

THE MORAL POLICY MONOPOLY: INTERLOCKING MECHANISMS DRIVING POLICY STASIS ON SAME-SEX UNIONS IN PERU

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Introduction

Policy stasis might suggest an absence of action, yet it is one of the most active forms that politics takes. It is the active reproduction of an existing policy order, in which political conflict persists but unfolds within institutional arrangements that remain fundamentally unchanged (Grin, 2018). Continuity is a process marked by friction (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012), inherently dynamic (Brock and Mallinson, 2023) and deeply political (Hope and Raudla, 2012).

This gap is particularly salient in the morality politics, the field that studies policies whose contestation unfolds not in technical or instrumental terms but in moral ones, that is, in disputes over what counts as life, family, the body or full citizenship, grounded in first principles or, often, in religious values (Engeli et al, 2013; Hurka et al, 2018). LGBTIQ+ issues, and particularly same-sex unions, sit squarely within this field, since whether the state should recognise them is seldom settled through technical rationality but disputed over the definition of family, the welfare of children and how religiosity ought to shape public regulation. In Europe and the United States, scholarship has produced explanations of when moral policies change or resist change, drawing on the manifest–latent morality politics framework and its refinements (Engeli et al, 2013; Knill et al, 2015; Hurka et al, 2018), yet it has explained much less the ongoing activity through which stasis is produced when change does not occur. In Latin America, research has concentrated on cases where recognition succeeded (Pierceson, 2013; Encarnación, 2016) and has addressed negative cases through a mirror approach that reads them as the mere absence of the factors present in the successful ones. A configurational analysis of thirty-eight country-episodes in ten Latin American countries has identified the conditions under which stasis is produced, but the activity through which it is sustained over time remains under-examined (Alza, 2025).

Among the theoretical traditions that address policy stability, neo-pluralist approaches give stasis a significant place (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Grin, 2018). Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) accounts for it through policy monopolies, configurations of actors that share a dominant policy image and control access to decision-making. Yet PET has

developed largely around instrumental policies and, where it has engaged moral cases, has focused on how monopolies are punctuated rather than sustained (True and Utter, 2002; Baumgartner et al, 2008; Studlar and Cairney, 2014). The policy monopoly has not been operationalised in morality politics, where stasis tends to be the rule.

Addressing this phenomenon is timely, given that advances in sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and LGBTIQ+ recognition face a sustained counter-offensive from ultraconservative groups connected through transnational networks (Chappell, 2006; Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Pinheiro-Machado and Vargas-Maia, 2023; Smrdelj and Kuhar, 2025), which in Europe, the United States and Latin America have sustained stasis or triggered backlashes against the rights of women and LGBTIQ+ persons. In Latin America, high religiosity and low social acceptance of homosexuality have recently been identified as key conditions for stasis on same-sex unions (Alza, 2025), and the importance of concerted action by conservative actors against gender-inclusive policies has been documented (Rodriguez et al, 2022; Gianella et al, 2017).

This article seeks to address this gap by asking through which mechanisms policy stasis on morality issues is sustained under conditions of high religiosity, substantial church capacity and religiously embedded party systems. Building on PET's concept of the policy monopoly and on the field of morality politics, I reconstruct the activities through which ultraconservative religious groups sustain stasis, in a process composed of deliberate and interlocking mechanisms. I term this set of mechanisms the moral policy monopoly, an operationalisation of PET's concept that can be understood as a religiously grounded political process which sustains stasis.

To this end, the article builds on Peru as a theory-building case study, examining three decades of legislative inertia on same-sex unions in Peru (1993–2024), during which seventeen bills were submitted to Congress and none advanced to plenary approval. Methodologically, I apply mechanistic and analyticist process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2019; van Meegdenburg, 2023, 2026), which enables me to reconstruct the activities actors undertake to sustain stasis and to abstract those activities into mechanisms that sustain policy stasis under these scope conditions. The abductive approach (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014) supports an ongoing back and forth between the conceptual repertoire and the empirical material to identify the mechanisms. The research draws on a qualitative meta-analysis (Hansen et al, 2021) of documentary sources and nine interviews with bill authors, activists, legal experts and journalists.

The analysis identifies five interlocking mechanisms, activated by specific triggering events, through which ultraconservative religious actors sustain stasis in Peru. Three of them, forging alliances, building moralised policy images and capturing politics, operate continuously across the three decades

under study. The remaining two, implementing joint opposition campaigns and submitting competing bills, operate episodically. Taken together, they constitute a moral policy monopoly.

The remainder of the article develops the theoretical framework of the moral policy monopoly and the two analytical claims that guide the analysis, outlines the Peruvian case, the data and the analytical strategy, and reconstructs the five mechanisms. The analysis shows that stasis is not the by-product of dispersed opposition but the outcome of interlocking activity that turns religiosity into political capacity, with implications for how counter-mobilisation against LGBTIQ+ rights is understood beyond Peru.

Policy monopolies in morality politics

Morality politics designates a domain in which public problems are debated through deeply held, often religious values rather than in technical or instrumental terms (Engeli et al, 2013; Hurka et al, 2018). Crucially, the moralisation of an issue is not an intrinsic property to the issue but the outcome of actor activity (Mooney, 2001). Actors frame policy problems by anchoring them in deeply embedded social values, and where those values are religious and widely shared, the actors who invoke them tend to command broad public and electoral support, positioning themselves as the principal custodians of the status quo. In this vein, stasis is not mere continuity, but a contentious political process upheld by these actors' ongoing activity (Grin, 2018).

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) places actors at the centre of the analysis of policy stability and change (Grin, 2018). It accounts for stability through the notion of policy monopolies. These are configurations of actors, spanning governmental spheres, agencies and interest groups, united by a dominant policy image. Such monopolies control access to deliberation and decision-making and suppress reform through negative feedback, until an exogenous shock produces punctuation (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; True et al, 2007; Cairney, 2011; Breunig and Koski, 2006).

