

Transnationalization of Anti-Gender Politics on Social Media: Hashtag Practices and Cross-Border Visibility

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Submitted: 6 May 2026 **Accepted:** 11 August 2026 **Published:** 29 October 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue “Contested Regimes of (In)Visibility in Gendered Public Spheres” edited by Stefan Wallaschek (Europa-Universität Flensburg) and Mareike Fenja Bauer (Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt – Oder), fully open access at <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.i511>

Abstract

Gender politics have become central arenas of contemporary political struggle, with anti-gender movements mobilizing across borders to contest women’s and LGBTQI+ rights. While research has shown that anti-gender actors articulate strikingly similar positions across national contexts, it remains insufficiently understood how such similarity translates into shared transnational action. This study examines how anti-gender movements collectively generate transnational visibility on social media by analyzing ten years of Twitter (now X) communication from 148 anti-gender social movement organizations in Croatia, Germany, France, Italy, and Poland ($N = 126,711$ tweets). Drawing on concepts of networked framing and discourse coalitions, this study employs a mixed-methods analysis of hashtag co-usage on Twitter, combining quantitative measures of transnational hashtag connectivity with qualitative thematic content analysis. The findings reveal that anti-gender movements co-create visibility for opposition to gender equality through a threefold pattern, including a continuous dissemination of ideological narratives, an episodic activation of campaigns, and a strategic extension of anti-gender frames into broader public debates. These practices enable actors to jointly enhance the visibility and persistence of anti-gender claims across multiple publics while simultaneously adapting frames to divergent political contexts. By linking cross-border hashtag practices to the co-production of visibility, this study contributes to research on gendered public spheres by demonstrating how similarity among anti-gender actors becomes transnationally consequential through the joint production of visibility in networked communication environments.

Keywords

anti-gender movements; digital activism; far-right politics; hashtag activism; networked framing; social media; social movements; transnational communication; transnationalization

1. Introduction

Gender politics have become one of the most contested arenas of contemporary political struggle across Europe. Since the early 2010s, movements opposing so-called “gender ideology” have mobilized against reproductive rights, LGBTQI+ equality, and gender mainstreaming policies. These mobilizations have contributed to major political developments, including Croatia’s constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, Hungary’s removal of gender studies from accredited university programs, Poland’s near-total abortion ban, and Turkey’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Although embedded in distinct national contexts, these movements display remarkable resemblance: Across countries, anti-gender actors invoke similar narratives about protecting children and families, and portray equality policies as ideological impositions that threaten national sovereignty and moral order (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Scholars therefore describe anti-gender politics as a transnational movement, highlighting cross-border cooperation and diffusion (Ayoub & Stoeckl, 2024; Holvikivi et al., 2024; Koch, 2024; Lavizzari & Siročić, 2023; Mariani, 2025).

Digital media are widely assumed to facilitate this transnationalization, as they enable actors to disseminate claims, mobilize supporters, and connect dispersed audiences (Bennett, 2005). Although research on anti-gender movements’ online strategies remains limited, existing studies show that these actors use digital infrastructures to circulate narratives and coordinate campaigns, often through professionalized advocacy networks and multilingual communication (Hall et al., 2024; Jaramillo et al., 2026; Reinhardt et al., 2023). Prior research has identified prominent actors such as CitizenGO operating across linguistic contexts (Righetti et al., 2025) and documented instances of cross-border online exchange among organizations (Tronina, 2024). At the same time, studies show that anti-gender communication between actors remains largely structured along national lines (Tronina, 2024; Wallaschek et al., 2022). This pattern mirrors findings in transnational public sphere research, where interaction-based measures (such as retweets, hyperlinks, or follows) often reveal limited cross-national exchange, falling short of the transnational promise associated with digital media (Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Heft, Reinhardt, & Pfetsch, 2023; Stier et al., 2021).

How, then, does anti-gender politics acquire a transnational character in digitally networked environments that remain predominantly nationally segmented? Scholarship on transnational and Europeanized communication suggests that transnationality may emerge not only through dense interaction but also through discursive synchronization and shared communicative markers across contexts (Eder & Kantner, 2000; Wessler et al., 2008). Rather than examining direct interaction between actors or comparing anti-gender discourses across countries, this article investigates how digital communication practices render ideological similarity transnationally visible. Drawing on the discourse coalition approach (Hajer, 2006) and research on networked framing in digital communication (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013), I conceptualize transnational visibility as the sustained cross-border presence of aligned claims within shared online issue publics.

To examine this process, I analyze how anti-gender movements produce transnational visibility through shared hashtag practices on social media. Rather than focusing on formal organizational ties or mobilization moments, the analysis traces how actors converge through recurring communicative practices that render aligned claims visible across national contexts. Drawing on ten years of Twitter (now X) communication from 148 anti-gender social movement organizations (SMOs) in Croatia, Germany, France, Italy, and Poland, the

study analyzes 148,088 tweets to investigate how shared hashtag practices connect actors, frames, and issues across borders. I conceptualize repeated cross-national hashtag usage as an indicator of transnational discourse coalitions, in which actors converge around shared storylines that generate collective visibility.

Empirically, this study combines quantitative measures of transnational hashtag connectivity with qualitative thematic content analysis to examine how anti-gender movements co-construct transnational visibility over time. The analysis identifies three recurring modes of hashtag usage: First, actors continuously disseminate ideological narratives that sustain the baseline visibility of anti-gender claims. Second, they engage in episodic campaign-driven communication that produces temporary spikes in attention. Third, they strategically extend anti-gender frames into broader public debates. Through these practices, actors co-create visibility for their claims across borders while adapting communication to domestic contexts.

