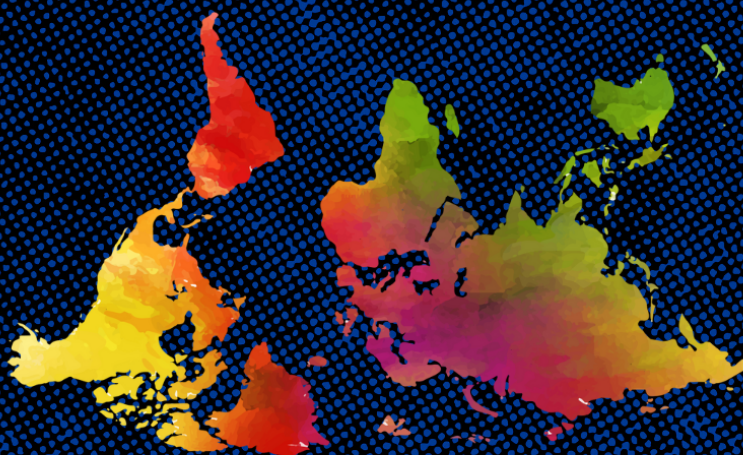


Sexual Politics in times of Pandemic - 2021 Retrospective

March 2022



First thoughts

The [last 2020 SPW special](#) hypothesized that during 2021, because of vaccines, Covid-19 would no longer be our main topic, but that did not prove to be the case. The pandemic followed its devastating course with the emergence of new, more aggressive variants, and the loss of life did not abate. In Brazil, where we are writing, 620,000 people had died [by the end of 2021](#). The pandemic has remained a dominant topic on the global debate agenda, and so we continue to collect and process information that contributes to a better understanding of the multiple and complex implications of the health crisis, including with regard to sexual politics, which is our main theme.

Throughout the year, the spread of the virus and its effects not only intertwined with a chain of events and political, economic, and social trends, but also appeared in our field of observation. Characterizing this dynamic are the interconnected traces of de-democratization and autocratic sedimentation on the one hand, and the worsening

patterns of socioeconomic inequality on the other. This worsening contrasts sharply with projections made in the early 2020s that the crisis seemed to be opening up space for addressing and correcting inequities in access to resources and well-being. This promise was illustrated by the [now-forgotten declaration](#) signed by dozens of millionaires, published in July 2020, which proposed the adoption of taxes on large fortunes as one of the solutions to the economic crisis arising from Covid-19.

Since then, the pandemic has in fact favored the rapid enrichment of the richest and the worsening precariousness of the conditions of existence of the poorest, whose vulnerability, as we know, is crossed by class, race-ethnicity, gender, age, abilities, and also by geographical differences. Oxfam's 2021 annual report, whose title is "Inequality Kills", shows, among other things, that the wealth of the ten richest men in the world [has doubled since March 2020](#), while 99% of the population has lost income and access to land, food, and services ([click here](#) to access the full report).

In the context of the pandemic, a dramatic effect of this widening inequality is vaccine apartheid. By December 31, 2021, only half of African countries had vaccinated more than 10% of their populations. In contrast, in Brazil, despite our brutal inequality and official denialism, 70% of the population has already been vaccinated. The emergence in November of the ultra-contagious Omicron variant and its exponential spread since then suggest that conditions unfavorable to equality are not going to abate. And, as virologists and epidemiologists have said ad nauseam, vaccine disparity favors the emergence of new variants. That is the scenario that is projected for 2022.

In this retrospective of 2021, it is clear that the year was very tough, not to say overwhelming. But we have also recorded events, moments, analyses, and interpretations that nourish our energies and push our imaginations in the direction of a more breathable and livable world. Lastly, since the English version of the year's round-up is coming a bit late in 2022, we have included information on events that occurred since January 1st that, albeit briefly, may offer a glimpse into the new year's trends.

Analyses by collaborators

Throughout 2021, we published a significant number of analyses by our collaborators that were produced exclusively for SPW or that we had the exclusive opportunity to translate. To this list are added two new texts published in this issue. We are very grateful for the generosity of these authors who broaden the plurality of lenses we use to examine the politics of gender and sexuality.

[The Failure of the Zan Law, the Neo-Catholic Movement and Vatican Policy: Interview with Massimo Prearo](#)

[Pedro Castillo: A Bicentennial Without Clear Proposals on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Absent in His First Message to the Nation – Ángel Pineda](#)

[Brazil: Maternal Death in the Context of Covid-19 \(2020-2021\) \(In Portuguese\)- Sandra Valongueiro](#)

[A Ministry for a Family: Dystopia and “familism 2.0” \(In Portuguese\) – Andrea Moraes Alves](#)

[Covid and Gender-Based Violence: An Analysis of the Impacts of the Crisis in Senegal \(In French\) – Codou Bop](#)

[Are Women Human Beings? – by Françoise Girard](#)

[The US Supreme Court is a Threat to Abortion Rights – Françoise Girard](#)

[Revealing the Reconfiguration of Population Politics in China – Yping Cai](#)

[Decriminalization with exclusion: Ecuador’s new rape abortion law – Manuela Lavinas Picq](#)

State of the Pandemic

In 2021, 198 million new cases of Covid-19 were officially registered, of which 3.5 million ended in death. The number may be even more frightening when it is known that there is, in global terms, [a high rate of underreporting](#). The hope that vaccination would curb the pandemic has not been realized for a number of reasons. As we have reported in our specials over the past year, new outbreaks have appeared on all continents, both in countries that in 2020 had been spared from the virus and in those that had already experienced dramatic epidemiological situations.

