

CASE STUDY 1.

PERU:

“HOW GENDER-RESTRICTIVE GROUPS MAY LOSE THE LEGAL BATTLE, BUT WIN THE COMMUNICATIONS AND CULTURAL WAR”

OVERVIEW

Peru is the birthplace of one of Latin America’s strongest transnational *gender-restrictive movements*. Understanding its sociocultural and political context sheds light on the operation of gender-restrictive groups and the rise of neoconservative politics in the region. Lima is geopolitically and strategically important because it hosts the headquarters for various gender-restrictive organizations in the region, including Ceprofarena, the Office for Latin America of the Population Research Institute, Latin American Alliance for the Family, Opus Dei, and Sodalicio de la Vida Cristiana (interview with George Hale, 2020). Therefore, many strategies that instrumentalize children³² to manufacture moral panic and oppose “gender ideology” in countries such as Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile are oftentimes planned

or tested in Peru, or implemented in the country after their success elsewhere.

Concretely, the Don’t Mess With My Kids (DMWMK) movement³³ in Peru is representative of how gender-restrictive groups instrumentalize children to threaten children’s rights, along with gender-justice, in a country with disturbing evidence of gender-based violence and intense sexism. The Peruvian case also illuminates the ways in which gender-restrictive groups identify key battlefields related to women’s and children’s issues—such as Comprehensive Sexuality Education—that they use as a toehold to advance gender-restrictive initiatives in many policy areas and at several political levels.

³² Throughout this report we highlight the ways in which gender-restrictive groups weaponize children. This is why we will usually speak about children, and the child protection rhetoric, unless explicit references to children’s rights were made by gender-restrictive actors.

³³ DMWMK is much more than a communications campaign or a slogan. It is a movement with recognizable leaders and a stable configuration aimed at mobilizing a collective to change government policies and social values, as evidenced by their official webpage and the systematic nature of their appearances in public debate.

Gender-restrictive groups and actors are organizations, politicians, researchers and institutions that seek to establish a gender-restrictive world order.

A gender-restrictive order organizes economic, political and social life through the imposition and enforcement of a restrictive and hierarchical vision of gender. It has two main and interdependent components: the naturalization of the gender binary, and the enforcement of gender-normativity.

Most of these groups and actors are faith-based, religiously affiliated or explicitly confessional. These groups attack human rights and gender justice, as well as the principles of self-determination and equity.”

Additionally, the case of Peru shows how, despite losing key legal battles, gender-restrictive groups benefit from widespread public exposure and deepen a dangerous rift between law and policy, where rights are officially recognized; and social and cultural spaces, where heteronormative values are reinforced, disinformation³⁴ abounds, and where, ultimately gender justice³⁵ needs to operate.

This case study begins by **I)** describing the events that gave rise to the DMWMK movement. Then, **II)** it explains religious, cultural, and political factors that made the movement’s messages appealing to many Peruvians. Later, it **III)** describes the messaging strategy of the movement and how this instrumentalized widespread — and often misinformed — ideas about children and women against several policies attempting to promote diversity, equity, and justice in Peru. It continues by **IV)** describing how the messages were strategically disseminated. Finally, **V)** the document provides general conclusions about the case.

³⁴ While misinformation is false information that is created and spread regardless of an intent to harm or deceive, disinformation is a type of misinformation that is created to be deliberately deceptive (Gebel, 2021).

³⁵ “Gender justice” is a systemic process of redistribution of power, opportunities, and access for people of all genders through the dismantling of structures of oppression including patriarchy, homophobia, and transphobia (Global Fund for Women, 2021). It encompasses the affirmation and protection of LGBTI rights, including the rights of LGBTI children and (cis)women’s rights, that is, the “ending of—and if necessary the provision of redress for—inequalities between women and men that result in women’s subordination to men.” (Goetz, 2007).

I. KEY EVENTS: FROM CSE CURRICULAR REFORM TO OBJECTIONS TO “GENDER”

TAKEAWAYS

- The curricular reform seeking to introduce Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) into Peru’s national curriculum was the official catalyzer of the DMWMK movement.
- However, movement leaders and other gender-restrictive groups had been actively organizing for years.
- After the controversy around the curricular reform, the agenda of faith-based, gender-restrictive groups in Peru expanded and became more ambitious. It went from the initial opposition to CSE to a larger project of defining the meaning of “gender” for public policy and the general public.
- The DMWMK movement lost the main legal battles in Peru, but succeeded in other perhaps more important ways:
- It created powerful alliances between the Evangelical Church, the Catholic Church, and key political actors.
- It mainstreamed its misinterpretation of and opposition to the term “gender.”

It garnered significant public support for its attacks on women’s and LGBT rights through the instrumentalization of children.

Against the backdrop of Peruvian schoolchildren’s poor performance in international standardized testing,³⁶ and in response to data showing the profound vulnerability of children, LGBT people, and women in the country, the administrations of Presidents Ollanta Humala (2011-2016), Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (2016-2018), and Martín Vizcarra (2018-2020) made a series of policy reforms, including the introduction of a new national curriculum for basic and secondary education. The curriculum was met with strong opposition from faith-based, gender-restrictive groups that presented themselves as a secular movement under the name Don’t Mess With My Kids (DMWMK).³⁷

The curricular reform was the official catalyst of the movement, but leaders had been actively organizing for years. Following the mobilizations around the curricular reform, the agenda of gender-restrictive groups in Peru expanded and became more ambitious, **shifting from initial opposition to CSE to embrace a larger project to define the meaning of “gender” for public policy and discourse** (Rousseau, 2020).

The following timeline highlights the key moments in this process:

FAITH-BASED AND GENDER-RESTRICTIVE GROUPS’ ACTIONS	GOVERNMENT ACTIONS AND POLITICAL CONTEXT
	<p data-bbox="922 751 1490 1066">The Ministry of Education (MINEDU) convenes working groups for the discussion of the curricular reform. “Gender,” one of the core values of the new curriculum, is not part of the discussion at that time. Religious groups, such as the Opus Dei and some Evangelical³⁸ Churches, participate in the conversations and advocate for the reincorporation of “Family Education”—which was removed from public education in the ‘90s—into the national curriculum (interview with Angela Bravo, 2020).</p>
<p data-bbox="142 1125 711 1564">The leaders of several churches and religious communities convene in Lima to sign the Compromise for Peru declaration.³⁹ They agree on four key points that undermine children’s, women’s, and LGBTI⁴⁰ rights despite their positive rhetorical framing: respect for life, signifying opposition to reproductive rights, particularly abortion; respect for religious freedom, meaning the imposition of faith-based, gender-restrictive values on legislation, public policy, and public life; the defense and promotion of heteronormative and patriarchal marriage and family; and the right to education, indicating opposition to CSE and other initiatives that promote gender justice and respect for LGBT people.</p>	<p data-bbox="769 831 862 989">2013 — 2014</p> <p data-bbox="769 1297 862 1392">July 2014</p>

36 Between 2008 and 2018, Peru was the fastest growing economy in Latin America (ECLAC, 2018). Despite this growth, Peru ranked last in the PISA test in 2012, which was conducted across the 34 members of the OECD, as well as in 31 affiliated countries. The results revealed wide gaps between boys and girls and across income levels (OECD, 2014). In 2015, despite some improvement, Peru was ranked among the last countries in Science, Language, and Mathematics once again (OECD, 2018).

