## Democratic backsliding and backlash against women's rights: Understanding the current challenges for feminist politics

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**Democratic backsliding and backlash against women's rights:
Understanding the current challenges for feminist politics**

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

**Abstract**

Trends of de-democratization across Europe and the Americas emerge along with opposition to gender equality and threats to previous gender equality policy achievements. Yet de-democratization is hardly analyzed through the lens of gender equality, and so far, efforts to systematically examine the implications for inclusive democracy and the representation of gender interests is fragmented. Backsliding in gender policies and on state commitments to gender equality, and new forms of feminist engagement with hostile states and audiences also raise new challenges to the literature on gender and politics. In this paper we propose a conceptual framework discussing two conceptually interesting realms: backsliding in gender equality policies and the emerging political space for feminist responses to backsliding. We illustrate our framework with empirical observations from four backsliding or temporarily backsliding Central and Eastern European countries: Croatia, Hungary, Poland and Romania. We aim to contribute to understanding gendered aspects of de-democratization and illiberal democracies functioning.

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The adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women was widely celebrated by feminists for its progressive global commitments. Yet, the hard-won gains on women's rights are currently under attack in fields as diverse as political participation, labor market, care or violence against women. Trends of backsliding and de-democratization emerged across Europe and the Americas, starting mainly around the times of the economic and financial crisis. We see articulated opposition to gender equality and threats to previous gender equality policy gains. Women's rights are particularly vulnerable in fragile and nascent democracies where such rights have been more recently established and where the space of civil society actors to defend them is limited and even shrinking (Carothers & Brechenmacher, 2014; Rutzen, 2015; Baker, Boulding, Mullenax, Murton, Todd, Velasco-Guachalla, Zackary, 2017). While significant attention is devoted to democratic backsliding (Greskovits, 2015; Bermeo, 2016), there is a striking lack of research into the gendered aspects and implications of democratic backsliding.

In this paper we propose a conceptual framework to analyze and reveal the consequences of these processes for inclusive democracy. The quality of democracy can be assessed on the degree of its inclusiveness and representativeness of societal interests, more specifically responsiveness to women's interests (McBride and Mazur, 2010:10). We ask: What does backsliding mean for gender equality policies and what are its implications for women's rights? How do feminists respond to and resist backsliding in the newly hostile political environment?

To develop our conceptual framework, we use empirical illustrations from the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, which was in the forefront of backsliding in gender equality policies in recent years (Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018 a,b; Roggeband and Krizsan, 2018; Kikas, 2016; Selewa, 2016). In a number of CEE countries, populist governments with hostile views on gender equality have taken office since 2010. As a result, official political discourses changed from positions that were either largely

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[1] This report is part of an ongoing research project on de-democratization processes and backlash against gender equality policies and activism. Parts of it have been previously published (Krizsán and Roggeband 2018b and Roggeband and Krizsán 2018) and presented at different conferences. We thank Agostina Allori for her research assistance in writing this report.

supportive or silent on gender equality to openly challenging formally adopted and accepted policies (Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018a,b). We examine the gender equality implications of these changes in three countries: Croatia, Hungary and Poland. Noted in recent studies as countries facing strong opposition to gender equality, both from civil society and from governmental actors (Krizsan and Roggeband 2018b; Felix 2015, Zbyszewska, 2017; Kikas, 2013; Kajinic, 2015). The Law and Justice (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc*, PiS) government in Poland, elected in 2015, launched a series of targeted attacks on reproductive and sexual rights. In close alliance with the Roman Catholic Church, the state opposes feminists, and LGBT groups and "western" liberal values. In Hungary, women's organizations are discredited as "foreign agents" threatening national identity, and the Istanbul Convention on Domestic Violence and Violence against Women is interpreted as an attack on the ideal of the traditional heterosexual family and marriage. In Croatia, men's rights, family protection and anti-gender ideology groups become the reference for gender equality issues. Removal of gender equality instruments and funding for women's groups is a reoccurring threat from government actors. Hungary and Poland, and to a lesser extent Croatia, are also countries whose governments are challenging fundamental democratic principles and EU norms. The countries have divergent records in establishing gender equality regimes. Croatia can be considered a pioneer of the region in adopting and implementing laws and policies related to gender equality. Poland, instead was a weak performer until 2008. However, it made important progress in establishing a comprehensive policy regime between 2009 and 2015. Hungary has been a notorious laggard in adopting and institutionalizing gender equality norms beyond formal EU requirements (Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018a).

Our study is not a systematic three country comparative analysis but takes these three, especially affected polities, as cases to illustrate political mechanisms that are in place in the context of de-democratization and attacks on gender equality. On the one hand, they all illustrate some backsliding, while on the other hand they also expose varying degrees of resilience in the face of attacks. The patterns we witness may not be typical only for these countries and the Central and Eastern European region, and as such can provide important lessons for understanding mechanisms of gender equality policy backsliding and responses to it in other parts of Europe or beyond.[2]

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[2] Data for our analysis comes partly from our previous comparative project focusing on the development of policies against violence against women in these countries (Krizsán and Roggeband 2018a). This data is complemented with desk and media research and interviews with feminist activists and femocrats conducted in

What is specific for countries of this region? They share a state socialist past and the experience of a decade-long transition to democracy and market economy, and towards democratic gender equality regimes. The years between 1989 and 2008 can be characterized as a period of relatively steady progress in gender equality policies in the region, even if the quality of adopted gender policies and institutions varied across countries (Krizsan et. al., 2010), and the quality of their implementation also diverged (Falkner, Treib and Holzleithner, 2008; Open Society Institute [OSI], 2005; Sedelmeier, 2009; Spehar, 2011). The progressive trend was disrupted when the economic crisis hit in 2008 and many countries started to show signs of backsliding (Sitter et. al., 2016). The economic crisis along with the disappearance of the EU accession incentive also led to changes in political regimes. Populist parties or parties hostile to gender equality started to govern in Hungary (2010), Croatia (2011) and Poland (2015). Whether some of these countries were façade democracies all along, that responded diligently to constraints of the global human rights actors and the EU remains a debated question (Sitter et al., 2016).

**Structure of the paper**

In its first part, the paper maps the recent strengthening of the transnational arena of anti-gender equality actors and illustrates manifestations of the offensive against gender equality with examples taken from various national contexts. The section looks at actors, networks and framing. The second part moves on to discuss two fundamental contextual elements for understanding the current backlash against gender equality: coming to power of anti-democratic and illiberal governments especially in the context of fragile democracies and the consequent curtailing of democratic rights including the closure of civic space.

Our third section looks at how the relationship between women's movements and states changes in the context of hostility to gender equality and women's rights taking into consideration both hostile governments and hostile publics and civil society. We ask how access, voice and political standing of women's rights advocates change in the context of hostility. We look at the implications of anti-genderism on women's rights advocates, the main drivers of gender equality policies (McBride and

Mazur, 2010; Htun and Weldon, 2012; Beckwith, 2013). We ask: how the capacities and strategies of women's movement change, adapt or decay in the context of state and public hostility. We argue that in the context of de-democratization and attacks on gender equality we need to move from a bilateral understanding of relationships between states and women's movements to one that takes into account the role of anti-gender equality actors in shaping this relationship.

The final part analyzes the implications of attacks on gender equality and women's rights on gender equality policies. Here we assess whether and how discursive attacks on gender equality translate to policy dismantling. We explore the conditions of decline and reversal of gender equality policies and their impact on political representation of women. We argue that in order to understand the nature of gender policy backsliding it is not sufficient to look at changes in laws and policies adopted, but we have to look at changes in implementation patterns, in accountability mechanisms of the state vis a vis women's rights advocates, as well as the discourses used by governments to delegitimize previously accepted gender equality objectives.

## II.     Backlash against women's rights: actors and strategies

While gender equality has always been contested, opposition to gender equality and to women's rights activism has become more vocal, global and better organized in recent years. A variety of actors has emerged and strengthened, including religious groups and conservative actors, right wing populist and nationalist groups, men's rights groups and more recently anti-gender ideology movements (Bob 2012; Kovats and Poim, 2015; Kovats, 2017; Kuhar, 2015; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018; Roggeband, 2018; Verloo, 2018). Some of these groups are long established actors and others are newly emerging such as the anti-gender ideology movements.

Oppositional actors started to organize and network transnationally in the mid-1990s when significant progress in women's rights was made at the international level (Buss and Herman, 2003; Chappell, 2006). At the 1995 Beijing conference religious and conservative governments and non-state actors made some small but significant inroads, including blocking the inclusion of sexuality rights in outcome documents (Chappell, 2006). This created the impetus to seek further collaboration between conservative actors within the framework of the UN conferences. An alliance between a wide range of conservative groups such as fundamentalist religious groups, both Christian and Islamic, and states with conservative governments that share a particular conservative and traditional perspective on gender issues emerged seeking to contest, undermine, and prevent further progress of women's rights internationally (Buss and Herman, 2003; Chappell, 2006; Bob, 2012; Sanders, 2018; Roggeband, 2019). This coalition operates and mobilizes both at the transnational and national level to act in favor of traditional family values and roles for men and women and thus counteract gender equality progress. Over the last decade, oppositional forces have become stronger and better organized (Bob, 2012; Halperin-Kaddari and Freeman, 2016; Sanders, 2018). The successful transnational counter mobilization of conservative and religious non-state and state actors potentially threatens existing international agreements and commitments and may undermine the work of international organizations and treaty monitoring bodies (Alston, 2017).

A leading actor in this transnational opposition is the Vatican. During the preparations of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Vatican sought the support from Libya and Iran to oppose language on women's rights and reproductive rights in the document (Buss and Herman, 2003; Chappell 2006). Often in tandem with the Vatican, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), an international organization with 57 member states, acted as powerful player opposing gender equality (Zwingel, 2016). Another source of opposition are conservative pro-family

NGOs, which initially were principally US- and Canada-based organizations that focus either on national-cultural tradition (e.g., the Heritage Foundation), religious and family values (e.g., the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute and conservative evangelical organizations like the World Family Policy Center, the Howard Center, and the Family Research Center) (Bob, 2012; Sanders, 2018, or promoting an "alternative female voice" to counter the perceived dominance of "radical feminists" (e.g., Concerned Women for America and REAL Women of Canada) (Blakely, 2010). These conservative North American NGOs have forged coalitions with NGOs in Islamic, Catholic and post-soviet states. For instance, the World Congress of Families, a loose coalition of pro-family and pro marriage Christian organizations from around the globe was launched in Moscow in 1995 by North American and Russian sociologists. It organizes bi-annual world conferences. In 2016, the World Congress of Families formalized its structure and now operates under the name of International Organization for the Family, which is headquartered in the US and links organizations from North America, Latin America and post-soviet countries. World Congresses were now held in Georgia, Hungary, Moldova and Italy (2019). The conservative Spanish organization HazteOir founded in 2001, launched the international platform Citizengo in 2013 that has local branches in Europe, Latin America and Russia. The platform coordinates large-scale e-petitions to influence national politics in relation to reproductive and sexual issues. In 2015, Belarus, Egypt and Qatar established the Group of Friends of the Family (GoFF). Many of these NGOs have a consultative status with UN Economic and Social Council (Roggeband, 2019).

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*Mobilizing against the Istanbul Convention*

The Council of Europe Convention on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Istanbul Convention (IC), has become one of the central sites of contestation over gender equality across Europe, at the national level as well as at the transnational level. Opened for signature in May 2011, the Convention is to date the most comprehensive international policy instrument addressing violence against women. Various actors started to mobilize to prevent the ratification of the Convention in their countries. These oppositional actors include various ultra conservative organization, men's rights groups, Churches (most prominently the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches) and related organizations, family protection groups advocating for traditional family models but also new grassroots initiatives (Korolczuk and Graff 2018). The main points of attacks appear to concern the attempt of the IC to introduce what opponents label 'gender ideology.' They engage with Art. 3 of the IC, which defines gender as "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men", and Art. 12-16 which prescribes the requirement for states to "promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behavior of women and men" by means of education and other methods. The concept of gender used in the IC goes, in their view, against differences between biological sexes and traditional understandings of the family and roles of women and men played in the society. Over the past five years opposition to the Convention skyrocketed. Resistances against the IC are particularly strong across the CEE region and in several countries attempts to block ratification have been successful (Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Latvia).

At the national level anti-gender movements started to mobilize in the mid-2000s (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018). There is no easily identifiable turning point in when anti-gender equality networks consolidated. In some countries an anti-gender rhetoric inspired by the Catholic Church was always present to some extent, for example in Poland (Gruziel, 2015). In other countries, the incoming right wing illiberal government and the opportunity provided by the transnational mobilization against the Istanbul Convention and sexuality rights facilitated the upsurge, such as in Hungary (Felix, 2015).

