A POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY: THE BUILD-UP OF THE COLOMBIAN CAMPAIGN AGAINST 'GENDER IDEOLOGY' IN THE 2016 PEACE PLEBISCITE

Angela Maria Bohorquez Oviedo[1]
angelambohorquezo@gmail.com
University of Delaware, Newark, Estados Unidos.

After the 2012-2016 peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels, right-wing leaders and anti-gender activists opposed the inclusion of gender equality in the peace agreement. They mobilized a national network portraying gender as a threat to societal morals, fueling protests ahead of the plebiscite elections. This article examines how this network built a campaign against gender ideology" to contest the peace agreement. Using archival materials from anti-gender activists, a senator, and 24 semi-structured interviews, the study finds that the network leveraged issues such as the education handbook proposed by the Ministry of Education, the ECAS survey conducted by DANE, and the 'No' vote plebiscite campaign as a political opportunity to build the campaign against 'gender ideology.'

Keywords: *Gender ideology, campaign, peace, political opportunity, Colombia*

1   Ph.D. in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Delaware in the United States. She holds MAs in Social Sciences from Universidad de Caldas (Colombia) and Université Paris-Est Créteil Val de Marne (France). Her bachelor's degree is in Communication and Journalism Studies from Universidad de Manizales (Colombia).

UNA OPORTUNIDAD POLÍTICA: LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DE LA CAMPAÑA COLOMBIANA CONTRA LA 'IDEOLOGÍA DE GÉNERO' EN EL PLEBISCITO POR LA PAZ 2016

Después del proceso de paz 2012-2016 entre el gobierno colombiano y las FARC, líderes de derecha y activistas antigénero cuestionaron la inclusión de la equidad de género en el acuerdo de paz. Movilizaron una red nacional que presentó género como una amenaza a la moral tradicional, impulsando protestas antes del plebiscito. Este artículo analiza cómo esta red construyó la campaña contra la 'ideología de género' para oponerse al acuerdo de paz. A través de archivos de activistas antigénero, de una senadora y 24 entrevistas con líderes clave del debate político nacional, esta investigación revela que la red utilizó eventos como un manual educativo del Ministerio de Educación, la encuesta ECAS del DANE y la campaña por el voto del 'No' en el plebiscito como una oportunidad política para consolidar la campaña.

Palabras Clave: *Ideología de género, campaña, paz, oportunidad política, Colombia*

Introduction

After four years of peace negotiations in Havana, Cuba, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos proposed a plebiscite to ratify the final peace agreement between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). In October 2016, Colombians surprised the international community by voting 'No' in the peace plebiscite, with 50.2% of the vote (González, 2017). The 2012–2016 peace negotiations were hailed as groundbreaking for including women as negotiators, establishing a Gender Subcommittee, and integrating a gender-sensitive perspective throughout the agreement (ONU Mujeres, 2016, cited in Gómez & Montealegre, 2021, p. 447). It was also described as "by far the most inclusive peace agreement in history" (Salvesen & Nylander, 2017, p. 1). The agreement showcased the perseverance of women's, feminist, and LGBTI movements (Gómez & Montealegre, 2021; González, 2017).

However, influential evangelical Christian leaders, right-wing politicians—including former president Álvaro Uribe and Attorney General Alejandro Ordoñez—and anti-gender activists framed the concept of gender as a threat to traditional family values and gendered social norms. These leaders reactivated a right-wing national network, and the 'gender ideology' ideas took form into a campaign that mobilized people in Colombia's major cities two months before the plebiscite elections. This article examines how this right-wing network built the campaign against 'gender ideology' in an effort to challenge the final peace agreement.

The analysis, which draws on an archival creation, including presentations and academic articles from a right-wing senator and anti-gender activists, as well as 24 semi-structured interviews with key participants in the national political debate—such as politicians, former ministers, senators, evangelical Christian leaders, anti-gender activists, leaders of women's and LGBTI non-governmental organizations, and journalists from the most popular national newspapers—reveals that the opposition to the peace process built the campaign against 'gender ideology' by articulating three key events as a political opportunity: (1) the revision of an educational handbook proposing the inclusion of gender equality in public schools by the Ministry of Education, (2) a survey on sexual behaviors and attitudes among middle and high school students conducted by the National Administrative Department of Statistics (*Departamento Nacional de Estadística,* DANE), and (3) the 'No' vote campaign promoted by the peace plebiscite opposition.

In this study, activists against 'gender ideology' shared their experiences and knowledge about the internal organization of the 2016 Colombian campaign ahead of the plebiscite elections. As a starting point, the interviewed activists explained how they used a presentation from the Ministry of Education to review educational handbooks and the ECAS questionnaire, aiming to' warn' teachers and parents about what they viewed as the imposition of a 'dangerous ideology' on children. An

anonymous activist (personal interview, July 26, 2019) also revealed how a regional mainstream media outlet spread disinformation related to the 'gender ideology' narrative.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the Colombian campaign followed an imported pattern linked to transnational actions, drawing on strategies and discourses from international anti-gender movements and networks. In this study, anti-gender activists revealed that the 2016 Colombian campaign was connected to international anti-gender networks via WhatsApp, linking the Colombian events to similar cases in Europe, Central America, and South America. As a result, this campaign was part of a restricted transnational elite network of power, reflecting similar collective actions and frames of meaning that have emerged in Brazil, Paraguay, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay, Argentina, and Mexico, as part of regional and global anti-gender movements (Corrêa et al., 2020).

The interviews and the archival creation also revealed that women and children were often portrayed as the 'exclusive' victims of the conflict, reinforcing their status as subordinates in need of State protection and diminishing their roles as central participants in political negotiations (Enloe, 2023a; Tickner, 2001). Additionally, the campaign against 'gender ideology' conveyed implicit messages of homophobia, misogyny, and the exclusion of LGBTI identities, reinforcing polarization and discriminatory views among potential plebiscite voters. Evangelical Christian pastors and anti-gender activists redefined their roles as political actors, asserting their authority and influencing gender policies and official institutions. Consequently, the Colombian campaign highlighted an ongoing effort to seize political opportunities to distort public policies related to inclusion and peace.

1. Context

'Gender ideology' Ideas

The term 'gender ideology'[2] has been understood as an "umbrella category" (Ravecca et al.; 2022, p.17) and a sort of "semantic umbrella" (Garcés Amaya, 2024, p. 10) in which the signifier goes beyond its original meaning to include a range of diverse concepts, ultimately linking various topics that may appear unrelated but create a cohesive framework of meaning (Garcés Amaya, 2024). This involves

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[2]   In Spanish, *'Ideología de Género'* is translated into English as 'gender ideology.' This study understands *'Campañas en contra de la Ideología de Género'* in Spanish as 'campaigns against gender ideology' or 'anti-gender campaigns' to be consistent with the literature of this field (Arguedas Ramírez, 2020; Barrientos, 2020; Kóvats, 2015; Korolczuk, 2015; Oliveira Kalil, 2018; Patternote & Kuhar, 2018; Corrêa, 2018; Pető, 2015).

the redefinition and substitution of terms, such as 'rights,' and the reemphasis of concepts like 'life' and 'family' to align with shared desires and demands (Garcés Amaya, 2024).

