

The rise in organized anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activities in New Brunswick

About the New Brunswick Women's Council

The New Brunswick Women's Council is an independent advisory body for study and consultation on matters of importance, interest, and concern to women and their substantive equality. Its objectives are:

- a) to be an independent body that provides advice to the Minister on matters of importance to women and their substantive equality;
- b) to bring to the attention of government and the public issues of interest and concern to women and their substantive equality;
- c) to include and engage women of diverse identities, experiences and communities, women's groups and society in general;
- d) to be strategic and provide advice on emerging and future issues; and
- e) to represent New Brunswick women.

In delivering on these objectives, the Women's Council may conduct or commission research and publish reports, studies, and recommendations. The Women's Council is directed by an appointed volunteer membership that includes both organizations and individuals. The work is executed by a small staff team.

Content note: *This brief contains detailed discussion of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activities and attitudes as well as discussion of childhood sexual abuse and white supremacy.*

New Brunswick is in the midst of a backlash against 2SLGBTQIA+¹ people and communities.

Some of this backlash is typical resistance to or slow adoption of social change. Individuals who haven't known any 2SLGBTQIA+ people (or haven't realized that they've known any) may question why these communities require explicit protection and affirmation. They may require support to understand that these sexual orientations and gender identities are part of the natural diversity of humanity and have existed throughout history. Those who have fought to advance women's equality may struggle with how to be inclusive of individuals who belong to gender minorities² while keeping the gendered nature of many issues front and centre.

There is, however, a segment of this backlash that is more extreme and is organized. Its participants have [protested drag storytime at a public library](#) and [professional development for teachers](#) on sexual orientation and gender diversity. They have [coordinated requests](#) to review 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming [sex education](#) books in library collections as well as [a school policy](#) that supports 2SLGBTQIA+ students and families. For the sake of precision and clarity, this brief refers to this subset of the backlash as *the organized backlash* and to those involved in its activities as *participants*.

Participants in the organized backlash claim there is a radical 2SLGBTQIA+ agenda (often referred to as "gender ideology") to indoctrinate children and youth, groom them for sexual abuse, and erode the rights of women and girls. They claim that this agenda is part of a larger plot to destabilize families, communities, and society.

Despite this, many participants also claim that they don't take issue with 2SLGBTQIA+ people for simply existing—they are just concerned that diversity, inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance have gone too far.

¹Two Spirit (an identity specific to Indigenous peoples), lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities. At times, this brief uses other acronyms to accurately reflect the demographics of participants in cited research.

²Gender minorities include individuals who are transgender, non-binary, agender, genderqueer, Two Spirit, and much more. Throughout the rest of this brief, we use the term *trans* as a broad term for gender minorities and because this is the term that the organized backlash is attempting to stigmatize.

This organized backlash is driven by online misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracy theories. It is far-right extremism.³ It is part of a more significant global movement against human rights for protected groups.

The claims made by participants can be compelling because they appropriate language about protecting children and youth as well as the rights of women and girls. In reality, the organized backlash is not only plainly anti-2SLGBTQIA+, it also undermines legitimate efforts to address sexual abuse of children and youth and is a threat to the equality of women and girls.

Some participants know this; others earnestly but mistakenly believe that their activities are legitimately not hateful and protect children, youth, and women. This brief aims to make the organized backlash's roots and goals clear and establish that the safety of children and youth as well as the rights of women and girls require that 2SLGBTQIA+ people of all ages be protected and affirmed through evidence-based policy.

The claims

This brief will first lay out the claims of the organized backlash before debunking them. While the participants in New Brunswick are currently focused on claims about protecting children and youth, this brief also addresses related claims about trans inclusion impacting the rights of women and girls. These claims are not as prominent in New Brunswick at this time, but they are present and they are part of the "logic" of the organized backlash.

Protecting children and youth

Participants argue that drag storytimes and 2SLGBTQIA+ affirming sex education materials in libraries are grooming children and youth for sexual abuse. The argument is that children and youth are being desensitized at a societal level to sexually explicit materials and discussions, not necessarily that performers will harm them at events. Participants claim this is part of an agenda to prepare the public to accept pedophilia as part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ umbrella, no longer criminalized but protected as a human right.

