) recent years have seen gender become a target used to oppose progressive agendas broadly. Anti-gender movements portray gender concepts as authoritarian tools that suppress diverse viewpoints and enforce "political correctness." This suggests we should understand anti-gender backlash not just as an attempt to reverse existing rights, but also as a strategy to prevent future progress by stigmatizing the very concept of gender. As Judith Butler (2024) and David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar (2018) highlight, anti-gender actors worldwide share similar messaging strategies. They consistently frame gender as a threat to social stability, child protection, and family structure.

Building on these global patterns of anti-gender discourse, our study examines how two European actors—CitizenGo and Europe for Family—present gender-related themes on their X profiles. The following section reviews how gender-related backlash manifests on social media platforms to provide context for our analysis.

Gender backlash online

When Caroline Criado-Perez successfully campaigned for portraying women on the British currency, she received rape and death threats on X. Claire Hardaker and Mark McGlashan's (2016) analysis of this case reveals that the abusers were only connected through their shared hatred towards Criado-Perez, highlighting the loose connection of online harassment campaigns. Criado-Perez's experiences are shared by many advocates for women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights, or gender equality online (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2023; Yelin and Clancy 2021; Fagundes-Ausani 2025).

Previous research on gender and backlash examines multiple dimensions, including the frequency of misogynistic statements (Jaki et al. 2019; Bartlett et al. 2014), cyberattacks against female professionals (Dej and Kilty 2023; Esposito 2022; Sakki and Martikainen 2021), and the impact of harassment on targets (Chen et al. 2020).Scholars have also investigated the "manosphere" (Cannito and Mercuri 2022), its association with policies (Mann 2008), and its relation to (White) nationalism (Bjork‐James 2020; Stern 2022). Tracie Farrell and colleagues (2019) analysed misogyny in the manosphere through data from seven online communities, documenting an increase in violent language against women online. Within these communities, narratives are typically flipped—feminists are depicted as oppressors and men are victims. These findings align with research by scholars who have conducted long-term immersive studies of these communities (Kendall 2002; Lin 2017; Zuckerberg 2018). Maria Anzovino, Elisabetta Fersini, and Paolo Rosso(2018)built a taxonomy of misogyny to automatically detect and categorize misogynous language online, which has inspired further research on automated classification methods. Together, these studies provide an extensive overview of online misogyny and the silencing of gender equality advocates.

Our study contributes and complements this body of work by examining how civil actors frame gender themes online. Rather than focusing primarily on hateful tweets and reactions against gender equality advocates—as previous studies have done—we investigate how these actors initiate and shape conversations. Specifically, we analyze which themes they emphasize and how they construct narratives around these themes to mobilize support and build followings.

CitizenGo and Europe for Family

CitizenGo is an advocacy group established in Spain in 2013, emerging as the successor of the Spanish advocacy group HatzeOir. The group uses online petitions as a form of activism to increase the political participation of citizens. According to their website, they are active in 50 countries worldwide, with the mission to defend "life, family and liberty." While CitizenGo supports a broad variety of themes, their primary focus is on opposition to same-sex marriage, abortion, and what they term "gender ideology." They position themselves as a grassroot movement, functioning bottom-up by enabling citizens to start their own petitions and aim to implement change at local, regional, national, or international levels. They assert that they are completely funded through private donations and reject financial support from political actors or foundations. However, CitizenGo's Board of Trustees includes politicians and representatives of other conservative foundations. Overall,

CitizenGo effectively facilitates low-cost, low-effort activism, claiming its place in the anti-gender and anti-feminist discourse landscape.

Europe for Family is a non-governmental organization that has been officially registered in the EU Transparency Register since 2015. According to the register their goals are:

> The association aims, in a non-profit framework, to promote and defend the family as the foundation of human society, and consequently, to address, among other things, questions concerning family policy, marriage, conception, filiation, parenthood, adoption, generational issues, childhood, education, end of life, the definition of the human being in relation to their environment, demography, the economy and fundamental freedom.

Consequently, Europe for Family focuses on influencing family-related policies through strategic engagement with four key parliamentary committees: the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, the Committee on Legal Affairs, the Subcommittee on Human Rights, and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs. The organization actively monitors EU working groups related to family policies, children's rights, health, and education. Further, they specifically track the legislative activities of three EU commissioners whose portfolios relate to their interests: children's rights, gender equality, and justice. Their advocacy strategy includes participation in various EU parliament forums such as working breakfasts, round tables, meetings, and formal presentations.

We selected these two organizations for analysis because they represent different tactical approaches to advancing similar conservative values. While both share core aims regarding family and gender issues, they operate at different mobilization levels. CitizenGo functions primarily at the citizen level, embracing an activist role through direct public engagement and employing more visible, disruptive tactics to gain attention. Their approach emphasizes broad grassroots participation and high-visibility campaigns. In contrast, Europe for Family operates at the institutional level, functioning more as a traditional lobbying organization working directly within Brussels power structures. They prefer behind-the-scenes influence through exclusive, invitation-only events with policymakers and stakeholders. This strategic difference means each organization targets distinct audiences with their messaging, despite promoting similar ideological positions.

Research Design

Research Questions

To successfully mobilize, individuals need to be engaged with an issue and perceive the need to act (Thomas and Louis 2013) and hence the story created and told by organizations about an issue,

group, or policy matters. The Narrative Policy Framework (Stone 2002) highlights the power of narratives in shaping policies, debates, and discussions. The framework postulates that narratives help to simplify complex themes, make them relatable, and shape social attitudes. Parts of larger narratives—crucial for mobilization—are the usage of common language, metaphors, symbols, and frames (Snow, Vliegenthart, and Ketelaars 2018; Tarrow 2013). Frames can be seen as "schemata of interpretations" (Goffman 1974) that aim to portray an issue in a light that serves the creator' agenda (Aslanidis 2018).

Using this framework, we examine how anti-gender actors identify problems and solutions in order to leverage group identity. We identify which groups are portrayed as an opposition (for example, "feminists") and thus are framed as threats to established systems (for example, 'traditional family'). Research highlights that movements strategically frame themes to align with their audience's worldview and gain maximum support for their agenda (Aslanidis 2018; Williams and Kubal 1999). Our first two research questions address these online narratives:

> *Research Question 1:* Who is characterized as a threat, and what entities are portrayed as being threatened?
>
> *Research Question 2:* How are specific themes and social groups characterized in these narratives?

X has long hosted discussions on contentious political and social issues that influence offline discourse and real-world outcomes (as seen with the #MeToo movement). These conversations raise important questions about platform governance and free speech boundaries. Following Elon Musk's acquisition of X, previously banned accounts including Donald Trump and Tommy Robinson were reinstated, prompting concerns about the platform potentially becoming more conservative, right-leaning, and hostile. Musk himself has publicly supported anti-gender perspectives by endorsing influencers like Matt Walsh. Yet, Musk's acquisition represents just one of several societal events potentially impacting anti-gender actors' online presence. Electoral events and other social developments may also influence content patterns. Our third research question examines these potential relationships:

> *Research Question 3:* What connections exist between broader societal events and the themes promoted by anti-gender actors? Has X's change in ownership corresponded with shifts in the content and framing of threat narratives?

Methodology

Traditionally, Narrative Policy Framework analysis examines various texts, including flyers, banners, manifestos, memoirs, and oral accounts when available. Our analysis focuses specifically on

content posted by CitizenGo and Europe for Family on their public X accounts. While X's salience as a platform fluctuates over time, particularly, since Musk's accusation and his personal position on gender+ themes, it remains a medium for activism, self-promoting, and interaction among political actors, including anti-gender actors. Despite recent user losses (Hern 2024), X continues to maintain significant usage.

Our analysis uses original data collected as part of the larger *Push*Back*Lash* research project[3]. We gathered tweets via X's APIv2 spanning November 2019 to September 2023 for CitizenGo and November 2018 to July 2023 for Europe for Family. Since 2023, access to historical tweets has been restricted due to X's API changes, which imposed significant limitations on retrievable historical data by implementing substantial fees.

The difference in time span for the two actors stems from two primary factors. First, within the research project we collected data from over 100 public accounts, focusing particularly on tweets from 2021. Due to X APIv2 restrictions limiting scraping to 10,000 tweets per month, our data collection was distributed across six months. We scraped data from the Europe for Family account in July 2023 and from CitizenGo account in September 2023. Second, we used the timeline endpoint to collect the last 1,000 tweets for Europe for Family and the last 1,500 Tweets for CitizenGo. Since CitizenGo tweets more frequently and was scraped later, their dataset doesn't extend as far back as that of Europe for Family.

