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Women's mobilization and antifeminist discursive framings in Portugal's far right

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Antifeminist and antigender rhetoric and campaigns have grown over the last decade, especially, but not exclusively, voiced by ultraconservative and far-right parties, movements and actors, and have prompted political and societal repercussions, with an increasingly visible participation of women in these attacks on feminism. These mobilizations are frequently articulated also through racist, xenophobic, homophobic, and transphobic discourses, in which feminism and gender equality are framed as external threats to the nation, the family, or "Western values." From an intersectional perspective, such narratives reinforce and reproduce multiple overlapping systems of domination, simultaneously targeting gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and nationality, while legitimizing exclusionary and hierarchical social orders. These features are globally shared and have proliferated across a wide range of contexts with some degree of similarities and coordination; however, conceptualizing them only as a singular transnational movement is unwarranted. Understanding how these campaigns are articulated differently in specific contexts and mobilized toward a range of goals is key to grasp both the similarities and the uniqueness of these narratives, agendas and campaigns in specific contexts. Portugal remains an under-researched case study primarily due to the slightly later emergence of far-right movements and parties with political significance. Based on the analysis of published materials and online content produced by the far-right party CHEGA (CH) from 2022 to the 2024 national legislative election, namely news, op-eds and interviews with women from CH, and their social networks content, this article reflects on how the success of CH in mobilizing women to antifeminist agendas has been key to normalizing undemocratic antifeminist, antigender agendas in the public sphere. Through the critical analysis of CH's discursive positions on feminism and gender, it will also examine the instrumentalization of "women's rights" in order to put forward homophobic, transphobic, anti-immigration, racist and xenophobic agendas, namely through the participation of women in leading roles in the antifeminist campaigns.

KEYWORDS

antifeminism, antigenderism, far-right, femonationalism, Portugal, far-right women

1 Introduction

Over the past decades, anti-feminist and antigender equality rhetoric and campaigns have expanded across the globe, especially, but not exclusively, voiced by (ultra-)conservative and far-right parties and movements. Expressions of organised antifeminism today manifest themselves at different scales—global, national, regional, local—and on different levels, such as

public policies (initiatives against the use of the term gender violence and in favor of concepts such as family violence, for example), legislation and criminal law (with the defence of the criminalisation of abortion in some contexts and resistance to conceptions of crime based on gender, such as femicide or sexual harassment), media (op-eds and cultural products contesting women's reproductive rights and LGBT+ citizenship) and academia (persecution of gender studies in some countries; see, for instance, [Ergas et al. \(2022\)](#)).

The global dimension of antifeminism was made visible in 2018 with the organization of coordinated protests in several European countries opposing the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, which protesters accused of being part of a veiled agenda aimed at ending the traditional family. Thus, antifeminist rhetoric does not operate only at a symbolic level; it has concrete political and societal repercussions. It has curtailed the space for debating progressive gender policies concerning sexual and reproductive rights, including abortion, and it has paved the way for attacks on women's rights and particularly on feminist, queer, left-wing and antiracist women activists, politicians and journalists, namely through online harassments and hate speech.

Existing scholarship demonstrates that antigender mobilizations and right-wing parties and movements operate in a mutually reinforcing manner. As exemplified by the Hungarian and Polish contexts, ant-gender campaigns and populist right-wing actors often act synergistically, with alliances between antigender movements and far-right parties proving crucial to the expansion and normalization of antifeminist agendas beyond conservative religious constituencies ([Graff and Korolczuk, 2022](#); [Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018](#)). Antifeminism functions as a symbolic and ideological “glue” that agglutinates a broader patriarchal ecosystem and diverse actors, enabling the far right to frame feminism and gender equality as destabilizing threats to the social order ([Kováts and Pöim, 2015](#); [Cabezas Fernández and Vega Solís, 2022](#)). Through this framing, far-right actors connect anxieties related to economic precarity, demographic decline, and cultural change in the context of the crisis of neoliberalism to a broader exclusionary ideological project ([Korolczuk and Graff, 2018](#); [Dietze and Roth, 2020](#)).

[Kuhar and Paternotte \(2018\)](#) identify two main fronts in the operationalization of antigender/antifeminist movements. Politically, they generate moral panic and organize campaigns opposing sexual and gender equality policies. Epistemologically, they target gender studies ([Verloo, 2018](#)), labeling them as ideological and accusing them of distorting gender relations, sex, and sexuality. This framing has given rise to the widely circulated accusatory term “gender ideology.” Significant research defines the far-right gender politics as explicitly antigender and antifeminist, based on the promotion of the heteropatriarchal family, framed as the “natural family,” and on ultraconservative interpretations of religion ([Cabezas Fernández and Vega Solís, 2022](#); [Karagiannopoulou and Papageorgiou, 2023](#)). In electoral terms, however, these parties need to appeal to a greater number of women, including those who may not identify with rigid traditional gender roles. This appeal tends to be anchored in the racialized othering of sexual danger and gender-based violence. Several studies about far-right parties in countries like Germany ([Berg, 2019](#); [Sprengholz, 2021](#)), France, Italy ([Scrinzi, 2024](#)), and Portugal ([Santos and Roque, 2021](#)) showed that antifeminist rhetoric is crucial for them to position themselves as the “true” defenders of women's rights against “racialized sexism” associated with (Muslim) immigration. In this way,

not only does widespread homegrown gender-based violence remain unchecked, but racialised and immigrant women are also placed outside the category of ‘women to defend’. In this sense, having racially accepted women as spokespersons has worked as an effective strategy for far-right antifeminism. Indeed, far-right movements increasingly feature women as visible and powerful militants to legitimize their antifeminist agendas, using female spokeswomen and activists to mask misogynistic ideologies, and present exclusionary politics as compatible with the interests and well-being of women. Analysing and exposing these mechanisms therefore requires intersectional approaches which, drawing on Crenshaw's work (1989), examine how gender inequality operates and is maximised by racial inequalities.

Antifeminist campaigns share global features and circulate across contexts, often linked to far-right agendas; however, as significant research has shown, they cannot be understood as a single transnational movement; attention to their context-specific articulations is essential to grasp both their similarities and their distinct goals, narratives, and forms of resistance ([Paternotte, 2023](#); [Caiani and Tranfić, 2024](#)).

Portugal offers a particularly relevant terrain for analyzing the role of women as far-right activists and politicians in the advance of antifeminism, particularly those related with the CHEGA party. CHEGA (meaning “Enough” in Portuguese) has had a meteoric rise, boosted by three consecutive snap elections. Until recently, political scientists considered Portugal as apparently immune to far-right populism due to low levels of immigration and of Euroscepticism, as well as to the resilience of traditional parties, but this has changed dramatically during the last 6 years ([Carvalho, 2023, 2](#); [Valentim, 2024](#)). CH thus represents the definitive end of what had long described as “Portuguese exceptionalism. CH's ideology is anchored in a nativist worldview. A major survey of 3,183 CH party members ([Marchi and Zúquete, 2024](#)) found a political culture that falls squarely within the main lines of the radical right: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. The growing success of CHEGA reflects the “radical populist playbook”: staunch opposition to immigration, particularly from Southeast Asia, criminalisation and stigmatisation of Roma people, punitivist rhetoric, hostility to so-called “cultural Marxism,” including feminist and LGBTQIA+ rights, and an anti-corruption discourse. Like other far-right movements, CH has capitalised on populist sentiments, portraying itself as a voice for the “ordinary people” against perceived threats to national identity and sovereignty, while capitalising on nationalist rhetoric and anti-immigration policies. Research into CH's emotional narratives shows that its political culture emphasises exclusionary, authoritarian, and securitisation processes, rather than mechanisms of deliberation or direct citizen involvement in decision-making ([Gianolla et al., 2024](#)).

The growing normalization of antigender and antifeminist discourse within public debate, media, and institutional politics mirrors broader European and global trends while also reflecting Portugal's own sociopolitical configurations and historical trajectories. Persistent socioeconomic inequalities, colonial legacies of structural racism, discrimination against Roma communities, and Portugal's shift from emigration to immigration have been exploited by the far right through conspiratorial narratives and moral panics, particularly linking migration to sexual violence and criminality in general, to scapegoat migrants for structural failures. An intersectional analysis is therefore essential to understand how gender politics are instrumentalised to advance antifeminist agendas, how women as far-right's activists and politicians are pivotal in this process, and how these

discourses are entangled in xenophobic, racist, homophobic, and transphobic agendas in contemporary Portugal.

This article begins by situating the study within existing scholarship on antifeminism and the far right, conceptualizing antifeminism as a core ideological pillar of contemporary far-right politics, demonstrating its interdependence with authoritarian, nationalist, and racist logics. It also analyses how women in the far-right weaponize femininity to normalize antifeminism. The next section outlines the methodological framework, which draws on critical discourse analysis to examine how antifeminist narratives are constructed, legitimized, and circulated within far-right political communication. The following section discusses the study's findings in the Portuguese context, examining the rise and consolidation of far-right actors alongside the parallel expansion of antifeminist discourse across public, media, and institutional arenas. It provides an in-depth, multidimensional analysis of: the role of women in legitimizing antifeminist discourses within the Portuguese far right; the ideological foundations of antifeminism as a project centered on specific prescriptions regarding sexuality, virtue, and social order; the transnational circulation of antifeminist narratives and the alliances that sustain them; and, finally, the logic of femonationalism, understood as the instrumental mobilization of women's rights to advance nationalist, exclusionary, and anti-feminist agendas. Together, these sections offer a comprehensive account of how antifeminism operates as a central and mobilizing force within far-right politics in Portugal and beyond.