The term 'gender ideology' "appears as a threat to the traditional values" (Félix, 2015, cited in Kováts & Põim, p.75) and "counter-discourse created to challenge international movements in gender and sexuality policies. This is because 'gender' is considered a 'label' and a transnational political 'threat' through the erosion of any biological difference between male and female and the modification of gendered binary roles in society with their reproductive condition (Catholic.Net, 2016). The goal is to "maintain the traditional status quo in power relations, with clear and unchangeable 'limits' between the sexes, which typically translate into privileges granted to men and those who 'conform' to socially established norms and patterns based on sex and gender" (Blanco, 2022, p. 252). These statements reveal reactionary activism worldwide with a relationship between religious discourse, protests, and campaigns against social, sexual, and reproductive rights in a conservative agenda (Freire & Ferreira, 2020).

At the beginning of 1998, the term 'gender ideology' was disseminated in a text written by the Peruvian bishop Óscar Alzamora Revoredo called '*La Ideología de Género: Sus peligros y alcances*' (Corredor, 2019; Cornejo–Valle & Pichardo, 2017, as cited in Rousseau, 2020). "It was the first text from an official body of the Catholic hierarchy to develop the concept […] as a reference to feminist agenda and theory" (Morán, 2021, p. 183-184) and linked 'gender ideology' with feminism and class struggle from Marxism as intertwined evils "(or even the same evil) that distort (s) reality and endanger (s) society" (Ravecca et al.; 2022, p.6). Other scholars also consider the article '*What does gender mean?'* written by theologian Jutta Burggraf, who is close to the Vatican, a piece in Spanish often quoted by opponents of 'gender ideology' (Viveros Vigoya, 2016).

Later, also in 2001, Pope John Paul II declared that "specific ideologies drive mis-leading concepts concerning sexuality, women's dignity, and the mission of gender" (Corredor, 2019, p. 616). Since 2013, Pope Francis has preferred the expression 'ideological colonization' when he refers to 'gender ideology' in several Vatican do-cuments (Patternote & Kuhar, 2018). In the last three decades, "conservative groups in different parts of the world have articulated their opposition to any project that threatens their conception of sexuality and reproduction through a continuous cri-tique of the concept of gender" (González & Castro, 2018, p. 17). These groups are constituted for "various sectors, including churches, right-wing political parties, and nationalist groups, among others" (Serrano, 2017, p.152).

Transnational Campaigns

Since the 90s, Latin American mainstream media outlets have reported how elite politicians, religious groups, pro-life organizations, teachers, and parents have protested against what they believe disseminates 'gender ideology' ideas. These campaigns are "a transnational phenomenon with national particularities" (González & Castro, 2018, p.23) that "can no longer be restricted to a specific country, culture or context, but appear as a transnational phenomenon that relies on a set of discourses and arguments, actors, tools and strategies shared across borders" (Patternote, 2023, p. 88). Thus, campaigns against 'gender ideology' are part of a "transnational kit that is highly adaptable to local circumstances" (Patternote, 2023, p. 82). These campaigns have attracted public opinion around anxiety surrounding the inclusion of women's and LGBTI rights in global politics, homosexualization, and the idea that fundamental rights may be threatened (Freire & Ferreira, 2020; Corrêa et al., 2018; Miskolci, 2018; Patternote & Kuhar, 2018; Serrano, 2017).

To understand 'gender ideology' manifestations, context matters because of policy implications within specific national circumstances that circulate transnationally (Corredor, 2019; Corrêa, 2016). The intensity and effects of these campaigns are different in geographical and cultural areas where gender and feminist movements have a strong history of consolidation, rather than places that barely participate in this political and academic discussion (Serrano, 2017). For instance, the first Latin American campaign against 'gender ideology' was in Paraguay in 2011. Ecuador followed in 2013, but anti-gender movements have been active in other countries since 2014 (Corrêa et al., 2018) that are predominantly Catholic states facing progressive developments in women and LGBTI rights in Latin America and Europe (Antića & Radačić, 2020).

Latin American campaigns against 'gender ideology' "have spread in a cascading manner. In Mexico, the mobilizations targeted same-sex couples in 2016, while in Ecuador, Brazil, and Peru, the focus in 2017 was on overturning initiatives that promoted comprehensive sex education, generally framed under the slogan 'don't mess with my children'" (González & Castro, 2018, p. 22). Between 2015 and 2016, Chile also had an intense campaign to prevent the imposition of gender ideology in the national school system, as well as former left-wing President Michelle Bachelet's proposal to repeal the abortion ban established during the Pinochet dictatorship (Barrientos, 2020; Corrêa, 2016). In Colombia, former deputy Ángela Hernández was among the most active politicians in introducing 'gender ideology' into the national debate in 2016. She participated in the protests in Mexico and was also specially invited to a forum by conservative groups to discuss the formation of a 'Latin American Front for the Right to Life and the Family' (González & Castro, 2018; Semana, 2016a).

Anti-gender transnational campaigns tend to be organized by supporters from diverse fields, including upper-middle-class and conservative groups (Patternote,

2023; Viteri & Marmol, 2020; Patternote & Kuhar, 2018; Corrêa et al., 2018, p. 4; Dubslaff, 2015; Kováts, 2015). Moreover, campaigns against 'gender ideology' have expanded into politics, aiming to discredit politicians' reputations and undermine political processes related to comprehensive sex education in schools (Viveros Vigoya & Rodríguez, 2017). The 'gender ideology' debates in Latin America involve both right- and left-wing groups, political parties, and various religious organizations opposing gender equality (Patternote, 2023; Dubslaff, 2015; Kováts, 2015). These debates reflect reactionary activism intersecting with religious discourses, protests, and campaigns against social, sexual, and reproductive rights within a conservative agenda (Freire & Ferreira, 2020).

Networks

Campaigns against 'gender ideology' operate through transnational networks, including the emerging voices of conservative Catholics and Evangelicals, which have gained prominence due to the increasing role of dogmatic Evangelism in Brazil and Colombia since 2016 (Corrêa, 2016). Evangelical groups from the United States play a significant role in international missions, training workshops for pastors, and sending funds (Corrales, 2020), suggesting the formation of transnational evangelical activism (Bosia & Weiss, 2013, p. 4). In Ecuador, Catholic, Christian evangelical, and Adventist groups also formed alliances with others who shared their commitment to fighting 'gender ideology,' organizing large protests, postponing LGBTI protections, and modifying the term 'gender' to 'women' in the '*Ley Orgánica Integral para Prevenir y Erradicar la Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres*,' as well as changing the language and curriculum related to new masculinities and women in their diversity (Viteri & Marmol, 2020).

Similarly, in Peru, after widespread mobilizations by conservative groups and religious organizations in 2017, "the Supreme Court annulled the section of the National Basic Education Curriculum that addressed gender equality, arguing it violated the law requiring educational policies to be developed jointly by the state and society" (Gestión, 2017, cited in González & Castro, 2018, p. 23). In Brazil, street protests the same year targeted the inclusion of gender equality, sexuality, and sexual orientation in the school curriculum. "These mobilizations were so impactful that they led to a local law banning what they considered 'gender ideology' in schools, and on a national level, they resulted in the dismissal of the Minister of Education" (Pina, 2017; Hernández, 2017, cited in González & Castro, 2018, p. 23).

In sum, the expansion of anti-gender movements and their large-scale campaigns against 'gender ideology' demonstrate the mobilization of people to perpetuate transnational frames that delegitimize rights while policing gender and sexuality across traditional, temporal, and geographical borders.

2. Method

To explore how the right-wing network constructed the campaign against 'gender ideology,' the research design involves qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and archival creation.[3]

Semi–Structured Interviews

In 2018, preliminary conversations were conducted in Bogotá with experts, professors, and a pastor who was also an activist in the Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology.' The findings from a previous content analysis of plebiscite news stories published online in *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo* between the announcement of the plebiscite on August 24 and the elections on October 2, 2016; literature reviews; and academic publications on the plebiscite and transnational anti-gender movements and campaigns helped identify the most prominent figures in the news stories, plebiscite campaign events, and political discussions.