The collected tweets appear in various formats, including text-based tweets, retweets, mentions, hashtags, image tweets (particularly memes), and retweets accompanied by comments. Importantly, our analysis examines tweets in their original language. CitizenGo posted mainly in English and Spanish, while Europe for Family posted mainly in French, English, and Spanish, along with other European languages including German, Hungarian, Polish, and Ukrainian.

We used a multi-phase analytical approach to examine the collected tweets. Initially, we conducted content analysis on all materials, including retweets and visual media (particularly memes), to categorize content by overarching themes. For identifying themes, threat sources, and threatened entities, we employed an inductive content analysis approach. We carefully examined tweets to categorize them into emergent main themes and sub-themes. To identify *who* poses a threat and *what* is threatened, we analysed who and what was referenced in the tweet. For example, when analysing

[3] The EU-funded *Push*Back*Lash* examines actors, attitudes, agendas, and strategies that push back against gender equality and democracy and develops evidence-based strategies to counteract this pushback. More information available on the project's website: https://pushbacklash.eu/.

"They are after our kids. We are just standing in the way," we coded the threat source as "generally unnamed" since the tweet itself does not explicitly identify who "they" are, even though the organization's broader narrative implies that groups with non-conservative values (such as LGBTQI+ communities) constitute threats to children.

After this initial categorization, we conducted a more detailed analysis of each tweet by addressing two key questions:

1. What does the actor aim to achieve with the tweet (goal)?
2. How does the actor attempt to achieve this goal (framing categories)?

For this phase, we implemented a deductive approach using pre-established goal categories based on previous research examining how far-right political actors (Froio and Ganesh 2019) and lobbying groups (Hunt 2021) utilize social media. We identified eight goal categories:

1. Self-Promotion: Highlighting own/actor's achievements.
2. Call for Action: Calling for action, activism or support.
3. Education: Providing educational information.
4. Exposure: Highlighting the failings/misconducts of others.
5. Role Model: Highlighting the success of specific others.
6. Policy: Advocating for the implementation or abolition of a law/regulation/institution.
7. Public Perception: Intending to impact the public perception of an issue.
8. Awareness: Making an issue salient.

These categories were developed for our broader research project encompassing tweets from diverse actors both supporting and opposing gender equality. Consequently, some categories might not perfectly align with the two organizations examined in this study. Additionally, these categories are not mutually exclusive, allowing us to code multiple goals per tweet. For instance, "Demand a parliamentary inquiry into kids' transgender treatment! Sign the petition!" aims to both call followers to action and influence policy.

Similarly, we categorized each tweet based on its rhetorical framing. For example, some tweets established associations to undermine opponents' credibility: "There's a strong correlation between believing in secular liberal ideals and lacking a sense of personal responsibility/accountability." Others appealed to shared identity: "It's time for true Hungarians to protect the family." Our framing analysis also captured rhetorical techniques like using emotional keywords (for example, using "genocide" or "murder" when referring to abortion) or posing rhetorical questions.

Based on prior research on rhetorical strategies (Eronen 2014; Maretha and Kongthai 2017; Arellano Salazar 2022; Savolainen 2014; Scaraboto et al. 2012), we classified tweets into eight framing categories:

1. Credibility: Discrediting the arguments or character of opposing individuals or groups.
2. Deflection: Shifting focus away from the main issue or criticism to avoid addressing it directly.
3. Effort: Highlight (the lack of) effectiveness of existing or suggested laws/regulations/institutions.
4. Selection Bias: Presenting information in a way that selectively supports a particular viewpoint while ignoring contradictory evidence
5. Causation: Using correlation as causation or circular reasoning.
6. False Dilemma: Displaying arguments/ solutions as a dichotomy or indicate there are only two opposing ways to see an issue.
7. Identity: Invoking a group/collective identity or appealing to a shared belief system/cultural value to distinguish between groups.
8. Emotions: Appealing to emotions or evoking a perception of threat/safety.

We analysed these coded categories to identify patterns and relationships in the data. By examining how different variables interconnected, we could reveal strategic patterns in anti-gender discourse. For instance, we tracked how often children appeared as a threatened entity within tweets categorized as Calls for Action to understand how children were instrumentalized in mobilization efforts. This approach allowed us to map connections between rhetorical strategies, framing techniques, and targeted audiences across the dataset. A comprehensive overview of our analytical framework, including detailed descriptions of frame and strategy categories with examples, is available in the supplementary materials in Appendix.

Finally, we conducted comparative analysis across time periods to contextualize identified themes and strategies within relevant political events, such as significant court rulings related to gender issues and Musk's acquisition of X.

Sampling

Starting with 1,489 Tweets from CitizenGo and 999 from Europe for Family, our research focuses on understanding which political themes the actors engage with, how they frame them, and which strategies they employ to gain support. With that in mind, we excluded all Tweets that did not

focus on any specific issue. For CitizenGo, we analysed 1,385 tweets after excluding 104 that contained job advertisements and reactions to world events (such as the death of Queen Elizabeth II). While we did not examine the excluded Tweets in detail, it is worth noting that CitizenGo's job advertisements appeared in multiple languages, highlighting its international audience and work. Additionally, these advertisements consistently mentioned searching for individuals who want to "defend life, freedom and family," emphasizing the organisation's core values and implying that these values are under attack, thus requiring protection. For Europe for Family, we analysed 964 tweets, excluding those not related to any issue (for example, tweets wishing followers a "Happy New Year" tweets).

Results and Analysis

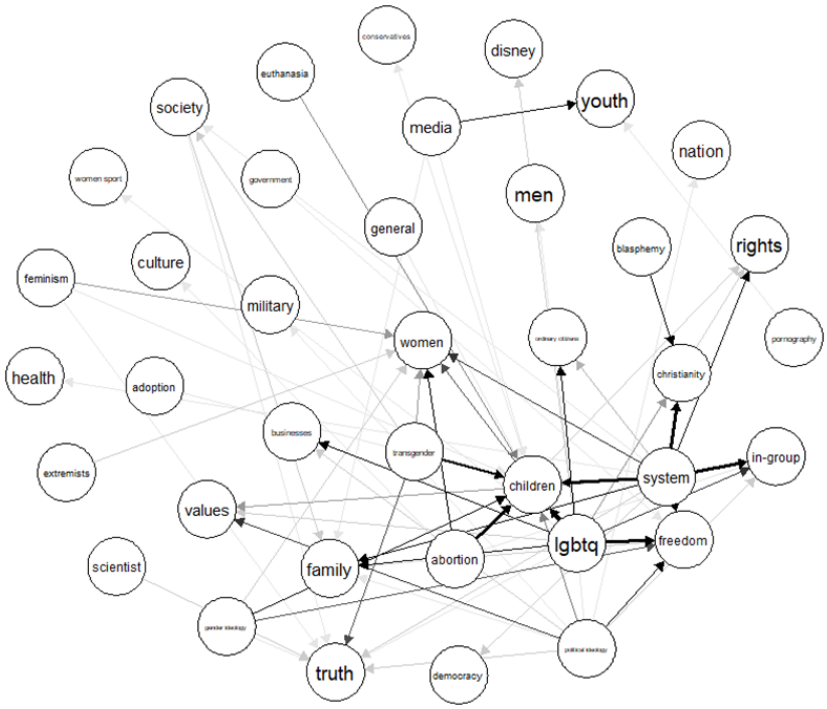
Threats and Threatened Entities

To address our first research question, we identified the most frequently mentioned "who" and "what" variables across all tweets for each actor. CitizenGo most frequently framed to the "system" (n = 325, 23,5%) and to LGBTQI+ (n = 206, 14,9%) as a threat in its discourse. By "system", we categorized all references to police, the state, and institutions such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization—essentially any established institutions. The third most frequently cited threat in CitizenGo's discourse was abortion (n = 97, 7%), which includes references to pro-choice movements and direct mentions to abortion. Less frequent threats were "blasphemy" and "gender ideology," both deriving from direct references in CitizenGo's discourse. Gender transition was also a frequently labelled as a threat to established structure, and thus we treated it as a distinct category rather than subsuming it under LGBTQI+ to capture nuanced meanings. Other threats identified in the actor's discourses were the left, youth, woke, and media —all directly referenced in the analysed tweets. Notably, threats were not limited to physical actors but also included ideas and rights, such as reproductive rights.

The most frequently occurring category of threatened entities was children (n = 569, 43%). This category was directly mentioned in CitizenGo's tweets and was strongly associated with the LGBTQI+ and abortion as sources of threat. Other frequently mentioned threatened entities included freedom (n = 194, 14%), encompassing freedom of speech and religious freedom, Christians (n = 74, 5,3%), women (n = 43, 3,1%), and the "in-group" (n = 31, 2,2%). By in-group, we categorized references in the discourse that portrayed CitizenGo's values and supporters as being under threat. This category contains all tweets, where "we" was explicitly mentioned, even if the specific group being referred to was not clearly defined.