The development of this concept, however, has two limitations. First, PET has grown largely around instrumental policies governed by efficiency and welfare criteria (Mucciaroni, 2011), such as water, energy, transport, or security, with limited application to moral policies guided

by deep-seated religious beliefs about life, family, or the body (Engeli et al, 2013). Where moral cases have been examined, such as gun control (True and Utter, 2002) or the death penalty (Baumgartner et al, 2008), scholarship has rarely identified the specific mechanisms that sustain stasis. Second, and more fundamentally, PET treats the policy monopoly as a configuration inferred from its attributes, directing the analytical lens towards the conditions under which exogenous shocks produce punctuation. What remains under-developed is how the policy monopoly reproduces itself between change episodes, through the activities by which actors sustain the conditions of monopoly over time. The tradition itself acknowledges this limitation, with recurrent calls for closer study of how punctuation and stasis are produced (Grin, 2018). This is especially pressing in morality politics, where stasis is typically the rule.

Addressing this gap requires a mechanistic approach. In policy analysis, a mechanism is a portable concept that explains how and why a cause, in a given context, produces a particular outcome (Falleti and Lynch, 2009). Mechanism-based explanations therefore shifts the analytical focus from the factors associated with an outcome to the activity that connects causes and outcomes, opening the black box between conditions and results (Hedström and Ylikoski, 2010). This orientation is well suited to the study of stasis, since it directs attention to what actors actually do to hold conditions and outcomes together over time. Mechanisms, from this perspective, are not observed directly but are reconstructed as ideal-typical abstractions from the contextually embedded activities that instantiate them (van Meegdenburg, 2023, 2026).

The moral policy monopoly operationalises PET's policy monopoly mechanistically within the domain of morality politics. Its contribution is not a new actor type but a way of rendering an analytically valuable yet static concept tractable. Drawing on historical-institutionalist insights, I disaggregate the policy monopoly into a set of interlocking mechanisms, understood as the activities of actors, whose joint operation reproduces stasis over time. The concept retains the constitutive elements of the original PET notion, namely, collaborative alliances, a defined institutional structure, powerful ideas grounded in belief and actors devoted to persuasion (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Yet, whereas PET invokes these elements to characterise the monopoly as a state, the moral policy monopoly reconstructs them as the ongoing activity through which actors (re)produce and sustain that state over time.

Three features of its operationalisation, summarised in Table 1, deserve further detail. The shift in analytical orientation is the most consequential. Rather than asking when monopolies are punctuated, the moral policy monopoly asks how religiously grounded actors sustain stasis through interlocking mechanisms (Beach and Pedersen, 2019; van Meegdenburg, 2023). In the case of same-sex unions, the ideational foundation takes the form of moralised policy images that portray marriage as a natural and heteronormative institution and any departure as a threat to children and to the social order (Vaggione, 2005; Corrêa, 2017; Butler, 2025). The institutional foundation shifts from bureaucratic agencies to churches and church-linked civil society, with mobilising capacity drawn from religiously embedded societies.

Table 1. Policy monopoly and moral policy monopoly compared.

Dimension	Policy monopoly (conceptual)	Moral policy monopoly (mechanistic / analyticist)
Analytical orientation	Resistance to negative feedback until exogenous shocks produce punctuation; analytical emphasis on promoters of change	Strategic agency: religiously grounded actors sustain policy stasis through interlocking mechanisms
Ideational foundation	Powerful supporting ideas grounded in belief systems	Moralised policy images anchored in religious values, strategically produced and reinforced through discourse
Institutional foundation	Defined institutional structure (bureaucratic agencies, epistemic communities and technical experts)	Churches and church-linked civil society, with mobilising capacity from high religiosity and embeddedness in religious societies

Source: own elaboration based on Baumgartner and Jones (1993); Baumgartner et al (2023); and True et al (2007).

The framework distinguishes between instantiations, mechanisms and the moral policy monopoly as their modular configuration, following van Meegdenburg et al (2026).

Instantiations are the deliberate activities of ultraconservative religious actors, traceable to specific persons, dates and arenas. Mechanisms, in turn, are ideal-typical abstractions through which patterns across many instantiations are read as systematic activity (van Meegdenburg, 2026). The moral policy monopoly is the modular configuration of these mechanisms operating in articulation (Nullmeier and Kuhlmann, 2022). It does not designate an entity, a coalition or a group of actors, but the interlocking operation of five mechanisms through which scope conditions, activated by specific triggering events, produce policy stasis. Mechanisms are interlocking rather than parallel, since each presupposes conditions that others produce, or reinforces their joint operation.

Several scope clarifications are needed. First, the concept addresses manifest morality issues (Engeli et al, 2013; Hurka et al, 2018) in which moralisation operates through religious values embedded in the polity. It does not extend to secular forms of moralisation, even where biomedical or biopolitical frames may generate similar effects (Lemaitre, 2014). Second, the concept does not equate morality with religiosity. Religious actors moralise the policy debate by drawing on religious frames as strategic resources that foreclose technical-rational deliberation, so that morality is the outcome of actor activity rather than a pre-given attribute of religion. Third, the mechanisms account for stasis where high religiosity, substantial church capacity and religious and conservative actors coexist; the analysis does not claim to travel beyond those conditions.

The argument rests on two analytical claims, which frame the analysis that follows. The first concerns the existence of analytically identifiable mechanisms; the second, the causal process through which they produce stasis.

Claim 1. Under conditions of high religiosity, substantial institutional capacity of churches and a party system embedded in religious society, the persistence of stasis in morality politics is not the effect of dispersed and unrelated episodes of religious opposition. It rests on a set of analytically identifiable mechanisms, produced and sustained by the deliberate action of ultraconservative religious actors and supported by the institutional reach of churches and by religiosity.