2 Literature review

2.1 Antifeminism at the core of the far-right ideology

Antifeminism is both a historically rooted response to women's struggles for rights, emerging from patriarchal cultures, sexism, and misogyny, and a set of organized political strategies operating at global, national, and local levels across multiple domains, including education, violence, sexual rights, and security. In this article, we are interested in the semi-organized nature of contemporary antifeminism, conceptualizing it as a constellation of counter-movements opposing women's participation in the public sphere, the reconfiguration of the private sphere, women's bodily autonomy, and women's rights more broadly (Connell, 2005; Verloo, 2018). These counter-movements do not operate in isolation; rather, they are reinforced, amplified, and normalized within patriarchal, misogynist, and sexist societies. Antifeminist ideas circulate widely through digital media, popular culture, and everyday social interactions, playing a central role in legitimizing resistance to gender equality and sustaining a broader antifeminist ecosystem.

Antifeminist counter-movements can be traced back to the opposition to first generation feminism's vindications. Backlash movements have since followed women's movements' achievements that threaten vested interests and privileges (Chafetz and Dworkin, 1987, 34). During the 20th century, these movements have remained latent or emerged at different moments, but perhaps never, as in the present moment, have these movements been so global, so interconnected, so similar in terms of discourse and strategy and played such a significant role in shaping political agendas and programmes. Thus, it is widely acknowledged that the 21st century, and particularly the past decade,

has witnessed a marked rise in anti-feminist sentiment worldwide in tandem with the political gains of the far-right. Fassin (2020) describes this as a "genderphobic turn": a virulent backlash against sexual and gender democracy that forms a key component of broader de-democratizing processes and contemporary authoritarian trends, driven predominantly, though not exclusively, by far-right parties and movements.

Influential scholars, notably Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015, 20), typically defined the far right,¹ and especially the populist radical right, through the ideological triad of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Within this framework, gender politics and antifeminism are not treated as core ideological pillars. Instead, they are often framed as secondary or instrumental phenomena, derivatives or by-products of nativist and authoritarian logics, rather than as central ideological commitment in its own right. Following the focus on far-right's nativism and nationalism, others such as Indelicato and Magalhães Lopes (2024), when addressing the Italian context, argue that race should be the primary category of analysis of antigender mobilization and of the contradictions that women leaders of far-right parties have to negotiate. Studies about the German context also signal that race and gender do not operate separately in far-right ideologies. Berg (2019) exposes how the regulation of women and female bodies by far-right politics (AfD) combines femonationalism—the mobilization of women's rights for xenophobic and anti-immigration agendas (Farris, 2017)—with antigender stances: by externalizing and ethnicizing sexism, sexual violence and discriminations against women as a problem that affects only immigrants and Muslims, it redefines far-right policies against immigration as policies aimed at protecting women; by depicting "gender ideology" as a threat to the heterosexual traditional family, while arguing that traditional heterosexual family is the cell of the "pure people," it redefines policies for gender equality and reproductive rights like abortion as threats to the reproduction of the nation and enablers of the "Great Replacement" (Berg, 2019). This conflation of biological motherhood with the nation underlies the rhetoric that signifies feminism and "gender ideology" as enemies of women and the nation.

While we recognize the deep entanglement between gender and sexuality-related politics and the racist and xenophobic agendas of the far right, we contend, following our earlier work (Santos and Roque, 2021), that antifeminism constitutes a core ideological pillar of far-right politics, on par with authoritarianism and nativism/racism. These elements cannot be meaningfully separated or hierarchized; rather than functioning as secondary or merely instrumental components, they operate as mutually reinforcing and co-constitutive principles. In this sense, we draw on feminist scholarship demonstrating

¹ A growing scholarship examines what is variously termed the right-wing populist, radical right, extreme right, or far right, though these labels often overlap. Mudde (2019) offers a useful distinction: the extreme right rejects democratic principles such as popular sovereignty, whereas the radical right accepts democracy but opposes liberal-democratic norms like minority rights and checks and balances. Despite terminological differences, there is broad consensus that far-right actors share core ideological commitments, above all, nationalism. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2015) identify nativism, authoritarianism, and populism as defining traits. Several authors argue these are not departures from mainstream conservatism, but intensifications of values already present within it; Mudde (2010) calls this "pathological normalcy," grounded in everyday nationalism. For this reason, the article uses the term far right to refer to formations often labelled radical or populist radical right, following Greig's (2019, 16) emphasis on this "pathological normalcy."

that gender identities and sexualities are fundamental to understanding diverse forms of authoritarianism and extremism, whether shaped by religious conservatism, far-right mobilization, or masculinist worldviews (Kováts and Pöim, 2015; Careaga-Pérez, 2016; Pearson and Winterbotham, 2017; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2018; Pearson, 2019; Graff and Korolczuk, 2022; Miller-Idriss, 2025).

We consider that far-right's antifeminism is characterized by three major ideological features: motherism, which idealizes women primarily as reproducers of the nation; gender essentialism, which frames men and women as naturally fixed and hierarchical categories and justifies transphobia; and femonationalism, which claims that (white) women's safety is guaranteed by ethno-nationalist anti-immigration policies.

To begin with, narratives about the nation are profoundly entangled with its biological and cultural reproduction through the recurrent use of the “mother of the nation” figure (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989). This image operates as a powerful gendered symbol that idealizes women as responsible not only for bearing children but also for transmitting “authentic” national values, ethnic purity, and conservative morality. This symbolic role places motherhood at the center of national survival, turning it into a national obligation and a moral imperative (motherism) in order to prevent the “Great Replacement” of white Europeans supposedly operated by immigration from the Global South. Within this narrative, women are celebrated only insofar as they conform to traditional, heteronormative, and domestic roles. The “mother of the nation” becomes a moral compass whose purity and vulnerability must be protected through exclusionary and xenophobic policies: protecting her is framed as protecting the nation itself. Moreover, this trope allows far-right actors to publicly elevate a supposedly “honored” place for women while simultaneously reinforcing patriarchal control and traditional gender roles, limiting women's autonomy, and delegitimizing feminist claims. It also helps create the illusion of a harmonious, gender-complementary, heteropatriarchal social order, ignoring the structural causes of gender inequalities. Cabezas Fernández (2022, 320) points out to the “the complex relation between women and nationalism: they [women] are used as symbols, governed as others, but at the same time they are participants in charge of the material and symbolic reproduction of the nation”.

Secondly, studies on gender in the far-right in some contexts stress gender essentialism as critical to justify and legitimise ultra-conservative agendas. The promotion of ‘traditional families’ and conservative gender roles is based on oversimplified biological understandings of “what” a woman or a man are, and what roles they must perform, alongside opposing women's sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTQIA+ emancipation (Norocel, 2013; Köttig et al., 2017; Saresma, 2018). Despite the fact that gender and feminisms are key concerns across far-right parties and movements, there is variation in gender positions among far-right parties. In Catholic Southern Europe, far-right parties usually portray “gender ideology” as an existential danger. In Spain, VOX, and in Italy, Brothers of Italy and the League, oppose LGBTQIA+ rights, reproductive rights, and comprehensive sex education, with VOX taking the most hardline position (Lavizzari and Pirro, 2024). In Orthodox contexts such as Greece and Cyprus, Golden Dawn and the National People's Front defend traditional family norms, insist on a biologically fixed understanding of gender, and denounce feminism (Kamenou, 2023). Greater diversity appears among Western European far-right parties. The Dutch Party for Freedom and the Danish People's Party publicly support LGBTQIA+ rights as part of their ethnonliberal platforms, while the French

National Rally, Austria's Freedom Party, and Belgium's Flemish Bloc take more conservative positions toward LGBTQ communities (Akkerman, 2015).

Finally, the far-right capitalizes on female support for traditional gender roles and participation in far-right movements and parties (Blee, 2017; Miller-Idriss and Pilkington, 2019), while instrumentalizing women's rights and gender equality discourse to promote racist and xenophobic perspectives against immigration (Keskinen, 2013; Farris, 2017). Far-right leaders often co-opt and exploit feminist rhetoric to bolster anti-immigration narratives, framing ‘migrant’ men as menaces to women's safety and to some degree to homosexual individuals. Many of these parties emphasize women's role as mothers within traditional family structures, reject feminist claims, and warn against demographic shifts attributed to Muslim immigration (Akkerman, 2015). Antifeminism and femonationalism (Farris, 2017) are hence two sides of the same coin (Santos and Roque, 2021) and are used in conjunction in far-right propaganda. Although this relationship may appear paradoxical, it is in fact essential, since antifeminism serves to claim that feminists do not defend women's rights and that the far-right is the true protector of women.

In sum, antifeminism emerges not as a peripheral stance but as a structuring pillar of far-right ideology. Far-right actors position themselves as the protectors of national women and mothers while promoting policies that erode gender equality from within (e.g., opposing parity laws and banning contraception and sexual health services) and affect women (e.g., labor laws that facilitate lay-offs and impose overtime). Concurrently with this process, many women have actively joined these efforts, contributing to the construction and dissemination of antifeminist narratives, as we will develop in the next section.

2.2 Women in the far-right: weaponizing femininity

Although far-right parties have long been seen as male-dominated, they have been very successful in appealing to women: they now have a significant membership of women, and many of them occupy leadership positions. Two dimensions are key to understanding this trend: the discursive strategies designed to attract women to anti-feminist parties and agendas, and the strategic use of women's visibility to normalize their presence within these movements.

Regarding the first dimension, as Dworkin (2025) explained several decades ago, antifeminism is central to the ultra-right's² appeal to women—particularly white heterosexual women. This attraction is not irrational; instead, it responds to a painful and insecure position women occupy within patriarchal society: “the perception that male violence against women is uncontrollable and unpredicted” (Dworkin, 2025, 11) forces women into a search for protection, offered by the ultra-right in a very simple way of survival: accommodation and acceptance of submission. The ultra-right promises women: shelter, safety, rules and love (Dworkin, 2025, 12). In other words, women are told that traditional gender roles, marriage, and male authority will protect them. This promise is based on the restoration of an imagined past in which men took care of women, families were stable, and sexual danger was controlled. By presenting the world as dangerous and blaming liberalism and feminism for the chaos, the restoration of

² We adopt the terminology used by the author—ultra-right—as equivalent to the far-right.

order will appear to be based on the return to strict gender roles. For women experiencing fear or instability, this clarity feels comforting. Today the far-right movements frame themselves precisely as defenders of morality, family, religion, and sexual purity, values that women are taught to uphold. These narratives structured by the complementarity of the sexes continue to appeal to significant numbers of women.