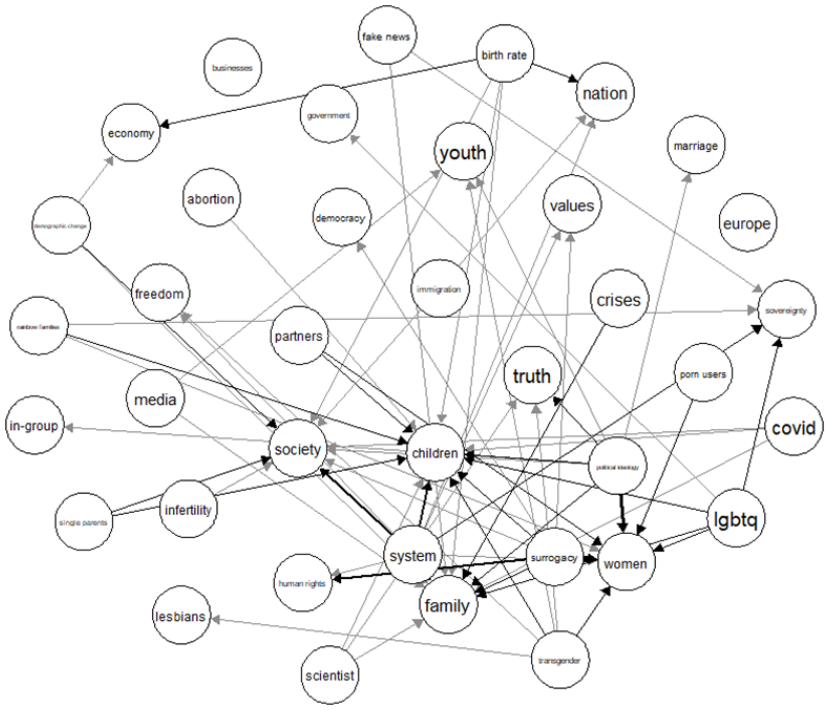
In contrast, Europe for Family's tweets were less explicit in identifying threats, both in terms of who poses a threat and what is under threat. The most frequently referenced threat in Europe for Family's discourse was the "system" (n = 94, 9,7%). Other threats included surrogacy (n = 57, 5,9%), ideology (n = 28, 2,9%), and birth rate (n = 14, 1,5%). Unlike CitizenGo, Europe for Family rarely mentioned the LGBTQI+ community or political ideologies such as communism. The most frequently referenced categories under threat in their tweets were women (n = 87, 9%), family (n = 102, 10,6%), and children (n = 35, 3,6%). Additionally, national sovereignty (n = 28, 2,9%) was often depicted as a threatened entity. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the interconnections between core threats and threatened entities in a network plot. Together, these figures reveal that while various threats are mentioned, the primary threats stem from the "system" and the LGBTQI+ community, targeting children, freedom, the "in-group," and women.

Figure 1. Interconnections between Core Threats and Threatened Entities for CitizenGo



Source: Authors
Note: Thickness of edges indicates frequency, arrows indicate direction.

Figure 2. Interconnections between Core Threats and Threatened Entities for Europe for Family

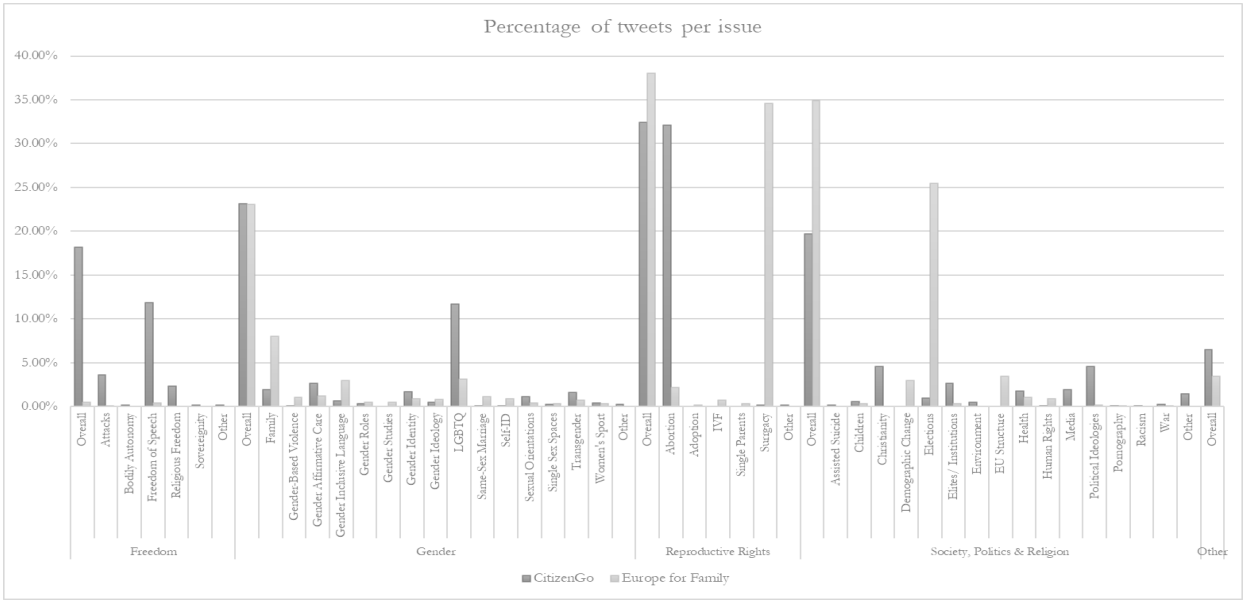


Source: Authors
Note: Thickness of edges indicates frequency, arrows indicate direction.

Thematic Focus and Strategic Communication Approaches

The most frequent themes in CitizenGo tweets were abortion (n = 439, 31,7%), freedom of speech (n = 155, 11,2%) and LGBTQI+ (n = 148, 10,7%). The most frequent themes in Europe for Family tweets were surrogacy (n = 333, 34,5%) and European elections (n = 245, 25,4%). In combination, for both actors at least 30% of tweets focused broadly on reproductive rights, with CitizenGo focusing on abortion while Europe for Family focused on surrogacy (see Figure 1).

Figure 3. Percentage of Tweets per Five Key Themes and Subthemes



Source: Authors

The next step is to explain how the actors frame their key themes. CitizenGo's most frequent strategy was Exposure, followed by Call for Action. This means that most of their tweets aimed to establish negative perception of opposing groups and to mobilise support for their petitions or demonstrations. In fact, 31,2% of their tweets contained links to CitizenGo petitions. Europe for Family's most frequent strategy was also Exposure, but their second most frequent strategy was to impact the Public Perception. Unlike CitizenGo, they do not aim to get immediate action from their followers, such as signing and sharing a petition. Instead, they frame themes and policies in a way that aligns with their values. Additionally, Europe for Family frequently provided educational material, whereas CitizenGo rarely included such content, focusing more on highlighting their own successes. We will return to these differences in the next section of the paper.

Both actors most frequently used the following rhetorical strategies: Credibility, Emotions, and Identity. Specifically, they often suggested that opponents' arguments were false or focused on attacking the person rather than addressing the argument itself (*ad hominem arguments*). Interestingly, they primarily sought to dismantle opponents' arguments rather than providing well-reasoned counterarguments.

Theme-Specific Framing and Mobilization Tactics

Moving to the second research question, we shift our focus to how each actor's frames, strategies, and threats are interconnected to explore our second research question of how the themes are discussed. This allows us to examine whether strategies are tied to specific themes or if they are evenly distributed across all themes (percentages are displayed in Table 1 and 2).

We find that Call for Action are predominately used by CitizenGo for themes of Reproductive Rights and Freedom. This pattern was partially influenced by our data collection period, which coincided with hate speech trials of two public figures central to CitizenGo's advocacy: Caroline Farrow and Päivi Räsänen. The organisation launched petitions to rally support for dismissing charges against these individuals. Tweets related to the theme of Freedom emphasized shared identities (for example, references to the nation) and/or employed emotionally charged language, while tweets related to the theme of Gender focused on effectiveness—or the perceived lack thereof.

Europe for Family used their tweets to educate their followers on the themes related to the Society, Politics, and Religion (for example, explaining the organisational structure of the EU), but they did not post similar educational content related to other themes. Their tweets also frequently aimed at raising awareness about specific political events, such as the European Parliament elections. Their politics-related tweets are characterized by invoking a shared identity, while gender-related tweets often used false dilemmas or zero-sum references, such as framing same-sex marriage as coming at the expense of heteronormative family.

