

THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION OVER THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION  
IN TÜRKİYE: ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS AND FEMINIST STRUGGLE

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## ABSTRACT

### THE IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION OVER THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION IN TÜRKİYE: ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS AND FEMINIST STRUGGLE

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This dissertation inquiries into the ideological contestation between the gender advocacy movement and anti-gender movement surrounding the ratification of and withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (IC) in Türkiye. Despite widespread public support and the political will for the IC before and during its ratification, Türkiye became the first country to withdraw from the Convention only a decade after its adoption. Disputes surrounding the IC in this dissertation are analyzed through the lens of the contentious politics framework. This research argues that the anti-gender mobilization in Türkiye has structured itself as an ideological countermovement to gender advocacy. Hence the study problematizes the coordinated discursive efforts of anti-gender activism and the anti-IC campaign, and analyzes how Türkiye's feminist movement has been responding to the anti-gender movement during and after the withdrawal from the IC. To illustrate how anti-gender advocates stigmatized the IC and disseminated this interpretation to broader society, this research employed a critical discourse analysis to relevant news from conservative media outlets between 2020 and 2023. In addition, semi-structured in-depth interviews were also conducted

with gender advocacy actors to tap into their perception of the IC and how they have updated their movement repertoires to respond to gender-conservative ideological attacks. Hence, the study also underlined the consequences of the immediate post-IC era, the feminist actors' reflections on the meanings, and legacies of their struggles against gender-based violence and the prospects of gender advocacy as they have resorted to strategies of "cautious activism" and a "silent struggle."

**Keywords:** Gender-based violence (GBV), violence against women (VAW), anti-gender movement, gender advocacy movement, the Istanbul Convention (IC)

## ÖZ

### TÜRKİYE'DE İSTANBUL SÖZLEŞMESİ KONUSUNDA İDEOLOJİK ÇEKİŞME: TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET KARŞITI HAREKETLER VE FEMİNİST MÜCADELE

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Bu tez, Türkiye'de İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin (İS) onaylanması ve sözleşmeden çekilme konusunda toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi ile toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket arasındaki ideolojik mücadeleyi araştırmaktadır. İS'nin onaylanması sürecinde ve öncesinde yaygın bir kamuoyu desteği ve siyasi irade bulunmasına rağmen, Türkiye Sözleşme'nin kabulünden yalnızca on yıl sonra sözleşmeden çekilen ilk ülke olmuştur. Bu tezde, İS etrafındaki tartışmalar çekişmeli siyaset çerçevesinin merceğinden analiz edilmiştir. Bu araştırma, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin kendisini toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğuna karşı ideolojik bir karşı hareket olarak yapılandırıldığını savunmaktadır. Araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı aktivizmin ve İS karşıtı kampanyanın koordineli söylemsel çabalarını sorunsallaştırmakta ve aynı zamanda çekilme sürecinde ve sonrasında Türkiye'deki feminist hareketin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı harekete nasıl karşılık verdiğini analiz etmektedir. Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı savunucuların İS'yi ötekileştirdiklerini ve mesajlarını toplumun daha geniş



kesimlerine nasıl yaydıklarını açıklayabilmek için bu çalışma, muhafazakâr medya kuruluşlarındaki ilgili haberleri eleştirel söylem analizi kullanarak 2020 ve 2023 yılları arasındaki dönemi kapsayan bir şekilde analiz etmiştir. Toplumsal cinsiyet savunucusu aktörler ile İS'yi nasıl algıladıkları ve toplumsal cinsiyet muhafazakâr ideolojik saldırılara yanıt vermek için hareket repertuarlarını nasıl güncellediklerini araştırmak amacıyla yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, İS sonrası dönemin sonuçlarını, feminist aktörlerin toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı şiddete karşı mücadelelerinin anlamı ve mirasına ilişkin düşüncelerini, "temkinli aktivizm" ve "sessiz mücadele" stratejilerine başvuran toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu aktivizminin beklentilerini ele almaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Toplumsal cinsiyet temelli şiddet, kadına karşı şiddet, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket, toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi, İstanbul Sözleşmesi

*To my grandmother Hanım Gülbahçe  
To my mother Serpil Bozdoğan  
To my sister Özge Bozdoğan  
To all those who contribute to the fight against gender based violence around the  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
ÖZ .....	vi
DEDICATION .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ix
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	xi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xvi
CHAPTERS .....	xvii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. The Scope, Problematique, and the Framework of the Thesis Research .....	1
1.2. Putting the Turkish Case of Anti-genderism in Perspective: Theoretical Significance and the Conceptual Framework.....	9
1.3. Methodological Considerations and the Research Procedure .....	18
1.4. The Contributions of the Study and the Limitations of the Research.....	21
1.5. The Outline of the Dissertation .....	24
2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL TRAJECTORIES OF ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS.....	26
2.1. Introduction .....	26
2.2. The Anti-Gender Movement: Its Evolution, Its Actors, and the Issues at Stake .....	27
2.3. The "Gender Ideology" as the Culprit: Polarizing Narratives and Strategies Against Gender Equality .....	37
2.4. The Intersection of the Campaigns Against the Istanbul Convention and Anti-Gender Mobilizations: The Discursive Terrain .....	40
2.5. The Dynamics of Contentious Politics: The Process of Ideological Contestation During the Istanbul Convention Debates .....	45
2.6. Conclusions .....	56
3. TRACING THE STRUGGLES AND POLICY DYNAMICS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN POLICIES (VAW) IN TURKIYE .....	58
3.1. Introduction .....	58

3.2. The Issue of Violence Against Women (VAW) on the Global and Local Feminist Agendas and the Gender-Based Violence (GBV) .....	60
3.3. The Approach to VAW Policies as Part of Gender Mainstreaming .....	62
3.3.1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the VAW .....	66
3.3.2. The Making of the Istanbul Convention and the Timeline of Its Adoption Globally and in Türkiye .....	71
3.3.3. Progressive Changes with Uneven Implementation of Anti-Violence Policies .....	83
3.3.4. The Implementation of the Domestic Violence Law and the Law No. 6284 .....	87
3.4. From Gender Mainstreaming to Family Mainstreaming and "Gender Justice": A Paradigm Change in Gender Policies .....	91
3.4. Conclusions .....	96
4. METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE.....	97
4.1. Introduction .....	97
4.2. Research Questions and Theoretical Expectations.....	98
4.3. The Analysis of the Discursive Construction of the Anti-Istanbul Convention Campaign: The Discursive Frames of Movement-Counter-movement Encounters .....	99
4.3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis and Deductive Thematic Analysis.....	101
4.3.2. The Synopsis of the Interviews with the Advocacy Actors .....	106
4.4. Conclusions .....	112
5. THE ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION BETWEEN THE ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT AND THE GENDER ADVOCACY MOVEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION DEBATES .....	114
5.1. Introduction .....	114
5.2. Contentious Politics and Ideological Contestation Framework .....	115
5.3. The Opposing and Politicizing Discourses in the Contestation Between the Counter-movement and Gender Advocacy Actors .....	120
5.4. Conclusions .....	132
6. ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSES SURROUNDING THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION.....	134
6.1. Introduction .....	134
6.2. The Political Opportunity Structures in Transition: The Rise of Anti-Genderism in Türkiye.....	135
6.3. Analyzing the Discursive Aspect of the Backlash Towards the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye.....	143
6.3.1. The Political Divide in the Istanbul Convention Debates: Polarization Process.....	149

6.3.2. Normative Judgements: Framing the Debate as a Moral Imperative.....	156
6.3.3. Nationalist Ideals: Framing the Debate as a National Sovereignty Issue.....	163
6.3.4. "Masculinist Restoration": The Construction of Male Victimhood Discourse.....	171
6.3.5. The Moral Panic: Fears of Societal Decay.....	177
6.4. Contesting "Gender Ideology": Countering the Gender Advocacy Movement.....	184
6.5. Conclusions.....	191
7. COUNTERING THE GENDER BACKLASH AND STANDING UP FOR THE CONVENTION: FEMINIST ACTORS UNDER COUNTERMOVEMENT THREATS AND MOVEMENT CONSTRAINTS..	192
7.1. Introduction.....	192
7.2. Assessments of Gender Equality Advocacy Actors on the Struggle and the Scope of Activism.....	195
7.3. Confronting Anti-Gender Movements: An Ongoing Challenge.....	205
7.3.1. Resorting to a Defensive Feminist Retreat: A "Silent Struggle" in the Making.....	209
7.3.2. The Activist Anxieties and the Introverted Turn Amidst Threats and Exclusion.....	224
7.4. Beyond the Defensive Retreat: Hope and Resilience in the Gender Advocacy Movement.....	228
7.5. Conclusions.....	248
8. CONCLUSION.....	250
REFERENCES.....	265
A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE.	295
B. PARTICIPANT PROFILE.....	296
C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	299
D. ANALYZED NEWS ITEMS.....	301
E. ANALYZED BOOKS.....	309
F. SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS TABLE FOR CDA.....	310
G. CURRICULUM VITAE.....	311
H. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET.....	313
I. THESIS PERMISSION FORM / TEZ İZİN FORMU.....	331

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Framing, Contestation, and Political Mobilization in the Debate on the Istanbul Convention.....	126
Table 2. Annual Distribution of News Articles Covering the Istanbul Convention.....	129
Table 3. The Silent Struggle: Constituent Forms of Activism.....	219



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The Status of The Istanbul Convention Across Europe.....	75
Figure 2. Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis.....	104
Figure 3. The Istanbul Convention Debates: A Contentious Episode.....	119
Figure 4. The Themes Obtained Through Critical Discourse Analysis.....	130
Figure 5. The categories and subcategories obtained through in-depth interviews.....	131
Figure 6. Summary of the Findings.....	132

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Justice and Development Party
BABADER	The Fathers and Children Association
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party
CAHVIO	Committee on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEECs	Central and Eastern European Countries
CEID	Association for Monitoring Gender Equality
CHP	Republican People's Party
CRDP	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil society organizations
DEVAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women
ESIK	Women's Platform for Equality
ETCEP	Promoting Gender Equality in Education Project
EU	European Union
FvD	Forum for Democracy
GBV	Gender-based violence
GONGO	Government Organized Non-Governmental Organization
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
HDP	People's Democratic Party
IC	Istanbul Convention
ILGA	International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
KADEM	Association of Women and Democracy

KA-DER	Association for the Support and Training of Women Candidates
KSSGM	General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex, Queer
MA-ÇOBDER	Victimized Children and Fathers' Rights Association
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
NGOs	Non-governmental Organizations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
ŞÖNİM	Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers
TCK	Turkish Penal Code
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VAW	Violence against women
WCF	World Congress of Families
WWHR	Women for Women's Human Rights
YÖK	Council of Higher Education

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. The Scope, Problematique, and the Framework of the Thesis Research

Over the last decade, the concept of gender and issues related to gender equality (such as gender self-determination, reproductive justice, sex education, and discrimination of non-binary gender identities) have faced increasing anti-gender (ideological) backlash. The feminist/social justice frames have been marginalized and demonized by these anti-gender movements. They also opposed gender-based analysis that aimed for emancipatory and equal visions for all groups oppressed under patriarchy, including women, men, and individuals who do not conform to gender norms. Anti-genderism is not a recent phenomenon. Since the mid-1990s, even in countries moving toward strengthening a gender-inclusive democratic order, anti-gender advocates have threatened to roll back progressive legislation and undermine reformist initiatives (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a). As the latest book by renowned gender scholar and philosopher Judith Butler explained, right-wing social and political forces and anti-gender actors often form alliances. This situation came to represent a distinct ideological stance with a systematic mobilization power (2024, pp. 22-23). This new social force or alliance is not merely a reaction or backlash against women's equal rights and gender pluralism; therefore, it cannot be explained solely as a culture war against the values that defend them. As debates over gender and gender-based violence (GBV) have shown, advocates of anti-gender perspectives continue to promote the idea of religiously sanctioned gender complementarity. As Butler notes, the anti-gender perspective promotes the idea of gender as "a phantasm with destructive powers" for the nation and the family (2024, p. 8).<sup>1</sup> In this context, the issue of GBV

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<sup>1</sup> As Butler reminds us, what is meant by the anti-gender attitude here is the groups that construct gender as an "ideology" (2024, pp. 17-18).

has been an important theme of an ideological attack on gender analysis that highlights the complexities of social reality aimed at challenging the heteronormative status quo (Butler, 2024, pp. 23-24). In point of fact, in many European countries and in Türkiye, the politicized debates on the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention (IC), have become examples of how advocates of "anti-gender ideology" frame an agenda of patriarchal restoration against what they see as destructive "gender ideology." They have done this through the activities of far-right and right-populist political parties, transnational organizations, online platforms, and religious organizations affiliated with Evangelical and Catholic church organizations (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Kováts, 2018).

Rising rates of violence and gender discrimination against women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersex, and Queer (LGBTIQ+) individuals in Türkiye have become alarming issues regarding progress in gender equality. Therefore, the Convention, which Türkiye signed in 2011, provided an important legal framework for the prevention of GBV. It also led to changes to the existing domestic violence law. The Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women (Law No. 6284) emerged under the influence of the IC. This law was drafted in line with the expectations of women's organizations. In contrast, conservative social groups, particularly those with gender-biased stances, reacted to the gender-sensitive content of the IC. In other words, these actors challenge the claims and demands of gender advocacy actors, including feminists, LGBTIQ+ groups, and women's civil society organizations (CSOs) working to promote women's human rights and gender equality. Therefore, the Convention discussions in Türkiye quickly turned into an area of struggle where actors advocating gender equality and anti-gender movements counter each other to conduct opposing campaigns and political lobbying activities. In other words, the Turkish case has been an addition to a global wave of gender-conservative trends that challenge the accumulated gains of feminism, especially in countries undergoing democratic reversals. This situation has been identified and problematized as another example of global anti-gender movements, mobilizations, or campaigns that undermine the power of feminist and other gender equality advocates (Kancı et al., 2023; Özkazanç, 2020a; Özkazanç, 2024; Ünal, 2024a). Therefore, this dissertation

sets out to analyze how the concept of gender and gender equality was contested and politicized during the IC debates in the context of a gender-conservative countermovement targeting the claims and achievements of gender equality actors, including women's movement actors in Türkiye.

Türkiye became the first country to sign the IC without reservations in 2011 during the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, and the adoption of the Convention was considered a turning point in policy measures to combat violence against woman (VAW) by the state and the public. The IC of the Council of Europe was signed and ratified by thirty-four countries in the European region and by the European Union (EU) in 2023. However, it was contested significantly by conservative segments of society, including political parties, governments, and religious organizations, in many countries, including Hungary, Poland, Croatia, Bulgaria, Czechia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Türkiye.<sup>2</sup>

In hindsight, and as scholars have rightly diagnosed, the polarizing and politicized attacks on the IC in Türkiye have also been described as a paradigm shift away from the state's gender equality policies, particularly by drying up EU-led democratic reforms and taking a significant step back in the implementation of instruments of VAW (Eslen-Ziya, 2020). Türkiye's anti-gender mobilizations, which were portrayed as a model of democracy and gender equality for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries during the transitional periods known as the Arab Spring, led to the formation of a vocal front of conservative forces that pressured and allied with state actors who jeopardized the possibility of a gender-inclusive order.

While they played a significant role in the anti-IC debates that paved the way for the withdrawal, they also had deep repercussions on libertarian civil society and subsequently led to defensive strategies by equality advocates in civil society and academia. More specifically, the focus of this dissertation is the discursive dynamics of the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye, which has been strengthened by anti-gender actors and discourses and has transformed into a movement with significant mobilization

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<sup>2</sup> Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia have not yet ratified the IC. Council of Europe. (n.d.) Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 210 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treaty=210>

potential to defend men's rights and the family. In an environment of an uneven process of gender-mainstreaming in Türkiye, this movement, which opposed the demands of women's rights defenders, feminist and LGBTIQ+ activism, influenced not only state policies but also the stance of feminist civil society in the fight against GBV.

In this context, the study narrows down the analysis of anti-gender activism, which emerged as a countermovement, by focusing on the process of Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC, which was turned into a polarized campaign by diverse actors. The objections to the IC revealed that the anti-gender movement in Türkiye, as a discourse-driven movement, is an elusive but influential force that can ally with a conservative government on gender issues, increasing its potential to shape public opinion on controversial issues. While the IC debates in Türkiye continued on the same hostile ground, its actors played an active role in the process of delegitimizing the gender equality perspective on issues concerning women and discrimination against all genders.

The fundamental line of inquiry of this study addresses the research question of how the politicized discourses of an anti-gender movement constitute and concretize an ideological struggle that influences the process of withdrawal from the IC in 2021. In fact, the President's decision to withdraw was a bold step back from the gender equality approach adopted by successive Turkish governments since the early 1990s. As this thesis addresses the discursive opposition of anti-IC groups to reveal the links between the anti-gender movement and the anti-gender campaign, the thesis research also explores the consequences of the encounter between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender (counter)movement during the IC debates in Türkiye.

Türkiye withdrew from the IC exactly a decade later by an overnight presidential decree, an act which was made possible by the switch to a system of executive presidency in 2018. Before the decision to withdraw from the Convention was announced, it was already clear that political tensions and politicized debates involved two identifiable groups, neither of which was homogeneous: gender advocacy movement actors in civil society and academia who defended the Convention confronted by religious conservative circles and political figures (including pseudo-intellectuals) who were skeptical and hostile towards those who support the

Convention and wanted the Convention to be repealed in the name of protecting the family. Apart from these two groups, there were also those who remained undecided or avoided taking a clear stance. Some groups that initially opposed a possible withdrawal turned against the IC and supported the Presidential Act. Those who defended the Convention (as a bastion of anti-GBV policies) were predominantly gender advocacy groups and actors upholding a human rights perspective while supporting gender equality policies. Those who opposed the Convention and took sides in the public debates over the perceived "perils" of the Convention came from religious conservatives and religious communities, as well as right-wing populist political parties, who shared similar objections. The government's anti-equality perspective on gender issues resonated well with the "anti-genderism" of these groups in the context of a social policy agenda that embraced family mainstreaming over gender mainstreaming.

As reflected in the concrete issues of anti-violence policies and subsequent discussions on the IC, the groups confronting each other on gender issues and perspectives on equality have not been monolithic. The fluidity of the actors and groupings of anti-gender movements, in particular, makes it difficult to separate and define each of them. However, in the case of the IC, these conservative actors and groups emerged with a common agenda and discourse targeting a critical bastion of gender equality policies at a specific point in time. Hence, the overriding objective of the analysis in this dissertation concerns the ideational positioning and discursive strategies of anti-IC actors *vis a vis* the claims of the gender equality advocacy actors with specific reference to VAW and GBV in the context of the debates over withdrawal from the IC. The departure point for the analysis is based on a review of the conceptual frameworks on the contentious politics as well as existing academic findings on anti-gender movements. It is argued that the opposition to the IC in Türkiye has been characterized as a process of ideological contestation that pits anti-gender actors against broader feminist civil society, that it has gone beyond a simple backlash to gender equality agendas and progress in Türkiye and that its discursive strategies are similar to other cases around the world.

It is understood that this ideological contestation, which forms the starting point of the thesis research, emerged as a hegemonic struggle in a polarized context, which



ultimately left the gender advocacy movement in retreat and worried about what this wave of regression in women's human rights would bring. Therefore, this study has traced the arguments and specific themes adopted by conservative actors in interaction with the pro-Islamic gender-conservative government to defend the anti-IC political agenda and challenge the gender progressive forces' arguments for gender-inclusive democracy. In other words, the conflict between the movement and the countermovement does not merely reflect differences in stances on how to approach gender inequality. On the contrary, it has heralded broader processes of political and social change, including the continued paradigm shift towards the institutionalization of family-centered policies and the mainstreaming of an anti-gender agenda in the legal system, social policies, the education system, and VAW policies. Accordingly, the dissertation puts forward and seeks answers to the following research questions:

- How does the anti-gender movement, as a countermovement, intersect with the anti-Istanbul Convention campaign in Türkiye in terms of overlapping themes and discourses?
- In what ways does this discursive conflict between anti-convention actors and pro-convention actors, which had previously been able to collaborate with the state on gender equality, represent an ideological contestation over gender?
- What impact has this contestation had on the activism of gender equality advocates, both emotionally and strategically, as they continued their struggle against gender-conservative policies and anti-gender perspectives following the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?

In addressing these questions, this study adopts a qualitative approach to reach in-depth inferences, considering also insights from existing literature on anti-gender movements and anti-gender debates in Türkiye and elsewhere (Balogh, 2020; Edenborg, 2021; Eslen-Ziya, 2022; Graff & Korolczuk, 2017; Grzebalska et al., 2017; Kováts, 2018; Korolczuk, 2020a; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Norocel & Paternotte, 2023; Özkazanç, 2020b; Patternote & Kuhar 2017a; Ünal, 2024a). Accordingly, the ideologically loaded discursive appeals and arguments of anti-IC actors in their campaigns since 2020 have important common themes and concerns with the discourses and rhetorical strategies of anti-gender movement actors in Türkiye.

Moreover, for gender advocacy movement actors, the withdrawal has created a strong impetus to both strengthen their solidarity networks and restructure their strategies in the face of long-term threats and challenges to existing rights, including their ongoing strong campaigns for the implementation of anti-GBV policies. Hence, it was inevitable to include in this analysis an inquiry into the constraints and obstacles that feminist (gender equality advocacy) actors face in their activism in defending the IC, challenging the withdrawal, and continuing their activism against ongoing anti-gender threats.

The opposition to the IC in Türkiye, an extension of the anti-gender (counter)movement, appears to have achieved its goal with the decision to withdraw from the Convention. In the process of organizing the campaign against the Convention, campaigns that included actors from the anti-gender movement referred to certain common themes and expressed a systematic hostility through discursive mobilization to appeal to the broad public. They also targeted feminist actors to stigmatize and undermine them, ultimately succeeding in influencing public opinion through the heightened perception of threat that allegedly stemmed from their gender perspective. As the developments following the withdrawal decision indicate, this countermovement dynamic strengthened the hand of the populist government, which has so far instrumentalized the IC together with other steps toward gender equality.

As explained below, in order to detail the process of ideological contestation under a conservative populist administration that replaced equality with justice, the discourses of the countermovement (specific actors opposing the Convention) were subjected to critical discourse analysis (CDA) in order to identify and systematically uncover their central themes, argumentation structures, and grounds for appealing to the public. In this analysis process, it was also important to trace the connections between anti-gender movement actors and their closeness to the anti-IC front. In similar cases around the world of backtracking on gender equality issues, while the actors and discourses of anti-gender movements have been shaped by distinctly local themes, there are also specific sets of discourses that are widely used and circulated, reflecting the transnational platform of global anti-gender campaigns and anti-feminist claims. Opposition to women's right to abortion and restrictions on access to abortion, rejection of sex education in the name of protecting minors, opposition to same-sex

marriage, backlash and hostility to the term gender, illiberal setbacks to scholarship on gender research, and opposition to globalization are among the prominent transnational themes of anti-gender movements (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a).

In this thesis, the discourses of anti-IC campaigns in Türkiye were analyzed to reveal how the opposition to the Convention sought public and political support through similar themes that anti-gender activism had raised. As will be explained in Chapter 6, the findings within the CDA framework reveal that in addition to the common anti-gender movement themes propagated by local actors and echoed by transnational forces, the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye constructed and articulated new and specific discourses and demands, particularly targeting Law No. 6284. The campaign against the IC also overlapped with the men's rights campaign (concerned with the restoration of male power and privilege); in this campaign, the claim that men were victimized by the alimony practices and other issues regulated in Law No. 6284, especially the decisions regarding the removal of perpetrators of violence from their homes, was popularized.

Therefore, based on CDA, this study argues that anti-IC activism in Türkiye falls within the scope of anti-gender movements as a counter-campaign that can be traced in the discursive themes and mobilizing claims of a front that includes both the same actors and new recruits. The study does not claim that all actors in the anti-gender movement are part of the anti-IC campaign or vice versa. It is argued here that anti-gender discourse and arguments and the themes of the anti-IC campaign have opposed gender mainstreaming in policymaking as their ultimate objective and strongly advocated an anti-gender (anti-equality) regime. The approach of the dissertation required that the anti-IC campaign be analyzed within a broader ideological context rather than overemphasizing it as a single-issue feature. As will be explained in more detail below, the issues addressed by the anti-IC front and anti-gender actors have been on the agenda since 2021. Indeed, the "unlimited alimony" debate on the agenda of the judicial reform bill spearheaded by men's rights activists in Türkiye also proves this.

Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC in July 2021 heralded a policy reversal and paradigm change that raised a puzzle that needed to be explained. In this context, it called for

analyzing the different aspects of feminist and women's rights activism, which has so far pressured the AKP government to design and implement anti-violence policies, especially its actor-based components. In order for women's human rights to be recognized and legally protected, international agreements and national legal regulations must be complied with. In this respect, the withdrawal decision from the IC and the recent challenges against the Convention on The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in Türkiye carry the risk of regression in women's rights and violence prevention policies.

## **1.2. Putting the Turkish Case of Anti-genderism in Perspective: Theoretical Significance and the Conceptual Framework**

While Türkiye is the only country to have withdrawn from the IC, it is not the only country where anti-IC campaigns have emerged. In a somewhat similar trajectory to Türkiye, anti-gender campaigns in many European countries created fertile ground for the politicization of gender issues and the IC. Pressure from organized right-wing and transnationally linked family rights groups led to the subversion of the ratification and implementation of the IC (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). The IC has become an area of contention across Europe between actors, including religious institutions, right-wing political figures, and specific societal groups (NGOs, GONGOs, movements, parties, and governments) (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). The politicized debates over the IC unleashed an anti-gender backlash also in other countries because it presented a gender-based approach to violence with a paradigm prioritizing a comprehensive strategy to achieve gender equality. In these regions, the dominant voice of the anti-convention position was raised by conservative groups (Balogh, 2020). The anti-IC sentiment in Europe has discursive commonalities with anti-genderism. As mentioned at the outset, anti-gender campaigns or movements have emerged in different parts of Europe since the 2000s, involving NGOs, churches, and politicians, and organized around rejecting what they call "gender ideology" (Balogh, 2020; Kováts, 2018). These conservative groups have criticized the IC for being a front for spreading the "gender ideology" rather than preventing VAW (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, pp. 62-69).

On the other hand, as the existing literature has already put forward, the global de-democratization processes over the past two decades have begun to threaten acquired rights in the context of human rights (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). This process also coincides with the illiberal transformation (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018), democratic backsliding (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020), and democratic erosion (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021), which has often gone hand in hand with the populist right (Kourou, 2020). The AKP's abandonment of the human rights-based democratization steps and legal harmonization process required by EU membership was considered a turning point for Turkish democracy (Aksoy, 2015). This turning point was identified with the coupling of de-democratization process with conservative gender politics in Türkiye (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020) and the de-Europeanization process with significant reflections in gender politics (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Kollias & Messis, 2024).

The rise of radical right, illiberalism, and right-wing populism in Europe and elsewhere has triggered important legal debates on issues of gender diversity and reproductive justice, particularly abortion rights, same-sex marriage, and sex education. The IC has been at the center of what seemed a backlash in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) and in Türkiye due to its marked emphasis on gender and the gender equality perspective. The fact that the gender equality approach has become at the center of the conflict has brought the concept of gender into discussion. It has been argued that the reactions that emerged in the context of gender criticism served as "symbolic glue" where different conservative actors, political and religious forces collaborated (Pető, 2022a).

Analysts argue that a similar opposition front in Türkiye has been established to defend the anti-IC position and to disseminate anti-gender discourses in order to call into question the demands or achievements of gender advocacy/feminist actors. Parallel to the cases of Poland and Hungary (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021), an alliance consisting of conservative civil society, journalists, academics, pseudo-intellectuals, and political actors has been at the forefront of the anti-gender activism, which turned into a countermovement in the face of gender advocacy movement. These actors also extended support to the opposition against the IC, pushing them closer to the AKP

government, followed by new debates over women's rights and social justice issues, most notably in the Turkish Civil Code.<sup>3</sup>

During the AKP's political reforms towards democratization, conservative and secular women's CSOs collaborated to ensure the implementation of important legal and constitutional reforms on gender equality and combating domestic violence (Aksoy, 2015, p. 147). However, in the subsequent period, when family mainstreaming and gender skepticism were voiced at the state level, the bureaucracy also abandoned collaboration with the libertarian civil society advocating women's rights on VAW policies; the gender-neutral approach to VAW policies led to a reversal in women's rights policymaking in Türkiye (Ünal, 2023).

The IC remains a unique legal framework at the international level as the most comprehensive policy instrument on VAW. As such, it provides an extensive and comprehensive definition of VAW by associating it with gender discrimination (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 3). Its gender-sensitive language and a non-discriminatory approach taking issue with stereotypes and discrimination regarding gender roles (Balogh, 2020, p. 4) have made it a target of conservative groups upholding heteronormativity and the family across Europe. On the basis of their analysis of the anti-IC campaigns in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and Croatia, Krizsán and Roggeband (2021) noted that the state's collaboration with anti-gender actors, rather than women's rights advocates, led to a significant democratic erosion in terms of gender equality. In Bulgaria, anti-gender campaigns are being carried out with the agenda of putting pressure on the government to prevent the ratification of the IC

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<sup>3</sup> Article 175 of the Turkish Civil Code regulates the right of the party who may be financially disadvantaged due to divorce to request alimony from the other party. The objections of divorced men who consider themselves victims of alimony and want to eliminate such support are based on the claim that such alimony amounts to financial exploitation by women through marriage. Contrary to the discourse of anti-alimony groups, it is understood that alimony can be terminated if the other party remarries or earns enough income to escape poverty (Moroğlu, 2020, p. 9). Another issue regarding the legal rights of women in Türkiye is related to the discussions around the new draft Constitution and the new Judicial Reform Package. The 9th Judicial Package has revealed a contradiction by raising questions about the regulations governing the right of women to use their maiden names after marriage. However, this situation contradicts the previous decision of the Constitutional Court, published in the Official Gazette dated February 22, 2023, which allowed women to keep their maiden names upon marriage within the framework of equal citizenship with men. Karagöz, A. (2024, May 17). 9. Yargı Paketi taslağı kadınları nasıl etkiliyor?: "Haklarımızın elimizden alınmasıyla karşı karşıyayız" Medyascope. <https://medyascope.tv/2024/05/17/9-yargi-paketi-taslagi-kadnlari-nasil-etkiliyor-haklarimizin-elimizden-alinmasiyla-karsi-karsiyayiz/>

(Gwiazda & Minkova, 2023), and in Poland, an anti-gender campaign led by the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture has been organized with the aim of banning sex education in schools, restricting access to abortion, and opposition to gender equality in general (Korolczuk, 2020b).

Moreover, Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC has triggered massive debate in Poland. As suggested by the Ordo Iuris Institute, it has been stated that a new convention aiming to protect the family should be prepared to replace the IC.<sup>4</sup> As an alternative to the IC and to challenge the gender equality perspective, the Warsaw Convention in Poland (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 62) and the Ankara Convention<sup>5</sup> in Türkiye<sup>6</sup> have been proposed.

Therefore, another commonality between Poland and Türkiye is that both countries envisage making regulations within the scope of domestic law to develop an alternative legal regulation to the IC (Kurnaz, 2023). It is evident that in both cases, the ultimate aim is to challenge the emphasis on gender equality in the IC and replace it with the aim of strengthening the family. Drawing attention to the similarity of populist strategies between Poland and Türkiye in terms of opposition to the IC, Kurnaz stated that a similar situation is experienced in Poland. In Türkiye, the government, while advocating withdrawal from the IC, emphasized the adequacy of domestic regulations and openly stated that they supported Law No. 6284. Similarly, the right-wing populist government in Poland argues that there is no need for the IC and that its own domestic regulations are sufficient to protect women from violence (Kurnaz, 2023, p. 173).

Paternotte and Kuhar (2017b) stated that the rhetoric and strategies of anti-gender activists are similar across Europe. In other words, the "discursive and strategic

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<sup>4</sup> Harper, J. (2021, March 22). Poland pitches 'Warsaw Convention' as Türkiye exits Istanbul version <https://emerging-europe.com/news/poland-pitches-warsaw-convention-as-turkey-exits-istanbul-version/>

<sup>5</sup> Senior AKP officials, including Erdoğan, have said Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC would not weaken their strong commitment to protecting women from violence. They have also announced their intention to craft a better convention that is sensitive to traditions and customs. The Istanbul Convention did not bring respect for women's rights: Erdoğan. (2021, April 14). Duvar English. [https://www.duvarenglish.com/istanbul-convention-did-not-bring-respect-for-womens-rights-erdogan-news-57089#google\\_vignette](https://www.duvarenglish.com/istanbul-convention-did-not-bring-respect-for-womens-rights-erdogan-news-57089#google_vignette)

<sup>6</sup> Ankara Sozlesmesi maddeleri. (2021, March 21). Yeni Akit. <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ankara-sozlesmesi-maddeleri-2021-nedir-bu-ankara-sozlesmesi-ankaramutabakatinda-sozlesmesi-neler-var-1522372.html>

alphabet" of anti-genderism is the same everywhere, and anti-genderism is a transnational, increasingly global phenomenon (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017b, p. 253). However, anti-genderism has not become a countermovement strong enough to influence state policies in all countries. On the contrary, in some countries, these anti-gender campaigns were state-backed and were highly influential in national policymaking (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). In Russia, a "discourse coalition" of different right-wing actors, whose voices were amplified by the state, has waged a discursive campaign to protect traditional Russian values from external influences and keep children away from "harmful sexual information" (Edenborg, 2021, p. 180).

In Hungary, representatives of the ruling party were directly influential in the development of anti-gender discourse by making statements such as giving birth is the highest fulfillment of women and complaining about "gender madness" in Europe (Kováts & Pető, 2017, p. 123). In the Turkish case, as a result of the rapid concentration of power in a single hand with the nationalist-conservative consensus, AKP leader Erdoğan paved the way for the politicization of gender with direct appeals regarding gender equality from 2010 onwards (Aybars et al., 2019).

The pronatalist turn in social policy was reflected in the speeches and appeals of senior politicians to the public. Since the 2010s, the family has been given more importance in social policies targeting women, and it has been seen as the most sacred and supreme social value that needs to be protected (Aybars et al., 2019). Then Prime Minister Erdoğan claimed in 2010 that he did not believe in equality between men and women and that cesarean births were a "secret" plot to reduce the population in Türkiye. Moreover, the pro-natalist insistence (Kandiyoti, 2016, p. 104) on the importance of large families and the consequent restriction of women's access to abortion in public hospitals suggest that the policy approach adopted by the state in Türkiye reflects the views of anti-gender advocates on gender, women's roles, sexuality, and family.

In Europe, the anti-gender movements, whose origins could be traced to the reactions to the claims of gender approach to women's rights in the aftermath of the 1995 Beijing conference, were motivated by religious referrals under the leadership of the Catholic Church. They were later articulated with right-wing populism contributing to a democratic backsliding with a broader connotation (Kováts & Pető, 2017; Krizsán &



Roggeband, 2021; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a). Nevertheless, the question of what gives these mobilizations a movement or countermovement characteristic or profile still retains its significance, given the enduring impact of these campaigns and their evolving features. The progression of a wave of anti-gender mobilization from South America to Eastern and Central Europe, including Türkiye, has increasingly put the movement aspect of these campaigns at the forefront of the research agenda. Recent scholarship on anti-gender campaigns highlights the need to pay more attention to the distinctive features of these developments and anti-gender activism beyond their common targets, overlapping themes, and shared frames and to strategies to avoid universalist claims that ignore local variations and ongoing changes in power configurations (Norocel & Paternotte, 2023, p. 124).

In Eastern European cases, anti-genderism has been a complex phenomenon. The strength of the countermovement often involves "retrogressive mobilization" (especially given the significance of the Church-affiliated groups).<sup>7</sup> Anti-genderists do not always directly bring about the change they demand, and they are not in a hegemonic position regarding their influence in policymaking. A case in point is Romania, where a referendum aimed at amending the Romanian Constitution to define the family as a heterosexual union failed (Norocel & Paternotte, 2023). Likewise, the aftermath of the Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC has not meant the total subsidizing of anti-gender campaigns. Meanwhile, the women's movement and feminist groups appear increasingly isolated from public policy, and a countermovement (religious communities, conservative NGOs, and men's rights groups) challenges LGBTIQ+ rights. Frequently, victimization rhetoric has been used to limit specific legislation on domestic violence against women, as in the case of protection orders and alimony, through the claim that men have been unjustly treated. This approach also provided a fertile ground for the government to include its intention to amend the existing Constitution to protect the traditional (i.e., heterosexual) family structure.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In a 2018 referendum to change the current definition of family, the Coalition for Family, a citizen initiative supported by the Orthodox and Catholic churches and US-based Evangelical religious groups, ran a campaign advocating gender traditionalism (Norocel & Paternotte, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> The Minister of Justice announced that they will take steps to address men's concerns about alimony and that they will discuss the issue at the "Family Law" symposium planned to be held in November 2023. Adalet Bakanı Yılmaz Tunç'tan nafaka düzenlemesine ilişkin açıklama. (2023, September 17).

This study examines the impact of the opposition, threats, and pressures against the gender advocacy movement on the movement as a spatial and discursive retreat. It is obvious that the anti-gender groups have mobilized and become "counter publics" by confronting the feminist perspective of equality (Kancı et al., 2023, p. 887). As anti-gender groups gain power in civil society and the capacity to collaborate with the government, the ability of gender advocacy groups to operate as CSOs and in collaboration with the state has become increasingly restricted. Civil society advocating gender equality has regressed in terms of its influence on policymaking, has even lost its agenda-setting power, and has been forced to search new collaborations to gain strength (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020; Negrón-Gonzales, 2016).

However, since the main concern of this study is the contestation between anti-genderists and advocates of gender equality and their competition for turning their claims into social policies, it is necessary to discuss how this contestation takes place at the level of discursive strategies aimed at influencing politics and reaching wider audiences. When the conflicting demands of two opposing groups collide, one group cannot easily eliminate the other and transform its own discourse into a hegemonic discourse. The discourses of both groups are in constant competition, and both groups engage in lobbying for gender mainstreaming or the adoption of anti-genderism in policymaking in line with their own ideologies. After President Erdoğan's administration withdrew from the IC, empowered by the informal alliance between state and non-state (conservative) actors, Law No. 6284 on domestic violence remained in force, but it also became the subject of an ideological contestation pointing to the critical role of the state.

There has been an ever-changing balance of power and contention between the movement and the countermovement to dominate the hegemonic discourse. This ideological contestation is characterized as an evolving discursive conflict. In this study, although continuous contestation is examined through the example of the IC, this situation is not limited to the IC and is not only seen in Türkiye. For example, in Poland, the government's exclusion of certain groups and ideas when defining

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NTV. <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/adalet-bakani-yilmaz-tunctan-nafaka-duzenlemesine-iliskin-aciklama,DDpgQ8rVjkKqeIw3eZnj7A>

"Polishness" and the production of anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses while doing so constitutes an example of an attempt to create a hegemonic discourse with anti-gender content (Bill & Stanley, 2020, p. 11). Given the rising right-wing rhetoric and anti-genderism in the world and in Türkiye, anti-gender activism has moved beyond being a counter-public and counter-movement challenging feminist gains and agendas; instead, anti-genderists are taking steps to prevent gender equality from becoming the dominant norm in international politics by directly influencing policymaking.

In Türkiye, policies aimed at preventing VAW have begun to be based on family mainstreaming rather than gender mainstreaming. The family mainstreaming policy strategy is evident not only in Türkiye but also in many parts of Europe through anti-abortion campaigns, policy proposals aimed at separating women from working life, and practices such as excluding gender from the education curriculum (Kourou, 2020, p. 4). Regarding the dynamics of anti-gender movements in Hungary and Poland, it was emphasized that the framework of family mainstreaming has been effective in reconstructing discourses of security, equality, and human rights for illiberal states (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). While commenting on the transition from the gender mainstreaming paradigm to the family mainstreaming, Eslen-Ziya explains the nature of this change as follows:

Although gender mainstreaming is about evaluating the different implications for people of different genders at all policy and legislative levels, family mainstreaming is just the opposite, and it creates single typology of women – mothers and wives. Family mainstreaming represents only heterosexual people and heterosexual families with the goal to promote population growth (2020, p. 7).

Another conceptual thrust of this study is the relationship between the anti-IC campaign and the rise of mainstreaming of anti-"gender ideology" in Türkiye. It has been noted that the debates in Europe on abortion rights, the family, and sex education in schools constitute examples of the strengthening of the discursive position of the anti-gender movement in politics (Korolczuk, 2020b). The most controversial area of this discursive conflict over the mainstreaming of anti-genderism is the IC debate. As it is a Convention based on gender equality and aims to set an international norm on VAW, it has become a direct target of anti-gender groups. Although not all EU member and candidate countries have ratified the Convention, the EU's ratification in

2023 adds a new dimension to the conflict between anti-gender and pro-gender groups in determining the normative discourse. Looking at the current situation, seven member states of the Council of Europe have not signed the IC: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia.<sup>9</sup> There is serious opposition to IC in Poland, one of the signatory countries. Similar to the discourse in Türkiye, the IC and LGBTIQ+ opposition go hand in hand in Poland (Kurnaz, 2023, p. 172).

This study primarily deals with the affinity between anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign, which transcends a backlash against the gains and the agenda of the gender mainstreaming paradigm and the feminist actors upholding it. The second major concern of the study focuses on the impact of anti-gender mobilization on gender advocacy activism, as anti-gender mobilization has powerfully employed its discursive strategies in the context of an ideological contestation and attack on the IC. Overall, it is argued here that the Turkish case on the IC debates and withdrawal, which followed a well-orchestrated anti-gender campaign, calls for a nuanced explanation with the conceptual tools drawn from the social movement literature and gender and politics scholarship to arrive at a specific theoretical expectation. Such an analysis calls for focusing on the discursive nature of countermovement and inquiry into the relational/reciprocal aspect of the discursive strategies employed by the actors of both fronts in the media outlets with publications and social media mobilizations. As scholars rightly identified, the anti-gender movements are "discourse-oriented movements" (Kancı et al., 2023), which led to the proliferation of rhetorical arguments. These are often supported by pseudo-scientific explanations, giving rise to "alternative knowledge" production (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021).

Although illiberalism and de-democratization debates are occasionally referenced, the theoretical framework of the study is based on anti-gender movements and contentious politics literature. A discursive analysis of the interaction and conflict of two opposing movements provides the opportunity to analyze the political context in which ideological contestation emerges. This political context also determines the aspects of the Turkish case that differentiate it from examples of anti-gender movements in Europe. Mouffe's (1999) discussion of agonism [i.e., "struggle between adversaries"]

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<sup>9</sup> Council of Europe. (n.d.) Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 210 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treatynum=210>

and populism provides insights into how the gender advocacy movement encountered anti-genderism. Mouffe argues that the accommodation of different political views, in what she calls "excess of consensus," endangers democracy (Mouffe, 1993, p. 6). According to Mouffe (2013), the aim of liberal democracies is not to create an absolutely inclusive consensus eradicating conflicts but to create a political environment in which conflicts can proceed with agonism.

As part of the de-democratization process, the conflict between the anti-gender movements and the gender advocacy movements over the IC, unlike what Mouffe describes, is between two opposing groups that directly confront each other in order to determine the hegemonic discourse in policy making. Therefore, polarization not only endangers democracy but also the sharp distinctions between political rivals do not remain at the discursive level. As has been the case in the conflict between anti-gender movements and the gender advocacy movements over the IC, when one side claims to produce a dominant discourse in collaboration with the state, it creates a policy output that is exactly opposite to what the other side aims for. However, these diametrically opposed political views also constitute a driving force for a social movement to develop new strategies and create new frames (Corredor, 2019).

In Türkiye, the anti-gender movement has more recently progressed through two steps. First, the movement is ideologically opposed to gender equality; it rejects it under the label of "gender ideology," allegedly targeting it as a "de-gendering" project (Kocabay-Şener et al., 2022). The IC debates have ushered in a turning point for both feminist and conservative actors (including the men's rights advocates) in the state and civil society with significant repercussions for the future trajectory of the struggle for human rights from a gender perspective in Türkiye.

### **1.3. Methodological Considerations and the Research Procedure**

This dissertation study takes up the discursive opposition between the anti-gender movement and the gender advocacy movement as an ideological contestation. This conflict was crystalized and raised to influence the public in the politicized debates on the IC. The research problem of this study reveals that there is constant tension and ideologically motivated rivalry between the two movements in order to construct a

norm-setting discourse that will guide policymaking on issues regarding VAW, women, family, and, in general, social policies.

This study interprets anti-genderism as fuel for the rise of debates over the IC in Türkiye. The theoretical departure point of this study is based on the insights and conceptual framework from the contentious politics to analyze the contestation dynamics to understand how and what kind of discursive strategies have been utilized for the construction of anti-genderism to unify an otherwise diffuse front of culturally, politically, and religiously conservative groups to provide them the synergy to pressure the state actors. The long-term strength of anti-gender movements rests on their capacity to organize and influence civil society and policies. As Pető notes, anti-gender movements cannot be regarded as just another strand of anti-feminism or a conservative reaction to the gains of the new social movements (2022a, p. 319). According to Pető (2022a), anti-gender movements are a neo-conservative reaction in which human rights are questioned and a battlefield for a change in public discourse. Accordingly, the first concern of this dissertation relates to how the anti-gender movement was organized in Türkiye and who its primary actors are. It claims that there have been two main actors in the anti-gender movement in Türkiye. First, there are conservative actors such as religious organizations, sects, journalists, and political parties, which cannot be considered as a countermovement on their own but contribute to the formation of the conservative opposition. The second cluster of the anti-gender movement consists of groups that organize as a countermovement in defense of men's rights. This group organizes protests and voices common demands, such as men fighting for the abolition of "indefinite alimony." In this context, the role of the state as a critical ally is identified, and the influence of the groups with which the government cooperates in the formulation of VAW and GBV policies is discussed. In the last part of the study, the strategies followed by the gender advocacy movement against anti-gender backlash are analyzed through data obtained from interviews with feminist activists. This analysis is expected to shed light on how gender equality advocates deal with this anti-gender pushback.

This study was carried out using a qualitative mixed method (Morse, 2010). The main techniques in this study are CDA and in-depth interviews with feminist activists working in the field of gender advocacy. Thus, this study discusses how gender

advocacy groups combat the anti-gender backlash and their projections regarding the future of gender equality. To broaden the scope of the study and explore how this pushback was responded to, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with gender advocacy activists. This approach to the study also offers an emotional dimension in terms of the current state and future of feminist activism. Therefore, their determination to promote gender equality and their motivation to continue the fight against anti-genderism can be evaluated. Simultaneously, the CDA is employed to detect the discourses produced by the anti-IC groups.

In this study, the analysis of the discourses of anti-genderists was based on selected association reports, books, and mainly news articles. Due to the size of the qualitative data obtained in the study, deductive thematic analysis is used as a supplementary technique. For the discursive analysis of the anti-IC campaign, *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Asya*, *Yeni Akit*, and *Yeni Şafak* newspapers were examined. Additionally, books and book chapters published by self-claimed anti-gender advocates were examined through deductive thematic analysis.

In order to make evaluations regarding the gender advocacy movement and pro-IC campaign within the scope of the IC debates, feminist activists were also interviewed in this study. The empirical findings of the study suggest that feminist activists experience activist fear and anxiety, which is defined by the concept of "activist anxiety." Due to democratic regression and the oppression of civil society in Türkiye, activist anxiety has become widespread among activists. In order to reveal the resilience capacity of the gender advocacy movement, this study focuses on how the actors of the gender advocacy movement strengthened their solidarity despite all the oppressions, how they developed strategies to strengthen feminist activism, what strategies they used to maintain democratic resilience, and whether feminist activists formed alliances with other democratic opposition actors in society. The findings show that the most effective strategy in the struggle of feminist activists, defined as "silent struggle" in this study, is "narrative strengthening."

Although some of the participants were affiliated with associations focusing on LGBTIQ+ rights, they identified themselves as feminist activists. Therefore, the participants in this study are referred to as gender advocacy activists or feminist

activists. Thus, the in-depth interviews in this study were conducted with individual gender equality advocacy actors from a diverse group of formal organizations and platforms working on gender equality and anti-violence policies. In other words, the focus of this study is on the experiences of individual advocates, not associations. It is important to include the views of feminist activists in the study because they are both parties to the IC debates and are oppressed as activists. In order to ensure diversity, interviews were conducted with activists from various associations with varying focuses. The views of individual activists are also important in reflecting the stance of their respective organizations.

#### **1.4. The Contributions of the Study and the Limitations of the Research**

In this study, the contentious rivalry between the gender advocacy movement and the conservative anti-gender countermovement is discussed as a discursive process of struggle for ideological dominance or hegemony in social policies, which became particularly evident during the IC debates. This dissertation addresses the ideological contestation dynamics after reviewing the emergence of the anti-gender movement in Türkiye in the context of the IC and its discursive framework. This study discusses the strained interaction between anti-gender and gender advocacy movements, drawing on the conceptual framework of the contentious politics and social movement literature and the insights from the anti-gender mobilization literature, particularly through Eastern European examples. Overall, the thesis study analyzes the Turkish case by following the anti-IC debates that emerged with the opposing and polarizing claims and discourses of the actors on gender issues such as women's rights, anti-violence approaches, and all the issues implied by the gender framework of the IC. Based on the research questions, the study focuses on analyzing how the pro- and anti-IC fronts discursively frame their arguments regarding the implications of the debates and withdrawal from the IC on tackling gender inequalities and implementing policies to deal with GBV. Thus, the dissertation has also been attentive to demonstrating how the constellation of actors opposing and defending the Convention were also preoccupied with legitimizing their positions politically.

This dissertation focuses on the anti-gender movement and anti-IC campaign in Türkiye. Therefore, anti-gender movements and anti-IC campaigns in other countries



are not directly the subject of this study, as they were covered to the extent that they showcase the trajectories and the transnational nature of anti-genderism. The second limitation of this research is that it does not cover the entire process from the signing of the IC in Türkiye to the present day. The CDA covers the period between 2020 and 2023, with the aim of covering the periods when the IC discussions started and relatively decreased. The third limitation of the study is that anti-gender advocates were not interviewed, and the views of these groups were presented through selected newspaper articles, books, and reports. Considering the highly polarized political environment in Türkiye over the IC, conducting interviews with groups such as religious orders and congregations as important representatives of the anti-gender movement would be quite challenging within the scope of research focusing on the IC. Therefore, instead of conducting interviews with these actors, an analysis is presented based on their discourses. This situation limits the findings and discussion of this research. However, it also presents an aspect that should be focused on to guide future research on this subject. In addition, this study argues that anti-gender movements are not overall grassroots formations; rather, these movements have gained power by being articulated with the populist discourses of existing political opportunity structures through "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Hence, the focus was on the discourses and demands of these movements through CDA. The fourth limitation of the research is the conditions set for the participants who participated in the in-depth interviews. Participant inclusion criteria were determined as the participants who were interviewed being affiliated with associations that support gender equality and contribute to combating GBV. For this reason, when determining the participants, attention was paid to whether they were affiliated with an NGO or grassroots organization. Almost all of the participants are representatives of leading organizations on gender equality. However, it is not possible to arrive at generalizations on an association basis. The primary issue taken into consideration was whether the participants were affiliated with an association within the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform, which is an important part of the pro-IC campaign. Twelve out of twenty participants were affiliated with associations that are members of this platform. In other words, this study did not aim to reach out to all components of the gender advocacy movement; inferences were made based on the experiences of

individual actors. An assessment of the fragmented nature of the feminist and women's movement in Türkiye is beyond the scope of this study and is a subject that needs to be addressed on its own. However, since the statements and evaluations of the activists participating in this study reflect the experiences of the organizations, platforms, or networks they are a part of, inferences can be made about feminist civil society in general.

Although this study does not claim that anti-gender movements emerge as countermovements with a purely reactionary stance in all countries or that they are transnational countermovements, it argues that the countermovement dimension is dominant in the IC debates in Türkiye. Furthermore, this dissertation does not explicitly associate the anti-gender movement with the "Global Right" (Corredor, 2019); instead, it makes assessments specific to Türkiye. Graff and Korolczuk argue that in countries where feminism is less powerful, it would not be correct to call anti-gender movements a countermovement (2022, p. 140). In Türkiye, feminism may seem less powerful at the moment due to the influence of the current political opportunity structures, but when we look at the dynamics of the anti-IC campaign, the reactionary dimension comes to the forefront, and the prominent actors of this campaign are anti-gender groups, so in the context of the IC debates focus of this study, the anti-gender movement is considered a countermovement and the anti-IC campaign is considered a countercampaign. Therefore, this study argues that even in cases where feminism was less powerful, the emerging anti-gender movement could structure itself as a countermovement and that this serves the populist interests of the movement. Therefore, the anti-gender movement has been able to assert its existence through this opposition discourse and define itself in a populist way as the defender of traditional values against the "corrupt elites," presenting itself as a grassroots movement and playing a role in the creation of an alternative civil society involved in the state in collaboration with right-populist political parties.

Because this study focuses on the IC debates, it directly compares those who support the Convention with those who oppose it. However, when looking at the backgrounds of these opposing groups, it is clear that both camps are strongly driven by either a gender advocacy movement or an anti-gender movement. This study interprets the interaction and contestation between groups that appear to be divided into two camps

on the IC issue as discursive politics, that is, the politics of meaning-making. Therefore, this study discursively analyzes the conflicting frames of these two camps on fundamental issues such as gender, gender equality, domestic violence, VAW, GBV, gender-based discrimination, alimony rights, custody rights, and early marriages. Therefore, other issues such as migration, ethnic discrimination or conflict, peace and resolution, which do not directly or indirectly fall within the scope of the IC debates but on which these two camps may clash due to their ideological backgrounds, are outside the scope of this study. This dissertation places the contestation between opponents and supporters of the IC within a broader political context, arguing that the tension between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement has an ideological background and that they do not only confront each other through the IC. However, it should be noted that these two opposing groups may have different conflict lines other than gender equality and may produce a common discourse on some issues.

### **1.5. The Outline of the Dissertation**

This study is divided into eight chapters. The introduction (Chapter 1) provides a brief overview of the subject on which the thesis focuses, the research problems, the method, and the relevant literature. Chapter 2 is devoted to introducing the theoretical framework. This framework, which guides the entire study, first outlines the characteristics of anti-gender movements, their actors, and their collaboration with the state. It then delves into the literature on social movements. Based on contentious politics, the framework offers a structured approach to understanding how the interaction between the anti-gender movement and the gender advocacy movement can be analyzed during the IC debates. Chapter 3 introduces the IC as the hitherto most comprehensive convention on VAW. In addition to the importance of the Convention internationally, its importance for Türkiye is emphasized. The development of the women's movement in Türkiye since the 1980s is described. In this context, CEDAW and Law No. 6284 are mentioned as two significant achievements in Türkiye regarding VAW. Chapter 4 is dedicated to introducing the research questions and methodological approach of the study. Chapter 5 presents how the case study was

handled within the framework of the theoretical approach, literature review, and methodology based on the original data of the thesis and summarizes the discussions to be made in the following chapters. Chapter 6 delves into analyzing the discursive frameworks of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye. This is done by comparing the data obtained in the study with the existing literature and examining the similar and different discourse and movement strategies of the Turkish case with European examples. Chapter 7, one of the main pillars of this research, is based on the analysis of data obtained through in-depth interviews with participants in the gender advocacy movement. This section addresses issues such as Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC and the impact of anti-gender movements gaining strength in activism. The evaluation in this chapter takes the discussion beyond the IC context by drawing on the original data from the study. This chapter mainly evaluates how to address oppositional or countermovements through democratic resilience and aims to provide new insights into the field of anti-gender research. Chapter 8, the conclusion, summarizes the answers to the research questions within the framework of the theoretical and methodological approach. While summarizing the findings, it also reveals the original aspects of the research that will make a significant contribution to the literature. This chapter also highlights the limitations of the research, suggests future study topics, and reiterates the contributions to the research and its impact.

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE GLOBAL AND LOCAL TRAJECTORIES OF ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS

#### 2.1. Introduction

This dissertation inquiries into the interaction between movement and countermovement, focusing particularly on the discursive dynamics of anti-gender mobilizations that ignited a politicized and ideological opposition to the IC in Türkiye after 2019 (Ünal, 2024a). Under the AKP government, Türkiye was the pioneering country to sign the IC in 2011. This momentous occasion was hailed by the state and public opinion as a landmark in policy measures against VAW. Ironically, Türkiye was also the first and only country to withdraw from the Convention. Among the factors influencing the political decision to withdraw from the IC were the arguments of anti-gender groups that the Convention had a "hidden agenda." According to these arguments, the IC had "hidden claims" disguised behind the human rights perspective. Globally speaking, anti-gender movements or campaigns have targeted the demands and the achievements of the gender equality advocacy movement. Therefore, they have proceeded as reactions to the gains of the gender advocacy movement. In Türkiye, as in Europe, the social actors of this movement have constructed and used effective discursive opposition to the IC. To build this opposition, they employed common themes of anti-genderism as a countermovement in the political process of mainstreaming ideological contestations against gender equality.

This chapter introduces the conceptual framework of the dissertation. Focusing on the discursive dimension of anti-genderism, the characteristics and actors of anti-gender movements are first introduced. As anti-genderism is a global phenomenon, emphasis is placed on the transnational commonalities of anti-gender movements. In this respect,

this chapter begins by explaining in which countries and with which discourses these movements emerged, who the actors of these initial movements were, what strategies they used to spread their discourses, and in which discursive frames they reflected their ideologies. Second, the chapter investigates the intersection of the discourses of the anti-IC campaign and the anti-gender movement. The theoretical framework presented in this section constitutes the basis of the background for insights into the analyses conducted in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

With reference to the scholarship on social movements, this dissertation argues that the anti-gender movement functioned as a countermovement, organized against the gains of the gender advocacy movement throughout the IC debates. Drawing on this, the ideological opposition between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement is discussed within the framework of contentious politics. Contentious politics encompasses social processes that involve not only social movements but also the coordinated efforts of groups, institutions, and political actors affected by inequality or power struggles (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, pp. 7-11). Therefore, contentious politics constitutes unique approach aiming to understand conflicting collective actions and the political aspects of those actions. As the IC debates facilitated the emergence of the encounter between anti-gender and gender advocacy movements, they serve as a notable example of contentious politics. Within this framework, this study considers the anti-gender movement as a countermovement because it has been motivated by the objective of protecting traditional norms while opposing gender-progressive policies. This movement's collaboration with the right-wing populist government is interpreted here through the political opportunity structures that facilitated its political gain. Additionally, it is argued that the anti-gender movement has achieved mass mobilization by reframing gender equality policies as a "threat" to society and the nation, as seen in the case of the anti-IC campaign.

## **2.2. The Anti-Gender Movement: Its Evolution, Its Actors, and the Issues at Stake**

In an increasing number of countries, democratic rights have come under attack over the past decade. Gender advocacy movements and their accumulated gains have been facing a pushback, even in more established democracies (Krizsán et al., 2024). With

the collaboration of populist governments, religious institutions, public figures, and gender-conservative CSOs, efforts to undermine gender equality have been organized (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). Paternotte (2023) suggests that the use of the term "anti-gender campaigns" instead of "anti-gender movements" is more accurate. According to Paternotte (2023), the term "anti-gender campaigns" encompasses a broader framework, referring to the interactions among civil society, politicians, and state authorities. On the other hand, the term "anti-gender movements" reflects a more limited framework, evoking only social movements and civil society. As this dissertation argues that anti-gender advocacy and the anti-IC campaigns are not exactly the same in terms of their various actors, it aims to differentiate them. Therefore, this study employs the term "anti-gender movements."

As previously emphasized, anti-gender movements are diverse in their actors, but the fact that religious groups are predominantly involved in these movements is a prominent feature. Based on their analysis of the church-backed anti-gender movements that arose in Poland in 2020 and their counterprotests for LGBTIQ+ rights and abortion rights, Graff and Korolczuk assert that the counterprotests argued for the "separation of church and state" (2022, p. 2). Therefore, the groups opposing anti-gender movements were actors not only advocating gender equality but also opposing religious interference in social policy issues. According to Graff and Korolczuk, "these events showed that gender, religion and politics are inextricably linked in the current moment: the conflict around 'gender' is also a struggle over the future of democracy" (2022, p. 2). Thus, attacks on gender equality have become a problem for anyone who aspires to the maintenance of democratic societies; they are not merely an issue for the gender advocacy movement.

Despite all the backlash campaigns, gender equality is still an important policy goal. Although the period between 2020 and 2025 witnessed the rise of anti-gender movements across Europe, the European Commission's information note covering these years referred to gender equality as one of the core principles of the EU.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while anti-gender opposition is increasing, the issue of gender still remains a political

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<sup>10</sup> European Commission. (2020, March 5). Commission takes action to tackle gender-based violence and promote equality. European Commission Press Corner. [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_358](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_358)

struggle that manifests itself in policies with entrenched gender equality or mainstreaming approaches. Within this framework, the IC became an important case of the contention between the groups advocating for gender equality and opposing groups because of the Convention's particular emphasis on the relationship between VAW and gender inequality. Furthermore, the IC debates are important because analysis of these debates reveals the intertwined nature of the discursive frames of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign. Such analysis further reveals that these discourses are also often advocated and pursued by the same social actors.

Anti-feminist policies and opposition to gender equality policies are not a recent phenomena. However, the current anti-gender movements or campaigns present distinctive features because they are associated with illiberal, populist, and neoconservative paradigms in which both anti-feminism and anti-genderism are articulated by diverse actors (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2019; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Scholars who have drawn links between right-wing populism and the rise of anti-genderism have argued that they discursively feed and reinforce each other. These scholars further state that right-wing populist parties that defend traditional family structures against the "LGBTIQ+ impositions" or "gender ideology" of "corrupt elites" are advancing the anti-gender movement (Kourou, 2020; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). However, it would be misleading to consider this situation as merely a locally confined political issue. The global commonalities of these actors should be emphasized, as anti-genderism constitutes an increasingly widespread approach in international politics.

Anti-gender movements, which emerged in the 1990s (Pető, 2022a) and gained strength in the 2010s (Fassin, 2020), are considered transnational mobilizations organized in line with objections to alleged "'gender ideology,' 'gender theory' or 'genderism'" (Kováts, 2017, p. 175). The Catholic Church was an influential actor in shaping the discursive framework of approaches labeling gender equality as "gender ideology" (Bracke & Paternotte, 2016, p. 145). Anti-gender discourses subsequently spread worldwide as a transnationally connected campaign. Alongside this pervasiveness of anti-gender rhetoric and opposition, anti-gender movements also developed local discourses and themes. Anti-gender groups have criminalized and demonized the term gender. Accordingly, the concept of "gender" became a "symbolic



glue" in terms of unifying rightist and populist claims. For instance, anti-gender discourses in Eastern Europe have intersected with anti-communism. In some European cases of anti-gender movements, an analogy has been drawn between "gender theory" and "Marxism 2.0," and in the Slovenia case, gender theory is considered an oppressive element produced by the former communists (Kuhar, 2017, pp. 221-222). Within this framework, for anti-gender movements "'gender ideology' is the ideological matrix of the different reforms they try to oppose, which pertain to intimate/sexual citizenship debates, including LGBT rights, reproductive rights, and sex and gender education" (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 8).

Although the European cases dominate the scholarship on anti-gender movements, these movements have emerged in various parts of the world. For instance, in Latin American cases, scholars have identified a political transformation in which democratic institutions are threatened in conjunction with de-democratic practices including discriminatory attitudes, the suppression of dissent, and polarization (Zarembeg et al., 2021). In analyzing the anti-gender activism in Peru, Rousseau (2020) notes that the groups opposing the gender equality organized the campaign *Con Mis Hijos No Te Metas* ("Don't Mess with My Children") with the objective of criticizing the policy steps taken to adopt a gender-sensitive and anti-discrimination curriculum in schools. This campaign has involved actors affiliated with conservative churches, and anti-gender activists. Another study from Latin America highlighted the ways in which a Church-led anti-gender and pro-life group in Mexico acted as a countermovement with a clear aim of reversing the institutional gains of feminists in terms of reproductive rights (Zarembeg, 2020).

It is also asserted that there are emerging anti-feminist mobilizations within the United Nations (UN) organized with the claims of re-establishing the primacy of the "natural family" as opposed to "gender ideology" (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020, p. 2). Anti-gender advocates conceptualize the "danger of gender equality" as "part of a global plan to dissolve the 'traditional' heterosexual family" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 6). This has led to the forging of a unified anti-gender alliance in transnational politics including representatives of populist governments. According to Cupać and Ebetürk (2020), these mobilizations within the UN are led by certain post-Soviet states, Catholic and Islamist states, the United States, the Vatican, and conservative CSOs.

Thus, anti-gender groups have increased their influence within the UN through the broad coalition they have established. With this anti-gender alliance, they are disseminating their aims of protecting and strengthening the traditional family and gender roles in response to gender equality and mainstreaming approaches. For instance, in 2008 the UN Family Rights Caucus was established, and the conservative groups described here founded the Group of the Friends of the Family in 2015 (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020, pp. 3-4).

Adopting an anti-gender stance and assuming an anti-feminist position in policymaking, these groups have expanded their influence in the UN (McEwen & Towns, 2025). This shows that anti-genderism and anti-feminism are often indistinguishable ideological stances. In other words, while undermining gender-equality-based policymaking, anti-gender and anti-feminist advocates are fueling misogyny in ways such as opposition to feminism and feminist reforms (Eslen-Ziya, 2022). As a result, anti-feminism is inherent in the discourses of anti-genderists, signifying opposition to the political and transformative impact of feminism on politics and social life.

Anti-gender politics was also conceptualized as a "transnational formation" associated with "coordinated attacks on the rise of 'gender ideology' and 'genderism' as a political force, the field of gender studies as an academic field, and feminist, queer, and trans individuals seen to be their embodied representatives" (Ojeda et al., 2024, p. 1). Thus, the areas under the threat by anti-gender movements have been political issues for which feminists have made political gains, or have struggled to achieve certain objectives both historically and in the present. Issues such as gender equality, gender discrimination, legal measures against VAW, and reproductive health are areas in which the impact of feminism on policymaking is particularly evident. Thus, both anti-genderism and anti-feminism serve to oppose the advancements of the feminists in the political sphere. This is obvious in the efforts of these actors to reinstate a patriarchal social and political order by institutionalizing an anti-gender perspective.

Especially since the 2010s, anti-gender groups organized campaigns on the issues of same-sex marriage, abortion rights, and sex education in schools in some EU countries (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021), Latin America (Estivalet & Dvoskin, 2022; Zarembeg,

2020; Rousseau, 2020; Zaremborg et al., 2021), Russia (Edenborg, 2021) and Türkiye (Kancı et al., 2023). These campaigns represented a backlash against the influence of feminism in politics. As will be discussed in detail later in this dissertation, anti-IC campaigns also mobilized with the theme of opposing "gender ideology." In the anti-IC protests in Europe in 2018, it was argued that "dismantling traditional families" and "legalizing same-sex marriage" were the hidden objectives of the IC (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020, p. 3). Thus, it is argued that the combination of anti-feminist and anti-gender reactions led to the emergence of the anti-IC campaigns (Gwiazda & Minkova, 2023).

In the existing literature on anti-gender movements, there are three main approaches. The differences between these approaches are roughly described. An attempt has been made to make a rough distinction by taking into account the dimensions that the studies emphasize the most when defining anti-gender movements and mobilizations, their reactionary structures or their relations with right-wing politics. It should be noted that since the literature is relatively new and is constantly being developed based on different cases, this grouping will not always be valid. The first approach argues that anti-gender movements, as a right-wing, conservative countermovements, are organized against the achievements of the gender advocacy movement (Corredor, 2019; Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020; Zaremborg, 2020). The second approach, draws a link between right-wing politics, neoliberalism, and anti-gender movements (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Ramos & Büttner, 2017). These two approaches relate anti-gender movements to far-right, right-wing populism, and religious conservatism. The third critical approach considers anti-gender movements through a critique of the "politics of origins." As representatives of this approach, Ojeda et al. argued that anti-gender politics is not solely Western-centric, right-wing, and solely organized with an opposition to the concept of gender; instead, it is "a wider and more complex formation that also draws from centrist, liberal, leftist, secular, and even supposedly feminist argumentations" (2024, p. 10). This comprehensive critical perspective provides a wider framework, recognizing that gender-critical feminists or trans-exclusionary feminists, who claim that women's spaces are exclusive to cis women (Zanghellini, 2020), are also likely to align with anti-gender discourses. In Italy, for example, it was argued that the controversies over "gender theory" had led to political divisions and

contentious discussions between feminists and secular left-wing movements. Although they are not fully involved in anti-gender movements, gender-critical feminists discursively contribute to the normalization of anti-gender narratives (Gusmeroli, 2023). Gender advocacy actors often employ the concept of gender equality, but it has not been fully adopted by all actors associated with the gender advocacy movement. However, for some others in the movement, gender equality remains an essential concept in explaining embedded power relations in society.

Analysis in gender studies has been evolving from a woman-focused approach to a gender-focused perspective as scholars emphasize the effects of the current patriarchal social order on all genders (Adams & Savran, 2002). For instance, critical masculinity studies have emerged as a particular field of research dedicated to investigating issues related to masculinities (Connell, 2005; Anderson, 2009). Thus, critiques of heteronormativity serve as a root of critical studies on gender discrimination. They also challenge the family in terms of gender inequality.

Accordingly, family is contested between the pro-gender equality groups and anti-gender groups. While pro-gender groups criticize traditional family structures as a pillar of the heteronormative social order with inherently oppressive gender inequality relations, anti-gender groups consider traditional family structures as the "sacred" core of society. Anti-gender advocates oppose the rights of sexual minorities and women while at the same time making the preservation of the traditional family their main agenda (Fassin, 2020).

The family is not the only focus of anti-gender movements. They also advocate for the protection of tradition and the undermining of gender research to safeguard national security because of the perceived threats coming from "gender ideology." For instance, in Poland, the advocacy for gender equality was deemed a threat to society, and the gender issues were considered threat to economic interests of the country, and the moral development of young people; therefore, it was unfavorably interpreted within a nationalist framework (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 166). According to Korolczuk and Graff (2017), this new anti-gender wave in Poland reflects an effective mass movement instead of a typical conservative mobilization because of a new ideological configuration that brings local and transnational themes together. Accordingly,

although anti-gender movements in different countries have specific characteristics in terms of local discourses and actors, they also have common themes that are shared transnationally.

Another area attacked by anti-gender movements is academic research on gender. There is a rapidly growing body of literature on the relationship between knowledge production and populist politics. Particular attention has been paid to the critiques of the far-right groups regarding gender studies (Giorgi & Eslen-Ziya, 2022; Korolczuk, 2020b; Paternotte & Verloo, 2021). The far-right party *Forum voor Democratie* (FvD) in the Netherlands, for example, known for its anti-gender stance, aims to develop "alternative knowledge" on gender (Segers, 2024).

Though it is said to take a more liberal stance than many of its counterparts in Europe, the FvD in the Netherlands denounces academic knowledge on gender equality by stigmatizing it through the viewpoints of its "alternative intellectuals," claiming that the production of knowledge based on gender equality is "transgender ideology" and "woke" (Segers, 2024, p. 2). Likewise, the *Fidesz* party in Hungary, known for its anti-gender stance, not only targeted LGBTIQ+ rights and but also gender studies in academia (Petó, 2020). As a result of efforts by *Fidesz*, research in the field of gender studies was banned in Hungary.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, while disseminating their anti-gender rhetoric, far-right groups also refer to conspiracy theories and pseudo-scientific experts (Giorgi & Eslen-Ziya, 2022). In the current literature, these reframing attempts or efforts at the production of alternative narratives by anti-gender groups have been interpreted as "troll-science" or "pseudo-science" (Eslen-Ziya, 2020, p. 3), and the development of "alternative knowledge" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 81).

Anti-gender advocates claim that gender is a "danger to children, family and reproduction" imposed by "global elites" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 20). The foundation of this accusation is the claim that the West or foreign sources fund "genderists" to mainstream projects that promote gender equality (Graff & Korolczuk,

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<sup>11</sup> This conservative attack on gender studies in academia resulted in the decision of the Central European University (CEU), known for its defense of liberal values, to move its campus from Budapest to Vienna. Laurella further notes that as a result of contestation over academia, Collegium Intermarium was established in Warsaw as a conservative university with the support of illiberal movements (2022, p. 317).

2022). Additionally, anti-gender advocates explain the problem of erosion of community by relating it to gender and the "rampant individualism of contemporary culture" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 15). Considering the actors of the anti-gender movements that come together with these common agendas, a campaign against "genderism" has been organized and popularized by right-wing parties, conservative media, and religious groups (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). In the two EU countries of Hungary and Poland, the institutionalization of an anti-gender perspective was tried to be achieved through mechanisms such as controlling reproductive health, restricting abortion, limiting LGBTIQ+ rights, and hindering gender studies in academia (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Pető, 2020). Under Viktor Orban's leadership, Hungary is one of the more prominent countries in terms of the alliance between a right-wing populist government and anti-gender groups. Therefore, Hungary is an example of "opportunistic synergy" described as "ideological/discursive and strategic/organizational" alliance between the government and anti-gender groups (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 165). Anti-gender discourses, jointly adopted and developed by populist right-wing parties and ultra-conservative religious actors, have also enabled the establishment of an alliance through which mutual political interests are achieved. According to Graff and Korolczuk, this reciprocal relationship of interests has led right-wing populist parties to establish cadres within state institutions from right-wing conservative groups (2022, p. 7). At the same time, anti-gender groups benefit from this relationship as their voices and claims are heard by wider audiences with the support of right-wing populist actors (Ünal, 2024a). Therefore, this "opportunistic synergy" has been beneficial for both parties.