Therefore, a growing body of research has been seeking to understand what leads so many women, in an age which seemed to be receptive to mainstream feminism, to join parties that apparently promote policies that threaten women's rights. A line of research looks at economic and social grievances in the context of neoliberalism examining women's adherence to far right parties as a phenomenon that affects mostly the blue-collar sector (Rippeyoung, 2007), while others put whiteness and xenophobia as the driving force behind these women's adherence to extremism (e.g., Indelicato and Magalhães Lopes, 2024; Siddiqui, 2021). A significant body of research explores the interconnectedness of economic factors and cultural imaginaries. In her study about the variety and complexity of women activists involved in far-right parties, Scrinzi (2024) calls attention to the neoliberal aspirations of empowerment through choice and personal responsibility that frame many women's adherence to parties anchored in the racialization of sexism.

Women's adherence to the far-right implies their participation in organizations shaped by traditional notions of masculinity. Because far-right parties are commonly shaped by an ethos of aggressive masculinity and pronounced antifeminism, visible in their candidate recruitment practices, gendered mobilization strategies, and their reliance on antagonistic narratives opposing "the people" to "the elites," they tend to cultivate a political style grounded in belligerent, hegemonic masculine archetypes (Kantola and Lombardo, 2019). Geva (2020, 7–8) suggests that 'heightened hegemonic masculinity is essential to the performance of populism as a contrast to 'effeminate' political elites' (Schippers, 2007) arguing that women in far-right parties may indeed rise to leadership positions, but they are often required to align themselves with traditional gender expectations. These women frequently affirm that their participation in politics is also aimed at defending women's right not to want to participate in public political life and rather dedicate themselves to the family, while claiming that they want to be "feminine, not feminist".

Thus, female far-right leaders often assert gender equality to justify their participation in politics, while simultaneously promoting traditional or "familial" (Kemper, 2016, 60) gender roles within their parties. As a result, they tend to adopt a "softened" or hybrid public persona that blends elements of hegemonic masculinity, such as assertiveness and authority, with traits associated with hegemonic femininity, including care, restraint, or moral purity (Schippers, 2007). For instance, the performance of the "mother of the nation," a role that enables far-right women leaders such as Giorgia Meloni (Italy), Marine Le Pen (France), Pia Kjaersgaard (Denmark), and Siv Jensen (Finland) to reconcile authoritative leadership with the avoidance of overt aggressiveness typically coded as masculine, expands the repertoire of legitimate political attributes available to them (Meret et al., 2016). This performance allows these leaders to combine supposedly "feminine" qualities, such as care and protection, with "masculine" ones like strength and decisiveness, while simultaneously upholding the traditional family model that underpins their vision of national cohesion.

Other forms of political femininity in the populist far right include the figure of the "self-made woman" and professionalized models of

womanhood that echo certain liberal feminist ideals (Meret et al., 2016; Scrinzi, 2024; Jiménez Aguilar and Álvarez-Benavides, 2024). These updated performances align with what McRobbie (2011) terms the "postfeminist neoliberal sexual contract," which frames women's autonomy and success as products of individual responsibility, competitiveness, and self-management, rendering sexism either irrelevant or merely interpersonal. In this logic, feminism becomes unnecessary for "native" women or is treated as disconnected from the real issues facing the nation—since women are presumed capable of securing their own emancipation individually.

Regarding the second dimension previously mentioned, a significant body of research explores the implications of the presence of women in the ranks of far-right parties in terms of the ideological expansion of extremism (Blee, 1996; Blee and McGee Deutsch, 2012; Della Sudda, 2021; Williams, 2024). The presence of women in leadership positions was defined as "strategic descriptive representation", i.e., as a way of attracting previously untapped women voters (Weeks et al., 2023). Looking at the German AfD, Berg argues that having female party leaders is a political strategy to oppose feminism, whereby they appear as key witnesses and members of a discriminated group—as women, mothers and female politicians—who say there is no discrimination (Berg, 2019).

To fully grasp the benefits that women's presence brought to the far right, we have to look at social media. Social media has been crucial in the dissemination and amplification of extremist content (Fielitz and Thurston, 2019) beyond the echo chamber effect (Cinelli et al., 2021); indeed, social networks are better understood as incubators of violent extremism (Ferrillo, 2024; Törnberg and Törnberg, 2025). These media have been a key medium for women's participation in the dissemination of extremism, white supremacism, and opposition to feminism (Stern, 2022; Leidig, 2023). In her study about women influences, Leidig (2023) examines the social media presence of young attractive women and argues that the way they propagandize a feminine lifestyle and call on women to become housewives has been crucial to radicalize their followers, counter feminism and foster white nationalism and white supremacism, concluding that far-right women make extremism relatable.

3 Methods and materials

The main objective of this article is to examine how the participation of women in defending antifeminist positions legitimizes far-right narratives, broadening the boundaries of what is considered as an acceptable public discourse about feminism, women and gender equality. For that purpose, we use critical discourse analysis—CDA (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2001) to identify the rhetorical strategies employed by CH's women militants and leaders when promoting anti-feminist narratives and policies. The study assumes that discourses (re)produce both ideologies and power relations (Van Dijk, 2001; Van Leeuwen, 2008) and are hence used to reinforce and exercise power and hegemony as well as to counter it. In this vein, we highlight how CH produces and amplifies the anti-feminist discourse across several communication channels through repetition of textual and visual messages that portray feminism as negative and dangerous, aiming at normalizing anti-feminist claims.

The period under analysis is from 2022 to 2024, encompassing the 2024 legislative election (9/03/24) and the 2024 European

parliamentary election (6-9/06/24) campaigns, a period which was marked by the party's exponential growth. For that purpose, it looks at three ways in which women are present in CH's communications: as contributors to the party's media outlets; as event organizers; and as members of parliament active on social media. We narrowed our scope of analysis to the following corpus: women's contribution to *Folha Nacional*, the party's official newspaper; a conference hosted in 2022 with the title "Feminism: Perversion and Subversion"; and the Instagram account of Rita Matias, the first woman to be elected by CH to the parliament in 2022 and member of the current chairmanship of the party's parliamentary group. In line with the article's aims and timeframe, the empirical corpus comprised 10 texts from *Folha Nacional*, 23 posts from Matias's Instagram account, 34 posts from CH's Instagram account, the "Feminism: Perversion and Subversion" conference, one flyer produced by CH for 8 March 2023 on antifeminism, and two press interviews with Matias. Our analysis examined how these materials constructed the 'problem' of feminism and gender in/equality in relation to other axes of power and the 'solutions' they proposed (Scrinzi, 2024, 185).

First, regarding *Folha Nacional*, we conducted a discourse analysis of the content published by women in the official communication medium of the party, which functions as a key indicator of the ideological positions of its affiliates. Through the systematic collection and qualitative examination of editorials, opinion pieces, and news articles authored by women referring to "feminism," "gender" and "sexuality," between 2022 and 2024, we identified recurrent themes, framings, and argumentative strategies concerning gender, feminism, and sexuality. This task aims to reveal how these issues are scripted and how they contribute to the construction of a broader ideological narrative within the party.

Second, we analyze the strategic use of the public image of a female figure, MP Rita Matias and her social media presence with the aim of exposing how she functions as a vehicle for reproducing and legitimizing sexist and gender-essentialist messages. By examining her image, messages and interactions online, we aim to uncover how the far right uses social media to mobilize femininity itself as a political instrument, simultaneously normalizing patriarchal narratives and softening the public face of antifeminist discourse.

Third, we explore the conference "Feminism: Perversion and Subversion," which was led by notorious Brazilian antifeminist Ana Campagnolo with MP Rita Matias. Campagnolo is state deputy in Santa Catarina (Brazil) since 2018, Bolsonaro supporter and a leading Brazilian antifeminist, author of three books on antifeminism. At the invitation of CH, Campagnolo spent 3 days in Portugal in November 2022, meeting and training with Matias, with whom she organized the conference. The analysis of the transcripts of this conference is aimed at examining the interdiscursive strategies of ideological formation highlighting how CH integrates global far-right antifeminist repertoires and rhetorical models into the Portuguese context in order to strengthen the party's antifeminist discourse. This includes the examination of cross-national discursive transfers, such as references to Brazilian context, the circulation of specific concepts (e.g., "gender ideology") and the appropriation of communicative tactics developed by Brazil's far-right. The goal of this analysis is to understand how transnational influences shape the ideological consolidation of Portuguese antifeminism, as a means of legitimizing these ideas through pseudo academic references that present themselves as critical of feminism.

Finally, we analyze how the party's gender frames (Siim et al., 2016) emerge alongside frames of sexuality, race and religion and intersect to produce entangled discursive positions that instrumentalize anti-immigration, racist, xenophobic and securitarian sentiments in the name of "protecting women's rights". Antifeminism is analyzed not only as opposition to gender equality, but as an ideological project that organizes social hierarchies across these dimensions.

Taken together, these materials provide a multidimensional understanding of how antifeminism operates discursively and symbolically within the Portuguese far-right, highlighting both its national specificities and its embeddedness in broader transnational networks.

4 Results and discussion

4.1 The far right and the expansion of antifeminism in Portugal

While there is a significant body of studies about antifeminist and antigender rhetoric and campaigns in Central, Eastern and Mediterranean countries where conservative and far-right parties and movements made headway, Portugal remains an under-researched case study, to a large extent due to the far-right's late appearance in institutional politics. In addition to two studies about the presence of femonationalism, antifeminism and antigender ideology discourses in the contemporary Portuguese far-right (Santos and Roque, 2021; Martins and Cabrera, 2023; Garraio et al., 2023), there is only one article about CH female activists (Oliveira, 2025) and a master thesis about two CH female MPs (Santos, 2025).

