

Challenges and opportunities in the advancement of Feminist Foreign Policy.

Explorations through the lens of
transforming patriarchal masculinities

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Introduction

As Feminist Foreign Policies (FFP) become more established within international and multilateral arenas, it is essential to deepen our understanding of how this approach impacts intra-state dynamics, strengthens multilateral cooperation, and reshapes relationships between countries, especially between the Global North and Global South, in addition to the real-world impact upon the lives of women, girls and LGBTIQ peoples.

This document draws on insights from feminist activists and collectives who have articulated both hopes and concerns regarding

FFP—highlighting issues such as its commitment (or lack of-) to decolonization, its potential to serve as a pink-washing tool, and its ability (or failure) to challenge militarism and climate justice. These activists and collectives have been foundational to the development and momentum of FFP, providing the critical vision and labor that continue to shape its direction and integrity. We seek to add value to these efforts, and to explore several of the current opportunities and challenges within FFP debates, from the perspective of transforming patriarchal masculinities from the individual to the systemic level.

Challenges & Opportunities in Feminist Foreign Policy

Foreign policies have maintained such deeply rooted patriarchal norms that they often appear indistinguishable from foreign policy itself. Challenging the core tenets of sovereignty, security, the state, militarism, and nationalism positionalities, Feminist Foreign Policies as a disruptive force, provoking accusations of dilution, diversion, and co-option.

To transform foreign policy is to confront and destabilize normalized power structures within and between nations. This mission invites inevitable patriarchal backlash. Sweden's 2022 withdrawal from FFP—despite being its pioneer—was a serious setback to the collective push for a global community of FFP states and revealed the project's current fragility.

FFP holds transformative potential: it can become a powerful and constructive driver of gender equality, climate justice and peace. Rooted in decades of feminist mobilization, it must both honor and advance that legacy. The following sections explore the tensions and possibilities that come with FFP's disruption of entrenched foreign policy norms. They amplify feminist concerns around anti-rights and anti-gender movements, eurocentrism, civilizational narratives, decolonization, funding justice for feminist movements, pink-washing, climate justice, and the increasing securitization and militarization of global affairs.

Anti-Rights and Anti-Gender Momentum

In recent decades, feminist movements have achieved significant gains in challenging patriarchal norms and systems, demanding political power, rights, and recognition for women and marginalized communities. Yet, these advances are increasingly met with coordinated patriarchal backlash—most starkly seen in the global rise of authoritarian 'strongman' leaders who position themselves through openly misogynistic, homophobic, and transphobic rhetoric and policy agendas. This backlash represents not just a political regression, but a direct threat to the principles and implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) around the world.

The past five years have seen alarming rollbacks in gender and sexuality-related policies,

legislation, and public discourse across multiple countries. One striking example is Argentina, where the newly elected president, Javier Milei—despite the country's prior leadership in adopting an FFP—has launched a series of regressive actions against gender equality domestically, putting the country's feminist foreign policy commitments at serious risk. This illustrates the vulnerability of FFP frameworks when they are not deeply embedded within state institutions and protected against ideological shifts in government.

At the core of this authoritarian resurgence is the politicization of so-called "traditional family values," rooted in patriarchal binaries of male authority and female domesticity.

These anti-feminist, anti-LGBTIQ ideologies present feminism and queer activism as existential threats to national and social order—framing gender justice as a destabilizing force rather than a human rights imperative¹. Central to this backlash is a calculated attack on the concept of “gender ideology,” which conservative forces use to delegitimize feminist and queer political demands, while reasserting the patriarchal heteronormative family as the foundation of national identity².

In this context, FFPs must be understood not only as progressive foreign policy tools but as ideological counters to global authoritarianism. The symbolic and political power of FFP lies in its capacity to confront and delegitimize the anti-gender narratives fueling patriarchal resurgence, while promoting international norms based on equality, human rights, peace, and cooperation. As *Política Exterior Feminista en América Latina (PEFAL)* has asked: how do we ensure that FFP is not just a short-term agenda item, vulnerable to reversal by far-right administrations, but a lasting transformation of the state’s approach to global relations?