By specifying how transnationality is enacted through shared hashtag practices, this study contributes to scholarship on anti-gender mobilization and digital political communication. It demonstrates that the transnational character of anti-gender politics lies not only in shared ideology or organizational networking, but also in the materialization of discursive similarity into sustained collective visibility. In this sense, hashtags enable geographically dispersed actors to operate as a transnational discourse coalition without formal organizational integration. Understanding these dynamics is crucial because anti-gender politics frequently serves as a testing ground for broader illiberal political projects eroding current democracies (Lombardo et al., 2021). Such transformations are often preceded by prolonged periods of discursive contestation in which exclusionary narratives gain visibility and gradually become normalized. Digital communication infrastructures allow actors to sustain this visibility across borders over time.

The next section introduces the theoretical framework, conceptualizing transnational visibility through networked framing and discourse coalitions, followed by the data, methods, and analysis of cross-national hashtag practices. The article concludes by discussing the implications for the transnationalization of anti-gender politics and the role of digital communication infrastructures in shaping contemporary ideological struggles.

2. Theoretical Framework

This framework conceptualizes the transnationalization of anti-gender movements as a process in which discursive similarity coalesces into a shared communicative formation across national contexts, arguing that digital platforms allow movements to materialize a cohesive transnational presence through networked communicative practices.

2.1. Anti-Gender Discourse Coalitions

Anti-gender movements are commonly described as heterogeneous alliances composed of religious fundamentalists, conservative activists, and far-right actors (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Despite their organizational diversity, research shows that these actors rely on a remarkably consistent set of discursive narratives. The anti-gender playbook constructs gender equality as an ideological imposition promoted by powerful elites and hostile interest groups, while feminist and LGBTQI+ actors are framed as members of a coordinated “lobby” seeking to impose progressive norms on unwilling societies (Roth & Sauer, 2022). These

storylines often take a populist form, opposing a supposedly threatened “people”—represented as families, children, or “ordinary citizens”—to liberal, feminist, or LGBTQI+ elites (Tranfić, 2022). At the same time, anti-gender narratives frequently position national communities against external actors such as the European Union, international organizations, or “the West” (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). Research has shown that anti-gender mobilizations across countries display striking similarities in rhetoric and repertoires of action, while simultaneously adapting these narratives to national contexts (Overhaart & van der Veer, 2024; Reinhardt et al., 2023; Roth & Sauer, 2022).

To account for this diversity, Edenborg (2021) proposes conceptualizing anti-gender mobilization as a discourse coalition. Building on Hajer (2006, p. 70), discourse coalitions consist of actors who reproduce shared storylines within public discourse over time. They do not require formal cooperation; rather, they emerge when different actors circulate similar interpretations of political issues. Through repetition, they increase the visibility of their demands and create an “appearance of discursive unity, as if everyone were talking about the same thing” (Edenborg, 2021, p. 176). As political influence increasingly depends on the ability to generate visibility for particular claims, discourse coalitions shape political agendas by repeatedly circulating shared interpretations and rendering them recognizable within the public sphere.

Research on transnational public spheres highlights a similar mechanism. While political communication typically remains embedded in national public spheres, transnational communication may emerge when similar issues are debated across multiple contexts using similar frames and criteria of relevance (Eder & Kantner, 2000; Heft, Pfetsch, et al., 2023). This represents a comparatively weak form of horizontal transnationalization, in which debates become linked through discursive convergence. Stronger forms additionally involve explicit references to actors or developments in other countries, thereby creating direct communicative linkages between national debates (Koopmans & Erbe, 2004; Wessler et al., 2008). Both differ from interaction-based understandings of transnationalization that emphasize interorganizational networking and transnational collective action that involve coordinated cross-border mobilization (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2005). Yet even these comparatively weak forms of horizontal transnationalization can become politically consequential. When the same claims gain visibility across multiple national arenas, they may influence supranational decision-making processes in multilevel governance systems such as the European Union or trigger policy diffusion across states (Ayoub, 2016). In this sense, recurring parallel visibility can generate the appearance of a transnational discourse coalition.

Building on this perspective, I focus on the discursive convergence (even though explicit cross-border references occasionally surface in the analysis). I thus conceptualize the cross-border similarity of anti-gender mobilization not merely as ideological resemblance but as a transnational discourse coalition that produces visibility for anti-gender claims across multiple public spheres.

2.2. Networked Framing and Hashtag Activism

Digital platforms provide the infrastructure through which transnational discourse coalitions can materialize. In the digitally networked public sphere, visibility is increasingly shaped by user engagement, platform architectures, and algorithmic amplification (Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Treré & Bonini, 2022). Connectivity therefore becomes a central organizing principle of contemporary political communication (Bennett & Segerberg, 2014; Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

Framing theory explains how political actors construct meaning around social and political issues. Frames define problems, attribute responsibility, and propose solutions, thereby shaping how audiences interpret political claims and mobilize around them (Benford & Snow, 2000). Social movements rely on framing processes to articulate grievances and legitimize their claims within public debate. A key mechanism in these processes is frame alignment, through which movements connect their interpretative frames with those of other actors or with broader public concerns (Snow et al., 1986): When movement actors link previously unconnected but ideologically compatible frames (frame bridging), reinforce shared values and beliefs (frame amplification), extend their claims to adjacent issues in order to reach wider audiences (frame extension), or more fundamentally redefine existing interpretative frameworks (frame transformation).

In digitally networked communication environments, framing processes increasingly occur in a distributed manner. Rather than being centrally orchestrated by a small number of movement organizations, interpretative frames emerge through the aggregation of many dispersed contributions across networked publics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2014). Meraz and Papacharissi (2013) term this phenomenon networked framing, a process through which dispersed actors collectively construct and circulate shared storylines that shape public debate.