Participants are profoundly concerned with the concepts of gender and gender diversity (i.e., that sex and gender are not the same thing, that a person's assigned sex at birth does not automatically determine their gender, and that there are more than two sexes and genders). They claim that students are being coached into identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+ (and trans in particular) by school programming and policies on sexual

³Researchers based at the University of New Brunswick define right-wing extremism as:

an umbrella term for individuals who hold reactionary worldviews, ideologies, or religious beliefs that espouse racial, ethnic, gender, or religious superiority, and which may lead to behaviours that break the law (e.g., engaging in hate crimes), or that may motivate, justify, or contribute to some form of violent action against individuals or the public-at-large. They include the following among the hallmarks of right-wing extremism: "Advocating for, and the active dissemination of, right-wing inspired conspiracy theories" and "Overt or covert expression, encouragement, and/or condoning of racist, misogynist, extreme anti-immigration, anti-semitic, islamophobic, and/or intolerant views."

orientation and gender identity. Students are said to be too young to understand these concepts and are therefore likely to be confused and overly influenced by discussions of them. The result, it is argued, is that students then come out as 2SLGBTQIA+ to gain social standing. An [urban legend](#) about [schools having litterboxes for students who identify as cats](#) is often cited as evidence that institutions are over-accommodating students who are making disingenuous claims to get attention.

The organized backlash also claims that this results in students' relationships with their families becoming strained. Students transitioning socially at school (e.g., changing pronouns and what name they use) without their families' knowledge or approval is considered proof of this. This is also said to make students vulnerable to abuse.

Under this logic, teachers, librarians, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people are labelled *groomers*.

Finally, participants also claim that trans children and youth receive untested, irreversible, and potentially sterilizing medical treatment as part of their transition. They link this to "depopulation," a conspiracy theory that white populations are being systematically reduced.

Defending women and girls

This part of the organized backlash is particularly fixated on transgender women. There is a subset of women's rights advocates who also share this fixation.

Participants claim that the acceptance of trans women makes women's washrooms, locker rooms, spas, etc. unsafe and sites of potential sexual violence against children and cisgender women.

Participants also claim that girls' and women's sports are under attack. Trans girls and women are assumed to have [an unfair advantage](#) over cisgender girls and women as athletes and to be a safety risk when sports involve physical contact. Participants suggests that some men transition simply to be able to compete at elite levels of play that they could not reach in men's divisions.

Finally, participants argue that women's ability to talk about their experiences as women is being limited by pressure to not only include, but centre trans people. This is said to be leading to the erasure of women and the issues they face. This concern often focuses on the increasing use of gender-inclusive language in relation to abortion, pregnancy and birth, and infant nursing.⁴ This, too, is said to contribute to the confusion and grooming of children and youth.

⁴Examples of this include referring to a pregnant person or birthing person instead of a pregnant woman or mother; chestfeeding instead of breastfeeding; and describing gynecological care as being required by people of all genders. These terms may be used because some non-binary people and trans men may become pregnant, give birth, nurse, or require gynecological care. Similarly, some non-binary people and trans women may require healthcare that is traditionally thought of as men's healthcare (e.g., prostate care).

It's worth noting that the organized backlash isn't uniform in its stance toward the very existence of trans adults. Some participants flatly deny that a person can be trans and thus view all trans women as men seeking access to women's spaces to harm them. Others accept that trans people exist but contend that they are exceedingly rare and cannot know they are trans until they are adults. Thus, even those who accept the existence of trans people argue that the attention given to them is outsized. Participants may also express concern that trans people transition thoughtlessly or too quickly. This aligns with claims that children and youth are too young to know that they are 2SLGBTQIA+ and therefore schools and libraries should simply not address gender identity or sexual orientation to avoid confusing or influencing them.

Examining the claims

The organized backlash's claims do not hold up under scrutiny. Evidence-based examination reveals that its contentions are clearly anti-2SLGBTQIA+ and rely on many debunked and harmful myths perpetuated by online misinformation and disinformation. Examination also shows that its claims are actually harming children, youth, and women of all sexual orientations and gender identities.

