

Conservative Ideologies: Implications on Domestic Violence Protections for Women

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Abstract

Violence against women, particularly in the context of domestic violence, is an ongoing health and human rights crisis. Domestic abuse is the most prevalent form of violence against women globally. Although there are various domestic and international legislations addressing the epidemic, deeply-rooted conservative ideologies and movements pose a threat to these protections for women. This paper is based on research collected from international organizations and databases, as well as varying analyses. Through analyzing policies and conservative movements mainly in Central Asian and Eastern European countries, we see that conservative ideologies, with religious ties and entrenched focuses on family values, influence the loosening of protections on violence against women. We see religious-conservative parties shining the focus on family values and bypassing protective legislation prioritizing female security. This paper provides a framework to take note of the permeation of far-right rhetoric that influences certain political decisions that ultimately impose a threat to women's safety and health. Increases in conservatism in states with active far-right movements detected through the use of language, threaten the protection of women against violence, especially domestic violence.

Keywords: domestic violence, gender violence, family values, conservatism

I. A Background on Domestic Violence

It was only in 1993, after the World Conference of Human Rights, that violence against women (VAW) began to be acknowledged as a human rights concern.¹ To put this into perspective, this was the same year Bill Clinton was sworn into office. The introduction of the internet, the discovery of the *Titanic*, and the birth of the first human conceived as a result of in-vitro fertilization (IVF) all

happened before this recognition. Before 1993, humanity had already made great strides in technology, science, and culture, while the systemic issue of violence against women remained overlooked. In the same year as the 1993 Conference, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was established to provide an international framework for action.²

¹ *WHO Multi-Country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women*. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2005.

² "[Global Norms and Standards: Ending Violence against Women](#)." UN Women. 2019.

We cannot talk about domestic violence without talking about violence against women, as one is a form of the other. Violence against women is defined by the United Nations as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."³ Most abuse experienced by women is perpetrated by an intimate partner.

Domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence or domestic abuse, is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviors."⁴ The United Nations makes clear that this behavior "is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner."⁵ Both former and current partners are taken into account when speaking about domestic violence. Although several forms of domestic violence exist, this paper focuses on male-to-female intimate partner violence. This kind of abuse is extremely prevalent and does not discriminate; women all over the world face domestic violence at alarmingly high rates.

1.1 Rates of Violence

A study conducted by the World Health Organization (Prevalence Estimates) containing data from 2000-2018 on

³ "[Violence against Women](#)." World Health Organization. 2021.

⁴ "[Intimate Partner Violence](#)." World Health Organization. 2022.

⁵ "[What Is Domestic Abuse?](#)" United Nations. 2024.

violence against women indicated that since the age of 15, up to 753 million women had been subjected to physical or sexual violence by their partner at least once. Around one in three women have experienced physical or sexual domestic abuse, sexual violence from someone who was not their partner, or both at least once in their lives. The statistics for women aged between 15 and 19 years old who have already experienced physical or sexual abuse at least once from their partner is around one in four.⁶

Robust legislation protecting women from violence is still lacking in many countries. Although there are advances, development is slow: data from 2022 showed that only 14 percent of the world's women were living in countries with elaborate legislation aimed at protecting their human rights.⁷ One of the 2024 reports the UN released establishes that countries with domestic violence legislation have lower rates of domestic abuse than those without legislation⁸.

The WHO's Prevalence Estimates⁹ show that the countries with the most elevated rates of intimate partner violence affecting women ages 15-49 are the least developed. The next highest rates belong to Southern Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries. Europe has lower rates in comparison. Although the rates of VAW in Europe are lower than in other regions, we will see that violence against women is still a systemic issue that is not

⁶ *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018*. Geneva, World Health Organization; 2021.

⁷ "[Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women](#)." UN Women. 2024.

⁸ *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024*. New York: UN-Women and DESA. 2024.

⁹ *Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018*. Geneva, World Health Organization; 2021.

sufficiently or appropriately addressed in these areas. It is probable that as some European countries are more developed than those of other regions mentioned above, there is more elaborate legislation addressing the issue, and therefore, the rates are lower.