Notwithstanding, the rise of contemporary political antifeminism nationally can be traced through a set of landmarks: the emergence of the "gender ideology" narrative in the mid-2010s through the dissemination of the Vatican writings (Giorgi, 2018; Garraio et al., 2023), the mobilizations against gender equality laws; the campaigns against gender equality promotion in the education system by far-right political parties and by others across the right and center-left as "ideological indoctrination" (Giorgi, 2018; Santos and Roque, 2021; Garraio et al., 2023; Alcaire and Moura, 2022); the instrumentalization of the Syrian crisis to advance agendas, showcasing the intertwining of anti-immigrant agendas and antifeminist narratives (Santos and Roque, 2021). Nevertheless, it wasn't until the far-right gained its momentum through CH's electoral success (Santos and Roque, 2021), and with help of the conservative and right-wing digital media like *Observador* (Garraio et al., 2023), that "gender ideology" came to be publicly classified as a wicked black box hiding vicious perspectives on equality.

The rise of the CH party is an undeniable turning point for the proliferation of anti-feminist discourses and attitudes in the Portuguese context.³ Since CH was founded, there has been

³ CHEGA completely changed the far-right scene in the country in 2019 under the leadership of André Ventura. The party first led a coalition Basta! with Partido Popular Monárquico—PPM, and Cidadania e Democracia Cristã party—to the 2019 European Parliament Elections, failing to elect a representative. The coalition was dissolved in July 2019 and in the 2019 Portuguese legislative elections, Ventura was elected to the national parliament through the circle of Lisbon, with 1.3% of the votes. In 2022, CH finished in third place, winning 12 seats and 7.2% of the vote. In 2024, CH reached 50 seats (18.1% of the votes). Recently, in the 2025 election, the CH MP delegation reached 60 seats (26% of the votes) and is now the second major political force, ahead of the Socialist Party, which has 58 seats (25%).

significant involvement of women in the party's activities. The first step was the creation of Mulheres do Chega/MMCH (Women of Chega) group, created after the 2020 CH Convention, signaling efforts to raise the profile of women in the party's ranks and internal life. Despite its women's agenda, the party adopted an openly antifeminist stance and did not aim for the strengthening of women's rights. In the party's 2020 convention, the motion Women of CHEGA claimed that 'feminists aim to further the homosexual-lesbian-bisexual-transsexual agenda and not the interest of common women' and presented itself as 'antifeminist' (Expresso, 2020). These arguments reiterate a focus on the heteronormative nuclear family in far-right narratives as well as on gender conservative roles, evoking a sense of gender 'complementarity' that advocates that women must be 'rewarded for having as many children as they want, and men must not be 'penalized for being men'. This was further emphasized by Women of CH's mission (2021), that stated:

MMCH believes progress happens by motivating women leaders who have the influence to bring about positive changes in the direction of valuing traditional family. It is through feminine hands that generational change happens. The unspeakable greatest mission is the maternal one, since women's greatest social responsibility is to raise and educate children for the world.

This signals a direct endorsement of gender essentialized roles, positing women at the reproductive core of family and nation, as well as of a cisheteronormative gender binary characteristic of the gender conservatism of far-right ideology appealing not only to men but also to many women.

CHEGA's antigender and anti-feminist agenda relies on highly charged rhetoric targeting those they frame as enemies of morals and virtue. This discourse thrives on moral panic and a persistent "us vs. them" narrative: "us" represents the virtuous members of society seeking to "save" it, while "them" comprises those allegedly intent on dismantling the social order that keeps the nation as such. This dynamic reproduces alterity through binary oppositions between in-group and out-group, structured hierarchically so that the former dominates the latter (Spivak, 1988; El-Tayeb, 2011). Feminists and LGBTQIA+ activists, alongside other marginalized groups such as migrants, refugees, Muslims, Roma, and Afro-descendants, are cast as the out-group (Brons, 2015). Their depiction relies on stereotyping them as fundamentally different and on discursive practices that delegitimize and dehumanize them.

Following the trend in other European countries, CH has progressively tried to attract women's votes⁴ by significantly increasing the role of women in the party, as exemplified by the number of women MPs elected by the party to the parliament: in the January 2022 elections, one woman was elected out of 12 MPs; in the March 2024 elections, 14 women were elected out of 50 MPs; and in the May 2025 elections, 17 women were elected out of a total of 60 MPs. Currently,

the chairmanship of the parliamentary group includes one woman and two men, as does the vice-chairmanship.

Although the Women of CHEGA group disappeared or was deactivated, for reasons unknown to the public, the inclusion of antifeminist women in the party's propaganda has been increasingly centered on individual personalities, who have been gaining a growing prominence. Some of these women already had significant experience in conservative associations. That is the case of Maria Helena Costa,⁵ president of the *Associação Família Conservadora*, evangelical and antigender ideology activist and author who described herself as a defender of Christian and conservative values. A less known but also relevant militant is Patrícia Carvalho, a former journalist for *Notícias ao Minuto* and then press officer for André Ventura and now MP and at the helm of CH. An increasingly prominent woman in the party is Cristina Rodrigues, who was formerly a member of the Portuguese Parliament as PAN (Party Animals and Nature) MP, and was elected by CH for the first time in 2024. Nonetheless, the most prominent woman in CH is Rita Matias, a young party militant who is perceived by many as CH's second most notorious politician. In a press report, in *Sábado* magazine (1–7 Feb 24), where Matias was interviewed in Madrid, while taking a "media training" with far-right Spanish VOX, she was described as Ventura's "trump card." Her important role in the promotion of antifeminism will be addressed in the following section.

As evidenced above, the increase of women protagonists and elected as MP for CH did not translate into more feminist positions. In its program for the 2024 legislative elections the only reference CHEGA made to gender equality appeared in the context of a proposition to replace the Commission for Gender Equality, that would disappear under the creation of a Secretariat of State for the Family, a proposition that signals that, for the party, women's rights and gender equality should be replaced by family politics. Simultaneously, the leader, André Ventura, also defended the need to cut all the funds intended to promote gender equality, more than 400 million euros in the State Budget for 2024. This proposition showed that he appeared to be unaware of its own proposition terms: these funds included support for victims of domestic violence, i.e., they were funds needs for measures that his party advocated like an increase in the number of shelters, better funding for bodies that provide support to victims and the creation of support centers for survivors of sexual violence.

In sum, the presence of women in CH does not constitute a challenge to the party's program and views on gender and women's issues, nor does it indicate any openness to feminist agendas or discourse; rather, it simply reflects the strategic mobilization of women as spokespersons for the party and its priorities. These changes are significant not because they alter the party's ideological foundations, but because they enhance its public legitimacy, broaden its electoral appeal, and help normalize its broader anti-feminist project.

4 Women (particularly young women) tend to vote more for left-wing parties and are usually more adverse to social conservatism and to the far-right's extremism. This gender gap has been consistently present in most West European countries (Allen and Wallace Goodman, 2021; Parth, 2022), and it has also been the case in Portugal in the last two legislative elections (Magalhães, 2024).

5 Maria Helena Costa has published extensively against so-called gender ideology. She writes regular op-eds for the conservative newspaper *Observador* and is the author of books such as *#éhoradospais* (2020) and *Identidade de Género—Ideologia ou Ciência*. She resigned from the party in 2022. Despite that she participated in the party's 2024 congress (Viana do Castelo) and supported the party in the two parliamentary elections of 2025 (Carvalho, 2025, 571).

4.2 Women legitimizing antifeminism

As we saw, antifeminism has been framed and popularized through the inclusion of women's voices in line with the gender agenda of the far-right. Like in other national contexts, women from CH gain prominence in the party by endorsing traditional gender roles, by calling for complementarity of the sexes, by endorsing xenophobia and racism, by calling for women's liberty and security, using their gender to legitimize and strengthen these attitudes (Eksi, 2021; Veilleux-Lepage et al., 2022; Indelicato and Magalhães Lopes, 2024). We develop this argument by focusing on MP Rita Matias.

Even though several women have a strong public image and have been very vocal in their attacks on feminism, it is undoubtedly Rita Matias who holds the greatest prominence and has become the face of CH's antifeminist brand. She was the first woman to be elected MP by Chega in the 2022 elections, being reelected in the subsequent legislative elections (2024 and 2025). Formerly active in an ultraconservative catholic movement (led by her father, also a CH's member) and known anti-abortion activist, Matias has led the party social media, including TikTok, and is seen as the party's bet to appeal to young voters and women alike. Her good looks and her modern and well-groomed clothes, make-up and hairstyle are in line with certain beauty standards that are very popular among teenagers and young adults today. She frequently appears in TV news commentaries, and she is also a dedicated activist, frequently promoting sessions and interventions in universities in order to combat what she decries as the hegemony of "cultural Marxism" and "gender ideology" in these establishments. Consequently, Matias has emerged not only as a key actor within the far-right party CH but also in the development and mainstreaming of antifeminism in Portugal. Since her entry into institutional politics, Matias has positioned herself as openly antifeminist, articulating a discourse that rejects the feminist project as divisive and outdated. This makes her a crucial case study for understanding the personalization and gendered mediation of antifeminist politics in far-right strategies, as well as the ways the participation of women in leading far-right agendas contribute to the normalization of antifeminist discourses within democratic institutions and liberal societies.

Matias publicly defines herself as antifeminist, claiming that feminism 'keeps us captive to a narrative in which the complementarity that can exist between men and women is undervalued' (Cassiano, 2022). She frequently frames feminism as a 'Marxist' or an ideological project grounded in antagonism rather than cooperation between genders, portraying herself instead as an advocate of 'true equality' through difference and complementarity. This positioning performs several political functions. First, it establishes an alternative woman's narrative framed as 'non-ideological' and 'pro-family', while still engaging directly with gender issues in the public sphere, as we can observe in this quote by Matias:

The main antagonism [with feminism] lies in it being a Marxist-inspired movement, one that divides society between "us" and "them." It is a movement that often places women and men in opposition.' Firstly, because it compares them, and we must acknowledge that the nature of men and women is different.' (Cassiano, 2022).