Claim 2. Mechanisms do not operate in isolation. They constitute the process through which the moral policy monopoly drives conditions to policy stasis, activated by specific triggering

events. Each mechanism presupposes or reinforces the operation of others, and their combined operation explains the persistent inertia observed in morality politics.

Data and methods

Analytical strategy

This study employs process tracing as a within-case method for reconstructing the activities through which initial conditions lead to a specific outcome (Collier, 2011; Beach and Pedersen, 2019). This process consists of a set of mechanisms conceived as ideal types: analytical abstractions of agent activities traced through the empirical record rather than tested deductively (van Meegdenburg, 2026; Kuhlmann and ten Brink, 2021).

The analytical strategy is abductive in the Peircean tradition (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014), iterating between empirical anomalies and candidate explanations, pursuing the most plausible account through a sustained dialogue between observation and conceptual repertoire. The initial conceptual repertoire was PET and its notion of policy monopoly. The empirical material prompted the disaggregation of that notion into specific agent activities that could not be accommodated by its original conceptualisation. These activities were grouped, in successive iterations, into a tentative set of mechanisms. The set was then tested against further empirical material, refined and ordered, until a stable configuration of five interlocking mechanisms emerged.

This procedure is consistent with theory-building process tracing (Beach and Pedersen, 2019), where mechanisms are reconstructed as entities and activities, and with the conception of mechanisms as scholarly abstraction adduced from contextually embedded instantiations (van Meegdenburg, 2023, 2026). The aim is not to propose a theoretical model in the deductive sense but to operationalise an existing concept by identifying the activities through which it produces its outcome. Validity rests on plausibility, parsimony and traceability rather than on probabilistic tests.

The unit of analysis is the three-decade Peruvian legislative process on same-sex unions (1993-2024), during which seventeen bills failed to advance to plenary approval. The seventeen bills constitute the empirical episodes through which the process is reconstructed. The analytical transferability of these mechanisms rests on their abstraction from concrete instantiations into

ideal-typical forms (van Meegdenburg, 2026) and on the country's shared scope conditions with comparable cases (Alza, 2025).

Data

The data collection strategy combines documentary sources and key-informant interviews for three reasons. Triangulation across source types was required because the moral policy monopoly operates simultaneously across legislative, executive and civil society arenas and through public discourse. Ideological breadth is ensured by including sources produced by ultraconservative religious organisations alongside those from progressive civil society and academic actors, avoiding asymmetries in the evidence base. Informants were selected through a purposive strategy, prioritising bill authors, activists with organisational responsibility in the religious or LGBTIQ+ field, legal experts on the issue and journalists covering the process.

The principal empirical basis of the analysis was a documentary corpus of 333 items, comprising 213 newspaper articles retrieved from Factiva (2003-2024), 19 open-source articles from Peruvian outlets, 22 activist reports, official records from state bodies and international human rights institutions, academic publications and materials produced by both progressive and ultraconservative organisations, complemented by specialised databases monitoring anti-rights activity in the Andean region (Appendix 1).

The documentary corpus was complemented by nine semi-structured interviews conducted in 2024, the function of which is to corroborate and elucidate the activities reconstructed from the documents. The informants span four categories of actors: bill authors and members of Congress, activists from civil society organisations, legal experts and journalists who covered the process.

Data were systematically coded using NVivo with an iteratively refined mechanism codebook to reconstruct actor activities and the operation of the moral policy monopoly (Appendix 1).

The Peruvian case

Peru is a case of policy stasis on same-sex unions. From 1993 to 2024, seventeen bills were systematically shelved or restricted to committee stage (2015, 2023, 2024) in the Congress of the Republic. Crucially, none advanced to plenary debate (Appendix 2). Such stasis is prevalent

across Latin America, where restrictive gender and SOGIE regulations persist (González-Rostani and Morgenstern, 2023; Bohigues et al, 2022). Only four of the nineteen countries in the region have approved marriage equality through their national legislatures: Argentina (2010), Uruguay (2013), Chile (2021) and Cuba (2022, ratified by referendum). In four others recognition came through the courts (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Costa Rica), in Mexico through subnational legislation, and in the remaining countries no form of recognition has been secured.

These seventeen bills fall into three categories by their substantive content. The first comprises three marriage equality bills (2017, 2021 and 2023), which recognise same-sex unions as marriage with full modification of civil status. The second comprises two gradualist bills proposing civil unions or comparable figures that modify civil status: Carlos Bruce's non-marital civil union bill (2013) and Martha Moyano's civil union bill (2003). The third comprises twelve competing bills, defined as legislative proposals that do not modify civil status, frame recognition as a private contract or a patrimonial arrangement, exclude the category of family from their object, and are submitted in temporal proximity to bills proposing same-sex unions.

The LGBTIQ+ community in Peru comprises small organisations with limited material and political resources. It is not monolithic, and some voices contest marriage or civil union as heteronormative institutions. Reforms and advocacy are usually supported by NGOs working on sexual and reproductive rights and democracy. On the other side, there are actors identified in the literature as the conservative right, anti-rights groups or neoconservatives (Gianella et al, 2017; Meléndez, 2019; Biroli and Caminotti, 2020; Amat y León and Córdor, 2021). They have positioned themselves as the 'custodial order' of Peruvian society (Nugent, 2010).

Furthermore, the Peruvian socio-religious context makes the case empirically suitable in morality politics. Catholic affiliation fell from 89.7% in 1995 to 63.7% in 2024 while evangelical affiliation rose from 6.9% to 24.2% with religious practice steadily increasing across both groups (Latinobarómetro, 2024). Social acceptance of homosexuality remained stagnant between 2000 and 2020 (UCLA, 2021), opposition persists around 66% (IPSOS,

2024) and 62,7% of the LGBTIQ+ population reports having experienced violence and discrimination (Sauza, 2019).