The Catholic Church played a crucial role in the emergence and spread of anti-gender movements (Case, 2016; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017), but the Christian Orthodox Church also played a significant role in countries like Russia and Bulgaria (Darakchi, 2019). Also, in Latin American and African countries evangelical and Pentecostal churches are actively involved in anti-gender movements (Beltrán and Creely, 2018; Kaoma, 2018). These movements share a critique of the concept of gender, which they see as ideology and political strategy, 'a sort of conspiracy aimed at seizing power and imposing deviant and minority values on average people' (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 9). They mobilize against LGBT rights, reproductive rights, sex and gender education in schools, gender studies, the use of the concept of gender in policy documents and legislation, and in defense of freedom of religion and a certain understanding of democracy (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018). The different national mobilizations share strong resemblances in issues, slogans and logos, pointing to the transnational dimension of the movement (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 9).

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*Anti-gender actors in Poland*

In Poland, the Roman Catholic Church has been a particularly powerful actor since the collapse of communism, with a strong institutional position allowing them direct access to the state and claiming moral authority on sexual and reproductive issues (Gruziel, 2015). Yet direct attacks on gender equality started to strengthen remarkably during the pro-Europe PO government between 2007 and 2015 (Gaweda, 2017). Opposition gained further strength after 2015 when the PIS government made anti-genderism a fundamental part of their governmental ideology, and Prime Minister Beata Szydlo started promoting the slogan "Good change" in line with a "compassionate conservatism" (Szczygielska, 2019: 1). Counter-movement organizations are well networked, partly reliant on Church infrastructure. But they also include think-tank like groups such as Ordo Iuris –Institute for Legal Culture (established in 2013)– which acts as a main legal expert group for the government in developing its policy proposals. In recent years the main strategies of the anti-gender movement are intertwined with governmental initiatives. The IC Convention was opposed by the Catholic Church, religious and conservative civil society actors, and political parties and this opposition started well before its signing and ratification.[3] The role of the Catholic Church was particular prominent, also because of its significant political influence in Poland (Graff, 2014; Fuszara, 2005; Szelewa, 2014). The Polish Episcopate warned against the harmful effects of the IC stating that signing the Convention would result in dismantling the understanding of family as a marital relationship

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[3] Already in 2014, an "Anti-gender Ideology" Parliamentary Committee was formed in Sejm (Gruziel, 2015).

between a woman and man, in legalizing same sex marriages and children's adoption by same sex parents (Gruziel, 2015:159). The Episcopate also pointed out that according to EU accession criteria despite Poland being part of the EU, Polish legislation is not subjected to any international regulations with respect to moral order, dignity of family, marriage, child raising and life protection (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2012, cited in Gruziel 2015).

These new actors are often acting in coalition with established agents such as churches, conservative and religious civil society organizations and (old or new) political parties. Important allies are populist right-wing organizations and political parties that strengthened in many countries as a result of the global financial crisis and the subsequent widespread austerity measures at the beginning of the millennium (Kovats, 2017). Many of these right-wing populist organizations tend to be racist, heterosexist, and homophobic and attack human rights, and gender and LGBT equality legislation and discourse (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; Kovats, 2018). Occasionally left-wing populist parties or leaders also promote an anti-gender agenda, like Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua (Kampwirth, 2008).

Literature on anti-gender mobilization (Kuhar and Patternote, 2017; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018; Kovats and Poim, 2015) point to the infiltration of these anti-gender actors in different state structures as well as good capacity to mobilize grassroots especially with the aid of religious actors and related organizations.

Conservative religious actors and right-wing populist organizations act in concerted efforts to promote their views and block or alter policies and legislation they see as a threat to traditional values. Their repertoire of action includes demonstrations, stand-ins and sit-ins, petitions and the collection of signatures, litigation, expertise and knowledge production, lobbying, referendum campaigns, electoral mobilization, and party politics (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018). Anti-gender activists are extremely active on the web and make extensive use of the opportunities and possibilities offered by new information and communication technologies (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018).

*Anti-gender networks in Croatia*

In Croatia, groups opposed to gender equality in different terms and partly linked to the Catholic Church were present since the beginning of the democratic period. Their positions have got slowly more articulated after 2008, when the conservative HDZ government started to be more supportive towards protecting traditional family values. It was during this period that fathers' rights counter-movements were also emerging in Croatia, with institutional allies and supporters within academic circles. The WAVE network report (2015: 101) found that there was "a reported increase in traditional and religiously extreme attitudes […] by the mass media and public institutions that provide services". The 2013 marriage referendum for a constitutional amendment to make marriage a union reserved for a man and a woman, supported by over 60% of the voters helped bring together a variety of actors and position them in the following years as "right wing civil society" with funding and access to

policy process. The main organization *In the Name of the Family* (U ime Obitelji), emerged in the context of the marriage referendum, but remained a central organization of the counter-movement afterwards. Other organizations included the local branch of the Polish *Ordo Iuris* (see above), GROZD (Voice of parents for children) and *Vigilare*. Their campaigns (directed against family policy reforms, sex education, abortion and domestic violence policy reforms –and mainly the Istanbul Convention– ) run under the umbrella of a war against gender ideology. Often in cooperation with the Church they run major public campaigns, organize demonstrations but they also sit in various working groups developing gender equality related policies. For example, the group called "the Truth About the Istanbul Convention (IC) (*Istina o istanbulskoj*) argued that the Istanbul Convention under the guise of protection of women from violence would introduce "gender ideology" into Croatian legislation. Anti-gender actors in Croatia argued that the IC was against Croatian family, tradition and culture, and that by signing it the state would renounce a part of its sovereignty. The leader of the Truth About the IC campaign (*Istina o istanbulskoj*) attempted to create moral panic by stating that children in schools will have to choose their gender (Sutlovic, 2019 forthcoming).

### III.    Fragile democracies and the rise of anti-democratic and anti-gender governments

To understand the current success of forces that oppose international women's rights in many countries across the globe, two interrelated political developments are relevant: democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; Greskovits 2015; Lust and Waldner, 2015), often led by (right and left wing) populist and nationalist governments, and the closure of civic space (Carothers and Brechenmacher, 2014; Rutzen, 2015).

The past decade was marked by a wave of hollowing and backsliding democracies in Central and Eastern European countries (Greskovits, 2015; Krizsan and Zentai, 2017, Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018b) but also Turkey, the United States and Latin American countries like Brazil, Nicaragua and Venezuela are led by anti-democratic and exclusionary forces now. The wave of democratization that began as early as the 1970s, is now rolling back and global freedom is in decline (Freedom House, 2018). A greater number of countries across the globe have seen a deterioration rather than improvement in the quality of their liberal democracies (24 vs. 21 countries respectively) (V-Dem Institute, 2019). Currently, almost one third of the world's population live in countries undergoing democratic reversals, particularly affecting those regions with the highest levels of democratization: Europe and North America, Latin America, and Central Asia (V-Dem Institute, 2019). Processes of democratic backsliding seem to be related to a wider discontent with liberal democracy, declining levels of political participation and trust, and an erosion of traditional party systems (Mair, 2006; Greskovits, 2015; Waldner and Lust, 2018). Democratic backsliding has also been related to a cultural backlash against ongoing social changes including progress in gender equality (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2016; Norris, 2016). Theories that link structural-economic variables to democratic transitions and breakdowns, point instead to a correlation between high rates of inflation and the risk of democratic breakdown (Kapstein and Converse, 2008). In Central and Eastern Europe, governments of countries that were hard hit by the 2008 global financial crisis attempted to gain control over free media, civil society and key democratic institutions (Greskovits, 2015). Finally, rising populist and nationalist parties often hold an ambiguous relation to democracy (Norris and Inglehart, 2016). As Müller argues, populists as "principled anti-pluralists, [populists] cannot accept anything like a legitimate opposition" (Müller, 2015: 85) and reject the democratic process. Populist leaders in the CEE have argued in favor "illiberal democracy" and gradually dismantled democratic institutions. Yet, so far, efforts to explain democratic backsliding remain incipient and we are lacking an

obvious theoretical framework for explaining it (Waldner and Lust, 2018:109). An underlying explanation could be the lack of conceptual clarity (Bermeo, 2016; Lust and Waldner, 2015). There is no clear definition available of what democratic backsliding entails. Bermeo remarks that "at its most basic, it denotes the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy" (2016:5). Not only formal political institutions are affected by processes of backsliding, but also informal political practices may be altered which reduces the capacity of citizens to make enforceable claims upon governments (Lust and Waldner, 2015). Democratic instruments such as referenda or constitutional amendments are used and abused to curtail democratic rights and the due process of law. Processes of backsliding are often difficult to identify as they take place gradually, resulting in ambiguously democratic or hybrid political systems (Bermeo, 2016; Lust and Waldner, 2015). Manifestations of such fluid and ambiguous change are executive aggrandizement, where new laws are developed to undermine executive accountability, and strategic manipulation of elections (Bermeo, 2016). Along the same lines, Greskovits finds that "semi-authoritarian projects of East Central Europe […] advance in an almost surreptitious way via adoption of a patchwork of worldwide existing legal and institutional 'worst practices' to gradually weaken democracy" (Greskovits, 2015:30). These incremental tactics make it difficult to assess the exact moment in which backsliding becomes critical. Assessing de-democratization processes not only requires fine-tuned measurement instruments, but also a refined conceptualization of democracy (Erdmann, 2011: 39).

In addition, we need a *gendered* conceptualization of democracy and democratic backsliding as current debates are strikingly gender blind and pay no attention to gender dynamics and the implications of backsliding for the rights and position of women. This is all the more remarkable as we see that many of the backsliding regimes promote state projects to enforce heteronormative and patriarchal family models (Baker et al., 2017; Bishop, 2017), aim to curtail reproductive rights and are strongly oppositional to rights of sexual minorities. Women are referred back to their roles as mothers and reproducers of the nation in contexts as diverse as Bolivia, Hungary, Poland, Turkey and Venezuela. Abortion and reproductive rights are curtailed across Central and Eastern Europe. Russia and Nicaragua are rolling back legal protections against domestic violence and in an alarming number of countries

existing legislation is poorly implemented.[4] Such agendas pose restrictions on the reproductive and sexual rights of women, but also affect their position on the labor market and in politics.

Political representation and participation of women in political decision making is a key element of defending the rights of women. Inclusion and recognition of women as well as accountability of the state with respect to gender equality commitments are crucial elements for gender democracy (Galligan, 2015; Alonso and Lombardo, 2018). Yet, feminist scholarship has pointed to the problems of interest representation through formal political channels. Political parties are often impervious to feminist demands which needs to be compensated through the active presence and space for civic associations and groups, including feminist ones. Alternative democratic spaces and collective agency are fundamental to the inclusion of women in democracy. Women's collective mobilization has been crucial for the advancement and protection of gender equality (Cornwall and Goetz, 2005; Htun and Weldon, 2018; Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018a). Alternative democratic spaces are particularly vital for women in fragile and nascent democracies where formal institutions are weak and women's rights were only recently established and not strong enough.

Yet, related to democratic backsliding, civic space is diminishing in many countries across the globe. Civil society organizations and in particular those defending human rights are facing increasing political restraints all over the world, including restrictive legislation to control their activities and to ban or restrict foreign funding (Christensen and Weinstein, 2013; Carothers and Breichenmacher, 2014; Rutzen, 2015; Poppe and Wolff, 2017). Since 2012, over 100 laws aimed at restricting funding, operations and registration of civil society organizations have been passed in different countries (IHRG, 2016). State hostility not only entails threats to the rights of civil society, but also repressive or even violent actions ranging from disproportionate auditing as a means of control to policing and physical attacks of activists (Baker et al., 2017; Human Rights First, 2017; Márton and Kerényi, 2017). What needs far more attention is how this closure of civic space is a gendered phenomenon that particularly affects women's rights activism. Women's rights activists are not only targeted because of the focus of their work that is often viewed as endangering "traditional values", but opposition to women's rights also uses gendered mechanisms to restrict and repress organizations that promote such rights, including gender-based

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[4] https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/-/joint-call-by-un-special-rapporteur-on-violence-against-women-and-global-and-regional-mechanisms-on-women-s-rights-to-eradicate-gender-based-violence (retrieved on July 19, 2019)

violence, harassment and intimidation (Bishop, 2017; Human Rights First, 2017). In their efforts to restrict women's rights activism, governments are sponsoring oppositional movements and use them to influence the realm of civil society in a way that directly supports state power (Doyle, 2017). The closure of the civic space for women's rights defenders not only obstructs them in exercising their rights, but also limits their role in safeguarding existing gender equality policies and arrangements and preventing erosion (McBride and Mazur, 2010; Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018 a,b).

Approaching democratic backsliding from a gender perspective urges us revise the narrow focus on procedural elements that prevail in current mainstream conceptualizations of democratic backsliding. We have pointed to specific gendered dynamics that are central to current processes such as the curtailing of sexual and reproductive rights and legal protections against gender based violence, the promotion of state projects to enforce heteronormative and patriarchal family models (Baker et al., 2017; Bishop, 2017), strongly oppositional discourses against gender equality rights and the rights of sexual minorities, and the gendered closure of civic space making it a phenomenon that particularly affects women's rights activism. These are starting points to rethink democratic backsliding from a gender perspective.