37 There is an important regional precedent. In 2011, under the administration of President Fernando Lugo (2008-2012), Paraguay’s Ministry of Education created a CSE Framework. Gender-restrictive groups criticized it and defended a patriarchal and heteronormative understanding of the family (Tabbush & Caminotti, 2020). A few days after the framework was published, the National Council on Education and Culture, a public institution, declared that the document went against educational freedom. The Council argued that “The Family” had sole authority in the education of children. The Catholic and Evangelical Churches rejected the Framework because they claimed it promoted debauchery by teaching children that there are more than two sexes (“Organizaciones repudian la no implementación del ‘Marco Rector,’ 2011). As a result of the opposition, the Ministry of Education did not implement the Framework.

38 In this report we use “Evangelical,” “Orthodox,” and “Anglican” to name non-Catholic Christian denominations. When relevant, specific denominations are mentioned.

39 Signatories included: Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani, Salvador Piñero (Peruvian Episcopal Conference), Enrique Alva (National Evangelical Council of Peru), William Godfrey (Peruvian Anglican Church), Daniel Vallejos (Seventh Day Adventist Church), Manuel Gutiérrez (Union of Peruvian Christian Evangelical Churches), Iosif Bosch (Peruvian Orthodox Church), and representatives of the Jewish and Buddhist communities; on the political side, Jorge del Castillo (APRA), Luis Bedoya Reyes (PPC), Jorge Morelli and Julio Rosas (Fuerza Popular), Fabiola Morales (Solidaridad Nacional), Humberto Lay (Restauración Nacional), Ántero Flores Aráoz (Orden), and José Vega (Unión por el Perú).

40 Intersex and non-binary people’s rights are also undermined by the actions of gender-restrictive groups. However, the researchers did not find evidence of gender-restrictive groups instrumentalizing the experiences of intersex persons in their narratives. Therefore, throughout this report we use the acronym LGBT when speaking of the rights explicitly targeted by

The Catholic Church organizes the first annual **March for Life** with support from the Global Missionary Movement Church, the Pentecostal Church of Peru, the Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (*Redacción Diario El Correo*, 2015).

**Mar.
2015**

Pedro Pablo Kuczynski wins a tight presidential election against the social conservative Keiko Fujimori, daughter of former president Alberto Fujimori (1993-2000), who was supported by a coalition of Evangelical leaders. Despite the defeat, Fujimori's party wins the majority in Congress and leads the opposition to Kuczynski's government.

**June
2016**

Soon after the inauguration of the new government, **MINEDU fast-tracks and approves the new national curriculum** through a ministerial resolution. Seven guiding principles crisscross the curriculum, including rights, inclusion, attention to diversity, and gender equality.

Gender-restrictive groups, with political support from Fujimori and Congressman Christian Rosas, son of Evangelical pastor Julio Rosas, establish the **DMWMK movement** to protest the new curriculum.

**Nov.
2016**

Disinformation about the new curriculum and MINEDU fill the walls, bus stops, and pedestrian bridges of the main streets in Lima and other important cities in Peru. The billboards claim that the new curriculum is based on "gender ideology" and has the intention to "homosexualize" children (González et al., 2018). Gender-restrictive groups portray these actions as spontaneous, resulting from grassroots gatherings of parents concerned for the wellbeing of their children (González et al., 2018). This use of public space **sets the stage for DMWMK's first national rally** in March 2017.

The national government, particularly Education Minister Jaime Saavedra, avoids directly debunking the arguments and disinformation presented by DMWMK. Instead, the government tries to defend the need to include gender equality as a core value of the new curriculum with **technical arguments and data** (interview with Ángela Bravo, 2020).

**Dec.
2016**

Congress removes Minister Saavedra due to alleged corruption charges (*Redacción rpp*, 2016). For many, this was a façade to cover up the real reason for his removal, namely the educational reform he promoted (interview with George Hale, 2020; interview with Ángela Bravo). The new Minister of Education, Marilú Martens, continues endorsing the new curriculum.

gender-restrictive groups, and LGBTI to denote the consequences of their actions that also affect intersex and non-binary people.

The gender-restrictive collective **Padres en Acción** (PEA) presents a **Constitutional Popular Action** to the Primera Sala Civil of the Superior Court of Lima seeking to halt the implementation of the National Curriculum, and to eliminate the term “gender” from the curriculum (Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación, 2019).

**Feb.
2017**

Gender-restrictive groups supporting the DMWMK movement promote a **national rally that gathers approximately 68,000 people in Peru**, including 25,000 in Lima (Redacción El Comercio, 2017a). The rally was organized by local and national gender-restrictive groups with deep ties to the Evangelical and the Catholic Churches (González et al., 2018).

**March
2017**

Under pressure after the march, **MINEDU makes some reforms to the curriculum**, arguing that these modifications are not concessions to DMWMK, but rather clarifications to key terms and concepts (Alaya, 2017; Meneses, 2019).

The Primera Sala Civil of the Superior Court of Lima nullifies the Ministerial Resolution that introduced the curricular reform. Lima’s tribunal argues that the text regarding the definition of gender did not properly consult parents, and thus violated the General Law on Education’s Articles 7 and 22, which state that strategic decisions regarding education should be the result of consensus between the state and civil society. The resolution is then elevated to the Supreme Court (Primera Sala Civil de la Corte Superior de Lima, 2017).

**July
2017**

**March
2018**

President Kuczynski presents his letter of resignation to Congress in the midst of a corruption investigation. **Martín Vizcarra, Kuczynski’s vice president, assumes the presidency**, with Daniel Alfaro Paredes as Minister of Education.

DMWMK organizes **another national protest** after Vizcarra's actions. Among other things, demonstrators ask the president to "avoid using the term gender" (*Redacción Aciprensa*, 2018), and to "stop interfering with other branches of democratic power to force them to accept the demeaning idea of gender parity, which underestimates women's natural capacity to compete on equal terms with men." (#ConMisHijosNoTeMetas, 2018).

In response to the government's policies, the Fuerza Popular party presents **Bill 3610-2018** to Congress. The bill, which has yet to be discussed at the time of writing this report, seeks to define gender as meaning "woman and man" in all documents, forms, and public policies of the Peruvian state. It also intends to replace a number of expressions containing gender in state documents—such as "gender perspective" or "gender violence"—with the concept of "equality of opportunities for women and men." Finally, it seeks to modify the name and scope of the ministry in charge of women's affairs from the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations to the Ministry of The Family, Women, and Vulnerable Populations (Rousseau, 2020).

The DMWMK movement is reignited when **gender-restrictive groups denounce a high school textbook** for a class called Personal Development, Citizenship, and Civics (DPSC), printed and distributed by MINEDU, with the term "sexual conduct" included in its glossary. The entry has a link to a Cuban online encyclopedia, EcuRed, with information about anal and oral sex. Some schools burn the books.

President Vizcarra does three things that enrage gender-restrictive groups:

- 1) Introduces the **National Public Policy on Gender Equality**.
- 2) **Objects to a law approved by Congress that omits gender parity** from a reform to their bicameral system.
- 3) **Repeals the Law for the Strengthening of the Family**, which was approved in 2005 and described the family as the foundation of society and the fundamental space for human development (Peruvian Congress Ley No. 28452, 2005). The new decree on the protection of families, describes the family as "democratic, egalitarian, inclusive, respectful, and violence-free" (Decreto Legislativo No. 1408, 2018).

**Nov.
2018**

The Peruvian Supreme Court withdraws the Superior Court's decision, approves the Ministerial Resolution's definition of gender equality, and recognizes the gender approach in the curriculum as constitutional. The Supreme Court argues that deleting that definition of gender from the curriculum, and with it, the idea that gender roles are socially constructed, would make the eradication of discriminatory behavior impossible, which is unconstitutional.