Vaccination did have a positive impact on the pandemic, ensuring clinical protection against severe forms of the disease and allowing social and economic life to return somewhat to its normal rhythm. However, unpredictable in many ways, the virus managed to evade the immunity built up by immunization, as the Omicron variant proves. As if this was not enough, resistance to vaccination encouraged by denialist forces has undermined vaccination coverage. This widespread refusal in many quarters gives impetus to the circulation of the virus, as shown in a [DW report](#). We also indicate a [Lancet article](#) that examines how the vaccine gap is the main factor enabling the surge

of new variants.

The current state of the pandemic worldwide continues to reinforce the reading of [Covid-19 as a syndemy](#). The disease manifests itself [in particular forms](#) according to the economic, political, and social scenarios where the virus circulates. Global in scope, Covid-19 has triggered distinct local and regional impacts. Access to vaccination, for example, has followed familiar patterns of North-South inequality. As shown in a *New York Times* [article](#), while some countries are on the way to applying the fourth dose, others, especially in Africa, are lagging behind in the coverage of the very first dose. We also note the alarming effects of differential vulnerability: it is flagrant that [gender](#), [race](#), [housing](#), and location are determinants of conditions of care, illness, and death. In Brazil, a study by the [Solidarity Research Network](#) showed how the lethality of Covid-19 was distributed across the different sectors of the labor market, revealing, above all, that in all of them being black or being a woman is always a factor of greater risk.

Amidst so many obstacles hampering the response to the pandemic and its wider effects, it is fundamental to make visible and to value the civil society initiatives dedicated to overcoming them, such as, for example, the [effort to suspend vaccine patents](#) mobilized by the Feminist Campaign for Vaccines.

The Economy in the Pandemic

Also an economic crisis, the pandemic had catastrophic effects in terms of recession and the destruction of production chains and entire sectors of national economies. These impacts followed the usual pattern of crises of capitalism, perversely and unequally affecting the working classes and disadvantaged sectors. The de-financing and deregulation of health and social protection systems took a heavy toll, not only in terms of Covid-19 mortality and morbidity, but also by increasing unemployment and reducing incomes.

The economic devastation caused by the pandemic was especially hard on women. Gender inequalities were exacerbated, not least because the pandemic expanded women's responsibility in the care economy and confined people and social life to the domestic environment. In that respect, we recommend the [article](#) published in *La Diaria* (in Spanish) on the labor market crisis for women and girls in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as an [analysis](#) published by the *Washington Post* that addresses the damage resulting of the pandemic in relation to the women's participation in the labor market globally. An [article](#) in *The Lancet* also drew attention to the consequences of this scenario in the medium and long term. And in the case of Brazil, a recent [article](#) in the *Folha de São Paulo* analyzed the harsh negative impacts of the pandemic on domestic workers.

The educational field is another area drastically affected by the pandemic. Recent data from UNICEF indicate that today 70% of children aged 7 to 10 years old in low- and middle-income countries cannot read and write due to the suspension of classroom lessons and lack of access to digital platforms. In Brazil, according to the 2021 School Census, released on January 31, 2022, [650,000 children's education enrollments were lost](#), and, according to experts, they will not be easily recovered. The [massive growth of orphanhood](#) is another tragedy that deserves attention and about which very little is being said. Orphanhood caused by Covid-19 is associated with gender and care giving. It also implies drastic social fallout in terms of poverty and access to education requires a robust social policy response that, however, we have not seen being implemented anywhere.

As noted above, the brutal scale of the economic crisis at first suggested that the pandemic could eventual lead to a fuller recognition of patterns of inequality and mobilize consistent policies to address them. However, this has not been the case. More recently, several research efforts have illuminated the overall worsening of inequality, such as the aforementioned Oxfam study. But nothing indicates that these pleas are being heard. The city of São Paulo, for example, [registered 32,000 homeless people in 2021](#), a population larger than that of 80% of Brazilian cities – 71% of these homeless people are brown/black. All over the world, [hunger and food insecurity](#) are spreading, implying a [severe setback to global progress in fighting hunger](#). In Brazil, specifically, as the [BBC](#) and the [Folha de São Paulo](#) have shown, a true devastation is underway. The [photos of women and children in line waiting for the disposal of bones](#) made by supermarkets will be forever remembered as deplorable images of the year 2021.

Politics: normalization of abnormality

At the political level, a striking feature of the pandemic era has been, as we have pointed out since our [first Special Issue of April 2020](#), the profusion of episodes of de-democratization and the worsening of autocratic politics. Since then, however, this trait has become increasingly normalized. In 2020, [Duterte's policy of shooting to kill](#) anyone who disrespected lock-down measures in the Philippines still caused astonishment. Throughout 2021, there were several coups or de-democratization dynamics that after being reported quickly disappeared from TV screens, first pages, websites, and social media.