Hashtags are a key communicative device within networked framing. As discursive markers, hashtags organize fast-paced communication by linking actors, topics, and ideas into searchable issue publics. Beyond merely labeling topics, the adoption of a shared hashtag allows actors to publicly associate their claims with a particular interpretative frame and contribute to its circulation across networked communication environments (Jackson et al., 2020; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013). Jackson et al. (2020, p. 30) note: “The use of hashtags and other conversational conventions enables an emergent organization whereby tweets coalesce into a larger collective storytelling.” In this way, hashtag activism illustrates how geographically dispersed actors can participate in shared meaning-making without requiring formal coordination.

As demonstrated below, hashtag practices are not limited to coordinated campaign moments. The long-term use of particular hashtags allows movements to continuously debate and reproduce ideological narratives over time, creating a persistent communicative layer in which interpretative frames remain visible and available for future mobilization. This dynamic applies both to periods of intense campaigning and to phases of lower mobilization, during which narratives remain present and can be reactivated when political opportunities arise. At the same time, movements strategically exploit digital affordances through practices such as “agenda surfing,” attaching their claims to trending topics in order to increase visibility (Knüpfer, 2025), and sometimes even attempt to “hijack” these hashtags (Knüpfer et al., 2020). Through such practices, actors extend their frames into broader public discussions and connect them to wider political conversations.

Taken together, networked framing and hashtag practices can be understood as mechanisms through which transnational discourse coalitions become visible in digitally networked communication environments. Discourse coalitions emphasize how actors converge around shared storylines without requiring formal coordination, while networked framing explains how these storylines are produced and circulated in a distributed manner across networked publics. Shared hashtag practices materialize this process and make it empirically observable: By using the same tags, geographically dispersed actors connect their contributions to shared streams of communication and align their framing practices across contexts. This framework therefore shifts the analytical focus from what actors say to how they use digital affordances to co-create visibility for their shared anti-gender claims.

3. Data and Methods

This study examines how anti-gender SMOs leverage hashtagging practices on Twitter to generate transnational visibility and discursive alignment across Europe. Rather than reconstructing anti-gender discourse or comparing national discursive differences, the analysis focuses on how cross-border similarity is enacted and materialized through platform affordances. In particular, hashtags serve as a key mechanism for connecting actors, claims, and audiences across national contexts, thereby facilitating cross-border resonance and enabling the formation of transnational discourse coalitions. Rather than capturing direct interaction between actors (e.g., retweets or mentions), this approach conceptualizes transnationality at the level of shared visibility and discursive alignment, as reflected in the cross-border co-use of hashtags (Schünemann, 2020).

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of hashtag co-usage and transnational connectivity with qualitative thematic content analysis. The quantitative component identifies patterns of cross-national hashtag convergence and measures the connective capacity of hashtags across actors and countries. The qualitative component examines how hashtags are strategically instrumentalized to frame and extend anti-gender discourse.

3.1. Country and Account Selection

The analysis focuses on anti-gender SMOs in five European countries: Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland. These countries have experienced significant public controversies related to gender, sexuality, and reproductive rights and show prior evidence of transnational anti-gender mobilization. At the same time, they represent diverse political and socio-cultural contexts. Although all five countries are members of the European Union, they vary considerably in levels of gender equality and democratic quality (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021; Freedom House, 2021), arguably influencing the organizational forms, strategies, and opportunities available to anti-gender actors (Krizsán & Roggeband, 2021), for instance, how intensely SMOs draw on transnationally connective hashtags, or the frames they attach to them. Although this study does not directly test these relationships, the diverse case selection allows for the identification of transnational patterns across heterogeneous national environments.

SMOs are formal organizations that pursue movement goals through coordinated action (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The sample includes civil society organizations such as non-governmental organizations, associations, and foundations. Religious institutions, educational institutions, media organizations, and political parties were excluded to maintain a focus on civil society actors rather than institutional or partisan actors.

Organizations were identified based on their documented participation in anti-gender mobilizations, membership in relevant national or transnational networks, or active promotion of anti-gender positions. Identification was conducted through systematic review of organizational participation in key events and networks, including the World Congress of Families, the Agenda Europe network, and national events. Data sources included official event websites, archived webpages accessed via the Wayback Machine, existing datasets (Velasco & Swindle, 2024), as well as expert reports and academic literature.

For each organization, its primary national Twitter account was located. Where no official organizational account existed, individual accounts of organizational leaders or presidents were included, as these frequently function as primary communication channels. The final sample consists of 148 Twitter accounts distributed across the five countries (Croatia: 9; Germany: 26; France: 41; Italy: 43; Poland: 29).

Because research on transnational anti-gender communication remains limited, the dataset was not artificially balanced across countries or organizations. No additional homogenization (e.g., equalizing country samples) was conducted, as the aim was to capture the full range of emergent patterns in transnational hashtag use. Although this design may result in stronger representation of larger countries or more digitally active organizations, such unevenness reflects real-world structural differences in movement presence and platform use across countries. It therefore corresponds to the empirical distribution of actors rather than to imposed sampling decisions.

3.2. Data Collection, Operationalization, and Analysis

Tweets were collected from the 148 identified accounts using the Twitter API (Academic Research access) between 2022 and 2023. The collection covered the period from January 2012 to July 2022, capturing the consolidation of anti-gender mobilization alongside the rise of Twitter as a central arena for political communication. Only original tweets were included; retweets were excluded to focus on actors' own communicative practices. Furthermore, only tweets containing at least one hashtag were retained, as hashtags constitute the primary unit of analysis (resulting in 148,088 tweets containing 37,917 unique hashtags). To focus on shared discursive practices, the analysis was further restricted to "mutual hashtags," defined as hashtags used by at least two different accounts. This filtering removes idiosyncratic tags and isolates hashtags that function as connective discursive elements. A total of 7,743 mutual hashtags were identified, representing 20.4% of all unique hashtags and a final analytical corpus of 126,711 tweets.