As shown in Table 1, a total of 24 recognized primary sources were identified, including right-wing political elites such as senators and ministers, evangelical Christian leaders from megachurches, anti-gender activists, women's and LGBTI organizations, and editors of *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo*. All of these interviewees are publicly outspoken on these issues. It is important to note that this study was able to reach some of the most prominent national anti-gender activists, who worked 'discreetly' and actively in the campaign against 'gender ideology' and the 'No' vote in the plebiscite and who largely remained out of the mainstream media and the Colombian public eye.

Table 1.

Interviewed Leaders of the Peace Plebiscite National Debate

Affiliation	Interviewee	Description
The 'No' Vote Campaign	María del Rosario Guerra	Senator, right-wing political party, Centro Democrático
	Juan Carlos Vélez	Coordinator, 'No' vote campaign in Centro Democrático
	Jhon Milton Rodriguez	Pastor and former Senator of the right-wing (and Christian evangelical) political party, Colombia Justa Libres

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[3]   The first part of this study focused on a content analysis of 301 randomly selected news stories about the plebiscite, published in the most widely read Colombian newspapers online, *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo*. The analysis primarily examined the agenda-setting and framing of the plebiscite coverage between August 24 and October 2, 2016.

The 'Yes' Vote Campaign	Gina Parody	Former Minister of Education
	Juan Fernando Cristo	Former Minister of Interior
	Roy Barreras	Former Senator, Partido de la U
	Armando Novoa	Former Magistrate, Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE)
	Diego Rodríguez	Pastor, Church La Vid (Ibagué)
Activists campaign against 'gender ideology'	Anonymous source	Anti-gender activist
	Edgar Patiño	Former President OBED private schools (Asociación de Colegios y Educadores Cristianos de Colombia)
	Catalina Moscoso	Director, non-governmental organization/project Ámalos
	Lila Palacios de Martínez	Pastor and director of Red Internacional de Familia y Educación (RIFE), and Colombian representative at the Congreso Iberoamericano por la Vida y la Familia.
Evangelical Christian Pastors[4]	Edgar Castaño	Pastor and leader, Confederación Evangélica de Colombia (CEDECOL)
	Héctor Pardo	Pastor of the megachurch[5] Tabérnaculo de la Fe
	Eduardo Cañas	Pastor of the megachurch Manantial de Vida Eterna and former co-president of the right-wing political party Colombia Justa Libres
Catholic Church	Monsignor Pedro Mercado	Former secretary of Episcopal Catholic Conference in Bogotá

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[4] Pastors Eduardo Cañas, Héctor Pardo, and former Senator Jhon Milton Rodríguez—are recognized for their leadership in Colombian 'megachurches.' They participated in the renegotiation of the final peace agreement in November 2016, after the 'No' victory in the plebiscite elections (See more about the role of pastors in the peace agreement renegotiation on page 27).

[5] A megachurch is a typically non-denominational Protestant church with more than 2,000 members and a "willingness to draw upon aspects of popular culture and modern consumerism as delivered by way of charismatic pastors and housed in familiar comfort-inducing settings" (Wade, 2016, as cited in Ferruccia & Nelson, 2019, 63).

Non-governmental organization leaders	Wilson Castañeda	Director of the non-governmental organization Caribe Afirmativo
	Marcela Sánchez	Executive Director, non-governmental organization, Colombia Diversa
	Fabián Hernández	Former coordinator of Media Research, non-governmental organization Misión de Observación Electoral (MOE)
	Beatriz Quintero	Director, non-governmental organization, Red Nacional de Mujeres
	Olga Sánchez	Director, non-governmental organization, Casa de la Mujer
Journalists	Marisol Gómez	Former editor, *El Tiempo*
	Jhon Torres	Editor, *El Tiempo*
	Alfredo Molano Jimeno	Former editor, Political Section *El Espectador*
Academic Source	Franklin Gil Hernández	Assistant Professor, Escuela de Estudios de Género, Universidad Nacional de Colombia

Source: 4Self-made by the author.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted in person in Bogotá, Medellín, and Ibagué, Colombia—key cities where the campaign against 'gender ideology' was organized and important leaders, participants, and anti-gender activists gathered. The interview questions followed a semi-structured guide that included broad and flexible queries about the national context, the campaign's organization, and the actors and networks involved.

The interviews were analyzed using NVivo 12 Plus and classified into categories, topics, and theme nodes, grouping references related to specific ideas discussed in the interviews (NVivo 12, 2021). Finally, a framework matrix was created to summarize the coded interviews, facilitating comparison and interpreting the findings.

Archival Creation

The interviews conducted in Colombia also allowed the collection of a set of archives, including PowerPoint presentations, a questionnaire from *Encuesta de Comportamientos y Factores de Riesgo en Niñas, Niños, y Adolescentes Escolarizados* (ECAS) survey, and handwritten notes as primary sources from the right-wing Senator María del Rosario Guerra and activists of the campaign against 'gender ideology. Archives contributed to this study's triangulation and decreased the biases from any single method (Hales, 2010). These documents enhanced and clarified the research

results and provided knowledge infrastructures as entities that facilitate data flow between parties, often over long periods (Borgman et al., 2019).

Table 2.

Archives Associated with 'Gender Ideology' Ideas

Source of Information	Archive Description
DANE (National Administrative Department of Statistics)	PowerPoint presentation for revision of the education handbook
	Ministry of Education questionnaire for schools' principals about the education handbook
	Education handbook '*Ambientes Escolares* Libres de Discriminación'
	ECAS Survey questionnaire Comportamiento y Actitudes sobre Sexualidad 2016
	Press statement about ECAS suspension in 2016
Red Internacional por la Familia y la Educación (RIFE)	Letter from CEDECOL requesting a meeting with President Santos against the final peace agreement.
	RIFE PowerPoint presentation against gender ideology
	RIFE statement to protest against abortion in Bogotá in February 2019
Pastor Diego Rodriguez (Church La Vid, Ibagué, Colombia)	An official statement from Pastor Diego Rodríguez to participate in the protests against 'gender ideology' ideas
Senator María del Rosario Guerra (Political Party Centro Democrático)	PowerPoint presentation against the peace plebiscite at the Congress
	Theoretical analysis inclusion of the gender perspective in the Colombian peace agreement (comparative table)
	Definitions of 'gender ideology' from the Catholic website Catholic.Net
Consejo Nacional Electoral (CNE)	Resolution 1733 with media coverage rules and standards for the 2016 peace plebiscite campaigning

Source: Self-made by the author.

The archives were organized and analyzed manually, providing valuable contextual information about the development of the campaign, its strategies, message dissemination rules, and the evolution of 'gender ideology' as a national campaign leading up to the plebiscite elections. These documents were essential for triangulating data collected from the qualitative and quantitative methods used in this study: semi-structured interviews and content analysis of plebiscite news stories.

The archive analysis followed a three-step process. First, physical and digital archives collected from Senator Guerra's office (Centro Democrático, a right-wing political party) and activists involved in the campaign against 'gender ideology' were organized in digital PDF format and categorized by analysis type. The findings were then summarized according to each source. Second, a comparative analysis of data from the three sources—content analysis of plebiscite news stories, 24 semi-structured interviews, and collected archives—helped identify differences, similarities, discrepancies, and commonalities. These connections were noted and linked to the respective categories of analysis. Finally, the interpretation of findings from all three sources contributed to answering the research questions, providing valuable insights from different perspectives, including key actors in the plebiscite debate, news stories, and campaign archives against 'gender ideology.'