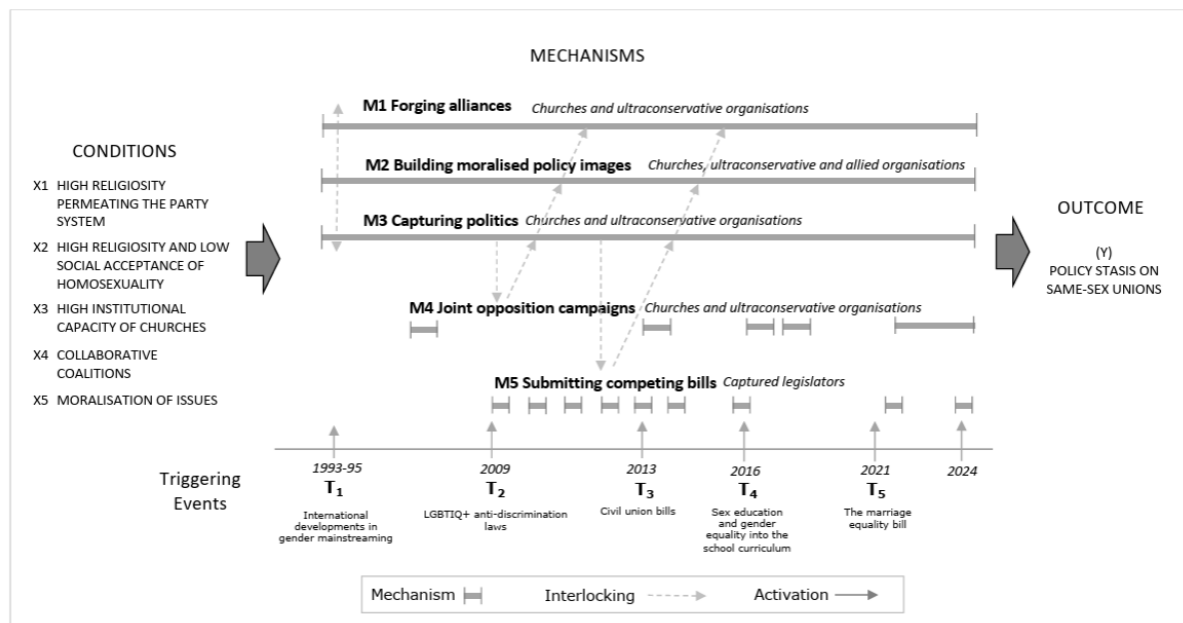
Since 1990, evangelical leaders have entered Congress and held high-level government positions, and evangelicals, Catholics and conservative groups, from right and left, have run public campaigns and lobbied to sustain stasis on same-sex unions and roll back related advancements.

Existing scholarship on the Peruvian case has examined constitutional legal aspects of the reform (Siverino, 2015; Zelada and Gurmendi, 2016), the influence of evangelicals (Jaime, 2017; Pérez Guadalupe and Grundberger, 2019; Amat y León and Córdor, 2021; Pérez Guadalupe and Amat y León, 2022), right-wing strategies (Meléndez, 2019; Torres, 2020; Rovira Kaltwasser et al, 2026), the rhetorics of fear (González et al, 2018) and investigative journalism on evangelical networks (Salud con Lupa, 2024; Ojo Público, 2018). Alza (2025) identified, through Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of ten Latin American countries, high religiosity as a significant condition that obfuscates religious cleavages. None of this work, however, reconstructs the specific mechanisms through which stasis is produced. This paper addresses that gap.

Unveiling the mechanisms

The analysis yielded a stable configuration of five interlocking mechanisms through which ultraconservative religious actors produce stasis on same-sex unions in Peru. Three of them (M1, M2 and M3) operate transversally across the three decades under study: alliances anchoring the operation, moralised images supplying the ideational content, and political capture securing institutional reach. Two further mechanisms (M4 and M5) operate episodically. All mechanisms intensify at triggering events, and the episodic ones feed back into the transversal: campaigns render the alliance system visible and consolidate moralised images through repetition, while competing bills exploit the political foothold captured by M3.

Figure 1. Interlocking mechanisms of the moral policy monopoly.



Source: own elaboration.

The actors who enact these mechanisms are collectively termed ultraconservative religious groups, in recognition of their close ties to the conservative right and Christian churches. Their activity is structured by five scope conditions. Two are contextual, identified through cross-country comparison as necessary configurations for stasis on same-sex unions in Latin America (Alza, 2025). X1, a political party system embedded in a highly religious society, which dilutes religious cleavages; and X2, high religiosity combined with low social acceptance of homosexuality. The remaining three concern actor behaviour and emerged from the abductive analysis (Sabatier and Weible, 2007; Jenkins-Smith et al, 2014; Engeli et al, 2013; Haidt, 2013). X3, the high institutional capacity of churches; X4, collaborative coalitions among churches; and X5, the moralisation of the debate through discourse grounded in religious values.

These conditions do not produce stasis on their own. They operate through mechanisms that intensify or are activated at specific triggering events (Appendix 3). T1, the international gender mainstreaming developments of the 1990s namely the Vienna 1993, Cairo 1994, Beijing 1995 conferences (Moser and Moser, 2005; Corrêa, 2017; Vaggione, 2005), which triggered the emergence of transnational conservative counter-networks (Chappell, 2006) and

were domestically translated through the Ministry for Women and birth control programmes; T2, the adoption of an anti-hatred criminal law bill and an anti-discrimination by-law in Lima (2009-2013); T3 continuous national efforts to promote civil unions; T4, the integration of sex education into school curriculum; and T5, the formal submission of marriage equality bills.

Rather than following a chronological sequence, the reconstruction organises the empirical record into the five mechanisms, examining for each of them the instantiations through which the activity is sustained. Individual instantiations occurred at specific moments but form part of long, repeated processes that the mechanisms abstract.