To safeguard the future of FFP, there is an urgent need for its institutionalization—not only across foreign policy departments but also within the

broader machinery of government, including education systems that shape future diplomats and decision-makers. FFP must be embedded into the DNA of the state, with legal, institutional, and normative mechanisms that insulate it from abrupt political reversals. Especially in 2024-2025, which marks the largest electoral cycle in global history, the stakes are high: the potential for far-right governments to dismantle feminist foreign policy initiatives is a grave concern.

Institutionalizing FFP means not only embedding feminist analysis and gender justice into foreign ministries but also building alliances across civil society, academia, and international institutions to ensure continuity, accountability, and resilience. The political sustainability of FFP depends on recognizing that the forces seeking to dismantle it are not fringe—but increasingly mainstream. In response, feminist foreign policy must be reasserted not as an optional agenda, but as a cornerstone of democratic resilience, peacebuilding, and global justice.

¹ Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics. See https://yogyakartaprinciples.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A5_yogyakartaWEB-2.pdf.

² Corrêa, Sonia. 2017. "Gender Ideology: Tracking Its Origins and Meanings in Current Gender Politics." LSE Engenderings Blog. Retrieved: September 6, 2020 (<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2017/12/11/gender-ideology-tracking-its-origins-and-meanings-in-current-gender-politics/>).

Eurocentrism, the Civilizing Project & Decolonization

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) compels states to critically examine their own domestic social norms, gender equality frameworks, and historical legacies—before turning outward to project values abroad. At its core, FFP is a commitment to humility, reflection, and relationality in international affairs. It challenges the idea that any one model of governance, policy, or gender justice—especially those rooted in Global North experiences—should be positioned as universally applicable or inherently superior.

This introspective and horizontal vision of power stands in direct contrast to traditional foreign policy models, which often center geopolitical dominance, militarized security, and nationalist exceptionalism. In countries like the United States, for example, contradictions between foreign policy rhetoric and domestic realities—such as the rollback of reproductive rights, ongoing gun violence, racialized policing, and systemic political violence—expose the fragility of claims to moral leadership on the global stage. FFP rejects these contradictions by demanding coherence between a state’s internal commitments to gender justice and its international actions.

Yet, as more governments adopt or explore FFPs, there is a growing tendency to frame them in competitive terms—seeking to be “world-leading” or “global firsts.” This framing risks reproducing the very hierarchies FFP was designed to dismantle. Feminist civil society has rightly raised concerns that such approaches replicate colonial-era logics of civilizing missions, where

Eurocentric or white feminist interpretations of rights and progress are exported under the guise of feminist internationalism. Without critical self-reflection, states risk embedding patriarchal assumptions under a feminist label, reinforcing norms like heteronormative family structures or top-down development models that marginalize those who do not conform.

This is why the label of FFP, while politically useful, should not be the sole benchmark of a government’s commitment to gender equality. Such labels risk bifurcating the international community into simplistic categories of “progressive” FFP states and “regressive” non-FFP ones—obscuring deeper systemic issues and ignoring the power dynamics that continue to structure global relations.

A decolonial framework offers a necessary corrective to these tendencies. Feminist advocates across the world, particularly in the Global South, are calling for FFPs that are grounded in meaningful accountability, shared power, and historical awareness. Foreign policies—especially those shaped in the Global North—inevitably impact communities in the Global South. Therefore, consultation with those directly affected is not optional but essential to uphold the intersectional feminist values that underpin FFP.

This includes confronting and addressing the structural injustices that continue to define Global North-Global South relations: the enduring impacts of colonialism, exploitative climate policy, extractivist economic practices, the unequal

architecture of international finance, and widespread inaction on climate and development injustices. Feminist civil society collectives in the Global South are leading the charge in calling out these dynamics—and Global North actors must listen, support, and learn, rather than dominate or dictate.

To institutionalize this decolonial approach, FFP must reject the nation-state logic of competition, suspicion, and superiority. Instead, it must build a foundation of transnational solidarity, mutual accountability, and collective care. For FFP to fulfill its visionary potential, it must not only speak

about equity—it must practice it in how it is designed, implemented, and sustained.

This critique is not limited to traditional powers. Emerging regional leaders in the Global South—such as India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa—must also be held to account. As their influence grows, they must resist replicating the same patterns of “power-over” that have historically characterized international relations. A feminist foreign policy from these states must avoid paternalism toward neighboring countries and instead embrace cooperative, horizontal, and inclusive models of engagement.