3. Findings

3.1. An Imported Campaign and a Political Opportunity

Ministers, directors of women and LGBTI non-governmental rights organizations, journalists, and academic experts interviewed highlighted that the Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology' was an imported pattern of similar transnational actions during Latin American democratic processes (M. Sánchez, F. Gil Hernández, and G. Parody, personal interviews, July 4, July 9, and July 23, 2019, respectively). "You realize this is not an isolated situation in Colombia, but part of a broader Latin American movement within the right-wing populist sector," explained Gina Parody, former Colombian Minister of Education, when asked about the campaign before the plebiscite elections (G. Parody, personal interview, July 23, 2019). This campaign was understood as a 'repetitive formula' that rides the anti-gender movement's wave of resisting norms and policies to promote gender diversity, equality, and inclusion (M. Sánchez, personal interview, July 4, 2019).

Two months before the plebiscite elections, 'gender ideology' took form in overarching aspects related to gender, education, and family. Right-wing politicians, including former President Álvaro Uribe and former attorney general Alejandro Ordoñez, with evangelical Christian pastors from national influential megachurches, and activists against 'gender ideology,' identified the articulation of three main Colombian events as a political opportunity[5] that they did not foresee to dispute the

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[5]   According to Sidney Tarrow, a political opportunity has "consistent dimensions, but not necessarily formal or permanent ones, of political struggle that encourage people to engage in political confrontation" (Ribeiro Gomes, 2023, p.4). This political opportunity connects the power of

plebiscite and the final peace agreement: the revision of the education handbook[6] '*Ambientes Escolares Libres de Discriminación, Orientaciones Sexuales e Identidades de Género no Hegemónicas en la Escuela,*' the survey '*Encuesta sobre Sexualidad en niños, niñas y adolescentes* (ECAS), and the 'No' vote campaign.

3.1.1. The Education Handbook Revision

Before 2016, the Colombian Ministry of Education (MEN) had already developed education handbooks to promote gender equality and prevent classroom bullying and discrimination (Garcés Amaya, 2024; Beltrán & Creely, 2022; Blanco, 2022; Corredor, 2021; Gil Hernández, 2020; González, 2017; Serrano Amaya, 2017). Parody explained that these education project campaigns started in 1998 with conservative President Andrés Pastrana, and these materials circulated in Colombian public and private schools (personal interview, July 23, 2019). Similarly, Marcela Sánchez, director of the LBGTI non-governmental organization Colombia Diversa (personal interview, July 4, 2019), pointed out that the MEN had led sexuality, gender, and civics projects for 15 years.

In 2015, the Colombian Constitutional Court ordered sentence T-478 to MEN[7] for revision and adjustments to ensure that all school codes of conduct protected all sexual orientations via specific clauses to ensure the absence of discriminatory language (Garcés Amaya, 2024; Blanco, 2022; Bárcenas, 2022; Beltrán & Creely, 2022; Gil Hernández, 2022; Gil Hernández, 2020; Rodríguez Benítez, 2020; González & Castro, 2018; Rodríguez Rondón, 2017; González, 2017; Serrano Amaya, 2017). Parody explained that as Minister of Education, she complied with the legislation and started a curricular reform in alliance with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the non-governmental organization Colombia Diversa to revise and redesign an education handbook for schools to prevent discrimination and bullying (Parody, personal interview, July

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activists and actors with fewer resources to contest what they perceive as challenges or changes (Ribeiro Gomes, 2023).

[6] The 2016 Ministry of Education PowerPoint presentation from the collected archive indicates that an education handbook serves as a tool agreed upon by the school community to promote and ensure harmony in daily life. This document outlines the community's actions, the resources and procedures to resolve conflicts, and the consequences of violating these agreements.

[7] Sergio Urrego, a sixteen-year-old student, tragically took his own life in 2014 after enduring severe bullying when his Catholic school in Bogotá discovered his sexual orientation (Colombia Diversa, 2015). Following a legal process led by his mother, Alba Reyes, the Colombian Constitutional Court issued a landmark ruling. One of the key outcomes was a mandate for the Ministry of Education to revise the national education guidelines to include provisions on gender equality, gender diversity, gender identity, and the prevention of discrimination in all public schools across Colombia (Colombia Diversa, 2024).

23, 2019; González & Castro, 2018). The handbook *'Ambientes Escolares Libres de Discriminación. Orientaciones Sexuales e Identidades de Género No Hegemónicas en la escuela. Aspectos para la Reflexión'* (Ministry of Education & UNFPA, 2016) was based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

> Uniting all efforts to ensure that educational spaces are free from barriers or practices that are based on the exercise of all types of violence against individuals who live and express their sexuality outside of what has historically been considered hegemonic; this includes those who build transgender identities or non-heterosexual sexual orientations […] This document is also an invitation to all members of the country's educational communities to reconsider the educational horizon as a space for transforming social inequities rooted in sexism, homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. It calls for contributing to the construction of stable, sustainable, and lasting peace in everyday life by making the provisions of the Political Constitution of Colombia effective. (Ministry of Education & UNFPA, 2016, p. 9).

While the MEN discussed revising the education handbook across the country, the government chief negotiator of the peace process, Humberto de la Calle, released an official statement in Havana on July 24 about the guaranteed gender perspective included in the first version of the peace accord (Beltrán & Creely, 2022; Gil Hernández, personal interview, July 9, 2019; Serrano Amaya, 2017). De la Calle, quoting the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, explained that the gender approach was considered a challenge with values that crossed the peace table and gender is related to cultural conceptions that generate social behavior structures because they are non-deterministic social products (De la Calle, July 24, 2016). Although the chief negotiator stated that his comments on gender were personal, the right-wing network in the 'No' vote campaign argued that these views would introduce 'gender ideology' into Colombian society.

3.1.2. Framing Meanings

The Colombian political context before the plebiscite elections exposed how the opposition to the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace agreement began to 'name' grievances (Tarrow, 2011a), connect them to other issues, and construct frames of meaning that resonated with the cultural predispositions of the population (Tarrow, 2011a). To frame the 'gender ideology' messaging, activists gathered their 'evidence' from teachers and network members nationwide (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019; and C. Moscoso, personal interview, July 19, 2019). A group of teachers discovered an invitation letter from the Ministry of Education (MEN), a PowerPoint presentation, and an unpublished preliminary version of the MEN education handbook during a workshop session (Anonymous activist,

personal interview, July 26, 2019). The teachers raised concerns about the proposal to revise their current handbooks because:

> Phrases such as 'morality' and 'preservation of good manners' must be removed from the education handbook. The 'blue book' (the education handbook *'Ambientes Escolares Libres de Discriminación'*) states that recognizing sexual orientations and gender identities is an expression of human identity (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019).

Furthermore, activists of the campaign believed that the MEN handbook would establish what they called a 'gender ideology' lifestyle:

> Since kindergarten, the education handbook aimed to teach children about 'gender ideology,' particularly targeting six- and seven-year-olds, instructing them on freedom without consulting their parents on how they should dress as men or women. We saw this as an interference in the home and a complete shift in the educational agenda for children. While we agreed with the Ministry of Education (MEN) on teaching sexuality, we believed it should be taught in the way we, as Christians, understand it (H. Pardo, personal interview, July 24, 2019).