M1: Forging alliances

The first mechanism is the construction of an alliance system among religious actors and with a heterogeneous network of civil-society, media and political allies. In Peru, the system has operated continuously across the three decades, intensifying at triggering events but persisting between them.

The foundational political alliance was formed in 1990, when evangelical churches abandoned the strategy of building their own parties and entered formal politics by aligning with Alberto Fujimori's Cambio 90. Eighteen of the fifty candidates on Fujimori's lists were evangelicals, marking their entry as a sustained presence alongside the historically dominant Catholic Church (Pérez Guadalupe, 2022). This instrumental alignment was transformed over the following decades into systematic infiltration across the ideological spectrum (see M3).

The second foundational alliance is interreligious. Prior to the 1990s, the Catholic Church regarded evangelical churches as sects and a threat to faith. The international conferences on women's rights (T1) and the LGBTIQ+ rights (T2) shifted this disposition. On 17 July 2014, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches signed the *Compromiso por el Perú*, committing to joint action on the right to life, religious freedom, the defence of marriage and family, and education. The precedent is the 1994 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' declaration in the United States, which sought to defend life, family and Christian values in the Third Millennium (Torres, 2020). Scholars describe this convergence as a 'political ecumenism' (Amat y León and Pérez Guadalupe, 2022: 8) or as 'fusionism' (Castro, 2023: 4), in which groups of diverse

ideologies converge around the regulation of sexual morality (Brown, 2019; Rodriguez et al, 2022).

From this religious backbone, the alliance system extends into civil-society organisations, universities and international networks. The Peruvian network includes the *Coordinadora Nacional Pro Familia* (CONAPFAM), *Red Nacional de Abogados por la Defensa de la Familia* (RENAFAM), the *Coordinadora Nacional Unión por la Vida*, Human Life International and its Peruvian affiliate the *Centro de Promoción Familiar y Reconocimiento Natural de la Fertilidad* (CEPROFARENA), the World Youth Alliance, the *Universidad Católica Sedes Sapientiae* and the *Universidad de Piura*. These alliances fund scholarships, internships and graduate courses abroad, with participants becoming voices for stasis in the national arena (Latam Chequea, 2023). Twenty-one US Christian Right organisations channelled at least US\$ 44 million in grants to Latin American anti-rights organisations between 2007 and 2018 (Archer and Provost, 2020). Disinformation organisations such as the Population Research Institute, ORIGEN, Political Network for Values, CitizenGo and Alliance Defending Freedom amplify their campaigns. The transnational dimension is institutionalised through the Iberoamerican Congress for Life and Family (since 2017) and the Iberoamerican Union of Latin American Parliamentarians.

The alliance with media outlets and opinion leaders is also significant. The Catholic Church leveraged its media presence for two decades through Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani's radio programme *Diálogos de Fe* on Radioprogramas del Perú (RPP), one of the country's largest broadcasters, where he openly intervened in the political debate (Blanco, 2016). The programme continued under his successor and diversified into a network of religiously affiliated voices. Since the 1980s, evangelical churches have built parallel media infrastructures, including *Bethel* and *La Luz* radio and TV; with congresspersons who are evangelical pastors and their advisors hosting programmes on these outlets (Salud con Lupa, 2024). Congressman and pastor Alejandro Muñante, for example, disseminates his message primarily via Bethel, while his advisers host the programme *No negociable*. Specific Twitter/X accounts and digital outlets (CERP, 2023) complete this resonating chamber (Interview 9).

The alliance is visible at pro-life and pro-family events. During the *Con mis hijos no te metas* (Don't mess with my children) campaign against the inclusion of a gender perspective in the

school curriculum, journalist Phillip Butters became the movement's media spokesperson, using his platform against the then-minister of education (Migoya, 2017). Prominent journalists have also been present at international pro-life and pro-family conferences in Latin America. The relational reach extends to individual political figures who promote the pro-family vision:

(...) Congresspersons Muñante and Jáuregui have their networks with [religious] organisations. (...) Muñante with (...) Renafán, which brings together various lawyers who promote (...) the pro-family vision. (...) Jáuregui is the founder of La Casa del Padre with her husband. (...) At the time of our report, they had a strong influence on the Women's Commission and other commissions [of Congress]. (Interview 2)

The alliance system constituted by M1 is the relational substrate sustaining the other mechanisms: it supplies the actors that M3 places inside parties, ministries and the legislature, the actors who propagate the moralised policy images of M2, and the organisational density required for the episodic deployments of M4 and M5. Its pervasive presence across three decades, observable before, during and after individual same-sex union bills, supports the first claim, namely, that stasis on same-sex union bills in Peru is not the cumulative effect of unrelated episodes of opposition but rests on an analytically identifiable, durable activity of actors.

M2: Building moralised policy images

The second mechanism is the production and deployment of moralised policy images. Over three decades, ultraconservative religious groups have constructed representations of same-sex unions and adjacent issues that anchor the debate in religious values rather than technical-rational deliberation. The discursive turn became observable in the early 1990s as a reaction to the international conferences on women's rights (T₁) and was thereafter recalibrated as a continuous reactive tool against each ensuing triggering event (Rodríguez et al, 2022).

The operation of M2 frames policy contestation as a 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1980), in which 'gender ideology' and the 'gay lobby' are constructed as existential threats to the 'natural family' and to children, embedded in a globalising narrative that portrays 'gender ideology' as a set of totalitarian ideas undermining social morality (Butler, 2025). The notion of a 'gay lobby' resonates where public concern about state corruption is high, since 'lobbying' evokes

illicit dealings between private interests and public officials. Ultraconservative religious groups position themselves as the nation's moral reserve, promoting Christianity as the principal bulwark against 'gender ideology' in an environment marked by political disillusionment and educational deficits (Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, 2018). The framework has been deployed across Latin America, notably in Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil and Fabricio Alvarado's Costa Rica (Rodriguez et al, 2022).

