Value Change Regarding Gender Roles and Backlash in Europe: Is Gender a New Polarization Element?

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In recent years, we have witnessed an increasingly visible right-wing populist rhetoric against gender equality across the globe, and this phenomenon has been explained and analyzed as a cultural backlash, which has pervaded political discussions and has led to polarization in political communication, reviving old debates on gender equality and bringing antifeminism. This article analyzes how attitudes toward gender equality have become subject to mounting global polarization. Specifically, it asks: To what extent are differences in the attitudes toward gender equality likelier to be related to ideological positioning in the present than in the previous decade? According to the classical theoretical approach, are attitudes and values still understood to be changing because of modernization? To answer these questions, we conducted a longitudinal comparative analysis of attitudes toward gender roles in European societies over the last 3 decades. We introduced specific controls for survey waves, gender, and ideology to test the hypothesis that the mediating effect of ideology on attitudes toward gender roles has strengthened in recent years, widening the gender and ideological gap on this subject.

Keywords: gender equality, gender attitudes, political communication, cultural backlash, pernicious polarization

Antifeminist rhetoric is common across right-wing populist forces in Europe. According to Schutzbach (2019), such political outlets tend to "center" right-wing ideologies by making right-wing attitudes acceptable across social groups and by shifting a growing number of citizens to the right without showing explicit hostility toward gender equality. Consequently, misogyny and the defense of traditional

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Date submitted: 07-09-2023

and hierarchical gender roles, central to the radical right-wing discourse, are permeating all social and political sectors and making negative attitudes toward gender equality more widespread and accepted. Moreover, Western democracies have targeted and challenged lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) rights as a specific type of conservative opposition to gender and sexual equality (Paternotte, 2019), supported by a discourse that aims to delegitimize democratic institutions and principles, such as equality, inclusion, human rights, minority protection, and antidiscrimination (Schutzbach, 2019).

Consequently, we expect to observe a correlation between right-wing populist rhetoric and opposition to gender and sexual equality in recent years in Europe and globally. When we mention the "right-wing populist rhetoric," we refer to the current European sociopolitical context, where various right-wing populist parties (RPPs) have grown electorally and gained institutional power.[1] Right-wing populist rhetoric emphasizes the legitimacy of authoritarian leaders and diminishes the importance of equality (Jost, Nosek, & Gosling, 2008). Precisely, such rhetoric endangers the elements of human rights: civil liberties, and sexual, ethnic, and religious tolerance. In line with these characteristics, we suggest that ideological orientations consist of the attitudes toward civil rights and equal access to services.

We focus on the phenomenon of "gender backlash" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 217; Schutzbach, 2019) by which RPPs and supporters defend the idea of a homogenous population reproducing the members of the nation via traditional and "idyllic" families. The traditional family is seen as the "gatekeeper" of the homeland, which must be protected against the racialized, culturally diverse "other" (Heinemann & Stern, 2022, p. 315) because it protects the social status quo of those who feel left behind by modernization and globalization and the attendant value shift toward more progressive views on gender equality.

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[1] Mudde (2021) speaks of the "fourth wave of the radical right" (pp. 39–43) to refer to the electoral expansion of radical right-wing populist parties in Western countries in the first decade of the 21st century, such as Le Pen's National Rally in France, Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden, and Viktor Orbán's Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union in Hungary. In Bulgaria, in 2016, the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria formed the coalition "United Patriots" together with VMRO-BND, the National Attack Union (ATAKA) and other organizations. In Germany, Alternative for Germany (in German, Alternative für Deutschland; AfD) won more than 10% of the vote and 83 seats in Germany's 2021 federal elections. In Italy, the post-fascist coalition led by "The Brothers of Italy" (Fratelli d'Italia), won nearly 43% of the vote in the 2022 general elections, and Giorgia Meloni's FdI was the most voted party in the country with 26.2% of the vote, allowing it to take over the presidency of the Italian government. In Belgium, the Vlaams Belang (VB) party under the leadership of Tom Van Grieken has regained lost support and won 11.95% of the vote in the 2019 federal elections, placing itself in opposition to the cordon sanitaire imposed by the rest of the political parties in the Belgian political system. In Finland, the Finns Party was part of a coalition government between 2015 and 2017, and in the last general elections of 2023, it has positioned itself as the second political force with 20% of the votes and 46 seats, improving the results of the previous elections. In Spain, the entry of Vox into the Congress of Deputies in 2019 and its position as the third force with 15.21% of the votes and 52 seats ended the exception that the Spanish party system, which seemed alien to radical right-wing populist formations, represented.

Populism, as a political phenomenon, attempts to polarize communities by applying social identity that is appealing to a wide audience as one of its main communication strategies. One of the consequences of this strategy is societal polarization on key issues, such as feminism and women's rights. Therefore, gender roles have become a crucial arena in which political actors garner support for populist ideas that can lead to sweeping electoral success. Within this context, one can identify a so-called "right-wing populist complex" that "transcends parties, impregnating organizations, social groups, media discourses, and narratives" (Dietze & Roth, 2020, p. 8) and that has subsequent implications for aspects of gender and sexuality. It promotes monolithic and traditional notions of women's roles as mothers, reproducers, and caretakers (Heinemann & Stern, 2022). Thus, it undermines progressive attitudes toward gender roles exhibited by people whose values have been transformed by modernization.