**April
2019**

Sep.
2019
–
March
2020

President **Vizcarra dissolves Congress**. In the new Congress, convened in March 2020, Fujimorismo loses its majority and gender-restrictive groups also lose seats, which diminishes their direct political influence (interview with George Hale, 2020; interview with Ángela Bravo, 2020).

March
–
Oct. 2020

Throughout 2020, gender-restrictive groups take advantage of different policies adopted during the pandemic to reinvigorate their attack on gender justice and LGBT rights: they object to the use of gender as a criterion for restrictions of movement⁴¹ and a decree to safeguard sexual and reproductive health during the pandemic. On May 15^t, gender-restrictive groups commemorate the **Day of the Family**, a celebration of the heterosexual patriarchal family (*Ojo Público*, 2020).

Congress removes President Vizcarra from office for “permanent moral incapacity” after reviewing corruption charges related to his tenure in a previous position. Manuel Merino assumes the presidency for a week, after which he is forced to resign by thousands of Peruvians who protest against his government and its agenda, which supports DMWMK⁴² (*El Hilo*, 2020).

Nov.
2020

What initially seems to be one of many political crises of recent years has turned into an **unprecedented movement of young Peruvians**. More than half of all Peruvians between 18 and 24 years of age participate in the protests against Merino’s government either in person or virtually, with women playing a key role (Arroyo, L., Fowks, J., & de Miguel, T. 2020).

Francisco Sagasti Hochhausler is elected president after Merino’s resignation. He is expected to remain in power until new elections take place in 2021.

41 The government established mandatory “stay at home” orders to combat the pandemic and allowed people to go outside on specific days during the month of April to tend to basic needs based on their gender. On paper, the policy recognized gender identity, granting trans people mobility according to their identity. However, in practice, trans and gender nonconforming individuals suffered discrimination and violence. Eighteen transphobic attacks—including cases of police brutality—were reported during the eight days the measure was enforced (*Ojo Público*, 2020). Gender-restrictive groups also opposed the measure, criticizing its recognition of gender identity. Christian Rosas, son of Congressman Julio Rosas and one of the leaders of DMWMK, appeared on national television denouncing the policy. After pushback from both LGBT and gender-restrictive groups, the government revoked the gender-based lockdown (Bitterly, 2020).

42 His most important minister, Antero Florez Araos, had previously expressed his opposition to equal marriage, arguing that “homosexuals could not procreate,” and had claimed that “killing a woman as a response to infidelity did not qualify as femicide” (*El Hilo*, 2020).

Legally speaking, gender-restrictive groups did not accomplish any of their goals in Peru. However, they made significant and long-lasting gains. This seeming contradiction illuminates the long-term vision, undeterred character, and adaptability of gender-restrictive groups.

According to a survey conducted after the curriculum controversy by El Comercio-IPSOS, 82% of Peruvians are in favor of the curricular reform. However, when asked what they understand by "gender perspective," 21% indicate that it "confused children with being man or woman" and 9% think that it "fostered homosexuality" (Alayo Orbegozo, 2019b).

Though the DMWMK movement lost its primary legal battles in Peru, it succeeded in three important ways:

- It created powerful alliances between Evangelical Churches, the Catholic Church, and key political actors. It mainstreamed its misinterpretation of and opposition to the term "gender."
- It mainstreamed its misinterpretation of and opposition to the term "gender."
- It garnered significant public support for its attacks on women's and LGBT rights through the instrumentalization of children and the language of human rights.

The progressive cause in Peru has not been able to fully counter these messages, with various actors still trying to articulate the importance of CSE to diminish gender-based violence, sexual violence against children, sexually transmitted infections, and unwanted teenage pregnancies while promoting gender equality (González et al., 2018).

ELIMINATING "GENDER" IN THE BATTLE FOR LANGUAGE

*A key element in the modern attack to women's, and LGBT rights is the appropriation and resignification of the term "gender." Following this strategy, **gender-restrictive groups in Peru have repeatedly tried to ban the use of the term "gender" in all public policy documents and laws in the country.** Instead, they propose a return to the binary terms "women" and "men," objecting to any reference to gender justice with the notion of "complementarity between the sexes" and "free competition between individuals."*

Their legal efforts have failed, but their communications strategy has been extremely successful.

The term "gender" was introduced by feminist scholarship and activism to differentiate between anatomical differences (designated by the term "sex") and the inequitable distribution of rights, resources, and opportunities based on the social meaning attributed to those differences ("gender").

For decades, the use of the term "gender" has been key to raising awareness of and mobilizing support for the rights of girls, women, and LGBT children and adults.

*However, as the term "gender ideology" shows, **gender-restrictive groups in Peru and elsewhere have effectively appropriated this term, giving it pejorative, panic-inducing connotations.***

*Regardless of legal outcomes, for millions of people in Peru, Latin America, and across the globe, **"gender" now signifies 1) the moral and sexual corruption of children; and 2) an attack on life, parental authority, and religion.***

II. CONTEXT

A. The Shifting Religious Landscape in Peru

TAKEAWAYS

- The attack on women's, children's, and LGBT rights under the banner of opposition to "gender ideology" in Latin America must be understood in relation to the shifting religious landscape in the region. For example, mired in sexual abuse scandals and struggling with an exodus of believers, the Catholic Church is attempting to remain relevant and recuperate influence through alliances with emerging religious and political actors, such as Evangelical Churches.
- Evangelical Christians are a growing and particularly disciplined voting bloc in the region and in Peru.
- The growth of Evangelical communities in Latin America has encouraged multiple alliances between prominent pastors and politicians who commit to sponsoring gender-restrictive legislation and policies in exchange for electoral support.
- The Catholic Church remains influential in the region and continues to have a strong foothold on Peru's education system.
- Gender-restrictive groups have tried to equate being a Christian with gender normativity in the social and political imaginary.

At least 90% of Latin America's population self-described as Catholic for most of the 20th century, but the number of Catholics has been shrinking over the last decades. Despite representing almost 40% of Catholics worldwide in 2014, data from that year also showed that the number of Catholics in Latin America had dropped to 69% of the total population. **This exodus from the Catholic Church did not mean a move away from faith, but a shift in religious affiliation:** Latin Americans were joining Evangelical Protestant churches in droves. **While just one in ten Latin Americans (9%) were raised in Protestant churches, nearly one in five (19%) described themselves as Protestants** (Pew Research Center, 2014). By 2018, the number of Catholics further diminished to 59% while Evangelical churches continued to grow and thrive (Latinbarometer, 2018). Peru is a case in point of this trend. In 1993, 89% of Peruvians were Catholic, while 6.8% were Evangelical

(National Institute of Statistics and Informatics, n.d.). By 2017, the percentage of Catholics had dropped to 76% and the number of Evangelicals had climbed to 14% (Compañía peruana de estudios de mercado y opinión pública SAC, 2014). Evangelical churches are mushrooming in the country, with growth projected to continue, especially in the Amazonian and Andean regions (CLACAI, 2020).

Due to this shift, and because Evangelicals have proven to be a particularly disciplined voting bloc, the political relevance of Evangelical churches in Peru and in the region has increased. As a result, **many politicians, including Alberto and Keiko Fujimori, have actively sought endorsement from prominent pastors,⁴³ which often translates to explicit commitment to policies, laws, and initiatives that curtail the rights of women, LGBTI people, and children and adolescents.⁴⁴**

43 In 1990, with Alberto Fujimori's presidential election, the political activities of Evangelicals started to intensify. Back then, a new form of "Evangelical Fujimorism" emerged and served as a link between the government and Evangelical churches (CLACAI, 2020). Although there was not a fundamentalist emphasis in this movement, as became evident with the DMWMK movement later, Fujimori's government was "a very ambivalent, if not detrimental, force for women's sexual and reproductive rights. [...] His government introduced the right to life from conception onwards in the 1993 Constitution, and while his government promoted the first Peruvian family planning policy to provide free public access to a range of modern contraception techniques, it also implemented forced sterilization campaigns in rural areas in the mid-1990s" (Rousseau, 2020). In the 2000s, pastors such as Humberto Lay, Alda Lazo, and Julio Rosas consolidated a more fundamentalist vision for an openly gender-restrictive Evangelical political platform (CLACAI, 2020).