In the rest of the paper we will discuss what these developments imply for the inclusion and participation of women. How are the relations between state and women's rights organizations reconfigured and what space is there to defend and promote women's rights? We introduce an analytical model to explain the current politics of gender equality in countries facing democratic backsliding and anti-gender mobilizations. This triadic model introduces a diversified and gendered understanding of civil society including both women's movements and antifeminist movements and how these two relate to states, in order to better understand current struggles and power dynamics around gender equality.

Next, an important question is to what extent the change of political regimes and the instability of democratic institutions impacts existing regulatory arrangements: Do we see an erosion of women's rights, dismantling of gender equality policies and decay of inclusive policy processes? We develop a conceptual framework to map the patterns of backsliding or resilience of gender-equality policies.

## IV.     Implications of backlash on state movement relations – a triadic approach

During the last decades, research on the role of women's movements in the advancement of women's rights has devoted a central role to movement/ state relations. Rather than seeing governments and policies as contextual variables for women's movement activism, this literature discusses states as active partners of the women's movement and often sees femocrats (feminist bureaucrats) as movement actors (Banaszak, 2010: Spehar, 2007). State feminism literature proposes an understanding of state-movement relations in which women's movements and states are partners rather than opponents, thus going against traditional feminist critiques of the state as patriarchal structure and against social movement literature which also sees states as opposed to movements (Stetson and Mazur, 1995; McBride and Mazur, 2010). This approach sees movement/state relations as fundamental for women's empowerment and looks at different interfaces (from women's policy agencies through feminist triangles of empowerment to femocrats) that proved successful in achieving gender equal change (Stetson and Mazur, 1995; Nijeholt, Vargas and Wieringa, 1998; Rai, 2003, Woodward, 2003).

However, this approach shows limitations if applied in the context of the current political hostility to gender equality. First, it operates on the assumption of benevolent states (if not necessarily pro-active ones), where institutional continuity exists, and democratic premises such as the need for adequate political representation of women are not challenged, at least not directly. In the current context of governments with an openly anti-gender equality position, which makes partnership between states and women's movements difficult, this assumption of the benevolent state needs to be amended or at least reviewed.

*Illiberal Government and openly anti gender-approach in Hungary*

A populist and right-wing government (FIDESZ) took office in 2010. It engaged in a drastic revision of the whole political and welfare system, and used the economic crisis as a justification to carry out major reforms including the dismantling of policies serving gender equality. Opposition to gender equality became particularly articulate in the context of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in May 2017 (Szikra, 2014: Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019 forthcoming). Among the first amendments of the FIDESZ governments was the revision of a 2009 governmental decree about gender-equality education for kindergartens. The articles on gender-sensitive education were removed with reference to gender ideology (Felix, 2015). The FIDESZ government have taken a hostile stance towards women's rights activists as well. Women's rights groups have seen an unprecedent absence of funding under the FIDESZ government, including the blocking of funding by non-state donors such as the Norwegian Civil Grants (Tasz, 2016).

*Illiberal Government and openly anti gender-approach in Poland*

The PiS government in Poland, elected in 2015, has set out to reform the democratic institutional settings, and a central element of this de-democratization process is a strong anti-gender-equality rhetoric in which 'gender ideology' is presented as a major threat to Polish society and Catholic family values. Statements that challenge gender equality are issued on a regular basis by government officials. The PiS government started a multifaceted process targeting gender-equality policies, particularly in the fields of reproductive rights, family policy and violence against women, through dismantling, the adoption of new hostile policies and reframing. Several policies established by the previous government were reversed, like the state-funded IVF program in December 2015 (Selewa, 2016). One month later, the government made access to emergency contraceptives difficult. The government further introduced the 'For Life' project, that provides a one-time payment to women who decide to give birth to a child prenatally diagnosed with malformation or life- threatening conditions.

Second, it largely operates on the idea of a bilateral relationship between states and women's movements, including feminist experts. It pays no systematic attention to counter-movements and their claim for representation within policy processes concerning gender equality issues, and what such claims do to the relationship between states and women's movements. In the context of de-democratizing states, groups opposed to gender equality gain new leverage and standing in policy processes. Empowerment triangles made up by states, women's movements and feminist experts (Nijeholt, Vargas and Wieringa, 1998; Woodward, 2003) need to be reconsidered in ways that integrate voices opposed to gender equality.

The growing importance of anti-gender equality arguments from a variety of actors, including social movement and state actors has implications both for states and how they relate to women's rights groups and for women's rights groups and how they approach states.

We propose a new conceptual framework based on the following premises:

a. Assumption of the benevolent state needs to be amended.
b. The assumption of a bilateral relationship between state and women's movement needs to be changed to a triangular understanding in which the state is seen in relation to both the women's movement and the anti-gender equality movement.
c. Thinking about women's movements transactional engagement with the state as the only and most successful form of engagement has to be revisited. New relationships may imply more

complex form of engagement, mixed strategies and capacities. This may imply the need for developing or strengthening different capacities (grassroots, less institutionalized) and different strategies (disruptive, confrontational rather than institutionalized, negotiated) compared to previously dominant ones.
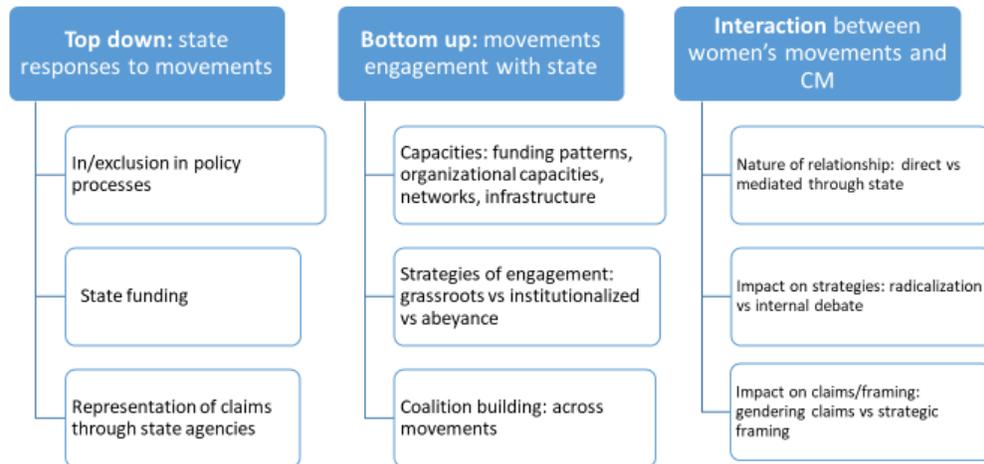
An alternative conceptual framework would better serve our understanding of the current dynamics of gender politics and struggles for gender policy progress. To disentangle changes in the relationship between states and women's rights activism in the current context, we need to move beyond the analysis of bilateral relationships between state and women's movements, and between movement and counter-movements, and turn to a framework that captures the triadic relationship between movements, counter-movements and the state. It is the interactions and interrelations between these three actors that are critical to capture the full picture of current changes.
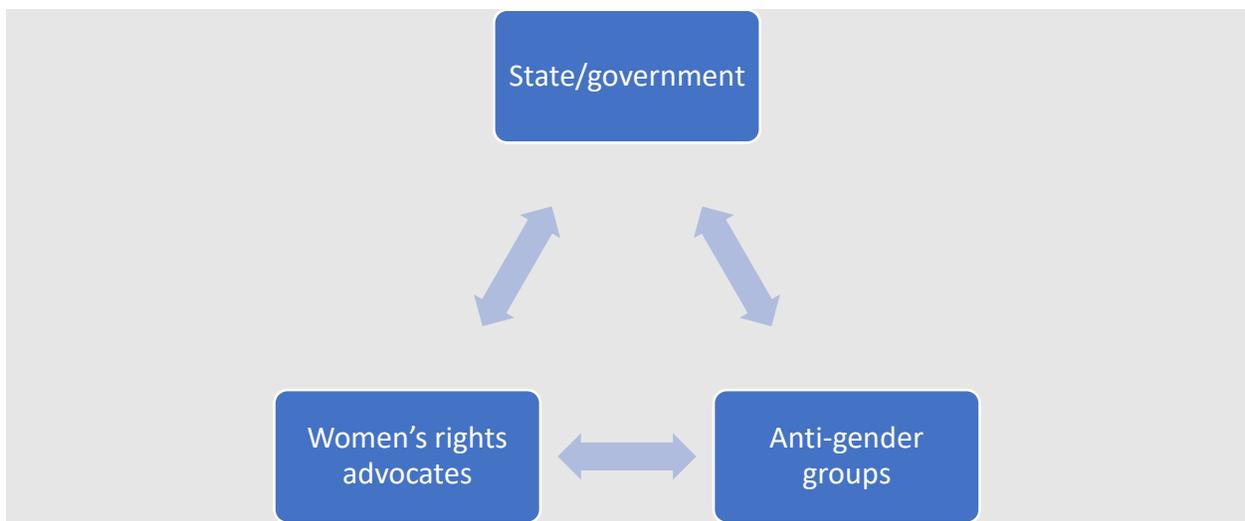


While our main focus is on women's movements and women's rights, we need to discuss them as part of these "gender power triangles", as we conceptualize them.

We propose to analyze dynamics within these triangles along three axes.

# Integrating movements, counter-movements and state: three axes

| Top down: state responses to movements | Bottom up: movements engagement with state | Interaction between women's movements and CM |
|---|---|---|
| In/exclusion in policy processes | Capacities: funding patterns, organizational capacities, networks, infrastructure | Nature of relationship: direct vs mediated through state |
| State funding | Strategies of engagement: grassroots vs institutionalized vs abeyance | Impact on strategies: radicalization vs internal debate |
| Representation of claims through state agencies | Coalition building: across movements | Impact on claims/framing: gendering claims vs strategic framing |

### a.   Top down: State responses to movements

Discussions of state responses to women's movement claims cannot be based on bi-lateral relations between states and women's movements. Movements and actors that make (different or contrasting) claims on gender issues also need to be taken into account. Analyses of state responses should therefore be comparative, in order to capture the nature of changes in the place of gender equality in government agendas. This can be captured through three dimensions: inclusion or exclusion in policy making through consultation/co-governance or other governance structures; state funding allocated for relevant civil society/movement organizations; and, finally representation of claims through state agencies (women's policy agencies or other).

*Consultation and inclusive policy processes* are critical elements of democracy and participation, they are instrumental for promotion of rights through policies but are also seen as policy and movement outcomes in themselves (Ferree and Gamson, 2003; Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018 a). Governments moving towards authoritarianism often use methods of control to suppress the voice of civil society organizations they perceive as threatening. These methods may range from closing consultation channels formerly in place or populating them with organizations (often referred to as GONGOs) that directly support state power (Doyle, 2017); through cutting or regrouping *funding of organizations* to repressive or even violent actions against these groups. Such violent action may range from disproportionate auditing as a means of control to policing and violence, which limit and disempower

organizations (Baker et al., 2017). Women's *policy agencies* are critical structures giving representation to women's rights within the government (Stetson and Mazur, 2005; McBride and Mazur, 2010; Squires, 2008). Analyzing the dismantling, reframing or replacing of these agencies with agencies giving voice to conservative anti-gender agendas is another way to capture changes in state movement relations.

Our data challenges the assumption of benevolent states and shows either state hostility towards women's rights actors or a newly emerging state neutrality, which gives equal voice and standing on women's rights issues to women's rights advocates and anti-gender equality actors, contrary to earlier times when women's rights advocates had exclusive standing. We see how previous partner relationships between states and women's movements are now replaced, but at least complemented, with partnerships with anti-gender equality groups.

These developments drastically changed the relations between the state and women's movements. We look at each of the three identified dimensions of this changed relationship between states and women's movements: inclusion or exclusion in policy making through consultation/co-governance or other mechanisms; state funding for civil society organizations and representation of claims through state agencies.

## In/exclusion in policy processes

We see different efforts to sideline women's movements from policy processes, that partly depend on the position that women's organizations had established in previous periods.