A growing body of literature has highlighted the demand side of polarization. McCoy and Somer (2019) claim that "pernicious polarization" emerges from the interaction between existing social grievances and politicization of them by leaders. This interaction involves communication channels, such as media outlets and social media platforms, which emphasize political disagreements in favor of certain political forces (Krämer, 2014; Rooduijn et al., 2019). Discussions of whether the populism on media pages should be considered a style, frame, or strategy remain at the forefront of the recent studies (Caiani & Della Porta, 2011).

Krämer (2014) defines the idea of a frame or strategy embodying intentionality as "media populism," which is deemed to include references to populist politicians whose notions and speeches may be incorporated into the media without strategic considerations. However, in terms of media effects, these messages have weight and contribute to the formation of populist attitudes among citizens. Thus, the present study is guided by the demand side of public populist attitudes and aims to determine what leads individuals to be influenced by populist messages.

Research has stressed the role of cultural modernization in shaping individual attitudes toward gender equality (Bergh, 2007; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). This article proposes that ideology increasingly influences gender beliefs and shapes populist discourse strategies and political communication. We argue that differences in attitudes toward gender roles in the last decade have moved from being explained mainly by modernization to being progressively explained by ideological factors polarized across a right–left scale. We analyze data from the European Values Study (EVS) and the World Values Survey (WVS; EVS, 2022) in different waves to evaluate whether this transformation in the factors used to explain gender roles shifted from modernization toward ideological positions across European societies. The use of the EVS–WVS integrated data allows us to have more data and more time points for European countries obtained in different waves to address this evolution in attitudes in our empirical analysis.

This article is structured as follows: First, we present modernization theory. Second, we theoretically review the characteristics of right-wing populism and the growing prominence of radical right-wing parties in Europe. Third, we consider gender backlash, cultural backlash, and the emergence of radical right-wing parties. Next, we present the main hypotheses that underpinned this study and explain the research design, data, and operationalization of main variables. This is followed by data analysis, interpretation, and discussion, and finally, we present the general conclusions of the article.

Modernization, Political Attitudes, and Cultural Backlash

Norris and Inglehart (2019) claim, based on systematic evidence, that nationalism and illiberal discourses and principles receded in modern Western democracies in the last decades of the twentieth century because of economic modernization, the globalization of ideas, and increasingly democratic principles and attitudes (Heinemann & Stern, 2022; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Unprecedented economic development, the introduction of the welfare state, and structural changes in affluent postindustrial societies drove cultural shifts, particularly the rapid expansion of access to education, secularization, gender equality, ethnic and religious diversity, and urbanization processes. Through generational replacement, socially liberal values expanded across society because older, less educated age cohorts were being superseded by a younger, more globalized, multicultural generation that espoused progressive attitudes toward sex and gender, homosexuality, abortion, and cultural and religious diversity (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Traditional gender norms and patriarchal values were replaced by norms that favored gender equality in public and private spaces, more fluid self-ascribed gender identities, and diverse cohabitation options that encompassed families, marriage, and divorce. Accordingly, in recent decades, modernization and the consequent transformation of values have created visible differences between generations and education levels that are considered one of the most evident and consistent cleavages to have occurred in the value domain.

In this context, Norris and Inglehart (2019) speak of a "tipping point" at which a former cultural majority attached to and defending traditional norms have been pushed out by a postmaterialist, postmodern new majority. The former majority have been feeling uncomfortable—"strangers in their own land" (p. 35)—when they lost their dominant cultural hegemony, and they blamed elites and other groups (e.g., socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, migrants, feminists, LGBTQI+ activists, and other minorities) for the transformation. By targeting the antielitist, liberal values of this former cultural majority, the radical right is perceived, as Sauer (2020) claims, to be breaking down trust in the liberal democratic order and forcing a shift toward postdemocratic illiberal conditions (Crouch, 2004). By reacting to the centering strategy of the catchall parties, the radical populist parties make a space for themselves. Simultaneously, in recent decades, as Sauer (2020) explains, Western democracies have witnessed neoliberal restructuring, unemployment, labor precarization, growing inequality and poverty, the financialization of capitalism, welfare cuts, growing individualization, competition, and erosion of collective forms of solidarity to the detriment of the working class and more vulnerable groups (Jessop, 2016; Sauer, 2020).

Right-Wing Radical Populist Parties

The right-wing populists have undoubtedly become major political actors on the European stage (Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016). Terminologically speaking, far-right parties are often distinguished from populist radical right parties by their rejection of democratic principles: The far right does not recognize the fundamental principle of the sovereignty of the people, whereas populist radical right parties are "(nominally) democratic" (Mudde, 2007, p. 31). However, as Griffin (2000) rightly argues, radical populist right parties today may be more dangerous than nostalgic far-right organizations because "ethnicist

liberalism has replaced fascism as the form of radical populist right that is best suited to the realities of the modern world" (p. 19).

In some media studies, researchers have suggested that populism is a consistent communication style (Krämer, 2014) and that the proximity of populism to journalistic ideology constitutes a threat to democratic communication (McDevitt, 2020). As Mudde (2007) explains, populism is a "thin-centered ideology" that defines society in terms of "we," "the [elite or establishment] people," versus the "others"— immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslims, LGBTQI+ people, or feminists, who pose a threat to the assumed autochthonous people, the "we" (p. 543). As a result, the emergence of radical right parties has fostered authoritarian values that promote (1) security against the risks of instability and disorder (foreigners stealing our jobs, immigrants attacking our women, terrorists threatening our safety, etc.), (2) conformity and preservation of the status quo and the traditional way of life, and (3) obedience to strong leaders. Also among these authoritarian values are nativism and the rejection of proimmigration, antiestablishment, and antipluralist values (Canovan, 1999; Dietz & Roth, 2020; Kriesi, 2010; Maxwell, 2019; Rydgren, 2008). While the roots of these movements differ from country to country, there are important commonalities between the style of such populist political messages and the nondiscursive style of political communication.