However, having more legislation on VAW and domestic violence protections does not necessarily indicate a dramatic decrease in these assaults. The Prevalence Estimates report indicates that “these estimates show unequivocally that violence against women is pervasive globally”. In 2023, Spain saw violence against women increase by more than 12 percent, and domestic violence increase by 12.6%.¹⁰ France sees femicide at a rate of once every three days¹¹. According to Amnesty International, around 33% of women¹² in the Netherlands have experienced domestic violence. Overall in the European Union, violence against women affects one in three women¹³. Nonetheless, legislation and language are important when addressing VAW and intimate partner violence, as they demonstrate a commitment to the protection of women and enhance widespread education. Furthermore, the integration of policies allows for a monitoring process, crucially needed as comprehensive data on prevalence rates is still lacking. Homicide, for example, is not legal in most countries and this does not

mean that people will not commit the crime. It does, however, allow for a recognized framework of human rights and this language has slowly integrated into our society’s shared value system.

One of the objectives of this paper, therefore, is to illustrate that higher protections eliminate all abuses, but rather to shed light on the importance of how language is used and the implications it has on legislation.

II. The Istanbul Convention

2.1 Background

Along with promoting democracy and the rule of law, fighting for human rights is at the heart of the Council of Europe’s mission. Founded in 1949 and consisting of 46 member states, this human rights organization has developed hundreds of international treaties and initiatives in line with its mission. Since the 1990s, various of these initiatives have focused on violence against women (including domestic violence). In May 2005, member states of the Council of Europe adopted an Action Plan which centered on combating VAW. This Plan consisted of two measures: setting up a task force and implementing a campaign, both named to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence. The task force, composed of eight international experts in the field, would focus on evaluating progress and establishing tools to measure it. The campaign to Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence did just that, cooperating with international organizations and European actors. This campaign ran from 2006-2008 and

¹⁰ Instituto Nacional de Estadística. “Statistics on Domestic Violence and Gender Violence: Year 2023.”

¹¹ Boudoussier, Lisa. “Rape, Assault, Harassment: What Do the Numbers Show about Violence against Women in France?” *Le Monde*. November 2024.

¹² Amnesty International. *Netherlands: Take Urgent Action to Address Gender-Based Psychological Violence*. 2024.

¹³ *EU Gender-Based Violence Survey*. European Institute for Gender Equality. 2024.

was one of the Council of Europe's most successful campaigns.¹⁴ It highlighted the severity of this issue in Europe and the need for a well-integrated, standardized legal process that would ensure protection for survivors across the continent. In 2008, a committee was established to draft a convention on this matter. From here, the human rights treaty known as the Istanbul Convention was born.

2.2 *The Istanbul Convention and its Importance*

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, was adopted in 2011 in Istanbul, Turkey, and entered into force in 2014¹⁵. It is, in its essence, a form of protection. Its purpose is not only to safeguard women against all violence but also to promote gender equality and encourage international cooperation to achieve these goals.

This Convention is significant because it is the first legally binding instrument in Europe that focuses specifically on the protection from and prevention of gender-based violence.¹⁶ Although before this convention there were individual national legislations on violence against women, there was no harmonized framework attacking the issue within Europe.

¹⁴ Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs. 2008. "[The Council of Europe Campaign to Combat Violence against Women, Including Domestic Violence.](#)" *Council of Europe*.

¹⁵ Đurković, Miša. "Disputes Regarding the Ratification of the Istanbul Convention in Europe." *Sociologija* 64, no. 4 (2022): 605-622.

¹⁶ Jurviste, Ulla, and Rosamund Shreeves. 2018. "The Istanbul Convention: A Tool to Tackle Violence against Women and Girls." European Parliamentary Research Service.

The Istanbul Convention presents a standard definition for and criminalizes violence against women. It is not only persecutory and protective, it also prioritizes providing accessible services for those affected and at risk. Furthermore, it holds states accountable through monitoring. The criminalization of offenses requires states to act against violations and take part in the monitoring process. States that have ratified the treaty are held responsible for any lack of action on their end against these violations of human rights and discrimination. Monitoring and accountability are imperative when it comes to regulating violence against women. Without these mechanisms in place, the challenge of protecting those affected is enhanced. Rates of violence and actions taken as a consequence of these violations are variables that help us better understand how to address the issue.