Second, it legitimizes antifeminism as a respectable conservative stance, softening its public image through her position as a young and modern looking female spokesperson. Third, it allows the far right to

appropriate feminist vocabulary, such as 'rights', 'protection', or 'freedom', while reversing its emancipatory content:

I have no complexes regarding men and no desire for a role of equality, but rather one of equity. There are rights that men have that I do not want. And there are still steps to be taken for women to gain greater recognition in society. Saying that we do not identify with the movement does not make us anti-women, as I am often told. I could not wish for others what I do not wish for myself—a woman's place is wherever she wants it to be.' (Cassiano, 2022).

Her rejection of feminism operates in conjunction with her adherence to particular gender roles. Across her social media presence, Matias blends elements of the "mother of the nation" performance, projected onto an imagined future where the defense of family and homeland justifies political engagement, with what Scrinzi (2024) identifies among women in the Lega (Italy) and the Front National (France) as the figure of the "female individual." She foregrounds a political persona and a personal narrative that emphasize her roles as a caring daughter, sister, and family member, alongside those of a competent and assertive political actor. The video post published in Matias' and CH Youth TikTok and IG profiles on March 11, 2024, after it became known that the party had experienced exponential growth in the legislative elections, is an example of this maternal-like and reassuring stance, in conjunction with her political assertiveness.⁶ Addressing teenagers and young voters, she says:

"Hello, I know you arrived at school today and your teachers told you to be very worried because the far right has grown and fascism has returned to Portugal. CHEGA is not a fascist party. The Portuguese Constitution prohibits fascism. And if CHEGA is a party that is legally recognized by the Constitutional Court, it naturally has to meet certain requirements, namely not being a fascist party, but we are also not a far-right party. What CHEGA has been saying is that we are extremists in fighting corruption and that we are radical in fighting the privileges of the same people as always, especially politicians. (...) Another very important thing: you must choose your sources carefully and understand where you want to get your information. There are various pages circulating out there that say CHEGA is an extremist party, but in reality they are left-wing pages. (...) Another very important point: you might not know what to reply when people tell you all this, nor how to explain that CH has brought very positive things to democracy, but here are some simple examples: First of all, CHEGA is making history. Until now, we had a two-party system. (...) But what happened? Yesterday, CHEGA managed to elect 48 MPs, which means that no decision can be taken solely by the will of PS and PSD. There is now a third party with an active voice, and this is historic. (...) So, at the end of the day, do not be afraid; it was not a dark day for democracy. On the contrary: justice was done.

The post combines two seemingly contradictory rhetorical registers, a maternal, assuring tone and a strongly assertive political

⁶ Video transcript: Title: Were you told that CHEGA is far-right? <https://www.instagram.com/reel/C4YwV2f16lc/>.

message, to produce a persuasive narrative aimed at young audiences. This dual strategy is characteristic of contemporary far-right communication styles, which often rely on emotional warmth and intimacy to legitimize otherwise confrontational or exclusionary political claims (Freistein et al., 2022).

Throughout the video, Matias adopts the role of a protective, emotionally available figure addressing vulnerable youth. This is conveyed through the intimate address ('Hello, I know you arrived at school today and your teachers told you to be very worried'), emotionally validating language ('do not be afraid', 'know that you are not alone'), and affective reassurance that frames political turbulence as something the adult (the politician) can explain and neutralize. Her tone, outfit choice and video setting, with dim lighting, echo this maternal posture (or, given her youth, that of an older caring sister), constructed around care, protection, emotional calm, and guidance. She positions herself as a trustworthy guardian who can shelter the viewer from confusion, misinformation, and fear. This maternal frame also infantilizes the audience, who is portrayed as in need of comfort and moral orientation, allowing the speaker to reframe political criticism as a form of emotional manipulation aimed at vulnerable youth.

Simultaneously, the message deploys assertive political rhetoric, through strong claims of injustice ('justice was done', 'a strategy has been created to fight CHEGA'), delegitimization of opponents ('they are left-wing pages', 'do not allow them to throw sand in your eyes'), reframing of the party's agenda as morally righteous ('we are extremists in fighting corruption and radical in fighting the privileges of the same people as always') and making triumphalist claims about electoral success and democratic relevance ('What CHEGA achieved yesterday was historic'). This assertiveness serves to rework the party's radical stances as morally righteous, reframe institutional criticism as persecution and construct a binary universe in which the party defends 'the people' against corrupt elites, manipulative teachers and media. The political assertiveness relies on a protective, almost disciplinary type of authority, akin to a parent who both consoles and tells the child the "truth."

The post's power lies in the blend of emotional intimacy and ideological direction. The maternal tone softens the assertiveness, making the message appear trustworthy, relatable, as well benevolent, as though the party's hardline positions were simply forms of protection. It enacts a paradigmatic example of "affective populism" where the leader embodies both caregiver and savior, a combination that increases persuasive power among young or politically inexperienced audiences (Moffitt, 2020).

In conclusion, the affective framing of Matias (the leader of Juventude CHEGA, the party's youth organization) is key to strategically shaping the ideological formation of younger party members. This role facilitated the diffusion of antifeminist narratives among youth constituencies, embedding them within broader far-right frameworks of nationalism, moral conservatism, and "anti-woke" rhetoric. Through a performative deployment of femininity, combining an image of modernity, religiosity, and national pride, she constructed a communicative style that initially presents antifeminism as relatable, authentic, and non-confrontational, a style which is anchored in traditional understandings of femininity and its association with motherhood and care. Over time, however, this aestheticized and seemingly benign posture has given way to a more assertive and confrontational tone, marked by sharper attacks on feminism, gender studies, and LGBTQIA+ rights. This evolution is particularly evident in more recent posts, after 2024, and as such falls

outside the corpus of analysis of this article. Nevertheless, it is important to mention this shift since it mirrors a broader trend in far-right communication strategies, where influencers gradually escalate rhetorical intensity while maintaining the appearance of youthful authenticity. By embodying the figure of the 'young, modern conservative woman'—a woman who embodies modern beauty standards with conservative values about motherhood—, she acts as a culturally resonant messenger who facilitates the normalization of antifeminist narratives across generations, platforms, and media ecosystems.

4.3 Sexuality, virtue and order

Rita Matias' views on feminism reflect ideas that are widely held within the party and voiced by other women leaders and activists. CH's antifeminist campaign claims that feminists are misguided, resentful women who have "gone too far" in their demands and are responsible for societal "moral decay" by aligning with allegedly dangerous groups such as LGBTQIA+ people, migrants, and Muslims, portrayed as the true adversaries of women. Grounded in gross distortions of feminism and gender theory, it selectively references feminist texts, goals, and principles to equate feminism with promiscuity, abortion, victimhood, excess, and, at times, sexual abuse and pedophilia. See, for instance, how Sara Dias, a female CH militant, depicts feminism in an op-ed published in *Folha Nacional*. She interprets the achievements of feminism's three waves as evidence of societal harm, framing feminist demands as inherently harmful for women's well-being (e.g., she accuses the access to contraception of obliging women to perform more sex with more men) and conducive to chaos (e.g., she accuses the sexual revolution, which she equates with feminism, of normalizing pedophilia) and death (e.g., she equates abortion with license to kill children):

What is feminism anyway? *Does it make sense for women who are constantly fighting for civil and equal rights to go out naked in the street? To fight to kill their own child, a life that does not yet have the power to decide, in their own womb? What about inducing children that they can be whatever they want, except what they themselves are (girl or boy)? Not to mention their recurrent denial of Christianity, which is the cradle of Western civilization, and which is now being taken away from us with all its might.*

It's easy to see that feminism is no longer about obtaining equal rights, because if it were, then there would be no more struggles. You could say it's about getting more rights than men—which would not be wrong—but I prefer to call it the Sexual Revolution.

Kate Millett herself says that feminism is 'the complete and satisfactory formulation of the ends of the sexual revolution.' A sexual revolution that allows women—and men—to be completely *libertine without the consequences, due to the legalization of abortion and easy access to contraceptive methods, without considering the psychological and physical problems that this will bring to women—and not to men.* It also makes it possible to accept mental retardation [sic] in men who are attracted to children, i.e., pedophilia, as well as the acceptance of men who harass women in the street—and vice versa. These were the demands of the Second Wave of the feminist movement.

The Second Wave of the feminist movement began with the right to vote being granted, even though women did not do the same things as men, such as going to war or being in charge of feeding the family. *This wave was ironically about benefiting men. In the time of our ancestors, men were deprived of sex until marriage, so that the woman could give herself confidently to her husband. Today, men aren't in charge of anything, at most they have to spend 2 euros on condoms, and even then, there are protests to make them free.*

The Third Wave of the feminist movement, the one we are witnessing now, is led by Judith Butler, founder of Gender Ideology. In her book *Gender Trouble*, she tells us that feminism is no longer for all women, but only for a certain group of people who understand its theory (...) *Feminism today is a deconstruction of women, and over the last few years, a deconstruction of women's lives. It is nothing more or less than a sexual revolution. It has nothing to do with ordinary women, but with frustrated women.* (Sara Dias, Student, "The fruits of feminism (or the Sexual Revolution) in contemporary times" in *Folha Nacional*, 7/13/2023).

Central to the text is the construction of feminism as inherently destructive to life, family, and social order. The op-ed echoes a claim that is frequent in antifeminist discourses: the depiction of feminist movements as dogmatic, ideological, and authoritarian. In this vein, feminists are accused of imposing "gender ideology" on innocent people that supposedly reject it or are being misled and exploited by left-wing totalitarians to accept it. Accordingly, feminists are portrayed as inherently dangerous leftists, abusive, oppressive, and supremacist, framed as women who see themselves as superior to men and strive to have control over them. Ultimately, they are depicted as unnecessary. The text explicitly reframes feminism's historical trajectory by denying its emancipatory goals.