Sexual abuse

People often imagine sexual abuse of children being perpetrated by a stranger or someone the victim barely knows. Most sexual violence, against both [children](#) and [adults](#), however, is perpetrated by someone the victim is acquainted with. People who sexually abuse children work hard to blend in and go unnoticed. They [typically groom children over time](#), building a relationship with a specific child or children, slowly testing and pushing their boundaries and building up secrecy, fear, and shame.

Drag artists are vibrant, over-the-top, animated performers—this is why they are both [well-suited to provide children's programming](#) and why drag storytimes aren't opportunities for sexual abuse.

In terms of drag storytime grooming children and youth by exposing them to sexualized material, this ignores that costuming and content for these events are age-appropriate.⁵ Many kinds of performers capably switch between adult material and content that is appropriate for children—just think of musicians and actors who appear on *Sesame Street*. A person would only assume that drag artists can't make that switch if they think that there's something fundamentally different about and wrong with drag artists—or else they think that it doesn't matter if the content is age-appropriate, drag artists simply don't belong around children.

Either way, the rationale is profoundly anti-2SLGBTQIA+. It is not simply about drag because, for the backlash, drag performers are a proxy for the full 2SLGBTQIA+ community. This is evidenced by participants' frequent references to the community in their anti-drag storytime activities as well as the fact that they are also organizing against sex education materials and school policies that affirm 2SLGBTQIA+ people. The

⁵While there are [videos available online](#) of adult-appropriate drag performances for women with infants and toddlers present, these videos are from private events and not within libraries or schools.

organized backlash's position implies that proximity to 2SLGBTQIA+ people (or information about them) is inherently dangerous or sexualizing to children and youth. It frames being 2SLGBTQIA+ as deviant and possibly contagious, something children and youth must be protected from.

The organized backlash isn't just anti-2SLGBTQIA+, however. By spreading misinformation about how grooming works, stigmatizing 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, and challenging affirming age-appropriate sex education materials in libraries, it is undermining legitimate efforts to protect children and youth from sexual abuse.

Preventing and reducing sexual abuse of children and youth requires ensuring that families, schools, community organizations, and government leaders understand how sexual abuse of minors is actually perpetrated. It requires evidence-based approaches to reducing vulnerability to abuse, including [sex education](#) that is age-appropriate and grounded in human rights. It requires that discussions of sex and sexuality not be stigmatized and that those who belong to sexual and gender minorities are affirmed. It requires fostering a culture of believing and supporting survivors of violence when they come forward.

The claims and activities of the organized backlash aren't simply not doing these things, they are actively attempting to prevent many of them from happening. Individuals who wish to make meaningful contributions to organizations that are actively engaged in protecting children and youth are being distracted by misinformation that feeds into the very problem they want to address. Thus, the organized backlash is enabling the kind of abuse it claims to be opposing.

Increasing rates of children and youth identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+

There is no debate: trans children and youth exist. Statistics Canada data demonstrates that [one in 300](#) Canadians over the age of 15 are transgender or non-binary. In New Brunswick, [21.9 per cent of youth from grades 6 to 12 identify as LGBTQ2+](#). The [Canadian Paediatric Society](#), [Canadian Psychological Association](#), [Canadian Medical Protective Association](#), and [Canadian Association of Social Workers](#) are among the respected national professional organizations that affirm trans children, youth, and adults. Further, gender identity and expression are protected in [Canadian](#) and [New Brunswick](#) human rights legislation.

It is true that [younger demographics are openly identifying as 2SLGBTQIA+ at higher rates than older generations](#). This is not because of "gender ideology," but because [they increasingly have language to describe their identity as well as institutional protections](#). It can be, imperfectly, compared to [the rise of left-handedness](#) when society stopped compelling left-handed people to function as if they were right-handed. Just as there have always been left-handed people, [there have always been trans people](#)—it just hasn't always been safe or possible to claim trans identities publicly in certain cultures, contexts, and time periods.