2.3 *Criticisms of the Convention*

The Istanbul Convention is unique in many ways, one of which is that it is the first international document to define gender in a social context rather than a biological one. Article 3 states that "Gender is defined as the socially constructed roles...and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men."¹⁷ This is the most targeted aspect of the Convention, as it is easily argued against by conservative groups. "Gender ideology"¹⁸ in many cases, and a religious context, is considered a

¹⁷ Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*. 2011.

¹⁸ "Gender Theory"/'Gender Ideology' – Select Teaching Resources." 2019. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2019.

“threat” to traditional family and societal values – straying from our biological identity deconstructs the foundation and basis of the family. The concept of gender ideology is often used as a rhetorical weapon by conservative parties¹⁹ to suggest a threat to sexuality and traditional (heterosexual) marriage.

Conservative movements are heavily influenced by religious values²⁰, and this, in turn, often leads to policies (or lack of) negatively affecting women. Whether we are talking about anti-gender movements, reproductive control, or domestic violence – all in context and the name of the ‘family unit’ – women and girls are at the center of the consequences imposed.

There are currently 39 states that have ratified this Convention and six that have signed it but not yet ratified it (Armenia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, and Slovakia), which means that it is not legally binding for those six states yet. Whether states have signed and/or ratified (or neither) this Convention can be used as an indicator of how much power certain conservative ideologies hold in those states.

Bulgaria, for example, has established that due to the definition of gender provided, the Convention does not align with its “traditional family values and beliefs.”²¹ The state argues that this will influence supporting legislation

on same-sex marriage and younger generations to identify as transgender.

Hungary’s concerns about the Convention lie in the belief that the treaty promotes gender ideology that is “destructive”²² and also promotes illegal immigration. Article 60 of the treaty protects asylum-seeking due to gender-based violence. It requires parties to recognize violence against women as a form of persecution and once these cases are recognized, those affected “shall be granted refugee status”²³. Hungary also argues that there is sufficient existing protection on VAW, however, there is resistance to even recognize the term “gender” legally²⁴ and there is little access to gender studies - an approach taken by far-right parties to keep political discourse focused on the family²⁵.

Slovakia, similarly to Bulgaria, claims that the Convention promotes a gender ideology that is a threat to “traditional family values.”²⁶ The state fears that this gender ideology will promote homosexuality, which does not have widespread social acceptance in the state of Slovakia.

2.4 Turkey and the Convention

Turkey is the first and, so far, the only country to have completely withdrawn from the Convention; it did so in 2021. Although his country was the first to sign the convention, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his

¹⁹ Gwiazda A (2023). Gender Ideologies and Polish Political Parties. Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics 58, 641–660. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.57>

²⁰ Baytok, Cemre. “The Istanbul Convention, gender politics and beyond: Poland and Turkey.” *Berlin: Hafıza Merkezi* (2021).

²¹ Mole, Nuala. 2023. “[The Council of Europe and Violence against Women-Past, Present and Future.](#)”

²² Mole, “[The Council of Europe and Violence against Women.](#)”

²³ Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Convention*.

²⁴ Đurković, “[Disputes,](#)” 616.

²⁵ Kourou, Nur Sinem. Right-wing populism and anti-gender movements: The same coin with different faces. Global Political Trends Center (GPoT), 2022.

²⁶ Mole, “[The Council of Europe and Violence against Women.](#)”

government claimed that the Convention is “incompatible with Turkey’s social and family values” due to its requirement to protect the LGBTQ community.²⁷ We have seen that this convention protects those regardless of sexual or gender identity, and this is exactly what the government used as its justification for withdrawing from the agreement. Withdrawing means that Turkey is no longer legally bound to fulfill the human rights protection requirements of this Convention nor held accountable for that fulfillment. Revoking this commitment poses a threat to the safety and well-being of women and girls in the country, as the WHO’s Database on the Prevalence of VAW placed Turkey at the top with rates of intimate partner violence at 32%²⁸ - the highest in Europe.