The presence of RPPs in Europe has evolved in the last few years, alongside with the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis, with a clear emphasis and focus on migrants and minorities as the main threats to the nation (Hajdinjak, Chromková, & Chytilek, 2022, p. 1). According to these authors, a democratic backsliding and an "illiberal turn" with the abandonment of liberal democratic principles have been initiated in Europe. In this context, illiberal democracies are defined as

> hybrid regimes that combine some characteristics of electoral competition with disregard for liberal values, pluralism and the protection of minorities, advocating for the limitation of freedom of the media and education and growing levels of antimigration, anti-Islamic, LGTBI phobia and discourses against gender equality. (Hajdinjak et al., 2022, p. 2)

Gender Backlash

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, the consensus on inequality between women and men and the distribution of tasks between private female life (i.e., unpaid care work) and male public life has been overturned, leading to women's emancipation, their wider participation in the job market and education, and their stronger public presence. Simultaneously, Western economies have witnessed the relative precarization of male labor and a progressive erosion of wealth among the working and middle classes, which in turn has eroded hierarchical gender relations with consequences for the public–private distribution of tasks, placing pressure on masculine hegemony, defined as "failed patriarchs" (Radhakrishnan & Solari, 2015), and producing a sense of threatened masculinity (Sauer, 2020).

In this context, right-wing radical parties have emerged in reaction to liberal transformations in postindustrial societies, maintaining a solid antigender-equality discourse and descriptive representation as "männerpartein," predominantly led and supported by males. This is due not only to their compositions but

also to their "masculine" party orientations and their notions of society and nation (Sauer, 2020), which have fostered a large proportion of male representatives in parliament and a masculinization of politics.

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015) adopt a "minimal definition" of populism (p. 151) that comprises three features: attacking "the elite," defending the interests of "the common people," and proclaiming "popular sovereignty as the only legitimate source of political power" (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019, p. 1108). The "ideological core" of these political formations consists of nationalism, populism, and authoritarianism as central and shared ideological variables or specific nuclear idea-forces/conceptions (Antón-Mellón, 2007; Antón-Mellón & Hernández-Carr, 2016; Casals, 2003; Mudde, 2007). We add to these negative ideological base ideas xenophobic or antimigration, antiestablishment (positioning oneself as the true people or the true nation), and antifeminist ideas.

The antifeminism of RPPs manifests as a reaction to the advances and achievements of feminism, such as the recognition of violence against women, the laws on reproductive health and voluntary interruption of pregnancy, and/or the recognition of plural gender identities and sexual orientations. In the hands of RPPs, equality policies are transformed into social or family policies, reinforcing the traditional roles of women as mothers and caregivers (Paleo & Alonso Álvarez, 2015). In addition, same-sex marriage and civil partnerships are seen as threats to reproduction and the traditional family, with practices such as contraception, abortion, surrogacy, and same-sex adoption posing a threat to the heteronormative family. Moreover, the homogenizing discourse about "the people" excludes intersectional feminist political practices (Kantola & Lombardo, 2019).

The relationship between populism and gender depends on varied cultural and political contexts and the personal goals and ideas of specific populist leaders, meaning that the "treatment of gender issues in populism is highly contextualized" (Abi-Hassan, 2017, p. 441). Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015) agree when they state that "it is the national culture and broader ideology used by populists that determine their gender position" (p. 16). De Lange and Mügge (2015) consider more traditionalist and more modern RPPs in their conceptions of gender relations. The different gender regimes in each country are central to understanding these peculiarities (Alonso Álvarez & Espinosa-Fajardo, 2023). Antigender discourses also play an important role in anti-European narratives, as gender equality is a European value and the gender-mainstreaming strategy is also provoking strong anti-gender reactions from the right-wing populists (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021).

RPPs often combine a strong antifeminist discourse with defense of equality between women and men (Alonso Álvarez & Espinosa-Fajardo, 2023). This apparent contradiction is known as "femonationalism" and reflects the use of women's rights to promote exclusionary political practices, maintaining the desirability of a nation composed only of indigenous citizens (Farris, 2017). As part of the gender backlash, antigender discourse attacks gender studies by equating them with a feminist "metropolitan elite" (Cain, 2016), which neglects the needs and interests of real women "in the streets" as part of an "othering" strategy about gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, and migration. Akkerman (2015) conducts an in-depth comparative analysis of the positions of the six most successful RPPs in Western Europe and shows that while the RPPs have been more conservative than the traditional right (and claimed this about family issues), they prominently highlight gender issues relating to immigration and integration policies. However, RPPs

are undoubtedly capable of fostering serious setbacks to equality (Morgan, 2017). According to Alonso Álvarez and Espinosa-Fajardo (2023), regression can be identified in at least three dimensions: (1) the delegitimization of existing policies on equality; (2) the elimination of equality measures, the weakening of their implementation, and the reorientation of their objectives; and (3) the erosion of consultation processes that incorporate the voices of the feminist movement (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2018). These regressions represent a multidimensional setback to women's political representation (Alonso Álvarez & Espinosa-Fajardo, 2023).