As the derogatory reference to "gender ideology" in the op-ed indicates, antifeminism aims to challenge and delegitimize LGBTQIA+ rights. CH shares with many other far right and conservative movements the view of LGBTQIA+ individuals, particularly transgender people and activists, as dangerous. They are frequently depicted as perverse, pedophilic, or mentally ill, allegedly seeking to sexualize defenseless children, harm or replace women. In this narrative, sex education, gender identity, and gender equality are characterized as the extreme manifestations of an imposed or imported gender agenda.⁷ As the above quoted op-ed exemplifies, feminism is accused of no longer serving women in general but the interests of "a certain group of people who understand its [Judith Butler's] theory". The association of contemporary feminism with Butler's theory is aimed at depicting it as elitist (in the sense that it is academic) and detached from "ordinary women" (in the sense that it is not about ciswomen). The concluding assertion that "feminism today is a deconstruction of women" encapsulates the text's core claim: that feminist progress has not liberated women but erased in favor of LGBTQIA+ agendas.

⁷ One of the most important initiatives of this antifeminist agenda was the hashtag #deixemascriançasempaz (leavethekidsalone) profusely disseminated by, among others, Maria Helena Costa, the President of the 'Associação Família Conservadora' (Conservative Family Association) and former leader of the Póvoa de Varzim Council of CH.

The mobilization of LGBTQIA+ issues is done by antigender and antifeminist actors to create a narrative whereby they present themselves as the "silenced majority," who is oppressed by a powerful "connected minority" (the so-called "feminist and LGBTQIA+ lobbies"). Hence, they position themselves as defenders of freedom of expression and, by extension, of democracy itself. In their attacks on "gender ideology" and most notably in their conflation of LGBTQIA+ identities with child sexualization or abuse, CH politicians and activists appropriate the language of rights, sometimes extending to rights that are not formally recognized, to legitimize their stance, framing themselves as protectors of children's rights (against alleged sexualization), women's rights, and parental rights, which according to them are threatened by the promotion of "gender ideology". As the following quotes exemplify, women's interventions converge totally with the party's (male) leadership:

'In this new era, the assertive thoughts of a minority prevail, forcing the imposition of new ideals in a rude and offensive way. The scenario of gender and sexuality ideals and their imposition and social alteration, defended by the parties that govern us, thirsty for power and blinded by the greed of political and financial ascension, is growing.(...)While it's crucial to promote understanding and acceptance, there is growing concern about the age at which these conversations are introduced into the school circle, especially by peers, who, due to coffee chats and the viewing of abrasive content on social media, influence the most naive, leading some to consider bisexuality or homosexuality to be a fashionable matter, while heterosexuality equates to homophobia. (...)Situations like these abound in our classrooms today and prove that developing children must not, and should not, be exposed to dubious interpretations that are prone to sowing inappropriate notions in their thinking and sexual development, perhaps in opposition to the interests of the children's own families. It is imperative that Portugal continues to embrace progress and inclusion, but this must be done in a way that preserves the essential mission of its educational institutions, that is, to educate and prepare the next generation for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead' (Op ed. by Maria do Carmo Gomes, "Desafios do Ensino: Identidade de Género", *Folha Nacional*, 11/20/2023).

We've started to confuse gender ideology with modernity. As if we were more modern, as if we were more humane, as if we were more decent by putting our children through school with indecent content, with content of a sexual nature and other obscene content in our schools. It's obscene. The school, the school paid for with our taxes, should not be used for that (...) if we're talking about public schools, paid for with our taxes, we should at least have one demand: that schools don't replace our families, our values and what we believe in to indoctrinate our children. We must tell them face to face that we will stop this from happening in Portugal. Our children deserve better; our young people deserve better. (André Ventura, 12/2/24 Video Post Instagram account Chega).

The language used in these excerpts—the first by an academic woman and party activist, the second by the president of the party—is overtly alarmist, framing gender and sexuality-related issues as part of an alleged conspiracy to "turn" children queer or transgender and

urging parents to react accordingly. Our previous research about the dissemination of antigender ideology discourses in Portugal through the conservative newspaper *Observador* (Garraio et al., 2023) noted that antigender actors focused mostly on LGBTQIA+ rights and education. We also argued that CH adoption of antigender ideology rhetoric capitalized on the already existing moral panic around school curricula and the “protection of our children” from sexualization and indoctrination. In that sense, “gender ideology” offered CH an “appealing language.” Not surprisingly, CH militants’ social media content and op-eds disproportionately target LGBTQIA+ individuals, especially trans people, as well as feminists, producing a climate of hostile hypervisibility.

Hence, the emphasis on the “T” reveals less about transgender identities themselves than about what they are perceived to destabilize: entrenched gender and racial ideologies, particularly anxieties over the erosion of the binary divide between men and women that underpins dominant social arrangements symbolized by the idealized traditional family. Because trans people contest biologically grounded gender norms and reproductive roles, they become focal points of hostility and sometimes violence. Yet this moral panic extends beyond trans individuals to cisgender people, most notably feminists, who challenge traditional gender expectations and the assumption that men and women are naturally suited to distinct roles within a nuclear family model.

4.4 A women’s movement without feminists: CHEGA’S pseudo-scientific legitimacy

Far-right parties today function as a consolidated transnational network, actively promoting cooperation across borders through alliances between women, cross-national knowledge exchange, and the training of younger activists in strategies tested elsewhere. Thus, CH’s antifeminist discourse is neither original nor unique. It reflects the adaptation of discourses that circulate globally, in particular in the Brazilian far-right, particularly that of the Bolsonaro support system.

This system has contributed to the ideological consolidation of Portuguese antifeminism by means of the adoption of the term “gender ideology” to justify essentialist views on men and women; the circulation of anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ narratives grounded in religious conservatism, and particularly on the rise and political mobilization of evangelical Pentecostalism (Moreira, 2023, 157); the centrality of female anti-feminists, sharing personal narratives of the pain and suffering that feminism has allegedly caused to them (Carbone, 2025); and through the use of purportedly academic references framed as critical of feminism, thereby granting them a veneer of intellectual credibility. Additionally, the influence of the Catholic Church in Portugal, historically one of the most religiously homogeneous countries in Europe, has provided an institutional bedrock for these movements (Garraio et al., 2023), with figures such as Rita Matias embodying the intersection of antifeminist politics and ultracatholic associativism that explicitly frames gender equality and LGBTQIA+ rights as threats to a divinely legitimized natural order.

The collaboration with Brazil is particularly notable. Rita Matias’ antifeminist positioning within CH is tightly intertwined with that of Brazilian leader Ana Campagnolo, suggesting a shared transnational project that links Portuguese and Brazilian antigender politics. Matias and Campagnolo publicly co-promote antifeminist ideas through joint media appearances, including the co-organisation of an antifeminist

conference in Portugal at CH’s request and in Brazil with the presence of Matias⁸ and the collaborative promotion of Campagnolo’s book *Hydra feminista*, for which Matias wrote the postface and attended the official launch at ALESC in March 2025.⁹ Their collaboration extends into Brazil’s right-wing digital media ecosystem: Matias appears as a guest on Campagnolo-linked platforms such as SensoCast/Senso Incomum¹⁰ and gives interviews to the far-right media company Brasil Paralelo,¹¹ spaces that are key infrastructures in a conservative, conspiratorial online mediascape that supported Bolsonaroism and now sustains a broader transnational antigender movement (Freitas Alves, 2025; Holanda, 2024). Through mutual praise,¹² invitations to follow, and shared antifeminist framing on social media, Matias is presented as part of the same political struggle as Campagnolo, and the available evidence points to symbolic and ideological alignment, recurring collaboration in public events, and joint participation in a cross-border conservative network that amplifies CH’s antifeminist discourse beyond Portugal.

The conference “Feminism: Perversion and Subversion”, led by the Brazilian state deputy and renowned antifeminist Ana Campagnolo¹³ is analyzed here as a clear example of such transnational borrowing. The conference sought to convey the idea that CH’s women, together with Brazilian activists, are participating in a transnational struggle against ‘gender feminism’, presented as a global threat to women and children. This narrative echoes the far right’s ongoing project of constructing “a women’s movement without feminists” and protecting societies from feminism.

The event’s central purpose was to produce an aura of scientific legitimacy for CH’s anti-feminist and antigender mobilizations. As Garraio et al. (2023) argued, pseudo-scientific discourse has become one of the key strategies in many op-eds with antigender rhetoric used in the newspaper *Observador*. Within this framing, the rejection of Judith Butler or other feminist theorists is not meant to appear as a symptom of intellectual inferiority but rather as a debate among equals, a form of “scientific critique” supposedly capable of exposing the alleged flaws of feminist and queer scholarship.

8 The II Antifeminist conference took place in Florianópolis in March 7 2025, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DGBwdavSNQu/>.

9 See, for instance: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DGvKPlvOSMH/>; <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DLQE-ejOF3Q/>—where the book is presented by Campagnolo as a “partnership with the Portuguese MP Rita Matias”.

10 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4753Mjh8gs>.

11 <https://www.brasilparalelo.com.br/noticias/deputada-portuguesa-fala-sobre-consequencias-do-feminismo-para-a-sociedade-do-pais>.

12 See, for instance, <https://www.instagram.com/p/DJz8B0wtD3w/>, where Campagnolo praises the election of Matias as MP.

13 *Carta Capital* (2018) state deputy in Santa Catarina, Brazil, from the Liberal Party (PL) was the most-voted state representative in 2022. The congresswoman and History teacher published the first explicitly anti-feminist book in Brazil in 2019, titled *Feminism: Perversion and Submission*. In this first book, Campagnolo engages in a revisionist account of the history of feminism, attempting to confront it and reveal what she claims are the “real motivations” of the movement, which she considers harmful to the values of the family, the church, and femininity. The representative was already an influencer when she was elected in 2018. Campagnolo built herself up as an activist anchored in the antifeminist agenda, while studying History and pursuing a master’s degree at the State University of Santa Catarina in 2016. She sued her former advisor, alleging that she had been discriminated against for being antifeminist and Christian. It was also during this period that the representative joined the ‘School Without Party’ movement and began to gain prominence in the field of education, later aligning herself, during the electoral period, with former Brazilian president Bolsonaro (Carta Capital, 2018).

