
BOOK REVIEW

Roggeband, C. & Krizsán, A. (2021) *Politicizing gender and democracy in the context of the Istanbul Convention*. Palgrave MacMillan

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The Council of Europe Convention on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, commonly referred to as 'the Istanbul Convention,' came into force in 2014, and is one of the most extensive legal and policy instruments on tackling violence against women (p. 2). However, opposition to the Istanbul Convention has become a focal point of broader opposition to gender equality in the European Union. This book explores the emergence and dynamics of this opposition. It investigates its implications for policies combating violence against women and contributes to scholarship of social movements, particularly their transnational qualities and their interaction with opponents and the state.

An extensive account of the actors and strategies in anti-gender movements in four country cases comprise the book's empirics. This includes a comparative analysis of anti-gender movements, consisting of complex networks populated by civil society organisations, religious groups, think tanks, and state actors, and with contextualisation of each national movement which enhances the authors' analysis. The four country cases, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Croatia, all of which have experienced staunch anti-gender mobilisation, offer illuminating variation in the contextual conditions underlying contention about the Istanbul Convention.

The book is divided into six sections. The first offers an introduction to the contestations around the Istanbul Convention, explains how these relate to the broader opposition to gender equality, and outlines the research design. The study applied qualitative methods; the authors describe their use of traditional narrative process tracing and critical frame analysis in order to examine the opposition to the Istanbul Convention. Narrative process tracing enabled the authors to identify and trace the relevant actors, their strategies, the frames used, and policy outcomes in the four countries studied. This method also allowed for the analysis of the resistance launched by women's rights groups by tracing their strategies in the face of anti-Istanbul Convention mobilization and how this impacts feminist mobilization in practice. Critical frame analysis further allowed the authors to explore in depth the way in which frames were manipulated to draw the emphasis away from the issue of violence against women and instead paint the Istanbul Convention as a danger to national sovereignty, democracy and traditional family values.

The second section provides the study's theoretical framework, bridging often disconnected research areas. It unpacks violence against women as a core concept, drawing from feminist theory, and connects this conceptual discussion to combatting violence against women as a policy issue. The authors then describe the politicisation of gender and the Istanbul Convention; the interactions between actors supporting and opposing the Istanbul Convention, and how this interplay impacted the violence against women policy agenda. This is the core of the analysis: triadic contention between feminist, anti-gender, and state actors. After furnishing readers with background knowledge on the politics of violence against women policy, the third section catalogues the actors involved in the four countries and identifies the strategies and frames they used to challenge the Istanbul Convention.

Yet the analysis of contention would be incomplete without accounting for the efforts of women's movements. Section four therefore covers how women's rights activists adapted to the mounting resistance to the Istanbul Convention across the four countries. Detailed accounts are provided of the challenges they faced in the midst of well-planned and coordinated attacks against the Istanbul Convention. Feminist organisations suffered resource deprivation and closing opportunity structures, and either innovated and adapted or demobilised.

Section five delivers detailed examples of how illiberal actors can appropriate democratic terminology in their attempt to give legitimacy to their rhetoric, in this case, by adopting framing that suggests the Istanbul Convention instead infringes upon the rights of women and families. This appropriates the violence against women policy field for the heteronormative, so-called 'pro-family' agenda, which excludes gender equality. Exposing this tactic provides vital information on the manipulation of democratic process to advance anti-equal rights agendas. Crucially, the final section of this book uncovers how this is not only an issue of the four countries analysed, but is part of a transnational movement which is broader than the opposition to gender equality, comprised also of nationalism and xenophobia.

The book makes an important contribution to research on political mobilisation against gender equality, as well as on the efforts of feminist movements to elevate combatting violence against women on the political agenda. While the book provides a valuable in-depth analysis across four countries, it remains unclear how generalizable are the contentious dynamics; whether they are similar in, for example, Turkey, which withdrew from the Istanbul Convention earlier this year, merits further research. Likewise, it would be interesting to examine how anti-gender mobilisation is impacting EU institutions. The effect of incongruous EU member state positions on gender equality has created challenges during EU-level discussions on gender equality, frustrating attempts to forge cohesive internal and external EU stances. Though beyond the scope of the authors' analysis, an analysis of EU-level dynamics would be a useful complement to the substantial ground covered in this text.

Politicizing Gender and Democracy in the Context of the Istanbul Convention is a tool which is not only useful for researchers of political movements or policy making because it goes further than analysing policy changes to assess whether opposition strategies have led to policy backsliding. By exploring the campaigns and networks of aligned actors, the anti-Convention mobilisation cases exemplify how a variety of actors can harness democratic processes to support illiberal agendas. Furthermore, by identifying strategies, frames, and tactics of these mobilisations, the authors provide useful information for researchers, advocates, and policymakers on how to repel opposition to gender equality and to consider the

challenges they face in future discussions related to gender equality. Ongoing national and transnational movements are working to stall, prevent, and water down policies which advance health and human rights; this book is therefore essential reading for scholars and activists in the fields of political science, gender studies, and public and global health.

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