Hashtags were classified as transnational if they were used by accounts from more than one country (Schünemann, 2020). To measure their connective capacity, a transnational connectivity score (TCS) was calculated (following Heft et al., 2021):

$$TCS_h = \frac{n_{\text{countries}}}{N_{\text{all_countries}}} + \frac{m_{\text{accounts}}}{M_{\text{all_accounts}}}$$

where $n_{\text{countries}}$ represents the number of countries in which the hashtag was used, $N_{\text{all_countries}}$ represents the total number of countries in the dataset, m_{accounts} represents the number of unique accounts using the hashtag, and $M_{\text{all_accounts}}$ is the total number of accounts. The score increases when a hashtag is used by many accounts across many countries. Hashtag frequency per actor was excluded to avoid overrepresenting highly active accounts and to ensure that connectivity reflects breadth of adoption rather than volume of use (Supplementary File, Part A). The ten most connective hashtags were identified for each year to account for temporal variation and to detect shifts in transnational alignment over time while maintaining a manageable corpus for close reading. An inspection of hashtags beyond the top ten indicated that they largely reinforced the same thematic patterns rather than introducing substantively different themes.

To examine the strategic functions of hashtag use, the study employs thematic qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). Rather than focusing on isolated hashtag campaigns, the analysis seeks to identify

recurring modes of action enacted through hashtag practices. Hashtags were treated as analytical entry points and preliminary codes, allowing for the systematic examination of how actors use them to frame their claims.

Tweets containing highly connective hashtags were subjected to close reading. As the dataset includes multiple languages (Croatian, French, German, Italian, and Polish), all tweets were translated into English using the DeepL API prior to coding. Automated translations were manually reviewed to ensure conceptual accuracy and consistency, particularly for politically sensitive or context-specific terminology.

The coding process followed an inductive and iterative procedure involving repeated reading, memo writing, and progressive refinement of codes. Interpretation was informed by scholarship on hashtag activism and digital framing practices (e.g., Fielitz & Staemmler, 2020; Meraz & Papacharissi, 2013; Östin & Lindgren, 2024) as well as frame alignment theory (Snow et al., 1986), which provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how hashtags not only function as mere topical markers but as strategic tools for aligning individual meaning systems with collective narratives by bridging issues, amplifying core messages, and extending or adapting frames to reach broader publics. The aim was not to categorize tweets by topic alone, but to identify patterned strategic uses of hashtags across contexts. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic categories based on recurring patterns in hashtag usage and associated tweet content.

This process resulted in the identification of three overarching modes of hashtag use: (a) conversational anti-gender hashtags, which reinforce and disseminate core anti-gender frames; (b) campaign-related anti-gender hashtags, which support short-term mobilization and campaigns; and (c) external hashtags, which are not part of anti-gender discourse but through which actors insert their claims into broader public debates. While individual tweets may combine multiple logics simultaneously, this typology captures dominant patterns in how anti-gender SMOs use hashtags to co-produce transnational visibility.

Although all analyzed tweets are publicly accessible, ethical considerations guided the presentation of qualitative material. To avoid further amplifying anti-gender actors and their messaging, tweets are paraphrased and anonymized in the analysis. This decision is based on harm minimization and responsible research practice when studying far-right political actors (AoIR Risky Research Working Group, 2025).

4. Results

4.1. *Most Transnationally Connective Hashtags*

Of the 7,743 mutual hashtags (used by at least two accounts), 1,397 (18%) were transnational, meaning they appeared in tweets from at least two different countries. Although this represents a minority of mutual hashtags, these transnational hashtags accounted for the majority of mutually hashtagged tweets—64,964 of 126,711 (51.3%)—indicating that most mutually hashtagged communication in the dataset is embedded in cross-border hashtag streams, which is an initial indicator of transnational visibility practices.

To identify which hashtags contribute most strongly to cross-border linkage, I use the TCS, which captures breadth of use across both accounts and countries. Table 1 lists the ten most connective hashtags per year.

First, a small set of enduring “anchor hashtags” consistently drives transnational connectivity across the decade. In particular, #gender, #prolife, and #lgbt repeatedly rank among the most connective hashtags. This continuity reflects how anti-gender actors rely on a stable vocabulary that is recognizable across national contexts and flexible enough to attach to diverse claims. Alongside these enduring hashtags, event-specific hashtags such as #demofüralle, #marchforlife, and #familyday appear prominently, reflecting national protest events. Finally, several highly connective hashtags reference major political events and controversies beyond the immediate anti-gender agenda, including #trump, #brexit, #covid19, and #ukraine. Their presence indicates that anti-gender actors do not communicate only within a gender-policy niche but routinely tweet about broader public debates. While these hashtags also represent a stronger form of horizontal transnationalization by explicitly integrating developments abroad, the analysis primarily focuses on similarity-based transnationalization. Moreover, some high-connectivity hashtags reflect platform conventions rather than substantive anti-gender discourse, such as #ff (“Follow Friday”), which is used to recommend accounts to follow (see Supplementary File, Part B).

Notably, many of the highest-connectivity hashtags are in English, although the SMOs primarily post in their national languages. This selective cross-linguistic practice can be read as a low-cost mechanism of discursive integration: English hashtags enable cross-border discoverability and connect otherwise

Table 1. Most connective hashtags per year.