We define gender backlash as the recent movement against gender equality because of the emergence of radical right-wing parties and a cultural backlash. This backlash has permeated societies differently in terms of public policy, remaining in some countries at the level of rhetoric and discourse and crystallizing in other countries into actual policies. The existing literature also offers the term "gender ideology" as a form of "ideological colonization" (Sauer, 2020; Spierings & Zaslove, 2017, p. 840). Thus, gender is connected with the forces of globalization, neoliberal transformation, and colonialism, in response to which scholars propose interventions against nontraditional lifestyles, such as same-sex marriage, LGBTQI+ rights, and gender equality.[2]

As Ignazi (2003) suggests, the ascension of extreme-right ideologies is a consequence of the "silent revolution" toward reflexive modernity: The ones that feel left behind raise their voices against the changes, leading to a "silent counter-revolution" that explains the ascension of extreme-right-wing parties. This adds to the wider cultural backlash manifested in all fields of society (Inglehart, 2018).

Profile of Right-Wing Parties' Supporters

The theory of cultural backlash and associated body of literature and evidence have presented a clear profile of radical right-wing parties' supporters as the "losers of globalization" (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 132); people (mostly men) from the working and lower-middle classes, of any age, with strong antiimmigrant attitudes, a sense of grievance because of job insecurity, and consequently lower levels of trust who tend to feel threatened by the social and economic transformations of recent decades (Spierings & Zaslove, 2017). In most European countries, the intersection of education, social status or class, and gender explains the growth of the radical right, since mainly young, poorly educated, or unemployed men vote for populist right.

Far-right parties' framing of a "we" against "others" seems to attract more men to its masculinist-heroic leadership stance than women (Schellenberg, 2005, p. 2). Hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) in the right-wing narrative and imaginary is constructed as heroic masculinity, able

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[2] It is important to bear in mind that, while it is possible to bring together the rejection of feminism and the LGBTQI+ movement when talking about the attitudes of RPPs, a broader and deeper reflection on the questioning of both movements would also need to include transphobic attitudes in left-wing populism or in some sectors of feminism, as well as the experience of homosexuality by some representatives of RPPs. This article does not intend to elaborate on this combination, but rather to focus on the subject of the far-right reaction in Europe.

to protect weak and vulnerable women, who are regarded as important for the reproduction of heterosexual families, the nation, and the state (Rommelspacher, 2011, p. 54). However, a good number of women also support radical right-wing parties, and economic factors may explain this phenomenon (Spierings & Zaslove, 2017). The notion of strong men defending the tribe and nation might also attract some women (Dietze & Roth, 2020).

Defined as the phenomenon of people lacking the energy to continuously rebuild gender-neutral spaces, the concept of "gender fatigue" is also a relevant factor for explaining women's support for radical right-wing parties and framing discrimination or backlashes against women as isolated events that happened in the past (Williamson, 2020, pp. 7–10). Gender fatigue places on women the burden of overcoming discrimination. Normalization and exhibition of attitudes toward gender fatigue operate in a context in which gender equality is increasingly being put into question. Consequently, those attitudes questioning said equality or challenging the growing presence of demands to incorporate the gender perspectives in society find shelter in radical right-wing parties and other sectors of society.

Hypotheses

The main theoretical argument of this article is that modernization forces have favored changes in value domains and attitudes toward more progressive positions on gender roles. Therefore, individuals who belong to younger age cohorts, have higher economic status, hold more secularized attitudes (as a consequence of modernization), or have higher levels of education tend to show more permissive attitudes toward gender equality. Modernization theory claims that these younger people generally have more progressive and permissive attitudes toward gender roles.

However, this trend, which extended steadily from the end of the Second World War to 2020, has been interrupted by a cultural backlash, because of the deterioration of material and economic conditions following the 2008 financial crisis and the emergence of right-wing populism, which demands a return to traditional gender and family roles. Based on this cultural backlash, a so-called gender backlash has occurred. Consequently, in the past decade, attitudes about gender roles in the general population have been explained to a greater degree by the pervasive ideological positions of RPPs. Consequently, our main hypothesis (H) is as follows:

H1:   *Differences in attitudes toward gender roles have moved from being explained mainly by modernization factors (age cohort, education level, social or economic status, and secularization) to being explained by ideology (mostly right/left ideology or a preference for strong leadership) over the past decade.*

Research Design

We base this study on two research questions: (1) What determines individual attitudes toward gender roles? (2) Has this effect of determinants been constant/persistent at different socioeconomic development stages over time? To answer these questions, we draw data from the Integrated Values Survey database, which is constructed from the EVS and WVS trend files. These surveys are cross-sectional,

extensive surveys used to collect data from national representative samples of adults (aged 18+) across more than 100 societies, repeated every five-to-nine years since 1981. Based on the EVS and WVS archives, Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences and JD Systems Institute Madrid have generated EVS and WVS trend files for 1981–2022 (European Values Survey, 2022).