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*Inclusion of women's rights organizations in Policy processes - Hungary*

FIDESZ government action targets gender policies and women's movement organization with increasing intensity since 2010. Consultation mechanisms between state actors and women's rights groups were not very consolidated in Hungary prior to 2010, with some minor improvement between 2009 and 2010. Yet, after 2010 the situation further deteriorated. Consultative relations first moved from formalized consultative status to ad-hoc involvement in a limited number of policy processes. More recently, this moved gradually towards limiting forms of cooperation between state actors and women's groups and ultimately into persecution of these groups. In 2010 the FIDESZ government dismantled most of the gender equality structures in place under the previous government. After 2010, the Council for Gender Equality was not convened, ending any formalized interaction between the government and women's rights organizations (Juhász, 2012; Szikra, 2014). Consultation groups after 2010 were ad-hoc. They now included conservative pro-family groups and conservative women's rights groups. But most formalized consultation between the government and women's rights groups stopped. Womens' organizations lost their standing in relevant policy processes and were replaced by conservative and religious organizations. The government started to provide support and opportunities for non-feminist conservative women's organizations and to include them in consultation. In 2013 an alternative coalition (Association of Hungarian Women) was

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launched that aimed to challenge the place of the Hungarian Women's Lobby in the European Women's Lobby and also to delegate a representative to the EU gender equality agency, European Institute for Gender Equality. Starting from 2013, the government moved beyond exclusion towards the repression of women's movement actors using methods ranging from regulatory tools such as excessive auditing and surveillance to more violent and repressive tools such as police searches. Thus, they limited capacity to activism both by means of threat but also by demanding unnecessary and mostly unavailable resources for handling excessive auditing. Waves of auditing and raids took place in Hungary against several rights NGOs (women's rights, LGBT, other civil rights groups) funded by the Norwegian Civil Fund starting from 2013. Auditing procedures run for years and were closed without any findings of irregularity (Tasz, 2016).

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*Inclusion of women's rights organizations in Policy processes - Poland*

Poland improved considerably the inclusion of women's rights advocates into policy processes in the period between 2009 and 2015, both by creating different issue specific consultative fora and by developing good cooperation with the Women's Congress. 2015 brought abrupt changes to Poland. In 2015 the PiS government dismantled existing gender equality institutions and institutional arrangements, cutting the principal channels of state access available to women's organizations. An analysis of Polish media reports reveals that the PiS government actively promotes new conservative actors emerging in civil society or previously marginal organizations especially active in spheres such as the rights of Catholic families, religious freedom, tradition, marriage, anti-abortion, anti-migration, nationalist agenda, etc. to play an increasingly important role in consulting law projects. Government officials, like the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Equal Treatment, have stated that they seek to develop a cadre of "conservative" NGOs that can focus on topics such as women's and family issues, discrimination, and refugee/migration from a traditional perspective.[5] In 2017, the Polish government began a financial review of targeted "liberal" NGOs, requiring many to produce documents in an audit like procedure for the first time. It has ordered several organizations to return grant money, while withholding funding from others (Human Rights First, 2017: 5). In Poland too women's organizations and LGBT groups faced physical attacks (Human Rights First, 2017) such as police searches, raiding of offices, holding computers or even arrests of activists. The Police raid on the offices of main women's rights organizations in several Polish cities in October 2017 exemplifies this kind of threat and repression. The timing of the raids, one day after women's organizations had staged anti-government marches to protest the country's restrictive abortion law, suggest the police raids to be an intimidation tool (The Guardian, October 5, 2017).[6]

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*Inclusion of women's rights organizations in Policy processes: Croatia*

Croatia had successful previous arrangements for inclusion and even co-governance on women's rights issues between women's rights actors and state actors (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a). The position of actors and rhetoric opposed to gender equality gradually strengthened after 2011. As a result, previously successful patterns of cooperation faltered. Women's rights organizations lost their exclusive insider status on women's rights issues. Contrary to the abrupt patterns of reconfiguration in Poland and Hungary, Croatia had a more subtle process which channeled conservative actors into consultation processes alongside with women's movement organizations. Increasing room was given in consultation platforms to groups opposing gender equality (men's rights groups, Vigilare, U ime Obitelji). In this way, oppositional actors managed to introduce some of their demands and viewpoints on the traditional family, sexual and reproductive rights and against the concept of

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[5] https://www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/dlaczego-niektore-organizacje-pozarzadowe-nie-moga-liczyc-na-dotacje-minister-sprawiedliwosci. Accessed July 18th 2019.

[6] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/05/police-raid-offices-of-womens-groups-in-poland. Accessed July 18th 2019.

gender. Yet, women rights organizations were not left out of the process, and in some issues they still remained an important voice. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention in 2018 despite strong and massive counter-movement protests and the inclusion of anti-gender actors in the political consultation process, suggests that women's organization were not silenced. The working group created for the ratification in 2017 included both feminists and neoconservatives' representatives. The main reason behind neoconservatives' participation was the alleged inclusion of 'gender ideology' in Croatian legislation through the Convention. Regardless of the backsliding of democratic procedures, the Convention ratification law mostly captured and contained feminists' requests and was adopted by the Parliament (Sutlović, 2019 forthcoming). The government seemed to assume a position as "neutral arbiter", that does not choose sides, but this position is also highly ambivalent as conservative actors are appointed in relevant positions. This indicates that the government does not openly support conservative movements, which is very different in the Hungarian and Polish case.

*State funding*

A shift in state approaches to women's rights advocates –replacing them with conservative groups or bringing conservative groups along with them to the process– is further illustrated by funding patterns.

We see three models of limiting funding depending on what was there before.

*Hungary: Attacks on international funding*

In Hungary, women's rights groups never received substantial funding from government budgets neither at a national nor at the local level. This continued under the Fidesz government. After 2010, the government increased its control over funding available for civil society: both public funding and funding from foreign donors. The amendment of the *Law on Civil Societies* limited the number of NGOs which had "public interest" status and reorganized funding mechanism. Boards deciding about the tenders came under governmental control. Consequently, the framing of the calls and their selection process could now follow the government's official agenda, thus further limiting funding for women's rights NGOs. Currently, to receive state funding as an NGO the applicant should be a partner of the government or its program should be based on ideas and values approved by the government. Due to this change, new NGO's have emerged working on objectives aligned to government priorities who now win significant amounts on public tenders. These organizations are also supported with public buildings allocated for their programs. Their objectives emphasize women's roles in sustaining the nation and its traditions, including traditional family norms (Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019 forthcoming). Since 2015, the government also curtailed the availability of foreign funding, the main source of funding for women's rights groups. The Norwegian Civil Fund was the first to be challenged because its refusal to channel funds through governmental actors. Waves of auditing and raids took place in Hungary against several rights NGOs (women's rights, LGBT, civil rights) funded by the Norwegian Civil Fund. Auditing procedures run for years but were closed without finding any irregularity[7]. Scarce NGO capacities were tied for years due to these investigations. In June 2017 the NGO Law (the so-called Stop Soros law[8]) was passed modelled after a Russian law, which requires a

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[7] A „Norvég civil támadások"a NER-ben, 2016. április 8.
https://ataszjelenti.blog.hu/2016/04/08/a_norveg_civil_tamadasok_a_ner-ben. Accessed July 18th 2019.
[8] Legal Analysis of Hungary's Anti-NGO Bill, June 2018
https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/briefing-papers/legal-analysis-hungary-s-anti-ngo-bill

special registration for NGOs that receive foreign funding and a public display of the foreign funding, in the spirit of labeling these groups as foreign agents[9]. Open Society Institute, a long-time international donor for rights issues in the region was also persecuted, which ultimately resulted in their departure from the country[10].

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*Poland: cutting public funds*

In Poland we find governmental strategies to defund women's rights organizations and redirect public funds to alternative, government friendly women's organizations, what they call a cadre of "conservative" NGOs. The newly established National Freedom Institute –Centre for the Development of Civil Society– that distributes state funding to civil society organizations, aims to systematically replace human rights focused groups labeled as "leftist" with these new civil society actors loyal to the government (Sczygelszka, 2019 forthcoming). Several Polish women's organizations that received state funding previously have now lost this support. The most illustrative example is the defunding of Centre for Women's Rights, one of the oldest women's rights organizations in Poland dealing with issues of gender-based violence that received state support since 1994. The center was denied funding in three subsequent occasions since 2016 (Ambroziak, 2018). The justification from the Ministry of Justice on terminating its financial support was that the Centre is "narrowing down its help to a specific group" (Ambroziak and Chrzczonowicz, 2017).

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*Croatia: Move from institutional grants to tendering*

In Croatia, new right-wing civil society organizations count with the support from the government. For instance, in 2017 the right-wing organization *In the Name of the Family[11]* (U ime Obitelji) founded in 2013 that focuses the protection of traditional Croatian family, was awarded with the three-year long support from the National Foundation for Civil Society Development (Sutlović, 2018). Here women's organizations, were not simply denied funding like in the Polish case, but the strategy used by the state to restrain women's groups, is to tender funding available for services for victims of domestic violence. Tendering requires extremely high investment of resources by women's groups as well as conforming to complex protocols that are often contrary to feminist principles (Minnesota Advocates et. al., 2012). This forces women's organizations to invest a lot of time in "selling their product". As one activist remarks: "…we should not have to imagine every time something new and innovative, what we do is established practice; the State does not recognize the obligation to finance the (autonomous) shelters."[12] Conditionality imposed on women's groups and resulting patterns of dependency have long been discussed in relation to neoliberal states (Alvarez, 1999; Ghodsee, 2004). A move towards replacing previous earmarked state funding with tendering however is a relatively recent phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe and gains new relevance when emerging together with state hostility and closure towards women's rights groups. As one activist in Croatia argues "they ignore us and keep cutting our funds for work. I would say that both previous and current government slowly play on the card of exhaustion, thinking, these women are not afraid and are not bribable, let's exhaust them."[13]

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[9] Joint statement on the Hungarian NGO Law, July 04, 2017
 https://www.liberties.eu/en/news/joint-statement-lexngo-hungary/12429. Accessed July 18th 2019.
[10] The Open Society Foundations to Close International Operations in Budapest, May 15, 2018
https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/open-society-foundations-close-international-operations-budapest. Accessed July 18th 2019.
[11] Later turned into a political party (Sutlović, 2019 forthcoming).
[12] Interview with Mamula conducted by Leda Sutlović.
[13] Interview with Neva Tölle, conducted by Leda Sutlović in January 2018.

A third dimension illustrating changes in women's movement/ state relations can be captured through the sidelining, closure or reframing of women's rights agencies to now meet conservative agendas. Women's *policy agencies* are critical structures giving representation to women's rights within governments (Stetson and Mazur, 2005; McBride and Mazur, 2010; Squires, 2008). The extent to which these agencies represents the voice of the women's movement may vary and its efficiency in representing women's rights may be determined by this relationship (McBride and Mazur, 2010). Women's policy agencies in late coming democracies such as countries of the Central and Eastern European region were always exposed to political changes and their cooperation with movement actors varied considerably (Krizsán and Zentai, 2012) already before the period of dismantling. Yet dismantling, reframing or replacing these agencies compared to their previous position in the government is another way to capture changes in state movement relations.

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*Women's policy agencies - Hungary*

In Hungary the gender equality machinery was dismantled soon after the governmental change. Prior to 2010 a small and relatively marginal yet operational Department for Gender Equality existed within the Ministry of Social and Labor Affairs. The new government downsized the department and its portfolio to 'policies affecting women' and transferred it under Deputy State Secretary of *Family and Population Policy* in the Ministry of Human Resources. Currently, the body concentrates primarily on the role of women as mothers within the family of their motherly responsibilities. In 2012, the minister of National Economy appointed a Ministerial Commissioner in charge for Women Participation on the Labor Market with a 2-year length mandate. Her role was to identify barriers to women's participation in the labor market and initiate programs. According to civil society reports (HWL and ERRC, 2013), this position had little weight, and during its mandate the question of gender equality has never been raised. The Equal Treatment Authority, responsible for the enforcement of anti-discrimination policy, also faced constraints after 2019. The budget of the Authority was cut in 2010-11, but then it started to slowly increase after 2012. The number of its staff has also decreased and has been replaced during these years of shortage, starting with the replacement of the director already in 2010. Finally, the Equal Treatment Advisory Board, which was the main expert body supporting the Authority was also dismissed in 2012. Since 2010, the Authority favored the anti-discrimination ground of motherhood over gender, thus prioritizing and communicating widely those cases in which employer practices discriminated mothers or pregnant women (Weverka, 2017).

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*Women's policy agencies - Poland*

In Poland the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment, which acted as the gender equality policy agency, was merged with the Plenipotentiary for Civil Society. The post was renamed Plenipotentiary for Civil Society and Equal Treatment but the new portfolio focuses only on civil society issues (Selewa, 2016). To protest these developments thirteen experts serving as consultants to the office of the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment and Civil Society resigned in November 2016, explaining their decision with lack of any actual influence on decisions made by the office. Also, in January 2016, the Parliament drastically reduced the budget of the Polish Ombudsman,

which PiS associated with promoting 'gender ideology'. PiS MP Mularczyk justified the decision, saying: 'the Parliament is not going to pay for gender'.