2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
#ff	#gender	#gender	#ff	#prolife	#prolife
#lgbt	#femen	#ff	#gender	#ff	#charliegard
#prolife	#ff	#manifpourtous	#laudatosi	#obama	#trump
#vita	#manifpourtous	#facebook	#prolife	#zika	#fakenews
#gay	#barilla	#lunacek	#demofüralle	#familyday	#usa
#gender	#prolife	#papa	#lgbt	#brexit	#gender
#l	#video	#prolife	#prayforparis	#gender	#macron
#la	#marchforlife	#gpa	#vincentlambert	#paris	#charlie
#lourdes	#obama	#apple	#demofueralle	#amorislaetitia	#marchforlife
	#twitter	#demofueralle	#islam	#trump	#down
					#freespeechbus
2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
#prolife	#prolife	#fakenews	#covid19	#ukraine	
#fakenews	#fakenews	#covid19	#prolife	#usa	
#alfieevans	#gender	#covid	#covid	#covid19	
#gender	#notredame	#lgbt	#gender	#gender	
#facebook	#marchforlife	#blacklivesmatter	#gpa	#roevswade	
#macron	#vincentlambert	#covid2019	#unplanned	#macron	
#lgbt	#gpa	#1	#pma	#lgbt	
#islam	#macron	#2	#afghanistan	#ukrainewar	
#usa	#lgbt	#coronavirus	#lgbt	#prolife	
#life	#pmasanspère	#prolife	#matic	#roevwade	
#marchforlife					

language-segmented discussions without requiring full translation of the surrounding text. While the data cannot determine whether coordination is deliberate, the outcome is a more interconnected transnational issue space than would emerge from national-language hashtagging alone.

Connectivity, however, is uneven. Only a limited subset of hashtags attains high connectivity across all five countries, such as #fakenews, #lgbt, #macron, #marchforlife, #prolife, #propaganda, and #usa. A larger share circulates within partially overlapping regional constellations. The strongest dyadic linkage occurs between France and Italy, accounting for 46% of all two-country combinations, followed by France and Germany (23%). These three countries also dominate triadic constellations, comprising 73% of all three-country combinations. In four-country constellations, Poland joins this core group (87.5%), whereas Croatia appears least frequently in cross-national combinations. Hashtag practices blur national boundaries but do not erase them.

Taken together, the results show that anti-gender SMOs engage in recurring cross-border hashtag co-use over the entire period. The transnational discourse coalition is therefore not episodic but durable and spans the five investigated European countries, albeit to varying degrees. Engagement online is not limited to gender-related issues; it also extends to wider political and cultural discussions, often articulated through seemingly unrelated hashtags.

While these quantitative patterns confirm that a structural infrastructure for cross-border connectivity exists, the following section employs qualitative content analysis to reveal the strategic logics and communicative modes through which this visibility is actively co-produced.

4.2. Modes of Hashtag Use

To understand how the transnational discourse coalition operates on Twitter, I inductively identify three modes of hashtag use. These modes describe how anti-gender SMOs (a) reproduce and circulate core ideological frames, (b) mobilize attention around campaigns and events, and (c) extend movement frames into broader public debates by inserting their messaging into other hashtag streams. Importantly, these modes can overlap within a single tweet, but they represent distinct logics of visibility production.

4.2.1. Shaping and Disseminating Anti-Gender Narratives

The first mode consists of conversational anti-gender hashtags: They recur across time and contexts as part of ongoing movement communication rather than short-lived mobilizations. The most prominent are #gender, #prolife, and #lgbt, which appear across nearly all national settings and repeatedly rank among the most connective hashtags (Table 1). These tags function as durable discursive infrastructure: They are broad enough to support continuous commentary, yet recognizable enough to index a shared ideological stance. While #prolife carries a clear movement-specific direction, #gender and #lgbt are broader terms also used by LGBTQI+ or feminist actors, suggesting an attempt to dominate discourse on gender and sexuality, rather than simply to spread a separate anti-gender hashtag. Across countries, these hashtags are used to circulate central elements of anti-gender discourse identified in prior literature, while mainly opposing two main topics, namely LGBTQI+ and abortion rights, which are sometimes even connected.

Posts frequently rely on the “gender ideology” frame as a flexible diagnostic narrative: Gender and LGBTQI+ equality are portrayed as an imposed ideology, linked to propaganda, totalitarianism, or “dictatorship,” and contrasted with a naturalized moral order centered on heterosexual marriage and procreation. LGBTQI+ rights are framed as the agenda of a powerful “lobby,” while “ordinary people,” families, and especially children are positioned as threatened subjects requiring protection (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017). Such narratives align with a populist “us vs. them” logic and provide connective tissue to conspiratorial interpretations of political change (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). The following tweet, paraphrased and anonymized from a Polish public account, exemplifies this:

An attack on family and the innocence of our children. How society, culture and law fall victim to the social engineering of #gender ideology and #lobbyLGBT. See the documentary ‘Twilight. The gender ideology offensive.’ (May 25, 2019)

The gender ideology frame is universal and, owing to its vagueness, can be applied transnationally. At times, actors also localize their claims, for instance, by using anti-colonial vocabulary to portray gender equality as a foreign imposition (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021; Stolze, 2026), and directing blame at supranational actors such as the EU or UN.

Everyone in Rome against the colonization of #Gender! #StopGender (tweet paraphrased and anonymized from an Italian public account, from June 4, 2015)

In the anti-abortion domain, the conversational mode is dominated by a “pro-life” branding strategy. The hashtag #prolife operates as a transnational label that links national debates to a global anti-abortion issue public. The 148 investigated SMOs often opt for this English hashtag, despite having national-language equivalents, such as “#zazivot,” “#provita,” “#provie,” “#jazumleben,” or “#zażyciem.” By utilizing a universally recognized hashtag like #prolife, national groups can align their claims with a global debate, expanding their reach beyond language-specific hashtags.