In Europe, for example, Viktor Orbán's Hungary [further restricted civic space](#) and waged attacks against [opponents and journalists](#). In Poland, [reports of civil rights violations](#) have also continued, especially in terms of weakening the free press. In [Belarus](#), the Lukashenko regime, in addition to [continuing its escalation of repression](#), [diverted a plane to arrest a journalist on board](#) and has created a major [crisis on the borders of Poland and Lithuania](#) (members of the European Union) by accepting

thousands of migrants and refugees into the country.

In Latin America, the political nightmare of the [Ortega-Murillo regime](#) in Nicaragua continues, while in neighboring El Salvador the [self-styled dictator Nayib Bukele](#) has not relented his [attacks on institutions](#) and kept feeding a climate favorable to [the violation of human rights](#). In Africa, meanwhile, a sequence of military coups was taken place: in May, in [Mali](#); in September, in [Guinea](#); and in October, in [Sudan](#), the military seized power, brutally interrupting a [vibrant redemocratization process](#) that began in 2019. Finally, in Ethiopia's Tigray region, a separatist war has left a trail of destruction, [deaths, reports of sexual abuse](#), and [famine](#).

In the Arab world, the endless killings that mark the armed conflicts in Syria and Yemen have also kept their pace. And in Tunisia, the president, Kais Said, struck a hard blow in July by [granting himself superpowers](#), an episode that signals toward the final evanescence of the democratic dreams of the Arab Spring, which began exactly ten years before 2021. In Asia, while in [India under the Modi government](#) and in [Sri Lanka](#) admittedly autocratic regimes remain in place, at the beginning of 2022, in [Kazakhstan](#), at least 225 people died and 5,000 were arrested in protests against high fuel prices.

Brazil was also another unequivocal [stage of de-democratizing dynamics](#). Throughout 2021, systematic attacks on institutions and anti-democratic onslaughts have intertwined with the biopolitics of the pandemic. Not only the [neo-Darwinist and denialist policies of the Bolsonaro administration](#) were implicated in the loss of 620,000 lives. The health crisis itself has become a stage on which arbitrary state measures have been displayed. Concurrently, Italian fascism-inspired "[motorcades](#)" were convoked, [routine insults and offenses](#) to the press and institutions have gained scale and [vicious rhetoric against the electoral system took form](#). These various trends culminated in a coup-like spectacle on [September 7](#) (Independence Day). In this highly troubled context, the [Covid-19](#) Parliamentary Inquiry Commission, installed in April 2021, opened a significant space for the exposure of corruption and deliberate mismanagement of the pandemic crisis and grounded the accusation of the crimes against humanity and other human rights violations perpetrated since 2020 (see the [report](#) published in October 2021).

Above all, 2021 began with the storming of the Capitol, the seat of the US Congress. This unusual event brutally revealed the scale and depth of democratic erosion in the US. The attack, which would have been unthinkable ten years ago, has been the subject of exhaustive description and analysis, including a detailed and careful [reconstruction of the fateful day by the NYT](#). And even though the US democratic architecture has not been shaken in a definitive way, analyses published in early 2022 to mark one year of the invasion seriously question whether the US is on its way to a civil war. An [article](#) by David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, is an example of this.

Signs of growing authoritarianism are also seen on the other pole of global geopolitics,

that is, in China. This trend is not exactly new, but it has become stronger during 2021, evidenced by the spectacular celebration of the centenary of the Communist Party, the [personal cult](#) of the figure of President Xi Jinping, and, most especially, the increasingly [draconian control](#) of the political system in Hong Kong. Not to mention, the upsurge in state violence against the [Muslim Uighur minority](#) and [new threats to invade Taiwan](#).

In March 2022, the V-DEM Institute, which in 2021 released the [report “Autocracy Has Gone Viral”](#), will publish its assessment of the state of democracies in the second year of the pandemic. By then, we will know with greater precision whether autocratization and de-democratization have worsened or not in the pandemic context. Before that, an [opinion poll conducted by YouGov](#), which surveyed 80,000 people in 27 countries, brought paradoxical results. It showed, on the one hand, that populist leaders like Bolsonaro, López Obrador, and Orbán have lost electoral support due to their poor management of the pandemic crisis. But on the other hand, it also identifies greater adherence to authoritarian policies and leadership, especially among young people.

On a geopolitical level, 2021 was also the year of the troubled US military withdrawal and the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan. This disaster has been interpreted in many quarters as a strong sign of the decline of the American hegemony. It has also made it abundantly clear that projects of democracy imposed by force [are doomed to fail](#). Our approach to this new political and humanitarian tragedy emphasized its [catastrophic effects](#) on the lives of girls, women, and minorities. It also underscored once again how [problematic it is to tie women's rights to imperial games](#), as it has happened when Afghanistan was invaded in 2001. Complementing this analysis, in January 2022, Human Rights Watch and OutRight jointly published a detailed [report](#) on the violations experienced by Afghan LGBTIQ+ people since August 2021.

Electoral processes

Another important facet of the global political landscape to be examined concerns a number of electoral processes, which positively signal the resilience of democratic architectures, even when their outcomes are paradoxical, and risks of further erosion remain palpable on the horizon.

Latin America, in particular, was the scene of several significant elections. In Argentina, where the year had begun with [celebrations for the abortion law reform](#), the November legislative elections [meant a defeat](#) for the Alberto Fernández government, and the extreme right or libertarian right, whose icon is Javier Milei, [expanded its electorate](#).

