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UPHOLDING RIGHTS AT A TIME OF GLOBAL BACKLASH

STRATEGIES IN SWANA

THE CASE OF JORDAN

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anti-gender movements; Jordan; feminist activism; queer activism; authoritarianism; civic space; resistance; SWANA

The researcher is a Jordanian feminist activist who has chosen to remain anonymous due to concerns about potential reprisals.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW **3**

2. METHODOLOGY **7**

2.1. Research Participants **8**

2.2. Risks and Limitations **8**

2.3. Additional Notes **9**

3. LITERATURE REVIEW **10**

3.1. Understanding the Jordanian Context **11**

3.2. Unpacking Anti-gender Movements **13**

3.3. A Close Look at The Manosphere **14**

4. PRIMARY DATA FINDINGS **17**

4.1. Dynamics of Anti-Gender Movements in Jordan **18**

4.1.1. Drivers of Anti-Gender Backlash 18
4.1.2. Recent pivotal moments 20
4.1.3. Anti-gender Tactics 21
4.1.4. Anti-gender Narratives 24

4.2. Developments in Feminist and Queer Activism **25**

4.2.1. Relevant Pre-existing Challenges 25
4.2.2. Impacts and Resistance Strategies 26

5. UNEXPECTED PATTERNS AND INSIGHTS **28**

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS **31**

6.1. Summary of Findings **32**

6.2. Recommendations for International, Regional, and Local Actors **33**

6.2.1. Recommendations for International Donors 33
6.2.2. Recommendations for Regional and International Feminist and Queer Actors 34
6.2.3. Recommendations for feminist and queer actors in Jordan 34

6.3. Future research directions **35**

7. REFERENCES **36**

ANNEXES **40**

Annex 1 – Interview Questions **41**

Annex 2 – List of Interviewees **42**

Annex 3 – Survey Questionnaire **43**

List of Abbriviations	
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DIFI	Doha International Family Institute
EU	European Union
IDAHOTB	International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia
IFFD	International Federation for Family Development
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, plus
MGTOW	Men Going Their Own Way
MRM	Men's Rights Movement
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
PUA	Pick-Up Artists
SRHRs	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SWANA	South West Asia and North Africa
UN	United Nations
WHRDs	Women Human-Rights Defenders

1. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

Across the world, fascism, authoritarianism, and cultural conservatism are on the rise and are often manifesting as anti-gender, and by implication anti-feminist, anti-queer, and anti-"other", sentiment and action (Roggeband and Krizsán 2020). Anti-gender actors don't oppose the gendered reality of our patriarchal social, economic, and political order; they oppose the diversion from, or even the contestation of, the heteronormative status quo, claiming that the hard-won rights of women and queer folks must be reversed to preserve the family and the nation. Within that context, feminist and LGBTQI+ movements are bearing the brunt of increasing repression globally (Wahba *et al*., 2024).

Renowned feminist scholar and activist Judith Butler highlights how these anti-gender movements are fascist trends that aim to instrumentalize so-called "gender-ideology" for political gain (Butler, 2021). Not only do these movements divert attention from the root causes of all the crises facing the world today, but they also pave the way to putting in place all the mechanisms required for sustaining a fascist order – mechanisms such as the normalization of state violence and surveillance, increasing control of media and education, and complete suppression of liberatory social movements (Butler, 2024).

Gender has been deformed by anti-gender actors and has become a common imaginary enemy that is able to represent many fears and anxieties facing different societies today (CREA, 2018). Depending on the context, "gender ideology" has been portrayed by anti-gender movements as cultural imperialism, a foreign ideological construct, an attack on religion, and cultural terrorism – among many other terms – in an attempt to demonize gender as a concept, a field of study, and a social reality (Butler, 2024). These terms, along with the contradictory claims and talking points of anti-gender movements, are repeated by political, cultural, and religious figures across the globe (Baek et al., 2024).

Anti-gender international organizations such as CitizenGo, which aims to mobilize against defenders of LGBTQI+ and reproductive rights, and the International Organization for the Family, which aims "to affirm, celebrate, and defend the natural family as the only fundamental and sustainable unit of society," have millions of followers and operate in tens of countries. These organizations incite misogynistic, transphobic, homophobic and xenophobic moral panic and are able to mobilize at an alarming speed (Butler, 2024; The International Organization for the Family, 2025). Other organizations, such as X.Y Worldwide, the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD), and the Doha International Family Institute (DIFI), are building cross-regional partnerships that facilitate the globalization of anti-gender narratives through the use of demographic data, such as population decline, as "evidence" of the threatening nature of LGBTQI+ and reproductive rights (Justice for Prosperity, 2024).

At the same time, online echo chambers for "red-pillers" who believe that they are able to see the world as it truly is – a world, as they claim, where patriarchy is a lie, and women hold all the real power – have grown immensely in the past decade, creating a "manosphere" that is an integral part of anti-gender movements globally (Bates, 2020). This manosphere is influenced by figures who blame women and feminists for men's misery today and actively trivialize and encourage misogynistic violence (Tadros, 2021; Kaddoura, 2024).

Strides made to secure gender rights are being reversed across the globe as a result. Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), gender-based violence prevention and response policies, diversity and inclusion policies, gender affirming care and queer rights are all being demonized and attacked (Baek *et al.*, 2024). In parallel, feminist and queer activists, whose activism is portrayed as one that seeks to attack the traditional family, indoctrinate children into homosexuality and "transgenderism", create a gateway to sexual perversion (e.g. pedophilia and bestiality), attack god's divine creation and destroy local cultures, are increasingly facing various threats, including death threats, imprisonment, and deportation in different countries across the world (Pruth and Zillén 2023; Butler, 2024).

In South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA), decades of systematic oppression and restrictions on civil society actors under authoritarian leaders have created fertile ground for recurring waves of backlash against political dissent (Hassan and Nihad, 2025). Today, multi-layered socio-economic and political crises such as revolutions, wars, ecological degradation, and economic collapse are causing a new wave of backlash and have accelerated actions to institutionalize the criminalization and prosecution of dissent by states across SWANA (Hassan and Nihad, 2025; Wahba *et al*., 2024). Imprisonment, interrogation, harassment and surveillance of activists, journalists and other political actors have become common practice in most countries in the region (Civicus, 2024; Wahba *et al*., 2024). But while conservative political actors and activists have, to varying extents, the support of society when facing threats by states, progressive ones, especially feminists, women human-rights defenders (WHRDs) and queer activists, face attacks from both states and societies (Hassan and Nihad, 2025).

Egyptian feminist author Mona El Tahawy highlights how authoritarian states such as those in the SWANA region utilize patriarchy to gain men's support through what she calls the "alliance of state and street". Through this alliance, El Tahawy argues that authoritarian states give power to men over women's bodies and life choices through laws, regulations, and practices in exchange for men's obedience towards the state. This naturally creates anti-feminist sentiment among men who see feminism as a threat to the power bestowed upon them by the state (El Tahawy, 2015). However, as states fail in meeting the basic needs of their populations, threatening the stability of that contract, politicians are increasingly scapegoating already marginalized and oppressed groups to escape critique of their failures and maintain the allegiance of men. Some states even promote "informant culture", giving a sense of power and ownership to citizens in fighting against those threatening "family values", which has led, in some cases, to vigilante attacks, namely against queer activists (Wahba *et al*., 2024). The backlash against gender within this context is an effort by authoritarian regimes to restore themselves as a legitimate, even necessary, form of paternalism (Butler, 2024).

The current wave of backlash could be unique from previous ones in the way in which it treats the digital sphere as a main battlefield to expand and solidify its reach (Hassan and Nihad, 2025; Wahba *et al*., 2024). Contrary to previous claims about social media's vital role in igniting and sustaining revolutions across SWANA, evidence seems to highlight how states have actually leveraged social media to counter revolutions (Smidi and Shahin, 2017; Guesmi, 2021). States in the region use many tactics such as internet blackouts, banning of social media platforms and websites, surveillance of personal devices, and criminalization of social media content to suppress opposition (Wahba *et al*., 2024). A growing Arabic-speaking "manosphere" is entrenching misogynistic values and anti-gender narratives among men across the region and painting feminists who promote "gender-ideology" as soldiers of Western cultural totalitarianism who aim to destroy Arab culture in support of imperialist powers (Kaddoura, 2024).

While Jordan has some contextual similarities to other countries in the region and beyond, it has its unique differences in the political, social, and economic spheres that influence how backlash is manifested and institutionalized. As a monarchy with complete political and military power and control over intelligence agencies and the media, all aspects of political engagement have been monitored and pre-approved by the state for decades. Yet, civil society actors, including feminists and women's rights defenders, have been able to slowly but steadily secure some rights relating to freedom of association, speech, and assembly in the past decades. But civic spaces in Jordan have been diminishing in the last few years. Under the pretext of security, the Jordanian state has been increasingly using vague criminal laws to harass and/or prosecute journalists, members of political parties, trade unions, and activists (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Jordanian feminist and women's rights activists and organizations are no exception (Murad Garlick and Jaber, 2020).

Feminist and queer actors in Jordan have always had to tread lightly to avoid state and societal backlash, while navigating the constraints imposed on them by (neo)liberal donors. This pushed most activists and organizations to adopt a (neo)liberal feminist framework that calls for equality between women and men without questioning the state or the economy's roles in maintaining patriarchal norms and practices (Asfari Institute, 2023). Despite the strides made to improve gendered realities in the country – be it through amendments to the Personal Status, Labor, and Social Protection laws or the Jordanian Criminal Code, women continuously face misogynistic violence and queer folks face even harsher homophobic and transphobic violence, with both being systematically prevented from meaningfully participating in economic, cultural, and political life (Outright International, 2018, UN ESCWA, 2018).

Influenced by revolutions that occurred in many countries across SWANA as well as an increasing practice of digital feminist knowledge production, a new wave of feminist and queer activists has been attempting to reshape and widen the scope of feminist activism in Jordan despite many risks (Asfari Institute, 2023). They have adopted an intersectional feminist framework in their activism, raised the ceiling of demands, discussed taboo topics, and offered an unapologetic and political discourse that is pushing existing boundaries (Daibes, 2021).

