Gender, Power, and Populism: Feminist Critique of Populist Leadership in Argentina, the U.S., and India

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Abstract

In recent decades, the rise of right-wing populism has transformed the global political landscape, challenging traditional democratic structures and international norms on human rights and gender equality. This research examines three populist leaders: Javier Milei, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi instrumentalize gender narratives to consolidate power, eroding the rights of women and queer communities. Through a feminist and intersectional theoretical framework, it analyses their anti-gender rhetoric, regressive policies, and performances of masculinity, highlighting their impact on global governance. The case studies reveal transnational patterns and the resilience of feminist resistance movements. The study employs a theoretical framework that integrates feminist International Relations theories, critical gender studies, and

populism research.

Key words: Right-wing Populism, Gender Politics, Feminist International Relations, Intersectionality, Anti-Gender Rhetoric, Populist Leadership, Masculinity.

Introduction

The rise of right-wing populism has transformed the global politics, challenging not only traditional democratic structures but also international norms concerning human rights and gender equality. This phenomenon, manifesting in diverse contexts such as Argentina, India, and the United States, has employed gender narratives as a central tool to construct national identities, mobilize electoral bases, and resist progressive agendas in multilateral forums. Accordingly, the study of how right-wing populist leaders instrumentalize gender to consolidate power and project their ideology globally has become an urgent issue in the fields of International Relations and gender studies. This research seeks to address the question: How do right-wing populist leaders use gender narratives to consolidate power and challenge global norms on gender equality? It focuses on three emblematic figures of this phenomenon: Javier Milei in Argentina, Narendra Modi in India, and Donald Trump in the United States. Each of these leaders has risen to power by promoting anti-establishment and nationalist discourses, in which gender plays a key role in legitimizing their political agendas. Milei, for example, has openly criticized feminism and gender policies, presenting them as threats to traditional values of Argentina. Modi, on the other hand, has fused gender with Hindu nationalism, promoting a vision of women as symbols of cultural purity while marginalizing the most vulnerable communities, such as Dalit and Muslim women. Trump, meanwhile, has used gender to mobilize his electoral base, opposing progressive gender equality and rights both domestically and internationally.

Through a comparative analysis, this research examines how these leaders use gender narratives to construct national identities, influence foreign policies, and challenge global norms on gender equality. To this end, a theoretical framework combining feminist theories of International Relations, critical gender studies, and populism studies is employed, complemented by three key variables: gendered nationalism, transnational feminist networks, and global governance and multilateralism.

It offers a novel contribution to the field of International Relations by introducing an

analytical framework that centres masculinity as a key discursive and symbolic structure in right-wing populist leadership. While existing scholarship has examined gender and populism, the gap in the research remains as few studies have approached masculinity as an operational category for understanding power in global politics. The comparative analysis of the three leaders will help understand how performances of masculinity inform national identity construction, anti-gender policymaking, and resistance to global governance norms. Misogyny is generally understood as "a feeling of enmity toward the female sex, a disgust or abhorrence toward women as an undifferentiated social category," a definition[1] that reduces the practice to individual attitudes while ignoring structural ideologies. Instead, this research draws on conceptualization of misogyny as the "law enforcement branch of a patriarchal order," where social and political control is exercised through the policing of norms and expectations, often without overt individual bias.[2] Women are thus subjected to societal surveillance shaped by control, punishment, and enforcement mechanisms rooted in white supremacy and heteropatriarchy.

The gendered rhetoric and policies of Trump, Milei, and Modi must also be contextualized within broader political developments. Their leadership reveals a convergence of ideological commitments: restrictions on reproductive rights, the criminalization of queer identities, and hostility toward migration and refugee rights. Notably, these leaders have publicly expressed admiration for one another, further indicating a transnational alignment of right-wing populist agendas.

Methodology

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to explore how right-wing populist leaders in Argentina, India, and the United States mobilize gender narratives to shape political discourse and policy. The research design integrates three methodological tools: discourse analysis, comparative case studies, and policy analysis. Discourse analysis follows the framework of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA),[3] which views discourse as not merely a reflection of reality but as an active force in shaping social practices and structures.

According to Fairclough, discourse is both a mode of communication and a site of struggle, making it especially suited for interrogating the hyper-masculinist narratives that

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[1] D. D. Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
[2] Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 78.
[3] Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995).

underpin contemporary right-wing populism. CDA provides a structured approach to analysing how language constitutes and legitimates social hierarchies, power relations, and ideologies. This methodology is applied to the leaders' public speeches, campaign rhetoric, and official statements, with particular attention to how gender, nationalism, and cultural identity are framed.

The research also draws on Lijphart's comparative case study approach,[4] which emphasizes the systematic comparison of a small number of thoughtfully chosen cases to identify patterns, similarities, and differences in far-right politics. Lijphart argues that for the comparative method, one must "generalize based of relatively few empirical cases" emphasizing the analytical value of comparable cases in shedding light on broader theoretical questions, which in this case, is the gendered dynamics of right-wing populism in global politics.

The selection of case studies is guided by Lijphart's *Most Similar Systems Design* (MSSD), which focuses on cases that differ in cultural, religious, and institutional contexts, yet exhibit convergence in authoritarian gender politics. The categories selected for comparison include the rise of right-wing populist leaders, the use of anti-gender rhetoric, the rollback of feminist and LGBTQ+ rights, and the weakening of gender equality mechanisms. Despite differences in political systems, geopolitical positioning, levels of democratic consolidation and cultural-religious configurations, Trump, Milei, and Modi share notable ideological parallels. This design helps to conceptualize gendered authoritarianism as a transnational pattern, rather than as a localized exception. While the countries vary significantly in regime type, democratic quality, and socio-religious structures, these differences are accounted for as contextual variables that illuminate how gendered populism adapts to local environments. The comparison is not intended to suggest institutional homogeneity, but to trace ideological convergence across distinct contexts.