The image of children at risk has been particularly effective. The argument that 'gender ideology' and permissive SOGIE policies corrupt children secured the removal of references to sexual diversity and gender identity from the 2016 National School Curriculum (Promsex, 2017), a pattern seen across Latin America (Gianella et al, 2017).

The moralised policy images have recently been complemented by what Lemaitre (2014) calls a 'shift to reason', the secularisation of conservative arguments through biomedical, constitutional and human-rights vocabularies. Both Evangelicals and Catholics now interpret the Constitution to protect a 'natural family' whose transformation would imperil Peruvian society. Although presented as legal, this reasoning rests on deep religious foundations, as one interviewee acknowledged:

(...) the spirit of the constitution is that the family is a natural and fundamental institution. [...] Because it allows for generational replacement (...) A non-marital civil union does not have the capacity to bring life. (...) the life of the nation depends on that generational replacement. (...) that is why the State has a duty to protect the family. The family understood as such: the union of a man and a woman with the capacity for reproduction. (Interview 5)

Other actors have deployed biomedical claims, such as the lawyer Beatriz Mejía's contention, advanced without evidence, that 'gender ideology' would cause mental disorders in children. These arguments, despite a legal or scientific veneer, remain dominated by religious dogmas (Rodriguez et al, 2022), and are the most aggressive in opposition to the rights of transgender people (Interview 1). The same register operated in 2024, when a supreme decree incorporating transsexualism, transvestism and other ICD-10 categories into the Essential Health Insurance Plan classifications was made non-mandatory only after civil-society mobilisation (Ministerio de Salud del Perú, 2024a, 2024b).

This secular turn does not weaken the religious grounding of the moral policy monopoly. It is a strategic adjustment to broaden the reach of moralised policy images beyond confessional audiences, towards legislators, courts and undecided publics where overtly religious arguments carry less traction, while preserving intact the alliances (M1) and the religiously grounded actors that produce them. The shift reinforces M2 rather than displacing its religious matrix, a pattern observable beyond Peru at the 52nd Organisation of American States General Assembly in Lima, where anti-rights groups deployed human-rights arguments contending that ‘gender ideology’ generates inequality and discrimination (CLACAI, 2022).

The activities reconstructed here instantiate the production and continuous deployment of moralised policy images of same-sex unions and adjacent issues. They are ideational glue of the alliance system (M1), the discursive resource mobilised by captured political actors (M3), the content propagated by joint campaigns (M4), and the frame under which competing bills (M5) are presented as the consensual alternative to legal recognition. Their presence across three decades, before and after specific bills, supports the first claim.

M3: Capturing politics

The third transversal mechanism is the political capture exercised by Christian churches across the legislative and executive branches. In a presidential system, presidential discourse shapes the viability of contested bills and ministerial opinions requested by congressional committees carry procedural weight. Leveraging the religiously embedded party system (X1) and the institutional capacity of churches (X3), Christian churches have executed three articulated activities since the 1990s, namely, the infiltration of political parties and of the executive branch, and direct influence over top-level political leaders.

The Catholic Church historically dominated political influence, a position intensified in the 1990s with the growing influence of *Opus Dei* and *Sodalicio de Vida Cristiana*, two *ultraconservative Catholic groups* (Vergara and Encinas, 2019). Evangelical penetration is more recent, marked by an evolution from ‘evangelical politicians’ to ‘political evangelicals’ who instrumentalise politics for a confessional agenda (Pérez Guadalupe, 2022: 468, 473). After failing to consolidate their own parties in the 1980s and 1990s, evangelicals built an alliance with *Cambio 90*, as discussed under M1, to infiltrate across the ideological spectrum.

Electoral presence has persisted across three decades and has diversified across the ideological spectrum, particularly at moments coinciding with advances in women's rights and the LGBTIQ+ agenda (T1-T4). Nineteen evangelicals were elected to Congress in 1990; seven across five parties in 2011; five across three parties in 2016. In 2020, FREPAP returned after twenty years, securing fifteen seats; in 2021, four evangelical pastors were elected for Renovación Popular, with others gaining seats for Fuerza Popular and Perú Libre (Appendix 4). Congresspersons such as Martha Chávez, Luis Galarreta, Pedro Olaechea, Juan Carlos Gonzáles and pastor Julio Rosas have voiced opposition based on confessional values. Rosas, congressman from 2011 to 2019, publicly stated that *'homosexuality is an attraction that cannot be regulated by law... it's outside God's plan'* (América TV, 2014). Evangelical pastors and congresspersons Alejandro Muñante and Milagros Jáuregui have amplified these messages through media platforms, including Jáuregui's declaration on X that a civil union bill represents a *'serious setback for #TheFamily and #Marriage in #Peru'* (Jáuregui, 2024).

The second activity is a direct channel into the executive through ministerial positions. Rafael Rey (*Opus Dei*) was Minister of Production (2006-2008) and Minister of Defence (2009-2010); Luis Solari, an ultraconservative Catholic, as Minister of Health and President of the Council of Ministers (2001-2003); and Fernando Carbone, Vice-President of CEPROFARENA, as Vice-Minister and Minister of Health (2001-2003). All opposed debates on same-sex unions. The originally left-wing Presidents Pedro Castillo (2021-2022) and Dina Boluarte (2022-2026) had ultraconservative evangelical spiritual advisers, one of whom promoted a chaplaincy inside the Government Palace (Sifuentes, 2025). Castillo was himself an evangelical, while every other President during the study period was a practising Catholic.