Against this backdrop, this research aims to investigate the rise of anti-gender movements with a focus on Jordan. It identifies the key drivers, actors, tactics, and narratives of those movements within the Jordanian context and beyond in an effort to understand how anti-gender actors operate. Moreover, the research analyzes the impacts of anti-gender backlash and expanded repression on feminist and queer actors in Jordan and explores the resistance strategies that they are currently using. Ultimately, the research aims to offer insights on strengthening cross-border feminist resistance against anti-gender movements as well as on policy recommendations to support the continuation of critical activism and advocacy work.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data. It explores the research questions through analyzing primary and secondary data, specifically through a comprehensive literature review and a review of relevant documents and media content, as well as through semi-structured interviews and an online survey.

2.1. RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The research participants include women's rights, feminist, and LGBTQI+ activists and representatives of organizations in Jordan and the wider SWANA region. Involvement of activists from outside Jordan who have extensive knowledge of anti-gender backlash at the regional level aims to enhance our understanding of relevant regional dynamics. The research involves 23 participants (9 interviewees and 14 survey respondents), ensuring a diverse representation in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic background. Inclusion criteria focus on individuals with direct involvement in advocacy, activism, or leadership within feminist and queer movements.

Exclusion criteria include those without meaningful engagement in feminist and queer movements or those unable to provide informed consent. Individuals with possible proximity to the state (in their discourse or work) are also excluded to ensure accuracy of responses and safety of others involved in the research.

Participants are provided with detailed information about the study, including its objectives, methods, and potential risks. Informed consent is obtained in writing or verbally, depending on the context.

2.2. RISKS AND LIMITATIONS

Given the sensitive nature of the research, there are possible risks, including psychological distress and possible retaliation against research participants. The likelihood of these risks is mitigated through strict confidentiality measures and secure data storage. Moreover, all interviews are conducted on safe online platforms with the option for interviewees to withdraw their participation at any time.

The potential benefits of this research, including enhanced protection for activists, informed policy recommendations, and stronger regional solidarity, outweigh the risks. The study's findings are expected to contribute to the understanding and mitigation of backlash against feminist and LGBTQI+ movements in Jordan and the wider SWANA region.

Due to time and capacity constraints, the number of participants in the research remained relatively low, focusing on key experts and activists. This limits the possibility of accurately identifying differences in the type of backlash and repression that different groups of activists and organizations experience based on gender, sexuality, age, location, institutional backing and other relevant factors.

2.3. ADDITIONAL NOTES

In this research, we only highlight regional and global trends that have direct impacts on the ways in which anti-gender movements in Jordan are developing and manifesting. We focus more closely on the relevant national dynamics, narratives and events with the aim of analyzing and accurately assessing how we got here and what feminists and queer movements see happening in the near and far future. We recognize that anti-gender movements in Jordan and across SWANA are part of wider anti-rights movements. However, the narratives and dynamics related to anti-gender movements differ from those targeting human rights more broadly. Therefore, we only highlight anti-rights trends when they are relevant to feminist and queer activism and advocacy.

This research recognizes that anti-gender movements can be attributed to various political, economic and social factors that are context-specific, but that all of these factors are rooted in patriarchal, capitalist, and colonialist systems of oppression. The research, therefore, aims to analyze the ways in which these systems of oppression interplay to create fertile ground for anti-gender movements in Jordan and beyond.

Finally, we highlight that this research is built on the efforts, sacrifices, and wisdom of all those who have been working tirelessly towards gender justice for decades. It is dedicated to all women, feminists, queer, and human rights activists who have paid heavy prices for their principled activism. We hope that the results of this research are able to contribute to the broader effort of countering the current wave of anti-gender backlash and expanding authoritarianism and fascism.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Anti-gender movements have become more organized, more mainstream, and more systematic than ever across the globe (Bates, 2020; Justice for Prosperity, 2024; McEwen and Narayanaswamy, 2023). In this chapter, we analyze publications, media stories, laws and policies, as well as statements in order to better understand the Jordanian political and civic context and the reasons behind the steady advancement of anti-gender movements, exploring their strategies and narratives within the context of Jordan, the region, and the globe.

3.1. UNDERSTANDING THE JORDANIAN CONTEXT

Jordanian civil society actors have always had to operate under tight control, with a number of laws that prohibit political activities without pre-approval by the state (Ragetlie *et al.*, 2021). Freedom of speech has many limits aimed at protecting the monarchy and its interests, as criticism of the king, governmental institutions, public officials, and any other "defamatory" speech, as well as criticism of foreign countries, Islam, and Christianity, is criminalized (Human Rights Watch, 2024). Freedom of association and assembly are also restricted, as many limitations are imposed on non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, and political parties, which impact their ability to effectively practice their political work (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Despite the already limited civic space available in Jordan, the state has taken many steps to further suppress dissent in the past few years against a backdrop of instability across the region, specifically the waves of revolutions across SWANA and the Israeli genocide in Gaza (Murad Garlick and Jaber, 2020; Civicus, 2024). Jordan's annual rating under the Civicus Monitor that assesses civic freedoms changed from "obstructed" to "repressed" in 2022 and has remained so until now, indicating a shift from being a country that imposes restrictions on fundamental civil rights (i.e., freedom of association, assembly, and speech) towards a country that practices routine and widespread repression (Civicus, 2024). Today, the state uses a number of laws with vague terminology – namely the Cybercrime Law, Anti-Terrorism Law, Crime Prevention Law, and Penal Code – to intimidate and prosecute activists, journalists, protestors, politicians, and trade unionists (Human Rights Watch, 2022).

Between 2019 and 2023, there have been at least 35 cases of personal devices of journalists, activists, representatives of NGOs, and human rights lawyers being surveilled by Pegasus, presumably by the Jordanian government (Access Now, 2024). Moreover, in May 2025, the Jordanian state announced the ban of 12 online media outlets for "spreading media poison and attacking Jordan" due to their criticism of the Jordanian state profiting from the humanitarian crisis in Gaza (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025). However, this is not a new practice. One of the earliest queer-feminist online magazines in the region, My Kali, which was initiated by a queer Jordanian activist, was banned in Jordan in 2015, for instance (Outright International, 2018). While TikTok was banned across the country in 2022 to ensure a media blackout amid protests by truck drivers in the southern governorate of Ma'an who were using the platform to livestream the protests. Residents of Ma'an also reported complete internet shutdowns for days (SMEX, 2023). Additionally, dating applications are used by state personnel, namely intelligence service agents and policemen, to harass and blackmail gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer men (Outright International, 2018). This showcases how digital fascism is an integral part of suppressing opposition and targeting those that divert from gender norms in Jordan (Wahbe *et al.,* 2024).

In addition to the above, a report on the impacts of the shrinking civic space in Jordan on feminist and women's organizations highlighted how a number of laws and policies are (1) restricting funding flows through the imposition of conditionalities related to sources of funding along with the exclusion of civil society organizations from banking systems, (2) complicating CSOs' compliance procedures (i.e., registration, licensing, reporting and accountability mechanism) to increase their workload and create opportunities for shutting down operations through non-compliance claims, (3) and co-opting women's movements through Royal NGOs such as the Jordanian National Commission for Women, the National Council for Family Affairs, the King Hussein Foundation and

the Jordan River Foundation – all of which receive the largest amounts of international funding and control how this funding is channeled to smaller NGOs (Murad Garlick and Jaber, 2020). Feminist movements in Jordan, and across the Global South, were also forced to navigate (neo)colonialist donor dynamics, which have had a big role in depoliticizing and "NGOizing" their activism in the past two decades, greatly hindering their ability to organize and mobilize effectively (Daibes, 2021).

Given all the above, feminist and queer movements have not been able to make big legislative strides. Some modest amendments to articles in the family, criminal, labor, and social protection laws have been achieved in favor of women in the past years (UN ESCWA 2018), but those laws remain deeply patriarchal and far from able to provide women with emancipatory tools – especially those that relate to bodily autonomy. Consensual sex before marriage is illegal, abortion even in cases of rape is illegal, rape within marriage is not criminalized, and legal provisions like "public indecency" and "promotion of immorality" are used to police and prosecute those who deviate from patriarchal gender roles (UN ESCWA, 2018). Moreover, women under 30 need permission from a male guardian to marry; women who marry foreigners cannot pass Jordanian nationality to their children or husband; and administrative detention of women who leave their family home without permission is still practiced (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Queer activism in the country is limited, and those who support the LGBTQI+ community do so discreetly and focus mostly on providing aid and creating safe spaces for queer folks (Outright International, 2018). Despite the fact that homosexuality is not explicitly criminalized in Jordan, vague "morality" provisions are used to intimidate and prosecute the LGB community, with no anti-discrimination laws that could protect queer individuals from being targeted for their gender and/or sexuality (Human Rights Watch, 2023; Younis, 2023; Outright International, 2018). Moreover, transgender women can be imprisoned under Article 307, which states that "any male who is disguised in a female's dress and enters a place reserved for women only or which cannot be entered by other than women at the time of committing the act; he shall be punished by imprisonment for a period not to exceed six months" (Jordanian Penal Code, 1960). Most of society is also highly conservative and "opposed" to homosexuality and gender or sexual expression beyond cis-heteronormativity (Outright International, 2018).

Despite the limited legislative wins, there have been developments within feminist and queer movements in Jordan and across SWANA in the past decade that are threatening the status quo (Asfari Institute, 2023). Many feminist and queer actors have become critical of donors that depoliticize their activism in the region, especially donors that have a (neo)liberal agenda, have close ties with governments, and have regulations that limit the political discourse of social movements that they fund – this has become more common since the Israeli genocide against Palestinians began in Gaza (Daibes, 2021; Daibes, 2023). Feminists and queer movements are increasingly vocal against white-centered feminist discourses and approaches as well as pinkwashing tactics by faux-allies (Jeem, 2024; Daibes, 2022). Both movements have deepened their intersectional analysis and practice and are increasingly highlighting systematic ways in which patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism shape the oppression of the people of SWANA generally, and women and queer folks in all their diversity specifically (Asfari Institute, 2023; Daibes, 2021). Instead of focusing narrowly on amending legal provisions in inherently patriarchal legal frameworks, feminist actors are diversifying their strategies. They especially focus on raising feminist consciousness and awareness through investing in the production of knowledge and providing spaces for co-learning (Doria Feminist Fund, 2025; Al Atiyat *et al.*, 2023). All of these developments are re-politicizing and strengthening feminist activism across the region and within Jordan (Abou Habib, 2022; Daibes, 2021).