Although Argentina, India, and the United States differ in institutional design, regime type, and socio-cultural configurations, these variations are analytically productive rather than disqualifying. As Levitsky and Way note, such differences enable a deeper understanding of how authoritarian tendencies manifest across diverse systems.[5] Populism, defined by Mudde as a "thin-cantered ideology," is adaptable to various ideological cores, including libertarianism,

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[4] Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *The American Political Science Review* 65, no. 3 (1971): 682–693, https://doi.org/10.2307/1955513.
[5] Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

nationalism, or religious majoritarianism, making it well-suited for cross-regime comparison. Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality[6] highlights the importance of attending to locally specific axes of power, such as caste and religion in India, race and Christian nationalism in the U.S., and state secularism in Argentina. Rather than weakening the comparative logic, these contextual differences illuminate how gendered populist strategies converge across settings. This supports Segato's notion of the "mandate of masculinity",[7] a structurally embedded logic of male domination through violence and control that transcends borders. Thus, these cases function not as identical systems but as parallel arenas in which gendered populism takes root through context-specific yet ideologically aligned practices.

This comparative framework underscores both the diffusion and localization of authoritarian gender politics in global governance. By tracing shared discursive strategies, such as attacks on "gender ideology", and examining their institutional effects, the case studies illuminate the transnational circulation of masculinist populism and its disruptive impact on international gender equality norms. Table 1 highlights the variations in regime structure and gender rights indicators to abridge both the diversity and comparability of the selected cases. It presents a structured comparison of the states across six key variables relevant to this study: regime type, government form, democratic consolidation, gender equality ranking, abortion law status, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Country	Regime Type[1]	Government Type[2]	Democratic Consolidation[1]	Gender Equality Rank[3]	Legal Status of Abortion[4]	LGBTQ+ Rights Score[5]
Argentina	Electoral Democracy	Presidential Republic	Moderate	16th (WEF 2024)	Legal since 2020 (on demand)	78/100 (Equaldex 2024)
India	Electoral Autocracy	Parliamentary Republic	Low	127th (WEF 2024)	Highly restricted (exceptions only)	52/100 (Equaldex 2024)
United States	Liberal Democracy	Presidential Republic	High	43rd (WEF 2024)	No federal protection (post-Roe)	67/100 (Equaldex 2024)

Table 1: Comparative Overview of Gender and Political Structures in Argentina, India, and the United

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[6] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–167, https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8.
[7] Rita Laura Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres* (Madrid: Traficantes de Sueños, 2016): 6.

States

[1] V-Dem Dataset v15 (2024); Freedom House (2024).

[2] Based on V-Dem (2024).

[3] Global Gender Gap Index 2024 (World Economic Forum).

[4] Based on Center for Reproductive Rights (2025).

[5] Based on Equaldex / ILGA-Europe & Human Rights Campaign (2025)

Policy analysis includes examining legislative proposals, enacted laws, and institutional reforms related to the issues, in line with the policy analysis methods outlined by Béland.[8] This approach views policies not merely as technical solutions but as being embedded in broader political struggles, shaped by discourses that construct and contest the political and social order. This is complemented by an interdisciplinary body of scholarship at the intersection of gender studies, populism theory, and international relations, offering a nuanced understanding of gender as both a symbolic and strategic resource in right-wing populism.

A purposive sampling strategy guides the selection of speeches, interviews, and policy decisions. The selection is based on: Discursive salience (e.g., explicit gender references), Temporal and political significance (e.g., election speeches, international addresses), and Policy alignment (e.g., laws or executive actions stemming from or reinforcing these discourses). This design ensures that each data point offers maximal analytical value in addressing how gendered narratives function in authoritarian populist projects across varying socio-political landscapes.

Feminist International Relations Theory as Analytical Framework

To further contextualize these findings, we turn to the Feminist theory of International Relations (IR) theory, as articulated by scholars such as Cynthia Enloe. This theoretical lens allows us to delve deeper into how right-wing populist leaders deploy gender narratives to construct national identities and legitimize their political agendas. This framework encompasses three interrelated concepts: gendered nationalism;[9] masculinity as performance;[10] and intersectional authoritarianism.[11] These concepts guide the comparative analysis across distinct socio-political contexts.

[8] Daniel Béland, "Reconsidering Policy Paradigms: Social Learning and the State," *Politics & Society* 38, no. 2 (2010): 145–175, https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329210365045.

[9] Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989); J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

[10] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); R. W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

[11] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex"; Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres*.

Enloe's concept of "gendered nationalism" is particularly relevant in understanding how contemporary right-wing populist leaders like Milei, Modi, and Trump deploy gender discourse as a tool for consolidating power. In *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases*, she highlights how gender shapes international politics, particularly through the militarization of societies and the exploitation of women's labour.[12] This framework provides a critical lens for analysing how Milei's anti-feminist rhetoric positions feminism as a threat to national sovereignty and traditional values.

J. Ann Tickner's *Gender in International Relations* critiques the male-dominated nature of IR theory and argues for the inclusion of women's experiences and perspectives.[13] This perspective is foundational for understanding how populist leaders like Milei exclude or marginalize women and gender minorities in their rhetoric and policies, reinforcing patriarchal structures in both domestic and international contexts.

Laura Sjoberg's *Gendering Global Conflict* further expands this analysis by examining the way masculinities and femininities are constructed and performed in global politics.[14] Sjoberg's work provides important insights into how leaders deploy hyper-masculinity to resonate with their base, while portraying feminism and gender equality as threats to national security.

The concept of intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw,[15] is crucial to understanding how gender intersects with other axes of identity, such as race, class, and religion, within right-wing populism. Crenshaw's framework urges us to examine how oppression operates at multiple levels, an essential consideration for analysing ideology and policy of leaders like Modi, where gender narratives are deeply entwined with caste and religious nationalism. For instance, the marginalization of Dalit women and the targeting of Muslim women under the guise of protecting Hindu culture exemplify the intersectional dynamics of gendered oppression in populist regimes.