People also do not come out as trans lightly or to impact their social standing. Despite gains in protections, being trans still comes with tremendous risk due to transphobia and cis normativity (i.e., treating being cisgender not just as more prevalent, but as "normal"). [One recent Canadian study](#) found that "trans and

gender non-conforming youth were five times more likely to be suicidal” than their cisgender and gender conforming peers. In Canada, 2SLGBTQIA+ youth face [higher rates and frequency of bullying](#) and [report worse mental health indicators compared to non-2SLGBTQIA+ peers](#). 2SLGBTQIA+ people age 15 and older in Canada [experience higher rates of violent victimization and suicidal ideation](#) than non-2SLGBTQIA+ people. 2SLGBTQIA+ youth in Canada are at [elevated risk](#) of [homelessness](#) which also contributes to elevated risk of [sexual violence and exploitation](#).

Rather, people—including children and youth—come out as trans because they know themselves to be trans. [Multiple studies have found](#) that trans children are as certain of their gender as their cisgender peers are of theirs. These studies also found that children’s identification with their gender identity is similar before and after social transition and regardless of how long it had been since they transitioned—meaning that transition did not create or alter their gender identity but affirmed it. [Research](#) also shows that the vast majority of children who socially transition continue to identify with the gender identity they transitioned to years later. Claims of the “social contagion” of children and youth identifying as trans have been [soundly debunked](#).

Preventing children and youth from learning about gender identity and diversity ignores the reality that some children and youth are in fact trans and need to be affirmed. It also ignores that many children and youth have trans people in their families and communities and that [all students benefit from school-based 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion](#).

Another concern from participants is that students are transitioning at schools without the knowledge or approval of their families. To be clear: this is social transition, not medical, and it is informal (e.g., it does not involve changing government-issued identification materials).

Students may wish to transition socially at schools without telling their parents for many reasons. School policy to trust students’ decision to transition socially and to do so without telling their families is not an effort to [usurp or disrespect the role of families](#). Rather, it is a matter of [taking students’ personhood and rights seriously](#) and acknowledging the reality that students may need time and support from peers and trusted teachers to prepare to come out to their families. It is also a matter of keeping trans students safe in the face of the reality that [not all families will welcome and affirm](#) their gender identity. There is, of course, always the possibility that parents of students who have informally socially transitioned at school without telling them will find out through social circles that their child has transitioned. In those situations, the child can always deny the validity of the information if they need to for safety reasons—after all, it came to them through social circles and not from a school staff member.

Removing schools’ ability to support student-initiated informal social transition or the requirement that this transition not be shared with students’ parents without their consent means that students simply won’t come out to school staff. This puts trans students at risk, as [research demonstrates](#) that [research demonstrates](#) that LGBTQ youth with at least one accepting adult in their lives are significantly less likely to

attempt suicide and that this accepting adult is often a teacher or school counsellor. School-based protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ students are a public health strategy to reduce suicide risk among 2SLGBTQIA+ children and youth as well as mental health risks for all those who would be negatively affected by these tragic losses. Discomfort over parents not being entitled to information about their child's gender identity would be best addressed by working to ensure that all families are affirming and safe for 2SLGBTQIA+ students, not rolling back students' options and rights.

In terms of medical transition, standards of care are set by the [World Professional Association for Transgender Health](#) (WPATH). The [current edition of the standards](#) aims to

provide clinical guidance to health care professionals to assist transgender and gender diverse (TGD) people in accessing safe and effective pathways to achieving lasting personal comfort with their gendered selves with the aim of optimizing their overall physical health, psychological well-being, and self-fulfillment.

The standards include separate chapters on care for adults, adolescents, and children. They do not allow for medical transition of children before adolescence (i.e., before puberty is reached). The standards for adolescents foreground puberty suppression and hormone therapy as medical interventions. Surgical interventions for adolescents are subject to significant and rigorous requirements.

Even with standards allowing for medical interventions, such treatment can be incredibly difficult to access. A 2019 [article focused on Canada](#) explains that accessing care (not just medical interventions) at specialized clinics took months and at times more than a year for youth. This delay in care "was also preceded by a period often extending to years of reflection and waiting as they explored and came to accept their own gender and then worked up the courage to come out to their parents." The article reports that outcomes of medical intervention were positive, saying that those:

who had accessed medication or surgery generally felt positively about the interventions they had received. They recounted how medical interventions had improved their well-being and outlook on the future, in general or specific ways. For example, those who had had suicidal thoughts and/or engaged in self-harm in the past recounted decreased incidence of these thoughts or actions since starting medical intervention.