Additionally, various regional feminist and queer platforms, which include the Jordanian context in their analysis, have been making cross-national connections and strengthening cross-border solidarity, enabling discussions and raising awareness that would have been otherwise suppressed on the national level (Al Atiyat *et al.*, 2023). Regional feminist and queer actors have also established a strong digital presence, with online initiatives, journals, webinars, digital campaigns,

podcasts, and blogs available to Arabic-speaking audiences across the region (Asfari Institute, 2023). This online presence has contributed to raising feminist consciousness and maturing feminist discourses and analysis on the regional and national levels, but it has also exposed activists to backlash by anti-gender actors (Hassan and Nihad, 2025; Bates, 2020).

3.2. UNPACKING ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS

Anti-gender actors vary between being reactive and proactive, or a combination of both. Reactive actors in the movement respond to advancements made towards gender justice and to a growing progressive and intersectional feminist and queer movements with backlash – i.e., angry demands for halting and/or reversing advancements made towards gender justice and calls for the suppression of feminist and queer activists and organizations (Baek *et al.*, 2024). While proactive, mostly state and political actors utilize gender to incite moral panic to divert attention from their failures and/or to allow themselves to establish or solidify mechanisms that serve their authoritarian or fascist projects – i.e., demonizing feminist and queer activism and "gender-ideology" to manufacture consent for expanding control and suppressing dissent (Sardá-Chandiramani and Bonilla, 2024; Butler, 2021).

A report by Justice for Prosperity divides anti-gender actors into populists, conservatives, and extremists, with each playing a role in solidifying anti-gender action across the globe (Justice for Prosperity, 2024). Throughout the past decade, a diverse set of anti-gender actors have strategically sought to create cross-national connections as religious institutions, conservative civil society actors, online influencers, and authoritarian state leaders that are involved in anti-gender movements have created networks beyond their national borders (CREA, 2018; Baek *et al.*, 2024). Through private meetings, official partnerships, and international conferences, these actors exchange strategies, expand their outreach, and pool their resources to strengthen their anti-gender movements (Justice for Prosperity, 2024). These actors have even been able to infiltrate influential international spaces and positions, specifically within UN and EU bodies as well as the Organization of Islamic States and the African Union (Justice for Prosperity, 2024).

Anti-gender movements in the West that are also built on white-supremacist ideology are painting critical race theory and decolonial studies, along with gender, as a weapon of societal destruction in the imagination of right-wing and white-supremacist individuals and groups to further suppress liberatory movements that threaten the racist political, social, and economic order (Butler, 2024). States have taken steps to limit these fields in education with the support of anti-gender movements. Denmark, for instance, imposed limitations on academia within those three fields to restrict "excessive activism" in research in 2021 (ECREA, 2021). Other countries like the United States, Hungary and Poland have introduced similar educational gag orders in recent years (Butler, 2024). Intersectional feminist and queer movements that are inherently decolonial and anti-racist are thus experiencing repression from various angles.

Global anti-gender actors have been able to mobilize through the use of nationalist, religious, and supremacist narratives to demonize all those who dare step out of the heteronormative norm, but even more severely, all those who promote this diversion from perceived heteronormative normality – i.e., feminist and LGBTQI+ activists (Justice for Prosperity, 2024). They are increasingly able to manipulate public discourses through co-opting human rights language (CREA, 2018; Justice for Prosperity, 2024; Baek *et al.,* 2024). The International Organization for the Family, for instance sights the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and claims to aim "to protect the sanctity and dignity of all human life" while calling for the roll-back of hard-won rights of women and the LGBTQI+ community (The International Organization for the Family, 2025).

While some anti-gender actors in SWANA – such as the "Fetra" Campaign[1] – use a similar strategy, most actors condemn women's and human rights agendas as foreign and imperialist endeavors – especially when it comes to women and queer liberation (Wahba *et al.*, 2024). On the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) in 2015, Jordanian LGBTQI+ activists organized an event that was attended by the US Ambassador. The event was met with outrage and an anti-queer campaign led by media outlets and members of the Islamic Action Front political party, who accused the organizers of imposing an immoral Western agenda (Outright International, 2018). Anti-CEDAW events organized by tribal leaders in Palestine in 2019 specifically demonized the CEDAW convention and feminist movements that promote it. They called for the withdrawal from CEDAW and the banning of feminist activism in Palestine (The New Arab, 2019). Selective approaches and inconsistencies among certain international actors in addressing Palestinian human rights have raised concerns about the universality of human rights standards and have damaged the perception of the Human Rights agenda among the public across SWANA (Ahmad, 2023).

Economist Yanis Varoufakis highlights the similarities between the rise of fascism in the 1920s following the great depression of 1920-1921 and the rise of fascism today, which he links to the global financial crisis of 2007-2008 (Varoufakis, 2016). It is thus not surprising that anti-gender actors attribute socio-economic crises caused by capitalism to "gender-ideology" (Ostolski and Graff, 2020; Kaddoura, 2024). For the anti-gender actors responsible for these crises, the attention and anger of those who are most negatively affected is diverted towards a phantom problem. While for actors interested in solidifying capitalist, authoritarian or fascist control, demonizing gender means ensuring that the patriarchal heteronormative family remains uncontested, this in turn ensures the availability of women to reproduce the labor force and "the nation" while providing social services on behalf of the state – namely, unpaid care labor (Cooper, 2017). At the same time, global capitalism's increase in economic inequalities has pushed a large portion of men to feel emasculated within a patriarchal social order due to their inability to provide financially (Kaddoura, 2024). With high unemployment rates, the spread of precarious labor, and inflation, men's frustrations and anxieties related to their economic and social standing in society across SWANA and the wider globe are being exploited by anti-gender movements (Kaddoura, 2024; Butler, 2024). It is important to highlight the role of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which have been widely critiqued for their roots in and alignment with longstanding global power imbalances, in imposing a neoliberal economic agenda on many countries in SWANA, including Jordan, and contributing to economic inequality and precarity in the region and the wider Global South (Andrews, 2021; Rehbein, 2022).

3.3. A CLOSE LOOK AT THE MANOSPHERE

In her book "Men Who Hate Women", Laura Bates delves deep into the manosphere, an online bubble created by various male-dominated groups that are dedicated to exposing and overcoming a perceived feminist conspiracy. Actors within the manosphere call on men to take the hypothetical red-pill - in reference to the Hollywood movie "The Matrix" - that enables them to clearly see the "gynocracy" that governs their lives. Gynocracy is part of the manosphere's jargon; it refers to the imagined system of oppression that is built to keep men subordinated to women without them even realizing it (Bates, 2020).

The manosphere consists of different groups of men with different approaches to overcoming the gynocracy (Mustafa and Abed, 2024; Bates, 2020). Incels, or involuntary celibates, are a sex-obsessed subgroup that focuses on discussing their perceived tragically lonely fate as physically undesirable men, exposing the tyrannical nature of women's sexual liberation, and plotting revenge against women for unjustly refusing to grant them sex. These groups discuss at length the need

1 When the anti-LGBTQI+ "Fetra" accounts, which had over 2 million followers across SWANA, were banned by META, the founders of the campaign called the move an infringement of their freedom of speech by the West (wahba et al., 2024).

to legalize rape or even enslave women as a means to break out of their supposed subordinate condition. Some even openly discuss fantasies about, and even glorify, the murder of women and girls (Bates, 2020). In 2022, Nayera Ashraf, a young Egyptian woman, was murdered by a man in front of her university for refusing his marriage proposal. The murder was recorded and widely shared within the Arab manosphere, inspiring another man to commit the exact same crime the next day in Jordan. Iman Rashid, the Jordanian young woman who was murdered, even received a death threat from the murderer through a text message that said: "Tomorrow I am coming to speak to you, and if you don't accept, I am going to kill you just like the Egyptian killed that girl today" (Wahba *et al*., 2024).

Pick-up artists, or PUAs, on the other hand, are dedicated to offering advice on the perfect secret combination of tricks that guarantee a man's ability to pick up any woman he wants. PUAs have built an industry that is worth an estimated 100 million USD through exploiting men's vulnerabilities and anxieties, giving them misogynistic advice and training them in various techniques that can only be described as sexual harassment and assault (Bates, 2020). PUAs often promote pursuing capitalist ambitions as one of the means to increase the chances of getting a "high value" woman in order to surpass their "beta employee" status towards an "alfa entrepreneur" (Bates, 2020). Jordanian "Coach Kareem" – who "started the first Arabic [YouTube] channel explaining the Red Pill Philosophy in Arabic Language" and claims that he is "a specialized life coach in inter sexual dynamics between women and men" - offers such trainings at the price of 216 USD in his YouTube videos, which have over 52 million views (Coach Kareem, 2025).

Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) is another subgroup that focuses on overcoming the gynocracy through separating partially or completely from women. Despite the fact that MGTOW are less dangerous than incels or PUA, they still build their worldview on misogynistic notions of women being inherently toxic, unfaithful, and too devious to even be around (Bates, 2020). MGTOWs believe that most women are willing to lie about sexual or domestic violence to advance their interests – namely to extort money from men or damage men's social reputation (Bates, 2020). "MGTOW-Towards taking back the rights of men in Tunisia" is only one of the MGTOW groups in SWANA, which are still relatively small communities when compared to other manosphere spaces (Wahba *et al*., 2024).