In Poland, the anti-gender groups collaboratively organized campaigns to oppose gender and "LGBTI ideology" and accused the IC of "imposing foreign norms and values" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 68). Furthermore, the anti-gender campaign in Poland also opposed regulations regarding reproductive health, including access to abortion and sex education in schools (Korolczuk, 2020b). As these examples mentioned show, while the campaigns against gender equality may arise with broader aims, the campaigns against the IC have been campaigns that highlight more family-oriented agendas. For instance, the *Ratujmy Maluchy!* ("Save the Little Ones!") movement in Poland organized by "concerned" parents and claimed that the IC would

weaken parental authority with its provisions on domestic violence (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 70). The anti-IC campaign in Poland is an example of the reinterpretation of the IC in the public opinion, shifting away from its original context of VAW and domestic violence, and toward a family-focused perspective.

The IC interprets VAW as a problem of gender inequality. Accordingly, in order to combat VAW, gender equality must be one of the founding principles in all areas of policymaking. This has caused gender equality to become a central dimension of the conflict between gender equality advocates and anti-gender movements. As the above cases from CEECs emphasize, anti-gender movements and "concerned citizens" who voice their hardship as a result of the Convention are the leading actors of anti-IC campaigns. They are concerned about the dismantling of social values and potential threats to society, including, hostile attitudes toward men (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, pp. 127-129). Therefore, gender as a "common enemy" is a concept that appeals to both anti-gender movements and anti-IC campaigns. In this respect, the IC was criticized with the accusations that it would lead to moral collapse by providing legal legitimacy to LGBTIQ+ identities (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). The hostility toward the IC is rooted in claims that the Convention is a product of "gender ideology" being imposed as a "global project," thus presenting it as a national security problem (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). The debates on the ratification of the IC in Poland in 2012 exemplified the intersection of anti-IC and anti-gender discourses. Jarosław Gowin, Minister of Justice at that time, claimed that the Convention, as a "carrier of gender ideology," was a "Trojan Horse" with hidden aims of eliminating traditional family structures (as cited in Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 72).

Although the IC was designed to combat VAW and domestic violence, opposing groups accused it of destroying family and society (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). Although they develop local themes and discourses, anti-genderists usually focus on broader issues such as protecting future generations, families, and traditional values in general from gender advocacy actors whose projects are funded or supported by "the West" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). As will be addressed in the next section, these nationalist perspectives are also related to authoritarian and right-wing populism and the rise of far-right politics in Europe (Mayer et al., 2020).

### 2.3. The "Gender Ideology" as the Culprit: Polarizing Narratives and Strategies Against Gender Equality

Anti-gender movements have close affinity with right-wing populism. Furthermore, anti-gender discourse is populist because anti-genderists identify themselves as the representatives of "innocent, gender-conservative people" while accusing gender advocacy actors of being "corrupt, immoral elites" spreading "gender ideology" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 7). The development of the "gender ideology" discourse dates back to the 1990s and to religiously inspired right-wing groups and the Catholic Church (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a, pp. 8-9). More specifically, the emergence of this discourse can be traced to the UN World Women's Conferences. These conferences, with the final conference held in Beijing in 1995 and the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 were considered problematic for leading to the dissemination of "genderism." Following the Beijing conference, the Vatican began to fight actively against gender mainstreaming (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a, p. 9).

Anti-genderists were concerned about the international recognition of abortion, the transformation of traditional motherhood, and the "legitimization of homosexuality" as a result of the recognition of reproductive rights in international politics (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a, p. 9). In this respect, the Catholic Church both indirectly and directly sponsored academic studies aiming to present knowledge on the potential harm that gender mainstreaming could cause at a global level. The Church also supported the translation of studies arguing the dangers of "gender ideology" and organized both academic and non-academic meetings in this field (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a, pp. 9-13). In this respect, Paternotte and Kuhar note that the "gender ideology" discourse already existed when *Lexicon*<sup>12</sup> was published by the Church in 2003. After ten years, it had spread from Rome to other European countries (2017a, p. 12). Similarly, Pope Francis described "gender ideology" as the "ideological colonization" of developing countries in his speeches in 2015 and 2016 (as cited in Korolczuk & Graff, 2018).

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<sup>12</sup> *Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions, prepared by the Pontifical Council for the Family.*



In spite of this manipulation of the concept of gender by anti-gender advocates, it remains significant for gender scholars to elucidate gendered power dynamics in society. Hence, as also emphasized in the IC, gender-based analysis is important for facilitating the investigation of gender inequality. In feminist theory, the concept of patriarchy is usually considered a necessary tool to address gender relations and gender inequalities (Walby, 1989). A gender-based approach or critique opposes the biological reductionist understanding of issues related to gender and society. Therefore, gender-based analysis also confronts heteronormativity based on the gender binarism (Marchia & Sommer, 2017). Gender inequality explains situations in society in which one group is in an advantageous position over another group because of gender, however, "it is usually women who are disadvantaged relative to similarly situated men" (Lorber, 2001, p. 5). Feminist scholars and practitioners have long held that gender inequality is deeply structured and manifests itself in VAW, exploitation, and the gendered division of labor (Lorber, 2001).

Gender is a critical concept in feminist and queer theory. It is employed to challenge stereotypical role expectations of society and beliefs in "ideal performances" of masculinity and femininity. These critical perspectives on gender emphasize its social nature and relate gender inequality to the heteronormative social order. According to Sancar, society reinforces dominant gender stereotypes, and individuals acquire them through socialization (2024, p. 38). Gender relations permeate every aspect of society, and they are deeply structured. Therefore, gender is also related to power relations and politics. Pateman (1988) underlines the relationship between gender and politics by claiming that politics is based on an unwritten gender contract that attributes power to men. Thus, critical gender analysis aims to uncover gender-based social inequalities in society. The elimination of gender inequalities is accordingly one of the important activism goals of gender advocacy groups (Sancar, 2024). Effectively challenging the existing power relations necessitates the aim of changing the traditional heteronormative social structure, which is considered to be the cause of the discrimination against women and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

On the other hand, anti-genderism is defined by its conservative ideological outlook, which opposes gender, gender equality, and policymaking on gender. The fundamental discourse that anti-gender movements globally and collaboratively challenge is the

notion of gender as a social construct (Wilson-McDonald, 2023). On this basis, anti-gender movements in Europe oppose various issues including, LGBTIQ+ rights, reproductive rights, and sex education in schools (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Gender is thus a contentious concept because it is also permanently kept on the agenda by those who oppose it. Anti-genderists have accordingly constructed the concept of "gender ideology," relating it to various themes including the protection of society, opposition to sex education, the promotion of heteronormative family, and the safeguarding of the nation and its traditions (Butler, 2024, pp. 7-9).

Challenging gender-based inequalities in society has been an international objective since the 1990s, as there has been increasing anti-genderism since then (Sancar, 2024). The Catholic Church was particularly influential in providing the discursive framework for "gender ideology" (Bracke & Paternotte, 2016, p.145). Groups advocating right-wing conservative ideology were motivated by religious sensitivities and concerns about preserving tradition and they became influential actors in the emergence of the anti-gender movement. Since then, populist right-wing political parties and religious groups have formed a broad coalition that advocates for opposing and marginalizing gender. In this respect, populist radical right-wing parties jumped on the bandwagon in gendering the processes of democratic backsliding processes (Reinhardt et al., 2023). Anti-gender movements have framed their mobilization as entailing the defense of the traditional values against "corrupt elites" and they gained momentum with the "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 7).

The claim that gender is an ideology has facilitated debates questioning the scientific credentials of gender research. The opposition to "gender theory" has also opened the scientific legitimacy of gender studies into discussion (Pető, 2020). Thus, the "gender ideology" discourse also aims to mask the scientific aspects of gender research. Challenging gender analysis in this way makes it possible to ignore its criticisms of the heteronormative order and discriminatory gender relations. In this context, "gender ideology" has been deemed the new major leftist ideology that came after Marxism (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a, p. 7). "Anti 'gender theory' strategies" have connections with conservative agendas, and for example, anti-gay marriage movements can put pressure on governments in a sort of "war of positions" in the Gramscian sense (Brustier, 2015). Thus, "gender ideology" is constructed as a global threat. This idea

was voiced by German scholar and anti-gender activist Kuby, who argued that gender mainstreaming is a global social engineering project: "For the first time in history, power elites are claiming authority to change men's and women's sexual identity through political strategies and legal measures" (as cited in Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018, p. 10). This view has been supported by other anti-gender advocates. For instance, the national conservative right-wing party Chega<sup>13</sup> in Portugal has argued that laws and regulations regarding gender identity self-determination constitute "ideological indoctrination." By their viewpoint, "cultural Marxism" and "gender ideology" lie behind the gender-based laws (Santos & Roque, 2021, p. 51). Another example is the law known as "Don't Say Gay," adopted in the US state of Florida in 2022. This law aimed to prohibit discussions of gender identity and sexual orientation in schools (Diaz, 2022).

Overall, the concept of gender has become a target of animosity and contestation because of the emphasis on the social dimension of gender. The most alarming issue for anti-gender activists is that the understanding of inequality developed based on gender could enable the legal recognition of different sexual identities or nonbinary gender identities other than the binary categories of "male" and "female." Challenging the privileged positions of some men over women, LGBTIQ+ people, and other men is seen as problematic by anti-gender groups because it is equated with threatening traditional norms. Accordingly, as will be discussed in detail in this dissertation, anti-gender groups have targeted the IC because it addresses VAW as an issue of gender inequality and because of its insistence that everyone should be protected from violence regardless of their sexual orientation. Thus, the animosity toward the IC is rooted in the "gender ideology" perspective promoted by anti-gender advocates.

#### **2.4. The Intersection of the Campaigns Against the Istanbul Convention and Anti-Gender Mobilizations: The Discursive Terrain**

The IC is the most comprehensive legal instrument in the world, with the objective of combatting VAW and domestic violence (Villanueva Sainz-Pardo, 2014). The

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<sup>13</sup> A recent report announced that Chega would join Orban's new far-right alliance, the "Patriots for Europe" alliance. <https://www.politico.eu/article/portugal-chega-party-andre-ventura-join-viktor-orban-new-far-right-alliance/>

Convention is considered to be the most comprehensive international treaty today on GBV as it relates violence to gender inequality and power imbalances in society. This is clearly stated in the preamble of the Convention, where VAW is defined as "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women" (Preamble of the Convention).<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Convention supports a comprehensive struggle against GBV with the participation of various actors including the state and civil society (Krizsán et al., 2024). While conceptualizing this struggle against violence, the IC developed a unique paradigm referred to as the "four Ps:" the prevention of violence, protection of victims, prosecution of perpetrators and the adoption of gender-sensitive policies (Art. 1-a).<sup>15</sup> Emphasizing the varying dimensions of violence, the Convention addresses it with a holistic approach. In this respect, the IC considers the existence of different types of violence such as physical violence, stalking, psychological violence, forced marriage, forced abortion, sexual harassment, and sexual violence including rape (Art. 3-b).<sup>16</sup> The Convention also defines domestic violence as follows:

...all acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim (Article 3-b).

As described above, by claiming that the IC is a product of "gender ideology," anti-genderists aim to undermine its character of being an international convention on VAW. Instead, they construct the IC as a threat to the family, the nation, and traditions as part of a global "secret" project. Thus, the opposition to gender raised by the anti-IC campaign has already been voiced by anti-gender groups since the 1990s. In this sense, the broader anti-gender movement encompasses the anti-IC campaign. Although they are not homogenous in terms of their actors, the discourses of anti-gender movements and anti-IC campaigns are intertwined.

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<sup>14</sup> Council of Europe. (2011). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

<sup>15</sup> Council of Europe. (2011). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

<sup>16</sup> Council of Europe. (2011). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

Anti-gender advocates support the common discourse claiming that "gender ideology" is part a "global project" (Özkazanç, 2020b). However, they also develop specific local discourses and they differ in terms of who they identify as being the most prominent figures in the emergence of "gender ideology." Anti-gender advocates accuse the West, the EU, the UN, and "global powers" i.e., international institutions and private funders, as being the source of "gender ideology" (Özkazanç, 2020b). In a similar vein, anti-gender groups in Europe claim that the EU, the UN, academics working in the field of gender theory, and feminist activists have played pivotal roles in the emergence of "gender ideology" (Santos & Roque, 2021; Ozkazanc, 2020b). In this context, the EU and the Brussels are accused of enforcing that "gender ideology" through the Europeanization mechanisms (Hansen, 2021). Thus, the EU is almost always seen by these groups as the leading figure in gender mainstreaming. Anti-gender groups accused the EU of imposing social norms in the forms of legal documents such as the IC. Overall, "gender ideology" and the EU are constructed as common culprits; "gender ideology" is presented as something imposed from the outside onto particular cultures and the EU is accepted as the prominent actor behind these attempts (Kováts & Pető, 2017).

Blaming the EU as the source of "gender ideology" is particularly problematic for anti-gender groups and governments in EU member states such as Hungary and Poland. These states should be acting in line with the EU's wider political framework, but at the same time, groups and governments arguing that the EU imposes cultural transformations that dismantle traditional values. However, for non-EU countries such as Türkiye and Russia, advocating this anti-gender stance creates less of a paradox as the anti-gender discourse also targets the EU.

According to Foxall (2017), in Russia, anti-EU sentiment was reflected in narratives about the EU presented with the "Gay-Europe" analogy, or "Gayropa," with the aim of humiliating the EU. This narrative was employed to emphasize that the cultural values of the EU are corrupt while highlighting the differences between Russia and Europe. "Gayropa" as a trope reflects the intersection of anti-EU sentiment and homophobia in this discourse (Morris & Garibyan, 2021). In both Türkiye and Russia, anti-gender groups consider feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists in their countries as having been deceived by the West (Ozkazanc, 2020b; Edenborg, 2021). Thus, in their

eyes the real threat is not the activists themselves but rather the values imposed from outside and circulated by global powers, such as "gender ideology" as a threat to national sovereignty and traditional authenticity.

Another problematic issue for both anti-genderists and anti-IC advocates is related to family. In their view, the "natural family" or "traditional family" is a union of man and woman. They have claimed that this traditional family is under threat due to the prospect of same-sex marriages, unmarried partnerships, women's participation in working life, the disruption of traditional roles within the family, and increasing rates of divorce. By their view, these issues are all manifestations of "gender ideology" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). Another issue seen as threatening is sex education in schools. In the IC, there is a particular proposition<sup>17</sup> stating that information on gender equality should be provided in "formal curricula and at all levels of education." However, according to some anti-gender groups in Poland and the US, any training on gender equality would teach children to "how to become homosexuals" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 76). Thus, subversive "gender ideology" is seen as a threat to both families and children. Another debated aspect of the IC is its conceptualization of VAW as an issue of gender inequality because it shifts the causes of violence from individual factors (psychological disorders, alcohol addiction, poverty, etc.) to social, political, and structural inequalities. Through a gender-based understanding of violence, the IC supports the idea that patriarchal relations and structures in society should be eliminated to combat VAW (Sancar, 2024). In this regard, for example, honor killings, historically legitimized by referencing traditional norms and culture, are considered unacceptable by the IC. The IC advocates that domestic violence should be opposed regardless of toward whom they are directed (Acar, 2014).

Therefore, addressing violence as it is comprehensively defined by the IC requires a multifaceted struggle. The IC calls for the involvement of the state in preventing and

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<sup>17</sup> "Article 14: 1. Parties shall take, where appropriate, the necessary steps to include teaching material on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education.

2. Parties shall take the necessary steps to promote the principles referred to in paragraph 1 in informal educational facilities, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media" (Council of Europe, 2011).

punishing violence with multi-actor efforts including civil society. The Convention also requires long-term policy planning regarding VAW, developed with collaboration between the state and civil society. The involvement of civil society in policymaking is also problematic for anti-gender groups because they accuse feminist NGOs of destroying traditional values with financial support from the EU (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). These criticisms also intersect with anti-globalization and anti-EU discourses (Santos & Roque, 2021). According to Martinsson and Ericson (2022), discourses of anti-gender ideology movements include various "anti-discourses." They further note that anti-gender and anti-Islam expressions are also linked in the discourses of anti-gender movements in Sweden (Martinsson & Ericson, 2022, p. 2012).

While analyzing the motivations behind the ratification or non-ratification of the IC by different countries in Europe, Krizsán et al. emphasize four motivations for ratification: "role models" focusing on gender equality, "EU dependents," "pro-EU governments," and "tame Catholicism" describing "countries with strong organized religion, but no strong popular opposition to gender equality" (2024, p. 4). In contrast, they identify three main patterns in countries with strong anti-IC movements: "countries with right-wing government and democratic backsliding," "unbridled resisters" describing "strong social opposition to gender, no strong support for women's equality," and countries with "illiberal political and governmental forces" (Krizsán et al., 2024, p. 4). According to these authors, Türkiye is one of the "backsliding" countries that combines all of the following features:

liberal democratic backsliding, a strong majority religion, solid right-wing government, and strong opposition to gender equality. Popular support for gender equality or political empowerment for women are absent here, so there is nothing to hinder opposition to the Convention. Only Turkey represents all these characteristics. This path shares many attributes with other countries rejecting the Convention, but the institutionalized majoritarian religion separates it from Hungary, a secular backsliding country, and visible democratic backsliding differentiates it from religious and authoritarian countries like Azerbaijan and Russia where there was no democracy in the first place (Krizsán et al., 2024, pp. 23-24).

Within the framework provided by Krizsán et al. (2024) Türkiye's position is interesting because the ratification of the IC took place during the terms of non-conservative governments in many countries, but during the ratification in Türkiye,

the influence of the AKP was strong.<sup>18</sup> As Chapter 6 will elaborate, Hungary and Poland are particularly important cases for Türkiye in terms of discursively leading anti-gender advocacy on some issues. However, Türkiye is the only country that has taken the radical step of withdrawing from the Convention to date, although Poland has announced plans to withdraw.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, considering its unique aspects, this contestation over the IC is a case that warrants analysis. To make sense of the IC debates within the framework of contentious politics, it is necessary to analyze the interactions of the IC opposition and the anti-gender movement while considering the particular roles played by the state and the gender advocacy movement in Türkiye. The following section introduces the contentious politics approach and explains how dissertation adopts that approach to analyze the IC debates in Türkiye.

## **2.5. The Dynamics of Contentious Politics: The Process of Ideological Contestation During the Istanbul Convention Debates**

This study asserts that the campaign defending the Convention was led by the gender advocacy movement, including women's rights actors, LGBTIQ+ activists, and feminist civil society. On the other hand, this study holds that the anti-IC campaign was driven by the anti-gender movement with the organizational ideological discursive and intellectual momentum that it accumulated through existing political opportunity structures. Therefore, contestation arose over the IC with two opposing groups unequivocally confronting each other.

This dissertation interprets that contestation through the approach of "contentious politics" developed by three influential theorists of political sociology: Charles Tilly, Sydney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam. The most prominent aspect of this approach is that it defines contention outside of institutional politics while emphasizing the influence of the existing political opportunity structures. Within this framework, the state, as a critical figure in the contestation, is able to facilitate or suppress the activities

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<sup>18</sup> Other countries that signed the Istanbul Convention under the leadership of solid right-wing governments similar to that of Türkiye are Armenia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Latvia, North Macedonia, and Slovakia (Krizsán et al., 2024).

<sup>19</sup> BBC, "Istanbul Convention: Poland to leave European treaty on violence against women," July 25, 2020 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53538205>



of claimant groups while taking the interests of state elites into account (Nash, 2010, p. 97). Furthermore, this approach also considers the historical and political contexts that enable movements or collective actions to emerge. In *Dynamics of the Contention*, the contentious politics is described as follows:

By contentious politics we mean: episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants (McAdam, et al. 2004, p. 5)

As can be inferred from this definition, to call an event as contentious politics, it is necessary that power holders in the relevant government be involved in some way. In the IC debates in Türkiye, the primary actors involved in this contentious episode are the pro-Convention and anti-Convention campaigns, and these campaigns have directed their claims to the existing AKP government. Thus, when the IC debates are viewed as a contentious episode, the government becomes "an object of claims" within this framework or, as this dissertation describes it, a critical ally. Another significant point related to the conceptualization of the IC debates as a contentious episode is that the demands raised in contentious politics must impact the interests of at least one party, whether as claimants or as the object of the claims. When this framework is adopted for the case of the IC in Türkiye, it is important to note that the government's decision to withdraw from the IC because of the influence of the anti-IC campaign limited the agenda-setting power of the gender advocacy movement. As Chapter 7 explains, the alliance between the anti-gender movement and the government not only led to the country's withdrawal from the IC but also caused the restriction and marginalization of the gender advocacy movement. As Tilly and Tarrow note, mobilizations trigger the emergence of countermobilizations, which may be peaceful or may escalate into radical mobilizations (2015, p. 38). According to Tilly and Tarrow, "claims and counterclaims do not occur randomly; they take their shape from surrounding regimes, cultures, and institutions. They respond to a regime's opportunities, threats, and constraints" (2015, p. 111). Therefore, the existing political opportunity structure or the political context is effective in shaping movements and their demands. Tilly and Tarrow further argue that democratic governments are

opportunity-rich regimes while some oppressive regimes tend to tolerate the actions of certain groups while suppressing others (2015, pp. 62–63). Adopting this framework for the IC debates reveals that the existing political opportunity structures in Türkiye are favorable for the anti-gender movement. For instance, the government has not restricted the Silent March organized after Grand Family Meetings by anti-gender advocates while prohibiting LGBTIQ+ events such as the Pride March.<sup>20</sup> This indicates that the existing political opportunity structures have been favorable to the anti-gender movement, allowing the movement's discourses to be disseminated easily.

Within the framework of contentious politics framework, Tilly and Tarrow defined the concept of the "episodes" to refer to the segmentation of "bounded sequences of continuous interaction" to conduct systematic analysis (2015, p. 39). In this regard, this dissertation interprets the clashing of IC campaigns as an episode in the ongoing conflict between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement. Another important concept adopted in this study is that of cycles of contention. This concept is utilized to describe episodes in which various actors, demands, opposing demands, governments, and institutions come together. Exploring cycles of contention provides a broader perspective compared to focusing on a single issue or case. It enables explanations of how social movements, conflicts, or contentions evolve in a complex and interconnected ways over time (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 119). This approach to cycles of protest or cycles of contention underlines that an unforeseen event emerging from a wave of social unrest facilitated by political opportunity structures may spark a movement that has a triggering effect for the emergence of other mobilizations (Nash, 2010, p. 98). This approach argues that the cycle begins within existing social networks and then it escalates into collective action affecting a broader segment of society. As a result, at the height of the protest or contention cycle, competing social movements emerge. However, after a certain period, social movements weaken or slow down and a decline in the cycle occurs. In this case, when social movements or collective actions succeed before gradually fading, their demands may become policies affecting the political agendas, political parties, and policy decisions (Nash, 2010, pp. 98-99).

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<sup>20</sup> Annual Pride Marches have been banned in Türkiye since 2015. For a detailed analysis, see: Kilic (2023).

In their book, Tilly and Tarrow (2015) define numerous other concepts to explain the contentious politics framework. The concepts presented in this chapter are not exhaustive. This dissertation focuses on the concepts of the contentious politics framework that are directly applicable to the IC debates case. Accordingly, mechanisms and processes are the two important concepts utilized in this study. While "mechanisms" refers to particular interactions that carry the potential for change, such as the diffusion of tactics, while "processes" refers to the combination of mechanisms, such as the brokerage or diffusion of claims (2015, p. 29). As this study argues, throughout the IC debates both of the opposing groups have sought to enhance the effectiveness of their efforts through different mechanisms and processes.

According to Tilly and Tarrow (2015), "collective making of claims" is related to performances. Therefore, claim making evolves as a performance involving two targets: the claimant and the object of the claim (2015, pp. 15-16). In this context, "contentious" performances are utilized by certain groups of actors for conveying their demands to political actors through familiar and established patterns such as demonstrations and petitions. "Contentious repertoires" refers to all of the known actions that can be employed by a movement's participants or political actors at any given moment. Therefore, a repertoire of collective action encompasses the ways in which a movement or collective action may use its resources to achieve a certain goal (Nash, 2010, p. 97). As there are various forms of action, a repertoire comprises combinations of various performances such as petitions, street protests, lobbying, and press releases. Repertoires of collective action thus constitute a wide spectrum of actions. As stated above, movements and mobilizations can trigger the emergence of other movements and mobilizations. These movements also affect each other as one movement adopts the tactics and performances of another (Nash, 2010, p. 98). Furthermore, repertoires provide information about particular performances and political opportunity structures. This information informs the potential claimants about the possible outcomes of different strategies or different coalitions. At the same time, political actors and governments can also evaluate the impact of various known repertoires. This enables the government to distinguish between what will be tolerated and what will be prohibited (McAdam et al., 2009, pp. 264-265).

As another important concept, "contentious campaigns" refers to a series of actions aimed at achieving particular policy change. Such campaigns entail various performances, and they end when the goal is achieved. They involve various actors, including social movements, interest groups, political parties, media, and state actors (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, pp. 14-15). When interpreted from this perspective, the anti-IC and pro-IC campaigns in Türkiye are examples of contentious campaigns. However, what is striking in the case of Türkiye is that, although Türkiye has withdrawn from the IC, the conflict between anti-IC and pro-IC campaigns still continues. The anti-IC campaign achieved its goal by ensuring the country's withdrawal from the Convention, but both campaigns continue with discursive opposition directed toward Law No. 6284.

This chapter has discussed three important aspects of contentious politics thus far: "(1) political opportunity structures, (2) collective actors, and (3) performances and repertoires" (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 263). As previously stated, political opportunity structures reflect the characteristics of the regime that affect the possible outcomes of a movement or collective action. In addition to opportunity structures, threat structures also exist. Given that there may be both low-opportunity and high-opportunity regimes, the opportunity attribution stage is considered as the initiator of mobilization (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 264). McAdam notes that movements are also capable of creating their own political opportunity structures as they develop (as cited in Nash, 2010, p. 103). Furthermore, focusing on shifts in the actors' definitions of "us" and "them" in line with the coalitions they form, contentious politics considers the formation of collective identity as a dynamic process (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 264). Repertoires such as street protests or petitions constitute a cluster of performances, and whether the regime in which a movement or collective action emerges is democratic or not is effective in determining the repertoires of that movement (McAdam et al., 2009, pp. 264-265).

When they are evaluated within the framework of contentious politics, the IC debates as an episode constitute an important example of contestation between two movements confronting each other and involving the government. The involvement of the state occurs in such cases through the competing claims developed by rival contentious campaigns. Evaluating Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC, Ünal (2023) notes that not

everyone within the AKP government was opposed to the Convention and there was widespread support for initiatives against VAW. However, anti-gender advocates fueled moral panic. They claimed that as the IC refers to gender and sexual orientation, the Convention endorses LGBTIQ+ identities by giving them legal recognition. This is an example of how the state and political actors holding power or authority are effective in the emergence of anti-gender movements. As anti-gender movements call for changes in policymaking, their demands are usually directed toward the state. According to Grzebalska and Pető (2018), in Hungary and Poland, the state played a critical role in the strengthening of anti-gender movements. These authors conceptualize the current government in Hungary as an illiberal polypore state.<sup>21</sup> Pető (2017) defines this concept of "illiberal polypore state" by pointing to the situation of the *Fidesz* government in Hungary. In this case, the government is caught in a political paradox because it wants to pursue its own political agenda, but at the same time, it remains interested in benefiting from the established institutions and funds of the EU (Pető, 2017, p. 19). Pető notes three core aspects of a polypore state: securitization of every aspect of life, the institutionalization of family-centered policies, and the creation of a parallel civil society (2017, p. 20). The creation of a polypore academia is particularly interesting because it reflects the state's objective of establishing research institutions, museums, and universities that are similar to their liberal counterparts in profile but different in terms of quality compared to existing institutions. Pető (2022b) employs the concept of "polypore academia" to indicate the efforts of illiberal states to transform academic institutions.

As discussed above, the emergence of anti-gender movements is directly related to the existing regime and the current political opportunity structures. These movements have emerged as a result of events that they viewed as threats to traditional social values and gender norms. As these movements arose with the aim of restricting the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals, this study considers them as

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<sup>21</sup> Özkazanç explains this concept by noting that polypores are fungi that grows on tree bark and consume the vital resources of their hosts. Accordingly, polypore states represent a new illiberal (authoritarian) state structure. This new structure develops on the liberal democratic institutional structures formed after the 1989 in CEECs. The interesting implication here is that this new structure absorbs the old one while decaying it (2020b, p. 31). However, this new structure is not limited to CEECs. According to Pető, "Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Brazil, the US, and Turkey" are all examples of illiberal polypore states (2022b, p. 38).

countermovements while recognizing that they are not solely reactionary movements. Meyer and Staggenborg noted that "any social movement of potential political significance will generate opposition" (1996, p. 1630). Considering the increasing contestation between the pro-life and pro-choice movements in the United States after the legalization of abortion in 1973, these authors conclude that the two movements were directly confronting each other. They also claim that, while social movement studies are typically focused on the challenges faced by a movement against the state, the contestation between competing movements deserves further investigation (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996, p. 1629).

According to Roggeband and Krizsán (2020), the groups opposing gender equality in recent years include right-wing populist parties, religious groups, conservative actors, nationalist factions, men's rights organizations, and anti-"gender ideology" advocates. The coalitions formed by these groups have created backlash against the legal documents developed based on the gender equality perspective, such as the IC. In this context, according to Roggeband and Krizsán, "gender power triangles" emerged among the women's movement, the state/government, and anti-gender groups (2020, p. 13). Similarly, a study focusing on the movement-countermovement dynamics in Poland in the case of the lesbian and gay movement argued that when movements confront each other they frame their identities and claims in response to one another (Ayoub & Chetaile, 2017). In another study focusing on the process of counter framing during abortion debates to analyze the interactions between movements, McCaffrey and Keys (2000) observed three core counter framing techniques: polarization, frame saving, and frame debunking. In their analysis, they addressed the fact that in addition to "counter framing processes," "reframing processes" (Benford & Hunt, 2003) can also be seen in movement-countermovement interactions. Thus, the framing strategies observed in contestations between movements may include: ignoring (rejecting the legitimacy of an opposing movement by disregarding it), keying (redefining the keywords of an opposing movement), embracing (appropriating and reversing the identity ascriptions of an opposing movement), distancing (avoiding the frames presented by an opposing movement), and counter-maligning (discrediting an opposing movement by portraying it as an enemy) (Benford & Hunt, 2003, pp. 169-175). All of

these framing strategies are applicable to the case of the IC debates case in Türkiye and were applied by both campaigns in countering the other.

This dissertation employs the concept of ideological counter reframing. This concept is used to signify that both parties have been driven by a strong ideological conflicts in their contestation regarding the IC. Therefore, the approach of contentious politics is significant for this study because it provides a comprehensive framework through which the political dimension of ideological contestation regarding the IC can be analyzed. In this sense, the concept of ideological contestation is of core importance for this study as it aims to reveal how opposing campaigns are ideologically motivated and influence each other. Another important concept for this study is the concept of political opportunity structures, which is also a central concept in contentious politics. This unique concept enables emphasis of the political context that fosters the emergence and evolution of anti-gender movements. Relying on this conceptual framework, it can be argued that the IC debates in Türkiye encouraged anti-gender advocates to disseminate their discourses to society on a wider scale. The outcomes of anti-gender movements are affected by the state's attitude toward them. For instance, the states' respective reluctance or willingness to collaborate with them and meet their demands will shape their effectiveness in politics. The recent dynamics arising between anti-gender advocates and the state also reflect the potential for broader alliances as a result of the changing opportunity structures. However, this dynamic relation is not unique to anti-gender movements; gender advocacy movements are also affected by the existing political opportunity structures in terms of shaping their trajectories and potential alliances.

To understand the dynamics of a movement it is necessary to focus on how that movement mobilizes its resources and frames its claims. A movement's capacity for acquiring funding, recruiting more participants, and successfully transmitting its messages can be decisive in that movements' influence in policymaking. Therefore, opposing movements will attempt to increase their influence through the complex interactions between collective action and the broader political context. As the literature suggests, while mobilizing against the claims of gender advocacy movements, anti-gender movements embrace particular tactics and strategies of progressive movements (Lavizzari & Siročić, 2022). Thus, the contentious politics

framework makes it possible to focus on the effects of the changing political opportunity structures on movements. It also helps us to understand which repertoires of action are utilized by participants to counter powerful opponents (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Similar dynamic processes occur when movements adopt their frames to the local context. A study of anti-gender movements in Italy and Croatia emphasized that these movements have transnational affinities but localize their frames to the local context. Through this "localization," they employ frame and tactic adoption processes (Lavizzari & Siročić, 2022). These authors claim that localization takes place through three stages. In the first stage, anti-gender movements borrow frames and tactics from left-liberal movements.

In the second stage, by forming alliances, anti-gender movements escalate their activities and garner more support. In this way, their messages can reach the wider public. In the final stage, they aim to impose their own political agenda to be institutionalized as a new framework for policymaking (Lavizzari & Siročić, 2022). This localization framework is applicable in efforts to explain the case of IC debates in Türkiye because all three stages can be observed in the contestation between the anti-gender movement and gender advocacy movement regarding the IC.

The performances and repertoires of the anti-IC campaign particularly exemplify this localization process. For instance, men's rights groups, as some of the prominent actors shaping the anti-IC campaign, employed a discourse of "discrimination," claiming that men face discrimination because of the existing legal regulations. They organized protests and social media campaigns demanding a change in laws in favor of men. In line with the final stage of localization, the groups forming the anti-IC campaign collaborated with right-wing political parties and demonstrated their power to impact policy decisions, ultimately leading to Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC.

Contentious politics provides a comprehensive framework for the analysis of mechanisms. As explained in detail in *Dynamics of Contention* (McAdam et al., 2004), mechanisms provide explanations for understanding how movements or collective actions are shaped and spread, together with their political effects. For instance, the mechanism of brokerage involves the establishment of new connections between unconnected groups, enhancing the impact of their collective actions. The mechanism,



of diffusion entails embracing tactics or strategies previously proven to be successful. The attribution of similarity, on the other hand, involves the formation of shared identity among participants; this mechanism contributes to coalition expansion. The mechanism of social appropriation entails the reorganization of an existing group for a movement. The boundary activation mechanism introduces the differences between opposing groups due to ongoing conflict. The polarization mechanism entails rising tension among opposing social groups, while escalation involves the heightening of tensions among groups due to increasing scope. Certification is a mechanism involving the recognition of a movement by a group with authority. The mechanism of identity shift entails the emergence of shared identities, while scale shift constitutes the processes of the dissemination of the movement or claims from local to broader levels (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, pp. 36-37). In the IC debates, the opposing campaigns have employed these mechanisms through particular strategies that they developed in the local context.

Overall, this dissertation argues that political contestation between opposing campaigns during the IC debates was particularly experienced at a discursive level. Thus, it is important to understand how these campaigns framed their discourses. Together with the main theoretical framework of contentious politics adopted in this study, the framing approach of Benford and Snow (2000) is also utilized. Frames help to define grievances, create collective identities, and interpret opportunities (Nash, 2010, p. 100). Benford and Snow (2000) initially developed the concept of "collective action frames" to refer to the elements that mobilize participants. They argued that "master frames" can facilitate collective action by mobilizing resources. In addition, when this mobilization resonates with existing approaches in society, it may lead to the emergence of a "cycle of protests" (Nash, 2010, p. 102). Although framing is not considered an aspect of contentious politics, it complements this dissertation's theoretical framework because it supports an understanding of the ideological dimensions of the contestation between anti-gender and gender advocacy movements. Therefore, this study utilizes a framing perspective to interrogate how movements interpret existing political opportunities and how they motivate and recruit more participants. The impact of frames increases when they are well aligned with political opportunities (Benford & Snow, 2000). In this respect, Benford and Snow (2000)

describe "core framing tasks:" The first type, diagnostic frames, encompasses the issues that a movement considers problematic. The second, prognostic frames, outlines the proposed solutions for identified problems. Motivational frames, as the third type, are the frames that mobilize participants. Motivational frames may include elements that are symbolic, emotional, or cultural (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). As introduced above, another significant concept employed in this study is counterframing. This concept encompasses the discursive strategies developed by one group to undermine the claims of its opponents and the legitimacy of their movements (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Anti-gender movements are considered political rather than theological movements, albeit with intense religious influence (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). Groups forming anti-gender movements include religious and political conservatives, men's rights advocates, and conservative NGOs (Wilson-McDonald, 2023). The main strategy of these groups entails fostering and disseminating anti-gender discourses through various channels and discursive strategies (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). Thus, anti-gender movements have various forms of performances and contentious repertoires, which they may globally adopt or locally developed. Their various pathways of action include social media campaigns, civil society efforts, and the development of policy proposals. To accomplish their aims, anti-gender movements also employ discursive strategies, including the scapegoating of minorities, the reversal of victim-perpetrator roles, and the dissemination of conspiracy theories (Estivalet & Dvoskin, 2022, p 31).

There is an ongoing debate in the literature on civil society regarding how to analyze organizations with anti-liberal or anti-democratic characteristics. For instance, ethno-nationalist movements are often regarded as "uncivil society," but, this concept has been criticized because for the lack of sufficient definition of its meaning (Kopecký, 2003, p. 10). Establishing clear-cut criteria to easily distinguish "uncivil society" from "civil society" is challenging (Kopecký, 2003; Mudde, 2003). Mudde (2003) notes that, for example, if economic independence is proposed as a distinguishing criterion, it would not be distinctive; it would vary from case to case because both civil and uncivil society may be financially dependent on the state. Furthermore, the structures identified as constituting uncivil society may be constructed as part of civil society in the future (Mudde, 2003). As Mudde underlines, the categorizations regarding civil

society and uncivil society are influenced by the perspectives of researchers, as well as the ideology of the organizations (Mudde, 2003, pp. 160-164). Anti-gender movements are formed through the collaborations of diverse groups as described above. Therefore, there have also been CSOs involved in these movements, such as men's rights associations. The ways in which these movements are to be categorized remains a topic for further discussion. Overall, this dissertation is mindful of Mudde's criticism but occasionally makes use of the concept of "alternative civil society" (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021). By employing this concept, this study aims to understand the collaborations of the state and the anti-gender movement.

As clarified in the discussion above, the departure point of the analysis for this study is the contestation over the IC. The debates surrounding the Convention led to contestation between opposing campaigns and this study investigates that contestation within the framework of contentious politics, particularly emphasizing the role of the state as a critical ally. This framework serves to identify both the contestation between anti-gender and gender advocacy movements and the changing gender policies in Türkiye by focusing on the role of the state in this contestation. However, this study does not claim that the contestation between anti-gender and gender advocacy movements has resulted in one group dominating the other. Instead, it is argued here that this contestation over the IC was just one episode in an ongoing cycle of contestation. These opposing groups continue to confront each other in various areas including abortion, custody rights, sex education in schools, same-sex marriage, and family relations. In highlighting this ongoing conflict, this study underscores the ideological contestation between gender advocacy and anti-gender movements as the basis of the struggle over gender policies.

## **2.6. Conclusions**

Anti-gender movements in Europe have targeted the IC, which they view as a product of "gender ideology" as in the Polish case (Graff & Korolczuk, 2017, p. 178). Campaigns opposing the IC have claimed that the Convention has a hidden agenda beyond combating VAW (Baytok, 2021). In this context, the collaboration between populist right-wing governments and anti-gender movements is considered a case of

"opportunistic synergy" from which both parties benefit (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). It has been emphasized that anti-gender advocates develop "contrary claims" against those advocating for gender equality, and when anti-gender movements collaborate with political elites, these movements gain strength (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Overall, anti-gender movements lead to significant challenges for gender advocacy movements, as in the case of Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC. As anti-gender movements become more effective in policymaking, they challenge the hard-won gains of the gender advocacy movement. To delve further into this contestation, the next chapter will present the background of Türkiye's ratification of and withdrawal from the Convention.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. TRACING THE STRUGGLES AND POLICY DYNAMICS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN POLICIES (VAW) IN TÜRKIYE

#### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter highlights the importance of the IC as a critical legal document by providing a background on the evolution of the VAW approach in the international arena and in Türkiye's domestic law, explicitly referencing the efforts of the women's movement and feminist movement in Türkiye. The topics discussed in this chapter also seek to illuminate why anti-gender movements have targeted the IC and the policy and political context of anti-IC activism within its broader framework.

The increasing rates and incidence of VAW have created a dilemma for social scientists, given that studies and policies on VAW have been growing since the 1990s, and transnational or global feminism has begun to engage with the issue more systematically than ever before. Since then, efforts to design policies to combat and prevent VAW and to ensure the implementation of these policies with the active participation of the gender advocacy movement have brought gender equality policies to the forefront of the policymaking agenda in Türkiye. This coincides with the mobilization of academic work, bureaucratic resources, and political will to promote gender equality in the post-2000 EU accession process, creating a political opportunity structure that significantly strengthens women's rights advocacy organizations.

In this process, the women's movement in Türkiye played a pivotal role in the implementation of legal regulations regarding VAW and GBV. These women's organizations, which acted collaboratively for anti-VAW policies, included groups formed by different actors such as the Kemalist women's movement, secular women's movement, liberal feminists, Kurdish feminists, or pious women NGOs. The

progressive policies developed in this process were shaped by the joint anti-VAW and women's rights strengthening campaigns carried out by these groups together (Arat & Pamuk, 2019, pp. 85-86; Diner & Toktaş, 2010). Although the pro-IC campaign also had a very diversified structure in terms of its actors, this study could not reach all the groups that were a part of the campaign. Therefore, it presents limited findings in terms of reflecting the diversified structure of the women's movement in Türkiye.

The prevalence of VAW, especially domestic violence, has been well documented and analyzed from various perspectives (Altınay & Arat, 2009; Ertürk, 2015; Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2015). Femicides (Önal & Marangoz, 2024) and violence motivated by homophobia (İnce-Yenilmez, 2017) remain significant in Türkiye, along with other non-physical forms of VAW. Another issue related to these types of GBV in Türkiye is the underage marriages of female children (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu & Ergöçmen, 2014). VAW includes physical, economic, psychological, sexual, and other forms of violence and the feminist movement and academic studies on gender have examined VAW's connections to social inequalities and gendered power imbalances in society. The Council of Europe's IC is recognized as an effective transnational legal framework that provides a powerful tool to combat violence, in line with the agenda-setting perspective of a gender equality approach. The IC addresses VAW and domestic violence as a gender inequality issue and proposes a comprehensive, long-term strategy to combat violence through its four pillars: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Coordinated Policies (Article 1-a). As a result, the Convention is considered one of the most comprehensive transnational legal arrangements of lately (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 3).

While acknowledging the socio-cultural determinants of violence for all gender identities, the IC adopts a gender-sensitive approach, focusing specifically on VAW and domestic violence. This section examines how the VAW issue is addressed within both the international gender equality regime and Türkiye's legal and political framework. In addition, the transformative effect of feminist activism on policies developed against VAW is examined by following the path leading to IC. The role of feminist activism and the women's movement in the comprehensive struggle that led to the emergence of IC is discussed.

### **3.2. The Issue of Violence Against Women (VAW) on the Global and Local Feminist Agendas and the Gender-Based Violence (GBV)**

The international community's collective global response to women's issues worldwide has a history of nearly fifty years. The UN held the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and declared the following decade the UN Decade for Women. Over time, this determined stance on women's rights at the international level gained content focused on discrimination and VAW, with the momentum provided by other international documents, especially CEDAW, in the following years (Englehart & Miller, 2014; Orta, 2023). The transnational campaigns led by the UN from the mid-1970s onwards to create a global response to women's issues and to unite them as a common global struggle were important steps in encouraging governments to make proactive changes and in legitimizing and strengthening local feminist movements. However, a gender-sensitive perspective was missing in the human rights paradigm at that time. Human rights legislation has been criticized for failing to take into account women's experiences or to develop a theoretical approach to actions committed against women simply because they are women (Chinkin 1995, p. 23).

Despite the widespread occurrence of GBV, some forms of violence have often been overlooked due to limited recognition by the international community. In her 1995 assessment, Chinkin criticized the international community's limited response to issues such as "domestic violence, rape, abortion of female fetuses, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, forced sterilization, forced childbirth, and numerous other forms of violence against women and girls" (1995, p. 23). Considering these criticisms, the IC has a progressive structure as a convention that consider these issues. The IC embraced the gendered power imbalance in society as a fundamental perspective and linked VAW to gender dynamics and patriarchy. In this context, it is considered the most advanced document to combat GBV today (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 3). While GBV has local dimensions, it remains a global problem. At the local level, various forms of violence can become widespread. As Amnesty International explained:

Women in Asia and the Middle East are killed in the name of honor. Girls in West Africa undergo genital mutilation in the name of custom. Migrant and refugee women in western Europe are attacked for not accepting the social

mores of their host community. Young girls in southern Africa are raped and infected with HIV/AIDS because the perpetrators believe that sex with virgins will cure them of their disease. And in the richest, most developed countries of the world, women are battered to death by their partners (Amnesty International, 2004: iii-iv).

Women's struggle at the level of rights and policies is a collective effort against the problems that arise from the fact that existing laws are often prepared without taking into account the problems that women experience (Pateman, 1988). Therefore, the organized struggle of women to change the laws is not only a struggle for justice but also a struggle against the patriarchal system. Scholars working on VAW emphasize that violence should be considered from a broader perspective, including not only physical assaults but also psychological aspects of interpersonal violence (Grych & Swan, 2012). Thus, it is widely accepted among gender scholars and feminist activists that VAW should not be understood just as physical violence. The Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (Mor Cati) in Türkiye, one of the leading organizations on VAW, classifies the types of violence as physical violence, economic violence, verbal violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, digital violence, dating violence, sexual harassment, and stalking.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that although there are various types of VAW, they do not occur as isolated events. Women often experience different types of violence simultaneously rather than independently or sequentially (Mor Cati, 2021, p. 12).

VAW is a concept used to describe gender-based oppression and systematic violence resulting from underlying inequalities and is most often perpetrated by men against women. The fact that VAW continues to be a significant problem today is not only due to the lack of legal regulations on this issue but also to social preconceptions about violence and normalization mechanisms, which are primarily based on traditions. For example, women's normalization of intimate partner violence<sup>23</sup> as "justified" in certain situations represents a widespread problem, as demonstrated in empirical studies conducted around the world (Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002).

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<sup>22</sup> Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation. Şiddet Biçimleri. <https://morcati.org.tr/siddet-bicimleri/>

<sup>23</sup> According to UN Women, 48,000 women and girls were killed worldwide in 2022, and 55% of femicides were committed by spouses and other family members. The UN Women (2024). Facts and figures: Ending violence against women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>



Women who are victims of domestic violence are often abused by men they know within their own families. However, VAW also occurs in public spaces such as workplaces, schools, and streets (Kadin Dayanisma Vakfı, 2021). Violence within families or intimate relationships is often more difficult to detect (Edwards et al., 2022). In Türkiye, the obstacles to women seeking legal help regarding VAW include lack of legal mechanisms, poverty, low literacy or lack of consultancy, and high fees (Hatipoğlu-Aydın & Aydın, 2016).

Therefore, many forms of violence become invisible (Mor Cati, 2021) or difficult to recognize and confront by the criminal justice system; feminist social science and gender studies have, therefore, problematized the normalization of violence behind traditional and cultural assumptions. It is noteworthy that in Türkiye and the Middle East, one of the types of VAW, "honor killings," was culturally legitimized and considered normal (Ertürk, 2007). Honor killings have long been an important local problem in Türkiye; while explaining the "legitimization" of femicides and so-called "honor killings" in Türkiye, Ertürk defined the concept honor as follows:

For women, compliance with the code of honour can range from having to dress and act with 'modesty', to observing chastity prior to marriage, to accepting arranged marriages and not leaving the house without the consent and/or accompaniment of an older relative. In the region, honour is particularly important as the norm is codified into customary law, which is referred to as *töre* (custom or law). According to *töre*, the family must ensure that the code of honour is observed by its members as transgressions (or mere rumours of such transgressions) are seen as 'stains' on the entire family. These stains may have to be cleansed at any cost, if necessary through murder (2007, p. 8).

The "honor" issue was also underlined in the IC (Preamble and Article 12).<sup>24</sup> The expression "so-called honor" in the IC was one of the issues that the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye reacted to, because they saw this expression as belittling traditions.

### **3.3. The Approach to VAW Policies as Part of Gender Mainstreaming**

To better comprehend the developments in VAW and GBV policies, it is also important to evaluate the struggle of women for their social, economic, and political

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<sup>24</sup> Council of Europe. (2011). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

rights and the gains they have achieved both in Türkiye and globally. Since the 1970s, women's organizations globally have significantly raised their voices in the international political arena, advocating for women's rights and gender equality and influencing policymaking frameworks on VAW (Sancar, 2011, p. 74). Addressing VAW and GBV from a human rights perspective prevents the VAW issue from being reduced to merely a criminal law issue. Approaching VAW from a human rights perspective also underlines the legal obligations of duty-holders to rights-holders (UNDP, 2006). This perspective therefore places a responsibility on the state to prevent and combat VAW, and in this context, international human rights law fulfills the function of defining the obligations of states and ensuring the accountability of states (UNDP, 2006).

Therefore, the preconceptions about violence have prevented VAW from being discussed as a crime. Referring to its structural nature, Chinkin argues that VAW is a manifestation of the power imbalance between men and women and a social mechanism that constantly forces women into subordination (1995, p. 24). Although the prevalence of VAW is well known, it is likely to be underreported because it is normalized and intertwined with other forms of inequality in society (Lundgren, 2022; Sinko et al., 2020). According to Chinkin, failure to report VAW leads human rights law to ignore it. Chinkin also suggests that women's economic dependence on men is problematic because it prevents them from complaining about violence (Chinkin, 1995, p. 23). As Altınay and Arat noted, two major perspectives came to the fore in domestic violence studies conducted since the 1970s: "the 'family violence' paradigm" and "the feminist 'male violence' paradigm" (2009, p. 7). The common thread is that the family is one of the most violent institutions in society. However, the family is usually associated with adjectives such as "'safe,' 'warm,' and 'loving'" (Altınay & Arat, 2009, p. 7).

In a patriarchal culture where male violence is normalized and rape is "victim blamed," the consequences of not implementing gender-sensitive legislation on VAW are dramatic. For instance, the studies conducted between the 1940s and 1970s explained rape as an "irresistible impulse, disease, and victim precipitation" that men cannot control (Scully, 2014, p. 45). This misinterpretation emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive legislation in addressing sexual crimes. Extreme forms of discrimination

against women, including VAW, are human rights violations that require the strong hand of the state to enforce the law and protect women's rights and freedoms. As the IC noted, international norms also recognize that certain cultural factors, such as discriminatory customs or stereotypical rules, restrict women's human rights (Article 12).

In general, when VAW is explained solely as acts of physical and sexual violence directed at women, the social and political reasons behind it are ignored. It has causal mechanisms deeply rooted in the patriarchal system, making it both the cause and the consequence of gender inequalities. Dominant social structures and institutional norms that defend men's privileged position in public and private spaces often leave women defenseless against the violence they face and deprive them of the means to seek their rights. This is a global problem; women all over the world are subjected to different forms of violence. In addition, war and conflict situations further increase women's vulnerability to violence (Copelon, 2011). Through technological advances, new forms of violence, such as cyberbullying, are emerging (Ray, McDermott, & Nicho, 2024). In addition to the diversification of forms of violence with developing technology, another problematic issue is how violence is presented in the media. Media representations have an important role in determining the social perception of VAW (Gavey & Gow, 2001).

Civil society-based support mechanisms are important in combating VAW, but they remain insufficient without legal sanctions, preventive and protective measures in policies as well as laws and necessary critical justice mechanisms operate effectively. This also underlines the critical role of the state in preventing GBV and VAW. It is the state's responsibility to take action and intervene to prevent violence. However, while the role of the state is crucial in combating gender-based violence, a multi-stakeholder approach that includes NGOs and advocates is more effective (Goldscheid & Liebowitz, 2015, p. 301). Regulations regarding GBV and VAW are subject to domestic law, but can also gain legal binding force through international agreements. International conventions such as CEDAW and the IC, consider VAW a human rights violation. To understand how comprehensive the IC's regulation of VAW is, it is important to touch upon the points criticized in international legal regulations before the IC. Prepared to prevent VAW, the IC operates with a holistic approach, addressing

the root causes of violence and means of prevention, protecting victims, and punishing perpetrators. The state's role is central in this framework as VAW is considered both feminist governance issue (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2023) and a human rights issue (Chinkin, 1995).

Ertürk (2015) correctly emphasized that approaching VAW from a cultural and traditional perspective (as in honor killings) constitutes an obstacle to a comprehensive fight against VAW. VAW was conceptualized as "a human rights violation within the framework of structural inequality relations by removing narrow stereotypes such as victimization/victim, harmful traditional practices or male identity deviating from the 'normal'" (Ertürk, 2015, p. 17). Combatting VAW through legal means by transforming institutions and structures is an important, albeit limited, step, considering the prevalence of violence.<sup>25</sup> It has been argued that in the fight against VAW and GBV, carrying out a grassroots struggle with only civil society actors, excluding the state and institutions, will not be sufficient to produce a comprehensive and sustainable solution. For women's right to live free from violence, the need for a gender-focused and collaborative approach against VAW with the participation of the state and civil society organizations has become vital and urgent.

The IC is the most effective legal tool combatting VAW and domestic violence. The IC emerged as the product of the joint work of delegates from different countries, including Türkiye, following the acceptance of the proposal for a regional convention on VAW (Acar, 2014, p. 62). Türkiye played a leading role in the negotiation and signing process of the Convention in 2011. The reasons behind Türkiye's withdrawal from the Convention are complex and multifaceted and will be discussed in detail in the following section. The transformation process of gender policies over the last twenty years can be defined as a paradigm shift from the mainstreaming of gender to the mainstreaming of the family by the state. In the context of ideological affinity between right-wing governments and conservative groups, it has eventually become the mainstreaming of an anti-gender approach. While anti-gender campaigns and

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<sup>25</sup> "In March of 2019, there were 1804 incidents of domestic violence in Istanbul alone, rising to 2493 in March 2020, an increase of 38%." EŞİK Women's Platform for Equality. (2021). Report Submitted to Ms. Dubravka Šimonović The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. [https://esikplatform.net/s/2547/i/ESIK-Input-to-Special-Rapporteur\\_30-April-2021.pdf](https://esikplatform.net/s/2547/i/ESIK-Input-to-Special-Rapporteur_30-April-2021.pdf)

activism have become increasingly visible, the polarization in Türkiye over the IC has become an indication that the family mainstreaming pillar of the AKP's social policy has evolved into an anti-gender direction. As the findings of this study explain in the following sections, the grievances and arguments of the anti-gender front eventually materialized as an opposition against the IC in Türkiye through a well-orchestrated campaign since 2019 and argue that the loose structure of anti-gender advocates in civil society, media, politics, and academia, mobilized around a specific culprit portrayed as the enemy of the family, social harmony, and national (authentic) culture, is a result of this new phase (Ünal, 2024a).

### **3.3.1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the VAW**

While VAW continues to be a problem for the human rights of women and female children around the world,<sup>26</sup> over time, research and analysis for policymaking from a gender perspective has become increasingly accepted and has been adopted by the UN and the EU. The most important reflection of this perspective is the identification of gender inequality as a priority problem that needs to be combated. As a result, regionally binding transnational frameworks aimed directly at combating VAW, such as the Belém do Pará Convention in Latin America or the IC in Europe, have been adopted by an increasing number of states.

From its gender-sensitive angle, the IC addresses the issue of VAW in a multi-layered context and ensures that violence is not limited to domestic environments but is understood in a broader social context. The Convention encourages a multi-actor social struggle within the scope of women's human rights and encourages preventive measures against violence. Based on the Convention's emphasis on human rights, this dissertation addresses VAW as a human rights violation and a part of GBV, thus GBV is understood as a broader category that encompasses VAW.

According to data on the incidents of violence by gender breakdown, it is evident that VAW is still much more common than violence against men by other men or by women and according to a recent review, the prevalence rate of domestic violence

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<sup>26</sup> UN Women. Women Count: Global Database on Violence against Women. <https://data.unwomen.org/global-database-on-violence-against-women>

against men worldwide is between 3.4% and 20.3% (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020). Due to the severe difference in prevalence rates, the UN has accepted GBV against women as a global health and development problem (Russo & Pirlott, 2006, pp. 178-179). UNHCR defined GBV by on the basis of its diverse forms and manifestations:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is violence committed against a person because of his or her sex or gender. It is forcing another person to do something against his or her will through violence, coercion, threats, deception, cultural expectations, or economic means. Although the majority of survivors of GBV are girls and women, LGBTIQ+, boys and men can also be targeted through GBV.<sup>27</sup>

To draw a more comprehensive framework, UNHCR did not limit the victims of violence to only women and girls in its GBV definitions. A similar approach was adopted in this study, and it is argued that the differences of people exposed to violence should be taken into account. The violence that women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and men are exposed to needs to be addressed by taking into account social power relations.

The legal framework of the fight against GBV has been established primarily through domestic law practices and international agreements, but grassroots efforts and activist struggles for gender equality have influenced the achievement of important legal gains. Owing to these struggles that women's human rights were conceptualized as a separate issue within human rights. The Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, a vital global collaboration adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993, is evidence of women's collective efforts to have their rights considered human rights (Ertürk, 2015, pp. 73-74). Considering women's human rights separately within the broader human rights framework will allow for a deeper understanding of the challenges women face, framing the issue as women's human rights was important to promote and advocate for gender-sensitive laws and sanctions that are essential to achieving gender equality. As a result of the joint efforts of the international community, CEDAW was adopted by the United Nations General

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<sup>27</sup> UNHCR. What is gender-based violence? <https://help.unhcr.org/turkiye/information-and-resources-on-protection-from-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence/>

Assembly in 1979 and came into force on September 3, 1981, with the genuine dedication of the international women's movement (Orta, 2023).

CEDAW also played an important role in laying the foundations of the global women's movement, which gained momentum among governments in the 1990s with the Beijing Action Plan. The Action Plan was advanced as the first comprehensive road map for achieving equality between men and women (Sancar, 2024, p. 47). Since the 1990s, gender equality has been included in UN documents as both hard law and soft policy instruments. On combating VAW, CEDAW contained two general recommendations (19 and 35), neither of which is legally binding like the Convention itself; however, they are considered pieces of soft law, which are recommendations for states to effectively implement the Convention.

In 1995, in addition to CEDAW, the Belém do Pará Convention by the American States, a Convention on the prevention, punishment, and elimination of VAW was adopted as the first legal instrument aimed at eliminating all forms of VAW (Güney, 2020, p. 131). The Protocol on African Charter on Human and People's Rights (Maputo Protocol) regarding African women's rights is also a binding instrument that emphasizes sexual harassment (Mavundla & Strode, 2023). Another international step that preceded the IC was the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), published by the UN in 1993. Similar to the approach to violence in the IC, this declaration defines VAW as "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of full advancement of women" (Preamble of the DEVAW).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in the Belém do Pará Convention, VAW was defined as "an offense against human dignity and a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men."<sup>29</sup>

Though there is no specific provision in CEDAW on VAW, CEDAW indirectly touches upon VAW. An important contribution of CEDAW to the IC is that CEDAW

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<sup>28</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/declaration-elimination-violence-against-women>

<sup>29</sup> The Organization of American States. Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) <https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/BelemDoPara-ENGLISH.pdf>

has identified cultural factors, such as discriminatory traditions and stereotyped gender roles, as factors that restrict women's enjoyment of their human rights. The CEDAW committee examines reports from different countries over the years. This review and monitoring exercise revealed the need for special regulations on VAW. The CEDAW committee's General Recommendation 19, a landmark document that provided a comprehensive framework for addressing VAW, was of particular importance in spurring the IC effort because of its specific emphasis on VAW. Therefore, before moving on to the content and brief history of the IC, it is important to introduce CEDAW, which paved the way for the emergence of the IC and determined the conditions for its implementation.

When we look at the recommendations of CEDAW in the 12th decision, which was announced for the first time after the 8th Session held in 1989, the party countries are requested to report statistical data on VAW. In Recommendation No. 19, published in 1992, the issue of GBV was directly addressed, and it was emphasized that the party states were expected to take comprehensive and concrete steps in this regard. The decision emphasized that GBV was also a part of discrimination. Recommendation 19 called on states to provide protective mechanisms and support services for women, as well as training activities, to raise awareness of gender issues among public officials (Chinkin, 1995, p. 25). CEDAW recommendation no. 19 demonstrates that the international community had taken action on GBV before the IC (Kurnaz, 2023, p. 160). While the CEDAW's original text did not explicitly connect violence and women's inequality, it did define GBV in its 19th recommendation and clarified that this definition also included VAW (Güney, 2020, p. 135).

Unlike other human rights treaties, CEDAW was prepared by the Commission on the Status of Women, not by the Human Rights Commission at the UN. Chinkin evaluates this situation as a "marginalization of women's rights" (Chinkin, 1995, p. 25). According to Acar, the Convention did not arise from an abstract notion of gender equality but rather determined the necessary measures and prohibited discrimination against women (2014, p. 63). CEDAW ends its definition of discrimination with the phrase "any other discrimination," permitting the inclusion of types of discrimination in this definition in the future (Acar, 2014, p. 64).



CEDAW expects signatory states to ensure equality between women and men in the public and private spheres against discrimination (Sancar, 2024, p. 51). CEDAW, which was opened for signature in 1980, took a decisive step towards preventing discrimination against women and played an important role in the emergence of the feminist movement in Türkiye in 1985. CEDAW was approved in Türkiye on July 24, 1985, and entered into force on January 19, 1986, with reservations made to some of its articles on the grounds that they were not compatible with the Civil Code, and some of these reservations were later withdrawn (Ayata & Candas, 2019, p. 184).

CEDAW assigns important responsibilities on the state in combating discrimination against women. It expects the state to share some of these duties with civil society, which is important not only to address the problems but also to ensure the continued implementation of CEDAW. CEDAW encourages women's rights NGOs to establish mechanisms to report and monitor discrimination against women. In January 1997, women's organizations in Türkiye contributed to the CEDAW evaluation by preparing a shadow report for the first time (Ayata & Candaş, 2019, p. 185). When addressing the implementation process, there are some similarities between the IC and CEDAW. Monitoring mechanisms have been established to monitor whether countries are fulfilling their obligations under the Conventions.

Countries that ratify CEDAW participate in world conferences held every five years and provide information about the structural practices they have implemented within the scope of the agreement. The CEDAW Committee and the GREVIO Committee of the IC monitor how the conventions are implemented and provide expert opinions to improve the implementation of the convention. Within the scope of the monitoring process, official reports are prepared by the relevant public units and submitted to the committees. The commissions evaluate reports from NGOs as well as official reports. As a result of the submission of these reports and subsequent discussions with party states, the CEDAW expert committee<sup>30</sup> prepares its final comments.

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<sup>30</sup> Ilkcaracan-Ajas defines the CEDAW committee as follows: "The CEDAW Committee, determined by the votes of the member states of the United Nations, consists of 23 experts known for their work on gender and women's human rights in various fields from law to economy, from public administration to civil society" (2008, p. 7).

Although it is one of the most important international agreements on women's rights, specific criticisms have also been levied regarding the provisions of CEDAW. According to Krook and True, who critically evaluated the implementation of CEDAW, the definition of the concept of gender equality was not clear: "gender equality thus remains contingent upon ongoing struggles at international and domestic levels, frequently resulting in inconsistent and uneven implementation" (2010, p. 112). Another criticism is that CEDAW does not directly address the prevention of VAW, and its scope is narrow. As mentioned above, although CEDAW contains many articles regarding women's issues, there is no regulation regarding violence before the Recommendation 19 (Chinkin, 1995, p. 25), showing that the IC, which was prepared with the sole and specific purpose of preventing VAW and domestic violence, is trying to compensate for the provisions of CEDAW.

### **3.3.2. The Making of the Istanbul Convention and the Timeline of Its Adoption Globally and in Türkiye**

Together with the UN, the EU also takes a determined stance in combating gender-based discrimination and gender inequality. The IC emerged as a result of the Council of Europe's persistent efforts to address the VAW issue, which is also on the EU's social agenda. For this reason, the IC was adopted by the Council of Europe in 2011 as a comprehensive legal framework for the prevention of VAW and domestic violence. This landmark convention has led to significant legislative reforms in signatory countries to prevent and combat GBV. Many challenges were encountered during the ratification and implementation process of the IC, but despite these challenges, the IC was ratified by 34 states<sup>31</sup> and remains to be an effective tool in combating VAW. With the amendment made to Article 90 of the Constitution in Türkiye in 2004, it was ruled that international agreements on human rights ratified by Türkiye would prevail over national legislation in the case of a conflict.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Key facts about the Istanbul Convention," Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/key-facts>

<sup>32</sup> According to Article 90, "In the case of a conflict between international agreements, duly put into effect, concerning fundamental rights and freedoms and the laws due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail." [https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa\\_eng.pdf](https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/7258/anayasa_eng.pdf)

In 2011, the IC was signed by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu on May 11, 2011, and entered into force in August 2014.<sup>33</sup> The Convention was published in the Official Gazette in 2012.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence Against Women entered into force in 2012. As an output of the IC in Türkiye, Law No. 6284 on VAW was prepared to regulate domestic law. Additionally, public campaigns organized by the feminist movement had a significant impact on the signing and implementation of the Convention (Ayata & Candaş, 2019). In Türkiye, where VAW rates remain high, CEDAW and IC have become particularly important for the gender equality agenda.<sup>35</sup> For both CEDAW and IC, signatory states are responsible for reporting on the implementation of the Convention's provisions. This obligation undertaken by countries due to the Convention is called due diligence obligation.<sup>36</sup> How signatory countries implement the IC is monitored by the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), a group of independent researchers.<sup>37</sup> GREVIO operates as a treaty body, which expects the countries that ratify the Convention to collect statistical data on incidents and forms of violence and to present the legal practices they have adopted to address these issues. In the country

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<sup>33</sup> When the IC was referred to the Turkish Grand National Assembly by the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on November 11, 2011, the following statements were included in the reasoning: "Our country played a leading role in the preparation and finalization of the said Convention, which is the first binding document on violence against women and domestic violence in the international arena, within the Council of Europe Temporary Committee for Combating and Preventing Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. The fact that the Convention was opened for signature and signed by our country during our presidency of the Presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers also has symbolic importance." Turkish Grand National Assembly. <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem24/yil01/ss81.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> The Official Gazette. Kadınlara Yönelik Şiddet ve Aile İçi Şiddetin Önlenmesi ve Bunlarla Mücadeleye İlişkin Avrupa Konseyi Sözleşmesi. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/03/20120308M1-1.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> According to the evaluation made by the OECD, when the rates of "having experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at least one in their lifetime" were examined in G20 countries in 2019, this rate was 38% in Türkiye, above the G20 average of 26%. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). <https://www.oecd.org/dev/W20-Ending-gender-based-discrimination-G20-countries-report-2021.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> For Chinkin's (2010) detailed evaluation on the subject, see: The Council of Europe. AD HOC Committee on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO). <https://rm.coe.int/1680593fc8>

<sup>37</sup> The first president of GREVIO was also elected from Türkiye. Prof. Dr. Feride Acar served in this position between 2015-2019. To review the first report on GREVIO's activities, see: The Council of Europe. 1st General Report on Grevio's Activities. <https://rm.coe.int/1st-general-report-on-grevio-s-activities/16809cd382>

report submitted by GREVIO in 2018, the Committee warned against regression in human rights and women's rights in Türkiye.<sup>38</sup>

Before the IC was prepared, some preliminary steps were taken. The Council of Europe established a committee in 2008, which greatly contributed to the emergence of the IC. The Ad Hoc Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CAHVIO) was instructed to prepare a convention on the prevention of VAW: "to prevent and combat domestic violence including specific forms of violence against women, other forms of violence against women, and to protect and support the victims of such violence as well as prosecute the perpetrators."<sup>39</sup> Prof. Dr. Feride Acar, a faculty member at Middle East Technical University (METU), Türkiye, served as the first president of GREVIO and took part in the establishment and approval process of the IC as a negotiator representing Türkiye in CAHVIO. Acar stated that CAHVIO<sup>40</sup> worked with the aim of developing a European convention to combat VAW and domestic violence (2014, p. 65). Although the IC focuses on combating domestic violence, it does not only include women, emphasizing the need for prioritizing VAW. According to Article 2 of the IC, "Parties are encouraged to apply this Convention to all victims of domestic violence. Parties shall pay particular attention to women victims of gender-based violence in implementing the provisions of this Convention."<sup>41</sup> Any state that wishes can apply the provisions of the Convention to anyone, including men, elderly people, and children, who are subjected to domestic violence, with critical consideration to ensure that other practices do not get in the way of paying particular attention to women (Acar, 2014, p. 69). However, how the IC conceptualizes the phenomenon of violence has

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<sup>38</sup> Report prepared on October 15, 2018: <https://ailevecalisma.gov.tr/media/3825/grevio-rapor-turkce-5bd99d7dbb799.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). Working towards a convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence [https://eige.europa.eu/resources/151103\\_flyer\\_cahvio\\_en.pdf](https://eige.europa.eu/resources/151103_flyer_cahvio_en.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> The Council of Europe Task Force, as a result of the work carried out between 2006 and 2009, stated that a European convention on VAW was needed. At the same time, the European Crime Prevention Committee of the Council of Europe concluded that a convention on the prevention of domestic violence should be established. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe also decided to prepare a convention that would include both proposed conventions. As a result, it was decided to establish a convention preparation committee (CAHVIO) in which the member states of the Council of Europe would be represented (Acar, 2014, p. 66).

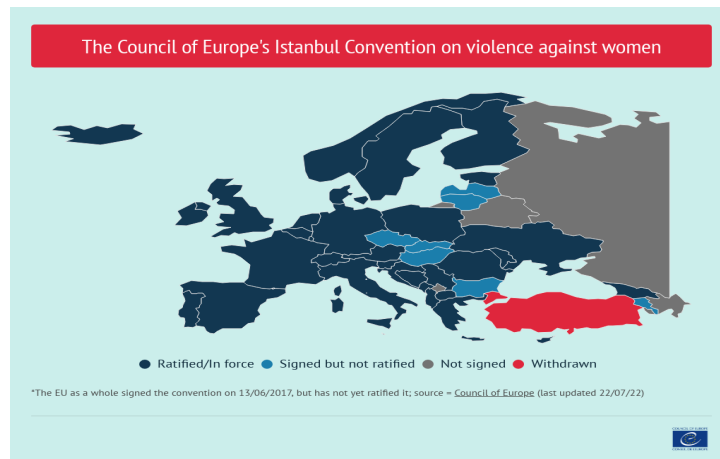
<sup>41</sup> The Council of Europe (2011). Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

undergone differences in meaning when translated from its official language. When the IC was translated from its official language (English and French) to Turkish, the concept of "domestic violence" was translated as meaning "intrafamilial violence." According to Acar, this has a meaning beyond a simple translation error: it reduces the comprehensive definition of domestic violence to a narrow definition of violence in the family (Acar, 2014, p. 69). The term domestic violence refers to not only "intrafamilial violence" but also violence between cohabiting individuals (Uygur, 2023, p. 70).

In the following years, while GREVIO experts criticized Türkiye for its deficiencies in the implementation of the Convention, oppositional voices against the IC also started to rise publicly. The demands of these opposition groups progressed to the view that the Convention should be renounced. The reasons for abandoning the IC were constructed as the Convention being a threat to "Muslim cultural identity" (Direk, 2023). In line with the demands of opposing views, the AKP government, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's presidency, announced that it would withdraw from the Convention as of July 2021. Most of the commentators and political science scholars emphasized that with this decision, the government bowed to pressure from religious conservative circles (religious orders and communities), was concerned about the upcoming elections, and was trying to gain populist benefits from this action by appealing to the sensitivities of religious segments. During the same period, men's rights groups also voiced their grievances regarding the "victimizations" they claimed they experienced under anti-violence policies and legislation (Özkazanç, 2020b).

The IC is the most comprehensive policy instrument on VAW, with its approach to domestic violence and GBV and its recommendations to combat violence. It organizes a progressive struggle line with its four pillars approach (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Co-ordinated Policies) (Article 1-a). However, its approach of subverting traditional approaches to GBV and making gender inequality a contested issue has also led to a backlash. As will be explained in detail in the following sections, there were two prominent arguments against the IC both in Türkiye and in Europe. The first argument is that the Convention disrupts the traditional family structure, the second is that the Convention does not only concern VAW but also allows for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage, and different sexual orientations through its "hidden

agenda" (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2020; Direk, 2023). There were no dissenting voices at the time of the signing period of the IC. However, in 2013, *Aile Akademisi Derneği* prepared specific publications criticizing CEDAW and the IC as in the Reports, "The End of the Family?: Family Policies and the Istanbul Convention"<sup>42</sup> and "Why is the Family Breaking Down? Family Policies and the Istanbul Convention."<sup>43</sup> As full-fledged campaign was launched in 2020 in Türkiye by a coalition of anti-gender movement actors, including right-wing political parties, conservative media, and associations, to create a public agenda to oppose the IC. In March 2021, it was announced that Türkiye would withdraw from the IC. Without the parliamentary process, a legally controversial Presidential decree stated the termination date of the IC as 01.07.2021 in the Official Gazette dated April 30, 2021.<sup>44</sup> The situation regarding the countries that have signed, ratified, or withdrawn from the IC across Europe as of 2022 is as follows:



Source: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/text-of-the-convention>

**Figure 1.** The Status of The Istanbul Convention Across Europe

<sup>42</sup> The End of the Family?: Family Policies and the Istanbul Convention <https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/aile-nicin-dagiliyor-yazisi-ve-istanbul-sozlesmesi.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> "Why is the Family Breaking Down? Family Policies and the Istanbul Convention." <https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/aile-nicin-dagiliyor-yazisi-ve-istanbul-sozlesmesi.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> The Republic of Türkiye. Presidential Decree No.3928 (2021, April 30). Official Gazette, Issue 31470. <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2021/04/20210430-13.pdf>

The binding nature of becoming a party to international agreements can be understood with the principle of *pacta sunt servanda*. This principle is also related to international law creating an order over national law (Özkan, 2013). Thus, the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* is to some extent reliant on the principle of good faith. Therefore, this principle of good faith leads to limitation of the state's sovereignty by increasing its commitment to international law (Reinhold, 2013). According to Ertürk, being a party to an agreement concerning the need to "act in good faith" is actually an obligation, not showing good faith (2015, p. 100), what is meant by good faith is that states undertake to fulfill their responsibilities sincerely.