Before that, in April, in Ecuador, former banker Guillermo Lasso, a conservative with reported ties to Opus Dei, won the presidential election in an election in which the runoff was hotly contested between two leftist forces. The winner of this contest was the indigenous leader Yaku Pérez, and the process seems to have brought so-called

Correism to an end. *Revista Rosa* has produced a [dossier on the process](#) and SPW has also [compiled articles](#) on the prospects and implications of the new government (in Portuguese and Spanish). The Lasso administration, as soon as it was sworn in, was hit by a major crisis in the [prison system](#) and by accusations of fiscal malpractice against the president, who was [cited in the Pandora Papers](#).

Then in Peru, trade unionist Pedro Castillo [won the presidential election](#), held in June. Although [celebrated by sectors of the Latin American left](#), his coming to power caused much concern amongst feminists and LGBTTI activists because of his position in relation to sexuality, gender, and abortion. Ángel Pineda [wrote an article](#) for SPW about these tensions. Since July 2021, the Castillo government has experienced consecutive waves of instability. Under attack from a hyper-conservative Congress, in early February, [the fourth re-shuffling of the cabinet](#) has taken place.

In Chile, the social upheaval of 2019 created an exceptional political dynamic that led to the [formation of a Constitutional Convention](#) to reform the constitution inherited from the Pinochet dictatorship. However, in the November presidential elections, the far-right candidate José Antonio Kast won the first round. Although the margin of votes was small, this victory signaled a direction radically contrary to the social and political process underway in the country.

Subsequently, after an intense and competitive campaign, in the second round that took place in December, the left-wing candidate [Gabriel Boric was elected president](#). The victory was by a significant margin and has many positive meanings, the most important being the defeat of the extreme right. But it is also vital to underline that Boric also represents a new generation of the Chilean left and politics more broadly speaking. Above all, his election signals a renewal of the Latin American left ([see our Spanish and Portuguese compilation](#) on Boric's election). Boric has already appointed his [cabinet](#), which includes fourteen women, a socialist as economy minister, a gay man as education minister, and a lesbian as sports minister.

In Honduras, Xiomara Castro, wife of Manuel Zelaya, whose government was ousted by a military coup in 2009, [won the elections](#), also leading a leftist front. This victory is relevant because of this past event, but also because Honduras was, in recent years, under the rule of a narco-government whose deceit and autocratic traits are widely known. Castro was strongly [supported by the feminist movement](#).

Finally, in Costa Rica, the first round of the presidential election took place on February 6, 2022. This was a very atomized electoral process in which the most competitive candidates were all situated on the right of the political spectrum. Going into the second round are José María Figueres of the National Liberation Party (PLN) and a former president of the country, and the economist Rodrigo Chaves of the newly created Social Democratic Party who has strong neoliberal leanings. According to a [BBC report](#), Figueres has been accused of corruption, while Chavez has been accused of sexual

harassment while working for the World Bank. Meanwhile, the pastor-singer Fabricio Alvarado, who came in second in the 2018 elections mobilizing a [strong anti-gender agenda](#), got just 15% of the vote.

Turning our eyes to Europe, in 2021, the Merkel era in Germany came to an end. The chancellor's long political life ended with a relatively weak victory for Social Democrats that entailed [long and complex negotiations](#) to form a new government. Quite significantly, the [extreme right did not perform well](#). Before that, in the Nordic countries, for the first time in several decades, Social Democrats returned to power. Meanwhile, in Portugal, contrary to the polls, the Socialist Party [enjoyed an overwhelming victory](#) over the PSD, its center-right opponent. The PS will have an absolute majority in the Assembly. However, the election also saw the rise of the extreme right [as the third force in Congress](#), as Chega, which until then had only one deputy, now has twelve representatives in parliament.

More elections are scheduled for 2022. In Latin America, Costa Rica will have its second round soon, and in March Colombian legislative elections take place followed by the presidential round in May. In Brazil, in October, the political catastrophe of the Bolsonaro government will be put to the test. So far, polls show that Lula da Silva leads by a wide margin. In Europe, the French elections are shaping up to be the most difficult in many decades. Most notably, the Biden administration and Trumpism will clash in the mid-term legislative elections. In other words, this will be an electorally turbulent year with new uncertainties on the horizon.

Sexual Politics in the pandemic

Anti-gender offensives

Anti-gender crusades did not retreat during the pandemic. Right on the contrary, as noted by [Clare Prevost](#), in 2020, when COVID-19 erupted these forces used the crisis as an opportunity. In particular, the use of fake news and the promotion of disinformation typical of anti-gender movements converged with the conspiratorial delusions of the anti-vaccine movements that were already at work since 2020 but gained significant momentum in 2021.

In Brazil, the machinery of disinformation fueled overlapping panics in relation to vaccines, communism, and sexuality. As [analyzed](#) by Isabela Kalil and co-authors, immunization was linked to [aborted fetal tissues](#) and conspiratorial allegations were made that Coronavac, produced by the Butantan Institute in partnership with China, carried a chip aimed at [sterilizing Brazilian men](#). The article also correctly notes that the anti-communist panic connected to the vaccine is, directly or indirectly, associated with the “gender ideology” strawman. The independent news agency [Pública](#), in turn, identified the confluence between groups of doctors opposed to the right to abortion

who also attack social isolation measures and promote ineffective treatments against Covid-19. Some of these figures are installed in the Ministry of Health and have close ties to the Federal Council of Medicine, which is the regulatory body of the medical profession (in Spanish).