Men's Rights Groups have a similar worldview to other manosphere sub-groups, but Men's Rights Activists want to fight back and are physically present and publicly vocal beyond the manosphere. Men's Rights activism, interestingly, began in the early 1970s as a feminist-supporting movement that recognizes the ways in which the patriarchy harms men and works towards resolving the real issues that men face. However, the movement was split in the late 1970s and a faction became the base of today's Men's Rights Movement (MRM) that believes that the gender equality that feminists aim to strive for is a plot aiming to give women the power to discriminate against and subjugate men (Bates, 2020). While the Men's Rights Movement does not seem to have organizational roots in SWANA, various influential figures within the manosphere discuss issues that are central to the global MRM (e.g., alimony, custody of children, defamatory accusations) (Kaddoura, 2024).

All sub-groups of the manosphere entrench patriarchal claims, treating all men as straight with a need to be sexually and financially dominant, and portraying all women as vessels that exist to satisfy men sexually and bear children (Bates, 2020). The manosphere systematically dehumanizes women and portrays them as robotic and evil – a common term used in the manosphere, for instance, is "foid," which is short for "female humanoid" (Bates, 2020). At the same time, all sub-groups demonize feminism and "gender ideology" and believe that both aim to oppress men, destroy the family unit, and create cultural instability (Bates, 2020). Prominent Arab figures within the manosphere include Mohammed Hijab, Dr. Haytham Talaat, and Eyad Quanibi – all of whom spread anti-gender moral panic among their millions of followers in SWANA (Wahba *et al*., 2024). The Arab manosphere ironically demonizes feminism and gender as foreign imports that aim to destroy Arab culture while adopting the exact narratives and ideological frameworks that were created by manosphere communities in the West (Kaddoura, 2024; Mustafa and Abed, 2024).

Andrew Tate, a main figure within the English-speaking manosphere, is widely celebrated by Arab manosphere influencers, especially after he converted to Islam in 2022. Tate's content is translated to Arabic and shared by dedicated YouTube channels such as "Alasna ala al Haq" ("Aren't We Right") and "Hayat Tate" ("Tate's Life") (Wahba *et al*., 2024).

Red-pillers believe that allowing women to have sexual and bodily autonomy grants them tyrannical control over men. Therefore, they discuss how that autonomy must be taken away by any means necessary (Bates, 2020). In SWANA, men in the manosphere believe that women who have financial autonomy are also concerning. An online campaign, which was initiated by a former Moroccan rapper, claimed that working women are "unfit to be good mothers and wives", later expanding to include divorced women, women who have university degrees, and women who passed a certain age (Wahba *et al*., 2024).

It is important to note that the global manosphere operates along racist lines and can be linked to white supremacy in various ways. First, the manosphere can be traced back to groups that emerged in the 1990s that consisted primarily of white men who still feel a sense of ownership towards the manosphere as a space. Terms like "currycel", "blackcel", "ricecel," and ethnic terms that refer to Asian, Indian, and black incels highlight the perceived inferiority of men of color. White women who choose non-white partners get special attention and hatred within the manosphere for their betrayal. Moreover, terms like "white Sharia" are used by white men in reference to their calls to adopt a white version of the perceived practice of enslaving women in Islamic Sharia (Bates, 2020). This racism that breeds hierarchy between men and women along racial lines is an additional danger posed by the manosphere.

4. PRIMARY DATA FINDINGS

This chapter highlights the findings from 9 interviews that were conducted and 14 survey responses received, as well as media content that was referenced by participants. It includes insights from participants with various backgrounds on several aspects that relate to anti-gender movements in Jordan. Those participants - who are involved in feminist, queer and rights-based activism within NGO, academia, art, and journalistic settings – shared personal experiences as well as experiences of those within their circles.

4.1. DYNAMICS OF ANTI-GENDER MOVEMENTS IN JORDAN

This section explores the dynamics within anti-gender movements in Jordan. Specifically looking at the drivers of backlash, relevant pivotal moments, the tactics used by anti-gender actors, and narratives that aim to demonize feminist and queer activism.

4.1.1. DRIVERS OF ANTI-GENDER BACKLASH

A wide array of social, economic, political, and cultural drivers was highlighted by research participants, all of which stem from three structures of oppression – patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism.

Patriarchal values shape all structures

Participants highlighted how the most intense anti-gender backlash is often related to discussing sexuality and reproductive health, advocating for the right to abortion - even if only in cases of rape and incest- or campaigning for the elimination of child marriage. “The domains we face the most difficulty with within women’s rights [advocacy] are the personal status laws and family laws… when you talk about personal status [laws], men’s authority is threatened,” one participant pointed out. Control of men over women within the family unit is a pillar of the patriarchy. That control is maintained through laws that deprive women and girls of bodily autonomy.

Within this context, patriarchal religious institutions play an important role by mainstreaming specific understandings of Islamic texts that shape laws and perceptions in Jordan and the wider region. Participants pointed out how feminist demands that align with Islamic teachings, but with more progressive interpretations, are aggressively fought against and are accused of being anti-Muslim by various conservative political actors. Three participants noted incidents where they were targeted by anti-gender actors specifically for using Islamic feminism as a framework. “The veiled feminist is a thousand times more dangerous than the blue-haired feminist with a pierced nose”, commented one social media user during a hate campaign against a feminist activist (Suleiman, 2023). This reflects a long-standing anti-gender sentiment amongst conservatives, but it also showcases a rising fear of feminism becoming increasingly relatable to Muslim women in Jordan and beyond.

However, as noted by a participant, “the interpretation of the different verses of the Quran, the interpretation of Islam in general, cannot be separated from the dominant political discourse”. Therefore, it is important to recognize how the authoritarian state structure that is inherently patriarchal contributes to driving anti-gender sentiment in the country, especially given Jordan’s positioning as a stable state within a politically volatile region. To maintain that stability, the state has frequently instrumentalized gender as a bargaining chip to appease those who might otherwise become dissident. “Our job is to maintain the status quo,” an intelligence agent responded when asked why he was interrogating a feminist activist, further specifying that he meant the moral, cultural, religious and political status quo. This blunt statement reflects the state’s interest in maintaining political stability through harassment, intimidation, and prosecution of anyone who

dares to challenge the patriarchal status quo, especially queer folks. This is an important factor in analyzing why homophobia, transphobia and anti-queerness are so common in a repressive authoritarian state like Jordan.

> *Queer identities have the political potential to disrupt the status quo by posing critical questions about family structures, hedonism and belonging.*
>
> *- Queer activist*

Participants involved in feminist activism for decades further highlighted how backlash has always been linked to concerted efforts by various women's rights and feminist actors. "When women are united, they are able to drive change that threatens the patriarchal structure," said one participating activist. Various anti-gender actors find it unacceptable for women to become a political force. Thus, when women's rights and feminist activists manage to do so through alliances on specific issues, they face the harshest and most well-coordinated backlash.

Colonialism and Jordan's national identity

There are clear links between rigid gender stereotypes in Jordan and colonialism. Jordanian men used to present themselves in ways deemed too feminine by British colonialists, who subsequently imposed laws related to gender conformity, modesty, and public conduct within a patriarchal framework – laws that are still used today to prosecute those who drift from the gender "norm", especially gay, bisexual, and queer men. A participant pointed out that "Joseph Massad has spoken about this extensively in his book, Colonial Effects, where he talks about how, in the formation of the Jordanian army very early on in the 1920s, there was a push against any form of non-typical male-presenting features that were customary in this region. So, for instance, wearing eyeliner, having long braids, or even wearing leather long shoes with a certain heel- these were all things that were immediately outlawed by the British in Jordan, and what it means to be a man was completely constructed on that image of a Western European man".

Ultimately, the post-colonial Jordanian national identity heavily emphasized certain forms of masculinity and femininity. For men, macho patriotism was expected, while for women, modesty and service to the nation were. This has led to the practice of questioning the "Jordanianess" of those who do not fully conform to gender stereotypes or those who dare to question them. In a recent anti-gender campaign, for instance, there were calls for withdrawing Jordanian nationality from a prominent feminist activist, claiming that her feminist values are incompatible with Jordanian identity.

Capitalism and neoliberal transformations

The economic transformations that have happened in the country and globally have contributed to the current wave of backlash in multiple ways. Participants highlighted the role of neoliberalism in mainstreaming a damaging variant of feminism and queer activism. Specifically, how "neoliberalism introduced a variant of feminism that focuses on middle-class and upper-middle-class women's interests. So when they [neoliberal feminists] speak of equality, they speak of equality in superficial class-based terms, further marginalizing women of rural, working-class, and Bedouin backgrounds", as one participant put it. Similarly, the neoliberal co-optation of homosexuality within the West, namely through pink-washing and rainbow-capitalist tactics, contributed to creating a perception of queerness as a homogeneous, a-political, white, and middle/upper-class identity.

Additionally, participants highlighted how years of austerity and diminishing public services through neoliberal policies have left poor, working-class, and middle-class men angry. With no political outlet due to suppression by the state, these men's attention is being diverted towards feminist and women's rights defenders as culprits in creating their intolerable material conditions. However, it is

important, as one participating activist pointed out, to avoid portraying anti-gender sentiment as a class-based issue – "it is true that the economic situation for many has worsened, but that does not mean that people stop thinking [critically]. Economic conditions alone are not drivers of [anti-gender] backlash; the many restrictions that people face are."

Capitalism has also allowed for wealthy elites to accumulate power that enables them to influence government decisions in Jordan. Those elites are able to halt certain reforms that hinder their ability to accumulate profit, such as reforms related to labor rights that would improve the conditions of working women, by threatening the government with investment withdrawal.

4.1.2. RECENT PIVOTAL MOMENTS

Participants in the research mentioned specific developments in the past few years that have shifted the political landscape in Jordan towards more repression. These developments were not directly related to feminist and queer activism; however, they led to the closing of civic space, which had direct impacts on feminist and queer activists, groups, and organizations.

> *There is a Jordan specific issue - anything related to organizing comes at a heavy price.*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

Following a strike that lasted a month in 2019, the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate managed to pressure the government to agree to its demands for better working conditions. This was one of the biggest wins for organized activism in the country, which intensified backlash by the state against any form of organizing. The Syndicate was forcibly shut down the following year. All of its branches were forced to close and many of its high-ranking members were arrested.

The COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned by a few participants as an opportunity that various anti-gender actors took advantage of. One participant mentioned how the feeling of isolation coupled with economic stagnation and high unemployment rates during lockdown periods pushed men and boys into finding community and solace within the manosphere. Other participants highlighted how the unprecedented level of state intervention in everyday life during lockdown and curfew periods, along with the loss of access to public spaces, was instrumentalized by the state, putting in place further conditionalities and restrictions on civil society organizations.

The genocide in Gaza was mentioned by many participants for its huge implications on activism in Jordan and the wider region. The genocide created a shock to the belief systems of many, causing refusal and anger towards anyone seen as complicit in normalizing the war crimes against Palestinians. The human rights agenda has come to be viewed as reflecting perceived inconsistencies in Western positions, contributing to skepticism among parts of the public who see it as selective. In this climate, feminist and queer movements, often associated with Western frameworks, have faced increased criticism, shaped in part by reactions to feminist responses following the events of October 7th and by critiques of Israel's use of LGBTQ+ narratives, often referred to as "pinkwashing".

On the level of the state, consistent and large demonstrations in solidarity with Palestine with clear demands became a threat, causing increasing repression of activism. "The 7th of October came, people started organizing across all sectors and social backgrounds because everyone is very angry, and they [the state] let it be... but I think after the Ma'amadani [Baptist Hospital bombing by Israel], the state saw the power of organization that people have, and the amount of anger. And since then, things started going south, and slightly, one protest after another, there was more and more violence," said one participant.

Intersectional feminist and queer activism is inherently decolonial and anti-imperialist. This meant that feminist and queer activists, groups and organizations that have an intersectional approach were the first to get involved in the wave of activism that began with the genocide. The Jordanian state has thus been targeting feminist and queer activists and journalists, not for their feminist and queer activism, but for their support of the Palestinian cause.

In the meantime, Western donors who aimed to suppress supporters of the Palestinian cause across the region by withdrawing funding added another challenge to intersectional feminist and queer activism in Jordan and across SWANA. "In recent years, most of the funding that I see being cut was not necessarily related to anti-gender movements, but more because of stances related to Palestine. I know a [feminist] group that was completely defunded; I know others that lost [partial] funding or lost scholarships for their stances on Palestine from feminist donors and Human Rights donors", highlighted a participant. At the same time, feminist and women's rights organizations that avoided taking public positions against the genocide to comply with the conditionalities of donors were distanced from their communities even further, as one participant highlighted.

> *"It has become very clear that the freedom that donors give you is quite conditional. This adds more challenges to feminists who are continuously fighting to prove that we are an integral part of society, and our concerns are the concerns of our communities".*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

Other pivotal moments were briefly mentioned by participants. These moments included the dismantling of USAID, which had negative repercussions even on groups and organizations that do not directly get USAID funding, as well as a controversy revolving around a planned screening of a queer film in a cultural space in Amman – which renewed anti-queer backlash in the country.

4.1.3. ANTI-GENDER TACTICS

Various tactics are used by different anti-gender actors in Jordan. These tactics differ between actors based on their goals and capacities. They also differ based on who they target, with activists' class, citizenship status, and sexual orientation, among other factors that affect their positionality along capitalist, nationalist, and patriarchal lines, determining the level of intensity and aggression of those tactics.

> *"I have a residency in the country, so he [an intelligence employee] threatened me saying oh yeah, you know, you're going to have to renew your residency soon, so maybe you want to stop doing this work".*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

The state is the most powerful actor

The state uses its institutions to intimidate, interrogate, surveil, and prosecute activists and organizations. These tactics aim to depoliticize women's rights activism, eliminate queer activism, suppress dissent, and maintain Jordan's liberal image internationally.

The state relies on various laws and regulations to impose restrictions or shut down operations, most notably the Cybercrime Law, which is used to prosecute those criticizing government practices. Other laws are selectively applied to silence critics, for example, removing billboards on sexual harassment for "regulatory violations" or closing queer-friendly spaces over fabricated

health standard issues. “This was done just to close the space for three weeks and be able to hold the person in charge for questioning”, noted one participant while shedding light on the type of laws used to harass and intimidate those willing to push patriarchal boundaries. Rights-based organizations are also targeted under claims of corruption or non-compliance with the Associations Law that governs the work of NGOs to suspend their operations and disrupt their work.

“Any voice that drifts from the ‘norm’ is worthy of backlash,” said one participant. The “norm” in this case refers to the state-approved narrative, which is mainstreamed through media, religious, and political institutions to influence the public. If only one voice drifts from that “norm,” it is directly targeted, either publicly or privately. When targeted publicly, it is usually through social media attacks by the public, media outlets, or political figures. When targeted privately, it often comes through direct communication. For instance, if a social media post by an activist is deemed unfavorable to the state’s image, that activist may receive a “friendly” phone call from a relevant state employee asking them to remove it immediately. But when there are multiple voices deviating from the “norm” around a particular issue, gag orders are imposed by public prosecutors. This was the case, for instance, when Fatmeh Abou Malek’s eyes were violently gouged out by her husband in a domestic violence case in 2019 that sparked public outrage and demands for justice by feminists and women’s rights defenders in Jordan. But these gag orders extend beyond gender-related issues. Any topic that opens up space for critique of the state becomes a matter of “public safety” that the state, or “Big Brother,” as one participant put it, is entitled to “protect” the public from.

> *“This person imposing the gag-order, whether prosecutor or judge, he can make this decision on his own. Because he is inside the system, he becomes a fuel of this system.”*
>
> *- Human rights Journalist*

State actors also instrumentalize patriarchal values to shame male relatives of women activists. “If you didn’t raise your daughters well, we will,” said one police officer to a man picking up his daughter from a sit-in against the genocide in Gaza that turned violent as policemen were seen dragging women protestors on the ground, a rare scene in Jordan despite widespread repression. Multiple participants noted how pro-Palestine protests have unleashed unprecedented levels of state violence, specifically against women, including imprisonment, inspections, confiscation of mobile phones, and arrest campaigns at activists’ homes, all part of a broader strategy of shaming protestors’ families. In another example, an activist’s husband was contacted by an employee of the General Intelligence Directorate and was told that he needed to “send his wife in for an interview.” Another participant with an online presence noted how hateful comments on her videos often addressed her family in an attempt to shame them.

However, there are contradictions in how the state operates as an anti-gender actor. One participant highlighted, for instance, how the government shifts its narrative on gender issues depending on its audience and immediate political needs. When facing domestic pressure or moments of controversy, the state often doubles down on anti-gender sentiment to appease the public and religious institutions, while simultaneously presenting a pro-feminist, or at least pro-women and pro-human rights, image to progressive Western donors and diplomatic partners to secure legitimacy and funding. Moreover, the level of coordination and alertness of state institutions regarding feminist and queer activism seems to shift by case, sometimes highly organized and well-informed, other times haphazard and based on inaccurate information or even complete assumptions by individual state employees.

Instigators of anti-gender backlash

Political actors such as parliamentarians[2], state personnel, and media institutions, as well as social media users – namely manosphere influencers and conservative public figures – were mentioned by participants as main contributors to anti-gender campaigns. The tactics these actors use fuel anti-feminist and anti-queer sentiment continuously in the country.

The delegitimization of activists is a tactic used by these various anti-gender actors. "Othering" activists based on identity factors is a common tactic. A Christian feminist activist of Palestinian origin was "othered" and accused of promoting values that contradict Jordanian Muslim traditions, while a Muslim activist of Palestinian origin was accused of being racist against "Jordanian-Jordanians"[3] for exposing human rights violations in the country. Depicting activists as intellectually incoherent is another tactic that is often used by manosphere influencers to delegitimize feminist activism in the region. They attempt to do so through tactics like (1) creating content that "deconstructs feminism" to Arabic-speaking audiences from a patriarchal standpoint, (2) framing feminists as uneducated women who have trauma and are suffering from "psychological and mental disorders", and (3) using arguments by prominent feminist figures like Angela Davis and Silvia Federici to belittle local activists and paint their ideas as incoherent and shortsighted.

Queer activism in Jordan has faced the harshest tactics. With virtually no public support, even from allies who fear prosecution or backlash, homophobic and transphobic actors operate without restraint or accountability. Queer individuals face arrest, death threats, exile, and denial of basic rights (e.g., access to legal counsel when arrested) with impunity. "No one was allowed to enter, not even the lawyer, and they [activists] were describing how they were chained to chairs while they were being questioned and being humiliated, really, by the governor and his team," recalled one participant who was involved in a group that was targeted by various anti-gender actors. However, the same tactics have different impacts on queer activists based on class. This meant, for example, that queer spaces owned by middle- or working-class individuals were permanently closed during the state's anti-queer campaign that began in 2016, while those owned by wealthy or well-connected individuals were closed only temporarily and later reopened.

> *"There's a class-specific tolerance for queer issues in Jordan."*
>
> *- Feminist researcher*

Scapegoating is another tactic used to demonstrate the possible repercussions of feminist activism. The backlash against attorney and activist Hala Ahed was mentioned by many participants as a clear example. Ahed faced an anti-gender campaign after a speech she gave when she accepted the International Front Line Defenders Award in 2023, in which she shed light on human rights violations in Jordan. Publicly, the backlash was tied to a feminist training she led, where the registration form included a question on gender identity with options: "man," "woman," and "other." Although "other" was soon removed to avoid controversy amid growing anti-queer sentiment, the backlash was already underway. She faced defamation, demonization, surveillance, hacking attempts, and death threats in a campaign that lasted over two months. The campaign was transnational, with attacks from Jordan, the SWANA region, and beyond. A religious *fatwa* issued by a *sheikh* in Canada, for instance, circulated during the campaign, declaring that feminist activism equated to "infidelism" and specifically referencing Ahed, further fueling violent threats against her.