Before the IC in Türkiye, important legal reforms were introduced to combat VAW in the 1990s with the efforts of the women's and feminist movements. In Türkiye, the institutionalization of demands for the protection of women's human rights has progressed since the 1990s (Karagöz, 2016, p. 25). The Directorate General on the Status of Women was established in 1990 to protect women's human rights and prevent discrimination against women (Ayata & Candaş, 2019, p. 188). With the amendment made to the Turkish Civil Code in 2002, the provision that the man is the "head of the family" was abolished. However, traditionally, men are held primarily responsible for the financial support of the family, and this ensures that men are the primary decision-making mechanism in the family. Although it was removed from the Civil Code, the dominance of men within the family was still influential in traditions and male-dominated culture (Ayata & Candaş, 2019). With the amendment made to the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) on October 12, 2004, sexual crimes were regulated under the title "Crimes Against Sexual Integrity"<sup>45</sup> within the scope of "Crimes Committed Against Persons." In the former TCK, sexual crimes were regulated under the title of "Crimes Against the Public Morality and Family Order."<sup>46</sup> In 2014, significant changes were made in the "Crimes Against Sexual Integrity" section of the TCK and when these changes were made, the minimum and maximum limits of the penalty for sexual assault crimes were increased. Therefore, the minimum limit of the sentence was increased from two to five years, and the maximum limit was increased from seven to ten years (Yokuş-Sevük, 2015, p. 122).

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<sup>45</sup> Cinsel Dokunulmazlığa Karşı Suçlar

<sup>46</sup> Genel Adap ve Aile Düzenine Karşı Cürümler

The most radical regulation against VAW was the enactment of the IC. To emphasize why the IC is an important document in preventing violence, it is necessary to mention examples of good practice. Successful implementation of the IC is not limited to imposing deterrent penalties in cases of violence or ensuring that people subjected to violence can quickly access protective services. The GREVIO reports provide exemplary good practices. In the report prepared for Sweden in 2019, attention was drawn to the "Come to Us" campaign launched by the Swedish Police Department. As part of the campaign, which ended in 2015, public information was prepared in 18 languages on how to report violent cases such as "domestic violence, forced marriage, honor-related violence" to the police.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, in Bari, Italy, the training given by gender professionals to officers working in the field of migration and dealing with refugee applications is cited as an example of good practice. Officers in Bari were briefed on investigating "hidden" violence that the asylum seeker or refugee could not easily express during the interview. Similarly, translators were also given training in gender sensitivity.<sup>48</sup>

During the IC process, which was implemented for approximately 10 years in Türkiye, many steps have been taken to increase collaboration between civil society and the state. As a result of the collective efforts of the gender advocacy movement, Law No. 6284 was passed by the Parliament in 2012, one year after the IC was signed. The IC encourages civil society and women's organizations to participate in such measures. During the implementation process, civil society contributed to the IC through shadow reports and monitoring exercises prepared by NGOs for GREVIO. Women's rights NGOs closely monitored the implementation of the IC and regularly prepared shadow reports. The legal commission of the Women and Democracy Association (KADEM), also published a shadow report on the implementation of the IC in 2017.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the IC monitoring process, the Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) launched a website. This website introduced the content and scope of the IC and

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<sup>47</sup> GREVIO (2019). Baseline evaluation report: Sweden. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-inf-2018-15-eng-final/168091e686>

<sup>48</sup> GREVIO (2020). Baseline evaluation report: Italy. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-report-italy-first-baseline-evaluation/168099724e>

<sup>49</sup> KADEM (2017). Türkiye'nin GREVIO'ya Sunacağı Dönemsel Anket Cevabı için STK Gölge Raporu <https://kadem.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/KADEM-GREVIO-RAPOR.pdf>



provided information about the operation of the IC in Türkiye.<sup>50</sup> ESİK, which was established in 2020 as a continuation of the TCK 103 Platform, later became the umbrella organization of the campaign against the decision to withdraw from the IC. A distinctive feature of the IC's approach to GBV is that it accounts for gender inequality and the existence of a historical power imbalance between men and women. The IC gains a unique character and differs from other international agreements covering the VAW issue through the idea that violence and inequality are two phenomena that feed on each other and sustain each other's existence in a vicious cycle (Güney, 2020, p. 134). The most extreme form of discrimination can be seen in VAW, and VAW further feeds the historical gender imbalance. In the IC, violence and gender inequality have been linked. The IC also emphasizes that culture, tradition, religion, or so-called honor (one of the issues most criticized by anti-gender advocates in Türkiye) cannot justify VAW (Article 12).<sup>51</sup> The Convention's tools to combat VAW are based on four pillars: prevention, protection, prosecution, and policies (Article 1-a). The fourth dimension of VAW in the IC is policy-related, such as addressing gender inequality requires integrating it into policies in education, politics, health, and labor. It is recommended that these four pillars be implemented through fundamental training on prevention mechanisms and criminal and civil law provisions. In this context, the opening of more shelters, training of personnel who are aware of violence, provision of sufficient budget allocations and cultural transformation are among the things that need to be done. Regarding the policy dimension of IC, Law No. 6284 was enacted in Türkiye to develop domestic measures compatible with the IC. Although the IC signatory countries have made policy changes based on the Convention, these policies are not fully compliant with the IC unless they are gender sensitive. In some countries, contrary to GREVIO's expectations, the gender perspective evolved into a gender-neutral approach. For instance, countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands have adopted this gender-neutral perspective.<sup>52</sup> A gender-neutral

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<sup>50</sup> Women for Women's Human Rights (Kadının İnsan Hakları Derneği) (WWHR). İstanbul Sözleşmesi. <https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org>

<sup>51</sup> Council of Europe. (2011). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

<sup>52</sup> KUN. (2018). The Istanbul Convention: The Nordic Way. [https://ntnuopen.ntnu.no/ntnu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2633543/stubberud\\_hovde\\_and\\_aarbakke\\_-\\_the\\_istanbul\\_convention\\_the\\_nordic\\_way\\_2018.pdf?sequence=2](https://ntnuopen.ntnu.no/ntnu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2633543/stubberud_hovde_and_aarbakke_-_the_istanbul_convention_the_nordic_way_2018.pdf?sequence=2)

approach ignores the unique needs and experiences of individuals by treating everyone the same regardless of gender. However, it is known that men are not victims of violence as often as women (Kolbe & Büttner, 2020).

Türkiye's status as a party to the IC and its leadership in the preparation of the IC cannot be attributed solely to the AKP government's desire to implement legal regulations regarding VAW. Important developments in Türkiye's journey toward the IC occurred through the efforts of the feminist and women's movements. There is a strong struggle for women's rights in Türkiye, with roots dating back to the Ottoman Empire. The history of the women's movement in Türkiye dates back to the late Ottoman period when the foundations of a limited but assertive elite women's struggle were laid in the early years of the Republic (Tekeli, 2010). The political gains and policy changes initiated by the feminist movement in Türkiye, however began in the 1980s. Post-1980s, during the transition to democracy, women's organized activism gained increasing political importance (Arat & Pamuk, 2019, p. 3). This period marked the beginning of feminist activism in civil society, with domestic violence and VAW emerging as the most critical issues highlighted by feminists (Sirman, 1989; Tekeli, 2010). This period also saw the execution of important legal reforms regarding women's human rights, including the signing of CEDAW.

In the 1980s, feminists addressed issues of women's oppression and emancipation by challenging patriarchy (Berktaş, 1994, pp. 26-27). The "Women's Discussion Group," which pioneered the establishment of the Women's Solidarity Foundation, was founded in Ankara in 1987. They organized festivals to support the opening of women's shelters, and in 1993, the foundation opened Türkiye's first feminist women's shelter in cooperation with the municipality. During the same period, books by feminist writers were translated into Turkish. These activities that started the feminist movement took place in Istanbul and Ankara (Sirman, 1989). Savran calls this period the "period of ideological fermentation" (2005, p. 82). According to Savran, this period coincides with the period from 1980 to the Women's Petition organized by feminist women from Istanbul and Ankara for the implementation of CEDAW in 1986; this was one of the first actions of the organized women's movement in Türkiye (Savran, 2005, p. 82). In March 1986, a petition campaign was carried out for Türkiye to become a signatory to CEDAW, and 7000 women participated in this campaign (Çakır

& Gülbahar, 2000, p. 245). The first joint mass action of women in Istanbul and Ankara was the petition campaign for the CEDAW (Timisi & Ağduk-Gevrek, 2021, p. 23). This petition campaign was also the first mass action after the 1980 coup (Çakır & Gülbahar, 2000, p. 245). The emergence of a women's movement capable of carrying out an organized struggle began to be influential in shaping state policies. The first institutionalization of gender equality began with the Advisory Board on Policies for Women established within the State Planning Organization in 1987 (Acuner, 2021, p. 126), which later became the Directorate General for the Status of Women under the Ministry of Family and Social Services.

The outcry of the women who united to protest domestic violence, which had traditionally been a taboo in a patriarchal culture, was directed against the statement of a judge who rejected a divorce petition from a pregnant woman who was a victim of spousal abuse. The judge had invoked a sexist proverb that condoned the beating of women. This decision compelled women to take to the streets (Balsoy, 2021) and led to the emergence of the "Solidarity Campaign Against Wife Beating," the first large-scale public protest action by women, which took place in many cities in 1987.<sup>53</sup> In 1988, a book was published in which women shared their experiences of violence, "Shout Everybody Hear!" This led to discussions within the women's movement about establishing a shelter for women (Altınay & Arat, 2007, p. 18). The second major gathering after the march against domestic violence was the street festival held in Kariye Square in 1987. At this event, it was decided to establish a special telephone line for women subjected to violence to seek help (Özdemir, 2022, pp. 311-312). The Feminist Weekend meeting organized by feminist women from Ankara and Istanbul in 1989 was an important turning point in the organization of the feminist movement in Türkiye. One of the most important outcomes of the Feminist Weekend meeting was the launch of the "Our Bodies Are Ours, No to Sexual Harassment" campaign against sexual harassment. This campaign, which was featured in the media as the Purple Needle Campaign, advised women to respond to street harassment by pricking the harassers with a purple needle (Özdemir, 2022, p. 313). Another action organized

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<sup>53</sup> Another important feature of this action is that it was the first mass march after the September 12, 1980 coup (Özdemir, 2022, p. 311). At the same time, a group of women who organized this action founded the Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation in 1990 (Özdemir, 2022).

by women regarding VAW was against the infamous Article 438 of the Turkish Penal Code, which provided a reduced sentence for the rapist if a woman was identified as a sex worker. The repeal of Article 438 was achieved in 1990 with the campaigns of a strong women's movement (Özdemir, 2022, p. 313). The 1990s were an important period in which the women's movement in Türkiye became institutionalized, and its visibility increased (Bora & Günal, 2021; Acuner, 2021; Özdemir, 2022). During this period, feminist and women's movement activists turned to more project-oriented work rather than mass activism spread throughout the country (Özdemir, 2022, p. 314). For example, the Mor Cati Women's Shelter Foundation was established in 1990, the Ankara Women's Solidarity Foundation was founded in 1993, and KA-MER (Women's Center) was established in Diyarbakır in 1997 (Özdemir, 2022, p. 314). Additionally, the Kurdish women's movement and Islamic women's groups began to voice feminist demands in the 1990s (Bora & Günal, 2021). The General Directorate of Women's Status and Problems (KSSGM) was established in 1990 to create policies to improve the status of women in Türkiye. Alongside external pressures, the women's movement's relentless advocacy through organizing, mass protests, and awareness campaigns contributed to the establishment of the KSSGM, which would serve as the official institution to promote gender equality (Acuner, 2021, p. 127).

Therefore, the years 1980-1990 were an important period in which women's issues and feminism were actively discussed in Türkiye. The importance of this period for the women's movement is explained by emphasizing concepts such as "raising consciousness," "empowerment," and "creating sensitivity" (Timisi & Ağduk-Gevrek, 2021, pp. 14-15). The challenges and areas of struggle that stand out in this period are as follows: "VAW, forced virginity checks, sexual harassment and rape, the Civil Code, the Penal Code, secularism, and the headscarf ban" (Ayata & Candaş, 2019, p.184). Arat (2017) attributes the increase in references to women's rights in the platforms of political parties in Türkiye to the influence of the women's movement, which effectively used international human rights norms and agreements at that time.

The campaigns carried out by the women's movement in Türkiye on gender equality gained momentum with the signing of CEDAW in 1986, and cooperation with the state intensified during the institutionalization process of the women's movement in the 1990s. After Türkiye became a candidate for the EU in 1999, the goal of gender

equality in women's policies began to be adopted by the state as part of the harmonization process. Mainstreaming gender equality is an important policy area supported by the EU and has important implications for effective subsequent legal reforms addressing VAW, particularly domestic violence (Booth & Bennett, 2002). Domestic violence legislation (Law No. 4230 on the Protection of the Family) was enacted in 1998, but the provisions and protective measures introduced into the criminal justice system by the original Domestic Violence Law were limited only to violence occurring within marriage (Aslan Akman & Tütüncü, 2013b). Between 2002 and 2004, the Platform for the Reform of the Turkish Penal Code was established, and a well-organized and successful campaign was carried out to add more than thirty amendments to the Turkish Penal Code in order to protect the sexual integrity and bodily rights of women and girls (Anıl et al., 2009). In 2012, this law was replaced by Law No. 6284, titled "The Protection of the Family and the Prevention of Violence against Women." As a result, a more comprehensive legal protection mechanism was established to address VAW. The new law aims to protect women who are subjected to violence, including stalking, regardless of their marital status, whether they are married, engaged, divorced, or single (Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2015).

When the impact of the women's movement on gender equality reforms in the 2000s is evaluated, it becomes evident that there was significant progress, followed by regression in gender equality policies compared to previous years (Kuloğlu, 2020, p. 335). As a result, Türkiye, especially towards the 2020s, has lost significant momentum in terms of achieving gender equality. During the AKP's prolonged tenure, family-oriented discourses became widespread, and this approach, which aimed to institutionalize family-oriented policies, was reflected in new legislation and institutions. This period also created a hostile environment for feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements, which were characterized as subversive and marginal by the government and conservative circles. For example, gender equality activism is criticized as an ideology imported from the West that endangers national and moral values. Despite the pressures they faced, the gender advocacy movement managed to run effective campaigns. In 2020, the Women's Platform Against Amnesty for Child Sexual Abusers (TCK 103 Platform) effectively stopped the TCK amendments that would

have granted amnesty to sexual abusers of children on the grounds that some men and families were "victims of early marriage." Therefore, the most important legal achievements of the women's movement in Türkiye regarding VAW include the signing of CEDAW, the ratification of the IC, and the enactment of Law No. 6284, which replaced Law No. 4230, the previous domestic violence law. The feminist movement acted as a watchdog for the implementation of CEDAW and IC, closely monitoring state policies and the implementation of new laws. Feminist activists effectively shaped public opinion through both online and offline campaigns. At the same time, they contributed to the progressive legal processes by following ongoing cases and making recommendations. Most importantly, feminists organized in civil society and academics working in the field of gender and women's studies in academia contributed to the production of feminist knowledge with their expertise and gender research from the relatively liberal period of Türkiye to the second term of the AKP, thus contributing to the mainstreaming of gender.<sup>54</sup>

### **3.3.3. Progressive Changes with Uneven Implementation of Anti-Violence Policies**

Gender mainstreaming, a strategy to promote gender equality, involves making organizational and procedural changes within state bureaucracies, NGOs, and international organizations to achieve this goal (Caglar, 2013, p. 336). Gender mainstreaming is considered a fundamental requirement of social justice and a policy approach that paves the way for important legal reforms in terms of governance (Squires, 2005). The concept of gender equality is discussed in three main areas: "capabilities, opportunities, and empowerment/agency" (Beer, 2009, p. 217).

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<sup>54</sup> For example, the Association for Monitoring Gender Equality (CEİD) was established with the aims of "Raising awareness on the importance and necessity of independent monitoring of institutions working on gender equality and women's rights; Accumulating and sharing knowledge on the concept of monitoring, monitoring methods, real needs and current practices and structures; Creating a pool of experts/expertise, determining priority areas and techniques on the scope of monitoring by ensuring cooperation and dialogue with women's NGOs across the country; Developing the technical capacities of women's NGOs, initiating cooperation opportunities, creating resources for monitoring to support the participation of women's NGOs in monitoring activities." Association for Monitoring Gender Equality (Cinsiyet Eşitliği İzleme Derneği) (CEİD) <https://www.ceid.org.tr/sub?pageId=ceidWeb2.1&menuId=ceidWeb2.1>

According to Beer (2009), health, education, and nutrition indicators have been widely used to assess capabilities. Equal access to resources such as land, credit and property, employment, and labor force participation rates serve as indicators of opportunity. The proportion of women in the legislature is often used to measure empowerment, which is linked to the degree of representation in deliberative bodies (Beer, 2009, p. 217). Gender equality is among the 12 Sustainable Development Goals set by the UN. The UN expresses the importance of gender equality as follows:

Regardless of where you live in, gender equality is a fundamental human right. Advancing gender equality is critical to all areas of a healthy society, from reducing poverty to promoting the health, education, protection and the well-being of girls and boys.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, gender equality is interpreted in a rights-based manner by the UN. Although gender equality has been a global goal since the Beijing Action Plan, the failure to translate gender equality commitments into action was criticized (Caglar, 2013, p. 336). According to Squires (2007), when gender equality was actively promoted globally, there was collaboration between international organizations, civil society, and the state, and the agendas of feminist activism were more integrated into state institutions. Thus, although the relationship between gender mainstreaming and feminist activism is controversial, gender mainstreaming has constituted an important framework for examining the changing policy landscape in Türkiye since the late 1990s. On the other hand, Türkiye's EU candidacy process, which started with the Helsinki decision in 1999, effectively transformed the institutions and legal framework by ensuring the spread of the Europeanization approach in politics (Alpan, 2021, pp. 107-108). One of the most important steps taken by Türkiye in the EU harmonization process was to develop social policies in collaboration with civil society, accounting for the perspective of gender equality. Although women in Türkiye legally have the same citizenship rights as men, discriminatory and sexist practices in society still disadvantage women. This discriminatory attitude also manifests itself in GBV: the

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<sup>55</sup> United Nations (n.d.). Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/#:~:text=Goal%205%3A%20Achieve%20gender%20equality%20and%20empower%20all%20women%20and%20girls&text=Gender%20equality%20is%20not%20only,achieve%20gender%20equality%20by%202030>.

culture of impunity for violence by men against women in Türkiye and the application of punishments that do not have a deterrent effect are causing an increase in VAW. Women's organizations operating in this field called on the state to resolutely fulfill its legal responsibilities as part of a comprehensive effort to combat physical and sexual violence (Mor Cati, 2021). In the 12th Decision, which was announced for the first time after the 8th session in 1989, the states were asked to report data on VAW, taking into account the recommendations of CEDAW. The 19th Resolution, published in 1992, also directly addressed GBV and emphasized that the parties were expected to take concrete steps.<sup>56</sup> The CEDAW committee's report dated July 1, 2021, regarding Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the IC, expressed anxieties about the weakening of women's rights. The report includes the assessment that it is "a retrogressive step back in the protection of women's human rights enshrined in the CEDAW Convention."<sup>57</sup>

Koğacıoğlu (2005) identifies two main components of gender inequality in the Turkish legal context: the first is the inconsistency in the content of legal texts, and the second is the non-implementation of laws. Similarly, the 2018 GREVIO report highlighted two problems concerning the implementation of the IC in Türkiye: that the policies on gender equality have not been comprehensively evaluated and that refocusing on women's roles as mothers and caregivers within the legal system and institutions, prioritizing the protection and well-being of families, and encouraging pronatalism. The same report also stated that the GREVIO Committee was unable to obtain judicial information from law enforcement, prosecutors' offices, and courts regarding the implementation of the convention in Türkiye.<sup>58</sup> While women's and feminist movements in Türkiye have made significant legal progress in gender equality and the fight against GBV, these gains have faced serious challenges due to anti-gender

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<sup>56</sup> Association for Monitoring Gender Equality (Cinsiyet Eşitliği İzleme Derneği) (CEİD). Kadınlara Karşı Ayrımcılığın Önlenmesi Komitesi Genel Tavsiye Kararları 1986-2013 [http://www.ceidizleme.org/ekutuphaneresim/dosya/453\\_1.pdf](http://www.ceidizleme.org/ekutuphaneresim/dosya/453_1.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> OHCHR. (n.d.). Statement of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw/activities>

<sup>58</sup> GREVIO (2018). Baseline evaluation report: Türkiye. <https://rm.coe.int/eng-grevio-report-turquie/16808e5283>



reactions, and as a result of these reactions, the decision to withdraw from the IC has been taken.

When the situation in Türkiye is evaluated in terms of gender equality, it is seen that women's participation in the workforce is low and VAW is high.<sup>59</sup> According to Arat, the AKP government has adopted "an Islamically recognized traditional division of labor between men and women" that encourages women to be primarily mothers and housewives (2017b, 176). The gender conservative discourse during the AKP period has stigmatized and marginalized the rights of LGBTIQ+ individuals and continued to frame women's rights within the context of the family (Özkazanç, 2020b). As a result, the tendency to confine women to the private sphere and exclude LGBTIQ+ visibility from all areas of life aligns with the claims of anti-gender advocates. From a feminist perspective, family is analyzed through power, intersectionality, and structure and agency themes (Allen et al., 2009). In this respect, feminist scholars have addressed issues such as equality, division of labor, sexuality, sexual violence, intimate violence, and emotional labor (Okin, 1989; Few-Demo, 2014; Anderson, 2010; Erickson, 2005). The state's interest in regulating and controlling the family, which it sees as the nucleus of society, is also evident in the rhetorical emphasis placed on family-related sections in political party programs. Social policies related to the family are included as a special section in the detailed plans of the parties and the institution of family has always been considered a fundamental aspect of the policy projections made by the political parties (Arat, 2017a).

Gender equality entered the agenda of policymakers in Türkiye from the late 1990s onwards and the family continued to hold an important place on the agenda of political parties. However, the recent adoption of a distinctly family-centered approach in government policies towards women has led to a conservative reframing of gender equality-based policies (Özkazanç, 2020b). Moreover, the rise of anti-genderism around the world suggests that gender mainstreaming is gradually being replaced by family mainstreaming, marking a paradigm shift at both the transnational and local policy levels.

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<sup>59</sup> OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/dev/W20-Ending-gender-based-discrimination-G20-countries-report-2021.pdf>

### **3.3.4. The Implementation of the Domestic Violence Law and the Law No. 6284**

One of the most discussed issues brought up by anti-IC campaigns in Türkiye is Law No. 6284 on the Law to Protect Family and Prevent Violence against Women, enacted in 2012.<sup>60</sup> This law, which served as a reflection of the IC ideals in domestic law, later became the target of anti-gender groups. The regulations established under this law demonstrate a commitment to an approach based on gender equality. For example, Law No. 6284 authorizes law enforcement officers and judges to implement protective measures such as issuing restraining orders and removing individuals who commit violence from shared residences. This law includes various provisions regarding a wide range of psychological, legal, and social support, such as temporary protection, nursery support, and changing identity information (Moroğlu, 2012, pp. 375-378).

Considering the regulations in domestic law on GBV, it is important to underline that significant steps have been taken against GBV due to the ongoing pressure from feminist civil society. In this context, Law No. 4320 on the Protection of the Family, enacted in 1998 and updated in 2007, and Law No. 6284, enacted in 2012, constitute legal frameworks of critical importance in Turkish domestic law (Uygur, 2020). The last regulation (Law No. 6284) is more comprehensive than Law No. 4320 and is closer to the provisions of the IC. For example, in combatting VAW Law No. 6284 and Violence Prevention Centers (ŞÖNİM) are directly related.

Through these legal regulations and practices, women subjected to violence can receive support, including psychological, economic, and legal assistance. Considering the impact of CEDAW and the IC on domestic law, the decision to withdraw from the IC and CEDAW in Türkiye carries the risk of restricting women's rights in domestic legislation, leading to a regression in violence prevention policies. Thus, Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the IC raises concerns as it could catalyze legal rights losses. Exploring further, Chapter 6 addresses the demands of the anti-gender movement regarding the withdrawal of CEDAW and Law No. 6284, while Chapter 7 discusses the concerns of the feminist movement regarding the loss of rights.

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<sup>60</sup> The Law replaced and expanded the scope of the original Domestic Law No. 4320, adopted in 1998.

In the early 2000s, new GBV initiatives began in Türkiye. On July 4, 2006, the Prime Ministry Circular No. 26218 titled "Measures to Prevent Acts of Violence Against Children and Women and Honor Killings" was published in the Official Gazette and entered into force. In 2007, the National Action Plan on VAW, which would last 3 years (2007-2010), was prepared and implemented. In 2008, the "National Action Plan on Gender Equality", which would last 5 years, was prepared and implemented. The IC was signed in 2011, and Law No. 6284 came into force in 2012. The Second and Third National Action Plans on VAW were prepared and implemented in 2011-2015 and 2016-2020. The National Action Plan on Gender Equality was prepared for the second time between 2014-2018 and for the third time between 2018-2023. The relevant action plans can be accessed on the website of the General Directorate of the Status of Women of the Ministry of Family and Social Services.<sup>61</sup> The latest action plan on the website is the "National Action Plan IV on Violence Against Women," which was developed to cover the years 2021-2025. This action plan does not mention the concept of "gender" and the IC. The action plan mentions Law No. 6284 and CEDAW recommendations.<sup>62</sup>

Domestic legal regulations regarding gender equality and the prevention of VAW are directly linked to the Civil Code and the Constitution, beyond Law No. 6284; legal regulations regarding the family are also included in the Civil Code. The Constitution explicitly acknowledged gender equality in 2001 by recognizing the equality of men and women within the family.<sup>63</sup> However, the Turkish Civil Code has a dual structure; there are dualities and contradictions between positive law and customary law regarding family law "depending on the level of democracy practiced in a country, the practice of making law" (Ayata & Candas, 2019, p. 181). The contradictions between religious and secular interpretations of law have emerged most clearly in family law, causing this area to become an area of ideological conflict (Serozan et al., 2016, p. 535).

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<sup>61</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı Kadının Statüsü Genel Müdürlüğü (n.d.). Kadının Güçlenmesi Strateji Belgesi ve Eylem Planı (2018-2023). <https://www.aile.gov.tr/ksgm/ulusal-eylem-planlari/kadinin-guclenmesi-strateji-belgesi-ve-eylem-planı-2018-2023/>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/82082/kadina-yonelik-siddetle-mucadele-iv-ulusal-eylem-planı-2021-2025.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> The Civil Code, which entered into force on January 1, 2001, defines the family as a partnership based on equality between men and women.

The shift towards a family mainstreaming perspective in state policymaking has led to changes in the effective implementation of IC-related regulations such as Law No. 6284. Since Law No. 6284 is directly linked to the IC, this law has also been jeopardized after the withdrawal process from the IC. The purpose and scope of Law No. 6284 are defined as follows:

This regulation outlines the relevant procedures and principles for protecting women, children, family members, and individuals subjected to or at risk of violence. It addresses the protection of victims of unilateral stalking, the prevention of violence against these individuals, and the measures to be taken against those who commit or are likely to commit such acts, along with the implementation of these measures.<sup>64</sup>

Approximately 300 women's organizations came together and carried out work to make Law No. 6284 compatible with the IC. Therefore, Law No. 6284 is the product of limited collaboration between independent women's organizations and the AKP (Ayata & Candaş, 2019, p. 187). Another important aspect of Law No. 6284 is that it assigns authorities, law enforcement officers, and courts the task of preventing and punishing acts of violence. One of the regulations on VAW, which is complementary to Law No. 6284 in the domestic law of Türkiye, is the responsibility assigned to municipalities. According to the Municipality Law No. 5393, it is mandatory to open women's shelters in municipalities with a population of over 50,000. However, Article 17 of Law No. 6360 states that the minimum population requirement for opening a women's shelter has been increased to 100.000.<sup>65</sup>

The Assembly of Women's Shelters and Solidarity Centers, which has come together since 1998 with the slogan "A World Without Shelters," has provided an opportunity for CSOs, public institutions, and municipalities working on domestic violence and VAW to exchange ideas at its annual meetings (Artan, 2023). As highlighted in these meetings, while shelters have played an important role in the fight against GBV, without strong support mechanisms such as the IC and Law No. 6284, the preventive

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<sup>64</sup> Türkiye. (n.d.). 6284 Sayılı Ailenin Korunması ve Kadına Karşı Şiddetin Önlenmesine Dair Kanuna İlişkin Uygulama Yönetmeliği  
<https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/File/GeneratePdf?mevzuatNo=17030&mevzuatTur=KurumVeKurulusYonetmeliği&mevzuatTertip=5>

<sup>65</sup> The Republic of Türkiye. On Üç İlde Büyükşehir Belediyesi ve Yirmi Altı İlçe Kurulması ile Bazı Kanun ve Kanun Hükmünde Kararnamelerde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Kanun. No. 6360. (2012, November 12). *Official Gazette*, Issue 28489.  
<https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2012/12/20121206-1.htm>

measures needed to effectively combat violence will be insufficient (Artan, 2023). Police stations are often the first places where women subjected to domestic violence go to report their complaints (Sallan Gül, 2013). While the vast majority of women who are subjected to violence are directed to ŞÖNİMs across the province by the police, officers often urge women to return home for the well-being of their families (Taşdemir-Afşar et al., 2017). Moreover, women who are subjected to domestic violence often report discouragement from police officers by saying this is a "domestic matter" (Sallan Gül, 2013).

It is vital to keep up-to-date and accurate data on VAW in order to document, record, and design policies on the extent, causes, and systematic nature of violence committed by men. The Research on Domestic Violence Against Women in Türkiye, conducted by Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies in 2014, provided comprehensive data.<sup>66</sup> The research conducted by Mor Çatı in collaboration with Disensus through in-depth interviews with 29 women living in Istanbul, Trabzon, and Mardin in November and December 2020 reveals remarkable findings.<sup>67</sup> According to this research, women experience the process of seeking legal rights regarding VAW differently. In some cases, cycles of violence repeat and perpetuate themselves. However, with some breakthroughs, women are reaching a threshold where they can break this cycle of violence and begin to seek legal solutions. Unfortunately, seeking redress through the criminal justice system to confront violence is not a simple or easy path. It was reported that women seeking legal support regarding VAW in Türkiye are often subjected to mistreatment, abuse of power, and pressure to reconcile with their abusers (Mor Cati, 2021).

However, Law No. 6284 remains the most comprehensive regulation on VAW, emphasizing the role of law enforcement officers and judges in implementing protective measures. The law defines violence, outlining its various forms (physical, sexual, psychological, and economic). Protective measures such as psychological, legal, and social support serve as a safety net for women and their children. These

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<sup>66</sup> Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (2015). Research on Domestic Violence against Women in Türkiye [https://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/hips/dosyalar/Arařtırmalar%20-%20raporlar/Aile%20içi%20Şiddet%20Arařtırmaları/2014\\_english\\_main\\_report\\_kyais.pdf](https://fs.hacettepe.edu.tr/hips/dosyalar/Arařtırmalar%20-%20raporlar/Aile%20içi%20Şiddet%20Arařtırmaları/2014_english_main_report_kyais.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> Mor Cati Women's Shelter Foundation. (2021). Kadına Yönelik Şiddet: Kadınların Deneyimleri, Kurumlar ve Mecralar [https://morcati.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MorCati\\_Dissensus-6.pdf](https://morcati.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MorCati_Dissensus-6.pdf)

include providing shelter, temporary financial assistance, temporary protection, nursery support, changing identity information,<sup>68</sup> and removing the perpetrator from the shared residence (Mor Cati, 2014).<sup>69</sup>

Overall, Law No. 6284, adopted after IC, paved the way for significant progress in gender equality and women's empowerment in Türkiye. Güney (2022) summarizes these developments in three main points. Law No. 6284, unlike the previous legal regulations (Law No. 4230), was regulated with a GBV-focused perspective. The criteria for protection from violence are not limited to official marriages, as stated in Law No. 4230. Law No. 6284 also covers violence in informal unions, such as cohabitation or religious marriage. Another striking feature of Law No. 6284 is that it introduces preventive and protective measures in accordance with the IC provisions. For example, provisions such as providing psychological support, changing identity information when necessary, removing the perpetrator from the house, and preventing the perpetrator from approaching the victim are some of the provisions in Law No. 6284 that facilitate the issuance of prevention and protection orders (Güney, 2022, pp. 139-141). Moreover, the fact that Law No. 6284 remains in force despite Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC constitutes the most striking aspect of the Turkish case in terms of the contestation between the gender-advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement.

### **3.4. From Gender Mainstreaming to Family Mainstreaming and "Gender Justice": A Paradigm Change in Gender Policies**

The struggle and policies for gender equality, especially issues related to LGBTIQ+ rights and same-sex marriage, face social and political threats on a global scale (Paternotte, 2018, p. 375). This has also been accompanied by a gendered democratic backslide defined as "states going back on previous commitments to gender equality

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<sup>68</sup> In a news report regarding changes in identity information in 2017, it was stated that the number of women who changed their identity information because they were subjected to violence increased from 40 in 2013 to 300 in 2017. Şiddet mağduru 300 kadın kimlik ve hayatını değiştirdi (2017, September 11). Haber Türk. <https://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1626831-siddet-magduru-300-kadin-erkek-siddetinden-kurtulmak-icin-kimlik-degistirdi>

<sup>69</sup> Mor Cati Women's Shelter Foundation. (2014). 6284 sayılı kanun uygulamaları izleme raporu [https://morcati.org.tr/attachments/article/255/6284\\_Kanun\\_Uygulamalari\\_Raporu.pdf](https://morcati.org.tr/attachments/article/255/6284_Kanun_Uygulamalari_Raporu.pdf)

norms as defined in their respective political contexts" (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020, p. 1). This definition of gendered democratic backsliding also reveals a significant political shift from gender mainstreaming to the institutionalization of family-centered policies in Türkiye's VAW policies.

In retrospect, and in line with criticisms of the AKP's conservative gender policies, it can be argued that the AKP's idealized image of women and family had a profound impact on the policy shift from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming in Türkiye. The AKP's image of the "Turkish woman" was constructed, first and foremost, as "a wife and mother, one who is more than willing to fulfill her domestic responsibilities through self-sacrifice without regard to her individuality" (Diner, 2018, p. 102). However, the discourse of sacrificing women existed in Türkiye before the AKP as well. During the early Republican period, the concept of "enlightened mothers" was common, emphasizing that women were the bearers of Republican ideals with their equal citizenship rights and public presence (Arat, 1994). Although this gender regime of the secular Republic established in the 1920s and 1930s recognized women as rights-bearing subjects within the family and national ideals (Kandiyoti, 1987), equality for them as citizens had become an integral part of the state discourse and public ideals.

The conservative discourse adopted by the AKP regarding women existed even before the IC discussions began. Pronatalist discourses that also interfered with women's rights to reproductive justice, particularly encouraging newlyweds to have at least three children, restricting access to caesarean sections and abortions in public hospitals, and discouraging delaying marriage for both men and women, were common in public officials' speeches and in public appeals made by President (then Prime Minister) Erdoğan at almost every opportunity (Diner, 2018). In fact, scholars have concluded that a form of "neo-Islamist patriarchy" has emerged in Türkiye since 2011 (Günay-Erkol & Sünbuloğlu, 2024). Moreover, the AKP has also encouraged sentiments against gender equality by adopting a discourse that emphasizes women's well-being within the context of the family (Günay-Erkol & Sünbuloğlu, 2024).

During the AKP period, two important dimensions of the paradigm shift from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming emerged in the state's women and gender

equality policies. The first of these is the gradual abandonment of the Europeanization objective and perspective in the post-2009 period, and the second is the efforts to create a uniform, state-controlled civil society instead of a diverse civil society that advocates for equal rights and deals with gender issues (Ünal, 2024a). It was asserted that in the process that started after the 2011 elections, when the AKP solidified its position as the dominant party, the state did not take into account the voices and public debates coming from the grassroots in the formation of gender policies and excluded feminist actors from the policy-making processes (Bodur Ün, 2019). During this period, instead of independent CSOs, GONGOs, which are CSOs under the control of the state, cooperated with the state and took on the role of spreading the state's views and ideology (Diner, 2018).

The most important organization that had close relations with the government was KADEM, which focused on women's issues. However, KADEM faced backlash from religious conservative groups for supporting the Convention during the debates in 2020 (Chapter 6). Thereupon, KADEM announced that it would no longer support the IC in 2021. Another important aspect of KADEM in terms of this study is that it developed the concept of "gender justice" instead of gender equality in response to the increasing gender opposition in Türkiye. Gender justice discourse, which exalts the perspective of gender complementarity with religious or divine overtones, advocates justice based on biological determination rather than an equality stance. This new concept is being disseminated through the media and civil society in a way that will influence public perception (Diner, 2018). KADEM's line of action, shaped within the framework of gender justice discourse, was described as defending women's rights from a cultural perspective and challenging feminism. Therefore, KADEM's challenge to the current gender equality approach is one of the events that paved the way for anti-gender reactions to have an impact on government policies (Günay-Erkol & Sünbuloğlu, 2024).

According to Çelebi, KADEM plays a role in the formation of gender policies in Türkiye in four main areas: "(1) direct engagement in domestic policymaking processes, (2) international agenda setting and representation, (3) expertise and advocacy work, and finally, (4) the solid institutional and personal links between the organization and the government" (2022, p. 328). Therefore, the views defended by



KADEM also reflect the views of the AKP. If the views advocated by KADEM contradict the AKP's attitudes towards policymaking, as seen during the IC discussions, it is not possible for the representatives to be in a position to criticize the government line and depart from it.

The weakening collaboration between autonomous NGOs and the government coincides with a period when the AKP has faced criticism for de-democratization (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanođlu, 2020; Aksoy, 2015; Kandiyoti, 2016). With the transition to the executive presidency system in 2018, the president was granted broad legislative and executive powers. This constitutional change also affected gender policymaking. The most notable of these events was Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC by presidential decree. One of the discursive and important indicators of this paradigm shift was the change of the name of the "Ministry of Women and Family Affairs" to the "Ministry of Family and Social Policy" in 2011 and the removal of the word "woman" from the Ministry. The second indicator is the "Vision Document and Action Plan for the Protection and Strengthening of the Family,"<sup>70</sup> which was prepared to set forth gender-based intentions and expectations for the period 2024-2028. In addition, 2025 was declared the "Year of the Family."<sup>71</sup> Additionally, with the announcement published in the Official Gazette dated December 25, 2024, it was announced that the Population Policies Board<sup>72</sup> and the Family Institute<sup>73</sup> were established within the Presidency of Family and Social Services. It was stated that the duties and authorities of the Population Policies Board will include issues such as changes in demographic structure, factors leading to a decrease in fertility rates, and strengthening the family institution. Regarding the Family Institute, it was stated that the aim is to protect the family structure and values, conduct research, education, and publication activities, and carry out educational initiatives such as certification programs and seminars for

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<sup>70</sup> Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Aile ve Sosyal Hizmetler Bakanlığı. Ailenin Korunması ve Güçlendirilmesi Vizyon Belgesi ve Eylem Planı (2024-2028). (2024). <https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/165130/ailenin-korunmasi-ve-gu-c-lendirilmesi-vizyon-belgesi-ve-eylem-planı.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> CHP'li Nazlıaka: AKP 2025'i aile yılı ilan edecekmiş, kim bilir ailelerin başına neler gelecek? (2024, December 26). Gazete Duvar. [https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/chpli-nazliaka-akp-2025i-aile-yili-ilan-edecekmiş-kim-bilir-ailelerin-basina-neler-gelecek-haber-1745110#google\\_vignette](https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/chpli-nazliaka-akp-2025i-aile-yili-ilan-edecekmiş-kim-bilir-ailelerin-basina-neler-gelecek-haber-1745110#google_vignette)

<sup>72</sup> The Republic of Türkiye. Presidential Decree No.172 (2024, December 25). Official Gazette, Issue 32763 <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2024/12/20241225-23.pdf>

<sup>73</sup> The Republic of Türkiye. Presidential Decree No.171 (2024, December 25). Official Gazette, Issue 32763 <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2024/12/20241225-22.pdf>

the public. It was also emphasized that national and international academic literature in the relevant field would be taken into consideration. As a result, political and epistemic preparations are being made to enable family policies to replace gender equality or women's policies. Political discourse that previously focused on gender or women's issues will now be limited to the family context, and issues that are incompatible with conservative family structures, such as LGBTIQ+ rights, will risk being completely excluded from both the political arena and public life.

This paradigm shift has had three main immediate effects on politics and civil society. The first of these is to further increase the pressure on LGBTIQ+ activists and CSOs and even ban their activities completely. Second, the determination of reasonable boundaries and discourses for the rights advocacy of secular, feminist, or opposition women's organizations. For example, the boundaries of politically acceptable discourse can be determined by developing dichotomies, such as accepting the discourse of gender equality as marginal and the discourse of protecting the family as acceptable. Third, the organization of the field of epistemic struggle and the development of academic literature that emphasizes traditional values and evaluates issues such as demography, gender, and women's issues as family problems instead of scientific studies developed within a feminist, critical theoretical framework that conducts gender-based analyses. As stated in the duties and authorities of the Family Institute, the information produced as deemed appropriate by the Family Institute may be disseminated and popularized through methods such as seminars, conferences, specialization, and certification programs. A similar epistemic struggle over knowledge production has previously occurred in Hungary (Pető, 2020), where it resulted in a complete ban on gender studies. As this latest development in the Turkish case points out, and as scholars who have previously examined anti-gender movements have noted (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022), these movements have followed similar paths that go beyond a simple backlash in terms of gender strategies. In the context of this transformation towards the mainstreaming of the family and the mainstreaming of anti-genderism, knowledge production, which is one of the areas of struggle that the anti-gender movement sees as important, has also become an important area of struggle in Türkiye.

### **3.4. Conclusions**

During Türkiye's EU candidacy process, various segments of the women's movement in Türkiye carried out project and issue-oriented campaigns on the VAW issue. However, after 2010, the women's movement, which made significant legal progress, most notably the signing of the IC and the enactment of new domestic violence legislation (Law No. 6284), entered a new period in which gender mainstreaming visibly stagnated and demands for gender equality became the target of direct anti-gender attacks towards the 2020s. As the AKP government abandoned EU-led policies on democratic freedoms and human rights and turned to defining the role of women within the family, anti-feminist backlash became more evident in political discourse. Therefore, the decision to withdraw from the IC in 2021 also carries symbolic importance. Currently, the legal basis of Türkiye's fight against GBV is Law No. 6284 and CEDAW. As discussed in Chapter 5, the adoption of family mainstreaming in Türkiye has contributed to the politicization of the VAW issue and its transformation into an arena of ideological contestation; this epitomized in the politicized debates on the IC.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PROCEDURE

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the research approach and provides a detailed explanation of the research process. The data analysis and research conducted for this study consisted of two stages. In the first stage, the aim was to analyze the discursive aspect of the anti-IC campaign. News articles about the IC from online newspapers linked to the anti-gender movement were analyzed using CDA. Based on the findings from the CDA, books written by self-identified anti-gender and anti-feminist authors and academics, as well as reports from CSOs leaning towards anti-gender positions, were included in the analysis of anti-IC discourses through deductive thematic analysis. In the second stage, the aim was to gather data from activists in the gender advocacy movement to discuss the pro-IC campaign. For this purpose, the semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with activists from the gender advocacy movement.

In this research procedure, a qualitative research design was employed. Creswell (2007) grouped qualitative research approaches into five traditions: narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, and case study research. As this dissertation aimed to gather in-depth information about a subject, it aligns with the case study research as described by Creswell: "Case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (2007, p. 73). Case study research aims to conduct a thorough analysis of one or more cases. Researchers conducting case studies rely on "multiple sources of information," including "observations, interviews, audio-visual material, and documents, and reports" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). By diversifying the data sources, the present study also aims to provide an overarching analysis of anti-

IC and pro-IC campaigns. Therefore, this research exemplifies the combination of qualitative methods (Alejandro & Zhao, 2023; Morse, 2010). In the following sections of this chapter, the specific research techniques employed in this work will be elaborated.

## **4.2. Research Questions and Theoretical Expectations**

This dissertation addresses to the ideological contestation between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement, highlighting the contention surrounding the IC in Türkiye. The research was primarily designed with the intent of exploring and analyzing how and why the anti-gender movement and anti-IC campaign have become intertwined in their efforts to institutionalize of family-centered policies. Similarities in terms of discursive commonalities, actor configurations, and overlapping or mutually supportive strategies are emphasized. Additionally, the research presented here examines the dynamics of the ideological contestation between gender (equality) advocacy and anti-gender movements, which are depicted as two opposing groups in the IC debates. As a result, this study also investigates how the gender advocacy movement reacts to the anti-gender movement. It considers the state's position as a "critical ally" in the context of the ideological contestation over the IC. At a time when the feminist movement was robust and vocal in Türkiye, and the government was taking steps toward democratization as part of the EU accession processes, the state collaborated with feminist civil society. However, the AKP's alliance with right-wing political parties and conservative civil society, driven by electoral partnerships, allowed anti-gender movements to exert greater influence over policymaking than it would have been possible under the leadership of another government.

Based on the focal points of the study described above, the following research questions were formulated:

- How does the anti-gender movement, as a countermovement, intersect with the anti-Istanbul Convention campaign in Türkiye in terms of overlapping themes and discourses?

- In what ways does this discursive conflict between anti-convention actors and pro-convention actors, which had previously been able to collaborate with the state on gender equality, represent an ideological contestation over gender?
- What impact has this contestation had on the activism of gender equality advocates, both emotionally and strategically, as they continued their struggle against gender-conservative policies and anti-gender perspectives following Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?

As stated in the introduction, this dissertation is underpinned by the claim that state-supported anti-gender movements have influenced policymaking, resulting in a setback in gender equality policies. In this context, there has been a shift in the gender policies through the attempts to institutionalize anti-gender perspectives in Türkiye. Particularly with regard to policies on VAW and GBV, a family-centered approach was adopted rather than pursuing a gender-equality perspective. The attempts to institutionalize the family-centered policies have also aimed to promote traditional and conservative values, as well as religious principles. This situation also reflects the substantially weakening influence of civil society efforts to promote a gender equality perspective in policymaking. While Türkiye has withdrawn from the IC, it continues to implement the same legal framework, Law No. 6284, in its domestic law on VAW. Accordingly, the anti-gender movement has made significant gains by influencing the government's decision to withdraw from the IC, but it has not been able to change the legal regulations entirely. Thus, although Türkiye has resigned from the IC, legal regulations based on the Convention remain in force, and the IC remains a contentious topic that requires further examination.

#### **4.3. The Analysis of the Discursive Construction of the Anti-Istanbul Convention Campaign: The Discursive Frames of Movement-Countermovement Encounters**

There is a substantial body of scientific research on the IC and anti-genderism (Özbay & Ipekci, 2024; Ünal, 2024a; Krizsán et al., 2024; Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2022; Eslen-Ziya, 2022; Kourou, 2020; Berthet, 2022; Sosa, 2021; Elsner, 2022; Balogh, 2020; Korolczuk & Graff, 2017). This dissertation contributes to the literature with a discussion specifically revolving around IC debates, focusing on the Turkish case. As

a woman living in Türkiye, who is aware of the importance of conducting research from a feminist perspective in the field of political sociology, I aim to present both an analysis of an ongoing political process and a future projection by examining the current state of gender politics in Türkiye. This perspective highlights the need to combat anti-genderism and foster a gender-sensitive approach to sustain feminist advancements in addressing GBV. Therefore, although this study takes on a descriptive nature while analyzing the discourses of the anti-IC campaign, it also produces explanatory content through discussions comparing opposing movements. This study evaluates the discursive aspect of anti-IC campaigning and it also explores the transformative impact of that campaign on the pro-IC campaign. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the interactions between opposing movements using the conceptual framework of contentious politics. This study also draws attention to the political opportunity structure of the AKP period, addressing the perspective of the state in society to underscore the ambiguity of the boundaries determining societal and state discursive frames and initiatives.

Numerous studies have examined anti-gender movements in Europe, particularly in Poland and Hungary. Most of these studies have addressed the actors involved in the anti-gender movements, how they are organized, and the discourses they disseminated (Kováts, 2018; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). News articles, speeches by right-wing populist leaders, church statements, and reports from conservative CSOs are the data sources for analysis in these studies. They have used a variety of methods and techniques, such as content analysis (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021), critical frame analysis (Ünal, 2024a), discourse analysis (Hansen, 2021), and CDA (Persson, 2021). Although these studies vary in terms of research techniques, their common aim is to identify the discourses of anti-gender movements and to reveal their connections with the far-right and right-wing populism. In addition to examining previous studies on cases in Europe, the present study focuses on the contestation between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement as opposing forces. Accordingly, after determining the discourses of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign in the Turkish context, the impact of anti-genderism on gender advocacy movements is discussed in this dissertation. For this purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 gender advocacy activists from Istanbul, Ankara, and Kocaeli. The

interviews provided original empirical data and also highlighted the unique aspects of the Turkish case in response to anti-gender threats.

#### **4.3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis and Deductive Thematic Analysis**

This study employs CDA and deductive thematic analysis to examine the discourses surrounding anti-IC campaigns. Since the topic at hand is related to anti-genderism, a recent phenomenon, and the IC, a current and controversial topic, comprehensive data were collected from various sources including news articles, books, and reports from CSOs. To comprehensively analyze the obtained data, this dissertation brings together various mutually reinforcing approaches. In this section, the compatibility of these approaches, their potential synergies, and their mutual contributions are outlined. This study adopts a critical perspective by addressing the political context that has been influential in the emergence and dissemination of anti-gender discourses. Consequently, CDA and thematic analysis were used in the analysis to uncover the ideological aspects of anti-gender discourses.

A widely accepted definition of discourse analysis describes it as "a research approach in which language material, such as talk or written texts, and sometimes other material altogether, is examined as evidence of phenomena beyond the individual person" (Taylor, 2013, p. 2). Taylor identifies two lines of academic work that can be evaluated within the scope of discourse analytic research. The first is a linguistically oriented approach, where linguistic analysis plays a significant role in analysis even though it emphasizes the variations in language across contexts and underlines social difference. The second major academic line in discourse analytic research draws contributions particularly from sociology and social psychology. This approach shifts the focus from language to society and individuals (Taylor, 2013, pp. 2-3). Therefore, CDA correlates more closely with the second line of discourse analysis and emphasizes the social, political, and historical context of discourse rather than relying solely on its grammatical structure or linguistic aspects.

Discourse analysis investigates how people construct differing actions and discourses. It also addresses "the rhetorical or argumentative organization of talk and texts" (Potter & Wetherel, 1994, p. 48). Potter and Wetherel argue that attention must be paid to variations in the texts to highlight differences, and this pertains to both the variations



in the texts and the differences that explain why a text was composed in one way rather than another (1994, pp. 55-56). Hence, critical discourse analysts contend that creating a speech, text, or visual content is fundamentally linked to power relations. Consequently, discourse analysis investigates not only the linguistic structure of texts but also the political and social dimensions of discourse. This type of analysis fits directly into the framework of CDA.

The CDA approach developed by Fairclough serves as the backbone of discourse analysis in this study. Fairclough's (1995) perspective on discourse analysis is popular among CDA frameworks because his analysis revolves around the concept of hegemony and questions power relations through discursive change. CDA stands out as a significant approach that establishes a relationship between discourse and context by taking the societal problems into account, particularly discrimination (Renkema & Schubert, 2018, p. 348). CDA, grounded in the concepts of power relations, dominance, hegemony, and ideology, facilitates discussions that extend beyond purely linguistic analysis of discourses by considering the context. As discourse is integral to our daily lives, we engage with it in various ways. According to Blommaert and Bulcaen, "CDA states that discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned" (2000, p. 448). Similarly, it is argued that discourse is decisive and shaped by society: "Discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people" (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 358). Thus, sociological and political meanings and the function of discourse are crucial aspects to be considered in CDA. Discourses that have become an integral part of our lives and that shape our ability to communicate as humans, have also become central subjects of analysis. It is essential to recognize that discourse is experienced differently depending on whether we are active or passive participants. According to van Dijk, most people maintain active control over their daily conversations with family, friends, and colleagues, while having passive control over media discourses (2001, p. 355). As van Dijk notes, the general public also often remains passive in interactions with authority figures such as bosses, teachers, police officers, and judges. In other words, people frequently find themselves in situations in which they are told what to do or what to believe (van Dijk, 2001, pp. 355-356). Discourse is thus a fundamental aspect

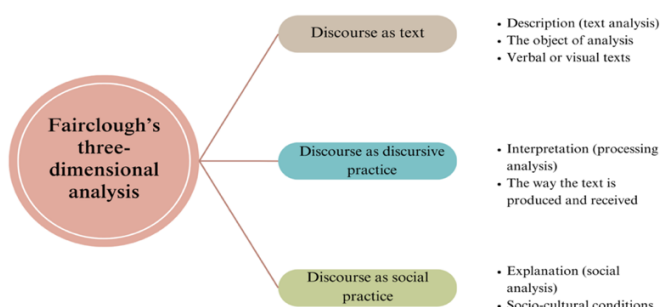
of our daily life experiences and an important element in our relationships with authority figures. CDA conceptualizes discourse as "a reflection of the power relations in society," and CDA-based analyses aim to identify societal problems (Renkema & Schubert, 2018, p. 348). CDA emphasizes the interrelationship between text and context. As a result, CDA research acquires content based on the discourse-specific context and creates a research process that is open to the researcher's interpretation. The use of the term "critical" in the name of this approach implies that "an analysis cannot be neutral or free of values" (Renkema & Schubert, 2018, p. 348). Focusing on how social relations are coded, CDA examines how discourse production methods such as conversations, texts, and visual materials interact with power. CDA is widely used in the analysis of written or visual texts. However, the application of CDA varies depending on the research context and the researcher's approach. Tenorio (2011) summarizes the main approaches developed within CDA by focusing on the relationship between language and society. As described by Tenorio, Teun van Dijk applies the sociocognitive discourse analysis approach; Norman Fairclough, another influential scholar, adopts the dialectical-relational approach; and Ruth Wodak introduces the discourse-historical approach as another critical perspective within the broader framework of CDA (2011, pp. 190-192). Although the main approaches presented by Tenorio are not limited to these three perspectives, these are the ones that have most strongly influenced the understanding of CDA utilized in this dissertation. These approaches differ in fundamental ways, but they also have commonalities in linking discourse to ideology, which distinguishes CDA from merely linguistic discourse analysis. Power, dominance, and inequality are key focal points for CDA-based analyses (van Dijk, 2001, p. 352). Thus, the interdisciplinary structure of CDA stems from various critical perspectives. Because of this diversity of approaches, CDA cannot be characterized as a method based solely on a single technique. However, the principle of maintaining a critical perspective across these different approaches emerges as a unifying element for CDA. The influence of critical perspectives on CDA is clear, but due to its diversity there is no theoretical orthodoxy within CDA (van Leeuwen, 2009, p. 166).

According to van Dijk, CDA is "a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted,

reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (2001, p. 352). Therefore, word choices play important roles in evaluations made within the scope of CDA. In this context, critical discourse analysts examine which expressions are preferable to others and how these conceptualizations are affected by ideology and power relations. Discursive practices are important because they create and maintain unequal power relationships and become the focus of CDA studies (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 358). Norman Fairclough describes the aim of the CDA as follows:

to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony (1995, pp. 132-133).

CDA is based on the belief that texts and talk play significant roles in perpetuating inequality, injustice, and oppression within society. Van Leeuwen argues that although CDA approaches differ from each other, they all share a common goal: "the critique of the hegemonic discourses and genres that effect inequalities, injustices, and oppression in contemporary society" (van Leeuwen, 2009, p. 166). CDA aims to uncover the broader sociological and political implications of the texts. As such, it can initiate political debates that extends beyond purely linguistic examinations. Fairclough establishes a three-dimensional framework (1995, p. 133) as illustrated as in Figure 2.



Adopted from Fairclough (1995) and Janks (1997)

**Figure 2.** Fairclough's three-dimensional analysis

As outlined in Figure 2, Fairclough proposes a three-step framework for CDA. Analysis based on this tripartite structure may not always be linear because there are no strict boundaries between these three dimensions (Janks, 1997, p. 330). The first stage of Fairclough's framework consists of the text itself at the micro level, focusing directly on the linguistic features of the text. The second stage, reflecting the meso-level, involves the production, distribution, reception, and adaptation of texts. As the macro level, the third stage of analysis addresses the dynamic sociocultural context in which the discourse community exists. At this level, it is important to examine broader social transformations (Merkl-Davies & Koller, 2012, p. 182).

The CDA conducted in this dissertation based on Fairclough's approach focuses on determining how social events are represented and exploring the political dimension of linguistic preferences. For such applications, CDA practitioners follow a tradition that rejects the idea of "value-free" science and contends that science is influenced by social structures (van Dijk, 2001, pp. 352-353). "What is distinctive about CDA compared with other approaches to research is that without compromising its social scientific objectivity and rigour, it openly and explicitly positions itself on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups" (Fairclough et al., 2011, p. 358). This open stance of CDA, promoting collaboration with oppressed groups, was an important factor in the decision to employ it in this dissertation to examine the dynamics of contention and reveal the power dynamics existing between anti-gender and gender advocacy movements.

This dissertation utilizes an extensive data set and employs various techniques to analyze the data. After analyzing news articles through CDA and identifying discursive frames, books with anti-IC contents were examined using deductive thematic analysis to interpret the political context in depth. Consequently, not all sections of the selected books were analyzed; only those sections that related to the predetermined themes were included and topics addressed in these books that were not related to the IC were excluded from the analysis. Thus, in this study, while CDA provided a comprehensive understanding of the ideological structure and discursive framework present in the news, thematic analysis revealed how the discourses in the news resonated with those of the books and vice versa. In the sense stated of Fairclough (1995), examples of intertextuality were frequently encountered, especially in books.

For instance, an article published as a newspaper column was also published as a book chapter in two separate books in 2020. While the authors of some books were listed with their full names, the authors of most chapters in the book titled *Istanbul Convention or Islamic Beautification? Which One Do You Think Suits This City of Minarets?* remained anonymous. In the section in which author information is given for that book, there are expressions such as "an article by a Prof. Dr. friend of ours," "an author who wishes to remain anonymous," "an article by a female friend," and "a valuable author who opposes the Istanbul Convention," among others.

According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is "a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (2012, p. 57). By focusing on meaning, researchers can make inferences about "collective or shared meanings and experiences," making this method "a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 57). The theoretically driven approach known as deductive analysis is based on a pre-existing theory and framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83). In this study, since the analysis of books with anti-IC content was conducted using the pre-existing themes derived from CDA, deductive analysis was preferred from among various types of thematic analysis.

#### **4.3.2. The Synopsis of the Interviews with the Advocacy Actors**

The second procedure of this dissertation for data gathering was based on the in-depth interviews conducted with activists of the gender advocacy movement. The interviews were carried out either face-to-face or via online meeting apps. Before conducting interviews, approval was obtained from the Middle East Technical University Social Sciences Institute Ethics Committee (Appendix A, p. 295).

In outlining the essential features of qualitative research, Ambert et al. begin by considering that "qualitative research seeks depth rather than breadth" (1995, p. 880). Consequently, qualitative research does not work with large sample sizes or provide generalizable information for a broad population; instead, qualitative researchers aim to obtain "in-depth and intimate information about a smaller group of persons" (Ambert et al., 1995, p. 880). The qualitative research process encompasses the stages of research design, data collection, and data analysis. All of these stages are directly

related to how the qualitative researcher handles and interprets the subject with regard to "meanings that people have constructed" (Liamputtong, 2019, p. 9). Since the present study focuses on interactions between the anti-gender movement and the gender advocacy movement, revealing how discourses are constructed is an important aspect of the work. In order to discuss this interaction from the side of the gender advocacy movement, a feminist research approach was adopted. Feminist research has "the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge" (Hesse-Biber, 2012, p. 3). Accordingly, it was aimed to shed light on the experiences of the interview participants and evaluate their experiences based on their own statements.

Assessing the significance of politics, ethics, and epistemology in feminist research, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) discuss the role of reflexivity in defining the interaction between the researcher and the researched. When reflexivity is evaluated personally, i.e. self-reflectively, the conclusions created by the researcher's presence in the research process are to be considered and critically evaluated (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 158). Emphasizing that the identity of the researcher in qualitative research influences the findings, Dodgson states that reflexivity is crucial for researchers to question their positions during the research processes (2019, p. 221). Berger (2015) explains reflexivity by linking it to three distinct researcher positions. The first position regarding reflexivity is the position in which the researcher shares the experience of the participants. In the second position, the researcher transitions from being an outsider to being an insider in the research process. The third type of reflexivity occurs when the researcher is unfamiliar with the subject being studied (Berger, 2015, pp. 4-11). Viewed within this framework, my position as researcher in preparing this dissertation overlapped with the first category described by Berger. I am familiar with the experiences of activists in the gender equality advocacy movement; therefore, I had an insider perspective throughout the course of the research. Consequently, the in-depth interviews I conducted with feminist activists and the reflexive notes I took throughout the study formed the basis of the reflexivity in this study. Since this study aimed to analyze the discourses of the anti-IC campaign as well as those of the pro-IC campaign and to address how the gender advocacy movement responds to the anti-gender movement, data were collected by conducting in-depth interviews with activists within the gender advocacy movement. In-depth interviewing

is one of the most commonly used techniques in the qualitative research tradition and it aims to gain insights into the participants' views. Interviews can be defined as conversations structured and guided by the researcher with the aim of gathering information on a specific subject (Della Porta, 2014, p. 228). The in-depth interview technique facilitates a dynamic exchange between researchers and participants, enabling the creation of knowledge and meaning in an interactive manner (Nathan et al., 2019). Thus, the in-depth interview technique is likely to have a transformative effect on the researcher due to increasing interaction and a reflexive research process. In order to determine the number of participants the theoretical saturation approach (Saunders et al., 2018) was utilized to identify a suitable number. According to this approach, saturation is achieved when participants' responses begin to repeat, and no new information and themes emerges that saturation has been achieved and the interviews can be ended (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409). In this. study, interviews were terminated after 20 participants were interviewed, considering that saturation had been reached.

Snowball and purposeful sampling techniques (Douglas, 2022) were employed to recruit participants for the study. The purposeful sampling technique was used because the interviewed participants were required to be actively involved in an NGO or grassroots organization that works with the goal of gender mainstreaming. However, when interviewing the first group of interviewees, attention was paid to the fact that the activists were part of associations that were members of the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform,<sup>74</sup> which had a significant impact on conducting a joint monitoring activity in the Istanbul Convention process of Türkiye and later on in the planning of the pro-IC campaign. However, in the later stage of the study, as an effect of the snowball technique, participants who were not affiliated with one of these associations were also included in this study. Then during the general evaluation it was clear that twelve out of twenty participants were affiliated with associations that were part of the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform. However, this study does not analyze the organizations. It took up the individual experiences of activists, the main

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<sup>74</sup> Istanbul Convention Türkiye Monitoring Platform Member List [https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/29-01-2015\\_istanbul-sozlesmesi-izleme-platform-uyeleri-Istanbul-Sozlesmesi.pdf](https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/29-01-2015_istanbul-sozlesmesi-izleme-platform-uyeleri-Istanbul-Sozlesmesi.pdf)

factor that was effective in including the participants in the study was their activism on issues related to VAW, GBV, and gender equality during and after the IC discussions. Therefore, when inviting participants to this study, no criteria were determined considering the diversified structure of the feminist and women's movement in Türkiye. For this reason, not all groups within the gender advocacy movement are represented in this study. However, the focus of the study on individual activism experiences has provided insight into the affective dimension of activists' common experiences, albeit in a limited way. These experiences, which will be defined as "activist anxiety" and "cautious activism" in the following sections, provide an inference that the gender advocacy movement is experiencing a sense of frustration and demoralization due to rising anti-genderism and the pressures associated with it.

However, while including activist experiences, special attention was paid to the experiences of participants working in the field of LGBTIQ+ rights, who experienced the most severe discrimination and criminalization. In order to reach associations working in this field, participants were invited to the study through an e-mail to the official accounts of the associations. When the experiences of the participants are examined in general, it was found out that associations working on VAW-focused faced less pressure than those working on LGBTIQ+-rights, and the most severe processes of exclusion, control, and threat are expressed by participants working in LGBTIQ+ associations. When inviting participants to this study, whether they were engaged in secular or conservative activism was not taken as a criterion. Therefore, it should be emphasized again that this study did not aim to reach out to all groups in the gender advocacy movement in Türkiye, but it primarily covered those who were affiliated with the Istanbul Convention Monitoring Platform or who were individually visible and engaged in activism within the pro-IC campaign.

In line with the suggestions of participants whom I had previously met, I contacted new participants in order to diversify the profile of the interviewees. In terms of demographic characteristics, the ages of the participants ranged from 19 to 67. Except for one participant (P15), all participants identified themselves as women in terms of gender identity (Appendix B, p. 296). Twelve participants were from Ankara, 6 were from Istanbul, and 2 were living in Kocaeli. The participants' activism experience ranged from 6 months to 36 years. Considering their educational backgrounds, all of



the participants were university graduates. While 14 of the participants (P1, P2, P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17, P18, and P19) defined the main field of work of the foundation or association with which they were affiliated with as women's rights, three participants (P3, P4, and P9) stated that they worked in the field of LGBTIQ+ rights.

Three other participants (P6, P7, and P20) stated that the association with which they were affiliated with works to foster gender equality. Except for two participants (P3 and P4), all participants stated that the names of their associations could be shared in this dissertation. P3 and P4 stated that they had concerns about security and anonymity and requested that the name of their association not be shared. Hence, only their areas of work have been mentioned. One participant (P5) described herself as an independent activist; however, she stated that she wanted to be mentioned in this study in association with a cooperative in which she had previously taken part. This participant justified her request by stating that the cooperative's past work had been influential for her current activism. Although the cooperative that this participant mentioned, the Kırkörük Cooperative for Combating Violence Against Women, is no longer active, it is named in this study in order to respect the participant's preference. Another participant (P2) requested that the information regarding the women's studies unit of a university in which she had been involved not be shared in this dissertation due to confidentiality concerns. This information was once again anonymized as per the participant's request.

The participants of this study included activists from different grassroots organizations or NGOs. The Flying Broom Women's Communication and Research Association<sup>75</sup> works on projects dedicated to protecting the rights of women and girls with the goal of fostering gender equality. Founded in 2018, the HAVLE Women's Association,<sup>76</sup> defines itself as "the first Muslim Feminist Women's Association in Türkiye," specifically addressing the problems experienced by women. The Purple Roof Women's Shelter Foundation (Mor Cati) was founded in 1990 by feminists motivated by the aim of combating VAW and GBV. It runs a shelter based on feminist principles

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<sup>75</sup> <https://ucansupurgedernegi.org/misyonumuz/>

<sup>76</sup> <https://www.havlekadin.com/en/>

and its goals are also related to achieving gender equality in general.<sup>77</sup> The Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD) was founded in 2011. It focuses on LGBTIQ+ rights and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation.<sup>78</sup> The Foundation for Women's Solidarity was founded in 1993 and it carries out campaigns and projects to combat all forms of VAW.<sup>79</sup> Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR) was founded in 1993 to carry out activities to protect women's human rights and foster gender equality.<sup>80</sup> The Lotus Women Solidarity and Life Association, a local advocacy organization, was founded in Kocaeli in 2017. It conducts regional projects based in Kocaeli and targets VAW in line with the goal of gender equality.<sup>81</sup> Young Feminist Solidarity is a new formation founded in 2024. This solidarity network is part of the We Will Stop Femicide Platform,<sup>82</sup> established in 2010, and it carries out activities to raise awareness of VAW, to record and document information, and to keep a record of femicides in Türkiye. Founded in 2011, the Red Pepper Association works for the protection of women's rights and gender equality.<sup>83</sup> Finally, the Women's Platform for Equality (EŞİK)<sup>84</sup> was founded in 2020 by various women's organizations with the aim of preventing perpetrators from receiving reduced sentences in child sexual abuse cases and also to defend the IC. EŞİK has been active in various areas such as campaigns, projects, networking, awareness raising, and lobbying, and one of its main campaign topics was the IC.<sup>85</sup>

In-depth interviews were conducted with these participants using a semi-structured interview form (Appendix C, p. 299). A total of 12 open-ended questions were asked and all participants answered each question. No participant ended the interview early or hesitated to answer certain questions. In the interim evaluation conducted after the first 10 interviews, it was observed that there was no consensus among the participants

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<sup>77</sup> <https://en.morcati.org.tr/about-us/who-we-are/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://spod.org.tr/support/>

<sup>79</sup> <https://www.kadindayanismavakfi.org.tr/en/who-are-we/>

<sup>80</sup> <https://wwhr.org/about-us/who-we-are/>

<sup>81</sup> <https://lotuskadin.org/en>

<sup>82</sup> <https://kadincinayetlerinidurduracagiz.net>

<sup>83</sup> <https://kirmizibiberdernegi.org.tr/biz-kimiz/>

<sup>84</sup> EŞİK was formed as an evolution of an alliance of gender advocacy organizations that united under the name of TCK 103 Platform.

<sup>85</sup> <https://esikplatform.net/hikayemiz/>

on the definition of the concept of gender. Therefore, starting from the eleventh in-depth interview, the following was added as the seventh question: "How would you define the concept of gender?" For the transcription and the analysis of the interview recordings, MAXQDA software was used.

The participants' responses were organized within 12 categories, and separate analysis was conducted for each question when necessary. Prior to the analysis, the in-depth interview questions were identified and linked to specific research questions (Appendix C, p. 299). First, I finished transcribing the interviews. The transcription phase can also be seen as an act of interpretation, as it is both selective and interpretative. In this process, overlapping parts of the interviews were identified and coded. Hesitations and pauses during the interviews were indicated with ellipses. I then conducted the coding process by compiling the notes I took during the interviews. After the coding, themes, categories, and subcategories were determined. The interviews, scheduled according to the availability of the participants, each lasted approximately 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded after the participants' consent was obtained. The interview recordings and my own notes were used in the data analysis process.

#### **4.4. Conclusions**

This study employs Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA and deductive thematic analysis in the discursive analysis of the anti-IC campaign. Since it focuses on the contention between the anti-gender movement and the gender advocacy movement regarding the IC, the texts selected for analysis were based on the criterion of containing anti-IC content. By identifying the discursive commonalities and differences among these texts, the scope of the analysis was expanded and a more comprehensive analytical framework was created. Additionally, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with gender equality advocacy actors to tap into their perspectives on the contestation (i.e., their positions, perceptions, experiences, and predicaments, as well as projections) during the IC debates and afterwards.

Regarding self-reflexivity, I must note that the insights presented in this study are based on both my academic pursuits and my activist engagements at the intersection

of academia, civil society, and the arts. My academic interest in critical pedagogies has enhanced my understanding of discourse, leading me to recognize the fundamental role that discursive strategies play in shaping public consciousness and mobilizing collective action. Engaging deeply with the works of Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal, and bell hooks further strengthened my determination to examine power imbalances in society. This intellectual journey eventually led me to focus on one of the most pressing issues of our time: gender inequality. By critically engaging with both discourse and pedagogy, I aim to contribute to efforts of fostering more egalitarian societies.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **5. THE ANALYSIS OF IDEOLOGICAL CONTESTATION BETWEEN THE ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENT AND THE GENDER ADVOCACY MOVEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION DEBATES**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

The theoretical framework of this study draws on conceptual approaches from existing literature on anti-gender movements. It is also rooted in contentious politics, as it examines the interaction between two opposing movements in which the government serves as an object of claims. The contestation between the anti-gender movement and the gender equality advocacy movement during the IC debates creates a scenario where anti-gender and pro-gender perspectives directly confront each other, unfolding discursively through opposing frames. As explained in Chapter 4, this dissertation analyzes news articles employing Fairclough's CDA and uncovers the relationship between power and discourse in the context of the IC debates.

Considered a complementary component of the theoretical framework, CDA facilitates the analysis of power relations embedded in language and discourse and offers a comprehensive examination of the case of the IC debates. CDA enables meaningful categorization and operationalization via interpretation in the context of contentious politics and ideological contestation; discussions rooted in this contestation represent the third stage of Fairclough's CDA analysis, namely the analysis of the socio-political context. Thus, this chapter will summarize how the theoretical framework and methodological approaches complement each other and outline the general findings to be further elucidated in detail in the sixth and seventh chapters of this dissertation.

## **5.2. Contentious Politics and Ideological Contestation Framework**

The core principles of Fairclough's CDA are texts, interactions, and contexts, emphasizing connections between "language, power, and ideology" (1995, p. 23). According to Fairclough, in contemporary social life, social transformations are largely "discourse-led;" that is, discourses are both first to change (2006, p. 27) and their analysis enable the tracing of social changes as a whole. Fairclough proposes three stages for CDA: the first is an analysis of the linguistic structure of the text, the second examines the production and circulation relations of the text, and the third analyzes the sociocultural context of the text (1995, p. 98). In the third stage, this study refers to contentious politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) to interpret the interaction between two opposing campaigns.

In this context, the capacity of these two campaigns to collaborate with the state is analyzed through political opportunity structures. Since there is discursive battle between these two opposing campaigns, namely the pro-Convention and anti-Convention campaigns, this study also evaluates the frames of these opposing campaigns using the concept of "counter reframing." According to Benford and Snow, frames are created both through "core framing tasks" namely "diagnostic framing," "prognostic framing," and "motivational framing," as well as discursive, contested, and strategic processes (2000, p. 615, 623).