In Colombia, meanwhile, anti-vaccine protests appropriated the vocabulary of feminist struggles by brandishing placards that read “[my body, my choice](#).” Anti-vaccine forces also took crowds to the streets in [Europe](#) as well as in the [US](#) and [Canada](#). Much yet remains to be researched before we are able to more fully grasp the motivations, scale, and significance of these movements. In this respect, we recommend as a good starting point [Richard Parker's article](#) on the production of ignorance in the pandemic.

The pandemic has evidently enabled the agitation of anti-gender forces. Even so, as of mid-2021, these offensives began to shift away from epidemiological dynamics to return to their more conventional dynamics, linked to the politics of gender and sexuality. This shift was decidedly marked by intense transnational connectivity. For example, in September, Pope Francis visited Hungary and Slovakia. On this tour, the pope repeated his well-known recommendations on the “pastoral welcome of homosexuals” while also taking the opportunity to reactivate the attack on “gender”. In a conversation with Jesuits in Slovakia, Francis said that gender is an abstract concept that “[exerts a diabolical fascination because it is not incarnate](#)”. All suggests that this statement was aimed at the ongoing parliamentary debate in Italy on the Zan hate crimes and anti-discrimination law that would stall a month later. In an [exclusive interview](#), political scientist Massimo Prearo analyzed this Italian parliamentary debate in light of what he calls the neo-Catholic movement and assessed the role of the Vatican in the process.

Hungary was an important epicenter of these connections. Right after the papal visit, Budapest hosted the Fourth Demographic Summit, hosted by the country's government, since 2018, to debate Europe's fertility decline and the “migration problem”. Marine Le Pen [was also in Budapest](#) to discuss with Prime Minister Orbán the “impositions” of the European Union that, according to both, infringe on the “constitutional identity of their countries”. It should also be noted that shortly before the G-20 Summit in Rome, in October, Russian President Vladimir Putin gave a [long speech](#) on geopolitical conditions and the global economy at the Valdai Club Discussion, in which several paragraphs were devoted to the “gender problem”.

The activity was also intense in Latin America, with representatives of VOX, the Spanish right-wing party, visiting the region to [collect support for the Madrid Charter](#). This step signaled towards scaling-up of [extreme right movement across the region](#). As we were finishing this year's round-up, an article in the Spanish newspaper *El Diario* covered a meeting of European right-wing parties in Madrid, in which VOX positioned itself as the main [potential liaison](#) between European groups and their counterparts in the Americas. In February, right before this edition was published, the [Madrid Charter](#)

[Forum was held in Bogota](#) (in Spanish), gathering a number of Spanish and regional right-wing actors.

In Latin America, Brazil was another hub of intense activity. In late September, Bolsonaro, who had [hosted an AfD leader in July](#), held talks (outside the official agenda) with [two German anti-vaccine activists](#). Before that, in preparation for the September 7th marches, the [ultraconservative American CPAC club met again](#) in Brazil. The gathering was devoted to a wide range of issues, including [attacks on feminism, abortion, and gender identity](#) (in Portuguese). Concurrently, the Financial Times informed that the congressman Luiz Felipe de Orleans, who is a faithful supporter of Bolsonaro, was raising funds for the new Trump media's venture. This was followed by Bolsonaro's [shameful participation](#) (in Portuguese) at the G20 Meeting in Rome when the Brazilian Foreign Minister announced that Bolsonaro would make an official visit to Russia. Right before this edition was finalized, in the midst of [diplomatic tensions](#) stemming from the Russian threat to invade Ukraine, Bolsonaro traveled to Russia and Hungary. A more full report on these errands will be published in the next edition.

Furthermore, parallel Brazilian diplomacy has been unfolding since April 2021, when Minister Ernesto Araújo left office and the management of transnational connection with the ultra-conservative camp was transferred to the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights. These activities are mainly led by Angela Gandra, National Secretary of the Family, while eventually also including Damares Alves, the Minister. In the [October special](#) we took stock of Gandra's and Damares's moves since July. At the beginning of 2022, there are signs that this diplomatic strategy now is shifting its focus to Latin America. In January, Angela Gandra was in Colombia for the Arete Academy run by Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) where she met José Antonio Kast. She also visited the Ecuadorian embassy in Brasilia and has already announced her participation in the Ibero-American Congress for Life and Family to be held soon in Guatemala.

Many battlefields

In factual terms, many setbacks in relation to gender and sexuality have been registered in the course of 2021. In Hungary, the Orbán government [banned LGBTQ+ content in schools and advertisements](#), and after having been harshly criticized it called for a referendum on the law, which will coincide with the April legislative elections. In Poland, ultra-Catholic pedagogies are [now integrated into education policies](#). Furthermore, new developments have taken place in relation to the so-called "LGBT-free zones" created in certain regions because in some cases these rules have been suspended [after the European Union threatened to cut its funding](#). Both countries are at the center of anti-gender movements cyclone in Europe as analyzed by the report ["Tip of the Iceberg"](#), which examines the complex funding flows that feed European neoconservative and far-right organizations and networks.