Judith Butler's concept of *gender as performance* offers a theoretical foundation for interpreting how masculinity is not a fixed identity but a repeated set of stylized acts. Populist leaders perform gender to delineate "the real people" from deviant others which for them are

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12 Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*
13 Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*
14 Laura Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict: Toward a Feminist Theory of War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
15 Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex."

feminists, LGBTQ+ activists, and progressives.[16]

Drawing from the literature on populism, gender becomes a key signifier in the construction of the antagonistic frontier between "the people" and "the elite." Gender, in this context, is a boundary-making device that distinguishes the populist base from the elites. Mudde frames populism as a thin-cantered ideology that draws a sharp moral distinction between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite," often mapped onto gender, where feminist and queer politics are depicted as elite, foreign, or anti-national.[17]

Further feminist scholars who studied populism like Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power show how women are both excluded and co-opted by right-wing populism: as cultural icons, but not as political agents.[18] Modi's invocation of *Nari Shakti* (women's power) exemplifies this paradox celebrating women symbolically while enacting policies that reinforce male authority. Finally, scholars like Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawer demonstrate how feminist movements resist and reframe populist discourse,[19] seen in the *Green Wave* in Argentina and feminist digital activism globally.

Finally, digital platforms like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram function as key spaces for the display and dissemination of gendered performances. The viral spread of masculinist aesthetics, assertive body language, slogans, and symbolic gestures plays a significant role in reinforcing patriarchal power under the guise of populist appeal. This hybrid framework allows for an analysis of gender not as a peripheral element, but as a core dimension of political power in today's populist movements.

From a Latin American perspective, Segato's provides critical insights into the intersection of gender, power, and violence.[20] Segato argues that gender-based violence is not merely a private or individual issue but a structural phenomenon rooted in colonial and patriarchal systems. Her concept of "pedagogies of cruelty," the normalization of violence against women and marginalized groups, offers a powerful lens for analysing how populist leaders like Milei use gendered violence and exclusionary rhetoric to consolidate power. Segato's emphasis on the "mandate of masculinity," also helps explain how hyper-masculinist

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[16] Butler, *Gender Trouble*.
[17] Cas Mudde, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[18] Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power, eds., *Right-Wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
[19] Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawer, eds., *The Women's Movement in Protest, Institutions, and the Internet: Australia in Transnational Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2013).
[20] Segato, *La guerra contra las mujeres*.

performances reinforce patriarchal norms and marginalize feminist movements.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's *Feminism Without Borders* provides a critical framework for understanding how gender, race, and colonialism intersect in the context of right-wing populism.[21] Mohanty critiques the universalization of Western feminist discourses and emphasizes the importance of contextualizing gender struggles within specific historical and cultural frameworks. Her work is particularly relevant for analysing how Modi's Hindu nationalism constructs gendered narratives that marginalize Dalit, Muslim, and LGBTQ+ communities while celebrating upper-caste Hindu women as symbols of cultural purity. Mohanty's concept of "Third World women" as a homogenized category in Western feminist discourse also highlights the need for intersectional approaches that account for the diverse experiences of women in the Global South.

Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* expands on intersectionality by emphasizing the importance of standpoint theory, which argues that marginalized groups have unique insights into systems of power.[22] This perspective is useful for analysing how feminist movements in Argentina, such as 'Ni Una Menos,' challenge the gender narratives of right-wing populism by centring the experiences of women and LGBTQ+ communities, thereby resisting the exclusionary and patriarchal agendas of leaders like Milei.

Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* further enriches this analysis by exploring how masculinities are constructed and performed in power structures, offering a framework for understanding how hyper-masculinist leadership styles to appeal to their base while framing feminism and gender equality as threats to traditional values.[23] Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain how populist leaders leverage gendered performances to consolidate power and marginalize progressive social movements.

Populism offers a useful lens for understanding how gender is mobilized in political rhetoric and policy and how populist leaders use gender narratives to construct an "us vs. them" divide, portraying feminists and gender minorities as threats to traditional values. This strategy is evident in Milei's speeches, where he frames feminism and gender ideology as foreign

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[21] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[22] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).
[23] Connell, *Masculinities*.

impositions that undermine national sovereignty and cultural identity of Argentina.[24]

Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power's *Right-Wing Women* questions the widespread assumption that women are natural allies of progressive politics by analysing how and why women actively participate in right-wing movements in diverse national contexts.[25] Their case studies reveal that women are not mere passive followers but occupy key positions in shaping, promoting, and sustaining far-right ideologies. They show how right-wing movements appropriate gender by engaging in gendered tokenism, glorifying traditional femininity and domestic roles, while excluding women from real political agency. The work underscores how women can function simultaneously as agents of and instruments for regressive political agenda.

Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawer's *The Women's Movement in Protest, Institutions, and the Internet* provides additional insights into how feminist movements respond to populism, offering a framework for analysing how movements like the Green Wave in Argentina challenge the gender narratives of right-wing populism and advocate for progressive gender policies.[26]

Case Study Analysis of the Gendered Narratives

1. Donald Trump (United States)

Donald Trump's re-election in November 2024 marked one of the most controversial presidential campaigns in recent U.S. history, with immediate and consequential policy shifts in the early days of his second term. During the campaign, Trump took credit for "Killing Roe v. Wade",[27] the landmark decision that had protected abortion rights, and pledged to "defeat the toxic poison of gender ideology,"[28] affirming that "God created two genders, male and female." These statements drew widespread criticism for promoting misogyny and transphobia. The consequences of his rhetoric and policy direction are already being felt by women and LGBTQ+ communities. While it may still be early to assess the full impact of his second term, his recent

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[24] Mudde, *Populism*

[25] Bacchetta and Power, *Right-Wing Women*.

[26] Maddison and Sawer, *The Women's Movement*.

[27] Brett Samuels, "Trump Boasts He 'Was Able to Kill Roe v. Wade,' Takes Credit for State Abortion Bans," *The Hill*, May 22, 2023, https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/4008311-trump-boasts-he-was-able-to-kill-roe-v-wade-takes-credit-for-state-abortion-bans/.

[28] Danielle Kurtzleben, "Trump's Executive Actions Curbing Transgender Rights Focus on 'Gender Ideology,'" *NPR*, February 7, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/02/07/g-s1-46893/trump-anti-trans-rights-executive-action-gender-ideology-confusion.

policy actions, coupled with the precedent set during his first presidency (2017–2021), offer clear indications of a regressive political trajectory concerning reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights.