The discursive process encompasses the verbal, written, and visual communications of the activities of movement members. The news articles, books, and reports analyzed in this study embody these discursive processes. When analyzing the discursive process, which events are emphasized and which are not is vital: Fairclough concurs that in CDA, some researchers consider both the information presented in the text and what is downplayed (1995, p. 210). Although this study compares pro-IC and anti-IC campaigns, only news articles related to anti-IC campaigns are analyzed using CDA. In the second part of the research, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with feminist activists and gender equality advocates.

These interviews aim to investigate the views of the pro-IC campaign based on activists' experiences and perceptions of the disputes. This study examines the IC

debates in Türkiye, defining a contested event in which anti-Convention and pro-Convention campaigns compete against each other. Even though the groups involved in these campaigns are not homogeneous, the case can be made that advocates of anti-gender ideology lead the anti-Convention campaign. In contrast, the pro-Convention campaign is driven by the gender advocacy movement. Thus, the case of IC debates has become a battleground for opposing ideological positions.

Citing Freedon (1996), ideological opposition was defined as ideological contestation in this dissertation, arguing that ideological contestation represents a discursive political struggle over the concept of "gender" and related elements, and contends that these two movements take opposite positions on key concepts such as gender, family, equality, and justice. The anti-gender movement reframed or recontextualized (Fairclough, 2012, p. 12) the concepts advanced by the feminist movement within the framework of its conservative ideology. Because I argue that the struggle between pro-IC and anti-IC campaigns represents a broader ideological contestation, the concept of ideology needs to be clarified in this specific context.

Furthermore, because I consider the anti-gender movement as the primary conservative actor in the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye, I also need to clarify the concept of conservatism from a specific perspective. According to Michael Freedon, "the morphological approach regards ideologies as discursive competitions over control of public political language" (2013, p. 117). In this respect, it aligns more closely with framing theory in social movement, particularly in terms of the discursive and symbolic dimensions that foster the collective action. Freedon (1996) does not define conservatism merely as a reaction against progressive forces; while evaluating modern conservatism from the perspective of change, order, and tradition, he argues that modern conservatism does not aim to preserve the status quo, rather, modern conservatism involves a controlled change that respects tradition and maintains order. Consequently, while anti-gender movements are classified as conservative movements in this study, their conservatism overlaps with Freedon's (1996) definition. The conservatism of these movements does not make them anti-change. They outlined the course of change within a traditional framework.

Therefore, this dissertation considers anti-gender movements as essentially conservative and argues that they have adopted "family protection" as a core frame. These movements have also successfully mobilized against "gender ideology" and organized the anti-IC campaign with a concrete objective and target. According to Fairclough, "ideologies are representations of the aspects of the world which can be shown to contribute to establishing, maintaining and changing social relations of power, domination and exploitation" (2003, p. 9). Freeden (1996) interprets ideologies through his ideological morphology framework, demonstrating how certain concepts and themes are organized, and indicating how such concepts and themes relate to each other.

According to Freeden, by defining and approaching the same concepts and themes differently, ideologies not only differentiate from each other but also aim to make decontested concepts by stabilizing their meanings. "Ultimately, ideologies are configurations of decontested meanings of political concepts" (Freeden, 1996, p. 76). Adopting this perspective to understand how the gender advocacy movement and anti-gender movement combat each other over the IC debates, we can infer that they compete for discursive hegemony through decontested meanings. Referencing Freeden (1996), this study uses "decontestation" to demonstrate that different groups attribute concrete, undisputed meanings to certain concepts. This study claims that both contestation and decontestation can be observed in the struggle to assign meanings to the concept of gender. For instance, in the IC debates, gender as a concept is indisputably aligned with "gender equality" by the gender advocacy movement; conversely, the anti-gender movement equates the concept of gender with "gender ideology" without room for interpretation.

As previously discussed, the groups participating in both anti-gender and gender advocacy movements are not homogenous, therefore, not every meaning ascribed to such foundational ideas is valid for every situation. For instance, even though they challenge the concept of gender, gender-critical feminists may support the pro-Convention campaign. Moreover, KADEM, which later joined the anti-Convention campaign, continues to defend the concept of gender by promoting the idea of "gender justice." Thus, even though a lack of controversy over the practical definition of gender

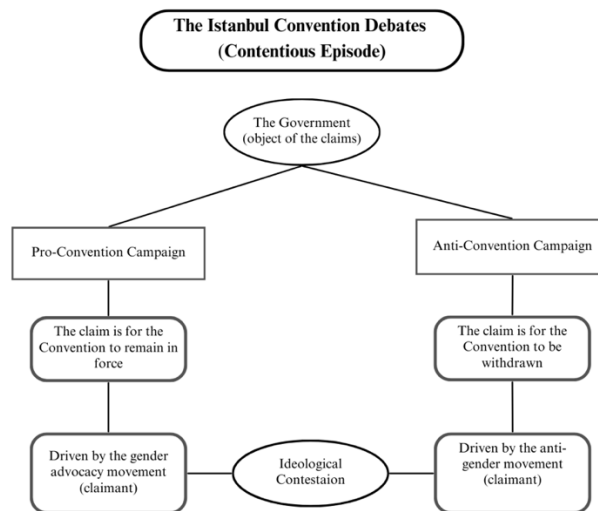


may be valid in the case of the contestation between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement, the diversity of actors in these movements make the attributed meanings towards the gender concept open to discussion among groups, albeit to a lesser extent. Interpreting the pro-Convention and anti-Convention campaigns through a contentious politics framework, this study discusses the political opportunity structures that enable ideological contestation to emerge.

This perspective emphasizes the shifting balance of power affected by the state's position on the issues of VAW, GBV, and domestic violence. In other words, the discussion centered on political opportunity structures enables the discussion of the transition from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming in Türkiye's gender policy paradigm. Pro-Convention and anti-Convention campaigns engage in dynamic struggle in which each side uses discursive strategies and mobilize resources to promote their respective agenda. Analyzing this struggle is imperative to understanding that defining gender is ideologically driven, and how opposing groups navigate the tensions and contradictions that arise on the basis of the concept of gender.

This analysis also explains how opposing campaigns engage in contentious collective action to reshape the sociopolitical landscape and exert their influence. Contentious politics possesses three common properties: "interactions, collective claims, and government" (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 261). "Interactions" in this context refers to communication between the parties: "the minimum set being one claimant, one object of claims, and a third party to the claims" (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 261).

When we adapt this interaction perspective to the case of IC debates in Türkiye, we observe two claimants: pro-Convention and anti-Convention. For groups advocating for the pro-Convention campaign, the object of claim is that the convention should remain enforced, while anti-Convention supporters insist that the convention should be withdrawn. In this context, the state is "an object of claims" for both groups. Based on this framework, this dissertation argues that the pro-Convention campaign is led by the gender advocacy movement and the anti-Convention campaign is driven by the anti-gender movement. Thus, the opposition between these two movements is considered as ideological contestation and the anti-gender movement is regarded as a countermovement in his sense.



**Figure 3.** The Istanbul Convention Debates: A Contentious Episode

As presented above, when the IC debates in Türkiye are considered a contentious episode, it becomes clear that the contestation occurs through pro-Convention and anti-Convention campaigns. Considering the legal aspect of the IC, the government has an important role in this contestation. This perspective attributes a critical role to the state because it is a critical ally in this contestation. Identifying which groups' discourses the state embraces and which it excludes reveals the policy framework that Türkiye is likely to adopt in the future regarding gender policies. Commenting on the importance of political opportunity structures, McAdam et al. allege that "the combination of repression of some groups and facilitation of others can produce the radicalization of the former and the institutionalization of the latter" (2009, p. 275).

Thus, the IC debates in Türkiye are exemplary of government-connected contention. Although the IC is not the only point of conflict between the gender advocacy and anti-gender movements, the rivalry over the IC unearths the diverse and opposing discursive frames regarding the gender politics, indicating that they emerged from ideologically distinct roots. The contestation between these two opposing movements is evaluated as a gendered ideological contestation that illuminates the political context in which the debates around the IC emerged. These collective claims have a political effect that represent the future viability of similar claims beyond their immediate

outcomes (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 262). Therefore, the analysis in this study also illuminates how the political collective claims of both movements are likely to proceed in the future.

### **5.3. The Opposing and Politicizing Discourses in the Contestation Between the Countermovement and Gender Advocacy Actors**

An overview of the cases in the existing literature shows that in various European contexts, the opposition to the IC and opposition against gender advocacy movements have become intertwined. They have gained power in suppressing the gender advocacy movements including the feminist movement, the women's movement, and the LGBTIQ+ movement (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021), and anti-gender advocates have already posed a serious challenge to LGBTIQ+ rights organizations. Global anti-feminist and anti-gender movements, mobilizations, or campaigns follow two main themes to build arguments against policies supporting gender equality. In hindsight, these represent significant points of contention raised during the IC debates to rally state actors and political parties to support their opposition to the Convention by appealing to broader groups. First, anti-gender advocates challenged the concept of gender, labeling it "gender ideology," and replacing it with a family-centered discourse as the best way to defend the traditional family. Second, the discourse of "colonization," emphasizing a perceived threat to national sovereignty coming from foreign actors, were also embraced by both state and societal actors (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). Further within Turkish context, the men's rights movement also mobilized against Law No. 6284 alongside the IC.

Countermovements, consisting of social actors, networks and organizations, aim to reverse the successes of influential social movements that have achieved specific goals and prevent any further progress. Typically, countermovements emerge after existing movements achieve notable political gains (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996). Within the scope of this ideological contestation, the anti-IC campaign was considered as a counter-campaign that produced counter-claims. This study does not claim that all anti-gender movements in Türkiye and elsewhere are countermovements, rather, it argues that in this study, the anti-gender movement is identified as a countermovement because of the unique context of the IC debates in which anti-gender advocates

explicitly target the IC. While the IC is a Convention that is considered important, even if it is within the framework of a "threat," for the anti-gender movement, it also has a symbolic importance for the feminist movement, reinforcing their struggle against GBV.

The ideological contestation over the IC, which has symbolic importance for both groups, has enabled this study to define the IC debates as a contentious episode, and has also led to the inference that anti-gender movements can be considered a countermovement in this context. Corredor (2019) paints a broader conclusion, presenting the entire anti-gender movement as a countermovement. This dissertation contradicts Corredor's generalization, considering the mostly state-driven nature of the anti-gender movement and the diversity of actors in the movement. However, Corredor's assessment of countermovement was influential in the claim of the present study of identifying anti-IC campaign as a countercampaign. In Corredor's assessment, anti-gender movements are countermovements, noting that "recent antigender activity transcends isolated and uncoordinated instances of resistance and instead operates within distinct and coordinated countermovements to defeat feminist and LGBTQ+ policy" (2019, p. 614).

According to Güneş and Ezikoğlu, the conflict over the IC in Türkiye is a "Conservative-Secular conflict over the abolition of the Istanbul Convention" (2022, p. 25) but, this dissertation opposes approaching the issue through "conservative vs. secular" dichotomy by claiming that the groups confronting each other in this contestation should not be simplified into this dichotomy. In both campaigns, the actors comprise broad coalitions from varied backgrounds, and even though the actors are diverse, this study considers the anti-IC campaigns as counter-campaigns. In this context, the anti-gender movement is regarded as a backlash mobilization during the contestation over the IC. Nevertheless, this research hesitantly employs this concept of backlash mobilization, as the intention is not to frame these movements as merely reactionary. Focusing on the IC debates, within this context, the opposition to the IC could be seen as backlash, transforming the anti-gender movement into a countermovement in this sense. If this study were not to focus on the IC, the emergence of the anti-gender movement in Türkiye could have been situated within a broader

right-wing and conservative political coalition instead of a direct opposition to the gender advocacy movement. However, as will be elaborated in the following chapter, in the particular case of the IC debates, the anti-gender advocates view themselves as opposing actors organized for reversing feminist gains in politics. Thus, this stance of the self-attributed anti-gender actors gives the anti-IC campaign a more backlash character. By analyzing the discourses of the anti-IC campaign with CDA, this dissertation also studies the discourses of the anti-gender advocates during the IC debates and identifies key concepts and themes. Additionally, the contested issues the themes gathered from the in-depth interviews with gender advocacy activists were compared with the findings of the CDA; these include issues such as gender equality, VAW, domestic violence, family, education, relations between the state and civil society, and democracy. When their frames clashed, the two opposing groups have been observed to attempt to counter each other's discourses through "ideological counter-framing," observed to be most often done by anti-gender advocates.

The basic concept that both groups explained differently was gender. The gender advocacy movement addressed the concept of gender by associating it with gender equality in the context of the IC, juxtaposing it against the pervasive problem of gender inequality and the challenging patriarchy and its structural aspects. Through advocating for gender equality, they also underline issues such as discrimination and violence faced by women, LGBTIQ+, and men due to gendered power imbalances, asserting that these inequalities must be challenged. On the other hand, anti-gender advocates claim that the "gender" is an ideologically constructed concept labeling it as "gender ideology." In their conceptualization, "gender ideology" proposes threats to society by challenging the traditional roles of women, eliminating the patriarchal privileges of men, and imposing the "third sex." As a result, anti-gender ideology movements aim to mobilize the public to challenge gender mainstreaming activities emerging from gender equality perspective. As they organize themselves to oppose progressive gender regimes, they gain a countermovement character. As previously emphasized, they are not a pure backlash movement because their ideological background is rooted in right-wing populism and conservatism. Citing Freeden (1996), this study argues that the ideological contestation between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement is an example of a discursive struggle over

the concept of gender. In a similar sense, Kováts relates this struggle for hegemony in the Gramscian sense to evaluate how gender become a contested field:

Gender provides the theater for the struggle for hegemony in the Gramscian sense, and these mobilizations are rather the throes of a contest for redefining liberal democracy where 'gender ideology' embodies numerous deficits of the so-called progressive actors, and the adversaries of the concept react to these by re-politicizing certain issues in a polarized language (2018, p. 535).

Gender advocacy actors contend that VAW, GBV, and domestic violence must be addressed within the framework of human rights. According to their views, these issues are connected to patriarchy and also related with gender inequality in the society. Therefore, transnational agreements such as the IC and CEDAW are influential in securing the substantial legal reforms. Conversely, anti-gender groups claim that VAW, GBV, and domestic violence, without differently categorizing, all should be framed as "intrafamilial violence" and should be regulated only through domestic legal regulations in penal codes.

The family issue is one of the most prevalent and complicated themes of this rivalry. According to gender advocacy groups, issues related to women including VAW should not be framed merely within the context of family. Gender advocacy advocates hold that this approach of framing ever issue within the family would lead to overlooking the gendered power imbalance in society. On the contrary, anti-gender advocates claim that policies focusing exclusively on women marginalizes men. According to this view, combating VAW will only be possible by enacting policies endorsing the heteronormative family, because the real cause of violence is the "destruction" of traditional male and female roles. Another controversial issue is education. Citing the IC principles, pro-gender advocates contend that gender equality and gender inequality issues should be included in educational curricula. They further argue that media campaigns should be organized to raise societal awareness about gender inequality and related discrimination. Anti-gender advocates view the adoption of issues concerning gender equality and gender inequality in educational curricula as imparting norms contradicting with "*fitrat*." Instead, they contend that traditional norms should be included in curriculum. According to this perspective, adopting a gender

mainstreaming perspective amount to "brainwashing" regardless of the levels of education including university.

Gender advocacy groups support the collaboration between the state and independent CSOs to institutionalize gender equality. They elaborate on their position in this potential collaboration as monitoring policies, identifying and reporting improper practices, and setting future objectives in scope of the gender mainstreaming. Thus, they believe that the collaboration between the state and independent civil society is necessary to adequately address and combat gender-based discrimination and violence. Meanwhile, in their evaluations of state-civil society relations, anti-gender advocates insist that the state should not collaborate with gender advocacy groups because they operate under a "gender ideology." Instead, they argue that the government should collaborate with conservative civil society to institutionalize family-centered policies. The last conflict revolves around democracy itself. In this context, the gender advocacy movement contends that there are several consequences of the state and anti-gender movement collaboration. They claimed that this collaboration marginalized their areas of struggle and their activities in civil society face pushbacks.

Additionally, discrimination against and hate speech towards LGBTIQ+ groups has increased. As in the case of the withdrawal from the IC, this collaboration endangers women's legal rights. According to their perspective, these problems should not be regarded as the opposition between gender advocacy versus anti-gender indicating that these are only problems for women's organizations, feminists, and LGBTIQ+ activists. Instead, they further claim that this pushback reflects de-democratization. In their view, new alliances must be forged to reinforce democratic resilience. The anti-gender movement argues that policymaking concerning women and families in Türkiye were developed with "feminist language" which they believe to be a discriminatory practice. The analysis of the news articles with the anti-IC sentiment unearths a widespread discourse claiming that feminist civil society in Türkiye has had more influence in policymaking compared to conservative associations.

Thus, the withdrawal from the IC corresponds to first significant break in this sense. According to their view, restricting the activities of CSOs operating in the field of

gender equality or changing legal regulations such as the IC, which they see as an extension of "gender ideology," is framed as a struggle against oppression. Anti-gender advocates argue that the withdrawal from the Convention and the discussions in society about the IC through conducted anti-IC campaign reflect a democratic process. They argue that the "people" who felt motivated by combat "gender ideology" influenced the decision of withdrawal from the IC, which they consider a "colonial text" imposed on Türkiye by the "West," and rationalize this as the struggle between the "people" and the "Western-pretend elites" in society. As a common discursive strategy, they describe the feminist movement as "Western imitators," "elite," "bourgeois," and "a minority group disconnected from the people."

However, it should be emphasized that these common discursive strategies stem from my empirical analysis and, therefore, are not generalizable. As the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign are not homogeneous groups their discourses may differ as their actors diversified (Ünal, 2022). Fairclough establishes a direct relationship between "ideological power" and discourse: "the power to project one's practices as universal and 'common sense', is a significant complement to economic and political power, and of particular significance here because it is exercised in discourse" (2001, p. 27). Proving that the language is a vital element in politics, various factors, including culture, power, political context, social status, and region, can significantly influence the emergence of particular discourses, whether in the form of talk or text. In order to emphasize the ideological conflict shaped by the "gender" this study focuses on the discursive aspect of the contestation.

Thus, to deepen the analysis of contentious politics, the study refers to ways in which two opposing campaigns challenge each other's frames. Developing common frames for action contribute to uniting participants, garnering broader social support, and recruiting more participant to the movement. Framing perspective (Benford & Snow, 2000) represents the cultural approach to social movements. Framing perspective allows us to examine the issues prompting the movement, emphasizing the establishment of common discursive frames, identifying how participants maintain cohesion, and exploring the strategies developed for bolstering broader support for movement. This dissertation argues that the "injustice frame" unites the gender



advocacy movement in their campaigning for the IC. On the other hand, "frame of threat" drives the anti-gender movement against the threats coming from "gender ideology." Benford and Snow define three elements for core framing tasks: diagnostic framing refers to assessing whether an event is fair, attribution of responsibility refers to identifying those responsible if it is deemed unjust, and prognostic framing refers to evaluating how to take action to rectify the injustice (2000, p. 615). Another element, motivational framing, refers to recruiting more participants to the movement. Table 1. summarizes the theoretical foundation of this dissertation and the prominent conclusions drawn from the analysis.

**Table 1.** Framing, Contestation, and Political Mobilization in the Debate on the Istanbul Convention

	<b>Pro-IC Campaign</b>	<b>Istanbul Convention (contentious episode)</b>	<b>Anti-IC Campaign</b>
<b>Contentious Politics (McAdam et al., 2009; Tilly &amp; Tarow, 2015)</b>	<p><b>Main Actors:</b> Feminist movement, women's movement, LGBTIQ+ movement</p> <p><b>Prominent Mechanisms:</b> Escalation, diffusion, brokerage</p> <p><b>Repertoires of Contention:</b> Silent struggle, forming alliances, narrative strengthening, micro activism, demonstrations, social media campaigns, lobbying</p>	<p>Campaigns mobilized to support and oppose the Convention confront each other based on the concept of gender and in the context of the IC.</p>	<p><b>Main Actors:</b> Conservative CSOs, religious groups, family groups, men's and father's rights groups, political parties, journalists, and media outlets</p> <p><b>Prominent Mechanisms:</b> Scale shift, certification, boundary activation, and polarization</p> <p><b>Repertoires of Contention:</b> Press releases, social media campaigns, petition campaigns, lobbying</p>

(Continued)

<p><b>Framing</b> (Benford &amp; Snow, 2000; Benford &amp; Hunt, 2003)</p>	<p><b>"Injustice frame"</b> <b>Diagnostic:</b> The IC is an important legal tool to combat the systemic issues of VAW, GBV and domestic violence. <b>Prognostic:</b> Re-ratification of the IC The IC should be re-ratified. <b>Motivational:</b> "Istanbul Convention saves lives"</p>	<p>When two opposing campaigns challenge each other, the IC is framed either as a protector of gender-based rights or a cultural threat.</p>	<p><b>"Frame of threat"</b> <b>Diagnostic:</b> The IC is a product of "gender ideology" and it threatens the traditional family structure, the sovereignty of the nation, and the existence of future generations. <b>Prognostic:</b> Protection of the family values Instead of the IC new domestic regulations aiming at family protection and complying with traditional norms should be made. <b>Motivational:</b> "Protect the family"</p>
<p><b>Ideological Contestation</b> (Freeden 1996; 2013)</p>	<p><b>Prominent Concepts:</b> Gender, gender equality, gender inequality, discrimination, women's rights, human rights <b>Decontestation:</b> The concept of gender is mostly associated with "gender equality" and fixed meanings are attributed to these concepts, arguing that the main context of the IC is to challenge gender inequality and power imbalance in the society.</p>	<p>Prominent contested concepts and themes include gender equality, VAW, domestic violence, family, education, relations between the state and civil society, and democracy</p>	<p><b>Prominent Concepts:</b> Family, tradition, religion, national security <b>Decontestation:</b> The concept of gender is constructed as "gender ideology" and given a fixed meaning. It is argued that IC, which is considered a product of "gender ideology", threatens the family, which is seen as the foundation of the nation.</p>

Three-dimensional approach proposed by Fairclough (2001) emphasizes texts, discursive practices, and contexts underlying social and cultural practices. Fairclough outlines three layers of analysis corresponding to these dimensions: description, interpretation, and explanation (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 21-22). The description stage deals with the structure of the texts such as vocabulary and grammar. In the description stage this study emphasizes language use, including exclusionary expressions, metaphors, and epithets. The interpretation stage relates to the production and circulation of texts. In this stage, this study considers that the news articles were ideologically an extension of conservative right-wing politics and emphasizes that their readership consisted of conservative groups in society. Intertextuality is also taken into account: the evaluations regarding intertextuality considered the sources and texts referenced while conveying certain discourses. These evaluations specifically focused on which groups' voices were highlighted in the news articles while excluding other groups. Furthermore, social power dynamics are presented as taken for granted in the news articles, and the explanation phase is about establishing connections between the text and the broader social and political context. The analysis in this phase cannot be solely based on language-based evaluations; non-discursive elements must be considered (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, p. 86). The explanation phase also considers how structures shape the discourse and in turn, how the discourse influences those structures. The final phase enables an evaluation of the broader social effects of discourses by reconnecting them to ideology and power relations (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002, pp. 86–87). With these three phases analysis, this dissertation aims to uncover the relationship between anti-gender movement and anti-IC campaign. In this context of the IC debates as a contentious episode, the anti-IC campaign is regarded as a countercampaign and the anti-gender movement considered as a countermovement. This analysis also sheds light on strategies and movement repertoires of the anti-gender advocates they developed while opposing the gender advocacy movement. Therefore, it is evident that the anti-IC campaign is not only a mobilization demanding changes in the existing legal regulations, but also a backlash related to an ideological conflict around gender.

The analysis of the anti-IC content news articles from selected newspapers between 2020 and 2023 was conducted through CDA. The analysis is based on the four

conservative newspapers affiliated with conservative, right-wing political parties, and religious groups. News articles in the *Milli Gazete*,<sup>86</sup> *Yeni Akit*,<sup>87</sup> *Yeni Şafak*,<sup>88</sup> and *Yeni Asya*<sup>89</sup> newspapers were analyzed through CDA. News articles that feature "Istanbul Convention" in the title or content were selected by searching the newspaper archives. While some newspapers provide an archived collection, others do not offer such an organized archiving system: scanning the websites of newspapers that do not have systematic archiving, filtering and selection were performed using news tags, such as the "#*Istanbulsözleşmesi*" tag. The selected news articles were categorized according to newspapers and years and a total of 523 news articles were identified through this selection criterion.

Through the elimination criterion outlined below, 523 news articles and columns were simplified by scanning them individually:

- Articles or columns published with identical content on different dates,
- Articles published jointly in different newspapers,
- Articles that are purely informational and not evaluative (e.g., news articles that only share the provisions of the Convention).

As a result of the simplification according to these elimination criteria, a total of 125 articles were included in the analysis (Appendix D, p. 301).

**Table 2.** Annual Distribution of News Articles Covering the Istanbul Convention<sup>90</sup>

Newspaper	2020	2021	2022	2023
<i>Milli Gazete</i>	48	5	1	4
<i>Yeni Akit</i>	25	9	2	4
<i>Yeni Safak</i>	7	6	3	3
<i>Yeni Asya</i>	7	-	-	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	87	20	6	12

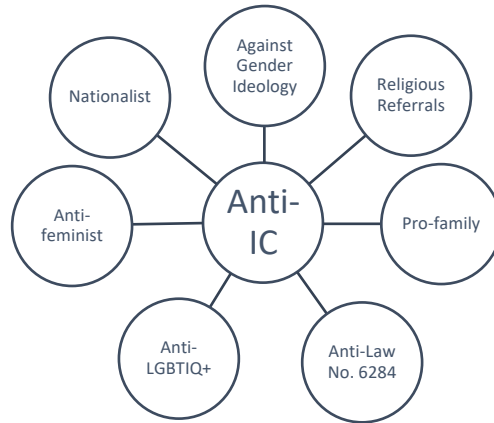
<sup>86</sup> Milli Gazete is directly affiliated with the *Saadet Partisi*, a right-wing political party.

<sup>87</sup> A famous Islamist daily close to AKP.

<sup>88</sup> A conservative Islamist daily close to AKP.

<sup>89</sup> An Islamist daily associated with the Nur Community.

<sup>90</sup> Most of the news reports in 2022 were repetitions of previous years.

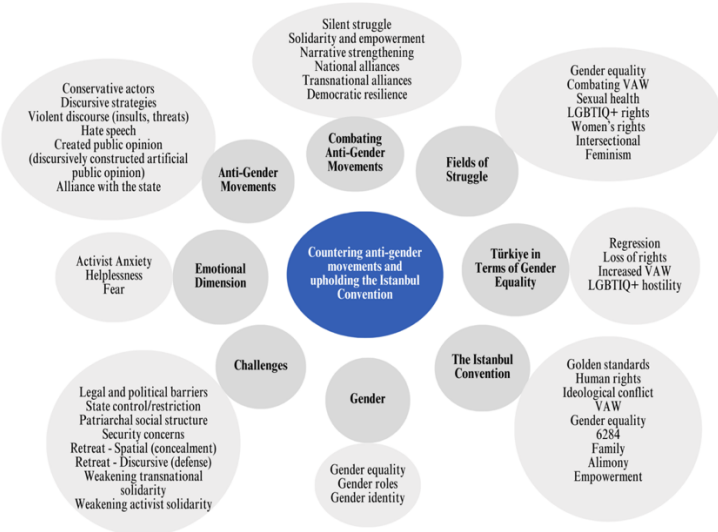


**Figure 4.** The Themes Obtained Through Critical Discourse Analysis

Before analyzing, each news article and column were categorized based on the publication in which it appeared. For CDA to be systematic and for each text to be examined in the same way, a previously prepared checklist was used (Appendix F, p. 310). With this analysis, the texts were evaluated by taking into account biases, key discursive selectivities, strategies, and language usage. The themes and styles that were obtained as a result of this analysis and that guided the deductive analysis in the books that were subsequently examined are listed below.

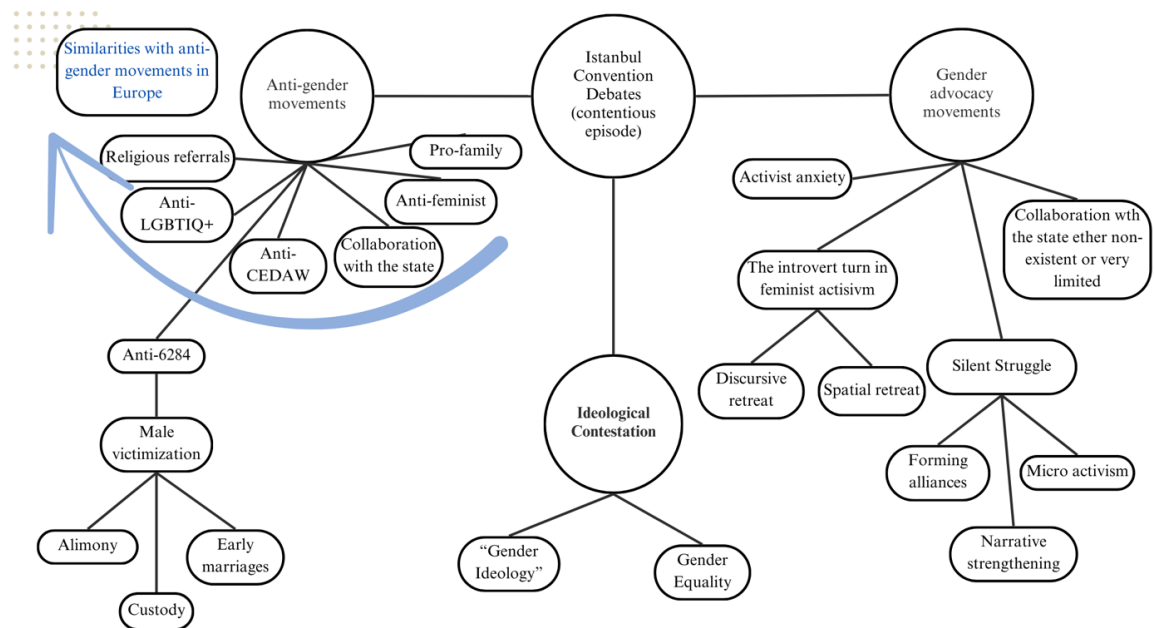
- Use of polarizing and discriminatory language
- The masculinist restoration: "male victimization"
- Counter reframing: Reinterpreting and redefining concepts and frames developed by feminist theory and the feminist movement
- Labeling the concept of gender and gender theory as "gender ideology"
- Proposing "protection of the family" and "strengthening of the family" instead of women's rights and gender equality policies
- Considering VAW only as "intrafamilial violence"
- Perception of fear and threat: Anti-globalist, anti-Western sentiment, and references to conspiracy theories
- Discrediting the feminist and the LGBTIQ+ movement
- Hate speech and violent rhetoric against feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists

The most important finding from the CDA is that the core discourses and agenda of the anti-IC campaign overlap with the concerns and the claims of the extant anti-gender movement. When this stage of the study is evaluated in terms of critical reflexivity, it is necessary to highlight the limitations arising from the research design. The fact that the analysis of anti-IC discourses is only text-based through selected news articles, books or reports indicates that the results of the analysis are not generalizable to individual actors. At the same time, the analysis presented here reflects the views of anti-gender activists or anti-IC campaign actors through the texts examined, without interviewing them in person. Therefore, another study directly interviewing the actors in these movements may yield different results. Within the scope of the third research question of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with activists in the gender advocacy movement to obtain findings on how they organized the pro-IC campaign and encountered the anti-gender movement in general. By asking the participants about the importance of the IC, their perspectives on the discourses and actors of anti-gender movements, and the strategies they developed against anti-gender movements, the goal was to conduct an analysis based on the participants' own evaluations. To achieve this, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 participants who identified as feminist activists and advocacy actors, and themes, categories and subcategories were determined based on the participants' statements.



**Figure 5.** The categories and subcategories obtained through in-depth interviews

The following chapters expound upon the principal findings obtained through combining CDA, deductive thematic analysis, and in-depth interviews.



**Figure 6.** Summary of the Findings

#### 5.4. Conclusions

In this study, CDA and deductive thematic analysis were used to analyze the discourses and themes of the anti-IC campaign. The findings were interpreted within the framework of contentious politics, as the third stage of CDA requires evaluating the socio-political context. Consequently, the IC debates in Türkiye were classified as a contentious episode, so within this framework, the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement were identified as claimants producing conflicting claims. In this context, the state, or in Turkish case, the government, was treated as the object of claims. Shown in the summary of the findings (figure 6), the prominent themes that were advanced during the IC debates by the anti-IC campaign closely echo their counterparts in Europe. However, the Turkish case gains a distinctive character with the subjects emphasized through the opposition to Law No. 6284. Conversely, when the gender advocacy actors or feminist activists evaluated the pro-IC campaign and

their encounter with anti-gender movement, they stressed an experience of oppression and restriction. Nonetheless, as the results demonstrate activists remain determined to continue their struggle, and have accordingly developed new contentious repertoires, the most prominent of which are silent struggle and narrative strengthening. In conclusion, it should be emphasized that although the analysis in this study is limited to the IC debates, the findings indicate a broader context of ideological contestation. Thus, although the anti-gender movement was characterized as a countermovement in the context of the IC debates, it was also interpreted as a conservative political movement that threatens legal rights and democracy itself in a wider political context.



## CHAPTER 6

### 6. ANTI-GENDER DISCOURSES SURROUNDING THE ISTANBUL CONVENTION

#### 6.1. Introduction

This chapter analyzes the interconnected aspects of the discourses that found in the anti-IC campaign and the anti-gender movement in Türkiye. The news articles and columns published with the "Istanbul Convention tag" between 2020 and 2023 were gathered by reviewing the four conservative online newspapers: *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Akit*, *Yeni Şafak*, and *Yeni Asya*. As the discussion in Chapter 5 presented, the CDA is based on the detailed analysis of 125 news items (Appendix D, p. 301). Ten books with anti-IC content (Appendix E, p. 309) were also analyzed using deductive thematic analysis, and reports of several NGOs mentioned in the news items were also reviewed in the scope of intertextuality. As the NGO reports were limited, the news items are primary texts analyzed in this chapter.

Fairclough's three-phase CDA is the primary framework used in this examination. The first phase, the textual analysis, pays attention to metaphors, word choices, and language. The second phase, discursive practice, focuses on the production and circulation of the news with a particular emphasis on the ideological backgrounds. The third phase, social practice, broadens this focus by overlaying the social effects and power relations onto these discourses. The assessment conducted in the third phase of the analysis aims to reveal the countermovement character of the anti-gender movement within the contentious politics framework attained through the anti-IC campaign. The analysis investigates the actors of the anti-IC campaign, the groups with whom this campaign collaborated, the discourses they produced, the strategies they adopted, and their relations with the state. Revealing the discursive blueprints of

the anti-IC campaign scrutinizes their agenda of countering "gender ideology," previously discussed, a trope commonly used by anti-gender advocates to discredit gender advocacy activism and scholarship.

The analysis in this Chapter is discourse-oriented, basing its arguments on the discursive strategies employed by the anti-IC campaign. Dichotomies such as "us/them," "conservatives/seculars," and "illiberals/liberals" serve as examples of those discursive strategies. Nonetheless, as mentioned in the previous chapter, anti-gender movements and anti-IC campaigns cannot be assessed solely based on these dichotomies. These mobilizations gain distinctive characters through localized agendas and discourses while maintaining global commonalities; their ideological backgrounds are diverse, thus the assessments through dichotomies provide a limited framework that overlooks the actor varieties in these mobilizations.

Regarding the global political background of the anti-gender movements, researchers underlined that anti-gender sentiments emerged after the UN meetings that were held in the 1990s. Concerning the global aspects and emergence of anti-gender campaigns, some regarded them as a "Catholic project" referring to the Vatican's criticism of "gender ideology" as the main reason for the emergence of anti-gender movements in Europe (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2018). Existing literature is mainly shaped by the European cases of anti-gender movements (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a; Kuhar & Zobec, 2017). Concerning the fact that anti-gender movements also emerge in Middle Eastern and Muslim societies, future studies will shed more light on the issue by contributing to the existing analysis of European or Christian contexts. Thus, the analysis presented in this chapter will present the distinctive expressions of the anti-gender discourses in the Turkish case.

## **6.2. The Political Opportunity Structures in Transition: The Rise of Anti-Genderism in Türkiye**

This section first addresses the political process considered the catalyst that triggered the emergence of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign, before proceeding to the analysis. The gender policy paradigm in Türkiye has been transitioning from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming through the AKP's

family-oriented policies, which provided a favorable political atmosphere for anti-gender movements by encouraging them to become more louder and more assertive. As the political ecosystem becomes better suited to host anti-gender movements and launch anti-IC campaigns, it becomes evident how anti-gender advocates view the IC debates, the way they develop and circulate their discourses, and the processes and mechanisms they employed while conducting the anti-IC campaign. This chapter asserts that through the anti-IC campaign, the anti-gender movement adopted a countermovement character as it introduced this campaign as a response to the legal gains of the gender advocacy movement. As a result of the Helsinki decision in 1999, Türkiye was declared an EU candidate country. The candidate status of the country triggered the emergence of numerous transformations in the political sphere along with the significant changes in gender policies. As discussed in Chapter 3, Türkiye had been making significant progressive strides in gender policies and women's rights since the late 1980s. These progressive steps include reforms on marriage, divorce, and domestic violence in the Turkish Civil Code and Penal Code, and one of the most important feminist achievements of the late 1980s was Türkiye becoming a signatory to CEDAW under pressure from the organized women's advocacy.

The legal harmonization process was accelerated with the AKP coming to power in 2002, and in this period, although limited, collaborations between the independent CSOs, i.e., gender advocacy advocates and the government on women's rights and gender policies, also continued. This period was regarded as the "peak of Europeanization" as a result of the AKP's declared commitment to meet the EU expectations on the issues of women's rights and gender equality (Aybars et al., 2019). However, the following years witnessed significant changes through the AKP's ideological stance shift from "conservative democracy" to Islamic conservative framework (Erkmen, 2020, p. 64). This ideological shift also indicates the transformation of political opportunity structures regarding gender politics. In this context, the year 2011 and witnessed the transition of the perspective of the AKP government from liberalism to conservatism and from Europeanization to de-Europeanization in terms of its approach toward women's rights (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2022).

The alliance between anti-gender politics and right-wing and conservative politics has been a widely debated issue (Kováts, 2017; Ramos & Büttner, 2017). The emergence and the rise of the anti-gender movement in Türkiye has been a debated issue. However, when looking at the prominent approaches, anti-gender sentiment in Türkiye was discussed in relation to changing state policies (Kourou, 2021; Özkazanç, 2020b), and some scholars also claimed that anti-genderism in Türkiye is a movement that acts as "a basis of activism for fundamentalists, nationalists, and conservatives" (Kancı et al., 2023, p. 882). The common point of both perspectives emphasizes the presence of a right-wing populist conservative government as a facilitator for the rise of the anti-gender movement by providing a favorable political climate, which has been a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship. Thanks to this collaboration, the populist government seized the opportunity to secure votes, and through the alliances between anti-gender movement and right populist political parties, this movement ensured that their discourses and agendas were recognized in foundational policymaking (Kourou, 2021).

This study contends that the anti-gender movement in Türkiye and its counterparts in Europe share similar agendas. As Kováts correctly asserts, the anti-gender movements in Europe were mobilized to challenge reproductive rights, oppose to political entities including international organizations or governments that promote gender-equality based policies, and restrict LGBTIQ+ rights (2017, p. 175). Even though anti-gender movements developed localized discourses specific to each country, targeting the policies based on gender equality perspective aimed at gender mainstreaming has always been a common political agenda. Institutionalization of family-centered policies aim to set a policy framework that promotes traditional gender roles, pronatalist policies, heteronormative families, and marriages. This situation represents a paradigm shift in the field of institutionalized gender politics from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming in Türkiye (Eslen-Ziya, 2020; Kandiyoti, 2016; Kourou, 2021; Özkazanç, 2020b)<sup>91</sup>. In a study that concerns the AKP's changing

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<sup>91</sup> In the early ministerial reports, the AKP cited gender mainstreaming as a goal (General Directorate on the Status of Women, 2008). However, according to Kourou (2021) the AKP always hold family-centered policies in its main agenda. Kourou's assessment is valid; however, it is also true that the AKP embraced gender mainstreaming perspective, even though it was "reluctant" acceptance. For instance, the IC, Law No. 6284, YÖK's Higher Education Institutions Gender Equality Project, and ETCEP were implemented during the AKP period.

gender regime, it was alleged that "a public-progressive approach to a public-conservative and authoritarian spectrum" was embraced (Parmaksız, 2025, p. 3). In fact, the AKP addressed the issues regarding family and women together from the very beginning. Its party program from the early years demonstrated that AKP referred to women as "the most effective [actors] in bringing up healthy generations" (Arat, 2017a, p. 252).

The accelerating family mainstreaming framework after the withdrawal from the IC led to the exclusion of LGBTIQ+ individuals together with an excessive emphasis on motherhood. This discursive choice indicates that the third stage of the paradigm shift in gender policies in Türkiye will involve anti-gender mainstreaming, and exemplifies the constant negotiation of the limits and capacities of anti-gender movements (Pető (2015). Thus, we can anticipate that anti-gender movements will have increased potential to expand their political influence, thanks to existing political opportunity structures.

The alliance between the anti-gender movement and the AKP government has led the emergence of a political opportunity structure from which both parties benefit and fosters a synergy of common interests. The discourses of the anti-gender movement were framed within a conservative and nationalist context, along with heavy religious references, with the ultimate aim of this movement being the opposition of gender equality while seeking to impose an agenda of policymaking based on promoting the maintenance of patriarchal gender relations. This anti-gender backlash is rooted in the idea that gender equality perspective undermines men's rights; therefore, the alliance between the anti-gender movement and the government has inevitably resulted in a paradigmatic change in policy framework and a regression of women's and LGBTIQ+ rights as well as the restriction of gender advocacy civil society.

The political transformations occurring in gender policies in Türkiye are an example of a gradual political contention. This process of change, which spans years, has allowed for the coexistence and contention of differing and opposing views. One of the reasons that the IC debates were seen as government-centered contention is that the final authority for Türkiye's decision regarding the IC was not the Turkish Grand National Assembly, but President Erdoğan himself. Another reason pertains to the

final decision taken by the AKP government on the IC in 2021 provides an idea about the nature of the policy line that Türkiye will adopt in women and family policies in the future. Thus, the government's decision about with which groups it potentially collaborates reflects the country's political direction.

Governments alter their organizations, personnel, policies, and practices in response to their participation in contentious politics. But their organizations, personnel, policies, and practices also profoundly shape contentious politics (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 263).

This study argues that the AKP's discursive transformation in terms of gender policies proceeded in three stages. At first, the government partially adopted a gender equality mainstreaming perspective. This situation even allowed Türkiye to take a leading role in the signing and creation of the IC. The second stage refers to the "local (the authentic) and national" discourse, which is a foundational discourse, reflecting AKP's nativist populism (Ünal, 2023), becoming pivotal in the policymaking perspective of the AKP. Within this framework, to replace gender equality, the concept of "gender justice," which is the heterosexist and reductionist "localized" gender approach, began to be circulated by some conservative women's rights advocates to align with the government. This "gender justice" approach rejects gender diversity. KADEM, government-aligned NGO, played a pivotal role in the popularization of this concept. Therefore, all of this transformation stages eventually culminated in this third stage which is marked by the AKP's adoption of the "protection of family" frame through the discursive collaborations with the anti-gender movement.

KADEM is the leading actor in the rise and popularization of the gender justice concept, which embraces gender but excludes equality. During the IC debates in 2020, KADEM represented the moderate group, standing against the withdrawal claims; however, it later yielded to this position, a decision which demands the analysis of the presence of the moderate groups during these debates. In addition to an anti-gender bloc and a gender advocacy bloc, there was a middle/moderate group that is not vocal as the others. This middle/moderate group adopts a human rights discourse but rejects gender equality. As in the case of the KADEM, this "gender complementary" approach employs the concept of gender justice instead of gender equality because they aim to emphasize that there are different roles and responsibilities for women and men in society (Ünal, 2024a).

Since 2018, anti-genderism has been gaining momentum in Türkiye, and the paradigm change of AKP's third stage in gender equality involves abandoning gender in favor of the family. "The family" was presented as a heteronormative ideal linking the welfare of women to the nation by the AKP that reflects the party's conservative democratic identity (Aslan-Akman, 2013b, p. 113). This policy perspective of putting the family ideal before individual human rights resonated well among religious groups, right-wing parties, and conservative civil society, which creates an anti-gender stance. This stance maintains that the government is trying to make changes in family policies through direct appeals to women, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs plays a critical role in reaching out to women accordingly (Adak, 2020, p. 208). Subsequently, the Family Guidance Bureaus were established, and female preachers were hired to communicate gender and family relations to women within the along government-approved lines (Adak, 2020, pp. 210-212). Moreover, it was discussed that during Friday *hutbes* (sermons), a pro-family narrative was promoted through the discussion over assigning different roles and responsibilities to women and men within the family (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2018, pp. 148-198). As a consequence of this paradigm change towards family mainstreaming, the government aims to communicate its messages directly to the citizens. In this case, the government is using the opportunities provided by conservative NGOs and state institutions to convey its messages about the changing gender regime (Connell, 2009). Similarly, according to Grzebalska and Pető (2018), as a result of the gradual process, governments in Hungary and Poland adopted a certain gender regime that promotes family mainstreaming rather than gender mainstreaming. Accordingly, the authors underlined that as a result of the new gender regime, the Council for Gender Equality has not met since 2010 in Hungary, and the objectives of the government body on gender equality were changed, transforming into a secretariat dealing with family and demographic issues (2018, p. 168). We can see a similar gradual process enacted in Türkiye for the institutionalization of the family mainstreaming.

According to Grzebalska and Pető (2018), there are three ways that illiberal states undermined the liberal states' established institutions. Based on their inferences from Polish and Hungarian cases the authors asserted that these three ways are creating a parallel civil society, dismantling the foundations of gender equality and human rights,

and manipulating democratic processes for the benefit of the ruling elite and their allies (2018, p. 168). A similar attitude was observed in the Spanish right-wing party Vox: according to Santos (2024), as a culture war strategy, Vox established a controlled civil society network to popularize their views on social issues, which are shaped through a far-right perspective. Vox aims to polarize the society on the issues once progressive views were dominant by re-politicizing them (Santos, 2024, p. 4), and consequently, the transformation of existing institutions and structures helps the institutionalization of anti-gender discourses. This situation is not only beneficial for the gender advocates: right-wing populist parties use this transformation to detriment of dissenting voices in civil society and institutional politics.

It is asserted that, in Türkiye there has been a regressive shift in gender politics (Kandiyoti, 2016). This shift was fueled by the accelerating conservatism and resulted in restrictions on the activities of women's organizations (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020). According to Eslen-Ziya and Kazanoğlu, the diverse effects can be observed on the issues centered on anti-abortion measures, the promotion of family, media control, and political pressures on academics and activists (2020, p. 103). Through this restrictive attitude, the government established its "discursive governance," and through media, specific political discourses regarding family and gender roles are reproduced (Burul & Eslen-Ziya, 2018). Erkmen noted that the AKP concentrated on pro-natalist narratives and programs during its second decade (2020, p. 61). Within the scope of the "neoliberal-conservative patriarchy," the family is constructed as the foundation of society by conservatives, and simultaneously, it is regarded as the fundamental building block of private property by neoliberals (Yeğenoğlu & Coşar, 2014, p. 166). Therefore, scholars in existing literature linked conservatism, neoliberalism, right-wing populism to anti-genderism. The rise of right-wing populism contributed to the proliferation of anti-gender discourses (Özkazanç, 2020b; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022), and as Eslen- Ziya et al. noted, during the AKP era, the right-wing populist narrative revolves around "neoliberalism, Islamism, nationalism, and authoritarianism" (2021, p. 3). Similarly, though the concept of "neoliberal neo-patriarchy," Campbell (2014, p. 13) argues that neoliberalism fuels the unequal social relations between women and men. The combination of patriarchy and neoliberalism calls on women to simultaneously participate in the workforce and stay at home to



conform to the roles of motherhood and wifeness (Yeğenoğlu & Cosar, 2014, p. 166). Thus, the AKP's association with a religious-conservative-nationalist political agenda has served as a mechanism to facilitate the production of anti-gender discourses as well as the emergence of "neoliberal neo-patriarchy." The then Prime Minister Erdoğan addressed women by saying that they should bear at least three children and condemned the idea of gender equality. These appeals marked the beginning of a "New Türkiye" discourse (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020, p. 103). The "New Türkiye" discourse and a counter-narrative emerged around it (Cebeci, 2016) served as the main framework of AKP's discursive governance (Korkut & Eslen-Ziya, 2018). This discursive governance was exercised through promoting pro-population policies which overlook women's autonomy over their own bodies (Pehlivanlı-Kadayıfçı et al., 2020) and the development of anti-gender knowledge production (Eslen-Ziya, 2020).

According to Eslen-Ziya, "protection of family, the Istanbul Convention, and the role of men within the family" are the main issues that the anti-gender campaign in Türkiye revolve around (2020, p. 6). Similarly, Günay-Erkol and Sünbülüoğlu argue that the preceding or accelerated events of the withdrawal decision from the IC were related to the adoption of the "illiberal, religion-based gender 'justice' regime" during the years between 2015 and 2018, emphasizing that President Erdoğan's pronouncements about the potential withdrawal came in 2019 (2024, p. 416). This period was also marked with regressions in gender politics and de-democratization (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2022). Afterwards, anti-gender advocates organized an anti-IC campaign and mobilized to force the government to withdraw from the Convention. In the European Commission's 2021 report, it was stated that Türkiye's withdrawal decision from the IC was considered a setback in terms of gender equality and women's rights.<sup>92</sup> Arat interpreted this as a democratic paradox meaning religious freedoms are expanding while gender equality gains are threatened (2010, p. 869). Religious minority groups were effective in the acceleration of the regression in women's rights policies that began in the 2010s (Sancar, 2024, p. 82). This dissertation also argues that this acceleration gained momentum through the alliance and common discursive terrain between the anti-gender advocates and the government.

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<sup>92</sup> [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/turkiye-report-2021\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/turkiye-report-2021_en)

### **6.3. Analyzing the Discursive Aspect of the Backlash Towards the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye**

It is argued that despite the rising rates of VAW, AKP's decision to withdraw from the IC was a vote-harvesting strategy (Baytok, 2021, p. 9). It is though that this decision was the result of the pressures coming from anti-feminist, anti-abortion, and anti-gender groups (Ünal, 2024a). Thus, the withdrawal decision was the mutual will of the government and the anti-gender movement. However, this common decision orchestrated by this alliance does not mean that all AKP bureaucrats and supporters of the party were against the Convention; several AKP bureaucrats supported the Convention by claiming there is no need to withdraw.<sup>93</sup> However, "gender ideology" as a trope was frequently deployed to stray the IC from its original focus on VAW and domestic violence during the IC discussions by anti-gender advocates to force the moderates to choose sides. Through this lens, they aimed to make those, who are undecided about or not fully support the withdrawal decision, abandon the defense of the Convention. Therefore, this dissertation argues that these discursive choices signal a discursive conflict and ideological contestation between "pro-gender equality" and "anti-gender ideology" perspectives.

Anti-gender advocates employed the term "gender ideology" not only in Türkiye but in other European countries, which has helped them to gain support from right-wing groups (Paternotte & Kuhar 2017a, p. 13). Therefore, some scholars claimed that "gender ideology" functions as an empty signifier (Mayer & Sauer, 2017, p. 23). Due to both fluidity of the concept and the meaning attributed to it, the gender advocacy movement had difficulty countering the accusations developed based on this concept. Anti-gender advocates accuse the gender advocacy movement of promoting "gender ideology" and "destroying societies" by adhering to this ideology. Interpreting how the anti-gender movement came up with this concept provides insights into discursive strategies of the anti-gender movement and the potential countering strategies of the gender advocacy movement. In the scope of its theoretical framework, this dissertation

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<sup>93</sup> Özlem Zengin, one of the influential AKP figures, was criticized for her support of the Convention. Zengin noted, "I have never seen such an unfortunate convention. I have never seen a convention discussed so frequently for things not written in it." <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/ozlem-zenginden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-aciklamasi-benim-butun-kabahatim-dogruyu-soylemek-haber-1616769>

also asserts that "gender ideology" serves as a collective action frame (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). This collective action frame of the anti-gender movement helps to solidify diverse groups with anti-gender sentiment, facilitate social appropriation and increase capacity and efficiency of these mechanisms of identity shift (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 37).

According to Güneş and Ezikoğlu, anti-IC mobilization within the AKP began in 2020 with the report of *Türkiye Düşünce Platformu*<sup>94</sup> (2022, p. 21). This report outlined the reasons they considered necessary for the withdrawal from the IC. Even though this report may have sparked controversies about the IC among the AKP supporters, this dissertation claims that the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye was not initiated by one single report. Instead, it argues that the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye had a more dispersed origin not associated with a single news article, book, or a report. It stemmed from the existing anti-gender movement through its discriminatory discourses, and was deeply rooted in the patriarchal structure of society. Although the organized anti-IC campaign emerged in 2020, there was news and publications featuring anti-IC content even in 2013.<sup>95</sup> The gradual start of the general election campaigns in 2020 also triggered the IC debates. As the political alliances began to be formed in the year 2020 onward, the IC became a debated topic among the opposite camps. Several news articles asserted that the ratification process of the IC was problematic because the Turkish Grand National Assembly approved the Convention in a notably brief period of twenty-six minutes. The problematic aspect of the ratification was not only its short duration, a notably brief period of twenty-six minutes, but also the fact that it was a decision agreed upon by all parties in parliament. The "unprecedented cooperation" of AKP, CHP, MHP, and HDP (then BDP) in the ratification of the IC formed the basis of the discourse claiming that the "Istanbul Convention is a global operation."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> This platform identifies itself as a digital area open to debates over social issues. During the IC debates, the platform announced that it was withdrawing from the subject. According to their statement, the contention over the IC is an irresolvable issue. <https://bianet.org/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ne-karsici-kan-platform-geri-cekildi-228469>

<sup>95</sup> In 2013, the report titled "Why Do Families Disintegrate: Family Policies and the Istanbul Convention?" was published by the *Aile Akademisi Derneği*. This report targeted Art. 4 of the IC because of the "sexual orientation" expression. According to their view, this expression proves that the IC has provisions regarding LGBTIQ+ rights. <https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/aile-nicin-dagiliyor-yazisi-ve-istanbul-sozlesmesi.pdf>

<sup>96</sup> 2020MG02, 2020MG91

Some news articles attempted to foster a divide within the Nation Alliance,<sup>97</sup> which was established with the collaboration of opposition parties for the 2023 general elections through the debates over the IC and by emphasizing the position of the *Saadet Partisi*<sup>98</sup>. Some news articles published in *Yeni Akit* and *Yeni Şafak*, which are aligned with the AKP, criticized the *Saadet Partisi* and *Milli Gazete* for being part of the Nation Alliance and opposing the IC at the same time.<sup>99</sup> In a news article published in *Milli Gazete* in response to these criticisms, it was noted that the Memorandum of Understanding on Common Policies of the Nation Alliance does not mention the IC as a result of the insistent attitude of *Saadet Partisi*.<sup>100</sup> Even though *Saadet Partisi* and *Milli Gazete* were criticized by *Yeni Akit* for forming a coalition with the IC supporters, when it came to spreading opposition to the Convention, the statements of the *Saadet Partisi* executives were also reported by *Yeni Akit*.<sup>101</sup>

This dissertation employs Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA approach to analyze the political context surrounding the IC debates. The first phase focused on the texts through the emphasis on the concepts, metaphors, attributions, and discursive strategies. Within this framework, five themes or discursive strategies were identified: polarization, normative judgments, nationalist ideals, masculinist restoration, and moral panic. Polarization as a discursive strategy refers to discriminatory expressions employed to differentiate "others," serving to differentiate between "us and them." Normative judgements, another discursive strategy, seeks to prove that the provisions of the IC are incompatible with traditions and cultural values. The discursive strategies in question are not separated from each other by sharp boundaries; even though anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses are also related to other discursive strategies, they were mentioned within the scope of the normative judgements strategy, and it also covers the language used for framing the IC as contrary to "religious doctrines." The strategy of nationalist ideals encompasses the anti-GREVIO and securitization

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<sup>97</sup> 2022YS08, 2023YA05

<sup>98</sup> The *Saadet Partisi* is a conservative political party that was founded in 2001. This party was part of the alliance formed against the alliance that stands out with the partnership of AKP and MHP during the 2023 general elections.

<sup>99</sup> 2023YA10, 2023YA07, 2020YA70

<sup>100</sup> 2023MG04

<sup>101</sup> 2020YA41

discourses. Arguments portraying the IC as a "Western imposition"<sup>102</sup> and the GREVIO as a "group of agents," instead of a group of experts, were evaluated within the scope of this strategy. Along with normative judgements strategy, the most common strategy observed in the texts was the moral panic strategy. This strategy claims that "the IC will de-gender society," meaning the Convention would inevitably disrupt the social structure. Through these arguments, they disseminate the fear that "future generations are under moral threat." As mentioned before, there are no strict boundaries between these strategies, and they are often used together. For instance, discourses claiming the IC is a "threat from the West" also intersect with the discriminatory discourses and hate speech towards LGBTIQ+ and feminist activists by depicting them as "immoral others." These discursive strategies contribute to the development of movement mechanisms such as polarization a boundary activism by marginalizing and denigrating the pro-IC campaign and its discourses. Furthermore, as the literature on framing suggests, counterframing practices of the anti-IC campaign involve the strategies such as "keying," "ignoring," and "countermaligning" (Benford & Hunt, 2003). Thus, the aforementioned strategies also contribute to removing the Convention's content and the pro-IC campaign's demands regarding gender equality from their original context. In this way, the anti-IC campaign would be able to reinterpret their meaning and further discriminate and marginalize those groups supporting the Convention.

A noteworthy point in the texts examined is the excessive use of irony and hyperbole. The reliance on hyperbole and irony serves to shift the focus away from the human rights context regarding issues such as abortion and VAW. Irony in particular is often used to redirect the conversation from the central subject and to undermine opposing views. On the other hand, hyperbole is often employed as a pattern of language use in introducing statements that redefine the framework of the IC defense. For instance, claiming that the main objective of the Convention is "promoting homosexuality" rather than VAW serves as an example of hyperbole.

Engaging in the analysis of discursive practice is the second stage of the CDA, in which specific attention is paid to the target audience and the context that the texts

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<sup>102</sup> 2020YA37

were produced. All four newspapers are similar in terms of the analysis of discursive practice: they all are positioned in a right-conservative ideological camp and rely heavily on referring to religion to legitimize their discourses. According to Fairclough, media discourses are designed for mass audiences however, "media producers do address an ideal subject be it viewer, or listener, or reader" (2001, p. 41). Considering the target audiences of the aforementioned newspapers, they all target a religiously inclined, conservative readership. Additionally, the analysis of the texts revealed that experts mentioned in the texts and the sources they referred to were usually religious authorities or conservative public figures.

Upon closer examination, the texts have a rich tapestry of intertextual connections. These connections include the views derived from other conservative newspapers,<sup>103</sup> the references to the Quran and Islamic teachings,<sup>104</sup> reports on the anti-IC campaign in other countries through translated content,<sup>105</sup> domestic law articles,<sup>106</sup> provisions of the IC,<sup>107</sup> and the insights from politicians, experts, artists, and civil society figures.<sup>108</sup> In addition, when the texts were evaluated in terms of ideology and power, it was observed that the anti-IC stance is deeply intertwined with right-wing ideology constructed through references to religion and national values. This phase of analysis interpreted the intertextuality and underlying assumptions. Concerning intertextuality, particular attention was directed to revealing the similarities between the existing societal narratives that echo anti-gender sentiments and discourses in the texts. When evaluated from this perspective, it should be emphasized that the rhetoric in the news have nativist and nationalist characteristics when looking at the most emphasized issues in the texts and the way they were interpreted. Among these discourses developed in line with President Erdoğan's "local (authentic) and national" discourse, which has significant weight in today's socio-political environment, the most striking contrast implied being between the "aggressiveness of the West" and the "purity of Anatolia."<sup>109</sup> When the discourses were evaluated in terms of political opportunity

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<sup>103</sup> 2020YA41

<sup>104</sup> 2020MG01

<sup>105</sup> 2020MG18

<sup>106</sup> 2020MG03

<sup>107</sup> 2020MG13

<sup>108</sup> 2020MG04, 2020MG05, 2020MG06, 2020MG07, 2020MG11

<sup>109</sup> 2020MG11

structures (McAdam et al., 2009), or social structures and institutions (Fairclough, 2001), it should be noted that regarding media ownership relations, all news outlets are closely connected to right-wing groups. This connection is particularly evident in the news, with the content emphasizing both the IC and the 2023 general elections.<sup>110</sup> While *Yeni Akit*, *Yeni Şafak*, and *Yeni Asya* are aligned with the People's Alliance and posit an anti-IC stance, *Milli Gazete* is aligned with the Nation Alliance, albeit with an open opposition to the Convention. The most striking aspect is that the anti-IC discourse is strategically positioned within the framework of laws and legal regulations, and additional changes are envisaged. For instance, some news articles promote the idea that withdrawal from the IC is not enough and that the CEDAW<sup>111</sup> and Lanzarote Conventions,<sup>112</sup> must be the next targets. This also suggests that the IC functions as an episode for anti-gender advocates, and that the anti-gender movement aims to campaign against other human rights agreements within cycles of contention (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

CDA's third stage focuses on social contexts, social practices, power relations, and ideological intersections, explicitly focusing on how gender equality issues were framed in the texts, and attempting to identify direct or implicit connections between anti-gender rhetoric and the prominent discourses of the anti-IC campaign. In this stage of the analysis, political opportunity structures, collective actors, and repertoires were evaluated within the context of contentious politics. These texts were interpreted together, not separately, and analyzed through the same themes. Deductive thematic analysis is a technique that draws on predetermined themes gathered from the existing theoretical frameworks or prior research findings; to identify the themes, this study relied on the CDA findings and the existing scholarship on anti-gender movements. In general evaluation of the news, it is evident that the Convention is portrayed as a "threat," and readers are encouraged to mobilize against the IC and those who support it. Supporters of the agreement were not the only groups targeted in the texts, with some news reports directly criticizing the AKP government, portrayed as the primary actor responsible for the ratification of the Convention. The demands to withdraw from

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<sup>110</sup> 2023MG03, 2022YS07, 2022YS06

<sup>111</sup> 2021MG54

<sup>112</sup> 2021YA39

the IC are being conveyed to the government using critical language, consequently turning into a pressure discourse that goes beyond the scope of the IC, which demands that the AKP government create a policy that considers religious doctrines rather than ideologically liberal-democratic values.

In this chapter, the authors of the analyzed texts, whether news articles, columns, or books, were mentioned under the presumption that they were prominent figures in public debates over the Convention or as if they were influential figures in the anti-gender movement. These authors were seen as the "ideological representatives" of the respective newspaper, reflecting their "shared voices." Additionally, the analysis concerning interpretation and the language used in the books containing anti-IC content emphasized the explicit and implicit expressions of social norms. As in the news articles, in the books supporting the IC were portrayed as "defending immorality."<sup>113</sup> Akin to the news reports, supporting the IC presented as "being a Western wannabe" in some of the books.<sup>114</sup> Corresponding to the language used in news articles, many authors use definitive statements, such as expressions of certainty including "impossible" and "unacceptable," which were widely employed, often relying on pseudo-scientific justifications. One of the most debated terms, "sexual orientation," is also presented with definitive statements to relate it to "gender ideology."<sup>115</sup>

### **6.3.1. The Political Divide in the Istanbul Convention Debates: Polarization Process**

During contentious events, the development of collective identities is a dynamic process, as the meaning attributed to "us" and "them" frequently shifts because of the new collaborations they form, along with expanding or shrinking their coalitions (McAdam et al., 2009, p. 264). Defining this distinction through ideological boundaries, the groups in the opposing campaigns and the meanings they attributed to "us" and "them" became more resistant to change during the IC debates. This distinction becomes particularly evident in the way anti-IC groups define the feminist

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<sup>113</sup> B062020

<sup>114</sup> B062020

<sup>115</sup> 2020YAS12



and LGBTIQ+ activists. In some news articles, pro-IC groups were referred through polarizing language;<sup>116</sup> accordingly, the first step of the CDA elucidates how such polarization and subsequent boundary formation mechanisms were prevalent among anti-IC groups.

Polarization is one of the most frequently employed mechanisms in various episodes of contention (McAdam et al., 2004, p. 314), contributing to the elimination of the "moderate center" position within the said contentious event and enabling "widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and the gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both extremes" (McAdam et al., 2004, p. 322). Due to the existence of similar actor formations, the polarization mechanism used in the anti-IC campaign is similar to the "us vs. them" distinction of anti-gender movements, which reflects their populist character (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). The main issue that lent a populist character to the discourses of the anti-IC campaign during the IC debates was the ideological distinction between "us" and "them" at the discursive level. This distinction was fueled with the discourse of "gender ideology," which has evolved into a "master frame" (Benford & Snow, 2000, pp. 618-619), demonstrating the boundary activation and polarization that both enables collective action and fosters the "us" and "them" divide. A study on the Croatian Catholic Church identified a similar pattern in mobilizing masses through "gender ideology" master frame as it facilitates frame bridging and contributes to the organization of various actors accordingly (Tranfic, 2022). This situation is reminiscent of the symbolic glue that gender scholars have previously explained (Grzebalska et al., 2017): opposition to gender equality has created a unifying effect that has brought different actors together and allowed conservative groups to develop new common agendas.

As Mudde puts it, the polarization observed in the anti-IC campaign corresponds to the definition of populism as a "thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'" (2007, p. 23). This populist feature manifests itself in the language used in the conservative media. In the news articles, those who support the

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<sup>116</sup> 2020MG01, 2020MG27

IC were presented as "hardline secularist, pro-Western, elitist,"<sup>117</sup> or "feminists, LGBTIQ+ individuals, (...) marginalized groups, communists, separatists, and opponents of religion."<sup>118</sup> Those who oppose the Convention were introduced as conservative, nationalist, and defenders of traditional values.<sup>119</sup> As a result of this differentiation, the gender advocacy movement was positioned as "external actors" or "immoral others,"<sup>120</sup> indicating that power relations are established discursively as a conflict between internal (conservative values) and external (Western values) or authentic actors (anti-gender groups) and foreign actors (gender advocacy activists).

Polarization, as a populist strategy, portrays pro-Convention and anti-Convention camps as separate and opposing groups, through which opponents of the IC were characterized as the "people" who defend traditional values. The supporters of the Convention were presented as "corrupt elites" who function as "agents of the West,"<sup>121</sup> and feminist activists were accused of undermining traditions, family, and social order as well as being representatives of a "demonic" convention.<sup>122</sup> In order to fuel the "us" and "them" contrast, feminists and LGBTIQ+ individuals were additionally presented as not "local and national," but as total outsiders and considered as collaborators of the West.<sup>123</sup> This polarizing language use is not unique to the Turkish case of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign; gender-critical movements tend to present themselves as "the people" and contrast themselves with the gender equality advocates as they deem "the corrupt global elites" (Bassi & LaFleur, 2022). Thus, this populist language depicts social groups as adversaries, further contributing to the polarization in society over gender (Paternotte & Kuhar 2017a, p. 15).

The effect of this polarization also seen in how the claims of the opponent groups presented in the news articles. Claims regarding the LGBTIQ+ rights were marginalized, and one particular news article claimed that fostering LGBTIQ+ rights internationally is a challenge to national, cultural, and religious values.<sup>124</sup> The views

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<sup>117</sup> 2021YS31

<sup>118</sup> 2020YA21

<sup>119</sup> 2021YS21

<sup>120</sup> 2020YA21

<sup>121</sup> B082021

<sup>122</sup> 2020MG01

<sup>123</sup> 2020YA104

<sup>124</sup> 2020MG10

of the opponents regarding gender equality were presented as a part of the global conspiracy against the family,<sup>125</sup> and were co-opted to claim that the use of the "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" concepts have caused the emergence of a "new third gender."<sup>126</sup> Based on these arguments, it was asserted that the IC depends upon the "neutralization of gender."<sup>127</sup>

Referencing various sources, the news articles portrayed the state, the right-wing political leaders, and religious figures as legitimate authorities regarding the subject of gender. However, the opponents' views, i.e., feminist perspectives, were delegitimized and excluded.<sup>128</sup> Trivializing opposing positions in the news means ignoring them as counter framing strategy (Benford & Hunt, 2003); as opposing views are portrayed as harmful and completely false, the readers are encouraged not to consider alternative perspectives in any form. For example, one news article presented the pro-IC groups as an "unholy alliance,"<sup>129</sup> to underline that they are a minority, and their views are not valid. Another report painted the groups defending the IC simply as "LGBTIs and women's associations," while the opposing groups were shown as all segments of society separate from these groups.<sup>130</sup>

CDA and thematic analysis identify two primary unsupportive attitudes towards the IC. As the main groups, some oppose the IC outright, and some approach the Convention more moderately. The moderate group is further differentiated as those who advocate for revision of the Convention and those who support the idea of new convention to replace the IC. In the news articles, while explaining who the supporters of the Convention are, they argue that some "conservative individuals/women" remain the IC and Law No. 6284 supporters because of the "fear of losing the positions they gained through affirmative action."<sup>131</sup> In another news depicting the moderate group, the text reports on *Memur-Sen's*<sup>132</sup> findings, underlining that the Convention has both positive and negative aspects. Although the headline of the news stated that "the civil

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<sup>125</sup> 2020MG22

<sup>126</sup> 2020MG62

<sup>127</sup> 2020MG66

<sup>128</sup> 2020MG44

<sup>129</sup> 2020MG22

<sup>130</sup> 2020MG65

<sup>131</sup> 2020YA21

<sup>132</sup> The Confederation of Public Servants Trade Union (*Memur-Sen*) is a conservative pro-government union.

servants also call for its termination," the content of the text reveal that the *Memur-Sen's* report has moderate attitude towards the IC:

Just as it seems excessive to think that withdrawing from the convention will completely eliminate the threats and problems facing our family and social structure, it is also extreme as claimed by supporters of the Istanbul Convention, who claim that women cannot be protected without the convention.<sup>133</sup>

Some reports directly oppose the Convention and are cited as reference sources in the news; one of the news articles' most frequently cited was the Anadolu Platform's<sup>134</sup> "Istanbul Convention Workshop Report"<sup>135</sup> prepared in 2020.

Further elaborated in Chapter 7, the news articles mention the public popularity of the debates over the IC. An article claimed that even though the involvement of the "public" in the IC debates is a reflection of democratic public space, this made the "elites" (i.e. gender advocacy movement actors) uncomfortable.<sup>136</sup> Another article in the *Milli Gazete* in 2020 emphasized the significance of the IC debates in increasing legal literacy within society. The same article argued that anyone who advocates for "democracy" should acknowledge that the debates over the IC made the conservative segments of the society participate in the debates and understand the "dangers" and "threats" of the Convention. Nevertheless, the same author claimed that the increasing awareness among the conservative people about the IC angered those who support the IC and previously handled the issues regarding the gender in their "lobbies." This author insisted that those supporting the Convention were troubled by the pursuit of "truths" of the conservative people, and feminists were accused of acting "slyly" and carrying out their work in secret.<sup>137</sup>

Feminists are not the only group that was targeted in the news articles, columns, or books; the authors also employed polarizing discourse towards the AKP and KADEM.

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<sup>133</sup> 2020MG85

<sup>134</sup> The Anadolu Platform is a conservative organization. The report and the platform's website are inaccessible. However, news about the report states that it used discriminatory language towards LGBTIQ+ and feminist activists. <https://bianet.org/haber/anadolu-platformu-ndan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-raporu-229502>

<sup>135</sup> 2020YA26

The report is inaccessible on the platform's website. A news article about it claimed that the reasons for withdrawing from the Convention were that it was written with "feminist language" and "legitimized actions defined as sins." <https://t24.com.tr/haber/anadolu-platformu-dan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-raporu-escinsel-birliktelikler-ve-gunah-olarak-tanimlanan-eylemler-mesrulastiriliyor,898601>

<sup>136</sup> 2020MG78

<sup>137</sup> 2020MG78

The main reason for the criticisms toward the AKP was the fact that the party pioneered in the signing and ratification of the Convention, and with governmental authority, the AKP took legal steps regarding the provisions of the IC.<sup>138</sup> Consequently, in some texts, the opposition to the government and opposition to the Convention became intertwined. For example, in the news articles and columns in *Milli Gazete*, a daily paper aligned with the *Saadet Partisi*, the Convention was used as a political tool to criticize the AKP.<sup>139</sup> Even though the news articles and columns criticized the government, the anti-gender attitude of the Presidency of Religious Affairs,<sup>140</sup> was appreciated by *Milli Gazete*.<sup>141</sup> KADEM was one of the most criticized groups because it supported the IC, Law No. 6284, and the concept of gender in general. The main criticism towards KADEM revolves around this issues, although KADEM claims that it does not equate gender with the "neutralization of gender,"<sup>142</sup> and in the book titled "Responses to KADEM in the context of the Istanbul Convention and Gender," KADEM was accused of overlooking that the concept of gender also includes queer identity.<sup>143</sup> When the criticism leveled against KADEM was interpreted through the conceptual framework of this study, KADEM was accused of reframing the concept of gender through keying as they introduced "gender justice" to replace gender equality (Benford & Hunt, 2003). Thus, this criticism of KADEM is also valid from the side of feminists because by introducing "gender justice," KADEM detached the concept of gender from its feminist sources.