This transnational discourse is translated into the Portuguese context through familiar themes: opposition to mixed bathrooms, defense of the heteropatriarchal family, and the preservation of “natural” sex differences. To achieve credibility, the speaker invokes Kate Millet, Simone de Beauvoir, and Judith Butler, while relying on distortions that generate the appearance of scholarly expertise.¹⁴ The claim to be revealing “feminist myths” reproduces the widely circulated “gender-critical” discourse promoted by far-right parties across Europe and the Americas. Attendees were instructed that feminism has ‘never truly benefited anyone,’ given that women supposedly already enjoy full equality thanks to liberalism.

Antifeminist pseudo-scientific thinking typically argues that feminism seeks to erase sex differences, a project linked to ‘Marxist culture’ or to a ‘war on marriage and motherhood.’ This logic appears in Campagnolo’s statement that: feminism does not only advocate for equal rights but also seeks to change the nature of men and women.”

Here, Campagnolo deploys the term “gender feminism”, originally coined by Sommers (1995) in *Who Stole Feminism?*, and widely used in antigender academic production (Rivera-Amarillo and Rondón, 2022). The term implies that feminist and queer theory do not pursue equality but instead wage a gender war, attacking the material basis of sex through gender-identity-affirming processes targeting trans people, reproductive rights, new reproductive technologies, and non-heteronormative subjectivities. This opposition between “gender feminism” and a supposedly legitimate feminism limited to ‘equity between men and women’ reflects a key trope in antifeminist discourse: the differentiation between “good” and “bad” feminisms (Garbagnoli, 2016).

The conference constructs a false dichotomy in which the discursive analysis of sex is equated with the denial of sexual materiality. From this perspective, constructivist, poststructuralist, and queer theories allegedly replace sexual difference with mere self-identification. Such misrepresenting of the sex/gender debate erases the historical sedimentation of gender and the sociocultural constraints shaping gendered subjectivities.

14 See for instance this quote (italics are our own): ‘In 1920, the time when the first wave of feminism was bubbling up, countries were beginning to discuss the right to vote, some were even granting women the right to vote (...) that feminism was doubly unnecessary. In short, feminism was only in the world to defend equality of opportunity, it was completely disposable because the liberals would have already done that, and technology, the Industrial Revolution and the natural progression of history would have meant that women would have had to occupy this space (...) The second wave of the feminist movement is a markedly sexual wave, and that’s how we know it best: the sexual wave of the feminist movement was born in conjunction with liberation and the spread of contraceptives, and those books published, for example, by Betty Friedan, as we have already mentioned, *The Feminine Mystique*, which defamed housewives and the domestic role of women. Like the book by this marxist and atheist philosopher who lured minors to have sex with her and her lover Sartre. (...) The point is that for the feminist movement, female sexual libertinism is fundamental and cannot be achieved without legalizing abortion because women can only behave irresponsibly in sex if they can kill the consequences of that irresponsible sex, which are babies. That’s why the second wave of the feminist movement has stuck to the abortionist agenda without exception. So all feminists have been abortionists since the first wave, and not just in the second. (...) In my view the feminism we know today, which is radical, anti-Christian, anti-Catholic, anti-institutional, anti-patriarchal, anti-family, anti-motherhood, pro-abortion, this feminism that we know today as gender feminism is and always has been the same embryonic feminism of the last century (Campagnolo, Conference Transcription, 2022).

CH promotes an essentialist view, asserting that ‘only sex exists; gender is an invention,’ rejecting the social construction of gender, based on religious and pseudo-scientific arguments to justify purportedly innate differences between men and women. In this framework, sex is treated as a purely biological category, while gender is framed as an ideological construct fabricated by feminists and the political Left. As Rita Matias explained at the conference:

We are in the house of democracy¹⁵ and I think that this house has never been as democratic as it is today, because for the first time we are asking to speak about something that was not allowed until then, because we know the narratives that unfortunately circulate in this house and we know the reaction, the cancellation, the censorship that is even being done to those who have the courage to say, who think differently. So it is a very special step *for the first time that we can state the obvious here, as I said before, that a man is a man and a woman is a woman, and there is nothing more beautiful than a complementary relationship.* (Rita Matias, Conference transcription, 2022).

In a related Instagram video (08/01/2024), André Ventura and Rita Matias reinforce this essentialist claim, asserting: “There are only two sexes: female or male.”

André Ventura: That’s how it should be: men’s toilets, women’s toilets. There’s the man, there’s the woman. Why confuse things? Why make everything so much more difficult to understand? Why not respect nature, which has given us the ease and clarity of things? Why not respect human nature? Gender ideology destroys, confuses, confuses and disturbs us. Gender ideology kills society.

Rita Matias: Have you seen it the other way round? It would never be a situation of equality, it would be a situation of vulnerability, especially for women. Why complicate what is simple, right?

Sex differentiation and clear boundaries, valued as a form of protection for women, are to be found in traditional gender roles. Because gender is portrayed as inherently complex or confusing, women are urged to embrace their “natural” roles, most prominently, motherhood. While not entirely dismissing women’s participation in the public sphere or in politics, the role of women as mothers is consistently portrayed as their most important and valued function, including by politically active individuals identifying as antifeminists:

Anything a woman can do that does not work, a woman will consider it a sacrifice or an oppression. *For example, the most beautiful thing you can do as a woman is to look after your children. That’s what women do not like because of the construction of the feminist movement, but there’s nothing greater they can do.* Men, on the other hand, when they go about their inherently masculine duties, such as serving in the army, pulling weights or doing something risky, do not do it with a sense of oppression, but they do it with a sense of honor. You can see that when you tell your husband to do something extremely dirty and

15 The event took place at the National Assembly.

dangerous, they like to do masculine duties because it gives them a sense of honor (Campagnolo, Conference Transcription, 2022).

Heteronormative, patriarchal families are portrayed as foundational units of the nation, deserving protection at all costs. To reinforce this notion, the figure of the vulnerable child, supposedly endangered by gender-equality education in schools or debates over bathroom access, is repeatedly invoked as a central trope. Within this framework, gender itself is constructed as a threat to the heteronormative nuclear family, to sex-based identities and roles, and to the nation as a whole.

Relatedly, the discursive turn in the social sciences, especially deconstruction, is misrepresented as evidence of reality denial or societal subversion. Feminist theory is portrayed as a project of deliberate “deconstruction” of essential truths. In this framing, deconstruction functions as a method for destroying rationality, leaving only a single “truth” accessible to the supposedly enlightened antigender actor. The adoption of pseudo-academic language grants this narrative the appearance of rigor, while familiar stereotypes (feminists as frustrated, promiscuous, anti-Christian) delegitimize feminist activism and encourage distrust toward protests, civic engagement, and democratic participation. This dynamic is illustrated in the conference transcript below:

The first and most fundamental feminist argument to which all efforts are directed is to deconstruct masculinity and femininity, saying that there is no such thing as a feminine essence and a masculine essence (...) People no longer accept, for example, that certain social roles can more easily be played by a man and certain social roles can more easily be played by women” (Campagnolo, Conference Transcription, 2022).

To “save women and children” from the perceived dangers of feminism, queer theory, and trans people, CH presents its fundamental mission as the restoration of traditional values and the unveiling of “truths” that feminists allegedly betrayed. This narrative is encapsulated in CH’s own promotional language:

“Unlike other political parties that take advantage of women and use them for political gain, CHEGA will always defend a balanced, fair society that values the role of women. CHEGA is the home of Portuguese women because we are the heirs of the greatest women in our history!”

This narrative is further articulated by Rita Matias, who frames the left as the cause of women’s alleged erasure by trans inclusion:

[We are] alone in the Assembly of the Republic... to say that the Gender Agenda... has today become the greatest betrayal that women have to face, because today we are being asked to keep quiet... to make way for biological men, who... compete directly with us in art, culture, sport, and relegate us to last place. And who has allowed this? This musty, hypocritical left, which swore to defend and honor women. (Transcription of video with Rita Matias, 17/3, Instagram Chega Juventude).

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that CH’s antifeminist legitimizing discourses cannot be understood as an isolated or purely national phenomenon. Rather, they are shaped by the transnational circulation of antifeminist narratives, with Brazilian antifeminism

playing a particularly influential role. Through the selective appropriation of feminist theories and politics, developed in the Brazilian context, CH constructs antifeminism as a legitimate defense of national values, social order, and antigender science against perceived progressive excesses. This process of discursive importation reinforces CH’s anti-feminist ideological positioning within a broader global backlash against feminism and gender equality.

4.5 Femonationalism: the other side of antifeminism

Understanding antifeminism is essential for grasping how nationalism, racism, and xenophobia are articulated through gendered representations. Within this framework, “women’s rights and human rights” are often depicted as concerns that only exist outside Western territories (Agathangelou and Turcotte, 2010, 44–45), implying that gender equality is no longer a pressing issue within Europe. Consequently, the antifeminist, anti-LGBTQIA+, and conservative positions of far-right parties must be examined in relation to their nationalist, racist, xenophobic, and Islamophobic orientations, which are always contextually specific (Köttig et al., 2017; Spierings et al., 2015).

In the Portuguese context, femonationalism emerges as an alternative to feminism grounded in the premise that national (white) women are better protected by nationalism, as members of the national community, than by universalist or transnational feminist agendas. Rather than challenging gendered power relations, femonationalism instrumentalizes women’s rights to reinforce exclusionary conceptions of nationhood. This framework is developed in two interconnected ways.