Table 1. Percentage of Goal per Theme and Per Actor

Goals	**Freedom**		**Gender**		**Reproductive Rights**		**Society, Politics, and Religion**	
	CitizenGo	*Europe for Family*	*CitizenGo*	*Europe for Family*	*CitizenGo*	*Europe for Family*	*CitizenGo*	*Europe for Family*
Self-Promotion	11.9%	0%	14.1%	10.9%	35%	32.7%	16.9%	29.1%
Call for Action	29.5%	2.1%	21.5%	5.3%	28%	56.4%	12.6%	29.8%
Education	0%	0%	0%	3%	25%	3%	50%	93.1%
Exposure	16.2%	1%	24.7%	27.3%	24.9%	53.1%	28.2%	15%
Role Model	22.7%	1.5%	11.3%	32.3%	47.2%	44.6%	11.3%	18.5%
Policy	11.1%	0%	33.3%	42.3%	33.3%	26.9%	11.1%	30.1%
Public Perception	4%	0%	16.8%	26.1%	61.6%	14.8%	15.2%	53.4%
Awareness	15.1%	0%	10.4%	27.2%	31.4%	8.8%	34.9%	54.4%

Table 2. Percentage of Frames per Theme and Per Actor

Frames	Freedom		Gender		Reproductive Rights		Society, Politics, and Religion	
	CitizenGo	*Europe for Family*	*CitizenGo*	*Europe for Family*	*CitizenGo*	*Europe for Family*	*CitizenGo*	*Europe for Family*
Credibility	15.7%	1%	25.1%	24.1%	26.7%	39.5%	24.2%	30.6%
Deflection	4.8%	0%	22.6%	43.5%	39.3%	47.8%	27.4%	4.3%
Effort	3.8%	0%	80.8%	25%	11.5%	37.5%	3.8%	37.5%
Selection Bias	12.3%	8.3%	12.3%	19.4%	50%	61.1%	16%	8.3%
Causation	22.4%	0%	9.5%	18.3%	49.1%	63.6%	16.4%	12.1%
False Dilemma	10%	0%	40%	52.2%	30%	34.8%	15%	8.7%
Identity	31.6%	0%	13.2%	18.2%	15.3%	8%	22.9%	60.2%
Emotions	23%	0%	22.3%	16.9%	32.3%	43.9%	18.3%	35.8%

Core Threats and Strategic Framings

Having identified the primary rhetorical mechanisms employed by both organizations, we now turn to analysing how these mechanisms are deployed to construct specific threat narratives. This analysis examines how CitizenGo and Europe for Family strategically frame their core perceived threats and threatened entities, revealing distinct patterns in their mobilisation tactics. The interconnections between threat construction, rhetorical mechanisms, and strategic goals illuminate the underlying logic of their communication approaches.

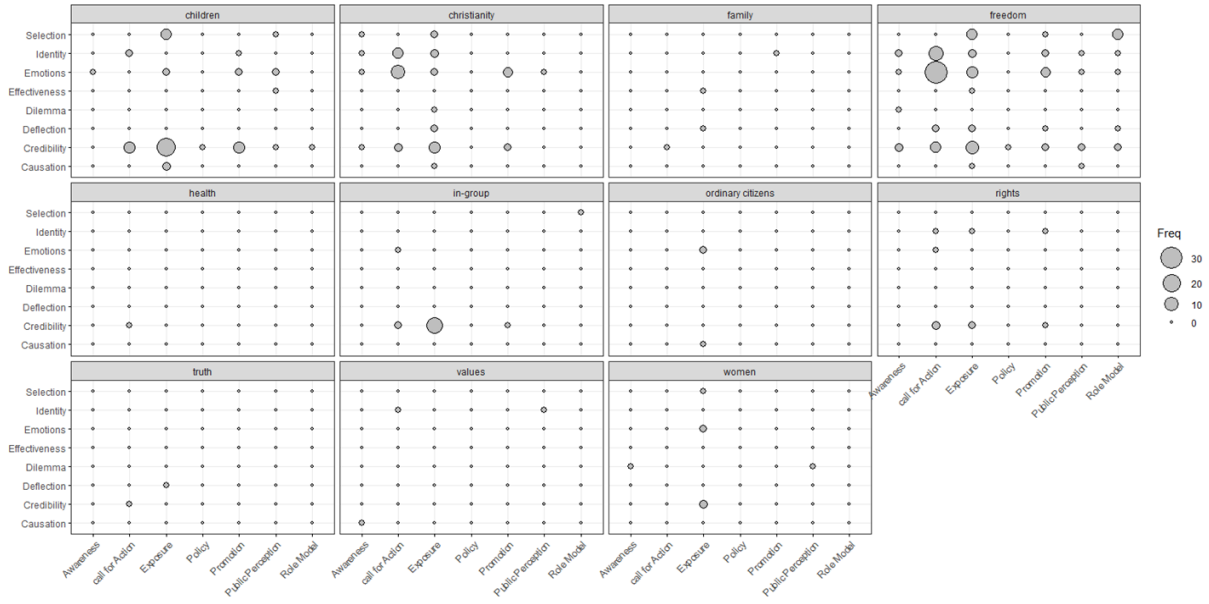
The "System" as Threat and Identity-Based Threat Framing

Figures 4 and 5 show the frequency of combinations between strategies, mechanisms, and threatened entities. CitizenGo (Figure 4) predominately mentioned the "system" in tweets coded as Self-Promotion (winning against the system), Call for Action (standing up against the system), Policy (identifying harmful policies the system wants to implement), and Role Model (presenting someone who fought against the system). To evoke threat to Christians and Freedom, CitizenGo used calls for action alongside emotional appeals and invocations of shared identities. When addressing threats to children, they most frequently targeted at the credibility of the system, aiming to expose its flaws.

In contract, Europe for Family (Figure 5) most frequently referenced the system in educational tweets (explaining the European Parliament elections) or policy-related tweets (criticizing the EU for overstepping its competences). When discussing threats to national sovereignty, they focused on exposing the system and undermining its credibility. Regarding threats to family, they cast doubt on

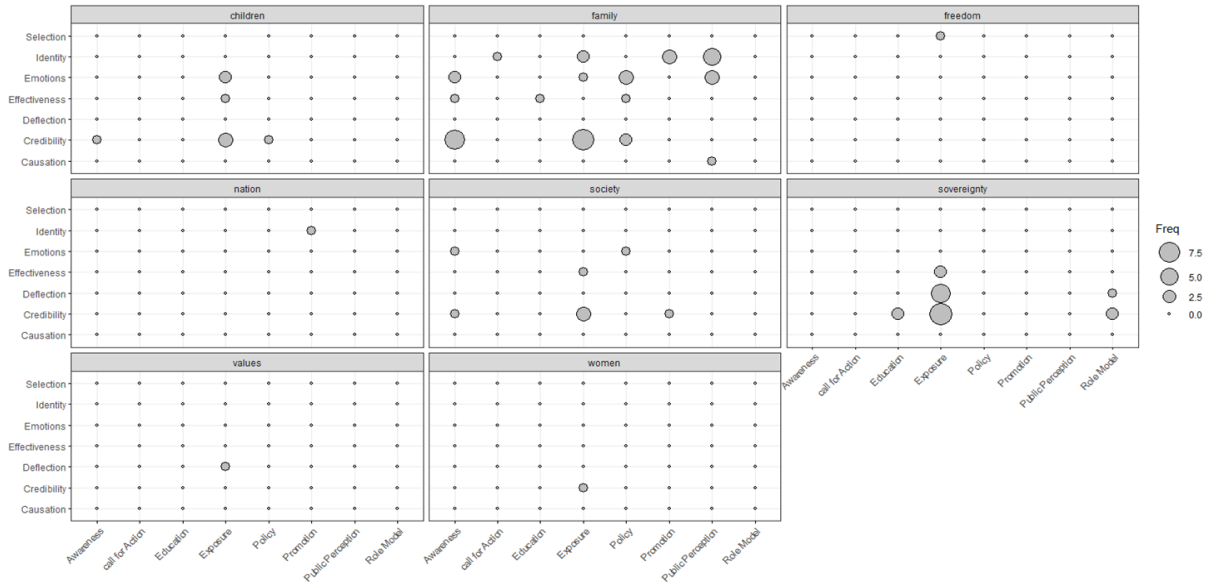
institutions' ability to protect the family, exposed the system's failures in this regard, and invoked a shared identity to rally support.