Since withdrawing from the Convention, Turkey has argued that it still has measures in place for combating violence against women, including a new action plan announced in 2021. However, the plan makes no mention of previous reports/analyses nor any of the specific recommendations given to Turkey by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) regarding the prevalence of VAW in the country. Furthermore, the term “gender equality” is specifically omitted. Mor Çatı, a women’s rights group, emphasizes that this indicates the government’s political stance regarding men’s and women’s place in society and

the fact that it is being reflected in policy documents exposes the approach it is taking regarding the issue at large.²⁹

A report from Human Rights Watch establishes that the Turkish state repeatedly fails to “provide effective protection from domestic violence, to assist survivors of domestic violence or to punish perpetrators of attacks on women, even when the perpetrator is a serial abuser.”³⁰ The consequences that arise when violence against women is not rigorously protected are severe, especially in a country like Turkey where the rates of gender-based violence are so high. When around four out of ten women in Turkey have experienced intimate partner violence, there is a contradiction between the concept of “family values” and the lack of meaningful and effective implementation of protective legislation on this kind of violence.

Coverage of the situation emphasizes that withdrawal from the Convention demonstrated a lack of determination to fight for gender equality³¹ and the protection of women. By doing this, Turkey set a principle: that the protection of women is not a priority against the concerns of sexual orientation, social definitions of gender, and above all, “traditional” family values.

2.4 Poland and the Convention

²⁷ Human Rights Watch, [Combatting Domestic Violence in Turkey: The Deadly Impact of Failure to Protect](#) (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2022).

²⁸ World Health Organization. “Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence against Women - National Estimates 2000-2018.” *Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women*, 2018.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, [Combatting Domestic Violence in Turkey](#), 16.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, [Combatting Domestic Violence in Turkey](#), 1.

³¹ Human Rights Watch, [Combatting Domestic Violence in Turkey](#), 5.

Although Poland ratified the Istanbul Convention in 2015, there was a great deal of debate and discourse damaging the significance of the treaty by conservative groups with support from the Catholic Church. A creator of a parliamentary group named “Stop Gender Ideology” claimed that the Istanbul Convention “...is a legal monster which does not combat violence. It only meets the demands of LGBT communities.”³² Furthermore, the Catholic Church challenged the document by asserting that “the Convention is based on ideological and false assumptions...[and] introduces in Article 3 the definition of gender and presupposes that gender can be chosen; and promotes in Article 14 non-stereotypical gender roles, that is, homosexuality and transsexualism.” Eventually, the President at the time proceeded with the ratification process, however, these conservative discourses have remained.

In 2021, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) of Poland officially called for withdrawing from the Istanbul Convention, although this did not come to be. The prime minister at the time, Mateusz Morawiecki, had expressed the government’s apprehension towards the so-called promotion of “gender ideology” in the bill.³³ This again demonstrates the prioritization of concerns from conservative groups, putting women’s safety many steps behind. The government tried to influence not only the

public’s opinion on the convention but also other governments that had not yet ratified it.

An alternative treaty named the Convention on the Rights of the Family was drafted by conservative groups re-framing the focus on protecting traditional family values. It was created to include strict regulations that could end up harming women more than protecting them. More specifically, an article of this draft stated that authorities should “not, in any way, affect the reduction of fertility or make it difficult for families to have children.”³⁴

The statement can be interpreted to put further restrictions on abortion and access to birth control, something that is highly concerning for women facing sexual violence. We have seen that the rates of rape in intimate relationships are astonishingly high, and clauses like these offer difficulties rather than protection for women suffering from domestic abuse. This clause would be problematic for pregnant women looking to receive abortion care because they were raped by their partners. In its attempt to create alliances on this front, the Polish government targeted countries that had not yet ratified the Convention to convince them to join this new alternative international agreement.

Tensions eased when Donald Tusk, Poland’s new prime minister, announced on January 30 that his government has no intention of withdrawing from the bill. The Chancellery of the Prime Minister echoed Tusk’s statement that “protecting women and children from violence is something that should never be the subject of a

³² Gwiazda, Anna, and Liana Minkova. “Gendered Advocacy Coalitions and the Istanbul Convention: A Comparative Analysis of Bulgaria and Poland.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 26, no. 1 (2024): 31-53.