Religious Nationalism and Gendered Hierarchies

Misogyny is central to Trump's political rhetoric and policies, closely tied to far-right populism and anti-gender ideology. His demeaning remarks about women and minorities reflect broader societal biases and have been widely documented. A key driver of his support is Christian nationalism, particularly among white evangelicals, who prioritize cultural dominance over moral integrity. This ideology, rooted in historical myths of Christian-European superiority[29] has been reanimated through the 'Trumpism' and 'MAGA' (Make America Great Again) movement, most visibly during the Capitol insurrection in 2021. At its core is the defence of a patriarchal, white, heteronormative order, portraying women as caregivers and men as protectors. It promotes racial and gender segregation under the guise of safeguarding traditional values, reinforcing fears about demographic change and social integration.[30]

Misogyny in the Presidential Campaigns 2016 and 2024

Since launching his 2016 campaign, Trump has consistently used misogynistic rhetoric, targeting high-profile women with personal and gendered insults. Hillary Clinton, the first female nominee of a major party, was demeaned as "crooked" and "nasty," while Trump portrayed himself as a dominant and more masculinist alternative, despite his lack of political experience. His attacks were widely commercialized, with campaign merchandise mocking women's bodies and reinforcing sexist stereotypes.[31] Analyses later confirmed that misogyny played a significant role in Clinton's defeat, reflecting voters' discomfort with women in power and expectations of gender conformity.[32]

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[29] Robert Jones, "The Roots of Christian Nationalism Go Back Further Than You Think," *Time*, August 31, 2023, accessed February 15, 2025, https://time.com/6309657/us-christian-nationalism-columbus-essay/.
[30] Sophie Bjork-James, "Racializing Misogyny: Sexuality and Gender in the New Online White Nationalism," *Feminist Anthropology* 1, no. 2 (2020): 176–183, https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12011; "White Sexual Politics: The Patriarchal Family in White Nationalism and the Religious Right," *Transforming Anthropology* 28, no. 1 (2020): 58–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/traa.12167.
[31] Nitasha Kaul, "The Misogyny of Authoritarians in Contemporary Democracies," *International Studies Review* 23, no. 4 (2021): 1619–1645, https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viab028; Charlotte Alter, "Sexist Hillary Clinton Attacks Are Best Sellers," *Time*, June 6, 2016, accessed February 15, 2025, https://time.com/4357406/hillary-clinton-sexist-donald-trump.
[32] Peter Beinart, *The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation's Schools* (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016), https://www.splcenter.org/resources/reports/trump-effect-impact-presidential-campaign-our-nations-schools; Laura Cummings and Jenepher Lennox Terrion, "A 'Nasty Woman': Assessing the Gendered Mediation of Hillary Clinton's Nonverbal Immediacy Cues During the 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign," *Feminist Media Studies* 21, no. 3 (2020): 427–

In 2024, Trump repeated similar tactics against Kamala Harris, using slurs like "Lying Kamala" and "childless cat lady," tapping into racist and sexist tropes about women of colour in politics.[33] Beyond rhetoric, Trump's campaigns attacked feminism, transgender rights, and gender-affirming care, painting them as threats to the traditional family structure. He pledged to ban such healthcare for minors, calling it "child abuse," and positioned himself as a defender of conservative values.

Trump's messaging has also grown more extreme on immigration, portraying migrants as criminals and existential threats to America. His language reached new levels of dehumanization in 2024, invoking racist fears and promising mass deportations under laws like the Alien Enemies Act.[34]

The Anti-Gender Legislation

Trump's policy record reflects deep hostility toward gender equality, reproductive rights, and protections for marginalized communities. His administration played a pivotal role in overturning *Roe v. Wade* in 2022, eliminating the federal right to abortion and shifting the decision to individual states.[35] This rollback disproportionately affects women of colour[36] and Trump openly celebrated it as his achievement. He has consistently attacked LGBTQ+ rights, vowing in 2024 to ban gender-affirming care for minors and eliminate "critical gender theory" from schools. His campaign rhetoric paints feminism and queer identities as threats to traditional family values. Aligned with conservative parent groups, Trump seeks to federally control school curricula, reflecting broader efforts like Florida's "Don't Say Gay" law.[37] Upon returning to office, Trump revoked Biden-era protections for transgender people, reinstating policies that deny gender identity and limit access to essential services in prisons, shelters, and public

442, https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2019.1706604; Robert Boatright and Valerie Sperling, *Trumping Politics as Usual: Masculinity, Misogyny, and the 2016 Elections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[33] Sanne Van Oosten, "Why Harris Lost? Let's Not Discount Policy Stereotypes," *Compass*, November 8, 2024, accessed February 15, 2025, https://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/article/why-harris-lost-lets-not-discount-policy-stereotypes.

[34] Jamiles Lartey, "Trump's Mass Deportation Plans Would Carry High Costs," *The Marshall Project*, October 26, 2024, https://www.themarshallproject.org/2024/10/26/trump-arizona-immigration-border-deportation; Emmy Martin, "Trump on Immigrants: 'We Got a Lot of Bad Genes in Our Country Right Now,'" *Politico*, October 7, 2024, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/10/07/trump-immigrants-crime-00182702; Myah Ward, "We Watched 20 Trump Rallies. His Racist, Anti-Immigrant Messaging Is Getting Darker," *Politico*, October 12, 2024, accessed February 13, 2025, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/10/12/trump-racist-rhetoric-immigrants-00183537.

[35] Brennan Center for Justice, *Roe v. Wade and Supreme Court Abortion Cases*, 2022, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/roe-v-wade-and-supreme-court-abortion-cases.

[36] Jenna Jerman, Rachel K. Jones, and Tsuyoshi Onda, *Characteristics of U.S. Abortion Patients in 2014 and Changes Since 2008* (New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2016), accessed February 12, 2025, https://www.guttmacher.org/report/characteristics-us-abortion-patients-2014.

[37] Emily Bazelon, "The Battle Over Gender Therapy," *The New York Times*, June 15, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/15/health/gender-therapy-minors.html

spaces.[38] These measures not only roll back civil rights but also contravene international human rights norms. Additionally, Trump's administration is dismantling Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, branding them as divisive "identity politics." The campaign against DEI intensified following the 2020 racial justice protests linked to the BLM movement, aiming to roll back advances in addressing systemic racism and gender inequality.[39] His rhetoric and policies continue to incite hostility toward women, queer communities and communities of colour, raising serious concerns about civil and human rights under his leadership.