Figure 4. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by the "System" in CitizenGo Discourse



Source: Authors

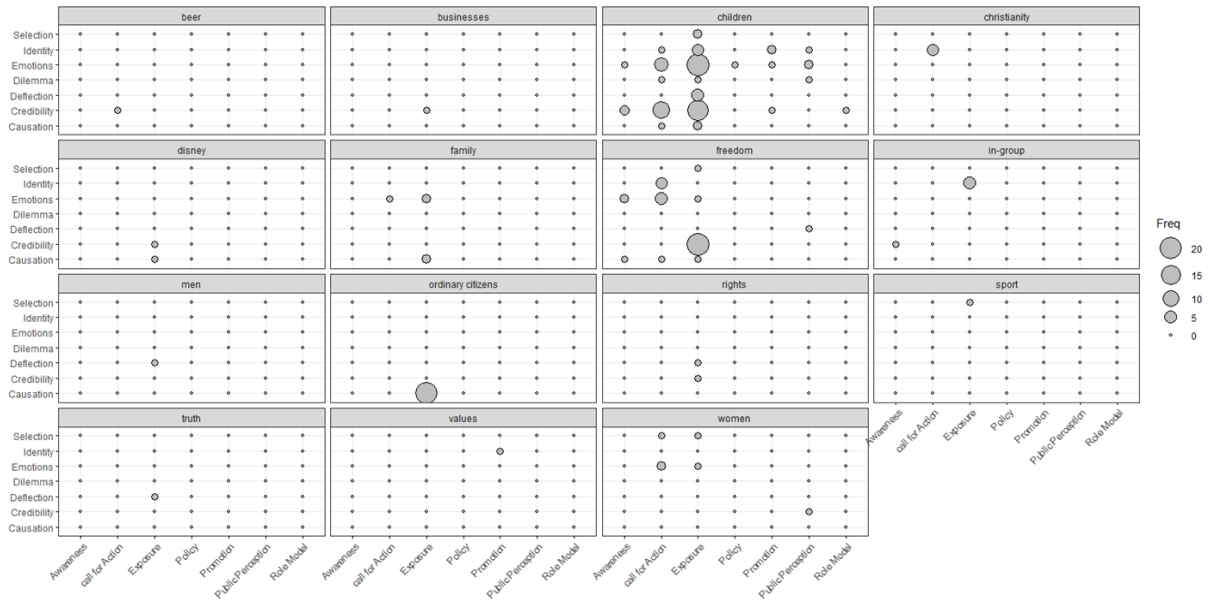
Figure 5. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by System in Europe for Family Discourse



Source: Authors

CitizenGo referenced the LGBTQI+ community in tweets coded as Exposure (highlighting crimes committed by LGBTQI+ individuals) or Call for Action (mobilizing opposition to LGBTQI+ indoctrination). The comprehensive visualization pattern in Figure 6 across all categories suggests a calculated framing approach that prioritizes children-related narratives over other potential angles. To frame the LGBTQI+ community as a threat to children, they heavily relied on emotional appeals and undermining the community's credibility. For instance, they posed rhetorical questions like, "Why do drag queens never want to read to old people, but only to children?" Additionally, they portrayed freedom as under threat by strategically undermining the credibility of LGBTQI+ advocates, while simultaneously depicting ordinary citizens as victims by framing the LGBTQI+ community as the direct source of everyday grievances experienced by the general public.

Figure 6. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by LGBTQI+ in CitizenGo Discourse



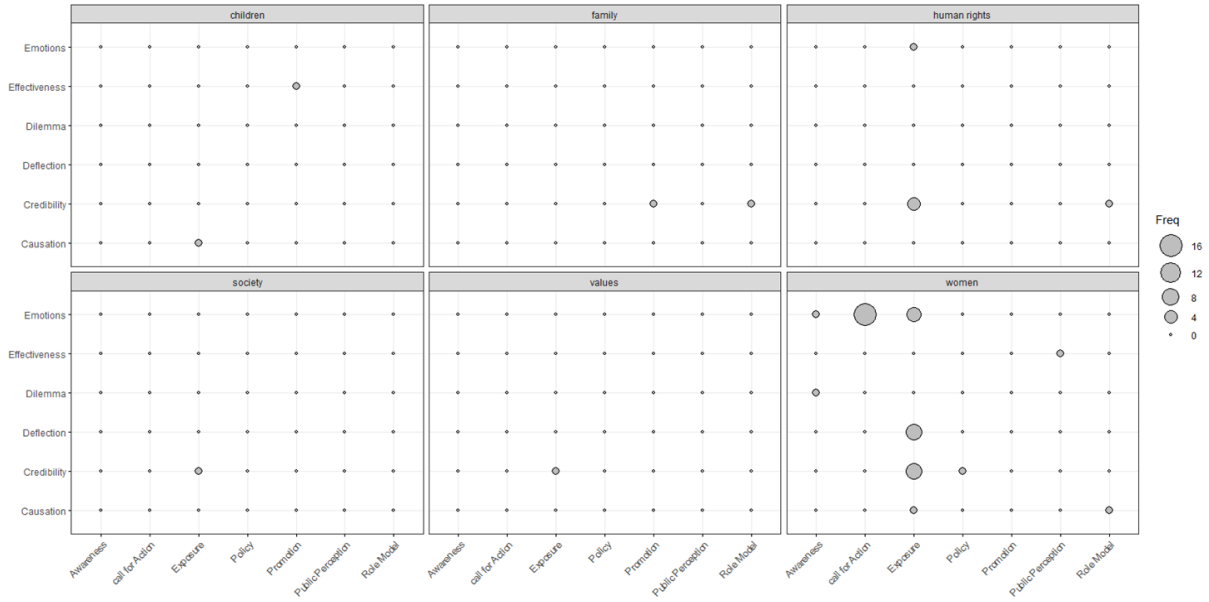
Source: Authors

Europe for Family portrayed surrogacy as a direct threat to women. Their strategy involved exposing how surrogacy exploits women, predominantly using emotional appeals and undermining the credibility of surrogacy supporters. When calling for bans on surrogacy, they similarly relied heavily on emotional arguments. Their messaging frequently characterized surrogacy as harmful to women (describing it as exploitation) while arguing that banning the practice was necessary to protect women's

rights. This approach strategically co-opted feminist rhetoric to argue against the feminist principle of bodily autonomy. Figure 7 reveals their framing approach combines Emotions and Credibility rhetorical strategies most frequently when discussing women and surrogacy.

We observe that discourse around "children," "family" and "values" is less prominent in this actor, suggesting a deliberate focus on framing surrogacy as a women's issue rather than emphasizing child welfare or traditional family value concerns.

Figure 7. Interconnection between Goals, Frames, and Entities Threatened by Surrogacy in Europe for Family Discourse

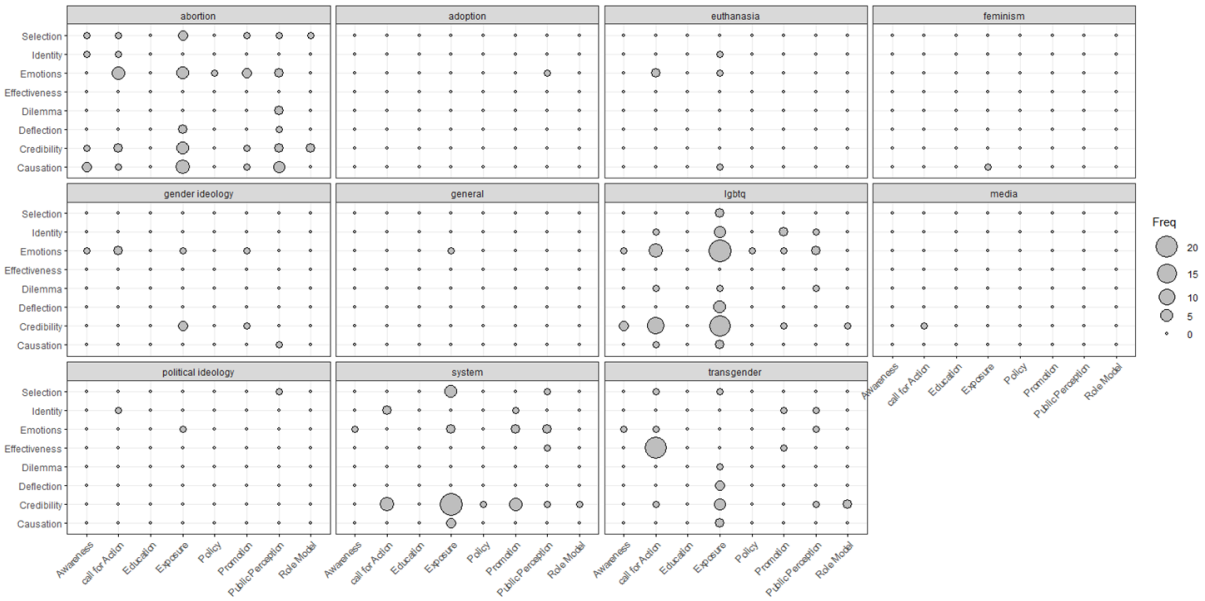


Source: Authors

Threatened Entities and Protective Framing

CitizenGo mentioned children predominately in tweets coded as Exposure (exposing child trafficking systems) and Call for Action (standing up for children). Their strongest messaging focused on framing abortion as threatening children. Their discourse also targeted transgender people transgender people, transition, and more broadly LGBTQ+ community, as well as the system. The visualization (Figure 8) confirms that across threat categories, CitizenGo consistently combines emotional appeals with challenges to credibility to amplify their narrative of children being endangered. This strategy is particularly evident in tweets about transitioning and gender-affirmative care.