Tweets commonly adopt framing strategies characteristic of contemporary anti-abortion rhetoric: Embryos and fetuses are personified as “children” or “unborn babies,” and abortion is equated with killing rather than pregnancy termination. By rebranding their position as “pro-life” rather than “anti-abortion,” activists frame themselves as defenders of universal rights, implicitly casting supporters of abortion rights as “against life.” This linguistic shift reflects an adaptation to increasingly secular contexts, where appeals to human rights and protection narratives resonate more broadly than explicitly religious arguments (Achtelik, 2018; Saurette & Gordon, 2016). This sentiment is exemplified in the following tweet, paraphrased and anonymized from a German public account, which asserts that choice advocates are proponents of death:

Even those who like to talk about a ‘cluster of cells’ say that when it comes to an #abortion, they decide ‘against a child’ and never ‘against a cluster of cells.’ Find the error.... #AbortionKills #ProLife instead of #ProDeath (June 6, 2021)

Some posts further expand this framing by positioning anti-abortion activism as protective of women (e.g., through references to regret or trauma) or of marginalized groups. In particular, references to disability—such as the use of #down in relation to Down syndrome—portray abortion as a form of ableist

discrimination. In these instances, anti-gender actors attach their messaging to broader anti-ableism discussions, illustrating how hashtag use can simultaneously reinforce core ideology and extend into adjacent debates. While #prolife fits within the category of shaping and disseminating anti-gender ideology, hashtags related to disability also exemplify the monitoring and alignment mode I discuss later, illustrating how tweets can serve multiple framing functions simultaneously.

Overall, conversational anti-gender hashtags function as a long-term visibility strategy. By repeatedly posting under high-recognition tags (especially #gender and #prolife), anti-gender SMOs keep their frames continuously present within searchable hashtag streams, sustaining a transnational discourse coalition that is easy to join and easy to encounter.

4.2.2. Mobilizing Around Campaigns and Events

The second mode consists of campaign-related hashtags used to mobilize support for specific actions and to coordinate attention around events. This includes both offline protest events and short-lived, issue-centered bursts of activity. In the dataset, examples include national protest tags such as #demofüralle/#demofueralle (Germany), #manifpourtous (France), and #familyday (Italy). These hashtags are largely national in their primary audience and volume, yet they circulate to a limited degree beyond their country of origin.

Such occasional cross-border use contributes to extending the visibility of protest events beyond national boundaries. SMOs outside the host country reference them to signal solidarity, to present national campaigns as part of a broader European pattern, and to “borrow” labels that carry established movement legitimacy, as illustrated in the following tweet:

#DemoFuerAlle who value the family, the 1st German #ManifPourTous yesterday in Stuttgart!
(paraphrased and anonymized from a German public account, from April 6, 2014)

Even minimal cross-national repetition can expand the visibility of national protest events beyond domestic publics and cultivate an impression of synchronized, Europe-wide resistance to gender and sexuality policies.

A particularly illustrative label is #marchforlife. The March for Life has been held in the USA since the 1970s, and several accounts praise it and American anti-abortion activism for its pioneering role. Here, transnational visibility operates through imitation and referencing: Activists connect domestic events to a globally familiar repertoire, drawing on the symbolic power of a longstanding movement label without requiring coordination.

In addition to offline-related hashtags, the data reveal limited instances of online campaign dynamics centered on “right-to-life” cases, including #alfieevans, #charliegard, and #vincentlambert. In these cases, tweets were used to mobilize sympathy, express condolences, and articulate broader “pro-life” narratives. Participation was limited to a handful of SMOs, yet the hashtags circulated across borders and generated temporally concentrated bursts of activity. Compared to more durable conversational tags such as #gender or #prolife, these campaign hashtags were issue-specific and short-lived, typically peaking within narrow time windows.

Among them, #alfieevans attracted the widest engagement, with 23 organizations producing 896 tweets across four of the five countries under investigation. Alfie Evans, a British infant suffering from a severe neurodegenerative condition, became the subject of an international legal and political controversy after a dispute between his parents and medical authorities over the continuation of life support. The case received substantial public attention, particularly in Italy, where actors advocated transferring him for treatment and framed the situation as a paradigmatic “right-to-life” struggle. This framing resonated strongly within anti-gender networks and facilitated cross-border uptake of the hashtag.

As shown in Figure 1, activity peaked almost simultaneously across countries in April and May 2018, following earlier references that began in February, initially driven by Italian accounts, which were among the first in the sample to pick up the UK-originated campaign. The near-synchronous rise and decline of #alfieevans tweets point to a shared temporal dynamic rather than purely isolated national reactions. While the data do not allow conclusions about intentional coordination, they indicate transnational resonance within the discourse coalition, as organizations in different countries responded to the same focal event within a similar time frame. Emotionally charged individual cases thus function as temporary visibility accelerators, intensifying cross-border engagement and reinforcing a shared moral narrative around anti-abortion and right-to-life claims.