The third activity involves direct influence over political leaders through meetings securing commitments for 'life and family'. Cardinal Cipriani held multiple meetings with presidential candidates in 2011 and 2016 (Vergara and Encinas, 2019). In December 2016, after a meeting with the Cardinal, President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and opposition leader Keiko Fujimori were photographed praying together, and both made public statements supporting the traditional family. One interviewee, a former minister, recalled:

I was a minister in Pedro Pablo Kuczynski's government. And he jokingly, laughing, told me, 'hey, last week I spoke with Cardinal Cipriani and he told me, "When are you

going to get rid of that minister, uh...?" [did not recall the adjective] (...) So, partly in jest, partly in earnest, those kinds of comments come from Church authorities, who [presumably] will say the same thing to political parties that support bills [on civil union]. (Interview 3)

Evangelical leaders employ similar tactics. In 2016, they met with presidential candidate Fujimori, who committed to opposing measures favouring women's and LGBTIQ+ rights (Fonseca, 2019). After meeting with conservative evangelical pastors, former President Castillo abstained from opposing a bill restricting comprehensive sexual education, enacted as Law 31498 (Infobae, 2022).

The cumulative effect is most visible in the executive's handling of congressional requests for opinion. The Ministry of Justice typically stayed silent, issuing no opinion on the competing bills accumulated in 2015 or on the marriage equality bills submitted by Paredes (2021, 2023). The few favourable opinions came from individual reform-minded officials rather than from the executive as a whole, such as Minister Flavio Figallo on Bruce's 2013 civil union bill or the Ministry of Women on the Moyano (2022) and Paredes (2023) bills. In every case, the bills failed to advance.

The activities reconstructed under M3 translate the alliance system of M1 into institutional foothold across both branches of power, propagate the moralised policy images of M2 through the discourse of high-level political actors, and supply the legislative presence without which the episodic deployment of M5 would be impossible. The persistence of this capture, observable across successive governments of all political colours, further supports the first claim.

M4: Implementing joint opposition campaigns

M4 and M5 operate episodically at triggering events. M4 consists of joint opposition campaigns with substantial street presence (Appendix 5). These campaigns began in the early 2000s promoted by the Catholic Church in reaction to the first advancements in women's rights and the LGBTIQ+ rights and intensified after 2013 with the sequence of progressive regulatory attempts.

A decisive impulse came from Pope Francis's 2013 World Youth Day for the Church to 'go out onto the streets' and 'resist everything worldly' (Pope Francis, 2013), selectively appropriated by Peruvian ultraconservative actors as public justification for their mobilisation. His pontificate also included statements opposing the criminalisation of homosexuality and recognising the dignity of LGBTIQ+ persons (Winfield, 2023), absent from the discourse of the networks examined here. They appropriate the doctrinal dimensions of his teaching while leaving aside its pastoral inflections, illustrating how moralised policy images (M2) operate through curated framings of religious authority rather than wholesale reproduction.

The strategy capitalised on high religiosity and low acceptance of homosexuality. While individual campaigns addressed specific issues such as the morning-after pill (Pro-Life demonstrations) or the gender perspective in school curriculum (*Con mis hijos no te metas*), all reinforced through media the narrative of the 'phantasm' of 'gender ideology' and the 'gay lobby', including absolute opposition to same-sex unions. The *Real Couples* campaign illustrates the reactive logic. Designed as a counter to the pro-marriage equality campaign *Imaginary Couples* and as a defence of heterosexual marriage against Bruce's 2013 civil union bill, it deployed large billboards with biblical phrases such as '*lying with another man is an abomination. Leviticus 18:22*' (Fumero, 2014) and an intense media campaign.

These campaigns and a set of international events make visible the network of coalitions built under M1. These actors have operated as a network, distributing functions and coordinating efforts (Mujica, 2007). The Population Research Institute (PRI) channels resources and lobbies in Congress; the *Alianza Latinoamericana para la Familia* (ALAFA) distributes material in schools; and CEPROFARENA coordinates contact networks through what is termed preventive education. The pattern is neither isolated nor local. Anti-gender campaigns in Europe share a common structure (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017), and Peru has functioned as an experimentation centre for these campaigns in Latin America, originating in North American conservatism (Mujica, 2007).

The activities reconstructed under M4 instantiate the episodic public deployment of the moral policy monopoly. They convert the infrastructure of M1 and the content of M2 into mass mobilisation, amplify the discourse of captured actors (M3), and feed back into both the alliance system and the moralised policy images. Their episodic concentration at triggering

events, combined with the durability of the actors and resources mobilised, supports the second claim.

M5: Submitting competing bills

The fifth mechanism is the production and deployment of competing bills, legislative proposals that do not modify civil status, frame recognition as a private contract or patrimonial arrangement, exclude the category of family, and are submitted in temporal proximity to bills proposing same-sex unions. Two analytically distinct subtypes can be identified. Competing bills by design are submitted by ultraconservative religious legislators to crowd out legal recognition. Competing bills by concession are submitted by legislators sympathetic to recognition who calibrate their proposals to a conservative political environment by avoiding modification of civil status. Both subtypes instantiate the same mechanism, regardless of authorial intent.

M5 is activated reactively in proximity to bills proposing same-sex unions (T3 and T5), drawing on the legislative presence supplied by M3 and the moralised policy images of M2 to render competing bills as the consensual alternative. This pattern is observable from 2013 onwards, when in response to Bruce's civil union proposal, two competing bills were tabled almost immediately, submitted by evangelical pastor Julio Rosas and conservative Catholic Martha Chávez. The following year, Bruce's bill obtained official support from the Ministry of Justice, the Ombudsman's Office, and LGBTIQ+ civil society groups, including the *Movimiento Homosexual de Lima*, which submitted ten thousand signatures to Congress. Ultraconservative religious groups responded with submitting forty-three thousand signatures, followed a month later by one million more (Diario El Comercio, 2014). Between 2014 and 2015, three further bills were submitted by evangelical pastor Humberto Lay, conservative Catholic Martín Belaúnde, and left-wing Catholic Rubén Condori. None of the five competing bills was approved; their primary effect was to dilute and distract attention from the principal proposals.