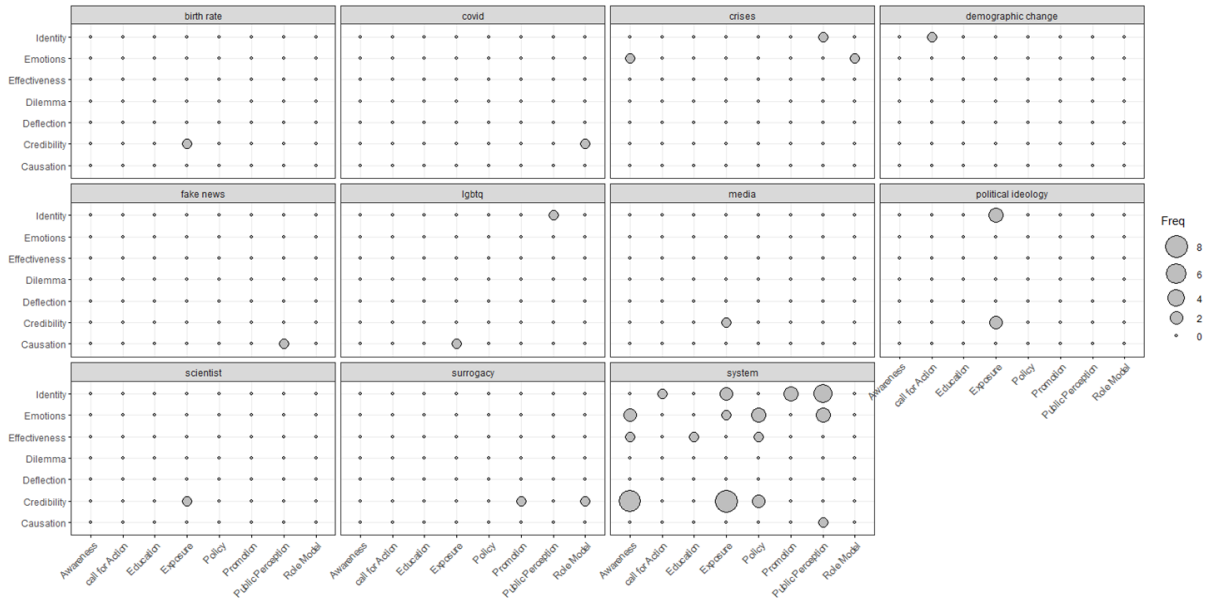
Figure 8. Interconnection between Goals, Frames and Constructions of Threats to Children in CitizenGo Discourse



Source: Authors

Europe for Family mentioned family predominately in tweets that were coded as Exposure (for example, "Why always LGBT and never for the family?") and Awareness (criticizing the EU parliament approach to family policies). As shown in Figure 9, most commonly, the family was depicted as being under threat by the system (especially the EU trying to impose on their members), evidenced by the larger circles in the system column particularly at the Selection, Emotions, and Credibility intersections. The visualization clearly demonstrates how this messaging was combined with evoking shared identity, doubting the credibility of the action (questioning the EU's competencies), and emotions related to losing sovereignty, with notable concentration of circles in these categories when discussing system-related threats.

Figure 9. Interconnection between Goals, Frames and Constructions of Threats to Family in the Europe for Family Discourse



Source: Authors

Temporal Patterns in Anti-Gender Discourse

In this final part, we address the third research question by presenting time-series analyses that visualize patterns in the anti-gender discourses over time. To examine how strategies, frames, and themes connect to international events, we focused six key events. For CitizenGo, we identified the following events: March for Life (2019-2021), Insurrection of the Capitol (2021), Twitter acquisition by Musk (April and October 2022), Overturning of Roe v. by the US Supreme Court (2022), and Anti-homosexual Bill in Uganda (2023). For Europe for Family, we added the European Parliament Elections of 2019.

Figure 10 and 11 show the frequency of four key themes for Europe for Family and CitizenGo over time. For Europe for Family's discourse, the theme of Society, Politics and Religion peaked just before the 2019 European Parliament elections. During this period, their tweets informed followers about EU structure and frequently shared pre-election polls from different countries, along with implicit voting recommendations. After the elections, this theme declined significantly in importance. While there are multiple spikes in discourse related to reproductive rights and gender in Europe for Family's communication, these were not linked to broader transnational events but instead corresponded with specific voting activities and discussions within EU institutions.

For CitizenGO, we observed an increase in tweets focusing on reproductive rights, particularly abortion, prior to the overturning of Roe v. Wade by the US Supreme Court in July 2022. Following this peak, abortion remained a frequent theme in their discourse, surging again after the March for Life in 2023. Several months earlier, in July 2021, we noted another spike in abortion-related content, which likely corresponded to the renewed discussions about abortion rights before the December 2021 U.S. Supreme Court hearing of Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization.

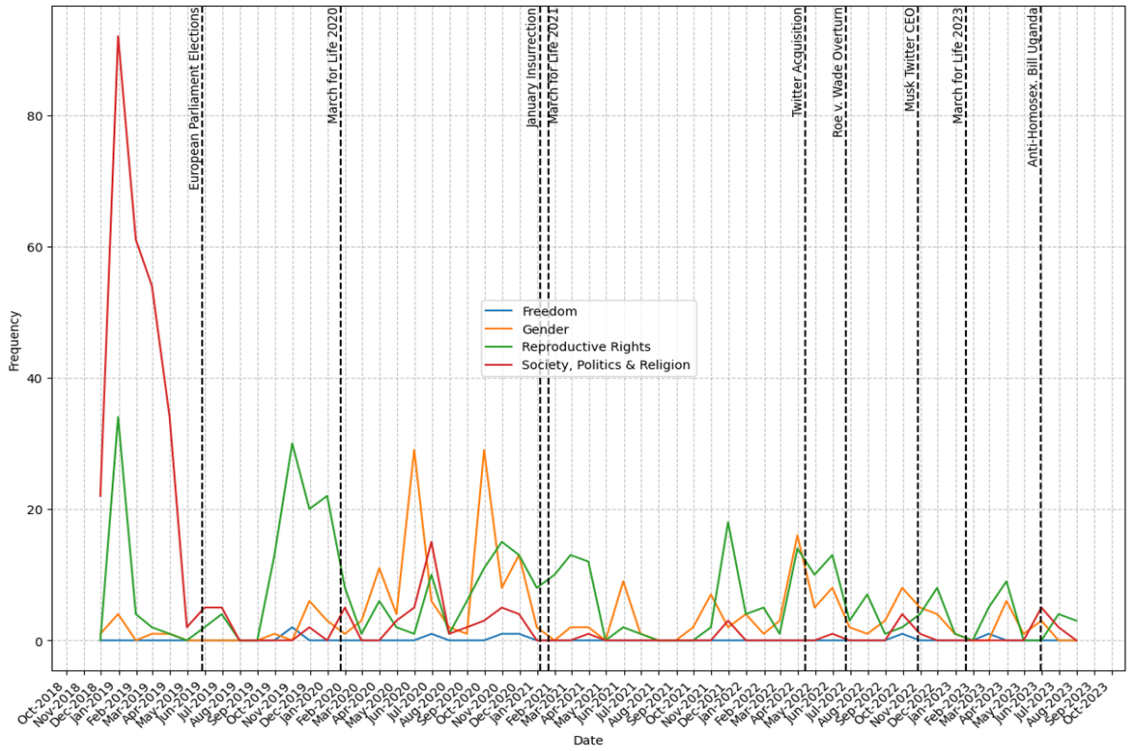
Interestingly, CitizenGo's tweeting frequency increased following Musk's acquisition of Twitter. However, our data does not provide sufficient evidence to establish a causal relationship between the platform's ownership change and this increase in activity.

Another notable trend emerged regarding LGBTQ+ themes, which began to appear more frequently in CitizenGO's tweets after Uganda passed its Anti-Homosexuality Bill in June 2023, as illustrated in Figures 11 and 12. The support for developments in Africa by seemingly Eurocentric actors highlights the global reach of anti-gender movements, demonstrating how they bridge regional divides and reinforce discriminatory ideologies across different sociopolitical contexts.