44 For example, Guatemala's president between 2016 and 2020, Jimmy Morales, is Evangelical; and in Brazil, Evangelicals were a key voting bloc in Jair Bolsonaro's successful presidential bid

The Catholic Church is still powerful across the region and in Peru,⁴⁵ exerting a strong influence on education, even within (supposedly) secular public schools.⁴⁶ However, the exodus to more conservative denominations has forced the Catholic Church into alliances and coalitional work with churches they had historically disdained or even attacked, like Evangelical churches. Although there are differences in belief systems, operational structures, and financial sources, these organizations have joined forces in recent years to advance a gender-restrictive agenda that seeks to reinstate patriarchal authority over women and children, and heteronormativity both within the household and the nation.

While just one in ten Latin Americans (9%) were raised in Protestant churches, nearly one in five (19%) described themselves as Protestants in 2014. (Pew Research Center, 2014).

This interfaith alliance successfully strengthened the political power and influence of Catholics and Evangelicals alike.⁴⁷ Due to the power and visibility of this alliance, there is an increasing tendency to associate Catholicism and Evangelism with gender normativity. However, even though gender normativity has been and continues to be at the core of these religions, it

is key to recognize that this is not always the case.

Equating religiosity with gender normativity is part of the narrative of gender-restrictive groups and one of its main goals, but it is not always the reality on the ground.⁴⁸ Many believers and religious leaders support women's, children's, and LGBT rights. **It is of utmost importance to identify and support religious organizations and regular citizens that uphold their faith while rejecting the anti-rights agenda promoted by groups like DMWMK.**

(Passarinho, 2019).

45 Many Peruvians believe that the Church should voice opinions on abortion (76.9%), sexuality (75.3%), education (83%), and the civil union of same-sex couples (6.4%) (Compañía peruana de estudios de mercado y opinión pública SAC, 2014).

46 The law mandates that all public and private schools provide Catholic education through the primary and secondary levels (U.S. Department of State, 2018). Additionally, MINEDU requires the presiding Catholic bishop of an area to approve public schools' religious education teachers. Parents may request the school principal to exempt their children from mandatory religion classes, and the government may grant exemptions from the religious education requirement to secular private schools and non-Catholic religious schools (U.S. Department of State, 2018:3), but these provisions are seldom used.

47 Since the Cairo Conference in 1994, a global alliance between Catholics and Evangelicals has been consolidated. This alliance seeks to stop the advancement of women's and LGBT rights. In the Americas, the alliance materialized in the declaration "Evangélicos y católicos juntos: la misión Cristiana en el Tercer Milenio" (Vicioso, 2007). The declaration promoted collaboration and joint action between Evangelicals and Catholics based on a unified Christian mission (Vicioso, 2007). This conservative alliance later expanded to include secular groups, political leaders (Faur & Viveros, 2020), and gender-restrictive scholars and activists (Rodríguez-Rondón & Rivera-Amarillo, 2020).

48 For example, a recent report from CONICET shows that 22.3% of Catholics in Argentina believe that abortion should not be criminalized, and 57.7% say it should be allowed in at least some cases; 50.3% of Evangelicals also agree that abortion should be legal in at least some cases (Baran et al., 2020). For more, see: <http://www.ceil-conicet.gov.ar/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ii27-ive.pdf>.

B. Anti-LGBT and Anti-Women Sentiment and Behavior in Latin America and Peru

TAKEAWAYS

- Despite legal protections and state policies that address systemic inequalities and gender injustice, data shows that LGBT and women's rights are often violated in Peru and Latin America.
- Gender-restrictive narratives feed on and nurture widespread and socially accepted expressions of homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny.

In recent decades, Latin America has advanced pro-LGBT legislation and policies protecting cisgender and transgender women's rights. These include pro-LGBT court rulings, nondiscrimination statutes, legalized equal marriage, and expansion of health services (Corrales, 2015).⁴⁹ Unfortunately, in many cases, these protections are not always enforced. Across the region, misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia lead to violence and death at a worrisome rate. **More than half of the countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world are located in the Americas (Voces, 2015); the region also has the highest rate of violence against LGBT people in the world (Brochetto, 2017).**

In Peru, neither same-sex unions nor equal marriage are legal, and there is no gender identity law protecting the rights of trans people. Surveys indicate that social attitudes towards LGBT rights have been improving in recent years, but discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia are still pervasive.

In terms of women's rights, the Criminal Code in Peru specifically includes sexual violence under the umbrella of domestic violence, while street harassment is also a prosecutable offense (Gurmendi, 2015). However, abortion is forbidden except when the life or health of the woman is at stake and, in 2009, the Constitutional Tribunal banned the free distribution of the morning-after pill.

Peruvian children experience physical, psychological, and sexual violence at alarming rates. According to the National Survey on Social Relations in 2013 and 2015 (Encuesta Nacional de Relaciones Sociales del Perú in Spanish), more than 80% of children and adolescents were victims of physical or psychological violence in their homes or schools (UNICEF, 2019). Data from the Ministry of Women revealed that a child is raped in the country every two hours (rpp Noticias, 2019). Likewise, 45% of teenagers have experienced some kind of sexual violence at least once in their life (UNICEF, 2019). Despite these worrisome statistics, **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (cross reference to the intro) is mostly absent from Peruvian schools.**

⁴⁹ Several international agreements protect women's rights in Latin America, including the Belem do Pará Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women; the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man; and the American Convention on Human Rights. There is also jurisprudence from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that protects women from violence and femicide (see: Campo Algodonero vs. Mexico). In the cases of *Atala Riffo v. Chile*, *Flor Freire v. Ecuador*, and *Duque v. Colombia*, the Inter-American Commission explained that sexual orientation and gender identity are protected categories (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2018). The Inter-American Court has also considered that the Belem do Pará Convention protects people from discrimination based on SOGIE (Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, 2018). In January 2018, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights mandated the signatory countries of the American Convention on Human Rights to legalize equal marriage.

BELIEFS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY AND ANTI-LGBT BEHAVIOR IN PERU

- Three quarters of Peruvians were against same-sex unions in 2014 (IPSOS, 2014).
- In 2019, only 23% of Peruvians agreed that homosexuals should be allowed to run for public office, and only 17% were in favor of equal marriage (Carrión et al., 2019).
- Over 16% of Peruvians agreed with the statement “homosexuality should be a crime,” compared with an average of 11% across the Latin American region (ILGA 2016).
- Sixty-two point seven percent of LGBT in Peru people have suffered some type of violence and discrimination (Sauza, 2018).

THE HIGH PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PERU

- In 2000, the percentage of adult women reporting sexual assault by an intimate partner was 22.5% in Lima and a shocking 46.7% in Cusco (World Health Organization, 2000).
- In 2012 Peru ranked third in the world for cases of sexual assault against women (World Health Organization, 2012).
- In 2013, more than 70% of married Peruvian women reported suffering some type of physical or psychological violence; 8% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported being raped by their partners (Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática, 2013).