³³ Ciobanu, Claudia, and Jules Eisenchteter. “[Women’s Rights in Poland and Czechia: Seeing Past the Istanbul Convention.](#)” *Balkan Insight*. 2024.

³⁴ Ciobanu, Claudia. “[Poland Begins Push in Region to Replace Istanbul Convention with ‘Family Rights’ Treaty.](#)” *Balkan Insight*. 2020.

political argument, but a shared concern....” Although this is certainly a step in retaining what protection there is for women, it does not undo the campaigns and the efforts of conservative groups to pull others in the opposite direction.

2.5 Conservative Movements

Right-wing movements in Turkey, Poland, and other countries are misconstruing the purpose of the Convention for political gain.³⁵ Using “social and family values” is a traditional and solid ground for these movements to maintain or gain momentum, especially as they tie into religious beliefs. A study commissioned by the European Parliament found that “Resistance to the Convention has been led by conservative political leaders and religious actors. A worrying thread among the factors contributing to the opposition to ratification is the involvement of religious actors in political decision-making...”³⁶ We see that although Turkey announced a new action plan to combat violence against women, it did not prioritize implementing recommendations given by organizations that had assessed the situation in the country, despite the demonstrated skyrocketing rates of violence. Using the discourse of family values is a political strategy that is used to gain -or maintain- the loyalties of citizens with close ties to religion. It is a traditional narrative that implies the importance of man and woman acting as a unit of strength for the family.

³⁵ Human Rights Watch, [Combating Domestic Violence in Turkey](#), 12.

³⁶ MEURENS, Nathalie, Hayley D’SOUZA, Saredo MOHAMED, Nazia CHOWDHURY, and Stelios CHARITAKIS. ["Tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe."](#) (2020).

In contrast, we see this very same discourse being used to reject majorly protective legislation, due to more progressive terminology being used.

III. Domestic Violence in Russia

3.1 Why Russia

Russia’s regime is debated by many³⁷, and although it may be considered to be more authoritarian and is outside the framework of the countries discussed in this paper, it is nonetheless an interesting case to look at when speaking about violence against women. Despite the Russian government’s regime structure, we see that it shares similar narratives to other countries when referring to overarching values. It is important to note that regimes of different types may share similarities and to notice what social and political shifts take place in parallel to certain narratives being disseminated.

3.2 Rates of Domestic Violence

Although the data on violence against women and domestic violence in Russia are not so clear, the issue remains a significant and pervasive problem across the country. It is estimated that domestic abuse affects one out of five women in Russia, and around 14,000 women lose their lives each year as a result.³⁸ Amnesty International related that in a study of about 2,200 people, conducted by the Council for Women of Moscow State University, 70%

³⁷ Velikaya, N. M. "Opposition as a Mirage of Political Field in Russia." *New authoritarianism: challenges to democracy in the 21st century* (2019): 77-99.

³⁸ Amnesty International. *Russian Federation: Nowhere to Turn to Violence Against Women in the Family*. International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 2005.

of women reported that they had previously been abused by their husbands.

Russia has been clear, more and more, on its stance regarding violence against women. It refused to ratify the Istanbul Convention on the basis that it did not align with the country's viewpoint on "traditional moral and family values."³⁹ Much like we have seen with Turkey and Poland, Russia used the context of tradition and family as a pretext for making decisions regarding the protection of women facing intimate partner violence.

3.3 Decriminalisation

In 2017, the Russian government decriminalized domestic violence, despite consistently rising rates. With this rescindment, unless hospital treatment is required, first-time acts of violence go unpunished and remain for the family to sort out. The act is now considered an administrative offense, similar to a speeding ticket, in which punishment can take the form of a fine or community service.⁴⁰

Despite public outcry, Putin's decision appealed much to conservative religious groups⁴¹ who believe that intervening in family matters (which includes domestic abuse) puts a restriction on traditional family values. The leaders of these groups argue that external interference, such as the criminalization of domestic violence, deconstructs the family unit.

³⁹ Rollins, Kay. "[Putin's Other War: Domestic Violence, Traditional Values, and Masculinity in Modern Russia](#)." Harvard International Review. 2022.

⁴⁰ Semukhina, Olga. "The decriminalization of domestic violence in Russia." *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization* 28, no. 1 (2020): 15-45.