Further analysis reveals significant differences in the general tweet frequency between the two actors. Nearly one third of Europe for Family's tweets (n = 298) were posted in 2019, coinciding with the European elections, while they showed significantly lower activity in 2021 (n = 99) and 2022 (n = 139).

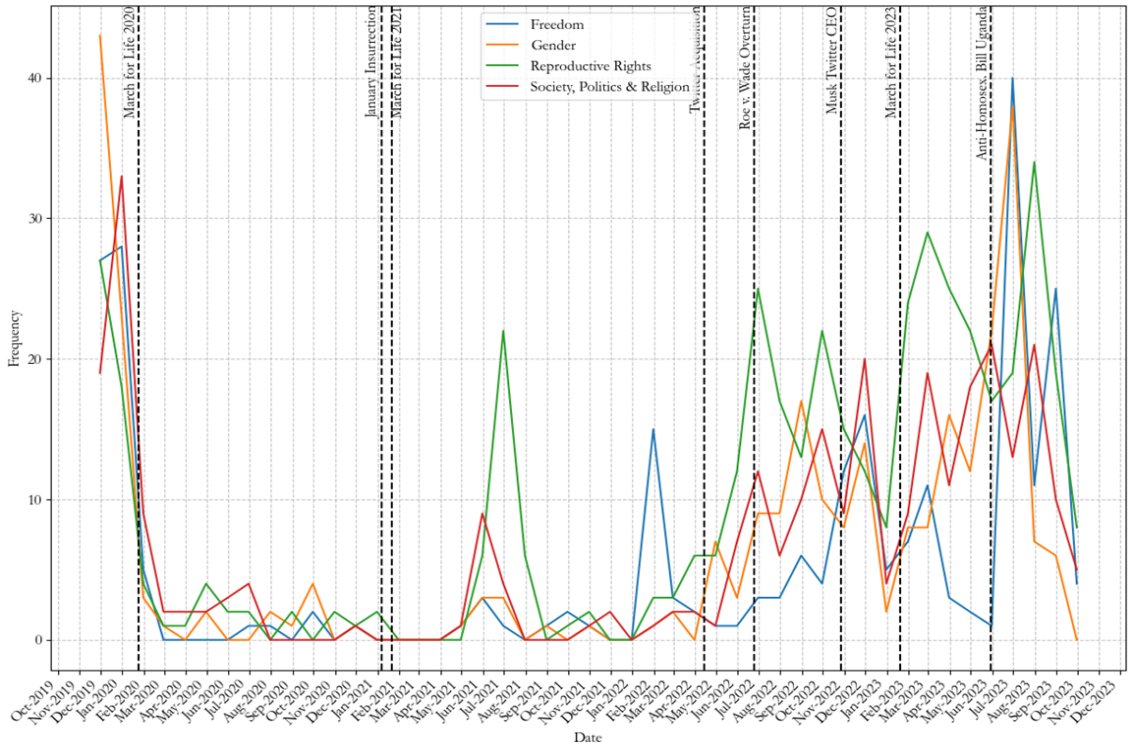
In contrast, CitizenGO's pattern differs markedly. Approximately 42% of their tweets were posted between January 2023 and September 2023, and around 30% were posted in 2022. Only 10% of their tweets date from 2020 and 2021. While it is possible that earlier tweets were deleted, contextual differences may also play a significant role. For instance, CitizenGO's reduced activity during the COVID-19 pandemic might reflect the cancellation of events they typically frame as threatening, such as Pride parades. Without these public gatherings to target in their discourse, they may have had fewer opportunities to mobilize their audience around these specific themes.

Figure 10. Timeline for Europe for Family



Source: Authors

Figure 11. Timeline for CitizenGo



Source: Authors

Discussion

Online spaces, particularly social media platforms, enable individuals and organizations to reach broad audiences, spreading their messages and narratives worldwide. While these platforms can raise awareness about important issues and mobilize support for social justice, they also facilitate the spread of harmful content that undermines gender equality and democratic values. This article examined how two prominent anti-gender actors—CitizenGo and Europe for Family—utilize X to advance their agenda. Our analysis focused on emerging themes, strategic approaches, and framing techniques employed by these organizations.

Our findings reveal that reproductive rights constituted a key theme for both CitizenGo and Europe for Family, though with different focal points within their online discourse. CitizenGo predominantly centered on abortion, while Europe for Family emphasized surrogacy. CitizenGo frames abortion as an immediate threat to children. Their discourse occasionally positioned anti-abortion advocacy as protection for women and unborn girls, as evidenced in posts such as this one:

> Many in favour of abortion claim to advocate for "women's rights". Meanwhile, they're murdering their baby girls. #ProLife #EndAbortion.

Europe for Family utilized surrogacy as a threat to women, linking it to discussions of gender equality, exploitation of women and same-sex marriage. Similar to CitizenGo's framing, Europe for Family portrays the restriction of reproductive rights, particularly banning surrogacy, as a form of advocacy for women's rights, as demonstrated in their messaging:

> Together, let's abolish the new form of women's slavery: the #ReproductiveExploitation. Women aren't commodities!
>
> In Spain, real feminists stand up against #ReproductiveExploitation. Together, lets abolish this new form of #ViolenceAgainstWomen!

These examples demonstrate how surrogacy is portrayed in Europe for Family's discourse as a dual threat. First, it is framed as a threat to women, characterized as exploitation, violence, and even slavery. Second, surrogacy is depicted as a threat to children by enabling non-traditional or non-heteronormative family structures, particularly those with same-sex parents. Europe for Family actively campaigns against both adoption and surrogacy, as these represent pathways to family formation for same-sex couples. Both anti-gender actors deliberately connect surrogacy and adoption in their messaging, portraying these practices as threats to children's well-being, as illustrated in the following example:

> In a surrogacy, the child is deprived of its right to know its mother. #StopSurrogacy now!
>
> Adoption is never EVER for money. At least in Denmark, this evidence is enforced. We must #StopSurrogacyNow!

As such, tweets related to reproductive rights play a significant role in framing and shaping perceptions of family dynamics, women's bodily autonomy, gender roles in general, and especially women's role within the family.

Additionally, both actors frequently tweeted about gender+ themes. CitizenGo focused on LGBTQI+ "indoctrination," while Europe for Family emphasized the need for family-friendly policies. CitizenGo frequently addressed freedom of speech and freedom of belief, while Europe for Family concentrated on political and societal themes, such as the structure of the EU and the European Parliament elections.

Examining the framing of threats and threatened entities, our analysis revealed that both actors often referred to established institutions like the World Health Organization or politicians as treats to freedom or sovereignty. CitizenGo predominately portrayed the LGBTQI+ community as a threat to children, suggesting they sexually abuse children or indoctrinate them with communist, Marxist, or socialist agenda. In contrast, Europe for Family portrayed surrogacy as harmful for children's well-being.

In general, both anti-gender actors highlighted perceived threats to traditional family structures and roles. This underscores their broader resistance to gender equality advancements in family dynamics, thus reaffirming the ongoing backlash against societal changes. Interestingly, while both actors articulated perceived threats against "family," they often refrained from clearly articulating the source of these threats. This ambiguity creates space for their audience to form their own interpretations about who or what exactly poses a threat.

Our findings show that CitizenGo and Europe for Family shared similar strategic patterns in their online communications. For both anti-gender actors, the most frequently utilized approach was Exposure of their opponents —that is, portraying their adversaries' work in a negative light. The patterns diverged somewhat in secondary strategies: CitizenGo's discourse featured Call for Action as the second most frequent approach, while Europe for Family emphasized Public Perception. Although CitizenGo's discourse included more explicit threats compared to Europe for Family, both actors heavily relied on undermining opponents' credibility and appealing to emotions as their primary framing techniques. When it comes to strategic use of frames, both actors shared similar patterns with

Exposure of opponent being the most frequently utilized strategy. The differences can be explained by the different levels of politics each anti-gender actor targets.

Temporal patterns revealed strong connections between the online activity and discourse of anti-gender actors and international political and societal events. Examples include their participation in and support for events such as the March for Life, interventions at the International Conference on Population and Development, representation in the European Parliament through elected officials, and the promotion of citizens' petitions across multiple countries. We observed a notable increase in CitizenGo's tweets on reproductive rights, particularly abortion, leading up to the U.S. Supreme Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade in July 2022 and following the March for Life in 2023. Similarly, discourse on LGBTQI+ themes surged after the passage of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda in June 2023. These findings highlight the actors' engagement with international political events, though further research is needed to explore the mechanisms linking anti-gender actors to global organizations and events.