In New Brunswick, Medicare only pays for gender affirming surgeries for [those who are 18 and older](#). Only [some gender affirming surgeries](#) are covered by Medicare and many have to be accessed outside of New Brunswick (and must also be accessed in a public hospital). This means that, effectively, only hormonal treatments can be accessed by youth under 18 in New Brunswick. As with all medical treatments, [children and youth under 16](#) must have parent and/or guardian consent to access hormonal treatments.

Medical gender affirming care in Canada, including hormones for youth, [prioritizes regret-prevention](#) in its approach. Claims that most children and youth who transition later “desist” and return to being cisgender [have been refuted and research, in fact, shows](#) that adopting a “wait and see” model for gender affirming care is harmful. While the focus of this section of the brief is not on adults, it is also worth noting that a US-based [meta-analysis of the prevalence of regret](#) after medical transition involving surgery found less than a 1 per cent regret rate for transmasculine surgeries and a 1 per cent regret rate for transfeminine surgeries.

Just as the organized backlash enables sexual abuse of children, it increases the vulnerability of children and youth by seeking to remove protections for 2SLGBTQIA+ students while also stigmatizing them (as well as those students that have 2SLGBTQIA+ family and friends). The impact of this is profound, as earlier statistics about bullying, harassment, mental health outcomes, suicidality, and homelessness demonstrate.

Rights of women and girls

This section focuses on addressing claims that efforts to affirm gender diversity harm women and girls. To do this, it explores common concerns about gender diversity and inclusion that cisgender people (including some women’s rights advocates) struggle with and that the organized backlash leverages.

“I accept trans women—but they aren’t real women.”

This claim is often made in an effort to uplift the experiences of cisgender women. People who share it typically note that “real” women experience menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing, etc. These experiences are framed almost as sweat equity that trans women haven’t put in. But even among cisgender women, not all menstruate, can become or ever do become pregnant, give birth to children, or nurse. Are these cisgender women not women? Perhaps it comes down to them having XX chromosomes, a vagina, cervix, uterus, and fallopian tubes. Except, again, [not all cisgender women do](#).

Including trans women in the category of women isn’t a matter of acting as if trans women and cis women are exactly the same. Rather, it is about expanding the concept of womanhood to include both trans and cis women and affirming that all women deserve rights and protections.

This not only serves trans women, but cisgender women as well. As it stands, infertility, for example, has [serious negative psychological effects](#) for cisgender women because they assume that being able to carry a pregnancy to term is an essential part of their identities. It also benefits women whose womanhood has historically been challenged or deemed atypical—notably queer, [racialized](#), and [disabled women](#).

Once the rationale for understanding womanhood more expansively becomes clear, so too does the reason that the organized backlash opposes it.

Psychologists understand [social categorization](#) to be an innate ability of humans that helps people engage with the social world. It is, however, also the foundation of prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping.

Extremist movements (including [genocidal ones](#)) take advantage of the human tendency to categorize people to further their own social, political, and economic goals. They enact a classification process that is not just about sorting people into groups but tagging segments of the population as deviants and [dehumanizing them](#).

This classification process not only excludes trans women from womanhood, but cisgender women who are gender nonconforming (meaning they are more “masculine” than women are “supposed” to be).

Extremist classification processes also include dividing cisgender women according to whether they birth children (and, if so, with whom) as the far-right is concerned with “depopulation” and the “great replacement theory” that claims that white populations are being systematically reduced as part of a “white genocide.”⁶ The 2022 book *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada and the United States* explores the significant overlap of men’s supremacy and white supremacy movements and notes that “Both movements are preoccupied with women’s reproductive and sexual function and see women as property to own and control.”⁷ The authors explain that reproductive politics are “a primary tenet”⁸ of white supremacy.