In Brazil, the Bolsonaro government has also made significant contributions to

anti-gender crusades. It appointed André Mendonça, an anti-gender, and anti-abortion fundamentalist Presbyterian pastor to the Supreme Court ([read the compilation in Portuguese](#)). It has also created a macabre instrument to police and criminalize “gender”. In early 2021, the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights (MMFDH) changed the architecture of the hotlines through which the denunciations of human rights violations are made. The new manual to guide the registering of complaints has abolished the terms “gender”, “homophobia” and “transphobia”.

Furthermore, “gender ideology” is defined in the manual as a “motivation for institutional violence against children and adolescents”. In November 2021, two public school professors were called by the police after having been denounced as propagators of “gender ideology” and “communism” through the hotline. As observed by the [note published by SPW on the episode](#) (in Portuguese), a policy instrument originally created to monitor human violations was converted into a mechanism of surveillance and ideological patrolling. In January, the MMFDH announced that it would make the hotline available for denounces against “forceful COVID-19 vaccination” and requirements of vaccine passport. In February, these misuses of the hotline became the [object of a lawsuit](#) presented to the Supreme Court, by two national confederations of workers, which frontally contest their constitutionality. A first preliminary decision has suspended the use of mechanisms for vaccine-related denunciations.

It should also be mentioned that a novel anti-gender trend at play worldwide since late 2020 is the attacks against gender-inclusive language that erupted concurrently in [France](#), [Spain](#), and [Germany](#). The French case had wider repercussions after the traditional dictionary *Le Robert* [included the neuter pronoun “iel” in its records](#). The groundswell is also building in Brazil, where dozens of bills have been introduced and several executive decrees were adopted that prohibit the use of inclusive vocabulary in education, the press, and documents presented to the federal administration.

No less importantly, in 2021 the landscape of anti-gender politics was also marked by the [expansion and increased visibility](#) of radical or anti-gender feminism, especially in Spain and England. One emblematic episode involved the feminist philosopher Judith Butler who was [interviewed by The Guardian](#) in September. After the interview was published the response in which she addressed the question of anti-gender feminism was deleted and this caused controversies (more [here](#)). Shortly thereafter, the newspaper published an [article by the philosopher](#) in which she resumes and amplifies her analysis of the intersections between trans-exclusive feminisms and far-right and fascist-inspired forces that had been previously censored.

Finally, a significant event on the national and world anti-gender landscape scene was the death of Olavo de Carvalho, the Brazilian traditionalist ideologue, known to be the guru of the Bolsonaro family and a close friend of Steve Bannon. Since the 1990's Carvalho embodied, like nobody else, the figure of the intellectual leader of the so-called Gramscian turn in Brazil. The magazine *Piauí* published an [article](#) about the

legacy left by Carvalho that also examines the financing of his activities and [exceptional analysis](#) of his trajectory by Camila Rocha was also published by “Ilustríssima”, the cult section of *Folha de São Paulo*.

LGBTQT+ rights under threat

Attacks on LGBTQT+ rights were news in the African continent. Episodes of persecution and violence against individuals and legal setbacks made headlines in Botswana, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, and Kenya ([learn more here](#)). Similarly, in Eastern Europe, we reported setbacks, most notably in [Lithuania](#) and [Georgia](#). In Asia, the Chinese government [excluded LGBTQT+ content from digital platforms](#) and there was an [offensive against “effeminate men”](#) clearly motivated by a nationalist and masculinist ideology.

In Latin America, it is important to draw attention to and repudiate the [bill](#) that Guatemalan deputies presented in Congress that uses [pathologizing language](#) to restrict the rights of transgender people and prevent access to education, information, and health.

In Europe, there were the mentioned attacks on LGBTQT+ rights in Hungary and the stalling in the Italian parliament of a law against hate crimes and discrimination. Also to be mentioned are the “LGBT-free zones” in Poland that prompted condemnations and measures from the European Union.

And in the US, the offensives have also been brutal, as dozens of decrees, laws, and bills restricting LGBTQT+ rights have been introduced and adopted. The Human Rights Campaign has issued a [statement](#) about an unprecedented wave of attacks on trans rights in state legislatures. In October, Texas joined seven other states in [banning trans girls from participating in women's sports](#). In addition, offensives against sex education have been taking on [new contours](#). According to an [article](#) in *The New Yorker*, Republican Glenn Youngkin's victorious campaign in Virginia targeted the slow return to school after the pandemic, the “intrusion of critical race theory into curricula, and respect for fluid gender norms in public schools”. Similar initiatives are being proposed in Florida. Then in February, the Texas Attorney General and Governor Greg Abbott announced that affirming a transgender young person's gender identity could be considered “child abuse” under Texas law. A directive was issued to ground and investigation of children and adolescents health care services, which as qualified by an [article](#) in *The Nation* as terrorizing of trans youth.