C. Between Political Disaffection and Turmoil

TAKEAWAYS

- Corruption and tension between the executive and legislative branches characterize Peru’s recent political history.
- Very few Peruvians are interested in politics, but most of them are concerned about corruption.
- Demonstrators in Peru are usually over 25 years old, have several years of formal education, and reside in rural areas or medium size cities.
- Gender-restrictive groups have mobilized the idea of “gender ideology” as a political weapon that promises a return to order and security.

Peru has witnessed several crises of governance in the last decades. **The last six presidents**—Alberto Fujimori, Alejandro Toledo, Alan García, Ollanta Humala, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, and Martín Vizcarra—**have all been indicted or convicted of a crime.**⁵⁰

Additionally, **Congress and the executive branch have regularly been in fierce opposition to each other**, which has led to the **dissolution of Congress twice in the last 30 years**: Fujimori did it in 1992, and Vizcarra in 2019. Meanwhile, Congress has enacted several impeachment processes seeking to undermine the president. For example, Kuczynski was put on trial twice between 2016 and 2018; he resigned from the presidency in 2018. Congress also impeached Vizcarra and removed him from office in November 2020 on grounds of “moral incapacity.”

These **multiple scandals have led to massive political disaffection**. Only 29.2% of Peruvians claim to have any interest in politics, much lower than any other country in the region. Citizens who skew older, more educated, wealthier, and urban tend to be the ones who report some interest in politics. Nonetheless, according to the Barómetro de las Américas, Peruvians are the most worried about corruption in the region (Carrión et al., 2019).

⁵⁰ Fujimori (1990-2000) was condemned for corruption and human rights violations, which prompted Congress to remove him from office in 2000. Toledo (2001-2006) is currently under house arrest in the United States for charges of influence peddling and money laundering. Hounded by multiple corruption charges, García (1985-1990, 2006-2011) committed suicide in 2019. Humala (2011-2016) is currently in preventive detention for money laundering and corruption. Kuczynski (2016-2018) resigned from the presidency after being accused of receiving money from the Brazilian firm Odebrecht in exchange for infrastructure contracts. And Vizcarra (2018-2020) was accused of influence peddling and accepting bribes.

Peru also has **one of the highest rates of participation in protests in the Americas**. In 2019, 14.3% of the population participated in at least one protest, which puts Peru, together with Argentina and Bolivia, at the top of the list in the region. In contrast to other countries around the world, 18- to 24-year-olds have the lowest rates of participation in protests. Residents of Lima's metropolitan area also have lower rates of participation in protests compared to smaller cities. This, too, is uncommon compared with global statistics that show protestors usually hailing from urban centers. In general, people who protest in Peru are older, with more years of formal education, and reside in rural areas or medium size cities.⁵¹

Gender-restrictive groups closely monitor the political situation of Latin American countries to identify opportunities for mobilization. They pay particular attention to protests and political unrest to define specific goals for each country and collaborate to meet their agendas. Currently, gender-restrictive groups have their eyes set on countries such as Peru and Chile, where there are democratic movements pushing for new and more progressive constitutions with an explicit focus on gender justice.

An important takeaway from this political landscape is that, as Carrión et al. note in their report, **intolerance of sexual minorities correlates with dissatisfaction over the country's democratic institutions**. Preoccupation with corruption and general insecurity feed a feeling of unrest, especially when it comes to changes that society regards as out of their control. This uncertainty and political dissatisfaction encourage the growth of demagogic discourses that promise a return to an idyllic past of law, order, and safety (Carrión et al., 2019). **Groups trying to maintain or attain political power are increasingly using the notion of "fighting gender ideology" as a critical component of their campaigns, supporting authoritative, nationalist, and anti-rights political platforms (Serrano Amaya, 2019).**⁵²

Gender-restrictive groups closely monitor the political situation of Latin American countries⁵³ to identify opportunities for mobilization. They define specific goals for each country and collaborate to meet their agendas.

51 In November 2020, there was a different wave of protests after Congress removed President Vizcarra from office and designated Manuel Merino as president. In this case, the protesters were mostly young Peruvians, the "Generation of the Bicentenary." They used social media platforms like TikTok to organize massive peaceful marches in the streets of Lima and other cities to protest against the new government (*El Hilo*, 2020).

52 The opposition to the Peace Agreement Plebiscite in Colombia is one of the most dramatic cases of this dangerous relation. Through disinformation, gender-restrictive groups successfully connected two entirely different events and mobilized opposition to the historic peace agreement between the government of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2018) and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). The agreements incorporated a groundbreaking gender perspective that recognized women and LGBT people as victims of specific forms of gender and SOGIE-based violence, and as key political actors in the construction of peace. Gender-restrictive groups rejected this framework, connecting it to an unrelated CSE controversy and claiming that the government was seeking to "homosexualize" Colombian children and hand the country over to communist guerrillas. The CSE controversy was related to revised handbooks issued by the Ministry of Education in response to a Constitutional Court's mandate. In 2015, the Constitutional Court decided the case of a teenager who died by suicide after experiencing homophobic bullying from his school's administration. The Court mandated that the Ministry of Education revise all educational community handbooks in the Colombian school system. The revision would ensure that schools respect students' sexual orientation and gender identity and include new mechanisms to promote students' human rights, SHRR, and gender justice. In 2016, the same year the peace process came to a successful end and the plebiscite to ratify the agreement was taking place, the (lesbian) Minister of Education issued the CSE handouts, sparking protests from gender-restrictive groups. The plebiscite to support or reject the agreements took place in October. Gender-restrictive groups deployed massive disinformation campaigns that went as far as to say that if CSE and the agreements were accepted, the state could take children from their parents' custody (Gil, 2020), a false claim also used to mobilize opposition against the Social Services Act and the National Strategy for the Child in Bulgaria (see Bulgaria, p.62). Those who voted against the agreement won by a slim margin. Two years later, Iván Duque (2018-2022) from the Centro Democrático, a right-wing political party, was elected president with the explicit mandate to thwart the implementation of the accords and curtail "the advancement of gender ideology." Several Evangelical churches and the Catholic Church were important supporters of his campaign.

53 Transcripts from the Ibero-American Congress for the Life and the Family reveal that during these transnational meetings country representatives shared their domestic politics and set concrete goals for the advancement of a gender-restrictive agenda. For instance, when Jeanine Áñez, a participant in the 2019 Ibero-American Congress for the Life and the Family, was declared interim president of Bolivia, gender-restrictive groups attributed her ascent to their efforts. (It is worth noting that Áñez's party was later soundly defeated by the MAS party, affiliated to former president Evo Morales, ousted in 2019). Gender-restrictive groups also decided to "guide Chile's youth" after the country's historic protests against inequality, corruption, and human rights violations. These efforts should be carefully monitored as the country is currently in the process of drafting a new constitution.

III. THE MESSAGING STRATEGY BEHIND THE DON'T MESS WITH MY KIDS MOVEMENT

The most incisive campaigns of gender-restrictive groups in Peru were against rights-centered educational initiatives that questioned traditional hierarchical gender relations and denounced gender-based violence and discrimination against LGBT people (Motta, 2016). Gender-restrictive groups **claimed that the new curriculum's focus on gender equality, its affirming vision on sexual and gender diversity, and its push for gender justice challenged their worldview and faith, threatening key institutions such as the heterosexual, patriarchal family, the constitution, and the nation.**

DMWMK deployed five interrelated messaging strategies to combat the implementation of the new curriculum and halt other progressive initiatives.