Far-right extremism is preoccupied with preserving a system in which there are two genders that follow directly from a clear sex binary and women’s reproduction is controlled in service of white supremacy. Insisting that trans women are not “real” women in the face of evidence proving otherwise is a first step down that path.

“Anyone can say they’re trans and you have to believe them. What about men who say they are trans to gain access to women’s spaces?”

The myth that men use trans inclusion policies to commit offences (more specifically sexual assaults in women’s washrooms) has been [disproven repeatedly](#).

Sexual violence perpetrated by men is driven by societally-rooted misogynistic beliefs. Public policies that reinforce misogyny, including those that exclude trans women from women’s spaces, only reinforce the social practices that enable sexualized violence in New Brunswick.

Excluding trans women from women’s bathrooms doesn’t protect anyone. It does, however, further stigmatizes and ostracizes trans women from communal spaces and public life and is the kind of policy that

⁶ Liram Koblentz-Stenzler and Alexander Pack, “Infected by Hate: Far Right Attempts to Leverage Anti-Vaccine Sentiment” (International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, March 2021), p. 5–8.

⁷ Meredith L. Pruden, Ayse D. Lokmanoglu, Anne Peterscheck, and Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, “Birds of a Feather: A Comparative Analysis of White Supremacist and Violent Male Supremacist Discourse,” in Barbara Perry, Jeff Gruenewald, Ryan Scrivens (Eds.) *Right Wing Extremism in Canada and the United States* (Palgrave Hate Studies, 2022), p. 243.

⁸ P.217.

negatively affects the mental health of trans adults. 2SLGBTQIA+ youth will see this happening and experience increased shame, stigma, and vulnerability. [Research also demonstrates](#) that trans youth who do not have access to appropriate bathrooms are at elevated risk of sexual assault compared to their peers who do.

“How is it fair for trans women to compete with cis women as athletes?”

This question is largely disingenuous when presented by the organized backlash. If concerns over equal opportunities for women and girls in sport were authentic, they would not focus exclusively on trans athletes but also broach the issue of [inadequate resourcing](#) of [sports programs for girls and women](#) as well as the [low compensation](#) that women receive as professional athletes.

Resourcing concerns aren't brought up because the organized backlash isn't actually interested in ensuring opportunities for girls and women in sports. Rather, it is interested in maintaining a strict two-gender system that reflects assumptions that there is a clear and absolute sex binary as well as persistent beliefs in harmful myths about 2SLGBTQIA+ people as predators. That this is the real focus is supported by the fact that participants ignore that organizations focused on women and sports support the inclusion of trans girls and women (for example, Canadian Women and Sport [affirms](#) that “inclusion for women and girls must include trans women and girls.”)

Despite the fact that this topic is often brought up in bad faith, it merits being addressed with rigour.

To begin, it is important to recognize that sports are in many ways inherently unfair. Athletes are typically divided not just by gender but by age and at times into recreational and competitive leagues to attempt to ensure they are competing against peers in terms of physicality. In his book *Beyond Trans: Does Gender Matter*, gender and sexuality scholar Heath Fogg Davis explains that despite this, gender-based policies for athletics still cannot ensure fairness because there is still “substantial intrasexual variation in musculature, bone density, lung capacity, stature, and endocrinology that exists within the categories of people we call male and female.”⁹ He summarizes: “There are plenty of big and strong women, and plenty of small and weak men.”

It is also important to ground discussion in the fact that for many children, youth, and adults, sports are amateur and recreational. Goals for their participation include being physically active, having a sense of community, honing skills, building self-confidence, practicing leadership, etc. Given this, it should not be controversial to include trans girls and women in recreational sports. In New Brunswick, CoachNB already [provides a guide](#) to create inclusive environments for LGBTQI2S athletes and coaches.

⁹ Heath Fogg Davis, *Beyond Trans Does Gender Matter?* (New York: New York University Press, 2017) p.124.