All three dimensions discussed show changes in relations between states and women's movements. If looked through the lens of the gender power triangle we propose, we can identify a marginalization and replacement of women's rights advocacy actors with new or strengthening conservative civil society organizations making anti-gender equality claims, rather than a complete closure of the civic space. The façade of democratic consultation remains in place but becomes one that can easily result in curtailing rights rather than advancing them. We find different types of state action towards women's movements. While in some countries distinctions between state policy and anti-gender movement agendas are blurred, in other cases states may play the neutral arbiter between pro-gender equality and anti-gender equality groups by insisting on including both parties to consultation processes, or by adopting alternate policies that serve both sides (for example by adopting a progressive partnership law just days after a successful referendum amends the constitution to the contrary in Croatia). We find that cooperation patterns between women's rights organizations and state actors are now weakened or disrupted due to the rise of counter movements and their proximity to government agendas. Previous arrangements largely dissolve, particularly in states with openly hostile agendas. No strong state feminism emerged in these countries before (Krizsán, 2012), but now we even see the opposite: hostile states that actively discredit gender equality as a goal. This is done with the help of civil society organizations that are used to replace women's organizations in the state agencies, and consultation mechanisms. In contexts where state feminism was better embedded, like Croatia (Spehar, 2008), the struggle goes on inside and outside the state arenas. Still, even in these cases, the political space that can be claimed by women's rights advocates is narrower compared to what was there in the 2000s.

Having discussed changes in state responses to women's movement claims (a top down approach) we now turn to an analysis of how women's movement strategies and capacities change in the context of altered state-movement relations, increased public hostility to gender equality and strengthening anti-gender movements (a bottom-up approach). We ask: what are the implications of the backlash against gender equality for women's rights advocates?

## b. Bottom up: women's movements responses to reconfigurations

How do women's movements respond to attacks on gender equality and emergent state hostility? In the context of hostile states and strong competition for access with anti-gender equality groups, women's rights organizations accommodate by changes in their capacities and changes in their strategies of advocating for women's rights. If threat and opposition is systematic and long term it can be incapacitating particularly for weaker and institutionally more dependent movements. Abeyance (Taylor, 2013) can emerge, like a last resort, when a movement is hardly able to openly challenge the state or function as usual. A move away from political activism towards academic feminism, organizing workshops, small group discussions is also a strategy that may be used, and is a familiar ground for many women's movements in CEE. However, threat and opposition can also reinvigorate activism and strengthen it (O'Dwyer, 2012). Giving up on political activism and the state might not be a good strategy for women's rights advocates given the importance of states in the provision of many basic women's rights. New strategies to persuade states and policymakers and to work with state actors may need to be identified. In this section we provide a framework for analyzing the ways in which women's movements alter and diversify their strategies and develop new capacities along the way.

We propose to capture changes by looking at three dimensions: changes in movement capacities, changes in strategies of engagement with states and new patterns of coalition building.


*Capacities*

The first dimension, *movement capacity*, relates to material, human and organizational resources, including leadership and networks. In their discussion of the political consequences of movements, Amenta et al. (2010) argue that "the ability to mobilize different sorts of resources is key for the impact of movements, and mobilization of resources and membership does provide some political influence" (Amenta et al., 2010: 296). In case of state hostility capacities for institutionalized action may prove useless and capacities for mobilizing grassroots, de-centralized action, to network beyond close feminist circles, to generate alternative sources of funding may become useful. Transnational embeddedness can also influence movement capacity.

In case of state hostility, capacities for institutionalized action, which were most prevalent for women's movements in countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the previous years (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a) may prove less beneficial and capacities for mobilizing grassroots, de-centralized action, networking beyond close circles, and generating alternative sources of funding may now become more beneficial. New ways of persuading state and public policy actors may emerge.

*Polish women's movement capacities: the Black Protests*

The Polish movement exhibits particularly remarkable changes in developing capacities independent of state actors. The most important response to backsliding in the field of reproductive rights were the massive "black protests" that took place on the streets of Poland in 2016-2017, as a reaction to further limitations in anti-abortion laws. The number of participants was unprecedent (over 150 thousand in 142 Polish cities and towns, widespread internationally as well). After many years of feminist lobbying and organizing against abortion ban, these protests brought not only different demographic strata of supporters (long-time feminist NGO activists and also young women and volunteers), but also gave place to a qualitative change in priorities, demanding the liberalization of restrictive anti-abortion laws. The law project by the civic initiative "Ratujmy Kobiety" ("Save the Women") advocated for abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy, as well as access to sex education and contraception. Grassroots organizations managed to collect 215 signatures supporting the project in 2016 and over 500 thousand in 2017. These protests should also be understood in a broader context: first, the intensity of the changes that directly affected women's daily reproductive choices (terminating funding for IVF), defunding programs to combat domestic violence, reduced access to contraception, and the threat of a bill fully banning the access to abortion. Second, they can be interpreted as a backlash to anti-choice conservative campaigners. Third, black protests followed the first wave of anti-government street protests organized in the early spring by the Committee for the Defense of Democracy. Another factor that contributed to the scope and inclusivity of the mobilizations were the use of social media and other online platforms (beyond NGO formal channels). Furthermore, the protests were also characterized by non-hierarchical leadership, which gave way to a diverse and heterogenous movement (Source: Szczygielska, 2019 forthcoming).

*Croatian women's movement: Generational Diversification*

The Croatian movement is characterized by quite developed and diversified capacities from 1990s onwards (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018) Further diversification by emergence of a new wave of activist ads to the capacities of an already mature women's movement. Backlash in the recent years enabled the emergence of new feminist initiatives orchestrated by a younger generation of feminist activists. The Night March (Noćsi marš), that takes place on March 8th every year attracted around 6 thousand people with heterogeneous claims: protesting for reproductive rights, ratification of the IC, against femicide and all forms of violence. This march could be seen both as a reaction to neoconservatism and as the outcome of a different generational approach to feminist activism. This diversified movement played a key role in responding to two neoconservative mobilizations: "the Walk for Life" and the protest against the IC ratification. To "the Walk for Life", women's movement responded with several initiatives over the years, being the most visible counter-protest the "Walk for Freedom (Hod za slobodu), that took place in 2018 in Rijeka. In the case of the protest against the IC ratification, the women's movement responded with a protest performance: 20 women dressed as Margaret's Atwood's "Handmaid's Tale", marching through Zagreb accompanied by public figures and hooded drummers. The tactics deployed by the feminist movement were their usual protest tactics. Nonetheless, the innovation lied in the creation of wider alliances and the inclusion of public figures from different spheres of social life (Source: Sutlović, 2019 forthcoming).

*Hungarian women's movement*

Capacities of the Hungarian women's movement changed in many ways during the last years. Certain aspects of capacity change point to a maturing and diversification of the movement, while more recently we also see tendencies pointing towards abeyance or even collapse. By 2010, when the first Orbán government came to power, Hungary had few women's movement organizations, mainly Budapest based NGO serving a relatively diversified set of functions: providing services, legal advocacy or awareness raising and communication, but with no grassroots capacity. The almost immediate restructuring of the gender equality architecture by the government in 2010, largely blocked communication with state actors. The early Orbán government years (2012-2013) witnessed one of the most prominent disruptive feminist protests in some time, which aimed for the criminalization of domestic violence. The petition was initiated by an ordinary woman, Halász Pálma, in the name of her organization "Life, Value Foundation". While the mobilization initially avoided any association with women's groups, it was joined in later stages by the main women's groups active in the field: NANE, Patent, MONA and Amnesty. Over one hundred thousand signatures were collected, serious street and Facebook based protest actions started. Not only were street protests and Facebook activism more forceful than before, new allies have also emerged. After 2013, when domestic violence was ultimately criminalized, mobilization decreased. Excluded from policy processes and even service provision and in absence of grassroots capacity, Hungarian women's rights NGO are almost suspended. Resistance shifted to non-NGO activism, to Facebook groups and mailing lists, isolated activism, academics and MPs and is mainly localized in workshops or academia. While most existing organizations faltered, some new feminist initiatives emerged. These are fragmented and not necessarily tied to organizations, yet their presence contributes to intensified feminist debates and a diversification and maturity in the movement (Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019 forthcoming). Diversification emerges in the Hungarian scene between veteran activists and a new generation of mostly non-affiliated activists bringing new strategies to the movement and an intersectional angle. Yet, as previous activism, new waves of activism are also far less dense in Hungary than in some other contexts in the region. (Source: Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019 forthcoming)

### *Strategies*

The second dimension where change might be remarkable is *strategic engagement of movements with states*. Women's movements traditionally use less obtrusive persuasive strategies, including participation in consultation processes or lobbying policy makers, more often than disruption (Htun and Weldon, 2012). Yet, in context of state hostility and closure such strategies are inefficient. More disruptive repertoires, including petitioning policy makers, street protests, other protest actions or well-communicated events that achieve influence by changing public opinion (McAdam and Su, 2002), or suing the state before international courts or organizations, will be prioritized. On the one hand, such confrontational or disruptive strategies may result in more radically framed claims that are less open to negotiation. On the other hand, use of such strategies requires different movement capacities and infrastructure (Andrews, 2001), such as legal expertise to litigate, grassroots capacity and infrastructure to mobilize that, but also openness to coalition work. Strength and capacity of movements before the period of backsliding has an impact on whether such capacity is available. Movements which had diversified capacities (Andrews, 2001) might be in a better position to turn to confrontational strategies.

During the democratization period, women's rights groups in the CEE region strongly relied on transactional activism (Tarrow and Petrova, 2007; Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a) rather than grassroots activism to pursue gender policy change, meaning that they focused on networking with other organizations, including state actors. It is through strategically chosen patterns of engagement with state and with other civil society actors that gender policy progress could take place in countries of the region (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a). Movements with diverse organizational patterns that combined insider and outsider engagement strategies with states, using complementarily a compromise seeking approach and a more radical and critical approach, were the most successful in gendering adopted policies (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a).

Increased hostility towards critical civil society organizations in general and towards women's rights organizations in particular, blocks earlier successful strategies of engaging with the state. Rather than relying on institutionalized strategies they will either opt for more radical grassroots protest actions or withdraw and choose abeyance or demise. While threat and opposition can reinvigorate resistance and strengthen it, if it is systematic and long term, it may incapacitate weaker and more institutionalized movements. Abeyance (Taylor, 1989) is a response that can emerge in such cases. Abeyance is a state of survival in which a social movement manages to sustain itself and mount a challenge to authorities in a hostile political and cultural environment (Taylor, 1989).

Literature on feminist responses to the economic or democratic crisis points both to instances of demise and failure of movements but in some cases also to revival and maturing and the emergence of innovative forms of resilience capable to achieve positive results (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Krizsán and Zentai, 2017; Popa, 2015; Korolczuk, 2016; Berry and Chenoweth, 2018). Persuading governments to change gender policies has most frequently come through the mediation of insider channels (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018; Weldon, 2002) which is now difficult. However, other more adversarial strategies may be available to women's movements for persuasion such as indirect influence through changing public attitudes (Soule and Olzak, 2004). Feminist resilience and responses to backsliding will however depend on both the previous strength of women's organizations and earlier strategies of state engagement, as well as modes of government hostility, forcefulness of attacks on gender policies and its advocates, and whether attacks are sustained over longer periods of time.

Overall, the way movements strategically engage with the state will be affected by the specific dynamics in the gender power triangle. State hostility will impact strategies and capacities of both women's

movements and counter-movements. Our focus here will be principally on changes in women's movements and their capacity to put pressure on the state in times of backsliding.

We illustrate different patterns of change.

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*Response of the Polish Women's movement*

The Polish women's movement shifts its strategies from relatively successful cooperation with different state actors in the period 2009-2015 to active resistance, street action and grassroots mobilization. The capacity and resilience of the Polish women's movement is well illustrated by the resistance it could exhibit in relation to the restriction of abortion policy (in 2016 and 2017). The women's movement managed to stage mass mobilization beyond the narrow feminist circles. Street protest and petitions, but also internet and social media- based tools aided the mobilization effort and made the attempt to involve women in rural and small-town areas also reachable. Beyond Facebook, other social media outlets like Instagram facilitated access to younger generations, as well. Data analysis also shows that the success of strategies used in the black protest impacted mainstream feminist organizations and generated new attempts to move beyond the capital city and to extend regionally. Organizing the Women's Congress (Kongres Kobiet) in 2017 in oppositional town Poznan, rather than Warsaw is indicative of such a tendency. Another characteristic seen in Poland is the increased forms of coalition building, some of which, such as the Anti-Violence Women's Network (Antyprzemocowa Sieć Kobiet) have emerged outside of the formal NGO framework, and are independent from state control (Source: Szcygelszka 2019, forthcoming).