Our analysis focuses on European societies because they had more time-point observations. The integrated EVS–WVS data set covered gender beliefs in 48 societies, from 1990 to 2022, in the following waves: EVS–WVS 1990–93, WVS 1994–98, EVS 1999–2000, WVS 2004–09, EVS 2008–09, WVS 2010–14, and EVS–WVS 2017–22. We use four dependent variables given in statements for the various waves. Each statement on gender attitudes asks for agreement on a scale from 1 = strongly agree to 4 = strongly disagree, which we reverse in the analyses to ease interpretation. The statements under assessment are the following: (1) "Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having a job" (BHW); (2) "The husband and wife should both contribute to the household income" (EqInc); (3) "Men make better political leaders than women do" (PolLead); (4) "University is more important for a boy than for a girl" (UnivG). BHW is included in most of the EVS/WVS waves; EqInc is no longer used after EVS 2008–09; and PolLead and UnivG are applied in WVS 1995–97. The supplemental file gives full information about the waves and countries to which each question applied.[3] Let also note that EVS includes in some of the waves additional gender-values items. However, focusing on these items would mean dropping the cases that were not part of the EVS but participated only in the WVS, such as Switzerland-1990, Bosnia-1999, Greece-2017, to give only a few examples. In addition, considering only EVS measurement would imply completely dropping the observations in the 2005 and 2010 waves. Other countries, such as Andorra, are only part of the WVS. To increase the number of measurement points and countries within the data set, we decided to use the joint data set and to focus on the items that were present in both survey series.

For each relevant wave, we compute the means for 10-year cohorts based on the participants' indicated years of birth: before 1920, 1920–29, 1930–39, . . . 1990–99, and 2000+. If, in one country, EVS and WVS data are collected in the same year, the two data sets are pooled, and the two samples receive equal weightings. If, in one country, EVS and WVS data are collected in two different years, even in the same wave (e.g., in EVS–WVS 2017–22, Romania collected WVS data in 2017 and EVS data in 2018), they are considered different measurements.

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[3] It is important to note that the interpretation of the items used to measure gender beliefs and the valuation of the sexual division of labor in the family setting has some limitations, since the meaning may include more than one concept (Braun, 2009). When answering to the question on whether "being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having a job," people can focus on the fulfillment issue (and not on gender roles). The statement that "the husband and wife should both contribute to the household income" has often been criticized because it is sensitive to economic and political regime biases (Voicu & Voicu, 2002). For example, in post-Soviet countries, every adult was obliged to work and contribute to the family income, but this was not related to the meaning of equality values as we intend it today (Constantin & Voicu, 2015). As Lomazzi (2022) rightly states, "without considering the error terms in the estimation of the mean, countries' situations may be described improperly. . . . Therefore, the estimation of error terms becomes even more relevant, not only in principle but also in terms of actual results" (pp. 4855–4877).

We construct the country–cohort–wave cases as pseudo panels (Verbeek, 2008). The pseudo-panel design is more suitable than cross-sectional individual-level data because it allows us to study causal effects rather than covariations. We therefore set up fixed-effects models for the analysis and included the moderating effects of time, as explained in the following section, to overcome the disadvantage of lacking a modeling strategy for the substitution effect of the cohorts.

The four indicators of gender beliefs averaged at the country–cohort–wave level are our dependent variables (Table 1). To test the hypotheses, we used similarly computed indicators (averages for each country–cohort–wave) for left–right political stances and assessed the importance of God as an indicator of cultural modernization. Both of these ideology proxies are derived from one-item measurements. Respondents are asked to position themselves on 10-point scales about their left–right preferences, and similar scales are used to show how important they consider God in their lives. Percentages of highly educated people in the respective cohorts are added to non-religiosity as other indicators of modernity.

Alternative ways to model the political stance were employed for robustness checks, as explained in the online appendix. Other additional models considered the positioning toward a strong leader, army rule, expert government, and democracy as modes to organize society, which are treated as proxy-indicators for populist vs. mainstream stances. The findings are also included in the online appendix.

Table 1. Main Descriptive Variables.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
BHW	1,550	1.67	4.00	2.77	0.33
EqInc	1,099	1.98	4.00	3.20	0.27
PolLead	961	1.00	4.00	2.33	0.50
UnivG	962	1.00	3.44	1.86	0.36
Year of data collection (wave)	1,854	1,989	2,022	2,005.20	9.11
Left–right average political stance	1,806	1	10	5.47	0.71
High education (%)	1,818	0	100	22.11	16.91
Low education (%)	1,818	0	100	32.10	28.07
Importance of God (%)	1,819	1	10	6.47	1.83
Happiness	1,845	1.41	4.00	2.98	0.34
In couple (%)	1,854	0	100	53.03	26.44
Divorced/separated/widowed (%)	1,854	0	100	22.71	22.58
Number of children	1,823	.00	6.01	1.66	0.93
Income: low (%)	1,818	0	100	37.44	22.02
Income: high (%)	1,818	0	100	20.81	16.99
Women (%)	1,854	0	100	53.55	10.55
Unweighted number of cases (cohort wave)	1,854	1	1,420	179.28	134.42

Findings

Over time, all cohorts in all parts of Europe tend to share more egalitarian gender values, except for older cohorts in posttotalitarian southern and eastern regions. The graphs in our supplementary file illustrate this phenomenon. We observe a slight but stable tendency to disagree with labor market inequality; that is, Europe is moving toward more equality, gradually reducing the average agreement with BHW. Agreement with financial equality (EqInc) increases mainly in continental Western Europe, where inequality is the most striking. In almost all cohorts, political inequality (PolLead) also has been decreasing over the decades. Finally, unequal access to higher education (UnivG) shows a steadily decreasing trend across almost all cohorts.

Using the pseudo panels, the fixed-effects models allow us to assess whether changes from one year to another in the levels of the predictors lead to changes in the levels of the dependent variables that stand for gender beliefs.