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2 Parliamentarians of the Muslim Brotherhood political party have been cited by many participants for their active role in inciting anti-queer sentiment in Jordan. Since May 2025, however, the state has officially outlawed the party's activities in Jordan and criminalized any affiliation with the group in another step that is seen as an indication of increasing repression against organizing.

3 Jordanian-Jordanians refers to holders of Jordanian Nationalities who are originally from Jordan as opposed to Palestinian-Jordanians who are holders of Jordanian Nationalities by are of Palestinian origin.

> *"What happened with Hala in my opinion was related to her acceptance speech for the Front Line Defenders award... who she dedicated the award to, the timing of the speech. She put Jordan in a critical situation."*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

Media institutions contribute to entrenching anti-gender sentiment by giving platforms to anti-gender actors while excluding feminist voices, mainstreaming anti-rights state narratives, and supporting anti-gender figures in inciting moral panic. Anti-gender public figures who engage with specific gender issues are sometimes invited to share their views and debate with activists; however, these figures often refuse to debate strong feminist speakers. The media also seeks to manufacture consent for expanded repression by focusing public attention on specific topics before a shift in the state's tone or actions. "We are currently seeing the sudden exposure of prostitution networks in the media, a topic that was until now deliberately ignored and hidden. This sudden focus on such topics has become an indicator - we are now waiting to see what repression will come out of this", noted one participant.

4.1.4. ANTI-GENDER NARRATIVES

Most anti-gender narratives in Jordan are common across the region and the globe. The narrative about feminism and queerness being a Western import is the most prominent one. Feminist, women's rights, and LGBTQI+ movements have always been portrayed by anti-gender actors as Western agendas that aim to destroy local culture, attack Islam, or tarnish Jordan's reputation. Since such feminist and queer issues are seen as foreign agendas imposed on the country, many claim that they are not actually issues in Jordan and that feminist and queer activists are trying to capitalize on funding and support imperialist agendas.

> *"There has been a huge backlash against them [a queer group] for being foreign-funded, accusing them of having an agenda to change society. Which is quite odd, because the government is American-funded. That allegation falls into itself, because why would funding then be okay if it's received by a governmental body, but not okay when it's received by a small group of, like, 12 people?"*
>
> *- Queer activist*

Activists working on sexuality and queer issues are accused of promoting or encouraging homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, "perversion", and bestiality in state documents as well as by the media and public. This narrative that conflates consensual sex between adults with a practice of animal cruelty or general "perversion" aims to incite moral panic. While the framing of such activism as "promotion" and "encouragement" of homosexuality or sexual relations before marriage, this framing aims to paint feminists and queer activists as "recruiters" to a lifestyle that is foreign to Jordanian culture. There is even a conflation between queerness and satanism – with someone who has a "goth" look being seen as queer, and spaces that are queer-friendly being accused of promoting satanism.

> *"Someone wrote a report and sent it to the intelligence department, [the report said] that this activist 'encourages sexual relationships between humans and animals', and this person was asked to present herself to the Department of Intelligence, and was held in questioning for quite some time."*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

One manosphere content creator compares feminist and queer activists to "cavities" slowly creeping into the homes of people in the region. A video by a Jordanian *Sheikh* warned viewers of the dangers of one feminist organization in the country, stating that people need to take care of their daughters and safeguard them from that organization. These narratives that aim to provoke fear for loved ones are powerful within protective paternalistic communities. As one participant said: "Protectionism is very entrenched in our society. Many parents would say I don't allow my daughter to do this or that because I'm afraid for her".

4.2. DEVELOPMENTS IN FEMINIST AND QUEER ACTIVISM

This section explores the current state of feminist and queer activism in Jordan, with a focus on relevant challenges that existed before the current wave of backlash, and the ways in which activists and organizations are reacting and resisting rising suppression and defamation.

4.2.1. RELEVANT PRE-EXISTING CHALLENGES

Participants highlighted how some women's rights actors in Jordan have been complicit in creating divisions within the movement that serve anti-gender actors, noting issues such as (1) a superficial understanding of feminism and intersectionality as theoretical and practical frameworks, (2) a fear of taking risks for "others" which hinders solidarity and alliance building, (3) an overemphasis on differences in discourse and approaches, (4) and homophobia and transphobia among many engaged in women's rights activism. A participant further clarified that "those who act to police feminist discourses and queer discourses in the region are not necessarily the usual suspects, the Islamists and the tribal leaders, you know, the boogeymen. But there is actually a far more pervasive understanding of women's activism as separate and as isolated from queer activism and queer interests. And they [many of those involved in women's rights activism] would like to keep that separation intact, not because their political survival and their political relevance depend on it, but because they're ideologically against queer issues and queer interests."

> *"This particular woman's organization maybe did not have enough reflection on what feminism means... They saw themselves as separate, focusing on women's issues and women's rights, as separate from sexuality issues and sexuality rights. And in that I felt that they gave themselves the liberty to be feminist yet anti-queer."*
>
> *- Feminist researcher*

The positioning of feminist issues within a development framework rather than a political framework is another challenge within feminist and women's rights activism in the country. Although this positioning creates some space for advocacy within a repressive political landscape, it still limits the movement's demands, isolates the movement from other political actors working on issues such as freedom of speech or labor rights, and depoliticizes feminist activism as a whole. This positioning is also maintained through funding that is channeled toward politically non-confrontational groups, especially those maintaining a non-confrontational discourse on Palestine.

Funding dynamics have greatly contributed to weakening social movements as they (1) fuel competition rather than collaboration, (2) discourage social enterprise models that could provide sustainability, and (3) remain dependent on the foreign and development policies of Western countries, which could change with each new government. The very existence of donor funding was seen by a few participants as a hindrance to building sustainable movements, since dependence on such funding becomes closely tied to movement survival. The tendency to work on donor-identified priorities has been another persisting problem.

> *"The donor today offers funding for a certain priority, we all go work on that priority for a couple of years, then the donor shifts priorities, we move on to work on another topic. But these causes all need accumulative work. We need to set our own priorities, and there are some organizations that do that. They resist this dynamic – but unfortunately, not all organizations do."*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

The funding that comes into the country has also become vital to the Jordanian economy. Civil society as a whole in Jordan has become an economic sector. As such, many enter the "sector" not out of a deep belief in social justice principles but to pursue relatively well-paid careers. Consequently, some participants shared their distrust of civil society actors as potential allies, especially since some of these actors appear to have close ties to state institutions and interests. Funding dynamics have also created a culture of overspending within Jordanian civil society. This has led not only to the NGOization of activism itself but to the NGOization of civic engagement, with participants in activities conducted by NGOs expecting a certain level of comfort in exchange for their engagement.

Additionally, failed attempts at alliance building to face donors' limiting conditionalities amongst civil society actors in general and women's rights and feminist organizations in particular shows that the lack of coordination and consensus does not only lie in fear of state backlash against organized activism – but that there is a culture or fragmentation and a lack of ethical solidarity within Jordanian civil society.

4.2.2. IMPACTS AND RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

The impacts of the current wave of backlash have been severe. "There is immense pressure that is not allowing us to breathe or to speak with a narrative that truly represents us in Jordan," said one participant. Amid this immense pressure, feminist actors have had to take a step back and brace for what comes next, as all indications point to worsening conditions in the near future. Almost all queer activists and groups have been forced to shut down their operations, including the suspension of the support and services they provided "underground" for queer folk.

> *"We have people now who sometimes reach out for help... [saying] 'my father discovered I'm gay, I'm 21, and I'm being beaten up somewhere in the south of the country'. And the last time this happened, I reached out to so many people who could have helped a couple of years ago, they cannot anymore".*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

Prioritizing safety amidst increasing aggression is one of the main strategies being used by various feminist and queer activists and organizations. Many participants noted that they practice self-censorship—sometimes in terms of the language and terminology they use, and other times in the topics they choose to publicly address. But "there is no recipe for this; each group decides what is best for them at a certain time... And sometimes we overthink, and we fail. We stay silent about things we should not be silent over", one participant said, highlighting the challenges in balancing between ensuring safety and standing by feminist principles. Nonetheless, this approach has allowed feminist and queer activists to continue working on "sensitive" topics despite the current climate. Detailed safety measures have also been implemented by some activists and groups to counter any scenario in which they might face physical or digital threats.

Many participants also found safety in maintaining a presence outside the country, with extreme examples such as migration (which is more common among queer activists) and less extreme ones like choosing to conduct most physical events outside Jordan. Some have taken preventative measures and have already registered their organizations outside the country to ensure sustainability in case the state shuts down their operations completely.

Another tactic to prioritize safety is reducing public visibility. This meant, in some cases, that an organization would remove staff information and photos from its website. In other cases, activists have chosen to refrain from writing in Arabic and have even resorted to using pseudonyms in their published material. The promotion of social media posts has also been limited or stopped to avoid reaching wider audiences that might trigger backlash against feminist content. Another strategy has been increasing the use of media formats that are not yet on the radar of the state or the general public.

The growing sense of distrust, or even paranoia, within civil society circles has pushed many feminist and queer activists to focus on community building and the strengthening of personal relationships within feminist and queer groups. This has also included efforts to build informal cross-national solidarity networks, especially with feminist groups working in similarly repressive contexts. “We develop tactics together, we talk about things together, we learn from each other,” mentioned one participant who highlighted that creating these cross-border networks is “a matter of essential need”. From Tunisian feminists’ long history of fighting against oppressive state institutions to Syrian activists’ methods of circumventing surveillance, tactics to counter various challenges are being exchanged among feminists in the region.

> *“I think we have really activated our personal relations, and tried to kind of connect more people to each other... We’re all very tired. But there’s still many people who are really willing to have each other’s backs.”*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

This direct approach of building networks and creating learning spaces to counter anti-gender backlash is aligned with how feminist groups in the region are conducting research and analysis on the Arabic-speaking manosphere as well as rising fascism, authoritarianism, and fundamentalism in order to build informed strategies moving forward.