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*Hungarian movement strategies*

The Hungarian movement, though weak and with basically no grassroots constituency also exhibited disruptive protest activity during the early years of the Orbán government in 2012. Upon the neglect and misogynic reception of a petition for criminalizing domestic violence supported by 100 thousand signatures by the Parliament, serious street and Facebook-based protest actions were launched. Not only were these protests more forceful and more gendered than earlier tactics, but new allies also emerged. For the first time in the history of domestic violence mobilization in Hungary, the wives of right-wing government MPs as well as right-wing women MPs acted as brokers, returning the issue to the parliamentary agenda (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a). In the years to come however, the already weak and underfunded Hungarian women's movement organizations could not maintain levels of mobilization beyond the achievement of the policy change. Excluded from policy processes and even service provision and in the absence of grassroots capacity by 2019 the state of the Hungarian women's movement can be characterized as abeyance. There is very limited engagement with state actors, no successful attempts for grassroots mobilization or outreach to a wider constituency. Tactics used are mainly Budapest based small-scale marches and workshops and other events with limited outreach. Some remarkable exceptions of grassroots organizing can be mentioned, which though not organized by feminist groups and not using an explicitly feminist agenda were nevertheless organized by women and for objectives highly relevant for women's rights. These included the movement for alternative birth and the movement for improvement of healthcare system and healthcare employee status. Importantly though these remains unconnected to the women's movement agenda (Source: Krizsán and Sebestyén 2019, forthcoming)

*Croatian women's movement strategies*

In response to the growing state hostility Croatian women's movement increasingly built on its diversified movement capacities. Inclusion in policy processes became more ad-hoc following 2011. Yet a practice of establishing working groups for every important new policy process (for example, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, the new domestic violence law, the new family policy, new gender equality strategy) was maintained and women's groups were still invited to join, though their standing in these processes decreased as discussed previously. Yet, importantly and unlike Polish or Hungarian women's organizations, they remained included and could put direct pressure on state actors and fight various anti-gender equality groups within these formalized settings. At the same time, struggles intensified on the streets as well. The Croatian women's movement long had strongholds in cities beyond the capital. This decentralized movement capacity is now increasingly mobilized. Based on a dense network of NGOs across the entire country, grassroots and local level and social network-based mobilization is used particularly in Night Marches and in abortion protests, and is mainly connected to the Platform for Reproductive Rights but was also impressive in the protest against education reform in 2017. While attacks on gender equality have intensified mobilization in Croatia, especially through the involvement of younger generations of feminists, overall, they have not caused radical changes to strategies used by the movement during the progressive years. This lack of flexibility may represent a challenge to overcome neoconservative mobilization (Sutlović, 2019 forthcoming).

## Coalition building

The third dimension of the bottom-up axis is *coalition building*. Hostile environments and threats to gained rights may generate coalition work that was not necessarily in place in times of partnership with states. Looser issue coalitions can come together to respond to such threats, or as a result of wider discontent with political trends (Almeida, 2010). Such coalitions could bridge otherwise competing women's rights groups, or range across diverse rights and pro-democracy groups. In the context of de-democratization gender equality comes under attack together with other democratic values, human rights and rights of other vulnerable groups, and these attacks generate widespread discontent in the wider population. These common external threats bring together coalitions between actors that would not cooperate in their absence (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010) and contribute to overcoming or at least suppressing ideational tensions (Borland, 2010). But the need for strategic action in times of hostility may also exacerbate competition and generate debate and tension within movements on how to strategize (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018b).

Coalitions of women's rights advocates with other pro-democracy groups can have different consequences. On the one hand, they may be beneficial for gendering democracy. Gendering wider pro-democracy coalitions is shown by research to be a fundamental element of gendering democratization and bringing about gender policy progress (Viterna and Fallon, 2008). On the other hand, coalition building may require strategic reframing of gender equality objectives to less radical forms (Van Dyke and McCammon, 2010), and as such could result in a move away from the original feminist objectives.

Women's movements in CEE countries were rarely part of democratization movements. Good working relations with other rights groups are the exception rather than the rule in the region (Krizsan and Roggeband, 2018a). Yet, new patterns of coalition-building beyond the usual feminist constituency are emerging in the recent period of de-democratization globally (Berry and Chenoweth, 2018; Alonso and Lombardo, 2018; Popa, 2015) and they emerge in countries of the CEE region, as well (Popa, 2015; Szczygelszka, 2019). Current attacks on gender equality in a way come as an opportunity to challenge the previous path and open a window of opportunity for gendering democratization frames.

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*Coalitions: Hungary*

In Hungary, throughout the last decades the core of the women's movement remained largely disconnected from wider human rights and democratization protests and women's rights claims were rarely backed by these groups. Current attacks on gender equality came as an opportunity to challenge this path. Yet, so far coalition building had only limited impact for women's rights. The 2012 mobilization to criminalize domestic violence, discussed above, stands out in this sense. This protest integrated several audiences beyond the usual feminist groups as well as voices of conservative women. The 2012 protest though remains an isolated instance. Pro-democracy protests after that point have largely ignored gender issues. Feminist speakers were only featured incidentally in demonstrations against the FIDESZ government and the gender aspects of the shrinking democratic space were rarely addressed. For example, the main protest condemning the new Constitution (which introduced serious limitations to abortion and other gender equality rights), featured only male speakers; women's groups were not present, and gender topics were not addressed, despite their centrality to the new text. A more systematic attempt to coalition building was the creation of a pro-human rights coalition (SZIAMACI) in 2015, during attacks against the Norwegian Civic Fund. The objective was to raise awareness about activities pursued by civil society and to facilitate networking between them to defend from governmental attacks. SZIAMACI includes 11 women's rights organizations, ultimately all the important groups. However, the visibility of the platform remains limited to date. Following the direct attacks on civil society organizations in 2017 and the withdrawal of accreditation of gender studies in 2018, gender equality issues became part of protest agendas, though no clear evidence of coalition building attempts can be identified even in this context (Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019 forthcoming).

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*Coalitions: Poland*

In 2015 a successful process of new networks and groups working with women's rights emerged. They are outside the NGO framework, thus are more independent from state control. Most of the new initiatives were responses to the backsliding of specific policies, especially regarding reproductive rights. The Polish "black" protests in 2016 and 2017 show the importance of connecting women's rights agendas to wider pro-democracy political protests. These demonstrations against the further restriction of abortion, a fundamental gender equality issue, mobilized wide support that extended well beyond feminist constituencies, thus integrating feminist claims into a wider pro-democracy agenda. The politicization of women's rights as an integral part of democratic achievements to be defended —and not just by women's rights groups— emerged as successful strategy in the Polish case. At the same time, femocrats and activists highlight that mobilizations and coalitions are more difficult when it comes to gender-violence protests (Szczygielska, 2019).

The successful coalitions between feminists and pro-democracy and human rights groups build on wider popular discontent with the state of democracy and curtailing rights well beyond the gender equality agenda. They achieve their results by linking important gender equality issues to wider democracy concerns. Our data shows the importance of wider coalitions for successfully defending the gender equality agenda, yet it also demonstrates the importance of path dependency as well as vibrancy of civil society overall in how successful each movement is in building these coalitions or in gendering existent protest waves.

The bottom up analysis of movement/state relations shows that changes in movement capacities and strategies and in coalition building are important consequences of hostility to gender equality and adaptation to the changed context can facilitate successful movement outcomes.

**c.  Interactions between women's movements and movements opposing gender equality**

The third axis of our analysis looks at interactions between women's movements and anti-gender equality counter-movements and their influence on strategies and on claims. As mentioned earlier, opposition to women's movements and their agenda has been an enduring story, yet over the past decade we see oppositional movements strengthening across the globe. This rise of populist and nationalist organizations, and movements that mobilize against gender-ideology and LGBT rights has received a lot of scholarly attention recently mapping transnational and national expressions of such movements (Bob, 2012; Kovats and Poim, 2015; Kovats, 2017; Kuhar, 2015; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Verloo 2018). Here we want to draw the attention to the position of the state in this conflict. Oppositional movements are instrumentalized by hostile states in many countries: they are sponsored and used to influence the realm of civil society in ways that directly support state power. This means that the disempowerment, exclusion and persecution of women's rights organizations is accompanied by the empowerment and inclusion of organizations with opposite values and goals. Public funding of women's organizations is redirected to pro-government NGOs and the positions that women's rights activists previously held in policy processes is now given to organizations with conservative agendas (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018). This indicates that rather than closure of civic space we see a reconfiguration of civic space. Closure is a selective process in which the space of specific civil society organizations defined as anti-state and anti-government is limited, while simultaneously the space and state support to organizations identified as pro-government is expanded.

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*Movement counter-movement interaction in Croatia*
In Croatia after 2011, when subsequent governments became more hostile toward gender equality as a policy goal, the playing field for women's movement was altered. The aim was to give more space to actors opposing gender equality, including politicians and institutional actors. Opposition was particularly manifest in debates around family policies, sexual education and violence against women (Kuhar 2015, Sutlović, 2019 forthcoming). This shift in government position led to more direct and open polarization and interaction between movement and counter movement, which was particularly visible in the ratification process of the Istanbul Convention. The ratification led to a spiral of contention and strong controversies, between conservative organizations opposing the convention and feminist forces. The contestation culminated with a massive protest in Zagreb, and other cities titled "Croatia Against the IC" (staged by a civil society initiative called "The Truth About the Istanbul Convention") gathering far-right political parties, war veterans' associations, politicians from the right political spectrum, and conservative civil society organization. Women's organizations responded in the form of a "protest performance" using characters from Margaret Atwood's "Handmaid's Tale" to march through Zagreb, accompanied with hooded drummers, while persons from public and cultural life were reading excerpts from the convention (Sutlović, 2019 forthcoming). The final ratification of the Istanbul Convention showed as well that women are not sidelined or silenced.

By actively intervening in the conflict between women's movements and their opponents –either by designing and bolstering counter movements, or by providing them with a strong institutional power position– governments give oppositional actors headway above women's movements. The examples of Hungary and Poland show governments that actively take the side of antifeminist actors and even actively promote civil society initiative that oppose women's rights agendas. In addition, counter-

movements also receive the support of other powerful vested interest groups and actors such as the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Support from states and other –often transnationally backed interests– brings resources, repertoires of action and discourses, and networks for legitimizing action. This creates a huge power disparity between women's movements on the one side and their opponents on the other.

In other contexts, as the example of Croatia shows, the state presents itself as a neutral arbiter in the conflict rather than a protector of women's rights. This means that struggle for gender equality has to be fought with the counter movement within and outside state arenas.

Whether the relationship between women's movements and their opponents is mediated through the state, or a direct interaction between civil society actors result in very different political dynamics. When women's movements have to deal with an alliance between state and civil society actors, their opportunities to resist such opposition are limited due to their weak position. Yet, when women's movements and their opponents engage in a sustained struggle this will likely lead to a politicization of gender, which may result in more articulated, more gendered claims: a better visibility for the gendered nature of social and political problems at stake. This can be captured first, through the *impact of movement and counter-movement relations on mobilization strategies*. Reactive strategies, radicalization but also internal debates within the movement can be important changes in activism. A second factor is the *impact of these relations on claims made by the movement and changes in framing*. Politicization of claims in conflictual setting can lead to more explicit gendering of claims. Where attacks on gender equality are explicit and radical, women's movement claims also tend to be more explicitly gendered. However, highly institutionalized and not very outspoken opposition to gender claims can also lead to a preference for strategic framing, and search for less radical claims towards gender sensitive policy solutions (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a).

We argue that this triadic conceptual framework is a starting point to further theorize the power dynamics between women's movements, counter-movements and states. This dynamics in turn will determine gender equality policy progress or regression. It provides an analytical tool to look at the gendered implications of current political developments and the implication and consequences for gender equality policies and rights. In addition, we contend that our model contributes to understanding recent debates on de-democratization. In these debates, gender aspects of de-democratization processes are generally overlooked, and we believe their inclusion is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of the consequences of democratic backsliding for women. We argue that backsliding

mainly leads to decreased inclusion of women's rights advocates in policy processes and in civic space, which are key for women and other groups that are underrepresented in formal politics. Yet, rather than understanding this phenomenon as a process of shrinking civic space, our triadic framework points to a more complex process in which governments reconfigure civic space and use civil society actors and other vested interest groups to support their efforts to undo women's rights.

## V. Implications of backlash for women's rights and gender equality policies

Given the strong backlash against women's rights and their defenders, it is important to consider the implications for the gender equality rights, policies and institutional arrangements that have been established over the past decades. This progress can be attributed to the increased participation of women in political realms and existing institutional channels. In particular, the collective mobilization of women has been key to the advancement of women's rights (Htun and Weldon 2012; Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018).

While generally the literature on gender and politics and gender policy change can be seen as progress biased, recently, in the context of the 2008 economic crisis that strengthened neoliberal trends and led to gendered austerity measures and restructuring packages across, Europe scholars have started to pay attention to backsliding of gender equality policies (Bettio et. al., 2012; Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; Walby, 2015; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). While anti-discrimination policies and other legal gender equality instruments remained in place, cuts were prominent in budgets and institutional frameworks, and negatively affected the inclusion of women's groups and feminist experts in policy processes (Guerrina, 2017). Jacquot (2017) also finds patterns of incremental backsliding in EU gender equality policies over the last decade. She identifies changes in framing, institutional placement, budgets and consultations with civil society as critical elements of what she labels "progressive extinction" (Jacquot, 2017:43).