Gender violence

Two cases resonated worldwide: the [resignation of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo](#), after a complaint about and investigation of sexual harassment against women on his staff, and the [accusation of sexual assault](#) by Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai against a former vice-premier of China. After exposing the case, the athlete went missing for three weeks, and when she reappeared in public, she denied what she had said. More news about campaigns, challenges, and debates around the world to fight gender violence can be found [here](#). Also, in January 2022, Uruguayan women were mobilized by feminist groups throughout the country to [protest against sexual violence](#). The marches were motivated by a brutal case of gang rape that received national attention.

Resistance and good news

But there is also good news. The new [Spanish gender identity law](#), passed in June after a long and polarizing debate, was one of them. Then, we celebrated a decree enacted by the Argentinian executive that complements the 2012 Gender Identity Law, authorizing the [registration of non-binary people on the National Identity Document](#). In Brazil, the state of Rio de Janeiro began including [non-binary gender on birth certificates](#).

In the realm of high-level legal decisions, an important number of positive judgments have occurred in Latin America, which substantively stem from the [2017 Advisory Opinion 24 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#). The first of these decisions was the [Inter-American Court's condemnation of Honduras](#) for the murder of trans woman Vicky Hernandez during the 2009 coup d'état. A [second decision of similar import](#) was issued by Sala III of the Constitutional Court of Costa Rica, which recognized that the vulnerability to violence against women also applies to gender-assigned persons. Finally, in Panama, the Supreme Court of Justice [ruled unconstitutional](#) the sex/gender-based mobility restriction rule adopted in 2020, which had been analyzed in an [article](#) by Sonia Corrêa, published in 2020.

At the UN, the reports "[El Derecho a la Inclusión](#)" and "[Prácticas de la Exclusión](#)", prepared by the independent expert Victor Madrigal-Borloz, were presented in June and October. It is also worth mentioning that 53 nations have requested that the UN Human Rights Council adopt measures to [protect the human rights of intersex persons](#).

In the field of so-called "homosexual healing", there were three very positive pieces of news: the Supreme Court of Madras (India) [banned the practice](#) in June; in Canada, Parliament passed a law in December [banning so-called "conversion therapies"](#); and in France, Parliament passed a [law prohibiting the practice](#). Same-sex marriage also advanced in 2021. [Switzerland](#) and the Mexican states of [Sonora](#) and [Querétaro](#) passed equal marriage laws. Also relevant was the progress in Cuba when a new family code

bill [expanded the definition of marriage](#).

The Tokyo Olympics, despite the limitations imposed by Covid-19, also brought good news. The abundance of demonstrations of [sexual and religious diversity and the participation of trans and non-binary athletes](#) were highlights. We recommend, on this topic, *Folha de São Paulo's* [report](#) on the games' appeal to "universal issues" and [Gender and Number's excellent report on LGBTQ+ participation](#).

Abortion Rights

Despite the advancements, the abortion rights scene was marked by troubling news coming from the two major global powers. In the US, the specter of overturning *Roe v. Wade* has become more feasible with the new [conservative majority on the Supreme Court](#) and due to the [proliferation of restrictive bills in state legislatures](#). The outlook of the battle for abortion rights became even more unfavorable after the [enactment of a draconian Texas law](#), which ended up being subject to suspension and reinstatement in the Federal Court circuit – we have produced [extensive compilations on the case](#) and particularly suggest [Françoise Girard's analysis](#) of the North American scene. As the author highlights with the [Supreme Court's analysis of the Mississippi Act](#) – which might be even more restrictive – the threat to the right to abortion is real. In mid-January, the Supreme Court [upheld the Texas law](#). It is also worth noting that, unfortunately, the Texas model of extreme restriction of abortion rights has been replicated in [Ohio](#) and [Florida](#), where draconian bills are pending in the respective state legislatures.

In China, the government announced in September that the policy plan for women and children foresees that, over the next decade, access to abortion will be restricted to cases with a medical referral. The policy change is directly associated with the aging population dynamics and a declining birth rate that, as early as 2013, had led to the easing of the one-child policy. Cai Yping, in an [exclusive article for SPW](#), masterfully unveils the reconfiguration of the country's population policies. Read also our [compilation](#) of news and analysis on the new Chinese policy.

In Latin America, there is also a lot of bad news. In Brazil, 100% of the bills presented in the Chamber of Deputies, as shown by [Gender and Number](#), are regressive. And the political scenario in Congress, according to Agência Pública, is very [unfavorable to this agenda](#). Moreover, the city of Fortaleza created the [“Week for Life”](#), which targets the right to abortion and contraception; also, the first telemedicine abortion service was the [target of attacks by conservative groups](#).

In Uruguay, various forms of [resistance to abortion rights have gained ground](#) with the election of a conservative government in 2019. The most recent incident was a report that a doctor who holds a coordinator position at ASSE, the country's most important service network, had tried to persuade a woman not to have an abortion. In response,

[feminists mobilized in defense of the 2012 law](#). In El Salvador, President Bukele [ruled out legalizing elective abortion](#) in the constitutional reform bill.

Sadly, as is routine in the universe of the criminalization of abortion, the tragic fate of one woman made headlines: a [37-year-old Polish woman died](#) after the procedure was delayed based on the country's draconian law, which [took effect in January 2021](#) and was already to blame for the [death of another pregnant woman in November](#).