1. Presenting patriarchal gender hierarchies, the gender binary, heteronormative relations, and cisgender identities as part of a universal and unchangeable natural order set by God.
2. Establishing a false causal relationship between CSE and deviant sexual behavior.
3. Claiming that the constitution favored parental authority over educational mandates.
4. Coopting the discourse of human rights by framing anti-rights discourse as pro-rights discourse.
5. Stoking nationalist sentiment by presenting women's and LGBT rights, and CSE as a neocolonial imposition supposedly led by "Western elites" and international organizations.

Furthermore, DMWMK used a segmented communications strategy to tailor these five messages to different audiences. One key aspect of this audience segmentation was that it allowed gender-restrictive groups to **appeal to a more moderate base of citizens.** The messaging for this segment of the population used pseudoscientific and supposedly rights-affirming language, presenting more sophisticated arguments than what could be seen in posters on the streets and memes circulating on social media. These arguments were effective in persuading more educated segments of the population (González et al., 2018).

From the name of their movement, gender-restrictive groups in Peru also appealed to a distorted idea of common sense to mobilize moderate, nonreligious audiences. In contrast to the complicated, jargon-filled rhetoric of many women's and LGBTI organizations, the phrase "Don't Mess With My Kids" resonated strongly with many people who intuitively wanted to protect children and defend their "rights as parents." The use of pseudoscientific and rights-affirming language, along with a manipulative notion of "common sense," were highly effective in provoking moral panic in a broad and diverse set of actors grouped under the banner of "concerned parents."

Finally, **the fact that most of these strategies coincide with the ones deployed in Bulgaria and Ghana indicates the existence of sharing mechanisms among gender-restrictive groups and points to their capacity to adapt narratives to local realities.**

In what follows, we explain the five key messaging strategies used by gender-restrictive groups in Peru more fully:

1. The Existence of a “Divine Order”

TAKEAWAYS

- In religious contexts and for more conservative audiences, gender-restrictive groups used religious terminology and references to justify their heteronormative and patriarchal worldview as stemming directly from God. They carefully avoided this language with more moderate, secular audiences.
- Gender-restrictive messaging strategies took on a “positive” tone that called for communities to come together to “save” children and LGBT people from damnation, rather than condemn them overtly.

The ideas of “natural order” and “salvation” were essential to building a community around traditional Christian values linked to “The Family” in Peru. In response to the definition of gender introduced in the new national curriculum, gender-restrictive groups insisted that **The Family was not a social institution but a divine one**, which meant that it was **universal, ahistorical, and could not be changed without unleashing devastating consequences on individuals, societies, and nations.**

As elsewhere, DMWMK argued that The Family, as an institution derived directly from God, was necessarily heteronormative and patriarchal, and could only be comprised of one man, one woman, and their children. This configuration, in turn, implies that there are only two sexes, that they are inherently different (and therefore hierarchical and complementary), and that sexuality—reduced to sexual acts—should be limited to procreation within a heterosexual marriage.



SEQ Ilustración\ *ARABIC ISource: RPP Noticias
Photographer: Rolando Gonzales

Despite the clear religious underpinnings of this strategy, DMWMK did not often use literal quotes from the Bible or rely too heavily on nuanced theological elaborations. Instead, **they deployed easily recognizable visual cues, such as the use of pink and blue to reinforce the supposedly universal differences between the sexes, and shareable images or memes** that allegedly made “God’s word” more understandable and less intimidating than the “Big Book” (Meneses, 2019)

*“We [the leaders of DMWMK movement are] committed to defending the truth of the family because The Family was not instituted by the State, The Family didn’t come after the State, it was the other way around: God created the human being, man and woman, Adam and Eve. The first institution established on Earth was The Family; much earlier than the State, much earlier than religion. It was the first institution established by God himself. Everyone comes from a family, from a father and a mother. **That is an objective reality, invariable, universal, and permanent.** That is why we united to protect this that is holy.” Christian Rosas, 2019*

The imposition of the heterosexual, patriarchal family as the only socially and legally viable configuration of family is a direct attack on LGBT rights and gender justice. The lack of legal and social recognition of same-sex marriage denies LGBT people full citizenship, undermines their dignity by denying the value and commitment of their relationships, and seriously hinders their ability to care for their loved ones.

2. CSE as “Causing Gender Dysphoria” and “Imposing Deviant Behavior” on Children

TAKEAWAYS

- Gender-restrictive messaging strategies in Peru used discredited and misleading medical, psychiatric, and psychological terms to substantiate their claims with pseudoscientific language.
- Gender-restrictive messaging strategies cherry-picked and misrepresented data, often **showing correlations** (e.g. there are more adolescents who self-identify as LGBT in Peru **and** CSE is being implemented) **as causality** (e.g. there are more adolescents who self-identify as LGBT in Peru **because** CSE is being implemented).

A vital element of the DMWMK movement’s success was their claim that the implementation of CSE was putting children at risk. Gender-restrictive groups manufactured moral panic through messages **claiming that CSE encouraged sexual activity and promiscuity in children, leading them to become sexual deviants and/or gay or trans, with the implication that being LGBT is both caused by external factors and undesirable** (Trome, 2019).

To support their claims, gender-restrictive groups used “strategic secularization” (Pecheny et al., 2017) by resorting to scientific-sounding messaging.

For instance, Beatriz Mejía, a spokesperson for the National Lawyer Network for the Defense of Family, created a **false causal link between CSE and homosexuality**. She argued that the rising number of teenagers who self-identify as LGBT in Peru was the result of the “homosexual indoctrination” in the nation’s schools (*Redacción La Mula*, 2017).

Though it is true that the number of adolescents who self-identify as LGBT in Peru is on the rise, as is the case worldwide, this is not the result of “indoctrination,” but of increasingly positive views on gender and sexual diversity. A diversity-affirming curriculum does not encourage children and adolescents to become LGBT—since that is impossible— but it does make it easier for LGBT children and teens to share their gender and/or sexual identity with their families, peers, or teachers. In other words, **there are not more LGBT teens now, there are simply more LGBT teens who are out of the closet**.

Additionally, gender-restrictive groups **presented nonnormative gender and sexual identities as pathological, that is to say, as psychiatric or hormonal disorders that could—and should—be cured**. For example, Mejía claimed that CSE produces “gender dysphoria”⁵⁴ in children. According to her: “instead of identifying with their biological

sex, children are inverting it, and they are becoming confused” (Trome, 2019). An immediate consequence of this misleading use of psychological terms is that trans children are being further stigmatized and discriminated against. Another detrimental consequence is that it assumes that LGBT people can and should be “converted” or “healed,” undermining one of the key efforts of gender justice, which is the recognition and celebration of diverse identities and orientations.

The misleading use of psychological and scientific language further stigmatizes trans and gender expansive people, particularly children. Furthermore, the lack of CSE has a detrimental effect on all students, but can be particularly devastating for LGBTI students who, in schools with no CSE, experience more bullying, social exclusion, and significant truancy which affects their right to education (Promsex et al., 2016).

In 2008, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines on CSE for schools, but only 9% of Peruvian students were receiving instruction of this sort almost a decade later (Motta et al., 2017). The absence of CSE can result in higher risk situations for children and teenagers, including unwanted pregnancies, sexual abuse, sexually transmitted infections, and dropping out of school (Bright, 2008; Plan International, n.d.; Santelli et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2009).