Considering the transitivity during the analysis of the news articles and columns, their exclusionary, marginalizing, and discriminatory statements towards feminists and LGBTIQ+ individuals are striking. At the level of textual analysis, the most obvious language element is the use of discriminatory expressions and hate speech, especially towards LGBTIQ+ individuals. The commonly used "homosexual perversion"<sup>144</sup> is an example of discriminatory language and hate speech used in the news articles and

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<sup>138</sup> 2020MG30, 2020MG65, 2020MG72

<sup>139</sup> 2020MG04, 2020MG08

<sup>140</sup> During the AKP period, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was held responsible for conveying the government's political vision to women in terms of gender and women's policies (Adak, 2020).

<sup>141</sup> 2020MG14

<sup>142</sup> 2020MG74

<sup>143</sup> B022020

<sup>144</sup> 2020YA43

columns; another common claim is that "homosexuality is a disease."<sup>145</sup> Through these marginalizing and discriminatory discourses, defending the IC was equated with supporting "diseased groups" as well as enabling their dissemination in society. This approach considers LGBTIQ+ individuals as a "perversion problem"<sup>146</sup> and further argues that this "perversion" in society remains a problem as long as the IC is enforced.<sup>147</sup> To support this position, the text cited the President of Religious Affairs' assessments regarding the necessity of "fighting homosexuality."<sup>148</sup>

The Council of Europe defines hate speech as follows:

"Hate speech" shall be understood as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.<sup>149</sup>

In a similar vein, Waldron proposes a definition of hate speech that emphasizes its function as undermining people's dignity and disrupting their social standing (2012, p. 5). Therefore, during the IC debates, the discriminatory expressions served the emergence of dangerous speech and hate speech. This prejudice against anti-IC groups led to legitimization of discrimination against feminists and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Adopting an attitude against gender equality shows that the social norms produced by anti-gender discourses are also against gender equality. Within this framework, using discriminatory expressions towards LGBTIQ+ individuals became mainstream in the news, which later resulted in the circulation of hostile language towards women whom they considered not politically aligned with the traditional values. One of the ways the pro-convention group was defined was by the use of generalizing expressions, employing the concept of "feminazis" to relate feminism to Nazism: "This Convention feeds murderers and feminazis! The Istanbul Convention, which fuels violence against women and destroys families, must be withdrawn."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> 2020MG65

<sup>146</sup> 2020YA43

<sup>147</sup> 2020MG12

<sup>148</sup> In the sermon delivered by the President of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş, on April 24, 2020, expressions were used that "homosexuality is condemned." After the Ankara Bar Association criticized Erbaş's remarks as containing "discriminatory statements," an investigation was initiated into the bar.

<sup>149</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/1680505d5b>

<sup>150</sup> 2021YA74

A news article with a moderate tone claimed that the disputes over the Convention have led to polarization and social division, asking readers to consider who will enjoy this societal polarization.<sup>151</sup> Those who take a moderate position have concerns regarding the social consequences of this sharp polarization; *Türkiye Düşünce Platformu*, a moderate group, in its online statement emphasized that they had tried to create a middle ground between the opposing camps during the IC debates. However, they later announced that they do not believe that these groups could reach an agreement. The book published by the platform emphasizes this issue, revealing that the group they refer to as Convention advocates is KADEM, not the gender advocacy movement.<sup>152</sup> As previously mentioned, the anti-gender movement does not have a homogeneous structure. Similarly, Ünal (2024a) asserts that the diversity of groups within this movement leads to "crack" among them, therefore, anti-gender groups can include various actors, such as conservative media outlets, some CSOs, and Islamist political figures who represent either "liberal/moderate" or "illiberal actors/hardliners" (2024a, p. 8). Because the anti-gender alliance is not homogeneous, the discriminatory discourses produced during the IC debates may not have been embraced by all groups in this anti-gender coalition. However, this polarization mechanism is important because it highlights the divisions during the contentious IC discussions. According to McAdam et al. (2004), this polarization mechanism also affects the participants in terms of the extinction of moderate groups and forcing them to join one of the opposing groups.

### **6.3.2. Normative Judgements: Framing the Debate as a Moral Imperative**

Normative judgements refer to the discourses that aim to set standards for the ideal society and ideal individual. One of the news articles reporting the views of the representative of the *Anadolu Gençlik Derneği*<sup>153</sup> argued that the IC "promotes social degeneration,"<sup>154</sup> and in the same news article it was argued that the traditional social organization of society and traditional family should be re-established in order to ensure well-being of society by emphasizing the role of the mothers in the well-being

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<sup>151</sup> 2020YS15

<sup>152</sup> B022020

<sup>153</sup> It is a conservative youth organization aligned with the *Saadet Partisi*.

<sup>154</sup> 2020MG07

of their children.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, in a news article motherhood was presented as the women's "sacred duty."<sup>156</sup> This overemphasis on family and motherhood exemplifies the concept of "familialism" defined by Kemper as "a political demand that presupposes a strictly standardized image of a 'functioning family' as the 'foundation of the nation'" (2016, p. 13). When the Convention became a more debated topic, the references to both familialism and nationalism increased. It is noteworthy that the news items published towards the end of 2020 emphasized that President Erdoğan was also uncomfortable with the Convention. Regarding this issue, in December 2020, one news article cited President Erdoğan directly, claiming that "our society neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, but a family-oriented society."<sup>157</sup> Kemper notes that the familialism perspective promotes the heteronormative family by equating the fate of the "nation" to the "family" through an identification between them (2016, pp. 60-61).

The ideal society promoted by anti-genderists considers women important actors in terms of conveying the state's ideology to the next generations. As previously explained, the themes determined through CDA and thematic analysis are not strictly differentiated from one another; therefore, the narratives interpreted under the normative judgements section also overlaps with the nationalist ideals theme because of its overemphasis on family and nation. However, the prominent aspect of the familialism was its overemphasis on motherhood and its anti-LGBTIQ+ stance; therefore, it was discussed under the normative judgements. The normative judgements embedded in anti-LGBTIQ+ discourse enable boundary activation mechanism through the "crystallization of existing boundaries" between groups (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015, p. 36).

Discourses grouped under normative judgements provide well-defined descriptions of the ideal individual, ideal social relations, and ideal society. In this respect one of the news articles, citing the President of Religious Affairs, Ali Erbaş, claimed that the Convention is not compatible with religious doctrines by recalling Erbaş's assessment on adultery and homosexuality.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, some news article called on the

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<sup>155</sup> 2020MG07

<sup>156</sup> 2020MG44

<sup>157</sup> 2020MG86

<sup>158</sup> 2020MG13



government to make "adultery" criminalized again by law.<sup>159</sup> As a response to this criticisms and claims, a report published in 2020 in *Milli Gazete* cited the Ankara Bar Association's reactions toward Erbaş's anti-adultery and anti-gay statements in a Friday sermon. The same report emphasized that on X (formerly Twitter) a hashtag campaign was launched, *#AliErbaşyalnızdeğildir* (*#AliErbaşisnotalone*), underlining that this campaign was supported by AKP ministers.<sup>160</sup> The Ankara Bar Association was not the only group that reacted against the Erbaş's statement: another article reported that the Izmir Bar Association also criticized Erbaş. According to this article, the reactions of the bar associations towards Erbaş are hate speech and denigration of sacred values.<sup>161</sup> Thus, Erbaş's statements served as unifying force for the anti-IC campaign. The production of common discourse is not only valid in the local context, as anti-gender groups or anti-IC advocates globally embrace similar discourses. For instance, it was argued that in UNHCR, the coalition formed against the promotion of LGBTIQ+ rights and rejection of reproductive rights led by Russia (Edenborg, 2021). This example indicates that anti-gender movements are gaining strength both nationally and internationally through the coalitions they formed and the discourses they commonly embrace. This situation also implies that the collaboration with right-wing conservative governments enable anti-gender groups to transmit their agendas to transnational institutions (Cupać & Ebetürk, 2022).

While increasing the discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ individuals, these transnational populist actions also lead to a regression in women's rights. The incitement of LGBTIQ+ hatred also contributed to the efforts to socially legitimize the decision to withdraw from the IC (Kurnaz, 2023, p. 169). In this respect, the "normalization of homosexuality" discourse was widely embraced and wielded as a threat against society. The very same discourse was also embraced by the Presidential Communications Department in its release explaining the reasons of the government's

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<sup>159</sup> 2020MG77, 2021YS28

<sup>160</sup> 2020MG13

It was mentioned that not only AKP bureaucrats but also CSOs supported this campaign. *Memur-Sen*, *Hukukçular Derneği*, *Diyanet-Sen*, and *Anadolu Gençlik Derneği* were mentioned as the groups that supported the campaign. It was also emphasized that the Ankara Bar Association made a press release claiming that Erbaş's words were "hatefully insulting." However, this press release led to an investigation, launched with the accusation of insulting religious values.

<sup>161</sup> 2020YAS14

decision to withdraw by claiming that the Convention "was manipulated by a group trying to normalize homosexuality, which is incompatible with Türkiye's social and family values."<sup>162</sup> In an article dated 2020 in the *Yeni Asya* newspaper, while evaluating the decision to withdraw from the Convention, it was claimed that the first event that influenced this decision was the meeting held at the Presidential Advisory Board in February 2020. This article elaborated that during the meeting, President Erdoğan was informed about the reactions from the society regarding the restraining orders against men, stating, "while we were claiming to prevent violence, we lost control."<sup>163</sup> Some commentary articles establish a connection between the re-criminalization of adultery and withdrawal from the IC, and demand that the issue of re-criminalization of adultery to protect family be brought to the agenda after the decision to withdraw from the convention is taken.<sup>164</sup>

An alliance of the conservative CSOs contributed to the anti-IC campaign, publishing online anti-IC manifestos as part of their collective action repertoires. In one of these manifestos, an alliance of the conservative CSOs criticized the Convention for popularizing "unnatural" family relations. They further claimed that the Convention is securing legal legitimacy to LGBTIQ+ individuals.<sup>165</sup> According to this perspective, "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as frequently used expressions in the IC were the concepts ensuring this legal legitimacy;<sup>166</sup> thus, opposition to the IC was also considered as challenging the potential legal legitimacy of the LGBTIQ+. While LGBTIQ+ individuals were being targeted during the opposition to the IC, the most prominent issue emphasized was the protection of future generations.<sup>167</sup> As a reflection of this accusation, the IC was mentioned as the text of "gender ideology" in the report titled "The Istanbul Convention and Law No. 6284 in 20 Questions," prepared by *Memur-Sen*. The same report also argued that gender mainstreaming is the mainstreaming of "gender ideology" in a way that becomes institutionalized in

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<sup>162</sup> Directorate of Communications. (2021, March 20). Statement on Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Presidency Directorate of Communications. <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/turkiyenin-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-cekilmesine-iliskin-aciklama>

<sup>163</sup> 2020YAS13

<sup>164</sup> 2021YA12

<sup>165</sup> 2020MG11

<sup>166</sup> 2020MG72

<sup>167</sup> 2020MG34

political decisions and processes by claiming that the IC led to the legitimization of homosexuality.<sup>168</sup>

Another common discursive strategy was the criminalization and marginalization of the LGBTIQ+ movement by associating it with illegal activities. One of the analyzed book chapters mentions seven articles of the "Structural Components of the Gender and LGBTification Project" as coined by the author.<sup>169</sup> According to the author, the first stage of this project is legal legitimation through international laws and national regulations. The second stage concerns all kinds of financial resources, including grants, loans, and funds. The third stage addresses academic legitimization, such as theses, books, and projects on the topic. The fourth stage is related to the project gaining a civilian appearance, and this stage describes the lobbying activities carried out with international institutions, organizations, or consulates. The fifth stage concerns the representation of LGBTIQ+ individuals in public institutions. In the sixth stage, it is argued that LGBTIQ+ individuals gain increased visibility through media and art. The seventh stage describes a structure that has been directly criminalized, and the author argues that at this stage, NGOs are actually used as a mask to hide their underground organizations. In this respect as threats of this "LGBTification Project," the author noted that these illegal activities include "drugs, prostitution, pedophilia, and human trafficking, etc."<sup>170</sup> The author also emphasized the "dangers" of this project by giving striking examples of a threat to social values, such as the "danger" of having LGBTIQ+ physicians. Another author similarly referred to the concept of fluidity by claiming that being LGBTIQ+ means "shifting from one identity to another," and according to the author, these switches refer to sexual attraction not only to humans but various other ways including "to animals (zoophilia), the dead (necrophilia), children (pedophilia), within the family (incest), voyeurism, exhibitionism, etc."<sup>171</sup> This argument is the most striking example of the "exaggeration" that found through CDA. This also illustrates an example of the ideological counter-framing of fluidity through "keying" (Benford & Hunt, 2003). As

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<sup>168</sup> Memur-Sen. (2020). "Istanbul Convention in 20 questions." Memur-Sen. <https://www.memursen.org.tr/yayinlar/raporlar/20sorudaistanbulsozlesmesi.pdf>

<sup>169</sup> B052020, pp. 99-100

<sup>170</sup> B052020

<sup>171</sup> B032020, p. 30

these examples illustrate, the "dangers" that the anti-gender authors presented reflect their perception of an Islam-centered ideal society. Consequently, when they make comments on the potential "threats" of "gender ideology," they are making normative judgements regarding the ideal society in their vision. Considering the rising anti-genderism in Türkiye before the 2023 general elections, Ünal (2024b) commented that as an election strategy, the government also employed "political homophobia" to intensify political antagonisms.

Regarding the anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment in the news, another major issue is the allegation that the Convention would legitimize same-sex marriage. In this respect, it was argued that the provisions in the IC regarding "economic violence" and "partner violence" enable legal recognition for unmarried couples and same-sex marriage. It further discussed as a problem that when LGBTIQ+ individuals live together as economically codependent, the violent incidents between them would be interpreted as domestic violence. According to this perspective, the IC enables the legal foundations for "homosexual relationships."<sup>172</sup> Similarly, in Bulgaria, the IC was faced with criticisms for introducing a "third-sex" into legislation even if there are no provisions in the Convention regarding "same-sex marriage" (Vassileva, 2018, p. 1).

The analysis focused on lexical code revealed that the news articles usually cited the Quranic verses and employed religious terms. This situation becomes even more evident in news articles that deal with the theme of "divine and superstitious opposition."<sup>173</sup> However, references to religion extend beyond lexical codes, simultaneously manifesting itself in syntax. For instance, when the texts were interpreted for internal coherence, it was observed that Islamic sayings were cited through passive sentence structures to restrict individuals' subject positions.<sup>174</sup> In addition, considering the rhetorical strategy employed in the news items, as a common strategy, supporting the IC was presented as morally unacceptable.<sup>175</sup> As another obvious example, news articles and columns ask readers to oppose the IC as a responsibility of Muslims by citing the Quran.<sup>176</sup> As a reflection of the intertextual

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<sup>172</sup> B082021

<sup>173</sup> 2020MG01

<sup>174</sup> 2020MG01

<sup>175</sup> 2020MG01

<sup>176</sup> 2020MG57

aspects, there were direct references to Islamic theological frameworks and Sharia law.<sup>177</sup> Similar to other conservative frames of anti-West discourse, in the news articles and columns, the Convention was presented as originating from the West and, therefore, incompatible with Islam.<sup>178</sup> Another dimension of intertextuality can be observed in the references to historical "Crusader invasions"<sup>179</sup> that are intended to evoke a sense of external cultural threat. In this respect, in the news articles and columns, it is mostly stated that the IC is "contrary to religious values, contrary to *fitrat*."<sup>180</sup> In a text full of religious references, which exemplifies the use of language analogy, the defense and approval of the IC is portrayed as if it were an act of devil worship.<sup>181</sup> Therefore, not only those who defend the IC but also those who voted for the Convention in the Turkish Grand National Assembly are indirectly labeled as "anti-religion." This mainly comes from the anti-LGBTIQ+ position reflected through the idea that the term "sexual orientation" in the IC confronts religion.<sup>182</sup> In a book chapter entitled "Analysis of the Istanbul Convention from the Perspective of Islamic Thought," it was argued that the basis of the Convention is on idea of gender equality targeted Islam as well as the traditions of society. It was also argued that this situation had led to a confrontation between the values of the state and society in Türkiye and as such it is interpreted as state power serving an ideological purpose.<sup>183</sup> A book that sharply criticize the AKP government asserted that the main agenda of the IC was not violence against women or men, and that its real target was the promotion of "homosexuality." In this context, the AKP government was accused of not retaining the Convention despite its awareness of the "threats" from the IC.<sup>184</sup> Fairclough (2001) asserted that discourse analysis should consider the social context surrounding the discourse. Based on this perspective, the analysis presented in this chapter reveals that the anti-IC content of the analyzed texts is itself a reflection of a certain political framework that emphasizes conservative and religious values. The tendency towards a certain conservative and religious ideological orientation in the discourses is because

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<sup>177</sup> 2020MG01

<sup>178</sup> 2020MG01, 2020YA50

<sup>179</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>180</sup> 2020MG61, 2020MG49

<sup>181</sup> 2020MG57

<sup>182</sup> 2020YS02

<sup>183</sup> B012020

<sup>184</sup> B102021, pp. 42-46

the analyzed news was selected from four conservative newspapers. Therefore, it cannot be generalized that the news with anti-IC content on different platforms share a similar discourse and language use. Overall, in terms of the analysis of normative judgment strategy, it can be concluded that the IC was portrayed as confronting traditional values and incompatible with Islamic doctrines.

### **6.3.3. Nationalist Ideals: Framing the Debate as a National Sovereignty Issue**

As the analysis shows, anti-globalization discourse and "threat to the nation" discourse are intertwined in the news texts. While framing anti-globalization as a threat, they were referring to the "gender ideology" as the real culprit, which they consider as produced and funded by the West. In this respect, some news articles mentioned that there is a global reaction emerging against the IC because everyone realized that it is the product of "gender ideology." Again, as a reason for these reactions, the anti-IC campaign points out gender equality and sexual orientation as the main culprits, which they believe have never explicitly defined hidden meanings.<sup>185</sup> They claim that global responses toward the IC are rising through the global anti-gender movement.<sup>186</sup> Even though the anti-IC campaign and anti-gender movement represent themselves as anti-globalists while criticizing the transnational human rights regulations, they favor transnational collaborations to amplify their voices against the IC.<sup>187</sup>

In right-wing discourse, gender has replaced feminism, and gender equality movements are constructed as powerful and foreign "colonizers" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 799). Arguing that the anticolonial frame is the central discursive structure of anti-genderism, Korolczuk and Graff claim that anti-genderism represents a "new language of resistance to neoliberalism" in the context of the illiberal turn (2018, p. 800). In this respect, anti-genderists argue that this "gender ideology" also manifests itself in the weakening of social ties and rising individualism in society which they see as the "corruption (*ifsad*) of society."<sup>188</sup> Therefore, anti-gender ideology movements consider themselves as the defenders of traditional values as well as defenders of

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<sup>185</sup> 2020MG38

<sup>186</sup> B032020

<sup>187</sup> B032020

<sup>188</sup> B082021

freedom against the "impositions" coming from transnational ideologies. In this context, while they argue that "gender ideology" is a "global threat," they point out the financial source of this ideology as corporations such as Amazon and Google. This anti-globalist stance of anti-genderists also coincides with "a new form of colonialism" (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 807). In this respect, in the analyzed news articles, it was observed that they mention the Soros Foundation as the funding actor of the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movement and the main figure that authored the IC.<sup>189</sup> A book chapter argues that foreign embassies, especially those of the USA and Western nations, and the Soros Foundation collaborated to erode the Turkish family structure.<sup>190</sup> They not only targeted transnational organizations and foreign countries but also targeted Türkiye's Koç Holding and Sabancı Holding, claiming that they are part of the "gender neutralization propaganda" because they support the IC.<sup>191</sup> Likewise, they also targeted the Eker Company because of the company's press release supporting the Convention, reasoning "mind your own business, Eker!"<sup>192</sup>

This threatening discourse of anti-genderists also intersects with other issues of societal concern, such as pandemics, climate change, and coronavirus. In this respect, it was argued that "neo-Marxist globalists" manipulate the world using critical issues such as public health concerns (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018, p. 807). A similar emphasis on the "global threat" narrative exists in Türkiye among anti-gender groups, with some arguing that "gender ideology" that is given legal protection by the IC is the work of the same global forces that manipulate agricultural genetics. For instance, citing a column by Abdurrahman Dilipak published in *Yeni Akit* Newspaper, a news article in *Milli Gazete* published in 2020, underlined that the "mind that produced Corona" is the actor behind the IC and LGBTIQ+ individuals.<sup>193</sup>

Some news articles portrayed the Convention as a tool of "powerful lobbies."<sup>194</sup> In a similar vein, one of the news reports mentioned the publication of a joint declaration defending the annulment of the IC, signed by 19 associations, claiming that "the

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<sup>189</sup> 2020MG40

<sup>190</sup> B052020

<sup>191</sup> 2020YA63, 2020YA28

<sup>192</sup> 2020YA64

<sup>193</sup> 2020MG39

<sup>194</sup> 2020YA77

Istanbul Convention has become a matter of national security."<sup>195</sup> To highlight that the IC is incompatible with national values, in this declaration the name of the Convention was referred as the "Constantinople Convention,"<sup>196</sup> signed by the associations that are part of the men's rights movement.<sup>197</sup> Securitization discourse serves to associate the Convention with "external powers" and consider it as a threat to national security and social structure. The conservative reaction that is attempted to be mobilized against the IC is based on an ideological framework that prioritizes "conservative values" over "Western values." For instance, in some news articles the idea claiming that the transnational agreements are the reflection of Western cultural imperialism was promoted.<sup>198</sup> A related article purports that adapting international norms instead of developing their national counterparts is an imposition of "Westernization" on society.<sup>199</sup> Some articles blamed the EU as the main culprit of "cultural imperialism,"<sup>200</sup> while others insisted that the IC was a "trap" that those who believed that Türkiye could be a member of the EU fell into.<sup>201</sup>

Within this framework, the news articles cited Ottoman history and its cultural legacy by bolstering the "Western coercion" discourse and drawing analogies between the regulations made in the Early Republican Era and the IC. The historical analogies used to glorify the Ottoman past also emphasized the effect of Islamic thought on politics during the Ottoman era. Some articles criticized the Early Republican Era for the legal regulations implemented align with Western law.<sup>202</sup> One of the commentary articles described this situation, arguing that Türkiye "has been dragged into the quagmire of Western imitation in the early twentieth century."<sup>203</sup> Some texts criticized the fact that

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<sup>195</sup> 2020MG98

<sup>196</sup> 2020MG98

<sup>197</sup> *Ata Eğitim ve Bilim Çalışanları Sendikası, Türkiye Aile Meclisi, Dağılmış Aileler ve Çocuk Hakları Derneği, Babalar ve Çocuklar Derneği, Boşanmanın Feri Sonuçları ve Çocuk Hakları Derneği, Mağdur Çocuklar ve Baba Hakları Derneği, Aileyi Yaşatma ve Koruma Derneği, Gelecek Dünya Çocuk Hakları Derneği, İyilik İnsan Hakları Derneği, Kemalist Atılım Birliği, Çocuk Hakları Platformu, Süresiz Nafaka Mağdurları Platformu, 6284 Sayılı Yasa Mağdurları Platformu, Velayet ve Nafaka Hapsi Platformu, Aile Platformu, Boşanmış Ebeveynler ve Çocuklar Platformu, Erkek ve Baba Hakları Platformu, Genç Evlilik Mağdurları Platformu, Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Platformu.*

<sup>198</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>199</sup> 2020MG10

<sup>200</sup> 2020MG11

<sup>201</sup> 2020MG30

<sup>202</sup> 2020MG41

<sup>203</sup> 2020MG32



the IC is named after Istanbul,<sup>204</sup> portrayed as the betrayal to the "historical legacy of Istanbul."<sup>205</sup>

Furthermore, some articles make a connection between the conquest of Istanbul by Sultan Mehmed in 1453 and the IC, claiming that the main reason behind the name of the Convention is the West's claim of taking revenge for the conquest of Istanbul.<sup>206</sup> Some news items argued that the content of the IC and its namesake, which was attributed to be "forced by the West," represents the West's aim of taking revenge for the War of Independence, which Türkiye won against the imperialist powers a century ago.<sup>207</sup>

Therefore, the anti-IC campaign involves historical and nostalgic aspects in Türkiye, giving it a unique character compared to its European counterparts. The astonishing aspect of this uniqueness comes from the linking of the anti-IC discourse and opposition to gender equality to the preservation of Ottoman cultural legacy. A similarly noteworthy example of neo-Ottoman sentiment echoed in the news articles was the interview conducted with the grandson of the last Ottoman sultan, Abdulhamid, which *Yeni Akit* published in 2020 quoted the grandson accordingly: "the Crusader mentality wants to take revenge on the Ottomans; however, they are not aware that the Ottomans' blood and soul descendants will never allow this."<sup>208</sup>

A similar nationalist framework can be observed in other cases in Europe. According to Korolczuk and Graff (2018), anti-genderists in Poland portrayed themselves as defenders of authentic values as well as colonized peoples. They also claimed that in the face of the threats coming from neoliberalism, they represented themselves as the defenders of economically marginalized groups. Similar to Poland, in 2020, the *Milli Gazete* published a news article titled "The Istanbul Convention is a Text of Colonization," discussing that the IC was written based on European values and law; therefore, its adoption in Türkiye should be interpreted as "cultural colonization" impose on a society shape through "Islamic cultural and civilization codes."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> 2020MG66

<sup>205</sup> 2020MG55

<sup>206</sup> 2020MG37, 2020YA08, 2022YA04

<sup>207</sup> 2020MG41

<sup>208</sup> 2020YA56

<sup>209</sup> 2020MG26

A similar criticism was presented in one of the analyzed book chapters, claiming that the ratification of the IC is an example of "self-colonization" because the Convention is based on "the European/Western Culture and Civilization Codes" and, therefore, does not align with "a nation and a country shaped according to the Islamic Culture and Civilization codes."<sup>210</sup> The same book chapter also asserted that "Kemalist revolutions" were also the examples of the "self-colonization" because the legal regulations developed based on the Western law.<sup>211</sup>

Criticism of the West in the anti-IC campaign is intertwined with the criticism of the secularization steps taken in the early republican period in Türkiye, and similarly, the author of one of the books analyzed argued that policies taken from the West were being implemented in Türkiye and that "90 percent of all ministries were shaped in the way LGBTIQ+ and feminists want." The author, who argued that Muslims had no role in the implementation of the laws, insists that they had been reduced to the position of "second-class citizens." Furthering his criticism, the author claimed that "what Kemalism had failed to achieve, neo-liberal/right-wing conservative politicians achieved" while evaluating the current legal framework.<sup>212</sup>

As previously mentioned, the nationalist rhetoric can be observed through the metaphorical links established between the Crusades and the Convention.<sup>213</sup> This assessment, which argues that European cultural values and the traditions of Muslim societies are incompatible with each other, interprets the IC as a "modern-day Crusade."<sup>214</sup> Ironically, by emphasizing a similar distinction, the ultra-conservative political party *Vox* in Spain also points out religion, claiming that "the jihadism of gender" must be fought against (Butler, 2019, p. 5). Thus, these assessments on "gender ideology" reveal that in every context, anti-genderists present it as a "threat" coming from a foreign and hostile force and something invading their authentic values, and in this respect, the IC was also criticized because of its provision saying VAW should be combatted through "eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions, and all other practices based on the notion of women's inferiority or on stereotypical roles for

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<sup>210</sup> B052020

<sup>211</sup> B052020, pp. 57-77

<sup>212</sup> B042020, p. 25

<sup>213</sup> 2021YA23

<sup>214</sup> 2020MG02, 2023MG05

women and men" in Article 12.<sup>215</sup> This provision of the Convention was accused of threatening "society, tradition, culture, and religion."<sup>216</sup> Within this frame, anti-IC groups interpreted the Convention's call for no excuses in fighting with VAW a threat to cultural values which is an example of "keying" (Benford & Hunt, 2003, p. 170). Thus, the IC's attempt to establish a culturally undetermined transnational standard of violence is reframed as a threat to culture, and in this respect, new meanings are attributed to the expressions used in the Convention.

As mentioned before, the naming of the Convention is problematic because it was named after Istanbul, a city once the center of the caliphate. In the news articles, this was interpreted as a deliberate Western move aimed at threatening the Islamic world symbolically,<sup>217</sup> illustrating how the nationalist and ummah discourses became intertwined in this context. This convergence of discourses is an important point for the analysis because it reveals that at the discursive level, complex dynamics are at play: referring to the activities of ILGA,<sup>218</sup> Lambda Istanbul,<sup>219</sup> and KAOS GL<sup>220</sup> in the context of Türkiye, one of the book authors argues that there is an organized operation against the values of the "Islamic world and humanity" saying there is "a sense of community with their common slogans, single flags, and common goals."<sup>221</sup>

Korolczuk and Graf (2018) note that formerly socialist Eastern European nations also represent distinct cases in terms of the self-assessment of anti-gender advocates in their local politics. According to their assessment, the "sexual revolution" in the West did not significantly influence their authentic culture (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). These countries also became significant examples of the anti-gender movement in Türkiye. Some authors assert that political parties in Türkiye did not take a specific stance against the IC like the parties in Poland.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> "Parties shall take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men." Article 12, The Istanbul Convention. <https://rm.coe.int/168046031c>

<sup>216</sup> 2020YA03

<sup>217</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>218</sup> ILGA is the international lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex association.

<sup>219</sup> Lambda Istanbul, an LGBTI solidarity association, was founded in 1993 and is a member of ILGA.

<sup>220</sup> Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Studies and Solidarity Association (Kaos GL) is the first official LGBTI+ association in Türkiye.

<sup>221</sup> B032020, p. 44

<sup>222</sup> 2020YS21

The vast majority of news coverage was critical of Western countries; for instance, news coverage criticized that the United States of America for a perceived interference with Türkiye's internal affairs through the IC by linking the Convention to the Marshall Plan and Fulbright Program,<sup>223</sup> but, this critical language is not found in the news mentioning Poland and Hungary. Some news reports praise the Hungarian government's determined stance not to ratify the Convention,<sup>224</sup> while a report on Poland's decision to withdraw from the IC stated that this decision was based on the belief that the IC was harmful to younger generations because it is a product of "gender ideology."<sup>225</sup> It was also argued that the debates about the IC are not only a problem for Türkiye, but that "the Istanbul Convention has divided the entire world in two."<sup>226</sup> In 2020, an article by Abdurrahman Dilipak was published in *Yeni Akit* about the IC and conspiracy theories, such as the "5G," "new normal," and "The Great Reset."<sup>227</sup> As emphasized by Dilipak and various others, "gender ideology" was portrayed as responsible for the objectives of a single state, single religion, genderless, and pagan new society.<sup>228</sup> Framed in a similar nationalist and "threat" framework, GREVIO was portrayed in news articles as an external, intrusive entity that undermined traditional values.<sup>229</sup> By citing the activities of the GREVIO as an "external threat," the IC was depicted as a "tumor," suggesting that the Convention harms the society like a cancer.<sup>230</sup> Due to the articles stating that GREVIO's official correspondence cannot be obstructed, GREVIO was criticized.<sup>231</sup> Within this framework, the IC was also targeted by claiming that the Convention is "a Trojan horse" which targets the family.<sup>232</sup> The existence of the GREVIO as a transnational entity presented as a proof of the Convention's having a hidden agenda of colonization.<sup>233</sup> Connected to the imagined threats of the GREVIO, one of the book chapters alleged that GREVIO is a "national threat" because "as GREVIO exaggerates VAW statistics, there is a risk of

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<sup>223</sup> 2020MG93

<sup>224</sup> 2020MG18

<sup>225</sup> 2020YA68

<sup>226</sup> 2020YA33

<sup>227</sup> 2020YA77

<sup>228</sup> 2020YS16

<sup>229</sup> 2020MG44

<sup>230</sup> 2020MG93

<sup>231</sup> 2020MG93

<sup>232</sup> B052020

<sup>233</sup> 2020MG26

military intervention in our country."<sup>234</sup> Therefore, the discourses mentioned under the nationalist ideals theme are a reflection of "securitization" discourse, which is employed by anti-genderists all over the world. In the case of the withdrawal from the IC, this securitization discourse used by the alliance of the government and the anti-IC campaign became the justification of the withdrawal decision. According to Wæver (1995), "by definition, something is a security problem when the elites declare it to be so," and he further discusses that "power holders can always try to use the instrument of securitization of an issue to gain control over it" (1995, p. 54). This securitization discourse not only supports the decision to withdraw from the Convention, but also functions as a "certification mechanism," declaring that the government recognized the anti-gender movement's discourse. As a result, this situation led to the emergence of a favorable political opportunity structure that would strengthen the anti-gender movement. Moreover, this securitization discourse helped to ensure that nationalists who had not previously participated in the IC debates would support the anti-IC campaign through the securitization discourse.

Ünal (2024b), on the other hand, argues that the traditional family approach fits within the securitization framework. Accordingly, the discourses of securitization and cultural authenticity, which the AKP always emphasizes, support each other and lead to the normalization of anti-genderism. In the scope of the securitization discourse, another emphasized threatening actor is "global powers," along with the West; thereby, anti-globalism is a reaction experienced not only within the anti-gender movement in Türkiye. As Segers noted, the right-wing party FvD in the Netherlands defined "globalists" as "an amorphous group of powerful actors whom the party considers to be the ultimate threat to Western civilization" (Segers, 2024, p. 13). Scholars researching anti-gender movements emphasize their transnational networks even though these movements appear to be anti-globalist. Similar actors in different parts of the world mobilize with similar claims, and they influence each other (Kováts, 2018; Graff & Korolczuk, 2022), and such transnational networks among anti-gender movements help them to establish an anti-gender global order. The analyzed Turkish

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<sup>234</sup> B082021, p. 50

case also represents similarities with other anti-gender and anti-IC groups in Europe through similar discourses and common agendas.

In some articles, the Convention was interpreted as a "global threat," arguing that transnational cooperation should be established to combat this global threat. In 2020, *Yeni Akit* published the views of family NGOs on the IC, reporting that "many countries have realized that the Istanbul Convention is a project to corrupt society and that a transnational family union should be formed against the Istanbul Convention." In the same publication, they further claimed that "Türkiye should take a stance against the Istanbul Convention,"<sup>235</sup> and that the family NGOs were asking the government to establish collaborations with Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Latvia, and Poland to challenge the Convention and help each other to strengthen the family.<sup>236</sup> In this respect, Poland is the most emphasized country in the analyzed news articles in *Milli Gazete* and *Yeni Asya*,<sup>237</sup> portrayed as a good example for Türkiye in *Yeni Akit*,<sup>238</sup> with one of the articles published in 2020 entirely focusing on the reactions towards the IC in Poland as they regarded it as a robust example of an anti-IC campaign.<sup>239</sup> Therefore, the demands raised among the groups forming the anti-IC campaign regarding the establishment of transnational collaboration are an example of brokerage as a mechanism that enables connecting previously disconnected actors (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, the local family advocacy movement in Türkiye calls for the establishment of a state-supported anti-gender movement and collaboration with countries in Europe that can come together on the same conservative line on this issue, garnering potential for the movement to change scale and move from local agendas to global agendas.

#### **6.3.4. "Masculinist Restoration": The Construction of Male Victimhood Discourse**

Male victimhood discourse observed in the news was interpreted through masculinity discussions, which assert that as a response to social changes, masculinity requires

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<sup>235</sup> 2020YA49

<sup>236</sup> 2020YA49

<sup>237</sup> 2020YAS22

<sup>238</sup> 2020YA96

<sup>239</sup> 2020YAS32

restructuring itself (Kandiyoti, 2016). Therefore, in the context of the rising conservative gender politics, "masculinist restoration" refers to reinvigorating patriarchal relations in response to so-called male victimization that is considered a result of the change in politics in favor of the gender advocacy movement's efforts. According to Kandiyoti (2016), in recent years, as a result of the rising backlash against feminist achievements, efforts to strengthen patriarchal relations and symbols have emerged. This dissertation employs the masculinist restoration concept to emphasize the discourses advocating the revival of patriarchal values and male dominance as well as guaranteeing the privileges of men in the family and society. This concept was interpreted as men's resistance to gender equality and policy measures driven by the feminist movement. The anti-gender ideology movement advocates claim that "gender ideology" challenges the traditional values and gender roles (Butler, 2019), but, according to their view, it also threatens the masculinity itself. The findings of this dissertation suggest that the future of gender binarism and masculinity is a great concern and a topic of urgent relevance for anti-gender advocates.

The main argument on which the discourse that men are victimized is based on the claim that IC usurps men's rights. In this respect, anti-genderists claim that the gender equality perspective and the policies developed based on this weaken masculinity while posing a threat to traditional gender roles. According to Korolczuk and Graff (2018), the 2008 financial crisis is also related to anti-genderism in Europe, arguing that those men who became economically vulnerable adopted patriarchal values, and in the same period, some far-right groups became part of the anti-gender movement. Similarly, alimony debates in Türkiye and opposition to Law No. 6284 exemplify men's efforts to undermine women's vested rights by citing their economic situation (Özkazanç, 2020b). In Türkiye, opposition to Law No. 6284 is one of the controversial subjects in the anti-IC campaign. This law was criticized for being an IC-based legal regulation,<sup>240</sup> but was also supported by the AKP government and President Erdoğan because it is the most effective legal tool to combat VAW. In this respect, Özkazanç noted that the male victimization narrative has been spreading at the grassroots level

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<sup>240</sup> 2022MG02, 2021YA11

concerning issues such as "alimony, custody issues, property division, and Law No. 6284" (2020b, p. 44).

Thus, among the groups that defend opposition to gender equality in Türkiye, those who oppose the right to alimony could be considered a group that receives grassroots support. Law No. 6284 was also another reason that the IC was criticized: one of the news articles argued that in society, there is a growing dissatisfaction because of the regulations implemented in the scope of Law No. 6284 regarding penalties for early marriages and ignoring victimization of men.<sup>241</sup> Additionally, it is argued that the IC and Law No. 6284 are based on the "female superiority" perspective and, therefore, lead to the victimization of men. The reasoning supporting the claim that men are victimized includes facing false allegations of violence, financially suffering due to the practice of "indefinite alimony," and not being able to obtain custody of their children during the divorce,<sup>242</sup> to bolster this argument, an article asked the government to pay attention to the claims growing in the public regarding perceived victimization that emerged because of the IC.<sup>243</sup> A news article citing the *Aile, Bilim ve Eğitim Derneği* referred to the Prophet Yusuf to criticize the IC.<sup>244</sup> This article in question, "woman's account is essential" provision regulated under Law No. 6284, was criticized on the grounds that claims without supporting evidence can be misleading, as in the case of the Prophet Yusuf.<sup>245</sup> Therefore, this provision of the Law No. 6284 was considered an unfair practice.<sup>246</sup> Underage marriage, another controversial issue, was also framed as exaggerated by new legal regulations.<sup>247</sup> A commentary news article elaborated on this issue by referring to the individuals sentenced to prison for marrying underage girls as "victims of gender laws" and "victims of early marriage."<sup>248</sup>

When claims of the men's rights movement are interpreted through Benford and Snow's (2000) tripartite structure, it is seen that this movement claims that men are

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<sup>241</sup> 2020MG08

<sup>242</sup> Article 175 of the Turkish Civil Code defines alimony. According to this article, it may be awarded indefinitely only in certain cases decided by the court. If a lawsuit is filed, this alimony can be terminated. In addition, its amount can be changed.

[https://esikplatform.net/s/2547/i/Istanbul\\_Barosu\\_Nafaka\\_Dosyasi.pdf](https://esikplatform.net/s/2547/i/Istanbul_Barosu_Nafaka_Dosyasi.pdf)

<sup>243</sup> 2020MG08

<sup>244</sup> 2020MG05

<sup>245</sup> 2020MG05

<sup>246</sup> 2020MG59

<sup>247</sup> 2020MG08

<sup>248</sup> 2020MG78



discriminated against because of laws that take feminist critiques into account, such as child custody regulations and alimony obligations. As a proposed solution, in terms of prognostic framing, they claim new regulations considering men's discriminated position. Within the framework of contentious politics, their claims refer to the government as "an object of claims" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) or a critical ally, as this dissertation suggests.

Furthermore, their claims also make them an organized countermovement aiming to challenge the feminist achievements in policies. Thus, from the perspective of the men's rights movement, the anti-IC campaign is just an episode within the cycle of contention. After the withdrawal decision from the IC, the men's rights movement continues to mobilize with different objectives, including the amendment of Law No. 6284. Therefore, the main motivation or motivational framing of this movement comes from its employment of "victimhood" and "justice" discourses to mobilize its supporters and broaden their support.

Some news articles referred to the Convention as the main responsible for the increasing rates of VAW.<sup>249</sup> According to this view, when men are removed from their homes as the Convention's provisions were implemented, they become isolated, and this encourages them to commit violence.<sup>250</sup> Some authors also argued that the regulation regarding the removal of male perpetrators of violence from home humiliates men.<sup>251</sup> Article 2 of the Convention regulates that "parties should give special importance to women victims of gender-based violence when implementing the provisions of this Convention." This woman-centered approach of the IC was also criticized as overlooking violence against men:

In this assessment, only women were deliberately assessed, completely ignoring the fact that men can also face various forms of violence, harassment, and rape. This resulted in an unfair and unequal situation for men, based on the assumption that men are inherently violent.<sup>252</sup>

Similarly, some news articles argued that the language of the Convention represents "feminist hostility towards men" by portraying men as "rapists" while depicting

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<sup>249</sup> 2020MG96

<sup>250</sup> 2020MG30

<sup>251</sup> 2020MG37

<sup>252</sup> B082021, p. 21

women as "victims."<sup>253</sup> The author of one of the analyzed books advocated a similar idea, claiming that in today's society, women's seeking rights has resulted in the emergence of a culture of conflict.<sup>254</sup> Therefore, the main perceived grievance for men caused by Law No. 6284 is also related to the "discriminated men" discourse, emphasizing that men are living with the fear of being slandered or removed from their homes at any time.<sup>255</sup> Another publication emphasized that the IC encourages women to slander men easily<sup>256</sup> and such misogynistic discourse is the reflection of the perspective that women's accounts of violence do not reflect reality. A book chapter titled "Istanbul Convention Legal Evaluation," states that one of the problematic dimensions of the Convention is its structure centered on VAW. The author argued that this situation means ignoring violence against men.<sup>257</sup> Similarly, in one of the books examined, the IC and Law No. 6284 were accused of being sexist. According to this perspective, reporting "the crime of some perverted and murderous men" in the media as "male violence" is sexist and divisive because it places all men under suspicion.<sup>258</sup> In another book under review, the author makes the point that the Convention's emphasis on GBV against women means that violence against men is ignored, and men are considered to be violent.<sup>259</sup>

After Türkiye withdrew from the Convention, the Fathers and Children Association (BABADER)<sup>260</sup> and the Victimized Children and Fathers' Rights Association (MA-ÇOBDER)<sup>261</sup> made an assessment to *Milli Gazete*, claiming that the abolishment of the IC should be seen as the beginning, followed by new regulations in the Civil Code restructured to protect families.<sup>262</sup> In support of similar arguments, *Yeniden Refah Partisi* organized a protest against the IC by in Beşiktaş, Istanbul. According to an

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<sup>253</sup> 2020YA15, 2020YA82

<sup>254</sup> B052020, p. 29

<sup>255</sup> 2020MG08

<sup>256</sup> 2020MG60

<sup>257</sup> B012020

<sup>258</sup> B072021, p.23

<sup>259</sup> B082021

<sup>260</sup> The Fathers and Children Association (BABADER) listed its focus areas, including custody, parental child abduction, the Istanbul Convention, and Law No. 6284.

<sup>261</sup> Compared to BABADER, the Victimized Children and Fathers' Rights Association (MA-ÇOBDER) does not have online visibility, and it does not have a website. Therefore, the news on the association was used as an information source. It was seen that the main areas of the association include alimony and parental child abduction. <https://www.hukukihaber.net/magdur-babalardan-cocuk-icrasinin-vesuresiz-nafakanin-kaldirilmesi-talebi>

<sup>262</sup> 2021MG35

article about this protest, the participants had banners such as "Men are being driven away from their homes," "Violence against women has quadrupled," "Who does this law protect from?" "No to the Istanbul Convention," and "What is the fault of the children?"<sup>263</sup> The basis of this argument is that the IC caused increases in the VAW rates, which is supported by allegations that femicides have increased after the ratification of the Convention.<sup>264</sup> Similarly, *Saadet Partisi* Chairman Karamollaoğlu made an assessment supporting the withdrawal decision by claiming that "the Istanbul Convention has increased violence against women tenfold."<sup>265</sup>

Some news articles cited President Erdoğan's words, claiming that "The Istanbul Convention is not the word of the God [*Nas*]," to prove that Law No. 6284 can also be annulled after the IC.<sup>266</sup> While the conservative media hailed the withdrawal decision from the IC in 2021, some argued this alone was insufficient and that Law No. 6284 should also be revoked.<sup>267</sup> In this respect, one column article published in the *Yeni Şafak* in 2021, argued that withdrawal from the IC should be just the beginning of the changes in VAW policies and other binding international agreements should be reviewed. In the same column, the author called for a presidential decree that would regulate the withdrawal decision from the agreements, as the author linked to the "Marshall Plan."<sup>268</sup>

As it was previously discussed, the anti-IC campaign includes various groups and, therefore, not homogeneous. Thus, every group taking part in the anti-IC campaign does not directly oppose Law No. 6284; for example, the *Vatan Partisi* asked for the improvement of Law No. 6284 to better combat VAW while supporting the withdrawal from the IC.<sup>269</sup> Therefore, after the withdrawal from the IC, two opposing positions emerged among the groups participating in the anti-IC campaign. The first group advocates for the continuation of the existing domestic violence legislation (Law No. 6284), and the representatives of this group include President Erdoğan, AKP bureaucrats, media outlets, and some conservative CSOs aligned with the government.

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<sup>263</sup> 2020YA57

<sup>264</sup> 2020YS21

<sup>265</sup> 2021MG07

<sup>266</sup> 2020YAS06

<sup>267</sup> 2021YA09

<sup>268</sup> 2021YS43

<sup>269</sup> 2020YA19, 2020YA62

On the other hand, the other group, including other conservative actors of the anti-"gender ideology" movement, opposes Law No. 6284 and asks for a repeal of the law.<sup>270</sup>

### **6.3.5. The Moral Panic: Fears of Societal Decay**

Both anti-gender movements and anti-IC campaigns referred to the potential threat of "gender ideology" as the destruction of society (*ifsad*), therefore, the danger of the moral collapse of society also functions as a motivational frame. This framing motivates more people by claiming that the IC, as a product of "gender ideology," is waging war against traditional values and will inevitably destroy society. Moral panic concerns are directly related to the "frame of threat," which this study considers as the core frame and is effective in the anti-gender movement's organization of the anti-IC campaign. Thus, the IC was portrayed as a "Western attack" by anti-gender advocates; as part of their problem diagnosis, anti-gender groups further interpreted the Convention as a project aimed to destroy family. While the prognostic framing advocates the rejection of the IC and the strengthening of traditional norms, motivational framing suggests that anti-gender advocates attempt to establish a sense of threat in society, triggering emotions such as fear and anger and thus mobilizing more people. The "frame of threat" mentioned in this study is also related to Cohen's (2011) discussion on "moral panic."

There is a developing literature on how anti-gender movements produce moral panic and anger in society by constructing a discursive "threat" (Kourou, 2020; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017b; Ural & Eslen-Ziya, 2024). In the literature, "gender ideology" is pointed out as a provocative dimension of moral panic in society (Kuhar & Zobec, 2017), and drawing on these discussions on moral panic, the most concerning issue in the anti-IC campaign resembling moral panic is the perceived danger of social decay. As a collective action frame, "the protection of family" is the backbone of this moral panic; thus, anti-gender ideology advocates aim to garner more support by claiming that family is endangered by "gender ideology," which is presented as an aggressive and organized threat. According to this perspective, "gender ideology" is a threat to family,

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<sup>270</sup> 2021YA09

nation, and ultimately all of humanity.<sup>271</sup> In this respect, alarming expressions were used to describe the Convention in the news, such as "servitude Convention," "superstition," "poison,"<sup>272</sup> "Crusader mentality,"<sup>273</sup> "cultural invasion,"<sup>274</sup> "cultural imperialism," "contractual immorality,"<sup>275</sup> "Trojan horse,"<sup>276</sup> "a cunning plan,"<sup>277</sup> "disgusting convention,"<sup>278</sup> "virus convention,"<sup>279</sup> "freak convention,"<sup>280</sup> "creepy convention,"<sup>281</sup> "domination convention,"<sup>282</sup> and "manifesto of feminist ideology."<sup>283</sup> These expressions convey the message that the IC is dangerous, and define it as dangerous and carrying a potential threat to "honor," "generations," "chastity," and "virtue." To underscore this threatening aspect, the news articles used expressions such as "poison in honey"<sup>284</sup> and "*fitnah* seeds."<sup>285</sup> The tone of the texts was alarming because they aimed to point out the existence of an urgent external threat. After the news article depicted the IC as a threat, they petitioned the government to withdraw from the Convention, and readers were instructed to resist the IC. As a reflection of the emotional dimension, these articles asked for broader support by calling the readers guardians of religious and moral values.<sup>286</sup> The claims that the IC disrupts society and encourages "sexual perversion" lay the basis for the anti-gender discourse developed to confront the IC. Thus, the emotional dimension of discursively constructed moral panic is observable in their efforts to activate anger, resistance, and fear in readers.

Article 42 of the IC emphasizes that "honor" should not be considered an excuse for VAW. Article 42 insists that VAW should not be legitimized under any circumstances by referring to cultural values, but because of the expression "so-called honor," some

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<sup>271</sup> 2020YA43

<sup>272</sup> 2020YA08

<sup>273</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>274</sup> 2020MG11

<sup>275</sup> 2020MG13

<sup>276</sup> 2020MG22

<sup>277</sup> 2020MG30

<sup>278</sup> 2020MG58

<sup>279</sup> 2020MG38

<sup>280</sup> 2020YAS18

<sup>281</sup> 2020YS08

<sup>282</sup> B052020

<sup>283</sup> 2020YA21, 2022YA03

<sup>284</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>285</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>286</sup> 2020YA56

articles criticized the IC for insulting cultural values.<sup>287</sup> In an article arguing that honor is a sacred value while explaining why the IC should be withdrawn, the Convention was accused of "devaluing sacred honor" and being "contrary to nature."<sup>288</sup> Additionally, another news report criticized the detailed definition of violence in the Convention and the inclusion of different types of violence, blaming alcohol consumption as the leading cause of violence.<sup>289</sup> This camp of anti-IC discourse argues that only physical violence should be taken into account when defining violence in the law, because it is the only violence that can be easily distinguished by the public and is therefore the only "real" type of violence. They also allege that defining the different types of violence, such as psychological violence and economic violence, leads to slander and abuse in violent incidents.<sup>290</sup> A 20220 report in *Milli Gazete* published the *Memur-Sen's* Report on VAW,<sup>291</sup> listing the causes of violence as individual-specific reasons, such as "psychological disorders, gambling, drinking, smoking, substance addiction, and alienation from spirituality."<sup>292</sup> Attributing the causes of VAW to individual-level reasons and habits leads to ignoring its structural aspect and the patriarchal norms that fuel the violence.

In 2020, *Milli Gazete* announced that it opened the IC file to publish a series aiming to reveal the objectives of the Convention. According to the article announcing the IC file, this series would uncover the Convention's agenda to conquer "our family" through popularizing the "free individual," "free woman," "sensitive issues," along with gender equality.<sup>293</sup> This news article also claimed that the Convention is trying to "destroy the family" and the gender equality perspective promoted by the IC is, in reality, an "ideology" plotting to ruin society. This news article also emphasized the IC as part of a "Western plot" made to undermine Muslim societies.<sup>294</sup> The discourses of anti-gender ideology advocates in Türkiye can be categorized regarding the family in the following areas, and moral concerns are highlighted in these categories:

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<sup>287</sup> 2020MG32

<sup>288</sup> 2020MG77

<sup>289</sup> 2020MG38

<sup>290</sup> 2020MG59

<sup>291</sup> 2020MG85

<sup>292</sup> Memur-Sen, "Odak analiz 1," n.d., <https://www.memursen.org.tr/yayinlar/odakanaliz1.pdf>.

<sup>293</sup> 2020MG02

<sup>294</sup> 2020MG02

- Female empowerment may deteriorate marital relations, weaken men's authority, and erode traditional values.
- When viewed as a whole, society is likely to see an increase in divorce rates and a decrease in marriage rates.
- "Gender ideology" may lead to the disappearance of the traditional family structure and, at the same time, increase the likelihood of cohabitation outside of marriage.

The implicit goal of the discourses revolving around the idea of family is to prevent women from developing a stronger and more nuanced role within the traditional family structure which would lead re-establishing male dominance, and ensuring that women retreat from the public sphere (work and education) into the private sphere (within the family). Moreover, a discursive campaign is being carried out to impose the idea that even demanding gender equality in society is inappropriate on religious grounds, which marginalizes LGBTIQ+ individuals, and prevents their legal recognition and social acceptance. All these implicit goals lead to the elimination of women's legal protection against violence. A book chapter titled "Distant Goals of the Istanbul Convention," emphasizes that one of the most criticized points of the Convention is the argument that it leads to a rivalry between women and men due to its excessive emphasis on VAW and its structure that takes into account gender inequality and power imbalance.<sup>295</sup> Similarly, another book argues that the Convention serves the creation of a "society without families."<sup>296</sup> Another book, which occasionally adopts a more moderate stance, argues that today, protecting the family is labeled as anti-freedom.<sup>297</sup>

The most debated concepts of the Convention are "gender equality" and "sexual orientation." Some news articles argued that the circulation of these concepts means "providing legal armor to LGBTIs" and "waging war against Islamic values."<sup>298</sup> Another feature of the Convention that has been criticized is the IC's objective of "eradicating" traditions and customs to combat VAW.<sup>299</sup> Likewise, the author of one

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<sup>295</sup> B012020

<sup>296</sup> B042020

<sup>297</sup> B092021

<sup>298</sup> 2020YA02

<sup>299</sup> 2021YA09

of the analyzed books argues that the IC facilitated "a world war declared against the family" because it led to an increase in divorce rates and a decrease in marriage rates.<sup>300</sup> As an ideal reaction that Türkiye should also adopt, some authors referred to conservative groups in Poland who, in their view, have long fought against the IC and demand that the definition of family in the IC updated as that the family consists of "mother, father, and children."<sup>301</sup>

As the analyzed news items demonstrate, anti-IC campaign actors define the family as a primarily heterosexual unit and encourage the maintenance of traditional gender roles.<sup>302</sup> As stated in the introduction of an edited book published as part of the anti-IC campaign, albeit with a moderate tone, those from anti-IC groups who saw the Convention as a threat to the family and traditional gender roles advanced their arguments based on the gender complementarity approach.<sup>303</sup> Praise for traditional family structures and gender roles is embraced not only in Türkiye but also in anti-gender discourse across Europe, representing a conservative call to re-establish a "golden age, where everything was simpler and genders were what they looked like" (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a, p. 14). Another promoted discourse was that Türkiye's social structure is not patriarchal but "familial," and according to this view, the only thing important for Turkish society is maintaining "healthy families."<sup>304</sup> The allegation that the IC seeks to change family structure by referring to unmarried partnerships and "same-sex marriages" is interpreted through a lens of illness: "The Council of Europe has imposed this distorted and unhealthy family structure on Türkiye by creating a family structure that is not even beneficial to itself."<sup>305</sup> Alongside the IC, CEDAW is another controversial international agreement in the news articles and books, further criticized based on moral panic and fear of social decay: "How many families have been destroyed! An unjust, unlawful process that started with CEDAW has reached unbearable dimensions with Indefinite Alimony... A terrible process that is gradually weakening families and tearing apart our social structure."<sup>306</sup> Another article also

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<sup>300</sup> B082021

<sup>301</sup> 2020YAS32

<sup>302</sup> 2020MG05

<sup>303</sup> B012020

<sup>304</sup> 2023YS04

<sup>305</sup> 2020MG87

<sup>306</sup> 2020YS08



targeted CEDAW on the grounds that it brought "sexual philosophy, culture and law" in the world.<sup>307</sup> Thus the anti-IC campaign did not only target the IC, but anti-IC groups challenged all legal instruments they consider similar to the IC and regarded as the reflection of "gender ideology." Overall, this indicates that "gender ideology" is the main culprit of the anti-IC campaign and, therefore, it is part of the anti-gender movement.

The prohibition of mediation in divorce cases was considered one of the most problematic aspects of the Convention. Opponents of the IC argued that Islam encourages mediation, therefore, a "Western" convention cannot forbid it.<sup>308</sup> According to this perspective, mediation is a necessary practice to prevent divorces. In 2020, *Yeni Şafak* published an informative news article citing the Divorced People and Family Platform (BIA Platform),<sup>309</sup> blaming the Convention for contributing to rising divorce rates in Türkiye.<sup>310</sup>

According to their assessment, a ban on mediation is problematic because "even simple disagreements between spouses can grow and be taken to court."<sup>311</sup> In some cases, it was criticized that even if the woman who was subjected to violence withdraws her complaint against the perpetrator, the case against him continues. This situation was criticized by anti-IC campaign because "the Istanbul Convention establishes a mechanism that desires war, not peace, within the family."<sup>312</sup> This perspective does not question women being subjected to violence, but women seeking their legal rights even in cases of non-physical violence, "victimizing men."

One of the news reports emphasized that there is an emerging global wave of opposition against the IC. The news article emphasized that in Europe, the reactions were coming from "right-wing parties, particularly the church, and those who oppose liberal policies." The text also underlined that "Bulgaria, Poland, and Croatia" have

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<sup>307</sup> 2020YS20

<sup>308</sup> 2020MG38

<sup>309</sup> The platform does not have an official website. In its Facebook group, the platform was defined as a social media awareness group. According to their statement, this group consists of individuals who have suffered injustices because of the Turkish Civil Code and its implementation. The other group members are listed as families, friends, and supporters.

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/biaplatformu/?locale=tr\\_TR](https://www.facebook.com/groups/biaplatformu/?locale=tr_TR)

<sup>310</sup> 2020YS07

<sup>311</sup> B082021

<sup>312</sup> B082021

discovered the global dangers of the IC.<sup>313</sup> In Hungary and Türkiye, anti-gender campaigns are similar in terms of defining the Convention as a "Trojan horse of gender ideology," where the anti-IC campaign in Hungary further argued that the main purpose of the Convention is the "implementation of the gender philosophy" (Kováts, 2018; p. 3). An article published in *Yeni Şafak* in 2020 with a moderate tone argued that the IC does not aim to promote "homosexuality;" instead, the real culprit is the logic of the Convention, a "nonsense called 'gender theory.'"<sup>314</sup> In a similar vein, it was argued that some groups exploited the Convention by politicizing gender and sexuality.<sup>315</sup>

In many news publications, the term "*ifsad/ifsat*" (both forms have been seen) was used to discuss the damage that the Convention allegedly inflicts on the social fabric.<sup>316</sup> *Ifsad*, a term of Arabic origin, was translated into Turkish as either subversion or corruption. In this respect, the news article argued that the gender equality perspective of the Convention leads to the corruption of society.<sup>317</sup> In a similar vein, a news article published in *Yeni Akit* in 2023 purported that the Convention brought gender equality, which is considered as "subversion (*ifsat*) project," to our lives.<sup>318</sup> Thus, while withdrawal from the Convention was seen as an essential step, it was argued that the fundamental objective should be opposing the gender equality approach as it reflects the "gender ideology." ETCEP was mentioned as another risk the IC created regarding social decay. ETCEP was implemented in 2014 in pilot provinces chosen by the Ministry of National Education. However, this project was quickly terminated due to the backlash against the gender equality perspective. A news item referring ETCEP as a "brain corruption project" asserted that "ETCEP manipulates the minds of young people under the guise of gender equality."<sup>319</sup> KADEM was among the groups opposing the ETCEP, stating that this project has the potential to "reach a point where it will harm the growth of healthy generations."<sup>320</sup> In

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<sup>313</sup> 2020MG38

<sup>314</sup> 2020YS15

<sup>315</sup> 2021YA21

<sup>316</sup> 2021YA16

<sup>317</sup> 2023YAS01, 2020MG02

<sup>318</sup> 2023MG02

<sup>319</sup> 2023MG02

<sup>320</sup> KADEM, "Eğitimde Toplumsal Cinsiyet Eşitliğinin Geliştirilmesi Projesi (ETCEP)ne İlişkin Değerlendirme", <https://kadem.org.tr/degerlendirme-etcep>

this respect, the "Are you ready to rewrite?" project, a part of the ETCEP, was criticized for enabling "eliminating the distinction between girls and boys" and allowing them to play with each other's toys without considering the traditional gender roles.<sup>321</sup>

Thus, one of the prominent aspects of the anti-IC campaign is its overemphasis of the protection of younger generations, as reflected in anti-gender rhetoric (Shevtsova, 2022). This argument was brought to the front to condemn the provisions of the Convention that request signatories to include informative content on gender equality at every educational level (IC, Art. 14).<sup>322</sup> In the book chapter entitled "Understanding Women and Family in the Process of Change," this concern regarding the protection of future generations is emphasized as a religious responsibility.<sup>323</sup> Therefore, the concerns expressed within the framework of "gender ideology" are diverse, including the concern about the decline of family relations, the fear that traditional male-female roles will disappear, the concern that society and, therefore, the nation will be subject to social decay, and the concern that gender equality may conflict with religious doctrines. This framework argues that supporting legal instruments developed based on gender equality such as CEDAW, the IC, and Law No. 6284, would result in "moral chaos."<sup>324</sup> Therefore, from this point of view, all these legal regulations should be annulled.

#### **6.4. Contesting "Gender Ideology": Countering the Gender Advocacy Movement**

The debates over the IC were analyzed through ideological contestation between the gender equality advocates and their opponents challenging gender equality. The gender advocacy movement led the pro-Convention campaign, and in this contestation, the groups advocating for gender equality try to mobilize the public with frames emphasizing the importance of the Convention as the most developed tool to combat VAW. The pro-IC campaign used various strategies to facilitate gender equality and influence the public opinion. The pro-IC campaign consists of a broad

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<sup>321</sup> B032020, p. 109

<sup>322</sup> Council of Europe. (2011). Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). Retrieved from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

<sup>323</sup> B012020

<sup>324</sup> B052020

solidarity network with actors, including the women's movement, the feminist movement, and the LGBTIQ+ movement, along with their national and transnational collaborations. These groups consider the claims of the anti-gender advocates as a threat to gender mainstreaming in Türkiye. They also oppose the anti-IC campaign because it undermines mechanisms developed to protect women from violence. Feminist activists' assessments were discussed in Chapter 7.

Elsewhere in the other cases of CEECs, during the IC debates and campaigns, gender advocacy movements rallied around the concept of "gender equality," while anti-gender groups mobilized around the concept of "gender ideology," reflecting their collective action frames (Benford & Snow, 2000). For both movements, the IC campaigns and debates represented an episode in their broader cycles of contention and ideological contestation (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). As previously discussed, the collaboration between the government and the anti-gender ideology advocates is a crucial part of the contentious politics discussed in this study. As feminist critics also elaborated, President Erdoğan's decision to collaborate with either pro-gender or anti-gender groups was critical because it reflected the policy outcomes of the contestations over the IC. Overall, as an "object of claims" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), the government played a critical role in this contestation.

According to anti-gender advocates, the gender equality perspective presents threats to religious values, family structure, and national identity, which casts the IC as a project imposed by the West aiming to destroy social values. Therefore, the core frame grouping and mobilizing diverse actors is "gender ideology," and they were organized around a "moral panic." The term "gender ideology" is an ideologically counter-framed version of "gender equality" which is also considered as "keying" (Benford & Hunt, 2003, p. 170). Through keying or, as this study named it, ideologically counter-framing, anti-gender groups reframed international norms as "foreign influence," and in this way, they attempted to garner broader public support, conducting a discursive counterattack by presenting the Convention as "subversive," "evil," and "imposed by the West." The gender advocacy movement considers the Convention as a tool to protect women from violence, while the anti-gender group advocated that the IC is a threat to the family. The conservative discourse employed by the anti-IC campaign challenges the claims of gender advocacy groups by putting "family values" and

"moral corruption" discourses to the front. In this way, they represented themselves as the protectors of the moral values of society and the family. Similarly, one news article employed the attack metaphor to indicate that the anti-IC campaign is calling for resistance to protect the existing social structure as a collective moral obligation.<sup>325</sup> Therefore, as a strategic choice, the anti-gender ideology advocates employed religious rhetoric and nationalist discourse to garner broader support.

The gender equality promoted by the gender advocacy movement received two reactions from the anti-gender movement. The first one primarily identified with its anti-LGBTIQ+ stance, opposing the term "sexual orientation" in the IC on the grounds of the claimed contradiction with religion. The second reaction revolves around the family, presented as a value to be protected. This response was developed through nationalist frames and opposes the feminists' criticisms of the family as a patriarchal institution upholding gender oppression. The news articles report a broad spectrum linking women's, family's, society's, and the nation's well-being to one another,<sup>326</sup> with motherhood featuring prominently in the discourse asserting that mothers are the founders of civilization<sup>327</sup> and bestowing responsibility upon women for raising the future generations. This expectation burdens women with the responsibility of transmitting traditional values and holds them accountable for the new generations' acquisition of cultural codes. This forced mission of transferring the cultural codes was legitimized through religious references in the analyzed texts.<sup>328</sup> The connections the anti-gender advocates established between motherhood and future generations are also related to how the nation was discursively constructed; the "woman-mother" metaphor is appropriated to highlight that nation-building is related to the social body's physical and cultural reproduction (Santos & Roque, 2021, p. 46). In this respect, heteronormative patriarchal families are constructed as the basic units of the nation that need to be protected (Santos & Roque, 2021).

As the anti-IC campaign actors established a relation between "women's honor" and "nation's honor" at the discursive level, they opposed the provisions of the IC

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<sup>325</sup> 2020MG13

<sup>326</sup> 2020MG32

<sup>327</sup> 2020MG07

<sup>328</sup> 2020MG07

employing the expression "so-called honor." Nationalist discourses and anti-gender frames intersect, on this issue, which adds a deeper nationalist dimension to the anti-IC position. Therefore, the discriminatory, marginalizing, and generalizing language use reinforces the "us" and "them" distinction by labeling the gender equality advocates as "others." Being a feminist or LGBTIQ+ activist is considered unacceptable and outside of the norm, confronting traditional social values.

The texts also reinforce stigmas of "good women" and "bad women" by referring to the maternal roles of women. Fulfilling duties such as marrying at an early age, not working outside the home, being the person who takes care of the care work at home, and being responsible for raising children are implicitly mentioned as necessary situations for the protection of the family. Women were held primarily responsible for the protection of the family and safeguarding children in order not to let them become defenseless against "negative trends" such as gender equality. Overall, when women fail to fulfill their reasonable "good woman" roles, society is shaken from its foundations, and this discursive theme and framing supports and defends the patriarchal social order existing in Turkish society and the power dynamics on which Turkish society depends.

Fairclough underlines that in CDA, in their analysis some researchers also consider what information is included and omitted (1995, p. 210). Some discursive strategies become obvious when the analyzed news articles, columns, and books are interpreted through this framework. Thus, the discursive choices employed by the anti-gender advocates, such as the dehistoricization of the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movement, present certain ideological reframing practices. Additionally, they reinterpret the IC outside of its VAW context by solely relating it to the LGBTIQ+ movement. Furthermore, they also consider gender equality claims as "non-religious." All these discursive practices are manifestations of "ideological counter (re)framing" or "de-contextualization," i.e., "taking meanings out of their contexts" (Fairclough, 2006, p. 26).

By applying these discursive strategies and collaborating with the political parties who hold governmental authority, the anti-gender movement forces the gender advocacy movement into a legitimacy crisis in ideological contestation. Moreover, the existing

political opportunity structures favor the anti-gender movement by amplifying their claims. However, there is also a political threat structure for the gender advocacy movement, limiting and criminalizing its rhetoric and demands, and within this context, the gender advocacy movement is constructed as "representative of foreign ideologies" while ignoring the grassroots support behind this movement. Furthermore, the feminist movement is represented as aligned with foreign interests and has been accused of co-opting transnational legal mechanisms to impose its own agenda.<sup>329</sup>

When the diverse action repertoires of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign are evaluated, we observe the utilization of social media campaigns, press releases, street protests, and publishing reports to uncover the more tacit agendas of the IC. For instance, one of the news articles mentioned the hashtag campaign organized on social media through the hashtags "#BeforeFamilyCollapses" and "#AbolishIstanbulConvention."<sup>330</sup> During the anti-IC campaign, conservative groups also utilized online channels effectively through social media campaigns (Eslen-Ziya, 2022). As a countercampaign, the groups in the anti-IC campaign reframed the pro-IC campaigns' hashtags to initiate their own social media campaign: for instance, they launched an online campaign utilizing the hashtag *#IstanbulSözlesmesiOldurur* (the Istanbul Convention kills) in response to the protest hashtag *#IstanbulSözlesmesiYasatir* (the Istanbul Convention saves lives).

These repertoires utilized by the anti-IC campaign also created opportunities for enhancing member participation and further mobilizing the movement. To advocate for the anti-IC campaign, the anti-gender movement established a platform, "Istanbul Convention Working Platform," to unify diverse actors. This platform served to unify the collective efforts of the anti-gender advocates, and under this platform, anti-genderists have worked to reveal the "dangers" of the IC. One of the news articles citing this platform argues that this platform launched a petition campaign with the objectives of withdrawal from the Convention and the preparation of a local and national legal regulation to protect the family.<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> 2020YA21

<sup>330</sup> 2020MG62

<sup>331</sup> 2020MG84

Interestingly, some news articles established a relation between the Hagia Sophia and the IC: the example of the conversion of the historic Hagia Sophia to a museum in 1934 and subsequent reconversion to a mosque in 2020 is embraced as a move associated with the withdrawal discussions that emerged in 2020. Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the IC is not interpreted as an event isolated from other political transformations; on the contrary, a news report emphasized that the withdrawal from the IC is just the beginning of similar political decisions.<sup>332</sup> In the analyzed news articles, columns, and books, the readers, the public, and political actors were invited to struggle against the Convention, and one author expressed hope that in the future, anti-gender movements will collaborate more and become an organized and institutionalized transnational force:

Our wish is that the anti-gender movement will gain a sense of community with its common discourse, slogans, banners, and flags, similar to how the feminist and gay movements were organized within a sense of community in previous years.<sup>333</sup>

According to Grzebalska et al. (2017), the opposition to gender and gender equality became the "symbolic glue" in terms of uniting far-right parties and anti-gender groups in Europe. Korolczuk and Graff (2018) noted that this collaboration between different conservative actors is associated with the illiberal turn. These evaluations demonstrate that the IC debates in Türkiye have similar and different aspects to these arguments. A similar collaboration between right-wing political parties and conservative groups can be seen in the case of Türkiye, where there is a collaborative resistance to gender equality. However, when considered in the context of the IC, it is evident that important political figures within the AKP still embrace Law No. 6284, even though it is seriously contested by some groups in the anti-gender movement.

Since the anti-IC campaign targets not only the particular feminist groups but also the civil society activities of Muslim women, it is important to consider the oppression they are subjected to in the process. For example, the HAVLE Women's Association, which describes itself as a Muslim feminist organization, and the government-backed women's group KADEM have also become targets of anti-gender backlash during the IC debates. Although these two organizations have different stances on gender equality

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<sup>332</sup> 2020MG78

<sup>333</sup> B032020, p. 155



and the IC, the anti-IC campaign also accused KADEM of trying to impose Western values by appearing to be Muslim (Kütük-Kuriş, 2022). These opposing reactions forced KADEM to withdraw its support for the Convention. The fact that KADEM first supported the Convention and then had to withdraw its support during the IC discussions shows that this organization maintains an ambiguous position in terms of women's rights activism (Günay-Erkol & Sünbülüoğlu, 2024). Highlighting a similar point, Kütük-Kuriş commented that: "Islamist women do not always choose to defend gender interests if it means withdrawing from their movements' larger political interests" (2022, p. 1). Concerning this point, one of the news articles published in *Milli Gazete* reporting President Erdoğan's visit to KADEM, Erdoğan is quoted as saying, "KADEM is very important in terms of explaining our perspective on women not only to Türkiye but to the world." The text then reminds the readers that KADEM once supported the IC and still advocated for Law No. 6284.<sup>334</sup>

KADEM's efforts to popularize the concept of gender justice to replace gender equality were also criticized by anti-gender advocates. An author argued that KADEM's efforts to popularize gender justice contributed to the strengthening of gender equality. According to the author, the concept of gender justice has no equivalent in society. The author argues that justice cannot be considered separately from legal equality and that even when the concept of gender is used together with the concept of justice, it evokes gender equality.<sup>335</sup> Similarly, it was observed that the concept of "gender justice" was not employed in the news items analyzed.

According to Kováts, defining anti-gender movements as "the patriarchy/heteronormativity fighting back" is a reductive approach (2018, p. 9). Kováts (2018) notes that these groups should not be understood as just conservative groups opposing "gender ideology," considering the diversity of the actors within these movements and their transnational and national collaborations. Kováts' caution against approaching these movements solely as backlash is important, as the findings of the CDA of this study reveal that the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye exhibit backlash traits. When the news articles, columns, and books examined thus far are evaluated in general, it is seen that some authors follow academic studies

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<sup>334</sup> 2021MG36

<sup>335</sup> B032020, p. 62

written in both Turkish and foreign languages in the field of gender studies and refer to them in their texts. In addition, it has been observed that they read the reports of CSOs on gender equality, and it has become evident that their main objective is to oppose what gender advocacy groups consider to be progressive steps. In this respect, they also aim to prevent policy steps from being taken or likely to be taken on women's and LGBTIQ+ rights. By closely following the work done by gender equality advocates in academia and civil society, they develop their blueprints for the issues they want to change.