Good News

There are also good reasons to celebrate in the difficult trenches of abortion rights. At the regional level, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights [condemned El Salvador](#) for violating the rights of a young woman sentenced to 30 years in prison after an obstetric emergency. Most principally we celebrate the [first anniversary of Argentina's abortion law](#), which legalized the procedure. [Página 12](#) and [La Malafe](#) document what happened after the law's passage.

Then, in Honduras, the [January constitutional reform](#) that established a future ban on legalized abortion generated a significant feminist protest. Six months later a [demand to decriminalize abortion](#) was presented to the Supreme Court as to contest the previous decision.

In Ecuador, in April, the Constitutional Court [decriminalized the procedure for women pregnant as a result of rape](#). The Court has also requested the National Assembly to pass legislation that will ensure the implementation of the decision. In February 2022, the Assembly approved a law provision that, as [analyzed by Manuela Picq](#), can be read as having the glass half full and half empty. In addition to other problems law imposed very restricted limits to pregnancy termination, Picq also shows that in Ecuador, as it also happens elsewhere, anti-abortion positions cut across gender, indigeneity, and the left-right divide.

In Mexico, the advances were even more significant. The Supreme Court of Justice [decriminalized abortion](#), de jure, when considering unconstitutional a state law that penalizes the practice. This was followed by an ordinance from the Federal Attorney General's office directing local judiciaries to review as soon as possible the convictions of women who are imprisoned or indicted. Then, the Court issued a decision restricting the scope of the right to conscientious objection. The significance of these various decisions was analyzed by Judge Zaldivar, who is the president of the Court, in an [article](#) for the *Washington Post*. Also in Mexico, the states of [Veracruz](#) and [Hidalgo](#) have decriminalized the practice. In January, the US press [published moving stories](#) about Mexican feminists who are making it easier for women living in Texas to access abortion services in their country.

Last but not least, as this retrospective was almost ready, the Colombian Constitutional

Court issued the final decision on the lawsuit presented by the [Causa Justa](#) movement calling for the [unconstitutionality of the crime of abortion](#). The Court did not grant the full demand. But it kept in place the exclusions defined by its 2006 decision that granted access to abortion in the cases of rape, grave fetal abnormality, and woman's life or health risk and granted the right to abortion on demand up until the 24 weeks of pregnancy ([check a compilation](#)). This groundbreaking event will be examined more in-depth in our next edition.

Mourning

The year 2021 registered irreparable and difficult losses for activism and thought in the field of gender and diversity. Argentine sociologist Susana Checa; Brazilian philosopher Fran Demétrio; philosopher Roberto Machado; psychoanalyst Contardo Calligaris; and philosopher José Arthur Gianotti departed ([click here for more details on their lives](#)). And, in December, the feminist theorist [bell hooks](#) also departed (read more about her legacy in the [article](#) by Silvia Pimentel and Alice Bianchini).

Two very painful departures that took place between the end of 2021 and the beginning of this year were that of the [singer Elza Soares](#), an [icon of feminism](#) and a [force for black resistance](#), and that of the Archbishop of the Anglican Church [Desmond Tutu](#), an important figure in confronting apartheid in South Africa and [promoting LGBTQQ+ rights](#).

Specials in full

For full access to the 2021 specials, click below.

[Sexual Politics in Times of Pandemic: January - July 2021](#)

[Sexual Politics in Times of Pandemic: August - October 2021](#)

Recommendations

Our list of academic and press articles, publications, and multimedia resources is immense, which is why we link [here](#) and [here](#) to the sections of each of the two specials produced during 2021. Nevertheless, we list below those that we consider fundamental and inescapable in describing and analyzing the sexual politics scene in 2021.

[Who Lost the Sex Wars? - New Yorker](#)

[How the pandemic changed abortion access in Europe - The Conversation](#)

[QAnon originated in South Africa - now that the global cult is back here we should all](#)

[be afraid - Daily Maverick](#)

[Who Is Behind QAnon? Linguistic Detectives Find Fingerprints - New York Times](#)

[The Radical Capitalist Behind the Critical Race Theory Furor - The Nation](#)

[The Battle for the World's Most Powerful Cyberweapon - New York Times](#)

[No Other Way to Live: Why Ai Weiwei Left China - The Nation](#)

[Giving Up on God - Ronald Inglehart - Foreign Affairs](#)

Resources

[Data Subjects in the Femtech Matrix: A Feminist Political Economy Analysis of the Global Menstruapps Market - Feminist Digital Justice Project](#)

[How can the COVID-19 crisis be harnessed to improve the rights and working conditions of paid care workers? - UN Women](#)

[US Christian Right groups promoting anti-LGBT 'conversion therapy' in the US and Central America - OpenDemocracy](#)

Multimedia

[“Right-wing gender politics in the Global South” - Wits University, África do Sul](#)

[Queering Europe: Nationalism and Sexuality- A LSE Event](#)

Art and Sexuality

The Olympic Games of Tokyo inspired us to revisit a brief article, [Arte, Risco, Desconstrução \(Art, Rock, Deconstruction\)](#) about the physical theater of Elizabeth Streb.

Paula Rego, the Portuguese painter of the ["abortion cakes"](#), was also highlighted, with a retrospective at the [Tate Modern museum showing unpublished works.](#)

[The mutant art of Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro conquers a space in institutions such as the Pinacoteca, MAM and IMS.](#)