⁴¹ Rollins, "[Putin's Other War](#)."

Another justification for this policy change was that it would make the legal procedures more efficient and justice easier for victims to attain.⁴² There is frustration within the justice system in Russia, much from lawyers and officers handling cases. Cases of domestic violence are so frequent in the country that defense lawyers become overworked and are unable to handle the load. Many women eventually drop the prosecutions, and as this is considered a failure of the case, some lawyers do not even open cases unless they stand out in some way against others. There is no immediate arrest when cases of domestic abuse are reported, which means that women who report must then go back home where the abuser still is. The risk of retaliation is too great for many to report these violations or to continue with the cases.

3.4 Consequences of Decriminalisation

Since the decriminalization of domestic violence, the number of administrative punishments for these offenses has increased. Some argue that this is an indication that the change is improving the efficiency of the legal processes. However, many defense lawyers in Russia argue that this, instead, is an indication of the rising rates of violence against women.⁴³

When a government establishes that domestic violence is equal to a parking ticket, it is protecting the abusers, and it is explicitly putting women in grave danger. It normalizes this violence towards women and leaves much more room for escalation when abusers know that there is little consequence from prosecution.

⁴² Semukhina, "Decriminalization," 15.

⁴³ Semukhina, "Decriminalization," 34.

Even if we strip away the call for efficiency and leave the reasoning to the restoration of family values, it begs the question: what family values are being protected, when women are threatened sexually, physically, psychologically, and economically? Furthermore, when arguing for the value of the family unit, we must also ask: what benefit is there for children to witness and endure this violence, that too often ends up affecting them as well?

Regardless of the justification, we can begin to notice a pattern here of how some conservative ideologies that are acted upon, in matters of male dominance over women, lessen the protection of women facing domestic violence. It puts them at even greater risk, leaves them with fewer resources, and does not lessen the prevalence of violence.

Russia could be looked at as an example of the reality that is political backtracking on human rights. In this case, women in the state went from having some legal protection, in an area where the rates of VAW were already high, to having less legal protection and procedure available to them. We can ask the question: does decriminalizing an act, normalize it? Where do the 'traditional moral and family values' lie when the acts of beating, raping, or otherwise harming a partner are not deemed criminal?

IV. Domestic Violence in Other Countries

Unfortunately, there are many more examples of these patterns in Central Asia and other countries in Eastern Europe. Amnesty International reports that "national governments have pointedly invoked traditions and 'family values' in their resistance to adopt domestic violence

legislation, and purposefully disregarded a problem affecting millions of women in their countries."⁴⁴

It is seen time and again when states reject policies on domestic violence based on these traditions, such as Belarus did in 2018. It is seen when the family unit is prioritized over women's safety, as is the case in Azerbaijan, and Armenia.

Armenia implemented legislation in 2017 specifically addressing domestic violence, however with an emphasis on the importance of the family unit. Article 2 of the law emphasizes the importance of "supporting the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society, strengthening traditional values and restoring peace in the family."⁴⁵

It is worth noting, however, that this year, Armenia has made revisions to the 2017 legislation removing the focus on family peace and expanding the definition of domestic abuse by recognizing additional violations.⁴⁶ Although Armenia has not signed the Istanbul Convention yet, this is a step we ought to recognize as progressive in the issue of VAW in the country. Still, existing legislations in Armenia and Azerbaijan require mediation services between victims and abusers "with the goal of achieving family reconciliation."⁴⁷ If reconciliation occurs, the abusers are

⁴⁴ Amnesty International. *Violence against Women in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Protect Women from Violence during Crisis and Beyond*. Amnesty International Ltd Peter Benenson House, 2022.

⁴⁵ [Armenia: Law on Prevention of Violence within the Family, Protection of Victims of Violence within the Family and Restoration of Peace in the Family](#). 2017.

⁴⁶ Chilingaryan, Anahit. "[Armenia Strengthens Domestic Violence Law](#)." Human Rights Watch. 2024.