Meaningful Engagement of- and Funding for- Feminist Movements

If Governments are serious about achieving gender equality for and sharing power with women and girls, then they need to show their commitment to meaningfully engage feminist initiatives by funding them. If feminist organisations are really valued, if we consider feminists as the experts on implementing FFP, then fund them. We attribute value to our principles in many ways, but financial backing is a clear, measurable and practical manifestation of commitment. We know that governments are extremely committed to their arms industries, with total global military expenditure at \$2443 billion in 2023. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institution (SIPRI), this was a 6.8% increase in real terms from 2022. This constituted the sharpest rise in expenditure since 2009.³ Governments are less committed to funding industries or organisations which do not

prioritise profit accumulation and who do not adhere to the traditional understanding of foreign policy as necessitating securitisation and militarisation to cope with the suspicion and fear of their neighbour's securitisation and militarisation. WILPF's #MovetheMoney campaign targeted the severe lack of funding dedicated to the WPS agenda by states who spend egregiously on their militaries. Does FFP need a similar campaign?

Other than directly divesting from military spending and investing that money into feminist-run initiatives, some argue that we need to take a closer look at how we raise funding through tax. At the III Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy, Isabel Mateos (Oxfam México) asked, how does the international tax structure work? How are resources shared at the global level? FFP offers the chance to examine how the accumulation of wealth is happening and how to make taxation fairer. FFP should center tax

³ [Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity | SIPRI](#)

justice, where people, nature and communities are at the centre of public money spending. In other words, centre women and girls and not a culture of capitalist accumulation. Therefore, funding needs to match the rhetorical value placed on FFP initiatives. It is not necessarily

Pink-washing

It must be ensured that FFP is being implemented in a meaningful way and is not being co-opted, much in the same way as it could on the national level, to promote the image of a country within the international community, without actually working towards gender equality. Some feminists are wary as to the potential of pink-washing with FFP. This can be best characterised perhaps by Liberia's attempt to implement FFP, under the auspices of 'feminist-in-chief' George Weah. Notwithstanding, even more significant articulations of FFP, such as in Germany, do not always live up to their ideals. Outside of policies dedicated specifically to articulating a feminist approach to foreign policy, FFP does not seem to receive much attention, such as in Germany's 'Strategy on China'.

What's more, given evidence of assistance being provided by Sweden to Liberia in the

Human vs. State Security

A foundational principle of Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) is the shift from traditional, militarized concepts of security—focused on borders, sovereignty, and state power—to a model centered on human security, which prioritizes the safety, dignity, and well-being of individuals and communities. In the context of men and

about finding more money, but looking at how public finances are already being spent and re-directing finances to initiatives which promote a lasting feminist peace, reject militarism, demand gender equality and the sharing of wealth to combat the climate crisis.

development of FFP, will a European understanding of FFP be imposed on non-European states in order to develop close diplomatic/economic ties? If Global South countries perceive FFP as another eurocentric international norms trend, then will attempts to implement it be meaningful? In Libya, it was only the foreign minister who advocated for FFP and she was left isolated by the rest of her government. To what degree is FFP an exercise in appeasing the European desire for flaunting progressive norms implementation in international affairs? With these points in mind, feminist CSOs must continue to receive promises of FFP critically, all the while acknowledging the progress being made by states in attempting to integrate feminist approaches to policy making.

masculinities, this paradigm shift is especially critical. Dominant forms of patriarchal masculinity are deeply entangled with militarism, nationalism, and coercive power. Traditional security frameworks often valorize these masculinities, rewarding aggression, control, and dominance as markers of leadership, strength, and national

identity. FFP must reject these logics and instead foster non-violent, relational, and care-based models of masculinity that align with a human security agenda.

This repositioning presents both a challenge and an opportunity. On one hand, challenging the security-state paradigm directly confronts the deeply embedded interests of military institutions, defense industries, and political ideologies that rely on threats and fear as tools of control. Reorienting security in feminist terms may be met with resistance from those who benefit from the current system—including many men in positions of power whose identities are shaped by these masculinized conceptions of strength and protection. On the other hand, this transformation opens up space to engage men and boys as allies in redefining what security means—emphasizing care, interdependence, peacebuilding, and the dismantling of systemic violence, including gender-based violence.