The archives revealed that the MEN's workshop materials emphasized sex as a biological condition based on human sex chromosomes, reproductive organs, and the concept of being intersexual (Ministerio de Educación de Colombia, 2016). Meanwhile, gender was defined as a set of rules, attitudes, values, expectations, and roles assigned by culture to individuals based on their sex (Ministerio de Educación de Colombia, 2016). Therefore, MEN defined "gender as learned" and used the 'genderbread person' as shown in Figure 1, to explain how gender identity, gender expression, and behavior do not necessarily align with or conform to the sex assigned at birth. However, the campaign activists Edgar Patiño, former President of the Colombian Association of Christian Schools (*Asociación Colombiana de Colegios Cristianos*, OBED), Catalina Moscoso, director of the non-governmental organization *Ámalos* and the anonymous anti-gender activist noted in the interviews that this "controversial image" represents ideas associated with 'gender ideology' (E. Patiño, Moscoso, and anonymous anti-gender activist, personal interviews, June 25, July 19, and 26, 2019, respectively).

Figure 1.

The Genderbread Person Included in the Colombian Ministry of Education's 2016 PowerPoint Presentation
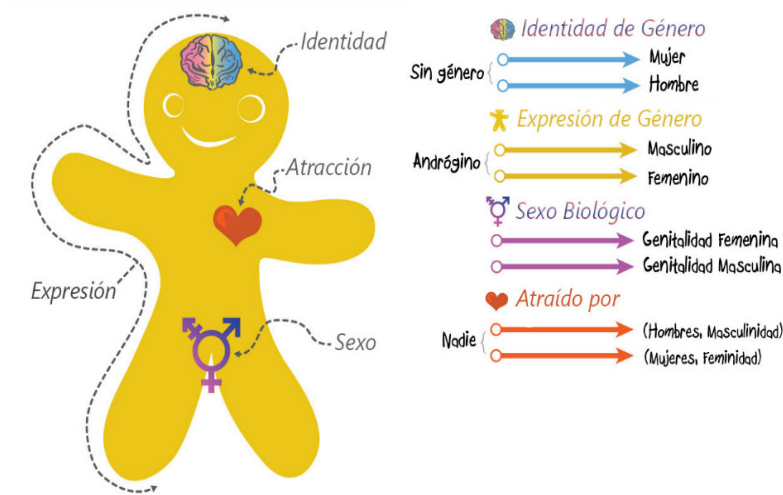
Source: Ministry of Education of Colombia, PowerPoint presentation on the Revision of Education Handbooks, 2016. Archival Creation made by Ángela María Bohórquez Oviedo.

Activists argued that what they considered the inclusion of 'gender ideology' ideas in the handbook would undermine their 'autonomy as school leaders' by accepting diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. They believed "Colombian schools would prioritize the LGBTI population rather than focusing on protecting students' rights" (C. Moscoso, personal interview, July 19, 2019). Thus, these ideas would support the recognition of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, thereby fostering a 'wrong' and 'problematic' interpretation of students' free development of their personalities (Patiño and Palacios, personal interviews, June 25 and July 11, respectively). For instance, uniforms for male and female students would become gender-neutral, allowing each student to choose based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (anonymous anti-gender activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019). Additionally, activists believed that parents should have the freedom to choose schools for their children based on academic, religious, and cultural preferences but that families should respect the schools' guidelines in shaping their children's education (Patiño and anonymous anti-gender activist, personal interviews, June 25 and July 26, 2019, respectively).

Hence, these frames against 'gender ideology' ideas helped activists simplify the world by encoding situations, events, experiences, and actions in a specific environment or context (Tarrow, 2011b). Anti-gender activists associated meanings with the

"generalization of a grievance and define the 'us' and 'them' in a movement's structure of conflict and alliances" (Tarrow, 2011b, p. 31). Moreover, they shaped frames to construct a collective identity in the public arena, delimiting boundaries and defining roles for potential enemies and supporters (Tarrow, 2011b).

Despite anti-gender activists' claims that 'gender ideology' could be incorporated into Colombian education through the official distribution of the education handbook, they also acknowledged that this term did not appear "so much in the education handbook, but rather in other videos and materials from the government" (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019). However, the activists did not clearly specify which materials they were referring to. For Minister Parody, this controversial national debate over the handbook also became a personal issue related to her sexual orientation (G. Parody, personal interview, July 23, 2019) and was also seen as an 'abuse' of her position of power (Garcés Amaya, 2024, p. 6).

3.1.3. The ECAS Survey

The Colombian anti-gender movement added the ECAS survey as a new perceived grievance in the campaign's frame against 'gender ideology' ideas in the country. Since 2006, Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE) has conducted the biannual survey '*Encuesta sobre Sexualidad en niños, niñas y adolescentes'* (ECAS) to middle and high school students to detect child exploitation, child pornography, and sexual tourism within students complying the Colombian Law 1336 from 2009 and Law 679 from 2001. This survey collected crucial statistical information on the social, individual, and familial risk factors that may provoke child sexual exploitation and its consequences.

According to the interviewed anti-gender activists, a private school teacher stole one of the ECAS questionnaires and passed it to Patiño (Moscoso and anonymous activist, personal interviews, July 19, and July 26, 2019; respectively). Activists found the survey's set of questions on sexuality to be 'immoral' and 'inappropriate' for students. Patiño and Moscoso argued that the ECAS was secretly administered in schools without parental consent or teacher supervision, using explicit and inappropriate sexual language, specifically in Chapter D on Sexuality (E. Patiño, personal interview, June 25, 2019; C. Moscoso, personal interview, July 19, 2019). The ECAS questions were related to comprehensive sexuality education discussed at school, sexual orientation, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual coercion, sexual behaviors or services, and unsolicited and unconsented advances.

Patiño and Moscoso explained that these questions could hypersexualize underage students in Colombian schools, particularly opposing the survey's definition of sexual relations, which included "kisses, hugs, caresses, genital contact (penis–vagina,

penis-anus, penis-mouth), or penetration with any element or object" (personal interviews, June 25 and July 19, 2019, respectively). Therefore, the ECAS survey represented a 'governmental strategy,' in collaboration with the United Nations, aimed at population control, similar to the revision of the education handbook (Moscoso, July 19, 2019).

Based on this frame of meaning, anti-gender activists mobilized individuals through emotions, a key component in capturing followers' attention (Gómez-Suárez, 2016; Tarrow, 2011b). The anonymous anti-gender activist (personal interview, July 26, 2019) explained that they arranged a meeting with President Juan Manuel Santos and later with an official from the Ministry of the Interior. Leaders of the Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology' understood that their newly perceived challenge could prompt a swift response from the government to avoid further controversy. In doing so, the right-wing network pressured the government to reconsider its commitments and alliances (McAdam et al., 2004).

Following this, private schools reached out to their allied networks from evangelical Christian churches, including the Colombian Evangelical Confederation (CEDECOL), the International Network of Family and Education (*Red Internacional de Familia y Educación*, RIFE), the National Catholic Confederation of Education (*Confederación Nacional Católica de Educación*, CONACED), the Union of International Schools (*Unión de Colegios Internacionales*, UNCOLI), and the Colombian Association of Christian Schools (*Asociación Colombiana de Colegios Cristianos*, OBED) to mobilize against DANE for conducting the ECAS in both private and public schools. The anonymous anti-gender activist, Moscoso, and Patiño emphasized that by leveraging their political influence, they could secure a meeting with the Director of DANE at the time (personal interviews, July 26, June 25, and July 19, respectively). During the meeting, the campaign representatives voiced their concerns about children's psychosocial development. Anti-gender activists called for a government review, particularly amid the polarized plebiscite campaign season.