## **6.5. Conclusions**

CDA conducted in this study reveals the relationship between language, social power, ideology, and social change in the case of the IC debates. In the analyzed news articles, columns, and books, the IC was criticized as a product of "gender ideology," with the authors calling for a collaborative campaign against the IC to protect the traditional family against threats coming from the Convention. This Chapter argues that the anti-IC campaign revolves around the themes of polarization, normative judgments, nationalist ideals, masculinist restoration, and moral panic. In response to the policy changes required by the Convention, the emphasis on the preservation of traditional values was presented as imperative in the news articles. Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC while retaining Law No. 6284 is a paradox, which further proves that government, though defending its decision to withdraw from the IC, has not openly declared an abandonment of the gender mainstreaming perspective. Future policymaking processes regarding gender equality will be affected by the political opportunity structures that are likely to change. As will be discussed in the next section, restrictive and exclusionary practices against progressive civil society organizations continue. The fact that these organizations have not been completely closed down and their activities have not been banned shows that gender equality policies in Türkiye can change; thus, gender equality policies in Türkiye remain a domestic political maneuver.

## CHAPTER 7

### 7. COUNTERING THE GENDER BACKLASH AND STANDING UP FOR THE CONVENTION: FEMINIST ACTORS UNDER COUNTERMOVEMENT THREATS AND MOVEMENT CONSTRAINTS

#### 7.1. Introduction

As elaborated throughout the preceding chapters of this dissertation, the assault of anti-gender countermovements on gender equality advocacy has had a regressive impact on policies against GBV due to ideological affinities and organizational ties with right-wing conservative political actors both within and outside of the state. This chapter discusses the impact of the anti-gender alliance on the gender advocacy movement in general, focusing on the effects of the anti-IC campaign threatening to challenge or reverse the rights and mechanisms established to promote gender equality. The first section of the chapter presents the participants' evaluations of the IC and discusses the campaigns organized to defend the Convention. The second section explores the gender advocacy movement's responses to the anti-gender movement. It also examines the participants' evaluations of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye. This section further addresses the transformative aspects of the interaction between them for the gender advocacy movement and reflects on the reasons why the gender advocacy movement has needed to reposition itself in gender politics regarding the contentious issues. Finally, the third section focuses on the possibilities available to gender advocacy actors in their struggle against the threats from the anti-gender movement, addressing their strategies, collaborations, motivations, solidarity, and future projections aimed at maintaining democratic resilience. With its core perspective aligning with the threat perception of anti-gender actors regarding "gender ideology," the IC holds a crucial symbolic importance for both the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement. From the viewpoint of the gender advocacy

movement, the IC is regarded as the most comprehensive and substantial, if not ideal, tool for addressing VAW and domestic violence to date (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Kocabay-Şener et al., 2022; Öziş, 2023). In response, opponents of the Convention adopted a particularly anti-LGBTIQ+ discourse, arguing that the Convention would harm traditional and cultural values and endanger the future of societies (Özkazanç, 2024; Kocabay-Şener et al., 2022; Özdemir-Taştan et al., 2022). This discursive framing has extended ideational support for family mainstreaming policies in Türkiye. Furthermore, the opponents of the IC in Türkiye and their demonization of gender equality provided the state with support in its quest for hegemonic dominance over women's issues by mainstreaming an anti-gender paradigm.

This chapter seeks to contribute to the analysis of the contestation between the anti-gender (ideology) and gender (equality) advocacy actors (in the feminist and women's movements) through the IC debates. Specifically, this chapter addresses the second and third research questions of the thesis: "In what ways does this discursive conflict between anti-convention actors and pro-convention actors, which had previously been able to collaborate with the state on gender equality, represent an ideological contestation over gender?" Furthermore "what impact has this contestation had on the activism of gender equality advocates, both emotionally and strategically, as they continued their struggle against gender-conservative policies and anti-gender perspectives following the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?" Thus, this chapter presents a discussion on the effects of anti-gender actors' opposition and hostile discourses towards the gender equality advocacy actors (i.e., feminist activists<sup>336</sup>) in Türkiye as well as reflecting on the process of Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC.

As explained in this study, anti-gender actors could easily "demonize" the concept of gender and gender advocacy. They have gained support from their alliances with right-wing populist parties and this strategic alliance has caused gender advocacy to be perceived as an "enemy of the people" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022, p. 4). Through discourses on "genderism" and "gender ideology," anti-gender ideology advocates aim

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<sup>336</sup> All participants in this study identified themselves as feminist activists.

to undermine the credibility of the feminist movement and gender scholars by presenting their activities as "threatening" (Kováts, 2018).

The relevant literature demonstrates that pro-IC actors have remained on the defensive side without completely overhauling their struggles or weakening their emotional state and the morale needed to resist regressive agendas (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). Despite the locally distinct features and dynamics of this capacity for resistance against anti-gender actors, the gender advocacy front is likely to counter these threats while relying on its accumulated legacy, mobilization capacity, and social justice praxis, which have received transnational support. Considering this, the recent scholarship has focused on the resilience and countering activities of (pro-) feminist actors in the broader struggle for democracy with particular attention to their strategic configurations, narratives, responses, and the emotional aspects of their struggle, the recent work addressed this countering issue (Çağatay et al., 2023; Kantola & Lombardo, 2024).

As briefly explained in Chapter 4, which presented this study's research procedure, the participants, as individual activists within the gender advocacy movement, all defined themselves as feminist activists. In general, the participants elaborated on issues such as the protection and expansion of the human rights of women and girls, reproductive rights, LGBTIQ+ rights, and the conducting of research and academic studies in the field of gender. Therefore, their work spans a wide range of activities, including combatting VAW and GBV, monitoring government activities, and developing policy recommendations, and creating inclusive language to combat hate speech. The participants are accordingly all involved in the gender advocacy movement, albeit with varying focuses. They have all participated in the pro-IC campaign by joining protests, filing lawsuits for the IC, and supporting the IC on social media.

As discussed in the analysis presented in Chapter 5, anti-gender advocates describe the gender advocacy movement as a homogeneous entity. News analysis revealed that anti-gender advocates differentiate the women's movement from the feminist movement and the LGBTIQ+ movement. Considering the existence of conservative women's associations, they particularly target the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements in their discriminatory discourse. The theoretical expectation of this study was

therefore held that the gender advocacy movement, being confronted with a threat from the anti-gender movement, was likely to have been shaped by a sense of urgency for developing solidarity and strategies to maintain the synergy of the decades long struggle for gender issues to defend the IC. It was also assumed that, if necessary, the gender advocacy movement would be likely to re-contextualize the struggle ahead to preserve legal gains. Accordingly, the following analysis taps into the perceptions, discourses, and the narratives of activists within the gender equality advocacy movement surrounding the IC in the aftermath of Türkiye's withdrawal. Perceptions regarding their advocacy work and involvement in combatting VAW, strategies to counter hostility towards feminism, and the gender equality agenda are discussed in this chapter in light of findings from interviews and with reference to reports from associations and solidarity networks.

This analysis focuses on the effects on the gender advocacy movement of ideological contestation, polarizing rhetoric, and misinformation campaigns conducted by anti-gender actors in collaboration with the conservative government. The components of the gender equality movement are discussed, drawing on the experiences of participants, before presenting the campaigns and strategies developed by the gender advocacy movement against the growing trend of anti-genderism. The ways in which feminist activists view the anti-gender movement are then evaluated and, in that context, the importance of the IC as an area of ideological struggle is discussed. Finally, the strategies adopted, and the campaigns launched by the gender advocacy movement in response to the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign are reviewed. The emotional and affective dimensions of a new repertoire of contention (i.e., silent struggle: fear vs. solidarity; despair or hope) and the associated struggles are also explored in this chapter to present a clear picture of the impact of the countermovement on feminist activists.

## **7.2. Assessments of Gender Equality Advocacy Actors on the Struggle and the Scope of Activism**

Among those involved in the gender advocacy movement and identifying themselves as feminist activists, the IC was viewed as a "golden standard" convention. It was

regarded as a comprehensive legal tool developed based on women's lived experiences through the contributions of activists. Additionally, the Convention was important for placing responsibilities and duties on the state in preventing and combating VAW. As one respondent explained: "The Istanbul Convention has the highest standards in combating VAW. The Convention clearly informs states about their responsibilities regarding what they must do before, during, and after VAW" (P8).

One of the factors shaping the IC's identity as a special legal tool is that the views of the activists were considered during its drafting process of the Convention. Regarding this issue, one participant stated the following: "States don't just say, 'Let's protect women from this and that.' There are always civil movements that put this on the state's agenda" (P1). Another respondent, P8, from the Mor Cati, which has held its Women's Shelters and Solidarity Centers Congress annually since 1998, stated that such congresses were effective in the emergence of the IC. According to P8, these congresses, which emerged with the slogan "A World Without Shelters," have presented outputs to guide public authorities in combating violence due to their direct focus on VAW. Thus, the final declarations they published after each congress were used as informative sources for drafting the IC.

Although the struggles of feminists and the women's movement were influential in shaping the IC, the AKP's vision at that time importantly allowed Türkiye to be a leading member among other Council of Europe countries. The ruling against Türkiye by the European Court of Human Rights for failing to prevent domestic violence in the infamous Opuz case (2009) particularly served as a catalyst for the development of the IC. The AKP government's motivation to present Türkiye as a country fighting VAW and domestic violence in the international arena has led to its leadership in the emergence of the IC. In this regard, while reflecting back on those times, the participants mentioned that back then, they were able to communicate with former minister Fatma Şahin then.<sup>337</sup> In that way, they were able to bring a significant portion

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<sup>337</sup> Fatma Şahin served as Minister of Family and Social Policies during the IC's preparation process. She was often cited by this study's participants as an important figure who made significant contributions to the development of gender equality policies within the AKP. A 2011 report on the KAOS-GL website reported that Şahin, serving as Minister of Family and Social Policies at the time, stated that she would not marginalize the LGBTIQ+ community: "As a result, there is such a reality, and I believe that as a minister of this country, I must help implement measures that will protect their

of their views, if not all, into the government's agenda. Furthermore, a participant from KA-DER (P20) stated that both women's associations and LGBTIQ+ organizations worked to convey their proposals during the preparation of Law No. 6284. Therefore, the gender advocacy movement played an active role in preparing of Law No. 6284. These collaborative struggles are similar to the campaigns launched for the drafting of the new Criminal Code of 2004, in which a coalition of women's rights advocacy groups successfully lobbied Parliament.

Regarding the significance of the IC, as an issue addressed in the semi-structured interviews, respondent P2 stated that the IC represented "the most advanced level reached so far in terms of women's human rights." By her assessment, the IC provides guidance and an effective protective shield for women who are subjected to VAW by considering their actual needs. P4 stated that the IC's approach to domestic violence reframed it as not merely a "domestic matter." Instead, according to P4, the Convention aimed to ensure that the state takes responsibility for preventing VAW, including domestic violence. Similarly, P6 claimed that the Convention imposed responsibilities on the state and, at the same time, enhanced its effectiveness as a legal tool by establishing a monitoring mechanism. According to P6, through GREVIO, the Convention aimed to guarantee that states would follow the highest standards in combating VAW.

While discussing the significance of the IC, P10 underlined the transnational aspects of the Convention, noting that it provides a standardized vision for combating VAW. In her words, "I do not believe that the Convention has a language or form that dictates and imposes conditions like the Civil or Penal Code. Rather, it defined an ideal and proposed this ideal as a responsibility to all states" (P10). Another participant, while elaborating on its transnational and unifying aspects, noted that "the IC emerged through the slogan of a non-violent Europe, which unites countries" (P12). Some respondents argued that the most effective dimension of the Convention is its detailed provisions: "It provides a comprehensive roadmap for what institutions need to do to combat violence in the short and long term" (P11). Similarly, another participant noted that the Convention is historically important as it was "the first transnational

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right to life and make their lives easier without discriminating them." See <https://kaosgl.org/haber/bakan-sahin-lsqwoescinselleri-otekilestirmecegizrsquo>



convention to address patriarchy" (P14). Likewise, according to P20, the Convention is a significant legal text because "it places inequality at the root of violence" (P20).

Regarding the denunciation of the IC by its opponents, which led to the withdrawal decree, the participants said they considered Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC as a turning point in gender equality policies and politics. According to P9, this withdrawal also marked a crucial shift in the AKP's policy framework on VAW (P9). With the withdrawal decision, the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye achieved a significant milestone in politicizing the content of the IC. The anti-gender movement viewed this outcome as a success.<sup>338</sup> However, the withdrawal decision also reflected a setback regarding transnational standards such as the rights of women and girls and gender equality (Güneş & Ezikoğlu, 2022).

According to P1, Türkiye's withdrawal from the Convention was a "misogynistic move." Similarly, P3 characterized it as a "dismantled or falling wall." This metaphor of a "falling wall" was employed by both anti-gender movement actors and gender equality advocates while referring to the IC. Anti-gender groups used the metaphor to suggest that the IC was a starting point. According to them, similar to falling dominoes, the withdrawal decision would trigger other actions to "combat gender ideology." On the other hand, feminist activists also attributed symbolic meaning to the Convention by comparing it to a collapsing wall to imply the loss of rights. "But withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention is a symbol... A collapsing wall... So now everything can be taken away from us" (P3).

The legal regulations that participants considered under threat of revocation or withdrawal, included the CEDAW, domestic violence legislation (Law No. 6284), the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (i.e., the Lanzarote Convention), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). According to P1, the decision to withdraw from the IC paved the way for other transnational agreements to be cancelled: "When you eliminate the Convention, the protection of the law [No. 6284] is at risk because the law becomes dysfunctional (...) They started asking, 'Why is Lanzarote needed?' They are trying to create such a perception. There may be losses

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<sup>338</sup> See Chapter 6 for further details

of rights" (P1). As discussed in Chapter 6, these participants were correct to think that other international agreements were also at risk. In fact, some anti-gender advocates have openly argued that these agreements should also be canceled or revoked.

When the participants were asked to evaluate Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the IC, they described the situation as "the weakening of the protective shield" (P1), "the removal of their means of defense" (P3), "the weakening of women" (P8), "the punishment of feminists for refusing to leave LGBTIQ+ individuals behind" (P9), "a decision that did not reflect society's will, yet everyone remained silent" (P12), "the deterioration of the relationship between civil society and politics" (P19), and "Türkiye's retreat from gender equality" (P20).

Considering their assessment of the withdrawal decision, this study argues that the participants contextualized their support for the IC within an "injustice frame" (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). Feminist activists considered the withdrawal from the IC as unjust. When their assessments are interpreted through diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing, it reveals the tripartite framework of injustice is revealed (Benford & Snow, 2000). Gender equality advocates argued that the decision to withdraw was influenced by a coalition of the government and the anti-gender movement. In response, activists have proposed a new strategy for their collective movements to increase their solidarity in ways that will ensure long-term democratic resilience.

The injustice frame highlights the importance of mobilizing gender advocacy in the wake of the withdrawal. This collectively shared frame helped raise awareness of the importance of preserving the gains made through cumulative struggles against VAW and increased participation in the movement supporting the IC. Street protests, shaped by participation in the Turkish Council of State (*Danıştay*) hearings opened in defense of the Convention, were effective in uniting groups that supported the Convention and in producing common discourses. Commenting on this critical momentum that was effective in taking determined action, one of the participants stated the following:

[Feminists] really didn't want to leave anyone behind. Maybe the relevant article in the Convention could be changed and negotiated. Sexual orientation could be redefined through the family, for example. But women didn't want to

compromise on this issue. One of the main points of the opposition was the criminalization of LGBTI+ individuals (P9).

Another participant offered similar assessment by claiming that "Although it is difficult to constantly be on the defensive side and fight for what has been taken from us, defending the Istanbul Convention may have positively impacted societal opposition by igniting a movement" (P3). Participants argued that the debates over the withdrawal from the IC served to increase the Convention's popularity. Accordingly, they stated that the effort to come together and defend the IC in the face of the anti-IC campaign was a new area of solidarity created by different social groups coming together. The debates surrounding the IC thus allowed both its supporters and detractors to unite. Strengthening solidarity against anti-gender movements is similarly evident in studies examining gender advocacy movements in Europe (Gwiazda & Minkova, 2023).

Many participants drew a clear connection between the Convention and opportunities that empower women in the fight against violence. Accordingly, they stated that women were more able to voice their concerns about violence during the period when the Convention was in force.

The Convention gave us strength; it empowered women. That's why it was so important. When women applied to Mor Çatı, visited the police station, or went to the Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM), they could confidently say, 'No, there is the Istanbul Convention. I have the right to demand this. It is your duty to provide it.' This was a critical and empowering environment where women could use strong expressions (P8).

The emphasis on women's empowerment in the IC<sup>339</sup> has led opponents of the Convention to reinterpret it from the perspective of gender essentialism. This perspective, called gender essentialism, rejects criticisms based on gender equality by arguing that women and men have different given roles determined by biological sex (Skewes et al., 2018). Therefore, as Freedon (1996) explained in the context of his morphological approach on ideologies aiming to make contested concepts decontested, stabilized meanings can be observed in the contestation over the IC.

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<sup>339</sup> "Article 6 – Gender-sensitive policies: Parties shall undertake to include a gender perspective in the implementation and evaluation of the impact of the provisions of this Convention and to promote and effectively implement policies of equality between women and men and the empowerment of women" (Council of Europe, 2011).

While gender equality is interpreted in relation to the women's rights for the gender advocacy movement, anti-gender groups interpreted it as a threat to the family and traditional roles. The example of the IC debates in Türkiye thus demonstrates how these two movements differently highlight issues and solutions differently through contentious frames (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Three participants of this study (P3, P12, and P13) were legal professionals working as lawyers. They were involved in legal efforts to defend the Convention. At the same time, these participants also wrote complaints directly referring to the IC and prepared case files using Law No. 6284. For example, P12 stated that in her case files, she frequently referred to the IC and Law No. 6284 but never to the CEDAW. Since the primary focus of the CEDAW is discrimination, it does not have a framework focuses directly relevant to VAW and domestic violence. Therefore, the lawyer-activists who participated in this study did not think that Türkiye's being a CEDAW signatory is a factor that directly empowers women in areas of VAW or domestic violence. P3 stated that the IC was a legal regulation that she used in her case files during the period in which it was in force. However, according to P3, even while the IC was in force, it was not sufficiently known or used by lawyers. She elaborated on this as follows: "It is said that the Istanbul Convention became popular after the withdrawal. This is indeed true. Before that, many judges had either not heard of the convention or were resistant to applying it" (P3). Another participant, P12, who has previously served as president of the Women's Rights Unit of the Ankara Bar Association, stated that during her presidency, the unit tried to organize activities on gender equality targeting lawyers. Emphasizing the distinction between the IC and other legal regulations, P12 said the following, "I was referring to the Istanbul Convention in a sexual assault case in criminal proceedings. I was emphasizing that we cannot discuss a person's previous sexual history in sexual assault cases. I was stating that there is a clear prohibition on this in the Istanbul Convention" (P12). This participant also stated that they worked to ensure that other lawyers who did not have sufficient knowledge of the Convention were properly informed by referring to the relevant provisions of the Convention during the trials: "We benefited greatly from the Istanbul Convention, especially in sexual assault cases. We even informed the judge and prosecutor about this issue. They

asked for permission to ask certain questions in court. ... We could see that they were starting to hesitate to question certain issues" (P12), she explained.

As a result of the reactions from the opposition, and particularly reactions from feminists, the government and especially President Erdoğan announced that Türkiye would continue to take a determined stance against VAW. The fact that Law No. 6284 remains in force was offered as evidence of this determination. This law, which the anti-gender movement considers to be an extension of "gender ideology" along with the IC, continues to remain in force despite the reactions of its opponents and the AKP openly declares its support for this law, indicating cracks within the anti-gender movement. This suggests that not all groups within the anti-gender coalition have fully aligned their frameworks on all issues related to VAW.

Therefore, withdrawal from the IC did not necessarily mean that Law No. 6284 would be repealed. However, it did mean that there would be serious setbacks in its implementation. According to the participants of this study, after Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC, the periods specified for restraining orders as issued under Law No. 6284 were shortened. Furthermore, although it is clearly stated in the law that evidence cannot be sought in relevant cases, evidence began to be pursued. "For example, when the protection measures based on Law No. 6284 were implemented, the maximum period was six months. However, now judges decide on periods such as one month or three months in their verdicts" (P3), she explained. Another participant stated the following: "Previously, women were able to get a restraining order for six months when they first applied. However, this period has gradually shortened. Now we have observed a shift toward ineffective decisions ranging from 24 to 32 hours" (P10).

Many of this study's participants in this study emphasized that although Türkiye has withdrawn from the IC, there are still legal regulations to ensure that preventive and protective measures are maintained regarding VAW and GBV. Accordingly, they claimed that legal instruments, primarily Law No. 6284 and the relevant provisions of the Turkish Penal Code, are still available, but there are difficulties in their effective implementation. They also criticized the sexist practices that embolden male perpetrators, such as the "good conduct discount" and "unjust provocation discount" that continue to be applied in VAW and GBV cases. Although Law No. 6284 remains

in force, the abandonment of the gender equality paradigm and the country's withdrawal from the IC indicate that the interpretation of that law has changed. This paradigm shift, rooted in the adoption of a pro-family agenda has led to the curbing of gender equality discussions and the proliferation of anti-gender discourses. The alliance formed by state actors and anti-gender groups has thus created an "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022) that has strengthened the ties between the anti-gender movement and the right-wing groups. A similar opportunistic synergy was instrumental in establishing a state-controlled "alternative civil society" in Hungary instead of an independent civil society (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022). In this way, right-wing populist governments keep civil society participation on gender issues open for certain groups while excluding others through "selective closure" (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021). In other words, these governments determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the groups they will work with as they reorganize civic space (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021).

In Türkiye, these exclusion and inclusion criteria are being shaped precisely through the ideological contestation that this study explores. While feminists and LGBTIQ+ activists advocating gender equality are excluded, the state continues to collaborate, albeit limitedly, with conservative women's associations and some feminist groups focused on VAW, as long as they focus solely on VAW. However, while the Convention was in force, collaboration between the government and civil society was required in accordance with the Convention's provisions. The IC was thus structured to guide right-wing governments in protecting democratic civil society and developing opportunities for collaboration. In this context, negative reactions to the Convention have been considered indicators of democratic backsliding (Krizsán et al., 2024), as is evident in the example of the anti-IC campaign and withdrawal decision in Türkiye.

One of the most important dimensions of the IC is that it approaches the fight against violence with a holistic perspective. The Convention addresses this issue in its policy path with four basic objectives: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and co-ordinated Policies, or the "four Ps" (IC, Art. 1-a). Thus, while the Convention aims to ensure that the efforts to combat violence are effective and comprehensive, it also clearly defines the responsibilities of the actors involved in this fight and provides them with a road map. In addition, the progress made by countries in combating VAW and domestic

violence was noted in monitoring reports prepared for each country by the GREVIO Committee with the aim of facilitating continuous improvements. In their interviews, the participants of the present study emphasized that one strength of the Convention is that it allows ratifying countries to improve their practices by following each other's experiences. In the words of P10, "not only can you think of improvements in your judicial system, but you can also follow the path that other countries have taken. There may be examples of policies that you can integrate into your own policy" (P10). According to feminist activists, GREVIO, has a central role in sharing experiences and disseminating best practices.

However, as described in previous chapters, GREVIO was criticized by anti-gender actors and referred to as one of the tools of "foreign agents" in the conservative media via securitization discourse. Some of the participants of this study stated that the term sexual orientation in the Convention was seized upon by its opponents as justification of the AKP's decision to withdraw from the IC. However, according to the participants, the decision to withdraw would still have been made even if the Convention had focused solely on women. According to these participants, the main issue at hand was the rejection of the specific efforts mandated by the IC. They argued that the Convention had attracted reactions because it was a transnational mechanism that challenged patriarchal power imbalances and gender norms. From this perspective, the fact that a securitization discourse developed against the IC is based on claims of protecting the "'pure' nation" from "'destructive' effects" (Ünal, 2023, p. 3) signifies that the rejection of transnational standards on VAW occurred within a nationalist and anti-globalization framework.

Under the guise of protecting the right to sovereignty, illiberal political actors emerged to produce "fears and anxieties around gender" in society (Ünal, 2023, p. 2). This securitization discourse has labeled groups advocating the IC as "threats to security," thereby marginalizing the activism of the gender advocacy movement. In Hungary and Poland, gender conservative backlash campaigns have threatened activism on gender equality and minority rights, marginalizing women's rights activists in the political arenas. At the same time, conservative and anti-gender organizations gained increased support and visibility (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 11). Similarly, this dissertation argues that the alliance of the right-wing populist AKP government and anti-gender

movements in Türkiye has forced the civil society actors advocating gender equality into a forced retreat.

### **7.3. Confronting Anti-Gender Movements: An Ongoing Challenge**

This section examines the impact of the discursive contestation between anti- and pro-IC campaigns on actors of the gender advocacy movement actors during and after the withdrawal debates. The analysis follows a comparative framework consisting of three stages: macro, meso, and micro. With reference to the analysis in Chapter 5, the macro-level analysis examines how the gender advocacy movement has evaluated the anti-gender movement, addressing key actors and their discourses. The anti-gender movement is not seen as a phenomenon specific to Türkiye but rather as a global campaign that is significantly influenced by the anti-gender ideology movements in Poland and Hungary. Thus, activists have interpreted the anti-gender movement in Türkiye as a localized version of the global conservative anti-gender wave. In this context, the macro-level evaluations of the gender advocacy movement in this study primarily focus more on their evaluations of the power of anti-gender movements as a countermovements within politics.

On the meso level, the ways in which the two movements have confronted each other are analyzed in the context of the IC debates. This analysis particularly focuses on how the anti-gender movement as a countermovement poses a threat to feminist gains. This is illustrated through the experiences of activists. As described above, it is clear that the anti-gender movement in Türkiye cannot be categorized as solely a reactionary movement or a countermovement that opposes only feminist advancements. However, the existence of a countermovement is discussed here in the context of the IC debates. In the meso-analysis stage, the collective action repertoire of the gender advocacy movement, referred to as "silent struggle," and the activist strategies described as "cautious activism," updated in response to gender opposition, are examined. Finally, the micro-level analysis foregrounds the personal experiences of feminist activists. Thus, this analysis addresses "activist anxieties" stemming from potential restrictive measures targeting civil society, security concerns, the limitation of financial resources, and the marginalization of their activism.



When asked to define the anti-gender movement and identify its participants and prominent discourses, participants provided examples both from Türkiye and around the world while also making reference to their personal experiences with activism. According to the participants, the actors involved in anti-gender movements include the following: "people who derive all their references about life from belief systems" (P1), "advocates of political Islam" (P2, P4), "sects, religious communities, or brotherhoods" (P19), "organizations such as the divorced fathers' association and alimony victims" (P1, P15), "political parties that oppose the AKP in other areas but align on anti-gender sentiments" (P2), "opponents of abortion" (P5, P11, P15), "anti-feminists" (P5), "everyone who supports anti-LGBTI positions" (P11, P15), "believers in conspiracy theories" (P5), "anti-alimony groups" (P6, P9), "gender-blind family associations" (P6), "men who claim to be victims" (P12, P15), "right-wing media outlets" (P12), "all men who seek to protect their sphere of power" (P13), "the Incell movement" (P13), "a male solidarity aimed at intimidating women" (P19), and "those who assert they are victims of early marriage" (P20).

Some participants, such as P4 and P7, expanded the definition of these movements by mentioning trans-exclusionary feminists, who might not have been considered as actors of the anti-gender movement in the first assessment but who, according to participants, have solidified the anti-gender position with their discourse, as actors in the anti-gender movement. This observation expands the understanding of the actors that constitutes anti-gender movements. Furthermore, P9, drew attention to the fact that anti-gender movements have diverse and multifaceted structures. While P9 acknowledged that these movements are gender-focused, she also emphasized their connections to issues such as racism, hostility toward immigrants, and class issues. These different assessments by the participants regarding the actors of anti-gender movements show that feminist activists recognize that these movements operate as multi-actor alliances. This interpretation resonates with previous research that argues that discursive pluralism within anti-gender movements leads those movements to associate multiple issues with "gender ideology" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021).

All of the participants in this study had difficulty providing a specific timeline while answering the question of when they first encountered the concepts of anti-gender,

anti-genderism, or the anti-gender movement. Most said that they became aware of these concepts relatively recently, within the last three or four years. The majority indicated that their initial assessments of anti-gender movements emerged during the IC discussions. For instance, P14 stated that she first heard about these movements in 2018 as a result of the activities of anti-gender groups in Hungary. P20 explained that she had been aware of the existence of an anti-gender voices criticizing gender mainstreaming since the Beijing Conference in 1995, but she also emphasized that those voices did not gain enough power to influence policy decisions until recently and that their influence and visibility had increased in recent years. Since the participants' encounters with anti-gender movements and related concepts were relatively recent, it was observed some participants avoided long-term analyses of the impact of these movements and emphasized the novelty of these movements while evaluating their impact.

Gender has been the central theme around which anti-gender movements have organized their discourses in order to attack and politicize gender advocacy and the IC. To further explore this issue, participants were asked to define the concept of "gender" during in-depth interviews. Various issues arose during these discussions, including gender equality, gender identity, and gender roles. None of the participants defined gender as a category of analysis or a theoretical concept; instead, many of them tried to explain it through their own lived experiences, thus defining gender in a variety of ways: "the fact that no one feels advantaged or disadvantaged when looking at another" (P10), "a concept that encompasses everything a person can think of, such as sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression" (P11), "norms imposed by society" (P12), "social roles that attempt to define us" (P13), "a constructed phenomenon or process" (P14), "the practice of labeling based on individuals' appearances, feelings, thoughts, and lifestyles" (P15), "something that includes every individual in society; equality" (P16), "women and men being equal in society" (P19), and "a concept that is culturally taught and describes various femininities and masculinities" (P20). These definitions show that the participants understood gender as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon based on their own life experiences.

Participants who acknowledged the difficulty of defining gender in these interviews stated that gender is a concept frequently discussed among themselves but that they had not previously felt the need to describe it in precise terms and explain it to each other. This shows that the meanings attributed to the concept of gender by feminist activists may differ and that some initial understandings are not shared by all actors in the gender advocacy movement. In fact, the ways in which activists define gender reflects the underlying motivations that encourage them to engage in activism within this movement. It is clear that the concept of gender is subjected to different formulations depending on the ideological perspectives of the actors. In the context of policymaking, "different types of gender knowledges can exist simultaneously, and even compete with each other" (Korolczuk, 2020b, p. 695). In the case of Türkiye, participants stated that until then, they had taken the concept of gender as a given. However, they also explained that they had previously taken the concept in a context separate from their practical engagement with gender inequalities. In the words of one participant:

Your question made me think that we have always ignored the concept of gender. I think we have never really had in-depth conversations about it. We have never really questioned what we do or do not understand about it or whether we are really at the same table on gender (P14).

This question was added to the interviews at a later stage because it was determined that the anti-gender movement in Türkiye has created a counter-discourse on the concept of gender and has often reinterpreted the concept by removing it from its original context. Therefore, to support the findings of this dissertation based on the discourses of the anti-gender movement, it was necessary to ask actors of the gender advocacy movement to define their understanding of the concept of gender as a fundamental topic in their contestation. Meanwhile, in striking contrast to the participating feminist activists, it was seen that the anti-gender movement offered a more precise and clear definition of the "culprit" of gender. They denounced gender as a "project or ideology" focused on "degendering."

On the other hand, there was no single and rigid definition of gender among activists advocating gender equality. This difference may be attributed to the fact that gender equality activists define the concept based on their own individual experiences or

diversified areas of struggle while the anti-gender movement interprets the concept of gender as being "against *fitrat*" or humankind's "innate nature" according to Islam and re-labels it as "gender ideology." As noted earlier, the "gender ideology" discourse served as a frame to mobilize conservative segments of society during the anti-IC campaign. Thus, this "disagreement" between two opposing groups on the concept of gender is actually a manifestation of a much broader ideological contestation (Fairclough, 2001; Freedden, 1996).

The political and ideological contestation over the concept of gender defines the ongoing conflict between gender advocacy, which seeks to strengthen its resistance to the conservative "masculinist restoration" (Kandiyoti, 2016), and the anti-gender movement, which seeks to challenge gender advocacy. This ideological conflict forces the gender advocacy movement to reposition itself in the political arena and increase its resilience to protect its gains and prevent further losses on issues such as GBV policies, women's and LGBTIQ+ rights, and abortion rights. Increasing anti-gender backlash is prompting gender advocacy movements to build new solidarity networks to strengthen their capacity and resilience to resist.

### **7.3.1. Resorting to a Defensive Feminist Retreat: A "Silent Struggle" in the Making**

The meso-level analysis presented in this section focuses on the IC debate and examines the conflicting frames of the two opposing groups, this time through the lens of the gender advocacy movement. It is argued here that the gender advocacy movement has been compelled to a discursive and spatial retreat due to a forced introvert(ed) turn. In this context, the "silencing" effect of rising anti-genderism on the gender advocacy movement is examined. However, it is argued that this silencing does not mean disempowerment, rather, it represents a new contentious repertoire with a silent struggle that reinforces resistance and resilience.

As seen in the analysis of the previous chapter, issues related to Türkiye's withdrawal from the Convention began appearing on the agenda in 2019. However, the actual discussions and campaigns regarding withdrawal from the IC started in 2020. Consequently, 2020 was also the year in which the pro-IC campaign emerged. The

leading actors of the pro-IC campaign are included feminists, LGBTIQ+ individuals, and women's organizations.<sup>340</sup> Groups that were active in the preparation, signing, and implementation of the Convention in Türkiye were also active in organizing the pro-IC campaign during the withdrawal discussions. The Istanbul Convention Türkiye Monitoring Platform, established on December 12, 2014, was created with the participation of independent women and LGBTIQ+ organizations.<sup>341</sup> In its first year, the group's work focused on amending domestic law in accordance with the IC, as required by Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution. At the same time, it focused on campaigning for a representative from the Turkish women's movement to be involved in the GREVIO Committee.

However, members of this platform claimed that they were not invited to join the committee responsible for selecting a GREVIO representative during this process and they published a statement titled "Women and LGBTI Organizations Are Excluded from the Council of Europe Convention on Violence!" on December 23, 2014. In that statement, the most discussed issue at the time was the exclusion of independent organizations from the selection board while pro-government organizations continued to be on the board.<sup>342</sup> As can be seen from this example, the decline in collaboration between the government and independent civil society is not a new occurrence. Participants emphasized that the most surprising aspect of Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the Convention was its suddenness. They stated that the issue had been brought up by conservative media and right-wing politicians from time to time since 2019. Therefore, they recognized that the possibility of a withdrawal decision was on their agenda.

However, they described themselves as being shocked because the withdrawal decision was announced unexpectedly by a presidential decree in the middle of the night. However, Türkiye's withdrawal from the Convention was the culmination of a

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<sup>340</sup> The "Implement the Istanbul Convention Campaign Group" was organized to carry out intensive campaign activities, especially in Istanbul in July 2020. See <https://morbulten.kadinininsanhaklari.org/istanbul-sozlesmesi-bizim-haklarimizdan-da-hayatlarimizdan-da-vazgecmiyoruz/>

<sup>341</sup> Istanbul Convention Türkiye Monitoring Platform Member List, [https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/29-01-2015\\_istanbul-sozlesmesi-izleme-platform-uyeleri-Istanbul-Sozlesmesi.pdf](https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/29-01-2015_istanbul-sozlesmesi-izleme-platform-uyeleri-Istanbul-Sozlesmesi.pdf)

<sup>342</sup> For more comprehensive information on the IC's preparation, implementation, monitoring, and withdrawal processes, see: <https://istanbulsozlesmesi.org>

years-long process driven by the AKP government's pro-family rhetoric and the anti-IC campaign as conservative backlash spearheaded by anti-gender groups. As detailed in Chapter 6, discussions regarding Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC began in late 2019 and escalated to a coordinated anti-IC campaign in 2020, culminating in withdrawal in 2021. The shocking impact of the withdrawal decision on feminists was, therefore, specifically due to the way the government announced it. A participant from KA-DER emphasized that, being announced at midnight, the decision to withdraw from the Convention was quite sudden. "When we heard that the government might withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, we immediately called some MPs, but no one knew about it" (P20) she said. This seemingly abrupt decision to withdraw from the IC was emotionally devastating and enraging for activists. One participant emphasized that the government's decision to withdraw from the Convention made them realize the importance of the IC:

We learned about this decision in the middle of the night... through WhatsApp groups. After we learned about it, all of a sudden I started receiving messages in those groups saying, 'There is such a thing happening, what are we going to do?' Actually, we were a little bit aware of how important the Convention was when it was in force, but I didn't realize how vital it really was (P10).

Commenting on the withdrawal decision, Respondent P11 noted that the sudden change had a demoralizing effect on feminist activists. On the other hand, P19 stated that they were not surprised by the decision to withdraw from the Convention because they had expected that outcome. P19 further explained that the government had initially stated that it might withdraw from the Convention in 2020, but feminists organized and launched a vigorous campaign to defend the Convention and were able to force the government to abandon its decision at that time. In 2020, KADEM, a state-supported NGO, also supported the Convention as the IC debates first emerged. Although KADEM later changed its position on the IC, its initial advice was "not to withdraw, but to submit an interpretative statement to the Council" (as cited in Özdemir-Taştan et al., 2022, p. 11).

The activists who participated in this study stated that, unlike members of KADEM, they opposed the idea of making changes to the IC's interpretation that would be in line with the government's understanding of mainstreaming the family. As a result, the

gender advocacy movement has been running a pro-IC campaign since July 2020. Although there have been interruptions from time to time, this campaign has continued its activities with the Council of State cases even after the withdrawal. Looking at the campaign's repertoire of actions, we see that women carried out street protests, clamor actions, and *cacerolazo*,<sup>343</sup> public demonstrations, visual activism, and hashtag campaigns on social media. The pro-IC campaign has spread nationwide but has been particularly notable in Istanbul. The Istanbul Convention Campaign Group displayed banners in various parts of the city calling for the withdrawal from the Convention to be reversed. In addition to these actions, the day after the decision to withdraw from the Convention was announced, 35 bar associations filed a lawsuit to object to the decision and request its suspension. Subsequently, some women's associations and the women's branches of the opposition parties also filed a lawsuit. These Council of State cases were important because the activism of the pro-IC campaign in late 2021 was primarily influenced by them.<sup>344</sup>

While sharing their experiences, participants described the initial campaign process as one filled with anxiety and anger. This experience made them concerned about the future of activism and the general state of GBV policies, but they emphasized that the process was important for the recognition of the IC in society. According to P7, "a man on the street had never heard of this Convention before. But now, at least, he's heard of it. He's either heard something negative about it or something positive... But now he definitely knows about it and has an idea." Similarly, P9 argued that discussions about the Convention in the media, especially on television, increased awareness of the Convention among women.

As discussed in Chapter 6, anti-gender advocates made similar assessments arguing that it was important for society to engage in discussions about the IC. They held that all segments of society should perform their own evaluations of the IC within a democratic framework and on an equal basis. However, by their assessments, "feminists" were disturbed by the proliferation of discussions about the IC because, it

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<sup>343</sup> *Cacerolazo* is a type of protest that originated in Latin America, where participants create noise by banging pots and pans, usually in reaction to political discontent or social problems.

<sup>344</sup> It was reported that more than 220 lawsuits were filed with the Council of State. ESIK, <https://esikplatform.net/en/category/istanbul-sozlesmesi/74158/bugun-28-kasim-da-istanbul-sozlesmesi-yururlukte-demek-ve-sozlesme-yi-savunmak-icin-bir-kez-daha-danistay-dayiz>

was argued, discussions of the IC would ultimately reveal its "hidden dimensions." The participants of this study, on the other hand, stated that they were not disturbed by the discussions surrounding the IC and that those discussions increased awareness of the issue in society and thus revealed the importance of the Convention. Although the pro-IC campaign could not prevent Türkiye from withdrawing from the Convention, it did ensure that the Convention was recognized by society. As a noteworthy detail, it should be emphasized that the sudden decision to withdraw from the IC was a trigger for some participants to begin organizing within the gender advocacy movement. The youngest participants of this study, P17 and P18, both members of the Young Feminist Solidarity platform, stated that their interest in gender issues arose during discussions about the IC in Türkiye during their high school years. According to these participants, this experience was transformative for them because it was the first time they learned about and were affected by a gender equality approach. Thus, the debates regarding the Convention which have been on the national agenda for years, led to the formation of a broadening coalitions or the attribution of similarity (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015), which has increased the participation in both pro-IC and anti-IC campaigns.

While discussions of the IC discussions effectively popularized the Convention, they also raised concerns about the future of VAW cases, particularly among women who were victims of violence, activists, lawyers, and CSOs advocating for gender equality. Participants expressed their discomfort with the fact that, despite the fear experienced by women as victims of violence, men as perpetrators of violence welcomed the decision to withdraw from the Convention. It was also noted that lawyers received two different reactions from their clients. One participant explained this as follows: "I could easily say that there were two different reactions in terms of the sociological impact. I mean, all the potential perpetrators started saying things like, 'We're going to win the case now, aren't we?' And women sent terribly desperate and frightened messages to their lawyers asking, 'What do we do now?'" (P12).

Another aspect of Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the IC that participants found problematic was that it was not a decision based on grassroots demand. As argued in the analysis of news articles and books in Chapter 5, the actors of the anti-IC campaign presented themselves as representatives of conservative segments of society and those who felt "victimized" by the IC. Therefore, the anti-IC campaign sought to



demonstrate that through family platforms and government-aligned NGOs that a grassroots movement existed. On the other hand, feminist activists argued that there was no public opposition to the IC because the Convention was largely unknown to the public.<sup>345</sup> Participants stated that women subjected to violence and men perpetrating violence were the most aware of the Convention. Some participants claimed that opposition to the Convention in Türkiye stemmed from an "artificial agenda." Feminist activists argued that the decision to withdraw was not based on clear public demand. According to the participants, the grievances against the IC were created with the aim of mobilizing the public against the gender equality perspective. Thus, in the view of these activists, the anti-IC campaign was organized by the anti-gender movement and strengthened by the participation of some right-wing political actors.

However, the withdrawal from the IC does not mean that women in Türkiye are completely deprived of legal protections against VAW and domestic violence. Mainstream media outlets, women's associations close to the government, and AKP government officials, especially President Erdoğan, have claimed that Türkiye is determined to combat VAW.<sup>346</sup> However, in this effort, the gender advocacy movement has been marginalized. Its discourse has been ignored amid polarizing debates that demonize gender mainstreaming perspective and fuel hate speech against LGBTIQ+ individuals. In evaluating the impact of anti-gender movements, participants commented on the extent to which these movements influence policymaking. They emphasized the ability of these movements to collaborate with the state through both discourse and actions.

For instance, P15 stated that the anti-gender movement aimed to replace the discourse of "gender equality" with the discourse of "protection of the family," and this transformed into a state-supported civil society framework and creating the illusion of

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<sup>345</sup> According to a survey conducted by the KONDA in 2020, with 3,569 respondents, 62% of the respondents did not have a clear understanding of the content of the Convention. Furthermore, "When we asked about their attitudes towards the Istanbul Convention, the vast majority of those familiar with the convention stated that 'the convention should be retained.' While 16% of those who know what the convention is believe that 'the convention should be withdrawn,' 84% argue that 'the convention should be retained.'" KONDA, "Istanbul Convention," August, 2020 <https://konda.com.tr/uploads/barometre-111-istanbulsozlesmesi-c17ac43bb57310fbc6dd7237c7fa3dcc24953a93535c01a20e64c76bb5424e7a.pdf>

<sup>346</sup> 2021MG16, 2021YS05, 2021YS07, 2023YA01, 2023YS02, 2023YS05, 2021YA34

public demand. Similarly, P19 noted that women's problems regarding alimony were not easily addressed in Parliament but the grievances of men who claimed to be alimony victims were quickly put on the legislative agenda by MPs and ministers. P7 explained that anti-gender movements have emerged on a global scale as political strategies used by right-wing populist governments, observing that "the state, the government constantly brings up the issue of alimony and eventually uses it as an excuse for withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention" (P7).

The main focus of the reactions against Law No. 6284 have been the issues of alimony, custody, and early marriages. These issues are particularly emphasized by advocates of the men's rights movement within the anti-gender alliance and the issue of alimony was one of the most contested points during the IC debates. It has even become a battleground, with opposing campaigns publishing investigative reports directly countering each other.<sup>347</sup> The narrative holding that indefinite alimony victimizes men is an important dimension of the anti-IC campaign. Men's rights activists have argued that the law puts unfair pressure on men by imposing indefinite alimony and that this outcome acts as an economic sanction. On the other hand, feminist activists have argued that such alimony aims to alleviate poverty and it can be indefinite or temporary, depending on the judge's decision. Even in cases of indefinite alimony, the termination conditions are determined by considering specific conditions (Akçabay & Boz, 2024).

A participant who is a lawyer by profession emphasized that the real problem is the patriarchal mindset, culminating in "the effort to establish a system that does not require men to deal with lawsuits" (P12). The same participant also stated that if a man believes that the other party's financial difficulties have been resolved, he can file a lawsuit against the woman and apply to the court for the termination of alimony. "I

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<sup>347</sup> It is said that a report published by the Divorce Commission established in the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 2016 regarding men being victims of indefinite alimony brought about alimony to the agenda (Akçabay, 2019). A report titled "Poverty Alimony Research: A Socio-Legal Review," prepared by the Women's Solidarity Foundation in 2019 in response to the previous report, caused significant backlash, especially in the conservative media. Critics argued that the data presented in the latter report did not reflect the truth. In a news article on the subject in the *Yeni Akit* newspaper, it was claimed that "feminist associations misled the Ministry of Family" while including the views of the Platform for Indefinite Alimony Victims. See <https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/nafaka-zulum-olmaktan-ciksin-1309504.html>

really can't believe we're talking about taking away women's alimony rights so that gentlemen won't have to bother to sue," she said (P12).

At the same time, current data on alimony provided by the Women's Solidarity Foundation suggest that alimony payments are low or are often not paid. In the Poverty Alimony Research Report, which was published by the foundation in 2024 based on the examination of 155 divorce case files, it is stated that the courts primarily approve alimony applications made for the care of children. In addition, it is emphasized that the alimony given to women is quite low considering the current economic conditions, and 44% of ordered alimony payments are not made (Akçabay & Boz, 2024, p. 3). As a result, the discourse of "alimony victimization," a central argument of the men's rights movement, is reframed by the feminist movement and essentially ignored with refusal to legitimize the opposing viewpoint (Benford & Hunt, 2003). Feminist activists argued that indefinite alimony does not victimize men, rather, women are the real victims due to unpaid or very low amounts of alimony.

When evaluated in the context of contentious politics, the government's perception of the alimony dispute is important. Although there is a perspective within the AKP that both women and men are victimized in terms of alimony, it is understood that the actual policy framework is shaped not by the victimization of either party but by the dominant motivation of "protecting the family" (Ünal, 2021, p. 76). However, when the core issue is defined as "family," power dynamics become obscured and, in reality, gender inequality is masked through the implementation of gender-neutral policies, as the male victimization narrative implies. These debates around alimony thus clearly demonstrate the concerns for "masculinist restoration" (Kandiyoti, 2016) supported by the government and anti-gender discourses.

The liberal policy changes that emerged in Türkiye in the early 2000s with the European integration process created a favorable political opportunity structure for the women's movement and feminists to demand progressive legal changes. The EU's emphasis on gender equality, human rights, and democracy also fostered a suitable environment for the gender advocacy movement to advocate for legal and social changes. During this period, conservative and feminist women's organizations successfully conducted joint campaigns to ensure improvements in the Civil Code and

the Penal Code in favor of women (Sancar, 2011, pp. 88-89). However, in the current situation, marked by de-democratization (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020) and de-Europeanization (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Kollias & Messis, 2024), the state's pursuit of a pro-family agenda within the gender regime poses more of a threat than an opportunity for the gender advocacy movement (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015).

Among the pieces of evidence demonstrating that the opportunity structure for feminist activism in Türkiye has changed are the activities implemented by the state with its pro-family agenda. This agenda is based on the interaction between the state and "alternative civil society" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021) and grounded in the discourse of "family strengthening." This has important implications at the institutional level. On this point, P7 emphasized the importance of the "Grand Family Meetings" as a critical turning point in Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC. She stated that "the anti-LGBTI sentiment expressed in these meetings paved the way for opposition to the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye" and noted that these meetings brought together anti-gender activists and created a long-term impact. P7 also observed that the CSOs that came together in the Grand Family Meetings were not grassroots movements and that they were forced to come together to voice similar views. These meetings according to P7, were effective in transforming anti-gender discourses into a social movement in Türkiye. In contrast to the P7's claim that the Grand Family Meetings were not a grassroots formation, the website of the platform<sup>348</sup> that organizes these meetings presented the platform as a coalition of conservative, religious, and nationalist (*ulusalçı*) associations.

These events held in Türkiye are reminiscent of those of the World Congress of Families,<sup>349</sup> as an international organization or transnational anti-gender movement. The analysis conducted by Graff and Korolczuk's (2022) regarding pro-family marches in Verona, Italy, held after one such congress emphasized the effect of this organization. Their analysis suggested that although these marches were attended by

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<sup>348</sup> Grand Family Platform, "Members," <https://www.buyukaileplatformu.org/uyeler/>

<sup>349</sup> "The WCF serves as an umbrella for interconnected organisations that promote Christian conservative values internationally. It gathers conservative and religious NGOs, politicians, and scholars who work together on 'pro-family' issues, and against a perceived 'global liberal agenda' that promotes abortion and birth control, female emancipation, gender theory, and sex education in schools" (Kalm & Meuwisse, 2020, p. 2).

fewer people than a feminist protest, the voices of pro-family groups resonated more strongly, mainly because political opportunity structures were less accessible to feminists due to the rise of right-wing populism (2022, pp. 65-66).

It was argued that the World Congress of Families, a pro-family organization, facilitates the spread of anti-abortion sentiment and the circulation of "emotional" content emphasizing women's role as mothers. Additionally, it was further argued that the Congress fuels anti-LGBTIQ+ sentiment and assists anti-gender and pro-family activists from various countries in adapting each other's rhetoric to their own contexts (Kalm & Meuwisse, 2020).

As described earlier, in contentious protest cycles, a campaign may give rise to a counter-campaign, or the perceived success of an action strategy may lead to its adoption by a countermovement (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). In response to the anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric at the Grand Family Meetings held in Türkiye, LGBTIQ+ organizations developed a creative repertoire for their counter-campaign. In this context, they organized an action that highlighted the presence of LGBTIQ+ individuals in the Grand "Family" Meetings, that is, within the family. One of these was the "Grand Life Meeting," which was organized as an online live broadcast by KAOS-GL simultaneously with the Grand Family Meetings in Saraçhane, İstanbul. Another was the "Our lives won't be restrained by your definition of family!" campaign organized by the Women Together Platform (as cited in Atlı, 2023). As these examples show, a movement's protest strategy can lead to counter mobilization, and the development of new repertoires (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996, Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) and during political contestation, a group may adopt its opponent's identity ascriptions (Benford & Hunt, 2023) and transform them into a new narrative through ideological counter reframing.

Therefore, the ideological conflict between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement that gained visibility through the IC campaigns in Türkiye does not mean that the collaboration between the anti-gender movement and the state has suppressed or weakened the gender advocacy movement. It is obvious that the gender advocacy movement has been forced into silence, and subjected to marginalization with decreased public visibility. However, in response to this, the gender advocacy

movement has developed a new repertoire, which in this study is referred to as silent struggle.

**Table 3.** The Silent Struggle: Constituent Forms of Activism

Silent Struggle		
Collaboration Strategies	Discursive Strategies	Everyday Engagement Strategies
<p><b><u>Forming alliances</u></b></p> <p><b>National alliances</b>            Opposition political parties            Academics            Artists            Media outlets            Feminist activists and organizations            Other democratic civil society organizations</p> <p><b>Transnational alliances</b>            Lobbying and networking activities targeting the European Union, the European Commission, and United Nations institutions            Feminist activists and organizations</p>	<p><b><u>Narrative strengthening</u></b></p> <p>Strengthening narratives within the context of discursive struggle against anti-gender backlash</p> <p>Developing the capacity to create a unified discourse</p> <p>Gaining discursive superiority and the power to set the agenda</p> <p>Preventing the erasure of the Istanbul Convention and other achievements of the feminist struggle from collective memory</p> <p>Retelling their own stories</p>	<p><b><u>Micro activism</u></b></p> <p><b>Online campaigns</b>            Organizing campaigns and disseminating them through social media, starting with trusted networks</p> <p><b>Sustaining micro solidarity relationships</b>            Enhancing solidarity among activists            Assisting women and LGBTIQ+ individuals</p>

The participants of this study also indicated that they had developed, or were in the process of developing, specific strategies to counter anti-gender movements. However, as the participants emphasized, anti-gender movements operate in collaboration with the government and state institutions. As a result, the strategies that the participants developed in response to anti-gender movements also functioned as a way to counter the political pressures they faced as opposition actors in the emerging "anti-democratic public space" (Ünal, 2021, p. 68). This analysis takes their silent struggle as both a cause and a consequence of a process known as the "introverted turn in the feminist

struggle." Although the anti-gender movement and government collaborations have forced activists to remain silent and turn inward, the activists' use of this process to create new repertoires has made their struggle simultaneously silent and resilient. Therefore, introversion is not immobility; rather, it is a new strategy that suggests avoiding defensive acts. In the context of a strategic retreat or introverted turn, the basic strategies of this "silent" struggle can lead to a long-term resistance.

From the viewpoint of social justice movements, silencing is seen as disempowerment. However, as Ferguson (2003) noted, silence, and especially "resistant silence," can have unexpected political consequences. In this case, silence represents not only isolation but also a refusal to interact with the dominant discourses in society. This clearly shows that the group's withdrawal functions as a rejection and serves as a form of resistance (Ferguson, 2003, p. 55). As previously described, anti-gender movements are discourse-driven movements (Kancı et al., 2023, p. 882). Therefore, the silence and introversion of the gender advocacy movement signify a stance against the mainstreaming of anti-genderism. The gender advocacy movement does not adopt the "family mainstreaming" framework or abandon its commitment to gender equality as it accepts gender equality as a decontested concept (Freedon, 1996). Therefore, it tries to produce a stronger discourse by turning inward, remaining silent, and maintaining its own narrative. As a result, it can be argued that this introverted turn could foster a more organized and much stronger solidarity as an unexpected political outcome of silence (Ferguson, 2003).

Looking at the narratives of the participants in this study, it can be said that they have identified an activist path from small groups to large collaborations and from silence to moving their discourse into the mainstream. Collaboration strategies entail activists' efforts to establish solidarity networks through national and transnational partnerships. In this respect, first of all, participants emphasized that the women's movement, feminist movement, and the LGBTIQ+ movement in Türkiye should not address their own problems independently. They then argued that the solidarity network they were trying to establish should evolve into a broader coalition that would include democracy, rights, and freedoms without being limited to a gender-focused approach. They held that this coalition would be successful if it were shaped in an inclusive manner and allowed the participation of groups that had already formed anti-gender

alliances. The coalition strategy of gender advocacy activists is, therefore, not a counter-stance to the anti-gender movement. Instead, it represents a coalition that emerging from a gender-focused approach based on democracy and pluralism and expanding outwards. One of the key mechanisms adopted by the gender advocacy movement is accordingly the strategy of scale shifting, which leads to the creation of more pluralistic discourses. In contrast, as the analysis in Chapter 5 showed, anti-gender movements have embraced polarization and sought to construct their collaborations on the basis of that polarization. They have adopted an approach that excludes LGBTIQ+ individuals and feminists, polarizing society in a discriminatory and restrictive way, and thus limiting participation in the movement. Finally, when interpreted specifically through the lens of the pro-IC campaign, it becomes clear that the cooperation that the gender advocacy movement is trying to establish is also aimed at strengthening its relations with the state. Although the participants defined themselves as activists and are maintaining their distance from project-based work in civil society, they underlined the important role of the state in increasing the impact of their work. In this context, they argued that weakened relations with state institutions should be re-established in order to strengthen GBV and gender equality policies. Collaboration strategies stand out as an important dimension of the silent struggle. This is because both the feminist introverted turn and the silent struggle are fundamentally caused by weakened collaborations. Therefore, before I elaborate on the strategies of silent struggle in the next section, I will highlight key events in the decline of collaboration between the gender advocacy movement and the government in Türkiye prior to the withdrawal from the IC.

At the time of the country's withdrawal from the IC in 2021, increasingly harsh restrictions on progressives and liberals in Türkiye were already hindering opportunities for activism and damaging collaboration between the state and independent civil society. However, the inclusion of independent civil society in decision-making processes is vital to address democratic deficiencies within institutions and governments (Eslen-Ziya, 2007). In the 2000s, the government made efforts to take different perspectives into account while developing social policy proposals. For example, the stakeholder list of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2008-2013 included information on work carried out in collaboration with



university programs for women's studies, feminist organizations, and women's associations.<sup>350</sup> Participant P3, arguing that in the past it was possible to collaborate with various ministries but that these opportunities have now disappeared, stated that they were no longer be able to communicate with state institutions. "I think this situation is very much reflected in our working style and reflexes... because, for example, as an association working in the field of sexual health, we can never work with the Ministry of Health" (P3).

Participants emphasized that there had been opportunities to collaborate with the government in the past. However, according to their assessments, this did not mean that they adopted the same understanding of gender. They reported that they had previously encountered serious disagreements and even pressure; but they were still invited to ministry meetings and their opinions were sought on legal regulations. For instance, comparing the past and present status of gender equality in Türkiye, P19 claimed that they were previously able to exchange ideas with nationalist MHP deputies on projects aimed at increasing gender equality: "However, this perspective has now disappeared" (P19). P2, who worked as an academic in the Women's Studies Center of a leading university, similarly stated that there used to be collaboration among the government, civil society, and academia on gender issues. She explained, that she taken part in preparing the contents of gender courses to be offered as elective or compulsory courses in universities and said that "the state was not against gender at that time."

As P2 emphasized, the decision to offer compulsory or elective gender courses with the aim of enhancing gender equality was made under the auspices of the IC. In this regard, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) prepared its "Gender Equality Attitude Document"<sup>351</sup> in 2015, outlining the steps needed to be taken to promote gender

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<sup>350</sup> In the annex section of the Action Plan titled "List of Stakeholders Interviewed in the Mapping Study Conducted Between March 26 and June 8, 2007", it was stated that many independent NGOs operating in different fields, women's units of universities, and unions were interviewed (pp. 72-76). <https://www.bpwankara.org/cms-uploads/kadinin-statusu-gm-toplumsal-cinsiyet-esitligi-ulusal-eylem-plani.pdf>

<sup>351</sup> The relevant document cannot be accessed via YÖK's website. However, news from that period included information about the content of the document. References were made to the CEDAW and the IC while developing the relevant document. It was also decided that the purpose of this document was to launch gender equality courses in universities, to organize information meetings for academic staff, administrative staff, and students, and to take preventive measures against all forms of violence, including sexual harassment.

equality in the higher education. However, the document was repealed in 2019 by the decision of the then YÖK's president at the time, Yekta Saraç, on the grounds that it "does not comply with our social values and acceptances and is not accepted by the society."<sup>352</sup> In the statements made by YÖK at that time, it was explained that instead of focusing on gender equality in universities, "justice-based women's studies" would be adopted.<sup>353</sup> In 2019, IC opposition emerged in Türkiye, and anti-gender discourses accordingly became more visible. Opposition to the "Gender Equality Attitude Document" was discussed as an important event that pioneered the opposition to the IC in Türkiye (Kocabay-Şener et al., 2022).

Participants also suggested that certain events occurring before and after the withdrawal from the IC reflected the trend toward the mainstreaming of anti-genderism. According to one participant, attacks on women's alimony rights and the Civil Code have gradually increased since 2011 (P12). Events on the eve of the IC withdrawal were also related to education policies. First, YÖK withdrew from its official commitments to gender equality. In the same period, the Ministry of National Education terminated the ETCEP, which was developed with EU support between 2014 and 2016. The project faced criticism from religious groups in the media and on social media platforms. These groups argued that the ETCEP would "destroy the family [and] de-gender' students/children," and they further suggested that ETCEP is a "Western project" and a "deliberate attack on our values" (Kocabay-Şener et al., 2022, p. 11).

Similarly, given the attacks on gender and academic education, the establishment of women's studies or women and family studies in place of gender studies clearly indicates a backlash and an ideological position. As gender scholars have noted, the struggle to produce knowledge about gender reflects the problem of "epistemic power." Populists, far-right politicians, religious figures, and ultraconservative movements have not only established a discourse of political hegemony through anti-intellectualism but have also encouraged the spread of illiberal movements on gender

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[https://static.bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/attachments/000/002/505/original/YOK\\_Tutum\\_belgesi\\_%281%29.pdf?1550666976](https://static.bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/attachments/000/002/505/original/YOK_Tutum_belgesi_%281%29.pdf?1550666976)

<sup>352</sup> <https://www.birgun.net/makale/toplumsal-cinsiyet-yok-u-rahatsiz-etti-247477>

<sup>353</sup> <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2019/02/19/yokten-cinsiyet-esitliginde-geri-adim>

in Europe by creating "far-right epistemic institutions" and employing epistemic strategies (Korolczuk, 2020b; Paternotte & Verloo, 2021, p. 572).

As the debates in Europe have shown, the collaborations between the anti-gender movement and right-wing populist governments constitute an alliance. This conservative alliance is aimed not only at gender advocacy but also at broader social transformations. Thus, increasing repression, attacks, and threats against independent civil society and the gender advocacy movement are having a demoralizing effect on activists. The next section examines the activists' experiences of activist anxiety, an emotional aspect of the introverted turn.

### **7.3.2. The Activist Anxieties and the Introverted Turn Amidst Threats and Exclusion**

The "activist anxiety" that emerged from the participants' experiences constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon. It is related to various concerns of activists facing the anti-gender countermovement. The first and most personal of these concerns are individual fears about the possible personal consequences they may face as a result of their activism. These include risks of being detained, arrested, and fired or not hired due to pressure and threats against the gender advocacy movement. The second area of concern pertains to their organizational structure and the struggle they focus on in the field of civil society. Accordingly, the participants were concerned that their associations or foundations might be shut down, and that their areas of work might be restricted. These concerns are not unfounded. For example, *The Platform to Stop Femicide*, which conducted comprehensive research on femicide with the aim of establishing a reliable data source, has narrowly escaped the threat of being closed down on charges of "engaging in activities contrary to law and morality."<sup>354</sup> Following the crackdown on opposition activities and NGOs after the coup attempt in 2016, several women's associations were closed down (Bor, 2023). The repression of activists in the women's movement has also been a situation experienced by activists in Hungary. The feminist movement in Hungary, which has taken on an "NGO-ized"

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<sup>354</sup> "The KCDP closure case was dismissed." Bianet. <https://bianet.org/haber/kcdp-kapatma-davasi-reddedildi-283918>

structure and adopted project-oriented activism, is in danger of dissolution due to increasing pressure (Pető, 2018). Finally, the third area in which the activist's concerns were concentrated involved the future of civil society in Türkiye.

In the literature on social movements, studies focusing on the emotional impact of struggle on movement's participants and activists have defined situations involving "activist burnout" (Cox, 2011; Gorski, 2018) or "exhaustion" (Emejulu & Bassel, 2020). Cox (2011) established a connection between activist burnout and the sustainability of movements, arguing that experiences of burnout due to pressures and threats impair personal sustainability and diminish the long-term success of a movement. According to Cox (2011), burnout is especially prevalent among social rights activists. In terms of the experiences of activists, Emejulu and Bassel defined exhaustion as "a very real emotional and psychological state of being with activists fighting burnout and demoralization" and it is said to impact activists' commitment to their struggle (2020, p. 401). The participants of the present study described emotional states that align with the definitions of both activist burnout and activist exhaustion. However, since they also expressed concerns about issues, including security, political oppression, and the possibilities of groups being banned, facing violence, or even being killed, the term "activist anxiety" is used here to characterize their situation. The underlying cause of the participants' feelings of burnout and exhaustion was anxiety about threats that have not yet occurred but that they fear will materialize. Participants expressed feelings of fear, humiliation, anxiety, and emptiness as they reflected on their experiences as activists. The situations they highlighted most often in terms of fear included the sanctions they could face because of their activism. These sanctions include both direct physical attacks from anti-gender activists and the prohibition of their activities. Participants noted that the anti-gender movement's anti-feminist and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourses, framed within the context of "gender ideology," involved sexism, othering and even instances of hate speeches. One participant mentioned a street protest she had attended, which was reported in the conservative *Yeni Akit* newspaper with the following headline "They went wild like dogs." She said that being described in such a derogatory manner due to her activism felt "humiliating" (P20). Similarly, according to P2, as a strategy, anti-gender movements label LGBTIQ+ movements as "weird people" who just dress up oddly and walk around, lacking any

real-life existence. Some participants stated that they would continue to engage in activism on social media but are now hesitant to join street protests. One explained that she did not feel pressured while sharing content online but participating in street protests made her particularly anxious:

I have never been afraid of losing my job because of the things I share on social media. Maybe that's why I don't feel this pressure. However, when I go out on the street, I hesitate to join a protest. Even though I'm a lawyer, I hesitate to go to the square alone. I just want someone to come with me... (P3).

I'm not sure if this started after the pandemic, but I can't go to protests by myself anymore. I would normally find someone to go with. I stay in constant contact with my friends and I definitely prefer to go with someone. If someone is going and I can't go, I worry about them and want to know how they're doing (P4).

P3 stressed that these concerns about street protests stemmed not only from the possibility of police intervention but also from disturbing memories of the ISIS terrorist attacks in Türkiye in 2016. Such incidents have led activists to feel uneasy when they enter crowded public spaces. Another participant, P9, stated that they had to hide the address of their association due to "very serious, paranoid-level security concerns."

Our association's address is currently showing up incorrectly on Google. We deliberately gave a different address. There are two iron gates at the entrance of the association. We receive a threatening call every day. For example, the caller is just swearing. This is especially true during Pride Month and when hate marches are approaching. I don't know if you remember, but a few years ago, an ISIS member was caught. That bomber had our association's address in his pocket (P9).

Another emotion that participants reported feeling due to their activism was a "sense of emptiness." They explained that they felt marginalized and their efforts seemed to be in vain because their activities were criminalized, and their work was obstructed. P15 shared, "People around me keep saying, 'Girl, look, nothing is changing. Are you going to save all the women?' and, of course, this demoralizes me. In other words, it makes me feel like I can't even convince my own circle to change" (P15). Despite the efforts of activists in Türkiye to combat VAW, the persistent instances of VAW in the country create a sense of discouragement among activists: "While I was actively working in the field of combating violence against women, I felt physically and mentally exhausted, so I distanced myself a bit. You try to do something, but you see

that the situation is getting worse, and you feel helpless" (P11). Participants expressed a sense of powerlessness due to the pressures and restrictions on their activism. However, they still emphasized that being part of a solidarity network empowered them and that they drew strength from facing similar challenges together.

Another dimension of their activist anxiety stemmed from concerns about possible problems that may occur for the organizations with which they are affiliated. In this context, they expressed their concerns about both the security of these organizations and their own personal safety. This fear was fueled by the decline in rights in the areas they focused on, threats and attacks from anti-gender groups, and the restrictive measures they believed the state could impose on civil society. For example, participant P1 said, "I am definitely afraid, especially in recent years. First of all, I am afraid for the association because we see that we are all targeted because we work in the areas of rights, equality, and non-discrimination. So it is something that has become natural, but it is not normal, and it is not acceptable" (P1).

Participants reported experiencing negative emotions and events such as being restricted in their activism or facing indirect punishment. For instance, P6 stated that she was not hired for a job she applied for recently because of photos, she had shared on social media, taken at a street demonstration that she had previously attended. In the literature, Tilly and Tarrow noted that when a government is involved in a conflict, it sets rules that determine how the situation will develop, establishing: "who can make what collective claims, by what means, with what outcomes" (2015, p. 8). As a result, activists are forced to calculate risks. In other words, they must take into account possible state reactions and possible sanctions while shaping their discourses and protest repertoires.

As repression and restrictions increased for the gender advocacy movement, there was widespread concern that youth participation in the movement would decline. P3, for example, who works for an organization focusing on LGBTIQ+ rights and sexual health, said that she was being made to feel anxious about her work, as if she were doing "something criminal." She explained: "Since the work we do is constantly being restricted or closed at any moment, we feel like criminals being interrogated even in our normal routine work. As a result, of course, we are struggling" (P3). She believed

that this situation also affected the society's perceptions of the organization's work and she expressed concern that their numbers of volunteers would not increase due to this criminalizing attitude. Another realm in which the participants experienced concerns and faced direct threats was social media. They reported receiving threatening or defamatory messages, including attacks from troll accounts and insulting comments under posts shared by their associations.

On social media, we often encounter groups that can be classified as anti-gender. These groups often manifest themselves in attacks on our platforms. They post a message about [this activism] 'destroying the family' under almost every post. For example, when a brochure about violence is published, comments like 'pushing minors into sex work' are made. On the Islamist Akit Daily site, we are labeled as the 'purple gang.' Sometimes, we laugh at them, but sometimes, they can be quite annoying and worrying (P8).

While some participants perceived the pressure, threats, and attacks they faced as demoralizing, others evaluated them as intimidation tactics. They emphasized that such situations served to strengthen them and that such actions would not weaken them, thus underlining the existence of a strong sense of solidarity. P11 stated that they regularly receive messages such as "The West is funding you," questions such as "How do you find your funding?" and comments such as "You eat at hotels, you spend money" and "You go to hotel meetings" under their social media posts. As demonstrated by discussion in Chapter 5, anti-gender advocates base their discourse on fear (Butler, 2024) and portray feminists as external actors who serve as "agents" in this context. This creates a dichotomy through polarization and also provides anti-feminist activists with the opposition and hostility they need to establish their own collective identity (Rothermel, 2020). In this way, through the ongoing conflict, they can define the boundaries of their movements (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). This polarizing discourse and the accompanying threats cause feminist activists to experience negative emotions, including burnout, exhaustion, and anxiety. On the other hand, they are also driven to unite and form stronger bonds of solidarity.

#### **7.4. Beyond the Defensive Retreat: Hope and Resilience in the Gender Advocacy Movement**

As the main axis of gender policies in Türkiye shifts from gender equality to the institutionalization of family-centered policies, the gender advocacy movement needs

to reposition itself to become an effective actor in policymaking. The narratives of participants in this study demonstrate that gender equality advocacy actors are working to build solidarity networks that will constitute a strong coalition promoting gender equality. As the participants emphasized, the main goal of the gender advocacy movement is to strengthen solidarity networks in order to increase democratic resilience for combating rising gender antagonism and increasing political repression. It should not be forgotten that the demands of anti-gender movements have agendas that go beyond gender politics and the IC and should, therefore, be addressed as part of current de-democratization processes rather than being treated as mere backlash (Paternotte, 2020). Accordingly, the coalition-building strategy of the gender advocacy movement reflects a desire to increase its democratic resilience or, in other words, its capacity for resistance in a struggle for democracy that includes the feminist movement.

Boese et al. provided the following definition of democratic resilience: "the ability to prevent substantial regression in the quality of democratic institutions and practices" (2021, p. 886). Nevertheless, I believe it will be helpful to redefine this concept here in alignment with the focus of this dissertation. Drawing on scholarship related to gender and social movements, and concentrating on combating anti-gender movements, democratic resilience can be redefined here as an organizational capacity and unifying mechanism that emphasizes gender equality, cultivates resistance against anti-gender discourses, and strives to maintain inclusive and democratic spaces even during times of crisis. Similarly, Çağatay et al. (2023) emphasized that resistance and resilience are intertwined in the anti-gender context. Therefore, the concept of resilience discussed here does not reflect individual struggles but rather the collective mobilizations of activists who have necessarily retreated.

The growing pressure on civil society in Türkiye has been associated with processes referred to as de-democratization (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020) and de-Europeanization (Bodur Ün & Arıkan, 2022; Kollias & Mesis, 2024). As political restrictions on activism intensified, the gender advocacy movement was forced to reposition itself. The AKP's partnership with civil society organizations collaborating on a common ideological stance and promoting its family mainstreaming perspective has led those organizations to present themselves as grassroots movements from a



populist point of view. As a consequence, the gender advocacy movement has been labeled as counter-public. In this respect, Öziş defined the current situation of the feminist movement as "a counter-hegemony struggle" (2023, p. 118). In civil society in the realm of gender politics, feminist NGOs have been marginalized and replaced by women's organizations that promote neoliberal policies in line with the AKP's ideological stance (Günay-Erkol & Sünbülüoğlu, 2024). The shrinking space for autonomous civil society and the backlash against gender politics have put pressure on feminist activism (Ünal, 2024a). Among all these organizations, KADEM, with its close relationship with the government and the leadership role assigned to it (Günay-Erkol & Sünbülüoğlu, 2024), has particularly prevented communication between the government and secular women's organizations (Eslen-Ziya & Kazanoğlu, 2020, p. 108).

Regarding the loosening of ties between the state and autonomous gender advocacy CSOs, participants noted that the reduced opportunities for collaboration and communication between the state and the gender advocacy movement have led not only to setbacks in gender equality but also regressions in areas such as disability, health, and migration. Addressing the issue from an intersectional gender perspective, P1 warned that if the state abandons the gender mainstreaming perspective, gendered aspects of individuals' challenging experiences will be ignored. P3, a lawyer working on sexual health issues, stated that they are unable to collaborate with ministries and public institutions and that this exclusion and marginalization has also limited their financial resources. Additionally, oppressive monitoring processes were highlighted. P4 spoke of experiencing "extra pressure" during routine inspections due to her organization's focus on LGBTIQ+ rights. One issue highlighted by the gender advocacy movement has been the increased scrutiny and pressure on civil society organizations focusing on gender equality, particularly implemented through financial penalties. P1 interpreted this situation as a form of "domestication practice" imposed by the state on civil society. Similarly, P7, stated that in 2021, the HAVLE Association faced a targeted lynching campaign on social media following its post about Muslim LGBTIQ+ individuals. According to Participant P1, after that incident, the association was subjected to inspections beyond routine procedures (P1).