In the face of coordinated campaigns, those who can afford it have refused to apologize for feminist stances they have taken. This is an important resistance strategy against attempts to force activists into shifting their positions to appease patriarchal institutions and avoid harassment or threats. “I didn’t want to show in any way that I was afraid, or that I was worried, or that I backed down because of the campaign,” highlighted a participating activist who faced anti-gender backlash.

Some participants additionally shared that they consider working to resolve pre-existing challenges facing the movement as a long-term resistance strategy. This includes strengthening grassroots mobilization capacities, seeking alternative funding sources, posing critical questions about accountability and internal differences within movements, and exploring ways to strengthen alliances and solidarity networks.

It is important to note that some participants felt understandably uncomfortable sharing specific resistance strategies, aware that anti-gender actors could treat such published information as intelligence.

5. UNEXPECTED PATTERNS AND INSIGHTS

The data collection process highlighted some unexpected patterns and valuable detailed insights. We highlight the most prominent of which in this chapter.

Despite the literature pointing to the big role of the manosphere in fueling anti-gender and anti-feminist sentiment across the globe, only one participant, who has focused on the Arabic-speaking manosphere in their work, mentioned the manosphere as a major threat to women's rights, queer rights and feminist activism. Many participants referred to social media attacks, including being targeted in videos by well-known manosphere figures. However, the framing of these attacks within a broader international movement, one with ideological frameworks opposing "gender ideology" and feminism, was not prominent among participants.

It was clear from participants' accounts that the "alliance between the state and the street," which we previously discussed in Chapter 1, has an additional layer within the Jordanian context. The state not only allows patriarchal control of men over women within the household in exchange for men's allegiance, but it also promises to keep "men's women" safe from state violence, unless these men fail to control "their" women. This dynamic enables the state to control women's political engagement through the same "alliance," capitalizing on patriarchal values within Jordanian communities.

Jordan's position within the international community, particularly its dependence on external funding and its concern with maintaining its liberal image, could offer a few insights into bottlenecks for gender related legal changes, both positive and negative. To maintain its image as a pro-women and pro-rights actor in the eyes of Western international partners and donors, some participants believed that the state avoids rolling back women's and queer rights, such as criminalizing homosexuality, despite anti-gender sentiments among political actors and the public. Within this context, one participant pointed out that "there were attempts in the [Jordanian] parliament to follow in the footsteps of Iraq's recent anti-gender laws[4], but those attempts failed because of funding dependency, as there is a chance funding would be cut if Jordan makes such changes". At the same time, to ensure that funding continues to flow while also appeasing the public and conservative religious and political actors, the state refrains from advancing progressive reforms that could bring gender justice closer. With the global rise of right-wing and conservative politics, along with the shifts within funding priorities across the globe, this balance could shift, and the possibility of rolling back gender rights could become a greater threat.

One participant noted that some women's rights actors tend to be elitist, not necessarily in their demands but in their organizing and approaches to change. These actors focus on working with and appealing to decision-makers in a top-down approach that excludes women directly affected by the issues they are working on, or they tend to fixate on demands of political inclusion when most women are concerned with economic demands. This, in turn, alienates the majority of women in the country from feminist activism and greatly limits the possibility of mobilizing for change. However, another participant noted that working directly with decision-makers might be one of the successful strategies in making small legal changes in favor of women because this minimizes the risks of backlash that comes with organizing and mobilizing efforts.

When asked about recommendations to improve current conditions, none of the participants gave recommendations related to state laws or policies. This shows complete distrust that advocacy and legal change to improve civic engagement, freedom of speech, or gender rights are possible in the near future. Many expect worsening conditions and are putting their trust and energy in reliable groups they work with, as well as progressive international partners. Therefore, most recommendations shared, which will be listed in the next chapter, were related to organizing, alliance building, or funding criteria and dynamics.

4 Iraq has legally banned the use of the words "gender" and "homosexuality" (Amnesty, 2023), and has passed laws to prosecute "same-sex conduct and transgender expression" in recent years (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

Despite existing networks and coalitions within Jordanian civil society, many participating feminists, queer, and human rights activists shared their disappointment in the lack of solidarity among different civil society actors. Many noted that feminist activism in the country does not exist as a movement, and that the lack of coordination, trust, and consensus on basic feminist and human rights principles among different women's rights, human rights, and feminist actors, coupled with backlash against any form of organizing, makes it difficult to build movements in the country. Young activists and less established groups and organizations felt like they lacked support, yet chose to take principled positions and solidarity actions despite the risks they faced. Established women's organizations, which can be less vulnerable to attacks, are hesitant to take risks and solidarity actions, especially in terms of "crossing the line" between feminism and queer activism.

There was clarity among many participants that the fight against anti-gender movements is not local but international. Because of this clarity, and due to the tensions existing within the civil society landscape in Jordan, many groups are leaning towards forging solidarity networks and alliances with groups and organizations outside the country.

> *"As radical feminists who oppose the concept of states and borders, it's contradictory to maintain a narrow national focus."*
>
> *- Feminist activist*

The Gaza genocide was expected to be an important political development in relation to anti-gender movements. But the repercussions of the genocide were discussed at length by most participants in the research, making it a bigger factor in the challenges faced by activists than previously expected. The genocide exposed many issues with existing dynamics related to feminist and queer activism in the country and added immense pressure on feminist and queer groups that coincided with the current wave of anti-gender backlash. Moreover, the genocide and broader Israeli aggression in the region were seen as an existential threat and a direct risk to movement building in general, and feminist and queer activism in particular. This is due to the level of aggression coupled with the disregard for international law, international humanitarian law, and other conventions, which may indicate a form of expansion of capitalist and imperialist control in the region. This expanded control is perceived as an indication of further suppression of social movements and worsening conditions for entire populations in the region.

Lastly, despite a lack of imaginative politics among social movements in the country, there seems to be an appetite among young feminists for more radical feminist concepts and approaches, especially in this critical moment in time, which was acknowledged as such by all participants.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we summarize the main findings from the literature review and the primary data collection process. We also provide recommendations for various actors that can advance gender justice in Jordan despite all the current challenges. Finally, we highlight possible research directions to close knowledge gaps that were found during the research process.

6.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

We set out to examine the rise of anti-gender movements globally and within the SWANA region, with a focused case study on Jordan. We situated the current wave of anti-gender backlash within broader authoritarian, patriarchal, capitalist, and (neo)colonial systems of oppression, arguing that anti-gender movements are not isolated phenomena but are integral to expanding authoritarian governance amidst multi-layered global, regional, and national crises. As one participating activist in this research highlighted, rising anti-gender sentiment and action across the globe are manifestations of "the desperation of states to maintain the status quo at a time when the status quo is exploding."

Across the world, anti-gender movements have become increasingly organized, transnational, and influential. They frame "gender ideology" as a threat to family, religion, culture, and "the nation", often portraying feminist and LGBTQI+ advocacy and activism as foreign or imperialist agendas. Drawing on the work of feminist scholars like Judith Butler, the research highlighted how these movements instrumentalize moral panic to legitimize state violence, surveillance, censorship, and suppression of social movements. Conservative international organizations and right-wing political actors, alongside religious institutions and manosphere figures, play key roles in spreading anti-gender narratives across borders.

Within SWANA, authoritarian regimes have created fertile ground for recurring waves of anti-gender backlash. The research emphasized how states in the region mobilize patriarchy as a political tool, exchanging men's dominance over women for political obedience, while using gender as a bargaining chip to appease various audiences and to deflect accountability for systemic failures. The research also highlighted how patriarchal views and values among societies across the region have meant that state repression of feminist and queer activism is practiced with the support and participation of religious institutions, conservative political figures, and the general public.

The Jordanian case study illustrates these dynamics and explores relevant developments within the national context. While Jordan has historically allowed some space for civic engagement, recent years have seen a marked erasure of civic freedoms. This closing of civic space has been accelerated by various pivotal moments, including the closure of the Jordanian Teachers Syndicate, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the genocide in Gaza.

When exploring developments related to feminist and queer activism in Jordan, it was clear that activists, groups, and organizations have long been constrained by state repression, conservative social norms, and donor-driven NGOization. Earlier gains, including modest legal reforms, have not been able to challenge patriarchal structures. This means that women and queer folks in Jordan continue to face systemic discrimination and violence within social, political, economic, and cultural spheres. In recent years, however, a new generation of feminist and queer activists has emerged, adopting intersectional, decolonial, and explicitly political approaches that aim to counter existing constraints. These activists engage in knowledge production, digital organizing, and cross-border solidarity building, influencing feminist discourses despite many risks.

The findings from primary data collection demonstrated that anti-gender backlash in Jordan is driven by intertwined patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist forces and dynamics. However, anti-gender actors in Jordan are neither organized nor strategic. Even the most well-equipped actor – the state – has a haphazard approach within the context of anti-gender action. Yet, long-standing anti-gender and anti-feminist positions among conservative political actors, manosphere figures, traditional

media, and the general public, as well as conservative civil society actors, pose an immediate threat to feminist and queer activists and organizations at a moment when the state is actively suppressing opposition and dissent with increasing violence. These anti-gender actors are using a wide array of tactics such as legal harassment, surveillance, smear campaigns, scapegoating, media manipulation, and incitement of moral panic that conflates feminism and queerness with immorality, foreign interference, and societal decay. These tactics aim to depoliticize feminist activism, eliminate queer activism, and suppress dissent to maintain patriarchal, nationalist, and neoliberal structures.

The repercussions of the above on feminist and queer activism in Jordan have been severe. Queer activists and groups have faced particularly devastating repression, often shaped by class and citizenship status. The LGBTQI+ community– especially queer men, trans folks, and those involved in activism – have been subjected to arrests, death threats, exile, and denial of various basic rights. This led to queer groups being forced to shut down almost all of the operations and services that they offered to support the queer community. At the same time, feminist actors have been forced to take a step back and prioritize safety and sustainability while forging cross-border solidarity networks and creating learning spaces that can enable them to face increased backlash.

6.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL ACTORS

Based on the research findings, this section highlights recommendations for various actors that have important roles to play in countering anti-gender backlash and expanded state repression in Jordan. These recommendations are not exhaustive and only focus on the ways in which various actors can support feminist and queer activists, groups, and organizations working to improve the conditions of women and queer folk in all their diversity.