A new wave of progressive bills emerged between 2016 and 2017, when liberal congresspersons Bruce and De Belaúnde presented a civil union bill and left-wing congresswomen Indira Huilca and Marisa Glave introduced a marriage equality bill. Both were shelved in December 2021 without debate. A further marriage equality bill by left-wing

congresswoman Susel Paredes elicited a renewed reaction. Two competing civil union bills were introduced in 2022, by Fujimorist Martha Moyano and by self-identified liberal Alejandro Cavero. Paredes's bill was later set aside.

On 19 November 2024, the Justice and Human Rights Commission approved a substitute text to the Cavero and Moyano bills. Promoted by a gay congressman who voted against Paredes's marriage equality bill, the text creates a registered contract that avoids the concept of family and does not change civil status (Centro de Noticias del Congreso, 2024). Cavero's stated rationale was that this figure safeguards the traditional family and avoids constitutional conflict (Cavero, 2024). By July 2026, it had not been scheduled for plenary debate.

Competing bills might be read as a pragmatic first step towards gradual protection of LGBTIQ+ families in a conservative environment, a view expressed by one of the bills' authors (Interview 5). The empirical record does not support this. Of the five competing bills submitted between 2013 and 2015, none reached plenary debate; all were shelved at committee stage. The 2022 proposals follow the same template and, at the time of writing, remain pending. The aggregate effect, regardless of individual intent, is not incremental protection but legislative distraction, filling the parliamentary space available for same-sex unions with figures that neither advance recognition nor are meant to pass. The mechanism operates at the level of effects rather than intentions.

The activities reconstructed under M5 instantiate the episodic legislative deployment of the moral policy monopoly across four waves (2013, 2014-2015, 2022, 2024), drawing on the political foothold of M3 and the moralised policy images of M2, to consummate in the legislative arena the stasis that the other mechanisms sustain. Their repeated activation across four electoral periods, with consistent template and effect, supports the second claim.

Discussion and conclusions

This article asked through which mechanisms policy stasis on morality issues is sustained under conditions of high religiosity and substantial church capacity. Through an abductive process tracing of three decades of Peruvian legislative inertia on same-sex unions, it reconstructed five interlocking mechanisms whose joint operation sustains stasis, namely, forging alliances (M1),

building moralised policy images (M2), capturing politics (M3), implementing joint opposition campaigns (M4) and submitting competing bills (M5). Together, these mechanisms constitute what I term the moral policy monopoly, understood not as an actor type or a configurational entity but as a political process composed of the activities of actors.

The analysis corroborates the two claims. The activities documented over three decades are not the cumulative effect of dispersed episodes of opposition by ultraconservative religious groups; rather, they instantiate a set of analytically identifiable and interrelated mechanisms whose joint operation produces stasis. It is those instantiations, taken together, that provide the empirical grounding of the mechanisms.

Reading the policy monopoly in morality politics offers a further analytical gain. In this field, religiosity is not a background condition that predisposes a polity to stasis, but a resource that actors actively mobilise. The distinction matters. Treated as context, high religiosity would explain stasis as a permanent feature of the setting; treated as a resource, it explains stasis as something agents produce by drawing on religious authority, networks and legitimacy to construct moralised policy images, to uphold narratives that place the family and the child beyond deliberation, and to forge alliances that render change close to unreachable.

This has a consequence for how the category of the policy monopoly is understood, and here lies the conceptual contribution of the article. In morality politics, the actors upholding stasis are the churches and the civil society linked to them, external to the state, which come to capture the political process by infiltrating and influencing politicians and decision-makers. Recognising this is only possible once the concept is moved from a set of attributes towards a set of activities. Where PET treats the policy monopoly as a configuration whose existence is inferred from its features, the moral policy monopoly reconstructs it as the ongoing activity through which actors drive scope conditions to stasis. The concept ceases to name a state of a policy domain and comes to name a persistent political process.

Methodologically, process tracing, under a mechanistic and analyticist approach, made this analysis possible, since it directs attention to what actors do to hold conditions and outcome together, rather than to the attributes a policy monopoly display. It follows that the reconstructed mechanisms are analytically transferable to other periods of stasis under comparable scope conditions. Two lines of inquiry remain open. First, comparative

applications to other Latin American cases with sustained stasis, such as Bolivia, Paraguay or Guatemala, would test whether the same interlocking configuration operates or whether variations in scope conditions produce different articulations. Second, examining the breaking points of the moral policy monopoly, that is, the conditions under which its interlocking architecture unravels in the absence of exogenous shocks, is essential for understanding both its durability and the possibilities of policy change.

The relevance of these findings extends beyond the Peruvian case. In the current global context of transnationally connected counter-mobilisation against sexual and reproductive rights, gender equality and LGBTIQ+ recognition (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Pinheiro-Machado and Vargas-Maia, 2023), the activities that reproduce stasis are recurring features of contemporary morality politics, not anomalies of particular polities. Two implications follow. Analytically treating stasis as the product of interlocking mechanisms rather than dispersed opposition offers a more precise account of how persistence is achieved and where it might be contested. Politically, mapping these mechanisms identifies the specific points at which strategies for policy change can be directed, from the alliance system to the moralised policy images and the legislative devices that distract from substantive reform. Stasis in moral policies is not a residual absence of change but the result of a political process, and understanding it as such is essential to advance the recognition of LGBTIQ+ rights.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Methodological notes

Appendix 2. List of bills on same-sex unions submitted to the Peruvian Congress, 1993–2024

Appendix 3. Triggering events

Appendix 4. Political evangelicals elected within different parties

Appendix 5. Most relevant events and campaigns.

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