2. Javier Milei (Argentina)

Argentina has been a trailblazer in Latin America in advancing gender-related rights, reflecting a broader shift toward inclusivity and equality. These transformations are deeply rooted in the activism of feminist movements, which have mobilized to challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for legislative changes.

A landmark achievement in Argentina was the passage of the Equal Marriage Law (2010) and the Gender Identity Law (2012). These laws not only expanded rights for LGBTQ+ individuals but also underscored the role of feminist activism in redefining societal values. Feminist IR theorists argue that such legal advancements reflect a broader global trend toward recognizing gender and sexual diversity as integral to human rights.

Another pivotal moment was the approval of the *Interrupción Voluntaria del Embarazo* or the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE) Law in 2020, following decades of advocacy by feminist groups. This law, which legalized abortion, represents a significant victory for women's bodily autonomy and reproductive rights. From a feminist IR perspective, this achievement highlights the intersection of local activism and global feminist networks, as Argentine feminists drew inspiration from and contributed to international debates on reproductive rights.

Ni Una Menos: A Feminist Movement with Global Resonance

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[38] Ryan Thoreson, "Trump Administration Moves to Reject Transgender Identity, Rights: Sweeping Executive Order Seeks to Dramatically Curtail Protections," *Human Rights Watch*, January 23, 2025, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/01/23/trump-administration-moves-reject-transgender-identity-rights; Gillian Branstetter, "Trump's Executive Orders Promoting Sex Discrimination, Explained," *American Civil Liberties Union*, 2022, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/trumps-executive-orders-promoting-sex-discrimination-explained.
[39] American Civil Liberties Union, *Trump on DEI and Anti-Discrimination Law*, 2024, accessed February 13, 2025, https://www.aclu.org/trump-on-dei-and-anti-discrimination-law#download-pdf.

The Ni Una Menos (Not One Less) movement, which emerged in 2015 in response to high rates of gender-based violence and femicides, has become a defining feature of Argentina's feminist landscape. This movement not only exposed the structural nature of violence against women but also catalysed a broader cultural shift toward questioning patriarchal norms. Feminist IR scholars, such as Carol Cohn, argue that movements like Ni Una Menos demonstrate how local struggles can resonate globally, influencing transnational advocacy and policy-making.

Ni Una Menos has also underscored the importance of an ethics of care and solidarity, central themes in feminist IR theory. By framing gender-based violence as a human rights issue, the movement has pushed for the inclusion of gender perspectives in public policies and international agendas. Its impact has extended beyond Argentina, inspiring similar movements across Latin America and reinforcing the region's role as a leader in gender equality advocacy.

Women in Politics and Decision-Making

The increased representation of women in Argentina's political sphere is another key aspect of the country's gender transformation. Feminist IR theorists emphasize the importance of women's participation in decision-making processes to challenge male-dominated power structures and promote gender-sensitive policies. Argentina's Gender Quota Law (1991), which mandated a minimum of 30% female representation in electoral lists, and the subsequent Gender Parity Law (2017) have significantly expanded women's presence in politics. Women in leadership positions, such as former President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, have played a transformative role in advancing gender-related issues. Their leadership has brought attention to topics like gender violence, wage gaps, and equal opportunities, aligning with feminist IR's emphasis on the need for gender-balanced governance.

Milei's Gendered Populism

Javier Milei's rise in Argentina reflects broader patterns in right-wing populism, where gender, minority rights, and migration are used to shape national identity and support political aims. His speeches often present feminism and gender ideology as threats to individual freedom, traditional values, and societal cohesion, echoing the anti-establishment and anti-globalist narratives of other right-wing populists like Donald Trump and Narendra Modi.

At the World Economic Forum in January 2025, Milei delivered a scathing critique of radical feminism, arguing that it seeks to dismantle the family, erode cultural heritage, and impose a globalist agenda that undermines national sovereignty. This rhetoric mirrors Trump's 2020 United Nations address, where he criticized global governance and radical ideologies as threats to national identity, signalling a broader ideological convergence among right-wing populists who position themselves as defenders of traditional values against perceived elitist and globalist forces.

Milei's alignment with global right-wing populism extends beyond his anti-feminist rhetoric to include opposition to LGBTQ+ rights and minority protections, which he often conflates with "woke culture" and globalist agendas. His ban on inclusive language in public institutions in February 2024, justified as a defence of cultural heritage, reflects a broader trend among populist leaders to marginalize LGBTQ+ communities and reinforce traditional gender norms. In addition to this, Milei's discourse on migration reflects a broader populist strategy of framing migrants as threats to national security and cultural identity. His campaign speeches in 2023 emphasized the need to secure Argentina's borders and prioritize the needs of citizens over "uncontrolled migration," echoing Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies.

The relevance of Milei's discourses to the broader study of gender, power, and populism lies in their transnational implications and their impact on global governance. By framing feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, and migration as threats to national identity and sovereignty, Milei and other right-wing populists challenge the legitimacy of international institutions and multilateral agreements that promote gender equality and human rights.

Institutional Erosion and the decline of Gender Equality Mechanisms

The erosion of Argentina's gender equality mechanisms under President Javier Milei's administration represents a stark example of how right-wing populist leaders dismantle institutional frameworks designed to promote gender justice. Through Decree 86/2023, the existing ministerial structure was modified, leading to the creation of eight new ministerial portfolios. Among these was the newly established Ministry of Human Capital, which absorbed the responsibilities of the former Ministries of Education, Labour, Social Development, and Culture. Notably, it also incorporated the previously independent Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity, effectively downgrading it to the Subsecretariat for Protection Against Gender Based Violence. This restructuring marked a significant diminishment of the institutional

standing of gender-related policies, signalling a shift away from prioritizing gender equality in Argentina's governance.

The consequences of this institutional downgrade were immediate and far-reaching. During the six months following the establishment of the Subsecretariat, budget cuts and a withdrawal of state support further weakened the government's ability to address gender-based violence and support marginalized communities. Women and LGBTQ+ communities, who were the intended beneficiaries of these public policies, found themselves increasingly vulnerable as the state retreated from its obligations to provincial and municipal governments. This dismantling of institutional mechanisms not only undermined Argentina's progress on gender equality but also reflected a broader trend of right-wing populist leaders marginalizing feminist and LGBTQ+ movements.