6.2.1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DONORS

International donors hold significant financial and political power that can either support feminist and queer movements or further constrain them under repressive conditions. To counter the current wave of anti-gender backlash in Jordan, donors must shift away from conditional funding models and instead adopt approaches that strengthen movements' autonomy, safety, and sustainability.

Donors should prioritize long-term, flexible funding for intersectional and transformative feminist and queer actors, including informal groups and activists working inside Jordan and in the diaspora. Funding guidelines must adapt to volatile political contexts by allowing flexibility in deliverables, priorities, timelines, and thematic focus if and when activists, groups, or organizations find it necessary to make such changes. Short-term, project-based funding cycles should be replaced with core support that enables actors within movements to set their own agendas and respond strategically to changing conditions.

Donors should also support alternative and sustainable funding models, such as feminist social enterprises, pooled funds, and collective resource-sharing mechanisms, instead of deepening dependency on externally driven project cycles that undermine movement continuity.

Financial and administrative guidelines must be adapted to repressive environments. This includes permitting funding to be channeled through bank accounts outside Jordan when necessary, minimizing visibility requirements, and avoiding reporting and branding practices that might expose activists to surveillance or targeting.

To reduce fragmentation and competition, donors should actively support collaboration and solidarity rather than fostering isolated or competitive projects. This includes funding joint initiatives, shared infrastructure, regional networks, and cross-border feminist coordination between actors in Jordan and across the Global South.

Crucially, donor institutions must uphold principled positions aligned with feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial values. This requires ending political conditionality, particularly around Palestine and in relation to critical political perspectives on global power relations, and ensuring that decision-makers within donor organizations possess contextual knowledge and the ability to engage with political and cultural complexity without holding sentiments of moral superiority. Selective solidarity and punitive defunding actively contribute to backlash and delegitimization on the ground.

Finally, donors must recognize their own structural role in shaping civic space and power relations. Supporting feminist and queer movements in Jordan requires moving beyond risk management and reputation protection toward genuine solidarity, accountability, and trust.

6.2.2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL FEMINIST AND QUEER ACTORS

Regional and international feminist and queer groups and organizations are vital allies in resisting anti-gender backlash in Jordan. These actors can play a critical role in alleviating the political, material, and psychological pressures facing feminist and queer actors.

Creating solidarity networks and alliances that are **accountable and reciprocal**, moving beyond symbolic support toward shared political commitment and risk, is a vital step. Such solidarity must be explicitly anti-racist, decolonial, and anti-capitalist. It must amplify locally grounded feminist and queer knowledge production and resist Western-centric feminist and queer approaches and assumptions. Such solidarity also entails **creating and maintaining spaces for mutual learning and strategic exchange on** countering anti-gender backlash and authoritarian control. Cross-border feminist solidarity networks and alliances should be treated as essential for survival, not as supplementary work.

Given the acute vulnerability of queer communities in Jordan, regional and international advocates and supporters of the LGBTQI+ community should **provide direct material support** and services to queer folks, as almost all relevant support services have been forced to shut down. This includes assistance with emergency housing, access to remote or safe employment opportunities, legal aid, mental health and psychosocial support, and relocation pathways when necessary.

Ultimately, the research underscores that regional and international feminist and queer actors are not neutral observers. Their choices, what they fund and amplify, as well as who they mentor or materially support, directly impact whether feminist and queer actors in Jordan can survive, adapt, and resist amid intensifying backlash.

6.2.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FEMINIST AND QUEER ACTORS IN JORDAN

Feminist and queer activists, groups, and organizations working in Jordan – including those working on women's rights advocacy without identifying as feminist - are operating under intensifying repression and backlash. Sustaining resistance in this context requires principled solidarity, strategic adaptability, and collective care.

Activists and organizations should prioritize building intersectional coalitions while remaining attentive to power dynamics within feminist spaces. Within Jordan, coalitions or alliances will not be possible without shared values that recognize the importance of theoretical intersectional feminist frameworks in building effective transformative strategies towards gender justice. Effective solidarity among these various actors in Jordan requires consistency and a willingness to bear political cost alongside those most at risk. Cross-border, especially cross-regional, coalitions can be fostered through mutual support and recognition of shared struggle. Within this context, and as advised

by participants, feminist and queer activists must refrain from monopolizing suffering despite the horrific events happening in our region, but rather recognize that similar suffering at the hands of the same perpetrators is happening across the Global South.

Collective safety, care, and resource-sharing must be centered in any resistance strategy. Strengthening personal relationships and building trust amongst activists as well as developing holistic safety protocols, are already being practiced and have had positive impacts on activists' wellbeing. However, activists and groups could find ways to better pool and share resources, be it financial, legal, technical, or emotional.

To resist fragmentation and co-optation, feminist and queer actors should take collective and firm positions against donor conditionalities, particularly those that depoliticize discourses, narrow demands, or punish political positions. Coordinated refusal and shared red lines can reduce individual risk and strengthen movement autonomy.

Given the accelerated shrinking of civic space, activists should diversify their strategies and tools, moving beyond conventional NGO advocacy, public campaigns, or social media visibility. This includes experimenting with alternative organizing methods, informal networks, cultural work, community-based education, mutual aid, and low-visibility political practices that maintain momentum while reducing risk. Activists and organizations are encouraged to think outside the box, recognizing that survival under repression depends not on a single strategy, but on adaptability, creativity, and sustained collective resistance.

6.3. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Multiple areas that this research addressed can be further investigated and analyzed to strengthen feminist and queer activism in the context of Jordan. For instance, the literature review and primary data collected did not reveal whether anti-gender actors in Jordan have links to regional or international anti-gender movements. This is important to know in order to better design resistant strategies. Additionally, due to various accounts of interviewees highlighting anti-gender sentiment among civil society actors in Jordan, it could be beneficial to study gender perceptions among those leading and working with civil society organizations. This can help feminist and queer activists and organizations in selecting possible allies in the country. Finally, as many participants highlighted the need to explore alternative funding mechanisms for social movements, research on possible entry ways and different approaches to funding that take contextual circumstances into consideration (e.g., exploring relevant national laws) can be very helpful to feminist and queer activists.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Can you describe a specific experience where you witnessed or faced backlash against your activism or organization?
  - » Follow-up: How did this backlash affect your work or the community you serve?

- What do you believe are the primary drivers (social, cultural, economic, political) of this backlash in your country/the region?
  - » Follow-up: Are there particular events or policies that have intensified this backlash?

- What strategies have you or your organization implemented to resist or counteract this backlash?
  - » Follow-up: How effective have these strategies been, and what challenges have you encountered?

- Can you speak to any policies or government actions that have either helped or hindered your efforts?
  - » Follow-up: What changes or reforms would you recommend to improve the situation for activists?

- What role do you see for alliances between feminist, LGBTQI+, and other rights-based movements in your country or the region?
  - » Follow-up: Can you share examples of successful collaborations or areas where more collaboration is needed?

- What are the biggest risks or threats to the sustainability of the feminist or LGBTQI+ movements in your context?
  - » Follow-up: What support or resources are lacking to address these risks?

ANNEX 2 – LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Code	Position	Affiliation	Focus
P001	Activist	Independent	Online knowledge production
P002	Expert	NGO	Feminism and Women's rights
P003	Activist	Independent	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
P004	Journalist	NGO	Human rights
P005	Researcher	Independent	knowledge production and research
P006	Researcher	Independent	Academia
P007	Activist	Independent	Feminism and women's rights
P008	Activist	NGO	Feminism and gender justice
P009	Activist	Independent	Feminism and women's rights

ANNEX 3 – SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Section 1: Demographics

1. Country of residence:

- ❍ Jordan
- ❍ Abroad

2. Gender:

- ❍ Female
- ❍ Male
- ❍ Non-binary
- ❍ Other

3. What type of activism are you affiliated with?

- ❍ Feminist movement/organization
- ❍ LGBTQI+ movement/organization
- ❍ Human rights organization
- ❍ Other (please specify)

4. How long have you been active in human right/feminist/LGBTQI+ activism?

- ❍ Less than 1 year
- ❍ 1-3 years
- ❍ 3-5 years
- ❍ More than 5 years

Section 2: Backlash Against Feminist and LGBTQI+ Movements

5. Which forms of backlash have you experienced or witnessed? (Select all that apply):

- ❍ Online harassment and abuse
- ❍ Media smear campaigns
- ❍ Legal restrictions or threats
- ❍ Physical violence or threats of violence
- ❍ Restriction of funding/resources
- ❍ Other (please specify)

6. In your view, which of the following factors contribute the most to the backlash? (Select what applies):

- ❍ Religious and cultural norms
- ❍ Patriarchy and gender inequality
- ❍ Political instability or authoritarian regimes
- ❍ Media narratives and public opinion
- ❍ External pressure (e.g., international actors, foreign policies)
- ❍ Other (please specify)

7. How effective do you think the following strategies have been in countering backlash in your context? (Rate each):

- ❍ Grassroots mobilization: Very Effective / Somewhat Effective / Not Effective / Don't Know
- ❍ Advocacy and lobbying: Very Effective / Somewhat Effective / Not Effective / Don't Know
- ❍ Media campaigns: Very Effective / Somewhat Effective / Not Effective / Don't Know
- ❍ Legal challenges: Very Effective / Somewhat Effective / Not Effective / Don't Know
- ❍ International support/alliances: Very Effective / Somewhat Effective / Not Effective / Don't Know

8. How would you rate the support provided by current policies and laws for feminist and LGBTQI+ activism in your country?

- ❍ Strongly supportive
- ❍ Somewhat supportive
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat obstructive
- ❍ Strongly obstructive

Section 3: Open-ended Questions

9. What are some successful strategies or approaches you have seen to counter backlash, and why do you think they worked?

10. What are the main challenges you face in building alliances across feminist, LGBTQI+, and other movements?

11. What policy changes or protections do you believe would make the biggest difference for feminist and LGBTQI+ movements in your country?



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