

Editorial

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In the last few years, the rise of anti-feminist backlash has been one of the most urgent challenges confronting gender justice movements globally. Across diverse contexts, hard-won gains in legal reforms, representation, and social norms are increasingly being contested, rolled back, or undermined. Examining backlash is therefore essential not only to understand the forces reshaping gender politics, but also to identify adaptive strategies that can safeguard and advance feminist agendas. In a rapidly shifting global landscape, critical engagement with backlash enables scholars and activists to anticipate risks, strengthen solidarities, and work towards transformative change.

This special issue of *Al-Raida* journal is part of a broader, initially five-year project funded by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in 2020, titled “Countering Backlash: Reclaiming Gender Justice.” The project was conceived in response to increasingly visible trends aimed at reversing the gains achieved in women’s rights, gender equality, and civic participation worldwide. The project works along three interlinked strands: Voice, Patriarchy, and Policy and Practice. The Voice strand focuses on amplifying countering backlash perspectives, creating public awareness campaigns, and enabling diverse actors to speak out against oppression. The Patriarchy strand addresses structural and cultural barriers, analyzing patterns of backlash and their impact on gender rights within local and global communities. Finally, the Policy and Practice strand examines institutional frameworks, seeks to identify gaps in gender-sensitive policies, and supports practical interventions that promote systemic change. Together, these strands create a holistic approach to understanding, documenting, and countering backlash against gender justice. Through its work under each of the aforementioned strands, the Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) has facilitated knowledge sharing, strengthened local and regional partnerships, and supported the design of interventions that are both context-sensitive and informed by real-time evidence. A range of key deliverables, including research papers, policy maps, a toolkit, and a documentary, have been produced to support research and knowledge-sharing on gender justice.

Complementing these outputs, this special issue of *Al-Raida* journal serves to conclude the project, bringing together global and regional perspectives that build on the project’s objectives and outcomes. It is composed of selected papers presented during the international conference “Anti-Feminist Backlash in the Global South: Cross-Regional Discussions, Strategies, and Innovative Practices” organized by the AiW and held at LAU Beirut in June 2023. The conference brought together participants from across the world, particularly from the Global South and the Arab region, including project partners and other scholars and activists who shared case studies and theoretical applications, highlighted successes, and reflected critically on the challenges of sustaining feminist agendas in volatile environments. These exchanges underscored the importance of cross-regional dialogue that responds to the shifting landscape of gender politics in the Global South and even worldwide.

While *Al-Raida* journal traditionally focuses on issues within Lebanon and the Arab region, this special issue, given the partnership with IDS, expands its scope to include cross-regional perspectives. By juxtaposing experiences from different countries, it offers readers a unique comparative advantage in understanding the transnational and interconnected nature of

anti-feminist movements, as well as some strategies for resisting them. It is worth noting that, following participation in the conference, some unfortunately had to withdraw their papers due to concerns about potential backlash in their own countries. However, this special issue of *Al-Raida* journal still presents interesting and timely articles that are of importance for understanding comparatively different trends of backlash globally. Jerker Edström, Tessa Lewin, Sohela Nazneen, Ben O'Donovan-Iland, Rosie McGee, and Chloe Skinner first outline the “Countering Backlash: Reclaiming Gender Justice” project, examining anti-gender backlash and feminist resistance across regions. Similarly, Azza Basarudin and Tina Beyene reflect on the 2023 international conference as they study global patterns of anti-feminist backlash and propose transnational strategies in the Global South. Then, Elif Savas analyzes anti-gender politics and democratic erosion in Turkey, while Caroline Ramos examines Brazil's Redpill movement and its effects on identity politics. Alternatively, in India, Sriya Satuluri highlights approaches to gender justice and the prevention of violence, while Deepta Chopra and Kaliat Ammu Sanyal explore how women redefine their caregiving roles across private and public spheres. Additionally, Bobičić Nada and Stojčić Marijana examine Serbian media to show how anti-gender narratives mirror and reinforce the transnational movement against feminism. On the case of Lebanon specifically, Nay El Rahi and Chantal Bou Akl revisit the global origins of the anti-gender backlash concept and argue for a localized understanding in Lebanon. Building on this, Abir Chebaro reviews recent anti-feminist backlash trends by analyzing how misogynistic discourse and violence undermine women's political participation, while Rima El Mokdad and Marianne Touma explore how civil society organizations face systematic defamation, repression, and funding pressures from state, religious, and community actors. Finally, the issue concludes with a thematic discussion drawn from the panel titled “Sustaining and Expanding South-South-North Partnerships and Knowledge Co-Construction on Global Backlash to Reclaim Gender Justice,” held at LAU New York in 2024, which brought together speakers to share their insights on the theme in question.

It is worth noting that since the AiW had begun working on the project, it has unfortunately faced unprecedented local challenges. On the local level, Lebanon's economic crisis, which intensified in October 2019 and exploded in nation-wide uprisings over several months, placed significant constraints on the AiW's ability to begin implementing planned activities. Then, the devastating Beirut Blast in 2020 further disrupted the team's morale and operations likewise, alongside the Covid-19 pandemic that had already introduced additional restrictions and made coordination, research, and engagement with partners more difficult. Most recently, the ongoing war since 2023 and its repercussions, have created additional difficulties in meeting project timelines, given that the team had to temporarily pause some of the activities. Despite these challenges, the AiW has remained committed to advancing the project's objectives.

In the face of complex local and global challenges, from economic crises and political instability to the ongoing global backlash against gender equality, the project highlights the power of research, collaboration, and adaptive strategies in advancing gender justice. The AiW and its partners have successfully demonstrated that even in difficult times, context-specific and innovative approaches can make meaningful strides towards reclaiming and protecting the gains achieved for women and broader issues of gender equality.

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