To fully grasp the significance of this institutional erosion, it is important to contextualize Argentina's prior achievements in gender equality. With the creation of the Ministry of Women, Genders, and Diversity in December 2020, Argentina had established a high-level institutional mechanism for the advancement of women, known as the Women's Advancement Mechanism (MAM), at the ministerial level. According to UN Women (2024), the hierarchical level of MAMs serves as a qualitative indicator of the status that countries formally assign to gender equality mechanisms through laws, decrees, and other official measures. The demotion of this Ministry to a Subsecretariat not only reversed this progress but also indicated a deliberate move away from the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in public policy.

One of the most immediate consequences of this demotion was the loss of a platform for promoting gender mainstreaming across the National Public Administration. The National Cabinet for the Mainstreaming of Gender Policies (GNTPG), established in August 2020 under Decree 680/2020, had been instrumental in elevating and institutionalizing gender units within national state agencies. However, with the reduction of ministerial structures and the downgrading of gender policies, the GNTPG was dismantled. This move not only weakened the institutional framework for gender equality but also disrupted the collection and dissemination of critical data on gender-based violence and other related issues.

The erosion of Argentina's gender equality mechanisms reached a new low with the transfer of the Subsecretariat for Protection Against Gender-Based Violence to the Ministry of

Justice through Decrees DNU-2024-450-APN-PTE and DECTO-2024-451-APN-PTE. The decree justified this transfer on the grounds of managerial reasons, stating that the competence for preventing and eradicating gender-based violence and assisting victims would now fall under the Ministry of Justice. However, this move further marginalized gender issues by subsuming them under a broader, less specialized bureaucratic structure.

The appointment of Claudia Barcia, a prosecutor from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, as the Subsecretary for Protection Against Gender-Based Violence, was emblematic of the administration's lack of commitment to gender equality. Decree 160/2024 misleadingly communicated that this was an unpaid (ad-honorem) position, and during its brief existence, the Subsecretariat lacked a functional operational structure at either the first or second level. This lack of resources and institutional support rendered the Subsecretariat ineffective, further exacerbating the challenges. The final blow came on June 6, 2024, when Subsecretary Barcia announced on her personal LinkedIn profile that she had received a phone call from Alberto Baños, the Secretary of Human Rights, informing her that the Subsecretariat for Protection Against Gender-Based Violence would cease to exist. This announcement was followed by a statement on X (formerly Twitter) account of the Ministry of Justice, which declared the closure of the former Ministry of Women. The statement justified this decision as being in line with President Javier Milei's mandate to reduce the size of the state and eliminate politicized entities. Notably, the alleged audit that led to these conclusions has not been made publicly available to citizens, raising questions about the transparency and legitimacy of the decision.

Human Rights Watch (2025) has expressed concerns over the institutional deterioration in Argentina, highlighting the administration's discriminatory rhetoric and its systematic dismantling of gender equality institutions. Furthermore, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, President Milei publicly criticized gender ideology and made inciting statements linking homosexuality with pedophilia. Such remarks have provoked strong reactions from LGBTQ+ organizations and human rights advocates, who warn of increasing discrimination under Milei's leadership.

3. Narendra Modi (India)

Misogyny in India is deeply intertwined with caste hierarchies and Brahminical patriarchy, an ideology that controls women, caste-oppressed, queer, and trans bodies through caste purity

and endogamy, highlighting the inseparability of caste and gender oppression.[40] This patriarchal ideology forms the backbone of Hindutva, a Hindu nationalist worldview rooted in upper-caste dominance and promoted by the RSS, a far-right group inspired by European fascism.[41] The BJP, as its political arm since 1980, has normalized misogyny, casteism, and religious bigotry in public discourse. While Modi often invokes "Nari Shakti" (women's power), his silence in the face of violence against Dalit and Muslim women is telling. His government promotes a vision of womanhood rooted in Hindu purity and domesticity, positioning Muslim men as hypersexual threats and Hindu women as protectors of honour.[42] Under BJP rule, women dissenters, especially Dalit and Muslim, face routinely abuse online and offline. According to data from India's National Crime Records Bureau over the past years, there has been a dramatic surge in crimes against marginalized communities since 2014. BJP affiliates have even advocated replacing India's Constitution with the Manusmriti, a text that explicitly subordinates women and caste-oppressed communities.[43] Misogynistic rhetoric from party leaders, trivializing rape, praising sexual offenders, and promoting forced fertility among Hindu women, has become commonplace.[44]

Religious minorities are also targeted. Muslims and Christians are vilified as foreign and anti-national, while hate crimes and sexual violence, like the rape cases in Unnao, Kathua and Hathras, have occurred with political complicity or silence. Despite judicial reversals, such as the 2024 Supreme Court ruling in Bilkis Bano's favour, the broader culture of impunity remains intact, with BJP leaders publicly honouring rapists.[45] Queerness, too, is marginalized under Hindutva. Although the 2018 repeal of Section 377 legally decriminalized same-ex relations, Hindu nationalism continues to frame queer identities as Western imports. Hindu queers are ambiguously included in the nationalist project only to the extent they can be folded into a

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[40] Jean Chapman, "Violence against Women in Democratic India: Let's Talk Misogyny," *Social Scientist* 42, no. 9/10 (2014): 49–61, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24372976; Thenmozhi Soundararajan, *The Trauma of Caste: A Dalit Feminist Meditation on Survivorship, Healing, and Abolition* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2022); Nishant Upadhyay, "Hindu Nation and Its Queers: Caste, Islamophobia, and De/coloniality in India," *Interventions* 22, no. 4 (2020): 464–480, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749709.

[41] Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-Up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence," *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, no. 4 (2000): 218–228, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4408848.

[42] Dibyesh Anand, "Anxious Sexualities: Masculinity, Nationalism and Violence," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9, no. 2 (2007): 257–269, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2007.00282.x; Tanika Sarkar, "Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra," *Economic and Political Weekly* 37, no. 28 (2002): 2872–2876.