3.1.4. The 'No' Vote Campaign

Former President Álvaro Uribe Vélez, from the political party Centro Democrático, led the opposition to the peace agreement with the FARC (BBC, 2016). The 'No' vote campaign supported and included the campaign against 'gender ideology' (González & Castro, 2018). In Congress, Senator María del Rosario Guerra, from the same political party, defended the 'No' vote in the plebiscite, arguing that the gender perspective was a limitation in the peace agreement. During the interview, Senator Guerra shared a PowerPoint presentation that included two academic articles from the plebiscite campaign in her archives: one titled *El Enfoque de Género en el Acuerdo Final para la Terminación del Conflicto y la Construcción de una Paz Estable y Duradera,* written by Ilva Myriam Hoyos (2016), former delegate Attorney for

the Defense of the Rights of Children and the Family, and another titled *Difference Between the Gender Perspective and the Gender Ideology* by Martha Miranda-Novoa (2012).

Senator Guerra's archives revealed three key aspects of the 'No' vote campaign. First, they highlighted a persistent fear regarding the recognition of the term 'gender' weaponized as 'gender ideology:'

> A new way of understanding the person, the family, society, the relationships between men and men, freedom, autonomy, fundamental rights, and even the duties of the State, replacing them with new realities centered on sexual identity and orientation. Is this not the essence of the 'gender ideology'? (Hoyos, 2016, cited in Guerra's archives, 2016)

Second, the relationship between the gender perspective and the term 'gender ideology' was explained in Guerra's PowerPoint presentation through a word frequency analysis of the initial Colombian peace agreement signed in September 2016. Gender was mentioned 114 times, gender perspective 21 times, and sexism and discrimination against women twice. Guerra's analysis framed gender as a semantic issue linked to unresolved accusations against the FARC, such as abortions and rapes documented by the public prosecutor's office. For Guerra, these issues conflicted with the Santos government's message of respecting human rights and protecting the lives of women and unborn children (M. R. Guerra, personal interview, July 18, 2019).

Third, Guerra's materials also confirmed that the opposition to the peace agreement and the plebiscite was already aware that 'gender ideology' was not mentioned anywhere in the peace agreement, as stated in one of her archival documents:

> Partly because the National government has acknowledged not knowing what it ('gender ideology') means […] Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that 'gender ideology' could be encrypted within the Final Agreement; it is not easily noticeable, but it can be revealed. To do so, it is necessary to understand the role of those who proposed expanding the 'gender approach' during the negotiation table, and whether any of the ideas they presented align with what is known as 'gender ideology.' (Hoyos, 2016, p.29)

These issues, along with the accusations against the FARC, have historically been sensitive topics due to Colombia's long-standing conflict. Such themes could fuel polarization and portray women and children as the sole victims of the conflict, which opens up a discussion about how ideas, words, and their placement matter (Enloe, 2012). First, "women and children should not be lumped together" (Enloe, 2012, p. 27) because:

> As if women were children as if there were no difference between an adult woman and a vulnerable child. Those are deeply patriarchal presumptions […] They still undergird a lot of the thinking of those male legislators everywhere who imagine that women, like children, need to be controlled by adult men (Enloe, 2023a).

Second, the assumption that portrays women and children as helpless has also been used to justify prolonging the conflict and preventing women from playing a more active role in peace negotiations or any political process (Ellerby, 2013; Shepherd, 2013; Puechguirbal, 2010, cited in Shepherd, 2010; Anderlini, 2007). Third, this statement highlights the ongoing significance of the 'myth of protection' (Tickner, 2001). Thus, gender is used by states to justify their protection of what they consider 'vulnerable people,' victims and casualties of war, while simultaneously exchanging obedience and subordination for promises of security (Tickner, 2001). "Men are the natural protectors of women and children," and "women are grateful for men's protection" (Enloe, 2023b, p. 138). Moreover, the portrayal of the protected and the protector is based on gendered dichotomies and the construction of masculine autonomy—freedom, control, heroism—against feminine dependency—passivity and vulnerability—where dependency becomes a status of subordination (Peterson, 1992).

In the meantime, several pastors joined the 'No' vote campaign in the plebiscite, including Eduardo Cañas from the megachurch *Manantial de Vida* and former co-president of the right-wing political party Colombia Justa Libres; Edgar Castaño, leader of the *Confederación Evangélica de Colombia* (CEDECOL); Héctor Pardo from the megachurch *Tabernáculo de la Fe*; and Jhon Milton Rodríguez, pastor of *Misión Paz a las Naciones* and, later, the first elected senator for the Christian political party Colombia Justa Libres. Juan Fernando Cristo, former Minister of the Interior, acknowledged that pastors recruited people from their pulpits with speeches against the inclusion of 'gender ideology' in the final agreement (J. F. Cristo, personal interview, July 11, 2019).

3.2. Reactivation of the Right–Wing Network

In August 2016, two months before the plebiscite election, Colombian right–wing leaders reactivated a preexisting national network that responded to moments when traditional social norms were perceived as being threatened. Gender was materialized as "a structural variable in the life of the country (Colombia) and will become increasingly important in the political debate" (González,

2017, p. 115). Former President Álvaro Uribe, former Attorney General Alejandro Ordóñez, influential pastors from the country's largest megachurches with political ties such as Eduardo Cañas and former Senator Jhon Milton Rodríguez, Héctor Pardo, and Edgar Castaño—who are nationally recognized for their religious leadership—along with coalitions of Christian schools, pro-life and pro-family non-governmental organizations such as Fundación *Ámalos,* parents, and anti-gender activists, comprised the right-wing network.

The Colombian right-wing network was "a construction of local, regional, national, and transnational links with anti-gender activists, elite leaders, and campaigns against 'gender ideology,' diverse secular supporters from different fields of expertise, thinking, and cultural, religious, political, and economic backgrounds to contest public policies, the government, and authorities" (Bohórquez, 2021, p.16). This network deals with political advocacy, legislative lobbying, strategic litigation, mass mobilizations, private social media campaigns, seminars, and religious worship (Bueno-Hansen, 2020).

This type of network tends to react to the political gains made by women's and LGBTI rights organizations in the Colombian Constitution of 1991, which recognized and protected minority rights, and when the Constitutional Court approved of same-sex marriage, same-sex adoption, and abortion in specific cases (Bueno-Hansen, 2020). This network is similar to other conservative groups worldwide that "have articulated their opposition to any project that threatens their conception of sexuality and reproduction […] They seek to discredit the sociological understanding of gender" (González & Castro, 2018, p.15).

When networks are spread through campaigns, their participants tend to congregate with students' parents, churches, diverse professionals, and anti-gender groups interested in collecting signatures and participating in campaigns against policies or gender inclusion proposals (Patternote, 2023; Corrêa et al., 2020; González & Castro, 2018, p.15). The network leaders promote and share messages about people's protests and virtual mobilizations to protect "the traditional family and values" (Patternote, 2023; Corrêa et al., 2020; González & Castro, 2018, p. 15).

3.3. The Disinformation Strategy

In August 2016, a set of fake images was circulated as the 'original' handbook (Barcénas, 2022; González & Castro, 2018) on digital media platforms, particularly WhatsApp. The traditional national newspapers *El Espectador* and *El Tiempo* began disseminating complaints from teachers and parents about this issue. Professor Franklin Gil Hernández from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia explained that the images related to family diversity circulating in the public domain originated from digital materials in Chilean books *Nicolás tiene dos papás* and *Anita y sus dos*

mamás, as well as the Belgian book *In Bed with David and Jonathan* by Tom Bouden (Gil Hernández, personal interview, July 9, 2019).