⁴⁷ Amnesty International. *Violence against Women*, 10.

absolved of any wrongdoing, as is also the case in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

In Belarus, the threat of the state taking away parental rights is especially palpable in the lives of politically active women. Many reports have indicated that existing mandates regarding state intervention in parental rights are specifically used to keep women from being politically or publicly active.⁴⁸ This keeps them fearful and hesitant to report domestic violence, seek assistance, or join public movements like protests. States with these tactics repress women by keeping them under desired traditional social roles.

4.1 Why Public Attitudes Towards Women Matter

Alyaksandr Lukashenko, the President of Belarus, was televised saying “Our Constitution is not made for a woman [as president]. Our society has not matured enough to vote for a woman. Because according to our Constitution, the president holds a strong power.”⁴⁹ One can, with little effort, interpret this rhetoric as a description of the prevailing attitude towards women not only in this country but in governments that share this narrative. We might consider that the percolation of this language in more progressive societies may be an indicator of shifting government attitudes towards women.

Although it is difficult to find accurate data on violence against women and domestic violence in many countries, the patterns we can identify cannot be ignored. By using “traditional family values” and the “family unit” as a

ground of defense, conservative ideologies, most especially religious ones, encourage traditional gender roles where men hold dominant power over women. It stops becoming about the safety and well-being of all, and instead firmly pushes down on keeping those traditional social roles.

V. Conclusion

The battle on violence against women, especially domestic violence, is one we are still fighting. We have seen great strides since the 1990s to address the crisis, and initiatives like the Istanbul Convention have been profoundly impactful in bringing attention to the issue and therefore, shifting the narrative.

Nuala Mole, founder of the AIRE (Advice on Individual Rights in Europe) Centre and a human rights lawyer with over 30 years of work behind her, expresses that women facing gender-based violence fall within the groups of those who suffer from the “rampant and negative influence of anti-rights movements.”⁵⁰ The efforts mentioned in this paper must continue, especially as there is still much resistance and dismissal from countries such as Russia and Turkey, where millions of women are still suffering.

It must be addressed that the sample in this paper is limited, as elaborate public data on the issue of violence against women, especially domestic violence, is not widely available. There are countries in which access to real, accurate data is not easily accessible, and this is also a problem in reaching a comprehensive assessment of the depth of the problem. However, with the data that is

⁴⁸ Amnesty International. *Belarus: Crackdown from the top: gender-based reprisals against women activists in Belarus*. 2020.

⁴⁹ Amnesty International. *Belarus*, 1.

⁵⁰ Mole, “[The Council of Europe and Violence against Women](#).”

available, we can get a sense of the severity of the issue in some areas.

It must also be noted that conservative ideologies are not the sole factors influencing the lack of protection for survivors of this kind of violence. This paper has focused on what is being done to protect women internationally, and what are some factors putting a dent in protective legislation.

The health and safety of women suffering and at risk when it comes to gender-based violence and domestic violence has been established as a global crisis. Protection for women is as important as the recognition and existence of the protections of all human rights, and this research must continue. However, I would like to propose an alternative perspective for how this global issue is spoken about: I would implore that as we speak and think about violence against women, we ask why there is persistent male aggression and ask ourselves what we can do about it. This paper lacks research on what movements and legislation are being implemented to address the issue from the other side, but we must keep in mind that this is not only a women's issue. In this context, millions of men are deeply violating women's human rights and we must ask ourselves why these rates are so high. The implementation and emphasis on protection recognize the reality, danger, and normalization of male aggression toward women. We must recognize and address the roots and cessation of male dominance through violence over women.

We have seen in this paper that conservative ideologies with ties to religious beliefs or institutions are often heavily founded on the concepts of "traditional family values",

"social values" and the "family unit", which in many countries pass laws that do not provide women as many protections from domestic violence. Proponents of these conservative movements are careful to emphasize these values when trying to influence policies or decision-making within the government. In many countries, these concepts are also enshrined in state constitutions, making it challenging for more progressive movements to take hold.

When observing traditional conservative rhetorics, especially in the sphere of political decision-making, we must critically consider the trajectories they may establish, and remember past effects that far-right movements have had on women's rights. We have seen the implications language used in conservative ideologies may have for shaping societal values and legal frameworks. With this knowledge, society can recognize when the protection of women against violence and domestic violence is under threat and amplify its voice to fight for the dignity and human rights of all women.

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