[43] Shamsul Islam, "How RSS Denigrated the Constitution," *Sabrang*, November 26, 2021, accessed February 11, 2025, https://sabrangindia.in/how-rss-denigrated-constitution/.

[44] Hansa Malhotra, "'Prostitute' and 7 Other Disturbing Remarks by BJP Leaders," *The Quint*, July 21, 2016, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.thequint.com/news/india/controversial-statements-embarrassed-bjp-sadhvi-prachi-sakshi-maharaj-yogi-adityanath-haraamzaade-prostitute.

[45] Sarah Shamim, "How Did India's Supreme Court Send Bilkis Bano's Rapists Back to Jail?" *Al Jazeera*, January 9, 2024, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/9/why-did-indias-supreme-court-send-bilkis-banos-rapists-back-to-jail.

sanitized vision of Hindu purity.[46] In sum, Hindutva nationalism, led by Modi, embeds gendered, casteist, and religious violence into the fabric of Indian political life. It mirrors global far-right movements through its attack on pluralism, disdain for minorities, and the promotion of a patriarchal, homogeneous nation-state.

Modi's Anti-Gender and Exclusionary Politics

Hindutva and Brahminical patriarchy extend beyond ideology, operating as institutionalized systems within India's political architecture and public discourse. The BJP currently holds the highest number of sitting MPs and MLAs with pending criminal charges involving violence against women, highlighting how gendered violence intersects with authoritarian and majoritarian state practices. Modi's rhetoric and policies reflect a longstanding pattern of misogyny and exclusion. In public speeches, he has repeatedly demeaned women in politics, including referring to opposition figures with sexist and derogatory slurs.[47] His inflammatory comments also extend to religious minorities, particularly Muslims, who have long been falsely accused and targeted under the baseless 'Love Jihad' conspiracy theory propagated by the BJP/RSS. During the 2024 elections, he accused the opposition of favouring "infiltrators" and "those with more children", a veiled reference to Muslims.[48] According to India Hate Lab (2025), hate speech surged by 74% in 2024, with Muslims targeted in 98.5% of 1,165 recorded incidents, often instigated by senior BJP figures. These discourses align with discriminatory policies such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which fast-tracks citizenship for non-Muslim refugees and threatens Muslim communities with statelessness.[49] Similarly, during the Farmers' Protests, Sikhs were labelled "Khalistanis" and "parasites."[50] In 2017, the BJP-led anti-Rohingya campaign called refugees "terrorists," stoking violence in

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[46] Upadhyay, "Hindu Nation and Its Queers," 464–480; Paola Bacchetta, "Queer Formation in (Hindu) Nationalism," in *Sexuality Studies*, ed. Sanjay Srivastava (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), 121–140.

[47] Angshukanta Chakraborty, "Why Renuka Chowdhury's Laughter Is More Powerful than That of Modi Coterie," *DailyO*, February 8, 2018, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.dailyo.in/politics/renuka-chowdhury-laughter-modi-parliament-patriarchy-bjp-ramayana-mahabharata-draupadi-22262.

[48] Rhea Mogul, "Modi's Muslim Remarks Spark 'Hate Speech' Accusations as India's Mammoth Election Deepens Divides," *CNN*, April 22, 2024, accessed February 11, 2025, https://edition.cnn.com/2024/04/22/asia/india-modi-muslim-hate-speech-allegations-intl-hnk/index.html.

[49] UN News, "New Citizenship Law in India 'Fundamentally Discriminatory': UN Human Rights Office," December 10, 2019, accessed February 11, 2025, https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053511; Jaffer Latief Najar, "Brahmanical Patriarchy and the Politics of Anti-Trafficking and Prostitution Governance: From Colonial to Contemporary India," *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (2023): 667–685, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2099824; Puja Changoiwala, "India's Muslims Are Terrified of Being Deported," *Foreign Policy*, February 21, 2020, accessed February 11, 2025, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/02/21/india-muslims-deported-terrified-citizenship-amendment-act-caa/; Salah Punathil, "Precarious Citizenship: Detection, Detention and 'Deportability' in India," *Citizenship Studies* 26, no. 1 (2022): 55–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2021.2013444.

[50] Human Rights Watch, "India: 'Hate Speech Fueled Modi's Election Campaign,'" August 14, 2024, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/08/14/india-hate-speech-fueled-modis-election-campaign

Delhi and Jammu. The government's reaction to protests against the discriminatory CAA in 2019 was equally severe, branding peaceful demonstrators "anti-national" and fuelling mob violence, including the 2020 Delhi riots in which most victims were Muslims.[51] Despite Modi's performative commitment to gender equality, epitomized by the *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao* (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) *scheme*, audits reveal systemic failures, including a worsening gender imbalance and misallocation of funds toward media campaigns rather than substantive change.[52] Programs like Ujjwala (clean cooking gas) and Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana (girl child savings) are framed as empowering, but critics argue they instrumentalize women as passive beneficiaries rather than agents of change. This form of gender governance reinforces Hindu patriarchal values under a façade of welfare.[53]

The Modi government has also adopted deeply heteropatriarchal and homophobic stances, remaining largely silent on key LGBTQ+ issues in India and removing protections for queer communities from legal frameworks.[54] The state has also expanded surveillance and digital policing as gendered tools of control. Women activists and journalists, particularly those from marginalized communities, report facing coordinated online harassment, doxxing, and state-enabled surveillance, including through spyware such as Pegasus. Feminist scholars argue that this form of digital repression disproportionately targets Dalit and Muslim women, silencing dissent and reinforcing casteist and patriarchal authority in cyberspace.[55]

Together, these examples illustrate the consolidation of a Hindutva-driven state under BJP rule, backed by the RSS and its affiliate organizations, collectively known as the *Sangh Parivar*. While projecting a global image of asceticism and cultural diplomacy, Modi simultaneously advances a nationalist agenda that pushes toward an exclusionary, militarized Hindu Rashtra. His double standard between international image and domestic reality distinguishes him from other far-right leaders, masking an authoritarian project that disenfranchises women and vulnerable communities. At the same time, resistance to gendered

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[51] Cecilia Jacob and Mujeeb Kanth, "'Kill Two Million of Them': Institutionalised Hate Speech, Impunity and 21st Century Atrocities in India," *Global Responsibility to Protect* 15, no. 2–3 (2023): 209–245, https://doi.org/10.1163/1875984X-20230002.