We argue that CitizenGo and Europe for Family operate on different levels—citizen versus institutional—reflecting their respective mission statements and organizational structures. To support this, we examined whom they mentioned, retweeted, and quoted.

CitizenGo focuses on mobilizing and empowering citizens at local, regional, and national levels. Their online presence demonstrates a broad repertoire of mobilization tactics, including calls for boycotts, petition signings, and participation in protests like the March for Life across various countries. They frequently frame the system, elites, or establishment as threats. Within their top ten mentioned accounts, CitizenGo did not directly engage with political figures or institutions but instead interacted with multiple private accounts.

In contrast, Europe for Family's top ten mentioned accounts included prominent institutions and political figures such as the European Commission, the European Parliament, Emmanuel Macron (French president), the United Nations, and Katharina Novák (Hungarian President). Additionally, many of their tweets were directed at several Members of European Parliament (MEPs), inquiring how they would vote on specific issues. Europe for Family interacted more directly with European state politicians, MEPs (for example, Germany's Ska Keller), and national and European-level institutions. For example, they highlighted their Executive Director's speech to the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group on family issues:

> Today at the European Parliament, our Executive Director Mrs. Laetitia Pouliquen, gave a speech on the project of "European Certificate of Parenthood". Thank you MEP @MargaPisa for hosting this conference for the @ecrgroup Policy Group on Family.

Like CitizenGo, Europe for Family also called for citizen mobilisation, but primarily at an institutional level, such as sharing information about political parties' agenda to encourage voting in the European Parliament elections. However, this mobilisation was largely confined to this specific event. While they used X to inform the public about their work, they did not rely on it as heavily for gaining grassroots support. Consequently, the distinct ways in which both actors use the platform reflect their differing levels of political mobilisation—CitizenGo focuses on citizen.

We acknowledge that some differences, such as the focus on the European Parliament elections, may be linked to the varying timeframes covered by the collected tweets. As such, we do not claim that CitizenGo did not mobilize around the European elections. Rather, we observe that CitizenGo maintains continuous mobilization efforts, such as sharing petitions, while Europe for Family exhibited a spike in activity specifically around the European Parliament elections.

Conclusion

Our study contributes to research on anti-gender equality movements by adopting the Narrative Policy Framework and a mixed-methods approach to explore narratives and how they are used by anti-gender actors to mobilize across different political levels. This framework allowed us to examine the intentions behind each narrative and delve into its interconnection with perceived threats. Building on existing literature on threats and anti-gender discourse, our methodology can be used to analyse narratives and mobilisation strategies of other anti-gender actors online.

In conclusion, our study demonstrates how anti-gender equality actors employ threat narratives and gender-related themes to mobilise support online. By analysing two similar yet distinct anti-gender actors, we explored how their structural differences translated into their discourses. CitizenGo's direct calls for action contrast with Europe for Family's interactions with MEPs, reflecting their differing strategies. Their online presence and discourse reveal their engagement with international politics, operating across multiple political levels to challenge advancements in gender equality, LGBTQI+ rights, and reproductive rights.

Furthermore, our findings indicate that anti-gender movements aim to mobilize by framing gender-related themes as threats to the status quo and to society's most vulnerable: children. Our research sheds light on how prominent anti-gender actors use X to promote their agendas, enhancing

our understanding of their narratives and mobilization strategies. This insight offers opportunities to inform feminist resistance and develop effective counter-strategies to address these challenges.

Future research should investigate how harmful anti-gender narratives can be countered while safeguarding freedom of speech. What mechanisms are effective in dismantling these narratives? From a policymaking perspective, a more detailed examination is needed to determine under what conditions narratives cause harm and might qualify as hate speech. While hate speech is often reduced to derogatory terms and incitement of hatred, the EU's definition is broader, encompassing negative stereotyping and stigmatization of groups. Legal scholars should further define the circumstances under which these narratives meet this definition and warrant restriction.

While legal mechanisms are crucial for reducing hate speech and regulating online debates, it is important to recognize that these narratives are rooted in social conventions. In her research on revenge porn, Rikke Amundsen (2019) argues that focusing solely on the malicious intentions of perpetrators overlooks how revenge porn exploits and reinforces existing gender inequalities. Treating revenge porn as an isolated incident neglects "addressing the underlying social conditions that enable revenge porn to work so well" (Amundsen 2019, 143). Amundsen's insight applies to discourses of anti-gender actors. Their narratives gain traction because they build on pre-existing social conventions. Therefore, the most effective way to neutralize their impact may be to address these underlying social conditions directly.

Finally, our finding that anti-gender actors target and engage with audiences at different levels calls for further analysis of their multilevel political mobilization strategies. Understanding how these actors operate across local, national, and international contexts could provide deeper insights into their influence and the broader implications of their discourse.

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Appendix

Goals with Examples

Goals	Code	Example
1. Self-promotion Tweets highlight own/actor's achievements.	G.01	*CitizenGO delivers at Disney's Florida headquarters 500,000 signatures against LGBT indoctrination in its series and films. #Disney #LGTBI #Indoctrination*
2. Call for Action Tweets call for action/support of the receiver.	G.02	*Please sign this petition to prevent the next gay pride parade and similar events from happening in any Disney park. #Disney #Adoctrination #MickeyMouse*
3. Education Tweets provide educational/statistical information.	G.03	*C'est bien pour cela qu'il faut s'informer, comprendre et voter pour le groupe politique européen qui porte notre vision de l'#EuropeQueNousVoulons*
4. Exposure of others Tweets highlight the failings/misconduct of others.	G.04	*This is a deceptive move to push the LGBT political agenda and expose children and families to lewd behavior. #Disney*
5. Role Model Tweets highlight the success of specific others.	G.05	[redacted] *a great pro-life campaigner against abortion throughout the world. Her speech at the Republican convention in the USA.*
6. Policy Tweets advocate for the implementation or abolition of a law/regulation/institution	G.06	*Demand a parliamentary inquiry into kids transgender treatment! Sign the petition!*
7. Public Perception Tweets intent to impact the perception of an issue.	G.07	*Many in favor of abortion claim to advocate for "women's rights." Meanwhile, they're murdering their baby girls.*
8. Awareness Tweets make an issue salient.	G.08	*First, demographic changes include rapid aging, which systematically leads to a decline in the working-age population. Immediate consequences are significant challenges for our economies, our social and health systems, and the general well-being of our societies.*

Source: Authors

Frames with Examples

Frames	Coded	Example
1. Credibility Tweet aims to establish or undermine the credibility	N.01	*Experts from around the world call for the universal abolition of #surrogacy: A hundred specialists on the subject will sign the [redacted] a text calling for the universal repeal of this practice.*
2. Deflection Tweets raise a counterargument/counteraccusation or attack the person who made the argument instead of focusing on the argument itself.	N.02	*The Bible has over 600 laws, and a lot are civil. You should actually inform yourself on something before you try to lecture others on it. Under liberal secular law, people murder babies for convenience and call it "abortion."*
3. Effort/Effectiveness Tweets aim to highlight (the lack of) effectiveness of existing or suggested laws/regulations/ institutions.	N.03	[redacted] *"The diary of this conference does not represent the spirit of African culture, which is predominantly pro-life, and the Constitution of Kenya, which declares life begins at conception, and unborn babies deserve the right to life," #ICPD #Kenya #Abortion*
4. Selection Bias Tweets emphasise single stories or rely on overgeneralization or claim that a majority of people support an idea or tell part of an issue, but not all of it.	N04	*VICTORY! South Carolina Supreme Court Again Upholds Heartbeat Law Saving Babies From Abortions.*
5. Correlation versus Causation; Post hoc ergo propter hoc; Circular Reasoning.	N.05	*RT @LifeNewsHQ:* [redacted] *And it has caused massive underpopulation... America's Birth Rate is Below Replacement Level, We Need More Babies.*
6. False Dilemma Tweets display arguments/ solutions as a dichotomy or indicate there are only two opposing ways to see an Issue.	N.06	*There is no such thing as a safe abortion. Abortion always kills the baby.*
7. Identity and Value System Tweets invoke a group/ collective identity or appeal to a shared belief systems/ shared cultural value or distinguish between different groups.	N.07	*Remembering 2019: CitizenGO delivered nearly half a million signatures to Disney's Orlando headquarters. This 2020, we will continue to fight for our values. If you haven't done so, sign up and join in!*
8. Appeal to emotions Tweets incite basic emotions or evoke a perception of threat or safety.	N.08	*End christian genocide and persecution in #Nigeria. Sign the petition???? #Genocide #Petition #Christian. @CitizenGO_USA: Transgenderism is a Satanic attack against God's image! @CitizenGO*

Source: Authors