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iFokus

The Anti-Gender Movement:

Who Are They and What Do They Want?

Når kvinneforakt blir storpolitisk våpen

Går kvinners og seksuelle
minoriteters rettigheter i revers?



Why American Ideologues Are Attacking Gender



Several thousand people gathered on the grounds of the Iowa State Capitol for "If You Can't Hear Our Voice, Hear Our Vote," the second annual edition of the Women's March and the first anniversary of the inauguration of Donald Trump. Photo: Phil Roeder/Flickr.

The Trump administration is systematically attacking women and gender equality.

In its first year, the Trump administration carried out bold, public attacks on women and gender, including its reintroduction and massive expansion of the Global Gag Rule and its defunding of UNFPA.

At the end of the second year, we saw new tactics emerge — more subtle, more bureaucratic, and likely long lasting attacks.

The administration is systematically destroying the government's position on sexual and reproductive health and rights for all, instead pushing the burden of health solely onto women.

Advocates in Washington, D.C. and New York are doing what they can to monitor both the people and the actions seeking to undermine decades of progress on gender equality, as the attacks are formalizing from chaotic to more systematic.

The Trump administration's anti-gender ideology

Much of the anti-gender ideology in the Trump administration seems to come from Vice President Mike

Pence and his acolytes throughout the political ranks of the government.

Vice President Pence himself is known for his rigid view of gender relationships and his attacks on Planned Parenthood.

As vice president, he is linked with ideologically driven political appointments, including the State Department's Mari Stull, who is under investigation for political retribution and using anti-LGBTQ slurs, and Bethany Kozma, a USAID gender advisor with an outsized influence and history of anti-transgender activism.

Anti-feminist rhetoric

The themes in the rhetoric and policy proposals coming from these actors are deeply conservative and rooted in anti-abortion and anti-feminist views.

At the most basic level, the ideology sees gender as binary, fixed in utero by biology and God, not society, and unchanging.

This is not the global, scientific, or indeed, even American, way of viewing gender, yet this is what they want to see reflected in the definitions, policies, and programs of the U.S. government. As leaked documents become U.N. negotiating positions, advocates are getting a better sense of the depth and breadth of the Trump administration's anti-gender ideology, and what's at stake.

While no formal redefinitions have been publicly proposed, staff throughout the U.S. government have received draft talking points and been given specific – political – edits to internal documents and negotiated language. Edits have included amending global women's economic empowerment language to add anti-feminist language regarding, "if women chose to work outside the home," and an aggressive attack on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) language.

Attack on sexual and reproductive health

The aggressive attack on SRH is notable as it reinforces a rigid gender binary, suggesting substituting in "women's health care ... including those factors that impact sexual function and reproduction, voluntary and informed family planning and related information and education in context sensitive to cultural, religious, and national priorities." This language re-embeds SRH as the role and sole responsibility of women, erasing wholly the SRH of men and boys, people who are transgender and nonbinary, and undermines a health framework that meets the needs of people who are intersex. This is violent erasure in language, and a recipe for inadequate and ideologically driven programming.

Gender-based violence vs. violence against women

Other edits and shifts made by U.S. political actors at the U.N. and State Department have included suggesting removal of "gender-based violence" (GBV) in favor of "violence against women and girls." While this could seem a semantic shift, it has enormous consequences in programs and services.

"Gender-based violence" has been defined in U.S. global health assistance as "any form of violence that is directed at an individual based on his or her biological

sex, gender identity or expression, or his or her perceived adherence to socially-defined expectations of what it means to be a man or woman, boy or girl. It includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse; threats; coercion; arbitrary deprivation of liberty; and economic deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life. GBV is rooted in gender-related power differences, including social, economic and political inequalities. It is characterized by the use and abuse of physical, emotional, or financial power and control. GBV takes on many forms and can occur across childhood, adolescence, reproductive years, and old age. It can affect women and girls, men and boys, and other gender identities."

Substituting in "violence against women and girls" strips the evidence-based definition of all meaning, and would mean that gay or bisexual men, and people who are transgender, as well as any who performs gender "differently" can easily be excluded from programs, including post-GBV care.

Attack on gender equality is an assault on global progress

Of course, in both existing U.S. policies and at the U.N., changing "gender equality" to "women's equality" does more than harm sexual orientation and gender identity. It fundamentally changes agreed upon language, and obscures important objectives.

The USAID Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, originally released in 2012, states that "gender equality and female empowerment are core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes." Central to this policy is the term "gender equality," which refers to the equal enjoyment of rights, opportunities, resources, and rewards across genders.

There are no benign edits. American ideologues are testing what they can rewrite, erase, and reframe, and advocates must take every edit of "gender" and "sexual and reproductive health" as an assault on the global progress since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. □



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«GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TAKES ON MANY FORMS AND CAN OCCUR ACROSS CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE, REPRODUCTIVE YEARS, AND OLD AGE.»