These studies point both to stability and to vulnerability in terms of institutional frameworks, implementation, and accountability and to discursive threats to gender equality objectives. They also indicate issue specificity within the wider range of gender policy issues. It has been argued earlier that various gender equality policy sub-issues are characterized by different policy dynamics, including diverse patterns of actor dynamics, different dynamics of political representation, institutional friction

and veto points and this may result in differences in policy attention (McBride and Mazur, 2010; Htun and Weldon, 2012; Annesley, Engeli and Gains, 2015). Morality issues –such as sexual and reproductive rights, and family policies– are particularly sensitive to contestation (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Kuhar, 2015; Kovats and Poim, 2015). Class based issues emerge as a topic of political struggle in the context of the economic and financial crisis (Karamessini and Rubery, 2013; Bettio et., al, 2012; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Krizsán and Zentai, 2017). Instead, legal frameworks embedded in international norms and treaties may be less prone to backsliding.

Certain patterns of backsliding in gender policies emerge, but it remains unclear how systematic these patterns are and what they imply for inclusive democracy and the representation of gender, particularly in the context of fragile democracies. Better conceptual work is needed to bring various dimensions of backsliding together in a sound conceptual framework (Goertz and Mazur, 2008).

We define backsliding in the field of gender equality policies with reference to substantive normative content of gender equality as a benchmark. But we see the meaning of gender equality to differ depending on political, social and cultural contexts (Lombardo et al., 2009). To use a substantive but contextualized approach we define backsliding as states going back on previous commitments to gender equality norms as defined in their respective political contexts.

We propose that backsliding needs to be understood as meaning more than just the removal or dismantling of policies, to include subtle and gradual reframing, or the undermining of implementation capacities such as institutions, planning or budgets and accountability mechanisms. We therefore operationalize policy backsliding in the field of gender equality along four complementary dimensions: 1) discursive (de)legitimation of gender policy objectives; 2) dismantling and reframing existent policies; 3) undermining implementation and 4) erosion of accountability and inclusion mechanisms. This multi-dimensional framework allows us to examine how backsliding patterns vary across specific gender equality issues and across countries, while it also allows for a gradual rather than a dichotomous approach to backsliding (Goertz and Mazur, 2008). We see the four dimensions as interrelated and complementary. For backsliding to occur it is not necessary that all dimensions are present simultaneously. Backsliding may be present in only one dimension, and not in others. We contend that presence of reversal in one aspect can be expected to lead to further backsliding in the policy regime. Discursive de-legitimization of policies, or broken accountability, may ultimately result in a change of

policy framing or institutional arrangements. Below we elaborate on each dimension and provide some empirical illustrations of it.

## a. Discursive delegitimization of gender equality policies

A widely noted and prominent aspect of policy backsliding is changes in official political discourses from positions largely supportive or silent on gender equality to statements that openly challenge gender equality objectives, often going in opposition to formally adopted and accepted policy positions of the country (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018). Oppositional statements on gender equality made by high level political actors who are part of the governing structure or governing political party questions the legitimacy of gender equality as a goal and discredit existing policies.

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*Discursive delegitimization: Hungary*

Anti-gender equality statements were first made in the context of amending kindergarten regulations in 2010. The Secretary of State for education, Rózsa Hoffman, explained the amendment by pointing out that the Kindergarten Education Decree had the potential to influence the mental and moral development of children in ways that served "gender ideology" (Félix, 2015). After this initial instance governmental discourse on gender ideology became more articulate in 2013-14 in the context of the Estrela and Lunacek reports (Félix, 2015). But attacks became more articulated and systematically built up in the context of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention in May 2017. Anti-gender equality statements were made by the deputy head of the FIDESZ party in government, by the youth section of the minor partner in government: the Christian Democratic Party and a government related think tank (Alapjogokért Központ/Center for Fundamental Human Rights) when arguing that the Istanbul Convention was a form of "sneaking-in gender politics" and problematized framing domestic violence as a form of violence against women. Moreover, in November 2017 FIDESZ MP Németh Szilárd (Commissioner for Reducing Utilities), stated in a public television program that Hungary did not sign the Istanbul Convention and will never do as long as his party is in government. In December 2017, Katalin Novák, State Secretary for Family Affairs (in charge for women's issues), connected to the debate by saying that gender issues are stretched too far, and are often washed together with LGBT issues, which is damaging for women's rights, given the often-provocative nature of LGBT claims. (Source: Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019 forthcoming).

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*Discursive delegitimization: Poland*

A particularly strong example of discursive opposition is Poland where the incoming populist right-wing government at the end of 2015 started to use a strong anti-gender equality rhetoric in which 'gender ideology' is featured as a major threat to Polish society and Catholic family values. Statements that challenge gender equality are issued on a regular basis by government officials (Szczygielska, 2019 forthcoming).

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Backsliding here means increasingly hostile policy processes, where anti-gender equality positions negatively influence how policies are perceived and implemented posing a potential challenge to the rule of law.

**b. Policy dismantling and reframing**

Reversal may take the form of dismantling or removing existing policies. However, radical changes can also take place by reframing policies so that their objectives change. Policy regimes are underpinned by a set of ideas about the nature of the problem, its causes and consequences and its solutions, by policy frames (Verloo, 2005: 20). Policy frames are a useful tools to analyze reversal or dismantling. Reversal of policy frames may also happen when gender sensitive issues present in policy frames disappear.

Backsliding may occur when a policy problem is radically reframed so that the new frame contrasts with gender equality meanings or allows for contrasting interpretations, as is shown in the example of changes in the Croatian family law with respect to domestic violence. Reversal of policy frames may also happen when gender sensitive issues present in the diagnostic or prognostic frames of policy regimes disappear. Re-framing existent policies from targeting equal opportunities to for example protecting family values, or re-familializing care, while allowing for their continued operation, is a pattern that can be observed to reverse progress in gender equality policy regimes (Krizsan and Zentai, 2017).

*Policy dismantling and reframing: Croatia*
In Croatia a new Criminal Code was adopted in 2011, and entered into force on January 1, 2013. It removed the specific prohibition of "violent, abusive, or particularly insolent conduct" within a family (Article 215A). Family relations were kept only as an aggravated circumstance for other, more severe criminal offences, such as injuries, severe and extremely severe injuries, threat or coercion (Manjoo, 2013). Repealing these specific domestic violence provisions meant that domestic violence offenses could now only be prosecuted as misdemeanor, the coercive control element was no longer part of the Criminal Code (Advocates for Human Rights & Autonomous Women's House [AHR & AWH], 2015). In addition, a new Family Law was drafted to "support traditional family values" (Stubbs, 2016). The Law contains provisions that oppose gender equality and disregard the power dynamics in domestic violence, such as mandatory mediation in divorce cases, serious consequences for a parent who "refuses to cooperate" in raising children, and fines for parents who prevent child contact with the other parent. Furthermore, the term "domestic violence" was replaced with the ambiguous "highly conflictual relations". The new Criminal Code and the Family Law brought the family protection framing to the level of statute. The Constitution of Croatia was also amended following a popular referendum in 2013 initiated by conservative actors, but tacitly supported by the government, to now limit notions of family and marriage to heterosexual couples. (Sutlović, 2019)

*Policy dismantling: Hungary*
In Hungary, the first policy changes after the 2010 elections aimed explicitly at combating gender ideology: articles on gender sensitive education were removed from a governmental decree on kindergarten education passed in 2009 (Felix, 2015). In 2011, a new constitution was adopted challenging several aspects of gender equality: it guaranteed the right to life from the moment of conception; redefined family as heterosexual marriage and removed the principle of equal pay between men and women from the constitution. There was no gender equality law or other law explicitly addressing gender inequality in place in Hungary before 2010, thus no dismantling could be witnessed there. The main objective of parenting-motherhood/care policies during the Orbán governments was to improve the demographic viability of the Hungarian nation and to do so mainly by increasing fertility rates. All policy changes and new measures served this objective in some way, even if the approach on how this would be served best changed and was often inconsistent over the years. The tools used by the Orbán government combined the objective of supporting a traditional family model and traditional gender roles for women and the objective of integrating women with children in the labor market. While many of these instruments ultimately served better gender equality, this support was always framed in terms of the need for better demographic increase.

The new constitution which was adopted without much deliberation in the Parliament given the super-majority of the governing party also stated that the family shall be based on the marriage of a men and a woman (Article L) thus excluding non-heterosexual relationships from constitutional protection. This reframing also triggered down to policies concerning parenting and childcare support. Overall, the approach taken by the government detached family policies from social policies and made them tools towards increasing fertility rates among 'appropriate' working families (by linking most substantive benefits to taxation or the availability of additional resources). This resulted in benefitting some women, particularly middle class and working women, while leaving poor, unemployed women (many of them Roma) very vulnerable. The reception of the policy among women's groups was limited and ambivalent. It was positive as these policies primarily benefitted women, but also critical given the nationalist/demographic objectives against which these measured were lined up. (Krizsán and Sebestyén, 2019)

**c. Undermining implementation arrangements**

Dismantling of policies can take less direct forms, called dismantling by default (Bauer et al., 2012). In such cases, policies may stay in place, but institutional arrangements serving effective policy implementation are challenged. Backsliding can thus affect policy enforcement agencies, mechanisms of policy coordination, intergovernmental and other partnerships, strategic and programmatic processes, or allocated budgets. The literature about the gendered implications of austerity measures points to stalling strategic programming processes, closing gender equality institutions and cutting funds that make their operation feasible (Bettio et al., 2012; Krizsán and Zentai, 2017; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017). Dismantling institutional capacities for implementation contribute to sustaining façade democracies in which laws and policies remain dead letters (Falkner et al., 2008). Dismantling of implementation arrangements is a relatively easy and low-key form of rolling back policies.

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*Dismantling implementation: Hungary*

Starting from 2010, the FIDESZ government dismantled most of the gender equality structures in place under the previous government: the gender equality unit was closed and re-established with only two people only board under the deputy state secretary for Family and Population Policy. This implied both a downsizing and a reframing of gender equality policy objectives into family policy objectives. The consultative Gender Equality Council was not convened any more after 2010. The implementation of the 2010 National Gender Equality strategy was immediately stalled after the elections, no activities were launched under it by the incoming government. Funds were diverted from gender equality objectives towards objectives opposing it. For example, funds coming from European Commission Progress Fund were used for an anti-abortion campaign in ways that were challenged by EC Commissioner Viviane Reading[14].

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    **d. Erosion of inclusion and accountability mechanisms**

Accountability processes –especially policy making and consultation with women's rights advocates– are recognized as a critical element in the field of gender policy progress (McBride and Mazur, 2010; Ferree and Gamson, 2003; Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a). Policy inclusion is a policy outcome in itself but is also a factor securing more gender equality sensitive policy outputs. Gender equality policies may be particularly hollowed out if women's rights advocates are not meaningfully involved in policy processes

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[14] See https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/eu-funds-used-for-hungarian-anti-abortion-campaign/. Accessed July 18th 2019.

beyond agenda-setting (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2018a). As discussed in the section on the relationship between states and women's organization breaking of accountability loops and de-democratizing policy making processes can be identified as a critical element of backsliding gender policy (Walby, 2015; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Sitter et al., 2017; Jacquot, 2017). As we wrote, accountability can be undermined by changing or closing altogether consultation platforms. The functioning of civil society organizations and their participation in consultation can also be undermined by cutting resources, creating alternative voices for consultation processes, or even persecution (Johnson and Saarinen, 2011; Sitter et al., 2017). These patterns of action make participation of women's rights organizations in consultation processes difficult if not impossible, thus challenging accountability patterns and contributing to de-democratization. We argue that this is not only a problem in terms of the relationship between states and women's rights advocates but should factor importantly in our understanding of backsliding. An essential element identified to backslide critically in the context of the economic crisis is breaking of accountability loops and de-democratizing policy making processes (Walby, 2015; Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Sitter et al., 2017).

### e. Dismantling patterns and strategies

What country-specific patterns and mechanisms of backsliding emerge and what are their consequences for gender equal democracy? Three main points emerge from previous analysis.

1. Rather than direct dismantling of existent laws and policies on gender equality, the core dimensions challenged by processes of backsliding are implementation and accountability. Dismantling of implementation tools, institutions and budgets and breaking accountability mechanisms takes place in all of these countries to some extent and affects all gender equality policies. Policies may stay in place, even if sometimes reframed, however their implementation is reversed or stalled everywhere.

Budgets allocated towards gender equality are also cut, diminished or reoriented towards reframed objectives, mainly protection of traditional family values, and demographic sustainability. Dismantling implementation mechanisms turn gender policies into dead letters (Falkner, Treib, Holzleithner, 2009) and leads to policy dismantling by inaction.

Inclusion and accountability mechanisms are also disrupted across the board. Processes of cooperation between states and women's rights groups are discontinued or obstructed. There is critical backsliding in the realm of policy inclusion, consultation and partnership compared to previous practices across the board. This takes a variety of forms. The most direct challenge is the dismantling of formal consultation

structures such as councils or committees established for sustainable communication between civil society groups and governments. Disrupting accountability for gender equality issues may be part of a more general tendency to sideline democratic processes through executive decision-making (Sitter et al., 2017).