At higher levels of competition, concerns around the perceived athletic advantages that post-pubescent trans girls and trans women have tend to focus on testosterone levels. However, as explained by Davis:

just as testosterone levels, alone, do not make us men or women, they are not the sole predictor of who wins and loses in sports. If that were the case, then there would be no need to hold track meets and tournaments; we could pick winners by measuring whose body makes and responds to the greatest amount of functional testosterone.¹⁰

The science is not clear cut. This is why organizations like the International Olympic Committee (IOC) are taking an approach based on the principles of fairness, inclusion, and non-discrimination. The IOC developed [a framework](#) that:

does not recommend a universal, one-size-fits-all approach to eligibility criteria for sex-segregated competition across the many sports, disciplines and events of the Olympic Movement. Rather, it recognises consensus that each sport, discipline and event is characterised by unique performance characteristics, which should inform the development of eligibility. [citation omitted]

Further,

The Framework does not preclude the possibility that certain individual athletes could be subject to participation restrictions or exclusions where an unfair and disproportionate advantage and/or unacceptable safety risk is clearly demonstrated and cannot be mitigated via reasonable accommodations.

It is important to note that those involved in the highest level of athletics policy are not asking *if* trans athletes should participate but *how*. U Sports, the national organization overseeing university athletics in Canada, also released an [evidence-based trans inclusion policy](#) that provides guidelines for university sports teams. The New Brunswick Interscholastic Athletic Association also has [operating regulations](#) that already address trans inclusion (and, to date, [has received no complaints](#) about trans inclusion).

The inclusion of trans athletes is an [evolving process](#). What the IOC and U Sports have developed are reasonable and promising policies to begin this important process. What is not reasonable, however, is the approach being taken in some jurisdictions in the United States, where the anti-2SLGBTQIA+ backlash has progressed further. Some states are requiring, or attempting to require, [minors to submit to examination of their genitals](#) before [athletic competitions](#). This is humiliating for all involved athletes and is profoundly stigmatizing to children and youth who are trans, whose sex characteristics do not neatly fall into the male or female category, or who are perceived as gender nonconforming (which is more likely to be racialized

¹⁰ P. 121 – 122.

children and youth). This practice is in line with extremist practices of classifying humans and is [an actual opportunity for sexual abuse of children and youth to be perpetrated](#).

“Women are being erased and this will roll back women’s rights.”

This concern about women’s rights is often raised in relation to the emphasis that is placed on trans people—not just trans women—in discussions of gender equality. The concern is often focused on language (for example, the shift to saying *gender* equality instead of *women’s* equality).

Gender-inclusive language is in fact being used more frequently by organizations like the Women’s Council to reflect and affirm gender diversity. Organizations that have historically worked for women’s rights are also increasingly expanding their mandates to include trans people of all genders (i.e., not just trans women, but trans men, non-binary people, etc.).

This is being done for a few reasons. First, trans women cannot be affirmed separately from the larger trans community. Second, cisgender women and trans people all face gender-based oppression and many also face gendered experiences of other forms of oppression, like racism and ableism. Third, the meaningful inclusion of trans women in the struggle for women’s equality—and the recognition that the struggle for women’s equality is part of a larger movement for gender equality that includes trans people of all genders—is a rejection of the kind of divisive classification that far-right extremism is fixated on. Rejecting the transformation of social categorization into systems of prejudice and discrimination is central to the work of women’s rights organizations.

For many people, the concerns about gender inclusion in women’s organizations and discussion of women’s equality issues begin and end with language. It’s true that gender-inclusive language can make communications feel clumsy and imprecise at times, but the alternative is to only pay superficial lip service to gender diversity by affirming it in theory and not in practice. If language matters—and those people expressing this concern clearly think that it does—then [affirming and accurate language is necessary](#), even if it makes crafting slogans and explaining issues more complex.

There are, however, pockets of the women’s rights movement that are not just opposed to gender-inclusive language. These “gender critical feminists” or “trans exclusionary radical feminists” do not recognize or accept gender identity as a concept and claim that trans women are a threat—if not a tactic to attack—women’s equality. They are the minority—and their “contributions” to the movement are often focused on their anti-trans efforts and those efforts alone. Among organizations that do the day-to-day work of serving, supporting, and advocating for women across a broad range of issues, there is [clear and widespread agreement](#) on the need to include trans people in their work.