The interview results revealed that the growing disinformation about the education handbook was closely linked to specific regional mainstream media outlets (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019). Activists disseminated 'gender ideology' messaging through regional newspapers and seven radio stations, particularly in traditionally conservative and Catholic areas such as Barranquilla on the Colombian northern Caribbean coast, to influence the national plebiscite debate (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019):

> Those images circulated across Colombia. Yes, the images were not from the handbook. They were taken from a Belgian book, but the journalists said the images referred to the education handbook. (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019)

As stated by the anonymous activist (personal interview, July 26, 2019), former deputy Ángela Hernández, who also participated in Mexican forums aimed at defeating 'gender ideology,' met with principals of several Colombian private schools to discuss what she described as 'the colonization of schools by the government to impose gender ideology' in the days that followed. Simultaneously, the pro-life organization *Red Familia Colombia* launched an online petition urging the Ministry of Education (MEN) to stop what they viewed as the imposition of 'gender ideology' in school handbooks. Former Minister Parody (personal interview, July 23, 2020) reported that the petition gathered over 2,000 signatures and revealed that an employee of the Attorney General's office started spreading messages about the distorted education handbook on social media. As a result, the office opened an investigation based on these allegations, which, Parody explained, was later closed (G. Parody, personal interview, July 23, 2020).

3.4. 'Gender Ideology' Ideas Become a National Campaign

The Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology,' mirroring other Latin American cases, exposed an organized group of diverse anti-gender activists from various fields who mobilize ideas through a 'repertoire of collective action' (Tilly, 2010, as cited in Lim, 2018). This refers to a "set of various protest-related tools and actions such as, but not limited to, public meetings, pamphleteering, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, sit-ins, petition drives, boycotts, and strikes" (Tilly, 2010, as cited in Lim, 2018, p. 113). The forms of collective action vary across countries, shaped by cultural contexts, networks, resources, and mobilization tools (McAdam et al., 2004). Therefore, these variations depend on specific regimes, political actors, and political opportunity structures (McAdam et al., 2004).

'Gender ideology' ideas were shaped into a national campaign that organized the protest 'Marcha por la Familia' on August 10, 2016, involving teachers and parents from religiously affiliated private schools in major Colombian cities, including Bogotá, Medellín, Manizales, Cartagena, Bucaramanga, Santa Marta, Valledupar, Riohacha, and Popayán (Garcés Amaya, 2024; ASTRAEA, 2023; Bárcenas, 2022; Beltrán & Creely, 2022; Gil Hernández, personal interview, July 9, 2019; Serrano Amaya, 2017; González, 2017; Rodríguez Rondón, 2017). According to an anonymous anti-gender activist (personal interview, July 26, 2019), this protest originated on the northern Colombian coast, where fake news about the education handbook was first spread. At a school meeting, an associate shared that Deputy Hernández would lead a protest in the north-central region of Colombia against the perceived threat of 'gender ideology.' Activists gathered 100 schools and 30 politicians to explain the potential consequences of implementing the MEN education handbook in the country (anonymous anti-gender activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019).Bottom of Form

Anti-gender activists worked 'discretely' in the right-wing network, disseminating unified messages and pursuing specific collective actions to empower participants, opponents, the media, and third parties (Tarrow, 2011a). Activists reached pastors across the country through CEDECOL, coordinated by pastor Castaño, RIFE, and one of the prominent representatives of private schools with religious affiliation, including Catholic schools grouped in CONACED (anonymous anti-gender activist and E. Patiño, personal interviews, June 25 and July 26, 2019, respectively). Some private schools extended the protest invitation to schools in other cities, such as Medellín, Cali, Cartagena, and Manizales (anonymous anti-gender activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019). Likewise, pastor Cañas communicated with his followers through his churches in Bogotá (Cañas, personal interview, July 4, 2019). Meanwhile, in the west of Colombia, in Ibagué, Pastor Diego Rodríguez from the church La Vid designed banners and collected offerings with his believers to participate in the protest (D. Rodríguez, personal interview, July 14, 2019).

Similar to other campaigns against 'gender ideology,' the Colombian campaign has a distinct transnational character, relying on networks that can be understood as central organizational structures and key groups that facilitate identity expression and help navigate complex, evolving political landscapes (Castells, 2000, as cited in Bennett & Segerber, 2012). These transnational networks also function as both face-to-face groups and connective structures that promote shared interests, frame collective action, and support identities that sustain opposition against adversaries (Tarrow, 2011a).

For example, the Colombian campaign was linked via WhatsApp to international anti-gender movements, forming a restricted transnational elite network of influence (E. Patiño and C. Moscoso, personal interviews, June 25, 2019, and July 19, 2019, respectively). However, access to these social media groups was limited to verified followers, professionals, participants in pro-life and pro-family congresses, and those

affiliated with religious organizations or maintaining strong ties to religious leaders (E. Patiño, C. Moscoso, and Cañas, personal interviews, June 25, 2019; July 19, 2019; and July 4, 2019, respectively). At the time of this study interviews, activists opposed to 'gender ideology' were actively participating in digital discussions organized by similar movements and campaigns from countries including Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay, Panama, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Spain (E. Patiño and C. Moscoso, personal interviews, June 25, 2019, and July 19, 2019, respectively).

3.5. 'Movement Entrepreneurs'

The campaign had key leaders with fundamental roles to stimulate mobilizations: a former President, an attorney general, senators, pastors, and pro-family activists as 'movement entrepreneurs' (Tarrow, 2011a, p. 11) that identified the feeling of solidarity and identity to stimulate mobilization (Tarrow, 2011a). These individuals and groups framed action while intersecting their goals, aspirations, beliefs, and values with the target population's inherited culture. These influential public figures have full access to creating robust networks, control the government, and participate in the media, official institutions, and cultural rituals (Tarrow, 2011a):

> The group most affected by 60 years of civil war in Colombia is the church, as the FARC has killed and kidnapped pastors, as well as burned temples and schools. However, the church is not mentioned in the peace agreement. (E. Cañas, personal interview, July 4, 2019)

Pastors' statements revealed a dispute for political representation that ultimately redefined political homophobia, misogyny, and the exclusion of LGBTI identities within the national plebiscite context. Pastors Castaño, Cañas, and Pardo (personal interviews, June 26, July 4, and July 24, 2019, respectively) argued that the government would grant 'certain privileges' to the LGBTI population while neglecting what they considered the 'real' victims of the conflict: women and children (J. M. Rodriguez, personal interview, July 18, 2019). They claimed "they lost their husbands, children, and jobs," and "the guerrilla did not attack any homosexuals" (E. Castaño and J. M. Rodriguez, personal interviews, June 26 and July 18, 2019). However, the 2015 report from the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica presents a different reality (Beltrán & Creely, 2022):

Although it is important to acknowledge that the State – through its armed forces and other institutions – has historically been one of the perpetrators of violence against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, the levels of certain forms of violence, such as threats, murders, massacres, and sexual violence, increased dramatically with the emergence or arrival of illegal armed groups. (Centro Nacional de Memoría Histórica, 2015, p. 129).