Table 2 introduces the main models, while other variations and robustness checks are covered in the supplemental online file. We used four similar models to predict average beliefs about labor market inequality, financial equality, political inequality, and educational inequality. Because of the different phrasings of the dependent variables, negative coefficients indicate increasing support for equality in the case of the labor market, educational, and political indicators, respectively, but decreasing support for equality in the case of income equality.

Our first conceptual discussion relates to the effect of political stance, and we expect that people who adopt right-wing positions are more likely to be inclined to support gender inequality. In terms of cohorts over time, the more a cohort shifts to the right, the less support for equality it is expected to show, whereas a shift toward the left indicates a greater propensity to adopt egalitarian gender beliefs. The findings in Table 2 show that political stance does not significantly affect agreement with the BHW statement. As expected, the direct impact is negative not only on labor market equality but also on political inequality and access to education.

The effect is more nuanced when we consider the interaction with the year of data collection. There is no difference in the role of homemaker, but there are some small changes over time. In the 1990s and 2000s, about the average positioning of cohorts toward the presence of women in the labor market, everyone had roughly the same level of acceptance or rejection of the idea, irrespective of left/right self-positioning. However, from the second half of the 2000s, particularly during the 2010s, averages shifted toward more egalitarian beliefs, and the change coincided with more leftist beliefs. Nevertheless, as noted, the effect was not significant at $p < .05$, but it may become significant when observed over a longer period of time.

Table 2. Main Results: Fixed-Effects Models for Pseudo Panels of Cohorts Across Countries.

	BHW	EqInc	PolLead	UnivG
Year	0.007	−0.016	−0.025**	−0.013
Left–right	2.577	−9.191**	−10.622***	−6.129*
Left–right # year	−0.001	0.005**	0.005***	0.003*
High education (%)	0.105	−0.200	0.255[†]	0.153
Highly education (%) # year	0.000	0.000	0.000[†]	0.000
Low education (%)	−0.054	0.094	0.029	0.076
Low education (%) # year	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Importance of God (%)	1.947[†]	2.571[†]	4.212**	3.613**
Importance of God (%) # year	−0.001[†]	−0.001[†]	−0.002**	−0.002**
Happiness	0.121**	0.052	−0.062	0.039
Is in couple (%)	0.003***	0.000	0.001	−0.001
Divorced/separated/widowed (%)	0.004**	0.003*	0.002	−0.001
Number of children	−0.056*	−0.025	−0.092**	0.007
Income: low (%)	0.000	0.000	0.000	−0.001*
Income: high (%)	−0.002**	−0.001	0.000	−0.002**
Women (%)	0.000	0.002*	0.000	0.001
Number of cases (cohort wave)	0.000	0.000**	0.000	0.000
Constant	−12.327	35.442[†]	52.604**	27.745
Observations	1428	1010	896	896
Groups (cohorts)	436	417	371	371
Rho	0.55	0.70	0.86	0.78

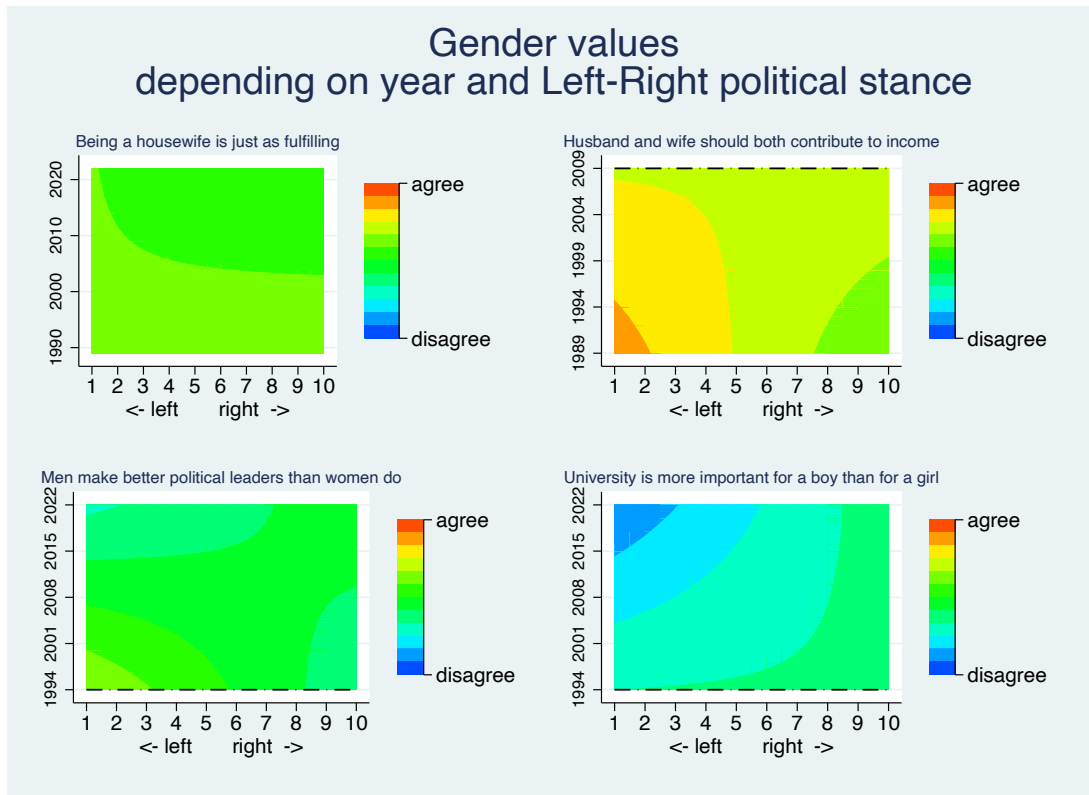*Note.* [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 1. Contour plot for the estimated impact of political stance on gender beliefs according to the year of data collection.