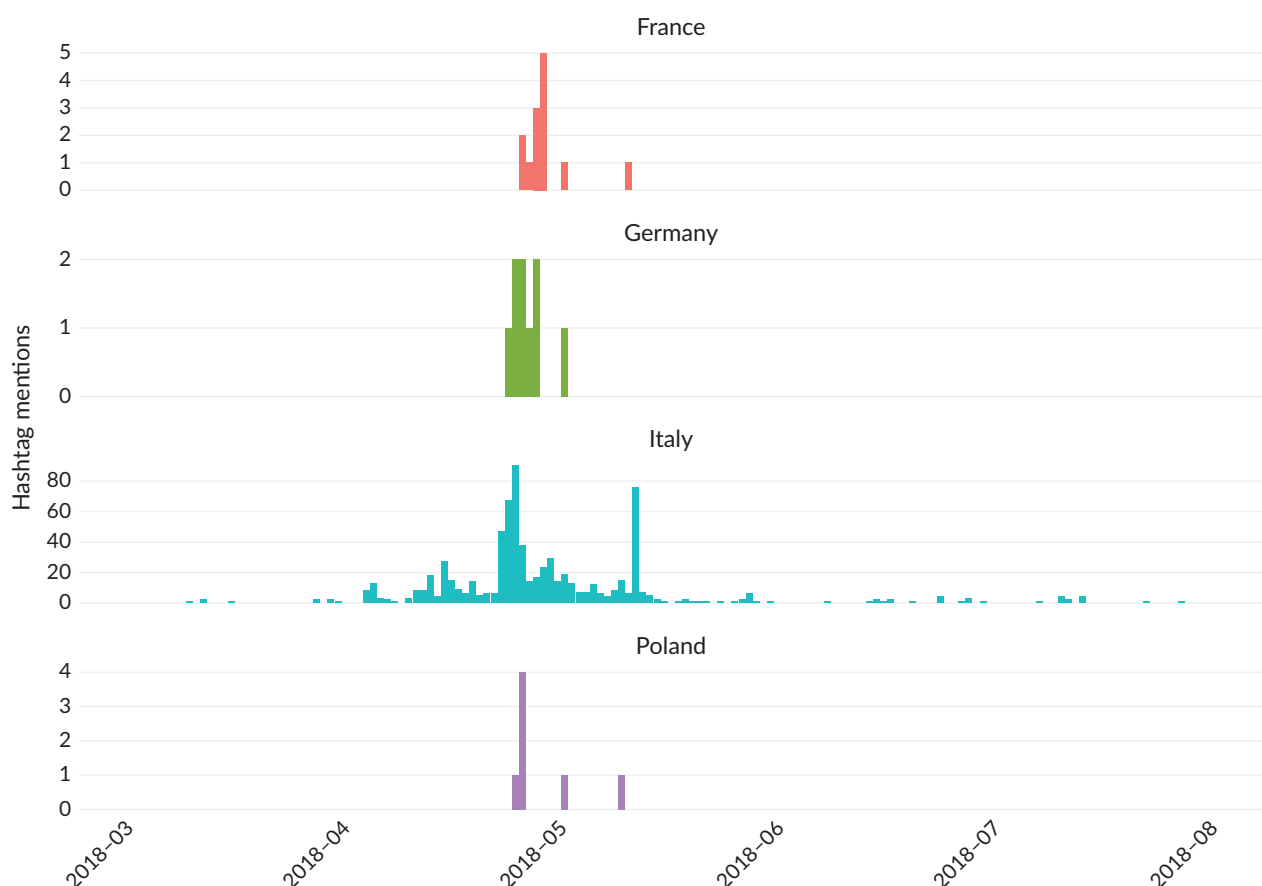


Figure 1. Frequency of #alfieevans hashtag usage over time.

4.2.3. Extending Frames Into Broader Public Debates

The third mode consists of external hashtags, i.e., tags not inherently tied to anti-gender discourse but strategically used to extend movement frames into high-attention public debates. This practice aligns with frame extension and alignment processes (Snow et al., 1986): Movements attach their claims to ongoing issues to remain visible, appear relevant, and reach audiences beyond their core publics.

Empirically, this mode appears through recurring engagement with internationally salient hashtags and references (e.g., #usa, #trump, #macron, #covid19, #ukraine) which circulate across the sampled countries. Not every use reflects strategic frame extension; many posts simply comment on current affairs. However, a subset of tweets uses external hashtags as visibility gateways: Anti-gender claims are inserted into streams where attention is already high, thereby broadening potential reach and positioning the movement as an interpreter of unrelated crises through its ideological lens.

An example of such alignment involves the use of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine to draw a provocative comparison between the killing of Ukrainians and abortion. By employing the hashtag #ukraine, the following tweet inserted anti-abortion claims into an ongoing conversation about wartime atrocities:

They condemn the #ukraine war (rightly so) but wage a #war against innocent, defenseless unborn children in the #womb with over 70 million victims every year. Now the #WHO—that criminal gang—wants to enforce killing before birth worldwide without a time limit. (paraphrased and anonymized from a German public account, from April 4, 2022)

Another illustrative example is the use of #blacklivesmatter, a hashtag originally associated with anti-racist and anti-police brutality activism. Within the dataset, some posts express explicit opposition to Black Lives Matter (BLM), while others seek to redirect the conversation toward anti-abortion claims. This occurs, for instance, through the addition of slogans such as “Beginning in the Womb” or the creation of derivative hashtags including #UnbornLivesMatter and #BabyLivesMatter. By inserting their messaging into a high-visibility hashtag stream, anti-gender actors move beyond their core issue publics and engage in adjacent political debates. Such practices appropriate the symbolic infrastructure of another movement, potentially reshaping the interpretive context of the hashtag while amplifying anti-gender claims within it (Knüpfer, 2025). This appropriation, however, is also not power-neutral: Derivative slogans, much like uses of “All Lives Matter,” aim to deracialize and dilute BLM's central claim by generalizing it. Framing anti-abortion politics in this way therefore also redirects attention away from the racialized violence BLM was created to address.