In practice, centering human security requires FFP to address structural forms of insecurity that disproportionately harm women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and marginalized men—including poverty, displacement, police violence, ecological degradation, and the erosion of social services. It also calls for robust investments in social infrastructure—education, healthcare, housing, and climate justice—as legitimate and necessary components of security policy. This redefinition of security inherently destabilizes patriarchal masculinities that associate power with

dominance and militarized control, and instead supports forms of masculinity rooted in equality, nonviolence, accountability, and care.

FFP-aligned governments must therefore design policies that simultaneously demilitarize foreign relations and invest in the transformation of masculinities. For example, foreign assistance, security sector reform, and peacebuilding efforts must be tied to clear criteria for promoting gender justice, engaging men and boys in feminist-informed violence prevention, and challenging norms that link masculinity with force. Education and diplomatic training should also include gender-transformative content that unpacks how traditional masculinities reproduce insecurity—not only for others, but also for men themselves, particularly those navigating economic hardship, racialized policing, or forced conscription.

Finally, the centrality of human security in FFP calls for inclusive, participatory processes that involve feminist and LGBTQIA+ movements, peacebuilders, and community-led organizations—including men working to dismantle patriarchy from within. This approach holds both individuals and institutions accountable while recognizing that transformation is a collective and ongoing process. By redefining security through a feminist lens, and by explicitly addressing the role of masculinities within it, FFP can lay the groundwork for more just, peaceful, and equitable global relations.

Climate Justice & Feminist Foreign Policies

Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) offers a critical framework for addressing the global climate crisis in ways that are equitable, inclusive, and justice-oriented. At its core, FFP calls for an intersectional analysis of power and privilege—including how masculinized systems of extraction, domination, and control over nature have driven ecological destruction and climate collapse. Within this paradigm, the role of patriarchal masculinities is central and must be explicitly examined. Dominant norms of masculinity—valorizing conquest, endless economic growth, resource control, and risk-taking—underpin the very logic of fossil fuel economies, environmental degradation, and the political resistance to bold climate action.

This presents a dual challenge and opportunity. On the one hand, climate and environmental policymaking spaces remain largely male-dominated and heavily influenced by techno-solutionist and militarized responses to climate insecurity, often sidelining feminist, Indigenous, and grassroots ecological knowledges. On the other hand, engaging men and boys through a gender-transformative, feminist lens offers powerful potential to disrupt these patterns and foster new, care-based masculinities aligned with climate justice. FFP can and must play a pivotal role in this work—by challenging extractivist masculinities at the heart of global capitalism and advancing policies that center community, regeneration, and interdependence over dominance and exploitation.

To this end, FFP-aligned governments should explicitly name climate justice as a feminist priority and integrate gender-transformative work with men and boys into their environmental diplomacy and development assistance. This includes supporting climate education programs that deconstruct traditional masculinities and empower young men to see themselves as stewards, not dominators, of the environment. It also means holding male political and corporate leaders accountable for upholding harmful systems that perpetuate environmental and gender-based injustices. These actors must be challenged not only on their carbon footprints, but on the masculinized power structures they maintain.

Additionally, FFP must resist the co-optation of climate agendas by patriarchal narratives that frame climate change as a national security threat, thereby justifying border militarization, resource hoarding, and climate apartheid. Instead, FFP should promote cooperative, multilateral approaches grounded in human and ecological security. This entails resourcing feminist climate movements—particularly in the Global South—while creating diplomatic and policy mechanisms to amplify the voices of women, girls, LGBTQIA+ people, and gender non-conforming individuals who are leading frontline climate resistance. Men and boys, particularly in government and decision-making roles, must be part of this transformation, not as saviors, but as accountable partners in dismantling patriarchal systems that harm both people and the planet.

The climate crisis is not gender-neutral, nor is it disconnected from the crisis of patriarchal masculinities. Feminist Foreign Policy provides the tools to address both simultaneously. By confronting the cultural and political power of masculinized extractivism and by nurturing alternative masculinities rooted in care, justice, and ecological interdependence, FFP can help reimagine a global order that is not only climate-resilient, but truly gender-just.