Note. *Dotted lines indicate the last year of measurement (2009) in the case of income, and the first year of measurement (1994) for the other two variables.

Leftist people in Europe see an equal contribution to income as important and, in this case, perceive it as a significant change over time. The difference between left and right was striking at the beginning of the 1990s, but slightly decreased over time, while opinions on equality increased their salience in society, as we have already commented. At the end of the 2000s, when the last measurement was taken, both the right and left supported equality, but the leftists continued to favor equality more.

The difference between left and right self-positioning in terms of gender equality in the European political field shows that the right favored gender equality in the late 1990s and mid-2000s, but the difference has been reversed in the last decade.

The choice of a university education for women depended most clearly on political stance, with leftists being more in favor of equality in recent times, which supported our hypotheses about the growing role of ideology in recent decades.

In fact, after considering the interaction effects and looking at the total effects over time, we observe that ideology increasingly influenced gender beliefs about the labor market, education, and politics. Notably, these are the domains in which societal controversy is strong or where there was explicit support for inequality at the beginning of the period under scrutiny. In the early 1990s, when the new Europe started to emerge after the fall of communism in the eastern states, only income equality was supported by societies. About political and educational equality, there is an important shift, whereas controversy about the labor market prevails. It is specifically in the fields where controversy is still present, or which have Experienced important shifts toward gender-egalitarian beliefs, that political stance has become more important in recent years. This is the meaning of the effects depicted in Figure 1, which confirms our first hypothesis.
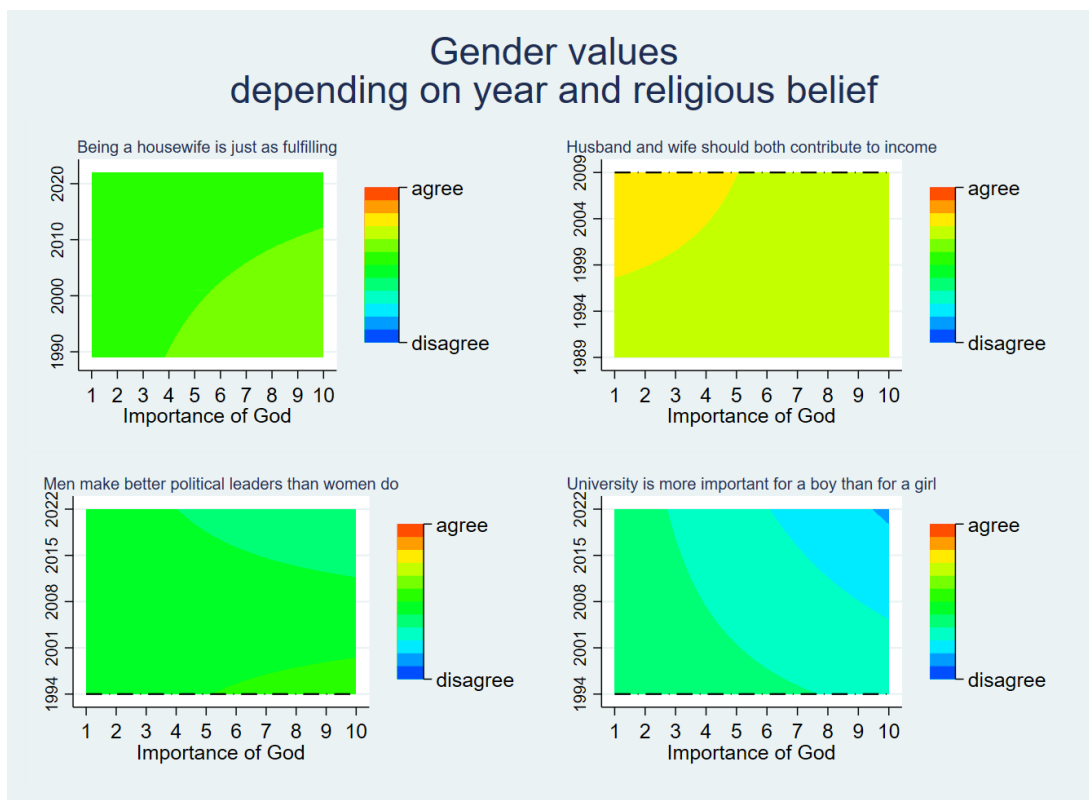

Figure 2. Contour plot for the estimated impact of religious belief on gender values according to the year of data collection.
Note. *Dotted lines indicate the last year of measurement (2009) in the case of income and the first year of measurement (1994) for the other two variables.

As Figure 2 shows, the importance of God as a proxy for modernization was crucial in determining the answers to the BHW statement in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, its influence has diminished to zero in recent years, which is in line with our hypotheses. Concerning EqInc, modernization was unimportant at the beginning of the 1990s but triggered differences (i.e., higher agreement from less religious people) at the

end of the 2000s. At the end of the 2010s, there was a slight influence on PolLead, with religious people showing more misogynistic or less egalitarian attitudes. Again, the most striking impact has been on access to university, with more important segmentations in recent years. However, the effect was the opposite of expectations. In the early 1990s, religious people were slightly less inclined to favor boys than girls for university access, but they became more egalitarian once society moved more in favor of equal access and strengthened their positions over time.