As the participants noted, pressures that limit the space for collaboration with the state and restrict activities in civil society have been part of the process of democratic backsliding in Türkiye and a clear indicator of the backlash against the women's rights agenda. This means that the political space is shrinking due to the influence of coalitions formed by right-wing parties, conservative actors, and anti-"gender ideology" advocates (Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020). This coalition not only threatens the continuity of existing gender equality structures but also encourages the adoption of anti-equality policies (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2020).

Activist organizations focused on combating VAW still maintain some channels of communication with the government, but these interactions are more limited than in the past. For instance, according to P8, there has been minimal interaction between the Ministry of Family and Social Policies and the Mor Çatı Foundation on VAW. In other words, the relationship with the state has also gained the nature of a political struggle: "We constantly remind the state of its responsibilities. We do not enter into any cooperation with it. We establish a relationship from a place that constantly reminds them of what they need to do by keeping our distance" (P8). Most of the participating activists stated that they were no longer invited to meetings organized by ministries to identify gender and women's issues and develop solution proposals. Regarding this issue, a participating lawyer volunteering at the Foundation for Women's Solidarity, referred to requests as a "reluctant invitation" when they were asked to attend Commission meetings.

They send an e-mail at five o'clock and say there is a meeting the next morning. I mean, they send an e-mail at a time when it cannot be checked then say, 'We wrote to civil society, they did not come.' We complained about this to the Council of Europe (P12).

However, a participant from Mor Cati (P8), stated that they were still being invited to some meetings. In general, organizations focusing on issues such as sexual health and LGBTIQ+ rights continue to be largely ignored by the government, with limited interaction for organizations focusing on VAW. Although the government does not approach the issue from a GBV perspective, combating VAW remains on the agenda, but issues related to LGBTIQ+ rights have been entirely marginalized. Other participants stated that even when they were invited to meetings organized by

ministries or state institutions, their views were often ignored, and the issues discussed in these meetings were sometimes censored or not reflected in reports.

An online meeting was held in 2020 to prepare the Action Plan to Combat Violence Against Women. Everyone had planned something along these lines: Let's constantly discuss the Istanbul Convention. The main group gathered and ministry officials made presentations summarizing each group. Although we always mentioned it, the name of the Istanbul Convention was not mentioned even once in the summary presentation (P11).

As can be seen in the decision to withdraw from the IC, gender equality and VAW are considered separate issues. Therefore, policies are being made without taking into account the gender-based dimension and power dynamics of the VAW issue. Overall, as collaboration between gender advocacy movements and government institutions diminished, these movements lost their capacity to influence policymaking and propagate gender equality agendas. Feminist actors now observe government actions from afar, making it increasingly difficult for them to voice their concerns about gender issues and GBV.

Regarding the same issues, according to P1, the gender advocacy movement has suffered a significant loss of power in civil society, which has also led to a decrease in volunteer participation. P1, while recognizing that the Covid-19 pandemic was also effective here, stated that young people who were considering joining the movement were hesitant to establish relations with civil society because they were afraid of the oppressive political atmosphere. Participant P9 stated that most of their volunteers had left Türkiye as part of the increasing wave of brain drain, adding that, "you can also call this an activist migration" (P9). Similarly, while describing her experiences working for an organization focusing on LGBTIQ+ rights in Türkiye, P7 stated that she felt a constant sense of pressure: "This limits our ability to set forward-looking targets, and we are constantly faced with security and confidentiality concerns in our work" (P7). Respondent P2 argued that portraying gender equality as a threat to national security is extremely dangerous. She also expressed her concern that this exclusion of struggles for democratic rights could disrupt both civil society and academic research.

The pressure on NGOs advocating gender equality is not only a concern for activists in Türkiye. In Hungary, for example, some associations have had their charity status

revoked by the state because of the organizations from which they receive funding. Similarly, in Poland, following protests over abortion laws, some civil society organizations faced legal investigations and had their documents confiscated (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 166). Like the "agency of influence" law planned to be enacted in Türkiye, civil society actors advocating gender equality in Hungary and Poland have been subjected to pressure on the grounds of "serving foreign interests," resulting in the demonization of the civil society sphere and human rights struggles (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018, p. 166).

One of the key findings from the participants' narratives in this study is that activists have begun adopting practices of self-restriction and self-censorship. Although they claimed to be encouraged by a strong sense of feminist solidarity, intense political pressures were pushing them toward a sense of "retreat." It has been suggested that with the rise of the right in Europe, pressures on feminist and LGBTIQ+ activism have increased, manifested in various ways, from the undermining gender studies (Pető, 2018), to the exclusion of feminists from policymaking by labeling them as "feminazis" (Cabezas, 2022) or the state closing down their NGOs (Johnson, 2014). As a result, the pressures faced by the gender advocacy movement are experienced not simply as a "war on gender" but as a process of "de-democratization" (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, p. 224). The constant pressure to which activists are subjected to had a variety of effects on this study's participants. While some said that they felt anxious, others felt restricted by these pressures. However, many noted that existing solidarity networks continued to support them even if they felt the need to remain silent. Activists are now looking for other ways to turn this forced silencing or retreat into a strategy for reorienting their struggle.

As described above, despite the challenges faced by activists who have resorted to silence with low-key activism, the strength of the movement has been maintained through as "resistant silence" (Ferguson, 2003). Thus, the experience of this feminist introverted turn represents a silent struggle in an ongoing process whereby activists are reshaping their solidarity, narratives, and micro-activities in response to the pressures they encounter. Three fundamental strategies were identified based on the experiences of the participants to define this silent struggle: collaboration strategies, discursive strategies, and everyday engagement strategies. These three types of

strategies mutually support and strengthen each other, ultimately enhancing the power of the movement as more pluralistic discourses are embraced. Among them, everyday engagement strategies are the most individualistic, while the other types of strategies focus more on collaboration and target broader audience. In this section, everyday engagement strategies will be examined first to connect micro experiences to the larger political context.

Everyday engagement strategies imply less visible and smaller-scale activist actions rather than bold, large-scale mobilizations, reflecting the retreat that activists have been forced into due to oppression. For instance, participants who voiced support for the IC on social media channels but limited the visibility of the posts to only family and friends could be described as engaging in micro-activism. In other words, they have continued their activism but they prioritize self-protection and avoid interactions with anonymous users. P16 described her approach to micro-activism with the slogan of "clean up your own doorstep." Even though she knows that she will reach a limited audience through her private social media accounts, she prepares informative infographics on topics such as the IC, VAW, gender-based discrimination, and gender equality. Another dimension of everyday engagement strategies entails the satisfaction that participants feel from their work on VAW and GBV, as this work leads to positive changes in the lives of women and LGBTIQ+ individuals. Participants explained that the strongest motivation driving them to work in this field on a daily basis is the possibility of changing lives and helping other individuals break free from the cycle of violence.

When I meet with a hundred women and hear very negative things from ninety-nine of them, but only get positive feedback from one, I still feel like I've found my purpose. That's where I am now... It motivates me tremendously because it shows me that my struggle can definitely pay off in the future (P10).

Everyday engagement strategies stem from the forced introversion and retreat that participants have experienced. These strategies have encouraged them to persist in their struggles, believing that they will be able to put forth their real efforts at a time when they feel able to be more assertive. Therefore, their primary goal for now is to regain agenda-setting power and raise their voices in areas where they feel excluded.

Anti-gender movements and state collaborations have led to the spatial and discursive retreat of the gender advocacy movement. This forced retreat is considered an introverted turn in the feminist movement and has led the gender advocacy movement to reposition itself in the political arena. The weakening, and in some cases the complete breakdown, of communication with the government and state institutions is forcing the gender advocacy movement to form new alliances and create new political opportunities to remain influential in policymaking. The struggle to increase communication and collaboration among members of the gender advocacy movement has been ongoing in the past four years following Türkiye's decision to withdraw from the IC. This struggle has been driven by campaigns resembling a "cycles of contention" (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, the gender advocacy movement has maintained its momentum despite being silenced in public.

Drawing on the experiences of the participants, this study argues that anti-gender backlash and pressure from the right-wing populist government in Türkiye has forced the gender advocacy movement to retreat in two ways: spatially and discursively. While women's and feminist movements have experienced predominantly discursive retreats, the LGBTIQ+ movement has been forced into both spatial and discursive retreats. Participants frequently described the political pressure they experienced as "stuckness" (P3) or as "being pushed from the center to the margins" (P2). However, considering the experiences of the participants and the ongoing gender advocacy campaigns in Türkiye, it can be said that this situation should be interpreted not as a loss of power, but rather as the definition of a new political field and the creation of a strategy for a strong comeback. The participants explained that they felt tired but hopeful despite the pressure.

Similarly, analysis of the interviews illustrates that the gender advocacy movement in Türkiye is going through a process of introspection and that this process represents a feminist repositioning. In a similar vein, one participant observed that the situation was reminiscent of a rip current: "During a rip current you can't see a wave in the ocean. But from below the surface the waves pull you out to sea. That's exactly the current situation of our struggle right now. It remains strong, but the visibility of the movement has diminished" (P5). Therefore, activists believe that although the feminist

movement may seem stagnant at first glance, participants believed that it is actually growing stronger deep down.

The Covid-19 pandemic indirectly affected the spatial retreat of feminist activism, as face-to-face interactions were limited during this period, which restricted street movements. Debates in Türkiye about withdrawing from the IC coincided with the pandemic. The loss of the streets as a space for political expression reduces the political impact of movements, and when the right or ability to participate in street demonstrations is restricted, movements are forced to change their protest practices. As the voices of the women's, feminist, and LGBTIQ+ movements as fundamental components of gender advocacy in Türkiye, are being silenced in the public sphere, the social legitimacy of these movements is jeopardized. Thus, it has become easier in general for the gender advocacy movement to be marginalized and criminalized.

However, this situation is not specific to the gender advocacy movement in Türkiye; it reflects a broader hampering of the struggle for rights on the streets due to conditions caused by the global pandemic (Pleyers, 2020). Pre-dating the pandemic, the situation that first pushed the Turkish activists to retreat in spatial terms was the oppression and bans on the street protests for the LGBTIQ+ movement, which became evident with first the postponement and then the complete ban on its marches. The Pride March was banned in 2015 on the grounds that it "offended people's sensitivities due to [its occurrence in] the month of Ramadan" (Yıldırım, 2022, p. 11). In the following years, the state's stance on this issue did not change, and Pride Marches have continued to be banned in Türkiye by the decision of governing bodies for the last ten years.

Activists' experiences of spatial retreat are related to their activist anxiety. For security reasons, activists take precautions that include concealing their activities or not disclosing their addresses. Therefore, one of the effects of an enforced spatial retreat is that activists who are concerned about their physical and spatial security cannot publicize their events. Instead, they are forced to share event information only within networks that they consider safe.<sup>355</sup> The concealing of organizations' addresses is a

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<sup>355</sup> I encountered a similar situation during the data collection process. One of the participants said that she would invite me to their workshops for participant observation purposes. but that I could only attend if the partner organizations in the workshop approved such participation by an outsider. As a result, I was not invited to the workshop.

related dimension of spatial retreat. One participant, who expressed concern for their safety after receiving threatening messages from anti-gender activists on social media noted that these perpetrators had visited their association's previous address as listed online and placed stickers on the door.

The address that appears on Google Maps is not up to date. One day we visited our old office... There were pictures of [Ottoman sultan] Abdulhamid on the door. I am not sure why Abdulhamid is important but there is a real threat to HAVLE there. There is something about it... There is a reference to the Tanzimat period. You know, when you talk about modernization, we are against it (P7).

As noted earlier, discursive retreat is another form of this forced retreat. The most striking aspect of discursive withdrawal is that activists stop fighting or, in other words, stop having a voice in some areas: "As an association, we are not directly campaigning on the Istanbul Convention anymore. Instead, we are focusing on preventing the loss of our gains in other areas" (P1). Similarly, one participant explained that the feminist movement had to retreat discursively, saying, "We must now fight harder not to gain more, but to stop further loss" (P11). Another participant emphasized the need to reorganize a strong struggle network for these struggles: "Instead of always being on the defensive, we must fight to expand our political space. We will not stop fighting. We are right. This is our reason for existence. We will not give up on ourselves" (P13).

Participants identified two main goals for overcoming this discursive retreat or silencing. The first is sharing their own stories through narrative strengthening. In this way, they aim to counter anti-gender movements' strategy of labelling them as "immoral others." The second goal is enhancing both local and transnational solidarity networks. The silencing, reflected in the introverted turn in the feminist movement, represents a process of strategically repositioning in the political landscape. This repositioning necessitates building power and strengthening alliances. Repertoires of contention encompass all methods of action employed during a movement's fight for rights (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015). Thus, this study argues that the "silent struggle" does not fundamentally indicate weakening. Instead, it is considered here as a new repertoire of contention.



Narrative strengthening strategies were the most frequently emphasized strategies in the context of silent struggle. In this respect, P2 argued that the social perceptions of LGBTIQ+ individuals have been shaped manipulatively: "Society should see LGBT people as individuals trying to live normal lives, not as a group wearing carnival costumes and using foul language" (P2). The anti-IC campaign represented them as "external" actors and so feminist activists are trying to challenge that narrative by arguing that they are not "other." Furthermore, they assert that their discourses and demands are legitimate. Within this context, the participants described their narrative strengthening strategies as retelling their own stories to challenge opposing narratives.

The Narrative Power Alliance, was launched as a narrative-oriented campaign by an alliance formed by HAVLE, SPoD, Positive Solidarity, and the Research Association for Democracy, Peace, and Alternative Politics (DEMOS Research Association). While SPoD and Positive Solidarity focus on LGBTIQ+ rights, HAVLE primarily focuses on women's issues. On the other hand, the DEMOS Research Association focuses on issues such as peace and democracy. Therefore, the joint efforts of these groups address anti-gender movements from a variety of perspectives. They aim to create a strong struggle network by bringing together groups advocating gender equality. "Here, the anti-gender movements we are facing operate as a unified bloc. In return, we aim to add a few more organizations every year. Although anti-gender movements seem fragmented, they have a common repertoire of activism and action. As for us, we are still struggling in a fragmented way" (P9). These collaborative steps reflect the gender advocacy movement's efforts to build broader alliances for democratic resilience. Furthermore, these steps demonstrate that activists do not view anti-gender movements as solely anti-feminist or anti-LGBTIQ+ movements; rather they are understood as anti-democratic movements in general.

When asked why they preferred the concept of narrative rather than discourse within their network, P7 stated that narratives offer more intimate aspects than discourse: "We are very aware that these movements create some narratives. By narrative, we actually mean something close to discourse. Narrative produces its own reality. It tells you the reality that was constructed through a story" (P7). In a report titled "The Pursuit of New Alliances to Debunk Anti-Gender Narratives," it was argued that anti-gender

movements employ a narrative strategy, and that, therefore, one important objective is examining how "this power translates into acts of violence" (Atli, 2023, 10).

Thus, in the scope of their silent struggle, the participants have turned to retelling their own history in parallel with the introverted turn in the feminist movement. In response to the counter-historiography of anti-gender movements that stigmatizes feminists as "non-national" and "other," they expressed their intention to produce works that would recall their own history of struggle. A participant from KA-DER stated that they are working on "a chronological feminist history study to remember, not to forget, and to preserve" (P20). The counter-reframing strategies of anti-gender movements involve two important effects. One strategy is decontextualizing the issue and the other is making the women's movement, feminist movement, and the LGBTIQ+ movement invisible. Anti-genderists reframe these movements, trivializing their struggles and labeling them as "marginal activities." In doing so, they obscure their historical significance and portray them as sudden events with no legitimate place in society.

Participants underlined the importance of narrative strengthening as a mechanism to be developed through intersectionality. They argued that the anti-gender movement's exclusionary and reactionary attitudes toward LGBTIQ+ rights and women's rights can only be effectively countered by forming stronger alliances. Regarding this, P7 underlined the importance of narrative strengthening, particularly in the context of the IC. According to P7, it is a crucial mechanism in terms of "overcoming the polarization in society created through the populist distinction of us and them. In developing our own narratives, we can say 'We have always been here, we did not come later or were not imported from the West' (P7). Thus, narrative strengthening serves as an important strategy for gender advocacy movements as groups retell their own stories. Through this strategy, support for the movement can be increased by activating emotions and strengthening empathy in various segments of society.

The Narrative Power Alliance report also emphasized the "power of narrative" with a similar assessment: "The hallmark of a compelling narrative lies in its ability to stir emotions and illuminate genuine threads of solidarity" (Atli, 2023, p. 31). Another function of narrative strengthening for social movements is to create a common frame that integrates the beliefs, values, and concerns of diverse participants within the

gender advocacy movement through frame bridging. Snow and Benford (2000) noted that frame bridging also enables the expansion of support for social movements. In this way, social movements can become more inclusive. They are also likely to gain support from broader audiences through intersectional frameworks and increase their capacity for collective action by encouraging solidarity between groups.

The participants' statements also revealed that the most important element of the silent struggle is solidarity. They argued that the solution to the increasing gender opposition and the shrinking space for activism is to form a strong alliance among democratic actors, identifying "political parties that defend democratic values" (P17), "transnational institutions" (P19), "CSOs advocating for human rights" (P8), "responsible and independent media" (P1), and "all conscientious citizens of society" (P5) are key actors of such an alliance. They stated that while forming alliances to increase their solidarity, they primarily aimed to increase the interaction among groups involved in the gender advocacy movement. Subsequently, they aim to develop their campaigns at the national level through joint projects with other rights movements, left-wing political parties, independent media organizations, and artists. They also aim to lobby organizations such as the EU and the UN to form transnational alliances and increase their collaboration with gender advocacy movements in other countries to achieve a wider impact. Participants argued that the gender advocacy movement should prioritize solidarity among its members, emphasizing that this area is also an area with conflict and that very different groups coexist. In fact, the common criticism voiced by activists in LGBTIQ+ and Muslim feminist organizations in this study was that the development of the feminist movement in Türkiye was not historically inclusive enough. In assessing the gender advocacy movement, one participant noted that it is also a movement experiencing internal conflicts:

There are tensions between the Kurdish women's movement and the feminist movement. In addition, there are tensions between LGBTIQ+ and other women's movements. But while you're trying to be inclusive, you don't want to separate one from the other because ultimately, the field [the gender advocacy movement] itself is intersectional (P9)

While evaluating the internally contentious situation of the gender advocacy movement, P10 stated that the strengthened anti-gender movements are trying to act

in a more organized and homogeneous way.<sup>356</sup> The effect of anti-gender movements on internal tensions within the gender advocacy movement, especially through polarizing discourses, causes the tensions that already exist within the gender advocacy movement to be further strained. For example, while the anti-gender movement defends policy proposals on woman and family, its anti-LGBTIQ+ stance forces the gender advocacy movement to react. In this case, there may be division between groups due to their perspectives on LGBTIQ+ rights within the gender advocacy movement.

The gender advocacy movement draws support and encouragement from the strong solidarity networks that activists have built. These connections enable them to look to the future with hope and strengthen their resolve as activists. However, as P8 emphasized, the gender advocacy movement is more established and organized in big cities like Istanbul and Ankara, and there is not an equally strong civil activism presence in every region of Türkiye. For example, P8, who explained that a feminist organization trying to operate in Erzincan was exposed to anti-feminist threats, said that in this case, they could only help them make their voices heard from a distance. According to P8, just making their voices heard is not as effective as standing with the groups that are being discriminated against and fighting together with them.

Participants in the Narrative Power Alliance expressed their intention to establish a broad solidarity and campaign network including activists, civil society experts, artists, political parties, local governments, and academics as a strategy for increasing solidarity. In their report, they stated that they had been fighting anti-gender movements in a "disorganized and fragmented manner" and that they would sought new alliances to change that situation (Atlı, 2023, p. 11). Dinçer (2020) argued that the women's movement in Türkiye has a fragmented structure, but that the capacity to form a coalition is possible with a move away from identity politics. It was argued that activism based on rigid identity politics prevents the creation of an inclusive coalition.

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<sup>356</sup> The analysis in this study is based on data from a limited number of interviews. Therefore, criticisms regarding the inclusiveness of the gender advocacy movement cannot be further evaluated within the scope of this study. Furthermore, since the participants of this study were reached through a snowball sampling technique, the sample does not represent all actors in the gender advocacy movement in Türkiye. For example, Kurdish women's movement activists are not represented in this study. Discussions regarding the inclusiveness of the feminist movement in Türkiye are therefore not pursued in this chapter; this topic that requires further investigation.

Similarly, P9 explained that an event they organized against anti-gender movements was targeted by gender critical feminists on social media, and argued that the polarization within this movement harmed the dynamics of solidarity. Lambie (2024), who argued that anti-gender movements and gender-critical feminists share commonalities based on an evaluation of the situation in Britain, stated that these two movements exist on different spectrums within the realm of gender-critical politics. While the former is considered more authoritarian and associated with the far right, the latter can also be found in left-wing circles. A study of the gender-critical feminist movement in Italy argued that this movement's critical stance towards "gender theory" places it discursively in a position close to anti-gender movements (Gusmeroli, 2023). Similarly, in Germany, gender-critical feminists and right-wing populist actors supported the #FrauenSagenNein (#WomenSayNo) campaign on X (formerly Twitter) in a joint campaign against a proposed law to facilitate gender reassignment procedures (Zahn & Lünenborg, 2024). As a result, divisions within the women's movement, the feminist movement, and the LGBTIQ+ movement are likely to create discursive opportunities for anti-gender actors to further marginalize these movements.

The second problem identified by the participants in strengthening solidarity was the necessity of establishing relations with other rights organizations, left-wing political parties, municipalities, and media organizations in order to increase their visibility. In their evaluations of the IC campaign, participants argued that opposition political parties in Türkiye had not fully embraced the IC. They also stated that opposition parties in general had limited communication with the gender advocacy movement. P2 believed that opposition parties had failed to adequately inform the public about the content of the Convention and the details of the protective mechanisms it provided. P15 stated that opposition parties have failed to create sufficient pressure, particularly for women's policies, and are hesitant to form partnerships with women's organizations. P16 said that they were only able to work with municipalities governed by the main opposition party, the CHP, to organize events. However, P16 also noted that in spite of their ability to partner on events, they did not receive any invitations from the CHP to help create policy documents on gender equality. Meanwhile, P19 from the Red Pepper Association stated that they are trying to continue their political

efforts through the Women's Party,<sup>357</sup> which they founded with the slogan of "From Male Democracy to Real Democracy."

Participants also noted that opposition parties in Türkiye are hesitant to engage with the gender equality advocacy movement. They described these parties as using gender equality rhetoric without sincerely embracing it just to get votes from their own base. Walters, who has made similar criticisms of companies, described this situation as "gender washing," or "a range of communications with the intent to mislead people into adopting overly positive beliefs about the impact of an organization's practices, policies, or products on girls and women" (2021, p. 1584). Rodríguez Gustá (2021), who made a similar assessment of this issue, emphasized in her study on Brazil and Argentina that both left-wing and right-wing governments instrumentalize gender policies. Participants also discussed the importance of building transnational collaborations and solidarity networks to expand alliance networks or, in other words, to move the movement's impact to a transnational level with a significant scale shift. In this context, they stated that establishing solidarity networks with gender advocacy movements in democratic countries is one of their high-priority goals. They also noted that anti-gender movements are increasingly being organized within structures such as the EU and the UN. For this reason, they emphasized the need for gender advocacy movements around the world to cooperate.

Feminist activists also argued that the amplification of gender advocacy movements in the transnational arena would enable them to pressure governments at the national level to implement gender policies (P19, P20). Feminist activists therefore advocate strengthening transnational networks as one of the key strategies for gender advocacy movements in Türkiye to counter the decline of civil society, expand opportunities for activism, and combat rising anti-gender sentiments. For example, P1 observed that relationships with universities and CSOs in the US and Europe have weakened compared to the past. In the past, she explained, they were able to organize meetings with the participation of activists and experts from various countries.

However, according to P1, foreign activists and experts no longer want to come to Türkiye as much as they did before. P1 also stated that the main reason for the decline

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<sup>357</sup> Women's Party. (n.d.). Homepage. Women's Party. <https://www.kadinpartisi.org.tr>

in transnational ties between groups working in the field of gender advocacy is that foreign activists do not see Türkiye as safe enough and in addition to the weakening of existing relations due to the restrictions of the pandemic in 2020. However, some participants emphasized that solidarity networks had not been completely disrupted and that they are still invited to some meetings. For example, P14 stated that they were frequently asked about their experiences following Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC in the transnational meetings they attended. However, according to P14, those who asked them this question were asking with the expectation that the dramatic answer would be "Türkiye withdrew from the Convention and everything got worse. Tell me about it" (p.14).

Participants emphasized the importance of solidarity and stressed that increasing communication with transnational institutions would enable their voices to be amplified. In this context, the main issue that they identified and problematized as a threat to their own efforts was the lobbying activities of anti-gender movements through transnational collaborations. Anti-gender movements lobby at the UN. In this context, they participate in UN delegations on women's rights as state representatives and establish relations with critical units of the UN as consultants. This shows that they are trying to create a hegemonic discourse through these relations. This strategy has allowed them to spread their anti-gender perspectives transnationally (Denkovski et al., 2021, p. 47). This issue was particularly concerning for the participating activists of the present study:

Anti-gender groups are also lobbying at UN meetings. You can see that the language used in UN reports has started to change in the last five years. For example, the term LGBTI is no longer used in final reports. They are actually organizing within the UN to try to erase the concepts of gender, gender equality and social violence (P19).

On one side, there is the growing transnational lobby of the anti-gender movement. On the other side, there are people like us who advocate for gender equality and human rights. In fact, all the conflicts that we discuss in our own countries exist there too, on a transnational level (P20).

As can be understood from the participants' narratives, strengthening solidarity relations as a strategy to combat anti-gender movements is not only a national but also a transnational goal for them. For now, however, they seem to have established this

solidarity within small circles. As discussed above, their silent struggle is an ongoing movement repertoire, and therefore, by drawing strength from solidarity, their efforts to transform their silence into "resistant silence" (Ferguson, 2003) and their democratic endurance into "resilient/resilience" are ongoing. In this context, the final question asked of the participants in the in-depth interviews, which allowed them to evaluate the future of their struggle and the direction of anti-gender movements. All participants looked to the future with optimism and believed that anti-gender movements will disappear, especially as a result of global demands for democratization.

The participants of this study primarily emphasized solidarity in combating anti-gender movements. However, researchers who have studied how to combat anti-gender movements in various Latin American cases have argued that reducing the influence of the Church in social policymaking is essential. Activists in Latin America are fighting for the establishment of an independent civil society of organized solidarity against the alternative civil society created by right-wing governments. They are also trying to prevent left-wing populist parties from exploiting gender politics. Most importantly, they are advocating for the strengthening of transnational feminist solidarity (Zarembek et al., 2021). In addition, researchers who believe that both institutional and activism responses are necessary to combat anti-genderism have recommended the following strategies: "knowledge, coalition building, rulemaking, and everyday pragmatic engagement" (Kantola & Lombardo, 2024, pp. 834). Therefore, the experiences of the participants of this study provide a unique contribution to the existing resistance strategies in the literature, especially in terms of narrative strengthening strategies.

Participants noted that while assessing the course of anti-gender movements, it is important to emphasize their transnational dimension and their global lobbying power. However, they also argued that the power of this countermovement should not be "exaggerated." P19 stressed the importance of recognizing that anti-gender movements are not only seen in Türkiye; they are particularly prevalent in Europe: "We must emphasize that these movements are global movements. In this way, we can show that they are not as authentic as they claim to be" (P19). In contrast P14 argued that claiming that anti-gender movements have emerged and become strong globally can create the false impression that these movements are stronger than they actually



are. According to P14, excessive emphasis on their global aspects more can imply that these movements have grassroots support when, in fact, they do not. This suggests that while the participants of this study seemed to agree on the actors and discourses of anti-gender movements, they differed in their assessments of the political power of these movements on a global scale. According to P2, anti-gender movements have not emerged recently or suddenly. On the contrary, these movements represent an "update to patriarchy" (P2). Therefore, it was argued that the feminist movement needs to update its own discourse and strategies against this updated countermovement. While some participants argued that anti-gender movements continue to grow stronger and expand their sphere of influence, others claimed that these movements are "over-exaggerated" (P14) and that "too many meanings are given to these concepts" (P9).

It was also argued that calling these groups "movements" was problematic as it made them appear to be a large in number even though they are a minority (P12). P14 held that it was wrong to attribute all gender equality rights losses solely to anti-gender movements. From this perspective, the loss of rights in the area of gender equality should be considered as a result of large-scale transformations such as neoliberalism and the erosion of democracy. This perspective is consistent with the approach of researchers studying illiberal transformation in Hungary and Poland, who have defined anti-genderism as a combination of neoliberalism and patriarchy (Grzebalska & Pető, 2018). P8 described anti-genderism as a "growing trend in politics." According to P8, this has led the gender advocacy movement into a collective "transitional phase." This dissertation, which advocates a similar approach, argues that we are in a global transition period and that anti-gender movements around the world are not yet as politically effective as they would like. Since these conservative countermovements draw their power from existing political opportunity structures, the way to counter them is to strengthen democracy and make existing opportunity structures more favorable to democratic actors.

In relation to the above point, it should be noted that in the emerging literature on anti-gender movements in Türkiye, these movements are not addressed separately from the trend towards democratic backsliding (Ünal, 2024a; Gençkal-Eroler, 2024). Therefore, it seems possible to combat both anti-gender movements and democratic regression through the formation of a strong democratic front that aims to establish democratic

resilience (Boese et al., 2021). As previously described, anti-gender movements do not entail only opposing the mainstreaming of gender and gender equality. However, these dimensions are the most prominent aspects of these movements and gender opposition is criticized as "gender ideology" in their lexicon, and enabling different actors to come together. As a result, to effectively combat these movements, it is not enough to simply strengthen the gender equality paradigm. It is necessary to foster democratic resilience. This includes combating discrimination and the loss of rights while also promoting democratic rights and freedoms in general. Another conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that activists remain hopeful that Türkiye will re-ratify the IC and continue to implement policies that promote gender equality. The participants believed that to achieve this goal, anti-gender movements must be confronted and their influence must be curbed. However, they stated that such efforts cannot be sustained solely by the women's movement, the feminist movement, or the LGBTIQ+ movement. According to the participants, this struggle should be carried out by a broader democratic coalition. Thus, this dissertation does not distinguish between anti-gender backlash and democratic backsliding. In this context, it is argued here that it is imperative for gender advocacy movements to strive to develop democratic resilience in order to counter anti-gender movements. Similarly, the Istanbul Convention Policy Report published by AĞ-DA calls for the establishment of "a comprehensive struggle line centered on democracy and freedoms." This report argues that if a solidarity alliance is not formed and/or the responsibility for combating anti-gender movements is placed solely on women's and LGBTI+ movements, the outcome will be further isolation and marginalization (Özdemir-Taştan et al., 2022, p. 29). The alliance discussed here does not mean the formation of a community of actors who are free of conflict, in complete harmony with each other, and who have put forward a homogeneous discourse. As stated in the Narrative Power Alliance report, what is needed is an agonistic alliance (Mouffe, 2013) of actors who do not hesitate to argue with each other from time to time but are determined to maintain a "safe and democratic space."

Alongside the inherent problems and emotions within the alliance, we talk about a safe and democratic space where the personal impacts of the current political climate are also transferred, occasionally experiencing disagreements, divergences, and exhaustion (Atlı, 2023, p. 17).

The present study, which has made its assessments in the context of contentious politics, argues that it is important to form a strong alliance for democratic resilience. However, it is also important to emphasize that as this alliance expands, the main focus of the conflict will shift from identity politics or gender issues to democracy itself, which is both an opportunity and a threat, reflecting diffusion of the focus of the conflict. Because the findings of this study are based on IC-focused analysis, they allow a relatively limited discussion of how a broad democratic alliance can be mobilized within the framework of gender equality. This study argues that after the government's decision to withdraw from the IC, the gender advocacy movement was mobilized primarily through the "injustice frame" (Benford & Snow, 2000). Therefore, if we assume that the gender advocacy movement will lead the struggle against anti-gender movements, it can be predicted that a struggle or a coalition led by this movement would adopt a similar frame. Moreover, when considered through the lens of contentious politics, it is important for the political opportunity structures to change in ways that support this new struggle in order to strengthen democratic resilience and solidarity to ensure that the struggle can be effective. Thus, it is crucial for the gender advocacy movement to reposition itself in the political arena. Considering the existing conditions, this could be possible through a defensive feminist retreat and the formation of alliances that strengthen solidarity. Enhancing solidarity is crucial to create new political opportunity structures. However, approaching anti-gender movements solely through the lens of gender politics leads to a limited evaluation within a restrictive framework. Therefore, in order for this solidarity coalition to be successful, the "injustice frame" that mobilized the gender advocacy movement in the context of the IC needs to be expanded with additional core frames. This will enable the creation of a coalition that is inclusive enough to invite other potential participants to join or support the movement.

## **7.5. Conclusions**

In this chapter, the participants' narratives have shown that the anti-gender movement and state collaboration have significantly influenced the gender advocacy movement. The findings suggest that this coalition has imposed challenges on them but their

strengthened solidarity has made them resilient. The public visibility of the gender advocacy movement has diminished due to political pressures. However, the core commitment to gender equality has remained strong among the participants. Based on the narratives of feminist activists, it appears that they are shifting toward more covert and strategic forms of resistance than before. This "silent struggle" described by the participants reflects a cautious way of responding with an increasingly narrow social and political space. As a result, the gender advocacy movement in Türkiye is facing challenges. However, the presence of strong activism enhances the movement's ability to develop a new repertoire of resistance to persevere in the face of adversity. The gender advocacy movement's pro-IC campaign is thus actually only one dimension of a much broader ongoing ideological contestation. As a reflection of this ideological contestation, the anti-gender movement in Türkiye generally portrays the gender advocacy movement as a group consisting of feminists and LGBTIQ+. Both the pro-IC campaign and the gender advocacy movement in general do not reflect the diversity of actors within it (Kemalist women's movement, conservative women's movement, pious CSOs, Kurdish women's movement, liberal feminists, radical feminists, LGBTIQ+ movement, etc.) and attempt to homogenize them. Although this study did not reach out to all actors in the gender advocacy movement, it is important to emphasize that the groups within this movement are quite diverse. Moreover, when the participants' general evaluations of anti-gender movements are examined, it is striking that they generally emphasize that these movements are strengthened not only by local but also by transnational connections. The discourses, frames, and repertoires of anti-gender movements in Poland and Hungary are exemplary in terms of their impact on anti-gender groups in Türkiye.

## CHAPTER 8

### 8. CONCLUSION

In the last decade, conservative movements that oppose progressive gender equality gains have been on the rise. These movements have increased their power and influence on a global scale to reach a point where they can impact the paradigm of states' policies on violence. With their strong transnational networks and influential discourses that shape public attitudes, these movements, referred to as anti-gender mobilizations, anti-gender movements, or anti-gender campaigns, have been organized as a response to reform initiatives on many issues, including reproductive rights, sex education, same-sex marriage, and gender studies in academia (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a).

This study inquired into the movement-counter movement dynamics in the context of the IC debates in Türkiye, which ultimately resulted Türkiye's withdrawal from the Convention by the government. Analysis based on a case study involving a qualitative research procedure confirmed that the ideological contestation between the two movements has been manifested through debates over gendered issues regarding the family, anti-violence policies, and gender equality. A common discursive opposition to gender equality among a loose coalition anti-gender actors and the more focused and targeted anti-IC campaign beginning the year 2020 were instrumental in pushing forward an ongoing process of paradigm change in gender policies with a more visible shift from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming and ultimately to anti-gender mainstreaming or the institutionalization of an approach excluding the gender perspective in all social and justice policies. It has been asserted here that these groups of actors have been seeking to influence policymaking and establish political collaborations with political parties by excluding feminist actors and gender advocacy networks. This study argued that the existing political opportunity structure in Türkiye has empowered the anti-gender movement, enabling it to impact the approach to and policies on VAW. In contrast, the gender advocacy movement, which suffered from

all the asymmetrical relations of power, has been pushed into retreat, as its agenda-setting capacity has been weakened within a political climate shaped by a strategic alliance between the government and the anti-gender movement actors. In response, the gender advocacy movement has sought to regain its strength by developing new repertoires of action and reinforcing solidarity networks through new political alliances, albeit in a state of retreat with lower-profile activism than ever before.

The analysis conducted in this study revealed important aspects of the ideological contestation between the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement in Türkiye. First, it was argued that the anti-gender movement adopted nationalist and conservative discourses to legitimize its campaigns, such as opposition to the IC, and to influence policymaking. It has thus been able to effectively use existing political opportunity structures. Second, the active role of the state in the transition from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming was emphasized in this study. In this context, it was determined that the government has aligned with anti-gender discourses while making efforts for the institutionalization of family-centered policies.

It was also revealed that the state has avoided a gender-inclusive perspectives while implementing its family-centered perspective on policymaking. Third, this study focused on the current state of the gender advocacy movement, revealing its efforts and challenges in terms of coalition building, strategic advocacy, and the strengthening of gender equality narratives. Nevertheless, as the gender equality advocates emphasized, these initiatives are significantly limited by a shrinking civic space and efforts to delegitimize them through the hostile discourses of the anti-gender wave. Fourth, CDA as one of the main focuses of the research, revealed the importance of framing strategies. The anti-IC campaign portrayed the gender advocacy movement as a product of a foreign power, an external imposition, and an attack on traditional values.

In contrast, gender equality advocates defended the IC by emphasizing its effectiveness as a policy tool against VAW and its transnationally important human rights framework. Ultimately, the analysis conducted based on the IC campaigns demonstrated that the conflict over gender equality policies in Türkiye has directly affected the policymaking. Accordingly, the state's collaboration with the anti-gender

movement reflects a broader ideological contestation affecting the policymaking process and redefining the role of civil society, with populist, neoliberal, and nationalist agendas intertwining.

As can be seen in the analyzed news and books, and as emphasized by feminist activists in interviews, anti-gender groups in Türkiye have been following the agendas of anti-gender movements in different countries, not only in the context of the IC but also in general. In this respect, they follow the cases of Poland and Hungary in particular and even present them in newspaper reports as exemplary countries that have taken decisive steps in combating "gender ideology." Another important point to emphasize is that anti-gender movements are not grassroots movements on their own. These movements have not simply emerged as a backlash to the gains of the gender advocacy movement. They have collaborated with right-wing populist parties with a strong ideological affinity based on existing right-wing and conservative ideologies. Therefore, even if they bring social issues to the agenda or include groups that can be considered grassroots due to their multi-actor structures, when the discourses, frames, and political alliances of these movements are taken into consideration, it becomes clear that they gain power, not from grassroots grievances but from the populist discourses of existing political opportunity structures and that they are able to influence policymaking through "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022).

This dissertation was planned with the aim of contributing to the existing literature on anti-gender movements and anti-IC campaigns. It has specifically analyzed the Turkish context, considering the interactions between the anti-gender equality movement and the conservative populist government in terms of their ideological affinity. Analysis of the debates regarding the IC in Türkiye addressed the power and visibility of the anti-gender movement as a countermovement opposing the gender advocacy movement and rejecting policy proposals developed with a gender equality perspective. This analysis ultimately revealed the movement's potential to influence policymaking. Debates surrounding the IC seemed to culminate in the 2021 withdrawal from the Convention through a presidential decision. However, the legal validity of that withdrawal decision was contested by a wide range of reactions, from the liberal political opposition to women's movements across the ideological spectrum.

This study was based on qualitative research. It employed a CDA and deductive thematic analysis in the discursive analysis of the discourses developed by anti-IC campaign actors. Additionally, to identify the views of actors involved in the pro-IC campaign, their responses and motivations, and their movement repertoires, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with feminist activists.

Accordingly, this study's evaluations of the gender advocacy movement's pro-IC campaign were based on the findings obtained in those interviews. The participant profile of this study was varied, including both feminist activists from formal organizations and those representing less formal platforms. The study generally presented an analysis based on individual activism experiences. No inferences were made regarding the impact of the diversity and fragmentation in the feminist movement in general or an evaluation that takes into account their fragmented structure. In addition to the interviews, this study also cited the reports from groups involved in this movement regarding the IC.

In the highly polarized atmosphere of Turkish politics, the IC debates quickly led to the emergence of both anti-Convention and pro-Convention fronts. Similar to other examples of objections to the IC, particularly those in CEECs, the anti-gender movement in Türkiye has triggered a discourse-driven campaign as well as demonstrations to undermine the cumulative gains and demands of feminist struggles. Meanwhile, actors of the gender equality advocacy movement have been responding to and reflecting on threats to the process of gender mainstreaming and the fight against GBV. As the findings of this study revealed, while both the pro-IC campaign and the gender advocacy movement, in general, have a diversified structure that brings together very different groups, the anti-gender movement homogenizes these groups to discriminate against them easily. However, since the gender advocacy movement began to focus on threats from anti-gender groups during the IC debates, discussions and analyses of these movements emerged later, especially in the context of the IC debates. During the IC debates, feminists primarily focused on religious groups and the AKP's institutionalization of family-centered policies, highlighted by its gender justice paradigm and family mainstreaming approach, while analyzing the anti-gender movement.



The political and electoral dominance of the AKP, which has been in power since 2002, has created political opportunity structures that support the rise of anti-gender demands and claims in society. These demands included calls for the country's withdrawal from the IC, claiming it posed a threat to the family and the masculinist order. The decision to withdraw from the Convention marked the final stage of an already weakened collaboration between the state and the gender advocacy movement. Since 2010, the AKP government has expressed its intentions of institutionalizing family-centered policies and family focused anti-violence programs rather than policies based on gender equality. The gender mainstreaming perspective was never fully adopted by the AKP because that perspective addresses the deeper structural dynamics of physical and sexual violence against women, female children, and other groups vulnerable to masculine assertions of domination across the public-private divide. As a result, the synergy and reciprocal interests between the anti-gender movement and the government have led to a change in gender policies in Türkiye. In this context, a family-focused paradigm was adopted at the policy level instead of a women-centered and gender-sensitive approach. Since the 2010s, "gender" and even "equality" have been targeted in the discursive struggle of anti-gender actors. The IC was declared the main culprit due to its comprehensive gender-focused approach. On the one hand, Türkiye has seen the successes of a strong women's movement aiming to facilitate a cultural transformation toward more equal citizenship. On the other hand, however, the country has experienced a paradigm shift prioritizing family, social values, and national security. This dissertation examined the ideological struggle between anti-IC and pro-IC groups as a process highlighting the conflict between the claims of the anti-gender movement and those of the gender equality movement. Because this study interpreted the IC debates through the lens of contentious politics, it positioned the gender advocacy movement and the anti-gender movement as opposing groups producing competing demands. It has been argued here that both movements directed their demands towards the state regarding the IC, and in this sense they mobilized by demanding either the defense of or the withdrawal from the IC.

From the perspective of ideological contestation, it was argued that the anti-gender movement functions as a countermovement that opposes the gender advocacy movement. In this context, the anti-IC campaign exhibits characteristics of a counter-

campaign and functions as a backlash. However, this study has not claimed that anti-gender movements are merely reactionary mobilizations. Furthermore, it has not been asserted that these movements were mobilized only to target the advances of the gender advocacy movement. On the contrary, this study suggests that future study examining the emergence of the anti-gender movement in Türkiye must also take into account the rise of anti-gender movements on a global scale and the right-wing and conservative movements in Türkiye. This study has argued that anti-gender movements are not purely reactionary or independent of local dynamics.

After Türkiye was officially declared an EU candidate country in 1999, the AKP government took steps to align its domestic policies with the EU. Expectations regarding gender equality with the aim of a more inclusive democracy were also included in the government's agenda. In this context, gender equality was adopted as a paradigm that would guide public policies on women's employment, access to anti-violence policies, and political empowerment, and steps were taken in those directions. However, although gender equality appeared to be adopted, it was never fully adapted to policymaking. The intersection of populism, conservatism, and neoliberalism served as the main factor preventing the effective implementation of these policies. The gender-conservative AKP government's reluctance to embrace gender equality also significantly impacted the effectiveness of policies aimed at combating GBV (Aslan Akman & Tutuncu, 2013a; Dedeoğlu & Elveren, 2012). While evaluating the status of gender policies in Türkiye, Kandiyoti (2016) emphasized that these policies are an integral part of the dominant conservative ideologies and patriarchal style of governance. Moreover, gender issues function as a key component of populist discourse in the politicization of rights-based demands. The IC debates of 2020 and 2021 and the anti-gender mobilizations that escalated in those years transformed the conflict and polarization over gender equality in Türkiye into an ideological contestation over the IC. The conflict between these two movements, which directly confronted each other on the issue of the IC, increased the symbolic importance of the Convention for both movements. In this context, the consequences of the transition from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming in policies for women and family in Türkiye have been met with apprehension by the gender advocacy movement and other opposition groups.

In Europe and Latin America, anti-gender actors have been supported by established institutions such as churches, right-wing political parties, and populist governments. Their discursive frameworks are well defined and in some countries, such as Russia, they even operate in a state-supported manner (Edenborg, 2021). However, although anti-gender movements share common themes and discourses, they have also adapted to their local contexts and existing political opportunity structures (Norocel & Paternotte, 2023, p. 124). Political opportunity structure shape and support movements in various ways, including defining their scope, disseminating their messages to the wider public, and allowing them to establish political alliances to increase their political effects. Anti-gender movements are using existing political opportunity structures to form alliances with right-wing parties, religious organizations, and conservative CSOs. In Türkiye, this alliance was expressed with the AKP's populist "local and national" (*yerli ve milli*) discourse. This conservative anti-gender alliance has played an important role in social policies by prioritizing traditional values over universal human rights norms. In other words, current political opportunity structures have allowed anti-gender movements to increase their influence using nationalist themes and religious references. At the same time, this movement has expanded its sphere of influence with a discourse that based on the protection of traditional gender roles and family structures, as well as a securitization discourse relating the existence of the family and the nation to one another.

In European countries that have not ratified the IC or where its implementation led to politicized debates, primarily due to processes of democratic backsliding, the existence of opposing groups with which the state could potentially collaborate has been considered a reflection of opportunity structures. Türkiye is one of the countries in which the government collaborates with anti-gender movements due to its anti-IC stance. Accordingly, the Turkish government aligned itself with the anti-IC camp with a desire for broader political change, as seen in the move away from gender mainstreaming in women's and gender policies. This dissertation has argued that the anti-IC campaign was led by the anti-gender advocates. It has not claimed here that the anti-IC campaign includes only anti-gender advocates. However, it was found out that the discourses prevalent in the literature on anti-gender movements are similar to the discourses of the anti-IC campaign in Türkiye. Research on the anti-gender

movement in Türkiye has listed conservative religious groups, right-wing populist actors, conservative NGOs, media organizations, and men's rights movements as important actors within this movement (Özkazanç, 2020b; Ünal, 2024a). Consistent with the literature, this present study identified similar types of actors involved in the anti-IC campaign. Thus, it can be said that the core frames of the anti-IC campaign were influenced by the anti-gender movement. The most prominent discourse or core frame of the anti-IC campaign held that the IC was a product of "gender ideology" and therefore, it threatened the family, society, nation, and humanity as a whole. Additionally, the anti-IC campaign targeted the concept of gender. This campaign argued that VAW should be interpreted through domestic legal frameworks, not through transnational norms developed based on gender equality.

In this study, the group that defended the IC in Türkiye during the debates and after the country's withdrawal was defined as the gender advocacy movement or the gender mainstreaming movement. The IC supporters constituted a loose and broad coalition that included the feminist movement, the women's movement, and the LGBTIQ+ movement, as well as liberal and left-leaning civil society and political parties. Although the themes they advocated in support of the IC varied, the most prominent issues included the prevention of VAW and GBV. Supporters of the IC argued that these issues should be addressed within the framework of international human rights norms as well as domestic regulations. The group advocating the IC framed violence as a human rights issue. In this context, they opposed discriminatory practices that would exclude any social group from the violence prevention policies. Most fundamentally, they considered VAW and GBV to be issues of gender inequality.

The first research question of this study focused on revealing the similarities between the anti-gender movement as a discourse-oriented movement and the anti-gender campaign that emerged as a response to the gender perspective. In doing so, special attention was paid to the main actors and the discourses they adopted. For that purpose, news articles and columns published between 2020 and 2023 with the IC content by four conservative media outlets, namely *Milli Gazete*, *Yeni Şafak*, *Yeni Akit*, and *Yeni Asya*, were analyzed with CDA. Fairclough's (1995) three-stage CDA allowed for the examination of both the language used in these publications and the political context surrounding the anti-IC campaign. Due to the significant amount of data collected

within the scope of the research, deductive thematic analysis was also used in the analysis of ten books with anti-IC content published in 2020 and 2021. The results from both analyses were discussed in cohesive manner while considering key themes. Focusing on the discourses of the anti-IC campaign, the analysis revealed that this campaign was led by the anti-gender movement and coordinated by the same actors. At the same time, the findings showed that withdrawal from the IC has symbolic significance for the anti-gender movement. The decision to withdraw from the Convention was seen as a first step toward reversing the hard-won policy advances of the gender advocacy movement. Analysis conducted within the framework of intertextuality (Fairclough, 1995) revealed that actors of the anti-IC campaign often defended their views by referring to religious texts together with reports, books, and news articles by other participants in the campaign. This finding highlighted the existence of a meaningful level of discursive interaction. The anti-IC campaign has significantly fueled the rhetoric of the anti-gender movement. It has also further strengthened the opposition to gender equality and LGBTIQ+ rights. Analysis revealed that among the groups advocating withdrawal from the IC, the issues related to the repeal of CEDAW and Law No. 6284 were also widely discussed.

CDA revealed that the language used in the news articles and books constructed and reinforced the anti-gender position through polarizing themes and arguments and boundary activation mechanisms. These mechanisms shaped ideological divisions and reinforced opposing identities. The polarizing discourse called for a mobilization against the gender advocacy movement, referred to in this discourse as "corrupt elites" wielding "gender ideology" against "innocent people," which corresponds to "thin-centered" populist manner (Mudde, 2004). The anti-gender movement has framed the gender equality perspective as a "global threat," arguing that these so-called "harmful trends" are being imposed on national governments by "the West, the UN, and the EU" through legal instruments such as the IC. They further claimed that the IC, as a "project" imposed from outside, contained "hidden agendas." They stripped the IC of its original context of VAW and domestic violence and associated it solely with the LGBTIQ+ movement, thereby arguing that the Convention was in fact a "de-gendering project." One of the central arguments of this study is therefore that the anti-gender movement has used ideological counter reframing during debates about the IC.

Ideological counter reframing, as a discursive strategy, involves persistently removing issues from their original context and reconstructing them within an alternative ideological framework. In doing so, actors can reframe the terms of the debate and influence public perceptions of the meaning of gender, thereby delegitimizing their opponents (Benford & Snow, 2000).

The second research question addressed ideological aspects of the debates on the IC between the anti-gender movement and the gender advocacy movement. Based on the contentious politics approach, this study has argued that the anti-gender countermovement aims to undermine the achievements of the gender advocacy movement in the policy arena and to marginalize the efforts of the latter in the political arena. Although anti-gender movements were not generally viewed in this study as arising solely from reactionary impulses, examining the IC debates and analyzing them through the lens of contentious politics shows these movements to be a countermovement motivated by an anti-gender equality perspective and aimed at opposing the gender advocacy movement.

As the debate between IC supporters and detractors is rooted in their ideological frameworks, this study examined the conflict between these opposing movements as an ideological contestation. Although anti-gender movements were considered as conservative mobilizations, it has been argued here that these movements are not inherently opposed to change. Instead, they advocate for a transition from gender mainstreaming to the institutionalization of an anti-gender perspective to restore traditional gender norms. In this respect, this study did not interpret the contestation between anti-gender movements and gender advocacy movements as merely a clash of progressive and conservative ideologies. Instead, it was argued that this conflict is a contentious struggle over the definition of gender norms, with the opposing sides constantly challenging each other in discourse. The ideological contestation between the two opposing movements was accordingly viewed as a struggle for legitimacy in discourse (Freedon, 1996). In this way, this study highlighted how the notions of "gender equality" and "gender ideology" are constructed and employed in opposition to each other. This particular perspective on ideology enabled the defining of anti-gender movements as more than just mobilizations against gender equality. It further contributed to the discussion of anti-gender movements with objectives of opposing

democratic and liberal values as a whole. Accordingly, this study considered anti-gender movements as attacks on democracy that present significant threats to liberal democratic rights and institutions. However, it was not claimed that anti-gender movements have succeeded in establishing a hegemonic discourse that suppresses the opposing claims. Rather, it has been argued that both in Türkiye and across Europe (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021) anti-gender movements have been unsuccessful in terms of completely silencing opposing voices even if they have been supported by the political parties and the media. Thus, this study concluded that anti-genderism has not established itself as a hegemonic discourse because there are growing efforts to counter the anti-gender discourses.

The third research question of this study aimed to investigate the experiences of the gender advocacy movement during and after the IC debates. Therefore, it focused on highlighting the significance of the IC for gender advocacy actors and illustrating the strategies adapted by the gender advocacy movement to counter the anti-gender movement. The participating gender equality advocates viewed Türkiye's withdrawal from the IC as a setback for gender equality. They considered the IC the most comprehensive legal tool to date addressing VAW and domestic violence. However, the participants of this study, as feminist activists, were hopeful that this setback can be reversed, and that the IC can be re-ratified through organized efforts. According to their assessments, these organized efforts must extend beyond gender focused struggles. They viewed anti-gender movements as a "threat" to their own struggle and they believed that during the IC withdrawal process, the anti-gender movement in Türkiye demonstrated its capacity to impact the political landscape. In order to counter anti-gender movements, these feminist activists proposed establishing national and transnational solidarity networks among democratic, liberal, left-leaning, and progressive CSOs, and grassroots movements that operate with various focuses.

This dissertation contributes to the literature on anti-gender movements by providing a perspective on how gender advocacy movements could counter the mobilization of anti-"gender ideology" actors. The in-depth interviews conducted with activists in this study were aimed at identifying their strategies for combating anti-gender pushbacks. According to the general assessments, there is an increasingly conservative political atmosphere in Türkiye regarding policies on women and the family. With this political

landscape and these political opportunity structures, the anti-gender movement gained momentum through its opposition to the IC. All of these factors have affected the gender advocacy movement and constrained the democratic space for activists advocating gender equality. In this regard, this study has discussed how the shrinking space for gender advocacy has affected the activists. It has also examined the democratic resilience of their struggle by particularly focusing on their strategies devised for responding to anti-gender pushbacks.

The in-depth interviews included open-ended questions about the participants' experiences as activists, their views on the status of gender equality in Türkiye, their evaluations of the IC, and their thoughts on anti-gender movements. This study did not focus on the civil society as a whole and how it has been affected by anti-gender movements. Although the participants' experiences provide insights into civil society to some extent, the focus of this study was on the individual experiences of the activists. Thus, the participant profile in this study is diverse rather than targeting a single area of struggle. Participants identified themselves as being affiliated with the feminist movement, women's movement, or LGBTIQ+ movement.

The efforts of gender equality actors to counter anti-gender pushbacks with democratic resilience are structured around a new movement repertoire, which this study identified as "silent struggle." In the interviews, the participants explained that their activism had been constrained. The collaboration between the government and the anti-gender movement has undermined their areas of struggle and these repressive tactics used against the gender advocacy movement forced them into retreat, both spatially and discursively. This also curtailed their influence in policymaking. However, this study has argued that the retreat experienced by activists is not a sign of disempowerment. Instead, it reflects an introverted shift in the feminist struggle. This introverted shift has been interpreted here as a process of gathering strength through solidarity, while the forced silencing of the gender advocacy movement was portrayed as "resistant silence" (Ferguson, 2003). In this regard, it was argued that the feminist movement has been forced into silence due to the refusal to accept the policy changes aimed at family mainstreaming instead of gender mainstreaming. These activists have also refused to overlook the marginalization of the LGBTIQ+ movement. Another cause of these actors being compelled into silence is the fact that they have refused to



remain apathetic toward attacks on women's rights. Their determined stance has shown that they have maintained their ideals of gender equality instead of compromising for increased public visibility. As a political consequence of this silencing, the gender advocacy movement has turned inward to focus on its internal conflicts, which may eventually lead to the strengthening of its solidarity networks.

The Turkish case is part of the broader phenomenon of anti-gender movements. However, it also entails distinct characteristics in terms of the prominent issue of the opposition to Law No. 6284. Resistance to this law primarily arises from its being a legal regulation established under the provisions of the IC. The men's rights movement confronted this law on the grounds that the regulations developed based on Law No. 6284 led to "men's vulnerability." Therefore, men's rights advocates have called for changes to the legal regulations in favor of men. They have argued that the regulations regarding alimony, custody, early marriages, and domestic violence in the Turkish Civil Code, the Turkish Penal Code, and Law No. 6284 were enacted under pressure from feminists. According to them, these legal regulations reflect "gender ideology," leading to the oppression of men through laws. Although this movement is an important part of the anti-gender movement in Türkiye, not all of its demands have been acknowledged by the government. AKP officials, particularly President Erdoğan, and government affiliated women's organizations such as KADEM refer to Law No. 6284 as Türkiye's determined stance in combating VAW and they assert that Law No. 6284 will remain in force.

Therefore, although it is possible to talk about the existence of an "opportunistic synergy" (Graff & Korolczuk, 2022) between anti-gender movements and the AKP government due to their current political interests, the AKP's commitment to implement domestic legal regulations in the fight against VAW reveals that its collaborative relationship with anti-gender groups has not been a completely straightforward relationship. Therefore, even if the AKP government continues its relationship and discursive cooperation with anti-gender groups due to its populist and conservative policy line, its declaration of determination on the VAW issue presents an uncertain path in terms of the future of gender policies in Türkiye. On the other hand, this situation complicates the gender advocacy movement's relationship with the state in terms of developing long-term policy proposals or organizing campaigns

demanding the improvement and implementation of existing policies on VAW. The fact that the government stated its determination to combat VAW but at the same time it excludes the gender advocacy movement out of the VAW policies poses a great challenge for this movement. At the same time, this precarious situation also makes it difficult for the gender advocacy movement to develop more inclusive discourses and strategies. The gender advocacy movement, which has been marginalized by the polarizing discourses of anti-gender groups, has had difficulty in reaching out to women from conservative groups, including the AKP voters, and in finding ways to include them. For example, as emphasized in the narratives of the participants, while cooperation could be established between the Directorate of Religious Affairs and independent women's associations in the past, and especially conservative women could be reached in this way, these opportunities now seem to have completely disappeared. Therefore, one of the biggest challenges for the gender advocacy movement will be how to position the state in the campaigns they will conduct or the demands they will voice in the future. For example, as in the case of the IC debates, the state may appear as an object of claims in the gender advocacy movement's policy proposals or demands regarding social problems, or it may become an actor they cooperate with, or it may become a structure from which they do not even directly address their demands because they feel completely excluded.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the collaboration between the government and the anti-gender movement is reshaping civil society by determining which demands will be met and which demands will remain unheard. This collaboration resulted in the sidelining of some demands that do not align with their normative judgements of the involved actors. As a result of their collaborative efforts, they have marginalized the gender advocacy movement and its demands for gender equality. This strategic partnership takes advantage of existing political opportunities to accommodate traditional and nationalist paradigms in policymaking. Thus, this study has argued that the shift from gender mainstreaming to family mainstreaming is actually a process leading towards the institutionalization of an anti-gender perspective.

However, the context is not the only indicator of the success of progressive movements, nor does it have to be limiting. Therefore, although the current political

structures present more threats than opportunities for the gender advocacy movement, as this study has indicated, the gender advocacy movement has been moving towards the goal of strengthening the processes of oppression with solidarity, working to resolve the conflicts originating from its fragmented structure by addressing internal conflicts, and expanding the defense of rights through a stronger solidarity network and increasing democratic resilience. Therefore, the partnerships of anti-gender movements and the government in the withdrawal from the IC and the ongoing pressures on the gender advocacy movement have weakened the movement's public visibility, but have not eliminated its influence in politics. In Türkiye, the women's movement keeps the re-ratification of the IC on its agenda while at the same time increasing its voice to produce new demands and uniting with other opposition voices around democratic resilience in a broader alliance that includes but also transcends the gender equality claims. Although the framework of this study provides limited insight into the dynamics, discourses, and actors of this newly established democratic resilience-focused alliance, it can be predicted that the components of the gender advocacy movement will definitely be a part of this democratic resilience alliance. Therefore, the post-IC process in Türkiye is likely to evolve into larger alliances rather than scattered movements and into broader contestations where broader claims such as democracy are voiced rather than issue-based struggles. This situation is likely to facilitate the emergence of new political opportunity structures for the gender advocacy movement in terms of re-establishing social legitimacy, regaining public visibility, protecting legal gains on VAW and GBV issues, and making progressive demands. Although this study has provided a nuanced analysis of the discourses of the anti-gender movement and the anti-IC campaign, its findings are specific to Türkiye. The results of the analysis are clearly specific to the Turkish case, within the limits of this study's focus on the IC debates in this national context. Therefore, future research should expand further on the issue of democratic resilience. In a political climate of increasing polarization, researchers could focus on how to foster democratic resilience among all actors pursuing anti-violence goals. In particular, comprehensive analyses could be conducted on the strategies adopted by gender advocacy movements and on their effectiveness in countering anti-gender discourses while maintaining gender equality goals.

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## APPENDICES

### A. APPROVAL OF THE METU HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARASTIRMA MERKEZİ  
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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16 AĞUSTOS 2023

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Doç. Dr. Canan Aslan Akman

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Melike Bozdoğan'ın "*Anti-Gender Campaign as a Countermovement: The Case of the Backlash Against the Istanbul Convention in Türkiye*" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek 0381-ODTÜİAEK-2023 protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Ş. Halil TURAN  
Başkan

Prof. Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK  
Üye

Doç. Dr. Ali Emre Turgut  
Üye

Doç. Dr. Şerife SEVİNÇ  
Üye

Doç. Dr. Murat Perit ÇAKIR  
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Süreyya ÖZCAN KABASAKAL  
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ  
Üye

## B. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Participant	Age	Gender	Education Level	Residence	Association	Activist Experience	Date of Interview
1.	48	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	Flying Broom Women's Communication and Research Association	22 years	28.12.2023
2.	49	Woman	PhD	Ankara	Women's Research Center in a university & Women in Foreign Policy Platform	6 years	05.01.2024
3.	31	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	An association working in the field of sexual health (The participant asked that the name of the association not be shared.)	6 months	19.02.2024
4.	35	Woman	Master's degree (Student)	Ankara	An association working in the field of sexual health (The participant asked that the name of the association not be shared.)	5 years	19.02.2024
5.	60	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	Kırkörtük Cooperative for Combating Violence Against Woman (This cooperative is not currently active. The participant, who defined herself as an independent activist, stated that she wanted to be mentioned in this study by being associated with this	36 years	05.04.2024

					cooperative that she had organized in the past.)		
6.	33	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	İstanbul	Havle Women's Association	13 years	20.05.2024
7.	29	Woman	PhD (Student)	İstanbul	Havle Women's Association	5 years	07.05.2024
8.	44	Woman	Master's degree	İstanbul	Mor Çatı (Purple Roof) Women's Shelter Foundation	26 years	18.07.2024
9.	27	Woman	Master's degree	İstanbul	Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association (SPoD)	12 years	19.07.2024
10.	30	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	The Foundation for Women's Solidarity	10 years	24.10.2024
11.	39	Woman	Master's degree	Ankara	Support Foundation for Civil Society (Formerly she was active in The Foundation for Women's Solidarity)	10 years	29.10.2024
12.	42	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	The Foundation for Women's Solidarity (volunteer lawyer)	8 years	01.11.2024
13.	61	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	The Foundation for Women's Solidarity (volunteer lawyer)	15 years	07.11.2024
14.	33	Woman	PhD	İstanbul	Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)	16 years	11.11.2024
15.	35	Woman+	Master's degree	Kocaeli	Lotus Women Solidarity and	17 years	13.11.2024

					Life Association		
16.	25	Woman	Master's degree (Student)	Kocaeli	Lotus Women Solidarity and Life Association	7 years	14.11.2024
17.	19	Woman	Bachelor's Degree (Student)	Ankara	Young Feminist Solidarity - (We Will Stop Femicide Platform)	9 months	29.11.2024
18.	20	Woman	Bachelor's Degree (Student)	Ankara	Young Feminist Solidarity - (We Will Stop Femicide Platform)	1 year	29.11.2024
19.	67	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	İstanbul	Red Pepper Association	20 years	21.11.2024
20.	59	Woman	Bachelor's Degree	Ankara	Association for Support of Women Candidates (KA-DER) & Women's Platform for Equality (EŞİK)	34 years	29.11.2024

### C. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Research Questions	In-Depth Interview Questions
-	<p>1. Demographic Information (age, gender, education level, place of residence)</p> <p>2. Can you provide information about your background in civil society/activism and your role in the association/foundation/organization/network you are currently affiliated with?</p>
<p><b>How does the anti-gender movement, as a countermovement, intersect with the anti-Istanbul Convention campaign in Türkiye in terms of overlapping themes and discourses?</b></p>	<p>3. Can you make a general assessment of gender equality in Türkiye?</p> <p>4. Why do you think the Istanbul Convention is considered an important legal text?</p> <p>5. What do you think about Türkiye's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention? What effects do you think this decision will have?</p>
<p><b>In what ways does this discursive conflict between anti-convention actors and pro-convention actors, which had previously been able to collaborate with the state on gender equality, represent an ideological contestation over gender?</b></p>	<p>6. During the discussions on the Istanbul Convention, did you participate in any campaigns or protests in defense of the convention? Did you organize such a campaign through an association, foundation, organization, or network?</p> <p>7. How would you define the concept of gender?</p> <p>8. When did you first come across the terms "anti-genderism" or "anti-gender campaigns/movements"?</p> <p>9. Who are the main actors in the anti-gender movement, and what are their main discourses?</p> <p>10. How do you evaluate the relationship between anti-gender movements and the state?</p> <p>11. Have you encountered any violent statements, such as threats, insults, etc., directed towards you or to the association, foundation, organization, or</p>

	network you are affiliated with from groups within the anti-gender movement?
<p><b>What impact has this contestation had on the activism of gender equality advocates, both emotionally and strategically, as they continued their struggle against gender-conservative policies and anti-gender perspectives following the withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention?</b></p>	<p>12. How do you think anti-genderism can be effectively countered? What coping strategies have you developed, or what do you think/plan to do about it in the future?</p>

#### D. ANALYZED NEWS ITEMS

	Number	Year	Newspaper	URL	C/N
1.	2020MG01	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/3452543/bahaddin-elci/kulluk-sozlesmemizden-istanbul-sozlesmesine-2">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/3452543/bahaddin-elci/kulluk-sozlesmemizden-istanbul-sozlesmesine-2</a>	Column
2.	2020MG02	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3460837/sozlesme-hacli-zihniyetinin-eseri">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3460837/sozlesme-hacli-zihniyetinin-eseri</a>	Column
3.	2020MG03	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3694313/aile-eski-bakani-sema-ramazanoglundan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-elestirisi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3694313/aile-eski-bakani-sema-ramazanoglundan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-elestirisi</a>	News Article
4.	2020MG04	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4311969/suclu-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-geri-adim-atmayan-iktidardir">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4311969/suclu-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-geri-adim-atmayan-iktidardir</a>	News Article
5.	2020MG05	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3600454/istanbul-sozlesmesine-hz-yusuf-as-uzerinden-manidar-tespit">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3600454/istanbul-sozlesmesine-hz-yusuf-as-uzerinden-manidar-tespit</a>	News Article
6.	2020MG06	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3633330/murat-kekilliden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-paylasimi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3633330/murat-kekilliden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-paylasimi</a>	News Article
7.	2020MG07	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3636877/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kabul-edilemez">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3636877/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kabul-edilemez</a>	News Article
8.	2020MG08	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/3656905/zeki-ceyhan/istanbul-sozlesmesi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/3656905/zeki-ceyhan/istanbul-sozlesmesi</a>	Column
9.	2020MG10	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/3668608/mucahit-gultekin/uluslararasi-hukuk-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-mesruiyetimiz">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/3668608/mucahit-gultekin/uluslararasi-hukuk-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-mesruiyetimiz</a>	Column
10.	2020MG11	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3669635/stklardan-ortak-bildiri-istanbul-sozlesmesi-feshedilsin">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/3669635/stklardan-ortak-bildiri-istanbul-sozlesmesi-feshedilsin</a>	News Article
11.	2020MG12	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4312547/istanbul-sozlesmesi-yururlukteyken-sapkinlik-sorunu-cozulemez">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4312547/istanbul-sozlesmesi-yururlukteyken-sapkinlik-sorunu-cozulemez</a>	News Article
12.	2020MG13	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4310102/batakligi-kurutmanin-tam-zamani-sozlesmeli-ahlaksizlik">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4310102/batakligi-kurutmanin-tam-zamani-sozlesmeli-ahlaksizlik</a>	News Article
13.	2020MG14	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4321270/diyadin-cagrisi-istanbul-sozlesmesini-imzalayanlaradir">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4321270/diyadin-cagrisi-istanbul-sozlesmesini-imzalayanlaradir</a>	News Article
14.	2020MG18	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4332398/istanbul-sozlesmesi-macar-parlamentosundan-gecedi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4332398/istanbul-sozlesmesi-macar-parlamentosundan-gecedi</a>	News Article
15.	2020MG44	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4347379/adnan-oksuz/istanbul-sozlesmesi-grevionun-ilk-raporunda-akla-ziyar-ifadeler">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4347379/adnan-oksuz/istanbul-sozlesmesi-grevionun-ilk-raporunda-akla-ziyar-ifadeler</a>	Column
16.	2020MG22	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340927/mustafa-kurdas/kod-adi-istanbul-sozlesmesi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340927/mustafa-kurdas/kod-adi-istanbul-sozlesmesi</a>	Column
17.	2020MG26	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340935/prof-dr-burhanettin-">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340935/prof-dr-burhanettin-</a>	Column



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18.	2020MG27	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340936/mucahit-gultekin/istanbul-sozlesmesini-feshetmek-meclisin-vatandasa-borcudur">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340936/mucahit-gultekin/istanbul-sozlesmesini-feshetmek-meclisin-vatandasa-borcudur</a>	Column
19.	2020MG30	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340947/prof-dr-mehmet-halil-cicek/milli-sahsiyetimizi-yok-etmenin-projesi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340947/prof-dr-mehmet-halil-cicek/milli-sahsiyetimizi-yok-etmenin-projesi</a>	Column
20.	2020MG32	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340949/dr-serafettin-kalay/aile-bozulursa-cemiyetin-saglam-yapisi-da-bozulur">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340949/dr-serafettin-kalay/aile-bozulursa-cemiyetin-saglam-yapisi-da-bozulur</a>	Column
21.	2020MG34	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340955/merve-aydin-kucuk/bu-sozlesme-iptal-edilmelidir">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340955/merve-aydin-kucuk/bu-sozlesme-iptal-edilmelidir</a>	Column
22.	2020MG37	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340964/adem-cevik/istanbul-sozlesmesi-islam-dunyasina-yonelik-bir-tehdittir">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4340964/adem-cevik/istanbul-sozlesmesi-islam-dunyasina-yonelik-bir-tehdittir</a>	Column
23.	2020MG38	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4344786/istanbul-sozlesmesi-neden-feshedilmeli">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4344786/istanbul-sozlesmesi-neden-feshedilmeli</a>	News Article
24.	2020MG39	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4315679/dilipaktan-korona-uyarisi-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-sahipleri-uretti">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4315679/dilipaktan-korona-uyarisi-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-sahipleri-uretti</a>	News Article
25.	2020MG40	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4345079/lgbtlin-destekcileri-ile-sozlesmenin-destekcilerini-soros-fonluyor">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4345079/lgbtlin-destekcileri-ile-sozlesmenin-destekcilerini-soros-fonluyor</a>	News Article
26.	2020MG41	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4345078/burhan-bozgeyik/yuz-yillik-planin-altin-vurusu-istanbul-sozlesmesi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4345078/burhan-bozgeyik/yuz-yillik-planin-altin-vurusu-istanbul-sozlesmesi</a>	Column
27.	2020MG49	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4349864/bahaddin-elci/sayin-cumhurbaskanimiza-istanbul-ifsad-sozlesmesi-mektubu-1">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4349864/bahaddin-elci/sayin-cumhurbaskanimiza-istanbul-ifsad-sozlesmesi-mektubu-1</a>	Column
28.	2020MG55	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4369403/necati-tuncer/adi-akplilerin-sozlesmesi-olsun">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4369403/necati-tuncer/adi-akplilerin-sozlesmesi-olsun</a>	Column
29.	2020MG57	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4578646/bahaddin-elci/sayin-cumhurbaskanimiza-istanbul-ifsad-sozlesmesi-mektubu-2">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4578646/bahaddin-elci/sayin-cumhurbaskanimiza-istanbul-ifsad-sozlesmesi-mektubu-2</a>	Column
30.	2020MG58	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4581169/sadrettin-karaduman/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-aileye-zararlari">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4581169/sadrettin-karaduman/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-aileye-zararlari</a>	Column
31.	2020MG59	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4725412/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-inanc-prensiplerimiz-yok-sayiyor">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4725412/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-inanc-prensiplerimiz-yok-sayiyor</a>	Column
32.	2020MG60	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4728496/26-dakikada-gecen-sozlesmenin-yikimi-buyuk-oluyor">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/4728496/26-dakikada-gecen-sozlesmenin-yikimi-buyuk-oluyor</a>	Editorial
33.	2020MG61	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4733967/elif-ors/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-perde-arkasindaki-maddeleri">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4733967/elif-ors/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-perde-arkasindaki-maddeleri</a>	Column