First, femonationalist discourse displaces violence against women from its roots in cisheteronormativity and structural sexism, relocating it instead to the realm of Islam. Through this shift, gender-based violence is reframed as a cultural and religious problem associated with immigrant populations, thereby transforming it into an immigration issue rather than a systemic one within European societies.

This logic is evident in CH’s political communication, including its 2024 European election campaign, modelled on similar initiatives by Spain’s far-right party VOX. In these materials,¹⁶ the “protection of women’s rights in Europe” is framed primarily through punitive measures and the redefinition of the problem as an immigration issue rather than preventive or structural ones: harsher criminalization of gender-based violence, restrictive anti-migration policies (including tighter border control, detention, and deportation), and the portrayal of Islam as inherently oppressive to women. Feminism, by contrast, is accused of hypocrisy and complicity, particularly for allegedly ignoring violence committed by “non-white, non-Western men.”

CH female leaders have played a central role in activating these narratives. Figures such as Rita Matias and Patrícia Carvalho used social media to contrast Portuguese culture with that of migrants, frequently highlighting specific forms of violence such as honor killings or female genital mutilation (Santos and Roque, 2021). These selective

¹⁶ Matias’ IG post “In which Europe do you want to live? In the face of this wave of growing Islamisation that threatens Europe and condemns women to oppression, we say unequivocally that #nomeansno. If you want to live in a free and safe Portugal, where men and women continue to have equal rights and duties, you only have one possible option. On June 9, vote CHEGA.” (3/06/2024).

references construct migrant men as uniquely violent and European societies as fundamentally egalitarian, while obscuring the persistence of cis-heteropatriarchal structures within Europe itself.

Within this discursive framework, feminists become strategic targets: they are accused of enabling “Islamization,” “terrorism,” and even “violence against women,” thus positioning feminism as a threat to women’s safety rather than a vehicle for gender justice, as seen on Matias’ IG video post ‘No more money for gender ideologies, which do nothing but destroy our civilization and our future,’ where she frames her opposition to “gender ideology” and feminists as resulting from her defense of women, children, and civilization and links women’s insecurity to uncontrolled immigration, human trafficking, and urban crime (29/01/2024). The same ideas are repeated on Carvalho’s IG post, entitled ‘Defenders of women, but support for Islamic immigration?’ (30/01/2024).

Second, femonationalism intersects with the myth of the “Great Replacement,” which is reinforced through antigender ideology. From the far-right perspective, there is a perceived political and ideological investment in the reproduction of immigrants at the expense of the biological reproduction of Portuguese nationals. Gender equality policies and what is termed “gender ideology” are framed as facilitating demographic decline and cultural erosion.

This narrative is clearly articulated in CH’s depiction of immigration and Islam as existential threats to a ‘Europe of (white) nations and [heteronormative, non-racialized] families’ and to so-called ‘European values’ (ChEGA, 2019). Pro-natalist policies are thus tightly interwoven with nationalist and racist imaginaries, presenting the “natural” demographic order of Portugal and Europe as endangered by foreign populations, particularly Muslims. For example, CH has commented on media reports about the number of newborns with foreign mothers in Lisbon maternity hospitals, misleadingly extrapolating local data to claim that Portuguese nationals risk becoming a minority in their own country unless immediate birth policies are adopted (CH Instagram post 19/04/2024). However, this support for natality does not materialize through policies capable of addressing the fundamentally economic causes of low birth rates (precarious employment, low wages, high cost of living, lack of access to independent housing), thereby placing responsibility for change in this area solely on women’s willingness. And here feminism emerges as the source of all evil, allegedly encouraging women not to have children and to resort to abortion, as well as to place their careers ahead of the family, as discussed in the previous sections.

In this framework, antifeminist ideology and femonationalism function as two sides of the same coin. The rejection of gender equality, LGBTQIA+ rights, and feminist pedagogy is justified in the name of protecting women, families, and children, while simultaneously reinforcing a nostalgic vision of a white, Christian, and heteronormative nation. Women’s safety is invoked to legitimize authoritarian criminal policies, restrictive immigration controls, and the dismantling of feminist and anti-discrimination frameworks, ultimately strengthening nationalist and exclusionary agendas rather than addressing gender-based violence itself.

These views have become mainstream, influencing supposedly moderate and centrist political parties, and even managing to bring about changes in recent legislation, such as introducing bills banning face-covering garments including the burqa and the niqab in public spaces (October 2025), a bill introduced by CH, and passed with the support of the right-wing parties (PSD, Iniciativa Liberal, and CDS), and changes in citizenship policy, recently amended in October

2025, setting out the requirements for acquiring Portuguese citizenship.

5 Conclusion

Antifeminism constitutes one of the most significant contemporary threats to democracy and human rights, producing real and material consequences for individuals and societies. Its rapid expansion across different contexts is closely linked to the growing influence of far-right parties, for whom antifeminism represents a central ideological pillar. These actors have played a decisive role in normalizing and disseminating antifeminist narratives within mainstream political and public discourse.

At the same time, antifeminism cannot be examined in isolation from the broader ideological ecosystem in which it operates. An intersectional perspective is essential to understand how antifeminism interacts with other far-right principles, such as nationalism, authoritarianism, antiLGBTQIA+ discourses, antimigrant rhetoric, islamophobia, racism, and conservative religious values. These intersections shape both the content and the impact of antifeminist agendas.

Across far-right parties and movements, gender and feminism consistently emerge as central points of contention, even though their specific views on gender and anti/feminism vary. In Portugal, the case of CH mirrors broader patterns in Catholic Southern Europe, where far-right actors frame “gender ideology” and feminism as a disruptive force in gender relations, (traditional) family and society at large, framing it as a threat and deploying a range of rhetorical strategies to justify this portrayal.

Our conclusions regarding CH point to significant parallels with other European far-right parties, as well as a marked proximity to Bolsonarism, both in ideological terms and in the specific gender-related narratives they deploy. This affinity is evident not only in discourse but also in the strategic use of women as the public face of antifeminist mobilization. The increasing presence of women within the party also mirrors international trends: these women help normalize the antifeminist agenda by anchoring it in nationalist and racialized frames, while leaving the far right’s underlying ideological foundations intact.

Echoing (Scrinzi’s, 2017) notion of the “authentic witness,” that is the figure of the modern woman who speaks from a position of purported empowerment while rejecting feminist politics, Portuguese far-right actors similarly promote female representatives as credible messengers of antigender ideology. In the national context, this strategy finds its clearest embodiment in Rita Matias, who performs the dual function of legitimizing the movement’s antifeminist agenda and presenting it as compatible with women’s autonomy and contemporary gender expectations.

In fact, the article argues that women play a significant role in the articulation and public dissemination of antifeminist discourse. In many cases, women themselves act as visible spokespersons, commentators, or advocates for positions that challenge feminist ideas or policies. Their presence in public debate is particularly meaningful because it can enhance the credibility and legitimacy of antifeminist narratives. When these arguments are voiced by women rather than exclusively by men, they may appear less easily dismissed as misogynistic and instead be framed as

expressions of “common sense,” personal experience or women’s own perspectives.

Nonetheless, our analysis reveals that these narratives frequently reinforce highly traditional understandings of gender. The discourse often emphasizes women’s responsibilities within the family, highlighting motherhood, caregiving, and domestic roles as central to women’s identity and social value. In this framing, the family is portrayed as the primary and most appropriate sphere for women’s fulfillment, while public and professional ambitions are sometimes presented as secondary, potentially disruptive, or even detrimental to social cohesion.

This dynamic creates a notable tension within antifeminist discourse. On the one hand, women are actively mobilized as political actors in the public sphere, speaking in media, participating in public debate and shaping ideological narratives. On the other hand, the ideas they promote often reaffirm a normative model in which women’s primary place is located in the private sphere of family and domestic life. In this sense, women’s public visibility is strategically used to defend a discourse that ultimately seeks to circumscribe women’s social roles.

Rather than simply constituting a contradiction, this dynamic can be understood as a discursive strategy. By having women at the forefront of antifeminist narratives, these movements can simultaneously claim authenticity and shield themselves from accusations of sexism, while promoting a vision of gender relations grounded in traditional hierarchies and complementary roles between men and women.

An ethnographic approach could shed greater light on the internal diversity of perspectives among CH members and, importantly, on the motivations that lead women to support far-right and specifically antifeminist politics. Examining this dimension will be a priority in future research. Looking ahead, it is thus crucial to move beyond electoral analysis and investigate how antifeminist frameworks circulate through other organizations, movements, and actors. In the Portuguese context, this includes extreme-right groups such as *Habeas Corpus*, *Reconquista*, and far-right influencers, as well as examining the broader diffusion of these ideas across political and media landscapes, including the role of mainstream parties and media outlets. Understanding and countering de-democratizing discourses requires, in particular, research on far-right electorates and on how the antifeminist narratives promoted by CH (and other far-right actors) resonate with voters (see Cabezas Fernández et al., 2023), shaping public understandings of gender relations, feminism, and equality policies.

Finally, scholarship on feminist strategies of resistance to this backlash in Portugal is still developing. It is therefore essential to analyze how Portuguese feminist groups articulate their messages, strategies, and advocacy channels at national and transnational levels; how they construct intersectional and decolonial approaches; and how they collaborate with LGBTQIA+, antiracist, and other social movements, as well as with governmental and international institutions. Such work is vital for building a feminist cartography of struggle (Mohanty, 2003).

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by Ethics Committee of the Centre for Social Studies (University of Coimbra). The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The ethics committee/institutional review board waived the requirement of written informed consent for participation from the participants or the participants’ legal guardians/next of kin because given that the research relies exclusively on publicly available or public-domain sources, concerns individuals for whom there is no reasonable expectation of privacy, and does not fall within any of the categories outlined in Chapter V of the CES ethical guidelines for research requiring approval, this study does not require formal ethical review or informed consent.

Author contributions

SR: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft. RS: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JG: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft.

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Conflict of interest

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