Considering only indirect effects, the point estimates of the interaction effects of the years with political stances are higher than the decreasing effect of religious belief, as stated in our hypothesis. In other words, at the cohort level, changes toward modernity tended to have a lesser impact in recent years than the changes in political stances. However, notably, the confidence intervals overlapped. When considering the impact of education within cohorts, the changes toward modernity triggered only marginally significant changes in gender beliefs and only for political leadership. Again, this aligns with our theoretical expectations.

The various robustness checks that we conducted consisted of modeling the left–right variable differently or adding controls to the model. In all cases, the impact of political self-positioning remained unchanged, at a maximum, with no significant effects when the number of country–cohort waves decreased. Religious beliefs and education also maintained their impacts, at least as a sign of the effect, irrespective of how we modeled them. When decomposing the left–right stances into their components (left, right, center, or no political stance), we observe that changes in the proportions of those with a nonneutral political stance led to similar changes in gender beliefs, irrespective of whether we consider left or right orientations. We also observe a decreasing effect over time in all models, indicating a slower decrease than in the case of modernization indicators. This confirms our hypothesis that, over time, political stances become more salient, and modernization indicators decrease their relative impact.

Similar results are revealed by the additional models that consider the stances toward different ways to organize society (see the online appendix). Beliefs that democracy is the best way to organize society are associated not only with financial and educational equality but also with lower political equality. However, the later effect disappears when controlling for percentages of active women/men. Consistent across models, increases in the choices for army rule are associated with decreasing support for financial equality, remaining significant irrespective of adding more predictors or constraining the sample to larger groups to increase precision. A switch toward stronger options for a government formed of experts tends to increase all four types of equalitarian beliefs, but the effects become significant or not depending on the model. Finally, there is no clear effect of the option for authoritarianism (having a strong leader).

Discussion and Conclusions

This article takes a retrospective view of the past three decades of building a new Europe and examines the degree to which the gender backlash effect can be explained by political positioning in objection to classic explanatory indicators of modernity. The context of cultural backlash and the role of radical right-wing parties' discourse in shaping opposition to women's rights and gender equality are central to this process. The far-right parties' discourse and strategy of communication, by centering the discussion

about traditional gender roles in all sectors of the population, is making these attitudes acceptable across all social groups. In addition, this anti-gender equality discourse makes very effective use of communication networks and channels to ensure the permeation of these attitudes and the normalization of a rhetoric that was previously neglected by mainstream parties and communication networks. Our analysis revealed a world that saw decreases in unequal gender beliefs about the political and educational spheres of life, maintained agreement on the need for both the husband and wife to contribute equally to household income, and observed a steady but small decrease in gender beliefs that favored labor market inequality.

The findings reveal a stronger impact of changes in political ideology than of changes in secularization levels as an indicator of modernization. Such impacts are more important in the domains that experienced important shifts or continued to witness agreement on inequality. Positions about the labor market and education were not paralleled by positions about the political realm. In all of these domains, we proved that the salience of political stances has increased over time, leading to differentiated positioning about gender issues. This finding indirectly stresses the relevance of left–right positioning for today's societies, despite contestation of the differentiation under the ascension of illiberalism and populism across societies. Political stances prove valuable, particularly in spaces where controversy or change is present; therefore, they fulfill their task as political stances—to set goals, discuss salient issues, and give consistency to individual values.

These results support our main argument claiming that ideological positions, mainly along the left–right spectrum, have, in the past decade, begun to substitute for modernization forces as the main explanations for the different positions about gender roles and gender equality. We claim that this shift in the explanatory capacity of attitudes toward gender roles resulted from the emergence of radical right-wing parties, their pervasive influence on traditional gender roles across all ideological positions, and their ability to function as niche parties for those people who hold traditional attitudes toward diversity and gender equality but have felt abandoned and neglected by mainstream parties. Consequently, we suggest that radical right-wing parties foster a gender backlash that is infiltrating some sectors of society, and the sociodemographic characteristics of their voters can clearly indicate which individual variables best explain the reaction to women's advances in society.

Our choice of pseudo panels based on age cohorts allows us to observe causal effects rather than mere covariances. Nevertheless, it limits our capacity to grasp individual-level effects and implies a very strong assumption of homogeneity among cohorts. However, this limitation also provides an opportunity for future studies to consider individual-level analyses and identify subtler impacts.

One may further ask whether the current gender backlash will continue or whether it is the final manifestation of a societal norm that is doomed to extinction. We have placed the gender backlash in the general framework of a "counter-silent revolution" (Ignazi, 2003), a "cultural backlash" (Inglehart, 2018), and a patriarchal reaction to the changes brought about by women (Beauvoir, 1949; Faludi, 1991). These phenomena relate to traditionalists trying to survive their dismissal from their dominant position about social values and voicing their opinions through right-wing stances and political ideologies that trigger polarization in gender values. We expect the process to continue, particularly with the increase in illiberal/populist leaders, as explained earlier in this article, and in the wars generated by nondemocratic hierarchical regimes

in places such as Ukraine and Taiwan. The presence of such powerful symbolic models inspires polarization along political lines, and we expect them to continue influencing the differentiation of gender values in the next 5-to-10 years. However, in the long term, we expect the polarization to fade away as the emotional impact of such elements and the novelty of postmodernization decrease and people become used to the new societal order in which men and women are increasingly equal.

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