Compared to conversational and campaign hashtags, external-hashtag practices are less voluminous and more situational. Yet they play a distinct role in the transnational discourse coalition, as they connect anti-gender communication to adjacent issue publics and expand the coalition's visibility beyond explicitly anti-gender debates. Doing so, they help embed anti-gender narratives within broader political conversations, even when the connection is tenuous, as hashtagging affords low-cost linkage across topics.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how anti-gender movements generate transnational visibility through social media communication. Combining quantitative analysis of hashtag connectivity with qualitative analysis of hashtag practices, it shows how cross-border alignment emerges through shared communicative practices on Twitter. The findings demonstrate that the transnational character of anti-gender mobilization online is produced through recurring hashtag use that renders aligned claims visible beyond national settings. In this way, ideological similarity becomes a communicative infrastructure through which geographically dispersed actors participate in a shared issue space while continuing to address domestic audiences.

Empirically, the analysis first identified the most transnationally connective hashtags per year using a transnational connectivity score and then examined three recurring modes of hashtag use through which this visibility is produced. First, conversational anti-gender hashtags function as a durable discursive infrastructure that enables the continuous circulation of core ideological narratives. Hashtags such as #gender and #prolife operate as recognizable markers that link national debates to broader transnational issue publics and sustain the baseline visibility of anti-gender claims over time. Second, campaign-related hashtags generate temporary bursts of attention around specific events, protests, or highly emotional cases. Although such campaigns are often nationally anchored, their occasional cross-border uptake allows activists to situate local mobilizations within a broader narrative of transnational resistance. Third, the strategic use of external hashtags enables actors to insert anti-gender frames into high-attention public debates. Through practices like agenda surfing, anti-gender actors attach their claims to unrelated issues and extend their interpretive frames into broader political conversations. While this threefold typology may reflect a general structural logic of hashtag activism rather than being unique to anti-gender mobilization, the narratives circulated through it are movement-specific, as anti-gender actors consistently frame their claims as resistance to a transnational “gender ideology” (Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017).

Taken together, these practices demonstrate how the discursive similarity of anti-gender actors becomes transnationally consequential in digital communication environments. Rather than relying on dense interaction or formal coordination, transnationality emerges through the repeated alignment of claims online. Through the repeated use of shared hashtags, dispersed organizations place their claims within common communication streams and make aligned narratives visible across countries. This suggests that transnational discourse coalitions are not only ideological formations but are enacted and materialized through everyday platform practices that sustain visibility over time.

These findings contribute to research on anti-gender mobilization by showing that the widely documented similarity of anti-gender narratives across countries (Holvikivi et al., 2024; Kuhar & Paternotte, 2017; Roth & Sauer, 2022) is not only a matter of shared ideology but also of communicative practices that continuously reproduce and circulate these narratives across borders. At the same time, these findings complement prior research showing that anti-gender online communication remains largely structured along national lines (Tronina, 2024; Wallaschek et al., 2022) and that transnational communication assessed through interaction typically remains limited (Froio & Ganesh, 2019; Heft, Reinhardt, & Pfetsch, 2023; Stier et al., 2021). Rather than contradicting this scholarship, the present study demonstrates that cross-border visibility can arise through the co-presence of aligned claims in shared hashtag debates. This visibility-based form operates independently of direct exchange, persisting even where interactional measures show minimal connectivity.

Read together, these findings suggest that anti-gender communication may be nationally segmented in direct exchange yet transnationally connected in discursive visibility, thus underscoring the need to treat transnationality not as a single phenomenon, but as a set of related dimensions requiring different methodological approaches.

Despite these insights, several caveats must be noted. Participation is uneven across countries: While French, Italian, and German SMOs appear more discursively interconnected, Polish and especially Croatian actors are less embedded in cross-border conversations. This partly reflects methodological factors, including larger samples and higher Twitter activity in some countries, which increase opportunities for transnational hashtag overlap. But it also mirrors country clusters identified in earlier analyses (Tronina, 2024), where France, Italy, and Germany formed more cohesive structures in their social and organizational networks. Moreover, the French movement has been an inspiration for Italian and German anti-gender mobilization, suggesting these transnational ties are grounded in offline movement dynamics, not only in the present sample. Nevertheless, the relative contribution of sampling, platform use, and underlying movement structures cannot be disentangled with the present data. Future research should therefore assess whether similar country clusters emerge across other platforms, datasets, and organizational samples. Also, future comparative research beyond Europe will be necessary to determine whether these patterns reflect specifically European processes of transnationalization or the localized uptake of globally circulating anti-gender repertoires. Still, we can conclude that national constellations continue to shape the configuration of cross-border ties.

Moreover, although instances of mutual hashtag use were identified, they were at times relatively rare and dispersed, more akin to finding needles in a haystack than clear, large-scale mobilizations. Mutual campaigning and monitoring, in particular, occurred rather sporadically and typically involved only a subset of actors. These overlaps should therefore be interpreted as indicative patterns: They demonstrate that resonance exists, but further research is needed to determine its depth.

An exploratory approach across ten years of social media communication and a broad hashtag range uncovered general tendencies but may have obscured more fine-grained dynamics. Future research could combine this longitudinal approach with focused case studies that trace particular campaigns and examine the heterogeneity of actors involved. Such work could further clarify how different actors participate in transnational communication, how narratives evolve over time, and how online visibility relates to offline mobilization and political influence.

Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of examining not only the content of political claims but also the communicative infrastructures through which they circulate. Digital platforms do not automatically produce transnational political publics, but they provide affordances through which dispersed actors can repeatedly align their framing practices and sustain shared narratives across borders. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for analyzing how contemporary ideological movements operate in networked communication environments and how discursive coalitions shape political debates beyond national boundaries.

Funding

Publication of this article in open access was made possible through the institutional membership agreement between Humboldt University Berlin and Cogitatio Press.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

LLMs Disclosure

ChatGPT and NotebookLM were used for language editing and technical assistance in R, including support with code generation and debugging during data processing. All conceptual development, validation of procedures, analysis, interpretation, and substantive writing were conducted by the author.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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