34.	2020MG62	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4728471/sedanur-bulut/medyada-istanbul-sozlesmesi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4728471/sedanur-bulut/medyada-istanbul-sozlesmesi</a>	Column
35.	2020MG65	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4804162/sadrettin-karaduman/konugene-istanbul-sozlesmesi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4804162/sadrettin-karaduman/konugene-istanbul-sozlesmesi</a>	Column
36.	2020MG66	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4918552/sakir-tarim/boyle-sozlesme-mi-olur">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4918552/sakir-tarim/boyle-sozlesme-mi-olur</a>	Column
37.	2020MG72	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4952158/siyami-akyel/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-lgbti">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/4952158/siyami-akyel/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-lgbti</a>	Column
38.	2020MG74	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5068921/kadenden-istanbul-sozlesmesine-destek">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5068921/kadenden-istanbul-sozlesmesine-destek</a>	News Article
39.	2020MG77	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5077650/bahaddin-elci/istanbul-ifsat-sozlesmesini-dogru-okumak">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5077650/bahaddin-elci/istanbul-ifsat-sozlesmesini-dogru-okumak</a>	Column
40.	2020MG78	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5081307/mucahit-gultekin/istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilecek-mi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5081307/mucahit-gultekin/istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilecek-mi</a>	Column
41.	2020MG84	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5140573/sozlesmeden-cekilin">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5140573/sozlesmeden-cekilin</a>	News Article
42.	2020MG85	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5159367/istanbul-sozlesmesini-memur-da-feshedin-dedi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5159367/istanbul-sozlesmesini-memur-da-feshedin-dedi</a>	News Article
43.	2020MG86	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5845718/erdogan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-tartismalari-bazi-yanlis-uygulamalarla-ilgili">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5845718/erdogan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-tartismalari-bazi-yanlis-uygulamalarla-ilgili</a>	Editorial
44.	2020MG87	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5861307/sakir-tarim/istanbul-sozlesmesi-oyun-mu">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5861307/sakir-tarim/istanbul-sozlesmesi-oyun-mu</a>	Column
45.	2020MG91	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5340298/istanbul-sozlesmesi-yasatirmi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5340298/istanbul-sozlesmesi-yasatirmi</a>	News Article
46.	2020MG93	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5506283/adnan-oksuz/istanbul-sozlesmesi-fulbright-marshall-yardimi">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/5506283/adnan-oksuz/istanbul-sozlesmesi-fulbright-marshall-yardimi</a>	Column
47.	2020MG96	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5762123/istanbul-sozlesmesi-unutuldu-mu">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5762123/istanbul-sozlesmesi-unutuldu-mu</a>	News Article
48.	2020MG98	2020	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5038116/istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilmeli">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/5038116/istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilmeli</a>	Editorial
49.	2020YA02	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ne-dir-bu-istanbul-sozlesmesi-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ne-zaman-imzalandi-1322940.html#google_vignette">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ne-dir-bu-istanbul-sozlesmesi-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ne-zaman-imzalandi-1322940.html#google_vignette</a>	News Article
50.	2020YA03	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-amacini-acikladi-kokunden-kazimak-istiyorlar-1349663.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-amacini-acikladi-kokunden-kazimak-istiyorlar-1349663.html</a>	News Article
51.	2020YA08	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kimin-eseri-32399.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kimin-eseri-32399.html</a>	Column
52.	2020YA15	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/sosyolog-yazar-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-yikimini-madde-madde-acikladi-1358685.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/sosyolog-yazar-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-yikimini-madde-madde-acikladi-1358685.html</a>	News Article

53.	2020YA19	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/vatan-partisinden-flas-istanbul-sozlesmesi-aciklamasi-1350979.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/vatan-partisinden-flas-istanbul-sozlesmesi-aciklamasi-1350979.html</a>	News Article
54.	2020YA21	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-feminist-ideolojinin-manifestosudur-33132.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesi-feminist-ideolojinin-manifestosudur-33132.html</a>	Column
55.	2020YA26	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-calisma-platformundan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-raporu-1354141.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-calisma-platformundan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-raporu-1354141.html</a>	Editorial
56.	2020YA28	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ulkeyi-enkaza-cevirdi-1355962.html#google_vignette">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ulkeyi-enkaza-cevirdi-1355962.html#google_vignette</a>	News Article
57.	2020YA33	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-dunyayi-ikiye-boldu-1227466.html#google_vignette">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-dunyayi-ikiye-boldu-1227466.html#google_vignette</a>	News Article
58.	2020YA37	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesini-desteklemeyen-kadin-gazeteciye-mor-halkalılardan-linc-iki-yuzluluklerini-gormus-oldum-1522272.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesini-desteklemeyen-kadin-gazeteciye-mor-halkalılardan-linc-iki-yuzluluklerini-gormus-oldum-1522272.html</a>	News Article
59.	2020YA41	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/abdullah-sevimden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-elestirisi-yanlista-israr-etmeye-gerek-yok-1299719.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/abdullah-sevimden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-elestirisi-yanlista-israr-etmeye-gerek-yok-1299719.html</a>	News Article
60.	2020YA43	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/car-e-islam-sozlesmesi-aileyi-ve-toplumu-ifsad-eden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-feshedilsin-1221277.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/car-e-islam-sozlesmesi-aileyi-ve-toplumu-ifsad-eden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-feshedilsin-1221277.html</a>	News Article
61.	2020YA49	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesine-karsi-guc-birligi-cagrisi-1415649.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesine-karsi-guc-birligi-cagrisi-1415649.html</a>	News Article
62.	2020YA50	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-aile-yapimiz-1355292.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-aile-yapimiz-1355292.html</a>	News Article
63.	2020YA56	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/osmanli-torunundan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-yorumu-fatihin-emaneti-istanbulun-adini-itibarsizlastirmak-istiyorlar-1374683.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/osmanli-torunundan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-yorumu-fatihin-emaneti-istanbulun-adini-itibarsizlastirmak-istiyorlar-1374683.html</a>	News Article
64.	2020YA57	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/yeviden-refahtan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilsin-eylemi-1391471.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/yeviden-refahtan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilsin-eylemi-1391471.html</a>	News Article
65.	2020YA62	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/vatan-partisi-istanbul-sozlesmesine-neden-karsi-onemli-aciklamalar-1358605.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/vatan-partisi-istanbul-sozlesmesine-neden-karsi-onemli-aciklamalar-1358605.html</a>	News Article
66.	2020YA63	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/derdi-kadin-degil-iste-koc-holdingin-istanbul-sozlesmesi-dayatmasinin-nedeni-1342780.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/derdi-kadin-degil-iste-koc-holdingin-istanbul-sozlesmesi-dayatmasinin-nedeni-1342780.html</a>	News Article
67.	2020YA64	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/isine-bak-eker-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-avukatligi-bunlara-kaldi-1346019.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/isine-bak-eker-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-avukatligi-bunlara-kaldi-1346019.html</a>	News Article
68.	2020YA68	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/sozlesmeden-cekildigini-duyuran-polonya-istanbul-sozlesmesini-ifsattetti-genc-nesilleri-1345344.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/sozlesmeden-cekildigini-duyuran-polonya-istanbul-sozlesmesini-ifsattetti-genc-nesilleri-1345344.html</a>	News Article
69.	2020YA70	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/saadet-partisi-istanbul-sozlesmesini-">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/saadet-partisi-istanbul-sozlesmesini-</a>	News Article

				destekleyen-hdp-chp-ip-ile-neden-ayni-tarapta-1457683.html	
70.	2020YA77	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/abdurrahman-dilipak/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kaldirilacak-mi-cekilecek-miyiz-33236.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/abdurrahman-dilipak/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kaldirilacak-mi-cekilecek-miyiz-33236.html</a>	Column
71.	2020YA82	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ifs-at-projesi-neden-iptal-edilmeli-1357703.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ifs-at-projesi-neden-iptal-edilmeli-1357703.html</a>	News Article
72.	2020YA96	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/avr-upa-ulkesi-istanbul-sozlesmesine-karsi-diplomatik-bir-atak-baslatti-1412257.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/avr-upa-ulkesi-istanbul-sozlesmesine-karsi-diplomatik-bir-atak-baslatti-1412257.html</a>	News Article
73.	2020YA104	2020	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/lgbt-nedir-1389908.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/lgbt-nedir-1389908.html</a>	News Article
74.	2020YS02	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ergun-yildirim/allah-nefret-sucu-isluyor-musulman-da-homofobik-escinsel-sapiklik-2055014">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ergun-yildirim/allah-nefret-sucu-isluyor-musulman-da-homofobik-escinsel-sapiklik-2055014</a>	Column
75.	2020YS07	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/istanbul-sozlesmesi-nedir-istanbul-sozlesmesi-maddeleri-zararlari-ve-6284-maddesi-3547655">https://www.yenisafak.com/hayat/istanbul-sozlesmesi-nedir-istanbul-sozlesmesi-maddeleri-zararlari-ve-6284-maddesi-3547655</a>	News Article
76.	2020YS08	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/istanbul-sozlesmesinden-kurtulduk-derken-simdi-de-gida-kanunu-tasarisi-2055687">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/istanbul-sozlesmesinden-kurtulduk-derken-simdi-de-gida-kanunu-tasarisi-2055687</a>	Column
77.	2020YS15	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ismail-kilicarslan/denge-birazcik-denge-2055855">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ismail-kilicarslan/denge-birazcik-denge-2055855</a>	Column
78.	2020YS16	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/erdogan-istanbul-sozlesmesini-cope-atmalı-2055842">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/erdogan-istanbul-sozlesmesini-cope-atmalı-2055842</a>	Column
79.	2020YS20	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ergun-yildirim/istanbul-sozlesmesi-cinsiyetci-isyenin-parcasidir-2055804">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ergun-yildirim/istanbul-sozlesmesi-cinsiyetci-isyenin-parcasidir-2055804</a>	Column
80.	2020YS21	2020	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/turkiye-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-derhal-cikmalidir-2055781">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/turkiye-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-derhal-cikmalidir-2055781</a>	Column
81.	2020YAS06	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/mehmet-cetin/istanbul-sozlesmesinden-6284-sayili-kanuna-gecis_513585">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/mehmet-cetin/istanbul-sozlesmesinden-6284-sayili-kanuna-gecis_513585</a>	Column
82.	2020YAS12	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/mehmet-cetin/istanbul-sozlesmesi-nin-sebep-oldugu-tartismalara-dogru_518655">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/mehmet-cetin/istanbul-sozlesmesi-nin-sebep-oldugu-tartismalara-dogru_518655</a>	Column
83.	2020YAS13	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/mehmet-kara/peki-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ne-olacak_518752">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/mehmet-kara/peki-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ne-olacak_518752</a>	Column
84.	2020YAS14	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/suleyma-n-kosmene/istanbul-sozlesmesi-orada-dururken-mi_518846">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/suleyma-n-kosmene/istanbul-sozlesmesi-orada-dururken-mi_518846</a>	Column
85.	2020YAS18	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/sukrubulut/istanbul-sozlesmesi-nde-aranan-orta-yol_519795">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/sukrubulut/istanbul-sozlesmesi-nde-aranan-orta-yol_519795</a>	Column
86.	2020YAS22	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/dunya/polonya-da-istanbul-sozlesmesi-nden-cekilme-hazirliklari_524968">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/dunya/polonya-da-istanbul-sozlesmesi-nden-cekilme-hazirliklari_524968</a>	News Article
87.	2020YAS32	2020	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/dunya/polonya-dan-diplomatik-atak_529887">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/dunya/polonya-dan-diplomatik-atak_529887</a>	News Article
88.	2021MG07	2021	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/6612741/karamollaoglu-istanbul-">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/6612741/karamollaoglu-istanbul-</a>	News Article

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89.	2021MG16	2021	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/6794067/bakan-selcuktan-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-cekilmesine-iliskin-aciklama">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/6794067/bakan-selcuktan-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-cekilmesine-iliskin-aciklama</a>	News Article
90.	2021MG35	2021	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/6806158/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-kaldirilmesi-son-degil-baslangic-olsun">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/6806158/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-kaldirilmesi-son-degil-baslangic-olsun</a>	News Article
91.	2021MG36	2021	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/7650623/erdogandan-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-destekcisi-kademe-surpriz-ziyaret">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/7650623/erdogandan-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-destekcisi-kademe-surpriz-ziyaret</a>	News Article
92.	2021MG54	2021	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/7272317/adnan-oksuz/50-milyon-ve-cedaw">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/7272317/adnan-oksuz/50-milyon-ve-cedaw</a>	Column
93.	2021YA09	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-feshinin-devami-gelmelidir-35347.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-feshinin-devami-gelmelidir-35347.html</a>	Column
94.	2021YA11	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-kaldirilmesi-sarttir-34908.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-kaldirilmesi-sarttir-34908.html</a>	Column
95.	2021YA12	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesiyle-kadincinayetleri-rekor-ustune-rekor-kirdi-1510512.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesiyle-kadincinayetleri-rekor-ustune-rekor-kirdi-1510512.html</a>	News Article
96.	2021YA16	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-feshi-ummet-ve-millet-ucurumun-kenarindan-dondu-1522303.html#google_vignette">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/istanbul-sozlesmesinin-feshi-ummet-ve-millet-ucurumun-kenarindan-dondu-1522303.html#google_vignette</a>	News Article
97.	2021YA21	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/ibrahim-karatas/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kadinlari-koruyor-mu-35366.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/ibrahim-karatas/istanbul-sozlesmesi-kadinlari-koruyor-mu-35366.html</a>	Column
98.	2021YA23	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/fesat-sozlesmesinden-kurtulduk-milletin-sesine-kulak-vererek-istanbul-sozlesmesini-fesheden-baskan-erdogana-tesekkur-yagiyor-1522347.html#google_vignette">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/fesat-sozlesmesinden-kurtulduk-milletin-sesine-kulak-vererek-istanbul-sozlesmesini-fesheden-baskan-erdogana-tesekkur-yagiyor-1522347.html#google_vignette</a>	News Article
99.	2021YA34	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/su-meyye-erdogandan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-cikisi-boyle-bir-alginin-gorulmesi-cok-tehlikeli-sonuclardogurur-1533213.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/su-meyye-erdogandan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-cikisi-boyle-bir-alginin-gorulmesi-cok-tehlikeli-sonuclardogurur-1533213.html</a>	Editorial
100.	2021YA39	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/avrupanin-baska-belasi-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-girisinde-gondermeyapilmisti-cocuklarımız-fuhusa-surukleniyor-1588327.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/avrupanin-baska-belasi-istanbul-sozlesmesinin-girisinde-gondermeyapilmisti-cocuklarımız-fuhusa-surukleniyor-1588327.html</a>	News Article
101.	2021YA74	2021	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/can-niyi-ve-feminazi-yi-o-sozlesme-besliyor-kadina-siddeti-korukleyen-yuvalari-yikan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilsin-1518535.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/can-niyi-ve-feminazi-yi-o-sozlesme-besliyor-kadina-siddeti-korukleyen-yuvalari-yikan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-iptal-edilsin-1518535.html</a>	News Article
102.	2021YS05	2021	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/il-etisim-baskani-altun-guclu-kadin-ve-guclu-aile-buyuk-turkiye-icin-vazgecilmezdir-3614603">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/il-etisim-baskani-altun-guclu-kadin-ve-guclu-aile-buyuk-turkiye-icin-vazgecilmezdir-3614603</a>	News Article
103.	2021YS07	2021	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/bakan-gulden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-aciklamasi-bizim-icin-kadina">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/bakan-gulden-istanbul-sozlesmesi-aciklamasi-bizim-icin-kadina</a>	News Article

				yonelik-siddetle-mucadele-bir-insan-haklari-mucadelesidir-3614635	
104.	2021YS21	2021	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/insani-ontolojik-olarak-asagilayan-bir-sozlesmeyi-dayatmak-veya-hukuk-emperyalizmi-2057973">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusuf-kaplan/insani-ontolojik-olarak-asagilayan-bir-sozlesmeyi-dayatmak-veya-hukuk-emperyalizmi-2057973</a>	Column
105.	2021YS28	2021	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hasan-ozturk/zina-sucu-tekrar-tckya-girer-mi-2057983">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hasan-ozturk/zina-sucu-tekrar-tckya-girer-mi-2057983</a>	Column
106.	2021YS31	2021	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ergun-yildirim/uygarlarin-ve-modernlerin-cehaleti-2057996">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ergun-yildirim/uygarlarin-ve-modernlerin-cehaleti-2057996</a>	Column
107.	2021YS43	2021	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/huseyin-likoglu/marshall-plani-icin-kararnamenin-tam-zamani-2058302">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/huseyin-likoglu/marshall-plani-icin-kararnamenin-tam-zamani-2058302</a>	Column
108.	2022MG02	2022	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/11197707/karadumandan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-cikisi-biz-oldukcagucunuz-yetmeyecek">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/11197707/karadumandan-istanbul-sozlesmesi-cikisi-biz-oldukcagucunuz-yetmeyecek</a>	Editorial
109.	2022YA03	2022	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesinden-kurtulduk-mu-39685.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesinden-kurtulduk-mu-39685.html</a>	Column
110.	2022YA04	2022	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesine-karsi-durmak-vatan-nobetidir-39044.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/sefa-saygili/istanbul-sozlesmesine-karsi-durmak-vatan-nobetidir-39044.html</a>	Column
111.	2022YS06	2022	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/6li-masada-istanbul-sozlesmesi-krizi-saadet-partisi-kilicdaroglu-ve-aksenerin-aciklamasina-karsi-cikti-3840035">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/6li-masada-istanbul-sozlesmesi-krizi-saadet-partisi-kilicdaroglu-ve-aksenerin-aciklamasina-karsi-cikti-3840035</a>	News Article
112.	2022YS07	2022	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/ilk-icraat-istanbul-sozlesmesi-3841283">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/ilk-icraat-istanbul-sozlesmesi-3841283</a>	News Article
113.	2022YS08	2022	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/6li-masa-krizleri-uyutacak-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-basortusu-gibi-konular-anayasa-calismasinda-yer-almadi-3892810">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/6li-masa-krizleri-uyutacak-istanbul-sozlesmesi-ve-basortusu-gibi-konular-anayasa-calismasinda-yer-almadi-3892810</a>	News Article
114.	2023MG02	2023	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/13598499/ekrem-sama/etcep-yuruyor-toplum-curuyor">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/13598499/ekrem-sama/etcep-yuruyor-toplum-curuyor</a>	Column
115.	2023MG03	2023	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/13927770/millet-ittifakinda-butun-uluslararasi-sozlesmelere-geridonulecek">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/13927770/millet-ittifakinda-butun-uluslararasi-sozlesmelere-geridonulecek</a>	News Article
116.	2023MG04	2023	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/13929751/saadet-partisi-itiraz-etti-istanbul-sozlesmesi-mutabakat-metninde-yok">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/haber/13929751/saadet-partisi-itiraz-etti-istanbul-sozlesmesi-mutabakat-metninde-yok</a>	News Article
117.	2023MG05	2023	Milli Gazete	<a href="https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/13935583/ismail-hakki-akkiraz/kadini-sozlesme-degil-islam-yasatir">https://www.milligazete.com.tr/makale/13935583/ismail-hakki-akkiraz/kadini-sozlesme-degil-islam-yasatir</a>	Column
118.	2023YA01	2023	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-aciklamalarda-bulunuyor-1807655.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-aciklamalarda-bulunuyor-1807655.html</a>	News Article
119.	2023YA05	2023	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/noter-masasinin-adayi-kilicdaroglu-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-sonra-6284u-de-vadetti-1740777.html">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/noter-masasinin-adayi-kilicdaroglu-istanbul-sozlesmesinden-sonra-6284u-de-vadetti-1740777.html</a>	News Article
120.	2023YA07	2023	Yeni Akit	<a 442="" 480="" 901="" 918"="" data-label="Page-Footer" href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ortak-mutabakat-metninde-istanbul-sozlesmesi-yokken-kursuden-&lt;/a&gt;&lt;/td&gt; &lt;td&gt;News Article&lt;/td&gt; &lt;/tr&gt; &lt;/table&gt; &lt;/div&gt; &lt;div data-bbox="> <p>307</p> </a>	

				vadedildi-spdn-iraz-sesi-geldi-1728975.html	
121.	2023YA10	2023	Yeni Akit	<a href="https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/gozler-temelde-kemal-kilicdaroglundan-kadinlara-istanbul-sozlesmesi-sozu-1739632.html#google_vignette">https://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/gozler-temelde-kemal-kilicdaroglundan-kadinlara-istanbul-sozlesmesi-sozu-1739632.html#google_vignette</a>	News Article
122.	2023YS02	2023	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/bakan-soyludan-kadina-siddet-mesaji-sifir-olana-kadar-mucadeleye-devam-3899211">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/bakan-soyludan-kadina-siddet-mesaji-sifir-olana-kadar-mucadeleye-devam-3899211</a>	News Article
123.	2023YS04	2023	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ersin-celik/aile-erkil-millete-guclu-aile-beyanamesi-4522857">https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ersin-celik/aile-erkil-millete-guclu-aile-beyanamesi-4522857</a>	Column
124.	2023YS05	2023	Yeni Şafak	<a href="https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-kadina-yonelik-siddetle-mucadele-2024-yili-faaliyet-plani-paylasimi-siddetsiz-bir-turkiye-insa-edecegiz-4577208">https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-kadina-yonelik-siddetle-mucadele-2024-yili-faaliyet-plani-paylasimi-siddetsiz-bir-turkiye-insa-edecegiz-4577208</a>	News Article
125.	2023YAS01	2023	Yeni Asya	<a href="https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/yasemin-gulecyuz/tce-bir-ifsad-projesi_582260">https://www.yeniasya.com.tr/yasemin-gulecyuz/tce-bir-ifsad-projesi_582260</a>	Column

## E. ANALYZED BOOKS

Code	Writer	Name of the Book	Year
B012020	Mahsum Aytepe (Ed.)	İstanbul Sözleşmesi Disiplinlerarası Bir Soruşturma	2020
B022020	Muharrem Balcı	İstanbul Sözleşmesi ve Toplumsal Cinsiyet Bağlamında KADEM'e Cevaplar	2020
B032020	Muharrem Balcı	İstanbul Sözleşmesinden İnsanı ve Aileyi Korumak	2020
B042020	Harun Ceylan	İstanbul Sözleşmesi: Kültürel İşgal Girişimi	2020
B052020	Mustafa Kurdaş	Kod Adı: İstanbul Sözleşmesi	2020
B062020	Fahri Özcan	İstanbul Sözleşmesi mi? İslam Güzelleşmesi mi?: Sizce Bu Minareler Şehrine Hangisi Uyar?	2020
B072021	Hatice Sunci	İstanbul Sözleşmesi: 6284 Sayılı Yasa Yuva Yıkıyor	2021
B082021	Mehmet Yaman	İnanç Değerlerimiz Işığında İstanbul Sözleşmesi	2021
B092021	Hilal Kaplan	Ailenin Adı Yok ya da Neden Feminist Değilim?	2021
B102021	Ahmet Akgül	İstanbul Sözleşmesi ve Ailenin Çözülmesi	2021



## F. SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS TABLE FOR CDA

Phase	Analysis	Underlined Subjects & Examples of Notes
<b>Textual Analysis</b>	Discursive Strategies & Language Use	Particular language use in the news was analyzed by taking into account points such as discourse patterns and metaphors. Discriminatory statements about feminist and LGBTIQ+ activists or framing the Convention with the discourse of "threat" are among the findings obtained at this stage of analysis.
<b>Discursive Practice</b>	Intertextuality & Context of News Production	The ideological and institutional background of the media in which the news is produced and circulated has been taken into account. At the same time, attention has been paid to which sources are referenced for information in the news. For example, the news in which religious authorities or representatives of conservative civil society organizations are cited as experts on the subject is taken into account at this stage of analysis.
<b>Social Context</b>	Ideological Intersections & Political Context	The discursive commonalities between the anti-IC campaign and the anti-gender movement were considered. Particular emphasis was paid to the discursive intersections such as the relation between "gender ideology" and "family protection" discourse.

## G. CURRICULUM VITAE

### MELİKE BOZDOĞAN

#### EDUCATION

**2015-2018**

**Master's Degree**

Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

Sociology

Thesis Title: Habitus of Sustainability: Daily Life Consumption Practices Among Green Consumers in Turkey

Advisor: Prof. Dr. Helga Rittersberger-Tılıç

**2010-2015**

**Bachelor's Degree**

Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey

Sociology

**2014-2014**

**Erasmus**

ISCTE-University Institute of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

Sociology

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

**2017-ongoing**

**Research Assistant**

Başkent University Department of Sociology (English)

**2016-2017**

**Student Assistant**

Middle East Technical University

Department of Media and Cultural Studies

#### JOURNAL ARTICLES

Bozdoğan, M. & Bozdoğan, Ö. (2022). Kamyon oyununda yabancılaşma ve gündelik hayat ritimleri. *Tiyatro Eleştirmenliği ve Dramaturji Bölümü Dergisi* 35, 17-35. <https://doi.org/10.26650/jtcd.1120559>

Bozdoğan, M. & Özuz-Dağdelen, E. (2022). Seyahat, çalışma ve boş zamanın kesişiminde yeni bir grup: Dijital göçebeler. *İnsan Hareketliliği Uluslararası Dergisi*, 2(2), 270-297

## **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS**

- Bozdoğan, M. (2024). The Alliance of Anti-Genderism and Right-Wing Populism: Global Commonalities and Local Manifestations, 16th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Porto, Portugal
- Bozdoğan, M. (2024). Anti-gender backlash and devaluation of feminism on social media, Retos sociales de las tecnologías emergentes. Vulnerabilidades, propuestas y experiencias: Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain
- Bozdoğan, M. & Özuz-Dağdelen, E. (2023). Digital Nomadism in the Context of Sociology of Leisure, BUSOC 2023 International Congress of Sociology: Başkent University, Ankara, Türkiye
- Derin, O. E. & Bozdoğan, M. (2023). Tilkinin Yolculuğu: Doğanın ve Topluluğun Düzeni Üzerine İki Halk Hikâyesi, the Fourth European Convention on Turkic, Ottoman and Turkish Studies: University. of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
- Bozdoğan, M. (2023). Online Hate Speech and Anti-Feminist Discourse in the Case of the Istanbul Convention, Feminist Pedagogy of/Beyond Borders: Kadir Has University, İstanbul, Türkiye
- Bozdoğan, M. (2023). Antroposantrizmin Ötesinde Bir Çevre Eğitimi İçin Posthümanizm ve Ekopedagoji, Sosyolojinin Geleceği ve Geleceğin Sosyolojisi: Başkent University, Ankara, Türkiye
- Bozdoğan, M. (2022). The Practices of Feminist Pedagogy Outside of Classrooms, 11th European Feminist Research Conference: University of Milano-Bicocca, Milan, Italy
- Bozdoğan M. (2020). Sürdürülebilir Tüketimi Açıklamak: Pratik Teorisi Yaklaşımı. IV. İlişkisel Sosyal Bilimler Kongresi: Ankara, Türkiye
- Bozdoğan M. (2019). Solidarity Economies and Solidarity Networks Among Green Consumers in Turkey. Sharing Society International Conference: Universidad del Pais Vasco, Bilbao, Spain

## **INVITED TALKS**

- Bozdoğan, M. (2020). Cultural Encounters in Playground: Applying the Tools of Theater Pedagogy to the Study of Migration, The Constellations Festival Organized by Open Program of The Workcenter of Jerzy Grotowski and Thomas Richards

## **MEMBERSHIP IN SCHOLARLY ORGANIZATIONS**

The International Sociological Association (ISA)

The European Sociological Association (ESA)

AtGender

## **LANGUAGES**

Turkish (native), English (fluent)

## H. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

Son on yılda daha görünür hale gelmekle birlikte, 1990'lı yılların ortalarından itibaren toplumsal cinsiyet kavramı, toplumsal cinsiyet teorisi ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine ilişkin konulara karşı ideolojik bir tepki dalgası ortaya çıkmıştır. Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı seferberlikler veya toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı kampanyalar olarak tanımlanan bu tepki dalgaları, feminist toplumsal adalet çerçevelerine ve toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırma hedefi doğrultusunda geliştirilen politikalara karşı çıkışlarıyla bilinmektedir. Bu hareketlerin temel gündemleri arasında toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini hedef alan ilerici mevzuatları ve reformist girişimleri zayıflatmak ve tersine çevirmek bulunmaktadır (Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a). Kadınlara Yönelik Şiddet ve Ev İçi Şiddetin Önlenmesi ve Bunlarla Mücadele Hakkındaki Avrupa Konseyi Sözleşmesi'ne (kısaca İstanbul Sözleşmesi) karşıtlık ise bu çerçevede ortaya çıkmakta ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı gruplar ve toplumun diğer muhafazakâr kesimlerini birleştiren ortak bir gündem haline gelmektedir.

Pek çok Avrupa ülkesi ve Türkiye'de görülen, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni siyasallaştıran tartışmalar, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler ve sağ popülist partiler arasındaki söylemsel ortaklıkların ve ortak politik ajandaların görünür hale gelmesini sağlamıştır. İstanbul Sözleşmesi ve ona bağlı olarak geliştirilen yasal düzenlemeler, aşırı sağ ve sağ popülist siyasi partilerin, ulus ötesi örgütlerin, çevrimiçi platformların, muhafazakâr sivil toplum örgütlerinin, kilise örgütleriyle bağlantılı dini kuruluşların faaliyetleri yoluyla "yıkıcı" bir "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisi" olarak değerlendirilmiştir (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Kováts, 2018). Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığı konusundaki mevcut literatür, bu hareketlerin kökenlerini 1995 yılında Pekin'de düzenlenen Dördüncü Dünya Kadın Konferansı'na dayandırarak, konferansın ardından kadın haklarına ilişkin ilerici uygulamalar ve toplumsal cinsiyet yaklaşımının yaygınlaştırılması kararlarına karşı ortaya çıkan bir nevi tepki hareketleri olarak değerlendirmektedir. Ayrıca mevcut literatürde, bu hareketlerin Katolik Kilisesi'nin liderliğindeki dini yönlendirmelerle motive edildiği savunulmaktadır. Özellikle 2010

sonrasındaki sürece odaklanan literatür, bu hareketlerin sağ popülizmle eklemlenerek daha geniş bir etki yaratma potansiyeline ulaştığını ve demokratik bir gerilemeye yol açtıklarını belirtmektedir (Graff & Korolczuk, 2017; Kováts & Pető, 2017; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021).

Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtları, toplumsal cinsiyet kavramına karşı çıkarken bu kavramın ve bu kavram temelinde geliştirilen politikaların veya teorilerin asıl kaynağının aileye, topluma, ulusa ve insanlığa tehdit olarak gördükleri "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisi" olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Dolayısıyla toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığını savunan gruplar açısından toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini temel alarak geliştirilen ulusal ve ulus ötesi yasal düzenlemeler bazı toplumsal ve politik risk ve tehditleri de beraberinde getirmektedir (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Özkazanç, 2020b).

Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerin küresel olarak benimsedikleri temel gündemler arasında kadınların kürtaj hakkına karşı çıkılması ve kürtaja erişim kaynaklarının kısıtlanması, gelecek nesilleri koruma adına cinsel eğitimin reddedilmesi, eşcinsel evliliklere karşı çıkılması, toplumsal cinsiyet teriminin kullanımına tepki ve düşmanlık gösterilmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet araştırmaları alanındaki akademik faaliyetlere karşı hoşgörüsüz bir tutum benimsenmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini dayatan bir mekanizma olarak değerlendirildiği için küreselleşmeye karşı çıkılması, feminist ve LGBTIQ+ aktivizminin marjinalleştirilmesi bulunmaktadır (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Paternotte & Kuhar, 2017a). Bu ortak söylemler ve gündemler dünyanın pek çok farklı yerinde ortaya çıkan toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler tarafından benimsense de bu hareketler kendi yerelleşen gündemlerini de geliştirmektedir. Örneğin, Türkiye'de, bu konulara ek olarak genellikle erkek hakları ve baba hakları hareketlerinin gündeme getirdiği nafaka ve velayet düzenlemelerine ilişkin tepkiler bulunmaktadır. Bu hareketlerin temel iddiası toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini temel alan yasal düzenlemelerin erkeklerin mağduriyetine sebep olduğudur.

Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerin aktörlerini, söylemlerini ve politika yapımına etki edebilme gücünü araştıran akademik literatür ağırlıklı olarak Avrupa'daki örnekler üzerinden gelişmiştir (Balogh, 2020; Edenborg, 2021; Graff & Korolczuk, 2017; Grzebalska et al., 2017; Kováts, 2018; Korolczuk, 2020; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021;

Norocel & Paternotte, 2023; Patternote & Kuhar, 2017a). Türkiye'dekine benzer bir şekilde Avrupa'da da toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığı ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtlığı ortak söylemler, aktörler ve gündemler üzerinden kesişmektedir. Bu toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı kampanyaların veya hareketlerin aktörleri arasında sivil toplum kuruluşları, kilise, medya, dini gruplar, akademisyenler ve politikacılar yer almaktadır. Bu grupların "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisinin reddi" etrafında örgütlendikleri ve toplumsal değerleri koruma söylemiyle motive oldukları belirtilmektedir (Balogh, 2020; Kováts, 2018). Toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin önemli aktörleri olan bu muhafazakâr gruplar aynı zamanda İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni kadına karşı şiddeti önlemek yerine "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisini" yaymak için bir cephe olmakla eleştirmiştir (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021; Özkazanç, 2020b).

Genel olarak dünyada İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ne karşı yükselen tepkiler ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerin ortaya çıkışı mevcut literatürün de ortaya koyduğu gibi küresel demokratik gerileme süreçleriyle ve insan hakları bağlamında yaşanan hak kayıpları ve gerilemelerle ilişkilendirilmektedir (Eslen-Ziya ve Kazanoğlu, 2020; Krizsán ve Roggeband, 2021). Bu hareketlerin ortaya çıkışının aynı zamanda illiberal dönüşümün (Grzebalska ve Pető, 2018), demokratik gerilemenin (Roggeband ve Krizsán, 2020) ve demokratik aşınmanın (Krizsán ve Roggeband, 2021) yükseldiği süreçlerle kesiştiği ve bu hareketlerin sıklıkla popülist sağ ile örtüşen gündemler ve söylemler belirlemiş oldukları vurgulanmaktadır (Kourou, 2020). İstanbul Sözleşmesi, kadına karşı şiddet konusunda kapsamlı bir politika aracı olarak uluslararası düzeyde benzersiz bir yasal çerçeve sunmaktadır. Kadına karşı şiddetin sebeplerini ve şiddetle mücadelede yetersiz kalan uygulamaları toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği ile ilişkilendirerek ele alıyor olması sözleşmeye özgün bir nitelik kazandırmaktadır (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021, s. 3). Ayrıca sözleşme, toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı bir dil kullanılarak yazılmış olması ve toplumsal cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin klişeleri ve ayrımcılığı eleştiren yaklaşımı sebebiyle, Avrupa genelinde heteronormativiteyi ve aileyi savunan muhafazakâr grupların hedefi haline gelmiştir (Balogh, 2020, s. 4).

Türkiye İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden ayrılan tek ülke olmasına rağmen sözleşme karşıtı örgütlü tepkilerin ortaya çıktığı tek ülke değildir. Sözleşmeyi henüz onaylamamış olan Macaristan ve sözleşmeden ayrılmayı düşündüğünü belirten Polonya hakkındaki analizler Türkiye'deki toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığı ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtlığını

açıklayabilmek açısından da dikkate değer bulgular sunmaktadır. Krizsán ve Roggeband (2021), Bulgaristan, Macaristan, Polonya ve Hırvatistan'daki İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyaların analizine dayanarak, devletin kadın hakları savunucuları yerine toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı aktörlerle işbirliği yapmasının, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği açısından önemli bir demokratik erozyona yol açtığını belirtmiştir. Bulgaristan'da toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin önemli gündemlerinden biri hükümete İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin onaylanmasını engellemesi için baskı yapılmasıdır (Gwiazda ve Minkova, 2023). Polonya'da, okullarda cinsel eğitimin yasaklanması, kürtaja erişimin kısıtlanması ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyalarının öncülüğünü yapan gruplardan biri olan Ordo Iuris, İstanbul Sözleşmesi yerine aileyi korumayı amaçlayan yeni bir sözleşmenin hazırlanması gerektiğini belirtilmiştir (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021). İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ne bir alternatif olarak ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifine meydan okumak için Polonya'da aile haklarını korumayı hedefleyen bir sözleşme (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021) ve Türkiye'de Ankara Sözleşmesi önerilmiştir. Bu nedenle, Polonya ve Türkiye arasındaki bir diğer ortak nokta, her iki ülkenin de İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ne alternatif bir yasal düzenleme geliştirmek için ulus ötesi anlaşmalar yerine yerel hukuk kapsamında düzenlemeler yapmayı öngörmesidir (Kurnaz, 2023).

Avrupa Konseyi ülkeleri arasında İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin hazırlanmasına öncülük eden Türkiye, 2011 yılında sözleşmeyi imzalayan ilk ülke olmuştur. Sözleşmenin imzalanması kamuoyunda toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, kadına karşı şiddet ve toplumsal cinsiyet temelli şiddetle mücadele konularında önemli bir gelişme olarak kabul edilmiş ve desteklenmiştir. Türkiye'yi İstanbul Sözleşmesi konusunda öncü bir ülke yapan gelişmeler AKP'nin ilk yıllarında benimsemiş olduğu ve zamanla zayıflayan Avrupa Birliği uyum süreci adımlarıyla ilişkilidir. Türkiye'nin 1999 yılında resmen Avrupa Birliği'ne aday ülke ilan edilmesinden bu yana, AKP hükümeti daha kapsayıcı bir demokrasiye yönelik toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği beklentileri de dahil olmak üzere iç politikasını Avrupa Birliği ile uyumlu hale getirmek için adımlar atmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırması kadın istihdamı, şiddet karşıtı politikalara erişim ve siyasi güçlenme konusunda kamu politikalarını yönlendirmek için bir paradigma olarak kısmi bir şekilde benimsenmiştir. Ancak, ilerleyen yıllarda bu politikalar tasarlandığı şekilde uygulanamamış ve hatta İstanbul Sözleşmesi

örneğinde olduğu gibi bazı ilerici adımlar geri çekilmiştir. Dolayısıyla, toplumsal cinsiyet açısından muhafazakâr AKP hükümetinin toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırmasını isteksizce sürdürmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet temelli şiddet ile mücadeleyi amaçlayan politikaların durumunu da önemli ölçüde etkilemiştir (Aslan Akman & Tutuncu, 2013a; Dedeoğlu & Elveren, 2012).

AKP, iktidara geldiği ilk yıllardan itibaren Avrupa Birliği uyum sürecinin de gerektirdiği demokratikleşme adımlarını benimseyeceğini ilan etmiş ve bu hedef doğrultusunda toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği savunusu yapan bağımsız sivil toplum örgütleri ile sınırlı da olsa iş birlikleri kurarak toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin sağlanması amacıyla yasal değişimlerin yapılmasında rol oynamıştır. Bu çalışma kapsamında bu sınırlı iş birliğinin en önemli çıktıları İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin imzalanması ve 6284 sayılı yasanın yürürlüğe girmesi olmuştur. 2012 yılında İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi'nde kabulünün ardından İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin gerektirdiği yasal düzenlemeleri yapabilmek amacıyla Ailenin Korunması ve Kadına Karşı Şiddetin Önlenmesine Dair Kanun (kısaca 6284 sayılı kanun) hazırlanmıştır.

Türkiye'deki toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarının durumunu değerlendiren Kandiyoti (2016), bu politikaların muhafazakâr ideolojilerin ve ataerkil bir yönetim biçiminin ayrılmaz bir parçası olduğunu gözlemlemiştir. Ayrıca toplumsal cinsiyet sorunları, hak temelli taleplerin siyasallaştırılmasında popülist söylemin temel bir bileşeni olarak hizmet etmektedir. 2020 ve 2021 yıllarında yoğunlaşan İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları sırasında ve sonrasında ortaya çıkan, artan toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı seferberlikler, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine ilişkin çatışmayı ve kutuplaşmayı, İstanbul Sözleşmesi ile ilgili ideolojik bir mücadeleye dönüştürmüştür. İstanbul Sözleşmesi konusunda doğrudan karşı karşıya gelen toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi arasındaki çekişme, sözleşmenin her iki hareket için sembolik önemini artırmıştır. Bu durum aynı zamanda Türkiye'nin toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları yapımında toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırmasından aile ana akımlaştırmasına geçişin ima ettiği sonuçlar nedeniyle kadın hareketi ve muhalefet tarafından endişeyle karşılanmıştır.

Türkiye'nin, hazırlanmasında öncülük ettiği ve toplumsal cinsiyet temelli şiddet ve kadına karşı şiddet konularında en gelişmiş yasal düzenleme (Krizsán & Roggeband,



2021, p. 3) olarak kabul edilen İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden ani bir kararla ayrılması, araştırılması gereken bir durum yaratmıştır. AKP'nin Avrupa Birliği üyeliğinin gerektirdiği insan hakları temelli demokratikleşme adımlarından ve yasal uyum süreçlerine ilişkin politikalar geliştirmekten vazgeçmesi, Türkiye'de demokrasi açısından bir dönüm noktası olarak değerlendirilmiştir (Aksoy, 2015). Bu dönüm noktasının muhafazakâr toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarıyla birleşmesi (Eslen-Ziya ve Kazanoğlu, 2020) ve Avrupa Birliği adaylık sürecinin gerektirdiği adımların hükümetin gündeminden düşmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarında önemli yansımalara sebep olmuş ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği çerçevesinin politika yapımında eskisi gibi sahiplenilmediği görülmüştür (Bodur Ün ve Arıkan, 2022; Kollias ve Mesis, 2024).

Bu ani kararda İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya ve genel olarak Türkiye'de yeni yeni görünür hale gelen toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket etkili olmuştur. 2002'den beri iktidarda olan AKP'nin siyasi hakimiyeti, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı taleplerin ve iddiaların yükselişini destekleyen siyasi fırsat yapılarının ortaya çıkmasında etkili olmuştur. Bu talepler, sözleşmenin aileye, topluma ve ulusa yönelik tehditler içerdiği argümanlarıyla dile getirilerek, hükümete sözleşmeden çekilme konusunda baskı yapılan kampanyalara dönüşmüştür. Dolayısıyla, hükümetin sözleşmeden çekilme kararı toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerle bir iş birliğini işaret ettiği gibi aynı zamanda devlet ve toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi arasında zaten zayıflamış olan ilişkilerin tamamen kopma tehlikesiyle karşı karşıya olduğunu da göstermiştir. 2010'lu yılların başından beri AKP hükümeti şiddet konusunda kadınlara ve kız çocuklarına karşı yaygın şiddeti gündeme alan ve bunlarla mücadele edilebilmesi için yapısal değişimlerin önünü açmayı hedefleyen toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırması yerine sosyal politikalarda ve şiddet karşıtı yasal uygulamalarda aile ana akımlaştırması perspektifini benimseme niyetini ortaya koymuştur. Dolayısıyla, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve hükümet arasındaki ortak söylemler ve gündemler, toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarında kadın merkezli ve toplumsal cinsiyete duyarlı bir yaklaşımın, aile odaklı bir paradigmayla değiştirilmesinde etkili olmuştur. İstanbul Sözleşmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet odaklı yaklaşımı nedeniyle toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlarının hedefi haline gelmiştir. "Toplumsal cinsiyet" ve hatta "eşitlik",

2010'lardan beri toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı aktörlerin söylemsel mücadelesinde "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisi" şeklinde etiketlenerek, suçlu ilan edilmiştir.

Ancak Türkiye'nin İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilme süreci analiz edilirken bu süreçte aynı zamanda feminist hareket ve kadın hareketinin önemli aktörleri arasında olduğu, güçlü bir sözleşme destekçisi kampanyanın var olduğu da gözden kaçırılmamalıdır. Sözleşmeden çekilme kararının öncesine ve sonrasına yayılan ve çoğunlukla toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği savunusu yapan aktivistler ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığını destekleyen aktörlerin karşı karşıya geldiği bir ideolojik çekişme süreci yaşanmıştır. Bu çalışma, İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi destekçisi gruplar arasındaki ideolojik mücadelenin aynı zamanda toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi arasındaki ideolojik çekişme olduğunu savunmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu ideolojik çekişmenin dinamiklerini açıklayabilmek için İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları çekişmeli siyaset yaklaşımı temelinde yorumlanmaktadır. Bu nedenle, toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketten, rekabet eden talepler üreten, karşıt gruplar olarak bahsedilmektedir. Her iki hareketin de sözleşmenin uygulanmasını ya da sözleşmeden ayrılmayı talep ederek, İstanbul Sözleşmesi konusundaki taleplerini devlete yönelttiğini ve bu durumun da çekişmeli siyaset çerçevesi üzerinden ele alınmaya uygun bir konu olduğu savunulmaktadır. Bu ideolojik mücadele, çekişmeli siyaset çerçevesinde analiz edildiğinde, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketine karşı seferber olan bir karşıt hareket olarak varlık gösterdiği belirtilmektedir. Bu durumda, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin feshedilmesi için yürütülen kampanyanın da bir karşıt kampanya işlevi gördüğü savunulmaktadır. Ancak bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketleri, yalnızca feministlerin hazırlanmasında öncülük ettiği yasal düzenlemeleri veya LGBTIQ+ hareketinin taleplerini hedef alarak kamuoyunu harekete geçirmeye çalışan ve tek motivasyonları bu konular olan seferberlikler olarak değerlendirmemektedir. Aksine, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin ortaya çıkışını ele alacak gelecekteki çalışmaların, bu hareketlerin ortaya çıktıkları bağlamı araştırırken küresel toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığının yanı sıra Türkiye'deki sağ muhafazakâr ideolojilerin geçmişten günümüze gündeme aldığı konuları ve söylemlerini de dikkate alması gerektiğini ileri sürmektedir.

Bu çalışmanın odaklandığı ilk konu Türkiye'de İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket arasındaki benzerlikler olmuştur. İkinci konu ise, daha geniş bağlamlı bir politik analiz yapabilmek amacıyla İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları sürecinde karşı karşıya gelen iki kampanyanın etkileşimini araştırmaktır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni destekleyen kampanyanın toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu yapan hareket tarafından yönlendirildiğini ve bunun karşıtı olan sözleşme karşıtı kampanyanın temel aktörünün de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket olduğunu savunmaktadır. Her iki kampanya da homojen bir yapıda değildir ve içerisinde pek çok farklı aktör yer almaktadır. Ancak her iki kampanyanın da öne çıkan aktörlerine bakıldığında sözleşme tartışmalarının aslında iki karşıt grubun birbirine karşı talepler ürettiği bir ideolojik çekişme alanı haline geldiği görülmektedir. Bu bağlamda, her iki kampanyanın sözleşmeye ilişkin geliştirdikleri karşıt argümanları ve çerçeveleri analiz edilmiştir. Bu söyleme odaklanan analiz, bu karşıt hareketlerin, İstanbul Sözleşmesi ve genel olarak toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine ilişkin karşıt yaklaşımlarını vurgulanmıştır. Çalışmanın odaklandığı diğer konu ise toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketinin İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya ve genel olarak yükselen toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığına ilişkin tepkilerini analiz etmektir. Bu çalışmada, feminist hareket, kadın hareketi ve LGBTIQ+ hareketinden oluşan koalisyonun, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni destekleyen kampanyanın başını çektiği düşünülerek bu aktörlerin hepsini kapsayacak şekilde bu koalisyon, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketi olarak isimlendirilmiştir.

Bu çalışma, nihayetinde hükümetin sözleşmeden çekilme kararıyla sonuçlanan Türkiye'deki İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmalarının hareket-karşı hareket dinamikleri içerdiğini savunmakta ve bu dinamiklerin ideolojik boyutunu tartışmaya açmaktadır. Nitel bir araştırma olarak tasarlanan analiz, iki hareket arasındaki ideolojik çekişmenin aile, kadına karşı şiddet politikaları ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ile ilgili konular üzerindeki tartışmalar yoluyla ortaya çıktığını ileri sürmektedir. 2020 yılından bu yana dağınık bir koalisyon olarak hareket eden toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı bir cephenin organize olarak İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyayı örgütlediği savunulmaktadır. İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya ile daha odaklı bir seferberlik haline gelen bu hareket, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik yaygın bir söylemsel muhalefet ile tanımlanmaktadır. Bu hareket, toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırmasından aile ana

akımlaştırmasına ve nihayetinde toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığının aile merkezli politikalarla kurumsallaştırılmasına doğru daha görünür bir kaymanın ortaya çıkmasında etkili olmuştur. Dolayısıyla Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın söylemleri ve talepleri, toplumsal cinsiyet politikalarında devam eden bir paradigma değişikliği sürecini anlatmaktadır. Ortak aktörlere, söylemlere ve gündemlere sahip olan toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği savunusu yapan hareketi, özellikle feminist ve LGBTIQ+ aktivistleri düşmanlaştırarak ve sağ siyasi partilerle iş birlikleri kurarak politika yapımını etkilemeye çalışmaktadır. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'de mevcut siyasi fırsat yapısının toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketi güçlendirdiğini ve kadına karşı şiddete yönelik politikaları etkilemesini sağladığını savunmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma, hükümet ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket arasında kurulan stratejik ittifakın belirlediği siyasi iklimin, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu yapan hareketi geriye ittiğini ve bu hareketin gündem belirleme ve kampanya yürütme kapasitesini sınırlandırdığını iddia etmektedir. Bu durumun, zorunlu bir geri çekilmeyle karşı karşıya kalan toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketini, yeni eylem repertuarları geliştirmeye yönelttiği ve yeni siyasi ittifaklar aracılığıyla güç kazanmaya çalıştığı bir aktivizm biçimine doğru kaymasına sebep olduğu savunulmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada yapılan analiz, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi arasındaki ideolojik mücadele süreciyle ilgili birkaç temel iç görü ortaya koymaktadır. İlk olarak, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin, politika yapımını etkilemek ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi gibi toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği girişimlerine karşı muhalefetini meşrulaştırmak için milliyetçi ve muhafazakâr söylemlerle uyum sağlayarak, siyasi fırsat yapılarını stratejik olarak kullandığını göstermiştir. İkinci olarak, çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırmasından aile ana akımlaştırmasına doğru gerçekleşen paradigma değişiminde devletin aktif rolünü vurgulamıştır. Çalışmanın bulguları hükümetin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini temel alan politikalara odaklanmak yerine aile odaklı politikaları kurumsallaştırmak yönündeki yaklaşımının, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı söylemlerle uyum içinde olduğunu göstermiştir. Üçüncü olarak, çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketinin koalisyon kurma, stratejik savunuculuğa başvurma ve toplumsal cinsiyet anlatılarını

güçlendirme yoluyla toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığına tepki vermeye çalıştığını ortaya koymuştur. Ancak, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği savunusu yapan hareketler mevcut durumda özellikle toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı gruplar tarafından kendilerine yönelen düşmanca söylemler, ayrıştırıcı tutumlar ve bu söylemlerin hükümet tarafından da sahiplenilmesi sebebiyle sivil toplum alanında kısıtlamalarla karşılaşmaktadır. Bu hareketin şu anda en önemli gündemlerinden biri genel olarak hareket üzerindeki baskılarla mücadele edilmesi ve hak kayıplarının engellenmesinin sağlanmasıdır. Dördüncü olarak, araştırmadaki kapsamlı eleştirel söylem analizi, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini bir dayatma ve geleneksel değerlere bir tehdit olarak tasvir ettiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Buna karşılık, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareket, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin insan haklarına dayanan çerçevesini ve kadına karşı şiddet konusunda oldukça ilerici yasal boyutlarını vurgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmalarının gösterdiği gibi, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği politikaları konusundaki çatışma, politika yapımını etkileyen ve sivil toplumun rolünü yeniden tanımlayan popülist, neoliberal ve milliyetçi gündemlerle iç içe geçmiş daha geniş kapsamlı ideolojik gerilimleri yansıtmaktadır.

Türkiye'de İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın söylemleri analiz edildiğinde bu kampanyanın, sözleşme referans alınarak düzenlenen 6284 sayılı kanunu ve ayrımcılıkla mücadele konusunda önemli bir ulus ötesi sözleşme olan Kadınlara Karşı Her Türlü Ayrımcılığın Önlenmesi Sözleşmesi'ni (CEDAW) de hedef alarak bu yasal düzenlemelerin de İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nde olduğu gibi iptalini savundukları görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu kampanyanın gündemi İstanbul Sözleşmesi bağlamının ötesinde daha geniş bir politik çerçeveye yerleşmekte ve toplumsal cinsiyet (eşitliği) karşıtlığı ile iç içe geçmektedir. Bu çalışmanın ilk araştırma sorusu tam da bu noktaya odaklanmakta ve Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın kesişen ve hatta iç içe geçen aktörlerini, söylemlerini ve stratejilerini araştırmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın söylemlerinin analizi, sözleşmeye muhalefetin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı aktivizm tarafından oluşturulan benzer temalar üzerinden kamuoyu ve siyasi desteği nasıl yarattığını ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu kapsamda dört sağ kanat muhafazakâr gazetenin (Milli Gazete, Yeni

Asya, Yeni Akit ve Yeni Şafak) 2020-2023 yılları arasında çevrim içi olarak yayınladığı 125 gazete haberi eleştirel söylem analizi ile incelenmiştir. Fairclough'un (1995) üç aşamalı eleştirel söylem analizi yöntemi, haberlerde kullanılan dilin ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyayı çevreleyen politik bağlamın analiz edilmesini sağlamıştır. Ayrıca, aynı yıllarda İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtlığını yaygınlaştırabilme amacıyla yayınlanan ve doğrudan sözleşmeyi hedef alan on kitap tümdengelimli tematik analiz ile incelemeye konu edilmiştir. Her iki analizden elde edilen sonuçlar temel temalar etrafında bütünleştirilmiş ve tutarlı bir şekilde, bir arada ele alınmıştır. İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın söylemlerine odaklanan analiz, bu kampanyanın söylemlerinin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ile örtüştüğünü ve benzer aktörler tarafından koordine edildiğini göstermiştir. Aynı zamanda, bulgular, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilmenin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket için sembolik bir öneme sahip olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Analiz, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin Türkiye'nin İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilme kararını, feminist hareketin bugüne kadar hayata geçirilmesinde rol oynadığı politika ilerlemelerini tersine çevirmek için ilk adım olarak gördüğünü göstermektedir.

Metinlerarasılık (Fairclough, 1995) çerçevesinde yürütülen analiz, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket içindeki grupların söylemlerini çoğunlukla dini metinlere, hareketin diğer katılımcılarının raporlarına, kitaplarına ve haber makalelerine atıfta bulunarak haklı çıkarmaya çalıştıklarını göstermiştir. Bu durum önemli düzeyde bir söylemsel etkileşime işaret etmektedir. Dolayısıyla, İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin söylemlerini önemli ölçüde yaygınlaştırdığını, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine ve LGBTIQ+ haklarına karşı muhalefetlerini daha da güçlendirdiğini göstermiştir. Ayrıca analiz, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin önemli bir kazanım olarak değerlendirdiği Türkiye'nin İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilmesinin ardından sıradaki hedefler olarak 6284 sayılı kanunun iptali ve CEDAW'dan çekilme konularının gündemlerinde olduğunu göstermiştir. Dolayısıyla Türkiye'nin İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden ayrılması ile sözleşme karşıtı kampanya amacına ulaştığı için sönmüş değildir; farklı gündemler belirleyerek, aynı örgütlülük üzerinden diğer yasal düzenlemeleri hedef alarak varlığını devam ettirmektedir.

Eleştirel söylem analizi ve tematik analiz uygulanarak yapılan değerlendirmede, haber makalelerinde ve kitaplarda kullanılan dilin kutuplaştırıcı temalar, argümanlar ve sınır

aktivasyon mekanizmaları aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı konumu inşa ettiği ve güçlendirdiği saptaması yapılmıştır. Bu sayede, sözleşme karşıtı kampanyanın ideolojik bölünmeleri şekillendirdiği ve karşıt kimliklerin kutuplaştırılmasına yol açtığı sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu kutuplaştırıcı söylemin, "masum insanlara" karşı "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisini" kullanan "yozlaşmış elitler" olarak adlandırdıkları toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketine karşı bir seferberlik çağrısında bulunduğu ve bu durumun da "ince merkezli" popülist bir tavırla örtüştüğü savunulmaktadır (Mudde, 2004). Bulgular, sözleşme karşıtı kampanyanın, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifini "küresel bir tehdit" olarak çerçeveleyerek, bu sözde "zararlı eğilimlerin" İstanbul Sözleşmesi gibi yasal araçlar aracılığıyla "Batı, Birleşmiş Milletler ve Avrupa Birliği" tarafından hükümetlere dayatıldığının savunduğunu göstermiştir. Kampanya, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin "bir proje" olarak dayatıldığını iddia etmenin ötesinde, "gizli gündemler" içerdiğini savunmaktadır. Ayrıca, İstanbul Sözleşmesi, kadına karşı şiddete ilişkin orijinal bağlamından çıkarılıp yalnızca LGBTIQ+ hareketiyle ilişkilendirilmiş ve sözleşmenin bir "cinsiyetsizleştirme projesi" olduğu ileri sürülmüştür. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları sırasında "ideolojik karşı çerçeveleme" yaptığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu çalışmanın tanımladığı ideolojik karşı çerçeveleme, söylemsel bir strateji olarak, konuları orijinal bağlamlarından ısrarla koparmayı ve alternatif bir ideolojik çerçeve içinde yeniden yapılandırmayı içermektedir. Yeniden çerçeveleme, tartışmanın kavramlarının yeniden şekillendirilmesinde, toplumsal cinsiyetin anlamı hakkındaki kamu algısının değiştirilmesinde ve muhaliflerin kendilerinin ve argümanlarının meşruiyetsizleştirilmesinde etkili olmaktadır (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Nitel araştırmaya dayalı bu çalışma, İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyayı çevreleyen söylemleri araştırmak için eleştirel söylem analizi ve tümdengelimli tematik analiz kullanmıştır. Ayrıca, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ni destekleyen cephenin tepkilerini, motivasyonlarını ve hareket repertuarlarını ortaya çıkarmak için feminist aktivistlerle derinlemesine görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketinin İstanbul Sözleşmesi ile ilgili değerlendirmeleri, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketi içerisinde yer alan yirmi katılımcıyla yapılan yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Katılımcıların tamamı kendilerini feminist

aktivist olarak tanımladığı için çalışma boyunca toplumsal cinsiyet savunucusu aktivistler ve feminist aktivistler ifadeleri birbirinin yerine geçecek şekilde kullanılmıştır. Türkiye'deki mevcut kutuplaşmış siyaset atmosferi göz önünde bulundurularak ve araştırmanın ihtilafli konusu sebebiyle katılımcılara ulaşmak konusunda büyük bir sıkıntı yaşanacağı öngörülerek toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket içerisinde yer alan aktörlerle görüşme yapılmamıştır. Bu durum araştırmanın bulguları açısından sınırlayıcı olsa da bu aktörlerin söylemlerinin en çok yankılandığı yerlerden biri olan sağ kanat gazeteler üzerinden yapılan söylem analizi, konuya ilişkin sözleşme karşıtlarının argümanlarına da yer verilmesini sağlamıştır.

Çalışmanın ikinci araştırma sorusu, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ile toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketi arasındaki İstanbul Sözleşmesi ile ilgili tartışmaların ideolojik arka planına odaklanmıştır. Çekişmeli siyaset yaklaşımını kullanarak, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin, toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketinin politikadaki başarılarını baltalamayı ve siyasi arenadaki çabalarını marjinalleştirmeyi amaçladığı iddia edilmektedir. Bu çalışmada, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler yalnızca tepkisel olarak ortaya çıkan, tepki hareketleri olarak tanımlanmamaktadır. Çalışma, çekişmeli siyaset perspektifini temel aldığı ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmalarına odaklandığı için, bu bağlam temelinde toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketi, toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketine karşı çıkmayı amaçlayan ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği karşıtı bir bakış açısıyla motive olmuş bir karşı hareket olarak tasvir etmiştir.

Türkiye siyasetinin son derece kutuplaşmış manzarasında, İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları kısa sürede hem sözleşme karşıtı hem de sözleşme yanlısı cephelerin birbirleriyle çatışan söylemler ve gündemler belirlemesine sebep olmuştur. Ancak, hükümetin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği yerine ailenin korunması perspektifini benimsemiş olması, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin gündemlerinin hükümet politikalarıyla uyumlu bir görünüme kavuşmasına ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini savunan aktörlerin taleplerinin göz ardı edilmesine yol açmıştır. Siyasi fırsat yapısı, bir hareketin söyleminin kapsamını tanımlamasına olanak tanıyarak hareketin mesajlarının ve taleplerinin daha fazla kişiye ulaşabilmesini ve politikayı etkileyebilmesini sağlamaktadır. Dolayısıyla, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler, mevcut siyasi fırsat yapılarını kullanarak sağ partiler, dini örgütler ve muhafazakâr



sivil toplum kuruluşlarıyla ittifaklar kurmaktadır. Türkiye'de bu ittifak, AKP'nin popülist "yerli ve milli" söylemi aracılığıyla şekillenmiştir. Hem AKP'nin bu söyleminin hem de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin küreselleşme karşıtı söylemlerinin kesiştiği nokta, kadına karşı şiddet ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği politikalarında evrensel insan hakları normları yerine geleneksel değerleri vurgulayan sosyal politikalar geliştirilmesidir. Başka bir deyişle, mevcut siyasi fırsat yapısı, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin etkisini genişletmesine destek olmuştur. Bu hareket, milliyetçi temalara, geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına, aileye ve ulusa yönelik tehlike söylemlerine dayanarak ve mevcut siyasi fırsat yapısının da desteği ile güçlenen bir aktör haline gelmiştir.

Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket üzerine yapılan araştırmalar, dini grupları, sağ siyasi partileri, muhafazakâr sivil toplum kuruluşlarını, medya kuruluşlarını ve erkek hakları destekçilerini bu hareketin kilit oyuncularını olarak tanımlamıştır (Özkazanç, 2020b; Ünal, 2024a). Mevcut literatürle tutarlı olarak, bu çalışma, İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyada yer alan aktörlerin aynı grupları içerdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Sonuç olarak, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığı savunucuları, İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın temel çerçevelerini ve gündemlerini etkilemiştir. İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanyanın en belirgin söylemi, sözleşmenin "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisinin" bir ürünü olduğu ve bu sebeple aileyi, toplumu, ulusu ve insanlığı bir bütün olarak tehdit ettiği yönündedir. İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya, "toplumsal cinsiyet" kavramının kullanımına karşı çıkmaktadır. Sözleşmedeki toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliğine ilişkin vurguları reddederek bunun yerine kadına yönelik şiddetin geleneksel normlar, etik yargılar ve yerel yasal çerçeveler aracılığıyla ele alınması gerektiğini savunmaktadır.

İstanbul Sözleşmesi destekçileri ile karşıtları arasındaki tartışmanın kökeni bir ideolojik arka plana dayandığından, bu çalışma, karşıt hareketler arasındaki çatışmayı ideolojik bir mücadele olarak incelemiştir. Çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketleri muhafazakâr seferberlikler olarak kabul ederken, bu hareketlerin değişime karşı olmadıklarını savunmaktadır. Bu hareketlerin talep ettiği değişim, geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet normlarını politika yapımında egemen kılmak için toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırmasından aile ana akımlaştırmasına geçişi savunmaktadır. Bu nedenle, çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ile toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu

hareket arasındaki çatışmayı dar anlamıyla muhafazakâr ve ilerici ideolojilerin çatışması olarak değil, söylemde sürekli olarak birbirine meydan okuyan, toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının tanımı üzerinden temellenen çekişmeli bir mücadele olarak yorumlamıştır. Dolayısıyla, iki hareket arasındaki ideolojik mücadele, söylemde meşruiyet için bir mücadele olarak görülmektedir (Freedon, 1996). Bu bağlamda, bu araştırma, "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisi" kavramının "toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine" karşı nasıl inşa edildiğini vurgulamıştır. İdeolojiye ilişkin bu bakış açısı, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketleri yalnızca toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine karşı seferberlikler olarak değil, aynı zamanda demokratik ve liberal değerlere bir bütün olarak karşı çıkan hareketler olarak tanımlamayı mümkün kılmıştır. Buna göre, bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketleri yalnızca feminist ve LGBTIQ+ aktivistlere karşı ortaya çıkan tepki hareketleri olarak değil, aynı zamanda liberal demokratik haklar ve kurumlar için önemli tehditler oluşturan "demokrasiye saldırılar" olarak değerlendirmiştir. Bununla birlikte, bu araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğine yönelik karşıt iddiaları bastıran hegemonik söylemi kurmada başarılı olamadığını ileri sürmektedir. Türkiye'de ve Avrupa genelinde (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021) toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerin tüm muhalif sesleri susturma konusunda başarısız olduğu açıktır. Bu nedenle, bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığının kendi söylemlerini toplumsal cinsiyet siyasetinde hegemonik söylem olarak kuramadığını savunmaktadır. Aksine, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı söylemlere karşı koymak için sürekli ve büyüyen bir mücadelenin var olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Üçüncü araştırma sorusu toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketinin İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları sırasındaki deneyimlerini ortaya koymayı amaçlamıştır. Bunu yaparken iki temel noktaya odaklanılmıştır. İlk olarak, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu yapan gruplar için İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin önemini vurgulamak amaçlanmıştır. İkinci olarak, toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu hareketinin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı harekete karşılık verebilmek amacıyla geliştirdiği stratejilerin neler olduğuna odaklanılmıştır. Bu araştırmada katılımcı olarak yer alan feminist aktivistler, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin bugüne kadar kadına yönelik şiddeti ele alan en kapsamlı yasal çerçeve olduğunu savunmuştur. Aktivistler, Türkiye'nin sözleşmeden çekilmesini toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği için bir gerileme olarak değerlendirmiştir. Bu gerilemenin, yalnızca toplumsal

cinsiyet eşitliği odaklı bir mücadele ile değil, genel olarak demokratik hakların savunulması odaklı daha geniş bağlamlı bir mücadele çerçevesinde tersine çevrilebileceğini savunmuşlardır. Hükümetin toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği perspektifinden tamamen vazgeçmediğini savunan katılımcılara göre yürütülecek kararlı kampanyalarla İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nin Türkiye'de yeniden onaylanabilmesi mümkündür. Katılımcılar, İstanbul Sözleşmesi tartışmaları aracılığıyla siyasi manzarayı etkileme kapasitelerini gösterdiklerini düşündükleri toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketi, kendi mücadeleleri için bir "tehdit" olarak görmekte-dirler. Katılımcılar, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığının sebep olduğu hak kayıplarının önüne geçilebilmesi için demokratik, liberal, sol eğilimli ve ilerici sivil toplum kuruluşlarıyla, çeşitli odaklarla faaliyet gösteren taban hareketleri arasında güçlü ulusal ve ulus ötesi dayanışma ağlarının kurulmasının gerekli olduğunu vurgulamışlardır.

Bu tez, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketinin toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığına nasıl karşı koyabileceğini tartışarak, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler hakkındaki mevcut literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketi içerisinde yer alan aktivistlerle yapılan görüşmeler, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı geri itmelerle mücadele stratejilerini ve siyasi iş birliklerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır. Türkiye'de kadın ve aile politikalarına ilişkin giderek daha muhafazakâr hale gelen siyasi çerçeve ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ne muhalefet yoluyla ivme kazanan toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini savunan aktivistler için demokratik alanı kısıtlamaktadır. Bu çerçevede, bu çalışma toplumsal cinsiyet savunuculuğu için bu daralan alanın, aktivistlerin deneyimlerini nasıl etkilediğini incelemiş ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı geri itmelerle yanıt olarak geliştirdikleri stratejiler aracılığıyla mücadelelerinin demokratik dayanıklılığını sorgulamıştır.

Yirmi katılımcıyla yapılan derinlemesine görüşmelerde katılımcıların aktivizm deneyimleri, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğinin durumu hakkındaki görüşleri, İstanbul Sözleşmesi'ne ilişkin değerlendirmeleri ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketler hakkındaki düşünceleri hakkında açık uçlu sorular yer almıştır. Bu çalışmanın ana odağı Türkiye'de sivil toplumun, toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerden ve İstanbul Sözleşmesi'nden çekilme sürecinden nasıl etkilendiği değildir. Katılımcıların deneyimleri sivil topluma ilişkin iç görüler sunsa da çalışma,

toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareket içinde yer alan bireysel aktivistlerin deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, katılımcı profili tek bir mücadele alanını hedeflemekten ziyade çeşitlidir. Katılımcılar kendilerini kadın hareketi, feminist hareket veya LGBTIQ+ hareket içerisinde yer alan feminist aktivistler olarak tanımlamıştır.

Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini savunan aktörlerin demokratik dayanıklılık konusundaki endişeleri ve çabaları, bu çalışmanın "sessiz mücadele" olarak adlandırdığı yeni bir hareket repertuarı etrafında yapılandırılmıştır. Görüşmelere katılanlar, sivil toplum ve siyaset içindeki aktivizmlerinin kısıtlandığını ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket ile hükümet arasındaki iş birliğinin mücadele alanlarını daralttığını ileri sürmüşlerdir. Toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketine karşı artan ayrımcı ve baskıcı tutumlar, hem mekânsal hem de söylemsel olarak zorunlu bir geri çekilme olarak algılanmakta ve politika yapımındaki etkilerini perdelemektedir. Bununla birlikte, bu çalışma, aktivistlerin geri çekilme deneyimlerinin zorunlu olarak hareketin güçsüzleşmesi anlamına gelmediğini savunmaktadır. Bunun yerine, bu sürecin feminist mücadelede içe dönme sürecini yansıttığını savunmaktadır. Katılımcıların bu durumu, dayanışma yoluyla güç toplama süreci olarak çerçevelediği ileri sürülmektedir. Bu araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketinin susturulmaya çalışılmasının "direnci sessizliğe" (direniş içeren sessizlik) (Ferguson, 2003) yol açtığını savunmaktadır. Feminist hareketin, aile ana akımlaştırma perspektifini onaylamayı reddetmesi, LGBTIQ+ hareketinin marjinalleştirilmesini görmezden gelmemesi ve kadın haklarına yönelik saldırılara karşı duyarsız kalmaması sebebiyle sessizliğe zorlandığı vurgulanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla bu "direnci sessizlik" politika yapımında artan kamu görünürlüğü ve etkisi elde edebilmek için kendi ideallerinden taviz vermek yerine feminist hareketin, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği ideallerini kararlılıkla koruduğunu anlatmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma, bu sessizliğin politik bir sonucu olarak, hareketin içe odaklanmasının iç çatışmaları ele alarak dayanışma ağlarını daha da güçlendirmesini sağlayacağını savunmaktadır.

Türkiye'de İstanbul Sözleşmesi karşıtı kampanya ve toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket örneği, küresel toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketlerin daha geniş bağlamının bir parçası olmasına rağmen, esas olarak İstanbul Sözleşmesi hükümleri uyarınca oluşturulan yasal bir düzenleme olan 6284 sayılı Kanun'a muhalefetle öne çıkan bir

yerel karakter kazanmıştır. "Erkeklerin mağdur edildiği" söylemiyle çerçeveselenen bir erkek hakları mücadelesi bağlamında ortaya çıkan bu tepki, genellikle yasal düzenlemelerde erkeklerin lehine değişiklikler yapılmasını talep etmektedir. Türk Medeni Kanunu ve Türk Ceza Kanunu'nda ve özellikle 6284 sayılı kanunda yer alan nafaka, velayet, erken evlilikler ve aile içi şiddete ilişkin düzenlemelerin, "toplumsal cinsiyet ideolojisi"ni yansıtan bir şekilde, feministlerin baskısı altında yapıldığı ve sonuç olarak erkeklerin ezilmesine yol açtığı ileri sürülmektedir. Bu erkek hakları odaklı hareket, Türkiye'de toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareketin önemli bir kesimini temsil etse de bütün talepleri henüz hükümet tarafından kabul edilmemiştir. AKP yetkilileri, özellikle Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan ve KADEM gibi hükümete yakın kadın örgütleri 6284 sayılı kanunu Türkiye'nin kadına yönelik şiddete karşı mücadelesindeki kararlı duruşu olarak göstermekte ve yasanın yürürlükte kalacağını belirtmektedir. 6284 sayılı kanun konusundaki fikir ayrılığına rağmen hükümet ile toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtı hareket arasındaki ittifak, toplumsal cinsiyet alanına odaklanan sivil toplumu yeniden şekillendirmektedir. Sonuç olarak, bu muhafazakâr ittifak, toplumsal cinsiyet savunusu hareketini ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği çağrılarını marjinalleştirmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu stratejik ortaklık, politika yapımında geleneksel ve milliyetçi paradigmaları yerleştirmek için mevcut siyasi fırsatlardan yararlanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet ana akımlaştırmasından aile ana akımlaştırmasına geçişin, "ailenin korunması ve güçlendirilmesi" olarak çerçeveselenmesine rağmen aslında toplumsal cinsiyet karşıtlığının ana akımlaştırılmasına doğru giden bir süreç olduğunu savunmaktadır.

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