Gender-restrictive groups also **cherry-picked data meant to advance children’s and LGBT rights to use against those very rights**. Mejía misleadingly quoted the findings of a national study that highlighted

54 The current scientific consensus in the DSM-5 of the American Psychiatric Association defines gender dysphoria as distress stemming from “physical sex characteristics or [an] ascribed social gender role that is incongruent with persistent gender identity” (Fraser, Karasic, Meyer & Wylie, 2010; emphasis [added? Or in original]).

the constant harassment that LGBT students suffered, both from their peers and school authorities. She argued that these findings were evidence that there was no space for LGBT children at schools, and that addressing LGBT issues prompted more harassment (*Redacción La Mula*, 2017). Contrary to this, the national study was actually aimed at illuminating how the lack of CSE has a detrimental effect on all students, but can be especially detrimental for LGBT students who, in schools with no CSE, experience more bullying, social exclusion, and significant truancy which affects their right to education (Promsex et al., 2016).

Gender-restrictive groups **portrayed themselves as concerned adults acting on scientific evidence**. This strategy was particularly effective to **broaden their support because it resonated with many parents who did not necessarily hold strong religious beliefs**.

3. A Threat to Parental Authority from an Overreaching State

TAKEAWAYS

- Gender-restrictive messaging strategies in Peru promoted the idea that the new curriculum threatened parental authority and violated the law.
- Gender-restrictive groups framed the opposition to CSE as a conflict between concerned citizens and an overreaching state.
- Presenting their claims as a vindication of parental authority helped gender-restrictive groups widen their base of support to include more moderate, nonreligiously affiliated Peruvians.

DMWMK promoted the idea that the new curriculum would diminish parental authority. Among the loudest messages from DMWMK were: “Gender ideology not only damages our children, it also violates our rights;” “Sexual education for my children? No, thank you. I will speak to them about sex,” and “Don’t be fooled, as parents we have the right to educate

our children according to our values and beliefs” (#ConMisHijosNoTeMetas, n.d.). According to these messages, sexual education is a private matter that families should resolve on their own.

The DMWMK movement also claimed that the new curriculum violated the law. They cited Article 13 of the General Education Law (No. 28044), which states that parents have the right to choose their children’s school and participate in their education, arguing that they had not been consulted in the CSE strategy that the government was promoting (Vitón, 2019).

According to a curriculum specialist who worked at the Ministry of Education at that time, this was the most successful part of the strategy: **presenting the issue as a conflict between an overreaching state and civil society allowed gender-restrictive groups to appeal to a more moderate group of the population**. While discourse about a natural order and sexual deviance appealed to the more conservative citizens, the suggestion of a “police state” that could dictate how families should raise their children appealed to a wider audience (interview with Ángela Bravo, 2020).

This strategy used the “slippery slope” model to create more panic and concern: if the state were allowed to interfere with private affairs, such as decisions about children’s education, how else might it encroach upon the personal domain?

4. Anti-Rights Discourse as Pro-Rights Discourse

TAKEAWAYS

- Instead of directly attacking women’s or LGBT rights, gender-restrictive messaging strategies claimed to defend family and children.
- Gender-restrictive groups appropriated the language of human rights and claimed to be defending the right to life, education, and freedom of speech and religion.
- Co-opting the discourse of human rights and dignity gave DMWMK’s supporters a positive sense of the movement and of themselves.
- This positive framing gave thousands of people purpose and affirmation because they saw themselves as actively defending—instead of attacking—democracy and rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable: children and women.

One of the most successful strategies of gender-restrictive groups in Peru was to link their anti-rights discourse to democratic values and, in the case of women and children, frame their movement as an initiative to protect the populations whose rights it sought to undermine.

Instead of directly attacking women’s, children’s, or LGBT rights, their messaging claimed to defend life, family, and children.

For instance, gender-restrictive groups strategically avoided direct attacks on women’s rights. Instead, they committed to the protection and dignification of life from the moment of conception (which was established as a right in the Peruvian constitution written under Fujimori’s government). To defend their opposition to abortion, even in cases of rape, they used the language of universal human dignity. In the words of one of the leaders of DMWMK, Christian Rosas: “Even in cases of rape, the life of the child-in-formation is dignified, because dignity is something intrinsic in every human being. If tomorrow you learn that your father is a rapist, that does not make your life less dignified” (*Redacción Lucidez*, 2018).

Similarly, DMWMK did not present itself as opposed to LGBT rights. Instead, it claimed to defend the Constitution’s definition of education, which includes parental participation and input in the school curriculum.

Finally, when it came to gender equality and justice, gender-restrictive groups in Peru claimed to be defending “[cisgender] women’s value and dignity” against attempts to undermine it through gender-parity norms that, according to them, treated women as inferior by claiming that they could not compete on equal terms with men.

In addition to presenting gender-restrictive groups as protectors of the very rights they were seeking to undermine, this kind of strategy provided DMWMK’s supporters with a positive sense of the movement and of themselves. This framing gave thousands of people purpose and affirmation because they saw themselves as actively defending—instead of attacking—democracy and rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable: children and women.

Co-opting the discourse of rights and dignity gave DMWMK’s supporters purpose and affirmation because they saw themselves as actively defending—instead of attacking—democracy and rights, particularly those of the most vulnerable: children and women.

5. International Development and Human Rights Agencies as Neocolonial Organizations

TAKEAWAYS

- Gender-restrictive messaging strategies in Peru presented international organizations such as the UN, the OEA, UNESCO, and the World Bank as neocolonial entities seeking to “impose gender ideology” in Peru and the region.
- This alleged imposition was framed by gender-restrictive groups as a violation of national sovereignty, and as part of a globalist agenda represented by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.
- Under this strategy, environmental activists emerge as key allies in the region.

Because international organizations such as the UN, the OEA (Organization for American States), and the World Bank defend women’s, children’s, and LGBT rights, gender-restrictive groups presented them as trying to impose “gender ideology” in Peru, without regard for local values and national sovereignty.

More specifically, gender-restrictive groups in Peru advanced a **conspiracy theory** around the UN’s It’s All One Curriculum, a set of guidelines and activities for a unified approach to sexuality, gender, HIV, and human rights education developed by the Population Council. According to the misleading narrative espoused by gender-restrictive groups, the It’s All One Curriculum was orchestrated by Planned Parenthood in an attempt to impose a unified curriculum on sexuality across the globe. The conspiracy theory also stated that the curriculum was authored by Hillary Clinton and would be introduced in the region as part of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (CLACAI, 2020).

This conspiracy theory allowed gender-restrictive groups to align their **anti-LGBT and anti-women’s rights agenda with opposition to environmental policies, as well**. Given the region’s privileged geographical location, its colonial history of extractivism by foreign powers, and the problematic relation between land ownership, displacement, and deforestation, environmental issues are becoming increasingly relevant and controversial in countries like Peru.

Additionally, connecting their anti-environmental stance to the SDGs gave gender-restrictive groups a **concrete timeframe to advance their agenda**. “The battle will last until 2030,” Christian Rosas said. “We still have 10 years.”

Under the false premise that the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals are part of a neocolonial agenda, gender-restrictive groups in the region are seeking to act against them and oppose environmental policies. Through this kind of messaging, gender-restrictive groups align themselves with powerful actors who have political or economic reasons to oppose environmental regulations in general, and the SDGs in particular. Jair Bolsonaro’s government in Brazil is a case in point.

IV. SPREADING AND MOBILIZING DISINFORMATION

Gender-restrictive groups in Peru disseminated the five key messages described in Section III through the following strategies:

Coalitional Work

Gender-restrictive, interfaith groups in Peru **leveraged the different strengths and expertise of their robust network to organize street protests, carry out impact litigation, deepen political alliances, and lobby within multilateral organizations.**

For example, while DMWMK used street protests as the primary and most visible venue to communicate their messages, Padres en Acción (Parents in Action), an organization of Catholic activists, brought the fight into the courtroom (Rousseau, 2020).