[52] India Matters, "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme: A Critical Analysis," *Observer Research Foundation*, October 19, 2022, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/beti-bachao-beti-padhao-scheme; The Quint, "80% Funds for 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' Spent on Ads, Says Parl Committee," December 11, 2021, accessed February 11, 2025, https://www.thequint.com/news/india/beti-bachao-beti-padhao-80-funds-spent-on-ads-says-parliamentary-committee.

[53] Tirtha Chatterjee, "Financial Incentives and Fertility Choices: Evidence from India," *The Indian Economic Journal* 71, no. 4 (2023): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.1177/00194662221139337; Kalpana Wilson, "Hindu Supremacism, 'Anti-Gender' Politics, and Feminist Resistance," *LSE Gender Blog*, March 29, 2023, accessed February 11, 2025, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2023/03/29/narratives-of-transnational-resistance-in-pakistan-and-india/.

[54] Upadhyay, "Hindu Nation and Its Queers," 464–480.

[55] Wilson, "Hindu Supremacism, 'Anti-Gender' Politics."

authoritarianism in India remains robust. The Shaheen Bagh protests led by Muslim women, Dalit women's collectives, and queer feminist networks have challenged Hindutva's moral order, asserting pluralism, bodily autonomy, and constitutional rights in highly visible ways. These movements echo global feminist counter-performances against masculinist populism.

Populist Masculinities as Political Performance: An Analytical Synthesis

The comparative analysis of Trump, Milei, and Modi reveals that masculinity is not merely a rhetorical feature of right-wing populism, it is a core logic through which political authority, national identity, and international positioning are constructed and sustained. These leaders embody distinct masculinist archetypes rooted in their political narratives: Trump as the hyper-aggressive alpha male, Milei as the defiant libertarian lion, and Modi as the disciplined spiritual patriarch.

These masculinities function as effective technologies of power. They are not only communicated through discourse and performance, but also institutionalized through policy rollbacks, symbolic exclusions, and anti-gender governance structures. Drawing on feminist IR theories these performances can be understood as part of a broader effort to remasculinize the nation-state in the face of perceived internal and external threats, particularly feminism, queerness, and global multilateralism.

Importantly, these masculinities operate transnationally. They circulate across borders via viral videos, speeches at global forums, and symbolic media aesthetics, producing a shared affective grammar that appeals to nationalist imaginaries worldwide. In this way, masculinity becomes both a mode of rule and a method of global alignment among authoritarian populists.

Yet, this reliance on symbolic excess and spectacle also reveals a fragility one that feminist, queer, and anti-racist movements continue to expose and challenge. These movements do more than resist; they offer counter-performances that reimagine sovereignty, legitimacy, and global justice.

Analytical Layer	Donald Trump (USA)	Javier Milei (Argentina)	Narendra Modi (India)

Discursive Tropes	"Nasty woman", "radical gender ideology", "monsters"	"Feminazis", "gender ideology as cultural Marxism"	"Love Jihad", "Nari Shakti", "foreign infiltrators"
Media Aesthetic	Virile meme culture, aggressive branding	Anti-establishment TikToks, visual ruptures	Ascetic imagery, mythological references
Performative Gestures	Interrupting opponents, mocking tone	Screaming, destruction of symbols, flamboyant dress	Ritualized speech, controlled posture, yogic calm
Policy Machinery	Roe reversal, DEI rollback, trans bans	Ministry closures, inclusive language ban	Citizenship Act, gender-neutral failures, symbolic inclusion
IR Positioning	Anti-UN, nationalist isolationism	Anti-globalist, rejection of multilateral norms	Soft power diplomacy abroad, repression at home
Mythic Function	Restorer of lost greatness	Purifier from decadence	Guardian of civilizational continuity
Masculinity Type	Hegemonic/hyper-masculinity	Chaotic libertarian masculinity	Paternal nationalist masculinity

Table 2: Masculinity as a Multi-Level Political Technology in Populist Leadership

Conclusion

The cases of Milei, Trump, and Modi demonstrate that contemporary right-wing populism is not only gendered in rhetoric, but fundamentally structured around masculinist logics of power. Each leader enacts a distinct model of political masculinity: Trump's hyper-aggressive Christian nationalism, Milei's chaotic libertarianism, and Modi's paternalistic Hindu nationalism. All deploy gender as a tool for disciplining dissent, legitimizing exclusion, and eroding democratic safeguards.

These masculinities function as transnational technologies of governance. While rooted

in specific political and cultural contexts, they converge around a shared repertoire: vilification of feminism, rollback of reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights, and hostility toward multilateral gender frameworks.

At the international level, these regimes reject global gender norms, delegitimize human rights mechanisms, and engage in soft-power diplomacy that conceals domestic repression. Their symbolic gestures, whether in Davos, the UN, or G20 summits, project a nationalist revival that aligns them with broader illiberal currents.

This masculinist order is far from monolithic. It relies heavily on spectacle, affective manipulation, and discursive polarization. These strategies are inherently unstable and vulnerable to sustained resistance. Feminist, queer, and anti-racist movements have emerged as key counterforces, confronting these narratives not only in streets and legislatures, but also across digital platforms and transnational networks.

By challenging hegemonic masculinities, these movements do more than resist. They reshape the boundaries of politics. In contrast to leaderships built on spectacle, exclusion, and fear, they advance alternative visions of sovereignty, community, and global justice. They reject the false dichotomy between tradition and equality, and reveal that gender is not a peripheral concern in international politics, but one of its most strategic and defining battlegrounds.

This research offers both empirical and theoretical insights into the gendered dynamics of populist leadership. Despite significant institutional and cultural differences, Argentina, India, and the United States reveal a disturbing alignment in the erosion of gender equality mechanisms as distinct masculinities function as political technologies that shape both domestic and international policy. The convergence of these patterns underscores the transnational nature of authoritarian populism and its strategic deployment of gender to legitimize exclusionary governance.