The real motivations and goals of the organized backlash

The organized backlash in New Brunswick is clearly anti-2SLGBTQIA+, not actually interested in protecting children or youth, not invested in the rights of women and girls, and laden with conspiracy theories and logic that aligns with the far-right—but is it actually full-blown extremism? Yes, it is.

This assertion is supported by emails that the government produced in response to the Child and Youth Advocate's [investigation into the decision to review a policy protecting 2SLGBTQIA+ students and families in schools](#). These emails, sent to the government by people concerned about policy and content in schools addressing sexual orientation and gender identity, reference "Marxist and racist Critical Race Theory," "gender identity theory," "the agenda of the LGBTQ2+ community," "indoctrination" of children, the "World Economic Forum and their far left woke friends," as well as concerns about litterboxes in schools. One includes a plea to "help make NB great again." The phrasing in these emails is taken directly from far-right conspiracies and internet hoaxes designed to misinform, agitate, and create distrust in public institutions.

The publicly available social media presences of the individuals who are organizing or raising the profile of these anti-2SLGBTQIA+ activities in New Brunswick also support this assertion. Their public profiles demonstrate that they are often COVID-19 denialists, opposed to vaccinations as a medical intervention, and supporters of the occupation of Ottawa in early 2022.¹¹ Many of these profiles also share content that references "depopulation" and fear of a rising "New World Order." Canadian flags, appeals to patriotism, and pleas to "save Canada" feature prominently. Participants are cast as "freedom fighters" and "mama and papa bears/grizzlies" (i.e., adults that will ferociously defend their young) that are "holding the line."

By looking at this fuller context, the scale and nature of the organized backlash comes into focus. The organized backlash is not just undeniably part of far-right extremism, it is fascist.

Fascism is an ultra-right political ideology. It is difficult to define—contradiction and inconsistency are some of its hallmarks. In a [foundational text on fascism](#), Umberto Eco (a survivor of mid-20th century Italian fascism) explains it as a "fuzzy totalitarianism... a beehive of contradictions." Rather than producing a rigid definition of fascism, he identifies its common characteristics. Many of these are present in the organized backlash described in this brief, including: incoherent and untenable logic; seemingly contradictory practices; rejection of modernism; bias toward action and denigration of analysis or intellectualism; appeals to adherents to act as heroes; obsession with plots and conspiracy theories; fear of difference; blaming and vilifying minority groups for frustrations; and appeals to nationalism [as a social identity](#) for a majority group that feels threatened (e.g., white, cisgender, straight Canadians). The targeting of public libraries and schools is also in line with it being fascistic.

¹¹ Further reading on the connection between conspiracy theories about the origins of COVID-19 and COVID-19 vaccinations and white supremacy is available [here](#).

It matters that the organized backlash is fascist and not simply far-right extremism because fascism is a strategy to accumulate power. Fascism is not content to be in the fringes as a minority position; it wants to expand and entrench itself. Understanding this puts the tactics and goals of the organized backlash in context. Why do participants lead with concerns about protecting children and youth when their activities are clearly not actually based on this? Why do some participants claim they accept 2SLGBTQIA+ people when their actions clearly demonstrate that they do not? It's not just because coherence and logic doesn't matter to fascism, but because fascism requires recruitment.

Blatantly anti-2SLGBTQIA+ rhetoric is increasingly rejected, so participants reframe the issue as being about protecting children, youth, and women. This framing can be disarming for people and, once they engage, they are fed misinformation and disinformation. Using fears about child sexual abuse and trafficking is characteristic of conspiracy-centred groups that recruit new participants by raising false alarms about child harm (e.g., “[pizzagate](#)” and the [Wayfair conspiracy](#)). Those recruited into these movements under false pretenses are introduced to increasingly extreme ideologies that distance them [from their families and friends](#). This is how the organized backlash functions as an on-ramp to extremism and a way for it grow and gain power.

The threat to the 2SLGBTQIA+ people and communities should be clear. The organized backlash is dehumanizing the 2SLBTQIA+ community while repeating that they are harming women and children. This is a recipe for violence—which the community is already [at elevated risk of](#). It is also a threat to [all marginalized groups and to democracy](#) in New Brunswick.