Faith-based, gender-restrictive groups also took advantage of their direct connections to political actors in Congress and/or other government positions (Grande, Brunner & Esglobal, 2017) and gained considerable ground in international human rights systems, like the OAS, that have traditionally been dominated by human rights advocates (interview with George Hale, 2020).⁵⁵ This is part of a broader strategy of intense lobbying to counter some of the initiatives from international development and human rights agencies.

For example, at the Ibero-American Congress for the Family, gender-restrictive groups shared a detailed plan to attend and influence the next OAS meeting. Part of the plan asked gender-restrictive organizations to register for the dialogues with civil society under five different organizations, all of which had secular names.⁵⁶ The preparations for the participation in this meeting included a detailed presentation on how the OAS works (CLACAI, 2020).

“Never Use the Same Strategy Twice”: Diversifying Platforms and Actions

Gender-restrictive groups in Peru used a **variety of actions and platforms to i) reach their audience directly, ii) give visibility to their claims and, iii) showcase their capacity for mobilization.**

Gender-restrictive groups used all means at their disposal to communicate their message: social media, television shows, radio programs, magazines, advertisement, rallies, petitions, and direct addresses in religious services (González et al., 2018).

Gender-restrictive groups are planning a Continental DMWMK mobilization “from Canada to Tierra del Fuego, thousands, millions of Christians protesting the same day, with the same slogans, in all the capital cities of America” (CLACAI, 2020).

DMWMK created the Facebook group Con mis hijos no te metas Perú- Oficial, which had 150,000 members by mid-2017. The publications in this group garnered thousands of likes and were used to spread disinformation about the new curriculum and to coordinate activities and protests (Meneses, 2019). The movement also has an official webpage where protestors can find resources and encouragement for participating in national rallies. The webpage broadcasts the national rallies live and also hosts a repository of previous marches and events. In addition, some churches own large venues, including soccer stadiums, where they can congregate thousands of followers and address these issues directly.⁵⁷

Christian Rosas, one of the spokespersons of DMWMK, explained that the combination of media messages, which are strategically deployed at different moments, is part of a general strategy of **not repeating themselves**: “One of the characteristics that has made DMWMK different is that we’ve never used the same strategy twice. For instance, the first march happened

⁵⁵ The appointment of former Colombian Attorney General Alejandro Ordoñez, a highly conservative Lefebriest Catholic who was demoted for corruption, as the country’s ambassador to the Organization of American States in Washington, DC in 2018 is a case in point.

⁵⁶ The names of the organizations were: Ibero-American Evangelical Congress, Coalition for the Progress of Society, Opportunities for Contemporary Social Structuring, Coalition for the Education and Culture for Democracy, and Building New Horizons (CLACAI, 2020).

⁵⁷ In March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic was just beginning, some churches created an option to virtually attend services and events led by national and international pastors (*Ojo Público*, 2020).

on a Saturday, the second time we marched on a weekday. Sometimes our marches are directed against MINEDU [and] their buildings; other times we do it in a decentralized way. For the next protest, we are hoping that it can last for several days. But I can't tell you right now what the concrete strategy is going to be, it is yet to be seen" (UCI, 2019).

Training and Educational Programming

Gender-restrictive groups **invest heavily in training and educational programming.** They combine traditional evangelization strategies and religious services—which are not necessarily anti-rights—with disinformation about children's, women's, and LGBT rights and what child protection entails according to their perspective, making these initiatives hard to identify and track.

The number of workshops, conferences, books, and other venues that spread disinformation about children's, women's, and LGBT rights has exploded in recent years (CLACAI, 2020). Some of these events take place in churches, but gender-restrictive groups have taken advantage of the pandemic to offer online alternatives that range from certifications on family counseling—offered by organizations with no academic or pedagogical certification, such as Salvemos a la Familia and Centro para el Desarrollo de la Familia—to online activities and clubs for children and adolescents (the Sunday Online School and Club of Explorers of the Bible created by MMM, for instance) (*Ojo Público*, 2020).

First-Person Narratives

Gender-restrictive groups in Peru used a wide range of first-person narratives to highlight the stories of “real people” opposing CSE and to build trust among supporters.

For instance, the DMWMK movement's YouTube channel has hundreds of videos of “concerned” **mothers and fathers—mostly fathers—explaining their personal reasons for protesting against the new curriculum** and other human rights-affirming initiatives and laws.

Gender-restrictive groups also **manufactured flagship cases** exploiting the testimonies of children who “had been saved from gender ideology.” In reality, these children and adolescents had been submitted to conversion therapy, a clear violation of their rights.⁵⁸

58 Some Evangelical churches in Peru perform conversion therapies in which they employ methods of psychological and even physical violence to convince children that nonnormative sexual orientations and gender identities are pathologies that can be cured. In 2019 alone, It Gets Better Peru provided support to 65 adolescents who were considering suicide after being subjected to these “therapies.” This practice is not forbidden in Peru (Goytizolo & Torres, 2019).

V. CONCLUSION

The Peruvian case is illustrative of how gender-restrictive groups weaponize children to manufacture moral panic and mobilize it against SHRR, LGBT rights, and gender justice. **It also highlights how gender-restrictive groups can win the cultural and communications war, even when they lose key legal battles.**

Gender-restrictive groups in Peru used a pedagogical tool designed to protect children and expand gender justice, and mobilized it to oppose the rights of those very children, in addition to women and LGBT people. To do so, they created the DMWMK movement.

The movement's opposition to Comprehensive Sexuality Education is particularly worrisome considering Peru's high rates of sexual violence against and rape of children and women, unwanted teenage pregnancies that result in girls dropping out of school, and SOGIE-based bullying.

In spite of DMWMK's aggressive messaging strategies and mobilization campaigns opposing CSE, the Supreme Court upheld the National Curriculum on Basic Education. After losing this battle, **gender-restrictive groups shifted their attention to the use of the term "gender" in several initiatives that sought to protect women's rights and promote gender justice.** Disregarding their fierce opposition, Vizcarra's government issued the National Policy on Gender Equality in 2019.

Despite losing key legal and policy battles in Peru around the curriculum and Vizcarra's reforms, gender-restrictive groups seem to be winning the communications and cultural war.

Gender-restrictive groups in Peru lost key legal and policy battles (for now), but they seem to be winning the communications and cultural war. Despite the positive legal outcomes, the DMWMK movement had significant negative impact in Peru and the region. This movement and its messages spread to Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay, Ecuador, Colombia, Mexico, and Uruguay, threatening the rights of women, children, and LGBT people across Latin America.

Teachers are currently scared to teach CSE, and support for progressive groups and causes has waned (interview with George Hale, 2020). Furthermore, the moral panic caused by the supposed corruption of children, the claim that the state would diminish parental authority, the alleged neocolonial threat that international human rights organizations represent, and, above all, the fragmentation of the language of human rights has had a profound influence on Peruvian society and the region.⁵⁹

The Peruvian case reminds us that, in the fight for human rights and gender justice, winning hearts and minds is as significant—if not even more so—than advancing legislation and policies.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance to **support sustained, long-term, non-reactive, worldmaking strategic communication campaigns and formal and informal education efforts** that explain key concepts and build consensus around the need to simultaneously advance women's, children's, and LGBT rights, environmental protections, and democratic values.

⁵⁹ For example, the National Front for the Family (Frente Nacional para la Familia) in Mexico used similar strategies and messages to question "the nondiscriminatory marriage" initiative aimed at promoting equal marriage in every state of the Republic (Tabbush & Caminotti, 2020).