The lack of recognition of LGBTI victims in the long-term armed conflict was reinforced as part of political strategies to reduce sexuality and gender to "nothing more than a variable reflecting static religious values and traditional attitudes about sexuality, whether shaped by public opinion or political leadership" (Bosia & Weiss, 2013, p. 7). According to the interviewed pastors, the peace agreement should focus on "the family" as a central element in healing Colombian society after the prolonged armed conflict (L. Palacios, personal interview, July 11, 2019). Moreover, any references to gender in the peace agreement should be modified to ensure "respect for gender" (E. Castaño, personal interview, June 26, 2019), while sexual orientation and gender identity should be viewed as 'personal conditions' rather than interconnected aspects of an individual's identity (L. Palacios, personal interview, July 11, 2019). Consequently, victims of the conflict should be recognized as 'human beings' rather than defined by their gender, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation (L. Palacios, personal interview, July 11, 2019).

However, these statements sought to delegitimize the critical role of women's and LGBTI rights organizations in advancing rights, as well as their authority over their embodied knowledge, while reinforcing heteronormativity (Bosia & Weiss, 2013). This campaign explicitly adopted a binary construction of heterosexual differences, unions, and families as the normative standard (Runyan & Peterson, 2014).

3.6. The Colombian 'Gender Ideology' Effect

In summary, the campaign against 'gender ideology' was aware that the '*Marcha por la Familia*' would sway opinions in the national plebiscite debate. Patiño, former President of OBED, explained, "Colombia was thirsty for defense and protection, and these activists have mobilized across countries" (E. Patiño, personal interview, June 25, 2019). Following the march, Minister Parody attended a political accountability session in the Colombian Congress, proposed by right-wing senators Guerra and Chamorro on August 16 (Semana, 2016b). Despite President Santos publicly stating that 'gender ideology' did not exist in the unpublished education handbook *Ambientes de Aprendizaje Libres de Discriminación*, the government rejected the final revision and publication of the handbook (*El Tiempo*, 2016).

On September 21, DANE announced the temporary suspension of the ECAS survey due to concerns from parents and school principals, as well as the need to reassess the phrasing of Chapter D on sexuality (DANE, 2016). The anonymous activist revealed that, two days before the October plebiscite, DANE held a second meeting with 25 professionals from various social science disciplines (personal interview, July 26, 2019). However, there is no evidence of modified survey materials or final results on DANE's website, limiting the tool's utility for public policy decisions on sexual exploitation and student safety.

The suspension of the ECAS survey reflected the persistent politicization of gender issues through 'gender ideology' messaging, which, rather than fostering an inclusive dialogue, may have silenced victims of abuse. As Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly (2004) explain, governments often adjust their practices and policies in response to contentious actions. In this case, the right-wing network gained greater recognition and strengthened its political power through the campaign, allowing it to influence gender policies while continuing to oppress marginalized communities in the pursuit of a peaceful society.

After the 'No' vote in the plebiscite, Parody resigned (Ministry of Education, 2016b). Later, CEDECOL sent a letter on behalf of the right-wing network to President Santos, urging him to renegotiate the agreement (E. Castaño, personal interview, June 26, 2019; Beltrán & Creely, 2022). During the renegotiation, Minister Cristo (personal interview, July 11, 2019) noted that pastors—Cañas, Castaño, Pardo, and Rodríguez—could not find the term 'gender ideology' in the agreement.

Pastors and politicians demanded changes during the peace agreement renegotiation regarding issues such as "the family; Christian victims; the right to educate children; freedom of worship; 'gender ideology;' political participation; transitional justice; and private property" (González, 2017, p. 124). The final version of the agreement reflected semantic changes from the original, with terms like 'gender,' 'gender perspective,' 'sexual diversity,' and 'sexual orientation' being mentioned less frequently (González, 2017). Additionally, churches were recognized as victims and relevant actors, on par with ethnic communities and women, while the family was also acknowledged as a victim of the armed conflict (Gómez, 2017). The gender perspective was reframed as equality of opportunity between men and women (Gómez, 2017). Finally, the agreement has been criticized for 'invisibilizing' diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, replacing them with references to vulnerable groups (Gómez, 2017). Nevertheless, eight years later, there have been no updates or revisions to Colombia's education handbooks and the ECAS survey.

Conclusion

Between August and October 2016, a reactivated right-wing network launched an organized campaign against 'gender ideology' in Colombia, joining the wave of transnational anti-gender movements. By using the catch-all term 'gender ideology,' this campaign became a central rallying point for stoking "public fears" (D. Rodríguez, personal interview, July 14, 2019). The anti-gender activists' grievances were often cloaked in religious and conservative rhetoric, framing their actions as a defense of 'well-being,' even as their arguments stigmatized historically marginalized communities.

Similar to other Latin American campaigns against 'gender ideology,' the 2016 Colombian case featured strategic leaders who united people around cultural ideas and built social networks for mobilization (Tarrow, 2011a). Followers of these campaigns trusted and cooperated with high-ranking leaders whom they saw as able to unite people around political, cultural, or religious ideas (Tarrow, 2011a). Consequently, the campaign proposed a shared pattern of understandings and identities (McAdam et al., 2004) through the leadership or endorsement of prominent figures, including a former president, a former attorney general, senators, and evangelical pastors, all of whom gained trust and cooperation as 'movement entrepreneurs' (Tarrow, 2011a, p. 11).

The Colombian campaign revealed a local, regional, and international networking operation. The campaign leaders followed patterns observed in transnational anti-gender campaigns, adapting their collective action to fit their cultural contexts, networks, and mobilization tools based on perceived political opportunities (McAdams et al., 2004). Interviews conducted for this research indicated that these leaders shared common identities and ideals, coordinating mobilizations and spreading narratives both locally and internationally.

At the same time, the campaign's leaders and followers engaged discreetly with various international networks, collaborating with movements, groups, and campaigns across political and academic fields through hybrid forms such as social media platforms, meetings, conferences, and forums (E. Patiño and C. Moscoso, personal interviews, June 25, 2019, and July 19, 2019, respectively). These findings underscore the campaign followers' preference for working privately, which has limited both research and public awareness of their internal dynamics and political strategies.

The collective action of the 2016 Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology' had a shared cause that went beyond preventing the 'homosexualization of schools.' It became contentious when right-wing actors confronted official authorities and infiltrated institutional projects aimed at protecting children and promoting human rights, such as the ECAS survey and the revision of the MEN educational handbooks designed to prevent bullying and discrimination in public schools.

The claims of the Colombian campaign about 'the family' (L. Palacios, personal interview, July 11, 2019) and the recognition of victims as 'human beings' rather than defined by their gender (L. Palacios, personal interview, July 11, 2019) or sexual orientation further illustrates the urgency of these activists to promote traditional social roles, moral norms, and biological dichotomies to sustain the sociopolitical power of traditional institutions such as religion and the family.

Under these circumstances, the analyzed campaign conveyed implicit messages of homophobia, misogyny, and exclusion of LGBTI identities, reinforcing radical views about women and children, who are often portrayed as the 'exclusive' victims of the conflict, which reinforced their status as subordinates in need of state protection and diminished their roles as central participants in political negotiations.

The Colombian emotional 'gender ideology' messaging surrounding cultural views on sexuality, identity, and parental rights to educate children also suggested a critical alliance with mainstream media outlets, as the anonymous activist noted in the northern region, spreading disinformation and fake news (Anonymous activist, personal interview, July 26, 2019). The findings of this research also urge practitioners and scholars to question the lack of media outlets' investigation into 'gender ideology' ideas, which empowered Colombian ultraconservative leaders and polarized public opinion on the inclusion of marginalized minorities in the peace process.

Finally, the dynamics of the 2016 Colombian campaign against 'gender ideology' before the plebiscite exacerbated power disparities and highlighted societal and institutional failures to adopt an intersectional approach to democratizing sociopolitical relations for peace.

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