Formal consultation processes are also curtailed by selective access to consultation based on government preferences. This leads to the exclusion of rights-based groups from consultation and their replacement by alternative groups. Women's rights groups are disempowered and limited in their functioning by cutting their funding, making it harder to challenge these negative developments. These measures and actions point to a tendency of state closure in times of backsliding. State closure to democratic consultation is not only problematic in itself but also has serious consequences for democratic control of gender policy content and for policy practice beyond mere symbolic existence of formal policies.

These mechanisms of dismantling implementation tools and accountability mechanisms are relevant for and impact the performance and effectiveness of all gender equality policies. Backsliding in gender policy along these two dimensions on the one hand, highlights the vulnerability and weakness of gender equality policy achievements in countries of the CEE region. On the other hand, it reminds us that these were problematized aspects of gender policy in the region already before backsliding started.

2. More blatant forms of backsliding, through dismantling and reframing policies, are specific to more politicized gender policy issues (Annesley, Engeli, and Gains, 2015) as well as issues of genuinely transformative nature. Gender policy issues that are at the center of backsliding are reproductive rights, family policies and violence against women particularly in the context of the Istanbul Convention, as well as sexual education issues. Anti-discrimination policies, economic issues such as women in the labor market or in leadership, equal pay, and sexual harassment, which are all mainly regulated in alignment with EU norms, are left remarkably untouched by the wave of policy dismantling (Roggeband and Krizsán, 2018).

Formal gender equality laws and policies are rarely removed or dismantled. However more subtle changes emerge through reframing of policy priorities and marginalizing gender equality as a priority everywhere. Protecting the traditional family model emerges at the constitutional level in all three countries. Policies are not cut but reframed into traditionalist family protection frames, or frames

promoting demographic sustainability, eradicating or subordinating gender equality objectives to nationalist or conservative projects. In all countries, we witness a move to define or rather re-define the family in traditional terms in reaction to previous tendencies to recognize diverse family forms. The emphasis on traditional families also leads to other legal amendments that signal a move from making care public towards a re-familiarization of care and from women active on the labor market towards women as caretakers and reproducers of the nation.

3. Patterns of backsliding in gender equality policies that we see undermine the democratic functioning of these states. The rule of law is threatened by dismantling implementation arrangements and turning existing laws and policies into dead letters. But it is also threatened by consistent discursive attacks of government officials on gender equality objectives that are often embodied in laws and policies of the country. Both legitimacy and effectiveness of existing laws is challenged this way.

Destabilizing constitutional arrangements is another way to challenge the rule of law. As Bermeo (2016) notes, in current backsliding regimes, the disassembling of institutions that might challenge the executive is often done through legal channels, using newly elected constitutional assemblies or referenda. Governments either seek to alter existing constitutional arrangements or threaten to disrupt constitutional politics. Majoritarian referenda (Croatia) or parliamentary supermajorities (Hungary, Poland) are used to curtail gender equality and sexuality rights. The amendment of constitutions can be seen as symbolic acts, not necessarily translated in policy practices. Yet, they function as threats to right holders, and also as signals about weakness and volatility of fundamental institutions and laws in these polities, disguised as pseudo-democratic operations.


Finally, democratic accountability is also weakened. This is done by undermining the functioning of civil society organizations by cutting their funding, sidelining their role in policy making processes, discrediting their status, and subjecting them to excessive monitoring. Along with the dismantling of women's policy agencies, and the decreasing of political representation of women, a fundamental element of gender democracy is undermined: that of participation and inclusion of women and other marginalized groups.

## VI. Conclusions

The last decade we witnessed a visible drive against gender equality across the globe threatening hard-won gender equality and human rights, including reproductive rights, protection against gender-based violence and funding for women's services. This gender equality backlash is led by transnational networks of conservative, religious and right-wing actors: political parties, churches, NGOs and also governments. The ascendance to power of right-wing parties in many countries provides a window of opportunity for these actors to challenge and reverse gender equality rights and policies. Increasingly, hostile governments are discrediting gender equality objectives and oppose or sideline the defenders of such rights. We see attacks on gender equality rights, attacks on women's rights groups, and –along the way– a change in state openness to include women's rights advocates to policy processes. This alters the relations between women's movements and states and leads to the backsliding of gender policies in the longer run.

In line with more general literature on de-democratization (Bermeo, 2016; Lust and Waldner, 2015) we find that in the field of gender rights (just as the process of de-democratization) they rely on a variety of democratic tools that are used to maintain the illusion of democracy but are utilized towards curtailing rights, freedoms and liberal democracy. We see how platforms of inclusive policy processes and consultations with civil society are maintained but populated with civil society or pseudo-civil society actors that are supportive of anti-gender equality government agendas. We see the use of popular referenda (in Croatia, Romania and Hungary), or nation-wide public consultations (Hungary) as legitimizing new policies; the power of the majority being used with the objective of limiting rights of minorities and underrepresented groups, including women and sexual minorities. We see extensive references to rights such as those of men, of fathers, of families or of unborn children, all applied in ways that limit gender equality and women's rights. In several gender equality fields we find that often progressive laws and policies remain in place, but they are turned into empty letters by dismantling the implementation mechanisms or the inclusive policy processes that supported their application.

We talk about a reconfiguration of both institutional and civic spaces, rather than a closure of the civic space. In institutional spaces the claim for gender equality is now frequently challenged and delegitimized. This takes place along with the exclusion of other pro-rights voices, those that claim human rights, minority and migrant's rights, rights of sexual minorities. Institutional spaces are reconfigured allowing anti-equality actors a more prominent stance in political processes and decision-

making. In consultation processes women's rights advocates are replaced with conservative groups or conservative groups are brought in along with them to participate in the policy process.

In addition, governments use a range of strategies to reorganize civil society by making it hard for women's rights and other rights organizations to prevent and resist the decay of equality or other democratic rights. Legal restrictions are introduced to control the activities and funding of civil society organizations. New legislation limits the number of NGOs that can apply for state funding but also makes impossible channels of foreign funding. In addition, women's and other rights organizations reportedly suffer from more repressive or even violent actions ranging from disproportionate auditing as a means of control to policing, blacklisting and smear campaigns discrediting women's rights activists as anti-state and foreign agents.

To be part of policy consultation processes or receive state funding, civil society organizations now have to align with government ideology. We witness attempts to establish an alternative civil society to replace existing civil society organizations. This alternative civil society often consists of new or old regime friendly NGOs which affirm the policies introduced by the government and manifest their support. These groups are usually portrayed as "real NGOs" protecting the real interest of the state, and democracy.

The decrease in access to the policy process and in having a political voice and standing has severe implications for gendered democracy, where alternative forms of representation are just as important as formal political representation. Changed conditions limit the possibilities of women's rights NGOs to comply with their democratic role. Women's rights NGOs play a vital role in maintaining democracy and the state ruled by law. Their inclusion and access serve the promotion of gender equal policies, but also their implementation and monitoring. Inclusion is instrumental to promote better gender equality policies but is also seen by a democratic requirement in itself.

By reconfiguring civic and institutional spaces, rather than closing them altogether, backsliding governments uphold the illusion of being democratic, because they can claim that civil society is sustained or even promoted and consulted on important political decisions. This contributes to both domestic and international legitimacy. In the meanwhile, it also helps build robust social foundations for backsliding regimes, to rally or recruit new supporters. Moreover, it is instrumental in expanding the Right's public sphere, and forging alliances between domestic and transnational NGOs, churches and existing conservative, nationalistic or religious and organizations with similar ideologies or goals (Greskovits, 2017).

We find that, rather than changing the letter of laws and policies, which only happens in a few politicized fields, backsliding of gender policies takes more subtle forms. To capture backsliding, we therefore propose two dimensions that complement looking at the letter of the law. These are: implementation and policy inclusion, which are the core dimensions challenged by processes of backsliding as our analysis indicates. Policies may stay in place, even if sometimes reframed; however, their implementation is reversed or stalled, and in all gender equality related fields. Existing policies may continue but budgets are not allocated or they are not acted upon. Gender-equality agencies are dismantled, downsized or de-funded. Dismantling implementation mechanisms turns gender policies into 'dead letters' (Falkner et al., 2009) and leads to backsliding by inaction. In addition, as discussed above, policy inclusion mechanisms are also disrupted everywhere. Backsliding in the realm of policy inclusion, consultation and partnership between women's rights advocates and states takes a variety of forms from dismantling of formal consultation structures, such as councils or committees established for sustainable communication between civil society groups and governments, through selective access based on governmental preferences to disempowering women's rights groups, while empowering oppositional groups. These mechanisms of dismantling implementation tools and accountability mechanisms are relevant for and impact on the performance and effectiveness of all gender-equality policies. Backsliding in gender policy along these two dimensions highlights the vulnerability and weakness of gender-equality policy achievements in recently democratized states such as countries of the CEE region.

In the face of hostility from opponents to gender-equality and from reconfiguring states that are much less likely to grant true standing and voice, women's rights groups need to adapt their strategies and to develop different capacities than needed previously. While threat and opposition can reinvigorate resistance and strengthen it, it may also incapacitate weaker and more institutionalized movements, in particular if hostilities are systematic and long lasted. Activists have to deal with physically and emotionally demanding conditions as de-funding requires unconditional commitment without pay or other resources. As an activist scholar phrased it "these attacks run over the bodies of these feminist advocates"[15].

Abeyance (Taylor, 1989) is a response that can emerge in such cases. Abeyance is likely to be the last resort, when a movement is hardly able to openly challenge the state or function as usual. It is a state of

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[15] Comment made by Maria Bucur, Indiana University at Council of European Studies conference, 21 June 2019, Universidad Carlos III, Madrid. Panel: The gendered+ dynamics of Europe's disintegration and de-democratization.

survival in which a social movement manages to sustain itself and mount a challenge to authorities in a hostile political and cultural environment (Taylor, 1989). Abeyance structures promote movement continuity by sustaining organizational infrastructure from which a new protest wave may emerge in a different political environment. A move away from political activism towards academic feminism, organizing workshops, small group discussions is also a strategy that may be used, and is a familiar ground for many women's movements in CEE.

On the other hand, increasing hostility may also have revitalizing impact on democracy. In the absence of effective entry points to policy processes, women's rights groups in several countries now turn to building and mobilizing grassroots capacities in unprecedented manner. More disruptive, more participatory strategies of mobilization are used, partly relying on the availability of social media. The attacks also generate new coalitions among actors opposing populist/illiberal/anti-European forces and bring in interesting new actor alignments compared to earlier debates on gender policies. We see now new alliances with pro-European, pro-democracy actors from formal politics including government actors, who, in the context of gender becoming a threatened value, are willing to be more articulate about the link between violence against women and gender equality than before. We also see widening feminist coalitions standing up against attacks, often including mainstream human rights organizations or various social justice groups. Finally, in this process, we also find a generational and intersectional diversification within women's groups which sparks new tensions and debates about the meaning of feminist and possible strategies, but which also aids feminist mobilization with new, more radical and protest driven repertoires of action. More wide-ranging coalition work is not only a strategy widening the constituency for women's rights claims but may also have the potential to mainstream gender equality objectives to wider pro-democracy protest frames. Overall, one can notice how the hostility and outspoken resilience to it may have the potential to increase the politicization of gender equality issues and make gender equality more inherently part of the wider democracy agenda, than it was the case before (Krizsán and Roggeband, 2019).

While our report focuses on the CEE region, we think that the two central mechanisms we described, the reconfiguration of institutional and civic space, and policy dismantling, will also apply to other regions with backsliding regimes. Current developments in Brazil or the United States make clear that attacks on sexual and reproductive rights and discourses on "gender ideology" are part of new government programs and rhetoric (Girard, 2017; Corredor, 2019; Biroli, 2019, Caminotti and Tabbush, 2019). We see new right-wing populist governments in the Americas aligning with religious actors, not

only Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, but also evangelical and (neo)Pentecostal churches and groups, to promote traditional family models and gender roles, as well. Religious and conservative actors have successfully entered political debates in Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Guatemala, Chile, Argentina, and Colombia to fight "gender ideology" (Corredor, 2019), but also in a number of African countries (Kaoma, 2018). It is clear that we are facing a global phenomenon with different national expressions. The particular dynamics this creates between women's movements, state actors and actors opposing gender equality rights depends on previous configurations between state and civil society, state-church relations, vibrancy and resilience of mainstream civil society, the previous position and strength of feminist actors and their relations to state actors and institutions. Also, state configurations and institutional settings may largely vary making it necessary to look beyond state level to include subnational configurations in some countries.

As democracy scholars have noted, democratic backsliding is particularly affecting more recent democracies and democracies that were part of the so-called "third wave" like Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America. Whether the patterns found in Central and Eastern Europe are applicable across world region requires further research that moves beyond the CEE region to understand commonalities and country or region-specific patterns of gendered backsliding and feminist resilience to it.

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